

# THE ACOLYTE

AN AMATEUR MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND THE SUPERNATURAL

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THE ACOLYTE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE  
H. P. LOVECRAFT BY A SINCERE ACOLYTE.  
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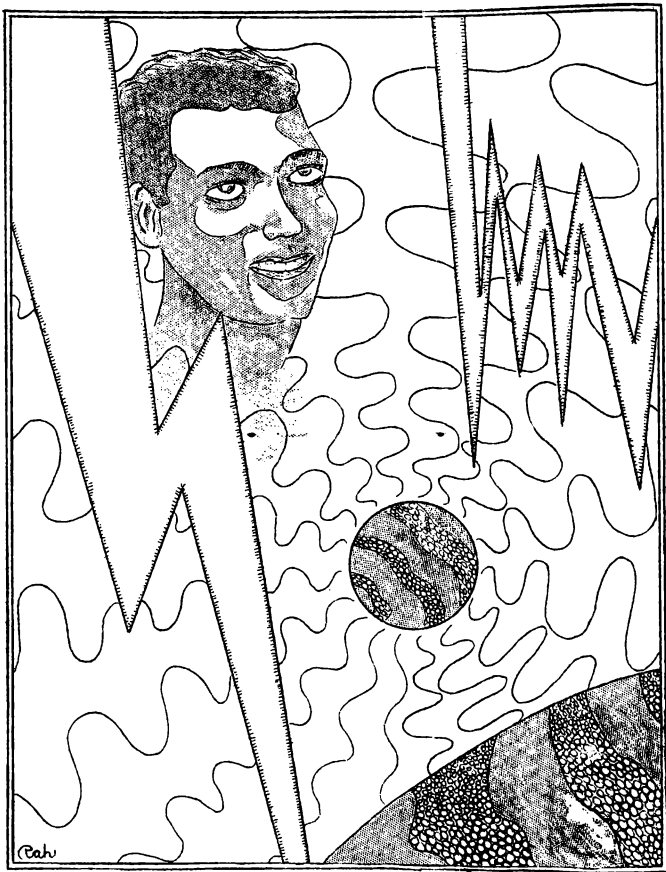
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## EDITORIALLY SPEAKING.

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THE ACOLYTE STARTS ITS SECOND YEAR with this issue, but aside from a few  
extra pages, I'm making no particular effort to celebrate. Fancy anni-  
versary issues are all right for fanzines which come out more frequent-  
ly, but it would be silly to make a great to-do over a mere four issues.  
However, if The Acolyte is able to continue for that long, I guarantee



"I felt a very strong attraction to, to whatever lay beyond."

# HORROR AT VECRA

by Henry Hasse

-oOo-

...an ancient evil that will not die,  
but draws men, soul and brain.

The pale stars peering fearfully down  
remember whence it came.

The very darkness where They wait  
doth shudder at a Name...

---Monstres and Their Kynde.

-oOo-

Now, after twelve years, vague reports are issuing again from the vicinity of Vecra. As yet they are little more than rumors, but they have served to awaken the remote horror in my brain---horror, for I now realize I must have failed, a dozen years ago, when I stood there on that brink of madness for a few hell-filled seconds.

I used dynamite then--enough of it, I thought--and believed that was the end. Now I can only wonder if this is the same evil, or some spawn of it that will never die. Perhaps even now it is not too late. I have kept silence, but now I shall tell my story and if I cannot then enlist aid, I will myself... But lest I become too incoherent, I had best begin on that day a dozen years ago.

Bruce Farleton and I were returning to Boston from a two-week camping trip. Bruce was driving, and before very long I began to suspect that he had taken the wrong fork back at North Eaton; though he maintained a stolid silence as the dirt road became gradually narrower and ruttier. I had a disquieting feeling that it was luring us on and on into this strange New England back-country.

Our way twisted through gloomy stretches of forest where limbs hung low over the road--they seemed strangely gnarled and misshapen. Queer patches of colorless vegetation pressed in upon us. We crossed narrow wooden bridges whose loose planks rumbled beneath us as the car rolled slowly over them. We dipped into shallow valleys where the evening sunshine seemed oddly depressing and not as bright as it should be.

For the most part these valleys seemed barren and rock-strown, but after a while we came upon occasional poorly tilled fields and square, ungainly, unpainted farmhouses. These were set upon slopes far back from the road, reminding me of nothing so much as dead things sprawled there in that unhealthy sunshine.

Neither of us had spoken much since leaving North Eaton, but I somehow got the impression that Bruce was secretly enjoying all this. At last we rumbled across a rickety wooden bridge, followed the turn of the road to the right, and with startling suddenness found ourselves in a little village. My first impression was one of surprise that it should be there at all; then, without exactly knowing why, I knew that I loathed the place.

"I guess this is Vecra," Bruce said, almost to himself.

"How do you know that?"

He turned and looked at me queerly. "Huh? Why, the sign--at the other end of the bridge back there. Didn't you see it?"

I looked at him suspiciously. No, I hadn't seen it; and I thought that was strange, because for the last twenty miles I had been watching for some such sign of a town. But I didn't say anything---instead, I looked about me. Vecra had evidently been at one time a more prosperous town than present indications showed. A score of frame houses lined each side of the road that was the main street; but now most of them were desolate, empty and weather-beaten, long since fallen into a state of sad decay. Only in a scattered few did we see pitiful enough signs of habitation, as oil lamps gleamed meagerly in the approaching dusk. Those lamps seemed no more meager than our own gloomy situation. Apparently the only way out of this forsaken country was back along the road we had travelled, and the prospect of retracing that route at night did not appeal to me!

