

The **SECOND**
CTHULHU MYTHOS
MEGAPACK®



FEATURING CLASSIC TALES BY
H.P. LOVECRAFT
AND HIS DISCIPLES

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Version 1.0

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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Here is a follow-up to our *Cthulhu Mythos MEGAPACK*®, this time selected by our own production manager, Shawn Garrett. The focus is on lesser-known Mythos stories (including a proto-Mythos tale, “Fishhead,” by Irvin S. Cobb, which may have influenced Lovecraft’s later writings.) Plus there are tales by Lovecraft’s friends and contemporaries, and a few modern tales.

Enjoy!

—John Betancourt
Publisher, Wildside Press LLC
www.wildsidepress.com

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INTRODUCTION

Collected here for you, a sampler of stories & poems set in or related to the “Cthulhu Mythos,” as conceived by H.P. Lovecraft, expanded on by the “Lovecraft Circle” and endlessly expanded on by current writers up to the current day!

So as not to replicate material available in *The H.P. Lovecraft MEGAPACK*® and *The Cthulhu Mythos MEGAPACK*®, we start with a range of Lovecraft pieces he “fixed up” for other authors, and a round-robin story he contributed to with a variety of other pulp authors of the time (“The Challenge From Beyond”). Then, after a slight detour into a historically interesting predecessor of Lovecraft’s Innsmouth folk (“Fishhead”), it’s on into a sampling of tales and poems from Lovecraft’s peers and followers that either reference or resonate with his concepts.

Cthulhu Fhtagn!

—Shawn M. Garrett
Editor, Wildside Press

DREAMS OF YITH, by Duane W. Rimel (Poem)

Originally published in *The Fantasy Fan*, July 1934.

I

*In distant Yith past crested, ragged peaks;
On far-flung islands lost to worldly eyes,
A shadow from the ancient star-world seeks
Some being which in caverns shrilly cries
A challenge; and the hairy dweller speaks
From that deep hole where slimy Sotho lies.
But when those night-winds crept about the place,
They fled—for Sotho had no human face!*

II

*Beyond the valleys of the sun which lie
In misty chaos beyond the reach of time;
And brood beneath the ice as aeons fly,
Long waiting for some brighter, warmer clime;
There is a vision, as I vainly try
To glimpse the madness that must some day climb
From age-old tombs in dim dimensions hid,
And push all angles back—unseal the lid!*

III

*Beside the city that once lived there wound
A stream of putrefaction writing black;
Reflecting crumbling spires stuck in the ground
That glow through hov'ring mists that no stray track
Can lead to those dead gates, where once was found
The secret that would bring the dwellers back.
And still that pitch-black current eddies by
Those silver gates of Yith to sea-beds dry.*

IV

On rounded turrets rising through the visne

*Of cloud-veiled aeons that the Old Ones knew;
On tablets deeply worn and fingered clean
By tentacles that dreamers seldom view;
In space-hung Yith, on clammy walls obscene
That writhe and crumble and are built anew;
There is a figure carved; but God! Those eyes,
That sway on fungoid stems at leaden skies!*

V

*Around the place of ancient, waiting blight;
On walls of sheerest opal, rearing high,
That moves as planets beckon in the night
To faded realms where nothing sane can lie;
A deathless guard tramps by in feeble light,
Emitting to the stars a sobbing cry.
But on that path where footsteps should have led
There rolled an eyeless, huge and bloated head.*

VI

*Amid dim halls that poison mosses blast,
Far from the land and seas of our clean earth,
Dread nightmare shadows dance—obscenely cast
By twisted talons of archaean birth
On rows of slimy pillars stretching past
A demon fane-fane that echoes with mad mirth.
And in that realm sane eyes may never see—
For black light streams from skies of ebony.*

VII

*On those queer mountains which hold back the horde
That lie in waiting in their mouldy graves,
Who groan and mumble to a hidden lord
Still waiting for the time-worn key that saves;
There dwells a watcher who can ill-afford
To let invaders by those hoary caves.
But some day then may dreamers find the way*

That leads down elfin-painted paths of gray.

VIII

*And past those unclean spires that ever lean
Above the windings of unpeopled streets;
And far beyond the walls and silver screen
That veils the secrets of those dim retreats,
A scarlet pathway leads that some have seen
In wildest vision that no mortal greets.
And down that dimming path in fearful flight
Queer beings squirm and hasten in the night.*

IX

*High in the ebon skies on scaly wings
Dread bat-like beasts soar past those towers gray
To peer in greedy longing at the things
Which sprawl in every twisted passageway.
And when their gruesome flight a shadow brings
The dwellers lift dim eyes above the clay.
But lidded blubs close heavily once more;
They wait—for Sotho to unlatch the door!*

X

*Now, though the veil of troubled visions deep
Is draped to blind me to the secret ways
Leading to blackness to the realm of sleep
That haunt me all my jumbled nights and days,
I feel the dim path that will let me keep
That rendezvous in Yith where Sotho plays.
At last I see a glowing turret shine,
And I am coming, for the key is mine!*

OUT OF THE AEONS, by H. P. Lovecraft and Hazel Heald

(Ms. found among the effects of the late Richard H. Johnson, Ph.D., curator of the Cabot Museum of Archaeology, Boston, Mass.)

It is not likely that anyone in Boston—or any alert reader elsewhere—will ever forget the strange affair of the Cabot Museum. The newspaper publicity given to that hellish mummy, the antique and terrible rumours vaguely linked with it, the morbid wave of interest and cult activities during 1932, and the frightful fate of the two intruders on December 1st of that year, all combined to form one of those classic mysteries which go down for generations as folklore and become the nuclei of whole cycles of horrific speculation.

Everyone seems to realise, too, that something very vital and unutterably hideous was suppressed in the public accounts of the culminant horrors. Those first disquieting hints as to the condition of one of the two bodies were dismissed and ignored too abruptly—nor were the singular modifications in the mummy given the following-up which their news value would normally prompt. It also struck people as queer that the mummy was never restored to its case. In these days of expert taxidermy the excuse that its disintegrating condition made exhibition impracticable seemed a peculiarly lame one.

As curator of the museum I am in a position to reveal all the suppressed facts, but this I shall not do during my lifetime. There are things about the world and universe which it is better for the majority not to know, and I have not departed from the opinion in which all of us—museum staff, physicians, reporters, and police—concurred at the period of the horror itself. At the same time it seems proper that a matter of such overwhelming scientific and historic importance should not remain wholly unrecorded—hence this account which I have prepared for the benefit of serious students. I shall place it among various papers to be examined after my death, leaving its fate to the discretion of my executors. Certain threats and unusual events during the past weeks have led me to believe that my life—as well as that of other museum officials—is in some peril through the enmity of several

widespread secret cults of Asiatics, Polynesians, and heterogeneous mystical devotees; hence it is possible that the work of the executors may not be long postponed. [Executor's note: Dr. Johnson died suddenly and rather mysteriously of heart-failure on April 22, 1933. Wentworth Moore, taxidermist of the museum, disappeared around the middle of the preceding month. On February 18 of the same year Dr. William Minot, who superintended a dissection connected with the case, was stabbed in the back, dying the following day.]

The real beginning of the horror, I suppose, was in 1879—long before my term as curator—when the museum acquired that ghastly, inexplicable mummy from the Orient Shipping Company. Its very discovery was monstrous and menacing, for it came from a crypt of unknown origin and fabulous antiquity on a bit of land suddenly upheaved from the Pacific's floor.

On May 11, 1878, Capt. Charles Weatherbee of the freighter *Eridanus*, bound from Wellington, New Zealand, to Valparaiso, Chile, had sighted a new island unmarked on any chart and evidently of volcanic origin. It projected quite boldly out of the sea in the form of a truncated cone. A landing-party under Capt. Weatherbee noted evidences of long submersion on the rugged slopes which they climbed, while at the summit there were signs of recent destruction, as by an earthquake. Among the scattered rubble were massive stones of manifestly artificial shaping, and a little examination disclosed the presence of some of that prehistoric Cyclopean masonry found on certain Pacific islands and forming a perpetual archaeological puzzle.

Finally the sailors entered a massive stone crypt—judged to have been part of a much larger edifice, and to have originally lain far underground—in one corner of which the frightful mummy crouched. After a short period of virtual panic, caused partly by certain carvings on the walls, the men were induced to move the mummy to the ship, though it was only with fear and loathing that they touched it. Close to the body, as if once thrust into its clothes, was a cylinder of an unknown metal containing a roll of thin, bluish-white membrane of equally unknown nature, inscribed with peculiar characters in a greyish, indeterminable pigment. In the centre of the vast stone floor was a suggestion of a trap-door, but the party lacked apparatus sufficiently powerful to move it.

The Cabot Museum, then newly established, saw the meagre reports of the discovery and at once took steps to acquire the mummy and the cylinder. Curator Pickman made a personal trip to Valparaiso and outfitted a schooner to search for the crypt where the thing had been found, though meeting with failure in this matter. At the recorded position of the island nothing but the sea's unbroken expanse could be discerned, and the seekers realised that the same seismic forces which had suddenly thrust the island up had carried it down again to the watery darkness where it had brooded for untold aeons. The secret of that immovable trap-door would never be solved. The mummy and the cylinder, however, remained—and the former was placed on exhibition early in November, 1879, in the museum's hall of mummies.

The Cabot Museum of Archaeology, which specialises in such remnants of ancient and unknown civilisations as do not fall within the domain of art, is a small and scarcely famous institution, though one of high standing in scientific circles. It stands in the heart of Boston's exclusive Beacon Hill district—in Mt. Vernon Street, near Joy—housed in a former private mansion with an added wing in the rear, and was a source of pride to its austere neighbours until the recent terrible events brought it an undesirable notoriety.

The hall of mummies on the western side of the original mansion (which was designed by Bulfinch and erected in 1819), on the second floor, is justly esteemed by historians and anthropologists as harbouring the greatest collection of its kind in America. Here may be found typical examples of Egyptian embalming from the earliest Sakkarah specimens to the last Coptic attempts of the eighth century; mummies of other cultures, including the prehistoric Indian specimens recently found in the Aleutian Islands; agonised Pompeian figures moulded in plaster from tragic hollows in the ruin-choking ashes; naturally mummified bodies from mines and other excavations in all parts of the earth—some surprised by their terrible entombment in the grotesque postures caused by their last, tearing death-throes—everything, in short, which any collection of the sort could well be expected to contain. In 1879, of course, it was much less ample than it is now; yet even then it was remarkable. But that shocking thing from the primal Cyclopean crypt on an ephemeral sea-spawned island was always its chief attraction and most impenetrable mystery.

The mummy was that of a medium-sized man of unknown race, and was cast in a peculiar crouching posture. The face, half shielded by claw-like hands, had its under jaw thrust far forward, while the shrivelled features bore an expression of fright so hideous that few spectators could view them unmoved. The eyes were closed, with lids clamped down tightly over eyeballs apparently bulging and prominent. Bits of hair and beard remained, and the colour of the whole was a sort of dull neutral grey. In texture the thing was half leathery and half stony, forming an insoluble enigma to those experts who sought to ascertain how it was embalmed. In places bits of its substance were eaten away by time and decay. Rags of some peculiar fabric, with suggestions of unknown designs, still clung to the object.

Just what made it so infinitely horrible and repulsive one could hardly say. For one thing, there was a subtle, indefinable sense of limitless antiquity and utter alienage which affected one like a view from the brink of a monstrous abyss of unplumbed blackness—but mostly it was the expression of crazed fear on the puckered, prognathous, half-shielded face. Such a symbol of infinite, inhuman, cosmic fright could not help communicating the emotion to the beholder amidst a disquieting cloud of mystery and vain conjecture.

Among the discriminating few who frequented the Cabot Museum this relic of an elder, forgotten world soon acquired an unholy fame, though the institution's seclusion and quiet policy prevented it from becoming a popular sensation of the "Cardiff Giant" sort. In the last century the art of vulgar ballyhoo had not invaded the field of scholarship to the extent it has now succeeded in doing. Naturally, savants of various kinds tried their best to classify the frightful object, though always without success. Theories of a bygone Pacific civilisation, of which the Easter Island images and the megalithic masonry of Ponape and Nan-Matol are conceivable vestiges, were freely circulated among students, and learned journals carried varied and often conflicting speculations on a possible former continent whose peaks survive as the myriad islands of Melanesia and Polynesia. The diversity in dates assigned to the hypothetical vanished culture—or continent—was at once bewildering and amusing; yet some surprisingly relevant allusions were found in certain myths of Tahiti and other islands.

Meanwhile the strange cylinder and its baffling scroll of unknown hieroglyphs, carefully preserved in the museum library, received their due share of attention. No question could exist as to their association with the mummy; hence all realised that in the unravelling of their mystery the mystery of the shrivelled horror would in all probability be unravelled as well. The cylinder, about four inches long by seven-eighths of an inch in diameter, was of a queerly iridescent metal utterly defying chemical analysis and seemingly impervious to all reagents. It was tightly fitted with a cap of the same substance, and bore engraved figurings of an evidently decorative and possibly symbolic nature—conventional designs which seemed to follow a peculiarly alien, paradoxical, and doubtfully describable system of geometry.

Not less mysterious was the scroll it contained—a neat roll of some thin, bluish-white, unanalysable membrane, coiled round a slim rod of metal like that of the cylinder, and unwinding to a length of some two feet. The large, bold hieroglyphs, extending in a narrow line down the centre of the scroll and penned or painted with a grey pigment defying analysis, resembled nothing known to linguists and palaeographers, and could not be deciphered despite the transmission of photographic copies to every living expert in the given field.

It is true that a few scholars, unusually versed in the literature of occultism and magic, found vague resemblances between some of the hieroglyphs and certain primal symbols described or cited in two or three very ancient, obscure, and esoteric texts such as the Book of Eibon, reputed to descend from forgotten Hyperborea; the Pnakotic fragments, alleged to be pre-human; and the monstrous and forbidden Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. None of these resemblances, however, was beyond dispute; and because of the prevailing low estimation of occult studies, no effort was made to circulate copies of the hieroglyphs among mystical specialists. Had such circulation occurred at this early date, the later history of the case might have been very different; indeed, a glance at the hieroglyphs by any reader of von Junzt's horrible Nameless Cults would have established a linkage of unmistakable significance. At this period, however, the readers of that monstrous blasphemy were exceedingly few; copies having been incredibly scarce in the interval between the suppression of the original Düsseldorf edition (1839) and of the Bridewell

translation (1845) and the publication of the expurgated reprint by the Golden Goblin Press in 1909. Practically speaking, no occultist or student of the primal past's esoteric lore had his attention called to the strange scroll until the recent outburst of sensational journalism which precipitated the horrible climax.

II.

Thus matters glided along for a half-century following the installation of the frightful mummy at the museum. The gruesome object had a local celebrity among cultivated Bostonians, but no more than that; while the very existence of the cylinder and scroll—after a decade of futile research—was virtually forgotten. So quiet and conservative was the Cabot Museum that no reporter or feature writer ever thought of invading its uneventful precincts for rabble-tickling material.

The invasion of ballyhoo commenced in the spring of 1931, when a purchase of somewhat spectacular nature—that of the strange objects and inexplicably preserved bodies found in crypts beneath the almost vanished and evilly famous ruins of Château Faussesflamms, in Averoine, France—brought the museum prominently into the news columns. True to its “hustling” policy, the Boston Pillar sent a Sunday feature writer to cover the incident and pad it with an exaggerated general account of the institution itself; and this young man—Stuart Reynolds by name—hit upon the nameless mummy as a potential sensation far surpassing the recent acquisitions nominally forming his chief assignment. A smattering of theosophical lore, and a fondness for the speculations of such writers as Colonel Churchward and Lewis Spence concerning lost continents and primal forgotten civilisations, made Reynolds especially alert toward any aeonian relic like the unknown mummy.

At the museum the reporter made himself a nuisance through constant and not always intelligent questionings and endless demands for the movement of encased objects to permit photographs from unusual angles. In the basement library room he pored endlessly over the strange metal cylinder and its membranous scroll, photographing them from every angle and securing pictures of every bit of the weird hieroglyphed text. He likewise asked to see all books with any bearing whatever on the subject of primal cultures and sunken continents—sitting for three hours taking notes,

and leaving only in order to hasten to Cambridge for a sight (if permission were granted) of the abhorred and forbidden Necronomicon at the Widener Library.

On April 5th the article appeared in the Sunday Pillar, smothered in photographs of mummy, cylinder, and hieroglyphed scroll, and couched in the peculiarly simpering, infantile style which the Pillar affects for the benefit of its vast and mentally immature clientele. Full of inaccuracies, exaggerations, and sensationalism, it was precisely the sort of thing to stir the brainless and fickle interest of the herd—and as a result the once quiet museum began to be swarmed with chattering and vacuously staring throngs such as its stately corridors had never known before.

There were scholarly and intelligent visitors, too, despite the puerility of the article—the pictures had spoken for themselves—and many persons of mature attainments sometimes see the Pillar by accident. I recall one very strange character who appeared during November—a dark, turbaned, and bushily bearded man with a laboured, unnatural voice, curiously expressionless face, clumsy hands covered with absurd white mittens, who gave a squalid West End address and called himself “Swami Chandraputra.” This fellow was unbelievably erudite in occult lore and seemed profoundly and solemnly moved by the resemblance of the hieroglyphs on the scroll to certain signs and symbols of a forgotten elder world about which he professed vast intuitive knowledge.

By June, the fame of the mummy and scroll had leaked far beyond Boston, and the museum had inquiries and requests for photographs from occultists and students of arcana all over the world. This was not altogether pleasing to our staff, since we are a scientific institution without sympathy for fantastic dreamers; yet we answered all questions with civility. One result of these catechisms was a highly learned article in *The Occult Review* by the famous New Orleans mystic Etienne-Laurent de Marigny, in which was asserted the complete identity of some of the odd geometrical designs on the iridescent cylinder, and of several of the hieroglyphs on the membranous scroll, with certain ideographs of horrible significance (transcribed from primal monoliths or from the secret rituals of hidden bands of esoteric students and devotees) reproduced in the hellish and suppressed *Black Book* or *Nameless Cults* of von Junzt.

De Marigny recalled the frightful death of von Junzt in 1840, a year after the publication of his terrible volume at Düsseldorf, and commented on his blood-curdling and partly suspected sources of information. Above all, he emphasised the enormous relevance of the tales with which von Junzt linked most of the monstrous ideographs he had reproduced. That these tales, in which a cylinder and scroll were expressly mentioned, held a remarkable suggestion of relationship to the things at the museum, no one could deny; yet they were of such breath-taking extravagance—involving such unbelievable sweeps of time and such fantastic anomalies of a forgotten elder world—that one could much more easily admire than believe them.

Admire them the public certainly did, for copying in the press was universal. Illustrated articles sprang up everywhere, telling or purporting to tell the legends in the Black Book, expatiating on the horror of the mummy, comparing the cylinder's designs and the scroll's hieroglyphs with the figures reproduced by von Junzt, and indulging in the wildest, most sensational, and most irrational theories and speculations. Attendance at the museum was trebled, and the widespread nature of the interest was attested by the plethora of mail on the subject—most of it inane and superfluous—received at the museum. Apparently the mummy and its origin formed—for imaginative people—a close rival to the depression as chief topic of 1931 and 1932. For my own part, the principal effect of the furore was to make me read von Junzt's monstrous volume in the Golden Goblin edition—a perusal which left me dizzy and nauseated, yet thankful that I had not seen the utter infamy of the unexpurgated text.

III.

The archaic whispers reflected in the Black Book, and linked with designs and symbols so closely akin to what the mysterious scroll and cylinder bore, were indeed of a character to hold one spellbound and not a little awestruck. Leaping an incredible gulf of time—behind all the civilisations, races, and lands we know—they clustered round a vanished nation and a vanished continent of the misty, fabulous dawn-years...that to which legend has given the name of Mu, and which old tablets in the primal Naacal tongue speak of as flourishing 200,000 years ago, when Europe

harboured only hybrid entities, and lost Hyperborea knew the nameless worship of black amorphous Tsathoggua.

There was mention of a kingdom or province called K'naa in a very ancient land where the first human people had found monstrous ruins left by those who had dwelt there before—vague waves of unknown entities which had filtered down from the stars and lived out their aeons on a forgotten, nascent world. K'naa was a sacred place, since from its midst the bleak basalt cliffs of Mount Yaddith-Gho soared starkly into the sky, topped by a gigantic fortress of Cyclopean stone, infinitely older than mankind and built by the alien spawn of the dark planet Yuggoth, which had colonised the earth before the birth of terrestrial life.

The spawn of Yuggoth had perished aeons before, but had left behind them one monstrous and terrible living thing which could never die—their hellish god or patron daemon Ghatanothoa, which lowered and brooded eternally though unseen in the crypts beneath that fortress on Yaddith-Gho. No human creature had ever climbed Yaddith-Gho or seen that blasphemous fortress except as a distant and geometrically abnormal outline against the sky; yet most agreed that Ghatanothoa was still there, wallowing and burrowing in unsuspected abysses beneath the megalithic walls. There were always those who believed that sacrifices must be made to Ghatanothoa, lest it crawl out of its hidden abysses and waddle horribly through the world of men as it had once waddled through the primal world of the Yuggoth-spawn.

People said that if no victims were offered, Ghatanothoa would ooze up to the light of day and lumber down the basalt cliffs of Yaddith-Gho bringing doom to all it might encounter. For no living thing could behold Ghatanothoa, or even a perfect graven image of Ghatanothoa, however small, without suffering a change more horrible than death itself. Sight of the god, or its image, as all the legends of the Yuggoth-spawn agreed, meant paralysis and petrification of a singularly shocking sort, in which the victim was turned to stone and leather on the outside, while the brain within remained perpetually alive—horribly fixed and prisoned through the ages, and maddeningly conscious of the passage of interminable epochs of helpless inaction till chance and time might complete the decay of the petrified shell and leave it exposed to die. Most brains, of course, would go mad long before this aeon-deferred release could arrive. No human eyes, it

was said, had ever glimpsed Ghatanothoa, though the danger was as great now as it had been for the Yuggoth-spawn.

And so there was a cult in K'naa which worshipped Ghatanothoa and each year sacrificed to it twelve young warriors and twelve young maidens. These victims were offered up on flaming altars in the marble temple near the mountain's base, for none dared climb Yaddith-Gho's basalt cliffs or draw near to the Cyclopean pre-human stronghold on its crest. Vast was the power of the priests of Ghatanothoa, since upon them alone depended the preservation of K'naa and of all the land of Mu from the petrifying emergence of Ghatanothoa out of its unknown burrows.

There were in the land an hundred priests of the Dark God, under Imash-Mo the High-Priest, who walked before King Thabon at the Nath-feast, and stood proudly whilst the King knelt at the Dhoric shrine. Each priest had a marble house, a chest of gold, two hundred slaves, and an hundred concubines, besides immunity from civil law and the power of life and death over all in K'naa save the priests of the King. Yet in spite of these defenders there was ever a fear in the land lest Ghatanothoa slither up from the depths and lurch viciously down the mountain to bring horror and petrification to mankind. In the latter years the priests forbade men even to guess or imagine what its frightful aspect might be.

It was in the Year of the Red Moon (estimated as B. C. 173,148 by von Junzt) that a human being first dared to breathe defiance against Ghatanothoa and its nameless menace. This bold heretic was T'yog, High-Priest of Shub-Niggurath and guardian of the copper temple of the Goat with a Thousand Young. T'yog had thought long on the powers of the various gods, and had had strange dreams and revelations touching the life of this and earlier worlds. In the end he felt sure that the gods friendly to man could be arrayed against the hostile gods, and believed that Shub-Niggurath, Nug, and Yeb, as well as Yig the Serpent-god, were ready to take sides with man against the tyranny and presumption of Ghatanothoa.

Inspired by the Mother Goddess, T'yog wrote down a strange formula in the hieratic Naacal of his order, which he believed would keep the possessor immune from the Dark God's petrifying power. With this protection, he reflected, it might be possible for a bold man to climb the dreaded basalt cliffs and—first of all human beings—enter the Cyclopean fortress beneath which Ghatanothoa reputedly brooded. Face to face with

the god, and with the power of Shub-Niggurath and her sons on his side, T'yog believed that he might be able to bring it to terms and at last deliver mankind from its brooding menace. With humanity freed through his efforts, there would be no limits to the honours he might claim. All the honours of the priests of Ghatanothoa would perforce be transferred to him; and even kingship or godhood might conceivably be within his reach.

So T'yog wrote his protective formula on a scroll of pthagon membrane (according to von Junzt, the inner skin of the extinct yakith-lizard) and enclosed it in a carven cylinder of lagh metal—the metal brought by the Elder Ones from Yuggoth, and found in no mine of earth. This charm, carried in his robe, would make him proof against the menace of Ghatanothoa—it would even restore the Dark God's petrified victims if that monstrous entity should ever emerge and begin its devastations. Thus he proposed to go up the shunned and man-untrodden mountain, invade the alien-angled citadel of Cyclopean stone, and confront the shocking devil-entity in its lair. Of what would follow, he could not even guess; but the hope of being mankind's saviour lent strength to his will.

He had, however, reckoned without the jealousy and self-interest of Ghatanothoa's pampered priests. No sooner did they hear of his plan than—fearful for their prestige and privilege in case the Daemon-God should be dethroned—they set up a frantic clamour against the so-called sacrilege, crying that no man might prevail against Ghatanothoa, and that any effort to seek it out would merely provoke it to a hellish onslaught against mankind which no spell or priestcraft could hope to avert. With those cries they hoped to turn the public mind against T'yog; yet such was the people's yearning for freedom from Ghatanothoa, and such their confidence in the skill and zeal of T'yog, that all the protestations came to naught. Even the King, usually a puppet of the priests, refused to forbid T'yog's daring pilgrimage.

It was then that the priests of Ghatanothoa did by stealth what they could not do openly. One night Imash-Mo, the High-Priest, stole to T'yog in his temple chamber and took from his sleeping form the metal cylinder; silently drawing out the potent scroll and putting in its place another scroll of great similitude, yet varied enough to have no power against any god or daemon. When the cylinder was slipped back into the sleeper's cloak Imash-Mo was content, for he knew T'yog was little likely to study that

cylinder's contents again. Thinking himself protected by the true scroll, the heretic would march up the forbidden mountain and into the Evil Presence—and Ghatanothoa, unchecked by any magic, would take care of the rest.

It would no longer be needful for Ghatanothoa's priests to preach against the defiance. Let T'yog go his way and meet his doom. And secretly, the priests would always cherish the stolen scroll—the true and potent charm—handing it down from one High-Priest to another for use in any dim future when it might be needful to contravene the Devil-God's will. So the rest of the night Imash-Mo slept in great peace, with the true scroll in a new cylinder fashioned for its harbourage.

It was dawn on the Day of the Sky-Flames (nomenclature undefined by von Junzt) that T'yog, amidst the prayers and chanting of the people and with King Thabon's blessing on his head, started up the dreaded mountain with a staff of tlath-wood in his right hand. Within his robe was the cylinder holding what he thought to be the true charm—for he had indeed failed to find out the imposture. Nor did he see any irony in the prayers which Imash-Mo and the other priests of Ghatanothoa intoned for his safety and success.

All that morning the people stood and watched as T'yog's dwindling form struggled up the shunned basalt slope hitherto alien to men's footsteps, and many stayed watching long after he had vanished where a perilous ledge led round to the mountain's hidden side. That night a few sensitive dreamers thought they heard a faint tremor convulsing the hated peak; though most ridiculed them for the statement. Next day vast crowds watched the mountain and prayed, and wondered how soon T'yog would return. And so the next day, and the next. For weeks they hoped and waited, and then they wept. Nor did anyone ever see T'yog, who would have saved mankind from fears, again.

Thereafter men shuddered at T'yog's presumption, and tried not to think of the punishment his impiety had met. And the priests of Ghatanothoa smiled to those who might resent the god's will or challenge its right to the sacrifices. In later years the ruse of Imash-Mo became known to the people; yet the knowledge availed not to change the general feeling that Ghatanothoa were better left alone. None ever dared to defy it again. And so the ages rolled on, and King succeeded King, and High-Priest succeeded High-Priest, and nations rose and decayed, and lands rose above the sea and

returned into the sea. And with many millennia decay fell upon K'naa—till at last on a hideous day of storm and thunder, terrific rumbling, and mountain-high waves, all the land of Mu sank into the sea forever.

Yet down the later aeons thin streams of ancient secrets trickled. In distant lands there met together grey-faced fugitives who had survived the sea-fiend's rage, and strange skies drank the smoke of altars reared to vanished gods and daemons. Though none knew to what bottomless deep the sacred peak and Cyclopean fortress of dreaded Ghatanothoa had sunk, there were still those who mumbled its name and offered to it nameless sacrifices lest it bubble up through leagues of ocean and shamble among men spreading horror and petrification.

Around the scattered priests grew the rudiments of a dark and secret cult—secret because the people of the new lands had other gods and devils, and thought only evil of elder and alien ones—and within that cult many hideous things were done, and many strange objects cherished. It was whispered that a certain line of elusive priests still harboured the true charm against Ghatanothoa which Imash-Mo stole from the sleeping T'yog; though none remained who could read or understand the cryptic syllables, or who could even guess in what part of the world the lost K'naa, the dreaded peak of Yaddith-Gho, and the titan fortress of the Devil-God had lain.

Though it flourished chiefly in those Pacific regions around which Mu itself had once stretched, there were rumours of the hidden and detested cult of Ghatanothoa in ill-fated Atlantis, and on the abhorred plateau of Leng. Von Junzt implied its presence in the fabled subterrene kingdom of K'n-yan, and gave clear evidence that it had penetrated Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, China, the forgotten Semite empires of Africa, and Mexico and Peru in the New World. That it had a strong connexion with the witchcraft movement in Europe, against which the bulls of popes were vainly directed, he more than strongly hinted. The West, however, was never favourable to its growth; and public indignation—aroused by glimpses of hideous rites and nameless sacrifices—wholly stamped out many of its branches. In the end it became a hunted, doubly furtive underground affair—yet never could its nucleus be quite exterminated. It always survived somehow, chiefly in the Far East and on the Pacific Islands, where its teachings became merged into the esoteric lore of the Polynesian Areoi.

Von Junzt gave subtle and disquieting hints of actual contact with the cult; so that as I read I shuddered at what was rumoured about his death. He spoke of the growth of certain ideas regarding the appearance of the Devil-God—a creature which no human being (unless it were the too-daring T'yog, who had never returned) had ever seen—and contrasted this habit of speculation with the taboo prevailing in ancient Mu against any attempt to imagine what the horror looked like. There was a peculiar fearfulness about the devotees' awed and fascinated whispers on this subject—whispers heavy with morbid curiosity concerning the precise nature of what T'yog might have confronted in that frightful pre-human edifice on the dreaded and now-sunken mountains before the end (if it was an end) finally came—and I felt oddly disturbed by the German scholar's oblique and insidious references to this topic.

Scarcely less disturbing were von Junzt's conjectures on the whereabouts of the stolen scroll of cantrips against Ghatanothoa, and on the ultimate uses to which this scroll might be put. Despite all my assurance that the whole matter was purely mythical, I could not help shivering at the notion of a latter-day emergence of the monstrous god, and at the picture of an humanity turned suddenly to a race of abnormal statues, each encasing a living brain doomed to inert and helpless consciousness for untold aeons of futurity. The old Düsseldorf savant had a poisonous way of suggesting more than he stated, and I could understand why his damnable book was suppressed in so many countries as blasphemous, dangerous, and unclean.

I writhed with repulsion, yet the thing exerted an unholy fascination; and I could not lay it down till I had finished it. The alleged reproductions of designs and ideographs from Mu were marvellously and startlingly like the markings on the strange cylinder and the characters on the scroll, and the whole account teemed with details having vague, irritating suggestions of resemblance to things connected with the hideous mummy. The cylinder and scroll—the Pacific setting—the persistent notion of old Capt. Weatherbee that the Cyclopean crypt where the mummy was found had once lain under a vast building...somehow I was vaguely glad that the volcanic island had sunk before that massive suggestion of a trap-door could be opened.

What I read in the Black Book formed a fiendishly apt preparation for the news items and closer events which began to force themselves upon me in the spring of 1932. I can scarcely recall just when the increasingly frequent reports of police action against the odd and fantastical religious cults in the Orient and elsewhere commenced to impress me; but by May or June I realised that there was, all over the world, a surprising and unwonted burst of activity on the part of bizarre, furtive, and esoteric mystical organisations ordinarily quiescent and seldom heard from.

It is not likely that I would have connected these reports with either the hints of von Junzt or the popular furore over the mummy and cylinder in the museum, but for certain significant syllables and persistent resemblances—sensationally dwelt upon by the press—in the rites and speeches of the various secret celebrants brought to public attention. As it was, I could not help remarking with disquiet the frequent recurrence of a name—in various corrupt forms—which seemed to constitute a focal point of all the cult worship, and which was obviously regarded with a singular mixture of reverence and terror. Some of the forms quoted were G'tanta, Tanotah, Than-Tha, Gatan, and Ktan-Tah—and it did not require the suggestions of my now numerous occultist correspondents to make me see in these variants a hideous and suggestive kinship to the monstrous name rendered by von Junzt as Ghatanothoa.

There were other disquieting features, too. Again and again the reports cited vague, awestruck references to a “true scroll”—something on which tremendous consequences seemed to hinge, and which was mentioned as being in the custody of a certain “Nagob,” whoever and whatever he might be. Likewise, there was an insistent repetition of a name which sounded like Tog, Tiok, Yog, Zob, or Yob, and which my more and more excited consciousness involuntarily linked with the name of the hapless heretic T'yog as given in the Black Book. This name was usually uttered in connexion with such cryptical phrases as “It is none other than he,” “He had looked upon its face,” “He knows all, though he can neither see nor feel,” “He has brought the memory down through the aeons,” “The true scroll will release him,” “Nagob has the true scroll,” “He can tell where to find it.”

Something very queer was undoubtedly in the air, and I did not wonder when my occultist correspondents, as well as the sensational Sunday papers, began to connect the new abnormal stirrings with the legends of Mu

on the one hand, and with the frightful mummy's recent exploitation on the other hand. The widespread articles in the first wave of press publicity, with their insistent linkage of the mummy, cylinder, and scroll with the tale in the Black Book, and their crazily fantastic speculations about the whole matter, might very well have roused the latent fanaticism in hundreds of those furtive groups of exotic devotees with which our complex world abounds. Nor did the papers cease adding fuel to the flames—for the stories on the cult-stirrings were even wilder than the earlier series of yarns.

As the summer drew on, attendants noticed a curious new element among the throngs of visitors which—after a lull following the first burst of publicity—were again drawn to the museum by the second furore. More and more frequently there were persons of strange and exotic aspect—swarthy Asiatics, long-haired nondescripts, and bearded brown men who seemed unused to European clothes—who would invariably inquire for the hall of mummies and would subsequently be found staring at the hideous Pacific specimen in a veritable ecstasy of fascination. Some quiet, sinister undercurrent in this flood of eccentric foreigners seemed to impress all the guards, and I myself was far from undisturbed. I could not help thinking of the prevailing cult-stirrings among just such exotics as these—and the connexion of those stirrings with myths all too close to the frightful mummy and its cylinder scroll.

At times I was half tempted to withdraw the mummy from exhibition—especially when an attendant told me that he had several times glimpsed strangers making odd obeisances before it, and had overheard sing-song mutterings which sounded like chants or rituals addressed to it at hours when the visiting throngs were somewhat thinned. One of the guards acquired a queer nervous hallucination about the petrified horror in the lone glass case, alleging that he could see from day to day certain vague, subtle, and infinitely slight changes in the frantic flexion of the bony claws, and in the fear-crazed expression of the leathery face. He could not get rid of the loathsome idea that those horrible, bulging eyes were about to pop suddenly open.

It was early in September, when the curious crowds had lessened and the hall of mummies was sometimes vacant, that the attempt to get at the mummy by cutting the glass of its case was made. The culprit, a swarthy Polynesian, was spied in time by a guard, and was overpowered before any

damage occurred. Upon investigation the fellow turned out to be an Hawaiian notorious for his activity in certain underground religious cults, and having a considerable police record in connexion with abnormal and inhuman rites and sacrifices. Some of the papers found in his room were highly puzzling and disturbing, including many sheets covered with hieroglyphs closely resembling those on the scroll at the museum and in the Black Book of von Junzt; but regarding these things he could not be prevailed upon to speak.

Scarcely a week after this incident, another attempt to get at the mummy—this time by tampering with the lock of his case—resulted in a second arrest. The offender, a Cingalese, had as long and unsavoury a record of loathsome cult activities as the Hawaiian had possessed, and displayed a kindred unwillingness to talk to the police. What made this case doubly and darkly interesting was that a guard had noticed this man several times before, and had heard him addressing to the mummy a peculiar chant containing unmistakable repetitions of the word “T’yog.” As a result of this affair I doubled the guards in the hall of mummies, and ordered them never to leave the now notorious specimen out of sight, even for a moment.

As may well be imagined, the press made much of these two incidents, reviewing its talk of primal and fabulous Mu, and claiming boldly that the hideous mummy was none other than the daring heretic T’yog, petrified by something he had seen in the pre-human citadel he had invaded, and preserved intact through 175,000 years of our planet’s turbulent history. That the strange devotees represented cults descended from Mu, and that they were worshipping the mummy—or perhaps even seeking to awaken it to life by spells and incantations—was emphasised and reiterated in the most sensational fashion.

Writers exploited the insistence of the old legends that the brain of Ghatanothoa’s petrified victims remained conscious and unaffected—a point which served as a basis for the wildest and most improbable speculations. The mention of a “true scroll” also received due attention—it being the prevailing popular theory that T’yog’s stolen charm against Ghatanothoa was somewhere in existence, and that cult-members were trying to bring it into contact with T’yog himself for some purpose of their own. One result of this exploitation was that a third wave of gaping visitors

began flooding the museum and staring at the hellish mummy which served as a nucleus for the whole strange and disturbing affair.

It was among this wave of spectators—many of whom made repeated visits—that talk of the mummy’s vaguely changing aspect first began to be widespread. I suppose—despite the disturbing notion of the nervous guard some months before—that the museum’s personnel was too well used to the constant sight of odd shapes to pay close attention to details; in any case, it was the excited whispers of visitors which at length aroused the guards to the subtle mutation which was apparently in progress. Almost simultaneously the press got hold of it—with blatant results which can well be imagined.

Naturally, I gave the matter my most careful observation, and by the middle of October decided that a definite disintegration of the mummy was under way. Through some chemical or physical influence in the air, the half-stony, half-leathery fibres seemed to be gradually relaxing, causing distinct variations in the angles of the limbs and in certain details of the fear-twisted facial expression. After a half-century of perfect preservation this was a highly disconcerting development, and I had the museum’s taxidermist, Dr. Moore, go carefully over the gruesome object several times. He reported a general relaxation and softening, and gave the thing two or three astringent sprayings, but did not dare to attempt anything drastic lest there be a sudden crumbling and accelerated decay.

The effect of all this upon the gaping crowds was curious. Heretofore each new sensation sprung by the press had brought fresh waves of staring and whispering visitors, but now—though the papers blathered endlessly about the mummy’s changes—the public seemed to have acquired a definite sense of fear which outranked even its morbid curiosity. People seemed to feel that a sinister aura hovered over the museum, and from a high peak the attendance fell to a level distinctly below normal. This lessened attendance gave added prominence to the stream of freakish foreigners who continued to infest the place, and whose numbers seemed in no way diminished.

On November 18th a Peruvian of Indian blood suffered a strange hysterical or epileptic seizure in front of the mummy, afterward shrieking from his hospital cot, “It tried to open its eyes!—T’yog tried to open his eyes and stare at me!” I was by this time on the point of removing the object from exhibition, but permitted myself to be overruled at a meeting of

our very conservative directors. However, I could see that the museum was beginning to acquire an unholy reputation in its austere and quiet neighbourhood. After this incident I gave instructions that no one be allowed to pause before the monstrous Pacific relic for more than a few minutes at a time.

It was on November 24th, after the museum's five o'clock closing, that one of the guards noticed a minute opening of the mummy's eyes. The phenomenon was very slight—nothing but a thin crescent of cornea being visible in either eye—but it was none the less of the highest interest. Dr. Moore, having been summoned hastily, was about to study the exposed bits of eyeball with a magnifier when his handling of the mummy caused the leathery lids to fall tightly shut again. All gentle efforts to open them failed, and the taxidermist did not dare to apply drastic measures. When he notified me of all this by telephone I felt a sense of mounting dread hard to reconcile with the apparently simple event concerned. For a moment I could share the popular impression that some evil, amorphous blight from unplumbed deeps of time and space hung murkily and menacingly over the museum.

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Two nights later a sullen Filipino was trying to secrete himself in the museum at closing time. Arrested and taken to the station, he refused even to give his name, and was detained as a suspicious person. Meanwhile the strict surveillance of the mummy seemed to discourage the odd hordes of foreigners from haunting it. At least, the number of exotic visitors distinctly fell off after the enforcement of the "move along" order.

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It was during the early morning hours of Thursday, December 1st, that a terrible climax developed. At about one o'clock horrible screams of mortal fright and agony were heard issuing from the museum, and a series of frantic telephone calls from neighbours brought to the scene quickly and simultaneously a squad of police and several museum officials, including myself. Some of the policemen surrounded the building while others, with the officials, cautiously entered. In the main corridor we found the night watchman strangled to death—a bit of East Indian hemp still knotted around his neck—and realised that despite all precautions some darkly evil

intruder or intruders had gained access to the place. Now, however, a tomb-like silence enfolded everything and we almost feared to advance upstairs to the fateful wing where we knew the core of the trouble must lurk. We felt a bit more steadied after flooding the building with light from the central switches in the corridor, and finally crept reluctantly up the curving staircase and through a lofty archway to the hall of mummies.

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It is from this point onward that reports of the hideous case have been censored—for we have all agreed that no good can be accomplished by a public knowledge of those terrestrial conditions implied by the further developments. I have said that we flooded the whole building with light before our ascent. Now beneath the beams that beat down on the glistening cases and their gruesome contents, we saw outspread a mute horror whose baffling details testified to happenings utterly beyond our comprehension. There were two intruders—who we afterward agreed must have hidden in the building before closing time—but they would never be executed for the watchman's murder. They had already paid the penalty.

One was a Burmese and the other a Fiji-Islander—both known to the police for their share in frightful and repulsive cult activities. They were dead, and the more we examined them the more utterly monstrous and unnamable we felt their manner of death to be. On both faces was a more wholly frantic and inhuman look of fright than even the oldest policeman had ever seen before; yet in the state of the two bodies there were vast and significant differences.

The Burmese lay collapsed close to the nameless mummy's case, from which a square of glass had been neatly cut. In his right hand was a scroll of bluish membrane which I at once saw was covered with greyish hieroglyphs—almost a duplicate of the scroll in the strange cylinder in the library downstairs, though later study brought out subtle differences. There was no mark of violence on the body, and in view of the desperate, agonised expression on the twisted face we could only conclude that the man died of sheer fright.

It was the closely adjacent Fijian, though, that gave us the profoundest shock. One of the policemen was the first to feel of him, and the cry of fright he emitted added another shudder to that neighbourhood's night of

terror. We ought to have known from the lethal greyness of the once-black, fear-twisted face, and of the bony hands—one of which still clutched an electric torch—that something was hideously wrong; yet every one of us was unprepared for what that officer's hesitant touch disclosed. Even now I can think of it only with a paroxysm of dread and repulsion. To be brief—the hapless invader, who less than an hour before had been a sturdy living Melanesian bent on unknown evils, was now a rigid, ash-grey figure of stony, leathery petrification, in every respect identical with the crouching, aeon-old blasphemy in the violated glass case.

Yet that was not the worst. Crowning all other horrors, and indeed seizing our shocked attention before we turned to the bodies on the floor, was the state of the frightful mummy. No longer could its changes be called vague and subtle, for it had now made radical shifts of posture. It had sagged and slumped with a curious loss of rigidity; its bony claws had sunk until they no longer even partly covered its leathery, fear-crazed face; and—God help us!—its hellish bulging eyes had popped wide open, and seemed to be staring directly at the two intruders who had died of fright or worse.

That ghastly, dead-fish stare was hideously mesmerising, and it haunted us all the time we were examining the bodies of the invaders. Its effect on our nerves was damnably queer, for we somehow felt a curious rigidity creeping over us and hampering our simplest motions—a rigidity which later vanished very oddly when we passed the hieroglyphed scroll around for inspection. Every now and then I felt my gaze drawn irresistibly toward those horrible bulging eyes in the case, and when I returned to study them after viewing the bodies I thought I detected something very singular about the glassy surface of the dark and marvellously well-preserved pupils. The more I looked, the more fascinated I became; and at last I went down to the office—despite that strange stiffness in my limbs—and brought up a strong multiple magnifying glass. With this I commenced a very close and careful survey of the fishy pupils, while the others crowded expectantly around.

I had always been rather sceptical of the theory that scenes and objects become photographed on the retina of the eye in cases of death or coma; yet no sooner did I look through the lens than I realised the presence of some sort of image other than the room's reflection in the glassy, bulging optics of this nameless spawn of the aeons. Certainly, there was a dimly outlined scene on the age-old retinal surface, and I could not doubt that it formed the

last thing on which those eyes had looked in life—countless millennia ago. It seemed to be steadily fading, and I fumbled with the magnifier in order to shift another lens into place. Yet it must have been accurate and clear-cut, even if infinitesimally small, when—in response to some evil spell or act connected with their visit—it had confronted those intruders who were frightened to death. With the extra lens I could make out many details formerly invisible, and the awed group around me hung on the flood of words with which I tried to tell what I saw.

For here, in the year 1932, a man in the city of Boston was looking on something which belonged to an unknown and utterly alien world—a world that vanished from existence and normal memory aeons ago. There was a vast room—a chamber of Cyclopean masonry—and I seemed to be viewing it from one of its corners. On the walls were carvings so hideous that even in this imperfect image their stark blasphemousness and bestiality sickened me. I could not believe that the carvers of these things were human, or that they had ever seen human beings when they shaped the frightful outlines which leered at the beholder. In the centre of the chamber was a colossal trap-door of stone, pushed upward to permit the emergence of some object from below. The object should have been clearly visible—indeed, must have been when the eyes first opened before the fear-stricken intruders—though under my lenses it was merely a monstrous blur.

As it happened, I was studying the right eye only when I brought the extra magnification into play. A moment later I wished fervently that my search had ended there. As it was, however, the zeal of discovery and revelation was upon me, and I shifted my powerful lenses to the mummy's left eye in the hope of finding the image less faded on that retina. My hands, trembling with excitement and unnaturally stiff from some obscure influence, were slow in bringing the magnifier into focus, but a moment later I realised that the image was less faded than in the other eye. I saw in a morbid flash of half-distinctness the insufferable thing which was welling up through the prodigious trap-door in that Cyclopean, immemorially archaic crypt of a lost world—and fell fainting with an inarticulate shriek of which I am not even ashamed.

By the time I revived there was no distinct image of anything in either eye of the monstrous mummy. Sergeant Keefe of the police looked with my glass, for I could not bring myself to face that abnormal entity again. And I

thanked all the powers of the cosmos that I had not looked earlier than I did. It took all my resolution, and a great deal of solicitation, to make me relate what I had glimpsed in the hideous moment of revelation. Indeed, I could not speak till we had all adjourned to the office below, out of sight of that daemoniac thing which could not be. For I had begun to harbour the most terrible and fantastic notions about the mummy and its glassy, bulging eyes—that it had a kind of hellish consciousness, seeing all that occurred before it and trying vainly to communicate some frightful message from the gulfs of time. That meant madness—but at last I thought I might be better off if I told what I had half seen.

After all, it was not a long thing to tell. Oozing and surging up out of that yawning trap-door in the Cyclopean crypt I had glimpsed such an unbelievable behemothic monstrosity that I could not doubt the power of its original to kill with its mere sight. Even now I cannot begin to suggest it with any words at my command. I might call it gigantic—tentacled—proboscidian—octopus-eyed—semi-amorphous—plastic—partly squamous and partly rugose—ugh! But nothing I could say could even adumbrate the loathsome, unholy, non-human, extra-galactic horror and hatefulness and unutterable evil of that forbidden spawn of black chaos and illimitable night. As I write these words the associated mental image causes me to lean back faint and nauseated. As I told of the sight to the men around me in the office, I had to fight to preserve the consciousness I had regained.

Nor were my hearers much less moved. Not a man spoke above a whisper for a full quarter-hour, and there were awed, half-furtive references to the frightful lore in the Black Book, to the recent newspaper tales of cult-stirrings, and to the sinister events in the museum. Ghatanothoa... Even its smallest perfect image could petrify—T'yog—the false scroll—he never came back—the true scroll which could fully or partly undo the petrification—did it survive?—the hellish cults—the phrases overheard—“It is none other than he”—“He had looked upon its face”—“He knows all, though he can neither see nor feel”—“He had brought the memory down through the aeons”—“The true scroll will release him”—“Nagob has the true scroll”—“He can tell where to find it.” Only the healing greyness of the dawn brought us back to sanity; a sanity which made of that glimpse of mine a closed topic—something not to be explained or thought of again.

We gave out only partial reports to the press, and later on coöperated with the papers in making other suppressions. For example, when the autopsy shewed the brain and several other internal organs of the petrified Fijian to be fresh and unpetrified, though hermetically sealed by the petrification of the exterior flesh—an anomaly about which physicians are still guardedly and bewilderedly debating—we did not wish a furore to be started. We knew too well what the yellow journals, remembering what was said of the intact-brained and still-conscious state of Ghatanothoa's stony-leathery victims, would make of this detail.

As matters stood, they pointed out that the man who had held the hieroglyphed scroll—and who had evidently thrust it at the mummy through the opening in the case—was not petrified, while the man who had not held it was. When they demanded that we make certain experiments—applying the scroll both to the stony-leathery body of the Fijian and to the mummy itself—we indignantly refused to abet such superstitious notions. Of course, the mummy was withdrawn from public view and transferred to the museum laboratory awaiting a really scientific examination before some suitable medical authority. Remembering past events, we kept it under a strict guard; but even so, an attempt was made to enter the museum at 2:25 a.m. on December 5th. Prompt working of the burglar alarm frustrated the design, though unfortunately the criminal or criminals escaped.

That no hint of anything further ever reached the public, I am profoundly thankful. I wish devoutly that there were nothing more to tell. There will, of course, be leaks, and if anything happens to me I do not know what my executors will do with this manuscript; but at least the case will not be painfully fresh in the multitude's memory when the revelation comes. Besides, no one will believe the facts when they are finally told. That is the curious thing about the multitude. When their yellow press makes hints, they are ready to swallow anything; but when a stupendous and abnormal revelation is actually made, they laugh it aside as a lie. For the sake of general sanity it is probably better so.

I have said that a scientific examination of the frightful mummy was planned. This took place on December 8th, exactly a week after the hideous culmination of events, and was conducted by the eminent Dr. William Minot, in conjunction with Wentworth Moore, Sc.D., taxidermist of the museum. Dr. Minot had witnessed the autopsy of the oddly petrified Fijian

the week before. There were also present Messrs. Lawrence Cabot and Dudley Saltonstall of the museum's trustees, Drs. Mason, Wells, and Carver of the museum staff, two representatives of the press, and myself. During the week the condition of the hideous specimen had not visibly changed, though some relaxation of its fibres caused the position of the glassy, open eyes to shift slightly from time to time. All of the staff dreaded to look at the thing—for its suggestion of quiet, conscious watching had become intolerable—and it was only with an effort that I could bring myself to attend the examination.

Dr. Minot arrived shortly after 1:00 p.m., and within a few minutes began his survey of the mummy. Considerable disintegration took place under his hands, and in view of this—and of what we told him concerning the gradual relaxation of the specimen since the first of October—he decided that a thorough dissection ought to be made before the substance was further impaired. The proper instruments being present in the laboratory equipment, he began at once; exclaiming aloud at the odd, fibrous nature of the grey, mummified substance.

But his exclamation was still louder when he made the first deep incision, for out of that cut there slowly trickled a thick crimson stream whose nature—despite the infinite ages dividing this hellish mummy's lifetime from the present—was utterly unmistakable. A few more deft strokes revealed various organs in astonishing degrees of non-petrified preservation—all, indeed, being intact except where injuries to the petrified exterior had brought about malformation or destruction. The resemblance of this condition to that found in the fright-killed Fiji-Islander was so strong that the eminent physician gasped in bewilderment. The perfection of those ghastly bulging eyes was uncanny, and their exact state with respect to petrification was very difficult to determine.

At 3:30 p.m. the brain-case was opened—and ten minutes later our stunned group took an oath of secrecy which only such guarded documents as this manuscript will ever modify. Even the two reporters were glad to confirm the silence. For the opening had revealed a pulsing, living brain.

FISHHEAD, by Irvin S. Cobb

Originally published in *The Cavalier*, January 11 1913.

It goes past the powers of my pen to try to describe Reelfoot Lake for you so that you, reading this, will get the picture of it in your mind as I have it in mine.

For Reelfoot Lake is like no other lake that I know anything about. It is an after-thought of Creation.

The rest of this continent was made and had dried in the sun for thousands of years—millions of years, for all I know—before Reelfoot came to be. It's the newest big thing in nature on this hemisphere, probably, for it was formed by the great earthquake of 1811.

That earthquake of 1811 surely altered the face of the earth on the then far frontier of this country.

It changed the course of rivers, it converted hills into what are now the sunk lands of three states, and it turned the solid ground to jelly and made it roll in waves like the sea.

And in the midst of the retching of the land and the vomiting of the waters it depressed to varying depths a section of the earth crust sixty miles long, taking it down—trees, hills, hollows, and all, and a crack broke through to the Mississippi River so that for three days the river ran up stream, filling the hole.

The result was the largest lake south of the Ohio, lying mostly in Tennessee, but extending up across what is now the Kentucky line, and taking its name from a fancied resemblance in its outline to the splay, reeled foot of a cornfield negro. Niggerwool Swamp, not so far away, may have got its name from the same man who christened Reelfoot: at least so it sounds.

Reelfoot is, and has always been, a lake of mystery.

In places it is bottomless. Other places the skeletons of the cypress-trees that went down when the earth sank, still stand upright so that if the sun shines from the right quarter, and the water is less muddy than common, a man, peering face downward into its depths, sees, or thinks he sees, down below him the bare top-limbs upstretching like drowned men's fingers, all

coated with the mud of years and bandaged with pennons of the green lake slime.

In still other places the lake is shallow for long stretches, no deeper than breast high to a man, but dangerous because of the weed growths and the sunken drifts which entangle a swimmer's limbs. Its banks are mainly mud, its waters are muddied, too, being a rich coffee color in the spring and a copperish yellow in the summer, and the trees along its shore are mud colored clear up their lower limbs after the spring floods, when the dried sediment covers their trunks with a thick, scrofulous-looking coat.

There are stretches of unbroken woodland around it, and slashes where the cypress knees rise countlessly like headstones and footstones for the dead snags that rot in the soft ooze.

There are deadenings with the lowland corn growing high and rank below and the bleached, fire-blackened girdled trees rising above, barren of leaf and limb.

There are long, dismal flats where in the spring the clotted frog-spawn cling like patches of white mucus among the weed-stalks, and at night the turtles crawl out to lay clutches of perfectly, round, white eggs with tough, rubbery shells in the sand. There are bayous leading off to nowhere, and sloughs that wind aimlessly, like great, blind worms, to finally join the big river that rolls its semi-liquid torrents a few miles to the westward.

So Reelfoot lies there, flat in the bottoms, freezing lightly in the winter, steaming torridly in the summer, swollen in the spring when the woods have turned a vivid green and the buffalo-gnats by the million and the billion fill the flooded hollows with their pestilential buzzing, and in the fall, ringed about gloriously with all the colors which the first frost brings—gold of hickory, yellow-russet of sycamore, red of dogwood and ash, and purple-black of sweet-gum.

But the Reelfoot country has its uses. It is the best game and fish country, natural or artificial, that is left in the South today.

In their appointed seasons the duck and the geese flock in, and even semi-tropical birds, like the brown pelican and the Florida snake-bird, have been known to come there to nest.

Pigs, gone back to wildness, range the ridges, each razor-backed drove captained by a gaunt, savage, slab-sided old boar. By night the bullfrogs, inconceivably big and tremendously vocal, bellow under the banks.

It is a wonderful place for fish—bass and crappie, and perch, and the snouted buffalo fish.

How these edible sorts live to spawn, and how their spawn in turn live to spawn again is a marvel, seeing how many of the big fish-eating cannibal-fish there are in Reelfoot.

Here, bigger than anywhere else, you find the garfish, all bones and appetite and horny plates, with a snout like an alligator, the nearest link, naturalists say, between the animal life of today and the animal life of the Reptilian Period.

The shovel-nose cat, really a deformed kind of fresh-water sturgeon, with a great fan-shaped membranous plate jutting out from his nose like a bowsprit, jumps all day in the quiet places with mighty splashing sounds, as though a horse had fallen into the water.

On every stranded log the huge snapping turtles lie on sunny days in groups of four and six, baking their shells black in the sun, with their little snaky heads raised watchfully, ready to slip noiselessly off at the first sound of oars grating in the row-locks. But the biggest of them all are the catfish!

These are monstrous creatures, these catfish of Reelfoot—scaleless, slick things, with corpsy, dead eyes and poisonous fins, like javelins, and huge whiskers dangling from the sides of their cavernous heads.

Six and seven feet long they grow to be, and weigh 200 pounds or more, and they have mouths wide enough to take in a man's foot or a man's fist, and strong enough to break any hook save the strongest, and greedy enough to eat anything, living or dead or putrid, that the horny jaws can master.

Oh, but they are wicked things, and they tell wicked tales of them down there. They call them man-eaters, and compare them, in certain of their habits, to sharks.

Fishhead was of a piece with this setting.

He fitted into it as an acorn fits its cup. All his life he had lived on Reelfoot, always in the one place, at the mouth of a certain slough.

He had been born there, of a negro father and a half-breed Indian mother, both of them now dead, and the story was that before his birth his mother was frightened by one of the big fish, so that the child came into the world most hideously marked.

Anyhow, Fishhead was a human monstrosity, the veritable embodiment of nightmare!

He had the body of a man—a short, stocky sinewy body—but his face was as near to being the face of a great fish as any face could be and yet retain some trace of human aspect.

His skull sloped back so abruptly that he could hardly be said to have a forehead at all; his chin slanted off right into nothing. His eyes were small and round with shallow, glazed, pale-yellow pupils, and they were set wide apart in his head, and they were unwinking and staring, like a fish's eyes.

His nose was no more than a pair of tiny slits in the middle of the yellow mask. His mouth was the worst of all. It was the awful mouth of a catfish, lipless and almost inconceivably wide, stretching from side to side.

Also when Fishhead became a man grown his likeness to a fish increased, for the hair upon his face grew out into two tightly kinked slender pendants that drooped down either side of the mouth like the beards of a fish!

If he had another name than Fishhead, none excepting he knew it. As Fishhead he was known, and as Fishhead he answered. Because he knew the waters and the woods of Reelfoot better than any other man there, he was valued as a guide by the city men who came every year to hunt or fish; but there were few such jobs that Fishhead would take.

Mainly he kept to himself, tending his corn patch, netting the lake, trapping a little, and in season pot hunting for the city markets. His neighbors, ague-bitten whites and malaria-proof negroes alike, left him to himself.

Indeed, for the most part they had a superstitious fear of him. So he lived alone, with no kith nor kin, nor even a friend, shunning his kind and shunned by them.

His cabin stood just below the State line, where Mud Slough runs into the lake. It was a shack of logs, the only human habitation for four miles up or down.

Behind it the thick timber came shouldering right up to the edge of Fishhead's small truck patch, enclosing it in thick shade except when the sun stood just overhead.

He cooked his food in a primitive fashion, outdoors, over a hole in the soggy earth or upon the rusted red ruin of an old cookstove, and he drank the saffron water of the lake out of a dipper made of a gourd, faring and

fending for himself, a master hand at skiff and net, competent with duck gun and fishspear, yet a creature of affliction and loneliness, part savage, almost amphibious, set apart from his fellows, silent and suspicious.

In front of his cabin jutted out a long fallen cottonwood trunk, lying half in and half out of the water, its top side burnt by the sun and worn by the friction of Fishhead's bare feet until it showed countless patterns of tiny scrolled lines, its underside black and rotted, and lapped at unceasingly by little waves like tiny licking tongues.

Its farther end reached deep water. And it was a part of Fishhead, for no matter how far his fishing and trapping might take him in the daytime, sunset would find him back there, his boat drawn up on the bank, and he on the other end of this log.

From a distance men had seen him there many times, sometimes squatted motionless as the big turtles that would crawl upon its dipping tip in his absence, sometimes erect and motionless like a creek crane, his misshapen yellow form outlined against the yellow sun, the yellow water, the yellow banks—all of them yellow together.

If the Reelfooters shunned Fishhead by day they feared him by night and avoided him as a plague, dreading even the chance of a casual meeting. For there were ugly stories about Fishhead—stories which all the negroes and some of the whites believed.

They said that a cry which had been heard just before dusk and just after, skittering across the darkened waters, was his calling cry to the big cats, and at his bidding they came trooping in, and that in their company he swam in the lake on moonlight nights, sporting with them, diving with them, even feeding with them on what manner of unclean things they fed.

The cry had been heard many times, that much was certain, and it was certain also that the big fish were noticeably thick at the mouth of Fishhead's slough. No native Reelfooter, white or black, would willingly wet a leg or an arm there.

Here Fishhead had lived, and here he was going to die. The Baxters were going to kill him, and this day in late summer was to be the time of the killing.

The two Baxters—Jake and Joel—were coming in their dugout to do it!

This murder had been a long time in the making. The Baxters had to brew their hate over a slow fire for months before it reached the pitch of

action.

They were poor whites, poor in everything, repute, and worldly goods, and standing—a pair of fever-ridden squatters who lived on whiskey and tobacco when they could get it, and on fish and cornbread when they couldn't.

The feud itself was of months' standing. Meeting Fishhead one day, in the spring on the spindly scaffolding of the skiff landing at Walnut Log, and being themselves far overtaken in liquor and vainglorious with a bogus alcoholic substitute for courage, the brothers had accused him, wantonly and without proof, of running their trout-line and stripping it of the hooked catch—an unforgivable sin among the water dwellers and the shanty boaters of the South.

Seeing that he bore this accusation in silence, only eyeing them steadfastly, they had been emboldened then to slap his face, whereupon he turned and gave them both the beating of their lives—bloodying their noses and bruising their lips with hard blows against their front teeth, and finally leaving them, mauled and prone, in the dirt.

Moreover, in the onlookers a sense of the everlasting fitness of things had triumphed over race prejudice and allowed them—two freeborn, sovereign whites—to be licked by a black man! Therefore they were going to get him!

The whole thing had been planned out amply. They were going to kill him on his log at sundown. There would be no witnesses to see it, no retribution to follow after it. The very ease of the undertaking made them forget even their inborn fear of the place of Fishhead's habitation.

For more than an hour they had been coming from their shack across a deeply indented arm of the lake.

Their dugout, fashioned by fire and adz and draw-knife from the bole of a gum-tree, moved through the water as noiselessly as a swimming mallard, leaving behind it a long, wavy trail on the stilled waters.

Jake, the better oarsman, sat flat in the stern of the round-bottomed craft, paddling with quick, splashless strokes, Joel, the better shot, was squatted forward. There was a heavy, rusted duck gun between his knees.

Though their spying upon the victim had made them certain sure he would not be about the shore for hours, a doubled sense of caution led them to hug closely the weedy banks. They slid along the shore like shadows,

moving so swiftly and in such silence that the watchful mudturtles barely turned their snaky heads as they passed.

So, a full hour before the time, they came slipping around the mouth of the slough and made for a natural ambushade which the mixed-breed had left within a stone's jerk of his cabin to his own undoing.

Where the slough's flow joined deeper water a partly uprooted tree was stretched, prone from shore, at the top still thick and green with leaves that drew nourishment from the earth in which the half uncovered roots yet held, and twined about with an exuberance of trumpet vines and wild fox-grapes. All about was a huddle of drift—last year's cornstalks, shreddy strips of bark, chunks of rotted weed, all the ruffle and dunnage of a quiet eddy.

Straight into this green clump glided the dugout and swung, broadside on, against the protecting trunk of the tree, hidden from the inner side by the intervening curtains of rank growth, just as the Baxters had intended it should be hidden when days before in their scouting they marked this masked place of waiting and included it, then and there, in the scope of their plans.

There had been no hitch or mishap. No one had been abroad in the late afternoon to mark their movements—and in a little while Fishhead ought to be due. Jake's woodman's eye followed the downward swing of the sun speculatively.

The shadows, thrown shoreward, lengthened and slithered on the small ripples. The small noises of the day died out; the small noises of the coming night began to multiply.

The green-bodied flies went away and big mosquitoes with speckled gray legs, came to take the places of the flies.

The sleepy lake sucked at the mud banks with small mouthing sounds, as though it found the taste of the raw mud agreeable. A monster crawfish, big as a chicken lobster, crawled out of the top of his dried mud chimney and perched himself there, an armored sentinel on the watchtower.

Bull bats began to flutter back and forth, above the tops of the trees. A pudgy muskrat, swimming with head up, was moved to sidle off briskly as he met a cotton-mouth moccasin snake, so fat and swollen with summer poison that it looked almost like a legless lizard as it moved along the surface of the water in a series of slow torpid S's. Directly above the head

of either of the waiting assassins a compact little swarm of midges hung, holding to a sort of kite-shaped formation.

A little more time passed and Fishhead came out of the woods at the back, walking swiftly, with a sack over his shoulder.

For a few seconds his deformities showed in the clearing, then the black inside of the cabin swallowed him up.

By now the sun was almost down. Only the red nub of it showed above the timber line across the lake, and the shadows lay inland a long way. Out beyond, the big cats were stirring, and the great smacking sounds as their twisting bodies leaped clear and fell back in the water, came shoreward in a chorus.

But the two brothers, in their green covert, gave heed to nothing except the one thing upon which their hearts were set and their nerves tensed. Joel gently shoved his gun barrels across the log, cuddling the stock to his shoulder and slipping two fingers caressingly back and forth upon the triggers. Jake held the narrow dugout steady by a grip upon a fox-grape tendril.

A little wait and then the finish came!

Fishhead emerged from the cabin door and came down the narrow footpath to the water and out upon the water on his log.

He was barefooted and bareheaded, his cotton shirt open down the front to show his yellow neck and breast, his dungaree trousers held about his waist by a twisted tow string.

His broad splay feet, with the prehensile toes outspread, gripped the polished curve of the log as he moved along its swaying, dipping surface until he came to its outer end, and stood there erect, his chest filling, his chinless face lifted up, and something of mastership and dominion in his poise.

And then—his eye caught what another's eyes might have missed—the round, twin ends of the gun barrels, the fixed gleam of Joel's eyes, aimed at him through the green tracery! In that swift passage of time, too swift almost to be measured by seconds, realization flashed all through him, and he threw his head still higher and opened wide his shapeless trap of a mouth, and out across the lake he sent skittering and rolling his cry.

And in his cry was the laugh of a loon, and the croaking bellow of a frog, and the bay of a hound, all the compounded night noises of the lake.

And in it, too, was a farewell, and a defiance, and an appeal!

The heavy roar of the duck gun came!

At twenty yards the double charge tore the throat out of him. He came down, face forward, upon the log and clung there, his trunk twisting distortedly, his legs twitching and kicking like the legs of a speared frog; his shoulders hunching and lifting spasmodically as the life ran out of him all in one swift coursing flow.

His head canted up between the heaving shoulders, his eyes looked full on the staring face of his murderer, and then the blood came out of his mouth, and Fishhead, in death still as much fish as man, slid, flopping, head first, off the end of the log, and sank, face downward slowly, his limbs all extended out.

One after another a string of big bubbles came up to burst in the middle of a widening reddish stain on the coffee-colored water.

The brothers watched this, held by the horror of the thing they had done, and the cranky dugout, having been tipped far over by the recoil of the gun, took water steadily across its gunwale; and now there was a sudden stroke from below upon its careening bottom and it went over and they were in the lake.

But shore was only twenty feet away, the trunk of the uprooted tree only five. Joel, still holding fast to his shot gun, made for the log, gaining it with one stroke. He threw his free arm over it and clung there, treading water, as he shook his eyes free.

Something gripped him—some great, sinewy, unseen thing gripped him fast by the thigh, crushing down on his flesh!

He uttered no cry, but his eyes popped out, and his mouth set in a square shape of agony, and his fingers gripped into the bark of the tree like grapples. He was pulled down and down, by steady jerks, not rapidly but steadily, so steadily, and as he went his fingernails tore four little white strips in the tree-bark. His mouth went under, next his popping eyes, then his erect hair, and finally his clawing, clutching hand, and that was the end of him.

Jake's fate was harder still, for he lived longer—long enough to see Joel's finish. He saw it through the water that ran down his face, and with a great surge of his whole body, he literally flung himself across the log and

jerked his legs up high into the air to save them. He flung himself too far, though, for his face and chest hit the water on the far side.

And out of this water rose the head of a great fish, with the lake slime of years on its flat, black head, its whiskers bristling, its corpsy eyes alight. Its horny jaws closed and clamped in the front of Jake's flannel shirt. His hand struck out wildly and was speared on a poisoned fin, and, unlike Joel, he went from sight with a great yell, and a whirling and churning of the water that made the cornstalks circle on the edges of a small whirlpool.

But the whirlpool soon thinned away, into widening rings of ripples, and the corn stalks quit circling and became still again, and only the multiplying night noises sounded about the mouth of the slough.

The bodies of all three came ashore on the same day near the same place. Except for the gaping gunshot wound where the neck met the chest, Fishhead's body was unmarked.

But the bodies of the two Baxters were so marred and mauled that the Reelfooters buried them together on the bank without ever knowing which might be Jake's and which might be Joel's.

WHEN CHAUGNAR WAKES, by Frank Belknap Long (Poem)

Originally published in *Weird Tales*, September 1932.

*A billion miles beyond the suns
Which gild the edge of space,
Great Chaugnar dreams, and there is hate
And fury on its face.*

*Beyond the universe of stars
Where red moons wane and swim,
Great Chaugnar stirs, and heaves its bulk
Upon a crater's rim.*

*Its ropy arms descend to suck
Dark nurture from the deeps
Of lava-pools within a cone
That shines whilst Chaugnar sleeps.*

*Explorers from the outer stars
Have glimpsed that glowing cone;
Have glimpsed the vast and silent shape
Asleep upon its throne.*

*Explorers from the world we know
Have seen that shape in dreams;
Have watched its shadow fall and spread
On dim, familiar streams.*

*When Chaugnar wakes, its mindless hate
Will send it voyaging far;
It may set Sirius adrift,
Or seek a humbler star.*

*A humbler star with satellites,
Small planets in its train:
And that is why I kneel and kneel*

Before Great Chaugnar's fane.

THE MOUND, by H.P. Lovecraft and Zelia Bishop

Part I

It is only within the last few years that most people have stopped thinking of the West as a new land. I suppose the idea gained ground because our own especial civilisation happens to be new there; but nowadays explorers are digging beneath the surface and bringing up whole chapters of life that rose and fell among these plains and mountains before recorded history began. We think nothing of a Pueblo village 2500 years old, and it hardly jolts us when archaeologists put the sub-pedregal culture of Mexico back to 17,000 or 18,000 B.C. We hear rumours of still older things, too—of primitive man contemporaneous with extinct animals and known today only through a few fragmentary bones and artifacts—so that the idea of newness is fading out pretty rapidly. Europeans usually catch the sense of immemorial ancientness and deep deposits from successive life-streams better than we do. Only a couple of years ago a British author spoke of Arizona as a “moon-dim region, very lovely in its way, and stark and old—an ancient, lonely land.”

Yet I believe I have a deeper sense of the stupefying—almost horrible—ancientness of the West than any European. It all comes from an incident that happened in 1928; an incident which I'd greatly like to dismiss as three-quarters hallucination, but which has left such a frightfully firm impression on my memory that I can't put it off very easily. It was in Oklahoma, where my work as an American Indian ethnologist constantly takes me and where I had come upon some devilishly strange and disconcerting matters before. Make no mistake—Oklahoma is a lot more than a mere pioneers' and promoters' frontier. There are old, old tribes with old, old memories there; and when the tom-toms beat ceaselessly over brooding plains in the autumn the spirits of men are brought dangerously close to primal, whispered things. I am white and Eastern enough myself, but anybody is welcome to know that the rites of Yig, Father of Snakes, can get a real shudder out of me any day. I have heard and seen too much to be “sophisticated” in such matters. And so it is with this incident of 1928. I'd like to laugh it off—but I can't.

I had gone into Oklahoma to track down and correlate one of the many ghost tales which were current among the white settlers, but which had strong Indian corroboration, and—I felt sure—an ultimate Indian source. They were very curious, these open-air ghost tales; and though they sounded flat and prosaic in the mouths of the white people, they had earmarks of linkage with some of the richest and obscurest phases of native mythology. All of them were woven around the vast, lonely, artificial-looking mounds in the western part of the state, and all of them involved apparitions of exceedingly strange aspect and equipment.

The commonest, and among the oldest, became quite famous in 1892, when a government marshal named John Willis went into the mound region after horse-thieves and came out with a wild yarn of nocturnal cavalry horses in the air between great armies of invisible spectres—battles that involved the rush of hooves and feet, the thud of blows, the clank of metal on metal, the muffled cries of warriors, and the fall of human and equine bodies. These things happened by moonlight, and frightened his horse as well as himself. The sounds persisted an hour at a time; vivid, but subdued as if brought from a distance by a wind, and unaccompanied by any glimpse of the armies themselves. Later on Willis learned that the seat of the sounds was a notoriously haunted spot, shunned by settlers and Indians alike. Many had seen, or half seen, the warring horsemen in the sky, and had furnished dim, ambiguous descriptions. The settlers described the ghostly fighters as Indians, though of no familiar tribe, and having the most singular costumes and weapons. They even went so far as to say that they could not be sure the horses were really horses.

The Indians, on the other hand, did not seem to claim the spectres as kinsfolk. They referred to them as “those people,” “the old people,” or “they who dwell below,” and appeared to hold them in too great a frightened veneration to talk much about them. No ethnologist had been able to pin any, tale-teller down to a specific description of the beings, and apparently nobody had ever had a very clear look at them. The Indians had one or two old proverbs about these phenomena, saying that “men very old, make very big spirit; not so old, not so big; older than all time, then spirit he so big he near flesh; those old people and spirits they mix up—get all the same.”

Now all of this, of course, is “old stuff” to an ethnologist—of a piece with the persistent legends of rich hidden cities and buried races which abound among the Pueblo and plains Indians, and which lured Coronado centuries ago on his vain search for the fabled Quivira. What took me into western Oklahoma was something far more definite and tangible—a local and distinctive tale which, though really old, was wholly new to the outside world of research, and which involved the first clear descriptions of the ghosts which it treated of. There was an added thrill in the fact that it came from the remote town of Binger, in Caddo County, a place I had long known as the scene of a very terrible and partly inexplicable occurrence connected with the snake-god myth.

The tale, outwardly, was an extremely naive and simple one, and centred in a huge, lone mound or small hill that rose above the plain about a third of a mile west of the village—a mound which some thought a product of Nature, but which others believed to be a burial-place or ceremonial dais constructed by prehistoric tribes. This mound, the villagers said, was constantly haunted by two Indian figures which appeared in alternation; an old man who paced back and forth along the top from dawn till dusk, regardless of the weather and with only brief intervals of disappearance, and a squaw who took his place at night with a blue-flamed torch that glimmered quite continuously till morning. When the moon was bright the squaw’s peculiar figure could be seen fairly plainly, and over half the villagers agreed that the apparition was headless.

Local opinion was divided as to the motives and relative ghostliness of the two visions. Some held that the man was not a ghost at all, but a living Indian who had killed and beheaded a squaw for gold and buried her somewhere on the mound. According to these theorists he was pacing the eminence through sheer remorse, bound by the spirit of his victim which took visible shape after dark. But other theorists, more uniform in their spectral beliefs, held that both man and woman were ghosts; the man having killed the squaw and himself as well at some very distant period. These and minor variant versions seemed to have been current ever since the settlement of the Wichita country in 1889, and were, I was told, sustained to an astonishing degree by still-existing phenomena which anyone might observe for himself. Not many ghost tales offer such free and open proof, and I was very eager to see what bizarre wonders might be

lurking in this small, obscure village so far from the beaten path of crowds and from the ruthless searchlight of scientific knowledge. So, in the late summer of 1928 I took a train for Binger and brooded on strange mysteries as the cars rattled timidly along their single track through a lonelier and lonelier landscape.

Binger is a modest cluster of frame houses and stores in the midst of a flat windy region full of clouds of red dust. There are about 500 inhabitants besides the Indians on a neighbouring reservation; the principal occupation seeming to be agriculture. The soil is decently fertile, and the oil boom has not reached this part of the state. My train drew in at twilight, and I felt rather lost and uneasy—cut off from wholesome and every-day things—as it puffed away to the southward without me. The station platform was filled with curious loafers, all of whom seemed eager to direct me when I asked for the man to whom I had letters of introduction. I was ushered along a commonplace main street whose ruled surface was red with the sandstone soil of the country, and finally delivered at the door of my prospective host. Those who had arranged things for me had done well; for Mr. Compton was a man of high intelligence and local responsibility, while his mother—who lived with him and was familiarly known as “Grandma Compton”—was one of the first pioneer generation, and a veritable mine of anecdote and folklore.

That evening the Comptons summed up for me all the legends current among the villagers, proving that the phenomenon I had come to study was indeed a baffling and important one. The ghosts, it seems, were accepted almost as a matter of course by everyone in Binger. Two generations had been born and grown up within sight of that queer, lone tumulus and its restless figures. The neighbourhood of the mound was naturally feared and shunned, so that the village and the farms had not spread toward it in all four decades of settlement; yet venturesome individuals had several times visited it. Some had come back to report that they saw no ghosts at all when they neared the dreaded hill; that somehow the lone sentinel had stepped out of sight before they reached the spot, leaving them free to climb the steep slope and explore the flat summit. There was nothing up there, they said—merely a rough expanse of underbrush. Where the Indian watcher could have vanished to, they had no idea. He must, they reflected, have descended the slope and somehow managed to escape unseen along the

plain; although there was no convenient cover within sight. At any rate, there did not appear to be any opening into the mound; a conclusion which was reached after considerable exploration of the shrubbery and tall grass on all sides. In a few cases some of the more sensitive searchers declared that they felt a sort of invisible restraining presence; but they could describe nothing more definite than that.

It was simply as if the air thickened against them in the direction they wished to move. It is needless to mention that all these daring surveys were conducted by day. Nothing in the universe could have induced any human being, white or red, to approach that sinister elevation after dark; and indeed, no Indian would have thought of going near it even in the brightest sunlight.

But it was not from the tales of these sane, observant seekers that the chief terror of the ghost-mound sprang; indeed, had their experience been typical, the phenomenon would have bulked far less prominently in the local legendry. The most evil thing was the fact that many other seekers had come back strangely impaired in mind and body, or had not come back at all. The first of these cases had occurred in 1891, when a young man named Heaton had gone with a shovel to see what hidden secrets he could unearth. He had heard curious tales from the Indians, and had laughed at the barren report of another youth who had been out to the mound and had found nothing. Heaton had watched the mound with a spy glass from the village while the other youth made his trip; and as the explorer neared the spot, he saw the sentinel Indian walk deliberately down into the tumulus as if a trap-door and staircase existed on the top. The other youth had not noticed how the Indian disappeared, but had merely found him gone upon arriving at the mound.

When Heaton made his own trip he resolved to get to the bottom of the mystery, and watchers from the village saw him hacking diligently at the shrubbery atop the mound. Then they saw his figure melt slowly into invisibility; not to reappear for long hours, till after the dusk drew on, and the torch of the headless squaw glimmered ghoulishly on the distant elevation. About two hours after nightfall he staggered into the village minus his spade and other belongings, and burst into a shrieking monologue of disconnected ravings. He howled of shocking abysses and monsters, of terrible carvings and statues, of inhuman captors and grotesque tortures, and

of other fantastic abnormalities too complex and chimerical even to remember. “Old! Old! Old!” he would moan over and over again, “great God, they are older than the earth, and came here from somewhere else—they know what you think, and make you know what they think—they’re half-man, half-ghost—crossed the line—melt and take shape again—getting more and more so, yet we’re all descended from them in the beginning—children of Tulu—everything made of gold—monstrous animals, half-human—dead slaves—madness—Iä! Shub-Niggurath!—that white man—oh, my God, What they did to him!...”

Heaton was the village idiot for about eight years, after which he died in an epileptic fit. Since his ordeal there had been two more cases of mound-madness, and eight of total disappearance. Immediately after Heaton’s mad return, three desperate and determined men had gone out to the lone hill together; heavily armed, and with spades and pickaxes. Watching villagers saw the Indian ghost melt away as the explorers drew near, and afterward saw the men climb the mound and begin scouting around through the underbrush. All at once they faded into nothingness, and were never seen again. One watcher, with an especially powerful telescope, thought he saw other forms dimly materialise beside the hapless men and drag them down into the mound; but this account remained uncorroborated. It is needless to say that no searching-party went out after the lost ones, and that for many years the mound was wholly unvisited. Only when the incidents of 1891 were largely forgotten did anybody dare to think of further explorations. Then, about 1910, a fellow too young to recall the old horrors made a trip to the shunned spot and found nothing at all.

By 1915 the acute dread and wild legendry of ’91 had largely faded into the commonplace and unimaginative ghost-tales at present surviving—that is, had so faded among the white people. On the nearby reservation were old Indians who thought much and kept their own counsel. About this time a second wave of active curiosity and adventuring developed, and several bold searchers made the trip to the mound and returned. Then came a trip of two Eastern visitors with spades and other apparatus—a pair of amateur archaeologists connected with a small college, who had been making studies among the Indians. No one watched this trip from the village, but they never came back. The searching-party that went out after them—

among whom was my host Clyde Compton—found nothing whatsoever amiss at the mound.

The next trip was the solitary venture of old Capt. Lawton, a grizzled pioneer who had helped to open up the region in 1889, but who had never been there since. He had recalled the mound and its fascination all through the years; and being now in comfortable retirement, resolved to have a try at solving the ancient riddle. Long familiarity with Indian myth had given him ideas rather stranger than those of the simple villagers, and he had made preparations for some extensive delving. He ascended the mound on the morning of Thursday, May 11, 1916, watched through spy glasses by more than twenty people in the village and on the adjacent plain. His disappearance was very sudden, and occurred as he was hacking at the shrubbery with a brush-cutter. No one could say more than that he was there one moment and absent the next. For over a week no tidings of him reached Binger, and then—in the middle of the night—there dragged itself into the village the object about which dispute still rages.

It said it was—or had been—Capt. Lawton, but it was definitely younger by as much as forty years than the old man who had climbed the mound. Its hair was jet black, and its face—now distorted with nameless fright—free from wrinkles. But it did remind Grandma Compton most uncannily of the captain as he had looked back in '89. Its feet were cut off neatly at the ankles, and the stumps were smoothly healed to an extent almost incredible if the being really were the man who had walked upright a week before. It babbled of incomprehensible things, and kept repeating the name “George Lawton, George E. Lawton” as if trying to reassure itself of its own identity. The things it babbled of, Grandma Compton thought, were curiously like the hallucinations of poor young Heaton in '91; though there were minor differences. “The blue light!—the blue light!...” muttered the object, “always down there, before there were any living things—older than the dinosaurs—always the same, only weaker—never death—brooding and brooding and brooding—the same people, half-man and half-gas—the dead that walk and work—oh, those beasts, those half-human unicorns—houses and cities of gold—old, old, old, older than time—came down from the stars—Great Tulu—Azathoth—Nyarlathotep—waiting, waiting...” The object died before dawn.

Of course there was an investigation, and the Indians at the reservation were grilled unmercifully. But they knew nothing, and had nothing to say. At least, none of them had anything to say except old Grey Eagle, a Wichita chieftain whose more than a century of age put him above common fears. He alone deigned to grunt some advice.

“You let um ’lone, white man. No good—those people. All under here, all under there, them old ones. Yig, big father of snakes, he there. Yig is Yig. Tiráwa, big father of men, he there. Tiráwa is Tiráwa. No die. No get old. Just same like air. Just live and wait. One time they come out here, live and fight. Build um dirt tepee. Bring up gold—they got plenty. Go off and make new lodges. Me them. You them. Then big waters come. All change. Nobody come out, let nobody in. Get in, no get out. You let um ’lone, you have no bad medicine. Red man know, he no get catch. White man meddle, he no come back. Keep ’way little hills. No good. Grey Eagle say this.”

If Joe Norton and Rance Wheelock had taken the old chief’s advice, they would probably be here today; but they didn’t. They were great readers and materialists, and feared nothing in heaven or earth; and they thought that some Indian fiends had a secret headquarters inside the mound. They had been to the mound before, and now they went again to avenge old Capt. Lawton—boasting that they’d do it if they had to tear the mound down altogether. Clyde Compton watched them with a pair of prism binoculars and saw them round the base of the sinister hill. Evidently they meant to survey their territory very gradually and minutely. Minutes passed, and they did not reappear. Nor were they ever seen again.

Once more the mound was a thing of panic fright, and only the excitement of the Great War served to restore it to the farther background of Binger folklore. It was unvisited from 1916 to 1919, and would have remained so but for the daredeviltry of some of the youths back from service in France. From 1919 to 1920, however, there was a veritable epidemic of mound-visiting among the prematurely hardened young veterans—an epidemic that waxed as one youth after another returned unhurt and contemptuous. By 1920—so short is human memory—the mound was almost a joke; and the tame story of the murdered squaw began to displace darker whispers on everybody’s tongues. Then two reckless young brothers—the especially unimaginative and hard-boiled Clay boys—

decided to go and dig up the buried squaw and the gold for which the old Indian had murdered her.

They went out on a September afternoon—about the time the Indian tom-toms begin their incessant annual beating over the flat, red-dusty plains. Nobody watched them, and their parents did not become worried at their non-return for several hours. Then came an alarm and a searching-party, and another resignation to the mystery of silence and doubt.

But one of them came back after all. It was Ed, the elder, and his straw-coloured hair and beard had turned an albino white for two inches from the roots. On his forehead was a queer scar like a branded hieroglyph. Three months after he and his brother Walker had vanished he skulked into his house at night, wearing nothing but a queerly patterned blanket which he thrust into the fire as soon as he had got into a suit of his own clothes. He told his parents that he and Walker had been captured by some strange Indians—not Wichitas or Caddos—and held prisoners somewhere toward the west. Walker had died under torture, but he himself had managed to escape at a high cost. The experience had been particularly terrible, and he could not talk about it just then. He must rest—and anyway, it would do no good to give an alarm and try to find and punish the Indians. They were not of a sort that could be caught or punished, and it was especially important for the good of Binger—for the good of the world—that they be not pursued into their secret lair. As a matter of fact, they were not altogether what one could call real Indians—he would explain about that later. Meanwhile he must rest. Better not to rouse the village with the news of his return—he would go upstairs and sleep. Before he climbed the rickety flight to his room he took a pad and pencil from the living-room table, and an automatic pistol from his father's desk drawer.

Three hours later the shot rang out. Ed Clay had put a bullet neatly through his temples with a pistol clutched in his left hand, leaving a sparsely written sheet of paper on the rickety table near his bed. He had, it later appeared from the whittled pencil-stub and stove full of charred paper, originally written much more; but had finally decided not to tell what he knew beyond vague hints. The surviving fragment was only a mad warning scrawled in a curiously backhanded script—the ravings of a mind obviously deranged by hardships—and it read thus; rather surprisingly for the utterance of one who had always been stolid and matter-of-fact:

For gods sake never go nere that mound it is part of some kind of a world so devilish and old it cannot be spoke about me and Walker went and was took into the thing just melted at times and made up agen and the whole world outside is helpless alongside of what they can do—they what live forever young as they like and you cant tell if they are really men or just gostes—and what they do cant be spoke about and this is only 1 entrance—you cant tell how big the whole thing is—after what we seen I dont want to live aney more France was nothing besides this—and see that people always keep away o god they wood if they see poor walker like he was in the end.

Yrs truely Ed Clay

* * * *

At the autopsy it was found that all of young Clay's organs were transposed from right to left within his body, as if he had been turned inside out. Whether they had always been so, no one could say at the time, but it was later learned from army records that Ed had been perfectly normal when mustered out of the service in May, 1919. Whether there was a mistake somewhere, or whether some unprecedented metamorphosis had indeed occurred, is still an unsettled question, as is also the origin of the hieroglyph-like scar on the forehead.

That was the end of the explorations of the mound. In the eight intervening years no one had been near the place, and few indeed had even cared to level a spy glass at it. From time to time people continued to glance nervously at the lone hill as it rose starkly from the plain against the western sky, and to shudder at the small dark speck that paraded by day and the glimmering will-o'-the-wisp that danced by night. The thing was accepted at face value as a mystery not to be probed, and by common consent the village shunned the subject. It was, after all, quite easy to avoid the hill; for space was unlimited in every direction, and community life always follows beaten trails. The mound side of the village was simply kept trailless, as if it had been water or swampland or desert. And it is a curious commentary on the stolidity and imaginative sterility of the human animal that the whispers with which children and strangers were warned away from the mound quickly sank once more into the flat tale of a murderous Indian ghost and his squaw victim. Only the tribesmen on the reservation, and

thoughtful old-timers like Grandma Compton, remembered the overtones of unholy vistas and deep cosmic menace which clustered around the ravings of those who had come back changed and shattered.

It was very late, and Grandma Compton had long since gone upstairs to bed, when Clyde finished telling me this. I hardly knew what to think of the frightful puzzle, yet rebelled at any notion to conflict with sane materialism. What influence had brought madness, or the impulse of flight and wandering, to so many who had visited the mound? Though vastly impressed, I was spurred on rather than deterred. Surely I must get to the bottom of this matter, as well I might if I kept a cool head and an unbroken determination. Compton saw my mood and shook his head worriedly. Then he motioned me to follow him outdoors.

We stepped from the frame house to the quiet side street or lane, and walked a few paces in the light of a waning August moon to where the houses were thinner. The half-moon was still low, and had not blotted many stars from the sky; so that I could see not only the weltering gleams of Altair and Vega, but the mystic shimmering of the Milky Way, as I looked out over the vast expanse of earth and sky in the direction that Compton pointed. Then all at once I saw a spark that was not a star—a bluish spark that moved and glimmered against the Milky Way near the horizon, and that seemed in a vague way more evil and malevolent than anything in the vault above. In another moment it was clear that this spark came from the top of a long distant rise in the outspread and faintly litten plain; and I turned to Compton with a question.

“Yes,” he answered, “it’s the blue ghost-light—and that is the mound. There’s not a night in history that we haven’t seen it—and not a living soul in Binger that would walk out over that plain toward it. It’s a bad business, young man, and if you’re wise you’ll let it rest where it is. Better call your search off, son, and tackle some of the other Injun legends around here. We’ve plenty to keep you busy, heaven knows!”

Part II

But I was in no mood for advice; and though Compton gave me a pleasant room, I could not sleep a wink through eagerness for the next morning with its chances to see the daytime ghost and to question the Indians at the reservation. I meant to go about the whole thing slowly and

thoroughly, equipping myself with all available data both white and red before I commenced any actual archaeological investigations. I rose and dressed at dawn, and when I heard others stirring I went downstairs. Compton was building the kitchen fire while his mother was busy in the pantry. When he saw me he nodded, and after a moment invited me out into the glamorous young sunlight. I knew where we were going, and as we walked along the lane I strained my eyes westward over the plains.

There was the mound—far away and very curious in its aspect of artificial regularity. It must have been from thirty to forty feet high, and all of a hundred yards from north to south as I looked at it. It was not as wide as that from east to west, Compton said, but had the contour of a rather thinnish ellipse. He, I knew, had been safely out to it and back several times. As I looked at the rim silhouetted against the deep blue of the west I tried to follow its minor irregularities, and became impressed with a sense of something moving upon it. My pulse mounted a bit feverishly, and I seized quickly on the high-powered binoculars which Compton had quietly offered me. Focussing them hastily, I saw at first only a tangle of underbrush on the distant mound's rim—and then something stalked into the field.

It was unmistakably a human shape, and I knew at once that I was seeing the daytime “Indian ghost.” I did not wonder at the description, for surely the tall, lean, darkly robed being with the filleted black hair and seamed, coppery, expressionless, aquiline face looked more like an Indian than anything else in my previous experience. And yet my trained ethnologist's eye told me at once that this was no redskin of any sort hitherto known to history, but a creature of vast racial variation and of a wholly different culture-stream. Modern Indians are brachycephalic—round-headed—and you can't find any dolichocephalic or long-headed skulls except in ancient Pueblo deposits dating back 2500 years or more; yet this man's long-headedness was so pronounced that I recognised it at once, even at his vast distance and in the uncertain field of the binoculars. I saw, too, that the pattern of his robe represented a decorative tradition utterly remote from anything we recognise in southwestern native art. There were shining metal trappings, likewise, and a short sword or kindred weapon at his side, all wrought in a fashion wholly alien to anything I had ever heard of.

As he paced back and forth along the top of the mound I followed him for several minutes with the glass, noting the kinaesthetic quality of his stride and the poised way he carried his head; and there was borne in upon me the strong, persistent conviction that this man, whoever or whatever he might be, was certainly not a savage. He was the product of a civilisation, I felt instinctively, though of what civilisation I could not guess. At length he disappeared beyond the farther edge of the mound, as if descending the opposite and unseen slope; and I lowered the glass with a curious mixture of puzzled feelings. Compton was looking quizzically at me, and I nodded non-committally. "What do you make of that?" he ventured. "This is what we've seen here in Binger every day of our lives."

That noon found me at the Indian reservation talking with old Grey Eagle—who, through some miracle, was still alive; though he must have been close to a hundred and fifty years old. He was a strange, impressive figure—this stern, fearless leader of his kind who had talked with outlaws and traders in fringed buckskin and French officials in knee-breeches and three-cornered hats—and I was glad to see that, because of my air of deference toward him, he appeared to like me. His liking, however, took an unfortunately obstructive form as soon as he learned what I wanted; for all he would do was to warn me against the search I was about to make.

"You good boy—you no bother that hill. Bad medicine. Plenty devil under there—catchum when you dig. No dig, no hurt. Go and dig, no come back. Just same when me boy, just same when my father and he father boy. All time buck he walk in day, squaw with no head she walk in night. All time since white man with tin coats they come from sunset and below big river—long way back—three, four times more back than Grey Eagle—two times more back than Frenchmen—all same after then. More back than that, nobody go near little hills nor deep valleys with stone caves. Still more back, those old ones no hide, come out and make villages. Bring plenty gold. Me them. You them. Then big waters come. All change. Nobody come out, let nobody in. Get in, no get out. They no die—no get old like Grey Eagle with valleys in face and snow on head. Just same like air—some man, some spirit. Bad medicine. Sometimes at night spirit come out on half-man-half-horse-with-horn and fight where men once fight. Keep 'way them place. No good. You good boy—go 'way and let them old ones 'lone."

That was all I could get out of the ancient chief, and the rest of the Indians would say nothing at all. But if I was troubled, Grey Eagle was clearly more so; for he obviously felt a real regret at the thought of my invading the region he feared so abjectly. As I turned to leave the reservation he stopped me for a final ceremonial farewell, and once more tried to get my promise to abandon my search. When he saw that he could not, he produced something half-timidly from a buckskin pouch he wore, and extended it toward me very solemnly. It was a worn but finely minted metal disc about two inches in diameter, oddly figured and perforated, and suspended from a leathern cord.

“You no promise, then Grey Eagle no can tell what get you. But if anything help um, this good medicine. Come from my father—he get from he father—he get from he father—all way back, close to Tiráwa, all men’s father. My father say, ‘You keep ’way from those old ones, keep ’way from little hills and valleys with stone caves. But if old ones they come out to get you, then you shew um this medicine. They know. They make him long way back. They look, then they no do such bad medicine maybe. But no can tell. You keep ’way, just same. Them no good. No tell what they do.’”

As he spoke, Grey Eagle was hanging the thing around my neck, and I saw it was a very curious object indeed. The more I looked at it, the more I marvelled; for not only was its heavy, darkish, lustrous, and richly mottled substance an absolutely strange metal to me, but what was left of its design seemed to be of a marvellously artistic and utterly unknown workmanship. One side, so far as I could see, had borne an exquisitely modelled serpent design; whilst the other side had depicted a kind of octopus or other tentacled monster. There were some half-effaced hieroglyphs, too, of a kind which no archaeologist could identify or even place conjecturally. With Grey Eagle’s permission I later had expert historians, anthropologists, geologists, and chemists pass carefully upon the disc, but from them I obtained only a chorus of bafflement. It defied either classification or analysis. The chemists called it an amalgam of unknown metallic elements of heavy atomic weight, and one geologist suggested that the substance must be of meteoric origin, shot from unknown gulfs of interstellar space. Whether it really saved my life or sanity or existence as a human being I cannot attempt to say, but Grey Eagle is sure of it. He has it again, now, and I wonder if it has any connexion with his inordinate age. All his fathers who

had it lived far beyond the century mark, perishing only in battle. Is it possible that Grey Eagle, if kept from accidents, will never die? But I am ahead of my story.

When I returned to the village I tried to secure more mound-lore, but found only excited gossip and opposition. It was really flattering to see how solicitous the people were about my safety, but I had to set their almost frantic remonstrances aside. I shewed them Grey Eagle's charm, but none of them had ever heard of it before, or seen anything even remotely like it. They agreed that it could not be an Indian relic, and imagined that the old chief's ancestors must have obtained it from some trader.

When they saw they could not deter me from my trip, the Binger citizens sadly did what they could to aid my outfitting. Having known before my arrival the sort of work to be done, I had most of my supplies already with me—machete and trench-knife for shrub-clearing and excavating, electric torches for any underground phase which might develop, rope, field-glasses, tape-measure, microscope, and incidentals for emergencies—as much, in fact, as might be comfortably stowed in a convenient handbag. To this equipment I added only the heavy revolver which the sheriff forced upon me, and the pick and shovel which I thought might expedite my work.

I decided to carry these latter things slung over my shoulder with a stout cord—for I soon saw that I could not hope for any helpers or fellow-explorers. The village would watch me, no doubt, with all its available telescopes and field-glasses; but it would not send any citizen so much as a yard over the flat plain toward the lone hillock. My start was timed for early the next morning, and all the rest of that day I was treated with the awed and uneasy respect which people give to a man about to set out for certain doom.

When morning came—a cloudy though not a threatening morning—the whole village turned out to see me start across the dustblown plain. Binoculars shewed the lone man at his usual pacing on the mound, and I resolved to keep him in sight as steadily as possible during my approach. At the last moment a vague sense of dread oppressed me, and I was just weak and whimsical enough to let Grey Eagle's talisman swing on my chest in full view of any beings or ghosts who might be inclined to heed it. Bidding au revoir to Compton and his mother, I started off at a brisk stride despite

the bag in my left hand and the clanking pick and shovel strapped to my back; holding my field-glass in my right hand and taking a glance at the silent pacer from time to time. As I neared the mound I saw the man very clearly, and fancied I could trace an expression of infinite evil and decadence on his seamed, hairless features. I was startled, too, to see that his goldenly gleaming weapon-case bore hieroglyphs very similar to those on the unknown talisman I wore. All the creature's costume and trappings bespoke exquisite workmanship and cultivation. Then, all too abruptly, I saw him start down the farther side of the mound and out of sight. When I reached the place, about ten minutes after I set out, there was no one there.

There is no need of relating how I spent the early part of my search in surveying and circumnavigating the mound, taking measurements, and stepping back to view the thing from different angles. It had impressed me tremendously as I approached it, and there seemed to be a kind of latent menace in its too regular outlines. It was the only elevation of any sort on the wide, level plain; and I could not doubt for a moment that it was an artificial tumulus. The steep sides seemed wholly unbroken, and without marks of human tenancy or passage. There were no signs of a path toward the top; and, burdened as I was, I managed to scramble up only with considerable difficulty. When I reached the summit I found a roughly level elliptical plateau about 300 by 50 feet in dimensions; uniformly covered with rank grass and dense underbrush, and utterly incompatible with the constant presence of a pacing sentinel. This condition gave me a real shock, for it shewed beyond question that the "Old Indian," vivid though he seemed, could not be other than a collective hallucination.

I looked about with considerable perplexity and alarm, glancing wistfully back at the village and the mass of black dots which I knew was the watching crowd. Training my glass upon them, I saw that they were studying me avidly with their glasses; so to reassure them I waved my cap in the air with a show of jauntiness which I was far from feeling. Then, settling to my work I flung down pick, shovel, and bag; taking my machete from the latter and commencing to clear away underbrush. It was a weary task, and now and then I felt a curious shiver as some perverse gust of wind arose to hamper my motion with a skill approaching deliberateness. At times it seemed as if a half-tangible force were pushing me back as I worked—almost as if the air thickened in front of me, or as if formless

hands tugged at my wrists. My energy seemed used up without producing adequate results, yet for all that I made some progress.

By afternoon I had clearly perceived that, toward the northern end of the mound, there was a slight bowl-like depression in the root-tangled earth. While this might mean nothing, it would be a good place to begin when I reached the digging stage, and I made a mental note of it. At the same time I noticed another and very peculiar thing—namely, that the Indian talisman swinging from my neck seemed to behave oddly at a point about seventeen feet southeast of the suggested bowl. Its gyrations were altered whenever I happened to stoop around that point, and it tugged downward as if attracted by some magnetism in the soil. The more I noticed this, the more it struck me, till at length I decided to do a little preliminary digging there without further delay.

As I turned up the soil with my trench-knife I could not help wondering at the relative thinness of the reddish regional layer. The country as a whole was all red sandstone earth, but here I found a strange black loam less than a foot down. It was such soil as one finds in the strange, deep valleys farther west and south, and must surely have been brought from a considerable distance in the prehistoric age when the mound was reared. Kneeling and digging, I felt the leathern cord around my neck tugged harder and harder, as something in the soil seemed to draw the heavy metal talisman more and more. Then I felt my implements strike a hard surface, and wondered if a rock layer rested beneath. Prying about with the trench-knife, I found that such was not the case. Instead, to my intense surprise and feverish interest, I brought up a mould-clogged, heavy object of cylindrical shape—about a foot long and four inches in diameter—to which my hanging talisman clove with glue-like tenacity. As I cleared off the black loam my wonder and tension increased at the bas-reliefs revealed by that process. The whole cylinder, ends and all, was covered with figures and hieroglyphs; and I saw with growing excitement that these things were in the same unknown tradition as those on Grey Eagle's charm and on the yellow metal trappings of the ghost I had seen through my binoculars.

