

# THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

and other pieces

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LOVECRAFT

H.P. LOVECRAFT  
& divers hands



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# THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

It is probable that the facts in regard to the mysterious destruction by fire of an abandoned house on a knoll along the shore of the Seekonk in a little habited district between the Washington and Red Bridges will never be entirely known. The police have been beset by the usual number of cranks, purporting to offer information about the matter, none more insistent than Arthur Phillips, the descendant of an old East Side family, long resident of Angell Street, a somewhat confused but earnest young man who prepared an account of certain events he alleges led to the fire. Though the police have interviewed all persons concerned and mentioned in Mr. Phillips' account, no corroboration—save for a statement from a librarian at the Athenaeum, attesting only to the fact that Mr. Phillips did once meet Miss Rose Dexter there—could be found to support Mr. Phillips' allegations. The manuscript follows.

# I

The nocturnal streets of any city along the Eastern Seaboard afford the nightwalker many a glimpse of the strange and terrible, the macabre and outré, for darkness draws from the crevices and crannies, the attic rooms and cellar hideaways of the city those human beings who, for obscure reasons lost in the past, choose to keep the day secure in their grey niches—the misshapen, the lonely, the sick, the very old, the haunted, and those lost souls who are forever seeking their identities under cover of night, which is beneficent for them as the cold light of day can never be. These are the hurt by life, the maimed, men and women who have never recovered from the traumas of childhood or who have willingly sought after experiences not meant for man to know, and every place where the human society has been concentrated for any considerable length of time abounds with them, though they are seen only in the dark hours, emerging like nocturnal moths to move about in their narrow environs for a few brief hours before they must escape daylight once more.

Having been a solitary child, and much left to my own devices because of the persistent ill-health which was my lot, I developed early a propensity for roaming abroad by night, at first only in the Angell Street neighborhood where I lived during much of my childhood, and then, little by little, in a widened circle in my native Providence. By day, my health permitting, I haunted the Seekonk River from the city into the open country, or, when my energy was at its height, played with a few carefully chosen companions at a “clubhouse” we had painstakingly constructed in wooded areas not far out of the city. I was also much given to reading, and spent long hours in my grandfather’s extensive library, reading without discrimination and thus assimilating a vast amount of knowledge, from the Greek philosophies to the history of the English monarchy, from the secrets of ancient alchemists to the experiments of Niels Bohr, from the lore of Egyptian papyri to the regional studies of Thomas Hardy, since my grandfather was possessed of very catholic tastes in books and, spurning specialization, bought and kept only what in his mind was good, by which he meant that which involved him.

But the nocturnal city invariably drew me from all else; walking abroad was my preference above all other pursuits, and I went out and about at night all through the later years of my childhood and throughout my adolescent years, in the course of which I tended—because sporadic illness kept me from regular attendance at school—to grow ever more self-sufficient and solitary. I could not now say what it was I sought with such determination in the nighted city, what it was in the ill-lit streets that drew me, why I sought old Benefit Street and the shadowed environs of Poe Street, almost unknown in the vastness of Providence, what it was I hoped to see in the furtively glimpsed faces of other night-wanderers slipping and slinking along the dark lanes and byways of the city, unless perhaps it was to escape from the harsher realities of daylight coupled with an insatiable curiosity about the secrets of city life which only the night could disclose.

When at last my graduation from high school was an accomplished fact, it might have been assumed that I would turn to other pursuits; but it was not so, for my health was too precarious to warrant matriculation at Brown University, where I would like to have gone to continue my studies, and this deprivation served only to enhance my solitary occupations—I doubled my reading hours and increased the time I spent abroad by night, by the simple expedient of sleeping during the daylight hours. And yet I contrived to lead an otherwise normal existence; I did not abandon my widowed mother or my aunts, with whom we lived, though the companions of my youth had grown away from me, and I managed to discover Rose Dexter, a dark-eyed descendant of the first English families to come into old Providence, one singularly favored in the proportions of her figure and in the beauty of her features, whom I persuaded to share my nocturnal pursuits.

With her I continued to explore nocturnal Providence, and with new zest, eager to show Rose all I had already discovered in my wanderings about the city. We met originally at the old Athenaeum, and we continued to meet there of evenings, and from its portals ventured forth into the night. What began light-heartedly for her soon grew into dedicated habit; she proved as eager as I to inquire into hidden byways and long disused lanes, and she was soon as much at home in the night-held city as I. She was little inclined to irrelevant chatter, and thus proved admirably complementary to my person.

We had been exploring Providence in this fashion for several months when, one night on Benefit Street, a gentleman wearing a knee-length cape over wrinkled and ill-kept clothing accosted us. He had been standing on the walk not far ahead of us when first we turned into the street, and I had observed him when we went past him; he had struck me as oddly disquieting, for I thought his moustached, dark-eyed face with the unruly hair of his hatless head strangely familiar; and, at our passing, he had set out in pursuit until, at last, catching up to us, he touched me on the shoulder and spoke.

“Sir,” he said, “could you tell me how to reach the cemetery where once Poe walked?”

I gave him directions, and then, spurred by a sudden impulse, suggested that we accompany him to the goal he sought; almost before I understood fully what had happened, we three were walking along together. I saw almost at once with what a calculating air the fellow scrutinized my companion, and yet any resentment I might have felt was dispelled by the ready recognition that the stranger’s interest was inoffensive, for it was rather more coolly critical than passionately involved. I took the opportunity, also, to examine him as carefully as I could in the occasional patches of streetlight through which we passed, and was increasingly disturbed at the gnawing certainty that I knew him or had known him.

