

**Hello.**

**I am Edward. To begin, I would like to clear a few things up.**

**First and foremost, I am not a violent person. No matter how much you want to read about someone who blows up cars and buildings, for the sole purpose of making an interesting premise for a book. I will not conform to your tastes.**

**I also do not plan and execute intricate revolutions or heists, just to keep you entertained. You are not the reason I tell this story; you are, in fact, very low on my list of priorities. I am not a terrorist; I am not the leader of a revolt; I am Edward, Curator of the Decrepit Pit, and I don't like you.**

**I sit here, in the midst of a hellish array of mutilated bathroom amenities, in one of the most terrifying and disturbing bathrooms God has ever born witness to. The urinals are no more than wet piles of broken porcelain lying on the floor, doubtlessly the work of the "Urinibomber," as he is called. Doors hang loosely from their hinges; bits of ceiling tiles carpet the floor, along with walls coated with abundant graffiti.**

**This bathroom is basically the reason I don't like you: the very thought that you have never experienced such hopeless disgust is enough to instill hatred in even the most sedate of hearts.**

**The second reason relies on my conviction that my life is infinitely more pathetic and hopeless than yours, no matter your walk, purpose, living conditions or otherwise. Still not convinced? Let us take a tour of my life, at least up until this point, after which I will allow you to make up your own mind.**

**Welcome to the 80s. Hair was big, skirts were small, and politicians were of at least minimalist decency. This is also when I was born.**

**This was a big turning point in my life; up until now I was warm, safe, and happy. I was forced to take a big step towards independence: I now both ate and breathed. I was instilled with basic human values: in essence, food is good, drugs are bad, air is nice. I was also now cold, in**

direct danger of being harmed by the slightly inebriated doctors of this cheap hospital, and utterly, utterly unhappy. Can't you tell? I seem to be crying rather loud now, which, you would think, would be a less-than-subtle sign that the best move at this point would be to shove me right back in there. But, alas, they did not.

However, all of this is rather trivial to my story, so we shall skip several years, to when my life took its spectacular nosedive.

Flash to the year 2000, with a bus holding only one remaining kid, of around 15, pulling up to an average house. The kid gets off, with a large, plaid suitcase. If you have little skill in the art of inference, I should probably inform you that this kid is me.

I pull out the handle, and roll the bulging suitcase up my average driveway to my average, well kemp house. Interpret this scene how you will; the only importance of it is that you realize that it is abnormally normal, to an unusual degree.

I open my door, and wander inside. My parents are momentarily distracted from their various means of occupation: the newspaper for my dad, television for my mom. They look up at me, in near unison, and smile. It is a Sunday, and I have just arrived home from a brief expedition to my aunt's house.

They get up to hug me, and fake parental happiness oozes from their plastic faces. They're hiding something.

They lead me into the living room, and sit me down on the couch. My mom speaks first.

"Honey," she begins. It is obvious that the news is horrific. "I have good news and bad news. The good news," she continues, "is that they finished the new high school."

That is definitely good news. The old high school, the one which I was previously destined to attend, was a grand and spectacular pit. The place would have been better off as a prison, and the food could have been

a cheap arsenic substitute. "The bad news," she says, "is that you won't be going there."

There it is. The news which she had tried to soften was laid bare before me like a rotting corpse by the means of necessity. I should have anticipated this; my dad's job was constantly launching us afar. When I was 5, I was only vaguely aware that there was any more to the world than our house and kindergarten. But my world was shattered like a glass vase around me, and I was thrust into the first move of my life. We lived at my next house for 3 years, the next for 3, then 2, and finally, we ended up here, for only 1. I knew it was only a matter of time before we left yet again.

The horror is apparently obvious on my face, because the dam holding back the flow of faux emotion has burst open. "I'm sorry," she gushes, "I know this is hard for you."