Sitting down, I further cleaned the magnetic cylinder against the rough corduroy of my knickerbockers, and observed that it was made of the same heavy, lustrous unknown metal as the charm—hence, no doubt, the singular attraction. The carvings and chasings were very strange and very horrible—

nameless monsters and designs fraught with insidious evil—and all were of the highest finish and craftsmanship. I could not at first make head or tail of the thing, and handled it aimlessly until I spied a cleavage near one end. Then I sought eagerly for some mode of opening, discovering at last that the end simply unscrewed.

The cap yielded with difficulty, but at last it came off, liberating a curious aromatic odour. The sole contents was a bulky roll of a yellowish, paper-like substance inscribed in greenish characters, and for a second I had the supreme thrill of fancying that I held a written key to unknown elder worlds and abysses beyond time. Almost immediately, however, the unrolling of one end shewed that the manuscript was in Spanish—albeit the formal, pompous Spanish of a long-departed day. In the golden sunset light I looked at the heading and the opening paragraph, trying to decipher the wretched and ill-punctuated script of the vanished writer. What manner of relic was this? Upon what sort of a discovery had I stumbled? The first words set me in a new fury of excitement and curiosity, for instead of diverting me from my original quest they startlingly confirmed me in that very effort.

The yellow scroll with the green script began with a bold, identifying caption and a ceremoniously desperate appeal for belief in incredible revelations to follow:

**RELACIÓN DE PÁNFILO DE ZAMACONA Y NUÑEZ, HIDALGO DE LUARCA EN
ASTURIAS, TOCANTE AL MUNDO SOTERRÁNEO DE XINAIÁN, A.D. MDXLV**

En el nombre de la santísima Trinidad, Padre, Hijo, y Espíritu-Santo, tres personas distintas y un solo. Dios verdadero, y de la santísima Virgen nuestra Señora, YO, PÁNFILO DE ZAMACONA, HIJO DE PEDRO GUZMAN Y ZAMACONA, HIDALGO, Y DE LA DOÑA YNÉS ALVARADO Y NUÑEZ, DE LUARCA EN ASTURIAS, juro para que todo que deco está verdadero como sacramento...

I paused to reflect on the portentous significance of what I was reading. “The Narrative of Pánfilo de Zamacona y Nuñez, gentleman, of Luarca in Asturias, Concerning the Subterranean World of Xinaián, A. D. 1545”... Here, surely, was too much for any mind to absorb all at once. A subterranean world—again that persistent idea which filtered through all the

Indian tales and through all the utterances of those who had come back from the mound. And the date—1545—what could this mean? In 1540 Coronado and his men had gone north from Mexico into the wilderness, but had they not turned back in 1542? My eye ran questingly down the opened part of the scroll, and almost at once seized on the name Francisco Vasquez de Coronado. The writer of this thing, clearly, was one of Coronado's men—but what had he been doing in this remote realm three years after his party had gone back? I must read further, for another glance told me that what was now unrolled was merely a summary of Coronado's northward march, differing in no essential way from the account known to history.

It was only the waning light which checked me before I could unroll and read more, and in my impatient bafflement I almost forgot to be frightened at the onrush of night in this sinister place. Others, however, had not forgotten the lurking terror, for I heard a loud distant hallooing from a knot of men who had gathered at the edge of the town. Answering the anxious hail, I restored the manuscript to its strange cylinder—to which the disc around my neck still clung until I pried it off and packed it and my smaller implements for departure. Leaving the pick and shovel for the next day's work, I took up my handbag, scrambled down the steep side of the mound, and in another quarter-hour was back in the village explaining and exhibiting my curious find. As darkness drew on, I glanced back at the mound I had so lately left, and saw with a shudder that the faint bluish torch of the nocturnal squaw-ghost had begun to glimmer.

It was hard work waiting to get at the bygone Spaniard's narrative; but I knew I must have quiet and leisure for a good translation, so reluctantly saved the task for the later hours of night. Promising the townsfolk a clear account of my findings in the morning, and giving them an ample opportunity to examine the bizarre and provocative cylinder, I accompanied Clyde Compton home and ascended to my room for the translating process as soon as I possibly could. My host and his mother were intensely eager to hear the tale, but I thought they had better wait till I could thoroughly absorb the text myself and give them the gist concisely and unerringly.

Opening my handbag in the light of a single electric bulb, I again took out the cylinder and noted the instant magnetism which pulled the Indian talisman to its carven surface. The designs glimmered evilly on the richly lustrous and unknown metal, and I could not help shivering as I studied the

abnormal and blasphemous forms that leered at me with such exquisite workmanship. I wish now that I had carefully photographed all these designs—though perhaps it is just as well that I did not. Of one thing I am really glad, and that is that I could not then identify the squatting octopus-headed thing which dominated most of the ornate cartouches, and which the manuscript called “Tulu.” Recently I have associated it, and the legends in the manuscript connected with it, with some new-found folklore of monstrous and unmentioned Cthulhu, a horror which seeped down from the stars while the young earth was still half-formed; and had I known of the connexion then, I could not have stayed in the same room with the thing. The secondary motif, a semi-anthropomorphic serpent, I did quite readily place as a prototype of the Yig, Quetzalcoatl, and Kukulcan conceptions. Before opening the cylinder I tested its magnetic powers on metals other than that of Grey Eagle’s disc, but found that no attraction existed. It was no common magnetism which pervaded this morbid fragment of unknown worlds and linked it to its kind.

At last I took out the manuscript and began translating—jotting down a synoptic outline in English as I went, and now and then regretting the absence of a Spanish dictionary when I came upon some especially obscure or archaic word or construction. There was a sense of ineffable strangeness in thus being thrown back nearly four centuries in the midst of my continuous quest—thrown back to a year when my own forbears were settled, homekeeping gentlemen of Somerset and Devon under Henry the Eighth, with never a thought of the adventure that was to take their blood to Virginia and the New World; yet when that new world possessed, even as now, the same brooding mystery of the mound which formed my present sphere and horizon. The sense of a throwback was all the stronger because I felt instinctively that the common problem of the Spaniard and myself was one of such abysmal timelessness—of such unholy and unearthly eternity—that the scant four hundred years between us bulked as nothing in comparison. It took no more than a single look at that monstrous and insidious cylinder to make me realise the dizzying gulfs that yawned between all men of the known earth and the primal mysteries it represented. Before that gulf Pánfilo de Zamacona and I stood side by side; just as Aristotle and I, or Cheops and I, might have stood.

Part III

Of his youth in Luarca, a small, placid port on the Bay of Biscay, Zamacona told little. He had been wild, and a younger son, and had come to New Spain in 1532, when only twenty years old. Sensitively imaginative, he had listened spellbound to the floating rumours of rich cities and unknown worlds to the north—and especially to the tale of the Franciscan friar Marcos de Niza, who came back from a trip in 1539 with glowing accounts of fabulous Cíbola and its great walled towns with terraced stone houses. Hearing of Coronado's contemplated expedition in search of these wonders—and of the greater wonders whispered to lie beyond them in the land of buffaloes—young Zamacona managed to join the picked party of 300, and started north with the rest in 1540.

History knows the story of that expedition—how Cíbola was found to be merely the squalid Pueblo village of Zuñi, and how de Niza was sent back to Mexico in disgrace for his florid exaggerations; how Coronado first saw the Grand Canyon, and how at Cicuyé, on the Pecos, he heard from the Indian called El Turco of the rich and mysterious land of Quivira, far to the northeast, where gold, silver, and buffaloes abounded, and where there flowed a river two leagues wide. Zamacona told briefly of the winter camp at Tiguex on the Pecos, and of the northward start in April, when the native guide proved false and led the party astray amidst a land of prairie-dogs, salt pools, and roving, bison-hunting tribes.

When Coronado dismissed his larger force and made his final forty-two-day march with a very small and select detachment, Zamacona managed to be included in the advancing party. He spoke of the fertile country and of the great ravines with trees visible only from the edge of their steep banks; and of how all the men lived solely on buffalo-meat. And then came mention of the expedition's farthest limit—of the presumable but disappointing land of Quivira with its villages of grass houses, its brooks and rivers, its good black soil, its plums, nuts, grapes, and mulberries, and its maize-growing and copper-using Indians. The execution of El Turco, the false native guide, was casually touched upon, and there was a mention of the cross which Coronado raised on the bank of a great river in the autumn of 1541—a cross bearing the inscription, "Thus far came the great general, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado."

This supposed Quivira lay at about the fortieth parallel of north latitude, and I see that quite lately the New York archaeologist Dr. Hodge has identified it with the course of the Arkansas River through Barton and Rice Counties, Kansas. It is the old home of the Wichitas, before the Sioux drove them south into what is now Oklahoma, and some of the grass-house village sites have been found and excavated for artifacts. Coronado did considerable exploring hereabouts, led hither and thither by the persistent rumours of rich cities and hidden worlds which floated fearfully around on the Indians' tongues. These northerly natives seemed more afraid and reluctant to talk about the rumoured cities and worlds than the Mexican Indians had been; yet at the same time seemed as if they could reveal a good deal more than the Mexicans had they been willing or dared to do so. Their vagueness exasperated the Spanish leader, and after many disappointing searches he began to be very severe toward those who brought him stories. Zamacona, more patient than Coronado, found the tales especially interesting; and learned enough of the local speech to hold long conversations with a young buck named Charging Buffalo, whose curiosity had led him into much stranger places than any of his fellow-tribesmen had dared to penetrate.

It was Charging Buffalo who told Zamacona of the queer stone doorways, gates, or cave-mouths at the bottom of some of those deep, steep, wooded ravines which the party had noticed on the northward march. These openings, he said, were mostly concealed by shrubbery; and few had entered them for untold aeons. Those who went to where they led, never returned—or in a few cases returned mad or curiously maimed. But all this was legend, for nobody was known to have gone more than a limited distance inside any of them within the memory of the grandfathers of the oldest living men. Charging Buffalo himself had probably been farther than anyone else, and he had seen enough to curb both his curiosity and his greed for the rumoured gold below.

Beyond the aperture he had entered there was a long passage running crazily up and down and round about, and covered with frightful carvings of monsters and horrors that no man had ever seen. At last, after untold miles of windings and descents, there was a glow of terrible blue light; and the passage opened upon a shocking nether world. About this the Indian would say no more, for he had seen something that had sent him back in

haste. But the golden cities must be somewhere down there, he added, and perhaps a white man with the magic of the thunder-stick might succeed in getting to them. He would not tell the big chief Coronado what he knew, for Coronado would not listen to Indian talk any more. Yes—he could shew Zamacona the way if the white man would leave the party and accept his guidance. But he would not go inside the opening with the white man. It was bad in there.

The place was about a five days' march to the south, near the region of great mounds. These mounds had something to do with the evil world down there—they were probably ancient closed-up passages to it, for once the Old Ones below had had colonies on the surface and had traded with men everywhere, even in the lands that had sunk under the big waters. It was when those lands had sunk that the Old Ones closed themselves up below and refused to deal with surface people. The refugees from the sinking places had told them that the gods of outer earth were against men, and that no men could survive on the outer earth unless they were daemons in league with the evil gods. That is why they shut out all surface folk, and did fearful things to any who ventured down where they dwelt. There had been sentries once at the various openings, but after ages they were no longer needed. Not many people cared to talk about the hidden Old Ones, and the legends about them would probably have died out but for certain ghostly reminders of their presence now and then. It seemed that the infinite ancientness of these creatures had brought them strangely near to the borderline of spirit, so that their ghostly emanations were more commonly frequent and vivid. Accordingly the region of the great mounds was often convulsed with spectral nocturnal battles reflecting those which had been fought in the days before the openings were closed.

The Old Ones themselves were half-ghost—indeed, it was said that they no longer grew old or reproduced their kind, but flickered eternally in a state between flesh and spirit. The change was not complete, though, for they had to breathe. It was because the underground world needed air that the openings in the deep valleys were not blocked up as the mound-openings on the plains had been. These openings, Charging Buffalo added, were probably based on natural fissures in the earth. It was whispered that the Old Ones had come down from the stars to the world when it was very young, and had gone inside to build their cities of solid gold because the

surface was not then fit to live on. They were the ancestors of all men, yet none could guess from what star—or what place beyond the stars—they came. Their hidden cities were still full of gold and silver, but men had better let them alone unless protected by very strong magic.

They had frightful beasts with a faint strain of human blood, on which they rode, and which they employed for other purposes. The things, so people hinted, were carnivorous, and like their masters, preferred human flesh; so that although the Old Ones themselves did not breed, they had a sort of half-human slave-class which also served to nourish the human and animal population. This had been very oddly recruited, and was supplemented by a second slave-class of reanimated corpses. The Old Ones knew how to make a corpse into an automaton which would last almost indefinitely and perform any sort of work when directed by streams of thought. Charging Buffalo said that the people had all come to talk by means of thought only; speech having been found crude and needless, except for religious devotions and emotional expression, as aeons of discovery and study rolled by. They worshipped Yig, the great father of serpents, and Tulu, the octopus-headed entity that had brought them down from the stars; appeasing both of these hideous monstrosities by means of human sacrifices offered up in a very curious manner which Charging Buffalo did not care to describe.

Zamacona was held spellbound by the Indian's tale, and at once resolved to accept his guidance to the cryptic doorway in the ravine. He did not believe the accounts of strange ways attributed by legend to the hidden people, for the experiences of the party had been such as to disillusion one regarding native myths of unknown lands; but he did feel that some sufficiently marvellous field of riches and adventure must indeed lie beyond the weirdly carved passages in the earth. At first he thought of persuading Charging Buffalo to tell his story to Coronado—offering to shield him against any effects of the leader's testy scepticism—but later he decided that a lone adventure would be better. If he had no aid, he would not have to share anything he found; but might perhaps become a great discoverer and owner of fabulous riches. Success would make him a greater figure than Coronado himself—perhaps a greater figure than anyone else in New Spain, including even the mighty viceroy Don Antonio de Mendoza.

On October 7, 1541, at an hour close to midnight, Zamacona stole out of the Spanish camp near the grass-house village and met Charging Buffalo for the long southward journey. He travelled as lightly as possible, and did not wear his heavy helmet and breastplate. Of the details of the trip the manuscript told very little, but Zamacona records his arrival at the great ravine on October 13th. The descent of the thickly wooded slope took no great time; and though the Indian had trouble in locating the shrubbery-hidden stone door again amidst the twilight of that deep gorge, the place was finally found. It was a very small aperture as doorways go, formed of monolithic sandstone jambs and lintel, and bearing signs of nearly effaced and now undecipherable carvings. Its height was perhaps seven feet, and its width not more than four. There were drilled places in the jambs which argued the bygone presence of a hinged door or gate, but all other traces of such a thing had long since vanished.

At sight of this black gulf Charging Buffalo displayed considerable fear, and threw down his pack of supplies with signs of haste. He had provided Zamacona with a good stock of resinous torches and provisions, and had guided him honestly and well; but refused to share in the venture that lay ahead. Zamacona gave him the trinkets he had kept for such an occasion, and obtained his promise to return to the region in a month; afterward shewing the way southward to the Pecos Pueblo villages. A prominent rock on the plain above them was chosen as a meeting-place; the one arriving first to pitch camp until the other should arrive.

In the manuscript Zamacona expressed a wistful wonder as to the Indian's length of waiting at the rendezvous—for he himself could never keep that tryst. At the last moment Charging Buffalo tried to dissuade him from his plunge into the darkness, but soon saw it was futile, and gestured a stoical farewell. Before lighting his first torch and entering the opening with his ponderous pack, the Spaniard watched the lean form of the Indian scrambling hastily and rather relievedly upward among the trees. It was the cutting of his last link with the world; though he did not know that he was never to see a human being—in the accepted sense of that term—again.

Zamacona felt no immediate premonition of evil upon entering that ominous doorway, though from the first he was surrounded by a bizarre and unwholesome atmosphere. The passage, slightly taller and wider than the aperture, was for many yards a level tunnel of Cyclopean masonry, with

heavily worn flagstones under foot, and grotesquely carved granite and sandstone blocks in sides and ceiling. The carvings must have been loathsome and terrible indeed, to judge from Zamacona's description; according to which most of them revolved around the monstrous beings Yig and Tulu. They were unlike anything the adventurer had ever seen before, though he added that the native architecture of Mexico came closest to them of all things in the outer world. After some distance the tunnel began to dip abruptly, and irregular natural rock appeared on all sides. The passage seemed only partly artificial, and decorations were limited to occasional cartouches with shocking bas-reliefs.

Following an enormous descent, whose steepness at times produced an acute danger of slipping and tobogganing, the passage became exceedingly uncertain in its direction and variable in its contour. At times it narrowed almost to a slit or grew so low that stooping and even crawling were necessary, while at other times it broadened out into sizeable caves or chains of caves. Very little human construction, it was plain, had gone into this part of the tunnel; though occasionally a sinister cartouche or hieroglyphic on the wall, or a blocked-up lateral passageway, would remind Zamacona that this was in truth the aeon-forgotten high-road to a primal and unbelievable world of living things.

For three days, as best he could reckon, Pánfilo de Zamacona scrambled down, up, along, and around, but always predominately downward, through this dark region of palaeogean night. Once in a while he heard some secret being of darkness patter or flap out of his way, and on just one occasion he half glimpsed a great, bleached thing that set him trembling. The quality of the air was mostly very tolerable; though foetid zones were now and then met with, while one great cavern of stalactites and stalagmites afforded a depressing dampness. This latter, when Charging Buffalo had come upon it, had quite seriously barred the way; since the limestone deposits of ages had built fresh pillars in the path of the primordial abyss-denizens. The Indian, however, had broken through these; so that Zamacona did not find his course impeded. It was an unconscious comfort to him to reflect that someone else from the outside world had been there before—and the Indian's careful descriptions had removed the element of surprise and unexpectedness. More—Charging Buffalo's knowledge of the tunnel had led him to provide so good a torch supply for the journey in and out, that

there would be no danger of becoming stranded in darkness. Zamacona camped twice, building a fire whose smoke seemed well taken care of by the natural ventilation.

At what he considered the end of the third day—though his cocksure guesswork chronology is not at any time to be given the easy faith that he gave it—Zamacona encountered the prodigious descent and subsequent prodigious climb which Charging Buffalo had described as the tunnel's last phase. As at certain earlier points, marks of artificial improvement were here discernible; and several times the steep gradient was eased by a flight of rough-hewn steps. The torch shewed more and more of the monstrous carvings on the walls, and finally the resinous flare seemed mixed with a fainter and more diffusive light as Zamacona climbed up and up after the last downward stairway. At length the ascent ceased, and a level passage of artificial masonry with dark, basaltic blocks led straight ahead. There was no need for a torch now, for all the air was glowing with a bluish, quasi-electric radiance that flickered like an aurora. It was the strange light of the inner world that the Indian had described—and in another moment Zamacona emerged from the tunnel upon a bleak, rocky hillside which climbed above him to a seething, impenetrable sky of bluish coruscations, and descended dizzily below him to an apparently illimitable plain shrouded in bluish mist.

He had come to the unknown world at last, and from his manuscript it is clear that he viewed the formless landscape as proudly and exaltedly as ever his fellow-countryman Balboa viewed the new-found Pacific from that unforgettable peak in Darien. Charging Buffalo had turned back at this point, driven by fear of something which he would only describe vaguely and evasively as a herd of bad cattle, neither horse nor buffalo, but like the things the mound-spirits rode at night—but Zamacona could not be deterred by any such trifle. Instead of fear, a strange sense of glory filled him; for he had imagination enough to know what it meant to stand alone in an inexplicable nether world whose existence no other white man suspected.

The soil of the great hill that surged upward behind him and spread steeply downward below him was dark grey, rock-strown, without vegetation, and probably basaltic in origin; with an unearthly cast which made him feel like an intruder on an alien planet. The vast distant plain, thousands of feet below, had no features he could distinguish; especially

since it appeared to be largely veiled in a curling, bluish vapour. But more than hill or plain or cloud, the bluely luminous, coruscating sky impressed the adventurer with a sense of supreme wonder and mystery. What created this sky within a world he could not tell; though he knew of the northern lights, and had even seen them once or twice. He concluded that this subterraneous light was something vaguely akin to the aurora; a view which moderns may well endorse, though it seems likely that certain phenomena of radio-activity may also enter in.

At Zamacona's back the mouth of the tunnel he had traversed yawned darkly; defined by a stone doorway very like the one he had entered in the world above, save that it was of greyish-black basalt instead of red sandstone. There were hideous sculptures, still in good preservation and perhaps corresponding to those on the outer portal which time had largely weathered away. The absence of weathering here argued a dry, temperate climate; indeed, the Spaniard already began to note the delightfully spring-like stability of temperature which marks the air of the north's interior. On the stone jambs were works proclaiming the bygone presence of hinges, but of any actual door or gate no trace remained. Seating himself for rest and thought, Zamacona lightened his pack by removing an amount of food and torches sufficient to take him back through the tunnel. These he proceeded to cache at the opening, under a cairn hastily formed of the rock fragments which everywhere lay around. Then, readjusting his lightened pack, he commenced his descent toward the distant plain; preparing to invade a region which no living thing of outer earth had penetrated in a century or more, which no white man had ever penetrated, and from which, if legend were to be believed, no organic creature had ever returned sane.

Zamacona strode briskly along down the steep, interminable slope; his progress checked at times by the bad walking that came from loose rock fragments, or by the excessive precipitousness of the grade. The distance of the mist-shrouded plain must have been enormous, for many hours' walking brought him apparently no closer to it than he had been before. Behind him was always the great hill stretching upward into a bright aerial sea of bluish coruscations. Silence was universal; so that his own footsteps, and the fall of stones that he dislodged, struck on his ears with startling distinctness. It was at what he regarded as about noon that he first saw the abnormal

footprints which set him to thinking of Charging Buffalo's terrible hints, precipitate flight, and strangely abiding terror.

The rock-strown nature of the soil gave few opportunities for tracks of any kind, but at one point a rather level interval had caused the loose detritus to accumulate in a ridge, leaving a considerable area of dark-grey loam absolutely bare. Here, in a rambling confusion indicating a large herd aimlessly wandering, Zamacona found the abnormal prints. It is to be regretted that he could not describe them more exactly, but the manuscript displayed far more vague fear than accurate observation. Just what it was that so frightened the Spaniard can only be inferred from his later hints regarding the beasts. He referred to the prints as "not hooves, nor hands, nor feet, nor precisely paws—nor so large as to cause alarm on that account." Just why or how long ago the things had been there, was not easy to guess. There was no vegetation visible, hence grazing was out of the question; but of course if the beasts were carnivorous they might well have been hunting smaller animals, whose tracks their own would tend to obliterate.

Glancing backward from this plateau to the heights above, Zamacona thought he detected traces of a great winding road which had once led from the tunnel downward to the plain. One could get the impression of this former highway only from a broad panoramic view, since a trickle of loose rock fragments had long ago obscured it; but the adventurer felt none the less certain that it had existed. It had not, probably, been an elaborately paved trunk route; for the small tunnel it reached seemed scarcely like a main avenue to the outer world. In choosing a straight path of descent Zamacona had not followed its curving course, though he must have crossed it once or twice. With his attention now called to it, he looked ahead to see if he could trace it downward toward the plain; and this he finally thought he could do. He resolved to investigate its surface when next he crossed it, and perhaps to pursue its line for the rest of the way if he could distinguish it.

Having resumed his journey, Zamacona came some time later upon what he thought was a bend of the ancient road. There were signs of grading and of some primal attempt at rock-surfacing, but not enough was left to make the route worth following. While rummaging about in the soil with his sword, the Spaniard turned up something that glittered in the eternal blue daylight, and was thrilled at beholding a kind of coin or medal

of a dark, unknown, lustrous metal, with hideous designs on each side. It was utterly and bafflingly alien to him, and from his description I have no doubt but that it was a duplicate of the talisman given me by Grey Eagle almost four centuries afterward. Pocketing it after a long and curious examination, he strode onward; finally pitching camp at an hour which he guessed to be the evening of the outer world.

The next day Zamacona rose early and resumed his descent through this blue-litten world of mist and desolation and preternatural silence. As he advanced, he at last became able to distinguish a few objects on the distant plain below—trees, bushes, rocks, and a small river that came into view from the right and curved forward at a point to the left of his contemplated course. This river seemed to be spanned by a bridge connected with the descending roadway, and with care the explorer could trace the route of the road beyond it in a straight line over the plain. Finally he even thought he could detect towns scattered along the rectilinear ribbon; towns whose left-hand edges reached the river and sometimes crossed it. Where such crossings occurred, he saw as he descended, there were always signs of bridges either ruined or surviving. He was now in the midst of a sparse grassy vegetation, and saw that below him the growth became thicker and thicker. The road was easier to define now, since its surface discouraged the grass which the looser soil supported. Rock fragments were less frequent, and the barren upward vista behind him looked bleak and forbidding in contrast to his present milieu.

It was on this day that he saw the blurred mass moving over the distant plain. Since his first sight of the sinister footprints he had met with no more of these, but something about that slowly and deliberately moving mass peculiarly sickened him. Nothing but a herd of grazing animals could move just like that, and after seeing the footprints he did not wish to meet the things which had made them. Still, the moving mass was not near the road—and his curiosity and greed for fabled gold were great. Besides, who could really judge things from vague, jumbled footprints or from the panic-twisted hints of an ignorant Indian?

In straining his eyes to view the moving mass Zamacona became aware of several other interesting things. One was that certain parts of the now unmistakable towns glittered oddly in the misty blue light. Another was that, besides the towns, several similarly glittering structures of a more

isolated sort were scattered here and there along the road and over the plain. They seemed to be embowered in clumps of vegetation, and those off the road had small avenues leading to the highway. No smoke or other signs of life could be discerned about any of the towns or buildings. Finally Zamacona saw that the plain was not infinite in extent, though the half-concealing blue mists had hitherto made it seem so. It was bounded in the remote distance by a range of low hills, toward a gap in which the river and roadway seemed to lead. All this—especially the glittering of certain pinnacles in the towns—had become very vivid when Zamacona pitched his second camp amidst the endless blue day. He likewise noticed the flocks of high-soaring birds, whose nature he could not clearly make out.

The next afternoon—to use the language of the outer world as the manuscript did at all times—Zamacona reached the silent plain and crossed the soundless, slow-running river on a curiously carved and fairly well-preserved bridge of black basalt. The water was clear, and contained large fishes of a wholly strange aspect. The roadway was now paved and somewhat overgrown with weeds and creeping vines, and its course was occasionally outlined by small pillars bearing obscure symbols. On every side the grassy level extended, with here and there a clump of trees or shrubbery, and with unidentifiable bluish flowers growing irregularly over the whole area. Now and then some spasmodic motion of the grass indicated the presence of serpents. In the course of several hours the traveller reached a grove of old and alien-looking evergreen-trees which he knew, from distant viewing, protected one of the glittering-roofed isolated structures. Amidst the encroaching vegetation he saw the hideously sculptured pylons of a stone gateway leading off the road, and was presently forcing his way through briers above a moss-crusteD tessellated walk lined with huge trees and low monolithic pillars.

At last, in this hushed green twilight, he saw the crumbling and ineffably ancient facade of the building—a temple, he had no doubt. It was a mass of nauseous bas-reliefs; depicting scenes and beings, objects and ceremonies, which could certainly have no place on this or any sane planet. In hinting of these things Zamacona displays for the first time that shocked and pious hesitancy which impairs the informative value of the rest of his manuscript. We cannot help regretting that the Catholic ardour of Renaissance Spain had so thoroughly permeated his thought and feeling.

The door of the place stood wide open, and absolute darkness filled the windowless interior. Conquering the repulsion which the mural sculptures had excited, Zamacona took out flint and steel, lighted a resinous torch, pushed aside curtaining vines, and sallied boldly across the ominous threshold.

For a moment he was quite stupefied by what he saw. It was not the all-covering dust and cobwebs of immemorial aeons, the fluttering winged things, the shriekingly loathsome sculptures on the walls, the bizarre form of the many basins and braziers, the sinister pyramidal altar with the hollow top, or the monstrous, octopus-headed abnormality in some strange, dark metal leering and squatting broodingly on its hieroglyphed pedestal, which robbed him of even the power to give a startled cry. It was nothing so unearthly as this—but merely the fact that, with the exception of the dust, the cobwebs, the winged things, and the gigantic emerald-eyed idol, every particle of substance in sight was composed of pure and evidently solid gold.

Even the manuscript, written in retrospect after Zamacona knew that gold is the most common structural metal of a nether world containing limitless lodes and veins of it, reflects the frenzied excitement which the traveller felt upon suddenly finding the real source of all the Indian legends of golden cities. For a time the power of detailed observation left him, but in the end his faculties were recalled by a peculiar tugging sensation in the pocket of his doublet. Tracing the feeling, he realised that the disc of strange metal he had found in the abandoned road was being attracted strongly by the vast octopus-headed, emerald-eyed idol on the pedestal, which he now saw to be composed of the same unknown exotic metal. He was later to learn that this strange magnetic substance—as alien to the inner world as to the outer world of men—is the one precious metal of the blue-lighted abyss. None knows what it is or where it occurs in Nature, and the amount of it on this planet came down from the stars with the people when great Tulu, the octopus-headed god, brought them for the first time to this earth. Certainly, its only known source was a stock of pre-existing artifacts, including multitudes of Cyclopean idols. It could never be placed or analysed, and even its magnetism was exerted only on its own kind. It was the supreme ceremonial metal of the hidden people, its use being regulated by custom in such a way that its magnetic properties might cause no

inconvenience. A very weakly magnetic alloy of it with such base metals as iron, gold, silver, copper, or zinc, had formed the sole monetary standard of the hidden people at one period of their history.

Zamacona's reflections on the strange idol and its magnetism were disturbed by a tremendous wave of fear as, for the first time in this silent world, he heard a rumble of very definite and obviously approaching sound. There was no mistaking its nature. It was a thunderously charging herd of large animals; and, remembering the Indian's panic, the footprints, and the moving mass distantly seen, the Spaniard shuddered in terrified anticipation. He did not analyse his position, or the significance of this onrush of great lumbering beings, but merely responded to an elemental urge toward self-protection. Charging herds do not stop to find victims in obscure places, and on the outer earth Zamacona would have felt little or no alarm in such a massive, grove-girt edifice. Some instinct, however, now bred a deep and peculiar terror in his soul; and he looked about frantically for any means of safety.

There being no available refuge in the great, gold-patined interior, he felt that he must close the long-disused door; which still hung on its ancient hinges, doubled back against the inner wall. Soil, vines, and moss had entered the opening from outside, so that he had to dig a path for the great gold portal with his sword; but he managed to perform this work very swiftly under the frightful stimulus of the approaching noise. The hoofbeats had grown still louder and more menacing by the time he began tugging at the heavy door itself; and for a while his fears reached a frantic height, as hope of starting the age-clogged metal grew faint. Then, with a creak, the thing responded to his youthful strength, and a frenzied siege of pulling and pushing ensued. Amidst the roar of unseen stampeding feet success came at last, and the ponderous golden door clanged shut, leaving Zamacona in darkness but for the single lighted torch he had wedged between the pillars of a basin-tripod. There was a latch, and the frightened man blessed his patron saint that it was still effective.

Sound alone told the fugitive the sequel. When the roar grew very near it resolved itself into separate footfalls, as if the evergreen grove had made it necessary for the herd to slacken speed and disperse. But feet continued to approach, and it became evident that the beasts were advancing among the trees and circling the hideously carved temple walls. In the curious

deliberation of their tread Zamacona found something very alarming and repulsive, nor did he like the scuffling sounds which were audible even through the thick stone walls and heavy golden door. Once the door rattled ominously on its archaic hinges, as if under a heavy impact, but fortunately it still held. Then, after a seemingly endless interval, he heard retreating steps and realised that his unknown visitors were leaving. Since the herds did not seem to be very numerous, it would have perhaps been safe to venture out within a half-hour or less; but Zamacona took no chances. Opening his pack, he prepared his camp on the golden tiles of the temple's floor, with the great door still securely latched against all comers; drifting eventually into a sounder sleep than he could have known in the blue-litten spaces outside. He did not even mind the hellish, octopus-headed bulk of great Tulu, fashioned of unknown metal and leering with fishy, sea-green eyes, which squatted in the blackness above him on its monstrously hieroglyphed pedestal.

Surrounded by darkness for the first time since leaving the tunnel, Zamacona slept profoundly and long. He must have more than made up the sleep he had lost at his two previous camps, when the ceaseless glare of the sky had kept him awake despite his fatigue, for much distance was covered by other living feet while he lay in his healthily dreamless rest. It is well that he rested deeply, for there were many strange things to be encountered in his next period of consciousness.

Part IV

What finally roused Zamacona was a thunderous rapping at the door. It beat through his dreams and dissolved all the lingering mists of drowsiness as soon as he knew what it was. There could be no mistake about it—it was a definite, human, and peremptory rapping; performed apparently with some metallic object, and with all the measured quality of conscious thought or will behind it. As the awakening man rose clumsily to his feet, a sharp vocal note was added to the summons—someone calling out, in a not unmusical voice, a formula which the manuscript tries to represent as “oxi, oxi, giathcán ycá relex.” Feeling sure that his visitors were men and not daemons, and arguing that they could have no reason for considering him an enemy, Zamacona decided to face them openly and at once; and

accordingly fumbled with the ancient latch till the golden door creaked open from the pressure of those outside.

As the great portal swung back, Zamacona stood facing a group of about twenty individuals of an aspect not calculated to give him alarm. They seemed to be Indians; though their tasteful robes and trappings and swords were not such as he had seen among any of the tribes of the outer world, while their faces had many subtle differences from the Indian type. That they did not mean to be irresponsibly hostile, was very clear; for instead of menacing him in any way they merely probed him attentively and significantly with their eyes, as if they expected their gaze to open up some sort of communication. The longer they gazed, the more he seemed to know about them and their mission; for although no one had spoken since the vocal summons before the opening of the door, he found himself slowly realising that they had come from the great city beyond the low hills, mounted on animals, and that they had been summoned by animals who had reported his presence; that they were not sure what kind of person he was or just where he had come from but that they knew he must be associated with that dimly remembered outer world which they sometimes visited in curious dreams. How he read all this in the gaze of the two or three leaders he could not possibly explain; though he learned why a moment later.

As it was, he attempted to address his visitors in the Wichita dialect he had picked up from Charging Buffalo; and after this failed to draw a vocal reply he successively tried the Aztec, Spanish, French, and Latin tongues—adding as many scraps of lame Greek, Galician, and Portuguese, and of the Bable peasant patois of his native Asturias, as his memory could recall. But not even this polyglot array—his entire linguistic stock—could bring a reply in kind. When, however, he paused in perplexity, one of the visitors began speaking in an utterly strange and rather fascinating language whose sounds the Spaniard later had much difficulty in representing on paper. Upon his failure to understand this, the speaker pointed first to his own eyes, then to his forehead, and then to his eyes again, as if commanding the other to gaze at him in order to absorb what he wanted to transmit.

Zamacona, obeying, found himself rapidly in possession of certain information. The people, he learned, conversed nowadays by means of unvocal radiations of thought; although they had formerly used a spoken language which still survived as the written tongue, and into which they still

dropped orally for tradition's sake, or when strong feeling demanded a spontaneous outlet. He could understand them merely by concentrating his attention upon their eyes; and could reply by summoning up a mental image of what he wished to say, and throwing the substance of this into his glance. When the thought-speaker paused, apparently inviting a response, Zamacona tried his best to follow the prescribed pattern, but did not appear to succeed very well. So he nodded, and tried to describe himself and his journey by signs. He pointed upward, as if to the outer world, then closed his eyes and made signs as of a mole burrowing. Then he opened his eyes again and pointed downward, in order to indicate his descent of the great slope. Experimentally he blended a spoken word or two with his gestures—for example, pointing successively to himself and to all of his visitors and saying “un hombre,” and then pointing to himself alone and very carefully pronouncing his individual name, Pánfilo de Zamacona.

Before the strange conversation was over, a good deal of data had passed in both directions. Zamacona had begun to learn how to throw his thoughts, and had likewise picked up several words of the region's archaic spoken language. His visitors, moreover, had absorbed many beginnings of an elementary Spanish vocabulary. Their own old language was utterly unlike anything the Spaniard had ever heard, though there were times later on when he was to fancy an infinitely remote linkage with the Aztec, as if the latter represented some far stage of corruption, or some very thin infiltration of loan-words. The underground world, Zamacona learned, bore an ancient name which the manuscript records as “Xinaián”; but which, from the writer's supplementary explanations and diacritical marks, could probably be best represented to Anglo-Saxon ears by the phonetic arrangement K'n-yan.

It is not surprising that this preliminary discourse did not go beyond the merest essentials, but those essentials were highly important. Zamacona learned that the people of K'n-yan were almost infinitely ancient, and that they had come from a distant part of space where physical conditions are much like those of the earth. All this, of course, was legend now; and one could not say how much truth was in it, or how much worship was really due to the octopus-headed being Tulu who had traditionally brought them hither and whom they still revered for aesthetic reasons. But they knew of the outer world, and were indeed the original stock who had peopled it as

soon as its crust was fit to live on. Between glacial ages they had had some remarkable surface civilisations, especially one at the South Pole near the mountain Kadath.

At some time infinitely in the past most of the outer world had sunk beneath the ocean, so that only a few refugees remained to bear the news to K'n-yan. This was undoubtedly due to the wrath of space-devils hostile alike to men and to men's gods—for it bore out rumours of a primordially earlier sinking which had submerged the gods themselves, including great Tulu, who still lay prisoned and dreaming in the watery vaults of the half-cosmic city Relex. No man not a slave of the space-devils, it was argued, could live long on the outer earth; and it was decided that all beings who remained there must be evilly connected. Accordingly traffic with the lands of sun and starlight abruptly ceased. The subterraneous approaches to K'n-yan, or such as could be remembered, were either blocked up or carefully guarded; and all encroachers were treated as dangerous spies and enemies.

But this was long ago. With the passing of ages fewer and fewer visitors came to K'n-yan, and eventually sentries ceased to be maintained at the unblocked approaches. The mass of the people forgot, except through distorted memories and myths and some very singular dreams, that an outer world existed; though educated folk never ceased to recall the essential facts. The last visitors ever recorded—centuries in the past—had not even been treated as devil-spies; faith in the old legendry having long before died out. They had been questioned eagerly about the fabulous outer regions; for scientific curiosity in K'n-yan was keen, and the myths, memories, dreams, and historical fragments relating to the earth's surface had often tempted scholars to the brink of an external expedition which they had not quite dared to attempt. The only thing demanded of such visitors was that they refrain from going back and informing the outer world of K'n-yan's positive existence; for after all, one could not be sure about these outer lands. They coveted gold and silver, and might prove highly troublesome intruders. Those who had obeyed the injunction had lived happily, though regrettably briefly, and had told all they could about their world—little enough, however, since their accounts were all so fragmentary and conflicting that one could hardly tell what to believe and what to doubt. One wished that more of them would come. As for those who disobeyed and tried to escape—it was very unfortunate about them. Zamacona himself

was very welcome, for he appeared to be a higher-grade man, and to know much more about the outer world, than anyone else who had come down within memory. He could tell them much—and they hoped he would be reconciled to his lifelong stay.

Many things which Zamacona learned about K'n-yan in that first colloquy left him quite breathless. He learned, for instance, that during the past few thousand years the phenomena of old age and death had been conquered; so that men no longer grew feeble or died except through violence or will. By regulating the system, one might be as physiologically young and immortal as he wished; and the only reason why any allowed themselves to age, was that they enjoyed the sensation in a world where stagnation and commonplaceness reigned. They could easily become young again when they felt like it. Births had ceased, except for experimental purposes, since a large population had been found needless by a master-race which controlled Nature and organic rivals alike. Many, however, chose to die after a while; since despite the cleverest efforts to invent new pleasures, the ordeal of consciousness became too dull for sensitive souls—especially those in whom time and satiation had blinded the primal instincts and emotions of self-preservation. All the members of the group before Zamacona were from 500 to 1500 years old; and several had seen surface visitors before, though time had blurred the recollection. These visitors, by the way, had often tried to duplicate the longevity of the underground race; but had been able to do so only fractionally, owing to evolutionary differences developing during the million or two years of cleavage.

These evolutionary differences were even more strikingly shewn in another particular—one far stranger than the wonder of immortality itself. This was the ability of the people of K'n-yan to regulate the balance between matter and abstract energy, even where the bodies of living organic beings were concerned, by the sheer force of the technically trained will. In other words, with suitable effort a learned man of K'n-yan could dematerialise and rematerialise himself—or, with somewhat greater effort and subtler technique, any other object he chose; reducing solid matter to free external particles and recombining the particles again without damage. Had not Zamacona answered his visitors' knock when he did, he would have discovered this accomplishment in a highly puzzling way; for only the strain and bother of the process prevented the twenty men from passing

bodily through the golden door without pausing for a summons. This art was much older than the art of perpetual life; and it could be taught to some extent, though never perfectly, to any intelligent person. Rumours of it had reached the outer world in past aeons; surviving in secret traditions and ghostly legendry. The men of K'n-yan had been amused by the primitive and imperfect spirit tales brought down by outer-world stragglers. In practical life this principle had certain industrial applications, but was generally suffered to remain neglected through lack of any particular incentive to its use. Its chief surviving form was in connexion with sleep, when for excitement's sake many dream-connoisseurs resorted to it to enhance the vividness of their visionary wanderings. By the aid of this method certain dreamers even paid half-material visits to a strange, nebulous realm of mounds and valleys and varying light which some believed to be the forgotten outer world. They would go thither on their beasts, and in an age of peace live over the old, glorious battles of their forefathers. Some philosophers thought that in such cases they actually coalesced with immaterial forces left behind by these warlike ancestors themselves.

The people of K'n-yan all dwelt in the great, tall city of Tsath beyond the mountains. Formerly several races of them had inhabited the entire underground world, which stretched down to unfathomable abysses and which included besides the blue-litten region a red-litten region called Yoth, where relics of a still older and non-human race were found by archaeologists. In the course of time, however, the men of Tsath had conquered and enslaved the rest; interbreeding them with certain horned and four-footed animals of the red-litten region, whose semi-human leanings were very peculiar, and which, though containing a certain artificially created element, may have been in part the degenerate descendants of those peculiar entities who had left the relics. As aeons passed, and mechanical discoveries made the business of life extremely easy, a concentration of the people of Tsath took place; so that all the rest of K'n-yan became relatively deserted.

It was easier to live in one place, and there was no object in maintaining a population of overflowing proportions. Many of the old mechanical devices were still in use, though others had been abandoned when it was seen that they failed to give pleasure, or that they were not necessary for a

race of reduced numbers whose mental force could govern an extensive array of inferior and semihuman industrial organisms. This extensive slave-class was highly composite, being bred from ancient conquered enemies, from outer-world stragglers, from dead bodies curiously galvanised into effectiveness, and from the naturally inferior members of the ruling race of Tsath. The ruling type itself had become highly superior through selective breeding and social evolution—the nation having passed through a period of idealistic industrial democracy which gave equal opportunities to all, and thus, by raising the naturally intelligent to power, drained the masses of all their brains and stamina. Industry, being found fundamentally futile except for the supplying of basic needs and the gratification of inescapable yearnings, had become very simple. Physical comfort was ensured by an urban mechanisation of standardised and easily maintained pattern, and other elemental needs were supplied by scientific agriculture and stock-raising. Long travel was abandoned, and people went back to using the horned, half-human beasts instead of maintaining the profusion of gold, silver, and steel transportation machines which had once threaded land, water, and air. Zamacona could scarcely believe that such things had ever existed outside dreams, but was told he could see specimens of them in museums. He could also see the ruins of other vast magical devices by travelling a day's journey to the valley of Do-Hna, to which the race had spread during its period of greatest numbers. The cities and temples of this present plain were of a far more archaic period, and had never been other than religious and antiquarian shrines during the supremacy of the men of Tsath.

In government, Tsath was a kind of communistic or semi-anarchical state; habit rather than law determining the daily order of things. This was made possible by the age-old experience and paralysing ennui of the race, whose wants and needs were limited to physical fundamentals and to new sensations. An aeon-long tolerance not yet undermined by growing reaction had abolished all illusions of values and principles, and nothing but an approximation to custom was ever sought or expected. To see that the mutual encroachments of pleasure-seeking never crippled the mass life of the community—this was all that was desired. Family organisation had long ago perished, and the civil and social distinction of the sexes had disappeared. Daily life was organised in ceremonial patterns; with games,

intoxication, torture of slaves, day-dreaming, gastronomic and emotional orgies, religious exercises, exotic experiments, artistic and philosophical discussions, and the like, as the principal occupations. Property—chiefly land, slaves, animals, shares in the common city enterprise of Tsath, and ingots of magnetic Tulu-metal, the former universal money standard—was allocated on a very complex basis which included a certain amount equally divided among all the freemen. Poverty was unknown, and labour consisted only of certain administrative duties imposed by an intricate system of testing and selection. Zamacona found difficulty in describing conditions so unlike anything he had previously known; and the text of his manuscript proved unusually puzzling at this point.

Art and intellect, it appeared, had reached very high levels in Tsath; but had become listless and decadent. The dominance of machinery had at one time broken up the growth of normal aesthetics, introducing a lifelessly geometrical tradition fatal to sound expression. This had soon been outgrown, but had left its mark upon all pictorial and decorative attempts; so that except for conventionalised religious designs, there was little depth or feeling in any later work. Archaistic reproductions of earlier work had been found much preferable for general enjoyment. Literature was all highly individual and analytical, so much so as to be wholly incomprehensible to Zamacona. Science had been profound and accurate, and all-embracing save in the one direction of astronomy. Of late, however, it was falling into decay, as people found it increasingly useless to tax their minds by recalling its maddening infinitude of details and ramifications. It was thought more sensible to abandon the deepest speculations and to confine philosophy to conventional forms. Technology, of course, could be carried on by rule of thumb. History was more and more neglected, but exact and copious chronicles of the past existed in the libraries. It was still an interesting subject, and there would be a vast number to rejoice at the fresh outer-world knowledge brought in by Zamacona. In general, though, the modern tendency was to feel rather than to think; so that men were now more highly esteemed for inventing new diversions than for preserving old facts or pushing back the frontier of cosmic mystery.

Religion was a leading interest in Tsath, though very few actually believed in the supernatural. What was desired was the aesthetic and emotional exaltation bred by the mystical moods and sensuous rites which

attended the colourful ancestral faith. Temples to Great Tulu, a spirit of universal harmony anciently symbolised as the octopus-headed god who had brought all men down from the stars, were the most richly constructed objects in all K'n-yan; while the cryptic shrines of Yig, the principle of life symbolised as the Father of all Serpents, were almost as lavish and remarkable. In time Zamacona learned much of the orgies and sacrifices connected with this religion, but seemed piously reluctant to describe them in his manuscript. He himself never participated in any of the rites save those which he mistook for perversions of his own faith; nor did he ever lose an opportunity to try to convert the people to that faith of the Cross which the Spaniards hoped to make universal.

Prominent in the contemporary religion of Tsath was a revived and almost genuine veneration for the rare, sacred metal of Tulu—that dark, lustrous, magnetic stuff which was nowhere found in Nature, but which had always been with men in the form of idols and hieratic implements. From the earliest times any sight of it in its unalloyed form had impelled respect, while all the sacred archives and litanies were kept in cylinders wrought of its purest substance. Now, as the neglect of science and intellect was dulling the critically analytical spirit, people were beginning to weave around the metal once more that same fabric of awestruck superstition which had existed in primitive times.

Another function of religion was the regulation of the calendar, born of a period when time and speed were regarded as prime fetiches in man's emotional life. Periods of alternate waking and sleeping, prolonged, abridged, and inverted as mood and convenience dictated, and timed by the tail-beats of Great Yig, the Serpent, corresponded very roughly to terrestrial days and nights; though Zamacona's sensations told him they must actually be almost twice as long. The year-unit, measured by Yig's annual shedding of his skin, was equal to about a year and a half of the outer world. Zamacona thought he had mastered this calendar very well when he wrote his manuscript, whence the confidently given date of 1545; but the document failed to suggest that his assurance in this matter was fully justified.

As the spokesman of the Tsath party proceeded with his information, Zamacona felt a growing repulsion and alarm. It was not only what was told, but the strange, telepathic manner of telling, and the plain inference

that return to the outer world would be impossible, that made the Spaniard wish he had never descended to this region of magic, abnormality, and decadence. But he knew that nothing but friendly acquiescence would do as a policy, hence decided to cooperate in all his visitors' plans and furnish all the information they might desire. They, on their part, were fascinated by the outer-world data which he managed haltingly to convey.

It was really the first draught of reliable surface information they had had since the refugees straggled back from Atlantis and Lemuria aeons before, for all their subsequent emissaries from outside had been members of narrow and local groups without any knowledge of the world at large—Mayas, Toltecs, and Aztecs at best, and mostly ignorant tribes of the plains. Zamacona was the first European they had ever seen, and the fact that he was a youth of education and brilliancy made him of still more emphatic value as a source of knowledge. The visiting party shewed their breathless interest in all he contrived to convey, and it was plain that his coming would do much to relieve the flagging interest of weary Tsath in matters of geography and history.

The only thing which seemed to displease the men of Tsath was the fact that curious and adventurous strangers were beginning to pour into those parts of the upper world where the passages to K'n-yan lay. Zamacona told them of the founding of Florida and New Spain, and made it clear that a great part of the world was stirring with the zest of adventure—Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English. Sooner or later Mexico and Florida must meet in one great colonial empire—and then it would be hard to keep outsiders from the rumoured gold and silver of the abyss. Charging Buffalo knew of Zamacona's journey into the earth. Would he tell Coronado, or somehow let a report get to the great viceroy, when he failed to find the traveller at the promised meeting-place? Alarm for the continued secrecy and safety of K'n-yan shewed in the faces of the visitors, and Zamacona absorbed from their minds the fact that from now on sentries would undoubtedly be posted once more at all the unblocked passages to the outside world which the men of Tsath could remember.

Part V

The long conversation of Zamacona and his visitors took place in the green-blue twilight of the grove just outside the temple door. Some of the

men reclined on the weeds and moss beside the half-vanished walk, while others, including the Spaniard and the chief spokesman of the Tsath party, sat on the occasional low monolithic pillars that lined the temple approach. Almost a whole terrestrial day must have been consumed in the colloquy, for Zamacona felt the need of food several times, and ate from his well-stocked pack while some of the Tsath party went back for provisions to the roadway, where they had left the animals on which they had ridden. At length the prime leader of the party brought the discourse to a close, and indicated that the time had come to proceed to the city.

There were, he affirmed, several extra beasts in the cavalcade, upon one of which Zamacona could ride. The prospect of mounting one of those ominous hybrid entities whose fabled nourishment was so alarming, and a single sight of which had set Charging Buffalo into such a frenzy of flight, was by no means reassuring to the traveller. There was, moreover, another point about the things which disturbed him greatly—the apparently preternatural intelligence with which some members of the previous day's roving pack had reported his presence to the men of Tsath and brought out the present expedition. But Zamacona was not a coward, hence followed the men boldly down the weed-grown walk toward the road where the things were stationed.

And yet he could not refrain from crying out in terror at what he saw when he passed through the great vine-draped pylons and emerged upon the ancient road. He did not wonder that the curious Wichita had fled in panic, and had to close his eyes a moment to retain his sanity. It is unfortunate that some sense of pious reticence prevented him from describing fully in his manuscript the nameless sight he saw. As it is, he merely hinted at the shocking morbidity of these great floundering white things, with black fur on their backs, a rudimentary horn in the centre of their foreheads, and an unmistakable trace of human or anthropoid blood in their flat-nosed, bulging-lipped faces. They were, he declared later in his manuscript, the most terrible objective entities he ever saw in his life, either in K'n-yan or in the outer world. And the specific quality of their supreme terror was something apart from any easily recognisable or describable feature. The main trouble was that they were not wholly products of Nature.

The party observed Zamacona's fright, and hastened to reassure him as much as possible. The beasts or gyaa-yothn, they explained, surely were

curious things; but were really very harmless. The flesh they ate was not that of intelligent people of the master-race, but merely that of a special slave-class which had for the most part ceased to be thoroughly human, and which indeed was the principal meat stock of K'n-yan. They—or their principal ancestral element—had first been found in a wild state amidst the Cyclopean ruins of the deserted red-litten world of Yoth which lay below the blue-litten world of K'n-yan. That part of them was human, seemed quite clear; but men of science could never decide whether they were actually the descendants of the bygone entities who had lived and reigned in the strange ruins. The chief ground for such a supposition was the well-known fact that the vanished inhabitants of Yoth had been quadrupedal. This much was known from the very few manuscripts and carvings found in the vaults of Zin, beneath the largest ruined city of Yoth. But it was also known from these manuscripts that the beings of Yoth had possessed the art of synthetically creating life, and had made and destroyed several efficiently designed races of industrial and transportational animals in the course of their history—to say nothing of concocting all manner of fantastic living shapes for the sake of amusement and new sensations during the long period of decadence. The beings of Yoth had undoubtedly been reptilian in affiliations, and most physiologists of Tsath agreed that the present beasts had been very much inclined toward reptilianism before they had been crossed with the mammal slave-class of K'n-yan.

It argues well for the intrepid fire of those Renaissance Spaniards who conquered half the unknown world, that Pánfilo de Zamacona y Nuñez actually mounted one of the morbid beasts of Tsath and fell into place beside the leader of the cavalcade—the man named Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn, who had been most active in the previous exchange of information. It was a repulsive business; but after all, the seat was very easy, and the gait of the clumsy gyaa-yoth surprisingly even and regular. No saddle was necessary, and the animal appeared to require no guidance whatever. The procession moved forward at a brisk gait, stopping only at certain abandoned cities and temples about which Zamacona was curious, and which Gll'Hthaa-Ynn was obligingly ready to display and explain. The largest of these towns, B'graa, was a marvel of finely wrought gold, and Zamacona studied the curiously ornate architecture with avid interest. Buildings tended toward height and slenderness, with roofs bursting into a multitude of pinnacles. The streets

were narrow, curving, and occasionally picturesquely hilly, but Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn said that the later cities of K'n-yan were far more spacious and regular in design. All these old cities of the plain shewed traces of levelled walls—reminders of the archaic days when they had been successively conquered by the now dispersed armies of Tsath.

There was one object along the route which Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn exhibited on his own initiative, even though it involved a detour of about a mile along a vine-tangled side path. This was a squat, plain temple of black basalt blocks without a single carving, and containing only a vacant onyx pedestal. The remarkable thing about it was its story, for it was a link with a fabled elder world compared to which even cryptic Yoth was a thing of yesterday. It had been built in imitation of certain temples depicted in the vaults of Zin, to house a very terrible black toad-idol found in the red-litten world and called Tsathoggua in the Yothic manuscripts. It had been a potent and widely worshipped god, and after its adoption by the people of K'n-yan had lent its name to the city which was later to become dominant in that region. Yothic legend said that it had come from a mysterious inner realm beneath the red-litten world—a black realm of peculiar-sensed beings which had no light at all, but which had had great civilisations and mighty gods before ever the reptilian quadrupeds of Yoth had come into being. Many images of Tsathoggua existed in Yoth, all of which were alleged to have come from the black inner realm, and which were supposed by Yothic archaeologists to represent the aeon-extinct race of that realm. The black realm called N'kai in the Yothic manuscripts had been explored as thoroughly as possible by these archaeologists, and singular stone troughs or burrows had excited infinite speculation.

When the men of K'n-yan discovered the red-litten world and deciphered its strange manuscripts, they took over the Tsathoggua cult and brought all the frightful toad images up to the land of blue light—housing them in shrines of Yoth-quarried basalt like the one Zamacona now saw. The cult flourished until it almost rivalled the ancient cults of Yig and Tulu, and one branch of the race even took it to the outer world, where the smallest of the images eventually found a shrine at Olathoë, in the land of Lomar near the earth's north pole. It was rumoured that this outer-world cult survived even after the great ice-sheet and the hairy Gnophkehs destroyed Lomar, but of such matters not much was definitely known in

K'n-yan. In that world of blue light the cult came to an abrupt end, even though the name of Tsath was suffered to remain.

What ended the cult was the partial exploration of the black realm of N'kai beneath the red-litten world of Yoth. According to the Yothic manuscripts, there was no surviving life in N'kai, but something must have happened in the aeons between the days of Yoth and the coming of men to the earth; something perhaps not unconnected with the end of Yoth. Probably it had been an earthquake, opening up lower chambers of the lightless world which had been closed against the Yothic archaeologists; or perhaps some more frightful juxtaposition of energy and electrons, wholly inconceivable to any sort of vertebrate minds, had taken place. At any rate, when the men of K'n-yan went down into N'kai's black abyss with their great atom-power searchlights they found living things—living things that oozed along stone channels and worshipped onyx and basalt images of Tsathoggua. But they were not toads like Tsathoggua himself. Far worse—they were amorphous lumps of viscous black slime that took temporary shapes for various purposes. The explorers of K'n-yan did not pause for detailed observations, and those who escaped alive sealed the passage leading from red-litten Yoth down into the gulfs of nether horror. Then all the images of Tsathoggua in the land of K'n-yan were dissolved into the ether by disintegrating rays, and the cult was abolished forever.

Aeons later, when naive fears were outgrown and supplanted by scientific curiosity, the old legends of Tsathoggua and N'kai were recalled and a suitably armed and equipped exploring party went down to Yoth to find the closed gate of the black abyss and see what might still lie beneath. But they could not find the gate, nor could any man ever do so in all the ages that followed. Nowadays there were those who doubted that any abyss had ever existed, but the few scholars who could still decipher the Yothic manuscripts believed that the evidence for such a thing was adequate, even though the middle records of K'n-yan, with accounts of the one frightful expedition into N'kai, were more open to question. Some of the later religious cults tried to suppress remembrance of N'kai's existence, and attached severe penalties to its mention; but these had not begun to be taken seriously at the time of Zamacona's advent to K'n-yan.

As the cavalcade returned to the old highway and approached the low range of mountains, Zamacona saw that the river was very close on the left.

Somewhat later, as the terrain rose, the stream entered a gorge and passed through the hills, while the road traversed the gap at a rather higher level close to the brink. It was about this time that light rainfall came. Zamacona noticed the occasional drops and drizzle, and looked up at the coruscating blue air, but there was no diminution of the strange radiance. Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn then told him that such condensations and precipitations of water-vapour were not uncommon, and that they never dimmed the glare of the vault above. A kind of mist, indeed, always hung about the lowlands of K'n-yan, and compensated for the complete absence of true clouds.

The slight rise of the mountain pass enabled Zamacona, by looking behind, to see the ancient and deserted plain in panorama as he had seen it from the other side. He seems to have appreciated its strange beauty, and to have vaguely regretted leaving it; for he speaks of being urged by Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn to drive his beast more rapidly. When he faced forward again he saw that the crest of the road was very near; the weed-grown way leading starkly up and ending against a blank void of blue light. The scene was undoubtedly highly impressive—a steep green mountain wall on the right, a deep river-chasm on the left with another green mountain wall beyond it, and ahead, the churning sea of bluish coruscations into which the upward path dissolved. Then came the crest itself, and with it the world of Tsath outspread in a stupendous forward vista.

Zamacona caught his breath at the great sweep of peopled landscape, for it was a hive of settlement and activity beyond anything he had ever seen or dreamed of. The downward slope of the hill itself was relatively thinly strown with small farms and occasional temples; but beyond it lay an enormous plain covered like a chess board with planted trees, irrigated by narrow canals cut from the river, and threaded by wide, geometrically precise roads of gold or basalt blocks. Great silver cables borne aloft on golden pillars linked the low, spreading buildings and clusters of buildings which rose here and there, and in some places one could see lines of partly ruinous pillars without cables. Moving objects skewed the fields to be under tillage, and in some cases Zamacona saw that men were ploughing with the aid of the repulsive, half-human quadrupeds.

But most impressive of all was the bewildering vision of clustered spires and pinnacles which rose afar off across the plain and shimmered flower-like and spectral in the coruscating blue light. At first Zamacona

thought it was a mountain covered with houses and temples, like some of the picturesque hill cities of his own Spain, but a second glance shewed him that it was not indeed such. It was a city of the plain, but fashioned of such heaven-reaching towers that its outline was truly that of a mountain. Above it hung a curious greyish haze, through which the blue light glistened and took added overtones of radiance from the million golden minarets. Glancing at Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn, Zamacona knew that this was the monstrous, gigantic, and omnipotent city of Tsath.

As the road turned downward toward the plain, Zamacona felt a kind of uneasiness and sense of evil. He did not like the beast he rode, or the world that could provide such a beast, and he did not like the atmosphere that brooded over the distant city of Tsath. When the cavalcade began to pass occasional farms, the Spaniard noticed the forms that worked in the fields; and did not like their motions and proportions, or the mutilations he saw on most of them. Moreover, he did not like the way that some of these forms were herded in corrals, or the way they grazed on the heavy verdure. Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn indicated that these beings were members of the slave-class, and that their acts were controlled by the master of the farm, who gave them hypnotic impressions in the morning of all they were to do during the day. As semi-conscious machines, their industrial efficiency was nearly perfect. Those in the corrals were inferior specimens, classified merely as livestock.

Upon reaching the plain, Zamacona saw the larger farms and noted the almost human work performed by the repulsive horned gyaa-yothn. He likewise observed the more manlike shapes that toiled along the furrows, and felt a curious fright and disgust toward certain of them whose motions were more mechanical than those of the rest. These, Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn explained, were what men called the y'm-bhi—organisms which had died, but which had been mechanically reanimated for industrial purposes by means of atomic energy and thought-power. The slave-class did not share the immortality of the freemen of Tsath, so that with time the number of y'm-bhi had become very large. They were dog-like and faithful, but not so readily amenable to thought-commands as were living slaves. Those which most repelled Zamacona were those whose mutilations were greatest; for some were wholly headless, while others had suffered singular and seemingly capricious subtractions, distortions, transpositions, and graftings in various places. The Spaniard could not account for this condition, but

Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn made it clear that these were slaves who had been used for the amusement of the people in some of the vast arenas; for the men of Tsath were connoisseurs of delicate sensation, and required a constant supply of fresh and novel stimuli for their jaded impulses. Zamacona, though by no means squeamish, was not favourably impressed by what he saw and heard.

Approached more closely, the vast metropolis became dimly horrible in its monstrous extent and inhuman height. Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn explained that the upper parts of the great towers were no longer used, and that many had been taken down to avoid the bother of maintenance. The plain around the original urban area was covered with newer and smaller dwellings, which in many cases were preferred to the ancient towers. From the whole mass of gold and stone a monotonous roar of activity droned outward over the plain, while cavalcades and streams of wagons were constantly entering and leaving over the great gold- or stone-paved roads.

Several times Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn paused to shew Zamacona some particular object of interest, especially the temples of Yig, Tulu, Nug, Yeb, and the Not-to-Be-Named One which lined the road at infrequent intervals, each in its embowering grove according to the custom of K'n-yan. These temples, unlike those of the deserted plain beyond the mountains, were still in active use; large parties of mounted worshippers coming and going in constant streams. Gll'Hthaa-Ynn took Zamacona into each of them, and the Spaniard watched the subtle orgiastic rites with fascination and repulsion. The ceremonies of Nug and Yeb sickened him especially—so much, indeed, that he refrained from describing them in his manuscript. One squat, black temple of Tsathoggua was encountered, but it had been turned into a shrine of Shub-Niggurath, the All-Mother and wife of the Not-to-Be-Named One. This deity was a kind of sophisticated Astarte, and her worship struck the pious Catholic as supremely obnoxious. What he liked least of all were the emotional sounds emitted by the celebrants—jarring sounds in a race that had ceased to use vocal speech for ordinary purposes.

Close to the compact outskirts of Tsath, and well within the shadow of its terrifying towers, Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn pointed out a monstrous circular building before which enormous crowds were lined up. This, he indicated, was one of the many amphitheatres where curious sports and sensations were provided for the weary people of K'n-yan. He was about to pause and

usher Zamacona inside the vast curved facade, when the Spaniard, recalling the mutilated forms he had seen in the fields, violently demurred. This was the first of those friendly clashes of taste which were to convince the people of Tsath that their guest followed strange and narrow standards.

Tsath itself was a network of strange and ancient streets; and despite a growing sense of horror and alienage, Zamacona was enthralled by its intimations of mystery and cosmic wonder. The dizzy giganticism of its overawing towers, the monstrous surge of teeming life through its ornate avenues, the curious carvings on its doorways and windows, the odd vistas glimpsed from balustraded plazas and tiers of titan terraces, and the enveloping grey haze which seemed to press down on the gorge-like streets in low ceiling-fashion, all combined to produce such a sense of adventurous expectancy as he had never known before. He was taken at once to a council of executives which held forth in a gold-and-copper palace behind a gardened and fountained park, and was for some time subjected to close, friendly questioning in a vaulted hall frescoed with vertiginous arabesques. Much was expected of him, he could see, in the way of historical information about the outside earth; but in return all the mysteries of K'n-yan would be unveiled to him. The one great drawback was the inexorable ruling that he might never return to the world of sun and stars and Spain which was his.

A daily programme was laid down for the visitor, with time apportioned judiciously among several kinds of activities. There were to be conversations with persons of learning in various places, and lessons in many branches of Tsathic lore. Liberal periods of research were allowed for, and all the libraries of K'n-yan both secular and sacred were to be thrown open to him as soon as he might master the written languages. Rites and spectacles were to be attended—except when he might especially object—and much time would be left for the enlightened pleasure-seeking and emotional titillation which formed the goal and nucleus of daily life. A house in the suburbs or an apartment in the city would be assigned him, and he would be initiated into one of the large affection-groups, including many noblewomen of the most extreme and art-enhanced beauty, which in latter-day K'n-yan took the place of family units. Several horned gyaa-yothn would be provided for his transportation and errand-running, and ten living slaves of intact body would serve to conduct his establishment and protect

him from thieves and sadists and religious orgiasts on the public highways. There were many mechanical devices which he must learn to use, but Gll'-Hthaa-Ynn would instruct him immediately regarding the principal ones.

Upon his choosing an apartment in preference to a suburban villa, Zamacona was dismissed by the executives with great courtesy and ceremony, and was led through several gorgeous streets to a cliff-like carven structure of some seventy or eighty floors. Preparations for his arrival had already been instituted, and in a spacious ground-floor suite of vaulted rooms slaves were busy adjusting hangings and furniture. There were lacquered and inlaid tabourets, velvet and silk reclining-corners and squatting-cushions, and infinite rows of teakwood and ebony pigeon-holes with metal cylinders containing some of the manuscripts he was soon to read—standard classics which all urban apartments possessed. Desks with great stacks of membrane-paper and pots of the prevailing green pigment were in every room—each with graded sets of pigment brushes and other odd bits of stationery. Mechanical writing devices stood on ornate golden tripods, while over all was shed a brilliant blue light from energy-globes set in the ceiling. There were windows, but at this shadowy ground-level they were of scant illuminating value. In some of the rooms were elaborate baths, while the kitchen was a maze of technical contrivances. Supplies were brought, Zamacona was told, through the network of underground passages which lay beneath Tsath, and which had once accommodated curious mechanical transports. There was a stable on that underground level for the beasts, and Zamacona would presently be shewn how to find the nearest runway to the street. Before his inspection was finished, the permanent staff of slaves arrived and were introduced; and shortly afterward there came some halfdozen freemen and noblewomen of his future affection-group, who were to be his companions for several days, contributing what they could to his instruction and amusement. Upon their departure, another party would take their place, and so onward in rotation through a group of about fifty members.

Part VI

Thus was Pánfilo de Zamacona y Nuñez absorbed for four years into the life of the sinister city of Tsath in the blue-litten nether world of K'n-yan. All that he learned and saw and did is clearly not told in his manuscript; for

a pious reticence overcame him when he began to write in his native Spanish tongue, and he dared not set down everything. Much he consistently viewed with repulsion, and many things he steadfastly refrained from seeing or doing or eating. For other things he atoned by frequent countings of the beads of his rosary. He explored the entire world of K'n-yan, including the deserted machine-cities of the middle period on the gorse-grown plain of Nith, and made one descent into the red-litten world of Yoth to see the Cyclopean ruins. He witnessed prodigies of craft and machinery which left him breathless, and beheld human metamorphoses, dematerialisations, rematerialisations, and reanimations which made him cross himself again and again. His very capacity for astonishment was blunted by the plethora of new marvels which every day brought him.

But the longer he stayed, the more he wished to leave, for the inner life of K'n-yan was based on impulses very plainly outside his radius. As he progressed in historical knowledge, he understood more; but understanding only heightened his distaste. He felt that the people of Tsath were a lost and dangerous race—more dangerous to themselves than they knew—and that their growing frenzy of monotony-warfare and novelty-quest was leading them rapidly toward a precipice of disintegration and utter horror. His own visit, he could see, had accelerated their unrest; not only by introducing fears of outside invasion, but by exciting in many a wish to sally forth and taste the diverse external world he described. As time progressed, he noticed an increasing tendency of the people to resort to dematerialisation as an amusement; so that the apartments and amphitheatres of Tsath became a veritable Witches' Sabbath of transmutations, age-adjustments, death-experiments, and projections. With the growth of boredom and restlessness, he saw, cruelty and subtlety and revolt were growing apace. There was more and more cosmic abnormality, more and more curious sadism, more and more ignorance and superstition, and more and more desire to escape out of physical life into a half-spectral state of electronic dispersal.

All his efforts to leave, however, came to nothing. Persuasion was useless, as repeated trials proved; though the mature disillusion of the upper classes at first prevented them from resenting their guest's open wish for departure. In a year which he reckoned as 1543 Zamacona made an actual attempt to escape through the tunnel by which he had entered K'n-yan, but

after a weary journey across the deserted plain he encountered forces in the dark passage which discouraged him from future attempts in that direction. As a means of sustaining hope and keeping the image of home in mind, he began about this time to make rough draughts of the manuscript relating his adventures; delighting in the loved, old Spanish words and the familiar letters of the Roman alphabet. Somehow he fancied he might get the manuscript to the outer world; and to make it convincing to his fellows he resolved to enclose it in one of the Tulu-metal cylinders used for sacred archives. That alien, magnetic substance could not but support the incredible story he had to tell.

But even as he planned, he had little real hope of ever establishing contact with the earth's surface. Every known gate, he knew, was guarded by persons or forces that it were better not to oppose. His attempt at escape had not helped matters, for he could now see a growing hostility to the outer world he represented. He hoped that no other European would find his way in; for it was possible that later comers might not fare as well as he. He himself had been a cherished fountain of data, and as such had enjoyed a privileged status. Others, deemed less necessary, might receive rather different treatment. He even wondered what would happen to him when the sages of Tsath considered him drained dry of fresh facts; and in self-defence began to be more gradual in his talks on earth-lore, conveying whenever he could the impression of vast knowledge held in reserve.

One other thing which endangered Zamacona's status in Tsath was his persistent curiosity regarding the ultimate abyss of N'kai, beneath red-litten Yoth, whose existence the dominant religious cults of K'n-yan were more and more inclined to deny. When exploring Yoth he had vainly tried to find the blocked-up entrance; and later on he experimented in the arts of dematerialisation and projection, hoping that he might thereby be able to throw his consciousness downward into the gulfs which his physical eyes could not discover. Though never becoming truly proficient in these processes, he did manage to achieve a series of monstrous and portentous dreams which he believed included some elements of actual projection into N'kai; dreams which greatly shocked and perturbed the leaders of Yig and Tulu-worship when he related them, and which he was advised by friends to conceal rather than exploit. In time those dreams became very frequent and maddening; containing things which he dared not record in his main

manuscript, but of which he prepared a special record for the benefit of certain learned men in Tsath.

It may have been unfortunate—or it may have been mercifully fortunate—that Zamacona practiced so many reticences and reserved so many themes and descriptions for subsidiary manuscripts. The main document leaves one to guess much about the detailed manners, customs, thoughts, language, and history of K'n-yan, as well as to form any adequate picture of the visual aspect and daily life of Tsath. One is left puzzled, too, about the real motivations of the people; their strange passivity and craven unwarlikeness, and their almost cringing fear of the outer world despite their possession of atomic and dematerialising powers which would have made them unconquerable had they taken the trouble to organise armies as in the old days. It is evident that K'n-yan was far along in its decadence—reacting with mixed apathy and hysteria against the standardised and time-tabled life of stultifying regularity which machinery had brought it during its middle period. Even the grotesque and repulsive customs and modes of thought and feeling can be traced to this source; for in his historical research Zamacona found evidence of bygone eras in which K'n-yan had held ideas much like those of the classic and renaissance outer world, and had possessed a national character and art full of what Europeans regard as dignity, kindness, and nobility.

The more Zamacona studied these things, the more apprehensive about the future he became; because he saw that the omnipresent moral and intellectual disintegration was a tremendously deep-seated and ominously accelerating movement. Even during his stay the signs of decay multiplied. Rationalism degenerated more and more into fanatical and orgiastic superstition, centring in a lavish adoration of the magnetic Tulu-metal, and tolerance steadily dissolved into a series of frenzied hatreds, especially toward the outer world of which the scholars were learning so much from him. At times he almost feared that the people might some day lose their age-long apathy and brokenness and turn like desperate rats against the unknown lands above them, sweeping all before them by virtue of their singular and still-remembered scientific powers. But for the present they fought their boredom and sense of emptiness in other ways; multiplying their hideous emotional outlets and increasing the mad grotesqueness and abnormality of their diversions. The arenas of Tsath must have been

accursed and unthinkable places—Zamacona never went near them. And what they would be in another century, or even in another decade, he did not dare to think. The pious Spaniard crossed himself and counted his beads more often than usual in those days.

In the year 1545, as he reckoned it, Zamacona began what may well be accepted as his final series of attempts to leave K'n-yan. His fresh opportunity came from an unexpected source—a female of his affection-group who conceived for him a curious individual infatuation based on some hereditary memory of the days of monogamous wedlock in Tsath. Over this female—a noblewoman of moderate beauty and of at least average intelligence named T'la-yub—Zamacona acquired the most extraordinary influence; finally inducing her to help him in an escape, under the promise that he would let her accompany him. Chance proved a great factor in the course of events, for T'la-yub came of a primordial family of gatelords who had retained oral traditions of at least one passage to the outer world which the mass of people had forgotten even at the time of the great closing; a passage to a mound on the level plains of earth which had, in consequence, never been sealed up or guarded. She explained that the primordial gate-lords were not guards or sentries, but merely ceremonial and economic proprietors, half-feudal and baronial in status, of an era preceding the severance of surface-relations. Her own family had been so reduced at the time of the closing that their gate had been wholly overlooked; and they had ever afterward preserved the secret of its existence as a sort of hereditary secret—a source of pride, and of a sense of reserve power, to offset the feeling of vanished wealth and influence which so constantly irritated them.

Zamacona, now working feverishly to get his manuscript into final form in case anything should happen to him, decided to take with him on his outward journey only five beast-loads of unalloyed gold in the form of the small ingots used for minor decorations—enough, he calculated, to make him a personage of unlimited power in his own world. He had become somewhat hardened to the sight of the monstrous gyaa-yothn during his four years of residence in Tsath, hence did not shrink from using the creatures; yet he resolved to kill and bury them, and cache the gold, as soon as he reached the outer world, since he knew that even a glimpse of one of the things would drive any ordinary Indian mad. Later he could arrange for

a suitable expedition to transport the treasure to Mexico. T'la-yub he would perhaps allow to share his fortunes, for she was by no means unattractive; though possibly he would arrange for her sojourn amongst the plains Indians, since he was not overanxious to preserve links with the manner of life in Tsath. For a wife, of course, he would choose a lady of Spain—or at worst, an Indian princess of normal outer-world descent and a regular and approved past. But for the present T'la-yub must be used as a guide. The manuscript he would carry on his own person, encased in a book-cylinder of the sacred and magnetic Tulu-metal.

The expedition itself is described in the addendum to Zamacona's manuscript, written later, and in a hand shewing signs of nervous strain. It set out amidst the most careful precautions, choosing a rest-period and proceeding as far as possible along the faintly lighted passages beneath the city. Zamacona and T'la-yub, disguised in slaves' garments, bearing provision-knapsacks, and leading the five laden beasts on foot, were readily taken for commonplace workers; and they clung as long as possible to the subterranean way—using a long and little-frequented branch which had formerly conducted the mechanical transports to the now ruined suburb of L'thaa. Amidst the ruins of L'thaa they came to the surface, thereafter passing as rapidly as possible over the deserted, blue-litten plain of Nith toward the Grh-yan range of low hills. There, amidst the tangled underbrush, T'la-yub found the long disused and half-fabulous entrance to the forgotten tunnel; a thing she had seen but once before—aeons in the past, when her father had taken her thither to shew her this monument to their family pride. It was hard work getting the laden gyaa-yothn to scrape through the obstructing vines and briers, and one of them displayed a rebelliousness destined to bear dire consequences—bolting away from the party and loping back toward Tsath on its detestable pads, golden burden and all.

It was nightmare work burrowing by the light of blue-ray torches upward, downward, forward, and upward again through a dank, choked tunnel that no foot had trodden since ages before the sinking of Atlantis; and at one point T'la-yub had to practice the fearsome art of dematerialisation on herself, Zamacona, and the laden beasts in order to pass a point wholly clogged by shifting earth-strata. It was a terrible experience for Zamacona; for although he had often witnessed

dematerialisation in others, and even practiced it himself to the extent of dream-projection, he had never been fully subjected to it before. But T'la-yub was skilled in the arts of K'n-yan, and accomplished the double metamorphosis in perfect safety.

Thereafter they resumed the hideous burrowing through stalactited crypts of horror where monstrous carvings leered at every turn; alternately camping and advancing for a period which Zamacona reckoned as about three days, but which was probably less. At last they came to a very narrow place where the natural or only slightly hewn cave-walls gave place to walls of wholly artificial masonry, carved into terrible bas-reliefs. These walls, after about a mile of steep ascent, ended with a pair of vast niches, one on each side, in which monstrous, nitre-encrusted images of Yig and Tulu squatted, glaring at each other across the passage as they had glared since the earliest youth of the human world. At this point the passage opened into a prodigious vaulted and circular chamber of human construction; wholly covered with horrible carvings, and revealing at the farther end an arched passageway with the foot of a flight of steps. T'la-yub knew from family tales that this must be very near the earth's surface, but she could not tell just how near. Here the party camped for what they meant to be their last rest-period in the subterranean world.

It must have been hours later that the clank of metal and the padding of beasts' feet awakened Zamacona and T'la-yub. A bluish glare was spreading from the narrow passage between the images of Yig and Tulu, and in an instant the truth was obvious. An alarm had been given at Tsath—as was later revealed, by the returning gyaa-yoth which had rebelled at the brier-choked tunnel-entrance—and a swift party of pursuers had come to arrest the fugitives. Resistance was clearly useless, and none was offered. The party of twelve beast-riders proved studiously polite, and the return commenced almost without a word or thought-message on either side.

It was an ominous and depressing journey, and the ordeal of dematerialisation and rematerialisation at the choked place was all the more terrible because of the lack of that hope and expectancy which had palliated the process on the outward trip. Zamacona heard his captors discussing the imminent clearing of this choked place by intensive radiations, since henceforward sentries must be maintained at the hitherto unknown outer portal. It would not do to let outsiders get within the passage, for then any

who might escape without due treatment would have a hint of the vastness of the inner world and would perhaps be curious enough to return in greater strength. As with the other passages since Zamacona's coming, sentries must be stationed all along, as far as the very outermost gate; sentries drawn from amongst all the slaves, the dead-alive y'm-bhi, or the class of discredited freemen. With the overrunning of the American plains by thousands of Europeans, as the Spaniard had predicted, every passage was a potential source of danger; and must be rigorously guarded until the technologists of Tsath could spare the energy to prepare an ultimate and entrance-hiding obliteration as they had done for many passages in earlier and more vigorous times.

Zamacona and T'la-yub were tried before three gn'agn of the supreme tribunal in the gold-and-copper palace behind the gardened and fountained park, and the Spaniard was given his liberty because of the vital outer-world information he still had to impart. He was told to return to his apartment and to his affection-group; taking up his life as before, and continuing to meet deputations of scholars according to the latest schedule he had been following. No restrictions would be imposed upon him so long as he might remain peacefully in K'n-yan—but it was intimated that such leniency would not be repeated after another attempt at escape. Zamacona had felt that there was an element of irony in the parting words of the chief gn'ag—an assurance that all of his gyaa-yothn, including the one which had rebelled, would be returned to him.

The fate of T'la-yub was less happy. There being no object in retaining her, and her ancient Tsathic lineage giving her act a greater aspect of treason than Zamacona's had possessed, she was ordered to be delivered to the curious diversions of the amphitheatre; and afterward, in a somewhat mutilated and half-dematerialised form, to be given the functions of a y'm-bhi or animated corpse-slave and stationed among the sentries guarding the passage whose existence she had betrayed. Zamacona soon heard, not without many pangs of regret he could scarcely have anticipated, that poor T'la-yub had emerged from the arena in a headless and otherwise incomplete state, and had been set as an outermost guard upon the mound in which the passage had been found to terminate. She was, he was told, a night-sentinel, whose automatic duty was to warn off all comers with a torch; sending down reports to a small garrison of twelve dead slave y'm-

bhi and six living but partly dematerialised freemen in the vaulted, circular chamber if the approachers did not heed her warning. She worked, he was told, in conjunction with a day-sentinel—a living freeman who chose this post in preference to other forms of discipline for other offences against the state. Zamacona, of course, had long known that most of the chief gate-sentries were such discredited freemen.

It was now made plain to him, though indirectly, that his own penalty for another escape-attempt would be service as a gate-sentry—but in the form of a dead-alive y'm-bhi slave, and after amphitheatre-treatment even more picturesque than that which T'la-yub was reported to have undergone. It was intimated that he—or parts of him—would be reanimated to guard some inner section of the passage; within sight of others, where his abridged person might serve as a permanent symbol of the rewards of treason. But, his informants always added, it was of course inconceivable that he would ever court such a fate. So long as he remained peaceably in K'n-yan, he would continue to be a free, privileged, and respected personage.

Yet in the end Pánfilo de Zamacona did court the fate so direfully hinted to him. True, he did not really expect to encounter it; but the nervous latter part of his manuscript makes it clear that he was prepared to face its possibility. What gave him a final hope of scatheless escape from K'n-yan was his growing mastery of the art of dematerialisation. Having studied it for years, and having learned still more from the two instances in which he had been subjected to it, he now felt increasingly able to use it independently and effectively. The manuscript records several notable experiments in this art—minor successes accomplished in his apartment—and reflects Zamacona's hope that he might soon be able to assume the spectral form in full, attaining complete invisibility and preserving that condition as long as he wished.

Once he reached this stage, he argued, the outward way lay open to him. Of course he could not bear away any gold, but mere escape was enough. He would, though, dematerialise and carry away with him his manuscript in the Tulu-metal cylinder, even though it cost additional effort; for this record and proof must reach the outer world at all hazards. He now knew the passage to follow; and if he could thread it in an atom-scattered state, he did not see how any person or force could detect or stop him. The only trouble

would be if he failed to maintain his spectral condition at all times. That was the one ever-present peril, as he had learned from his experiments. But must one not always risk death and worse in a life of adventure? Zamacona was a gentleman of Old Spain; of the blood that faced the unknown and carved out half the civilisation of the New World.

For many nights after his ultimate resolution Zamacona prayed to St. Pamphilus and other guardian saints, and counted the beads of his rosary. The last entry in the manuscript, which toward the end took the form of a diary more and more, was merely a single sentence—“Es más tarde de lo que pensaba—tengo que marcharme”... “It is later than I thought; I must go.” After that, only silence and conjecture—and such evidence as the presence of the manuscript itself, and what that manuscript could lead to, might provide.

Part VII

When I looked up from my half-stupefied reading and notetaking the morning sun was high in the heavens. The electric bulb was still burning, but such things of the real world—the modern outer world—were far from my whirling brain. I knew I was in my room at Clyde Compton’s at Binger—but upon what monstrous vista had I stumbled? Was this thing a hoax or a chronicle of madness? If a hoax, was it a jest of the sixteenth century or of today? The manuscript’s age looked appallingly genuine to my not wholly unpracticed eyes, and the problem presented by the strange metal cylinder I dared not even think about.

Moreover, what a monstrously exact explanation it gave of all the baffling phenomena of the mound—of the seemingly meaningless and paradoxical actions of diurnal and nocturnal ghosts, and of the queer cases of madness and disappearance! It was even an accursedly plausible explanation—evilly consistent—if one could adopt the incredible. It must be a shocking hoax devised by someone who knew all the lore of the mound. There was even a hint of social satire in the account of that unbelievable nether world of horror and decay. Surely this was the clever forgery of some learned cynic—something like the leaden crosses in New Mexico, which a jester once planted and pretended to discover as a relique of some forgotten Dark Age colony from Europe.

Upon going down to breakfast I hardly knew what to tell Compton and his mother, as well as the curious callers who had already begun to arrive. Still in a daze, I cut the Gordian Knot by giving a few points from the notes I had made, and mumbling my belief that the thing was a subtle and ingenious fraud left there by some previous explorer of the mound—a belief in which everybody seemed to concur when told of the substance of the manuscript. It is curious how all that breakfast group—and all the others in Binger to whom the discussion was repeated—seemed to find a great clearing of the atmosphere in the notion that somebody was playing a joke on somebody. For the time we all forgot that the known, recent history of the mound presented mysteries as strange as any in the manuscript, and as far from acceptable solution as ever.

The fears and doubts began to return when I asked for volunteers to visit the mound with me. I wanted a larger excavating party—but the idea of going to that uncomfortable place seemed no more attractive to the people of Binger than it had seemed on the previous day. I myself felt a mounting horror upon looking toward the mound and glimpsing the moving speck which I knew was the daylight sentinel; for in spite of all my scepticism the morbidities of that manuscript stuck by me and gave everything connected with the place a new and monstrous significance. I absolutely lacked the resolution to look at the moving speck with my binoculars. Instead, I set out with the kind of bravado we display in nightmares—when, knowing we are dreaming, we plunge desperately into still thicker horrors, for the sake of having the whole thing over the sooner. My pick and shovel were already out there, so I had only my handbag of smaller paraphernalia to take. Into this I put the strange cylinder and its contents, feeling vaguely that I might possibly find something worth checking up with some part of the green-lettered Spanish text. Even a clever hoax might be founded on some actual attribute of the mound which a former explorer had discovered—and that magnetic metal was damnably odd! Grey Eagle's cryptic talisman still hung from its leathern cord around my neck.

I did not look very sharply at the mound as I walked toward it, but when I reached it there was nobody in sight. Repeating my upward scramble of the previous day, I was troubled by thoughts of what might lie close at hand if, by any miracle, any part of the manuscript were actually half-true. In such a case, I could not help reflecting, the hypothetical Spaniard Zamacona

must have barely reached the outer world when overtaken by some disaster—perhaps an involuntary rematerialisation. He would naturally, in that event, have been seized by whichever sentry happened to be on duty at the time—either the discredited freeman, or, as a matter of supreme irony, the very T’la-yub who had planned and aided his first attempt at escape—and in the ensuing struggle the cylinder with the manuscript might well have been dropped on the mound’s summit, to be neglected and gradually buried for nearly four centuries. But, I added, as I climbed over the crest, one must not think of extravagant things like that. Still, if there were anything in the tale, it must have been a monstrous fate to which Zamacona had been dragged back...the amphitheatre...mutilation...duty somewhere in the dank, nitrous tunnel as a dead-alive slave...a maimed corpse-fragment as an automatic interior sentry...

It was a very real shock which chased this morbid speculation from my head, for upon glancing around the elliptical summit I saw at once that my pick and shovel had been stolen. This was a highly provoking and disconcerting development; baffling, too, in view of the seeming reluctance of all the Binger folk to visit the mound. Was this reluctance a pretended thing, and had the jokers of the village been chuckling over my coming discomfiture as they solemnly saw me off ten minutes before? I took out my binoculars and scanned the gaping crowd at the edge of the village. No—they did not seem to be looking for any comic climax; yet was not the whole affair at bottom a colossal joke in which all the villagers and reservation people were concerned—legends, manuscript, cylinder, and all? I thought of how I had seen the sentry from a distance, and then found him unaccountably vanished; thought also of the conduct of old Grey Eagle, of the speech and expressions of Compton and his mother, and of the unmistakable fright of most of the Binger people. On the whole, it could not very well be a village-wide joke. The fear and the problem were surely real, though obviously there were one or two jesting daredevils in Binger who had stolen out to the mound and made off with the tools I had left.

Everything else on the mound was as I had left it—brush cut by my machete, slight, bowl-like depression toward the north end, and the hole I had made with my trench-knife in digging up the magnetism-revealed cylinder. Deeming it too great a concession to the unknown jokers to return to Binger for another pick and shovel, I resolved to carry out my

programme as best I could with the machete and trench-knife in my handbag; so extracting these, I set to work excavating the bowl-like depression which my eye had picked as the possible site of a former entrance to the mound. As I proceeded, I felt again the suggestion of a sudden wind blowing against me which I had noticed the day before—a suggestion which seemed stronger, and still more reminiscent of unseen, formless, opposing hands laid on my wrists, as I cut deeper and deeper through the root-tangled red soil and reached the exotic black loam beneath. The talisman around my neck appeared to twitch oddly in the breeze—not in any one direction, as when attracted by the buried cylinder, but vaguely and diffusely, in a manner wholly unaccountable.

Then, quite without warning, the black, root-woven earth beneath my feet began to sink cracklingly, while I heard a faint sound of sifting, falling matter far below me. The obstructing wind, or forces, or hands now seemed to be operating from the very seat of the sinking, and I felt that they aided me by pushing as I leaped back out of the hole to avoid being involved in any cave-in. Bending down over the brink and hacking at the mould-caked root-tangle with my machete, I felt that they were against me again—but at no time were they strong enough to stop my work. The more roots I severed, the more falling matter I heard below. Finally the hole began to deepen of itself toward the centre, and I saw that the earth was sifting down into some large cavity beneath, so as to leave a good-sized aperture when the roots that had bound it were gone. A few more hacks of the machete did the trick, and with a parting cave-in and uprush of curiously chill and alien air the last barrier gave way. Under the morning sun yawned a huge opening at least three feet square, and shewing the top of a flight of stone steps down which the loose earth of the collapse was still sliding. My quest had come to something at last! With an elation of accomplishment almost overbalancing fear for the nonce, I replaced the trench-knife and machete in my handbag, took out my powerful electric torch, and prepared for a triumphant, lone, and utterly rash invasion of the fabulous nether world I had uncovered.

It was rather hard getting down the first few steps, both because of the fallen earth which had choked them and because of a sinister up-pushing of a cold wind from below. The talisman around my neck swayed curiously, and I began to regret the disappearing square of daylight above me. The

electric torch shewed dank, water-stained, and salt-encrusted walls fashioned of huge basalt blocks, and now and then I thought I descried some trace of carving beneath the nitrous deposits. I gripped my handbag more tightly, and was glad of the comforting weight of the sheriff's heavy revolver in my right-hand coat pocket. After a time the passage began to wind this way and that, and the staircase became free from obstructions. Carvings on the walls were now definitely traceable, and I shuddered when I saw how clearly the grotesque figures resembled the monstrous bas-reliefs on the cylinder I had found. Winds and forces continued to blow malevolently against me, and at one or two bends I half fancied the torch gave glimpses of thin, transparent shapes not unlike the sentinel on the mound as my binoculars had shewed him. When I reached this stage of visual chaos I stopped for a moment to get a grip on myself. It would not do to let my nerves get the better of me at the very outset of what would surely be a trying experience, and the most important archaeological feat of my career.

But I wished I had not stopped at just that place, for the act fixed my attention on something profoundly disturbing. It was only a small object lying close to the wall on one of the steps below me, but that object was such as to put my reason to a severe test, and bring up a line of the most alarming speculations. That the opening above me had been closed against all material forms for generations was utterly obvious from the growth of shrub-roots and accumulation of drifting soil; yet the object before me was most distinctly not many generations old. For it was an electric torch much like the one I now carried—warped and encrusted in the tomb-like dampness, but none the less perfectly unmistakable. I descended a few steps and picked it up, wiping off the evil deposits on my rough coat. One of the nickel bands bore an engraved name and address, and I recognised it with a start the moment I made it out. It read “Jas. C. Williams, 17 Trowbridge St., Cambridge, Mass.”—and I knew that it had belonged to one of the two daring college instructors who had disappeared on June 28, 1915. Only thirteen years ago, and yet I had just broken through the sod of centuries! How had the thing got there? Another entrance—or was there something after all in this mad idea of dematerialisation and rematerialisation?

Doubt and horror grew upon me as I wound still farther down the seemingly endless staircase. Would the thing never stop? The carvings grew

more and more distinct, and assumed a narrative pictorial quality which brought me close to panic as I recognised many unmistakable correspondences with the history of K'n-yan as sketched in the manuscript now resting in my handbag. For the first time I began seriously to question the wisdom of my descent, and to wonder whether I had not better return to the upper air before I came upon something which would never let me return as a sane man. But I did not hesitate long, for as a Virginian I felt the blood of ancestral fighters and gentlemen-adventurers pounding a protest against retreat from any peril known or unknown.

My descent became swifter rather than slower, and I avoided studying the terrible bas-reliefs and intaglios that had unnerved me. All at once I saw an arched opening ahead, and realised that the prodigious staircase had ended at last. But with that realisation came horror in mounting magnitude, for before me there yawned a vast vaulted crypt of all-too-familiar outline—a great circular space answering in every least particular to the carving-lined chamber described in the Zamacona manuscript.

It was indeed the place. There could be no mistake. And if any room for doubt yet remained, that room was abolished by what I saw directly across the great vault. It was a second arched opening, commencing a long, narrow passage and having at its mouth two huge opposite niches bearing loathsome and titanic images of shockingly familiar pattern. There in the dark unclean Yig and hideous Tulu squatted eternally, glaring at each other across the passage as they had glared since the earliest youth of the human world.

From this point onward I ask no credence for what I tell—for what I think I saw. It is too utterly unnatural, too utterly monstrous and incredible, to be any part of sane human experience or objective reality. My torch, though casting a powerful beam ahead, naturally could not furnish any general illumination of the Cyclopean crypt; so I now began moving it about to explore the giant walls little by little. As I did so, I saw to my horror that the space was by no means vacant, but was instead littered with odd furniture and utensils and heaps of packages which bespoke a populous recent occupancy—no nitrous reliques of the past, but queerly shaped objects and supplies in modern, every-day use. As my torch rested on each article or group of articles, however, the distinctness of the outlines soon

began to grow blurred; until in the end I could scarcely tell whether the things belonged to the realm of matter or to the realm of spirit.

All this while the adverse winds blew against me with increasing fury, and the unseen hands plucked malevolently at me and snatched at the strange magnetic talisman I wore. Wild conceits surged through my mind. I thought of the manuscript and what it said about the garrison stationed in this place—twelve dead slave y'm-bhi and six living but partly dematerialised freemen—that was in 1545—three hundred and eighty-three years ago... What since then? Zamacona had predicted change...subtle disintegration...more dematerialisation...weaker and weaker...was it Grey Eagle's talisman that held them at bay—their sacred Tulu-metal—and were they feebly trying to pluck it off so that they might do to me what they had done to those who had come before?... It occurred to me with shuddering force that I was building my speculations out of a full belief in the Zamacona manuscript—this must not be—I must get a grip on myself—

But, curse it, every time I tried to get a grip I saw some fresh sight to shatter my poise still further. This time, just as my will power was driving the half-seen paraphernalia into obscurity, my glance and torch-beam had to light on two things of very different nature; two things of the eminently real and sane world; yet they did more to unseat my shaky reason than anything I had seen before—because I knew what they were, and knew how profoundly, in the course of Nature, they ought not to be there. They were my own missing pick and shovel, side by side, and leaning neatly against the blasphemously carved wall of that hellish crypt. God in heaven—and I had babbled to myself about daring jokers from Binger!

That was the last straw. After that the cursed hypnotism of the manuscript got at me, and I actually saw the half-transparent shapes of the things that were pushing and plucking; pushing and plucking—those leprous palaeogean things with something of humanity still clinging to them—the complete forms, and the forms that were morbidly and perversely incomplete...all these, and hideous other entities—the four-footed blasphemies with ape-like face and projecting horn...and not a sound so far in all that nitrous hell of inner earth...

Then there was a sound—a flopping; a padding; a dull, advancing sound which heralded beyond question a being as structurally material as the pickaxe and the shovel—something wholly unlike the shadow-shapes that

ringed me in, yet equally remote from any sort of life as life is understood on the earth's wholesome surface. My shattered brain tried to prepare me for what was coming, but could not frame any adequate image. I could only say over and over again to myself, "It is of the abyss, but it is not dematerialised." The padding grew more distinct, and from the mechanical cast of the tread I knew it was a dead thing that stalked in the darkness. Then—oh, God, I saw it in the full beam of my torch; saw it framed like a sentinel in the narrow passage between the nightmare idols of the serpent Yig and the octopus Tulu...

Let me collect myself enough to hint at what I saw; to explain why I dropped torch and handbag and fled empty-handed in the utter blackness, wrapped in a merciful unconsciousness which did not wear off until the sun and the distant yelling and the shouting from the village roused me as I lay gasping on the top of the accursed mound. I do not yet know what guided me again to the earth's surface. I only know that the watchers in Binger saw me stagger up into sight three hours after I had vanished; saw me lurch up and fall flat on the ground as if struck by a bullet. None of them dared to come out and help me; but they knew I must be in a bad state, so tried to rouse me as best they could by yelling in chorus and firing off revolvers.

It worked in the end, and when I came to I almost rolled down the side of the mound in my eagerness to get away from that black aperture which still yawned open. My torch and tools, and the handbag with the manuscript, were all down there; but it is easy to see why neither I nor anyone else ever went after them. When I staggered across the plain and into the village I dared not tell what I had seen. I only muttered vague things about carvings and statues and snakes and shaken nerves. And I did not faint again until somebody mentioned that the ghost-sentinel had reappeared about the time I had staggered half way back to town. I left Binger that evening, and have never been there since, though they tell me the ghosts still appear on the mound as usual.

But I have resolved to hint here at last what I dared not hint to the people of Binger on that terrible August afternoon. I don't know yet just how I can go about it—and if in the end you think my reticence strange, just remember that to imagine such a horror is one thing, but to see it is another thing. I saw it. I think you'll recall my citing early in this tale the case of a bright young man named Heaton who went out to that mound one day in

1891 and came back at night as the village idiot, babbling for eight years about horrors and then dying in an epileptic fit. What he used to keep moaning was “That white man—oh, my God, what they did to him...”

Well, I saw the same thing that poor Heaton saw—and I saw it after reading the manuscript, so I know more of its history than he did. That makes it worse—for I know all that it implies; all that must be still brooding and festering and waiting down there. I told you it had padded mechanically toward me out of the narrow passage and had stood sentry-like at the entrance between the frightful eidola of Yig and Tulu. That was very natural and inevitable—because the thing was a sentry. It had been made a sentry for punishment, and it was quite dead—besides lacking head, arms, lower legs, and other customary parts of a human being. Yes—it had been a very human being once; and what is more, it had been white. Very obviously, if that manuscript was as true as I think it was, this being had been used for the diversions of the amphitheatre before its life had become wholly extinct and supplanted by automatic impulses controlled from outside.

On its white and only slightly hairy chest some letters had been gashed or branded—I had not stopped to investigate, but had merely noted that they were in an awkward and fumbling Spanish; an awkward Spanish implying a kind of ironic use of the language by an alien inscriber familiar neither with the idiom nor the Roman letters used to record it. The inscription had read “Secuestrado a la voluntad de Xinaián en el cuerpo decapitado de Tlayúb”—“Seized by the will of K’n-yan in the headless body of T’la-yub.”

THE THING ON THE ROOF, by Robert E. Howard

*They lumber through the night
With their elephantine tread;
I shudder in affright
As I cower in my bed.
They lift colossal wings
On the high gable roofs
Which tremble to the trample
Of their mastodonic hoofs.*

—Justin Geoffrey: *Out of the Old Land*

Let me begin by saying that I was surprised when Tussmann called on me. We had never been close friends; the man's mercenary instincts repelled me; and since our bitter controversy of three years before, when he attempted to discredit my *Evidences of Nahua Culture in Yucatan*, which was the result of years of careful research, our relations had been anything but cordial. However, I received him and found his manner hasty and abrupt, but rather abstracted, as if his dislike for me had been thrust aside in some driving passion that had hold of him.

His errand was quickly stated. He wished my aid in obtaining a volume in the first edition of Von Junzt's *Nameless Cults*—the edition known as the Black Book, not from its color, but because of its dark contents. He might almost as well have asked me for the original Greek translation of the *Necronomicon*. Though since my return from Yucatan I had devoted practically all my time to my avocation of book collecting, I had not stumbled onto any hint that the book in the Dusseldorf edition was still in existence.

A word as to this rare work. Its extreme ambiguity in spots, coupled with its incredible subject matter, has caused it long to be regarded as the ravings of a maniac and the author was damned with the brand of insanity. But the fact remains that much of his assertions are unanswerable, and that he spent the full forty-five years of his life prying into strange places and discovering secret and abysmal things. Not a great many volumes were

printed in the first edition and many of these were burned by their frightened owners when Von Junzt was found strangled in a mysterious manner, in his barred and bolted chamber one night in 1840, six months after he had returned from a mysterious journey to Mongolia.

Five years later a London printer, one Bridewall, pirated the work, and issued a cheap translation for sensational effect, full of grotesque woodcuts, and riddled with misspellings, faulty translations and the usual errors of a cheap and unscholarly printing. This still further discredited the original work, and publishers and public forgot about the book until 1909 when the Golden Goblin Press of New York brought out an edition.

