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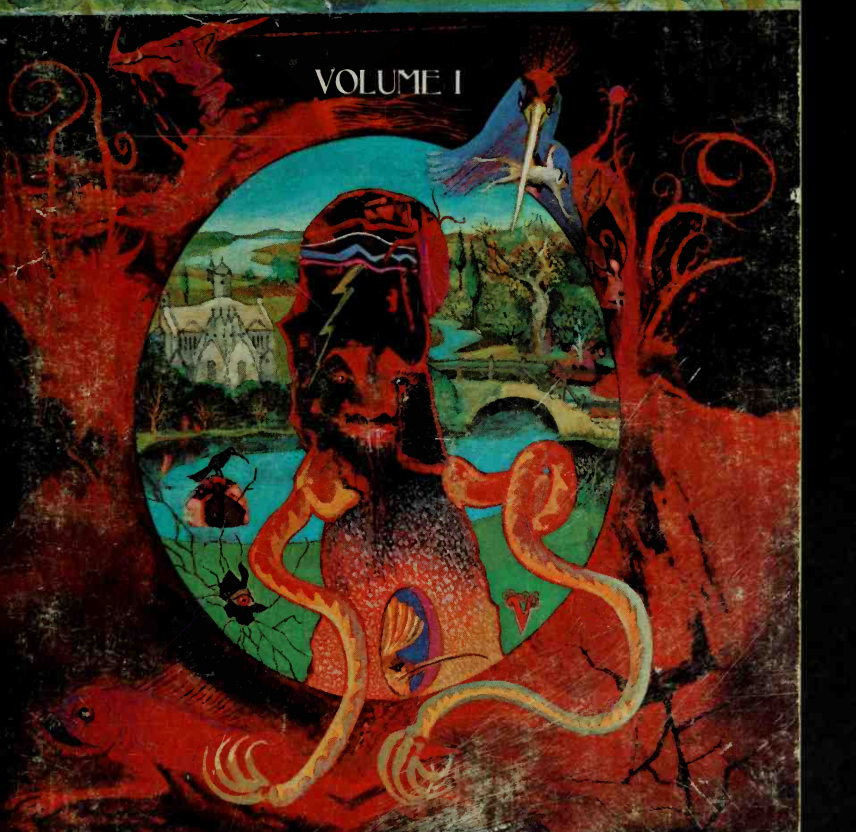
Edited and with an introduction by August Derleth

H.P. LOVECRAFT
AND OTHERS

TALES
OF THE
CTHULHU MYTHOS

The greatest cycle of supernatural horror

VOLUME I



THE ARKHAM EDITION OF
H.P. LOVECRAFT

The Thing!

The awful squid-head with writhing feelers came nearly up to the bowspit of the sturdy yacht . . .

There was bursting as of an exploding bladder, a slushy nastiness as of a cloven sunfish, a stench as of a thousand opened graves, and a sound that the chronicler would not put on paper.

For an instant the ship was befouled by an acrid and blinding green cloud, and then there was only a venomous seething . . .

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TALES OF THE CTHULHU MYTHOS, Volume I

Available in Beagle editions

TALES OF THE CTHULHU MYTHOS

H. P. LOVECRAFT
and Others

Collected by
AUGUST DERLETH

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THE CTHULHU MYTHOS

"All my stories," wrote H. P. Lovecraft, "unconnected as they may be, are based on the fundamental lore or legend that this world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practising black magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live on outside ever ready to take possession of this earth again." When this pattern became evident to Lovecraft's readers, particularly in the stories that followed publication of *The Call of Cthulhu,* in *Weird Tales,* February 1928, it was named "the Cthulhu Mythos" by Lovecraft's correspondents and fellow-writers, though Lovecraft himself never so designated it.

It is undeniably evident that there exists in Lovecraft's concept a basic similarity to the Christian Mythos, specifically in regard to the explusion of Satan from Eden and the power of evil. But any examination of the stories in the Mythos discloses also certain non-imitative parallels with other myth-patterns and the work of other writers, particularly Poe, Ambrose Bierce, Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany, and Robert W. Chambers, who afforded Lovecraft helpful keys, though it was from Dunsany that Lovecraft admitted getting the "idea of the artificial pantheon and myth-background represented by 'Cthulhu,' 'Yog-Sothoth,' 'Yuggoth,' etc."; yet he got no more than the idea from Dunsany's work, for none of the major Love-

craftian figures of the Mythos has any existence in Dunsany's writings, for all that on occasion a Dunsanian place-name makes its appearance in Lovecraft's tales.

As Lovecraft conceived the deities or forces of his Mythos, there were, initially, the Elder Gods, none of whom save Nodens, Lord of the Great Abyss, is ever identified by name; these Elder Gods were benign deities, representing the forces of good, and existed peacefully at or near Betelgeuze in the constellation Orion, very rarely stirring forth to intervene in the unceasing struggle between the powers of evil and the races of Earth. These powers of evil were variously known as the Great Old Ones or the Ancient Ones, though the latter term is most often applied in the fiction to the manifestation of one of the Great Old Ones on Earth. The Great Old Ones, unlike the Elder Gods, are named, and make frightening appearances in certain of the tales. Supreme among them is the blind idiot god, Azathoth, an "amorphous blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the center of all infinity." Yog-Sothoth, the "all-in-one and one-in-all," shares Azathoth's dominion, and is not subject to the laws of time and space, being co-existent with all time and conterminous with all space. Nyarlathotep, who is presumably the messenger of the Great Old Ones; Great Cthulhu, dweller in hidden R'lyeh deep in the sea; Hastur the Unspeakable, who occupies the air and interstellar spaces, half-brother to Cthulhu; and Shub-Niggurath, "the black goat of the woods with a thousand young," complete the roster of the Great Old Ones as originally conceived. Parallels in macabre fiction are immediately apparent, for Nyarlathotep corresponds to an earth-elemental, Cthulhu to a water-elemental, Hastur to an air-elemental, and Shub-Niggurath is the Lovecraftian conception of the god of fertility.

To this original group of Great Old Ones, Lovecraft subseqeuntly added many another deity, though usually lower in rank—such as Hypnos, god of sleep (representing an attempt to link an earlier tale with the Mythos, as Lovecraft did also by describing Yog-Sothoth as 'Umr

At-Tawil in the Lovecraft-Price collaboration, *Through the Gates of the Silver Key*), Dagon, ruler of the Deep Ones, dwellers in the ocean depths allied to Cthulhu, the "Abominable Snow-Men of Mi-Go," Yig, the prototype of Quetzalcoatl, etc. Adding appreciably to the Mythos were other beings sprung from the fertile imagination of Lovecraft's creative correspondents—the Hounds of Tindalos and Chaugnar Faugn, by Frank Belknap Long; Nygotha, by Henry Kuttner; Tsathoggua and Atlach-Nacha by Clark Ashton Smith; Lloigor, Zhar, the Tcho-Tcho people, Ithaqua, and Cthuga of my own invention; and by such later inventions as J. Ramsey Campbell's Glaaki and Daoloth, Brian Lumley's Yibb-Tstll and Shudde-M'ell, and Colin Wilson's Mind Parasites.

The trappings of the mythology necessarily came into being. Pre-human races were evolved to serve the Ancient Ones; place-names were invented to establish the "homes" of the beings—sometimes actual places, such as Aldebaran, the Hyades, sometimes mythical places like the Plateau of Leng, or the Massachusetts towns and villages of Arkham (corresponding to Salem), Kingsport (corresponding to Marblehead), Dunwich (corresponding to the country around Wilbraham, Monson, and Hampden), etc. To further implement the Mythos, Lovecraft wrote of and sometimes quoted from a shunned and terrible book, the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred, which contained shuddersome and frightening hints of the Great Old Ones who lurk just beyond the consciousness of man and make themselves visible or manifest from time to time in their unceasing attempts to regain their sway over Earth and its races. For this book Lovecraft drew up a "history and chronology" so convincing that many a librarian and bookdealer has been called upon to supply copies. In brief, the book, originally entitled *Al Azif,* was written circa A.D. 730 at Damascus by Abdul Alhazred, "a mad poet of Sana, in Yemen, who is said to have flourished during the period of the Ommiade Caliphs." Thereafter, its history was as follows:

"Translated into Greek as the *Necronomicon,* A.D. 950 by Theodorus Philetas.

"Burnt by Patriarch Michael A.D. 1050 (i.e. Greek text . . . Arabic text now lost).

"Olaus Wormius translates Greek into Latin, A.D. 1228.

"Latin and Greek editions suppressed by Pope Gregory IX, A.D. 1232.

"Black letter edition. Germany—1440?

"Greek text printed in Italy—1500-1550.

"Spanish translation of Latin text—1600?"

To supplement this remarkable creation, Lovecraft added the fragmentary records of the "Great Race," the *Pnakotic Manuscript;* the blasphemous writings of the minions of Cthulhu, the *R'lyeh Text;* the *Book of Dzyan,* the *Seven Cryptical Books of Hsan,* and the *Dhol Chants.* Members of the Lovecraft Circle added to the bibliography —Clark Ashton Smith with the *Book of Eibon* (or *Liber Ivoris*), Robert E. Howard the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of Von Junzt, Robert Bloch the *De Vermis Mysteriis* of Ludvig Prinn, and I the *Celaeno Fragments* and the Comte d'Erlette's *Cultes des Goules.* Brian Lumley later added the *G'harne Fragments* and the *Cthaat Aquadingen* and J. Ramsey Campbell the *Revelations of Glaaki.*

The stuff of the stories belonging to the Cthulhu Mythos, those of the followers in the Lovecraft tradition as well as those by Lovecraft himself, usually concern the ingenious and terrible attempts of the Great Old Ones to resume their sway over the peoples of Earth, manifesting themselves in strange, out-of-the-way places, and affording glimpses of blasphemous horrors, those dislocations of time and space Lovecraft liked so well, or, on a secondary level, some related evidence of the existence of the Great Old Ones and their terrestrial minions.

The primary stories of the Cthulhu Mythos, written by Lovecraft, include thirteen definite titles—*The Nameless City, The Festival, The Call of Cthulhu, The Colour out of Space, The Dunwich Horror, The Whisperer in Darkness, The Dreams in the Witch-House, The Haunter of the Dark, The Shadow over Innsmouth, The Shadow out of*

Time, At the Mountains of Madness, The Case of Charles Dexter Ward, and *The Thing on the Doorstep.* In addition, Lovecraft worked into many of his "revisions" (which were actually far more Lovecraft than the work of his clients) allusions to the Mythos; such stories, "revised" by Lovecraft, as Zealia Brown-Reed's *The Curse of Yig* and *The Mound,* Hazel Heald's *The Horror in the Museum* and *Out of the Eons,* and some few others properly take secondary place in the Cthulhu Mythos, together with the tales of writers who were contemporaries of Lovecraft or came after him—such tales as these gathered here, ranging from Smith's *The Return of the Sorcerer* to the most recent of them, Colin Wilson's *The Return of the Lloigor.** The unfinished novel, *The Lurker at the Threshold,* which I completed and saw published in 1945, is also part of the Mythos.

Interestingly enough, while most writers have elected to utilize the Lovecraft settings, some—notably J. Ramsey Campbell and Brian Lumley—have simply transplanted the myth-pattern to the English countryside and added milieus of their own to the growing body of work, in which the Lovecraft books have been supplemented by such books as my own *The Mask of Cthulhu* and *The Trail of Cthulhu,* J. Ramsey Campbell's *The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants,* Colin Wilson's *The Mind Parasites,* and Brian Lumley's *The Caller of the Black.*

It would be a mistake to assume that the Cthulhu Mythos was a planned development in Lovecraft's work. There is everything to show that he had no intention whatsoever of evolving the Cthulhu Mythos until that pattern made itself manifest in his work, which accounts for certain trivial inconsistences among the stories. The roots of the Cthulhu Mythos are readily recognizable: Poe's *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym,* after reading which, compare the being which cried out *Tekali!, Tekeli-li!* in the antarctic wastes in *At the Mountains of Madness* (though

* In Volume II of this edition.

the Poe scholar, J. O. Bailey, points out that Lovecraft, like Jules Verne, misunderstood Poe's destination for Pym, adding in extenuation that "very few people did know what Poe had in mind for the rest of his story until the relationship to *Symzonia* was uncovered and published"); *The Yellow Sign,* in *The King in Yellow,* by Robert W. Chambers, which gave us a Hastur and a Hali in mystic form, to be given additional substance later by Lovecraft's adoption of them; Ambrose Bierce's *An Inhabitant of Carcosa,* whence came Carcosa in the Mythos; and the tales of Arthur Machen, particularly *The White People,* from which came the Aklo Letters, the Dols (Lovecraft made them Dholes), the Jeelo, the voolas. Little by little, these were assimilated into the structure of the Cthulhu Mythos as Lovecraft slowly put it together.

In point of time, the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred, was the first character of the Cthulhu Mythos to make his appearance; this was in the strongly Dunsanian tale, *The Nameless City* (1921), fashioned about the "unexplainable couplet:

> " 'That is not dead which can eternal lie,
> And with strange aeons even death may die.' "

The second tale to carry on the pattern was *The Festival,* (1923), in which Lovecraft drew upon the more familiar New England background for the first time, tying up the Kingsport of his Dunsanian tales with the Mythos, bringing the mad Arab back once more, and for the first time mentioning the *Necronomicon.*

The next of the tales, chronologically, was *The Call of Cthulhu* (1926), in which, for the first time, the pattern of the Mythos began to emerge. Lovecraft begins this tale with a significant quotation from Algernon Blackwood: "Of such great powers or beings there may be conceivably a survival . . . a survival of a hugely remote period when . . . consciousness was manifested, perhaps, in shapes and forms long since withdrawn before the tide of advancing humanity . . . forms of which poetry and

legend alone have caught a flying memory and called them gods, monsters, mythical beings of all sorts and kinds." The concept of Cthulhu, the first of the Great Old Ones, comes out of this tale of horror rising from the sea; here also the *Necronomicon* reappears; and the mad Arab's couplet is echoed for the first time in that chanted ritual, "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn," which Lovecraft translates as: "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming." Ancient "Irem, the City of Pillars," from *The Nameless City,* reappears briefly in *The Call of Cthulhu.* From this story Lovecraft began deliberately to construct the Cthulhu Mythos, and for the remainder of his life all his major work developed the Mythos.

The present collection, therefore, is headed by *The Call of Cthulhu,* and contains, in rough chronological order, other developments of the Mythos by friends and correspondents of Lovecraft's, as well as by more recent writers, whose tales in this anthology have not been previously published. One other Lovecraft tale has been included; that is *The Haunter of the Dark,* which was written in reply to Robert Bloch's pastiche on Lovecraft, *The Shambler from the Stars,* and publication of which was followed by Bloch's *The Shadow from the Steeple;* these three connected tales appear here* for the first time together in chronological order. The tales here collected are but representative of the host written for the Mythos by Clark Ashton Smith, Frank Belknap Long (notably his short novel, *The Horror from the Hills,* based on a dream of Lovecraft's), Robert Bloch, Henry Kuttner, Robert E. Howard, myself, and others. Stories by J. Vernon Shea, J. Ramsey Campbell,* Brian Lumley,* James Wade,* and Colin Wilson* appear here for the first time anywhere.

The Cthulhu Mythos, it might be said in retrospect—for certainly the Mythos as an inspiration for new fiction is hardly likely to afford readers with enough that is new and sufficiently different in concept and execution to cre-

* In Volume II of this edition.

ate a continuing and growing demand—represented for H. P. Lovecraft a kind of dream-world; and it ought to be pointed out that Lovecraft lived vicariously in a succession of dream-worlds, sometimes only peripherally attached to reality—that of ancient Greece, that of ancient Rome, that of eighteenth century England (he was all his life a pronounced Anglophile), and the domain of fantasy and "remote wonder" which led him into the world of the Cthulhu Mythos, where he indulged his predilection for the fantastic, and the strange and terrible in a series of memorable stories of such strength that even today, more than three decades after his death, they command the respect and admiration of readers throughout the world.

—AUGUST DERLETH

Sauk City, Wisconsin
November 27, 1968

THE CALL OF CTHULHU

H. P. LOVECRAFT

I. THE HORROR IN CLAY

THE most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.

Theosophists have guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents. They have hinted at strange survivals in terms which would freeze the blood if not masked by a bland optimism. But it is not from them that there came the single glimpse of forbidden eons which chills me when I think of it and maddens me when I dream of it. That glimpse, like all dread glimpses of truth, flashed out from an accidental piecing together of separated things—in this case an old newspaper item and the notes of a dead professor. I hope that no one else will accomplish this piecing out; certainly, if I live, I shall never knowingly supply a link in so hideous a chain. I think that the professor, too,

intended to keep silent regarding the part he knew, and that he would have destroyed his notes had not sudden death seized him.

My knowledge of the thing began in the winter of 1926-27 with the death of my granduncle, George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages in Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. Professor Angell was widely known as an authority on ancient inscriptions, and had frequently been resorted to by the heads of prominent museums; so that his passing at the age of ninety-two may be recalled by many. Locally, interest was intensified by the obscurity of the cause of death. The professor had been stricken whilst returning from the Newport boat; falling suddenly, as witnesses said, after having been jostled by a nautical-looking Negro who had come from one of the queer dark courts on the precipitous hillside which formed a short cut from the waterfront to the deceased's home in Williams Street. Physicians were unable to find any visible disorder, but concluded after perplexed debate that some obscure lesion of the heart, induced by the brisk ascent of so steep a hill by so elderly a man, was responsible for the end. At the time I saw no reason to dissent from this dictum, but latterly I am inclined to wonder—and more than wonder.

As my granduncle's heir and executor, for he died a childless widower, I was expected to go over his papers with some thoroughness; and for that purpose moved his entire set of files and boxes to my quarters in Boston. Much of the material which I correlated will be later published by the American Archaeological Society, but there was one box which I found exceedingly puzzling, and which I felt much averse from showing to other eyes. It had been locked, and I did not find the key till it occurred to me to examine the personal ring which the professor carried always in his pocket. Then, indeed, I succeeded in opening it, but when I did so seemed only to be confronted by a greater and more closely locked barrier. For what could be the meaning of the queer clay bas-relief and the disjointed jottings, ramblings, and

cuttings which I found? Had my uncle, in his latter years, become credulous of the most superficial impostures? I resolved to search out the eccentric sculptor responsible for this apparent disturbance of an old man's peace of mind.

The bas-relief was a rough rectangle less than an inch thick and about five by six inches in area; obviously of modern origin. Its designs, however, were far from modern in atmosphere and suggestion; for, although the vagaries of cubism and futurism are many and wild, they do not often reproduce that cryptic regularity which lurks in prehistoric writing. And writing of some kind the bulk of these designs seemed certainly to be; though my memory, despite much familarity with the papers and collections of my uncle, failed in any way to identify this particular species, or even hint at its remotest affiliations.

Above these apparent hieroglyphics was a figure of evidently pictorial intent, though its impressionistic execution forbade a very clear idea of its nature. It seemed to be a sort of monster, or symbol representing a monster, of a form which only a diseased fancy could conceive. If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing. A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings; but it was the *general outline* of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful. Behind the figure was a vague suggestion of a Cyclopean architectural background.

The writing accompanying this oddity was, aside from a stack of press cuttings, in Professor Angell's most recent hand; and made no pretense to literary style. What seemed to be the main document was "CTHULHU CULT" in characters painstakingly printed to avoid the erroneous reading of a word so unheard-of. This manuscript was divided into two sections, the first of which was headed "1925—Dream and Dream Work of H. A. Wilcox, 7 Thomas St., Providence, R. I.," and the second, "Narrative of Inspector John R. Legrasse, 121 Bienville St., New

Orleans, La., at 1908 A. A. S. Mtg.—Notes on Same, & Prof. Webb's Acct." The other manuscript papers were all brief notes, some of them accounts of the queer dreams of different persons, some of them citations from theosophical books and magazines (notably W. Scott-Elliott's *Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria*), and the rest comments on passages in such mythological and anthropological source-books as Frazer's *Golden Bough* and Miss Murray's *Witch-Cult in Western Europe*. The cuttings largely alluded to outré mental illness and outbreaks of group folly or mania in the spring of 1925.

The first half of the principal manuscript told a very peculiar tale. It appears that on March 1st, 1925, a thin, dark young man of neurotic and excited aspect had called upon Professor Angell bearing the singular clay bas-relief, which was then exceedingly damp and fresh. His card bore the name of Henry Anthony Wilcox, and my uncle had recognized him as the youngest son of an excellent family slightly known to him, who had latterly been studying sculpture at the Rhode Island School of Design and living alone at the Fleur-de-Lys Building near that institution. Wilcox was a precocious youth of known genius but great eccentricity, and had from childhood excited attention through the strange stories and odd dreams he was in the habit of relating. He called himself "physically hypersensitive," but the staid folk of the ancient commercial city dismissed him as merely "queer." Never mingling much with his kind, he had dropped gradually from social visibility, and was now known only to a small group of esthetes from other towns. Even the Providence Art Club, anxious to preserve its conservatism, had found him quite hopeless.

On the occasion of the visit, ran the professor's manuscript, the sculptor abruptly asked for the benefit of his host's archeological knowledge in identifying the hieroglyphics on the bas-relief. He spoke in a dreamy, stilted manner which suggested pose and alienated sympathy; and my uncle showed some sharpness in replying, for the conspicuous freshness of the tablet implied kinship with

anything but archeology. Young Wilcox's rejoinder, which impressed my uncle enough to make him recall and record it verbatim, was of a fantastically poetic cast which must have typified his whole conversation, and which I have since found highly characteristic of him. He said, "It is new, indeed, for I made it last night in a dream of strange cities; and dreams are older than brooding Tyre, or the contemplative Sphinx, or garden-girdled Babylon."

It was then that he began that rambling tale which suddenly played upon a sleeping memory and won the fevered interest of my uncle. There had been a slight earthquake tremor the night before, the most considerable felt in New England for some years; and Wilcox's imagination had been keenly affected. Upon retiring, he had had had an unprecedented dream of Cyclopean cities of titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths, all dripping with green ooze and sinister with latent horror. Hieroglyphics had covered the walls and pillars, and from some undetermined point below had come a voice that was not a voice; a chaotic sensation which only fancy could transmute into sound, but which he attempted to render by the almost unpronounceable jumble of letters, *"Cthulhu fhtagn."*

This verbal jumble was the key to the recollection which excited and disturbed Professor Angell. He questioned the sculptor with scientific minuteness; and studied with almost frantic intensity the bas-relief on which the youth had found himself working, chilled and clad only in his nightclothes, when waking had stolen bewilderingly over him. My uncle blamed his old age, Wilcox afterward said, for his slowness in recognizing both hieroglyphics and pictorial design. Many of his questions seemed highly out of place to his visitor, especially those which tried to connect the latter with strange cults or societies; and Wilcox could not understand the repeated promises of silence which he was offered in exchange for an admission of membership in some widespread mystical or paganly religious body. When Professor Angell became convinced that the sculptor was indeed ignorant of any cult or system of

cryptic lore he besieged his visitor with demands for future reports of dreams. This bore regular fruit, for after the first interview the manuscript records daily calls of the young man, during which he related startling fragments of nocturnal imagery whose burden was always some terrible Cyclopean vista of dark and dripping stone, with a subterrene voice or intelligence shouting monotonously in enigmatical sense-impacts uninscribable save as gibberish. The two sounds most frequently repeated are those rendered by the letters *"Cthulhu"* and *"R'lyeh."*

On March 23, the manuscript continued, Wilcox failed to appear; and inquiries at his quarters revealed that he had been stricken with an obscure sort of fever and taken to the home of his family in Waterman Street. He had cried out in the night, arousing several other artists in the building, and had manifested since then only alternations of unconsciousness and delirium. My uncle at once telephoned the family, and from that time forward kept close watch of the case, calling often at the Thayer Street office of Dr. Tobey, whom he learned to be in charge. The youth's febrile mind, apparently, was dwelling on strange things; and the doctor shuddered now and then as he spoke of them. They included not only a repetition of what he had formerly dreamed, but touched wildly on a gigantic thing "miles high" which walked or lumbered about. He at no time fully described this object but occasional frantic words, as repeated by Dr. Tobey, convinced the professor that it must be identical with the nameless monstrosity he had sought to depict in his dream-sculpture. Reference to this object, the doctor added, was invariably a prelude to the young man's subsidence into lethargy. His temperature, oddly enough, was not greatly above normal; but the whole condition was otherwise such as to suggest true fever rather than mental disorder.

On April 2 at about 3 P.M. every trace of Wilcox's malady suddenly ceased. He sat upright in bed, astonished to find himself at home and completely ignorant of what had happened in dream or reality since the night of March

22. Pronounced well by his physician, he returned to his quarters in three days; but to Professor Angell he was of no further assistance. All traces of strange dreaming had vanished with his recovery, and my uncle kept no record of his night-thoughts after a week of pointless and irrelevant accounts of thoroughly usual visions.

Here the first part of the manuscript ended, but references to certain of the scattered notes gave me much material for thought—so much, in fact, that only the ingrained skepticism then forming my philosophy can account for my continued distrust of the artist. The notes in question were those descriptive of the dreams of various persons covering the same period as that in which young Wilcox had had his strange visitations. My uncle, it seems, had quickly instituted a prodigiously far-flung body of inquiries amongst nearly all the friends whom he could question without impertinence, asking for nightly reports of their dreams, and the dates of any notable visions for some time past. The reception of his request seems to have been varied; but he must, at the very least, have received more responses than any ordinary man could have handled without a secretary. This original correspondence was not preserved, but his notes formed a thorough and really significant digest. Average people in society and business—New England's traditional "salt of the earth"—gave an almost completely negative result, though scattered cases of uneasy but formless nocturnal impressions appear here and there, always between March 23 and April 2—the period of young Wilcox's delirium. Scientific men were little more affected, though four cases of vague description suggest fugitive glimpses of strange landscapes, and in one case there is mentioned a dread of something abnormal.

It was from the artists and poets that the pertinent answers came, and I know that panic would have broken loose had they been able to compare notes. As it was, lacking their original letters, I half suspected the compiler of having asked leading questions, or of having edited the correspondence in corroboration of what he had

latently resolved to see. That is why I continued to feel that Wilcox, somehow cognizant of the old data which my uncle had possessed, had been imposing on the veteran scientist. These responses from esthetes told a disturbing tale. From February 28 to April 2 a large proportion of them dreamed very bizarre things, the intensity of the dreams being immeasurably the stronger during the period of the sculptor's delirium. Over a fourth of those who reported anything, reported scenes and half-sounds not unlike those which Wilcox had described; and some of the dreamers confessed acute fear of the gigantic nameless thing visible toward the last. One case, which the note describes with emphasis, was very sad. The subject, a widely known architect with leanings toward theosophy and occultism, went violently insane on the date of young Wilcox's seizure, and expired several months later after incessant screamings to be saved from some escaped denizen of hell. Had my uncle referred to these cases by name instead of merely by number, I should have attempted some corroboration and personal investigation; but as it was, I succeeded in tracing down only a few. All of these, however, bore out the notes in full. I have often wondered if all the objects of the professor's questioning felt as puzzled as did this fraction. It is well that no explanation shall ever reach them.

The press cuttings, as I have intimated, touched on cases of panic, mania, and eccentricity during the given period. Professor Angell must have employed a cutting bureau, for the number of extracts was tremendous, and the sources scattered throughout the globe. Here was a nocturnal suicide in London, where a lone sleeper had leaped from a window after a shocking cry. Here likewise a rambling letter to the editor of a paper in South America, where a fanatic deduces a dire future from visions he has seen. A dispatch from California describes a theosophist colony as donning white robes en masse for some "glorious fulfilment" which never arrives, whilst items from India speak guardedly of serious native unrest toward the end of March. Voodoo orgies multiply in

Haiti, and African outposts report ominous mutterings. American officers in the Philippines find certain tribes bothersome about this time, and New York policemen are mobbed by hysterical Levantines on the night of March 22-23. The west of Ireland, too, is full of wild rumour and legendry, and a fantastic painter named Ardois-Bonnot hangs a blasphemous *Dream Landscape* in the Paris spring salon of 1926. And so numerous are the recorded troubles in insane assylums that only a miracle can have stopped the medical fraternity from noting strange parallelisms and drawing mystified conclusions. A weird bunch of cuttings, all told; and I can at this date scarcely envisage the callous rationalism with which I set them aside. But I was then convinced that young Wilcox had known of the older matters mentioned by the professor.

II. THE TALE OF INSPECTOR LEGRASSE

THE older matters which had made the sculptor's dream and bas-relief so significant to my uncle formed the subject of the second half of his long manuscript. Once before, it appears, Professor Angell had seen the hellish outlines of the nameless monstrosity, puzzled over the unknown hieroglyphics, and heard the ominous syllables which can be rendered only as *"Cthulhu;"* and all this in so stirring and horrible a connection that it is small wonder he pursued young Wilcox with queries and demands for data.

This earlier experience had come in 1908, seventeen years before, when the American Archaeological Society held its annual meeting in St. Louis. Professor Angell, as befitted one of his authority and attainments, had had a prominent part in all the deliberations; and was one of the first to be approached by the several outsiders who took advantage of the convocation to offer questions for correct answering and problems for expert solution.

The chief of these outsiders, and in a short time the

focus of interest for the entire meeting, was a commonplace-looking middle-aged man who had traveled all the way from New Orleans for certain special information unobtainable from any local source. His name was John Raymond Legrasse, and he was by profession an inspector of police. With him he bore the subject of his visit, a grotesque, repulsive, and apparently very ancient stone statuette whose origin he was at a loss to determine.

It must not be fancied that Inspector Legrasse had the least interest in archeology. On the contrary, his wish for enlightenment was prompted by purely professional considerations. The statuette, idol, fetish, or whatever it was, had been captured some months before in the wooded swamps south of New Orleans during a raid on a supposed voodoo meeting; and so singular and hideous were the rites connected with it, that the police could not but realize that they had stumbled on a dark cult totally unknown to them, and infinitely more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles. Of its origin, apart from the erratic and unbelievable tales extorted from the captured members, absolutely nothing was to be discovered; hence the anxiety of the police for any antiquarian lore, which might help them to place the frightful symbol, and through it track down the cult to its fountainhead.

Inspector Legrasse was scarcely prepared for the sensation which his offering created. One sight of the thing had been enough to throw the assembled men of science into a state of tense excitement, and they lost no time in crowding around him to gaze at the diminutive figure whose utter strangeness and air of genuinely abysmal antiquity hinted so potently at unopened and archaic vistas. No recognized school of sculpture had animated this terrible object, yet centuries and even thousands of years seemed recorded in its dim and greenish surface of unplaceable stone.

The figure, which was finally passed around slowly from man to man for close and careful study, was between seven and eight inches in height, and of exquisitely artistic

workmanship. It represented a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopuslike head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind. This thing, which seemed instinct with a fearsome and unnatural malignancy, was of a somewhat bloated corpulence, and squatted evilly on a rectangular block or pedestal covered with undecipherable characters. The tips of the wings touched the back edge of the block, the seat occupied the center, whilst the long, curved claws of the doubled-up, crouching hind legs gripped the front edge and extended a quarter of the way down toward the bottom of the pedestal. The cephalopod head was bent forward, so that the ends of the facial feelers brushed the backs of the huge forepaws which clasped the croucher's elevated knees. The aspect of the whole was abnormally lifelike, and the more subtly fearful because its source was so totally unknown. Its vast, awesome, and incalculable age was unmistakable; yet not one link did it show with any known type of art belonging to civilization's youth—or indeed to any other time.

Totally separate and apart, its very material was a mystery; for the soapy, greenish-black stone with its golden or iridescent flecks and striations resembled nothing familiar to geology or mineralogy. The characters along the base were equally baffling; and no member present, despite a representation of half the world's expert learning in this field, could form the least notion of even their remotest linguistic kinship. They, like the subject and material, belonged to something horribly remote and distinct from mankind as we know it; something frightfully suggestive of old and unhallowed cycles of life in which our world and our conceptions have no part.

And yet, as the members severally shook their heads and confessed defeat at the inspector's problem, there was one man in that gathering who suspected a touch of bizarre familiarity in the monstrous shape and writing, and who presently told with some diffidence of the odd trifle he knew. This person was the late William Channing

Webb, professor of anthropology in Princeton University, and an explorer of no slight note.

Professor Webb had been engaged, forty-eight years before, in a tour of Greenland and Iceland in search of some Runic inscriptions which he failed to unearth; and whilst high up on the West Greenland coast had encountered a singular tribe or cult of degenerate Eskimos whose religion, a curious form of devil-worship, chilled him with its deliberate bloodthirstiness and repulsiveness. It was a faith of which other Eskimos knew little, and which they mentioned only with shudders, saying it had come down from horribly ancient eons before ever the world was made. Besides nameless rites and human sacrifices there were certain queer hereditary rituals addressed to a supreme elder devil or *tornasuk;* and of this Professor Webb had taken a careful phonetic copy from an aged *angekok* or wizard-priest, expressing the sounds in Roman letters as best he knew how. But just now of prime significance was the fetish which this cult had cherished, and around which they danced when the aurora leaped high over the ice cliffs. It was, the professor stated, a very crude bas-relief of stone, comprising a hideous picture and some cryptic writing. And as far as he could tell, it was a rough parallel in all essential features of the bestial thing now lying before the meeting.

These data, received with suspense and astonishment by the assembled members, proved doubly exciting to Inspector Legrasse; and he began at once to ply his informant with questions. Having noted and copied an oral ritual among the swamp cult-worshipers his men had arrested, he besought the professor to remember as best he might the syllables taken down amongst the diabolist Eskimos. There then followed an exhaustive comparison of details, and a moment of really awed silence when both detective and scientist agreed on the virtual identity of the phrase common to two hellish rituals so many worlds of distance apart. What, in substance, both the Eskimo wizards and the Louisiana swamp-priests had chanted to their kindred idols was something very like this—the

word-divisions being guessed at from traditional breaks in the phrase as chanted aloud:

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn."

Legrasse had one point in advance of Professor Webb, for several among his mongrel prisoners had repeated to him what older celebrants had told them the words meant. This text, as given, ran something like this:

"In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming."

And now, in response to a general urgent demand, Inspector Legrasse related as fully as possible his experience with the swamp worshipers; telling a story to which I could see my uncle attached profound significance. It savored of the wildest dreams of mythmaker and theosophist, and disclosed an astonishing degree of cosmic imagination among such half-castes and pariahs as might be least expected to possess it.

On November 1, 1907, there had come to New Orleans police a frantic summons from the swamp and lagoon country to the south. The squatters there, mostly primitive but good-natured descendants of Lafitte's men, were in the grip of stark terror from an unknown thing which had stolen upon them in the night. It was voodoo, apparently, but voodoo of a more terrible sort than they had ever known; and some of their women and children had disappeared since the malevolent tom-tom had begun its incessant beating far within the black haunted woods where no dweller ventured. There were insane shouts and harrowing screams, soul-chilling chants and dancing devil-flames; and, the frightened messenger added, the people could stand it no more.

So a body of twenty police, filling two carriages and an automobile, had set out in the late afternoon with the shivering squatter as a guide. At the end of the passable road they alighted, and for miles splashed on in silence through the terrible cypress woods where day never came. Ugly roots and malignant hanging nooses of Spanish moss beset them, and now and then a pile of dank stones or fragments of a rotting wall intensified by its hint of morbid habitation a depression which every malformed tree and

every fungous islet combined to create. At length the squatter settlement, a miserable huddle of huts, hove in sight; and hysterical dwellers ran out to cluster around the group of bobbing lanterns. The muffled beat of tom-toms was now faintly audible far, far ahead; and a curdling shriek came at infrequent intervals when the wind shifted. A reddish glare, too, seemed to filter through the pale undergrowth beyond endless avenues of forest night. Reluctant even to be left alone again, each one of the cowed squatters refused point-blank to advance another inch toward the scene of unholy worship, so Inspector Legrasse and his nineteen colleagues plunged on unguided into black arcades of horror that none of them had ever trod before.

The region now entered by the police was one of traditionally evil repute, substantially unknown and untraversed by white men. There were legends of a hidden lake unglimpsed by mortal sight, in which dwelt a huge, formless white polypous thing with luminous eyes; and squatters whispered that bat-winged devils flew up out of caverns in inner earth to worship it at midnight. They said it had been there before D'Iberville, before La Salle, before the Indians, and before even the wholesome beasts and birds of the woods. It was nightmare itself, and to see it was to die. But it made men dream, and so they knew enough to keep away. The present voodoo orgy, was, indeed, on the merest fringe of this abhorred area, but that location was bad enough; hence perhaps the very place of the worship had terrified the squatters more than the shocking sounds and incidents.

Only poetry or madness could do justice to the noises heard by Legrasse's men as they plowed on through the black morass toward the red glare and the muffled tom-toms. There are vocal qualities peculiar to men, and vocal qualities peculiar to beasts; and it is terrible to hear the one when the source should yield the other. Animal fury and orgiastic license here whipped themselves to demoniac heights by howls and squawking ecstasies that tore and reverberated through those nighted woods like pestilential

tempests from the gulfs of hell. Now and then the less organized ululations would cease, and from what seemed a well-drilled chorus of hoarse voices would rise in singsong chant that hideous phrase or ritual:

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn."

Then the men, having reached a spot where the trees were thinner, came suddenly in sight of the spectacle itself. Four of them reeled, one fainted, and two were shaken into frantic cry which the mad cacophony of the orgy fortunately deadened. Legrasse dashed swamp water on the face of the fainting man, and all stood trembling and nearly hypnotized with horror.

In a natural glade of the swamp stood a grassy island of perhaps an acre's extent, clear of trees and tolerably dry. On this now leaped and twisted a more indescribable horde of human abnormality than any but a Sime or an Angarola could paint. Void of clothing, this hybrid spawn were braying, bellowing and writhing about a monstrous ringshaped bonfire; in the center of which, revealed by occasional rifts in the curtain of flame, stood a great granite monolith some eight feet in height; on top of which, incongruous in its diminutiveness, rested the noxious carven statuette. From a wide circle of ten scaffolds set up at regular intervals with the flame-girt monolith as a center hung, head downward, the oddly marred bodies of the helpless squatters who had disappeared. It was inside this circle that the ring of worshipers jumped and roared, the general direction of the mass motion being from left to right in endless bacchanale between the ring of bodies and the ring of fire.

It may have been only imagination and it may have been only echoes which induced one of the men, an excitable Spaniard, to fancy he heard antiphonal responses to the ritual from some far and unillumined spot deeper within the wood of ancient legendry and horror. This man, Joseph D. Galvez, I later met and questioned; and he proved distractingly imaginative. He indeed went so far as to hint of the faint beating of great wings, and of a glimpse of shining eyes and mountainous white bulk

beyond the remotest trees—but I suppose he had been hearing too much native superstition.

Actually, the horrified pause of the men was of comparatively brief duration. Duty came first; and although there must have been nearly a hundred mongrel celebrants in the throng, the police relied on their firearms and plunged determinedly into the nauseous rout. For five minutes the resultant din and chaos were beyond description. Wild blows were struck, shots were fired, and escapes were made; but in the end Legrasse was able to count some forty-seven sullen prisoners, whom he forced to dress in haste and fall into line between two rows of policemen. Five of the worshipers lay dead, and two severely wounded ones were carried away on improvised stretchers by their fellow-prisoners. The image on the monolith, of course, was carefully removed and carried back by Legrasse.

Examined at headquarters after a trip of intense strain and weariness, the prisoners all proved to be men of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type. Most were seamen, and a sprinkling of negroes and mulattoes, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands, gave a coloring of voodooism to the heterogeneous cult. But before many questions were asked, it became manifest that something far deeper and older than negro fetishism was involved. Degraded and ignorant as they were, the creatures held with surprising consistency to the central idea of their loathsome faith.

They worshiped, so they said, the Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky. These Old Ones were gone now, inside the earth and under the sea; but their dead bodies had told their secrets in dreams to the first man, who formed a cult which had never died. This was that cult, and the prisoners said it had always existed and always would exist, hidden in distant wastes and dark places all over the world until the time when the great priest Cthulhu, from his dark house in the mighty city of R'lyeh under the waters, should rise and bring the earth again beneath his sway. Some day he would call, when

the stars were ready, and the secret cult would always be waiting to liberate him.

Meanwhile no more must be told. There was a secret which even torture could not extract. Mankind was not absolutely alone among the conscious things of earth, for shapes came out of the dark to visit the faithful few. But these were not the Great Old Ones. No man had ever seen the Old Ones. The carven idol was great Cthulhu, but none might say whether or not the others were precisely like him. No one could read the old writing now, but things were told by word of mouth. The chanted ritual was not the secret—that was never spoken aloud, only whispered. The chant meant only this: "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming."

Only two of the prisoners were found sane enough to be hanged, and the rest were committed to various institutions. All denied a part in the ritual murders, and averred that the killing had been done by Black-winged Ones which had come to them from their immemorial meeting-place in the haunted wood. But of those mysterious allies no coherent account could ever be gained. What the police did extract came mainly from an immensely aged mestizo named Castro, who claimed to have sailed to strange ports and talked with undying leaders of the cult in the mountains of China.

Old Castro remembered bits of hideous legend that paled the speculations of theosophists and made man and the world seem recent and transient indeed. There had been eons when other Things ruled on the earth, and They had had great cities. Remains of Them, he said the deathless Chinamen had told him, were still to be found as Cyclopean stones on islands in the Pacific. They all died vast epochs of time before man came, but there were arts which could revive Them when the stars had come round again to the right positions in the cycle of eternity. They had, indeed, come themselves from the stars, and brought Their images with Them.

These Great Old Ones, Castro continued, were not composed altogether of flesh and blood. They had shape—

for did not this star-fashioned image prove it?—but that shape was not made of matter. When the stars were right, They could plunge from world to world through the sky; but when the stars were wrong, They could not live. But although They no longer lived, They would never really die. They all lay in stone houses in Their great city of R'lyeh, preserved by the spells of mighty Cthulhu for a glorious resurrection when the stars and the earth might once more be ready for Them. But at that time some force from outside must serve to liberate Their bodies. The spells that preserved them intact likewise prevented Them from making an initial move, and They could only lie awake in the dark and think whilst uncounted millions of years rolled by. They knew all that was occurring in the universe, for Their mode of speech was transmitted thought. Even now They talked in Their tombs. When, after infinities of chaos, the first men came, the Great Old Ones spoke to the sensitive among them by molding their dreams; for only thus could Their language reach the fleshy minds of mammals.

Then, whispered Castro, those first men formed the cult around small idols which the Great Ones showed them; idols brought in dim eras from dark stars. That cult would never die till the stars came right again, and the secret priests would take great Cthulhu from His tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth. The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and reveling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom. Meanwhile the cult, by appropriate rites, must keep alive the memory of those ancient ways and shadow forth the prophecy of their return.

In the elder time chosen men had talked with the entombed Old Ones in dreams, but then something had happened. The great stone city R'lyeh, with its monoliths

and sepulchers, had sunk beneath the waves; and the deep waters, full of the one primal mystery through which not even thought can pass, had cut off the spectral intercourse. But memory never died, and high priests said that the city would rise again when the stars were right. Then came out of the earth the black spirits of earth, moldy and shadowy, and full of dim rumors picked up in caverns beneath forgotten sea-bottoms. But of them old Castro dared not speak much. He cut himself off hurriedly, and no amount of persuasion or subtlety could elicit more in this direction. The *size* of the Old Ones, too, he curiously declined to mention. Of the cult, he said that he thought the center lay amid the pathless deserts of Arabia, where Irem, the City of Pillars, dreams hidden and untouched. It was not allied to the European witch-cult, and was virtually unknown beyond its members. No book had ever really hinted of it, though the deathless Chinamen said that there were double meanings in the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred which the initiated might read as they chose, especially the much-discussed couplet:

> That is not dead which can eternal lie,
> And with strange eons even death may die.

Legrasse, deeply impressed and not a little bewildered, had inquired in vain concerning the historic affiliation of the cult. Castro, apparently, had told the truth when he said that it was wholly secret. The authorities at Tulane University could shed no light upon either cult or image, and now the detective had come to the highest authorities in the country and met with no more than the Greenland tale of Professor Webb.

The feverish interest aroused at the meeting by Legrasse's tale, corroborated as it was by the statuette, is echoed in the subsequent correspondence of those who attended; although scant mention occurs in the formal publication of the society. Caution is the first care of those accustomed to face occasional charlatanry and imposture. Legrasse for some time lent the image to Professor Webb,

but at the latter's death it was returned to him and remains in his possession, where I viewed it not long ago. It is truly a terrible thing, and unmistakably akin to the dream-sculpture of young Wilcox.

That my uncle was excited by the tale of the sculptor I did not wonder, for what thoughts must arise upon hearing, after a knowledge of what Legrasse had learned of the cult, of a sensitive young man who had *dreamed* not only the figure and exact hieroglyphics of the swamp-found image and the Greenland devil tablet, but had come *in his dreams* upon at least three of the precise words of the formula uttered alike by Eskimo diabolists and mongrel Lousianans? Professor Angell's instant start on an investigation of the utmost thoroughness was eminently natural; though privately I suspected young Wilcox of having heard of the cult in some indirect way, and of having invented a series of dreams to heighten and continue the mystery at my uncle's expense. The dream-narratives and cuttings collected by the professor were, of course, strong corroboration; but the rationalism of my mind and the extravagance of the whole subject led me to adopt what I thought the most sensible conclusions. So, after thoroughly studying the manuscript again and correlating the theosophical and anthropological notes with the cult narrative of Legrasse, I made a trip to Providence to see the sculptor and give him the rebuke I thought proper for so boldly imposing upon a learned and aged man.

Wilcox still lived alone in the Fleur-de-Lys Building in Thomas Street, a hideous Victorian imitation of Seventeenth Century Breton architecture which flaunts its stuccoed front amidst the lovely Colonial houses on the ancient hill, and under the very shadow of the finest Georgian steeple in America. I found him at work in his rooms, and at once conceded from the specimens scattered about that his genius is indeed profound and authentic. He will, I believe, be heard from sometime as one of the great decadents; for he has crystallized in clay and will one day mirror in marble those nightmares and fantasies

which Arthur Machen evokes in prose, and Clark Ashton Smith makes visible in verse and in painting.

Dark, frail, and somewhat unkempt in aspect, he turned languidly at my knock and asked me my business without rising. When I told him who I was, he displayed some interest; for my uncle had excited his curiosity in probing his strange dreams, yet had never explained the reason for the study. I did not enlarge his knowledge in this regard, but sought with some subtlety to draw him out.

In a short time I became convinced of his absolute sincerity for he spoke of the dreams in a manner none could mistake. They and their subconscious residuum had influenced his art profoundly, and he showed me a morbid statue whose contours almost made me shake with the potency of its black suggestion. He could not recall having seen the original of this thing except in his own dream bas-relief, but the outlines had formed themselves insensibly under his hands. It was, no doubt, the giant shape he had raved of in delirium. That he really knew nothing of the hidden cult, save from what my uncle's relentless catechism had let fall, he soon made clear; and again I strove to think of some way in which he could possibly have received the weird impressions.

