

Cthulhu
Something in the Mud

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Acknowledgements

Thanks primarily to H.P. Lovecraft but also others for Cthulhu and his kind.

What is Normal?

“I’m getting old,” said Jack. “31 years last week and feeling it, and I’m bored.”

Cooper chuckled the way he always did when Jack talked rubbish, when the man had nothing to add.

“I’m bored, you hear?”

“I heard you, sir. Perhaps a game at the club?”

“Suppose I could,” said Jack looking at his wristwatch. Nearly lunch time.

It had been nearly four years since the Armistice. Four years of getting back to normal, but there was no more normal. The England of old was no more and the world had changed. What had he accomplished since then? Not much. His father wanted him to join him in the world of printed news, but Jack would not have last a week. He tired too quickly of work and got distracted by any little thing, especially the kind with long legs and a pretty smile.

“I need to find a proper job, Cooper.”

“I thought you had a job with the Foreign Office, sir.”

“No, they just call on me... us every now and then.” When they want something done on the quiet. A little snooping, a little clandestine diplomacy. Jack rather enjoyed that, but they did not call often. It was due to his efforts in the war with the “Odd Jobs” and his talent for the lingo, having always been one for languages. French, German, Latin, a little Greek, some Spanish and even a smattering of Arabic too. Mandarin, now that was a language he needed to master, but he had yet to force himself down to the library to make a start. It would have been useful in the case of the Black Finger.

Of course he did a little snooping outside of the diplomatic service too, but little is ever that exciting. Recently Lady Penelope Young asked him to investigate her husband, Sir Lawrence, a proper boor, whom she suspected was having an affair. Jack could have told her there and then that he was, but chose instead to decline the case. He had not fallen so low yet, but he did need a good case; something to get the blood pumping. Something to challenge both mind and body. Or was that entirely true? Did Jack really crave the chase? He had not forgotten the horrors he had seen. Perhaps it was duty? There was a war going on beyond that of nations, a war that had yet to be won, if there was such a thing as winning. At least the inevitable could perhaps be delayed. Some things are too big fight; too horrible to even consider challenging.

“Get the Bentley ready,” Jack told Cooper, his soldier servant, a good man who had been with him since the beginning of the war. “Tell Sally I’ll be eating out.” Sally was Cooper’s wife and a dear girl, full of wit, charm and beauty. If she had been born into money she would have worked her way to the higher echelons of nobility by then, but she seemed happy with Cooper whom she obviously loved, and Cooper adored her, the lucky blighter.

Lucky? Lucky because she had married him, and they had each other. Jack too had been in love once, but that was another story. Now he made do. Lady Penelope Young did for a while.

On returning from the club after having lost a game of cards to that oik, Archie Brown, whom Jack actually quite liked, he found the afternoon post had arrived and threw himself down

into the white settee and picked out what looked like a letter of possible interest, postmarked the day before.

“Postal service is slowing down, Cooper.”

“So you keep saying, Captain,” said Cooper from the other room. The cheeky sod.

This one was sent from West Wittering. That meant that it was probably from Jack’s former Odd Jobs commander, Colonel James Sinclair whom he knew to have a summer house down there which Sinclair had often said he should visit.

On opening the letter, Jack was proved right. It was an invitation to come and spend the weekend at Marsh Sand House, his “little getaway” as he called it. There would be other guests for dinner on Saturday too, including the Colonel’s granddaughter, Olivia. How old must she be by now? In her twenties probably. The weekend had potential.

“I shall be away for the weekend, Cooper. Pack my bags will you?”

“Of course, sir. Will you be requiring my services?”

“No. Going solo, old boy.”

“Should I include the kit?”

The kit - a pack of essential gear that can and often had come in handy, but never for a spring weekend away. “No. Perhaps just the Webley in the glove compartment.” Jack never liked going far without his trusty service revolver. It had seen duty on more than one occasion since the war. Of course, the only danger round West Wittering was the sucking mud and the risk of losing a shoe, but it did no harm to have the pistol to hand.

It would be nice to see the Colonel again. It would be interesting to see Olivia too.

24th March 1922

The Friday drive down to West Wittering took most of the day but at long last Jack found himself in the quaint village, the smell of salt and mud in the air, seagulls calling and the sun getting low.

