Jared Keim

Dr. Gingrich

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13 Past

Sleepless and uneasy, I decided to pass time until the security of sunlight brought about the only conditions in which I could sleep while staying there. My relatives who stay there more frequently than I will blame their lack of sleep on the seemingly endless whistling caused by the wind shooting through the cracked window leading out to the porch, but it would be no exaggeration to say the hand of god continually nudges them awake to ensure their constant awareness of the dangers surrounding them in the two-century-old farmhouse.

On this night, like any other, I passed time with the most advance piece of technology in that household: a 1976 17" Sony Trinitron Television, a particularly advanced TV for its time. The TV’s age was beginning to show as the pine wood casing around the screen was slightly warped upwards resembling the blade of a Karambit. Seated on the couch where my grandfather had passed a few years earlier, I recurrently bumped my head against the shelf from which my grandmother’s rosary beads hung. Occasionally, I’d hit it hard enough to knock off the crucifix which rested on its platform.

The walls in the room were covered by an antiquated orange and brown flower pattern wallpaper my grandma must have bought 30 years to the prior. It was peeling at the edges and exposing the blood-stained paint left from the previous owners, whom which no one in my family has had the luxury to meet seeing as they abandoned the house in the early 1960’s. I was especially careful when entering and exiting the room to ensure I didn’t accidentally bump the China Cabinet housing my grandmother’s favorite figurines.

The strong and unstoppable Midwestern winds would, each night, grab the edges of the glass and pull that cracked widow farther open. I cringed at that whistling sound. My grandfather awoke every night he lived there to what he thought was the sound of a woman screaming out for help from the corn fields he tended to each day. I felt especially uneasy that night, the whistling bore an even closer resemblance to screaming than usual and the TV’s signal was so weak that the TV's flickering lights flickered to the sound of white noise, which was the only thing masking the whistling.

As the night grew older, it became apparent that the sounds of the farmhouse were working together to mask the cry of something I couldn’t quite identify. I decided this warranted a deeper look. Unfortunately, on this night in particular, I was in the house only with my grandmother, who’s right leg had been amputated a few years before to prevent the spread of a sudden and unexplainable infection that turned her leg swollen and blue. I was on my own.

The 26 degree weather and snow on the ground weren’t compelling enough to force me to travel back up to my bedroom to grab my jacket. "Besides," I told myself, "I'm only checking on what the sound is - nothing more."

As I opened the door to the cold and bitter outside, the breath of God immediately blew it shut. I could almost hear his voice warning me to stay inside, but my mind, so blurred from the lack of sleep, had lost its sense of good judgment, and so I proceeded.

My first step on the snow-covered sidewalk was greeted by a feeling of exposedness. Suddenly, the only thing between me and the harsh Nebraskan winter was no longer a wall, but a thin layer of cotton pajamas. The crying sound was still there. I had a difficult time deciphering where it was coming from, but my first urge was to check the swine barn.

It’s not uncommon for swine to squeal when they experience feelings of uncertainty or fear. Like most nights, this was probably rooted from the violent winds, which occasionally erupted in to tornados, much like the one in 2007 which ripped 3 of the 7 barns on the property to shreds. For this reason, looters commonly mistook the property for an abandoned one and on multiple occasions they’ve gone as far to enter the house where my grandmother lives and have stolen money off of my grandmother’s nightstand, while she’d laid there, asleep and unaware.

Luckily, the swine barn remained intact.

I approached the barn, the screeching intensified as I grew closer. 20 feet away the sounds were miserable. 10 feet away they were unbearable. 5 feet away I pressed my palms against my ears to try and silence the noise that was now piercing through my ears and into my brain. I ran towards the door, ready to see what was happening. Like ripping off a Band-Aid, I grabbed the door handle, twisted it, and shoved the door open so aggressively that bottom hinge broke off. I ran through the door prepared to do whatever I needed to do to shut those pigs up! Right as I entered that barn: nothing. The pigs stood there, silent and motionless. "One, two, three, four..." I counted, all 14 of them stared at me, inspecting my every move. I walked around the barn, suspicious and terrified.

"It's just that: nothing," I whispered to myself aloud, ignoring the freshly made depressions in the hay roughly the size of a grown man's foot.

I left the barn, attempting to shut the door entirely behind me, but leaving the hinge detached from the bottom left of the door. I walked back to the house, still barefoot in my pajamas. Everything seemed ordinary. The wind still blew, now more aggressively than before; the black night was now even darker as clouds had moved over the full-moon, and the pigs now resuming their screeching.

By this time it was 1:13am, I distinctly remember looking at the grandfather clock as it rang once I walked back into the farmhouse. The clock rang 13 minutes past every hour instead of on the hour. My grandmother had the clock adjusted professionally to mark the minute on each hour that my grandfather had passed. She told me it was to honor him, but, after staying in that house long enough, I realized the real reason.