He was dressed almost uniformly in sombre black, save for his white shirt and the flowing Windsor tie he affected. His clothing was unpressed, as if it had been worn for a long time without having been attended to, but it was not unclean, as far as I could see. His brow was high, almost dome-like; under it his dark eyes looked out hauntingly, and his face narrowed to his small, blunt chin. His hair, too, was longer than most men of my generation wore it, and yet he seemed to be of that same generation, not more than five years past my own age. His clothing, however, was definitely not of my generation; indeed, it seemed, for all that it had the appearance of being new, to have been cut to a pattern of several generations before my own.

“Are you a stranger of Providence?” I asked him presently.

“I am visiting,” he said shortly.

“You are interested in Poe?”

He nodded.

“How much do you know of him?” I asked then.

“Little,” he replied. “Perhaps you could tell me more?”

I needed no second invitation, but immediately gave him a biographical sketch of the father of the detective story and a master of the macabre tale whose work I had long admired, elaborating only on his romance with Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman, since it involved Providence and the visit with Mrs. Whitman to the cemetery whither we were bound. I saw that he listened with almost rapt attention, and seemed to be setting down in memory everything I said, but I could not decide from his expressionless face whether what I told him gave him pleasure or displeasure, and I could not determine what the source of his interest was.

For her part, Rose was conscious of his interest in her, but she was not embarrassed by it, perhaps sensing that his interest was other than amorous. It was not until he asked her name that I realized we had not had his. He gave it now as “Mr. Allan,” at which Rose smiled almost imperceptibly; I caught it fleetingly as we passed under a street-lamp.

Having learned our names, our companion seemed interested in nothing more, and it was in silence that we reached the cemetery at last. I had thought Mr. Allan would enter it, but such was not his intention; he had evidently meant only to discover its location, so that he could return to it by day, which was manifestly a sensible conclusion, for—though I knew it well and had walked there on occasion by night—it offered little for a stranger to view in the dark hours.

We bade him good night at the gate and went on.

“I’ve seen that fellow somewhere before,” I said to Rose once we had passed beyond his hearing. “But I can’t think where it was. Perhaps in the library.”

“It must have been in the library,” answered Rose with a throaty chuckle that was typical of her. “In a portrait on the wall.”

“Oh, come!” I cried.

“Surely you recognized the resemblance, Arthur!” she cried. “Even to his name. He looks like Edgar Allan Poe.”

And, of course, he did. As soon as Rose had mentioned it, I recognized the strong resemblance, even to his clothing, and at once set Mr. Allan down as a harmless idolater of Poe’s, so obsessed with the man that he must fashion himself in his likeness, even to his outdated clothing—another of the curious specimens of humanity thronging the night streets of the city.

“Well, that one is the oddest fellow we’ve met in all the while we’ve walked out,” I said.

Her hand tightened on my arm. “Arthur, didn’t you feel something—something wrong about him?”

“Oh, I suppose there is something ‘wrong’ in that sense about all of us who are haunters of the dark,” I said. “Perhaps, in a way, we prefer to make our own reality.”

But even as I answered her, I was aware of her meaning, and there was no need of the explanation she tried so earnestly to make in the spate of words that followed—there was something wrong in the sense that there was about Mr. Allan a profound note of error. It lay, now that I faced and accepted it, in a number of trivial things, but particularly in the lack of expressiveness in his features; his speech, limited though it had been, was without modulation, almost mechanical; he had not smiled, nor had he been given to any variation in facial expression whatsoever; he had spoken with a precision that suggested an icy detachment and aloofness foreign to most men. Even the manifest interest he showed in Rose was far more clinical than anything else. At the same time that my curiosity was quickened, a note of apprehension began to make itself manifest, as a result of which I

turned our conversation into other channels and presently walked Rose to her home.



## II

I suppose it was inevitable that I should meet Mr. Allan again, and but two nights later, this time not far from my own door. Perhaps it was absurd to think so, but I could not escape the impression that he was waiting for me, that he was as anxious to encounter me again as I was to meet him.

I greeted him jovially, as a fellow haunter of the night, and took quick notice of the fact that, though his voice simulated my own joviality, there was not a flicker of emotion on his face; it remained completely placid—"wooden," in the words of the romantic writers, not the hint of a smile touched his lips, not a glint shone in his dark eyes. And now that I had had it called to my attention, I saw that the resemblance to Poe was remarkable, so much so, that had Mr. Allan put forth any reasonable claim to being a descendant of Poe's, I could have been persuaded to belief.

It was, I thought, a curious coincidence, but hardly more, and Mr. Allan on this occasion made no mention of Poe or anything relating to him in Providence. He seemed, it was soon evident, more intent on listening to me; he was as singularly uncommunicative as he had been at our first meeting, and in an odd way his manner was precisely the same—as if we had not actually met before. But perhaps it was that he simply sought some common ground, for, once I mentioned that I contributed a weekly column on astronomy to the Providence Journal, he began to take part in our conversation; what had been for several blocks virtually a monologue on my part became a dialogue.

It was immediately apparent to me that Mr. Allan was not a novice in astronomical matters. Anxious as he seemed to be for my views, he entertained some distinctly different views of his own, some of them highly debatable. He lost no time in setting forth his opinion that not only was interplanetary travel possible, but that countless stars—not alone some of the planets in our own solar system—were inhabited.

"By human beings?" I asked incredulously.