He talked of his dreams in a strangely poetic fashion; making me see with terrible vividness the damp Cyclopean city of slimy green stone—whose *geometry,* he oddly said, was *all wrong*—and hear with frightened expectancy the ceaseless, half-mental calling from underground: *"Cthulhu fhtagn," "Cthulhu fhtagn."*

These words had formed part of that dread ritual which told of dead Cthulhu's dream-vigil in his stone vault at R'lyeh, and I felt deeply moved despite my rational beliefs. Wilcox, I was sure, had heard of the cult in some casual way, and had soon forgotten it amidst the mass of his equally weird reading and imagining. Later, by virtue of its sheer impressiveness, it has found subconscious expression in dreams, in the bas-relief, and in the terrible statue I now beheld; so that his imposture upon my uncle had

been a very innocent one. The youth was of a type, at once slightly affected and slightly ill-mannered, which I could never like; but I was willing enough now to admit both his genius and his honesty. I took leave of him amicably, and wish him all the success his talent promises.

The matter of the cult still remained to fascinate me, and at times I had visions of personal fame from researches into its origin and connections. I visited New Orleans, talked with Legrasse and others of that old-time raiding-party, saw the frightful image, and even questioned such of the mongrel prisoners as still survived. Old Castro, unfortunately, had been dead for some years. What I now heard so graphically at first hand, though it was really no more than a detailed confirmation of what my uncle had written, excited me afresh; for I felt sure that I was on the track of a very real, very secret, and very ancient religion whose discovery would make me an anthropologist of note. My attitude was still one of absolute materialism *as I wish it still were,* and I discounted with a most inexplicable perversity the coincidence of the dream notes and odd cuttings collected by Professor Angell.

One thing which I began to suspect, and which I now fear I *know,* is that my uncle's death was far from natural. He fell on a narrow hill street leading up from an ancient waterfront swarming with foreign mongrels, after a careless push from a negro sailor. I did not forget the mixed blood and marine pursuits of the cult-members in Louisiana, and would not be surprised to learn of secret methods and poison needles as ruthless and as anciently known as the cryptic rites and beliefs. Legrasse and his men, it is true, have been let alone; but in Norway a certain seaman who saw things is dead. Might not the deeper inquiries of my uncle after encountering the sculptor's data have come to sinister ears? I think Professor Angell died because he knew too much, or because he was likely to learn too much. Whether I shall go as he did remains to be seen, for I have learned much now.

III. THE MADNESS FROM THE SEA

IF HEAVEN ever wishes to grant me a boon, it will be a total effacing of the results of a mere chance which fixed my eye on a certain stray piece of shelf-paper. It was nothing on which I would naturally have stumbled in the course of my daily round, for it was an old number of an Australian journal, *Sydney Bulletin* for April 18, 1925. It had escaped even the cutting bureau which had at the time of its issuance been avidly collecting material for my uncle's research.

I had largely given over my inquiries into what Professor Angell called the "Cthulhu Cult," and was visiting a learned friend of Paterson, New Jersey; the curator of a local museum and a mineralogist of note. Examining one day the reserve specimens roughly set on the storage shelves in a rear room of the museum, my eye was caught by an odd picture in one of the old papers spread beneath the stones. It was the *Sydney Bulletin* I have mentioned, for my friend has wide affiliations in all conceivable foreign parts; and the picture was a half-tone cut of a hideous stone image almost identical with that which Legrasse had found in the swamp.

Eagerly clearing the sheet of its precious contents, I scanned the item in detail; and was disappointed to find it of only moderate length. What it suggested, however, was of portentous significance to my flagging quest; and I carefully tore it out for immediate action. It read as follows:

MYSTERY DERELICT FOUND AT SEA

Vigilant Arrives with Helpless Armed New Zealand Yacht in Tow. One Survivor and Dead Man Found Aboard. Tale of Desperate Battle and Deaths at Sea. Rescued Seaman Refuses Particulars of Strange Experience. Odd Idol Found in His Possession. Inquiry to Follow.

The Morrison Co.'s freighter *Vigilant,* bound from Val-

paraiso, arrived this morning at its wharf in Darling Harbour, having in tow the battled and disabled but heavily armed steam yacht *Alert* of Dunedin, N. Z., which was sighted April 12th in S. Latitude 34°21′, W. Longitude 152°17′, with one living and one dead man aboard.

The *Vigilant* left Valparaiso March 25th, and on April 2d was driven considerably south of her course by exceptionally heavy storms and monster waves. On April 12th the derelict was sighted; and though apparently deserted, was found upon boarding to contain one survivor in a half-delirious condition and one man who had evidently been dead for more than a week.

The living man was clutching a horrible stone idol of unknown origin, about a foot in height, regarding whose nature authorities at Sydney University, the Royal Society, and the Museum in College Street all profess complete bafflement, and which the survivor says he found in the cabin of the yacht, in a small carved shrine of common pattern.

This man, after recovering his senses, told an exceedingly strange story of piracy and slaughter. He is Gustaf Johansen, a Norwegian of some intelligence, and had been second mate of the two-masted schooner *Emma* of Auckland, which sailed for Callao February 20th, with a complement of eleven men.

The *Emma,* he says, was delayed and thrown widely south of her course by the great storm of March 1st, and on March 22d, in S. Latitude 49°51′, W. Longitude 128° 34′, encountered the *Alert,* manned by a queer and evil-looking crew of Kanakas and half-castes. Being ordered peremptorily to turn back, Capt. Collins refused; whereupon the strange crew began to fire savagely and without warning upon the schooner with a peculiarly heavy battery of brass cannon forming part of the yacht's equipment.

The *Emma's* men showed fight, says the survivor, and though the schooner began to sink from shots beneath the waterline they managed to heave alongside their enemy and board her, grappling with the savage crew on the yacht's deck, and being forced to kill them all, the number being slightly superior, because of their particularly abhorrent and desperate though rather clumsy mode of fighting.

Three of the *Emma's* men, including Capt. Collins and First Mate Green, were killed; and the remaining eight

under Second Mate Johansen proceeded to navigate the captured yacht, going ahead in their original direction to see if any reason for their ordering back had existed.

The next day, it appears, they raised and landed on a small island, although none is known to exist in that part of the ocean; and six of the men somehow died ashore, though Johansen is queerly reticent about this part of his story and speaks only of their falling into a rock chasm.

Later, it seems, he and one companion boarded the yacht and tried to manage her, but were beaten about by the storm of April 2d.

From that time till his rescue on the 12th, the man remembers little, and he does not even recall when William Briden, his companion, died. Briden's death reveals no apparent cause, and was probably due to excitement or exposure.

Cable advices from Dunedin report that the *Alert* was well known there as an island trader, and bore an evil reputation along the waterfront. It was owned by a curious group of half-castes whose frequent meetings and night trips to the woods attracted no little curiosity; and it had set sail in great haste just after the storm and earth tremors of March 1st.

Our Auckland correspondent gives the *Emma* and her crew an excellent reputation, and Johansen is described as a sober and worthy man.

The admiralty will institute an inquiry on the whole matter beginning tomorrow, at which every effort will be made to induce Johansen to speak more freely than he has done hitherto.

This was all, together with the picture of the hellish image; but what a train of ideas it started in my mind! Here were new treasuries of data on the Cthulhu Cult, and evidence that it had strange interests at sea as well as on land. What motive prompted the hybrid crew to order back the *Emma* as they sailed about with their hideous idol? What was the unknown island on which six of the *Emma's* crew had died, and about which the mate Johansen was so secretive? What had the vice-admiralty's investigation brought out, and what was known of the noxious cult in Dunedin? And most marvelous of all, what

deep and more than natural linkage of dates was this which gave a malign and now undeniable significance to the various turns of event so carefully noted by my uncle?

March 1st—our February 28th according to the International Date Line—the earthquake and storm had come. From Dunedin the *Alert* and her noisome crew had darted eagerly forth as if imperiously summoned, and on the other side of the earth poets and artists had begun to dream of a strange, dark Cyclopean city whilst a young sculptor had molded in his sleep the form of the dreaded Cthulhu. March 23rd the crew of the *Emma* landed on an unknown island and left six men dead; and on that date the dreams of sensitive men assumed a heightened vividness and darkened with dread of a giant monster's malign pursuit, whilst an architect had gone mad and a sculptor had lapsed suddenly into delirium! And what of this storm of April 2nd—the date on which all dreams of the dank city ceased, and Wilcox emerged unharmed from the bondage of strange fever? What of all this—and of those hints of old Castro about the sunken, starborn Old Ones and their coming reign; their faithful cult *and their mastery of dreams?* Was I tottering on the brink of cosmic horrors beyond man's power to bear? If so, they must be horrors of the mind alone, for in some way the second of April had put a stop to whatever monstrous menace had begun its siege of mankind's soul.

That evening, after a day of hurried cabling and arranging, I bade my host adieu and took a train for San Francisco. In less than a month I was in Dunedin: where, however, I found that little was known of the strange cult-members who had lingered in the old sea taverns. Waterfront scum was far too common for special mention; though there was vague talk about one inland trip these mongrels had made, during which faint drumming and red flame were noted on the distant hills.

In Auckland I learned that Johansen had returned *with yellow hair turned white* after a perfunctory and inconclusive questioning at Sydney, and had thereafter sold his cottage in West Street and sailed with his wife to his old

home in Oslo. Of his stirring experience he would tell his friends no more than he had told the admiralty officials, and all they could do was to give me his Oslo address.

After that I went to Sydney and talked profitlessly with seamen and members of the vice-admiralty court. I saw the *Alert,* now sold and in commercial use, at Circular Quay in Sydney Cove, but gained nothing from its non-committal bulk. The crouching image with its cuttlefish head, dragon body, scaly wings, and hieroglyphed pedestal, was preserved in the Museum at Hyde Park; and I studied it long and well, finding it a thing of balefully exquisite workmanship, and with the same utter mystery, terrible antiquity, and unearthly strangeness of material which I had noted in Legrasse's smaller specimen. Geologists, the curator told me, had found it a monstrous puzzle; for they vowed that the world held no rock like it. Then I thought with a shudder of what old Castro had told Legrasse about the primal Great Ones: "They had come from the stars, and had brought Their images with Them."

Shaken with such a mental revolution as I had never before known, I now resolved to visit Mate Johansen in Oslo. Sailing for London, I re-embarked at once for the Norwegian capital; and one autumn day landed at the trim wharves in the shadow of the Egeberg.

Johansen's address, I discovered, lay in the Old Town of King Harold Haardrada, which kept alive the name of Oslo during all the centuries that the greater city masqueraded as "Christiania." I made the brief trip by taxicab, and knocked with palpitant heart at the door of a neat and ancient building with plastered front. A sad-faced woman in black answered my summons, and I was stung with disappointment when she told me in halting English that Gustaf Johansen was no more.

He had not long survived his return, said his wife, for the doings at sea in 1925 had broken him. He had told her no more than he had told the public, but had left a long manuscript—of "technical matters" as he said—written in English, evidently in order to safeguard her from the peril of casual perusal. During a walk through a

narrow lane near the Gothenberg dock, a bundle of papers falling from an attic window had knocked him down. Two Lascar sailors at once helped him to his feet, but before the ambulance could reach him he was dead. Physicians found no adequate cause for the end, and laid it to heart trouble and a weakened constitution.

I now felt gnawing at my vitals that dark terror which will never leave me till I, too, am at rest; "accidently" or otherwise. Persuading the widow that my connection with her husband's "technical matters" was sufficient to entitle me to his manuscript, I bore the document away and began to read it on the London boat.

It was a simple, rambling thing—a naive sailor's effort at a post-facto diary—and strove to recall day by day that last awful voyage. I can not attempt to transcribe it verbatim in all its cloudiness and redundance, but I will tell its gist enough to show why the sound of the water against the vessel's sides became so unendurable to me that I stopped my ears with cotton.

Johansen, thank God, did not know quite all, even though he saw the city and the Thing, but I shall never sleep calmly again when I think of the horrors that lurk ceaselessly behind life in time and in space, and of those unhallowed blasphemies from elder stars which dream beneath the sea, known and favored by a nightmare cult ready and eager to loose them on the world whenever another earthquake shall heave their monstrous stone city again to the sun and air.

Johansen's voyage had begun just as he told it to the vice-admiralty. The *Emma,* in ballast, had cleared Auckland on February 20th, and had felt the full force of that earthquake-born tempest which must have heaved up from the sea-bottom the horrors that filled men's dreams. Once more under control, the ship was making good progress when held up by the *Alert* on March 22nd, and I could feel the mate's regret as he wrote of her bombardment and sinking. Of the swarthy cult-fiends on the *Alert* he speaks with significant horror. There was some peculiarly abominable quality about them which made their destruc-

tion seem almost a duty, and Johansen shows ingenuous wonder at the charge of ruthlessness brought against his party during the proceedings of the court of inquiry. Then, driven ahead by curiosity in their captured yacht under Johansen's command, the men sight a great stone pillar sticking out of the sea, and in S. Latitude 47° 9′, W. Longitude 126° 43′, come upon a coastline of mingled mud, ooze, and weedy Cyclopean masonry which can be nothing less than the tangible substance of earth's supreme terror—the nightmare corpse-city of R'lyeh, that was built in measureless eons behind history by the vast, loathsome shapes that seeped down from the dark stars. There lay great Cthulhu and his hordes, hidden in green slimy vaults and sending out at last, after cycles incalculable, the thoughts that spread fear to the dreams of the sensitive and called imperiously to the faithful to come on a pilgrimage of liberation and restoration. All this Johnsen did not suspect, but God knows he soon saw enough!

I suppose that only a single mountain-top, the hideous monolith-crowned citadel whereon great Cthulhu was buried, actually emerged from the waters. When I think of the *extent* of all that may be brooding down there I almost wish to kill myself forthwith. Johansen and his men were awed by the cosmic majesty of this dripping Babylon of elder demons, and must have guessed without guidance that it was nothing of this or of any sane planet. Awe at the unbelievable size of the greenish stone blocks, at the dizzying height of the great carven monolith, and at the stupefying identity of the colossal statues and bas-reliefs with the queer image found in the shrine on the *Alert,* is poignantly visible in every line of the mate's frightened description.

Without knowing what futurism is like, Johansen achieved something very close to it when he spoke of the city; for instead of describing any definite structure or building, he dwells only on the broad impressions of vast angles and stone surfaces—surfaces too great to belong to any thing right or proper for this earth, and impious with horrible images and hieroglyphs. I mention his talk

about *angles* because it suggests something Wilcox had told me of his awful dreams. He had said that the *geometry* of the dream-place he saw was abnormal, non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours. Now an unlettered seaman felt the same thing whilst gazing at the terrible reality.

Johansen and his men landed at a sloping mud-band on this monstrous acropolis, and clambered slipperily up over titan oozy blocks which could have been no mortal staircase. The very sun of heaven seemed distorted when viewed through the polarizing miasma welling out from this sea-soaked perversion, and twisted menace and suspense lurked leeringly in those crazily elusive angles of carven rock where a second glance showed concavity after the first showed convexity.

Something very like fright had come over all the explorers before anything more definite than rock and ooze and weed was seen. Each would have fled had he not feared the scorn of the others, and it was only half-heartedly that they searched—vainly, as it proved—for some portable souvenir to bear away.

It was Rodriguez the Portuguese who climbed up the foot of the monolith and shouted of what he had found. The rest followed him, and looked curiously at the immense carved door with the now familiar squid-dragon bas-relief. It was, Johansen said, like a great barn-door; and they all felt that it was a door because of the ornate lintel, threshold, and jambs around it, though they could not decide whether it lay flat like a trap door or slantwise like an outside cellar-door. As Wilcox would have said, the geometry of the place was all wrong. One could not be sure that the sea and the ground were horizontal, hence the relative position of everything else seemed fantasmally variable.

Briden pushed at the stone in several places without result. Then Donovan felt over it delicately around the edge, pressing each point separately as he went. He climbed interminably along the grotesque stone molding—that is, one would call it climbing if the thing was not

after all horizontal—and the men wondered how any door in the universe could be so vast. Then, very softly and slowly, the acre-great panel began to give inward at the top; and they saw that it was balanced.

Donovan slid or somehow propelled himself down or along the jamb and rejoined his fellows, and everyone watched the queer recession of the monstrously carven portal. In this fantasy of prismatic distortion it moved anomalously in a diagonal way, so that all the rules of matter and perspective seemed upset.

The aperture was black with a darkness almost material. That tenebrousness was indeed a *positive quality;* for it obscured such parts of the inner walls as ought to have been revealed, and actually burst forth like smoke from its eon-long imprisonment, visibly darkening the sun as it slunk away into the shrunken and gibbous sky on flapping membranous wings. The odor arising from the newly opened depths was intolerable, and at length the quick-eared Hawkins thought he heard a nasty, slopping sound down there. Everyone listened, and everyone was listening still when It lumbered slobberingly into sight and gropingly squeezed Its gelatinous green immensity through the black doorway into the tainted outside air of that poison city of madness.

Poor Johansen's handwriting almost gave out when he wrote of this. Of the six men who never reached the ship, he thinks two perished of pure fright in that accursed instant. The Thing can not be described—there is no language for such abysms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order. A mountain walked or stumbled. God! What wonder that across the earth a great architect went mad, and poor Wilcox raved with fever in that telepathic instant? The Thing of the idols, the green, sticky spawn of the stars, has awaked to claim his own. The stars were right again, and what an age-out cult had failed to do by design, a band of innocent sailors had done by accident. After vigintillions of years great Cthulhu was loose again, and ravening for delight.

Three men were swept up by the flabby claws before anybody turned. God rest them, if there be any rest in the universe. They were Donovan, Guerrera and Angstrom. Parker slipped as the other three were plunging frenziedly over endless vistas of green-crusted rock to the boat, and Johansen swears he was swallowed up by an angle of masonry which shouldn't have been there; an angle which was acute, but behaved as if it were obtuse. So only Briden and Johnsen reached the boat, and pulled desperately for the *Alert* as the mountainous monstrosity flopped down the slimy stones and hesitated, floundering at the edge of the water.

Steam had not been suffered to go down entirely, despite the departure of all hands for the shore; and it was the work of only a few moments of feverish rushing up and down between wheels and engines to get the *Alert* under way. Slowly, amidst the distorted horrors of that indescribable scene, she began to churn the lethal waters; whilst on the masonry of that charnel shore that was not of earth the titan Thing from the stars slavered and gibbered like Polypheme cursing the fleeing ship of Odysseus. Then, bolder than the storied Cyclops, great Cthulhu slid greasily into the water and began to pursue with vast wave-raising strokes of cosmic potency. Briden looked back and went mad, laughing at intervals till death found him one night in the cabin whilst Johansen was wandering deliriously.

But Johansen had not given out yet. Knowing that the Thing could surely overtake the *Alert* until steam was fully up, he resolved on a desperate chance; and setting the engine for full speed, ran lightning-like on deck and reversed the wheel. There was a mighty eddying and foaming in the noisome brine, and as the steam mounted higher and higher the brave Norwegian drove his vessel head on against the pursuing jelly which rose above the unclean froth like the stern of a demon galleon. The awful squid-head with writhing feelers came nearly up to the bowspit of the sturdy yacht, but Johansen drove on relentlessly.

There was bursting as of an exploding bladder, a slushy

nastiness as of a cloven sunfish, a stench as of a thousand opened graves, and a sound that the chronicler would not put on paper. For an instant the ship was befouled by an acrid and blinding green cloud, and then there was only a venomous seething astern; where—God in heaven!—the scattered plasticity of that nameless sky-spawn was nebulously *recombining* in its hateful original form, whilst its distance widened every second as the *Alert* gained impetus from its mounting steam.

That was all. After that Johansen only brooded over the idol in the cabin and attended to a few matters of food for himself and the laughing maniac by his side. He did not try to navigate after the first bold flight; for the reaction had taken something out of his soul. Then came the storm of April 2nd, and a gathering of the clouds about his consciousness. There is a sense of spectral whirling through liquid gulfs of infinity, of dizzying rides through reeling universes on a comet's tail, and of hysterical plunges from the pit to the moon and from the moon back again to the pit, all livened by a cachinnating chorus of the distorted, hilarious elder gods and the green, bat-winged mocking imps of Tartarus.

Out of that dream came rescue—the *Vigilant,* the vice-admiralty court, the streets of Dunedin, and the long voyage back home to the old house by the Egeberg. He could not tell—they would think him mad. He would write of what he knew before death came, but his wife must not guess. Death would be a boon if only it could blot out the memories.

That was the document I read, and now I have placed it in the tin box beside the bas-relief and the papers of Professor Angell. With it shall go this record of mine—this test of my own sanity, wherein is pieced together that which I hope may never be pieced together again. I have looked upon all that the universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me. But I do not think my life will be long. As my uncle went, as poor Johansen

went, so I shall go. I know too much, and the cult still lives.

Cthulhu still lives, too, I suppose, again in that chasm of stone which has shielded him since the sun was young. His accursed city is sunken once more, for the *Vigilant* sailed over the spot after the April storm; but his ministers on earth still bellow and prance and slay around idol-capped monoliths in lonely places. He must have been trapped by the sinking whilst within his black abyss, or else the world would by now be screaming with fright and frenzy. Who knows the end? What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men. A time will come—but I must not and can not think! Let me pray that, if I do not survive this manuscript, my executors may put caution before audacity and see that it meets no other eye.

THE RETURN OF THE SORCERER

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

I HAD been out of work for several months, and my savings were perilously near the vanishing point. Therefore I was naturally elated when I received from John Carnby a favorable answer inviting me to present my qualifications in person. Carnby had advertised for a secretary, stipulating that all applicants must offer a preliminary statement of their capacities by letter, and I had written in response to the advertisement.

Carnby, no doubt, was a scholarly recluse who felt averse to contact with a long waiting-list of strangers; and he had chosen this manner of weeding out beforehand many, if not all, of those who were ineligible. He had specified his requirements fully and succinctly, and these were of such nature as to bar even the average well-educated person. A knowledge of Arabic was necessary, among other things; and luckily I had acquired a certain degree of scholarship in this unusual tongue.

I found the address, of whose location I had formed only a vague idea, at the end of a hilltop avenue in the suburbs of Oakland. It was a large, two-story house, overshaded by ancient oaks and dark with a mantling of unchecked ivy, among hedges of unpruned privet and shrubbery that had gone wild for many years. It was separated from its neighbors by a vacant, weed-grown lot

on one side and a tangle of vines and trees on the other, surrounding the black ruins of a burnt mansion.

Even apart from its air of long neglect, there was something drear and dismal about the place—something that inhered in the ivy-blurred outlines of the house, in the furtive, shadowy windows, and the very forms of the misshapen oaks and oddly sprawling shrubbery. Somehow, my elation became a trifle less exuberant, as I entered the grounds and followed an unswept path to the front door.

When I found myself in the presence of John Carnby, my jubilation was still somewhat further diminished; though I could not have given a tangible reason for the premonitory chill, the dull, somber feeling of alarm that I experienced, and the leaden sinking of my spirits. Perhaps it was the dark library in which he received me as much as the man himself—a room whose musty shadows could never have been wholly dissipated by sun or lamplight. Indeed, it must have been this; for John Carnby himself was very much the sort of person I had pictured him to be.

He had all the earmarks of the lonely scholar who has devoted patient years to some line of erudite research. He was thin and bent, with a massive forehead and a mane of grizzled hair; and the pallor of the library was on his hollow, clean-shaven cheeks. But coupled with this, there was a nerve-shattered air, a fearful shrinking that was more than the normal shyness of a recluse, and an unceasing apprehensiveness that betrayed itself in every glance of his dark-ringed, feverish eyes and every movement of his bony hands. In all likelihood his health had been seriously impaired by overapplication; and I could not help but wonder at the nature of the studies that had made him a tremulous wreck. But there was something about him—perhaps the width of his bowed shoulders and the bold aquilinity of his facial outlines—which gave the impression of great former strength and a vigor not yet wholly exhausted.

His voice was unexpectedly deep and sonorous.

"I think you will do, Mr. Ogden," he said, after a few formal questions, most of which related to my linguistic

knowledge, and in particular my mastery of Arabic. "Your labors will not be very heavy; but I want someone who can be on hand at any time required. Therefore you must live with me. I can give you a comfortable room, and I guarantee that my cooking will not poison you. I often work at night; and I hope you will not find the irregular hours too disagreeable."

No doubt I should have been overjoyed at this assurance that the secretarial position was to be mine. Instead, I was aware of a dim, unreasoning reluctance and an obscure forewarning of evil as I thanked John Carnby and told him that I was ready to move in whenever he desired.

He appeared to be greatly pleased; and the queer apprehensiveness went out of his manner for a moment.

"Come immediately—this very afternoon, if you can," he said. "I shall be very glad to have you, and the sooner the better. I have been living entirely alone for some time; and I must confess that the solitude is beginning to pall upon me. Also, I have been retarded in my labors for lack of the proper help. My brother used to live with me and assist me, but he has gone away on a long trip."

I returned to my downtown lodgings, paid my rent with the last few dollars that remained to me, packed my belongings, and in less than an hour was back at my new employer's home. He assigned me a room on the second floor, which, though unaired and dusty, was more than luxurious in comparison with the hall-bedroom that failing funds had compelled me to inhabit for some time past. Then he took me to his own study, which was on the same floor, at the further end of the hall. Here, he explained to me, most of my future work would be done.

I could hardly restrain an exclamation of surprise as I viewed the interior of this chamber. It was very much as I should have imagined the den of some old sorcerer to be. There were tables strewn with archaic instruments of doubtful use, with astrological charts, with skulls and alembics and crystals, with censers such as are used in the Catholic Church, and volumes bound in worm-eaten

leather with verdigris-mottled clasps. In one corner stood the skeleton of a large ape; in another, a human skeleton; and overhead a stuffed crocodile was suspended.

There were cases overpiled with books, and even a cursory glance at the titled showed me that they formed a singularly comprehensive collection of ancient and modern works on demonology and the black arts. There were some weird paintings and etchings on the walls, dealing with kindred themes; and the whole atmosphere of the room exhaled a medley of half-forgotten superstitions. Ordinarily I would have smiled if confronted with such things; but somehow, in this lonely, dismal house, beside the neurotic, hag-ridden Carnby, it was difficult for me to repress an actual shudder.

On one of the tables, contrasting incongruously with this melange of medievalism and Satanism, there stood a typewriter, surrounded with piles of disorderly manuscript. At one end of the room there was a small, curtained alcove with a bed in which Carnby slept. At the end opposite the alcove, between the human and simian skeletons, I perceived a locked cupboard that was set in the wall.

Carnby had noted my surprise, and was watching me with a keen, analytic expression which I found impossible to fathom. He began to speak, in explanatory tones.

"I have made a life-study of demonism and sorcery," he declared. "It is a fascinating field, and one that is singularly neglected. I am now preparing a monograph, in which I am trying to correlate the magical practices and demon-worship of every known age and people. Your labors, at least for a while, will consist in typing and arranging the voluminous preliminary notes which I have made, and in helping me to track down other references and correspondences. Your knowledge of Arabic will be invaluable to me, for I am none too well-grounded in this language myself, and I am depending for certain essential data on a copy of the *Necronomicon* in the original Arabic text. I have reason to think that there are certain omis-

sions and erroneous renderings in the Latin version of Olaus Wormius."

I had heard of this rare, well-nigh fabulous volume, but had never seen it. The book was supposed to contain the ultimate secrets of evil and forbidden knowledge; and, moreover, the original text, written by the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred, was said to be unprocurable. I wondered how it had come into Carnby's possession.

"I'll show you the volume after dinner," Carnby went on. "You will doubtless be able to elucidate one or two passages that have long puzzled me."

The evening meal, cooked and served by my employer himself, was a welcome change from cheap restaurant fare. Carnby seemed to have lost a good deal of his nervousness. He was very talkative, and even began to exhibit a certain scholarly gaiety after we had shared a bottle of mellow Sauterne. Still, with no manifest reason, I was troubled by intimations and forebodings which I could neither analyze nor trace to their rightful source.

We returned to the study, and Carnby brought out from a locked drawer the volume of which he had spoken. It was enormously old, and was bound in ebony covers arabesqued with silver and set with darkly glowing garnets. When I opened the yellowing pages, I drew back with involuntary revulsion at the odor which arose from them —an odor that was more than suggestive of physical decay, as if the book had lain among corpses in some forgotten graveyard and had taken on the taint of dissolution.

Carnby's eyes were burning with a fevered light as he took the old manuscript from my hands and turned to a page near the middle. He indicated a certain passage with his lean forefinger.

"Tell me what you make of this," he said, in a tense, excited whisper.

I deciphered the paragraph, slowly and with some difficulty, and wrote down a rough English version with the pad and pencil which Carnby offered me. Then, at his request, I read it aloud:

"It is verily known by few, but is nevertheless an attestable fact, that the will of a dead sorcerer hath power upon his own body and can raise it up from the tomb and perform therewith whatever action was unfulfilled in life. And such resurrections are invariably for the doing of malevolent deeds and for the detriment of others. Most readily can the corpse be animated if all its members have remained intact; and yet there are cases in which the excelling will of the wizard hath reared up from death the sundered pieces of a body hewn in many fragments, and hath caused them to serve his end, either separately or in a temporary reunion. But in every instance, after the action hath been completed, the body lapseth into its former state."

Of course, all this was errant gibberish. Probably it was the strange, unhealthy look of utter absorption with which my employer listened, more than that damnable passage from the *Necronomicon,* which caused my nervousness and made me start violently when, toward the end of my reading, I heard an indescribable slithering noise in the hall outside. But when I finished the paragraph and looked up at Carnby, I was more than startled by the expression of stark, staring fear which his features had assumed—an expression as of one who is haunted by some hellish phantom. Somehow, I got the feeling that he was listening to that odd noise in the hallway rather than to my translation of Abdul Alhazred.

"The house is full of rats," he explained, as he caught my inquiring glance. "I have never been able to get rid of them, with all my efforts."

The noise, which still continued, was that which a rat might make in dragging some object slowly along the floor. It seemed to draw closer, to approach the door of Carnby's room, and then, after an intermission, it began to move again and receded. My employer's agitation was marked; he listened with fearful intentness and seemed to follow the progress of the sound with a terror that mounted as it drew near and decreased a little with its recession.

"I am very nervous," he said. "I have worked too hard lately, and this is the result. Even a little noise upsets me."

The sound had now died away somewhere in the house. Carnby appeared to recover himself in a measure.

"Will you please re-read your translation?" he requested. "I want to follow it very carefully, word by word."

I obeyed. He listened with the same look of unholy absorption as before, and this time we were not interrupted by any noises in the hallway. Carnby's face grew paler, as if the last remnant of blood had been drained from it, when I read the final sentences; and the fire in his hollow eyes was like phosphorescence in a deep vault.

"That is a most remarkable passage," he commented. "I was doubtful about its meaning, with my imperfect Arabic; and I have found that the passage is wholly omitted in the Latin of Olaus Wormius. Thank you for your scholarly rendering. You have certainly cleared it up for me."

His tone was dry and formal, as if he were repressing himself and holding back a world of unsurmisable thoughts and emotions. Somehow I felt that Carnby was more nervous and upset than ever, and also that my reading from the *Necronomicon* had in some mysterious manner contributed to his perturbation. He wore a ghastly brooding expression, as if his mind were busy with some unwelcome and forbidden theme.

However, seeming to collect himself, he asked me to translate another passage. This turned out to be a singular incantatory formula for the exorcism of the dead, with a ritual that involved the use of rare Arabian spices and the proper intoning of at least a hundred names of ghouls and demons. I copied it all out for Carnby, who studied it for a long time with a rapt eagerness that was more than scholarly.

"That, too," he observed, "is not in Olaus Wormius." After perusing it again, he folded the paper carefully and put it away in the same drawer from which he had taken the *Necronomicon.*

That evening was one of the strangest I have ever spent. As we sat for hour after hour discussing renditions from that unhallowed volume, I came to know more and more definitely that my employer was mortally afraid of something; that he dreaded being alone and was keeping me with him on this account rather than for any other reason. Always he seemed to be waiting and listening with a painful, tortured expectation, and I saw that he gave only a mechanical awareness to much that was said. Among the weird appurtenances of the room, in that atmosphere of unmanifested evil, of untold horror, the rational part of my mind began to succumb slowly to a recrudescence of dark ancestral fears. A scorner of such things in my normal moments, I was now ready to believe in the most baleful creations of superstitious fancy. No doubt, by some process of mental contagion, I had caught the hidden terror from which Carnby suffered.

By no word or syllable, however, did the man admit the actual feelings that were evident in his demeanor, but he spoke repeatedly of a nervous ailment. More than once, during our discussion, he sought to imply that his interest in the supernatural and the Satanic was wholly intellectual, that he, like myself, was without personal belief in such things. Yet I knew infallibly that his implications were false; that he was driven and obsessed by a real faith in all that he pretended to view with scientific detachment, and had doubtless fallen a victim to some imaginary horror entailed by his occult researches. But my intuition afforded me no clue to the actual nature of this horror.

There was no repetition of the sounds that had been so disturbing to my employer. We must have sat till after midnight with the writings of the mad Arab open before us. At last Carnby seemed to realize the lateness of the hour.

"I fear I have kept you up too long," he said apologetically. "You must go and get some sleep. I am selfish, and I forget that such hours are not habitual to others, as they are to me."

I made the formal denial of his self-impeachment which

courtesy required, said good night, and sought my own chamber with a feeling of intense relief. It seemed to me that I would leave behind me in Carnby's room all the shadowy fear and oppression to which I had been subjected.

Only one light was burning in the long passage. It was near Carnby's door; and my own door at the further end, close to the stair-head, was in deep shadow. As I groped for the knob, I heard a noise behind me, and turned to see in the gloom a small, indistinct body that sprang from the hall-landing to the top stair, disappearing from view. I was horribly startled; for even in that vague, fleeting glimpse, the thing was much too pale for a rat and its form was not at all suggestive of an animal. I could not have sworn what it was, but the outlines had seemed unmentionably monstrous. I stood trembling violently in every limb, and heard on the stairs a singular bumping sound like the fall of an object rolling downward from step to step. The sound was repeated at regular intervals, and finally ceased.

If the safety of the soul and body depended upon it, I could not have turned on the stair-light; nor could I have gone to the top steps to ascertain the agency of that unnatural bumping. Anyone else, it might seem, would have done this. Instead, after a moment of virtual petrification, I entered my room, locked the door, and went to bed in a turmoil of unresolved doubt and equivocal terror. I left the light burning; and I lay awake for hours, expecting momentarily a recurrence of that abominable sound. But the house was as silent as a morgue, and I heard nothing. At length, in spite of my anticipations to the contrary, I fell asleep and did not awaken till after many sodden, dreamless hours.

It was ten o'clock, as my watch informed me. I wondered whether my employer had left me undisturbed through thoughtfulness, or had not arisen himself. I dressed and went downstairs, to find him waiting at the breakfast table. He was paler and more tremulous than ever, as if he had slept badly.

"I hope the rats didn't annoy you too much," he remarked, after a preliminary greeting. "Something really must be done about them."

"I didn't notice them at all," I replied. Somehow, it was utterly impossible for me to mention the queer, ambiguous thing which I had seen and heard on retiring the night before. Doubtless I had been mistaken; doubtless it had been merely a rat after all, dragging something down the stairs. I tried to forget the hideously repeated noise and the momentary flash of unthinkable outlines in the gloom.

My employer eyed me with uncanny sharpness, as if he sought to penetrate my inmost mind. Breakfast was a dismal affair; and the day that followed was no less dreary. Carnby isolated himself till the middle of the afternoon, and I was left to my own devices in the well-supplied but conventional library downstairs. What Carnby was doing alone in his room I could not surmise; but I thought more than once that I heard the faint, monotonous intonations of a solemn voice. Horror-breeding hints and noisome intuitions invaded my brain. More and more the atmosphere of that house enveloped and stifled me with poisonous, miasmal mystery; and I felt everywhere the invisible brooding of malignant incubi.

It was almost a relief when my employer summoned me to his study. Entering, I noticed that the air was full of a pungent, aromatic smell and was touched by the vanishing coils of a blue vapor, as if from the burning of Oriental gums and spices in the church censers. An Ispahan rug had been moved from its position near the wall to the center of the room, but was not sufficient to cover entirely a curving violet mark that suggested the drawing of a magic circle on the floor. No doubt Carnby had been performing some sort of incantation; and I thought of the awesome formula I had translated at his request.

However, he did not offer any explanation of what he had been doing. His manner had changed remarkably and was more controlled and confident than at any former time. In a fashion almost bsuiness-like he laid before me

a pile of manuscript which he wanted me to type for him. The familiar click of the keys aided me somewhat in dismissing my apprehensions of value evil, and I could almost smile at the recherché and terrific information comprised in my employer's notes, which dealt mainly with formulae for the acquisition of unlawful power. But still, beneath my reassurance, there was a vague, lingering disquietude.

Evening came; and after our meal we returned again to the study. There was a tenseness in Carnby's manner now, as if he were eagerly awaiting the result of some hidden test. I went on with my work; but some of his emotion communicated itself to me, and ever and anon I caught myself in an attitude of strained listening.

At last, above the click of the keys, I heard the peculiar slithering in the hall. Carnby had heard it, too, and his confident look had utterly vanished, giving place to the most pitiable fear.

The sound drew nearer and was followed by a dull, dragging noise, and then by more sounds of an unidentifiable slithering and scuttling nature that varied in loudness. The hall was seemingly full of them, as if a whole army of rats were hauling some carrion booty along the floor. And yet no rodent or number of rodents could have made such sounds, or could have moved anything so heavy as the object which came behind the rest. There was something in the character of those noises, something without name or definition, which caused a slowly creeping chill to invade my spine.

"Good Lord! What is all that racket?" I cried.

"The rats! I tell you it is only rats!" Carnby's voice was a high, hysterical shriek.

A moment later, there came an unmistakable knocking on the door, near the sill. At the same time I heard a heavy thudding in the locked cupboard at the further end of the room. Carnby had been standing erect, but now he sank limply into a chair. His features were ashen, and his look was almost maniacal with fright.

The nightmare doubt and tension became unbearable

and I ran to the door and flung it open, in spite of a frantic remonstrance from my employer. I had no idea what I should find as I stepped across the sill into the dim-lit hall.

When I looked down and saw the thing on which I had almost trodden, my feeling was one of sick amazement and actual nausea. It was a human hand which had been severed at the wrist—a bony, bluish hand like that of a week-old corpse, with garden-mold on the fingers and under the long nails. *The damnable thing had moved!* It had drawn back to avoid me, and was crawling along the passage somewhat in the manner of a crab! And following it with my gaze, I saw that there were other things beyond it, one of which I recognized as a man's foot and another as a forearm. I dared not look at the rest. All were moving slowly, hideously away in a charnel procession, and I cannot describe the fashion in which they moved. Their individual vitality was horrifying beyond endurance. It was more than the vitality of life, yet the air was laden with a carrion taint. I averted my eyes and stepped back into Carnby's room, closing the door behind me with a shaking hand. Carnby was at my side with the key, which he turned in the lock with palsy-stricken fingers that had become as feeble as those of an old man.

"You saw them?" he asked in a dry, quavering whisper.

"In God's name, what does it all mean?" I cried.

Carnby went back to his chair, tottering a little with weakness. His lineaments were agonized by the gnawing of some inward horror, and he shook visibly like an ague patient. I sat down in a chair beside him, and he began to stammer forth his unbelievable confession, half incoherently, with inconsequential mouthings and many breaks and pauses:

"He is stronger than I am—even in death, even with his body dismembered by the surgeon's knife and saw that I used. I thought he could not return after that—after I had buried the portions in a dozen different places, in the cellar, beneath the shrubs, at the foot of the ivy-vines. But the *Necronomicon* is right . . . and Helman Carnby

knew it. He warned me before I killed him, he told me he could return—*even in that condition.*

"But I did not believe him. I hated Helman, and he hated me, too. He had attained to higher power and knowledge and was more favored by the Dark Ones than I. That was why I killed him—my own twin-brother, and my brother in the service of Satan and of Those who were before Satan. We had studied together for many years. We had celebrated the Black Mass together and we were attended by the same familiars. But Helman Carnby had gone deeper into the occult, into the forbidden, where I could not follow him. I feared him, and I could not endure his supremacy.

"It is more than a week—it is ten days since I did the deed. But Helman—or some part of him—has returned every night. . . . God! His accursed hands crawling on the floor! His feet, his arms, the segments of his legs, climbing the stairs in some unmentionable way to haunt me! . . . Christ! His awful, bloody torso lying in wait! I tell you, his hands have come even by day to tap and fumble at my door . . . and I have stumbled over his arms in the dark.

"Oh God! I shall go mad with the awfulness of it. But he wants me to go mad, he wants to torture me till my brain gives way. That is why he haunts me in this piecemeal fashion. He could end it all at any time, with the demoniacal power that is his. He could re-knit his sundered limbs and body and slay me as I slew him.

"How carefully I buried the parts, with what infinite forethought! And how useless it was! I buried the saw and the knife, too, at the farther end of the garden, as far away as possible from his evil, itching hands. But I did not bury the head with the other pieces—I kept it in that cupboard at the end of my room. Sometimes I have heard it moving there, as you heard it a while ago. . . . But he does not need the head, his will is elsewhere, and can work intelligently through all his members.

"Of course, I locked all the doors and windows at night when I found that he was coming back. . . . But it made

no difference. And I have tried to exorcise him with the appropriate incantations—with all those that I knew. Today I tried that sovereign formula from the *Necronomicon* which you translated for me. I got you here to translate it. Also, I could no longer bear to be alone and I thought that it might help if there were someone else in the house. That formula was my last hope. I thought it would hold him—it is a most ancient and most dreadful incantation. But, as you have seen, it is useless. . . ."

His voice trailed off in a broken mumble, and he sat staring before him with sightless, intolerable eyes in which I saw the beginning flare of madness. I could say nothing —the confession he had made was so ineffably atrocious. The moral shock, and the ghastly supernatural horror, had almost stupefied me. My sensibilities were stunned; and it was not till I had begun to recover myself that I felt the irresistible surge of a flood of loathing for the man beside me.

I rose to my feet. The house had grown very silent, as if the macabre and charnel army of beleaguerment had now retired to its various graves. Carnby had left the key in the lock; and I went to the door and turned it quickly.

"Are you leaving? Don't go," Carnby begged in a voice that was tremulous with alarm, as I stood with my hand on the doorknob.

"Yes, I am going," I said coldly. "I am resigning my position right now; and I intend to pack my belongings and leave your house with as little delay as possible."

I opened the door and went out, refusing to listen to the arguments and pleadings and protestations he had begun to babble. For the nonce, I preferred to face whatever might lurk in the gloomy passage, no matter how loathsome and terrifying, rather than endure any longer the society of John Carnby.

The hall was empty; but I shuddered with repulsion at the memory of what I had seen, as I hastened to my room. I think I should have screamed aloud at the least sound or movement in the shadows.

I began to pack my valise with a feeling of the most

frantic urgency and compulsion. It seemed to me that I could not escape soon enough from that house of abominable secrets, over which hung an atmosphere of smothering menace. I made mistakes in my haste, I stumbled over chairs, and my brain and fingers grew numb with a paralyzing dread.

I had almost finished my task, when I heard the sound of slow measured footsteps coming up the stairs. I knew that it was not Carnby, for he had locked himself immediately in his room when I had left; and I felt sure that nothing could have tempted him to emerge. Anyway, he could hardly have gone downstairs without my hearing him.

The footsteps came to the top landing and went past my door along the hall, with that same dead monotonous repetition, regular as the movement of a machine. Certainly it was not the soft, nervous tread of John Carnby.

Who, then, could it be? My blood stood still in my veins; I dared not finish the speculation that arose in my mind.

The steps paused; and I knew that they had reached the door of Carnby's room. There followed an interval in which I could scarcely breathe; and then I heard an awful crashing and shattering noise, and above it the soaring scream of a man in the uttermost extremity of fear.

I was powerless to move, as if an unseen iron hand had reached forth to restrain me; and I have no idea how long I waited and listened. The scream had fallen away in a swift silence; and I heard nothing now, except a low, peculiar, recurrent sound which my brain refused to identify.

It was not my own volition, but a stronger will than mine, which drew me forth at last and impelled me down the hall to Carnby's study. I felt the presence of that will as an overpowering, superhuman thing—a demoniac force, a malign mesmerism.

The door of the study had been broken in and was hanging by one hinge. It was splintered as by the impact of more than mortal strength. A light was still burning in the room, and the unmentionable sound I had been hear-

ing ceased as I neared the threshold. It was followed by an evil, utter stillness.

Again I paused, and could go no further. But, this time, it was something other than the hellish, all-pervading magnetism that petrified my limbs and arrested me before the sill. Peering into the room, in the narrow space that was framed by the doorway and lit by an unseen lamp, I saw one end of the Oriental rug, and the gruesome outlines of a monstrous, unmoving shadow that fell beyond it on the floor. Huge, elongated, misshapen, the shadow was seemingly cast by the arms and torso of a naked man who stooped forward with a surgeon's saw in his hand. Its monstrosity lay in this: though the shoulders, chest, abdomen and arms were all clearly distinguishable, the shadow was headless and appeared to terminate in an abruptly severed neck. It was impossible, considering the relative position, for the head to have been concealed from sight through any manner of foreshortening.

I waited, powerless to enter or withdraw. The blood had flowed back upon my heart in an ice-thick tide, and thought was frozen in my brain. An interval of termless horror, and then, from the hidden end of Carnby's room, from the direction of the locked cupboard, there came a fearsome and violent crash, and the sound of splintering wood and whining hinges, followed by the sinister, dismal thud of an unknown object striking the floor.

Again there was silence—a silence as of consummated Evil brooding above its unnamable triumph. The shadow had not stirred. There was a hideous contemplation in its attitude, and the saw was still held in its poising hand, as if above a completed task.

Another interval, and then, without warning, I witnessed the awful and unexplainable *disintegration* of the shadow, which seemed to break gently and easily into many different shadows ere it faded from view. I hesitate to describe the manner, or specify the places, in which this singular disruption, this manifold cleavage, occurred. Simultaneously, I heard the muffled clatter of a metallic

implement on the Persian rug, and a sound that was not of a single body but of many bodies falling.

Once more there was silence—a silence as of some nocturnal cemetery, when grave-diggers and ghouls are done with their macabre toil, and the dead alone remain.

Drawn by the baleful mesmerism, like a somnambulist led by an unseen demon, I entered the room. I knew with a loathly prescience the sight that awaited me beyond the sill—the *double* heap of human segments, some of them fresh and bloody, and others already blue with beginning putrefaction and marked with earthstains, that were mingled in abhorrent confusion on the rug.

A reddened knife and saw were protruding from the pile; and a little to one side, between the rug and the open cupboard with its shattered door, there reposed a human head that was fronting the other remnants in an upright posture. It was in the same condition of incipient decay as the body to which it belonged; but I swear that I saw the fading of a malignant exultation from its features as I entered. Even with the marks of corruption upon them, the lineaments bore a manifest likeness to those of John Carnby, and plainly they could belong only to a twin brother.

The frightful inferences that smothered my brain with their black and clammy cloud are not to be written here. The horror which I beheld—and the greater horror which I surmised—would have put to shame hell's foulest enormities in their frozen pits. There was but one mitigation and one mercy: I was compelled to gaze only for a few instants on that intolerable scene. Then, all at once, I felt that something had withdrawn from the room; the malign spell was broken, the overpowering volition that had held me captive was gone. It had released me now, even as it had released the dismembered corpse of Helman Carnby. I was free to go; and I fled from the ghastly chamber and ran headlong through an unlit house and into the outer darkness of the night.

