Father Dunne's School for Wayward Boys #5

by Kyle Hemmings

It's been many years since I left Father Dunne's School, and now, I'm in prison for helping a devil escape. The big wigs call it aiding and abetting. I became an left-handed accountant with a tendency to fudge numbers for the damned. I still suffer from night sweats time to time and the bunk beds here remind me of those back at the school. Some things only change in small degrees.

I was placed at Father Dunne's School because my guilt turned me green and ready with confessions. Stolen dollars, a molesting feel up an absent-minded girl, a double cheat sheet for the pre-algebra mid-term, all transformed into the snakes I shed everywhere. It was so easy for them to stand me up in the corner. A ruddy-faced teacher with a trembling hand said I was too shy to be bad. I thought I was too thin to be caught.

The school was located in a circle of Kansas that was near nowhere. At night, I dreamt my own devils. They mocked me with their mischievous grins, their insincere consolations at my being inept. They said the world was a giant caper pulled off by God while He sleepwalked. I recalled the white lies told by my mother that I would only be here for a year. She never used the word "rehabilitation." She downed men like a river, all with their false histories and surface reflections.

At night, I felt emptier and lighter, as if I could turn into what I was not: a devil who was both above and below right and wrong. Above my bunk bed, my roommate, a kid taken in for starting small fires in a Wichita porn shop, snored like my mom after an orgy of booze and men with big hands. I counted the spaces between his snores. I

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wanted to leak through everything. To seep unnoticed, become unreal, to steal other souls. I would return to the world and score. I would someday marry a nice girl with dreamy curves.

It was from the roommate that I first learned about the tunnels. The other boys mentioned them while in line for cafeteria slop, or discussing which priests had lost their virginity in an empty parking lot. They never discussed the tunnels at length, conjectured that there might be dead bodies there, the homeless who had lost their way or had given up on light, boys, who in trying to escape, became devils addicted to the smell of piss and dead rodents.

I wanted to explore.

While the priests slept inside the vault of their private rooms, wearing blindfolds to whatever tempestuous visions, I slipped down into the basement under the dorm. There were several mouths veering off of the main walkway. The mouths, I imagined, twisted and became smaller and smaller. The tongue inside my mouth felt dry.

I crept inside one. It was so dark I became blind. The spaces grew tighter and I wondered what would I do if confronted by a small rabid creature. I would tell it that I too am a devil.

I returned night after night, bringing a pen light. For once, I was not caught at being somewhere I shouldn't have been. There was a presence weighing upon me, perhaps the tunnel itself. I tried to make myself small as a bat. A bad bat spirit.

I made several high-pitched noises with my mouth. I listened to the echoes. I heard a distant voice. The voice said "Feed me." I became scared and I crept back in reverse. In the dorm room, I inspected my knees and arms for bruises, my face for splotches of mud. I washed myself clean and I was quiet about it. My roommate still snored.

Sometimes, he stopped breathing.

I decided to feed the echo in the tunnel. From the closet, I took an old electric toy truck, a miniature flatbed, and placed bits of crackers and cheese on it. As a child, I always considered it my lucky red truck, although I was never lucky.

Back in the tunnel, I winded the truck and released it. I waited. The truck returned with a crumpled note, same color as my notebook paper--yellow. Back in the dorm, I opened it. It was scrawled with the same light charcoal I used for drawing classes. It said: SAVE ME!

I went back into the tunnel again and again. I made noises and I brought my truck with food and the pen light. The voice grew closer and I wanted to see the face it belonged to.

I crawled further and further, fitting my body into all kinds of contortions. It was getting harder to breathe.

The voice said again: SAVE ME.

It must have been only several breaths away. I turned on the pen light.

A hand came towards me. It was a small delicate hand like my own. So white. Maybe it was mine.

I freaked and slithered and slid back out the tunnel.

On the main floor of the dorm, a flashlight shone at my eyes.

"Stop," he said.

It was Father R. He was the most lenient and most tolerant of the

teaching staff.

"What are you doing,? he said. "Do you know what time it is?"

I stammered.

"I was feeling claustrophobic in that room, Father, I needed some fresh air."

He moved closer, inspected my face. He must have noticed the black marks from the tunnel floor.

Perhaps he too once explored those very tunnels.

"Get upstairs, " he said softly.

Night after night, I thought about those tunnels under our bunk beds, the voice I had heard, the face I never saw.

One night, I heard a sound under my bed. I leaned over and saw a hand coming up the floor. It was reaching for me.

Or maybe, I didn't see anything. Maybe I was just blind. Maybe I was just blind and deaf and I had to invent my own devils.

Maybe, I wanted to feed them.