“Need it be?” he replied. “Life is unique—not man. Even here on this planet life takes many forms.”

I asked him then whether he had read the works of Charles Fort.

He had not. He knew nothing of him, and, at his request, I outlined some of Fort’s theories, together with the facts Fort had adduced in support of those theories. I saw that from time to time, as we walked along, my companion’s head moved in a curt nod, though his unemotional face betrayed no expression; it was as if he agreed. And on one occasion, he broke into words.

“Yes, it is so. What he says is so.”

I had at the moment been speaking of the sighting of unidentified flying objects near Japan during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

“How can you say so?” I cried.

He launched at once into a lengthy statement, the gist of which was that every advanced scientist in the domain of astronomy was convinced that earth was not unique in having life, and that it followed therefore that, just as it could be concluded that some heavenly bodies had lower life forms than our own, so others might well support higher forms, and, accepting that premise, it was perfectly logical that such higher forms had mastered interplanetary travel and might, after decades of observation, be thoroughly familiar with earth and its inhabitants as well as with its sister planets.

“To what purpose?” I asked. “To make war on us? To invade us?”

“A more highly developed form of life would hardly need to use such primitive methods,” he pointed out. “They watch us precisely as we watch the moon and listen for radio signals from the planets—we here are still in the earliest stages of interplanetary communication and, beyond that, space travel, whereas other races on remote stars have long since achieved both.”

“How can you speak with such authority?” I asked then.

“Because I am convinced of it. Surely you must have come face to face with similar conclusions.”

I admitted that I had.

“And you remain open-minded?”

I admitted this as well.

“Open-minded enough to examine certain proof if it were offered to you?”

“Certainly,” I replied, though my skepticism could hardly have gone unnoticed.

“That is good,” he said. “Because if you will permit my brothers and me to call on you at your home on Angell Street, we may be able to convince you that there is life in space—not in the shape of men, but life, and life possessing a far greater intelligence than that of your most intelligent men.”

I was amused at the breadth of his claim and belief, but I did not betray it by any sign. His confidence made me to reflect again upon the infinite variety of characters to be found among the nightwalkers of Providence; clearly Mr. Allan was a man who was obsessed by his extraordinary beliefs, and, like most of such men, eager to proselytize, to make converts.

“Whenever you like,” I said by way of invitation. “Except that I would prefer it to be later rather than early, to give my mother time to get to bed. Anything in the way of an experiment might disturb her.”

“Shall we say next Monday night?”

“Agreed.”

My companion thereafter said no more on this subject. Indeed, he said scarcely anything on any subject, and it was left for me to do the talking. I was evidently not very entertaining, for in less than three blocks we came to an alley and there Mr. Allan abruptly bade me good night, after which he turned into the alley and was soon swallowed in its darkness.

Could his house abut upon it? I wondered. If not, he must inevitably come out the other end. Impulsively I hurried around one end of that block and stationed myself deep in the shadows of the parallel street, where I could remain well hidden from the alley entrance and yet keep it in view.

Mr. Allan came leisurely out of the alley before I had quite recovered my breath. I expected him to pursue his way through the alley, but he did not; he turned down the street, and, accelerating his pace a little, he proceeded on his way. Impelled by curiosity now, I followed, keeping myself as well hidden as possible. But Mr. Allan never once looked around; he set his face straight ahead of him and never, as far as I could determine, even glanced to left or right; he was clearly bound for a destination that could only be his home, for the hour was past midnight.

I had little difficulty following my erstwhile companion, for I knew these streets well, I had known them since my childhood. Mr. Allan was bound in the direction of the Seekonk, and he held to his course without deviation until he reached a somewhat rundown section of Providence, where he made his way up a little knoll to a long-deserted house at its crest. He let himself into it and I saw him no more. I waited a while longer, expecting a light to go up in the house, but none did, and I could only conclude that he had gone directly to bed.

Fortunately, I had kept myself in the shadows, for Mr. Allan had evidently not gone to bed. Apparently he had gone through the house and around the block, for suddenly I saw him approach the house from the direction we had come, and once more he walked on, past my place of concealment, and made his way into the house, again without turning on a light.

This time, certainly, he had remained there. I waited for five minutes or a trifle more; then turned and made my way back toward my own home on Angell Street, satisfied that I had done no more in following Mr. Allan than he had evidently done on the night of our initial meeting in following me, for I had long since concluded that our meeting tonight had not been by chance, but by design.

Many blocks from the Allan house, however, I was startled to see approaching me from the direction of Benefit Street, my erstwhile

companion! Even as I wondered how he had managed to leave the house again and make his way well around me in order to enable him to come toward me, trying in vain to map the route he could have taken to accomplish this, he came up and passed me by without so much as a flicker of recognition.

Yet it was he, undeniably—the same Poesque appearance distinguished him from any other nightwalker. Stilling his name on my tongue, I turned and looked after him. He never turned his head, but walked steadily on, clearly bound for the scene I had not long since quitted. I watched him out of sight, still trying—in vain—to map the route he might have taken among the lanes and byways and streets so familiar to me in order to meet me so once more, face to face.

We had met on Angell Street, walked to Benefit and north, then turned riverward once more. Only by dint of hard running could he have cut around me and come back. And what purpose would he have had to follow such a course? It left me utterly baffled, particularly since he had given me not the slightest sign of recognition, his entire mien suggesting that we were perfect strangers!

