

“THE TERRIBLE GOD”

BY

Banshee Blackwell

“The bones of man. The brittle remnants of cosmic torment that once made him wonder if matter was Lucifer upward-groping back to his God. And yet now, he knew better.” –William Peter Blatty; *The Exorcist*

10 February, 19—

He began with the animals. He hit them, cut off their tails, and finally slaughtered them, mercilessly. He left almost none but his favorite dog, the cat that managed to dodge him at every turn, and two goats that we begged him to leave be. But when he began to kick his dog, I realized I am but a lamb.

He pulled us out of school, Helena and me. She was in her last year and I was in my eighth. I didn't understand why. Mother was sick and she had expressed no desire to teach us on her own, and he would be working all day. Both of us excelled in our studies. Lena was good at History, and the sciences and I was good at Literature and writing. I suppose it was because I tended to document everything in my journals and put my nose to books. Mother encouraged it, as she was the same. She'd let me read whatever she was after she finished it. My mother was a reasonable woman, or so I believed. When Father pulled us out of school, she argued with him all night about it but when I told her that I believed this was only happening because of Tommy, she waved me away and said I was being silly.

I confided in Lena and she concurred. I decided to write every detail down, just in case. Perhaps when I'm done, I'll send it to someone for safekeeping; perhaps Fredrick or even Jessica, maybe I'll hide it under the floorboards and hope it'll be uncovered later...

The reason I started this journal is that I've been scared. I'm afraid of my father and what he's become. See, my youngest brother, Tommy died in an accident about a year ago: he fell off the roof of our barn and landed squarely on his head. No one was home but our Father, so he was the one who found him. Fredrick, my eldest brother, came as soon as he got the news and the police weren't called for hours after the accident. My father handled Tommy's body, putting it under a sheet, and then brought it closer to the house so the animals wouldn't get to it. When the police came, while my mother was inconsolable, my father was perfectly stoic. It chilled me.

Since then, he's been prone to violent outbursts, especially towards my poor mother. I've been away from school for a week now. I miss it.

14 February, 19—

Today Jessie came by to exchange Valentine's cards with me. She wanted me to go into town with her so we could get a slice of cake from the bakery. Mother said I could as long as I got back before my father did. So, I had three hours.

As we walked Jessie told me everything that's been happening at school in my absence. When we got to town, I noticed people staring at me with pity in their eyes.

I hated them for it.

I didn't *want* their pity; I wanted *help*.

The cake at the bakery was made special for the holiday: pink strawberry cake with white icing and red sprinkles all down the side. Jessie and I devoured the big slice in no time. The ladies who ran the bakery were always sweet to me whenever I came in, even before the sad faces plagued me. They seemed to take a liking to Helena and I; I suppose it was because they were sisters as well.

Jessie asked me how I was spending my time.

"Mostly doing needlework and reading," I answered.

"Anything new?"

"No, I'm mostly rereading a lot of my favorites. I need comfort in any way I can get."

I thought she would laugh at this but she didn't; she gave me a look of *pity*, but I wasn't mad at her because I knew *she* couldn't do anything about my situation.

Jessie and I wanted to stop into the dress shop to see the new garments on display but I realized I should've been getting home. She was disappointed but understanding.

I got home in time. I checked my watch, and it was only 4, but he was home somehow. I heard his booming voice from outside, "*How could you let her go out?*"

I fought my instinct to run away and rushed through the door. He was cornering my mother and a dish lay in pieces on the ground. My mother's eyes fell on me, and that was when he turned around, "*Where were you?!*"

I shirked away from him, "I was with Jessie."

"I don't want you going out without me knowing!"

"But—"

"No *buts*, no *disobeying*!"

My mother cut in with a voice like warm tea, "Douglas, please, I need to clean up this plate."

Father pulled his eyes from me and put them back on her. He was still for a moment, then backed up. She let out a deep sigh and closed her eyes briefly before bending to pick up the shattered plate.

