

H. P. Lovecraft

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Deaf, Dumb, and Blind

A little after noon on the twenty-eighth day of June, 1924, Dr. Morehouse stopped his machine before the Tanner place and four men alighted. The stone building, in perfect repair and freshness, stood near the road, and but for the swamp in the rear it would have possessed no trace of dark suggestion. The spotless white doorway was visible across a trim lawn for some distance down the road; and as the doctor's party approached, it could be seen that the heavy portal yawned wide open. Only the screen door was closed. The proximity of the house had imposed a kind of nervous silence on the four men, for what lurked therein could only be imagined with vague terror. This terror underwent a marked abatement when the explorers heard distinctly the sound of Richard Blake's typewriter.

Less than an hour before, a grown man had fled from that house, hatless, coatless, and screaming, to fall upon the doorstep of his nearest neighbor, half a mile away, babbling incoherently of "house", "dark", "swamp", and "room". Dr. Morehouse had needed no further spur to excited action when told that a slaving, maddened creature had burst out of the old Tanner home by the edge of the swamp. He had known that something would happen when the two men had taken the accursed stone house—the man who had fled; and his master, Richard Blake, the author-poet from Boston, the genius who had gone into the war with every nerve and sense alert and had come out as he was now; still debonair though half a paralytic, still walking with song among the sights and sounds of living fantasy though shut forever from the physical world, deaf, dumb, and blind!

Blake had reveled in the weird traditions and shuddering hints about the house and its former tenants. Such eldritch lore was an imaginative asset from whose enjoyment his physical state might not bar him. He had smiled at the prognostications of the superstitious natives. Now, with his sole companion fled in a mad ecstasy of panic fright, and himself left helpless with whatever had caused that fright, Blake might have less occasion to revel and smile! This, at least, was Dr. Morehouse's reflection as he had faced the problem of the fugitive and called on the puzzled cottager to help him track the matter down. The Morehouses were an old Fenham family, and the doctor's grandfather had been one of those who burned the hermit Simeon Tanner's body in 1819. Not even at this distance could the trained physician escape a spinal tingle at what was recorded of that burning—at the naive inferences drawn by ignorant countrymen from a slight and meaningless conformation of the deceased. That tingle he knew to be foolish, for trifling bony protuberances on the fore part of the skull are of no significance, and often observable in bald-headed men.

Among the four men who ultimately set resolute faces toward that abhorrent house in the doctor's care, there occurred a singularly awed exchange of vague legends and half-furtive scraps of gossip handed down from curious grandmothers—legends and hints seldom repeated and almost never systematically compared. They extended as far back as 1692, when a Tanner

had perished on Gallows Hill in Salem after a witchcraft trial, but did not grow intimate till the time the house was built—1747, though the ell was more recent. Not even then were the tales very numerous, for queer though the Tanners all were, it was only the last of them, old Simeon, whom people desperately feared. He added to what he had inherited—added horribly, everyone whispered—and bricked up the windows of the southeast room, whose east wall gave on the swamp. That was his study and library, and it had a door of double thickness with braces. It had been chopped through with axes that terrible winter night in 1819 when the stinking smoke had poured from the chimney and they found Tanner's body in there—with that expression on its face. It was because of that expression—not because of the two bony protuberances beneath the bushy white hair—that they had burned the body and the books and manuscripts it had had in that room. However, the short distance to the Tanner place was covered before much important historical matter could be correlated.

As the doctor, at the head of the party, opened the screen door and entered the arched hallway, it was noticed that the sound of typewriting had suddenly ceased. At this point two of the men also thought they noticed a faint effusion of cold air strangely out of keeping with the great heat of the day, though they afterward refused to swear to this. The hall was in perfect order, as were the various rooms entered in quest of the study where Blake was presumably to be found. The author had furnished his home in exquisite Colonial taste; and though having no help but the one manservant, he had succeeded in maintaining it in a state of commendable neatness.

Dr. Morehouse led his men from room to room through the wide-open doors and archways, at last finding the library or study which he sought—a fine southerly room on the ground floor adjoining the once-dreaded study of Simeon Tanner, lined with the books which the servant communicated through an ingenious alphabet of touches, and the bulky Braille volumes which the author himself read with sensitive finger-tips. Richard Blake, of course, was there, seated as usual before his typewriter with a draft-scattered stack of newly written pages on the table and floor, and one sheet still in the machine. He had stopped work, it appeared, with some suddenness; perhaps because of a chill which had caused him to draw together the neck of his dressing-gown; and his head was turned toward the doorway of the sunny adjoining room in a manner quite singular for one whose lack of sight and hearing shuts out all sense of the external world.