But if I was mystified at the occurrences of the night, I was even more puzzled at my meeting with Rose at the Athenaeum the following night. She had clearly been waiting for me, and hastened to my side as soon as she caught sight of me.

“Have you seen Mr. Allan?” she asked.

“Only last night,” I answered, and would have gone to recount the circumstances had she not spoken again.

“So did I! He walked me out from the library and home.”

I stifled my response and heard her out. Mr. Allan had been waiting for her to come out of the library. He had greeted her and asked whether he might walk with her, after having ascertained that I was not with her. They had walked for an hour with but little conversation, and this only of the most superficial—relative to the antiquities of the city, the architecture of certain

houses, and similar matters, just such as one interested in the older aspects of Providence would find of interest—and then he had walked her home. She had, in short, been with Mr. Allan in one part of the city at the same time that I had been with him in another; and clearly neither of us had the slightest doubt of the identity of our companions.

“I saw him after midnight,” I said, which was part of the truth but not all the truth.

This extraordinary coincidence must have some logical explanation, though I was not disposed to discuss it with Rose, lest I unduly alarm her. Mr. Allan had spoken of his “brothers” it was therefore entirely likely that Mr. Allan was one of a pair of identical twins. But what explanation could there be for what was an obvious and designed deception? One of our companions was not, could not have been the same Mr. Allan with whom we had previously walked. But which? I was satisfied that my companion was identical with Mr. Allan met but two nights before.

In as casual a manner as I could assume in the circumstances, I asked such questions of Rose as were designed to satisfy me in regard to the identity of her companion, in the anticipation that somewhere in our dialogue she would reveal some doubt of the identity of hers. She betrayed no such doubt; she was innocently convinced that her companion was the same man who had walked with us two nights ago, for he had obviously made references to the earlier nocturnal walk, and Rose was completely convinced that he was the same man. She had no reason for doubt, however, for I held my tongue; there was some perplexing mystery here, for the brothers had some obscure reason for interesting themselves in us—certainly other than that they shared our interest in the nightwalkers of the city and the hidden aspects of urban life that appeared only with the dusk and vanished once more into their seclusion with the dawn.

My companion, however, had made an assignation with me, whereas Rose said nothing to indicate that her companion had planned a further meeting with her. And why had he waited to meet her in the first place? But this line of inquiry was lost before the insistent cognizance that neither of the meetings I had had after leaving my companion at his residence last night

could have been Rose' s companion, for Rose lived rather too far from the place of my final meeting last night to have permitted her companion to meet me at the point we met. A disquieting sense of uneasiness began to rise in me. Perhaps there were three Allans—all identical—triplets? Or four? But no, surely the second Mr. Allan encountered on the previous night had been identical with the first, even if the third encounter could not have been the same man.

No matter how much thought I applied to it, the riddle remained insoluble. I was, therefore, in a challenging frame of mind for my Monday night appointment with Mr. Allan, not but two days away.

### III

Even so, I was ill-prepared for the visit of Mr. Allan and his brothers on the following Monday night. They came at a quarter past ten o' clock; my mother had just gone upstairs to bed. I had expected, at most, three of them; there were seven—and they were as alike as peas in a pod, so much so that I could not pick from among them the Mr. Allan with whom I had twice walked the nocturnal streets of Providence, though I assumed it was he who was the spokesman for the group.

They filed into the living room, and Mr. Allan immediately set about arranging chairs in a semi-circle with the help of his brothers, murmuring something about the “nature of the experiment,” though, to tell the truth, I was still much too amazed and disquieted at the appearance of seven identical men, all of whom bore so strong a resemblance to Edgar Allan Poe as to startle the beholder, to assimilate what was being said. Moreover, I saw now by the light of my Welsbach gas-lamp that all seven of them were of a pallid, waxen complexion, not of such a nature as to give me any doubt of their being flesh and bone like myself, but rather such as to suggest that one and all were afflicted with some kind of disease—anemia, perhaps, or some kindred illness which would leave their faces colourless; and their eyes, which were very dark, seemed to stare fixedly and yet without seeing, though they suffered no lack of perception and seemed to perceive by means of some extra sense not visible to me. The sensation that rose in me was not predominantly one of fear, but one of overwhelming curiosity tinged with a spreading sense of something utterly alien not only to my experience but to my existence.

Thus far, little had passed between us, but now that the semi-circle had been completed, and my visitors had seated themselves, their spokesman beckoned me forward and indicated a chair placed within the arc of the semi-circle facing the seated men.

“Will you sit here, Mr. Phillips?” he asked.



I did as he asked, and found myself the object of all eyes, but not essentially so much their object as their focal point, for the seven men seemed to be looking not so much at me as through me.

“Our intention, Mr. Phillips,” explained their spokesman—whom I took to be the gentleman I had encountered on Benefit Street—“is to produce for you certain impressions of extra-terrestrial life. All that is necessary for you to do is to relax and to be receptive.”

“I am ready,” I said.

I had expected that they would ask for the light to be lowered, which seems to be integral to all such seance-like sessions, but they did not do so. They waited upon silence, save for the ticking of the hall clock and the distant hum of the city, and then they began what I can only describe as singing—a low, not unpleasant, almost lulling humming, increasing in volume, and broken with sounds I assumed were words though I could not make out any of them. The song they sang and the way they sang it was indescribably foreign; the key was minor, and the tonal intervals did not resemble any terrestrial musical system with which I was familiar, though it seemed to me more Oriental than Occidental.