We stopped at what appeared to be the general store, to inquire where we might stay overnight. A small, bent, leathery old man shuffled toward us as we entered. I took an immediate dislike to him. Maybe it was his suspicious black eyes that peered

from beneath a tangle of dirty white hair. Maybe it was his quaint old dialect, and the way he seemed to be secretly enjoying something at our expense.

"Lost yur way, hev ye, young fellers? I see ye drive up out there, an' I reckoned as how that war the case; ain't many outside wms has call ter come thissaway, ceptin' them as takes the wrong rud back at Naorth Eaton." He peered closer at us and chuckled. "Them as does, allus comes cleer on ter Vecra, acause thur ain't no other way they kin come."

I glanced nervously at Bruce, but saw that he was listening with intense interest to the old man's archaic speech. After another evil chuckle, he went on:

"Naow, as I war sayin', folks as gits up ter Vecra in daylight most allus goes back ter Naorth Eaton. An' them as gets up here by dark...they be mostly skeered ter travel back afore mornin'." He leered at us with yellowish, blood-shot eyes. "Which be ye?"

"I guess we'll stay over for the night," I said hurriedly, "if there's some one who will be kind enough..."

"Yep! Reckon Eb Corey kin fix ye up fer the night. His place be easy ter find--the big haouse down't end o' the rud. Tell Eb that Lyle Wilson sent ye."

As we went out the door I looked back and saw the old man still leering at us. Although I couldn't hear him, I imagined he was chuckling evilly again.

"I don't like him," I said to Bruce.

Bruce chuckled, and it didn't sound much better than the old man's. "I do, He's certainly a queer old bird. I think I'll come down here tomorrow and have a longer talk with him."

We found the Corey place without any trouble. Eb Corey, a tall, gaunt, slow-speaking man, received us stolidly. However, I imagined his wife was vaguely perturbed. There was something tragic about her, especially in her eyes, as though she had been haunted a long time ago and had never quite forgotten. She served us a plain but substantial meal, and we ate appreciatively. The room was large and appeared to me as definitely nineteenth century, including the smell; it was lighted by only two or three oil lamps, and shadows clung to the far corners. The room seemed full of dozens of children of all sizes, though we learned later there were only five. As their mother sent them upstairs to bed, they peered back at us curiously through the stair banister.

"Many outsiders up this way?" Bruce asked at last, when we had finished the meal.

"Last was a few months ago," Corey replied. He seemed reluctant to talk.

Bruce lit his pipe and blew a wreath of smoke at the ceiling. His next words were so abrupt and inventive they startled even me.

"I hear you've got some mighty queer land hereabouts. I'm a government soil inspector--sent up from Boston." I gaped at the lie, knowing he was nothing of the kind; but he sent me a silencing look.

About land, especially about his land, and most particularly about what was wrong with his land, Eb Corey was more than willing to talk. For an hour or more they talked, while I smoked cigarettes in silence and listened amazedly to the technical knowledge of soil that Bruce displayed. He was a professor in languages at Boston College, a far cry from an expert in soil conditions; but then, I had learned always to expect the unexpected from Bruce Tarleton.

Before retiring, we went out to move the car. We came back in time to hear Mrs. Corey remonstrating with her husband; it seemed to have something to do with our sleeping quarters. Corey was shaking his head stubbornly, and Mrs. Corey retired from the argument as we entered.

"It's that room in the back wing upstairs," Eb explained as he led the way up the worn wooden stairs, lamp in hand. "There's been some tale about it for more'n fifty years--Martha's made me keep it locked lately. My grandfather built this place, added the wing later.

"Not haunted, is it?" Bruce asked with a show of jocularly. I noticed the falseness of his tone, the suppressed excitement, but Eb Corey did not.

"Naw!" he said. "The story's got something to do with a funny kind of dream people sometimes have when they sleep in that room; I don't know what it is. Martha

says she does, but she won't talk about it. I slept in there a couple of times, but I never had any dream."

"That's all right," Bruce said. "I don't dream either."

"I knew a scientific man like you wouldn't put up with such stock. There's only a small cot in there that one of you can use--and then there's another small room across the hall. Sorry I can't offer you better."

I looked about me dubiously as we passed along a narrow hall toward the rear of the old house. The lamplight made a pale, moving pattern on the papered walls that were worn smooth and brown from the contact of generations. I stopped at my door, and Bruce went along to his, which directly faced the length of the hall. Eb unlocked that door and said, "I'll be out in the south field tomorrow, Mr. Tarleton; hope you'll come out and take a look at the soil."

I saw Bruce nod, and I waited until Eb Corey made his way expertly back downstairs in the dark. Then I quickly crossed the hall to where Bruce stood with the lamp in his hand. "I don't like this at all," I began. "What's this business about you being..."

"Come on in here, and I'll tell you."

Everywhere in this house I had been aware of that dank, age-old, peculiar odor. I might almost call it a yellow odor. I had smelled it in other old houses. But the moment we entered this upstairs room it seemed magnified, became almost tangible. The place seemed half bedroom and half store room. One side was piled haphazardly with trunks, boxes, broken tables and chairs. Bruce held the lamp high, looked around, and grinned most delightedly.

Already he had espied a tall, clumsy bookcase in the far corner. He strode over to it, and examined the faded tomes. Quickly he pulled one out, then another, and another. I groaned. I might have known this. Bruce had had this detour planned all the time; he had come up here deliberately. I sat down on a rickety chair and watched him. Finally I said, "All right, what is it this time? And don't give me any more of that Necronomicon stuff, for I know that's a myth." Bruce was an authority on certain terrible lores and forbidden books dealing with such lores, and he had told me things from a certain Necronomicon that literally made my flesh crawl.

"What?" he said in answer to my question. "Why look at these! Not Necronomicons, but interesting!" He thrust a couple of worn, leather-bound volumes into my hands. I glanced at the titles. One was Horrid Lysteries by the Marquis of Grosse; the other, Nemedian Chronicles. I looked up at Bruce, and saw that he was genuinely excited.

