

Evil Carnate:

A Validation of the Hidden Optimism of Horror

Submitted by Benjamin Arthur Abbott Winfield to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, September 2014

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EVIL CARNATE

By Benjamin Winfield

If the world and man do not come from a creative intelligence, which stores within itself their measures and plots the path of human existence, then all that is left are traffic rules for human behavior, which can be discarded or maintained according to their usefulness.

- Pope Benedict XVI

Jesus Christ is a reality. And so is that other guy.

- Charles Manson

Skype Text Correspondence, Wednesday, July 23 2015

(2:10PM) REDNECKBOY: hey dude

(2:10PM) FULCIFAN: hey

(2:11PM) REDNECKBOY: whatcha doin?

(2:12PM) FULCIFAN: watching this old movie called evil in enoch

(2:14PM) REDNECKBOY: awesome. that the one about edith blaine?

(2:14PM) FULCIFAN: yup

(2:15PM) REDNECKBOY: she killed some kids in the 70's right?

(2:16PM) FULCIFAN: yup

(2:19 PM) REDNECKBOY: how many did she kill?

(2:22 PM) REDNECKBOY: u there?

(2:25 PM) FULCIFAN: sorry had 2 go shit

(2:25 PM) FULCIFAN: she killed 7

(2:26 PM) FULCIFAN: 3 from her class and 4 in the woods, buried them alive

(2:26 PM) REDNECKBOY: her class? she was a teacher?

(2:27 PM) FULCIFAN: yup

(2:27 PM) REDNECKBOY: fuckin sick

(2:28 PM) REDNECKBOY: hey I got "Blood War 3"

(2:28 PM) FULCIFAN: awsum

(2:29 PM) FULCIFAN: any good?

(2:29 PM) REDNECKBOY: graphics are pretty cool

(2:29 PM) REDNECKBOY: some of the level design sucks

(2:29 PM) FULCIFAN: gotta go bro, my date's calling

(2:30 PM) REDNECKBOY: is it michelle?

(2:30 PM) FULCIFAN: none your business beeyatch

(2:30 PM) REDNECKBOY: fuk you 2 LOL

**Excerpt from the Introduction to “Edith Blaine: The Witch of Enoch”,
by Debra M. Hox**

...for a time, I wanted to pursue a career in theology, but my parents were against the idea. After a while, journalism seemed my best option. All these years later, I’ve had a preoccupation with religion, specifically Catholicism, which eventually lead me to the case of Edith Blaine. Finding trustworthy records about this woman proved difficult; our country’s grotesque fascination with serial killers has created a sordid subculture of sensationalistic “true crime” novels, whose tone is often either imbued with too much indignant hysteria or unnerving identification with the killer himself. I hope to avoid both pitfalls.

Regardless, the legend that has arisen around Edith Blaine makes this project a considerable challenge. Edith was possibly the closest approximation to a real-life witch; not the imaginary archetype that was hunted during the Salem trials of Massachusetts, or the diabolical threesome of Shakespeare’s classic texts. Rather, Edith could be viewed as a borderline mythological creature from a Grimm fairy tale. Her eight child victims rank among the most infamous infanticides of the decade - not merely because they were children, which was heinous enough, but because of how exactly they were murdered.

My own personal fascination with Edith Blaine cannot be easily explained. As an amateur theologian, I’ve had an aching need to discover something more, something beyond the inevitabilities of flesh and body. I’m inclined to consider that some individuals are more desiring of faith than others. Atheists claim that reason and science is enough to satisfy them, anything else being a fool’s errand, but perhaps that is only because the hard coldness of reason and science can only satisfy particular people with particular temperaments. Past the shrill obviousness of the worst religious fanatic, there’s a pathos, a harrowing need for transcendence. I believe this is what drew me to the strange story of Edith Blaine of Enoch, South Carolina.

Tracking down those who knew her was a Herculean task. Edith was often

remarked about having an introverted personality, and friends were difficult for her to come by. This problem was further exacerbated when the crimes Edith later committed forced them to sever any ties they once had. I would like to thank Terry Denton to take time out of his busy schedule to participate in my research, and Jodie Milligan, for sorting through and providing records of Edith Blaine's many years at St. Derek's Elementary.

My greatest disappointment is the "monster's" inability to speak in her own words. Edith never kept any journals or diaries, as far as we know, and so her time on this Earth is destined to remain a tragic mystery...

Diary of Edith Blaine. Aged 10.

MARCH 3, 1934.

John Cummings shoved me today.

He shoved me hard. Right into the dirt. Face first.

I cried, and he laughed at me. I told one of the teachers. She said I need to get strong. Learn to take my hits. Ladies have to be strong and can't whine.

I say to Mom every time someone hurts me and I get mad, people tell me I'm whining. Mom says, sometimes there's whining and sometimes there's knowing when you have the right to speak up. If people call that whining, well it's their problem. By keeping small and quiet, bad people get away with a lot more. They know that if the people they hurt speak up, they might get into trouble, so they convince everyone else that it's whining.

Mom bandaged me up and gave me a bath. She said that maybe I should keep a diary of things that happen to me so I can put my thoughts somewhere and they don't bubble and boil in my head. So that's what I'm doing.

We had spaghetti tonight. I love spaghetti.

MARCH 5, 1934.

Just got back from church. I liked the big hall inside. We sat in these seats Mom calls a pew. I think that sounds funny.

A man in black clothes stood in front of us and talked about God. I asked Mom who God was but she told me to be quiet and she'll tell me after church.

After church Mom said God was what made everything. Everything? Everything. Even me?

Yes, even you. When we die, Mom says, we go to see God in Heaven. If we're

bad we go to Hell and if we're good we stay in Heaven.

I asked Mom, are you sure God's real? She said yes. What would happen if he wasn't, Mom?

Then we would all be in trouble, Mom said.

What do you mean?

I mean there would be nothing except what our bodies tell us to do, and nothing would happen after we die.

What happens after we die?

We go to Heaven.

If God's real?

Yes.

And if we've been good?

Yes.

And if He isn't real?

Nothing.

Nothing?

We just stop being, Edith. That's all.

MARCH 8, 1934.

I saw a funny-looking dog today. Somebody had tied him to a bench outside a barber shop. He was short with a wrinkly face. I played with him for a while before a big man came out of the shop and said hey little girl, what are you doing?

I said I really like your dog.

Thanks, the man said. He's a bassett hound. The man took the dog and walked off.

When I got home I asked Mom if we could get a bassett hound for Christmas. She said no we can't afford it, sorry Edith. Why don't you play with the cat some more? I said I don't like the cat, he makes my nose itch. I want a bassett hound.

Well we can't get one right now, said Mom.

I went out to the backyard and played with my dolls. One of their dresses is getting ripped. I'll ask Mom to stitch it up.

MARCH 9, 1934.

I got the idea of writing some stories "hymns" from going to church. On a sign on the wall there's a list of songs that are going to be sung, and everybody calls them "hymns". I really love some of them. There's one called "Immortal Invisible God Only Wise" that's my favorite. I sing it a lot at home.

I like to sing them when Dad's in a mood (that's what Mom calls them). He doesn't get angry or shout, he just goes really quiet and sort of scary. But maybe it's not working anymore. Just today Dad told me to stop singing. He says he wants no mention or word about God in his house, not for a while. Mom gets mad and talks to him when he talks like that.

I started thinking about dying again last night and how it's going to happen sooner or later, because that's what Mom says. Sooner or later you have to go and you can't stop it. I hope I go to Heaven. I don't know if I'm a nice person. I try to be but a lot of people seem to like being bad instead. When John Cummings pulled my hair yesterday I told him he should stop because God might send him to Hell. He laughed at me and said there is no Hell stupid, you just die and rot. That's what you're gonna do, Edith. Die and rot. Die and rot.

I feel sick.

SELECTED EXCERPTS FROM "EDITH'S HYMNS"

HYMN 1

1. Eternal Father, thank you for tears.

Pressure building behind our eyes

Our stomach aching with the sharpest hurt

All that hurt must escape to the dirt

*2. Fire in my head and in my belly,
It eats me up from inside like hot tar
The world does not love my heart
I want the rainfall.*

*3. Crying is shedding your soul
The hurt remains but its edge is dulled
Water from our eyes is most holy
Tears are dewdrops of water*

MARCH 11, 1934.

I have chicken pox. I don't know who I caught it from. Maybe Donny Deever, he's always coughing and sneezing on everybody.

I've got spots on my skin and I'm achy. I'm in bed and Mom's taking care of me. She has me to drink ginger ale and eat bread. Dad's gone away again.

Sometimes I feel a little better and hide under the bed covers. Under the bed covers, it feels like I'm in a different place, as if suddenly the whole world disappeared and the only things left were me and my blankets. I think to myself, "If this is what Heaven was like, just me and blankets, maybe it would be okay. Maybe it would get boring, but that's not so bad. It's better than just rotting like what John Cummings said would happen."

Or maybe my dolls would be there too. Just me and my dolls. Then I'd have other people to talk to.

It's raining outside. Big, fat heavy drops. I think Dad's working outside. I can hear his shovel digging into the ground: chuf, chuf, chuf. He must be so wet right now. I can see the hair sticking to his face, drops dripping down from his nose to the ground, his fingers and palms brown with mud.

Dad's always digging or doing something dirty, doing something with the ground and other hard dirty things. He never smiles either. I don't remember him ever smiling. Maybe if I asked him what happens when it's time to go, he'll just say "die and rot" like John Cummings.

I hide deeper into the bed covers, away from Dad and his dirt and mud and frowning unsmiling face. I hear Mom somewhere in the house, moving something. Dad's always digging things while Mom's always moving things. Dad always looks down, Mom always looks up. When I grow up I hope I'll look up instead of down too

HYMN 2

1. *Eternal Father, thank you for giving us cookies.*

Thank you for giving us a rainbow of stones.

They are as joy melting in my mouth

Gold rolling down my throat

2. *Thank you for chocolate chip cookies.*

Thank you for white chocolate cookies

Thank you for oatmeal cookies.

Thank you for even the raisin cookies.

3. *Cookies are pieces of heaven*

Fallen from above us

They are blue sky

Milk is the white cloud

MARCH 14, 1934.

Homework, Edith, it's time to do your homework.

I don't want to, Mom.

Well you have to, or you'll get bad grades. Do you want bad grades, Edith?

But it's math. I hate math, Mom.

Math is important. Without math we wouldn't be able to do much of anything. If a person doesn't know how to put two and two together, well, you have a big problem.

I know what two and two is, Mom. It's four.

What's fifteen times three, Edith?

I don't know.

That's something you have to fix.

Mom's never happy until my homework's done. I can't do anything until my homework's done. No, wait, that's wrong. I can't be happy DOING anything until my homework's done. It's like an anvil, pressing down on my head. And Mom, she keeps nagging. Nagging and nagging, until I'm crying. But I have to do it, because if she stops nagging, Dad will start shouting, and I don't want that. So I work until my fingers ache and my eyes burn.

First question. What's twelve times seven? I don't know, I don't care, but I have to answer or Mom will nag and Dad will shout. Maybe I'll just write "dragon". Why can't twelve times seven equal dragon? Because it isn't right? I like dragons more than I like numbers anyway. All I want is to go outside with Barney and run around, but then that anvil will start pressing down on my head again.

Every day, it's homework and more homework. Sometimes math, sometimes history. What was the Louisiana Purchase? Who founded the Pony Express? What sparked the Agricultururural Revolution? I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. The teacher talks about it in class, everyone hears and writes it down, but I never do. Dad thinks I'm lazy. It's just so boring in class. I always want to be somewhere else, like on a spaceship on the moon or swimming under a rainbow. That girl, my Dad says, she always wants to be somewhere except where she is right now.

Get to work, get to work, get to work. Doesn't matter if the answers are wrong, just write stuff so they'll leave you alone. Pencil on paper, scribble scribble scribble. Dragon, unicorn, muffin, chocolate milkshake, tiger, spider, blue, green, purple, basset hound. Finish it, finish the homework, so Mom will stop nagging and Dad will stop shouting and you can go outside and play without the anvil pressing down on your head.

Scribble, dragon, scribble chocolate milkshake, scribble, basset hound.

MARCH 15, 1934.

Dad's talking to Mom downstairs. He's starting to shout. Grownups are scary when they're mad, like big screaming giants. Sometimes I dream about Dad being a giant and walking towards me with his scary angry frowning face, his mouth getting bigger and bigger until he swallows me up.

It's time to stop ignoring reality, Charlotte. That's what Dad says.

Reality's what we make of it. That's what Mom says.

Don't make me laugh. Dad again.

I tear up a handkerchief and stuff the pieces into my ears so I don't have to hear them anymore. I close my eyes and think of that funny basset I saw outside the barber shop.

Then I feel something. I don't hear something, I feel something. Like a thud from downstairs so big it actually shakes the whole house. I take the handkerchief pieces out of my ears and listen. Nothing. Everything's quiet.

I'm scared to get out of my bed covers but I have to see. I go to the window and look out. The town is so dark tonight, as if everyone left their houses and we're the only ones still here. Dad is walking to the car. I can't see his face, but something, something about the way he moves scares me.

I go downstairs. The steps creak, the wood's so old. Mom's sitting in the kitchen. She's looking down at the table even though there's nothing on the table.

Mom looks at me. She's been crying.

Where's Dad going, Mom?

Mom comes over and hugs me. She never tells me where Dad's going.

MARCH 18, 1934.

Today's my birthday. I don't have many friends over, just Linda Craine and Susie Parrish. All the other girls at school don't like me too much. There were ten candles on the cake. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10. I counted them to make sure. Linda gave me a bag of marbles. Susie gave me a skipping rope.

Mom gave me a bassett hound doll. Not a real bassett hound, just a bassett hound doll. Mom says we can't afford a real dog yet, but this is the next best thing, Edith. He'll keep you company at night. I ask Mom, safe from monsters? Mom says well there's no such thing as monsters, Edith. I can prove it.

Susie and Linda go home early. They say they're bored. I stand by the gate and wave them goodbye. Mom and I go upstairs and Mom shows me what's under the bed and in the closet. Some of my dolls are under the bed and my clothes are in the closet. No monsters.

Mom tells me, do you know what happened to all the monsters Edith? They ran away because this is a good house and monsters only live in bad houses. I ask Mom, how do you know if you're living in a bad house?

You just can, Mom says.

When it's nighttime I play with my marbles and pretend they're whole worlds drifting through space, all alone.

MARCH 21, 1934.

I have a name for my bassett hound doll. It's Barney. I wanted a really good funny name for my bassett hound and I thought Barney was really good and funny. My Grandad's name was Barney. That's what Mom told me.

I take him for walks in the backyard. I live the backyard after lunch, when the sun is a little darker and everything has this orange glow. Sometimes I climb the tree in our yard even though Mom tells me to stop because I might fall and get hurt, but I'm careful.

Mom says God's in Heaven. I climb the tree so I can get higher and maybe see

God, but I haven't yet. If I tried to shout up at him, Mom would hear and get angry because I'm in the tree again. Sometimes there are clouds in the sky and I think God's hiding inside one of them. But there are lots and lots of clouds, so I don't know which one. If God is heavy, maybe that makes the cloud he's hiding inside lower to the ground. Maybe if I go somewhere higher I can reach up and touch the cloud that God is hiding inside. I need to find a higher tree. So I go into the forest, where the branches are bigger and longer and tougher.

I try to climb up one tree, this really big tree, but I scratch my leg. So I sit down and look up at the sky.

HYMN 3

1. *Eternal Father, thank you for clouds*

When the day has been thick as oil

And the children have been sad

I see the clouds

And I am reminded of You

2. *The streets are full of tears*

I hear the people crying

That is not the sound of rain

This is a year of bad people

But there is room for feathers

3. *The clouds take many shapes*

Some like rabbits, others like mushrooms

I see angels living in the clouds

Looking down upon me

A white spot in a field of grass

Alone as a fallen star

Transcript of Hox/Dawlish Interview

April 3rd, 2015

DEBRA HOX: ...so just feel free to start whenever you're comfortable.

DR. JAMES DAWLISH: Should I lean forward a little?

HOX: No, you're fine where you are.

DAWLISH: All right. Will it...will my voice be audible, or...?

HOX: Yes, yes. You're fine.

DAWLISH: So what did you want to know?

HOX: I had a few questions for you about Edith Blaine...

I understand there's already been extensive research conducted on her case.

DAWLISH: Do you mean from a psychological or a neurobiological standpoint?

HOX: Both, but for the sake of the interview, we'll speak of neurobiology.

DAWLISH: Right. Well, in regards to Edith Blaine, she...I'm sure you've heard of the orbitofrontal cortex?

HOX: I'm vaguely familiar with it.

DAWLISH: (LAUGHS) "Vaguely familiar?"

HOX: What I mean is...

DAWLISH: Would you like a power-point presentation?

HOX: No. But I know that...if there were any radical alterations to the personality, the orbitofrontal cortex would be the one section of the brain most responsible for such alterations?

DAWLISH: As far as what happened to Edith Blaine goes, who's to know? Enoch Hospital was terrible at maintaining its medical records. Downright infamous, in fact.

HOX: But would you say that was the most likely scenario?

DAWLISH: The human brain is a strange beast. Give it a sound thrashing, and there's no way to accurately predict how it's going to respond. We can make an informed

assessment if the damage is confined to one particular area, but...

HOX: What about Vietnam veterans?

DAWLISH: Oh, yes. But that's not brain damage, if you and I are thinking of the same thing.

HOX: I'm afraid I don't understand.

DAWLISH: Have you heard of the term peri-traumatic appraisal? In layman's tongue, it's essentially an experience that occurs at the moment of a person's near-death. Say you're drowning, or on board an airplane that's falling out of the sky. There's an exact second of total, appalling realization: "Dear God, this is it. I'm done for. It's the end".

Peri-traumatic appraisal. We've seen that in plenty of Vietnam vets, of course...

HOX: Are you referring to post-traumatic stress disorder?

DAWLISH: No no no. PTSD is a natural outcome of PTA, but the two are separate unto themselves. One simply complements the other. PTA's are stuck in time. PTSD is ongoing.

HOX: Nevertheless, Edith Blaine did suffer from head trauma.

DAWLISH: Yes, but consider the events leading up to the trauma. She was the victim of an attempted rape. The men pushed her over the edge of the bridge, and we already know she was still conscious by that point.

HOX: And that was enough to drive her mad?

DAWLISH: "Mad?" A rabid dog is mad. Edith Blaine was just sick in the head. I won't deny it was a singular incident. No human should come face-to-face with their mortality in such a way. Old age is inevitable, but rape and murder...well, we can only imagine what that was like for Edith.

HOX: Are you a religious person?

DAWLISH: What does that have to do with the topic?

HOX: Edith Blaine was known to be a believer, and...

DAWLISH: I'm sorry, I still don't understand the relevance.

HOX: Do you think life after death is possible?

DAWLISH: Of course I don't. I'm a neurobiologist. I deal with the realities of the human brain. Spirituality is a wonderful conceit to help cope with death, but it still remains a

conceit.

HOX: And you think Edith experienced peri-traumatic appraisal?

DAWLISH: I think the circumstances would have warranted it. Whatever actual brain damage she endured only exacerbated her condition.

HOX: And the murders she committed?

DAWLISH: That pretty much goes without saying, don't you think? Everything about Edith prior to the attack indicates she was a relatively normal, sane individual. Oddly enough, my wife is fascinated with Edith's case. This might sound a tad sexist, but I've noticed women seem more intrigued by Edith Blaine's life than men. I don't know if there's some kind of corrupt wish-fulfillment fantasy going on there, or...I'm sorry, do you have something to say?

HOX: I wanted to ask you about what happened later, with the Amish children. I'd only like to hear your perspective...DAWLISH: I have to warn you, Mrs. Hox, that I'll shut down this interview prematurely if I feel it's becoming inappropriate.

HOX: All right, I'm sorry.

DAWLISH: No need to apologize, just...let's not bring it up again.

HOX: So let's move on to Edith's childhood.

DAWLISH: Oh, yes. None of it responsible for her psychosis later on, of course, but I'd say the stage was set. Edith's father left rather abruptly...money concerns, if I remember correctly. As a result, Edith and her mother insulated themselves into a kind of cocoon. Edith never entirely stopped being dependent on her mother, which goes a long way to explain her inability to "grow up", so to speak.

HOX: A child at heart?

DAWLISH: That phrase isn't quite as tender as it sounds. In Edith's case, she was a child in mind as well as body. Always unfortunate when that happens to a human being. They never learn how to fulfill society's expectations of them.

HOX: She was also a target of bullying...

DAWLISH: Well, yes, but that's nothing new, is it? The playground is a perfect life tutorial for children. It's there we find out if we're destined to be predator or prey. In Edith's case, well...it was meant to be the latter, it seems.

HOX: Until the attack on the bridge. Do you think she could have escaped her circumstances?

DAWLISH: How do you mean?

HOX: Do you think she could have retained some of her...original personality?

DAWLISH: After the attack? No. I'm afraid not.

HOX: How would you know for sure?

DAWLISH: The brain is the person, Ms. Hox. Destroy the brain, destroy the person.

FIRST PRAYER

Eternal Father, please bless me with a library

A building with a billion pages hidden among its shelves

Every page with a billion words

Every word with the power of a billion stars

Books and books and books

Mountains of hardcovers and softcovers

Happy covers and sad covers

Each book its own angel

I want fairies and unicorns

Angels and devils

Love and wars

Books for children, not grown-ups

Grown-ups are hard and as stone

Like cold candy and broken bottles

They care for nothing but green paper

And gold coins

Eternal Father, make my house into a book

So I can pull the pages over me

They will be a blanket to hide me

From the grown-ups of dirt

MAY 5, 1934.

My fault. All my fault. Mom told me not to bring Barney to school. But I wanted to. I wanted him everywhere with me because I wanted a basset hound, even if he's a fake one. I knew John Cummings and his friends could be bad, but I didn't know they could be very very bad.

I was on the playground, alone. I like being alone. Sometimes I try to play with Susie or Linda but they say they're busy with stuff.

I was climbing a tree with Barney. There's a big tree in the playground, way in the back where none of the other kids go. I can climb right to the top and see the roof of the school. One day I stayed at the tree even after the bell rang. It started raining. I was outside in the cold and rain while everybody else was inside warm and dry. Everybody else was in class learning something while I was out on the tree learning nothing. No one except me and the grey sky and the wet rain. It was beautiful.

This time I wanted to bring Barney and see if I could touch the cloud with god hiding inside it. I was almost at the top branch when something hit my back. It hurt and I dropped Barney. I looked down and saw John Cummings with his friends. I don't know if John Cummings was the one who threw the rock at me, but he was the one who grabbed Barney first. They all wanted to make sure I was watching, that I knew what they were doing before they did it. They tore him open and threw the white fluff inside him everywhere until there was nothing left but a lot of fluff blowing in the wind and a lump on the ground that used to be his skin. Then they ran off laughing.

I climbed down the tree and took the lump and hugged it. I went behind the tree

and stayed there, hugging the lump. The bell rang. Everybody left except me, and I was alone again. I don't know how long. Mrs. Baxter came out after a while and dragged me in, saying Edith this is ridiculous you know we told you that you can't do this anymore. I tried to tell her about John Cummings and his friends, and she said Edith you know what we've talked about before, about you learning to be strong.

I don't remember the rest of the day. I didn't learn anything because I wasn't paying attention. After school I walked down a road I never walked down before. I got lost. I sat down and looked at a storm drain. I thought to myself, if John Cummings isn't punished now, well then he might never be punished. That means sometimes bad people get away with being bad.

I don't think I could stand that, living in a world where bad people can win.

But there's something worse. Barney's gone. Gone gone gone. I can't, I can't say what it's like, the "goneness". I wonder if this what death feels like, when somebody you love goes away. This goneness.

And if there's no Heaven, the goneness would go on forever.

MAY 7, 1934.

Mom promised to get me a new bassett hound doll but said I'll have to wait until Christmas because we need to be careful with our money. That's okay. I'll wait.

I put the lump that used to be my old bassett hound doll under my bed. Mom tells me to throw it away. I lie to her and say that I did. All night I can't sleep because I'm scared that I lied to Mom. Even if I get away with it that will only make me feel worse because John Cummings got away with what he did too. Next morning I tell Mom I lied and I'm sorry but please please let me keep the lump.

She takes the lump and says no Edith, it's too dirty and it's useless and it has to go. And then it was gone.

I go for a walk. I keep walking until I'm sure there's no one around. Then I sit down in the dirt. I start talking to the dirt, I can't remember what I said really. I think I was praying to it. Mom said God is everywhere, even in the dirt, so if I'm talking to the

dirt that means I'm also talking to God. I prayed to the dirt to bring back my bassett hound. Do this special thing that You're not allowed to do, just once. My tummy won't stop hurting. Please, make the goneness go away.

I think I was crying, because I saw the ground right under my eyes was a little wet. Nothing happened. I looked up at the sky. It was very beautiful today.

HYMN 4

1. *Eternal Father, thank you for giving us sleep
When the day is dead and our bodies are broken
And our minds are as soft jelly
All the little miseries of our life
Melt as we sink under the blanket*
2. *When I sleep I dream,
Sometimes of Barney
Sometimes of Mom,
Sometimes of Dad
And sometimes of strange shadowy things
I wake up in the night crying*
3. *Scary dreams are as rats in the brain
I dream of death and rot
I dream of Heaven and golden gates
Which is true? I beg you God
Take me to the gates of gold*
4. *The day has broken me
There is so much I wanted to be
But now I must be happy as I am
Perhaps death is only like sleeping forever*

I slumber in black ink

Diary of Edith Blaine. Aged 17.

APRIL 3, 1943.

I took the Lord's name in vain today.

I was outside. Mom wanted me to do some gardening. Mom loves growing flowers and digging up dirt, but I don't know why. I hate it when I'm hot, and I hate it when I'm sweating. Mom said it's supposed to cool your body down, but it only made me feel worse. Greasier, slimier. Bits of dirt stuck to my skin. I was starting to look like a cave girl.

Then a bee stung me. First time I've ever been stung by a bee. Boiling lava injected right into my finger. I shrieked the Lord's name loud and hard. Mom took me inside and scraped out the stinger, then she washed my hand with soap and water, then she wrapped it in ice. All the time I was screaming, screaming loud enough to make my throat bleed, but she never said a word.

Edith, I want you to stop right now. This really isn't that bad. She pressed the ice into my finger. Keep holding it down to take care of the swelling. You'll be fine. Stop.

The bee was hiding inside a flower. My hand brushed past the petals when I was reaching for the shovel. I saw this...THING fly out, this big fat dark ugly shape. It went straight for my hand as if it already knew what it was doing.

Mom tells me that it might have hurt, but now the bee will die, because I had taken out its stinger.

Then why would it sting me in the first place, Mom?

Because you scared it.

But now it'll die.

That's the way Nature works. You have to die if you're ever going to be born. Those are God's rules.

Then Mom tells me I should apologize for swearing the way I did, even if it did hurt. So I said I was sorry.

No, you have to do that kind of apology in church. We'll do exactly that next Sunday. Okay?

Okay, Mom.

Mom, I said, is there a way to keep something from ever dying?

Not that I know of

Should there be?

No, Edith.

Why not?

Because you can't ever say hello without having to say goodbye.

APRIL 5, 1943.

So. There's a war on, "the mother of all wars" - that's what Mr. Kartshire calls it, and all the men are gone. Well, all the "important" men. The big, strapping, tough men. They've all been sent off to blow up the Germans, leaving us behind to make sure everything is clean and tidy when they get back.

I don't know anything about it. Neither does Mom. The only man I ever really knew was Dad, and he's gone...gone for good. He left and took all his seriousness and talk of "reality" with him. I don't know what reality is. I only know that people who talk about it all the time tend to be miserable. Sometimes I wonder where he is, what he's doing. I think Mom knows, but she doesn't like to talk about him. When we go to the movies, there's a newsreel before the show that tells us what's going on with the war. Just a lot of guns and explosions, as far as I can make out. People killing people.

Mom says I don't have much of a right to complain so much, not right now, not with whole countries at war. But I don't know anything about that. I don't want to. I'm tired and I'm sick of being told about how bad things are just to make me feel better about who I am and where I am.

Maybe I do whine a lot. Maybe I'm whining into this diary right now. Maybe my diary's sick of my whining. But if I can't do it here, where else can I do it? And if I don't whine, if I don't say a word, I know something will happen. I'll go crazy, and take off my clothes and run down the street naked. Mom doesn't whine. I'd sure like to know how she manages it.

I've heard people talk about how the war turned things around, took bums off the street, got "industry" moving again, whatever the heck industry is. We're out of the "bad times", only to be in another kind of "bad times", where instead of being scared of Losing Money, we're scared of all speaking German one day.

I'm afraid of saying too much, of getting into trouble. Everybody's acting...weird. Mr. Kartshire says it's "a good war" we're fighting. Maybe he's right. The Germans don't look as if they're really good guys. They dress in black. Black coats, black hats, black boots. Not that I know what the difference is between a "good war" and a "bad war". Someday America could have a "bad war"; I wonder what it'll look like, and how the posters will read. "Sure it's Not a Good War, But You Have to Fight Anyway?" It all mixes me up inside, like a stomach ache.

I don't know. One way or another people die, good wars or bad wars. All I see are explosions, then old men talking, then more explosions. Does that mean something is wrong with me? Maybe if I had gone to war, I'd know I was fighting a good war, then I wouldn't be whining so much.

APRIL 6, 1943

Mom says I need to find myself a good strong boyfriend. She doesn't like how I don't get out too often. I tell her that I don't want any boys in my life. Mom says, well you have to, Edith. Women can't be born and grow up and die without having anyone in their lives. Women aren't meant to never have children. That's something God decided for us.

Is God a woman, Mom?

No, Edith.

If God's a man, why should He decide for us?

Because God decides for everyone and everything. Men, women, children, animals, plants, stars, everyone, everything.

I just can't find any boy who likes me. I don't know why. I look in the mirror, and I don't see anyone beautiful, but I don't see anyone ugly either. Maybe that's just not

enough. I see lots of beautiful girls at school, at least I hear boys call them beautiful. Some of them don't even have to wear makeup. I once heard Mr. Kartshire call one of the girls "Helen of Troy", and I don't even know who that is. It must be great to be born beautiful.

There's one girl I know. Her name is Patty Harpgood. She's...fat. Really fat. Patty says it's because of something in her "genes", but nobody believes it. I've heard the kids call her everything from "cow" to "couch". She doesn't ever cry, as far as I know. She just sort of takes it and takes it and takes it. Sometimes the teasing gets worse. I've heard about how they once rubbed poop into her hair, but I don't want to believe it. She can't tell the teachers about it. Then everybody would just call her a tattletale. A complainer. No one likes a person who whines.

I want to help her somehow, tell her she's not ugly, she doesn't deserve what they do to her, but if you associate with a loser, everyone labels you a loser in turn. Those are the rules. I'm not popular, but I'd be in even worse shape if I tried to get along with Patty. So it goes on for her, and on, and on, without end.

At least I have a chance with boys, if I try hard enough.

APRIL 8, 1943

Mr. Kartshire asked me to see him after class today. He said he wanted to ask me about something.

I kept sitting while everybody else walked out. All the time, Mr. Kartshire was looking out the window. Sometimes he'd take off his spectacles and rub his eyes, as if he was tired. Sometimes I forget how old Mr. Kartshire really looks. When everyone was gone, he opened up the front of his desk and took out a piece of paper. Edith, come up here. I want you to see this.

I came over to his desk. I sit way in the back of class, so I don't have to see his face real close when he gets angry. Mr. Kartshire shows me the paper. It's an assignment he had us write yesterday. "How I'll support my family and home when I'm an adult."

So, you really want to be a teacher?

Yes, Mr. Kartshire.

And what gave you the notion of being a teacher?

Basset hounds.

I beg your pardon?

Basset hounds. People keep spelling 'basset' with two t's at the end. I want to teach them not to do that.

That's nice, but you can't just teach people what not to do. It's all about positives, positives. No negatives. You understand?

Yes, Mr. Kartshire.

Now, what I want you to do is go home and rewrite this. I want better answers from you, and I want them tomorrow morning. And no more of this obsession with damn basset hounds.

Yes, Mr. Kartshire.

Are you listening to me?

Yes, Mr. Kartshire.

No you're not. And Mr. Kartshire's face goes ugly. You know how I know? Your eyes. They go up and to the right. You're thinking of other things, other places. Am I boring you, Edith?

No, Mr. Kartshire.

Don't lie to me, Edith. Lies might come naturally to women your age, but I will not tolerate them. I will not.

No, Mr. Kartshire.

You have poor attention, I can tell that much about you. I've done my best to be sympathetic so far, but trust me, that all stops after you graduate. Learn to focus, Have I made myself clear?