I had little time to consider the music, however, for I was rapidly overcome with a feeling of profound malaise, the faces of the seven men grew dim and coalesced to merge into one swimming face, and an intolerable consciousness of unrolled aeons of time swept over me. I concluded that some form of hypnosis was responsible for my condition, but I did not have any qualms about it; it did not matter, for the experience I was undergoing was utterly novel and not unpleasant, though there was inherent in it a discordant note, as of some lurking evil looming far behind the relaxing sensations that crowded upon me and swept me before them. Gradually, the lamp, the walls, and the men before me faded and vanished and, though I was still aware of being in my quarters on Angell Street, I was also cognizant that somehow I had been transported to new surroundings, and an element of alarm at the strangeness of these surroundings, together with one of repulsion and alienation, began to make themselves manifest. It was as if I feared losing consciousness in an alien place without the means of

returning to earth—for it was an extra-terrestrial scene that I witnessed, one of great and magnificent grandeur in its proportions, and yet one completely incomprehensible to me.

Vast vistas of space whirled before me in an alien dimension, and central in them was an aggregation of gigantic cubes, scattered along a gulf of violet and agitated radiation—and other figures moving among them—enormous, iridescent, rugose cones, rising from a base almost ten feet wide to a height of over ten feet, and composed of ridgy, scaly, semi-elastic matter, and sporting from their apexes four flexible, cylindrical members, each at least a foot thick, and of a similar substance, though more fleshlike, as that of the cones, which were presumably bodies for the crowning members, which, as I watched, had an ability to contract or expand, sometimes to lengthen to a distance equal to the height of the cone to which they adhered. Two of these members were terminated with enormous claws, while a third wore a crest of four red, trumpetlike appendages, and the fourth ended in a great yellow globe two feet in diameter, in the center of which were three enormous eyes, darkly opalescent, which, because of their position in the elastic member, could be turned in any direction whatsoever. It was such a scene as exercised the greatest fascination upon me and yet at the same time spread in me a repellant inspired by its total alienation and the aura of fearful disclosures which alone could give it meaning and a lurking terror.

Moreover, as I saw the moving figures, which seemed to be tending the great cubes, with greater clarity and more distinctness, I saw that their strange heads were crowned by four slender grey stalks carrying flowerlike appendages, as well as, from its nether side, eight sinuous, elastic tentacles, moss green in colour, which seemed to be constantly agitated by serpentine motion, expanding and contracting, lengthening and shortening and whipping around as if with life independent of that which animated, more sluggishly, the cones themselves. The whole scene was bathed in a wan, red glow, as from some dying sun which, failing its planet, now took second place to the violet radiation from the gulf.

The scene had an indescribable effect on me; it was as if I had been permitted a look into another world, one incredibly vaster than our own, distinguished from our own by antipodally different values and life-forms, and remote from ours in time and space, and as I gazed at this far world, I

became aware—as were this intelligence being funnelled into me by some psychic means—that I looked upon a dying race which must escape its planet or perish. Spontaneously then, I seemed to recognize the burgeoning of a menacing evil, and with an urgent, violent effort, I threw off the bondage of the chant that held me in its spell, gave vent to the uprushing of fear I felt in a cry of protest, and rose to my feet, while the chair on which I sat fell backward with a crash.

Instantly the scene before my mind's eye vanished and the room returned to focus. Across from me sat my visitors, the seven gentlemen in the likeness of Poe, impassive and silent, for the sounds they had made, the humming and the odd word-like tonal noises, had ceased.

I calmed down, my pulse began to slow.

“What you saw, Mr. Phillips, was a scene on another star, remote from here,” said Mr. Allan. “Far out in space—indeed, in another universe. Did it convince you?”

“I've seen enough,” I cried.

I could not tell whether my visitors were amused or scornful; they remained without expression, including their spokesman, who only inclined his head slightly and said, “We will take our leave then, with your permission.”

And silently, one by one, they all filed out into Angell Street.

I was most disagreeably shaken. I had no proof of having seen anything on another world, but I could testify that I had experienced an extraordinary hallucination, undoubtedly through hypnotic influence.

But what had been its reason for being? I pondered that as I set about to put the living room to rights, but I could not adduce any profound reason for the demonstration I had witnessed. I was unable to deny that my visitors had shown themselves to be possessed of extraordinary faculties—but to what end? And I had to admit to myself that I was as much shaken by the appearance of no less than seven identical men as I was by the hallucinatory experience I had just passed through. Quintuplets were possible, yet—but

had anyone ever heard of septuplets? Nor were multiple births of identical children usual. Yet here were seven men, all of very much the same age, identical in appearance, for whose existence there was not a scintilla of explanation.

Nor was there any graspable meaning in the scene that I had witnessed during the demonstration. Somehow I had understood that the great cubes were sentient beings for whom the violet radiation was life-giving; I had realized that the cone-creatures served them in some fashion or other, but nothing had been disclosed to show how. The whole vision was meaningless; it was just such a scene as might have been created by a highly-organized imagination and telepathically conveyed to a willing subject, such as myself. That it proved the existence of extra-terrestrial life was ridiculous; it proved no more than that I had been the victim of an induced hallucination.

But, once more, I came full circle. As hallucination, it was completely without reason for being.

Yet I could not escape an insistent disquiet that troubled me long that night before I was able to sleep.

## IV

Strangely enough, my uneasiness mounted during the course of the following morning. Accustomed as I was to the human curiosities, to the often incredible characters and unusual sights to be encountered on the nocturnal walks I took about Providence, the circumstances surrounding the Poesque Mr. Allan and his brothers were so outré that I could not get them out of mind.