"Do you mean to say," I said, "that you really didn't expect to find these?"

"Of course not! I'll admit I came up here deliberately, because I've heard certain rumors..."

"Something to do with a dream?"

"No, nothing to do with a dream. And I'm as surprised as you are to see these books. These two I've seen before in expurgated editions. But this I've never seen before, although I've heard vaguely of it." He looked fondly at a third book he held, and I could see that his eyes were aglow with a sort of wild anticipation.

I reached for the tome, and he relinquished it almost reluctantly. It was huge, heavy, and the pages were brittle and brown. There was no title on the spine or cover, but on the first page I read in a delicate, faded script: M-O-N-S-T-E-R-S A-N-D T-H-E-I-R K-Y-N-D-E. Each word was in script capital letters, free of each other. No author was mentioned. I placed the book on my knees and saw that the edges of the leather binding were well worn, frayed in places. As I turned a few pages at random, a powdery brown dust blew out and lodged in my nose. I sneezed.

"Hey, be careful how you handle that!" Bruce took the volume back as solicitously as a mother with her child. I took one more look around the room, sniffed the air distastefully, and said, "I'm getting sleepy. Good night."

I don't think he even heard me. When I left him there, to cross the hall into my own room, he was sitting hunched over the table by the oil-lamp, opening Monstres and Their Kynde tenderly, peering down into it.

The next morning I was downstairs early only to be informed by Mrs. Corey that

Bruce had preceded me. He had eaten hastily and said he was going down the road to see Lyle Wilson. She pronounced the name distastefully, and I could see that she didn't like the old man. I didn't blame her.

I waived breakfast, my only concern being to get out of this morbid town as soon as possible. I was doomed to disappointment, however. Upon reaching Lyle Wilson's store, I saw that Bruce and the old man had been talking in what appeared to be a mutual earnestness, if not eagerness. I came up in time to hear the latter say:

"I'm sartinly glad yew intend ter stick around a mite. Ain't many outside uns hankers ter do thet. I've heerd more nor one o' 'em calc'late as haw the sunshine, an' the land, an' all around here be sorta unhealthy like..." He stopped a moment when I came up; then went on with renewed eagerness, as if he didn't often have such an audience. "An' leave me toll ye suthin', young sirs -- they may be right. Thur be sartin things I could tell about the cause o' it, tew---things such as yed' never b'lieve. But mark ye this: they be more in this world nor meets the eye, an' they be other things asides them as walks on top th' graound..." He looked from one to the other of us, grinning, and I moved back a pace to avoid his obnoxious breath.

But Bruce, to my surprise, said, "You moua things such as..." And he pronounced a word that I wouldn't even attempt. Lyle Wilson's eyes popped out in amazement. He looked at Bruce with a sudden startled suspicion.

"I read about it," Bruce hurried to explain, "in a book called Monstres and Their Kynde." He regarded the old man carefully, to see the effect his words would have.

The effect was one of relief. "Oh, thet book. It aren't much. Belonged to old Hans Zickler--Eb Corey's grandfather--he thet built the house. But d'ye know, I got a better book than thet..." He chuckled in a way that sent a cold chill up my spine. He paused and peered at Bruce as though waiting for him to exhibit some curiosity, but Bruce wisely did not.

"I'll tell ye anyway. I got old Zick's diary! Eb Corey, he used ter hev it, but real suddint one day he told me as he war goin' ter burn it. I reckon as haw he had been readin' inter it. I asked Eb fer it, an' I guess he war more'n glad ter give me it as payment for some things he war owin'. Said he didn't keer what become o' it, ceptin' as he wouldn't have it in his house no longer."

Now I could see Bruce's curiosity surge up, and his voice bordered almost on excitement. "You say you still have this diary?"

"Yep. Reckon I be the only person that's ever seed inter it, ceptin' Eb Corey hisself, and I dun't think he read much o' it. He thought 'twar only the old man's crazy ravin's." Wilson's voice became confidential. "D'ye know, I'm kinda glad you fellers drapped by. Folk here--about wun't lissen ter me. Acause they be scairt o', thet's what; they be scairt o' what I could tell 'em about ol' Zickler an' -- an' sartin things I seed 'im do. Things thet -- thet warn't jest right. But sometimes when I gits ter ponderin', an' rememb'rin', an' readin' in the diary agin, thur comes a kinda hankerin' like; an' I wanta try, so's I kin know them things too, like ol' Zick did. An' sometimes the hankerin' gits too strong like..."

He stopped suddenly, as though afraid he would go too far, and a wild light died slowly out of his eyes.

"O' course," he went on more calmly, "I war jest a young un then, when I spied on ol' Zick, but I remembers right enough. An' even of the land dew be gittin' better every year, an' things around here ain't so bad as they used ter be, they's still suthin' about an' active oncet in a while. Look't the young Lunroe boy, he as they claim wandered off an' fell daown in the ravine. But I knows a heap better. Ef he fell daown the ravine whyn't they ever find the body?" He moved his stool closer to Bruce, leered at him and repeated almost defiantly: "Eh? Whyn't they ever find the body?" The old man chuckled delightedly at the sensation he had made.

I was becoming considerably annoyed at all this crazy gibberish. I told Bruce I was going back to the house. He nodded absently. As I left, he hunched forward, listening intently as Lyle Wilson started on another wild trend.

At noon Bruce showed up for lunch, seemingly preoccupied and puzzled about something. I wondered what further stories he had succeeded in getting out of Lyle Wilson. I suddenly remembered, too, something I had intended to ask Bruce, but had

forgotten. So, half facetiously, I asked: "Well, did you dream last night?"

