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# Out Of The Mists Of Time



by William  
Benton  
Frazier

*"Eric was pressing his antagonist hard, swinging his immense two-handed sword in a flashing arc that beat through the other's defense time after time."*

## 1. *Statement of Professor Henry Wesley, January 13, 1909.*

**N**O ONE could have been more shocked than I at the terrible news of yesterday. My mind is in a turmoil—I find it impossible to readjust myself to this thing which has disturbed the peace of our university.

As for my opinion, I can truthfully say that I can formulate none. All the evidence seems to point to the guilt of Jordan, but something within me cries out when I would damn him as a murderer. Ericson, that great

bull of a young man, was my chief delight—his translations of Tacitus were things of beauty. Jordan was a good student, too; and here is the point that I feel it my duty to make plain: there was an antipathy between Jordan and Ericson.

This was obvious in the classroom disputes over the meanings of obscure passages; they used to argue fiercely, and it was evident that this was not so much from a desire to discuss the Latin as from envy and jealousy. Each seemed to want to humiliate the other. I often wished that these two fine young men could overcome this

childish dislike, and conduct themselves more like the gentlemen and scholars they were. But my efforts to overcome the coolness seemed only to increase it, and from worry over the situation I began to let it affect me more than its apparent importance, which was not great, warranted. But my instinct told me truly, even then, that there was something about the affair both strange and dangerous. How correct this was, I was to discover later.

The quarrel, if it could be called that, finally came to a head. Both the principals were always courteous to all others, but they had come less and less to conceal their hatred for each other, and at last they allowed their words, arising from some triviality, to become so heated that I could do nothing but request both young men to withdraw from the room. This occurrence affected my nerves so that I was positively ill by the end of the day.

This morning as I was leaving my house, an undergraduate blared the dreadful news at me. I was shocked beyond measure. I can only say for the unfortunate young man, Jordan, that he appeared to me to be a studious and respectable youth. But let me emphasize once more my intuition, or perhaps I had better say my strong conviction, that there must be forces and factors concerned in this case other than those at present known. Let us consider the evidence as wisely and as sanely as we can, and not draw back from what it leads us to.

2. *From the diary of John Henchard Andrews, student at C—University, in January, 1909.*

JANUARY 10—I shall have to cut the acquaintance of either Jordan or Ericson. They are simply making my life miserable. I have already hinted very broadly that I don't wish my rooms to be made a battleground for private feuds, but with no result.

It is hard for me to decide which one of them to drop. Neither has many friends, and I suppose I have become a sort of father confessor to them both.

How is it that such a mild, ascetic chap as Jordan can work himself into a towering rage at Ericson, and how can that good-natured giant return it so heartily? If ever I have seen hate in men's eyes, it has been since my acquaintance with those two.

JANUARY 11—A most extraordinary thing happened last night. It fairly gives me the creeps to think of it. And as for explaining it, it will always remain as dark a mystery for me as any ever compounded by Poe.

Jordan came into my rooms terribly excited, just as I was settling to some good, hard study—for I was somewhat behind in my mathematics. I'm afraid that for that reason I didn't give him a particularly hearty greeting, but when I had a look at him I saw that he was really on the verge of collapse. His face was white as a sheet, and there was a look about his eyes that I can only describe as *horrified*.

He huddled by the fire, spreading out his thin hands to the blaze, and watching me almost beseechingly while I put aside my books and drew up a chair beside him. He sat, silent as death, evidently trying to find the words to begin a story of pain and terror with.

What a picture he made!—slender and lithe as a panther, his hair brushed sleekly away from his high forehead, and gusts of emotion flickering over his chalky countenance.

At last he spoke, but not in his usual pleasant voice. His tones were reedy and hoarse:

" . . . a dull voice of wo  
From the heart's chamber."

"Andrews," he said, "I am the most accurst of men! I have had a terrible experience. Out of the mists

of time, Andrews, out of the mists of time!"

He paused for a moment, and the shadows from the firelight danced weirdly over his face.

"But I'm wandering," he continued, hurriedly. "I mustn't let myself do that. I must tell you something at once, before——"

He broke off again, and looked over his shoulder.