No, mom, it was hard for me the first, and maybe even the second. But I've hardened. I've learned to not get attached to friends, because it makes moving all the more painful. I've gotten used to the unrest. We trade monotony for loss of security, and I accept that. Not. But I say nothing.

Flash to someplace new. Imagine the nicest, cleanest, and most desirable little city you can. Now tear it apart, burn it to ashes, and mix with glue. Pour over a mold garden. Bake at 375 degrees for 40 to 45 min. Allow to cool. Welcome to Hamusborn, New Jersey.

Hamusborn had seen better days. It was positively affected, if not created entirely due to, the New Jersey hat manufacture boom of the 60s. Once people came to their senses and realized that New Jersey hats were neither better nor worth more than their competitors, the town fell on hard times. Permanently.

Half of the buildings were boarded up. Vacant lots infested with weeds and rats lurked on every block. Gangs and muggers occupied every alley. This place is a dump, save for the schools.

The schools are monuments of education; temples paying homage to well planned educational funding. At least, the elementary and middle schools are, along with every single high school, except one. This is early September. Would you like to guess which high school Edward is going to, come Labor Day?

Flash to the high school. It is, if anything, worse than the town itself. I am in the cafeteria, cautiously poking at my lunch with my fork. It looked like a dead mouse had been placed in a blender with a piece of rotten driftwood. The resulting dish had then been slathered in a sauce made of old tires and the puke of the last kid who ate this particular lunch.

I am somewhat aware that someone is standing near the table. "Are you going to eat that?" the person asks. That annoys me. You come to this beaten down, torn up cafeteria, buy your food, and sit down. Immediately, someone's there, asking you for your disgusting crap, even though they should have their own disgusting crap.

I slide the tray across the table, not so much out of generosity, as much in hope that the food would attack and kill him. It doesn't.

"Ahem," he clears his throat. What now? I already gave you my deep fried cyanide with raw blowfish marinade. What more do you want from me? I charge up my best glare, and jerked my head up.

The boy in question has two ears, two eyes, one nose, two legs, pants, and a shirt. Period. Once, again, if you are without the skills of inference required to understand the underlying meaning of that sentence, I will tell you strait: he has neither arms, nor hair.

Though I did not know it at the time, the boy had been trapped in snow when his car crashed and his mother died. The resulting frostbite presented cause to amputate his arms when he was eventually found. His father then took him on a tropical vacation, to take his mind off the horrific memories... during which he was sunburned so severely that he got skin cancer. He was then put on chemo. He also developed a brain tumor, but that was just because he is unlucky.

I confess that I had been prepared to tear off his arms and beat him to death with them, but, seeing as that was not possible, I, instead, stare like a moron. The boy begins to look uneasy, and, slowly, I become aware that he had seemed to need something just recently, and he was waiting. He then gets sick of waiting.

He leans across the table, and picks up the fork between his teeth, and drops it near the tray. He then brings up his leg, picks up the fork and begins eating. This is, I must admit, quite entertaining. However, this is not an opinion I share.

When he eventually finishes, he sits down and looks at his feet. I take a look at his face; he looks miserable. He has sad, drooping eyes, and eyebrows that scream "Please, kill me." We are sitting in silence, when, suddenly, a body flies from no obvious source, landing on our table. It is followed by a second, slightly more active body, which starts beating mercilessly on the original figure with what looks like a pickle. The one doing the beating has veins visible in his forehead, in a stereotypical I'm-on-steroids fashion. With one final blow, he shoves the pickle into the mouth of the now unconscious lump of flesh. He screams, "Do you still want this pickle, huh? I bet you won't be stealing my pickle again, will ya?" before stalking off to parts unknown.

