

JULY

Weird Tales

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Silvey

Strange footprints, other than human, had appeared on the floor of the cave!

"The House in the Valley"

By

AUGUST DERLETH

Weird Tales



JULY, 1953

Cover by W. H. Silvey

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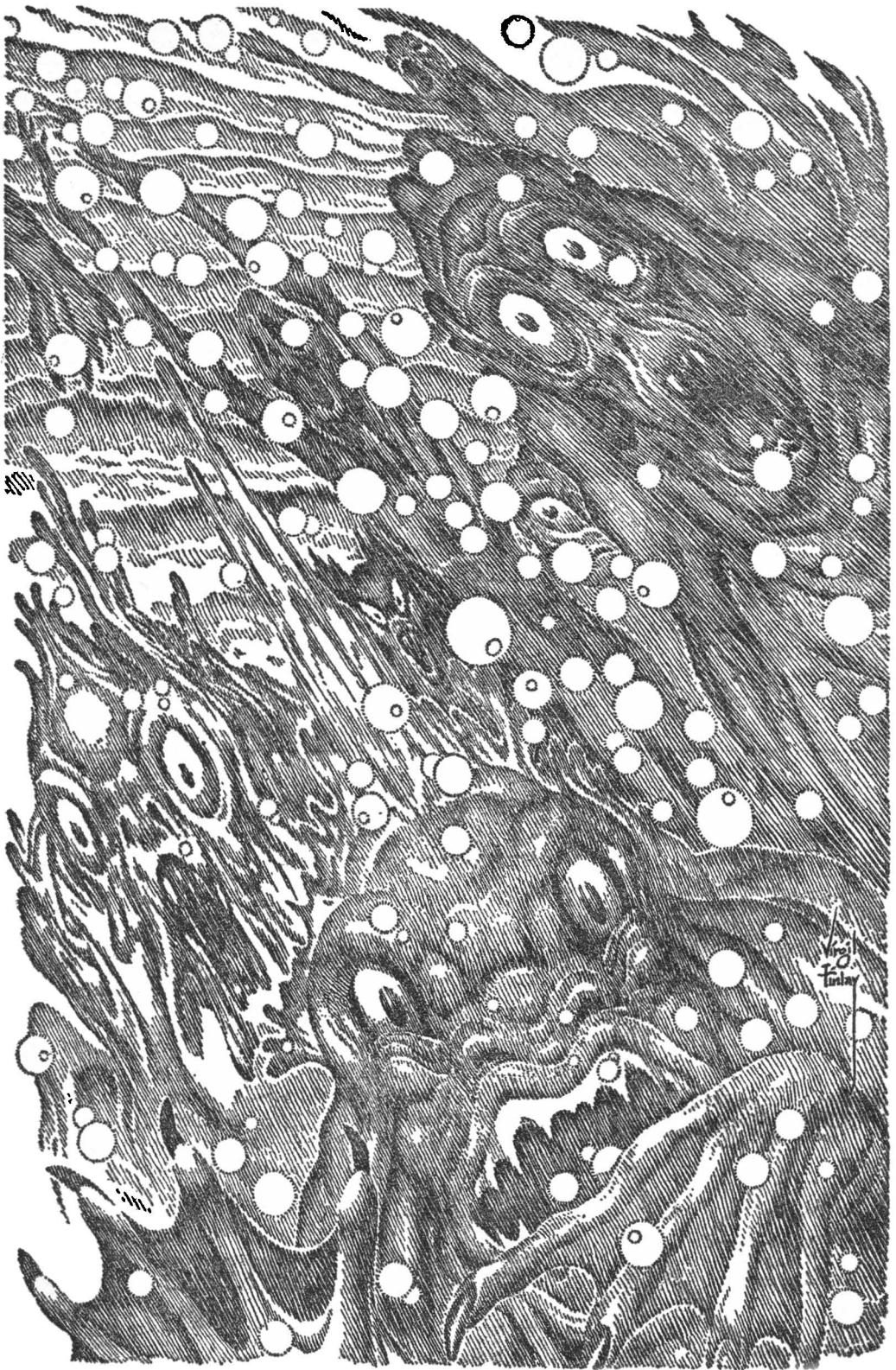
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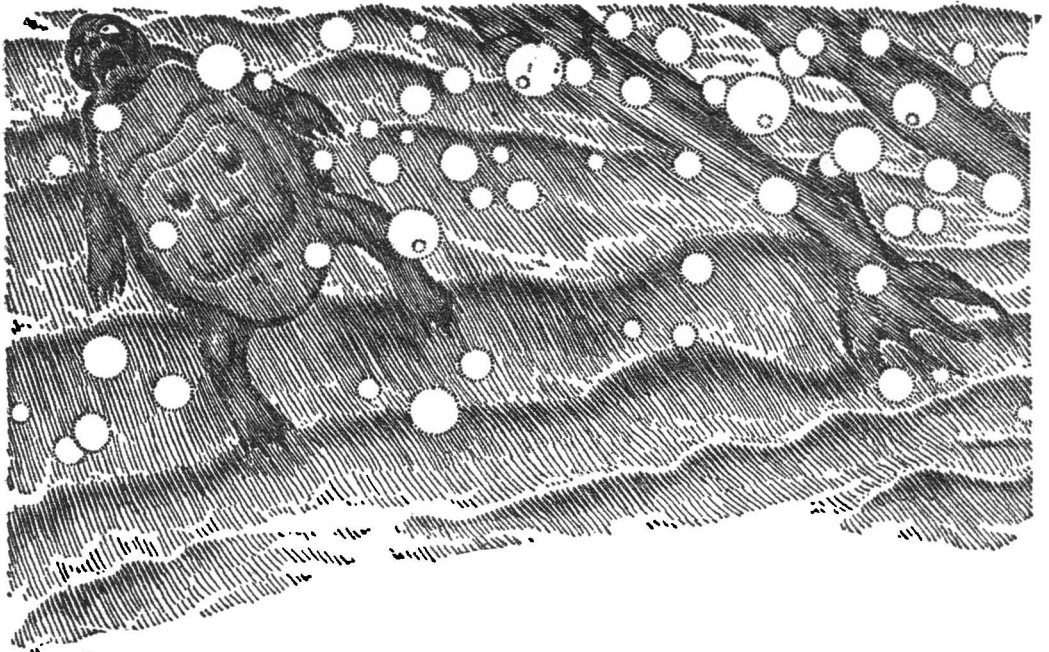
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D. McILWRAITH, Editor



Heading by Virgil Finlay



The House in the Valley

By August Derleth

I

I, JEFFERSON BATES, make this deposition now, in full knowledge that, whatever the circumstances, I have not long to live. I do so in justice to those who survive me, as well as in an attempt to clear myself of the charge of which I have been so unjustly convicted. A great, if little-known American writer in the tradition of the Gothic once wrote that "the most merciful thing in the world is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents," yet I have had ample time for intense thought and reflection, and I have achieved an order in my thoughts. I would never have thought possible only so little as a year ago.