UBBO-SATHLA

CLARK ASHTON SMITH

. . . For Ubbo-Sathla is the source and the end. Before the coming of Zhothaqquah or Yok-Zothoth or Kthulhut from the stars; Ubbo-Sathla dwelt in the steaming fens of the new-made Earth: a mass without head or members, spawning the gray, formless efts of the prime and the grisly prototypes of terrene life. . . . . And all earthly life, it is told, shall go back at last through the great circle of time to Ubbo-Sathla.

—The Book of Eibon

PAUL TREGARDIS found the milky crystal in a litter of oddments from many lands and eras. He had entered the shop of the curio-dealer through an aimless impulse, with no object in mind, other than the idle distraction of eyeing and fingering a miscellany of far-gathered things. Looking desultorily about, his attention had been drawn by a dull glimmering on one of the tables; and he had extricated the queer orb-like stone from its shadowy, crowded position between an ugly little Aztec idol, the fossil egg of a dinornis, and an obscene fetish of black wood from the Niger.

The thing was about the size of a small orange and was

slightly flattened at the ends, like a planet at its poles. It puzzled Tregardis, for it was not like an ordinary crystal, being cloudy and changeable with an intermittent glowing in its heart, as if it were alternately illumed and darkened from within. Holding it to the wintry window, he studied it for awhile without being able to determine the secret of this singular and regular alternation. His puzzlement was soon complicated by a dawning sense of vague and irrecognizable familiarity, as if he had seen the thing before under circumstances that were now wholly forgotten.

He appealed to the curio-dealer, a dwarfish Hebrew with an air of dusty antiquity, who gave the impression of being lost to commercial considerations in some web of cabalistic revery.

"Can you tell me anything about this?"

The dealer gave an indescribable, simultaneous shrug of his shoulders and his eyebrows.

"It is very old—palagean, one might say. I can not tell you much, for little is known. A geologist found it in Greenland, beneath glacial ice, in the Miocene strata. Who knows? It may have belonged to some sorcerer of primeval Thule. Greenland was a warm, fertile region beneath the sun of Miocene times. No doubt it is a magic crystal; and a man might behold strange visions in its heart, if he looked long enough."

Tregardis was quite startled; for the dealer's apparently fantastic suggestion had brought to mind his own delvings in a branch of obscure lore; and, in particular, had recalled *The Book of Eibon,* that strangest and rarest of occult forgotten volumes, which is said to have come down through a series of manifold translations from a prehistoric original written in the lost language of Hyperborea. Tregardis, with much difficulty, had obtained the mediaeval French version—a copy that had been owned by many generations of sorcerers and Satanists—but had never been able to find the Greek manuscript from which the version was derived.

The remote, fabulous original was supposed to have been the work of a great Hyperborean wizard, from whom

it had taken its name. It was a collection of dark and baleful myths, of liturgies, rituals and incantations both evil and esoteric. Not without shudders, in the course of studies that the average person would have considered more than singular, Tregardis had collated the French volume with the frightful *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred. He had found many correspondences of the blackest and most appalling significance, together with much forbidden data that was either unknown to the Arab or omitted by him . . . or by his translators.

Was this what he had been trying to recall, Tregardis wondered—the brief, casual reference, in *The Book of Eibon,* to a cloudy crystal that had been owned by the wizard Zon Mezzamalech, in Mhu Thulan? Of course, it was all too fantastic, too hypothetic, too incredible—but Mhu Thulan, that northern portion of ancient Hyperborea, was supposed to have corresponded roughly with modern Greenland, which had formerly been joined as a peninsula to the main continent. Could the stone in his hand, by some fabulous fortuity, be the crystal of Zon Mezzamalech?

Tregardis smiled at himself with inward irony for even conceiving the absurd notion. Such things did not occur—at least, not in present-day London; and in all likelihood, *The Book of Eibon* was sheer superstitious fantasy, anyway. Nevertheless, there was something about the crystal that continued to tease and inveigle him. He ended by purchasing it, at a fairly moderate price. The sum was named by the seller and paid by the buyer without bargaining.

With the crystal in his pocket, Paul Tregardis hastened back to his lodgings instead of resuming his leisurely saunter. He installed the milky globe on his writing-table, which it stood firmly enough on one of its oblate ends. Then, still smiling at his own absurdity, he took down the yellow parchment manuscript of *The Book of Eibon* from its place in a somewhat inclusive collection of recherché literature. He opened the vermiculated leather cover with hasps of tarnished steel, and read over to

himself, translating from the archaic French as he read, the paragraph that referred to Zon Mezzamalech:

"This wizard, who was mighty among sorcerers, had found a cloudy stone, orb-like and somewhat flattened at the ends, in which he could behold many visions of the terrene past, even to the Earth's beginning, when Ubbo-Sathla, the unbegotten source, lay vast and swollen and yeasty amid the vaporing slime. . . . But of that which he beheld, Zon Mezzamalech left little record; and people say that he vanished presently, in a way that is not known; and after him the cloudy crystal was lost."

Paul Tregardis laid the manuscript aside. Again there was something that tantalized and beguiled him, like a lost dream or a memory forfeit to oblivion. Impelled by a feeling which he did not scrutinize or question, he sat down before the table and began to stare intently into the cold, nebulous orb. He felt an expectation which, somehow, was so familiar, so permeative a part of his consciousness, that he did not even name it to himself.

Minute by minute he sat, and watched the alernate glimmering and fading of the mysterious light in the heart of the crystal. By imperceptible degrees, there stole upon him a sense of dream-like duality, both in respect to his person and his surroundings. He was still Paul Tregardis —and yet he was some one else; the room was his London apartment—and chamber in some foreign but well-known place. And in both milieus he peered steadfastly into the same crystal.

After an interim, without surprise on the part of Tregardis, the process of re-identification became complete. He knew that he was Zon Mezzamalech, a sorcerer of Mhu Thulan, and a student of all lore anterior to his own epoch. Wise with dreadful secrets that were not known to Paul Tregardis, amateur of anthropology and the occult sciences in latterday London, he sought by means of the milky crystal to attain an even older and more fearful knowledge.

He had acquired the stone in dubitable ways, from a more than sinister source. It was unique and without fellow

in any land or time. In its depths, all former years, all things that had ever been, were supposedly mirrored, and would reveal themselves to the patient visionary. And through the crystal, Zon Mezzamalech had dreamt to recover the wisdom of the gods who died before the Earth was born. They had passed to the lightless void, leaving their lore inscribed upon tablets of ultra stellar stone; and the tablets were guarded in the primal mire by the formless, idiotic demiurge, Ubbo-Sathla. Only by means of the crystal could he hope to find and read the tablets.

For the first time, he was making trial of the globe's reputed virtues. About him an ivory-panelled chamber, filled with his magic books and paraphernalia, was fading slowly from his consciousness. Before him, on a table of some dark Hyperborean wood that had been graven with grotesque ciphers, the crystal appeared to swell and deepen, and in its filmy depth he beheld a swift and broken swirling of dim scenes, fleeting like the bubbles of a mill-race. As if he looked upon an actual world, cities, forests, mountains, seas and meadows flowed beneath him, lightening and darkening as with the passage of days and nights in some weirdly accelerated stream of time.

Zon Mezzamalech had forgotten Paul Tregardis—had lost the remembrance of his own entity and his own surroundings in Mhu Thulan. Moment by moment, the flowing vision in the crystal became more definite and distinct, and the orb itself deepened till he grew giddy, as if he were peering from an insecure height into some never-fathomed abyss. He knew that time was racing backward in the crystal, was unrolling for him the pageant of all past days; but a strange alarm had seized him, and he feared to gaze longer. Like one who has nearly fallen from a precipice, he caught himself with a violent start and drew back from the mystic orb.

Again, to his gaze, the enormous whirling world into which he had peered was a small and cloudy crystal on his rune-wrought table in Mhu Thulan. Then, by degrees, it seemed that the great room with sculptured panels of mammoth ivory was narrowing to another and dingier

place; and Zon Mezzamalech, losing his preternatural wisdom and sorcerous power, went back by a weird regression into Paul Tregardis.

And yet not wholly, it seemed, was he able to return. Tregardis, dazed and wondering, found himself before the writing-table on which he had set the oblate sphere. He felt the confusion of one who has dreamt and has not yet fully awakened from the dream. The room puzzled him vaguely, as if something were wrong with its size and furnishings; and his remembrance of purchasing the crystal from a curio-dealer was oddly and discrepantly mingled with an impression that he had acquired it in a very different manner.

He felt that something very strange had happened to him when he peered into the crystal; but just what it was he could not seem to recollect. It had left him in the sort of psychic muddlement that follows a debauch of hashish. He assured himself that he was Paul Tregardis, that he lived on a certain street in London, that the year was 1933; but such commonplace verities had somehow lost their meaning and their validity; and everything about him was shadow-like and insubstantial. The very walls seemed to waver like smoke; the people in the streets were phantoms of phantoms; and he himself was a lost shadow, a wandering echo of something long forgot.

He resolved that he would not repeat his experiment of crystal-gazing. The effects were too unpleasant and equivocal. But the very next day, by an unreasoning impulse to which he yielded almost mechanically, without reluctation, he found himself seated before the misty orb. Again he became the sorcerer Zon Mezzamalech in Mhu Thulan; again he dreamt to retrieve the wisdom of the antemundane gods; again he drew back from the deepening crystal with the terror of one who fears to fall; and once more—but doubtfully and dimly, like a failing wraith—he was Paul Tregardis.

Three times did Tregardis repeat the experience on successive days; and each time his own person and the world about him became more tenuous and confused than be-

fore. His sensations were those of a dreamer who is on the verge of waking; and London itself was unreal as the lands that slip from the dreamer's ken, receding in filmy mist and cloudy light. Beyond it all, he felt the looming and crowding of vast imageries, alien but half familiar. It was as if the fantasmagoria of time and space were dissolving about him, to reveal some veritable reality—or another dream of space and time.

There came, at last, the day when he sat down before the crystal—and did not return as Paul Tregardis. It was the day when Zon Mezzamalech, boldly disregarding certain evil and portentous warnings, resolved to overcome his curious fear of falling bodily into the visionary world that he beheld—a fear that had hitherto prevented him from following the backward stream of time for any distance. He must, he assured himself, conquer his fear if he were ever to see and read the lost tablets of the gods. He had beheld nothing more than a few fragments of the years of Mhu Thulan immediately posterior to the present—the years of his own lifetime; and there were inestimable cycles between these years and the Beginning.

Again, to his gaze, the crystal deepened immeasurably, with scenes and happenings that flowed in a retrograde stream. Again the magic ciphers of the dark table faded from his ken, and the sorcerously carven walls of his chamber melted into less than dream. Once more he grew giddy with an awful vertigo as he bent above the swirling and milling of the terrible gulfs of time in the world-like orb. Fearfully, in spite of his resolution, he would have drawn away; but he had looked and leaned too long. There was a sense of abysmal falling, a suction as of ineluctable winds, of maelstroms that bore him down through fleet unstable visions of his own past life into antenatal years and dimensions. He seemed to endure the pangs of an inverse dissolution; and then he was no longer Zon Mezzamalech, the wise and learned watcher of the crystal, but an actual part of the weirdly racing stream that ran back to reattain the Beginning.

He seemed to live unnumbered lives, to die myriad

deaths, forgetting each time the death and life that had gone before. He fought as a warrior in half-legendary battles; he was a child playing in the ruins of some olden city of Mhu Thulan; he was the king who had reigned when the city was in its prime, the prophet who had foretold its building and its doom. A woman, he wept for the bygone dead in necropoli long-crumbled; an antique wizard, he muttered the rude spells of earlier sorcery; a priest of some pre-human god, he wielded the sacrificial knife in cave-temples of pillared basalt. Life by life, era by era, he retraced the long and groping cycles through which Hyperborea had risen from savagery to a high civilization.

He became a barbarian of some troglodtic tribe, fleeing from the slow, turreted ice of a former glacial age into lands illumed by the ruddy flare of perpetual volcanoes. Then, after incomputable years, he was no longer man but a man-like beast, roving in forests of giant fern and calamite, or building an uncouth nest in the boughs of mighty cycads.

Through eons of anterior sensation, of crude lust and hunger, of aboriginal terror and madness, there was someone—or something—that went ever backward in time. Death became birth, and birth was death. In a slow vision of reverse change, the earth appeared to melt away, to slough off the hills and mountains of its latter strata. Always the sun grew larger and hotter above the fuming swamps that teemed with a crasser life, with a more fulsome vegetation. And the thing that had been Paul Tregardis, that had been Zon Mezzamalech, was a part of all the monstrous devolution. It flew with the claw-tipped wings of a pterodactyl, it swam in tepid seas with the vast, winding bulk of an ichthyosaurus, it bellowed uncouthly with the armored throat of some forgotten behemoth to the huge moon that burned through Liassic mists.

At length, after eons of immemorial brutehood, it became one of the lost serpent-men who reared their cities of black gneiss and fought their venomous wars in the

world's first continent. It walked undulously in ante-human streets, in strange crooked vaults; it peered at primeval stars from high, Babelian towers; it bowed with hissing litanies to great serpent-idols. Through years and ages of the ophidian era it returned, and was a thing that crawled in the ooze, that had not yet learned to think and dream and build. And the time came when there was no longer a continent, but only a vast, chaotic marsh, a sea of slime, without limit or horizon, that seethed with a blind writhing of amorphous vapors.

There, in the gray beginning of Earth, the formless mass that was Ubbo-Sathla reposed amid the slime and the vapors. Headless, without organs or members, it sloughed from its oozy sides, in a slow, ceaseless wave, the amebic forms that were the archetypes of earthly life. Horrible it was, if there had been aught to apprehend the horror; and loathsome, if there had been any to feel loathing. About it, prone or tilted in the mire, there lay the mighty tablets of star-quarried stone that were writ with the inconceivable wisdom of the premundane gods.

And there, to the goal of a forgotten search, was drawn the thing that had been—or would sometime be—Paul Tregardis and Zon Mezzamalech. Becoming a shapeless eft of the prime, it crawled sluggishly and obliviously across the fallen tablets of the gods, and fought and ravened blindly with the other spawn of Ubbo-Sathla.

Of Zon Mezzamalech and his vanishing, there is no mention anywhere, save the brief passage in *The Book of Eibon*. Concerning Paul Tregardis, who also disappeared, there was a curt notice in several London papers. No one seems to have known anything about him: he is gone as if he had never been; and the crystal, presumably, is gone too. At least, no one has found it.

THE BLACK STONE

ROBERT E. HOWARD

"They say foul beings of Old Times still lurk
In dark forgotten corners of the world,
And Gates still gape to loose, on certain nights,
Shapes pent in Hell."

—JUSTIN GEOFFREY

I READ of it first in the strange book of Von Junzt, the German eccentric who lived so curiously and died in such grisly and mysterious fashion. It was my fortune to have access to his *Nameless Cults* in the original edition, the so-called Black Book, published in Düsseldorf in 1839, shortly before a hounding doom overtook the author. Collectors of rare literature are familiar with *Nameless Cults* mainly though the cheap and faulty translation which was pirated in London by Bridewall in 1845, and the carefully expurgated edition put out by the Golden Goblin Press of New York in 1909. But the volume I stumbled upon was one of the unexpurgated German copies, with heavy leather covers and rusty iron hasps. I doubt if there are more than half a dozen such volumes in the entire world today, for the quantity issued was not great, and when the manner of the author's demise was

bruited about, many possessors of the book burned their volumes in panic.

Von Junzt spent his entire life (1795-1840) delving into forbidden subjects; he traveled in all parts of the world, gained entrance into innumerable secret societies, and read countless little known and esoteric books and manuscripts in the original; and in the chapters of the Black Book, which range from startling clarity of exposition to murky ambiguity, there are statements and hints to freeze the blood of a thinking man. Reading what Von Junzt *dared* put in print arouses uneasy speculations as to what it was that he dared *not* tell. What dark matters, for instance, were contained in those closely written pages that formed the unpublished manuscript on which he worked unceasingly for months before his death, and which lay torn and scattered all over the floor of the locked and bolted chamber in which Von Junzt was found dead with the marks of taloned fingers on his throat? It will never be known, for the author's closest friend, the Frenchman Alexis Ladeau, after having spent a whole night piecing the fragments together and reading what was written, burnt them to ashes and cut his own throat with a razor.

But the contents of the published matter are shudder-some enough, even if one accepts the general view that they but represent the ravings of a madman. There among many strange things I found mention of the Black Stone, that curious, sinister monolith that broods among the mountains of Hungary, and about which so many dark legends cluster. Von Junzt did not devote much space to it—the bulk of his grim work concerns cults and objects of dark worship which he maintained existed in his day, and it would seem that the Black Stone represents some order or being lost and forgotten centuries ago. But he spoke of it as one of the *keys*—a phrase used many times by him, in various relations, and constituting one of the obscurities of his work. And he hinted briefly at curious sights to be seen about the monolith on Midsummer Night. He mentioned Otto Dostmann's theory that this

monolith was a remnant of the Hunnish invasion and had been erected to commemorate a victory of Attila over the Goths. Von Junzt contradicted this assertion without giving any refutory facts, merely remarking that to attribute the origin of the Black Stone to the Huns was as logical as assuming that William the Conqueror reared Stonehenge.

This implication of enormous antiquity piqued my interest immensely and after some difficulty I succeeded in locating a rat-eaten and mouldering copy of Dostmann's *Remnants of Lost Empires* (Berlin, 1809, "Der Drachenhaus" Press). I was disappointed to find that Dostmann referred to the Black Stone even more briefly than had Von Junzt, dismissing it with a few lines as an artifact comparatively modern in contrast with the Greco-Roman ruins of Asia Minor which were his pet theme. He admitted his inability to make out the defaced characters on the monolith but pronounced them unmistakably Mongoloid. However, little as I learned from Dostmann, he did mention the name of the village adjacent to the Black Stone—Stregoicavar—an ominous name, meaning something like Witch-Town.

A close scrutiny of guide-books and travel articles gave me no further information—Stregoicavar, not on any map that I could find, lay in a wild, little-frequented region, out of the path of casual tourists. But I did find subject for thought in Dornly's *Magyar Folklore*. In his chapter on *Dream Myths* he mentions the Black Stone and tells of some curious superstitions regarding it—especially the belief that if any one sleeps in the vicinity of the monolith, that person will be haunted by monstrous nightmares for ever after; and he cited tales of the peasants regarding too-curious people who ventured to visit the Stone on Midsummer Night and who died raving mad because of *something* they saw there.

That was all I could glean from Dornly, but my interest was even more intensely roused as I sensed a distinctly sinister aura about the Stone. The suggestion of dark antiquity, the recurrent hint of unnatural events on Mid-

summer Night, touched some slumbering instinct in my being, as one senses, rather than hears, the flowing of some dark subterraneous river in the night.

And I suddenly saw a connection between this Stone and a certain weird and fantastic poem written by the mad poet, Justin Geoffrey: *The People of the Monolith.* Inquiries led to the information that Geoffrey had indeed written that poem while traveling in Hungary, and I could not doubt that the Black Stone was the very monolith to which he referred in his strange verse. Reading his stanzas again, I felt once more the strange dim stirrings of subconscious promptings that I had noticed when first reading of the Stone.

I had been casting about for a place to spend a short vacation and I made up my mind. I went to Stregoicavar. A train of obsolete style carried me from Temesvar to within striking distance, at least, of my objective, and a three days' ride in a jouncing coach brought me to the little village which lay in a fertile valley high up in the fir-clad mountains. The journey itself was uneventful, but during the first day we passed the old battlefield of Schomvaal where the brave Polish-Hungarian knight, Count Boris Vladinoff, made his gallant and futile stand against the victorious hosts of Suleiman the Magnificent, when the Grand Turk swept over eastern Europe in 1526.

The driver of the coach pointed out to me a great heap of crumbling stones on a hill near by, under which he said, the bones of the brave Count lay. I remembered a passage from Larson's *Turkish Wars:* "After the skirmish" (in which the Count with his small army had beaten back the Turkish advanceguard) "the Count was standing beneath the half-ruined walls of the old castle on the hill, giving orders as to the disposition of his forces, when an aide brought to him a small lacquered case which had been taken from the body of the famous Turkish scribe and historian, Selim Bahadur, who had fallen in the fight. The Count took therefrom a roll of parchment and began to read, but he had not read far before he turned very pale and without saying a word, replaced the parchment in the

case and thrust the case into his cloak. At that very instant a hidden Turkish battery suddenly opened fire, and the balls striking the old castle, the Hungarians were horrified to see the walls crash down in ruin, completely covering the brave Count. Without a leader the gallant little army was cut to pieces, and in the war-swept years that followed, the bones of the nobleman were never recovered. Today the natives point out a huge and moldering pile of ruins near Schomvaal beneath which, they say, still rests all that the centuries have left of Count Boris Vladinoff."

I found the village of Stregoicavar a dreamy, drowsy little village that apparently belied its sinister cognomen —a forgotten back-eddy that Progress had passed by. The quaint houses and the quainter dress and manners of the people were those of an earlier century. They were friendly, mildly curious but not inquisitive, though visitors from the outside world were extremely rare.

"Ten years ago another American came here and stayed a few days in the village," said the owner of the tavern where I had put up, "a young fellow and queer-acting— mumbled to himself—a poet, I think."

I knew he must mean Justin Geoffrey.

"Yes, he was a poet," I answered, "and he wrote a poem about a bit of scenery near this very village."

"Indeed?" Mine host's interest was aroused. "Then, since all great poets are strange in their speech and actions, he must have achieved great fame, for his actions and conversations were the strangest of any man I ever knew."

"As is usual with artists," I answered, "most of his recognition has come since his death."

"He is dead, then?"

"He died screaming in a madhouse five years ago."

"Too bad, too bad," sighed mine host sympathetically. "Poor lad—he looked too long at the Black Stone."

My heart gave a leap, but I masked my keen interest and said casually: "I have heard something of this Black Stone; somewhere near this village, is it not?"

"Nearer than Christian folk wish," he responded. "Look!" He drew me to a latticed window and pointed up

at the fir-clad slopes of the brooding blue mountains. "There beyond where you see the bare face of that jutting cliff stands that accursed Stone. Would that it were ground to powder and the powder flung into the Danube to be carried to the deepest ocean! Once men tried to destroy the thing, but each man who laid hammer or maul against it came to an evil end. So now the people shun it."

"What is there so evil about it?" I asked curiously.

"It is a demon-haunted thing," he answered uneasily and with the suggestion of a shudder. "In my childhood I knew a young man who came up from below and laughed at our traditions—in his foolhardiness he went to the Stone one Midsummer Night and at dawn stumbled into the village again, stricken dumb and mad. Something had shattered his brain and sealed his lips, for until the day of his death, which came soon after, he spoke only to utter terrible blasphemies or to slaver gibberish.

"My own nephew when very small was lost in the mountains and slept in the woods near the Stone, and now in his manhood he is tortured by foul dreams, so that at times he makes the night hideous with his screams and wakes with cold sweat upon him.

"But let us talk of something else, *Herr;* it is not good to dwell upon such things."

I remarked on the evident age of the tavern and he answered with pride: "The foundations are more than four hundred years old; the original house was the only one in the village which was not burned to the ground when Suleiman's devils swept through the mountains. Here, in the house that then stood on these same foundations, it is said, the scribe Selim Bahadur had his headquarters while ravaging the country hereabouts."

I learned then that the present inhabitants of Stregoicavar are not descendants of the people who dwelt there before the Turkish raid of 1526. The victorious Moslems left no living human in the village or the vicinity hereabouts when they passed over. Men, women and children they wiped out in one red holocaust of murder, leaving a vast stretch of country silent and utterly deserted. The

present people of Stregoicavar are descended from hardy settlers from the lower valleys who came into the upper levels and rebuilt the ruined village after the Turk was thrust back.

Mine host did not speak of the extermination of the original inhabitants with any great resentment and I learned that his ancestors in the lower levels had looked on the mountaineers with even more hatred and aversion than they regarded the Turks. He was rather vague regarding the causes of this feud, but said that the original inhabitants of Stregoicavar had been in the habit of making stealthy raids on the lowlands and stealing girls and children. Moreover, he said that they were not exactly of the same blood as his own people; the sturdy, original Magyar-Slavic stock had mixed and intermarried with a degraded aboriginal race until the breeds had blended, producing an unsavory amalgamation. Who these aborigines were, he had not the slightest idea, but maintained that they were "pagans" and had dwelt in the mountains since time immemorial, before the coming of the conquering peoples.

I attached little importance to this tale; seeing in it merely a parallel to the amalgamation of Celtic tribes with Mediterranean aborigines in the Galloway hills, with the resultant mixed race which, as Picts, has such an extensive part in Scotch legendry. Time has a curiously foreshortening effect on folklore, and just as tales of the Picts became interwined with legends of an older Mongoloid race, so eventually to the Picts was ascribed the repulsive appearance of the squat primitives, whose individuality merged, in the telling, into Pictish tales, and was forgotten; so, I felt, the supposed inhuman attributes of the first villagers of Stregoicavar could be traced to older, outworn myths with invading Huns and Mongols.

The morning after my arrival I received directions from my host, who gave them worriedly, and set out to find the Black Stone. A few hours' tramp up the fir-covered slopes brought me to the face of the rugged, solid stone cliff which jutted boldly from the mountainside. A narrow

trail wound up it, and mounting this, I looked out over the peaceful valley of Stregoicavar, which seemed to drowse, guarded on either hand by the great blue mountains. No huts or any sign of human tenancy showed between the cliffs whereon I stood and the village. I saw numbers of scattering farms in the valley but all lay on the other side of Stregoicavar, which itself seemed to shrink from the brooding slopes which masked the Black Stone.

The summit of the cliffs proved to be a sort of thickly wooded plateau. I made my way through the dense growth for a short distance and came into a wide glade; and in the center of the glade reared a gaunt figure of black stone.

It was octagonal in shape, some sixteen feet in height and about a foot and half thick. It had once evidently been highly polished, but now the surface was thickly dinted as if savage efforts had been made to demolish it; but the hammers had done little more than to flake off small bits of stone and mutilate the characters which once had evidently marched in a spiraling line round and round the shaft to the top. Up to ten feet from the base these characters were almost completely botted out, so that it was very difficult to trace their direction. Higher up they were plainer, and I managed to squirm part of the way up the shaft and scan them at close range. All were more or less defaced, but I was positive that they symbolized no language now remembered on the face of the earth. I am fairly familiar with all hieroglyphics known to researchers and philologists and I can say with certainty that those characters were like nothing of which I have ever read or heard. The nearest approach to them that I ever saw were some crude scratches on a gigantic and strangely symmetrical rock in a lost valley of Yucatan. I remember that when I pointed out these marks to the archeologist who was my companion, he maintained that they either represented natural weathering or the idle scratching of some Indian. To my theory that the rock was really the base of a long-vanished column, he merely laughed, calling my attention to the dimensions of it, which

suggested, if it were built with any natural rules of architectural symmetry, a column a thousand feet high. But I was not convinced.

I will not say that the characters on the Black Stone were similar to those on the colossal rock in Yucatan; but one suggested the other. As to the substance of the monolith, again I was baffled. The stone of which it was composed was a dully gleaming black, whose surface, where it was not dinted and roughened, created a curious illusion of semi-transparency.

I spent most of the morning there and came away baffled. No connection of the Stone with any other artifact in the world suggested itself to me. It was as if the monolith had been reared by alien hands, in an age distant and apart from human ken.

I returned to the village with my interest in no way abated. Now that I had seen the curious thing, my desire was still more keenly whetted to investigate the matter further and seek to learn by what strange hands and for what strange purpose the Black Stone had been reared in the long ago.

I sought out the tavern-keeper's nephew and questioned him in regard to his dreams, but he was vague, though willing to oblige. He did not mind discussing them, but was unable to describe them with any clarity. Though he dreamed the same dreams repeatedly, and though they were hideously vivid at the time, they left no distinct impression on his waking mind. He remembered them only as chaotic nightmares through which huge whirling fires shot lurid tongues of flame and a black drum bellowed incessantly. One thing only he clearly remembered—in one dream he had seen the Black Stone, not on a mountain slope but set like a spire on a colossal black castle.

As for the rest of the villagers I found them not inclined to talk about the Stone, with the exception of the schoolmaster, a man of surprising education, who spent much more of his time out in the world than any of the rest.

He was much interested in what I told him of Von Junzt's remarks about the Stone, and warmly agreed

with the German author in the alleged age of the monolith. He believed that a coven had once existed in the vicinity and that possibly all of the original villagers had been members of that fertility cult which once threatened to undermine European civilization and gave rise to the tales of witchcraft. He cited the very name of the village to prove his point; it had not been originally named Stregoicavar, he said; according to legends the builders had called it Xuthltan, which was the aboriginal name of the site on which the village had been built many centuries ago.

This fact roused again an indescribable feeling of uneasiness. The barbarous name did not suggest connection with any Scythic, Slavic or Mongolian race to which an aboriginal people of these mountains would, under natural circumstances, have belonged.

That the Magyars and Slavs of the lower valleys believed the original inhabitants of the village to be members of the witchcraft cult was evident, the schoolmaster said, by the name they gave it, which name continued to be used even after the older settlers had been massacred by the Turks, and the village rebuilt by a cleaner and more wholesome breed.

He did not believe that the members of the cult erected the monolith but he did believe that they used it as a center of their activities, and repeating vague legends which had been handed down since before the Turkish invasion, he advanced the theory that the degenerate villagers had used it as a sort of altar on which they offered human sacrifices, using as victims the girls and babies stolen from his own ancestors in the lower valleys.

He discounted the myths of weird events on Midsummer Night, as well as a curious legend of a strange deity which the witch-people of Xuthltan were said to have invoked with chants and wild rituals of flagellation and slaughter.

He had never visited the Stone on Midsummer Night, he said, but he would not fear to do so; whatever *had* existed or taken place there in the past, had been long

engulfed in the mists of time and oblivion. The Black Stone had lost its meaning save as a link to a dead and dusty past.

It was while returning from a visit with this schoolmaster one night about a week after my arrival at Stregoicavar that a sudden recollection struck me—it was Midsummer Night! The very time that the legends linked with grisly implications to the Black Stone. I turned away from the tavern and strode swiftly through the village. Stregoicavar lay silent; the villagers retired early. I saw no one as I passed rapidly out of the village and up into the firs which masked the mountain slopes in a weird light and etched the shadows blackly. No wind blew through the firs, but a mysterious, intangible rustling and whispering was abroad. Surely on such nights in past centuries, my whimsical imagination told me, naked witches astride magic broomsticks had flown across this valley, pursued by jeering demoniac familiars.

I came to the cliffs and was somewhat disquited to note that the illusive moonlight lent them a subtle appearance I had not noticed before—in the weird light they appeared less like natural cliffs and more like the ruins of cyclopean and Titan-reared battlements jutting from the mountain-slope.

Shaking off this hallucination with difficulty I came upon the plateau and hesitated a moment before I plunged into the brooding darkness of the woods. A sort of breathless tenseness hung over the shadows, like an unseen monster holding its breath lest it scare away its prey.

I shook off the sensation—a natural one, considering the eeriness of the place and its evil reputation—and made my way through the wood, experiencing a most unpleasant sensation that I was being followed, and halting once, sure that something clammy and unstable had brushed against my face in the darkness.

I came out into the glade and saw the tall monolith rearing its gaunt height above the sward. At the edge of the woods on the side toward the cliff was a stone which formed a sort of natural seat. I sat down, reflecting that

it was probably while there that the mad poet, Justin Geoffrey, had written his fantastic *People of the Monolith.* Mine host thought that it was the Stone which had caused Geoffrey's insanity, but the seeds of madness had been sown in the poet's brain long before he ever came to Stregoicavar.

A glance at my watch showed that the hour of midnight was close at hand. I leaned back, waiting whatever ghostly demonstration might appear. A thin night wind started up among the branches of the firs, with an uncanny suggestion of faint, unseen pipes whispering an eery and evil tune. The monotony of the sound and my steady gazing at the monolith produced a sort of self-hypnosis upon me; I grew drowsy. I fought this feeling, but sleep stole on me in spite of myself; the monolith seemed to sway and dance, strangely distorted to my gaze, and then I slept.

I opened my eyes and sought to rise, but lay still, as if an icy hand gripped me helpless. Cold terror stole over me. The glade was no longer deserted. It was thronged by a silent crowd of strange people, and my distended eyes took in strange barbaric details of costume which my reason told me were archaic and forgotten even in this backward land. Surely, I thought, these are villagers who have come here to hold some fantastic conclave—but another glance told me that these people were not of the folk of Stregoicavar. They were a shorter, more squat race, whose brows were lower, whose faces were broader and duller. Some had Slavic or Magyar features, but those features were degraded as from a mixture of some baser, alien strain I could not classify. Many wore the hides of wild beasts, and their whole appearance, both men and women, was one of sensual brutishness. They terrified and repelled me, but they gave me no heed. They formed in a vast half-circle in front of the monolith and began a sort of chant, flinging their arms in unison and weaving their bodies rhythmically from the waist upward. All eyes were fixed on the top of the Stone which they seemed to be invoking. But the strangest of all was the dimness of their

voices; not fifty yards from me hundreds of men and women were unmistakably lifting their voices in a wild chant, yet those voices came to me as a faint indistinguishable murmur as if from across vast leagues of Space—or *time.*

Before the monolith stood a sort of brazier from which a vile, nauseous yellow smoke billowed upward, curling curiously in an undulating spiral around the black shaft, like a vast unstable serpent.

On one side of this brazier lay two figures—a young girl, stark naked and bound hand and foot, and an infant, apparently only a few months old. On the other side of the brazier squatted a hideous old hag with a queer sort of black drum on her lap; this drum she beat with slow, light blows of her open palms, but I could not hear the sound.

The rhythm of the swaying bodies grew faster and into the space between the people and the monolith sprang a naked young woman, her eyes blazing, her long black hair flying loose. Spinning dizzily on her toes, she whirled across the open space and fell prostrate before the Stone, where she lay motionless. The next instant a fantastic figure followed her—a man from whose waist hung a goatskin, and whose features were entirely hidden by a sort of mask made from a huge wolf's head, so that he looked like a monstrous, nightmare being, horribly compounded of elements both human and bestial. In his hand he held a bunch of long fir switches bound together at the larger ends, and the moonlight glinted on a chain of heavy gold looped about his neck. A smaller chain depending from it suggested a pendant of some sort, but this was missing.

The people tossed their arms violently and seemed to redouble their shouts as this grotesque creature loped across the open space with many a fantastic leap and caper. Coming to the woman who lay before the monolith, he began to lash her with the switches he bore, and she leaped up and spun into the wild mazes of the most incredible dance I have ever seen. And her tormentor

danced with her, keeping the wild rhythm, matching her every whirl and bound, while incessantly raining cruel blows on her naked body. And at every blow he shouted a single word, over and over, and all the people shouted it back. I could see the working of their lips, and now the faint far-off murmur of their voices merged and blended into one distant shout, repeated over and over with slobbering ecstacy. But what that one word was, I could not make out.

In dizzy whirls spun the wild dancers, while the lookers-on, standing still in their tracks, followed the rhythm of their dance with swaying bodies and weaving arms. Madness grew in the eyes of the capering votaress and was reflected in the eyes of the watchers. Wilder and more extravagant grew the whirling frenzy of that mad dance —it became a bestial and obscene thing, while the old hag howled and battered the drum like a crazy woman, and the switches cracked out a devil's tune.

Blood trickled down the dancer's limbs but she seemed not to feel the lashing save as a stimulus for further enormities of outrageous motion; bounding into the midst of the yellow smoke which now spread out tenuous tentacles to embrace both flying figures, she seemed to merge with that foul fog and veil herself with it. Then emerging into plain view, closely followed by the beast-thing that flogged her, she shot into an indescribable, explosive burst of dynamic mad motion, and on the very crest of that mad wave, she dropped suddenly to the sward, quivering and panting as if completely overcome by her frenzied exertions. The lashing continued with unabated violence and intensity and she began to wriggle toward the monolith on her belly. The priest—or such I will call him—followed, lashing her unprotected body with all the power of his arm as she writhed along, leaving a heavy truck of blood on the trampled earth. She reached the monolith, and gasping and panting, flung both arms about it and covered the cold stone with fierce hot kisses, as in frenzied and unholy adoration.

The fantastic priest bounded high in the air, flinging

away the red-dabbled switches, and the worshippers, howling and foaming at the mouths, turned on each other with tooth and nail, rending one another's garments and flesh in a blind passion of bestiality. The priest swept up the infant with a long arm, and shouting again that Name, whirled the wailing babe high in the air and dashed its brains out against the monolith, leaving a ghastly stain on the black surface. Cold with horror I saw him rip the tiny body open with his bare brutish fingers and fling handfuls of blood on the shaft, then toss the red and torn shape into the brazier, extinguishing flame and smoke in a crimson rain, while the maddened brutes behind him howled over and over that Name. Then suddenly they all fell prostrate, writhing like snakes, while the priest flung wide his gory hands as in triumph. I opend my mouth to scream my horror and loathing, but only a dry rattle sounded; a huge monstrous toad-like *thing* squatted on the top of the monolith!

I saw its bloated, repulsive and unstable outline against the moonlight, and set in what would have been the face of a natural creature, its huge, blinking eyes which reflected all the lust, abysmal greed, obscene cruelty and monstrous evil that has stalked the sons of men since their ancestors moved blind and hairless in the tree-tops. In those grisly eyes mirrored all the unholy things and vile secrets that sleep in the cities under the sea, and that skulk from the light of day in the blackness of primordial caverns. And so that ghastly thing that the unhallowed ritual of cruelty and sadism and blood had evoked from the silence of the hills, leered and blinked down on its bestial worshippers, who groveled in abhorrent abasement before it.

Now the beast-masked priest lifted the bound and weakly writhing girl in his brutish hands and held her up toward that horror on the monolith. And as that monstrosity sucked in its breath, lustfully and slobberingly, something snapped in my brain and I fell into a merciful faint.

I opened my eyes on a still white dawn. All the events

of the night rushed back on me and I sprang up, then stared about me in amazement. The monolith brooded gaunt and silent above the sward which waved, green and untrampled, in the morning breeze. A few quick strides took me across the glade; here had the dancers leaped and bounded until the ground should have been trampled bare, and here had the votaress wriggled her painful way to the Stone, streaming blood on the earth. But no drop of crimson showed on the uncrushed sward. I looked, shudderingly, at the side of the monolith against which the bestial priest had brained the stolen baby—but no dark stain or grisly clot showed there.

A dream! It had been a wild nightmare—or else—I shrugged my shoulders. What vivid clarity for a dream!

I returned quietly to the village and entered the inn without being seen. And there I sat meditating over the strange events of the night. More and more was I prone to discard the dream-theory. That what I had seen was illusion and without material substance was evident. But I believed that I had looked on the mirrored shadow of a deed perpetrated in ghastly actuality in bygone days. But how was I to know? What proof to show that my vision had been a gathering of foul specters rather than a mere nightmare originating in my own brain?

As if for answer a name flashed into my mind—Selim Bahadur! According to legend this man, who had been a soldier as well as a scribe, had commanded that part of Suleiman's army which had devastated Stregoicavar; it seemed logical enough; and if so, he had gone straight from the botted-out countryside to the bloody field of Schomvaal, and his doom. I sprang up with a sudden shout—that manuscript which was taken from the Turk's body, and which Count Boris shuddered over—might it not contain some narration of what the conquering Turks found in Stregoicavar? What else could have shaken the iron nerves of the Polish adventurer? And since the bones of the Count had never been recovered, what more certain than that lacqured case, with its mysterious contents, still lay hidden beneath the ruins that covered Boris

Vladinoff? I began packing my bag with fierce haste.

Three days later found me ensconced in a little village a few miles from the old battlefield, and when the moon rose I was working with savage intensity on the great pile of crumbling stone that crowned the hill. It was back-breaking toil—looking back now I can not see how I accomplished it, though I labored without a pause from moonrise to dawn. Just as the sun was coming up I tore aside the last tangle of stones and looked on all that was mortal of Count Boris Vladinoff—only a few pitiful fragments of crumbling bone—and among them, crushed out of all original shape, lay a case whose lacquered surface had kept it from complete decay through the centuries.

I seized it with frenzied eagerness, and piling back some of the stones on the bones I hurried away; for I did not care to be discovered by the suspicious peasants in an act of apparent desecration.

Back in my tavern chamber I opened the case and found the parchment comparatively intact; and there was something else in the case—a small squat object wrapped in silk. I was wild to plumb the secrets of those yellowed pages, but weariness forbade me. Since leaving Stregoicavar I had hardly slept at all, and the terrific exertions of the previous night combined to overcome me. In spite of myself I was forced to stretch myself down on my bed, nor did I awake until sundown.

I snatched a hasty supper, and then in the light of a flickering candle, I set myself to read the neat Turkish characters that covered the parchment. It was difficult work, for I am not deeply versed in the language and the archaic style of the narrative baffled me. But as I toiled through it a word or phrase here and there leaped at me and a dimly growing horror shook me in its grip. I bent my energies fiercely to the task, and as the tale grew clearer and took more tangible form my blood chilled in my veins, my hair stood up and my tongue clove to my mouth. All external things partook of the grisly madness of that infernal manuscript until the night sounds of

insects and creatures in the woods took the form of ghastly mumurings and stealthy treadings of ghoulish horrors and the sighing of the night wind changed to tittering obscene gloating of evil over the souls of men.

At last when gray dawn was stealing through the latticed window, I laid down the manuscript and took up and unwrapped the thing in the bit of silk. Staring at it with haggard eyes I knew the truth of the matter was clinched, even had it been possible to doubt the veracity of that terrible manuscript.

And I replaced both obscene things in the case, nor did I rest or sleep or eat until that case containing them had been weighted with stones and flung into the deepest current of the Danube which, God grant, carried them back into the Hell from which they came.

It was no dream I dreamed on Midsummer Midnight in the hills above Stregoicavar. Well for Justin Geoffrey that he tarried there only in the sunlight and went his way, for had he gazed upon that ghastly conclave, his mad brain would have snapped before it did. How my own reason held, I do not know.

No—it was no dream—I gazed upon a foul rite of votaries long dead, come up from Hell to worship as of old; ghosts that bowed before a ghost. For Hell has long claimed their hideous god. Long, long he dwelt among the hills, a brain-shattering vestige of an outworn age, but no longer his obscene talons clutch for the souls of living men, and his kingdom is a dead kingdom, peopled only by the ghosts of those who served him in his lifetime and theirs.

By what foul alchemy or godless sorcery the Gates of Hell are opened on that one eery night I do not know, but mine own eyes have seen. And I know I looked on no living thing that night, for the manuscript written in the careful hand of Selim Bahadur narrated at length what he and his raiders found in the valley of Stregoicavar; and I read, set down in detail, the blasphemous obscenities that torture wrung from the lips of screaming worshippers; and I read, too, of the lost, grim black cavern high in the

hills where the horrified Turks hemmed a monstrous, bloated, wallowing toad-like being and slew it with flame and ancient steel blessed in old times by Muhammad, and with incantations that were old when Arabia was young. And even staunch old Selim's hand shook as he recorded the cataclysmic, earth-shaking death-howls of the monstrosity which died not alone; for a half-score of his slayers perished with him, in ways that Selim would not or could not describe.

And that squat idol carved of gold and wrapped in silk was an image of *himself,* and Selim tore it from the golden chain that looped the neck of the slain high priest of the mask.

Well that the Turks swept that foul valley with torch and cleanly steel! Such sights as those brooding mountains have looked on belong to the darkness and abysses of lost eons. No—it is not fear of the toad-thing that makes me shudder in the night. He is made fast in Hell with his nauseous horde, freed only for an hour on the most weird night of the year, as I have seen. And of his worshippers, none remains.

But it is the realization that such things once crouched beast-like above the souls of men which brings cold sweat to my brow; and I fear to peer again into the leaves of Von Junzt's abomination. For now I understand his repeated phrase of *keys!*—age! Keys to Outer Doors—links with an abhorrent past and—who knows?—of abhorrent spheres of the *present.* And I understand why the cliffs look like battlements in the moonlight and why the tavern-keeper's nightmare-haunted nephew saw in his dream, the Black Stone like a spire on a cyclopean black castel. If men ever excavate among those mountains they may find incredible things below those masking slopes. For the cave wherein the Turks trapped the—*thing*—was not truly a cavern, and I shudder to contemplate the gigantic gulf of eons which must stretch between this age and the time when the earth shook herself and reared up, like a wave, those blue mountains that, rising, enveloped unthinkable

things. May no man ever seek to uproot that ghastly spire men call the Black Stone!

A Key! Aye, it is a Key, symbol of a forgotten horror. That horror had faded into the limbo from which it crawled, loath-somely, in the black dawn of the earth. But what of the other fiendish possibilities hinted at by Von Junzt—what of the monstrous hand which strangled out his life? Since reading what Selim Bahadur wrote, I can no longer doubt anything in the Black Book. Man was not always master of the earth—*and is he now?*

And the thought recurs to me—if such a monstrous entity as the Master of the Monolith somehow survived its own unspeakably distant epoch so long—*what nameless shapes may even now lurk in the dark places of the world?*

THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

"I'M GLAD you came," said Chalmers. He was sitting by the window and his face was very pale. Two tall candles guttered at his elbow and cast a sickly amber light over his long nose and slightly receding chin. Chalmers would have nothing modern about his apartment. He had the soul of a mediaeval ascetic, and he preferred illuminated manuscripts to automobiles, and leering stone gargoyles to radios and adding-machines.

As I crossed the room to the settee he had cleared for me I glanced at his desk and was surprised to discover that he had been studying the mathematical formulae of a celebrated contemporary physicist, and that he had covered many sheets of thin yellow paper with curious geometric designs.

"Einstein and John Dee are strange bedfellows," I said as my gaze wandered from his mathematical charts to the sixty or seventy quaint books that comprised his strange little library. Plotinus and Emanuel Moscopulus, St. Thomas Aquinas and Frenicle de Bessy stood elbow to elbow in the somber ebony bookcase, and chairs, table and desk were littered with pamphlets about mediaeval sorcery and witchcraft and black magic, and all of the valiant glamorous things that the modern world has repudiated.

Chalmers smiled engagingly, and passed me a Russian cigarette on a curiously carved tray. "We are just discovering now," he said, "that the old alchemists and sorcerers were two-thirds *right,* and that your modern biologist and materialist is nine-tenths *wrong.*"

"You have always scoffed at modern science," I said, a little impatiently.

"Only at scientific dogmatism," he replied. "I have always been a rebel, a champion of originality and lost causes; that is why I have chosen to repudiate the conclusions of contemporary biologists."

"And Einstein?" I asked.

"A priest of transcendental mathematics!" he murmured reverently. "A profound mystic and explorer of the great *suspected.*"

"Then you do not entirely despise science."

"Of couse not," he affirmed. "I merely distrust the scientific positivism of the past fifty years, the positivism of Haeckel and Darwin and of Mr. Bertrand Russell. I believe that biology has failed pitifully to explain the mystery of man's origin and destiny."

"Give them time," I retorted.

