

The Shuttered Room

August Derleth & H. P. Lovecraft



calibre 1.0.0

THE SHUTTERED ROOM

I

At dusk, the wild, lonely country guarding the approaches to the village of Dunwich in north central Massachusetts seems more desolate and forbidding than it ever does by day. Twilight lends the barren fields and domed hills a strangeness that sets them apart from the country around that area; it brings to everything a kind of sentient, watchful animosity—to the ancient trees, to the brier-bordered stone walls pressing close upon the dusty road, to the low marshes with their myriads of fireflies and their incessantly calling whippoorwills vying with the muttering of frogs and the shrill songs of toads, to the sinuous windings of the upper reaches of the Miskatonic flowing among the dark hills seaward, all of which seem to close in upon the traveller as if intent upon holding him fast, beyond all escape.

On his way to Dunwich, Abner Whateley felt all this again, as once in childhood he had felt it and run screaming in terror to beg his mother to take him away from Dunwich and Grandfather Luther Whateley. So many years ago! He had lost count of them. It was curious that the country should affect him so, pushing through all the years he had lived since then—the years at the Sorbonne, in Cairo, in London—pushing through all the learning he had assimilated since those early visits to grim old Grandfather Whateley in his ancient house attached to the mill along the Miskatonic, the country of his childhood, coming back now out of the mists of time as were it but yesterday that he had visited his kinfolk.

They were all gone now—Mother, Grandfather Whateley, Aunt Sarey, whom he had never seen but only knew to be living somewhere in that old house—the loathsome cousin Wilbur and his terrible twin brother few had ever known before his frightful death on top of Sentinel Hill. But Dunwich, he saw as he drove through the cavernous covered bridge, had not changed; its main street lay under the looming mound of Round Mountain, its

gambrel roofs as rotting as ever, its houses deserted, the only store still in the broken-steepled church, over everything the unmistakable aura of decay.

He turned off the main street and followed a rutted road up along the river, until he came within sight of the great old house with the mill wheel on the riverside. It was his property now, by the will of Grandfather Whateley, who had stipulated that he must settle the estate and “take such steps as may be necessary to bring about that dissolution I myself was not able to take.” A curious proviso, Abner thought. But then, everything about Grandfather Whateley had been strange, as if the decadence of Dunwich had infected him irrevocably.

And nothing was stranger than that Abner Whateley should come back from his cosmopolitan way of life to heed his grandfather’s adjurations for property which was scarcely worth the time and trouble it would take to dispose of it. He reflected ruefully that such relatives as still lived in or near Dunwich might well resent his return in their curious inward growing and isolated rustication which had kept most of the Whateleys in this immediate region, particularly since the shocking events which had overtaken the country branch of the family on Sentinel Hill.

The house appeared to be unchanged. The riverside of the house was given over to the mill, which had long ago ceased to function, as more and more of the fields around Dunwich had grown barren; except for one room above the mill-wheel—Aunt Sarey’s room—the entire side of the structure bordering the Miskatonic had been abandoned even in the time of his boyhood, when Abner Whateley had last visited his grandfather, then living alone in the house except for the never seen Aunt Sarey who abode in her shuttered room with her door locked, never to move about the house under prohibition of such movement by her father, from whose domination only death at last had freed her.

A verandah, fallen in at the corner of the house, circled that part of the structure used as a dwelling; from the lattice-work under the eaves great cobwebs hung, undisturbed by anything save the wind for years. And dust lay over everything, inside as well as out, as Abner discovered when he had found the right key among the lot the lawyer had sent him. He found a lamp

and lit it, for Grandfather Whateley had scorned electricity. In the yellow glow of light, the familiarity of the old kitchen with its nineteenth century appointments smote him like a blow. Its sparseness, the hand-hewn table and chairs, the century-old clock on the mantel, the worn broom—all were tangible reminders of his fear-haunted childhood visits to the formidable house and its even more formidable occupant, his mother's aged father.

The lamplight disclosed something more. On the kitchen table lay an envelope addressed to him in handwriting so crabbed that it could only be that of a very old or infirm man—his grandfather. Without troubling to bring the rest of his things from the car, Abner sat down to the table, blowing the dust off the chair and sufficiently from the table to allow him a resting place for his elbows, and opened the envelope.

The spidery script leapt out at him. The words were as severe as he remembered his grandfather to have been. And abrupt, with no term of endearment, not even the prosaic form of greeting.

Grandson:

When you read this, I will be some months dead. Perhaps more, unless they find you sooner than I believe they will. I have left you a sum of money—all I have and die possessed of—which is in the bank at Arkham under your name now. I do this not alone because you are my own and only grandson but because among all the Whateleys—we are an accursed clan, my boy—you have gone forth into the world and gathered to yourself learning sufficient to permit you to look upon all things with an inquiring mind ridden neither by the superstition of ignorance nor the superstition of science. You will understand my meaning.

It is my wish that at least the mill section of this house be destroyed. Let it be taken apart, board by board. If anything in it lives, I adjure you solemnly to kill it. No matter how small it may be. No matter what form it may have, for if it seem to you human it will beguile you and endanger your life and God knows how many others.

Heed me in this.

If I seem to have the sound of madness, pray recall that worse than madness has spawned among the Whateleys. I have stood free of it. It has not been so of all that is mine. There is more stubborn madness in those who are unwilling to believe in what they know not of and deny that such exists, than in those of our blood who have been guilty of terrible practises, and blasphemy against God, and worse.

Your Grandfather, Luther S. Whateley.

How like Grandfather! thought Abner. He remembered, spurred into memory by this enigmatic, self-righteous communication, how on one occasion when his mother had mentioned her sister Sarah, and clapped her fingers across her mouth in dismay, he had run to his grandfather to ask, "Grandpa, where's Aunt Sarey?"

The old man had looked at him out of eyes that were basilisk and answered, "Boy, we do not speak of Sarah here."

Aunt Sarey had offended the old man in some dreadful way—dreadful, at least, to that firm disciplinarian—for from that time beyond even Abner Whateley's memory, his aunt had been only the name of a woman, who was his mother's older sister, and who was locked in the big room over the mill and kept forever invisible within those walls, behind the shutters nailed to her windows. It had been forbidden both Abner and his mother even to linger before the door of that shuttered room, though on one occasion Abner had crept up to the door and put his ear against it to listen to the snuffling and whimpering sounds that went on inside, as from some large person, and Aunt Sarey, he had decided, must be as large as a circus fat lady, for she devoured so much, judging by the great platters of food—chiefly meat, which she must have prepared herself, since so much of it was raw—carried to the room twice daily by old Luther Whateley himself, for there were no servants in that house, and had not been since the time Abner's mother had married, after Aunt Sarey had come back, strange and mazed, from a visit to distant kin in Innsmouth.

He refolded the letter and put it back into the envelope. He would think of its contents another day. His first need now was to make sure of a place to

sleep. He went out and got his two remaining bags from the car and brought them to the kitchen. Then he picked up the lamp and went into the interior of the house. The old-fashioned parlor, which was always kept closed against that day when visitors came—and none save Whateleys called upon Whateleys in Dunwich—he ignored. He made his way instead to his grandfather's bedroom; it was fitting that he should occupy the old man's bed now that he, and not Luther Whateley, was master here.

The large, double bed was covered with faded copies of the Arkham Advertiser, carefully arranged to protect the fine cloth of the spread, which had been embossed with an armigerous design, doubtless a legitimate Whateley heritage. He set down the lamp and cleared away the newspapers. When he turned down the bed, he saw that it was clean and fresh, ready for occupation; some cousin of his grandfather's had doubtless seen to this, against his arrival, after the obsequies.