Eb Corey, who had come in from the fields, looked at me curiously but not angrily. Mrs. Corey, however, shot me a look that made me wish I hadn't asked the question. Nevertheless we all awaited Bruce's answer---she most anxiously of all.

"Yes," he said, "I did. And that's peculiar, because I usually never dream. Maybe it was because I was up pretty late reading in those books..."

At the mention of the books Mrs. Corey looked at Bruce quickly, quizzically. "Oh," Bruce said. "I'm sorry if I wasn't supposed to look at them, but you see I'm interested in that kind of lore."

"It's all right. Please go on."

"Sure," I reminded him, "what about the dream? But I suppose you don't remember it. Most people don't..."

"But I do. It was just a fragment of a dream really, but too vivid for me to forget. It seemed that I was walking somewhere in a sort of mist. Down a narrow dirt road. There was a rusty wire fence to my right, and I came to a gap in it. Automatically I turned and passed through it, and walked down a path behind a large house..." Bruce turned to me and smiled, as though he were reciting a fairy story to a child. "All this while, mind you, something was drawing me---I wasn't walking of my own volition. I knew I should make an effort to turn back, but at the same time, paradoxically, I seemed very anxious to get to whatever was drawing me. Well... the path was tangled with coarse grass and weeds, and suddenly I saw where I was walking: in a graveyard. All around me were tombstones, but not stones really, for most of them were ancient name-boards of wood, inclining at all angles and overgrown with weeds and brambles. Then--right before me--I saw a low cement tomb. It was cracked and moss-covered, but the wooden door was still solid, and the huge iron hinges, though rusty, were still intact. I stood a moment before that door; now I felt a very strong attraction, almost an affinity, to -- to whatever lay beyond. I don't doubt that I would have entered--in fact, I was just about to--but at that moment I awoke. I was lying on my cot upstairs and a cool breeze was coming in the window at my head. I closed the window and went back to sleep, but I didn't dream any more."

I glanced at Mrs. Corey. She had sat there taut and silent as Bruce talked. Now she was biting her lips as though to keep from screaming, but the scream showed in her eyes. She rose in sudden agitation and left the room.

Her husband continued eating for a moment in silence. Then he looked up, unperturbed, and said: "Martha's easy upset. But maybe there's good reason. You see, she had a sister that slept in that room once, and she dreamed that same dream, and then -- she just disappeared. No trace ever found of her. Before that, it was the Munroe boy---I remember it like it was yesterday."

"Yes, Lyle Wilson was telling me about the Munroe boy's disappearance," said Bruce. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Nothing except he was playing out in the fields near the ravine, and he disappeared. We searched, but no trace of him. Then--it must have been all of a week later--his younger brother came running home and said he'd seen Willio's face, with a lot of others."

"His face!" Bruce sat bolt upright. "Is that what he said?"

"Yep, that's all he could say. He'd seen his brother's face, with a lot of others. Said he'd been playing down in the ravine, but he didn't know just where."

Bruce looked at me, and he wasn't smiling now. Corey seemed to take everything stoically. "Of course," he went on, "it used to be horses and cattle that disappeared -- no trace. This all happened some few years ago. The land was pretty bad then, too, but hasn't been so bad since. Not 'til just recent."

"What do you think of all this, Eb?"

Eb Corey looked at Bruce stolidly. "Mr. Tarleton, you're a scientific man. I'm just trying to make a living here off of land that -- that ain't right, somehow. You said that books like them upstairs is a kind of hobby of yours. Then you oughta know more about all this than I do. I looked into one of them books once--just once. I can say this: I didn't understand much of it, but I know such studyin' won't bring you to no good end. But that's your affair. Me -- I just try not to think too much about it."

That's the longest speech I ever heard Eb Corey make, and it seemed definite enough. Bruce apparently thought so too, for he said, "I think I'll come out there a little later this afternoon and take a look at your soil."

"Wish you would, Mr. Tarleton, wish you would. You'll find me down on the south end."

I had listened to all this in silence, but something was bothering me, almost haunting me. I couldn't get it out of my mind. Bruce's dream. I arose from the table and left them there, still talking; and went upstairs, wondering just what it was about that dream that bothered me. The path across the old graveyard... the ancient tomb... something drawing him on...

On a sudden impulse I entered that room where Bruce had slept. A faded green blind was still drawn over the single window. I raised that blind. Even before I looked, I knew. Then I looked and saw. The scene swept across my brain like a dash of icy water. As I stood there momentarily paralyzed, I felt the first hint of the cosmic horror that was soon to engulf both Bruce and myself, and come near to blasting my mind.

There was the narrow dirt road, to the left. There was the rusty wire fence. The broken gap. There was the grass-tangled path, and the fallen tombstones in the ancient graveyard just behind this house. And there was the cracked cement tomb, just as Bruce had described it from his dream, only a short distance away from this window...

A few hours later, as we walked across the fields, I told Bruce what I had discovered--the graveyard behind the house, and the exact parallel to his dream. He wasn't surprised, said he'd seen it too.

"I suppose you're beginning to think that what I experienced wasn't a dream at all -- that I actually walked down that path toward the tomb. Well, you're wrong. It was nothing but a dream; I know I never left my room..." He seemed for a moment about to tell me more, then changed his mind.

But I was, by now, very curious; not with the avidity of a student of the ancient lore such as Bruce displayed, but with a certain skepticism. "Did Lyle Wilson tell you any more stories? What about that diary--I know you were dying to see it?"

"I saw it--but not enough of it. He brought it out and read me certain parts. Remember his saying he had a certain hankerin' sometimes? Well, I told him I often had a sort of hankerin' too. Then he brought out the diary."

"A hankerin' for what, in heaven's name?"

"I don't know--but I'm afraid it isn't in heaven's name. Whatever he was talking about. That's what I wanted to find out."