Chalmers' eyes glowed. "My friend," he murmured, "your pun is sublime. Give them *time.* That is precisely what I would do. But your modern biologist scoffs at time. He has the key but he refuses to use it. What do we know of time, really? Einstein believes that it is relative, that it can be interpreted in terms of space, of *curved* space. But must we stop there? When mathematics fails us can we not advance by—insight?"

"You are treading on dangerous ground," I replied. "That is a pitfall that your true investigator avoids. That is why modern science has advanced so slowly. It accepts nothing that it cannot demonstrate. But you—"

"I would take hashish, opium, all manner of drugs. I would emulate the sages of the East. And then perhaps I would apprehend—"

"What?"

"The fourth dimension."

"Theosophical rubbish!"

"Perhaps. But I believe that drugs expand human consciousness. William James agreed with me. And I have discovered a new one."

"A new drug?"

"It was used centuries ago by Chinese alchemists, but it is virtually unknown in the West. Its occult properties are amazing. With its aid and the aid of my mathematical knowledge I believe that I can *go back through time.*"

"I do not understand."

"Time is merely our imperfect perception of a new dimension of space. Time and motion are both illusions. Everything that has existed from the beginning of the world *exists now.* Events that occurred centuries ago on this planet continue to exist in another dimension of space. Events that will occur centuries from now *exist already.* We cannot perceive their existence because we cannot enter the dimension of space that contains them. Human beings as we know them are merely fractions, infinitesimally small fractions of one enormous whole. Every human being is linked with *all* the life that has preceded him on this planet. All of his ancestors are parts of him. Only time separates him from his forebears, and time is an illusion and does not exist."

"I think I understand," I murmured.

"It will be sufficient for my purpose if you can form a vague idea of what I wish to achieve. I wish to strip from my eyes the veils of illusion that time has thrown over them, and see the *beginning and the end.*"

"And you think this new drug will help you?"

"I am sure that it will. And I want you to help me. I intend to take the drug immediately. I cannot wait. I must *see.*" His eyes glittered strangely. "I am going back, back through time."

He rose and strode to the mantel. When he faced me again he was holding a small square box in the palm of his hand. "I have here five pellets of the drug Liao. It was used by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tze, and while under its influence he visioned Tao. Tao is the most

mysterious force in the world; it surrounds and pervades all things; it contains the visible universe and everything that we call reality. He who apprehends the mysteries of Tao sees clearly all that was and will be."

"Rubbish!" I retorted.

"Tao resembles a great animal, recumbent, motionless, containing in its enormous body all the worlds of our universe, the past, the present and the future. We see portions of this great monster through a slit, which we call time. With the aid of this drug I shall enlarge the slit. I shall behold the great figure of life, the great recumbent beast in its entirety."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"Watch, my friend. Watch and take notes. And if I go back too far you must recall me to reality. You can recall me by shaking me violently. If I appear to be suffering acute physical pain you must recall me at once."

"Chalmers," I said, "I wish you wouldn't make this experiment. You are taking dreadful risks. I don't believe that there is any fourth dimension and I emphatically do not believe in Tao. And I don't approve of your experimenting with unknown drugs."

"I know the properties of this drug," he replied. "I know precisely how it affects the human animal and I know its dangers. The risk does not reside in the drug itself. My only fear is that I may become lost in time. You see, I shall assist the drug. Before I swallow this pellet I shall give my undivided attention to the geometric and algebraic symbols that I have traced on this paper." He raised the mathematical chart that rested on his knee. "I shall prepare my mind for an excursion into time. I shall approach the fourth dimension with my conscious mind before I take the drug which will enable me to exercise occult powers of perception. Before I enter the dream world of the Eastern mystic I shall acquire all of the mathematical help that modern science can offer. This mathematical knowledge, this conscious approach to an actual apprehension of the fourth dimension of time will supplement the work of the drug. The drug will open

up stupendous new vistas—the mathematical preparation will enable me to grasp them intellectually. I have often grasped the fourth dimension in dreams, emotionally, intuitively, but I have never been able to recall, in waking life, the occult splendors that were momentarily revealed to me.

"But with your aid, I believe that I can recall them. You will take down everything that I say while I am under the influence of the drug. No matter how strange or incoherent my speech may become you will omit nothing. When I awake I may be able to supply the key to whatever is mysterious or incredible. I am not sure that I shall succeed, but if I *do* succeed"—his eyes were strangely luminous—*"time will exist for me no longer!"*

He sat down abruptly. "I shall make the experiment at once. Please stand over there by the window and watch. Have you a fountain pen?"

I nodded gloomily and removed a pale green Waterman from my upper vest pocket.

"And a pad, Frank?"

I groaned and produced a memorandum book. "I emphatically disapprove of this experiment," I muttered. "You're taking a frightful risk."

"Don't be an asinine old woman!" he admonished. "Nothing that you can say will induce me to stop now. I entreat you to remain silent while I study these charts."

He raised the charts and studied them intently. I watched the clock on the mantel as it ticked out the seconds, and a curious dread clutched at my heart so that I choked.

Suddenly the clock stopped ticking, and exactly at that moment Chalmers swallowed the drug.

I rose quickly and moved toward him, but his eyes implored me not to interfere. "The clock has stopped," he murmured. "The forces that control it approve of my experiment. *Time* stopped, and I swallowed the drug. I pray God that I shall not lose my way."

He closed his eyes and leaned back on the sofa. All of the blood had left his face and he was breathing heavily.

It was clear that the drug was acting with extraordinary rapidity.

"It is beginning to get dark," he murmured. "Write that. It is beginning to get dark and the familiar objects in the room are fading out. I can discern them vaguely through my eyelids, but they are fading swiftly."

I shook my pen to make the ink come and wrote rapidly in shorthand as he continued to dictate.

"I am leaving the room. The walls are vanishing and I can no longer see any of the familiar objects. Your face, though, is still visible to me. I hope that you are writing. I think that I am about to make a great leap—a leap through space. Or perhaps it is through time that I shall make the leap. I cannot tell. Everything is dark, indistinct."

He sat for a while silent, with his head sunk upon his breast. Then suddenly he stiffened and his eyelids fluttered open. "God in heaven!" he cried. "I *see!*"

He was straining forward in his chair, staring at the opposite wall. But I knew that he was looking beyond the wall and that the objects in the room no longer existed for him. "Chalmers," I cried, "Chalmers, shall I wake you?"

"Do not!" he shrieked. "I *see everything.* All of the billions of lives that preceded me on this planet are before me at this moment. I see men of all ages, all races, all colors. They are fighting, killing, building, dancing, singing. They are sitting about rude fires on lonely gray deserts, and flying through the air in monoplanes. They are riding the seas in bark canoes and enormous steamships; they are painting bison and mammoths on the walls of dismal caves and covering huge canvases with queer tuturistic designs. I watch the migrations from Atlantis. I watch the migrations from Lemuria. I see the elder races —a strange horde of black dwarfs overwhelming Asia, and the Neandertalers with lowered heads and bent knees ranging obscenely across Europe. I watch the Achaeans streaming into the Greek islands, and the crude beginnings of Hellenic culture. I am in Athens and Pericles is young.

I am standing on the soil of Italy. I assist in the rape of the Sabines; I march with the Imperial Legions. I tremble with awe and wonder as the enormous standards go by and the ground shakes with the tread of the victorious *hastati.* A thousand naked slaves grovel before me as I pass in a litter of gold and ivory drawn by night-black oxen from Thebes, and the flowergirls scream *'Ave Caesar'* as I nod and smile. I am myself a slave on a Moorish galley. I watch the erection of a great cathedral. Stone by stone it rises, and through months and years I stand and watch each stone as it falls into place. I am burned on a cross head downward in the thymescented gardens of Nero, and I watch witth amusement and scorn the torturers at work in the chambers of the Inquisition.

"I walk in the holiest sanctuaries; I enter the temples of Venus. I kneel in adoration before the Magna Mater, and I throw coins on the bare knees of the sacred courtezans who sit with veiled faces in the groves of Babylon. I creep into an Elizabethan theater and with the stinking rabble about me I applaud *The Merchant of Venice.* I walk with Dante through the narrow streets of Florence. I meet the young Beatrice, and the hem of her garment brushes my sandals as I stare enraptured. I am a priest of Isis, and my magic astounds the nations. Simon Magus kneels before me, imploring my assistance, and Pharaoh trembles when I approach. In India I talk with the Masters and run screaming from their presence, for their revelations are as salt on wounds that bleed.

"I perceive everything *simultaneously.* I perceive everything from all sides; I am a part of all the teeming billions about me. I exist in all men and all men exist in me. I perceive the whole of human history in a single instant, the past and the present.

"By simply *straining* I can see farther and farther back. Now I am going back through strange curves and angles. Angles and curves multiply about me. I perceive great segments of time through *curves.* There is *curved time,* and *angular time.* The beings that exist in angular time cannot enter curved time. It is very strange.

"I am going back and back. Man has disappeared from the earth. Gigantic reptiles crouch beneath enormous palms and swim through the loathly black waters of dismal lakes. Now the reptiles have disappeared. No animals remain upon the land, but beneath the waters, plainly visible to me, dark forms move slowly over the rotting vegetation.

"The forms are becoming simpler and simpler. Now they are single cells. All about me there are angles—strange angles that have no counterparts on the earth. I am desperately afraid.

"There is an abyss of being which man has never fathomed."

I stared. Chalmer had risen to his feet and he was gesticulating helplessly with his arms. "I am passing through unearthly angles; I am approaching—oh, the burning horror of it."

"Chalmers!" I cried. "Do you wish me to interfere?"

He brought his right hand quickly before his face, as though to shut out a vision unspeakable. "Not yet!" he cried; "I will go on. I will see—what—lies—beyond—"

A cold sweat streamed from his forehead and his shoulders jerked spasmodically. "Beyond life there are"—his face grew ashen with terror—"*things* that I cannot distinguish. They move slowly through angles. They have no bodies, and they move slowly through outrageous angles."

It was then that I became aware of the odor in the room. It was a pungent, indescribable odor, so nauseous that I could scarcely endure it. I stepped quickly to the window and threw it open. When I returned to Chalmers and looked into his eyes I nearly fainted.

"I think they have scented me!" he shrieked. "They are slowly turning toward me."

He was trembling horribly. For a moment he clawed at the air with his hands. Then his legs gave way beneath him and he fell forward on his face, slobbering and moaning.

I watched him in silence as he dragged himself across

the floor. He was no longer a man. His teeth were bared and saliva dripped from the corners of his mouth.

"Chalmers," I cried. "Chalmers, stop it! Stop it, do you hear?"

As if in reply to my appeal he commenced to utter hoarse convulsive sounds which resembled nothing so much as the barking of a dog, and began a sort of hideous writhing in a circle about the room. I bent and seized him by the shoulders. Violently, desperately, I shook him. He turned his head and snapped at my wrist. I was sick with horror, but I dared not release him for fear that he would destroy himself in a paroxysm of rage.

"Chalmers," I muttered, "you must stop that. There is nothing in this room that can harm you. Do you understand?"

I continued to shake and admonish him, and gradually the madness died out of his face. Shivering convulsively, he crumpled into a grotesque heap on the Chinese rug.

I carried him to the sofa and deposited him upon it. His features were twisted in pain, and I knew that he was still struggling dumbly to escape from abominable memories.

"Whisky," he muttered. "You'll find a flask in the cabinet by the window—upper left-hand drawer."

When I handed him the flask his fingers tightened about it until the knuckles showed blue. "They nearly got me," he gasped. He drained the stimulant in immoderate gulps, and gradually the color crept back into his face.

"That drug was the very devil!" I murmured.

"It wasn't the drug," he moaned.

His eyes no longer glared insanely, but he still wore the look of a lost soul.

"They scented me in time," he moaned. "I went too far."

"What were *they* like?" I said, to humor him.

He leaned forward and gripped my arm. He was shivering horribly. "No words in our language can describe them!" He spoke in a hoarse whisper. "They are symbolized vaguely in the myth of the Fall, and in an obscene

form which is occasionally found engraved on ancient tablets. The Greeks had a name for them, which veiled their essential foulness. The tree, the snake and the apple—these are the vague symbols of a most awful mystery."

His voice had risen to a scream. "Frank, Frank, a terrible and unspeakable *deed* was done in the beginning. Before time, the *deed,* and from the deed—"

He had risen and was hysterically pacing the room. "The deeds of the dead move through angles in dim recesses of time. They are hungry and athirst!"

"Chalmers," I pleaded to quiet him. "We are living in the third decade of the Twentieth Century."

"They are lean and athirst!" he shrieked. *"The Hounds of Tindalos!"*

"Chalmers, shall I phone for a physician?"

"A physician cannot help me now. They are horrors of the soul, and yet"—he hid his face in his hands and groaned—"they are real, Frank. I saw them for a ghastly moment. For a moment I stood on the *other side.* I stood on the pale gray shores beyond time and space. In an awful light that was not light, in a silence that shrieked, I saw *them.*

"All the evil in the universe was concentrated in their lean, hungry bodies. Or had they bodies? I saw them only for a moment; I cannot be certain. *But I heard them breathe.* Indescribable for a moment I felt their breath upon my face. They turned toward me and I fled screaming. In a single moment I fled screaming through time. I fled down quintillions of years.

"But they scented me. Men awake in them cosmic hungers. We have escaped, momentarily, from the foulness that rings them round. They thirst for that in us which is clean, which is clean, which emerged from the deed without stain. There is a part of us which did not partake in the deed, and that they hate. But do not imagine that they are literally, prosaically evil. They are beyond good and evil as we know it. They are that which in the beginning fell away from cleanliness. Through the deed they became bodies of death, receptacles of all foulness. But

they are not evil in *our* sense because in the spheres through which they move there is no thought, no moral, no right or wrong as we understand it. There is merely the pure and the foul. The foul expresses itself through angle; the pure through curves. Man, the pure part of him, is descended from a curve. Do not laugh. I mean that literally."

I rose and searched for my hat. "I'm dreadfully sorry for you, Chalmers," I said, as I walked toward the door. "But I don't intend to stay and listen to such gibberish. I'll send my physician to see you. He's an elderly, kindly chap and he won't be offended if you tell him to go to the devil. But I hope you'll respect his advice. A week's rest in a good sanitarium should benefit you immeasurably."

I heard him laughing as I descended the stairs, but his laughter was so utterly mirthless that it moved me to tears.

2

When Chalmers phoned the following morning my first impulse was to hang up the receiver immediately. His request was so unusual and his voice was so wildly hysterical that I feared any further association with him would result in the impairment of my own sanity. But I could not doubt the genuineness of his misery, and when he broke down completely and I heard him sobbing over the wire I decided to comply with his request.

"Very well," I said. "I will come over immediately and bring the plaster."

En route to Chalmers' home I stopped at a hardware store and purchased twenty pounds of plaster of Paris. When I entered my friend's room he was crouching by the window watching the opposite wall out of eyes that were feverish with fright. When he saw me he rose and seized the parcel containing the plaster with an avidity that amazed and horrified me. He had extruded all of the

furniture and the room presented a desolate appearance.

"It is just conceivable that we can thwart them!" he exclaimed. "But we must work rapidly. Frank, there is a stepladder in the hall. Bring it here immediately. And then fetch a pail of water."

"What for?" I murmured.

He turned sharply and there was a flush on his face. "To mix the plaster, you fool!" he cried. "To mix the plaster that will save our bodies and souls from a contamination unmentionable. To mix the plaster that will save the world from—Frank, *they must be kept out!*"

"Who?" I murmured.

"The Hounds of Tindalos!" he muttered. "They can only reach us through angles. We must eliminate all angles from this room. I shall plaster up all of the corners, all of the crevices. We must make this room resemble the interior of a sphere."

I knew that it would have been useless to argue with him. I fetched the stepladder, Chalmers mixed the plaster, and for three hours we labored. We filled in the four corners of the wall and the intersections of the floor and wall and the wall and ceiling, and we rounded the sharp angles of the window-seat.

"I shall remain in this room until they return in time," he affirmed when our task was completed. "When they discover that the scent leads through curves they will return. They will return ravenous and snarling and unsatisfied to the foulness that was in the beginning, before time, beyond space."

He nodded graciously and lit a cigarette. "It was good of you to help," he said.

"Will you not see a physician, Chalmers?" I pleaded.

"Perhaps—tomorrow," he murmured. "But now I must watch and wait."

"Wait for what?" I urged.

Chalmers smiled wanly. "I know that you think me insane," he said. "You have a shrewd but prosaic mind, and you cannot conceive of an entity that does not depend for its existence on force and matter. But did it ever occur

to you, my friend, that force and matter are merely the barriers to perception imposed by time and space? When one knows, as I do, that time and space are identical and that they are both deceptive because they are merely imperfect manifestations of a higher reality, one no longer seeks in the visible world for an explanation of the mystery and terror of being."

I rose and walked toward the door.

"Forgive me," he cried. "I did not mean to offend you. You have a superlative intellect, but I—I have a *superhuman* one. It is only natural that I should be aware of your limitations."

"Phone if you need me," I said, and descended the stairs two steps at a time. "I'll send my physician over at once," I muttered, to myself. "He's a hopeless maniac, and heaven knows what will happen if someone doesn't take a charge of him immediately."

3

The following is a condensation of two announcements which appeared in the Partridgeville Gazette *for July 3, 1928:*

Earthquake Shakes Financial District

At 2 o'clock this morning an earth tremor of unusual severity broke several plate-glass windows in Central Square and completely disorganized the electric and street railway systems. The tremor was felt in the outlying districts and the steeple of the First Baptist Church on Angell Hill (designed by Christopher Wren in 1717) was entirely demolished. Firemen are now attempting to put out a blaze which threatens to destroy the Partridgeville Glue Works. An investigation is promised by the mayor and an immediate attempt will be made to fix responsibility for this disastrous occurrence.

OCCULT WRITER MURDERED BY UNKNOWN GUEST

Horrible Crime in Central Square

Mystery Surrounds Death of Halpin Chalmers

At 9 A.M. today the body of Halpin Chalmers, author and journalist, was found in an empty room above the jewelry store of Smithwich and Isaacs, 24 Central Square. The coroner's investigation revealed that the room had been rented furnished to Mr. Chalmers on May 1, and that he had himself disposed of the furniture a fortnight ago. Chalmers was the author of several recondite books on occult themes, and a member of the Bibliographic Guild. He formerly resided in Brooklyn, New York.

At 7 A.M. Mr. L. E. Hancock, who occupies the apartment opposite Chalmers' room in the Smithwick and Isaacs establishment, smelt a peculiar odor when he opened his door to take in his cat and the morning edition of the *Partridgeville Gazette*. The odor he describes as extremely acrid and nauseous, and he affirms that it was so strong in the vicinity of Chalmer's room that he was obliged to hold his nose when he approached that section of the hall.

He was about to return to his own apartment when it occurred to him that Chalmers might have accidentally forgotten to turn off the gas in his kitchenette. Becoming considerably alarmed at the thought, he decided to investigate, and when repeated tappings on Chalmers' door brought no response he notified the superintendent. The latter opened the door by means of a pass key, and the two men quickly made their way into Chalmers' room. The room was utterly destitute of furniture, and Hancock asserts that when he first glanced at the floor his heart

went cold within him, and that the superintendent, without saying a word, walked to the open window and stared at the building opposite for fully five mintues.

Chalmers lay stretched upon his back in the center of the room. He was starkly nude, and his chest and arms were covered with a peculiar bluish pus or ichor. His head lay grotesquely upon his chest. It had been completely severed from his body, and the features were twisted and torn and horribly mangled. Nowhere was there a trace of blood.

The room presented a most astonishing appearance. The intersections of the walls, ceiling and floor had been thickly smeared with plaster of Paris, but at intervals fragments had cracked and fallen off, and someone had grouped these upon the floor about the murdered man so as to form a perfect triangle.

Beside the body were several sheets of charred yellow paper. These bore fantastic geometric designs and symbols and several hastily scrawled sentences. The sentences were almost illegible and so absurd in contect that they furnished no possible clue to the perpetrator of the crime. "I am waiting and watching," Chalmers wrote. "I sit by the window and watch walls and ceiling. I do not believe they can reach me, but I must beware of the Doels. Perhaps *they* can help them break through. The satyrs will help, and they can advance through the scarlet circles. The Greeks knew a way of preventing that. It is a great pity that we have forgotten so much."

On another sheet of paper, the most badly charred of the seven or eight fragments found by Detective Sergeant Douglas (of the Partridgeville Reserve), was scrawled the following:

"Good God, the plaster is falling! A terrific shock has loosened the plaster and it is falling. An earthquake perhaps! I never could have anticipated this. It is growing dark in the room. I must phone Frank. But can he get here in time? I will try. I will recite the Einstein formula. I will—God, they are breaking through! They are breaking

through! Smoke is pouring from the corners of the wall. Their tongues—ahhhh—"

In the opinion of Detective Sergeant Douglas, Chalmers was poisoned by some obscure chemical. He has sent specimens of the strange blue slime found on Chalmers' body to the Partridgeville Chemical Laboratories; and he expects the report will shed new light on one of the most mysterious crimes of recent years. That Chalmers entertained a guest on the evening preceding the earthquake is certain, for his neighbor distinctly heard a low murmur of conversation in the former's room as he passed it on his way to the stairs. Suspicion points strongly to this unknown visitor and the police are diligently endeavoring to discover his identity.

4

Report of James Morton, chemist and bacteriologist:

My dear Mr. Douglas:

The fluid sent to me for analysis is the most peculiar that I have ever examined. It resembles living protoplasm, but it lacks the peculiar substances known as enzymes. Enzymes catalyze the chemical reactions occurring in living cells, and when the cell dies they cause it to disintegrate by hydrolyzation. Without enzymes protoplasm should possess enduring vitality, i.e., immortality. Enzymes are the negative components, so to speak, of unicellular organism, which is the basis of all life. That living matter can exist without enzymes biologists emphatically deny. And yet the substance that you have sent me is alive and it lacks these "indispensable" bodies. Good God, sir, do you realize what astounding new vistas this opens up?

5

Excerpt from The Secret Watcher *by the late Halpin Chalmers:*

What if, parallel to the life we know, there is another life that does not die, which lacks the elements that destroy *our* life? Perhaps in another dimension there is a *different* force from that which generates our life. Perhaps this force emits energy, or something similar to energy, which passes from the unknown dimension where *it* is and creates a new form of cell life in our dimension. No one knows that such new cell life does exist in our dimension. Ah, but I have seen *its* manifestations. I have *talked* with them. In my room at night I have talked with the Doels. And in dreams I have seen their maker. I have stood on the dim shore beyond time and matter and seen *it*. It moves through strange curves and outrageous angles. Some day I shall travel in time and meet *it* face to face.

THE SPACE EATERS

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

1

THE horror came to Partridgeville in a blind fog.

All that afternoon thick vapors from the sea had swirled and eddied about the farm, and the room in which we sat swam with moisture. The fog ascended in spirals from beneath the door, and its long, moist fingers caressed my hair until it dripped. The square-paned windows were coated with a thick, dewlike moisture; the air was heavy and dank and unbelievably cold.

I stared gloomily at my friend. He had turned his back to the window and was writing furiously. He was a tall, slim man with a slight stoop and abnormally broad shoulders. In profile his face was impressive. He had an extremely broad forehead, long nose and slightly protuberant chin—a strong, sensitive face which suggested a wildly imaginative nature held in restraint by a skeptical and truly extraordinary intellect.

My friend wrote short-stories. He wrote to please himself, in defiance of contemporary taste, and his tales were unusual. They would have delighted Poe; they would have delighted Hawthorne, or Ambrose Bierce, or Villiers de l'Isle Adam. They were studies of abnormal men, abnormal beasts, abnormal plants. He wrote of remote realms of imagination and horror, and the colors, sounds and

odors which he dared to evoke were never seen, heard or smelt on the familiar side of the moon. He projected his creations against mind-chilling backgrounds. They stalked through tall and lonely forests, over ragged mountains, and slithered down the stairs of ancient houses, and between the piles of rotting black wharves.

One of his tales, *The House of the Worm,* had induced a young student at a Midwestern University to seek refuge in an enormous red-brick building where everyone approved of his sitting on the floor and shouting at the top of his voice: "Lo, my beloved is fairer than all the lilies among the lilies in the lily garden." Another, *The Defilers,* had brought him precisely one hundred and ten letters of indignation from local readers when it appeared in the *Partridgeville Gazette.*

As I continued to stare at him he suddenly stopped writing and shook his head. "I can't do it," he said. "I should have to invent a new language. And yet I can comprehend the thing emotionally, intuitively, if you will. If I could only convey it in a sentence somehow—the strange crawling of its fleshless spirit!"

"Is it some new horror?" I asked.

He shook his head. "It is not new to me. I have known and felt it for years—a horror utterly beyond anything your prosaic brain can conceive."

"Thank you," I said.

"All human brains are prosaic," he elaborated. "I meant no offense. It is the shadowy terrors that lurk behind and above them that are mysterious and awful. Our little brains—what can they know of vampire-like entities which may lurk in dimensions higher than our own, or beyond the universe of stars? I think sometimes they lodge in our heads, and our brains feel them, but when they stretch out tentacles to probe and explore us, we go screaming mad." He was staring at me steadily now.

"But you can't honestly believe in such nonsense!" I exclaimed.

"Of course not!" He shook his head and laughed. "You know damn well I'm too profoundly skeptical to believe

in anything. I have merely outlined a poet's reactions to the universe. If a man wishes to write ghostly stories and actually convey a sensation of horror, he must believe in everything—and *anything*. By *anything* I mean the horror that transcends *everything,* that is more terrible and impossible than *everything*. He must believe that there are things from outer space that can reach down and fasten themselves on us with a malevolence that can destroy us utterly—our bodies as well as our minds."

"But this thing from outer space—how can he describe it if he doesn't know its shape—or size or color?"

"It is virtually impossible to describe it. That is what I have sought to do—and failed. Perhaps some day—but then, I doubt if it can ever be accomplished. But your artist can hint, suggest . . ."

"Suggest what?" I asked, a little puzzled.

"Suggest a horror that is utterly unearthly; that makes itself felt in terms that have no counterparts on Earth."

I was still puzzled. He smiled wearily and elaborated his theory.

"There is something prosaic," he said, "about even the best of the classic tales of mystery and terror. Old Mrs. Radcliffe, with her hidden vaults and bleeding ghosts; Maturin, with his allegorical Faustlike hero-villains, and his fiery flames from the mouth of hell; Edgar Poe, with his blood-clotted corpses, and black cats, his telltale hearts and disintegrating Valdemars; Hawthorne, with his amusing preoccupation with the problems and horrors arising from mere human sin (as though human sins were of any significance to a coldly malign intelligence from beyond the stars). Then we have modern masters—Algernon Blackwood, who invites us to a feast of the high gods and shows us an old woman with a harelip sitting before a ouija board fingering soiled cards, or an absurd nimbus of ectoplasm emanating from some clairvoyant ninny; Bram Stoker with his vampires and werewolves, mere conventional myths, the tag-ends of medieval folklore; Wells with his pseudo-scientific bogies, fish-men at the bottom of the sea, ladies in the moon, and the hundred and one

idiots who are constantly writing ghost stories for the magazines—what have they contributed to the literature of the unholy?

"Are we not made of flesh and blood? It is but natural that we should be revolted and horrified when we are shown that flesh and blood in a state of corruption and decay, with the worms passing over and under it. It is but natural that a story about a corpse should thrill us, fill with fear and horror and loathing. Any fool can awake these emotions in us—Poe really accomplished very little with his Lady Ushers, and liquescent Valdemars. He appealed to simple, natural, understandable emotions, and it was inevitable that his readers should respond.

"Are we not the descendants of barbarians? Did we not once dwell in tall and sinister forests, at the mercy of beasts that rend and tear? It is but inevitable that we should shiver and cringe when we meet in literature dark shadows from our own past. Harpies and vampires and werewolves—what are they but magnifications, distortions of the great birds and bats and ferocious dogs that harassed and tortured our ancestors? It is easy enough to arouse fear by such means. It is easy enough to frighten men with the flames at the mouth of hell, because they are hot and shrivel and burn the flesh—and who does not understand and dread a fire? Blows that kill, fires that burn, shadows that horrify because their substances lurk evilly in the black corridors of our inherited memories—I am weary of the writers who would terrify us by such pathetically obvious and trite unpleasantness."

Real indignation blazed in his eyes.

"Suppose there were a greater horror? Suppose evil things from some other universe should decide to invade this one? Suppose we couldn't see them? Suppose we couldn't feel them? Suppose they were of a color unknown on Earth, or rather, of an *appearance* that was without color?

"Suppose they had shape unknown on Earth? Suppose they were four-dimensional, five-dimensional, six-dimensional? Suppose they were a hundred-dimensional? Sup-

pose they had no dimensions at all and yet existed? What could we do?

"They would not exist for us? They would exist for us if they gave us pain. Suppose it was not the pain of heat or cold or any of the pains we know, but a new pain? Suppose they touched something besides our nerves—reached our brains in a new and terrible way? Suppose they made themselves felt in a new and strange and unspeakable way? What could we do? Our hands would be tied. You can not oppose what you can not see or feel. You can not oppose the thousand-dimensional. *Suppose they should eat their way to us through space!*"

He was speaking now with an intensity of emotion which belied his avowed skepticism of a moment before.

"That is what I have tried to write about. I wanted to make my readers feel and see that thing from another universe, from beyond space. I could easily enough hint at it or suggest it—any fool can do that—but I wanted actually to describe it. To describe a color that is not a color! a form that is formless!

"A mathematician could perhaps slightly more than suggest it. There would be strange curves and angles that an inspired mathematician in a wild frenzy of calculation might glimpse vaguely. It is absurd to say that mathematicians have not discovered the fourth dimension. They have often glimpsed it, often approached it, often apprehended it, but they are unable to demonstrate it. I know a mathematician who swears that he once saw the sixth dimension in a wild flight into the sublime skies of the differential calculus.

"Unfortunately I am not a mathematician. I am only a poor fool of a creative artist, and the thing from outer space utterly eludes me."

Someone was pounding loudly on the door. I crossed the room and drew back the latch. "What do you want?" I asked. "What is the matter?"

"Sorry to disturb you, Frank," said a familiar voice, "but I've got to talk to someone."

I recognized the lean white face of my nearest neighbor,

and stepped instantly to one side. "Come in," I said. "Come in, by all means. Howard and I have been discussing ghosts, and the things we've conjured up aren't pleasant company. Perhaps you can argue them away."

I called Howard's horrors ghosts because I didn't want to shock my commonplace neighbor. Henry Wells was immensely big and tall, and as he strode into the room he seemed to bring a part of the night with him.

He collapsed on a sofa and surveyed us with frightened eyes. Howard laid down the story he had been reading, removed and wiped his glasses, and frowned. He was more or less tolerant of my bucolic visitors. We waited for perhaps a minute, and then the three of us spoke almost simultaneously. "A horrible night!" "Beastly, isn't it?" "Wretched."

Henry Wells frowned. "Tonight," he said. "I—I met with a funny accident. I was driving Hortense through Mulligan Wood . . ."

"Hortense?" Howard interrupted.

"His horse," I explained impatiently. "You were returning from Brewster, weren't you, Harry?"

"From Brewster, yes," he replied. "I was driving between the trees, keeping a sharp lookout for cars with their lights on too bright, coming right at me out of the murk, and listening to the foghorns in the bay wheezing and moaning, when something wet landed on my head. 'Rain,' I thought. 'I hope the supplies keep dry.'

"I turned round to make sure that the butter and flour were covered up, and something soft like a sponge rose up from the bottom of the wagon and hit me in the face. I snatched at it and caught it between my fingers.

"In my hands it felt like jelly. I squeezed it, and moisture ran out of it down my wrists. It wasn't so dark that I couldn't see it, either. Funny how you can see in fogs—they seem to make night lighter. There was a sort of brightness in the air. I dunno, maybe it wasn't the fog, either. The trees seemed to stand out. You could see them sharp and clear. As I was saying, I looked at the thing, and what do you think it looked like? Like a piece

of raw liver. Or like a calf's brain. Now that I come to think of it, it was more like a calf's brain. There were grooves in it, and you don't find many grooves in liver. Liver's usually as smooth as glass.

"It was an awful moment for me. 'There's someone up in one of those trees,' I thought. 'He's some tramp or crazy man or fool and he's been eating liver. My wagon frightened him and he dropped it—a piece of it. I can't be wrong. There was no liver in my wagon when I left Brewster.'

"I looked up. You know how tall all of the trees are in Mulligan Wood. You can't see the tops of some of them from the wagon-road on a clear day. And you know how crooked and queer-looking some of the trees are.

"It's funny, but I've always thought of them as old men —tall old men, you understand, tall and crooked and very evil. I've always thought of them as wanting to work mischief. There's something unwholesome about trees that grow very close together and grow crooked.

"I looked up.

"At first I didn't see anything but the tall trees, all white and glistening with the fog, and above them a thick, white mist that hid the stars. And then something long and white ran quickly down the trunk of one of the trees.

"It ran so quickly down the tree that I couldn't see it clearly. And it was so thin anyway that there wasn't much to see. But it was like an arm. It was like a long, white and very thin arm. But of course it wasn't an arm. Who ever heard of an arm as tall as a tree? I don't know what made me compare it to an arm, because it was really nothing but a thin line—like a wire, a string. I'm not sure that I saw it at all. Maybe I imagined it. I'm not even sure that it was as wide as a string. But it had a hand. Or didn't it? When I think of it my brain gets dizzy. You see, it moved so quickly I couldn't see it clearly at all.

"But it gave me the impression that it was looking for something that it had dropped. For a minute the hand seemed to spread out over the road, and then it left the tree and came toward the wagon. It was like a huge white

hand walking on its fingers with a terribly long arm fastened to it that went up and up until it touched the fog, or perhaps until it touched the stars.

"I screamed and slashed Hortense with the reins, but the horse didn't need any urging. She was up and off before I could throw the liver, or calf's brain, or whatever it was, into the road. She raced so fast she almost upset the wagon, but I didn't draw in the reins. I'd rather lie in a ditch with a broken rib than have a long white hand squeezing the breath out of my throat.

"We had almost cleared the wood and I was just beginning to breathe again when my brain went cold. I can't describe what happened in any other way. My brain got as cold as ice inside my head. I can tell you I was frightened.

"Don't imagine I couldn't think clearly. I was conscious of everything that was going on about me, but my brain was so cold I screamed with the pain. Have you ever held a piece of ice in the palm of your hand for as long as two or three minutes? It burnt, didn't it? Ice burns worse than fire. Well, my brain felt as though it had lain on ice for hours and hours. There was a furnace inside my head, but it was a cold furnace. It was roaring with raging cold.

"Perhaps I should have been thankful that the pain didn't last. It wore off in about ten minutes, and when I got home I didn't think I was any the worse for my experience. I'm sure I didn't think I was any the worse until I looked at myself in the glass. Then I saw the hole in my head."

Henry Wells leaned forward and brushed back the hair from his right temple.

"Here is the wound," he said. "What do you make of it?" He tapped with his fingers beneath a small round opening in the side of his head. "It's like a bullet-wound," he elaborated, "but there was no blood and you can look in pretty far. It seems to go right in to the center of my head. I shouldn't be alive."

Howard had risen and was staring at my neighbor with angry and accusing eyes.

"Why have you lied to us?" he shouted. "Why have you told us this absurd story? A long hand! You were drunk, man. Drunk—and yet you've succeeded in doing what I'd have sweated blood to accomplish. If I could have made my readers feel that horror, know it for a moment, that horror that you described in the woods, I should be with the immortals—I should be greater than Poe, greater than Hawthorne. And you—a clumsy drunken liar . . ."

I was on my feet with a furious protest.

"He's not lying," I said. "He's been shot—someone has shot him in the head. Look at this wound. My God, man, you have no call to insult him!"

Howard's wrath died and the fire went out of his eyes. "Forgive me," he said. "You can't imagine how badly I've wanted to capture that ultimate horror, to put it on paper, and he did it so easily. If he had warned me that he was going to describe something like that I would have taken notes. But of course he doesn't know he's an artist. It was an accidental *tour de force* that he accomplished; he couldn't do it again, I'm sure. I'm sorry I went up in the air—I apologize. Do you want me to go for a doctor? That *is* a bad wound."

My neighbor shook his head. "I don't want a doctor," he said. "I've seen a doctor. There's no bullet in my head—that hole was not made by a bullet. When the doctor couldn't explain it I laughed at him. I hate doctors; and I haven't much use for fools that think I'm in the habit of lying. I haven't much use for people who won't believe me when I tell 'em I saw the long, white thing come sliding down the tree as clear as day."

But Howard was examining the wound in defiance of my neighbor's indignation. "It was made by something round and sharp," he said. "It's curious, but the flesh isn't torn. A knife or bullet would have torn the flesh, left a ragged edge."

I nodded, and was bending to study the wound when Wells shrieked, and clapped his hands to his head "Ah-h-h!" he choked. "It's come back—the terrible, terrible cold."

Howard stared. "Don't expect me to believe such nonsense!" he exclaimed disgustedly.

But Wells was holding on to his head and dancing about the room in a delirium of agony. "I can't stand it!" he shrieked. "It's freezing up my brain. It's not like ordinary cold. It isn't. Oh God! It's like nothing you've ever felt. It bites, it scorches, it tears. It's like acid."

I laid my hand upon his shoulder and tried to quiet him, but he pushed me aside and made for the door.

"I've got to get out of here," he screamed. "The thing wants room. My head won't hold it. It wants the night—the vast night. It wants to wallow in the night."

He threw back the door and disappeared into the fog. Howard wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his coat and collapsed into a chair.

"Mad," he muttered. "A tragic case of manic-depressive psychosis. Who would have suspected it? The story he told us wasn't conscious art at all. It was simply a nightmare-fungus conceived by the brain of a lunatic."

"Yes," I said, "But how do you account for the hole in his head?"

"Oh, that!" Howard shrugged. "He probably always had it—probably was born with it."

"Nonsense," I said. "The man never had a hole in his head before. Personally, I think he's been shot. Something ought to be done. He needs medical attention. I think I'll phone Dr. Smith."

"It is useless to interfere," said Howard. "That hole was *not* made by a bullet. I advise you to forget him until tomorrow. His insanity may be temporary; it may wear off; and then he'd blame us for interfering. If he's still emotionally disturbed tomorrow, if he comes here again and tries to make trouble, you can notify the proper authorities. Has he ever acted queerly before?"

"No," I said. "He was always quite sane. I think I'll take your advice and wait. But I wish I could explain the hole in his head."

"The story he told interests me more," said Howard. "I'm going to write it out before I forget it. Of course I

shan't be able to make the horror as real as he did, but perhaps I can catch a bit of the strangeness and glamor."

He unscrewed his fountain pen and began to cover a sheet of paper with curious phrases.

I shivered and closed the door.

For several minutes there was no sound in the room save the scratching of his pen as it moved across the paper. For several minutes there was silence—and then the shrieks commenced. Or were they wails?

We heard them through the closed door, heard them above the moaning of the foghorns and the wash of the waves on Mulligan's Beach. We heard them above the million sounds of night that had horrified and depressed us as we sat and talked in that fog-enshrouded and lonely house. We heard them so clearly that for a moment we thought they came from just outside the house. It was not until they came again and again—long, piercing wails —that we discovered in them a quality of remoteness. Slowly we became aware that the wails came from far away, as far away, perhaps as Mulligan Wood.

"A soul in torture," muttered Howard. "A poor, damned soul in the grip of the horror I've been telling you about —the horror I've known and felt for years."

He rose unsteadily to his feet. His eyes were shining and he was breathing heavily.

I seized his shoulders and shook him. "You shouldn't project yourself into your stories that way," I exclaimed. "Some poor chap is in distress. I don't know what's happened. Perhaps a ship foundered. I'm going to put on a slicker and find out what it's all about. I have an idea we may be needed."

"We *may* be needed," repeated Howard slowly. "We may be needed indeed. It will not be satisfied with a single victim. Think of that great journey through space, the thirst and dreadful hungers it must have known! It is preposterous to imagine that it will be content with a single victim!"

Then, suddenly, a change came over him. The light went out of his eyes and his voice lost its quaver. He shivered.

"Forgive me," he said. "I'm afraid you'll think I'm as mad as the yokel who was here a few minutes ago. But I can't help identifying myself with my characters when I write. I'd described something very evil, and those yells—well, they are exactly like the yells a man would make if—if . . ."

"I understand," I interrupted, "but we've no time to discuss that now. There's a poor chap out there"—I pointed vaguely toward the door—"with his back against the wall. He's fighting off something—I don't know what. We've got to help him."

"Of course, of course," he agreed, and followed me into the kitchen.

Without a word I took down a slicker and handed it to him. I also handed him an enormous rubber hat.

"Get into these as quickly as you can," I said. "The chap's desperately in need of us."

I had gotten my own slicker down from the rack and was forcing my arms through its sticky sleeves. In a moment we were both pushing our way through the fog.

The fog was like a living thing. Its long fingers reached up and slapped us relentlessly on the face. It curled about our bodies and ascended in great, grayish spirals from the tops of our heads. It retreated before us, and as suddenly closed in and enveloped us.

Dimly ahead of us we saw the lights of a few lonely farms. Behind us the sea drummed, and the foghorns sent out a continuous, mournful ululation. The collar of Howard's slicker was turned up over his ears, and from his long nose moisture dipped. There was grim decision in his eyes, and his jaw was set.

For many minutes we plodded on in silence, and it was not until we approached Mulligan Wood that he spoke.

"If necessary," he said, "we shall enter the wood."

I nodded. "There is no reason why we should not enter the wood," I said. "It isn't a large wood."

"One could get out quickly?"

"One could get out very quickly indeed. My God, did you hear that?"

The shrieks had grown horribly loud.

"He is suffering," said Howard. "He is suffering terribly. Do you suppose—do you suppose it's your crazy friend?"

He had voiced a question which I had been asking myself for some time.

"It's conceivable," I said. "But we'll have to interfere if he's as mad as that. I wish I'd brought some of the neighbors with me."

"Why in heaven's name didn't you?" Howard shouted. "It may take a dozen men to handle him." He was staring at the tall trees that towered before us, and I didn't think he really gave Henry Wells so much as a thought.

"That's Mulligan Wood," I said. I swallowed to keep my mouth. "It isn't a big wood," I added idiotically.

"Oh my God!" Out of the fog there came the sound of a voice in the last extremity of pain. "They're eating up my brain. Oh my God!"

I was at that moment in deadly fear that I might become as mad as the man in the woods. I clutched Howard's arm.

"Let's go back," I shouted. "Let's go back at once. We were fools to come. There is nothing here but madness and suffering and perhaps death."

"That may be," said Howard, "but we're going on."

His face was ashen beneath his dripping hat, and his eyes were thin blue slits.

"Very well," I said grimly. "We'll go on."

Slowly we moved among the trees. They towered above us, and the thick fog so distorted them and merged them together that they seemed to move forward with us. From their twisted branches the fog hung in ribbons. Ribbons, did I say? Rather were they snakes of fog—writhing snakes with venomous tongues and leering eyes. Through swirling clouds of fog we saw the scaly, gnarled boles of the trees, and every bole resembled the twisted body of an evil old man. Only the small oblong of light cast by my electric torch protected us against their malevolence.

Through great banks of fog we moved, and every moment the screams grew louder. Soon we were catching fragments of sentences, hysterical shoutings that merged in-

to prolonged wails. "Colder and colder and colder . . . they are eating up my brain. Colder! Ah-h-h!"

Howard gripped my arm. "We'll find him," he said. "We can't turn back now."

When we found him he was lying on his side. His hands were clasped about his head, and his body was bent double, the knees drawn up so tightly that they almost touched his chest. He was silent. We bent and shook him, but he made no sound.

"Is he dead?" I choked out. I wanted desperately to turn and run. The trees were very close to us.

"I don't know," said Howard. "I don't know. I hope that he is dead."

I saw him kneel and slide his hand under the poor devil's shirt. For a moment his face was a mask. Then he got up quickly and shook his head.

"He is alive," he said. "We must get him into some dry clothes as quickly as possible."

I helped him. Together we lifted the bent figure from the ground and carried it forward between the trees. Twice we stumbled and nearly fell, and the creepers tore at our clothes. The creepers were little malicious hands grasping and tearing under the malevolent guidance of the great trees. Without a star to guide us, without a light except the little pocket lamp which was growing dim, we fought our way out of Mulligan Wood.

The droning did not commence until we had left the wood. At first we scarcely heard it, it was so low, like the purring of gigantic engines far down in the earth. But slowly, as we stumbled forward with our burden, it grew so loud that we could not ignore it.

"What is that?" muttered Howard, and through the wraiths of fog I saw that his face had a greenish tinge.

"I don't know," I mumbled. "It's something horrible. I never heard anything like it. Can't you walk faster?"

So far we had been fighting familiar horrors, but the droning and humming that rose behind us was like nothing that I had ever heard on Earth. In excruciating fright, I

shrieked aloud. "Faster, Howard, faster! For God's sake, let's get out of this!"

As I spoke, the body that we were carrying squirmed, and from its cracked lips issued a torrent of gibberish: "I was walking between the trees looking up. I couldn't see their tops. I was looking up, and then suddenly I looked down and the thing landed on my shoulders. It was all legs—all long, crawling legs. It went right into my head. I wanted to get away from the trees, but I couldn't. I was alone in the forest with the thing on my back, in my head, and when I tried to run, the trees reached out and tripped me. It made a hole so it could get in. It's my brain it wants. Today it made a hole, and now it's crawled in and it's sucking and sucking and sucking. It's as cold as ice and it makes a noise like a great big fly. But it isn't a fly. And it isn't a hand. I was wrong when I called it a hand. You can't see it. I wouldn't have seen or felt it if it hadn't made a hole and got in. You almost see it, you almost feel it, and that means that it's getting ready to go in."

"Can you walk, Wells? Can you walk?"

Howard had dropped Wells' legs and I could hear the harsh intake of his breath as he struggled to rid himself of his slicker.

"I think so," Wells sobbed. "But it doesn't matter. It's got me now. Put me down and save yourselves."

"We've got to run!" I yelled.

"It's our one chance," cried Howard. "Wells, you follow us. Follow us, do you understand? They'll burn up your brain if they catch you. We're going to run, lad. Follow us!"

He was off through the fog. Wells shook himself free, and followed like a man in a trance. I felt a horror more terrible than death. The noise was dreadfully loud; it was right in my ears, and yet for a moment I couldn't move. The wall of fog was growing thicker.

"Frank will be lost!" It was the voice of Wells, raised in a despairing shout.

"We'll go back!" It was Howard shouting now. "It's death, or worse, but we can't leave him."

"Keep on," I called out. "They won't get me. Save yourselves!"

In my anxiety to prevent them from sacrificing themselves I plunged wildly forward. In a moment I had joined Howard and was clutching at his arm.

"What is it?" I cried. "What have we to fear?"

The droning was all about us now, but no louder.

"Come quickly or we'll be lost!" he urged frantically. "They've broken down all barriers. That buzzing is a warning. We're sensitives—we've been warned, but if it gets louder we're lost. They're strong near Mulligan Wood, and it's here they've made themselves felt. They're experimenting now—feeling their way. Later, when they've learned, they'll spread out. If we can only reach the farm . . ."

"We'll reach the farm!" I shouted as I clawed my way through the fog.