Then he got his bags and transferred them to the bedroom, which was in that corner of the house away from the village; its windows looked along the river, though they were more than the width of the mill from the bank of the stream. He opened the only one of them which had a screen across its lower half, then sat down on the edge of the bed, bemused, pondering the circumstances which had brought him back to Dunwich after all these years.

He was tired now. The heavy traffic around Boston had tired him. The contrast between the Boston region and this desolate Dunwich country depressed and troubled him. Moreover, he was conscious of an intangible uneasiness. If he had not had need of his legacy to continue his research abroad into the ancient civilizations of the South Pacific, he would never have come here. Yet family ties existed, for all that he would deny them. Grim and forbidding as old Luther Whateley had always been, he was his mother's father, and to him his grandson owed the allegiance of common blood.

Round Mountain loomed close outside the bedroom; he felt its presence as he had when a boy, sleeping in the room above. Trees, for long untended, pressed upon the house, and from one of them at this hour of deep dusk, a

screech owl's bell-like notes dropped into the still summer air. He lay back for a moment, strangely lulled by the owl's pleasant song. A thousand thoughts crowded upon him, a myriad of memories. He saw himself again as the little boy he was, always half-fearful of enjoying himself in these foreboding surroundings, always happy to come and happier to leave.

But he could not lie here, however relaxing it was. There was so much to be done before he could hope to take his departure that he could ill afford to indulge himself in rest and make a poor beginning of his nebulous obligation. He swung himself off the bed, picked up the lamp again, and began a tour of the house.

He went from the bedroom to the dining room, which was situated between it and the kitchen—a room of stiff, uncomfortable furniture, also handmade,—and from there across to the parlor, the door of which opened upon a world far closer in its furniture and decorations to the eighteenth century than to the nineteenth, and far removed from the twentieth. The absence of dust testified to the tightness of the doors closing the room off from the rest of the house. He went up the open stairs to the floor above, from bedroom to bedroom—all dusty, with faded curtains, and showing every sign of having remained unoccupied for many years even before old Luther Whateley died.

Then he came to the passage which led to the shuttered room—Aunt Sarey's hideaway—or prison—he could now never learn what it might have been, and, on impulse, he went down and stood before that forbidden door. No snuffling, no whimpering greeted him now—nothing at all, as he stood before it, remembering, still caught in the spell of the prohibition laid upon him by his grandfather.

But there was no longer any reason to remain under that adjuration. He pulled out the ring of keys, and patiently tried one after another in the lock, until he found the right one. He unlocked the door and pushed; it swung protestingly open. He held the lamp high.

He had expected to find a lady's boudoir, but the shuttered room was startling in its condition—bedding scattered about, pillows on the floor, the

remains of food dried on a huge platter hidden behind a bureau. An odd, ichthyic smell pervaded the room, rushing at him with such musty strength that he could hardly repress a gasp of disgust. The room was in shambles; moreover, it wore the aspect of having been in such wild disorder for a long, long time.

Abner put the lamp on a bureau drawn away from the wall, crossed to the window above the mill wheel, unlocked it, and raised it. He strove to open the shutters before he remembered that they had been nailed shut. Then he stood back, raised his foot, and kicked the shutters out to let a welcome blast of fresh, damp air into the room.

He went around to the adjoining outer wall and broke away the shutters from the single window in that wall, as well. It was not until he stood back to survey his work that he noticed he had broken a small corner out of the pane of the window above the mill wheel. His quick regret was as quickly repressed in the memory of his grandfather's insistence that the mill and this room above it be torn down or otherwise destroyed. What mattered a broken pane!

He returned to take up the lamp again. As he did so, he gave the bureau a shove to push it back against the wall once more. At the same moment he heard a small, rustling sound along the baseboard, and, looking down, caught sight of a long-legged frog or toad—he could not make out which—vanishing under the bureau. He was tempted to rout the creature out, but he reflected that its presence could not matter—if it had existed in these locked quarters for so long on such cockroaches and other insects as it had managed to uncover, it merited being left alone.

He went out of the room, locked the door again, and returned to the master bedroom downstairs. He felt, obscurely, that he had made a beginning, however trivial; he had scouted the ground, so to speak. And he was twice as tired for his brief look around as he had been before. Though the hour was not late, he decided to go to bed and get an early start in the morning. There was the old mill yet to be gone through—perhaps some of the machinery could be sold, if any remained—and the mill wheel was now a curiosity, having continued to exist beyond its time.

He stood for a few minutes on the verandah, marking with surprise the welling stridulation of the crickets and katydids, and the almost overwhelming choir of the whippoorwills and frogs, which rose on all sides to assault him with a deafening insistence of such proportion as to drown out all other sounds, even such as might have risen from Dunwich. He stood there until he could tolerate the voices of the night no longer; then he retreated, locking the door, and made his way to the bedroom.

He undressed and got into bed, but he did not sleep for almost an hour, bedevilled by the chorus of natural sounds outside the house and from within himself by a rising confusion about what his grandfather had meant by the “dissolution” he himself had not been able to make. But at last he drifted into a troubled sleep.

II

He woke with the dawn, little rested. All night he had dreamed of strange places and beings that filled him with beauty and wonder and dread—of swimming in the ocean's depths and up the Miskatonic among fish and amphibia and strange men, half batrachian in aspect—of monstrous entities that lay sleeping in an eerie stone city at the bottom of the sea—of utterly outré music as of flutes accompanied by weird ululations from throats far, far from human—of Grandfather Luther Whateley standing accusingly before him and thundering forth his wrath at him for having dared to enter Aunt Sarey's shuttered room.

He was troubled, but he shrugged his unease away before the necessity of walking into Dunwich for the provisions he had neglected to bring with him in his haste. The morning was bright and sunny; pewees and thrushes sang, and dew pearled on leaf and blade reflected the sunlight in a thousand jewels along the winding path that led to the main street of the village. As he went along, his spirits rose; he whistled happily, and contemplated the early fulfillment of his obligation, upon which his escape from this desolate, forgotten pocket of ingrown humanity was predicated.

But the main street of Dunwich was no more reassuring under the light of the sun than it had been in the dusk of the past evening. The village huddled between the Miskatonic and the almost vertical slope of Round Mountain, a dark and brooding settlement which seemed somehow never to have passed 1900, as if time had ground to a stop before the turn of the last century. His gay whistle faded and died away; he averted his eyes from the buildings falling into ruin; he avoided the curiously expressionless faces of passersby, and went directly to the old church with its general store, which he knew he would find slovenly and ill-kept, in keeping with the village itself.

A gaunt-faced storekeeper watched his advance down the aisle, searching his features for any familiar lineament.

Abner strode up to him and asked for bacon, coffee, eggs, and milk.

The storekeeper peered at him. He made no move. "Ye' ll be a Whateley," he said at last. "I dun' t expeck ye know me. I' m yer cousin Tobias. Which one uv ' em are ye?"

"I' m Abner-Luther' s grandson." He spoke reluctantly.

Tobias Whateley' s face froze. "Libby' s boy-Libby, that married cousin Jeremiah. Yew folks ain' t back-back at Luther' s? Yew folks ain' t a-goin' to start things again?"

"There' s no one but me," said Abner shortly. "What things are you talking about?"

"If ye dun' t know, tain' t fer me to say."

Nor would Tobias Whateley speak again. He put together what Abner wanted, took his money sullenly, and watched him out of the store with ill-concealed animosity.

Abner was disagreeably affected. The brightness of the morning had dimmed for him, though the sun shone from the same unclouded heaven. He hastened away from the store and main street, and hurried along the lane toward the house he had but recently quitted.

