

CREEPING HEMLOCK PRESS PRESENTS

NIGHTMARE

M A G A Z I N E



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Coming Attractions

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Welcome to issue six of *Nightmare*!

This month, we have original fiction from David Tallerman (“The Sign in the Moonlight”) and Jeff VanderMeer (“No Breather in the World But Thee”), along with reprints by Molly Tanzer (“The Infernal History of the Ivybridge Twins”) and Livia Llewellyn (“Jetsam”). We also have the latest installment of our column on horror, “The H Word,” plus author spotlights with all of our authors, a showcase on our cover artist, and a feature interview with bestselling author Jonathan Maberry.

That’s about all I have for you this month, but before I step out of your way and let you get to the fiction, here are a few URLs you might want to check out or keep handy if you’d like to stay apprised of everything new and notable happening with *Nightmare*:

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Thanks for reading!

John Joseph Adams, in addition to serving as publisher and editor of *Nightmare* (and its sister magazine, *Lightspeed*), is the bestselling editor of many anthologies, such as *The Mad Scientist’s Guide to World Domination*, *Oz Reimagined*, *Epic: Legends of Fantasy*, *Other Worlds Than These*, *Armored*, *Under the Moons of Mars: New Adventures on Barsoom*, *Brave New Worlds*, *Wastelands*, *The Living Dead*, *The Living Dead 2*, *By Blood We Live*, *Federations*, *The Improbable Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and *The Way of the Wizard*. He is a four-time finalist for the Hugo Award and the World Fantasy Award. He is also the co-host of Wired.com’s *The Geek’s Guide to the Galaxy* podcast. Find him on Twitter @johnjosephadams.

The Infernal History of the Ivybridge Twins

Molly Tanzer

I.

Concerning the life and death of St. John Fitzroy, Lord Calipash—the suffering of the Lady Calipash—the unsavory endeavors of Lord Calipash’s cousin Mr. Villein—as well as an account of the curious circumstances surrounding the birth of the future Lord Calipash and his twin sister

In the county of Devonshire, in the parish of Ivybridge, stood the ancestral home of the Lords Calipash. Calipash Manor was large, built sturdily of the local limestone, and had stood for many years without fire or other catastrophe marring its expanse. No one could impugn the size and antiquity of the house, yet often one or another of those among Lord Calipash’s acquaintance might be heard to comment that the Manor had a rather rambling, hodgepodge look to it, and this could not be easily refuted without the peril of speaking a falsehood. The reason for this was that the Lords Calipash had always been the very essence of English patriotism, and rather than ever tearing down any part of the house and building anew, each Lord Calipash had chosen to make additions and improvements to older structures. Thus, though the prospect was somewhat sprawling, it served as a pleasant enough reminder of the various styles of Devonian architecture, and became something of a local attraction.

St. John Fitzroy, Lord Calipash, was a handsome man, tall, fair-haired, and blue-eyed. He had been bred up as any gentleman of rank and fortune might be, and therefore the manner of his death was more singular than any aspect of his life. Now, given that this is, indeed, an *Infernal History*, the sad circumstances surrounding this good man’s unexpected and early demise demand attention by the author, and they are inextricably linked with the Lord Calipash’s cousin, a young scholar called Mr. Villein, who will figure more prominently in this narrative than his nobler relation.

Mr. Villein came to stay at Calipash Manor during the Seven Years’ War, in order to prevent his being conscripted into the French army. Though indifference had previously characterized the relationship between Lord Calipash and Mr. Villein (Mr. Villein belonging to a significantly lower branch of the family tree), when Mr. Villein wrote to Lord Calipash to beg sanctuary, the good Lord would not deny his own flesh and blood. This was not to say, however, that Lord Calipash was above subtly encouraging his own flesh and blood to make his stay a short one, and to that end, he gave Mr. Villein the tower bedroom that had been built by one of the more eccentric Lords some generations prior to our tale, who so enjoyed pretending to be the Lady Jane Grey that he had the edifice constructed so his wife could dress up as member of the Privy Council and keep him locked up there for as long as nine days at a stretch. But that was not the reason Lord Calipash bade his cousin reside there—the tower was a drafty place, and given to damp, and thus seemed certain of securing Mr. Villein’s speedy departure. As it turns out, however, the two men were so unlike one another, that what Lord Calipash thought was an insulting situation, Mr. Villein found entirely salubrious, and so, happily, out of a case of simple misunderstanding grew an affection, founded on deepest admiration for Mr. Villein’s part, and for Lord Calipash’s, enjoyment of toadying.