Their production was so carefully expurgated that fully a fourth of the original matter was cut out; the book was handsomely bound and decorated with the exquisite and weirdly imaginative illustrations of Diego Vasquez. The edition was intended for popular consumption but the artistic instinct of the publishers defeated that end, since the cost of issuing the book was so great that they were forced to cite it at a prohibitive price.

I was explaining all this to Tussmann when he interrupted brusquely to say that he was not utterly ignorant in such matters. One of the Golden Goblin books ornamented his library, he said, and it was in it that he found a certain line which aroused his interest. If I could procure him a copy of the original 1839 edition, he would make it worth my while; knowing, he added, that it would be useless to offer me money, he would, instead, in return for my trouble on his behalf, make a full retraction of his former accusations in regard to my Yucatan researches, and offer a complete apology in *The Scientific News*.

I will admit that I was astounded at this, and realized that if the matter meant so much to Tussmann that he was willing to make such concessions, it must indeed be of the utmost importance. I answered that I considered that I had sufficiently refuted his charges in the eyes of the world and had no desire to put him in a humiliating position, but that I would make the utmost efforts to procure him what he wanted.

He thanked me abruptly and took his leave, saying rather vaguely that he hoped to find a complete exposition of something in the Black Book which had evidently been slighted in the later edition.

I set to work, writing letters to friends, colleagues and book dealers all over the world, and soon discovered that I had assumed a task of no small

magnitude. Three months elapsed before my efforts were crowned with success, but at last, through the aid of Professor James Clement of Richmond, Virginia, I was able to obtain what I wished.

I notified Tussmann and he came to London by the next train. His eyes burned avidly as he gazed at the thick, dusty volume with its heavy leather covers and rusty iron hasps, and his fingers quivered with eagerness as he thumbed the time-yellowed pages.

And when he cried out fiercely and smashed his clenched fist down on the table I knew that he had found what he hunted.

“Listen!” he commanded, and he read to me a passage that spoke of an old, old temple in a Honduras jungle where a strange god was worshipped by an ancient tribe which became extinct before the coming of the Spaniards. And Tussmann read aloud of the mummy that had been, in life, the last high priest of that vanished people, and which now lay in a chamber hewn in the solid rock of the cliff against which the temple was built. About that mummy’s withered neck was a copper chain, and on that chain a great red jewel carved in the form of a toad. This jewel was a key, Von Junzt went on to say, to the treasure of the temple which lay hidden in a subterranean crypt far below the temple’s altar.

Tussmann’s eyes blazed.

“I have seen that temple! I have stood before the altar. I have seen the sealed-up entrance of the chamber in which, the natives say, lies the mummy of the priest. It is a very curious temple, no more like the ruins of the prehistoric Indians than it is like the buildings of the modern Latin-Americans. The Indians in the vicinity disclaim any former connection with the place; they say that the people who built that temple were a different race from themselves, and were there when their own ancestors came into the country. I believe it to be a remnant of some long-vanished civilization which began to decay thousands of years before the Spaniards came.

“I would have liked to have broken into the sealed-up chamber, but I had neither the time nor the tools for the task. I was hurrying to the coast, having been wounded by an accidental gunshot in the foot, and I stumbled onto the place purely by chance.

“I have been planning to have another look at it, but circumstances have prevented—now I intend to let nothing stand in my way! By chance I came upon a passage in the Golden Goblin edition of this book, describing the

temple. But that was all; the mummy was only briefly mentioned. Interested, I obtained one of Bridewall's translations but ran up against a blank wall of baffling blunders. By some irritating mischance the translator had even mistaken the location of the Temple of the Toad, as Von Junzt calls it, and has it in Guatemala instead of Honduras. The general description is faulty, the jewel is mentioned and the fact that it is a 'key'. But a key to what, Bridewall's book does not state. I now felt that I was on the track of a real discovery, unless Von Junzt was, as many maintain, a madman. But that the man was actually in Honduras at one time is well attested, and no one could so vividly describe the temple—as he does in the Black Book—unless he had seen it himself. How he learned of the jewel is more than I can say. The Indians who told me of the mummy said nothing of any jewel. I can only believe that Von Junzt found his way into the sealed crypt somehow—the man had uncanny ways of learning hidden things.

“To the best of my knowledge only one other white man has seen the Temple of the Toad besides Von Junzt and myself—the Spanish traveler Juan Gonzales, who made a partial exploration of that country in 1793. He mentioned, briefly, a curious fane that differed from most Indian ruins, and spoke skeptically of a legend current among the natives that there was ‘something unusual’ hidden under the temple. I feel certain that he was referring to the Temple of the Toad.

“Tomorrow I sail for Central America. Keep the book; I have no more use for it. This time I am going fully prepared and I intend to find what is hidden in that temple, if I have to demolish it. It can be nothing less than a great store of gold! The Spaniards missed it, somehow; when they arrived in Central America, the Temple of the Toad was deserted; they were searching for living Indians from whom torture could wring gold; not for mummies of lost peoples. But I mean to have that treasure.”

So saying Tussman took his departure. I sat down and opened the book at the place where he had left off reading, and I sat until midnight, wrapt in Von Junzt's curious, wild and at times utterly vague expoundings. And I found pertaining to the Temple of the Toad certain things which disquieted me so much that the next morning I attempted to get in touch with Tussmann, only to find that he had already sailed.

Several months passed and then I received a letter from Tussmann, asking me to come and spend a few days with him at his estate in Sussex;

he also requested me to bring the Black Book with me.

I arrived at Tussmann's rather isolated estate just after nightfall. He lived in almost feudal state, his great ivy-grown house and broad lawns surrounded by high stone walls. As I went up the hedge-bordered way from the gate to the house, I noted that the place had not been well kept in its master's absence. Weeds grew rank among the trees, almost choking out the grass. Among some unkempt bushes over against the outer wall, I heard what appeared to be a horse or an ox blundering and lumbering about. I distinctly heard the clink of its hoof on a stone.

A servant who eyed me suspiciously admitted me and I found Tussmann pacing to and fro in his study like a caged lion. His giant frame was leaner, harder than when I had last seen him; his face was bronzed by a tropic sun. There were more and harsher lines in his strong face and his eyes burned more intensely than ever. A smoldering, baffled anger seemed to underlie his manner.

"Well, Tussmann," I greeted him, "what success? Did you find the gold?"

"I found not an ounce of gold," he growled. "The whole thing was a hoax—well, not all of it. I broke into the sealed chamber and found the mummy—"

"And the jewel?" I exclaimed.

He drew something from his pocket and handed it to me.

I gazed curiously at the thing I held. It was a great jewel, clear and transparent as crystal, but of a sinister crimson, carved, as Von Junzt had declared, in the shape of a toad. I shuddered involuntarily; the image was peculiarly repulsive. I turned my attention to the heavy and curiously wrought copper chain which supported it.

"What are these characters carved on the chain?" I asked curiously.

"I can not say," Tussmann replied. "I had thought perhaps you might know. I find a faint resemblance between them and certain partly defaced hieroglyphics on a monolith known as the Black Stone in the mountains of Hungary. I have been unable to decipher them."

"Tell me of your trip," I urged, and over our whiskey-and-sodas he began, as if with a strange reluctance.

"I found the temple again with no great difficulty, though it lies in a lonely and little-frequented region. The temple is built against a sheer stone

cliff in a deserted valley unknown to maps and explorers. I would not endeavor to make an estimate of its antiquity, but it is built of a sort of unusually hard basalt, such as I have never seen anywhere else, and its extreme weathering suggests incredible age.

“Most of the columns which form its facade are in ruins, thrusting up shattered stumps from worn bases, like the scattered and broken teeth of some grinning hag. The outer walls are crumbling, but the inner walls and the columns which support such of the roof as remains intact, seem good for another thousand years, as well as the walls of the inner chamber.

“The main chamber is a large circular affair with a floor composed of great squares of stone. In the center stands the altar, merely a huge, round, curiously carved block of the same material. Directly behind the altar, in the solid stone cliff which forms the rear wall of the chamber, is the sealed and hewn-out chamber wherein lay the mummy of the temple’s last priest.

“I broke into the crypt with not too much difficulty and found the mummy exactly as is stated in the Black Book. Though it was in a remarkable state of preservation, I was unable to classify it. The withered features and general contour of the skull suggested certain degraded and mongrel peoples of Lower Egypt, and I feel certain that the priest was a member of a race more akin to the Caucasian than the Indian. Beyond this, I can not make any positive statement.

“But the jewel was there, the chain looped about the dried-up neck.”

From this point Tussmann’s narrative became so vague that I had some difficulty in following him and wondered if the tropic sun had affected his mind. He had opened a hidden door in the altar somehow with the jewel—just how, he did not plainly say, and it struck me that he did not clearly understand himself the action of the jewel-key. But the opening of the secret door had had a bad effect on the hardy rogues in his employ. They had refused point-blank to follow him through that gaping black opening which had appeared so mysteriously when the gem was touched to the altar.

Tussmann entered alone with his pistol and electric torch, finding a narrow stone stair that wound down into the bowels of the earth, apparently. He followed this and presently came into a broad corridor, in the blackness of which his tiny beam of light was almost engulfed. As he told this he spoke with strange annoyance of a toad which hopped ahead of him, just beyond the circle of light, all the time he was below ground.

Making his way along dank tunnels and stairways that were wells of solid blackness, he at last came to a heavy door fantastically carved, which he felt must be the crypt wherein was secreted the gold of the ancient worshippers. He pressed the toad-jewel against it at several places and finally the door gaped wide.

“And the treasure?” I broke in eagerly.

He laughed in savage self-mockery.

“There was no gold there, no precious gems—nothing”—he hesitated—“nothing that I could bring away.”

Again his tale lapsed into vagueness. I gathered that he had left the temple rather hurriedly without searching any further for the supposed treasure. He had intended bringing the mummy away with him, he said, to present to some museum, but when he came up out of the pits, it could not be found and he believed that his men, in superstitious aversion to having such a companion on their road to the coast, had thrown it into some well or cavern.

“And so,” he concluded, “I am in England again no richer than when I left.”

“You have the jewel,” I reminded him. “Surely it is valuable.”

He eyed it without favor, but with a sort of fierce avidness almost obsessional.

“Would you say that it is a ruby?” he asked.

I shook my head. “I am unable to classify it.”

“And I. But let me see the book.”

He slowly turned the heavy pages, his lips moving as he read. Sometimes he shook his head as if puzzled, and I noticed him dwell long over a certain line.

“This man dipped so deeply into forbidden things,” said he, “I can not wonder that his fate was so strange and mysterious. He must have had some foreboding of his end—here he warns men not to disturb sleeping things.”

Tusmann seemed lost in thought for some moments.

“Aye, sleeping things,” he muttered, “that seem dead, but only lie waiting for some blind fool to awake them—I should have read further in the Black Book—and I should have shut the door when I left the crypt—but I have the key and I’ll keep it in spite of Hell.”

He roused himself from his reveries and was about to speak when he stopped short. From somewhere upstairs had come a peculiar sound.

“What was that?” he glared at me. I shook my head and he ran to the door and shouted for a servant. The man entered a few moments later and he was rather pale.

“You were upstairs?” growled Tussmann.

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you hear anything?” asked Tussmann harshly and in a manner almost threatening and accusing.

“I did, sir,” the man answered with a puzzled look on his face.

“What did you hear?” The question was fairly snarled.

“Well, sir,” the man laughed apologetically, “you’ll say I’m a bit off, I fear, but to tell you the truth, sir, it sounded like a horse stamping around on the roof!”

A blaze of absolute madness leaped into Tussmann’s eyes.

“You fool!” he screamed. “Get out of here!” The man shrank back in amazement and Tussmann snatched up the gleaming toad-carved jewel.

“I’ve been a fool!” he raved. “I didn’t read far enough—and I should have shut the door—but by heaven, the key is mine and I’ll keep it in spite of man or devil.”

And with these strange words he turned and fled upstairs. A moment later his door slammed heavily and a servant, knocking timidly, brought forth only a blasphemous order to retire and a luridly worded threat to shoot anyone who tried to obtain entrance into the room.

Had it not been so late I would have left the house, for I was certain that Tussmann was stark mad. As it was, I retired to the room a frightened servant showed me, but I did not go to bed. I opened the pages of the Black Book at the place where Tussmann had been reading.

This much was evident, unless the man was utterly insane: he had stumbled upon something unexpected in the Temple of the Toad. Something unnatural about the opening of the altar door had frightened his men, and in the subterranean crypt Tussmann had found *something* that he had not thought to find. And I believed that he had been followed from Central America, and that the reason for his persecution was the jewel he called the Key.

Seeking some clue in Von Junzt's volume, I read again of the Temple of the Toad, of the strange pre-Indian people who worshipped there, and of the huge, tittering, tentacled, hoofed monstrosity that they worshipped.

Tussmann had said that he had not read far enough when he had first seen the book. Puzzling over this cryptic phrase I came upon the line he had pored over—marked by his thumb nail. It seemed to me to be another of Von Junzt's many ambiguities, for it merely stated that a temple's god was the temple's treasure. Then the dark implication of the hint struck me and cold sweat beaded my forehead.

The Key to the Treasure! And the temple's treasure was the temple's god! And sleeping Things might awaken on the opening of their prison door! I sprang up, unnerved by the intolerable suggestion, and at that moment something crashed in the stillness and the death-scream of a human being burst upon my ears.

In an instant I was out of the room, and as I dashed up the stairs I heard sounds that have made me doubt my sanity ever since. At Tussmann's door I halted, essaying with shaking hand to turn the knob. The door was locked, and as I hesitated I heard from within a hideous high-pitched tittering and then the disgusting squashy sound as if a great, jelly-like bulk was being forced through the window. The sound ceased and I could have sworn I heard a faint swish of gigantic wings. Then silence.

Gathering my shattered nerves, I broke down the door. A foul and overpowering stench billowed out like a yellow mist. Gasping in nausea I entered. The room was in ruins, but nothing was missing except that crimson toad-carved jewel Tussmann called the Key, and that was never found. A foul, unspeakable slime smeared the windowsill, and in the center of the room lay Tussmann, his head crushed and flattened; and on the red ruin of skull and face, the plain print of an enormous hoof.

THE ISLE OF DARK MAGIC, by Hugh B. Cave

Originally published in *Weird Tales*, August 1934.

Captain Bruk, master of the *Bella Gale*, was the man who brought Peter Mace to Faikana; and since I did not meet the boy until his arrival, I must tell the first part of this tale as it was seen through Captain Bruk's eyes. So, then, I must go back a little.

Bruk was "on the beach," as the saying is, when the Joransen Trading Company, in Papeete, offered him the *Bella Gale*. The Joransen Company, like most of Papeete's smaller concerns, operated a fleet of second-rate tramps which were schooner-rigged and sailed under their own spread. No captain of repute would have accepted command of even the best of them. But Bruk was desperate.

His orders were to touch Faaite, sail north to Fakarava and Taou, and wind up at Rarioa, bartering for as much copra as the schooner would hold. He was to be back in Papeete inside the month, if possible. And he was to carry one passenger, a white man, as far as Rarioa.

The white man was Peter Mace, and, given his choice, Bruk would have-picked more promising company or none at all. Peter Mace was a thin, worried-looking youth possessed of a pair of eyes which missed nothing. He could not have been more than twenty-five, and he had been in Papeete, so he said, only three weeks.

He came aboard an hour before the schooner sailed, and he brought with him a large wooden packing-case which he insisted on storing in his own cabin. And for two days he kept entirely to himself, offering not a word of explanation to any one.

Later, however, he found time and the desire to ask questions. Before the *Bella Gale* reached Faaite, he had demanded the name of every atoll in Paumotu. He had questioned Bruk concerning the habits of the islanders, how they treated white men, what atolls were the least populated, and whether Bruk knew any small motu off the schooner routes where a man might be entirely alone. A thousand things he insisted on knowing, but not one word did he speak of himself or of his work or of his reason for going

to Rarioa. And not once did he mention the meaning of the packing-case in his cabin.

Then one day, out of a clear sky, he said:

“If I give you five hundred dollars, Captain, will you go out of your way to put me ashore at Faikana?”

“Five hundred dollars!” Bruk echoed.

“Is that too little?”

“In the name of all that’s holy,” Bruk demanded, “what do you want with Faikana? If I put you down there, you’ll wait half your life for a tub to take you off!”

“If five hundred dollars is too little,” Peter Mace smiled, “we’ll double it.”

And that was all Bruk got out of him. Five hundred dollars, doubled, and Faikana. Faikana, the end of all creation, a forgotten island inhabited by a mere handful of Marquesan natives and a missionary with queer ideas!

So Peter Mace came to Faikana. And I, Father Jason, the “missionary with queer ideas,” met him for the first time and wondered about that strange wooden packing-case which he brought with him.

* * * *

Within a week, the boy had established himself. He first found an abandoned native shack and moved into it, taking his belongings with him. Then, with a methodical lack of haste which brought amazing results, he obtained native assistance and began building for himself a permanent residence, more than three miles from the little settlement of which my house was the center. Apparently he preferred to be alone with whatever business had brought him to our island. Yet he came several times to visit me, and politely invited me to spend the first evening with him in his new home, when it was completed.

This I did, and was mildly surprized. Though I had heard whispers from the natives, I had discreetly remained away from the scene of the boy’s operations until implicitly invited there by him. I found the house to be practically isolated in a natural clearing in the midst of that belt of desolation which covers the northernmost tip of Faikana. Its only means of communication with the village was a narrow, perilous trail through dense

jungle, which entailed more than an hour of the hardest kind of walking. Surely Peter Mace had no desire for casual visitors!

The house itself, however, was complete in every detail—an elaborate two-roomed native dwelling with an additional small chamber upstairs. We sat there that evening, he and I, sipping native brandy and playing chess. Our conversation never once touched on personalities. Neither he nor I asked questions, nor did he offer to show me what lay in the upstairs room. When the time came for me to go, he wished me a pleasant good-night and instructed his newly acquired native boy, Menegai, to accompany me back to the village. And for two weeks, that was all I saw of him!

But native curiosity, you know, is a thing easily aroused; and I heard many strange stories during those two weeks. “Peteme,” the Marquesans called the boy, and Peteme, so they said, was a devil incarnate. During the daytime they heard him working in the upstairs room of his house, and when he was not working he was striding about like a caged animal, muttering and grumbling to himself. Several times, when they had crept close to the downstairs window and peered in, they had seen him sitting at the table, hunched over a pile of books, with whisky bottles stacked in front of him. He was drunk, they said. His eyes were distended and bloodshot, and his hands shook as they held the books. But what he had in that upstairs chamber they did not know, for it was impossible to peer in the window and find out.

All these stories I knew to be greatly exaggerated, because my people were superstitious children at best. But I knew, too, that there must be some truth in them, for natives are not deliberate liars unless they can, by lying, gain material things for themselves. And so, thinking to invite the boy to my home and there talk to him about himself, I went one afternoon to his house.

He was not there when I arrived. I knocked, and received no answer, and, on opening the door, found no one within. It was strange, I thought, that he should go away and leave the door open, for I saw that he had fitted it with a patent lock. I called his name aloud, and then, bewildered, looked about me.

The table was piled high with books, and with cardboard-covered manuscripts. Curiously I looked at these, and then intently I studied them. I shuddered, then, and felt suddenly as if I were in an unhallowed place. If a

fire had been burning, I should have thrown those books into it, despite the boy's certain anger on discovering my act. For the books were forbidden books, each and every one of them; and I say forbidden, not because I come of a religious calling, but because such volumes have been condemned by truth and science alike. One of them was the *Black Cults* of Von Heller. Another, in manuscript form, inscribed in Latin, was the unexpurgated edition of what is now *The Veil Unseen*. A third I believed to be—and I now know that my belief was correct—the missing portion of that perilous treatise, *Le Culte des Morts*, of whose missing portion only four copies are reputed to exist! Merciful God, these were no books for the soul of a twenty-five-year-old boy who lived alone with his thoughts!

Utterly confounded, I turned from the table and sat for some time in a chair near the open door, waiting impatiently for Peter Mace to return. When he did not come, I rose and paced the floor, and suddenly recalled what the natives had whispered about the room above me. Was it possible, I thought, that the books on the table beside me had some connection with the contents of the chamber above? Could it be that Peter Mace had gone deeper into these matters than the mere study of them?

I hesitated. This was not my home; I had no right to climb the narrow ladder which hung so invitingly in the shadowed corner of the room where I stood. Yet I had a right, as a religious adviser, to know what sins the boy was guilty of, so that I might instruct him accordingly. Deliberately, therefore, I strode across the floor.

The ladder was a flimsy one, solid enough, perhaps, to bear the weight of the boy's lean body, but not so solid that I felt comfortable in ascending it. I groped upward slowly and cautiously, testing each rung before trusting my weight upon it. Then I reached above me and pushed aside the atap mat which covered the aperture in the ceiling; and with a sigh of relief I thrust my arms through the hole. And then two things happened. Behind and below me, the door of the house clattered back against the wall, as Peter Mace came over the threshold. And before me, on a level with my eyes, I saw a thing sitting Buddha-fashion on the floor of that upstairs room.

I saw the thing only for an instant, before the boy's drunken hands clawed at my legs and dragged me down. I saw it, too, in semi-darkness, which accounts for the mistake of my first impression—which impression I carried with me for weeks afterward, believing it to be truth. For the thing I

saw was a woman, naked and staring at me. A young and lovely girl, sitting utterly without motion on a pedestal made of boards covered with cloth. Beside her stood the packing-case in which she had been transported to Faikana. In her hands, extended toward me, was a large metal bowl in which some chemical, or combination of chemicals, burned with an odor as sweet as the smell of ether.

That was all I saw. The rung of the ladder broke under me as Peter Mace hurled himself upon me. I fell sideways against the wall. The fall stunned me. The next thing I knew, Peter Mace was standing wide-legged before me, and my back was against the table, and my hands were rigidly outflung to keep the boy's contorted face from thrusting itself into mine.

At that moment Peter Mace did not know me. He was insane with rage. His face was drained of all color, and the veins on his forehead protruded like ancient scars. Animal hate was in his eyes. Guttural words, uncouth and terrible, snarled from his lips. He would have battered me to unconsciousness, perhaps to death, if I had not stumbled backward and groped my way to the door.

Then I ran, knowing better than to remain and try to reason with a man so fiendishly angry. I had no desire to fight him; nor could I, at that time, explain the reason for my investigation of that forbidden room. I ran, as fast as my legs would take me; and when I looked back, after plowing blindly through the deep cogon grass to the edge of the small clearing, I saw him standing rigid in the doorway of the house, his hands clutching the door-frame and his legs spread wide beneath him.

And with that picture engraved in my mind, I turned and plunged down the trail to the village.

* * * *

That was the beginning of what I may rightly call a reign of terror—not for me, but for the natives. From that day on they were not safe in going near Peter Mace's house, and yet, despite the danger, their curiosity continued to take them there. More than one tale reached me of the boy's insane fury—of how, on discovering some luckless native inside the forbidden boundary, he had rushed out like a man gone mad, pursuing the native even into the jungle. True, these tales reached me after many

recountings, and were certainly magnified for my benefit; but they were nevertheless significant. I did not go again to Peter Mace's domain.

And then one day he came to me! Alone he came, in the heat of noonday, bare-headed and bare-footed. Gazing at him, no man could ever have guessed that this disheveled degenerate had been, less than three weeks ago, a young and well-to-do adventurer. He faced me unsteadily. His eyes were black-rimmed, blood-streaked. His breath was foul with liquor fumes. And yet he came triumphantly. He glared at me! His wet lips, set in a facial mask which had not felt the touch of a razor for days, curled upward at the corners and grinned at me viciously.

"Well," he sneered, "are you still curious?"

I stood on the veranda of my house and stared at him, half afraid of him and half pitying him. But he wanted no pity. His filthy hands gripped the railing, and his bare feet were planted firmly on the steps. He returned my stare.

"Well, can't you speak?" he said. "Am I so drunk I can't be spoken to?"

"You are," I answered coldly. "You're too drunk to know what you're doing."

"That's what you think," he said, thrusting his face forward. "But I'm not doing anything, see? It's done. If you want to satisfy your damned curiosity, you can come back with me and *satisfy* it! And don't worry; I won't kick you out this time. I won't need to!"

Why I went with him, after such an outburst, I am not sure. Curiosity? Certainly, to a limited extent. But it was more than that. The boy was ill. He was mentally ill, morally ill. He needed help. It was my duty to go with him.

And I went. Assailed by doubts and by no little physical fear, I followed him into the jungle. Had he wished to murder me in safety and secrecy, he could have done so easily, in that labyrinth of gloom. The trail underfoot was slimy and uncertain after a night's rain. Not once did the sun beat down upon us through the ceiling of interlaced branches and drooling aroidinae which hung above us at every step. On all sides the eternal drip, drip, drip of moisture accompanied our slow progress. No word passed between us.

He could have murdered me, I say; but he did nothing but trudge along like an automaton, slopping through pools of black mud and staring straight ahead of him. The physical effort of that unpleasant journey was doing

something to him. When we reached the clearing where his house stood, he turned to look at me with bewildered eyes, as if he had forgotten why I had accompanied him. And, in truth, he had forgotten!

“What do you want?” he demanded sullenly.

I hesitated. I tried desperately to read what lay behind his challenging stare. I told myself that his bewilderment was genuine; that the knowledge of what he had done while in the grip of liquor and near-madness had, in reality, gone from him. So I said, very quietly, as we stood there on the steps of his house:

“You asked me to help you.”

“Help me?” he frowned. “How?”

“You had something to tell me, to show me. Some trouble that was hurting you. You came to me because it is my duty to hear other men’s troubles and show them, if I can, a way out.”

For quite some time he studied me, as if he were studying some printed puzzle in a book and wondering if the given solution were the correct one. He raised one hand to push the mop of hair out of his eyes, and then he chewed on the knuckles of that hand, gazing at me all the while like a small child trying very hard to recall certain things which had been forgotten. Finally he smiled and led the way into the house.

From that moment on, he was not the same. He turned to Menegai, his house-boy, who was standing near us, and told the native to go away and leave us alone. Then he motioned me silently to a chair, and drew up another chair facing me. He leaned forward, peered steadily at me, and finally said:

“Do you know who I am, Father?”

“Truthfully,” I replied, “I do not.”

“No, no, I don’t mean that. Peter Mace is my real name. I mean, do you know *who* I am? *What* I am?”

“I should like to,” I told him. “Then I might be able to help you.”

“Yes, you might. But I’m not religious, Father. I don’t believe in a God, that way. I know too much that is different.”

“Tell me,” I suggested softly.

And he told me.

* * * *

His name was Peter Mace. Had I ever heard that name? Did I know what it meant in New York, Philadelphia? No? Well, names did not mean much in the South Seas, anyway—and he smiled wearily as he said that. What did it matter? *His* part of the name was unimportant, after all. He had been only a student at a well-known New York medical school—an honor student, until his fourth year, when he had been expelled in disgrace for certain lectures and experiments which were better left undescribed.

There had been a girl. A lovely girl, but a creature of the streets. Mureen Kennedy was her name. She had loved him.

“She was clean, pure,” he told me. “We loved each other the way your God meant a boy and a girl to love. Nothing else in the world was worth thinking about. And—your God took her from me.

He, Peter Mace, had been living a life of secrecy at the time, reluctant to face his family after being expelled from the university. He had cast his lot with a likable young fellow who kept small and unpretentious rooms in the Village. This fellow, Jean Lanier, studied art. No! Created art!

“They laughed at him, Father, just as they laughed at everything beyond their understanding.”

But *she* had died. Death had stalked those shadowed rooms, leering and screaming in derision, until—

“I went mad, Father. Sometimes I am still mad, when I think of it, of her. There she lay, in my arms, *dead*. A woman of the streets, they said. An unclean woman. But she was not! She was beautiful! For two days I sat beside her dead body, caressing her, staring at her, until my eyes could cry no more and I had no voice left for sobbing. All that while Jean Lanier kept silence, bringing me food and drink, respecting my anguish, never once condemning me. And then, in my madness, I conceived the idea of keeping her with me for ever!”

For ever? Peter Mace must have seen the horror that came into my eyes as I stared at him. He smiled and leaned forward to place his hand gently on my arm.

“Not that way, Father,” he said, shaking his head. “You misunderstand. Jean Lanier, he was an artist, a sculptor. We stole money, he and I, and for a week he worked day and night, without sleeping, to make for me what I wanted. When it was finished, we covered her poor dead body and took it far from the city, where every single thing was quiet and peaceful. There, at

night, we buried her. No one missed her; no one asked questions. She was only a woman of the streets; and who cares when a woman of the streets disappears?”

He stared at me, and at the floor, and for a long time he did not speak again. Then he said heavily:

“I should never have done it, Father. I should never have made Jean Lanier do what he did. It drove me insane. It filled my mind with hate for Almighty God. And because I had studied these”—he pointed bitterly to the pile of forbidden books on the table beside us—“there was only one way for me to turn. I studied more and more. I *learned* things. Jean Lanier turned me out and would have no more of me. Wherever I went, with the thing Jean had made for me, people whispered and called me mad.”

“And so,” I said, “you came here to Faikana.”

He nodded. “That, too, was part of the madness,” he confessed. “It was no separate insanity in itself; it was a part of the whole. I had to get away from every living person. I had to be alone, with her. Do you understand?—I had to be alone with *her*! I had to finish what I had started! And I have! *I have!*”

All at once he was on his feet before me, laughing shrilly. I shrank from him, realizing the horror of the transformation that had taken place in him. I knew, then, the condition of his mind. When he had come for me, at my house, his mind had been full of this strange triumph which was burning within him, and he had been at least partly mad. Then, on that long, silent journey through the jungle, the fires within him had burned low; he had even forgotten the cause of his madness. And now he had slowly, terribly, talked himself into being once more a savage beast with but one idea. Certainly it was no sane man that I cringed from.

“I’ll show her to you!” he bellowed, beating the air in front of my face with his clenched fists. “You sneaked upstairs once, damn you, and all you saw was a chunk of dead marble! Come up with me, *now*! I’ll show you something your religion-stuffed brain won’t dare believe!”

He gripped my arms and hauled me out of my chair. His wide eyes were close to my face, finding fiendish satisfaction in every expression that twisted my features. He shook me as a grown man shakes a terrified child.

“You think your idiotic religion is the answer to everything in life; don’t you?” he flung out. “You think you know all there is to know! Well, I’ll

show you! I'll teach you something!"

He pushed me past the table, where those obscene volumes were piled. Savagely he held my arm and forced me toward the ladder which led to that shadowed chamber above. Had I been able to get past him, to reach the door, I should have fled from that place without hesitation, just as I have fled once before. But escape was not possible. He would have followed me—I am sure of it—and dragged me back. God alone knows what might have happened then.

The ladder swayed perilously as I climbed it. I had no time to ascend cautiously. Had I paused, he might have thrust me forcibly up those slender rungs, precipitating both of us to the floor below. Strange that I should have feared physical harm, when I should have been dreading a thousand times more intently the probable mental horror into which I was stumbling! But I did not see that horror at first, even after clambering through the aperture in the ceiling and groping to my feet on the floor of the room beyond. That room was a domain of shadow, and the sudden flare of a match in Peter Mace's uplifted hand did not at first reveal the thing that faced me.

Then I saw, and stepped backward with such violence that my rigid body was lashed by the nipa uprights in the wall behind me. Peter Mace had paced forward to a small table and ignited a candle which sat there; and the candle—a crude, home-made thing which burned with ghastly brilliance—sputtered and hissed as it flooded the chamber with illumination.

That room was a garret, small and bare and uninviting. Standing erect in it, a man of ordinary height could have reached up, without effort, and touched the ceiling. Walls and floor were of the crudest construction, fashioned of huhu wood and overlaid with coarsely woven atap mats. Only one window was in evidence, and that masked by a strip of unclean cotton cloth. And there, against the far wall, staring straight at me, sat the thing which I had once before dared to look at. There, in the restless glare of the candle, the thing confronted me—and this time I saw every separate, single detail of it.

I have said before that the thing was a woman. It was. Now, as I advanced fearfully toward it, fascinated by the almost life-like manner in which it studied me, I could not repress amazement at the uncanny perfection of it. If Jean Lanier had made this, then Jean Lanier had been truly an artist! For the woman was a creature of marble, so delicately and

expertly sculptured that every portion of her exquisite form could have been mistaken, even at close range, for living reality. Naked she was, and sitting in an attitude of meditation, with her extended hands holding the metal dish which I had seen before. And I knew intuitively, even as I wondered at the uncanny loveliness of her, that there was something terrible, something wrong, in the way she was sitting there.

“This,” I said slowly to Peter Mace, “is the woman you loved? This is Maureen Kennedy?”

He laughed—not wildly or triumphantly, but so softly that I turned abruptly to peer at him, and found him smiling at me as a man smiles who knows more, much more, than his victim.

“She *will* be the woman I love, when I am finished,” he replied; and he walked to the marble figure and put his hands on her shoulders, and looked down into her face as if she could understand him.

And then I made a mistake. I believed him to be less mad than when he had forced me up the ladder a moment ago. I put my hand on his arm and said quietly:

“My boy, this is not good. Your friend should never have made such an idol for you to worship. The commandment tells us: Thou shalt have none other God but me.”

He flung my hand away. Savagely he whirled on me, glared at me. I thought his clenched fist would crash into my face. Then he stepped back, smiling. Deliberately he walked past me to the opening in the floor, and stooped, and dragged a heavy wooden square over the aperture, securing the square in place with thongs which were attached to it. With equal deliberation he paced to the opposite wall, grasped a chair which leaned there, and set the chair down in the center of the room. Standing behind it, he said evenly:

“Come here and sit down.”

“I have no wish to remain in this room,” I retorted.

“Come here and sit down.”

“Why?”

“Because I say so! And if your idiotic God were here, he would sit beside you. If either of you refused, I would kill you both.”

I hesitated, and he stood motionless, waiting. Slowly, then, I obeyed him, and my hands trembled on my knees as I lowered myself into the

chair.

“Now you will sit here and watch,” he ordered, “and you will say nothing. I have work to do. I must not be interrupted. And if your foolish God does not strike you down for looking at forbidden things, you will soon know why I asked Jean Lanier to make this woman for me!”

And now I must recount truths which were perhaps better left untold. Probably I shall be condemned severely for the words which I here set down. Perhaps I shall be more than condemned—and you, also, for reading them. But these things *must* be told, for the salvation of those who may some day be mad enough to walk in Peter Mace’s footsteps!

There I sat, in a small chamber filled with leaping shadows. There, facing me, sat that marble image of a too-lovely woman. The exit was closed, the single window shut and masked. We were alone, Peter Mace, the woman, and I, in a room cursed with sinister thoughts and evil machinations. And, disregarding my presence entirely, the boy proceeded with his unhallowed labors.

He went first to a small compartment in the wall and took therefrom a number of bound volumes, one of which he carried to the table. Poring over this, and deliberately turning its pages, he found what he sought and began to read silently to himself. I saw his lips move with the words. I saw the terrible eagerness in his eyes as they stared unblinkingly at the page. Rigid and motionless he stood there, full in the candle’s glare, his shoulders hunched forward, his head down-thrust, his hands clenched white on the table-top. Then he straightened, turned slowly, and walked toward the woman.

From a soft leather pouch which lay there at the woman’s feet, he took something small and black and touched it to the woman’s marble lips. I thought at first that it was a crucifix; then I saw my error and shuddered, for it was an *inverted* crucifix and the face upon it was the face of a leering demon. Carefully he placed it in the metal dish which the woman’s lifeless hands extended toward him. With the same deliberate care he took a small phial in his hands, and poured into the dish a viscous dark liquid which gleamed dully in the dim light. Then I saw a match blaze brightly, and the dish was suddenly alive with pale blue flame.

Slowly, then, the boy sank to his knees. He did not turn to look at me. I doubt if he even realized my presence. He knelt, and stared into the

woman's face, and raised his arms in supplication. From his lips came an almost inaudible low monotone, as if he were praying.

In truth, I thought he was praying, and my heart was filled with pity for him. I respected his torment; I understood his loneliness. Then I heard the *words* he was muttering—I knew them for what they were—and it was I who prayed to a merciful God to forgive us both!

You have heard of the Black Mass? You are aware of its hideous significance? Then you know the extent of the madness in Peter Mace's soul, and you know to whom he was muttering his maledictions.

But it was more than that. Dimly I realized the enormity of his intent, and slowly but surely, as I listened, I became prey to utter terror. A thousand times since that day I have reviled myself for not finding courage enough to stop him. Had I leaped out of my chair and flung myself upon him, he might have thanked me for it later. Even had I been forced to seize the very chair in which I sat, and strike him with it, I could not have been condemned for such violence. For the boy was mad. He was inviting annihilation.

Yet I sat there, staring at him. I sat rigid, eyes wide and blood pounding in my temples. I was terrified and fascinated, and, God help me, I let him have his way.

Those words, I can hear them yet, whenever I sit alone in a shadowed room. They mutter at me in the same singsong chant. They are in my brain:

“This is the night, O Bethmoora. This is the night, though it be day and the sun be shining without our sanctuary. Hear me, while I walk by the black lake of Hali, O Nyarlathotep. Hear me what I say...word for word... as the earth-born must say to command the presence of the Black King. Hear me...heaven in art...heaven in art...and the Yellow Sign is burning on the altar of my desire, that She may open her eyes and be mine again. Who father our name, thy be hallowed! Words for you, O Yuggoth, O Yian, O Hastur, O Prince of Evil! Give her to me, I say, and command your price. And in the name of the Great One who must not be named...through the wells of night where the crawling ones lurk unseen, waiting for wings to raise them...and in the name of the headless ones born in the red foulness of the limitless pit...give her to me in life, O Hastur. Give her to my arms, O Yuggoth! Hear me, O Lord of Lords, Nyarlathotep!”

These words, born of madmen's minds and filled with hideous suggestions of horrors forbidden to men, tumbled from the lips of the boy who knelt in that vile room with me! These words and more; but the others I did not hear, for I had become like a man impaled, sitting as straight and stiff as a marble statue. No, no—not as a marble statue! *That* statue was no longer straight and stiff! Into the chamber with us had come darkness—a living, evil darkness which threatened to smother the other glare of the candle. And before me the pale statue of the woman was in motion, swaying slowly, awfully, from side to side, while its outstretched hands carried the metal dish to and fro like a pendulum and the blue flame in that dish became a weaving, living tongue of fire.

Peter Mace had stopped muttering. *Other* voices had become audible, low and vibrant and speaking words which had no beginning or end. As if uttered through long, deep tubes, those syllables droned into being. As if moaned aloud by some dark-robed priest of an uncouth cult, they singsonged into every niche of that foul room.

We were no longer alone. The darkness all about us was peopled with shadows, with nameless things which had no shape, no form, no substance, and yet were there! It was a time for prayer and supplication; yet I knew no prayer mighty enough to afford protection. We had forfeited the right to pray! Peter Mace, with his evil machinations, had summoned elements from the deeper pits of darkness. His blasphemies had established communion with entities more powerful than any who might listen to prayers from human lips. And it is I, Father Jason, a missionary, who say that!

I went to my knees with my hands uplifted before me. But no words came from my lips. I spoke them, but they died unborn. On all sides of me that hell-dark was in motion, those hell-shapes were gathering closer. Before me the boy had risen unsteadily to his feet and stood like a man drunk, as if stunned by the enormity of his sin. But what I saw most of all, and what I remembered with awful clarity for nights afterward, was the transformation which was taking place in the marble woman!

God help me for ever looking into that face! The eyes, which had been open only to natural dimensions, had widened in agony. The lips were shapeless, the face a gray-white mask twisted beyond recognition. Every inch of the woman's body was in motion, struggling hideously, pitifully, to be free of its marble bonds. She was no longer dead! She was no longer a

thing of stone! Life had been poured into her rigid body. And she was fighting now, in a hell of physical torment, to assimilate that cursed power and become *all* alive!

You have seen a victim of epilepsy suddenly seized by that dread disease? This woman was like that. She strove to rise. She fought to free her hands from the metal dish to which they clung, so that she might embrace the boy who stood before her. Slowly, horribly, with a paroxysmal jerking of her hips and breasts, she turned toward him. In agony she stared into his face, begging his assistance. She was trying to speak, but could not!

And the boy returned her stare. He had become like a man standing erect in sleep. He seemed not to realize her agony, or to be aware of the hideous darkness which hung all about him like a winding-sheet. Slowly, mechanically, as if obeying orders over which he had no command, he advanced toward her. Mutely he peered into her face. Then I heard him say quietly, evenly, as if he were reciting the words:

“It is not yet. No, it is not yet. This is the fifth time, O Hastur. Only the fifth time, O Lord of Lords. Each time the agony is greater and the life is stronger. You have promised that on the seventh time the agony will destroy the death and the life will be complete. I am patient. I am content to wait. All things come to him who waits.”

Deliberately he extended his arms. His hands came together and pressed downward upon the metal dish. I saw his eyes close and his lips whiten as the blue flame ate into his palms. But no sound came from him as he stood there; and in a moment, when he stepped back, the blue fire was a living thing no longer. Then, as if performing a ritual, the boy sank slowly to his knees and placed his hands upon the body of the living-dead woman before him. The agony went out of her face; her struggles ceased. She became as before, a creature of stone, inanimate and lifeless. He—he knelt with bowed head at the feet of his shrine. Knelt and prayed, not to the God of men, but to the obscene gods who possessed his soul. While he knelt there in supplication, the room emptied itself of shadow and sound, and he and I and the woman were alone together, as we had been. And I, knowing only that my heart was black with horror and my eyes blinded by the forbidden things they had looked upon, crept quietly to the aperture in the floor, and drew aside the square of wood which covered it, and lowered myself slowly, cautiously, down the ladder to the room below.

No sound was audible in that chamber of mystery above me as I paced noiselessly to the door. No sound accompanied my escape from Peter Mace's house. When I reached the rim of the jungle, and looked back, I saw only a glow of yellow light behind the masked window of that upstairs room; and I knew that Peter Mace was still there, still kneeling in prayer, while the crude candle on the table cast its innocent light over the chamber's unholy contents.

Slowly, and with my heart heavy within me, I went away.

* * * *

From that day until the day of the final accounting, I did not see Peter Mace. In truth, I did not want to. Hours passed before the color crept back into my face and my hands stopped shaking. After reaching my home that night, sick and weary from tramping through the jungle, I closed and barred my door and sat like a dead man, staring at the floor. My mind was full of the monstrous things I had participated in. I dreaded the penalty! Worse—I knew that those horrors were not yet complete. Over and over in my brain rang the boy's words: "On the seventh time the agony will destroy the death and the life will be complete. I am patient. All things come to him who waits."

No, I did not return to Peter Mace's house in the jungle. I feared to. I feared *him*, and the denizens of darkness who inhabited that horror-house with him. And this time, when the natives came to me with stories of the boy's madness, I knew better than to condemn those stories as exaggerations.

Menegai came, finally. Wide-eyed and terrified he hammered on my door and begged to be admitted. It was the evening of the ninth day, and the sight of the Marquesan's face brought to the surface all the fears which had lain dormant within me. I opened the door to him, and closed it quickly, and then listened to the shrill words which chattered from his betel-stained mouth.

"*I teienei!*"—he wailed. "God almighty!"

And then, in his own tongue, he screamed and muttered and whispered his story, with such genuine fear in his eyes that I knew his words to be truth.

Less than an hour ago, he, Menegai, had been sitting on an atap mat on the floor of his master's house. Peteme (Peter Mace) had been studying books, as usual, with his elbows on the table and his head bent over the printed pages. Then, suddenly, without a word, Peteme had pushed back his chair, risen to his feet, and paced toward the ladder which led to the upstairs room.

Menegai had begun to be afraid, then. Always when his master retired to that secret attic, strange things happened. Peteme was never the same after returning from that chamber. He became *heva*—wrong in the head. He became like a man drunk with tuak, or like a man who had watched the *titii e te epo*, the dance of love, so long that his mind went mad with desire.

And this time was no exception. Soon, from the room overhead, came sounds without meaning. Voices muttered, and other voices chanted in unison. Louder and louder the sounds grew, until, after an eternity, they were climaxed in a woman's scream—a horrible scream, as if some poor girl were being torn apart while yet alive. And then had come Peteme's shrill voice, bellowing in triumph, shouting over and over:

“The seventh time draws near! The sixth ordeal is finished! Hear me, O Hastur! The sixth ordeal is finished!”

Menegai had crouched near the door, trembling and afraid. Never before had his master thundered in a voice so full of triumph. Never before had the woman in that dread room screamed in such agony. Never before had she screamed at all. How could she? He, Menegai, had seen her with his own eyes, one afternoon when he had dared to look into his master's secret, forbidden chamber. She was a stone woman. *How could a stone woman scream?*

Terrified, Menegai had waited for his master to come down the ladder; and after a while Peteme had come, reeling and staggering and muttering to himself. Menegai had backed away from him and stared at him. Peteme had stood rigid, returning that stare with eyes full of red madness. Then, all at once, the white man had become like a devil crazed with *atae*—like a monster in the grip of *rea inoeruru*, the drug which makes men commit murder. Snarling horribly, he had flung himself forward.

“Damn you!” he had roared. “You're like every one else on this blasted island! You think I'm mad! You came to spy on me, to laugh at me! By God, I'll show you what happens to curiosity-seekers! I'll show them all!”

Only by a miracle had Menegai escaped. The edge of the atap mat, curling under Peteme's feet, had caused the white man to stumble. Menegai had flung the door open and raced over the threshold, screaming. Peteme had lurched after him. But Menegai had reached the jungle first; and in the jungle the Marquesan had fled to hiding-places where the white man dared not follow.

And now Menegai was here in my house, begging protection, and in my heart I knew that before another twenty-four hours had passed, the whole hideous affair of Peter Mace and the stone woman would reach its awful conclusion. And I was right—but before the twenty-four hours were up, something else occurred.

I was standing on the veranda of my house, and it was morning again, and the sun was a crimson ball of blood ascending from the blue waters of the lagoon. Menegai, the Marquesan, had crept away to his hut in the village. I was alone.

At first the thing I saw was merely a gray speck on the far horizon, so small that it might have been no speck at all, but merely my imagination. I put both hands to my eyes and peered out from under them; but my eyes were blinded from staring into the red sun, and presently I could see nothing but a glare of crimson. Yet that speck was there, and I knew it for what it was—a ship.

Later I saw it again, and while I stood staring at it, Menegai came running up the path, pointing and gesticulating excitedly.

“A schooner, Tavana!” he cried. “A schooner come here!”

Yes, a schooner was coming. But why? What could any tramp trader want with Faikana? In four years only one ship had visited our secluded island, and that ship had brought Peter Mace. It had brought unhappiness and horror, a madman and a woman of stone. Could this one be bringing a similar cargo?

I said nothing in answer to Menegai's eager questions. In my heart I dreaded the coming of this new messenger from the outside. Menegai, peering up into my face, read my thoughts and ceased his chatter. Bewildered, he left me and hurried down to the beach. Long after he had gone, I stood staring, hoping against hope that the approaching vessel would somehow, at the last moment, change its course and depart again, leaving us to ourselves.

* * * *

Two hours later the schooner dropped anchor outside the reef, close enough to shore so that we on the beach were able to discern its name. It was the *Bella Gale*—the same *Bella Gale* which had brought Peter Mace to Faikana. Even while we stared, a small boat swept through the reefs opening and came slowly toward us; and a moment later I was peering into the bearded face of Captain Bruk and shaking the grimy hand which he thrust into mine. And I was wondering, even then, what terrible event or chain of events had happened to put that haunted, desperate glare in Captain Bruk's eyes.

I soon learned. Without preamble Bruk said bluntly: "I want to talk with you, Father. Alone."

Together we went to my house, and closed the door upon the inquisitive natives who gathered outside. There, with the table between us, Bruk told his story.

"I've got a woman on board, Father," he scowled. "Go on, tell me I'm crazy. I know it. Tell *her* she's crazy! Any woman fool enough to trust herself to a roach-infested scow like the *Bella Gale* ought to be put in an asylum. This one ought to be there anyway. She's queer."

He pulled a bottle from his pocket, offered it to me, and then drank from it. Choking, he rammed the cork back viciously and leaned forward, resting both elbows on the table.

"She was waiting in Papeete when I got back after marooning the boy here," he grumbled. "Harlan—that's the Papeete manager—brought her aboard soon as we dropped anchor. He introduced me and gave me a good looking-over to make sure I was sober; then he said: 'All right, Bruk. You're going back to Rarioa. This woman wants to find the young fellow you put ashore there.'

"Well, I took her. I had to. But, by heaven, she was an odd one. You'll see for yourself, when I go back after her. She dresses like a funeral; wears black every damned minute of the day, and a black veil to boot. What does she look like? Don't ask me! I've been on board the same rotten schooner with her for almost ten days, coming straight here from Papeete, and I don't know yet what kind of a face she has! She don't speak unless she has to,

and then she don't say more than three words at a time, so help me! And she's queer. She's uncanny. I tell you—”

Brük put his hand on my arm and leaned even farther over the table, speaking in a whisper as if he were afraid of being overheard. I looked into his eyes and saw fear in them. Real fear, which had been there a long time.

“It's about this Rarioa business, Father,” he mumbled. “Harlan thought I took the boy there, and told me to take the woman there, too. He didn't know I marooned the boy on Faikana. I didn't tell him that. If I had, he'd have claimed the money the boy paid me; and I wanted that money for myself. So when I left Papeete this last time, I headed for Rarioa. That's what he told me, wasn't it? Take the woman to Rarioa. But we hadn't been out more than three days when she came to me and said: ‘You're not taking me to Peter.’ Just like that, Father! How in the name of all that's holy did *she* know where Peter was?”

I stared at him. Some of the fear in his eyes must have found its way into my eyes as well. He returned my stare triumphantly.

“She's not human, I tell you!” he blurted. “She's not human even to look at! She walks around like she was asleep. She talks in the same tone of voice all the time, like she was tired. By heaven, I won't have any more to do with her, Father! I brought her here, and I'm leaving her here! It's up to you, now. You know more about this kind of business than I do.”

“You brought her here,” I said slowly, “because you were afraid not to?”

“Afraid?” he bellowed. “I tell you, when she looked at me with those eyes of hers and said, ‘You're not taking me to Peter,’ I knew better than to double-cross her! I *brought* her to Peter!”

That was all. Brük heaved himself up and stood swaying, while he drank again from the bottle of whisky. He glared at me, then laughed drunkenly as he pulled open the door.

“You can have her,” he said. “I'll put her ashore like I was told to. You're welcome to her.”

Then he went out.

It was with mingled feelings of fear and apprehension that I awaited his return. Somehow I could not bring myself to go down to the beach. I chose to remain behind the closed door of my house, alone with my thoughts, though I might better have taken myself out of that shadowed room, into

sunshine and open air, where my mind would have created visions less morbid.

Who could she be, this woman? A sister, perhaps, of the boy who had established himself in that house of sin in the jungle? A relative, perhaps, of the dead sweetheart whom he had left behind him? I wondered; and wondering, found myself drawing mental pictures of her. Subconsciously, Bruk's descriptions influenced those pictures. The woman of my imagination was a black-robed nun, uncouth and ungainly, eccentric of speech and action, not at all like the woman who confronted me less than ten minutes later.

Bruk's throaty hullo startled me out of my reverie, and I drew the door open with a nervous jerk. And there she was—tall and graceful and utterly lovely, in direct contrast to my mental image of her. Quietly she followed him up the steps. Without embarrassment she stood facing me, while Bruk said curtly:

"This is Father Jason, ma'am. He runs the place here."

The woman nodded. Her eyes, behind an opaque veil which entirely concealed her features, regarded me intently. She was perhaps twenty-five years old, certainly not more. Deliberately she stared about the room. Almost mechanically she stepped past me and sank into a chair. In a peculiarly dull voice she said:

"I am tired. I have come a long way." She *was* tired. Though her face was hidden from me, I could sense the exhaustion in it. She seemed suddenly to have lost the power of movement—almost the power of life itself. She sat perfectly still, staring straight before her. I thought, strangely, that she was on the verge of death.

"You—you wish to go to Peter?" I said gently.

"Peter?" she whispered, and raised her head slowly to look at me. "Peter? Yes. In a little while."

I studied her. Surely this woman loved Peter Mace, or she would not have gone to such trouble to find him. If so, she could help him. He needed help. He needed some one near and dear to him, to talk to him, to convince him that his horrible research was wicked. If this woman could do that, her coming would not be in vain.

"When you are rested," I said quietly, "I will take you to him. You had better sleep first. It is a long way."

She smiled, as if she were pitying me for not knowing something I ought to know.

“Yes,” she said. “It is a long way, through the jungle. I know.”

Then she slept.

* * * *

Darkness had fallen when we began that journey to Peter Mace’s house. We were alone. Captain Bruk had departed more than an hour ago, vowing that he wanted no more of her, and that so far as he was concerned he didn’t care if he “never set foot on Faikana’s blasted beach again.” The natives, tired of hanging about the house in hopes of satisfying their childish curiosities, had returned to the village. No one saw us begin that journey which was to have such a terrible end.

But I had no premonition of the end, then. I thought of Peter Mace, living alone in his isolated abode in the jungle, and I thanked God for sending the woman to aid him. Mysterious she was, to be sure—and not once had she given herself a name—but my hopes were high, and a queer confidence possessed me as I led her along the jungle trail. Even the jungle itself, black as death and full of sinister shapes and sounds, could not kill the song in my heart. I refused to consider the possible peril on all sides of us. I refused to be afraid. A merciful God had sent this woman to Faikana, and the same merciful God would conduct her safely to the end of her quest.

She, too, was unafraid. She followed boldly, deliberately, in my steps. She did not speak. Several times, when I turned to assist her through stretches of black morass, or over huge fallen stumps of aoa trees, she merely smiled and accepted my hand without comment.

So, finally, we reached the end of the trail and entered the clearing where Peter Mace’s house loomed high before us. And for the first time, doubt assailed me.

Only one light burned in that grim structure—one light, pale and yellow behind the masked window of the upstairs room. Slowly we walked toward it, and even more slowly we ascended the veranda steps. I knocked hesitantly, and there was no answer. My hand trembled on the latch. The door swung open, and silently we entered.

There in the dark we stood side by side, the woman and I, and neither of us spoke.

In the far corner of the room a feeble shaft of light descended from the ceiling, revealing the top rungs of the ladder and the uneven surface of the wall beside it. The aperture was closed. From the chamber above us came the deep, singsong voice of Peter Mace, uttering words which brought sudden terror to my heart.

There is no need to repeat those words here. Already I have described in detail the ritual for which that room of horror was designed. Enough to say that the horror, this time, was nearing its climax—that *other* voices, born of lips which had no human form, were slowly and terribly rising in a shrill crescendo, smothering the blasphemies which poured from the boy's throat. Even while the veiled woman and I stood motionless, those sounds rose to a mighty roar, screaming their triumph. And with them came the shrill, awful outcry of a woman in mortal anguish.

I wish now that I had yielded to the fear in my soul and fled from that evil place. I wish I had seized my companion's arm and dragged her back across the threshold. Instead, I remained rooted to the floor. I stood rigid, listening to the medley of mad voices that bellowed above me.

The whole house echoed those wild vibrations. Words of terrible significance, of frightful suggestiveness, were flung out of monstrous throats, to wail and scream into the deepest depths of my consciousness. Again and again I heard names hurled out which bore sufficient significance to spike my soul with nameless and uncontrollable dread. And above them all, *within* them all, shrilled that wild screech of physical agony which tocsined from a woman's lips!

The awful din reached its climax while I stood there. For a long moment the walls around me, the ceiling above, the floor below, trembled as if in the grip of a great wind. Then, slowly, the sounds subsided. Slowly they died to a sinister whispering and muttering in which I could distinguish no individual words. And finally only one audible sound remained—the low, passionate voice of Peter Mace, speaking in triumphant tones which were, in themselves, all too significant.

Then I moved. Mechanically I turned from the woman beside me and paced toward the ladder in the corner. Fearfully I ascended the wooden rungs, holding myself erect with hands that shook violently as they groped

upward at a snail's pace. From the chamber above me, the boy's voice came in fitful exclamations, uttering words of triumph, of endearment. Wildly he was saying:

"It is finished! Beloved, it is finished! The agony has destroyed the death; the life is complete! They promised me it would be so, and they have fulfilled their promise. Oh, my beloved, come to me!"

I shuddered, and for a long time clung motionless to my perch, fearing to ascend higher. Had I been aware of the scene which would meet my gaze when I reached up to drag the wooden covering from the aperture above me, I would have flung myself back down the ladder and left that evil chamber for ever undisturbed. But I did not know. I slid aside the barrier. I heaved myself to the floor above. And I saw.

The room was a well of darkness, illuminated only by the sputtering candle on the table. Before me stood Peter Mace, disheveled and ragged, his head flung back and his bare feet planted on the crude atop mat which covered the floor. In his arms, pressed close against his emaciated body, clung a naked woman—a woman whose skin was as white and as smooth as fine-grained gypsum. Lovely she was. Too lovely. And then I realized the truth.

Abruptly I turned and stared at the cloth-covered pedestal in the corner—the pedestal where the marble woman had sat. Then, in horror, I stared again at the creature in Peter Mace's embrace. And she was the same woman. God help me, she was the same! Those horrors of outer darkness had given her the power of life! The woman in Peter Mace's arms, clinging to him, was a woman of living stone!

I stared, unable to believe what I knew to be true. The very frightfulness of it prevented me from assimilating its whole significance. I merely stared, and heard words issuing from her lips, and heard him answering them. Then, after an eternity, I stood erect and said aloud:

"A woman is here to see you, Peter." Peter Mace turned, very slowly, releasing the naked thing in his arms. He looked at me steadily, as if bewildered by my presence. He peered all around him, as if puzzled even by the room in which he stood. Then he said quietly:

"A woman? To see me?"

"Yes," I nodded. "She's waiting."

He came toward me. He did not understand. His forehead was creased and his lips frowning. Leaving his companion where she was, he stepped past me and slowly descended the ladder. The stone woman said nothing; she stood very still, watching him. Silently I followed him down the creaking rungs to the room below, where the other woman was waiting. And then it was my turn to be bewildered.

Peter Mace and the woman in black stared at each other. Neither moved. For a full moment, neither spoke. The very intensity of their stares—the very completeness of their silence—indicated a climactic something which I did not fully comprehend. I felt that when the woman did speak, she would scream. But she did not. She said calmly:

“You sent for me, Peter. I’m here.” He moved toward her. Behind and above him a muffled creaking sound came from the wooden ladder, but none of us turned. The boy was still gazing with horribly wide eyes. He said falteringly: “You—you are not dead? You’re here? How can that be?”

“I *was* dead, Peter.”

“What do you mean?” he whispered. “I was dead, but you gave me life. I came to you.”

The boy seemed not to understand. Not until she raised her hands and drew the veil from her face—not until then did he realize the hideous results of the sins he had committed. And I realized them, too. The woman before me was Peter Mace’s loved one. She was walking in death! She had been raised from the grave by the hellish rituals performed by him! This—this woman before me—was the flesh and blood reality from whom he and his artist companion had designed that stone creature in the room above us! The likeness was unmistakable!

But there was a difference. The face of this corpse-woman was lovely only because she had *made* it lovely. Beneath the mask of powder which covered it, death had written with an indelible pencil, leaving certain signs which could never be erased. Little wonder she had worn a *veil*! Little wonder she had refused to reveal herself to me, or to Captain Bruk, or to any of the people who had come in contact with her! Yet Peter Mace, her lover, failed to see what the grave had done. He was blinded to all but her loveliness. He reached out his arms and stepped toward her, and with terrible eagerness he crushed her against him.

I stood close to them, unable to move away. Again I heard the creaking of the ladder behind me, but still I did not turn. Nothing mattered but the pitiful thing which was occurring before me. I saw only this wild-eyed, sobbing boy, holding in his arms the woman who had been returned to him—the woman who, resurrected from her distant grave by the far-reaching powers of his unholy rites, had found her way across half the earth to reach his arms. Again and again he cried her name aloud. Over and over he sobbed words of endearment. All his loneliness and longing poured through his lips, and his soul was bare for her to look at.

And then some sixth sense made me turn—or perhaps it was the thud of heavy feet striking the floor behind me. I swung slowly about, and stood transfixed. There, at the foot of the ladder, stood the stone woman whom Peter Mace had created.

As long as I live, the expression of her face will haunt me. Her eyes were as dark and deep as midnight pits. Her lips were drawn back over parted teeth, in a snarl of animal hate. She had heard the boy's every word. She had witnessed his every act. And now her once-beautiful face was contorted. She was a savage beast whose mate had deserted her. She meant murder.

Slowly, with awful deliberation, she advanced across the floor. She did not see me, did not consider my presence. She had eyes only for Peter Mace and the woman who clung to him. Straight past me she walked, so close that I might have reached out and touched her. And I—God help me!—I stood like a graven image, utterly unable to move or to shriek a warning.

I did not see all of what happened. Her back was toward me, and she was between me and her victims. But I saw and heard enough to blast my soul.

Peter Mace was whispering to his loved one, uttering low words of love and happiness. His voice suddenly ceased, then screamed aloud in terror. He leaped backward, then flung himself forward again. He might have escaped, had he not hurled himself upon that relentless stone figure in a futile attempt to protect his beloved. Those hideous fingers had already gripped the other woman's throat. Peter Mace tore at them madly, in an effort to dislodge them.

He might better have thought of his own safety. Slowly and surely those stone fingers committed murder. The corpse-woman sank backward to the

floor, staring with dead eyes at the ceiling. The fingers released their grip.

Not until then did the boy realize the futility of resistance. Not until then did he seek to escape. Then it was too late. Those infernal hands buried themselves in the flesh of his neck. His lips opened to release a prolonged shriek of agony. The shriek became a bloody gurgle. He hung suspended, his feet beating a terrible tattoo on the floor. When she released him, he fell across the body of the woman beneath him; and he, like her, was dead.

The room, then, was filled with the silence of death. The stone woman stood over her victims, gazing down at them. An eternity passed. Slowly, and still without speaking, the woman turned and paced to the door. Her groping hand raised the latch; the door creaked inward. Staring straight ahead of her, she walked across the veranda and descended the steps. Stiffly, and with that same hideous deliberation, she paced toward the jungle. The darkness of the outer night claimed her, and she was gone.

* * * *

That is all. That is why I, Father Jason, went away from Faikana the next day, taking my native people with me. Risking death in clumsy pahis, we paddled for two days and a night on the open sea, to reach the sparsely inhabited atoll of Mehu, where we might begin life over again. That is why, in the clearing on Faikana where Peter Mace's horror-house stands, you will find a crude slab of tou wood planted for men to look upon; and you will read the words: *Inei Teavi o te mata epoa o Faikana!*'—which mean, literally: "Here lie the bodies of the lovers of Faikana."

But Faikana is inhabited by one living person only—a woman created for love, out of sin. And she is a stone woman who may not die, who may not find peace, until those unnamable horrors of the world of darkness take pity on her and relieve her of the life they gave her.

THE SECRET IN THE TOMB, by Robert Bloch

Originally published in *Weird Tales*, May 1935.

The wind howled strangely over a midnight tomb. The moon hung like a golden bat over ancient graves, glaring through the wan mist with its baleful, nyctalopic eye. Terrors not of the flesh might lurk among cedar-shrouded sepulchers or creep unseen amid shadowed cenotaphs, for this was unhallowed ground. But tombs hold strange secrets, and there are mysteries blacker than the night, and more leprous than the moon.

It was in search of such a secret that I came, alone and unseen, to my ancestral vault at midnight. My people had been sorcerers and wizards in the olden days, so lay apart from the resting-place of other men, here in this moldering mausoleum in a forgotten spot, surrounded only by the graves of those who had been their servants. But not all the servants lay here, for there are those who do not die.

On through the mist I pressed, to where the crumbling sepulcher loomed among the brooding trees. The wind rose to torrential violence as I trod the obscure pathway to the vaulted entrance, extinguishing my lantern with malefic fury. Only the moon remained to light my way in a luminance unholy. And thus I reached the nitrous, fungus-bearded portals of the family vault. Here the moon shone upon a door that was not like other doors—a single massive slab of iron, imbedded in monumental walls of granite. Upon its outer surface was neither handle, lock nor keyhole, but the whole was covered with carvings portentous of a leering evil—cryptic symbols whose allegorical significance filled my soul with a deeper loathing than mere words can impart. There are things that are not good to look upon, and I did not care to dwell too much in thought on the possible genesis of a mind whose knowledge could create such horrors in concrete form. So in blind and trembling haste I chanted the obscure litany and performed the necessary obeisances demanded in the ritual I had learned, and at their conclusion the cyclopean portal swung open.

Within was darkness, deep, funereal, ancient; yet, somehow, uncannily *alive*. It held a pulsing adumbration, a suggestion of muted, yet purposeful rhythm, and overshadowing all, an air of black, impinging *revelation*. The

simultaneous effect upon my consciousness was one of those reactions misnamed intuitions. I sensed that shadows know queer secrets, and there are some skulls that have reason to grin.

Yet I must go on into the tomb of my forebears—tonight the last of all our line would meet the first. For I was the last. Jeremy Strange had been the first—he who fled from the Orient to seek refuge in centuried Eldertown, bringing with him the loot of many tombs and a secret forever nameless. It was he who had built his sepulcher in the twilight woods where the witch-lights gleam, and here he had interred his own remains, shunned in death as he had been in life. But buried with him was a secret, and it was this that I had come to seek. Nor was I the first in so seeking, for my father and his father before me, indeed, the eldest of each generation back to the days of Jeremy Strange himself, had likewise sought that which was so maddeningly described in the wizard's diary—the secret of eternal life after death. The musty yellowed tome had been handed down to the elder son of each successive generation, and likewise, so it seemed, the dread atavistic craving for black and accursed knowledge, the thirst for which, coupled with the damnably explicit hints set forth in the warlock's record, had sent every one of my paternal ancestors so bequeathed to a final rendezvous in the night, to seek their heritage within the tomb. What they found, none could say, for none had ever returned.

It was, of course, a family secret. The tomb was never mentioned—it had, indeed, been virtually forgotten with the passage of years that had likewise eradicated many of the old legends and fantastic accusations about the first Strange that had once been common property in the village. The family, too, had been mercifully spared all knowledge of the curse-ridden end to which so many of its men had come. Their secret delvings into black arts; the hidden library of antique lore and demonological formulae brought by Jeremy from the East; the diary and its secret—all were undreamt of save by the eldest sons. The rest of the line prospered. There had been sea captains, soldiers, merchants, statesmen. Fortunes were won. Many departed from the old mansion on the cape, so that in my father's time he had lived there alone with the servants and myself. My mother died at my birth, and it was a lonely youth.

I spent in the great brown house, with a father half-crazed by the tragedy of my mother's end, and shadowed by the monstrous secret of our

line. It was he who initiated me into the mysteries and arcana to be found amid the shuddery speculations of such blasphemies as the *Necronomicon*, the *Book of Eibon*, the *Cabala of Saboth*, and that pinnacle of literary madness, Ludvig Prinn's *Mysteries of the Worm*. There were grim treatises on anthropomancy, necrology, lycanthropical and vampiristic spells and charms, witchcraft, and long, rambling screeds in Arabic, Sanskrit and prehistoric ideography, on which lay the dust of centuries.

All these he gave me, and more. There were times when he would whisper strange stories about voyages he had taken in his youth—of islands in the sea, and queer survivals spawning dreams beneath arctic ice. And one night he told me of the legend, and the tomb in the forest; and together we turned the worm-riddled pages of the iron-bound diary that was hidden in the panel above the chimney-corner. I was very young, but not too young to know certain things, and as I swore to keep the secret as so many had sworn before me, I had a queer feeling that the time had come for Jeremy to claim his own. For in my father's somber eyes was the same light of dreadful thirst for the unknown, curiosity, and an inward urge that had glowed in the eyes of all the others before him, previous to the time they had announced their intention of "going on a trip" or "joining up" or "attending to a business matter." Most of them had waited till their children were grown, or their wives had passed on; but whenever they had left, and whatever their excuse, they had never returned.

Two days later, my father disappeared, after leaving word with the servants that he was spending the week in Boston. Before the month was out there was the usual investigation, and the usual failure. A will was discovered among my father's papers, leaving me as sole heir, but the books and the diary were secure in the secret rooms and panels known now to me alone.

Life went on. I did the usual things in the usual way—attended university, traveled, and returned at last to the house on the hill, alone. But with me I carried a mighty determination—I alone could thwart that curse; I alone could grasp the secret that had cost the lives of seven generations—and I alone must do so. The world had nought to offer one who had spent his youth in the study of the mocking truths that lie beyond the outward beauties of a purposeless existence, and I was not afraid. I dismissed the servants, ceased communication with distant relatives and a few close

friends, and spent my days in the hidden chambers amid the elder lore, seeking a solution or a spell of such potency as would serve to dispel forever the mystery of the tomb.

A hundred times I read and reread that hoary script—the diary whose fiend-penned promise had driven men to doom. I searched amid the satanic spells and cabalistic incantations of a thousand forgotten necromancers, delved into pages of impassioned prophecy, burrowed into secret legendary lore whose written thoughts writhed through me like serpents from the pit. It was in vain. All I could learn was the ceremony by which access could be obtained to the tomb in the wood. Three months of study had worn me to a wraith and filled my brain with the diabolic shadows of charnel-spawned knowledge, but that was all. And then, as if in mockery of madness, there had come the call, this very night.

I had been seated in the study, pondering upon a maggot-eaten volume of Heiriarchus' *Occultus*, when without warning, I felt a tremendous urge keening through my weary brain. It beckoned and allured with unutterable promise, like the mating-cry of the lamia of old; yet at the same time it held an inexorable power whose potency could not be defied or denied. The inevitable was at hand. I had been summoned to the tomb. I must follow the beguiling voice of inner consciousness that was the invitation and the promise, that sounded my soul like the ultra-rhythmic piping of trans-cosmic music. So I had come, alone and weaponless, to the lonely woods and to that wherein I would meet my destiny.

The moon rose redly over the manor as I left, but I did not look back. I saw its reflection in the waters of the brook that crept between the trees, and in its light the water was as blood. Then the fog rose silently from the swamp, and a yellow ghost-light rode the sky, beckoning me on from behind the black and bloated trees whose branches, swept by a dismal wind, pointed silently toward the distant tomb. Roots and creepers impeded my feet, vines and brambles restrained my body, but in my ears thundered a chorus of urgency that can not be described and which could not be delayed, by nature or by man.

Now, as I hesitated upon the door-step, a million idiot voices gibbered an invitation to enter that mortal mind could not withstand. Through my brain resounded the horror of my heritage—the insatiable craving to know the forbidden, to mingle and become one with it. A paean of hell-born

music crescendoed in my ears, and earth was blotted out in a mad urge that engulfed all being.

I paused no longer upon the threshold. I wait in, in where the smell of death filled the darkness that was like the sun over Yuggoth. The door closed, and then came—what? I do not know—I only realized that suddenly I could see and feel and hear, despite darkness, and dankness, and silence.

I was in the tomb. Its monumental walls and lofty ceiling were black and bare, lichened by the passage of centuries. In the center of the mausoleum stood a single slab of black marble. Upon it rested a gilded coffin, set with strange symbols, and covered by the dust of ages. I knew instinctively what it must contain, and the knowledge did not serve to put me at my ease. I glanced at the floor, then wished I hadn't. Upon the debris-strewn base beneath the slab lay a ghastly, disarticulated group of mortuary remains—half-fleshed cadavers and desiccated skeletons. When I thought of my father and the others, I was possessed of a sickening dismay. They too had sought, and they had failed. And now I had come, alone, to find that which had brought them to an end unholy and unknown. The secret! The secret in the tomb!

Mad eagerness filled my soul. I too would know—I must! As in a dream I swayed to the gilded coffin. A moment I tottered above it; then, with a strength born of delirium, I tore away the paneling and lifted the gilded lid, and then I knew it was no dream, for dreams can not approach the ultimate horror that was the creature lying within the coffin—that creature with eyes like a midnight demon's, and a face of loathsome delirium that was like the death-mask of a devil. It was smiling, too, as it lay there, and my soul shrieked in the tortured realization that it was *alive!* Then I knew it all; the secret and the penalty paid by those who sought it, and I was ready for death, but horrors had not ceased, for even as I gazed it spoke, in a voice like the hissing of a black slug.

And there within the nighted gloom it whispered the secret, staring at me with ageless, deathless eyes, so that I should not go mad before I heard the whole of it. All was revealed—the secret crypts of blackest nightmare where the tomb-spawn dwell, and of a price whereby a man may become one with ghouls, living after death as a devourer in darkness. Such a thing had it become, and from this shunned, accursed tomb had sent the call to the descending generations, that when they came, there might be a ghastly

feast whereby it might continue a dread, eternal life. I (it breathed) would be the next to die, and in my heart I knew that it was so.

I could not avert my eyes from its accursed gaze, nor free my soul from its hypnotic bondage. The thing on the bier cackled with unholy laughter. My blood froze, for I saw two long, lean arms, like the rotted limbs of a corpse, steal slowly toward my fear-constricted throat. The monster sat up, and even in the clutches of my horror, I realized that there was a dim and awful resemblance between the creature in the coffin and a certain ancient portrait back in the Hall. But this was a transfigured reality—Jeremy the man become Jeremy the ghoul; and I knew that it would do no good to resist. Two claws, cold as flames of icy hell, fastened around my throat, two eyes bored like maggots through my frenzied being, a laughter born of madness alone cachinnated in my ears like the thunder of doom. The bony fingers tore at my eyes and nostrils, held me helpless while yellow fangs champed nearer and nearer to my throat. The world spun, wrapped in a mist of fiery death.

Suddenly the spell broke. I wrenched my eyes away from that slavering, evil face, and instantly, like a cataclysmic flash of light, came realization. This creature's power was purely mental—by that alone were my ill-fated kinsmen drawn here, and by that alone were they overcome, but once one were free from the strength of the monster's awful eyes—good God! Was I going to be the victim of a crumbled mummy?

My right arm swung up, striking the horror between the eyes. There was a sickening crunch; then dead flesh yielded before my hand as I seized the now faceless lich in my arms and cast it into fragments upon the bone-covered floor. Streaming with perspiration and mumbling in hysteria and terrible revulsion, I saw the moldy fragments move even in a second death—a severed hand crawled across the flagging, upon musty, shredded fingers; a leg began to roll with the animation of grotesque, unholy life. With a shriek, I cast a lighted match upon that loathsome corpse, and I was still shrieking as I clawed open the portals and rushed out of the tomb and into the world of sanity, leaving behind me a smoldering fire from whose charred heart a terrible voice still faintly moaned its tortured requiem to that which had once been Jeremy Strange.

The tomb is razed now, and with it the forest graves and all the hidden chambers and manuscripts that serve as a reminder of ghoul-ridden

memories that can never be forgot. For earth hides a madness and dreams a hideous reality, and monstrous things abide in the shadows of death, lurking and waiting to seize the souls of those who meddle with forbidden things.

THE HORROR FROM THE HILLS, by Frank Belknap Long

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Chapter 1

The Coming of the Stone Beast

In a long, low-ceilinged room adorned with Egyptian Graeco-Roman, Minoan and Assyrian antiquities a thin, careless-seeming young man of twenty-six sat jubilantly humming. As nothing in his appearance or manner suggested the scholar—he wore gray tweeds of Ivy League cut, a pin-striped blue shirt with a buttoned-down collar and a ridiculously brilliant necktie—the uninitiated were inclined to regard him as a mere supernumerary in his own office. Strangers entered unannounced and called him “young man” at least twenty times a week, and he was frequently asked to convey messages to a non-existent superior. No one suspected, no one dreamed until he enlightened them, that he was the lawful custodian of the objects about him; and even when he revealed his identity people surveyed him with distrust and were inclined to suspect that he was ironically joking with them.

Algernon Harris was the young man’s name and postgraduate degrees from Yale and Oxford set him distinctly apart from the undistinguished majority. But it is to his credit that he never paraded his erudition, nor succumbed to the impulse—almost irresistible in a young man with academic affiliations—to put a Ph.D on the title page of his first book.

It was this book which had endeared him to the directors of the Manhattan Museum of Fine Arts and prompted their unanimous choice of him to succeed the late Halpin Chalmers as Curator of Archeology when the latter retired in the fall of the previous year.

In less than six months young Harris had exhaustively familiarized himself with the duties and responsibilities of his office and was becoming the most successful curator that the museum had ever employed. So boyishly ebullient was he, so consumed with investigative zeal, that his field workers contracted his enthusiasm as though it were a kind of fever

and sped from his presence to trust their scholarly and highly cultivated lives to the most primitive of native tribes in regions where an outsider was still looked upon with suspicion, and was always in danger of bringing down the thunder.

And now they were coming back—for days now they had been coming back—occasionally with haggard faces, and once or twice, unfortunately, with something radically wrong with them. The Symons tragedy was a case in point. Symons was a Chang Dynasty specialist, and he had been obliged to leave his left eye and a piece of his nose in a Buddhist temple near a place called Fen Chow Fu. But when Algernon questioned him he could only mumble something about a small malignant face with corpsy eyes that had glared and glared at him out of a purple mist. And Francis Hogarth lost eighty pounds and a perfectly good right arm somewhere between Lake Rudolph and Naivasha in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

But a few inexplicable and hence, from a scientific point of view, unfortunate occurrences were more than compensated for by the archeological treasures that the successful explorers brought back and figuratively dumped at Algernon's feet. There were mirrors of Graeco-Bactrian design and miniature tiger-dragons or too-tiehs from Central China dating from at least 200 B.C., enormous diorite Sphinxes from the Valley of the Nile, "Geometric" vases from Mycenaean Crete, incised pottery from Messina and Syracuse, linens and spindles from the Swiss Lakes, sculptured lintels from Yucatan and Mexico, Mayan and Manabi monoliths ten feet tall, Paleolithic Venuses from the rock caverns of the Pyrenees, and even a series of rare bilingual tablets in Hamitic and Latin from the site of Carthage.

It is not surprising that so splendid a gathering should have elated Algernon immoderately and impelled him to behave like a college junior at a fraternity-house jamboree. He addressed the attendants by their first names, slapped them boisterously upon their shoulders whenever they had occasion to approach him, and went roaming haphazardly about the building immersed in ecstatic reveries. So far indeed did he descend from his pedestal that even the directors were disturbed, and it is doubtful if anything short of the arrival of Clark Ulman could have jolted him out of it.

Ulman may have been aware of this, for he telephoned first to break the news mercifully. He had apparently heard of the success of the other

expeditions and hated infernally to intrude his skeleton at the banquet. Algernon, as we have seen, was humming, and the jingling of a phone-bell at his elbow was the first intimation he had of Ulman's return. Hastily detaching the receiver he pressed it against his ear and injected a staccato "What is it?" into the mouthpiece.

There ensued a silence. Then Ulman's voice, disconcertingly shrill, forced him to hold the receiver a little further from his ear. "I've got the god, Algernon, and I'll be over with it directly. I've three men helping me. It's four feet high and as heavy as granite. Oh, it's a strange, loathsome thing, Algernon. An unholy thing. I shall insist that you destroy it!"

"What's that?" Algernon raised his voice incredulously.

"You may photograph it and study it, but you've got to destroy it. You'll understand when you see what—*what I have become!*"

There came a hoarse sobbing, while Algernon struggled to comprehend what the other was driving at.

"It has wreaked its malice on me—on me..."

With a frown Algernon re-cradled the receiver and began agitatedly to pace the room. "The elephant-god of Tsang!" he muttered to himself. "The horror Richardson drew before—before they impaled him. It's unbelievable. Ulman has crossed the desert plateau on foot—he's crossed above the graves of Steelbrath, Takhan, McWilliams, Henley and Holmes. Richardson swore the cave was guarded night and day by hideous yellow abnormalities. I'm sure that's the phrase he used—abnormalities without faces—subhuman worshipers only vaguely man-like, in thrall to some malign wizardry. He averred they moved in circles about the idol on their hands and knees, and participated in a rite so foul that he dared not describe it.

"His escape was a sheer miracle. He had displayed extraordinary courage and endurance when they had tortured him, and it was merely because they couldn't kill him that the priest was impressed. A man who can curse valiantly after three days of agonizing torture must of necessity be a great magician and wonder-worker. But it couldn't have happened twice. Ulman could never have achieved such a break. He is too frail—a day on their cross would have finished him. They would never have released him and decked him out with flowers and worshipped him as a sort of subsidiary

elephant-god. Richardson predicted that no other white man would ever get into the cave alive. And as for getting out...

"I can't imagine how Ulman did it. If he encountered even a few of Richardson's beast-men it isn't surprising he broke down on the phone. 'Destroy the statue!' Imagine! Sheer insanity, that. Ulman is evidently in a highly nervous and excitable state and we shall have to handle him with gloves."

There came a knock at the door.

"I don't wish to be disturbed," shouted Algernon irritably.

"We've got a package for you, sir. The doorman said for us to bring it up here."

"Oh, all right. I'll sign for it."

The door swung wide and in walked three harshly-breathing shabbily dressed men staggering beneath a heavy burden.

"Put it down there," said Algernon, indicating a spot to the rear of his desk.

The men complied with a celerity that amazed him.

"Did Mr. Ulman send you?" he demanded curtly.

"Yes, sir." The spokesman's face had formed into a molding of relief. "The poor guy said he'd be here himself in half an hour."

Algernon started. "What kind of talk is that?" he demanded. "He doesn't happen to be a 'guy' but I'll pretend you didn't say it. Why the 'poor'? That's what I'm curious about."

The spokesman shuffled his feet. "It's on account of his face. There's something wrong with it. He keeps it covered and won't let nobody look at it."

"Good God!" murmured Algernon. "They've mutilated him!"

"What's that, sir? What did you say?"

Algernon collected himself with an effort. "Nothing. You may go now. The doorman will give you a dollar. I'll phone down and tell him."

Silently the men filed out. As soon as the door closed behind them Algernon strode into the center of the room and began feverishly to strip the wrapping from the thing on the floor. He worked with manifest misgivings, the distaste in his eyes deepening to disgust and horror as the massive idol came into view.

Words could not adequately convey the repulsiveness of the thing. It was endowed with a trunk and great, uneven ears, and two enormous tusks protruded from the corners of its mouth. But it was not an elephant. Indeed, its resemblance to an actual elephant was, at best, sporadic and superficial, despite certain unmistakable points of similarity. The ears were *webbed and tentacled*, the trunk terminated in a huge flaring disk at least a foot in diameter, and the tusks, which intertwined and interlocked at the base of the statue, were as translucent as rock crystal.

The pedestal upon which it squatted was of black onyx: the statue itself, with the exception of the tusks, had apparently been chiseled from a single block of stone, and was so hideously mottled and eroded and discolored that it looked, in spots, as though it had been dipped in sanies.

The thing sat bolt upright. Its forelimbs were bent stiffly at the elbow, and its hands—it had human hands—rested palms upward on its lap. Its shoulders were broad and square and its breasts and enormous stomach sloped outward, cushioning the trunk. It was as quiescent as a Buddha, as enigmatical as a sphinx, and as malignantly poised as a gorgon or cockatrice. Algernon could not identify the stone out of which it had been hewn, and its greenish sheen disturbed and puzzled him.

For a moment he stood staring uncomfortably into its little malign eyes. Then he shivered, and taking down a woolen scarf from the coat rack in the corner he cloaked securely the features which repelled him.

Ulman arrived unannounced. He advanced unobtrusively into the room and laid a tremulous hand on Algernon's shoulder. "Well, Algernon, how are you?" he murmured. "I—I'm glad to get back. Just to see—an old friend—is a comfort. I thought—but, well it doesn't matter. I was going to ask—to ask if you knew a good physician, but perhaps—I—I..."

Startled, Algernon glanced backward over his shoulder and straight into the other's eyes. He saw only the eyes, for the rest of Ulman's face was muffled by a black silk scarf. "Clark!" he exclaimed. "By God, but you gave me a start!"

Rising quickly, he sent his chair spinning against the wall and gripped his friend affectionately by the shoulders. "It's good to see you again, Clark," he said, with a warm cordiality in his voice. "It's good—why, what's the matter?"

Ulman had fallen upon his knees and was choking and gasping for breath.

“I should have warned you not to touch me,” he moaned. “I can’t stand—being touched.”

“But why...”

“The wounds haven’t healed,” he sobbed. “*It* doesn’t want them to heal. Every night it comes and lays—the disk on them. I can’t stand being touched.”

Algernon nodded sympathetically. “I can imagine what you’ve been through, Clark,” he said. “You must take a vacation. I’ll have a talk with the directors about you tomorrow. In view of what you’ve done for us I’m sure I can get you at least four months. You can go to Spain and finish your *Glimpses into Pre-History*. Paleontological anthropology is a soothing science, Clark. You’ll forget all about the perplexities of mere archeological research when you start poking about among bones and artifacts that haven’t been disturbed since the Pleistocene.”

Ulman had gotten to his feet and was staring at the opposite wall.

“You think that I have become—irresponsible?”

A look of sadness crept into Algernon’s eyes. “No, Clark. I think you’re merely suffering from—from non-psychotic, very transitory visual hallucinations. An almost unbearable strain can sometimes produce hallucinations when one’s sanity is in no way impaired, and considering what you’ve been through.”

“What I’ve been through!” Ulman caught at the phrase. “Would it interest you to know precisely what they did to me?”

Algernon nodded, meeting the other’s gaze steadily.

“Yes, Clark. I wish to hear everything.”

“They said that I must accompany Chaugnar Faugn into the world.”

“Chaugnar Faugn?”

“That is the name they worship *it* by. When I told them I had come from the United States they said that Great Chaugnar had *willed* that I should be his companion.

“‘It must be carried,’ they explained, ‘and it must be nursed. If it is nursed and carried safely beyond the rising sun it will possess the world. And then all things that are now in the world, all creatures and plants and stones will be devoured by Great Chaugnar. All things that are and have

been will cease to be, and Great Chaugnar will fill all space with its Oneness. Even its Brothers it will devour, its Brothers who will come down from the mountains ravening for ecstasy when it calls to them.’ They didn’t use precisely that term, because ‘ecstasy’ is a very sophisticated word, peculiar to our language. But that’s the closest I can come to it. In their own aberrant way they were the opposite of unsophisticated.

“I didn’t protest when they explained this to me. It was precisely the kind of break I had been hoping for. I had studied Richardson’s book, you see, and I had read enough between the lines to convince me that Chaugnar Faugn’s devotees were growing a little weary of it. It isn’t a very pleasant deity to have around. It has some regrettable and very nasty habits.”

A horror was taking shape in Ulman’s eyes.

“You must excuse my levity. When one is tottering on the edge of an abyss it isn’t always expedient to dispense with irony. Were I to become wholly serious for a moment, were I to let the—what I believe, what I know to be the truth behind all that I’m telling you coalesce into a definite construction in my mind I should go quite mad. Let us call them merely regrettable habits.

“I guessed, as I say, that the guardians of the cave were not very enthusiastic about retaining Chaugnar Faugn indefinitely. It made—depredations. The guardians would disappear in the night and leave their clothes behind them, and the clothes, upon examination, would yield something rather ghastly.

“But however much your savage may want to dispose of his god the thing isn’t always feasible. It would be the height of folly to attempt to send an omnipotent deity on a long journey without adequate justification. An angered god can take vengeance even when he is on the opposite side of the world. And that is why most barbarians who find themselves saddled with a deity they fear and hate are obliged to put up with it indefinitely.

“The only thing that can help them is a legend—some oral or written legend that will enable them to send their ogre packing without ruffling its temper. The devotees had such a legend. At a certain time, which the prophecy left gratifyingly indefinite, Chaugnar Faugn was to be sent out into the world. It was to be sent out to possess the world to its everlasting glory, and it was also written that those who sent it forth should be forever immune from its anger.

“I knew of the existence of this legend, and when I read Richardson and discovered what a vile and unpleasant customer the god was I decided I’d risk a trip across the desert plateau of Tsang.”

“You crossed on foot?” interrupted Algernon with undisguised admiration.

“There were no camels available,” assented Ulman. “I made it on foot. On the fourth day my water ran short and I was obliged to open a vein in my arm. On the fifth day I began to see mirages—probably of a purely hallucinatory nature. On the seventh day”—he paused and stared hard at Algernon—“on the seventh day I consumed the excrements of wild dogs.”

Algernon shuddered. “But you reached the cave?”

“I reached the cave. The—the faceless guardians whom Richardson described found me groveling on the sands in delirium a half-mile to the west of their sanctuary. They restored me by heating a flint until it was white-hot and laying it on my chest. If the high priest hadn’t interfered I should have shared Richardson’s fate.”

“Good God!”

“The high priest was called Chung Ga and he was devilishly considerate. He took me into the cave and introduced me to Chaugnar Faugn.

“You’ve Chaugnar there,” Ulman pointed to the enshrouded form on the floor, “and you can imagine what the sight of it squatting on its haunches at the back of an evil-smelling, atrociously lighted cave would do to a man who had not eaten for three days.

“I began to say very queer things to Chung Ga. I confided to him that Great Chaugnar Faugn was not just a lifeless statue in a cave, but a great universal god filling all space—that it had created the world in a single instant by merely expelling its breath, and that when eventually it decided to inhale, the world would disappear. ‘It also made this cave,’ I hastened to add, ‘and you are its chosen prophet.’

“The priest stared at me curiously for several moments without speaking. Then he approached the god and prostrated himself before it. ‘Chaugnar Faugn,’ he intoned, ‘the White Acolyte has confirmed that you are about to become a great universal god filling all space. He will carry you safely into the world, and nurse you until you have no further need of him. The prophecy of Mu Sang has been most gloriously fulfilled.’

“For several minutes he remained kneeling at the foot of the idol. Then he rose and approached me. ‘You shall depart with Great Chaugnar tomorrow,’ he said. ‘You shall become Great Chaugnar’s companion and nurse.’

“I felt a wave of gratitude for the man. Even in my befuddled state I was sensible that I had achieved a magnificent break. ‘I will serve him gladly,’ I murmured, ‘if only I may have some food.’

“Chung Ga nodded. ‘It is my wish that you eat heartily,’ he said. ‘If you are to nurse Great Chaugnar you must consume an infinite diversity of fruits. And the flesh of animals. Red blood—red blood is Chaugnar’s staff. Without it my god would suffer tortures no man could endure. It is impossible for a man to know how great can be the suffering of a god.’

“He tapped a drum and immediately I was confronted with a wooden bowl filled to the brim with pomegranate juice.

“‘Drink heartily,’ he urged. ‘I have reason to suspect that Chaugnar Faugn will be ravenous tonight.’

“I was so famished that I scarcely gave a thought to what he was saying and for fifteen minutes I consumed without discrimination everything that was set before me—evil-smelling herbs, ewe’s milk, eggs, peaches and the fresh blood of antelopes.

“The priest watched me in silence. At last when I could eat no more he went into a corner of the cave and returned with a straw mattress. ‘You have supped most creditably,’ he murmured, ‘and I wish you pleasant dreams.’

“With that he withdrew, and I crawled gratefully upon the mat. My strength was wholly spent and the dangers I still must face, the loathsome proximity of Great Chaugnar and the possibility that the priest had been deliberately playing a part and would return to kill me, were swallowed up in a physical urgency that bordered on delirium. Relaxing upon the straw I shut my eyes, and fell almost instantly into a deep sleep.

“I awoke with a start and a strange impression that I was not alone in the cave. Even before I opened my eyes I knew that something unspeakably malign was crouching or squatting on the ground beside me. I could hear it breathing in the darkness and the stench of it strangled the breath in my throat.

“Slowly, very slowly, I endeavored to rise. An unsurpassably ponderous weight descended upon my chest and hurled me to the ground. I stretched

out my hand to disengage it and met with an iron resistance. A solid wall of something cold, slimy and implacable rose up in the darkness to thwart me.

“In an instant I was fully awake and calling frantically for assistance. But no one came to me. And even as I screamed the wall descended perpendicularly upon me and lay clammily upon my chest. An odor of corruption surged from it and when I tore at it with my fingers it made a low, gurgling sound, which gradually increased in volume till it woke echoes in the low-vaulted ceiling.

“The thing had pinioned my arms, and the more I twisted and squirmed the more agonizingly it tightened about me. The constriction increased until breathing became a torture, until all my flesh palpitated with pain. I wriggled and twisted, and bit my lips through in an extremity of horror.

“Then, abruptly, the pressure ceased and I became aware of two unblinking, fish-white eyes glaring truculently at me through the darkness. Agonizingly I sat up and ran my hands over my chest and arms. My fingers encountered a warm wetness and with a hideous clarity it was borne in on me that the thing had been feasting on my blood! The revelation was very close to mind-shattering. I was on my feet in an instant, trying desperately not to succumb to panic, but knowing, deep in my mind, that it would be a losing battle.

“A most awful terror was upon me, and so unreasoning became my desire to escape from that fearsome, vampirish obscenity that I retreated straight toward the throne of Chaugnar Faugn.

“It loomed enormous in the darkness, a refuge and a sanctuary. The wild thought came to me that if I could scale the throne and climb upon the lap of the god the horror might cease to molest me. Malignant beyond belief it undoubtedly was. But I refused to credit it with more than animalistic intelligence. Even in that moment of infinite peril, as I groped shakingly toward the rear of the cave, my mind was evolving a conceit to account for it.

“It was undoubtedly, I told myself, some cave-lurking survival from the age of reptiles—some atavistic and predatory abnormality that had experienced no necessity to advance on the course of evolution. It is more than probable that all backboned animals above the level of fishes and amphibians originated in Asia, and I had recklessly conveyed myself to the hoariest section of that primeval continent. Was it after all so amazing that I

should have encountered, in a dark and inaccessible cave on a virtually uninhabited plateau, a reptilian predator endowed with the rapacity of that most hideous of blood-sucking animals—the vampire bat of the tropics?

“It was a just-short-of-destructive conceit and it sustained me and made my desperate groping for some kind of certainty seem the opposite of wasted until I reached the throne of Great Chaugnar. I fear that up to that instant my failure to suspect the truth was downright idiotic. There was only one adequate explanation for what had occurred. But it wasn’t until I actually ascended the throne and began to feel about in the darkness for the body of Chaugnar that the truth rushed in upon me.

“Great Chaugnar had forsaken its throne! It had descended into the cave and was roaming about in the darkness. In its vampirish explorations it had stumbled upon my sleeping form, and had felled me with its trunk so that it might satisfy its thirst for blood with quick and hideous ferocity.

“For an instant I crouched motionless upon the stone, screaming inwardly, feeling the darkness tightening about me like a shroud. Then, quickly, I began to descend. But I had not lowered more than my right leg when something ponderous collided with the base of the throne. The entire structure shook and I was almost hurled to the ground.

“I refuse to dwell on what happened after that. There are experiences too revolting for sane description. Were I to tell how the horror began slowly to mount, to recount at length how it heaved its slabby and mucid vastness to the pinnacle of its throne and began nauseatingly to breathe upon me, the slight uncertainty I now entertain as to my sanity would be dispelled in short order.

“Neither shall I describe how it picked me up in its corpse-cold hands and began detestably to maul me, and how I nearly fainted beneath the foulness which drooled from its mouth. Eventually it wearied of its malign sport. After sinking its slimy black nails into my throat and chest until the pain became almost unbearable, it experienced a sudden excess of wrath and hurled me violently from the pedestal.

“The fall stunned me and for many minutes I lay on my back on the stones, dimly conscious only of a furtive whispering in the darkness about me. Then, slowly, my vision cleared and under the guidance of some nebulous and sinister influence my eyes were drawn upward until they

encountered the pedestal from which I had fallen and the enormous, ropy bulk of Chagnar Faugn loathsomely waving his great trunk in the dawn.

“It isn’t surprising that when Chung Ga found me deliriously gibbering at the cavern’s mouth he was obliged to carry me into the sunlight and force great wooden spoonfuls of revivifying wine down my parched throat. If there was *anything* inexplicable in the sequel to that hideous nightmare it was the matter-of-fact reception which he accorded my story.

“He nodded his head sympathetically when I recounted my experiences on the throne, and assured me that the incident accorded splendidly with the prophecies of Mu Sang. ‘I was afraid,’ he said, ‘that Great Chagnar would not accept you as its companion and nurse—that it would destroy you as utterly as it has the guardians—more of the guardians than you might suppose, for a god is not motivated by our kind of expediency.’

“He studied me for a moment intensely. ‘No doubt you think me a superstitious savage, a ridiculous barbarian. Would it surprise you very much if I should tell you that I have spent eight years in England and that I am a graduate of the University of Oxford?’

“I could only stare at him in stunned disbelief for a moment, but so unbelievable and ghastly had been the coming to life of Chagnar Faugn that lesser wonders made little impression on me and my incredulity passed quickly. Had he told me that he had an eye in the middle of his back or a tail twenty feet long which he kept continuously coiled about his body I should have evinced little surprise. I doubt indeed if anything short of a universal cataclysm could have roused me from my dazed acceptance of revelations which, under ordinary circumstances, I should have dismissed as preposterous.

“‘It astonishes you perhaps that I should have cast my lot with filthy primitives in this loathsome place and that I should have so uncompromisingly menaced your countrymen.’ A wistfulness crept into his eyes. ‘Your Richardson was a brave man. Even Chagnar Faugn was moved to compassion by his valor. He gave no cry when we drove wooden stakes through his hands and impaled him. For three days he defied us. Then Chagnar tramped toward him in the night and set him at liberty.

“‘You may be sure that from that instant we accorded him every consideration. But to return to what you would undoubtedly call my

perverse and atavistic attitude. Why do you suppose I chose to serve Chaugnar?’

“His recapitulation of what he had done to Richardson had awakened in me a confused but violent resentment. ‘I don’t know,’ I muttered. ‘There are degrees of human vileness—’

“‘Spare me your opprobrium, I beg of you,’ he exclaimed. ‘It was Great Chaugnar speaking through me that dictated the fate of Richardson. I am merely Chaugnar’s interpreter and instrument. For generations my forebears have served Chaugnar, and I have never attempted to evade the duties that were delegated to me when our world was merely a thought in the mind of my god. I went to England and acquired a little of the West’s decadent culture merely that I might more worthily serve Chaugnar.

“‘Don’t imagine for a moment that Chaugnar is a beneficent god. In the West you have evolved certain amiabilities of intercourse, to which you presumptuously attach cosmic significance, such as truth, kindness, generosity, forbearance and honor, and you quaintly imagine that a god who is beyond good and evil and hence unamenable to your “ethics” can not be omnipotent.

“‘But how do you know that there *are* any beneficent laws in the universe, that the cosmos is friendly to man? Even in the mundane sphere of planetary life there is nothing to sustain such an hypothesis.

“‘Great Chaugnar is a terrible god, an utterly cosmic and unanthropomorphic god. It is akin to the fire mists and the primordial ooze, and before it incarnated itself in Time it contained within itself the past, the present and the future. Nothing was and nothing will be, but all things are. And Chaugnar Faugn was once the sum of all things that are.’

“I remained silent and a note of compassion crept into his voice. I think he perceived that I had no inclination to split hairs with him over the paradoxes of transcendental metaphysics.

“‘Chaugnar Faugn,’ he continued, ‘did not always dwell in the East. Many thousands of years ago it abode with its Brothers in a cave in Western Europe, and made from the flesh of toads a race of small dark shapes to serve it. In bodily contour these shapes resembled men, but they were incapable of speech and their thoughts were the thoughts of Chaugnar.

“The cave where Chaugnar dwelt was never visited by men, for it wound its twisted length through a high and inaccessible crag of the

mysterious Pyrenees, and all the regions beneath were rife with abominable hauntings.

“Twice a year Chagnar Faugn sent its servants into the villages that dotted the foothills to bring it the sustenance its belly craved. The chosen youths and maidens were preserved with spices and stored in the cave till Chagnar had need of them. And in the villages men would hurl their first-borns into the flames and offer prayers to their futile little gods, hoping thereby to appease the wrath of Chagnar’s mindless servants.

““But eventually there came into the foothills men like gods, stout, eagle-visaged men who carried on their shields the insignia of invincible Rome. They scaled the mountains in pursuit of the servants and awoke a cosmic foreboding in the mind of Chagnar.

““It is true that its Brethren succeeded without difficulty in exterminating the impious cohorts—exterminating them unspeakably—before they reached the cave, but it feared that rumors of the attempted sacrilege would bring legions of the empire-builders into the hills and that eventually its sanctuary would be defiled.

““So in ominous conclave it debated with its Brothers the advisability of flight. Rome was but a dream in the mind of Chagnar and it could have destroyed her utterly in an instant, but having incarnated itself in Time it did not wish to resort to violence until the prophecies were fulfilled.

““Chagnar and its Brothers conversed by means of thought-transference in an idiom incomprehensible to us and it would be both dangerous and futile to attempt to repeat the exact substance of their discourse. But it is recorded in the prophecy of Mu Sang that Great Chagnar spoke *approximately* as follows:

“““Our servants shall carry us eastward to the primal continent, and there we shall await the arrival of the White Acolyte.”

““His Brothers demurred. “We are safe here,” they affirmed. “No one will scale the mountains again, for the doom that came to Pompelo will reverberate in the dreams of prophets till Rome is less to be feared than moon-dim Ninevah, or Medusa-girdled Ur.”

““At that Great Chagnar waxed ireful and affirmed that it would go alone to the primal continent, leaving its Brothers to cope with the menace of Rome. “When the time-frames are dissolved I alone shall ascend in glory,” it told them. “All of you I shall devour before I ascend to the dark

altars. When the hour of my transfiguration approaches you will come down from the mountains cosmically athirst for That Which is Not to be Spoken of, but even as your bodies raven for the time-dissolving sacrament I shall consume them.”

“Then it called for the servants and had them carry it to this place. And it caused Mu Sang to be born from the womb of an ape and the prophecies to be written on imperishable parchment, and into the care of my fathers it surrendered its body.

“I rose gropingly to my feet. ‘Let me leave this place, I pleaded. ‘I respect your beliefs and I give you my solemn word I will never attempt to return. Your secrets are safe with me. Only let me go—

“Chung Ga’s features were convulsed with pity. ‘It is stated in the prophecy that you must be Chaugnar’s companion and accompany it to America. In a few days it will experience a desire to feed again. You must nurse it unceasingly.

“‘I am ill,’ I pleaded. ‘I can not carry Chaugnar Faugn across the desert plateau.’

“‘I will have the guardians assist you,’ murmured Chung Ga soothingly. ‘You shall be conveyed in comfort to the gates of Lhasa, and from Lhasa to the coast it is less than a week’s journey by caravan.