He was even more disturbed to discover, standing before the house, an ancient rig drawn by an old workhorse. Beside it stood a boy, and inside it sat an old, white-bearded man, who, at sight of Abner' s approach, signalled to the boy for assistance, and by the lad' s aid, laboriously descended to the ground and stood to await Abner.

As Abner came up, the boy spoke, unsmiling. "Great-grampa' ll talk to yew."

"Abner," said the old man quaveringly, and Abner saw for the first time how very old he was.

"This here' s Great-grampa Zebulon Whateley," said the boy.

Grandfather Luther Whateley' s brother—the only living Whateley of his generation. “Come in, sir,” said Abner, offering the old man his arm.

Zebulon Whateley took it.

The three of them made slow progress toward the verandah, where the old man halted at the foot of the steps, turning his dark eyes upon Abner from under their bushy white brows, and shaking his head gently.

“Naow, if ye' ll fetch me a cheer, I' ll set.”

“Bring a chair from the kitchen, boy,” said Abner.

The boy sped up the steps and into the house. He was out as fast with a chair for the old man, and helped to lower him to it, and stood beside him while Zebulon Whateley caught his breath.

Presently he turned his eyes full upon Abner and contemplated him, taking in every detail of his clothes, which, unlike his own, were not made by hand.

“Why have ye come, Abner?” he asked, his voice firmer now.

Abner told him, as simply and directly as he could.

Zebulon Whateley shook his head. “Ye know no more' n the rest, and less' n some,” he said. “What Luther was abaout, only God knowed. Naow Luther' s gone, and ye' ll have it to dew. I kin tell ye, Abner, I vaow afur God, I dun' t know why Luther took on so and locked hissself up and Sarey that time she come back from Innsmouth—but I kin say it was suthin' turrible, turrible—and the things what happened was turrible. Ain' t nobody left to say Luther was to blame, nor poor Sarey—but take care, take care, Abner.”

“I expect to follow my grandfather' s wishes,” said Abner.

The old man nodded. But his eyes were troubled, and it was plain that he had little faith in Abner.

“How’ d you find out I was here, Uncle Zebulon?” Abner asked.

“I had the word ye’ d come. It was my bounden duty to talk to ye. The Whateleys has a curse on ’ em. Thar’ s been them naow gone to graoun’ has had to dew with the devil, and thar’ s some what whistled turrible things aout o’ the air, and thar’ s some what had to dew with things that wasn’ t all human nor all fish but lived in the water and swum aout–way aout–to sea, and thar’ s some what growed in on themselves and got all mazed and queer–and thar’ s what happened on Sentinel Hill that time–Lavinny’ s Wilbur–and that other one by the Sentinel Stone–Gawd, I shake when I think on it

“Now, Grandpa–don’ t ye git yer dander up,” chided the boy.

“I wun’ t, I wun’ t,” said the old man tremulously. “It’ s all died away naow. It’ s forgot–by all but me and them what took the signs daown–the signs that pointed to Dunwich, sayin’ it was too turrible a place to know about

” He shook his head and was silent.

“Uncle Zebulon,” said Abner. “I never saw my Aunt Sarah.”

“No, no, boy–she was locked up that time. Afore you was borned, I think it was.”

“Why?”

“Only Luther knowed–and Gawd. Now Luther’ s gone, and Gawd dun’ t seem like He knowed Dunwich was still here.”

“What was Aunt Sarah doing in Innsmouth?”

“Visitin’ kin.”

“Are there Whateleys there, too?”

“Not Whateleys. Marshes. Old Obed Marsh that was Pa’ s cousin. Him and his wife that he faound in the trade–at Ponape, if ye know whar that is.”

“I do.”

“Ye dew? I never knowed. They say Sarey was visitin’ Marsh kin—Obed’ s son or grandson—I never knowed which. Never heered. Dun’ t care. She was thar quite a spell. They say when she come back she was different. Rightly. Unsettled. Sassed her pa. And then, not long after, he locked her up in that room till she died.”

“How long after?”

“Three, four months. And Luther never said what fer. Nobody saw her again after that till the day she wuz laid aout in her coffin. Two year, might be three years ago. Thar was that time nigh onto a year after she come back from Innsmouth thar was sech goins-on here at this house—a-fightin’ and a-screamin’ and a-screechin’—most everyone in Dunwich heerd it, but no one went to see whut it was, and next day Luther he said it was only Sarey took with a spell. Might be it was. Might be it was suthin’ else

.”

“What else, Uncle Zebulon?”

“Devil’ s work,” said the old man instantly. “But I fergit—ye’ re the eddicated one. Ain’ t many Whateleys ever bin eddicated. Thar was Lavinny—she read them turrible books what was no good for her. And Sarey—she read some. Them as has only a little learnin’ might’ s well have none—they ain’ t fit to handle life with only a little learnin’ , they’ re fitter with none a-tall.”

Abner smiled.

“Dun’ t ye laugh, boy!”

“I’ m not laughing, Uncle Zebulon. I agree with you.”

“Then ef ye come face to face with it, ye’ ll know what to dew. Ye wun’ t stop and think—ye’ ll jest dew.”

“With what?”

“I wisht I knowed, Abner. I dun’ t. Gawd knows. Luther knowed. Luther’ s dead. It comes on me Sarey knowed, too. Sarey’ s dead. Now nobody knows whut turrible thing it was. Ef I was a prayin’ man, I’ d pray you dun’ t find aout—but ef ye dew, dun’ t stop to figger it aout by eddication, jest dew whut ye have to dew. Yer grandpa kep’ a record—look fer it. Ye might learn whut kind a people the Marshes was—they wasn’ t like us—suthin’ turrible happened to ’ em—and might be it reached aout and tetched Sarey

.”

Something stood between the old man and Abner Whateley—something unvoiced, perhaps unknown; but it was something that cast a chill about Abner for all his conscious attempt to belittle what he felt.

“I’ ll learn what I can, Uncle Zebulon,” he promised.

The old man nodded and beckoned to the boy. He signified that he wished to rise, to return to the buggy. The boy came running.

“Ef ye need me, Abner, send word to Tobias,” said Zebulon Whateley. “I’ ll come—ef I can.”

“Thank you.”

Abner and the boy helped the old man back into the buggy. Zebulon Whateley raised his forearm in a gesture of farewell, the boy whipped up the horse, and the buggy drew away.

Abner stood for a moment looking after the departing vehicle. He was both troubled and irritated—troubled at the suggestion of something dreadful which lurked beneath Zebulon Whateley’ s words of warning, irritated because his grandfather, despite all his adjurations, had left him so little to act upon. Yet this must have been because his grandfather evidently believed there might be nothing untoward to greet his grandson when at last

Abner Whateley arrived at the old house. It could be nothing other by way of explanation.

Yet Abner was not entirely convinced. Was the matter one of such horror that Abner should not know of it unless he had to? Or had Luther Whateley laid down a key to the riddle elsewhere in the house? He doubted it. It would not be Grandfather's way to seek the devious when he had always been so blunt and direct.

He went into the house with his groceries, put them away, and sat down to map out a plan of action. The very first thing to be accomplished was a survey of the mill part of the structure, to determine whether any machinery could be salvaged. Next he must find someone who would undertake to tear down the mill and the room above it. Thereafter he must dispose of the house and adjoining property, though he had a sinking feeling of futility at the conviction that he would never find anyone who would want to settle in so forlorn a corner of Massachusetts as Dunwich.

He began at once to carry out his obligations.

His search of the mill, however, disclosed that the machinery which had been in it—save for such pieces as were fixed to the running of the wheel had been removed, and presumably sold. Perhaps the increment from the sale was part of that very legacy Luther Whateley had deposited in the bank at Arkham for his grandson. Abner was thus spared the necessity of removing the machinery before beginning the planned demolition. The dust in the old mill almost suffocated him; it lay an inch thick over everything, and it rose in great gusts to cloud about him when he walked through the empty, cobwebbed rooms. Dust muffled his footsteps and he was glad to leave the mill to go around and look at the wheel.

