

The Shadow in the Attic

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I

My Great-uncle Uriah Garrison was not a man to cross - a dark-faced, shaggy-browed man with wild black hair and a face that haunted my childhood dreams. I knew him only in those early years. My father crossed him, and he died - strangely, smothered in his bed a hundred miles from Arkham, where my great-uncle lived. My Aunt Sophia condemned him, and she died - tripped on a stair by nothing visible. How many others might there have been - Who knows? Who could do more than whisper fearfully of what dark powers were at Uriah Garrison's command?

And of how much of what was said of him was superstitious gossip, baseless, and malicious, none could say. We never saw him again after my father's death, my mother hating her uncle then and until the day she died, though she never forgot him. Nor did I, either him or his gambrel-roofed house on Aylesbury Street, in that part of Arkham south of the Miskatonic River, not far from Hangman's Hill and its wooded graveyard. Indeed, Hangman's Brook flowed through his grounds, wooded, too, like the cemetery on the hill; I never forgot the shadowed house where he lived alone and had someone in - by night - to keep his house for him - the high-ceilinged rooms, the shunned attic which no one entered by day and into which no one was permitted, ever, to go with a lamp or light of any kind, the small-paned windows that looked out upon the bushes and trees, the fan-lit doors; it was the kind of house that could not fail to lay its dark magic upon an impressionable young mind, and it did upon mine, filling me with brooding fancies and, sometimes, terrifying dreams, from which I started awake and fled to my mother's side, and one memorable night lost my way and came upon my great-uncle's housekeeper, with her strange emotionless, expressionless face - she stared at me and I at her, as across unfathomable gulfs of space, before I turned and sped away, spurred by new fear imposed upon those engendered in dreams.

I did not miss going there. There was no love lost between us, and there was little communication, though there were occasions on which I was moved to

send Uriah Garrison a short greeting - the old man's birthday, or Christmas - to which he never responded, which was as well.

It was, therefore, all the more surprising to me that I should have inherited his property and a small competence at his death, with no more annoying a provision but that I inhabit the house for the summer months of the first year after his death; he had known, clearly, that my teaching obligations would not permit occupancy throughout the year.

It was not much to ask. I had no intention of keeping the property. Arkham had even in those years begun to grow outward along the Aylesbury Pike, and the city which had once been so detached from my great-uncle's home, was now pressing close upon it, and the property would be a desirable acquisition for someone. Arkham held no particular attraction for me, though I was fascinated by the legends that haunted it, by its clustering gambrel roofs, and the architectural ornamentation of two centuries ago. This fascination did not run deep, and Arkham as a permanent home did not appeal to me. But before I could sell Uriah Garrison's house, it was necessary to occupy it in accordance with the terms of his will.

In June of 1928, over my mother's protests and in spite of her dark hints that Uriah Garrison had been peculiarly cursed and abhorred, I took up my residence in the house on Aylesbury Street. It required little effort to do so, for the house had been left furnished since my great-uncle's death in March of that year, and someone, clearly, had kept it clean, as I saw on my arrival from Brattleboro. My great-uncle's housekeeper had evidently been instructed to continue her duties at least until my occupancy.

But my great-uncle's lawyer - an ancient fellow who still affected high collars and solemn black attire - knew nothing of any arrangements Uriah Garrison had made, when I called upon him to investigate the provisions of the will. "I've never been in the house, Mr. Duncan," he said. "If he made arrangements to have it kept clean, there must have been another key. I sent you the one I had, as you know. There is no other, to my knowledge."

As for the provisions of my great-uncle's will - these were barrenly simple. I was merely to occupy the house through the months of June, July and August, or for ninety days following my coming, if my teaching obligations

made it impossible to take up occupancy on the first of June. There were no other conditions whatsoever, not even the ban on the attic room I had expected to see set down.

“You may find the neighbors a trifle unfriendly at first,” Mr. Saltonstall went on. “Your great-uncle was a man of odd habits, and he rebuffed the neighbors. I suppose he resented their moving into the neighborhood, and they for their part took umbrage at his independence and made much of the fact that, because he took walks into the cemetery on Hangman’s Hill, he seemed to prefer the company of the dead to that of the living.”

As to what the old man had been like in his last years, about which I asked; “He was a lusty, vigorous old fellow, very tough, actually,” answered Mr. Saltonstall, “but, as so often happens, when his decline came, it came fast - he was dead in just one week. Senility, the doctor said.”

“His mind?” I asked.

