

# The Experiment

Morgan Elizabeth Huneke

## **The Experiment**

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All Scripture quotations are taken from the 1599 Geneva Bible

ISBN 13: 978-1492214304

ISBN 10: 1492214302

*To my family, especially my mom for helping this book  
become what it is, and to Addy for lending her  
personality to Abby Raingold.*

*And to the Hoerls, the Penns, and the Palmers,  
the inspiration for some of the Raingolds' friends.*



The back door creaked as it slowly swung inward on its hinges. Heavy footsteps pounded across the kitchen floor. A heavy object thudded to the ground. And in the cellar underneath the floor, his arms wrapped protectively about his younger sister Anne, Edmund Rubin prayed earnestly for safety.

“What’s happening, Edmund?” Anne whispered.

“Hush, Anne,” Edmund returned. “Don’t

speak. Just pray.”

Anne lapsed into silence. Edmund clasped her tighter in a fervent attempt to quell the fear growing in his heart.

Streams of light sliced through the dark cellar, except for directly above them, where the object lay. As Edmund watched the shadow, he saw something, he could not tell what, dripping from it through the floorboards. A drop fell on his arm. He held it up to the light. The drop was red!

Anne raised her head.

“Don’t look, Anne,” Edmund whispered. Anne promptly hid her face on her brother’s shoulder.

Edmund’s heart was pounding, as realization swept over him. His mother had been the only one in the kitchen . . . if an intruder had entered . . . if the red liquid was blood . . .

He gave a violent shudder.

The shadow was moving, accompanied by the sound of something being dragged across the floor above them.

What would happen to his father and his brothers, Henry and Brian, when they came home? What would happen if he and Anne were discovered? His ears caught the sound of Anne’s whispered prayer.

“Please, God, keep Mama and Daddy and Brian and Henry and Edmund and me safe.”

If only he could be sure they were all safe!

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If only he could be sure that they would all come out of this alive! But he could not.

The lights went out above them and the door slammed shut. Instinctively, Edmund knew that he and Anne were all alone.

Edmund strained his ears for a sound. He heard none, save the sound of his and Anne's breathing. But he was not yet ready to leave the relative safety of the cellar.

"What . . . do you think . . . happened?" Anne whispered.

Edmund didn't answer. He did not want to cause Anne to share his fears, though in his heart he knew she already knew them.

"Edmund, I'm scared," Anne said. "What if . . . what if we're discovered here?"

"We won't be," Edmund said with feigned confidence.

It was nearly morning before Edmund dared ascend the stairs that led out of the cellar. He raised the trapdoor and stepped out through the pantry, Anne clinging tightly to his hand. Edmund could hear his heart pounding. What would they find?

A dark red spot stained the kitchen floor that had been so clean only the night before. The back door was slightly ajar; there was no sign of a forced entrance. Of course not. It had been left unlocked for their father . . .

Edmund shut the door and locked it.

"What is that?" Anne asked, indicating the

red spot on the floor. “And where’s Mama?”

“You know just as much as I do, Anne,” Edmund said.

“Do you think someone will come for us?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are we safe even here?” Anne asked.

“I don’t think we’re safe anywhere.”

Several nights later, Edmund lay on an air mattress in the living room, trying unsuccessfully to sleep. Anne gave a little cry from where she lay on the couch. Edmund was at her side in an instant.

“What is it, Anne?” he asked gently.

“Oh, Edmund,” she cried tremulously, “it was that awful dream again. The one about Mama.”

Edmund took her hand in his. For a moment he did not know how to comfort her, the fears interrupting his sister’s rest were the very ones that kept him awake. A text came into his mind.

“‘He hath said, I will not fail, neither forsake you.’ Remember, Anne, God will never forsake us. No matter what happens. Even if something happens to me, God will still take care of you.”

“If something happens to you?”

“Don’t worry,” Edmund said. “Nothing’s going to happen to me. I’ll always be here for you.”

He held her hand until she fell asleep.

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ANNE SCOOPED UP a spoonful of cereal, then tilted her spoon, watching it fall back into her bowl.