"Andrews"—his voice sank to a whisper,—"have you not often wondered why I quarrel so much with Ericson? I did not——"

Here he stopped short; for a heavy footstep sounded outside my door, and Ericson entered, not pausing to knock. For a moment he stood, poisoning his six feet of insolent brawn, and the old saying "speak of the devil and the devil will appear" occurred to me. Certainly there was something of the devil in Ericson's hot eyes last night.

"Take a chair, Eric," I invited.

He did so, without saying a word.

We made a strange group as we sat there, Ericson on my left hand and Jordan on my right, none of us speaking, and all three staring moodily at the fire. For perhaps five minutes we sat thus; and then I began to feel a strange influence permeating the atmosphere of the room. I wanted, somehow, to get up and open a window.

My guests sensed the peculiar feeling, which I can only describe as a sort of *heaviness*, too. Ericson leaped to his feet, with a defiance glaring from his deep-set blue eyes, but Jordan turned a face toward us that showed only the realest agony, both mental and physical. Then a racking change came over his features, and they twisted into a scowl of rage, while he came to his feet, facing Ericson.

The blue-eyed giant whirled from him and stepped to the center of the room. He clenched his fists and

squared off; but he was facing directly away from Jordan and toward the dark side of my study!

Then a swirling group of shadows seemed to leap at Ericson; I heard him gasp and pant as he flailed with his fists at a formless mass of darkness that I now discerned, and now lost sight of. Jordan watched, wild excitement mingling with anger on his hectic face. He took a quick step nearer Ericson, who was now crouching and slowly revolving on his heels. I knew that his shadowy adversary was still in the room, although I could not see it any longer.

Jordan's hands clenched fiercely, and he raised himself to strike. His fist whirled in the air. Then I heard a great breath of relief from him. He dropped his hand and turned to me. I have never seen so thankful a countenance; and without a word he hurried from the room. The strange influence seemed to dwindle, the fire burned up brighter, and the air cleared.

Ericson, perplexed and still angry, silently took his departure after a minute or two, leaving me to stare into my dying fire and wonder what inexplicable force had been there in my room to turn two men almost into savages before my eyes.

JANUARY 12—I scarcely know what to write today. All the university is shaken with horror over the news which came out this morning. In brief, it is that Karl Jordan murdered Eric Ericson last night in the Art Museum, where Ericson was temporarily employed as night watchman. He stabbed his victim several times in the back with an antique dagger—believed by some to have traces of a deadly poison still on it—from one of the exhibits. The janitors found Ericson's body this morning, and traced the fresh footprints in the snow outside the museum to Jordan's dormitory. They summoned the po-

lice, and while the officers were starting their investigation, Jordan gave himself up.

He was lodged in the town jail at once, and refused to make any statement, other than a confession of the crime; and he insisted that he did not want to see any visitors, until finally he asked for me.

I saw him this afternoon, and found him calm and composed, apparently resigned to his fate, and only anxious for justice to take its course as speedily as possible. I could only mumble some trite remark, and try to avoid his eyes, for the pain in them was too deep for words, a sorrow which I did not want to see. He sat on his cell cot for a moment, and then said, in a level voice:

"Andrews, my hand struck down Eric Ericson, but I am as innocent of the crime as an unborn child."

Of course I did not know what to say to this, so I remained silent, waiting for him to continue. He reached beneath the mattress of his cot, and brought out some papers, which he handed to me.

"This is my statement," he continued, quietly. "Read it, Andrews, and do with it as you think best. As for me, I am doomed. Good-bye."

I have just finished reading the notes that he gave me. I am convinced of their authenticity, for I am an eye-witness to some of the things with which they deal. Therefore I intend to make them public, even though they may meet with universal disbelief, and I propose to carry the fight for Jordan's acquittal to the finish on the strength of these unprecedented revelations, which show how the circumstances of the crime absolve him completely of all guilt.

After that I intend to leave this university forever, for it would be impossible for me to stay in surroundings which remind me at every turn of that dreadful thing which suddenly intruded itself into our lives,

to use Jordan's phrase, "from the very mists of time."

