

[Recovered 11/16/1989 - Property of D.A.R.R. (Department of Augmented Reality Research)]

12 / 12 / 1988

Finished Christmas preparations today. Finally got the red lights strung up around the chimney and the gutters on the roof. The tiles were heavily iced; Alec nearly slipped off and broke his neck. Gave me half a heart attack.

It's 10:27 P.M. right now. I can't sleep for some reason. It's just void beyond my window. Snow's coming down pretty hard. I can hear the ice cracking and reforming on the roof above me. Sounds like the house's bones are breaking. Or maybe mine.

Only a single candle's lit in my room, right on my desk where I'm sitting. I'm immersed in this little pool of warmth. All that's illuminated is this journal and the photo of me and Marissa. Baby Alec looks so small in the dark.

I feel like the void outside my window is getting closer.

12 / 13 / 1988

It was so quiet when I woke up. Normally, the birds and cows and pigs just won't shut up. But today - nothing. I hadn't realized it until I'd already nearly finished shaving. I cut myself on accident. That snapped me out of it. Didn't end up being too bad, but it bled a lot. Good thing my shirt was red to begin with.

When I came down, Alec was already at the table. He was trying to make it seem like he wasn't as unnerved as I was. I let him think that I didn't notice. Sometimes you owe it to someone to let them lie. Makes them feel better. It kept

us from the inevitable questions, which was appreciated. I got a bowl of cereal while he played with his own.

We just sat there for a while. The most we spoke to each other was a word or two, and all the while my skin was crawling. Little prickles like someone pulling hairs.

I finished my breakfast and started towards the door. Needed to check on the barn. I was walking down the hall when the hair on my arms stood up. I don't mean figuratively. Everywhere on my body was tingling, all my hair quivered. My vision tunneled in towards the door. It loomed so large I thought it would slam down on me and crush every bone in my body.

My hand was on the doorknob before I realized what I was doing. It zapped my palm when I touched it. It was like my mind flinched at the pain, but my body couldn't. Didn't want to. I opened the door.

Outside, a girl was standing on the porch. She couldn't have been more than eight. Her dress was whiter than the snow blanketing the ground outside. It was heavenly. Her hair drifted down in wisps from her head. They flowed about despite the fact that no wind filled the air. Freckles punctuated her cheeks here and there, but her skin was so pale that I could hardly see them. She seemed on the verge of tears, water shimmering just on top of her eyes like frost melting from a roof.

In that moment, I wanted to die for her. I wanted to protect her with my life. I wanted to go to her and wrap her in my arms and make sure that nothing could hurt her ever again.

"I'm so cold," she said, and her voice seemed like that of a frost phantom.

My jaw went slack, and I opened the door wider to let her in. Drool froze on my lip like a teardrop.

"Dad, why's the..." He cut off upon seeing the girl, assuming a stance similar to mine.

I closed the door softly behind myself and turned to the girl. "What's your name?" I asked. I can't remember how my voice sounded.

"Eva," she said, looking down at the floorboards.

We got her situated in a room. Her's is just down the hall from mine, right next to Alec's. It's dark now, and I can feel her calling to me. I look at the picture again, and it feels so incomplete.

There are little cuts on my palm from where my fingernails bit into it. I hadn't even known I was clenching my hand until just now. The blood's seeped onto the page a little. Should be fine, though.

I love her. I love her, and Alec does too.

12 / 14 / 1988

Alec and I showed Eva around the farm today. We took her through the barn and let her meet all the animals. She seemed particularly taken by the pigs, but everything else elicited no reaction. She didn't try to hide it. It's not boredom, it's something else. Like grief.

The animals should have made her happy. At least she liked the pigs.

We might have to put down the dog. I figured she'd love him, but when she came close Otis just snarled and barked at her. His hair was standing straight up. He snapped at her a couple times. He wouldn't stop watching her until she was out of sight.

If I hadn't stopped myself, I think I would have killed that dog right then and there. Maybe I should see Doc about it again. I haven't talked to him in months at this point. Haven't had the time, what with the farm and all. Maybe talking to him will set my nerves straight again.

12 / 16 / 1988

I came downstairs yesterday to the sound of weeping. The front door was hanging open, and as I got closer I felt this pulsing in my chest that drove me forward, forward, forward.

I raced outside and found Eva sitting in the snow, cradling her hand. Splotches of red dotted the ground in front of her like Christmas decorations. Tears ran down her cheeks.

When I asked her what had happened, she just pointed at Otis. He snarled and barked at her, but I held her away from him. He'd bitten her hand. Nothing bad, but I cleaned the wound with some alcohol just to be sure. I held her through the whole thing, and even though she was crying I'm pretty sure she felt better about it.

That dog has to go.

12 / 17 / 1988

I planned on killing the dog today. I was gonna put him in the truck and drive him into town to be put down.

Today, he wasn't a dog anymore.

His entire body was covered in fleshy growths like cysts. I could see pus gathering beneath the surface. Across his left flank tendrils shot out, wiggling in the wind even though he seemed to be dead. He'd been split in half down to the middle of his body, and teeth lined the hole that'd been carved into him. His tongue lolled lazily like a joke.

I walked to him, my boots crunching in the snow. I grabbed a cut piece of wood from the pile gathered beside the barn and reached toward him, hoping to see if he was alive.

He lunged at me, that awful hole in his middle gaping wide like a mouth, the tendrils along his side flailing urgently as he leapt. I fell to the ground, and Otis came down on top of me, falling on the cut log and stabbing himself through.

