

The Fisherman of Falcon Point

August Derleth & H. P. Lovecraft



calibre 1.0.0

THE FISHERMAN OF FALCON POINT

Along the Massachusetts coast where he lived many things are whispered about Enoch Conger—and certain others are hinted at in lowered voices and with great caution—things of surpassing strangeness which flow up and down the coast in the words of sea-farers from the port of Innsmouth, for he lived only a few miles down the coast from that town, at Falcon Point, which was so named because it was possible to see the peregrines and merlins and even sometimes the great gyrfalcons at migration time passing by this lonely finger of land jutting into the sea. There he lived until he was seen no more, for none can say he died.

He was a powerful man, broad in the shoulders, barrel-chested, with long, muscular arms. Even in middle age he wore a beard, and long hair crowned his head. His eyes were a cold blue in color, and set deep in his square face, and when he was clad in rainproof garments with a hat to match, he looked like someone who had stepped from an old schooner a century ago. He was a taciturn man, given to living alone in a house of stone and driftwood which he himself had constructed on the windswept point of land where he heard the voices of the gulls and terns, of wind and sea, and, in season, of migrants from far places passing by, sometimes invisibly high. It was said of him that he answered them, that he talked with the gulls and terns, with the wind and the pounding sea, and with others that could not be seen and were heard only in strange tones like the muted sounds made by great batrachian beasts unknown in the bogs and marshes of the mainland.

Conger made his living by fishing, and a spare living it was, yet it contented him. He cast his net into the sea by day and by night, and what it brought up he took into Innsmouth or Kingsport or even farther to sell. But there was one moonlight night when he brought no fish into Innsmouth, but only himself, his eyes wide and staring, as if he had looked too long into the sunset and been blinded. He went into the tavern on the edges of town, where he was wont to go, and sat by himself at a table drinking ale, until some of the curious who were accustomed to seeing him came over to his table to join him, and, with the aid of more liquor, set his tongue to

babbling, even though he talked as though he spoke but to himself, and his eyes did not seem to see them.

And he said he had seen a great wonder that night. He had brought his boat up to Devil Reef more than a mile outside Innsmouth, and cast his net, and brought up many fishes—and something more—something that was a woman, yet not a woman, something that spoke to him like a human being but with the gutturals of a frog speaking to the accompaniment of fluting music such as that piped from the swamps in the spring months, something that had a wide slash of a mouth but soft eyes and that wore, beneath the long hair that trailed from her head, slits that were like gills, something that begged and pleaded for its life and promised him his own life if ever the need came upon him.

“A mermaid,” said one, with laughter.

“She was not a mermaid,” said Enoch Conger, “for she had legs, though her toes were webbed, and she had hands, though her fingers were webbed, and the skin of her face was like that of mine, though her body wore the color of the sea.”

They laughed at him and made many a jest, but he heard them not. Only one of their number did not laugh, for he had heard strange tales of certain things known to old men and women of Innsmouth from the days of the clipper ships and the East India Trade, of marriages between men of Innsmouth and sea-women of the South Pacific islands, of strange happenings in the sea near Innsmouth; he did not laugh, but only listened, and later slunk away and held his tongue, taking no part in the jesting of his companions. But Enoch Conger did not notice him any more than he heard the crude baiting of his tavern companions, going on with his tale, telling of how he had held the creature caught in the net in his arms, describing the feeling of her cold skin and the texture of her body, telling of how he had set her free and watched her swim away and dive out of sight off the dark mound of Devil Reef, only to reappear and raise her arms aloft to him and vanish forever.

After that night Enoch Conger came seldom to the tavern, and if he came, sat by himself, avoiding those who would ask him about his “mermaid” and

demand to know whether he had made any proposal to her before he had set her free. He was taciturn once more, he spoke little, but drank his ale and departed. But it was known that he did not again fish at Devil Reef; he cast his net elsewhere, closer to Falcon Point, and though it was whispered that he feared to see again the thing he had caught in his net that moonlit night, he was seen often standing on the point of land looking out into the sea, as if watching for some craft to make its appearance over the horizon, or longing for that tomorrow which looms forever but never arrives for most searchers for the future, or indeed, for most men, whatever it is they ask and expect of life.