Mr. Saltonstall smiled frostily. “Well, now, Mr. Duncan, you must know there was always some question about your uncle’s mind. He had some very strange ideas which were, in a real sense, archaic. This witchcraft exploration, for one thing - he spent a good deal of money investigating the Salem trials. But you’ll find his library intact - and filled with books on the subject. Other than this obsessive interest in one subject, he was a coldly rational man - that describes him best. Unfriendly, and holding himself aloof.”

So Great-uncle Uriah Garrison had not changed in the years that had intervened between my childhood and my late twenties. And the house had not changed, either. It still had that air of watchful waiting - like someone huddled together against the weather, waiting for a stagecoach - nothing more recent, certainly, for the house was two hundred years old, and, though well kept up, it had never been invaded by electricity and its plumbing was archaic. Apart from its appointments, and some aspects of its finishing lumber, the house had no value - only the property on which it stood had considerable monetary worth in view of the expansion of Arkham along the Aylesbury Pike.

The furniture was in cherry and mahogany and black walnut, and I more than half suspected that if Rhoda - my fiancée, saw it, she would want to keep it for our own house when we built one - and, what with the money the sale of the property and the furniture might realize, we should be able to build that house, leaving my salary as an English Department assistant and hers as an instructor in philology and archaeology to keep it up.

Three months' time was not long to do without electricity, and I could endure the ancient plumbing for those weeks, but I decided forthwith that I could not do without a telephone; so I drove into Arkham and ordered a telephone installed without delay. While I was in the business section, I stopped in at the telegraph office on Church Street and sent wires to both my mother and Rhoda, assuring them of my arrival and inviting Rhoda, at her leisure, to drive around and inspect my newly acquired property. I stopped long enough, too, for a good meal at one of the restaurants, bought a few necessary provisions for breakfast - however little inclined I might be toward building a fire in the old iron range in the kitchen - and went back fortified against hunger for the remainder of that day.

I had brought with me various books and papers necessary to the doctoral dissertation on which I was at work, and I knew that the shelves of the library of Miskatonic University, scarcely a mile from the house, would offer me all the additional assistance I might need; Thomas Hardy and the Wessex country hardly constituted a subject so obscure as to make necessary application to the Widener or some more expanded college library. So to that work I set myself until mid-evening of my first day in Uriah Garrison's old house, when, being tired, I went to bed in what had been my great-uncle's room on the second floor rather than in the guestroom on the ground floor.

II

Rhoda surprised me by coming to visit late the following day. She arrived without any prior notice, driving her own roadster. Rhoda Prentiss. It was, actually, a ridiculously prim name for such a lovely young lady, one so filled with excitement and so vigorously alive. I failed to hear her drive in, and was not aware of her until she opened the front door of the house and called out, “Adam! Are you home?”

I bounded out of the study where I was at work - by lamplight, for the day was dark and louring with squalls - and there she stood, with her shoulder-length ash-blond hair damp with raindrops, and her thin-lips parted, and her candid blue eyes taking in what she could see of the house with lively curiosity.

But when I took her in my arms, a faint tremor ran through her body.

“How can you bear three months in this house?” she cried.

“It was made for doctoral dissertations,” I said. “There’s nothing here to disturb me.”

“The whole house disturbs me, Adam,” she said with unaccustomed gravity. “Don’t you feel anything wrong?”

“What was wrong about it is dead. That was my great-uncle. When he was here, I admit, the house reeked of evil.”

“And it still does.”

“If you believe in psychic residue.”

She might have said more, but I changed the subject.

“You’re just in time to drive into Arkham for dinner. There’s a quaint old-fashioned restaurant at the foot of French Hill.”

She said no more, however much, as I saw by the small frown that held for a while, she was of a mind to say. And at dinner her mood changed, she spoke of her work, of our plans, of herself and of me, and we spent over two hours in the French House before we returned to the house. It was only natural that she should stay the night, taking the guest room, which, being below my own, enabled her simply to rap on the ceiling if she wanted for anything, or if, as I put it, “the psychic residue crowds you.”

Nevertheless, despite my jesting, I was aware from the moment of my fiancée’s arrival of a kind of heightened awareness in the house; it was as if the house had shaken off its indolence, as if, suddenly, it had come upon need to be more alert, as if it apprehended some danger to itself in somehow learning of my intention to dispose of it to someone who would unfeelingly tear it down. This feeling grew throughout the evening, and with it a curious response that was basically sympathetic, unaccountably. Yet, I suppose this should not have been so strange to me, since any house slowly assumes an atmosphere, and one of two centuries in age has undeniably more than a house less old. Indeed, it was the great number of such houses that lent to Arkham its chief distinction - not alone the architectural treasures, but the atmosphere of the houses, the lore and legendry of human lives come into being and spent in the relatively small confines of the city.

