Sarah Flamminio

Stay

Voicemail of Corporal Hannah McNally

8 April 2010 0934

Hannah? It's your Memaw in Saw-whet. You're gonna get a Red Cross message probably today or tomorrow, the social worker helped me send it. Your Pawpaw's gone to his Judgement sometime last night. Tina Donnelly's girl works at the VA hospital in Nashville and she called to tell me before I got the official call.

The notification was the hospital chaplain, which was decent of him, I suppose, but it put the wind up the Wilsons, seeing a strange car on our road. Paul and Amy came over after to make sure I was all right and I told them I was but I didn't know how I was going to get Billy back for the funeral yet. You know he always wanted to be buried on the property, with his Ma and Pa and the little 'uns, in that back corner.

Paul Wilson said he was going to Nashville soon anyway and he could bring Billy back as long as we sorted the papers first. That weren't easy but the social worker—she ain't more than a little thing but she has ideas—helped me with them forms too. Said it was real sweet to see traditions preserved. Sweet. So now I have to invite her to the funeral too.

And I want you back for the funeral. I know he wasn't your favorite person and you and he never did see eye-to-eye what with you joining the Corps, but he was your Pawpaw, even if he did have a mean streak in him a mile wide. 'Sides, I expect you've missed your cousin Jimmy and that damn dog of yours. I heard you was planning on coming back for Jimmy's high school graduation this spring.

Now don't be mad, but I figure two trips back might be a mite expensive and the social worker told me you can get-

8 April 2010 0937

Damn recorder cut off. What was I saying? Oh, the social worker said you can get a special loan from the Navy Relief Society or something like that. She said you was to ask your chain of command about it and they'll see you right. Now I know, "neither a borrower nor a lender be." That's Biblical. But it seems sense to me to take help if it's offered in the proper way and all. And you're only in Quantico, it's not as though you've got to come all the way back from Iraq. Your Aunt Mary-Ellen said you can stay on their sofa like you used to sleepover when you and Jimmy was little. She'd be glad to see you too, you know. Let me know what you decide is best as soon as you can. The

church funeral is in two days and the burial will be right after. The wake'll be at the VFW hall.

12 April 2010 1226

Hannah, it's Memaw here. It was mighty good of you to come to the funeral. I thought you looked fine in your dress blues. I hoped you might talk to your Aunt Mary-Ellen at the wake. A few weeks ago she found an old photo of her and your Ma, wearing those matching blue sweaters they got for Christmas one year. She said even with the uniform you look more like Lizzy every day, God bless her wherever she is. You didn't stay long at the VFW but I expect that's because it was so crowded and hot. They ought to get the air fixed in there. I wanted to leave too, but you know I couldn't.

I don't mean to trouble you on something small but I figure you always want news about Jimmy or that dog, so I thought I'd best tell you, that your dog is being awful peculiar. She got away from Jimmy a few days ago and came all the way back here! First thing I knew about it, I saw her lying there on your Pawpaw's grave. Some of the distant cousins, the Hickmans, I think, they'd put some fake flowers on the grave. I didn't want a fight about anything so I let them. Though if you ask me, they're ugly as sin. Your dog had the same mind, she'd taken them all off, put them in a neat little pile right by the cross and laid down on the grave. I called Jimmy and he came by for her after school, but who do you think I saw this morning when I went outside to feed the cats?

I told her—and don't you think I'm getting peculiar myself, you know I always talk to the cats and that dog, but your dog is the only one I think wants to answer back—I told her "Don't you think about digging him up. He never even liked you." And she just gave me a look clear as day, as if to say, *Annie McNally, hush up.* But she's never been a digging dog, too damn smart for that.

I fed her, probably a mistake, but I'm sure she gets fed better over at your Aunt Mary-Ellen's and I called Jimmy again. I never liked your dog and I don't want it over here.

Texts between Corporal Hannah McNally and James Lewis

HM: Can't you keep Echo away from MeMaw's?

JL: Put her in my room before I went to school but Ma opened the door to get something

and she got out. Sorry.

HM: Don't you have a line in the yard for Nuggets? Put Echo on the line.

JL: She pulled it out.

HM: ?? Nuggets? The five pound fluff?

JL: No birdbrain, Echo.

HM: Echo?

JL: lol yes Echo.

HM: New line?

JL: You paying for it? Dad was real mad. he put that line in for Sampson back in the day and it never moved. One more thing to fix.

HM: Yeah I'll pay for it, ask how much.