3. *Ms. of Karl Jordan, student in C——— University, dated January 12, 1909.*

How well I remember the day I met Eric Ericson! I was filled with admiration for his great frame and pleasant open countenance. Some classmate had introduced us, and I smiled with pleasure as I grasped his hand. Imagine my astonishment when I felt the smile congeal into a scowl. Involuntarily my hands clenched, and my breath came quicker. It was like the instinctive reaction of a cat to a dog, and yet I felt no intuition that Ericson was an enemy of mine. I hurried away, astounded and distressed.

That night I awoke about midnight in a frenzy of rage. I was alternately swept by the fierce desire to face Ericson and fight him, and by a consuming wonder at that desire. The man was only a chance acquaintance—it was ridiculous that I should feel toward him as one Kentucky feudist does toward another, when he had given me absolutely no cause. For an hour I paced the floor, trying to fathom the reason for my strange, involuntary feelings, and my equally strange actions.

In the morning, when I awoke, and the cool, fresh air blew in on me, I felt once more at peace with the world. My rage of the night past seemed absurd, far away, and almost unreal. But I happened to encounter Ericson on my way to chapel, and instantly all my good will was dissipated. In spite of myself, I gave him an ugly scowl.

So matters went from day to day. Everywhere my unreasonable rage grew more easily inflammable. But the point that frightened me and made me sick at heart was the discovery which I soon made that it was not I who flared at Ericson so con-

stantly, but *something else*, something within me, apparently, over which I had no control.

I was able to stand aside, mentally, and analyze myself as the hot words leaped to my lips and the dark thoughts hurried through my brain. I was able to apply my student's mind to the problem, even though it baffled me.

It was especially at night that I got opportunities to investigate this passionate state of mind that would temporarily eclipse my better judgment, for often as I lay in bed I would feel the first throes of my senseless anger. It would grow stronger and stronger, until finally I would find myself compelled to leap up and pace the floor until the fit passed.

Then, late one evening, I got a flood of light upon the problem, which cleared it up completely, verified my worst suspicions, and made the awful predicament I was in completely plain to me at last. It was now evident that I must abandon all hope.

I WAS seated at my desk on the evening to which I have reference, having completed several hours of hard study on calculus. My mind was in the misty, sleepy state that follows a prolonged period of concentration. The sound of my little clock, jangling out the hour of midnight, seemed to reach me from a great distance off.

Allowing my eyes to wander idly to my open bedroom door, I was amazed to see a vaporous cloud like a bank of mist rolling about within the chamber. I got unsteadily to my feet and walked to the door, supporting myself there with a hand on each casing. With eyes dimmed by astonishment I began to make out the details of a scene such as I am sure no man of this age has ever looked upon.

I saw a great feast-hall, dimly at first, but as clearly as a photograph when the mist had disappeared. It was a huge, rough room, with large

beams across the ceiling, which I judge must have been thirty or forty feet from the floor. The impression I had was that I stood on a small private balcony at one end of the room, and placed at a distance about half-way up from the floor.

In the center of the hall stood a long table, loaded with flagons and trenchers of heroic size. Around it sat a company of about fifty banqueters—big blond men whom I identified instantly as vikings of old. Faintly the sound of their revelry came to my ears. Many a rude jest and song in a tongue unfamiliar to me floated up to my gallery. Mingled with this was the bang and clash of the dishes, and a sound like that of hogs at a trough.

At one end of the table sat a great red-bearded man who was the king. I knew this the moment I set eyes upon him. Every proud line in his face showed it, as did every regal gesture that he made. By his side, in the place of honor, was a venerable old man, revered by all. At a word from the king, this graybeard took up an instrument like a harp, and sang.

As the sound drifted to me I knew the song was a saga of love and war: and the wild thrilling music affected the men even more than the ale they had quaffed. When the singer stopped, an uproar of approbation broke out. The king took a ring from his finger and gave it to the minstrel, while the diners cheered.

Then the drinking bout began in earnest: wilder and wilder grew the talk and singing, madder and madder grew the drinkers, and suddenly I noticed something that astounded me so that I wonder I did not faint away. Seated half-way down the board was a yellow-haired, yellow-bearded man that I knew to be none other than the Twentieth Century Eric Ericson! Save that the Eric I knew was clean-shaven, this viking

was the image of him. Eric Ericson and Eric the Giant were the same!