And from that moment, too, I was aware of something on another plane about the house - not that Rhoda’s intuitive reaction to it had been communicated to me, but simply that her arrival spurred events, the first of which took place that very night. I have thought afterward that Rhoda’s appearance on the scene hastened the happenings that were bound to take place in any event, but which would, in the normal course of circumstances, have taken place more insidiously.

We went to bed late that night. For my part, I fell asleep instantly, for the house was set well away from most of the city traffic, and there was nothing in the house of those settling and creaking noises so common to old houses. Below me, Rhoda still moved restlessly about, and she was still up and around when I drifted off.

It was sometime after midnight when I was awakened.

I lay for a few seconds growing to full wakefulness. What was it that had awakened me? A sound of breathing not my own? A nearby presence? Something on my bed? Or all these things together?

I thrust forth a hand and encountered, unmistakably, a woman's naked breast! And at the same moment I was aware of her hot, fervid breath - and then, instantaneously, she was gone, the bed lightened, I felt, rather than heard, her movement toward the door of the bedroom.

Fully awake now, I thrust back the light sheet covering me - for the night was sultry and humid, and got out of bed. With hands that trembled a little, I lit the lamp and stood there, undecided as to what to do. I was clad only in my shorts, and the experience had unsettled me more than I cared to say.

I am ashamed to admit that I thought at first it had been Rhoda - which was only evidence of the mental confusion the incident had brought me to, for Rhoda was incapable of such an act; had she wished to spend the night in my bed, she would have said as much - she had done so before this. Further, the breast I had touched was not Rhoda's; her breasts were firm, beautifully rounded - and the breast of the woman who lay next to me on my bed was flaccid, large nipples, and old. And the effect of it, unlike Rhoda's, was one of shuddering horror.

I took up the lamp and stepped outside my room, determined to search the house. But at the moment of my entry into the hall I heard, drifting down as if from somewhere outside, high up over the house, the wailing and screaming of a woman's voice, the voice of a woman being punished - only a drift of sound that grew more and more tenuous and was finally lost. It could not have lasted thirty seconds in all, but it was, in its way, as unmistakable as what I had felt beside me on my bed.

I stood, shaken - and in the end retreated to my bed and lay sleepless for over an hour, waiting for what might happen.

Nothing did, and when at last I slept again, I had begun to wonder whether I had not confused dream with reality.

But in the morning, the cloud on Rhoda's face told me that something was wrong. She had got up to prepare breakfast for the two of us, and I came upon her in the kitchen.

Without a greeting, she turned and said, "There was a woman in the house last night!"

"Then it wasn't a dream!" I cried.

"Who was she?" she demanded.

I shook my head. "I wish I could tell you."

"It seems to me an extraordinary thing to have a cleaning woman in the middle of the night," she went on.

"You saw her?"

"I saw her, yes. Why?"

"What did she look like?"

"She seemed to be a young woman - but I had a strange feeling that she wasn't young at all. Her face was expressionless - fixed. Only her eyes seemed to be alive."

"She saw you?"

"I don't think so."

"My great-uncle's cleaning woman!" I cried. "That's who it must have been. I found the house clean when I came. You see how clean it is. He must never have left orders for her not to come again. I remember seeing her once when I was a child. He always had her in at night..."

"How utterly ridiculous! Uriah Garrison died in March - over three months ago. Only a cretin couldn't tell by this time that he was no longer alive. Who pays her?"

Who, indeed? I could not answer.

Furthermore, in the circumstances, I could not tell Rhoda of my experience in the night. I could only assure her that I had not seen a woman in the house since that night in my early years when I had inadvertently caught a glimpse of the cleaning woman at her work.

“I remember having the same impression, too - the expressionlessness of her face,” I said.

“Adam, that was twenty years ago - perhaps more,” Rhoda pointed out. “It couldn’t be the same woman.”

“I shouldn’t think so. Still, I suppose it isn’t impossible. And in spite of what Mr. Saltonstall said, she must have a key.”

“It simply doesn’t make sense. And you’ve hardly been here long enough to hire anyone yourself.”

“I didn’t.”