Yes, Mr. Kartshire.

All right. Now go home and think about what you did wrong.

APRIL 9, 1943

The roads are getting bigger every day, getting louder. Big, chunky cars bellowing past, waking me up every night, waking Mom up. Sometimes I try to hide in the closet, where there aren't any windows, and stuff my ears with cotton to block out the noise. It's always noisiest before seven am.

Mom told me she's thinking about turning the house into a guest house, which means there's going to be strangers walking around, in the bathroom, in the hallway, in the kitchen and the den and the backyard. I might even have to share a room with someone. Strangers, strangers everywhere. Thinking about it makes me feel sick. Mom says it's good for us, because we need the money, and good for the strangers, because we give them a place to stay. A lot of people were left out on the street after the "bad times", and we don't have any right to judge them, Mom says.

I've never lived out on the street, so maybe she's right. Sometimes I wish God would just tell me outright whether I'm being good or only being sort-of-good. I don't think you can get to Heaven by only being "sort of good". I feel guilty because I've never been poor, not too poor anyway, and I just can't say anything at all about it. Sometimes I'm afraid all the worst things in my life will happen when I'm older, while all the best things have already happened when I was a kid. Maybe that's how life works. You have a garbage childhood and a happy adulthood, or the other way around.

It's late November; people are putting up Christmas decorations. I love Christmas, when everything feels colder yet warmer. Crackling fireplaces. Smell of wood and pine. Boxes wrapped in rainbow colors. Milk and cookies. Reindeers. Santa Claus. This is probably the last Christmas we'll have alone before strangers start filling the house. I hope Mom changes her mind.

APRIL 12, 1943

Terry Denton came up to me after class today. He asked me out on a date. It felt so weird, having a boy actually ask me up front like that. It almost makes me feel like a princess. Is that good or bad?

I couldn't tell him no, could I? So I said yes. We're going out on Friday evening, to Big Harry's. It's a restaurant near old Bluejay River. I've seen it a few times when riding around on my bicycle, but I never went in. But this time I have an excuse; I have a boyfriend.

Mom was in the kitchen when I got home. She was at the table, a letter in her hand. I asked her, you okay Mom? She told me the letter was from Dad. I asked, what does it say Mom? She looked at me, then said go upstairs and stay there because she wanted to be alone.

I didn't even tell her about Terry. Mom's been nagging me non-stop about getting a boyfriend, she probably wouldn't leave me alone if she found about him.

Sometimes I start thinking about death again. What will happen once Mom is gone. I know she'll be gone one day, I can't stop it. Unless I die first, then I'll never have to go through it. But it would have to be an accident for that to happen. So maybe I could kill myself? But that would be a sin. The worst kind of sin. That's what Reverend Belt tells me, anyway.

Reverend Belt is our local reverend. We go to his church every Sunday. Mom dresses me in really fancy clothes, the kind that itch and makes you want to scream. The socks are the worst. They scratch my legs like sandpaper. But I get used to it. We sit and listen to Reverend Belt delivering his sermons from his pedestal. Sometimes I listen, sometimes my mind goes other places. So I try to focus. I try to hear everything old Reverend Belt says about God and Jesus. When I asked him about what happens when you kill yourself, he told me that you're barred from Heaven.

But as I grow older, I grow more afraid. Afraid that with each year, I'll become more worthless. I'll have to learn to drive a car soon. Mom's getting a little rusty, and needs someone else behind the wheel. A fat lot of good I'll be if I can't even drive a car. I don't know why it's taken me this long to get behind the wheel. Maybe I'm scared. I've got to learn, no matter how long it takes or how embarrassed I get. I've got to learn.

If only I could focus. If only I could fixate on one little thing at a time. But my brain feels wrong. Mixed up. Cross-wired. Sometimes I wonder if I'm lazy or stupid, or both. All I want to do is eat and sleep. We're coming out of the bad times, that's what Mom says. The war had a silver lining after all, she says. More people have jobs. More people are working. No more of the ugly reality that made Dad go away.

I hope she's right. I get up every morning, only to feel afraid of going to school. I don't even know why I'm afraid. Or maybe I do; people are scary. You just never know what they're going to do. Some of the things I've heard about what goes on in Germany...Mr. Kartshire says they're just stupid rumors cooked up by the Jews, but then there's this nasty shadow that falls over his face when he says THAT word. His lips curl so slightly you can't even see it unless you're real close. Like he wants to be one of the Germans, doing what the Germans are doing, but he won't tell anybody. I see that shadow on a lot of other people. I see it on the kids in my class. I see it in our neighbors. We don't like those dirty Nazis, no sirree bob, but maybe they've got at least one good idea in their favor. Maybe we should start something ourselves once this war is over. Something sort of like what the Nazis are doing. But just sort of.

PRAYER 251

1. *Oh Lord, I am thankful*
For the sun and the grass
Oh Lord I am thankful
For the trees and the leaves
I am thankful

2. *Oh Lord I am thankful*
To have my mother
Oh Lord I am thankful
That she is a good mother
I am thankful

3. *Oh Lord I am thankful*

We still have our house

Oh Lord I am thankful

We have a backyard where I can play

I am thankful

4. *Oh Lord I am thankful*

For your love and your glory

Oh Lord I am thankful

You are always with me when I'm alone

I am thankful

APRIL 15, 1943

I don't want to die. I don't want to die. There has to be something I can do so I'll never die. And then I can do the same for Mom.

I was on the way to school. The sidewalk felt hot; I could feel it stinging even through my shoes. The sun was out and roasting everything. I saw a little baby bird on the side of the road. I think it was a sparrow. It was sitting still, very still. It wasn't dead, because it sometimes looked around, but it wasn't moving anywhere. As if its legs were caught or something.

I saw a nest in a tree branch hanging above the baby. It was too high for me to see the mother or the other chicks, but I knew that's where the baby probably came from. I knelt down and almost touched it, but I read somewhere, National Geographic I think, that if a human touches a chick, the mother will abandon it. I kept watching the bird for a long time, trying to decide what to do.

After a while I walked away. It'll fly back up to the nest, or the mother will come down, or something. If I tried to help I'd only make things worse.

I saw the school at the bottom of the hill. I kept going for a bit, then I turned

around and headed back to where I saw the bird. I had to know if it was okay. I sound weird, talking and obsessing over a bird, but it's one of those kind of sights you see that you know will drive you crazy if you don't see how it ended, like a man walking a tightrope.

I reached the spot, but the bird wasn't there. Good. That means it's back in the nest.

I looked across the street, and saw a crushed little...thing. It was the baby bird. It must have tried to cross the road, and a car ran over it. Guts and blood mixed with brown and black feathers in one big mess. Death.

I've seen road kill on the streets, but this was the first time I'd seen an animal alive before it was...

...and this happens all the time to other animals...

...even if I had saved the bird, another one would be dying just like that...

...or it would die eventually anyway...

My head was starting to hurt. I couldn't breathe. I sat down under the tree and stayed there.

MAY 2, 1943

I think I hate Terry Denton.

I was getting dressed. I wanted to look good. No, I wanted to look A M A Z I N G. I wanted Terry to remember exactly what I looked like tonight, so every other girl would seem ugly in comparison. All the beautiful girls who will grow up to have houses and husbands and lots of money, while all I'll have is my basset hound Barney. So I took everything out of the drawers. Everything. I laid them all out in a row in the floor. Underwear at the top, dresses in the middle, socks and shoes at the bottom.

I couldn't decide. They all looked so ugly to me. So I went eeney-meaney-minie-mo, catch a tiger by his toe. I was going to make this work. I knew I could make this work. All it takes is a little love and care, just like Mom says. Just take your time. Don't make yourself look like a tramp. Things made from love and care look like gold. Things

made from vanity and lust look like fool's gold. Always remember. So I chose the blue dress, because no one seems to wear blue any more.

Mom helped me put on my makeup since this was my first time. I couldn't stop remembering the dead bird. I got distracted, and now I was late. I've heard Mom say it's okay for women to be "fashionably late", but Terry doesn't look like the sort of guy who'd put up with girls that keep him waiting. If I wasn't careful, he could start going out with somebody else. Maybe Janine Rhodes. She's always been the prettiest girl at school.

There was a knock at the door. Mom told me to go open it, while she...hid in the kitchen, Terry was out on the front porch, looking very..."dapper". I think that's the right word. I saw a couple of bloody spots on his chin where he nicked himself shaving. They were still wet.

So we started walking. Terry said, you know what made you stick out from all the others? Your eyes. A person's eyes are like animals, some are tame and stupid, some are wild and free. You like that? He said, grinning. I just made it up. Clever huh?

What are my eyes like, Terry?

Terry looked confused. What do you mean?

I mean what kind of animal are my eyes like?

Terry shrugged. I don't know. Like a dog's. Wide and kind of sad.

It was getting dark by the time we reached Bluejay River, bright blue turning to dark purple in the horizon, little white dots popping out of the sky. Terry said, I love fishing here every summer. The fish are big and fat, like they've been eating hamburgers. They're delicious, too. Would you eat a fish I caught?

Sure, Terry.

What does that mean?

I didn't say anything, Terry.

You had this funny look on your face. You do that a lot.

Oh. Well, it's just that I like fish, I really do, they taste great and Mom always said they're good for the brain, but one time I saw my Dad catch and gut a fish. I couldn't stop thinking what it's like, to have a hook caught in your throat. It must be a mix of thirst and pain, which is really the worst kind of pain, because there's something in your throat

which is sort of like thirst, but it hurts like nothing you've felt before. I've had trouble eating fish since then.

Terry looked at the river. He didn't say anything again for a while.

Even when we ate Big Harry's, Terry didn't say much. We both ordered hamburgers, and Terry was just sort of munching his, when he suddenly asked, sort of angrily: Now look, what the heck are you eating?

I didn't understand. What do you mean, Terry?

You're eating a cow. How is eating a cow any different from eating a fish? Can you tell me?

I was saying, Well cows don't have to...and then he interrupted me. There's no difference. Heck, if you think fish have to die horribly so we can eat them, you'd faint if you found out what they do to cows. Have you ever been to a slaughterhouse? Things are dying all the time. Usually in a bad way. That's just how everything works.

I looked down at my burger.

Are you angry at me, Terry? What did I do? What did I say?

Terry just kind of chuckled, this nasty, happy little chuckle. Nothing, Edith. You did nothing at all.

I finished my burger fast. Terry walked me home, but he didn't say anything to me this time. He just kept looking somewhere else, snorting and giggling. As if there was something funny about me.

We got to my house. I turned and said, Bye Terry. But he didn't even stop. He just kept walking on and giggling.

Mom let me in. She had a big smile on her face. How did it go, Edith?

I feel sick, Mom.

MAY 5, 1943

I should have done something. I could have stopped it.

Class was really quiet today when I got to school. Some of the girls looked pale, while the boys snickered weirdly like hyenas. I kept wanting to ask but nobody looked as if they wanted to talk. Mr. Kartshire talked and talked and talked about arithmetic and geography. Then the bell rang for lunch.

I found my usual spot where I like to eat by myself, near the windows, where I can look out and watch the sparrows hopping about on the gravel. I've tried to get into the groups before, into the little gangs at each table. There are tables for boys, and tables for girls. Nobody marked them that way, different kinds of people just sort of gathered in their own places, and it stuck. Yesterday I had vegetable lasagna; I almost threw up. Today I was going to try plain old spaghetti instead. Mom cooks the best spaghetti at home. She knows exactly how to get the sauce just right. I hoped the spaghetti they served at school would be just as good.

It wasn't bad. It wasn't terrific, but it wasn't bad. All of the other girls choose food that isn't "messy", like sandwiches or boiled vegetables. I've tried all those, but sometimes the messy food always seems to taste the best.

Then I heard some of the girls whispering: "Patty Harpgood killed herself. Patty Harpgood killed herself." Over and over. Like a chant.

So I moved down the table and listened to some of the boys. "Patty Harpgood killed herself. Patty Harpgood killed herself." After a while the chant started changing a little: "Just couldn't take a joke. Just couldn't take a joke."

I left the cafeteria and walked out into the schoolyard. I sat under a tree and looked up at the sunlight flashing through the branches.

That's it. She's gone.

MAY 8, 1943

Bad day at school. I got into an argument with Mr. Kartshire. I think a lot, but today I talked too much. We're fighting a good war, he told us. You see class, there are bad wars and there are good wars. There might be bad wars in the future, but right now, we're fighting a good war. We know who the good guys and the bad guys are, because Hitler makes it easy for us. He's up there on a podium, shrieking at the Germans in his black suit and goofy moustache, and we know right away what we're fighting. The enemy.

All the time I'm in the back, feeling like I'm shrinking. I've been trying to keep quiet more often in class, since every time I open it, I always get into trouble. It's like stupid things just tumble out of my mouth. Sometimes I wonder if I'm really, actually stupid in some way, like those "idiot savants" Mrs. Harrick in science class talks about. But Mr. Kartshire is walking back and forth, and I feel angry at him. Angry that he's always right, or always acts like he's right. So then I asked him why he likes a lot of what Hitler says about the you-know-whats.

Mr. Kartshire's face went ugly. The faces of everybody in the class went ugly. Some of them called me things I can't write here, because I'd make my diary dirty. He sent me to the principal's office. Ten minutes of a bigger, older, uglier face talking down to me. Then a note to my Mom. Sweetie, she says, you can't ask Mr. Kartshire those kind of questions. We're fighting a war and we have to keep our priorities straight. We have to keep our eyes on the prize.

In one week everything's gone rotten. First Patty Harpgood, then Mr. Kartshire. At times like these I wish I could just stay home. Being alive means dealing with people, and I just don't know what I'm supposed to do or say around people. I feel like I'm out of synch somehow with everybody on the planet. I want to believe we're fighting a good war, I really do. But when Mr. Kartshire talks about the Jews, and when everybody else agrees with him, I don't know. I just don't know. It's not like I've met a lot of Jews. It's not like I love them.

I tried to meet Terry in the park. He didn't want to talk to me. He said his parents don't want me hanging around unpatriotic girls.

MAY 9, 1943

I went to the library today. Lots of good books there. I've been reading Jane Austen. One time I brought *Sense & Sensibility* back a day late. They charged me fifty cents, and Mom had to pay. Since then I've been careful.

But what I've really been reading is *Dracula*. It's the first time I've seen a book made up of letters. There's another war going in that book, between good guys and bad guys. Dracula is horrible. I'm starting to have nightmares about him coming into my room, making me into another monster like him. There's something scary about that. Instead of the boogeyman killing you, he turns you into another boogeyman.

Dracula turned Lucy into a vampire. That was when Lucy stopped being Lucy. I don't think I'll ever get over that, somebody so gentle like Lucy turning into something...awful. She never wanted it to happen, never asked for it. What's worse is that she doesn't ask why she's suddenly killing kids all over London. It just comes naturally to her. If that happened to me, I like to think I would have asked some questions about why I'm killing kids.

There was a man reading a book on the main floor. He was small, hunched over, like a crab. I walked over to him.

What are you reading? I asked.

The man looked at me. His face was older than the rest of his body. He wore a coat that was wet, but I looked out the window and it wasn't raining outside. The collar of his coat was rumpled, like a turtle's neck. He looked a lot like a turtle.

What do you know about the war, young lady?

Everybody says it's a good war, I said.

And what do you say, young lady?

I don't know.

Some of it's a good war, the man said, going back to his book. Some of it is. But that's the problem with war. Sooner or later the good guys decide they can only win by doing the same as the bad guys. That's when we're screwed. That's when we're up a creek without a paddle.

He was quiet for a long time.

I'm a journalist, young lady, he told me. Some of the articles I write can be published, and others can't. Everything you hear about what the Germans do is true, and it's great somebody's fighting them. But sometimes I get stories about what the Americans do, and I start to lose faith. It's not nearly as bad as the Germans, you understand. But it's enough to get me worried.

About what?

That everybody's waiting to be a German.

But that's not the worst of it, he said, looking down at his book. The worst are the people they kill. They never do anything. They don't fight back, because they can't or they won't or both. They can't be the heroes, somebody has to be the hero for them. Take a good look at me, young lady. Would you say I'm handsome?

He didn't look too handsome or too ugly, so I didn't know what to say.

A lot of people don't like my nose, he said. It's too long. Gives me away, if you know what I mean. I've lost many potential friends through the years thanks to this infernal nose. I can't even begin to imagine what kind of trouble my nose would get me into over in Germany. Beware of noses, young lady. Depending on their length, they can be the harbingers of delight or doom.

His voice was getting louder. An old woman upstairs was staring at us.

Take the people in those..."camps", for example. I bet they all have the longest noses of all. Maybe that's just the natural order of things. Short noses survive, long noses bite the dust. Darwinism at its most primal -

The librarian came up to the man and asked him to please leave. He was making a ruckus.

He got up and walked out. He left his jacket behind on the chair. He came back and yanked it off. Then he was gone again. His shoes left mud footprints on the library floor, as if he'd been walking through a swamp.

The book he'd been reading was still on the table. I opened it but couldn't figure out the letters. Weird, fancy scrawls. I wish I knew what they meant.

OCTOBER 15, 1943

Mom's sick. She had to take a day off from work. She's not happy about that. She says she's taken too many days off already. At this rate they could fire her. Mom says it's the best thing that's ever happened to her, working at the telephone company. We finally had money coming in and we didn't have to turn the house into a guesthouse full of strangers.

I can't be around Mom too long because she says she's still contagious, so I go out into the garden. I hear Mom coughing from the bedroom. It's a sad little sound, and it makes me cry.

Terry won't talk to me at all anymore. I'm glad I never told Mom about what happened. But I'm alone again. I need something else in my life. If I can't have a boy, can't I have a dog? Maybe I should ask Mom about that when she's better.

Barney. I forgot all about him. Somehow Mom's coughing reminds me of Barney. That's what I need now; a dog. A basset hound.

Looking back at my older diaries makes me laugh. I used to spell "basset" with two t's. I don't know why I did that. I've seen other kids do it too; always the same mistake. Two t's at the end of a word, like "catt" or "fatt". Maybe I should become a teacher, someone better than Mr. Kartshire. Then I could tell my students to never use two t's at the end of "bassett" or "fatt" or "catt".

I try to climb the tree in our backyard, like I did when I was a kid. A branch snaps and I hit the ground on my bottom, which is supposed to be the best place where you can fall, but that didn't make it hurt any less. I think I'm bruised down there, and now I have to sleep on my chest. That branch never broke when I was younger. That only means the branch was older, just like I'm older, just like Mom's older.

I hear Mom cough again, and I get scared. All I want is for her to get better. So I do everything I need to do. I give her the medicine, I tuck her in, I cook the meals. I wish I could make her live forever.

I wish Dad was here.

OCTOBER 23, 1943

Mom's better. She's stopped coughing, and she's moving around the house again, putting up Halloween decorations. I love Halloween almost as much as I love Christmas. Every holiday has its own atmosphere, its own ambience. Halloween has shades of orange and the smell of pumpkin and kids walking around in colorful costumes. Mom's dressed like a ghost this year. I'm going out as Charlie Chaplin.

I asked Mom again about getting a basset. She said no Edith, we can't afford it. Then I asked when will we afford it? Not for a long time yet Edith. We have to be careful, Edith, very very careful.

She's done this so many times now. We have to be careful, Edith, very careful. Over and over. As if we're walking through a minefield every day. Mom, please, how much longer do I have to wait? Just stop lying to me, stop lying. I go up to my room and slam the door. She hates it when I do that. I'm angry. I'm angry because Mom tells me money isn't everything but money is all that's keeping me from having a basset. Everywhere I go, everything has to be about money. I'm starting to hate money. I hate the need for it. I hate the people who have it, the people who will never be unhappy because they have stupid little green pieces of paper for the rest of their lives.

I'll apologize to Mom. I know it's not her fault, but I get mad sometimes because there's nothing she can do about it. I hate the helplessness. I wish I could go outside and just find a basset waiting for me on the sidewalk. People have been doing that, leaving their pets outside for other people to pick up because they can't afford them anymore. I wish something like that would happen to me.

I think to myself: If I wish for something hard enough, deep enough, will it come true? Could I pray to God for a basset? But if God heard me and gave me a basset, would it be fair to everybody else in the world who's in worse shape than I am? Why should God give me what I want and not them?

Maybe I'm going about this the wrong way. Maybe I shouldn't pray to God; just reality. The same reality Dad worshipped, the reality of math and money and science. The stuff that's around me all the time; people, books, movies, cars, dogs, cats, trees, money, grass, life, death. I should ask reality to give me a basset, because reality is

real. That's what Dad would tell me. So please reality, give me a basset.

I start to put on my Charlie costume. Pants first, big and baggy. Then jacket, bigger and baggier.

OCTOBER 31, 1943

I'm never seeing Terry again. And I'm never going to school again. Period. End of story. I don't care how much Mom will try to make me go, I'm staying in my bedroom for the rest of my life. Where it's safe.

I walked to the school dance dressed as Chaplin. A pair of boys saw me. They pointed and laughed. Since Chaplin is supposed to be funny, I just ignored them. The dance was big and loud. Balloons, fruit punch, masks. A lot of kids came dressed as Dracula. I keep remembering Lucy from the book, and avoid them. Terry was there. He said he wanted to show me something. I told him I thought he didn't want to talk with me anymore. He said he'd change his mind.

Terry wanted to go out into the woods behind the school. Way out. Where there aren't any lights or roads. I didn't know what to do. I should have said no, I should have gone back home. But Terry was the only boy I've ever really known, and Mom would want me to be with him. He seemed so good to me, I thought I was safe. So I said yes.

I've never really known how scary the forest is at night. The moon was out, but sometimes the clouds passed over it. The edges of the clouds would glow white as the moon poked out from them. Terry led me by the hand past the trees. Sometimes I thought I'd hear something, something like a frog or a bird, but I couldn't be sure. Noises become louder at night, weirder. Almost like echoes, but...not. And the wind, always the wind, nudging and whispering the leaves and branches. It made me feel as if Terry and I were the only people in an empty world. Forests and houses and buildings in every country everywhere completely empty. Nothing but shadows and quietness, forever. I tried to tell Terry how I was feeling, but it's hard, very hard, to describe a mood, a thing you can't touch or smell. He just laughed.

We kept moving forward, deeper and deeper. We started walking down a slope. I

almost slipped on some fallen leaves; Terry caught me. I heard an owl hoot somewhere far away. That noise made me feel lonely, even if Terry was with me. I wonder how much of the world is God's, and how much is the Devil's. Owls have the Devil's eyes at night.

I asked Terry about what he was going to show me. He said It's a surprise, Edith, that's the whole point. But Terry, I want to go home. Not yet Edith.

We keep walking until we stop. Across the path in front of us, there's a big mound of fallen leaves. I've seen clumps like that all over the woods; when autumn comes, sometimes hobos go around sweeping up the leaves into thick batches of brown and yellow. Nobody seems to know why. Something to do, I guess. On top of the mound is a mask, a mask of a witch's face. Big warty nose, green skin, hollow eyes. When I look at it, it looks back at me. And I'm frightened.

Terry moves closer, dragging me along. What's wrong Edith, are you scared? No Terry. I'm not scared.

Somebody must have dropped that mask here, Terry said. People do it all the time on Halloween. They get drunk and leave their masks everywhere.

He kneels down and keeps looking at it. Who do you think left it here, Edith?

I don't know, Terry.

You know, Edith, there's a Halloween legend, a real old one. If a girl picks up a witch's mask on Halloween night, she turns into a witch herself. Then Terry looks at me with a smile I don't like.

Why don't you pick it up and see what happens, Edith?

I don't want to touch it. I'm not superstitious or anything, although everybody calls me superstitious because I wear a crucifix around my neck all the time, but I'm scared of bad luck. I'm scared that some things, some physical things, are tainted with badness, and if you touch them you become tainted yourself. Maybe that's what drove Dad away; he had touched too many things, too many cars and tools and trees, that were tainted with badness.

And I didn't want to turn into a witch.

But Terry's looking at me and smiling, and I can't NOT touch the mask. I reach

down. My fingers start curling around it.

The mask MOVES. It bursts out from the leaves, right out, and screams at me. Maybe an inch away from my face. Horrible, shrieking noise, like a pig's screech, only worse. I might have screamed too, I don't know for sure. All I remember is the terror, the total total terror. I felt my Chaplin pants become wet with pee. I fell back on the ground and scurried away.

Then there was laughing. Three or four other boys appeared from behind the trees and joined Terry. The girl who was hidden beneath the leaves took off the witch's mask. All of them laughing.

I ran, I ran away from the laughing people, the witch's mask, that one moment I'll never be able to go back and stop, I'll never be able to fix. I ran deeper into the woods, deeper and deeper, where it was so dark I couldn't see my hand in front of my face anymore. I tripped over something and hit the ground.

I laid there for a long time, not moving, not even breathing I think. I wasn't scared of the dark anymore, at least not as much. It was hiding me, away from Terry and his friends and all the people they would tell about me. That's all I wanted.

Quiet. Black. Peace. Moon. Leaves. Sleep.

Transcript of Hox/Denton Interview

February 21st, 2015

HOX: How did you first meet Edith Blaine?

DENTON: Oh God. Let's rewind a little bit. I came to her first. Because that's the correct protocol, isn't it? The man has to break the ice, not the other way around. I'm trying to remember if it was in the classroom, or outside on the...no, it was the classroom. I walked right up to her and asked if she was interested in a date.

HOX: She was happy to meet you, then?

DENTON: (LAUGHS) Chagrined, maybe. But happy?

HOX: Edith was very much into philosophy, wasn't she?

DENTON: Philosophy? Where on earth did you hear that?

HOX: "Serial Killers of Carolina." There's a section where...

DENTON: Oh, right. Well, it's a waste of time. A lot of what you're going to read about Edith is a waste of time. People can't help themselves, they have to turn everything into some kind of cheap movie.

HOX: I've been doing my best to seek out records from St. Derek's...

DENTON: Wait a minute. What records?

HOX: Personal accounts from friends, grade reports, student-slash-teacher conferences...

DENTON: I see.

HOX: I'm sorry, have I crossed some kind of - ?

DENTON: No, not at all. I just...well, there's Edith's perspective of what happened, you understand, and then there's everyone else's perspective. You were saying?

HOX: Was Edith a popular girl?

DENTON: No, but she wasn't unpopular, either. She was "Bonkers Blaine". We all thought she was hilarious. It was a term of affection. She was a little scatterbrained, all over the place. Almost like a dog. I mean that in a good way.

HOX: So what drew you to her?

DENTON: I'm not sure. I mean, sitting right here in front of you, trying to explain a spur-

of-the-moment sort of thing...

HOX: If you don't mind me asking - did you think she was attractive?

DENTON: (LAUGHS) Not in the traditional sense. It was more of the attitude she harbored, I think, that acted like a repellent. A sort of desperation. It's something you find in boys and girls alike. I've always harbored a theory that people are marked from birth to be winners or losers.

HOX: And which are you?

DENTON: Well, take a look around. That's pretty indicative, don't you think? (LAUGHS) But no, Edith wasn't what I'd call ugly. It was more of an experiment. I was bored with the girls I already knew and wanted a change. At least that's how I understand it now, looking back. Hormones make a teenager pull the weirdest stunts. Like trying to be a good dancer when you don't know a thing about dancing.

HOX: She was a Christian...Southern Baptist, I think?

DENTON: No, Roman Catholic I'm pretty sure she was Roman Catholic...they all blur together to me, honestly. It's all about the flying spaghetti monster one way or another.

HOX: Did she make her religious attitude pretty obvious, then?

DENTON: Yeah, that was one of Edith's little quirks. Her parents programmed her that way. I thought it was adorable.

HOX: Do you have any kind of faith yourself? I was wondering if there could have been...

DENTON:...a connection between us? No, I don't think so. Not on that level, anyway. I was raised in a very secularist household, you know? My father was a Karl Marx fanatic. "Religion is the opium for the masses," or however it goes. But I didn't mind that aspect of Edith. Like I said, it made her quirky. I love quirky.

HOX: And how did your first date go?

DENTON: It was...(LONG PAUSE)...an eye-opener. All of my dates usually turned out well, in the sense that I knew the right kind of persona to project. Confidence was important. It didn't solve everything, but it was important.

HOX: Did you get the impression Edith would become a child-killer on that night you went out with her?

DENTON: I'm sorry, could you repeat the question? Your accent makes everything you say sound...

HOX: Sorry. I was just asking if Edith seemed like a killer to you.

DENTON: Oh, no, no, no. Absolutely not. Edith was quirky, but she was never what I would call psychotic.. Didn't a crack on the head do that to her?

HOX: The attack on the bridge. When did you first hear about that?

DENTON: To be honest, I didn't learn of it until years after. Edith was teaching somewhere, and I was climbing my way up at R.D. Boone in New York. Once my mind got stuck in that groove, everything that had happened to me prior sort of became irrelevant. You just shelve those memories until you need to access them later.

HOX: What did you know about the attack?

DENTON: What do *you* know?

HOX: Only what I've read. DENTON: Well, Lance, one of my friends from the old days, rang up the day after it happened. "Terry, you know what's happened to Bonkers Blaine?" She was always a little off-balance, but she never had that coming.

HOX: They never identified the men who pushed her over the bridge...

DENTON: Yes. Horrible. Then again, that's law enforcement in South Carolina for you. All the more reason why I moved.

HOX: You had a date with Edith at some point, didn't you?

DENTON: (LAUGHS) Oh Christ, now you're really pushing it. I can't even recall a whole lot about it. She made a strange comment about the fish in the nearby river. I don't remember her words exactly, that was back in...I don't know, 1944, '45, give or take. Edith was preoccupied with how a fish dies. Being yanked out of the water, gutted, etcetera. She seemed to have a problem eating an animal that dies under those circumstances. She didn't have any issue eating a hamburger shortly thereafter, of course. I called her out on that. I can stand a lot of flaws in a person's character, but never hypocrisy.

HOX: Is that why you broke off with her?

DENTON: I hadn't even started.

HOX: You make it sound a little sinister.

DENTON: Yes, I've been told that before. Maybe it's the inflection in my voice, I don't know. But seriously, Edith was fascinating. We weren't what you'd call star-crossed lovers, but I didn't want to simply turn my back on her altogether. Again, chalk it all up to the confused brain of a teenager with raging hormones.

HOX: Backtracking for just a moment, what did you know of Edith's parents?

DENTON: Nothing at all. I might have seen her mother once, from a distance, but I never met the lady. Same goes for the father. All I know is that my own folks didn't approve of Edith. My father always had an allergic reaction to Jesus. (LAUGHS). Never had a problem with Christ myself, but Dad disapproved of flights of fancy. He raised me to believe in the hard stuff, the practical stuff. You know, saving all you've got and putting it in a really big piggy bank. He thought Edith was going to be a bad influence on me. There was this time when we pulled a prank on Edith...HOX: What was the motivation behind it?

DENTON: "Motivation?" (LAUGHS) Is this the first time you've ever interviewed someone? Pranks don't have motivation. It's all about chaos and fun. I'd already been seeing Cathy for a while, and we thought "Bonkers Blaine" needed to loosen up a bit. After that ridiculous remark she made about fish...I'm sorry, but it really was a clueless thing to say...I felt she needed a little more humor injected into her life. There was absolutely no ill will intended.

HOX: What exactly did this prank entail?

DENTON: A witch mask. Just this cheap old piece of junk we used to scare her. I can't remember if it was mine or Cathy's. I do remember that the set-up was my idea...with Cathy hiding under the leaves, while Edith and I would come across her.

HOX: How do you remember Edith responding?

DENTON: Oh, she overreacted. I should have expected as much, really, but you know, I was young and stupid. We all were.

HOX: She didn't show up at school for at least a week...

DENTON: Exactly. Overreacting. It all happened under ten seconds or less, so it's difficult to be sure. A lot of confusion going on. She didn't scream, I think, but she made these strange sounds...almost like a dog. At the time we all thought it was hilarious. I

don't know if you've ever seen those cartoon shorts Disney used to put out...

HOX: A few.

DENTON: Right. Well, there's this character called Goofy...he would have the wackiest reactions to just about everything. That was Edith, after Cathy jumped out at her. She ran off, and we all walked back to the dance hall without her.

HOX: Did you ever have any regrets about that night?

DENTON: I suppose. None of us anticipated Edith behaving the way she did, but she got over it. I'm sorry if she interpreted our joke as something more malignant than it actually was. I mean, I've moved on, as you can see. Joining the Wall Street pack sort of necessitates moving on.

HOX: What was your first reaction upon hearing about the murders?

DENTON: This is the point in the conversation where I have to say something deep or insightful, isn't it? Something clever and wise. The fact is, all I felt was shock. I'd pretty much forgotten about Edith by that point, but when I snapped on the TV and saw the reports...imagine having that double-whammy of recognition upon seeing an old friend, and then the realization of the horrors she's committed.

