



The Blawenburg Beacon

March 2010

A newsletter for the members and friends
of *The Blawenburg Reformed Church*

Turn, Turn, Turn

"To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."

It's snowing again.

Fortunately, this time it's the wet, non-stick kind of snow.

But it's still snow.

Are you as tired of it as I am - the grey skies, the drenched brown grass, that intensifying claustrophobic feel?

When will it end?

Of course, it *will* end. It could end as early as next week. Certainly by next month the snow will disappear, except for that rogue system that could race up the coast and wallop us for a day, and that mountain of dirty, stone-ridden ice by the garage.

When we close our eyes and flash forward, we can see the dogwoods budding, the return of our favorite birds, perhaps even a rainbow.

That's the beauty of the seasons. If one starts to bring us down with unrelenting inclemency, we know the weather will eventually turn for the better.

The seasons of our hearts are somewhat different. Not to be confused with the seasons of our lives, which we cannot change because we cannot stop time, the seasons of our hearts are largely within our control.

We can choose to confront and overcome our late-winter blues, choose to focus on the things in our lives that really matter - like family and friends - and be uplifted because of it, choose to be fruitful or fruitless, faithful or faithless, selfish or selfless.

The choices we make not only enrich our own lives, they brighten the lives of others and they preserve the beauty and serenity of the world. In other words, they serve God.

If we find ourselves too deep in the doldrums, edgy, even combative, given to too many tears, let's remember that with God's help through prayer a new season will come.

The weather will turn.

Will we?

Peace, Pastor Rich

The Ghost Next Door

by Richard Van Doren

Part 3

“How do you know the kid wasn’t screaming at you?”

“Very funny.” Terry Hansen met Father Glenn O’Ryan’s familiar teasing with a stone face.

O’Ryan frowned. His Protestant counterpart took life way too seriously, he thought, but this was sobriety to the extreme – and on the eve of the biggest day of the church year, no less.

“To be honest with you, Rev. Terrence, you might find Catholic Rites of Exorcism buried on the internet sooner than you would at one of our seminary libraries. Few if any of my bosses take this activity seriously anymore.”

Hansen figured that, but he had to ask. He sighed and glanced around Father O’Ryan’s study, rich oak paneling, plush leather furniture and walls of books neatly arranged by the caring hands in the reception room outside. Through the window a thick deep green lawn filled the horizon. He never failed to acknowledge this startling, perhaps revealing contrast to his own office, piled high with books and barely big enough for private consultation. He knew it was the result of historical architecture, not an intentional slight. Still, it fed a deteriorating mood.

“There must be some other explanation,” Poppa Duke continued. This was a nickname coined by the local clergy club for this energetic, fun-loving padre who seemed more fulfilled by the adulation of a big parish than a demanding opportunity to serve the Lord. Everyone liked him, though, which could not be said for others in the group, especially Hansen.

“There probably is,” Hansen said, “but that’s all I’ve got right now.”

“Your story sounds like the plot of a horror movie,” Poppa continued unrelentingly, perhaps to punish him for this interruption on a most important day of preparation. “And they all stink, if you don’t mind my saying so.”

Hansen shifted uneasily. Even though Poppa Duke O’Ryan admitted to a lack of understanding in matters of faith, the minister hoped the hint of a solution might be forthcoming. “They’re not all bad,” he said.

“Besides *The Exorcist* and *Paranormal Activity*, name one.”

Hansen lightened slightly. “Don’t have to,” he said, “You just proved my point.”

O’Ryan sighed. “All right, Terry, for the sake of my golfing partner,” the priest arose, avoiding any reference to their one-on-one basketball games and table tennis matches, which were considerably less amicable than golf once the sweat flew, “I’ll make a copy of the latest version of our ghost buster pamphlet, and present it to you with the standard warnings not to engage in such a rite without a full investigation and written sanction from our diocese – and not to do it alone.”

O’Ryan disappeared for several minutes and returned with a few 8 ½ x11 sheets of white paper stapled together, making good on his promise.

“So formal,” Hansen said. “Care to join me in this adventure?”

