

Blight

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Blight

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[GRIAN]

Statement of Shrub... something, looks like a last name wasn't taken down... regarding the depopulation of her hometown. Original interview transcribed eleven years ago, April 5th, 2011. Statement begins.

Notes

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Statement:



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[GRIAN]

Statement of Shrub... something, looks like a last name wasn't taken down... regarding the depopulation of her hometown. Original interview transcribed eleven years ago, April 5th, 2011. Statement begins.

[GRIAN (STATEMENT)]

Can you turn the lights up in here? Um, thank you. Yes, that's bright enough. Thank you.

I guess I should start at the very start, right?

I grew up on a little homestead in Nebraska, just outside a small town. It was all wheat country- we had a couple acres, and some chickens and cows for eggs and milk. Plenty to feed ourselves, and we could sell the rest. It was pretty isolated, and we never really made any more profit than what would keep us going, but it was nice. We were happy. It was my dad, my sister, my brother, and me- I was the youngest. I was fifteen when... everything happened.

Our farm wasn't the first one to get hit with the blight. It first started showing up just at the tail end of summer, right when the days started to get shorter and the nights longer.

We would hear about it when we went to the farmer's market on weekends to buy and sell, or from the other kids when we went to school, about people whose plants were getting all... sick. It was a little unseasonably cold that summer, so we put it down to that at first, but a week or so later my sister found a stalk broken open that was just... pitch black, inside. All rotted out.

That's when we knew it was something worse.

It wasn't like a normal sickness, that was the thing. I mean, we were all farm families. We all knew what mosaic virus and leaf rust and all those look like. Normally if your field gets sick, it's not hard to identify what it is, and from there you can start working on treating it. But this was... different. Even besides the fact that it was spring wheat- normally it's winter wheat you have to worry about getting sick, but it happens.

The thing that was really strange were the symptoms themselves. It was just... black. Like rot, but not really. It didn't *smell* like rot, and nothing we did that should have worked did- draining the soil, using fungicides, nothing. It would start at the roots and spread up the inside of the stem, and eat its way out. By the time you started seeing spots of black on the outside, the plant was already gone, had been for months.

As the weeks dragged on, we found more and more sick plants, but we still figured it was... manageable, at least. And... there was something else, too.

It feels wrong to call it a person. It wasn't a person.

I saw it for the first time at the very start of September, about a week before we were due for harvest. It was nighttime. I don't remember why I was awake... bad dreams, I think. But I happened to glance out my window, and I saw... something. Standing out in the field. It was so dark out. Not dark like a clear night, like it should have been. Dark like a basement. And it was just... standing out there. Staring.

It was... human-shaped, but... too tall, and it had... horns, or- antlers, or something. It was too dark for me to make out details. The outlines of it all sort of melted into the night, so I couldn't even really tell how big it was. The only thing I could really see was its face, if you can call it that. Its eyes and its... smile. They weren't human features, not at all. The eyes were bright red, no pupils or anything. The mouth was the same. It looked... torn, almost, an ugly ragged sort of thing, but I could still tell what it was meant to be.

It was staring at me, and it was *smiling*.

Sorry, could you turn on that lamp, too? Um. Thank you.

I didn't want to take my eyes off it. I yelled for my dad, but he didn't answer, and neither did either

of my siblings. I turned to look up the stairs to see if his light had gone on, just for a second, and when I looked back out the window it was gone.

I don't think I was surprised when, a week later, we found out the harvest was rotten to the core.

Almost every stalk of wheat we threshed that fall was black inside, crumbling like ash or mold. It would just fall apart in your hands. I can't even imagine what horrible flour you'd get if you tried to process it. We burned it all, pounds and pounds and pounds of it. The smoke blocked out the sun. It made me feel all cold, standing in the shadows.

We... we knew, then, that it was going to be a hard winter. We didn't know *how* hard.

It seemed like it got cold so much faster than usual, as winter set in. We were short on bread- nobody's fields had survived the blight, so any flour we had to buy from out of town, and we hadn't gotten the money coming in from the harvest that we should've. But it still wouldn't have been... it would've been alright, like that, if it hadn't gotten any worse.

The animals were next.

I remember one morning, going out to feed the chickens and finding one of them just... dead. Out of nowhere. It was obvious it hadn't been a dog or a fox or anything. I think maybe I thought it was the cold that did it. We figured we'd eat it for dinner- no sense letting good meat go to waste. But when my sister plucked it and cut it open, it was just like the wheat. All black, inside, and ashy. We had to throw the whole thing out.

That night, I saw the figure in the fields again. It was closer to the house than the first time. It just stood out there, surrounded by all the broken-off and burned stalks of sick wheat, just... staring at me. Its smile was even wider that time. It knew- it felt like it knew that I knew that it was responsible. It wanted me to know. So I'd be scared. And I was.

We lost three more chickens and a cow within the month. All to the same thing. We called the town vet in, but she couldn't make anything of it. She said it was happening to a lot of people's animals. It was like they were all just hollowing out, from the inside out. Like the darkness was just... *eating* them.