The boy opens his eyes. He tries to move and fails miserably. He turns to the amputee, and says, "Derek, could you give me- a- oh..." he trails off. Then Derek, as he is apparently called, turns and looks at me. The boy also turns. I realize what is expected of me, and accept the responsibility. I drag the boy across the table, and drop him into a chair. He straitens up lazily, before slumping down a few moments later. "Um," I say, trying to form some sort of intelligent response to the preceding event, as if a defense mechanism to restore normality. "Who are you?" I direct this at the newcomer; however, the answer would have been equally appreciated from either. The new boy looks the other direction from the pickle warrior, who has come behind us and sat at a nearby table (seemingly unaware that

he had recently attempted to murder someone with a vegetable), and mumbles something that sounds like "inulph." Derek says, for the first time in our brief time together, "Just call him 'Warren.'"

His real name, I later found out, was Adolf. He had issues with chronic depression, and the ridicule in response to his unfortunate method of identification drove him deep into his own world. Just so you know, "His Own World" is not the sort of place you would buy a timeshare.

By the time lunch is over, I fall back into the basic pattern of school. At least I know people, but our little group can't be considered normal by any standards. I suppose you don't really have a very good idea of what I look like.

Envision a long, black trench coat/robe sort of thing, wrapped around a tall, skinny frame. Add knee-high black leather boots, with polished steel toes, and liberally administer gel to black hair. Add big eyes, average Caucasian skin, and you get me.

I haven't always been a Goth. I was a sweet, well dressed third grader. Forth grade brought the discovery of spiked hair, and fifth brought a developing taste for black. But as middle school progressed, I began to lose confidence in my parents, move after move. The summer of seventh grade bore host to my full transition into Gothhood, when I found a store that sold the most interesting clothes I had ever seen, which I promptly bought. Then fingernails and hair changed color, along with my attitude toward life. The latter did not deteriorate; just became more accurate.

Derek is somewhat stranger to look at, with his bald head and lack of arms. It seems he has also cut the sleeves off and sewed the holes closed, giving him the appearance of someone victimized by a serial killer, who was caught midway through the mutilation. He still looks depressed, unlike Warren, who seems to be high at the moment. Or it could just be a concussion, which wouldn't surprise me.

We split in opposite directions, Warren stumbling off to science, Derek going to some unknown class (he seems to be social, in a Howard Hughes kind of way), and me standing looking over my schedule. Apparently, my next period is algebra. Hopefully it goes better than the morning.

The day had started off with homeroom. For some reason, that first period seemed mostly about cooking. The teacher brought out a little camping stove and a pot, and made a strange dish for us. He served it to each of us in painfully small portions, as a “treat.” “Congratulations: you showed up. Here’s your reward!” It comforts me that they have such high expectations, and I wondered, “What sort of people did they expect to come to this place?”

This trend continued into second period, with no work required. It was supposed to be a physics class, but the teacher was memorizing our names for the first half of the period. The class ended with a homework project we had to do, which would demonstrate what we weren’t taught.

I began to believe that I had been teleported into a world of very tall second graders when I was introduced to my world studies teacher. She seemed to be some sort of psychotic hippie eco-terrorist. Her hair reached her heels, and she started off by giving us a speech about cultural acceptance, and how we were all the same. Fortunately, lady, I am not the same as you. I happen to know that the world is not a happy, accepting place. In fact, it is more of the sort of place where crazy ELF members refuse to accept that you are *not* the accepting type. The hypocrisy is less than subtle.

The class continued with a little game similar to that one you played in first grade where you say your name and something about yourself. In fact, it was exactly like that game.

Lunch, as you know, was not much of a release.

I walk into algebra. The others sit in their chairs and stare at me, in fear it seems. I stare back. "You're late!"

I jump. I turn towards the voice. What I see disturbs me.

There before me stands the shortest, oldest, palest little old lady on earth. But that's not what disturbs me. The most horrific part is the shrill, sharp, nasty voice that came out of this unassuming little troll.

"Sorry," I say. "I got lost. This is my first day."

"No," the sick little witch utters. "Really? You must be the only one, since everyone else seemed to find their way fine."