Enoch Conger retired into himself more and more, and from coming seldom to the tavern at the edge of Innsmouth, he came not at all, preferring to bring his fish to market, and hasten home with such supplies as he might need, while the tale of his mermaid spread up and down the coast and was carried inland to Arkham and Dunwich along the Miskatonic, and even beyond, into the dark, wooded hills where lived people who were less inclined to make sport of the tale.

A year went by, and another, and yet another, and then one night the word was brought to Innsmouth that Enoch Conger had been grievously hurt at his lonely occupation, and only rescued by two other fishermen who had come by and seen him lying helpless in his boat. They had brought him to his house on Falcon Point, for that was the only place he wished to go, and had come back hastily to Innsmouth for Dr. Gilman. But when they returned to the house of Enoch Conger with Dr. Gilman, the old fisherman was nowhere to be seen.

Dr. Gilman kept his own counsel, but the two who had brought him whispered into one ear after another a singular tale, telling how they had found in the house a great moisture, a wetness clinging to the walls, to the doorknob, even to the bed to which they had lowered Enoch Conger only a short while before hastening for the doctor—and on the floor a line of wet footprints made by feet with webbed toes—a trail that led out of the house and down to the edge of the sea, and all along the way the imprints were deep, as if something heavy had been carried from the house, something as heavy as Enoch.

But though the tale was carried about, the fishermen were laughed at and scorned, for there had been only one line of footprints, and Enoch Conger was too large a man for but one other to bear him for such a distance; and besides, Dr. Gilman had said nothing save that he had known of webbed feet on the inhabitants of Innessmouth, and knew, since he had examined him, that Enoch Conger's toes were as they should have been. And those curious ones who had gone to the house on Falcon Point to see for themselves what was to be seen came back disappointed at having seen nothing, and added their ridicule to the scorn of others for the hapless fishermen, silencing them, for there were those who suspected them of having made away with Enoch Conger, and whispered this, too, abroad.

Wherever he went, Enoch Conger did not come back to the house on Falcon Point, and the wind and the weather had their way with it, tearing away a shingle here and a board there, wearing away the bricks of the chimney, shattering a pane; and the gulls and terns and falcons flew by without hearing an answering voice; and along the coasts the whispers died away and certain dark hints took their place, displacing the suspicions of murder and some deed of darkness with something fraught with even greater wonder and terror.

For the venerable old Jedediah Harper, patriarch of the coastal fishermen, came ashore one night with his men and swore that he had seen swimming off Devil Reef a strange company of creatures, neither entirely human nor entirely batrachian, amphibian creatures that passed through the water half in the manner of men and half in the manner of frogs, a company of more than two score, male and female. They had passed close to his boat, he said, and shone in the moonlight, like spectral beings risen from the depths of the Atlantic, and, going by, they had seemed to be singing a chant to Dagon, a chant of praise, and among them, he swore, he had seen Enoch Conger, swimming with the rest, naked, like them, and his voice too raised in dark praise. He had shouted to him in his amazement, and Enoch had turned to look at him, and he had seen his face. Then the entire school of them—Enoch Conger as well—dove under the waves and did not come up again.

But, having said this, and got it around, the old man was silenced, it was told, by certain of the Marsh and Martin clan, who were believed to be

allied to strange sea-dwellers; and the Harper boat did not go out again, for afterward he had no need of money; and the men who were with him were silent, too.

Long after, on another moonlit night, a young man who remembered Enoch Conger from his boyhood years in Innsmouth returned to that port city and told how he had been out with his young son, rowing past Falcon Point in the moonlight, when suddenly out of the sea beyond him rose upward to his waist a naked man—so close to him he might almost have touched him with an oar—a man who stood in that water as if held aloft by others, who saw him not, but only looked toward the ruins of the house on Falcon Point with great longing in his eyes, a man who wore the face of Enoch Conger. The water ran down his long hair and beard, and glistened on his body, and was dark where beneath his ears he appeared to wear long slits in his skin. And then, as suddenly and strangely as he had come, he sank away again.

And that is why, along the Massachusetts coast near Innsmouth, many things are whispered about Enoch Conger—and certain others are hinted at in lowered voices

.