JL: K.

HM: Everything else ok?

JL: Just trying to not fail algebra.

HM: Head up, chin out. Just a few more months. You running every day?

JL: Yes. Bossy britches.

HM: Memorized your General Orders?

JL: almost.

Voicemail of Corporal Hannah McNally

20 April 2010 1423

It's MeMaw here, Hannah. I need you to talk to Jimmy. He came by again to get that damn dog, which I was expecting. But I had my hands full up with the laundry and didn't go out to say hello to him, just watched from the window to see him leash up that creature and go. He did something disrespect—aw, hell. Hannah. He pissed on Pawpaw's grave. He didn't know I seen him. Now, I know Pawpaw was not an easy man to get along with, but there's no call for disrespect like that. You need to have a word with him. He's gonna be a Marine and what's he gonna do when an officer makes him mad? Piss on him? If you don't talk to him, I will tell your Uncle and Jimmy will get the hiding he deserves for that.

Texts between Corporal Hannah McNally and James Lewis

HM: MeMaw saw what you did.

JL: Don't care.

HM: Don’t act the fool. You apologize to her. Play nice.

JL: I’m glad he’s dead. So’s Echo.

HM: Me too, but there’s no need to be obvious about it! I swear, you and Echo don’t have a lick of sense between you!

JL: She’s smarter than both of us.

HM: She’s gonna end up at Animal Control if you don’t keep a better eye on her! I’ll get her out when I come for your graduation. Found a friend who can keep her when I deploy.

JL: She’ll come back here the moment she gets a chance. Probably as long as MeMaw’s alive.

HM: You’re depressing me. Go study. And apologize to MeMaw!

JL: 😛

Voicemail of Corporal Hannah McNally

23 April 2010 1828

Hannah, it’s Memaw. I have had it with that dog of yours. She broke the new line at Jimmy’s, so I called a lady from a German Shepherd rescue to take her. Well, she ain’t a German Shepherd anyway it turns out, she’s a mal-in-wa or some such French thing. And the lady said she weren’t grieving, she was blocking or resource-something. I tried to tell her she was your damn dog, not Pawpaw’s and she looked at me like I had two heads. *And* she didn’t believe that damn dog was at least ten years old, she said she looked more like four or five and I told her that you brought it home on your thirteenth birthday and you’re twenty now and I know how to do my sums! Anyhow, she should be sending you an email. I don’t feed that damn dog no more but she is still out there, just as cool as a cucumber.

Email from Corporal Hannah McNally to Ms. Suzy Watts of the Blue Ridge Shepherd Rescue.

24 April 2010 2033

Dear Ms. Watts,

Thank you for your email and for checking in on Echo for me. Like my grandmother said, Echo found me when I was thirteen (I’m twenty now) and we don’t know how old

she was then. But the vetthought she was about three, based on teeth. She's always been smart and in good condition. She knew a bunch of commands and learned more real quick. MeMaw said she was probably someone's valuable lost dog but no one ever answered the posters I put up. She was my dog but she stayed with my cousin James when I shipped out and she's never ran away like this. When I lived with my grandparents, she used to sleep across the threshold of my door.

She's a very good dog and she's not hurting anything, but my grandmother seems scared and I can't get back to Saw-whet before June. Is there anything we can do to fix this situation? Do you have any recommendations?

Very Respectfully,

Cpl. Hannah McNally USMC

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"The Marine Corps is all about teamwork; everyone doing their part for the team mission." — LtGen L. Reynolds, USMC

Voicemail of Corporal Hannah McNally

25 April 0304

I saw her. Oh God. Oh God! Hannah, I saw her! Lizzy was standing out there on the grave in the moonlight. I saw her and she was still seventeen, she was wearing that blue sweater she was wearing the last time I saw her! She's Echo! She's… you'll think I've cracked Hannah! It was Lizzy!

Texts between Corporal Hannah McNally and James Lewis

JL: MeMaw had a heart-attack.

HM: Is Echo all right?

JL: Asleep on my feet now. Showed up here before the Wilsons even called to tell us about MeMaw. Hannah, looks she wrote a letter to you and one to Ma and then just keeled over. Ma burned her letter after she read it and she wanted to burn yours but I've got it hid. Do you want me to open it?