For, of course, it was within the year that my "trouble" began. I put it so because I am not yet certain what other name to give it. If I had to set a precise day, I suppose in all fairness, it must be the day on which Brent Nicholson telephoned me in Boston to say he had discovered and rented for me the very place of isolation and natural beauty I had been seeking for the purpose of working at some paintings I had long had in mind. It lay in an almost hidden valley beside a broad stream, not far from, yet well in from the Massachusetts coast, in the vicinity of the ancient settlements of Arkham and Dunwich, which every artist of the region knows for their curious gambrel structure, so pleasing to the eye, however forbidding to the spirit.

Once more the epic struggle between the Elder Gods and the Ancient Ones was having repercussions on one of earth's seemingly most peaceful valleys.

True, I hesitated. There were always fellow artists pausing for a day in Arkham or Dunwich or Kingston, and it was precisely fellow-artists I sought to escape. But in the end, Nicholson persuaded me, and within the week I found myself at the place. It proved to be a large, ancient house—certainly of the same vintage as so many in Arkham—which had been built in a little valley which ought to have been fertile but showed no sign of recent cultivation. It rose among gaunt pines, which crowded close on the house, and along one wall ran a broad, clear brook.

Despite the attractiveness it offered the eye at a distance, up close it presented another face. For one thing, it was painted black. For another, it wore an air of forbidding formidableness. Its curtainless windows stared outward gloomily. All around it on the ground floor ran a narrow porch which had been stuffed and crammed with bundles of sacking tied with twine, half-rotted chairs, highboys, tables, and a singular variety of old-fashioned household objects, like a barricade designed either to keep someone or something inside or to prevent it from getting in. This barricade had manifestly been there a long time, for it showed the effects of exposure to several years of weather. Its reason for being was too obscure even for the agent, to whom I wrote to ask, but it did help to lend the house a most curious air of being inhabited, though there was no sign of life, and nothing, indeed, to show that anyone had lived there for a very long time.

But this was an illusion which never left me. It was plain to see that no one had been in the house, not even Nicholson or the agent, for the barricade extended across both front and back doors of the almost square structure, and I had to pull away a section of it in order to make an entry myself.

ONCE inside, the impression of habitation was all the stronger. But there was a difference—all the gloom of the black-painted exterior was reversed inside. Here everything was light and surprisingly clean, considering the period of its abandonment. Moreover, the house was fur-

nished, scantily, true, but furnished, whereas I had received the distinct impression that everything which had once been inside had been piled up around the house on the veranda outside.

The house inside was as box-like as it appeared on the outside. There were four rooms below—a bedroom, a kitchen-pantry, a dining-room, a sitting-room; and upstairs, four of exact the same dimensions—three bedrooms, and a storeroom. There were plenty of windows in all the rooms, and especially those facing north, which was gratifying, since the north light is best for painting.

I had no use for the second story; so I chose the bedroom on the northwest corner for my studio, and it was there that I put in my things, without regard for the bed, which I pushed aside. I had come, after all, to work at my paintings, and not for any social life whatever. And I had come amply supplied, with my car so laden that it took me most of the first day to unload and store my things, and to clear away a path from the back door, as I had cleared the front, so that I might have access to both north and south sides of the house with equal facility.

Once settled, with a lamp lit against the encroaching darkness, I took out Nicholson's letter and read it once more, as it were, in the proper setting, taking note again of the points he made.

"Isolation will indeed be yours. The nearest neighbors are at least a mile away. They are the Perkinses on the ridge to the south. Not far past them are the Mores. On the other side, which would make it north, are the Bowdens.

"The reason for the long-term desertion is one which ought to appeal to you. People did not want to rent or buy it simply because it had once been occupied by one of those strange, ingrown families which are common in obscure and isolated rural areas—the Bishops, of which the last surviving member, a gaunt, lanky creature named Seth, committed a murder in the house. This one fact the superstitious natives allow to deter them from use of either the house or the land, which, as you will see—if you had any use for it—is rich and fertile.

Even a murderer could be a creative artist in his way, I suppose—but Seth, I fear, was anything but that. He seems to have been somewhat crude, and killed without any good reason—a neighbor, I understand. Simply tore him apart. Seth was a very strong man. Gives me cold chills, but hardly you. The victim was a Bowden.

"There is a telephone, which I ordered connected.

"The house has its own power plant, too. So it's not as ancient as it looks. Though this was put in long after the house was originally built. It's in the cellar, I am told. It may not be working now.

"No waterworks, sorry. The well ought to be good, and you'll need some exercise to keep yourself fit—you can't keep fit sitting at an easel.

"The house looks more isolated than it is. If you get lonely, just telephone me."

The power plant, of which he had written, was not working. The lights in the house were dead. But the telephone was in working order, as I ascertained by placing a call to the nearest village, which was Aylesbury.

I was tired that first night, and went to bed early. I had brought my own bedding, of course, taking no chances on anything left for so long a time in the house, and I was soon asleep. But every instant of my initial day in the house I was aware of that vague, almost intangible conviction that the house was occupied by someone other than myself, though I knew how absurd this was for I had made a thorough tour of the house and premises soon after I had first entered it, and had found no place where anyone might be concealed.

EVERY house, as no sensitive person needs to be told, has its own individual atmospheres. It is not only the smell of wood, or of brick, old stone, paint—no, it is also a sort of residue of people who have lived there and of events which have transpired within its walls. The atmosphere of the Bishop house challenged description. There was the customary smell of age, which I expected, of dampness rising from the cellar, but there was something beyond this and of greater importance, something

which actually lent the house itself an aura of life, as if it were a sleeping animal waiting with infinite patience for something, which it knew must happen, to take place.

It was not, let me say at once, anything to prompt uneasiness. It did not seem to me in that first week to have about it any element of dread or fear, and it did not occur to me to be at all disquieted until one morning in my second week—after I had already completed two imaginative canvases, and was at work outside on a third. I was conscious that morning of being scrutinized; at first I told myself, jokingly, that of course the house was watching me, for its windows did look like blank eyes peering out of that sombre black; but presently I knew that my observer stood somewhere to the rear, and from time to time I flashed glances toward the edge of the little woods which rose southwest of the house.

At last I located the hidden watcher. I turned to face the bushes where he was concealed, and said, "Come on out; I know you're there."

At that a tall, freckle-faced young man rose up and stood looking at me with hard, dark eyes, manifestly suspicious and belligerent.

"Good morning," I said.

He nodded, without saying anything.

"If you're interested, come on up and have a look," I said.

He thawed a little and stepped out of the bushes. He was, I saw now, perhaps twenty. He was clad in jeans, and was barefooted, a lithe young fellow, well-muscled, and undoubtedly quick and alert. He walked forward a little way, coming just close enough so that he could see what I was doing, and there stopped. He favored me with a frank examination. Finally he spoke.