Shut up, you stupid midget. This school is a disgusting labyrinth. Every hallway looks exactly the same. It certainly doesn't help that I had to spend 5 minutes cleaning the toilet seat, because someone can't learn to pee.

I sit down. The psycho dwarf writes EDWARD OLSEN, LUNCH DETENTION and then tomorrow's date on the board. She then commences the lesson.

"Pull out your algebra books and turn to page seventeen," she commands. We do. The page I covered in equation graphing, the same stuff we did the year before. I raise my hand. "Uh, we already did this," I say, semi-helpfully.

She silently walks to the board, and adds the next day's date before assigning three pages of problems. I miss the hippie.

Be the last period, P.E., I have developed a passionate hate for Hamusborn Regional High School. Sixth period did not raise my spirits: I was never a fan of science... or feminist rants.

Derek is in my P.E. class. He walks up to me after I'm out of the locker room. "I think Warren is stealing from me," he says.

"How do you know?" I ask. He shakes himself up and down until a pill bottle falls from his pocket. I pick it up. It's empty. "That held pain pills. They gave them to me when I started chemo. I've never taken one."

Ah. So that would explain his wasted demeanor. “What are you going to do?” I reply. “Well, I never used them anyway. I just won’t refill my prescription. I won’t feel much guilt for his withdrawals.”

I begin the trek home. It is close enough to the school to walk there, and walking delays my arrival, to and from.

I turn onto the street across from the school. It has no sidewalk, and the side of the road is full of garbage and broken glass bottles, so I walk down the middle of the oncoming lane: this way I can see any cars coming my way. What I cannot see, however, are drunken people driving very fast in the wrong lane.

I hear brakes, screeching tires, little tingly noises, and then, nothing.

When I wake up, I hear nothing, then little tingly noises, then beeps. I open my eyes. I see white. Lot’s of white. This scares me: I know I was hit by a car; I also know that I am a card-carrying atheist.

The white materializes into lights, and the beeping materializes into an EKG machine. I’m in a hospital.

Spectacular.

There is no one in my room, but I can see people through the slightly open door. A cart full of instruments sits to my right, connected to me via little suction cups and bands. To my left, a stand holds up a bag of what I can only describe as goo, which has a needle in my skin. A respirator lends a cup, fitted over my mouth and nose, which I remove. I promptly replace it, as my lungs don’t seem to be cooperating.

A nurse hears something moving, and comes into my room. She gasps, and runs back out. A few minutes later, she returns. “Your parents will be here in a few minutes. Do you need anything?”

“Food would be nice,” I reply though my respirator. I try taking it off again. I fail. The nurse leaves.

The food she brings back rivals the HRHS cafeteria unfood, continuing my streak of terrible culinary luck. I actually eat this, however: I am seriously hungry.

My parents walk in, looking less fake than our last documented encounter. They flop down in chairs: apparently they haven't gotten much sleep. Mrs. Olsen (I refuse to refer to her as "mom") speaks first. "You've been in a coma for three days. You were hit by a car," she says.

"I'd noticed," I reply. My parents look at each other. "We have some more bad news," Mr. Olsen starts. Where's my razor blade? "The school suffered some damage."

"What kind of damage?" I inquire wearily. Mr. Olsen blinks.

"It burned down."

The firebombing occurred on the second day of my coma. Nearly everyone in the building, including Derek the Amputee and Wasted Warren/Adolf, perished in the flames. In fact, the arsonist went out of his way to eliminate our inebriated friend: he beat on him with his Molotov Cocktail for a few minutes before lighting it. A survivor claimed to hear him scream about pickles while he was doing it.

Until a few days prior to my attendance, New Jersey High School in Hamusborn was the best school in the state (which may not be saying much), but the entire district had suffered from the massive budget cuts. The school deteriorated quickly, no doubt aided by the mass murder of the entire custodial staff.