"Heaven help us if we don't!" moaned Howard.

He had thrown off his slicker, and his seeping wet shirt clung tragically to his lean body. He moved through the blackness with long, furious strides. Far ahead we heard the shrieks of Henry Wells. Ceaselessly the foghorns moaned; ceaselessly the fog swirled and eddied about us.

And the droning continued. It seemed incredible that we should ever have found a way to the farm in the blackness. But find the farm we did, and into it we stumbled with glad cries.

"Shut the door!" shouted Howard.

I shut the door.

"We are safe here, I think," he said. "They haven't reached the farm yet."

"What has happened to Wells?" I gasped, and then I saw the wet tracks leading into the kitchen.

Howard saw them too. His eyes flashed with momentary relief.

"I'm glad he's safe," he muttered. "I feared for him."

Then his face darkened. The kitchen was unlighted and no sound came from it.

Without a word Howard walked across the room and into the darkness beyond. I sank into a chair, flicked the moisture from my eyes and brushed back my hair, which had fallen in soggy strands across my face. For a moment I sat, breathing heavily, and when the door creaked, I shivered. But I remembered Howard's assurance: "They haven't reached the farm yet. We're safe here."

Somehow, I had confidence in Howard. He realized that we were threatened by a new and unknown horror, and in some occult way he had grasped its limitations.

I confess, though, that when I heard the screams that came from the kitchen, my faith in my friend was slightly shaken. There were low growls, such as I could not believe came from any human throat, and the voice of Howard raised in wild expostulation. "Let go, I say! Are you quite mad? Man, man, we have saved you! Don't, I say—let go of my leg. Ah-hh!"

As Howard staggered into the room I sprang forward and caught him in my arms. He was covered with blood from head to foot and his face was ashen.

"He's gone raving mad," he moaned. "He was running about on his hands and knees like a dog. He sprang at me, and almost killed me. I fought him off, but I'm badly bitten. I hit him in the face—knocked him unconscious. I may have killed him. He's an animal—I had to protect myself."

I laid Howard on the sofa and knelt beside him, but he scorned my aid.

"Don't bother with me!" he commanded. "Get a rope, quickly, and tie him up. If he comes to, we'll have to fight for our lives."

What followed was a nightmare. I remember vaguely that I went into the kitchen with a rope and tied poor Wells to a chair; then I bathed and dressed Howard's wounds, and lit a fire in the grate. I remembered also that I telephoned for a doctor. But the incidents are confused in my memory, and I have no clear recollection of any-

thing until the arrival of a tall, grave man with kindly and sympathetic eyes and a presence that was as soothing as an opiate.

He examined Howard, nodded, and explained that the wounds were not serious. He examined Wells, and did not nod. He explained slowly, "His pupils don't respond to light," he said. "An immediate operation will be necessary. I tell you frankly, I don't think we can save him."

"That wound in his head, Doctor," I said. "Was it made by a bullet?"

The doctor frowned. "It puzzles me," he said. "Of course it was made by a bullet, but it should have partially closed up. It goes right into the brain. You say you know nothing about it. I believe you, but I think the authorities should be notified at once. Someone will be wanted for manslaughter, unless"—he paused—"unless the wound was self-inflicted. What you tell me is curious. That he should have been able to walk about for hours seems incredible. The wound has obviously been dressed, too. There is no clotted blood at all."

He paced slowly back and forth. "We must operate here—at once. There is a slight chance. Luckily, I brought some instruments. We must clear this table and—do you think you could hold a lamp for me?"

I nodded. "I'll try," I said.

"Good!"

The doctor busied himself with preparations while I debated whether or not I should phone for the police.

"I'm convinced," I said at last, "that the wound was self-inflicted. Wells acted very strangely. If you are willing, Doctor . . ."

"Yes?"

"We will remain silent about this matter until after the operation. If Wells lives, there would be no need of involving the poor chap in a police investigation."

The doctor nodded. "Very well," he said. "We will operate first and decide afterward."

Howard was laughing silently from his couch. "The

police," he snickered. "Of what use would they be against the things in Mulligan Wood?"

There was an ironic and ominous quality about his mirth that disturbed me. The horrors that we had known in the fog seemed absurd and impossible in the cool, scientific presence of Dr. Smith, and I didn't want to be reminded of them.

The doctor turned from his instruments and whispered into my ear. "Your friend has a slight fever, and apparently it has made him delirious. If you will bring me a glass of water I will mix him a sedative."

I raced to secure a glass, and in a moment we had Howard sleeping soundly.

"Now then," said the doctor as he handed me the lamp. "You must hold this steady and move it about as I direct."

The white, unconscious form of Henry Wells lay upon the table that the doctor and I had cleared, and I trembled all over when I thought of what lay before me.

I should be obliged to stand and gaze into the living brain of my poor friend as the doctor relentlessly laid it bare.

With swift, experienced fingers the doctor administered an anesthetic. I was oppressed by a dreadful feeling that we were committing a crime, that Henry Wells would have violently disapproved, that he would have preferred to die. It is a dreadful thing to mutilate a man's brain. And yet I knew that the doctor's conduct was above reproach, and that the ethics of his profession demanded that he operate.

"We are ready," said Dr. Smith. "Lower the lamp. Carefully now!"

I saw the knife moving in his competent, swift fingers. For a moment I stared, and then I turned my head away. What I had seen in that brief glance made me sick and faint. It may have been fancy, but as I stared at the wall I had the impression that the doctor was on the verge of collapse. He made no sound, but I was almost certain that he had made some horrible discovery.

"Lower the lamp," he said. His voice was hoarse and seemed to come from far down within his throat.

I lowered the lamp an inch without turning my head. I waited for him to reproach me, to swear at me perhaps, but he was as silent as the man on the table. I knew, though, that his fingers were still at work, for I could hear them as they moved about. I could hear his swift, agile fingers moving about the head of Henry Wells.

I suddenly became conscious that my hand was trembling. I wanted to lay down the lamp; I felt that I could no longer hold it.

"Are you nearly through?" I gasped in desperation.

"Hold that lamp steady!" The doctor screamed the command. "If you move that lamp again—I—I won't sew him up. I don't care if they hang me! I'm not a healer of devils!"

I knew not what to do. I could scarcely hold the lamp, and the doctor's threat horrified me.

"Do everything you can," I urged hysterically. "Give him a chance to fight his way back. He was kind and good—once!"

For a moment there was silence, and I feared that he would not heed me. I momentarily expected him to throw down his scalpel and sponge, and dash across the room and out into the fog. It was not until I heard his fingers moving about again that I knew he had decided to give even the damned a chance.

It was after midnight when the doctor told me that I could lay down the lamp. I turned with a cry of relief and encountered a face that I shall never forget. In three quarters of an hour the doctor had aged ten years. There were dark hollows beneath his eyes, and his mouth twitched convulsively.

"He'll not live," he said. "He'll be dead in an hour. I did not touch his brain. I could do nothing. When I saw—how things were—I—I—sewed him up immediately."

"What did you see?" I half-whispered.

A look of unutterable fear came into the doctor's eyes. "I saw—I saw . . ." His voice broke and his whole body

quivered. "I saw . . . oh, the burning shame of it . . . evil that is without shape, that is formless . . ."

Suddenly he straightened and looked wildly about him.

"They will come here and claim him!" he cried. "They have laid their mark upon him and they will come for him. You must not stay here. This house is marked for destruction!"

I watched him helplessly as he seized his hat and bag and crossed to the door. With white, shaking fingers he drew back the latch, and in a moment his lean figure was silhouetted against a square of swirling vapor.

"Remember that I warned you!" he shouted back; and then the fog swallowed him.

Howard was sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"A malicious trick, that!" he was muttering. "To deliberately drug me! Had I known that glass of water . . ."

"How do you feel?" I asked as I shook him violently by the shoulders. "Do you think you can walk?"

"You drug me, and then ask me to walk! Frank, you're as unreasonable as an artist. What is the matter now?"

I pointed to the silent figure on the table. "Mulligan Wood is safer," I said. "He belongs to them now!"

Howard sprang to his feet and shook me by the arm.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "How do you know?"

"The doctor saw his brain," I explained. "And he also saw something that he would not—could not describe. But he told me that they would come for him, and I believe him."

"We must leave here at once!" cried Howard. "Your doctor was right. We are in deadly danger. Even Mulligan Wood—but we need not return to the wood. There is your launch!"

"There is the launch!" I echoed, faint hope rising in my mind.

"The fog will be a most deadly menace," said Howard grimly. "But even death at sea is preferable to *this* horror."

It was not far from the house to the dock, and in less than a minute Howard was seated in the stern of the launch and I was working furiously on the engine. The fog-

horns still moaned, but there were no lights visible anywhere in the harbor. We could not see two feet before our faces. The white wraiths of the fog were dimly visible in the darkness, but beyond them stretched endless night, lightless and full of terror.

Howard was speaking. "Somehow I feel that there is death out there," he said.

"There is more death here," I said as I started the engine. "I think I can avoid the rocks. There is very little wind and I know the harbor."

"And of course we shall have the foghorns to guide us," muttered Howard. "I think we had better make for the open sea."

I agreed.

"The launch wouldn't survive a storm," I said, "but I've no desire to remain in the harbor. If we reach the sea we'll probably be picked up by some ship. It would be sheer folly to remain where they can reach us."

"How do we know how far they can reach?" groaned Howard. "What are the distances of Earth to things that have traveled through space? They will over-run Earth. They will destroy us all utterly."

"We'll discuss that later," I cried as the engine roared into life. "We're going to get as far away from them as possible. Perhaps they haven't *learned* yet! While they're still limitations we may be able to escape."

We moved slowly into the channel, and the sound of the water splashing against the sides of the launch soothed us strangely. At a suggestion from me, Howard had taken the wheel and was slowly bringing her about.

"Keep her steady," I shouted. "There isn't any danger until we get into the Narrows!"

For several minutes I crouched above the engine while Howard steered in silence. Then, suddenly, he turned to me with a gesture of elation.

"I think the fog's lifting," he said.

I stared into the darkness before me. Certainly it seemed less oppressive, and the white spirals of mist that had been continually ascending through it were fading into

insubstantial wisps. "Keep her head on," I shouted. "We're in luck. If the fog clears we'll be able to see the Narrows. Keep a sharp lookout for Mulligan Light."

There is no describing the joy that filled us when we saw the light. Yellow and bright it streamed over the water and illuminated sharply the outlines of the great rocks that rose on both sides of the Narrows.

"Let me have the wheel," I shouted as I stepped quickly forward. "This is a ticklish passage, but we'll come through now with colors flying."

In our excitement and elation we almost forgot the horror that we had left behind us. I stood at the wheel and smiled confidently as we raced over the dark water. Quickly the rocks drew nearer until their vast bulk towered above us.

"We shall certainly make it!" I cried.

But no response came from Howard. I heard him choke and gasp.

"What is the matter?" I asked suddenly, and turning, saw that he was crouching in terror above the engine. His back was turned toward me, but I knew instinctively in which direction he was gazing.

The dim shore that we had left shone like a flaming sunset. Mulligan Wood was burning. Great flames shot up from the highest of the tall trees, and a thick curtain of black smoke rolled slowly eastward, blotting out the few remaining lights in the harbor.

But it was not the flames that caused me to cry out in fear and horror. It was the shape that towered above the trees, the vast, formless shape that moved slowly to and fro across the sky.

God knows I tried to believe that I saw nothing. I tried to believe that the shape was a mere shadow cast by the flames, and I remember that I gripped Howard's arm reassuringly.

"The wood will be destroyed completely," I cried, "and those ghastly things with us will be destroyed with it."

But when Howard turned and shook his head, I knew

that the dim, formless thing that towered above the trees was more than a shadow.

"If we see it clearly, we are lost!" he warned, his voice vibrant with terror. "Pray that it remains without form!"

It is older than the world, I thought, *older than all religion. Before the dawn of civilization men knelt in adoration before it. It is present in all mythologies. It is the primal symbol. Perhaps, in the dim past, thousands and thousands of years ago, it was used to—repel the invaders. I shall fight the shape with a high and terrible mystery.*

I became suddenly curiously calm. I knew that I had hardly a minute to act, that more than our lives were threatened, but I did not tremble. I reached calmly beneath the engine and drew out a quantity of cotton waste.

"Howard," I said, "light a match. It is our only hope. You must strike a match at once."

For what seemed eternities Howard stared at me uncomprehendingly. Then the night was clamorous with his laughter.

"A match!" he shrieked. "A match to warm our little brains! Yes, we shall need a match."

"Trust me!" I entreated. "You must—it is our one hope. Strike a match quickly."

"I do not understand!" Howard was sober now, but his voice quivered.

"I have thought of something that may save us," I said. "Please light this waste for me."

Slowly he nodded. I had told him nothing, but I knew he guessed what I intended to do. Often his insight was uncanny. With fumbling fingers he drew out a match and struck it.

"Be bold," he said. "Show them that you are unafraid. Make the sign boldly."

As the waste caught fire, the form above the trees stood out with a frightful clarity.

I raised the flaming cotton and passed it quickly before my body in a straight line from my left to my right shoulder. Then I raised it to my forehead and lowered it to my knees.

In an instant Howard had snatched the brand and was repeating the sign. He made two crosses, one against his body and one against the darkness with the torch held at arm's length.

For a moment I shut my eyes, but I could still see the shape above the trees. Then slowly its form became less distinct, became vast and chaotic—and when I opened my eyes it had vanished. I saw nothing but the flaming forest and the shadows cast by the tall trees.

The horror had passed, but I did not move. I stood like an image of stone staring over the black water. Then something seemed to burst in my head. My brain spun dizzily, and I tottered against the rail.

I would have fallen, but Howard caught me about the shoulders. "We've saved!" he shouted. "We've won through."

"I'm glad," I said. But I was too utterly exhausted to really rejoice. My legs gave way beneath me and my head fell forward. All the sights and sounds of Earth were swallowed up in a merciful blackness.

2

Howard was writing when I entered the room.

"How is the story going?" I asked.

For a moment he ignored my question. Then he slowly turned and faced me. He was hollow-eyed, and his pallor was alarming.

"It's not going well," he said at last. "It doesn't satisfy me. There are problems that still elude me. I haven't been able to capture *all* of the horror of the thing in Mulligan Wood."

I sat down and lit a cigarette.

"I want you to explain that horror to me," I said. "For three weeks I have waited for you to speak. I know that you have some knowledge which you are concealing from me. What was the damp, spongy thing that landed on Wells' head in the woods? Why did we hear a droning

as we fled in the fog? What was the meaning of the shape that we saw above the trees? And why, in heaven's name, didn't the horror spread as we feared it might? What stopped it? Howard, what do you think really happened to Wells' brain? Did his body burn with the farm, or did they—*claim* it? And the other body that was found in Mulligan Wood—that lean, blackened horror with riddled head—how do you explain that?"

(Two days after the fire a skeleton had been found in Mulligan Wood. A few fragments of burnt flesh still adhered to the bones, and the skullcap was missing.)

It was a long time before Howard spoke again. He sat with bowed head fingering his notebook, and his body trembled all over. At last he raised his eyes. They shone with a wild light and his lips were ashen.

"Yes," he said. "We will discuss the horror together. Last week I did not want to speak of it. It seemed too awful to put into words. But I shall never rest in peace until I have woven it into a story, until I have made my readers feel and see that dreadful, unspeakable thing. And I cannot write of it until I am convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that I understand it myself. It may help me to talk about it.

"You have asked me what the damp thing was that fell on Wells' head. I believe that it was a human brain—the essence of a human brain drawn out through a hole, or holes, in a human head. I believe the brain was drawn out by imperceptible degrees, and reconstructed again by the horror. I believe that for some purpose of its own it used human brains—perhaps to learn from them. Or perhaps it merely played with them. The blackened, riddled body in Mulligan Wood? That was the body of the first victim, some poor fool who got lost between the tall trees. I rather suspect the trees helped. I think the horror endowed them with a strange life. Anyhow, the poor chap lost his brain. The horror took it, and played with it, and then accidentally dropped it. It dropped it on Wells' head. Wells said that the long, thin and very white arm he saw was looking for something that it had dropped. Of course Wells didn't

really see the arm objectively, but the horror that is without form or color had already entered his brain and clothed itself in human thought.

"As for the droning that we heard and the shape we thought we saw above the burning forest—that was the horror seeking to make itself felt, seeking to break down barriers, seeking to enter our brains and clothe itself with our thoughts. It almost got us. If we had seen the white arm we should have been lost."

Howard walked to the window. He drew back the curtains and gazed for a moment at the crowded harbor and the tall, white buildings that towered against the moon. He was staring at the skyline of lower Manhattan. Sheer beneath him the cliffs of Brooklyn Heights loomed darkly.

"Why didn't they conquer?" he cried. "They could have destroyed us utterly. They could have wiped us from Earth—all our wealth and power would have gone down before them."

I shivered. "Yes . . . why didn't the horror spread?" I asked.

Howard shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know. Perhaps they discovered that human brains were too trivial and absurd to bother with. Perhaps we ceased to amuse them. Perhaps they grew tired of us. But it is conceivable that the *sign* destroyed them—or sent them back through space. I think they came millions of years ago, and were frightened away by the sign. When they discovered that we had not forgotten the use of the sign they may have fled in terror. Certainly there has been no manifestation for three weeks. I think that they are gone."

"And Henry Wells?" I asked.

"Well, his body was not found. I imagine they came for him."

"And you honestly intend to put this—this obscenity into a story? Oh my God! The whole thing is so incredible, so unheard of, that I can't believe it. Did we not dream it all? Were we ever really in Partridgeville? Did we sit in an ancient house and discuss frightful things while the fog

curled about us? Did we walk through that unholy wood? Were the trees really alive, and did Henry Wells run about on his hands and knees like a wolf?"

Howard sat down quietly and rolled up his sleeve. He thrust his thin arm toward me.

"Can you argue away that scar?" he said. "There are the marks of the beast that attacked me—the man-beast that was Henry Wells. A dream? I would cut off this arm immediately at the elbow if you could convince me that it was a dream."

I walked to the window and remained for a long time staring at Manhattan. *There,* I thought, *is something substantial. It is absurd to imagine that anything could destroy it. It is absurd to imagine that the horror was really as terrible as it seemed to us in Partridgeville. I must persuade Howard not to write about it. We must both try to forget it.*

I returned to where he sat and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"You'll give up the idea of putting it into a story?" I urged gently.

"Never!" He was on his feet, and his eyes were blazing. "Do you think I would give up now when I've almost captured it? I shall write a story that will penetrate to the inmost core of a horror that is without form and substance, but more terrible than a plague-stricken city when the cadences of a tolling bell sound an end to all hope. I shall surpass Poe. I shall surpass all the masters."

"Surpass them and be damned then," I said angrily. "That way madness lies, but it is useless to argue with you. Your egoism is too colossal."

I turned and walked swiftly out of the room. It occurred to me as I descended the stairs that I made an idiot of myself with my fears, but even as I went down I looked fearfully back over my shoulder, as though I expected a great stone weight to descend from above and crush me to the earth. *He should forget the horror,* I thought. *He should wipe it from his mind. He will go mad if he writes about it.*

Three days passed before I saw Howard again.

"Come in," he said in a curiously hoarse voice when I knocked on his door.

I found him in dressing-gown and slippers, and I knew as soon as I saw him that he was terribly exultant.

"I have triumphed, Frank!" he cried. "I have reproduced the form that is formless, the burning shame that man has not looked upon, the crawling, fleshless obscenity that sucks at our brains!"

Before I could so much as gasp he placed the bulky manuscript in my hands.

"Read it, Frank," he commanded. "Sit down at once and read it!"

I crossed to the window and sat down on the lounge. I sat there oblivious to everything but the typewritten sheets before me. I confess that I was consumed with curiosity. I had never questioned Howard's power. With words he wrought miracles; breaths from the unknown blew always over his pages, and things that had passed beyond Earth returned at his bidding. But could he even suggest the horror that we had known?—could he even so much as hint at the loathsome, crawling thing that had claimed the brain of Henry Wells?

I read the story through. I read it slowly, and clutched at the pillows beside me in a frenzy of loathing. As soon as I had finished it Howard snatched it from me. He evidently suspected that I desired to tear it to shreds.

"What do you think of it?" he cried exultantly.

"It is indescribably foul!" I exclaimed. "It violates privacies of the mind that should never be laid bare."

"But you will concede that I have made the horror convincing?"

I nodded and reached for my hat. "You have made it so convincing that I can not remain and discuss it with you. I intend to walk until morning. I intend to walk until I am too weary to care, or think, or remember."

"It is a very great story!" he shouted at me, but I passed down the stair and out of the house without replying.

3

It was past midnight when the telephone rang. I laid down the book I was reading and lowered the receiver.

"Hello. Who is there?" I asked.

"Frank, this is Howard!" The voice was strangely high-pitched. "Come as quickly as you can. *They've come back!* And Frank, the sign is powerless. I've tried the sign, but the droning is getting louder, and a dim shape . . ." Howard's voice trailed off disastrously.

I fairly screamed into the receiver. "Courage, man! Do not let them suspect that you are afraid. Make the sign again and again. I will come at once."

Howard's voice came again, more hoarsely this time. "The shape is growing clearer and clearer. And there is nothing I can do! Frank, I have lost the power to make the sign. I have forfeited all right to the protection of the sign. I've become a priest of the Devil. That story—I should never have written that story."

"Show them that you are unafraid!" I cried.

"I'll try! I'll try! Ah, my God! The shape is . . ."

I did not wait to hear more. Frantically seizing my hat and coat I dashed down the stairs and out into the street. As I reached the curb a dizziness seized me. I clung to a lamp post to keep from falling, and waved my hand madly at a fleeting taxi. Luckily the driver saw me. The car stopped and I staggered out into the street and climbed into it.

"Quick!" I shouted. "Take me to Ten Brooklyn Heights!"

"Yes, sir. Cold night, ain't it?"

"Cold!" I shouted. "It will be cold indeed when they get in. It will be cold indeed when they start to . . ."

The driver stared at me in amazement. "That's all right, sir," he said. "We'll get you home all right, sir. Brooklyn Heights, did you say, sir?"

"Brooklyn Heights," I groaned, and collapsed against the cushions.

As the car raced forward I tried not to think of the horror that awaited me. I clutched desperately at straws. *It is conceivable,* I thought, *that Howard has gone temporarily insane. How could the horror have found him among so many millions of people? It can not be that* they *have deliberately sought him out. It can not be that they would deliberately choose him from among such multitudes. He is too insignificant—all human beings are too insignificant. They would never deliberately angle for human beings. They would never deliberately trawl for human beings—but they did seek Henry Wells. And what did Howard say? 'I have become a priest of the Devil.' Why not* their *priest? What if Howard has become their priest on Earth? What if his story has made him their priest?*

The thought was a nightmare to me, and I put it furiously from me. *He will have courage to resist them,* I thought. *He will show them that he is not afraid.*

"Here we are, sir. Shall I help you in, sir?"

The car had stopped, and I groaned as I realized that I was about to enter what might prove to be my tomb. I descended to the sidewalk and handed the driver all the change that I possessed. He stared at me in amazement.

"You've given me too much," he said. "Here, sir . . ."

But I waved him aside and dashed up the stoop of the house before me. As I fitted a key into the door I could hear him muttering: "Craziest drunk I ever seen! He gives me four bucks to drive him ten blocks, and doesn't want no thanks or nothin' . . ."

The lower hall was unlighted. I stood at the foot of the stairs and shouted. "I'm here, Howard! Can you come down?"

There was no answer. I waited for perhaps ten seconds, but not a sound came from the room above.

"I'm coming up!" I shouted in desperation, and started to climb the stairs. I was trembling all over. *They've got him,* I thought. *I'm too late. Perhaps I had better not—great God, what was that?*

I was unbelievably terrified. There was no mistaking the sounds in the room above, someone was volubly pleading and crying aloud in agony. Was it Howard's voice that I heard? I caught a few words indistinctly. "Crawling—ugh! Crawling—ugh! Oh, have pity! Cold and clee-ar. Crawling—ugh! God in heaven!"

I had reached the landing, and when the pleadings rose to hoarse shrieks I fell to my knees, and made against my body, and upon the wall beside me, and in the air—the sign. I made the primal sign that had saved us in Mulligan Wood, but this time I made it crudely, not with fire, but with fingers that trembled and caught at my clothes, and I made it without courage or hope, made it darkly, with a conviction that nothing could save me.

And then I got up quickly and went on up the stairs. My prayer was that they would take me quickly, that my sufferings should be brief under the stars.

The door of Howard's room was ajar. By a tremendous effort I stretched out my hand and grasped the knob. Slowly I swung it inward.

For a moment I saw nothing but the motionless form of Howard lying upon the floor. He was lying upon his back. His knees were drawn up and he had raised his hand before his face, palms outward, as it to blot out a vision unspeakable.

Upon entering the room I had deliberately, by lowering my eyes, narrowed my range of vision. I saw only the floor and the lower section of the room. I did not want to raise my eyes. I had lowered them in self-protection because I dreaded what the room held.

I did not want to raise my eyes, but there were forces, powers at work in the room which I could not resist. I knew that if I looked up, the horror might destroy me, but I had no choice.

Slowly, painfully, I raised my eyes and stared across the room. It would have been better, I think, if I had rushed forward immediately and surrendered to the thing that towered there. The vision of that terrible, darkly shrouded shape will come between me and the pleasures

of the world as long as I remain in the world.

From the ceiling to the floor it towered, and it threw off blinding light. And pierced by the shafts, whirling around and around, were the pages of Howard's story.

In the center of the room, between the ceiling and the floor, the pages whirled about, and the light burned through the sheets, and descending in spiraling shafts entered the brain of my poor friend. Into his head, the light was pouring in a continuous stream, and above, the Master of the light moved with a slow swaying of its entire bulk. I screamed and covered my eyes with my hands, but still the Master moved—back and forth, back and forth. And still the light poured into the brain of my friend.

And then there came from the mouth of the Master a most awful sound . . . I had forgotten the sign that I had made three times below in the darkness. I had forgotten the high and terrible mystery before which all the invaders were powerless. But when I saw it forming itself in the room, forming itself immaculately, with a terrible integrity above the downstreaming light, I knew that I was saved.

I sobbed and fell upon my knees. The light dwindled, and the Master shriveled before my eyes.

And then from the walls, from the ceiling, from the floor, there leapt flame—a white and cleansing flame that consumed, that devoured and destroyed forever.

But my friend was dead.

THE DWELLER IN DARKNESS

AUGUST DERLETH

Searchers after horror haunt strange, far places. For them are the catacombs of Ptolemais, and the carven mausolea of the nightmare countries. They climb to the moonlit towers of ruined Rhine castles, and falter down black cobwebbed steps beneath the scattered stones of forgotten cities in Asia. The haunted wood and the desolate mountain are their shrines and they linger around the sinister monoliths of uninhabited islands. But the true epicure in the terrible, to whom a new thrill of unutterable ghastliness is the chief end and justification of existence, esteems most of all the ancient, lonely farmhouses of backwoods regions; for there the dark elements of strength, solitude, grotesqueness and ignorance combine to form the perfection of the hideous.

—H. P. LOVECRAFT

UNTIL recently, if a traveler in north central Wisconsin took the left fork at the junction of the Brule River highway and the Chequamegon pike on the way to Pashepaho, he would find himself in country so primitive that it would seem remote from all human contact. If he drove on along the little-used road, he might in time pass a few

tumble-down shacks where presumably people had once lived and which have long ago been taken back by the encroaching forest; it is not desolate country, but an area thick with growth, and over all its expanse there persists an intangible aura of the sinister, a kind of ominous oppression of the spirit quickly manifest to even the most casual traveler, for the road he has taken becomes ever more and more difficult to travel, and is eventually lost just short of a deserted lodge built on the edge of a clear blue lake around which century-old trees brood eternally, a country where the only sounds are the cries of the owls, the whippoorwills, and the eerie loons at night, and the wind's voice in the trees, and—but is it always the wind's voice in the trees? And who can say whether the snapped twig is the sign of an animal passing—or of something more, some other creature beyond man's ken?

For the forest surrounding the abandoned lodge at Rick's Lake had a curious reputation long before I myself knew it, a reputation which transcended similar stories about similar primeval places. There were odd rumors about something that dwelt in the depths of the forest's darkness—by no means the conventional wild whisperings of ghosts—of something half-animal, half-man, fearsomely spoken of by such natives as inhabited the edges of that region, and referred to only by stubborn head-shakings among the Indians who occasionally came out of that country and made their way south. The forest had an evil reputation; it was nothing short of that; and already, before the turn of the century, it had a history that gave pause even to the most intrepid adventurer.

The first record of it was left in the writings of a missionary on his way through that country to come to the aid of a tribe of Indians reported to the post at Chequamegon Bay in the north to be starving. Fr. Piregard vanished, but the Indians later brought in his effects: a sandal, his rosary, and a prayerbook in which he had written certain curious words which had been carefully preserved: "I have the conviction that some creature is following me. I thought at first it was a bear, but I am now compelled

to believe that it is something incredibly more monstrous than anything on this earth. Darkness is falling, and I believe I have developed a slight delirium, for I persist in hearing strange music and other curious sounds which can surely not derive from any natural source. There is also a disturbing illusion as of great footsteps which actually shake the earth, and I have several times encountered a very large footprint which varies in shape. . . ."

The second record is far more sinister. When Big Bob Hiller, one of the most rapacious lumber barons of the entire midwest, began to encroach upon the Rick's Lake country in the middle of the last century, he could not fail to be impressed by the stand of pine in the area near the lake, and, though he did not own it, he followed the usual custom of the lumber barons and sent his men in from an adjoining piece he did own, under the intended explanation that he did not know where his line ran. Thirteen men failed to return from that first day's work on the edge of the forest area surrounding Rick's Lake; two of their bodies were never recovered; four were found —inconceivably—in the lake, several miles from where they had been cutting timber; the others were discovered at various places in the forest. Hiller thought he had a lumber war on his hands, laid his men off to mislead his unknown opponent, and then suddenly ordered them back to work in the forbidden region. After he had lost five more men, Hiller pulled out, and no hand since his time touched the forest, save for one or two individuals who took up land there and moved into the area.

One and all, these individuals moved out within a short time, saying little, but hinting much. Yet, the nature of their whispered hints was such that they were soon forced to abandon any explanation; so incredible were the tales they told, with overtones of something too horrible for description, of age-old evil which preceded anything dreamed of by even the most learned archeologist. Only one of them vanished, and no trace of him was ever found. The others came back out of the forest and in the course of time were lost somewhere among other people in

the United States—all save a half-breed known as Old Peter, who was obsessed with the idea that there were mineral deposits in the vicinity of the wood, and occasionally went to camp on its edge, being careful not to venture in.

It was inevitable that the Rick's Lake legends would ultimately reach the attention of Professor Upton Gardner of the State university; he had completed collections of Paul Bunyan, Whiskey Jack and Hodag tales, and was engaged upon a compilation of place legends when he first encountered the curious half-forgotten tales that emanated from the region of Rick's lake. I discovered later that his first reaction to them was one of casual interest; legends abound in out-of-the-way places, and there was nothing to indicate that these were of any more import than others. True, there was no similarity in the strictest sense of the word to the more familiar tales; for, while the usual legends concerned themselves with ghostly appearances of men and animals, lost treasure, tribal beliefs, and the like, those of Rick's Lake were curiously unusual in their insistence upon utterly outré creatures—or "a creature"—since no one had ever reported seeing more than one even vaguely in the forest's darkness, half-man, half-beast, with always the hint that this description was inadequate in that it did injustice to the narrator's concept of what it was that lurked there in the vicinity of the lake. Nevertheless, Professor Gardner would in all probability have done little more than add the legends as he heard them to his collection, if it had not been for the reports—seemingly unconnected—of two curious facts, and the accidental discovery of a third.

The two facts were both newspaper accounts carried by Wisconsin papers within a week of each other. The first was a terse, half-comic report headed: *Sea Serpent in Wisconsin Lake?,* and read: "Pilot Joseph X. Castleton, on test flight over northern Wisconsin yesterday, reported seeing a large animal of some kind bathing by night in a forest lake in the vicinity of Chequamegon. Castleton was caught in a thundershower and was flying low at the time,

when, in an effort to ascertain his whereabouts, he looked down when lightning flashed, and saw what appeared to be a very large animal rising from the waters of a lake below him, and vanish into the forest. The pilot added no details to his story, but asserts that the creature he saw was not the Loch Ness monster." The second story was the utterly fantastic tale of the discovery of the body of Fr. Piregard, well-preserved, in the hollow trunk of a tree along the Brule River. At first called a lost member of the Marquette-Joliet Expedition, Fr. Piregard was quickly identified. To this report was appended a frigid statement by the President of the State Historical Society dismissing the discovery as a hoax.

The discovery Professor Gardner made was simply that an old friend was actually the owner of the abandoned lodge and most of the shore of Rick's Lake.

The sequence of events was thus clearly inevitable. Professor Gardner instantly associated both newspaper accounts with the Rick's Lake legends; this might not have been enough to stir him to drop his researches into the general mass of legends abounding in Wisconsin for specific research of quite another kind, but the occurrence of something even more astonishing sent him posthaste to the owner of the abandoned lodge for permission to take the place over in the interests of science. What spurred him to take this action was nothing less than a request from the curator of the state museum to visit his office late one night and view a new exhibit which had arrived. He went there in the company of Laird Dorgan, and it was Laird who came to me.

But that was after Professor Gardner vanished.

For he did vanish; after sporadic reports from Rick's Lake over a period of three months, all word from the lodge ceased entirely, and nothing further was heard of Professor Upton Gardner.

Laird came to my room at the University Club late one night in October; his frank blue eyes were clouded, his lips tense, his brow furrowed, and there was everything to show that he was in a state of moderate excitation which

did not derive from liquor. I assumed that he was working too hard; the first period tests in his University of Wisconsin classes were just over; and Laird habitually took tests seriously—even as a student he had done so, and now as an instructor, he was doubly conscientious.

But it was not that. Professor Gardner had been missing almost a month now, and it was this which preyed on his mind. He said as much in so many words, adding, "Jack, I've got to go up there and see what I can do."

"Man, if the sheriff and the posse haven't discovered anything, what can you do?" I asked.

"For one thing, I know more than they do."

"If so, why didn't you tell them?"

"Because it's not the sort of thing they'd pay any attention to."

"Legends?"

"No."

He was looking at me speculatively, as if wondering whether he could trust me. I was suddenly conscious of the conviction that he *did* know something which he, at least, regarded with the gravest concern; and at the same time I had the most curious sensation of premonition and warning that I have ever experienced. In that instant the entire room seemed tense, the air electrified.

"If I go up there—do you think you could go along?"

"I guess I could manage."

"Good." He took a turn or two about the room, his eyes brooding, looking at me from time to time, still betraying uncertainty and an inability to make up his mind.

"Look, Laird—sit down and take it easy. That caged lion stuff isn't good for your nerves."

He took my advice; he sat down, covered his face with his hands, and shuddered. For a moment I was alarmed; but he snapped out of it in a few seconds, leaned back, and lit a cigarette.

"You know those legends about Rick's Lake, Jack?"

I assured him that I knew them and the history of the place from the beginning—as much as had been recorded.

"And those stories in the papers I mentioned to you . . .?"

The stories, too. I remembered them since Laird has discussed with me their effect on his employer.

"That second one, about Fr. Piregard," he began, hesitated, stopped. But then, taking a deep breath, he began again. "You know, Gardner and I went over to the curator's office one night last spring."

"Yes, I was east at the time."

"Of course. Well, we went over there. The curator had something to show us. What do you think it was?"

"No idea. What was it?"

"That body in the tree!"

"No!"

"Gave us quite a jolt. There it was, hollow trunk and all, just the way it had been found. It had been shipped down to the museum for exhibition. But it was never exhibited, of course—for a very good reason. When Gardner saw it, he thought it was a waxwork. But it wasn't."

"You don't mean that it was the real thing?"

Laird nodded. "I know it's incredible."

"It's just not possible."

"Well, yes, I suppose it's impossible. But it was so. That's why it wasn't exhibited—just taken out and buried."

"I don't quite follow that."

He leaned forward and said very earnestly, "Because when it came in it had all the appearance of being completely preserved, as if by some natural embalming process. It wasn't. It was frozen. It began to thaw out that night. And there were certain things about it that indicated that Fr. Piregard hadn't been dead the three centuries history said he had. The body began to go to pieces in a dozen ways—but no crumbling into dust, nothing like that. Gardner estimated that he hadn't been dead over five years. Where had he been in the meantime?"

He was quite sincere. I would not at first have believed it. But there was a certain disquieting earnestness about Laird that forbade any levity on my part. If I had treated his story as a joke, as I had the impulse to do, he would have shut up like a clam, and walked out of my room to

brood about this thing in secret, with Lord knows what harm to himself. For a little while I said absolutely nothing.

"You don't believe it."

"I haven't said so."

"I can feel it."

"No. It's hard to take. Let's say I believe in your sincerity."

"That's fair enough," he said grimly. "Do you believe in me sufficiently to go along up to the lodge and find out what may have happened there?"

"Yes, I do."

"But I think you'd better read these excerpts from Gardner's letters first." He put them down on my desk like a challenge. He had copied them off onto a single sheet of paper, and as I took this up he went on, talking rapidly, explaining that the letters had been those written by Gardner from the lodge. When he finished, I turned to the excerpts and read.

> I cannot deny that there is about the lodge, the lake, even the forest an aura of evil, of impending danger—it is more than that, Laird, if I could explain it, but archeology is my forte, and not fiction. For it would take fiction, I think, to do justice to this thing I feel. . . . Yes, there are times when I have the distinct feeling that *someone* or *something* is watching me out of the forest or from the lake—there does not seem to be a distinction as I would like to understand it, and while it does not make me uneasy, nevertheless it is enough to give me pause. I managed the other day to make contact with Old Peter, the half-breed. He was at the moment a little the worse for firewater, but when I mentioned the lodge and the forest to him, he drew into himself like a clam. But he did put words to it: he called it the Wendigo—you are familiar with this legend, which properly belongs to the French-Canadian country.

That was the first letter, written about a week after Gardner had reached the abandoned lodge on Rick's Lake. The second was extremely terse, and had been sent by special delivery.

Will you wire Miskatonic University at Arkham, Massachusetts to ascertain if there is available for study a photostatic copy of a book known as the *Necronomicon,* by an Arabian writer who signs himself Abdul Alhazred? Make inquiry also for the *Pnakotic Manuscripts* and the *Book of Eibon,* and determine whether it is possible to purchase through one of the local bookstores a copy of *The Outsider and Others,* by H. P. Lovecraft, published by Arkham House last year. I believe that these books individually and collectively may be helpful in determining just what it is that haunts this place. For there *is* something; make no mistake about that; I am convinced of it, and when I tell you that I believe it has lived here not for years, but for centuries—perhaps even before the time of man—you will understand that I may be on the threshold of great discoveries.

Startling as this letter was, the third was even more so. For an interval of a fortnight went by between the second and third letters, and it was apparent that something had happened to threaten Professor Gardner's composure, for his third letter was even in this selected excerpt marked by extreme perturbation.

Everything evil here. . . . I don't know whether it is the Black Goat With a Thousand Young or the Faceless One and/or something more that rides the wind. For God's sake . . . those accursed fragments! . . . Something in the lake, too, and at night the sounds! How still, and then suddenly those horrible flutes, those watery ululations! Not a bird, not an animal then—only those ghastly sounds. And the voices! . . . Or is it but dream? It is my own voice I hear in the darkness? . . .

I found myself increasingly shaken as I read those excerpts. Certain implications and hints lodged between the lines of what Professor Gardner had written were suggestive of terrible, ageless evil, and I felt that there was opening up before Laird Dorgan and myself an adventure so incredible, so bizarre, and so unbelievably dangerous that we might well not return to tell it. Yet even then

there was a lurking doubt in my mind that we would say anything about what we found at Rick's Lake.

"What do you say?" asked Laird impatiently.

"I'm going."

"Good! Everything's ready. I've even got a dictaphone and batteries enough to run it. I've arranged for the sheriff of the county at Pashepaho to replace Gardner's notes, and leave everything just the way it was."

"A dictaphone," I broke in. "What for?"

"Those sounds he write about—we can settle that for once and all. If they're there to be heard, the dictaphone will record them; if they're just imagination, it won't." He paused, his eyes very grave. "You know, Jack, we may not come out of this thing."

"I know."

I did not say so, because I knew that Laird, too, felt the same way I did: that we were going like two dwarfed Davids to face an adversary greater than any Goliath, an adversary invisible and unknown, who bore no name and was shrouded in legend and fear, a dweller not only of the darkness of the wood but in that greater darkness which the mind of man has sought to explore since his dawn.

II

Sheriff Cowan was at the lodge when we arrived. Old Peter was with him. The sheriff was a tall, saturnine individual clearly of Yankee stock; though representing the fourth generation of his family in the area, he spoke with a twang which doubtless had persisted from generation to generation. The half-breed was a dark-skinned, ill-kempt fellow; he had a way of saying little, and from time to time grinned or snickered as at some secret joke.

"I brung up express that come some time past for the professor," said the sheriff. "From some place in Massachusetts was one of 'em, and the other from down near Madison. Didn't seem t' me 'twas worth sendin' back. So

I took and brung 'em with the keys. Don't know that you fellers 'll git anyw'eres. My posse and me went through the hull woods, didn't see a thing."

"You ain't tellin' 'em everything," put in the half-breed, grinning.

"Ain't no more to tell."

"What about that carvin'?"

The sheriff shrugged irritably. "Damn it, Peter, that ain't got nothin' to do with the professor's disappearance."

"He made a drawin' of it, didn't he?"

So pressed, the sheriff confided that two members of his posse had stumbled upon a great slab or rock in the center of the wood; it was mossy and overgrown, but there was upon it an odd drawing, plainly as old as the forest—probably the work of one of the primitive Indian tribes once known to inhabit northern Wisconsin before the Dacotah Sioux and the Winnebago—

Old Peter grunted with contempt. "No Indian drawing."

The sheriff shook this off and went on. The drawing represented some kind of creature, but no one could tell what it was; it was certainly not a man, but on the other hand, it did not seem to be hairy, like a beast. Moreover, the unknown artist had forgotten to put in a face.

" 'N beside it there wuz two things," said the half-breed.

"Don't pay no attention to him," said the sheriff then.

"What two things?" demanded Laird.

"Jest things," replied the half-breed, snickering. "Heh, heh! Ain't no other way to tell it—warn't human, warn't animal, jest things."

Cowan was irritated. He became suddenly brusque; he ordered the half-breed to keep still, and went on to say that if we needed him, he would be at his office in Pashepaho. He did not explain how we were to make contact with him, since there was no telephone at the lodge, but plainly he had no high regard for the legends abounding about the area into which we had ventured with such determination. The half-breed regarded us with an almost stolid indifference, broken only by his sly grin from time to time, and his dark eyes examined our luggage

with keen speculation and interest. Laird met his gaze occasionally, and each time Old Peter indolently shifted his eyes. The sheriff went on talking; the notes and drawings the missing man had made were on the desk he had used in the big room which made up almost the entire ground floor of the lodge, just where he had found them; they were the property of the State of Wisconsin and were to be returned to the sheriff's office when we had finished with them. At the threshold he turned for a parting shot to say he hoped we would not be staying too long, because "While I ain't givin' in to any of them crazy ideas—it jest ain't been so healthy for some of the people who came here."

"The half-breed knows or suspects something," said Laird at once. "We'll have to get in touch with him sometime when the sheriff's not around."

"Didn't Gardner write that he was pretty close-mouthed when it came to concrete data?"

"Yes, but he indicated the way out. Firewater."

We went to work and settled ourselves, storing our food supplies, setting up the dictaphone, getting things into readiness for a stay of at least a fortnight; our supplies were sufficient for this length of time, and if we had to remain longer, we could always go into Pashepaho for more food. Moreover, Laird had brought fully two dozen dictaphone cylinders, so that we had plenty of them for an indefinite time, particularly since we did not intend to use them except when we slept—and this would not be often, for we had agreed that one of us would watch while the other took his rest, an arrangement we were not sanguine enough to believe would hold good without fail, hence the machine. It was not until after we had settled our belongings that we turned to the things the sheriff had brought and, meanwhile, we had ample opportunity to become aware of the very definite aura of the place.

For it was not imagination that there was a strange aura about the lodge and the grounds. It was not alone the brooding, almost sinister stillness, not alone the tall pines encroaching upon the lodge, not alone the blue-black

waters of the lake, but something more than that: a hushed, almost menacing air of waiting, a kind of aloof assurance that was ominous—as one might imagine a hawk might feel leisurely cruising above prey it knows will not escape its talons. Nor was this a fleeting impression, for it was obvious almost at once, and it grew with sure steadiness throughout the hour or so that we worked there; moreover, it was so plainly to be felt, that Laird commented upon it as if he had long ago accepted it, and knew that I too had done so! Yet there was nothing primary to which this could be attributed. There are thousands of lakes like Rick's in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota, and while many of them are not in forest areas, those which are do not differ greatly in their physical aspects from Rick's; so there was nothing in the appearance of the place which at all contributed to the brooding sense of horror which seemed to invade us from outside. Indeed, the setting was rather the opposite; under the afternoon sunlight, the old lodge, the lake, the high forest all around had a pleasant air of seclusion—an air which made the contrast with the intangible aura of evil all the more pointed and fearsome. The fragrance of the pines, together with the freshness of the water served, too, to emphasize the intangible mood of menace.

We turned at last to the material left on Professor Gardner's desk. The express packages contained, as expected, a copy of *The Outsider and Others,* by H. P. Lovecraft, shipped by the publishers, and photostatic copies of manuscript and printed pages taken from the *R'lyeh Text* and Ludwig Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis*—apparently sent for to supplement the earlier data dispatched to the professor by the librarian of Miskatonic University, for we found among the material brought back by the sheriff certain pages from the *Necronomicon,* in the translation by Olaus Wormius, and likewise from the *Pnakotic Manuscripts.* But it was not these pages, which for the most part were unintelligible to us, which held our attention. It was the fragmentary notes left by Professor Gardner.

It was quite evident that he had not had time to do

more than put down such questions and thoughts as had occurred to him, and, while there was little assimilation manifest, yet there was about what he had written a certain terrible suggestiveness which grew to colossal proportions as everything he had not put down became obvious.

"Is the slab a) only an ancient ruin, b) a marker similar to a tomb, c) or a focal point for Him? If the latter, from outside? Or from beneath? (NB: Nothing to show that the thing has been disturbed.)

"Cthulhu or Kthulhut. In Rick's Lake? Subterrene passage to Superior and the sea via the St. Lawrence? (NB: Except for the aviator's story, nothing to show that the Thing has anything to do with the water. Probably not one of the water beings.)

"Hastur. But manifestations do not seem to have been of air beings either.

"Yog-Sothoth. Of earth certainly—but he is not the Dweller in Darkness." (NB: The Thing, whatever it is, must be of the earth deities, even though it travels in time and space. It could possibly be more than one, of which only the earth being is occasionally visible. Ithaqua, perhaps?)

" 'Dweller in Darkness.' Could He be the same as the Blind, Faceless One? He could be truly said to be dwelling in darkness. Nyarlathotep? Or Shub-Niggurath?