On drawing nearer and crossing to where he could see the author's face, Dr. Morehouse turned very pale and motioned to the others to stand back. He needed time to steady himself, and to dispel all possibility of hideous illusion. No longer did he need to speculate why they had burned old Simeon Tanner's body on that wintry night because of the *expression* it wore, for here was something only a well-disciplined mind could confront. The late Richard Blake, whose typewriter had ceased its nonchalant clicking only as the men had entered the house, had seen something despite his blindness, and had been affected by it. Humanity had nothing to do with the look that was on his face, or with the glassy morbid vision that blazed in great, blue, bloodshot eyes shut to this world's images for six years. Those eyes were fixed with an ecstasy of clear-sighted horror on the doorway leading to Simeon Tanner's old study, where the sun blazed on walls once shrouded in bricked-up blackness. And Dr. Arlo Morehouse reeled dizzily when he saw that for all the dazzling daylight the inky pupils of those eyes were dilated as cavernously as those of a cat's eyes in the dark.

The doctor closed the staring blind eyes before he let the others view the face of the corpse. Meanwhile he examined the lifeless form with feverish diligence, using scrupulous technical care, despite his throbbing nerves and almost shaking hands. Some of his results he communicated from time to time to the awed and inquisitive trio around him; other results he judiciously withheld, lest they lead to speculations more disquieting than human speculations should be. It was not from any word of his, but from shrewd independent observation, that one of the men muttered about the body's tousled black hair and the way the papers were scattered. This man said it was as if a strong breeze had blown through the open doorway which the dead man faced; whereas, although the once-bricked windows beyond were indeed fully open to the warm June air, there had been scarcely a breath of wind during the entire day.

When one of the men began to gather the sheets of newly written manuscript as they lay on floor and table, Dr. Morehouse stopped him with an alarmed gesture. He had seen the sheet that remained in the machine, and had hastily removed and pocketed it after a sentence or two blanched his face afresh. This incident prompted him to collect the scattered sheets himself, and stuff them bulkily into an inside pocket without stopping to arrange them. And not even what he had read terrified him half so much as what he now noticed—the subtle difference in touch and heaviness of typing which distinguished the sheets he picked up from the one he had found on the typewriter. This shadowy impression he could not divorce from that other horrible circumstance which he was so zealously concealing from the men who had heard the machine's clicking not ten minutes before—the circumstance he was trying to exclude from even his own mind till he could be alone and resting in the merciful depths of his Morris chair. One may judge of the fear he felt at that circumstance by considering what he braved to keep it suppressed. In more than thirty years of professional practice he had never regarded a medical examiner as one from whom a fact might be withheld; yet through all the formalities which now followed, no man ever knew that when he examined this staring, contorted, blind man's body he had seen at once *that death must have occurred at least half an hour before discovery.*

Dr. Morehouse presently closed the outer door and led the party through every corner of the ancient structure in search of any evidence which might directly illuminate the tragedy. Never was a result more completely negative. He knew that the trap-door of old Simeon Tanner had been removed as soon as that recluse's books and body had been burnt, and that the sub-cellar and the sinuous tunnel under the swamp had been filled up as soon as they were discovered, some thirty-five years later. Now he saw that no fresh abnormalities had come to replace them, and that the whole establishment exhibited only the normal neatness of modern restoration and tasteful care.

Telephoning for the sheriff at Fenham and for the county medical examiner at Bayboro, he awaited the arrival of the former, who, when he came, insisted on swearing in two of the men as deputies until the examiner should arrive. Dr. Morehouse, knowing the mystification and futility confronting the officials, could not help smiling wryly as he left with the villager whose house still sheltered the man who had fled.