"Your name Bishop?"

Of course, the neighbors might understandably think that a member of the family had turned up in some remote corner of the earth and come back to claim the abandoned property. The name of Jefferson Bates would mean nothing to him. Moreover, I was curiously reluctant to tell him my name, which I could not understand. I answered

civilly enough that my name was not Bishop, that I was not a relative, that I had only rented the house for the summer and perhaps a month or two in the fall.

"My name's Perkins," he said. "Bud Perkins. From up yonder." He gestured toward the ridge to the south.

"Glad to know you."

"You been here a week," Bud continued, offering proof that my arrival had not gone unnoticed in the valley. "You're still here."

There was a note of surprise in his voice, as if the fact of my being in the Bishop house after a week was strange of itself.

"I mean," he went on, "nothing's happened to you. What with all the goin's-on in this house, it's a wonder."

"What goings-on?" I asked bluntly.

"Don't you know?" he asked, open-mouthed.

"I know about Seth Bishop."

He shook his head vigorously. "That ain't near the all of it, Mister. I wouldn't set foot in that house if I was paid for it—and paid good. Makes my spine prickle jest to be standing this near to it." He frowned darkly. "It's a place should-a been burned down long ago. What were them Bishops doing all hours of the night?"

"Looks clean," I said. "It's comfortable enough. Not even a mouse in it."

"Hah! If 'twas only mice! You wait."

With that he turned and plunged back into the woods.

I realized, of course, that many local superstitions must have arisen about the abandoned Bishop house; what more natural than that it should be haunted? Nevertheless, Bud Perkins' visit left a disagreeable impression with me. Clearly, I had been under secret observation ever since my arrival; I understood that new neighbors are always of interest to people, but I also perceived that the interest of my neighbors in this isolated spot was not of quite that nature. They expected something to happen; they were waiting for it to take place; and only the fact that nothing had as yet occurred had brought Bud Perkins within range.

That night the first untoward "incident" took place. Quite possibly Bud Perkins' oblique comments had set the stage by

preparing me for something to happen. In any case, the incident was so nebulous as to be almost negative, and there were a dozen explanations for it; it is only in the light of later events that I remember it at all. It happened perhaps two hours after midnight.

I was awakened from sleep by an unusual sound. Now, anyone sleeping in a new place grows accustomed to the sounds of the night in that region, and, once accustomed to them, accepts them in sleep; but any new sound is apt to obtrude. Just as a city-dweller spending several nights on a farm may accustom himself to the noises of chickens, birds, the wind, frogs, may be awakened by the new note of a toad trilling because it is strange to the chorus to which he has become accustomed, so I was aware of a new sound in the chorus of whippoorwills, owls, and nocturnal insects which invaded the night.

THE new sound was a subterranean one; that is, it seemed to come from far below the house, deep down under the surface of the earth. It might have been earth settling, it might have been a fissure opening and closing, it might readily have been a fugitive temblor, except that it came and went with a certain regularity, as if it were made by some very large thing moving along a colossal cavern far beneath the house. It lasted perhaps half an hour; it seemed to approach from the east and diminish in the same direction in a fairly even progression of sounds. I could not be sure, but I had the uncertain impression that the house trembled faintly under these subterranean sounds.

Perhaps it was this which impelled me on the following day to poke about in the storeroom in an effort to find out for myself what my inquisitive neighbor had meant by his questions and hints about the Bishops. What had they been doing that their neighbors thought so bad?

The storeroom, however, was less crammed than I had expected it to be, perhaps largely because so many things had been put out on the veranda. Indeed, the only unusual aspect of it that I could find was a shelf of books which had evidently

been in the process of being read when tragedy had obliterated the family.

These were of various kinds.

Perhaps chief among them were several gardening texts. They were extremely old books, and had been long in disuse, quite possibly hidden away by an earlier member of the Bishop family, and only recently discovered. I glanced into two or three of these, and found them to be completely useless for any modern gardener, since they described methods of raising and caring for plants which were unknown to me, for the most part—hellebore, mandrake, nightshade, witch hazel, and the like; and such of the pages which were given over to the more familiar vegetables were filled with bits of lore and superstition which held utterly no meaning for anyone in this modern world.

There was also one paper-covered book devoted to the lore of dreams. This did not appear to have been much read, though its condition was such for dust and lint, that it was impossible to draw any conclusions about it. It was one of those inexpensive books which were popular two or three generations ago, and its dream interpretations were the most ordinary; it was, in short, just such a book as one might expect a rather ignorant countryman to pick up.

Indeed, of them all, only one interested me. This was a most curious book indeed. It was a monumental tome, entirely copied in longhand, and bound by hand in wood. Though it very probably had no literary worth whatsoever, it could have existed in any museum as an item of curiosa. At that time I made little attempt to read it, for it seemed to be a compilation of gibberish similar to the nonsense in the dream book. It had a crudely lettered title which indicated that its ultimate source must have been some private old library—*Seth Bishop, His Book . . . Being Excerpts from the "Nekronomicon" & the "Cultes des Ghouls" & the "Pnakotic Manuscripts" & the "R'lyeh Text" Copied in His Own Hand by Seth Bishop in the Yrs. 1919 to 1923.* Underneath, in a spidery hand which did not seem likely for one known to be so uneducated, he had scrawled his signature.

In addition to these, there were several

works allied to the dream book. A copy of the notorious *Seventh Book of Moses*, a text much prized by certain oldsters in the Pennsylvania hex country—which, thanks to newspaper accounts of a recent hex murder, I knew about. A slender prayer-book in which all the prayers seemed to be mockeries, for all were directed to Asarael and Sathanus, and other dark angels.

There was nothing of any value whatsoever, apart from being simply curious items, in the entire lot. Their presence testified only to a diversity of dark interests on the part of succeeding generations of the Bishop family, for it was fairly evident that the owner and reader of the gardening books was very probably Seth's grandfather, while the owner of the dream book and the hex text was most likely a member of Seth's father's generation. Seth himself seemed interested in more obscure lore.

The works from which Seth had copied, however, seemed appreciably more erudite than I had been led to believe a man of Seth's background would be likely to consult. This puzzled me, and at the first opportunity I traveled into Aylesbury to make such inquiries as I could at a country store on the outskirts of the village, where, I reasoned, Seth might most probably have made purchases, since he had had the reputation of being a reclusive individual.