And the nights just kept getting longer, and darker. I honestly don't know if it was my imagination or not, but knowing what I do now... I remember thinking it almost looked like the shadows would swarm around the house at dusk. They looked like puddles around the foundation. I always tried to step around them, even though I knew they were only shadows. Every time I looked at them, I would just see that dead chicken, cut open, nothing but black rot and bones inside.

People started leaving. Or at least I'd assumed then that they'd left. Now I don't know if they did or if they... but whenever we went into town it would be a little emptier, a little more desolate. Whole families would just be gone, people I'd known all my life. Everything started to feel... dark, and cold, and unwelcoming, even during the day. They had to close the library because the head librarian got sick, and when they were cleaning up they found that the books were all falling apart with black rot.

It...

December. It all ended in December. It was the longest night of the year, I remember that. The sun was gone before five, and it was so *cold*. We were all inside, huddled in the living room with the blankets. The furnace was running, but it didn't seem to make any difference at all.

And then my dad noticed the spot on the floorboards.

It was black. Like a stain from a spill. I was looking at it, and I was just remembering about the wheat. How by the time you could see spots on the outside of the stalk, it meant the whole plant was black inside. My dad told us not to touch it. He went and got a crowbar, and pried up the board, and it just...

It was like taking the lid off a... a jar of bees, or something. The darkness just sort of... exploded out, like a... a wave, or a swarm. It was under the floor, behind all the walls. The whole house was...

I just ran. I didn't- my brother told me to run, and I did. The door was open. I just ran, out of the house and into the fields and into the dark.

I couldn't see where I was going. It was so dark. And so *cold*. I could see my breath. I hadn't grabbed my coat or anything. All the broken-off stems of the wheat scraped at my legs. When I looked back, I couldn't see any lights from my house, or from the town, or *anything* except... darkness. I couldn't even see any stars overhead, when I looked up. It was just dark.

And *it* was there.

It was just standing there, in the field. Watching. And smiling. And *laughing*. That was the first time I heard it. It laughed. It was the worst sound I've ever heard in my life.

I ran, and it didn't follow me. I know I didn't... escape. It chose to let me go.

I found a road, eventually. It must have been... miles from my house, but it was *something*. I followed it until I found a gas station, and the people there helped me call the police. They went out to the town in the morning, and found... nothing. Rotted beams and piles of black ash, and... and bones. They could only tell where most of the buildings had been from where the basements were dug into the ground. My house was...

There wasn't anything left.

So far as I know, nobody got away but me.

I'm here now because it's as far away as I could get from there. It's still not far *enough*, though. I still see it. That... thing, with the red smile and the antlers. It follows me. I only see it when it's very, very dark. Maybe it brings the dark. I don't know.

I-I'm sorry, I need to go home.

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[Click]

[GRIAN]

I never want to have to look into American police reports for a followup ever again. *Midwestern* American police reports, too. They're *so* boring.

I didn't even find anything, but Mumbo eventually dug up a report from two years before this statement was given regarding a town- really more of a village- called Empire, Nebraska, which does match in a few details. The report did say the devastation was likely caused by a fire, with no

mention of the sort of... shadow mold Shrub describes, but from what she said about what was left behind, it does seem like that would be an easy assumption to make.

The phone number she left for followups is now out of service, which is... somewhat worrying. I called the front desk of the apartment building where she was living when she gave this statement and was able to have quick chat with her former landlord. Apparently she left in the middle of her lease term a couple years ago, and left quite a mess in her apartment, though he couldn't give me any further details besides that it needed to be fumigated.

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Supplemental:

Chapter Summary

[GRIAN]

Regarding statement #0110425-

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[GRIAN]

Regarding statement #0110425-

Scar stumbled across a file of newspaper cuttings labeled with the statement number but, inexplicably, stored in a box six rows down from where we found the statement. (*Irritated*) Etho.

My predecessor's *quirks* aside, the clippings are all obituaries, published to various local Nebraskan papers, of the unfortunate residents of Empire. According to the dates of death, Etho collected - or obituaries survive for - exclusively the victims of that last winter. I have over thirty here, and who knows whether there's any more hiding in some other implausible location among the shelves.

Of course, none are for Shrub, and there's no way to tell which ones belong to her family members, because Etho didn't bother to record her last name.

(*Papers shuffle*)

They're all *remarkably* detailed, too. I have to assume they were written by a former resident and frequent visitor to the town, although whoever that was published them anonymously.

I do wonder what *exactly* Etho saw in them.

[Click]

End Notes

this is empires smp propaganda. go watch [shubble's series](#) it's very good. i would possibly like to incorporate more lore from empires in the future? we'll have to see. but shubble was easy to do because her empires backstory is already just a straight up horror movie.

you may wonder why this one is set in nebraska! it's because shubble is american, and her empires character is specifically from a farming family, and i decided on a whim they would farm wheat, and nebraska is wheat country. real shubble is not from nebraska. she is from a different state.

anyways! i'm sure she's fine. maybe we'll get another statement from or about her in the future. who knows!

Works inspired by this one

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