They found the patient exceedingly weak, but conscious and fairly composed. Having promised the sheriff to extract and transmit all possible information from the fugitive, Dr. Morehouse began some calm and tactful questioning, which was received in a rational and compliant spirit and baffled only by effacement of memory. Much of the man's quiet must have

come from merciful inability to recollect, for all he could now tell was that he had been in the study with his master and had seemed to see the next room suddenly grow dark—the room where sunshine had for more than a hundred years replaced the gloom of bricked-up windows. Even this memory, which indeed he half doubted, greatly disturbed the unstrung nerves of the patient, and it was with the utmost gentleness and circumspection that Dr. Morehouse told him his master was dead—a natural victim of the cardiac weakness which his terrible wartime injuries must have caused. The man was grieved, for he had been devoted to the crippled author; but he promised to show fortitude in taking the body back to the family in Boston after the close of the medical examiner's formal inquiry.

The physician, after satisfying as vaguely as possible the curiosity of the householder and his wife, and urging them to shelter the patient and keep him from the Tanner house until his departure with the body, next drove home in a growing tremble of excitement. At last he was free to read the typed manuscript of the dead man, and to gain at least an inkling of what hellish thing had defied those shattered senses of sight and sound and penetrated so disastrously to the delicate intelligence that brooded in external darkness and silence. He knew it would be a grotesque and terrible perusal, and he did not hasten to begin it. Instead, he very deliberately put his car in the garage, made himself comfortable in a dressing-gown, and placed a stand of sedative and restorative medicines beside the great chair he was to occupy. Even after that he obviously wasted time as he slowly arranged the numbered sheets, carefully avoiding any comprehensive glance at their text.

What the manuscript did to Dr. Morehouse we all know. It would never have been read by another had his wife not picked it up as he lay inert in his chair an hour later, breathing heavily and unresponsive to a knocking which one would have thought violent enough to arouse a mummied Pharaoh. Terrible as the document is, particularly in the obvious *change of style* near the end, we cannot avoid the belief that to the folklore-wise physician it presented some *added and supreme horror* which no other will ever be so unfortunate as to receive. Certainly, it is the general opinion of Fenham that the doctor's wide familiarity with the mutterings of old people and the tales his grandfather told him in youth furnished him some special information, in the light of which Richard Blake's hideous chronicle acquired a new, clear, and devastating significance nearly insupportable to the normal human mind. That would explain the slowness of his recovery on that June evening, the reluctance with which he permitted his wife and son to read the manuscript, the singular ill-grace with which he acceded to their determination not to burn a document so darkly remarkable, and most of all, the peculiar rashness with which he hastened to purchase the old Tanner property, destroy the house with dynamite, and cut down the trees of the swamp for a substantial distance from the road. Concerning the whole subject he now maintains an inflexible reticence, and it is certain that there will die with him a knowledge without which the world is better off.

The manuscript, as here appended, was copied through the courtesy of Floyd Morehouse, Esq., son of the physician. A few omissions, indicated by asterisks, have been made in the interest of the public peace of mind; still others have been occasioned by the indefiniteness of the text, where the stricken author's lightning-like touch-typing seems shaken into incoherence or ambiguity. In three places, where lacunae are fairly well elucidated by the context, the task of recension has been attempted. Of the *change in style* near the end it were best to say nothing. Surely it is plausible enough to attribute the phenomenon, as regards both

content and physical aspect of typing, to the racked and tottering mind of a victim whose former handicaps had paled to nothing before that which he now faced. Bolder minds are at liberty to supply their own deductions.

Here, then, is the document, written in an accursed house by a brain closed to the world's sights and sounds—a brain left alone and unwarned to the mercies and mockeries of powers that no seeing, hearing man has ever stayed to face. Contradictory as it is to all that we know of the universe through physics, chemistry, and biology, the logical mind will classify it as a singular product of dementia—a dementia communicated in some sympathetic way to the man who burst out of that house in time. And thus, indeed, may it very well be regarded so long as Dr. Arlo Morehouse maintains his silence.

THE MANUSCRIPT

Vague misgivings of the last quarter hour are now becoming definite fears. To begin with, I am thoroughly convinced that something must have happened to Dobbs. For the first time since we have been together he has failed to answer my summons. When he did not respond to my repeated ringing I decided that the bell must be out of order, but I have pounded on the table with vigor enough to rouse a charge of Charon. At first I thought he might have slipped out of the house for a breath of fresh air, for it has been hot and sultry all the forenoon, but it is not like Dobbs to stay away so long without first making sure that I would want nothing. It is, however, the unusual occurrence of the last few minutes which confirms my suspicion that Dobbs's absence is a matter beyond his control. It is this same happening which prompts me to put my impressions and conjectures on paper in the hope that the mere act of recording them may relieve a certain sinister suggestion of impending tragedy. Try as I will, I cannot free my mind from the legends connected with this old house—mere superstitious fol-de-rol for dwarfed brains to revel in, and on which I would not even waste a thought if Dobbs were here.