THE proprietor, who turned out to be a distant relative of Seth's on his mother's side, seemed somewhat loath to speak of Seth, but did ultimately reveal something in his reluctant answers to my persistent questions. From him, whose name was Obed Marsh, I gathered that Seth had "at first"—that is, presumably as a child and young man—been as "backward as any of that clan." In Seth's later teens, he had grown "queer," by which Marsh meant that Seth had taken to a more solitary existence; he had spoken at that time with frequency of strange and disturbing dreams he had had, of noises he had heard, of visions he believed he saw in and out of the house; but, after two or three years of this, Seth had never mentioned a word of these things again. Instead, he had locked himself up in a room—which had certainly been the storeroom, judging by

Marsh's description—and read everything he could lay his hands on, for all that he never "went past the fourth grade." Later on, he had gone into Arkham, to the library of Miskatonic University, to read more books. After that "spell," Seth had come home and lived as a solitary until the time of his outbreak—the horrible murder of Amos Bowden.

All this, certainly, added up to little save a tale of a mind ill-equipped for learning, trying desperately to assimilate knowledge, the burden of which seemed to have ultimately snapped that mind. So, at least, it appeared at this juncture of my tenure of the Bishop house.

II

THAT night events took a singular turn. But, like so many other aspects of that strange sojourn, I was not aware immediately of the full implications of what happened. Set down baldly, it seems absurd that it should have given me any cause for second thought. It was nothing more than a dream which I experienced in the course of that night. Even as a dream, it was not particularly horrifying or even frightening, rather more awesome and impressive.

I dreamed simply that I lay asleep in the Bishop house, that while I so lay a vague, indefinable, but somehow awesome and powerful cloud—like a fog or mist—took shape out of the cellar, billowed up through the floors and walls, engulfing the furniture, but not seeming to harm it or the house, taking shape, meanwhile, as a huge, amorphous creature with tentacles flowing from its monstrous head, and swaying like a cobra back and forth all the while it gave voice to a strange ululation, while from somewhere in the distance a chorus of weird instruments played unearthly music, and a human voice chanted inhuman words which, as I subsequently learned, were written thusly:

*Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'l'yeh
wgab'nagl fhtagn*

In the end, the amorphous creature billowed even farther upward and engulfed also the sleeper who was I. Thereupon it seemed to

dissolve into a long dark passageway, down which came at a frantically eager lope a human being who was certainly similar in appearance to descriptions I had had of the late Seth Bishop. This being grew in size, too, looming almost as large as the amorphous fog, and vanished even as it had done, coming straight at the sleeping figure in the bed in that house in the valley.

Now, on the face of it, this dream was meaningless. It was a nightmare, beyond question; but it lacked any capacity for fear. I seemed to be aware that something of tremendous importance was happening to me or about to happen to me, but, not understanding it, I could not fear it; moreover, the amorphous creature, the chanting voice, the ululations, and the strange music all lent a ritual impressiveness to the dream.

ON AWAKENING in the morning, however, I found it readily possible to recall the dream, and I was obsessed with a persistent conviction that all its aspects were not really strange to me. Somewhere I had heard or seen the written equivalent of that fantastic chanting, and, so thinking, I found myself once more in the storeroom, poring over that incredible book in Seth Bishop's handwriting; reading here and there and discovering with wonder that the text concerned an ancient series of beliefs in Elder Gods and Ancient Ones and a conflict between them, between the Elder Gods and such creatures as Hastur and Ygg-Sothoth and Cthulhu. This, at last, struck a familiar note, and, seeking farther, I discovered what was certainly the chant I had heard—with, moreover, its translation in Seth Bishop's hand, which read:

In his house at R'l'yeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.

The one disturbing factor in this discovery was that I had most certainly not seen the line of the chant on occasion of my examination of the room. I might have seen the name "Cthulhu," but nothing more in that cursory glance at the Bishop manuscript. How then could I have duplicated a fact which was not part of my conscious or subconscious store of knowledge? It is not commonly believed that the mind can dupli-

cate in a dream state or any other any experience which is utterly alien to it. Yet I had done so.

What was more, as I read on in that often shocking text of queer survivals and hellish cults, I found that hints in vague descriptive passages described just such a being as I had seen in my dream—not of fog or mist, but of solid matter, which was a second occurrence of the duplication of something utterly alien to my experience.

I had, of course, heard of psychic residue—residual forces left behind at the scene of any event, be it major tragedy or any powerful emotional experience common to mankind—love, hate, fear—and it was possible that something of this sort had brought about my dream, as were it the atmosphere of the house itself invading and possessing me while I slept, which I did not regard as completely impossible, since certainly it was strange and the events which had taken place there were experiences of impressive power.

Now, however, though it was noon and the demands of my body for food were great, it seemed to me that the next step in pursuit of my dream lay in the cellar. So to it I made my way at once, and there, after a most exhaustive search, which included the moving away from the walls of tiers of shelves, some still with ancient jars of preserved fruit and vegetables on them, I discovered a hidden passageway which led out of the cellar into a cave-like tunnel, down part of which I walked. I did not go far, before the dampness of the earth underfoot, and the wavering of my light, forced me to return—but not before I had seen the disquieting whiteness of scattered bones, embedded in that earth.

When I returned to that subterranean passageway after replenishing my flashlight, I did not quit it before ascertaining beyond reasonable doubt that the bones were those of animals—for, clearly, there had been more than one animal. What was disturbing about their discovery was not their being there, but the puzzling question of how they had got there.

But I did not at the time give this much thought. I was interested in pushing deeper into that tunnel, and I did so, going as far

in the direction, I thought, of the seacoast, as I could before my passage was blocked by a fall of earth. When at last I left the tunnel it was late in the afternoon, and I was famished; but I was reasonably certain of two things—the tunnel was not a natural cave, at least at this end; it was clearly the work of human hands; and it had been used for some dark purpose, the nature of which I could not know.

Now for some reason, these discoveries filled me with excitement. Had I been fully in control of myself, I have no doubt that I would have realized that this in itself was unlike me, but at the moment I was faced and challenged with a mystery which seemed to me insistently of the greatest importance, and I was determined to discover all I could of this apparently hitherto unknown part of the Bishop property. This I could not very well do until another day, and in order to find my way through the cave, I would need implements I had not yet found on the property.

ANOTHER trip to Aylesbury was unavoidable. I went at once to the store of Obed Marsh and asked for a pick and shovels. For some reason, this request seemed to upset the old man beyond all reason. He paled and hesitated to wait on me.

"You aimin' to dig, Mr. Bates?"

I nodded.

"'Taint none o' my business, but maybe you'd like to know that was what Seth took to doin' for a spell. Wore out three, four shovels, diggin'." He leaned forward, his intense eyes glittering. "And the queerest thing about it was nobody could find out where he was diggin'—never see a shovel-ful of dirt anywhere."

I was somewhat taken aback by this information, but I did not hesitate. "That soil there around the house looks rich and fertile," I said.

He seemed relieved. "Well, if you're aimin' to garden, that's a different thing."

One other purchase I made puzzled him. I needed a pair of rubber boots to shield my shoes from the muck and mud of many parts of the tunnel floor, where, doubtless, the nearness of the brook outside caused

seepage. But Marsh said nothing about this. As I turned to go, he spoke again of Seth.