Undated letter from Annie McNally to Corporal Hannah McNally

Hannah,

I never would have married your Pawpaw if I knew what he could be. I tried to tell myself that it was the war that made him like that. The wound in his head let the evil in but maybe it was always there deep down and that wound just let it out. I begged but your mother, Lizzy, would never tell me who your father was. I thought she was afraid of what Pawpaw would do to him. I was wrong. When Lizzy disappeared, I couldn't think she meant to leave you with us. She loved you. Don't you ever think for a moment she didn't love you.

When she disappeared, that seemed to spook Mary-Ellen bad. I thought that was why Mary-Ellen dropped out, married Stanley Lewis and moved in with him right quick. When James was born early, I was sure I understood. But I got less sure. Your Pawpaw had started to see you. You were a little skinned-knee ragamuffin, always out in the woods, peas in a pod with James but you were growing up fast.

And then you found that damn dog and she used to sleep across your door. I always thought that was an odd spot for the dog to be. But then one night, when you were about fourteen, I heard that dog growling, low-down and angry like. She never did that. I got up to see what had her like that. She was stood in the hallway in front of your door. Billy was standing there too, drunk and in a filthy mood. I remember he barked back at the dog back at the dog and grinned, but I think he was scared. "Dumb bitch," he said, and walked off back to his room. My blood went cold. Hannah I swear to God I only really knew then.

And so I did what I could. I mixed up his medications. I caused that first stroke and when he was gone to the hospital in Nashville it was like I could breathe right again for the first time in years. And I saw you and Jimmy out in the yard playing catch, with that damn dog chasing the ball and it all looked nor-

Texts between Corporal Hannah McNally and James Lewis

HM: Jimmy, you need to send me a Red Cross message for MeMaw. Your Ma might not do it.

JL: Will they really let you come back again so soon?

HM: I'm in a holding company just waiting for another class to open up since I came back for Pawpaw's funeral. No reason to not let me go. Jimmy I'm so sorry you had to read that yourself.

JL: It doesn't feel real.

HM: No. This doesn't change us.

JL: No. Hannah, Echo stopped him once, out by the woodshed. I was ten and I didn't know what he wanted but she did and she stopped him.

HM: You never told me.

JL: I didn't really know—didn't understand until later.

HM: Jimmy.

JL: It's ok. Echo kept me safe. She's not really your mom though, is she?

HM: No. Can't be.

JL:It would be too weird if Aunt Lizzy was curled up on my feet.

HM: Just a dog. Just a strange dog. Get that message sent. I'll be home as soon as I can, take good care of Echo. I'll paypal you some money for steak for her. Tell her I'll be home soon.

Recorded interview with Corporal Hannah McNally USMC and Deputy Alan Hickman, White County Sheriff's Department

27 April 2010 1422

AH: You start whenever you like, Miz McNally.

HM: Corporal McNally. I'm home on emergency leave. Um.

AH: Sorry, Corporal McNally of course. And you're Anne McNally's oldest granddaughter.

HM: Only grandaughter.

AH: Right, sorry. I'm not as up on that side of the family as I should be. You do put me in mind of your Ma though. We were in highschool together.

HM: Her only grandkids are me and my cousin James Lewis, Jimmy. Who was with me.

AH: And what were you doing on the property?

HM: We went to get my dog, Echo. She was supposed to be staying with Jimmy but Memaw had been calling me to complain that Echo kept showing up on her property.

AH: Chasing her chickens, causing trouble?

HM: Echo never chased a chicken in her life. Jimmy told me she would just lay there, quiet-like on Pawpaw's grave after they brought him back from Nashville. But it was

putting the wind up Memaw for some reason so she called in a dog specialist who said Echo was guarding.

AH: Guarding the grave?

HM:I guess. So after Jimmy told me about Memaw, I got the Red Cross message and I thought I'd better head over for the funeral and to collect Echo. When I got to Jimmy's, Echo was back over there again on Memaw's land, so I drove us over. We got out of the car and Echo… she got up from the grave and started walking. Past the family plot, back into the woods. There's a clearing back there, been there as long as I can remember. She went right up to this one tree. It'd been struck by lightning so it stood out. And she started digging. Echo's never been a digger. And she's old- she was old. But she was digging, slow and steady like. And then we saw a scrap of something, blue cloth. I told Jimmy to go get us some shovels from the toolshed. I dug maybe two shovelfuls and then I saw…well, it looked like bone to me. So I stopped and made Jimmy call. While we were waiting for the law to show up, my dog just laid down and died. She was…old.

AH: Any idea who your dog might've found?

HM: They say my Ma ran off. I'm thinking she didn't run far.



Wiktoria Szamotulska