“I believe it. You wouldn’t lift a finger to dust even if you were drowning in it.” She shrugged. “You’ll have to find out who she is and put a stop to it. It won’t do to have people gossiping, you know.”

On this note we sat down to breakfast, after which, I knew, Rhoda intended to be on her way.

But the troubled frown remained on Rhoda’s forehead, and she said very little during the meal, responding to my comments with only the briefest of monosyllables, until at last she burst forth with, “Oh, Adam - can’t you feel it?”

“Feel what?”

“Something in this house wants you, Adam? I sense it. It’s you the house wants.”

After my initial astonishment, I pointed out soberly that the house was an inanimate object, I was to the best of my knowledge the only living creature in it, exclusive of mice I may not have seen or heard, and that the house could not want or not want anything.

She was not convinced, and when, an hour later, she was ready to leave, she said impulsively, "Adam come away with me - now."

"It would be folly to surrender a valuable property we can both turn to good use simply to satisfy your whim, Rhoda," I answered.

"It's more than a whim. Take care, Adam."

On this note we parted, Rhoda promising to come again later in the summer, and exacting my promise to write her faithfully.

III

The experience of that second night in the house stirred my memory to thoughts of the sinister gloom that had pervaded the house for me as a boy - gloom which radiated from my great-uncle Uriah's forbidding countenance, and from the locked attic room which no one dared enter, however often my great-uncle went in and out of it. I suppose it was only natural that eventually I would think again of the challenge represented by the attic room and would respond to it.

The rain of yesterday had given way to bright sunlight which streamed into the house through the windows on the sunny side and gave to it an air of genteel and mellow age, one far removed from the sinister. It was such a day as to make all that was dark and ominous seem very far away, and I did not hesitate to light a lamp to dispel the darkness in the windowless attic and set out forthwith for the top of the old house, carrying along all the keys Mr. Saltonstall had surrendered to me.

None was necessary, however. The attic room was unlocked.

And empty, too, I thought, when I stepped into it. But not quite. A single chair stood in the middle of that gabled room, and on it lay a few prosaic objects and one which could not be so described - some woman's clothing - and a rubber mask - one of that kind which moulds to the features of the wearer. I crossed to it, astonished, and put the lamp down on the floor the better to examine the things on the chair.

They were nothing more than what I had seen at a glance - a common cotton house dress in a very old-fashioned square print design, in various shades of grey - an apron - a pair of skin-tight rubber gloves - elastic stockings - house slippers - and then the mask, which, on examination, proved to be ordinary enough, save for having hair attached to it - however unusual it was to find it here. The clothing could very likely have belonged to Great-uncle Uriah's cleaning woman - it would have been like him to let her use only the attic room in which to change. And yet, of course, this did

not ring true, considering the care he had always taken to allow no one to enter that room but himself.

The mask could not be so readily explained. It was not at all hardening, betokening long disuse; it had the softness and flexibility of rubber that is being used, which was all the more mystifying. Moreover, in common with all the rest of the house, the attic was spotless.

Leaving the clothing undisturbed, I picked up the lamp again and held it high. It was then that I saw the shadow, which lay beyond my own, against the wall and sloping ceiling - a monstrous, misshapen, blackened area, as if some vast flame had flared forth and burnt its image into the wood there. I stared at it for some time before I realized that, however grotesque it was, it bore a resemblance to a distorted human figure, though its head —f or it had a surmounting blob of shapelessness that served it as head - was horribly out of shape.

I walked over to examine it, but its outlines faded as I drew close. Yet, undeniably, it had the appearance of having been burned into the wood by some searing blast. I moved back again, toward the chair, and a trifle beyond it. The shadow bore the appearance of having come from a blast of flame virtually at floor level; its angle was odd and inexplicable. I turned, accordingly, and tried to find the possible point from which whatever had made this strange blemish on the wall and ceiling could have come.

As I turned, the light fell upon the opposite side of the attic room and disclosed, at the point I sought, an opening at the juncture of the roof and the floor - for there was along this side of the house no wall between floor and roof - an opening no larger than that for a mouse, and I assumed instantly that it was, indeed, a mouse-hole, and it did not attract my attention for more than a second, but what was painted in garish red chalk or oil around it did - a sequence of curious angular lines, which seemed to me completely unlike any geometrical designs with which I was familiar and which were arranged in such a fashion as to make the mouse-hole seem their precise center. I thought instantly of my great-uncle's absorption in witchcraft, but no, these were not the familiar pentagrams and tetrahedrons and circles associated with sorcery - rather their opposite.