“If it’s the 18th green of Somerton Woods that’s possessed, and I can take my clubs . . . oh, and don’t forget, tomorrow’s somewhat of a big day.”

That night Terry stood at his bedroom window staring at the house next door, which was bathed in light inside and out. Somehow he didn't think that would make a difference, but if the Sellers' felt better . . .

"You told Father O'Ryan everything you just told me?" Janet asked, sitting up in bed, a hard-cover book resting on her thighs.

"That I did," Hansen answered, unmoving. "He still thinks I had too much hot food for dinner. The gas gave me brain vapors, he called them, which often resulted in supernatural fantasies, and – what did he say – delusions of athletic prowess."

"We had tacos Friday evening. He may have a point."

Hansen turned to confront his diminutive blue eyed paramour, who still made his heart jump, but decided to let it go. "You don't know how powerful this was, Hon. I've never felt anything like it before."

"Tell me again." She closed her book, set it on the night stand and gave him her undivided attention.

"The room seemed perfectly normal, except for the windows being shut because of the storm. The air was a little close, but not unhealthy by any means. I was about to leave when I heard Marsha coming up the stairs with Chucky. That's when I felt this – presence. Or maybe I should say two presences. The feelings coursing through me were so different – boundless rage, bottomless hatred - the other despair, deep sadness. One seemed to move aside and let the other in, then back and forth – almost like they were wrestling with each other and I was the mat. It was the strangest doggone thing. Scary!"

Janet took off her reading glasses and cleaned them on her night gown. "Are you sure these feelings weren't your own, incited by the situation?"

Hansen approached the bed and rested his hands on it, looking at her. "I haven't felt something like this in decades, perhaps ever. No. These feelings were not my own. I'm sure of that."

Janet looked down at her hands. "I want to believe you, Terry," she said. "I really do."

Hansen slid next to her. "Honey, remember my *condition*. I haven't felt anything for years – except my love for you."

Good save, she thought, if somewhat delayed.

He used a slightly different metaphor. "My emotional self was like an empty arena where someone else's fight was being held. I never thought clinical depression would have its advantages," he sighed.

"So, what are you going to do about it?"

"Well, nothing until Monday. And after that . . . I have Poppa Duke's liturgy."

Janet lifted her head and peered straight into his eyes. "You'd better not do anything until you're sure what this is. If you're even close to being right, you could be way over your head."

"That's true. But there's something else to consider."

"What's that?"

"A little boy."

The Easter service attracted its usual overflow crowd, consisting mostly of C&E (Christmas and Easter only) Christians, visiting family, and several “samplers.” Rev. Hansen gamely tried to inspire them with an old sermon he was pretty sure no one would remember, but he never felt entirely present – not because of disinterest this time, but distraction. He could not take his mind off the events of Good Friday evening. Fortunately, very few came to hear the minister. They came for the tradition, the lovely flowers and beautiful music, and on these last two subjects the other participants did not disappoint.

As colorfully bedecked worshipers filed out the two front doors, a few came up to the minister and his wife, who stood between them in the back of the sanctuary, to shake hands and offer the requisite compliments.

One of these was Laura Graham, self-appointed church archivist. A good-natured woman with a passion for the past, Laura assumed a job no one else wanted: care for the church’s extensive collection of historical documents. Fortunately, she was one of the last to leave that morning, so Hansen did not hold anyone up when he took her aside for a semiprivate conversation.

“Laura,” he began, “where might I find the pertinent records of a particular ministry in this church?”

“Well, that depends on how far back you want to go, Reverend. Anything within the last fifty years would be right here in our filing cabinets.”

“Farther than that. Actually much farther than that.”

“How far?”

“Almost back to the beginning of our church, the third ministry to be precise.”

Recognition filled Laura’s face, and she didn’t even have to look at the roster of ministers hanging on the wall behind Hansen. “You mean the pastorate of Wolfgang Timms.”

“That I do, Mrs. Graham,” he nodded. She thought it funny that he would call her Laura one minute and Mrs. Graham the next, but she never questioned it.

“Is there anything particular about Reverend Timms that you want to know? Perhaps I can help you.”