Following a description in the letter he found a small road leading out of the village, running alongside mud banks until at last it turned and crossed a mud flat dotted with grass banks, birds wading, and the occasional rock here and there. The road led to a house placed on what was essentially an island would it not have been for the raised causeway.

The house was not big as such but it looked relatively modern. Jack could understand the Colonel’s reason for buying it, placed on the water which he had always talked fondly of, and surrounded by birds of all kinds. The Colonel was an avid bird watcher.

Jack’s first encounter with the Reverend Abel Dunberry was as he drove carefully along the causeway. There was rather an odd obstacle in the way in the form of a small to medium sized man, trudging along the middle of the road. All he could see was this man’s back - bent somewhat inside a long black coat and a balding head and no hat.

Jack drove carefully up behind him, but the man did not seem to notice. How could he not hear a Bentley 3 Litre growling at his heels? There was no way round him. Jack revved the engine a little. Still the figure ignored him. Finally, in exasperation, Jack hooted the horn. The man stopped. Jack stopped. Slowly, so slowly, he turned. He looked at Jack with dark sunken eyes set into a gaunt face. The stranger then made his way to the driver door.

“Are you in a hurry, my boy? Are Satan’s hounds at your heels? Perhaps the light of Jesus, our lord calls from yonder house?”

“Pardon? Sorry. I thought perhaps you had not noticed me behind you.” Then Jack saw the white dog collar. “Reverend?”

“Abel Dunberry,” said the man as an introduction. “And you must be Captain Jack Hart.”

“Captain no more.”

“Mr Hart then.”

“Can I give you a lift the rest of the way?” Jack offered. The Reverend Abel Dunberry looked along the road to the house in the distance and finally nodded his head.

The both of them reached the house in silence. The man was unnerving to say the least and kept looking at Jack as though he was appraising him for some reason. As Jack was about to get out of the car, Dunberry suddenly reached down to the glove compartment and found the Webbley revolver kept there. He looked at it, then to Jack. “You were one of the Colonel’s Odd Job boys weren’t you?”

Does he know? How much does he know? Odd Jobs: so called not because they were varied or petty but because they could only be collectively described as odd; Missions into a world of mysticism, the occult and sometimes even the horrific and nightmarish. A world beyond a war, beyond man and his understanding. A world seen but never believed or one would instantly go insane.

“You fought in the greater war, Mr Hart. I can only hope you were not too seriously wounded.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about, Reverend.” What else could Jack say? It was, still is, and can only ever be top secret. If Man knew the truth, it would burn his mind from within. Only the instant denial of what is beyond can save the mind and even then the memories never fade. The horror never fades.

“Of course not. Gods army is meek, Mr Hart.” Abel put the pistol back and then to Jack’s surprise retrieved a hip flask from an inside pocket and offered Jack a taste. It was brandy and good stuff too. The man then took a long swig himself before offering Jack a wink.

Colonel James Sinclair was older, but he still had a certain spring in his step and curl in his moustache - a grand thing from a bygone age. He was delighted to see Jack and Able, and so, the weekend began. As the winds rose, the sea churned and the clouds gathered, something stirred under the mud flats of West Wittering.

Jack sat at the dinner table having enjoyed a fine meal of crab, fish, wine and now coffee, tea, brandy and cigars.

The day had been spent sailing. The wind was up and the Colonel had skippered the little craft with Jack and Olivia as crew, Olivia having arrived early that morning and, to his delight was as pretty as he remembered, and now fully grown. The Reverend Dunberry stayed at the house to catch up on some reading in the Colonel’s small library.

At one end of the table was the Colonel. At the other was Lady Audrey Farthington, the widowed wife of Colonel James Sinclair’s old school chum, Sir Henry Farthington. Jack sat next to Olivia who in turn sat next to a Mr Stuart Morgan who it seemed was courting Olivia. Blasted luck! Opposite sat the Colonel’s neighbours and friends Mr and Mrs Roger and Valery Hillman.