“I realized then how impossible it would be for me to depart without Great Chaugnar. ‘Very well, Chung Ga,’ I said. ‘I submit to the prophecy. Chaugnar shall be my companion and I shall nurse it as diligently as it desires.’

“There was a ring of insincerity in my speech which was not lost on Chung Ga. He approached very close to me and peered into my eyes. ‘If you attempt to dispose of my god,’ he warned, ‘its Brothers will come down from the mountains and tear you indescribably.’

“He saw perhaps that I wasn’t wholly convinced, for he added in an even more ominous tone, ‘It has laid upon you the mark and seal of a flesh-dissolving sacrament. Destroy it, and the sacrament will be consummated in an instant. The flesh of your body will turn black and melt like tallow in the sun. You will become a seething mass of corruption.’”

Ulman paused, a look of unutterable torment in his eyes. “There isn’t much more to my story, Algernon. The guardians carried us safely to Lhasa and a fortnight later I reached the Bay of Bengal, accompanied by half a

hundred ragged, gaunt-visaged mendicants from the temples of obscure Indian villages. There was something about our caravan that had attracted them. And all during the voyage from Bengal to Hong Kong the Indian and Tibetan members of our crew would steal stealthily to my cabin at night and look in on me, and I had never before seen human faces quite so distorted with superstitious terror.

“Don’t imagine for a moment that I didn’t share their awe and fear of the thing I was compelled to companion. Continuously I longed to carry it on deck and cast it into the sea. Only the memory of Chung Ga’s warning and the thought of what might happen to me if I disregarded it kept me chained and submissive.

“It was not until weeks later, when I had left the Indian and most of the Pacific Ocean behind me, that I discovered how unwise I had been to heed his vile threats. If I had resolutely hurled Chaugnar into the sea the shame and the horror might never have come upon me!”

Ulman’s voice was rising, becoming shrill and hysterical. “Chaugnar Faugn is an awful and mysterious being, a repellent and obscene and lethal being, but how do I know that it is omnipotent? Chung Ga may have maliciously lied to me. Chaugnar Faugn may be merely an extension or distortion of inanimate nature. Some hideous *process*, as yet unobserved and unexplained by the science of the West, may be obnoxiously at work in desert places all over our planet to produce such fiendish anomalies. Perhaps parallel to protoplasmic life on the earth’s crust is this other aberrant and hidden life—the revolting sentiency of stones that aspire, of earth-shapes, parasitic and bestial, that wax agile in the presence of man.

“Did not Cuvier believe that there had been not one but an infinite number of ‘creations,’ and that as our earth cooled after its departure from the sun a succession of vitalic phenomena appeared on its surface? Conceding as we must the orderly and continuous development of protoplasmic life from simple forms, which Cuvier stupidly and ridiculously denied, is it not still conceivable that another evolutionary cycle may have preceded the one which has culminated in us? A non-protoplasmic cycle?

“Whether we accept the planetismal or the three or four newer theories of planetary formation it is permissible to believe that the earth coalesced very swiftly into a compact mass after the segregation of its constituents in

space and that it achieved sufficient crustal stability to support animate entities one, or two, or perhaps even five billion years ago.

“I do not claim that life *as we know it* would be possible in the earliest phases of planetary consolidation, but is it possible to assert dogmatically that beings possessed of intelligence and volition could not have evolved in a direction merely parallel to the cellular? Life as we know it is complexly bound up with such substances as chlorophyll and protoplasm, but does that preclude that possibility of an evolved sentiency in other forms of matter?

“How do we know that stones cannot think; that the earth beneath our feet may not once have been endowed with a hideous intelligence? Entire cycles of animate evolution may have occurred on this planet before the most primitive of ‘living’ cells were evolved from the slime of warm seas.

“There may have been eons of—experiments! Three billion years ago in the fiery radiance of the rapidly condensing earth who knows what monstrous shapes crawled—or shambled?

“And how do we know that there are not survivals? Or that somewhere beneath the stars of heaven complex and hideous processes are not still at work, shaping the inorganic into forms of primal malevolence?

“And what more inevitable than that some such primiparous spawn should have become in my eyes the apotheosis of all that was fiendish and accursed and unclean, and that I should have ascribed to it the attributes of divinity, and imagined in a moment of madness that it was immune to destruction? I should have hurled it into the depths of the seas and risked boldly the fulfillment of Chung Ga’s prophecy. For even had it proved itself omnipotent and omniscient by rising in fury from the waves or summoning its Brothers to destroy me I should have suffered indescribably for no more than a moment.”

Ulman’s voice had risen to a shrill scream. “I should have passed quickly enough into the darkness had I encountered merely the wrath of Chaugnar Faugn. It was not the fury but the forbearance of Chaugnar that has wrought an uncleanliness in my body’s flesh, and blackened and shriveled my soul, till a furious hate has grown up in me for all that the world holds of serenity and joy.”

Ulman’s voice broke and for a moment there was silence in the room. Then, with a sudden, convulsive movement of his right arm he uncloaked the whole of his face.

He was standing very nearly in the center of the office and the light from its eastern window illumed with a hideous clarity all that remained of his features. But Algernon didn't utter a sound, for all that the sight was appalling enough to revolt a corpse. He simply clung shakingly to the desk and waited with ashen lips for Ulman to continue.

"It came to me again as I slept, drinking its fill, and in the morning I woke to find that the flesh of my body had grown fetid and loathsome, and that my face—my face..."

"Yes, Clark, I understand." Algernon's voice was vibrant with compassion. "I'll get you some brandy."

Ulman's eyes shown with an awful light.

"Do you believe me?" he cried. "Do you believe that Chaugnar Faugn has wrought this uncleanliness?"

Slowly Algernon shook his head. "No, Clark. Chaugnar Faugn is nothing but a stone idol, sculptured by some Asian artist with quite exceptional talent, however primitive he may have been in other respects. I believe that Chung Ga kept you under the influence of some potent drug until he had—had cut your face, and that he also hypnotized you and suggested every detail of the story you have just told me. I believe you are still actually under the spell of that hypnosis."

"When I boarded the ship at Calcutta there was nothing wrong with my face!" shrilled Ulman.

"Conceivably not. But some minion of the priest may have administered the drug and performed the operation on shipboard. I can only guess at what happened, of course, but it is obvious that you are the victim of some hideous charlatantry. I've visited India, Clark, and I have a very keen respect for the hypnotic endowments of the Oriental. It's ghastly and unbelievable how much a Hindoo or a Tibetan can accomplish by simple suggestion."

"I feared—I feared that you would doubt!" Ulman's voice had risen to a shriek. "But I swear to you..."

The sentence was never finished. A hideous pallor overspread the archeologist's face, his jaw sagged and into his eyes there crept a look of panic fight. For a second he stood clawing at his throat, like a man in the throes of an epileptic fit.

Then something, some invisible force, seemed to propel him backward. Choking and gasping he staggered against the wall and threw out his arms

in a gesture of frantic appeal. “Keep it off!” he sobbed. “I can’t breathe. I can’t...”

With a cry Algernon leapt forward, but before he reached the other’s side the unfortunate man had sunk to the floor and was moaning and gibbering and rolling about in a most sickening way.

Chapter 2

The Atrocity at the Museum

Algernon Harris emerged from the B.M.T. subway at the Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue entrance and began nervously to pace the sidewalk in front of a large yellow sign, which bore the discouraging caption: “Buses do not stop here.” Harris was most eager to secure a bus and it was obvious from the expectant manner in which he hailed the first one to pass that he hadn’t the faintest notion he had taken up his post on the wrong side of the street. Indeed, it was not until four buses had passed him by that he awoke to the gravity of his predicament and began to propel his person in the direction of the legitimate stop-zone.

Algernon Harris was abnormally and tragically upset. But even a man trembling on the verge of a neuropathic collapse can remain superficially politic, and it isn’t surprising that when he ascended into his bus and encountered on a conspicuous seat his official superior, Doctor George Francis Scollard, he should have nodded, smiled and responded with an unwavering amiability to the questions that were shot at him.

“I got your telegram yesterday,” murmured the president of the Manhattan Museum of Fine Arts, “and I caught the first train down. Am I too late for the inquest?”

Algernon nodded. “The coroner—a chap named Henry Weigal—took my evidence and rendered a decision on the spot. The condition of Ulman’s body would not have permitted of delay. I never before imagined that—that putrefaction could proceed with such incredible rapidity.”

Scollard frowned. “And the verdict?”

“Heart failure. The coroner was very positive that anxiety and shock were the sole causes of Ulman’s total collapse.”

“But you said something about his face being horribly disfigured.”

“Yes. It had been rendered loathsome by—by plastic surgery. Weigal was hideously agitated until I explained that Ulman had merely fallen into the hands of a skillful Oriental surgeon with sadistic inclination in the course of his archeological explorations. I explained to him that many of our field workers returned slightly disfigured and that Ulman had merely endured an exaggeration of the customary martyrdom.”

“And you believe that plastic surgery could account for the repellent and gruesome changes you mentioned in your night-letter—the shocking prolongation of the poor devil’s nose, the flattening and broadening of his ears...”

Algernon winced. “I must believe it, sir. It is impossible sanely to entertain any other explanation. The coroner’s assistant was a little incredulous at first, until Weigal pointed out to him what an unwholesome precedent they would set by even so much as hinting that the phenomenon wasn’t pathologically explicable. ‘We would play right into the hands of the spiritualists,’ Weigal explained. ‘An officer of the police isn’t at liberty to adduce an hypothesis that the district attorney’s office wouldn’t approve of. The newspapers would pounce on a thing like that and play it up disgustingly. Mr. Harris has supplied us with an explanation which seems adequately to cover the facts, and with your permission I shall file a verdict of natural death.’”

The president coughed and shifted uneasily in his seat. “I am glad that the coroner took such a sensible view of the matter. Had he been a recalcitrant individual and raised objections we should have come in for considerable unpleasant publicity. I shudder whenever I see a reference to the Museum in the popular press. It is always the morbid and sensational aspects of our work that they stress and there is never the slightest attention paid to accuracy.”

For a long moment Dr. Scollard was silent. Then he cleared his throat, and recapitulated, in a slightly more emphatic form, the question that he had put to Algernon originally. “But you said in your letter that Ulman’s nose revolted and sickened you—that it had become a loathsome greenish trunk almost a foot in length which continued to move about for hours after Ulman’s heart stopped beating. Could—could your operation hypothesis account for such an appalling anomaly?”

Algernon took a deep breath. "I can't pretend that I wasn't astounded and appalled and—and frightened. And so lost to discretion that I made no attempt to conceal the way I felt from the coroner. I could not remain in the room while they were examining the body."

"And yet you succeeded in convincing the coroner that he could justifiably render a verdict of natural death!"

"You misunderstood me, sir. The coroner wanted to render such a verdict. My explanation merely supplied him with a straw to clutch at. I was trembling in every limb when I made it and it must have been obvious to him that we were in the presence of something unthinkable. But without the plastic surgery assumption we should have had nothing whatever to cling to."

"And do you still give your reluctant assent to such an assumption?"

"Now more than ever. And my assent is no longer reluctant, for I've succeeded in convincing myself that a surgeon endowed with miraculous skill could have effected the transformation I described in my letter."

"Miraculous skill?"

"I use the word in a merely mundane sense. When one stops to consider what astounding advances plastic surgery has made in England and America during the past decade it is impossible to disbelieve that the human frame will soon become more malleable than wax beneath the scalpels of our surgeons and that beings will appear in our midst with bodies so grotesquely distorted that the superstitious will ascribe their advent to the supernatural.

"And we can adduce *more* than a surgical 'miracle' to account for the horror that poor Ulman became without for a moment encroaching on the dubious domain of the super-physical. Every one knows how extensively the ductless glands regulate the growth and shape of our bodies. A change in the quantity or quality of secretion in any one of the glands may throw the entire human mechanism out of gear. Terrible and unthinkable changes have been known to occur in the adult body during the course of diseases involving glandular instability. We once thought that human beings invariably ceased to grow at twenty-one or twenty-two, but we now know that growth may continue till middle age, and even till the very onset of senility, and that frequently such growth does not culminate in a mere increase in stature or in girth.

“Doubtless you have heard of that rare, and hideously deforming glandular malady acromegaly. It is characterized by an abnormal over-growth of the skull and face, and the small bones of the extremities, and its victims become in a short time tragic caricatures of humanity. The entire face assumes a more massive cast but the over-growth is most pronounced in the region of the jawbones. In exceptional cases the face has been known to attain a length of nearly a foot. But it is not so much the size as the revolting primitiveness of the face which sets the victims of this hideous disease so tragically apart from their fellows. The features not only grow, but they take on an almost apelike aspect, and as the disease advances even the skull becomes revoltingly simian in its conformation. In brief, the victims of acromegaly become in short while almost indistinguishable from very primitive and brutish types of human ancestors, such as *Homo neanderthalensis* and the unmentionable, enormous-browed caricature from Broken Hill, Rhodesia, which Sir Arthur Keith has called the most unqualifiedly repulsive physiognomy in the entire gallery of fossil men.

“The disease of acromegaly is perhaps a more certain indication of man’s origin than all the ‘missing links’ that anthropologists have exhumed. It proves incontestably that we still carry within our bodies the mechanism of evolutionary retrogression, and that when something interferes with the normal functioning of our glands we are very apt to return, at least physically, to our aboriginal status.

“And since we know that a mere insufficiency or superabundance of glandular secretions can work such devastating changes, can turn men virtually into Neanderthals, or great apes, what is there really unaccountable in the alteration I witnessed in poor Ulman?

“Some Oriental diabolist merely ten years in advance of the West in the sphere of plastic surgery and with a knowledge of glandular therapeutics no greater than that possessed by Doctors Noel Paton and Schafer might easily have wrought such an abomination. Or suppose, as I have hinted before, that no surgery was involved, suppose that this fiend has learned so much about our glands that he can send men back and back through the mists of time—back past the great apes and the primitive mammals and the carnivorous dinosaurs to their primordial sires! Suppose—it is an awful thought, I know—suppose that some creature closely resembling what Ulman became was *once* our ancestor, that a hundred million years ago a

gigantic batrachian shape with trunk-like appendages and great flapping ears paddled through the warm primeval seas or stretched its leathery length on banks of Permian slime!”

Dr. Scollard turned sharply and plucked at his subordinate’s sleeve. “There’s a crowd in front of the Museum,” he muttered. “See there!”

Algernon started, and rising instantly, pressed the signal bell above his companion’s head. “We’ll have to walk back,” he muttered despondently. “I should have watched the street numbers.”

His pessimism proved well-founded. The bus continued relentlessly on its way for four additional blocks and then came so abruptly to a stop that Dr. Scollard was subjected to the ignominy of being obliged to sit for an instant on the spacious lap of a middle-aged stout woman who resented the encroachment with a furious glare.

“I’ve a good mind to report you,” he shouted to the bus conductor as he lowered his portly person to the sidewalk. “I’ve a damn good mind...”

“Let it pass, sir.” Algernon laid a pacifying arm on his companion’s arm. “We’ve got no time to argue. Something dreadful has occurred at the Museum. I just saw two policemen enter the building. And those tall men walking up and down on the opposite side of the street are reporters. There’s Wells of the *Tribune* and Thompson of the *Times*, and...”

Dr. Scollard gripped his subordinate’s arm. “Tell me,” he demanded, “did you put the—the statue on *exhibition*?”

Algernon nodded. “I had it carried to Alcove K, Wing C last night. After the inquest on poor Ulman I was besieged by reporters. They wanted to know all about the fetish, and of course I had to tell them that it would go on exhibition eventually. They would have returned every day for weeks to pester me if I hadn’t assured them that we’d respect the public clamor to that extent at least.

“Yesterday afternoon all the papers ran specials about it. The *News-Graphic* gave it a front-page write-up. I remained at my office until eleven, and all evening at half-minute intervals some emotionally overcharged numbskull would ring up and ask me when I was going to exhibit the thing and whether it really looked as repulsive as its photographs, and what kind of stone it was made of and—oh, God! I was too nervous and wrought-up to be bothered that way and I decided it would be best to satisfy the public’s idiotic curiosity by permitting them to view the thing today.”

The two men were walking briskly in the direction of the Museum.

“Besides, there was no longer any necessity of my keeping it in the office. I had had it measured and photographed and I knew that Harrison and Smithstone wouldn’t want to take a cast of it until next week. And I couldn’t have chosen a safer place for it than Alcove K. It’s roped off, you know, and only two paces removed from the door. Cinney can see it all night from his station in the corridor.”

By the time that Algernon and Dr. Scollard arrived at the Museum the crowd had reached alarming proportions. They were obliged to fight their way through a solid phalanx of excited men and women who impeded their progress with elbow-thrusting aggressiveness, and scant respect for their dignity. And even in the vestibules they were repulsed with discourtesy.

A red-headed policeman glared savagely at them from behind horn-rimmed spectacles and brought them to a halt with a threatening gesture. “You’ve got to keep out!” he shouted. “If you ain’t got a police card you’ve got to keep out!”

“What’s happened here?” demanded Algernon authoritatively.

“A guy’s been bumped off. If you ain’t got a police card you’ve got to...”

Algernon produced a calling-card and thrust it into the officer’s face. “I’m the curator of archeology,” he affirmed angrily. “I guess I’ve got a right to enter my own museum.”

The officer’s manner softened perceptibly. “Then I guess it’s all right. The chief told me I wasn’t to keep out any of the guys that work here. How about your friend?”

“You can safely admit him,” murmured Algernon with a smile. “He’s president of the Museum.”

The policeman did not seem too astonished. He regarded Dr. Scollard dubiously for a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders and stepped complacently aside.

An attendant greeted them excitedly as they emerged from the turnstile. “It’s awful, sir,” he gasped, addressing Dr. Scollard. “Cinney has been murdered—knifed, sir. He’s all cut and mangled. I shouldn’t have recognized him if it weren’t for his clothes. There’s nothing left on his face, sir.”

Algernon turned pale. “When—when did this happen?” he gasped.

The attendant shook his head. "I can't say, Mr. Harris. It must've been some time last night, but I can't say exactly when. The first we knew of it was when Mr. Williams came running down the stairs with his hands all bloodied. That was at eight this morning, about two hours ago. I'd just got in, and all the other attendants were in the cloak room getting into their uniforms. That is, all except Williams. Williams usually arrives about a half-hour before the rest of us. He likes to come early and have a chat with Cinney before the doors open."

The attendant's face was convulsed with terror and he spoke with considerable difficulty. "I was the only one to see him come down the stairs. I was standing about here and as soon as he came into sight I knew that something was wrong with him. He went from side to side of the stairs and clung to the rails to keep himself from falling. And his face was as white as paper."

Algernon's eyes did not leave the attendant's face. "Go on," he urged.

"He opened his mouth very wide when he saw me. It was like as if he wanted to shout and couldn't. There wasn't a sound came out of him."

The attendant cleared his throat. "I didn't think he'd ever reach the bottom of the stairs and I called out for the boys in the cloak room to lend me a hand."

"What happened then?"

"He didn't speak for a long time. One of the boys gave him some whisky out of a flask and the rest of us just stood about and said soothing things to him. But he was trembling all over and we couldn't quiet him down. He kept throwing his head about and pointing toward the stairs. And foam collected all over his mouth. It was ghastly.

"What's wrong, Jim?" I said to him. "What did you see?"

"The worm of hell!" he said. "The Devil's awful mascot!" He said other things I can't repeat, sir. I'm a God-fearing man, and there are blasphemies it's best to forget you ever heard. But I'll tell you what he said when he got through talking about the worm out of hell. He said: 'Cinney's upstairs stretched out on his back and there ain't a drop of blood in his veins.'

"We got up the stairs quicker than lightning after he'd told us that. We didn't know just what his crazy words meant, but the blood on his hands made us sure that something pretty terrible had happened. They kind of

confirmed what we feared, sir—if you get what I mean.” Algernon nodded. “And you found Cinney—dead?”

“Worse than that, sir. All black and shrunken and looking as though he’d been wearing clothes about four sizes too large for him. His face was all gone, sir—all eaten away, like. We picked him up—he wasn’t much heavier than a little boy—and laid him out on a bench in Corridor H. I never seen so much blood in my life—the floor was all slippery with it. And the big stone animal you had us carry down to Alcove K last night was all dripping with it, ’specially its trunk. It made me sort of sick. I never like to look at blood.”

“You think someone attacked Cinney?”

“It looked that way, Mr. Harris. Like as if some one went for him with a knife. It must have been an awful big knife—a regular butcher’s knife. That ain’t a very nice way of putting it, sir, but that’s how it struck me. Like as if some one mistook him for a piece of mutton.”

“And what else did you find when you examined him?”

“We didn’t do much examining. We just let him lie on the bench till we got through phoning for the police. Mr. Williams did all the talking, sir.” A look of relief crept into the attendant’s eyes. “The police said we wasn’t to disturb the body further, which suited us fine. There wasn’t one of us didn’t want to give poor Mr. Cinney a wide berth.”

“And what did the police do when they arrived?”

“Asked us about a million crazy questions, sir. Was Mr. Cinney disfigured in the war? And was Mr. Cinney in the habit of wearing a mask over his face? And had Mr. Cinney received any threatening letters from Chinamen or Hindoos? And when we told them no, they seemed to get kind of frightened. ‘If it ain’t murder,’ they said, ‘we’re up against something that ain’t natural. But it’s got to be murder. All we have to do is get hold of the Chinaman.’”

Algernon didn’t wait to hear more. Brushing the attendant ungratefully aside he went dashing up the stairs three steps at a time. Dr. Scollard followed with ashen face.

They were met in the upper corridor by a tall, loose-jointed man in shabby, ill-fitting clothes who arrested their progress with a scowl and a torrent of impatient abuse. “Where do you think you’re going?” he demanded. “Didn’t I give orders that no one was to come up here? I’ve got

nothing to say to you. You're too damn nosy. If you want the lowdown on this affair you've got to wait outside till we get through questioning the attendants."

"See here," said Algernon impatiently. "This gentleman is president of the Museum and he has a perfect right to go where he chooses."

The tall man waxed apologetic. "I thought you were a couple of newspaper Johns," he murmured confusedly. "We haven't anything even remotely resembling a clue, but those guys keep popping in here every ten minutes to cross-examine us. They're worse than prosecuting attorneys. Come right this way, sir."

He led them past a little knot of attendants and photographers and fingerprint experts to the northerly part of the corridor. "There's the body," he said, pointing toward a sheeted form which lay sprawled on a low bench near the window. "I'd be grateful if you gentlemen would look at the poor lad's face."

Algernon nodded, and lifting a corner of the sheet peered for an instant intently into what remained of poor Cinney's countenance. Then, with a shudder, he surrendered his place to Dr. Scollard.

It is to Dr. Scollard's credit that he did not cry out. Only the trembling of his lower lip betrayed the revulsion which filled him.

"He was found on the floor in the corridor about two hours ago," explained the detective. "But the guy who found him isn't here. They've got him in a straitjacket down at Bellevue, and it doesn't look as though he'll be much help to us. He was yelling his head off about something he said came out of hell when they put him in the ambulance. That's what drew the crowd."

"You don't think Williams could have done it?" murmured Algernon.

"Not a chance. But he saw the murderer all right, and if we can get him to talk..." He wheeled on Algernon abruptly. "You seem to know something about this, sir."

"Only what we picked up downstairs. We had a talk with one of the attendants and he explained about Williams—and the Chinaman."

The detective's eyes glowed. "The Chinaman? What Chinaman? Is there a Chinaman mixed up in this? It's what I've been thinking all along, but I didn't have much to go on."

“I fear we’re becoming involved in a vicious circle,” said Algernon. “It was your Chinaman I was referring to. Willy said you were laboring under the impression that all you had to do to solve this distressing affair was to catch a Chinaman.”

The detective shook his head. “It’s not as simple as that,” he affirmed. “We haven’t any positive evidence that a Chinaman did it. It might have been a Jap or Hindoo or even a South Sea Islander. That is, if South Sea Islanders eat rice!”

“Rice?” Algernon stared at the detective incredulously.

“That’s right. In a bowl with long sticks. I’m no authority on eternalogy, but it’s my guess they don’t use chopsticks much outside of Asia.”

He went into Alcove K and returned with a wooden bowl and two long splinters of wood. “All those dark spots near the rim are blood stains,” he explained, as he surrendered the gruesome exhibits to Algernon. “Even the rice is all smeared with blood.” Algernon shuddered and passed the bowl to Scollard, who almost dropped it in his haste to return it to the detective.

“Where did you find it?” The president spoke in a subdued whisper.

“On the floor in front of the big stone elephant. That’s where Cinney was killed. There’s blood all over the elephant—if it’s supposed to be an elephant.”

“It isn’t, strictly speaking, an elephant,” said Algernon. “Well, whatever it is, it could tell us what Cinney’s murderer looked like. I’d give the toes off my left foot if it could talk.”

“It doesn’t talk,” said Algernon decisively.

“I wasn’t wisecracking,” admonished the detective. “I was simply pointing out that that elephant could give us the lowdown on a mighty nasty murder.”

Algernon accepted the rebuke in silence.

“There ain’t no doubt whatever that a Chinaman or Hindoo or some crazy foreigner sneaked in here last night, set himself down in front of that elephant and began eating rice. Maybe he was in a church-going mood and mistook the beast for one of his heathen gods. It kind of looks like an oriental idol—the ferocious-looking kind you sometimes see in Chinatown store windows.”

Algernon smiled ironically. “But unquestionably unique,” he murmured.

The detective nodded. "Yeah. Larger and uglier-looking, but a heathen statue for all that. I bet it actually was worshipped once. Hindu...Chinese... I wouldn't know. But it sure has that look."

"Yes," admitted Algernon, "it is indubitably in the religious tradition. For all its hideousness it has all the earmarks of a quiescent Eastern divinity."

"There ain't anything more dangerous than interfering with an Oriental when he's saying his prayers," continued the detective. "I've been in Chinatown raids, and I know. Now here's what I think happened. Cinney is standing in the corridor and suddenly he hears the Chinaman muttering and mumbling to himself in the dark. He's naturally frightened and so he rushes in with his pocket light where an angel would be fearing to tread. The light gets in the Chinaman's eyes and sets him off."

"It's like putting a match to a ton of TNT to throw a light on a Chinaman when he's squatting in the dark in a worshipful mood. So the Chinaman goes for the kid with a knife. He feels outraged in a religious way, isn't really himself, thinks he's avenging an insult to the idol."

Algernon nodded impatiently. "There may be something in your theory, sergeant. But there's a great deal it doesn't explain. What was it that Williams saw?"

"Nothing but Cinney lying dead in the corridor. Nothing but Cinney looking up at him without a face and that awful heathen animal looking down at him with blood all over its mouth."

Algernon stared. "Blood on its mouth?"

"Sure. All over its mouth, trunk and tusks. Never seen so much blood in my life. That's what Williams saw. I don't wonder it crumpled the kid up."

There was a commotion in the corridor. Someone was sobbing and pleading in a most fantastic way a few yards from where the three men were standing. The detective turned and shouted a curt command. "Whoever that is, bring him here!"

Came an appalling, ear-harassing shriek and two plain-clothesmen emerged around a bend in the corridor with a diminutive and weeping Oriental spread-eagled between their extended arms.

"The Chinaman!" muttered Scollard in amazement. For a second the detective was too startled to move, and his immobility somehow

emboldened the Chinese to break from his captors and prostrate himself on the floor at Algernon's feet.

"You are my friend," he sobbed. "You are a very good man. I saw you in green-fire dream. In dream when big green animals came down from mountain I saw you and Gautama Siddhartha. Big green animals all wanted blood—all very much wanted blood. In dream Gautama Siddhartha said: 'They want you! They have determined they make you all dark fire glue.'

"I said, 'No! *Please*,' I said. Then Gautama Siddhartha let fall jewel of wisdom. 'Go to *museum*. Go to big *museum* round block, and big green animal will eat you quick. He will eat you quick—before he make American man dark fire glue.'

"All night I have sat here. All night I said: 'Eat me. *Please!*' But big green animal slept till American man came. Then he moved. Very quickly he moved. He gave American man very bad hug. American man screamed and big green animal drank all American man's blood."

The little Oriental was sobbing unrestrainedly. Algernon stooped and lifted him gently to his feet. "What is your name?" he asked, to soothe him. "Where do you live?"

"I'm boss big laundry down street," murmured the Chinaman. "My name is Hsieh Ho. I am a good man, like you."

"Where did you go when—when the elephant came to life?"

The Chinaman's lower lip trembled convulsively. "I hid back of big white lady."

In spite of the gravity of the situation Algernon couldn't repress a smile. The "big white lady" was a statue of Venus Erycine and so enormous was it that it occupied almost the whole of Alcove K. It was a perfect sanctuary, but there was something ludicrously incongruous in a Chinaman's seeking refuge in such a place.

One of the detectives, however, confirmed the absurdity. "That's why we found him, sir. He was lying on his back, wailing and groaning and making faces at the ceiling. He's our man, all right. We'll have the truth out of him in ten minutes."

The chief sergeant nodded. "You bet we will. Put the bracelets on him, Jim."

Reluctantly Algernon surrendered Hsieh Ho to his captors. "I suggest you treat him kindly," he said. "He had the misfortune to witness a ghastly

and unprecedented exaggeration of what Eddington would call the random element in nature. But he's as destitute of criminal proclivities as Dr. Scollard here."

The detective raised his eyebrows. "I don't get it, sir. Are you suggesting we just hold him as a material witness?"

Algernon nodded. "If you try any of your revolting third-degree tactics on that poor little man you'll answer in court to my lawyer. Now, if you don't mind, I'll have a look at Alcove K."

The detective scowled. He wanted to tell Algernon to go to hell, but somehow the inflection of authority in the latter's voice glued the invective to his tongue, and with a surly shrug he escorted the group into the presence of Chaugnar Faugn.

Sanguinary baptism becomes some gods. Were the gracious figures of the Grecian pantheon to appear to us with blood upon their garments we should recoil in horror, but we should think the terrible Mithra or the heart-devouring Huitzilopochtli a trifle unconvincing if they came on our dreams untarnished by the ruddy vintage of sacrifice.

Algernon did not at first look directly at Chaugnar Faugn. He studied the tiled marble floor about the base of the idol and tried to make out in the gloom the precise spot where Cinney had lain. The attempt proved confusing. There were dark smudges on almost every other tile and they were nearly all of equal circumference.

"Right there is where he found the corpse," said the detective impatiently. "Right beneath the trunk of the elephant."

Algernon's blood ran cold. Slowly, very slowly, for he feared to confront what stood before him, he raised his eyes until they were level with the detective's shoulders. The detective's shoulders concealed a portion of Chaugnar Faugn, but all of the thing's right side and the extremity of its trunk were hideously visible to Algernon as he stared. He spoke no word. He did not even move. But all of the blood drained out of his lips, leaving them ashen.

Dr. Scollard was staring at his subordinate with frightened eyes. "You act as though—as though—good God, man, what is it?"

"It has moved its trunk!" Algernon's voice was vibrant with horror. "It has moved its trunk since—since yesterday. And most hideously. I can not

be mistaken. Yesterday it was vertical—today it is in a slightly upraised position.”

Dr. Scollard gasped. “Are you sure?” he muttered. “Are you absolutely certain that the trunk wasn’t in that position when the god arrived here?”

“Yes, yes. Not until today. In the excitement no one has noticed it, but if you will call the attendants—wait!”

The president had started to do that very thing, but Algernon’s admonition brought him up short. “I shouldn’t have suggested that,” he murmured in Scollard’s ear. “The attendants mustn’t be questioned. It’s all too unutterably ghastly and inexplicable and—and mad. We’ve got to keep it out of the papers, seek a solution secretly. I know some one who may be able to help us. The police can’t. That’s obvious.”

The detective was staring at them pityingly. “You gentlemen better get out of here,” he said. “You aren’t used to sights like this. When I was new at this game I made a lot of mistakes. I could hardly stand the sight of a dead man, for instance. Used to hurry things along when there was no real need for haste, which is just about the worst mistake you can make at the preliminary examination stage.”

With an effort Algernon mastered his agitation. “You’re right, sergeant,” he said. “Dr. Scollard and I realize that this business is a little too disturbing for sane contemplation. So we’ll retire, as you suggest. But I must warn you again that you’d better think twice about treating poor Hsieh Ho as a convicted murderer.”

In the corridor he drew Dr. Scollard aside and conversed for a moment urgently in a low voice. Then he approached the detective and handed him a card. “If you want me within the next few hours you’ll find me at this address,” he said. “Dr. Scollard is returning to his home in Brooklyn. You’ll find his phone number in the directory, but I hope you won’t disturb him unless something really grave turns up.”

The detective nodded and read aloud the address on Algernon’s card. “Dr. Henry C. Imbert, F.R.S., F. A. G. S.”

“A friend of yours?” he asked impertinently.

Algernon nodded. “Yes, sergeant. The foremost American ethnologist. Ever hear of him?”

To Algernon’s amazement the sergeant nodded. “Yes. I got kind of interested in ethnology once. I was on a queer case about two years ago. An

old lady got bumped off by a poisoned arrow and we had him in for a powwow. He's clever all right. He gave us all the dope soon as he saw the corpse. Said a little negro had done it—one of those African pigmies you read about. We followed up the tip and caught the murderer just as he was giving the little fellow a cyanide cigarette to smoke. He was a shrewd Italian. He got the pigmy in Africa, hid him in a room down on Houston Street and sent him out to rob and bump off old ladies. He was as spry as a monkey and could shinny up a drainpipe on the side of a house in ten seconds. If it hadn't been for Imbert we'd never have got our hands on the guy that owned him."

Dr. Scollard and Algernon descended the stairs together. But in the vestibule they parted, the president proceeding down the still crowded outer steps in the direction of a bus whilst Algernon sought his office in Wing W.

"When Imbert sees this," Algernon murmured, as he extracted a photograph of Chagnar Faugn from his chaotically littered desk, "he'll be the most disturbed ethnologist that this planet has harbored since the Pleistocene Age."

Chapter 3

An Archeological Digression

"The figure is totally unfamiliar," said Doctor Imbert. "Nothing even remotely resembling it occurs in Asian or African mythology."

He scowled and returned the photograph to his youthful visitor, who deposited it on the arm of his chair.

"I confess," he continued, "that it puzzles and disturbs me. It's preposterously archeological, if you get what I mean. It isn't the sort of thing that one would—imagine."

Harris nodded. "I doubt if I could have imagined it from scratch. Without imaginative prompting or guidance from someone who had actually set eyes on it, it would be very difficult to conceive of anything so—so—"

"Racial," put in Doctor Imbert. "I believe that is the word you were groping for. That thing is a symbolic embodiment of the massed imaginative heritage of an entire people. It's a composite—like the Homeric epics or the Sphinx of Giza. It's the kind of art manifestation you would

expect a primitive people to produce collectively. It's so perversely diabolical and contradictory in conception that one can scarcely conceive of a mere individual anywhere in the world deliberately sitting down and creating it out of his own imagination. I will concede that an unusually gifted artist might be capable of imagining it, but I doubt if such an obscenity would ever form in the human brain without a *raison d'être*. And no individual living in a civilized state would experience the need, the desire to imagine such a thing, and least of all, to give it objective expression.

“Mental illness, of course, might account for it, but the so-called interpretative reveries of psychotics are nearly always of predictable nature. Grotesque and absurd as they may sometimes be, certain images occur in them again and again and these images are definitely meaningful. They follow prescribed patterns, are crude and distorted representations of familiar objects and people. The morbidities out of which they arise have been studied and classified and a psychiatrist who knows his business can usually decipher them. If you have ever examined a batch of drawings from a mental institution you will have noticed how the same motifs occur repeatedly and how utterly *unimaginative* such things are from a sane and sophisticated point of view.

“It is of course true that the folk creations of primitive peoples usually embody or symbolize definite human preoccupations, but more boldly and imaginatively, and occasionally they depart from the predictable to such an extent that even our expert is obliged to throw up his hands.

“I have always believed that most of the major and minor monstrosities that figure so conspicuously in the pantheons of barbarian races—feathered serpents, animal-headed priests, grimacing sphinxes, etc., are synthetic conceptions. Let us suppose, for instance, that a tribe of reasonably enlightened barbarians is animated by the unique social impulse of co-operative agriculture and is moved to embody its ideals in some colossal fetish designed to suggest both fertility and brotherhood—in, let us say, a great stone *Magna Mater* with arms outstretched to embrace all classes and conditions of men. Then let us suppose that co-operative agriculture falls into disrepute and the tribe becomes obsessed by dreams of martial conquest. What happens? To an obbligato of tom-toms and war drums the Mother Goddess is transfigured. A spear is placed between her extended

arms, the expression of her face altered from benignity to ferocity, great gashes chiseled in her cheeks, red paint smeared on her arms, breasts and shoulders and her ears lopped off. Let another generation pass and the demoniac goddess of war will be transformed into something else—perhaps into a symbol of the most abandoned kind of debauchery.

“In a hundred years the original fetish will have become a monstrous caricature, a record in stone of the thoughts and emotions of generations of men.

“It is the business of the ethnologist and the archeologist to decipher such records, and if our scientist is sufficiently learned and diligent he can, as you know, supply a reason for every peculiarity of configuration. Competent scholars have traced, in a rough way, the advance or retrogression of racial groups in ethical and esthetic directions merely by studying and comparing their objects of worship and there does not exist a more fruitful science than idolography.

“But occasionally our ethnologist encounters a nut that he cannot crack, a god or goddess so diabolical or grotesque or loathsome in conformation that it is impossible to link it associatively with even the most revolting of tribal retrogressions. It is a notorious fact that human races are less apt to advance than circle back on the course of evolution, and that idols and fetishes that were originally conceived in a comparatively noble spirit very often become, in the course of time, embodiments of the bestial and the obscene. Some of the degraded objects of worship now employed by African bushmen and Australian aborigines may conceivably have been considerably less revolting ten or fifteen thousand years ago. It is impossible to predict the depths to which a race may descend and the appalling transformation which may occur in its ‘sacred’ imagery.

“And so occasionally we encounter shapes that we scarcely like to speculate about, shapes so *complicatedly* vile that they haven’t even analogous counterparts in comparative mythology. Your fetish is of that nature. It is, as I say, preposterously archeological and it differs unmistakably—although I am willing to concede a superficial resemblance—from the distorted dream images conjured up by psychotics and surrealist artists. Only racial dissolution and decay extending over wide wastes of years could, in my opinion, account for such a ghastly anomaly.”

He leaned forward and tapped Algernon significantly upon the knee. “You haven’t told me its history,” he admonished. “Reticence is an archeologist’s prerogative, and in our work it is always an asset, but for a young man you’re almost abnormally addicted to it.”

Algernon blushed to the roots of his hair. “I’m seldom actually reticent,” he said. “At the Museum they all think I talk too much. I’ve an exuberant, officious way at times that positively appalls Mr. Scollard. But this affair is so—so outside all normal experience that I’ve been dreading to tax your credulity with a resume of it.”

Doctor Imbert smiled. “Your books reveal that you are a very cautious and honest scholar,” he said. “I don’t believe I’d be inclined to question the veracity of whatever you may choose to tell me.”

“Very well,” said Algernon. “But I must entreat that you suspend judgment until you’ve heard all of the evidence. One can adduce rational explanations for each of the incidents I shall describe, but when one views them in the sequence in which they occurred they resolve themselves into a devastatingly hideous enigma.”

Very tersely, without self-consciousness or affectation, Algernon then related all that he knew and all that he surmised and suspected about the thing whose image spread defilement on the paper before him.

Doctor Imbert heard him out in silence. But his eyes, as he listened, grew bright with horror.

“I doubt if I can help you,” he said, when Algernon was done. “This thing transcends all of my experience.”

There ensued a silence. Then Algernon said in a tone of desperate urgency, “But what *are* we to do? Surely you’ve something to suggest!”

Doctor Imbert rose shakingly to his feet. “I have—yes. I know some one who can, perhaps, help. He’s a recluse, a psychic—a magnificent intellect obsessed by mysteries and mysticisms. I put little faith in such things—to me it’s a degradation. But I’ll take you to him. I’ll take you anyway. God knows you’re in trouble—that is obvious to me. And this man may be able to suggest something. Roger Little is his name. No doubt you’ve heard of him. He used to be a criminal investigator. A good one—a psychologist—discerning, erudite, shrewd—no mere detective-novel sleuth.”

Algernon nodded understanding. “Let us go to him at once,” he said.

Chapter 4

The Horror on the Hills

It was while Algernon and Doctor Imbert were journeying in the subway toward Roger Little's residence in the Borough of Queens that the Horror was announced to the world. An account of its initial manifestation had been flashed from Spain at midday to a great American news syndicate and all of the New York papers had something about it in their evening editions. The *News-Graphic's* account was perhaps the most ominously disturbing in its implications. A copywriter on that enterprising sheet had surmised that the atrocities were distinguished by something outré, something altogether inexplicable, and by choosing his diction with unusual care he had succeeded in conveying to his unappreciative readers a tingling intimation of shockingness, of terror.

Beneath half-inch headlines which read: HIDEOUS MASSACRE IN THE PYRENEES, he had written:

"The authorities are completely baffled. Who would wish to assassinate fourteen simple peasants? They were found at sundown on the mountain's crest. All in a row they lay, very still, very pale—very silent and pale beneath the soft Spanish sky. All about them stretched new-fallen snow and beside them on the white expanse were marks, peculiar and baffling. Men do not make footprints a yard wide. And why were all the victims laid so evenly in a row? What violence was it that could deprive them of their heads, drain the blood from their bodies and lay them stark and naked in a row upon the snow?"

Chapter 5

Little's Dream

"Someone has been murdered and so you wish my advice," murmured Roger Little wearily. "You wish the advice of a retired and eccentric recluse, well on in years, who has ceased to traffic with crime. I am quoting from a profile which did not appear in the *New Yorker*." He was staring into the fire and the bright radiance which streamed roomward from the grate so illumed the sharp outlines of his profile that Algernon was struck silent with awe.

“A positively Satanic presence,” he murmured, to himself. “The exact facsimile of a sorcerer from the *Malleus Maleficarum*. They would have burned him in the Fifteenth Century.”

“Murder,” resumed Little, “has become a shabbily synthetic art and even the most daring masterpieces of the contemporary school are composed of inferior ingredients clumsily combined. Men no longer live in fear of the unknown, and that utter and abysmal disintegration of soul which the wise still call psychic evil no longer motivates our major atrocities. Anger, jealousy, and a paltry desire for material gain are pitiful emotional substitutes for the perverse and lonely egoism which inspired the great crimes of the Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. When men killed with the deliberate certainty that they were jeopardizing their immortal souls and when the human body was regarded as a tabernacle for something more—or less—than human the crime of murder assumed epic and unholy proportions. The mere discovery of a mutilated cadaver in an age when men still believed in something—at least in *something*—filled every one with terror and with awe. Men, women and children took refuge behind barricaded doors and the more devout fell upon their knees, crossed themselves, lighted candles and chanted exorcisms.

“But in this decadent age when a human being is assassinated society merely shrugs its shoulders and relinquishes the sequel to the police. What have the police to do with a sacrament of evil in our midst? The sense of virtually immitigable evil, of stark unreasoning fear which murder once left in its wake, and the intense esthetic enjoyment which certain individuals derived from merely studying such crimes as works of perverse and diabolical art have no parallels in contemporary experience. Hence it is that all modern murderers commit commonplace crimes—kill prosaically and almost indifferently without any suspicion that they are destroying more than lives of their unfortunate victims. And people go calmly about their business and are apparently not displeased to rub shoulders with the unholy ones in theaters, restaurants and subways!”

Algernon shifted excitedly in his chair. “But the problem we bring to you is enmeshed in the supernatural more hideously than any atrocity of the Ages of Faith. It transcends normal experience. If you will listen while I...”

Little shook his head. “I have written books—many books—describing dozens of instances of possession, of return, of immolation, of divination,

and of transformation. I have confirmed the reality of the *concupitus daemonum*; have proved incontestably the existence of vampires, succubi and lamias, and I have slipped not too unwillingly into the warm and clinging arms of women five centuries dead.”

He shuddered. “But what I have experienced in this very room is no more than a flickering shadow, swift passing and obscurely glimpsed, of the horror that lurks Godlessly in undimensioned space. In my dreams I have heard the nauseous piping of its glutinous flutes and I have seen, terribly for an instant, the nets and trawls with which it angles for men.”

“If you are convinced that such a horror exists...” Algernon began, but Little would not let him finish.

“My books have left most of my readers totally unconvinced, for it would disturb them to believe that I am not mentally unbalanced,” he went on quickly.

“Erudite and brilliant, but as mad as Bruno when he was burned at the stake for refusing to keep his speculations about the nature of the physical universe to himself.”

He rose passionately to his feet. “So I’ve definitely renounced the collection and correlation of facts,” he said. “Hereafter I shall embody my unique convictions in the eloquent and persuasive guise of a fable. I shall write a novel. The art of fiction as a purveyor of essential truth has innumerable advantages which detached and impersonal utterance must of necessity lack. The fictioneer can familiarize his readers *gradually* with new and startling doctrines and avoid shocking them into a precipitous retreat into the shell of old and conventional beliefs. He can prevent them from succumbing to prejudice before they have grasped one-quarter of the truths he is intent upon promulgating. Then, too, the artist can be so much more persuasive and eloquent than the scientist, and it can never be sufficiently emphasized that eloquence is never so effective in convincing men that certain things which are obviously false are momentarily true as it is in inducing them to discover that which is ultimately true beneath all the distortions of reality which can leave reason stranded in minds dominated by wishful thinking and a deep-seated fear of the unknown. Human wishes and desires are so eloquent in themselves that certainly some eloquence must be used in combating them. And that is why the mere scientist is so

hopelessly at a loss when he seeks to convert others to what he himself believes to be the truth.

“He doesn’t perceive that new truths must be presented to the human mind vividly, uniquely, as though one were initiating a mystery or instituting a sacrament, and that every failure to so present them decreases the likelihood that they will gain proponents, and that an entire civilization may pass away before any one arises with sufficient imagination and sufficient eloquence to take truths which have been enunciated once or twice coldly and forgotten because of the repugnance with which the common man regards fact barely recited and to clothe them in garments of terror and splendor and awe and so link them with far stars and the wind that moves above the waters and the mystery and strangeness that will be in all things until the end of time.”

Little’s eyes were shining. “I have determined,” he said, “to thrust aside the veil as fearlessly as Blake must have done when he wrote of a new heaven and a new earth, to fashion a garment so mind-beguiling in its beauty that the ultimate revelation will remain cloaked until a spell has been cast which will permit of no drawing back, no craven surrender to fear.”

He stopped suddenly, as if sobriety and an awareness of his surroundings had returned with a blood-rush to his entranced brain. “I have raved, no doubt. Like Blake, like Poe, like Gerard De Nerval. I am always dreaming dreams, seeing visions. And to worldly men, calm and objective toward everyday realities, skeptical of all else, such visions, such glimpses are wholly incomprehensible. And you, no doubt, are inwardly pitying me and wondering how offended I would be if you should get up abruptly and plead a pressing engagement elsewhere. But if you only knew.

“There are things from *outside* watching always, secretly watching our little capers, our grotesque pranks. Men have disappeared. You’re aware of that, aren’t you? Men have disappeared within sight of their homes—at high noon, in the sunlight. Malignant and unknowable entities, *fishers* from outside have let down invisible tentacles, nets, trawls, and men and women have been caught up in a kind of pulsing darkness. A shadow seems to pass over them, to envelop them for an instant and then they are gone. And others have gone mad, witnessing such things.

“When a man ascends a flight of stairs it does not inevitably follow that he will arrive at the top. When a man crosses a street or a field or a public

square it is not foreordained that he will reach the other side. *I have seen strange shadows in the sky.* Other worlds impinging on ours? I know that there are other worlds, but perhaps they do not *dimensionally* impinge. Perhaps from fourth, fifth, six-dimensional worlds things with forms invisible to us, with faces veiled to us, reach down and take— instantaneously, mercilessly. Feeding on us perhaps? Using our brains for fodder? A few have glimpsed the truth for a terrifying instant in dreams. But it takes infinite patience and self-discipline, and years of study to establish waking contact, even for an instant, with the bodiless shapes that flicker appallingly in the void a thousand billion light years beyond the remotest of the spiral nebulae.

“Yet I—can do this. And you,” he laughed, “come to me with a little mundane murder.”

For an instant there was silence in the room. Then Algernon stood up, his face brightened by the flames that were still crackling in the grate. “You say,” he exclaimed, “a little mundane murder. But to me it is more hideous, more alien to sanity and the world we know than all of your cosmic trawlers, and ‘intrusions’ from beyond.”

Little shook his head. “No,” he said. “I cannot believe that you are not exaggerating. It is so easy for men of exceptional intelligence to succumb at times to the fears, dreads, forebodings of ordinary men. Imaginative in a worldly sense, but blinder and dumber than clods cosmically. I am sure that I could unravel your puzzle with the most superficial layer of my waking mind, the little conscious mind that is so weak, so futile to grapple with anything more disturbing than what the body shall eat and drink and wear.”

“If I had not seen,” said Algernon, speaking very deliberately, “a stone thing shift its bulk, doing what the inanimate has never done in all the ages man has looked rationally upon it, I would have seriously doubted your sanity. It would be dishonest for me to pretend otherwise.”

“A stone, you say, moved?” For the first time Little’s interest quickened and a startled look came into his eyes.

“Yes, in the shape in which something—nature primeval perhaps, in eons primeval—shaped it. Moved in the night, unwatched by me. When Chaugnar Faugn...” He stopped, was silent. For from his chair Little had sprung with a cry, his face bloodless, a cry of terror issuing from his thin lips.

“What is the matter?” gasped Doctor Imbert, and Algernon turned pale, not knowing what to make of so strange an occurrence. For Little seemed wholly undone, a mystic gone so completely mad that a violent outburst was only to be expected and might well be repeated, if he were not placed under immediate restraint. But at last he sank again into the chair from which he had so shockingly risen, and a trace of color returned to his cheeks.

“Forgive me,” he murmured brokenly. “Letting go like that was inexcusable. But when you mentioned Chaugnar Faugn I was for an instant mortally terrified.”

He drew a deep breath. “The dream was so vivid that my mind rejected instantly a symbolic or allegorical interpretation. That name especially—Chaugnar Faugn. I was certain that something, somewhere, bore it—that the ghastliness that took Publius Libo on the high hills was an actuality, but not, I had hoped, an actuality for us. Something long past, surely, a horror of the ancient world that would never return to...” He broke off abruptly, seemingly lost in thought.

“Tell me about it,” he entreated, after a moment.

With bloodless lips Algernon related once again the history of Chaugnar Faugn as it had been related to him by Ulman, enhancing a little its hideousness by half-guesses and surmises of his own. Little listened in tight-lipped silence, his face a mask, only the throbbing of the veins on his temples betraying the agitation which wracked him. As Algernon concluded, the clock on the mantel, a tall, negro-colored clock with wings on its shoulders and a great yellow ocean spider painted on its opalescent face, struck the hour: eleven even strokes pealed from it, shattering the stillness that had settled for an instant on the room. Algernon shivered, apprehensive at the lateness of the hour, fearful that in his absence Chaugnar Faugn might move again.

But now Little was speaking, striving painfully to keep his voice from sinking to a whisper.

“I had the dream last Halloween,” he began, “and for detail, color and somber, brooding menace it surpasses anything of the kind I have experienced in recent years. It took form slowly, beginning as a nervous move from the atrium of my house into a scroll-lined library to escape the sound of a fountain, and continuing as an earnest and friendly argument

with a stout, firm-lipped man of about thirty-five, with strong, pure Roman features and the rather cumbersome equipment of a *legatus* in active military service. Impressions of identity and locale were so nebulous and gradual in their unfoldment as to be difficult to trace to a source, but they seem in retrospect to have been present from the first.

“The place was not Rome, nor even Italy, but the small provincial municipium of Calagurris on the south bank of the Iberus in Hispania Citerior. It was in the Republican age, because the province was still under a senatorial proconsul instead of a *legatus* of the Imperator. I was a man of about my own waking age and build. I was clad in a civilian toga of yellowish color with the two thin reddish stripes of the equestrian order. My name was L. Caelius Rufus and my rank seemed to be that of a provincial quaestor. I was definitely an Italian-born Roman, the province of Calagurris being alien, colonial soil to me. My guest was Cnaeus Balbutius, *legatus* of the XII Legion, which was permanently encamped just outside the town on the riverbank. The home in which I was receiving him was a suburban villa on a hillside south of the compact section, and it overlooked both town and river.

“The day before I had received a worried call from one Tib. Annaeus Mela, edile of the small town of Pompelo, three days’ march to the north in the territory of the Vascones at the foot of the mysterious Pyrenees. He had been to request Balbutius to spare him a cohort for a very extraordinary service on the night of the Kalends of November and Balbutius had emphatically refused. Therefore, knowing me to be acquainted with P. Scribonius Libo, the proconsul at Tarraco, he had come to ask me to lay his case by letter before that official. Mela was a dark, lean man of middle age, of presentable Roman features but with the coarse hair of a Celtiberian.

“It seems that there dwelt hidden in the Pyrenees a strange race of small dark people unlike the Gauls and Celtiberians in speech and features, who indulged in terrible rites and practices twice every year, on the Kalends of Maius and November. They lit fires on the hilltops at dusk, beat continuously on strange drums and horribly all through the night. Always before these orgies people would be found missing from the village and none of them were ever known to return. It was thought that they were stolen for sacrificial purposes, but no one dared to investigate, and eventually the semi-annual loss of villagers came to be regarded as a

regular tribute, like the seven youths and maidens that Athens was forced to send each year to Crete for King Minos and the Minotaur.

“The tribal Vascones and even some of the semi-Romanized cottages of the foothills were suspected by the inhabitants of Pompelo of being in league with the strange dark folk—*Miri Nigri* was the name used in my dream. These dark folk were seen in Pompelo only once a year—in summer, when a few of their number would come down from the hills to trade with the merchants. They seemed incapable of speech and transacted business by signs.

“During the preceding summer the small folk had come to trade as usual—five of them—but had become involved in a general scuffle when one of them had attempted to torture a dog for pleasure in the forum. In this fighting two of them had been killed and the remaining three had returned to the hills with evil faces. Now it was autumn and *the customary quota of villagers had not disappeared*. It was not normal for the *Miri Nigri* thus to spare Pompelo. Clearly they must have reserved the town for some terrible doom, which they would call down on their unholy Sabbath night as they drummed and howled and danced outrageously on the mountain’s crest. Fear walked through Pompelo and the edile Mela had come to Calagurris to ask for a cohort to invade the hills on the Sabbath night and break up the obscene rites before the ceremony might be brought to a head. But Balbutius had laughed at him and refused. He thought it poor policy for the Roman administration to meddle in local quarrels. So Mela had been obliged to come to me. I enheartened him as best I could, and promised help, and he returned to Pompelo at least partly reassured.

“Before writing the proconsul I had thought it best to argue with Balbutius himself, so I had been to see him at the camp, found him out and left word with a centurion that I would welcome a call from him. Now he was here and had reiterated his belief that we ought not to complicate our administration by arousing the resentment of the tribesmen, as we undoubtedly would if we attempted to suppress a rite with which they were obviously in ill-concealed sympathy.

“I seemed to have read considerable about the dark rites of certain unknown and wholly barbaric races, for I recall feeling a sense of monstrous impending doom and trying my best to induce Balbutius to put down the Sabbath. To his objections I replied that it had never been the

custom of the Roman people to be swayed by the whims of the barbarians when the fortunes of Roman citizens were in danger and that he ought not to forget the status of Pompelo as a legal colony, small as it was. That the good-will of the tribal Vascones was little to be depended upon at best, and that the trust and friendship of the Romanized townsfolk, in whom was more than a little of our own blood after three generations of colonization, was a matter of far greater importance to the smooth working of that provincial government on which the security of the Roman imperium primarily rested. Furthermore, that I had reason to believe, from my studies, that the apprehensions of the Pompelonians were disturbingly well-founded, and that there was indeed brewing in the high hills a monstrous doom which it would ill become the traditions of Rome to countenance. That I would be surprised to encounter laxity in the representatives of those whose ancestors had not hesitated to put to death large numbers of Roman citizens for participation in the orgies of Bacchus and had ordered engraved on public tablets of bronze the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*.

“But I could not influence Balbutius. He went away courteously but unmoved. So I at once took a reed pen and wrote a letter to the proconsul Libo, sealing it and calling for a wiry young slave—a Greek called Antipater—to take it to Tarraco.

“The following morning I went out on foot, down the hill to the town and through the narrow block-paved streets with high whitewashed dead-walls and gaudily painted shops with awnings. The crowds were very vivid. Legionaries of all races, Roman colonists, tribal Celtiberi, Romanized natives, Romanized and Iberized Carthaginians, mongrels of all sorts. I spoke to only one person, a Roman named Aebutius, about whom I recall nothing. I visited the camp—a great area with an earthen wall ten feet high and streets of wooden huts inside, and I called at the *praetorium* to tell Balbutius that I had written the proconsul. He was still pleasant but unmoved. Later I went home, read in the garden, bathed, dined, talked with the family and went to bed—having, a little later, a nightmare *within the dream* which centered about a dark terrible desert with cyclopean ruins of stones and a malign presence over all.

“About noon the next day—I had been reading in the garden—the Greek returned with a letter and enclosure from Libo. I broke the seal and

read: ‘P. SCRIBONIVS L. CAELIO. S. D. SI. TV. VALES. VALEO. QVAE SCRIPSISTI. AVDIVI. NEC. ALIAS, PVTO.’

“In a word, the proconsul agreed with me—had known about the Miri Nigri himself—and enclosed an order for the advance of the cohort to Pompelo at once, by forced marches, in order to reach the doom-shadowed town on the day before the fatal Kalends. He requested me to accompany it because of my knowledge of what the mysterious rites were whispered to be, and furthermore declared his design of going along himself, saying that he was even then on the point of setting out and would be in Pompelo before we could be.

“I lost not a second in going personally to the camp and handing the orders to Balbutius, and I must say he took his defeat gracefully. He decided to send Cohors V, under Sextus Asellius, and presently summoned that *legatus*—a slim, supercilious youth with frizzed hair and a fashionable fringe of beard-growth on his under jaw. Asellius was openly hostile to the move but dared not disregard orders. Balbutius said he would have the cohort at the bridge across the Iberus in an hour and I rushed home to prepare for the rough day and night march.

“I put on a heavy paenula and ordered a litter with six Illyrian bearers, and reached the bridge ahead of the cohort. At last, though, I saw the silver eagles flashing along the street to my left, and Balbutius—who had decided at the last moment to go along himself—rode out ahead and accompanied my litter ahead of the troops as we crossed the bridge and struck out over the plains toward the mystic line of dimly glimpsed violet hills. There was no long sleep during all the march, but we had naps and brief halts and bites of lunch—cakes and cheese. Balbutius usually rode by my litter in conversation (it was infantry, but he and Asellius were mounted) but sometimes I read—M. Porcius Cato *De Re Rustica*, and a hideous manuscript in Greek, which made me shudder even to touch or look at but of which I cannot remember a single word.

“The second morning we reached the whitewashed houses of Pompelo and trembled at the fear that was on the place. There was a wooden amphitheater east of the village, and a large open plain on the west. All the immediate ground was flat, but the Pyrenees rose up green and menacing on the north, looking nearer than they were. Scribonius Libo had reached there ahead of us with his secretary, Q. Trebellius Pollio, and he and the edile

Mela greeted us in the forum. We all—Libo, Pollio, Mela, Balbutius, Asellius and I—went into the curia (an excellent new building with a Corinthian portico) and discussed ways and means, and I saw that the proconsul was with me heart and soul.

“But Balbutius and Asellius continued to argue and at times the discussion grew very tense. Libo was an utterly admirable old man, and he insisted on going into the hills with the rest of us and seeing the awful revelations of the night. Mela, ghastly with fright, promised horses to those of us who were not mounted. He had pluck—for he meant to go himself.

“It is impossible even to suggest the stark and ghastly terror which hung over this phase of the dream.

“Surely there never was such evil as that which brooded over the accursed town as the sinking sun threw long menacing shadows amidst the reddening afternoon. The legionnaires fancied they heard the rustling of stealthy, unseen and ominously deliberate presences in the black encircling woods. Occasionally a torch had to be lighted momentarily in order to keep the frightened three hundred together, but for the most part it was a dreadful scramble through the dark. A slit of northern sky was visible ahead between the terrible, cliff-like slopes that encompassed us and I marked the chair of Cassiopeia and the golden powder of the Via Lactea. Far, far ahead and above and appearing to merge imperceptibly into the heavens, the lines of remoter peaks could be discerned, each capped by a sickly point of unholy flame. And still the distant, hellish drums pounded incessantly on.

“At length the route grew too steep for the horses and the six of us who were mounted were forced to take to our feet. We left the horses tethered to a clump of scrub oaks and stationed ten men to guard them, though heaven knows it was no night nor place for petty thieves to be abroad! And then we scrambled on—jostling, stumbling and sometimes climbing with our hands’ help up places little short of perpendicular. Suddenly a sound behind us made every man pause as if hit by an arrow. It was from the horses we had left, and it did not cease. They were not neighing but *screaming*. They were screaming, mad with some terror beyond any this earth knows. No sound came up from the men we had left with them. Still they screamed on, and the soldiers around us stood trembling and whimpering and muttering fragments of a prayer to Rome’s gods, and the gods of the East and the gods of the barbarians.

“Then there came a sharp scuffle and yell from the front of the column which made Asellius call quaveringly for a torch. There was a prostrate figure weltering in a growing and glistening pool of blood and we saw by the faint flare that it was the young guide Accius. He had killed himself because of the sound he had heard. He, who had been born and bred at the foot of those terrible hills and had heard dark whispers of their secrets, knew well why the horses had screamed. And because he knew, he had snatched a sword from the scabbard of the nearest soldier—the centurion P. Vibulanus—and had plunged it full-length into his own breast.

“At this point pandemonium broke loose because of something noticed by such of the men as were able to notice anything at all. *The sky had been snuffed out.* No longer did Cassiopeia and the Via Lactea glimmer betwixt the hills, but stark blackness loomed behind the continuously swelling fires on the distant peaks. And still the horses screamed and the far-off drums pounded hideously and incessantly on.

“Cackling laughter broke out in the black woods of the vertical slopes that hemmed us in and around the swollen fires of the distant peaks we saw prancing and leaping the awful and cyclopean silhouettes of things that were neither men nor beasts, but fiendish amalgams of both—things with huge flaring ears and long waving trunks that howled and gibbered and pranced in the skyless night. And a cold wind coiled purposively down from the empty abyss, winding sinuously about us till we started in fresh panic and struggled like Laocoon and his sons in the serpent’s grasp.

“There were terrible sights in the light of the few shaking torches. Legionnaires trampled one another to death and screamed more hoarsely than the horses far below. Of our immediate party Trebellius Pollio had long vanished, and I saw Mela go down beneath the heavy caligae of a gigantic Aquitanian. Balbutius had gone mad and was grinning and simpering out an old Fescennine verse recalled from the Latin countryside of his boyhood. Asellius tried to cut his own throat, but the sentient wind held him powerless, so that he could do nothing but scream and scream and scream above the cackling laughter and the screaming horses and the distant drums and the howling colossal shapes that capered about the demon-fires on the peaks.

“I myself was frozen to the helplessness of a statue and could not move or speak. Only old Publius Libo the proconsul was strong enough to face it

like a Roman—Publius Scribonius Libo, who had gone through the Jugurthine and Mithridatic and social wars—Publius Libo three times praetor and three times consul of the republic, in whose atrium stood the ancestral forms of a hundred heroes. He and he alone had the voice of a man and of a general and triumphator. I can see him now in the dimming light of those horrible torches, among that fear-struck stampede of the doomed. I can hear him still as he spoke his last words, gathering up his toga with the dignity of a Roman and a consul: *'Malitia vetus—malitia vetus est—venit—tandem venit...'*

“And then the wooded encircling slopes burst forth with louder cackles and I saw that they were slowly moving.

The hills—the terrible living hills—were closing up upon their prey. The Miri Nigri had called their terrible gods out of the void.

“Able to shriek at last, I awoke in a sea of cold perspiration.

“Calagurris, as you probably know, is a real and well-known town of Roman Spain, famed as the birthplace of the rhetorician Quintilianus. Upon consulting a classical dictionary I found Pompelo also to be real, and surviving today as the Pyrenean village of Pampelona.”

He ceased speaking, and for a moment the three men were silent. Then Algernon said: “The Chinaman had a strange dream too. He spoke of the horror on the mountains—of great things that came clumping down from the hills at nightfall.”

Little nodded. “Mongolians as a rule are extremely psychic,” he said. “I have known several whose clairvoyant gifts were superior to a yoga adept’s often astounding feats of precognition.”

“And you think that Hsieh Ho’s dream was a prophecy?” whispered Imbert.

“I do. Some monstrous *unfettering* is about to take place. That which for two thousand years has lain somnolent will stir again and the ‘great things’ will descend from their frightful lair on the Spanish hills drawn cityward through the will of Chaugnar Faugn. We are in propinquity to the primal, hidden horror that festers at the root of being, with the old, hidden loathsomeness which Greeks and Romans veiled under the symbolic form of a man-beast—the *feeder*, the *all*. The Greeks knew, for the horror left its lair to ravage, striding eastward in the dawn across Europe, wading waist-deep in the dark Ionian seas, looming monstrous at nightfall over Delos,

and Samothrace and far-off Crete. A nimbus of star-foam engirdled its waist; suns, constellations gleamed in its eyes. But its breath brought madness, and its embrace, death. The feeder—the all.”

The telephone bell at Little’s elbow was jangling disconcertingly. Stretching forth a tremulous hand he grasped the receiver firmly and laid it against his cheek. “Hello,” he whispered into the mouthpiece. “What is it? Who is speaking?”

“From the Manhattan Museum.” The words smote ominously upon his ear. “Is Mr. Algernon Harris there? I phoned Doctor Imbert’s house and they gave me this number.”

“Yes, Harris is here.” Little’s voice was vibrant with apprehension. “I’ll call him.”

He turned the instrument over to Algernon and sank back exhaustedly in his chair. For a moment the latter conversed in a low tone; then an expression of stunned incredulity appeared on his face. His hand shook as he put back the receiver and tottered toward the fireplace. For an instant he stood staring intensely into the coals, his fingers gripping the mantel’s edge so tightly that his knuckles showed white. When he turned there was a look of utter consternation in his eyes.

“Chaugnar Faugn has disappeared,” he cried. “Chaugnar Faugn has left the museum. No one saw him go and the idiot who phoned thinks that a thief removed him. Or possibly one of the attendants. But *we* know how unlikely that is.”

“I’m afraid we do,” Little said, grimly. “I am to blame,” Algernon went on quickly. “I should have insisted they patrol the alcove. I should have at least explained to them that someone might try to steal Chaugnar Faugn, even if Ulman’s story had to be kept from them.”

He shook his head in helpless frustration.

“No...no...that would have done no good. A watchman would have been utterly impotent to cope with such a horror. Chaugnar Faugn would have destroyed him hideously in an instant. And now it is loose in the streets!”

He walked to the window and stared across the glittering harbor at the darkly looming skyline of lower Manhattan. “It is loose over there,” he cried, raising his arm and pointing. “It is crouching in the shadows

somewhere, alert and waiting, preparing to..." He broke off abruptly, as if the vision his mind had conjured up was too ghastly to dwell upon.

Little rose and laid a steadying hand on Algernon's arm. "I haven't said I couldn't help," he said. "Though Chaugnar Faugn is a very terrible menace it isn't quite as omnipotent as Ulman thought. It and its brothers are incarnate manifestations of a very ancient, a very malignant hyperdimensional entity. Or call it a principle, if you wish—a principle so antagonistic to life as we know it that it becomes a spreading blight, as destructive as a nest of cancer cells would be if cancer could be transplanted by surgical means into healthy tissue, and continue to grow and proliferate until every vestige of healthy tissue has been destroyed. But it is a cancer whose growth I can at least retard. And if I am successful I can send it back to its point of origin beyond the galactic universe, can cut it asunder forever from our three-dimensional world. Had I known that the horror still lurked in the Pyrenees I should have gone, months ago, to *send it back*. Yes, even though the thought of it now fills me with a loathing unspeakable, I should have gone.

"I am not," he continued, "a merely theoretical dreamer. Though I am by temperament disposed toward speculations of a mystical nature, I have forged a very concrete and effective weapon to combat the cosmic malignancies. If you'll step into my laboratory I'll show you something which should restore your confidence in the experimental capacity of the human mind when there is but one choice confronting it—to survive or go down forever into everlasting night and darkness."

Chapter 6

The Time-Space Machine

Roger Little's laboratory was illumed by a single bluish lamp imbedded in the concrete of its sunken floor. An infinite diversity of mechanism lined the walls and sprawled their precise lengths on long tables and dangled eerily from hooks set in the high, domed ceiling; mechanisms a-glitter in blue-lit seclusion, a strange, bizarre foreglimpse into the alchemy and magic of a far-distant future, with spheres and condensers and gleaming metal rods in lieu of stuffed crocodiles and steaming elixirs.

All of the contrivances were arresting, but one was so extraordinary in size and complexity that it dominated the others and riveted Algernon's attention. He seemed unable to drag his gaze from the thing. It was a strange agglomeration of metallic spheres and portions of spheres, of great bluish globes surrounded by tiny clusters of half globes and quarter-globes, whose surfaces converged in a most fantastic way. And from the globes there sprouted at grotesque angles metallic crescents with converging tips.

To Algernon's excited imagination the thing wore a quasi-reptilian aspect. "It's like a toad's face," he muttered. "Bulbous and bestial."

Little nodded. "It's a triumph of mechanical ugliness, isn't it? Yet it would have been deified in Ancient Greece—by Archimedes especially. He would have exalted it above all his Conoids and Parabolas."

"What function does it perform?" asked Algernon.

"A sublime one. It's a time-space machine. But I'd rather not discuss its precise function until I've shown you how it works. I want you to study its face as it waxes non-Euclidean. When you've glimpsed a fourth-dimensional figure you'll be prepared to concede, I think, that the claims I make for it are not extravagant. I know of no more certain corrective for an excess of skepticism. I was the *Critique of Pure Reason* personified until I looked upon a *skinned sphere*—then I grew very humble, reverent toward the great *Suspected*.

"Watch now." He reached forward, grasped a switch and with a swift downward movement of his right arm set the machine in motion. At first the small spheres and the crescents revolved quickly and the large spheres slowly; then the large spheres literally spun while the small spheres lazed, and then both small spheres and large spheres moved in unison. Then the spheres stopped altogether, but only for an instant, while something of movement seemed to flow into them from the revolving crescents. Then the crescents stopped and the spheres moved, in varying tempo, faster and faster, and their movement seemed to flow back into the crescents. Then both crescents and spheres began to move in unison, faster and faster and faster, until the entire mass seemed to merge into a shape paradoxical, outrageous, unthinkable—a spheroid with a non-Euclidean face, a geometric blasphemy that was at once isosceles and equilateral, convex and concave.

Algernon stared in horror. "What in God's name is that?" he cried.

“You are looking on a fourth-dimensional figure,” said Little soothingly. “Steady now.”

For an instant nothing happened; then a light—greenish, blinding—shot from the center of the crazily distorted figure and streamed across the opposite wall, limning on the smooth cement a perfect circle.

But only for a second was the wall illumed. With an abrupt movement Little shot the lever upward and its radiance dimmed, and vanished. “Another moment, and that wall would have crumbled away,” he said.

With fascination Algernon watched the outrageous spheroid grow indistinct, watched it blur and disappear amidst a resurgence of spheres.

“That light,” cried Little exultantly, “will send Chaugnar Faugn back through time. It will reverse its decadent *randomness*—disincarnate and disembody it, and send it back forever.”

“But I don’t understand,” murmured Algernon. “What do you mean by *randomness*?”

“I mean that this machine can work havoc with entropy!” There was a ring of exaltation in Little’s voice.

“Entropy?” Algernon scowled. “I’m not sure that I understand. I know what entropy is in thermodynamics, of course, but I’m not sure...”

“I’ll explain,” said Little. “You are of course familiar with the A B C’s of Einsteinian physics and are aware that time is *relatively* arrowless, that the sequence in which we view events in nature is not a cosmic actuality and that our conviction that we are going somewhere in time is a purely human illusion conditioned by our existence on this particular planet and the limitations which our five senses impose upon us. We divide time into past, present and future, but in reality an event’s sequence in time depends wholly on the position in space from which it is viewed. Events which occurred thousands of years ago on this planet haven’t as yet taken place to a hypothetical observer situated billions and billions of light years remote from us. Thus, cosmically speaking, we can not say of an event that it has happened and will never happen again or that it is about to happen and has never happened before, because ‘before’ to us is ‘after’ to intelligences situated elsewhere in space and time.

“But though our familiar time-divisions are purely arbitrary there is omnipresent in nature a principle called entropy which, as Eddington has pointed out, equips time with a kind of empirical arrow. The entire universe

appears to be ‘running down.’ It is the consensus of astronomical opinion that suns and planets and electrons are constantly breaking up, becoming more and more *disorganized*. Billions of years ago some mysterious dynamic, which Sir James Jeans has likened to the Finger of God, streamed across primeval space and created the universe of stars in a state of almost perfect integration, welded them into a system so highly organized that there was only the tiniest manifestation of the random element anywhere in it. The random element in nature is the uncertain element—the principle which brings about disorganizations, disintegration, decay.

“Let us suppose that two mechanical men, robots, are tossing a small ball to and fro, to and fro. The process may go on indefinitely, for the mechanical creatures do not tire and there is nothing to make the ball swerve from its course. But now let us suppose that a bird in flight collides with the ball, sends it spinning so that it misses the hand of the receiving robot. What happens? Both robots begin to behave grotesquely. Missing the ball, their arms sweep through the empty air, making wider and wider curves and they stagger forward perhaps, and collapse in each other’s arms. The random, the uncertain element has entered their organized cosmos and they have ceased to function.

“This tendency of the complex to disintegrate, of the perfectly-balanced to run amuck, is called entropy. It is entropy that provides time with an arrow and, disrupting nebulae, plays midwife to the birth of planets from star-wombs incalculable. It is entropy that cools great orbs, hotter than Betelgeuse, more fiery than Arcturus through all the outer vastnesses, reducing them to sterility, to whirling motes of chaos.

“It is the random element that is slowly breaking up, destroying the universe of stars. In an ever-widening circle, with an ever-increasing malignancy—if one may ascribe malignancy to a force, a tendency—it works its awful havoc. It is analogous to a grain of sand dropped into one of the interstices of a vast and intricate machine. The grain creates a small disturbance which in turn creates a larger one, and so on *ad infinitum*.

“And with every event that has occurred on this earth since its departure from the sun there has been an increase of the random element. Thus we can legitimately ‘place’ events in time. Events which occurred tens of thousands of years ago may be happening *now* to intelligences situated elsewhere, and events still in the offing, so to speak, may exist already in

another dimension of space-time. But if an earth-event is very disorganized and very decadent in its contours even our hypothetical distant observer would know that it has occurred very late in the course of cosmic evolution and that a series of happier events, with less of the random element in them, must have preceded it in time. In brief, that sense of time's passing which we experience in our daily lives is due to our intuitive perception that the structure of the universe is continuously breaking down. Everything that 'happens,' every event, is an objective manifestation of matter's continuous and all-persuasive decay and disintegration."

Algernon nodded. "I think I understand. But doesn't that negate all that we have been taught to associate with the word 'evolution'? It means that not advancement but an *inherent* degeneration has characterized all the processes of nature from the beginning of time. Can we apply it to man? Do you mean to suggest..."

Little shrugged. "One can only speculate. It may be that mediaeval theology wasn't so very wrong after all—that old Augustine and the Angelic Doctor and Abelard and the others surmised correctly, that man was once akin to the angels and that he joined himself to nature's decay through a deliberate rejection of heaven's grace. It may be that by some mysterious and incomprehensibly perverse act of will he turned his face from his Maker and let evil pour in upon him, made of himself a magnet for all the malevolence that the cosmos holds. There may have been more than a little truth in Ulman's identification of Chaugnar with the Lucifer of mediaeval myth."

"Is this," exclaimed Imbert reproachfully, "a proper occasion for a discussion of theology?"

"It isn't," Little acknowledged. "But I thought it desirable to outline certain—possibilities. I don't want you to imagine that I regard the intrusion of Chaugnar Faugn into our world as a scientifically explicable occurrence in a facilely dogmatic sense."

"I don't care how you regard it," affirmed Algernon, "so long as you succeed in destroying it utterly. I am a profound agnostic as far as religious concepts are concerned. But the universe is mysterious enough to justify divergent speculations on the part of intelligent men as to the ultimate nature of reality."

“I quite agree,” Little said. “I was merely pointing out that modern science alone has very definite limitations.”

“And yet you propose to combat this...this horror with science,” exclaimed Imbert.

“With a concrete embodiment of the concepts of transcendental mathematics,” corrected Little. “And such concepts are merely empirically scientific. I am aware that science may be loosely defined as a systematized accumulation of tendencies and principles, but classically speaking, its prime function is to convey some idea of the nature of reality by means of an inductive logic. Yet our mathematical physicist has turned his face from induction as resolutely as did the mediaeval scholastics in the days of the Troubadours. He insists that we must start from the universal assumption that we can never know positively the real nature of anything, and that whatever ‘truth’ we may deduce from empirical generalities will be chiefly valuable as a kind of mystical guidepost, at best merely roughly indicative of the direction in which we are travelling; but withal, something of a sacrament and therefore superior to the dogmatic ‘knowledge’ of Nineteenth Century science. The speculations of mathematical physicists today are more like poems and psalms than anything else. They embody concepts wilder and more fantastic than anything in Poe or Hawthorne or Blake.”

He stepped forward and seized the entropy-reversing machine by its globular neck. “Two men can carry it very easily,” he said, as he lifted it a foot from the floor by way of experiment. “We can train it on Chaugnar Faugn from a car.”

“If it keeps to the open streets,” interjected Algernon. “We can’t follow it up a fire-escape or into the woods in a car.”

“I’d thought of that. It could hide itself for days in Central Park or Inwood or Van Cortland Park or the wider stretches of woodland a little further to the north but still close to the city. But we won’t cross that bridge until we come to it.” His expression was tense, but he spoke with quiet deliberation. “We could dispense with the car in an emergency,” he said. “Two men could advance fairly rapidly with the machine on a smooth expanse.”

“We must make haste,” he continued, after a moment “It’s my chauffeur’s day off, but I’ll take a taxi down to the garage and get the car

myself.” He turned to Algernon. “If you want to help, locate Chaugnar Faugn.”

Algernon stared. “But how...” he gasped.

“It shouldn’t be difficult. Get in touch with the police—Assistance and Ambulance Division. Ask if they’ve received any unusually urgent calls, anything of a sensational nature. If Chaugnar has slain again they’ll know about it.”

He pointed urgently toward a phone in the corner and strode from the laboratory.

Chapter 7

A Cure for Skepticism

When Algernon had completed his phone call he lit a cigarette very calmly and deliberately and crossed to where Doctor Imbert was standing. Only the trembling of his lower lip betrayed the agitation he was having difficulty in controlling. “There have been five emergency calls,” he said, “all from the midtown section—between Thirty-fifth and Forty-eighth Streets.”

Imbert grew pale. “And—and deaths?”

Algernon nodded. “And deaths. Two of the ambulances have just returned.”

“How many were killed?”

“They don’t know yet. There were five bodies in the first ambulance—three men, a woman and a little girl—a negress. All horribly mutilated. They’ve gone wild over there. The chap who spoke to me wanted to know what I knew, why I had phoned—he shouted at me, broke down and sobbed.”

“God!”

“There’s nothing we can do till Little gets back,” Algernon said.

“And then? What do you suppose we can do then?”

“The machine...” Algernon began and stopped. He couldn’t endure putting the way he felt about Little’s machine, and the doubts he had entertained concerning it into words. It was necessary to believe in the machine, to have confidence in Little’s sagacity—supreme confidence. It would have been disastrous to doubt in such a moment that a blow would

eventually be struck, that Little and his machine together would dispose, forever, of the ghastly menace of Chaugnar Faugn. But to defend such a faith rationally, to speak boldly and with confidence of a mere intuitive conviction was another matter.

“You know perfectly well that Little’s mentally unbalanced,” affirmed Imbert, “that it would be madness to credit his assertions.” He gestured toward the machine. “That thing is merely a mechanical hypnotizer. Ingenious, I concede—it can induce twilight sleep with a rapidity I wouldn’t have thought possible—but it is quite definitely three-dimensional. It brings the subconscious to the fore, the subconscious that believes everything it is told, induces temporary somnolence while Little whispers: ‘You are gazing on a fourth-dimensional figure. You are gazing on a fourth-dimensional figure.’ Such deceptions aren’t difficult to implant when the mind is in a dreamlike state.”

“I’d rather not discuss it,” murmured Algernon. “I can’t believe the figure we saw was wholly a deception. It was too ghastly and unbelievable. And remember that we both saw the same figure. I was watching you at the time—you looked positively ill. And mass hypnotism is virtually an impossibility. You ought to know that. No two men will respond to suggestion in the same way. We both saw a four-dimensional figure—an outrageous figure.”

“But how do you know we both saw the same figure? We may easily have responded differently to Little’s suggestion. Group hypnotism is possible in that sense. I saw something decidedly disturbing and so did you, but that doesn’t prove that we weren’t hypnotized.”

“I’ll convince you that we weren’t,” exclaimed Algernon. “A time-space machine of this nature isn’t theoretically inconceivable, for physicists have speculated on the possibility of reversing entropy in isolated portions of matter for years. Watch now!”

Deliberately he walked to the machine and shot the lever upward.

Chapter 8

What Happened in the Laboratory

Algernon raised himself on his elbow and stared in horror at the gaping hole in the wall before him. It was a great circular hole with jagged edges

and through it the skyline of lower Manhattan glimmered nebulously, like an etching under glass. His temples throbbed painfully; his tongue was dry and swollen and adhered to the roof of his mouth.

Some one was standing above him. Not Imbert, for Imbert wore spectacles. And this man's face was destitute of glitter, a blurred oval faultlessly white. Confusedly Algernon recalled that Little did not wear spectacles. This, then, was Little. Little, not Imbert. It was coming back now. He had sought to convince Imbert that the machine wasn't a mechanical hypnotizer. He had turned it on and then—Good God! What had happened then? Something neither of them had anticipated. An explosion! But first for an instant they had seen the figure. And the light. And he and Imbert had been too frightened—too frightened to turn it off. How very clear it was all becoming. They had stood for an instant facing the wall, too utterly bewildered to turn off the light. And then Little had entered the room, and had shouted a warning—a frenzied warning.

“Help me, please,” exclaimed Algernon weakly.

Little bent and gripped him by the shoulders. “Steady, now,” he commanded, as he guided him toward a chair. “You're not hurt. You'll be all right in a moment. Imbert, too, is all right. A piece of plaster struck him in the temple, gave him a nasty cut, but he'll be quite all right.”

“But—what happened?” Algernon gestured helplessly toward the hole in the wall. “I remember that there was an explosion and that—you shouted at me, didn't you?”

“Yes, I shouted for you to get back into the room. You were standing too close to the wall. Another instant and the floor would have crumbled too and you'd have had a nasty tumble—a tumble from which you wouldn't have recovered.”

He smiled grimly and patted Algernon on the shoulder. “Just try to calm down a bit. I'll get you a whiskey and soda.”

“But what, precisely happened?” persisted Algernon.

“The light decreased the wall's *randomness*, sent it back through time. I warned you that the wall would crumble if the light rested on it for more than an instant. But you had to experiment.”

“I'm sorry,” muttered Algernon shamefacedly. “I fear I've ruined your apartment.”

“Not important, really. It’s eerie, of course, having all one’s secrets open to the sky, but my landlord will rectify that.” He gazed at Algernon curiously. “Why did you do it?” he asked.

“To convince Imbert. He said the machine was merely a mechanical hypnotizer.”

“I see, Imbert thought I was rather pathetically ‘touched.’”

“Not exactly. I think he wanted to believe you...”

“But couldn’t. Well, I can’t blame him. Five years ago I would have doubted too—laughed all this to scorn. I approve of skeptics. They’re dependable—when you’ve succeeded in convincing them that unthinkable and outrageous things occasionally have at least a pragmatic potency. I doubt if even now Imbert would concede that this is an entropy-reversing machine, but you may be sure his respect for it has grown. He’ll follow my instructions now without hesitation. And I want you to. We must act in unison, or we’ll be defeated before we start.”

Algernon began suddenly to tremble. “We haven’t an instant to lose,” he exclaimed. “I got in touch with the police just before you came back—they’re sending out ambulance calls from all over the city. Chagnar has begun to slay—” Algernon had risen and was striding toward the door.

“Wait!” Little’s voice held a note of command. “We’ve got to wait for Imbert. He’s downstairs in the bathroom dressing his wound.”

Reluctantly Algernon returned into the room.

“A few minutes’ delay won’t matter,” continued Little, his voice surprisingly calm. “We’ve such a hideous ordeal before us that we should be grateful for this respite.”

“But Chagnar is killing now,” protested Algernon. “And we are sitting here letting more lives...”

“Be snuffed out? Perhaps. But at the same instant all over the world other lives are being snuffed out by diseases which men could prevent if they energetically bestirred themselves.” He drew a deep breath. “We’re doing the best we can, man. This respite is necessary for our nerves’ sake. Try to view the situation sanely. If we are going to eradicate the malignancy which is Chagnar Faugn we’ll need a surgeon’s calm. We’ve got to steel our wills, extrude from our minds all hysterical considerations, and all sentiment.”

“But it will kill thousands,” protested Algernon. “In the crowded streets...”

“No,” Little shook his head. “It’s no longer in the streets. It has left the city.”

“How do you know?”

“There has been a massacre on the Jersey coast—near Asbury Park. I stopped for an instant in the *Brooklyn Standard* office on my way up from the garage. The night staff’s in turmoil. They’re rushing through a sensational morning extra. I found out something else. There’s been a similar massacre in Spain! If we hadn’t been talking here we’d have known. All the papers ran columns about it—hours ago. They’re correlating the dispatches now and by tomorrow every one will know of the menace. What I fear is mass hysteria.”

“Mass hysteria?”

“Yes, they’ll go mad in the city tomorrow—there’ll be a stampede. Unreasoning superstition and blind terror always culminate in acts of violence. Hundreds of people will run amuck, pillage, destroy. There’ll be more lives lost than Chagnar destroyed tonight.”

“But we can do something. We must.”

“I said that we were merely waiting for Doctor Imbert.” Little crossed to the eastern window and stared for a moment into the lightening sky. Then he returned to where Algernon was standing. “Do you feel better?” he asked. “Have you pulled yourself together?”

“Yes,” muttered Algernon. “I’m quite all right.”

“Good.”

The door opened and Imbert came in. His face was distraught and of a deathly pallor, but a look of relief came into his eyes when they rested on Algernon. “I feared you were seriously hurt,” he cried. “We were quite mad to experiment with—with that thing.”

“We must experiment again, I fear.”

Imbert nodded. “I’m ready to join you. What do you want us to do?”

“I want you and Harris to carry that machine downstairs and put it into my car. I’ll need a flashlight and a few other things. I won’t be long...”

Chapter 9

The Horror Moves

“We must overtake it before it reaches the crossroads,” shouted Little.

They were speeding by the sea, tearing at seventy miles an hour down a long, white road that twisted and turned between ramparts of sand. On both sides there towered dunes, enormous, majestic, morning stars a-glitter on the dark waters intermittently visible beyond their seaward walls. The horseshoe-shaped isthmus extended to six miles into the sea and then doubled back toward the Jersey coast. At the point where it changed its direction stood a crossroad, explicitly sign-posted with two pointing hands. One of these junctions led directly toward the mainland, the other into a dense, ocean-defiled waste, marshy and impregnable, a kind of morass where anything or any one might hide indefinitely.

And toward this retreat Chaugnar fled. For hours Little’s car had pursued it along the tarred and macadamized roads that fringe the Jersey coast—over bridges and viaducts and across wastes of sand, in a straight line from Asbury Park to Atlantic City and then across country and back again to the coast, and now down a thin terrain lashed by Atlantic spray, deserted save for a few ramshackle huts of fishermen and a vast congregation of gulls.

Chaugnar Faugn had moved with unbelievable rapidity, from the instant when they had first encountered it crouching somnolently in the shadows beneath a deserted bathhouse at Long Branch and had turned the light on it and watched it awake to the moment when it had gone shambling away through the darkness its every movement had been ominous with menace.

Twice it had stopped in the road and waited for them to approach and once its great arm had raised itself against them in a gesture of malignant defiance. And on that occasion only the entropy machine had saved them. Its light Chaugnar could not bear, and when Little had turned the ray upon the creature’s flanks the great obscene body had heaved and shuddered and a ghastly screeching had issued from its bulbous lips. And then forward again it had forged, its thick, stumpy legs moving with the rapidity of pistons—carrying it over the ground so rapidly that the car could not keep pace.

But always its tracks had remained visible, for a phosphorescence streamed from them, illuming its retreat. And always its hoarse bellowing could be heard in the distance, freighted with fury and a hatred incalculable.

And by the stench, too, they trailed it, for all the air through which it passed was acridly defiled—pungent with an uncleanness that evades description.

“It is infinitely old,” cried Little as he maneuvered the car about the base of a sea-lashed dune. “As old as the earth’s crust. Otherwise it would have crumbled. You saw how the bathhouse crumbled—how the shells beneath its feet dissolved and vanished. It is only its age that saves it.”

“You had the light on it for five minutes,” shouted Algernon. His voice was hoarse with excitement. “And it still lives. What can we do.?”

“We must corner it—keep the light directed at it for—many minutes. To send it back we must decrease the random element in it by a billion years. It has remained substantially as it is now for at least that long. Perhaps longer.”

“How many years of earth-time does the machine lop off a minute?” shouted Imbert.

“Can’t tell exactly. It works differently with different objects. Metals, stone, wood all have a different entropy-rhythm. But roughly, it should reverse entropy throughout a billion years of earth-time in ten or fifteen minutes.”

“There it is!” shouted Algernon. “It’s reached the crossroads. Look!”

Against a windshield glazed with sea-mist Imbert laid his forehead, peering with bulging eyes at the form of Chaugnar, phosphorescently illumed a quarter-mile before them on the road, and even as he stared the distance between the car and the loathsome horror diminished by fifty yards.

“It isn’t moving,” cried Little. He had half risen from his seat and was gripping the wheel as though it were a living thing. “It’s waiting for us. Turn on the light, sir. Quick! For God’s sake! We’re almost on top of it!” Algernon fell upon his knees in the dark and groped about for the switch. The engine’s roar increased as Little stepped furiously upon the accelerator. “The light, quick!” Little almost screamed the words.

Algernon’s fingers found the switch and thrust it sharply upward. There ensued the drone of revolving spheres. “It’s moving again. God, it’s moving!”

Algernon rose shakingly to his feet. “Where is it?” he shouted. “I don’t see it!”

“It’s making for the marshes,” shouted Little. “Look. Straight ahead, through here.” He pointed toward a clear spot in the windshield. Craning hysterically, Algernon descried a phosphorescent bulk making off over the narrowest of the bisecting roads.

With a frantic spin of the wheel Little turned the car about and sent the speedometer soaring. The road grew narrower and more uneven as they advanced along it and the car careened perilously. “Careful,” Algernon called out warningly. “We’ll get ditched. Better slow up.”

“No,” cautioned Little, his voice sharp with alarm. “We can’t stop now.”

The light from the machine was streaming unimpeded into the darkness before them.

“Keep it trained on the road,” shouted Little. “It would destroy a man in an instant.”

They could smell the mud flats now. A pungent salty odor of stagnant brine and putrescent shellfish drifted toward them, whipped by the wind. A sickly yellow light was spreading sluggishly in the eastern sky. Across the road ahead of them a turtle shambled and vanished hideously in a flash.

“See that?” cried Little. “That’s how Chaugnar would go if it wasn’t as old as the earth.”

“Be ready with the brakes,” Algernon shouted back.

The end of the road had swept into view. It ran swiftly downhill for fifty yards and terminated in a sandy waste that was half submerged at its lower levels. The illumed bulk of Chaugnar paused for an instant on a sandy hillock. Then it moved rapidly downward toward the flats, arms spread wide, body swaying strangely, as though it were in awe of the sea.

Little steered the car to the side of the road and threw on the brakes. “Out—both of you!” he shouted.

Algernon descended to the ground and stood for an instant shakingly clinging to the door of the car. Then, in a sudden access of determination, he sprang back and began tugging at the machine, whilst Imbert strove valiantly to assist him.

There came a bellow from the great form that was advancing into the marsh. Algernon drew close to Little, and gripped him firmly by the arm. “Hadn’t we better wait here?” he asked, his voice tight with strain. “It seems to fear the sea. We can entrench ourselves here and attack it with the light when it climbs back.”

“No,” Little’s reply was emphatic. “We haven’t a second to waste. It may—mire itself. It’s too massive to flounder through the mud without becoming hopelessly bogged down. We’ll drive it forward into the marsh.”

Resolutely he stopped and beckoned to his companions to assist him in raising and supporting the machine. Dawn was spreading in the east, as the three men staggered downward over the sandy waste, a planet’s salvation in the glittering shape they carried.

Straight into the morass they went, quaking with terror but impelled by a determination that was oblivious to caution. From Chagnar there now came an insistent screeching and bellowing, a noise that smote so ominously on Algernon’s ear that he wanted, desperately, to drop the machine and head back toward the car. But above the obscene bellowings of the horror rose Little’s voice in courageous exhortation. “Don’t stop for an instant,” he cried. “We must keep it from circling back to the road. It will turn in a moment. It’s sinking deeper and deeper. It will have to turn.”

Their shoes sank into the sea-soaked marsh weeds, while luridly across the glistening morass streamed the greenish light from the machine, effacing everything in its path save the mud itself, which bubbled and heaved, made younger in an instant by ten thousand years. And then, suddenly, the great thing turned and faced them.

Knee-deep in the soft mud it turned, its glowing flanks quivering with ire, its huge trunk malignly upraised, a flail of flame. For an instant it loomed thus terribly menacing, the soul of all malignancy and horror, a cancerous Cyclops oozing feter. Then the light swept over it, and it recoiled with a convulsive trembling of its entire bulk. Though half mired, it retreated swayingly, and its bellows turned to hoarse gurglings, such as no animal throat had uttered in all earth’s eons of sentient evolution.

And then, slowly, it began to change. As the light streamed over and enveloped it, it began unmistakably to shrivel and darken.

“Keep the light steady,” Little cried out, his voice tremulous with concern, his features set in an expression of utter revulsion.

Algernon and Imbert continued to advance with the machine, as sickened as Little was by what they saw but supported now by the disappearance of all uncertainty as to the truth of Little’s claims.

And now that which had taken to itself an earth-form in eons primordial began awfully to disincarnate and before their gaze was enacted a drama so

revolting as to imperil reason. A burning horror withdrew from its garments of clay and retraced in patterns of unspeakable dimness the history of its enshrinement. Not instantly had it incarnated itself, but by stages slow and fantasmal and sickening. To ascend, Chaugnar had had to feast, not on men at first, for there were no men when it lay venomously outspread on the earth's crust, but on entities no less malignant than itself, the spawn of star-births incalculable. For before the earth cooled she had drawn from the skies a noxious progeny. Drawn earthward by her holocaust they had come, and relentlessly Chaugnar had devoured them.

And now as that which had occurred in the beginning was enacted anew these blasphemies were disgorged, and above the dark wrack defilement spread. And at last from a beast-shape to a jelly Chaugnar passed, a jelly enveloped in darting filaments of corpse-pale flame. For an instant it moved above the black marsh, as it had moved in the beginning when it had come from beyond the universe of stars to wax bestial in the presence of Man. And then the flames vanished and nothing remained but a cold wind blowing across the estuary from the open sea.

Little let out a great cry and Algernon released his hold on the machine and dropped to his knees on the wet earth. Imbert, too, relinquished the machine but before doing so he shot back the lever at its base.

Only for an instant did the victory go unchallenged. For before the spheres on the machine had ceased to revolve, before even the light had vanished from the gleaming waste, the malignancy that had been Chaugnar Faugn reshaped itself in the sky above them.

Indescribably it loomed through the gray sea-mists, its bulk magnified a thousandfold, its long, dangling trunk swaying slowly back and forth.

For an instant it towered above them, glaring venomously. Then, like a racer, it stooped and floundered forward and went groping about with its monstrous hands for the little shapes it hated. It was still groping when it dimmed and vanished into the depth of the hazy, dawn-brightened sky.

Chapter 10

Little's Explanation

It was the fifth day since Chaugnar Faugn had been sent back through time. Algernon and Little sat in the latter's laboratory and discussed the

destruction of the horror over cups of black coffee.

“You think, then, that the last manifestation we saw was a kind of spectral emanation, without physical substance.”

“Not wholly, perhaps,” replied Little. “An odor of putrefaction came from it. I should regard the phenomenon as a kind of tenuous reassembling rather than an apparition in a strict sense. Chaugnar had been incarnate for so long in the hideous shape with which we are familiar that its disembodied intelligence could re-clothe itself in a kind of porous mimesis before it returned to its hyperdimensional sphere. So rapidly did our machine reverse entropy that perhaps tiny fragments of its terrestrial body survived, and these, by a tremendous exercise of will, it may have reassembled and, figuratively, *blown up*. That is to say, it may have taken these tiny fragments and so increased their porosity beyond the normal porosity of matter that they produced the cyclopean apparition we saw. All matter, you know, is tremendously porous, and if I could remove all the ‘vacuums’ from your body you would shrink to the size of a pin-head.”

Algernon nodded, and was silent for a moment. Then he stood up, laid his coffee cup on the windowsill and crossed to where Little was sitting. “We agreed,” he said, “that we wouldn’t discuss Chaugnar further until... well, until we were in a little calmer frame of mind than we were a few days ago. It was a wise decision, I think. But I’m now so certain that what we both witnessed was not an illusion that I must insist you return an *honest* answer to two questions. I shall not expect a comprehensive and wholly satisfying explanation, for I’m aware that you are not completely sure yourself as to the exact nature of Chaugnar. But you have at least formed an hypothesis, and there are a good many things you haven’t told me which I’ve earned the right to know.”

“What do you wish to know?” Little’s voice was constrained, reluctant.

“What destroyed the horror in the Pyrenees? Why were there no more massacres after—after that night?”

Little smiled wanly. “Have you forgotten the pools of black slime which were found on the melting snow a thousand feet above the village three days after we sent Chaugnar back?”

“You mean...?”

Little nodded. “Chaugnar’s kin, undoubtedly. They accompanied Chaugnar back, but left like their master, a few remainders. Little round

pools of putrescent slime—a superfluity of rottenness that somehow resisted the entropy-reversing action of the machine.”

“You mean that the machine sent entropy-reversing emanations half across the world?”

Little shook his head. “I mean simply that Chaugnar Faugn and its hideous brethren were *joined together* hyperdimensionally and that we destroyed them simultaneously. It is an axiom of virtually every speculative philosophy based on the newer physics and the concepts of non-Euclidean mathematics that we can’t perceive the real *relations* of objects in the external world, that since our senses permit us to view them merely three-dimensionally we can’t perceive the hyperdimensional links which unite them.

“If we could see the same objects—men, trees, chairs, houses—on a fourth-dimensional plane, for instance, we’d notice connections that are now wholly unsuspected by us. Your chair, to pick an example at random, may actually be joined to the window-ledge behind you or...to the Woolworth Building. Or you and I may be but infinitesimally tiny fragments of some gigantic monster occupying vast segments of space-time. You may be a mere excrescence on the monster’s back, and I a hair of its head—I speak metaphorically, of course, since in higher dimensions of space-time there can be nothing but analogies to objects on the terrestrial globe—or you and I and all men, and everything in the world, every particle of matter, may be but a single fragment of this larger entity. If anything should happen to the entity you and I would *both* suffer, but as the monster would be invisible to us, no one—no one equipped with normal human organs of awareness—would suspect that we were suffering because we were parts of *it*. To a three-dimensional observer we should appear to be suffering from different causes and our invisible hyperdimensional *solidarity* would remain wholly unsuspected.

“If two people were thus hyperdimensionally joined, like Siamese twins, and one of them were destroyed by a machine similar to the one we used against Chaugnar Faugn, the other would suffer effacement at the same instant, though he were on the opposite side of the world.”

Algernon looked puzzled.

“But why should the link be invisible? Assuming that Chaugnar Faugn and the Pyrenean horrors were hyperdimensionally joined together—either

because they were parts of one great monster, or merely because they were one in the hyperdimensional sphere, why should this hyperdimensional connecting link be invisible to us?”

“Well—perhaps an analogy will make it clearer. If you were a two instead of a three-dimensional entity, and if, when you regarded objects about you—chairs, houses, animals—you saw only their length and breadth, you wouldn’t be able to form any intelligible conception of their relations to other objects in the dimension you couldn’t apprehend—the dimension of thickness. Only a portion of an ordinary three-dimensional object would be visible to you and you could only make a mystical guess as to how it would look with another dimension added to it. In that, to you, unperceivable dimension of thickness it might join itself to a thousand other objects and you’d never suspect that such a connection existed. You might perceive hundreds of flat surfaces about you, all disconnected, and you would never imagine that they formed one object in the third dimension.

“You would live in a two-dimensional world and when three-dimensional objects intruded into that world you would be unaware of their true objective conformation—or relatively unaware, for your perceptions would be perfectly valid so long as you remained two-dimensional.

“Our perceptions of three-dimensional world are only valid for that world—to a fourth-dimensional or fifth-or sixth-dimensional entity our conceptions of objects external to us would seem utterly ludicrous. And we know that such entities exist. Chaugnar Faugn was such an entity. And because of its hyperdimensional nature it was joined to the horror on the hills in a way we weren’t able to perceive. We can perceive connections when they have length, breadth and thickness, but when a new dimension is added they pass out of our ken, precisely as a solid object passes out of the ken of an observer in a dimension lower than ours. Have I clarified your perplexities?”

Algernon nodded. “I think—yes, I am sure that you have. But I should like to ask you another question. Do you believe that Chaugnar Faugn is a transcendent world-soul endowed with a supernatural incorporeality, or just—just a material entity? I mean, was Ulman’s priest right and was Chaugnar an incarnation of the Oneness of the Brahmic mysteries, the portentous all-in-all of theosophists and occultists, or merely a product of physical evolution on a plane incomprehensible to us?”