"What of fire? There must be a deity here, too. But no mention. (NB: Presumably, if the Earth and Water Beings oppose those of Air, then they must oppose those of Fire as well. Yet there is evidence here and there to show that there is more constant struggle between Air and Water Beings than between those of Earth and Air. Abdul Alhazred is damnably obscure in places. There is no clue as to the identity of Cthugha in that terrible footnote.

"Partier says I am on the wrong track. I'm not convinced. Whoever it is that plays the music in the night is a master of hellish cadence and rhythm. And, yes, of cacophony. (Cf. Bierce and Chambers.)"

That was all.

"What incredible gibberish!" I exclaimed.

And yet—and yet I knew instinctively it was not gibberish. Strange things had happened here, things which demanded an explanation which was not terrestrial; and here, in Gardner's handwriting, was evidence to show that he had not only arrived at the same conclusion, but passed it. However it might sound, Gardner had written it in all seriousness, and clearly for his own use alone, since only the vaguest and most suggestive outline seemed apparent. Moreover, the notes had a startling effect on Laird; he had gone quite pale, and now stood looking down as if he could not believe what he had seen.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Jack—he was in contact wih Partier."

"It doesn't register," I answered, but even as I spoke I remembered the hush-hush that had attended the severing of old Professor Partier's connection with the University of Wisconsin. It had been given out to the press that the old man had been somewhat too liberal in his lectures in anthropology—that is, he had "Communistic leanings!"—which everyone who knew Partier realized was far from the facts. But he had said strange things in his lectures, he had talked of horrible, forbidden matters, and it had been thought best to let him out quietly. Unfortunately, Partier went out trumpeting in his contemptuous manner, and it had been difficult to hush the matter up satisfactorily.

"He's living down in Wausau now," said Laird.

"Do you suppose he could translate all this?" I asked and knew that I had echoed the thought in Laird's mind.

"He's three hours away by car. We'll copy these notes, and if nothing happens—if we can't discover anything, we'll go to see him."

If nothing happened—!

If the lodge by day had seemed brooding in an air of ominousness, by night it semed surcharged with menace. Moreover, events began to take place with disarming and insidious suddenness, beginning in mid-evening, when Laird and I were sitting over those curious photostats sent out by Miskatonic University in lieu of the books and

manuscripts themselves, which were far too valuable to permit out of their haven. The first manifestation was so simple that for some time neither of us noticed its strangeness. It was simply the sound in the trees as of rising wind, the growing song among the pines. The night was warm, and all the windows of the lodge stood open. Laird commented on the wind, and went on giving voice to his perplexity regarding the fragments before us. Not until half an hour had gone by and the sound of the wind had risen to the proportions of a gale did it occur to Laird that something was wrong, and he looked up, his eyes going from one open window to another in growing apprehension. Then I, too, became aware.

Despite the tumult of the wind, no draft of air had circulated in the room, not one of the light curtains at the windows was so much as trembling!

With one simultaneous movement, both of us stepped out upon the broad verandah of the lodge.

There was no wind, no breath of air stirring to touch our hands and faces. There was only the sound in the forest. And both of us looked up to where the pines were silhouetted against the starswept heavens, expecting their tops would be bending before a high gale; but there was no movement whatever; the pines stood still, motionless; and the sound as of wind continued all around us. We stood on the verandah for half an hour, vainly attempting to determine the source of the sound—and then, as unobtrusively as it had begun, it stopped!

The hour was now approaching midnight, and Laird prepared for bed; he had slept little the previous night, and we had agreed that I was to take the first watch until four in the morning. Neither of us said much about the sound in the pines, but what was said indicated a desire to believe that there was a natural explanation for the phenomenon, if we could establish a point of contact for understanding. It was inevitable, I suppose, that even in the face of all the curious facts which had come to our attention, there should still be an earnest wish to find a natural explanation. Certainly the oldest fear and the

greatest fear to which man is prey is fear of the unknown; anything capable of rationalization and explanation cannot be feared; but it was growing hourly more patent that we were facing something which defied all known rationales and credos, but hinged upon a system of belief that antedated even primitive man, and indeed, as scattered hints within the photostat pages from Miskatonic University suggested, antedated even earth itself. And there was always that brooding terror, the ominous suggestion of menace from something far beyond the grasp of such a puny intelligence as man's.

Thus it was with some trepidation that I prepared for my vigil. After Laird had gone to his room, which was at the head of the stairs, with a door opening upon a railed-in balcony looking down into the lodge room where I sat with the book by Lovecraft, reading here and there in its pages, I settled down to a kind of apprehensive waiting. It was not that I was afraid of what might take place, but rather that I was afraid that what took place might be beyond my understanding. However, as the minutes ticked past, I became engrossed in *The Outsider and Others,* with its hellish suggestions of aeon-old evil, of entities co-existent with all time and conterminous with all space, and began to understand, however vaguely, a relation between the writings of this fantasiste and the curious notes Professor Gardner had made. The most disturbing factor in this cognizance was the knowledge that Professor Gardner had made his notes independent of the book I now read, since it had arrived after his disappearance. Moreover, though there were certain keys to what Gardner had written in the first material he had received from Miskatonic University, there was growing now a mass of evidence to indicate that the professor had had access to some other source of information.

What was that source? Could he have learned something from Old Peter? Hardly likely. Could he have gone to Partier? It was not impossible that he had done so, though he had not imparted this information to Laird. Yet it was not to be ruled out that he had made contact

with still another source of which there was no hint among his notes.

It was while I was engaged in this engrossing speculation that I became conscious of the music. It may actually have been sounding for some time before I heard it, but I do not think so. It was a curious melody that was being played, beginning as something lulling and harmonious, and then subtly becoming cacophonous and demoniac, rising in tempo, though all the time coming as from a great distance. I listened to it with growing astonishment; I was not at first aware of the sense of evil which fell upon me the moment I stepped outside and became cognizant that the music emanated from the depths of the dark forest. There, too, I was sharply conscious of its weirdness; the melody was unearthly, utterly bizarre and foreign, and the instruments which were being used seemed to be flutes, or certainly some variation of flutes.

Up to that moment there was no really alarming manifestation. That is, there was nothing but the suggestiveness of the two events which had taken place to inspire fear. There was, in short, always a good possibility that there might be a natural explanation about the sound as of wind and that of music.

But now, suddenly, there occurred something so utterly horrible, something so fraught with terror, that I was at once made prey to the most terrible fear known to man, a surging primitive horror of the unknown, of something from outside—for if I had had doubts about the things suggested by Gardner's notes and the material accompanying them, I knew instinctively that they were unfounded, for the sound that succeeded the strains of that unearthly music was of such a nature that it defied description, and defies it even now. It was simply a ghastly ululation, made by no beast known to man, and certainly by no man. It rose to an awful crescendo and fell away into a silence that was the more terrible for this soul-searing crying. It began with a two-note call, twice repeated, a frightful sound: *"Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih!"* and then became a triumphant wailing cry that ululated out of the forest and into the dark

night like the hideous voice of the pit itself: *"Eh-ya-ya-ya-yahaaahaaahaaahaaa-ah-ah-ah-ngh'aaaa-ngh'aaa-ya-ya-ya . . ."*

I stood for a minute absolutely frozen to the verandah. I could not have uttered a sound if it had been necessary to save my life. The voice had ceased, but the trees still seemed to echo its frightful syllables. I heard Laird tumble from his bed, I heard him running down the stairs calling my name, but I could not answer. He came out on the verandah and caught hold of my arm.

"Good God! What was that?"

"Did you hear it?"

"I heard enough."

We stood waiting for it to sound again, but there was no repetition of it. Nor was there a repetition of the music. We returned to the sitting room and waited there, neither of us able to sleep.

But there was not another manifestation of any kind throughout the remainder of that night!

III

The occurrences of that first night more than anything else decided our direction on the following day. For, realizing that we were too ill-informed to cope with any understanding with what was taking place, Laird set the dictaphone for that second night, and we started out for Wausau and Professor Partier, planning to return on the following day. With forethought, Laird carried with him our copy of the notes Gardner had left, skeletal as they were.

Professor Partier, at first reluctant to see us, admitted us finally to his study in the heart of the Wisconsin city, and cleared books and papers from two chairs, so that we could sit down. Though he had the appearance of an old man, wore a long white beard, and a fringe of white hair straggled from under his black skull cap, he was as agile as a young man; he was thin, his fingers were bony, his

face gaunt, with deep, black eyes, and his features were set in an expression that was one of profound cynicism, disdainful, almost contemptuous, and he made no effort to make us comfortable, beyond providing places for us to sit. He recognized Laird as Professor Gardner's secretary, said brusquely that he was a busy man preparing what would doubtless be his last book for his publishers, and he would be obliged to us if we would state the object of our visit as concisely as possible.

"What do you know of Cthulhu?" asked Laird bluntly.

The professor's reaction was astonishing. From an old man whose entire attitude had been one of superiority and aloof disdain, he became instantly wary and alert; with exaggerated care he put down the pencil he had been holding, his eyes never once left Laird's face, and he leaned forward a little over his desk.

"So," he said, "you come to me." He laughed then, a laugh which was like the cackling of some centenarian. "You come to me to ask about Cthulhu. Why?"

Laird explained curtly that we were bent upon discovering what had happened to Professor Gardner. He told as much as he thought necessary, while the old man closed his eyes, picked up his pencil once more and, tapping gently with it, listened with marked care, prompting Laird from time to time. When he had finished, Professor Partier opened his eyes slowly and looked from one to the other of us with an expression that was not unlike one of pity mixed with pain.

"So he mentioned me, did he? But I had no contact with him other than one telephone call." He pursed his lips. "He had more reference to an earlier controversy than to his discoveries at Rick's Lake. I would like now to give you a little advice."

"That's what we came for."

"Go away from that place, and forget all about it."

Laird shook his head in determination.

Partier estimated him, his dark eyes challenging his decision; but Laird did not falter. He had embarked upon this venture, and he meant to see it through.

"These are not forces with which common men have been accustomed to deal," said the old man then. "We are frankly not equipped to do so." He began then, without other preamble, to talk of matters so far removed from the mundane as to be almost beyond conception. Indeed, it was some time before I began to comprehend what he was hinting at, for his concept was so broad and breath-taking that it was difficult for anyone accustomed to so prosaic an existence as mine to grasp. Perhaps it was because Partier began obliquely by suggesting that it was not Cthulhu or his minions who haunted Rick's Lake, but clearly another; the existence of the slab and what was carved upon it clearly indicated the nature of the being who dwelled there from time to time. Professor Gardner had in final analysis got on to the right path, despite thinking that Partier did not believe it. Who was the Blind, Faceless One but Nyarlathotep? Certainly not Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat of a Thousand Young.

Here Laird interrupted him to press for something more understandable, and then at last, realizing that we knew nothing, the professor went on, still in that vaguely irritable oblique manner, to expound mythology—a mythology of pre-human life not only on the earth, but on the stars of all the universe. "We know nothing," he repeated from time to time. "We know nothing at all. But there are certain signs, certain shunned places. Rick's Lake is one of them." He spoke of beings whose very names were awesome—of the Elder Gods who live on Betelguese, remote in time and space, who had cast out into space the Great Old Ones, led by Azathoth and Yog-Sothoth, and numbering among them the primal spawn of the amphibious Cthulhu, the bat-like followers of Hastur the Unspeakable, of Lloigor, Zhar, and Ithaqua, who walked the winds and interstellar space, the earth beings. Nyarlathotep and Shub-Niggurath—the evil beings who sought always to triumph once more over the Elder Gods, who had shut them out or imprisoned them—as Cthulhu long ago slept in the ocean realm of R'lyeh, as Hastur was imprisoned upon a black star near Aldebaran in the

Hyades. Long before human beings walked the earth, the conflict between the Elder Gods and the Great Old Ones had taken place; and from time to time the Old Ones had made a resurgence toward power, sometimes to be stopped by direct interference by the Elder Gods, but more often by the agency of human or non-human beings serving to bring about a conflict among the beings of the elements, for, as Gardner's notes indicated, the evil Old Ones were elemental forces. And every time there had been a resurgence, the mark of it had been left deep upon man's memory—though every attempt was made to eliminate the evidence and quiet survivors.

"What happened at Innsmouth, Massachusetts, for instance?" he asked tensely. "What took place at Dunwich? In the wilds of Vermont? At the old Tuttle house on the Aylesbury Pike? What of the mysterious cult of Cthulhu, and the utterly strange voyage of exploration to the Mountains of Madness? What beings dwelt on the hidden and shunned Plateau of Leng? And what of Kadath in the Cold Waste? Lovecraft knew! Gardner and many another have sought to discover those secrets, to link the incredible happenings which have taken place here and there on the face of the planet—but it is not desired by the Old Ones that mere man shall know too much. Be warned!"

He took up Gardner's notes without giving either of us a chance to say anything, and studied them, putting on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles which made him look more ancient than ever, and going on talking, more to himself than to us, saying that it was held that the Old Ones had achieved a higher degree of development in some aspects of science than was hitherto believed possible, but that, of course, nothing was *known.* The way in which he consistently emphasized this indicated very clearly that only a fool or an idiot would disbelieve, proof or no proof. But in the next sentence, he admitted that there was certain proof—the revolting and bestial plaque bearing a representation of a hellish monstrosity walking on the winds above the earth found in the hand of Josiah Alwyn when his body was discovered on a small Pacific island months

after his incredible disappearance from his home in Wisconsin; the drawings made by Professor Gardner—and, even more than anything else, that curious slab of carven stones in the forest at Rick's Lake.

"Cthugha," he murmured then, wonderingly. "I've not read the footnote to which he makes reference. And there's nothing in Lovecraft." He shook his head. "No, I don't know." He looked up. "Can you frighten something out of the half-breed?"

"We've thought of that," admitted Laird.

"Well, now, I advise a try. It seems evident that he knows something—it may be nothing but an exaggeration to which his more or less primitive mind has lent itself; but on the other hand—who can say?"

More than this Professor Partier could not or would not tell us. Moreover, Laird was reluctant to ask, for there was obviously a damnably disturbing connection between what he had revealed, however incredible it might be, and what Professor Gardner had written.

Our visit, however, despite its inconclusiveness—or perhaps because of it—had a curious effect on us. The very indefiniteness of the professor's summary and comments, coupled with such fragmentary and disjointed evidence which had come to us independently of Partier, sobered us and increased Laird's determination to get to the bottom of the mystery surrounding Gardner's disappearance, a mystery which had now become enlarged to encompass the greater mystery of Rick's Lake and the forest around it.

On the following day we returned to Pashepaho, and, as luck would have it, we passed Old Peter on the road leading from town. Laird slowed down, backed up, and leaned out to meet the old fellow's speculative gaze.

"Lift?"

"Reckon so."

Old Peter got in and sat on the edge of the seat until Laird unceremoniously produced a flask and offered it to him; then his eyes lit up; he took it eagerly and drank deeply, while Laird made small talk about life in the north woods and encouraged the half-breed to talk about the

mineral deposits he thought he could find in the vicinity of Rick's Lake. In this way some distance was covered, and during this time, the half-breed retained the flask, handing it back at last when it was almost empty. He was not intoxicated in the strictest sense of the word, but he was uninhibited, and he made no protest when we took the lake road without stopping to let him out, though when he saw the lodge and knew where he was, he said thickly that he was off his route, and had to be getting back before dark.

He would have started back immediately, but Laird persuaded him to come in with the promise that he would mix him a drink.

He did. He mixed him as stiff a drink as he could, and Peter downed it.

Not until he had begun to feel its effects did Laird turn to the subject of what Peter knew about the mystery of the Rick's Lake country, and instantly then the half-breed became close-mouthed, mumbling that he would say nothing, he had seen nothing, it was all a mistake, his eyes shifting from one to the other of us. But Laird persisted. He had seen the slab of carven stone, hadn't he? Yes—reluctantly. Would he take us to it? Peter shook his head violently. Not now. It was nearly dark, it might be dark before they could return.

But Laird was adamant, and finally the half-breed, convinced by Laird's insistence that they could return to the lodge and even to Pashepaho, if Peter liked, before darkness fell, consented to lead us to he slab. Then, despite his unsteadiness, he set off swiftly into the woods along a lane that could hardly be called a trail, so faint it was, and loped along steadily for almost a mile before he drew up short and, standing behind a tree, as if he were afraid of being seen, pointed shakily to a little open spot surrounded by high trees at enough of a distance that ample sky was visible overhead.

"There—that's it."

The slab was only partly visible, for moss had grown over much of it. Laird, however, was at the moment only

secondarily interested in it; it was manifest that the half-breed stood in mortal terror of the spot and wished only to escape.

"How would you like to spend the night here, Peter?" asked Laird.

The half-breed shot a frightened glance at him. "Me? Gawd, no!"

Suddenly Laird's voice steeled. "Unless you tell us what it was you saw here, that's what you're going to do."

The half-breed was not so much the worse for liquor that he could not foresee events—the possibility that Laird and I might overcome him and tie him to a tree at the edge of this open space. Plainly, he considered a bolt for it, but he knew that in his condition, he could not outrun us.

"Don't make me tell," he said. "It ain't supposed to be told. I ain't never told no one—not even the professor."

"We want to know, Peter," said Laird with no less menace.

The half-breed began to shake; he turned and looked at the slab as if he thought at any moment an inimical being might rise from it and advance upon him with lethal intent. "I can't, I can't," he muttered, and then, forcing his bloodshot eyes to meet Laird's once more, he said in a low voice, "I don't know what it was. Gawd! it was awful. It was a Thing—didn't have no face, hollered there till I thought my eardrums 'd bust, and them things that was with it—Gawd!" He shuddered and backed away from the tree, toward us. "Honest t' Gawd, I seen it there one night. It jist come, seems like, out of the air and there it was a-singin' and a-wailin' and them things playin' that damn' music. I guess I was crazy for a while afore I got away." His voice broke, his vivid memory recreated what he had seen; he turned, shouting harshly, "Let's git outa here!" and ran back the way we had come, weaving among the trees.

Laird and I ran after him, catching up easily, Laird reassuring him that we would take him out of the woods in the car, and he would be well away from the forest's

edge before darkness overtook him. He was as convinced as I that there was nothing imagined about the half-breed's account, that he had indeed told us all he knew; and he was silent all the way back from the highway to which we took Old Peter, pressing five dollars upon him so that he could forget what he had seen in liquor if he were so inclined.

"What do you think?" asked Laird when we reached the lodge once more.

I shook my head.

"That wailing night before last," said Laird. "The sounds Professor Gardner heard—and now this. It ties up —damnably, horribly." He turned on me with intense and fixed urgence. "Jack, are you game to visit that slab tonight?"

"Certainly."

"We'll do it."

It was not until we were inside the lodge that we thought of the dictaphone, and then Laird prepared at once to play whatever had been recorded back to us. Here at least, he reflected, was nothing dependent in any way upon anyone's imagination; here was the product of the machine, pure and simple, and everyone of intelligence knew full well that machines were far more dependable than men, having neither nerves nor imagination, knowing neither fear nor hope. I think that at most we counted upon hearing a repetition of the sounds of the previous night; not in our wildest dreams did we look forward to what we did actually hear, for the record mounted from the prosaic to the incredible, from the incredible to the horrible, and at last to a cataclysmic revelation that left us completely cut away from every credo of normal existence.

It began with the occasional singing of loons and owls, followed by a period of silence. Then there was once more that familiar rushing sound, as of wind in the trees, and this was followed by the curious cacophonous piping of flutes. Then there was recorded a series of sounds, which

I put down here exactly as we heard them in that unforgettable evening hour:

Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih! EEE-ya-ya-ya-Yahaahaaahaaa-ah-ah-ah-ngh'aaa-ngh'-aaa-ya-yayaaa! (In a voice that was neither human nor bestial, but yet of both.)

(An increased tempo in the music, becoming more wild and demoniac.)

Mighty Messenger—Nyarlathotep . . . from the world of Seven Suns to his earth place, the Wood of N'gai, whither may come Him Who Is Not to be Named. . . . There shall be abundance of those from the Black Goat of the Woods, the Goat With the Thousand Young . . . (In a voice that was curiously human.)

(A succession of odd sounds, as if audience-response: a buzzing and humming, as of telegraph wires.)

Iä! Iä! Shub-Niggurath! Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih! EEE-yaa-yaa—haa-haaa-haaaa! (In the original voice neither human nor beast, yet both.)

Ithaqua shall serve thee, Father of the million favored ones, and Zhar shall be summoned from Arcturus, by the command of 'Umr At-Tawil, Guardian of the Gate. . . . Ye shall unite in praise of Azathoth, of Great Cthulhu, of Tsathoggua. . . . (The human voice again.)

Go forth in his form or in whatever form chosen in the guise of man, and destroy that which may lead them to us . . . (The half-bestial, half-human voice once more.)

(An interlude of furious piping accompanied once again by a sound as of the flapping of great wings.)

Ygnaiih! Y'bthnk . . . h'ehye-n'grkdl'lh . . . Iä! Iä! Iä! (Like a chorus.)

These sounds had been spaced in such a way that it seemed as if the beings giving rise to them were moving about within or around the lodge, and the last choral chanting faded away, as if the creatures were departing. Indeed, there followed such an interval of silence that Laird had actually moved to shut off the machine when once again a voice came from it. But the voice that now emanated from the dictaphone was one which, simply because of its nature, brought to a climax all the horror so

cumulative in what had gone before it; for whatever had been inferred by the half-bestial bellowings and chants, the horribly suggestive conversation in accented English, that which now came from the dictaphone was unutterably terrible.

Dorgan! Laird Dorgan! Can you hear me?

A hoarse, urgent whisper calling out to my companion, who sat white-faced now, staring at the machine above which his hand was still poised. Our eyes met. It was not the appeal, it was not everything that had gone before, it was the identity of that voice—*for it was the voice of Professor Upton Gardner!* But we had no time to ponder this, for the dictaphone went mechanically on.

"Listen to me! Leave this place. Forget. But before you go, summon Cthugha. For centuries this has been the place where evil beings from outermost cosmos have touched upon Earth. I know. I am theirs. They have taken me, as they took Piregard and many others—all who came unwarily within their wood and whom they did not at once destroy. It is His wood—the Wood of N'gai, the terrestrial abode of the Blind, Faceless One, the Howler in the Night, the Dweller in Darkness, Nyarlathotep, who fears only Cthugha. I have been with him in the star spaces. I have been on the shunned Plateau of Leng—to Kadath in the Cold Waste, beyond the Gates of the Silver Key, even to Kythamil near Arcturus and Mnar, to N'kai and the Lake of Hali, to K'n-yan and fabled Carcosa, to Yaddith and Y'ha-nthlei near Innsmouth, to Yoth and Yuggoth, and from far off I have looked upon Zothique, from the eye of Algod. When Fomalhaut has topped the trees, call forth to Cthugha in these words, thrice repeated: *Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthugha Fomalhaut n'gha-ghaa naf'l thagn. Iä! Cthugha!* When He has come, go swiftly, lest you too be destroyed. For it is fitting that this accursed spot be blasted so that Nyarlathotep comes no more out of interstellar space. Do you hear me, Dorgan? Do you hear me? Dorgan! Laird Dorgan!"

There was a sudden sound of sharp protest, followed by a scuffling and tearing noise, as if Gardner had been

forcibly removed, and then silence, utter and complete!

For a few moments longer Laird let the record run, but there was nothing more, and finally he started it over, saying tensely, "I think we'd better copy that as best we can. You take every other speech, and let's both copy that formula from Gardner."

"Was it . . .?"

"I'd know his voice anywhere," he said shortly.

"He's alive then?"

He looked at me, his eyes narrowed. "We don't know that."

"But his voice!"

He shook his head, for the sounds were coming forth once more, and both of us had to bend to the task of copying, which was easier than it promised to be for the spaces between speeches were great enough to enable us to copy without undue haste. The language of the chants and the words to Cthugha enunciated by Gardner's voice offered extreme difficulty, but by means of repeated playings, we managed to put down the approximate equivalent of the sounds. When finally we had finished, Laird shut the dictaphone off and looked at me with quizzical and troubled eyes, grave with concern and uncertainty. I said nothing; what we had just heard, added to everything that had gone before left us no alternative. There was room for doubt about legends, beliefs, and the like—but the infallible record of the dictaphone was conclusive even if it did no more than verify half-heard credos—for it was true, there was still nothing definite; it was as if the whole were so completely beyond the comprehension of man that only in the oblique suggestion of its individual parts could something like understanding be achieved, as if the entirety were too unspeakably soul-searing for the mind of man to withstand.

"Formalhaut rises almost at sunset—a little before, I think," mused Laird—clearly, like myself, he had accepted what we had heard without challenge other than the mystery surrounding its meaning. "It should be above the trees—presumably twenty to thirty degrees above the

horizon, because it doesn't pass near enough to the zenith in this latitude to appear above these pines—at approximately an hour after darkness falls. Say nine-thirty or so."

"You aren't thinking of trying it tonight?" I asked. "After all—what does it mean? Who or what is Cthugha?"

"I don't know any more than you. And I'm not trying it tonight. You've forgotten the slab. Are you still game to go out there—after this?"

I nodded. I did not trust myself to speak, but I was not consumed by any eagerness whatever to dare the darkness that lingered like a living entity within the forest surrounding Rick's Lake.

Laird looked at his watch, and then at me, his eyes burning now with a kind of feverish determination, as if he were forcing himself to take this final step to face the unknown being whose manifestations had made the woods its own. If he expected me to hesitate, he was disappointed; however beset by fear I might be, I would not show it. I got up and went out of the lodge at his side.

IV

There are aspects of hidden life, exterior as well as of the depths of the mind, that are better kept secret and away from the awareness of common man; for there lurk in dark places of the earth terrible desiderata, horrible revenants belonging to a stratum of the subconscious which is mercifully beyond the apprehension of common man—indeed, there are aspects of creation so grotesquely shuddersome that the very sight of them would blast the sanity of the beholder. Fortunately, it is not possible even to bring back in anything but suggestion what we saw on the slab in the forest at Rick's Lake that night in October, for the thing was so unbelievable, transcending all known laws of science, that adequate words for its description have no existence in the language.

We arrived at the belt of trees around the slab while afterglow yet lingered in the western heavens, and by the

illumination of a flashlight Laird carried, we examined the face of the slab itself, and the carving on it: of a vast, amorphous creature, drawn by an artist who evidently lacked sufficient imagination to etch the creature's face, for it had none, bearing only a curious, cone-like head which even in stone seemed to have a fluidity which was unnerving; moreover, the creature was depicted as having both tentacle-like appendages and hands—or growths similar to hands, not only two, but several; so that it seemed both human and non-human in its structure. Beside it had been carved two squat squid-like figures from a part of which—presumably the heads, though no outline was definitive—projected what must certainly have been instruments of some kind, for the strange, repugnant attendants appeared to be playing them.

Our examination was necessarily hurried, for we did not want to risk being seen here by whatever might come, and it may be that in the circumstances, imagination got the better of us. But I do not think so. It is difficult to maintain that consistently, sitting here at my desk, removed in space and time from what happened there; but I maintain it. Despite the quickened awareness and irrational fear of the unknown which obsessed both of us, we kept a determined open-mindedness about every aspect of the problem we had chosen to solve. If anything, I have erred in this account on the side of science over that of imagination. In the plain light of reason, the carvings on that stone slab were not only obscene, but bestial and frightening beyond measure, particularly in the light of what Partier had hinted, and what Gardner's notes and the material from Miskatonic University had vaguely outlined, and even if time had permitted, it is doubtful if we could have looked long upon them.

We retreated to a spot comparatively near the way we must take to return to the lodge, and yet not too far from the open place where the slab lay, so that we might see clearly and still remain hidden in a place easy of access to the return path. There we took our stand and waited in that chilling hush of an October evening, while stygian

darkness encompassed us, and only one or two stars twinkled high overhead, miraculously visible among the towering treetops.

According to Laird's watch, we waited exactly an hour and ten minutes before the sound as of wind began, and at once there was a manifestation which had about it all the trappings of the supernatural; for no sooner had the rushing sound begun, than the slab we had so quickly quitted began to glow—at first so indistinguishably that it seemed an illusion, and then with a phosphorescence of increasing brilliance, until it gave off such a glow that it was as if a pillar of light extended upward into the heavens. This was the second curious circumstance—the light followed the outlines of the slab, and flowed upward; it was not diffused and dispersed around the glade and into the woods, but shone heavenward with the insistence of a directed beam. Simultaneously, the very air seemed charged with evil; all around us lay thickly such an aura of fearsomeness that it rapidly became impossible to remain free of it. It was apparent that by some means unknown to us the rushing sound as of wind which now filled the air was not only associated with the broad beam of light flowing upward, *but was caused by it;* moreover, as we watched, the intensity and color of the light varied constantly, changing from a blinding white to a lambent green, from green to a kind of lavender; occasionally it was so intensely brilliant that it was necessary to avert our eyes, but for the most part it could be looked at without hurt to our eyes.

As suddenly as it had begun, the rushing sound stopped, the light became diffuse and dim; and almost immediately the weird piping as of flutes smote upon our ears. It came not from around us, but from *above,* and with one accord, both of us turned to look as far into heaven as the now fading light would permit.

Just what took place then before our eyes I cannot explain. Was it actually something that came hurtling down, streaming down, rather?—for the masses were shapeless—or was it the product of imagination that

proved singularly uniform when later Laird and I found opportunity to compare notes? The illusion of great black things streaking down in the path of that light was so great that we glanced back at the slab.

What we saw there sent us screaming voicelessly from that hellish spot.

For, where but a moment before there had been nothing, there was now a gigantic protoplasmic mass, a colossal being who towered upward toward the stars, and whose actual physical being was in constant flux; and flanking it on either side were two lesser beings, equally amorphous, holding pipes or flutes in appendages and making that demoniac music which echoed and reechoed in the enclosing forest. But the thing on the slab, the Dweller in Darkness, was the ultimate in horror; for from its mass of amorphous flesh there grew at will before our eyes tentacles, claws, hands, and withdrew again; the mass itself diminished and swelled effortlessly, and where its head was and its features should have been there was only a blank facelessness all the more horrible because even as we looked there rose from its blind mass a low ululation in that half-bestial, half-human voice so familiar to us from the record made in the night!

We fled, I say, so shaken that it was only by a supreme effort of will that we were able to take flight in the right direction. And behind us the voice rose, the blasphemous voice of Nyarlathotep, the Blind, Faceless One, the Mighty Messenger, even while there rang in the channels of memory the frightened words of the half-breed, Old Peter—*It was a Thing—didn't have no face, hollered there till I thought my eardrums 'd bust, and them things that was with it—Gawd!*—echoed there while the voice of that Being from outermost space shrieked and gibbered to the hellish music of the hideous attending flute-players, rising to ululate through the forest and leave its mark forever in memory!

Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih! EEE-yayayayayaaa-haaahaaahaaahaaa-ngh'aaa-ngh'aaa-ya-ya-yaaa!

Then all was still.

And yet, incredible as it may seem, the ultimate horror awaited us.

For we had gone but half way to the lodge when we were simultaneously aware of something following; behind us rose a hideous, horribly suggestive *sloshing* sound, as if the amorphous entity had left the slab which in some remote time must have been erected by its worshippers, and were pursuing us. Obsessed by abysmal fright, we ran as neither of us has ever run before, and we were almost upon the lodge before we were aware that the sloshing sound, the trembling and shuddering of the earth—as if some gigantic being walked upon it—had ceased, and in their stead came only the calm, unhurried tread of footsteps.

But the footsteps were not our own! And in the aura of unreality, the fearsome outsideness in which we walked and breathed, the suggestiveness of those footsteps was almost maddening!

We reached the lodge, lit a lamp and sank into chairs to await whatever it was that was coming so steadily, unhurriedly on, mounting the verandah steps, putting its hand on the knob of the door, swinging the door open . . .

It was Professor Gardner who stood there!

Then Laird sprang up, crying, "Professor Gardner!"

The professor smiled reservedly and put one hand up to shade his eyes. "If you don't mind, I'd like the light dimmed. I've been in the dark so long . . ."

Laird turned to do his bidding without question, and he came forward into the room, walking with the ease and poise of a man who is as sure of himself as if he had never vanished from the face of the earth more than three months before, as if he had not made a frantic appeal to us during the night just past, as if. . . .

I glanced at Laird; his hand was still at the lamp, but his fingers were no longer turning down the wick, simply holding to it, while he gazed down unseeing. I looked over at Professor Gardner; he sat with his head turned from the lights, his eyes closed, a little smile playing about his lips; at that moment he looked precisely as I had often

seen him look at the University Club in Madison, and it was as if everything that had taken place here at the lodge were but an evil dream.

But it was not a dream!

"You were gone last night?" asked the professor.

"Yes. But, of course, we had the dictaphone."

"Ah. You heard something then?"

"Would you like to hear the record, sir?"

"Yes, I would."

Laird went over and put it on the machine to play it again, and we sat in silence, listening to everything upon it, no one saying anything until it has been completed. Then the professor slowly turned his head.

"What do you make of it?"

"I don't know what to make of it, sir," answered Laird. "The speeches are too disjointed—except for yours. There seems to be some coherence there."

Suddenly, without warning, the room was surcharged with menace; it was but a momentary impression, but Laird felt it as keenly as I did, for he started noticeably. He was taking the record from the machine when the professor spoke again.

"It doesn't occur to you that you may be the victim of a hoax?"

"No."

"And if I told you that I had found it possible to make every sound that was registered on that record?"

Laird looked at him for a full minute before replying in a low voice that of course, Professor Gardner had been investigating the phenomena of Rick's Lake woods for a far longer time than we had, and if he said so. . . .

A harsh laugh escaped the professor. "Entirely natural phenomena, my boy! There's a mineral deposit under that grotesque slab in the woods; it gives off light and also a miasma that is productive of hallucinations. It's as simple as that. As for the various disappearances—sheer folly, human failing, nothing more, but with the air of coincidence. I came here with high hopes of verifying some of the nonsense to which old Partier lent himself long ago—

but—" He smiled disdainfully, shook his head, and extended his hand. "Let me have the record, Laird."

Without question, Laird gave Professor Gardner the record. The older man took it and was bringing it up before his eyes when he jogged his elbow and, with a sharp cry of pain, dropped it. It broke into dozens of pieces on the floor of the lodge.

"Oh!" cried the professor. "I'm sorry." He turned his eyes on Laird. "But then—since I can duplicate it any time for you from what I've learned about the lore of this place, by way of Partier's mouthings—" He shrugged.

"It doesn't matter," said Laird quietly.

"Do you mean to say that everything on that record was just your imagination, Professor?" I broke in. "Even that chant for the summoning of Cthugha?"

The older man's turned on me; his smile was sardonic. "Cthugha? What do you suppose he or that is but the figment of someone's imagination? And the inference—my dear boy, use your head. You have before you the clear inference that Cthugha has his abode on Fomalhaut which is twenty-seven light years away, and that, if this chant is thrice repeated when Fomalhaut has risen, Cthugha will appear to somehow render this place no longer habitable by man or outside entity. How do you suppose that could be accomplished?"

"Why, by something akin to thought-transference," replied Laird doggedly. "It's not unreasonable to suppose that if we were to direct thoughts toward Fomalhaut that something there might receive them—granting that there might be life there. Thought is instant. And that they in turn may be so highly developed that dematerialization and rematerialization might be as swift as thought."

"My boy—are you serious?" The older man's voice revealed his contempt.

"You asked."

"Well, then, as the hypothetic answer to a theoretical problem, I can overlook that."

"Frankly," I said again, disregarding a curious negative shaking of Laird's head, "I don't think that what we saw

in the forest tonight was just hallucination—caused by a miasma rising out of the earth or otherwise."

The effect of this statement was extraordinary. Visibly, the professor made every effort to control himself; his reactions were precisely those of a savant challenged by a cretin in one of his classes. After a few moments he controlled himself and said only, "You've been there then. I suppose it's too late to make you believe otherwise . . ."

"I've always been open to conviction, sir, and I lean to the scientific method," said Laird.

Professor Gardner put his hand over his eyes and said, "I'm tired. I noticed last night when I was here that you're in my old room, Laird—so I'll take the room next to you, opposite Jack's."

He went up the stairs as if nothing had happened between the last time he had occupied the lodge and this.

V

The rest of the story—and the culmination of that apocalyptic night—are soon told.

I could not have been asleep for more than an hour—the time was one in the morning—when I was awakened by Laird. He stood beside my bed fully dressed and in a tense voice ordered me to get up and dress, to pack whatever essentials I had brought, and be ready for anything. Nor would he permit me to put on a light to do so, though he carried a small pocket-flash, and used it sparingly. To all my qestions, he cautioned me to wait.

When I had finished, he led the way out of the room with a whispered, "Come."

He went directly to the room into which Professor Gardner had disappeared. By the light of his flash, it was evident that the bed had not been touched; moreover, in the faint film of dust that lay on the floor, it was clear that Professor Gardner had walked into the room, over to a chair beside the window, and out again.

"Never touched the bed, you see," whispered Laird.

"But why?"

Laird gripped my arm, hard. "Do you remember what Partier hinted—what we saw in the woods—the protoplasmic, amorphousness of the thing? And what the record said?"

"But Gardner told us—" I protested.

Without a further word, he turned. I followed him downstairs, where he paused at the table where we had worked and flashed the light upon it. I was surprised into making a startled exclamation which Laird hushed instantly. For the table was bare of everything but the copy of *The Outsider and Others* and three copies of *Weird Tales,* a magazine containing stories supplementing those in the book by the eccentric Providence genius, Lovecraft. All Gardner's notes, all our own notations, the photostats from Miskantonic University—everything gone!

"He took them," said Laird. "No one else could have done so."

"Where did he go?"

"Back to the place from which he came." He turned on me, his eyes gleaming in the reflected glow of the flashlight. "Do you understand what that means, Jack?"

I shook my head.

"*They* know we've been there, *they* know we've seen and learned too much . . ."

"But how?"

"You told them."

"I? God God, man, are you mad? How could I have told them?"

"Here, in this lodge, tonight—you yourself gave the show away, and I hate to think of what might happen now. We've got to get away."

For one moment all the events of the past few days seemed to fuse into an unintelligible mass; Laird's urgency was unmistakable, and yet the thing he suggested was so utterly unbelievable that its contemplation even for so fleeting a moment threw my thoughts into the extremest confusion.

Laird was talking now, quickly. "Don't you think it

odd—how he came back? How he came out of the woods *after* that hellish thing we saw there—not before? And the questions he asked—the drift of those questions. And how he managed to break the record—our one scientific proof of something? And now, the disappearance of all the notes —of everything that might point to substantiation of what he called 'Partier's nonsense'?"

"But if we are to believe what he told us . . ."

He broke in before I could finish. "One of them was right. Either the voice on the record calling to me—or the man who was here tonight."

"The man . . ."

But whatever I wanted to say was stilled by Laird's harsh, *"Listen!"*

From outside, from the depths of the horror-haunted dark, the earth-haven of the dweller in darkness, came once more, for the second time that night, the weirdly beautiful, yet cacophonous strains of flute-like music, rising and falling, accompanied by a kind of chanted ululation, and by the sound as of great wings flapping.

"Yes, I heard," I whispered.

"Listen closely!"

Even as he spoke, I understood. There was something more—the sounds from the forest were not only rising and falling—*they were approaching!*

"Now do you believe me?" demanded Laird. *"They're coming for us!"* He turned on me. "The chant!"

"What chant?" I fumbled stupidly.

"The Cthugha chant—do you remember it?"

"I took it down. I've got it here."

For an instant I was afraid that this, too, might have been taken from us, but it was not; it was in my pocket where I had left it. With shaking hands, Laird tore the paper from my grasp.

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthugha Fomalhaut n'gha-ghaa naf'l thagn! Iä! Cthugha!" he said, running to the verandah, myself at his heels.

Out of the woods came the bestial voice of the dweller in the dark, *"Ee-ya-ya-haa-haahaaa! Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih!"*

"Ph-nglui mglw'nafh Cthugha Fomalhaut n'gha-ghaa naf'l thagn! Iä! Cthugha!" repeated Laird for the second time.

Still the ghastly melée of sounds from the woods came on, in no way diminished, rising now to supreme heights of terror-fraught fury, with the bestial voice of the thing from the slab added to the wild, mad music of the pipes, and the sound as of wings.

And then, once more, Laird repeated the primal words of the chant.

On the instant that the final guttural sound had left his lips, there began a sequence of events no human eye was ever destined to witness. For suddenly the darkness was gone, giving way to a fearsome amber glow; simultaneously the flute-like music ceased, and in its place rose cries of rage and terror. Then, there appeared thousands of tiny points of light—not only on and among the trees, but on the earth itself, on the lodge and the car standing before it. For still a further moment we were rooted to the spot, and then it was borne in upon us that the myriad points of light were *living entities of flame!* For wherever they touched, fire sprang up, seeing which, Laird rushed into the lodge for such of our things as he could carry forth before the holocaust made it impossible for us to escape Rick's Lake.

He came running out—our bags had been downstairs—gasping that it was too late to take the dictaphone or anything else, and together we dashed toward the car, shielding our eyes a little from the blinding light all around. But even though we had shielded our eyes, it was impossible not to see the great amorphous shapes streaming skyward from this accursed place, nor the equally great being hovering like a cloud of living fire above the trees. So much we saw, before the frightful struggle to escape the burning woods forced us to forget mercifully the other details of that terrible, maddened flight.

Horrible as were the things that took place in the darkness of the forest at Rick's Lake, there was something more cataclysmic still, something so blasphemously con-

clusive that even now I shudder and tremble uncontrollable to think of it. For in that brief dash to the car, I saw something that explained Laird's doubt, I saw what had made him take heed of the voice on the record and not of the thing that came to us as Professor Gardner. The keys were there before, but I did not understand; even Laird had not fully believed. Yet it was given to us—we did not know. "It is not desired by the Old Ones that mere man shall know too much," Partier had said. And that terrible voice on the record had hinted even more clearly: *Go forth in his form or in whatever form chosen in the guise of man, and destroy that which may lead them to us. . . .* Destroy that which may lead them to us! Our record, the notes, the photostats from Miskatonic University, yes, and even Laird and myself! And the thing had gone forth, for it was Nyarlathotep, the Night Messenger, the Dweller in Darkness who had gone forth and who had returned into the forest to send his minions back to us. It was he who had come from interstellar space even as Cthugha, the fire-being, had come from Fomalhaut upon the utterance of the command that woke him from his eon-long sleep under that amber star, the command that Gardner, the living-dead captive of the terrible Nyarlathotep, had discovered in those fantastic travelings in space and time; and it was he who returned whence he had come, with his earth-haven now forever rendered useless for him with its destruction by the minions of Cthugha!

I know, and Laird knows. We never speak of it.

If we had had any doubt, despite everything that had gone before, we could not forget that final, soul-searing discovery, the thing we saw when we shielded our eyes from the flames all around and looked away from those beings in the heavens, the line of footprints that led away from the lodge in the direction of that hellish slab deep in the black forest, *the footprints that began in the soft soil beyond the verandah in the shape of a man's footprints, and changed with each step into a hideously suggestive imprint made by a creature of incredible shape and weight, with variations of outline and size so grotesque as to*

have been incomprehensible to anyone who had not seen the thing on the slab—and beside them, torn and rent as if by an expanding force, the clothing that once belonged to Professor Gardner, left piece by piece along the trail back into the woods, the trail taken by the hellish monstrosity that had come out of the night, the Dweller in Darkness who had visited us in the shape and guise of Professor Gardner!

BEYOND THE THRESHOLD

AUGUST DERLETH

THE story is really my grandfather's.

In a manner of speaking, however, it belongs to the entire family, and beyond them, to the world; and there is no longer any reason for suppressing the singularly terrible details of what happened in that lonely house deep in the forest places of northern Wisconsin.

The roots of the story go back into the mistas of early time, far beyond the beginnings of the Alwyn family line, but of this I knew nothing at the time of my visit to Wisconsin in response to my cousin's letter about our grandfather's strange decline in health. Josiah Alwyn had always seemed somehow immortal to me even as a child, and he had not appeared to change throughout the years between: a barrel-chested old man, with a heavy, full face, decorated with a closely-clipped moustache and a small beard to soften the hard line of his square jaw. His eyes were dark, not over-large, and his brows were shaggy; he wore his hair long, so that his head had a leonine appearance. Though I saw little of him when I was very young, still he left an indelible impression on me in the brief visits he paid when he stopped at the ancestral country home near Arkham, in Massachusetts—those short calls he made on his way to and from remote corners of the world:

Tibet, Mongolia, the Arctic regions, and certain little-known islands in the Pacific.

I had not seen him for years when the letter came from my cousin Frolin, who lived with him in the old house grandfather owned in the heart of the forest and lake country of northern Wisconsin. "I wish you could uproot yourself from Massachusetts long enough to come out here. A great deal of water has passed under various bridges, and the wind has blown about many changes since last you were here. Frankly, I think it most urgent that you come. In present circumstances, I don't know to whom to turn, grandfather being not himself, and I need someone who can be trusted." There was nothing obviously urgent about the letter, and yet there was a queer constraint, there was something between lines that stood out invisibly, intangibly to make possible only one answer to Frolin's letter—something in his phrase about the wind, something in the way he had written *grandfather being not himself,* something in the need he had expressed for *someone who can be trusted.*

I could easily take leave of absence from my position as assistant librarian at Miskatonic University in Arkham and go west that September; so I went. I went, harassed by an almost uncanny conviction that the need for haste was great: from Boston by plane to Chicago, and from there by train to the village of Harmon, deep in the forest country of Wisconsin—a place of great natural beauty, not far from the shores of Lake Superior, so that it was possible on days of wind and weather to hear the water's sound.

Frolin met me at the station. My cousin was in his late thirties then, but he had the look of someone ten years younger, with hot, intense brown eyes, and a soft, sensitive mouth that belied his inner hardness. He was singularly sober, though he had always alternated between gravity and a kind of infectious wildness—"the Irish in him," as grandfather had once said. I met his eyes when I shook his hand, probing for some clue to his withheld distress, but I saw only that he was indeed troubled, for his eyes

betrayed him, even as the roiled waters of a pond reveal disturbance below, though the surface may be as glass.

"What is it?" I asked, when I sat at his side in the coupe, riding into the country of the tall pines. "Is the old man abed?"

He shook his head. "Oh, no, nothing like that, Tony." He shot me a queer, restrained glance. "You'll see. You wait and see."

"What is it then?" I pressed him. "Your letter had the damndest sound."

"I hoped it would," he said gravely.

"And yet there was nothing I could put my finger on," I admitted. "But it was there, nevertheless."

He smiled. "Yes, I knew you'd understand. I tell you, it's been difficult—extremely difficult. I thought of you a good many times before I sat down and wrote that letter, believe me!"

"But if he's not ill . . . ? I thought you said he wasn't himself."

"Yes, yes, so I did. You wait now, Tony; don't be so impatient; you'll see for yourself. It's his mind, I think."

"His mind!" I felt a distinct wave of regret and shock at the suggestion that grandfather's mind had given way; the thought that that magnificent brain had retreated from sanity was intolerable, and I was loath to entertain it. "Surely not!" I cried. "Frolin—what the devil is it?"

He turned his troubled eyes on me once more. "I don't know. But I think it's something terrible. If it were only grandfather. But there's the music—and then there are all the other things: the sounds and smells and—" He caught my amazed stare and turned away, almost with physical effort pausing in his talk. "But I'm forgetting. Don't ask me anything more. Just wait. You'll see for yourself." He laughed shortly, a forced laugh. "Perhaps it's not the old man who's losing his mind. I've thought of that sometimes, too—with reason."