“Oh, nothing special,” Hansen smiled through his lie. “I just wanted to find out a little bit about, well, Gladys Timms.”

Laura’s face fell. “The ghost of Gladys Timms, you mean,” she said flatly.

Hansen tried to keep it light. “Yeah, I was thinking about writing a story about the legend – just for fun, mind you – because there’s been so much said about her over the years.” He smiled awkwardly, knowing it did not appear genuine.

Laura started to move away. “I think you should let that poor soul rest in peace. She had a pretty rough time, from what I read.”

“Oh, really? What did you read?” he asked eagerly.

She looked at him with suspicion, now.

“Just some of the old coot’s sermons,” she answered, spying him like she suddenly thought all clergy were the same. “He was a hard boiled tyrant from what I’ve seen and heard.”

“These sermons – are they here somewhere on our property?”

“Oh, no-no-no. Documents that old were taken to the seminary years ago. Otherwise they would have disintegrated here. They have a climate controlled historical document library inside the regular one. Haven’t you ever been there?”

Hansen felt sheepish. “No. I know of its existence, of course, but I’ve never been.”

Understanding filled her face. “Just like all the others,” she said “doomed to repeat history because you have no respect for it.”

“That’s overstating it a bit, Laura, but you’re not all wrong.” He glanced at Janet, who had finished shaking hands and was waiting for him to join her. “Can anyone go there and check these documents out?”

“You can’t check them out,” Laura said somewhat impatiently. “You have to inspect them there.”

Bad choice of words, he thought. “Are these docs accessible to the public?”

“Yes, Reverend, they are. Now if you don’t mind. You and Mrs. Hansen have a lovely Easter.” She turned and left.

That night Hansen shared his next day’s plans with Janet. “Too bad I’m back to work tomorrow, or I’d go with you,” she said. “The kids can smell summer vacation, now, so their attention spans will be nil.” Such were the trials of fourth grade teachers.

Immediately after breakfast on the day after Easter, Reverend Terry Hansen left home for a thirty-mile trip to his denomination’s eastern seminary. Situated on half a block in the center of the sprawling state university, the struggling institution seemed squashed between towering residence halls and thousands of pedestrians. The library, however, provided unexpected escape from the constant din outside. Hansen approached the desk and asked for the Historical Documents Librarian, a name he seemed to remember from his own days in the seminary. Soon, a portly, graying, bespectacled man emerged from an office beyond, a stereotype of the professional bookworm.

Moderately familiar with each other, they exchanged cordial greetings, but quickly got down to business.

“Yes, your church was one of our earliest and biggest contributors. We have you and several others to thank for silencing our critics and taking immediate advantage of our little experiment – which is no longer an experiment, of course,” John De Holland spoke, barely above a whisper.

“So, our church brought all of its documents in at one time?”

“There have been a couple of deposits, since, but most of it came here on May 20, 1965.”

Which means Laura had read it all, he thought, and either had nothing of interest to contribute, or was holding out, which was unlikely. In short, Hansen fought the rising disappointment of a wasted trip – on his day off.

“Of course, we had an historical documents library right from the start, but nothing as elaborate as we have now,” De Holland offered.

“Come again?”

As if speaking to a grammar school tour, the librarian continued, “Our denomination is the oldest in the United States with a continuing history, well over three hundred years. This seminary is over two hundred and twenty years old. People have been bringing their treasures to us for a long time by North American standards.”

Hansen felt the germ of an idea. “Do you keep records of all contributions?”

“Do we keep records . . .” De Holland answered sarcastically. “Do we keep records.” He paused. “I supposed you’d like to see them?”

“If you don’t mind.”

“Step right over to our computer terminal, and I’ll show you where to look.”

After a brief tutorial, Hansen began scrolling through the extensive list of files given by his church alone. Surprisingly, several hundred items were entered before the great donation of '65, pieces of history about which Laura Graham may not be aware.

Had he not blinked to clear his blurring eyes, he might have missed the entry that froze him, a submission in the summer of 1851 by a woman named Constance Sharp.

With heart pounding he asked De Holland to give him entry into the archives room.