Little took a long sip of coffee and very deliberately lowered his head, as though he were marshalling his convictions for a debate. "I believe I once told you," he said at last, "that I didn't believe Chagnar Faugn could be destroyed by any agent less transcendental than that which we used against it. It certainly wasn't protoplasmic or mineral, and no mechanical device not based on relativist concepts could have effected the dissolution we witnessed. An infra-red ray machine, for instance, or a cyclotron would have been powerless to send it back. Yet despite the transcendental nature of even its incarnate shell, despite the fact that even in its earth-shape it was fashioned of a substance unknown on the earth and that we can form no conception of its shape in the multidimensional sphere it now inhabits, it is my opinion that it is inherently, like ourselves, a circumscribed entity—the spawn of remote worlds and unholy dimensions, but a creature and not a creator, a creature obeying inexorable laws and occupying a definite niche in the cosmos.

"In a way we can never understand it had acquired the ability to roam and could incarnate itself in dimensions lower than its own. But I do not believe it possessed the attributes of deity. It was neither beneficent nor evil, but simply amorally virulent—a vampire-like life form from beyond the universe of stars strayed by chance into our little, walled-in three-dimensional world. One unguarded gate may be standing ajar..."

"But do you believe that it actually made a race of men to serve it—that the Miri Nigri were fashioned from the flesh of primitive amphibians?"

Little frowned. "I don't know. Conditions on the cooling earth two billion years ago may once have been such that creations of that nature antedated the process of biological evolution with which we are familiar. And we may be sure that Chagnar Faugn with its inscrutable endowments could have fashioned men-shapes had it so desired—could have fashioned them even from the plankton-like swarms of small organisms which must have drifted with the tides through the ancient oceans."

Little lowered his voice and looked steadily at Algernon. "Some day," he murmured, "Chagnar may return. We sent it back through time, but in five thousand or a hundred thousand years it may return to ravage. Its return will be presaged in dreams, for when its brethren stirred restlessly on the Spanish hills both I and Hsieh Ho were disturbed in our sleep by harbingers from beyond. Telepathically Chagnar spoke to sleeping minds, and if it

returns it will speak again, for Man is not isolated among the sentient beings of earth but is linked to all that moves in hyperdimensional continuity.”

THE TERRIBLE PARCHMENT, by Manly Wade Wellman

Originally published in *Weird Tales*, August 1937.

“Here’s your *Weird Tales*,” smiled my wife, entering the apartment.

“Thanks, Gwen,” I said, rising and taking the magazine she held out. “I say, it’s surely not the first of the month.”

“Not for two days yet,” Gwen assured me. “But, just as I came to the front door, a funny old man bobbed up with an armful of magazines—advance copies, I guess. He stuck a copy of *W.T.* right under my nose. I gave him a quarter and—oop!”

I had opened the magazine, and a page fluttered to the floor. We both stooped for it, both seized it, and we both let go.

Gwen gasped and I whistled. For that fallen page had such a clammy, wet feel to it. *Dank* is the word, I should think. Still stooping, we frowned mystifiedly at each other. Then I conquered my momentary disgust, took hold of it again, and lifted it into the light of my desk lamp.

“It’s not paper,” Gwen said at once.

No more it was, and what could it be doing in *Weird Tales*?—though it looked weird enough, in all conscience. It was a rectangle of tawny, limp parchment, grained on the upper side with scales, like the skin of some unfamiliar reptile. I turned it over, revealing a smoother surface with pore-like markings and lines of faint, rusty scribbling.

“Arabic,” I pronounced at once. “Let’s phone for Kline to come over; he reads the stuff.”

“There’s one Greek word,” Gwen pointed out. Her pink-tipped forefinger touched the string of capital letters at the upper edge:

NEKPONOMIKON

“*Necronomicon*,” she spelled out. “That P would be the letter *rho* in Greek. *Necronomicon*—sounds woogey, what?”

“That’s the name of H. P. Lovecraft’s book,” I told her.

“Lovecraft’s book? Oh, yes, I remember. He’s always mentioning it in his stories.”

“And lots of *W.T.* authors—Clark Ashton Smith and Robert Bloch and so on—have taken it up,” I added.

“But Lovecraft imagined the thing, didn’t he?”

I laid the parchment on the desk, for my fingers still rebelled at its strange dankness. “Yes, Lovecraft imagined it. Describes it as the work of a mad Arab wizard, Abdul Alhazred, and it’s supposed to contain secrets of powerful evils that existed before the modern world. It’s already become legendary.”

Again my wife touched the thing, very gingerly. “But what’s it for? Some sort of valentine or April Fool joke, stuck in to thrill the subscribers? If so, it’s cleverly made—looks a million years old.”

We pored over the rusty-looking scrawl of Arabic, our heads close together. It must be a fake, we agreed, yet there was every appearance of age-old fadedness about the ink.

“Kline must come over and have a look at it,” I reiterated. “He may give some clue as to where it’s from, and what it was doing in *Weird Tales*.”

Gwen was studying the last line of characters.

“This part isn’t faked,” she said suddenly. “Look, the ink is fresh—almost wet. And it’s not Arabic, it’s Latin.” She paused a moment, slowly translating in her mind. “It says, ‘Chant out the spell, and give me life again.’” She straightened up. “How about a spot of cribbage?”

We both sighed with genuine relief as we turned our backs on the parchment. Light as had been our talk, we had been somehow daunted by the sense of mystery that had ridden in upon us. I got the board and the cards and we began to play on the dining-table.

Ten minutes later I turned suddenly, as if a noise had come to my mind’s ear, and gazed at the desk. The parchment was no longer there.

“Look,” cried Gwen. “It’s blown off on the floor.”

I rose and picked it up. It felt even more unpleasant than before, and this time it seemed to wriggle in my hand. Perhaps a draft stirred it, but I could detect no draft. Dropping it back on the desk, I weighted it with an ash-tray and went back to the game.

Gwen beat me soundly, adding to her household money thereby. I taunted her with suggestions of a girlhood misspent at gaming-tables, then turned idly to the desk once more.

The rectangle of parchment was *beside* the ash-tray, not *under* it, and—that undetectable draft again!—was sliding ever so deliberately toward the edge of the desk. I swore, or so Gwen insists, and fairly jumped over to seize it.

“This is getting ridiculous,” Gwen protested, fumbling nervously with the cards on the table.

I was studying the thing again. “I thought you said the last line was in Latin,” I remarked.

“Why, so it is.”

“No, it’s in English.” I read it aloud: “‘Chant out the spell, and give me life again.’ Hello, the next to the last line is in English, too.”

It also was written with fresh ink and in a bold hand:

“Many minds and many wishes give substance to the worship of Cthulhu.”

Gwen had come to look over my shoulder. “By heaven, dear, you’re right. ‘Many minds and—’ But what does Cthulhu mean? Does it have anything to do with the chthonian gods—the underworld rulers that the ancient Greeks served in fear?”

“I shouldn’t be surprised,” I replied, and it sounded even drier than I had intended. “Cthulhu is a name that Lovecraft and Smith and the others used in their yarns. He’s a god of old time, they tell us, and a rank bad one at that.”

She shuddered, but gamely turned the shudder into a toss of her shoulders. “I suppose,” she hazarded, “that the ‘many minds and wishes’ have given substance to this page of the *Necronomicon!*”

“Nonsense, the *Necronomicon*’s only something in Lovecraft’s stories.”

“Didn’t you just say that it had become a legend among readers of weird fiction?” she reminded, utterly serious. “What’s the next step after that?”

“What you’re trying to suggest,” I said, trying to be gaily scornful, “is that so many people have thought and talked about Lovecraft’s book that they’ve actually given it substance.”

“Something like that,” she nodded thoughtfully. Then, more brightly: “Oh, it’ll turn out to be a joke or something else anticlimactic.”

“Right,” I agreed readily. “After all, we’re not living in a weird tale, you know.”

“If we were, that would explain why there was one last line in Latin before, and now two last lines in English.” She warmed to the idea. “You see, it was turning deliberately into a language we could read. When we hesitated over the Latin—”

“—it kindly changed into English,” I finished.

Again she nodded. “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy.”

“Trite but true. Still, my name’s not Horatio, and it’s bedtime. Let’s not dream any philosophies that will turn into nightmare.” Once more I picked up that clammy parchment. “As for this creation of many minds or what have you, I’m putting it under stoppages.” Opening the big dictionary that lies on a stand beside my desk, I laid the parchment inside and closed the heavy book upon it. “There it stays until we get Kline here tomorrow. And now to bed.”

To bed we went, but not to sleep.

Gwen squirmed and muttered, and I was weary in every portion of my body save the eyelids. We got up once for sandwiches and milk, and a second time for aspirin. A third time we lay down, and I, at least, dozed off.

I started awake to the pressure of Gwen’s fingers on my shoulder.

“I think—” she began tensely. Then I heard what she had heard, a faint, stealthy rustle.

I reached for the light cord above the bed and gave it a jerk. The room sprang into radiance, and through the open door I could see the parlor. I sat up in bed, staring.

Something hung down from between the leaves of the dictionary by the desk, something that moved even as I made it out. Something that would be rectangular if laid flat, but which was now limper, more flexible than the wettest rag, that seemed to *flow* from its narrow prison like a trickle of fluid filth.

“It’s getting away,” breathed Gwen almost inaudibly. “It’s going to come here for us.”

The parchment worked its last corner free and dropped to the floor with a fleshy slap, as though it had soft weight. It began to move across the rug toward the bedroom door. Toward us.

I dare say I might be able to describe painstakingly its appearance as it moved—how it humped up in the middle and laid its corners to the floor

like feet. But how can I convey the heart-stopping nastiness of it, how visualize for you the animosity and sense of wicked power that it gave off in waves almost palpable? You might get an idea of how it looked by draping a sheet of brown paper over the back of a creeping turtle...no, that sounds ludicrous. There was nothing funny in the way that parchment moved across the carpet toward us, not a single atom of humor.

Gwen had slipped out from under the covers and crouched, all doubled up and panicky, against the headboard. Her helpless terror nerved me to defense. Somehow I got out and stood upright on the floor. I am sure that I looked most unheroic with my rumpled hair and my blue pajamas and my bare feet, but I was ready to do battle.

Yes, do battle with what? And how?

That crawling scrap of parchment had reached the threshold, hunched over the door-sill like a very flat and loathly worm. I could see the writing on it, not rusty and faint but black and heavy. Snatching a water-glass from the bedside table, I hurled it. The foul thing crumpled suddenly sidewise. The glass splintered to atoms where it had been. Next moment the parchment was humping and creeping faster, almost scampering, toward my bare toes.

“Smash it,” Gwen choked out. She must have been ready to faint.

Against a chair close at hand leaned her little parasol, a feminine thing with a silken tassel at its handle and a ferrule of imitation amber. I seized it and made a violent stab at the horrid invader. My point thrust the center of it against the floor, and for a moment I pinned it there.

Then I was able to see in what manner it was changed.

At the top was still the Greek word NEKPONOMIKON in aged ink; but the Arabic writing that had filled the page below was gone, or transformed; transformed into English, written large and bold and black as jet. Stooped as I was above it, I read at a glance the first line.

A thousand times since I have yearned to speak that line aloud, to write it down, to do something that would ease my mind of it. But I must not, now or ever. As it was, the world escaped all too narrowly.

Who shaped so dreadful a thought? Abdul Alhazred is but a figment of Love-craft’s imagination. And Lovecraft is human—he could never have dreamed anything like those words, those words that lie upon my mind, I

say, like links of a red-hot iron chain. And they were but the beginning of the writing. What could it have been like in full?

I dare not surmise. But this much I suddenly knew for the truth, as I tried to crush that horribly alive parchment-scrap beneath my inadequate parasol—the formless evil of the centuries had taken form. An author had fancied the book, hundreds of others had given it fuller being by their own mental images. The new-hatched legend had become a slender but fearsome peg on which terror, creeping over the borderland from its own forbidding realm, could hang itself. Once hung there, it could grow tangible, solid, potent.

“Gwen,” I warned, “hide your eyes. Don’t look. Don’t read.”

“What do you mean, don’t read?” Her pale face moved closer as she leaned across the bed.

“Don’t read!” I raved at her. “Remember what you’ve seen already—‘Chant out the spell and give me life again!’”

The parchment slid slowly out from under the down-pressed parasol. I could hold it no easier than if it had been a moist melon seed. It reached my foot—*ugh!* It was climbing my leg.

What was it up to? Merciful heavens, would it scale my body as a squirrel scales a tree, would it drape itself upon my face and force its unspeakable message into my eyes and my mind? Because then I’d *have* to speak.

The burden of it would be too great. My lips would open to ease the torture. “Chant out the spell”—chant it out, and the world would be crushed again under the fearsome feet of Cthulhu and his brother-horrors of the evil eld. What sins and woes would run loose, at which Satan in hell must hide his shocked face? And it would be I, I, who spoke the words that released them.

I felt faint and dizzy, but I tore the repellent sheathing from my leg. For a moment it clung against my strength, as though with tendrils or suckers. With all my force I dashed it into a metal waste-basket, among crumpled heaps of paper. It tried to flop out again, but I pushed it back with the parasol. At the same time I clutched my cigarette lighter from the bedside table. Thank heaven it worked, it burst into flame. I flung it into the basket.

The whole mass of paper burst into fire and smoke. Up from the midst of it rose a faint, throbbing squeak, to be felt rather than heard, like the

voice of a bat far away. Deeper into the little furnace I thrust that outcast messenger from the forces that threatened my world.

The flames worried it, and it crinkled and thrashed as if in agony, but it did not burn. Prodding it back again and again, I must have shouted something in my despair, for Gwen hurried to the telephone and jabbered into it.

“Father O’Neal!” she cried. “Come quick, with holy water!”

Hanging up, she turned to me.

“Is he coming?” I panted.

“Yes, he’ll be here in two minutes.” Her voice quavered. “But what if the holy water doesn’t work?”

It did work. At the first spatter, the unhallowed page and its prodigious gospel of wickedness vanished into a fluff of ashes. I pray my thankfulness for that, every day that I live. Yet, even as I offer thanks, my troubled mind forms again the question that Gwen asked:

What if the holy water had not worked?

Update-3...

THE SHAMBLER FROM THE STARS, by Robert Bloch

Originally published in *Weird Tales*, September 1935.

CHAPTER 1

I have nobody but myself to blame for the whole affair. It was my own blundering that precipitated that unforeseen horror upon us both; my own stupidity that caused our downfall. The acknowledgment of my fault does not help us now; my friend is dead, and in order to escape an impinging doom worse than death I must follow him into the darkness. So far I have relied upon the ever-diminishing potency of alcohol and drugs to dull the pangs of memory, but I shall find true peace only in the grave.

Before I go I shall inscribe my story as a warning, lest others make the same mistake and suffer a similar fate.

I am what I profess to be—a writer of weird fiction. Since earliest childhood I have been enthralled by the cryptic fascination of the unknown and the un-guessable. The nameless fears, the grotesque dreams, the queer, half-intuitive fancies that haunt our minds have always exercised for me a potent and inexplicable delight.

In literature I have walked the midnight paths with Poe or crept amidst the shadows with Machen; combed the realms of horrific stars with Baudelaire, or steeped myself with earth's inner madness amidst the tales of ancient lore. A meager talent for sketching and crayon work led me to attempt crude picturizations involving the outlandish denizens of my nighted thoughts. The same somber trend of intellect which drew me in my art interested me in obscure realms of musical composition; the symphonic strains of the *Danse Macabre* and the like became my favorites. My inner life soon became a ghoulish feast of eldritch, tantalizing horrors.

My outer existence was comparatively dull. Days of grammar school and adolescent high school soon passed. As time went on I found myself drifting more and more into the life of a penurious recluse; a tranquil, philosophical existence amidst a world of books and dreams.

A man must live. By nature constitutionally and spiritually unfitted for manual labor, I was at first puzzled about the choice of a suitable vocation.

The depression complicated matters to an almost intolerable degree, and for a time I was close to utter economic disaster. It was then that I decided to write.

I procured a battered typewriter, a ream of cheap paper, and a few carbons. My subject matter did not bother me. What better field than the boundless realms of a colorful imagination? I would write of horror, fear, and the riddle that is Death. At least, in the callowness of my unsophistication, this was my intention.

My first attempts soon convinced me how utterly I had failed. Sadly, miserably, I fell short of my aspired goal. My vivid dreams became on paper merely meaningless jumbles of ponderous adjectives, and I found no ordinary words to express the wondrous terror of the unknown. My first manuscripts were miserable and futile documents; the few magazines using such material being unanimous in their rejections.

I had to live. Slowly but surely I began to adjust my style to my ideas. Laboriously I experimented with words, phrases, sentence-structure. It was work, and hard work at that. I soon learned to sweat. At last, however, one of my stories met with favor; then a second, a third, a fourth. Soon I had begun to master the more obvious tricks of the trade, and the future looked brighter at last. It was with an easier mind that I returned to my dream-life and my beloved books. My stories afforded me a somewhat meager livelihood, and for a time this sufficed. But not for long. Ambition, ever an illusion, was the cause of my undoing.

I wanted to write a real story; not the stereotyped, ephemeral sort of tale I turned out for the magazines, but a real work of art. The creation of such a masterpiece became my ideal. I was not a good writer, but that was not entirely due to my errors in mechanical style. It was, I felt, the fault of my subject matter. Vampires, werewolves, ghouls, mythological monsters—these things constituted material of little merit. Commonplace imagery, ordinary adjectival treatment, and a prosaically anthropocentric point of view were the chief detriments to the production of a really good weird tale.

I must have new subject matter, truly unusual plot material. If only I could conceive of something utterly ultra-mundane, something truly macrocosmic, something that was teratologically incredible!

I longed to learn the songs the demons sing as they swoop between the stars, or hear the voices of the olden gods as they whisper their secrets to

the echoing void. I yearned to know the terrors of the grave; the kiss of maggots on my tongue, the cold caress of a rotting shroud upon my body. I thirsted for the knowledge that lies in the pits of mummied eyes, and burned for wisdom known only to the worm. Then I could really write, and my hopes be truly realized.

I sought a way. Quietly I began a correspondence with isolated thinkers and dreamers all over the country. There was a hermit in the western hills, a savant in the northern wilds, a mystic dreamer in New England. It was from the latter that I learned of the ancient books that hold strange lore. He quoted guardedly from the legendary *Necronomicon*, and spoke timidly of a certain *Book of Eibon* that was reputed to surpass it in the utter wildness of its blasphemy. He himself had been a student of these volumes of primal dread, but he did not want me to search too far. He had heard many strange things as a boy in witch-haunted Arkham, where the old shadows still leer and creep, and since then he had wisely shunned the blacker knowledge of the forbidden.

At length, after much pressing on my part, he reluctantly consented to furnish me with the names of certain persons he deemed able to aid me in my quest. He was a writer of notable brilliance and wide reputation among the discriminating few, and I knew he was keenly interested in the outcome of the whole affair.

As soon as his precious list came into my possession, I began a widespread postal campaign in order to obtain access to the desired volumes. My letters went out to universities, private libraries, reputed seers, and the leaders of carefully hidden and obscurely designated cults. But I was foredoomed to disappointment.

The replies I received were definitely unfriendly, almost hostile. Evidently the rumored possessors of such lore were angered that their secret should be thus unveiled by a prying stranger. I was subsequently the recipient of several anonymous threats through the mails, and I had one very alarming phone-call. This did not bother me nearly so much as the disappointing realization that my endeavors had failed. Denials, evasions, refusals, threats—these would not aid me. I must look elsewhere.

The book stores! Perhaps on some musty and forgotten shelf I might discover what I sought.

Then began an interminable crusade. I learned to bear my numerous disappointments with unflinching calm. Nobody in the common run of shops seemed ever to have heard of the frightful *Necronomicon*, the evil *Book of Eibon*, or the disquieting *Cultes des Goules*.

Milwaukee was barren ground. Chicago became my next hunting-place. I made the trip, planning to spend a week there. Instead, I was forced to remain in that city for well over a month. Never have I seen so many book stores!

Persistence brings results. In a little old shop on South Dearborn Street, amidst dusty shelves seemingly forgotten by time, I came to the end of my search.

There, securely wedged between two century-old editions of Shakespeare, stood a great black volume with iron facings. Upon it, in hand-engraved lettering, was the inscription *De Vermis Mysteriis*, or “Mysteries of the Worm.”

The proprietor could not tell how it had come into his possession. Years before, perhaps, it had been included in some second-hand job-lot. He was obviously unaware of its nature, for I purchased it with a dollar bill. He wrapped the ponderous thing for me, well pleased at this unexpected sale, and bade me a very satisfied good-day.

I left hurriedly, the precious prize under my arm. What a find! I had heard of this book before. Ludvig Prinn was its author; he who had perished at the inquisitorial stake in Brussels when the witchcraft trials were at their height. A strange character—alchemist, necromancer, reputed mage—he boasted of having attained a miraculous age when he at last suffered a fiery immolation at the hands of the secular arm. He was said to have proclaimed himself the sole survivor of the ill-fated ninth crusade, exhibiting as proof certain musty documents of attestation. It is true that a certain Ludvig Prinn was numbered among the gentlemen retainers of Montserrat in the olden chronicles, but the incredulous branded Ludvig as a crack-brained impostor, though perchance a lineal descendant of the original warrior.

Ludvig attributed his sorcerous learning to the years he had spent as a captive among the wizards and wonder-workers of Syria, and glibly he spoke of encounters with the djinns and efreetts of elder Eastern myth. He is known to have spent some time in Egypt, and there are legends among the Libyan dervishes concerning the old seer’s deeds in Alexandria.

At any rate, his declining days were spent in the Flemish lowland country of his birth, where he resided, appropriately enough, in the ruins of a pre-Roman tomb that stood in the forest near Brussels. Ludvig was reputed to have dwelt there amidst a swarm of familiars and fearsomely invoked conjurations. Manuscripts still extant speak of him guardedly as being attended by “invisible companions” and “star-sent servants.” Peasants shunned the forest by night, for they did not like certain noises that resounded to the moon, and they most certainly were not anxious to see what worshipped at the old pagan altars that stood crumbling in certain of the darker glens.

For years the old thaumaturgist was infamously notorious throughout the countryside, and many a pilgrim came to him for prophecies, horoscopes, and the dubious service of his potions, philtres, and talismans. There are a few surviving accounts which speak cautiously of his sepulchral dwelling-place, the Saracenic relics, and the invisible servitors he had summoned from afar. There is a curiously uniform reticence on the part of these chroniclers when it comes to describing these servitors in detail, but all agree that the terrible old man was gifted with baleful and unholy powers.

Be that as it may, these creatures that he commanded were never seen after Prinn’s capture by the inquisitorial minions. Searching soldiers found the tomb entirely deserted, though it was thoroughly ransacked before its destruction. The supernatural entities, the unusual instruments, the obscure herds and compounds—all had most curiously vanished. A search of the forbidding woods and a timorous examination of the strange altars did not add to the information. There were fresh blood-stains on the altars, and fresh blood-stains on the rack, too, before the questioning of Prinn was finished. A series of particularly atrocious tortures failed to elicit any further disclosures from the silent wizard, and at length the weary interrogators ceased, and cast the aged sorcerer into a dungeon.

It was in prison, while awaiting trial, that he penned the morbid, horror-hinting lines of *De Vermis Mysteriis*, known today as *Mysteries of the Worm*. How it was ever smuggled through the alert guards is a mystery in itself, but a year after his death it saw print in Cologne. It was immediately suppressed, but a few copies had already been privately distributed. These in turn were transcribed, and although there was a later censored and

deleted printing, only the Latin original is accepted as genuine. Throughout the centuries a few of the elect have read and pondered on its secret. The secrets of the old archimage are known today only to the initiated, and they discourage all attempts to spread their fame, for certain very definite reasons.

This, in brief, was what I knew of the volume's history at the time it came into my possession. As a collector's item alone the book was a phenomenal find, but on its contents I could pass no judgment. It was in Latin. Since I can speak or translate only a few words of that learned tongue, I was confronted by a barrier as soon as I opened the musty pages. It was maddening to have such a treasure-trove of dark knowledge at my command and yet lack the key to its unearthing.

For a moment I despaired, since I was unwilling to approach any local classical or Latin scholar in connection with so hideous and blasphemous a text. Then came an inspiration. Why not take it east and seek the aid of my friend? He was a student of the classics, and would be less likely to be shocked by the horrors of Prinn's baleful revelations. Accordingly I addressed a hasty letter to him, and shortly thereafter received my reply. He would be glad to assist me—I must by all means come at once.

CHAPTER 2

Providence is a lovely town. My friend's house was ancient, and quaintly Georgian. The first floor was a gem of Colonial atmosphere. The second, beneath antique gables that shadowed the enormous window, served as a workroom for my host.

It was here that we pondered that grim, eventful night last April; here beside the open window that overlooked the azure sea. It was a moonless night; haggard and wan with a fog that filled the darkness with bat-like shadows. In my mind's eye I can see it still—the tiny, lamplit room with the big table and the high-backed chairs; the book-cases bordering the walls; the manuscripts stacked in special files.

My friend and I sat at the table, the volume of mystery before us. His lean profile threw a disturbing shadow on the wall, and his waxen face was furtive in the pale light. There was an inexplicable air of portentous revelation quite disturbing in its potency; I sensed the presence of secrets waiting to be revealed.

My companion detected it too. Long years of occult experience had sharpened his intuition to an uncanny degree. It was not cold that made him tremble as he sat there in his chair; it was not fever that caused his eyes to flame like jewel-incarned fires. He knew, even before he opened that accursed tome, that it was evil. The musty scent that rose from those antique pages carried with it the reek of the tomb. The faded leaves were maggoty at the edges, and rats had gnawed the leather; rats which perchance had a ghastlier food for common fare.

I had told my friend the volume's history that afternoon, and had unwrapped it in his presence. Then he had seemed willing and eager to begin an immediate translation. Now he demurred.

It was not wise, he insisted. This was evil knowledge—who could say what demon-dreaded lore these pages might contain, or what ills befall the ignorant one who sought to tamper with their contents? It is not good to learn too much, and men had died for exercising the rotted wisdom that these leaves contained. He begged me to abandon the quest while the book was still unopened and to seek my inspiration in saner things.

I was a fool. Hastily I overruled his objections with vain and empty words. I was not afraid. Let us at least gaze into the contents of our prize. I began to turn the pages.

The result was disappointing. It was an ordinary-looking volume after all—yellow, crumbling leaves set with heavy black-lettered Latin texts. That was all; no illustrations, no alarming designs.

My friend could no longer resist the allurements of such a rare bibliophilic treat. In a moment he was peering intently over my shoulder, occasionally muttering snatches of Latin phrasing. Enthusiasm mastered him at last. Seizing the precious tome in both hands, he seated himself near the window and began reading paragraphs at random, occasionally translating them into English.

His eyes gleamed with a feral light; his cadaverous profile grew intent as he pored over the moldering runes. Sentences thundered in fearsome litany, then faded into tones below a whisper as his voice became as soft as a viper's hiss. I caught only a few phrases now, for in his introspection he seemed to have forgotten me. He was reading of spells and enchantments. I recall allusions to such gods of divination as Father Yig, dark Han, and

serpent-bearded Byatis. I shuddered, for I knew these names of old, but I would have shuddered more had I known what was yet to come.

It came quickly. Suddenly he turned to me in great agitation, and his excited voice was shrill. He asked me if I remembered the legends of Prinn's sorcery, and the tales of the invisible servants he commanded from the stars. I assented, little understanding the cause of his sudden frenzy.

Then he told me the reason. Her under a chapter on familiars, he had found an orison or spell, perhaps the very one Prinn had used to call upon his unseen servitors from beyond the stars! Let me listen, while he read.

I sat there dully, like a stupid, uncomprehending fool. Why did I not scream, try to escape, or tear that monstrous manuscript from his hands? Instead I sat there—sat there while my friend, in a voice cracked with unnatural excitement, read in Latin a long and sonorously sinister invocation.

“Tibi, Magnum Innominandum, signa stellarum nigrarum et bufaniformis Sadoquæ sigillum...”

The croaking ritual proceeded, then rose on wings of nighted, hideous horror. It stabbed my soul with exquisite pain, even though I did not understand. The words seemed to writhe like flames in the air, burning into my brain. The thundering tones seemed to echo into infinity, beyond the farthest star. They seemed to pass into primal and undimensioned gates, to seek out a listener there, and summon him to earth. Was it all an illusion? I did not pause to ponder.

For that unwitting summons was answered. Scarcely had my companion's voice died away in that little room before the terror came. The room turned cold. A sudden wind shrieked in through the open window; a wind that was not of earth. It bore an evil bleating from afar, and at the sound my friend's face became a pale white mask of newly awakened fear. Then there was a crunching at the walls, and the window-ledge buckled before my staring eyes. From out of the nothingness beyond that opening came a sudden burst of lubricious laughter—a hysterical cackling born of utter madness. It rose to the grinning quintessence of all horror, without mouth to give it birth.

The rest happened with startling swiftness. All at once my friend began to scream as he stood by the window; scream and claw wildly at empty air. In the lamplight I saw his features contort into a grimace of insane agony. A

moment later, his body rose unsupported from the floor, and began to bend outward to a back-breaking degree. A second later came the sickening grind of broken bones. His form now hung in midair, the eyes glazed and the hands clutching convulsively as if at something unseen. Once again there came the sound of maniacal tittering, but this time it came from *within the room!*

The stars rocked in red anguish; the cold wind gibbered in my ears. I crouched in my chair, my eyes riveted on that astounding scene in the corner.

My friend was shrieking now; his screams blended with that gleeful, atrocious laughter from the empty air. His sagging body, dangling in space, bent backward once again as blood spurted from the torn neck, spraying like a ruby fountain.

That blood never reached the floor. It stopped in midair as the laughter ceased, and a loathsome sucking noise took its place. With a new and accelerated horror, I realized that that blood was being drained to feed the invisible entity from beyond! What creature of space had been so suddenly and unwittingly invoked? What was that vampiric monstrosity I could not see?

Even now a hideous metamorphosis was taking place. The body of my companion became shrunken, wizened, lifeless. At length it dropped to the floor and lay nauseatingly still. But in midair another and a ghastlier change was taking place.

A reddish glow filled the corner by the window—a *bloody* glow. Slowly but surely the dim outlines of a Presence came into view; the blood-filled outlines of that unseen shambler from the stars. It was red and dripping; an immensity of pulsing, moving jelly; a scarlet blob with myriad tentacular trunks that waved and waved. There were suckers on the tips of the appendages, and these were opening and closing with ghoulish lust...The thing was bloated and obscene; a headless, faceless, eyeless bulk with the ravenous maw and titanic talons of a star-born monster. The human blood on which it had fed revealed the hitherto invisible outlines of the feaster. It was not a sight for sane eyes to see.

Fortunately for my reason, the creature did not linger. Spurning the dead and flabby corpse-like thing on the floor, it purposely seized the dreadful volume with one slimy, sinuous feeler and shambled swiftly to the window;

then squeezed its rubbery, viscous body through the opening. There it disappeared, and I heard its far-off, derisive laughter floating on the wings of the wind as it receded into the gulfs from whence it had come.

That was all. I was left alone in the room with the limp and lifeless body at my feet. The book was gone; but there were bloody prints upon the wall, bloody swaths upon the floor, and the face of my poor friend was a bloody death's-head, leering up at the stars.

For a long time I sat alone in silence before I set on fire that room and all it contained. After that I went away, laughing, for I knew that the blaze would eradicate all trace of what remained. I had arrived only that afternoon, and there were none who knew, and none to see me go, for I departed ere the glowing flames were detected. I stumbled for hours through the twisted streets, and quaked with renewed and idiotic laughter as I looked up at the burning, ever-gloating stars that eyed me furtively through wreaths of haunted fog.

After a long while I became calm enough to board a train. I have been calm throughout the long journey home, and calm throughout the penning of this screed. I was even calm when I read of my friend's curious accidental death in the fire that destroyed his dwelling.

It is only at nights, when the stars gleam, that dreams return to drive me into a gigantic maze of frantic fears. Then I take to drugs, in a vain attempt to ban those leering memories from my sleep. But I really do not care, for I shall not be here long.

I have a curious suspicion that I shall again see that shambler from the stars. I think it will return soon without being re-summoned, and I know that when it comes it will seek me out and carry me down into the darkness that holds my friend. Sometimes I almost yearn for the advent of that day, for then I too shall learn once and for all, the *Mysteries of the Worm*.

THE DIARY OF ALONZO TYPER, by H. P. Lovecraft and William Lumley

Originally published in *Weird Tales*, February 1938.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Alonzo Hasbrouch Typer of Kingston, New York, was last seen and recognized on April 17, 1908, around noon, at the Hotel Richmond in Batavia. He was the only survivor of an ancient Ulster Country family, and was fifty-three years old at the time of his disappearance.

Mr. Typer was educated privately and at Columbia and Heidelberg universities. All his life was spent as a student, the field of his researches including many obscure and generally feared borderlands of human knowledge. His papers on vampirism, ghouls and poltergeist phenomena were privately printed after rejection by many publishers. He resigned from the Society for Psychical Research in 1900 after a series of peculiarly bitter controversies.

At various times Mr. Typer traveled extensively, sometimes dropping out of site for long periods. He is known to have visited obscure spots in Nepal, India, Tibet, and Indo-China, and passed most of the year 1899 on mysterious Easter Island. The extensive search for Mr. Typer after his disappearance yielded no results, and his estate was divided among distant cousins in New York City.

The diary herewith presented was allegedly found in the ruins of a large country house near Attica, N.Y., which had borne a curiously sinister reputation for generations before its collapse. The edifice was very old, antedating the general white settlement of the region, and had formed the home of a strange and secretive family named van der Heyl, which had migrated from Albany in 1746 under a curious cloud of witchcraft suspicion. The structure probably dated from about 1760.

Of the history of the van der Heyls very little is known. They remained entirely aloof from their normal neighbors, employed negro servants brought directly from Africa and speaking little English, and educated their children privately and at European colleges. Those of them who went out into the world were soon lost to sight, though not before gaining evil repute

for association with Black Mass groups and cults of even darker significance.

Around the dreaded house a straggling village arose, populated by Indians and later by renegades from the surrounding contry, which bore the dubious name of Chorazin. Of the singular hereditary strains which afterward appeared in the mixed Chorazin villagers, several monographs have been written by ethnologists. Just behind the village, and in sight of the van der Heyl house, is a steep hill crowned with a peculiar ring of ancient standing stones which the Iroquois always regarded with fear and loathing. The origin and nature of the stones, whose date, according to archeological and climatological evidence, must be fabulously early, is a problem still unsolved.

From about 1795 onward, the legends of the incoming pioneers and later population have much to say about strange cries and chants proceeding at certain seasons from Chorazin and from the great house and hill of standing stones; though there is reason to suppose that the noises ceased about 1872, when the entire van der Heyl household—servants and all—suddenly and simultaneously disappeared.

Thenceforward the house was deserted; for other disastrous events—including three unexplained deaths, five disappearances, and four cases of sudden insanity—occurred when later owners and interested visitors attempted to stay in it. The house, village, and extensive rural areas on all sides reverted to the state and were auctioned off in the absence of discoverable van der Heyl heirs. Since about 1890 the owners (successively the late Charles A. Shields and his son Oscar S. Shields, of Buffalo) have left the entire property in a state of absolute neglect, and have warned all inquirers not to visit the region.

Of those known to have approached the house during the last forty years, most were occult students, police officers, newspaper men, and odd characters from abroad. Among the latter was a mysterious Eurasian, probably from Chochin-China, whose later appearance with blank mind and bizarre mutilations excited wide press notice in 1903.

Mr. Typer's diary—a book about 6 x 3 1/2 inches in size, with tough paper and an oddly durable binding of thin sheet metal—was discovered in the possession of one of the decadent Chorazin villagers on November 16, 1935, by a state policeman sent to investigate the rumored collapse of the

deserted van der Heyl mansion. The house had indeed fallen, obviously from sheer age and decrepitude, in the severe gale of November 12. Disintergration was peculiarly complete, and no thorough search of the ruins could be made for several weeks. John Eagle, the swarthy, simian-faced, Indian-like villager who had the diary, said that he found the book quite near the surface of the debris, in what must have been an upper front room.

Very little of the contents of the house could be identified, though an enormous and astonishingly solid brick vault in the cellar (whose ancient iron door had to be blasted open because of the strangely figured and perversely tenacious lock) remained intact and presented several puzzling features. For one thing, the walls were covered with still undeciphered hieroglyphs roughly incised in the brickwork. Another peculiarity was a huge circular aperture in the rear of the vault, blocked by a cave-in evidently caused by the collapse of the house.

But strangest of all was the apparently recent deposit of some fetid, slimy, pitch-black substance on the flagstoned floor, extending in a yardbroad, irregular line with one end at the blocked circular aperture. Those who first opened the vault declared that the place smelled like the snake-house at a zoo.

The diary, which was apparently designed solely to cover an investigation of the dreaded van der Heyl house, by the vanished Mr. Typer, has been proved by handwriting experts to be genuine. The script shows signs of increasing nervous strain as it progresses toward the end, in places becoming almost illegible. Chorazin villagers—whose stupidity and taciturnity baffle all students of the region and its secrets—admit no recollection of Mr. Typer as distinguished from other rash visitors to the dreaded house.

The text of the diary is here given verbatim and without comment. How to interpret it, and what, other than the writer's madness, to infer from it, the reader must decide for himself. Only the future can tell what its value may be in solving a generation-old mystery. It may be remarked that genealogists confirm Mr. Typer's belated memory in the matter of Adriaen Sleght.

THE DIARY

Arrived here about 6 P.M. Had to walk all the way from Attica in the teeth of an oncoming storm, for no one would rent me a horse or rig, and I can't run an automobile. This place is even worse than I had expected, and I dread what is coming, even though I long at the same time to learn the secret. All too soon will come the night—the old Walpurgis sabbat horror—and after that time in Wales I know what to look for. Whatever comes, I shall not flinch. Prodded by some unfathomable urge, I have given my whole life to the quest of unholy mysteries. I came here for nothing else, and will not quarrel with fate.

It was very dark when I got here, though the sun had by no means set. The stormclouds were the densest I had ever seen, and I could not have found my way but for the lightning-flashes. The village is a hateful little back-water, and its few inhabitants no better than idiots. One of them saluted me in a queer way, as if he knew me. I could see very little of the landscape—just a small, swamp valley of strange brown weedstalks and dead fungi surrounded by scraggly, evilly twisted trees with bare boughs. But behind the village is a dismal-looking hill on whose summit is a circle of great stones with another stone at the center. That, without question, is the vile primordial thing V—— told me about the N—— estbat.

The great house lies in the midst of a park all overgrown with curious-looking briars. I could scarcely break through, and when I did the vast age and decrepitude of the building almost stopped me from entering. The place looked filthy and diseased, and I wondered how so leprous a building could hang together. It is wooden; and though its original lines are hidden by a bewildering tangle of wings added at various dates, I think it was first built in the square colonial fashion of New England. Probably that was easier to build than a Dutch stone house—and then, too, I recall that Dirck van der Heyl's wife was from Salem, a daughter of the unmentionable Abaddon Corey. There was a small pillared porch, and I got under it just as the storm burst. It was a fiendish tempest—black as midnight, with rain in sheets, thunder and lightning like the day of general dissolution, and a wind that actually clawed at me.

The door was unlocked, so I took out my electric torch and went inside. Dust was inches thick on floor and furniture, and the place smelled like a mold-caked tomb. There was a hall reaching all the way through, and a curving staircase on the right.

I plowed my way upstairs and selected this front room to camp out in. The whole place seems fully furnished, though most of the furniture is breaking down. This is written at 8 o'clock, after a cold meal from my traveling-case. After this the village people will bring me supplies, though they won't agree to come any closer than the ruins of the park gate until (as they say) later. I wish I could get rid of an unpleasant feeling of familiarity with this place.

Later

I am conscious of several presences in this house. One in particular is decidedly hostile toward me—a malevolent will which is seeking to break down my own and overcome me. I must not countenance this for an instant, but must use all my forces to resist it. It is appallingly evil, and definitely nonhuman. I think it must be allied to powers outside Earth—powers in the spaces behind time and beyond the universe. It towers like a colossus, bearing out what is said in the Aklo writings. There is such a feeling of vast size connected with it that I wonder these chambers can contain its bulk—and yet it has no visible bulk. Its age must be unutterably vast—shockingly, indescribably so.

April 18

Slept very little last night. At 3 A.M. a strange, creeping wind began to pervade the whole region, ever rising until the house rocked as if in a typhoon. As I went down the staircase to see the rattling front door the darkness took half-visible forms in my imagination. Just below the landing I was pushed violently from behind—by the wind, I suppose, though I could have sworn I saw the dissolving outlines of a gigantic black paw as I turned quickly about. I did not lose my footing, but safely finished the descent and shot the heavy bolt of the dangerously shaking door.

I had not meant to explore the house before dawn; yet now, unable to sleep again, and fired with mixed terror and curiosity, I felt reluctant to postpone my search. With my powerful torch I plowed through the dust to the great south parlor, where I knew the portraits would be. There they were, just as V—— had said, and as I seemed to know from some obscurer source as well. Some were so blackened and dustclouded that I could make little or nothing of them, but from those I could trace I recognized that they

were indeed of the hateful line of the van der Heyls. Some of the paintings seemed to suggest faces I had known; but just what faces, I could not recall.

The outlines of that frightful hybrid Joris—spawned in 1773 by Dirck’s youngest daughter—were clearest of all, and I could trace the green eyes and the serpent look in his face. Every time I shut off the flashlight that face would seem to glow in the dark until I half fancied it shone with a faint, greenish light of its own. The more I looked, the more evil it seemed, and I turned away to avoid hallucinations of changing expression.

But that to which I turned was even worse. The long, dour face, small, closely set eyes and swine-like features identified it at once, even though the artist had striven to make the snout look as human as possible. This was what V—— had whispered about. As I stared in horror, I thought the eyes took on a reddish glow, and for a moment the background seemed replaced by an alien and seemingly irrelevant scene—a lone, bleak moor beneath a dirty yellow sky, whereon grew a wretched-looking blackthorn bush. Fearing for my sanity, I rushed from that accursed gallery to the dust-cleared corner upstairs where I have my “camp.”

Later

Decided to explore some more of the labyrinthine wings of the house by daylight. I cannot be lost, for my footprints are distinct in the ankle-deep dust, and I can trace other identifying marks when necessary. It is curious how easily I learn the intricate windings of the corridors. Followed a long, outflung northerly “ell” to its extremity, and came to a locked door, which I forced. Beyond was a very small room quite crowded with furniture, and with the panelling badly worm-eaten. On the outer wall I spied a black space behind the rotting woodwork, and discovered a narrow secret passage leading downward to unknown inky depths. It was a steeply inclined chute or tunnel without steps or handholds, and I wondered what its use could have been.

Above the fireplace was a moldy painting, which I found on close inspection to be that of a young woman in the dress of the late Eighteenth Century. The face is of classic beauty, yet with the most fiendishly evil expression which I have ever known the human countenance to bear. Not merely callousness, greed, and cruelty, but some quality hideous beyond human comprehension seems to sit upon those finely carved features. And

as I looked it seemed to me that the artist—or the slow processes of mold and decay—had imparted to that pallid complexion a sickly greenish cast, and the least suggestion of an almost imperceptibly scaly texture. Later I ascended to the attic, where I found several chests of strange books—many of utterly alien aspects in letters and in physical form alike. One contained variants of the Aklo formulae which I had never known to exist. I have not yet examined the books on the dusty shelves downstairs.

April 19

There are certainly unseen presences here, even though the dust bears no footprints but my own. Cut a path through the briars yesterday to the park gate where my supplies are left, but this morning I found it closed. Very odd, since the bushes are barely stirring with spring sap. Again I had that feeling of something at hand so colossal that the chambers can scarcely contain it. This time I feel more than one of the presences is of such a size, and I know now that the third Aklo ritual—which I found in that book in the attic yesterday—would make such being solid and visible. Whether I shall dare to try this materialization remains to be seen. The perils are great.

Last night I began to glimpse evanescent shadow-faces and forms in the dim corners of the halls and chambers—faces and forms so hideous and loathsome that I dare not describe them. They seemed allied in substance to that titanic paw which tried to push me down the stairs night before last, and must of course be phantoms of my disturbed imagination. What I am seeking would not be quite like these things. I have seen the paw again, sometimes alone and sometimes with its mate, but I have resolved to ignore all such phenomena.

Early this afternoon I explored the cellar for the first time, descending by a ladder found in a store-room, since the wooden steps had rotted away. The whole place is a mass of nitrous encrustations, with amorphous mounds marking the spots where various objects have disintegrated. At the farther end is a narrow passage which seems to extend under the northerly “ell” where I found the little locked room, and at the end of this is a heavy brick wall with a locked iron door. Apparently belonging to a vault of some sort, this wall and door bear evidences of the Eighteenth Century workmanship and must be contemporary with the oldest additions to the house—clearly

pre-Revolutionary. On the lock, which is obviously older than the rest of the ironwork, are engraved certain symbols which I cannot decipher.

V—— had not told me about this vault. It fills me with a greater disquiet than anything else I have seen, for every time I approach it I have an almost irresistible impulse to listen for something. Hitherto no untoward sounds have marked my stay in this malign place. As I left the cellar I wished devoutly that the steps were still there; for my progress up the ladder seemed maddeningly slow. I do not want to go down there again—and yet some evil genius urges me to try it at night if I would learn what is to be learned.

April 20

I have sounded the depths of horror—only to be made aware of still lower depths. Last night the temptation was too strong, and in the black small hours I descended once more into that nitrous, hellish cellar with my flashlight, tiptoeing among the amorphous heaps to that terrible brick wall and locked door. I made no sound, and refrained from whispering any of the incantations I knew, but I listened with mad intentness.

At last I heard the sounds from beyond those barred plates of sheet iron, the menacing padding and muttering as of gigantic night-things within. Then, too, there was a damnable slithering, as of a vast serpent or sea-beast dragging its monstrous folds over a paved floor. Nearly paralyzed with fright, I glanced at the huge rusty lock, and at the alien, cryptic hieroglyphs graven upon it. They were signs I could not recognize, and something in their vaguely Mongoloid technique hinted at a blasphemous and indescribable antiquity. At times I fancied I could see them glowing with a greenish light.

I turned to flee, but found that vision of the titan paws before me, the great talons seeming to swell and become more tangible as I gazed. Out of the cellar's evil blackness they stretched, with shadowy hints of scaly wrists beyond them, and with a waxing, malignant will guiding their horrible gropings. Then I heard from behind me—within that abominable vault—a fresh burst of muffled reverberations which seemed to echo from far horizons like distant thunder. Impelled by this greater fear, I advanced toward the shadowy paws with my flashlight and saw them vanish before

the full force of the electric beam. Then up the ladder I raced, torch between my teeth, nor did I rest till I had regained my upstairs “camp.”

What is to be my ultimate end, I dare not imagine. I came as a seeker, but now I know that something is seeking me. I could not leave if I wished. This morning I tried to go to the gate for my supplies, but found the briars twisted tightly in my path. It was the same in every direction—behind and on all sides of the house. In places the brown, barbed vines had uncurled to astonishing heights, forming a steel-like hedge against my egress. The villagers are connected with all this. When I went indoors I found my supplies in the great front hall, though without any clue as to how they came there. I am sorry now that I swept the dust away. I shall scatter some more and see what prints are left.

This afternoon I read some of the books in the great shadowy library at the rear of the ground floor, and formed certain suspicions which I cannot bear to mention. I had never seen the text of the Pnakotic Manuscripts or of the Eltdown Shards before, and would not have come here had I known what they contain. I believe it is too late now—for the awful Sabbath is only ten days away. It is for that night of horror that they are saving me.

April 21

I have been studying the portraits again. Some have names attached, and I noticed one—of an evil-faced woman, painted some two centuries ago—which puzzled me. It bore the name of Trintje van der Heyl Slegt, and I have a distinct impression that I once met the name of Slegt before, in some significant connection. It was not horrible then, though it becomes so now. I must rack my brain for the clue.

The eyes of the pictures haunt me. Is it possible that some of them are emerging more distinctly from their shrouds of dust and decay and mold? The serpent-faced and swine-faced warlocks stare horribly at me from their blackened frames, and a score of other hybrid faces are beginning to peer out of shadowy backgrounds. There is a hideous look of family resemblance in them all, and that which is human is more horrible than that which is non-human. I wish they reminded me less of other faces—faces I have known in the past. They were an accursed line, and Cornelis of Leydon was the worst of them. It was he who broke down the barrier after his father had found that other key. I am sure that V—— knows only a

fragment of the horrible truth, so that I am indeed unprepared and defenseless. What of the line before old Class? What he did in 1591 could never have been done without generations of evil heritage, or some link with the outside. And what of the branches this monstrous line has sent forth? Are they scattered over the world, all awaiting their common heritage of horror? I must recall the place where I once so particularly noticed the name of Sleght.

I wish I could be sure that those pictures stay always in their frames. For several hours now I have been seeing momentary presences like the earlier paws and shadow-faces and forms, but closely duplicating some of the ancient portraits. Somehow I can never glimpse a presence and the portrait it resembles at the same time—the light is always wrong for one or the other, or else the presence and the portrait are in different rooms.

Perhaps, as I have hoped, the presences are mere figments of imagination, but I cannot be sure now. Some are female, and of the same helling beauty as the picture in the little locked room. Some are like no portrait I have seen, yet make me feel that their painted features lurk unrecognized beneath the mold and soot of canvases I cannot decipher. A few, I desperately fear, have approached materialization in solid or semi-solid form—and some have a dreaded and unexplained familiarity.

There is one woman who in full loveliness excels all the rest. Her poisonous charms are like a honeyed flower growing on the brink of hell. When I look at her closely she vanishes, only to reappear later. Her face has a greenish cast, and now and then I fancy I can spy a suspicion of the squamous in its smooth texture. Who is she? Is she that being who dwelt in the little locked room a century and more ago?

My supplies were again left in the front hall—that, clearly, is to be the custom. I had sprinkled dust about to catch footprints, but this morning the whole hall was swept clean by some unknown agency.

April 22

This has been a day of horrible discovery. I explored the cobwebbed attic again, and found a carved, crumbling chest—plainly from Holland—full of blasphemous books and papers far older than any hitherto encountered here. There was a Greek Necronomicon, a Norman-French Livre d'Eibon, and a first edition of old Ludvig Prinn's De Vermis

Mysteriis. But the old bound manuscript was the worst. It was in low Latin, and full of the strange, crabbed handwriting of Claes van der Heyl, being evidently the diary or notebook kept by him between 1560 and 1580. When I unfastened the blackened silver clasp and opened the yellowed leaves a colored drawing fluttered out—the likeness of a monstrous creature resembling nothing so much as a squid, beaked and tentacled, with great yellow eyes, and with certain abominable approximations to the human form in its contours.

I had never before seen so utterly loathsome and nightmarish a form. On the paws, feet, and head-tentacles were curious claws—reminding me of the colossal shadow-shapes which had groped so horribly in my path—while the entity as a whole sat upon a great throne-like pedestal inscribed with unknown hieroglyphs of vaguely Chinese cast. About both writing and image there hung an air of sinister evil so profound and pervasive that I could not think it the product of any one world or age. Rather must that monstrous shape be a focus for all the evil in unbounded space, throughout the eons past and to come—and those eldritch symbols be vile sentient ikons endowed with a morbid life of their own and ready to wrest themselves from the parchment for the reader's destruction. To the meaning of that monster and of those hieroglyphs I had no clue, but I knew that both had been traced with a hellish precision and for no namable purpose. As I studied the leering characters, their kinship to the symbols on that ominous lock in the cellar became more and more manifest. I left the picture in the attic, for never could sleep come to me with such a thing near by.

All the afternoon and evening I read in the manuscript book of old Claes van der Heyl; and what I read will cloud and make horrible whatever period of life lies ahead of me. The genesis of the world, and of previous worlds, unfolded itself before my eyes. I learned of the city Shamballah, built by the Lemurians fifty million years ago, yet inviolate still behind its wall of psychic force in the eastern dexter. I learned of the Book of Dzyan, whose first six chapters antedate the Earth, and which was old when the lords of Venus came through space in their ships to civilize our planet. And I saw recorded in writing for the first time that name which others had spoken to me in whispers, and which I had known in a closer and more horrible way—the shunned and dread name of Yian-Ho.

In several places I was help up by passages requiring a key. Eventually, from various allusions, I gathered that old Claes had not dared to embody all his knowledge in one book, but had left certain points for another. Neither volume can be wholly intelligible without its fellow; hence I have resolved to find the second one if it lies anywhere within this accursed house. Though plainly a prisoner, I have not lost my lifelong zeal for the unknown; and am determined to probe the cosmos as deeply as possible before doom comes.

April 23

Searched all the morning for the second diary, and found it about noon in a desk in the little locked room. Like the first, it is in Claes van der Heyl's barbarous Latin, and it seems to consist of disjointed notes referring to various sections of the other. Glancing through the leaves, I spied at once the abhorred name of Yian-Ho—of Yian-Ho, that lost and hidden city wherein brood eon-old secrets, and of which dim memories older than the body lurk behind the minds of all men. It was repeated many times, and the text around it was strewn with crudely-drawn hieroglyphs plainly akin to those on the pedestal in that hellish drawing I had seen. Here, clearly, lay the key to that monstrous tentacled shape and its forbidden message. With this knowledge I ascended the creaking stairs to the attic of cobwebs and horror.

When I tried to open the attic door it stuck as never before. Several times it resisted every effort to open it, and when at last it gave way I had a distinct feeling that some colossal unseen shape had suddenly released it—a shape that soared away on non-material but audibly beating wings. When I found the horrible drawing I felt that it was not precisely where I left it. Applying the key in the other book, I soon saw that the latter was no instant guide to the secret. It was only a clue—a clue to a secret too black to be left lightly guarded. It would take hours—perhaps days—to extract the awful message.

Shall I live long enough to learn the secret? The shadowy black arms and paws haunt my vision more and more now, and seem even more titanic than at first. Nor am I ever long free from those vague, unhuman presences whose nebulous bulk seems too vast for the chambers to contain. And now

and then the grotesque, evanescent faces and forms, and the mocking portrait-shapes, troop before me in bewildering confusion.

Truly, there are terrible primal arcana of Earth which had better be left unknown and unevoked; dread secrets which have nothing to do with man, and which man may learn only in exchange for peace and sanity; cryptic truths which make the knower evermore an alien among his kind, and cause him to walk alone on Earth. Likewise there are dread survivals of things older and more potent than man; things that have blasphemously straggled down through the eons to ages never ment for them; monstrous entities that have lain sleeping endlessly in incredible crypts and remote caverns, outside the laws of reason and causation, and ready to be waked by such blasphemers as shall know their dark forbidden signs and furtive passwords.

April 24

Studied the picture and the key all day in the attic. At sunset I heard strange sounds, of a sort not encountered before and seeming to come from far away. Listening, I realized that they must flow from that queer abrupt hill with the circle of standing stones, which lies behind the village and some distance north of the house. I had heard that there was a path from the house leading up that hill to the primal cromlech, and had suspected that at certain seasons the van der Heyls had much occasion to use it; but the whole matter had hitherto lain latent in my consciousness. The present sounds consisted of a shrill piping intermingled with a peculiar and hideous sort of hissing or whistling, a bizarre, alien kind of music, like nothing which the annals of Earth describe. It was very faint, and soon faded, but the matter has set met thinking. It is toward the hill that the long, northerly "ell" with the secret chute, and the locked brick vault under it, extend. Can there be any connection which has so far eluded me?

April 25

I have made a peculiar and disturbing discovery about the nature of my imprisonment. Drawn toward the hill by a sinsiter fascination, I found the briars giving way before me, but in that direction only. There is a ruined gate, and beneath the bushes the traces of an old path no doubt exist. The briars extend part-way up and all around the hill, though the summit with the standing stones bears only a curious growth of moss and stunted grass. I

climbed the hill and spent several hours there, noticing a strange wind which seems always to sweep around the forbidding monoliths and which sometimes seems to whisper in an oddly articulate though darkly cryptic fashion.

These stones, both in color and texture, resemble nothing I have seen elsewhere. They are neither brown nor gray, but rather of a dirty yellow merging into an evil green and having a suggestion of chameleon-like variability. Their texture is queerly like that of a scaled serpent, and is inexplicably nauseous to the touch—being as cold and clammy as the skin of a toad or other reptile. Near the central menhir is a singular stone-rimmed hollow which I cannot explain, but which may possibly form the entrance to a long-choked well or tunnel. When I sought to descend the hill at points away from the house I found the briars intercepting me as before, though the path toward the house was easily retraceable.

April 26

Up on the hill again this evening, and found that windy whispering much more distinct. The almost angry humming came close to actual speech, of a vague, sibilant sort, and reminded me of the strange piping chant I had heard from a far. After sunset there came a curious flash of premature summer lightning on the northern horizon, followed almost at once by a queer detonation high in the fading sky. Something about this phenomenon disturbed me greatly, and I could not escape the impression that the noise ended in a kind of unhuman hissing speech which trailed off into guttural cosmic laughter. Is my mind tottering at last, or has my unwarranted curiosity evoked unheard-of horrors from the twilight spaces? The Sabbath is close at hand now. What will be the end?

April 27

At last my dreams are to be realized! Whether or not my life or spirit or body will be claimed, I shall enter the gateway! Progress in deciphering those crucial hieroglyphs in the picture has been slow, but this afternoon I hit upon the final clue. By evening I knew their meaning—and that meaning can apply in only one way to the things I have encountered in this house.

There is beneath this house—sepulchered I know not where—an Ancient One Who will show me the gateway I would enter, and give me the

lost signs and words I shall need. How long It has lain buried here, forgotten save by those who reared the stone on the hill, and by those who later sought out this place and built this house, I cannot conjecture. It was in search of this Thing, beyond question, that Hendrik van der Heyl came to New-Netherland in 1638. Men of this Earth know It not, save in the secret whispers of the fear-shaken few who have found or inherited the key. No human eye has even yet glimpsed It—unless, perhaps, the vanished wizards of this house delved farther than has been guessed.

With knowledge of the symbols came likewise a mastery of the Seven Lost Signs of Terror, and a tacit recognition of the hideous and unutterable Words of Fear. All that remains for me to accomplish is the Chant which will transfigure that Forgotten One Who is Guardian of the Ancient Gateway. I marvel much at the Chant. It is composed of strange and repellent gutturals and disturbing sibilants resembling no language I have ever encountered, even in the blackest chapters of the *Livre d'Eibon*. When I visited the hill at sunset I tried to read it aloud, but evoked in response only a vague, sinister rumbling on the far horizon, and a thin cloud of elemental dust that writhed and whirled like some evil living thing. Perhaps I do not pronounce the alien syllables correctly, or perhaps it is only on the Sabbat—that hellish Sabbat for which the Powers in this house are without question holding me—that the great Transfiguration can occur.

Had an odd spell of fright this morning. I thought for a moment that I recalled where I had seen that baffling name of Sleght before, and the prospect of realization filled me with unutterable horror.

April 28

Today dark ominous clouds have hovered intermittently over the circle on this hill. I have noticed such clouds several times before, but their contours and arrangements now hold a fresh significance. They are snake-like and fantastic, and curiously like the evil shadow-shapes I have seen in the house. They float in a circle around the primal cromlech, revolving repeatedly as though endowed with a sinister life and purpose. I could swear that they give forth an angry murmuring. After some fifteen minutes they sail slowly away, ever to the eastward, like the units of a straggling battallion. Are they indeed those dread Ones whom Solomon knew of old—

those giant black beings whose number is legion and whose tread doth shake the earth?

I have been rehearsing the Chant that will transfigure the Nameless Thing; yet strange fears assail me even when I utter the syllables under my breath. Piercing all evidence together, I have now discovered that the only way to It is through the locked cellar vault. That vault was built with a hellish purpose, and must cover the hidden burrow leading to the Immemorial Lair. What guardians live endlessly within, flourishing from century to century on an unknown nourishment, only the mad may conjecture. The warlocks of this house, who called them out of inner Earth, have known them only too well, as the shocking portraits and memories of the place reveal.

What troubles me most is the limited nature of the Chant. It evokes the Nameless One, yet provides no method for the control of That Which is evoked. There are, of course, the general signs and gestures, but whether they will prove effective toward such an One remains to be seen. Still, the rewards are great enough to justify any danger, and I could not retreat if I would, since an unknown force plainly urges me on.

I have discovered one more obstacle. Since the locked cellar vault must be traversed, the key to that place must be found. The lock is far too strong for forcing. That the key is somewhere hereabouts cannot be doubted, but the time before the Sabbat is very short. I must search diligently and thoroughly. It will take courage to unlock that iron door, for what prisoned horrors may not lurk within?

Later

I have been shunning the cellar for the past day or two, but late this afternoon I again descended to those forbidding precincts.

At first all was silent, but within five minutes the menacing padding and muttering began once more beyond the iron door. This time it was loud and more terrifying than on any previous occasion, and I likewise recognized the slithering that bespoke some monstrous sea-beast—now swifter and nervously intensified, as if the thing were striving to force its way through the portal where I stood.

As the pacing grew louder, more restless, and more sinister, there began to pound through it those hellish and more unidentifiable reverberations

which I had heard on my second visit to the cellar—those muffled reverberations which seemed to echo from far horizons like distant thunder. Now, however, their volume was magnified an hundredfold, and their timbre freighted with new and terrifying implications. I can compare the sound to nothing more aptly than the roar of some dread monster of the vanished saurian age, when primal horrors roamed the Earth, and Valusia's serpent-men laid the foundation-stones of evil magic. To such a roar—but swelled to deafening heights reached by no known organic throat—was this shocking sound akin. Dare I unlock the door and face the onslaught of what lies beyond?

April 29

The key to the vault is found. I came upon it this noon in the little locked room—buried beneath rubbish in a drawer of the ancient desk, as if some belated effort to conceal it had been made. It was wrapped in a crumbling newspaper dated October 31, 1872; but there was an inner wrapping of dried skin—evidently the hide of some unknown reptile—which bore a Low Latin message in the same crabbed writing as that of the notebooks I found. As I had thought, the lock and key were vastly older than the vault. Old Claes van der Heyl had them ready for something he or his descendants meant to do—and how much older than he they were I could not estimate. Deciphering the Latin message, I trembled in a fresh access of clutching terror and nameless awe.

“The secrets of the monstrous primal Ones;” ran the crabbed text, “whose cryptic words relate the hidden things that were before man; the things no one of Earth should learn, lest peace be for ever forfeited; shall be me never suffer revelation. To Yian-Ho, that lost and forbidden city of countless eons whose place may not be told, I have been in the veritable flesh of this body, as none other among the living has been. Therein have I found, and thence have I borne away, that knowledge which I would gladly lose, though I may not. I have learnt to bridge a gap that should not be bridged, and must call out of the Earth That Which should not be waked nor called. And what is sent to follow me will not sleep till I or those after me have found and done what is to be found and done.

“That which I have awaked and borne away with me, I may not part with again. So it is written in the Book of Hidden Things. That which I have

willed to be has twined its dreadful shape around me, and—if I live not to do its bidding—around those children born and unborn who shall come after me, until the bidding be done. Strange may be their joinings, and awful the aid they may summon till the end be reached. Into lands unknown and dim must the seeking go, and a house must be built for the outer guardians.

“This is the key to that lock which was given me in the dreadful, eon-old and forbidden city of Yian-Ho; the lock which I or mine must place upon the vestibule of That Which is to be found. And may the Lords of Yaddith succor me—or him—who must set that lock in place or turn the key thereof.”

Such was the message—a message which, once I had read it, I seemed to have known before. Now, as I write these words, the key is before me. I gaze on it with mixed dread and longing, and cannot find words to describe its aspect. It is of the same unknown, subtly greenish frosted metal as the lock; a metal best compared to brass tarnished with verdigris. Its design is alien and fantastic, and the coffin-shaped end of the ponderous bulk leaves no doubt of the lock it was meant to fit. The handle roughly forms a strange, nonhuman image, whose exact outlines and identity cannot now be traced. Upon holding it for any length of time I seem to feel an alien, anomalous life in the cold metal—a quickening or pulsing too feeble for ordinary recognition.

Below the eidolon is graven a faint, eon-worn legend in those blasphemous, Chinese-like hieroglyphs I have come to know so well. I can only make out the beginning—the words: “My vengeance lurks...”—before the text fades to insistentness. There is some fatality in this timely finding of the key—for tomorrow night comes the hellish Sabbat. But strangely enough, amidst all this hideous expectancy, that question of the Sleight name bothers me more and more. Why should I dread to find it linked with the van der Heyls?

Walpurgis-Eve—April 30

The time has come. I waked last night to see the key glowing with a lurid greenish radiance—that same morbid green which I have seen in the eyes and skin of certain portraits here, on the shocking lock and key, on the monstrous menhirs of the hill, and in a thousand other recesses of my

consciousness. There were strident whispers in the air—sibilant whisperings like those of the wind around that dreadful cromlech. Something spoke to me out of the frore [?] aether of space, and it said, “The hour falls.” It is an omen, and I laugh at my own fears. Have I not the dread words and the Seven Lost Signs of Terror—the power coercive of any Dweller in the cosmos or in the unknown darkened spaces? I will no longer hesitate.

The heavens are very dark, as if a terrific storm were coming on—a storm even greater than that of the night when I reached here, nearly a fortnight ago. From the village, less than a mile away, I hear a queer and unwonted babbling. It is as I thought—these poor degraded idiots are within the secret, and keep the awful Sabbat on the hill.

Here in the house the shadows gather densely. In the darkness the sky before me almost glows with a greenish light of its own. I have no yet been to the cellar. It is better that I wait, lest the sound of that muttering and padding—those slitherings and muffled reverberations—unnerve me before I can unlock the fateful door.

Of what I shall encounter, and what I must do, I have only the most general idea. Shall I find my task in the vault itself, or must I burrow deeper into the nighted heart of our planet? There are things I do not yet understand—or at least, prefer not to understand—despite a dreadful, increasing and inexplicable sense of bygone familiarity with this fearsome house. That chute, for instance, leading down from the little locked room. But I think I know why the wing with the vault extends toward the hill.

6 P.M.

Looking out the north windows, I can see a group of villagers on the hill. They seem unaware of the lowering sky, and are digging near the great central menhir. It occurs to me that they are working on that stone-rimmed hollow place which looks like a long-choked tunnel entrance. What is to come? How much of the olden Sabbat rites have these people retained? That key glows horribly—it is not imagination. Dare I use it as it must be used? Another matter has greatly disturbed me. Glancing nervously through a book in the library I came upon an ampler form of the name that has teased my memory so sorely: “Trintje, wife of Adriaen Sleght.” The Adriaen leads me to the very brink of recollection.

Midnight

Horror is unleashed, but I must not weaken. The storm has broken with pandemoniac fury, and lightning has struck the hill three times, yet the hybrid, malformed villagers are gathering within the cromlech. I can see them in the almost constant flashes. The great standing stones loom up shockingly, and have a dull green luminosity that reveals them even when the lightning is not there. The peals of thunder are deafening, and every one seems to be horribly answered from some indeterminate direction. As I write, the creatures on the hill have begun to chant and howl and scream in a degraded, half-simian version of the ancient ritual. Rain pours down like a flood, yet they leap and emit sounds in a kind of diabolic ecstasy.

“Iä Shub-Niggurath! The Goat With a Thousand Young!”

But the worst thing is within the house. Even at this height, I have begun to hear sounds from the cellar. It is the padding and muttering and slithering and muffled reverberations within the vault....

Memories come and go. That name Adriaen Sleght pounds oddly at my consciousness. Dirck van der Heyl’s son-in-law...his child old Dirck’s granddaughter and Abaddon Corey’s greatgranddaughter....

Later

Merciful God! At last I know where I saw that name. I know, and am transfixed with horror. All is lost...

The key has begun to feel warm as my left hand nervously clutches it. At times that vague quickening or pulsing is so distinct that I can almost feel the living metal move. It came from Yian-Ho for a terrible purpose, and to me—who all too late know the thing stream of van der Heyl blood that trickles down through the Sleghts into my own lineage—has descended the hideous task of fulfilling that purpose....

My courage and curiosity wane. I know the horror that lies beyond that iron door. What if Claes van der Heyl was my ancestor—need I expiate his nameless sin? I will not—I swear I will not!... (the writing here grows indistinct) ...too late—cannot help self—black paws materialize—am dragged away toward the cellar....

HYDRA, by Henry Kuttner

Originally published in *Weird Tales*, April 1939.

“There are sacraments of evil as well as of good about us, and we live and move to my belief in an unknown world, a place where there are caves and shadows and dwellers in twilight. It is possible that man may sometimes return on the track of evolution, and it is my belief that an awful lore is not yet dead.”

—Arthur Machen.

*

Two men died; possibly three. So much is known. The tabloids ran flaming headlines telling of the mysterious mutilation and death of Kenneth Scott, noted Baltimore author and occultist, and later, they capitalized similarly on the disappearance of Robert Ludwig, whose correspondence with Scott was well known in literary circles. The equally strange and even more ghastly death of Paul Edmond, while separated from the scene of the Scott horror by the width of a continent, was clearly connected with it. This was shown by the presence of a certain much-discussed object which was found clutched in Edmond’s rigid hands—and which the credulous claim caused his death. While this solution is improbable, it is nevertheless true that Paul Edmond bled to death because his carotid artery was severed, and it is also true that there are features about the case difficult to explain in the light of present-day science.

The tabloids made a great deal of Edmond’s diary, and even conventional papers found it difficult to handle that unusual document in a fashion that would not lay them open to the charge of yellow journalism. The Hollywood *Citizen-News* solved the problem for its contemporaries by quoting the least fantastic portions of the diary, and hinting plainly that Edmond had been a fiction writer, and that the man’s notes had never been intended as a truthful summary of events. The privately printed pamphlet, *On the Sending Out of the Soul*, which played so important a part in the diary, seems to be of purely fictional origin. None of the local booksellers has heard of it, and Mr. Russell Hodgkins, California’s most noted

bibliophile, declares that the title and the volume must have originated in the mind of the ill-fated Paul Edmond.

Yet, according to Edmond's diary and certain other papers and letters discovered in his desk, it was this pamphlet which caused Ludwig and Edmond to undertake the disastrous experiment. Ludwig had decided to visit his California correspondent, making a leisurely voyage from New York by way of the Panama Canal. The *Carnatic* docked on August 15th, and Ludwig spent several hours wandering-through San Pedro. It was there, in a musty "swap shop," that he bought the pamphlet, *On the Sending Out of the Soul*. When the young man arrived at Edmond's Hollywood apartment he had the booklet with him.

Both Ludwig and Edmond were deeply interested in the occult. They had dabbled in witchcraft and demonology, as a result of their acquaintance with Scott, who possessed one of the best occult libraries in America.

Scott was a strange man. Slender, sharp-eyed, and taciturn, he spent most of his time in an old brownstone house in Baltimore. His knowledge of esoteric matters was little short of phenomenal; he had read the *Chhaya Ritual*, and in his letters to Ludwig and Edmond had hinted at the real meanings behind the veiled hints and warnings in that half-legendary manuscript. In his great library were such names as Sinistrari, Zancherius, and the ill-famed Gougenot des Mousseau; and in his library safe he had, it was rumored, an immense scrapbook filled with excerpts copied from such fantastic sources as the *Book of Karnak*, the monstrous Sixtystone, and the blasphemous Elder Key, of which only two copies are reputed to exist on earth.

It was little wonder, therefore, that the two students were anxious to tear aside the veil and view the astounding mysteries of which Scott hinted so cautiously. In his diary Edmond confessed that his own curiosity was the direct cause of the tragedy.

Yet it was Ludwig who bought the booklet and pored over it with Edmond in the latter's apartment. Certainly Edmond described the pamphlet plainly enough, and it is strange, therefore, that no bibliophile could identify it. According to the diary, it was quite small, about four by five inches, bound in coarse brown paper, and yellowed and crumbling with age. The printing—in Eighteenth Century type with the long *s*—was crudely done, and there was neither a date-line nor a publisher's imprint. There

were eight pages; seven of them filled with what Edmond called the usual banal sophisms of mysticism, and on the last page were the specific directions for what would nowadays be known as “projecting one’s astral.”

The general process was familiar to both students. Their researches had informed them that the soul—or in modern occult language, “astral body”—is supposed to be an ethereal double or ghost, capable of projection to a distance. But the specific directions—finding these was unusual. Nor did they seem difficult to follow. Edmond has purposely been vague about these preparations, but one gathers that the two students visited several chemists before obtaining the ingredients needed. Where they secured the *cannabis indica* later discovered on the scene of the tragedy is a mystery, but not, of course, one impossible of solution.

On August 15th Ludwig, apparently without Edmond’s knowledge, wrote to Scott by air-mail, describing the pamphlet and its contents, and asking for advice.

On the night of August 18th, approximately half an hour after Kenneth Scott received Ludwig’s letter, the two young occultists undertook their disastrous experiment.

CHAPTER 2

Later, Edmond blamed himself. In the diary he mentions Ludwig’s uneasiness, as though the latter sensed some hidden danger. Ludwig suggested postponing the trial for a few days, but Edmond laughed at his fears. It ended with the two placing the required ingredients in a brazier and kindling the mixture.

There were other preparations, too, but Edmond is quite vague. He makes one or two furtive references to “the seven lamps” and “the infra color,” but nothing can be made of these terms. The two had decided to attempt projection of their astral bodies across the continent; they would attempt communication with Kenneth Scott. One can detect a tinge of youthful vanity in this.

Cannabis indica formed one of the ingredients of the mixture in the brazier; that has been ascertained by analysis. It was the presence of this Indian drug which led so many to believe that the later entries in Edmond’s diary were evolved from nothing more tangible than the fantasies of an opium or hashish dream, directed along the curious channels they took

merely because of the students' preoccupation with those things at the time. Edmond dreamed he saw Scott's house in Baltimore. But it must be remembered that he had been staring at a photograph of that house which he had placed on the table before him; and he was consciously willing to go there. Nothing is more logical therefore, than that Edmond simply dreamed *what he wanted to dream*.

But Ludwig had the identical vision, or, at least, so he stated afterward—unless Edmond, in that entry, lied. It is the opinion of Professor Perry L. Lewis, a recognized expert on dream-phenomena, that Edmond, during his hashish vision, spoke of his illusions aloud, with no conscious intention of so doing, nor any later memory of it—and that Ludwig, as in a hypnotic trance, simply saw the phantasms Edmond's words conjured up in his mind.

Edmond states in his diary that after watching the burning contents of the brazier for some minutes, he fell into a state of somnolent trance, in which he saw his surroundings clearly, but with certain curious alterations which can only be attributed to the action of the drug. The marijuana smoker may see a tiny hall bedroom metamorphose itself into a huge vaulted chamber; similarly, Edmond stated that the room in which he sat seemed to enlarge. Oddly, however, the growth was of a strangely abnormal type; the geometry of the room gradually became *all wrong*. Edmond stresses this point without attempting to explain it. Just when the shifting became noticeable he does not mention, but presently he found himself in the midst of a chamber which, although recognizably his own, had changed *until it centered at a certain point*.

The notes are almost incoherent here. Edmond obviously found it difficult to describe what he saw in his vision. All the lines and curves of the room, he insists with odd emphasis, seemed to point at one specific spot, the brazier where the mixture of drugs and chemicals was smoldering.

Very faintly a persistent ringing came to his ears, but this dwindled and at last died away altogether. At the time Edmond thought the sound due to the effects of the drug. It was not until later that he learned of Scott's frantic efforts to reach him by means of long-distance telephone. The shrill ringing grew fainter and faded into silence.

Edmond was of an experimental turn of mind. He tried to shift his gaze to specific objects he remembered, a vase, a lamp, a table. But the room seemed to possess an indescribable viscid fluidity, so that he found his stare

inevitably slipping along warped lines and curves until he was again watching the brazier. And it was then that he became conscious of something unusual taking place at that spot.

The mixture no longer smoldered. Instead, a strange crystal formation was building itself up within the brazier. This object Edmond found impossible to describe; he could only say that it seemed a continuation of the warped lines of the room, carrying them *beyond* the point where they centered. Apparently unconscious of the insanity of such a concept, he goes on to say that his eyes began to ache as he watched the crystalline object, but he could not turn away his gaze.

The crystal drew him. He felt an abrupt and agonizing suction; there was a high-pitched thrumming in the air, and suddenly he was drifting with increasing velocity toward the thing in the brazier. It sucked him in—such is Edmond's inexplicable phrase; he felt a moment of incredible cold, and then a new vision rose up before him.

Gray fog, and instability. Edmond stressed this curious feeling of flux, which he declared existed *within himself*. He felt, he says oddly, like a cloud of smoke, wavering and drifting aimlessly. But when he glanced down he saw his own body, fully clothed and apparently quite substantial.

Now a dreadful feeling of uneasiness began to oppress his mind. The fog thickened and whirled; the nightmare, causeless fear familiar to the opium-taker clutched him in its grip. Something, he felt, was approaching, something utterly horrible and frightful in its potent menace. Then, quite suddenly, the fog was gone.

Far beneath him he saw what at first he took to be the sea. He was hanging unsupported in empty air, and a surging grayness shimmered and crawled from horizon to horizon. The fluctuating leaden surface was dotted and speckled with round dark blobs, these were innumerable. Without conscious volition he felt himself drawn down vertically, and as he approached the mysterious grayness he saw it more clearly.

He could not determine its nature. It seemed merely a sea of gray slime, protoplasmic and featureless. But the dark blobs became recognizable as heads.

Into Edmond's mind flashed the memory of a narrative he had once read, written in the Twelfth Century by the monk Alberico, and purporting to be the record of a descent into hell. Like Dante, Alberico had seen the

torments of the damned; the blasphemers (he wrote in his stilted, pedantic Latin) had been immersed to their necks in a lake of molten metal. Edmond remembered Alberico's description now. Then he saw that the heads were not those of beings partly submerged in the gray slime; instead, they were homogenous with the grayness. They grew from it!

Edmond's fear had left him. With oddly detached curiosity he scanned the fantastic surface below. There were human heads bobbing and nodding from the gray sea, uncountable thousands of them, but by far the greater number of the heads were not human. Some of these latter bore traces of the anthropoid, but others were scarcely recognizable as living objects.

For the heads lived. Their eyes stared with awful agony; their lips writhed in soundless laments; tears coursed down the sunken cheeks of many. Even the horribly inhuman heads—bird-like, reptilian, monstrous things of living stone and metal and vegetable matter—showed traces of the unceasing torment that gnawed at them. Down toward the ghastly horde Edmond was drawn.

Again blackness enveloped him. It was transitory, but as he emerged from momentary unconsciousness he felt (he says) curiously changed. Something had happened to him during that fateful period of darkness. There seemed to be a cloudy vagueness shadowing his mind, so that he viewed his surroundings darkly and through a kind of haze. In this new vision he seemed to be high in the air above a silent, moonlit city, and rapidly moving downward.

There was a full moon, and by its light he recognized the old brownstone house toward which he was descending. It was Kenneth Scott's home, made familiar to him by the photograph. A vague thrill of triumph warmed him; the experiment, then, had succeeded.

The house loomed up before him. He was hovering outside an open, unlighted window. Peering in, he recognized the slender form of Kenneth Scott seated at a desk. The occultist's lips were tightly compressed, and a worried scowl darkened his face. A great book with yellowed parchment pages was open before the man, who was studying it carefully. Occasionally his worried eyes would turn to the telephone on the desk beside him. Edmond made an attempt to call to Scott, and the latter looked up, staring through the window.

Instantly a shocking change transformed Scott's face. The man seemed to become quite insane with fear. He sprang up from the desk, overturning his chair, and simultaneously Edmond felt an impelling urge dragging him forward.

What happened after that is confused and hazy. Edmond's notes are fragmentary at this point, and it is only possible to gather that Edmond was in the room and pursuing the frantic Scott in a fashion that was inexplicable and utterly abnormal. He was *flowing*—and Scott was caught and *engulfed*—and here Edmond's notes break off utterly, as though he had been overcome by remembrance of the episode.

Merciful blackness swallowed Edmond then, but there was one more flashing vision before the dream faded and was gone. Again he seemed to be outside Scott's window, swiftly retreating into the night, and through the open square of yellow radiance was visible part of Scott's desk and the crumpled body of the man himself lying on the carpet beyond it. At least Edmond assumed that it was Scott's body, for either the man was lying with his head doubled at an impossible angle out of sight beneath his torso, *or else he was headless*.

That ended the dream. Edmond awoke to find the room in darkness, and Ludwig stirring sleepily near by. Both students were distracted and overwrought. They argued excitedly for some time, with occasional semi-hysterical outbursts, and Ludwig revealed that his vision had been identical with Edmond's. It is a pity that neither of them took the trouble to analyze the situation and look for a logical explanation, but both, of course, were mystics, and thoroughly credulous.

The telephone rang. An impatient operator asked if Edmond would receive a call from Baltimore. She had, she said, been ringing the apartment for some time without getting a response. Edmond cut her off abruptly and requested that the connection be put through. But this could not be done. The operator at the Baltimore exchange reported that her party did not answer, and, after a futile exchange of questions, Edmond hung up. It was then Ludwig confessed to writing Scott, bemoaning the reticence that had made him refrain from telling the Baltimore occultist the purpose of the experiment—the destination to which the astrals were directed.

Nor were their fears calmed by the discovery of the object in the brazier. Apparently part of the vision at least had been founded on truth; the

unknown chemicals had crystallized into a thing that appeared to be all planes and angles. It was formed of some brittle substance resembling frosted glass, was roughly pyramidal, and measured about six inches from apex to base. Ludwig wanted to smash it at once, but Edmond prevented him.

Their arguments were brought to an end by the arrival of a telegram from Scott. It read:

ATTEMPT NO EXPERIMENTS WITH PAMPHLET YOU
MENTION STOP TREMENDOUSLY DANGEROUS AND MAY
MEAN MY DEATH STOP AM WRITING YOU TODAY BY AIR
MAIL FULL DETAILS STOP ADVISE YOU BURN PAMPHLET
KENNETH SCOTT

CHAPTER 3

There were two more communications which resulted in Paul Edmond's temporary stay at a Hollywood hospital. The first was an item which appeared in time for the morning edition of the Los Angeles Times of August 20th. It stated briefly that Kenneth Scott, well-known author and occultist, residing in Baltimore, Maryland, had been mysteriously murdered. There were no clues to indicate the identity of the assailant, and the body had not been discovered until the afternoon of the 19th. The fact that the victim's head had been severed from his body and was inexplicably missing made identification at first doubtful, but Scott's physician confirmed the logical supposition. A quantity of grayish slime smeared on the carpet added another element of mystery to the case. Scott's head, the coroner declared, had been cleanly severed from his body by a sharp blade. Police stated that an arrest would be made shortly.

Needless to say, that arrest was never made. The tabloids seized the juicy morsel and made much of it, and an enterprising reporter unearthed the fact that Scott had sent an air-mail letter from the Baltimore Central post office shortly before the time at which his death had been fixed. It was this communication which was the direct cause of Edmond's nervous collapse and his retirement to a hospital.

The letter was found in Edmond's apartment, but it sheds little light on the case. Scott was a visionary, and his letter bears an almost suspicious

resemblance to his fictional work.

“Both of you know” (ran part of the long letter) “how much truth there is often to be found behind old legends and folk-lore. The Cyclops is no longer a myth, as any doctor familiar with monstrous births can tell you. And you know how my theories regarding the Elixir Vitae have been confirmed by the discovery of heavy water. Well, the myth of the Hydra is based on such a truth.

“There are innumerable tales of multi-headed monsters, all springing from the actual entity of whose real existence a very few have known through the ages. This creature did not originate on earth, but in the gulfs Outside. It was, after a fashion, a vampiric entity, living not on the blood of its victims but on their heads—their brains. This may sound strange to you, but you know by this time that there are beings Outside whose needs and flesh are not as ours. Through the eons this entity has ravaged in the abyss beyond our dimension, sending out its call to claim victims where it could. For this entity, by absorbing the heads and brains of intelligent creatures both of this world and of other planets, emerges with its powers and vitality greatly augmented.

“You both know that through the ages there have been certain people willing to worship the Great Ones—even the evil Aliens who have come down to us in folk-lore as demons. Every god and every entity has had its worshippers, from black Pharos to the least of the Aliens whose powers are more than human. And these cults intermingle in a very curious way, so that we find traces of a forgotten worship cropping up in far later times. When the Romans worshipped the Magna Mater in Italy’s dark forests, for instance, why do you suppose they incorporated into their ritual the mystic adoration, ‘Gorgo, Mormo, *thousand-faced moon*’? The implication is clear.

“I have gone into considerable detail, but it has been necessary to prepare you for my explanation of the origin of that pamphlet Robert found in San Pedro. I knew of this booklet, which was printed in Salem in 1783, but I had thought that there were no longer any copies in existence. That pamphlet is a *trap*, and a most damnable one, created by the worshippers of the Hydra to lure victims into the maw of their god!

“It purports to be merely an innocent experiment with the astral self. However, the real purpose of the thing is to open a gateway and prepare a sacrifice for the Hydra. When the booklets were first distributed, through

secret underground channels, there was an epidemic of deaths in New England.

“Dozens of men and women were found headless, with no trace of any human murderer. Yet the real killers were the ones who performed the experiment according to the directions given in the booklet, and unknowingly let the Hydra use their vital forces to materialize on this planet.

“Baldly speaking, what happens is this: the subject, following the instructions, inhales the fumes of the drug which tears apart the veil between our world and Outside. He concentrates upon the person whom he wishes his astral to visit, and that person is doomed. For the experimenter is drawn Outside, into another dimension of space, and through a certain psychic and chemical process is temporarily made one with the Hydra. What it amounts to is this: the Hydra, using the experimenter’s astral as a host, comes to earth and takes its prey—which is the person upon whom the subject has been concentrating. There is no real danger to the experimenter himself, save, perhaps, for a possible severe nervous shock. But the other—the victim—is taken by the Hydra for its own. He is doomed to eternal torment, except in certain unusual cases where he can maintain a psychic link with an earthly mind. But I need not speak of that.

“I am greatly worried. I have put through a long-distance call to Edmond’s apartment, and no doubt you will hear from me tonight long before this letter can arrive. If you are rash enough to undertake the experiment before I can communicate with you, I shall be in grave danger, for you may attempt projection of your astral to Baltimore, to me. After I have posted this letter, and while I am waiting for my telephone call to be put through, I shall do my utmost to find a protective formula, although I do not think one exists.

“Kenneth Scott.”

* * * *

It was this letter which sent Edmond to the hospital for a few days to recover from his nervous condition. Ludwig was apparently of stronger stuff; he stayed, at Edmond’s request, in the latter’s apartment, and indulged in some experimenting of his own.

Just what happened in Edmond's apartment during the next few days will never be fully known. Ludwig visited his host daily at the hospital, and told him of his experiments, and Edmond noted what he could remember on slips of paper which he subsequently inserted between pages of his diary. One is inclined to believe that the anomalous mixture of drugs in the brazier continued to exert its influence on the minds of the two students, for certainly Ludwig's experiences, as recorded by Edmond, seem like a continuation of the original hashish dream.

Ludwig had burned the pamphlet, as might be expected. And then, on the night following Edmond's removal to the hospital, the other youth maintained, he had heard Scott speaking to him.

Edmond did not scoff, for he was vastly credulous. He listened intently while Ludwig declared that the occultist was still alive, although existing in another dimension of space. The Hydra had captured Scott, but the occultist had the power to communicate with Ludwig. It is necessary to keep constantly in mind the fact that neither of these two youths was quite normal after the mental agitation he had undergone.

So Ludwig added more and more every day to his tale, and Edmond listened. They spoke furtively, in whispers, and Edmond kept careful watch over his notes so that they would not fall into skeptical hands. The whole crux of the matter, Ludwig said, was the strange crystalline object which had formed in the brazier. It was this which kept open the path to Outside. One could pass through it if one wished, despite the fact that it was not as large as a man's head, because the crystal created a "warp in space"—a term Edmond mentions several times, but entirely neglects to explain. The Hydra, however, could not return to earth unless the original conditions were duplicated.

Ludwig said he had heard Scott's voice whispering thinly from the crystalline thing of insane planes and angles, and the occultist was in horrible agony and insistent that Ludwig rescue him. It would not be difficult, provided the student followed instructions implicitly. There were dangers, but he must have courage, obey, and strive to undo the harm he had done. Only thus could Scott be freed from endless agony and return to earth.

So, Ludwig told Edmond, he went through the crystal—again this vague and extraordinary phrase!—taking those things Scott had said he would

need. Chief among these was a razor-keen, bone-handled carving knife. There were other objects, some of them difficult to obtain, which Ludwig did not specify, or which if he did, Edmond did not mention in his notes.

According to Ludwig's narrative, he went through the crystal, and he found Scott. But not at first. There were nights of fumbling progress through fantastic and terrible visions of nightmare, guided always by the insistent whisper of Scott's voice. There were gates to be passed, and strange dimensions to traverse. And so Ludwig moved through awful abysses of pulsing, fearful darkness; he went through a place of curious violet light that sent tinkling, evil trills of goblin laughter after him; he went through a Cyclopean deserted city of ebon stone which he shudderingly recognized as fabled Dis. In the end he found Scott.

He did what was necessary. When he came to the hospital the next day Edmond was shocked by the bloodless pallor of his friend, and the little crawling lights of madness that shone in his eyes. The pupils were unnaturally dilated, and Ludwig spoke that day in disjointed whispers which Edmond found hard to follow. The notes suffered. It is only clear that Ludwig declared he had freed Scott from the grip of the Hydra, and that over and over again the youth kept muttering something about the terrible gray slime that had smeared the blade of his carving-knife. He said his task was not yet ended.

Undoubtedly it was the drug-poisoned mind of Robert Ludwig speaking when he told how he had left Scott, or at least the living part of him, in a plane of space which was not inimical to human life, and which was not subject to entirely natural laws and processes. Scott wanted to return to earth. He could return now, Ludwig told Edmond, but the strange vitality that maintained life in what was left of Scott would dissipate immediately on earth. Only in certain planes and dimensions was it possible for Scott to exist at all, and the alien force that kept him alive was gradually departing now that he was no longer drawing sustenance from the Hydra. Ludwig said that quick action was necessary.

There was a certain spot Outside where Scott could achieve his desire.

In that place thought was obscurely linked to energy and matter, because of an insane shrill piping (Ludwig said) that eternally filtered from beyond a veil of flickering colors. It was very near the Center, the Center of Chaos, where dwells Azathoth, the Lord of All Things. All that exists was

created by the thoughts of Azathoth, and only in the Center of Ultimate Chaos could Scott find means to live again on earth in human form. There is an erasure in Edmond's notes at this point, and it is only possible to make out the fragment: "...of thought made real."

White-faced, hollow-cheeked, Ludwig said that he must complete his task. He must take Scott to the Center, although he confessed to a horrible fear that made him hesitate. There were dangers in the way, and pitfalls where one might easily be trapped. Worst of all, the veil shielding Azathoth was thin, and even the slightest glimpse of the Lord of All Things would mean utter and complete destruction to the beholder. Scott had spoken of that, Ludwig said, and had also mentioned the dreadful lure that would drag the young student's eyes to the fatal spot unless he fought strongly against it.

Biting his lips nervously, Robert Ludwig left the hospital, and we assume met with foul play on his way to Edmond's apartment. For Edmond never saw his friend again on earth.

CHAPTER 4

The police were still searching for the missing head of Kenneth Scott. Edmond gathered that from the newspapers. He waited impatiently the next day for Ludwig to appear, and after several hours had passed without result, he telephoned his apartment and got no response. Eventually, worried and almost sick with anxiety, he spent a turbulent ten minutes with his doctor and another with the superintendent. Finally he achieved his purpose and went by taxi to his apartment, having overruled the objection of hospital officials.

Ludwig was gone. He had vanished without a trace. Edmond considered summoning the police, but speedily dismissed the thought. He paced about the apartment nervously, seldom turning his gaze from the crystalline object that still rested in the brazier.

His diary gives little clue to what happened that night. One can conjecture that he prepared another dose of the narcotic drug, or that the toxic effects of the fumes Edmond inhaled several days before had finally worked such disintegration within his brain that he could no longer distinguish between the false and the real. An entry in the diary dated the following morning begins abruptly, "I've heard him. Just as Bob said, he

spoke through the crystal thing. He's desperate, and tells me that Bob failed. He didn't get Scott to the Center, or S. could have materialized again on earth and rescued Bob. Something—I'm not sure what—caught Bob, God help him. May God help all of us...Scott says I must begin where Bob left off and finish the job."

There is a soul laid bare on the last pages of that record, and it is not a pleasant sight. Somehow the most frightful of the unearthly horrors the diary describes seem not quite as dreadful as the last conflict that took place in that apartment above Hollywood, when a man wrestled with his fear and realized his weakness. It is probably just as well that the pamphlet was destroyed, for such a brain-wrecking drug as was described in it must surely have originated in some hell as terrible as any which Edmond portrays. The last pages of the diary show a mind crumbling into ruin.

"I went through. Bob has made it easier; I can begin where he left off, as Scott says. And I went up through the Cold Flame and the Whirling Vortices until I reached the place where Scott is. Where he *was*, rather, for I picked him up and carried him through several planes before I had to return. Bob didn't mention the suction one has to keep fighting against. But it doesn't get very strong until I've got quite a distance in."

The next entry is dated a day later. It is scarcely legible.

"Couldn't stand it. Had to get out. Walked around Griffith Park for hours. Then I came back to the apartment and almost immediately Scott spoke to me. I'm afraid. I think he senses that, and is frightened too, and angry.

"He says we can't waste any more time. His vitality is almost gone, and he's got to reach the Center quick and get back to earth. I saw Bob. Just a glimpse, and I wouldn't have known it was he if Scott hadn't told me. He was all-awry, and horrible somehow. Scott said the atoms of his body had adapted themselves to another dimension when he let himself get caught. I've got to be careful. We're nearly at the Center."

The last entry.

"Once more will do it. God, I'm afraid, horribly afraid. *I heard the piping*. It turned my brain into ice. Scott was shouting at me, urging me on, and I think trying to drown that—other sound, but of course he couldn't do it. There was a very faint violet glow in the distance, and a flickering of colored lights. Beyond, Scott told me, was Azathoth.

"I can't do it. I don't dare—not with that piping, and those Shapes I saw moving far down. If I look in that direction when I'm at the Veil it will mean—but Scott is insanely angry with me. He says I was the cause of it all. I had an almost uncontrollable impulse to let the suction draw me back, and then to smash the Gateway—the crystal thing. Maybe if I find myself unable to keep looking away from the Veil when next I go through I'll do just that. I told Scott if he let me come back to earth for one more breathing-space I'd finish the job this next time. He agreed, but said to hurry. His vitality is going fast. He said if I didn't come through the Gateway in ten minutes he'd come after me. He won't, though. The life that keeps him going Outside wouldn't be any use on earth, except for a second or two.

"My ten minutes is up. Scott is calling from the Gateway. *I'm not going!* I can't face it—not the last horror Outside, with those things moving behind the Veil and that awful piping screaming out—

"I won't go, I tell you! No, Scott—I can't face it! You can't come out—*like that.* You'd die—I tell you I won't go! You can't force me—I'll smash the Gateway first!...what? No! No, you can't...you can't do it!...Scott! Don't, *don't...God he's coming out—*"

That was the last entry in the diary, which police found open on Edmond's desk. A hideous screaming and subsequently a stream of red liquid seeping out sluggishly from beneath the door of Edmond's apartment had resulted in the arrival of two radio patrol officers.

The body of Paul Edmond was found near the door, the head and shoulders lying in a widening crimson pool.

Near by was an overturned brass brazier, and a flaky white substance, granular in nature, was scattered over the carpet. Edmond's stiff fingers still tightly gripped the object which has since been the cause of so much discussion.

This object was in an incredible state of preservation, in view of its nature. Part of it was coated with a peculiar grayish slime, and its jaws were clamped tightly, the teeth having horribly mangled Edmond's throat and severed the carotid artery.

There was no need to search further for the missing head of Kenneth Scott.

THE SUICIDE IN THE STUDY, by Robert Bloch

Originally published in *Weird Tales*, June 1935.

To see him sitting there in the dim-lit darkness of the study, one would never have suspected him for what he was. Wizards nowadays are not garbed in cabalistic robes of silver and black; instead they wear purple dressing-gowns. It is not required of them that their eyebrows meet, their nails grow long as talons, and their eyes flame like emerald-imprisoned dreams. Nor are they necessarily bent and furtive, and old. This one was not; he was young and slim, almost imperially straightforward.

He sat beneath the lamplight in the great oak-paneled room; a dark, handsome man of perhaps thirty-five years of age. There was little of cruelty or malice visible in his keen, clean-featured face, and little of madness in his eyes; yet he was a wizard, just as surely as if he lurked over human sacrifices in the skull-strewn darkness of forbidden tombs.

It was only necessary for one to survey the walls of his study for corroboration. Only a wizard would possess those moldering, maggoty volumes of monstrous and fantastic lore; only a thaumaturgical adept would dare the darker mysteries of the *Necronomicon*, Ludvig Prinn's *Mysteries of the Worm*, the *Black Rites* of mad Luveh-Keraph, priest of Bast, or Comte d'Erlette's ghastly *Cultes des Goules*. No one save a sorcerer would have access to the ancient manuscripts bound in Ethiopian skin, or burn such rich and aphrodisiac incense in an enshrined skull. Who else would fill the mercifully cloaking darkness of the room with curious relics, mortuary souvenirs from ravished graves, or worm-demolished scrolls of primal dread?

Superficially, it was a normal room that night, and its occupant a normal man. But for proof of its inherent strangeness it was not necessary to glance at the skull, the bookcases, or the grim, shadow-shrouded remains, to know its occupant for what he was. For James Allington wrote in his secret diary tonight, and his musings were far from sanity.

"Tonight I am ready to make the test. I am convinced at last that splitting of the identity can be accomplished by means of therapeutic

hypnotism, provided that the mental attitude conducive to such a partition can be induced.

“Fascinating subject, that. Dual identity—the dream of men from the beginning of time! Two souls in one body...all philosophy is based on comparative logic; good and evil. Why, then, can not such a division exist in the human soul? Stevenson was only partly right when he wrote *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He imagined a chemical metamorphosis varying from one extreme to the other. I believe that both identities are *co-existent*; that, once they are separated by auto-hypnotic thought, a man can enjoy two existences simultaneously—his good self and his bad.

“They laughed at my theory in the club. Foster—that pompous old fool!—called me a dreamer. Dreamer? What does he, a petty scientific chemist, know of the basic mysteries of Life and Death? A glimpse into my laboratory would shock his smug soul into insanity. The others, too; mob-catering writers, pedantic fossils who call themselves professors, prim biologists who are shocked at the mention of my experiments in synthetic creation of life—what do such as these understand? They would shudder at the *Necronomicon*; burn it, too, if they could; burn it as their pious ancestors did three hundred years ago. Witch-baiters, skeptics, materialists all! I’m sick of the whole silly pack of them. It is the fate of the genius to dwell alone. Very well, then, I’ll dwell alone—but soon they will come cringing to my door and beg for mercy!

‘If my work tonight only succeeds! If I can succeed in hypnotizing myself into dual personality, physically manifested! Even modern psychology claims it can be done. Spiritualism credits its possibilities. The ancients have furnished me the key to the problem, as they have done before... Alhazred knew many things—it was only the weight of the knowledge that drove him mad.

“Two bodies! Once I can achieve that state at will, I shall hold the key to powers for ever denied to men. Immortality, perhaps; it is only a step further. After that there will be no need of skulking here in secret; no necessity of passing my researches off as a harmless hobby. Dreamer, eh? I’ll show them!

“I wonder what the *other* shape will look like? Will it be human? It must, otherwise—but I had better not think of that. It is quite probable that it will be an ugly-looking customer. I do not flatter myself. I know that the

evil side of my nature, while concealed, is undoubtedly dominant. There is danger, though—evil is an uncontrollable force in its purest form. It will draw strength from my body, too—energy to manifest itself physically. But that must not deter me. I must make the test. If it succeeds I shall have power—power undreamt of—power to kill, to rend, to destroy! I shall add to my little collection here, and settle a few old scores with my skeptical friends. After that there will be other pleasant things to do.

“But enough of such musings. I must begin. I shall lock the study doors; the servants have gone for the evening and there will be no one to intrude upon my privacy. I dare not risk using an electrically manipulated machine for fear of some untoward consequences in removing the hypnosis. I shall try to induce a hypnotic trance by concentrating intently on this heavy, polished paper-knife here on my desk. Meanwhile, I shall focus my will on the matter at hand, using the Soul Chant of Sebek as a focal point.

“I shall set the alarm for twelve o’clock, exactly one hour from now. Its ringing will break the spell. That, I believe, is all I need bother to do. As an added precaution, I shall burn this record. Should anything go wrong, I would hate to have all my little plans disclosed to the world.

“Nothing shall go wrong, however. I have used auto-hypnosis many times before, and I will be very careful. It will be a marvelous feeling to control two bodies at once. I can hardly control myself—I find my body trembling in eagerness and anticipation of its forthcoming metamorphosis. Power!

“Very well. After this report is reduced to ashes I shall be ready—ready to undertake the greatest experiment man has ever known.”

CHAPTER 2

James Allington sat before the shaded lamp. Before him on the table lay the paper-knife, its polished blade shimmering. Only the slow ticking of a clock broke the sable silence of the locked room.

The wizard’s eyes were glassy; they shone in the light, immobile as a basilisk’s. The reflection from the surface of the knife stabbed through his retina like the fiery ray of a burning sun, but his betranced gaze never wavered.

Who knows what strange inversion was occurring in the dreamer’s bewitched brain; what subtle transmutation generated from his purpose? He

had fallen into his sleep with the fixed resolve of severing his soul, dividing his personality, bisecting his ego. Who knows? Hypnotism does many strange things.

What secret Powers did he invoke to aid him in his fight? What black genesis of unholy life lurked within the shadows of his inner consciousness; what demons of leering evil granted him his dark desires?

For granted they were. Suddenly he awoke, and he could feel that he was no longer alone in that nighted room. He felt the presence of another, there in the darkness on the other side of the table.