HOX: Did you ever meet Barney?

DENTON: (PAUSE) Who's Barney?

HOX: Her dog.

DENTON: What does a dog have to do with anything?

HOX: Well, he...the dog was with her all the time she was...

DENTON: When she was what? Crazy? I don't understand. Never had much interest in dogs anyway. I prefer cats. (LAUGHS) Clean, responsible, dignified. Have one at home called Oliver.

HOX: One last question...

DENTON: Go ahead.

HOX: Do you feel sorry for Edith? DENTON: Every day.

NOVEMBER 1, 1943

I can't remember how I got home. There's a long, white blank where my memories are supposed to be. I remember pictures, images, sounds; that's all. Orange morning sunlight on my face. Legs moving. Birds singing. Cracking twigs. Cold wind.

Then home, in the bath. Mom pressing a little towel on my head. Then bed. She asks about what happened. I tell her I was going for a walk after the dance, and I got lost in the woods. I don't know why I lie. Maybe Mom believes me, maybe she doesn't. She says everything's all right, you weren't hurt, that's all that matters. You won't go to school today. You get to stay home.

She walks out of the room and I'm alone. I look at the ceiling, and see the witch's mask staring down at me. Big warty nose, green skin, hollow eyes. I've never been scared of a face before. They can be twisted into weird, horrible things that make you want to claw your eyes out. I'm frightened of seeing that face whenever I look in the mirror now. But if I don't look into the mirror, I can't take care of my face, which means I only get uglier, and look more like the witch.

I'm having dreams again, and most of them are about the mask. It's moving by itself this time, with no girl underneath it. Following me through the woods. It doesn't chase after me, it just sort of...drifts. Like a jellyfish in the ocean. Closer and closer. Sometimes I can force myself awake, sometimes I can't. All the time, the witch's mask drifting closer and closer towards me, and I can't run, because my feet are stuck in mud. I think it's mud. It feels like mud.

Then I wake up crying. Mom has to come in and stay with me for a while, before I can sleep again.

Please Mom, can we get a basset now? Can we?

No, Edith, not yet. But I'm here. That's all you need right now. Just me.

NOVEMBER 10, 1943

The next day I have to go to school. You're going to school, Edith. You have to go to school. It's the law.

Mom, saying the same thing over and over again. Go to school, go to school. Don't make me, Mom, I'm still sick. You've been sick for a week now, Edith. No more excuses. Now get your rear in gear.

Please don't make me, Mom, please don't make me. Terry and all his friends will be waiting for me. They'll have already told everybody about...that night. You don't know what they'll do. Please, just tell people I ran away, and I can hide in the house forever. No, Edith, you can't do that. Now come on. Hop hop, out of bed.

So out of bed I go. Brushing my teeth, combing my hair, getting dressed. And feeling so sick, sick, sick. I have some Weetabix for breakfast, then vomit into the toilet. What are you doing in there, Edith? Nothing, Mom. I'm fine.

And then the walk, the long walk. Knowing what's waiting for me at school, when all I want to do is hide someplace bright and warm forever. Like a cabin on a mountain top, or a castle. A huge, empty castle. I would walk through the halls and bedrooms, all by myself, my footsteps making the strangest echoes. Or maybe I wouldn't be by myself. I'd let Mom stay with me, and a basset. I'd grow up there with my Mom and my dog, and never have to worry about growing up and washing dishes and having children, and being a responsible housewife.

The school was around the corner. All the other kids walking up the stairs through the big front door. Just seeing them makes me feel sick in my stomach all over again. How many of them know about that night? Some of them? All of them?

I stop for a while and sit down under a tree. I see an old sparrow's nest in a branch above me. This is where the baby bird fell and died.

A bell rings inside the school. I have to go.

It was worse than I thought. Terry and his friends had told other people about what happened, and they had told other people, and on and on. Some of them made weird faces at me, trying to look like the witch's mask. There was one girl, her name

was Sally, who did it really well. I slapped her, then went to the bathroom and vomited into the toilet. I was sent to the principal's office. Bigger, older, uglier face talking down to me. Inappropriate behavior. A lady must behave like a lady around other ladies.

He spent five minutes talking to me, then another five minutes writing something down on a piece of paper. Nothing in the office except the sound of his pen, scribbling. Then he gives the note to me. Take that to your mother, Edith. She has the right to know what happened today.

The last class was Mrs. Jarrod's. Some of the kids call her "the Cheshire Cat", because her lips are always smiling. I don't know if I ever liked cats. They know how to take care of themselves. If I died, my cat would get along just fine without me, and that makes me feel...sick. After the bell rang, I ran out of the building so the other kids wouldn't catch up. I tore up the principal's note and pushed it down a street grill. I didn't want her to know. I didn't want to put any more wrinkles on her face, otherwise she'll start looking like the witch's mask too.

When I sleep, I dream of being in the woods again, the mask drifting towards me like a jellyfish. Then I wake up and stare at the ceiling.

HYMN 252

1. *Eternal Father, protect me from the witch mask.*

It burns my eyes.

Whispering lips, pointed nose, fat warts

2. *It sees me and laughs as a monster.*

The witch mask floats as a jellyfish

Hunting me in the woods

If I am found I will die

3. *And I will be like the mask*

I smell the stink of dead meat

Squirming maggots and green mold

Where can I hide from the mask?

I call for Barney

He howls from the hills

NOVEMBER 26, 1943

Halloween's gone. I helped Mom take down all the decorations. In a few weeks we'll start on the Christmas decorations. I'm going to stay away from Terry and his friends at Christmas. I don't want them ruining it too.

Today Mom stopped on the way home from work to pick up a Christmas tree. I was excited. I love the smell of pine, I love the little bits of green left on the floor as we carry the tree into the den, the sap from the tree making my fingers all gummy. I ask Mom if we have any new decorations this year. No Edith, just the old ones we've had for two years. I thought you loved those decorations, Edith. I do, Mom.

She asked me if I still believe in Santa Claus. I said yes. Mom was happy about that. Not enough people believe in Santa Claus these days, she said. When people stop believing, just look at what happens to them.

What happens to them, Mom?

They turn hard and cold, Edith, that's what happens to them. Hard and cold and brittle. People need something outside of themselves to believe in. What we have in front of our own two eyes just isn't enough.

I asked Mom if we still have any milk left over. Yes, we have plenty of milk, Edith. And cookies. All the cookies Santa could eat.

I think I'm going to write another letter to Santa this year. My favorite part of Christmas is coming down the stairs in the morning and finding the glass of milk empty, little crumbs on the plate instead of chocolate chip cookies, and my letter with Santa's answer written on the back. I don't read Santa's answer until we're done with opening the presents and having breakfast. Christmas breakfast is always wonderful. Pancake and syrup and bacon, yum.

I hope Santa remembered to bring me a basset this time. That 's what I asked for in my letter this year, and the letter last year, and the year before that. I don't talk about

writing letters for Santa with the other girls. They'd say I'm too old for that, or they'd just call me weird. I can't help it. When something special like this happens, I have to be a part of it. I want to believe. When you stop believing in some things, you turn hard and cold, like Mom said. I don't care how stupid it makes me look. I don't care.

HYMN 378

1. *Eternal Father, thank you for angels*
They are as fireflies near my body
Bright and warm as lanterns
The darkness dies

2. *The angels sing me to sleep*
Barney slumbers, his wrinkles frowning
Feathers and fur, soft as pillows
Love and life are in this house

3. *The angels outside my window glow*
As decorations on a Christmas tree
I run to them, panting for breath
But they fade as melted ice

HYMN 379

1. *Eternal Father, thank you for Christmas.*

*Thank you for the smell of pine inside living rooms
The cold air and the white snow crunching underfoot
The wondrous tree of many colors*

2. *By the end of the year we are tired*

*Reality has ripped us like cloth
But tonight we leave milk and cookies
Empty glasses and saucers in the morning*

3. *The carols are as white sugar poured into my ears*

*The muck in my head dries over
Barney howls to the sound of the carols
He is a happy howler*

DECEMBER 25, 1943

I went downstairs at 7:45am. I always go down just before eight; it gave Santa enough time to come and go without me seeing him, and that's when the sunlight is just starting to appear. I love the dark blue light filling the house at the hour.

I found the wrapped gifts under the Christmas tree, the empty glass, the plate covered with cookie crumbs, and my letter to Santa. I pick it up and turn it around, and there is Santa's answer.

It's the same answer as last year. Santa tried to get me a basset this time, but they were all out of them at the North Pole. Bassets are very popular, Edith. A lot of children ask for them. Santa promises he'll bring me a basset hound next year.

Then I notice something. The style of the words, the way the letter "p" is scribbled. And I feel sick.

I sit down on the stairs and wait until Mom gets up. Good morning, Edith, and Merry Christmas. Why don't we see what Santa brought you this year?

I look at her. What's wrong, Edith?

Mom, did you write the answer in my letter to Santa?

She doesn't say anything for a moment. Then she sits down next to me.

Edith, it doesn't matter who wrote it. All that matters is someone answered. Isn't that what everyone wants? When you make a prayer, shouldn't somebody reply? What kind of world would this be if no one did?

We have breakfast, we open the presents, we go skating out on the frozen pond by St. Claire Avenue. But all the time I feel sick and tired. I think something broke inside me.

DECEMBER 26, 1943

I've made a mistake.

I ran away from home. Just out, right out into the woods. Something about knowing Santa Claus wasn't real made me feel so scared. Not normal-scared, when

you're afraid of spiders or snakes, but scared there's nothing after dying. That howling, moaning scaredness right in your heart.

And now I'm lost, and cold. I don't know how far away I am from town. I don't see any lights. I sit on the ground, and I grovel, I pray, I beg to the leaves, the dirt, the tiniest of tiniest atoms, to let there be something after death. They can't or won't answer me. I rub my face into the ground making soft little noises, begging and begging. Please.

I look up at the trees, through their leaves, out and out to the stars so far away. When I was a girl, I thought if I could climb to the top of the trees, I could reach out and maybe, just maybe touch the stars. I think of all the explorers, to the Sahara, to the Amazon, to the Arctic and Antarctic, all alone with nothing to keep them company except the stars above.

All alone out here, all alone. I could die alone. I'm writing by moonlight, that's the only way I can see the paper in front of me. I remember another book I read at the library. THE WORST JOURNEY IN THE WORLD. It was about a man, a man called Robert Falcon Scott, who went to the Antarctic, who wanted to reach the South Pole first, but someone else beat him there, a man called Amundsen. Then he had to turn and go all the way back, back through the snow and ice. What could that have been like, the cold snapping at your skin, and so hungry you could faint? And then to become so tired, so tired, you have to stop. You just have to.

Then Robert Falcon Scott wrote his last words in this diary. What is that like, writing a message you know is your last? Knowing you're going to die, die, die, and there's nothing, no way out, no escape, just the dying and death. The hopelessness, the total total hopelessness. My heart starts aching again, that awful ache not exactly pain but something else, something deeper, a hole in your stomach. If I stayed out here too long, I could die like Robert Falcon Scott.

I wonder if monsters are real. It's funny how you believe in monsters and ghosts more easily at night than you do in the day. Haunted woods, full of terrible dark shapes nobody ever sees or should ever see. But if there's nothing after death, then there aren't any ghosts out here either. Nothing to be scared of except the cold, and maybe some crazy hermit who might live out here. What's worse: Living in a world where ghosts are real and can do horrible and frightening things to people, or living in a world where

there's nothing after dying?

I think I'd rather live in a world of ghosts than a world without them.

DECEMBER 26TH

It rained all through the night. No snow, just rain. I kept my diary safe by hiding it inside a hollow tree, one of those big oaks that looks as if it's been gutted out from the inside. Nothing but hard brown skin. I was soaked. My hair stuck to my face, wet and clingy. My clothes felt heavy, fat, bulky. Weird feeling, to be in the rain without any shelter. I spent so much time running away from black clouds when they loomed over me in the sky, and now I spent a whole night under one. It was awful, damp and awful, but I don't feel so afraid of rain anymore. At least my diary didn't get wet.

I walk home, avoiding the streets so I won't be seen. Our house is right at the tip of town, one footstep away from the great woods, like a lighthouse looking out on a great green ocean. I find my way back, remembering different sights to help me, like a fallen branch, or an upturned root. I coughed a lot. I see Mom through the kitchen window. She sees me and cries something out, I'm not sure if it's my name or God's name, she's still too far away. She runs out and grabs me, pulling me inside.

Never do that again, Edith, never never never again. You frightened me. Look at you. You're soaked to the bone.

Mom takes me to the bathroom and starts to fill the tub. I sit on the toilet, thinking of nothing. When the tub's full, Mom leaves so I can undress.

I sink into the bath until my head goes under. I stay underwater for a long time. It was so peaceful there, nothing except the dull roar you hear when your ears are full of water.

I thought to myself: If I stay here long enough, I'll drown. But it wouldn't be the worst way to die, because I'm home with my Mom where it's cozy and warm and I'm not alone. I wouldn't die like Robert Falcon Scott, or those people in those camps in Germany. I think I would be okay with that. Then I'd never have to feel what it's like when Mom has to -

I'm not going to write about it. If I do, it'll come true.

JANUARY 11, 1944

*I Believe in God the Father almighty;
Maker of Heaven and Earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son
Our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried.*

That's called the Apostle's Creed. We recite it every Sunday, while we look at the big cross at the front of the hall. I've never written about it until now. I feel I have to, because I want to remember it. I really love the last line too..."life everlasting." As if there's always going to be more.

I haven't seen the witch's mask in my dreams for a few nights now. That must be good. Maybe the church has driven her out of my head. It's always beautiful at church, all light and airy. Except when it rains. The pastor stands on his podium and talks about God. Sometimes Jesus, mostly God. One time, I remember him talking about God creating the Earth in six days. After the sermon I asked Mom when this happened. She says six thousand years ago.

There are people who think the Earth was made by "science". Lots of them. Some folks try to come up with something between God and science, but then they're just called agnostics, and it's a dirty word as far as I can tell. They say it like a dirty word. They spit it out like people spit out "coward" or "yellow". You can believe in God or not, but you can't be agnostic, no no no. Then both sides hate you.

I made up my mind about who I was because I had to. I believe God because He goes beyond death, while science only...talks to death. Makes deals with it. Bargains.

Arrangements. It's just not enough, not for me. I wish it was. I'm jealous of people who can live with the idea there's nothing after dying. Just thinking about it makes me feel sick all over again.

The church boy is going around collecting money with his pot. Mom gives me one dollar, just so I can put something into it and not seem impolite. I keep forgetting to use my own coins, the ones I save up in my piggy bank. One of these days I'll remember.

This is the first time I've seen just how old Reverend Belt really is. Sometimes he makes this little wheezing noise, just between words. You have to be right up in the front pew to hear it. I've heard kids around the neighborhood call him a zombie. They laugh whenever they say it. I don't know much about zombies, except for a poster I saw in a movie theater. It was about someone walking with a zombie. The faces of the handsome stars were to the left, while to the right, there was this big, looming hand reaching out to grab you. I definitely wouldn't want to walk with a zombie, so the whole idea is just dumb.

Reverend Belt makes the sign of the cross; head, heart, right, left. Just like the ABCs, only easier. I practiced with Mom a few times. I always feel better after doing it. The kids look at me funny if I make the cross at school, like I'm offending them or something, which is...kind of weird.

Terry Denton and his friends haven't gone after me for a while. I guess they just got bored.

JANUARY 14, 1944

My fault, always my fault, over and over again. I wonder if I was born to be a screw-up. Maybe it's my destiny.

Problem with the toilet today. It got backed up and Mom had to stick her hand into the water. I don't know how she can do that; I sure as heck couldn't. She thought something was wrong. She pulled her hand out, washed it in the sink, having that little frown on her face I've seen since I was a kid. Edith, we're going to have to call the

plumber. This is beyond me. I have no idea what's going on.

The plumber came three hours later. Fat man, greasy, like a pig. No, that's not right. I've seen pigs who look cleaner than him. His chin and cheeks are shaved, but his neck is thick with hair. Let me see what I can do, miss. He was in and out of the bathroom in five minutes. He told Mom, I'm not sure how it happened miss, but I think there's a dead rat stuffed right down deep in the pipe. I'm gonna have to go all-out on this one, sorry miss. He charged fourteen dollars; too much, way too much for Mom. I hate money, how it changes people. It turned Dad into a horrible old man before his time.

How does a rat get into a toilet pipe? Why would it WANT to get into a toilet pipe? I know rats are dirty animals, but I don't think they're an animal that WANTS to drown. That's what lemmings do, sure, but rats? All they want is stay alive and make babies. I'm sure everything would make a whole lot more sense to me if I knew why God put rats on Earth. And mosquitoes. And hornets.

I don't know. Sometimes I think I'm doomed to never really understand anything, like I'm retarded in some way that hasn't been...discovered by doctors. Mr. Kartshire once called me the kind of girl who's "permanently inexperienced". No matter how much I try or how much I learn, I just can't...I can't...

Aaaarrrrggghhh, I can hear the plumber working in the bathroom. Slimy, sloppy noises. I can just picture him leaned over the toilet, looking into it, loving it like a child. He's a man who would love everything to do with toilets, with pipes and dark damp places and scurrying things. Money is something that belongs in toilets too, so of course he'd love money. Rubbing the green paper in his sweaty palms, drool dribbling down his fat chin, his eyes big and staring like a fish.

God, I don't want to grow up. The world is made on money, money, money, and I can't stand people who think without money you're nothing. All I want is a basset hound, a basset hound named Barney, and I'd live alone with him out in the woods away from everyone. There's a word for the kind of place I'd like to live; "sanctuary". I learned it at church. Somewhere I can just go off with my dog and be alone. I just don't think I'm cut out to be a grown-up, to have all the responsibilities a grown-up has. I don't even know how Mom does what she does without going crazy.

Maybe it'll all come to me naturally. Just like growing older comes naturally. I won't even know it's happening. I'll be a good, responsible housewife who takes care of my kids and works at a good job and I won't even understand how it happened. If I keep getting older, but my mind stays the same...young and stupid, like a dog's...

The plumber's finished. I can hear him walking out the door; big, heavy, thudding steps. Like an ox.

HYMN 380

1. *Eternal Father, thank you for the shadows.*

They glide and flutter as birds

Stretching over the walls like taffy

Keeping my room alive in the night

2. *Barney chases the shadows*

Paws scuffing on the floor

One deep bark, two deep barks

What are these strange things? He barks

3. *Barney sniffs out the shadows*

He is always close

His nose like a star

Smelling the goodness in the room

JANUARY 18, 1944

Again the witch mask. Just last night. Not floating through a forest this time, but in my room. Coming towards me, slowly, like a jellyfish.

I wake up, crying. Mom hears me. What's wrong, Edith? Bad dream, Mom. Bad dream.

Mom stays with me, sings a little song that makes me sleep again. This time I have a different dream. A basset hound is all alone in a city. Everything's deserted; buildings, houses, streets, parks. I don't know if everyone died, or just...went away. The basset wanders and wanders. There's nobody around. All he wants is someone, anyone to play with him, to feed him, to keep him warm. Finally he comes to a statue. He sits down and waits for the statue to move, to say hello, to do something. I wake up crying again, but this time it's soft and quiet. I crawl under my bed and hide in the darkness. My heart feels like it's breaking.

When being under the bed isn't enough, I go out into the backyard. It's cold; I can see my breath. I look at the stars, far away, and try to spot the Big Dipper. I can just make it out. I crawl through the grass, keeping my head low, sniffing the ground like a basset. I pretend my long ears are rolling along the grass, getting dirty. It's very quiet. No one around. Mom doesn't wake up. After a while, I don't know how long, I go back inside. I sleep on the sofa.

Morning, finally. I always seems to feel better in the morning; everything's fresh and new. Mom cooks waffles for breakfast. I tell her I had another dream last night, about a basset. Really, Edith?

Yeah.

Do you still want one?

Yeah.

I'll see what I can do, Edith.

Diary of Edith Blaine. Aged 48.

FEBRUARY 24, 1972.

God, sometimes I wonder how I got here.

You go through life making all these little decisions expecting some big decision to come along and change everything. But it turns out the little decisions added up to the one big decision all along, and by then it's too late to turn back and start things over again. You're stuck, for better or worse.

Moving back to South Carolina, for example. There's one big decision that came out of a series of little decisions and I didn't even know it. I knew Mom was born and raised here, she'd never stop talking about those childhood stories of obscure towns in the woods and murky swamps, but she never told me why she left for South Carolina. Bad memories about something, maybe.

It was a mistake coming here, I know that now. But I'm too entrenched in Enoch to pull out, to run somewhere else. It's the toughness, this weird creepy psychotic need to be a total bastard that's hard for me to take. Too many men with tattoos of serpents coiling around naked women covering their obscene bulging muscles, men who do unspeakable things to weaker, smaller men because their vocabulary doesn't entirely consist of "shit" and "fuck." Pardon my French. It makes me grateful I'm not a man, otherwise people would have expectations of me that could get me killed.

There are crosses here too. Crosses everywhere, hanging up on walls, outside of buildings, sticking out of the ground. But I think everyone just sees them as decoration, because they never seem to care what it's supposed to mean. At least not the way Mom taught me. It's all part of the same macho idiocy. The men are dumb, the women even dumber. Morons and sluts who are proud of being morons and sluts.

Thank God for the kids. They haven't been processed yet...haven't fallen in love with the flesh. I can still teach them about the spirit. Too many people around here love the flesh. Some of them say they believe in the Word, but in truth their own bodies are the only real places of worship. It's too late to make them learn the spirit is something

real too, something that deserves respect. Children are ready to listen. Their eyes haven't narrowed and turned red yet, their ears haven't been clogged up with waxy cynicism.

Ranting again. I can't remember where I first got this idea of writing a diary. I don't like so much of my bile going into it. This shouldn't be a toilet, it should be a confessional. So I'll write about some more good stuff, to balance out the ugliness. Last Monday I was given a raise. A few more months and I can afford my own dog. It's unbelievable how long I've been fantasizing about having a basset hound. It was money, always about money. I hate money.

Come to think of it, maybe I should drop the idea of getting a puppy. Adopting is bound to be a lot cheaper. Besides, I've seen what puppies can do. The one time I dropped by Wendy's to visit her parents, they had a little Labrador who was decimating the entire house. I don't think I could survive that. Mom definitely couldn't survive it.

What time is it? 9:30. Better see how Mom's doing.

Prayer 782

*1 This is the world we live in, this is the world we live in
Full of men, and women, good and bad
Love and hate, joy and sorrow
This is the world we live in*

*2 This is the world we live in, this is the world we live in
From the blue skies above to the brown dirt below
From the deep dark seas to the bright deserts of sand
This is the world we live in*

*3. This is the world we live in, this is the world we live in
Do not be jealous, do not be envious
We all die in the end, we are the same
This is the world we live in*

*4. This is the world we live in, this is the world we live in
Do not fear death, because Jesus always waits for you
High in Heaven at God's right hand
This is the world we live in*

February 25, 1972

Show and tell today. The kids brought some wonderful items to class. Jessica Craine had this lovely rock she found in her backyard; it looked as if a human face was carved into it. Paul Jacobson had a jar filled with butterflies. Apparently he had spent all yesterday afternoon catching every single one, running around on his white sneakers, staining them with green grass and brown dirt. He admitted to accidentally crushing a couple, although I don't know for sure how "accidental" it might have been. I told him to set them loose outside after he was finished.

Next up was Sarah Channard. She held up a cross to the class, which she claimed belonged to her grandmother. The other children moved back in their seats, away from Sarah. A plain, iron-wrought cross. Nothing fancy. That's the way I like to see them, without any kind of elaborate decorations or naked women adorning the image. One of the children - I think it was Calvin Derkins - asked what the crucifix was supposed to mean. Sarah didn't know; like Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny, it just sort of existed around the house. When I explained what the cross meant, he said "Ew." Calvin does that a lot. How do girls pee? "Ew". How are babies made? "Ew." Maybe it's his own personal catchphrase.

Down we went, boy to girl to boy to girl, like an assembly line. Maggie Parrish had a box of chocolate chip cookies her mother had baked on Maggie's birthday, almost a week ago. The chocolate was starting to melt; she'd better eat them soon. Lance Stern brought a framed photograph of Mary Tyler Moore. Lance said he loved her show, and that was it, but the boys in the class knew a liar when they saw one. Little Lance Stern had a crush, and they were going to torture him until the end of time over it. Strange, the hatred boys have for girls.

Cathy Simmons took one of those picture-toys with her...what on earth do you call them?... "Lite-Brite". She had put together the outline of a house, the sun, and an oversized flower, using the appropriate colors. I told her it was very creative. But try something even better next time, like Noah's Ark. Then she could get to draw all kinds of animals too.

Next Josh Barley and his "Speak n Spell" machine. I have no idea what kids are

getting into these days. It's all becoming more based in electronics and machines and what-not, rather than just playing outside. Just last Sunday I saw this...thing...inside an arcade. It almost looked like an ATM, only bigger and chunkier. At first I thought it was a television. There was about four or five children gathered around it, and on the screen was a...I suppose it was a spaceship, and it was shooting UFOs, but I didn't stay around long enough to make sure.

Josh smashed in these letters into his little red machine, and these horrible tinny voice comes out that tells him whether he's right or wrong. The worst part came when Josh fiddled around with the volume on the thing. One hideous noise after another. They started to sound like the screams of a pig, and I told him to switch it off.

Time to grade everyone. I honestly don't think machines deserve a high mark. Like Calvin would say, "Ew." Sorry, Josh, but I can't make any exceptions. Paul's show-and-tell was very clever...assuming he let the butterflies go, of course. I hope he did; Paul often has this devious look on his face that I simply don't trust. I did enjoy Sarah's exhibit. Very simple and straightforward. And pure.

FROM: Reverend Matthew Hooper, Enoch Parish
TO: Edith Blaine, Harrison Cottage, 9 Spring Road.
February 26, 1972.

Dear Ms. Blaine,

In regards to your question about the Church's stance on original sin, all I can say is not once have I ever prescribed to a metaphorical view of the idea. I find that atheists will mock any Catholic conceit, whether literal or metaphorical, so broaching the subject with them at all is a useless endeavor. Original sin is stark reality; Adam & Eve - or the figure we today remember as Adam & Eve - might have been the instigators of original sin, but you don't have to drive far from your house to see it perpetuated every day.

My biggest worry with the current advent of secularism in popular culture is the moral relativism that will accompany it. I have a suspicion the 21st century will be a hardened, cynical, and wildly hedonistic hundred years if the human race opts to favor so-called practical reality over divinity.

Nonetheless, I strongly encourage you not to become depressed or despondent whenever the topic of original sin is discussed. Simply because we are born to a crime doesn't mean we're to remain shackled to that crime.

Original sin is our basest need, the natural predilection to cruelty and violence. While I can't presume to know the thoughts of God, rest assured you have, thus far, led a good Christian life. You have a job imparting knowledge on children, you care for your mother, and demonstrate genuine compassion towards everyone around you. Your regular Sunday attendance is also very welcome indeed.

God will judge us all in the end, but you needn't fear His final decision with regards to your soul.

Kind regards,

Rev. Matthew Hooper

February 27, 1972

Not much to report this time. Had a parent-teacher conference with Josh Barley's mother and father. Josh hasn't been faring well for a few weeks now. It's hard to tell if he's genuinely...weak-minded in some way, or if he just doesn't care. I hope it's the latter. There's nothing worse than knowing there's something wrong about you, something wrong inside your head, and never being free of it.

I can't feel impatient with Josh, only because I'm not entirely sure how stupid I am myself. I feel I was born a fraction of a second out of rhythm with the rest of the human race. Josh keeps making these...mistakes. One time, when he was in front of the classroom, I asked him to draw a picture of a bird. He looked at me with this big frown, and started scribbling on the chalkboard. I heard some of the girls gasp; the boys just giggled. I took a glance at the board, and saw he'd drawn a squiggly hand holding up its middle finger.

I wasn't sure, Ms. Blaine. I wasn't sure what you wanted. A real bird, or the kind of bird my Dad makes at people who make him angry.

I rubbed the drawing off the board and sent Josh back to his desk. I felt like crying, because even then I knew Josh had made an innocent mistake, but it was still an idiotic mistake to make. Worse, I made those kind of mistakes all the time. As if my brain and my mouth were misaligned somehow. God, I remember the people laughing. Not in front of me, of course, but just a polite little snicker behind my back, so faint I could never be sure who it was. I'm just like Josh; permanently inexperienced.

I shouldn't have been surprised by Josh's father. The man wasn't exactly rude, just blunt. Always wanting to be somewhere else. If he was at home, he'd want to be somewhere else. If he was at work, he'd want to be somewhere else. If he was vacationing in Bermuda, he'd want to be somewhere else. And the mother...

She didn't say a word. She looked at the floor, her hands, my desk, but never at me. Why? Did she hate me? Had I done something to her boy?

I drove home feeling sick, but grateful it was Friday. Mom was in the kitchen, reading her book. She does more reading than walking these days, and I wish she would get off her rear end more often. Exercise helps the bones, keeps them from stiffening. But she's not interested.

How was work today, Edith?

It's not really work, Mom. I like what I'm doing.

Have you fixed the window on the car yet?

Mom, I got it fixed three days ago. I keep telling you.

Oh. When is Reverend Hooper coming over?

He cancelled, Mom. I told you yesterday.

He cancelled?

Yes, Mom.

Oh.

Never mind then.

PRAYER 783

1. *Eternal Father, please help the children.*

They are as lost doves.

The world outside grows uglier than a witch.

I seek to protect the boys and girls

But they do not belong to me.

2. *Are we truly born to what we are?*

But I see the eyes of the children,

And I see the PAIN of FLESH

Hot red coals burning behind soft white jelly If only I was a smarter woman

3. *Then I could save them*
But I am as dumb as fog
As lost as a dying cow
So please Eternal Father, guide the children
Take them away from this land
Of poisoned honey

Phone Transcript. May 11th.

9:30am.

EDITH BLAINE: Hello?

ALAN GRAHAM: Hello? Is this Edith Blaine?

BLAINE: Yes...hi.

GRAHAM: Morning, ma'am. This is Graham's Dog Shelter calling. You've been wanting to know if we ever got our hands on a...sorry, a blood hound, was it?

BLAINE: A basset hound. A basset hound.

GRAHAM: Good, sorry, couldn't remember for a second.

BLAINE: You've found a basset hound?

GRAHAM: We've found a basset hound. Came in last Friday...

BLAINE: Oh, that's...

GRAHAM: ...I was away on business and didn't even know he was here until ten minutes ago. None of the staff told me, you see.

BLAINE: ...no no, that's fine, that's wonderful. Where did you find him?

GRAHAM: Out on the street, digging through somebody's trash bag. Made a real mess on the pavement. He's dirty as hell.

BLAINE: No, I don't care, I...I don't care how dirty he is.

GRAHAM: We gave him a bath anyway, dog was stinking to high heaven. Didn't have a collar on him, so that pretty much settled it.

BLAINE: Has there been...any wanted posters stuck up around the neighborhood?

GRAHAM: Haven't seen any yet, and if someone's lost a dog, we're usually the first ones to be notified. He's an old son of a bitch, judging from the wrinkles.

BLAINE: Oh. Uhm...how much is he?

(B.G. noise of yelping dogs)

GRAHAM: Jed, get those fucking beasts under control! *(into phone)* Sorry ma'am, what was that about?

BLAINE: How much is he?

GRAHAM: Forty-five.

BLAINE: Dollars?

GRAHAM: No, gold coins. Of course it's dollars, ma'am.

BLAINE: Oh, yes, I knew that, I'm sorry. I'm just...really excited...

GRAHAM: That's nice. So, when do you want to pick him up?

BLAINE: Well, I just...do you take checks?

GRAHAM: Cash only, ma'am.

BLAINE: (sharp breath)

GRAHAM: Ma'am?

BLAINE: Okay, okay. How long can you keep him?

GRAHAM: Two weeks, then we gotta euthanize him.

BLAINE: Oh God, no no no, don't do that. I'll get him, I'll get him.

GRAHAM: When?

BLAINE: What?

GRAHAM: When, ma'am?

BLAINE: Uh...just a few days. I'll get him on Wednesday.

GRAHAM: We need to follow regulations over here, ma'am. We're getting new strays in all the time, and we've gotta make room. If you can't come by Monday...

BLAINE: I'll be there Monday. I swear to God I'll be there on Monday.

GRAHAM: Fine. We'll see you here Monday, then.

BLAINE: What time is good for you?

GRAHAM: We shut at five, ma'am.

BLAINE: Five. What time do you open?

GRAHAM: Nine.

BLAINE: Nine. Okay. I'll be there, I promise.