The staff were Richard Ashton, the valet, Paul Jones, a footman and general handyman, Jennifer Taylor, the house keeper and Helen Croft the cook. Jack liked to know people’s names. They interested him. Names seemed to describe a person or at least it often seemed so. All the

staff had been hard at work that evening preparing and serving food. Jennifer was not a bad looker although somewhat flustered it seemed by the evening's events. Cook was a middle aged woman, quick to smile. Ashton seemed dull but he certainly knew his job. Paul Jones was a solid lad and did what he was told – he had the bearing of private while Ashton would have been a corporal. At least that was Jack's guess.

As evening drew in, the wind got stronger and rain began to fall. Paul Jones was sent out to check on the cars and returned soaked only to report that the road was flooded. Olivia ran out to make sure her car was properly closed up, refusing any help. An independent woman. The Colonel informed his guests that this can happen when the wind was up, but it should be clear again by morning. He sent the housekeeper to prepare the rooms. This was followed by the ominous flash of lightning followed by a crack of thunder. Wilhelm, one of the Colonel's two wolfhounds was let back into the dining room/living room as everyone retired to the settees and fireplace. Olivia returned rather wet with muddy shoes which she laughed off.

"Silly girl," said the Colonel affectionately. "Where is Kaiser?" he then demanded of Ashton. The valet said he would have a look and left the room. Kaiser was the other wolfhound. Wilhelm had taken prime position in front of the roaring fireplace and just as the colonel began to pat him, the dog whimpered and skulked away to the corner of the room. There was another crash of thunder and lightning.

"Gosh, how dramatic," said Olivia.

The sop, Morgan patted her hand. "Don't be alarmed, my dear." The fellow had arrived late in the day and instantly placed himself between Jack and Olivia. The jealous type it would seem. Not to worry, a little competition never stopped Jack before.

"Tell me, Lady Farthington, did your late husband enjoy shooting?" said Jack. "I think the Colonel mentioned it to me."

"Why yes, Henry was a big fan of the sport. Do you shoot?"

"Not I, but I hear Mr Morgan does. Mr Morgan?"

"Yes, what was that?" said Stuart, surprised to hear his name.

Jack motioned the man over. "Lady Farthington was just telling me about her late husband's passion for shooting. Please go on Lady Farthington."

Without missing a beat Jack placed Morgan before the old woman and made his way over to Olivia who was admiring some old photos above the fireplace.

"Family?" said Jack.

Olivia turned and at once saw the game Jack had played. She smiled. "You are cruel, Mr Hart."

"Jack, please."

"Those two are my grandparents. That one is an aunt, and those two are mother and father."

Jack recognised the Colonel and nodded. He knew the Colonel's wife had died some years past of smallpox.

"So tell me," said Jack. "Do you enjoy being back in Blighty?" He knew she had stayed on in France after the war. Her mother had loved it there and so had Olivia who finished her education in Paris.

"I miss France, but England is home. I hear you are well travelled."

"I suppose. Business does sometimes require me to leave London."

"And what business would that be? I asked father you know? He just waved the question away which tells me that it's probably something secret."

"It would bore you," said Jack. "I do the odd job for the Foreign Office."

“Oh? How exciting. Are you a spy?”

“No, no. Nothing like that. More of a messenger boy really.”

There was another crack of thunder. The wind was picking up, the windows rattled. It was dark out but with the lightning, Jack could see the waters of the Solent, rough and ragged through the large bay windows. It reminded him of the still photographs from the Front – a moment of time caught forever in black and white.

“Would somebody draw the curtains?” This was Lady Farthington. “There is a chill and it is dark out.”

Abel Dunberry took the lead and pulled them closed but not before another flash of lightning. He froze.

“What was that?” said Lady Farthington. “There is something out there.”

Ashton, the valet returned and apologised. He had failed to find the dog.

Dunberry snapped the curtain closed, turned to the Colonel and whispered urgently in his ear. Jack did not miss the dark look on the Reverend’s face.

The lights went out.

Olivia took hold of Jack’s hand. It was pitch black. Blustery rain lashed the windows.

“Candles!” demanded the Colonel. “Damned power is out.” There was an edge to his voice. What had Dunberry told him? Had the Reverend seen something? Memories came back to Jack. Memories of things he wished would forever remain in the dark.

Morgan fumbled his way over to Olivia who let go of Jack’s hand. In came Ashton again, this time carrying two candles and at once Jack knew something was very wrong indeed. Abel Dunberry stood very still, facing the windows. It was as though he was expecting something, and in his hand was a gun, held at his side.