“It’s very cold in there. You’ll need your jacket, AND you’ll need to wear a mask and light rubber gloves. No handling the documents with bare hands. The oil from your hands will hasten their disintegration.”

Hansen consented to all of the rules and was led to a heavy glass revolving door. “Please move slowly, and tap on the glass if you need some help.”

The minister nodded and pushed through the door, feeling like he had entered the fifth level of the infectious diseases compound in Virginia. He made his way immediately to the drawers containing Baileysburg history, all of the items separated by their dates of submission.

He soon found the partition he was looking for: July 9, 1851. Gingerly, he opened the cloudy plastic pouch and looked inside. Taking a deep breath he lifted its contents, a single, frayed notebook, and read its cover: “Happye Thoughts, Mye Diary – Gladys Timms.”

Terry Hansen sat down at the metallic table and took another deep breath. He then opened the book that would raise as many questions as it answered – and fill him with dread.

(Part 4 Continues on Page 12)

Outreach Lunch Menus

March 2010

March 2

Maine Clam Chowder, Grilled Cheese Sandwiches,
Chicken Francais, Rice Pilaf, Pie

March 9

Hamburger Vegetable Soup, Egg Salad,
Baked Ziti with Chicken Parmesan, Pumpkin Roll

March 16—St. Patrick’s Day—

Corned Beef & Cabbage; Potatoes, Carrots, Irish Soda Bread

March 23—Picnic Foods—Welcome Spring!

Hamburgers, Hot dogs, Potato Salad, Cole Slaw

March 30

Broccoli Cheddar Soup, Chef Salad,
Spaghetti, Ice Cream and Cookies

The Reformed Church Women of the Mid Atlantic Synod
Are Having their Annual Crossroads Retreat
On April 16 and 17th at the Harvey Cedars Conference Center
On Long Beach Island

This Year's Theme is Challenges in Our Spiritual Journey

For more information see the flyer
on the bulletin board outside the church office

Reader's Alert - Some of the library is slowly being re-shelved in the Theater in Memorial Hall. It is totally self service---check it out, put card in file box, read, return, take card from box and return to book, and you are ready for more books. There are no date due reminders, no late fees, and no limit to number of books taken. Please use this lovely resource.

Reminder--there are still some good books available outside the church office.

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE!

Rummage Sale * Rummage Sale * Rummage Sale !!

April 15-17

Drop-off April 4-10

Set-up and Sort April 11- 15

Look for work crew sign-up sheets at coffee hour and plan on helping us as much as you can the week of the sale!

March Birthdays

March 12	Colby White
March 18	Byron Gurzo
March 19	Joe Pavlicek
March 21	Christopher Reyes
March 24	Cheryl Soos
March 26	Mac Harris
March 28	Pat Wengel
March 29	Dot Dorey Pam Wanner

Lost and Found

Ring
Bracelet
Gloves
Denim Jacket

Check with the church office

Soup-r-Bowl

On February 7th, we collected \$50 favoring the Indianapolis Colts and \$31 for the New Orleans Saints. Although we didn't pick that winner, the true winner was the Montgomery Food Pantry, the recipient of the \$81!

Heifer

Our annual Advent mission this year raised \$3,190 for Heifer International. Thank you for your support of this wonderful mission!

Saturday Soup Sale

Many thanks to all of you who made and/or bought soups for our spectacular Saturday soup sale. We sold about 77 quarts and 67 pints of yummy-looking gourmet recipe frozen soups to warm our winters. With the container cost of \$95, this netted about \$700 to be split between our Preservation Fund and our current mission, One Great Hour. All were happy and many benefited from this. Thank you! (We will accept clean used containers to re-use and buy new lids if needed.)

ONGOING MISSIONS

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Kits for CWS Baby, Student and Health

On the mission table in Cook Hall are lists of needed items for you to keep on hand as you see sales. We have lots of notebooks now. We had a donation of diapers so we have enough to make 8 Baby Kits. With the help of the Sunday School Children, we will plan to pack these kits in the spring.

Non-Perishable Food and Toiletry Items for our Township food pantry are being collected in the Sanctuary and Cook Hall.

