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I do not know if it ever existed--
That lost world floating dimly on Time's stream--
And yet I see it often, violet-misted,
And shimmering at the back of some vague dream.
There were strange towers and curious lapping rivers,
Labyrinths of wonder, and low vaults of light,
And bough-crossed skies of flame, like that which quivers
Wistfully, just before a winter's night.

Great moors led off to sedgy shores unpeopled,
Where vast birds wheeled, while on a windswept hill
There was a village, ancient and white-steeped,
With evening chimes for which I listen still.
I do not know what land it is--or dare
Ask when or why I was, or will be, there.

.....H.P. Lovecraft*

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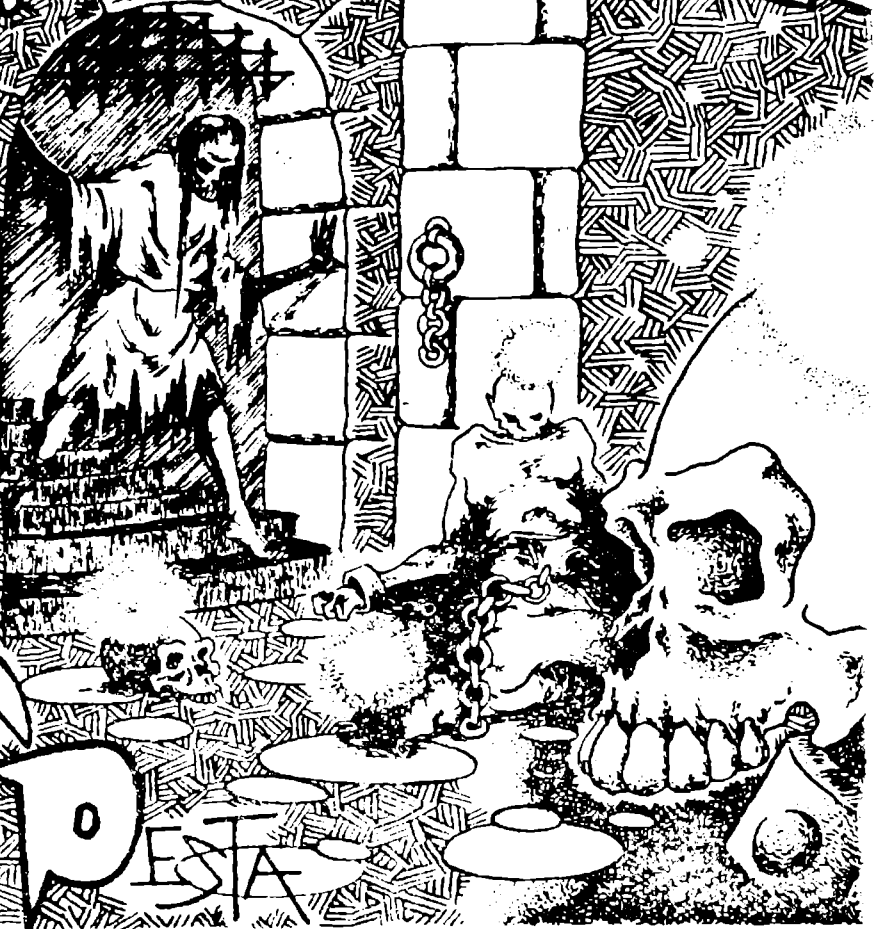
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OTHER OF DARKNESS

BY

J. P.



I was never allowed to call her my mother and when I did she would boast me. Savagely, with all her obsessed fury and the thrashings have left me with both the memories and markings of her rage. Yet she was my mother so that in absolute truth I can state that I never once in the twenty-six years I lived with her had even the remotest thought of killing her -- an act which probably, even had I the most desperate desire to compose, would have been thwarted anyway, for she slept little, preferring the sleepless landscape beyond our mansion to the dreaded memories of bed and the happenings therein then, too, on nights after she had wreaked her insatiable and cruel tortures upon my person, consequently provoking at least the motive for retaliation, I was subsequently chained to the damp posts in the collar beneath the house to cry and scream in utter agony, all to her full delight.