Or was it another? Was it not he, himself? He glanced down at his body, and was unable to suppress a gasp of astonishment. *He seemed to have shrunk to less than a quarter of his ordinary size!* His body was light, fragile, dwarfed. For a moment he was incapable of thought or movement. His eyes strayed to the corner of the room, trying vainly to see the gloom-obscured movements of a presence that shambled there.

Then things happened. Out of the darkness nightmare came; stark, staring nightmare—a monstrous, hairy figure; huge, grotesque, simian—a hideous travesty of all things human. It was black madness; slaving, mocking madness with little red eyes of wisdom old and evil; leering snout and yellow fangs of grimacing death. It was like a rotting, living skull upon the body of a black ape. It was grisly and wicked, troglodytic and wise.

A monstrous thought assailed Allington. Was *this* his other self—this ghoul-spawned, charnel horror of corpse-accursed dread?

Too late the wizard realized what had befallen him. His experiment *had* succeeded, but terribly so. He had not realized how far the evil in his nature had outbalanced the good. This monster—this grisly abomination of darkness—was stronger than he was, and, being solely evil, *it was not mentally controlled by his other self*. Allington viewed it now with new fear in his eyes. It was like a creature from the Pit. All that was foul and obscene and anti-human in his makeup lay behind that grinning parody of a countenance. The beast-like body hinted of shadows that creep beneath the grave or lurk entombed within the deepest recesses of normal minds. Yet in it Allington recognized a mad, atavistic caricature of himself—all the lust, the greed, the insane ambition, the cruelty, the ignorance; the fiend-spawned secrets of his soul within the body of a gigantic ape!

As if in answer to his recognition, the creature laughed, and tentacles of terror gripped the wizard's heart.

The thing was coming toward him—it meant to destroy him, as evil always does. Allington, his tiny body ludicrously struggling to move quickly while impeded by clothes now ridiculously large for his diminutive frame, raced from his chair and flattened himself against the wall of the study. His voice, curiously treble, shrieked frantic supplication and futile commands to the approaching nemesis.

His prayers and curses turned to the hoarse gibberings of madness as the huge beast lunged across the table. His experiment was succeeding with a vengeance...*vengeance!* His glaring eyes watched, fascinated, as one great paw grasped the paper-knife, and fearsome laughter riddled the night. It was laughing...laughing! Somewhere an alarm-clock rang, but the wizard could not hear...

They found James Allington lying dead upon his study floor. There was a paper-knife imbedded in his breast, and they called it suicide, for no one could possibly have entered that locked and windowless room.

But that did not explain the fingerprints on the handle of the knife—the terrible fingerprints—*like those left by the hand of a gigantic ape.*

MARMOK, Emil Petaja (Poem)

*Sleep that doth harbor a dream of dread,
Whence come the fingers that beckoned and led
My dream-stung soul from my canopied bed—
Whither dost take me, ere I am dead?
Beyond the skull-grinning mid- March moon
Over the phosphorous-lit lagoon
Out past the darkest pits of the night,
Fast thru the stars in this evil flight;
Lead thee me out past the rim of space,
Show me that ravenous, pain- black face,
Marmok, whose myrmidons ever are questing
For souls who wander at night, unresting.
Then shall I know an ultimate bliss
Tasting the fury of that cosmic kiss,
Whilst my earth-cloak lies limply on the floor
To waken and gibber forever-more.*

THE INTRUDER, by Emil Petaja

It was in San Francisco, on the walk above the sand and surf that pounded like the heart of the Earth. There was wind, the sky and sea blended in a grey mist.

I was sitting on a stone bench watching a faint hint of distant smoke, wondering what ship it was and from what far port.

Mine was a pleasant wind—loneliness. So when he came, wrapped in his great overcoat and muffler, hat pulled down, and sat on my bench I was about to rise and leave him. There were other benches, and I was not in the mood for idle gossip about politics and taxes.

“Don’t go. Please.” His plea was authentic.

“I must get back to my shop,” I said.

“Surely you can spare a moment.”

I could not even to begin to place the accent in his voice. Low as a whisper, tense. His deep-set eyes held me...his face was pale and had a serenity born of suffering. A placid face, not given to emotional betrayals, yet mystical. I sat down again. Here was someone bewilderingly strange. Someone I wouldn’t soon forget. He moved a hand toward me, as tho to hold me from going, and I saw with mild curiosity that he wore heavy gloves, like mittens.

“I am not well. I...I must not be out in the damp air,” I said. “But today I just had to go out and walk. I had to.”

“I can understand.” I warmed to the wave of aloneness that lay in his words. “I too have been ill. I know you, Otis Marlin. I have visited your shop off Market Street. You are not rich, but the feel of the covers on a fine book between your hands suffices. Am I right?”

I nodded, “But how...”

“You have tried writing, but have had no success. Alone in the world, your loneliness has much a family man, harassed might envy.”

“That’s true,” I admitted, wondering if he could be a seer, a fake mystic bent on arousing in me an interest in spiritism favorable to his pocket-book. His next words were a little amused, but he didn’t smile.

“No, I’m not a psychic—in the ordinary sense, I’ve visited your shop. I was there only yesterday,” he said. And I remembered him. In returning

from my lunch I had met him coming out of my humble place of business. One glimpse into those brooding eyes was not a thing to soon forget, and I recalled pausing to watch his stiff-legged progress down the street and around the corner.

There was now a pause, while I watched leaves scuttling along the oiled walk in the growling wind. Then a sound like a sigh came from my companion. It seemed to me that the wind and the sea spoke loudly of a sudden, as tho approaching some dire climax. The sea wind chilled me as it had not before, I wanted to leave.

“Dare I tell you? *Dare I!*” His white face turned upward. It was as though he questioned some spirit in the winds.

I was silent; curious, yet fearful of what it might be he might not be allowed to tell me. The winds were portentously still.

“Were you ever told, as a child, that you must not attempt to count the stars in the sky at night—that if you did you might *lose your mind?*”

“Why, yes. I believe I’ve heard that old superstition. Very reasonable, I believe—based on the assumption that the task would be too great for one brain. I—”

“I suppose it never occurred to you,” he interrupted, “that this superstition might hold even more truth than that, truth as malignant as it is vast. Perhaps the cosmos hold secrets beyond comprehension of man; and what is your assurance that these secrets are beneficent and kind? Is nature rather not terrible, than kind? In the stars are patterns—designs which if read, might lure the intrepid miserable one who reads them out of earth and beyond...beyond, to immeasurable evil...Do you understand what I am saying?” His voice quivered metallically, was vibrant with emotion.

I tried to smile, but managed only a sickly grin. “I understand you, sir, but I am not in the habit of accepting nebulous theories such as that without any shred of evidence.”

“There is, sad to say, only too much evidence. But do you believe that men have *lost their minds* from incessant study of the stars?”

“Perhaps some have, I don’t know,” I returned. “But in the South of this state in one of the country’s leading observatories, I have a friend who is famous as an astronomer. He is as sane as you or I. If not saner.” I tacked the last sentence on with significant emphasis.

The fellow was muttering something into his muffler, and I fancied I caught the words “danger...” and “fools...” We were silent again. Low dark clouds fled over the roaring sea and the gloom intensified.

Presently, in his clipped speech, the stranger said, “Do you believe that life exists on other planets, other stars? Have you ever wondered what kind of life might inhabit the other stars in this solar system, and those beyond it?” His eyes were near mine as he spoke, and they bewitched me. There was something in them, something intangible and awful. I sensed that he was questioning me idly, as an outlander might be questioned about things with which the asker is familiar, as I might ask a New Yorker, “What do you think of the Golden Gate Bridge?”

“I wouldn’t attempt to guess, to describe, for instance, a Martian man,” I said. “Yet I read with interest various guesses by writers of fiction.” I was striving to maintain a mood of lightness and ease, but inwardly I felt a bitter cold, as one on the rim of a nightmare. I suddenly realized, with childish fear, that night was falling.

“Writers of fiction! And what if they were to *guess too well*? What then? Is it safe for them to have full rein over their imaginations? Like the stargazers...”

I said nothing, but smiled.

He went on, “Perhaps, man, there have been those whose minds were acute beyond most earthly minds—those who have guessed too closely to truth. Perhaps *those who are Beyond* are not yet ready to make themselves known to Earthlings? And maybe THEY, are annoyed with the puny publicity they receive from imaginative writers.... Ask yourself, *what is imagination*? Are earth-minds capable of conceiving that which is not and has never been; or is this imagination merely a deeper insight into worlds you know not of, worlds glimpsed dimly in the throes of dream? And whence come these dreams? Tell me, have you ever awakened from a dream with the sinister feeling that all was not well inside your mind?—that while you, the real you, were away in Limbo—*someone*—*something* was probing in your mind, invading it and reading it. Might not THEY leave behind them in departure shadowy trailings of *their* own minds?”

Now I was indeed speechless. For a strange nothing had started my neck-hairs to prickling. Authors who might have guessed too well.... Two,

no three, writers whose stories had hinted at inconceivable yet inevitable dooms; writers I had known; had recently died, by accident.

He continued, “What of old legends? Of the serpent who shall one day devour the sun. That legend dates back to Mu and Atlantis. Who, man, was and is Satan? Christ? And Jehovah? benevolent and all-saving, were but a monstrous jest fostered by THEY to keep man blindly content, and keep him divided among himself so that he strove not to unravel the stars?”

He paused, and when I said nothing, he said: “Man, in my foolish youth I studied by candleflame secrets that would scorch your very soul. Of women who with their own bare hands have strangled the children they bore so that the world might not know.... Disease and sickness at which physicians throw up their hands in helpless bafflement. When strong men tear at their limbs and heads and agony—seeking to drive forth alien forces that have netted themselves into their bodies. I need scarcely recount them all, each with its own abominable significance. It is THEM. Who are eternal and nameless, who send their scouts down to test earth-man. Don’t you realize that they have watched man creep out of primal slimes, take limbs and shamble, and finally walk? And that they are waiting, biding their time....”

I shivered with a fear beyond name. I tried to laugh and could not. Then, bold with stark horror, I shouted quite loudly: “How do you know this? Are you one of *them*?”

He shook his head violently. “No, no!”

I made as to go, feeling an aching horror within me.

He called, “Stay only a moment more, man. I will have pity on you and will not tell you all. I will not describe *them*. And I will not assay that which, when upon first seeing you here by the sea, *I first intended....*” I listened. Not daring to look at him; as in the grip of daemoniac dream. My fingers clutched at the edges of the bench so tightly that I have been unable to write with them until now. He concluded thus:

“So you see that I am everywhere a worldless alien. Sometimes this secret is too great for one mind to contain, and I must talk. I must feel the presence of someone human near me, else I shall attempt to commit suicide and again fail. It is without end—my horror. Have pity on me, man of earth, as I have had pity on you.”

It was then that I gripped him by the shoulders and looked with pleading desperation into his staring eyes. “Why have you told me? What—” My voice broke. My hands fell to my sides. I shuddered.

He understood. Shrieked one word: “*Pity!*” into my insensible ear, and was gone.

That was three nights ago and each night since has been hell. I cannot remember how long it was after the stranger left that I found myself able to move, to rise, hobble home, suddenly ancient with knowledge. And I cannot—*will not*—reveal to you all that I heard.

I thought myself insane, but after an examination, a physician pronounced me that I had been strained mentally. I am competent. But I wonder if he is wrong.

I view the silken stars tonight with loathing. *He* sought to master their inscrutable secret meaning, and succeeded. He imagined, he dreamed; and he fed his sleep with potions, so that he might learn where his mind might be during sleep, and himself probe into the mind that wandered from space into his resting body-shell. I am no scientist, no bio-chemist, so I learned little of his methods. Only that he did succeed in removing his mind from Earth, and soaring to some remote world over and beyond this universe—where *they* dwell. And *they* knew him to be a mind of Earth, he told me. He but hinted of the evil he beheld, so potent with dread that it shattered his mind. And *they* cured him, and sent him back to earth....“They are waiting!” he shrieked, in his grating skeleton of a voice. “They are contemptuous of man and his feeble colonies. But they fear that some day, like an overgrown idiot child, he may do them harm. But before this time—when Man has progressed into a ripeness—*they* will descend! Then they will come in hordes to exploit the world as *they* did before!”

Of his return, and his assuming the role of a man, the Alien spoke evasively. It was to be assured that this talk of his was not some repulsive caprice; to know that all of it was true, that I gripped him and beheld him.

To my everlasting horror, I must know. Little in itself, what I saw, but sufficient to cause me to sink down on the stone bench in a convulsive huddle of fear. Never again in life can I tear this clutching terror from my soul. Only this: That when I looked into his staring eyes in the dimness of murky twilight, and before he understood and quickly avaulted, I glimpsed with astoundment and repugnance that between the muffling of his coat and

black scarf *the intruder wore a meticulously painted metal mask—to hide what I must not see....*

OUT OF THE JAR, by Charles A. Tanner

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I am presenting here, at the insistence of my friend, James Francis Denning, an account of an event or series of events which, he says, occurred to him during the late summer and early fall of 1940. I do so, not because I concur in the hope which Denning has that it may arouse serious investigation of the phenomena he claims took place, but merely that a statement of those phenomena may be placed on record, as a case history for future students of occult phenomena or—psychology. Personally, I am still unpersuaded under which head this narration should be placed.

Were my mind one of those which accepts witches, vampires and werewolves in the general scheme of things, I would not doubt for a moment the truth of Denning's tale, for certainly the man believes it himself; and his lack of imagination and matter-of-fact mode of living up until the time of the occurrence speak strongly in his favor. And then too, there is the mental breakdown of the brilliant young Edward Barnes Halpin, as added evidence. This young student of occult history and the vague lesser known cults and religions was a fairly close acquaintance of Denning's for years, and it was at Denning's home that he suffered the stroke which made him the listless, stricken thing that he is today.

That much is fact and can be attested to by any number of people. As to Denning's explanation, I can only say that it deserves a thorough investigation. If there is any truth in it at all, the truth should certainly be verified and recorded. And so, to the story.

* * * *

It began, Denning says, in the summer of last year, when he attended a sale disposing of the stock of one of those little secondhand stores that call themselves antique shops and are known to most people as junk shops. There was the usual hodge-podge of Indian curios, glassware, Victorian furniture and old books; and Denning attended it as he did every event of this kind, allowing himself to indulge in the single vice which he had—that of filling his home with a stock of cheap and useless curios from all parts of the world.

At this particular sale he emerged triumphantly with a carved elephant tusk, an Alaskan medicine man's mask and—an earthenware jar. This jar was a rather ordinary thing, round-bodied, with a very short cylindrical neck and with a glazed band around its center, blue glaze, with curious angular characters in yellow that even the rather illiterate Denning could see bore a certain relation to Greek characters. The auctioneer called it very old, said it was Syraic or Samaritan and called attention to the seal which was affixed to the lid. This lid was of earthenware similar to the jar and was set in the mouth after the manner of a cork and a filling of what seemed to be hard-baked clay sealed it in. And on this baked clay, or whatever it was, had been stamped a peculiar design—two triangles interwoven to form a six-pointed star, with three unknown characters in the center. Although the auctioneer was as ignorant as Denning as to the real significance of this seal, he made a mystery of it and Denning was hooked. He bought the thing and brought it home, where it found a place, in spite of his wife's objections, on the mantle in the living room.

And there it rested, in a questionable obscurity, for a matter of four or five months. I say questionable obscurity, for as near as I can gather it was the bone of contention, during most of that time, between Denning and his wife. It was but natural, I think, that this estimable lady should object to having the best room in their little home filled with what were to her a mass of useless objects. Yet nothing was done about it. In the light of Denning's story of subsequent events, it seems almost incredible that that frightful thing could sit there, day after day, in that commonplace living room, being taken down and dusted now and then, and carelessly placed back.

Yet such was the case, and such remained the case until the first visit of young Halpin. This young man was an acquaintance of Denning's of long standing, and their friendship had been slowly ripening during the last year, owing to the fact that Halpin was able to add much to Denning's knowledge of the curios which he accumulated. Both of them worked for the same company and seeing each other every day, it was not unusual that they had become quite friendly in spite of the fact that neither had ever visited the other's home. But Denning's description of certain carvings on the elephant's tusk which he had bought interested young Halpin sufficiently to cause him to pay a visit to Denning's home to make a personal examination of the tusk.

Halpin, at this time, was still under thirty, yet he had become already a recognized authority in this country of that queer borderland of mystic occult study that Churchward, Fort, Lovecraft and the Miskatonic school represent. His articles on some of the obscure chapters of d'Erlette's "Cultes des Goules" has been accepted favorably by American occult students, as well as his translation of the hitherto expurgated sections of the Gaelic "Leabhar Mor Dubh." In all, he was a most promising student and one in whom the traits of what now seem to have been incipient dementia praecox were conspicuous by their absence. Indeed, one of his strongest characteristics, Denning tells me, was a pronounced interest in almost everything about him.

* * * *

"He was like that, the night that he first visited me," says Denning. "He looked over the tusk, explained all the curious carvings that he could and made little sketches of the remaining figures, to take away and study. Then his eyes began roving about the room and pretty soon they noticed some other little thing, I don't remember just what, and he began talking about that. I had a couple of Folsom points—those curious flints that are supposed to be much older than any other American artifacts—and he spoke about them for nearly twenty minutes.

"Then he laid them down and was up and around the room again; and presently he picked up something else and was talking about that. I used to learn an awful lot from Ed Halpin, but I think I learned more that night than I ever did at any other one time. And at last his eyes lit on that jar."

* * * *

Yes, his eyes lit on the jar, and started the series of happenings that at last made this story necessary. For Halpin was stricken with a sudden curiosity, picked up the jar and glanced over it, and then suddenly became wildly excited. "Why, it's old!" he ejaculated. "It's ancient Hebrew, Jim. Where in the world did you get it?"

Denning told him, but his curiosity was unappeased. He spent several minutes trying to extract from Denning a knowledge which it became obvious that the latter did not possess. It was easy to see that Halpin already

knew more concerning the jar than did Denning, and so his questions ceased.

“But surely you know what it is supposed to be, don’t you?” quizzed Halpin. “Didn’t the auctioneer tell you anything about it? Didn’t you see the previous owner? Lord, Denning! How can you find interest in these things, if you don’t learn all you can of them?”

Denning was rendered apologetic by his evident exasperation, and Halpin suddenly relented, laughed and started to explain.

“That six-pointed star, Jim, is known as Solomon’s seal. It has been a potent sign used in Hebraic cabala for thousands of years. What has me interested is its use in connection with Phoenician characters around the body of the vase. That seems to indicate a real antiquity. It might just be possible that this is actually the seal of Solomon himself! Jim,” his attitude suddenly changed, “Jim, sell me this thing, will you?”

Now, it seems incredible that Denning saw no slightest gleam of light in this guarded explanation of Halpin’s. The young student certainly was aware of much of the importance of the jar, but Denning insists that the explanation meant nothing whatever to him. To be sure, Denning was no student, he had probably never heard of the Cabala, nor of Abdul Alhazred or Joachim of Cordoba, but surely, in his youth he had read the “Arabian Nights.” Even that should have given him a clue. Apparently not—he tells me that he refused Halpin’s offer to buy the vase, simply because of a collector’s vagary. He felt that, well, to use his own words: “If it was worth ten dollars to him, it was worth ten dollars to me.”

And so, though Halpin increased the offer which he first made, Denning was obdurate. Halpin left with merely an invitation to come back at any time and examine the vase to his heart’s content.

* * * *

During the next three weeks, Halpin did return, several times. He copied down the inscription on the blue band, made a wax impression of the seal, photographed the vase and even went so far as to measure it and weigh it. And all the time his interest increased and his bids for the thing rose higher. At last, unable to raise his offer further, he was reduced to pleading with Denning that he sell it, and at this, Denning grew angry.

“I told him,” says Denning, “I told him that I was getting sick and tired of his begging. I said I wasn’t going to sell it to him and that, even if it cost me our friendship, that vase was going to stay mine. Then he started on another line. He wanted to open it and see what was inside.

“But I had a good excuse for not complying with that plea. He himself had told me of the interest that attached to the seal on the clay and I wasn’t going to have that broken if I knew myself. I was so positive on this score that he gave in and apologized again. At least, I thought he gave in. I know different now, of course.”

We all know different now. Halpin had decided to open the vase at any cost, and so had merely given up the idea of trying to buy it. We must not think, however, that he had been reduced to the status of a common thief in spite of his later actions. The young man’s attitude was explainable to any one who can understand the viewpoint of a student of science. Here was an opportunity to study one of the most perplexing problems of occult art, and obstinacy, combined with ignorance, was trying to prevent it. He determined to circumvent Denning, no matter to what depths he had to stoop.

* * * *

Thus it was that several nights later Jim Denning was awakened, sometime during the early morning hours, by a slight, unusual noise on the lower floor of his home. At first but half awake, he lay and listlessly pondered the situation. Had his wife awakened and gone downstairs for a midnight snack? Or had he heard, perhaps, a mouse in the kitchen? Could it be a sleeping sigh from his wife’s bed made him realize that it wasn’t she and at the same moment came a repetition of the sound—a dull “clunk” as of metal striking muffled metal. Instantly alert, he rose from his pillow, stepped out of bed, fumbled for robe and slippers and was tiptoeing down the steps, stopping only long enough to get his revolver from the drawer in which he kept it.

From the landing he could see a dim light in the living room, and again he heard the “clunk” that he had heard before. By leaning far over the banister, he was able to look into the living room, where he could see, by the light of a flashlight lying on the floor, the dark form of a man; his long overcoat and hat effectively concealing all his features. He was stooping

over a round object, and as Denning looked, he raised a hammer and brought it down sharply but carefully on a chisel which he held in his hand. The hammer's head was wrapped in rags and again Denning heard the dull noise which had awakened him.

Of course, Denning knew at once who the dark form was. He knew that the round object was his vase. But he hesitated to make an outcry or even to interrupt the other for several seconds. He seemed a little uncertain as to the reason for this, but I am convinced, from what I know of Denning's character, that curiosity had gotten the better of him. Half consciously, he was determined to find out just why Halpin was so interested in the vase. So he remained silent, and it was only after several seconds that some slight noise he made caused Halpin to turn in a panic. As he did so, the last bit of seal crumbled from the jar, and rising, he still clung unconsciously to the lid. The jar turned over on its side and lay there for a moment unnoticed. Halpin was almost horror-stricken at the realization that he had been caught, as the lawyers say, in *flagrante delicto*. He burst into chattering, pleading speech.

“Don't call the police, Jim! Listen to me. I wasn't going to steal it, Jim. I'd have been gone with it long ago if I had intended to steal it. Honest! Let me tell you, Jim. It's one of Solomon's jars, all right. I was only going to open it. Good Lord, man, haven't you ever read about them? Listen. Jim, haven't you ever heard those old Arabian legends? Let me tell you about them, Jim—”

As he spoke, Denning had descended the stairs. He stepped into the room and seized Halpin by the shoulders and angrily shook him.

“Quit babbling, Halpin. Don't act like a damned fool. I guess the jar and its contents are still mine. Come on, snap out of it and tell me what this is all about.”

Halpin swallowed his panic and sighed.

“There are old Arabian and Hebrew legends, Jim, that speak of a group or class of beings called Jinn. A lot of the stuff about them is claptrap, of course, but as near as we can make out, they were a kind of super-being from some other plane of existence. Probably they were the same things that other legends have called the Elder Ones, or the Pre-Adamites. Perhaps there are a dozen names for them if they are the same beings that appear in myths of other countries, before the time of man, they ruled the world; but

fighting among themselves and certain conditions during the Glacial Period caused them to become almost extinct, here on this earth. But the few that were left caused damage enough among men until the time of King Solomon.

* * * *

“Arabian legend says that Solomon was the greatest of all kings, and from an occult standing I guess he was, in spite of the fact that the kingdom he ruled over was little more than a jerk-water principality, even in that age. But Solomon’s occult knowledge was great enough to enable him war on the Jinn and to conquer them. And then, because it was impossible to kill them (their metabolism is entirely different from ours), he sealed them up into jars and cast the jars into the depths of the sea!”

Denning was still dense.

“Halpin, you’re not trying to tell me that you expect to find a Jinn in that jar, are you? You’re not such a superstitious fool as to believe—”

“Jim, I don’t know what I believe. There’s no record of such a jar as this having ever been found before. But I know that the Elder Ones once existed, and from an examination of the jar an occultist might learn much concerning—”

While Halpin had been speaking, Denning’s eye had fallen on the jar, lying where it had tumbled at Halpin’s sudden rising and the hair on Denning’s neck quivered with a wave of horripilation, as he stammered suddenly: “For the love of God, Halpin, look at that jar!”

Halpin’s eyes turned at Denning’s first words and he, too, stared, unable to take his eyes off the thing that was taking place. From the mouth of the jar was flowing, slowly, sluggishly, a thick, viscous mass of bluish, faintly luminous stuff. The mass was spreading, oozing across the floor, reaching curious curly pseudopods out in all directions, acting, not like an inert viscous body should, but like—like an amoeba under a microscope. And from it, as though it were highly volatile, curled little streamers of heavy smoke or vapor. To their ears came, almost inaudibly at first, and then more loudly, a slow deliberate “cluck—cluck—c-lu-uck” from the mass, as it spread.

The two had forgotten their differences. Denning stepped toward Halpin and clasped his shoulder fearfully. Halpin stood like a stone statue but his

breath was like that of a winded runner. And they stood there and looked and looked as that incredible jelly spread and steamed across the floor.

I think it was the luminous quality of the mass that horrified the men the most. It had a dull bluish glow, a light of a shade that made it absolutely certain that it was not merely a reflection from the light of the flashlight which still threw its beam in a comet's tail across the floor. And too, it was certain properties, in the mist, for that behaved not like a normal mist, but with a sentience of its own. It floated about the room, seeking, seeking, and yet it avoided the presence of the two men as though it feared their touch. And it was increasing. It was quite apparent that the mass on the floor was evaporating, passing into the mist, and it was evident that it would soon be gone.

"Is it—is it one of those things, Halpin?" whispered Denning, hoarsely; but Halpin answered him not at all, but only gripped his hand, tighter and tighter and tighter. Then the mist began a slow twirling motion and a deep sigh came from Halpin. It seemed that he was assured of something by this, for he leaned over and whispered to Denning with what seemed a certain amount of confidence: "It's one of them, all right. Stand back by the door and let me handle it. I know a little something from the books I've read."

Denning backed away, more than a little fearful of Halpin now, seeing that the young man seemed to know something of this terrible thing, but nevertheless grateful for the suggestion. Standing there by the doorway, hoping vaguely that his traitorous legs would obey him if it became necessary to flee. He watched the dread process of materialization take place. And I think he has never quite recovered from the effects of it; for surely, at that moment, the entire philosophy of his life was changed. Denning, I have noticed, goes to church quite regularly now.

However, as I say, he stood there and watched. Watched the smoke, or vapor, or whatever it was, whirl and whirl, faster and faster, snatching up the vagrant wisps and streamers that had strayed to the far corners of the room, sucking them in, incorporating them into the central column, until it last that column, swirling there, seemed almost solid.

It was solid. It had ceased its whirling and stood there quivering, jelly-like, plastic, but nevertheless, solid. And, as though molded in the hands of an invisible sculptor, that column was changing. Indentations appeared here, protuberances there. The character of the surface altered subtly;

presently it was no longer smooth and lustrous, but rough and scaly. It lost most of its luminosity and became an uncertain, lichenous green. Until at last it was a—thing.

That moment, Denning thinks, was the most horrible in all the adventure. Not because of the horror of the thing that stood before him, but because at that very moment an automobile, driven by some belated citizen passed by outside, the light from its headlights casting eerie gleams across the walls and the ceiling; and the thought of the difference between the commonplace world in which that citizen was living, and the frightful things taking place in this room almost overcame the cowering man by the doorway. And, too, the light made just that much plainer the disgusting details of the creature that towered above them.

For tower it did. It was, apparently about nine feet tall, for its head quite reached the ceiling of Denning's little room. It was roughly man-like, for it had an erect body and four limbs, two upper and two lower. It had a head and a sort of a face on it. But there its similarity to man ceased. Its head had a high ridge running from the forehead to the nape of the neck—and it had no eyes and no nose. In the place of these organs was a curious thing that looked not unlike the blossom of a sea-anemone, and beneath that was a mouth with an upper lip that was like a protruding fleshy beak, making the whole mouth take on the semblance of a sardonic letter V.

The front of its body had the flat, undetailed plainness of a lizard's belly, and the legs were long, scaly and terribly scrawny. The same might be said of the arms, which terminated in surprisingly delicate, surprisingly human hands.

Halpin had been watching the materialization with the eagerness of a hawk, and no sooner was it complete, no sooner did he notice that tautening of the creature's muscles that indicated conscious control, then he burst out with a jumble of strange words. Now, it happens that Denning was so keyed up that his mind was tense and observant of every detail, and he clearly remembers the exact words that Halpin uttered. They are in some little-known tongue and I have failed to find a translation, so I repeat them here for any student who may care to look them up:

“Ia, Psuchawrl!” he cried. “’Ng topuothikl Shelemoh, ma’kthoqui h’nirl!”

At the cry, the horror moved. It stooped and took a short step toward the uncowering Halpin, its facial rosette rose just as a man lifts his eyebrows in surprise, and then—speech came from its lips. Halpin, strangely, answered it in English.

“I claim the forfeit,” he cried boldly. “Never has one of your kind been released that it did not grant to whoever released it one wish, were it in its power to grant it.”

The thing bowed, actually bowed. In deep—inhumanly deep—tones it gave what was manifestly an assent. It clasped its hands over what should have been its breast and bowed, in what even the paralyzed Denning could tell was certainly mock humility.

“Very well, then!” the heedless Halpin went on. “I want to know! That is my wish—to know. All my life I have been a student, seeking, seeking—and learning nothing. And now—I want to know the why of things, the cause, the reason, and the end to which we travel. Tell me the place of man in this universe, and the place of this universe in the cosmos!”

The thing, the Jinni, or whatever it was bowed again. Why was it that Halpin could not see its mockery! It clasped those amazingly human hands together, it drew them apart, and from fingertips to fingertips leaned a maze of sparks. In that maze of brilliant filaments a form began to take shape, became rectangular, took on solidity and became a little window. A silvery, latticed window whose panes were seemingly transparent, but which looked out upon—from where Denning stood, it seemed nothing but blackness. The creature’s head made a gesture and it spoke a single word—the only word which it spoke that Denning recognized.

“Look!” it said, and obeying, Halpin stepped forward and looked through that window.

Denning says that Halpin stared while you might have counted ten. Then he drew back a step or two, stumbled against the couch and sat down. “Oh!” he said softly—very only, and then: “Oh, I see!” Denning says he said it like a little child that had just had some problem explained by a doting parent. And he made no attempt to rise, no comment, nor any further word of any kind.

And the Jinni, the Elder One, demon or angel or whatever it was, bowed again and turned around—and was gone! Then, suddenly, somehow or other, Denning’s trance of flight was over, and he rushed to the light switch

and flooded the room with light. An empty jar lay upon the floor, and upon the couch sat one who stared and stared into vacancy with a look of unutterable despair on his face.

* * * *

Little more need be said. Denning called his wife, gave her a brief and distorted tale which he later amplified for the police, and spent the rest of the night trying to rouse Halpin. When morning came, he sent for a doctor and had Halpin removed to his own home. From there Halpin was taken to the state asylum for the insane where he still is. He sits constantly in meditation, unless one tries to arouse him, and then he turns on them a sad, pitying smile and returns to his musings.

And except for that sad, pitying smile, his only look is one of unutterable despair.

SKYDRIFT, by Emil Petaja

Originally published in *Weird Tales*, November, 1949.

Last night's storm had left the desolate beach littered with drift. Drift of every kind imaginable, the flotsam of a harried ocean; and two human derelicts as well. The sky was antiqued copper, sheathing the earth, protecting it from the menaces lurking in outer space. Last night the wind had howled like a thousand demons, thunder had bellowed along the foothills, lightning had lashed. They had cowered in the deepest, driest cave they could find until dawn drove them out, or rather sharp hunger and cold. The wind had erased itself, a strange calm possessed the nervous gray ocean. But it was unseasonably cold for late April along this ragged skirt of ocean thirty miles north of San Quentin.

Big Tom's heavy lips were blue. They shivered when he curled them and spat on the packed sand in anger.

"P-pick it up, jerk! We n-need dry wood! I'm freez-zing my t-tail off!"

Bony little Aino shivered, too. But he said nothing, he only hunched closer against the wet-smelling sand, staring at a chunk of drift in front of him, clutching some others to his scrawny chest.

The piece of drift was half-poked into the sand, as if it had been flung there like that. It was about ten inches long, flat, bleached and smooth. It was like all the other chunks of drift along the beach, half-rounded by gnawing waves, serrulated in curious rows so that you might almost imagine it had writing on it

Big Tom Clegg scratched his paunch where his cowhide belt divided him. His wide stubbled face darkened when Aino didn't answer him right away or do what he said. Then his foot went out. Aino toppled. He almost touched the curious piece of drift. He would have had he not dropped his load and plunged his hands against the wet sand.

"I said pick it up!" There was that ominous quantity to Big Tom's command which had heretofore caused Aino to respond like a well-trained hound, back in the iron cell they'd shared for three years.

Aino Halvor was weak physically. Perhaps he was born to obey somebody stronger than he. Perhaps something in him demanded that he

take orders from someone more able to bargain with life than he was. Tom Clegg had appointed himself that somebody back in San Quentin, and since their release eight days ago had continued to demand servility as his right by reason of superior physical strength. But now, for the first time in three years and eight days, Aino hadn't obeyed his order.

"Pick it up!" Big Tom's voice rose warningly. He set down his load.

Aino turned and looked up. His thin pocked face turned white. His mouth—it was like a careless gouge out of slovenly turned clay—gaped and showed little overlapping teeth. His eyes leaped with terror.

Aino was afraid of Big Tom. Especially when Big Tom looked at him like that, his left eyelid drooping a little and his pendulous lower lip pushed out. Big Tom had carefully nurtured this fear, punctuating it with generous samples of what would happen to Aino if he didn't do what Big Tom told him to.

Aino's fearful eyes whipped back to the piece of drift in question. He whimpered like a puppy, but he didn't touch it.

Big Tom's hand lashed out.

Aino rolled across the sand almost to the ragged line of wetness which the surf claimed. His eyes were fearfully open. There was blood on his face. He made no move to wipe it off. He didn't move at all, only waited, until Big Tom crabbed across the sand to him and yanked him up on his feet. Big Tom shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Why the hell didn't you pick it up like I told you? Why the hell didn't you, eh?"

He kept repeating this over and over, as if it were something past all understanding. After awhile he let Aino loose so he could catch a breath and answer him. Aino gulped air and swabbed a furtive hand over his cut mouth, as if his bleeding was something he should be ashamed of.

"I—"

"Spit it out!" Big Tom's left eyelid drooped.

"It's not a chunk of drift," Aino muttered. "It—it's got writing on it. It came—out of the sky, in the lightning."

Big Tom stared at him. Then he started to laugh. This was rich! Here he had been scared Aino was getting next to himself, was going to stop being a sucker, that he, Big Tom, was going to lose his slavish tool. Aino might be a shrimp and a jerk, as Big Tom continued to remind him, but he could read

and write. When they panhandled on Third Street in Frisco it was Aino who copped the handouts. He looked sick, hungry. Big Tom got only cold stony looks as they hurried past. Those looks said, *why don't you get a job, you big ox.*

"I suppose you got that out of those damn books in the stir library," Big Tom jeered, in sadistically good humor again. "I knew I shouldn't ought to left you read so damn much. I should of knew it would drive you nuts. That's what books does to people, don't you know that, jerk?" He walked back to the white piece of drift. "Want to see me pick it up, shrimp? What am I supposed to do? Drop dead if I pick it up? He grinned.

"Don't—" Aino's narrow teeth nipped his lipless mouth.

But there was no use telling Big Tom. Big Tom had never heard of Charles Fort or thunderstones. He'd never heard about the terrors that lurk in the wind and the storm, about *Them* outside...

Big Tom chuckled as he reached down and pulled up the flat piece of drift. "See?" he jeered. "You thought it was going to kill me. You think it's some kind of a—a magic thing, a god even. Is that what you think, jerk?"

He walked over and pushed it in Aino's face. Aino jumped back, whimpering. Big Tom roared.

"Still think so, eh? *Why?* Answer me that! What makes you think it ain't just another chunk of drift out of the sea, eh?" Aino's eyes approached the thing in Big Tom's hand timidly, but once there they clung, pupils dilating. His mouth curved and then he spoke, with a new dignity.

"It isn't drift, Tom. It came out of the sky, not out of the sea. It came down in the storm. Sometimes *they* send something down, or come down themselves in different shapes. Charles Fort calls the things from outside thunderstones. He knew about them, but he didn't know that—"

Big Tom interrupted with a snort. "So now you're smarter'n them guys who wrote them books, eh? Think you're pretty cute, don't you, jerk? Pretty smart, eh?"

"No, Tom. I just know—"

"Look at it! It's only a hunk of seadrift!"

"It has writing on it."

Big Tom squinted. "Call that writing? Hell, I can't read but I know writing when I see it. Where's your letters?"

Aino didn't try to explain. He didn't bother to tell Big Tom that there were books in many languages and that some languages used different phonetic symbols, and that if something came out of the sky and had writing on it...

"That's from being in the sea so long," Big Tom snorted. "It's the wood grain. Anybody with brains can see that. Make good firewood.

Fear and worry crossed blades in Aino's mind as he gathered up his load of driftwood. On their way back to the cave his fears spilled out in words.

"Tom, you aren't going to try to burn it!"

"Ain't I?" Big Tom grinned. "Just stick around!" His heavy shoe squashed a rubbery rope of kelp.

"You can't, Tom!" Aino cried. "It's not—what it looks like. It's *alive*—like a god."

They walked on along the black curve of beach.

"You're wacky, Aino," Big Tom said. "I knew it would happen, reading all them books. What makes you say a dumb thing like that, anyway?"

Aino hesitated. "It—it talked to me."

"Oh, it just opened its mouth and talked to you!"

"It talked to my mind."

Big Tom whirled impatiently. He had had enough. His lips curved in a sadistic grin as he shifted his load of drift and tossed the thing Aino was so worried about down at Aino's feet.

"Kick it!" he commanded Aino. "Kick it to pieces! See if there's a god hid inside of it. Go on! Kick it to pieces before I kick you to pieces!"

Aino shivered, but there were beads of sweat on his face. "Don't, Tom! Don't make me touch it!"

Big Tom crowded in. "If you don't, you know what'll happen to you." Over the droning of the sea his voice cracked like a whip.

Aino fell whimpering to his knees. He stared at the object they had found. He stared. Wordless syllables rattled in his throat. He looked up at Big Tom. Big Tom's face was merciless. He was annoyed, impatient, and plain sore. His was the anger of a common animal man who has had his limited intelligence outraged, who must have a retraction or he will smash something.

Aino's eyes rolled. Behind them the ocean sighed wetly. Overhead in the coppery sky a gull dipped, bleated, and went on. Around them was

nothing but desolation. Aino looked down at the thing in front of him. Then, reverently, he bowed his head and touched it with his mouth.

After he had beaten and kicked Aino until his limbs were worn out; Big Tom jerked him back on his feet and pushed him ahead toward the cave. He made Aino carry the thing. Aino stumbled ahead, his legs like rubber. The sky and the sea and the desolate beach were nothing but a crazy blur to his swollen eyes. But he strained and kept going until they reached the rocky entrance to the cave. Then he flopped. Driftwood scattered but he held it fiercely against his skinny chest.

“Get up!”

Big Tom kicked until he clawed at boulders and managed to gain his feet.

“Go on back to Bolinas. Get something to eat while I build a fire. Get going!”

“I have no money, Tom.”

“Gee, do I have to tell you everything? Panhandle it, or swipe it. Only make damn sure you bring me back something to eat.” When Aino weaved away, he grabbed his wrist, “And make damn sure you come back, too, because if I have to come after you, so help me, I’ll kill you. Think I’m fooling, eh?”

“I’ll come back, Tom,” Aino gulped.

* * * *

It was near eleven by the time the wide curve of familiar beach met his sight again. He limped across it toward the sea-lashed rocks and the cave. His back and his legs ached where Big Tom had punched and kicked him. His sallow face was bruised and purple with clotted blood. But the sun was warm on his back. He kicked little spurts of half-dried sand ahead of him with each step he took. Aino felt good.

Funny how some days you struck things just right, he mused. Like this morning in Bolinas. Everybody was nice to him. They smiled at him and were friendly. He had already had coffee, two cups, and a bear claw with frosting on it. He wouldn’t tell Big Tom about the coffee and the bear claw. Make him sore. The big sack he carried had plenty of food for them both, enough to last two days. And he hadn’t had to swipe it, either. Big Tom wouldn’t be sore when he saw all the food Aino had brought back with him.

He looked up at the coppery sun and hurried. Big Tom's reactions were sure to be tempered by the lateness of the hour and the emptiness of his stomach.

"Beans!" Big Tom snorted, peering critically down into Aino's store sack. "I'm sick of damn stinking beans!"

Aino hastily dug deeper and produced two cans of Spam, and one of pressed chicken.

"Where'd you swipe these?" Big Tom asked, more mildly.

"Grocer gave them to me." Aino displayed his narrow teeth in a self-conscious grin. "He said I reminded him of somebody."

"Bugs Bunny?" Big Tom grinned and spat as he flicked open his pocket knife. "Never mind. I know you swiped 'em. Heave some wood on the fire. Let's get at it. My belly thinks my throat's cut."

They wolfed down their meat and beans in silence. Aino wanted to say what was bursting inside him. But he thought better of it. He wanted to say, *I didn't steal anything. I didn't have to. Everybody was swell to me. Not like a vag who just got out of San Quentin. Not like I was a vag, but real folks...*

He ate with relish. This seemed to be the most satisfying meal he had ever eaten.

Belly filled, Big Tom yawned and slid his rump down and slept. But Aino just sat by the fire and thought. His mind was filled with all kinds of thoughts, new ones, thoughts he had never had or dared to have before. His mind stretched out into the future with a calm sense of well-being. Things were going to be different from now on. He didn't know how or why, but they were. He continued to feed the fire and think until Big Tom hawked and coughed himself awake.

"I just remembered something," Aino remarked cheerfully.

"Did, eh?" For Aino to make a statement like that on his own was unusual. Big Tom wasn't sure he liked it. What was coming over the jerk?

"That box we found yesterday down near Stinson."

"What about it? It's only a kid's tool box washed ashore."

"We should open it," Aino said...

Big Tom frowned. "It's probably got some kid's stuff in it."

"Mind if I open it?"

"Help yourself." Big Tom cleared his throat and spat. "I tried for an hour yesterday to open it. It's only nailed shut and the nails are rusted solid,

that's all. We got no hammer, nothing to pry it open. But you can do it, sure."

Aino bent down, stepping to the low cave corner where Big Tom had heaved the flat oblong box yesterday, when they took shelter from the gathering storm. Big Tom watched him with derisive eyes. The box was sodden, heavy. When Aino started to lift it Big Tom grinned. Aino's arms were like spindles. But to Big Tom's astonishment Aino lifted the box easily, carried it over by the fire and set it down, as if it were full of feathers. Then, to his further amazement, Aino proceeded to open it without difficulty. He seemed to know just how to do it, to sense where the weakest part of the nailed-down lid was. He pried a sharp stick under it and lifted the lid off with scarcely any effort.

Big Tom watched, and his left eyelid drooped. He identified this with the books Aino read. Big Tom hated books. They represented a threat. Aino was showing him up, doing something he couldn't do. Big Tom didn't like it.

"Well?" he growled. "What's in it? A toy gun or something?"

"No," Aino said. "It's full of money. Full of old coins and jewels."

First Big Tom couldn't grasp it. He couldn't assimilate this fact, that this box that looked like a child's tool box nailed shut and heaved into the sea, contained & fortune in gold coins and jewels that gleamed with colored fire when you rubbed the sea-scum off. His mind could not easily manage such heights. He tested the coins and the pieces of fire with his teeth and his mind was squeezed into a corner. It had to accept the fact that Aino and he—two vagrants with shady, pasts—between them possessed a great fortune.

"Where'd it come from?" he demanded, shoving Aino aside and hovering over the open box.

"Who knows? It could have come from China, or from Persia, or Mu." Aino's slate eyes wandered beyond the mouth of the cave, to the far horizon. "Maybe even further."

"We got to get busy and hide it, bury it, or they'll come and take it away from us."

"They can't," Aino told him. "Nobody can touch this treasure. It's ours. We found the box floating in the surf. That means no one can claim it. It's treasure trove, by law it belongs to us."

Big Tom started to refute him, but something in the little man's voice halted his blusterings. It was as if Aino, standing there looking at the horizon, were looking into the future, seeing what must be. Aino's words held conviction. This thing was true. They had found this treasure in the surf and nobody could take it away from them.

Then, after this solidified in his mind, Big Tom Clegg became what Big Tom Clegg was. Big Tom was by nature a scoundrel and a thief. Aino was a thief, too, but through necessity, because he had been told to be one. You could blame it on environment, or on the system, or on hunger. Actually, it was because someone way back had told Aino to be a thief. It was in Aino's make-up to serve somebody. Now Big Tom's cupidity and lust went to work.

This treasure, it was theirs. But Aino didn't matter. Aino was a jerk. So the treasure was *his*. Aino was handy, sure. He'd served Big Tom well in the past three years. Come to think of it, Aino first saw the box, bobbing up and down in a foaming eddy between two jutting rocks near Stinson Beach. It was Aino who found a stick and poled it in, Aino who suggested they take it along with them, in spite of the rumbling skies and windy gusts of rain. But Big Tom didn't need Aino now. This fortune would buy him other servants, better ones.

Big Tom ruminated and gloated over the box. He ended up deciding that Aino must never leave this cave. This desolate outscop in the rock would be Aino's last resting place. There was nobody to worry about what happened to Aino...

* * * *

It was night. Outside the sea drummed. Framed by the jagged rock, the sky had faded to brushed charcoal gray, with only the faintest thread of luminescence to distinguish it from the far-away ocean. That far-away ocean seemed to have no connection at all with the savage breakers that pounded closer and closer, with the incoming tide.

Aino slept like a child.

The fire was nearly gone. Only a few darting tongues of flame were left to etch the craggy cave roof over Aino's head, to shimmer on the flat closed box between them; then, as Big Tom held vigil, wiping a covetous hand

over his wide lips, these needle-flames died and only the glowing memory of fire remained.

He couldn't see Aino. That was bad. Big Tom frowned into the darkness. He must have light to do what he meant to do, just a little light. But there was no more wood left. He didn't want to leave the cave to find any. Aino might wake up. Besides, he wanted to do it *now*. He wanted to go to sleep tonight knowing that the treasure was all his.

He squinted, trying to see Aino lying there in the deep shadows. He couldn't see, him, but he saw something. What he saw glowed-with a faint luminescent whiteness. It stuck partway out of Aino's shirt. Big Tom grinned.

It was the piece of drift they had found this morning, the one that had got Aino all worked up, the chunk of wood that brought Aino his beating. Big Tom grinned wider, remembering how Aino had humbled himself before it. What a jerk he was!

Big Tom had forgotten all about it until he saw it there, sticking out of Aino's shirt. The jerk must have carried it around with him all day, hidden under his shirt so he wouldn't see it. Now, while Aino slept, it had fallen partway out invitingly.

This was rich! Aino thought it had magic in it, that it was a god. Now this god of Aino's was going to light his way to heaven.

Big Tom moved like a cat. His hand scuttled over the closed box, then snaked across Aino's pigeon chest and grabbed back the piece of drift. Big Tom grinned as he tossed it on the glowing embers: For a minute he crouched by the fire, clenching and unclenching his cold-stiffened fingers for practice. He watched the white piece of drift smolder and smoke. Then a tiny flame sprouted, mirroring twin flames of red murder in his eyes.

Outside the incoming tide drummed louder.

Big Tom heard Aino stir and whimper. He turned and made ready. Aino's hands were fumbling over his shirt. He was hunting for the piece of drift. When he opened his eyes Big Tom gave a low growl and plunged forward.

His blunt fingers closed down on Aino's throat before he could move or scream. His thumbs pressed. It was so easy it wasn't much fun. If only Aino would fight back a little, but he didn't even squirm. He just lay there, his

eyes bulging. The pressure on his windpipe made it look as if he was staring behind Big Tom, staring at something that terrified him.

Big Tom was almost tempted to turn and see for himself, but he had a job to finish. He pressed harder. Then his fingers loosened and he let out a scream that echoed from the cave walls and funneled out hideously across the sea. Smoke was pouring from the fire behind him. He couldn't see, but the smoke had arms, tentacles, and the tentacles were around his throat, choking him. He couldn't see. He couldn't even see any longer if Aino's eyes were bulging. The smoke was a black pillar, a pillar of whipping snakes. The snakes wrapped themselves around his throat.

He screamed and backed away. He fell across the fire, which leaped up hungrily...

* * * *

There wasn't much left of Big Tom. Just some indistinguishable bones. It might seem that some itinerant had camped in this cave for the night, that he had overheated his fire, then had been overcome by the fumes and, trying to get out had stumbled into the fire and been, burned to death. It wasn't too plausible an explanation, considering the condition of those bones, but it might suffice. Or were they human bones after all?

Aino looked gravely down at the charred mess for a long moment, then he fished under it carefully for the piece of drift. It came out white and whole as ever, as cool and smooth to his touch as fine silk. Aino caressed it with reverence. He bowed his head to it, and put it back under his shirt, his face luminous with humble pride.

He turned. Oh yes, the box. He nudged open the lid with his foot. A wry smile touched his lips as he looked down at a tangled mass of rocks and mud and feline bones. Some imaginative youngster had given his dead cat a sea burial. Aino faced the drumming tide. He squared his thin shoulders and stepped out of the cave. He walked rapidly down the lonely beach. Born to serve, Aino had found a new master.

ANONYMOUS, by George T. Wetzel

Originally published in *The Gothic Horror and Other Weird Tales*.

Tobacco farmers there still speak, with dread and dislike, of ancient covered bridges, certain Palladian-windowed houses, and even of an occasional unsociable and reclusive family; but when asked the basis of their ill feeling, they can answer only that their forebears in this Tidewater region also felt thusly.

I was on an antiquarian quest through a tidal swamp of Southern Maryland, searching for the weedy site of a particular, now long extinct, Potomac River town—a region rich with such inherited superstitious beliefs—when the twilight sky filled with rain squalls. Swamp oaks are not always the best shelter, so I looked anxiously for other means of weathering the squall.

I had heard the local gossipers at the rotting, abandoned steamboat landing speak with dislike and vague fear of a ruined seventeenth century Maryland manor-house that stood in the general vicinity where I was exploring; so I began to climb up a tree to see if it was very near me. It was; and I ran to its questionable shelter.

Rain dripped off me and puddled around me on the mouldy flooring of its dilapidated hall.

The place reeked with damp and soon had me wishing I had instead remained in the leaf-fragrant shelter of the woods. Behind me the appearance of the hall was impossible of discernment due to the deep gloom cast by the rain which was now descending in a blind cloud, driven almost into a mist or spray by the gales of wind. When one of the few lulls of a squall came, I ventured to peep out of the door and see what sort of manor-house it was, seeing as how such a view had not been possible when I raced up before because the driving clouds of rain reduced vision to but a few yards. Now however I was able to note in surprise that the roof over me was an incredible twin to the former Bond manor-house of Calvert County.

The ancient Bond manor was also an early house, built in the seventeenth century, but it was pulled down a few years ago to make room for an ugly farm building. And here was a place bearing remarkably

resemblant features to that house, which was unique and almost the only known example of a cross-house with a Medieval overhang in the Old South—until I stumbled into this one. A sudden intensity in the downpour drove me back from the door and broke up my jubilation at this architectural find. By the uncertain light I made my way into one of the cruciform's arms and into the great hall that had open beam ceilings and an enormous fireplace. Gothic molding was carved on the mantelpiece and a faded and indistinct mural painting decorated the overmantle. There were traces of Jacobean style here as well as on the outside of the relic, I perceived, as the flickering light of a fire I started up illumined the room.

A couple pieces of rude furniture were revealed then, and I started with surprise. Why would anyone attempt to live in such a dampish ruin as this? From a glance I noted that such occupancy must have been not long ago—as the furniture was not antique stuff but the rough items you would expect a countryman to own—but that it was now vacant seemed evidenced by the dust on everything.

Near the fireplace, on the floor, I picked up a notebook of damp, discolored pages, written in a rectilinear hand.

It was a curious manuscript, full of the experimental results of engulfed drugs such as Lobelia and Mandrake, and references to Herrick's *Materia Medica*, Paracelsus' *Herbarious* and that elusive book of Michael Zittle's on *Die Heimlich Wissenschaft*; while one page contained obscure remarks about a dark anodyne once used in the legendary drowned city of Ys. And on another leaf I found puzzling references to Egyptian balms and oils. Occasionally there were significant passages that would suggest the writer was a metaphysicist and alchemist. One such passage that intrigued me was his experiments' basic hypothesis of using a drug-cauldron, the simultaneous imbibition of several drugs. This was extraordinary in a way, as I do not think modern science ever attempted this kind of experiment. What this alchemist hoped to accomplish was not definitely stated, but he did seem enthralled by the idea that, since each drug had its only individual effect on the senses, a drug-cauldron of different combinations would give him all the separate effects of the separate drugs in his cauldron but acting upon his senses simultaneously. Nevertheless, this fantastic, almost science-fictional idea of his has a strange fascination about it.

I had heard of the bizarre effect on the time sense that Hashish has; of another drug that telescopes time; the drug phantasies that DeQuincy experienced and recorded and drug dreams similarly described by Baudelaire; how Lobelia causes fantasm to evolve because of its effect on the optic nerve, and another drug that imposed on the aural centers musical aberrations that could equal the haunted mysticism of a Cesar Franck; of laudanum which gave Poe nightmares and which he told of; even H. P. Lovecraft had once essayed anent the eerie result of a certain drug which brought the user to the rim of the Outside, beyond which no light exists. If this alchemist could encompass this staggering multitude of sensual and spiritual effects all at once upon himself, I wondered if his or any other mind could stand the shock without disorientation of self and a resultant madness.

The experiment would prove dangerous.

I was not surprised when I read a couple of pages later of his dawning belief in the dream-soul superstition that is current in all primitive mythologies. To me this was a symptom of decaying reason when so brilliant an experimenter—and I must confess there were flashes of near-genius—degenerated into consideration of superstition. Whoever this man was, his researches verged on the astounding; from a repetition of text phrases, couched in a sort of cipher, and in conjunction with certain chemical formulas for his drug-cauldron, I began to perceive that he had solved one of the most puzzling mysteries in organic chemistry. The ethyl radical, that is frequent in drugs with a hypnotic effect, has long caused speculations among some chemists. My anonymous experimenter went further than mere speculation; he apparently solved this molecular arrangement and knew something of its valence characteristics not guessed by chemists, for I found scattered throughout his notes peculiar but workable structural formulas. And as my admiration for the man would mount, I then would encounter textual notes on superstitious beliefs—like his extrapolations on the dream-soul ideas of the primitives and their insistence that the dream-soul wandered from the body in dream and drugged slumber.

The manuscript dragged on almost pedantically with preposterous accounts of what the drug camphor allegedly did when added to that monstrous drug-cauldron (its causing of sensual aberrations that continue

over into the waking state are too well known to remark upon). Then there was the fear of the writer of being mistaken for dead when deep in drugged slumber. A basis for this fear did exist, as I recalled that respiratory depressants like certain barbiturate compounds have a physiological effect that closely resembles a death state; and this man was using a number of them *simultaneously*.

No wonder he feared lest someone find him during the drugged state of one of his experiments and commit him to premature burial.

The outlandish experiences he had while in the drugged state were horrendous fantasies worthy of a Lovecraft with their adumbrations of entities encountered in nightmarish settings, of surrealistic perceptions of utterly unbelievable transgressions of natural law—perspective effects inverted, distortions in the time sense. My mind reeled from just contemplating his accounts—and he had lived through them! The exotic drugged visions of DeQuincy were inane babblings beside this journey into the kaleidoscope of cosmic evil and Outsidedness.

The calligraphy upon the remaining pages was different, as if made by the same original hand now hindered by some physical anomaly that caused it to careen and fumble the lettering.

It was the last entry:

April 29. Just returned to consciousness. Must decrease the Lobelia in formula as it has an increasing tendency to keep me under too long. The Camphor in formula seems about right as I still retain distinct memory of just past vision. Will record it here while Camphor effect enables vision to still remain in brain.

Took usual precautions (leaving this notebook in prominent place; antidote by couch, etc.), then drank the present mixture. Usual preliminary symptoms manifested themselves.

Then the ensuing anomalous state of exotic and ephemeral sense fantasies. Once across this abyss the disordered neural messages stabilized and perception was again possible.

I hovered above a valley in which cacti abounded...a colossal stone city sprawled there through which a chain of great lakes ran; across the lakes stretched causeways akin to those of Tenochtitlan of the Aztecs; the feathered serpent motif appeared in fresco on temples before which the

serpent column, of the Toltec culture, supported the portal openings; tlaxtli-courts and plazas were scattered in the tangle of buildings; truncated pyramids. I saw one structure that was the twin of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan; its façade of embryonic panels and serpent sculpture was more than the twin—it *was* the Teotihuacan temple.

The colossal city was a pristine Teotihuacan, the religious center of the mysterious Toltecs, not the debris and rubble clustered group of ruins known to 20th century eyes. I was gazing on a sight that existed countless centuries ago.

A magnetism pulled at me and I struggled against it when I saw where it was dragging me: the central pyramid to which all the city's causeways and streets and buildings were oriented. An atmosphere of evil hung about this axial pyramid, yet I marveled at the same time at the aspect of dark grandeur it had. My feeble struggles against the force were useless for now I saw the top of it leap up and then my impalpable body sank through the stone into a mindless limbo. A graying of the utter black soon took place and I was in a small room. I had no doubt it was the chambered interior of the pyramid. Only once before has anything like it been known to me—the vault found in the temple of the High Priest in the ruins at Chichen Itza.

The walls of this chamber had not a single blank spot on them, being carved with the feathered serpent motif but in a rectilinear style exactly like the temple façade of Xochicalco; in between the undulating coils of the carved serpents were glyphs and the stepped scroll ornament called “xicalcolihqui.” The ceiling was held up by serpent columns. The entrance was a blackened maw which must have been one of the giant edifice's subterranean drainage tubes discovered by Dr. Gamio in our time.

Seated within a glyph design on the floor, beside a flaming brazier in which both fire and copal incense burned, was a man who seemed to have come to life out of the Troano Codex. He traced the glyphs of Kan, Muluc, Ix, and Cauac at the four corners of his protective talisman, then began to address me. By necromancy he had summoned me out of the future to answer his questions as the Olin-Tonatihah.

“Why do you desire this knowledge,” I asked him. Puzzlement spread over his face; and, ignoring my question, he intoned a guttural phrase, made a sign in the air, and demanded I tell him what he wanted to know. A force indescribable beat around me but curiously had no effect upon my

resistance. In some inexplicable manner my psyche was not completely under his control. He was vastly surprised, he said, as the things he called up had always been subservient to him; was I, he asked, some entity from the world's twilight who had such extraordinary powers though defunct—a sorcerer in Mu once encountered such, he had heard. I shook my head. Still puzzled, he consented to explaining why he wanted such knowledge. By necromancy he conjured up those from ages anterior to his and from the dim future, in a quest to delve into the secrets, the history, and the world disasters of succeeding sun-eras; and this wealth of esoteric and arcane knowledge was set down in codices and in part of the Calendrical stones, so seekers after knowledge in bilateral eons could consult it for a certain price.

A dead mind from Paleogean mists told the Toltec priest of the end brought about by animal, the Ocelotl-era, which seemed to have been the Age of Dinosaurs. He conversed with an outlandish being, that had lived in airless interstellar space, concerning the Ehecatl-era, when a tremendous wind, funneling down from the stars, devastated the globe; and engulfed in its vortex this space-beast, hurling it to its death in the troposphere of earth; and there was the entity who whispered of the Quiahuitlera, when a strange rain of fire covered the planet. A drowned Rmoahl, conjured up, related of the Atl-era (the last one) when a world wide flood came and submerged the ancient continent of Mu in the Pacific.

Many more shadows of coining events and past history were thus found by this Toltec. In all ancient chronicles of the Incas, the Mayas and the Mexicans, the coming of the Spaniards was well known; and they are but copies of this Toltec's prophecy; for he summoned a dead Conquistador who confessed the infamy of Cortes and Pizarro.

What this Toltec desired of me was to know if the Olin-era, the time an earthquake is to destroy the world, had begun in my age. As I replied negatively, a chilling apprehension filled me as I recalled ominous speculations of scientists concerning what nuclear bombs might do to the earth's axial stability—the scheduled underwater A-bomb test at Bikini was never carried out because of such fears.

A ghost of a Ruvoduum from the future had witnessed part of the Olin-Toniah, which was prefaced by a giant air battle over the frozen ocean and part of his city, lost in the polar wastes. For ages his people had lived inviolate in their icy fortress; and were a mixture of Norse and indigenous

Eskimo blood, the Norse being the remnants of 12th century Greenland colonists who fled a weird doom and sought sanctuary in the arctic. But the war in the skies ended the Ruvoduum idyll. Fearful detonations— unquestionably Hydrogen and Cobalt bombs—tore up the ice cap and melted it into great seas; in the polar heavens strange auras glowed. But this was not the worst. Ground forces of both sides began a contest over polar terrain and set off an increasing number of nuclear weapons against each other's armies. The result was inescapable. The earth's axial rotation, disturbed in its most vulnerable spot, wobbled—and planet-wide seismic shocks began. I screamed at the Toltec to stop, to reveal no more.

What partial power he held over me seemed to vanish when my despair caused me to cry out. The whole chamber twisted and spiraled, blurred and was gone in a twinkling; and I returned to a mindless oblivion. Eventually I crept up through a graying void and awoke. The usual nausea, debility of the limbs, and deadened senses were at once experienced. This Teotihuacan adventure frightens me in many ways; and there is a new physical sensation I now feel that I have never before had as an after-effect. Must cut down the cauldron's strength—but I have a terrible presentiment it may be due to another reason..."

* * * *

The crazy, over-large script began to falter near its termination and at the end of the last sentence it expired into an ominous illegibility, with a smudge or claw-like mark at the bottom that exuded a faint and unpleasant fetidness.

When I reached this part of the book—there was no more writing in it—and smelled the faint fetid reek on its page, I became aware that similar fetidness was in the room and had been there when I first entered the building, but the mouldy timbers had fooled me into thinking it part of their odour of decay. The fetid smell grew stronger near the doorway into the blackened hallway and I tracked it to a stronger place near the door into the opposite wing. Against murky lighted windows of that room was silhouetted chemical apparatus and along the walls the dull glint of glassware. A scuffling movement came from a darkened corner and I watched it, thinking a rodent would emerge. But at my height I saw a pair

of watery eyes shine and the fetid reek grew overwhelming. The inhabitant of the gloom stumbled forward in the lesser dark.

It was a horrible travesty of the human form yet I *knew* at once what had happened—the notebook gave me the clue—and felt a compassion for this presence. But as it shambled closer, revulsion overpowered me and I backed out and shrank along the hall passageway, still too shocked to run. But it still groped closer and I stepped out into the driving rain. Whatever motive impelled the thing, I do not know, but it had no knowledge of what the rain would do to its already precarious hold on life, if such animation can be called life. The driving rain pelted and tore at its substance, unmercifully revealing white bones and washing the blotches of rot from its form. I could not watch the terrible sight any longer but turned and hid my face...Who knows what crumbling, fleshy abode may await the dream-soul of a living sleeper when that soul has tarried elsewhere, too long and too far?

WHY ABDUL ALHAZRED WENT MAD, by D.R. Smith

Originally published in *The Nekromantikon* #3, 1950.

The fabulous Necronomicon was never finished. This is well-known to all advanced students of the occult, whether or not they have had the courage and good fortune to peruse a copy. Well-known—in spite of the fact that few who have delved into the soul-blasting secrets of that loathsome mixture of revolting instruction and blasphemous history have managed to preserve their sanity to read that final chapter, which begins with the mutterings of one in a frenzy and dies away in the hideous ravings of mania—Abdul Alhazred—may his name be accursed forever—remained devilishly sane during the acquisition and recording of that abominable knowledge which few throughout the centuries have dared to acquire, even in part. It was the story he attempted to tell in that last frenzied chapter that shattered his black mind and sent his spirit gibbering with horror out of his diseased body into the gleeful embraces of the torturers of the damned.

And no one has ever dared to make that story known. Indeed, the most diligent search has failed to trace any mention of the terrible message by any student of the occult. Yet it was known to one sublime genius, and the crux of it published to the world in words still spoken on the public stage:

*“(Anthony) on the Alps
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh
which some did die to look on;”*

But should that story be widely known, it may be that what drove the blaspheming Arab mad may well drive honest men sane. And so I transcribe below, shorn of as much of its incoherent madness as possible, and cleansed of the filth that besmirched every thought that bubbled from the cesspit of Alhazred’s obscene mind, a correct version of the last chapter of the Necronomicon.

* * * *

There was One Other. The Great One. Great Father and Great Mother in One. Greater than Great Cthulhu, than Hastur his brother, than Shub-Niggurath the Goat with a Thousand Young, than Tsathoggua, than great Yog-Sothoth himself—for They are but Ones Spawn. One was once of the Great Old Ones, near the mightiest, for One challenged the supremacy of Azathoth Himself, the blind idiot, Lord of All. Nay, his children have told me—but this I may not believe—that One (who is too great to be Named) was indeed Lord of All! So great was One that They-Who-Are-Not-To-Be-Thought-Of, fearing lest Evil become supreme, hurled him from his awful throne and chained him with chains of flesh that he might not break to this, the Planet of the Damned. And as he fell he spawned Yog-Sothoth, who only is less than Azathoth. So says great Cthulhu, first of the Great Abominations which One formed from his own flesh to be his servants and the masters of the planet.

Mighty was the Great One, loathsome the body They had bound him in—yet he gloried in its horror, and moulded it with his own will into a Thing to describe which would strike death into the craven soul of mortal men. The Faceless Nyarlathotep, messenger of the Great Old Ones, could not endure the foulness that was One, where he lay in a pool of his own slimy exhalations in the cavern in the mountains, lay and ruled the world with the terror of himself and the gods he had spawned. Had but I, Abdul Alhazred, been alive then to worship him! Great his Children, diligently have I served them and well have they paid me, with ecstasies the name of which would draw shrieks of horror from those white-livered children-in-men's-shapes who talk so loud of their puerile torturings with knives and fire and water. But the Great One—to serve him would have been—would have been—Curse the Roman! May the Hounds of Tindalos hunt his shrieking soul through the ends of space for a million million times a million eons! How could he do that which he did! Great Cthulhu I asked and he shrank and would not reply. Tsathoggua I asked, and Tsathoggua would not tell me. Yog-Sothoth I asked, greatest of the Spawn, and Yog-Sothoth would not tell me. Yea, by my Art did I call on Nyarlathotep, the faceless howler in the darkness, commanding the messenger of the Great Old Ones as never man had dared before, and Nyarlathotep ceased his eternal howling and would not reply, though he feared me as he fears only Cthugha, the Eternal Fiery One, who when the Time comes shall consume him utterly.

Was it a machination of Azathoth? One's children say Azathoth, even mighty as he was, would never have dared to plot against the Great One. Yet surely it was only by some hostile guidance that this man, this incredible man, was driven with his rabble of soldiers into the mountains where lay the cavern of the Great One. Perhaps the Elder Gods—but they had only wanted to exile the Great One, not destroy him.

However it was, the Roman came. Marcus Antonius, a big brawling lecherous brute who boasted he feared god nor devil. A foolish boast, which many have made to me—and fled shrieking if they but smelt the week-old effluvium left from one of Cthulhu's visits. But Marcus Antonius—how could there be such a man? Man he was, who fought and loved like a man, and died foolishly as a man will through stupid devotion to a trollop. Could such a one be greater than the Great Ones to whom I have given so much worship? That I have damned myself to all eternity for—for—NO!

* * * *

I must tell it. It must be recorded. This Antonius and his soldiers were lost. Starving. They drank the urine of the horses. They killed the horses and ate them—and went on through the bare mountains. Antonius was their leader. He boasted of his strength and endurance and would not eat of the horse-flesh, leaving it for the others. On they went, and they came to a valley—a gloomy cleft in the hills. But water ran crystal clear down a rocky bed and scrubby pines grew around. They drank the water and made a huge fire of the trees—but the hunger was still there. And Marcus Antonius was hungriest of all.

At the head of the cleft was a cave. Caves are often inhabited by animals. Animals can be eaten. Marcus Antonius led the way to the mouth of the cave, but there all stopped. For from the cave came such a stench as would petrify a man's soul within his living body, and more evil than that. None could advance further but Antonius, who called them cowards and went on, went down into the dreadful gloom of that cavern. Went alone....

Silence. A long silence. Then suddenly, horribly, the reverberating uproar of a furious combat in some vast hollow below. Part of the noise the bellows of fighting-mad Marcus Antonius—part of such a nature that many who heard fled screaming from the accursed spot. They were the lucky ones. Those who remained, white-faced, frozen with terror, heard the noises

continue, and draw nearer. Abruptly the cavern belched forth a writhing mass, the maniacally fighting Antonius smeared from head to foot with a mixture of his own blood and revolting slime from that which he fought. That which he had dragged out into the light of day, where never had it been seen before. That which his javelin could not slay, his sword not wound. That abomination at the sight of which the watchers dropped dead, the very souls blasted out of their bodies.

It called for help, and twilight shrouded the sun, and the strong shapes of the Wind Walkers, Ithaqua and Iloigor and Zhar and great Hastur himself came howling down. And Antonius saw and laughed unafraid, and called upon Jupiter, whom the Greeks called Zeus, the Lord of Heaven and master of storms, called asking for aid as from an equal. And lo, on the Walkers and on Hastur, on Cthulhu hurtling from the sea and on Yog-Sothoth gathering formlessly from everywhere and nowhere, on all the hastening spawn of One, Jupiter hurled his thunderbolts, and his laughter crashed and bellowed and split the skies as he lashed back the children of One with the multi-thonged lashes of the lightning.

And under that madness of light and noise Marcus Antonius, with strength beyond the compute of mortal man, raised the Great One and hurled him onto the mighty fire his men had kindled. Horribly, the One screamed and writhed amongst the glowing embers, and Antonius laughed and threw on more wood, and in the heart of the flames the One screamed abominably until little but blacked charcoal was left of his frightful body. And then Marcus Antonius, a man amongst men, who feared nor god nor devil, but who was very hungry, smashed the charred shell and inside found nothing but a single steaming piece of rank flesh, loathsome of shape and color and odor. But it was flesh, and he ate.

Yes, he ate it, the brutish Roman dolt, he ate it, the yet-living heart of the Great One! And so he destroyed for ever the Great One! And if One could himself be thus destroyed by brute courage and appetite, what of his children? Have I given my life and more than my life to the service of those who have no more power over a brave man than the beasts of the field?

* * * *

The rest is madness.

CAER SIDHI, by George T. Wetzel

Originally published in *Dark Mind, Dark Heart* (1962).

Documents in the case of the Shoal Light

I. O'Malley's Journal

November 6, 1799.

Awoke this morning from another nightmare. Neal also had such disturbed slumber. He has unusual views regarding them—describes them as accompanied by a “whirling around without motion”—which seems to me pure Celtic superstition. But the real cause of the dreams is probably not his imagination—he seems to think some baneful influence is at work!—but rather the difficulty we have been having with the villagers. It is this concern that gives us both bad dreams. He disagrees.

This forenoon several of the village fishermen rowed out to our lighthouse to remonstrate with us. The Shoal Light “took God’s grace away” from them, they claimed. What blasphemy!—to think that shipwrecks and the drowning of poor sailors are a special mark of God’s favor to gain them the spoils of salvage! They are as bad as the Cornishmen who have lured ships to their doom with false lights!

November 7, 1799.

Brian Mackenzie rowed out unobtrusively this morning with a letter left for us at the Turk’s Head Tavern by the post rider. It had been sent by the Trinity House of Navigation to tell us an inspector is on his way, no doubt to check our logbook, for this Light has been reported unfavorably by several ship captains, who claim its beacon operated oddly when sighted. Neal and I have been very attentive to our watches. It seems very strange that such reports should have been made, and neither of us can understand it.

Mackenzie warned us of trouble—perhaps this evening. The fishermen are speaking against the Light and met last night at the Turk’s Head, where they roused themselves to fury against the Light. We primed and loaded our fowling piece and our three pistols. Neither of us is alarmed, but we cannot help being uneasy, and being sleep-weary does not help. Sleep last night

was full of illogical nightmares—of confused ideas, alien visions, a dreadful sense of vertigo. I did not rest much and I have been tired all day, yet I will need sharp ears and eyes which are already heavy with fatigue. Neal is in the same condition, having had worse dreams than I. His recurrent dream came back—the anomalous nightmare of a “whirling around without motion,” which, he thinks, must have some connection—however obscure—with our Light.

Evening—The attack came just after dusk. Neal has an ugly head wound as a result of it. Two boats attempted to land on the rocks, unseen, but Neal heard their oars creak and challenged them. One man stood up in his boat, shook his fist, and cursed us. Then two others fired at Neal, one shot wounding him. I returned their fire before they could reload. They retreated, not without some wounded, I believe.

November 8, 1799.

Awake all last night. No new attack. The strain of watching shoreward constantly is taking its toll—my head swims with dizziness. If only I could snatch a few hours sleep! But I dare not. Neal needs a doctor’s care, but it would be disastrous to leave the Light unguarded for the fishermen would surely demolish it. Neal is too irrational to be of any help, and certainly cannot resume his watch.

In his delirium, Neal’s nightmares and superstitions seem to be taking conscious form—at least, to him. I found him at dawn with his ear pressed to the stone floor. He was listening to the sound of the sea, he said. He explained that both sea shells and lighthouses were hollow spirals and thus both subject to the same acoustical phenomena. He babbled somewhat incoherently about the architectural similarity of our lighthouse to the *Caer Sidhi*—the “spiral castle” of Celtic myth.

The fishermen left us alone all day. Perhaps they are waiting for the dark of the moon to try again.

November 9, 1799.

My third night of sleeplessness. Every time I close my eyes I seem to plunge into hallucination or nightmare. Sometimes I feel that I am asleep despite my open eyes and general awareness of my surroundings.

Neal’s muttering about the *Caer Sidhi* stirred my memories of something I had forgotten long ago. An old farmer I once knew accidentally

plowed into a raised knoll in his grain-field—one which had never been planted to grain—and opened a passageway; a local clergyman, an amateur antiquarian, crawled in, and found it an ancient chambered mound whose walls were carved with the Celtic *spiral of immortality*.

The relics were not Britanno-Roman, he said, and talked a great deal of symbols found before graves in Goidelic legends, of cromlechs, and of obscure philological-mythic relations between the Welsh *Sidhi* and the *Aes Sidhe* of Erin, and of *Towinoiont* and *Catair Cu Roi*. There was something else about *Caer Sidhi* of some significance, but my mind is so fatigued that memory of it will not return to me.

I sat on the parapet outside for a long while last night with a lantern. As the clock work mechanism revolved it, I felt the rhythm of the Light winking out in one quadrant and darkness that rushed in to fill the resulting vacuum. Perhaps this is where Neal gets his strange nightmare of a “whirling around without motion”—nothing more than the revolving beacon on top of our stationary lighthouse. *And yet...*

November 10, 1799.

A smoke-squall has now raged for hours—one of the kind the Norwegians call a *Roegflage* breeding in the ocean between Norway and the Orkneys. It is in a way a Godsend, for the hostile fishermen will never put out from shore in such weather to attack the Light. So I have been able to sleep and rest.

We had the first hint of it at dawn. The clouds took on a water-green tint. Afterwards I saw an unbroken black line far out to sea; this crept, hardly perceptibly, toward shore.

In an hour it was near enough to study in detail with my glass. It was a black wall of water, fathoms high—the herald of a fearful storm to follow. I saw a ship, too. Did its captain not see our warning beacon in the grey dawn? If he came closer, the monstrous waves would pound him on our reef.

The aqueous wall grew to awesome heights, reaching almost to the waning stars and thrusting its crown through the lower levels of the clouds there. It seemed to me that this monstrous wave would surely roll over and swallow up the earth in its maw—yet it was still leagues away, and growing larger, wearing the aspect of doom.

I took Neal down into the tower and lashed him, and then myself, to the beams, while the wall of water came rushing on like the sound of the last judgment. The roaring of water steadily increased—I thought for hours, but it must have been only minutes—until all existence was one tremendous crescendo of wind and water. It struck at last, and the tower shook as if beset by a cyclopean earthquake. Tons of water crashed into the tower through the lantern and through fissures between the stone blocks, drenching and almost drowning us. Lesser structures would have been torn up into the air and scattered, but our tower was built to withstand the enormous tidal surges and the incredibly high seas that rise from winds and storms blowing across the entire Atlantic without impediment—forces vastly more destructive than anything known to nature.

Then it passed. I untied Neal and myself, and, struggling through the water—some still pouring in—made my way to the top of the tower. A few dead fish and some seaweed littered the interior of the smashed lantern—debris spewed up by the ocean. But outside the world still existed. The force of the wave was still being thrown back by the shore's mass. Out on the sea a water-logged hulk drifted, with several unfortunate seamen clinging to its masts. The rebounding swell shook the tower and passed on toward the foundering ship. I could not watch the end.

November 11, 1799.

The storm diminishing today, though the wind drives sheets of water still above the boiling sea. Visibility very low.

Evening—I repaired the lantern as best I could and got it into working order. I could not repair the shattered windows, and now the wind whistles eerily within the tower—like a single bass pipe in a church organ, or that sound a boy makes by blowing over the lip of an empty bottle. Several feet of water still stand below.

Neal is much worse. He raves now and then, but is in a kind of torpor, almost comatose. I cannot understand most of what he says, but it is disquieting if not frightening to listen to him babble about the *Caer Sidhi*, coupling it with such other-worldly places as *Annwfn* and *Pedryvan* all the more so since the significance of *Caer Sidhi* occurs to me now, and I remember enough of my boyhood in Erin—of the Celtic lore—to know that the *Caer Sidhi* was much feared and believed in by the older fishermen—

that its name in the Gaelic, meaning “spiral castle,” was well chosen (an ominous symbol of death!)—that it revolved or spiraled at night so that none coming to its base could find its entrance—and more I cannot or would rather not recall...

In many ways—its watery isolation, the spiral stairs, the revolving light—this tower is akin to the *Caer Sidhi*. Lighthouse geometry and architecture might be precarious!

November 12, 1799.

Someone on shore attempted signal communication today, but the wind is too violent and the atmosphere too full of sea-spray—the *Roegflage*—to permit reading the signals. Perhaps they saw Neal from the shore...

Last night I put Neal on the parapet outside the tower. I would be more Christian, but I have a horror of him now. I cannot put him into the sea. In any event, they will think that I am mad. Perhaps I am. What I have noticed these past few nights inclines me to doubt my own reason, though I have tried to keep this record sane and balanced. That is the blurring of the view outside the tower, particularly at night—like a landscape glimpsed through a flawed window pane. No natural explanation offers itself for it—if it is an actual phenomenon and not the hallucination of decayed reason.

Another thing—one utterly *outré*—threatens my sanity. Can the residuum of one man’s nightmares be left over for another’s dreams? I awoke trembling last night from visions like those Neal had, those that cursed his last nights and haunted his days. I seem to recall its beginning in a megalithic place where I wandered among cromlechs, dolman stones and menhirs like fantastically high walls making a maze of spiral design. I was in a roofless, gigantic tower, down which shone a million stars out of heavens virtually alive with those circumpolar stars ever to be seen, heavens in which Draco writhed evilly about that forgotten axis of the skies where once it reigned aeons ago, coiling and twisting around Polaris.

But what drew me in that alien place was the great nebula of Andromeda, that majestic whirlpool of light whose irresolvable depths held a fascination I could not escape. There was a curious association of ideas dominating all things—that vast nebula—the watery vortex of the *maelstrom* at the bottom of which the monster Kraken is rumored to lurk—

and the endless ascending stairs of a tower that reached up out of blackness and ascended to darkness above.

And, as in my dream, I contemplated these triple spirals, I saw suddenly descending upon me, like a sentient beast, a towering waterspout—a mass of wind-driven water come screaming out of the starlit darkness, blotting out the stars. It fell upon me, and I began a terrible, twisting fall into the endless space of its darkness, and above the shrieking of the wind and the torrent of the water there echoed in my ears that mocking phrase of Neal’s —“the whirling around without motion.” Then I awoke, screaming.

II. THE LATE INSPECTOR MISHEW’S LETTER TO THE TRINITY HOUSE OF NAVIGATION.

November 24, 1799

Honorable Sirs:

Inspection of the Shoal Light at this place has been delayed by the bad storms which have been raging here since before my arrival earlier this month, great seas making it impossible to put in any sort of boat. Signal flag communication was ineffectual by reason of limited visibility.

As we had been informed, the country people here are very hostile to this new Light; they are probably responsible for tampering with reef markers and other navigational aids in this vicinity.

Concerning the Light—I observed daily through my telescope one of the keepers standing watch on the outside parapet in the worst weather, unaware of the hideous truth about his vigilance, but since I learned that an attack had actually been made on the lighthouse, I supposed that the keepers were determined to prevent another and were thus constantly on guard. The beacon itself, however, has shone steadily; I am at a loss to understand complaints about its unreliability.

The seas calmed last week, and I was able to get out to the Shoal Light with Brian Mackenzie. What I found there was shocking. The vigilant sentry was Neal’s corpse, horribly wasted away; he had been fatally wounded in an armed skirmish with some of the fishermen. O’Malley seemed to be in mortal fear of being blamed for making away with his companion in a fit of madness; he could not abide the corpse, and, rather than cast it into the sea, lashed it where I found it. Perhaps its presence there

was intended to deter a second surprise attack, though the weather was enough to do that.

O'Malley's privations must have been terrible. He existed on stale bread and, of course, water. No more. His overwhelming responsibilities would have finished a lesser man. As it is, he is so subject to the wildest visions, followed by only partial comprehension and logic, obsessed with something he calls the *Caer Sidhi*, that he cannot be called sane, and perhaps has not been sane for some time. He is surely not long for this world.

Until you send new keepers, I myself will tend the Shoal Light.

Yr. obedient servant,

John Mishew
Shoal Light
Banff Firth, Scotland

POSTSCRIPT.

I cannot understand the post rider's failure to deliver your letter last night. He claimed failure under circumstances that suggest too much ale. Even in the dark he could have found the door if he had but walked around the lighthouse and felt the stone with his hand.

I trust the new keepers reach here very soon, for I seem to be coming down with some obscure illness which is incomprehensible to me. I am conscious of a curious nausea at night—a touch of vertigo—and the stars blur to my eyes and *look wrong*.

DEAD OF NIGHT, by Lin Carter

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CHAPTER 1

Number Thirteen

Below Fourteenth Street, between Chinatown and the river, extends a disreputable region of cryptic, winding alleys, crumbling tenements, rotting wharves and abandoned warehouses slumping in decay. Here dwell the human dregs of a thousand Eastern ports: Hindus, Japanese, Arabs, Chinamen, Levantines, Turks, Portuguese. Once these dark and sinister side-streets and fetid alleyways were the battlefield of the Tong wars; that was in the days of the legendary detective, Steve Harrison, who single-handedly dealt out the white man's law and the white man's justice along River Street.

Those days are long since gone—not that River Street has changed in any noticeable way. Urban Renewal has yet to touch the decaying tenements, nor has the law managed to close down the dives and dope dens and honky-tonks. Neither has the furtive, polyglot Asian populace altered, and few could guess what drugs are trafficked in these dark rooms or what crimes of violence and greed are done in those black and garbage-choked alleys...

Of all these matters, Dona Teresa de Rivera was all too uncomfortably aware, and with every block her taxi carried her deeper into the tangled maze of filthy slums, her discomfiture grew. Only the urgency of her mission goaded her into venturing into this ill-famed corner of the city, far from the quiet residential streets and fine cafes which were her accustomed haunts.

Fog came drifting in from the riverfront to wind its clammy tendrils about walls of rotting old brick, and to blur the dim luminance of the infrequent streetlights.

The cab pulled up before the yawning mouth of a black alley off Levant Street, and the gloom that thickly shadowed the narrow, cobbled lane was

feebly dispelled by a single light which burned above a doorway only a few steps from the street.

“That’s it, lady. Number Thirteen China Alley,” announced the driver, cocking his thumb at the dim light. Privately, the cabby wondered what the handsome young Spanish woman could possibly want in this dangerous neighborhood. She had money, that was obvious: no woman wore an expensive frock with such careless elegance unless she had wealth, breeding and taste.

“Are you quite certain this is the address?” the girl faltered.

“Yes, ma’m. Number Thirteen China Alley, between Levant and River streets. That’ll be six seventy-five.” Dona Teresa gave the driver a ten dollar bill and declined to accept any change.

“How do I get back from here?”

He handed her a card. “Call the garage; they’ll send a cab to pick you up.”

With uneasiness clutching at her heart, the young woman left the cab, which hurriedly drove off, fog swirling in its wake. She entered the dark mouth of the alley, cautiously feeling her way on the greasy cobbles. The light which was her goal burned above the single door of a small, narrow, two-story building, shouldered to either side by larger tenements. The small house would have looked long abandoned, had it not been for that light above the door. Its walls of crumbling brick were black with generations of grime, and the windows peered blindly like cataract-infested eyes, their panes dim and smudged with greasy soot. Dona Teresa shivered and drew her fur wrap more closely about her slim shoulders against the chill, damp air from the river.

The door, surprisingly, was an imposing slab of solid oak. A small brass plate above the bell read *Zarnak*. Shivering a little, the young woman pressed the bell. She did not have to wait long before it opened noiselessly on well-oiled hinges.

In the doorway was a tall man, lean and rangy, in an immaculate white jacket—a Hindu of some sort, from his swarthy, hawk-like face and spotless turban. Keen dark eyes as sharp as dagger-points scrutinized her closely.

“Pray come in, madame,” said the Hindu with a slight bow. “The *sahib* is expecting you. Let me take your wrap.”

Mechanically, Dona Teresa handed him her gloves and fur, staring about the foyer with astonished eyes. Nothing about the locale or outward appearance of the little house could have prepared her for its furnishings. The foyer held an immense bronze Chinese incense-burner on a teak wood stand; Tibetan *tonkas* or scroll-paintings adorned the walls, which were hung with watered silk. Lush Persian carpets were soft and thick underfoot.

She was ushered into a small study and informed that her host would attend her presently. As the door closed softly behind the tall servant, Dona Teresa looked about, her amazement growing. All her young life she had been raised in luxury, but nothing like *this*. Furniture of antique workmanship stood here and there, all of carved and polished teak, inlaid with mother-of-pearl or ivory plaques. The walls were hung with rich brocade and displayed illuminated cabinets crowded with exquisite antiquities—Etruscan, Creek, Roman, Hittite, Egyptian—museum-worthy pieces, all. The carpet underfoot was a superb Ispahan of fabulous value, faded with centuries but still glorious. A subtle fragrance hung on the still air, rising in blue and lazy whorls from the grinning jaws of a silver idol of Eastern work.

Bookshelves held hundreds of scholarly-looking tomes whose gilt titles were in Latin, German, French *Unaussprechlichen Kulturen*, *Livre d'Ivonis*, *Cultes de Goules*. None of the titles were familiar to her, but they held a sinister connotation of the occult, of the nightshade of science and philosophy.

A carven teak wood desk was drawn up before a fireplace. It held a clutter of books, manuscripts and notepads, weighed down with Egyptian tomb-figurines of blue faience, huge scarabs of schist. Babylonian or Sumerian tablets of baked clay inscribed with sharp cuneiform. Above the fireplace hung a grotesque mask of carved and painted wood, scarlet, black, and gold. It depicted a hideous devil-face with three glaring eyes and open fanged jaws from which escaped painted gold whorls of stylized flames. She was staring up at it with fascination mingled with revulsion when a quiet voice spoke from behind her, startling the girl.

“Tibetan,” said the voice. “It depicts Yama, King of Devils. Some say that he was worshipped in prehistory, in Lemuria, as Yamath, lord of fire.”

The girl turned swiftly. Her host was tall, slender, saturnine, with a fine-boned visage as sallow as old ivory. His hair was sleek, seal-black, with a

dramatic streak of pure silver that began at his right temple and zigzagged to the base of his skull. The dark eyes were hooded and cryptic and thoughtful. His age was indeterminate. He wore a dressing-gown of black silk acrawl with writhing gold dragons.

“I am Anton Zarnak,” he said with a slight smile, “and you are Miss de Rivera. Pray make yourself comfortable.” Zarnak glanced at a side-table laden with crystal decanters. “A sip of brandy, perhaps?”

“No, thank you,” the girl declined, sinking into a deep chair. Zarnak nodded, seating himself behind his desk. He opened a notebook and selected a pen.

“How can I assist you?” he inquired.

CHAPTER 2

Night-Fear

Dona Teresa twisted her hands together. “Doctor, there is nothing the matter with me. It is my Uncle, Don Sebastian de Rivera. We are the last survivors of an old California family of Hispanic origin. Ever since my parents died when I was a child, Don Sebastian has been my guardian and my dearest friend. Now he is suffering in the grip of some terrible thing—some hideous curse... I come to you for aid. No one else can help; my Uncle forbids it.”

“Indeed? And what is the problem?”

Dona Teresa lowered her head, veiling lustrous dark eyes behind thick lashes. “It sounds ridiculous... *he is afraid of the dark.*”

When Zarnak made no response, the young woman continued in a rush of words. “He has not always been so! When I was much younger, he owned immense lands in southern California, in Santiago County. He was a gentleman rancher, as our family has always been for many, many generations. He was tall, strong, a veritable lion of a man, afraid neither of God, man or devil.”

“And now?” Zarnak prompted softly. The girl raised eloquent eyes to his.

“Now he is an old man, although still in his prime...a shuddering coward who hides from the dark; gaunt, wasted, bent—old before his time. Stooped as if under the burden of some terrible and nameless guilt...”

“You say that your Uncle is afraid of the dark. Can you be more precise?”

She twisted her hands together nervously. “It was our priest who bade me visit you—Father Xavier of—”

“I know him well; an excellent man, and a fine priest. Pray continue.”

“It began about seven years ago. I was scarcely more than a child at the time. You must understand, Doctor: our family has ranched our ten thousand acres since the days of the first Spaniards. We raise sheep, cattle, grain. My Uncle was a veritable bull of a man; I have seen him kill a rattlesnake with his bare hands; once, he slew a grizzly with what you call a Bowie knife. Never in his life did he taste the bitterness of fear; now, he cowers behind shut curtains when night falls, trusting to the blaze of a thousand lights to keep the night away...”

Zarnak meditated briefly. “Has your Uncle consulted a physician? A—psychiatrist?”

“The family doctor prescribed nostrums, tonics, a vacation. My Uncle, Don Sebastian, despises analysts. He considers them little more than witch-doctors.”

“*I am little more than a witchdoctor,*” remarked Anton Zarnak with a slight smile. “But please go on; tell me more. Any detail that springs to mind may be of help, offering a clue...”

“I think that it began when my Uncle opened an old Indian burial mound which has stood on our property for more centuries than we have owned the land,” said Dona Teresa. “I believe it was supposed to have been built by a tribe called the Mutsune, long since extinct, at least in California. It was only after this intrusion upon the sanctity of the ancient dead that my Uncle began to...change.”

Something leapt to life and alertness behind Zarnak’s impassive gaze at this mention of the Mutsune burial mound. He made a brief note on the pad in his small, precise hand.

“Was anything of interest discovered in the mound?” he asked.

The girl shrugged listlessly. “I don’t know...perhaps an anthropologist might find these things of interest or value. It was the tomb, I believe, of some old Mutsune shaman or ghost-doctor or medicine man, whatever you wish to call them. My Uncle found clay pots of corn, scattered beads, shell work, bones. The shaman was well preserved, almost like an Egyptian

mummy. The remains, I recall, fell to dust when opened and exposed to the air...”

“Was anything else found in this tomb?”

“Jewelry of hammered copper...silver bracelets studded with uncut but polished turquoises...there was an odd pectoral pendent, carved of black volcanic glass—”

“Obsidian? That is interesting,” commented Zarnak.

“It was some months after opening the mound that my Uncle began to display peculiar tendencies to avoid the dark. Within a year, he abruptly sold all of our land to a rival rancher and brought me here into the east. I had hoped we would relocate to San Francisco, a city that I love; but, no, we must put the breadth of the entire continent between us and our ancestral home, it seemed. We took a town-house on a lovely tree-lined street off Park Avenue, and have lived in seclusion ever since.”

“While your Uncle’s health has declined?”

“In seven years, he shrank and dwindled into an old man frail and fearful. It is not a physical thing, I am sure; the family doctor assures me that it is merely nerves. As I have mentioned, he refuses to consult a psychiatrist. Even a priest; I am a good Catholic, I hope. My Uncle is indifferent to the Church; he supports it but rarely attends. He has not been to confession in more years than I can remember. Sometimes, I fear for his soul.”

“Tell me more about his fear of the dark.”

“It sounds absurd and childish, doesn’t it? But to him the peril is horribly real. In the daylight hours he is normal enough, takes meals with me, talks, even jests. But when twilight nears, Uncle commands the servants to close the drapes over every window, and to light every light. Then he retires to his own quarters. He is armored against the darkness by powerful electric lamps contrived in such a manner that no corner is shadowy. He detests even shadows. And he lives in constant dread of a power-failure; every room of the house contains dozens of candelabra and flashlights with fresh batteries. It is a fearful thing to see a grown man cower before night-fears...”

“How does your Uncle pass his time?”

“In research; he digs through old, mouldering books; he writes to scholars all over the world, he is in constant touch with great libraries...to

be honest, sir, I have no notion of the nature of his research. We never talk of it...but he is horribly afraid of *something*...it is almost as if my Uncle had somehow incurred the wrath of some demon of the darkness, and clings with frail hands pitifully to the light.”

Zarnak made a small notation in his careful hand.

“What became of the relics which your Uncle discovered in the Indian burial mound?” he asked quietly.

“He has them with him. Keeps them in his rooms. He clings to them, seems to cherish them,” said the girl.

“I see. Is there anything else you can tell me?”

Dona Teresa thought for a moment. “Perhaps, Doctor, but whether it’s of any value or not...anyway, before Uncle sold the ranch, we had a priest staying with us. He was of pure Indian blood, of a race descended from the Mutsunes. I’ll never forget how violently agitated he became when he discovered that Uncle had disturbed the mound, and brought the artifacts to light...he was transfixed with horror, as if of a sacrilege or the exposure of some dreadful danger.”

“Was there any one of the artifacts in particular that seemed to alarm him?” inquired Zarnak.

The girl considered. “Yes; the tablet or pectoral of black obsidian. I remember how he stared at my Uncle in frozen shock, and what he said. It was...‘*You dared expose this thing to the light of day?*’ And then he went into a sort of Indian chant, repeating one name or phrase over and over, swaying to the rhythm of the sound.”

“Can you recall what the phrase was?”

The young woman shuddered. “I certainly can! It made a frightful impression on me at the time. Three sounds, repeated over and over...‘Zoo, Chee, Khan...Zoo, Chee, Khan...’”

Zarnak made a notation, then rose and pulled a bellcord.

“I will visit you and your Uncle tomorrow morning. It might be better for you not to address me as ‘doctor,’ since Don Sebastian seems adverse to such; while I have a doctorate in psychology, I am not a practicing analyst. Best, however, not to arouse his emotions. Introduce me merely as an antiquarian and amateur collector of antiquities; you have seen my small collection and it will be no lie. My Rajput servant, Ram Singh, will call you a cab. Good evening.”

Once the young woman had left, Zarnak studied his notes with a thoughtful expression on his sallow visage.

Under the name she had repeated which he had written down in phonetics, he added a brief notation.

Zulchequon?

CHAPTER 3

The Black Tablet

Despite the darkness, for night fell early during these seasons of the year, it was not too late for Zarnak to make a few phone calls. From an anthropologist friend who was an expert in American Indian cultures, he learned that the Mutsune tribe were related to the Zuni Indians, and that their culture was obscure. Little was known of their beliefs, as they were extinct in California, but they were known to have feared a demon whom they called Zu-che-quon; even less was known of this dark demon, but another call to an old friend who was on the staff of the library of Miskatonic University in Massachusetts recommended that Zarnak consult, if at all possible, the *Book of Iod* for information on this demonic entity. The text itself was fabulously rare: only one copy was known to exist, and it was in the translation by one Johann Negus, from which the translator had rigorously excised many fearful matters of which he deemed it better that mankind remain mercifully unaware.

A work of such rarity was not in Zarnak's private collection, although many other obscure and suppressed volumes were. However, Zarnak took down a lengthy manuscript indited by several different hands over many generations, bound in snakeskin. The book consisted of excerpts copied from many little-known texts, and one of these was the *Book of Iod*. The quotations had been copied from the only extant copy of the book, preserved in the locked shelves of the Huntington Library of California, and the copyist had been a man named Denton, whom Zarnak had known many years before. He read:

The Dark Silent One dwelleth deep beneath the earth on the shore
of the Western Ocean.

Not one of those potent Old Ones from hidden worlds and other stars is He, for in earth's hidden blackness He hath always dwelt. No other name hath He, for He is the ultimate doom and the undying emptiness and Silence of Old Night...

There was more in this vein; Zarnak read on, skipping quickly, until a passage near the very end of the excerpt arrested his attention with a sudden chill of menace:

...He bringeth darkness within the day, and blackness within the light; all life, all sound, all movement passeth away at His coming. He cometh sometimes within the eclipse, and although He hath no name, the brown ones know Him as Zyshakon.

They knew him anciently in elder Mu, and in Xinian under the earth's crust, they worshipped Him in strange ways by the ringing of certain small, terrible bells, as Eibon telleth. He feareth nothing more than the light of day, which He abhors, but even artificial light is enough to drive Him down whence He came. He is the Bringer of Darkness, the Hater of Day, and Ubbo-Sathla was His Sire. As a crawling clot of darkness, and as a writhing of clotted shadows shall ye know Him.

A note in Denton's hand explained that the last eighty-nine words of this excerpt were deleted from the expurgated copy of the Huntington Library, and had been found in a citation by Von Junzt, who had obviously enjoyed access to the uncensored text.

Zarnak closed the manuscript volume and replaced it on the shelf, brows furrowed in deepest thought.

* * * *

The next morning. Doctor Anton Zarnak travelled by taxi uptown, to the residence of Don Sebastian de Rivera and his niece. The cab drew up before a handsome building on a quiet street lined with old beech trees. When a butler, apparently of Hispanic descent, answered the bell, Zarnak identified himself and was ushered into a sunlit parlor where Dona Teresa awaited him.

“My Uncle will be down to breakfast at any moment,” the girl said. “Surely you will join us?”

“For coffee only,” Zarnak smiled. “I have already eaten. I prefer my coffee black, with no sugar, please.”

A pretty Mexican maid named Carmelita served them both. Silver dishes on the sideboard held steaming bacon, sausages, scrambled eggs, toasted muffins. A frosted decanter held freshly-squeezed orange juice. The coffee was a superb blend of Columbian beans.

When Don Sebastian appeared, Zarnak found his host in shocking condition. Despite his relatively youthful age, the man was shrunken, wasted, his gaunt shoulders bowed as if beneath some intolerable weight, his features pasty, prematurely lined with age, the eyes shifty and red-rimmed.

Don Sebastian accepted without comment the information that Zarnak was an antiquarian, interested in ancient artifacts. During the meal they conversed on American Indian artifacts. Zarnak’s host seemed almost pathetically pleased by his visitor, as if normal human contacts were somehow denied him, except for his niece and the servants.

After breakfast, Zarnak was shown Don Sebastian’s private collection of rarities. There were some fine examples of Zuni silver, set with polished but uncut turquoises, miniature totem poles from the tribes of the Pacific Northwest, and examples of beadwork that would have been the pride of any museum. Zarnak innocently mentioned the mound-builders of the southwest, and was, however reluctantly, shown the artifacts he had come uptown to examine.

For the most part, the artifacts were innocuous: as Dona Teresa had said, they consisted of clay pots of withered corn, broken shards, beadwork belts and bracelets. Certain motifs in the bead-work held a sinister connotation for Zarnak, who had been up much of the night consulting reference works on American Indian anthropology. The mummy in the mound had been given to the worship of dark subterranean forces, it became evident.

The black tablet was not in view. Eventually, Zarnak was forced to inquire of the obsidian pendent, saying (quite truthfully) that he had heard of it as unique and curious. With obvious reluctance, his host displayed the peculiar object.

It was irregular in shape and the volcanic glass from which it had been carved was oddly heavy in the hand, unnaturally so. Holding the black pendent to the light, Zarnak discovered it hewn with an odd design, resembling a hooded man-shaped figure surrounded by fawning, groveling shadowy shapes, curiously repellent. Strange characters in a tongue unknown to human science ringed the emblem about. The object was unique to Zarnak's experience, but he recalled to mind another passage from the *Book of Iod* that might prove of relevance: "*Power and peril lurk in those images. They brought down from the stars when the Earth was newly-formed...*"

Dr. Zarnak engaged his host in conversation, as he strolled about, examining the superb small collection. While the gaunt, wasted man seemed distraught, even feeble, his speech was coherent and his knowledge of scientific matters extraordinary, for an amateur. It was apparent that his intellectual faculties remained unimpaired. And Zarnak's keen knowledge of medicine led him to the conclusion that whatever had so deeply troubled Don Sebastian was of a mental and not of a physical nature. There were no obvious symptoms of disease.

Zarnak asked for, and received, permission from his host to take a rubbing of the carvings on the black tablet. Later, having returned to his residence at Number Thirteen China Alley, he studied the cryptic characters with bafflement, consulting text after text from his extensive library. The writing was in neither the Tsath-yo language of elder Hyperborea nor the Naacal of primal Mu, nor was it R'lyehian. The faint possibility that it might be in the queer characters of the Aklo tongue led Doctor Zarnak to peruse certain texts of fabulous rarity.