"Ain't heard tell anything more, have you, Mr. Bates?"

"People hereabouts don't talk much."

"They ain't all Marshes," he replied, with a furtive grin. "There's some that do say Seth was more Marsh than Bishop. The Bishops believed in hexes and such-like. But never the Marshes."

With this cryptic announcement ringing in my ears, I took my leave. Prepared now for the tunnel, I could hardly wait for the morrow to come, so that I could return once more to that subterranean place and carry on my explorations into a mystery which must certainly have been related to the entire legendry surrounding the Bishop family.

Events were now moving forward at an increasing tempo. That night two more occurrences were recorded.

The first came to my attention just past dawn, when I caught sight of Bud Perkins lurking about outside the house. I was needlessly annoyed, perhaps, since I was making ready to descend into the cellar; just the same, I wanted to know what he was after; so I opened the door and stepped out into the yard to confront him.

"What are you looking for, Bud?" I asked.

"Lost a sheep," he said laconically.

"I haven't seen it."

"It come this way," he answered.

"Well, you're welcome to look."

"Sure hate to think this's all settin' up to start again," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"If you don't know, 'twon't do any good to say. If you do, it's better I don't say a thing, anyway. So I'm not sayin'."

This mystifying conversation baffled me. At the same time, Bud Perkins' obvious suspicion that somehow his sheep had come to my hands was irritating. I stepped back and threw open the door.

"Look in the house if you like."

But, at this, his eyes opened wide in positive horror. "Me set foot in there?" he cried. "Not for my life." He added, "Why, I'm the only one's got gumption enough to come this close to this place. But I wouldn't step

in there for all the money you could pay me. Not me."

"It's perfectly safe," I said, unable to conceal a smile at his fright.

"Maybe you think so. We know better. We know what's waitin' there behind them black walls, waitin' and waitin' for somebody to come. And now you've come. And now things are startin' up again, jest like before."

WITH that, he turned and ran, vanishing as on his previous visit into the woods. When I had satisfied myself that he was not coming back, I turned and re-entered the house. And there I made a discovery which ought to have been alarming, but which seemed to me then only vaguely unusual, since I must clearly have been in a lethargic state, not yet fully awake. The new boots I had bought only yesterday for my use had been used; they were caked with mud. Yet I knew indisputably that they had been clean and unused yesterday.

At sight of them, a growing conviction took form in my mind. Without putting on the boots, I descended into the cellar, opened the wall into the tunnel, and walked rapidly to the area of the barrier. Perhaps I had a premonitory certainty of what I would find, for I found it—the cave-in of earth had been dug partially away, sufficiently for a man to squeeze through. And the tracks in the wet earth were clearly made by the new boots I had bought, for the stamped trademark in the sole of those boots was plainly to be seen in the glow of my flashlight.

I was thus faced with one of two alternatives—either someone had used my boots in the night to effect this change in the tunnel, or I myself had walked in my sleep to bring it about. And I could not much doubt which it had been—for, despite my eagerness and anticipation, I was fatigued in a way which would have been accounted for only by my having spent a considerable portion of my sleeping hours digging away at this blockade in the passageway.

I cannot escape the conviction now that even then I knew what I should find when I pursued my way down that tunnel—the ancient altar-like structures in the subter-

ranean caverns into which the tunnels opened, the evidence of further sacrifice—not alone animals this time, but undeniably human bones, and at the end, the vast cavern opening downward and the faint glimmering far below of waters, surging powerfully in and out through some opening far down, the Atlantic Ocean itself, beyond doubt, which had made its way to this place by means of subsurface caverns on the coast. And I must have had a premonition, too, of what else I should see there at the edge of that final descent into the aquatic abyss—the tufts of wool, the single hoof with its portion of torn and broken leg—all that remained of a sheep, fresh as the night just past!

I turned and fled, badly shaken, unwilling to guess how the sheep had got there—Bud Perkins' animal, I felt certain. And had it, too, been brought there for the same purpose as the creatures whose remains I had seen before those dark and broken altars in the lesser caverns between this place of constantly stirring waters and the house I had left not long ago?

I did not tarry in the house long, either, but made my way into Aylesbury once again, apparently aimlessly, but, as I know now, pressed by my need to know yet more of what legend and lore had accumulated about the Bishop house. But at Aylesbury I experienced for the first time the full force of public disapproval, for people on the street averted their eyes from me and turned their backs to me. One young man to whom I spoke hurried past me as if I had not spoken at all.

Even Obed Marsh had changed in his attitude. He was nothing loath to take my money, but was surly in his manner and obviously wished that I would leave his store as soon as possible. But here I made it clear I would not move until my questions had been answered.

What had I done, I wanted to know, that people should shun me as they did?

"It's that house," he said finally.

"I'm not the house," I retorted, dissatisfied.

"There's talk," he said then.

"Talk? What kind of talk?"

"About you and Bud Perkins' sheep.

About the way things happened when Seth Bishop was alive." Then he leaned forward with a dark, beetling face, and whispered harshly, "There's them that say Seth's come back."

"Seth Bishop's dead and buried this long time."

He nodded. "Aye, part of him is. But part of him maybe ain't. I'll tell you, best thing in the world is for you to clear out now. You got time yet."

I reminded him coldly that I had leased the Bishop place and had paid the rent for at least four months, with an option to complete a year there. He clammed up at once and would say nothing further about my tenure. I pressed him, nevertheless, for details about Seth Bishop's life, but all he would or could tell me was clearly the summation of vague, uncertain hints and dark suspicions which had been common in the vicinity, so that I left him at last not with any picture of Seth Bishop as a man to be feared, but rather of him as a man to be pitied, kept at bay in his black-walled house in the valley like an animal by his neighbors on the ridge and the people of Aylesbury, who were at one in hating and fearing him, without any but the most circumstantial evidence that he had committed any crime against the safety or peace of the environs.

What, in fact, had Seth Bishop knowingly done—apart from the final crime of which he had been proved guilty? He had led a recluse's existence, abandoning even the strange garden of his ancestors, turning his back, certainly, on what was reputed to be his grandfather's and his father's sinister interest in wizardry and the lore of the occult, instead of which he had interested himself obsessively in a far more ancient lore which appeared to me to be fully as ridiculous as that of witchcraft. One might expect such interests not to falter in such isolated areas, and, in particular, among families so ingrown as the Bishop family was.

Perhaps somewhere in the old books of his forebears Seth had found certain obscure references which had sent him to the library at Miskatonic, where, in his consuming interest, he had undertaken the mon-

umental task of copying great portions of books, which, presumably, he could not get permission to withdraw from the library.

This lore which was his primary concern was, in fact, a distortion of ancient Christian legend; reduced to its most simple terms, it was a record of the cosmic struggle between forces of good and forces of evil.