Acting on impulse, I took time off from my work that afternoon and made my way to the house on the knoll along the Seekonk, determined to confront my nocturnal companion. But the house, when I came to it, wore an air of singular desertion; badly worn curtains were drawn down to the sills of the windows, in some places blinds were up; and the whole milieu was the epitome of abandonment.

Nevertheless, I knocked at the door and waited.

There was no answer. I knocked again.

No sound fell to ear from inside the house.

Powerfully impelled by curiosity now, I tried the door. It opened to my touch. I hesitated still, and looked all around me. No one was in sight, at least two of the houses in the neighborhood were unoccupied, and if I was under surveillance it was not apparent to me.

I opened the door and stepped into the house, standing for a few moments with my back to the door to accustom my eyes to the twilight that filled the rooms. Then I moved cautiously through the small vestibule into the adjacent room, a parlor sparely occupied by horsehair furniture at least two decades old. There was no sign here of occupation by any human being, though there was evidence that someone had not long since walked here, making a path through dust visible on the uncarpeted flooring. I crossed the room and entered a small dining-room, and crossed this, too, to find myself in a kitchen, which, like the other rooms, bore little sign of having been

used, for there was no food of any kind in evidence, and the table appeared not to have been used for years. Yet here, too, were footprints in substantial numbers, testifying to the habitation of the house. And the staircase revealed steady use, as well.

But it was the far side of the house that afforded the most disturbing disclosures. This side of the building consisted of but one large room, though it was instantly evident that it had been three rooms at one time, but the connecting walls had been removed without the finished repair of the junctions at the outer wall. I saw this in a fleeting glance, for what was in the center of the room caught and held my fascinated attention. The room was bathed in violet light, a soft glowing that emanated from what appeared to be a long, glass-encased slab, which, with a second, unlit similar slab, stood surrounded by machinery the like of which I had never seen before save in dreams.

I moved cautiously into the room, alert for anyone who might prevent my intrusion. No one and nothing moved. I drew closer to the violet-lit glass case and saw that something lay within, though I did not at first encompass this because I saw what it laid upon—nothing less than a life-sized reproduction of a likeness of Edgar Allan Poe, which, like everything else, was illuminated by the same pulsing violet light, the source of which I could not determine, save that it was enclosed by the glass-like substance which made up the case. But when at last I looked upon that which lay upon the likeness of Poe, I almost cried out in fearful surprise, for it was, in miniature, a precise reproduction of one of the rugose cones I had seen only last night in the hallucination induced in my home on Angell Street! And the sinuous movement of the tentacles on its head—or what I took to be its head—was indisputable evidence that it was alive!

I backed hastily away with only enough of a glance at the other case to assure myself that it was bare and unoccupied, though connected by many metal tubes to the illumined case parallel to it; then I fled, as noiselessly as possible, for I was convinced that the nocturnal brotherhood slept upstairs and in my confusion at this inexplicable revelation that placed my hallucination of the previous night into another perspective, I wished to meet no one. I escaped from the house undetected, though I thought I

caught a brief glimpse of a Poesque face at one of the upper windows. I ran down the road and back along the streets that bridged the distance from the Seekonk to the Providence River, and ran so for many blocks before I slowed to a walk, for I was beginning to attract attention in my wild flight.

As I walked along, I strove to bring order to my chaotic thoughts. I could not adduce an explanation for what I had seen, but I knew intuitively that I had stumbled upon some menacing evil too dark and forbidding and perhaps too vast as well for my comprehension. I hunted for meaning and found none; mine had never been a scientifically-oriented mind, apart from chemistry and astronomy, so that I was not equipped to understand the use of the great machines I had seen in that house ringing that violet-lit slab where that rugose body lay in warm, life-giving radiation—indeed, I was not even able to assimilate the machinery itself, for there was only a remote resemblance to anything I had ever before seen, and that the dynamos in a power-house. They had all been connected in some way to the two slabs, and the glass cases—if the substance were glass—the one occupied, the other dark and empty, for all the tubing that tied them each to each.

But I had seen enough to be convinced that the dark-clad brotherhood who walked the streets of Providence by night in the guise of Edgar Allan Poe had a purpose other than mine in doing so; theirs was no simple curiosity about the nocturnal characters, about fellow walkers of the night. Perhaps darkness was their natural element, even as daylight was that of the majority of their fellowmen; but that their motivation was sinister, I could not now doubt. Yet at the same time I was at a loss as to what course next to follow.

I turned my steps at last toward the library, in the vague hope of grasping at something that might lead me to some clue by means of which I could approach an understanding of what I had seen.

But there was nothing. Search as I might, I found no key, no hint, though I read widely through every conceivable reference—even to those on Poe in Providence on the shelves, and I left the library late in the day as baffled as I had entered.

Perhaps it was inevitable that I would see Mr. Allan again that night. I had no way of knowing whether my visit to his home had been observed, despite the observer I thought I had glimpsed in an upper window in my flight, and I encountered him therefore in some trepidation. But this was evidently ill-founded, for when I greeted him on Benefit Street there was nothing in his manner or in his words to suggest any change in his attitude, such as I might have expected had he been aware of my intrusion. Yet I knew full well his capacity for being without expression—humor, disgust, even anger or irritation were alien to his features, which never changed from that introspective mask which was essentially that of Poe.

“I trust you have recovered from our experiment, Mr. Phillips,” he said after exchanging the customary amenities.