For this, not the beatings, I hated her; since it was in the dark and huge basement that her men were, and who in my presence were in the most horrid state possible, nearly returning to that frantic condition in which they were when first imprisoned. On those nights, as my swoating and wracked mind recalls, I myself was no longer human, but rather a stiff, terrified, hopeless demon bound to iron pillars that were slick with the sharpness of filed steel and wet with the liquid of my sweat-filled blood. It was usually days after those ordeals before I recalled anything and the many lapses in my memory bear witness to the frequency of my mother's (I say it with cold shudders still) vengeance. But I am sure she never hated me, and, afterwards, when her warped and bitter soul was in its nearest proximity to humanity, I feel certain she pitied me with at least the fundamental relationship of creator to created. At those times, though it seems in contradiction to the feeling stated above, and most likely do to the fact that it was the barest and only form of kindness I ever knew, I actually cared for her and would have undoubtedly defended her should the angry and revengeful beings imprisoned below have escaped somehow and come hungrily seeking her.

Indeed, in those moments she was but a step from womanhood, and the recollection of those brief hours fortify the bulwark of my few and isolated patches of happiness and hope, though that is a term which has little and probably incorrect meaning to me both now and in the time that she was alive. For it was only the hope of terrible vengeance which demanded that my mother live.

It was during those brief periods of restraint and near conscientiousness that I received the fundamental incentive toward knowledge. It should be obvious that time and its uses were bountiful things, leaving me a virtual wealth of minutes to pursue my interests which even in my outé surroundings were existent. For these concerns I again have my mother to thank, for it was she who, in her collected and near-sane mentality, introduced me to those interests which she herself once pursued before her plight became such as it now was. She had what I suppose was a beautiful voice, for, although I had never the opportunity for comparison among women vocalists, the occasions when the men were in the house were often ones in which she sang. This, I have no doubt, was the pretext under which many of them were induced to come: mother "lured" them into the domicile of an elderly and eccentric woman for the purpose of displaying their pedantic aptitudes -- a show which was to be their farewell appearance. Singing did strange things to her and it is with the wottist of chills that I recall the vibrant, high-pitched, exultant notes that rang from the depths of the collar after an affair had been completed.

Here also was a fanatic love of poetry and often in the dim shadows of the great room that faced the grove and meadow before our house I sat in silence listening to the intricate and floating rhythms from her downy throat. Those scenes are those first in my mind: the massive room with the far-off ceiling, draped with the plush, dusty curtains; the aged oak paneling which surrounded a thick, matted carpet that sank and swelled under a passing foot; the wide, huge windows that jutted out of the house's side and gaped like huge lenses at the green countryside; the soft, staccato voice of mother reading verse from her poets -- her loveliest of men. To her, they were her men.

How clearly I remember the soft lisplings of her haggard frame as the words and analogies were borne into the stale air of that old, leather-chaired chamber. The soft, sensitive similes that caught at heart-strings and held them and pulled...until they should snap and drip blood and tears of loveliness...

Such ago how beautiful! O lady bright,
Whose mortal lineaments soon all refined
By favoring Nature and a saintly mind...

Perhaps her favorite was Whitman, that strange case of loneliness and dissatisfaction. How clearly I still can see the nearness to ecstasy in which she became enraptured when confronted with those powerful lines:

I know I am deathless,
I know this order of mine cannot be swept by a
carpenter's compass,
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue
out with a burnt stick at night.