This study led him eventually to a copy of Otto Dostmann's book, *Remnants of Lost Empires*, published in Berlin in 1809 by the Drachenhaus Press. Therein he found the notorious "Aklo Tables" and compared the curious hooked and looped characters to those in the rubbing he had taken from the tablet from the mound: they were the same.

In translation they read: *Keep me from the Light, for Night is my friend and Day my foe, lest Zulchequon consume thee utterly.* He then studied those parts of the *Livre d'Ivonis* wherein the Lord of Darkness is described and came to a sudden realization of the extremity of peril in which Don

Sebastian de Rivera had lived daily, since the excavation of the burial mound of the Mutsune shaman.

Light—even artificial light—held the Dark One at bay and helpless to visit His wrath on mortals. Only during the hours of darkness could He strike and slay, to avenge Himself upon the disturber of ancient relics never meant to be exposed to the luminance of day. Whatever perversity of greed had caused Don Sebastian to cling to the black obsidian tablet had placed him in perpetual peril all these years; *and this was the season of the year in which the overuse of electricity, together with sudden electrical storms, frequently caused power failures...*

Disturbed by these discoveries, which seemed ominous, Zarnak telephoned the townhouse of Don Sebastian and his niece. Some sort of trouble on the line had rendered their residence temporarily beyond the reach of telephonic communication. Zarnak went to the window and drew aside the heavy drapes: night had fallen, and the sky was a sullen and sulphurous hue, wherein lightning flickered. The radio warned of sudden and unexpected electrical storms, which might paralyze portions of the city with the brief loss of electrical power to certain areas.

Zarnak doffed his robe, donned his coat and took up a slender black case that was seldom far from his side by night or by day. He then rang his tall Rajput servant and ordered a taxi.

CHAPTER 4

Thing of Darkness

The cab seemed to take forever to forge its way through streams of heavy traffic uptown, and all the while the sulphurous sky, turgid with thunderclouds, lowered threateningly and tongues of lightning flickered in their dark masses. At any moment one such bolt might strike a power line, causing a brief but fatal—fatal to Don Sebastian, that is—cessation of electricity.

At length the cab pulled up before the imposing facade of the de Rivera residence on that quiet, tree-lined street off Park Avenue, and Zarnak emerged, hastily tossing a bill to the driver. His repeated ringing of the bell eventually elicited a response, in the lissome form of Dona Teresa. Her

lustrous eyes widened at the unexpected sight of Doctor Zarnak; she opened the door swiftly.

“Is all well?” he demanded harshly. She nodded mutely, then explained that radio warnings of temporary power blackouts had driven her Uncle into a frenzy of fear, and that he had the servants lighting scores of candles in his rooms against the possibility.

“Take me to your Uncle at once, I implore you! I must take the black tablet with me, to neutralize it as best I can—”

They ascended the stairs and entered the rooms where Don Sebastian lived. Every tabletop held silver candelabra filled with lit tapers, and all electric lights were blazingly alit. The room fairly teemed with luminance, to such an extent that even the shadows in far corners were dispelled. Don Sebastian himself was in a frightful condition, hands shaking, spittle dribbling from the corners of his mouth. He seemed scarcely aware of Zarnak’s presence, such was his agitation.

Carmelita and the other servants departed to seek additional candles in some storage space in the cellar, when Zarnak implored Don Sebastian to let him borrow the obsidian pectoral overnight; so distraught was the stooped older man, that he seemed scarcely to hear the words of his guest, and paid them little heed.

And then it was that it happened.

Suddenly, the electric lights waned and died. Don Sebastian screeched like a doomed soul and cowered in a corner. Dona Teresa ran to comfort him, while Zarnak sprang to the windows and tore asunder the heavy curtains to peer out. All up and down the street the lights in windows were dying, and the street lights faded into gloom. The threatened power blackout had occurred.

A great gust of icy, fetid air burst through the parted curtains, curiously subarctic in this sweltering temperature.

The candles blew out, all at once, as if simultaneously extinguished by a giant’s breath!

Zarnak sprang to his black case and snapped it open. He withdrew therefrom a curious object, like a magician’s wand. The handpiece was a tube of copper with a core of magnetized iron, and the rod was tipped with a curious talisman of gray-green stone, shapen like a five-pointed star. As

the light died to densest gloom, a faint halo of greenish luminance flickered and shone about the star-shaped stone.

In one corner of the room, shadows swirled, clotted, thickened.

Cold perspiration bedewed Zarnak's ascetic features. He brandished the star-tipped wand, whose luminance brightened but when he thrust the wand towards the cloud of gathering shadows, the darkness drank the dim light and failed to disperse. Don Sebastian shrieked!

Zarnak looked desperately towards the open, undraped window. Fomalhaut leered like a dim eye above the horizon, barely visible through the sulphurous murk. He tried a last resort:

Iä! Iä! Cthugha!

Ph'nglui mglw'nafh

Cthugha Fomalhaut

Ngha-ghaa naf'l thagn

Iä! Cthugha!

Three times he recited the uncouth vocables of this strange incantation, and all the while the dark thing thickened and grew ever more substantial in the far corner of the room, until it was veritably palpable.

Minute sparks of golden fire flickered into being, like a whirling cloud of fireflies. Their luminance did little to lighten the impenetrable gloom, but they warmed the air. There came a rustling as of gigantic, unseen wings—

Then the lights came on, dazzling, blinding!

The blackout had been very temporary, blessedly. The whirling cloud of pale golden sparks faded as Zarnak dismissed them. The heavy clot of darkness in the corner shrank; Zarnak advanced upon it, brandishing the star-stone rod. The massed darkness that was Zulchequon faded from view, leaving only icy fetid air behind.

Zarnak composed himself, turned to see Dona Teresa where she knelt in the opposite corner of the room, cradling her Uncle's still form in her arms, weeping. His face was white as milk, features distorted in a hideous grimace of sheer terror. Zarnak crossed the room in swift strides, knelt, examined the wasted form swiftly. No breath, no pulse, no heartbeat; the old man was dead...

The police came with an ambulance and a medical examiner. Zarnak took it upon himself to explain, in brief terms, that Don Sebastian had

suffered from a neurotic fear of darkness. There were no signs of foul play. The medical examiner diagnosed the cause of death as a massive heart seizure. The police were satisfied. Ambulance workers in long white coats placed the corpse on a stretcher.

Observing the horrible expression of pure terror graven on the dead man's features, the doctor murmured: "Looks like I should write up this one as 'dead of fright.'"

Zarnak, who stood with his arm around the shaking, sobbing form of Dona Teresa, permitted himself a small, grim jest:

"No, doctor. I would say 'dead of night,'" he muttered.

DEATH OF A DAMNED GOOD MAN, by Avram Davidson

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Steuart had a poor memory for names. Lawson collected bugs and lizards and things. Hughes couldn't jump. There you have it all.

Lawson's broad old house had its single floor high off the ground on posts in order to catch the breeze in hot summers and avoid extra-high tides or storm-driven waves; and like other such houses the underneath had eventually been boarded up to "protect" (as it might be) such items as a couple of old dories or dinghies or skiffs, lots of broken traps and eel-pots, a couple of failed generators, a chancy heater, a kerosene refrigerator or two, several automobile engines, and God knows what else; I never looked. If this cut off some of the cool breezes it also cut off some of the cold winds, and if it didn't, there was probably a pile of coal, and a cord of wood. And various flotsam and jetsam.

A visit to Lawson's house was a visit to an antique state of amateur science, and the smells of kerosene, old lamps, old newspapers, old books, old socks, old birds, and other things musty and musky and presumably also old. A vast brass microscope held down a heap of yellow and dirty *Smithsonian Reports*. Skins of things moldered on the wall next to ancient calendars. Out of a small hole in a wooden box, once, poured a thing with a head like a bat, body like a cat, and hands like a bird-eating spider; it had orange fur: I forget *what* Lawson said it was. He spoke baby-talk to it, fed it bits of banana, and told me it could have cuddled up in a tea-cup when he first got it. "I'm a widely traveled man," he assured me. "I have a great interest in native dialects and customs and odd corners of the world. *Look* at this ceremonial mask," he invited in a hortatory voice which implied that you had better look; "I got that in Celebes; Sulawasi they call it now. *Look* at the wing-span on those butterflies. I fit twenty of its cocoons into a common matchbox." Something went *bump* underneath the house and Lawson banged on the floor with his foot and the noises stopped.

So might the house of John Bartram or Louis Agassiz have seemed, I thought; though minus of course the kerosene; did any living man or

woman still know what whale-oil lamps smelled like? “For Christ’s sake *feed* it,” the old lady said, speaking for the first time, the holy name suddenly shocking from that sagging flowing old face. “All right, Aggie Brown,” Lawson said, not bothered or in haste. I suppose the huge wooden ice-box had come once upon a time from an old restaurant, and when Lawson opened it a wave of cold and corruption came rolling out. I was tempted to use again Aggie’s word of emphasis, but—

“For God’s sake what *is* that, Laws?” is what I cried.

A faint simper as he dislodged some log-sized hunks of god-knows-what, ice crystals on the dark-red-and-blue-green; the simper never faltered. “That is horse-meat I buy wholesale from the mink ranch for my German Shepherd police guard-dogs, this neighborhood is not at all what it was,” he fumbled with his foot and raised a small trap-door and thrust the frowzy flesh through it and slipped the bolt back all in a few seconds; the odors of the snake house at the zoo were added to everything else in that close fuggy air. A dead boa constrictor smells a lot like a dead fish. But whatever he had just fed was not dead. *That is not dead which does eternal lie, And with strange aeons even death may die*—who had said *that*? Philemon Holland’s translation of Pliny’s Natural History was surely not in verse, was it? Well, it wasn’t Edgar Guest. The old lady flapped her skirts; they could have done with a washing, too. I said that I hadn’t noticed any Shepherd dogs, Laws; and he said (I think he said) that he was “getting some more tomorrow.”

Fact, fascination, curiosity, or not, I moved rapidly. “Well, I’ve got to be going now, Laws—”

The old woman was at my heels going down the stairs and I turned to ask if he were all there but she moved off in another direction as we went out the thick-wired gate which swung back on its weights with a heavy sound behind us. My mind provided me with a picture of an anaconda or a python and Lawson’s voice assuring me that it had been no bigger than a garter snake when he had gotten it (but only my mind); then a gust of wind from the not-distant-sea slapped at my face and I realized that I was holding my breath. The air, when I breathed it in again, was salty and fresh. Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am vast, I contain multitudes.

My neighbor, Wilfred Steuart, was retired from I don’t know what; asking him a question was a pleasure because, for one thing, he usually

knew the answer, and, for another, he never, ever, insisted *on Why do you want to know?* before he answered. It seemed to him the most natural thing in the world that anyone would want to know anything. And he saw no reason why, if he knew, he should not say; not for him the sad scowl of suspicion: to the pure, all things are pure. “Her name is Agnes Overholt, used to be Agnes Brown. O-ver-holt? Ab-er-crom—” He tasted the syllables. “I got a poor memory for names. She and Art Lawson they used to be childhood sweet-hearts.” They *did?* something cried out within me. Lawson, with the face of a withered monkey and non-too-well-scrubbed, either—and old Agnes, whose own face had loosened out of all confinement, and who perhaps was not fanatically clean, either: childhood sweethearts? *Rejoice, young man...and young woman, too...ere the evil days draw nigh*—that Preacher knew what he was talking about. Even if Lawson showed no signs of knowing that the evil days had drawn more than nigh. And *Hughes?*

Lew Hughes had gone to the same school. What did he do now? Hung around other people’s houses, mostly. Didn’t actually come *in*, just hung around. Thus informed, I realized that I did know that Lew Hughes was a dedicated loiterer, had known this for longer than I had known I knew. Grey-faced Lewis Hughes, obviously a man with a grievance; and what was it? A general grievance, you may be sure, against anyone any less unhappy and discontented than Lewis Hughes. But specifically because he had some physical ailment for which the United States in Congress Assembled refused to allow him a pension. “Something the matter with his bones or his muscles or his tendons. ‘You can *walk*, can’t you?’ is what I asked him; ‘Oh...yeah...I can *walk*...but I can’t *jump*—’ ‘What do ya wanna *jump* for? You wanna be a delivery boy hopping on and off of wagons?’ But he keeps on mooning and moaning that he just can’t jump, and he calls it *My Condition* and he claims he got it sleeping in the wet trenches during the War and the Veterans won’t give him a pension because it’s not Service Connected...*they* claim...*he* claims, Yes it *is*...*they* say, then how come it took thirty years to find out? Also—”

Also, Hughes was jealous of Lawson on account of Aggie.

“On account of *Aggie?*”

Steuart said, “Why sure. Aggie goes to see Arty Lawson. She doesn’t go to see Lew Hughes. *Nobody* goes to see Lew Hughes.”

I supposed so; still...smelly old dirty addled old Art Lawson? profane, smelly old saggy old Aggie? and sullen old Hughes: *jealous*?

“Know what he says, Lew Hughes? Says that Lawson’s got a buried treasure and that when Aggie comes to visit, Lawson digs it up and lets her look at it!” Mr. Steuart laughed. I laughed, too, I didn’t know what *he* thought about, but *I* thought about the scene in the Quixote where Sancho Panza’s wife confronts him on his return.

What did you bring me, husband?

I brought you some precious jewels, wife.

Show them to me! Show them to me right now!

I will show them to you at home, wife.

Lawson?

Aggie?

You never know.

Not my business.

And Steuart told me that at one time he and Lawson had been “in the Merchants Marine together. We sailed on a *couple* of ships together. All through the South Pacific. All through the East Indias. All through the West Indias, too.”

Clem lived next door.

“I cleck *clams*,” intoned Clem, looking at me out of his intense and almost Indian-dark face. “I cleck *clams*. I cleck *oysters*. I cleck *mussels*. Believe me, I’m a citizen, and I *earn* my money,” he said, bitterly; implications of aliens lolling on federally funded opium couches. “What’s the matter a citizen can’t own a machine-gun if he so desires? Because the East Coast Liberal Ustablishment wants to *disarm* the citizens! They think I doe know about them uh-legal orientals being smuggled in offa the boats in the dark a the moan, they think I doe’n observe them Lo-etians or whatever they are slipping and slapping around in the shadows, but I observe ’em!” said Clem, coming closer. I feared for my buttonholes. “I can *smell* ’em! They eat *fish*! They live on a fish-head and a handful of rice a day and that’s how come a citizen can’t compete with ’em!” I thought of asking if perhaps they ate oysters, mussels, or clams, but I desisted. Clem was widely known to possess a large number of items which the East Coast Liberal Establishment had not succeeded in outlawing; and I was by no means satisfied with my ability to move Faster Than a Speeding Bullet.

No indeed.

Luigi had the contract to remove garbage and he removed it at his own rate of speed in an ancient truck which no appeals to civic pride had ever persuaded him to replace. Luigi's truck was parked one day very nearly outside the small police station, but even if I hadn't been able to identify it I would have known he was inside the station. First I became aware of a high shrill sound as I approached, then I recognized it as a *voice*, then I realized *whose* voice, then I began to understand elements of what he was saying. *Can't jump he says I can't jump he says Oh my God I was driving along real slow to save my tires and I hear him screaming he was screaming and I seen him running and I seen this thing chasing him*; by this time I was inside and saw O'Dowd the Chief of the two-man police force leaning his heavy hands on Luigi's shoulders. *He was running and he was screaming and I lean over the seat and I hold the door open and I yell jump Lew jump up and he yells I can't jump he screams I can't I can't jump Oh my God oh my God and I slam the door shut*; and then Luigi began to stamp his feet upon the floor and though his voice stopped speaking words, articulate words, his voice did not stop and O'Dowd wrestled him back down into the chair and just then Dr. Stanyan the Health Officer came in walking very fast and in his hand was something I recognized from the War as a morphine syrette and then I saw something else I recognized from the War namely that Luigi was splashed with blood evidently emitted under pressure— — and then Petey the other policeman took hold of me by the elbow and walked me rapidly to the door; and even when I heard Clem say almost in my ear, "It was a steel-jacketed bullet, I'm a citizen and I had a right—" I kept on going, I did not insist upon my own right as a citizen, but even when the noise of the door stopped slamming Luigi's voice kept on going on and then by and by it sank to a drone and I leaned against a tree and first I was very cold and then I was very sick.

Steuart made a gesture at home when he saw me and began to talk. "Well what a terrible thing, two men dead," he said. "I suppose it was one of those alligators that maybe come up out of the sewer—"

"—that wasn't no alligator and it didn't come up out of no sewer," said Clem.

Steuart yielded the point entirely, "Well, then probably Hughes was poking around looking for Art Lawson's buried treasure but I don't believe

Art had any buried treasure; did it *get* out or did Hughes *let* it out, oh of course by accident? well maybe I suppose we'll never know. Art went quick, that's a blessing, he went just like *that*," Steuart snapped his fingers. "We were boys together, him always climbing the trees to get the birds' eggs and such things like that: and now he's *gone*."

Someone else was in the kitchen, Aggie had made tea and she poured it out and it was strong dark tea and she poured rum into it and it was strong dark rum and it was hot in the kitchen and perhaps that was sweat on her eroded old face and then again perhaps it wasn't.

Clem gulped without blowing hardly at all. He must have had a mouth of iron. "It probably come ashore with them aliens from the boats," he said. "What would a *citizen* want with something like that? Of course it's all hushed up, your big moneyed interests, Safeway, 7-11, they doe want no bad publicity, here. *I* didn't want any reward," he said, *gulp*. "*I* didn't want any Carnegie Medal. I just wanted the skin, Jesus I could of made some lovely holsters out of that skin. But you think the Police and the Public Health they even let me have a piece of it? They're Relks," he said, bitterly, *gulp*. "The Chiefs a Nelk, the Doctor's a Nelk: all of them Melks they stick together. That's your East Coast Liberal *Uh*-stablishment for you," he said.

"Oh will you shut the Hell up," said Aggie Brown. "Your goddamn grandfather he was no goddamn good either. Lew Hughes he was no goddamn good either."

"Sealed *coffin*," said Clem. Then he held up his cup for more.

"Arty Lawson and me we were in the Merchants Marine," Steuart said. "We went everywhere. Like, couple times we went all through the East Indias. Jamoke, where the good coffee comes from? Sullivan's that a great big island, *no* I can't spell it, I ain't got no memory for names, everywhere we went he come back aboard with like natural history samples: bugs: lizards: Monkeys, *lemurs*; he used to smuggle them ashore. Bali—"

"Did your ship call at Komodo?" I asked.

Steuart's lips moved, he was trying out the word. After a moment he shrugged. "It could very well be," he said. "I dunno for sure. Well, a sudden death. Art Lawson I mean, we all—"

"He was a damned good man," said Aggie Brown.

Steuart had a poor memory for names. Lawson collected bugs and lizards and things. Hughes couldn't jump. There you have it all.

MEDUSA'S COIL, by Howard Phillips Lovecraft and Zealia Bishop

Chapter 1

The drive toward Cape Girardeau had been through unfamiliar country; and as the late afternoon light grew golden and half-dreamlike I realized that I must have directions if I expected to reach the town before night. I did not care to be wandering about these bleak southern Missouri lowlands after dark, for roads were poor and the November cold rather formidable in an open roadster. Black clouds, too, were massing on the horizon; so I looked about among the long, grey and blue shadows that streaked the flat, brownish fields, hoping to glimpse some house where I might get the needed information.

It was a lonely and deserted country, but at last I spied a roof among a clump of trees near the small river on my right; perhaps a full half-mile from the road, and probably reachable by some path or drive which I would presently come upon. In the absence of any nearer dwelling, I resolved to try my luck there; and was glad when the bushes by the roadside revealed the ruin of a carved stone gateway, covered with dry, dead vines and choked with undergrowth which explained why I had not been able to trace the path across the fields in my first distant view. I saw that I could not drive the car in, so I parked it very carefully near the gate—where a thick evergreen would shield it in case of rain—and got out for the long walk to the house.

Traversing that brush-growth path in the gathering twilight I was conscious of a distinct sense of foreboding, probably induced by the air of sinister decay hovering about the gate and the former driveway. From the carvings on the old stone pillars I inferred that this place was once an estate of manorial dignity; and I could clearly see that the driveway had originally boasted guardian lines of linden trees, some of which had died, while others had lost their special identity among the wild scrub growths of the region.

As I ploughed onward, cockleburs and stickers clung to my clothes, and I began to wonder whether the place could be inhabited after all. Was I tramping on a vain errand? For a moment I was tempted to go back and try some farm farther along the road, when a view of the house ahead aroused my curiosity and stimulated my venturesome spirit.

There was something provocatively fascinating in the tree-girt, decrepit pile before me, for it spoke of the graces and spaciousness of a bygone era and a far more southerly environment. It was a typical wooden plantation house of the classic, early nineteenth-century pattern, with two and a half stories and a great Ionic portico whose pillars reached up as far as the attic and supported a triangular pediment. Its state of decay was extreme and obvious; one of the vast columns having rotted and fallen to the ground, while the upper piazza or balcony had sagged dangerously low. Other buildings, I judged, had formerly stood near it.

As I mounted the broad stone steps to the low porch and the carved and fanlighted doorway I felt distinctly nervous, and started to light a cigarette—desisting when I saw how dry and inflammable everything about me was. Though now convinced that the house was deserted, I nevertheless hesitated to violate its dignity without knocking; so tugged at the rusty iron knocker until I could get it to move, and finally set up a cautious rapping which seemed to make the whole place shake and rattle. There was no response, yet once more I plied the cumbrous, creaking device—as much to dispel the sense of unholy silence and solitude as to arouse any possible occupant of the ruin.

Somewhere near the river I heard the mournful note of a dove, and it seemed as if the coursing water itself were faintly audible. Half in a dream, I seized and rattled the ancient latch, and finally gave the great sixpanelled door a frank trying. It was unlocked, as I could see in a moment; and though it stuck and grated on its hinges I began to push it open, stepping through it into a vast shadowy hall as I did so.

But the moment I took this step I regretted it. It was not that a legion of specters confronted me in that dim and dusty hall with the ghostly Empire furniture; but that I knew all at once that the place was not deserted at all. There was a creaking on the great curved staircase, and the sound of faltering footsteps slowly descending. Then I saw a tall, bent figure silhouetted for an instant against the great Palladian window on the landing.

My first start of terror was soon over, and as the figure descended the final flight I was ready to greet the householder whose privacy I had invaded. In the semi-darkness I could see him reach in his pocket for a match. There came a flare as he lighted a small kerosene lamp which stood on a rickety console table near the foot of the stairs. In the feeble glow was

revealed the stooping figure of a very tall, emaciated old man; disordered as to dress and unshaved as to face, yet for all that with the bearing and expression of a gentleman.

I did not wait for him to speak, but at once began to explain my presence.

“You’ll pardon my coming in like this, but when my knocking didn’t raise anybody I concluded that no one lived here. What I wanted originally was to know the right road to Cape Girardeau—the shortest road, that is. I wanted to get there before dark, but now, of course—”

As I paused, the man spoke; in exactly the cultivated tone I had expected, and with a mellow accent as unmistakably Southern as the house he inhabited.

“Rather, you must pardon me for not answering your knock more promptly. I live in a very retired way, and am not usually expecting visitors. At first I thought you were a mere curiosity-seeker. Then when you knocked again I started to answer, but I am not well and have to move very slowly. Spinal neuritis—very troublesome case.

“But as for your getting to town before dark—it’s plain you can’t do that. The road you are on—for I suppose you came from the gate—isn’t the best or shortest way. What you must do is to take your first left after you leave the gate—that is, the first real road to your left. There are three or four cart paths you can ignore, but you can’t mistake the real road because of the extra large willow tree on the right just opposite it. Then when you’ve turned, keep on past two roads and turn to the right along the third. After that—”

“Please wait a moment! How can I follow all these clues in pitch darkness, without ever having been near here before, and with only an indifferent pair of headlights to tell me what is and what isn’t a road? Besides, I think it’s going to storm pretty soon, and my car is an open one. It looks as if I were in a bad fix if I want to get to Cape Girardeau tonight. The fact is, I don’t think I’d better try to make it. I don’t like to impose burdens, or anything like that—but in view of the circumstances, do you suppose you could put me up for the night? I won’t be any trouble—no meals or anything. Just let me have a corner to sleep in till daylight, and I’m all right. I can leave the car in the road where it is—a bit of wet weather won’t hurt it if worst comes to worst.”

As I made my sudden request I could see the old man's face lose its former expression of quiet resignation and take on an odd, surprised look.

“Sleep—here?”

He seemed so astonished at my request that I repeated it.

“Yes, why not? I assure you I won't be any trouble. What else can I do? I'm a stranger hereabouts, these roads are a labyrinth in the dark, and I'll wager it'll be raining torrents outside of an hour—”

This time it was my host's turn to interrupt, and as he did so I could feel a peculiar quality in his deep, musical voice.

“A stranger—of course you must be, else you wouldn't think of sleeping here, wouldn't think of coming here at all. People don't come here nowadays.”

He paused, and my desire to stay was increased a thousandfold by the sense of mystery his laconic words seemed to evoke. There was surely something alluringly queer about this place, and the pervasive musty smell seemed to cloak a thousand secrets. Again I noticed the extreme decrepitude of everything about me; manifest even in the feeble rays of the single small lamp. I felt woefully chilly, and saw with regret that no heating was provided, and yet so great was my curiosity that I still wished most ardently to stay and learn something of the recluse and his dismal abode.

“Let that be as it may,” I replied. “I can't help about other people. But I surely would like to have a spot to stop till daylight. Still—if people don't relish this place, mayn't it be because it's getting so run-down? Of course I suppose it would take a fortune to keep such an estate up, but if the burden's too great why don't you look for smaller quarters? Why try to stick it out here in this way—with all the hardships and discomforts?”

The man did not seem offended, but answered me very gravely.

“Surely you may stay if you really wish to—you can come to no harm that I know of. But others claim there are certain peculiarly undesirable influences here. As for me—I stay here because I have to. There is something I feel it a duty to guard—something that holds me. I wish I had the money and health and ambition to take decent care of the house and grounds.”

With my curiosity still more heightened, I prepared to take my host at his word; and followed him slowly upstairs when he motioned me to do so. It was very dark now, and a faint pattering outside told me that the

threatened rain had come. I would have been glad of any shelter, but this was doubly welcome because of the hints of mystery about the place and its master. For an incurable lover of the grotesque, no more fitting haven could have been provided.

Chapter 2

There was a second-floor corner room in less unkempt shape than the rest of the house, and into this my host led me, setting down his small lamp and lighting a somewhat larger one. From the cleanliness and contents of the room, and from the books ranged along the walls, I could see that I had not guessed amiss in thinking the man a gentleman of taste of breeding. He was a hermit and eccentric, no doubt, but he still had standards and intellectual interests. As he waved me to a seat I began a conversation on general topics, and was pleased to find him not at all taciturn. If anything, he seemed glad of someone to talk, and did not even attempt to swerve the discussion from personal topics.

He was, I learned, one Antoine de Russy, of an ancient, powerful, and cultivated line of Louisiana planters. More than a century ago his grandfather, a younger son, had migrated to southern Missouri and founded a new estate in the lavish ancestral manner; building this pillared mansion and surrounding it with all the accessories of a great plantation. There had been, at one time, as many as 200 negroes in the cabins which stood on the flat ground in the rear—ground that the river had now invaded—and to hear them singing and laughing and playing the banjo at night was to know the fullest charm of a civilization and social order now sadly extinct. In front of the house, where the great guardian oaks and willows stood, there had been a lawn like a broad green carpet, always watered and trimmed and with flagstoned, flower-bordered walks curving through it. “Riverside”—for such the place was called—had been a lovely and idyllic homestead in its day; and my host could recall it when many traces of its best period.

It was raining hard now, with dense sheets of water beating against the insecure roof, walls, and windows, and sending in drops through a thousand chinks and crevices. Moisture trickled down to the floor from unsuspected places, and the mounting wind rattled the rotting, loose-hinged shutters outside. But I minded none of this, for I saw that a story was coming. Incited to reminiscence, my host made a move to shew me to sleeping-

quarters; but kept on recalling the older, better days. Soon, I saw, I would receive an inkling of why he lived alone in that ancient place, and why his neighbours thought it full of undesirable influences. His voice was very musical as he spoke on, and his tale soon took a turn which left me no chance to grow drowsy.

“Yes—Riverside was built in 1816, and my father was born in 1828. He’d be over a century old now if he were alive, but he died young—so young I can just barely remember him. In ’64 that was—he was killed in the war, Seventh Louisiana Infantry C.S.A., for he went back to the old home to enlist. My grandfather was too old to fight, yet he lived on to be ninety-five, and helped my mother bring me up. A good bringing-up, too—I’ll give them credit. We always had strong traditions—high notions of honor—and my grandfather saw to it that I grew up the way de Russys have grown up, generation after generation, ever since the Crusades. We weren’t quite wiped out financially, but managed to get on very comfortable after the war. I went to a good school in Louisiana, and later to Princeton. Later on I was able to get the plantation on a fairly profitable basis—though you see what it’s come to now.

“My mother died when I was twenty, and my grandfather two years later. It was rather lonely after that; and in ’85 I married a distant cousin in New Orleans. Things might have been different if she’d lived, but she died when my son Denis was born. Then I had only Denis. I didn’t try marriage again, but gave all my time to the boy. He was like me—like all the de Russys—darkish and tall and thin, and with the devil of a temper. I gave him the same training my grandfather had give me, but he didn’t need much training when it came to points of honor. It was in him, I reckon. Never saw such high spirit—all I could do to keep him from running away to the Spanish War when he was eleven! Romantic young devil, too—full of high notions—you’d call ’em Victorian, now—no trouble at all to make him let the black wenches alone. I sent him to the same school I’d gone to, and to Princeton, too. He was Class of 1909.

“In the end he decided to be a doctor, and went a year to the Harvard Medical School. Then he hit on the idea of keeping to the old French tradition of the family, and argued me into sending him across to the Sorbonne. I did—and proudly enough, though I knew how lonely I’d be with him so far off. Would to God I hadn’t! I thought he was the safest kind

of boy to be in Paris. He had a room in the Rue St. Jacques—that's near the University in the 'Latin Quarter'—but according to his letters and his friends he didn't cut up with the gayer dogs at all. The people he knew were mostly young fellows from home—serious students and artists who thought more of their work than of striking attitudes and painting the town red.

“But of course there were lots of fellows who were on a sort of dividing line between serious studies and the devil. The aesthetes—the decadents, you know. Experiments in life and sensation—the Baudelaire kind of a chap. Naturally Denis ran up against a good many of these, and saw a good deal of their life. They had all sorts of crazy circles and cults—imitation devil-worship, fake Black Masses, and the like. Doubt if it did them much harm on the whole—probably most of 'em forgot all about it in a year or two. One of the deepest in this queer stuff was a fellow Denis had known at school—for that matter, whose father I'd known myself. Frank Marsh, of New Orleans. Disciple of Lafcadio Hearn and Gauguin and Van Gogh—regular epitome of the yellow 'nineties. Poor devil—he had the makings of a great artist, at that.

“Marsh was the oldest friend Denis had in Paris, so as a matter of course they saw a good deal of each other—to talk over old times at St. Clair academy, and all that. The boy wrote me a good deal about him, and I didn't see any especial harm when he spoke of the group of mystics Marsh ran with. It seems there was some cult of prehistoric Egyptian and Carthaginian magic having a rage among the Bohemian element on the left bank—some nonsensical thing that pretended to reach back to forgotten sources of hidden truth in lost African civilisations—the great Zimbabwe, the dead Atlantean cities in the Haggar region of the Sahara—and they had a lot of gibberish concerned with snakes and human hair. At least, I called it gibberish, then. Denis used to quote Marsh as saying odd things about the veiled facts behind the legend of Medusa's snaky locks—and behind the later Ptolemaic myth of Berenice, who offered up her hair to save her husband-brother, and had it set in the sky as the constellation Coma Berenices.

“I don't think this business made much impression on Denis until the night of the queer ritual at Marsh's rooms when he met the priestess. Most of the devotees of the cult were young fellows, but the head of it was a young woman who called herself 'Tanit-Isis'—letting it be known that her

real name—her name in this latest incarnation, as she put it—was Marceline Bedard. She claimed to be the left-handed daughter of Marquis de Chameaux, and seemed to have been both a petty artist and an artist’s model before adopting this more lucrative magical game. Someone said she had lived for a time in the West Indies—Martinique, I think—but she was very reticent about herself. Part of her pose was a great show of austerity and holiness, but I don’t think the more experienced students took that very seriously.

“Denis, though, was far from experienced, and wrote me fully ten pages of slush about the goddess he had discovered. If I’d only realised his simplicity I might have done something, but I never thought a puppy infatuation like could mean much. I felt absurdly sure that Denis’ touchy personal honour and family pride would always keep him out of the most serious complications.

“As time went, though, his letters began to make me nervous. He mentioned this Marceline more and more, and his friends less and less, and began talking about the ‘cruel and silly way’ they declined to introduce her to their mothers and sisters. He seems to have asked her no questions about herself, and I don’t doubt but that she filled him full of romantic legendry concerning her origin and divine revelations and the way people slighted her. At length I could see that Denis was altogether cutting his own crowd and spending the bulk of his time with his alluring priestess. At her especial request he never told the old crowd of their continual meetings; so nobody over there tried to break the affair up.

“I suppose she thought he was fabulously rich; for he had the air of a patrician, and people of a certain class think all aristocratic Americans are wealthy. In any case, she probably thought this a rare chance to contract a genuine right-handed alliance with a really eligible young man. By the time my nervousness burst into open advice, it was too late. The boy had lawfully married her, and wrote that he was dropping his studies and bringing the woman home to Riverside. He said she had made a great sacrifice and resigned her leadership of the magical cult, and that henceforward she would be merely a private gentlewoman—the future mistress of Riverside, and mother of de Russys to come.

“Well, sir, I took it the best way I could. I knew that sophisticated Continentals have different standards from our old American ones—and

anyway, I really knew nothing against the woman. A charlatan, perhaps, but why necessarily any worse? I suppose I tried to keep as naïve as possible about such things in those days, for the boy's sake. Clearly, there was nothing for a man of sense to do but let Denis alone so long as his new wife conformed to de Russy ways. Let her have a chance to prove herself—perhaps she wouldn't hurt the family as much as some might fear. So I didn't raise any objections or ask any penitence. The thing was done, and I stood ready to welcome the boy back, whatever he brought with him.

“They got here three weeks after the telegram telling of marriage. Marceline was beautiful—there was no denying that—and I could see how the boy might very well get foolish about her. She did have an air of breeding, and I think to this day she must have had some strains of good blood in her. She was apparently not much over twenty; of medium size, fairly slim, and as graceful as a tigress in posture and motion. Her complexion was a deep olive—like old ivory—and her eyes were large and very dark. She had small, classically regular features—though not quite clean-cut enough to suit my taste—and the most singular braid of jet black hair that I ever saw.

“I didn't wonder that she had dragged the subject of hair into her magical cult, for with that heavy profusion of it the idea must have occurred to her naturally. Coiled up, it made her look like some Oriental princess in a drawing of Aubrey Beardsley's. Hanging down her back, it came well below her knees and shone in the light as if it had possessed some separate, unholy vitality of its own. I would almost have thought of Medusa or Berenice myself—without having such things suggested to me—upon seeing and studying that hair.

“Sometimes I thought it moved slightly of itself, and tended to arrange itself in distinct ropes or strands, but this may have been sheer illusion. She braided it incessantly, and seemed to use some sort of preparation on it. I got the notion once—a curious, whimsical notion—that it was a living being which she had to feed in some strange way. All nonsense—but it added to my feeling of constraint about her and her hair.

“For I can't deny that I failed to like her wholly, no matter how hard I tried. I couldn't tell what the trouble was, but it was there. Something about her repelled me very subtly, and I could not help weaving morbid and macabre associations about everything connected with her. Her complexion

called up thoughts of Babylon, Atlantis, Lemuria, and the terrible forgotten dominations of an elder world; her eyes struck me sometimes as the eyes of some unholy forest creature or animal goddess too immeasurably ancient to be fully human; and her hair—that dense, exotic, overnourished growth of oily inkiness—made one shiver as a great black python might have done. There was no doubt but that she realised my involuntary attitude—though I tried to hide it, and she tried to hide the fact that she noticed it.

“Yet the boy’s infatuation lasted. He positively fawned on her, and overdid all the little gallantries of daily life to a sickening degree. She appeared to return the feeling, though I could see it took a conscious effort to make her duplicate his enthusiasms and extravagances. For one thing, I think she was piqued to learn we weren’t as wealthy as she had expected.

“It was a bad business all told. I could see that sad undercurrents were arising. Denis was half-hypnotised with puppy-love, and began to grow away from me as he felt my shrinking from his wife. This kind of thing went on for months, and I saw that I was losing my only son—the boy who had formed the centre of all my thoughts and acts for the past quarter century. I’ll own that I felt bitter about it—what father wouldn’t? And yet I could do nothing.

“Marceline seemed to be a good wife enough in those early months, and our friends received her without any quibbling or questioning. I was always nervous, though, about what some of the young fellows in Paris might write home to their relatives after the news of the marriage spread around. Despite the woman’s love of secrecy, it couldn’t remain hidden forever—indeed, Denis had written a few of his closest friends, in strict confidence, as soon as he was settled with her at Riverside.

“I got to staying alone in my room more and more, with my failing health as an excuse. It was about that time that my present spinal neuritis began to develop—which made the excuse a pretty good one. Denis didn’t seem to notice the trouble, or take any interest in me and my habits and affairs; and it hurt me to see how callous he was getting. I began to get sleepless, and often racked my brain in the night to try to find out what made my new daughter-in-law so repulsive and even dimly horrible to me. It surely wasn’t her old mystical nonsense, for she had left all the past behind her and never mentioned it once. She didn’t even do any painting, although I understood that she had once dabbled in art.

“Oddly, the only ones who seemed to share my uneasiness were the servants. The darkies around the house seemed very sullen in their attitude toward her, and in a few weeks all save the few who were strongly attached to our family had left. These few—old Scipio and his wife Sarah, the cook Delilah, and Mary, Scipio’s daughter—were as civil as possible; but plainly revealed that their new mistress commanded their duty rather than their affection. They stayed in their own remote part of the house as much as possible. McCabe, our white chauffeur, was insolently admiring rather than hostile; and another exception was a very old Zulu woman, said to have been a sort of leader in her small cabin as a kind of family pensioner. Old Sophonisba always shewed reverence whenever Marceline came near her, and one time I saw her kiss the ground where her mistress had walked. Blacks are superstitious animals, and I wondered whether Marceline had been talking any of her mystical nonsense to our hands in order to overcome their evident dislike.”

Chapter 3

“Well, that’s how we went on for nearly half a year. Then, in the summer of 1916, things began to happen. Toward the middle of June Denis got a note from his old friend Frank Marsh, telling of a sort of nervous breakdown which made him want to take a rest in the country. It was postmarked New Orleans—for Marsh had gone home from Paris when he felt the collapse coming on—and seemed a very plain though polite bid for an invitation from us. Marsh, of course, knew that Marceline was here; and asked very courteously after her. Denis was sorry to hear of his trouble and told him at once to come along for an indefinite visit.

“Marsh came—and I was shocked to notice how he had changed since I had seen him in his earlier days. He was a smallish, lightish fellow, with blue eyes and an undecided chin; and now I could see the effects of drink and I don’t know what else in his puffy eyelids, enlarged nose-pores, and heavy lines around the mouth. I reckon he had taken his dose of decadence pretty seriously, and set out to be as much of a Rimbaud, Baudelaire, or Lautreamont as he could. And yet he was delightful to talk to—for like all decadents he was exquisitely sensitive to the color and atmosphere and names of things; admirably, thoroughly alive, and with whole records of conscious experience in obscure, shadowy fields of living and feeling which

most of us pass over without knowing they exist. Poor young devil—if only his father had lived longer and taken him in hand! There was great stuff in the boy!

“I was glad of the visit, for I felt it would help to set up a normal atmosphere in the house again. And that’s what it really seemed to do at first; for as I said, Marsh was a delight to have around. He was as sincere and profound an artist as I ever saw in my life, and I certainly believe that nothing on earth mattered to him except the perception and expression of beauty. When he saw an exquisite thing, or was creating one, his eyes would dilate until the light irises were nearly out of sight—leaving two mystical black pits in that weak, delicate, chalk-like face; black pits opening on strange worlds which none of us could guess about.

“When he reached here, though, he didn’t have many chances to shew this tendency; for he had, as he told Denis, gone quite stale. It seems he had been very successful as an artist of a bizarre kind—like Fuseli or Goya or Sime or Clark Ashton Smith—but had suddenly become played out. The world of ordinary things around him had ceased to hold anything he could recognize as beauty—beauty, that is, of enough force and poignancy to arouse his creative faculty. He had often been this way before—all decadents are—but this time he could not invent any new, strange, or outré sensation or experience which would supply the needed illusion of fresh beauty or stimulatingly adventurous expectancy. He was like a Durtal or a des Esseintes at the most jaded point of his curious orbit.

“Marceline was away when Marsh arrived. She hadn’t been enthusiastic about his coming, and had refused to decline an invitation from some of our friends in St. Louis which came about that time for her and Denis. Denis, of course, stayed to receive his guest; but Marceline had gone on alone. It was the first time they had ever been separated, and I hoped the interval would help to dispel the daze that was making such a fool of the boy. Marceline shewed no hurry to get back, but seemed to me to prolong her absence as much as she could. Denis stood it better than one would have expected from such a doting husband, and seemed more like his old self as he talked over other days with Marsh and tried to cheer the listless aesthete up.

“It was Marsh who seemed most impatient to see the woman; perhaps because he thought her strange beauty, or some phase of the mysticism which had gone into her one-time magical cult, might help to reawaken his

interest in things and give him another start toward artistic creation. That there was no baser reason, I was absolutely certain from what I knew of Marsh's character. With all his weaknesses, he was a gentleman—and it had indeed relieved me when I first learned that he wanted to come here because his willingness to accept Denis' hospitality proved that there was no reason why he shouldn't.

“When, at last, Marceline did return, I could see that Marsh was tremendously affected. He did not attempt to make her talk of the bizarre thing which she had so definitely abandoned, but was unable to hide a powerful admiration which kept his eyes—now dilated in that curious way for the first time during his visit—riveted to her every moment she was in the room. She, however, seemed uneasy rather than pleased by his steady scrutiny—that is, she seemed so at first, though this feeling of hers wore away in a few days, and left the two on a basis of the most cordial and voluble congeniality. I could see Marsh studying her constantly when he thought no one was watching; and I wondered how long it would be that only the artist, and not the primitive man, would be aroused by her mysterious graces.

“Denis naturally felt some irritation at this turn of affairs; though he realised that his guest was a man of honour and that, as kindred mystics and aesthetes, Marceline and Marsh would naturally have things and interests to discuss in which a more or less conventional person could have no part. He didn't hold anything against anybody, but merely regretted that his own imagination was too limited and traditional to let him talk with Marceline as Marsh talked. At this stage of things I began to see more of the boy. With his wife otherwise busy, he had time to remember that he had a father—and a father who was ready to help him in any sort of perplexity or difficulty.

“We often sat together on the veranda watching Marsh and Marceline as they rode up or down the drive on horseback, or played tennis on the court that used to stretch south of the house. They talked mostly in French, which Marsh, though he hadn't more than a quarter-portion of French blood, handled more glibly than either Denis or I could speak it. Marceline's English, always academically correct, was rapidly improving in accent; but it was plain that she relished dropping back into her mother-tongue. As we looked at the congenial couple they made, I could see the boy's cheek and

throat muscles tighten—though he wasn't a whit less ideal a host to Marsh, or a whit less considerate husband to Marceline.

“All this was generally in the afternoon; for Marceline rose very late, had breakfast in bed, and took an immense amount of time preparing to come downstairs. I never knew of anyone so wrapped up in cosmetics, beauty exercises, hair-oils, unguents, and everything of that kind. It was in these morning hours that Denis and Marsh did their real visiting, and exchanged the close confidences which kept their friendship up despite the strain that jealousy imposed.

“Well, it was in one of those morning talks on the veranda that Marsh made the proposition which brought on the end. I was laid up with some of my neuritis, but had managed to get downstairs and stretch out on the front parlour sofa near the long window. Denis and Marsh were just outside; so I couldn't help hearing all they said. They had been talking about art, and the curious, capricious elements needed to jolt an artist into producing the real article, when Marsh suddenly swerved from abstractions to the personal application he must have had in mind from the start.

“‘I suppose,’ he was saying, ‘that nobody can tell just what it is in some scenes or objects that makes them aesthetic stimuli for certain individuals. Basically, of course, it must have some reference to each man's background of stored-up mental associations, for no two people have the same scale of sensitiveness and responses. We decadents are artists for whom all ordinary things have ceased to have any emotional or imaginative significance, but no one of us responds in the same way to exactly the same extraordinary. Now take me, for instance...’”

“He paused and resumed.

“‘I know, Denny, that I can say these things to you because you such a preternaturally unspoiled mind—clean, fine, direct, objective, and all that. You won't misunderstand as an oversubtilised, effete man of the world might.’”

“He paused once more.

“‘The fact is, I think I know what's needed to set my imagination working again. I've had a dim idea of it ever since we were in Paris, but I'm sure now. It's Marceline, old chap—that face and that hair, and the train of shadowy images they bring up. Not merely visible beauty—though God knows there's enough of that—but something peculiar and individualised,

that can't exactly be explained. Do you know, in the last few days I've felt the existence of such a stimulus so keenly that I honestly think I could outdo myself—break into the real masterpiece class if I could get ahold of paint and canvas at just the time when her face and hair set my fancy stirring and weaving. There's something weird and otherworldly about it—something joined up with the dim ancient thing Marceline represents. I don't know how much she's told you about that side of her, but I can assure you there's plenty of it. She has some marvellous links with the outside...'

"Some change in Denis' expression must have halted the speaker here, for there was a considerable spell of silence before the words went on. I was utterly taken aback, for I'd expected no such overt development like this; and I wondered what my son could be thinking. My heart began to pound violently, and I strained my ears in the frankest of intentional eavesdropping. Then Marsh resumed.

"Of course you're jealous—I know how a speech like mine must sound—but I can swear to you that you needn't be.'

"Denis did not answer, and Marsh went on.

"To tell the truth, I could never be in love with Marceline—I couldn't even be a cordial friend of hers in the warmest sense. Why, damn it all, I felt like a hypocrite talking with her these days as I've been doing.

"The case simply is, that one of her phase of her half hypnotises me in a certain way—a very strange, fantastic, and dimly terrible way—just as another phase half hypnotises you in a much more normal way. I see something in her—or to be psychologically exact, something through her or beyond her—that you didn't see at all. Something that brings up a vast pageantry of shapes from forgotten abysses, and makes me want to paint incredible things whose outlines vanish the instant I try to envisage them clearly. Don't mistake, Denny, your wife is a magnificent being, a splendid focus of cosmic forces who has a right to be called divine if anything on earth has!'

"I felt a clearing of the situation at this point, for the abstract strangeness of Marsh's statement, plus the flattery he was now heaping on Marceline, could not fail to disarm and mollify one as fondly proud of his consort as Denis always was. Marsh evidently caught the change himself, for there was more confidence in his tone as he continued.

“I must paint her, Denny—must paint that hair—and you won’t regret. There’s something more than mortal about that hair—something more than beautiful—”

“He paused, and I wondered what Denis could be thinking. I wondered, indeed, what I was really thinking myself. Was Marsh’s interest actually that of the artist alone, or was he merely infatuated as Denis had been? I had thought, in their schooldays, that he had envied my boy; and I dimly felt that it might be the same now. On the other hand, something in that talk of artistic stimulus had rung amazingly true; so that the more I pondered, the more I was inclined to take the stuff at face value. Denis seemed to do so, too, for although I could not catch his low-spoken reply, I could tell by the effect it produced that it must have been affirmative.

“There was a sound of someone slapping another on the back, and then a grateful speech from Marsh that I was long to remember.

“That’s great, Denny, and just as I told you, you’ll never regret it. In a sense, I’m half doing it for you. You’ll be a different man when you see it. I’ll put you back where you used to be—give you a waking-up and a sort of salvation—but you can’t see what I mean as yet. Just remember old friendship, and don’t get the idea that I’m not the same old bird!”

“I rose perplexedly as I saw the two stroll off across the lawn, arm in arm, and smoking in unison. What could Marsh have meant by his strange and almost ominous reassurance? The more my fears were quieted in one direction, the more they were aroused in another. Look at it any way I could, it seemed to be a rather bad business.

“But matters got started just the same. Denis fixed up an attic room with skylights, and Marsh sent for all sorts of painting equipment. Everyone was rather excited about the new venture, and I was at least glad that something was on foot to break the brooding tension. Soon the sittings began, and we all took them quite seriously—for we could see that Marsh regarded them as important artistic events. Denny and I used to go quietly about the house as though something sacred were occurring, and we knew that it was sacred as far as Marsh was concerned.

“With Marceline, though, it was a different matter, as I began to see at once. Whatever Marsh’s reactions to the sittings may have been, hers were painfully obvious. Every possible way she betrayed a frank and commonplace infatuation for the artist, and would repulse Denis’ marks of

affection whenever she dared. Oddly, I noticed this more vividly than Denis himself, and tried to devise some plan for keeping the boy's mind easy until the matter could be straightened out. There was no use in having him excited about it if it could be helped.

"In the end I decided that Denis had better be away while the disagreeable situation existed. I could represent his interests well enough at this end, and sooner or later Marsh would finish the picture and go. My view of Marsh's honour was such that I did not look for any worse developments. When the matter had blown over, and Marceline had forgotten about her new infatuation, it would be time enough to have Denis on hand again.

"So I wrote a long letter to my marketing and financial agent in New York, and cooked up a plan to have the boy summoned there for an indefinite time. I had the agent write him that our affairs absolutely required one of us to go East, and of course my illness made it clear that I could not be the one. It was arranged that when Denis got to New York he would find enough plausible matters to keep him busy as long as I thought he ought to be away.

"The plan worked perfectly, and Denis started for New York without the least suspicion; Marceline and Marsh going with him in the car to Cape Girardeau, where he caught the afternoon train to St. Louis. They returned after dark, and as McCabe drove the car back to the stables I could hear them talking on the veranda—in those same chairs near the long parlour window where Marsh and Denis had sat when I overheard them talk about the portrait. This time I resolved to do some intentional eavesdropping, so quietly went down to the front parlour and stretched out on the sofa near the window.

"At first I could not hear anything but very shortly there came the sound of a chair being shifted, followed by a short, sharp breath and a sort of inarticulately hurt exclamation from Marceline. Then I heard Marsh speaking in a strained, almost formal voice.

"I'd enjoy working tonight if you aren't too tired."

"Marceline's reply was in the same hurt tone which had marked her exclamation. She used English as he had done.

"Oh, Frank, is that really all you care about? Forever working! Can't we just sit out here in this glorious moonlight?"

“He answered impatiently, his voice shewing a certain contempt beneath the dominant quality of artistic enthusiasm.

“Moonlight! Good God, what cheap sentimentality! For a supposedly sophisticated person you surely do hang on to some of the crudest claptrap that ever escaped from the dime novels! With art at your elbow, you have to think of the moon—cheap as a spotlight at the varieties! Or perhaps it makes you think of the Roodmas dance around the stone pillars at Auteiul. Hell, how you used to make those goggle-eyed yaps stare! But not—I suppose you’ve dropped all that now. No more Atlantean magic or hair-snake rites for Madame de Russy! I’m the only one to remember the old things—the things that came down through the temples of Tanit and echoed on the ramparts of Zimbabwe. But I won’t be cheated of that remembrance—all that is weaving itself into the thing on my canvas—the thing that is going to capture wonder and crystallise the secrets of 75,000 years...’

“Marceline interrupted in a voice full of mixed emotions.

“It’s you who are cheaply sentimental now! You know well that the old things had better be let alone. All of you had better watch out if ever I chant the old rites or try to call up what lies hidden in Yuggoth, Zimbabwe, and R’lyeh. I thought you had more sense!’

“You lack logic. You want me to be interested in this precious painting of yours, yet you never let me see what you’re doing. Always that black cloth over it! It’s of me—I shouldn’t think it would matter if I saw it...’

“Marsh was interrupting this time, his voice curiously hard and strained.

“No. Not now. You’ll see it in due course of time. You say it’s of you—yes, it’s that, but it’s more. If you knew, you mightn’t be so impatient. Poor Denis! My God, it’s a shame!’

“My throat was suddenly dry as the words rose to an almost febrile pitch. What could Marsh mean? Suddenly I saw that he had stopped and was entering the house alone. I heard the front door slam, and listened as his footsteps ascended the stairs. Outside on the veranda I could still hear Marceline’s heavy, angry breathing. I crept away sick at heart, feeling that there were grave things to ferret out before I could safely let Denis come back.

“After that evening the tension around the place was even worse than before. Marceline had always lived on flattery and fawning and the shock of those few blunt words from Marsh was too much for her temperament.

There was no living in the house with her anymore, for with poor Denis gone she took out her abusiveness on everybody. When she could find no one indoors to quarrel with she would go out to Sophonisba's cabin and spend hours talking with the queer old Zulu woman. Aunt Sophy was the only person who would fawn abjectly enough to suit her, and when I tried once to overhear their conversation I found Marceline whispering about 'elder secrets' and 'unknown Kadath' while the negress rocked to and fro in her chair, making inarticulate sounds of reverence and admiration every now and then.

"But nothing could break her dog-like infatuation for Marsh. She would talk bitterly and sullenly to him, yet was getting more and more obedient to his wishes. It was very convenient for him, since he now became able to make her pose for the picture whenever he felt like painting. He tried to shew gratitude for this willingness, but I thought I could detect a kind of contempt or even loathing beneath his careful politeness. For my part, I frankly hated Marceline! There was no use in calling my attitude anything as mild as dislike these days. Certainly, I was glad Denis was away. His letters, not nearly so frequent as I wished, shewed signs of strain and worry.

"As the middle of August went by I gathered from Marsh's remarks that the portrait was nearly done. His mood seemed increasingly sardonic, though Marceline's temper improved a bit as the prospect of seeing the thing tickled her vanity. I can still recall the day when Marsh said he'd have everything finished within a week. Marceline brightened up perceptibly, though not without a venomous look at me. It seemed as if her coiled hair visibly tightened around her head.

"'I'm to be the first to see it!' she snapped. Then, smiling at Marsh, she said, 'And if I don't like it I shall slash it to pieces!'

"Marsh's face took on the most curious look I have ever seen it wear as he answered her.

"'I can't vouch for your taste, Marceline, but I swear it will be magnificent! Not that I want to take much credit—art creates itself—and this thing had to be done. Just wait!' "During the next few days I felt a queer sense of foreboding, as if the completion of the picture meant a kind of catastrophe instead of a relief. Denis, too, had not written me, and my agent in New York said he was planning some trip to the country. I wondered what the outcome of the whole thing would be. What a queer

mixture of elements—Marsh and Marceline, Denis and I! How would all these ultimately react on one another? When my fears grew too great I tried to lay them all to my infirmity, but that explanation never quite satisfied me.”

Chapter 4

“Well, the thing exploded on Tuesday, the twenty-sixth of August. I had risen at my usual time and had breakfast, but was not good for much because of the pain in my spine. It had been troubling me badly of late, and forcing me to take opiates when it got too unbearable; nobody else was downstairs except the servants, though I could hear Marceline moving about in her room. Marsh slept in the attic next his studio, and had begun to keep such late hours that he was seldom up till noon. About ten o’clock the pain got the better of me, so that I took a double dose of my opiate and lay down on the parlour sofa. The last I heard was Marceline’s pacing overhead. Poor creature—if I had known! She must have been walking before the long mirror admiring herself. That was like her. Vain from start to finish—revelling in her own beauty, just as she revelled in all the little luxuries Denis was able to give her.

“I didn’t wake up till near sunset, and knew instantly how long I had slept from the golden light and long shadows outside the long window. Nobody was about, and a sort of unnatural stillness seemed to be hovering over everything. From afar, though, I thought I could sense a faint howling, wild and intermittent, whose quality had a slight but baffling familiarity about it. I’m not much for psychic premonitions, but I was frightfully uneasy from the start. There had been dreams—even worse than the ones I had been dreaming in the weeks before—and this time they seemed hideously linked to some black and festering reality. The whole place had a poisonous air. Afterward I reflected that certain sounds must have filtered through into my unconscious brain during those hours of drugged sleep. My pain, though, was very much eased; and I rose and walked without difficulty.

“Soon enough I began to see that something was wrong. Marsh and Marceline might have been riding, but someone ought to have been getting dinner in the kitchen. Instead, there was only silence, except for that faint, distant howl or wail; and nobody answered when I pulled the old-fashioned

bell-cord to summon Scipio. Then, chancing to look up, I saw the spreading stain on the ceiling—the bright red stain, that must have come through the floor of Marceline’s room.

“In an instant I forgot my crippled back and hurried upstairs to find out the worst. Everything under the sun raced through my mind as I struggled with the dampness-warped door of that silent chamber, and most hideous of all was a terrible sense of malign fulfilment and fatal expectedness. I had, it struck me, known all along that nameless horrors were gathering; that something profoundly and cosmically evil had gained a foot-hold under my roof from which only blood and tragedy could result.

“The door gave at last, and I stumbled into the large room beyond—all dim from the branches of the great trees outside the windows. For a moment I could do nothing but flinch at the faint evil odour that immediately struck my nostrils. Then, turning on the electric light and glancing around, I glimpsed a nameless blasphemy on the yellow and blue rug.

“It lay face down in a great pool of dark, thickened blood, and had the gory print of a shod human foot in the middle of its naked back. Blood was spattered everywhere—on the walls, furniture, and floor. My knees gave way as I took in the sight, so that I had to stumble to a chair and slump down. The thing had obviously been a human being, though its identity was not easy to establish at first; since it was without clothes, and had most of its hair hacked and torn from the scalp in a very crude way. It was of a deep ivory colour, and I knew that it must have been Marceline. The shoe-print on the back made the thing seem all the more hellish. I could not even picture the strange, loathsome tragedy which must have taken place while I slept in the room below. When I raised my hand to wipe my dripping forehead I saw that my fingers were sticky with blood. I shuddered, then realised that it must have come from the knob of the door which the unknown murderer had forced shut behind him as he left. He had taken his weapon with him, it seemed, for no instrument of death was visible here.

“As I studied the floor I saw that a line of sticky footprints like the one on the body led away from the horror to the door. There was another blood-trail, too, and of a less easily explainable kind; a broadish, continuous line, as if marking the path of some huge snake. At first I concluded it must be due to something the murderer had dragged after him. Then, noting the way

some of the footprints seemed to be superimposed on it, I was forced to believe that it could have been there when the murderer left. But what crawling entity could have been in that room with the victim and her assassin, leaving before the killer when the deed was done? As I asked myself this question I thought I heard fresh bursts of that faint, distant wailing.

“Finally, rousing myself from a lethargy of horror, I got on my feet again and began following the footprints. Who the murderer was, I could not even faintly guess, nor could I try to explain the absence of the servants. I vaguely felt that I ought to go up to Marsh’s attic quarters, but before I had fully formulated the idea I saw that the bloody trail was indeed taking me there. Was he himself the murderer? Had he gone mad under the strain of the morbid situation and suddenly run amok?

“In the attic corridor the trail became faint, the prints almost ceasing as they merged with the dark carpet. I could still, however, discern the strange single path of the entity who had gone first; and this led straight to the closed door of Marsh’s studio, disappearing beneath it at a point about half way from side to side. Evidently it had crossed the threshold at a time when the door was wide open.

“Sick at heart, I tried the knob and found the door unlocked. Opening it, I paused in the waning north light to see what fresh nightmare might be awaiting me. There was certainly something human on the floor, and I reached for the switch to turn on the chandelier.

“But as the light flashed up my gaze left the floor and its horror—that was Marsh, poor devil—to fix itself frantically and incredulously upon the living thing that cowered and stared in the open doorway leading to Marsh’s bedroom. It was a tousled, wild-eyed thing, crusted with dried blood and carrying in its hand a wicked machete which had been one of the ornaments of the studio wall. Yet even in that awful moment I recognised it as one whom I had thought more than a thousand miles away. It was my own boy Denis—or the maddened wreck which had once been Denis.

“The sight of me seemed to bring back a trifle of sanity—or at least of memory—in the poor boy. He straightened up and began to toss his head about as if trying to shake free from some enveloping influence. I could not speak a word, but moved my lips in an effort to get back my voice. My eyes wandered for a moment to the figure on the floor in front of the heavily

draped easel—the figure toward which the strange blood-trail led, and which seemed to be tangled in the coils of some dark, ropy object. The shifting of my glance apparently produced some impression in the twisted brain of the boy, for suddenly he began to mutter in a hoarse whisper whose purport I was soon able to catch.

“I had to exterminate her—she was the devil—the summit and high-priestess of all evil—the spawn of the pit—Marsh knew, and tried to warn me. Good old Frank—I didn’t kill him, though I was ready to before I realised. But I went down there and killed her—then that cursed hair—’

“I listened in horror as Denis choked, paused, and began again.

““You didn’t know—her letters got queer and I knew she was in love with Marsh. Then she nearly stopped writing. He never mentioned her—I felt something was wrong, and thought I ought to come back and find out. Couldn’t tell you—your manner would have given it away. Wanted to surprise them. Got here about noon today—came in a cab and sent the house-servants all off—let the field hands alone, for their cabins are all out of earshot. Told McCabe to get me some things in Cape Girardeau and not bother to come back until tomorrow. Had all the negroes take the old car and let Mary drive them to Bend Village for a vacation—told ’em we were all going on some sort of outing and wouldn’t need help. Said they’d better stay all night with Uncle Scip’s cousin, who keeps that negro boarding house.’

“Denis was getting very incoherent now, and I strained my ears to grasp every word. Again I thought I heard that wild, far-off wail, but the story had first place for the present.

““Saw you sleeping in the parlour, and took a chance you wouldn’t wake up. Then went upstairs on the quiet to hunt up Marsh and...that woman!’

“The boy shuddered as he avoided pronouncing Marceline’s name. At the same time I saw his eyes dilate in unison with a bursting of the distant crying, whose vague familiarity had now become very great.

““She was not in her room, so I went up to the studio. Door was shut, and I could hear voices inside. Didn’t knock—just burst in and found her posing for the picture. Nude, but with the hellish hair all draped around her. And making all sorts of sheep’s eyes at Marsh. He had the easel turned half away from the door, so I couldn’t see the picture. Both of them were pretty

well jolted when I shewed up, and Marsh dropped his brush. I was in a rage and told him he'd have to shew me the portrait, but he got calmer every minute. Told me it wasn't quite done, but would be in a day or two—said I could see it then—she—hadn't seen it.

““But that didn't go with me. I stepped up, and he dropped a velvet curtain over the thing before I could see it. He was ready to fight before letting me see it, but that—that—she—stepped up and sided with me. Said we ought to see it. Frank got horrible worked up, and gave me a punch when I tried to get at the curtain. I punched back and seemed to have knocked him out. Then I was almost knocked out myself by the shriek that—that creature—gave. She'd drawn aside the hangings herself, and caught a look at what Marsh had been painting. I wheeled around and saw her rushing like mad out of the room—then I saw the picture.’

“Madness flared up in the boy's eyes again as he got to this place, and I thought for a minute he was going to spring at me with his machete. But after a pause he partly steadied himself.

““Oh, God—that thing! Don't ever look at it! Burn it with the hangings around it and throw the ashes into the river! Marsh knew—and was warning me. He knew what it was—what that woman—that leopardess, or gorgon, or lamia, or whatever she was—actually represented. He'd tried to hint to me ever since I met her in his Paris studio, but it couldn't be told in words. I thought they all wronged her when they whispered horrors about her—she had me hypnotised so that I couldn't believe the plain facts—but this picture has caught the whole secret—the whole monstrous background!

““God, but Frank is an artist! That thing is the greatest piece any living soul has produced since Rembrandt! It's a crime to burn it—but it would be a greater crime to let it exist—just as it would have been an abhorrent sin to let—that she-daemon—exist any longer. The minute I saw it I understood what—she—was, and what part she played in the frightful secret that has come down from the days of Cthulhu and the Elder Ones—the secret that was nearly wiped out when Atlantis sank, but that kept half alive in hidden traditions and allegorical myths and furtive, midnight cult-practices. For you know she was the real thing. It wasn't any fake. It would have been merciful if it had been a fake. It was the old, hideous shadow that philosophers never dared mention—the thing hinted at in the *Necronomicon* and symbolised in the Easter Island colossi.

“She thought we couldn’t see through—that the false front would hold till we had bartered away our immortal souls. And she was half right—she’d have got me in the end. She was only—waiting. But Frank—good old Frank—was too much for me. *He knew what it all meant, and painted it.* I don’t wonder she shrieked and ran off when she saw it. It wasn’t quite done, but God knows *enough was there.*”

“Then I knew I’d got to kill her—kill her, and everything connected with her. It was a taint that wholesome human blood couldn’t bear. There was something else, too—but you’ll never know that if you burn the picture without looking. I staggered down to her room with this machete that I got off the wall here, leaving Frank still knocked out. He was breathing, though, and I knew and thanked heaven I hadn’t killed him.

“I found her in front of the mirror braiding that accursed hair. She turned on me like a wild beast, and began spitting out her hatred of Marsh. The fact that she’d been in love with him—and I knew she had—only made it worse. For a minute I couldn’t move, and she came within an ace of completely hypnotising me. Then I thought of the picture, and the spell broke. She saw the breaking in my eyes, and must have noticed the machete, too. I never saw anything give such a wild jungle beast look as she did then. She sprang for me with claws out like a leopard’s, but I was too quick. I swung the machete, and it was all over.’”

“Denis had to stop again, and I saw the perspiration running down his forehead through the spattered blood. But in a moment he hoarsely resumed.

“I said it was all over—but God! Some of it had only just begun! I felt I had fought the legions of Satan, and put my foot on the back of the thing I had annihilated. *Then I saw that blasphemous braid of coarse black hair begin to twist and squirm of itself.*”

“I might have known it. It was all in the old tales. That damnable hair had a life of its own, that couldn’t be ended by killing the creature itself. I knew I’d have to burn it, so I started to hack it off with the machete. God, but it was devilish work! Tough—like iron wires—but I managed to do it. And it was loathsome the way the big braid writhed and struggled in my grasp.

“About the time I had the last strand cut or pulled off I heard that eldritch wailing from behind the house. You know—it’s still going off and

on. I don't know what it is, but it must be something springing from this hellish business. It half seems like something I ought to know but can't quite place. It got my nerves the first time I heard it, and I dropped the severed braid in my fright. Then, I got a worse fright—for in another second the braid had turned on me and began to strike venomously with one of its ends which had knotted itself up like a sort of grotesque head. I struck out with the machete, and it turned away. Then, when I had my breath again, I saw that the monstrous thing was crawling along the floor by itself like a great black snake. I couldn't do anything for a while, but when it vanished through the door I managed to pull myself together and stumble after it. I could follow the broad, bloody trail, and I saw it led upstairs. It brought me here—and may heaven curse me if I didn't see it through the doorway, striking at poor dazed Marsh like a maddened rattler as it had struck at me, finally coiling around him as a python would. He had begun to come to, but that abominable serpent got him before he was on his feet. I knew that all of the woman's hatred was behind it, but I hadn't the power to pull it off. I tried, but it was too much for me. Even the machete was no good—I couldn't swing it freely or it would have slashed Frank to pieces. So I saw those monstrous coils tighten—saw poor Frank crushed to death before my eyes—and all the time that awful faint howling came from somewhere beyond the fields.

“That's all. I pulled the velvet cloth over the picture and hope it'll never be lifted. The thing must be burnt. I couldn't pry the coils off poor, dead Frank—they cling to him like a leach, and seem to have lost their motion altogether. It's as if that snaky rope of hair has a kind of perverse fondness for the man it killed—it's clinging to him—embracing him. You'll have to burn poor Frank with it—but for God's sake don't forget to see it in ashes. That and the picture. They must both go. The safety of the world demands that they go.

“Denis might have whispered more, but a fresh burst of distant wailing cut us short. For the first time we knew what it was, for a westerly veering wind brought articulate words at last. We ought to have known long before, since sounds much like it had often come from the same source. It was wrinkled Sophonisba, the ancient Zulu witch-woman who had fawned on Marceline, keening from her cabin in a way which crowned the horrors of this nightmare tragedy. We could both hear some of the things she howled,

and knew that secret and primordial bonds linked this savage sorceress with that other inheritor of elder secrets who had just been extirpated. Some of the words she used betrayed her closeness to daemonic and palaeogean traditions.

“Iä! Iä! Shub-Niggurath! Ya-R’lyeh! N’gagi n’bulu bwana n’lolo! Ya, yo, poor Missy Tanit, poor Missy Isis! Marse Clooloo, come up outen de water an’ git yo chile—she done daid! She done daid! De hair ain’ got no missus no mo’, Marse Clooloo. Ol’ Sophy, she know! Ol’ Sophy, she done got de black stone outen Big Zimbabwe in ol’ Affriky! Ol’ Sophy, she done dance in de moonshine roun’ de crocodile-stone befo’ de N’bangu cotch her and sell her to de ship folks! No mo’ Tanit! No mo’ Isis! No mo’ witch-woman to keep de fire a-goin’ in de big stone place! Ya, yo! *N’gagi n’bulu bwana n’lolo! Iä! Shub-Niggurath!* She daid! Ol’ Sophy know!”

“That wasn’t the end of the wailing, but it was all I could pay attention to. The expression on my boy’s face shewed that it had reminded him of something frightful, and the tightening of his hand on the machete boded no good. I knew he was desperate, and sprang to disarm him before he could do anything more.

“But I was too late. An old man with a bad spine doesn’t count for much physically. There was a terrible struggle, but he had done for himself before many seconds were over. I’m not sure yet but that he tried to kill me, too. His last panting words were something about the need of wiping out everything that had been connected with Marceline, either by blood or marriage.”

Chapter 5

“I wonder to this day that I didn’t go stark mad in that instant—or in the moments and hours afterward. In front of me was the slain body of my boy—the only human being I had to cherish—and ten feet away, in front of that shrouded easel, was the body of his best friend, with a nameless coil of horror wound around it. Below was the scalped corpse of that she-monster, about whom I was half-ready to believe anything. I was too dazed to analyse the probability of the hair story—and even if I had not been, that dismal howling coming from Aunt Sophy’s cabin would have been enough to quiet doubt for the nonce.

“If I’d been wise, I’d have done just what poor Denis told me to—burned the picture and the body-grasping hair at once and without curiosity—but I was too shaken to be wise. I suppose I muttered foolish things over my boy—and then I remembered that the night was wearing on and that the servants would be back in the morning. It was plain that a matter like this could never be explained, and I knew that I must cover things up and invent a story.

“That coil of hair around Marsh was a monstrous thing. As I poked at it with a sword which I took from the wall I almost thought I felt it tighten its grip on the dead man. I didn’t dare touch it—and the longer I looked at it the more horrible things I noticed about it. One thing gave me a start. I won’t mention it—but it partly explained the need for feeding the hair with queer oils as Marceline had always done.

“In the end I decided to bury all three bodies in the cellar—with quicklime, which I knew we had in the storehouse. It was a night of hellish work. I dug three graves—my boy’s a long way from the other two, for I didn’t want him to be near either the woman’s body or her hair. I was sorry I couldn’t get the coil from around poor Marsh. It was terrible work getting them all down to the cellar. I used blankets in carting the woman and the poor devil with the coil around him. Then I had to get two barrels of lime from the storehouse. God must have given me strength, for I not only moved them but filled all three graves without a hitch.

“Some of the lime I made into whitewash. I had to take a stepladder and fix over the parlour ceiling where the blood had oozed through. And I burned nearly everything in Marceline’s room, scrubbing the walls and floor and heavy furniture. I washed up the attic studio, too, and the trail and footprints that led there. And all the time I could hear old Sophy’s wailing in the distance. The devil must have been in that creature to let her voice go on like that. But she always was howling queer things. That’s why the blacks didn’t get scared or curious that night. I locked the studio door and took the key to my room. Then I burned all my stained clothes in the fireplace. By dawn the whole house looked quite normal so far as any casual eye could tell. I hadn’t dared touch the covered easel, but meant to attend to that later.

“Well, the servants came back the next day, and I told them all the young folks had gone to St. Louis. None of the field hands seemed to have

seen or heard anything, and old Sophonisba's wailing had stopped at the instant of sunrise. She was like a sphinx after that, and never let out a word of what had been on her brooding brain the day and night before.

"Later on I pretended that Denis and Marsh and Marceline had gone back to Paris and had a certain discreet agency mail me letters from there—letters I had fixed up in forged handwriting. It took a good deal of deceit and reticence in several things to various friends, and I knew people have secretly suspected me of holding something back. I had the deaths of Marsh and Denis reported during the war, and later said Marceline had entered a convent. Fortunately Marsh was an orphan whose eccentric ways had alienated him from his people in Louisiana. Things might have been patched up a good deal better for me if I had had the sense to burn the picture, sell the plantation, and give up trying to manage things with a shaken and overstrained mind. You see what my folly has brought me to. Failing crops—hands discharged one by one—place falling apart to ruin—and myself a hermit and a target for dozens of queer countryside stories. Nobody will come around here after dark anymore—or any other time if it can be helped. That's why I knew you must be a stranger.

"And why do I stay here? I can't wholly tell you that. It's bound up too closely with things at the very rim of sane reality. It wouldn't have been so, perhaps, if I hadn't looked at the picture. I ought to have done as poor Denis told me. I honestly meant to burn it when I went up to that locked studio a week after the horror, but I looked first—and that changed everything.

"No—there's no use telling what I saw. You can, in a way, see for yourself presently; though time and dampness have done their work. I don't think it can hurt you if you want to take a look, but it was different with me. I knew too much of what it all meant.

"Denis had been right—it was the greatest triumph of human art since Rembrandt, even though still unfinished. I grasped that at the start, and knew that poor Marsh had justified his decadent philosophy. He was to painting what Baudelaire was to poetry—and Marceline was the key that had unlocked his inmost stronghold of genius.

"The thing almost stunned me when I pulled aside the hangings—stunned me before I half knew what the whole thing was. You know, it's only partly a portrait. Marsh had been pretty literal when he hinted that he

wasn't painting Marceline alone, but what he saw through her and beyond her.

"Of course she was in it—was the key to it, in a sense—but her figure only formed one point in a vast composition. She was nude except for that hideous web of hair spun around her, and was half-seated, half-reclining on a sort of bench or divan, carved in patterns unlike those of any known decorative tradition. There was a monstrously shaped goblet in one hand, from which was spilling fluid whose colour I haven't been able to place or classify to this day—I don't know where Marsh even got the pigments.

"The figure and the divan were in the left-hand foreground of the strangest sort of scene I ever saw in my life. I think there was a faint suggestion of its all being a kind of emanation from the woman's brain, yet there was also a directly opposite suggestion—as if she were just an evil image or hallucination conjured up by the scene itself.

"I can't tell you know whether it's an exterior or an interior—whether those hellish Cyclopean vaultings are seen from the outside or the inside, or whether they are indeed carven stone and not merely a morbid fungous arborescence. The geometry of the whole thing is crazy—one gets the acute and obtuse angles all mixed up.

"And God! The shapes of nightmare that float around in that perpetual daemon twilight! The blasphemies that lurk and leer and hold a Witches' Sabbath with that woman as a high-priestess! The black shaggy entities that are not quite goats—the crocodile-headed beast with three legs and a dorsal row of tentacles—and the flat-nosed Ægipans dancing in a pattern that Egypt's priests knew and called accursed!

"But the scene wasn't Egypt—it was *behind* Egypt; behind even Atlantis; behind fabled Mu, and mythwhispered Lemuria. It was the ultimate fountainhead of all horror on this earth, and the symbolism shewed only too clearly how integral a part of it Marceline was. I think it must be the unmentionable R'lyeh, that was not built by any creatures of this planet—the thing Marsh and Denis used to talk about in the shadows with hushed voices. In the picture it appears that the whole scene is deep under water—though everybody seems to be breathing freely.

"Well—I couldn't do anything but look and shudder, and finally I saw that Marceline was watching me craftily out of those monstrous, dilated eyes on the canvas. It was no mere superstition—Marsh had actually caught

something of her horrible vitality in his symphonies of line and color, so that she still brooded and hated, just as if most of her weren't down in the cellar under quicklime. *And it was worst of all when some of those Hecate-born snaky strands of hair began to lift themselves up from the surface and grope out into the room toward me.*

“Then it was that I knew the last final horror, and realised I was a guardian and a prisoner forever. She was the thing from which the first dim legends of Medusa and the Gorgons had sprung, and something in my shaken will had been captured and turned to stone at last. Never again would I be safe from those coiling snaky strands—the strands in the picture, and those that lay brooding under the lime near the wine casks. All too late I recalled the tales of the virtual indestructibility, even through centuries of burial, of the hair of the dead.

“My life since has been nothing but horror and slavery. Always there had lurked the fear of what broods down in the cellar. In less than a month the blacks began whispering about the great black snake that crawled around near the wine casks after dark, and about the curious way its trail would lead to another spot six feet away. Finally I had to move everything to another part of the cellar, for not a darky could be induced to go near the place where the snake was seen.

“Then the field hands began talking about the black snake that visited old Sophonisba's cabin every night after midnight. One of them shewed me its trail—and not long afterward I found out that Aunt Sophy herself had begun to pay strange visits to the cellar of the big house, lingering and muttering for hours in the very spot where none of the other blacks would go near. God, but I was glad when that old witch died! I honestly believe she had been a priestess of some ancient and terrible tradition back in Africa. She must have lived to be almost a hundred and fifty years old.

“Sometimes I think I hear something gliding around the house at night. There will be a queer noise on the stairs, where the boards are loose, and the latch of my room will rattle as if with an inward pressure. I always keep my door locked, of course. Then there are certain mornings when I seem to catch a sickish musty odour in the corridors, and notice a faint, ropy trail through the dust of the floors. I know I must guard the hair in the picture, for if anything were to happen to it, there are entities in this house which would take a sure and terrible revenge. I don't even dare to die—for life and

death are all one to those in the clutch of what came out of R'lyeh. Something would be on hand to punish my neglect. Medusa's coil has got me, and it will always be the same. Never mix up with secret and ultimate horror, young man, if you value your immortal soul."

Chapter 6

As the old man finished his story I saw that the small lamp had long since burned dry, and that the large one was nearly empty. It must, I knew, be near dawn, and my ears told me that the storm was over. The tale had held me in a half-daze, and I almost feared to glance at the door lest it reveal an inward pressure from some unnamable source. It would be hard to say which had the greatest hold on me—stark horror, incredulity, or a kind of morbid fantastic curiosity. I was wholly beyond speech and had to wait for my strange host to break the spell.

"Do you want to see—the thing?"

His voice was low and hesitant, and I saw he was tremendously in earnest. Of my various emotions, curiosity gained the upper hand; and I nodded silently. He rose, lighting a candle on a nearby table and holding it high before him as he opened the door.

"Come with me—upstairs."

I dreaded to brave those musty corridors again, but fascination downed all my qualms. The boards creaked beneath our feet, and I trembled once when I thought I saw a faint, rope-like line trace in the dust near the staircase.

The steps of the attic were noisy and rickety, with several of the treads missing. I was just glad of the need of looking sharply to my footing, for it gave me an excuse not to glance about. The attic corridor was pitch-black and heavily cobwebbed, and inch-deep with dust except where a beaten trail led to a door on the left at the farther end. As I noticed the rotting remains of a thick carpet I thought of the other feet which had pressed it in bygone decades—of these, and of one thing which did not have feet.

The old man took me straight to the door at the end of the beaten path, and fumbled a second with the rusty latch. I was acutely frightened know that I knew the picture was so close, yet dared not retreat at this stage. In another moment my host was ushering me into the deserted studio.

The candle light was very faint, yet served to shew most of the principal features. I noticed the low, slanting roof, the huge enlarged dormer, the curios and trophies hung on the wall—and most of all, the great shrouded easel in the centre of the floor. To that easel de Russy now walked, drawing aside the dusty velvet hangings on the side turned away from me, and motioning me silently to approach. It took a good deal of courage to make me obey, especially when I saw how my guide's eyes dilated in the wavering candle light as he looked at the unveiled canvas. But again curiosity conquered everything, and I walked around to where de Russy stood. Then I saw the damnable thing.

I did not faint—though no reader can possibly realise the effort it took to keep me from doing so. I did cry out, but stopped short when I saw the frightened look on the old man's face, as I had expected, the canvas was warped, mouldy, and scabrous from dampness and neglect; but for all that I could trace the monstrous hints of evil cosmic outsidersness that lurked all through the nameless scene's morbid content and perverted geometry.

It was as the old man had said—a vaulted, columned hell of mungled Black Masses and Witches' Sabbaths—and what perfect completion could have added to it was beyond my power to guess. Decay had only increased the utter hideousness of its wicked symbolism and diseased suggestion, for the parts most affected by time were just those parts of the picture which in Nature—or in the extra-cosmic realm that mocked Nature—would be apt to decay and disintegrate.

The utmost horror of all, of course, was Marceline—and as I saw the bloated, discoloured flesh I formed the odd fancy that perhaps the figure on the canvas had some obscure, occult linkage with the figure which lay in quicklime under the cellar floor. Perhaps the lime had preserved the corpse instead of destroying it—but could it have preserved those black, malign eyes that glared and mocked at me from their painted hell?

And there was something else about the creature which I could not fail to notice—something which de Russy had not been able to put into words, but which perhaps had something to do with Denis' wish to kill all those of his blood who had dwelt under the same roof with her. Whether Marsh knew, or whether the genius in him painted it without his knowing, none could say. But Denis and his father could not have known till they saw the picture.

Surpassing all in horror was the streaming black hair—which covered the rotting body, but which was itself not even slightly decayed. All I had heard of it was amply verified. It was nothing human, this ropy, sinuous, half-oily, half-crinkly flood of serpent darkness. Vile, independent life proclaimed itself at every unnatural twist and convolution, and the suggestion of numberless *reptilian heads* at the out-turned ends was far too marked to be illusory or accidental.

The blasphemous thing held me like a magnet. I was helpless, and did not wonder at the myth of the gorgon's glance which turned all beholders to stone. Then I thought I saw a change come over the thing. The leering features perceptibly moved, so that the rotting jaw fell, allowing the thick, beast-like lips to disclose a row of pointed yellow fangs. The pupils of the fiendish eyes dilated, and the eyes themselves seemed to bulge outward. And the hair—that accursed hair! *It had begun to rustle and wave perceptibly, the snake-heads all turning toward de Russy and vibrating as if to strike!*

Reason deserted me altogether, and before I knew what I was doing I drew my automatic and sent a shower of twelve steel-jacketed bullets through the shocking canvas. The whole thing at once fell to pieces, even the frame toppling from the easel and clattering to the dust-covered floor. But though this horror was shattered, another had risen before me in the form of de Russy himself, whose maddened shrieks as he saw the picture vanish were almost as terrible as the picture itself had been.

With a half-articulate scream of “God, now you’ve done it!” the frantic old man seized me violently by the arm and commenced to drag me out of the room and down the rickety stairs. He had dropped the candle in his panic; but dawn was near, and some faint grey light was filtering in through the dust-covered windows. I tripped and stumbled repeatedly, but never for a moment would my guide slacken his pace.

“Run!” he shrieked, “run for your life! You don’t know what you’ve done! I never told you the whole thing! There were things I had to do—*the picture talked to me and told me*. I had to guard and keep it—now the worst will happen! *She and that hair will come up out of their graves, for God knows what purpose!*

“Hurry, man! For God’s sake let’s get out of here while there’s time. If you have a car take me along to Cape Girardeau with you. It may well get

me in the end, anywhere, but I'll give it a run for its money. Out of here—quick!”

As we reached the ground floor I became aware of a slow, curious thumping from the rear of the house, followed by a sound of a door shutting. De Russy had not heard the thumping, but the other noise caught his ear and drew from him the most terrible shriek that ever sounded in human throat.

“Oh, God—great God—that was the cellar door—she’s coming—”

By this time I was desperately wrestling with the rusty latch and sagging hinges of the great front door—almost as frantic as my host now that I heard the slow, thumping tread approaching from the unknown rear rooms of the accursed mansion. The night’s rain had warped the oaken planks, and the heavy door stuck and resisted even more strongly than it had when I forced an entrance the evening before.

Somewhere a plank creaked beneath the foot of whatever was walking, and the sound seemed to snap the last cord of sanity in the poor old man. With a roar like that of a maddened bull he released his grip on me and made a plunge to the right, through the open door of a room which I judged had been a parlour. A second later, just as I got the front door open and was making my own escape, I heard the tinkling clatter of broken glass and knew he had leapt through a window. And as I bounded off the sagging porch to commence my mad race down the long, weed-grown drive I thought I could catch the thud of dead, dogged footsteps which did not follow me, but which kept leadenly on through the door of the cobwebbed parlour.

I looked backward only twice as I plunged heedlessly through the burrs and briars of that abandoned drive, past the dying lindens and grotesque scrub-oaks, in the grey pallor of a cloudy November dawn. The first time was when an acrid smell overtook me, and I thought of the candle de Russy had dropped in the attic studio. By then I was comfortably near the road, on the high place from which the roof of the distant house was clearly visible above its encircling trees; and just as I expected, thick clouds of smoke were billowing out of the attic dormers and curling upward into the leaden heavens. I thanked the powers of creation that an immemorial curse was about to be purged by fire and blotted from the earth.

But in the next instant came that second backward look in which I glimpsed two other things—things that cancelled most of the relief and gave me a supreme shock from which I shall never recover. I have said that I was on a high part of the drive, from which much of the plantation behind me was visible. This vista included not only the house and its trees but some of the abandoned and partly flooded land beside the river, and several bends of the weed-choked drive I had been so hastily traversing. In both of these latter places I now beheld sights—or suspicions of sights—which I wish devoutly I could deny.

It was a faint, distant scream which made me turn back again, and as I did so I caught a trace of motion on the dull grey marshy plain behind the house. At that human figures are very small, yet I thought the motion resolved itself into two of these—pursuer and pursued. I even thought I saw the dark-clothed leading figure overtaken, seized, and dragged violently in the direction of the now burning house.

But I could not watch the outcome, for at once a nearer sight obtruded itself—a suggestion of motion among the underbrush at a point some distance back along the deserted drive. *Unmistakably, the weeds and bushes and briars were swaying as no wind could sway them; swaying as if some large, swift serpent were wriggling purposefully along on the ground in pursuit of me.*

That was all I could stand. I scrambled along madly for the gate, heedless of torn clothing and bleeding scratches, and jumped into the roadster parked under the great evergreen tree. It was a bedraggled, raindrenched sight; but the works were unharmed and I had no trouble in starting the thing. I went on blindly in the direction the car was headed for; nothing was in my mind but to get away from that frightful region of nightmares and cacodaemons—to get away as quickly and as far as gasoline could take me.

About three or four miles along the road a farmer hailed me—a kindly, drawling fellow of middle age and considerable native intelligence. I was glad to slow down and ask directions, though I knew I must present a strange enough aspect. The man readily told me the way to Cape Girardeau, and inquired where I had come from in such a state at such an early hour. Thinking it best to say little, I merely mentioned that I had been caught in

the night's rain and had taken shelter at a nearby farmhouse, afterward losing my way in the underbrush trying to find my car.

"At a farmhouse, eh? Wonder whose it could'a been. Ain't nothin' standin' this side o' Jim Ferris' place acrost Barker's Crick, an' that's all o' twenty miles by the rud."

I gave a start, and wondered what fresh mystery this portended. Then I asked my informant if he had overlooked the large ruined plantation house whose ancient gate bordered the road not far back.

"Funny ye sh'd recollect that, stranger! Must a ben here afore some time. But that house ain't here now. Burnt down five or six years ago—and they did tell some queer stories about it."

I shuddered.

"You mean Riverside—ol' man de Russy's place. Queer goin's on there fifteen or twenty years ago. Ol' man's boy married a gal from abroad, and some folks thought she was a mighty odd sort. Didn't like the looks of her. then she and the boy went off sudden, and later on the ol' man said he was kilt in the war. But some o' the negroes hinted queer things. Got around at last that the ol' fellow fell in love with the gal himself and kilt her and the boy. That place was sure enough haunted by a black snake, mean that what it may.

"Then five or six years ago the ol' man disappeared and the house burned down. Some do say he was burnt up in it. It was a mornin' after a rainy night just like this, when lots o' folks heard an awful yellin' across the fields in old de Russy's voice. When they stopped and looked, they see the house goin' up in smoke quick as a wink—that place was all like tinder anyhow, rain or no rain. Nobody never seen the ol' man again, but onct in a while they tell of the ghost of that big black snake glidin' aroun'.

"What d'ye make of it, anyhow? You seem to hev knowed the place. Didn't ye ever hear tell of the de Russys? What d'ye reckon was the trouble with that gal young Denis married? She kinder made everybody shiver and feel hateful, though ye' couldn't never tell why."

I was trying to think, but that process was almost beyond me now. The house burned down years ago? Then where, and under what conditions, had I passed the night? And why did I know what I knew of these things? Even as I pondered I saw a hair on my coat sleeve—the short, grey hair of an old man.

In the end I drove on without telling anything. But did I hint that gossip was wronging the poor old planter who had suffered so much. I made it clear—as if from distant but authentic reports wafted among friends—that if anyone was to blame for the trouble at Riverside it was the woman, Marceline. She was not suited to Missouri ways, I said, and it was too bad that Denis had ever married her.

More I did not intimate, for I felt that the de Russys, with their proudly cherished honour and high, sensitive spirits, would not wish me to say more. They had borne enough, God knows, without the countryside guessing what a daemon of the pit—what a gorgon of the elder blasphemies—had come to flaunt their ancient and stainless name.

Nor was it right that the neighbours should know that other horror which my strange host of the night could not bring himself to tell me—that horror which he must have learned, as I learned it, from details in the lost masterpiece of poor Frank Marsh.

It would be too hideous if they knew that the one-time heiress of Riverside—the accursed gorgon or lamia whose hateful crinkly coil of serpent-hair must even now be brooding and twining vampirically around an artist's skeleton in a lime-packed grave beneath a charred foundation—was faintly, subtly, yet to the eyes of genius unmistakably the scion of Zimbabwe's most primal grovellers. No wonder she owned a link with that old witch-woman—for, though in deceitfully slight proportion, Marceline was a negress.

PERCHANCE TO DREAM, by Lin Carter

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CHAPTER 1.

China Alley

The cab drove past Fourteenth Street and continued south, driving between Chinatown and the river. This part of town was shadowy and disreputable—the streets grew narrow, crooked, the corner lamps dim, the shadows deeper, the people fewer and more furtive. There were Levantines and Turks, Portuguese, Lascars: the gutter-scrapings of half a hundred Eastern ports. The shops became smaller and their signs and windows bore inscriptions in queer Oriental letters. Heaven alone knew what crimes were plotted in these black alleys, these crumbling tenements...

Of all these matters, Parker Winfield was all too uncomfortably aware, and with every block his taxi bore him deeper into a tangled maze of decaying slums, his discomfort grew. *Damn* that nosy Muriel Vanvelt for goading him into making the appointment, which made him come into parts of the city that he had always instinctively avoided, far from the luxurious clubs and fashionable, expensive restaurants that were his usual habitat! And damn the mystery-man, this seeker into strange lore and forbidden places, for daring to dwell in such a hellish neighborhood!

Fog was drifting in from the riverfront as the cab drew up to the yawning mouth of one black alley, whose gloom was feebly dispelled by a lone lamp that shone above a doorway off Levant Street.

“That’s it, buddy, Number Thirteen China Alley,” announced the cabdriver. Parker peered at the narrow cobbled way with strong emotions of *misgiving*.

“You’re quite sure?” he quavered. The driver nodded curtly.

“Sure. Number Thirteen China Alley, between River Street and Levant. That’ll be six seventy-five.”

Winfield tossed him a crisp ten dollar bill and got out of the cab.

“How the hell do I get back?” he demanded petulantly. The driver shrugged and pressed a card into his hand.

“Call the garage—if they got a phone in there,” he muttered, with a dubious glance at the one dim light that glowed above the door. Then he drove off, mist swirling in gray tendrils in his wake. Hesitantly, Parker Winfield drew his expensive topcoat more closely about him to ward off the damp and chill and entered the alley’s yawning mouth. The glow of a streetlight illuminated his features, revealing a spoiled young man with lines of dissipation under watery eyes and a weak, indecisive mouth which a costly Bermuda tan did little to disguise.

The house was narrow and small, two stories in height, shouldered to either side by taller brick tenements. The door, surprisingly, was a heavy slab of polished oak with stout hinges. A small brass plaque above the doorbell bore the single word *Zarnak*. The visitor thumbed the bell and waited, wishing he had never let Muriel Vanvelt talk him into coming.

The door was opened by a tall man in a turban, lean and rangy, his aquiline features swarthy, hawk-like. Keen eyes sharp as dagger points scrutinized Winfield from top to toe.

“You will be Mr. Winfield,” said the turbaned man in flawless English. “Pray enter; the *sahib* is expecting you.”

As the door was shut behind him and steel bolts slid home, Winfield gave the servant his hat and topcoat, staring about him with vague astonishment. He had not known quite what to expect, but certainly nothing like *this*. The small foyer bore an immense bronze incense-burner on a teak wood stand; Tibetan scroll-paintings hung on walls covered with silk brocade; lush Persian carpets were soft underfoot.

He was ushered into a small study.

“Pray make yourself comfortable, sir; the *sahib* will attend you in one moment,” said the Indian servant. Left alone, Winfield glanced with dazed eyes about the room. Furniture, evidently of antique workmanship, stood here and there, all of heavy, polished teak inlaid with ivory or mother-of-pearl. Damask-hung walls displayed illuminated cabinets crowded with curiosities, among them Etruscan, Hittite, Egyptian, Creek artifacts. The carpeting underfoot was ancient Ispahan, faded but still glorious. A subtle fragrance sweetened the air, rising in lazy blue whorls from the grinning jaws of a brass idol.

Bookshelves held hundreds of scholarly-looking tomes; Winfield scanned them absently but they were in Latin, German, French, with titles

unknown to him...*Unaussprechlichen Kulten, Livre d'Ivonis, Cultes des Goules.*

A desk also of old, carven teak, was covered with a clutter of papers, notebooks, leather-bound volumes. Egyptian tomb-figurines of blue faience, heavy scarabs of schist, Sumerian tablets inscribed with cuneiform inscriptions, served as paperweights. Above the desk a leering devil-mask, painted scarlet, black and gold, snarled down from the wall, symbolic gold flames coiling from fanged mouth and dilated nostrils. Winfield gaped at it.

"Tibetan," said a quiet voice from behind him. "It represents Yama, King of Demons; in prehistoric Lemuria he was worshipped as Yamath, Lord of Fire."

Winfield flinched at the unexpected voice and turned to view his host, a lean saturnine individual of indeterminate age, wrapped in a gold-and-purple dressing-gown. His skin was sallow, his eyes dark and hooded, his black hair seal-slick, with a dramatic streak of pure silver that zigzagged from his right temple.

"You're Zarnak, I guess," blustered Winfield rudely. His host gave a slight smile. Seating himself behind the long, cluttered desk, he gestured towards a marble-topped table where decanters of cut crystal reposed.

"To quote an old adversary rather imprecisely, I have a doctorate in medicine from Edinburgh University, a doctorate in theology from Heidelberg, a doctorate in psychology from Vienna, and a doctorate in metaphysics from Miskatonic; my guests usually address me as *Doctor Zarnak*. Please help yourself to some brandy, and tell me of what service I can be."

Probably some damnable spic or dago rotgut, thought Winfield, taking up a bell-shaped glass. But the bottle was crusted with age and from the first gulp, Winfield felt as though he were drinking liquid gold.

"Imperial Tokay," murmured Zarnak, opening a notebook and selecting a pen. "From the cellars of the late Emperor Franz-Joseph. Now: how can I help you?"

CHAPTER 2.

The City in the Sea

“It’s these damned dreams, you know,” began Parker Winfield, settling into a chair. “Always the same damned dream, night after night...I’m sinking under the sea: at first, the water’s light green, like muttonfat jade, then darker, like turquoise, then malachite. Finally, it’s a green so dark it’s almost black. I...I get near the sea-bottom. There is a *city* there, all ruins, a tumble of huge stone blocks, thick with seaweed, slimy with mud. There’s a central building, a temple of some sort; virulent green light shines through the portal, luring me towards it—”

“Does this city have a name in your dream?” inquired Doctor Zarnak. Winfield’s weak mouth twisted sneeringly.

“Sure does! Nonsense, though...‘Arlyah.’”

Zarnak made a note in a small, precise hand. “Please continue,” he said softly. Winfield shrugged uncomfortably.

“That’s really all there is,” he admitted. “Except that in the dream, I’m damnably afraid! And every night I get nearer and nearer to that green-lit portal...before I wake, drenched in cold perspiration. And then, there’s the *chanting*, you know...some damnable Eastern gobbledygook...sheer mumbo-jumbo...”

“Can you recite any of it?” asked Zarnak. The other nodded, with a small shudder.

“Certainly can: I’ve heard the nonsensical words often enough...sounds like ‘fuh, nug, louis, muggle, waffle, klool, yu, arlyah, waggle, naggle, fong.’”

He broke off, eyes defensive. “You must think I’m nuts! Everybody does. Tell me to see an analyst, but they’re just a bunch of witch-doctors after your wallet!”

“Have you consulted a physician of any kind concerning these dreams of yours?”

Winfield nodded. “Dr. Cartwright on Park Avenue; family physician, you know.”

“An excellent man,” murmured Zarnak. “What was his conclusion?”

Winfield laughed harshly. “Too much champagne, too late hours, not enough exercise, rich diet...*that* sort of thing.”

“I believe that when you phoned you mentioned that it was Miss Vanvelt who suggested that you consult me?” Zarnak murmured meditatively.

“Yes, it was Muriel.” Winfield muttered. “I thought you’d be some fancy, high-priced nerve specialist on Fifth Avenue or Sutton Place...why in the world do you live down in this filthy neighborhood?” Winfield suddenly asked.

Zarnak smiled. “The denizens of River Street and its environs know how to mind their own business since many of them hide guilty secrets in their hearts and a lack of curiosity about their neighbors is an excellent means of preserving their own lives. Also, I have many scholarly colleagues among the Asian populace down here, and thus access to obscure and arcane information...but let me change the subject, if I may. You mentioned muttonfat jade and gemstones a moment or so earlier: may I assume that you collect antiquities or rare minerals?”

Parker Winfield smirked. “Not me! Know next to nothing about that sort of stuff. But my grandfather, now, *he* collected all sorts of oddities, from all over.”

“Indeed. Was your grandfather born to wealth, or did he establish the family income?” asked Zarnak.

“Gramps? He was in the China trade; all over the Pacific—Indonesia, the Carolines—”

“Ponape?” hazarded Doctor Zarnak.

“Most likely. Not sure where they are, the Carolines, but if they’re in the Pacific, Gramps was there. Brought home a load of junk, Gramps did. Been in storage for years and years, since we closed the country estate and sold it off. Odd you should mention Gramps and his collection; I’ve been unpacking some of it, now that I’ve opened my new apartment. Got an extra room I’ve fitted out for his collection; nothing else to put in there.”

“How very interesting! I should like to visit, just to compare: one antiquarian collection with another. May I call tomorrow morning?”

Winfield looked uneasy. “Thought you’d have some surefire way to get rid of my bad dreams,” he complained. “Muriel said—”

Zarnak spoke soothingly. “There are one or two things I could try, but I need more information. There is nothing that I can do at this late hour, and, besides, I am expecting another visitor. But permit me to call on you tomorrow morning, and explore your new residence. There may be something about the apartment that has been causing you to have these dreams of a city in the sea.”

“Ghosts, you mean!” demanded Winfield scornfully. “Think the place is haunted, do you?”

Zarnak spread his hands. “Who can say what psychic residue may have been left by former residents? I am sensitive to atmospheres; give me a chance to help you.”

He rose, touched a bell. “My servant will see you out.”

“Hindu, ain’t he?” asked Winfield.

“Ram Singh is a Rajput,” replied Zarnak. “They are a princely race of noble warriors.”

“Where do you find a servant like that? My man Rufus is all right, but I’d give plenty for a fellow like the one you’ve got working for you—”

Zarnak asked, without expression: “Have you ever heard much of werewolves?”

Winfield stared at him. “Like in those old Lon Chaney movies, you mean? Certainly! But what’s that got to do with India?”

“In India, they have were-tigers,” said Zarnak tonelessly. “I was able to save Ram Singh from one. To reply to your question, you cannot hire a Rajput servant; but you can earn their lifelong gratitude and service. A Rajput chooses his own master, and not the other way around.”

“Your hat and coat, sir,” said Ram Singh from the doorway.

When Parker Winfield had left, Zarnak sat down at his desk to look at his notes.

After a moment, under the line of “gibberish” his visitor had heard from the chanting in his dreams, Zarnak wrote in a precise hand: *Ph’nglui mglw’nafh Cthulhu R’lyeh wgaw’nagl fhtagn.*

Under the name of the sea-drowned city, which Winfield had given him, phonetically, as “Arlyah,” he wrote a single name: R’lyeh.

Ram Singh appeared in the doorway.

“*Sahib*, the Doctor de Grandin is arriving.”

An expression of pleasure crossed the saturnine features, as Zarnak rose to greet his very old friend.

CHAPTER 3.

Something from Down There

At ten o'clock in the morning of the next day, a car pulled up before a fashionable condominium off Fifth Avenue, and Zarnak carrying a black leather briefcase that seldom left his side, emerged.

At the door of Winfield's apartment he was greeted by a young black man neatly attired in a somber gray suit, white shirt and narrow black tie.

"I am Doctor Anton Zarnak. I believe Mr. Winfield is expecting me." The black man smiled and opened the door wider.

"Surely! Mr. Winfield is having breakfast right now but if you'd like to join him—?"

The apartment was discreetly furnished in good modern taste, obviously by an expensive interior decorator and not the resident. The furniture was of blond wood in Swedish Modern, and the carpet was an excellent Rya. The bric-a-brac was polished aluminum and the pictures were signed lithographs.