"And did you?"

"Very little. I got too curious, I guess, and Lyle got suspicious. Still, he read me quite a few passages from that diary of Hans Zickler's, and I'm beginning to piece things together. Remember Corey saying his grandfather built this house, and added the back wing later? Well, that's right. Maybe you noticed the wing brings that room pretty close to the dge of the graveyard?"

"What about the diary?" I insisted.

"Well, I learned this much. Old Zickler used to sit at the window of that upstairs back room, in the late evenings, and mumble a kind of gibberish. That window's easily visible from the road; neighbors passing by soon got the idea that Zickler was crazy. Lyle Wilson says that he was just a young man then, but he remembers seeing old Zick sitting there--could hear him, too--and he was certainly a wild sight. Well...it seems that there was something in that tomb, and Zickler was talking to it!

"Then there came places in the diary where Zickler suggested that it had answered him--but in a strange way. Not audibly, but mentally. A sort of unearthly telepathy, I guess. Old Zick couldn't explain it quite right. A sort of unearthly that it was teaching Zickler something, and that occasionally it thanked him for something. I'd certainly like to read more in that part of the diary," but old Lyle is too shrewd.

"Along about that time, a lot of livestock was disappearing. And a few children. It seems that Zickler had them all carefully recorded, but it's hard to place



any of these circumstances consecutively; as Lyle read to me he kept skipping about in the diary haphazardly, looking up every once in a while to see what impression it made.

"There was one place where Zickler hinted at being dissatisfied and restless and wanting to learn more, but to do that he would have to look up a certain passage in the Necronomicon. He mentioned saving his money so he could take a trip over to Arkham, to look into the copy of the Necronomicon it is rumored they have hidden away in the Miskatonic University there. But evidently he never did make the trip. At least, there's no mention of it, and Lyle tells me that Zick never left Weera. Died a natural death here, though he was mumbling bizarre things on his death-bed."

We walked on to the south field, where we found Eb Corey busily plowing. He stopped for a while and watch Bruce poking around in the ground at various spots.

"I'll bet you never saw any soil like that before," Eb said grimly as Bruce straightened up with a sample.

"You'd win that bet all right. Look at this stuff, will you?" And Bruce handed a clod to me. It was the most peculiar looking soil I had ever seen--a queer grayish color, almost powdery, though it wasn't dry. More like slightly damp ashes. It seemed tainted somehow, and evil--even felt tainted to the touch, not like fresh clean earth should, I dropped it, repressing a shudder, and wiped my fingers clean.

Bruce looked at Eb in amazement. "Do you mean to say that things grow in this "Oh, sure. "Tain't near so bad down on this end as it is closer to the house "Closer to the old graveyard, you mean?"

Eb looked at Bruce, then shrugged. "Well, same thing. Not as bad as it was in my grandfather's day, either. Only thing is, stuff don't quite get to normal size somehow; and often as not, I raise some things that are mighty -- well, queer, distorted like. But it all seems eatable enough."

"I wonder what your grandfather thought about this land. He must have had some idea about it..."

Eb shrugged again. "No telling what grandfather Zickler thought, especially in his last years. He was half crazy then, everybody knew that. All I can say is, he was drove to it--or drove hisself to it. I remember him saying once that the land didn't belong to us now. And the way he said it, he didn't mean just this little piece of land--he meant all the land everywhere, I guess. It give me the creeps the way he used to talk. Said something about we was here just temporary, like, and someday they would wake and claim the land that was rightfully theirs. He used to mention they sort of reverent like."

There was an awakened light of interest in Bruce's eyes as he tried to press this point. "He didn't say how or when this was to happen? He didn't mention certain names, such as--Lloigor? Or B'Moth? Or Ptakhar?"

But Eb didn't seem to remember. Old Zickler had spoken too many queer words. Bruce put a sample of that evil soil in an envelope, and before we left he asked one more question, "Eb, do you remember Lyle Wilson taking a trip to Arkham fairly recent ly? Maybe he said something about visiting the Miskatonic University library..."

"Nope," Eb shook his head. Then he seemed to remember something. "Maybe you mean that time a little more than a year ago; Wilson made a trip then, was gone two or three days, but he never breathed a word to anybody where he'd been."

"Thanks." Bruce seemed deeply immersed in thought. Corey resumed his plowing, and Bruce and I cut across a field toward the ravine. It was quite steep where we reached it, full of small trees and scrub bushes. In the direction of the house, however, a quarter of a mile away, it shallowed into a little gully that ended by the edge of the old graveyard. Bruce looked intently down into the ravine for a moment, then turned away.

"What did you mean by those names you asked Corey?" I said, as we walked back to the house. "And what do they mean? Lord knows I won't attempt to pronounce them the way you did!" And I laughed.

Bruce didn't laugh.

"What do they mean?" he repeated. His voice was different than I had ever heard it. "I had come almost to believe that they meant nothing, that they were only names. But now--my god, I'm beginning to believe again. Do there really exist en-

bodiments of those names? Perhaps old Zickler knew. And others, from time to time. After all, those names and the rumors and the books do persist through the years, and where there is legend there is a basis of fact, if only it could be traced back through the eons."

That was all I got from Bruce. But he didn't need to tell me more. For a long time I had been aware, disinterestedly, of his study of ancient lores. I knew he had in his library a certain shelf of old books, besides scores of fiction pieces on the subject. I had read a few of the fiction pieces, and was amused. Deep in my mind was the safe and comfortable knowledge that they were fiction and nothing more.

But now I wasn't so sure, and I didn't feel so safe. Perhaps all that fiction, after all, had been based on -- on something I didn't like to think of. My vague perturbation was enhanced by the way Bruce had said those words: "But now--my god, I'm beginning to believe again!"