He gave an awful, gasping whimper before he died.

When I got up and turned around, I saw Eva run back inside.

She is safe n o w.

12 / 18 / 1988

Eva is starting to feel like part of the family now. Alec really assumed the role of older brother well. It's been too long since I've gotten to be a father. Alec's so old now, almost off to college. I'd missed those times. Until now.

Eva is spending more and more time with the pigs. I'm glad she's getting accustomed to life on the farm.

Christmas is getting closer, and I still haven't gotten Eva anything. I should do that.

12 / 19 / 1988

I found Eva in my room today after I came in from the barn. She was staring at the picture on my desk. Something about it made her sad.

I went to her and asked her what was wrong. Instead of answering, she lifted one thin finger and asked, "who's that?" She was pointing at Marissa.

"That was my wife," I said.

"She's pretty," she said. Her voice quivered, and I wanted nothing more than for it to stop.

12 / 20 / 1988

I think of Eva constantly now. She's a brilliant humming spot in my mind, always pulsing with my love. Alec and I have finally managed to make her smile, and that makes me love her even more.

I asked her what she loves so much about the pigs.

"They're perfect," she replied. I asked what she meant, but she didn't reply beyond that.

"Well, I think you're perfect," I said.

She turned to me and gazed up with those beautiful crying eyes. "I love you, Daddy."

"I love you too, Sweetie."

12 / 21 / 1988

I woke up at around 1 this morning and found Eva in the bed with me. She was curled up against me and shivering. Her eyes were clenched together but I could tell that she was awake.

I asked her what was wrong, and she replied, "they're back."

"Who are they?"

"The smiling men."

"Who are they?" I asked again. I've never felt more useless in my life.

"They wear suits and coats and weird glasses and some have wires stringing around their ears and little needles in their hands and all kinds of stuff but they're all just smiling," she said in an unfettered string of emotion. It was the most I've ever heard her talk.

I hugged her close and told her that everything was going to be alright, over and over and over again. I looked at the door of the bedroom and I could swear to God I saw it move and in the shadows something lurched out. But no, that's not right. The door didn't move. It was still, just slightly ajar from where Eva had failed to close it when she came in. Nothing was back there. Nothing.

I let her stay in my room that night.

12 / 24 / 1988

A lot happened tonight.

I'd been thinking a lot about what to get Eva for Christmas, but I just couldn't think of anything. I told Alec to look after the farm while I headed into town to see if anything sparked my interest.

I hopped around a few stores before I realized something: nothing that I could get Eva would make me feel any better. It needed to be something symbolic. I knew exactly what I would give her.

Myself. My love and devotion and protection.

It was perfect. I hopped back into my truck and sped off back to the farm as the sun sank.

When I got back to the farm, everything was quiet. I headed into the house, whistling, and went around to look for Eva. I just wanted to see her. I found Eva

in her room, staring out her window towards the barn where the pigs are kept. I smiled, closing the door softly so I wouldn't disturb her.

I started making dinner. It was tradition for me to prepare it on Christmas Eve. I hadn't for the past few years, but now seemed like as good a time as any to start that tradition up again.

After about an hour, I'd finished, and I called out for the kids to join me in the kitchen. Eva arrived, and we started eating. We were halfway through dinner when I realized that Alec hadn't joined us. I got frustrated, calling out his name a few times but getting no response.

I searched around for him, but I just couldn't find him anywhere.

Finally, I went outside and started calling his name. After a few repeats, the pigs started squealing. I shook my head, annoyed at myself for waking them up. I stomped into the barn to see if I could shut them up. I grabbed a flashlight that I kept by the front door and started making my way down the central alley of the barn towards where the pigs were kept in the back.

Their squeals were so loud.

When I shined my beam on them, I found Alec. He had become one with them. He was beautiful.

He was p e r f e c t.

I started laughing, found I couldn't stop. I looked over to the entrance and saw Eva standing there, silhouetted against the moon's light shining off the snow. I turned back to Alec and looked upon it with love.

It was a Christmas miracle.

12 / 25 / 1988

When I woke up today, the first thing I did was look at the picture on my desk. It was such a gorgeous scene. Me and Marissa, side-by-side, with baby Alec cradled in our arms. And, beside us, Eva. It was like she hadn't aged a day. I ran a finger lovingly across the frame.

I opened the door to my room, the scent of a meal cooking wafting up from the kitchen downstairs. My smile grew broader. She'd always been a better cook than me.

The snow fell in loving flakes, little tufts of hair streaming down from the sky. I wanted to run outside and lay down in it forever. It was gorgeous.

Marissa stood in the kitchen. She had just finished cooking, steam drifting up from the skillet on the stove. She turned to me, her fleshy, crimson eyes looking upon me with love. Pus gathered beneath their skin. Tendrils floated off her head like hair. Strings of flesh like sashes wrapped around her body, winding up and down her form. The air whispered around her as she moved.

We met in the middle of the kitchen and kissed, my lips coming away wet. She placed an arm over my shoulder and led me to the table, where Eva and Alec already sat. Eva beamed up at us as we emerged. Alec squealed with delight, quivering in its seat.

I placed myself down at the head of the table, Marissa setting plates of food before us before taking her place opposite me. I smiled across the table at her, and she smiled back.

"Merry Christmas, everyone!" I said, raising my glass. The others did the same. After the toast, we sat back in companionable silence.

I could hardly keep myself from giggling above my cup.

W e a r e f i n a l l y w h o l e .

I l o v e y o u E v a .

M e r r y C h r i s t m a s !