“What is going on?” said Lady Farthington.

“He’s got a gun!” said Mr Hillman. His wife whimpered and hid behind the man.

Suddenly there was a scream. It came from outside, close to the house. It was loud and shrill, gurgling and inhuman. It made the very hairs on Jack’s neck stand up.

“What the devil was that?” said Mr Hillman.

“Colonel?” said Jack.

“Jack. You stay here. Watch the women. Reverend, come with me. Ashton, fetch Matilda.”

Matilda? Of course! Jack remembered the Colonel had a double barrelled shotgun lovingly called Matilda. Something was out there.

“What’s going on, sir?” Jack persisted.

The Colonel gave him a dark look. “They found me,” was all he said.

Jack nodded. This could only mean the enemy. Throughout the war and beyond, the Colonel and the Odd Jobs had fought them. Who were they? The Nameless Ones, the horrors beyond the thin veil of reality - the waking nightmares. Call them demons, witches, warlocks, anything because it makes no difference. No words can describe what is not real and yet able to drive you mad with a single glance.

With shotgun in hand, the Colonel led Dunberry, Ashton and Smith to the front door. Jack watched from the living room door as the Colonel hesitated, nodded to the others, then opened the door and charged the very darkness that lay beyond.

Jack rushed back to the bay windows.

“Jack. What is happening?” said Olivia.

“Yes,” said Morgan. “Is this some joke? If so, it’s not funny. The women are terrified!”

Before Jack could answer, there was another of the shrill screams, followed by shots. Now a man screamed out there and more shots were fired. The very ground shook which was followed by the sudden silence of the screaming man. Jack saw the panic on the faces of all those gathered in the dim candle light. A window smashed to splinters behind the curtain. The women screamed and cried.

“Get away from the window!” said Jack. “In fact get to the back of the house. Get to the kitchen now!”

Everyone rushed out. Jack had to help the shivering Lady Farthington. She was as pale as a ghost.

“Let me,” said Jennifer, the house keeper, and took the Lady’s arm.

There was more gun fire and Jack went back to the front door just as it burst open. Ashton, the valet, soaked and muddy, dragged in the Reverend Abel Dunberry by the arms. Behind them the Colonel snapped shut his shot gun and fired off two more shots at something Jack could not see before retreating back into the house and slamming the door shut behind him.

Jack helped Ashton. Dunberry was only semi-conscious and together they got him on the settee in the living room. The curtains flapped from the broken window, the wind now howling beyond.

“Move the settee,” said Jack, and they dragged it away from the window. Dunberry groaned.

“Where is the footman? Smith?” Jack then asked, realising the man had not returned with the others.

“Gone,” said the Colonel. “The thing got him.”

“What is it?”

The Colonel shook his head.

“Spawn,” croaked Dunberry. He grasped Jack’s arm and pulled him closer.

“What was that?”

“Mud Spawn of Cthulhu,” said Dunberry. And that was it. He had spoken the name of the enemy, a name Jack feared, a name well known to the Odd Jobs. Cthulhu.

“A spawn? How do we stop it? Can we kill it?”

“We hurt it, but our guns are not enough,” said the Colonel.

“Ritual,” whispered the Reverend. “Break the summoning. Listen man.”

“I’m listening,” said Jack. It was obvious that Dunberry was in great pain and would probably pass out soon.

“Manon Brodeur.”

“What?”

“Did he say Manon Brodeur?” asked the Colonel moving closer.

“I think so. A French woman?”

“Coven,” said Abel. “Found Colonel. Revenge. I suspected it. Must break summoning...” Abel closed his eyes and said no more. Jack checked the man’s pulse. He was alive but he needed medical attention.

“Coven?” said Jack.

The Colonel was silent, thinking. Suddenly there was a mighty crash from the roof and the entire house shook.

“It’s going to rip the house to pieces,” said the Colonel. “We need light. Damned generator!”

“Tell me about this coven, sir.”

“Back in the war. I sent men to fetch Manon Brodeur. Intelligence said she was the leader of a coven. The Germans gave us the location. There was trouble however. The woman was killed. I sent four men. A fifth joined them, shot the woman and then vanished. Never found out who he was, but the coven survived and it would seem that they have finally found me.”