Just how much Bruce believed, I don't know. Nor what he was trying to learn, nor why he left his room that night. I doubt now if I could have acted in any way to stop him, even if I had known. The one fact I see clearly now is that neither of us then realized how slowly and insidiously everything was building up to that tragic climax.....

That night after supper, Bruce went upstairs to his room--intending, he said, to look more carefully into those ancient books. I stopped outdoors to smoke my pipe; somehow I always enjoy it more outdoors and at night--it helps me to think, and that's what I needed to do. In a muddled sort of way I was trying to decide how much of this "ancient lore" business I dared, and how much I feared, to believe. I only knew that I liked this place less and less, and if Bruce didn't want to leave in the morning, I would take the car myself.

Finding I was nearly out of tobacco, I walked down to Lyle Wilson's store. The place was dark. I stepped onto the porch and was about to try the door, thinking perhaps he hadn't locked up yet; but then I decided he must be in bed, and I had better wait until morning. I stepped off the porch and was almost out to the road again, when I heard his front door open. I turned, and was about to call out to him ...when something stopped me.

It may have been partly intuition, but mainly it was Lyle's actions. I could see him only dimly, and apparently he did not see me at all. But the way he closed his door ever so softly, and crept furtively across the porch interested me. He disappeared around the corner of his store, and I followed.

He passed through a gate at the rear of his property, crossed a field, climbed a low fence into another field. I stayed a safe distance behind him, just keeping him in sight. I could barely make out something that he carried under his arm--apparently a thick book; undoubtedly the diary that both he and Bruce seemed so interested in.

I soon saw that he was heading for the ravine. Undoubtedly he had travelled this route before, because he seemed very sure of his direction and seemed to be heading for a certain point. I lost him in the dark for a moment, hurried forward, bumped into the low-hanging branches of a tree and scratched my face. When I reached the ravine he had disappeared entirely, but I could hear him faintly as he climbed down some path near by. I searched for a few minutes; finally finding it, I descended.

Rather, I skidded, rolled and tumbled down that steep path in the dark, arriving at the bottom by the simple expedient of plunging head first the last five feet. I arose and brushed off my clothes. By that time, Lyle Wilson had disappeared entirely. I couldn't hear a sound, couldn't even guess which direction he'd taken. And if the night were dark before, it was positively Stygian at the bottom of this ravine.

As disgruntled as I was puzzled, I tried to climb back up the path. But I couldn't. I stood there for a minute, nursing my bruises and cursing myself for a fool. Then I remembered that the ravine became shallower until it led out by the edge of the graveyard a quarter of a mile away. The only thing to do was to follow it in that direction. After all, I decided, I might come upon Wilson again.

But I didn't see him. Once I stopped, thinking I heard the sound of metal striking on metal, but I didn't hear it again. I proceeded in the dark, avoiding

small clumps of bushes and trees as best I could. It wasn't until I was almost at the graveyard that I remembered--suddenly, disturbingly--something Eb Corey had said; about the youngest Munroe boy who had been playing in the ravine, and had run home to tell his mother he'd seen his lost brother's face, "with a lot of others".

At the thought of it, I hurried my steps. I cut across a corner of the graveyard to the house. Looking up at the window of the rear room, I saw no light there. Thinking Bruce must be asleep, I went around the house, entered the front door a bit breathlessly, and hurried upstairs.

I had intended to waken Bruce, if necessary, to tell him of Lyle Wilson's nocturnal excursion, for it might mean something to him. I pushed open the door and entered his room, and moved through the darkness to the table and the dimly-seen oil lamp. I searched in my pocket for a match, while with the other hand I fumbled for the lamp.

"Damn!" My searching fingers had found the lamp all right, and I had burned them on the still hot glass chimney. Bruce must have turned it off no more than a few minutes before. I finally managed to light it again, and as the shadows flickered about the room, I saw that Bruce wasn't there at all, nor had his bed been slept in. Perhaps he had stepped out for a breath of air.

On the table one of the heavy tomes lay open, which I recognized as Monstres and Their Kynde. Beside it was a soft-loaded pencil. Then I noticed that Bruce apparently had been checking certain passages with the pencil, very lightly on the crisp yellowish pages.

I decided to wait for him, so drew up a chair and began to read those passages which Bruce had so painstakingly marked. Now, after twelve years, I cannot precisely remember those excerpts; but I do know they were in a quaint old English spelling, and the first paragraph to strike my eye was almost as follows:

"These be nott manifest, but They do wait in patience for a tyme that ys nott yet. Of a hydeous potency be ye blackeness wherein They dwell, for They do nott always sleep. They be remote one from another; nonetheless They do have a devious yntercourse. Beneath that far Northe, in ye ancient tymes yclept Hyperborea, do They wait. Afar in ye East, beneath vaste plateaus, They be rymoured. In ye new darke lande across ye seas They surely be. Men of ye sea have whispered of unspeakable manifestations on strange Islands. Indecde there be fearfulle rumour of yo fate of men who go down with doomed shippes. These Creatures be nameless, but assuredly must They be spawned of ancient B'Moth and Ptakhar, Lloigor and Kathuln and ye others. In silence do They await ye call of those Elder Ones...."

I stopped reading there, aware that this all sounded vaguely familiar. I must have read similar things in other old books of Bruce's. I turned a few pages to see if he had checked other passages. He had.