Murder and the like had been a big problem lately; teachers were found dead weekly, and kids would disappear, only to return as gibbering and mentally scarred. So, it's my usual educational package.

It's my second first day of school, and I am not particularly excited. It happens to be most people's fourth day, so I'm not too far behind. However,

by now the cliques have formed, alliances made, and rumors spread. I am not looking forward to this.

In first period, I wheel myself into first period. Did I tell you that I'm in a wheelchair? Well, I am. As you know, being rammed by roughly one and a half tons of various metals tends to do damage to your body. I am no exception.

I move my chair out of the way so I can maneuver my wheelchair up to my desk. I maneuver it. There are only about 15 kids in the room: the gibbering and the mentally scarred have their own schools. The teacher waddles in, displaying the low confidence of a substitute. She is about five feet tall, overweight, and vaguely resembles a penguin. She begins a horrifically boring lecture on the history of French bread, in a sickeningly seizure-inducing monotone. I desperately try to find something with which I can entertain myself, lest I return to my coma, whether or not that would have been a release. I find refuge fiddling with a paperclip.

"Edward Olsen," an Antarctic penguin calls from the front of the room. I look up. The penguin stares at me, until I give in and say, "What?" The penguin shakes her head, and makes a mark on a sheet of paper. The algebra teacher's back.

"Melissa Forests?" the penguin continues.

"Here," replies a tall, skinny girl with shockingly brown hair.

Oh.

In second period art, our teacher, who also seems to be a sub, announces that today is a day for "Free Art," which is ironic, because I had always thought of art as the freedom of expression, but the curriculum states otherwise. And we must obey the curriculum.

I sketch out an emperor penguin, when a girl walks up to me. "Hi. Would you mind if I asked you some questions?"

"Questions?" I say. "What sort of questions?" "I write for the school paper. You look like a good human interest story." Ah. I see. I'm from the

newspaper. I can see that you're hurt. Can I use your pain for personal gain?

I detest reporters.

"I guess." Anything for a boredom buster.

She asks me what my story is. She probably meant the story of how I dismembered myself. I told her the entire story.

It's my first second day of school. In first period, we receive the weekly copy of the school newspaper, which happens to contain a front-page article about me and the firebombing of HRHS.

By lunch I have my own cult. The story was a depressing, yet interesting story about the crappiest life ever documented. At least, that's what my cult thinks.

The story brought on a barrage of interest and questions for me. I now have friends, or at least people who think I'm cool. Or, at least, people who say they think I'm cool to impress other people who say they think I'm cool. In essence, a cult.

Those anti-cult advocates, the ones who might get riled up about this sort of thing need to calm down. What I'm describing is no more of a cult than the ones led by the "popular" of any school. Have you met your kids lately?

As the leader of this apparent cult, I am given a title. They call me "Edward, Curator of the Decrepit pit," as someone who seems to thrive in the most decrepit of conditions (thrive? By what stretch of the imagination, may I ask?). I'm enjoying this immensely.

One week after my cult begins, it abruptly ends.

It happens as follows: as a prank, someone tells my cult that their leader wants them to commit mass suicide. 40% of them do. The rest of them think me a freak and a murderer, and refuse to associate themselves

with me, preferring instead to idolize shallow, beautiful people, as they always have.

The people who run the school make a valiant effort to have me expelled from it, before realizing that they had no evidence that said I did it. I managed to stay, though everyone still believes I did it. I am now alone in the school, all but isolated from social contact.

After a few days, I give up on school, and life. I leave second period to go to the bathroom, now thoroughly disgusting after weeks of neglect. I slump down in a corner.

So there it is. My very own oral autobiography.

So, as I sit here, in this pathetic excuse for a bathroom, you can tell that I'm unhappy. I have made at least a reasonable effort to stabilize my life, right?

Anyway, I suppose I should ask you, are you satisfied with my little story? Have I convinced you that my life sucks worse than yours? If not, you are obviously being way too negative and... oh. You should leave now.