“The Reverend seems to think the creature was summoned to this place, not sent.”

“Yes. He warned me that he suspected something was afoot. That is why I invited the fellow.”

“Is he what I think he is?”

“Yes,” said the Colonel. “Bellatorum Dei.”

Jack nodded. He knew of Bellatorum Dei from his time in the Odd Jobs – a secretive, cult like organisation made up of members of the CoE. It had always been denied, but rumour was that at its heart was royalty. The few encounters Jack had had with them had left him with a very different view of the Church. Not the friendly, forgiving Christians, Bellatorum Dei, but ruthless, calculating hunters of the Enemy.

“That would mean that the coven are here. Perhaps in this very house.”

“Exactly,” said the Colonel followed by another crash from the upper floors.

“Your staff.”

“Perhaps. Not Ashton,” said the Colonel nodding towards Ashton.

“The cook. The maid. What was her name? Jennifer...”

“Tailor.”

“Brodeur,” said Jack. The Colonel nodded.

They both went to the kitchen, Ashton close behind. People gathered round the large kitchen table. Curtains were drawn and only two small candles lit the room. The hound whimpered from beneath the table. Jennifer was in the far corner, near hidden by the shadows, watching Jack and the Colonel, waiting it seemed.

“Miss Tailor?” said Jack. She did not answer. “Parlez-moi de Manon Brodeur.”

Jennifer smiled. The shadows grew deeper. There was a light in her eyes, like a cat’s reflecting the candle light back at him.

“What have you done?” demanded the Colonel.

“She was my mother,” said Jennifer. She was murdered by that man. She pointed a finger at the Colonel. “And now he will die. You will all die.”

Mrs Hillman began to cry. Her husband turned on the Colonel. “No hear this, Sinclair. We’ve had quite enough. We are leaving this madhouse. We are leaving now!”

“Nobody is leaving,” said Jennifer.

“How dare you...” began Lady Farthington, but Jennifer cut her off with a hiss.

Olivia moved to be with her father.

Again the house shook and something fell from the upper floor, the kitchen outside door flew open and the candles went out. Lightning struck close by and in the white light was reflected the massive form of something outside the house. The shriek again, but this time so loud and so close. The form was that of black rubbery skin, rising high into the air. It was wet and melted and puckered - sickly.

“Close the door!” shouted the Colonel. Hillman and Morgan did so.

“What was that? What on God’s earth was that?” said Morgan.

“We are under attack by a creature. A creature summoned by this woman, Jennifer or is it Genevieve?” said the Colonel. There was no answer.

Ashton got a candle lit just as the kitchen's inner door closed and by the sounds of it was locked from the other side. Jack realised that Jennifer was gone. In the darkness she had fled.

It was a substantial door, but the Colonel clicked shut the shotgun and blew a hole where the handle and locking mechanism were. Jack pulled the door open and rushed out, but it was too dark to see anything.

"A candle." said Jack and Ashton handed him one.

"We must find the artefacts of summoning," said the Colonel.

"Any idea where?"

"Probably not upstairs. I suspect that there is little left of that." The house was still being attacked. Every strike shook it to its foundations. "The basement."

"Where's the door?"

The Colonel did not answer. Instead Ashton stepped in. "Outside, sir."

Damn. Someone was going to have to go out there. That creature was out there. Perhaps Jennifer too.

"Well in that case, I will have to go out," said Jack.

"Good man," said the Colonel. "The door is on the south side. We can distract the thing from the main door. You go out the kitchen door."

"Will do, sir."

There were questions asked by those in the kitchen but Jack ignored them. "Ready!" he called out instead. There was a moment's hesitation. Then he heard the front door open and gunfire erupting from the other side of the house. Jack opened the door and peered out just in time to see the lumbering shape of a monstrous creature vanish behind the building.

Lightning struck again and Jack ran through the rain, round the house and to some steps leading down into the house. He ran down them and yanked at the door at the bottom. It was padlocked! Looking round there was nothing. No tool.