HOWEVER difficult it was to summarize, it would appear that the first inhabitants of outer space were great beings, not in human shape, who were called the Elder Gods and lived on Betelgeuse, at a remote time. Against these certain elemental Ancient Ones, also called the Great Old Ones, had rebelled—Azathoth, Yog-Sothoth, the amphibious Cthulhu, the bat-like Hastur the Unspeakable, Lloigor, Zhar, Ithaqua, the wind-walker, and the earth beings, Nyarlathotep and Shub-Niggurath; but, their rebellion failing, they were cast out and banished by the Elder Gods—locked away on far planets and stars under the seal of the Elder Gods—Cthulhu deep under the sea in the place known as R'lyeh, Hastur on a black star near Aldebaran in the Hyades, Ithaqua in the icy Arctic barrens, still others in a place known as Kadath in the Cold Waste, which existed in time and space contemporaneously with a portion of Asia.

Since this initial rebellion—which was basically in a legend pattern paralleling the rebellion of Satan and his followers against the arch-angels of Heaven—the Great Old Ones had continually sought to regain their power to war against the Elder Gods, and there have grown up on earth and other planets certain cultists and followers—like the Abominable Snowmen, the Dholes, the Deep Ones, and many others, all dedicated to serve the Ancient Ones, and often succeeding in removing the Elder Seal to free the forces of ancient evil, which had then to be put down again either by direct intervention of the Elder Gods or by the alert watchfulness of human beings armed against them.

This was the sum total of what Seth Bishop had copied from very old and very rare books, much of it repetitive, and all surely the wildest kind of fantasy. True, there were certain disturbing newspaper clip-

pings appended to the manuscript—of what happened at Devil Reef off Innsmouth in 1928, of a supposed sea serpent in Rick's Lake, Wisconsin, of a terrible occurrence at nearby Dunwich, and another in the wilds of Vermont, but these, beyond question, I felt to be coincidental accounts which happened to strike a parallel chord. And, while it was also true that there was as yet no explanation for the subterranean passage leading toward the coast, I felt comfortably certain that it was the work of some distant forebear of Seth Bishop's; and only appropriated for his own use at a considerably later date.

All that emerged from this was the portrait of an ignorant man striving to improve himself in the directions which appealed to him. Gullible and superstitious he may have been, and at the end, perhaps deranged—but evil, surely not.

III

IT WAS at about this time that I became aware of a most curious fancy.

It seemed to me that there was someone else in the house in the valley, an alien human being who had no business there, but intruded from outside. Though his occupation seemed to be to paint pictures, I was reasonably certain that he had come to spy. I caught only the most fugitive glimpses of him—on occasion a reflection in a mirror or in a windowpane when I was near, but I saw in the north room of the ground floor the evidence of his work—one unfinished canvas on his easel, and several that had been completed.

I did not have the time to look for him, for the One below commanded me, and each night I descended with food, not for him, for he devoured what no mortal man knew, but for those of the deeps who accompanied him, and came swimming up out of that cavernous pit, and were to my eyes like a travesty born of men and batrachian things, with webbed hands and feet, and gilled, and wide, frog-like mouths, and great searing eyes made to see in the darkest recesses of the vast seas about the place where Hé lay sleeping, waiting to rise and come forth once more and take posses-

sion again of his kingdom, which was on Earth and in the space and time all about this planet, where once he had ruled above all others until the casting-down.

Perhaps this was the result of my coming upon the old diary, which now I settled down to read, as were it a book I had treasured since childhood. I found it by accident in the cellar, mildewed and showing the effects of having been long lost—a fortunate thing, for there were in it things no outsider should see.

The early pages were gone, having been torn out and burned in an access of fear, before any self-confidence had come. But all the others were still there, and plain to be read in their spidery script. . . .

"Jun. 8, Went to the meeting-place at eight, dragging the calf from Mores. Counted forty-two of the Deep Ones. Also one other, not of them, which was like an octopus, but was not. Remained there three hours."

That was the first entry I saw. Thereafter the entries were similar—of trips underground to the water pits, of meetings with the Deep Ones and occasionally other water beings. In September of that year, a catastrophe . . .

"Sept. 21, The pits crowded. Learned something terrible had happened at Devil Reef. One of the old fools at Innsmouth gave things away, and the Federal men came with submarines and boats to blast Devil Reef and the waterfront at Innsmouth. The Marsh crowd got away, most of them. Many Deep Ones killed. Depth charges did not reach R'lyeh where He lies dreaming. . . .

"Sept. 22, More reports from Innsmouth. 371 Deep Ones killed. Many taken from Innsmouth, all those who were given away by the Marsh 'look'. One of them said what was left of the Marsh clan had fled to Ponape. Three of the Deep Ones here tonight from that place; they say they remember how old Captain Marsh came there, and what a compact he made with them, and how he took one of them and married her, and had children who were born of man and the Deep Ones, tainting the whole Marsh clan forever, and how ever since then the Marsh ships fared well, and all their sea enterprises succeeded beyond their

wildest dreams; they grew rich and powerful, the wealthiest of all the families at Innsmouth, to which they took their clan to live by day in the houses and by night slipping away to be with the other Deep Ones off the reef. The Marsh houses in Innsmouth were burned. So the Federal men knew. But the Marshes will be back, say the Deep Ones, and all will begin again toward that day when the Great Old One below the sea will rise once more.

"Sept. 23, Destruction terrible at Innsmouth.

"Sept. 24, It will be years before the Innsmouth places will be ready again. They will wait till the Marshes come back."

They might say what they liked of Seth Bishop. No fool, he. This was the record of a self-educated man. All that work at Miskatonic had not been in vain. He alone of all who lived in the Aylesbury region knew what lay hidden in the Atlantic depths off the coast; none other even suspected. . . .

This was the direction of my thoughts, the preoccupation of my days at the Bishop house, I thought thusly, I lived so. And by night?

Once darkness had come to the house, I was more keenly aware than ever that something impended. But somehow memory rejects what must have happened. Could it be otherwise? I knew why that furniture had been moved out on the veranda—because the Deep Ones had begun to come back along the passage, had come up into the house. They were amphibious. They had literally crowded the furniture out and Seth had never taken it back.

EACH time I left the house to go any distance, I seemed to see it once again in its proper perspective, which was no longer possible while I occupied it. The attitude of my neighbors was now quite threatening. Not only Bud Perkins came to look at the house, but some of the Bowdens and the Mores, and certain others from Aylesbury. I let them all in, without comment—those who would come. Bud would not, nor would any of the Bowdens. But the others searched in vain for what they expected to find and did not.

And what was it they expected to find? Certainly not the cows, the chickens, the pigs and sheep they said had been taken. What use would I have for them? I showed them how frugally I lived, and they looked at the paintings. But one and all went away sullenly, shaking their heads, unconvinced.

Could I do more? I knew they shunned and hated me, and kept their distance from the house.