He walked away in a huff but not before telling me, "Go help your mother."

20 February, 19—

Snow fell late into the night.

I used to love the snow but now something about it was confining, menacing. I should go to bed soon but I don't want to wake up to the pristine and delicate white blanket that will trap me inside for days to come.

Every year until this death, Tommy and I looked forward to the snow; it made winter worthwhile in our eyes. We loved making snowmen, forts, and playing war.

The thought is starting to make me tear up...

20 February 19— Day—

I woke up after only a few hours of sleep to the sun reflecting brightly off the snow and into my window. My father was shoveling the walkway. I'll have some breakfast after I finish writing. I think Lena and Mom are tending to the remaining animals. I would like pancakes this morning. Warm pancakes. And syrup.

I'll see if we have any mix.

23 February, 19—

It's been three days inside, stuck with my father. Fredrick came over two days ago to help Dad shovel the drive and walkway leading up to the house. It was hard work, and I wanted to help, if anything, to spend time with my older brother, but Father insisted it was "Man's Work." His loss. It was almost night before they finished, and Father came back inside, irritable about how long it took. Mom implored Fredrick to stay, but he just gave her a kiss and insisted he had to go back to his wife before it got too late.

Dad lit the fireplace after he left. I watched him stare at the flames, deep in thought.

24 February, 19—

I heard a crash downstairs while I was reading. Lena and I came out of our rooms and hurried down the stairs. We saw our Mother on the floor, holding her cheek, and our Father, above her, in a damning stance. He struck her. God knows why—if he even had a reason—but he struck her. I tried to help her up, but he yelled at me to leave her there. Helena was standing in shock. "Go back upstairs, girls," Mother told us. We did as she said.

28 February 19—

One of the goats gave birth prematurely. There was still a small bit of snow on the ground and it was freezing at night. It being the end of the month made these babies feel special for some reason. I knew it was magical thinking but the feeling was real. The goat, Siobhan, was bleating very loudly, very early in the morning which caused Buddy to bark and howl. I thanked God my

mother got to her before my father did. I knew he would've done something horrible to the babies.

We only had two goats left, both female (Siobhan got pregnant before her suitor was murdered) so this was a welcome development. The other doe, Aoife, was standing watch over her friend. Mom came in the middle of Siobhan giving birth to her second kid and she ran back to get blankets from the house. When she returned with Helena and me in tow, Siobhan had given birth to her third and final kid. They were slick and nursing from their mother even before the umbilical cord was cut.

“Do you want to cut the cord?” Mom asked me.

“No, but I’ll name them,” I answered. Lena laughed, but Mom only nodded and crouched down to Siobhan’s level with the scissors.

“Helena, lift one of the babies.”

She did so and Mom snipped the cord, then dabbed a washcloth with iodine on the severance. She did that one after the other and then the babies were left to feed and rest.

Here’s what I’m naming them:

Brown with white spots (boy)—Darragh (Darra)

Solid brown (boy)—Tadhg (Tige)

Solid white (girl)—Ailbhe (Alva)

Mom complimented the name choices. Having Mom and Lena in a room with me without having to worry about Dad coming in, was the most relaxed I felt in months. We cleaned up, gave Siobhan and Aoife more food, and closed the barn so Buddy couldn’t get in.

Back in my room, I heard Mom and Dad talking through the wall, but I couldn’t make out what they were saying. Dad was speaking rapidly, though.

28 February, 19—Afternoon—

Tadhg didn’t survive the night. In the afternoon, before Dad got home, Mom instructed me to check on Siobhan and her kids. When I entered the barn, I saw Darragh and Ailbhe suckling on their mother, but Tadhg was curled up in the straw near them. I thought he was just sleeping, but when I picked him up, he was heavy and stiff. I held him in my hands and started to cry. I found a towel, wrapped him in it, and took him to Mom.

“We’ll bury him, sweetheart.”