Through the years that I have been shut away from the world I used to know, Dobbs has been my sixth sense. Now, for the first time since my incapacitation, I realize the full extent of my impotency. It is Dobbs who had compensated for my sightless eyes, my useless ears, my voiceless throat, and my crippled legs. There is a glass of water on my typewriter table. Without Dobbs to fill it when it has been emptied, my plight will be like that of Tantalus. Few have come to this house since we have lived here—there is little in common between garrulous country folk and a paralytic who cannot see, hear, or speak to them—it may be days before anyone else appears. Alone... with only my thoughts to keep me company; disquieting thoughts which have been in no wise assuaged by the sensations of the last few minutes. I do not like these sensations, either, for more and more they are converting mere village gossip into a fantastic imagery which affects my emotions in a most peculiar and almost unprecedented manner.

It seems hours since I started to write this, but I know it can be only a few minutes, for I have just inserted this fresh page into the machine. The mechanical action of switching the sheets, brief though it was, has given me a fresh grip on myself. Perhaps I can shake off this sense of approaching danger long enough to recount that which has already happened.

At first it was no more than a mere tremor, somewhat similar to the shivering of a cheap tenement block when a heavy truck rumbles close by the curb—but this is no loosely built frame structure. Perhaps I am supersensitive to such things, and it may be that I am allowing my

imagination to play tricks; but it seemed to me that the disturbance was more pronounced directly in front of me—and my chair faces the southeast wing; away from the road, directly in line with the swamp at the rear of the dwelling! Delusion though this may have been, there is no denying what followed. I was reminded of moments when I have felt the ground tremble beneath my feet at the bursting of giant shells; times when I have seen ships tossed like chaff before the fury of a typhoon. The house shook like a Dweurgarian cinder in the sieves of Niflheim. Every timber in the floor beneath my feet quivered like a suffering thing. My typewriter trembled till I could imagine that the keys were chattering of their fear.

A brief moment and it was over. Everything is as calm as before. Altogether too calm! It seems impossible that such a thing could happen and yet leave everything exactly as it was before. No, not exactly—I am thoroughly convinced that something has happened to Dobbs! It is this conviction, added to this unnatural calm, which accentuates the premonitory fear that persists in creeping over me. Fear? Yes—though I am trying to reason sanely with myself that there is nothing of which to be afraid. Critics have both praised and condemned my poetry because of what they term a vivid imagination. At such a time as this I can heartily agree with those who cry “too vivid”. Nothing can be very much amiss or....

Smoke! Just a faint sulfurous trace, but one which is unmistakable to my keenly attuned nostrils. So faint, indeed, that it is impossible for me to determine whether it comes from some part of the house or drifts through the window of the adjoining room, which opens on the swamp. The impression is rapidly becoming more clearly defined. I am sure, now, that it does not come from outside. Vagrant visions of the past, somber scenes of other days, flash before me in stereoscopic review. A flaming factory... hysterical screams of terrified women penned in by walls of fire; a blazing schoolhouse... pitiful cries of helpless children trapped by collapsing stairs, a theatre fire... frantic babel of panic-stricken people fighting to freedom over blistering floors; and, over all, impenetrable clouds of black, noxious, malicious smoke polluting the peaceful sky. The air of the room is saturated with thick, heavy, stifling waves... at any moment I expect to feel hot tongues of flame lick eagerly at my useless legs... my eyes smart... my ears throb... I cough and choke to rid my lungs of the Ocyptean fumes... smoke such as is associated only with appalling catastrophes... acrid, stinking, mephitic smoke permeated with the revolting odor of burning flesh ***

Once more I am alone with this portentous calm. The welcome breeze that fans my cheeks is fast restoring my vanished courage. Clearly, the house cannot be on fire, for every vestige of the torturous smoke is gone. I cannot detect a single trace of it, though I have been sniffing like a bloodhound. I am beginning to wonder if I am going mad; if the years of solitude have unhinged my mind—but the phenomenon has been too definite to permit me to class it as mere hallucination. Sane or insane, I cannot conceive these things as aught but actualities—and the moment I catalogue them as such I can come to only one logical conclusion. The inference in itself is enough to upset one’s mental stability. To concede this is to grant the truth of the superstitious rumors which Dobbs compiled from the villagers and transcribed for my sensitive finger-tips to read—unsubstantial hearsay that my materialistic mind instinctively condemns as asininity!