"Some mortals there do be who revere Them, and some fewe also whom They instruct in a certain wyse. One of these was ye Eybon of that ancient Hyperborea, and there have been others." Suddenly startled, I remembered old Zickler sitting at that very window talking a sort of gibberish to something in the tomb, which he hinted had answered him. Now I read on, suddenly eager, seeking out those passages which Bruce had marked:

"There be divers ways, mostly forgotte, in whych They may be awakened; and it ys then that They become resteless and impatient for ye tyme, and provoke Their powers. One of ye ways, as sette down by Eybon in hys Booke, doth follow..." Here there was only the beginning of a long incantation of indistinguishable words. Most of it had faded away, as though from constant reference to this page. As I thought again of old Zickler sitting mumbling at this window, my interest surpassed all previous bounds. I turned back a few pages, to where Bruce had first begun marking.

"So evyl They be, that ye lande whych under They lie doth become strangely polluted, and ye very soil dothe crwle, and strangely be ye thynge whych growe thereon. . . Alhazed in hys chronicle hath avowed: that whomssoever be attracted unto Them (by ye nefarious ynflyuence whych They project when invoked), doth remain forever a parte of Them, nott dead, but newe and oddly bodied, instructing ye very grounde and adding to ye power of Them . . . also hath Alhazed said: evyl ye Mynde whych ys helde by no Hedde, and dyre ys ye grounde whych...."

For the moment I stopped reading there, and my eyes skipped over to the next page where Bruce seemed to have underlined several of the statements, as if they were of the utmost importance. I read that passage carefully.

"But Some there be amonge Them, which wait restelless and impatient for ye tyme. 'Tis said these fewe do inherit ye Elder Power to attracte unto Them small animals; then ye cattle and smalle children; then ye woake and ye sycke; then whych-ever men who sleepe close to Them, upon ye whom They do project a kynde of Dreame. 'Tis also said, that whom-so-ever be thusly attracted unto Them, doth become a Part of Them (thate ys to saye, ye All-in-One which ye Elder Ones await), and doth instruct ye Creatures and ye very grounde in which They be. In thys wyse (when ye tyme doth come) shall They enjoy ye ultimate consummation; thusly shalle They inherit ye lande again which once was Theirs."

That is as much as I read. I remembered old Zicklor's statement about the earth not belonging to us. I remembered Mrs. Coroy's vague hintings of people who had slept in this room, and who had dreamed and then disappeared. I remembered Bruce's dream the previous night, of the graveyard and the tomb behind this house. For perhaps five minutes I sat there in the flickering lamplight, remembering these and other things. Suddenly I leaped to my feet, shuddering, an icy-cold wave of horror sweeping over me. Here I had been sitting waiting for Bruce to come back!

In that moment, I knew what I must do. I went leaping down the stairway out into the dark night, and around to the side of the house where we had left the car. The .45 automatic that Bruce usually carried in the glove compartment was gone. So was the flashlight. Anyway, it made no difference now. I found another flashlight in my kit; the batteries were very weak, but I was thankful for it.

I went through the gap in the fence, and down that path behind the house toward the tomb. I remembered Bruce's description of his dream, wherein something had drawn him here against his will. Nothing was drawing me, of that I was certain.

How true is the saying, "Fools rush in..."

Not until I was standing right before the tomb did I see that Bruce had indeed been there. The heavy plank door was pulled slightly ajar, making a little arch in the dirt. The iron chain which had held it was now broken. It was a tight squeeze, since the door would open no further, but I finally managed to enter. Flashing my light around, I saw a few mouldering wooden coffins at one side. I scarcely glanced at them. Instead, I examined the cement walls that were damp and musty.

Then I gave a start of surprise. Without quite knowing what I was looking for, I had found it! At the rear of the tomb, I saw a roughly rectangular hole in the cement. Quickly I crossed to it. I flashed my light into a passage that led slightly downward for about ten feet, then seemed to level off. Determined now to go where Bruce had gone, I bent low and squeezed into the passage.

At the bottom of the slight incline, I again flashed my light ahead. Then my heart pounded in excitement and amazement. The passage was narrow, but high enough for a man to stand erect---and it extended far beyond the feeble beam of my flashlight! I moved slowly ahead. Soon I began to distinguish what seemed to be other smaller passages branching off, but what struck me so forcibly was that this main passage seemed to extend straight toward the ravine!

There was a stagnant, loathsome stench that seemed to roll over me in tangible waves. I touched the earth walls, and recoiled. It was the same dampish, grayish kind of soil Bruce had examined, but much worse. It was slimy; it seemed to crawl under my touch as though it were alive. I came near then to giving up and going back; but, gritting my teeth, I went on.

My foot struck something hard. I bent, fumbled, and picked it up. It was Bruce's automatic. It still felt faintly warm. I knew it had been fired. Now there was no more doubt---only a vague fear and foreboding. I stood there in that noisome passage, holding the gun that had been fired, wondering what I should do next.

It was decided for me. Just then I heard the sound. Quickly I snapped off the flashlight and stood there in the dark, tense and listening. My heart pounded blood into my ears so that I could hardly hear the sound when it came again. But I heard it all right---faint and far away, not close as I had first thought.

The sound was a voice. A blurred and mumbled voice that seemed to chant, and the chant was a thing obscene and alien for all its vugueness---of that much I was sure. Quite still I stood and listened, and still the sound came, faintly from far away down that passage toward the ravine. It seemed jubilant and joyous; now uttering paeans of praise, now again descending to a garbled undertone of obscene implications that made my flesh crawl, despite that I could distinguish none of the words.

I knew, as I stood there listening to that loathesome ritual, that there were things I should piece together---something to do with Lyle Wilson---but somehow I couldn't remember any more; my thoughts were becoming jumbled and uncertain. Not daring to use the flashlight, I moved warily forward a few more paces.

"Bruce!" I called softly, and listened. Then a bit louder: "Bruce! Can you hear me? You must be in here!"

Then -- oh god! -- then I heard a sound that was not the chanting, a sound much closer, just ahead of me. I stopped and listened and didn't breathe. Something a few yards away was moving toward me in the darkness.