I carried the lamp toward the painted lines and examined them; up close, they were simply lines, no more - but from the middle of the attic they had a strange kind of design, essentially other-dimensional, I thought. There was no telling how long they had been there, but they did not seem to be of recent origin - that is, within the last three decades or so, and they might very well have been a century old.

It was while I was pondering the meaning of the strange shadow and the painted lines opposite it, that I began to grow aware of a kind of tension in the attic; it was actually indescribable; it felt - how curious it is to put it into words - as if the attic were holding its breath! I began to grow uneasy, as if not the attic but I were under observation, and the flame on the wick wavered and began to smoke, and the room seemed to grow dark. There was a moment that was as if the earth had taken a half turn backward or something of that kind, and I had not gone along with it but were suspended somewhere far out in space at the instant before plunging into orbit of my own - and then the moment passed, the earth resumed its regularity of turning, the room lightened, the flame in the lamp steadied.

I left the attic in unseemly haste, with all the whispered lore of my childhood pressing after me out of the store of memories. I wiped away from my temples the fine beading of perspiration which had gathered there, blew out the lamp, and started down the narrow stairs, considerably shaken, though, by time I reached the ground floor I had regained my composure. Nevertheless, I was now a little less ready than I had been to brush aside my fiancée's perturbation about the house in which I had consented to spend the summer.

I pride myself on being a methodical man. In her lighter moments, Rhoda has referred to me as her "little pendant," - referring strictly, of course, to my concern with books and writers and the circumstances of literature. Not that I mind. The truth, no matter how it is put, is no less truth. Once recovered from my momentarily frightening experience in the attic, following so hard upon the events of the night, I resolved to get to the bottom of the matter and uncover some tenable explanation for what had happened in both instances. Had I, in fact, been in an hallucinatory state on both occasions - Or had I not?

The cleaning woman obviously was the nearest point of departure.

An immediate telephone call to Mr. Saltonstall, however, only confirmed what he had said before - he knew of no cleaning woman, he had no knowledge that my great-uncle had ever employed a housekeeper of any kind, and to the best of his knowledge there was no other key to the house.

“But you do understand, Mr. Duncan,” finished Mr. Saltonstall, “that your great-uncle was a reclusive sort of man, secretive almost to the point of fanaticism. What he did not wish others to know, others did not know. But, if I may make a suggestion - -why not make inquiry among the neighbors? I’ve set foot in the house only once or twice, and they’ve had it under daily observation for years. There isn’t much, you know, that neighbors don’t find out.”

I thanked him and rang off.

Approaching the neighbors, however, apart from a frontal attack, represented a problem, for most of the houses in the area were at more than lot-line distances from my great-uncle’s house. The nearest house was two lots away, off to the left of my great-uncle’s ancient house; I had noticed very little sign of life about it, but now that I peered from the windows, I saw someone in a rocking-chair taking the sun on the porch of that house.

I pondered for a few minutes about my best approach, but I could think of nothing but a direct question. So I walked out of the house and down the lane to the house next door. As I turned into the yard, I saw that the occupant of the chair was an old man.

“Good morning, sir,” I greeted him. “I wonder if you could help me.”

The old man stirred. “Who’re you?”

I identified myself, which aroused an immediate responsive interest. “Duncan, eh? Never heard the old man mention you. But then, I never spoke with him more’n a dozen times. What can I do for you?”

“I’m trying to find out how to reach my great-uncle’s cleaning woman.”

He gave me a sharp glance out of suddenly narrowed eyes. "Young fellow, I'd like to have known that myself - just out of curiosity," he said. "I never knew her to have any other place."

"You've seen her come?"

"Never. Saw her through the windows at night."

"You've seen her leave, then?"

"Never saw her come, never saw her leave. Neither did anybody else. Never saw her by day, either. Maybe the old man kept her there - but I wouldn't know where."

I was baffled. I thought briefly that the old man was being deliberately obstructive, but no, his sincerity was self-evident. I hardly knew what to say.

"That's not the only thing, Duncan. You seen the blue light yet?"

"No."

"You heard anything you couldn't explain?"

I hesitated.

The old man grinned. "I thought so. Old Garrison was up to something. I wouldn't be surprised if he's still at it."

"My great-uncle died last March," I reminded him.

"You can't prove it by me," he said. "Oh, I saw a coffin carried out of that house up to the cemetery on Hangman's Hill - but that's as much as I know about it. I don't know who or what was in the coffin."