“Anne, you need to eat something.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“You still need to eat something,” Edmund told his sister. “You need to stay healthy. Not eating is the perfect way to ruin your health. Do you think our parents would want you to do that?”

Anne shook her head and obediently swallowed a few spoonfuls of cereal.

“When you finish that, hurry up and get dressed,” Edmund said. “We need to go to the grocery store.”

“Why?”

“We need a few things.”

The nearest grocery store was not exactly close to the Rubins’ home, but it was not so far away that they could not walk to it. So, the Rubin children set out on foot, their first time outside since that terrible night which was the cause of all their fear and anxiety.

When they got to the grocery store, Edmund sent Anne to the back of the store to get a carton of milk. As Anne reached up to grab the milk, she was startled by a gruff voice speaking behind her.

“Are you one of the Rubin kids?”

Anne whipped around to face the speaker. He was rather tall and extremely muscular. He

had long, messy, brown hair and his arms were covered in tattoos. In short, he was not like anyone she knew, nor was he the sort of person she cared to know.

“I’m not supposed to talk to strangers,” she said. She took her milk and walked away. The man followed.

“I knew your parents,” he said.

Anne was a bit worried by the use of the past tense. “My parents didn’t associate with people like you,” she returned without so much as turning her head. She scanned the store in search of Edmund.

Edmund spotted his sister and, seeing her plight, hurried to her. Anne’s eyes were wide with terror. Edmund tried to take charge of the situation.

“Please excuse us,” he said to the man. Anne and Edmund turned down an aisle.

“Oh, no, you don’t,” the man said.

Both Anne and Edmund were enveloped in large, burlap bags. Edmund could feel himself being lifted, slung over someone’s shoulder, and carried away. He was flung into a dark place, something was put in after him, and a door slammed shut. Then an engine started.

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“A bby, Ian, come see what I found in the frog’s large intestine!”

A boy and a girl, ages seven and nine respectively, jumped up from their play and ran to where their older sister sat, dissecting a frog as a school assignment. She held up a small black object with large tweezers. The younger children peered closely at it.

“What is it, Audrey?” Abby asked.

“A beetle’s exoskeleton,” Audrey replied.

“Cool!” Ian held out his hand. “Can I have it?”

“To look at, but not to keep,” Audrey said as she dropped it into his hand. “Make sure you wash your hands really well once you throw it away. After all, it was in the frog’s large intestine.”

“That’s almost at the end of the digestive system,” Abby said. “The frog must have died before it could expel it as waste.”

“I know that,” Ian said. He ran up the stairs with his beetle. “Look, Ginnie,” he called. “Audrey found a beetle in the frog!”

Twelve-year old Ginnie, doing algebra at the dining room table, shuddered as Ian shoved the beetle in her face.

“Indiana Raingold, get that nasty thing out of my face!” Ginnie scolded.

Ian, a bit subdued by the use of his full first name, quietly took his beetle away. He was not ready to part with it just yet, but he wouldn’t bother Ginnie anymore. After all, nobody called him Indiana unless they were mad at him.

The doorbell rang.

Ian ran to the door and peeked out the window.

“It’s a stranger, Mama!” he yelled.

Mrs. Raingold came to the door and opened it. A man and a woman stood on the doorstep, a clipboard in the woman’s hands. Mrs. Raingold, seeing the clipboard, assumed they were selling something.

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“Sorry, I’m not . . .”

The woman cut her off.

“That’s a lovely little boy you’ve got there, ma’am.”

Ian wrinkled up his nose. “Lovely” was not a word he would ever apply to himself.

The woman continued. “Why isn’t he in school?”

“We homeschool,” Mrs. Raingold explained.

“Interesting,” the man said. “I assume you are not aware that under HR 1074 all forms of schooling outside of public school are illegal?”

Mrs. Raingold stiffened. “I was not aware such a law had been passed.”

“As you are in violation of this law,” the man said, “we have the authority not only to arrest you, but to inspect your home in order to determine whether or not it is fit for children to live in.”