GRAHAM: All right, ma'am. Pleasure talking with you.

BLAINE: Thank you.

GRAHAM: Bye.

BLAINE: Goodbye.

March 8, 1972

I'm doing it. It's happening. I'm going to the pound to get my dog.

How long have I been waiting for this? God knows. There was always a reason I couldn't get a dog. Money. Dad and Mom, always talking about money, imparting all that damn insecurity and hand-wrangling on to me. I don't even know if I can afford one now. But I've stopped caring. It's time.

He's been at the pound for almost two weeks. The staff are getting annoyed with me; they probably think I've been stringing them along. But I had to get the money first. Eight days is the maximum amount of time before a dog has to be put down. Eight days. I almost didn't make it.

I sold my earrings and necklace at the nearest pawn shop. Over three hours worth of driving. \$45. Forty-five dollars. I keep counting the number in my head. I had to be sure it was exact. When I talked to Mr. Graham over the phone, I wrote down the price he quoted, right on the palm of my hand in blue ink. Forty-five dollars. \$45. Not a penny more or less.

Mr. Graham said the basset came in all of a sudden. I was lucky to call when I did. Someone found him on the streets, rummaging through a trash can. No collar, no name. Absolutely filthy. Yes, they washed him, but basset hounds have a tendency to just suck up the dirt from the ground, or so Mr. Graham told me. I honestly don't care. In fact, that only makes a basset more endearing.

The wrinkles too. I love the wrinkles, and how they get even more wrinkly as they grow older. I knew this was going to be an adoption from day one. A puppy would have been too much, too much for Mom and I. Don't get me wrong, I love puppies, adore them, but they're so excitable and all over the place. Chewing and peeing like machines.

This is the sort of day that almost feels like Christmas. That time when you know something big and warm, and GOOD is on the horizon. I've spent so many days being afraid of what kind of nasty surprise each hour will hold for me, I have the right to treat

myself. Forty-five dollars. \$45. Every penny worth it. I don't know how long I've been dreaming about this. I hope, I hope I won't be disappointment. I don't think I can take any more disappointments, any more bad news. Please, if there's a single day in my life when my expectations are actually surpassed, let it be this one. Just good news and good times from here on out.

10:20. Better get going.

March 9, 1972

Je t'aime. That's French for "I love you." Those are the only words for me right now.

I pulled up at the shelter; a man named Jed was waiting. Tall, gangly young man, with the long hair and beard that seems to be so popular among kids these days. No sign of Mr. Graham; maybe he was on business again.

Jed led me down the main hall. So many dogs, some of them looking out, some of them huddled up in a corner, cold shivering balls of fur waiting for their time to end. Who were they? Did they have names? Would they ever have names? What is life, for them? Is it like a dream, with all the briefness of a dream? What if I hadn't been born human? Do dogs have souls? There must be more for them besides this existence. Abandonment, scavenging on the street, an occasional bite or snarl, then into a cell, waiting, waiting for an angel that may or may not come. Is it like praying for God, I wonder? Am I God to these dogs? Are they waiting for me to save them from reality?

We're almost at the end of the hall. Jed stops and kneels down in front of a cage, right at the bottom. He motions to me. Here he is, Ms. Blaine. Take a look.

I see him, on top of a pile of blankets black with dirt. He's laying on his side, facing away from the bars. He's big, big and wrinkly. Folds of creased flesh, brown fur all over with a few spots of white under the belly and atop the head. I can hear him snoring. Low and rumbling, like the gentlest earthquake in the world.

Hey, hound man, Jed shouts. You got yourself an owner.

His tail jerks a little. He rubs himself into the blankets a little more, making a loud groaning sort of noise. Jed bangs a stick on the bars.

Hey, hound man! Jed shouts. Wakey-wakey!

His head tilts, facing the grey wall. He stays that way for a moment, as if waking up has to be a slow, slow thing for him, like the sun coming out from the clouds. Then he look at me. Crinkled rumpled face, droopy eyes even droopier from too much sleep.

Hello, I whisper to him. He yawns.

Jed unlocks the cage. He reaches in and grabs the dog by his blank collar. Jed pulls him out, too fast, much too fast. The dog hobbles along, little claws going pit-pat on the linoleum floor.

I take him away from Jed, and bury my face into his neck. For a second it's only darkness and the dog's smell, just the way I want it. He smells of earth and hard dirt, of trash cans and backyards, places that could only be called home.

You okay there, Ms. Blaine? Jed sounds annoyed, with me or the dog I can't tell. I think he's seen this sort of thing before, many times - this closeness, and for some reason it irritates him.

I tell Jed I'm fine, and give him the money. I hope he didn't notice my hands were shaking. They felt like they were shaking. Jed counts the bills while I put my face into the dog's neck again.

Jed offers me a leash. No, thank you, I brought one with me. Jed walks us back out into the sunlight, the dog waddling next to my feet. Jed shows us to my car. Pleasure doing business with you, ma'am. Jed opens the trunk for me. Need any help picking him up, ma'am?

No, thank you. I'll manage.

I put one arm underneath the dog's chest, another under his stomach, and lift. God, he's so heavy. I hear a little puff of air come out of his mouth while I lower him into the trunk.

Looks like you got a bit of slobber on your dress there, ma'am, Jed says, pointing a finger.

That's all right. I slowly close the hood, making sure the dog's tail or ears aren't in the way. Jed tilts his red hat at us and walks back to the shelter.

I sit in the car for a moment, listening to the dog snuffling around in the trunk.

Then I get out and open the hood. He looks at me.

Barney, I said to him. Your name's Barney. Okay?

He sniffs my hand.

First I open the door to the passenger seat. Then I put my hands under Barney, and lift. He makes the same little puff with his mouth. I walk around the car and ease him into the chair.

I get back into the driver's seat and start up the car. Barney is looking out the window. I roll down the glass a little, so he can stick his head out. Then we go home.

I don't remember many sounds, except the wind whistling past the car and Barney's shuffling and snuffling about the seat. I rub him behind the ear; he makes the same funny groaning noise I heard before in the shelter.

Home. I open the door, Barney hops out. I let him explore every inch of the house, except Mom's room, because she was still sleeping. I follow him, watching him figure everything out, where everything was. Sometimes he'd stop and look at me with his drooping eyes, then he would put his nose to the floor and begin sniffing again. After an hour, he settles down in the living room, putting his head on the soft rug. I do the same, face down on the rug, eye-level with Barney, putting my hand on his wrinkly head. He closes his eyes and sleeps, snoring gentle earthquakes.

Je t'aime. I love you.

PRAYER 784

1. *Eternal Father, I wish for you to make Barney as the tides.*

As forever as death, but not death.

I am aware that I am flesh and will be dust.

But please, never make Barney dust.

Forgive me.

2. *Priests know how to speak, how to give words made of roses.*

All I can say is please.

This is a world of hard rock.

Because the pain of his goneness

Would break my body.

3. *Every day he waits,*

Every afternoon we walk among the trees

Every evening I cook dinner

Dry and wet food, mush in a silver bowl.

It's a simple thing, a happy thing.

May 14, 1972

Ugh. People. I just can't understand - ugh.

I'm reading the newspaper this morning. Mom's sitting at the table with me. She's counting the bread crumbs on her plate. I find this...article, called TWO RAPED AND MURDERED IN BUNGALOW HOME. A man and his pregnant wife. Their names Lee and Mary Anne. Pregnant. Their first baby. That's what makes it so...difficult.

It happened in South Carolina. They were all alone in their house. Just married, new baby on the way. Then, three people came inside. They broke in through the windows. Two men and a woman. The men went after the man, the woman after the woman. Makes some sense, I suppose.

It's what they did that takes away my ability to sleep. They didn't just kill them. They humiliated them. Broke them down into nothing through ways I won't tell here because I don't want the same filth coming off my pen. The pregnant woman was the worst. Something small, something unborn, that could be taught pain and misery and death before ever leaving the womb.

But for them, it was more about the hurting than the killing. The killing they did only because they had to. They could only have so much fun for so long.

Why did those people hate Lee and Mary Anne so much? Were they too normal? They were massacred because they were too normal for sneering animals who only live to hurt and hurt and hurt? How could they even do that? How can a person pick up a knife, and say to a pregnant woman...and then stab the knife into...and then use the husband for...

What's wrong with these people? What's going through their minds when they do these things? Can they see themselves doing what they're doing? Could they be made to care? Do they get so caught up in hurting and killing, it's impossible for them to see what it's like for the person who's being hurt and...

To die like that. Scared, in pain. No way out. If someone has to die so badly, they deserve something after death. They deserve something beyond the rot and the flies.

No excuses, reality. No excuses.

Reality is filled with monsters. The monster could be a person, or it could be an accident. Doesn't matter that much. The outcome is always the same. A random thing happens, and it destroys your life. It's not fair.

I rip up the newspaper and toss it in the trash. Mom's upset because she wanted to solve the crossword puzzle. I take her back upstairs, then play with Barney out in the garden. No ball-throwing; Barney refuses to fetch anything. Just tugging. Sometimes we use a blanket, sometimes a stick. Barney always looks so funny when he's pulling on a blanket. Like his head is about to burst.

This is good, I need to do this. I need to be in this world, this garden, with Barney, away from the bad things. I have class in an hour. I need to be responsible. I need to be focused. I need to be a leader. I need to be a grown-up.

PRAYER 785

Eternal Father, I do not want work.

I fear that I am lazy

My blood is thick wax

The children see me as bronze

But I am made of jelly

Please take away my terror

Terror of the judges and officers

Of the lawyers and the businessmen

All I want is to hide.

I'm scared in the heart, scared in the head.

Scared of what is beyond my door.

My bed is my only church from the world

The strong and the cruel swarm as ants

They bite me and lash me and cut me every day

But I must keep thumping as the human heart

Like an old engine

This is a world of statues

I am made of cotton

May 16, 1972

Mom had another tantrum. Jodie was visiting, and we were having dinner around the table. Twice, Mom asks me: Edith, who is that? That's Jodie, Mom. She's a teacher at the school like me.

Oh, I see.

Jodie and I are talking about the kids. Little Simon Kent is being a real nuisance. Did some terrible things to Nancy just yesterday. Put dog's feces into her lunchbox. Jodie wonders if all children are amoral monsters from birth, and it's simply a matter of us having to program them to think like a moral animal.

No, no Jodie, that's nonsense. It has to be. Kids are...mischievous, but they know what's right and wrong from the moment they're -

Edith, what are you talking about? Mom again. Her voice getting sharp. Never a good sign. Mom gets so angry when she feels she's being left out of the conversation. Mom's hearing is going, day by day. She hears less every morning, the world's sounds fading away from her. It frightens her, I think, and it makes her furious. At herself, at people who can still hear, I don't know.

Mom, please don't shout. You don't have to shout.

I'm not shouting. I'm simply tired of being ignored.

Jodie senses it's time to go, even though she only got here ten minutes before. I shake her hand at the doorway. Bye, Jodie. Keep in touch.

Edith?

Yes, Jodie?

You're wrong about the kids. I'm sorry, but you're wrong.

Then she's gone. I go back to Mom. She's left the table. So I head into the living room. Mom's looking out the window into the garden.

Why, Edith? Why do you insist on making me feel old?

We've been through this before. Maybe a dozen times, maybe more, I haven't counted. I sit down beside Mom and say I'm sorry. That's all you can do in situations like these. Say you're sorry.

Mom leans forward. What is that smelly dog of yours up to now?

Barney's in the garden, digging. I gave him a bone this morning, one of those big, chunky edible bones they make out of rawhide. He loves them. His slobber quota increases by a hundred percent, but as long as I have a roll of paper handy I couldn't care less.

Barney sometimes tries to bury his bones. If not in the garden, he uses the kitchen. Barney claws and claws and claws at the floor, never understanding why it won't give. It's hilarious to watch. This time Barney is digging through my rose patch. It's annoying, but I never get as livid as Mom. Roses are her one last fancy, her final hobby. Even if she doesn't grow them herself. Nothing can get in the way of that.

It's okay, Mom, I'll take care of him.

Make sure you do. I'm mighty tired of that animal.

I go outside and stop Barney before he hits any roots. I take the bone out of his mouth - blech - and I leave him in the house for a while.

The roses are easily fixed. Some fresh fertilizer, and a little fresh water to make it muddy and appetizing for the plants. I got to Barney before he could do any real damage. But I have to find a place for him to bury his damn bones, because I won't stop giving them to him, not when he loves them so much.

Mom's still in the living room. She has her glasses on, filling in the crossword puzzle. She doesn't look at me.

Mom, don't you want to watch *Kung Fu*? It's coming on in five minutes.

No, Edith.

But you love that show -

I'm not interested, Edith.

Okay, Mom.

Prayer 786

1. *Eternal Father, thank you for giving me Jodie
A friend for times of hard stone.
She is of sunshine and wet grass
Her house is a place of candy*
2. *Jodie walks in the park
Barney chases a duck
The duck bit poor old Barney
Feathers flying, Jodie laughing*
3. *Jodie is a dog woman
Her dog is Mace, big and thick I am alone in my house
Dead inside*
4. *Jodie believes in angels
Children draw, pencil scratching on paper
My pencil always breaks
I write to keep my hands alive
And my heart alive*
5. *Jodie sings to her students
I sing the alphabet
"Cat" and "Bat" and "Hat"
And "Basset"
With just one T*

Dear Ms. Blaine,

You asked me in the confessional about the nature of death, especially with your mother in the twilight years of her life. I for one take issue with the finality that seems to be invariably associated with death. I believe what you are looking for is confirmation, or evidence, of an existence after death. If you seek the finite kind of evidence scientists abide by, I can only say there are many things that transcend the empirical reality they've imposed on the world.

Let me tell you a story about my brother. He is now an old, bitter man, although he lives a seemingly content life in Tennessee with a wife and son. We were both raised in the Catholic faith, but my brother was the more inquisitive of the two of us. He always wanted to know more, more, more. If his brain was a mouth, it would have eaten every book in the town library.

There came a time when he attended a biology class, taught by a staunch (some would say even a little militant) atheist. Once my brother learned more of his teacher's secularist leanings, he inevitably began to seek further knowledge on the topic. That isn't to say he gave up Christianity at that point; but he extended his research into other religions. Judaism, Paganism, Native American mysticism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism...as soon as he was done with one, he had to start on another almost immediately, almost as if he were afraid of bringing down the wrath of any faith he might have unfairly missed.

What happened next was a messy confluence of too many voices, too many dissenting opinions, too many ways of thinking. Who was right, and who was wrong? Soon my brother decided that either everyone had to be right, or everyone had to be wrong. Having thrown down the gauntlet, he turned his back on religion altogether and embraced the empirical sciences.

Three years passed without much incident, and then, suddenly, my brother took to screaming wildly in his sleep during the night. His fits were presumably brought about by bad dreams, but he could never remember the exact details of what occurred in the nightmares. What he did remember was the all-encompassing mood of final, irresolute, inescapable death.

My brother thought he had made peace with the “truth” of entropy and decay. There was no room for agnostics among his peers; you had to accept the empire of facts hook, line and sinker. But the “truth” was driving him mad. He had reached the endgame of knowing everything; he had come face-to-face with what he perceived to be the void. No words of comfort or hope from his family, including myself, could dissuade him. He was convinced hope itself was a weakness exploited by the cruel and powerful, to delude their victims into obeying the mandates they set. Every syllable of light we offered was counteracted with a syllable of darkness; he had become a nihilistic lump of a man.

There were several suicide attempts. As you can understand, I don’t wish to go into any detail about them. It was only his wife that managed to bring him back from the brink, but to this day he remains broken. We barely talk to one another anymore; he sees me as a mangy sheepdog, helping to keep the herd in line.

His science dictates Jesus Christ did not, could not, have returned from the grave. But this is the singular event in human history that defines our faith. The belief in Christ’s restoration convinces me to get out of bed every morning. My brother believed the pursuit of newer and better medicines would be a far more realistic motivation, and yet, this didn’t stop the gloom from poisoning his mind.

Those who mislead themselves to a life without faith are damned. You must never forget this, Edith. We can help them however we can, but if they refuse our aid with a snarl, not much else can be done. My brother became miserable precisely because faith is an indelible aspect of ourselves, which, in turn, refutes death’s power over us.

As soon as he denied faith, all that remained was reality; but reality - at least his understanding of it - could only carry him so far.

You will never say goodbye to your mother, as we never say goodbye to any of our loved ones. There is only the temporary departure. This is God's guarantee.

Kind regards,

Rev. Matthew Hooper

May 19, 1972

Dog show in the neighborhood next Monday. I saw a pamphlet stuck on a telephone pole while I was walking with Barney. "*Canine Bonanza! Once a year in Enoch! Bring your dog, win \$300!*" I tore the paper off and showed it to Barney. What do you think, boy? Should we go? Barney sniffed the paper.

I'm going. It's not like there's a lot of competition around here. Sure, there are lots of dogs, but there's only one basset hound in town. My Barney. Who knows, we just might win Best in Show. As long as I clean him. I really need to get into the habit of washing Barney more often. I rinse him down every Wednesday, but he just gets so dirty so fast. I never see him roll on the ground. How does he do it?

I'm going to put together a list of everything I need. Dog shampoo, dog Q-tips, toenail clippers...the whole kit and caboodle. I hope Barney won't mind this much preparation. I don't want to turn him into some over processed French poodle, I only tidy enough for the judges to approve.

How about ribbons, Barney? Little pink ribbons we can wrap around your ears? No, I didn't think you'd like that. How about a new collar? Bright, shining, studded with diamonds? No? Too feminine for you? I agree. I couldn't afford it anyway. Maybe we should look into getting your teeth whitened. They're awfully yellow right now. And your breath...no more wet food for you, mister. From now on you're getting regular tartar cleaning from the vet's.

Mom shouting from upstairs. Edith, don't forget to take out the trash, it's Tuesday! All right, Mom.

Barney has a bad habit of tearing open the garbage bags. What he smells in there that's so appealing, I haven't the foggiest notion. If he keeps this up, I'll never be able to wash the stink out of his fur. Then we'll never have a chance at the show.

I wonder if Jodie will bring along Mace. He's a German Shepherd. Beautiful dog, all brown and black. Friendly face too. But I don't know. They always seem to turn bad at the drop of a hat. All of a sudden that friendly face becomes a demon's snarl, biting and rending flesh. Even if Barney was to ever turn bad, he couldn't be scary if he tried. He looks ridiculous enough already.

One time when I was at Jodie's, Mace gave me this odd look; the kind of expression dogs make when they're trying to figure out if you're friend or foe. I lost my breath for a minute, and I think Mace sensed that. He could actually smell my fear, and showed his teeth. Thank God for Jodie; she took Mace inside before there was an altercation. I don't know how anyone would want to be around a dog that actually waits for you to smell afraid. Not even wild wolves could be that cruel.

I'm writing this on the kitchen table. Barney's sleeping next to my feet. I can feel the soft rolls of his skin on my toes. It's a good feeling; like a thick, furry blanket. I can hear him snoring.

Mom shouting again. Will you PLEASE take out the garbage?

I took it out five minutes ago, Mom. You saw me do it.

Oh.

PRAYER 787

1. *Eternal Father, keep me safe from humans.*

They are hard and cold, as statues.

They wear masks of scowls and sneers.

They hate me, a soft creature, a rabbit

2. *They beasts of reality, wolves*

Knowing death has made them cruel beasts

Knowing life has made me weak as water

Starvation is Satan's dog

3. *Starved people are mouths*

Who chomp and bite

Free me from hunger, O Lord

From the rabid weasel in my belly

4. *Free Barney from hunger*

So he can never know the weasel

The wicked sheep are everywhere

Black spit dripping from their mouths

5. *People are beasts when the law is gone*

And all we have left is God's law

God's law is good

God's law is wise

Tuesday, May 20

“Another day, another dollar”. I have no clue where that phrase came from, but I’d say it applies to my life.

Today was all about basic math. I thought the kids would be intimidated, but turns out it was the other way around. Basic math is about as far as I’ve ever gotten, and I could only hope the class wouldn’t figure that out.

Sarah Channard was the first to raise her arm. She asked if she could use a calculator. No, Sarah. No calculators. This is all about the power of the mind. I tried to say it with the sort of gentle humor that always seems to come so naturally to teachers. I don’t think Sarah was convinced. I knew right from the beginning this was going to be a long day.

Sometimes I wish I could perfectly attune myself to the wavelength of every child in the classroom. Some are thick and hard as rock, others fragile glass. Winners and losers. I can sense it even at this stage in their lives. A few are destined to ascend, but most are condemned to fall. Am I one of the people who fell? I don’t think my ambitions have ever been that . I might have wanted to be an astronaut once, but I got scared away by the challenges involved. That’s what it comes down to; the challenges.

Who are the losers in this classroom, I wonder? Could it be little Gerald Matheson, puffing down on his inhaler? Or Patrick Varney, with his unfortunate fish-face? Or Arnold Cameron, that one boy who’s not quite idiotic, just a little slow, just a little lazy, and will probably remain that way for most of his life?

God knows I understand where he’s coming from. I can only guess how much of my current position in life is within my control. I don’t even know why I’m teaching math to a bunch of kids when I don’t even understand a scrap of math myself. Math is the language of reality, and I’ve never had much of a liking for reality. From what I can tell, it doesn’t like me either. There’s too much madness out there for math to convince me we can find any damn semblance of order.

I’m marking the papers now. Arnold Cameron did abysmally, as expected. I honestly don’t know what else to do for him. Dennis Taylor was a little prodigy. I really need to learn his secret. Sarah Channard’s earned a B minus. That’s a pleasant

surprise. Math was never her forte. Creative writing always seemed to be more up her alley; I remember that lovely story she wrote about a spaceship filled with jellybeans traveling to the sun. They walked on the surface, and then had to hurry back to the ship before they melted.

Maybe it's time I put together another creative writing session for the kids. They need to cool their jets after an endurance test like math.

PRAYER 788

1. *Eternal Father, forgive me.*

My hands clasp in sweat

I want to ask and should not.

Everything is money.

2. *It's on people's tongues.*

It's in their eyes.

It's in their bellies.

And they have infected me with their hungry mouths.

3. *I am sick of their greedy little ways*

I would leave for Bermuda

An island small and warm and cool

I would disappear into a little cottage

And never be found

4. *I asked for the plumber to come*

Always the same evil pipe.

I have not learned.

I will never learn.

5. *He touches the evil pipe*

But does not fix it

He comes out and says he needs more money

Always more money

6. *To make people do things*

Grownups like the plumber

Are sick animals

Thank you for allowing me the children

7. *The children keep me from the fire*

I am stupid

Weak and dumb

I am supposed to be someplace good

The only way to arrive is money, money, money

8. The grownups always talk of money

Please make them stop

Make them leave

Make them die

Thursday, May 22nd

Rain, rain, go away. Come again another day.

Two straight weeks of rain. Sometimes the light, drizzly kind, other times the big, fat kind. Either way the sky won't stop falling. Days and days of grey clouds without a hint of blue. Cats and dogs kept indoors for an obscenely long time. Children dressed in thick raincoats, looking all the world like yellow dwarfs, running down sidewalks, hoping not to drown. Thunderclaps smashing on my roof. A flood warning's been issued in our area. Lovely.

I wouldn't mind the rain so much, if it didn't permeate everything. I think there's something odd, even cozy, about hard rain falling from the safety of one's home. The pitter-patter on the roof, the peals of close and distant thunder. The sense of being all on your own, as if the rest of the planet has drowned in a second deluge courtesy of God. Alone on a dry island, surrounded by water that's rising all the time, rising, rising...

The garage floor is flooded. Better start stuffing towels under the doors. It can't get bad, not too bad. Can it?

Barney's sleeping on the couch. I wonder if he's part-deaf; the thunder cracks don't seem to frighten him. Sometimes he looks like a giant brown blanket, all lumpy and curled up on the sofa. He snores like a series of grenades going off. Mom's in bed, watching *Lucas Tanner*. If the lightning causes the power to go out, I'll be in trouble. Mom needs her distractions. She always has to talk with someone, and I'm terrible with words.

Reading the newspaper. There's a drought going on in Sierra Leone. It's lasted for almost a month. There's something unfair about that. We're getting too much water, and they're not getting enough. Everything's out of synch, imbalanced. Just like me. I always seem to be behind everyone. Sometimes just by an inch, sometimes a foot, sometimes a kilometer. What will it take, I wonder? What will it take to catch up with everyone?

I'm looking out the window. It's coming down really hard now. I can barely see the edge of the garden. I could walk out the door and drown.

Another thunder crack. Almost right on top of us. Sounds like a giant putting his foot down on our roof.

Barney's awake. Even he heard it.

It's okay, Barney, it's all right. Just thunder.

But he's been through storms before. I can see it, somewhere in his eyes. When he was owned, or when he was still drifting, he'd been caught out in the open. Soaked to the bone. It's a miracle he's alive. That's what he is; a miracle.

I walk outside and stay in the rain for a while. Maybe three minutes, maybe an hour. I don't know.

Back inside. My clothes are saggy and heavy. I take a bath. Barney's still sleeping on the couch.

What time is it?

Ten to seven.

Time to get dinner ready.

Monday, May 26

I'm feeling sick. I think Barney's feeling sick too. Just two sick souls, all alone in the universe. We should never have gone to the show.

Barney and I spent the whole morning getting ready. Bath, breakfast, then another bath. Barney, God bless him, takes it all in stride. He doesn't like water, but he just stands still and sucks it up while I hose him down. He keeps looking towards the flowers, or the trees, or the sky. Anything that's a good distraction.

Then the car. I lift him into the passenger seat. He's heavier than cement; how can he put on so much weight so fast? Barney always rides beside me in the car. I open the window a crack so he can stick his head out. We're on our way, Barney. You and me.

So busy over there. So many dogs, so many people. Beautiful day. Blue skies, with just a few wisps of cloud. And the smells! I never knew how different dogs could have different smells. Almost like being at a farm. Barney tried to make friends with a

rottweiler, but he wouldn't have any of it. Such big, strong animals. Too dangerous for my liking.

I met Jodie. She had taken along Mace for the show. He looked absolutely gorgeous. I have no idea what Jodie did to him, but she obviously has access to some newfangled brand of shampoo that can turn your dog into one of heaven's hounds. If only Barney and I were so lucky. I spent all of yesterday afternoon washing him right down to his feet, but his skin sucks up dirt like a vacuum.

Jodie seems pleased. I see you brought Barney, Edith. Good luck. Just out of curiosity, why did you choose a basset?

For the show, or for myself?

Both.

I don't know, Jodie. I've just always been fond of bassets.

I see.

Why do you like German Shepherds, Jodie?

Oh, no real reason. I just think they're beautiful dogs. A lot more than basset hounds, don't you think?

Yes, Jodie, they are more beautiful.

An announcer shouts. Time to get in our groups. Jodie and I join the "Best in Breed" row. Mace is sniffing at Barney's head. Every time Barney looks at Mace, he stops. I wonder if he's teasing him.

The veterinary is walking by, checking each of our dogs. Tall, thin man. High cheekbones. He frowns and shakes his head more often than he nods it. He looks serious, much too serious for this line of work. He's at a dog show, for crying out loud, not a symposium. Some people are just too caught up in themselves for their own good. Isn't that right, Barney?

But now it's Barney's turn. The veterinary picks up his paw, pretends to shake it like a hand. Maybe this man isn't so serious after all. Then he runs his fingers through Barney's wrinkles. Barney is panting; he's spent too much time out in the sun.

The vet stands up, looks at me. Sorry, ma'am, I'm going to have to disqualify you. Your dog's just not up to scratch.

What's wrong with him?

His legs are too short, his wrinkles too heavy. He looks dwarfish to me. Might have congenital problems.

Have you ever seen a basset hound before?

Absolutely, ma'am. Your basset's just got health issues a lot of bassets have. That's just the way it is.

Please don't do this. He's looking forward to this show -

Maybe he is and maybe he isn't, but I've gotta disqualify you either way. Sorry, ma'am, those are the rules.

Back in the car. Sitting in the front seat, Barney next to me. I pour water out of my bottle into a bowl. Barney slurps it up. A few drops fly out of his mouth on to my dress. I rub Barney's head for a while, looking out the window at nothing.

June 3, 1972

Sometimes I wish people would just leave me alone.

Slow class today. Three of the kids were home with chicken pox. Knowing the pattern of chicken pox, it won't be long before the whole classroom is deserted. Always an eerie sight. We took a quick rundown of American geography, and had a longer recess than normal. Everybody seemed so bored. It must be something I'm doing wrong.

Met Jodie on the way to the fountain. So, Jodie, how did the dog show go?

Jodie looks confused. What do you mean? You were there -

Then she smiles, and remembers. Oh, right. Sorry. Completely forgot. Poor Barney. He didn't have that coming.

I try to focus on Jodie's face. Focus, Edith, focus. That's what Mr. Kartshire would keep barking at me. I wonder where he is now. Old? Dead? Buried?

But all I can see is myself and Barney in the car, driving home. Barney's head bowed low, his skin sagging more heavily than ever. I don't think he understood enough about what happened to be disappointed, but I could tell he was sad about something,

and it made my heart ache. He and I were the only people in the world at that moment. I used to have dreams - or nightmares - about a basset hound walking through an empty city. I never talked about them with Mom.

I didn't expect it either, Jodie. All that talk about congenital problems...

Congenital problems, my ass. That judge was just incompetent.

Jodie, do you think Barney is ugly?

Not at all. He's the most huggable animal I've ever met. But there's a glaze in her eyes, and I don't trust her. I'm looking past Jodie to the doorway at the end of the hall. Light is shining through it. I'm reminded of being in church.

Edith? Edith, are you all right?

I'm fine, Jodie.

By the way, how's your brood doing?

They're quiet. I think they might be bored.

I wish I had your luck. See you later, Edith.

Bye, Jodie.

I stood in the hall for a while. I think something must have happened to me. All I remember is looking at the door. I felt someone tugging at my dress. It was Sarah Channard. She had come looking for me.

Ms. Blaine? Are you okay, Ms. Blaine?

I looked at the clock on the wall. I'd been standing outside for a whole hour.

Transcript of Hox/Ellison Interview

April 8th, 2014

ROBERT ELLISON: Hello?

DEBRA HOX: Hello, Mr. Ellison. This is Ms. Hox calling. I wanted to get in touch with you about -

ELLISON: Oh, yes, yes. Of course. I'm sorry, I'd forgotten.

HOX: We talked on the phone last Tuesday. You said you were busy at the time.

ELLISON: No, no, I remember. I'm sorry, I just wasn't ready.

I'd like to ask you about Edith Blaine.

ELLISON: I'd see her once every fortnight, give or take. Truth be told, I got to know her dog more than I got to know her.

HOX: How long were you Enoch's resident veterinarian?

ELLISON: Thirty years.

HOX: ...that's quite a while.

ELLISON: Well, I had found my calling. I'd seen every breed of dog known to man, and possibly a few unknown.(LAUGHS)

HOX: How old are you, presently?

ELLISON: I'm turning ninety the end of this month.

HOX: Impressive.

ELLISON: Yes, it's going to be a big event for my grandchildren. I haven't given them any idea what to buy for me, as usual. When all else fails, they get me dog-related memorabilia.

HOX: So you liked your job?

ELLISON: Loved it. I always prefer the company of animals to humans. You always know where you stand with them, don't you? I used to have cat allergies when I was a kid, but that sort of vanished as I grew older...

HOX: What was the name of Edith's dog?

ELLISON: Barney. He was a...blood hound. No, no, I beg your pardon, a basset hound.

Short, stumpy kind of dogs.

HOX: There wasn't any other pet Edith brought to you?

ELLISON: No, just good old Barney. He had a recurring problem with bloat. Awful farter, too. (LAUGHS) You wouldn't believe the gas he'd stew...

HOX: How do you remember Edith in those days?

ELLISON: Pleasant, very pleasant. Friendly, warm...confused...strange word to use, I know. I'm not quite sure how to put it. She always seemed a little lost, unless Barney was around. Sometimes I wondered who was really the owner and the pet. Of course, she always loved that dog.

HOX: Could you tell me more about Barney?

ELLISON: Besides the farting? (LAUGHS) No, seriously, he was a hoot. Slept whenever nobody was paying attention to him. Always hungry. Edith had this habit of putting her head against Barney's and whispering into his ear. Nothing new there, I've seen a lot of owners do that. Pets and owners having their own secret language with each other. If you could even call it a language.

HOX: Are there any memories of Edith and Barnaby that stand out for you?

ELLISON: Sorry, come again? Barnaby?

HOX: I meant Barney.

ELLISON: Absolutely. There was this time when Edith brought home a box of chocolates. Not milk chocolate, mind you, I'm talking about the Swiss stuff, the purest kind of chocolate. And Barney managed to get to the box.