All the long years of the international conflict Mr. Villein remained at Calipash Manor, and with the passing of each and every day he came more into the confidence of Lord Calipash, until it was no uncommon occurrence to hear members of Lord Calipash’s circle using words like *inseparable* to describe their relationship. Then, only six months before the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the possibility of continued fellowship between Lord Calipash and Mr. Villein was quite suddenly

extinguished. A Mr. Fellingworth moved into the neighborhood with his family, among them his daughter of fifteen years, Miss Alys Fellingworth. Dark of hair and eye but pale of cheek, her beauty did not go long unnoticed by the local swains. She had many suitors and many offers, but from among a nosegay of sparks she chose as her favorite blossom the Lord Calipash.

Mr. Villein had also been among Miss Fellingworth's admirers, and her decision wounded him—not so much that he refused to come to the wedding (he was very fond of cake), but certainly enough that all the love Mr. Villein had felt for Lord Calipash was instantly converted, as if by alchemy, to pure hatred. In his dolor, Mr. Villein managed to convince himself that Miss Fellingworth's father had pressured her to accept Lord Calipash's offer for the sake of his rank and income, against her true inclinations; that had she been allowed to pick her heart's choice, she certainly would have accepted Mr. Villein's suit rather than his cousin's. Such notions occupied Mr. Villein's thoughts whenever he saw the happy couple together, and every day his mind became more and more inhospitable to any pleasure he might have otherwise felt on account of his friend's newfound felicity.

A reader of this history might well wonder why Mr. Villein did not quit Calipash Manor, given that his situation, previously so agreeable, he now found intolerable. Mr. Villein was, however, loath to leave England. He had received a letter from his sister informing him that during his absence, his modest home had been commandeered by the army, and thus his furniture was in want of replacing, his lands trampled without hope of harvest, his stores pilfered, and, perhaps worst of all, his wretched sister was with child by an Austrian soldier who had, it seemed, lied about his interest in playing the rôle of father beyond the few minutes required to grant him that status. It seemed prudent to Mr. Villein to keep apart from such appalling circumstances for as long as possible.

Then one evening, from the window of his tower bedroom, Mr. Villein saw Lord Calipash partaking of certain marital pleasures with the new Lady Calipash against a tree in one of the gardens. Nauseated, Mr. Villein called for his servant and announced his determination to secretly leave Calipash Manor once and for all early the following morning. While the servant packed his bags and trunks, Mr. Villein penned a letter explaining his hasty departure to Lord Calipash, and left it, along with a token of remembrance, in Lord Calipash's study.

Quite early the next morning, just as he was securing his cravat, Mr. Villein was treated to the unexpected but tantalizing sight of Lady Calipash in *deshabille*. She was beside herself with grief, but eventually Mr. Villein, entirely sympathetic and eager to understand the source of her woe, coaxed the story from her fevered mind:

"I woke early, quite cold," gibbered Lady Calipash. "Lord Calipash had never come to bed, though he promised me when I went up that he should follow me after settling a few accounts. When I discovered him absent I rose and sought him in his study only to find him—*dead*. Oh! It was too terrible! His eyes were open, wide and round and staring. At first I thought it looked very much like I had been badly frightened, but then I thought he had almost a look of . . . of *ecstasy* about him. I believe—"

Here the Lady Calipash faltered, and it took some minutes for Mr. Villein to get the rest of the story from her, for her agitated state required his fetching smelling salts from out of his valise. Eventually, she calmed enough to relate the following:

"I believe he might have done himself the injury that took him from me," she sobbed. "His wrists were slit, and next to him lay his letter-opener. He . . . he had used his own blood to scrawl a message on the skirtingboards . . . oh Mr. Villein!"

"What did the message say?" asked Mr. Villein.

"It said, *he is calling, he is calling, I hear him*," she said, and then she hesitated.

"What is it, Lady Calipash?" asked Mr. Villein.

"I cannot see its importance, but he had this in his other hand," said she, and handed to Mr. Villein

a small object wrapped in a handkerchief.

He took it from her, and saw that it was an odd bit of ivory, wrought to look like a lad's head crowned with laurel. Mr. Villein put it in his pocket and smiled at the Lady Calipash.