“Where is your warrant?” Mrs. Raingold asked.

“We don’t need one.”

“Oh, yes you do!” Abby shouted. “And it has to be a reasonable warrant! It’s unconstitutional for you to do it without! That’s unlawful search and seizure, and we’re protected from that by the Fourth Amendment!”

Mrs. Raingold started to close the door, but the man forced it open.

“Nevertheless, we are searching your home.”

The man pushed Mrs. Raingold aside, and

entered the house. The Raingold children stood about staring at him. The man swept up the stairs and glanced around. He shook his head and turned to go down the stairs. Ginnie, standing at the top of the stairs with little Collin, thought there was no reason for his scornful glance. Yes, the dining room table was cluttered with her school books, but she thought it rather cleaner than one would expect from a family with five children.

The man went down the stairs. Unfortunately, here his shock was somewhat justified. After all, when children play with Legos, all the Legos seem to find a temporary home on the floor. At least, such was the case in the Raingold home.

He returned to the front door.

“Mrs. Raingold,” he said, “you are under arrest. And I am sorry to inform you that we will have to take your children as well.”

“No you’re not,” Ian said.

“I beg your pardon.”

“You’re not sorry.”

Mrs. Raingold gave her young son a warning glance.

“I think you’d have taken us whether you found reason or not,” Abby said, coming up the stairs. “And I don’t think you really had a reason.”

“Abby!” Mrs. Raingold reproved her daughter.

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“Enough of this chit-chat,” the man barked. He grabbed Mrs. Raingold roughly by the arm and dragged her out to the waiting police car.

“Audrey!” Mrs. Raingold called. “Take care of the younger children! Stay together! And remember, ‘All things work together for the best unto them that love God, even to them that are called according to his purpose.’”

Mrs. Raingold was herded into a police car and driven off.

The Raingold children gathered together in the landing in the middle of the stairs, in front of the door. Audrey took Collin in her arms.

The woman gazed with disapproval over the little scene.

“Come with me,” she ordered.

They had no choice but to follow. A large bus was parked in front of the Raingold home. It was into this they were forced to climb. The bus was packed with children. Other home-schooled children. Children the Raingolds knew.

“Audrey, over here!” It was Elisabeth Poole. Audrey led her brothers and sisters through the crowded bus over to her friend. She could see tears in Elisabeth’s eyes.

“What’s going on?” Elisabeth asked.

“I wish I knew.”

Audrey sat down next to Elisabeth and put Collin in her lap.

“Audrey.” Elisabeth’s little sister Maddy came over to Audrey. Audrey put her arm

around the little girl. Usually it gave her great pleasure to see Maddy, for Maddy was a great favorite of hers and the sort of girl one couldn't help loving, but now it did not.

Ginnie, Abby, and Ian gazed around the bus. They saw their friends everywhere: Annelise, David, Bethy, Grace, Suzy, Carrie, Max, Mike, Candace, Ben, Samuel, Samantha, Timmy, Tabby, Hope, Sarah, Gordon, Isanna . . . It was as if their whole homeschool group was crowded into that bus. It was not a happy sight. Brothers, sisters, friends, hugging each other and blinking back tears. The fear and bewilderment in the eyes of the younger children, the ill-concealed fear of the older children.

Abby and Hope wept in each other's arms. Ian and Mike stared at each other in a stony silence. Little Carrie Pauley hugged Ginnie, but did not ask for her usual piggy-back ride.

Elisabeth tried to pull herself together in order to take care of her little brother Elliot. Audrey tried to comfort the weeping Maddy. Collin looked around in amazement, not comprehending the situation.

The bus drove on. How long the drive was, none of those children ever knew. They did not know where they were. They did not know where they were going. They did not know why they were being taken. They did not know if they would ever see their parents again.

Hours later, the bus stopped. The doors

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were thrown open and they were ordered to depart.

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The roar of the engine died. The doors swung open and the back of the truck flooded with light. Someone grabbed the bag containing Edmund Rubin and carried it out. Edmund could see light through the bag, but not much else. The light dimmed and he was set down on the floor. His bag was untied and a door slammed shut. He scrambled out of the bag.