“Fully,” I answered, though it was not the truth. I added something about a sudden spell of dizziness to explain my bringing the experiment to its precipitate end.

“It is but one of the worlds outside you saw, Mr. Phillips,” Mr. Allan went on. “There are many. As many as a hundred thousand. Life is not the unique property of Earth. Nor is life in the shape of human beings. Life takes many forms on other planets and far stars, forms that would seem bizarre to humans, as human life is bizarre to other life-forms.”

For once, Mr. Allan was singularly communicative, and I had little to say. Clearly, whether or not I laid what I had seen to hallucination—even in the face of my discovery in my companion’s house—he himself believed implicitly in what he said. He spoke of many worlds, as if he were familiar with them. On occasion he spoke almost with reverence of certain forms of life, particularly those with the astonishing adaptability of assuming the life-forms of other planets in their ceaseless quest for the conditions necessary to their existence.

“The star I looked upon,” I broke in, “was dying.”

“Yes,” he said simply.

“You have seen it?”



“I have seen it, Mr. Phillips.”

I listened to him with relief. Since it was manifestly impossible to permit any man sight of the intimate life of outer space, what I had experienced was nothing more than the communicated hallucination of Mr. Allan and his brothers. Telepathic communication certainly, aided by a form of hypnosis I had not previously experienced. Yet I could not rid myself of the disquieting sense of evil that surrounded my nocturnal companion, nor of the uneasy feeling that the explanation which I had so eagerly accepted was unhappily glib.

As soon as I decently could, thereafter, I made excuses to Mr. Allan and took my leave of him. I hastened directly to the Athenaeum in the hope of finding Rose Dexter there, but if she had been there, she had already gone. I went then to a public telephone in the building and telephoned her home.

Rose answered, and I confess to an instantaneous feeling of gratification.

“Have you seen Mr. Allan tonight?” I asked.

“Yes,” she replied. “But only for a few moments. I was on my way to the library.”

“So did I.”

“He asked me to his home some evening to watch an experiment,” she went on.

“Don’ t go,” I said at once.

There was a long moment of silence at the other end of the wire. Then, “Why not?” Unfortunately, I failed to acknowledge the edge of truculence in her voice.

“It would be better not to go,” I said, with all the firmness I could muster.

“Don’ t you think, Mr. Phillips, I am the best judge of that?”

I hastened to assure her that I had no wish to dictate her actions, but meant only to suggest that it might be dangerous to go.

“Why?”

“I can’ t tell you over the telephone,” I answered, fully aware of how lame it sounded, and knowing even as I said it that perhaps I could not put into words at all the horrible suspicions which had begun to take shape in my mind, for they were so fantastic, so outré, that no one could be expected to believe in them.

“I ll think it over,” she said crisply.

“I ll try to explain when I see you,” I promised.

She bade me good night and rang off with an intransigence that boded ill, and left me profoundly disturbed.

# V

I come now to the final, apocalyptic events concerning Mr. Allan and the mystery surrounding the house on the forgotten knoll. I hesitate to set them down even now, for I recognize that the charge against me will only be broadened to include grave questions about my sanity. Yet I have no other course. Indeed, the entire future of humanity, the whole course of what we call civilization may be affected by what I do or do not write of this matter. For the culminating events followed rapidly and naturally upon my conversation with Rose Dexter, that unsatisfactory exchange over the telephone.

After a restless, uneasy day at work, I concluded that I must make a tenable explanation to Rose. On the following evening, therefore, I went early to the library, where I was accustomed to meeting her, and took a place where I could watch the main entrance. There I waited for well over an hour before it occurred to me that she might not come to the library that night.

Once more I sought the telephone, intending to ask whether I might come over and explain my request of the previous night.

But it was her sister-in-law, not Rose, who answered my ring.

Rose had gone out. "A gentleman called for her."

"Did you know him?" I asked.

"No, Mr. Phillips."

"Did you hear his name?"

She had not heard it. She had, in fact, caught only a glimpse of him as Rose hurried out to meet him, but, in answer to my insistent probing, she admitted that Rose's caller had had a moustache.

Mr. Allan! I had no further need to inquire.

For a few moments after I had hung up, I did not know what to do. Perhaps Rose and Mr. Allan were only walking the length of Benefit Street. But perhaps they had gone to that mysterious house. The very thought of it filled me with such apprehension that I lost my head.

I rushed from the library and hurried home. It was ten o' clock when I reached the house on Angell Street. Fortunately, my mother had retired; so I was able to procure my father' s pistol without disturbing her. So armed, I hastened once more into night-held Providence and ran, block upon block, toward the shore of the Seekonk and the knoll upon which stood Mr. Allan' s strange house, unaware in my incautious haste of the spectacle I made for other nightwalkers and uncaring, for perhaps Rose' s life was at stake—and beyond that, vaguely defined, loomed a far greater and hideous evil.

When I reached the house into which Mr. Allan had disappeared I was taken aback by its solitude and unlit windows. Since I was winded, I hesitated to advance upon it, and waited for a minute or so to catch my breath and quiet my pulse. Then, keeping to the shadows, I moved silently up to the house, looking for any sliver of light.

I crept from the front of the house around to the back. Not the slightest ray of light could be seen. But a low humming sound vibrated just inside the range of my hearing, like the hum of a power line responding to the weather. I crossed to the far side of the house—and there I saw the hint of light—not yellow light, as from a lamp inside, but a pale lavender radiance that seemed to glow faintly, ever so faintly, from the wall itself.

