

THE DIVINE AFFLICTION

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Black Rose Writing | Texas

*Vocatus atque non
Vocatus Deus aderit
-An Ancient Spartan Proverb*

A SPEECH TO PARLIAMENT 1995

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), commonly known as *Mad-Cow Disease*, is an infectious and incurable disease that destroys the brain and nervous system of cattle. The destructive agent is neither bacteria nor a virus, and it breaks all the rules of biology, as we understand them.

The first confirmed case of BSE occurred in Hampshire, early 1985. By now, we have identified it in 150,000 cattle and more than half of all British herds. The disease has been epidemic in British cattle for ten years. It is now time that all herds must be destroyed. This shall wreak havoc on the cattle industry of our Great Britain.

Spongiform encephalopathies are not unique to cattle. We find forms of the disease in other species, including humans, where it goes by the name Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease.

The incubation period can be more than twenty-five years, which means that, once infected, the disease remains dormant and undetected during that time. The ailment bores holes into the brain and nervous system. When established, it causes dementia and death.

Prior to the terminal phase of the disease, behaviors tend to be erratic and unpredictable. The symptoms can be mistaken for other common mental illnesses such as psychosis, schizophrenia and Alzheimer's disease. However, on autopsy, the brains of Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease victims are sponge-like and full of tiny holes, thus the name spongiform.

There is no treatment.

The auditorium remained unnervingly silent.

CHAPTER 1

SUMMER 2016

A cold granite tombstone offered relief against Eve's bare skin. Stagnant heat of late summer's night produced an abundance of sweat that drenched her bare body. Jason pulled her hips tight to his and she panted with every thrust. Her nails broke flesh on his back, and he groaned with pleasure. It seemed that nothing could stop their connection, nothing until the grinding sound of a diesel engine stole their fleeting visit to paradise.

"What's wrong now?" he asked, oblivious to the source of her distraction.

"You don't hear that? The lights..." she stopped mid-sentence pulling away to gather her clothing.

The sound of gravel rustling under heavy load announced an unmarked tanker passing through the south gate of the still cemetery. Headlights bounced off grave markers, offering momentary animation to otherwise stationary structures. After several turns, the tanker stopped. Lights and engine went silent against the voice of a thousand night crawlers.

From fifty yards away, the couple observed the driver, cloaked in steamy shadow, tending delivery through a hose fitted into the ground.

"Let's leave," Eve begged.

"Hold it. This is kind a weird. Just hold on."

After fifteen minutes, an eternity for the impatience of youth, the tanker left the site.

"What was that all about?" she said, as she hurried to finish

buttoning her blouse.

“Don’t know, but I’d want to get a closer look.”

“For what?”

“Follow me. There’s no one around.”

As they moved toward the delivery site with caution, Eve tripped on a grave marker buried at ground level. Jason caught her before she fell to the turf.

“This is creepy. Let’s go,” she pleaded.

“Quiet. We’re almost there.”

Though they used caution in approaching the delivery pad, no one saw Eve and Jason again. No one knew this young couple rendezvoused at the cemetery. The search revolved around all of their usual haunts. After an intensive investigation, authorities concluded that runaway status might better explain their mysterious disappearance.