"Bruce, is that you?" I called again.

And suddenly I knew those were not footsteps nor anything resembling footsteps, nor anything I had ever heard before.

I used never to have nightmares. I never used to feel an awful fear of an enclosed room. I never used to wake in the middle of the night with a dread of a monstrous unclean thing coming toward me out of the dark, so that I must fumble frantically for the lightcord, and lie sweating afterward, and fear to sleep again.

I wish I had never clicked on my flashlight, there in that passage behind the tomb. Something stopped there, half revealed at the end of my pale beam of light. I know only that it wasn't human. I fired the gun and I didn't miss. There were only three bullets left, and I remember hearing every one of them hit with a soggy, sucking sound like pebbles thrown into thick mud. It could not have been more than ten seconds, but it was ten eternities. I suddenly knew that it did not fear the light, but was only momentarily confused.

And then -- it came just a little nearer into the beam of light and stood fully revealed. I didn't hear myself scream, but I know I must have, for my throat was raw afterward. I felt my mind slipping slowly away into a chaos of vertiginous horror. I knew it was I that moved, and I must have screamed again. Yes, it was I who moved steadily, slowly closer; and I could not help myself! I knew I must move closer still, until.....

Until what, I never knew; for at that moment, strangely, I seemed touched with a surging wave of coolness that beat down my rising panic. It no longer seemed I that moved; it was another part of me---a part that had been eons ago, that was trying now to go back to the soft, safe warmth of the primordial. It was the kind of ecstatic feeling I'd had as a child when I squeezed thick black mud between my hands ---but this was magnified a thousand-fold, cozy and dreamy and logical.

And yet there was something wrong, vaguely disturbing. There was another I, unimportant and far away somewhere, but persistently imploring . . . imploring me not to succumb, not to go back . . . to remember. Remember what? That tiny faraway me was so pitifully amusing, as it tried with a feeble sort of intensity to burst the surrounding comfortable darkness. It was trying to tell me...something to do with...

A dream? Was that it? Seemingly eons ago I remembered a dream a friend had told me...of something irresistibly drawing...an affinity....

How swiftly did comprehension flee back to me then, through a newly rising panic, as I remembered! How quickly I was back in that passage again as the ancient part of me and the present part of me merged with a frantic rush, and I saw.....

Then it was that I screamed, for the third and final time, an articulate scream: "Bruce! ....."

I was very near now to that thing that was drawing me, and I saw it quite clearly---but with that last articulate scream, something about me abruptly shivered, wavered, and I felt a sudden surge of power. I could feel something trying to help me tear my mind away; something softly, subtly, urgently aiding me; something whispering, "Do not come! Do not move! Go back! Now! Quickly!"

And that urging was the greatest horror of all, for I knew Bruce was there...

By what supreme effort I did tear my eyes and mind away, I shall never know. I do not remember it. I only remember the frantic escape up that last ten feet of slope...of something surging soundlessly behind, something that touched my ankle as I squeezed through the broken rectangle into the tomb...and the awful sodden sound of it hitting, seconds too late, with a sort of squish like a heavy wet sponge against a wall...

There remained one more thing to be done. Out of the tomb I fled, across the graveyard and into the ravine. I knew now what I was searching for, and I found it despite the darkness. I found it, well concealed in a little gully behind masses of bush and vine -- the other end of that passage.

I saw the iron-barred gate across the tiny entrance, probably placed there by Lyle Wilson himself. It now stood open with a snap-lock hanging from it. Just inside the gate I could dimly see Lyle Wilson, a crouching figure, rapt and listening. He had heard my revolver shots, he had heard my screams -- and then silence. Now he began another of those low chants that gradually rose in volume to a jubilant psalm of praise. I could not have remembered the words even if I had wanted to. They were hardly even articulate words. I saw him accompany it with an unholy little ritual and dance that ordinarily would have sickened me to the soul; but already I was beyond that.

He didn't hear or see me until I had leaped forward to swing that gate shut upon him and snap the lock. The most horrible part of it was that his chant didn't even stop as he rushed at me, clawing, with a whitish sort of foam around his mouth. He crashed into the gate, tugged furiously at it...and then his chant turned into a sickening gurgle of terror as he quite suddenly realized what was going to happen. He sank down just within the tunnel, grovelling in stark fear. I think his mind snapped, for soon his cries reverted again to an incoherent gibberish, like the memory of a horrible language long dead.

I waited there only until I was very sure I heard -- coming swiftly nearer down the tunnel -- that surging, primordial horror.

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I have destroyed, of course, the book which Bruce was reading on that last night. And I, myself, may someday forget most of those excerpts at which I glanced. But never the one which read: "...whomsoever be attracted unto Them (by ye nefarious influence wch they project when invoked), doth remain forever a part of Them, nott deade, but newe and oddly bodied, instructing ye very grounde...."

I have said it was ten seconds that were ten eternities, there in the darkness of that passage, but my mind was numbed then. It is the horrible remembering later...

If there be gods, I pray to them to set my brain at rest. And as surely as there be things of evil, I pray to them to let me forget. But neither prayer is answered, so I must still remember that writhing, surging thing of iridescent evil, all shapes and yet shapeless . . . that primal, quasi-amorphous thing that moved as worms move . . . that sightless mass, not complete of itself, but with the power to draw men to it.

That much I could forget. That much would not make me dream, or wake up screaming with an awful fear of the dark.

But those dim faces that peered from out of it; that were now eternally part of it, still horribly alive and wide-eyed with the terrible anguish of knowing . . . those human faces that could not speak, could only implore in silent agony that I destroy them and this thing that should not be . . . those distorted faces enmeshed and enfolded in the confluent parts of that blasphemous thing, those faces among which I saw, dimly but surely, that of my friend, Bruce Tarleton. . . .

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