
BLOOD LINES deleted scene

Brownies

by [Eileen Wilks](#)

11:32 p.m. December 19 (local);

4:32 a.m. December 20 (Greenwich)

At the brownie reservation in the mountains north of Chattanooga, Tennessee, Helen Bingham had dozed off on the couch to a rerun of Law and Order. She woke abruptly when her cat used her stomach as a trampoline to reach the back of the couch.

“One of these days,” she muttered, glaring at the animal. Patches twitched her tail, stalked to the end of the couch, jumped down and went to the back door.

This was obvious cat-speak for, “Open the door, woman.” Helen eyed the big calico, trying to persuade herself it couldn’t be anything urgent.

It was well known that brownies could communicate with cats. In fact, they often preferred that to talking to humans if the cat in question refrained from playing catch-the-brownie. Following prolonged negotiations that, thankfully, had not included any casualties, Patches and the brownies had come to a mutually acceptable territorial arrangement. The house and yard belonged to the cat, who was allowed to roam, but not hunt in, the rest of the reservation. In exchange, Patches occasionally carried a message to their shared human.

Those messages tended to be oblique. Most often the cat simply fetched Helen. So maybe this was duty calling.

Or maybe the cat just wanted out.

Then Helen noticed the noise, a babbling sort of sound not quite drowned out by the TV. Puzzled, she obeyed her cat, going to the back door and opening it . . . on a yard overrun with brownies.

She stared. There were so many of them. Helen had been an agent here for fifteen years and had worked to overcome their timidity, even growing to know a few of them personally. But in all her years of service and study, she'd never seen so many brownies in one place at one time.

They seemed oblivious to her presence. They were giggling, staggering, singing . . . why, they were drunk.

If it took Helen longer than it should have to realize the merrymaking Little Folk were intoxicated, she had reason. Her paper debunking the myth of brownie revels was considered definitive. Fifteen years of study since then had made done nothing to shake her conclusion: brownies were shy, hardworking little folk with no inclination to tipple.

To Helen's credit, once her shock wore off she didn't hesitate to document behavior that would disprove the work on which her academic reputation rested. She dashed back into her house for her digital camera and recorder.

It was the next day when she called her superior in the Bureau of Brownie Affairs to report the second, even bigger, shock. She'd checked and double-checked, but there was no denying that the population of the Southern Brownie Reservation had more than doubled overnight.

"We didn't think there were that many brownies left in North America," Helen told a reporter later. "It's quite staggering to realize their population isn't as endangered as we've believed. Previous studies indicated . . . what? No, I have no explanation at this time."

She shrugged at the next question. "Well, you know brownies. They speak excellent English, but the words don't always hold the same meaning for them they do for us. But for what it's worth, they claimed they were celebrating because their cousins have come back."



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