ONGOING MISSIONS

ONGOING MISSIONS

BRC Lecture Series

We will be hosting a monthly *Lecture Series* in the sanctuary. The first program will feature local celebrity and noted pollster George Gallup, on Wednesday, March 10th at 7:30pm. Gallup will speak on ***“The Mood in America: Is There Cause for Being Hopeful?”***

We Need Volunteers—There will be a time of refreshments after the lectures in the Cook Hall basement. We need people to bake cookies and bar cookies and we will need one or two people willing to act as host/hostess for the evening. The host/hostess will make the coffee, put out the refreshments, and clean up. The other dates for the Lectures would be April 7, May 5 and May 26.

“Feed My Sheep”

“Feed My Sheep” is the theme of this year’s Lenten mission of One Great Hour of Sharing, the national fund-raising effort for Reformed Church World Service. We kicked off this campaign with a pancake supper on Fat Tuesday. In spite of the inclement weather we netted \$100 for OGHS. Thanks to all those who cooked, ate and cleaned!

We are urged by Jesus to provide food, clothing, shelter, clean water and spiritual comfort and healing to our brothers and sisters. We do what we can to serve locally; but through this campaign, we provide as much as we can to fund those who are able to serve globally. Coin boxes, envelopes and guides for sacrificial daily giving have been sent home. The guides provide good topics for dinner table discussion! If you did not receive them or would like additional materials, they will be available in the back of the Sanctuary and at coffee hour throughout Lent. There are fun activity sheets for children and the child in you!

If you would like to learn about the work of Reformed Church World Service, check out their website www.rcws.rca.org.

Coin boxes and envelopes with cash or checks (made payable to BRC, noting O.G.H.S. on memo line) will be collected and offered up in gratitude during worship on Easter Sunday.



Blawenburg Village School

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News from BVS:

The students in the Berry Patch class are working hard to get to the 100th day of school. Unfortunately the weather isn't cooperating. So, if you are busy praying for snow, please stop, we need to have some good weather so we can be 100 days smarter very soon! Hopefully this wonderful event will take place in the next few days as our students are looking forward to sharing some songs, crafts, and snacks with their families.

On March 10th the children's librarian from Mary Jacobs Library will visit BVS. She will be sharing her love of literature with all of our students.

We will hold our annual Scholastic Book Fair during the week of March 15th in the basement of Cook Hall. We will be selling a variety of children's books at very reasonable prices. There will be books appropriate to use for Easter gifts/baskets so please stop by and browse.

BVS has a new website, so please take a minute to explore all the happenings at the school. You can find us at Blawenburgvillageschool.com.

New for the 2010-2011 school year is a kindergarten enrichment class. Kindergarten students will spend the morning at BVS engaged in a variety of educational activities, have lunch and then take the Montgomery Township school bus to Orchard Hill School for an afternoon kindergarten class. Please help us spread the word!

Croatia Update—Fellow American missionary keeps us going

By Rev. Eric Titus

He has been our wheels, our voice, our cultural reference. Without him, we would have jumped in the deep end of missionary life in Croatia without a wall to swim over to and get our bearings, not to mention our breath. His name is Paul Dragowski, a fellow Michigander (from Kalamazoo to my Lansing), and a good friend who keeps us going.

Paul has been one of the answers to prayers in our work here in Osijek. In addition to being a missionary himself, he is a member of the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia and so is a direct partner with us as he reaches out to the youth of our city.

With a wealth of experience across Croatia and near-native command of the language, Paul helps us negotiate the many and assorted challenges that arise when living in another culture.

He began this ministry to us even before we arrived, helping us with visa documents, an official translator who charged reasonable rates, and insights into what we could expect. Early on, he helped us buy cell phones and took my wife shopping every week for nearly two years before we got a car. He also has driven us – quite happily I might add – to the airport numerous times. This is especially kind since Budapest is a four-hour trip each way. He drove us everywhere and translated for us as we shopped for a car and then walked with me through the two-day process of registering it the first time and the two-day processing of renewing it the next year.

Paul dropped everything to go with me to buy a refrigerator when ours died last summer and again in January when we bought a washing machine, which he installed for us. He has been my translator for sermons and has driven me to Prague when I needed to go for my doctoral work.