But they disturbed and troubled me, nevertheless. There were mornings when I woke near to noon, and woke exhausted, as if I had not slept at all. Most troubling of all, often I found myself dressed, whereas I knew I had gone to bed undressed, and I found blood spattered on my clothing and covering my hands.

I was afraid to go back into that subterranean passage by day, but I forced myself to do so one day, just the same. I went down with my flashlight, and I examined the floor of that tunnel with care. Wherever the earth was soft, I saw the marks of many feet, passing back and forth. Most of them were human footprints, but there were disquieting others—naked feet with blurred toes, as if they were webbed! I confess I turned the light away from them, shuddering.

What I saw at the edge of the water pits sent me fleeing back along the passage. Something had climbed out of those watery depths—the marks were plain to see and understand, and what had taken place there was not difficult to imagine, for all the evidence scattered there in the mute remains which lay gleaming whitely under the glow of my flashlight.

I knew it could not be long before the neighbors allowed their resentment to boil over. There was no peace capable of achievement in that house, nor, indeed, in the valley. Old hatreds, old enmities persisted, and thrived in that place. I soon lost all sense of time; I existed in another world, literally, for the house in the valley was surely the focal point for entry into another realm of being.

I DO not know how long I had been in the house—perhaps six weeks—perhaps two months—when one day the sheriff of

the county, accompanied by two of his deputies, came grim-faced to the house with a warrant for my arrest. He explained that he did not wish to use the warrant, but that nevertheless, he wished to question me, and if I did not accompany him and his men willingly, he would have no alternative but to use the warrant, which, he confided, was based on a serious charge, the nature of which seemed to him grossly exaggerated and entirely unmotivated.

I went along willingly enough—all the way to Arkham, in which ancient, gambrel-roofed town I felt strangely at ease and completely unafraid of what was to come. The sheriff was an amiable man who had been driven to this deed, I had not the slightest doubt, by my neighbors. He was almost apologetic, now that I found myself seated opposite him in his office, with a stenographer to take down notes.

He began by wanting to know whether I had been away from the house night before last.

"Not to my knowledge," I answered.

"You could hardly leave your house and not know it."

"If I walked in my sleep, I could."

"Are you in the habit of walking in your sleep?"

"I wasn't before coming here. Since then, I don't know."

He asked meaningless questions, always skirting the central point of his mission. But this emerged presently. A human being had been seen in charge of a company of some kind of animals, leading the pack to an attack on a herd of cattle in night pasture. All but two of the cattle had been literally torn to pieces. The cattle had belonged to young Sereno More, and it was he who had made the charge against me, an act in which he was abetted by Bud Perkins, who was even more insistent than Sereno.

Now that he had put the charge into words, it seemed more ridiculous than ever. He himself apparently felt so, for he became more than ever apologetic. I myself could hardly forbear laughing. What motive could I have for so mad an act? And what "animals" could I have led? I owned none, not even a dog or cat.

Nevertheless, the sheriff was politely persistent. How had I come by the scratches visible on my arms?

I seemed to be aware of them for the first time and gazed at them thoughtfully.

Had I been picking berries?

I had, and said so. But I added also that I could not recall having been scratched.

The sheriff seemed relieved at this. He confided that the scene of the attack on the cattle was bordered on one side by a hedge of blackberry bushes, the coincidence of my bearing scratches was bound to be noticed, and he could not ignore it. Nevertheless, he appeared to be satisfied, and, being satisfied that I was no more than I pretended to be, he became somewhat more loquacious; thus I learned that once before a similar event had occurred, with the charge that time being leveled at Seth Bishop, but, like this, it had come to nothing, the Bishop house had been searched, nothing had been found, and the attack was so baseless and unmotivated that no one could be brought to trial on the suspicions, however dark, of the neighbors.

I assured him that I was perfectly willing that my house be searched, and he grinned at this, and told me in all friendliness that it had been searched from roof to cellar while I was in his company, and once again nothing had been found.

Yet, when I returned to the house in the valley, I was uneasy and troubled. I tried to keep awake and wait upon events, but this was not to be. I fell asleep, not in the bedroom, but in the storeroom, poring over that strange and terrible book in Seth Bishop's hand.

That night I dreamed again, for the first time since my initial dream.

And once again, I dreamed of a vast, amorphous being, which rose out of the water pit in the cavern beyond the passage under the house; but this time it was no misty emanation, this time it was horribly, shockingly real, built of flesh that seemed to have been created out of ancient rock, a vast mountain of matter surmounted by a neckless head, from the lower edges of which great tentacles writhed and curled, reaching out to singular lengths; this came rising out of the waters, while all around

it flowed the Deep Ones in an ecstasy of adoration and subservience, and once again, as before, the weirdly beautiful music which had accompanied it rose, and a thousand batrachian throats called harshly "*Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn!*" in accents of worship.

And once again came the sound of great footfalls below the house, in the bowels of the earth. . . .

At this juncture I woke, and to my terror, heard still the subterranean footfalls, and felt the shuddering of the house and the earth in the valley, and heard distantly the incredible music fading away into the depths below the house. In my terror, I ran and burst from the house, running blindly to get away, only to face into still another danger.

Bud Perkins stood there, his rifle aimed at me.

"Where you think you're goin'?" he demanded.

I stopped running, not knowing what to say. Behind me, the house was silent.

"Nowhere," I said finally. Then, my curiosity overcoming my dislike of this gaunt neighbor, I asked, "Did you hear anything, Bud?"

"We all been hearin' it, night after night. Now we're guardin' our stock. You might as well know it. We don't aim to shoot, but if we have to, we'll do it."

"It's not my doing," I said.

"'Tain't nobody else's," he answered laconically.

I could feel his animosity.

"That's the way it was when Seth Bishop was here. We ain't sure he's not still here."

I felt a curious coldness come over me at his words, and at that instant, the house behind me, for all its looming terrors, seemed more inviting than the darkness outside, where Bud and his neighbors stood vigil with weapons as lethal as anything I might find within those black walls. Perhaps Seth Bishop, too, had met this kind of hatred; perhaps the furniture had never been moved back into the house because it made a barrier against bullets.

I turned and went back into the house without a further word.

Inside, all was now quiet. There was not a sound anywhere. I had previously thought

it somewhat unusual that not a sign of mouse or rat had existed in the abandoned house, knowing how quickly these small animals take over a house; now I would have welcomed the sound of their scampering to and fro or gnawing. But there was nothing, only a deathly, pregnant stillness, as if the house itself knew it was ringed around with grim, determined men armed against a horror they could not know.

It was late when at last I slept that night.

IV

MY SENSE of time was not effective in those weeks, as I have already set down. If my memory now serves me rightly, there was a lull of almost a month after that night. I discovered that, gradually, the guards had been withdrawn; only Bud Perkins remained, and he stayed grimly night after night.