“Okay,” I sniffled.

We dug up a hole next to the barn. I put Tadhg’s small body in the grave, and we buried him. I embedded a bunch of stones in a circle around the grave and went back inside with Mom. She’s making Lena and me tea now.

Having time to reflect on it, I'm somewhat upset that I cried. Not to say I was mad at myself for being sad, but *specifically* for crying. I felt like a *baby* blubbering like that.

2 March, 19—

Dad had been complaining all day about what work the goats were, even though he wasn't the one taking care of them. He thought them a nuisance to everyone.

I spoke up, "I love the goats."

"You're a young girl, you get silly attachments to everything."

No one said anything. I felt like I was in a madhouse. I huffed and got up from the table. Now, I'm in my room, writing this.

Sometimes I feel like the only one with the courage to stand up to him! Lena and Mom *know* he's wrong, but they do *nothing*! I may be scared of him, but I know how to push back at him. If I had the authority, I'd banish him from this house so Mom and Helena and I could live happily. I'd tell myself that it was only a matter of time until that happened, but I didn't know that for sure.

I hold on to it, though.

It's one of the only things that keeps me sane.

3 March, 19—

He killed the baby goats.

He *killed* them!

I went to the barn to check on them, but they weren't there. Siobhan was bleating almost as loudly as she did when she was giving birth. She was facing towards the back of the barn, so I ran out and behind it, and that's when I saw the scene of the slaughter. The kids were ripped limb from limb. Ailbhe's head was separated from her body and strewn a couple of feet away. Darragh was cleaved open, his intestines were crudely pulled out from him like a celebration of gore. I turned away and threw up where I stood. Not even a week old! And he *murdered* them. As I hurried back to the house to let Mom know what happened, I saw Buddy stalking near the tree line, muzzle matted with blood.

Mom and Dad were in the kitchen together, and I was so horrified that it emboldened me to accuse my father outright of the murder.

"What *are* you talking about?" He pushed back.

"The baby goats are *dead*! You *killed* them!"

"They're... dead?" Mother was decidedly shocked.

"Yes!" I said through tears, "It was horrible!"

“I don’t know what you’re on about, but I didn’t do anything to those damned goats. Maybe Buddy got to them.”

“Sweetie,” Mom said, leaning to hug me, “Buddy must’ve gotten to them, your father wouldn’t kill the kids.”

“But he’d kill them if they were grown up, right?! Like he did with the other animals?”

“Elizabeth!” Mom gasped.

“He *killed* them!”

“It was the *dog*!” Dad insisted.

I was sent to my room after that. Lena, who was listening from the stairs, gave me a hug and said, “I believe you.”

4 March, 19—

I woke up this morning to find Mom had buried the babies next to their brother. Dad had left for work already. I read and wrote while Helena did her needlepoint project. She’s making an effigy of all the animals we used to have. She’s been working on it since we got into this situation. She drew up a diagram of all our dearly departed, sewing a representation of their species, then writing their names next to it.

10 March, 19—

I wanted to leave. I wanted to go to Fredrick’s and live with him and his wife. I told Mom as such.

“No, honey, your father would never agree.”

“I think he wants me out of his hair.”

“I think you’re wrong. Your father loves you so much, I just don’t know what’s gotten into him lately.”

I didn’t know what to say, so I stayed quiet.

Madhouse.

11 March, 19—

I was forced to sit with him during breakfast. He was acting perfectly nice, but it felt worse than if he were yelling and throwing things. It felt like he was mocking me...

15 March, 19—

I have a little cold, so I didn't end up waking up early to tend to the goats. I had to stay away from mom so as not to get her sick.

Dad came into my room when he got home.

“I heard you were ill, sweetheart.” His voice was oozing with honey.

“Yes.”

“Has your sister been taking care of you?”

“Yes.”

“I'll let you rest.”

“Okay.” I nodded.