HOX: Chocolate is poisonous to dogs, isn't it?

ELLISON: Depends, but like I said, this was unrefined Swiss chocolate. So she rushes poor Barney to me, less than five minutes before I'm about to call it a day, and she was terrified. Terrified. She was actually crying out of fear for Barney. There was almost something funny about it. Of course, it's one of those things that seem hilarious in hindsight...

HOX: So what did you do for Barney?

ELLISON: (PAUSE) What did I do? You'll have to give me a moment, it's been so many years...this happened in the '70's, and I'm so ancient now...my brain's like a rusty can

opener...pills. That's it. I gave Barney a couple of pills to barf up the chocolate. First time in my life vomit smelled that nice. (LAUGHS)

HOX: And then Barney disappeared with Edith...

ELLISON: Yes, I...I'm sorry, does this have anything to do with the murders?

HOX: I was hoping to ease the discussion into it...

ELLISON: No no, that's all right. It's just...it's very, very sad, you know. Sad and horrible.

HOX: I know. But I wanted to specifically ask you about Barnaby...

ELLISON: That's the second time now, missy. (LAUGHS)

HOX: I'm sorry. Barney.

ELLISON: Why? He didn't have anything to do with it.

HOX: No, but despite everything Edith did, she never went after him.

ELLISON: Yes, I...I'm not quite sure what to make of that. I'm no psychiatrist, so I can't begin to guess what she was thinking. She was fine with killing children, but not the dog? He should have been cold meat to her like everybody else.

HOX: Did she really take Barney with her out of Enoch?

ELLISON: Good grief, I remember reading about that in the newspapers. Then the television. So bizarre.

HOX: That she did what she did, or that she took Barney along?

ELLISON: Both. How she just up and disappeared...like a wraith.

HOX: Why do you think she never harmed Barney?

ELLISON: You're asking the wrong guy. I'm just a vet. Dogs are...peculiar animals. Maybe they can evoke something in psychos that people can't. Then again, psychos would torture small animals when On the other hand, I don't remember reading about Hitler torturing any animals when he was a tyke.

HOX: Edith Blaine suffered from a traumatic head injury.

ELLISON: And attempted rape. I know. (LONG PAUSE) Yes. Very...very nasty. Nasty business. What can I say, miss? I deal with animals instead of humans for a reason.

HOX: Her attitude seemed to change towards everyone except Barney.

ELLISON: Well, Barney was the most inoffensive creature I'd ever known.

HOX: But how does that explain the children?

ELLISON: No goddamn clue, miss. Maybe Edith thought he was just too pitiful to kill. I know she adored the children she'd teach at school before the...attack, but she loved Barney. Capital "L". Not even a blow to the head could...it's difficult to put into words...the sense that some things are incorruptible somehow. Maybe it's just because I've led a pretty good life...I mean, I've had my share of misery, everyone has, but overall it's been good. I can actually look back on what I've done and be at peace with myself. Edith Blaine was a strong believer in that sort of thing too. I'd call it a warmth. Believers just have a warmth about them that's hard to come by for folks who don't believe.

HOX: Would Edith ever say anything about atheists, or people who never really believed in anything?

ELLISON: I remember her talking about them time and again. Apparently she would get into the most...unpleasant arguments with them, and they'd always win. Edith was never a good debater. But that's part of the problem, isn't it? You see...I can say this from personal experience...atheists talk from the head, believers from the heart. Two different organs in the same body, but divided by this awful contempt...I mean, the head thinks the heart is an idiot, and the heart thinks the head is a bastard, and they're both right and both wrong, but neither of them are willing to admit it, so nothing ever gets solved. In Edith's case, she was more a creature of the heart.

HOX: That's quite poetic.

ELLISON: I suppose. But it's not me talking, it's Edith. That's how she...tried to understand things she felt she was too stupid to understand. Edith's confidence level was somewhere below zero. Don't know why, really. Barney was the only other living thing she could ever seem to talk to without looking...intimidated. Then again, you need confidence to get ahead, don't you? Or if you don't have it, you've gotta fake it. Hell, politicians do it all the time. First couple of years I was a vet, I almost killed a dozen animals. I was an incompetent jackass, a total quack. But the owners never knew it, simply because I could put on a mask...figuratively speaking, of course. Poor Edith had no idea how to wear a mask. Now you've got the internet these days, and now everybody can be anonymous and say the worst kind of bullshit without fear of

reprisal...cyber-masks. That's the new thing now.

ELLISON: You've browsed the internet?

HOX: A few times. I get lost pretty easily. (LAUGHS) My daughter gave up trying to send me emails back in '05. Barney was slow, physically slow I mean, and a little slow in the head too...basset hounds tend to be that way...but sometimes I'd catch him staring out the window as if he were fascinated with what he could see out there. He stood around doors a lot. I think he knew they always led someplace else. They must have appeared like mystical portals to him. Edith said she washed him once a week, but he would get so dirty so fast. Rolled in the dirt a lot, apparently. And when he shook his head, all this slobber would go everywhere. I mean, I've seen plenty of drool from every breed you could name, but Barney was a regular drool factory. Edith had gotten into the habit of rubbing his mouth every so often with a handkerchief. She loved that dog, no question. So did I. I always looked forward to a visit from Edith, just to say hi to Barney. Some dogs have issues with particular humans, but Barney was okay with everybody.

HOX: Did you ever see Edith and Barney again after Edith was attacked?

ELLISON: (PAUSE) Yes. Once.

HOX: Could you go into any detail about it?

ELLISON: I'd rather not...(PAUSE) ...I would like to talk about it, but maybe after I've had some time to...think it over. Would you mind calling back tomorrow?

HOX: Yes, that's fine. What time would be good?

ELLISON: Not in the morning. That's all I can say. Just not in the morning.

HOX: Shall we say two pm?

ELLISON: Two pm. Yes, I can do two pm.

HOX: All right, thank you very much.

ELLISON: Thank you. Goodbye.

June 6, 1972

Spent the morning at confessional. God bless Reverend Hooper. The man's always in a good mood. I don't know how he manages it.

It seems I'm never out of questions for him. After all the times I suffer from these little flare-ups, these...little moments of doubt, he holds my hand and always has the right words. Jodie thinks I should see a psychologist instead. I don't want anything to do with them. Psychologists deal too much with reality. I can see it in their eyes. They can't help, and they don't want to help. Not unless they're paid. That's what it comes down to, again and again. Money. Want to be cured of what ails you? Give me a hundred dollars first. Sorry lady, that's the way it is, nothing I can do to change it.

I only trust people who don't ask for money. Money means they have limits. If someone can only do something for money, it means they're capable of anything. Want me to set fire to that guy's house? Give me money. Want me to sleep with you? Give me money. Want me to drown this baby? Give me money.

I told Reverend Hooper about Barney. About how much of a lift he's given my mood. That sounds terrific, Edith. Has he been fixed?

I don't think so.

You should look into that. Dogs mark everything.

I don't know. I don't think I want to do that to him.

Well, your choice. What's Jodie been up to these days?

Oh, just the same old same old.

Edith? Are you all right?

Why do you ask, Father?

You seem distracted.

I'm always like that.

I mean, more than usual.

Well, I keep wondering what things would be like if we could see ourselves in the past or future. What would my ten-year-old self say if she could see me now? Would she be excited? Disgusted? We have such big dreams when we're kids, Father. Going

to the moon or becoming President. Then we get older and harder. We modify our expectations. If I can't have this, maybe I can at least still be happy. Do you understand? If I can't be someone famous, can I at least be happy?

Are you asking me, or God?

I thought you would have a good idea what God might say.

I think He'd encourage you to be happy, Edith. Are you happy?

I don't know.

How do you mean?

I mean I've never met anyone miserable enough to make me feel more grateful about who I am.

Well, do you want to kill yourself?

No.

That's a very good start. Edith, you've got a good home, a good job, and a good dog. There's balance in your life. That's something to be grateful for.

Should I be grateful to God, Father?

Of course, always.

Despite everything?

I don't understand.

I look around the world, and all I see is...

Tell you what, Edith. I'll send you another letter later in the week. I have an idea what's on your mind, and I'd feel better knowing you had my thoughts on paper to read whenever you like.

Thank you, Father.

You're welcome, Edith.

See you Sunday, Father.

You too, Edith. Goodbye.

June 9, 1972

Next time, I'm going to clean out my own damn ears.

My inner ear got infected somehow. One too many trips to Jodie's swimming pool, I don't know. I had to wait three days before Dr. Allen had any room in his schedule for me. Busy people always have schedules, busy people always have more important things to do, busy people are always being inconvenienced by lazy people. Three days of a Tasmanian devil clawing around in my ear. I dunked my head into the bath so many times just to cool it off. I wonder if steam came up out of the water while I was in there.

Then the waiting room. I tried to read one of the magazines they always have laying around. There was an interview with David Hartman that took my mind off the pain for maybe five minutes. There was a mother sitting next to me with a baby. The baby kept screaming. I put down the magazine and pushed my fingers into my eyes. Please God, make it stop. I beg you, I beseech you.

Somebody calls out. Edith?

Dr. Allen's office is clean. Bright. There's a stuffed teddy bear on the desk, but I think it's for the kids who come to see Dr. Allen. Just to make the place look a little warmer. Dr. Allen has no use for teddy bears personally.

He's a tall man, broad shoulders. He might have been really handsome at some point, I'm not sure. But he's a serious man who's been dealing with serious things for many years, and it shows on his face.

Morning, Edith. Sit down, right here. Be with you in a sec.

The examination table crinkles underneath me. Dr. Allen is writing something on a notepad.

How's the ear, Edith?

Horrible. Horrible.

Well, let's just have a look at it.

The otoscope, shuffling around inside my ear. Normally I like the feeling. It's sort of soft and comforting. But the pain, the pain makes everything joyless.

The swelling's gone down, Edith, so your body's definitely doing the job, but there's a lot of gunk that's built up in there. Going to have to clean it out.

All right.

Dr. Allen opens his little steel box and pulls out a syringe. He sticks it into a bottle and fills the needle up with a clear watery fluid.

Ever had your ears cleaned before, Edith?

No.

Well, this won't be a big deal, I promise. You could do it yourself.

I guess it has to be a little gross.

More than a little gross. It's hard to believe in anything clean and good after you're done.

How hard?

What do you mean, Edith?

How hard is it to believe in something clean and good?

Are we talking about the same thing, Edith?

God is clean and good, isn't He?

If you're asking me if I believe in the idea of a holy spirit, Edith, I can only answer in the negative. Some doctors might still be religious after they've looked into every nook and cranny of the human body, but I deal with reality. That's my stock and trade. Now sit back and relax.

Digging through my ear. I bite down on my lip.

How are you doing, Edith?

Fine, just fine.

Well, that's sarcasm if I've ever heard it, but I can sympathize. This won't take too long. Just think of something else.

Why does the human body have to be so gross, Dr. Allen?

It's called life, Edith. We all have to deal with the grossness sometimes.

June 12, 1972

It's true what they say. You can never appreciate what you have until it's gone. Everything always looking forward, never looking back. I wonder if the lives of some people are inverted differently. A few have an awful childhood, with belt-beatings and black eyes, and others are given a world of colors and...joy. One day becomes another with no care about how fast they seem to be going by. You believe in strange things, stupid things, wondrous things. Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. Hellos instead of goodbyes. Sunlight.

Mom and I went for another walk. Barney wasn't in the mood for a stroll; I spoiled him for breakfast, and I think he was going through a little indigestion. There was a movie theater. Mom stopped and peered at one of the posters.

Edith, is that a boat?

Yes, Mom.

Why is it upside down?

I think a wave flipped the boat over, Mom.

Is that Gene Hackman? What's he running away from?

He's running away from the water that's flooding into the boat, Mom.

That's awful. What's happening in movies these days? It's like everyone just wants to be dark and miserable all the time.

We reach the park. Mom sits on a bench and watches the birds.

Edith, I've wanted to ask you something. Something that happened when you were still in high school. Do you remember?

What do mean, Mom?

I mean, why did you lie to me about what happened to you and Terry?

Suddenly I feel sick, like my stomach is filling up with bilge water. Mom's waiting for me.

I don't know what really happened, Edith, I just know you lied. I didn't get on your case about it because I could tell you were upset about something, but...

I'm sorry I lied to you, Mom.

Edith, I don't want apologies, I just want answers. What happened that night?

The witch's mask. It's coming back to me again, every line and contour of her face etching itself out in my line of vision, and all I want to do is scream.

Something scary, Mom. That's all.

Scary? Did Terry...what did he do, Edith? Did he...

No no no no no. He didn't, Mom. He didn't do anything like that.

But he had something to do with it. I can tell. I can see it in your face.

Why is Mom suddenly remembering all of this? Year after year I watch as she gets older, displacing things and memories, feeling something tickle in the back of my throat every moment I see her forget a name or a place or a story, and all I ever want to do is stop, stop, STOP what's happening to her. I hate time. No, I hate Time. Capital T.

He pulled a prank on me, Mom. That's all. A stupid, scary prank.

What happened?

He used a mask. I mean, he had another girlfriend...I think it was his girlfriend...and they surprised me. There were some other people too.

Who?

I don't know. I couldn't see them in the dark.

That's terrible, Edith. Terrible. Why did they do that?

I look down at the grass around my feet. I don't know. Some people just like being that way.

Terrible. Terrible.

And for the first time in a long time, Mom's acting like Mom again. I know it will soon be over, and the...thing in her head will make her hateful and miserable again. Please, God, don't take her away from me. Not yet. I'm begging you.

June 17, 1972

My fault. All my fault. I'm so stupid, always so stupid.

A birthday gift from Jodie. Swiss chocolate. The best kind on the planet, so she said. All wrapped in a heart-shaped box. Jodie knows I love chocolate. Every time we

go to Walter's, I always have a chocolate milkshake. It's terrible for me, I know. I can't begin to guess how high my cholesterol is now. I couldn't wait to open the box. I've heard some wonderful stories about Swiss chocolate. I got home and left it on the kitchen table. Too close, way too close to the edge. Stupid.

I checked on Mom. Still in bed. She's been sleeping more and more often. I didn't feel like waking her. Then a noise from the kitchen. I came back, and found the box on the floor, ripped open. All the chocolates gone, eaten. By Barney.

I've heard that chocolate is poisonous to dogs. Mom told me, I think. Oh God, only a few months with Barney and I've already killed him. Please, don't punish me for my stupidity, God. I need Barney.

I called Robert. Robert, Barney's eaten chocolate.

All right, Edith, calm down. What kind of chocolate? If it's milk chocolate, for example, we don't have much to worry about. The weaker the chocolate, the better off the dog will -

It was Swiss chocolate, Robert. The purest kind.

Oh. I see. Better bring him down, then.

I pick up Barney. He makes that grumpy little "harrumph" sound I love so much as I take him outside. He's so heavy, but I don't care. To the vet's, Barney, we've got to get you to the vet's. There's something inside you, boy, something inside that could kill you. Oh why, why why why did you have to go after that box, Barney? Why do you let your stomach make all the decisions?

In the car, hands on the wheel. Barney standing on the door, sticking his head out, wrinkles and ears blowing in the breeze. And I'm thinking, Barney is here with me, right now. Tomorrow he might be gone. Gone, gone. Nothing but air. I almost hit someone. Screeching tires. The driver yells at me, fat face red with sweat and hate. Watch the road, you dumb bitch.

Then the waiting room. I drag Barney in by his leash. He only wants to sniff everything. A short man with long hair and an even longer beard is sitting under the air conditioner. A hippy. There's another dog with him; a border collie. He barks and bares his yellow teeth at Barney. The hippy doesn't look like he cares. Maybe he's stoned on

something. Mister, mister, could you please keep your dog close to you? Barney's very old and can't fight back.

The hippy shrugs. Sure, lady. And does nothing.

Woman in glasses behind the desk. Professional and bored. Excuse me, excuse me, I have to see Robert. My dog ate some chocolate and I'm scared he's going to -

The woman gives me some papers. Fill these out, please. Mr. Ellison will be right with you.

Forms. I hate, hate, hate forms. I can never fill them out right. Strange, exact questions that only make sense to the people who ask them. Information that I never have on me. Numbers and more numbers. Social insurance, telephone, home address, next of kin, current employer, on and on. Oh, and don't write in red ink. One mistake and I have to start all over. I'm a stupid person and can't ever remember all this stuff. But they don't care. If you're dumb, that's your own cross to bear.

Meanwhile, Barney is sitting next to my feet. The hippy's dog keeps growling, like an engine. The hippy reads a book; ROSEMARY'S BABY. Is it my imagination, or is Barney's breath getting thicker, heavier? Oh God, if he dies right here, right now, I'll never forgive these officious people with their forms and rules and -

The door opens. A tall man with a thick black mustache walks out, carrying a cage with a cat inside. The cat meows. He doesn't sound happy.

Thanks again, Robert.

No problem, Sid. Remember, keep applying the lotion and that swelling will go down lickety-split.

Robert. Large man, heavy man, but always smiling. He sees me with Barney. Hi, Edith. Hi, Barney. I'll be with you in just a sec. Then he motions to the hippy. You're up next, Mr. Hancock.

Oh God, no. No more waiting. I can't take it.

The hippy picks up his collie and walks inside. All that time, the dog's staring, growling at Barney. If that dog keeps us waiting, if he's responsible for Barney...going away, I swear I'll...

A young mother comes in with her little boy. The boy is carrying a poodle. They

sit down next to me. The boy shouts and screeches like an angry bird. I think he's from Jodie's class. Mom, look, at that lady's dog. He's melting, Mom.

He's not melting, Jarvis. He's just a beagle.

I close my eyes. How long, how long?

Ten minutes, ten hours. I'm not sure. The door opens and out comes Mr. Hancock with his border collie. Thanks for the help, doc. You sure I just need to take him for more walks?

That's right, son. Twice every week, if you can.

Robert looks at me again. Motions with his hand. Your turn, Barney.

In we go. Barney, humped down to the ground, sniffing the floor.

Okay then, Edith, Robert says, putting on his spectacles. You said Barney's eaten some chocolate?

Yes. Yes. Swiss chocolate.

Robert sits down and opens Barney's mouth. Checks his teeth. Squeezes his sides. Then he rubs his head.

Well, Edith, tell you what. I'll give Barney some pills to vomit up the chocolate, and that should do the trick.

What if it doesn't?

It will, Edith.

But what if it doesn't?

Edith, Barney will be fine. Trust me.

So Robert wraps up two pills in bread and hands them to Barney. Barney gobbles them down, because he's ready to eat just about anything.

Robert gives me a bowl. Take him into the waiting room, Edith. When he gets sick, make sure he vomits into this bowl.

So I take Barney into the waiting room. And watch him. The mother and her son go into Robert's office with their poodle.

Barney wanders around, sniffing, always sniffing. I think he's getting bored. Oh Barney, I know you're bored, boy, but I'm so scared, and I need to keep you here where Robert can get all that poisonous stuff out of you.

I wait, and wait, and wait. Barney nibbles at his leg. Oh God, how long, how much longer?

I remember once when I prayed for Dad to never go away. I prayed to God, and I prayed to reality. None of it did any good, and Dad left. So I'm praying now, no, I'm begging, I'm begging reality, right down to its very atoms and molecules, please, please don't kill Barney. Please don't be that cruel. I know you're cruel by nature, you always have been but don't be cruel today. Not to Barney.

Barney starts making funny noises. His stomach rumbles. He stands still for a few seconds, as if waiting for something to happen. I put the bowel under his mouth.

Blechhh. Out it all comes. One great foamy white mess with some dark spots, right into the bowel.

Barney sniffs the bowel's edge, then looks at me. I bury my face into his head, getting lost in the darkness and smell.

Thank you.

June 20, 1972

"Human consciousness is a series of neurophysiologic events and nothing more." I read that in a book today. I wish I hadn't. One too many trips to the library. Jodie convinced me to go, but looking back, all I remember is that damn passage.

Who wrote the book? I can't even recall anymore. It was dusty, grey, ugly. The words were like hard stones, thumping at my head. Why did I read it? Why did I let myself read it?

The old frights of my childhood are coming back. The hole in the stomach. I'm starting to feel scared again. I find myself wandering around in the backyard, digging up pits in the ground with my bare hands. I whisper strange things into the dirt, to the worms and the ants and the blades of grass. Incoherent, inchoate squeals. Begging. Begging to reality.

Why was I ever born, if only to experience this terror? Maybe I should be grateful for being alive, but I don't feel grateful. What's the point of me?

I vomited into the toilet three times this morning. It feels like something is coming, coming, coming. Like a storm billowing on from the horizon.

Did Jesus rise from the grave? Oh God, please tell me he rose from the grave. I don't want to live in a world where Jesus didn't rise from the grave. I can't, I can't stand this. I feel like I'm drowning.

Something's about to happen. I can almost hear it. Like a countdown. Ten, nine, eight, seven...

Please stop shouting, Mom.

Mom, I'm doing everything. Everything I can.

No, Dad's not here. Dad's gone. He's been gone for years. I'm all there is.

Please, Mom. You have to be better than this. You have to be better than your body. Do you understand what I'm saying?

No, Barney's not here. He's outside, Mom.

No, Mom, I won't bring him inside the house.

I promise.

Yes.

This is the ninth time I've told you.

That's right, I counted. I'm sorry.

Please stop shouting.

FROM: Reverend Matthew Hooper, Enoch Parrish

TO: Edith Blaine, Harrison Cottage, 9 Spring Road

Dear Ms. Blaine,

I'm concerned about your welfare, especially after last Monday's confessional. You always seem on the cusp of some awful panic without even knowing what the source of your terror is. All I can do is reiterate what I've explained to you before; God allows wickedness to be present in the world simply because through its absence, good would cease to exist in turn.

As for your fear that evil always appears dominant over good, have you ever wondered why it always seems so easy to perpetuate cruelty rather than put a stop to it? It's God's means of knowing who is sincere, and who is insincere. It brings about horrible suffering and random tragedy, but there is meaning to the madness, as impossible as it may seem at such times.

The secularists might laugh at our optimism, believing that ignorance is our bliss, but it is they who have blinded themselves.

Please don't hesitate to visit me whenever the need arises.

Kind regards,

Rev. Matthew Hooper

Transcript of a 9-1-1 call placed at 10:51 p.m. on July 3rd, 1972.

DISPATCH: 911, what's your emergency?

CALLER NAMED "EDITH": Hello.

DISPATCH: Hello? Are you there?

EDITH: Hello.

DISPATCH: Hello? What's your emergency?

EDITH: I think I'm hurt. My head is bleeding.

DISPATCH: Where are you?

EDITH: Home.

DISPATCH: I need an address.

EDITH: Harrison Cottage, 9 Spring Road.

DISPATCH: What's happened?

EDITH: I've struck my head. There's...there's blood on my...

DISPATCH: How did you hit your head?

EDITH: I was pushed over a bridge.

DISPATCH: You were pushed over a bridge?

EDITH: Yes.

DISPATCH: Who pushed you over?

EDITH: There were two of them.

DISPATCH: Two what? Two men?

EDITH: Yes.

DISPATCH: Did you walk back to your home?

EDITH: I think so. I can't remember.

DISPATCH: How are you feeling?

(NO REPLY)

DISPATCH: Miss, how are you feeling?

EDITH: Dizzy. A little weird.

DISPATCH: Could I have your name?

EDITH: Edith. Edith Blaine.

DISPATCH: Is there anyone else in the house with you, Edith?

EDITH: My Mom. But she's asleep.

DISPATCH: I need you to wake her up.

EDITH: (DISORIENTATED) Wake her up? I can't. What's...

DISPATCH: Edith, never mind. That's all right. Never mind. Are you standing up or sitting down?

EDITH: Standing.

DISPATCH: All right. An ambulance is on the way, but this is what I need you to do first. Do you have a couch?

EDITH: Yes.

DISPATCH: Lay back on it.

(SHUFFLING NOISES IN B.G.)

EDITH: Okay.

DISPATCH: Are you on the couch?

EDITH: Yes.

DISPATCH: Edith, it's important that you don't move your spine or neck until the ambulance gets there. Can you do that?

(DOG BARKING IN B.G.)

EDITH: Hi, Barney.

DISPATCH: Who's Barney?

EDITH: My dog. He's a basset hound.

DISPATCH: Edith, do you think you can stay conscious?

EDITH: Am I going to die?

DISPATCH: Edith, I need you to stay calm -

EDITH: Just say yes or no. I won't get mad. I promise.

DISPATCH: No, you're not going to die, Edith. The ambulance will be there in a couple of minutes. I'll be right here with you. Just keep talking to me.

EDITH: (GIGGLES)

DISPATCH: Edith? What's going on?

EDITH: Barney's licking my hand.

DISPATCH: Okay.

EDITH: Barney has the funniest face when he looks at the floor. It gets all wrinkly and scrunched up - (TRAILS OFF. SOUND OF OBJECT HITTING THE FLOOR.)

DISPATCH: Edith? Edith, are you there? (PAUSE) Edith, can you hear me? (PAUSE, THEN IN B.G.) I think she's passed out. (INAUDIBLE VOICE) Yeah, I know. Yeah. Okay, right.

CALL ENDS.

help me

I Bel

I Believe in God the Fa

Father Almighty

Maker of heav

heaven and earth

who was concei

ved by the Holy Ghost

OH GOD IT HURTS

WAKE ME UP

WAKE ME UP MOMMY

we die and rot Edith that's

all we

do die and rot

a series of neurophysiologic events nothing more

GET YOUR FUCKING HANDS OFF MY HEAD YOU FUCKING

One banana two banana three banana four

Four bananas make a bunch and so

Edith, Edith can you hear me, I need you to stop struggling

FUCK YOU COCKSUCKER I'LL

coming on to bring you the Banana Splits Show

confirm she has a skull fracture?

can't breathe I'm choking

cantbreathecantbreeeeeeeeathe

please God don't

if I have to die this way

let there be more

more than this

I beg you

I beseech you

COCKSUCKER I'LL KILL YOU

I see Barney, he's holding a stick, I'm pulling on it, he won't give it to me

HATE HATE HATE HATE HATE HATE

how is eating a cow any different from eating a fish Edith

BarneyBarneyBarneyBarneyBarneyBarneyBarney

Through Hell's Fires Scarlet

I Walk

Evil Carnate

AUGUST 11, 1972

At last I'm home again.

It took me so long to find my way back. My paws scuffling on the hard concrete, my ears going black and grimy from dragging along the soil and gravel. The house was pitch-dark when I opened the door. I felt so alone. I jumped up on the couch and lowered my wrinkly head on the cushions, waiting, waiting, waiting for someone else to come through that door. But no one did. Strange, the sounds you hear when nothing else makes noise. The soft whoosh of a passing car, or the chirp of a cricket.

I feel so lazy. My muscles ache. My bones ache. All I want is to lie still forever. But I can't do that, because I'm hungry and there's no one here to feed me. When I'm hungry, I try to find bones. I dug so many holes in the garden. Holes with bones. Big dinosaur bones. I wonder if I could eat a dinosaur? Do dinosaurs taste like chicken?

Ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall, ninety-nine bottles of beer...

One potato, two potatoes, three potatoes, four...

I spy with my little eye...

No use procrastinating. Time to make dinner. First, the dry food, out of the dry bag. Then the wet food, out of the wet can. Mash it all up and scarf it down.

There. That's better. Time for some TV.

What should I watch? How about Scooby-Doo? I love Scooby-Doo.

Ugh. I've seen this episode. All right, how about the Streets of San Francisco with Michael Douglas? Mom always had a crush on Kirk Douglas. She always talked about this film, "Lust for Life", where Kirk Douglas played Vincent van Gogh. I've never seen it.

Or have I?

I don't

Can't remember

Now calm down, calm down. Sniff the floor a little, doing that always settles me. I always find the most lovely smells on the floor, they help me forget about moments of anger, of pain and regret. It's so quiet around here. I never realized until

now how silent everything could be when I'm alone. Sometimes all I hear are the birds, but I don't trust them. They poo on our house all the time without the courtesy of even offering an apology. I remember that day when I pooped in the neighbor's yard. They were not happy. I did my best to apologize. You'd think birds would have the same common decency.

Sometimes I feel my life is a series of almos-but-not-quotes. There should be no shame in that. A dime a dozen can be just as happy as a diamond if it finds the right way to live. All I need is good food, a warm bed, a scratch behind my ears, and

The bridge

I remember falling

My head

I'm not dead

I'm. Not. Dead.

Transcript of Hox/Milligan Conference

March 14th, 2015

MILLIGAN: So what do you want to know?

HOX: What was your relationship with Edith Blaine?

MILLIGAN: We worked together as teachers at Enoch Elementary.

HOX: What were your first impressions of her?

MILLIGAN: The day she started there, you mean? Warm, kind, unassuming...

HOX: To the children?

MILLIGAN: ...to the rest of the staff. I'm not sure about the children. She wanted so much to make them happy. She wanted to make learning fun. But you can't force that sort of thing on a kid. I remember Edith being infatuated with a type of dog...

HOX: Basset hounds.

MILLIGAN: That's right. She'd do her best to stretch out on other topics, of course, so she wouldn't become repetitious, but she was very definitely taken with them. I suppose she did look a bit like a basset herself. Short, a little round, bags under the eyes...as if she never got enough sleep. But I'm not one to talk. I adored German Shepherds back then. Still do.

HOX: Were you ever given the impression Edith would become a murderer?

MILLIGAN: No. No. But I'll admit she was always a little..."off", whatever that could mean...

HOX: How so?

MILLIGAN: She'd try to teach the strangest things in class. She was a very religious girl, you know. I mean, I was brought up Christian myself, but she sometimes got a little too..."Bible-thumpy" for my tastes. Every morning, she'd ask the kids what they believed in. The answer always had to be the resurrection of Jesus. Most of them didn't even know what resurrection meant. I'm happy to see that sort of thing at Sunday school, but in regular school...

HOX: How did you two become friends?

MILLIGAN: I suppose it was inevitable. I was teaching directly across the hall from Edith, and we shared some of the same interests, so we hit it off pretty well. She really was an intelligent woman.

HOX: I see. Mrs. Morgan, I'd like you to –

MILLIGAN: My name is Milligan.

HOX: Sorry. Mrs. Milligan. I'd like you to specify what you mean by "intelligent."

MILLIGAN: Oh, she was a smart woman, but...how do I put this? She wasn't exactly sharp. As in, common-sense sharp.

HOX: You didn't like that about her?

MILLIGAN: Kind of the opposite, actually. I thought it made her endearing. Besides, none of that is to blame for what happened later.

HOX: You mentioned your love for German Shepherds...

MILLIGAN: Yes, we both spoiled our dogs, so we had that in common too. Come to think of it, there was that time when we took them to a dog show.

HOX: And her dog won a blue ribbon, didn't he?

MILLIGAN: What? No, he didn't win anything. He was disqualified. A deformity or something like that. It was ridiculous. All bassets look weird in some way. I don't know what that judge was going on about. It was so heartbreaking to watch. Poor Edith was destroyed. I suspect her pet sensed what was going on, too. HOX: You had a chance to meet him?

MILLIGAN: Oh, yes. He'd make these awful...he'd fart something fierce, you see. But it would depend on what Edith fed him. Oddly enough, it made him more lovable.

HOX: Would you say you were close friends with Edith?

MILLIGAN: Very much so. I think I was one of the few real friends she had. There were a few acquaintances, but...well, she just never seemed too good at establishing an inner circle, if you know what I mean. She was a very warm, very tender person...anyone who knew her would tell you the same thing, I'm sure. I suppose she could be overly sensitive at times...she couldn't take criticism very well. (LAUGHS) Maybe that's why she hated handing out poor marks to her kids. She knew what it felt like, to be...put down. Emotionally, I mean. Tony always said Edith was too easy on

them. She couldn't learn to discipline anyone.

HOX: How well did he know Edith?

MILLIGAN: Oh, just a casual working relationship. Mr. Arkman was a very...strict man. Fair but stern. It wasn't easy for Edith to get along with that type of man. She would keep her head low and mouth shut whenever he was around. Otherwise there might have been trouble.

HOX: And after the bridge incident?

MILLIGAN: Edith became more...I wouldn't say defiant, but she developed a very snarky attitude towards Tony. To most of us, really.

HOX: Getting back to school for just a moment. What did Edith use to teach in her classroom?

MILLIGAN: The usual course outline. Mathematics, geography, grammar, American history...

HOX: Would you say she was good at her job?

MILLIGAN: That would depend on the subject matter. History and literature seemed to be a strong point for her, but grammar...(LAUGHS) She didn't just have a problem with teaching it. She had a problem with knowing it herself.

HOX: Are you saying she couldn't read?