He worked his way around the wooden ledge to the frame of the wheel, somewhat uncertain, lest the wood give way and plunge him into the water beneath; but the construction was firm, the wood did not give, and he was soon at the wheel. It appeared to be a splendid example of middle nineteenth century work. It would be a shame to tear it apart, thought Abner. Perhaps the wheel could be removed, and a place could be found for it either in some museum or in some one of those buildings which were

forever being reconstructed by wealthy persons interested in the preservation of the American heritage.

He was about to turn away from the wheel, when his eye was caught by a series of small wet prints on the paddles. He bent closer to examine them, but, apart from ascertaining that they were already in part dried, he could not see in them more than marks left by some small animal, probably batrachian—a frog or a toad—which had apparently mounted the wheel in the early hours before the rising of the sun. His eyes, raising, followed the line of the wheel to the broken out shutters of the room above.

He stood for a moment, thinking. He recalled the batrachian creature he had glimpsed along the baseboard of the shuttered room. Perhaps it had escaped through the broken pane? Or, more likely, perhaps another of its kind had discovered its presence and gone up to it. A faint apprehension stirred in him, but he brushed it away in irritation that a man of his intelligence should have been sufficiently stirred by the aura of ignorant, superstitious mystery clinging to his grandfather's memory to respond to it.

Nevertheless, he went around and mounted the stairs to the shuttered room. He half expected, when he unlocked the door, to find some significant change in the aspect of the room as he remembered it from last night, but, apart from the unaccustomed daylight streaming into the room, there was no alteration.

He crossed to the window.

There were prints on the sill. There were two sets of them. One appeared to be leading out, the other entering. They were not the same size. The prints leading outward were tiny, only half an inch across. Those leading in were double that size. Abner bent close and stared at them in fixed fascination.

He was not a zoologist, but he was by no means ignorant of zoology. The prints on the sill were like nothing he had ever seen before, not even in dream. Save for being or seeming to be webbed, they were the perfect prints in miniature of human hands and feet.

Though he made a cursory search for the creature, he saw no sign of it, and finally, somewhat shaken, he retreated from the room and locked the door behind him, already regretting the impulse which had led him to it in the first place and which had caused him to burst open the shutters which for so long had walled the room away from the outer world.

III

He was not entirely surprised to learn that no one in Dunwich could be found to undertake the demolition of the mill. Even such carpenters as those who had not worked for a long time were reluctant to undertake the task, pleading a variety of excuses, which Abner easily recognized as a disguise for the superstitious fear of the place under which one and all labored. He found it necessary to drive into Aylesbury, but, though he encountered no difficulty in engaging a trio of husky young men who had formed a partnership to tear down the mill, he was forced to wait upon their previous commitments and had to return to Dunwich with the promise that they would come "in a week or ten days."

Thereupon he set about at once to examine into all the effects of Luther Whateley which still remained in the house. There were stacks of newspapers—chiefly the Arkham Advertiser and the Aylesbury Transcript—now yellowing with age and mouldering with dust, which he set aside for burning. There were books which he determined to go over individually in order that he might not destroy anything of value. And there were letters which he would have burned at once had he not happened to glance into one of them and caught sight of the name "Marsh," at which he read on.

"Luther, what happened to cousin Obed is a singular thing. I do not know how to tell it to you. I do not know how to make it credible. I am not sure I have all the facts in this matter. I cannot believe but that it is a rigmarole deliberately invented to conceal something of a scandalous nature, for you know the Marshes have always been given to exaggeration and had a pronounced flair for deception. Their ways are devious. They have always been.

"But the story, as I have it from cousin Alizah, is that when he was a young man Obed and some others from Innsmouth, sailing their trading ships into the Polynesian Islands, encountered there a strange people who called themselves the 'Deep Ones' and who had the ability to live in the water or

on the earth. Amphibians, they would then be. Does this sound credible to you? It does not to me. What is most astonishing is that Obed and some others married women of these people and brought them home to live with them.

“Now that is the legend. Here are the facts. Ever since that time, the Marshes have prospered mightily in the trade. Mrs. Marsh is never seen abroad, save on such occasions as she goes to certain closed affairs of the Order of Dagon Hall. ‘Dagon’ is said to be a sea god. I know nothing of these pagan religions, and wish to know nothing. The Marsh children have a very strange look. I do not exaggerate, Luther, when I tell you that they have such wide mouths and such chinless faces and such large staring eyes that I swear they sometimes look more like frogs than human beings! They are not, at least, so far as I can see, gilled. The ‘Deep Ones’ are said to be possessed of gills, and to belong to Dagon or to some other deity of the sea whose name I cannot even pronounce, far less set down. No matter. It is such a rigmarole as the Marshes might well invent to serve their purposes, but by God, Luther, judging by the way the ships Captain Marsh has in the East India trade keep afloat without a smitchin of damage done to them by storm or wear—the brigantine Columbia, the barque Sumatra Queen, the brig Hetty and some others—it might almost seem that he has made some sort of bargain with Neptune himself!

“Then there are all the doings off the coast where the Marshes live. Night swimming. They swim way out off Devil Reef, which, as you know, is a mile and a half out from the harbor here at Innsmouth. People keep away from the Marshes—except the Martins and some such others among them who were also in the East India trade. Now that Obed is gone—and I suppose Mrs. Marsh may be also, since she is no longer seen anywhere—the children and the grandchildren of old Captain Obed follow in his strange ways.”

The letter dwindled down to commonplaces about prices—ridiculously low figures seen from this vantage of over half a century later, for Luther Whateley must have been a young man, unmarried, at the time this letter had been written to him by Aariah, a cousin of whom Abner had never heard. What it had to say of the Marshes was nothing—or all, perhaps, if Abner had

had the key to the puzzle of which, he began to believe with mounting irritation, he held only certain disassociated parts.

But if Luther Whateley had believed this rigmarole, would he, years later, have permitted his daughter to visit the Marsh cousins? Abner doubted it.

He went through other letters—bills, receipts, trivial accounts of journeys made to Boston, Newburyport, Kingsport—postcards, and came at last to another letter from Cousin Ariaiah, written, if a comparison of dates was sufficient evidence, immediately after the one Abner had just read. They were ten days apart, and Luther would have had time to reply to that first.

Abner opened it eagerly.

The first page was an account of certain small family matters pertinent to the marriage of another cousin, evidently a sister of Ariaiah's; the second a speculation about the future of the East India trade, with a paragraph about a new book by Whitman—evidently Walt; but the third was manifestly in answer to something Grandfather Whateley had evidently written concerning the Marsh branch of the family.

“Well, Luther, you may be right in this matter of race prejudice as responsible for the feeling against the Marshes. I know how people here feel about other races. It is unfortunate, perhaps, but such is their lack of education that they find much room for such prejudices. But I am not convinced that it is all due to race prejudice. I don't know what kind of race it is that would give the Marshes after Obed that strange look. The East India people—such as I have seen and recall from my early days in the trade—have features much like our own, and only a different color to the skin—copper, I would call it. Once I did see a native who had a similar appearance, but he was evidently not typical, for he was shunned by all the workers around the ships in the harbor where I saw him. I've forgotten now where it was, but I think Ponape.

“To give them their due, the Marshes keep pretty much to themselves—or to those families living here under the same cloud. And they more or less run the town. It may be significant—it may have been accident—that one

selectman who spoke out against them was found drowned soon after. I am the first to admit that coincidences more startling than this frequently occur, but you may be sure that people who disliked the Marshes made the most of this.