Paul came to Croatia in 1988 and worked in Rijeka, on the coast. He moved to war-torn Vukovar at the border with Serbia when it was still basically a city of rubble. He moved to Osijek to help the Reformed Church reach out to youth, and he lives in the Osijek church property where he conducts a drop-in ministry that sees dozens of youth per week.

His is a ministry of relationship, built one at a time with more than 200 young people in Osijek. It is no exaggeration to say that whenever we go anywhere in Osijek with Paul, someone will stop him just to chat.

One reason he is so successful is his Croatian ability. Natives are surprised to learn he is an American who didn't start learning the language until his mid-thirties. He goes wherever the youth are, and his Croatian allows him to interact naturally as he strikes up conversations that invariably lead to questions of faith.

Another reason is his interest in the things that interest youth, which in turn he uses as tools of ministry, such as: weight-lifting, backpacking, swimming, and skateboarding, a new hobby he took up while we were in the States. With these, he builds friendships that naturally provide opportunities for ministry.

His heart of gold extends to the larger missionary community as well. Recently an American Pentecostal missionary who runs a different youth ministry in Osijek had problems with his car. He went to a repair shop and got an estimate for 18,000 kuna, about \$3,600. Paul called his mechanic and found a garage in another town. The cost to our friend was 2,400 kuna, about \$480. Without Paul's intervention, this missionary could not have found a way around this obvious price-gouging of an American!

Paul does all this freely and joyfully and never begrudgingly. He lives out the passage that tells us never to be weary in well-doing. That in a nutshell is Paul's ministry to us and others, Americans or Croatians. When you pray for us, please add Paul to your prayers, as he is a vital part of our ministry.

Eric and Nancy Titus are RCA missionaries in Osijek, Croatia, where they work at the Evangelical Theological Seminary and with the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia. They have three children: Samuel, 15, Valerie, 12, and Penny, 10.
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Part 4

Hansen closed his eyes, took a deep breath and whispered a prayer. Before starting to read he tried to visualize the writer - a little girl with pig tails in a lacy pink dress playing with a rag doll in a sylvan setting long since vanished.

Almost immediately the entries in this crumbling bound journal troubled him. He knew the important material would be found at the end, but he felt compelled to acquaint himself with the young woman's history. Unfortunately, Gladys Timms, whose maiden name he could not discern, proved to be an enigma.

In a very neat, practiced style the youthful Gladys recorded nothing that one might expect a girl to hold dear, no reference to parents, siblings, friends, pets, beloved toys, memorable trips - nothing. Instead, he read a threadbare description of her home in a northern county on a quiet street with a large oak tree on the front lawn, how a bad storm tore limbs off the tree, but it survived. Gladys enjoyed her walks to school past a brook that frequently overflowed its banks. She loved history, but hated math . . .

Hansen closed the journal for a moment and frowned. He decided to skip over the early pages and focus on her later life. To his surprise he found seven blank sheets between her last entry as a young girl and the beginning of her married life with the Right Reverend Wolfgang Timms. Why? he wondered.

Again, the journal contained no description of her wedding day or any reference to early marital bliss. It began with trouble and quickly descended through grief and ultimately into despair.

These have been the four loneliest years of my life, she wrote in the same self-consciously neat style, complete with misspellings - every paragraph on a different page and day. This man I thout would be my frend and menter has proved to be my werst enemy. From the first he seemed to hate me. He never smiles and treetis me with such meeness!

Now I am not only hart sick, but my body seems to have fallen victum to contajin. Lately, I have felt so weak I can barely rise from my bed. Thank the Lord for Constance, whose trustwerthy ministratons have kept me from falling sicker in both thout and form. Is that pity I see in her eyes? She tries so hard to lift my spirits, but it seems she has resined herself to failer before she utters a word. What does she know that she is not telling me?

The whisperings that drift from below add to my werry. Am I neering the end of my erthly life? But the tone of their words bespeaks stelh, not sorrow - and the woman's voice is not Connie's.