I have no trouble supposing that far within her she longed for one night with him, one rapture-filled darkness of bed love from which she might arise fulfilled and perfect. Possibly even, she imagined herself child to that "fierce old mother" of the bard of humanity. She loved poetry and song and their beauty which vastly complimented hers. For although I have not mentioned it before, my mother was dramatically beautiful! So much greater the contrast. Her clothes were ugly and her mind hideous, and it is for one thing alone that I owe her thanks -- she sowed the ripe seed of the quest for knowledge. I still so quest. On warm days, of which there were many in the valley, it was with vast pleasure that I walked beyond sight of the house and into the long roadways. The house itself was huge and of the type found atop craggy hills, staring boastfully into mountainous chasms and valleys. But our house was nestled within a ring of small domed hills, the sides of which ran like smooth mats upwards into a low-slung sky. The house, from on top of the hills, appeared like a dirty and sharp jewel, jutting spike-like out of the verdure and higher than the swaying willows which built low minarets around the towers of the gothic structure. Occasionally, in the evening, before the sun had set, we would walk in that green softness and inhale the misty fragrance of life and her beauties, though these concepts were strange ones, surely. I certainly remember the tall broach of trees that faced us as we started into the yard of uncut grasses; it was a wall of hanging vegetation that defied the stars and heavens and dropped small leaves into the shallow pond that ran, pencil-like, through them. In the dusk that settled into the valley at those twilight hours the trees stood out like shadowy sentinels, rigidly silhouetted against a gray sea of sky. They appeared lonely, not having mastered that reverent bliss of solitude that is isolation, and when the moon finally had risen, casting white melodies and filling the valley with splendor, they looked tragic.

It was after one of those night walks that the most vivid -- practically visual -- impressions of my mother's wrath remain. I daresay that I was an emotional being, although not usually prone to tears; yet I suffice to plead the deep and profound feeling which rent my frame following my mother's readings, or, on strikingly beautiful nights, a walk outside the house when it became lost and wrapped in hanging, vine-like willow branches. Birds lived in the trees, and probably other animals thereabouts, but of those I was unaware at the time. Even the winged creatures whose notes so thrilled me were usually lost in the grandeur of high-thrown boughs and pillared trunks and were seldom outstanding in my mind, but on occasion it was so. Having a particularly refreshing walk, I was on completion mummified in folicitous joy.

It was in this state I digned to express my affection and call her Mother!

What changes wrought themselves across her face which had become so glowingly aware to her surroundings! It was as if a blunt knife had been drawn across her features,

awakening the sore passions that had so fleetingly recessed inside her twisted consciousness. It was a dire moment for me, and to the blasting surge of curses too profane to mention I was pulled and whipped across the shadowy fields toward the house which now appeared a gaping, red-misted demon, tremulous in the anticipation of that which was to ensue. The sky was closing in as clouds appeared over the house and the walk back to the grounds, choked and writhing in their roots, was filled with the mockeries of whipporwills.

It was days and possibly longer afterwards that awareness returned and I awoke sitting in the huge room, my mother reading to me, a stupefied and unperceiving audience, from her favorite of poets. I tittered and sat dully, confused and disorientated, while the sight danced through my brain and recollection returned. Then, when it returned, and the horrors were renewed in my mind, I leapt from my seat and stood glaring at her who sat calmly, even peacefully, in her huge brown chair inside the frame of one window. I stood, cowering inside myself, and met her fearful gaze which now silenced me and forced me into a chair to stifle my rent passions, freeing them to swell and burn within me. On this day the poetry was nothing, for it was the sharp and focused knowledge of the last torture which had filled me.

The dread of that last ordeal! The heinous, spleen-turning horror of that night in the near past shook the fibres of my weak being! The straight, deeply penetrating gaze of her who looked at me from passive -- even, apparently friendly -- eyes! It was too much, and began the charade of scenes before my inward eye.