I wish the throbbing in my ears would stop! It is as if mad spectral players were beating a duet upon the aching drums. I suppose it is merely a reaction to the suffocating sensations I have just experienced. A few more deep drafts of this refreshing air...

Something—someone is in the room! I am as sure I am no longer alone as if I could see the presence I sense so infallibly. It is an impression quite similar to one which I have had while elbowing my way through a crowded street—the definite notion that eyes were singling me out from the rest of the throng with a gaze intense enough to arrest my subconscious attention—the same sensation, only magnified a thousandfold. Who—what—can it be? After all, my fears may be groundless, perhaps it means only that Dobbs has returned. No... it is not Dobbs. As I anticipated, the tattoo upon my ears has ceased and a low whisper has caught my attention... the overwhelming significance of the thing has just registered itself upon my bewildered brain... *I can hear!*

It is not a single whispering voice, but many! *** Lecherous buzzing of bestial blowflies . . . Satanic humming of libidinous bees... sibilant hissing of obscene reptiles... a whispering chorus no human throat could sing! It is gaining in volume... the room rings with demoniacal chanting; tuneless, toneless, and grotesquely grim... a diabolical choir rehearsing unholy litanies... paeans of Mephistophelian misery set to music of wailing souls... a hideous crescendo of pagan pandemonium ***

The voices that surround me are drawing closer to my chair. The chanting has come to an abrupt end and the whispering has resolved itself into intelligible sounds. I strain my ears to distinguish the words. Closer... and still closer. They are clear, now—too clear! Better had my ears been blocked forever than forced to listen to their hellish mouthings ***

Impious revelations of soul-sickening Saturnalia *** ghoulish conceptions of devastating debaucheries *** profane bribes of Cabirian orgies *** malevolent threats of unimagined punishments ***

It is cold. Unseasonably cold! As if inspired by the cacodemoniacal presences that harass me, the breeze that was so friendly a few minutes ago growls angrily about my ears—an icy gale that rushes in from the swamp and chills me to the bone.

If Dobbs has deserted me I do not blame him. I hold no brief for cowardice or craven fear, but there are some things *** I only hope his fate has been nothing worse than to have departed in time!

My last doubt is swept away. I am doubly glad, now, that I have held to my resolve to write down my impressions... not that I expect anyone to understand... or believe... it has been a relief from the maddening strain of idly waiting for each new manifestation of psychic abnormality. As I see it, there are but three courses that may be taken: to flee from this accursed place and spend the torturous years that lie ahead in trying to forget—but flee I *cannot*; to yield to an abominable alliance with forces so malign that Tartarus to them would seem but an alcove of Paradise—but yield I *will not*; to die—far rather would I have my body torn limb from limb than to contaminate my soul in barbarous barter with such emissaries of Belial ***

I have had to pause for a moment to blow upon my fingers. The room is cold with the foetid frigor of the tomb... a peaceful numbness is creeping over me... I must fight off this lassitude; it is undermining my determination to die rather than give in to the insidious importunings... I vow, anew, to resist until the end... the end that I know cannot be far away ***

The wind is colder than ever, if such a thing be possible... a wind freighted with the stench of dead-alive things *** O merciful God Who took my sight! *** a wind so cold it burns where it should freeze... it has become a blistering sirocco ***

Unseen fingers grip me... ghost fingers that lack the physical strength to force me from my machine... icy fingers that force me into a vile vortex of vice... devil-fingers that draw me down into a cesspool of eternal iniquity... death fingers that shut off my breath and make my sightless eyes feel they must burst with the pain *** frozen points press against my temples *** hard, bony knobs, akin to horns *** boreal breath of some long-dead thing kisses my fevered lips and sears my hot throat with frozen flame ***

It is dark *** not the darkness that is part of years of blindness *** the impenetrable darkness of sin-steeped night *** the pitch-black darkness of Purgatory ***

I see *** *spes mea Christus!* *** it is the end ***

Not for mortal mind is any resisting of force beyond human imagination. Not for immortal spirit is any conquering of that which hath probed the depths and made of immortality a transient moment. The end? Nay! It is but the blissful beginning....