Looking across the table I saw two men who were undoubtedly brothers—their faces were as alike as coins stamped in the same mold. And such singularly mean, wicked and cynical faces it has seldom been my lot to see. One of these brothers, inflamed with drink, was evidently seeking a quarrel with the blue-eyed giant who faced him, and Eric was not the man to evade a fight. Both rose, and something told me that the appellation "coward" had been given. Eric's palm left a ruddy mark on the other's cheek. In another moment their broadswords were out, and the vikings stopped drinking to enjoy the spectacle to the full.

The clanking of the swords, wielded like twigs in the hands of the combatants, came to my straining ears like the tapping of a far-off alarm bell. The scene was beginning to fade again, and I felt, I can not say why, that soon there was to be enacted something of the greatest importance to me. I concentrated every sense upon the picture before me.

Eric swung his sword, an immense two-handed brand, with a disregard for wounds that showed him to be a true Norseman. His opponent was made of less sturdy stuff: he danced in and out, feinted and parried, and leaped nimbly out of reach after each lunge. Both men began to show red spots of blood on their chests and arms, but Eric seemed to be getting the better of it.

The feasters, wild with the sight of blood, yelled for a finishing stroke. Eric was pressing his antagonist hard, swinging his sword in a flashing arc that beat through the other's defense time and time again. Then I happened to look at the other brother. His hand was stealing toward the dagger that hung at his side!

Eric got home a mighty blow, and his enemy staggered. But the brother

who had been seated leaped up behind Eric, his face twisted with hate, his dagger poised. There was a sharp command from the king, cries of shame sounded from all sides, and the mist rolled up again, obscuring every detail of the scene save that wolfish face. It seemed to grow to immense proportions, blotting out even the rolling fog of vapor, then to hang poised for a moment before me, and suddenly *run together*, and I felt something enter my consciousness that had not been there before.

It was a spirit of pride and hatred! The vapor cleared from my bedroom, But I knew the truth, and fear and disgust shadowed my soul. I was the unlucky dupe of the treacherous brother, whose twisted personality had appeared out of a fog of yesterdays to seize my own and use it for vengeance upon the reincarnation of Eric the Giant.

I was in a mental turmoil. Although I now knew exactly what was wrong with me, the realization of the truth was of no help to me in controlling myself. I felt the murderous passion flooding my brain, and my hands kept reaching for the poker. It was only by the greatest effort that I kept myself from rushing out to Ericson's rooms and braining him.

But I made this effort, and when I felt quieter I hurried to Andrews' quarters to ask his advice. It was obvious that I could not stay in the university, and I wanted to have Andrews get Ericson out of the way for a day so that I could leave without seeing him. Andrews was certainly surprised when I burst in upon him, haggard and wild-eyed as I was. It was his habit to study very late at night, otherwise I should not have found him up at that hour, and he was obviously more anxious to get to work than to chat with me.

However, I knew he would give me sympathetic attention as soon as I had informed him of my situation, and I

was just about to do so when, by some unfortunate chance, Ericson came in. Of course I could not talk before him, so I resolved to wait for him to go, and since he showed no intention of doing so, we sat about the fire, moody and distraught.

Then I felt the powers of evil marshaling about us in the room. In another moment I knew that Ericson's age-old antagonist was there. They struggled, and as they did so, I felt my self-control slipping away from me. I was no longer Karl Jordan. I was a fiend. I looked around the room for something with which to strike him down from behind.

To my indescribable relief the spell of the Evil grew less, and like a flood of cold water, my real self came back to me. In a daze of horror, I flung myself out of the room and hurried to bed, sending up a fervent prayer that I might wake to find myself no longer hag-ridden with another man's hate. Shortly I was in a heavy slumber.

I awoke just as my little clock was striking 2, and to my terror and despair I found that the spirit of the viking had me completely in its clutch. I lay, muscles tense, hands clenched, waiting for the next move of the preemptor of my body.

