

Journal of Puritan Minister, Jon Sorrin: Fragment 1

by Wesley Baines

We arrived in October of 1630. Autumn swept in from the land, through brittle leaves, picking up their dying whispers, and carrying them across the deck of the Talbot as we lowered the boats to row to shore. It was cold, and the clouds gathered.

I stepped into one of the boats. Faith, Abraham, and Joshua joined me, and we took up the oars. In silence, we glided over the rippling waters toward the New World. I lifted my head, tasting the wind as it picked up. It was crisp and lovely, and I drank it down like cold water. My eyes roamed the shore lazily, lingering for but a moment upon the people gathered there. My gaze left them, scanning the edge of the dark forest behind them.

I stopped breathing when I saw it.

There was a face between two trees. It stood out like a lamp to my eyes, yet darkened the ground before it. Still, I have trouble describing it. It was there, and yet it was not. Solid, yet made of darkness. Beautiful and hideous and impossible in its shape and arrangement. Utterly dead.

It was the first time I had ever seen a possession.

I wished desperately that I could close the sight that the angel had opened, that I could put the scales back in my eyes. When my gaze touched that darkened face, it knew me. It knew me.

The common man thinks of possession as a malady of shrieking and cursing and bile, but the reality is far worse. These things that were once angels, stripped of their forms by God Almighty, are infinitely more capable than that. Yes, some of them, driven utterly mad by hellfire, tear men's minds and bodies apart from the inside. These, when they can be captured, are locked away in a cell for the rest of their short life. The harm they do is limited to what they can

seize and break with their hands. These cases are obvious, and the work of the priest can exorcise the creature.

But then there are the others. They are slow in the taking, subtle and kind in their caress. Their minds are unfathomable, nearly as far from ours as God's. They linger upon the skin, sinking into flesh and bone over the years. The worst of them never take full control. No, for that would alert the soul upon which they reside. Instead, they pull upon emotion and desire, the puppet strings of the human heart. You think that your choices are yours. They are no longer.

In the end, they take from you God's greatest gift—free will. Your hands, and worse, oh so much worse, your tongue are theirs. Through you, more will be taken and indwelt, and through you, the name of God shall be blasphemed. It takes a great opening of the spirit to let such a one in—the higher in the angelic hierarchy, the greater the opening need be. In the worst of these, death is the only answer that we know. I have never known such a thing to be exorcised.

But there, in the colony, we had the chance to keep the people pure from the beginning, to build a world untouched by the hands in the dark. The angel had touched all seven of us. Our eyes were opened to the invisible world, and our gifts could part spirit and flesh as no priest ever could. We could kill them. They would flee us as they once did from God in heaven when He turned His wrath upon them.

But as I looked upon that face in the wood, I shook, and the world seemed a darkened place. The thing disappeared as we reached the shore, but my eyes could not leave that dark place between the two trees. The wind blew, and a sudden, warm stench came with it. It passed in but a heartbeat, and all was autumn rustle.

I stepped from the boat onto the rocky shore of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