I said nothing more, but there was beginning to mushroom up inside me now a kind of tense fear, and for some time I sat by his side, thinking only of Frolin and old

Josiah Alwyn living together in that old house, unaware of the towering pines all around, and the wind's sound, and the fragrant pungence of leaf-fire smoke riding the wind out of the northwest. Evening came early to this country, caught in the dark pines, and, though afterglow still lingered in the west, fanning upward in a great wave of saffron and amethyst, darkness already possessed the forest through which we rode. Out of the darkness came the cries of the great horned owls and their lesser cousins, the screech owls, making an eerie magic in the stillness broken otherwise only by the wind's voice and the noise of the car passing along the comparatively little-used road to the Alwyn house.

"We're almost there," said Frolin.

The lights of the car passed over a jagged pine, lightning struck years ago, and standing still with two gaunt limbs arched like gnarled arms toward the road: an old landmark to which Frolin's words called my attention, since he knew I would remember it but half a mile from the house.

"If grandfather should ask," he said then, "I'd rather you said nothing about my sending for you. I don't know that he'd like it. You can tell him you were in the midwest and came up for a visit."

I was curious anew, but forebore to press Frolin further. "He does know I'm coming, then?"

"Yes. I said I had word from you and was going down to meet your train."

I could understand that if the old man thought Frolin had sent for me about his health, he would be annoyed and perhaps angry; and yet more than this was implied in Frolin's request, more than just the simple salving of grandfather's pride. Once more that odd, intangible alarm rose up within me, that sudden, inexplicable feeling of fear.

The house looked forth suddenly in a clearing among the pines. It had been built by an uncle of grandfather's in Wisconsins's pioneering days, back in the 1850's: by one of the sea-faring Alwyns of Innsmouth, that strange,

dark town on the Massachusetts coast. It was an unusually unattractive structure, snug against the hillside like a crusty old woman in furbelows. It defied many architectural standards without, however, seeming ever fully free of most of the superficial facets of architecture circa 1850 making for the most grotesque and pompous appearance of structures of that day. It suffered a wide verandah, one side of which led directly into the stables where, in former days, horses, surreys, and buggies had been kept, and where now two cars were housed—the only corner of the building which gave any evidence at all of having been remodeled since it was built. The house rose two and one-half stories above a cellar floor; presumably, for darkness made it impossible to ascertain, it was still painted the same hideous brown; and, judging by what light shone forth from the curtained windows, grandfather had not yet taken the trouble to install electricity, a contingency for which I had come well prepared by carrying a flashlight and an electric candle, with extra batteries for both.

Frolin drove into the garage, left the car and, carrying some of my baggage, led the way down the verandah to the front door, a large, thick-paneled oak piece, decorated with a ridiculously large iron knocker. The hall was dark, save for a partly open door at the far end, out of which came a faint light which was yet enough to illumine spectrally the broad stairs leading to the upper floor.

"I'll take you to your room first," said Frolin, leading the way up the stairs, surefooted with habitual walking there. "There's a flashlight on the newel post at the landing," he added. "If you need it. You know the old man."

I found the light and lit it, making only enough delay so that when I caught up with Frolin, he was standing at the door of my room, which, I noticed, was almost directly over the front entrance and thus faced west, as did the house itself.

"He's forbidden us to use any of the rooms east of the hall up here," said Frolin, fixing me with his eyes, as much as to say: You see how queer he's got! He waited for me

to say something, but since I did not, he went on. "So I have the room next to yours, and Hough is on the other side of me, in the southwest corner. Right now, as you might have noticed, Hough's getting something to eat."

"And grandfather?"

"Very likely in his study. You'll remember that room."

I did indeed remember that curious windowless room, built under explicit directions by great-uncle Leander, a room that occupied the majority of the rear of the house, the entire northwest corner and all the west width save for a small corner at the southwest, where the kitchen was, the kitchen from which a light had streamed into the lower hall at our entrance. The study had been pushed part way back into the hill slope, so that east wall could not have windows, but there was no reason save uncle Leander's eccentricity for the windowless north wall. Squarely in the center of the east wall, indeed, built into the wall, was an enormous painting, reaching from the floor to the ceiling and occupying a width of over six feet. If this painting, apparently executed by some unknown friend of uncle Leander's, if not by my great-uncle himself, had had about it any mark of genius or even of unusual talent, this display might have been overlooked, but it did not, it was a perfectly prosaic representation of a north country scene, showing a hillside, with a rocky cave opening out into the center of the picture, a scarcely defined path leading to the cave, an impressionistic beast which was evidently meant to resemble a bear, once common in this country, walking toward it, and overhead something that looked like an unhappy cloud lost among the pines rising darkly all around. This dubious work of art completely and absolutely dominated the study, despite the shelves of books that occupied almost every available niche in what remained of the walls in that room, despite the absurd collection of oddities strewn everywhere—bits of curiously carven stone and wood, strange mementoes of great-uncle's sea-faring life. The study had all the lifelessness of a museum and yet, oddly, it responded to my grandfather like something alive, even the painting on the

wall seeming to take on an added freshness whenever he entered.

"I don't think anyone who ever stepped into that room could forget it," I said with a grim smile.

"He spends most of his time there. Hardly goes out at all, and I suppose, with winter coming on, he'll come out only for his meals. He's moved his bed, too."

I shuddered. "I can't imagine sleeping in that room."

"No, nor I. But you know, he's working on something, and I sincerely believe his mind has been affected."

"Another book on his travels, perhaps?"

He shook his head. "No, a translation, I think. Something different. He found some old papers of Leander's one day, and ever since then he seems to have got progressively worse." He raised his eyebrows and shrugged. "Come on. Hough will have supper ready by this time, and you'll see for yourself."

Frolin's cryptic remarks had led me to expect an emaciated old man. After all, grandfather was in his early seventies, and even he could not be expected to live forever. But he had not changed physically at all, as far as I could see. There he sat at his supper table—still the same hardy old man, his moustache and beard not yet white, but only iron grey, and still with plenty of black in them; his face was no less heavy, his color no less ruddy. At the moment of my entrance he was eating heartily from the drumstick of a turkey. Seeing me, he raised his eyebrows a little, took the drumstick from his lips and greeted me with no more excitement than if I had been away from him but half an hour.

"You're looking well," he said.

"And you," I said. "An old war horse."

He grinned. "My boy, I'm on the trail of something new—some unexplored country apart from Africa, Asia and the Arctic regions."

I flashed a glance at Frolin. Clearly, this was news to him; whatever hints grandfather might have dropped of his activities, they had not included this.

He asked then about my trip west, and the rest of the

supper hour was taken up with small talk of other relatives. I observed that the old man returned insistently to long-forgotten relatives in Innsmouth: what had become of them? Had I ever seen them? What did they look like? Since I knew practically nothing of the relatives in Innsmouth, and had the firm conviction that all had died in a strange catastrophe which had washed many inhabitants of that shunned city out to sea, I was not helpful. But the tenor of these innocuous questions puzzled me no little. In my capacity as librarian at Miskatonic University, I had heard strange and disturbing hints of the business in Innsmouth, I knew something of the appearance of Federal men there, and stories of foreign agents had never had about them that essential ring of truth which made a plausible explanation for the terrible events which had taken place in that city. He wanted to know at last whether I had ever seen pictures of them, and when I said I had not, he was quite patently disappointed.

"Do you know," he said dejectedly, "there does not exist even a likeness of uncle Leander, but the oldtimers around Harmon told me years ago that he was a very homely man, that he reminded them of a *frog.*" Abruptly, he seemed more animated, he began to talk a little faster. "Do you have any conception of what that means, my boy? But no, you wouldn't have. It's too much to expect . . ."

He sat for a while in silence, drinking his coffee, drumming on the table with his fingers and staring into space with a curiously preoccupied air until suddenly he rose and left the room, inviting us to come to the study when we had finished.

"What do you make of that?" asked Frolin, when the sound of the study door closing came to us.

"Curious," I said. "But I see nothing abnormal there, Frolin. I'm afraid . . ."

He smiled grimly. "Wait. Don't judge yet; you've been here scarcely two hours."

We went to the study after supper, leaving the dishes to Hough and his wife, who had served my grandfather

for twenty years in this house. The study was unchanged, save for the addition of the old double bed, pushed up against the wall which separated the room from the kitchen. Grandfather was clearly waiting for us, or rather for me, and, if I had had occasion to think cousin Frolin cryptic, there is no word adequate to describe my grandfather's subsequent conversation.

"Have you ever heard of the Wendigo?" he asked.

I admitted that I had come upon it among other north country Indian legends: the belief in a monstrous, supernatural being, horrible to look upon, the haunter of the great forest silences.

He wanted to know whether I had ever thought of there being a possible connection between this legend of the Wendigo and the air elements, and, upon my replying in the affirmative, he expressed a curiosity about how I had come to know the Indian legend in the first place, taking pains to explain that the Wendigo had nothing whatever to do with his question.

"In my capacity as a librarian, I have occasion to run across a good many out of the way things," I answered.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, reaching for a book next to his chair. "Then doubtless you may be familiar with this volume."

I looked at the heavy black-bound volume whose title was stamped only on its backbone in goldleaf. *The Outsider and Others,* by H. P. Lovecraft.

I nodded. "This book is on our shelves."

"You've read it, then?"

"Oh, yes. Most interesting."

"Then you'll have read what he has to say about Innsmouth in his strange story, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth.* What do you make of that?"

I reflected hurriedly, thinking back to the story, and presently it came to me: a fantastic tale of horrible sea-beings, spawn of Cthulhu, beast of primordial origin, living deep in the sea.

"The man had a good imagination," I said.

"Had! Is he dead, then?"

"Yes, three years ago."

"Alas! I had thought to learn from him . . ."

"But, surely, this fiction . . ." I began.

He stopped me. "Since you have offered no explanation of what took place in Innsmouth, how can you be so sure that his narrative is fiction?"

I admitted that I could not, but it seemed that the old man had already lost interest. Now he drew forth a bulky envelope bearing many of the familiar three-cent 1869 stamps so dear to collectors, and from this took out various papers, which, he said, uncle Leander had left with instructions for their consignment to the flames. His wish, however, had not been carried out, explained grandfather, and he had come into possession of them. He handed a few sheets to me, and requested my opinion of them, watching me shrewdly all the while.

The sheets were obviously from a long letter, written in a crabbed hand, and with some of the most awkward sentences imaginable. Moreover, many of the sentences did not seem to me to make sense, and the sheet at which I looked longest filled with allusions strange to me. My eyes caught words like *Ithaqua, Lloigor, Hastur;* it was not until I handed the sheets back to my grandfather that it occurred to me that I had seen those words elsewhere, not too long ago. But I said nothing. I explained that I could not help feeling that uncle Leander wrote with needless obfuscation.

Grandfather chuckled. "I should have thought that the first thing which would have occurred to you would have been similar to my own reaction, but no, you failed me! Surely it's obvious that the whole business is a code!"

"Of course! That would explain the awkwardness of his lines."

My grandfather smirked. "A fairly simple code, but adequate—entirely adequate. I have not yet finished with it." He tapped the envelope, with one index finger. "It seems to concern this house, and there is in it a repeated warning that one must be careful, and not pass beyond the threshold, for fear of dire consequences. My boy, I've

crossed and recrossed every threshold in this house scores of times, and there have been no consequences. So therefore, somewhere there must exist a threshold I have not yet crossed."

I could not help smiling at his animation. "If uncle Leander's mind was wandering, you've been off on a pretty chase," I said.

Abruptly grandfather's well-known impatience boiled to the surface. With one hand he swept my uncle's papers away; with the other he dismissed us both, and it was plain to see that Frolin and I had on the instant creased to exist for him.

We rose, made our excuses, and left the room.

In the half-dark of the hall beyond, Frolin looked at me, saying nothing, only permitting his hot eyes to dwell upon mine for a long minute before he turned and led the way upstairs, where we parted, each to go to his own room for the night.

II

The nocturnal activity of the subconscious mind has always been of deep interest to me, since it has seemed to me that unlimited opportunities are opened up before every alert individual. I have repeatedly gone to bed with some problem vexing me, only to find it solved insofar as I am capable of solving it, upon waking. Of those other, more devious activities of the night mind, I have less knowledge. I know that I retired that night with the question of where I had encountered my uncle Leander's strange words before strong and foremost in mind, and I know that I went to sleep at last with that question unanswered.

Yet, when I awoke in the darkness some hours later, I knew at once that I have seen those words, those strange proper names in the book by H. P. Lovecraft which I had read at Miskatonic and it was only secondarily that I was

aware of someone tapping at my door, and called out in a hushed voice.

"It's Frolin. Are you awake? I'm coming in."

I got up, slipped on my dressing gown, and lit my electric candle. By this time Frolin was in the room, his thin body trembling a little, possibly from the cold, for the September night air flowing through my window was no longer of summer.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He came over to me, a strange light in his eyes, and put a hand on my arm. "Can't you hear it?" he asked. "God, perhaps it *is* my mind . . ."

"No, wait!" I exclaimed.

From somewhere outside, it seemed, came the sound of weirdly beautiful music: flutes, I thought.

"Grandfather's at the radio," I said. "Does he often listen so late?"

The expression on his face halted my words. "I own the only radio in the house. It's in my room, and it's not playing. The battery's run down, in any case. Besides, did you ever hear *such* music on the radio?"

I listened with renewed interest. The music seemed strangely muffled, and yet it came through. I observed also that it had no definite direction; while before it had seemed to come from outside, it now seemed to come from underneath the house—a curious, chant-like playing of reeds and pipes.

"A flute orchestra," I said.

"Or Pan pipes," said Frolin.

"They don't play them any more," I said absently.

"Not on the radio," answered Frolin.

I looked up at him sharply; he returned my gaze as steadily. It occurred to me that his unnatural gravity had a reason for being, whether or not he wished to put that reason into words. I caught hold of his arms.

"Frolin—what is it? I can tell you're alarmed."

He swallowed hard. "Tony, that music doesn't come from anything in the house. It's from outside."

"But who would be outside?" I demanded.

"Nothing—no one human."

It had come at last. Almost with relief I faced this issue I had been afraid to admit to myself must be faced. *Nothing—no one human.*

"Then—what agency?" I asked.

"I think grandfather knows," he said. "Come with me, Tony. Leave the light; we can make our way in the dark."

Out in the hall, I was stopped once more by his hand tense on my arm. "Do you notice?" he whispered sibilantly. "Do you notice this, too?"

"The smell," I said. The vague, elusive smell of water, of fish and frogs and the inhabitants of watery places.

"And now!" he said.

Quite suddenly the smell of water was gone, and instead came a swift frostiness, flowing through the hall as of something alive, the indefinable fragrance of snow, the crip moistness of snowy air.

"Do you wonder I've been concerned?" asked Frolin.

Giving me no time to reply, he led the way downstairs to the door of grandfather's study, beneath which there shone yet a fine line of yellow light. I was conscious in every step of our descent to the floor below that the music was growing louder, if no more understandable, and now, before the study door, it was apparent that the music emanated from within, and that the strange variety of odors came, too, from that study. The darkness seemed alive with menace, charged with an impending, ominous terror, which enclosed us as in a shell, so that Frolin trembled at my side.

Impulsively I raised my arm and knocked on the door.

There was no answer from within, but on the instant of my knock, the music stopped, the strange odors vanished from the air!

"You shouldn't have done that!" whispered Frolin. "If he . . ."

I tried the door. It yielded to my pressure, and I opened it.

I do not know what I expected to see there in the study, but certainly not what I did see. No single aspect of the

room had changed, save that grandfather had gone to bed, and the lamp burning. I stood for an instant staring, not daring to believe my eyes, incredible before the prosaic scene I looked upon. Whence then had come the music I had heard? And the odors and fragrances in the air? Confusion took possession of my thoughts, and I was about to withdraw, disturbed by the repose of my grandfather's features, when he spoke.

"Come in, then," he said, without opening his eyes. "So you heard the music, too? I had begun to wonder why no one else heard it. Mongolian, I think. Three nights ago, it was clearly Indian—north country again, Canada and Alaska. I believe there are places where Ithaqua is still worshipped. Yes, yes—and a week ago, notes I last heard played in Tibet, in forbidden Lhassa years ago, decades ago."

"Who made it?" I cried. "Where did it come from?"

He opened his eyes and regarded us standing there. "It came from here, I think," he said, placing the flat of one hand on the manuscript before him, the sheets written by my great-uncle. "And Leander's friends made it. Music of the spheres, my boy—do you credit your senses?"

"I heard it. So did Frolin."

"And what can Hough be thinking?" mused grandfather. He sighed. "I have nearly got it, I think. It only remains to determine with which of them Leander communicated."

"Which?" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

He closed his eyes and the smile came briefly back to his lips. "I thought at first it was Cthulhu; Leander was, after all, a sea-faring man. But now—I wonder if it might not be one of the creatures of air: Lloigor, perhaps—or Ithaqua, whom I believe certain of the Indians call the Wendigo. There is a legend that Ithaqua carries his victims with him in the far spaces above the earth—but I am forgetting myself again, my mind wanders." His eyes flashed open, and I found him regarding us with a peculiarly aloof stare. "It's late," he said. "I need sleep."

"What in God's name was he talking about?" asked Frolin in the hall.

"Come along," I said.

But, back in my room once more, with Frolin waiting expectantly to hear what I had to say, I did not know how to begin. How would I tell him about the weird knowledge hidden in the forbidden texts at Miskatonic University—the dread *Book of Eibon,* the obscure *Pnakotic Manuscripts,* the terrible *R'lyeh Text,* and, most shunned of all, the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred? How could I say to him with any conviction at all the things that crowded into my mind as a result of hearing my grandfather's strange words, the memories that boiled up from deep within—of powerful Ancient Ones, elder beings of unbelievable evil, old gods who once inhabited the earth and all the universe as we know it now, and perhaps far more—old gods of ancient good, and forces of ancient evil, of whom the latter were now in leash, and yet ever breaking forth, becoming manifest briefly, horribly to the world of men. And their terrible names came back now, if before this hour my clue to remembrance had not been made strong enough, had been refused in the fastnesses of my inherent prejudices—Cthulhu, potent leader of the forces of the waters of earth; Yog-Sothoth and Tsathoggua, dwellers in the depths of earth; Lloigor, Hastur, and Ithaqua, the Snow-Thing, and Wind-Walker, who were the elementals of air. It was of these beings that grandfather had spoken; and the inference he had made was too plain to be disregarded, or even to be subject to any other interpretations—that my great-uncle Leander, whose home, after all, had once been in the shunned and now deserted city of Innsmouth, had had traffic with at least one of these beings. And there was a further inference that he had not made, but only hinted at in something he had said earlier in the evening—that there was somewhere in the house—a threshold, beyond which a man dared not walk, and what danger could lurk beyond that threshold but the path back into time, the way back to that hideous communication with the elder beings my uncle Leander had had!

And yet somehow, the full import of grandfather's words

had not dawned upon me. Though he had said so much, there was far more he had left unsaid, and I could not blame myself later for not fully realizing that grandfather's activities were clearly bent toward discovering that hidden threshold of which uncle Leander had so cryptically written—*and crossing it!* In the confusion of thought to which I had now come in my preoccupation with the ancient mythology of Cthulhu, Ithaqua and the elder gods, I did not follow the obvious indications to that logical conclusion, possibly because I feared instinctively to go so far.

I turned to Frolin and explained to him as clearly as I could. He listened attentively, asking a few pointed questions from time to time, and, though he paled slightly at certain details I could not refrain from mentioning, he did not seem to be as incredulous as I might have thought. This in itself was evidence of the fact that there was still more to be discovered about my grandfather's activities and the occurrences in the house, though I did not immediately realize this. However, I was shortly to discover more of the underlying reason for Frolin's ready acceptance of my necessarily sketchy outline.

In the middle of a question, he ceased talking abruptly, and there came into his eyes an expression indicating that his attention had passed from me, from the room to somewhere beyond; he sat in an attitude of listening, and, impelled by his own actions, I, too, strained to hear what he heard.

Only the wind's voice in the trees, rising now a little, I thought. A storm coming.

"Do you hear it?" he said in a shaky whisper.

"No," I said quietly. "Only the wind."

"Yes, yes—the wind. I wrote you, remember. Listen"

"Now, come, Frolin, take hold of yourself. It's only the wind."

He gave me a pitying glance, and, going to the window, beckoned me after him. I followed, coming to his side. Without a word he pointed into the darkness pressing close to the house. It took me a moment to accustom myself to the night, but presently I was able to see the line of trees

struck sharply against the starswept heavens. And then, instantly, I understood.

Though the sound of the wind roared and thundered about the house, nothing whatever disturbed the trees before my eyes—not a leaf, not a treetop not a twig swayed by so much as a hair's breadth!

"Good God!" I exclaimed, and fell back, away from the pane, as if to shut the sight from my eyes.

"Now, you see," he said, stepping back from the window, also. "I have heard all this before."

He stood quietly, as if waiting, and I, too, waited. The sound of the wind continued unabated; it had by this time reached a frightful intensity, so that it seemed as if the old house must be torn from the hillside and hurtled into the valley below. Indeed, a faint trembling made itself manifest even as I thought this: a strange tremor, as if the house were *shuddering,* and the pictures on the walls made a slight, almost *stealthy* movement, almost imperceptible, and yet quite unmistakably visible. I glanced at Frolin, but his features were not disquieted; he continued to stand, listening and waiting, so that it was patent that the end of this singular manifestation was not yet. The wind's sound was now a terrible, demoniac howling, and it was accompanied by notes of music, which must have been audible for some time, but were so perfectly blended with the wind's voice that I was not at first aware of them. The music was similar to that which had gone before, as of pipes and occasionally stringed instruments, but was now much wilder, sounding with a terrifying abandon, with a character of unmentionable evil about it. At the same time, two further manifestations occurred. The first was the sound as of someone walking, some great being whose footsteps seemed to flow into the room from the heart of the wind itself; certainly they did not originate in the house, though there was about them the unmistakable swelling which betokened their approach to the house. The second was the sudden change in the temperature.

The night outside was warm for September in upstate Wisconsin, and the house, too, had been reasonably com-

fortable. Now, abruptly, coincident with the approaching footsteps, the temperature began to drop rapidly, so that in a little while the air in the room was cold, and both Frolin and I had to put on more clothing in order to keep comfortable. Still this did not seem to be the height of the manifestations for which Frolin so obviously waited; he continued to stand, saying nothing, though his eyes, meeting mine from time to time, were eloquent enough to speak his mind. How long we stood there, listening to those frightening sounds from outside, before the end came, I do not know.

But suddenly Frolin caught my arm, and in a hoarse whiper, cried, "There! There they are! Listen!"

The tempo of the weird music had changed abruptly to a diminuendo from its previous wild crescendo; there came into it now a strain of almost unbearable sweetness, with a little of melancholy to it, music as lovely as previously it had been evil, and yet the note of terror was not completely absent. At the same time, there was apparent the sound of voices, raised in a kind of swelling chant, rising from the back of the house somewhere—as if from the study.

"Great God in Heaven!" I cried, seizing Frolin. "What is it now?"

"It's grandfather's doing," he said. "Whether he knows it or not, that thing comes and sings to him." He shook his head and closed his eyes tightly for an instant before saying bitterly in a low, intense voice, "If only that accursed paper of Leanders' had been burned as it ought to have been!"

"You could almost make out the words," I said, listening intently.

There *were* words—but not words I had ever heard before: a kind of horrible, primeval mouthing, as if some bestial creature with but half a tongue ululated syllables of meaningless horror. I went over and opened the door; immediately the sounds seemed clearer, so that it was evident that what I had mistaken for many voices was but one, which could nevertheless convey the illusion of

many. Words—or perhaps I had better write *sounds,* bestial sounds—rose from below, a kind of awe-inspiring ululation:

"Iä! Iä! Ithaqua! Ithaqua cf'ayak vulgtmm. Iä! Uhg! Cthulhu fhtagn! Shub-Niggurath! Ithaqua naflfhtagn!"

Incredibly, the wind's voice rose to howl ever more terribly, so that I thought at any moment the house would be hurled into the void, and Frolin and myself torn from its rooms, and the breath sucked from our helpless bodies. In the confusion of fear and wonder that held me, I thought at that instant of grandfather in the study below and, beckoning Frolin, I ran from the room to the stairs, determined, despite my ghastly fright, to put myself between the old man and whatever menaced him. I ran to his door and flung myself upon it—and once more, as before, all manifestations stopped: as if by the flick of a switch, silence fell like a pall of darkness upon the house, a silence that was momentarily even more terrible.

The door gave, and once more I faced grandfather.

He was sitting still as we had left him but a short time before, though now his eyes were open, his head was cocked a little to one side, and his gaze was fixed upon the overlarge painting on the east wall.

"In God's name!" I cried. "What was that?"

"I hope to find out before long," he answered with great dignity and gravity.

His utter lack of fear quieted my own alarm to some degree, and I came a little further into the room, Frolin following. I leaned over his bed, striving to fix his attention upon me, but he continued to gaze at the painting with singular intensity.

"What are you doing?" I demanded. "Whatever it is, there's danger in it."

"An explorer like your grandfather would hardly be content if there were not, my boy," he replied crisply, matter-of-factly.

I knew it was true.

"I would rather die with my boots on than here in this bed," he went on. "As for what we heard—I don't know

how much of it *you* heard—that's something for the moment not yet explicable. But I would call to your attention the strange action of the wind."

"There was no wind," I said. "I looked."

"Yes, yes," he said a little impatiently. "True enough. And yet the wind's sound was there, and all the voices of the wind—just as I have heard it singing in Mongolia, in the great snowy spaces, over the shunned and hidden Plateau of Leng where the Tcho-Tcho people worship strange ancient gods." he turned to face me suddenly, and I thought his eyes feverish. "I did tell you, didn't I, about the worship of Ithaqua, sometimes called Wind-Walker, and by some, surely, the Wendigo, by certain Indians in upper Manitoba, and of their beliefs that the Wind-Walker takes human sacrifices and carries them over the far places of the earth before leaving them behind, dead at last? Oh, there are stories, my boy, odd legends —and something more." He leaned toward me now with a fierce intensity. "I have myself seen things—things found on a body dropped from the air—just that—things that could not possibly have been got in Manitoba, things belonging to Leng, to the Pacific Isles." He brushed me away with one arm, and an expression of disgust crossed his face. "You don't believe me. You think I'm wandering. Go on then, go back to your little sleep, and wait for your last through the eternal misery of monotonous day after day!"

"No! Say it now. I'm in no mood to go."

"I will talk to you in the morning," he said tiredly, leaning back.

With that I had to be content; he was adamant, and could not be moved. I bade him good-night once more and retreated into the hall with Frolin, who stood there shaking his head slowly, forbiddingly.

"Every time a little worse," he whispered. "Every time the wind blows a little louder, the cold comes more intensely, the voices and the music more clearly—and the sound of those terrible footsteps!"

He turned away and began to retrace the way upstairs, and, after a moment of hesitation, I followed.

In the morning my grandfather looked his usual picture of good health. At the moment of my entrance into the dining room, he was speaking to Hough, evidently in answer to a request, for the old servant stood respectfully bowed, while he heard grandfather tell him that he and Mrs. Hough might indeed take a week off, beginning today, if it was necessary for Mrs. Hough's health that she go to Wausau to consult a specialist. Frolin met my eyes with a grim smile; his color had faded a little, leaving him pale and sleepless-looking, but he ate heartily enough. His smile, and the brief indicative glance of his eyes toward Hough's retreating back, said clearly that this necessity which had come upon Hough and his wife was their way of fighting the manifestations which had so disturbed my own first night in the house.

"Well, my boy," said grandfather quite cheerfully, "you're not looking nearly as haggard as you did last night. I confess, I felt for you. I daresay also you aren't nearly so skeptical as you were."

He chuckled, as if this were a subject for joking. I could not, unfortunately, feel the same way about it. I sat down and began to eat a little, glancing at him from time to time, waiting for him to begin his explanation of the strange events of the previous night. Since it became evident shortly that he did not intend to explain, I was impelled to ask for an explanation, and did so with as much dignity as possible.

"I'm sorry if you've been disturbed," he said. "The fact of the matter is that that threshold of which Leander wrote must be in that study somewhere, and I felt quite certain I was onto it last night, before you burst into my room the second time. Furthermore, it seems undisputable that at least one member of the family has had traffic with one of those beings—Leander, obviously."

Frolin leaned forward. "Do you believe in them?"

Grandfather smiled unpleasantly. "It must be obvious

that, whatever my abilities, the disturbance you heard last night could hardly have been caused by me."

"Yes, of course," agreed Frolin. "But some other agency. . . ."

"No, no—it remains to be determined only which one. The water smells are the sign of the spawn of Cthulhu, but the winds might be Lloigor or Ithaqua or Hastur. But the stars aren't right for Hastur," he went on. "So we are left with the other two. There they are, then, or one of them, just across that threshold. I want to know what lies beyond that threshold, if I can find it."

It seemed incredible that my grandfather should be talking so unconcernedly about these ancient beings; his prosaic air was in itself almost as alarming as had been the night's occurrences. The temporary feeling of security I had had at the sight of him eating breakfast was washed away; I began to be conscious again of that slowly growing fear I had known on my way to the house last evening, and I regretted having pushed my inquiry.

If my grandfather were aware of anything of this, he made no sign. He went on talking much in the manner of a lecturer pursuing a scientific inquiry for the benefit of an audience before him. It was obvious, he said, that a connection existed between the happenings at Innsmouth and Leander Alwyn's non-human contact *outside*. Did Leander leave Innsmouth originally because of the cult of Cthulhu that existed there, because he, too, was becoming afflicted with that curious facial change which overtook so many of the inhabitants of accursed Innsmouth?—those strange batrachian lineaments which horrified the Federal investigators who come to examine into the Innsmouth affair? Perhaps this was so. In any event, leaving the Cthulhu cult behind, he had made his way into the wilds of Wisconsin and somehow he had established contact with another of the elder beings, Lloigor or Ithaqua—all, to be noted, elemental forces of evil. Leander Alwyn was apparently a wicked man.

"If there is any truth to this," I cried, "then surely

Leander's warning ought to be observed. Give up this mad hope of finding the threshold of which he writes!"

Grandfather gazed at me for a moment with speculative mildness; but it was plain to see that he was not actually concerning himself with my outburst. "Now I've embarked upon this exploration, I mean to keep to it. After all, Leander died a natural death."

"But, following your own theory, he had traffic with these—these things," I said. "You have none. You're daring to venture out into unknown space—it comes to that—without regard for what horrors might lie there."

"When I went into Mongolia, I encountered horrors, too. I never thought to escape Leng with my life." He paused reflectively, and then rose slowly. "No, I mean to discover Leander's threshold. And tonight, no matter what you hear, try not to interrupt me. It would be a pity, if after so long a time, I am still further delayed by your impetuosity."

"And having discovered the threshold," I cried. "What then?"

"I'm not sure I'll want to cross it."

"The choice may not be yours."

He looked at me for a moment in silence, smiled gently, and left the room.

III

Of the events of that catastrophic night, I find it difficult even at this late date to write, so vividly do they return to mind, despite the prosaic surroundings of Miskatonic University where so many of those dread secrets are hidden in ancient and little-known texts. And yet, to understand the widespread occurrences that came after, the events of that night must be known.

Frolin and I spent most of the day investigating my grandfather's books and papers, in search of verification of certain legends he had hinted at in his conversation, not only with me, but with Frolin even before my arrival.

Throughout his work occurred many cryptic allusions, but only one narrative at all relative to our inquiry—a somewhat obscure story, clearly of legendary origin, concerning the disappearance of two residents of Nelson, Manitoba, and a constable of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and their subsequent reappearance, as if dropped from the heavens, frozen and either dead or dying, babbling of *Ithaqua,* of the *Wind-Walker,* and of many places on the face of the earth, and carrying with them strange objects, mementoes of far places, which they had never been known to carry in life. The story was incredible, and yet it was related to the mythology so clearly put down in *The Outsider and Others,* and even more horribly narrated in the *Pnakotic Manuscripts,* the *R'lyeh Text,* and the terrible *Necronomicon.*

Apart from this, we found nothing tangible enough to relate to our problem, and we resigned ourselves to waiting for the night.

At luncheon and dinner, prepared by Frolin in the absence of the Houghs, my grandfather carried on as normally he was accustomed to, making no reference to his strange exploration, beyond saying that he now had definite proof that Leander had painted that unattractive landscape on the east wall of the study, and that he hoped soon, as he neared the end of the deciphering of Leander's long, rambling letter, to find the essential clue to that threshold of which he wrote, and to which he now alluded increasingly. When he rose from the dinner table, he solemnly cautioned us once more not to interrupt him in the night, under pain of his extreme displeasure, and so departed into that study out of which he never walked again.

"Do you think you can sleep?" Frolin asked me, when we were alone.

I shook my head. "Impossible. I'll stay up."

"I don't think he'd like us to stay downstairs," said Frolin, a faint frown on his forehead.

"In my room, then," I replied. "And you?"

"With you, if you don't mind. He means to see it

through, and there's nothing we can do until he needs us. He may call . . ."

I had the uncomfortable conviction that if my grandfather called for us, it would be too late, but I forebore to give voice to my fears.

The events of that evening started as before—with the strains of that weirdly beautiful music welling flute-like from the darkness around the house. Then, in a little while, came the wind, and the cold, and the ululating voice. And then, preceded by an aura of evil so great that it was almost stifling in the room—then came something more, something unspeakably terrible. We had been sitting, Frolin and I, with the light out; I had not bothered to light my electric candle, since no light we could show would illumine the source of these manifestations. I faced the window and, when the wind began to rise, looked once again to the line of trees, thinking that surely, certainly, they must bend before this great onrushing storm of wind; but again there was nothing, no movement in that stillness. And there was no cloud in the heavens; the stars shone brightly, the constellations of summer moving down to the western rim of earth to make the signature of autumn in the sky. The wind's sound had risen steadily, so that now it had the fury of a gale, and yet nothing, no movement disturbed the line of trees dark upon the night sky.

But suddenly—so suddenly that for a moment I blinked my eyes in an effort to convince myself that a dream had shuttered my sight—in one large area of the sky the stars were gone! I came to my feet and pressed my face to the pane. It was as if a cloud had abruptly reared up into the heavens, to a height almost at the zenith; but no cloud could have come upon the sky so swiftly. On both sides and overhead stars still shone. I opened the window and leaned out, trying to follow the dark outline against the stars. *It was the outline of some great beast, a horrible caricature of man, rising to a semblance of a head high in the heavens, and there, where its eyes might have been glowed with a deep carmine fire two stars!*—Or were they

stars? At the same instant, the sound of those approaching footsteps grew so loud that the house shook and trembled with their vibrations, and the wind's demoniac fury rose to indescribable heights, and the ululation reached such a pitch that it was maddening to hear.

"Frolin!" I called hoarsely.

I felt him come to my side, and in a moment felt his tight grasp on my arm. So he, too, had seen; it was not hallucination, not dream—this giant thing outlined against the stars, and moving!

"It's moving," whispered Frolin. "Oh, God!—it's coming!"

He pulled frantically away from the window, and so did I. But in an instant, the shadow on the sky was gone, the stars shone once more. The wind, however, had not decreased in intensity one iota; indeed, if it were possible, it grew momentarily wilder and more violent; the entire house shuddered and quaked, while those thunderous footsteps echoed and reechoed in the valley before the house. And the cold grew worse, so that breath hung a white vapor in air—a cold as of outer space.

Out of all the turmoil of mind, I thought of the legend in my grandfather's papers—the legend of *Ithaqua,* whose signature lay in the cold and snow of far nothern places. Even as I remembered, everything was driven from my mind by a frightful chorus of ululation, the triumphant chanting as of a thousand bestial mouths—

"Iä! Iä! Ithaqua, Ithaqua! Ai! Ai! Ai! Ithaqua cf'ayak vulgtmm vugtlagln vulgtmm. Ithaqua fhatagn! Ugh! Iä! Iä! Ai! Ai! Ai!"

Simultaneously came a thunderous crash, and immediately after, the voice of my grandfather, raised in a terrible cry, a cry that rose into a scream of mortal terror, so that the names he would have uttered—Frolin's and mine—were lost, choked back into his throat by the full force of the horror revealed to him.

And, as abruptly as his voice ceased to sound, all other manifestations came to a stop, leaving again that ghastly, portentous silence to close around us like a cloud of doom.

Frolin reached the door of my room before I did, but I was not far behind. He fell part of the way down the stairs, but recovered in the light of my electric candle, which I had seized on my way out, and together we assaulted the door of the study, calling to the old man inside.

But no voice answered, though the line of yellow under the door was evidence that his lamp burned still.

The door had been locked from the inside, so that it was necessary to break it down before we could enter.

Of my grandfather, there was no trace. But in the east wall yawned a great cavity, where the painting, now prone upon the floor, had been—a rocky opening leading into the depths of earth—and over everything in the room lay the mark of Ithaqua—a fine carpet of snow, whose crystals gleamed as from a million tiny jewels in the yellow light of grandfather's lamp. Save for the painting, only the bed was disturbed—*as if grandfather had been literally torn out of it by stupendous force!*

I looked hurriedly to where the old man had kept uncle Leander's manuscript—but it was gone; nothing of it remained. Frolin cried out suddenly and pointed to the painting uncle Leander had made, and then to the opening yawning before us.

"It was here all the time—the threshold," he said.

And I saw even as he; as grandfather had seen too late —*for the painting by uncle Leander was but the representation of the site of his home before the house had been erected to conceal that cavernous opening into the earth on the hillside, the hidden threshold against which Leander's manuscript had warned, the threshold beyond which my grandfather had vanished!*

Though there is little more to tell, yet the most damning of all the curious facts remain to be revealed. A thorough search of the cavern was subsequently made by county officials and certain intrepid adventurers from Harmon; it was found to have several openings, and it was plain that anyone or *anything* wishing to reach the house through the cavern would have had to enter through one of the innumerable hidden crevices discovered among the sur-

rounding hills. The nature of uncle Leander's activities was revealed after grandfather's disappearance. Frolin and I were put through a hard grilling by suspicious county officials, but were finally released when the body of my grandfather did not come to light.

But since that night, certain facts came into the open, facts which, in the light of my grandfather's hints, coupled with the horrible legends contained in the shunned books locked away here in the library of Miskatonic University, are damning and damnably inescapable.

The first of them was the series of gigantic footprints found in the earth at that place where on that fatal night the shadow had risen into the starswept heavens—the unbelievable wide and deep depressions, as of some prehistoric monster walking there, steps a half mile apart, steps that led beyond the house and vanished at a crevice leading down into that hidden cavern in tracks identical with those found in the snow in northern Manitoba where those unfortunate travelers and the constable sent to find them had vanished from the face of the earth!

The second was the discovery of my grandafther's notebook, together with a portion of uncle Leander's manuscript, encased in ice, found deep in the forest snows of upper Saskatchewan, and bearing every sign of having been dropped from a great height. The last entry was dated on the day of his disappearance in late September; the notebook was not found until the following April. Neither Frolin nor I dared to make the explanation of its strange appearance which came immediately to mind, and together we burned that horrible letter and the imperfect translation grandfather had made, the translation which in itself, as it was written down, with all its warnings against the terror beyond the threshold, had served to summon from *outside* a creature so horrible that its description has never been attempted by even those ancient writers whose terrible narratives are scattered over the face of the earth!

And last of all, the most conclusive, the most damning evidence—the discovery seven months later of my grand-

father's body on a small Pacific island not far southeast of Singapore, and the curious report made of his condition; perfectly preserved, *as if in ice,* so cold that no one could touch him with bare hands for five days after his discovery, and the singular fact that he was found half buried in sand, *as if "he had fallen from an aeroplane!"* Neither Frolin nor I could any longer have any doubt; this was the legend of Ithaqua, who carried his victims with him into far places of the earth, in time and space, before leaving them behind. And the evidence was undeniable that my grandfather had been alive for part of that incredible journey, for if we had had any doubt, the things found in his pockets, the mementoes carried from strange hidden places where he had been, and sent to us, were final and damning testimony—the gold plaque, with its miniature presentation of a struggle between ancient beings, and bearing on its surface inscriptions in cabalistic designs, the plaque which Dr. Rackham of Miskatonic University identified as having come from some place beyond the memory of man; the loathsome book in Burmese that revealed ghastly legends of that shunned and hidden Plateau of Leng, the place of the dread Tcho-Tcho people; and finally, the *revolting and bestial stone miniature of a hellish monstrosity walking on the winds above the earth!*

THE SALEM HORROR

HENRY KUTTNER

WHEN Carson first noticed the sounds in his cellar, he ascribed them to the rats. Later he began to hear the tales which were whispered by the superstitious Polish mill workers in Derby Street regarding the first occupant of the ancient house, Abigail Prinn. There was none living today who could remember the diabolical old hag, but the morbid legends which thrive in the "witch district" of Salem like rank weeds on a neglected grave gave disturbing particulars of her activities, and were unpleasantly explicit regarding the detestable sacrifices she was known to have made to a worm-eating, crescent-horned image of dubious origin. The oldsters still muttered of Abbie Prinn and her monstrous boasts that she was high priestess of a fearfully potent god which dwelt deep in the hills. Indeed, it was the old witch's reckless boasting which had led to her abrupt and mysterious death in 1692, about the time of the famous hangings on Gallows Hill. No one liked to talk about it, but occasionally a toothless crone would mumble fearfully that the flames could not burn her, for her whole body had taken on the peculiar anesthesia of her witch-mark.

Abbie Prinn and her anomalous statue had long since vanished, but it was still difficult to find tenants for her decrepit, gabled house, with its overhanging second story

and curious diamond-paned casement windows. The house's evil notoriety had spread throughout Salem. Nothing had actually happened there of recent years which might give rise to the inexplicable tales, but those who rented the house had a habit of moving out hastily, generally with vague and unsatisfactory explanations connected with the rats.

And it was a rat which led Carson to the Witch Room. The squealing and muffled pattering within the rotting walls had disturbed Carson more than once during the nights of his first week in the house, which he had rented to obtain the solitude that would enable him to complete a novel for which his publishers had been asking—another light romance to add to Carson's long string of popular successes. But it was not until some time later that he began to entertain certain wildly fantastic surmises regarding the intelligence of the rat that scurried from under his feet in the dark hallway one evening.

The house had been wired for electricity, but the bulb in the hall was small and gave a dim light. The rat was a misshapen, black shadow as it darted a few feet away and paused, apparently watching him.

At another time Carson might have dismissed the animal with a threatening gesture and returned to his work. But the traffic on Derby Street had been unusually noisy, and he had found it difficult to concentrate upon his novel. His nerves, for no apparent reason, were taut; and somehow it seemed that the rat, watching just beyond his reach, was eyeing him with sardonic amusement.

Smiling at the conceit, he took a few steps toward the rat, and it rushed away to the cellar door, which he saw with surprize was ajar. He must have neglected to close it the last time he had been in the cellar, although he generally took care to keep the doors shut, for the ancient house was drafty. The rat waited in the doorway.

Unreasonably annoyed, Carson hurried forward, sending the rat scurrying down the stairway. He switched on the cellar light and observed the rat in a corner. It watched him keenly out of glittering little eyes.

As he descended the stairs he could not help feeling that he was acting like a fool. But his work had been tiring, and subconsciously he welcomed any interruption. He moved across the cellar to the rat, seeing with astonishment that the creature remained unmoving, staring at him. A strange feeling of uneasiness began to grow within him. The rat was acting abnormally, he felt; and the unwinking gaze of its cold shoe-button eyes was somehow disturbing.

Then he laughed to himself, for the rat had suddenly whisked aside and disappeared into a little hole in the cellar wall. Idly he scratched a cross with his toe in the dirt before the burrow, deciding that he would set a trap there in the morning.

The rat's snout and ragged whiskers protruded cautiously. It moved forward and then hesitated, drew back. Then the animal began to act in a singular and unaccountable manner—almost as though it were dancing, Carson thought. It moved tentatively forward, retreated again. It would give a little dart forward and be brought up short, then leap back hastily, as though—the simile flashed into Carson's mind—a snake were coiled before the burrow, alert to prevent the rat's escape. But there was nothing there save the little cross Carson had scratched in the dust.

No doubt it was Carson himself who blocked the rat's escape, for he was standing within a few feet of the burrow. He moved forward, and the animal hurriedly retreated out of sight.

His interest piqued, Carson found a stick and poked it exploringly into the hole. As he did so his eye, close to the wall, detected something strange about the stone slab just above the rat burrow. A quick glance around its edge confirmed his suspicion. The slab was apparently movable.

Carson examined it closely, noticed a depression on its edge which would afford a handhold. His fingers fitted easily into the groove, and he pulled tentatively. The stone moved a trifle and stopped. He pulled harder, and with a

sprinkling of dry earth the slab swung away from the wall as though on hinges.

A black rectangle, shoulder-high, gaped in the wall. From its depths a musty, unpleasant stench of dead air welled out, and involuntarily Carson retreated a step. Suddenly he remembered the monstrous tales of Abbie Prinn and the hideous secrets she was supposed to have kept hidden in her house. Had he stumbled upon some hidden retreat of the long-dead witch?

Before entering the dark gap he took the precaution of obtaining a flashlight from upstairs. Then he cautiously bent his head and stepped into the narrow, evil-smelling passage, sending the flashlight's beam probing out before him.

He was in a narrow tunnel, scarcely higher than his head, and walled and paved with stone slabs. It ran straight ahead for perhaps fifteen feet, and then broadened out into a roomy chamber. As Carson stepped into the underground room—no doubt a hidden retreat of Abbie Prinn's, a hiding-place, he thought, which nevertheless could not save her on the day the fright-crazed mob had come raging along Derby Street—he caught his breath in a gasp of amazement. The room was fantastic, astonishing.

It was the floor which held Carson's gaze. The dull gray of the circular wall gave place here to a mosaic of varicolored stone, in which blues and greens and purples predominated—indeed, there were none of the warmer colors. There must have been thousands of bits of colored stone making up that pattern, for none was larger than a walnut. And the mosaic seemed to follow some definite pattern, unfamiliar to Carson; there were curves of purple and violet mingled with angled lines of green and blue, intertwining in fantastic arabesques. There were circles, triangles, a pentagram, and other, less familiar, figures. Most of the lines and figures radiated from a definite point: the center of the chamber, where there was a circular disk of dead black stone perhaps two feet in diameter.

It was very silent. The sounds of the cars that occasionally went past overhead in Derby Street could not be heard. In a shallow alcove in the wall Carson caught a glimpse of markings on the walls, and he moved slowly in that direction, the beam of his light traveling up and down the walls of the niche.

The marks, whatever they were, had been daubed upon the stone long ago, for what was left of the cryptic symbols was indecipherable. Carson saw several partly-effaced hieroglyphics which reminded him of Arabic, but he could not be sure. On the floor of the alcove was a corroded metal disk about eight feet in diameter, and Carson received the distinct impression that it was movable. But there seemed no way to lift it.

He became conscious that he was standing in the exact center of the chamber, in the circle of black stone where the odd design centered. Again he noticed the utter silence. On an impulse he clicked off the ray of his flashlight. Instantly he was in dead blackness.