It was not long in coming, for I rose, or rather, it rose, and walked softly across to the window. From there I could see, faintly, the outlines of the museum, black as a toad against the snow. A light gleamed in one of the basement windows. I felt my features crease into a savage grin of satisfaction, and I suddenly remembered that Ericson was serving as night watchman there during the regular watchman's illness. An inkling of what was to happen flashed through my mind, but I refused to accept it; I should have lost my sanity if I had.

MY NEXT move was to pull on my clothes and walk, bareheaded, straight out of the dormitory and across the snow to the little window where the light showed. My tracks were left, clear and distinct, in the snow behind me.

I crouched and peered through the window; Ericson was seated with a book by a small electric reading light. His coat and vest were off and his sleeves were rolled up, so that the smooth muscles of his forearms were displayed. My eyes dilated with hate, while my real self covered in a corner of my brain, aghast at the monstrous plans the spirit from time was formulating.

With great caution I slipped from my position by the window and made my way around to the main entrance of the building. At one side and beneath the wide steps was a little door, used for entrance to the basement. Shuddering at my own strength, I pushed this open, breaking off an old rusty bolt as I did so. Entering, I found myself in the dismal place that every museum has—the storeroom where the objects not on exhibition are kept. I hurried silently by heaps of musty, dusty old things, averting my eyes from the faces that accused me out of ancient canvas, from spinning-wheels that seemed to be turning with ghostly activity, making my shroud, and from the grinning skulls of cavemen.

At last I came to the end of this morgue of inanimate objects. (Were they inanimate?) I quietly opened a heavy oak door and was in a part of the main museum—the archeological section. I began to tread softly, like a beast stalking its prey, and as I made the turn of a corridor I found myself directly behind Ericson, who was still engrossed in his book.

Slinking behind a case of exhibits I peered out and engraved every detail of the scene on my brain. Ericson was seated beside a case like the



one that hid me, with his feet propped up on a railing which was used to keep the museum's patrons from handling the set of swords which hung upon the wall.

For several minutes I lurked there, waiting for the next move in the game. Suddenly I felt the influence which had foretold the combat in Andrews' room. The light went out, and the cold brilliant rays of the moon lit up the alcove. I *knew* that someone, materialized but invisible, was in the room. Ericson knew it, too, for he leaped to his feet with a guttural roar.

A rattling at the rack of swords attracted my attention, and for a moment I could not believe my eyes. One of the blades had been hauled from its place and hung at salute in mid-air, glistening in the moonlight, and steady as if held by an unseen swordsman. In another moment Ericson had drawn a great sword from the wall, and he held it at salute before the other weapon. By the carving and ornamentation on the hilt I recognized it as the brand that Eric the Giant had wielded when I saw him in my vision.

The poised sword of Eric's invisible antagonist made a quick feint. Eric responded with a bullying swing and thrust, and the fight was on.

It was an unforgettable scene, clear in the white glow of moonshine, and looked down upon by ranks of frowning old things—battered shields and ancient swords still sharp, side-arms deadly yet. Eric's opponent used the same tactics he had employed many centuries before, in that banquet hall of King Red-Beard. Feint and parry, parry and feint, he kept nimbly out of the reach of Eric's brawny sword-arm. And Eric seemed to be slowing under the pace, for his breath came in labored gasps. Indeed, as I watched and listened, I fancied I could hear the breathing of the other man, long, sibilant, and unbelievably brutal.

So they fought, tramping up and down, making the air rough with the clashing of their swords. And although the moon shone through the window brightly, never a line of the other viking could I see.

It was then I noticed that the case behind which I was hiding held a show of daggers, some of bronze, others of steel, and the knowledge of the part I was to play became clear to me. My brain reeled with the horror of it. Ericson had rushed the viking into a corner and the swords flashed more rapidly even than before, although the struggle seemed to be going Ericson's way very decidedly now. My hand went to the case of daggers, and lifted the latch and slid back the glass, while I watched it, fascinated and powerless to prevent what I knew was going to happen.

I watched my hand, and saw it pick up a greenish bronze dagger; next I found myself stealing up behind Ericson. He was pressing his antagonist hard, and the power in charge of my body wasted no time. Twice the dagger went into Ericson's back, and he fell with a cry.

He was dead, and as I dropped the knife I saw the sword, that had engaged his, fall to the floor. A cloud drifted in front of the moon, the museum seemed darker; and I fled from the place as though the devil were after me.