I didn't think to write about this interaction until now. I woke up in the middle of the night and realized my door was open. I didn't know what was happening, so I didn't lift my head. I stared into the doorway. He was standing there...*looking* at me. I don't think he knew I was awake. He stood there for minutes before he left, shutting my door quietly. I lit a candle to write this because I think my lamp light would be too noticeable.

17 March, 19—

I was sitting on Lena's bed as she cleaned up her room when I told her about what happened a few nights ago. Her eyes widened, and a deep frown formed on her face.

“He was only standing there?”

I nodded.

“Has he done that to you before?”

“No.”

She let go of the breath she was holding in. I could tell what she was feeling, but not why she was feeling it.

I hesitated to ask why, but I finally did. She got up to shut her room door and sat back down at her desk, taking another breath.

She closed her eyes, “He's been doing that for a while.”

“T-To you?”

She nodded, slowly.

“He doesn't just stand there: he comes in. I had to start locking my door a while ago. You have to do the same, okay?”

“Lena, why is he doing it?”

“I...I don't know. If he does it again, tell me, and I'll tell mom.”

“Lena—“

“You should go to your room.”

I tried to argue, but she insisted. And that was that. I'll lock my door tonight.

20 March, 19—

Father hasn't spoken to me directly since I started locking my door. The night I first did, I heard a futile attempt to turn the knob and, when he failed, I heard him go back to bed. He's just been quiet around me, avoiding me the way I avoid him. Since nothing happened, I didn't report back to Lena. Lena, subsequently, didn't give me more information about our father's... habit, for lack of a better term.

25 March, 19—

I told Lena about my plan to run away to Fredrick's. She said it wasn't a good idea and that things will get better soon, but... I see the writing on the wall: it'll only get worse.

"What if he comes looking for you?" She asked, "The first place he'll look is Freddie's!"

"He'll protect me!"

Lena looked at me and sighed, "We need to hunker down and brave the bad weather."

I shook my head, "No, I can't."

I left her room after that. She hasn't come to check on me, but I don't want to talk to her, anyway.

I had to make a bag.

Underwear

Toothbrush

Journals

Shirts

Bottoms

That's all I could think of needing.

29 March, 19—

One more blow up and I swear I'll take my pack and leave this place for good! I don't care if I don't make it to Fredrick's, I'm *leaving!*

3 April, 19—

My mother's been ill, so Lena has been picking up all her duties as well as her own chores. I've been doing my best to help, too, but I fear there was only so much I could do.

She felt marginally better today, and it was warmer out so we went on a short walk. I checked on the goats. I tried to find Buddy, but he wasn't responding to me, and I put out food for the cat I wasn't sure was still around.

There wasn't much to do, so I helped Lena by cleaning dishes as she cooked. Dad came home not too long ago so I went up to my room. I try not to make it obvious that I'm avoiding my father as to not set him off but it's h

There was a crash in the kitchen

The Written Confession of Douglas Tully:

All of my life, I've been unlucky. But when I met Mavis, I thought maybe my luck had turned. She was the most beautiful girl I've ever known, smart, kind, and loyal. Five times I asked her to marry me and when she finally said yes, the sixth time, I truly thought no one was as fortunate as I. But when our Fredrick was born, the doctors said she shouldn't have any more children or her health would deteriorate. However, we wanted a big family. From Fredrick to Helena to Beth to Thomas, all the children had taken something from her after they were born. She would recover then fall ill and the cycle would repeat. She almost died giving birth to Thomas which is when she decided to stop bearing children.

The kids grew up to be healthy, spry things. Seemingly good souls who cared about their mother dearly, but I never felt at ease around them. I felt love towards them, like any father would towards his offspring but I approached them sternly to quell them from acting out.

Soon, they grew up: Fredrick moved out of the house to start a family of his own, Helena was on track to university and Beth and Thomas earned high marks in school.