“But I know how your analytical mind is cold to such talk; I will spare you more of it.”

Thereafter not a word. Abner went through bundles of letters in vain. What Aariah wrote in subsequent letters dealt scrupulously with family matters of the utmost triviality. Luther Whateley had evidently made his displeasure with mere gossip clear; even as a young man, Luther must have been strictly self-disciplined. Abner found but one further reference to any mystery at Innsmouth—that was a newspaper clipping dealing in very vague terms, suggesting that the reporter who sent in the story did not really know what had taken place, with certain federal activity in and near Innsmouth in 1928—the attempted destruction of Devil Reef, and the blowing up of large sections of the waterfront, together with wholesale arrests of Marshes and Martins and some others. But this event was decades removed from Aariah’s early letters.

Abner put the letters dealing with the Marshes into his pocket, and summarily burned the rest, taking the mass of material he had gone through out along the riverbank and setting fire to it. He stood guarding it, lest a chance wind carry a spark to surrounding grass, which was unseasonably dry. He welcomed the smell of the smoke, however, for a certain dead odor lingered along the riverbank, rising from the remains of fish upon which some animal had feasted—an otter, he thought.

As he stood beside the fire, his eyes roved over the old Whateley building, and he saw, with a rueful reflection that it was high time the mill were coming down, that several panes of the window he had broken in the room that had been Aunt Sarey’s, together with a portion of the frame, had fallen out. Fragments of the window were scattered on the paddles of the mill wheel.

By the time the fire was sufficiently low to permit his leaving it, the day was drawing to a close. He ate a meager supper, and, having had his fill of reading for the day, decided against attempting to turn up his grandfather's "record" of which Uncle Zebulon Whateley had spoken, and went out to watch the dusk and the night in from the verandah, hearing again the rising chorus of the frogs and whippoorwills.

He retired early, unwontedly weary.

Sleep, however, would not come. For one thing, the summer night was warm; hardly a breath of air stirred. For another, even above the ululation of the frogs and the demoniac insistence of the whippoorwills, sounds from within the house invaded his consciousness—the creaks and groans of a many-timbered house settling in for the night; a peculiar scuffling or shuffling sound, half-drag, half-hop, which Abner laid to rats, which must abound in the mill section of the structure—and indeed, the noises were muffled, and seemed to reach him as from some distance; and, at one time, the cracking of wood and the tinkle of glass, which, Abner guessed, very probably came from the window above the mill wheel. The house was virtually falling to pieces about him; it was as if he served as a catalytic agent to bring about the final dissolution of the old structure.

This concept amused him because it struck him that, willy-nilly, he was carrying out his grandfather's adjuration. And, so bemused, he fell asleep.

He was awakened early in the morning by the ringing of the telephone, which he had had the foresight to have connected for the duration of his visit in Dunwich. He had already taken down the receiver from the ancient instrument attached to the wall before he realized that the call was on a party line and not intended for him. Nevertheless, the woman's voice that leapt out at him, burst open his ear with such screaming insistence that he remained frozen to the telephone.

"I tell ye, Mis' Corey, I heard things las' night—the graoun' was a-talkin' agen, and along abaout midnight I heerd that scream—I never figgered a

caow' s scream that way—jest like a rabbit, only deeper. That was Lutey Sawyer' s caow—they faoun' her this morning—more' n haff et by animals

”

“Mis' Bishop, you dun' t s' pose

it' s come back?”

“I dun' t know. I hope t' Gawd it ain' t. But it' s the same as the las' time.”

“Was it jest that one caow took?”

“Jest the one. I ain' t heerd abaout no more. But that' s how it begun the las' time, Mis' Corey.”

Quietly, Abner replaced the receiver. He smiled grimly at this evidence of the rampant superstitions of the Dunwich natives. He had never really known the depths of ignorance and superstition in which dwellers in such out-of-the-way places as Dunwich lived, and this manifestation of it was, he was convinced, but a mild sample.

He had little time, however, to dwell upon the subject, for he had to go into town for fresh milk, and he strode forth into the morning of sun and clouds with a certain feeling of relief at such brief escape from the house.

Tobias Whateley was uncommonly sullen and silent at Abner' s entrance. Abner sensed not only resentment, but a certain tangible fear. He was astonished. To all Abner' s comments Tobias replied in muttered monosyllables. Thinking to make conversation, he began to tell Tobias what he had overheard on the party line.

“I know it,” said Tobias, curtly, for the first time gazing at Abner' s face with naked terror.

Abner was stunned into silence. Terror vyed with animosity in Tobias' s eyes. His feelings were plain to Abner before he dropped his gaze and took the money Abner offered in payment.

“Yew seen Zebulon?” he asked in a low voice.

“He was at the house,” said Abner.

“Yew talk to him?”

“We talked.”

It seemed as if Tobias expected that certain matters had passed between them, but there was that in his attitude that suggested he was puzzled by subsequent events, which seemed to indicate that Zebulon had not told him what Tobias had expected the old man to tell him, or else that Abner had disregarded some of his uncle's advice. Abner began to feel completely mystified; added to the superstitious talk of the natives on the telephone, to the strange hints Uncle Zebulon had dropped, this attitude of his cousin Tobias filled him with utter perplexity. Tobias, no more than Zebulon, seemed inclined to come out frankly and put into words what lay behind his sullen features—each acted as if Abner, as a matter of course, should know.

In his bafflement, he left the store, and walked back to the Whateley house determined to hasten his tasks as much as he could so that he might get away from this forgotten hamlet with its queer, superstition-ridden people, for all that many of them were his relatives.

To that end, he returned to the task of sorting his grandfather's things as soon as he had had his breakfast, of which he ate very little, for his disagreeable visit to the store had dulled the appetite which he had felt when he had set out for the store earlier.

It was not until late afternoon that he found the record he sought—an old ledger, in which Luther Whateley had made certain entries in his crabbed hand.

IV

By the light of the lamp, Abner sat down to the kitchen table after he had a small repast, and opened Luther Whateley' s ledger. The opening pages had been torn out, but, from an examination of the fragments of sheets still attached to the threads of the sewing, Abner concluded that these pages were purely of accounts, as if his grandfather had taken up an old, not completely used account book for a purpose other than keeping accounts, and had removed such sheets as had been more prosaically utilized.

From the beginning, the entries were cryptic. They were undated, except for the day of the week.

“This Saturday Ariaiah answered my inquiry. S. was seen sev times with Ralsa Marsh. Obed' s great-grandson. Swam together by night.”

Such was the first entry, clearly pertaining to Aunt Sarey' s visit to Innsmouth, about which Grandfather had plainly inquired of Ariaiah. Something had impelled Luther to make such inquiry. From what he knew of his grandfather' s character, Abner concluded that the inquiry had been made after Sarey had returned to Dunwich.

Why?

The next entry was pasted in, and was clearly part of a typewritten letter received by Luther Whateley.

“Ralsa Marsh is probably the most repellent of all the family. He is almost degenerate in his looks. I know you have said that it was Libby of your daughters who was the fairest; even so, we cannot imagine how Sarah came to take up with someone who is so repulsive as Ralsa, in whom all those recessive characteristics which have been seen in the Marsh family after Obed' s strange marriage to that Polynesian woman—(the Marshes have denied that Obed' s wife was Polynesian, but of course, he was trading there

at that time, and I don' t credit those stories about that uncharted island where he was supposed to have dallied)—seem to have come to fullest fruit.

“As far as I can now ascertain—after all, it is over two months—close to four, I think—since her return to Dunwich—they were constantly together. I am surprised that Ariaiah did not inform you of this. None of us here had any mandate to halt Sarah' s seeing Ralsa, and, after all, they are cousins and she was visiting at Marshes—not here.”