I drew back, recalling only too sharply what I had seen in that house.

But my role now could not be a passive one. I had to know whether Rose was in that darkened house—perhaps in that very room with the unknown machinery and the glass case with the monster in the violet radiance.

I slipped back to the front of the house and mounted the steps to the front door.

Once again, the door was not locked. It yielded to the pressure of my hands. Pausing only long enough to take my loaded weapon in hand, I pushed open the door and entered the vestibule. I stood for a moment to accustom my eyes to that darkness; standing there, I was even more aware of the humming sound I had heard—and of more—the same kind of chant which had put me into that hypnotic state in the course of which I had witnessed that disturbing vision purporting to be that of life in another world.

I apprehended its meaning instantly, I thought. Rose must be with Mr. Allan and his brothers, undergoing a similar experience.

Would that it had been no more!

For when I pushed my way into that large room on the far side of the house, I saw that which will be forever indelibly imprinted on my mind. Lit by the radiance from the glass case, the room disclosed Mr. Allan and his identical brothers all prone upon the floor around the twin cases, making their chanting song. Beyond them, against the far wall, lay the discarded life-size likeness of Poe I had seen beneath that weird creature in the glass case bathed in violet radiance. But it was not Mr. Allan and his brothers that so profoundly shocked and repelled me—it was what I saw in the glass cases!

For in the one that lit the room with its violently pulsating and agitated violet radiation lay Rose Dexter, fully clothed, and certainly under hypnosis—and on top of her lay, greatly elongated and with its tentacles flailing madly, the rugose cone-like figure I had last seen shrunken on the likeness of Poe. And in the connected case adjacent to it—I can hardly bear to set it down even now—lay, identical in every detail, a perfect duplicate of Rose!

What happened next is confused in my memory. I know that I lost control, that I fired blindly at the glass cases, intending to shatter them. Certainly I struck one or both of them, for with the impact the radiance vanished, the room was plunged into utter darkness, cries of fear and alarm rose from Mr. Allan and his brothers, and, amid a succession of explosive sounds from the machinery, I rushed forward and picked up Rose Dexter.

Somehow I gained the street with Rose.

Looking back, I saw that flames were appearing at the windows of that accursed house, and then, without warning, the north wall of the house collapsed, and something—an object I could not identify—burst from the now burning house and vanished aloft. I fled, still carrying Rose.

Regaining her senses, Rose was hysterical, but I succeeded in calming her, and at last she fell silent and would say nothing. And in silence I took her safely home, knowing how frightening her experience must have been, and resolved to say nothing until she had fully recovered.

In the week that followed, I came to see clearly what was taking place in that house on the knoll. But the charge of arson—lodged against me in lieu of a far more serious one because of the pistol I abandoned in the burning house—has blinded the police to anything but the most mundane matters. I have tried to tell them, insisting that they see Rose Dexter when she is well enough to talk—and willing to do so. I cannot make them understand what I now understand only too well. Yet the facts are there, inescapably.

They say the charred flesh found in that house is not human, most of it. But could they have expected anything else? Seven men in the likeness of Edgar Allan Poe! Surely they must understand that whatever it was in that house came from another world, a dying world, and sought to invade and ultimately take over Earth by reproducing themselves in the shape of men! Surely they must know that it must have been only by coincidence that the model they first chose was a likeness of Poe, chosen because they had no knowledge that Poe did not represent the average among men? Surely they must know, as I came to know, that the rugose, tentacled cone in the violet radiance was the source of their material selves, that the machinery and the tubing—which they say was too much damaged by the fire to identify, as if they could have identified its functions even undamaged!—manufactured from the material simulating flesh supplied by the cone in the violet light, creatures in the shape of men from the likeness of Poe!

“Mr. Allan” himself afforded me the key, though I did not know it at the time, when I asked him why mankind was the object of interplanetary scrutiny—“To make war on us? To invade us?”—and he replied: “A more highly developed form of life would hardly need to use such primitive

methods.” Could anything more plainly set forth the explanation for the strange occupation of the house along the Seekonk? Of course, it is evident now that what “Mr. Allan” and his identical brothers afforded me in my own house was a glimpse of life on the planet of the cubes and rugose cones, which was their own.

And surely, finally, most damning of all—it must be evident to any unbiased observer why they wanted Rose. They meant to reproduce their kind in the guise of men and women, so that they could mingle with us, undetected, unsuspected, and slowly, over decades—perhaps centuries, while their world died, take over, and prepare our Earth for those who would come after.

God alone knows how many of them may be here, among us, even now!

Later, I have been unable to see Rose until now, tonight, and I am hesitant to call for her. For something unutterably terrible has happened to me. I have fallen prey to horrible doubts. While it did not occur to me during that frightful experience in the shambles following my shots in that violet-lit room, I have now begun to wonder, and my concern has grown hour by hour until I find it now almost unbearable. How can I be sure that, in those frenzied minutes, I rescued the real Rose Dexter? If I did, surely she will reassure me tonight. If I did not—God knows what I may unwittingly have loosed upon Providence and the world!

From The Providence Journal—July 17

# LOCAL GIRL SLAYS ATTACKER

Rose Dexter, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Elisha Dexter of 127 Benevolent Street, last night fought off and killed a young man she charged with attacking her. Miss Dexter was apprehended in an hysterical condition as she fled down Benefit Street in the vicinity of the Cathedral of St. John, near the cemetery attached to which the attack took place.

Her attacker was identified as an acquaintance, Arthur Phillips

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