My mother's harangue had been but a wind through immovable cliffs in comparison to the tirade of punishment which was mine once we reached the house. It would be of little necessity to delve into detail to compose an orderly arrangement of facts; to relate the torture my body endured -- the brute pounding of fists flung in stark anger and hatred; the kicks, hard and well-aimed; the ripping, scourging clawing which ushered forth rivers of blood from a ripped frame; the sheer, unimaginable despair and fear which I sustained while being beaten and stomped upon and permeated throughout with the maniacal gruntings -- not and yet nearly -- laughter. Oh God, the memory of her glowing eyes; eyes which nearly flamed red as the imprisoned unfortunates in the collar, to whom I would presently go to be chained and lashed and left in despoiled darkness to seek out the candle-like tabernacles from which emanated the proof of her promiscuous indulgence, though that is stating it mildly. And the lashing that night was more hateful than most, for it was not often that I called her Mother. I received scars that night which remain indelibly impressed over countless others and to this day impart painful hours and sore-filled memories.

I was not present for the following horrors and shall actually be relating the events which I have soon happen in other instances. From those erstwhile experiences, I feel an odd note of gladness that I was absent from the proceedings, for my mother's attack, already catalyzed through me, must surely have been unimaginably demonic. So on with the dispersal of those facts which I have been most likely subconsciously concealing thus far in this record. I pray to contain my sanity -- hoping it is still mine to contain -- while I once more delve into those events, being an actual and outstanding particular in my life.

After my mother had finished me, a man came to the house, and her gloatings made plain her evil thoughts. They ran true to form. My mother's humor must have been at awesome heights, for when I first stumbled out of my stupor to find myself chained to the stouly pillars, I was shocked beyond description. There, not more than two steps from my drooping head, was the latest of the writhing, taper-like prisons; a neat, sturdy pyramid of bones which reached about twelve inches into the gloom of the fetid collar. The bones were those of her latest victim. It was a witchly technique of hers,

and one which I knew thoroughly, for she had no qualms about discussing it with me and actually took pride in so doing -- although the reason for it was never clear. Inside squirmed the wraithlike red glow which, I know, was the imprisoned soul. Within the sepulcher of his own bones, the murdered man was doomed to spend his eternal days, not even to be freed when the bones should decay into nothingness -- for whom this happened, a strange and unusual bird-like thing (according to my mother) devoured the red-dish life-force, depriving them at last of the freedom of eternity. Fantastic, undoubtedly, but true and in terms of all the other happenings -- believable, even if horribly diabolical. It was my mother's vengeance on all men, creatures whom she hated and hated and hated. Yet she must have realized that it was not my fault but really hers if anyone's that I was male, and it was probably this that saved me from similar ends.

Had the hours following my boating and consequent pillory in that dank, malodorous basement run the same to other cases to which I was witness, they would run something like this: the man had called at the house -- be he tramp or salesman is inconsequential -- not having been lured there under the already established pretext of musical talents (there had hardly been time). My mother invariably invited them to stay, and, after an exceptionally fine dinner, began her play of magnificent charm. It was a performance that should be seen to be appreciated. It was a seduction any man, be he beggar or bishop, could not resist. It was a classic interpretation of the powers of woman over man, and undeniable proof of the strings of existence she manipulates above his head. My mother's beauty, when loosed of her ragged clothing, was only part of the show -- the prop, you might say -- and it was her polished charm which really turned the act from a lusty comedy into a subtle tragedy. For, just at the moment when the male might submit to her adroit promiscuity, she struck!

It was usually with a knife, thin and long-handled, which she used deftly, inserting to the applause of a twisted grin into his whiskey-fod belly or slightly below, withdrawing it with a quick, corkscrew motion. This injured no bones, which was very necessary for the construction of that devilish pyramid which was to take the place of her hateful vengefulness. After this debauchery and while life still principally remained, the real pleasures began. And let it be known that sorrow will be eternally mine for not being a party to the feast which followed. It was another of the rare pleasures that filled my life -- the devouring of flesh and tissue in an ecstasy of wine-like blood. That night it was just further revenge on her part over me, and I waited deprived of any satisfaction of appetite.