Abner judged that this letter had been written by a woman, also a cousin, who bore Luther some resentment for Sarah' s not having been sent to stay with her branch of the family. Luther had evidently made inquiry of her regarding Ralsa.

The third entry was once again in Luther' s hand, summarizing a letter from Ariaiah.

“Saturday. Ariaiah maintains Deep Ones a sect or quasi-religious group. Sub-human. Said to live in the sea and worship Dagon. Another God named Cthulhu. Gilled people. Resembling frogs or toads more than fish, but eyes ichthyic. Claims Obed' s late wife was one. Holds that Obed' s children all bore the marks. Marshes gilled? How else could they swim a mile and a half to Devil Reef, and back? Marshes eat sparingly, can go without food and drink a long time, diminish or expand in size rapidly.” (To this Luther had appended four scornful exclamation marks.)

“Zadok Allen swears he saw Sarah swimming out to Devil Reef. Marshes carrying her along. All naked. Swears he saw Marshes with tough, warty skin. Some with scales, like fish! Swears he saw them chase and eat fish! Tear them apart like animals.”

The next entry was again a portion of a letter, patently a reply to one from Grandfather Whateley.

“You ask who is responsible for those ridiculous tales about the Marshes. Well, Luther, it would be impossible to single out any one or a dozen people over several generations. I agree that old Zadok Allen talks too much,

drinks, and may be romancing. But he is only one. The fact is this legendry—or rigmarole, as you call it,—has grown up from one generation to the next. Through three generations. You have only to look at some of the descendants of Captain Obed to understand why this could have come about. There are some Marsh offspring said to have been too horrible to look upon. Old wives' tales? Well, Dr. Rowley Marsh was too ill to attend one of the Marsh women one time; so they had to call Dr. Gilman, and Gilman always said that what he delivered was less than human. And nobody ever saw that particular Marsh, though there were people later who claimed to have seen things moving on two legs that weren't human."

Following this there was but a brief but revealing entry in two words: "Punished Sarah."

This must then mark the date of Sarah Whateley's confinement to the room above the mill. For some time after this entry, there was no mention of his daughter in Luther's script. Instead, his jottings were not dated in any way, and, judging by the difference in the color of the ink, were made at different times, though run together.

"Many frogs. Seem to bear in on the mill. Seem to be more than in the marshes across the Miskatonic. Sleeping difficult. Are whippoorwills on the increase, too, or is this imagination?"

Counted thirty-seven frogs at the porch steps tonight."

There were more entries of this nature. Abner read them all, but there was no clue in them to what the old man had been getting at. Luther Whateley had thereafter kept book on frogs, fog, fish and their movements in the Miskatonic—when they rose and leaped from the water, and so on. This seemed to be unrelated data, and was not in any way connected to the problem of Sarah.

There was another hiatus after this series of notes, and then came a single, underscored entry.

"Ariah was right!"

But about what had Aariah been right? Abner wondered. And how had Luther Whateley learned that Aariah had been right? There was no evidence that Aariah and Luther had continued their correspondence, or even that Aariah desired to write to the crochety Luther without a letter of direct inquiry from Luther.

There followed a section of the record to which newspaper clippings had been pasted. These were clearly unrelated, but they did establish for Abner the fact that somewhat better than a year had passed before Luther's next entry, one of the most puzzling Abner found. Indeed, the time hiatus seemed to be closer to two years.

"R. out again."

If Luther and Sarah were the only people in the house, who was "R."? Could it have been Ralsa Marsh come to visit? Abner doubted it, for there was nothing to show that Ralsa Marsh harbored any affection for his distant cousin, or certainly he would have pursued her before this.

The next notation seemed to be unrelated.

"Two turtles, one dog, remains of woodchuck. Bishop's—two cows, found on the Miskatonic end of the pasture."

A little further along, Luther had set down further such data.

"After one month a total of 17 cattle, 6 sheep. Hideous alterations; size commensurate with amt. of food. Z. over. Anxious about talk going around."

Could Z. stand for Zebulon? Abner thought it did. Evidently then Zebulon had come in vain, for he had left him, Abner, with only vague and uncertain hints about the situation at the house when Aunt Sarey was confined to the shuttered room. Zebulon, on the evidence of such conversation as he had shared with Abner, knew less than Abner himself did after reading his grandfather's record. But he did know of Luther's record; so Luther must have told him he had set down certain facts.

These notations, however, were more in the nature of notes for something to be completed later; they were unaccountably cryptic, unless one had the key of basic knowledge which belonged to Luther Whateley. But a growing sense of urgency was clearly manifest in the old man's further entries.

"Ada Wilkerson gone. Trace of scuffle. Strong feeling in Dunwich. John Sawyer shook his fist at me—safely across the street, where I couldn't reach him."

"Monday. Howard Willie this time. They found one shoe, with the foot still in it!"

The record was now near its end. Many pages, unfortunately, had been detached from it—some with violence—but no clue remained as to why this violence had been done to Grandfather Whateley's account. It could not have been done by anyone but Luther himself; perhaps, thought Abner, Luther felt he had told too much, and intended to destroy anything which might put a later reader on the track of the true facts regarding Aunt Sarey's confinement for the rest of her life. He had certainly succeeded.

The next entry once again referred to the elusive "R."

"R. back at last."

Then, "Nailed the shutters to the windows of Sarah's room."

And at last: "Once he has lost weight, he must be kept on a careful diet and to a controllable size."

In a way, this was the most enigmatic entry of them all. Was "he" also "R."? If so, why must he be kept on a careful diet, and what did Luther Whateley mean by controlling his size? There was no ready answer to these questions in such material as Abner had read thus far, either in this record—or the fragmentary account still left in the record—or in letters previously perused.

He pushed away the record-book, resisting an impulse to burn it. He was exasperated, all the more so because he was uneasily aware of an urgent

need to learn the secret embalmed within this old building.

The hour was now late; darkness had fallen some time ago, and the ever-present clamor of the frogs and the whippoorwills had begun once more, rising all around the house. Pushing from his thoughts briefly the apparently unconnected jottings he had been reading, he called from his memory the superstitions of the family, representing those prevalent in the countryside—associating frogs and the calling of whippoorwills and owls with death, and from this meditation progressed readily to the amphibian link which presented itself—the presence of the frogs brought before his mind's eye a grotesque caricature of one of the Marsh clan of Innsmouth, as described in the letters Luther Whateley had saved for so many years.

Oddly, this very thought, for all that it was so casual, startled him. The insistence of frogs and toads on singing and calling in the vicinity was truly remarkable. Yet, batrachia had always been plentiful in the Dunwich vicinity, and he had no way of knowing for how long a period before his arrival they had been calling about the old Whateley house. He discounted the suggestion that his arrival had anything at all to do with it; more than likely, the proximity of the Miskatonic and a low, swampy area immediately across the river on the edge of Dunwich, accounted for the presence of so many frogs.

His exasperation faded away; his concern about the frogs did likewise. He was weary. He got up and put the record left by Luther Whateley carefully into one of his bags, intending to carry it away with him, and to puzzle over it until some sort of meaning came out of it. Somewhere there must exist a clue. If certain horrible events had taken place in the vicinity, something more in the way of a record must exist than Luther Whateley's spare notes. It would do no good to inquire of Dunwich people; Abner knew they would maintain a close-mouthed silence before an "outsider" like himself, for all that he was related to many of them.

It was then that he thought of the stacks of newspapers, still set aside to be burned. Despite his weariness, he began to go through packs of the Aylesbury Transcript, which carried, from time to time, a Dunwich department.