At that moment a curious idea entered his mind. He pictured himself at the bottom of a pit, and from above a flood was descending, pouring down the shaft to engulf him. So strong was this impression that he actually fancied he could hear a muffled thundering, the roar of the cataract. Then, oddly shaken, he clicked on the light, glanced around swiftly. The drumming, of course, was the pounding of his blood, made audible in the complete silence—a familiar phenomenon. But, if the place was so still——

The thought leaped into his mind, as though suddenly thrust into his consciousness. This would be an ideal place to work. He could have the place wired for electricity, have a table and chair brought down, use an electric fan if necessary—although the musty odor he had first noticed seemed to have disappeared completely. He moved to the tunnel mouth, and as he stepped from the room he felt an inexplicable relaxation of his muscles, although he had not realized that they had been contracted. He ascribed it to nervousness, and went upstairs to brew black coffee and write to his landlord in Boston about his discovery.

The visitor stared curiously about the hallway after Carson had opened the door, nodding to himself as though with satisfaction. He was a lean, tall figure of a man, with thick steel-gray eyebrows overhanging keen gray eyes. His face, although strongly marked and gaunt, was unwrinkled.

"About the Witch Room, I suppose?" Carson said ungraciously. His landlord had talked, and for the last week he had been unwillingly entertaining antiquaries and occultists anxious to glimpse the secret chamber in which Abbie Prinn had mumbled her spells. Carson's annoyance had grown, and he had considered moving to a quieter place; but his inherent stubbornness had made him stay on, determined to finish his novel in spite of interruptions. Now, eyeing his guest coldly, he said, "I'm sorry, but it's not on exhibition any more."

The other looked startled, but almost immediately a gleam of comprehension came into his eyes. He extracted a card and offered it to Carson.

"Michael Leigh . . . occultist, eh?" Carson repeated. He drew a deep breath. The occultists, he had found, were the worst, with their dark hints of nameless things and their profound interest in the mosaic pattern on the floor of the Witch Room. "I'm sorry, Mr. Leigh, but—I'm really quite busy. You'll excuse me."

Ungraciously he turned back to the door.

"Just a moment," Leigh said swiftly.

Before Carson could protest he had caught the writer by the shoulders and was peering closely into his eyes. Startled, Carson drew back, but not before he had seen an extraordinary expression of mingled apprehension and satisfaction appear on Leigh's gaunt face. It was as though the occultist had seen something unpleasant—but not unexpected.

"What's the idea?" Carson asked harshly. "I'm not accustomed——"

"I'm very sorry," Leigh said. His voice was deep, pleasant. "I must apologize. I thought—well, again I apologize. I'm rather excited, I'm afraid. You see, I've

come from San Francisco to see this Witch Room of yours. Would you really mind letting me see it? I should be glad to pay any sum——"

Carson made a deprecatory gesture.

"No," he said, feeling a perverse liking for this man growing within him—his well-modulated, pleasant voice, his powerful face, his magnetic personality. "No, I merely want a little peace—you have no idea how I've been bothered," he went on, vaguely surprised to find himself speaking apologetically. "It's a frightful nuisance. I almost with I'd never found the room."

Leigh leaned forward anxiously. "May I see it? It means a great deal to me—I'm vitally interested in these things. I promise not to take up more than ten minutes of your time."

Carson hesitated, then assented. As he led his guest into the cellar he found himself telling the circumstances of his discovery of the Witch Room. Leigh listened intently, occasionally interrupting with questions.

"The rat—did you see what became of it?" he asked.

Carson looked surprized. "Why, no. I suppose it hid in its burrow. Why?"

"One never knows," Leigh said cryptically as they came into the Witch Room.

Carson switched on the light. He had had an electrical extension installed, and there were a few chairs and a table, but otherwise the chamber was unchanged. Carson watched the occultist's face, and with surprise saw it become grim, almost angry.

Leigh strode to the center of the room, staring at the chair that stood on the black circle of stone.

"You work here?" he asked slowly.

"Yes. It's quiet—I found I couldn't work upstairs. Too noisy. But this is ideal—somehow I find it very easy to write here. My mind feels"—he hesitated—"free; that is, disassociated with other things. It's quite an unusual feeling."

Leigh nodded as though Carson's words had confirmed some idea in his own mind. He turned toward the alcove

and the metal disk in the floor. Carson followed him. The occultist moved close to the wall, tracing out the faded symbols with a long forefinger. He muttered something under his breath—words that sounded like gibberish to Carson.

"Nyogtha . . . k'yarnak. . . ."

He swung about, his face grim and pale. "I've seen enough," he said softly. "Shall we go?"

Surprised, Carson nodded and led the way back into the cellar.

Upstairs Leigh hesitated, as though finding it difficult to broach his subject. At length he asked, "Mr. Carson—would you mind telling me if you have had any peculiar dreams lately."

Carson stared at him, mirth dancing in his eyes. "Dreams?" he repeated. "Oh—I see. Well, Mr. Leigh, I may as well tell you that you can't frighten me. Your compatriots—the other occultists I've entertained—have already tried it."

Leigh raised his thick eyebrows. "Yes? Did they ask you whether you'd dreamed?"

"Several did—yes."

"And you told them?"

"No." Then as Leigh leaned back in his chair, a puzzled expression on his face, Carson went on slowly, "Although, really, I'm not quite sure."

"You mean?"

"I *think*—I have a vague impression—that I have dreamed lately. But I can't be sure. I can't remember anything of the dream, you see. And—oh, very probably your brother occultists put the idea into my mind!"

"Perhaps," Leigh said non-committally, getting up. He hesitated. "Mr. Carson, I'm going to ask you a rather presumptuous question. Is it necessary for you to live in this house?"

Carson sighed resignedly. "When I was first asked that question I explained that I wanted a quiet place to work on a novel, and that any quiet place would do. But it isn't easy to find 'em. Now that I have this Witch Room,

and I'm turning out my work so easily, I see no reason why I should move and perhaps upset my program. I'll vacate this house when I finish my novel, and then you occultists can come in and turn it into a museum or do whatever you want with it. I don't care. But until the novel is finished I intend to stay here."

Leigh rubbed his chin. "Indeed. I can understand your point of view. But—is there no other place in the house where you can work?"

He watched Carson's face for a moment, and then went on swiftly.

"I don't expect you to believe me. You are a materialist. Most people are. But there are a few of us who know that above and beyond what men call science there is a greater science that is built on laws and principles which to the average man would be almost incomprehensible. If you have read Machen you will remember that he speaks of the gulf between the world of consciousness and the world of matter. It is possible to bridge that gulf. The Witch Room is such a bridge! Do you know what a whispering-gallery is?"

"Eh?" Carson said, staring. "But there's no——"

"An analogy—merely an analogy. A man may whisper a word in a gallery—or a cave—and if you are standing in a certain spot a hundred feet away you will hear that whisper, although someone ten feet away will not. It's a simple trick of acoustics—bringing the sound to a focal point. And this principle can be applied to other things besides sound. To any wave impulse—*even to thought!*"

Carson tried to interrupt, but Leigh kept on.

"That black stone in the center of your Witch Room is one of those focal points. The design on the floor—when you sit on the black circle there you are abnormally sensitive to certain vibrations—certain thought commands—dangerously sensitive! Why do you suppose your mind is so clear when you are working there? A deception, a false feeling of lucidity—for you are merely an instrument, a microphone, tuned to pick up certain malign vibrations the nature of which you could not comprehend!"

Carson's face was a study in amazement and incredulity. "But—you don't mean you actually *believe*——"

Leigh drew back, the intensity fading from his eyes, leaving them grim and cold. "Very well. But I have studied the history of your Abigail Prinn. She too, understood this super-science of which I speak. She used it for evil purposes—the black art, as it is called. I have read that she cursed Salem in the old days—and a witch's curse can be a frightful thing. Will you——" He got up, gnawing at his lip. "Will you, at least, allow me to call on you tomorrow?"

Almost involuntarily Carson nodded. "But I'm afraid you'll be wasting your time. I don't believe—I mean, I have no——" He stumbled, at a loss for words.

"I merely wish to assure myself that you—oh, another thing. If you dream tonight, will you try to remember the dream? If you attempt to recapture it immediately after waking, it is often possible to recall it."

"All right. If I dream——"

That night Carson dreamed. He awoke just before dawn with his heart racing furiously and a curious feeling of uneasiness. Within the walls and from below he could hear the furtive scurryings of the rats. He got out of bed hastily, shivering in the cold grayness of early morning. A wan moon still shone faintly in a paling sky.

Then he remembered Leigh's words. He *had* dreamed —there was no question of that. But the content of his dream—that was another matter. He absolutely could not recall it to his mind, much as he tried, although there was a very vague impression of running frantically in darkness.

He dressed quickly, and because the stillness of early morning in the old house got on his nerves, went out to buy a newspaper. It was too early for shops to be open, however, and in search of a news-boy he set off westward, turning at the first corner. And as he walked a curious and inexplicable feeling began to take possession of him: a feeling of—familiarity! He had walked here before, and there was a dim and disturbing familiarity about the

shapes of the houses, the outline of the roofs. But—and this was the fantastic part of it—to his knowledge he had never been on this street before. He had spent little time walking about this region of Salem, for he was indolent by nature; yet there was this extraordinary feeling of remembrance, and it grew more vivid as he went on.

He reached a corner, turned unthinkingly to the left. The odd sensation increased. He walked on slowly, pondering.

No doubt he *had* traveled by this way before—and very probably he had done so in a brown study, so that he had not been conscious of his route. Undoubtedly that was the explanation. Yet as Carson turned into Charter Street he felt a nameless uneasy waking within him. Salem was rousing; with daylight impassive Polish workers began to hurry past him toward the mills. An occasional automobile went by.

Before him a crowd was gathered on the sidewalk. He hastened his steps, conscious of a feeling of impending calamity. With an extraordinary sense of shock he saw that he was passing the Charter Street Burying Ground, the ancient, evilly famous "Burying Point." Hastily he pushed his way into the crowd.

Comments in a muffled undertone came to Carson's ears, and a bulky blue-clad back loomed up before him. He peered over the policeman's shoulder and caught his breath in a horrified gasp.

A man leaned against the iron railing that fenced the old graveyard. He wore a cheap, gaudy suit, and he gripped the rusty bars in a clutch that made the muscles stand out in ridges on the hairy back of his hands. He was dead, and on his face, staring up at the sky at a crazy angle, was frozen an expression of abysmal and utterly shocking horror. His eyes, all whites, were bulging hideously; his mouth was a twisted, mirthless grin.

A man at Carson's side turned a white face toward him. "Looks as if he was scared to death," he said somewhat hoarsely. "I'd hate to have seen what he saw. Ugh—look at that face!"

Mechanically Carson backed away, feeling an icy breath of nameless things chill him. He rubbed his hand across his eyes, but still that contorted, dead face swam in his vision. He began to retrace his steps, shaken and trembling a little. Involuntarily his glance moved aside, rested on the tombs and monuments that dotted the old graveyard. No one had been buried there for over a century, and the lichen-stained tombstones, with their winged skulls, fat-cheeked cherubs, and funeral urns, seemed to breathe out an indefinable miasma of antiquity. What had frightened the man to death?

Carson drew a deep breath. True, the corpse had been a frightful spectacle, but he must not allow it to upset his nerves. He could not—his novel would suffer. Besides, he argued grimly to himself, the affair was obvious enough in its explanation. The dead man was apparently a Pole, one of the group of immigrants who dwell about Salem Harbor. Passing by the graveyard at night, a spot about which eldritch legends had clung for nearly three centuries, his drink-befuddled eyes must have given reality to the hazy phantoms of a superstitious mind. These Poles were notoriously unstable emotionally, prone to mob hysteria and wild imaginings. The great Immigrant Panic of 1853, in which three witch-houses had been burned to the ground, had grown from an old woman's confused and hysterical statement that she had seen a mysterious white-clad foreigner "take off his face." What else could be expected of such people, Carson thought?

Nevertheless he remained in a nervous state, and did not return home until nearly noon. When on his arrival he found Leigh, the occultist, waiting, he was glad to see the man, and invited him in with cordiality.

Leigh was very serious. "Did you hear about your friend Abigail Prinn?" he asked without preamble, and Carson stared, pausing in the act of siphoning charged water into a glass. After a long moment he pressed the lever, sent the liquid sizzling and foaming into the whiskey. He handed Leigh the drink and took one himself—neat—before answering the question.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Has—what's she been up to?" he asked, with an air of forced levity.

"I've been checking up the records," Leigh said, "and I find Abigail Prinn was buried on December 14th, 1690, in the Charter Street Burying Ground—with a stake through her heart. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Carson said tonelessly. "Well?"

"Well—her grave's been opened and robbed, that's all. The stake was found uprooted near by, and there were footprints all around the grave. Shoe-prints. Did you dream last night, Carson?" Leigh snapped out the question, his gray eyes hard.

"I don't know," Carson said confusedly, rubbing his forehead. "I can't remember. I was at the Charter Street graveyard this morning."

"Oh. Then you must have heard something about the man who——"

"I saw him," Carson interrupted, shuddering. "It upset me."

He downed the whiskey at a gulp.

Leigh watched him. "Well," he said presently, "are you still determined to stay in this house?"

Carson put down the glass and stood up.

"Why not?" he snapped. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't? Eh?"

"After what happened last night——"

"After *what* happened? A grave was robbed. A superstitious Pole saw the robbers and died of fright. Well?"

"You're trying to convince yourself," Leigh said calmly. "In your heart you know—you must know—the truth. You've become a tool in the hands of tremendous and terrible forces, Carson. For three centuries Abbie Prinn has lain in her grave—*undead*—waiting for someone to fall into her trap—the Witch Room. Perhaps she foresaw the future when she built it, foresaw that some day someone would blunder into that hellish chamber and be caught by the trap of the mosaic pattern. It caught you, Carson—and enabled that undead horror to bridge the gulf between consciousness and matter, to get *en rapport* with you.

Hypnotism is child's play to a being with Abigail Prinn's frightful powers. She could very easily force you to go to her grave and uproot the stake that held her captive, and then erase the memory of that act from your mind so that you could not remember it even as a dream!"

Carson was on his feet, his eyes burning with a strange light. "In God's name, man, do you know what you're saying?"

Leigh laughed harshly. "God's name! The devil's name, rather—the devil that menaces Salem at this moment; for Salem is in danger, terrible danger. The men and women and children of the town Abbie Prinn cursed when they bound her to the stake—and found they couldn't burn her! I've been going through certain secret archives this morning, and I've come to ask you, for the last time, to leave this house."

"Are you through?" Carson asked coldly. "Very well. I shall stay here. You're either insane or drunk, but you can't impress me with your poppycock."

"Would you leave if I offered you a thousand dollars?" Leigh asked. "Or more, then—ten thousand? I have a considerable sum at my command."

"No, damn it!" Carson snapped in a sudden blaze of anger. "All I want is to be left alone to finish my novel. I can't work anywhere else—I don't want to, I won't——"

"I expected this," Leigh said, his voice suddenly quiet, and with a strange note of sympathy. "Man, you can't get away! You're caught in the trap, and it's too late for you to extricate yourself so long as Abbie Prinn's brain controls you through the Witch Room. And the worst part of it is that she can only manifest herself with your aid—she drains your life forces, Carson, feeds on you like a vampire."

"You're mad," Carson said dully.

"I'm afraid. That iron disk in the Witch Room—I'm afraid of that, and what's under it. Abbie Prinn served strange gods, Carson—and I read something on the wall of that alcove that gave me a hint. Have you ever heard of Nyogtha?"

Carson shook his head impatiently. Leigh fumbled in a pocket, drew out a scrap of paper. "I copied this from a book in the Kester Library," he said, "a book called the *Necronomicon,* written by a man who delved so deeply into forbidden secrets that men called him mad. Read this."

Carson's brows drew together as he read the excerpt:

> Men know him as the Dweller in Darkness, that brother of the Old Ones called Nyogtha, the Thing that should not be. He can be summoned to Earth's surface through certain secret caverns and fissures, and sorcerers have seen him in Syria and below the black tower of Leng; from the Thang Grotto of Tartary he has come ravening to bring terror and destruction among the pavilions of the great Khan. Only by the looped cross, by the Vach-Viraj incantation and by the Tikkoun elixir may he be driven back to the nighted caverns of hidden foulness where he dwelleth.

Leigh met Carson's puzzled gaze calmly. "Do you understand now?"

"Incantations and elixirs!" Carson said, handing back the paper. "Fiddle-sticks!"

"Far from it. That incantation and that elixir have been known to occultists and adepts for thousands of years. I've had occasion to use them myself in the past on certain—occasions. And if I'm right about this thing——" He turned to the door, his lips compressed in a bloodless line. "Such manifestations have been defeated before, but the difficulty lies in obtaining the elixir—it's very hard to get. But I hope . . . I'll be back. Can you stay out of the Witch Room until then?"

"I'll promise nothing," Carson said. He had a dull headache, which had been steadily growing until it obtruded upon his consciousness, and he felt vaguely nauseated. "Good-bye."

He saw Leigh to the door and waited on the steps, with an odd reluctance to return to the house. As he watched the tall occultist hurry down the street, a woman came out of the adjoining house. She caught sight of him,

and her huge breasts heaved. She burst into a shrill, angry tirade.

Carson turned, staring at her with astonished eyes. His head throbbed painfully. The woman was approaching, shaking a fat fist threateningly.

"Why you scare my Sarah?" she cried, her swarthy face flushed. "Why you scare her wit' your fool tricks, eh?"

Carson moistened his lips.

"I'm sorry," he said slowly. "Very sorry. I didn't frighten your Sarah. I haven't been home all day. What frightened her?"

"T'e brown t'ing—it ran in your house, Sarah say——"

The woman paused, and her jaw dropped. Her eyes widened. She made a peculiar sign with her right hand —pointing her index and little fingers at Carson, while her thumb was crossed over the other fingers. "T'e old witch!"

She retreated hastily, muttering in Polish in a frightened voice.

Carson turned, went back into the house. He poured some whisky into a tumbler, considered, and then set it aside untasted. He began to pace the floor, occasionally rubbing his forehead with fingers that felt dry and hot. Vague, confused thoughts raced through his mind. His head was throbbing and feverish.

At length he went down to the Witch Room. He remained there, although he did not work; for his headache was not so oppressive in the dead quiet of the underground chamber. After a time he slept.

How long he slumbered he did not know. He dreamed of Salem, and of a dimly-glimpsed, gelatinous black thing that hurtled with frightful speed through the streets, a thing like an incredibly huge, jet-black ameba that pursued and engulfed men and women who shrieked and fled vainly. He dreamed of a skull-face peering into his own, a withered and shrunken countenance in which only the eyes seemed alive, and they shone with a hellish and evil light.

He awoke at last, sat up with a start. He was very cold.

It was utterly silent. In the light of the electric bulb the green and purple mosaic seemed to writhe and contract toward him, an illusion which disappeared as his sleep-fogged vision cleared. He glanced at his wrist-watch. It was two o'clock. He had slept through the afternoon and the better part of the night.

He felt oddly weak, and a lassitude held him motionless in his chair. The strength seemed to have been drained from him. The piercing cold seemed to strike through to his brain, but his headache was gone. His mind was very clear—expectant, as though waiting for something to happen. A movement near by caught his eye.

A slab of stone in the wall was moving. He heard a gentle grating sound, and slowly a black cavity widened from a narrow rectangle to a square. There was something crouching there in the shadow. Stark, blind horror struck through Carson as the thing moved and crept forward into the light.

It looked like a mummy. For an intolerable, age-long second the thought pounded frightfully at Carson's brain: *It looked like a mummy!* It was a skeleton-thin, parchment-brown corpse, and it looked like a skeleton with the hide of some great lizard stretched over its bones. It stirred, it crept forward, and its long nails scratched audibly against the stone. It crawled out into the Witch Room, its passionless face pitilessly revealed in the white light, and its eyes were gleaming with charnel life. He could see the serrated ridge of its brown, shrunken back. . . .

Carson sat motionless. Abysmal horror had robbed him of the power to move. He seemed to be caught in the fetters of dream-paralysis, in which the brain, an aloof spectator, is unable or unwilling to transmit the nerve-impulses to the muscles. He told himself frantically that he was dreaming, that he would presently awaken.

The withered horror arose. It stood upright, skeleton-thin, and moved to the alcove where the iron disk lay embedded in the floor. Standing with its back to Carson

it paused, and a dry and sere whisper rustled out in the dead stillness. At the sound Carson would have screamed, but he could not. Still the dreadful whisper went on, in a language Carson knew was not of Earth, and as though in response an almost imperceptible quiver shook the iron disk.

It quivered and began to rise, very slowly, and as if in triumph the shriveled horror lifted its pipestem arms. The disk was nearly a foot thick, but presently as it continued to rise above the level of the floor an insidious odor began to penetrate the room. It was vaguely reptilian, musky and nauseating. The disk lifted inexorably, and a little finger of blackness crept out from beneath its edge. Abruptly Carson remembered his dream of a gelatinous black creature that hurtled through the Salem streets. He tried vainly to break the fetters of paralysis that held him motionless. The chamber was darkening, and a black vertigo was creeping up to engulf him. The room seemed to rock.

Still the iron disk lifted; still the withered horror stood with its skeleton arms raised in blasphemous benediction; still the blackness oozed out in slow ameboid movement.

There came a sound breaking through the sere whisper of the mummy, the quick patter of racing footsteps. Out of the corner of his eye Carson saw a man come racing into the Witch Room. It was the occultist, Leigh, and his eyes were blazing in a face of deathly pallor. He flung himself past Carson to the alcove where the black horror was surging into view.

The withered thing turned with dreadful slowness. Leigh carried some implement in his left hand, Carson saw, a *crux ansata* of gold and ivory. His right hand was clenched at his side. His voice rolled out, sonorous and commanding. There were little beads of perspiration on his white face.

"Ya na kadishtu nilgh'ri . . . stell'bsna kn'aa Nyogtha . . . k'yarnak phlegethor. . . ."

The fantastic, unearthly syllables thundered out, echoing from the walls of the vault. Leigh advanced slowly, the

crux ansata held high. And from beneath the iron disk black horror came surging!

The disk was lifted, flung aside, and a great wave of irridescent blackness, neither liquid nor solid, a frightful gelatinous mass, came pouring straight for Leigh. Without pausing in his advance he made a quick gesture with his right hand, and a little glass tube hurtled at the black thing was engulfed.

The formless horror paused. It hesitated, with a dreadful air of indecision, and then swiftly drew back. A choking stench of burning corruption began to pervade the air, and Carson saw great pieces of the black thing flake off, shriveling as though destroyed with corroding acid. It fled back in a liquescent rush, hideous black flesh dropping as it retreated.

A pseudopod of blackness elongated itself from the central mass and like a great tentacle clutched the corpse-like being, dragged it back to the pit and over the brink. Another tentacle seized the iron disk, pulled it effortlessly across the floor, and as the horror sank from sight, the disk fell into place with a thunderous crash.

The room swung in wide circles about Carson, and a frightful nausea clutched him. He made a tremendous effort to get to his feet, and then the light faded swiftly and was gone. Darkness took him.

Carson's novel was never finished. He burned it, but continued to write, although none of his later work was ever published. His publishers shook their heads and wondered why such a brilliant writer of popular fiction had suddenly become infatuated with the weird and ghastly.

"It's powerful stuff," one man told Carson, as he handed back his novel, *Black God of Madness*. "It's remarkable in its way, but it's morbid and horrible. Nobody would read it. Carson, why don't you write the type of novel you used to do, the kind that made you famous?"

It was then that Carson broke his vow never to speak of the Witch Room, and he poured out the entire story, hoping for understanding and belief. But as he finished,

his heart sank as he saw the other's face, sympathetic but skeptical.

"You dreamed it, didn't you?" the man asked, and Carson laughed bitterly.

"Yes—I dreamed it."

"It must have made a terribly vivid impression on your mind. Some dreams do. But you'll forget about it in time," he predicted, and Carson nodded.

And because he knew that he would only be arousing doubts of his sanity, he did not mention the thing that was burned indelibly on his brain, the horror he had seen in the Witch Room after wakening from his faint. Before he and Leigh had hurried, white-faced and trembling, from the chamber, Carson had cast a quick glance behind him. The shriveled and corroded patches that he had seen slough off from that being of insane blasphemy had accountably disappeared, although they had left black stains upon the stones. Abbie Prinn, perhaps, had returned to the hell she had served, and her inhuman god had withdrawn to hidden abysses beyond man's comprehension, routed by powerful forces of elder magic which the occultist had commanded. But the witch had left a memento behind her, a hideous thing which Carson, in that last backward glance, had seen protruding from the edge of the iron disk, as though raised in ironic salute—*a withered, claw-like hand!*

THE HAUNTER OF THE GRAVEYARD

J. VERNON SHEA

NEW acquaintances always had difficulty in locating Elmer Harrod's address, for, although his street was just off one of the main arteries of the city, a stand of firs partially obscured the entrance. A large sign, DEAD END STREET, further discouraged entry, seemingly contradicted by a tiny arrow that quivered in the wind, bearing the legend: OLD DETHSHILL CEMETERY.

Despite the sign, no entrance way was provided for either car or pedestrian, nor was there a custodian's building. One had to clamber over a low stone fence, for this was the rear of the cemetery. The cemetery itself was long disused, every lot occupied. The last burial there had taken place more than fifty years before.

City officials were uninterested in the maintenance of the cemetery. They had tried to cut a freeway through the grounds twelve years ago, but such a hue and cry had been raised about the desecration of consecrated grounds that they had had to abandon the project. Having won their case, the defenders of the historic cemetery promptly forgot about it. Now its roads were in such a state of disrepair, with Joe Pye weed rustling triumphantly above the cracked concrete, that they were closed to automobile traffic. Even the bridle path that ran outside the cemetery and crossed its roads at several points had

been forsaken, for horses there always behaved strangely, skittering and shying at invisible obstacles.

Harrod's street debouched sharply downhill. Harrod had few neighbors, although a number of mouldering, tumble-down houses, long abandoned, offered hazardous shelter to vagrants. Harrod's home was the last one on the street, close by the stone fence of the cemetery. It was a house straight out of the Victorian era, with a cupola, a widow's walk, gables, and other evidences of gingerbread. Its bravura delighted the pronounced histrionic streak in Harrod, and was the sole reason for his purchase. Had the house not afforded such Gothic touches, Harrod would have found it necessary to have them built in.

Harrod even boasted that the house contained a secret passageway, but he would never show it to his guests "else it wouldn't be secret any longer." His guests suspected him of fantasticating in this manner—Harrod always overdid everything—but it was quite true.

Harrod had discovered the passageway in a curious manner. Shortly after he had moved in, he had had a dream, a very disturbing dream, in which he had been summoned in the night for some strange ritual and had gone down into the basement and, as if through long familiarity, had pressed upon the wall in a certain place and had gone through a suddenly revealed opening. The dream had ended at this point, before he could discover where the passageway led or why he had been called. In the morning he had retraced his steps to the basement wall and, feeling rather silly, had looked for a hidden switch —and had found one.

The passageway, he had discovered, was a tunnel hewn out of the earth. It appeared to burrow deep for many miles, a dank and cobwebbed place seemingly without end, with some undisclosed vents that permitted a little air to circulate. Along the way were fixtures to hold torches, and it was evident from the flooring—not just packed earth, but some finished material—that many feet had trod this way before. Even the beam of his flash-

light could not penetrate all the recesses cut out along the way, but they apparently contained nothing of interest, not even the bones and skulls he half-suspected to find. The tunnel was broad and high enough for several people to hasten along here at the same time.

Hasten—for there was a feeling of urgency about the tunnel. The people who had passed here had not dallied. Even Harrod was conscious of a compulsion to reach the tunnel's end.

It ended unexpectedly in a blank wall. No turn veered off it on either side, and though he played the flashlight over its entire expanse again and again, he could discover no sign of a switch or button. It seemed to Harrod that when he pressed his ear against the wall he could hear from behind it a distant roaring, like the pounding of surf; but he knew very well that that couldn't be, for the house was miles away from the sea.

In the days that followed Harrod made many trips to the tunnel, but never managed to get past the wall. However, further exploration revealed that one of the recesses contained an exit that he had overlooked, an extension of the tunnel that led upward, and following its course he was brought outdoors, to a secluded corner behind a mausoleum, in old Dethshill Cemetery.

Perhaps this discovery whetted his interest in the cemetery. Old Dethshill Cemetery had very few visitors. Sometimes Harrod would see from his bay window some oldster laboriously seeking an ancestor's grave, or some antiquarian with camera case slung over strolling along looking for some especially old gravestone, or a youthful art student intent upon making a rubbing of some curious inscription. Lovers came there occasionally for trysts; vagrants for a brief time cooked edibles over little fires; and children new to the neighborhood enchantedly climbed over the fence, bemused by all those acres to play in. But even in broad daylight children did not tarry there long. They soon withdrew, subtly frightened.

The cemetery had long had a name in the city as a place to be shunned, and its reputation was not helped

by Harrod's discovery, during the first year of his occupancy of the house, of the body of a vagrant close by one of the paths. The throat had been freshly torn out by something very sharp. Possibly it was the deed of another vagrant, seeking vengeance, or the work of some large animal. He reported his discovery to the officials; the police came, made but a cursory examination, and hastily had the body carted away.

Trees proliferated in the cemetery, descending into the valley to drink from the meandering creek and marching resolutely up the hillsides. They grew quite fat, elbowing one another for living space, so close together that even at noon the sunlight could not quite penetrate their masses; when Harrod lay under one of the trees, the sun was but a rumor in the sky.

One would think that with such a bounty of trees, the cemetery would be alive with birdsong, but Harrod had never heard or seen a bird there. Yet the cemetery was never still: there was constant faint rustlings or scutterings; but Harrod had yet to encounter any small creatures, not even a muskrat down at the creek or a nervous field mouse. But perhaps he was just not observant enough; when he paused to examine an inscription, he might hear the snapping of twigs behind him, but no matter how swiftly he turned then, nothing would be in sight.

There is something eerie about trees undappled by sun, where a sense of twilight prevails even at high noon; and Harrod found himself returning to the grounds again and again, if only to catch whatever it was that lurked amongst the trees. But strain his eyes though he might, turn his head unexpectedly, keep his eyes to the ground then suddenly look up, he never could surprise anything in the act of watching him, not even a deer sticking out an inquisitive nose. There was nothing to see but trees and the spaces between them and leaves twisting in the wind.

And the trees had the look of a primeval forest, as this land might have looked before the advent of man. These woods wanted no visitors, and Harrod sensed that he was an intruder.

But intrude he must, for that was in his nature, like the actor who feels compelled to perform upon a darkened stage in an empty theatre. He felt because of the nearness of his house a sense of proprietorship over the cemetery grounds, and was made actively resentful on the rare day when he passed someone strolling along.

Harrod's house was familiar to thousands of TV viewers, for on his show Harrod frequently was pictured before it in some horrendous makeup or other. Or the camera would dwell lovingly upon some architectural oddity or other—the gargoyle on the roof was a favorite subject —and eventually would discover Harrod in his library, in the midst of his tremendous collection of books of fantasy. Harrod would smirk at the viewer, perhaps stroke a phoney beard, and finger some book that might have some relationship to the film about to be shown. In over-rich, fluting tones he would give a history of the vampire or the werewolf or ghoul while the screen credits flashed on.

For Harrod's specialty—and means of livelihood—was the showing of horror films, the older and more rubbishy the better, for television audiences predominantly teen-agers. He knew that they turned on his program—or claimed to—not for vicarious chills, but for the sardonic commentaries with which he frequently laced the proceedings. He would comment scathingly upon the acting and the quality of the script and the obvious phoniness of the backgrounds and he would "encourage" the actors: "Come on, Bela, show your fangs now." "Better not go in there, little lady." "Boo to you, too." Harrod turned a deaf ear to those horror film buffs who 'phoned in to suggest he let the films alone. Once it had been released, any film was fair game for his arrows.

Increasingly, as the years went by, the cemetery exerted a fascination for Harrod. It concealed a mystery he was determined to unfathom. For some time he had harbored a suspicion that someone—one of his neighbors, perhaps, or even one of his TV viewing public—was in the habit

of playing tricks upon him. Sometimes of an evening he might see flickering lights deep within the cemetery, but whenever he went in to investigate he could find no evidence of another's presence.

Sometimes there were subtle sounds on the wind, like whispering or keening, sounds that were eldritch and infinitely chilling; and whenever he heard them he would feel that his heart had stopped beating, and nothing could drag him into the cemetery then.

Harrod told his acquaintances that the cemetery reminded him of a movie set. When fog collected in the valley, and the gravestones loomed crazily askew, one half-expected Count Dracula to emerge upon a nocturnal errand. Certain areas of the cemetery could pass readily enough for Brontë moors. At first Harrod had delighted in being photographed against such backgrounds—his scrapbook bulged with snaps of him in weird disguises—but after a time he began to realize that it was all very well to have fun in the cemetery, but that he had been overlooking its readily exploitable possibilities.

He devised dramatic little scripts for use on TV films and enlisted the aid of some students from Miskatonic University to enact them. The unaccustomed sounds of camera crews in action were now heard in the cemetery. The actors entered readily into the spirit of things. It was not difficult to register shock or horror in these macabre surroundings, especially when it seemed that the cemetery itself wished to co-operate. When the day's rushes were shown, it seemed to the company that things appeared thereon that they did not remember filming: deep menacing shadows that seemed to reach out for the players; just a suggestion of gibbering things on the periphery of the action; clouds of mists that obscured the screen momentarily; skies far more lowering that memory pictured them. And the sound track had recorded far more things that the sound engineers had counted upon—not the things that plague Hollywood crews like the buzzing of insects or the roar of passing planes, but sounds thoroughly in keeping with the mood of the film, a really in-

spired series of whisperings and rustlings of half-heard scutterings. The sound track, in fact, was so very busy that Harrod decided to dispense with the usual (and costly) electronic background music. Music here would be too much like painting the lily.

These films, shown to the TV studios, impressed the advertising agencies greatly; and the films formed the basis for the spot offered Harrod. After an introductory shot of Harrod picking his way up the grave-strewn hillside, with trees bending so far in the wind that it seemed they were reaching out to clutch Harrod, the horror film that followed seemed doubly synthetic and Harrod's gibes the more diverting. He suspected—but did not want to know—that some of these presumably genuine shots had been faked by the Miskatonic students when his back was turned, for to think otherwise—that these unrehearsed sights and sounds were quite authentic—was a possibility too chilling to be long entertained.

For his memory would not permit him to rest. He remembered that when the camera crews had gone for the day, and he went for his wonted stroll through the cemetery, he sensed almost immediately a change in the atmosphere. He felt himself under surveillance—and the surveillance was distinctly inimical. It was as if he had betrayed a trust. And when he noticed the ravages left by the company—the cigarette butts mashed into the ground, the litter of paper cups with an inch or two of coffee still in them, the used flashbulbs, the trampled grass, the scuffmarks on gravestones, the treads left by the camera equipment—he realized why the atmosphere was so actively hostile. There was a stillness in the air, as if something were waiting. A branch of a tree he passed under tensed as if about to tear at his throat. Old Dethshill Cemetery employs no caretakers, and he felt just a bit foolish as he began to repair the damage as best he could, gathering up the accumulated litter into one pile and going back to his home for cardboard boxes into which to place it—but he had the definite feeling that his pres-

ence would be unwelcome here until he made at least a show of effort on the cemetery's behalf.

It was true that the cemetery did not always wear so forbidding an air, else he would have been reluctant to visit it so frequently. There were bright days in spring and summer when the cemetery seemed in a relaxed mood, like a tiger washing itself in the sun. There were never any flowers upon the graves, of course, but during the warm months nature itself provided bouquets of wild flowers. Even a hillside yellow with dandelions in the sun is a joy to the eye, and in the soft light that sometimes filtered through the trees and dappled the ground the cemetery looked almost benign. And down in the creek the water that gurgled over the rocks pretended to be rapids. Sometimes a big brindle cat would walk for some distance along the stone fence and seem about to venture inside, but at the last moment would think better of it and drop hastily down.

It was on such a day that Harrod first thought of bringing reading material to the cemetery, and thereafter whenever he strolled there a book or magazine always accompanied him. He had to select his reading carefully, for he had found that such favorite writers of his as Jane Austen and Peacock, for instance, clashed immediately with the surroundings. He discovered, conversely, that whenever he stretched out upon a gravestone to read, even the most spurious story in a pulp horror magazine seemed to gain validity thereby. He realized that such behavior was sheerist bravado, but it gave him a delectable titillation. Once when a child strayed into the cemetery and found him enwrapped in an Inverness cape (part of his Dracula getup) dozing upon a grave, the child screamed and screamed and ran and ran, and the sound of his screams brought chuckles to Harrod in delighted remembrance.

But reading in Old Dethshill Cemetery at night, with a strong flashing light spilling over the pages of Blackwood or Machen, was the greatest thrill of all. He chose usually the finest horror tales for these nocturnal excursions, some-

times almost afraid to turn a page because the sentence he had been reading had been punctuated by a quite indefinable sound. . . .

It had been warm during the day, but now the sharpness of the night air presaged the winter to come. Harrod drew the flaps of his topcoat protectively about his face. It was uncommonly quiet in the cemetery, the only sounds for a moment being the crackling of the sere leaves underfoot.

With so many leaves fallen, the branches looked unduly prominent, each contorted shape as eye-arresting as if it had been newly painted. The trees seemed huddled less in coterie, their bareness permitting the full moonlight to penetrate the cemetery grounds.

But the moonlight held no warmth. It was obscured of a sudden by a passing cloud, causing Harrod to look up. The sight was so reminiscent of a hundred horror films that Harrod tittered involuntarily and lifted his head mockingly and bayed the moon in deft imitation of the Wolf Man.

The mockery was out of place, Harrod suddenly had cause to feel. He felt a prickling of the skin. The cemetery was sentiently aware of his presence. He had the disquieting sensation of being *watched*. He half-expected the tentacle of some extra-terrestrial monster to come probing out of the bushes.

The grass along the path had not been cut within memory and came up past his knees, the blades seeming to cut at him with serrated teeth. The wind came up strong just then, and a rippling ran through the high grasses as if to mark the passage of some small creature.

He stumbled and almost fell over a gravestone that had been hidden by weeds. He pulled them back and sent a beam from his flashlight upon the marker. OBEDIAH CARTER the marker read; the dates had been almost obliterated by time, but so far as he could decipher they read 179- — 18-7. There were a number of Carter graves hereabouts, part of a once flourishing shipbuilding family.

Hadn't he known a Randolph Carter in his youth, one who had a fearsome tale of some cemetery such as this?

Old Dethshill Cemetery no doubt knew many such tales. Harrod had often wondered what the faces of the people who dwelt in cold solitude here had been like. Dour, Puritanical faces, no doubt, or disturbed, mad faces. The faces of nightmare. . . .

Obediah Carter's grave was too weed-choked to provide what he was looking for, and so he hastened on. He had come along this way dozens of times, and yet in the moonlight everything looked oddly different, graves appearing before his eyes in places where he hadn't remembered them, and the path meandering in unexpected turns. Before he was quite prepared for it, he came upon the spot he had termed Witches' Hollow, his destination.

It was a place where the trees and the underbrush had been pushed back as if by the hand of a gigantic gardener, a place roughly in the shape of a circle, where the earth looked as black and dead as that of a burned-out forest, although no fire had blazed here within anyone's memory. Perhaps, a century or so ago, this had been the meeting place of a coven of witches who had burned sacrificial offerings to their black goat god.

The place was fringed by firs standing like sentries, the tallest trees of the cemetery; and just beyond them oaks and willows and maples crowded in for a look. The gravestones were arranged within the circle to an order lost to history. Harrod suspected that were one to shift the markers of the principal graves a few inches here and there, a perfect pentagram would be formed. And it took little imagination to picture witches and warlocks sitting upon the markers of their graves, watching him; indeed, Harrod had filmed just such a scene here.

He himself had been the sacrificial victim of the film, for with his rather plump body and look of preening self-indulgence, he was marked for the part. He considered that he had given quite a good performance, rolling his eyes in terror and quavering in his speech.

Harrod settled himself as comfortably as he could

in his usual position upon the grave of Jeremy Kent and opened his book, directing the beam of his powerful flashlight upon the pages, although the moonlight washed the scene so brightly here that he could almost dispense with the flashlight. The marble of the gravestone was quite cold in the night air, and after a while its chill began to seep into his buttocks even through the thickness of his topcoat. His ungloved fingers grew so stiff and numb that he could scarce turn the pages.

Jeremy Kent. A euphonious, harmless-sounding name. But in local folklore Jeremy Kent was reputed to have been a warlock or wizard, possibly the leader of the coven. The gravestone attested that he had been still in his early thirties when he died, a handsome man with the coldest of blue eyes. The legends concerning Kent were uncommonly interesting, and it had long been Harrod's plan, whenever he could raise the necessary capital, to make a feature-length film about his life. But how would he be able to suggest the scene in which Jeremy Kent tears the living heart out of a child's body?

Jeremy Kent had not died of natural causes. The enflamed townspeople had taken matters into their own hands. But of Harrod acceded to historical accuracy in this matter, the scene would be too much like scenes from *Frankenstein* and a dozen other horror films. Possibly, Harrod thought, he could have Kent visited by celestial vengeance. . . .

He kept pondering about Kent, as if loath to continue reading the Lovecraft story at the point at which he had left off last evening. For the Providence recluse had come too uncomfortably close to reality. Old Dethshill Cemetery itself was like a plagiarism from his pages, this clearing which Harrod had termed Witches' Hollow would fit all too easily into a Lovecraftian work, and Jeremy Kent differed very little from one of Lovecraft's villains. It was almost as if Lovecraft had visited this place himself; and considering his extensive antiquarian wanderings in this region, the possibility that he had done so was not unlikely.

The most disturbing thing was the dream. It was well-known that H. P. Lovecraft had had a number of distinctly disturbing dreams, eerie dislocations of time and space, nightmares so complete and well-organized in themselves that frequently he was able to transfer the dreams to the printed page virtually without change. His dreams had none of the random illogic that characterizes the usual dream, but granted their fantastic premise, were quite compellingly real.

The story Harrod had been reading last evening, Harrod suspected, had likewise had its genesis in one of Lovecraft's dreams. It was such a disquieting story that it had filled Harrod's thoughts all last evening; so that it was not really surprising that when at last he fell off to sleep he had found himself re-living Lovecraft's story.

With this difference: that he found that the locale of the story had shifted to Harrod's own house. He was part of a group of cowled figures, with clothes beneath the cowls that were suitable for another century, that was moving swiftly along the secret passageway that he had discovered. They had seized torches from the brackets along the walls and were moving three abreast. When they came to the terminal wall, they did not hesitate long; the leader inserted his fingers into grooves at the base of the wall and lifted; and in a moment the entire wall slid up like a garage door.

From behind the wall came a sudden breath of cold air; and Harrod found himself moving along with the group into a grotto whose immensity staggered his eyes, an ill-illumined cavern whose walls dripped slime. The greenish light revealed water lapping only a few hundred yards from his feet, the water of a cove with apparently an entrance to the sea beyond the rocks far in the distance. The curious part was that Harrod knew himself to be in a dream *at the time,* and tried to struggle awake. There must have been some elision of time in the dream at this point, for the next thing he knew he was participating with the group in some kind of ceremony at the shore of the cove, chanting a gibberish incantation:

Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah-nagl fhtagn.

And in the dream, presently, there was an *answer* to the call. His memory refused to sort out the details of the thing that rose to the surface then, a thing tremendous in size, with unbelieveably long tentacles. . . .

The dream mercifully had come to an end at this point. In the morning Harrod had been so shaken that his mind balked at the thought of going down into the passageway to confirm that the wall would indeed slide up as it had done in the dream; the thought that he might see the cove again was too much for his peace of mind.

Fortunately, a call had come later from the studio, and he had busied himself most of the day preparing a script. But now, as he read the pages of the Lovecraft story, the monstrous dream kept intruding. . . .

A sudden great gust of wind riffled the pages as he read, almost tearing the book from his hands. It diminished, moaning. A stillness overtook the clearing. The firs at its edge, which had been tossing and quivering like a dog shedding water, stood now monumentally erect.

It was too still. Seized by a sudden impulse, whose origin he couldn't fathom. Harrod turned back in the Lovecraft story, going through the pages until he found what he sought. He drew the topcoat about him, rose as if on cue, and with great histrionic effect slowly pronounced the words, pronouncing them as best he could:

Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah-nagl fhtagn.

The moonlight paled. There was a gathering of shadows where there had been no shadows, a sudden suspension of light that blotted out the trees and tall grasses. The shadows appeared to advance.

Harrod blinked and rubbed his eyelids to clear them of granular roughnesses. No, it wasn't his imagination. The shadows *were* there, somehow more solid than they had been an instant before, an advancing phalanx of darkness.

Icewater coursed down his spine. The shadows were there. They had stopped now, but did not retreat; they stopped, and looked at Harrod, and waited.

The darkness disappeared from the face of the moon, and there was light in the sky once again, a precipitous flow of light at the edge of the clearing, between the flanking firs.

And there were things in the sky there, high above the trees; there were faces on a gigantic scale, faces that were only remotely human, and a tumultous threshing of non-human parts, with a suggestion of tentacles.

They were up there, with rapacious eyes, but it seemed that their concentration had not yet been engaged upon Harrod; they were searching the ground like a bird looking for insects. Harrod whimpered and sought to hide, heaving himself off the gravestone and scrabbling in the loose gravel with his hands.

Possibly the movement of his feet had triggered some mechanism, for as he cowered beside the marker there was a creaking sound, as of protesting hinges, that set up a reverberating clangour on the night air; and the gravestone he had just vacated slowly began to rise before his eyes.

And now Harrod saw that the gravestone had concealed steps, a flight of stairs that descended subterraneously, and from them came a breath of stale and noisome air.

As he gazed at the steps in terror, he was conscious of a diminution of light just beyond the periphery of his vision, and looking up he saw that the moonlight had quitted the clearing and that the shadows had come very near, surrounding him in an inescapable ring, with little pinpoints of light which might have been eyes.

The pale light could not define their shapes. They were not wraith-like at all, not in the least transparent, but rather concentrations of darkness.

There was the slightest susurration of sound, almost below hearing level, and it gradually grew into a hollow whispering. It came from the subterranean passage.

There was no one, no thing down there, he knew. There

couldn't be. And yet he kept looking fearfully down the steps, as if expecting momentarily the appearance of a shrouded figure, possibly one with cold blue eyes. . . .

The whispering increased in volume, insistent, urgent. The voice sounded cold and ancient and unspeakably corrupt. And now he began to distinguish its words:

Come down, Harrod. Come down.

Old Dethshill Cemetery is little frequented, and it was a considerable time later that a pair of lovers, cutting off from the main path, almost trod upon a body. It was so badly decomposed that it required a dental checkup to identify it as that of the missing Elmer Harrod.

Had Harrod still been living, he himself would have cut the shot as too horrifying for his TV viewers. For the head had almost been completely torn from the body, adhering to it only by a few shreds of rotting flesh. The mouth was engaged in a perpetual scream, and the eyes, almost popping from their sockets, held too much nightmare horror to contemplate for long. The body was only barely recognizable as human; it had been twisted almost inside out, and something had gnawed upon it for quite a little while.

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