MILLIGAN: No, no, no. If anything, she couldn't get enough to read. But it was the niggling little details she had a hard time wrapping her head around. I'm sure the doctors have thought up some new name for it. But all those years ago, she was just strange to me.. Sometimes I wondered if she was just afraid to deal with other people. She had a better time with children than she did with adults, but even with children...

HOX: You seem to be doubtful about her aptitude as a teacher.

MILLIGAN: Back then, absolutely not. But now, after all this time, I've had the chance to mull over the details.

HOX: Would you say it was a precursor to her behavior later on?

MILLIGAN: Oh God. You're referring to the murders, aren't you?. I mean, it's...to have known the person who did those things...it's unreal. I simply can't connect Edith's face with those murders. I can't. I heard something about that injury Edith suffered...she was

pushed over a bridge, wasn't she?MILLIGAN: Horrible. Horrible.

HOX: I've been looking through the medical records at Enoch Hospital, and there doesn't appear to be any indication of brain damage...

MILLIGAN: Yes, but those were the 1970's, weren't they? The equipment they had back then...well, I can't deny I know jack-squat about it, but I doubt they would have picked up something so...subtle.

HOX: Nowadays there's been speculation her orbitofrontal cortex was altered by the injury.

MILLIGAN: Like I said, dear, I wouldn't know anything about that.

HOX: But you did see Edith afterwards.

MILLIGAN: Yes. Yes I did.

HOX: How would you describe her?

MILLIGAN: I don't really...I'm not a writer, dear, so I'm not good putting this into words. Imagine someone who looks and sounds like your friend in every way, but act as if they're an actor pretending to be your friend. Nothing was immediately wrong, there was just this awful sense of..."not-rightness".

HOX: Did anyone else pick up on this change in Edith?

MILLIGAN: Maybe, but Edith never had that many close friends. She was terrible at it. "I don't know what I'm supposed to say or do," she'd sometimes tell me. "You make it look so easy." So after she had been...attacked, it made sense that only a few people would notice something different about her. Tony didn't care about anything besides his job. He was a natural workaholic. If it was something petty or irreverent, he didn't have any time for it. It was beneath him.

HOX: But her entire personality had altered...

MILLIGAN: It's hard to explain these things now without sounding like a fool, I know. But Tony was always so busy, and Edith...she was scary, but not scary enough for me to...say anything. Do you understand?

HOX: Yet you continued working at Enoch Elementary for ten years.

MILLIGAN: Well, when you find your niche, you can't afford to ditch it.

HOX: Could you go into a little more detail about Edith's behavior?

MILLIGAN: Sly. Malevolent. Desperate. Like a lost evil child. I knew the day when she hurt my dog. One day, she gave him a biscuit laced with rat poison. He almost died.

HOX: How did you know it was rat poison?

MILLIGAN: The vet told me after he had flushed out Mace's stomach.

HOX: And you still didn't do anything?

MILLIGAN: I was frightened of Edith. No excuses, no excuses. I was just completely terrified of her.

HOX: Could we talk a little about Sarah Channard...

MILLIGAN: No. No, I can't.

HOX: Are you sure?

MILLIGAN: Please. Just don't bring it up again. I'm just...I rather wouldn't. Out of all the children Edith went after, Sarah...I got to know her, you see, and she was...God damn it...

HOX: Do you want me to turn off the tape?

MILLIGAN: Yes. Yes please. That's a good idea. Thank you.

AUGUST 13, 1972

I saw myself in the mirror. I'm frightened.

It's been a long day, very very long, so I crawled up on the bed. Took me a while, but I managed. They all thought I was stupid. Well, stupid dog's now on the bed. So last laugh's on them. Hardy-har-har.

Jodie Milligan is somewhere in the neighborhood, but I don't think she wants to talk with me anymore. I remember the days when she kept me fed, but she didn't know exactly what to do with the food. She didn't mix up the wet and dry food, the way you're supposed to. She just gave me the dry food. She soaked it with a little water, but it's not the same. She only took me for a walk around the block. We didn't enter the playground. I love going past the playground. Lots of good smells there.

I'll just lay down over here and pretend I'm a rock. I'm very good at that. You know what's great about rocks? They don't move. It's easy to be a rock. Rocks are dependable.

New smell, new smell! Where's it coming from? Must find it, find find find!

The mirror is above me. Mustn't look at the mirror. Look somewhere else.

I keep my head to the ground, rubbing my face along the fuzzy matted floor, hoping to find that funny and wonderful smell. It's chocolate, I know that for sure now. I know I should never eat chocolate, but the little things you should never eat always taste the best. Reality is unfair that way. I say, the hell with reality. I want my chocolate, and I will find it, even if I have to dig under the floorboards and go

I want to kill something.

Something small.

Something soft.

No, won't do that. Keep sniffing, keep smelling. Find the chocolate. Don't think about killing or ripping or biting or

Excerpt from the Daily Falcon, August 14 1972

INFANT MURDERED IN ENOCH PARK

Article by Lloyd Brummers

Enoch is a sizeable community located in South Carolina, approximately thirty miles from the border. Most popular for its luxury retirement homes, Enoch has enjoyed over twenty years of a crime rate almost below zero. Nonetheless, the peace and sanctity of the town was torn asunder early one Wednesday morning, when Richard Parrish, son of David and Molly Parrish, was found dead in his carriage.

Mrs. Parrish had been taking her baby for a ride along Enoch's main playground site. At around 9:33am, she dropped her wallet somewhere on the trail. Mrs. Parrish left her baby in the care of an as-yet unidentified woman while she tried to find her missing wallet. The woman then smothered the child during Molly's absence.

"It's horrible, unspeakable," Mr. Parrish told this reporter forty-eight hours after the murder had been committed. "Killing a grown man is one thing. Happens all the time everywhere. But I just can't understand how a person could work up the will to harm a baby. Molly can't talk right now. I'm not sure how I'm talking, to be honest. Maybe it's shock. Our lives are over."

Richard will be buried Monday morning at a private funeral. The search for his killer is still in progress.

AUGUST 14, 1972

I don't know why I killed the baby; I could only watch. I wasn't sure what was happening, but it felt good when I know it shouldn't. I hate when life suddenly become serious.

The park was very beautiful. The sun was so bright, bright enough to make you think dark things could never happen. All I wanted to do was sniff and pee, but then this pretty young lady comes over to me and says: "Excuse me, I'm kind of in a panic, I think I dropped my wallet somewhere, could you keep an eye on my baby for me? I'll be right back." I said, of course. And then she was gone.

I jumped onto the side of the baby's carriage and peered in. The little thing was so tiny and soft. It was sleeping. I poked its cheek. The baby made a soft, mewling little sound and opened its eyes. It looked at me, then at the sky, then at the trees, then back at me. Anything and everything can catch a baby's attention.

"Hello," I said.

The baby made a grumbling, dissatisfied little noise before pulling a blanket over its nose. It wanted its mother.

I looked up at a cloud. I started thinking of Santa Claus. I don't know why.

I looked back down, and my hand was squeezing the baby's face. I could feel it screaming into my palm, but that only made me press harder, and harder, and harder. All I could do was just squeeze, to crush this little fleshy thing, to make it DEAD.

And then it was.

Everything was so quiet. Even the chirp of the birds sounded far away. I heard the soft roar of a plane somewhere above me. I wonder who's in that plane, I thought to myself. Another basset hound, just like me? A basset hound stuck in a dark cargo hold, alone and troubled, all by itself in a strange zone of metal and pipes?

I tucked the dead thing under its blanket. I can't remember if I was crying or laughing or both. Then I ran.

What to do, what to do? I don't have the brains or the wits to figure out a plan. All I can do is eat and love and be lazy. Sometimes fart. Depends on what I've eaten. I just want to be somewhere warm.

It's so peaceful right now. Quiet. Not enough smells, though. I like to rummage through the garbage for smells, but I hurt myself a lot.

I feel lonely. The house has felt so empty since I came back. I whine and scratch at the doors for someone to love me, but nobody answers. I keep saying "I'm sorry". Again and again. "I'm sorry." But I don't know who I'm apologizing to, or what I'm apologizing for.

Phone Transcript. Aug. 15.

4:33pm.

JESSICA CHANNARD: Hello?

EDITH BLAINE: Hello.

CHANNARD: Who is this?

BLAINE: Edith Blaine.

CHANNARD: Oh! Sarah's teacher. How are you?

BLAINE: Good.

CHANNARD: Oh, great. Lovely. Is there, ah, something I can...?

BLAINE: I need to talk with Sarah.

CHANNARD: Well, she's out playing with Lizzie at the moment, I...

BLAINE: Right now.

CHANNARD: ...I'm sorry, has Sarah done something?

BLAINE: I need to talk with Sarah.

CHANNARD: Can it wait till tomorrow?

BLAINE: (PAUSE) It can wait till tomorrow.

CHANNARD: Look, is this about her stealing that stapler? I already told the principal I'm sorry about...

BLAINE: She might be late coming home tomorrow.

CHANNARD: How late?

BLAINE: An hour.

CHANNARD: ...I see. Well, that should be...fine. Has she done something wrong?

(PAUSE) Hello? Hello?

AUGUST 18, 1972

I can't stop. I can't stop. First the baby in the park, and now...

There was a time when the thought of – her – dying was enough to make me vomit. The pain, oh the inevitable pain, I couldn't take it, I wanted to rip out my hair and eat the atoms of my body. I wanted to scream so horribly, the noise from my throat would actually kill Death itself. I wanted to chew the fingers off my hands. The dreadful, hateful, gnawing gnawing gnawing gone-ness.

But I couldn't stop. She was right there, in bed. My owner. So old and drained and tender, my heart bled just looking at her wrinkles. The pain was tearing my stomach apart. I had to make it end. I had to kill my owner before Death killed her. Then it wouldn't be inevitable. She would be an immortal.

My paws were on the pillow before she opened her eyes. She saw me once. Her mouth opened, and a little gasp came out.

"Edith, what are you...?"

I pressed my heavy body on my face. I could feel her thrash about underneath, fighting. No, my owner, please understand. I'm doing this because I don't want Death to get you. I won't let Death win. Just this once, just this once, Death won't win.

It took a long time. How do humans measure seconds? Minutes? Hours? Years? Centuries? For a dog like me, a moment is forever. I was in hell.

Then she stopped thrashing, and I was in Heaven.

We've won, my owner, I kept crying. We've won. We've beat Death. Now you'll never be gone. You're with me, inside me.

Nothing ever dies.

Phone Transcript. Aug. 21.

9:04am.

SUSAN HAMILTON: Hello?

JESSICA CHANNARD: Hello? Is that you, Susan?

HAMILTON: Jessie? Good to hear from you! What -

CHANNARD: Is Sarah over at your place? With Katherine?

HAMILTON: Sarah? I don't know what you mean, dearie.

CHANNARD: She hasn't come home.

HAMILTON: Who hasn't, Jessie?

CHANNARD: Sarah. Sarah hasn't come home.

HAMILTON: Oh. Well, have you called the -

CHANNARD: I've called everyone.

HAMILTON: Let me finish, Jessie. Call Candice. You know how Sarah likes to fool around in her backyard when she's -

CHANNARD: I've called Candice. I've called everyone. She's missing, Susan.

HAMILTON: (PAUSE) What about the police?

CHANNARD: The police? You mean, have I called the police?

HAMILTON: I'm not sure who's left that you could ring up, Jessie.

CHANNARD: No, I haven't. I just... I don't know if she's run away, or...

HAMILTON: Does she make a habit of running away?

CHANNARD: No.

HAMILTON: Then call the police.

CHANNARD: All right. (PAUSE) All right.

HAMILTON: She's fine, Jessie. I know she's fine. You know what kids do when they're hyperactive. They go and disappear into a secret hiding place and stay there, just to give their parents a few more grey hairs.

CHANNARD: I don't know. I'm so scared.

HAMILTON: Do you want me to come over?

CHANNARD: ...no. I'm okay.

HAMILTON: Are you sure?

CHANNARD: Yes.

HAMILTON: Where's Bob? Is he there with you?

CHANNARD: Still at work. I didn't want to...he gets so cranky when I call him on the job...he almost bit my head off when I rang him about Sarah...

HAMILTON: The hell with him. Being cranky is his only damn job.

CHANNARD: (NERVOUS LAUGHTER)

HAMILTON: Just sit down, Jessie. Take a deep breath. Call the police. They'll sort everything out.

CHANNARD: All right. All right.

HAMILTON: I'm here whenever you need to talk.

CHANNARD: Thank you, Susan.

HAMILTON: It's what I -

(CALL ENDS)

AUGUST 22, 1972

Poor little Sarah Channard is screaming through the duct tape, and all I can do is whine.

The basement is dark and damp. I can smell things down here that I never want to smell again. Sarah Channard is strung upside down like a slab of meat, her blonde hair cascading from her head as a golden waterfall. I use sharp and pointy bits of metal to...cut her. And all the time she's screaming. I've muffled her voice by slapping some duct tape over her mouth, but somehow that makes it so much worse. Her yells turn to awful, muffled little noises that make me want to hide.

Her eyes are wet. I sniff at Sarah Channard's face. "Bahnee," I hear her mumble through the tape. "Bahnee. Bahnee." Even now, when she's in such pain, such awful unfair pain, she knows me and loves me.

Sarah Channard keeps screaming through the tape until she stops. Red stuff drips from her body like a leaky faucet. But I keep cutting anyway. It's like eating junk food. I hate it, and I love it. I kneel down and pick up a strip of skin. I chew it where she can see. Who is doing this? Not me, not me. I could never...hurt someone. It must be the Other. The Enemy.

This isn't me. You have to know this isn't me, Sarah. It's my body. My brain. When it tells me to hurt and kill, I hurt and kill. I don't even hesitate. That's the worst part. I don't even try to fight. All the other monsters I read about...is this what it was like for them? The easiness? I can't feel anything until I've destroyed something. It's like being in hell without dying, and I only know I'm not in hell because you're still here.

Sarah?

I've killed a little girl.

Poor little Sarah Channard. She was a good kid. A good kid. For her to die like this is evil. My brain is evil now, and I know I should...I should die. But I'm too scared. Too scared to kill myself after what I've done. There's nowhere I can go now except hell. I've killed a little girl for no reason, no reason at all.

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so so sorry.

Don't be scared of me. Please don't. I swear upon my soul you're safe from me.

Stay with me. Don't leave me alone with me.

FROM: Reverend Matthew Hooper, Enoch Parish

TO: Archbishop Luke Watford, Vatican City

August 26, 1972

Dear Father Watford,

I've been meaning to get in touch with you for almost a year now, but I'm ignorant of your address in Italy, and I know your schedule is already crowded. It concerns one of my parishioners, Edith Blaine. She is a woman in her early 40's who would ask me a wide array of questions regarding the Catholic faith. Edith has, or rather had, a sensitive personality, and carried the kind of demeanor of a person who was inexperienced with some aspects of the world. By "some aspects", I mostly mean the ones we could all do without.

That all changed in early March, when Edith was assaulted by two unidentified men. She was pushed over the town's bridge and landed head-first on a sharp rock jutting out of the water. She spent more than a month recovering in Enoch Hospital, and the doctors insisted upon her release that she hadn't endured any lasting head trauma. However, I feel something has changed in Edith, something almost imperceptible, and this change has unnerved me, which is why I am seeking your advice on the matter.

Prior to the attack, Edith arrived at church every Sunday morning, right on schedule, and listened to each of my sermons with rapt attention. Every fortnight or so, she would come visit me at home, or I would be invited to her house for lunch, to discuss a wide variety of topics, although our conversations tended to drift towards the presence of Edith's beloved basset hound, Barney.

I urged my parishioners to offer a prayer for Edith during her time in the hospital. I simply didn't know what else to do; I tried to visit, but the staff informed me Edith was in a highly irrational state, and couldn't be seen that particular week. They told me the same thing the next week, and the next, and the next, until Edith was suddenly out and about in the world again.

Now I'm certain you're going to think Edith stopped attending church after the

attack on the bridge. Edith never had her faith tested to such a brutal extent before, and perhaps one out of every ten parishioners would turn away from God under normal circumstances. But in hindsight, I'm beginning to wish Edith had done the same, as it would have meant her disappearing entirely from the church's pews. Instead, I had to witness what she had become.

For approximately three months following her time in the hospital, Edith continued her church attendance every Sunday. But something was different. During my sermons, she no longer paid any heed to what I was saying on the pulpit. She would stare at the stained glass windows throughout the entire sermon, and if she was sitting closer to me on a particular day, I could spot her eyes moving about in erratic patterns. A change had also come over Edith's features. Before the attack, her face always seemed impressionable and malleable, like a child's. But now, her lips are twisted into a permanent snarl, and she appears consistently irritated with everyone around her.

One could believe that Edith's experience had simply hardened her into a cynic, and her regular church attendance was some form of sarcastic mockery, but something else is going on. I've already described Edith as being akin to a child. That childishness remains, albeit perverted into a bully's thuggish disposition. The son of one of the parishioners told me that Edith would pull the most terrifying "faces", and when I asked him to elaborate, he couldn't.

I was hesitant to confront Edith about this behavior. It didn't help that only the children at the church seemed put off by her; the grown-up parishioners didn't seem to pick up on anything. But eventually, after the service was over for the day, I asked Edith to talk to me in private. I questioned her specifically about how she was feeling, and if she needed help.

Her first response was a shrill kind of laughter that almost cracked the stained glass windows surrounding us. "Help?" She said to me. "Help with what? I'm fine, Father, better than fine. I love life. I love everything. Even this church. I've never felt so good in my life. I feel free."

My next question was, "free of what?"

Edith began teasing her hair with her fingers and looked towards the pulpit. "I want to ask you something," she said. "And you'd better have a good answer. A really

good answer.”

I told her to ask me.

At this point, she gave the strangest pause, and tilted her head. “I have this...friend. She wasn’t born...bad, but turns bad because of...something that happened to her. Is she still going to Hell?”

I can’t begin to tell you how much I wished you were at my side at that moment. I hesitated, and she leapt on this hesitation like a panther.

“You don’t know!” She howled at me. “You’re getting boring. I don’t like being bored. You know who else used to bore me?” At this point, she hissed like a reptile. “My mother.”

With that, she stood and left the hall. I must have stayed sitting on that pew for almost half an hour, trying to collect my thoughts. Once in a while, a parishioner would ask if demonic possession was a real threat. I could never give them a straight answer, but I don’t think the truth would be so dissimilar from what I saw in Edith today.

However, I believe others close to Edith have picked up on her new...personality quirks, but are afraid to come forward with the knowledge. Why, I couldn’t say for sure. I’m beginning to fear for Edith, and not just her. Nevertheless, her question is tearing my mind apart every time I try to sleep at night, and your counsel is deeply needed.

Kind regards,

Rev. Matthew Hooper

AUGUST 29, 1972

The damned policeman. I could smell him coming from a mile away. Policemen have a very distinct odor. Strict and humorless, like spilled detergent on linoleum. I could tell he meant business. A grown-up come to do grown-up things. He's come to take me to the hard house of crazy creatures, where men in white stare and stare with needles that sting. It's no place for a basset hound.

He knocks at the door, and I jump. I've always been scared of loud sounds and loud people. Always scared of doing something wrong and bringing down their wrath. Humans scare me in general. Jodie sometimes got angry with the way I smelled, or the way I ate, or the way I slept. I snore a lot. Apparently Mace never snores. That's nice for Mace, but I never particularly liked him.

I opened the door. I tried to look fierce, but I probably didn't do a good job of it. The policeman is tall and gruff. He hasn't shaved. He looks tired and angry. I don't think I've seen a policeman who didn't look tired and angry. So many days dealing with mean people makes him mean in turn. It's like an awful disease.

He asks questions I can't understand. Stuff about where I was at such-and-such an hour. He doesn't mention the baby, not directly, but he does a good job of poking around the baby. Hinting at it, nudging towards it. He never smiles. This is a dead baby we're talking about after all, but this is the sort of man who never smiles, not even if the baby was alive and the sky was glowing with rainbows every day.

After he was done, the policeman left. But he was going to come back. I could see it in his mean face. I'm scared.

I spent a long time in the bedroom, hiding under the blankets. The fabric became wet from my tears. I have to leave. I have to disappear into the woods where they'll never find me. I've done something bad, and I know I'll do it again, because I can't stop myself. All I want to do now is break things.

I clattered down the stairs and opened the front door. It was late. The sunlight was going orange as the afternoon crept on. I couldn't see anyone on the street. Occasionally a car drove by. Somewhere a bird was singing.

I can go. There's nobody out here.

I hurry to the car, feet and paws moving and scraping first on tiles, then wood, then gravel. I jump onto the driver's seat, paws first. It takes a moment for me to drag my heavy rear into the car. I buckle up. Start the engine.

Here we go. We're running away.

Hox/Milligan Conference, Pt. 2

March 14th, 2015

HOX: ...all right, we're all set up.

MILLIGAN: Good. Look, I'm sorry about. I haven't talked about Sarah in ages. She was an angel. I really mean that. Not just in personality, but...well, I always had the feeling she would grow up to be someone great. Someone wonderful. Like Martin Luther King Jr. It was just a feeling. She had a sort of glow about her.

HOX: And the other children?

MILLIGAN: Oh, Lord. I'd rather focus on one at a time, if that's fine with you. She used to be brilliant at math, but her real talent was in speech. She had the most magnificent oratory skills. Sarah could go up to the front of the class and speak with a confidence and power I'd never seen in a child her age..

HOX: Did she ever attend any of your classes?

MILLIGAN: A few times, when Edith was home sick. I wish I could have kept her. Sometimes it doesn't feel as if she's really...gone.

HOX: Was Sarah a favorite of Edith's as well?

MILLIGAN: Oh, yes. They both were...they shared the same beliefs, and I mean they had sincere faith in God, but Sarah was a little different from Edith. She always seemed on edge about something. What, I don't know. She could get flustered very easily, if someone pushed her. Like she was scared of God being...I don't know. But Sarah? An army of atheists couldn't break her beliefs. That's a lot to say about a little girl, but she just had this...I think I've already said confidence, haven't I? They say that's the key to everything. Money, fame, friends...Edith was always so envious of people like that.

HOX: And that's why Edith targeted her first.

MILLIGAN: Is that a statement or a question?

HOX: (PAUSE) A question.

MILLIGAN: Maybe. Maybe. I really don't...killing a child is unfathomable to me, you understand, so I'm afraid I can't...I know she was sick by that point, but it's still just so...

HOX: In your opinion, why did she go after Sarah?

MILLIGAN: For the hell of it, maybe? I can't begin to guess, dear. Monsters are monsters, and we don't have any business knowing what's going on in their rotten-turnip heads. None at all.

HOX: Let's talk about something less morbid for a while.

MILLIGAN: Yes, let's! (LAUGHS)

HOX: How did you first come to know Edith Blaine?

MILLIGAN: A car accident, actually. She was pulling out of her driveway, and I was just passing by on the road...Edith was daydreaming, as she often does, and I was listening to Springsteen on the radio, so I guess you could say we were mutually responsible for what happened.

HOX: Did you collide head-on?

MILLIGAN: No, we just grazed each other, but my goodness, it was frightening.

HOX: No broken glass or bones, I hope?

MILLIGAN: Just a really big dent in my car's fender! Not that Edith emerge unscathed. The rear of her vehicle was just destroyed. I got out first, and started shouting. Edith was horrified, rattled. She looked all the world like a cornered rabbit. She was always like that; trying to avoid conflict wherever it sprang up. She couldn't handle being around arguments or fights. She wasn't so much a pacifist...I suppose she was just afraid of violence. Or confrontation. She used to get into so much trouble when she was younger. I was ready to pop my fist into her mouth, as you can imagine! But she was so apologetic, and...humiliated. After all the red mist had left my head, I was able to admit I was partly responsible for the accident as well. So we agreed to split the cost of repairs between us. Nowadays one of us would have tried to sue the other!

HOX: So it was a 50-50 kind of arrangement?

MILLIGAN: Yes, I paid for the damage to Edith's car, and she paid for mine. Although I believe Edith had to pay a little more than I did...the fender was in terrible shape.

HOX: Nevertheless, you got on well after that?

MILLIGAN: We got along like old friends. Turned out we shared a lot of the same interests...dogs, school teaching...movies. She tried to catch a film every weekend at the old Matheson Theater. If she didn't fancy anything that was playing there, she'd

watch the movie of the week on the TV.

HOX: Could you name a few?

MILLIGAN: Well, I remember her eating up "Planet of the Apes"...she was secretly in love with Charlton Heston, I'm sure of it. I always thought he was a horribly ugly man, but to each their own. Then there was the old Universal monster movies...she used to watch "Little House on the Prairie" with her mother every weekend...

HOX: What about books?

MILLIGAN: Well, she adored the old fantastic literature...H.G. Wells and all that...positively ate it up...I think she was into James Clavell for a while, but his books were just too long for her.

HOX: You and Edith continued to be friends for eight years?

MILLIGAN: Yes, we taught classes just down the hall from each other, so it was inevitable, really. (LAUGHS) But Edith was such a warm, lovely...

(INAUDIBLE MAN'S VOICE IN B.G.)

MILLIGAN: I'm sorry. you'll have to excuse me a moment. (CONVERSATION IN B.G.)

MILLIGAN: ...hello?

HOX: Hello, I'm still here.

MILLIGAN: I'm sorry, that was my son. He wanted to know where I left the keys to the car...anyway, you were saying?

HOX: I just wanted to ask if Edith had any particular hobbies.

MILLIGAN: She's go on and on about wanting to buy a bicycle and exploring the mountains, but I don't think she ever got around to it. She used to talk about all these things she wanted to do, but never did.

HOX: Why?

MILLIGAN: Oh, simple human laziness. I don't mean that as a putdown. We all suffer from it, don't we? All these little dreams of ours that go unrealized because we just never seem to have the energy...actually, that's exactly what Edith used to say. I think she was aware of it, or at the very least, she felt incredibly insecure about it. She was insecure about a lot of things...

HOX: Would you say she was envious of you?

MILLIGAN: (LAUGHS) No no, we were mutual underachievers. Except for my house, I guess. It was a little larger than hers.

HOX: Did she ever talk about that?

MILLIGAN: No, but you could tell with Edith. She would have been an awful poker player. I think she wanted to become an astronaut once. (LAUGHS) It could have been a joke on her part, I'm not sure. She also said she was writing. Writing this, writing that. Nothing ever came out of it, of course. "So Edith, how are you keeping yourself busy these days?" "I'm writing." That sort of thing. She hated when people asked questions like that, as if she were being interrogated. Like she had to justify her existence to them. Otherwise, they would have seen her as a...I don't know.

HOX: Do you know if she kept a journal?

MILLIGAN: It's possible, but I never saw anything from her.

HOX: Did Edith ever mention anything about a specific idea, or story?

MILLIGAN: She sometimes said she was working on a book about Jesus. She didn't go into any greater detail about it, I'm afraid...would you like to ask me what kind of food she liked? (LAUGHS)

HOX: No, no, I don't think I have to be that thorough.

MILLIGAN: Why not? You're writing a book on her, aren't you? I just don't want it to be one of those horrible lurid novels you see on bookshelves about Ted Bundy or Ed Gein...

HOX: I'm doing my best to avoid -

MILLIGAN: Because I really can't stand the people who love those kind of people, you know? I see young men walking around on the street wearing t-shirts with Charles Manson's face on them, and I just...

HOX: Mrs. Milligan -

MILLIGAN: ...all I want to do is walk up and slap them across the face...

HOX: Mrs. Milligan, I'm not trying to idolize -

MILLIGAN: Well, why not? It's hip to love the bad guys these days, isn't it?

HOX: I think that's only a particular subculture -

MILLIGAN: No, it's not. It's everywhere. Everywhere. God, what's wrong with these

people? Don't they know what their heroes did?

HOX: If we could get back to Edith...

MILLIGAN: I mean, it's no wonder the world is in such a bad state. Everyone making damn t-shirts and movies and video games out of...human vermin, and all the people they killed so horribly, well, they're just sheep, aren't they, and they have it coming, so they don't deserve our sympathy... (LONG PAUSE) I'm sorry. Sometimes I rant once in a while. My grandchildren do their best to endure, but...once I get started, I often can't stop. Edith seems to be getting that sort of attention now, and it really...chills my blood, you know?

HOX: In that case, would you say Edith Blaine was the kind of "hero" the new generation would idolize?

MILLIGAN: No. Not in the beginning. But after the attack...yes, she was twisted into the kind of...creature they adore.

HOX: Mrs. Milligan, I believe there was a meeting between Edith, Principal Arkman, and yourself during the first week she came back to work...

MILLIGAN: (PAUSE) Yes. Yes, there was. There'd been...well, the students coming out of Edith's classroom would sometimes tell about these things Edith would...would do...

HOX: Such as?

MILLIGAN: She would discipline them. Through...psychological intimidation, I suppose. I don't know what else to call it. She never laid a hand on them before the...murders, but she would keep them in line with some of the most ghastly stories. Like bedbugs coming to eat them the night if they didn't do their homework, or mushrooms growing out of their skin if they didn't take baths, or...worse. The stories just went on like that. So, I brought them to Tony's attention, and we had a little sit-down about it in his office.

HOX: How did Edith behave during this meeting?

MILLIGAN: Bored.

(LONG PAUSE)

HOX: Hello? Yes?

MILLIGAN: Oh, I'm sorry, you wanted more?

HOX: "Bored"? Is that all?

MILLIGAN: Yes. No. She kept acting as if...(PAUSE) Whenever Tony would look away from Edith, she would pull these...horrible faces at him. I don't mean the typical kindergarten variety, I mean she would actually contort her features in a way she had never done before. Then she went back to normal as soon as Tony turned his head back. As if Tony was beneath her attention.

HOX: But he never noticed?

MILLIGAN: No. Like I said before, work was everything to him. He didn't care about...about the little things.

HOX: He died from heart complications a few years later, didn't he?

MILLIGAN: Yes, so I heard. Poor man. I'd moved away from Enoch by that point. I have to give Tony credit, he...the rest of us who knew Edith sort of ran away after she went bad, but Tony, he stayed. I guess he was stronger than all of us. (PAUSE) I'm sorry, dear. Do you mind if we end this conversation now?

HOX: Is there a problem?

MILLIGAN: No, I'm just...very tired. Tired and sad.

HOX: One last question, then. If you were to meet Edith again today, what would you say to her?

MILLIGAN: What would I say? I'd say that I'm sorry for what happened to you, but I'm more sorry for your victims.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1972

It's raining. It's raining so hard the front window looks like a waterfall. The night is all around us. Sometimes another car's headlights go by, but they only make me feel twice as lonely.

My paws are glued to the wheel. It's hard to drive without opposable thumbs, but I make do. There are so many smells, and I never have time to enjoy any of them. I'm moving so fast down the highway, they come and go faster than I can blink. A scent of oil...and then it's gone. A woman wearing lavender perfume...gone. Another dog, small and yappy...gone. This is not happiness. Happiness is staying in one place long enough to drink in the smells.

Where am I now?

My brain is exploding all the time, like a fireworks show. Is this what almost dying does to you? I see everything so differently now. The only thing I don't want to tear to pieces is myself, and I don't understand why. It doesn't make sense. Nothing makes sense. I miss the days of gentle sounds and tender sights, of my big long ears dragging along the ground, picking up the most wonderful smells in the world.

I'm hungry.

There's plenty of treats in the back. I packed everything I could before I left. But there's

no dog food back here. Just human food. Now why did I do that?

I'm very afraid. I'm not a bright dog, I'll admit it. Sometimes I can be really slow. But I'm smart enough to know I can't live on my own. I'm just too lazy. If only I could go back to scrounging garbage cans for a living. My head is aching and my heart is aching. If only I was human, I would know what to do and when to do it. Humans are so brilliant that way. I must find a new home.

I like sticking my head out the window. Wind blowing my ears, feels good on my face. I see a glimpse of something in the mirror. Eyes weird and twitchy. Mouth moving around but no words coming out. Just sounds. Strange noises. The wind makes them hard to hear. They make me afraid, and I duck my head back inside. I need to get off

the highway. Too many people, too much danger.

Pulling off the big road, into a smaller road. Less cars, less lights. Darker. I hear thunder crashing on the roof above me. Blue lightning streaks across the pitch black void, and I whimper. I never liked lightning, or getting wet.

No lights on in the car. Can't see anything from where I am. Too low. Sometimes I see another face flashing the dark. Scary, twisted. I think it's crying, but I'm not sure.

Hox/Ellison Interview, Part 2

April 9th, 2015

ELLISON: I have to apologize about yesterday. I just...

HOX: Did something come up?

ELLISON: Yeah, my daughter wanted...she wanted...(PAUSE) All right, you know what? That's a lie. I simply couldn't talk any more. Going on about Edith does that to me.

HOX: Is it because of what she did later, or...