He was in a small, dimly lit room. The room

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had two doors, one in front of him, one behind. Both were shut. He was completely alone.

The door behind him opened, and Anne stumbled in. The door hastily shut after her.

“Edmund!” Anne clung to her brother.

The door in front of them opened. A slim, graceful woman entered. She wore a simple white gown that came almost to her feet and her long, blond hair hung loose. She was rather pretty, and her movements were gentle and graceful.

“Hello, children,” she said. Her voice was as sweet as honey. “Come with me. I have a meal prepared for you.

She held open the door through which she had entered. Edmund could see a table spread with a most tantalizing feast. His mouth began to water.

The woman gestured toward the open door. “It’s all for you.”

Edmund started forward, but Anne drew back, pulling Edmund’s hand as she did so.

“What is the matter, little girl?” the woman asked.

“I don’t trust you,” Anne whispered.

The woman laughed a silvery laugh. “What reason can you possibly have?” she asked.

“Circumstances,” Anne whispered so quietly that even Edmund could barely hear.

Edmund caught her meaning. “We’ve been kidnapped and turned over to you. So whether

your real intention is for good or ill, I must say, it doesn't look good."

The woman laughed again. "What clever children! Your parents must be very proud of you."

"Our parents are . . . gone," Edmund said.

"That *is* a pity. But you have nothing to fear here. Come along."

Edmund and Anne exchanged a long glance. Then they followed.

The room was brightly lit. The table was scattered with candles. The chandeliers above shone bright. A glorious feast such as the Rubins had never before seen was spread before them. The delicious aroma entered their nostrils and made their mouths water.

"Go ahead," the woman said. "Help yourselves."

Anne and Edmund seated themselves at the table.

"I don't think it's poisoned," Edmund said.

"Of course it's not," the woman laughed.

Edmund and Anne glanced at each other and began to eat. Oh, what a feast! There was fried chicken and ham and turkey and stuffing and corn on the cob and hot buttered rolls and green beans and a dozen kinds of soup, all much more than Anne and Edmund could ever eat. And it was good, better than anything they had ever tasted.

But a cold feeling began to grow in the pit

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of Edmund's stomach. His fork stopped halfway to his mouth.

"Why are you doing this?" he asked.

The woman laughed her silvery laugh. "Doing what?"

Edmund set his fork down. "Feeding us like this. What's your motive?"

She laughed again. "It pleases me to see children eat," she said. The woman seated herself beside Edmund and loaded more turkey onto his plate. Then she stroked his hair with her fingers. "I would be pleased if you would answer a few questions."

Edmund pushed her hand away. "What sort of questions?"

"Questions which, if answered honestly, will tell me what I need to know," she answered vaguely.

"What if I don't want to answer?"

"What do you know about your parents' work?"

Anne grabbed Edmund's hand and held it tightly. "Don't answer her," she whispered.

Edmund said nothing.

"Surely you know what they did for a living."

The children were silent.

"When they were home, did they ever speak of what had occurred during the day?" The woman's voice was growing harsh. Still the children said nothing.

"Your brothers. What did they do when

they were away from home?” Her voice was icy and sinister.

Still she received no answer. Anne’s eyes were wide with terror. Edmund gripped his sister’s hand.

“Very well, then,” the woman said. “If you will not succumb to subtle methods, I must try a different method. I have other ways of making you talk. Guards!” she called.

Two big, burly men appeared. The woman pointed to the Rubins.

“Take them away.”

“Yes, m’ lady.”

Anne and Edmund were seized by strong, rough hands and dragged from the room.

# 4

Audrey Raingold stood in line behind her brother Ian, Collin balanced on her hip, Maddy Poole clinging to her hand. She moved slowly towards a large brick building. Just inside the door, a woman sat at a desk signing in the children. Ian stepped up to the desk.

“Name and age,” the woman barked.

“I’m seven,” said Ian, “and my name’s Indiana Raingold.”

“Indiana?” the woman said skeptically.