The old fellow went on in this vein until it was clear to me that he knew nothing, no matter how much he suspected. He gave me hints and innuendos, but nothing tangible, and the sum of what he hinted was little more than what I had known myself - that my great-uncle kept to himself,

that he was engaged in some “hellish business,” and that he was better dead than alive - if in fact he were dead. He had concluded also that there was something “wrong” with my great-uncle’s house. He did concede that, left alone, he did not trouble the neighbors. And he had been left strictly alone ever since old Mrs. Barton had gone to his house and upbraided him for keeping a woman there - and was found dead of a heart attack next morning at her home, “scared to death, they said.”

There was plainly no short-cut to information about my great-uncle to be had; unlike the subject of my doctoral dissertation, there were no references in libraries - other than my great-uncle’s own, to which I repaired at once, only to find there an almost solid array of books, both ancient and modern, on the subject of sorcery and witchcraft and allied superstitions - the *Malleus Maleficarum*, for example, and very old books by Olaus Magnus, Eunapius, de Rochas and others. Few titles meant anything to me; I had never heard of Anania’s *De Natura Daemonum* or De Vignate’s *Quaestio de Lamiis* or Stampa’s *Fuga Satanae*.

It was evident that my great-uncle had read his books, for they were marked up with annotations - principally cross-references jotted down for his easy use. I had no difficulty reading the often ancient printing, but it was all on related themes - my great-uncle’s interest ran not only to the ordinary practices of witchcraft and demonology, but to a persistent fascination with succubi, the retention of the “essence” from one existence to another - not, apparently, a reference to reincarnation, familiars, the wreaking of vengeance by means of sorcery, incantations, and the like.

I had no intention of studying the books, but I took time to follow through some of his references on the “essence,” and found myself led from book to book from a discussion of the “essence” or “soul” or “life-force,” as it was variously called, through chapters on transmigration and possession, to a dissertation on taking over a new body by driving out the life-force within and substituting one’s own essence - the sort of rigmarole which might conceivably have appealed to an aging man on the threshold of death.

I was still at work among the books when Rhoda called from Boston.

“Boston!” I was astonished. “You didn’t get very far.”

“No,” she said. “I just began to think about your great-uncle and stopped off here at the Widener to look at some of their rare books.”

“Not on sorcery?” I hazarded a guess.

“Yes. Adam, I think you ought to get out of that house.”

“And just throw a tidy little inheritance over my shoulder? Not a chance.”

“Please don’t be stubborn. I’ve been doing some research. I know what a closed mind you have, but believe me,” she said earnestly, “your uncle was up to no good when he made that stipulation. He wants you there for a definite reason. Are you all right, Adam?”

“Perfectly.”

“Has anything happened?”

I told her in detail what had taken place.

She listened in silence. When I had finished, she said again, “I think you ought to leave, Adam.”

As she spoke, I was conscious of a growing irritation with her. Her possessiveness, her assumption of the right to tell me what I ought to do - which did, certainly, postulate her conviction of knowing better than I what served my welfare, angered me.

“I’m staying, Rhoda,” I said.

“Don’t you see, Adam - that shadow in the attic - some monstrous thing came in by way of that hole and blasted that shadow there,” she said.

I’m afraid I laughed. “I’ve always said women simply aren’t rational creatures.”

“Adam - this isn’t a man-woman thing. I’m scared.”

“Come back,” I said. “I’ll protect you.”

Resigned, she rang off.

IV

That night was memorable for what I chose then to believe pure hallucination. It began, literally, with a step on the stair some time after I had gone to bed. I listened for a moment, to hear it again; then I slipped out of bed, made my way in the dark to the door, and opened it just enough to enable me to look out.

The cleaning woman had just passed my door, bound for the ground floor. I backed into my room at once, fumbled my way to my dressing-gown in my bag - I had not had occasion to use it before - and let myself out of the room, bent upon facing the woman at her work.

I moved quietly in the darkness down the stairs, though the dark was alleviated somewhat by the iridescence of moonlight flowing into the house from outside. Not quite midway down, I experienced that curious sensation I had known previously - of being watched.

I turned.