One day, when the girls were in town with their mother, Thomas left to play near the barn. I was busy looking over some papers at my desk. I heard a loud *THUD* come from outside. Thomas had climbed the barn and fallen off it. I ran to him but recoiled at the sight, for it was a bloody one. His head had split open, a puce pink peeking out from behind his head as he lay twitching in the grass. I knew I had to move him away from the animals so I rushed to get a blanket from the house and wrap him in it, moving him to the porch. I waited for Mavis to come back before calling the police because I knew they wouldn't have let her see him if they had gotten there before her. I sat on the porch waiting. An hour had passed and they finally came home. Mavis kept the girls as far away from the sight as possible, sending them off near the tree line. She screamed and cried over his body and I called Fredrick to tell him the news, and *then* the police. Mavis stayed in bed for weeks after the incident, occasionally walking like a spectre through the house, moaning and weeping.

A year later, everything got worse. All I wanted was my family and they turned away from me, gradually. They conspired against me. I became paranoid that Beth was planning to run away. It came to a head one night when I was home late and I saw through the window, Helena and Beth talking. They nodded at each other and Beth went upstairs quickly. I knew if there was any night she'd leave, it'd be tonight. I opened the door to see Helena still in the kitchen. I demanded to know what she and her sister were planning and when she responded as if she didn't know what I was referring to, my simmering anger boiled over. I grabbed the nape of her dress and dragged her outside towards the cellar, unsure of what I was going to do next. She shrieked, begging me to let her go. I couldn't stand to hear the sound of her cries but I kept going. Mavis soon rushed from her place in the parlor to the scene and put her hands on me, telling me to let her go. I struck her, something I would never do of sound mind. She crumpled to the ground; I only then realized just how frail she was.

I threw Helena down the cellar and chained the door shut. I heard her hit the floor hard but she got back up and ascended the ladder. The doors would respond to her pushing, but never give in. I saw Mavis crawling away from me and I had to think fast. I grabbed the axe that lay near the cellar and advanced towards her, '*Monster!*' she cried, '*These are your children!*'

She repeated that over and over until she finally choked after I buried the axe in her chest. I heard the crack of her ribs. She gurgled out blood, still attempting to speak and I brought the axe down again and again, splitting skin, opening a wound, until she finally lay still, mouth agape and bloody. Immediately, I dropped the axe and backed away from the body. In shock, I began to call for Beth, my dear Beth...

I ran back into the house. I heard her footfall above me; she was still in her room. I called after her continuously, trying to find her upstairs. At her door, I knocked on it calmly. I twisted the doorknob but it was locked. I was sent into a frenzy, and I pushed on the door until finally, it broke open. The room was deserted; the window, however, was wide open. Sticking my head out of it, I looked for her outside in the dimming light. I heard her voice coming from the side of the house where the cellar was. '*I'll get you out, Lena!*' she said I heard the heavy *CLANK* of the axe on chains. I yelled her name again and all went quiet. Suddenly, her little form, carrying the axe, ran from the house to the woodland on the far side of the property.

Before running back outside, I grabbed my shotgun from my bedroom. Then I followed her into the woods.

I could barely see out there, as day had now turned to night. I was jumpy; I just wanted my baby girl back: the one who would dance and sing and talk to me.

After nearly half an hour in the forest, I began to lament the fact that I had likely lost her. I worried— how would she find her way back, and with only an axe to protect her?

Behind me, I heard a rustling and the snapping of a twig from far away, the leaves crunching getting closer and closer and closer— acting quickly, I reeled around and pulled the trigger... And there lay Beth about ten feet away from me, bleeding out, axe thrown from her hand.

She had called the police just before Mavis began screaming. They arrived shortly after I had gotten back to the house. I sat on the porch steps, just as I had done with Thomas.

They let Helena out of the cellar after I was securely away in the police car.

Apparently, they found Beth's journal. They say it's damning, I said it was likely all lies.

Signed,
D. Tully
4 April, 19—