After an hour's hasty search, he found three vague articles, none of them in the regular Dunwich columns, which corroborated entries in Luther Whateley's ledger. The first appeared under the heading: Wild Animal Slays Stock Near Dunwich—

“Several cows and sheep have been slain on farms just outside Dunwich by what appears to be a wild animal of some kind. Traces left at the scenes of the slaughter suggest some large beast, but Professor Bethnall of Miskatonic University's anthropology department points out that it is not inconceivable that packs of wolves could lurk in the wild hilly country around Dunwich. No beast of the size suggested by the traces reported was ever known to inhabit the eastern seaboard within the memory of man. County officials are investigating.”

Search as he might, Abner could find no follow-up story. He did, however, come upon the story of Ada Wilkerson.

“A widow-lady, Ada Wilkerson, 57, living along the Miskatonic out of Dunwich, may have been the victim of foul play three nights ago. When she failed to visit a friend by appointment in Dunwich, her home was visited. No trace of her was found. However, the door of her house had been broken in, and the furniture had been wildly thrown about, as if a violent struggle had taken place. A very strong musk is said to have pervaded the entire area. Up to press time today, Mrs. Wilkerson has not been heard from.”

Two subsequent paragraphs reported briefly that authorities had not found any clue to Mrs. Wilkerson's disappearance. The account of a “large animal” was resurrected, lamely, and Professor Bethnall's beliefs on the possible existence of a wolf-pack, but nothing further, for investigation had disclosed that the missing lady had neither money nor enemies, and no one would have had any motive for killing her.

Finally, there was the account of Howard Willie's death, headed, Shocking Crime at Dunwich.

“Some time during the night of the twenty-first Howard Willie, 37, a native of Dunwich, was brutally slain as he was on his way home from a fishing

trip along the upper reaches of the Miskatonic. Mr. Willie was attacked about half a mile past the Luther Whateley property, as he walked through an arborescent lane. He evidently put up a fierce fight, for the ground is badly torn up in all directions. The poor fellow was overcome, and must have been literally torn limb from limb, for the only physical remains of the victim consisted of his right foot, still encased in its shoe. It had evidently been cruelly torn from his leg by great force.

“Our correspondent in Dunwich advises us that people there are very sullen and in a great rage of anger and fear. They suspect many of their number of being at least partly to blame, though they stoutly deny that anyone in Dunwich murdered either Willie or Mrs. Wilkerson, who disappeared a fortnight ago, and of whom no word has since been heard.”

The account concluded with some data about Willie's family connections. Thereafter, subsequent editions of the Transcript were distinguished only for the lack of information about the events which had taken place in Dunwich, where authorities and reporters alike apparently ran up against blank walls in the stolid refusal of the natives to talk or even speculate about what had happened. There was, however, one insistent note which recurred in the comments of investigators, relayed to the press, and that was that such trail or track as could be seen appeared to have disappeared into the waters of the Miskatonic, suggesting that if an animal were responsible for the orgy of slaughter which had occurred at Dunwich, it may have come from and returned to the river.

Though it was now close to midnight, Abner massed the discarded newspapers together and took them out to the riverbank, where he set them on fire, having saved only torn pages relative to the occurrences at Dunwich. The air being still, he did not feel obliged to watch the fire since he had already burned a considerable area, and the grass was not likely to catch on fire. As he started away, he heard suddenly above the ululation of the whippoorwills and frogs, now at a frenzied crescendo, the tearing and breaking sound of wood. He thought at once of the window of the shuttered room, and retraced his steps.

In the very dim light flickering toward the house from the burning newspapers, it seemed to Abner that the window gaped wider than before. Could it be that the entire mill part of the house was about to collapse?

Then, out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of a singularly formless moving shadow just beyond the mill wheel, and a moment later heard a churning sound in the water. The voices of the frogs had now risen to such a volume that he could hear nothing more.

He was inclined to dismiss the shadow as the creation of the wild flames leaping upward from the fire. The sound in the water might well have been that of the movement made by a school of fish, darting forward in concert. Nevertheless, he thought, it would do no harm to have another look at Aunt Sarey's room.

He returned to the kitchen, took the lamp, and mounted the stairs. He unlocked the door of the shuttered room, threw open the door, and was almost felled by the powerful musk which pushed hallward. The smell of the Miskatonic, of the marshes, the odor of that slimey deposit left on the stones and sunken debris when the Miskatonic receded to its low water stage, the cloying pungence of some animal lairs—all these were combined in the shuttered room.

Abner stood for a moment, wavering on the threshold. True, the odor in the room could have come in through the open window. He raised the lamp so that more of its light fell upon the wall above the mill wheel. Even from where he stood, it was possible to see that not only was all the window itself now gone, but so was the frame. Even at this distance it was manifest that the frame had been broken out from inside!

He fell back, slammed the door shut, locked it, and fled down stairs with the shell of his rationalizations tumbling about him.

V

Downstairs, he fought for self-control. What he had seen was but one more detail added to the proliferating accumulation of seemingly unrelated data upon which he had stumbled ever since his coming to his grandfather's home. He was convinced now that however unlikely it had at first seemed to him, all these data must be related. What he needed to learn was the one basic fact or element which bound them together.

He was badly shaken, particularly because he had the uneasy conviction that he did indeed have all the facts he needed to know, that it was his scientific training which made it impossible for him to make the primary assumption, to state the premise which the facts before him would inevitably prove. The evidence of his senses told him that something laired in that room—some bestial creature; it was folly to assume that odors from outside could so permeate Aunt Sarey's old room and not be noticeable outside the kitchen and at the windows of his own bedroom.

The habit of rational thinking was strong in him. He took out Luther Whateley's final letter to him once more and read it again. That was what his grandfather had meant when he had written "you have gone forth into the world and gathered to yourself learning sufficient to permit you to look upon all things with an inquiring mind ridden neither by the superstition of ignorance nor the superstition of science." Was this puzzle, with all its horrible connotations, beyond rationalization?

The wild ringing of the telephone broke in upon his confused thoughts. Slipping the letter back into his pocket, he strode rapidly to the wall and took the receiver off the hook.

A man's voice screamed over the wire, amid a chaos of inquiring voices as everyone on the line picked up his receiver as if they waited, like Abner Whateley himself, for word of another tragedy. One of the voices—all were disembodied and unidentifiable for Abner—identified the caller.

“It’ s Luke Lang!”

“Git a posse up an’ come quick,” Luke shouted hoarsely over the wire.
“It’ s jest aoutside my door. Snufflin’ araoun’ . Tryin’ the door. Feelin’ at the winders.”

“Luke, what is it?” asked a woman’ s voice.

“Oh, Gawd! It’ s some unairthly thing. It’ s a-hoppin’ raoun’ like it was too big to move right—like jelly. Oh, hurry, hurry, afore it’ s too late. It got my dog

.”

“Git off the wire so’ s we can call fer help,” interrupted another subscriber.

But Luke never heard in his extremity. “It’ s a-pushin’ at the door—it’ s a-bowin’ the door in

.”

“Luke! Luke! Git off n the wire!”

“It’ s a-tryin’ the winder naow.” Luke Lang’ s voice rose in a scream of terror. “There goes the glass. Gawd! Gawd! Hain’ t yew comin’ ? Oh, that hand! That turri’ ble arm! Gawd! That face

!”

Luke’ s voice died away in a frightful screech. There was the sound of breaking glass and rending wood—then all was still at Luke Lang’ s, and for a moment all was still along the wire. Then the voices burst forth again in a fury of excitement and fear.

“Git help!”

“We’ ll meet at Bishops’ place.”

And someone put in, "It's Abner Whateley done it!"