There in the well of glowing darkness behind and a little above me hung the spectral likeness of Great-uncle Uriah Garrison - something as ephemeral as air - the heavy bearded face distorted a little by the moonlight's iridescence, the burning eyes, the shock of touseled hair, the high bones of his cheeks with the parchment skin tight over them - seen for an instant so unmistakably - then it collapsed like a pricked balloon and vanished, save for a thin, serpentine coil or rope of some dark substance which seemed to flow writhing and turning, down the stairs to where I stood, until it, too, disappeared like smoke.

I stood frozen with terror until reason reasserted control. I told myself I had had an hallucination of a kind not to be entirely unexpected, in view of my concern during the day about my great-uncle and his curious preoccupations, though I should have thought this far more likely to have occurred in dream than in a vision while awake. But at this moment, too, I questioned the degree of my wakefulness. I had to think what I was doing

on the stairs, and remembered the cleaning woman. I had an impulse to return to my room and go to sleep, but I would not. I pulled myself together and went on.

There was a light in the kitchen - a lamp burning dimly and low, by the glow of it. I crept silently toward the kitchen and stood where I could look in.

The woman was there, cleaning, as always. Now was the time to front her directly and demand an accounting of her presence.

But something held me where I was. Something about the woman repelled me. Something other stirred my memories, and I remembered that other woman I had seen there in the years of my childhood. Slowly, certainly, I became aware that they were one and the same; the woman's impassive, expressionless face was unchanged over twenty years or more, her actions were mechanical, and she seemed even to be wearing the same clothing!

And intuitively I knew that this was the woman whose body I had felt beside me on the bed in the night!

My reluctance to face her grew. But I forced myself to step into the room just over the threshold, on the tip of my tongue the demand for an accounting of her presence.

But no word left my lips. She turned and for but a brief few moments our eyes met - and I looked into pools of glowing fire, eyes that were hardly eyes at all but so much more - the epitome of passion and hunger, the apex of evil, the embodiment of the unknown. In every other respect the confrontation was no different from what it had been in the earlier years - she did not move, her face save for her eyes remained expressionless. Then I lowered my eyes, unable to gaze into hers any longer, and stepped back across the threshold into the darkness behind me.

And fled up the stairs to my room, where I stood trembling, my back to the door, my thoughts confused, for I knew that what I had seen was something more than a woman, but I did not know what, something in bondage to my

dead uncle, something bound to return night after night and perform these rites. Where she came from remained unknown.

It was while I still stood there that I heard her once again on the stairs starting up from below. For a few moments I thought her bound for my room - as once before - and I felt myself grow cold with fear - but her steps carried her past, on to the stairs that led to the attic.

As the sound of her steps receded, my courage returned, and, emboldened, I opened the door and looked out.

All was in darkness. But no - up at the top of the stairs, out from under the attic door, shone a blue glow.

Even as I mounted to the attic, the blue glow began to fade.

I stood with my ear pressed to the door, listening. There was no sound.

Pressed by mounting courage, I threw open the door.

There was no sign of the woman. But over against the floor, where the angle of the roof joined it, the blue light I had noticed under the door was flowing out like water through the mouse-hole there! And the painted lines all around the hole glowed as with a light all their own, which faded even as I watched.

I lit a match and held it high.

The clothing the woman had worn lay as before, on the chair. And the mask.

I crossed to the chair and touched the mask.

It was warm.

The match burned my fingers and went out.

All was now black as pitch. But from the direction of the mouse-hole I felt such a drawing power as must I fling myself on my knees and try to follow the blue light, if I did not at once escape - a pulsing, sensate evil - and once

again the earth seemed to stop in its turning, there was a lurch in time, and a great cloud of paralyzing fear enveloped me.

I stood as if transfixed.

Then, from the mouse-hole, a drift of blue light like smoke came seeping into the attic. The sight of it burgeoning there broke the spell that held me - I ran, crouching, to the door, and flung myself out of the attic. I raced down the stairs to my room, looking back as if I expected some eldritch thing to be hot on my heels.

There was nothing but blackness, nothing but the dark.

I went into my room and threw myself upon the bed, fully clothed, and there I lay, waiting apprehensively, for whatever might come - knowing I should do as Rhoda had asked, yet curiously reluctant to leave the house on Aylesbury Street - not because it was my inheritance, but for a frightening kind of bondage, almost kinship, that kept me there.

I waited in vain for even the ghost of a sound to disturb the quiet. Nothing whatsoever came to ear but the natural sounds the house made on a windy night, for a wind had come up - and the occasional keening of a screech owl from the direction of Hangman's Hill.