Up the steps again, he slipped and fell, but quickly got to his feet. More gunshots. Inside he heard screaming. What to do? His gun! It was in the car. He ran round the corner and saw the beautiful Bentley. It had been shunted aside, the window cracked, but to his relief the damage looked superficial. He ran to it, not daring to look for the creature. Grabbing the door handle, Jack yanked it open and fumbled for the Webley. Gun now in hand, he turned to run back, but before him loomed what he could only describe as a monstrous worm like creature with a head of tentacles surrounding a round sphincter like sucking mouth. Lightning struck again and the creature screeched, now diving towards him. Jack fired the gun, but he knew it was hopeless.

The stench was horrendous, like rotting seaweed. The creature rose from the mud just beyond the raised hard standing of the property and arced down towards him, tentacles flapping and slapping as they reached out to him.

Jack fell back against the car and fired again but all went black as the tentacles enveloped him and he heard the sucking of the thing's mouth yearning to feed. The tentacles, slick and ghastly tightened about his body, one seeking his mouth which Jack bit hard but was unable to stop the intrusion from working its way down his throat. Lifted into the air, Jack struggled but to no avail.

Suddenly he was yanked sideways, black cold blood covered his face and he was released. He fell and heard the gun shots and shouts of the Colonel and Ashton another man. More

gunshots and Jack hit the ground and tried to vomit up the tentacle. He scrabbled at it with his hands and pulled hard. It came up and he gagged for air, half choking on his of sick. The tentacle had been shot clean off and now lay wriggling on the wet ground. Looking up he saw the creature lashing out at the Colonel, Ashton and Morgan who it would seem had joined them. Jack had to give him some credit. Most men shrivel into the foetal position on seeing one of the enemy, but Morgan was throwing rocks at the thing, distracting it. In fact he did a better job than the guns as the mud spawn suddenly lunged and grabbed the poor fool by the head, lifted him into the air and sucked. To Jack's horror he saw Morgan disappear into the creature's mouth head first to become no more than a swelling in its trunk like throat as he was swallowed whole.

"Go!" shouted the Colonel. "Go now."

Jack got to his feet and ran past them back to the basement door. There, he shot the padlock which flew apart and he pushed the door open. Inside was utter darkness. Again the house shook. The Colonel and Ashton must have either been overcome or retreated back to the house. Jack found himself in a black corridor.

Now that he looked again, ahead, he could just make out the outline of another door at the end of the corridor. He suspected a candle was lit beyond. He held his gun before him. Jack was soaked, freezing and shivering. Reaching the door, he tried the handle. It was not locked and so he pushed it open, ready to fire, ready to run.

"Jack?"

He span round and took aim. There in the outside door was the silhouette of a woman.

"Don't shoot, Jack. It's me, Olivia."

"Olivia? What are you doing here?" Was she mad? The creature could have killed her.

"I came to see what you are doing."

"Well... stay there. Don't move. I have to see what is down here." He felt he should say something about Mr Morgan, but now was not the time.

"There's nothing down here."

"Let me check and then I'll get you back into the house."

Jack turned again and pushed past the door. What he saw made him sick to the stomach. Here was indeed foul play for Jack had discovered what had become of Kaiser, the second wolfhound.

The floor was slick with the dog's blood. Someone had strung the poor creature up by its hind legs, then slit its belly open to allow the intestines to fall about its head, lolling tongue and bulging eyes. The blood dripped into a large copper bowl which was overflowing with the stuff. The bowl stood upon a wooden table. Next to this was a single guttering candle and a book. Marks covered the table, symbols of things Jack did not understand, but the very sight of them was sickening as though they were not meant for human eyes.

Suddenly Olivia was behind him.

"Get back," he hissed.

This must be it, the summoning. A quick glance at the book told him the book was old. The leather cover was worn and had the words *Nocte Vocationem* cut into it. The dog moved! It faintly whimpered. The poor thing was still alive, but only just. Jack raised his gun to the creature's head. He could not let it suffer any longer.

"There's a good boy."

Just as he tightened his finger on the trigger, a silver flash of light caught his eye and a knife slashed across his gun hand. Jack dropped the gun and turned to see Olivia with a long kitchen knife in her hand.

“Sorry you had to get involved, Jack.”

“What are you doing?”

“I can’t let you kill the animal. Father is still alive and he is promised to the Great One.”