Sick with shock and half-paralyzed with a growing awareness, Abner struggled to tear the receiver from his ear, to shut off the half-crazed bedlam on the party line. He managed it with an effort. Confused, upset, frightened himself, he stood for a moment with his head leaning against the wall. His thoughts seethed around but one central point—the fact that the Dunwich rustics considered him somehow responsible for what was happening. And their conviction, he knew intuitively, was based on more than the countryman's conventional distrust of the stranger.

He did not want to think of what happened to Luke Lang—and to those others. Luke's frightened, agonized voice still rang in his ears. He pulled himself away from the wall, almost stumbling over one of the kitchen chairs. He stood for a moment beside the table, not knowing what to do, but as his mind cleared a little, he thought only of escape. Yet he was caught between the desire to get away, and the obligation to Luther Whateley he had not yet fulfilled.

But he had come, he had gone through the old man's things—all save the books—he had made arrangements to tear down the mill part of the house—he could manage its sale through some agency; there was no need for him to be present. Impulsively, he hastened to the bedroom, threw such things as he had unpacked, together with Luther Whateley's note-filled ledger, into his bags, and carried them out to his car.

Having done this, however, he had second thoughts. Why should he take flight? He had done nothing. No guilt of any kind rested upon him. He returned to the house. All was still, save for the unending chorus of frogs and whippoorwills. He stood briefly undecided; then he sat down at the table and took out Grandfather Whateley's final letter to read it once more.

He read it over carefully, thoughtfully. What had the old man meant when, in referring to the madness that had spawned among the Whateleys, he had said, "It has not been so of all that is mine" though he himself had kept free of that madness? Grandmother Whateley had died long before Abner's birth; his Aunt Julia had died as a young girl; his mother had led a

blameless life. There remained Aunt Sarey. What had been her madness then? Luther Whateley could have meant none other. Only Sarey remained. What had she done to bring about her imprisonment unto death?

And what had he intended to hint at when he adjured Abner to kill anything in the mill section of the house, anything that lived? No matter how small it may be. No matter what form it may have

. Even something so small as an inoffensive toad? A spider? A fly? Luther Whateley wrote in riddles, which in itself was an affront to an intelligent man. Or did his grandfather think Abner a victim to the superstition of science? Ants, spiders, flies, various kinds of bugs, millers, centipedes, daddy long-legs—all occupied the old mill; and doubtless in its walls were mice as well. Did Luther Whateley expect his grandson to go about exterminating all these?

Behind him suddenly something struck the window. Glass fragmented to the floor, together with something heavy. Abner sprang to his feet and whirled around. From outside came the sound of running footsteps.

A rock lay on the floor amid the shattered glass. There was a piece of “store paper” tied to it by common store string. Abner picked it up, broke the string, and unfolded the paper.

Crude lettering stared up at him. “Git out before ye get kilt!” Store paper and string. It was not meant so much as a threat as a well-intentioned warning. And it was clearly the work of Tobias Whateley, thought Abner. He tossed it contemptuously to the table.

His thoughts were still in turmoil, but he had decided that precipitate flight was not necessary. He would stay, not only to learn if his suspicions about Luke Lang were true—as if the evidence of the telephone left room for doubt—but also to make a final attempt to fathom the riddle Luther Whateley had left behind.

He put out the light and went in darkness to the bedroom where he stretched out, fully clothed, upon the bed.

Sleep, however, would not come. He lay probing the maze of his thoughts, trying to make sense out of the mass of data he had accumulated, seeking always that basic fact which was the key to all the others. He felt sure it existed; worse, he was positive that it lay before his eyes—he had but failed to interpret it or to recognize it.

He had been lying there scarcely half an hour, when he heard, rising above the pulsating choir of the frogs and whippoorwills, a splashing from the direction of the Miskatonic—an approaching sound, as if a large wave were washing up the banks on its seaward way. He sat up, listening. But even as he did so, the sound stopped and another took its place—one he was loath to identify, and yet could define as no other than that of someone trying to climb the mill-wheel.

He slid off the bed and went out of the room.

From the direction of the shuttered room came a muffled, heavy falling sound—then a curious, choking whimpering that sounded, horribly, like a child at a great distance trying to call out—then all was still, and it seemed that even the noise and clamor of the frogs diminished and fell away.

He returned to the kitchen and lit the lamp.

Pooled in the yellow glow of light, Abner made his way slowly up the stairs toward the shuttered room. He walked softly, careful to make no sound.

Arriving at the door, he listened. At first he heard nothing—then a susurrations smote his ears.

Something in that room—breathed!

Fighting back his fear, Abner put the key in the lock and turned it. He flung open the door and held the lamp high.

Shock and horror paralyzed him.

There, squatting in the midst of the tumbled bedding from that long-abandoned bed, sat a monstrous, leathery-skinned creature that was neither

frog nor man, one gorged with food, with blood still slavering from its batrachian jaws and upon its webbed fingers—a monstrous entity that had strong, powerfully long arms, grown from its bestial body like those of a frog, and tapering off into a man's hands, save for the webbing between the fingers

.

The tableau held for only a moment.

Then, with a frenzied growling sound—"Eh-ya-ya-ya-yaahaah—ngh' aaa—h' yuh, h' yuh—" it rose up, towering, and launched itself at Abner.

His reaction was instantaneous, born of terrible, shattering knowledge. He flung the kerosene-filled lamp with all his might straight at the thing reaching toward him.

Fire enveloped the thing. It halted and began to tear frantically at its burning body, unmindful of the flames rising from the bedding behind it and the floor of the room, and at the same instant the calibre of its voice changed from a deep growling to a shrill, high wailing—"Mama-mama-ma-aa-ma-aa-ma-aah!"

Abner pulled the door shut and fled.

Down the stairs, half falling, through the rooms below, with his heart pounding madly, and out of the house. He tumbled into the car, almost bereft of his senses, half-blinded by the perspiration of his fear, turned the key in the ignition, and roared away from that accursed place from which the smoke already poured, while spreading flames in that tinder-dry building began to cast a red glow into the sky.

He drove like one possessed—through Dunwich—through the covered bridge—his eyes half-closed, as if to shut out forever the sight of that which he had seen, while the dark, brooding hills seemed to reach for him and the chanting whippoorwills and frogs mocked him.

But nothing could erase that final, cataclysmic knowledge seared into his mind—the key to which he had had all along and not known it—the knowledge implicit in his own memories as well as in the notes Luther Whateley had left—the chunks of raw meat he had childishly supposed were going to be prepared in Aunt Sarey’s room instead of to be eaten raw, the reference to “R.” who had come “back at last” after having escaped, back to the only home “R.” knew—the seemingly unrelated references also in his grandfather’s hand to missing cows, sheep, and the remains of other animals—the hideous suggestion clearly defined now in those entries of Luther Whateley’s about R.’s “size commensurate with amt. of food,” and “he must be kept on a careful diet and to a controllable size”—like the Innsmouth people!—controlled to nothingness after Sarah’s death, with Luther hoping that foodless confinement might shrivel the thing in the shuttered room and kill it beyond revival, despite the doubt that had led him to adjure Abner to kill “anything in it that lives,”—the thing Abner had unwittingly liberated when he broke the pane and kicked out the shutters, liberated to seek its own food and its hellish growth again, at first with fish from the Miskatonic, then with small animals, then cattle, and at last human beings—the thing that was half-batrachian, half-human, but human enough to come back to the only home it had ever known and to cry out in terror for its mother in the face of the fatal holocaust—the thing that had been born to the unblessed union of Sarah Whateley and Ralsa Marsh, spawn of tainted and degenerate blood, the monster that would loom forever on the perimeter of Abner Whateley’s awareness—his cousin Ralsa, doomed by his grandfather’s iron will, instead of being released long ago into the sea to join the Deep Ones among the minions of Dagon and great Cthulhu!