“Yes,” said Ian. “I know it’s not a regular state name for people, but Mama and Daddy decided to name me that because Daddy grew up in Indiana, just like Ginnie’s named Virginia because that’s where Mama grew up. But I’m called Ian. It’s taken out of the middle of Indiana, with a little different sound to the ‘a.’”

“Ian!” Audrey said sharply.

Ian turned to his sister. “What?”

“Just stop.”

The woman looked angry. “Move on,” she told Ian. Then she turned to Audrey. “You his sister?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Audrey said.

“Name and age.”

“Audrey Raingold. I’m fourteen years old.”

The woman nodded toward Collin. “That your brother too?”

“Yes, ma’am. His name is Collin and he just turned two.”

The woman jotted it down and looked at Maddy. “That your sister?”

“No, ma’am,” Audrey said. “She’s a neighbor. A family friend.”

“Then move on.”

Audrey looked down at Maddy. “I have to go on,” she said. She turned to Elisabeth. “I’ll wait for you.” Then she moved on to join her siblings, just past the desk.

As the Pooles joined the Raingolds, the children were forced through another doorway

into a large room with tables on either side. Each table was covered in clothes.

The children were each given a plain gray uniform, a pair of pajamas, and a toothbrush. When they reached the other end of the room, a woman spoke to them.

“Dormitories are on the second and third floors. Last names A through L are on the third. M through Z on the second. Take whatever empty beds you can find.”

The children passed out of the room.

“Everybody here is terribly short-tempered,” Abby remarked.

They went up a flight of stairs and found themselves in a long corridor. The first two doors on the right were labeled “MNO” and “PQR.” The first two on the left were labeled “STUV” and “WXYZ.”

Elisabeth’s nine-year old brother Mike went to the door marked “PQR.”

“I guess we’re in here,” he said.

The Raingolds and the rest of the Pooles followed him in. They found themselves in a large room filled with rows and rows of bunk beds. Children occupied nearly all of the beds.

“It’s just like an orphanage,” Ian said.

“Can we play run away from the orphanage for real?” Maddy asked.

Audrey shook her head. She scanned the room.

“Look, there’s the Pauleys,” Ginnie said.

Bethy and Grace Pauley beckoned to them. Audrey took Maddy and Collin by the hand and led the little group over to the Pauleys.

“We saved you some room,” Bethy informed them. “But it’ll be tight. There’s not enough room for everybody in this place.”

“Do we just make our own sleeping arrangements?” Audrey asked.

“I guess so,” Bethy said. “There’s only three free bunk beds over here and thirteen of us, but I think we can manage.”

“We’ll have to,” said Audrey.

“Go to the dressing rooms and change into your uniforms,” a woman ordered from the doorway. “Deposit your own clothes in the bins you will find there. Now, march!”

All the children filed out into the hallway. Past the doors to the dormitories were the dressing rooms, marked, as the dormitories had been, by letters of last name, but further divided by gender. Audrey made sure Collin was in Ian’s care, and Elliot Poole in Mike’s, then went into the dressing room. They changed into their ugly, gray uniforms, then returned to the dormitory until the call to supper. Supper was an unappetizing meal of stale bread and water, but, being hungry, the children quickly devoured it. Then they were sent to change into their pajamas and brush their teeth, after which they were ordered back to their dormitories.

By now, the children were quite exhausted.

The brave face Bethy had worn earlier in the day was gone. Elisabeth was far from her usual happy self. Suzy and Carrie Pauley and Maddy Poole were not far from tears, an unusual state for the Pauley girls. Elliot had fretted himself to sleep. Collin was not far behind. Ginnie was quieter even than normal, and Abby, Ian, Grace, and Mike hardly spoke. Audrey felt like having a good cry, but felt she could not succumb to such a display of emotion in front of the younger children. Instead, she led them in prayer, and they climbed into bed.

Above them, in the "DEF" dormitory, seventeen year old Adam Ellison led a similar prayer group.

To find out more about The Experiment and other books by Morgan Elizabeth Huneke, visit her website:

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