“Great One? Olivia, you cannot mean you are behind this?”

“Not I. My purpose is to serve,” she said calmly with a smile. There was an odd light in her eyes, a madness of some kind. Jack had seen this before. She was possessed, controlled or hypnotised. In the Odd Jobs, Jack had seen that light, and always there was a greater mind behind such eyes.

“Jennifer?”

“Her name is Sister Genevieve Brodeur. She came to me after the war. She told me what Father had done and showed me a greater purpose. She speaks to the Great One. She is my mother now and the Great One is my new father.”

“Cthulhu,” whispered Jack.

Olivia smiled even as the house shook from a new onslaught by the creature beyond. “His child has come to take us all home to the depths of R’lyeh.”

The gun was on the floor. Olivia, knife in hand, watched him. Jack edged to the other side of the table, took his handkerchief from his pocket and wrapped it round his wounded hand. Olivia glanced at it and Jack struck.

With both hands, he lifted the table by the edge and hurled it at her. She screamed. The candle went out and darkness engulfed them. Jack dove to where he last saw his gun, but could not find it. Scrabbling about, he instead found the knife. She must have dropped it.

Before he could get back to his feet, she was on his back, scratching, screaming and pulling his hair. Jack threw himself back and hit the wall. Olivia let go and Jack turned on her. Fumbling for a grip, she tried to gouge his eyes, but he landed a hard slap on her face and heard her crumple to the floor in silence.

Now he reached up for the dog, found the ropes and cut them. Then he groped the floor again, found the book and bowl and dragged the lot towards the exit. He could hear gun shots and screams from the upstairs. When he got to the steps, he saw the massive form of the spawn devouring the very house, its head lunged deep into the building, tentacles searching for prey.

“Take them!” screamed Jack as he reached the top of the steps and held out the bowl and dog. “Come on, you bastard. Take them and go.”

The creature pulled back from the house’s innards, tentacles thrashing the night sky, mouth sucking. Jack threw the items towards the sea, away from the house. They landed in the mud. In the darkness, Jack could just about make out the form of the dog move again. He had not been able to put the poor blighter out of its misery but the spawn would surely see to that soon enough.

Now Jack rushed back down to the basement. In the darkness he found Olivia, seemingly unconscious, but breathing. He lifted her up and carried her out. The creature was devouring the dog with horrific slurping sounds, tentacles thrashing the mud. Jack carried Olivia back into the house where he was met by the Colonel and Ashton.

“What happened?” demanded the Colonel. “She vanished.”

They laid her down in the living room with a cushion under her head. Dunberry was still on the settee, eyes closed, pale.

“I found the summoning,” said Jack. “She attacked me, sir.”

“Olivia?” The Colonel looked shocked.

“Yes, sir. The coven got to her in France.”

“No,” said the Colonel shaking his head. “The swine!”

“I think it’s leaving, sir,” said Ashton from the window.

“No!” came a wild scream. It was Jennifer. She had been hiding in the shadows and now she threw herself at the Colonel with a knife in hand. She was so fast and so wild that nobody had time to react. The knife plunged into the man’s shoulder, both of them tumbling to the floor. Now on top of him she stabbed again. Jack fumbled for the gun in his pocket, Ashton moved to grab her, but before either could aid the Colonel there was a gunshot.

It came from the pale Reverend Abel Dunberry who lay in the settee, smoking revolver in hand. Jennifer slumped forward, dead.

“Like mother, like daughter,” was all Abel said before closing his eyes again.

Both the Colonel and Reverend survived. Olivia was put into a home where she could rest. Jack returned to the city. Reverend Dunberry had come clean and admitted that he had been the man who shot Genevieve Brodeur during the war. He had orders from Bellatorum Dei to send her back to hell. Since the war he had been tracking the coven and suspected an attempt would be made on the Colonel’s life.

The whole incident had been reported in the local papers as storm damage. This was often the case. The war is hidden, but it goes on.

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About the Author

Nikolai Bird is a lead designer for a global web application company. When he is not designing, he is writing. When he is not writing, he is illustrating and has to date illustrated four children's books. He also spent many years as an artist selling paintings worldwide, but his passion has always been reading and writing. To find out more about Nikolai go to <http://nikolaibird.com/>

Other books by this author

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