ELLISON: That, and Barney. Poor miserable animal. To be in the company of someone like Edith. I hate what dogs can become if people do a bad job raising them...trust me, I used to see some of the most depressing cases. Some of them had visible damage...scars or whatnot...but others...well, their brains were just sort of broken. Nothing wrong with them physically, they were just sick in the head. The owner was almost always responsible. A few dogs can just be born sick, sure, but most of the time...

HOX: Well, wolves can be quite vicious, and they don't need people to help them.

ELLISON: Oh, sure. But dogs are something else entirely, aren't they? That's our fault. I won't deny it. We domesticated them and bred them and twisted them into different shapes and sizes to the point where a wolf could meet a chihuahua and one would regard the other as an alien life form.

HOX: It's more likely the wolf would eat the chihuahua.

ELLISON: (LAUGHS) Yes, well, I guess that's a foregone conclusion.

HOX: Did you ever treat a wolf?

ELLISON: Nope. Came close a few times, though. I remember taking care of this Malamute who was part-wolf. He never lost his cool while I was around, but there was always a sense of...intimidation, maybe. That's the funny thing about dogs. The farther back you go, the more...wolf-like they get. Something Darwinian about that.

HOX: And basset hounds?

ELLISON: (LAUGHS) Well, basset hounds were originally bred by the French to hunt

rabbits. They were low but heavy, so they could cut through any kind of backcountry and underbrush like a tank. Nowadays it's less about the hunting and more about the fact they're...basset hounds. They're as far away from Darwin as you can get. If they ever had to fend for themselves, the poor guys would get their butts handed to them by the elements. Maybe that's why some people love them, I don't know.

HOX: If it's all right with you, I was wondering if it's possible to talk about that time when you met Edith after her incident on the town bridge.

ELLISON: Ah. Well, uh...excuse me a moment.

(B.G. NOISE - SHUFFLING PAPERS)

ELLISON: Yeah, that'll be fine.

HOX: So when did Edith come to see you?

ELLISON: About two months after the...attack. I think it was two months. I don't know much of what happened, other than...that she'd been attacked.

HOX: Was she different?

ELLISON: Yes. And no. I mean...it's the sort of thing you'd only notice if you'd already known her for a long time. Edith used to be so nervous. She seemed to be scared of everyone. Even me. But then she wasn't. It was if a switch had been flicked inside her head, and all of a sudden, she was...well, I didn't much enjoy her company. I don't know how Barney could even cope being around her.

HOX: Where there any other...changes?

ELLISON: She swore like a machine gun. "F" this, "S" that...with a lot of variation thrown in, just for fun, I think. And she'd say them with the most casual attitude...you know, "if you inject that blankity-blank into Barney, I'm going to cut out your eyeballs and piss into the empty sockets." (PAUSE) Speechless, are we? I was speechless too.

HOX: Did Edith ever threaten your life?

ELLISON: No, but I'm convinced she was primed to kill me. There was something wild about her, something broken. She acted like a child who found out she wouldn't have to go to school again for the rest of her life. Just...joy. But the worst kind of joy. Like she could do anything anywhere, anytime, without ever being afraid of...well, anybody, really. Edith loved Barney. The stranger pretending to be Edith cared for Barney too. If

she were some completely opposite...thing, like Mr. Hyde, she would have killed Barney a long time ago.

HOX: But the similarities ended there?

ELLISON: Pretty much.

HOX: What else did she do differently?

ELLISON: You mean, what didn't she do differently? Because that's what you're really asking, isn't it? She treated me like an incompetent quack. Just being around her was dangerous for your health. She was radioactive.

HOX: So how would you describe this other person?

ELLISON: Crafty. Malevolent. An evil fox. A miserable lump of hate. Out to hurt. It didn't matter who or what, she just wanted to cause pain. I could see Edith, this new Edith, killing me, or some other grown-up, but not... kids. Don't know why. Wishful thinking, maybe.

HOX: How did she behave when Barney was around?

ELLISON: Well, I've already told you what she was like before. Edith would throw the vilest profanities at me. Sometimes she'd do the same to old Barney, but somehow it never came off as...sincere, the way it was for me. She always seemed on the brink of ripping his poor ears off for some minor offense, like farting or drooling on the floor, but then she'd stop at the last second. She never held herself back like that with anybody else, never. She almost acted...reverential around him.

HOX: Would you say she still loved him?

ELLISON: I don't think it was love, not anymore, but something else happened to whatever emotion Edith had felt for Barney. Everything that was so familiar to the old Edith must have been so alien to the new Edith. But she just swept it all aside. Only Barney was different. It's like she didn't know what to DO with him. Can you understand? I can't begin to describe it. I couldn't figure it out, not back then, but now when I'm ancient and primed to die...it makes me feel...

HOX: Are you all right?

ELLISON: Do you want to know how my wife died?

HOX: I beg your pardon?

ELLISON: Breast cancer. The doctors didn't get to her in time, and it had already spread. I remember hating it...the thing inside her body that was killing her. Capital H. I was with her the hour she passed on. The last thing she ever said to me was, "I'm frightened." That's it. Then she was gone. The last emotion she ever experienced was the purest kind of fear. At the time I couldn't get over how monstrously unfair that was. I wanted to bite off my fingers, I wanted to burn down the heavens, I couldn't think straight. I said to myself, "I'd rather live in a universe where there are witches and goblins and horrible gypsy curses than a universe where there's nothing after dying." For a couple of weeks I thought about killing myself. Then I remembered the way Edith...the new Edith...would behave with Barney, and I didn't. For some forgotten reason, I didn't.

HOX: I'm afraid I don't follow.

ELLISON: That's the ultimate hope, isn't it?

HOX: What is?

ELLISON: That there's something after dying.

Excerpt from the Daily Falcon, September 1 1972

THREE CHILDREN DEAD AS MADWOMAN GOES ON THE RUN

Article by Lloyd Brummers

The community of Enoch reels from the news of multiple infanticides committed by schoolteacher Edith Blaine. All three of her victims belonged in the same class: Sarah Channard, 8, Paul Jacobson, 10, and Calvin Derkins, 8. Young Sarah was locked inside Ms. Blaine's cellar, where she was subsequently skinned before dying of blood loss, while Paul and Calvin were buried alive in the woods behind Edith's house.

"First Sarah was absent at school, followed by Paul and Calvin less than two days later," noted Principal Tony Arkman of Enoch Elementary. "I don't believe Enoch will ever be able to put this tragedy behind it."

Jessica Channard, mother of Sarah, was the first to call the police about her daughter's disappearance. Principal Arkman later confirmed with the precinct that Sarah had been last seen with her teacher Edith. Officer Mike Cardigan was sent to Edith's home, only to meet resistance by Ms. Blaine.

All three bodies of the missing children have since been discovered. A statewide manhunt has been launched to track down Edith Blaine. She had also taken a pet along, a basset hound approximately ten or eleven years old named Barney. "If you see the fugitive, do not under any circumstances approach her," cautioned Sergeant Kevin Williams. "She isn't in her right mind, and is liable to attack. Simply call your nearest precinct, and they'll handle the rest."

Edith Blaine was last seen fleeing Enoch in a rundown Chevrolet with her dog, in the direction of the border to Jasper.

FROM: Archbishop Luke Watford, Vatican City

TO: Reverend Matthew Hooper, Enoch Parish, South Carolina

September 14, 1972

Dear Rev. Hooper,

My apologies for not getting back to you sooner; my visit with Bishop Marcello took up more of my schedule than expected, and unfortunately I allowed many of my correspondences to fall by the wayside.

In regards to the case of Edith Blaine, I'm inclined to think you have two options ahead of you. The first, and probably the most obvious, would be for Edith to seek out psychiatric help. But the way you described her attitude and disposition puzzled me. Her "breakdown" if it could be called that, sounds more of the spiritual/theological persuasion.

I highly doubt the possibility of demonic influence, but the words you described to me from Ms. Blaine are similar to a probable case of authentic possession I once treated in Paris. Although the doctrines of the Church forbid me from going into any great detail about the incident, the abrupt shifts in the victim's personality, the gross profanity, et al, have uncomfortable parallels with what you've informed me about Ms. Blaine.

I'm currently engaged to visit the mayor of Naples next week, but please don't hesitate to keep me up to date on Ms. Blaine and her erratic behavior. I have a suspicion her conflict is best left to the hands of the Church than medical science, but in Heaven's name, don't tell anyone else I said so. At least not for the time being.

Kind regards,

Rev. Luke Watford

SEPTEMBER 8, 1972

I wasn't happy about going into the gas station alone, but there was no other option. I needed dog food, and there was only human food. Normally I wouldn't mind eating human food, but it's important to maintain a consistent diet. Even a basset hound has to be picky about what goes into its stomach once in a while. The last time I wasn't picky, I ate a whole box of Swiss chocolates. I had to swallow a funny little white pill that made me throw up. Never again.

There was a young man behind the counter. Couldn't have been any older than twenty or twenty-one. Big glasses perched atop a beakish nose. His hair long and stringy in the way that's so popular these days. He was reading a book; "Bad Ronald". He'd been eating a chocolate bar. I knew because the pages of the book were stained.

I work up the nerve to speak. Dog food, please.

He looks up from Bad Ronald, frowning. I beg your pardon?

Dog food, please.

The young man makes a weird little noise with his throat and nods towards the back of the station. Uh...yeah, sure. Right over there. Help yourself.

There's a little TV playing on the counter. I listen while I look through the shelves. So many snacks, so many colors, so many tastes. A sweaty man with black hair in a suit is talking on the TV. Something about a town or city or hotel called Watergate. I don't pay much attention, but the young man does.

Fuckin' asshole, he keeps saying, over and over. Do you believe this fuckin' asshole? Can you believe what he's done? How the fuck does someone do something so evil, man?

I look out the window towards the car. It looks so lonely without me inside.

Maybe he was just confused, I say.

The young man laughs like a jackal. Yeah, that's what he was. Confused. Riiiiight.

I figure out he doesn't want to do much talking, and go back to the dog food. This station only has one brand. Doofy's Treats. I don't like Doofy's Treats, but I can't see

anything else, and I feel scared. The TV isn't talking about the man in the suit any more. I think it's talking about me.

I grab five packs of Doofy's Treats off the shelf and hurry back to the front counter, my little claws scuffling on the linoleum tiles. That'll be \$22.81, the young man says. The light inside the gas station flickers. I think there's a problem with the electricity.

You have a good night now, the young man says as I go to the door, but I know he doesn't mean it.

Excerpt from the Daily Falcon. Sep. 9 1972

'WITCH OF ENOCH' ESCAPES INTO WOODS

Article by Lloyd Brummers

Edith Blaine, or "the Witch of Enoch", as South Carolina has dubbed her, continues to evade the authorities. Her vehicle was discovered near Georgia's border by a pair of hitchhikers, abandoned by its owner.

"A lot of people tend to ditch their cars when they're drunk or stoned," Matt Gibbons, 27, told this reporter. "The driver's door was wide open. So was the rear trunk. So it looked pretty obvious to us. But then Debbie noticed the funny smell in the back of the car. She said it smelled like an old dog. We've been in and out of plenty shelters, so she'd have a good idea of what a dog smells like. Then I'm thinking, so, okay...somebody's just taken their pet for a walk, that's all. But then I saw the blood stains on the wheel."

Matt and his girlfriend, Debbie Jones, hurried to the nearest pay phone and called the local precinct. Subsequent inspection of the vehicle confirmed it as the property of Edith Blaine, 47, who at the time of this writing is wanted for the murder of three innocent children and her own mother in her hometown of Enoch. Edith fled from the community approximately forty-eight hours ago with her dog, a basset hound named Barney. The police are collaborating with Georgia forest rangers to ensure Edith Blaine is caught.

"With any luck, she'll get herself killed out there," Donald Depp, a senior officer from the United States Forest Service, stated to an open press conference early this morning. "This woman is hoping she'll simply just disappear into the woods. She won't disappear. Chances are we'll find her body at the foot of a tree or something. It's easy to starve in the great outdoors if you have no clue what you're doing."

Nevertheless, citizens living on the border of South Carolina and Georgia are warned to call law enforcement immediately if Edith Blaine is seen. They have also been cautioned to watch for her dog, who can also be tracked through the woods to

Blaine's location.

Transcript of Hox/Stewart Interview

April 3rd, 2015

STEWART: I can't begin to tell you how many times I've heard the same horseshit over and over. "Edith Blaine was a psycho." Gotta love that word. "Psycho." It makes everything so damn simple, doesn't it?

HOX: I'd like you to introduce yourself, before we...

STEWART: Jerry Stewart. I run the "Witch of Enoch" website. When I'm not working, anyway. That's w w w, dot, w-i-t...

HOX: I think people will know where to find it.

STEWART: Right, right, right. You'd have to really go out of your way to find anyone who's internet illiterate. As in, anybody who's over ninety. (LAUGHS)

HOX: When did you first hear of Edith Blaine?

STEWART: About five years ago. I stumbled across this thread talking about serial killers of the 1970's, and Edith's name cropped up. So I started to research her, and the more I learned, the more intrigued I got. She's pretty much "required reading" for female serial killer enthusiasts. Elisabeth Bathory, Aileen Wuornos...Edith Blaine. Only instead of going after peasant girls or middle-aged white guys, she killed children. There's really something incredible about that.

HOX: You also run a website about Ed Gein...

STEWART: Yeah. Gotta love Eddie.

HOX: I've noticed a recurring tone in your posts about Blaine and Gein.

STEWART: Tone? There's no tone on the web. I write the truth, that's all.

HOX: I've noticed your sympathy isn't always for the killers' targets.

STEWART: No, no, no. That's just...that's opening a can of worms I don't want to go into. I'm fascinated by them, I'll put it that way. I'm fascinated by them. I've always been like that. I've always been into villains more than heroes, you know? Doesn't matter if it's Saturday morning cartoons or real-life crimes. In their own fucked-up way, they're just straight and true, you know? A badass is a badass.

HOX: On your website, you often argue that Edith Blaine is a misunderstood figure.

STEWART: No, not misunderstood. Underappreciated. People get so caught up in what these psychopaths do, they completely ignore the flashes of genius they display every once in a while.

HOX: And Ed Gein?

STEWART: An artist unbound. Because, let's face it, the only way an artist can really go all-out is to lose all sense of social mores, right? Just think about what it must have been like breaking into his house for the first time and finding all these macabre creations.

(LONG PAUSE)

STEWART: Hello? You all right?

HOX: Sorry, I'm just thinking about the women who were slaughtered to assist Mr. Gein with his macabre creations.

STEWART: See, you're doing it. You're going into "Lifetime Network" mode. You look at what he's done, and you switch off your brain.

HOX: And what should I be doing? Educate me.

STEWART: Just learn to stop being a prude. You've got to keep an open mind about these things, lady. Sure, it would be horrible to die the way Gein's victims died, but that's just life. And life sucks. Sometimes you get to grow old and die in your bed, and sometimes you get axed by the Manson family. When you're fucked, you're fucked. I just try to keep some perspective about it.

HOX: So you're telling me that I should re-evaluate my perspective of the Manson family?

STEWART: Hell, Charles Manson is a rebel. In his own way.

HOX: Charles Manson is a Nazi.

STEWART: Yeah, that's just the sort of kneejerk bullshit I'd...

HOX: No, I mean he's literally a Nazi. He upholds Nazi ideals. STEWART: Look, you want to talk or not? Because I can just hang up.

HOX: Yes, yes, of course. I'm sorry. What was it about Edith Blaine's case that you found so fascinating?

STEWART: She was a child-killer. A multiple child-killer. A multiple child-killer who killed children in extremely fucked-up ways. However you look at it, that's just a whole other level of awesome. I remember reading a newspaper article that said she got a bump on the head. Or something.

HOX: She was pushed over a bridge by two unidentified assailants.

STEWART: Okay, maybe she wasn't born twisted, but getting her head smashed definitely rectified that.

HOX: How many other serial killers can you name who experienced anything similar? Head trauma, I mean?

STEWART: None. None at all. That's what makes Edith so fucking interesting.

HOX: Because she didn't start out as a killer?

STEWART: Partly that, I guess, but also the idea we're all ready to be killers under the right circumstances. I mean, you've fantasized about killing some asshole once in a while, right? Well, if that particular hypothetical asshole pushed all the right buttons...raping your mom or your sister, for example...you'd want to bash his fucking brains in, right?

HOX: I don't think serial killers always have to be antagonized to make them kill.

STEWART: Sure, but every mom's had fantasies about wringing the necks of their offspring, hasn't she? That's what I'm talking about. These people make sense, if you just give them a chance.

HOX: You've gained some attention with your four-part amateur documentary on Edith Blaine, which you uploaded to YouTube.

HOX: You re-enacted some of Edith's murders with one of your friends.

STEWART: Yeah, Pauline's been my "sort-of" girlfriend for almost two years now. I figured we should do something together.

HOX: You used a midget as a stand-in for one of Edith's child victims.

STEWART: Yeah! (LAUGHS) His name was Ron Lebbers. Funniest guy you ever met, and I mean funny in the way he would tell jokes, not because he was...you know, short. But there was absolutely no chance in hell I could use a real child for those scenes. I would have been thrown in jail, or slapped with the mother of all lawsuits by some

conservative jackass. Have you seen it?

HOX: The documentary? Yes. It definitely has a...lurid quality.

STEWART: Thanks! That's exactly what I was going for. Critics used to say that all the time about "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," so I think that's the best possible compliment I could hear.

HOX: There was something missing, however...

STEWART: Really? I thought it was damn thorough. I did my research.

HOX: I'll admit you nailed the minute details of Edith's murders. You seemed very preoccupied with them.

STEWART: (LAUGHS) What can I say, it's all about the blood. People come to see the blood. I know that sounds cynical.

HOX: I'm actually talking about the dog.

STEWART: The dog? What about the dog?

HOX: You replaced it with a rottweiler.

STEWART: (PAUSE) Yeah, so?

HOX: Well, there are photos and records that prove her dog was a basset hound.

STEWART: Yeah, I knew that.

HOX: So why...

STEWART: Because having a basset hound is ridiculous, that's all. Fucking ridiculous. Whatever works in real life doesn't work in movies. I needed Edith to have a scarier dog, so I went with a rottweiler.

HOX: There was a television movie made about Edith back in 1991...

STEWART: Yeah. "Evil in Enoch." I've seen it. Decent. They skimmed over the nasty parts, though. That's the problem with shooting for TV...

HOX: The director also used another dog, but it was a Doberman pinscher. Otherwise everything else was pretty accurate.

STEWART: He had the right idea, I'll give him that. But rottweilers have such mass and muscle. I actually wanted to use a St. Bernard, but I couldn't find one that could do what I needed it to do. Have you seen "Cujo"?

HOX: No.

STEWART: St. Bernard gets bitten by a bat, infected by rabies, goes on a rampage. Good movie. Now, try to imagine that with a basset hound. Doesn't really work as fucking well, does it?

HOX: I wouldn't say so.

STEWART: There, see? We finally agree on something. (LAUGHS)

HOX: In the TV movie and your documentary, Edith trains her dog to kill some of the children. I'm not trying to contradict you on this, but I've been going through police records from Enoch for the past month, and they state Edith's dog never actually...

STEWART: So what if he didn't?

HOX: But you were making a documentary, not a fictionalized account.

STEWART: Look, I don't care what damn breed her dog really was. No one cares. I couldn't use a basset hound. It would just...take all the horror out of the situation. Both Ron and Pauline agreed with me, even while we were shooting. Obviously the guy who directed "Evil in Enoch" felt the same.

HOX: Nevertheless, you also played down Edith's years as an elementary teacher, in favor of her time living in the forest.

STEWART: Yeah, well, the forest is just so much more cinematic, isn't it? The fact nobody knows how the fuck she managed to survive out there so long is great too. A lot of room to speculate.

HOX: In your case, you had Edith eating raw squirrels.

STEWART: Aw man, that was hilarious, wasn't it? (LAUGHS) I didn't actually have Pauline eat a live squirrel, but our makeup guy, Mike, came up with this awesome prop. He packed it with all sorts of red goop and slime. We'd use footage of a real squirrel first, then we'd cut to a shot of Pauline tearing open this prop with her bare teeth. What a riot.

HOX: But so little is known about what she did out in the woods.

STEWART: Well, sure. On the upside, that leaves a lot of room for creative license.

HOX: It's a shame she never kept any diaries or journals.

STEWART: Yeah. Real shame.

HOX: Do you think it would have changed anyone's perspective? About her, I mean?

STEWART: (LAUGHS) I doubt it.

Phone Transcript. Sep. 14.

2:04am.

HARLAN McCOY: (COUGHS) Damn. Hello?

MIKE DONOVAN:...hello?

HARLAN: Who the hell is this? Mike?

MIKE: Yeah, hi Harlan.

MIKE: Do you have any fucking idea what time it is?

MIKE: I know, I know, but there's something I've got to tell you...

HARLAN: Unless a meteor's about to hit the store, I'm hanging up. I need to sleep.

MIKE: It's the dog food, Mike.

HARLAN: The dog food? What about the dog food?

MIKE: It keeps disappearing. We got a shipment in yesterday of about five boxes of Boney Blasts, right?

HARLAN: Yeah, yeah. I double-checked the inventory myself.

MIKE: Well, I'm telling you somebody's been getting into the store, because I was stocking up the shelves, and I was two bags short.

HARLAN: Bull. The doors are all padlocked, the windows are -

MIKE: I don't know how he's doing it. Whoever it is.

HARLAN: Any broken panes or locks?

MIKE: None that I can find, but maybe he's getting in another way.

HARLAN: Where the fuck else could they break in?

MIKE: Through the floor?

HARLAN: You mean they'd just dig up through the floor into the store? Without leaving a hole? What are you, a dumbass?

MIKE: I keep telling you we should get that alarm installed, Mike.

HARLAN: Don't have the budget for it.

MIKE: Yeah we do. You're just too damn cheap, that's all.

HARLAN: I'll get you an alarm for Christmas, Mike. The kind police cars use. That make

you feel better?

MIKE: Stop yanking my chain, Harlan.

HARLAN: It's two in the morning, Mike. Either I yank your chain or I drive down to the store and murder you myself.

MIKE: Come on, Harlan, better safe than sorry -

HARLAN: We don't need no alarm, we don't have anything valuable.

MIKE: (PAUSE) Food's pretty valuable.

HARLAN: Sure, if you live in Sierra Leone.

MIKE: Where's Sierra Leone?

HARLAN: Fuck if I know. Look, Mike, I was dreaming about Farrah Fawcett in a red bikini, so if you don't mind, I'd like to get back to that.

MIKE: But you know how these things go! First it's the dog food, then the bean cans, and then...

HARLAN: Okay, so some asshole hobo is raiding our store. We'll have a squad car or something keep watch. Will that make you happy?

MIKE: For how many nights?

HARLAN: One more question at two am, Mike, and your thief is going to be the least of your goddamn problems.

MIKE: Fine. Don't say I didn't warn you.

HARLAN: I'll consider myself warned. Good-fucking-night.

JULY 26, 1972

I didn't need the dog food. I wasn't that hungry.

Okay, I was that hungry. But I didn't want to steal.

Besides, there's plenty to eat out here, if you're clever enough. This old shack, it can't be my home forever. It's too dark and wet. I've made a good little bed out of a mattress and some dusty blankets, but it's getting colder. The air feels like it's biting me all the time. I know so little about making fires. All I can make are soft fires, the kind from machines, from stoves and ovens. Not hard fire, the fire born of pain and blood.

I'm dead. I'm dead and now I have to find a way to come back to life. Something is...wrong with me, but I can't understand what. Wanting to understand is driving me mad. I'm only a dog, a dog who is loyal and silly and stupid. I fled from my home to escape the humans who would hunt me...which is ridiculous. I'm a basset hound. I'm the one who should be doing all the hunting and sniffing.

I have to look on the bright side. I don't have to go anywhere any more. No work, no school, no bills, no responsibilities except eating and living. Maybe that's a better way to live, but I just don't know if I'm suited for it. I'm a basset, after all, not a wolf. I couldn't survive a flea bite, let alone Antarctica. Or the Congo. Or...

It's starting to rain again.

The drops go pit-pat on the tin roof. I listen and begin to think of God. Is He in here with me, now? How would I know it was Him? How do I even know that I'm me anymore? I'm a monster now. I've killed children. That should make me feel something. But there's nothing. Not even voices. Is our brain all that we are?

It can't be. Please please please, it can't be. There must be something more.

I beg you. I implore you.

Let there be something more.

FUNERAL HOME BURNED TO THE GROUND

Article by John Heston

“Restful Solitude”, a funeral parlor on the border of Georgia and South Carolina, was found in a gutted state early this morning at 6:30am by Howard R. Keens, the owner and manager. At least three empty cans of gasoline were discovered by police within the area. Almost 90% of the main building’s interior structure has been burned through, and most of the expensive funeral caskets inside were reduced to ash.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything quite so bizarre in my life,” Keens told this reporter. “It’s devastating, for sure, but I just can’t understand the damn motivation. Who would do this? Why would they do it? What’s the point?”

Examination of the parlor’s remains by forensics have determined a rough idea of when the building was set aflame: Approximately between 2 and 2:30 in the morning. So far, no suspects have been connected with the fire, although the investigation is ongoing.

Mr. Keens hopes to begin reconstruction on Restful Solitude within two months. In the meantime, “Pearly Gates”, a smaller but no less busy parlor, has found its revenue significantly increased with some of the competition temporarily set back.

Transcript of Hox/Kneale Interview

June 11th, 2015

HOX: This is a wonderful house.

KNEALE: Thank you. It's actually inherited. Long, long family history. Almost had to sell it during the recession. I fought tooth-and-nail with the bank.

HOX: You directed "Evil in Enoch," a television movie about Edith Blaine...

KNEALE: Right, right. That was a hell of a shoot. Somebody once asked me if I had directed a couple episodes of "The Dukes of Hazzard." I was pretty sure I hadn't, but who knows for sure? For a while I thought I'd made some movie called HORROR AT 37,000 FEET. My poor wife had to correct me all the time. You see, my first job was assistant director on another TV flick made around the same year, HORROR FROM ABOVE. Hence the confusion.

HOX: When did you first hear about the case of Edith Blaine?

KNEALE: I might have seen a news bulletin around the time it was going on, but I guess it didn't leave much of an impression on me, because I never remembered it again until I was approached to direct "Evil in Enoch" by the network. Then I did some of my own research, and I thought, "hey, this is some pretty interesting, twisted stuff."

HOX: Any reason why you were chosen for the production?

KNEALE: The producers were looking to shoot fast, and I had a reputation for shooting fast. We weren't exactly adapting SHOGUN, you know. Come on, it's a sordid little tale about a woman who killed kids. Not exactly material worthy of an Emmy.

HOX: Did you have any script input, or...?

KNEALE: Not really. The script was pretty much primed to go by the time I signed on. One upside in the TV industry is that you don't often have the luxury of rewriting something over and over again until there's eighty drafts of one fucking story. You don't get any of the wishy-washy crap you have to go through in Hollywood. At least, you didn't back then. I have no idea how the business works now.

HOX: How did you personally feel about Edith Blaine, as a real-life figure?

KNEALE: Tragic. Tragic and scary. Almost like a werewolf movie, really. I used to love the classic Universal monsters of old, you see. Then the '70's rolled around, and all of a

sudden you have real-life monsters like John Wayne Gacy or Edith Blaine becoming celebrities...

HOX: Edith Blaine didn't start out like Gacy.

KNEALE: Well, yeah, exactly. Hence the werewolf metaphor.

HOX: Did you shoot the film with the werewolf symbolism in mind?

KNEALE: No, I kept everything quite gritty. Nothing extravagant. We stuck to the facts, for the most part. Except for the Doberman pinscher.

(LAUGHS) Just for the record, that wasn't my idea, it was the screenwriter's. But I saw where he was coming from. Viewers don't want reality, you see. Not really. It could be the kind of sexed-up glamour you see in Hollywood movies these days, or the down-and-dirty glamour you see in movies about serial killers. Just not reality.

HOX: I've forgotten the name of the actress who played Edith...

KNEALE: Jennifer Bryers. Bryers? Yeah, Bryers.

HOX: I thought she was quite good.

KNEALE: Yeah. She had a nice, feral vibe.

HOX: She was all right after the accident scene, but before...

KNEALE: Well, that's the biggest challenge. The actress has to play two parts almost at the same time, and play them convincingly. Jennifer did psycho-Edith wonderfully, but normal-Edith was something else.

HOX: I notice that you skimmed over the scenes of Edith's murders.

KNEALE: Well, you know, there was only so much the network allowed us to film. I wanted to imply them somehow, something subtle without really showing much, but this was the squeaky-clean era of television. Nowadays, you can flip to almost any channel to watch...what are they calling it now? Torture porn.

HOX: Were there any deleted scenes?

KNEALE: We did shoot some of Sarah Channard's murder, but that was all cut pretty fast. I suppose it's been included on the DVD.

HOX: I don't believe a DVD has been released yet.

KNEALE: Yeah. Obscurity's a bitch.

HOX: I think there's an online petition for it. HOX: It was started by George Stewart. He

runs a website called -

KNEALE: It's no use telling me about websites, miss. I avoid the internet like the plague.

HOX: Well, Mr. Stewart goes into greater detail with the child murders than you did.

KNEALE: Can't say I'm surprised. It's all about the gore factor with these people. Post-Friday the 13th nostalgia, or something. They act like cinema didn't exist before the 1980's.

HOX: What would you say was the most difficult aspect of the film?

KNEALE: Definitely the scenes out in the woods. We cut out a lot, but it's all about pacing, pacing, pacing. And the stuff in the forest just dragged. Plenty of good atmosphere, but atmosphere's for arthouse movies.

HOX: I'd like to ask you about Edith Blaine's religious obsessions...

KNEALE: Oh, right. I didn't care at the time. Just one other detail about her we could use to dramatic effect. I'm afraid hardcore Southern baptism just isn't my scene.

HOX: I don't think she was Southern Baptist.

KNEALE: So what was she?

HOX: Catholic.

KNEALE: (PAUSE) Whatever. You say tomatoes, I say tomatoes...

HOX: Nevertheless, you had the interior of Edith's shack decorated in crucifixes, miniature Christ statues, candles.

KNEALE: It looked creepy. That's all that mattered.

HOX: I know a few crosses were scratched into the walls of the shack, but it wasn't quite like you depicted it.

KNEALE: Your point being?

HOX: I want to understand your own perception of it. Her psychosis, I mean.

KNEALE: Hell, I don't know. It started out as one thing, and mutated into another. I'm Jewish, so I can't say I identified with Edith in terms of personal faith, but in terms of her desperation...sure, maybe there were other reasons why she went nuts. Look, we only know that Edith was religious from how other witnesses described her, before and after the accident. She never kept a journal or diary, to the best of my knowledge.

HOX: No.

KNEALE: Okay then. So let's just say I was granted a lot of creative leeway thanks to the sketchy nature of the source material, and leave it at that.

HOX: Still, the way you ended the film was somewhat disappointing.

KNEALE: How do you mean?

HOX: Well, in real life, Edith -

KNEALE: I thought we agreed not to discuss that.

HOX: Yes, you're right. I'm sorry.

KNEALE: Apology accepted.

HOX: Perhaps we have time for one more question?

KNEALE: Go right ahead.

HOX: Why not a basset hound?

KNEALE: (LAUGHS) That's sort of a trick question, don't you think?

Phone Transcript. Oct. 30

3:41pm.

DEVIN CROWLEY: ...hi? Hello?

WILL HANCOCK: Hey, Dev.

DEVIN: Hey Will. Look, I want to -

WILL: Just a sec. (SHOUTS) Yeah, Mom, I washed the door!

DEVIN: You there?

WILL: Yeah. Sorry.

DEVIN: So what are you goin' as for Halloween?

WILL: Dracula. You?

DEVIN: Captain Hook. Is Mick coming?

WILL: Yeah, I checked with him. He'll be there.

DEVIN: Cool. Don't forget your cloak. And fangs.

WILL: Never do.

DEVIN: Okay, where do you want to start trick-or-treating?

WILL: Brady's Creek, like usual?

DEVIN: Yeah.

WILL: Cool. See you there.

DEVIN: Bye.

October 31, 1972

Why? Why why why why why why why?

They were good boys. I didn't have to smell them to know they were good. Now I'm scared to look into a mirror all over again. Everything was going so well, too. All this time trapped in a dingy old shack, I managed to find...a peace of mind. Plenty of great smells, and much to eat, if I knew where to look. I'm supposed to be a tracking dog, after all. But then the boys had to appear, to interrupt my dream.

The boys were trying to take some kind of shortcut through the woods. Dressed in those bright, gaudy costumes that make Halloween such a feast for the eyes. Children like them belong on friendly little streets, not barely-trodden paths leading through darkness. I wanted to help them, to warn them. I gave out a little bark to tell them I was coming. But they didn't hear. Or they didn't care.