Lately, the Reverend ("the Reverend"!?) has attempted to comfert me. He insists on bringing me soup of his own creaton. I feel it is so disrespectfull to write

that inventing recipees is not his nateral talent. How bitter is the concokshin! He has now taken as his duty to raze the windows and swing wide the shudders at nite as a gester of his love, he says. The fresh air will sweep away the vapers, he says. How cold my room becomes at nite!

A few days ago a north wind filled the room, pushing its chill under my bedding and taking hold of my hart. I sens a presents in the air that waches me expektintly. I sens it smiling - or sneering. I reech out to it and sometimes it rushes to my embrace. Sometimes it backs away.

The laffter from below ways upon me as hevily now as my strange illness. Does no one see this is wrong? Will no one speek to the Reverend? Your loyal wife is dying in your very house, in the room rite above you! And you find space in your hart to laff - with a stranger - or is it a stranger?

As my body weekens my senses sharpen. I can here better then they know. I think it is the Widow Hortense Montcrief I here, the one who joined our church after her husband's sudden death- young, suple, tempting - a danger to all womenfoke, but now most esp-eshully to me.

That presence has become my frend, my companon. It comfertis me in hushed tones - understanding - enceraging rather than condemming my anger. My limms are too week to move, but my hart still pownds with rage. It feeds my soul, soothing me when I am most awash in fury and hatred. It asks to become part of me, to take hold of my very being. It fills me with misgiving, but I need a frend! Connie is alowed entry so rarely now and she always seems on the verge of tears. Surely, she knows something and is not telling me. Finally, we share our suspishins - and they are the same! What can she do? a faithful farmers wife whos frends are all in our church, who even if they beleaved would be too afraid to confront the Reverend.

This is monstrus! and my secret companyun agrees. Last nite I reched onto my bedcloths and saw blood. The end is near.

My companyun seems to drink of my despare, ganing strenkth from it. What is this thing I have taken into my sole? It thretens to imprison me after my body fails!

That was the last entry. Hansen sat back and stared for long minutes at the file cabinets, certain of his conclusion and embittered by it.

The diary was a fake.

"Are you sure?" Janet pressed, resigned now to the fact that her reading time was over for the evening.

"Completely, thoroughly, one hundred percent." Hansen slipped into bed beside her, leaned back against the headboard and crossed his legs.

Janet waited.

"The evidence is inarguable," he continued. "First, the name on the cover - Gladys Timms. I examined that cover with a magnifying glass and that is the only name ever written there. No earlier name had been erased and replaced with Timms. I doubt she was married at the age of five, or whenever the diary began."

"Maybe her maiden name was Timms," Janet offered, not really believing it.

"I thought of that. It's possible but a real long shot. Besides there's plenty more. Then there's the handwriting. It is exactly the same her entire life, as a child and as an adult. Have you ever dug out an old paper from grammar school and been struck by how much your handwriting has changed over the years?"

"Yup," Janet answered, sharing his disappointment over what was now an obvious conclusion.

"So that diary, which we are supposed to believe covered decades, was really written in a matter of months. Then there are the blank pages. Who leaves seven blank pages in the middle of a diary? One page might make sense if a lot of time has passed, but seven? Something's strange there - and then finally there's the fact that she's so sick she can barely move her limbs, but she's able to write in a clear, neat style."

Janet sighed. "I think you're right, Terry, and I'm sorry. I know you were hoping for answers, but it looks like you wasted your time."

"I still have these nagging thoughts, though, that it's not over in spite of the bogus diary." He rose from the bed and walked to the window that looked over the old parsonage. "I checked the church records while I was at the seminary and discovered that Constance Sharp died a little over a month after she submitted the diary to the archives. Why would a woman, who might have known she was dying, make a difficult thirty mile trip to drop off a fake document?"

"Right!" Janet leaned forward, fully engaged now. "I forgot. They didn't travel by car in 1850. That was a long trip. She had to be determined to see that diary preserved!"

"Either she took the barge up the canal, a stage coach, or rode horse back - harsh, even dangerous traveling conditions for a mortally sick woman." Hansen started to pace back and forth across the room.