Today I find that my evil genius has left me, and my instinct tells me that it is forever. Thus an indescribable peace has come to me with all the dread and suffering. It is, of course, impossible for me to bring the truth into court as a defense, and indeed I do not wish to. This statement is only for my few friends, in order that they may not think ill of me after I am gone.

Those who see these papers and have the courage to face the facts will

realize the truth with which the poet said:

There are more things in heaven and earth,  
 Horatio,  
 Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

4. *Item in the New York Globe, January 13, 1909.*

## STUDENT ACCUSED OF MURDER DIES IN JAIL

(By Staff Correspondent.)

NEWTON, MASS., Jan. 13.—The body of Karl Jordan, student of C—— university, and self-confessed murderer of Eric Ericson, one of his classmates, was removed today from the County Jail, where he died last night.

Jailers are inclined to doubt that Jordan committed suicide, and the coroner has already stated that he finds the death due to heart failure. Sheriff Williams looked in on his prisoner shortly after midnight and found him dead in bed. He must have died about the hour of 12, as he asked one of the turnkeys for a glass of water just before the hour struck.

A peculiar circumstance was revealed when an attaché of the jail told your correspondent this morning that one of the bars in Jordan's window had been bent aside, although not enough to allow a man to get through. Although the jailers had thought this bar was unbent when Jordan was incarcerated, none of them can remember definitely when it was pulled out of line. They believe that it must have happened some weeks ago when three tramps were confined in the cell—as one man's strength is not sufficient to move it—and have been unnoticed until now.

Jordan's friends, it is understood, were planning to introduce sensational evidence in court in an effort to establish extenuating circumstances, but the case is now closed by the young man's death.

Feeling among the students and townspeople had run high against Jordan, and an extra guard of constables and student friends of the prisoner was around the jail last night until word of his death came.

5. *Extract from a letter to John Henchard Andrews from his classmate, James Warren, August 10, 1917.*

I HAVE been trying to forget it, but I have never been able to. Sometimes the terror of the thing drives me almost hysterical, and I often think that I am losing my mind.

From the night Karl Jordan died in prison until the time of this writing I have kept still about the thing, but tonight I feel that I *must* tell someone or I shall go mad. I have selected you, John, because you knew Karl, and because you were the one who gave me those facts of the case contained in his statement written in jail which caused us who had known the principals in the affair to leave college.

I, for one, have never been back, and I dare say you have never returned either. There were ugly primeval forces at work there, John. They were things that shouldn't come thrusting suddenly into our rationalistic, orderly modern life. When they do, it isn't healthy.

How unhealthy it can be you know from the papers that were put into your hands by Jordan. But John, that statement of Karl's is *not all*. The rest of the case, so far as I know, includes something I saw the night Jordan died.

You remember how the rumor went out that a lynching party was going after Jordan, and how a group of us armed ourselves to help the constables keep guard. Perhaps you will recall how we huddled by our fires before the jail, just as the clock in the tower tolled 12. Do you remem-

ber how we shuddered at the iron notes, sensing something that we could not define?

Then the sheriff came out, looking gravely around the deserted square where the wind blew flurries of snow along like ghosts, and said, "I guess you boys better go home. Karl Jordan's dead."

I'm sure you will recollect how we parted, with sick, hasty good-nights. I turned up the alley by the jail, and was half-way through it, when I heard the noise of someone dropping to the ground behind me. I thought it might be some would-be rioter, and I went back a few paces, peering ahead in the darkness.

My man was a big fellow; his back was toward me, and he was busy pulling a loose board out of the fence

across from the jail. I had a flashlight with me, and I turned it on him, with a challenge on the tip of my tongue; but when the light fell on him, he turned and looked at me, and I found that I had nothing to say. In fact, I could not have spoken had I wished to, for the man was Eric Ericson!

His teeth flashed in the light from my torch, and just as I turned its rays out of his face he got the board loose and slipped through the fence. I hurried home and passed a sleepless night; but it was next day, when I examined the scene, that I observed the fact that caused me to leave town on the next train.

The fact was this: the thing I saw had passed through an opening about three and one-half inches wide.

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