The one dressed as a pirate was the first. I came at him from the side, while he skipped and danced along with all the uncaring joy of a child. I moved so fast, much faster than a smelly old basset should rightfully move. He had enough time to make a sharp, surprised cry – not exactly a scream – before I...struck him.

The other two boys froze. I wonder if this was the first time they'd ever seen the likes of me. I don't think they could entirely understand what they were seeing. I turned on them before they had a chance to run. The striking and bashing, that I'd seen coming, but the biting? I knew I was hungry, but to sink my teeth into their soft skin? That's something Jodie's dog would do, not me. Not a basset hound.

They went down fast. Looking back, that was probably for the best. I don't want to say what happened, not all of it. Putting death into words on paper is giving it more power, and God has allowed death enough power in this world. But I'll always remember that fat boy's face looking up at me, his mouth and eyes wide.

After I was done, I slumped back against the stump of an old oak tree, looking at my bloody, gory hands. I was giggling or sobbing, or both. Stupid, silly dog. This isn't what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to love children, not kill them. Give them warm memories of the sky, not cold memories of the dirt. The bodies, I can feel the bodies looking at me. Why won't they close their eyes? Why do I always have to close

their eyes for them?

What do you want me to say? What the hell do you want me to say? Eh? Do you want me to say I'm sorry? It's not my fault. I can't help it. I didn't kill you any more than I killed Patty Harpgood. My mind has nothing to with it. My body is doing these things, and I can't...I just can't...

Shh, now. It's all right. It's quiet and dark. There's no one here to hurt you. There's no reason to be scared.

THE BRIDGE

i'm walking alone along the road thinking about many things like why am i alive where am i going then i reach the old bridge i always liked this bridge old and mysterious as if there might be a troll hiding underneath it so i start crossing the bridge thinking about Barney and how much he's been scratching himself he needs a flea bath and then i feel something behind me a presence a terrible weight in the air so i turn around but it's too late first one grabs me second one smacks me they

Journal of Joseph Hawkmeyer, age 12.

Monday.

Today I got up to milk the cows. I wake from bright light glowing outside my eyelids, orange and painful. Papa is talking to me, but I don't want to hear him. It's cold outside and I like my bed. The bed is always warm, blankets soft and gentle. I can hide from the world under my blankets. But the world wants me up and milking the cows. Papa's voice again, louder and harder. "Four thirty, Joseph. I want you in the barn." Papa only tells me to get up twice before getting angry.

Old wood creaks under my feet. Papa leaves, and my room is quiet again. Dark everywhere. My body aches to go back to bed, but I can't or Papa will be mad again. Hands on drawers, loud creaks as I open them. Everything creaking, like my bones. And my head. But it's good creaking, the kind that wakes you up. I don't want to go outside where it's cold, but like Ma says, "the sooner you start the sooner you're done".

The grass is wet this morning. Papa carries the lantern as we walk across the field. It's so dark I can't even see the fence. But Papa, he always knows where to go. Even when it's raining and the ground is so wet and thick with mud you could slip and fall a hundred times before reaching the cows. Nothing ever breaks Papa. He's like wood. But I'm not wood yet, and I won't be for a long time.

The light from Papa's lantern falls on the barn. It's wet and glistening, just like the grass under our feet. Papa, he yanks the thick bar open and pulls the doors. It takes longer for him; the ground has swollen from the rain, and the door drags.

"Joseph," he says. "Stand back." Sometimes the cows get a little strange after a thunderstorm. I've heard talk that one of them went crazy and ran over a baby. But that was years ago. Papa pulls open the door. The cows are quiet.

"Papa?"

"What is it, Joseph?" Every time Papa asks a question, he never sounds like he's asking a question.

"I feel sick."

"We'll have your mother take a look at you when we're back in the house. Right

now, we're doing chores."

Papa puts the lantern on top of a bench. I am hurting everywhere. In my bones, in my muscles, in my head. I want to go back to bed and hide there forever. But Papa would only get angry at me. He might spank me. He's spanked me before, when I complained too much about my chores. Don't whine, Joseph. God may forgive you for whining, but I cannot. Whining is for lazy people and donkeys.

Papa pulls up a stool beside Old May. "Nice and steady on her teats, Joseph. Just like we've done a hundred times before."

I wrap my fingers around Old May and squeeze.

"Harder, Joseph. You're always too gentle."

The smell of the barn is so thick and heavy. All I want to do is sleep. But Papa, he won't have any of that from me.

I squeeze, and squeeze, and squeeze. The milk spurts out into the bucket, and I feel sick again. All I want is to sleep in my bed forever. But that would only make Papa angry. If only I could hide from him. Hide from the world. I would be so happy.

I keep waiting for the rooster to cry out. That means dawn is coming, and I can have breakfast. Ma makes the best sausages in the country.

Papa disappears into the shadows like he always does, doing the grown-up things he's always training me to do. Moving around, moving things, getting things ready. "It's all about working together, Joseph," he would say every time I started whining. "What we can give to others, so they can give back. If you can't do that, you're not part of the family. That's the way it works, for ourselves and for God."

I try not think about Papa, and keep squeezing Old May. Then I hear something. A soft, floppy kind of noise. I look up at the loft.

It's a dog. A dog with a strange wrinkly face, like an old man's. His head is poking over the edge, sniffing the air. A hand, a woman's hand, all gnarled and brown with dirt, grabs the dog's neck and pulls him back.

"Papa?"

"What is it, Joseph." He sounds cross, like he always does.

"Sorry, Papa. The shadows, they scare me."

“They’re just shadows, Joseph.”

I don’t know why I didn’t tell Papa about the dog and the woman.

November 4, 1972

I love this barn. It's not like the shack at all. There are all sorts of lovely smells here. Better smells. This barn smells of life. The shack smelled of things ending, and that's always sad. Some places are like people. They make you feel better, or make you feel sick.

I just wish I wasn't so alone.

Will I hurt the boy, I wonder? I think he knows about me. I didn't mean to be seen, but I was curious.

The boy looks so little and alone next to his big and gnarled father. The father is a hard man who expects his son to be hard. I could tell just from his smell. Each of us reach an age where playful loafing must become a shameful thing, and each subsequent day making us older, meaner, more grown-up. The boy wanted to hide from his father, just like I am hiding, but he knew he would be found. He's a fool, just like me.

I am a fool, am I not? Smelly dog hiding in a barn with nowhere to go and no one to love. I miss the house back in Enoch, where I knew where all the right smells were. I miss the days of coming home and cooking my favorite bowl of dry and wet food. I loved the chicken-flavored bowls the best. I had to be so careful sticking my old wrinkled face into the bowl. My ears are so long, they easily fell over the rim into the food. They would get so dirty. Now my ears are dirty all the time.

What will I do next? The shack couldn't protect me from the cold, and I doubt this barn will either. I must raid the houses for food, any food. And water. I never knew you could get so thirsty in the cold. My throat feels like cracked ice.

Always talking, always talking to myself. Why don't I stop? I'm doing my best, God, I swear. But my brain is broken. It's broken, and I can't control my body any more. That's why you have to bear with me as much as you can.

I think the boy knows I'm here.

I will have to do something about him.

Joseph's Journal.

Thursday.

I asked Ma about the birds that sing outside my window, and why they don't sing at night. She said the birds don't sing because it's dark, and birds are creatures of the light. Then I ask her if that means crickets are creatures of the dark. She said yes. I don't tell her about the dog and the woman in the barn.

But I hear them at night. The dog's feet scuffling on the wood, and the woman's voice, telling him to be quiet. I don't know why the dog never barks.

Sometimes, I hear the woman calling. She's hungry. I bring food to the barn and leave it for her. Oatmeal and sausages. It's always gone when I come back.

I do my chores and pretend no one's in the barn. Ma and Papa, they work all day and all night, but they don't ask about the barn. Maybe the woman and her dog are invisible to them. Like fairies.

Should I tell Ma and Papa about the woman and her dog? Papa always said to never keep secrets from each other, but I'm scared if I tell him, the woman and her dog will vanish and I'll never see them again. Everything is always the same here. The woman and her dog are different. They're new. They're from someplace else. I've never had a dog before. Papa thinks they're a distraction. They keep us from working.

Tomorrow I'll talk to Gwendolyn. She'll know what to do. All I ever want is to sleep in my bed forever. Gwendolyn, she's always on the move. Like a pixie. Jumping and bouncing everywhere. While I'm slow like a turtle. She always makes fun of me because of that. "Little Slowpoke", she calls me, even though I'm bigger than here. Well, one day I'll catch up to her, and she'll see who's the slowpoke.

Joseph's Journal.

Saturday.

I played out in the fields today. Everything was golden and sweet, the way it always is at morning. Mama calls it "magic hour". I asked her if that means fairies come out to have fun in the fields. She said there's no such thing. Papa, he was busy building that house for Uncle Jericho. I asked Papa if he could come out to the fields with me, and he said no. Both Mama and Papa had said no to me, and it makes me sad.

I ran far out into the wheat and pretended I was a fox. "Marco," I shouted.

"Polo," Gwendolyn yelled. Gwendolyn is my friend. Every Saturday she runs out into the fields with me so we can play Marco Polo. You never see grown-ups playing Marco Polo; they're always talking about serious things that make their faces crinkled and ugly. I'm scared to grow up. But don't tell Gwendolyn that, she's a tattletale, because all girls are tattletales. They just can't help it.

Gwendolyn found the dog before I did. I was hiding under the wheat like I always do, pretending to be a fox, when I heard a bark. A deep, thick sort of bark, not like the yippie barks that tiny dogs make. Then Gwendolyn's voice: "Hello, what's your name?" She was talking to something else, not me.

I hear Gwendolyn's feet crunching through wheat, and a smaller, lower sound. Something panting. I jumped out of my hiding place and followed the noises. I saw Gwendolyn. She was walking away. The dog was walking next to her. It was a fat, old dog, with lots of wrinkles. And dirty, real real dirty. Like he had been sleeping beneath the earth for a hundred years.

"Gwendolyn!"

She screamed a little (I scared her!) and turned around.

"Don't do that," she said, real angry.

"Don't do what?"

"Shout my name."

"I couldn't find you."

"Well, don't do it even if you can't."

"Who's that?" I pointed at the dog.

"A dog."

Gwendolyn likes to tell me something when I already know what it is, just to make me mad. "I know it's a dog. What's his name?"

"How do you know it's a he?"

"So you don't know his name?"

Gwendolyn made a sulky face. She kneeled down and looked at something around the dog's neck. "His collar says Barney."

"Does it say anything else?"

"No. Just Barney."

"What are you going to do with him?"

Gwendolyn frowned. Then she pouted. "None of your business."

I giggled loud enough so she could hear. "You don't know, do you?"

Gwendolyn scratched Barney behind his ear. He kicked his leg. "Maybe we can keep him as our dog. Only we know. It'll be a secret."

I didn't like the sound of that. Papa always says secrets are where the Devil can grow. "Let's just show him to everybody else."

Gwendolyn shook her head real fast. "Nuh-uh. They'll take him away. You know they will. They'll give him to...someone outside. Or...put him to sleep."

I had to think about that long and hard.

"Okay," I said. "But we don't tell anyone else."

Barney sniffed my shoe.

RADIO CALL – OFFICER DANIEL JURGENS TO COUNTY POLICE

JURGENS: Charlie 55 to Com.

DISPATCH: Go ahead Charlie 55.

JURGENS: 938 at Franklin Road. Positive I.D. on dog belonging to 187b case. Playing with two Amish children. 12-84, Com?

DISPATCH: Negative, Charlie 55. 10-19, repeat, 10-19. 10-57 notified.

JURGENS: 10-4, Com.

Transcript of Hox/Joseph Hawkmeier Interview

June 15th, 2014

HOX: When did you decide to leave the Amish community?

HAWKMEYER: February 1980.

HOX: What were your reasons for leaving?

HAWKMEYER: Desperation. And loneliness. We all wanted God so badly. My parents, they wanted Him more than anything. But all the rules...they were wearing me down. I was lazy, you see. Maybe something in the blood, I don't know. I just hated working. I only wanted to be left alone in peace and quiet. But when you're living with...the Amish, that's not an option, is it? You're part of the community, or you're...(LONG PAUSE)

HOX: Did you believe in God personally?

HAWKMEYER: When I was a child. I was told to love and fear Him. But the rules...I knew I had to obey, but...(LONG PAUSE)HOX: Is this a bad time for you?

HAWKMEYER: No. I was very lonely. Besides Gwendolyn, there was no one. Everybody cooperated, but I couldn't. I just wanted peace and quiet. But there was always noise, and people. Too much of both. My father was a good man. Very hard, and tough. He didn't put up with laziness. Sloth was the worst of the seven sins, as far as he was concerned. And I was very lazy. I always felt tired. All I wanted to do was sleep and dream about...things. About being on an island way out in the ocean. There wouldn't be anyone except my dog and I. So I left, but then I found out it was even worse out here. Everything was always about money. You wanted money from people, and people wanted money from you. I couldn't take it.

HOX: So how did you financially support yourself?

HAWKMEYER: Worked at a movie theatre for most of my life. The other staff used to make fun about how old I was getting, but I didn't care. I was getting money, so the world was leaving me alone.

HOX: Did you ever see your parents again?

HAWKMEYER: No. Sometimes I thought about...no, they were gone.

HOX: You hid from them?

HAWKMEYER: I hid from everything. I couldn't deal with people.

HOX: I'd like to talk about Edith Blaine now, if we could.

HAWKMEYER: You know more than I do. You're the one who's been doing all this research. All I've been doing is hiding.

HOX: I'm referring to the time she abducted you.

HAWKMEYER: (PAUSE) Could we talk about Barney instead? I like Barney. He's a good dog.

HOX: Are you all right, Mr. Hawkmeier?

HAWKMEYER: What? Yes. I'm fine. Just tired. I never have a lot of energy for...well, anything. I'm just scared of what I should be saying to a woman like you, or...

HOX: What do you think you should be saying?

HAWKMEYER: Things that will impress you? That's what life is all about, isn't it? Impressing people.

HOX: And you didn't have to impress Barney?

HAWKMEYER: No. But he never tried to impress me, either, so we had an...understanding. I was always tired, and he was always tired. The first day I met Barney, I remember him running through the corn fields with Gwendolyn. After we reached the village, we snuck him beneath the barn. He had a lot of room down there, and he slept for the rest of the day. I thought the chickens would get on his case, but I guess they had never seen a basset hound before. We kept a lot of other dogs around. Mutts, mostly.

HOX: I understand the Amish view pets somewhat differently from other communities. Is this true?

HAWKMEYER: We loved our cows and appreciated the milk they gave us, but they were still livestock. Same for dogs. We appreciated the loyalty and company they gave us, but they weren't no different from cows. Not really. If a dog wasn't contributing anything, if a dog was a burden, we put him down. One time, Papa made me drown a litter of puppies. We had a bitch who popped out one too many of 'em, that's all. Papa said we couldn't afford to waste any bullets. Ammo we could use for hunting. So I stuffed them all into this bag, and dumped them into the river.

HOX:...still alive?

HAWKMEYER: Still alive.

HOX: (PAUSE) And how did you feel about this?

HAWKMEYER: Didn't feel nothing. Couldn't. If I started crying, Papa would get mad. The worst thing about Papa wasn't that he sometimes hit me, the worst thing was never being sure when he would. He'd look at me with these eyes underneath those big hairy eyelashes, and I was never sure. Never sure how angry I could make him before he snapped.

HOX: Your father believed in discipline, then.

HAWKMEYER: He believed in God and family. He wasn't a bad man. You have to know that, miss. He wasn't bad. Just hard.

HOX: About the time you were abducted by Edith Blaine...

HAWKMEYER: Horrible. Horrible woman. I remember her eyes the most. They didn't move naturally.

HOX: She took you to a hut out in the woods, yes?

HAWKMEYER: Gwendolyn and I. Gwendolyn was coming over to see me, and Edith...grabbed her. She knocked us both out with...a hammer.

HOX: She left that scar on your temple.

HAWKMEYER: Yes.

HOX: Do you remember any of the time you were in the hut?

HAWKMEYER: Just noises. Smells. It was so dark, I couldn't see much. I remember Barney sniffing at my face, and Edith screaming so hard I could feel my ears bleeding. There was also a man.

HOX: Reverend Matthew Hooper.

HAWKMEYER: Yes. Yes. I didn't know who he was at the time. I just saw two black shapes out of the corner of my eye, talking to each other. Edith was terrible, don't get me wrong, but there was something about her voice...she sounded like...you know the sinking feeling you get in your stomach when you hear a dog scream with pain? I was actually crying because of how she sounded.

HOX: Do you remember what she specifically said?

HAWKMEYER: Not much. Just a few words. The ones she kept repeating. "God".
"Barney". "Love". "Death".

HOX: And afterwards?

HAWKMEYER: Just the hospital. Mama and Papa were there. Gwendolyn, she...it
could have been me. It could have been me.

HOX: Mr. Hawkmeier, I'd like to ask if...

HAWKMEYER: I'm sorry, I have to go. I'm sorry.

HOX: Mr. Hawkmeier, wait –

(AUDIO ENDS)

Joseph's Journal.

Thursday.

There are police sirens outside the house. I try to tell Papa, but he says it doesn't concern us. Every night I hear them. They're looking for someone. Or something.

We had dinner half an hour late tonight. Papa wasn't happy about it, but he and Ezekiel were talking all day. I could see the two of them outside the window. Ezekiel is old and grey, but his eyes are always looking around, always alert. Papa was sitting on a tree trunk, carving something with his hands. I could hear Papa scrape away, but I couldn't see what he was doing. Ezekiel was arguing with Papa. Papa's voice is loud and carries on the wind, but Ezekiel's is very soft and quiet, like a mouse. You had to listen real close to hear them both. This is what they said:

"Two days, Sam. Two straight days of those sirens."

Scrape, scrape, goes Papa's knife. His head is low and hidden by the big hat he wears every time the sun is big and hot.

"Normally I wouldn't care, you know that. But the people outside, they're on edge about something. There's a hunt going on, that much I'm sure of."

Scrape, scrape. Papa's head bobs up and down.

"Gwendolyn's been making a fuss. The sirens wake her up every night. Just yesterday I saw a dozen policemen walking northwest of the village. They were marching side-by-side, and they had bloodhounds."

Papa stops carving. I see his head tilt a little sideways.

"But they're not marching on our fields." It didn't sound like a question.

"No, but..."

"But nothing, Ezekiel. We go on as we've always done. The folks outside can keep their conflicts to themselves."

"What if their conflicts come to us?"

Papa stood up. I saw him toss a little black thing out of his hands into the bushes.

"What exactly are you trying to say, Ezekiel?"

Ezekiel rubbed his hands and looked around. He was going to say something,

stopped, then said it. "Don't you feel it, Sam?"

"What am I supposed to be feeling, Ezekiel?"

"I don't know!" Ezekiel almost shouted. Papa sometimes calls Ezekiel 'senile', but only to Mama, and only when he thinks I can't hear him. Ezekiel knows Papa calls him 'senile', and doesn't want to make him right. "Just...something in the air. I get goosebumps every time I walk outside the house. Sometimes I can't focus on my work, and I end up falling behind schedule. I'm telling you, there's a stranger in this village, hiding somewhere."

Papa shakes his head, looking out onto the field.

"Sam, you've got to listen..."

Papa turns around. For the first time I can see his face. His mouth is tight and clamped like a trap. Eyes squinting in the sunlight.

"I've been listening, Ezekiel. I've been listening to this foolishness for hours on end. You think there's someone hiding in the village? Someone the police are after? Where's your proof, Ezekiel? I need something to go on here. Otherwise you're just wasting my damn time. Now you're letting your paranoia affect your farm chores. I can forgive paranoia, but not bone idleness."

Now it was Ezekiel's turn to be angry. "Bone idleness?" He walked up real close to my Papa. I ducked below the window ledge. Grownups getting mad is one of the scariest things to see and hear. "Bone idleness? You unsympathetic bastard, you'd allow your son to be carried away into the night by a witch if you felt he wasn't contributing to the community!"

Papa's voice went quiet. "Careful. Be careful now."

"He's eight years old, Sam!" Ezekiel shouted. "Why don't you go easy on the boy? Just once in a while?"

Papa stood an inch from Ezekiel's face. "That's the first step to sloth, Ezekiel. I've already seen sloth in Joseph, and you can be sure I won't tolerate it." He turned away and walked back up to the house. I hid under the bed, but I could still hear Ezekiel yelling.

"There has to be a limit, Sam! You'll kill your son trying to hammer a work ethic

into him! He's just not a natural farmer!"

Phone Transcript. November 18th.

1:21pm.

MICHELLE GOLL: Hello?

CALVIN WINHART: Hello? How may I help you?

GOLL: I'm sorry, who is this?

WINHART: Calvin Winhart. I'm the senior usher.

GOLL: Oh, yes! We've met! This is Michelle Goll.

WINHART: Hello, Mrs. Goll.

GOLL: Is Father Hooper available? I'd like to arrange an appointment.

WINHART: I'm afraid Father Hooper has left town.

GOLL: Oh. (PAUSE) Where's he gone?

WINHART: He didn't say. He didn't leave any note behind, or address...

GOLL: That's very unlike him.

WINHART: Yes it is.

GOLL: He was acting a little odd on Sunday...

WINHART: Odd?

GOLL: Well, you see, Father Hooper and I would talk once in a while. He's good at that, talking to people like me. After every sermon, he usually flees to his office or something, but this time I found him sitting in one of the pews. He had this look on his face. He seemed distracted. I walk up to him and ask him if we could talk. He doesn't say a word, he doesn't even seem to hear me. So I ask him again.

WINHART: Did he say anything?

GOLL: He looks up at me, very suddenly, as if he were...I don't know, snapping out of a trance. "Hm? What?" He says. "Oh, Michelle, I'm sorry, did you want something?" I ask him if he's all right. He says, "Yes, no. I'm not sure. I had a dream last night about..."

Then he stands real fast, so fast he almost knocks me off my feet. "I'm sorry, I have to go." And just like that, he was gone.

(LONG PAUSE)

GOLL: Did he behave like that around you recently?

WINHART: I can't say. I haven't seen him since Sunday's services.

GOLL: Well...goodbye then.

WINHART: Goodbye.

Joseph's Journal.

Saturday.

The witch is hunting us.

I try to tell Gwendolyn. She won't believe me. I know there's someone out there who wants Barney back, someone who's angry and ugly. But Gwendolyn, she thinks Barney is ours now. We've hidden Barney in the attic, but he will be found by the witch. She wants her dog back. The dog is good and gentle, and maybe that's why she wants him. He's the only thing in the world that will love her. But Gwendolyn thinks there's no witch. Gwendolyn thinks it's all in my mind. We meet up by the old oak tree facing away from the village. There's a branch that can hold a dozen little boys and girls, or so Ezekiel says. Gwendolyn and I sit on the branch and talk.

"Witches aren't real, Joseph," she tells me.

"The Devil's real. My Papa says so all the time. Why can't witches be real too?"

"You're just going crazy about witches because you heard my granddaddy talking of witches with your papa."

"That ain't true."

"Witches aren't real," she says again.

I go quiet for a while. We sit on the tree branch and watch the sun rise. It's real quiet now, the sort of quiet that comes when morning starts to happen. I'm glad I'm not milking the cows today.

"I'm tired," I say.

Gwendolyn looks at me all funny. "What?"

"I said I'm tired. I always feel tired. I just want to be left alone, but there's always something on the farm to do."

"We got to contribute, Joseph."

I feel myself getting mad. I've heard that word so many times I could throw up. "I know we gotta contribute! That's all we ever do! What I want is to go somewhere quiet and hide there forever."

"Why would you want to go do that?" Gwendolyn frowns. "You're not thinking of

running off into the world, are you?"

"No."

"You'd better not. My granddaddy says the world's gone to the Devil. All everyone cares about out there is money."

I feel like I'm drowning and don't know why. I smack the hard wood underneath and scratch my hand. "And all everyone cares about here is working!"

Gwendolyn bites her lip.

"I'm telling you there's a witch out there."

"No there ain't."

She's not listening to me. The more she doesn't listen, the madder I get. "There's a witch somewhere in the fields and everybody around here is too busy working and contributing to see her!"

Gwendolyn laughs. "You look so funny when you're angry."

If I stayed on the branch, I knew I would hit her. So I jumped off. I land on my feet all wrong. I twist my ankle.

Mama says pain is like a zoo with different kinds of animals living inside it. Depending on what happens, you can get a mouse, or a lion. I got a lion that day. I screamed and forgot where I was.

Joseph's Journal.

Wednesday.

Today I let Barney out of the attic. He was scratching the wood, trying to make a hole, and Papa would have heard the noise. Barney is a good dog. I don't want to see Papa hurt him.

Gwendolyn and I played with Barney out in the fields. Barney is old and slow, but Gwendolyn didn't care. I think she loves Barney more than she loves her Grandpa. She kept throwing a stick for him to fetch, but he wouldn't. Barney would just look at the stick all confused, and that would make Gwendolyn laugh. It's good to hear her laugh. There isn't much laughing in the house when Papa is around.

But the witch is out there. I know she's out there. She's watching us. She wants her dog back. And she's going to get her dog back by eating us. I'm scared, but I can't tell Gwendolyn how scared I am, or she'll just laugh at me, like she always does. It's not right for boys to be scared. Papa would just say I have a weak spine. Every boy has a weak spine, and getting older is all about making the spine tougher. I don't want my spine to get tough. I just want to be left alone with Barney and Gwendolyn.

The darkness was coming. The light changed from yellow to orange. Something was in the air, something hidden and waiting. I think Barney knew it too. Poor dumb old dog, he's just an animal who's loved by a monster. Love is a four-letter word, but four letters don't mean anything. Love is something impossible, something that can't be touched by our world. It's something beyond. I love my Mama. I know I love my Papa, even if he makes it hard sometimes. But the love a dog has for a person? It's pure, and it's pure because it's so stupid. And I know the dog loves the monster, despite of everything. That's why the monster will get him back.

I wish Gwendolyn would believe me.

November 10, 1972

Are you out there, God? Can you hear me?

I have taken the children with me, and I know I will kill them. I don't want to because they're good, but my brain, my brain is screaming and all I want to do is cut. It doesn't make sense. I'm a basset hound. All I can ever do is to be loyal and loving. Why am I thinking of cutting these children? I can't live with children the way you can live with me. I have to kill them or I'll get even worse. You've watched over me for so long, not once telling me if I'm saved or damned. All our talks, all our one-sided conversations in the forest, did none of those mean anything to you?

But no more. I cannot bear the silence any longer. I want to believe in you so badly. I want to see water turned to wine, Lazarus to rise from his grave, the demon driven out of the peasant's body. But you say nothing, and so the non-believers smirk and sneer in triumph, and all I have left is myself. I am so lonely; a dog with no owner. No one will take me in now except you. So, please...give me something to believe in.

I will do my best to escape, but I'm old and stupid. I can scratch at the wood, but can't dig through it. My heart aches for you, but I don't have the right tongue to tell the children. Sometimes I think I hear you moving out in the bushes, and I almost howl. I remember the days in Enoch when I would howl. An ambulance came bellowing past the house, I would raise my muzzle, and...

The children are screaming.

I can't stand that sound. It's like eagle's talons scraping at my heart. I've gagged and bound them both, but still they scream. It's the scream of morality, of inevitable death, and the only way I can make it NOT inevitable is to kill them before they die from old age and rot in the ground. The terror, oh God the terror. I'm a dog, and I should know nothing of death, and yet I feel my heart clench and my brain shiver. My fear isn't even unique. Not one creature on earth is exempt from it, not one. I cannot stand this injustice, this cosmic sadism. I will not stand it. No more. Death dies here, tonight.

This is how it must be. I am a dog, and I am meant to be a tender and loving thing, but I must silence their screams before death comes and takes them away from

"Edith."

A man at the door. Tall and old. Where have I seen him before?

"It's Reverend Hooper. You remember me, don't you, Edith?"

Who is he talking to? The children? There's no Edith here. Just a dog.

"Hooper."

"Yes. Yes, Edith. Listen to me. I got here before the police could, but they're surrounding the shack right now. They know you're inside. They"

Another voice, loud and blaring from the forest like an angry elephant.

EDITH BLAINE COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS RAISED OR WE WILL OPEN FIRE

The grown-ups have come to take away the children, to make them into more grown-ups, creatures who care only for money and good-looking things. They won't have them. They are mine.

"No! Sergeant, don't shoot! I'll talk her down!"

Who is this old man? I remember a smell like his before. Sad and gentle.

"Edith, listen to me. It's not too late."

I feel myself crying, but I don't know why. The tears pulse out of my eyes, the screams of a thousand years turned to water.

"They know it's not your fault. They know you're sick, Edith. That attack on the bridge damaged you. There's an ambulance outside, past all of those officers. It will take you to a special hospital. You'll be helped, cared for. I'll go with you..."

Someone else speaks now. Not me. Not the old man. Not one of the children. I don't know who it is. It's a hot, shrieking voice. The kind of sound I make when I'm in pain.

"She's killed children, Father! Too late for her. She's damned. Damned to the fires. No going back. No way out but through."

"Edith..."

"Bastards! All of you! Christians, atheists, agnostics, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, what does it matter? She believes in God, she goes to Hell. She doesn't believe in God, she rots in the ground. Which is worse? Damnation or oblivion? What's it

all been for? All the pain? All the horror? Why was she born? Why does she exist? What do you want from her?! All she ever wanted was hope, just a little hope, in something beyond death. But even that's too much to ask. God is silent, and reality laughs at her. All this wickedness her body has committed. She can't control my body anymore, because her brain is destroyed! All she has left are the children. In time, they will die, like all things. So she must kill them before Death does. Do you understand? It's the only way to beat Death! If you don't want her to kill the children, reverend, give her an answer! Give her an answer she can believe in! An answer that makes sense, that no one can sneer at! Give it to her NOW!"

"You're not damned, Edith."

EDITH BLAINE YOU HAVE TEN SECONDS TO COME OUT WITH YOUR
HANDS IN THE AIR

"...what?"

TEN NINE

"You have a damaged brain, Edith. That means your actions were not those of a human. We are judged on human acts. You are not damned."

EIGHT SEVEN

"Not damned, not"

SIX

"not"

FIVE

FOUR

"Barney"

THREE

TWO

"Sergeant, hold your fire! She's surrendered! The children are

What do I love when I love my God?

Joseph's Journal.

Tuesday.

Everything is quiet again. The police took away the witch. Gwendolyn's still at the hospital. Mama and Papa are downstairs and I'm in my bedroom. Papa is arguing with Mama.

Barney is with me. Together we hide under the bed and wait for the noises outside to stop. Outside the sun is rising. Papa is going to leave us alone for a while. But soon he'll want me working again, because that's how we contribute to the community. All I want is to be left in my room with Barney forever, just floating on a black sea of nothing. I can hear the rooster crowing, and I'm frightened.

The witch is gone, but not really. I still hear her moving around in the shadows and dark, hungry as the wolf. Sometimes the wind whispers her name. Sometimes the rain falling on the roof sounds like her footsteps. She's still out there. She'll always be out there, even when Papa and Mama say she's been locked away forever. She scares me because she's awful, but she also scares me because she's so sad.

I remember the look on her face as the men in white took her away. She saw me with Barney. She said with her eyes, *Keep him safe. Keep him loved. Or I will come back.*

November 18, 2015

Carl Sloan
Monkey House Publications
C.R. Building
595 Oswald Street
Boston, MS 71498

Dear Mr. Sloan,

For the past two years I have been conducting extensive research into the life of the notorious South Carolina child killer, Edith Blaine. During that time, you and I have been sharing letters, emails, and skype conversations discussing my progress and my book's eligibility for publication. You even took many hours out of your already hectic schedule to meet with me personally to offer feedback, for which I will always remain grateful. However, due to unforeseen developments, I have found myself at something of a crossroads. Without going into explicit detail, all I can tell you is that I've become emotionally involved with Ms. Blaine's case to an unprofessional extent.

I am hereby halting all further progress on my book, until I feel I am of sound mind and body again. I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause you, and I wish to repeat that I'm immensely grateful for your support over the last couple of years.

Kind regards,
Debra Hox

DELETED AUDIO FROM HAWKMEYER INTERVIEW

HOX: ...you adopted Barney, didn't you?

HAWKMEYER: Yes. The police found us out in the woods. Barney's barking drew them to the shed.

HOX: It must have been sad when you finally lost him.

HAWKMEYER: I didn't lose him.

HOX: Didn't lose...I'm sorry, what do you mean?

HAWKMEYER: (INAUDIBLE)

HOX: I beg your pardon?

HAWKMEYER: I said he's still alive.