"Maybe she didn't know the diary was a fake," Janet offered

"Maybe, but she had to know what it contained for her to be so committed to its preservation."

"Then there are the blank pages," Janet added breathlessly, "and the same handwriting!"

It was starting to come together. They were getting close.

Finally, they said it together. "SHE WROTE IT HERSELF!"

"Gladys might have been too weak to write, but she wasn't too weak to whisper," Hansen continued eagerly.

"Plus Constance must have had some inkling of what was going on. Otherwise Gladys' testimony would have seemed like the ramblings of a failing mind." Janet's voice rose with excitement.

Hansen plopped down on the foot of the bed, almost bouncing off onto the floor. "She can't tell anybody, because '*THE REVEREND*' has too much clout. She could be ostracized from the community for suggesting such things."

"So she tries to create compelling evidence, but she really doesn't have the skill to pull it off. She knows nothing of Gladys' life, so she has to invent one."

"She records the critical part of the story toward the end of the book, while her memory of it is still clear and then tries to fill in earlier detail to make it seem authentic."

"But she lacks the imagination - and maybe the time, if she's dying."

Once again, they said it together, "She falls seven pages short."

Hansen bowed his head. "So that rotten old so and so poisoned his wife."

"And if I'm not mistaken about the lore of our church," Janet continued, "didn't his marriage less than a year later raise some eyebrows?"

"Right! And I suspect when we check the church records we'll find that the new Mrs. Timms was one Hortense Montcrief."

Janet's tone dropped to a virtual whisper. "Do you think that's why Gladys won't let go? Why she chooses to haunt the old parsonage rather than vacating for the kingdom of God?"

"If that's true, it renders suspect some basic biblical theology."

They fell silent.

"The only thing that works," Hansen began haltingly, "the only possible explanation that's not covered by scripture is that her *companion* has truly imprisoned her like her diary said. Constance got that part of the story right. Her *companion*, being a demon, possessed her soul."

"Which means she wasn't a believer," Janet said sadly. "But with a husband like that who could blame her?"

Still troubled, Hansen ran both hands through his hair. "But that feeling I had in Chucky's room confuses everything. It felt like the stronger dark power, the malevolent personality was trying to cast off the weaker despairing one, but it wouldn't let go, like Gladys' companion was trying to push her away, but she was having none of it. Why?"

"Maybe there's some truth to movies and TV."

Maybe she's staying because of unresolved matters. She wants to have her story told and won't leave until it is."

"Why would somebody put off heaven after a hundred and sixty years for something so comparatively trivial? When all is said and done Wolfgang Timms got his just desserts on the day he died, so vengeance was achieved. She must know that. There must be something else."

After a minute of silence, Janet finally said, "Let's go to sleep," and turned off the light.

Hansen lay awake for almost an hour, running various scenarios through his mind, but finding none satisfactory. Shortly after midnight sleep claimed him.

At three fifteen he bolted upright, his heart pounding with excitement-dread-horror-revelation. He reached over and with both arms shook his wife clumsily. "Janet! Wake up! It's about Gladys! Wake up!"

Janet sprang awake, her eyes wide with terror. "What is it, Terry! For God's sake!"

"It's about Gladys, Janet! I know! I finally understand why she won't leave!"

She could barely discern his face in the darkened room, but saw enough to shudder at his expression of awe.

"She's trying to protect the boy!" he gasped.

Watch for the Conclusion of "The Ghost Next Door" in two weeks.

"Serve the Lord with Gladness"
Psalm 100:2

April 9, 2010

The Imperia

1714 Easton Avenue, Somerset

This year the Synod Lay Recognition Dinner will recognize Tom & Bea Skillman and Jean & Harold Skillman as our honorees. To make reservations, contact Nancy in the church office. There is a reception at 6:00 PM and dinner at 7:00 PM – the cost of the event is \$45 per person.

The Blawenburg Beacon

P.O. Box 266

Blawenburg NJ 08504

Dated Material

The Blawenburg Reformed Church is a covenant community of God's people united in Christ through the Holy Spirit. We commit our gifts to worship, hospitality, life-long learning, serving those in need, and proclaiming the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.