And presently I slept, fully clothed as I was, and in my sleep I dreamed - dreamed that the blue light burgeoned and mushroomed into the attic, came flowing down the stairs and into the room where I lay, and out of the mouse-hole at the apex of the angle of roof and floor came to swell and grow the figures of the cleaning woman, now clad and rubber-masked, now hideous with age, now naked and beautiful as a young woman, and beside her my great-uncle Uriah Garrison, invading the house and the room and at last me - a dream from which I woke bathed in perspiration on the edge of dawn which lay pale blue in the room before it gave way to the roseate hue of the morning sky.

What kept me awake, exhausted as I was, was the pounding at the outside door. I struggled to my feet and made my way to the door.

Rhoda stood there.

“Adam!” she cried. “You look terrible.”

“Go away,” I said, “We don’t need you.”

I was momentarily shocked to hear my own words, but in a few moments I was resigned to them, I began to understand that I meant them, I resented Rhoda’s interference - as if she thought I could not take care of myself.

“So-I’m too late then,” she said.

“Go away,” I said again. “Just leave us alone.”

She pushed past me and strode into the house. I went after her. She was bound for the study, and when she got there she put together my notes and manuscript for my Hardy dissertation and confronted me with them.

“You won’t need these any more, will you?” she asked.

“Take them,” I said. “Take them all.”

She took them. “Goodbye, Adam,” she said.

“Goodbye, Rhoda,” I said.

I could hardly believe the evidence of my eyes, but Rhoda went, as meek as any lamb. And though I was still vaguely troubled by it, I was aware of a secret satisfaction at the way things were turning out.

V

I spent most of the rest of that day just relaxing and, in a sense, waiting upon the events of that night. It is impossible now to describe my frame of mind. All fear had left me, and I was consumed with a vivid curiosity, even with a kind of eagerness.

The day dragged. I slept through part of it. I ate very little. My appetite now was for something no food could satisfy, and it did not trouble me that this was so.

But the night and darkness came at last, and I set myself to waiting with keen anticipation for whatever might come from that room in the attic. I waited at first down stairs, but at last I understood that it was the room above - my great-uncle Uriah's old room - where I must wait upon the events of night in the house; so I went there and sat in the darkness.

I waited while the night grew older, hearing the old clock downstairs strike the hours of nine and ten and eleven. I expected to hear, soon, the step of the woman on the stair, the woman called Lilith, but it was the blue light that came first, seeping in under the door - as in my dream.

But I was not sleeping, I was not dreaming.

The blue light came, filling the room until I could just faintly see the naked form of the woman and the shaping form of Great-uncle Uriah looming up, with a writhing, twisting, serpentine coil reaching out from where he was taking shape to where I sat on the bed...

And then something more, something that filled me with sudden terror. I smelled smoke - and I heard the crackling of flames.

And from outside came Rhoda's voice calling, "Adam! Adam!"

The vision collapsed. The last thing I saw was the expression of terrible rage on my great-uncle's spectral face, the fury on the face of the woman

changing in that light from that of a lissome girl to that of an ancient hag. Then I flung myself to the window and opened it.

“Rhoda!” I cried.

She had taken no chances. There was a ladder up against the windowsill.

*

The house burned to the ground with everything in it.

Its burning did not affect my great-uncle’s will. As Mr. Saltonstall put it, I had been fulfilling his condition when circumstances beyond my control made it impossible to continue. So I did inherit the property, and I sold it, and Rhoda and I were married.

In spite of her insistently feminine delusions.

“I set fire to it myself,” she said. She had spent the day after she had left with my papers and books at the library of Miskatonic University, famed for its collection of arcane books, studying witchcraft lore. She had concluded that the spirit animating the house and responsible for the events in it was that of Great-uncle Uriah Garrison, and that his sole reason for the condition that I must live there was to place me within his reach so that he could usurp my own life-force and take possession of my body. The woman was a succubus, perhaps his mistress. The mouse-hole obviously an opening into another dimension.

Trust a woman to construe some kind of romantic angle out of even the most curious events. Succubus, indeed!

There are times even now when her notions affect me. From time to time I find myself unsure of my own identity. Am I Adam Duncan or Uriah Garrison? It does no good to mention it to Rhoda. I did so once and she said only, “It seems to have improved you, Adam.”

Women are fundamentally not rational creatures. Nothing will shake her free of her notions about the house on Aylesbury Street. It annoys me that I

find myself unable to come up with a more rational explanation myself, one that will satisfy all the questions that occur to me when I sit down and think about the events in which I played such a small, if motivating, part.