Rufus—for that must have been his name—led Zarnak into a sunny breakfast-nook where he found Parker Winfield, his face more pouched than before, with bleary, red-rimmed eyes, hunched over a table. Apparently, the younger man had indulged in a bit of alcoholic beverage after leaving China Alley. He waved a feeble hand.

"Good to see you, Doc! Help yourself...I don't have much appetite this morning." Zarnak inspected the sideboard: selected a rasher of Canadian bacon, an English muffin dripping with Devonshire butter and clover honey, eggs Florentine, and asked the servant for a cup of black coffee.

"More of those dreams last night?" Zarnak asked of his host, who nodded dejectedly.

"Worse than ever. Doc; I got closer to that hellish portal than ever before. Don't know how much more of this I can take before my nerves are entirely shot. Think you can help?"

"I will try," said Zarnak.

After breakfast, he asked Winfield to show him around. The apartment was a sumptuous one, comprised of eight rooms, of which two held the cook and Rufus. A terrace gave a sunny view of Central Park. In none of the rooms did Zarnak experience that chill *frisson* along the nerves that would have signaled, to a Sensitive, the presence of malign forces. The building, it appeared, was too newly erected to have had time to acquire the psychic residue that ordinary people call "ghosts."

Nothing that Zarnak experienced alarmed or disturbed him, until his host led him into a side room where reposed Grandfather Winfield's relics of his South Sea voyages. The room was crowded with uncouth artworks, chiseled from stone or carved from wood. Most of these were obviously antiques and worth considerable sums of money. Zarnak examined them with thoughtful care.

There were pieces of tapa-cloth from the Tonga Islands, charged with an odd motif like repeated five-pointed stars, curiously froglike idols of wood or stone from the Cook Islanders, A Sepik River Valley figure from New Guinea with an odd, kraken-like fringe of waving tentacles, pendants of carven shell from Papua shaped into octopoidal heads, wooden masks from the New Hebrides with a mane of writhing serpents instead of hair, a basalt image from Easter Island depicting a peculiarly loathsome combination of frog and fish, and the fragment of a lava bas-relief from South Indochina upon which Zarnak's eyes did not linger.

His very worst suspicions were confirmed. Grimly, he went on, examining exhibit after exhibit, until he found one which arrested him in his tracks. He lingered before it staring unwinkingly.

"Ugly creature, isn't it?" asked Parker Winfield at his elbow. "Maybe I should donate the whole lot somewhere; some of 'em give me the creeps."

"I suggest that you do," murmured Zarnak distractedly. "And I could recommend the Sanbourne Institute in Santiago, California; they have an admirable collection of this kind of...art."

The piece upon which Anton Zarnak's attention was fixed seemed to have been hewn from jadeite. It was about eleven inches tall, and depicted a bipedal monstrosity whose hind legs resembled those of a batrachian, with forelimbs uplifted almost as if in menace, sucker-tipped, webbed hands extended towards the viewer. The head of the image was a seething mass of pseudopods or tentacles, amidst which a single glaring eye could be discerned.

The symbols carven in the idol's base were in a language long vanished from human knowledge; few human beings on earth could have read them. Zarnak was one of the few.

"*Ythogtha*," he breathed.

"That's the thing's name?" inquired Winfield cheerfully.

Zarnak nodded somberly. “I don’t suppose you have ever happened to look into any of the late Professor Copeland’s books about the prehistoric Pacific civilizations?”

Winfield chuckled. “Not me! Not much of a reader, I’m afraid. What is it about this bugger that interests you?”

“It is quite unique. I should like to study it at length. May I borrow it for a time?”

“Well...valuable, is it?”

“Priceless, I should say. It is probably the only piece of its kind on earth...fortunately for us. In my opinion, you will sleep much more soundly without it on the premises, and enjoy much more wholesome dreams,” said Zarnak.

Winfield looked skeptical; nevertheless he insisted that Doctor Zarnak take the piece with him and keep it as long as he wished.

“Grandfather said that thing was found by a native diver somewhere in the waters off Easter Island,” he remarked. “Maybe it would have been a lot better if it had stayed down below, eh?”

“Quite so,” said Zarnak fervently. And he had never spoken more sincerely in his life...

CHAPTER 4.

To Dream No More

Once back in China Alley, Zarnak examined the stony image more closely. It was made of a greasy gray stone, mottled with dark green splotches like fungus or lichen. He weighed the image, and it was abnormally heavy—heavier than lead, far heavier than any terrene mineral was supposed to be. The phrase “star-quarried stone” passed through his mind briefly.

Zarnak consulted the books in his library. First he looked into a slim, cheaply-produced pamphlet which bore the title *The Zanthu Tablets*, and read of Great Ythogtha, the Abomination in the Abyss, imprisoned by the Elder Gods in Yhe. Then he consulted Von Junzt, and found the following passage of interest:

Of the Spawn of Cthulhu, only Ythogtha lies prisoned in regions contiguous to sunken R'lyeh, for Yhe was once a province of Mu, and R'lyeh is not far off the submerged shores of that riven, drowned continent; and Yhe and R'lyeh are close nigh unto each other, along dimensions not numbered among the three we know.

Zarnak studied the stony image with some of the scientific instruments in his laboratory. It seemed to possess a powerful electromagnetic charge: at least, contact with the image wilted the gold leaves of the electroscope. Zarnak meditated: such images, he knew, brought down from the stars when the earth was young, may be fashioned of an unearthly and abnormal amalgam of stone and metal, which would account for the unusual weight of the object. And that such figures may be impregnated with thought-waves, even as a strip of magnetic tape can be recorded with sound-waves, was also known to him from his researches. Was that the secret of the image, or did it somehow serve as the transmitter of thought-waves from the lair of Ythogtha's awful Sire?

All the while, the froglike image squatted on the laboratory table, regarding him unwinkingly with that one Medusa-like eye of cold malignancy...

The thing seemed virtually alive in some uncanny way. Almost, it seemed, the gray-green mineral surged with vitality and the writhing tendrils that mercifully masked its hideous visage seemed almost to flicker with furtive motion, when glimpsed from the corners of his eye.

At length, completing his notes, Zarnak rose and went to a steel cabinet against one wall, whose topmost drawer he unlocked with a small key. He drew forth a tray lined with black velvet whereupon reposed a number of curious objects shaped like five-pointed stars. Some had been carved from a stony mineral, either slate-gray or dull green. But the bottom row were of ceramic, taffy-colored, baked in a kiln and heavily glazed. These last had been manufactured for Zarnak by a sculptor friend in Seattle, and Zarnak himself had consecrated them, had energized them with power, according to an old formula he had discovered in Clithanus.

Thoughtfully, he weighed the star-shaped amulet of the Elder Gods in the palm of one hand, while his gaze brooded upon the stone image. It would be interesting to discover whether the statuette of Ythogtha had so

impregnated the mind of Parker Winfield with its malign and sinister influence that the dreams continued even without the eidolon being present as a sort of “conductor.”

It would also be interesting to learn what happened when one of the star-stones came in physical contact with the image from Outside...

* * * *

The dream began as all the dreams began: he was sinking slowly down through luminous water that dimmed and darkened around him into blackest gloom, lit only with that eerie emerald radiance from the ruin. He was vaguely conscious of stifling pressure from the many tons of water above him, of wet cold, of utter helplessness...

Parker Winfield felt his body drift without volition over the murky vista of tumbled stone blocks that were matted with pallid weed and thick with slime...the broken stone ruin came closer, ever closer. The weird green luminance waxed in strength, pulsing like the beating of some enormous heart...

Now his dream-form was floating up the mossy, mud-thick stone steps; now the very portal of the ruin filled his vision, immense, of unthinkable antiquity, concealing God alone knew what horrible abnormality, what monstrous dweller in the depths...

The portal *opened*: throbbing green radiance smote Parker Winfield full in the face, blinding, dazzling him—then his dreamer’s vision adjusted to the unwholesome light, and he strove to see the source of that lambent glow, which seemed throned in some vast and oddly-angled chair—

Then a flash of clear, pure golden light wiped the dreamscape away!

And Winfield awoke, gasping, saturated with cold perspiration, hands shaking like willows in a wind. He stared about him with wild and haunted gaze, seeing only his own darkened bedroom, nothing more. A wave of sheer relief sluiced through him, washing away the residue of night-fear—

The telephone rang. With nerveless hands, Winfield snatched up the instrument.

“Yes?”

“Doctor Zarnak here,” said the familiar voice. “Have you had another of those sea-dreams?”

“I certainly have, and worse than the ones before, although it ended differently from the others—”

Zarnak listened carefully to his client’s description of the nightmare. From time to time he made small, precise notes in the book on his desk before him. When the other was finished with his recital:

“Very good. I believe I have isolated and eradicated the source of the infection, as you might call it. You shall dream no more; or, rather, such dreams as you experience from henceforward will be only the healthy dreams of normal sleep...ah, one thing more. I regret to tell you that the jadeite image from your grandfather’s collection of artifacts met with severe damage during the testing process, and I will be unable to return it. Yes; very good. And you are shipping the remainder of the collection to the Institute? Very satisfactory. Good day to you.”

Zarnak replaced the instrument in its cradle, made a final note in his book, rose and stepped silently from the room.

On the asbestos mat atop the small steel and porcelain table which had borne the jadeite image and the star-stone, now reposed only a heap of fine gray ash. The sharp stench of ozone hovered in the air.

It was much better so...and the case was one that had, after all a happy ending.

THE WINFIELD HERITENCE, by Lin Carter

Originally published in *Weird Tales* #3, 1981.

Statement of Winfield Phillips

In the event of my death or disappearance, I herewith request of the person into whose hands this statement shall come that he mail it without delay to Dr. Seneca Lapham, care of the Anthropology Department of Miskatonic University in the city of Arkham, Massachusetts. And, for his own safety, if not indeed his sanity of mind, I beg him to send it *unread*.

My name is Winfield Phillips, and I reside at number 86 College Street in Arkham. I am a graduate of Miskatonic University, where I majored in American literature and took for my minor the study of anthropology. Since my freshman year I have been in the employ of Dr. Lapham in the capacity of a private secretary, and have continued thereafter in that position in order to support myself while researching for a book on the Decadent movement in recent art and literature. I am twenty-nine years old, and consider myself to be sound of mind and body.

As for my soul, I am not so certain.

Chapter I

On the morning of June 7th, 1936, having obtained a brief leave of absence from my employer, I boarded the train for California at the B & O Station on Water Street. My purpose in undertaking a journey of such length as to traverse the entirety of the continent was partially business and partially pleasure. And, in part, from a sense of family duty.

Due to the recent death of my Uncle, Hiram Stokely of Durnham Beach, California, I felt obligated to attend his funeral and to take my place at the obsequies in order that the Eastern branch of the family might be represented on this solemn occasion. Uncle Hiram had been, after all, my Mother's favorite brother; and, even though I had never met him, had, in fact, never even seen him to my knowledge, I knew that she would have wished me to attend his burial. My late Mother was a Winfield of New Hampshire, but my Father was a Phillips, sprung from ancient Massachusetts stock which can be traced back to 1670, if not further. I am a descendant of the celebrated, and ever so slightly notorious, Reverend Ward

Phillips, former pastor of the Second Congregationalist Church in Arkham, author of an obscure but psychologically fascinating bit of New England eccentricity called *Thaumaturgical Prodigies in the New-English Canaan*, first published at Boston in 1794 and later reprinted in rather expurgated form in 1801. It is an old family joke that the reverend doctor, in this his only known venture into the fine art of letters, literally did his “damndest” to out-do in hellfire and brimstone mad old Cotton Mather’s hellish *Magnalia* and the even more nightmarish *Wonders of the Invisible World*. If so, he succeeded admirably.

Many years before I was born, there had been some sort of trouble between my Uncle Hiram and the rest of my Mother’s family. I have never quite known what occasioned this breach, but the breaking-off of relations was lasting and permanent. If my Mother ever knew the reason, she never confided it to me, but I can remember my aged Grandfather muttering about “forbidden practices” and “books no one should ever read,” whenever Uncle Hiram’s name came up, which was not very often. Whatever the nature of the family scandal, Uncle Hiram moved away from Arkham, went to California, and never returned. These ancient, in-bred New England families, as you may be aware, are rife with skeletons in the closet, old feuds, centuried scandals. It seems quaint, even perverse nowadays, to bear a grudge for a lifetime, but we are a proud, stubborn, stiff-necked race. Just how stiff-necked we are can be demonstrated by the fact that my Uncle, as if not content with severing all relations with the family (even with my Mother, who was his favorite sister), actually repudiated the family name, Winfield, adopting instead his mother’s maiden name, Stokely.

At any rate, all of this happened long before I was born—before my Mother married into the Phillips family, in fact—and because of this, and of the fact that no single communication had ever passed between my Uncle and myself, I had no slightest thought of even being mentioned in my Uncle’s will, and had as well utterly no interest in his Estate, although it was commonly known that he had become immensely wealthy since moving to distant California.

As for the element of pleasure involved in my journey, this lay in the opportunity to resume a cherished friendship with my cousin, Brian Winfield, the only son of my other Uncle, Richard. We had first met, Brian and I, quite by chance, in the Widener Library at Harvard in 1927. I had

been sent there by my employer to copy out some passages from a certain very rare version of a curious old volume of myths and liturgies called the *Book of Eibon*, since Harvard was lucky enough to possess the only known text of the medieval Latin translation made from the Greek by Philippus Faber. The young man seated next to me, a cheerful, freckle-faced, snub-nosed fellow with tousled sandy hair and friendly eyes, deep in a medical book full of the most repulsive illustrations imaginable, responded to the librarian's call of "Winfield" and ambled forward to claim another book just fetched up from the stacks for his perusal. Thinking he must certainly be a relative, I took the liberty of introducing myself; later, chatting over coffee, we laid the foundations of a lasting friendship.

Brian was about five years younger than myself and had come east to study at the medical school, hoping to become a doctor. We both took to each other from the start, both equally delighted to discover we were cousins. Although my stay was a brief one, we managed to continue our friendship on weekends and during vacations. On these occasions I had to come to the dorm to visit him, since his father had made him swear never to venture a foot closer to Arkham than the Boston city limits.

This afforded me no particular discomfort in traveling, of course, since Boston and Arkham are only some fifteen miles apart. But after some two years my visits to Boston had to end, for Brian flunked out of medical school because of some ridiculously boyish prank, and he went home to live again with his parent. He later studied veterinary medicine at Tate College in Buford, the county seat of Santiago County in which Durnham Beach is located, and became a licensed veterinarian. I suppose this was quite a come-down for one who had hoped to cure cancer and win the Nobel Prize; or perhaps his father, discovering our surreptitious correspondence, demanded that it cease. At any rate, our exchange of letters dwindled and died. An infrequent card at Christmases or birthdays, and that was about it.

Until this June, when suddenly and to my delight I found in my mailbox a brief, scribbled letter in his familiar, childish hand, informing me of our Uncle's death and inviting—virtually *begging*—that I come west for the funeral. I did not need much urging, and, as Dr. Lapham was willing to dispense with my services for a week or so, I went out that very afternoon and purchased my railway tickets, informing Brian by telegraph of the time of my arrival.

Besides the pleasure of resuming my acquaintance with Brian, and the family duty of attending my Uncle's funeral, I had also a bit of unfinished business to clean up on the behalf of Dr. Lapham.

A few miles north of Durnham Beach, on the coast of Southern California, lay the town of Santiago in which the famous Sanbourne Institute of Pacific Antiquities was situated. About seven years earlier we had been visited at Miskatonic by a gentleman named Arthur Wilcox Hodgkins, the assistant curator of the manuscripts collection at the Sanbourne Institute. This earnest and scholarly young man had implored the assistance of Dr. Lapham and certain of his colleagues in unraveling an ancient mystery which I shall not go into here, save that it involved the necessary destruction of a rare primitive idol of unknown craftsmanship, found off Ponape some decades earlier. Possession of this peculiar statuette—which gained considerable notoriety in the popular press under the rather melodramatic name of the “Ponape Figurine”—was already reputed to have driven two famous scientists mad, and from Hodgkins' agitated state, threatened to unhinge his own reason as well.

Rather to my surprise, Dr. Lapham took these ravings quite seriously indeed, as did Dr. Henry Armitage, the librarian at Miskatonic. It is a measure of their concern over the potential danger to mankind in the continued existence of this so-called Ponape Figurine that the two of them placed at young Hodgkins' use the fabulously rare copy of a grim, blasphemous old book called the *Necronomicon*, of which Miskatonic owns and jealously guards in a locked vault the only copy of the “complete edition” of the book known to exist in the Western Hemisphere.

This book, and several other volumes of similar rarity and esoteric lore, form the central source of information the world possesses on an obscure, very ancient, and bafflingly wide-spread prehistoric mythology called by some the “Alhazredic demonology,” from the name of the *Necronomicon's* Arabic author, and by others the “Cthulhu Mythos,” from the appellation of its most celebrated devil. Traces of the Cthulhu cult, and of other cognate cults and secret societies devoted to the worship of Cthulhu's three sons, Ghatanothoa, Ythogtha, and Zoth-Ommog, as well as his half-brother, Hastur the Unspeakable, and other gods or demons with names like Tsathoggua, Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, Daoloth, Rhan Tegoth, Lloigor, Zhar, Ithaqua, Shub-Niggurath, and so on, have persisted for ages in the far

corners of the world, and are not yet entirely extinct. Linked together into a vast secret network, a sort of “occult underworld,” the Cthulhu cult and its minions form, in the opinions of some authorities, little less than an enormous, and age-old, criminal conspiracy against the safety, the sanity, and the very existence of mankind.

Dr. Lapham and Dr. Armitage asked me, while visiting Santiago, where Brian was currently employed, to look into the mysterious end of Arthur Wilcox Hodgkins. He had cruelly bludgeoned an old watchman to death, set fire to the South Gallery of the museum wing of the Institute, hidden or destroyed the noxious Figurine, and had been hauled off raving mad to the local sanatorium.

It would seem that there was considerably more to his wild story than one might reasonably have assumed. While assisting Dr. Lapham in his investigations of the activities of the Cthulhu cultists I have undergone a few unnerving and scientifically inexplicable experiences myself. I knew, although I tried not to believe, that there was in fact a hard, grim kernel of truth behind the nightmarish legends of this fantastic mythology. I saw enough in Billington’s Wood that dark day in 1924 when Dr. Lapham and I shot and killed Ambrose Dewart and his Indian bodyservant, Quamis—or whomever it *really* was had taken over their minds, bodies and souls—to treat these matters with caution and trepidation.

Something had driven poor Hodgkins mad. The Ponape Figurine? Or what he saw in the instant in which he touched to the cold, slick jadeite of the Figurine the grey star-stone talisman from lost, immemorial Mnar which Dr. Armitage had entrusted to him? I did not know. But Lapham and Armitage wanted desperately to find out; they wanted to close their file on the weird and unearthly statuette they believed had come down from the black yawning gulfs between the stars when the Earth was young.

And so did I.

Chapter II

Brian was there to greet me at the Santiago railway station when the train pulled in. Hatless, his sandy hair tousling in the breeze, he waved and grinned and thrust his broad shoulders through the crowd to crush my hand in his clumsy, powerful grip. He had changed very little in the years since we had last seen each other: he was still loud and boyish and irrepressible,

with that joyous zest in life and boundless store of physical energy I admired and envied so much.

Collecting my bags, he tossed them into the back seat of his car, a sporty red roadster, and bade me pile in. I had been just as willing to have employed the dilapidated old taxi which was pulled up before the station, but this was even more comfortable an arrangement. While we drove to Brian's little apartment on Hidalgo Street, just off the park, we talked, renewing our acquaintance.

"Tomorrow, I'd like to motor down to Durnham Beach, so we can explore Uncle Hiram's house," said Brian as he helped me unpack. "The lawyers gave me the key to the front door, and directions on getting there."

"Haven't you ever seen it?" I asked. "Living so close to our Uncle, all these years..."

He grimaced. "Uncle Hiram didn't get along with my Dad any better than he got along with the rest of the family, I guess! Anyway, I never got invited down. Queer old bird he must have been, but not a bad sort, after all. By the way—I didn't get around to mentioning it before—did you know that you and I are his beneficiaries?"

I blinked, fairly thunderstruck. "Do you mean it?"

He grinned, nodding. "Everything but the money, I'm afraid! That goes to some sort of foundation. But we can split the house, the library and furnishings. Reckon you'll be most interested in the books...I understand our Uncle had quite a library. Well; come on, let's wash up and get something to eat."

Chapter III

The events of the following morning I will pass over without comment. There were only a few people at the services, a couple of our Uncle's old servants and a curiosity-seeker or two. The burial was done rather hastily, and I noticed it was a closed-casket service, for some reason.

After lunch, we motored down the Coast. It was a brisk, bright day, and Brian drove with the top down. I could tell Brian had some news for me—he was fairly bursting with it. Finally, I asked him what was up. He gave me a mischievous sidewise glance.

"Remember, when you wrote you were coming, you asked me to find out anything I could about that 'Ponape Figurine' affair?" he asked. I

nodded. “Well, I got together some newspaper clippings for you—give them to you later. But I discovered something positively weird while looking into the matter...”

And he mentioned the name of the late Professor Harold Hadley Copeland. Time was, what with all the newspaper sensationalism connected with that name, it would instantly have been familiar to the reader of Sunday supplements. But how swiftly yesterday’s news becomes ancient history! I suppose few people would even recognize the name nowadays, although his death in a San Francisco mental institution was only some seven years ago.

It had been Professor Copeland who had discovered the notorious Ponape Figurine, which formed the nexus about which so many strange and baffling mysteries had centered. The Figurine had been part of the collection of rare Pacific antiquities and books which Copeland had left to the Sanbourne Institute in 1928. It seems that the Figurine was in some way connected to an ancient, little-known cult which worshipped “Great Old Ones from the stars,” whose myths and legends were presumably recorded in a number of old, seldom-found books. Several of these books Copeland had left to the Sanbourne Institute, as they bore upon the matter of his research. What I now learned from the lips of my cousin thoroughly astounded me:

“The old Prof had a copy of the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*, did you know?” asked Brian, teasingly, playing with my curiosity.

I nodded. The book, by a German scholar named Von Junzt, was a principal text in the study of the cult.

“*And* some pages from the *Yuggya Chants*,” he added, “and a copy of something called the *R’lyeh Text*...”

“Yes, I know all about that,” I said impatiently. “Get on with it, won’t you?”

“Well, Win, where do you suppose Professor Copeland got these rare books from in the first place?”

I shrugged, irritably. “How the devil should I know?”

Still smiling, Brian dropped his bombshell.

“He bought them from Uncle Hiram.”

I’m sure my jaw must have dropped, making me look ludicrous, for after another sidewise glance, Brian began chuckling.

“Great Scott,” I murmured, “what a coincidence? D’you mean to say our Uncle was interested in occultism—in this Alhazredic demonology?”

He frowned, not recognizing the term. ““Alhazredic—?””

“After the Arabic demonologist, Abdul Alhazred, author of the celebrated *Necronomicon*, one of the rarest books in the world. We have a copy back at Miskatonic, kept under lock and key. The only one in the Western hemisphere.”

He confessed that he had no idea about our Uncle’s interests, scholarly or otherwise. “But Uncle Hiram made a fortune, you know...and he went in for book-collecting in a big way...anything old and rare and obscure and hard-to-find was just his meat. He had purchasing agents all over the world working for him...say, bet that sounds good to you, since you’ve inherited your pick of his books!”

I didn’t say anything, feeling a bit uncomfortable. While my Uncle Hiram’s death had meant nothing at all to me personally, there is something a trifle ghoulish about profiting from another man’s demise. I changed the subject.

The long drive down to Durnham Beach took us by a scenic route which disclosed frequent glimpses of the rugged, rocky coast, with the smiling blue Pacific lazing beyond under clear sunlight. But, as we approached the town, the highway turned inland, and the scenery became by gradual stages oddly drab and even depressing. We passed acres of scrub pine and mud-flats full of stagnant, scummed water. Then followed, for dreary miles, abandoned farms and fields where the raw, unhealthy earth, eroded by the salt breeze from the ocean, exposed beneath pitifully-thin layers of topsoil nothing but dead and sterile sand. Sea birds honked and cried mournfully, as if to fit the mood of uneasy depression that had fallen over us both. Even the clear sunlight seemed vitiated and dull, although the skies were as clear as ever.

I said something about this to my cousin, and he nodded soberly.

“It’s not a very healthy place,” he remarked. “Town’s been going downhill as far back as I can remember—especially when they started to close down the canneries and people were out of jobs. I can remember when all these farms were going strong, lots of orange groves, truck gardening...some communities thrive and grow, and others just sort of crumble and go rotten at the heart...”

We passed a road sign and the name on it seemed vaguely familiar to me, like something I half-remembered reading years ago in the newspapers. I asked Brian about it. He looked grim.

“Hubble’s Field? Sure, you must have read about it—ten or fifteen years ago, something like that. They found all those bodies buried there—hundreds, I think it was.”

His remark sent a shiver of cold apprehension through me. Of course, I remembered, the Hubble’s Field atrocity—who could forget it? The county was putting in a pipeline for some reason, and when they came to excavate a certain stretch of condemned property, they began to dig up the remains of human bodies, literally hundreds, as Brian said, although from the way the bodies were dismembered and jumbled together, it was never possible to ascertain an accurate count. Somebody on the radio at the time remarked that if you took all of the mass-murders in history and put them together, you wouldn’t have half as many corpses as those found buried in Hubble’s Field...oddly gruesome thing to remember! Or to think about.

“Yes, I remember something about it now,” I murmured. “They never did find out who did it, or why, did they?”

Brian uttered a harsh little bark of laughter. “No, they didn’t,” he said shortly. “What they did find out, was that it had been going on for one hell of a long time...the further down they dug, they began to find scraps of homespun and tanned leather and old bottles from the early settlers...deeper down, bits and pieces of old Spanish armor were found mixed in with the skeletons...and beneath *that*—”

He broke off, saying nothing. I nudged him.

“Beneath that—*what?*”

“Indians,” he said heavily “Lot’s of ’em. Infants, old people, braves, women. Way back before the Spaniards came. This was all Indian country once, of course. The Hippaway nation owned all these parts before the explorers came. Still some Hippaways around, on reservations in the mountains. But not anywhere around *here*, you can bet!”

“What do you mean?”

“Back in school I took a course in anthropology, Indian stuff. Hippaways had a name for Hubble’s Field in their own language... something like E-choc-tah, I think it was.”

“What does it mean?” I inquired curiously.

His face looked stony.

“‘The Place of Worms.’”

Suddenly the sunlight dulled, the sky seemed to darken, and the air around us became dank and unwholesomely chill. But when I glanced up, the sky was still clear and the sun shone brightly...but seemed weirdly unable to warm the air.

I changed the subject.

Chapter IV

We arrived at our Uncle’s house by late afternoon, after driving through what was left of the old town. Rows of dingy housing inhabited by whiskered, surly men and slatternly women and squalling brats...storefronts shut and mouldering into decay...dirt streets cut with ruts, with scrub grass growing in many of them. And beyond the rotting wharfs of the harbor, where only a small boat or two gave evidence of fishermen, loomed the abandoned warehouses and the crumbling canneries. It was hard to believe that this disintegrating ghost town had been a vigorous community in Brian’s boyhood, only a dozen or fifteen years ago. It looked contaminated—poisoned, in some uncanny way—and slumping almost visibly into ruin.

“I’m certainly not surprised you’ve stayed away all of these years,” I murmured. “The wonder is, Uncle Hiram kept on, with all his money: I’d of moved to San Francisco or somewhere—*anywhere* but Durnham Beach!”

Brian grunted assent. “Still, the house *is* grand,” he mused, looking it over. And I had to admit that it was. A two-story, rambling stucco structure in the Spanish Hacienda style, with red tile roofs and chimneys, ringed about with desolate gardens gone to seed and fishponds long dry, scummed with filth and rotting leaves.

“Doesn’t look like he kept the place up in recent years,” I remarked.

“No, it doesn’t,” he said. Then he pointed to a stretch of empty field bordering the property, beyond a row of dilapidated and dying palms. “Maybe he *couldn’t*,” he added thoughtfully.

“What does *that* mean?”

He nodded to the empty fields: raw red clay, cut into ditches and hollows and gullies, stretched beyond the row of palms.

“Neighborhood sort of went to pot,” he said sourly. “*That* is Hubble’s Field...”

After a couple of tries, we opened the big front door with the keys from Uncle Hiram's lawyer, and entered a dim, cool front hall. Suits of rusty armor stood beneath tattered banners and faded tapestries; a grand spiral staircase wound through the dimness into the upper reaches of the house. Dust lay thick and scummy on heavy, carved, antique furniture, and gusts of rain from some broken window upstairs had turned the old carpet green with mildew.

The place had a cold, unlived-in feeling, despite its attempt at feudal grandeur. It looked like the reception hall in some high-class funeral parlor with pretensions towards Baroque.

"Well, we're here," Brian grunted. "Let's look around—explore." There were tall stained glass windows in the grand dining hall, whose heavy oak table must have seated twenty guests, if guests had ever been welcome here, and I had a queasy feeling they had not. Bronze statuary stood about on old sideboards and stone mantles, and there was quite a clutter of end-tables and bric-a-brac, some fine pieces of old Indian pottery, Victorian art glass, ashtrays and brass pots. The air was musty and unwholesome, although the house had not really been closed that long: Hiram Stokely had only recently died, after all—did he have something about open windows and fresh air?

Or did the breeze that blew across Hubble's Field, where hundreds and hundreds of corpses had rotted into the earth over centuries, bear with it the taint of some miasma, some pestilence so unholy, that even in the hot summer months, Hiram Stokely had preferred to stifle behind shut windows, rather than breathe it in?

It was a question to which I really desired no answer.

We found the library on the second floor, a huge room, lined from floor to ceiling with bookshelves. I didn't really feel in the mood for evaluating my inheritance that grey and gruesome afternoon: but ran my eye cursorily over the shelves. Tooled leather bindings held standards sets of Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, the Lake Poets. Doubtless, a good second-hand book dealer in San Francisco could turn a tidy profit for me, if the damp and mildew hadn't gotten to the books first.

"My God! What's that?" ejaculated Brian in startled tones. He was staring at an oil painting which hung on the paneled wall beside the door. Dim with dust and neglect, its thickly scrolled gilt frame held a shocking scene I could not quite make out in the dim light.

Peering closer, I read the little brass plate attached to the bottom of the frame. “Richard Upton Pickman,” I murmured. “I’ve heard of him, Boston artist—”

Then I lifted my eyes to study the painting. With a distinct sense of shock I saw a dim, shadowy graveyard vault, stone walls slick with trickling moisture, pallid and bloated fungi sprouting underfoot; scores of obscenely naked, un-wholesomely plump men and women, naked and filthy, with heavy clawed hands and a suggestion of dog-like muzzles about their sloping brows and distorted lower faces, were clustered about one who held a guidebook. What was so spine-chillingly ghastly about the grotesque painting was the uncanny, the virtually *photographic* realism of the artist’s technique...that, and the hellish expressions of hideous, gloating relish stamped on the fat features of the degenerate, the almost bestial, hound-muzzled faces...

With a shudder of aversion, I dropped my gaze hastily from the oil, to scan the title of the picture.

“Holmes, Lowell, and Longfellow Lie Buried in Mount Auburn,” I read half-aloud.

Brian looked sick. “God, I’ll sell that abomination first off!” he swore feelingly. And I didn’t blame him: frankly, I’d have burned the grisly thing.

We decided to stay the night, since it would have taken us hours to drive back to Santiago. We’d driven past a dingy little diner near the docks on our trip through town, but, somehow, neither of us felt like retracing our path through those rutted streets lined with tottering, decaying tenements. In a mood of festive generosity, Brian’s landlady had packed us a large picnic lunch, which we had only nibbled at along the way, so we built a fire in a cavernous stone fireplace and wolfed down cold tea, ham and chicken sandwiches and potato salad by the flickering orange light of the blaze. A thin, drizzly rain had started up; the skies were leaden and overcast; a mournful wind prowled and whimpered about the eaves. It was going to be a filthy night, and neither of us felt like crawling into bed after one look at damp, stale-smelling sheets and empty, drafty bedrooms. We fed the fire and curled up on a couple of sofas, wrapped in quilts found in an upstairs closet.

Brian was soon snoring comfortably, but I found myself unable to get relaxed enough to feel drowsy. Giving it up after a while, I stirred up the

fire and lit an old hurricane lamp we'd found on the back porch, which still held plenty of oil. Then I went hunting through the shelves for something to read. Twain, Dumas, Balzac—all of the standard classics were too heavy for my gloomy mood, but surely, somewhere in among all of these thousands of embalmed masterpieces, Uncle Hiram must have tucked away a good thriller or a juicy detective story...

On one of the lower shelves I noticed something odd: a row of books and pamphlets which stood *behind* the front row, which made me wonder if all of the bookshelves were built double...or was this, perhaps, where Uncle Hiram had squeamishly concealed from casual public discovery a small, choice collection of "risqué" Victoriana? Grinning, I pried one of the volumes out and held it up to the light so that I could read the title.

It was *Night-Gaunts*, a novel by Edgar Henquist Gordon, published in London by Charnel House Publishers...great heaven! I was holding in my hands an extremely rare and very valuable book. It was the first book Gordon had published and, probably because of what critics of the period had damned as its "excessive morbidity," had been a total failure, which was why the volume I held in my grasp was so sought-after by collectors of the bizarre and the fantastic.

Setting it down gently on the table, I removed the front row of books and began to take out and to examine one by one the hidden volumes they had concealed. The next one was also by Gordon, his privately published novel, *The Soul of Chaos*. This was followed by a rare copy of the obscure magazine *Outré*, the very issue which contained Gordon's famous first short-story, "Gargoyle"...for my projected book on Decadence in literature I had studied a photographic copy of "Gargoyle," obtained not easily and with considerable expenditure of time, and I remembered well its phantasmagoric lore of black cities on the outermost rim of space, where weird beings whisper unmentionable blasphemies from formless thrones that stand beyond the domain of matter...

The next volume was a slim volume of verse by Edward Pickman Derby entitled *Azathoth and Other Horrors*, into which I had also peered and which was a valuable first edition in a very desirable state. Paired with this was a second volume of verse, *The People of the Monolith*, by Justin Geoffrey; then came several crumbling and yellowed copies of *Outré* and another magazine called *Whispers* which contained the famous tales of that

extraordinary, overlooked young genius, Michael Hayward. But the next book was such an astonishing find that I virtually reeled backwards in slack-jawed amazement: it was the original, unpublished manuscript of Amadaeus Carson's notorious and legendary novel, *Black God of Madness*, which most authorities believed no longer to be in existence.

I had stumbled upon an amazing trove of literary treasures so fabulously rare as almost to be considered legendary.

Which made me wonder—it was only an idle, passing thought!—what other hidden treasures the house of Hiram Stokely might conceal.

Chapter V

When Brian woke to a grey and drizzly morning, and I shared with him the wonder and delight of my discoveries, he was considerably less enthralled than he might have been. I suppose it takes a Liberal Arts education with a deep interest in decadent literature to fully appreciate the profundity of my discoveries, but, still, he could have showed a little more interest—!

“Pretty rare stuff, and really valuable, eh?” he mused, leafing through the bound manuscript of *Black God of Madness*.

“Some of these items are almost priceless,” I said. “The one you’re examining is not the only unpublished manuscript, either: here’s what seems to be the authentic original manuscript of Simon Maglore’s celebrated, prize-winning poem “The Witch is Hung,” famous for its riot of wild imagery and eldritch color...and here’s a gem: a true first edition of Halpin Chalmer’s arcane and recondite work, *The Secret Watcher*, another first edition from Charnel House in London...”

“Yes, and here’s another one,” he muttered, looking through a slender pamphlet. “*Visions from Yaddith*, verses by Ariel Prescott, Charnel House, Publishers: London, 1927...I’ve heard of her; didn’t she die raving in a madhouse, like your Harold Hadley Copeland?”

“Yes; in Oakdeane,” I said briefly. “And here’s the notorious January, 1922 issue of *Whispers*, which contains that famous—or infamous!—tale by Randolph Carter, “The Attic Window.” This copy could be worth hundreds to the right collector; when the story appeared, it aroused such an outcry of revulsion that every known copy of that issue was withdrawn from the newsstands...”

Brian was glancing through some magazines, flaking and yellowed with age. “Who was Phillip Howard?” he murmured curiously.

“The author of several short-stories that would have delighted the soul of Poe and Bierce,” I declared. “‘The House of the Worm’ is probably the most notorious; at least one young reader, a student at Midwestern University, I believe, went insane because of it. Another of his tales is in one of the issues you’re looking at: ‘The Defilers,’ it’s called; I remember an article in the Partridgeville Gazette as claiming the magazine received no fewer than three hundred and ten letters of outraged indignation when they published that tale...”

“Didn’t know Uncle had such morbid tastes in literature,” he said wonderingly. Then, looking up: “What’s that you’ve got?”

“More original manuscripts,” I whispered almost reverently. “I don’t suppose you’ve ever heard of that appalling young genius, Robert Blake? I thought not; well, he only died last year, after all...but word is getting around about these stories.”

I stared at the neatly-written manuscript pages of “Shaggai,” “The Feaster from the Stars,” “The Stairs in the Crypt,” “The Burrower Beneath,” and “In the Vale of Pnath.”

“Someday, they must be published, for all to read,” I murmured, hungrily scanning the papers.

But Brian was examining the pile in bafflement. “If they’re so rare and valuable, why hide them away behind another row of books?” he asked, almost challengingly. “I always thought collectors liked to show off their treasures—*why?*”

I gave him look for look.

“I don’t know,” I said honestly.

* * * *

We drove to the diner for breakfast and bought some supplies for lunch, as the utilities were still turned on and it might be more pleasant to cook something than go out through the rain again. We spent the rest of the morning cataloguing the furniture and pictures; I don’t know much about antiques, but everything looked pretty valuable to me. With a little luck, we could each come away from this with a sizable sum of money. The real estate value of Uncle Hiram’s house was another matter; the way the town

was slouching into decay—and the nearness of the house to Hubble’s Field—might bring the resale value way down.

I was mulling over these things while going through my Uncle’s curio collection, when I was roused by a startled whoop from Brian.

“What’s up?” I demanded, joining him in the library. “You just about gave me a heart attack...”

Then my words trailed away. Brian was grinning at me excitedly, beside a door-size opening in the bookshelves. “A secret room!” he exclaimed, eyes a-gleam with boyish enthusiasm. “I was searching behind the shelves to see if there were any more concealed books, and must have triggered the mechanism. Like to scared me out of a year’s growth! Take a look...”

I peered past his burly shoulders into a narrow, small, cramped, airless room, revealed to view when one of the bookcases had swung ajar like a door. It was so dark within the hidden chamber that, at first, all I could see was a huge piece of ancient oakwood furniture. It took me a few moments to identify it.

“My God! That’s an adumbry; looks authentic, too,” I gasped.

“What’s—”

“Sort of a Medieval bookcase. Monks in the old monasteries used them to lay flat books too huge to stand on edge,” I said absently.

“Looks like they left a few behind, then,” he remarked. For there were a number of immense volumes on the low, flat shelving—books bound in vellum, wrinkled and yellowed with age, or in flaking black leather. I pulled one down, screwing up my face at the reek of ancient mildew and decay which arose from it like a palpable touch.

The next instant a pang of fearful surmise stabbed through me. I held in my hands an Elizabethan folio of fabulous age, a bound manuscript written in a crabbed hand on thick sheets of excellent parchment. And the title page bore this inscription: *Al Aziph, ye Booke of ye Arab, Call’d, ye Necronomicon of Abdoul Al-hazred, Newly Englished by Me, Master Jno. Dee, of Mortlake, Doctor of ye Arts.*

Even Brian could not help but be impressed, by the discovery, doubtless remembering that I had called the *Necronomicon* “one of the rarest books in the world,” which indeed it was. It was worth, I suppose, thousands...even more, if it truly was what it seemed to be. That is, I am no expert in Elizabethan or Jacobean handwriting, but the huge folio pages looked old

enough to have been in Dr. Dee's own hand. *Could* this be the original manuscript?

"Here's another one," Brian muttered thoughtfully. "*Livre d'Eibon...*"

"...*The Book of Eibon,*" I said dazedly. I examined it; the ancient bound manuscript was tattered and in a disreputable condition, the pages water-stained and foxed with mildew. Still and all, the antiquated Norman-French seemed legible enough...and also, the calligraphy of the handwriting looked old enough to be in Gaspard du Nord's veritable hand...

With repetition, I found, the shocks of discovery diminish. The mind numbs, can bear no more. There were other books on the shelves, but we did not look at them. The light from the open door revealed cabalistic designs traced in chalk on the floor; curious and oddly obscene instruments of brass, copper, or steel glittered on the topmost shelf; the air was rank with mouldering decay, stale and vitiated. Quite suddenly, I felt sick to my stomach: now I knew, or thought I knew, why Uncle Hiram had broken off relations with his family.

It was not his doing, it was *theirs*. The Winfields were of ancient stock; rumors and whispers of disgusting witch-cult survivals in our accursed corner of New England had come to them, with whispers of certain disturbing and unsettling doings in Arkham, Innsmouth and Dunwich.

The Winfields had cast Uncle Hiram out because he was dabbling in rituals and lore too loathsome, too blasphemous, to be tolerated.

And I am a Winfield...

No words passed between us, but we left the secret room together, as if in obedience to the same impulse. And we left the hidden door ajar.

Chapter VI

We did little more the rest of that cold, drizzly day; nor did we discuss what we had found. Brian was too healthy-minded, too whole-boyishly wholesome and normal to have read the queer old texts and the tainted literature into which I have delved deeper than I wish I had. But he sensed the evil that lurked all about us, in the pages of those abominable old books, and that gloated down from the smirking canine faces in that grisly painting, and that breathed about the dark old house from that charnel pit of buried horrors men call Hubble's Field...

Later, feeling a bit hungry, and oddly desirous of some human companionship, we drove through the dank drizzle back to the diner by the waterfront. Before, it had been empty, save for a slatternly girl behind the counter and a fat cook chewing on the stub of a dead cigar, bent over the steam-table. Now, though, it was half-full, and I thought the locals looked at us oddly as we went in and took a table by the blurred and greasy window. They were a disreputable lot, men with stubbled cheeks and furtive eyes, clad in filthy overalls and flannel shirts. We paid them no attention, but it seemed to me that we were a larger object of curiosity, or resentment, than we should have been, even taking into consideration the attention a “city stranger” draws in secluded, decaying backwaters like Durnham Beach.

The gum-chewing waitress leaned over the counter and said something to one of the locals couldn’t make out her whining tones, something about “ol’ Stokely place” and “Hubble’s Field,” but he grumbled something in reply that sounded like “Damned lotta nerve, comin’ in here.”

“...Git back where they came from,” muttered another. A third gave a surly nod of agreement.

“Now it’s gonna start all over again, I bet!” he growled.

More disapproving, even menacing looks were directed at us. Brian noticed it, too. “We seem to be distinctly unpopular, Win,” he observed. I nodded quickly.

“We do, indeed. Let’s finish up and get out of here before there’s trouble.”

“Good idea,” he agreed. We left and drove back through the wet, saying little, each busy with his own thoughts.

* * * *

That evening Brian was browsing through one of the old books while I tried to concentrate on cataloguing the contents of the house. My mind seemed unable to focus on business, being obscurely troubled.

“Here’s something odd, Win,” Brian spoke up. Something in his tones made me look up sharply.

“What’s that you’re reading?”

“The *Necronomicon*...listen to this! Hm, let’s see—here it is:... ‘and the Mi-Go that are the minions of His Half-Brother, Lord Hastur, come down but rarely to the,’ no, a little further on: ‘and likewise is it with the fearsome

Yuggs that are the servitors of Zoth-Ommog and His Brother, Ythogtha, and that are led in That Service by Ubb, Father of Worms, they slither but seldom from the moist and fetid burrows beneath the fields where they make their loathsome lair’...wasn’t that Ponape Figurine you people were so concerned about supposed to be an image of Zoth-Ommog?”

I felt a queer foreboding. “It was. Is there any more?”

“Plenty. Listen to this. ‘But all such as these, aye, and the Night-Gaunts, too, that be in the service of Nyarlathotep under their leader, Yegg-ha the Faceless Thing, and the Dholes of Yaddith, and the Nug-Soth, that serve the Mighty Mother’—I’ll skip down the page—‘they fret and fumble ever at the fetters of the Elder Sign, the which doth bind their Masters, and they strive ever to do That which should set Them free, even unto the Red Offering. And in this dreadful Cause they have full many times ere this seduced and bought the hearts and souls of mortal men, selecting such as be frail and vain, venal or avaricious, and thereby easily corrupted by the thirst for knowledge, or the lust for gold, or the madness for power that is man’s deepest and most direful sin...’”

We stared at each other for a moment. Then I got up and crossed to where my cousin was sitting, and examined the page over his shoulder.

I read: “Such men as these, I say, they whisper to of night, and lure into their toils with Promises most often unfulfilled. For men they need, and that hungrily: for ’tis the hand of mortal men alone can dislodge the Elder Sign and undo the mighty ensorcellments stamped upon the prisons of the Old Ones by the Elder Gods...”

“Look at the next passage,” he said in low, troubled tones.

I read on: “In particular it be those of the minions that inhabit the noisome depths beneath the Earth’s crust that lure men to their dreadful service through promise of wealth; for all the ore and riches of the world be theirs to dispense, aye, mines of gold and great heaps of inestimable gems. Of these, the Yuggs, whose name the Scribe rendereth as the Worms of the Earth, are by far the most to be feared, for it is said that there be many a rich and wealthy man bestriding the proud ways of the world today, the secret of whose wealth lies in accursed treasure brought to his feet by the immense and loathsome, the white and slimy Yuggs, whereby to purchase his service to their Cause, *to the utter and most damnable betrayal, of humankind, and the imperilment of the very Earth.*”

Brian's face was drawn, his eyes haunted by a fearful surmise. "Remember we wondered where Uncle Hiram's fortune came from," he whispered.

I flinched away from his stare. "What are you suggesting?" I cried, protestingly. "That's absolutely crazy—madness!"

"Is it?...remember that queer term, the 'Red Offering'...and all those bodies out in Hubble's Field...?"

"What are you...trying to say?" I scoffed, but my voice was shaky and I knew that Brian could read the doubt in my eyes.

"Hubble's Field," he murmured somberly, "Ubb, Father of Worms...the Worms of the Earth...those that inhabit the noisome depths beneath the Earth's crust that lure men to their service through promise of wealth'... Hubble's Field...E-choc-tah, 'The Place of Worms'..."

"...*Ubb's Field*," I gasped. He nodded grimly.

"Come on," said Brian briefly, springing up and heading for the secret chamber. I paused only long enough to snatch up my electric torch. Then I followed him into the Unknown...

Chapter VII

The beam of my torch flashed about the plaster walls of the cramped, airless little room sending enormous shadows leaping crazily. Brian was running his hands over the walls as if searching for something. I asked him in a rather breathless voice what it was he was looking for. He shook his head numbly.

"Damned if I know," he confessed. "Another secret panel, I guess, leading maybe to another hidden room beyond this one."

At my suggestion we dragged the huge Medieval adumbry away from the wall. As the only piece of furniture in the hidden chamber, it might conceal another door, if door there was.

And there was...

Brian's searching fingers found and pressed a button set flush into the plaster. Some mechanism concealed behind the wall squealed rustily, protesting. A black opening appeared. I shone my light within the opening, and we saw crudely-hewn stone steps going down into darkness.

"That's it!" Brian breathed triumphantly.

"You're crazy," I said. "Probably just lead to the basement."

“This is Southern California,” he reminded me. “Houses don’t have cellars or basements like they do back East. Just hot water heaters out in back...come on! And hold that light steady.”

Propping the sliding panel open with one of the brass implements from the top shelf of the adumbry, we started down the steps, Brian leading the way.

The stone stair wound down into the depths in a spiral; air blew up from below us, sickening with the stench of mould and rot and mildew, sweetish with the smells of raw wet soil. And over all the other stenches, strangely, the salt smell of the sea.

“My God! There! *Look—*”

Strewn on the lichen-crusting steps beneath us gems glimmered and flashed in the light of the torch. Some were cut into facets and set in antique gold or silver settings, others were raw and neither cut nor polished. Interspersed among the jewels were lumps of gold ore, and silver, and worked pieces of precious metals. There were many coins scattered down the steps: I bent, picked one up, examined it, peering with dread surmise at noble Spanish profiles of ancient kings.

“No wonder he was so rich, damn him!” breathed Brian, his eyes gleaming wildly in the electric glare of the torch. “No wonder they bought his ‘service’ so easily...my God! The ‘Red Offerings!’”

“You still don’t have any real proof,” I protested. But my words rang hollowly, even to my hearing.

“*There’s* all the proof I need,” raged Brian, kicking with his shoe at the surface of the mould-crusting step. Gems and coins scattered, clattering. And it seemed to me that something stirred in the darkness beneath where we stood.

“Come on, let’s follow this thing to the end of it.” Without waiting for me to follow, he plunged recklessly down the coiling stair, rubies and sapphires crunching and squealing under his tread. While I lingered, hesitating just a little, he vanished from my sight.

Then I heard him cry out in a wrathful roar.

“There’s someone down here, Win! You, there, stop—”

A moment of dead silence. The stench became overpowering, sickening. Something huge and wet and glistening white surged in the gloom beneath where I stood hesitating.

Then Brian *screamed*...a raw shriek of ultimate horror such as I have never heard before from human lips, and hope and pray never to hear again. A scream such as that could rip and tear the lining of a man's throat—

Calling his name out, I plunged and stumbled and half-fell down the steps, slipping in the slimy muck that coated the stones.

I reached the bottom of the stair, but Brian was not there. There was nothing at all to be seen, no side-passages, no doorways: nothing.

The coiling stone stair did not end, but it vanished into a black pool of slimy liquid mud which completely filled the bottom of the stairwell. Something died within me as I shone my light across that black pool. *The agitated ripples that crawled from edge to edge of the pool, as if something heavy had just fallen in...*

Fallen, or been dragged.

* * * *

I did not stay very much longer in the huge old house so near, so fearfully near to Hubble's Field. Once the police had taken my wild and incoherent statement—which doubtless they dismissed as the ravings of a lunatic—I returned to Brian's apartment in Santiago.

I brought with me the old books. It was—it *is*—my firm intention to give them to some suitable, scholarly collection; I shall most likely donate them to the Sanbourne Institute of Pacific Antiquities, which already has Copeland's *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* and the *Zanthu Tablets*. For some reason, I linger on here; and I do not think I shall go back to my place of employment at Miskatonic. After all, with the wealth of my heritage from Uncle Hiram's estate, I need no longer work for a living and may indulge my whims.

Every night, as I hover on the brink of sleep, the Voices come—whispering, whispering. Wealth and power and forbidden knowledge they promise me, over and over...now that I have already performed the Red Offering, I may enjoy the fruits of my—sacrifice.

In vain I protest that *it was not I* that flung or felled or drove Brian down into that horrible pool of black, liquescent mud at the bottom of the secret stair. The stair of which I said nothing to the police.

But the Voices say it does not matter: the Red Offering has been made. And it must be made, again, and again, and again.

Is that what the loutish workman in the diner meant when he predicted, “now it’s gonna start all over again?” Perhaps. From the hundreds of corpses the authorities found buried in Hubble’ Field, it has been going on for a very long time already.

Oh, they know too well how easy it is to seduce weak and fallible men, curse them!

The Voices whisper to me how easy it is to make the Sign of Koth which will take me beyond the Dream-Gates where the Night-Gaunts and the Ghouls, and the Ghasts of Zin, wait to welcome me; from thence the great winged Byakhee that serve Hastur in the dark spaces between the stars linger upon my coming, to fly me to the dark star amidst the Hyades, to Carcosa beside the cloudy shores of Lake Hali, to the very foot of the Elder Throne where the King in Yellow—even He, Yhtill the Timeless One—will receive my Vow, and where I will receive the penultimate guerdon of my service, and will at length glimpse That which is hidden behind the Pallid Mask...soon...soon...

I have been reading the *Necronomicon* a lot, these empty days, waiting for the nights to come and the Voices to begin.

I think I will move back to Uncle Hiram’s house In Durnham Beach soon. After all, it belongs to me, now.

It, too, is part of the Winfield heritage.

THE CHALLENGE FROM BEYOND, by Multiple Authors

A collaborative work by C.L. Moore, Abraham Merritt, H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard,
and Frank Belknap Long.

[C. L. Moore]

George Campbell opened sleep-fogged eyes upon darkness and lay gazing out of the tent flap upon the pale August night for some minutes before he roused enough even to wonder what had wakened him. There was in the keen, clear air of these Canadian woods a soporific as potent as any drug. Campbell lay quiet for a moment, sinking slowly back into the delicious borderlands of sleep, conscious of an exquisite weariness, an unaccustomed sense of muscles well used, and relaxed now into perfect ease. These were vacation's most delightful moments, after all—rest, after toil, in the clear, sweet forest night.

Luxuriously, as his mind sank backward into oblivion, he assured himself once more that three long months of freedom lay before him—freedom from cities and monotony, freedom from pedagogy and the University and students with no rudiments of interest in the geology he earned his daily bread by dinning into their obdurate ears. Freedom from—

Abruptly the delightful somnolence crashed about him. Somewhere outside the sound of tin shrieking across tin slashed into his peace. George Campbell sat up jerkily and reached for his flashlight. Then he laughed and put it down again, straining his eyes through the midnight gloom outside where among the tumbling cans of his supplies a dark anonymous little night beast was prowling. He stretched out a long arm and groped about among the rocks at the tent door for a missile. His fingers closed on a large stone, and he drew back his hand to throw.

But he never threw it. It was such a queer thing he had come upon in the dark. Square, crystal smooth, obviously artificial, with dull rounded corners. The strangeness of its rock surfaces to his fingers was so remarkable that he reached again for his flashlight and turned its rays upon the thing he held.

All sleepiness left him as he saw what it was he had picked up in his idle groping. It was clear as rock crystal, this queer, smooth cube. Quartz, unquestionably, but not in its usual hexagonal crystallized form. Somehow—he could not guess the method—it had been wrought into a perfect cube, about four inches in measurement over each worn face. For it was incredibly worn. The hard, hard crystal was rounded now until its corners were almost gone and the thing was beginning to assume the outlines of a sphere. Ages and ages of wearing, years almost beyond counting, must have passed over this strange clear thing.

But the most curious thing of all was that shape he could make out dimly in the heart of the crystal. For imbedded in its center lay a little disc of a pale and nameless substance with characters incised deep upon its quartz-enclosed surface. Wedge-shaped characters, faintly reminiscent of cuneiform writing.

George Campbell wrinkled his brows and bent closer above the little enigma in his hands, puzzling helplessly. How could such a thing as this have imbedded in pure rock crystal? Remotely a memory floated through his mind of ancient legends that called quartz crystals ice which had frozen too hard to melt again. Ice—and wedge-shaped cuneiforms—yes, didn't that sort of writing originate among the Sumerians who came down from the north in history's remotest beginnings to settle in the primitive Mesopotamian valley? Then hard sense regained control and he laughed. Quartz, of course, was formed in the earliest of earth's geological periods, when there was nothing anywhere but beat and heaving rock. Ice had not come for tens of millions of years after this thing must have been formed.

And yet—that writing. Man-made, surely, although its characters were unfamiliar save in their faint hinting at cuneiform shapes. Or could there, in a Paleozoic world, have been things with a written language who might have graven these cryptic wedges upon the quartz-enveloped disc he held? Or—might a thing like this have fallen meteor-like out of space into the unformed rock of a still molten world? Could it—

Then he caught himself up sharply and felt his ears going hot at the luridness of his own imagination. The silence and the solitude and the queer thing in his hands were conspiring to play tricks with his common sense. He shrugged and laid the crystal down at the edge of his pallet, switching off

the light. Perhaps morning and a clear head would bring him an answer to the questions that seemed so insoluble now.

But sleep did not come easily. For one thing, it seemed to him as he flashed off the light, that the little cube had shone for a moment as if with sustained light before it faded into the surrounding dark. Or perhaps he was wrong. Perhaps it had been only his dazzled eyes that seemed to see the light forsake it reluctantly, glowing in the enigmatic deeps of the thing with queer persistence.

He lay there unquietly for a long while, turning the unanswered questions over and over in his mind. There was something about this crystal cube out of the unmeasured past, perhaps from the dawn of all history, that constituted a challenge that would not let him sleep.

[A. Merritt]

He lay there, it seemed to him, for hours. It had been the lingering light, the luminescence that seemed so reluctant to die, which held his mind. It was as though something in the heart of the cube had awakened, stirred drowsily, become suddenly alert...and intent upon him.

Sheer fantasy, this. He stirred impatiently and flashed his light upon his watch. Close to one o'clock; three hours more before the dawn. The beam fell and was focused upon the warm crystal cube. He held it there closely, for minutes. He snapped it out, then watched.

There was no doubt about it now. As his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness, he saw that the strange crystal was glimmering with tiny fugitive lights deep within it like threads of sapphire lightnings. They were at its center and they seemed to him to come from the pale disk with its disturbing markings. And the disc itself was becoming larger...the markings shifting shapes...the cube was growing...was it illusion brought about by the tiny lightnings....

He heard a sound. It was the very ghost of a sound, like the ghosts of harp strings being plucked with ghostly fingers. He bent closer. It came from the cube....

There was squeaking in the underbrush, a flurry of bodies and an agonized wailing like a child in death throes and swiftly stilled. Some small tragedy of the wilderness, killer and prey. He stepped over to where it had been enacted, but could see nothing. He again snapped off the flash and

looked toward his tent. Upon the ground was a pale blue glimmering. It was the cube. He stooped to pick it up; then obeying some obscure warning, drew back his hand.

And again, he saw, its glow was dying. The tiny sapphire lightnings flashing fitfully, withdrawing to the disc from which they had come. There was no sound from it.

He sat, watching the luminescence glow and fade, glow and fade, but steadily becoming dimmer. It came to him that two elements were necessary to produce the phenomenon. The electric ray itself, and his own fixed attention. His mind must travel along the ray, fix itself upon the cube's heart, if its beat were to wax, until...what?

He felt a chill of spirit, as though from contact with some alien thing. It was alien, he knew it; not of this earth. Not of earth's life. He conquered his shrinking, picked up the cube and took it into the tent. It was neither warm nor cold; except for its weight he would not have known he held it. He put it upon the table, keeping the torch turned from it; then stepped to the flap of the tent and closed it.

He went back to the table, drew up the camp chair, and turned the flash directly upon the cube, focusing it so far as he could upon its heart. He sent all his will, all his concentration, along it; focusing will and sight upon the disc as he had the light.

As though at command, the sapphire lightnings burned forth. They burst from the disc into the body of the crystal cube, then beat back, bathing the disc and the markings. Again these began to change, shifting, moving, advancing, and retreating in the blue gleaming. They were no longer cuneiform. They were things...objects.

He heard the murmuring music, the plucked harp strings. Louder grew the sound and louder, and now all the body of the cube vibrated to their rhythm. The crystal walls were melting, growing misty as though formed of the mist of diamonds. And the disc itself was growing...the shapes shifting, dividing and multiplying as though some door had been opened and into it companies of phantasms were pouring. While brighter, more bright grew the pulsing light.

He felt swift panic, tried to withdraw sight and will, dropped the flash. The cube had no need now of the ray...and he could not withdraw...could not withdraw? Why, he himself was being sucked into that disc which was

now a globe within which unnameable shapes danced to a music that bathed the globe with steady radiance.

There was no tent. There was only a vast curtain of sparkling mist behind which shone the globe.... He felt himself drawn through that mist, sucked through it as if by a mighty wind, straight for the globe.

[H. P. Lovecraft]

As the mist-blurred light of the sapphire suns grew more and more intense, the outlines of the globe ahead wavered and dissolved to a churning chaos. Its pallor and its motion and its music all blended themselves with the engulfing mist—bleaching it to a pale steel-colour and setting it undulantly in motion. And the sapphire suns, too, melted imperceptibly into the greying infinity of shapeless pulsation.

Meanwhile the sense of forward, outward motion grew intolerably, incredibly, cosmically swift. Every standard of speed known to earth seemed dwarfed, and Campbell knew that any such flight in physical reality would mean instant death to a human being. Even as it was—in this strange, hellish hypnosis or nightmare—the quasi-visual impression of meteor-like hurtling almost paralyzed his mind. Though there were no real points of reference in the grey, pulsing void, he felt that he was approaching and passing the speed of light itself. Finally his consciousness did go under—and merciful blackness swallowed everything.

It was very suddenly, and amidst the most impenetrable darkness, that thoughts and ideas again came to George Campbell. Of how many moments—or years—or eternities—had elapsed since his flight through the grey void, he could form no estimate. He knew only that he seemed to be at rest and without pain. Indeed, the absence of all physical sensation was the salient quality of his condition. It made even the blackness seem less solidly black—suggesting as it did that he was rather a disembodied intelligence in a state beyond physical senses, than a corporeal being with senses deprived of their accustomed objects of perception. He could think sharply and quickly—almost preternaturally so—yet could form no idea whatsoever of his situation.

Half by instinct, he realised that he was not in his own tent. True, he might have awaked there from a nightmare to a world equally black; yet he knew this was not so. There was no camp cot beneath him—he had no

hands to feel the blankets and canvas surface and flashlight that ought to be around him—there was no sensation of cold in the air—no flap through which he could glimpse the pale night outside...something was wrong, dreadfully wrong.

He cast his mind backward and thought of the fluorescent cube which had hypnotised him—of that, and all which had followed. He had known that his mind was going, yet had been unable to draw back. At the last moment there had been a shocking, panic fear—a subconscious fear beyond even that caused by the sensation of daemonic flight. It had come from some vague flash or remote recollection—just what, he could not at once tell. Some cell-group in the back of his head had seemed to find a cloudily familiar quality in the cube—and that familiarity was fraught with dim terror. Now he tried to remember what the familiarity and the terror were.

Little by little it came to him. Once—long ago, in connection with his geological life-work—he had read of something like that cube. It had to do with those debatable and disquieting clay fragments called the Eltdown Shards, dug up from pre-carboniferous strata in southern England thirty years before. Their shape and markings were so queer that a few scholars hinted at artificiality, and made wild conjectures about them and their origin. They came, clearly, from a time when no human beings could exist on the globe—but their contours and figurings were damnably puzzling. That was how they got their name.

It was not, however, in the writings of any sober scientist that Campbell had seen that reference to a crystal, disc-holding globe. The source was far less reputable, and infinitely more vivid. About 1912 a deeply learned Sussex clergyman of occultist leanings—the Reverend Arthur Brooke Winters-Hall—had professed to identify the markings on the Eltdown Shards with some of the so-called “pre-human hieroglyphs” persistently cherished and esoterically handed down in certain mystical circles, and had published at his own expense what purported to be a “translation” of the primal and baffling “inscriptions”—a “translation” still quoted frequently and seriously by occult writers. In this “translation”—a surprisingly long brochure in view of the limited number of “shards” existing—had occurred the narrative, supposedly of pre-human authorship, containing the now frightening reference.

As the story went, there dwelt on a world—and eventually on countless other worlds—of outer space a mighty order of worm-like beings whose attainments and whose control of nature surpassed anything within the range of terrestrial imagination. They had mastered the art of interstellar travel early in their career, and had peopled every habitable planet in their own galaxy—killing off the races they found.

Beyond the limits of their own galaxy—which was not ours—they could not navigate in person; but in their quest for knowledge of all space and time they discovered a means of spanning certain transgalactic gulfs with their minds. They devised peculiar objects—strangely energized cubes of a curious crystal containing hypnotic talismen and enclosed in space-resisting spherical envelopes of an unknown substance—which could be forcibly expelled beyond the limits of their universe, and which would respond to the attraction of cool solid matter only.

These, of which a few would necessarily land on various inhabited worlds in outside universes, formed the ether-bridges needed for mental communication. Atmospheric friction burned away the protecting envelope, leaving the cube exposed and subject to discovery by the intelligent minds of the world where it fell. By its very nature, the cube would attract and rivet attention. This, when coupled with the action of light, was sufficient to set its special properties working.

The mind that noticed the cube would be drawn into it by the power of the disc, and would be sent on a thread of obscure energy to the place whence the disc had come—the remote world of the worm-like space explorers across stupendous galactic abysses. Received in one of the machines to which each cube was attuned, the captured mind would remain suspended without body or senses until examined by one of the dominant race. Then it would, by an obscure process of interchange, be pumped of all its contents. The investigator's mind would now occupy the strange machine while the captive mind occupied the interrogator's worm-like body. Then, in another interchange, the interrogator's mind would leap across boundless space to the captive's vacant and unconscious body on the trans-galactic world—animating the alien tenement as best it might, and exploring the alien world in the guise of one of its denizens.

When done with exploration, the adventurer would use the cube and its disc in accomplishing his return—and sometimes the captured mind would

be restored safely to its own remote world. Not always, however, was the dominant race so kind. Sometimes, when a potentially important race capable of space travel was found, the worm-like folk would employ the cube to capture and annihilate minds by the thousands, and would extirpate the race for diplomatic reasons—using the exploring minds as agents of destruction.

In other cases sections of the worm-folk would permanently occupy a trans-galactic planet—destroying the captured minds and wiping out the remaining inhabitants preparatory to settling down in unfamiliar bodies. Never, however, could the parent civilization be quite duplicated in such a case; since the new planet would not contain all the materials necessary for the worm-race's arts. The cubes, for example, could be made only on the home planet.

Only a few of the numberless cubes sent forth ever found a landing and response on an inhabited world—since there was no such thing as aiming them at goals beyond sight or knowledge. Only three, ran the story, had ever landed on peopled worlds in our own particular universe. One of these had struck a planet near the galactic rim two thousand billion years ago, while another had lodged three billion years ago on a world near the centre of the galaxy. The third—and the only one ever known to have invaded the solar system—had reached our own earth 150,000,000 years ago.

It was with this latter that Dr. Winters-Hall's "translation" chiefly dealt. When the cube struck the earth, he wrote, the ruling terrestrial species was a huge, cone-shaped race surpassing all others before or since in mentality and achievements. This race was so advanced that it had actually sent minds abroad in both space and time to explore the cosmos, hence recognised something of what had happened when the cube fell from the sky and certain individuals had suffered mental change after gazing at it.

Realising that the changed individuals represented invading minds, the race's leaders had them destroyed—even at the cost of leaving the displaced minds exiled in alien space. They had had experience with even stranger transitions. When, through a mental exploration of space and time, they formed a rough idea of what the cube was, they carefully hid the thing from light and sight, and guarded it as a menace. They did not wish to destroy a thing so rich in later experimental possibilities. Now and then some rash, unscrupulous adventurer would furtively gain access to it and sample its

perilous powers despite the consequences—but all such cases were discovered, and safely and drastically dealt with.

Of this evil meddling the only bad result was that the worm-like outside race learned from the new exiles what had happened to their explorers on earth, and conceived a violent hatred of the planet and all its life-forms. They would have depopulated it if they could, and indeed sent additional cubes into space in the wild hope of striking it by accident in unguarded places—but that accident never came to pass.

The cone-shaped terrestrial beings kept the one existing cube in a special shrine as a relique and basis for experiments, till after aeons it was lost amidst the chaos of war and the destruction of the great polar city where it was guarded. When, fifty million years ago, the beings sent their minds ahead into the infinite future to avoid a nameless peril of inner earth, the whereabouts of the sinister cube from space were unknown.

This much, according to the learned occultist, the Eltdown Shards had said. What now made the account so obscurely frightful to Campbell was the minute accuracy with which the alien cube had been described. Every detail tallied—dimensions, consistency, hieroglyphed central disc, hypnotic effects. As he thought the matter over and over amidst the darkness of his strange situation, he began to wonder whether his whole experience with the crystal cube—indeed, its very existence—were not a nightmare brought on by some freakish subconscious memory of this old bit of extravagant, charlatanic reading. If so, though, the nightmare must still be in force; since his present apparently bodiless state had nothing of normality in it.

Of the time consumed by this puzzled memory and reflection, Campbell could form no estimate. Everything about his state was so unreal that ordinary dimensions and measurements became meaningless. It seemed an eternity, but perhaps it was not really long before the sudden interruption came. What happened was as strange and inexplicable as the blackness it succeeded. There was a sensation—of the mind rather than of the body—and all at once Campbell felt his thoughts swept or sucked beyond his control in tumultuous and chaotic fashion.

Memories arose irresponsibly and irrelevantly. All that he knew—all his personal background, traditions, experiences, scholarship, dreams, ideas, and inspirations—welled up abruptly and simultaneously, with a dizzying speed and abundance which soon made him unable to keep track of any

separate concept. The parade of all his mental contents became an avalanche, a cascade, a vortex. It was as horrible and vertiginous as his hypnotic flight through space when the crystal cube pulled him. Finally it sapped his consciousness and brought on fresh oblivion.

Another measureless blank—and then a slow trickle of sensation. This time it was physical, not mental. Sapphire light, and a low rumble of distant sound. There were tactile impressions—he could realise that he was lying at full length on something, though there was a baffling strangeness about the feel of his posture. He could not reconcile the pressure of the supporting surface with his own outlines—or with the outlines of the human form at all. He tried to move his arms, but found no definite response to the attempt. Instead, there were little, ineffectual nervous twitches all over the area which seemed to mark his body.

He tried to open his eyes more widely, but found himself unable to control their mechanism. The sapphire light came in a diffused, nebulous manner, and could nowhere be voluntarily focussed into definiteness. Gradually, though, visual images began to trickle in curiously and indecisively. The limits and qualities of vision were not those which he was used to, but he could roughly correlate the sensation with what he had known as sight. As this sensation gained some degree of stability, Campbell realised that he must still be in the throes of nightmare.

He seemed to be in a room of considerable extent—of medium height, but with a large proportionate area. On every side—and he could apparently see all four sides at once—were high, narrowish slits which seemed to serve as combined doors and windows. There were singular low tables or pedestals, but no furniture of normal nature and proportions. Through the slits streamed floods of sapphire light, and beyond them could be mistily seen the sides and roofs of fantastic buildings like clustered cubes. On the walls—in the vertical panels between the slits—were strange markings of an oddly disquieting character. It was some time before Campbell understood why they disturbed him so—then he saw that they were, in repeated instances, precisely like some of the hieroglyphs on the crystal cube's disc.

The actual nightmare element, though, was something more than this. It began with the living thing which presently entered through one of the slits, advancing deliberately toward him and bearing a metal box of bizarre

proportions and glassy, mirror-like surfaces. For this thing was nothing human—nothing of earth—nothing even of man’s myths and dreams. It was a gigantic, pale-grey worm or centipede, as large around as a man and twice as long, with a disc-like, apparently eyeless, cilia-fringed head bearing a purple central orifice. It glided on its rear pairs of legs, with its fore part raised vertically—the legs, or at least two pairs of them, serving as arms. Along its spinal ridge was a curious purple comb, and a fan-shaped tail of some grey membrane ended its grotesque bulk. There was a ring of flexible red spikes around its neck, and from the twistings of these came clicking, twanging sounds in measured, deliberate rhythms.

Here, indeed, was outré nightmare at its height—capricious fantasy at its apex. But even this vision of delirium was not what caused George Campbell to lapse a third time into unconsciousness. It took one more thing—one final, unbearable touch—to do that. As the nameless worm advanced with its glistening box, the reclining man caught in the mirror-like surface a glimpse of what should have been his own body. Yet—horribly verifying his disordered and unfamiliar sensations—it was not his own body at all that he saw reflected in the burnished metal. It was, instead, the loathsome, pale-grey bulk of one of the great centipedes.

[Robert E. Howard]

From that final lap of senselessness, he emerged with a full understanding of his situation. His mind was imprisoned in the body of a frightful native of an alien planet, while, somewhere on the other side of the universe, his own body was housing the monster’s personality.

He fought down an unreasoning horror. Judged from a cosmic standpoint, why should his metamorphosis horrify him? Life and consciousness were the only realities in the universe. Form was unimportant. His present body was hideous only according to terrestrial standards. Fear and revulsion were drowned in the excitement of titanic adventure.

What was his former body but a cloak, eventually to be cast off at death anyway? He had no sentimental illusions about the life from which he had been exiled. What had it ever given him save toil, poverty, continual frustration and repression? If this life before him offered no more, at least it offered no less. Intuition told him it offered more—much more.

With the honesty possible only when life is stripped to its naked fundamentals, he realized that he remembered with pleasure only the physical delights of his former life. But he had long ago exhausted all the physical possibilities contained in that earthly body. Earth held no new thrills. But in the possession of this new, alien body he felt promises of strange, exotic joys.

A lawless exultation rose in him. He was a man without a world, free of all conventions or inhibitions of Earth, or of this strange planet, free of every artificial restraint in the universe. He was a god! With grim amusement he thought of his body moving in earth's business and society, with all the while an alien monster staring out of the windows that were George Campbell's eyes on people who would flee if they knew.

Let him walk the earth slaying and destroying as he would. Earth and its races no longer had any meaning to George Campbell. There he had been one of a billion nonentities, fixed in place by a mountainous accumulation of conventions, laws and manners, doomed to live and die in his sordid niche. But in one blind bound he had soared above the commonplace. This was not death, but re-birth—the birth of a full-grown mentality, with a new-found freedom that made little of physical captivity on Yekub.

He started. Yekub! It was the name of this planet, but how had he known? Then he knew, as he knew the name of him whose body he occupied—Tothe. Memory, deep grooved in Tothe's brain, was stirring in him—shadows of the knowledge Tothe had. Carved deep in the physical tissues of the brain, they spoke dimly as implanted instincts to George Campbell; and his human consciousness seized them and translated them to show him the way not only to safety and freedom, but to the power his soul, stripped to its primitive impulses, craved. Not as a slave would he dwell on Yekub, but as a king! Just as of old barbarians had sat on the throne of lordly empires.

For the first time he turned his attention to his surroundings. He still lay on the couch-like thing in the midst of that fantastic room, and the centipede man stood before him, holding the polished metal object, and clashing its neck-spikes. Thus it spoke to him, Campbell knew, and what it said he dimly understood, through the implanted thought processes of Tothe, just as he knew the creature was Yukth, supreme lord of science.

But Campbell gave no heed, for he had made his desperate plan, a plan so alien to the ways of Yekub that it was beyond Yukth's comprehension and caught him wholly unprepared. Yukth, like Campbell, saw the sharp-pointed metal shard on a nearby table, but to Yukth it was only a scientific implement. He did not even know it could be used as a weapon. Campbell's earthly mind supplied the knowledge and the action that followed, driving Tothe's body into movements no man of Yekub had ever made before.

Campbell snatched the pointed shard and struck, ripping savagely upward. Yukth reared and toppled, his entrails spilling on the floor. In an instant Campbell was streaking for a door. His speed was amazing, exhilarating, first fulfillment of the promise of novel physical sensations.

As he ran, guided wholly by the instinctive knowledge implanted in Tothe's physical reflexes, it was as if he were borne by a separate consciousness in his legs. Tothe's body was bearing him along a route it had traversed ten thousand times when animated by Tothe's mind.

Down a winding corridor he raced, up a twisted stair, through a carved door, and the same instincts that had brought him there told him he had found what he sought. He was in a circular room with a domed roof from which shone a livid blue light. A strange structure rose in the middle of the rainbow-hued floor, tier on tier, each of a separate, vivid color. The ultimate tier was a purple cone, from the apex of which a blue smoky mist drifted upward to a sphere that poised in mid-air—a sphere that shone like translucent ivory.

This, the deep-grooved memories of Tothe told Campbell, was the god of Yekub, though why the people of Yekub feared and worshipped it had been forgotten a million years. A worm-priest stood between him and the altar which no hand of flesh had ever touched. That it could be touched was a blasphemy that had never occurred to a man of Yekub. The worm-priest stood in frozen horror until Campbell's shard ripped the life out of him.

On his centipede-legs Campbell clambered the tiered altar, heedless of its sudden quiverings, heedless of the change that was taking place in the floating sphere, heedless of the smoke that now billowed out in blue clouds. He was drunk with the feel of power. He feared the superstitions of Yekub no more than he feared those of earth. With that globe in his hands he would be king of Yekub. The worm men would dare deny him nothing,

when he held their god as hostage. He reached a hand for the ball—no longer ivory-hued, but red as blood....

[Frank Belknap Long]

Out of the tent into the pale August night walked the body of George Campbell. It moved with a slow, wavering gait between the bodies of enormous trees, over a forest path strewn with sweet scented pine needles. The air was crisp and cold. The sky was an inverted bowl of frosted silver flecked with stardust, and far to the north the Aurora Borealis splashed streamers of fire.

The head of the walking man lolled hideously from side to side. From the corners of his lax mouth drooled thick threads of amber froth, which fluttered in the night breeze. He walked upright at first, as a man would walk, but gradually as the tent receded, his posture altered. His torso began almost imperceptibly to slant, and his limbs to shorten.

In a far-off world of outer space the centipede creature that was George Campbell clasped to its bosom a god whose lineaments were red as blood, and ran with insect-like quiverings across a rainbow-hued hall and out through massive portals into the bright glow of alien suns.

Weaving between the trees of earth in an attitude that suggested the awkward loping of a werebeast, the body of George Campbell was fulfilling a mindless destiny. Long, claw-tipped fingers dragged leaves from a carpet of odorous pine needles as it moved toward a wide expanse of gleaming water.

In the far-off, extra-galactic world of the worm people, George Campbell moved between cyclopean blocks of black masonry down long, fern-planted avenues holding aloft the round red god.

There was a harsh animal cry in the underbrush near the gleaming lake on earth where the mind of a worm creature dwelt in a body swayed by instinct. Human teeth sank into soft animal fur, tore at black animal flesh. A little silver fox sank its fangs in frantic retaliation into a furry human wrist, and thrashed about in terror as its blood spurted. Slowly the body of George Campbell arose, its mouth splashed with fresh blood. With upper limbs swaying oddly it moved towards the waters of the lake.

As the variform creature that was George Campbell crawled between the black blocks of stone thousands of worm-shapes prostrated themselves

in the scintillating dust before it. A godlike power seemed to emanate from its weaving body as it moved with a slow, undulant motion toward a throne of spiritual empire transcending all the sovereignties of earth.

A trapper stumbling wearily through the dense woods of earth near the tent where the worm-creature dwelt in the body of George Campbell came to the gleaming waters of the lake and discerned something dark floating there. He had been lost in the woods all night, and weariness enveloped him like a leaden cloak in the pale morning light.

But the shape was a challenge that he could not ignore. Moving to the edge of the water he knelt in the soft mud and reached out toward the floating bulk. Slowly he pulled it to the shore.

Far off in outer space the worm-creature holding the glowing red god ascended a throne that gleamed like the constellation Cassiopeia under an alien vault of hyper-suns. The great deity that he held aloft energized his worm tenement, burning away in the white fire of a supermundane spirituality all animal dross.

On earth the trapper gazed with unutterable horror into the blackened and hairy face of the drowned man. It was a bestial face, repulsively anthropoid in contour, and from its twisted, distorted mouth black ichor poured.

“He who sought your body in the abysses of Time will occupy an unresponsive tenement,” said the red god. “No spawn of Yekub can control the body of a human.

“On all earth, living creatures rend one another, and feast with unutterable cruelty on their kith and kin. No worm-mind can control a bestial man-body when it yearns to raven. Only man-minds instinctively conditioned through the course of ten thousand generations can keep the human instincts in thrall. Your body will destroy itself on earth, seeking the blood of its animal kin, seeking the cool water where it can wallow at its ease. Seeking eventually destruction, for the death-instinct is more powerful in it than the instincts of life and it will destroy itself in seeking to return to the slime from which it sprang.”

Thus spoke the round red god of Yekub in a far-off segment of the space-time continuum to George Campbell as the latter, with all human desire purged away, sat on a throne and ruled an empire of worms more

wisely, kindly, and benevolently than any man of earth had ever ruled an empire of men.

THE LAST HORROR OUT OF ARKHAM, by Darrell Schweitzer

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Professor Latham Knucklebury was a bent, grey-haired little man with a penchant for bizarre theories, and a tendency to lecture on them, as if he were in front of a class, to anyone he could corner. I shared an office with him at U. Mass, (pronounced You-Mass by its denizens) and I suppose I heard more of his ideas than anyone else in those days. His arguments were uniformly as strange, incredible, and seemingly ridiculous on the surface as they were, if you stopped to listen to all the reasoning behind them, logical, brilliant, and backed by evidence overlooked by everyone else. Knucklebury often compared himself to Copernicus, Galileo, and other persecuted scientific greats of the past, and perhaps this wasn't entirely inappropriate, because his mind was undeniably first rate, but in the end that didn't save him. He had no tact at all, and thumbed his nose at the Chairman of the Anthropology Department visibly, publicly and with a personal vindictiveness matched only by that directed against him by the late Professor Chambers.

It was obvious that Latham wouldn't last long at the University and it came as no surprise when the axe finally fell. The immediate cause was the publication of his article, Evidence of Fungoid Phallic Worship Among the Early Fire Islanders, despite statements of disapproval and outright threats from Chambers in the Spring 1978 issue of the Squammous Review. It made a laughing stock out of the department as I had feared it would, and when it appeared the Chairman consulted with the President of the Board of Directors, and it was agreed that my colleague had to go. He did. The next morning Latham found a note of dismissal in his mailbox and, true to his nature, his first impulse was to rush into the Chairman's office, interrupt a long-distance phone call and demand an explanation. Now the Anthropology Department's office consisted of a large centre room with the individual offices of the chairman and the various teachers opening into it, and this meant that anything said in a loud voice behind one door could be heard behind all the others. I was at my desk that morning grading some

exams, so I heard the whole thing. Before long Chambers was shouting like a barrage of cannon fire, and Knucklebury had degenerated into a shrill screech. Latham sounded hurt, indignant, and furious all at the same time, as if the most cowardly and treacherous thing imaginable had been done to him. He played the martyr-to-science role well.

“I don’t need to remind you,” he said, “that when I was teaching at Miskatonic they never treated me like this. There I was given respect!”

“And that’s why they closed the place down!” retorted Chambers. “Nobody wanted to go to a place filled with lunatics like you!”

“That’s not true! They lost a government grant!”

“Hallelujah! Maybe Nixon was a good guy after all!”

“Just because your own curiosity has dried up, because you haven’t functioned as a scientist in decades because your sterile little mind can’t appreciate anything new.”

“You ought to be locked up, Knucklebury. You might be dangerous. Delusions of grandeur, hallucinations, I don’t know what. But in the meantime, get out of here. The matter is settled. You’re fired. Talk it out with the Board or the President, but leave me alone. I never want to see your face in here again!”

With that Professor Chambers broke into a stream of language unbecoming a scholar speaking to another scholar. Latham realized that there was nothing he could do and left the room. He came over to my office and I dropped the test paper I had been hiding behind during the battle.

“Jesus Christ, what brought that on?”

“Just make sure that you don’t rock the boat around here Richard,” he said. “If you write anything more than stale rehash you won’t have your job very long.”

“Anything I can do for you, Latham?”

“No. Just watch and wait. I swear to you that I’ll vindicate myself. I’ll prove every one of my hypotheses to be a fact, not just conjecture. Watch and wait, and I promise you, unusual things will begin to happen.”

He refused to explain what he meant while he packed a few papers into his briefcase. He left the office and that was the last I saw of him for months.

* * * *

An unusual thing did happen almost immediately, within a week in fact, but at the time there was no way I could connect it with Latham Knucklebury.

Even though anthropology is my profession, I have always maintained an avid interest in literature. It was my undergraduate minor and my wife Peg teaches English, so between the two of us ours is a very literary household. Both of us are incurable bibliophiles. We collect rare editions, old periodicals, and publishing oddities, so we were both fully equipped to appreciate the uniqueness of the volume that came in the mail the following Saturday morning, four days after my friend's dismissal.

I was sitting at the table finishing my coffee while Peg tidied up the kitchen, when the doorbell rang and the mailman left off a large parcel marked "fourth class book." When I picked it up I was surprised, the thing must have weighed a good fifteen pounds. I looked for a return address but there wasn't any, and the stamps were obscured by a black smear of a postmark.

"What was that?" Peg called.

"A package."

"What is it?"

"A book, but I don't know who it's from. You didn't order anything, did you?"

"No. It might be freebies from some textbook company."

"I don't think so," I said as I began to unwrap it. "No, it's an old book, a very old book. *God!*"

She dropped something and came running.

"Well? What is it?"

I showed her the title page:

**Mr. William
SHAKESPEARE'S
Comedies
Histories & Tragedies.
Published according to the
True Original Copies
London**

Printed by Isaac Jaggard and Ed. Blount, 1623

“It’s got to be a fake,” I said. “It must be a fake.”

Peg picked up the book gingerly, with a half religious awe. She paged through it, checking certain points, then sniffed the binding.

“No,” she said. “I think it’s the real thing. This is a genuine First Folio. The paper’s old enough. Smell it.”

I did. Every book collector knows what musty old books smell like, and very old ones, prior to the invention of wood pulp paper, have an odour all their own, and you get to recognize it after a while. This one smelled right.

“Isn’t there any way you could fake it?”

“Have you got any idea how much trouble it would take to forge a book of this size? You’d have to make all the plates, get specially aged paper, get the watermarks right, get the typos right, the corrupt lines, the smears, the wormholes, everything accurate enough to fool an expert. The expense wouldn’t be worth it. You could only make one or two copies without raising suspicion, and this book isn’t all that rare. A hundred and fifty copies are known to exist, and that’s pretty good for an Elizabethan book that isn’t a bible.”

“How much do you think it’s worth?”

“A lot. A hundred and fifty thousand dollars maybe. But wouldn’t it be easier to rob a bank than to counterfeit something like this? And then why would anyone send it to you anonymously in the mail, real or fake?”

“I don’t know. Maybe they’ll come to collect a pound of flesh later, but when they do I’ll make them explain that inscription first.”

“What inscription?”

I pointed out the handwriting in the upper right corner of the title page, in a nearly illegible hand and faded ink. It read:

To my dear friend, R. B.
—William Shakespeare.

“Your initials,” Peg said.

“Isn’t that funny. But wait a minute, didn’t Shakespeare die in 1616, and wasn’t the first edition of his plays posthumous?”

“Touché! Now you see why it can’t possibly be real. Shakespeare couldn’t have autographed it if he was already dead.”

“One minute. Let me check something.” She left the room and came back a minute later with a book on Shakespeare, in which were reproduced

the four extant signatures of the Bard. Ours matched one of them almost exactly.

“Somebody is one hell of a good forger,” I said.

We kept the book as a curiosity. I took it to a rare book dealer once when the lure of a hundred and fifty thousand dollars became too much for me, and he went over it carefully. He asked me how I had come across it, and when I couldn't tell him he became very suspicious. Books like that don't drop out of the blue. Usually an individual copy has a known history with a long line of owners who can be traced. Eventually he refused to even make an offer on it, convinced that I was some sort of crook, and the book rested on our shelves ever after.

I took it down to glance through occasionally, and that was how I chanced to notice something written in quite modern ballpoint on the blank page following *Troilus and Cressida*. The handwriting was not my wife's, but it looked somehow familiar. The message was:

TEST RUN ONLY THE BEGINNING.

* * * *

That summer Peg and I went on vacation for all three months.

One of the wonderful things about teaching is that if you live modestly, hoard your money, are married to another teacher, and don't have any kids, you can afford to take the entire summer off sometimes and travel. That year we drove west to California, up through Oregon and Washington, then all the way across to Canada and down into Maine. When we got there we indulged in one of our quaint hobbies of dubious legality.

The backwoods areas of northern New England were cleared and farmed once, but the principle crop turned out to be rocks and the farmers went broke. They left their land and moved away, the result was a region of declining population scattered with empty farmhouses and barns, many half in ruins among overgrown fields and re-encroaching forests. Many of these were left partially furnished, filled with whatever the owners thought not worth taking or couldn't carry. Values change over the years, and what was junk in 1890 is often today a much sought after antique.

So what Peg and I have done more than once is find a particularly isolated abandoned house, break in and help ourselves. Sheriffs frown on it,

but I don't think there's an antique dealer in the business who doesn't do the same. They don't see anything wrong with taking old books, plates, and furniture that have been left to the elements and neither do I. Call it an informal type of archeology.

We went treasure hunting in our station wagon at a place called Appleton Ridge which is off Route 1 near Rockland, atop miniature mountains. The view is spectacular on a clear day, and where the cliffs drop away you can see for miles across a wide green valley to the opposite slopes where another row of hills rise. Roads wind in long dusty lines, occasionally stirred by the speck of a car; houses are white matchboxes, and the cows in their pastures look like ants.

We spent a lot of time bouncing along the narrow rocky path that was the local excuse for a road.

We stopped and looked at the scenery, picked blueberries where they grew wild among barren slabs of boulder, and finally we found the house. It stood alone with weeds up to the windowsills facing a barn on the other side of the way with its roof fallen in. I knew there would be nothing in the barn that the wind and rain hadn't ruined long ago, but the house appeared to be in good shape. I parked the car out of sight behind the wreckage of the barn, perilously close to the edge of a cliff, and then Peg and I went around to the back of the house, found an open window, and climbed in.

The place had been looted before. Most of the furniture was gone or smashed, and there were empty liquor bottles scattered about, left by passing derelicts or the local teenagers. Broken glass was everywhere, and in many places plaster had fallen from the ceiling in heaps. We dug around in what must have been the kitchen looking for china plates the kind they used to use as ballast on clipper ships and now sell for two and three figures but came up with nothing.

It was only when we got upstairs that the pickings got any better. There we found a laboratory the vandals never touched.

All the upstairs rooms were empty save for one, which was locked, but it wasn't hard for me to break the door in. The first thing we noticed was that there was a statue in the middle of the room, a huge, extremely crude man-like figure with bat wings on its back and the trunk of an elephant for a face. Two deep holes represented eye sockets. Whoever made it hadn't been much of a sculptor, obviously.

Around on tables were pieces of chemical equipment, glassware, tubing, beakers with a gummy residue in them. These I passed over quickly, and forgot them entirely when I noticed what books were on the shelves that lined the walls.

“Peg! Look at this! It’s impossible!”

The shelves were packed with crumbling leatherbound volumes. I picked one up and the spine left a brown smear on the palm of my hand.

I opened the book and it cracked.

When I saw the title page I couldn’t believe my eyes. It was a book of magic, the *Grimoire* of the sorcerer Honorius, and it was one of the most sought after books in the occult field. It was worth a fortune. Peg opened another at random, and it was something similar. “The guy must have been a wizard,” I said. “And I halfway believe the lump of rock over there is in fact the original Golem, brought from de ghetto of Prague to vork new ewils in dis land.”

“The what? What are you talking about?”

“The Golem, dear, is, or maybe I should say was, a stone robot built by Rabbi Loew in medieval Prague to protect his people from persecution. He wrote the word for “life” on its forehead and that turned it on, and the only way to stop it was to erase the word. Unfortunately the thing didn’t like having its word erased, so it got loose. Like Frankenstein’s monster.

“I hope you’re not serious about this. Besides, this writing doesn’t look Jewish.” She handed me a thick, squat volume in black leather.

“Hebrew, dear, and no I’m not serious. As for this book, it’s in Latin, and it’s a copy of Alhazred’s screwy gibberings, collectively known as the *Necronomicon*. It’s worth a mint, and I’m quite serious about that. We’re rich, you know, and maybe sometime we can come back and have the statue made into a birdbath for the lawn of our estate. I mean, look at these books!”

And look we did. There was another copy of the *Necronomicon*, John Dee’s English version, carefully sewn into what looked like late 18th century deluxe leather. The original was just unbound sheets, you recall.

Also stuffed on those shelves, covered with cobwebs and filled with worm tooth-marks were such rarities as Ferdinand de Schertz’s *Magia Posthuma*, Morryster’s wild *Marvels of Science*, the mind-blasting *Sonnets on Time* by the crazed medieval monk Donaldius of Garthstead, Borellus’

De Motu Animalium, *The Book of Eibon* bound in some sort of reptile hide, the *Complete Works* of Scott Edelstein, *Magia Naturalis* by Della Porta, the 1720 edition of Mason's *Observations on Superhuman Natures*, *The Stone from Mnar* undated, and perhaps five hundred more.

As we were carrying the books out of the house I remarked, "You know Peg, the guy who lived here must have found the philosopher's stone. Where else would he have gotten the gold to buy all these? This house hasn't been abandoned for more than fifty or sixty years. *Necronomicon*s didn't come cheap even then."

"Your friend Latham was interested in this sort of thing, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was."

"Well, I was thinking, now that we have so many, that we should send him a couple as a gift."

"Yeah, that would be nice."

We had intended to spend a couple more days vacationing, but after we got the books loaded into the wagon we decided to head home right away. This cargo was too valuable to risk theft in a hotel parking lot. We made it to Amherst Massachusetts a few hours later, with only a few odd looks from the toll booth attendants on the turnpike.

The two of us spent the following week taking inventory of what we had, comparing them against prices in catalogues and reading some. The name of Latham Knucklebury came to me again in a very odd way, as I found another message written in a book, in the same hand that had marked out Shakespeare. It was on the flyleaf of an edition of Van Prims and read:

HAVEN'T YOU EVER WONDERED WHY THESE BOOKS
ALWAYS TURN UP, DESPITE THEIR ALLEGED RARITY?

—LK

Latham Knucklebury! It had to be.

"I have to be going dear."

"Why? Where?"

"To Arkham," I said. "I'll tell you more about it later. Hold the fort for me in the meantime. Bye."

And I was gone.

* * * *

West of Arkham the hills rise wild, and the roads are narrow, steep and treacherous through those deep woods that no axe has ever cut. Still I drove like a maniac, spewing dust and gravel in my wake. I showered a bearded old man and he raised his hand to make an odd sign against me, but I was gone around a bend in an instant.

“So you have come at last. Good.” Latham Knucklebury said as he met me before the locked gates of the Miskatonic University campus. “I knew you would be here. Your curiosity would force you to come.”

He walked away from the gate, over the grass and along the wall.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“I know a way in. I still have a key. Several keys in fact.”

He took me through a tiny gate around the back, and we walked briskly across the empty campus, past rows of dormitories with gabled roofs and fan lighted doorways, until we came to a large brick building the size of a barn with no windows on the first floor. It had only one opening, a massive slab of metal which slid aside after Latham had inserted and turned a six-inch key.

“Now you see my work, and I hope you’ll understand,” he announced.

Inside was a single room, almost completely filled with a fantastic array of machinery of completely alien design. There were huge globes of translucent glass, coils of tubing, cyclopean columns of a greenish metal, gigantic cubes, pyramids and cylinders, rhomboid-sided solids of impossible crystals, blue, red, and yellow, and some shapes defying any geometry I knew altogether. In front of all of it stood the image of what I took to be an animal, perhaps an incomplete specimen. It was as tall as an elephant, with four long, tapering legs, and covered all over with a rope-like hair of a vaguely purplish colour. It had no visible head or tail, and I wasn’t sure which end was the front.

Latham Knucklebury climbed in among the machines, onto a three-pronged operator’s pedestal obviously designed for anatomies other than human.

“Behold around you,” he said, waving his hand showman-like, “the innermost secret of Miskatonic University.”

There was a faint humming sound coming from the hardware, which seemed to get a little louder as he spoke.

“Some secret! What’s the hairy thing?”

“That’s the builder of this apparatus, Richard, a being from beyond the Earth. Alone it came from distant Shaggai in centuries past. It transported all this machinery here and assembled it, then went into suspended animation when the task was completed. It is actually a low form of Shaggaian life, more like a dog than anything else in the ecology of that world.”

“A Shaggai dog built *this*?”

“Yes. You see, the Old Ones are so advanced and incomprehensible to mankind, that they never lower themselves to touch mechanical objects at all. But this device was a vital part of their overall plan, so they sent the creature you see before you to set it up.”

“Now wait a minute! This mutt looks stuffed to me.” I tried to touch the thing with my finger, but suddenly a blue light arced over it, and I felt a strong electrical shock. I drew back, and found that my arm was numb past the elbow.

“Not stuffed,” said Knucklebury. “It’s in a kind of time stasis. The beings of Shaggai have long since harnessed Time.”

“Tell me more,” I said, nursing my arm.

Latham was no longer merely conversing. He began to take on a fanatical tone, like a soapbox preacher ranting for revolution. He got down from his stool and began to shout and point.

“The Old Ones are the masters of all cosmic forces, Richard, and they have bided their time while the superstitious rabble forgot them and went on to new hysterias. The men who first discovered this equipment were persecuted as witches. Later others came, and to hide the frightful object from view they built this hall around it and locked the massive door, after the Shaggaian machinery proved indestructible despite all the childish efforts of the Puritans to smash it as a work of the Devil. Eventually braver and wiser souls arrived, men who understood. They built Miskatonic University on this site to mask their true activities. Only a few of all those who have studied here ever came inside this building. When I was here in my last year there were only nine professors and three graduate students who were part of our brotherhood. We alone knew, and had the power.”

“What power? What does this gizmo do?”

“Have you never heard of the Great Old Ones, who came to this world ere mankind was even an idea in the mind of a deranged amoeba? The Old

Ones are: the Old Ones were; the Old Ones shall be. They came from the stars and ruled over the Earth in Their mysterious ways, until they were cast down by forces even more terrible. But They shall come again and drive the human scum from the globe. I tell you!”

“You tell me just what all this is about, because I still haven’t the slightest idea. What has this contraption and that...that whatever it is got to do with anything? Where did those old books come from, and how did you know we would come to that particular house? We didn’t know ourselves until we got there.”

“Like I said, the Old Ones have made Time their servant. I merely looked ahead, saw that you would get there, and deposited what I wanted you to find. By our science such a thing is inconceivable, but to the Old Ones it is nothing.”

“Well thanks, but I really couldn’t take them all from you.”

“Richard, you *will* take them and you *will* read them and you *will*...”

“I won’t do anything unless you tell me where they came from.”

“Alright then, if you must know, this device here bends the fabric of space. When you do that something coexists with itself. I merely took the extra copy each time.”

“Huh?”

“Did you by chance notice the stamps on the wrapping to the Shakespeare book?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Well you should have, because they’re all 1856 British Guiana one cent magenta, the rarest stamp in the world, worth easily \$75,000.

Only one copy is known to exist, and you have six. And that is a demonstration of my power. It has nothing to do with my true purpose.”

“Tell me, did you get Shakespeare’s autograph with your space bending machine?”

“Of course. I took the book back, asked him to autograph it, and brought it to our own time again. He took me for a magician, and said I had inspired him to write a play about a magician.”

“*The Tempest.*”

“Maybe so, but in any case. They of Shaggai and Yuggoth have no interest in Shakespeare. This machine was designed to mass produce mouldering and unquestionably authentic copies of the *Necronomicon*, the

Book of Eibon, and all the rest, so they would get wide circulation and inevitably fall into the hands of those who know how to use them.”

“Wouldn’t it be a lot simpler just, to publish the *Necronomicon* in paperback?”

“What? No, don’t be silly. It would vanish into the occult racks without a ripple. People would think Lin Carter wrote it. I want these copies to be *believed*.”

He was clearly mad, or at least half mad. I didn’t understand half of what he said, but what was clear was simply more of his screwball ravings magnified enormously. I didn’t feel like humouring him any more.

“Is this your idea of a joke?”

At that he grow wild with rage.

“*Joke?* Do you take me for a prankster? No, I tell you it is my plan to bring the Old Ones back *in our own time*. When I am done every occultist, every Satanist, every teenaged witch, every person on the planet with the slightest amount of curiosity will have a copy of *Alhazred*. They’ll read it aloud, speak spells they don’t understand, and the gates will be ripped back, and the Old Ones will come through and clear the world of all human garbage. Nothing will be left of what was!”

This was ridiculous. I didn’t know whether to laugh or feel sorry for him. I tried to show him the illogic of his fantasy.

“Yes, but if that happens, won’t everybody be killed, *including you, Latham Knucklebury?*”

“No, I shall not die, for the blood of Dagon and Cthulhu runs deep in me. Those who are touched by Them and who serve Them shall live on in new and glorious life.”

“You really are crazy. Chambers was right.”

“No, I am not crazy, Richard. I am not entirely human, nor are you.”

“Me? What, do you mean I’m not human?”

“Through my machines I know more than you think, about the world, about you. Professor Richard Brown. What happened to those tentacles on your chest?”

“How did you ever? The doctor cut them off when I was a baby! A birth defect.”

“Your tail, Richard! The scales down your back. What of them?”

“What the hell are you, some kind of peeping tom?”

“Richard, I know you have webbing between your toes.”

“Shut up you madman! Shut up!”

“Ia Hastur! Tonight the stars are right! The time of Their return is at hand!”

I turned and fled from that place in blind terror. Behind me the machinery began to whir and clank. As I passed a copy of *Cultes des Ghoules* slid down a chute and fell into a basket. The blue Light arced again and the nameless creature from Shaggai began to stir. I glimpsed over my shoulder—God that I had not!—and saw that the creature’s head was not at the front or the back, *but in the middle*.

The last thing I heard was the shrill voice of Latham Knucklebury cackling in hideous, obscene triumph.

“Run you coward! Run and die! You won’t escape Them. Ia! Ia Hastur! We want a touchdown! Ia! Harken ye, O Dark Ones, to the ancient words! Ia Shub-Niggurath! Yog-Sothoth! *Yog-Sothoth!*”

* * * *

Three months have passed since that frightful spectacle at Miskatonic University, and I know now that I should not have run away. I should have allied myself with Latham Knucklebury and the demonic forces he served, for then I would have had some hope of survival.

Since last I saw him there have been signs and wonders, reports of strange lights in the sky, unheard of shapes rising out of the seas, monsters roaming the countryside, and even a walking winged statue haunting New England.

This morning the sun did not rise. There are no stars, and a black shroud has fallen over the world. I can hear nothing but static on the radio and my watch has stopped, so I know not what hour it is, but I know that all over the globe cities are in flame, and humankind reels before its last, irresistible nemesis. The Old Ones *have* returned and again they walk the face of their ancient home!

I shall not live long now! The Last news bulletin was two days ago, and Professor Chambers has been found murdered in his office, with inhuman three-toed footprints in blood on the ceiling. A similar doom awaits me.

God! Downstairs! My wife is screaming. Something has shattered the living room window! I hear the flapping of leathern wings! Outside in the

hall! The house is filled with smoke! Terrible stench! Hell—wind!

“Help me! The three-lobed burning pustule...”

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