It must have been at least five weeks later when I woke from sleep one night and found myself in the passage below the house, walking toward the cellar, away from the yawning chasm at the far end. What had awakened me was a sound to which I was unaccustomed—a screaming which could have come only from a human voice, far behind me. I listened in cold horror, and yet somewhat lethargically, while the screams of fright rose and fell, and were cut off terribly at last. Then I stood for a long time in that place, unable to move forward or back, waiting for a resumption of that frightening sound. But it did not come again, and at last I made my way back to my room and fell exhausted on my bed.

I woke that next morning with a premonition of what was to come.

And in mid-morning, it came. A sullen, hateful mob of men and women, most of them armed. Fortunately, they were in charge of a deputy-sheriff, who kept them in a semblance of order. Though they had no search warrant, they demanded the right to search the house. In the face of their mood, it would have been folly to deny them; so I made no attempt to do so. I stepped outside and left the door stand open for them. They surged into the house, and I could hear them going through room after

room, upstairs and down, moving and throwing things about. I made no protest, for I was stoutly guarded by three men, one of whom was Obed Marsh, the storekeeper from Aylesbury.

It was to him I finally addressed myself in as calm a voice as I could muster. "May I ask what this is all about?"

"You sayin' you don't know?" he asked scornfully.

"I don't."

"Jared More's boy disappeared last night. Walkin' home from a school party up the road a piece. He had to come by here."

There was nothing I could say. It was patent that they believed the boy had vanished into this house. However much I wanted to protest, I could not rid my thoughts of the memory of that terrible screaming I had heard in the tunnel. I did not know who had screamed, and I knew now that I did not want to learn. I felt reasonably sure that they would not find the entrance to the tunnel, for it was artfully concealed behind shelving in that small cellar space, but from that moment forward I stood in an agony of suspense, for I had little doubt about what would happen to me if by some chance anything belonging to the missing boy should be found on the premises.

But again a merciful Providence intervened to prevent any discovery—if there were one to be made; I dared to hope that my own fears were groundless. In truth, I did not know, but horrible doubts were now beginning to assail me. How came I in the tunnel? And whence? When I had awakened, I had been on the way back from the water's edge. What had I done there—and *had I left anything behind?*

By twos and threes, the mob came out of the house again, empty-handed. They were no less sullen, no less angry—but they were somewhat dubious and bewildered. If they had expected to find anything, they were sharply disappointed. If the missing boy had not been taken to the Bishop house, they could not imagine where he might have gone.

Urged by the deputy-sheriff, who had given them their way, they now drew back from the house and began to disperse, all

but Bud Perkins and a handful of equally grim men, who remained on guard.

Then for days I was aware of the oppressive hatred which was directed toward the Bishop house and its lone occupant.

Thereafter came an interval of comparative quiet.

And then that final catastrophic night!

IT BEGAN with faint intimations of something stirring below. I suppose I was subconsciously aware of movement even before I was conscious of it. At the time I was reading in that hellish manuscript book of Seth Bishop's—a page devoted to the minions of Great Cthulhu, the Deep Ones who devoured sacrifice of warm-blooded animals, being themselves cold-blooded, and waxing fat and strong on what would seem a kind of pagan cannibalism; I was reading this, I say, when without warning I became conscious of the stirrings below, as if the very earth were becoming animated, trembling faintly, rhythmically, and there began immediately thereafter a faint, far-away music, exactly similar to that which I had heard in my first dream in that house, rising from instruments unknown to human hands, but resembling a fluting or piping sound heard in chorus, and accompanied once more by an occasional ululation which came from the throat of some living entity.

I cannot adequately describe the effect which this had on me. At the moment, engrossed as I was in an account clearly related to the events of the past weeks, I was, as it were, conditioned to such an occurrence, but my state of mind was one of nothing short of exaltation, and I was filled with a compelling urgency to rise and serve Him who lay dreaming far below. Almost as in a dream, I put out the light in the storeroom, and slipped out in darkness, possessed by caution against the enemies who waited beyond the walls.

As yet, the music was too faint to be heard outside the house. I had no way of knowing how long it would remain so faint; so I made haste to do that which was expected of me before the enemy could be warned that the dwellers in the watery chasm below were once again rising toward

the house in the valley. But it was not to the cellar that I moved. As if by pre-ordained plan, I slipped out the back door of the house and made my way stealthily in the darkness to the protecting shrubbery and trees.

There I began to make slow but steady progress forward. Somewhere up ahead Bud Perkins stood on guard. . . .

OF WHAT happened after that, I cannot be sure.

The rest was nightmare, certainly. Before I reached Bud Perkins, two shots rang out. That was his signal to the others to come. I was less than a foot away from him in the darkness, and his shots startled me out of my wits. He, too, had heard the sounds from below, for now I could hear them outside in this darkness as well.

So much I remember with reasonable clarity.

It was what happened after that that baffles me even now. Certainly the mob came, and if the men from the sheriff's office had not been waiting, too, I would not now be alive to make this deposition. I remember the screaming, furious mob; I remember that they set fire to the house. I had been back there, I had run out, escaping the flames. From where I looked back, I saw not only the flames, but that other sight—those shrilly crying Deep Ones, falling victim to flame and terror, and at the last that gigantic being which reared up out of the flames flailing its tentacles, before it dropped defiantly back down, compacting into a great sinuous column of flesh, and vanished without trace! It was then that someone in the mob threw dynamite into the flaming house. But even before the echo of the blast had died away, I heard, as did all the others encircling all that remained of the Bishop house, that chanting voice which cried, "*Pb'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgab'nagl fhtagn!*"—announcing to all the world that Great Cthulhu still lay dreaming in his subaqueous haven of R'lyeh!

They said of me that I was crouched beside the torn remains of Bud Perkins, and they intimated hideous things. Yet they must have seen, even as I saw, what writhed

in that flaming ruin, though they deny that there was anything at all there but myself. What they say I was doing is too horrible to repeat. It is the fiction of their diseased, hate-filled brains, for surely they cannot deny the evidence of their own senses. They witnessed against me in court, and sealed my doom.

Surely they must understand that it was not I who did all the things they say I did! Surely they must know that it was the life-force of Seth Bishop, which invaded and took possession of me, which again restored that unholy link to those creatures of the deeps, bringing them their food, as in the days when Seth Bishop had an existence in a body of his own and served them, even as the Deep Ones and those countless others

scattered over the face of the earth, Seth Bishop who did what they say I did to Bud Perkins' sheep and Jared More's boy and all those missing animals and finally to Bud Perkins himself, for all that he made them believe it was I, for I could not have done such things, it was Seth Bishop come back from hell to serve again those hideous beings who came to his watery pit from the depths of the sea, Seth Bishop, who had discovered their existence and summoned them to do his bidding and who lived to serve them in his own time and in mine, and who may still lurk deep in earth below that place where the house stood in the valley, waiting for another vessel to inhabit and so serve them in time to come, forever.