Now bear in mind that this is all conjecture in regard to the last act of my mother. I first became aware of its outcome when the breath of consciousness stirred in the flat air of the collar and the terrible structure of bones stood before me, its occupant flitting in maddening designs to and fro as they so often did when first made aware of their ghastly plight. Perhaps the full fear lay in the fact that when I first gazed from my blood-streaked and damaged face at the being, the red soul had risen into the skull which my mother placed above the pile of bodiless bones and stood glaring at me from hollow eye-sockets, an effect which nearly took my life. And suddenly I heard from nowhere -- and yet, everywhere -- a terrible screeching, the sound of the bird-thing was in my ears for the first time, although the reason for it I know not. I resumed coherence seated in that plush room to the tune of my mother's readings...

Today my mother is dead, and her death was as inexplicable as her life had been. It began with the hard knock at the front door. In anticipation of a new man, I stayed back in my room, listening until the time should be right for me to take my place at the Feast. But this was not to be. I could not see the man from my doorway, but I could hear him plainly.

"So, you wouldst first defy the Master by havin' a human son by that miserable wretch

Faraday, though why after what he done to ye is beyond me. From the Coven ye wast expelled, and from the Master's influences were ye barred, lost ye shouldst sacrifice the child to He of the Outer Darkness. Aye! And yer brain, twisted as it wore by that fiendish Faraday -- may he choke on his harp-strings -- pursued yer noodless vengoonce upon the human folk, jopardizin' the Society! And ye dare yet to use the Forbidden Words of the Master to wreak your childish vengoonce!" The voice was old and crackily, yet it boomed out with great force and gave the impression of immense power. And then he yelled in a terrible voice at her, "MOTHER! Mah! Ye dared to defy the Master once -- and for that ye wast expelled and condemned with yer illegal brood! Yet ye hast dared use the Forbidden Word in defiance of the Master hisself! Argh! Ya sothute vi Inturos!" With this queer chant there came a loud rumble, and in the rumble voices, hideous beyond description, boomed out in answer, speaking Words that awaked in me great revulsion and fear, and I screamed and fled through the nearest doorway... the doorway to that accursed collar! I ran down the steps in a blind frenzy, and sought a great pillar, which I hid behind whimpering softly, not daring to even look up, lest I be faced with that room's own horrors. And then, suddenly, I heard a noise... a soft, muffled padding -- footsteps! Someone was descending the collar stair!

I peered out from my hiding place, as much in wonder and curiosity as in fear. But I was not prepared for the sight that met my eyes. There, in the archway, a figure swayed drunkenly, attempting to brace itself by outstrooting its arms to press against both walls. Its black hair writhed as if each strand wore a snake; its face was horrible, the skin flaking off and revealing the skull beneath; the flesh was virtually molting from its arms and legs, revealing clean, white bone but nothing else. And I know, from the tattered clothing and the bits of flesh that still remained, that this was my own, once-beautiful mother who stood there.

Suddenly, there was a noise, and I watched in horrible, half-numbed fascination as the figure turned towards a dark spot in the basement and omitted a horrible, inhuman scream. How long will it take to purge the horrors of those few moments from my tortured brain? For, out of that dark and damp corner, came a shadow -- just a shadow -- of the horrible creature whose sound so imitated that of a large bird. The forms were becoming more distinct. I screamed at the half-formed blasphemy, and the figure upon the stairs screamed with me. I passed into a delayed, but still merciful, oblivion.

When I awoke, I knew that something was wrong. I looked about, and saw that, while the terrible pyramids remained, there was no reddish glow in any. The souls of her poor victims had gone. And upon the stair was the greatest sorrow that I have ever known -- the lifeless, horribly mutilated and decayed body of the creature that had been my mother, and had met her end in a most fitting manner. And yet....

It was with a heavy heart and tear-laden eyes that I began mounting the stairway to that now empty house above...

.....John Posta