Every hour, when the clock rang, my grandmother would sit up. Aware and paranoid, she would grasp any object near her that could be used as a weapon and for 60 seconds, she stood there. She believed there was something inherently evil about that minute. It was the minute my grandfather had been declared dead, the minute the tornado of 2007 struck the ground, the minute the gas oven in the kitchen exploded giving my grandma the third degree burns that mark her face today, and the minute she received the call letting her know that her eldest and youngest daughters had been involved in a fatal car crash which left both of them unidentifiable. The 13th minute of every hour was not a coincidence, it was a pattern.

I felt confident that this night would pass by uneventful, but I decided it would hurt to make a call. I called Sean, my grandmother's neighbor who I had become close with from visiting my grandmas so frequently as a child. Sean was tall; maybe 6'2", had a muscular build and a deep, somewhat monotone, voice, and had darker complexion than I from working in the Nebraskan corn fields each day. If someone was going to help me get through the night, it was Sean. His knowledge on the land was comforting and build, even bigger than mine, was reassuring.

Though I called so late, he agreed to come over. I immediately apologized for waking him once he arrived.

"You didn't. I haven't been able to sleep tonight either," Sean replied.

"Something about these Midwestern winds I guess," he added.

I explained the circumstances were under and he acknowledged them as if they were nothing out of the ordinary. I almost felt ridiculous for taking his time just because I heard some pigs squeal.

"I'll go give them some feed, it will help calm them down. Stay here with your grandmother, I don't want you to have to put on wither clothes anyways."

No one disagreed with anything Sean said. He had been admitted to the University of Stanford a few months earlier with a full-ride for baseball. I trusted whatever he said.

About 20 minutes passed, the clock approached 2:09 and I was begging to fiddle my thumbs out of excitement.

The clock read 2:10

2:11

2:12

2:13... I was still unaware the whereabouts of Sean. I walked into my grandmother’s dark and cold room. The only things visible were her eyes open wide while she sat up in her bed, and the reflection of the light admitted from the television off the blade of the knife she grasped firmly. I didn't say a word. Once the clock hit 2:14, she lifted up her pillow, placed the knife under it, and fell back asleep.

It was now 2:18 and I heard a knock on the door. Sean had returned.

"Everything seems to fine, all 13 pigs are calm now and I fixed the bottom hinge on the door and patched up the hold in the back door."

"13?" I said.

"Yes sir, all 13"

"I could have sworn there were 14, and what hole?"

"The hole just above the door handle, and each time I counted it was 13."

"I just... guess I miscounted"

"We can go back if you'd like" Sean said, grudgingly and sympathetic.

"Let's"

Sean, of course, led the way to the swine barn. I followed close behind, ensuring I didn't lose him.

Out of the peripheral of my eye I saw something move with a human-esc movement. Concerned, I looked over for a few moments, but nothing was there. When I regained my focus, Sean was out of my sight. "I'm sure he's made his way to the barn" I told myself, so I continued to the barn.

When I arrived, the door was wide open and all of the pigs, and Sean for that matter, were nowhere to be found.

I could hear the screech of one of the pigs in the distance just barley over the sound of the wind so I followed it. It took me to the meat cellar/ tornado shelter that my grandpa had constructed in 1983.I pulled back the rotting wood that was the door and walked down into the cellar where the pigs sequel was originating. Still pitch black, when I reached the bottom the squeal was even more intense than ever, especially in that small, underground, concrete room. I flipped on the lights, and then... silence.

The pigs no longer squealed and the winds had died. The only sound now was the drops of blood hitting the cold concrete floor under the pigs which were hanging from 13 of the 15 meat hooks.

The silence wasn't long lived, shortly after a huge gust of wind slammed the door shut and the lights went out.

Silence resumed.

I attempted to find my way out but each wall felt the same and the darkness was unforgiving. Suddenly, I felt something brush against my side. It was more of a call for attention that it was a aggressive touch, but never the less, something was there.

"Get the fuck off me!" I yelled, louder than I ever have before. I pushed whatever it was back and then proceeded aggressively until my hands were around its neck. I then grasped it hard and slammed its head against the concrete wall and kick and punch and threw all of my strength into it. I shoved it to the floor where it laid motionless. I felt for one of the pigs and the ripped off one of the pig’s legs and beat whatever was on the ground with it, drenching it in the pigs blood. With all my will, I picked it up and lifted it over to the location of an open meat hook. The darkness slowed me down, but in no way did it stop me, I shoved it on the hook unapologetically and could hear the person choking on its own blood.

The lights came back on.

It was a man. The top right of his head caved in and was gushing out blood. One eye had been pushed into the skull by the concrete and was not visible outside of the head. The other eye was wide open and just barley moving from side to side, looking into each of my eyes, one at a time. His arms and legs dangled, covered in mostly pig blood. The hook pierced through his jaw, just positioned right so the only thing holding him on the hook was his jaw bone. The tip of the hook protruded from his mouth and was drenched in blood. I read what was visible on his shirt: University of Stanford Athletics, My stomach sank, and as I looked up, I now recognized the childhood friend who I had mistaken for something else.

Clearly and distinctly, I heard the scream of my grandma. It was brief. Then, faintly, was the sound of the clock. It was 3:13.