"Likely it has nothing to do with your husband's tragic end," he said gently. "I purchased this whilst in Greece, and the late Lord Calipash had often admired it. I gave it to him as a parting gift, for I had meant to withdraw from Calipash Manor this very morning."

"Oh, but you mustn't," begged Lady Calipash. "Not now, not after . . . Lord Calipash would wish you to be here. You mustn't go just now, please! For my sake . . ."

Mr. Villein would have been happy to remain on those terms, had the Lady Calipash finished speaking, but alas, there was one piece of information she had yet to relate.

". . . and for our child's sake, as well," she concluded.

While the Lord Calipash's final message was being scrubbed from the skirtingboards, and his death was being declared *an accident* by the constable in order that the departed Lord might be buried in the churchyard, Mr. Villein violently interrogated Lady Calipash's serving-maid. The story was true—the Lady was indeed expecting—and this intelligence displeased Mr. Villein so immensely that even as he made himself pleasant and helpful with the hope that he might eventually win the Lady Calipash's affections, he sought to find a method of ridding her of her unborn child.

To Mr. Villein's mind, Lady Calipash could not but fall in love with her loyal confidant—believing as he did that she had always secretly admired him—but Mr. Villein knew that should she bear the late Lord Calipash's son, the estate would one day be entirely lost to him. Thus he dosed the Lady with recipes born of his own researches, for while Mr. Villein's *current* profession was that of scholar, in his youth he had pursued lines of study related to all manner of black magics and sorceries. For many years he had put aside his wicked thaumaturgy, being too happy in the company of Lord Calipash to travel those paths that demand solitude and gloom and suffering, but, newly motivated, he returned to his former interests with a desperate passion.

Like the Wife of Bath, Mr. Villein knew all manner of remedies for love's mischances, and he put wicked spells on the decoctions and tisanes that he prepared to help his cause. Yet despite Mr. Villein's skill with infusion and incantation, Lady Calipash grew heavy with child; indeed, she had such a healthy maternal glow about her that the doctor exclaimed that for one so young to be brought to childbed, she was certain of a healthy *accouchement*. Mr. Villein, as canny an adept at lying as other arts, appeared to be thrilled by his Lady's prospects, and was every day by her side. Though privately discouraged by her salutary condition, he was cheered by all manner of odd portents that he observed as her lying-in drew ever closer. First, a murder of large, evil-looking ravens took up residence upon the roof of Calipash Manor, cackling and cawing day and night, and then the ivy growing on Calipash Manor's aged walls turned from green to scarlet, a circumstance no naturalist in the area could satisfactorily explain. Though the Lady Calipash's delivery was expected in midwinter, a she-goat was found to be unexpectedly in the same delicate condition as her mistress, and gave birth to a two-headed kid that was promptly beaten to death and buried far from the Manor.

Not long after that unhappy parturition, which had disturbed the residents of Calipash Manor so greatly that the news was kept from Lady Calipash for fear of doing her or her unborn child a mischief, the Lady began to feel the pangs of her own travail. At the very stroke of midnight, on the night of the dark of the moon, during a lighting storm that was as out of season as the she-goat's unusual kid, the Lady Calipash was happy to give birth to a healthy baby boy, the future Lord Calipash, and as surprised as the midwife when a second child followed, an equally plump and squalling girl. They were so alike that Lady Calipash named them Basil and Rosemary, and then promptly gave them over to the wet-nurse to be washed and fed.

The wet-nurse was a stout woman from the village, good-natured and well-intentioned, but a

sounder sleeper than was wanted in that house. Though an infant's wail would rouse her in an instant, ~~footfalls masked by thunder were too subtle for her country-bred ear, and thus she did not observe the~~ solitary figure that stole silently into the nursery in the wee hours of that morning. For only a few moments did the individual linger, knowing well how restive infants can be in their first hours of life. By the eldritch glow of a lightning strike, Mr. Villein uncorked a phial containing the blood of the two-headed kid now buried, and he smeared upon both of those rosy foreheads an unholy mark, which before the next burst of thunder, sank without a trace into their soft and delicate skin.

II.

A brief account of the infancy, childhood, education, and adolescence of Basil Vincent, the future Lord Calipash, and his sister Rosemary—as well as a discussion of the effect that reputation has on the prospect of obtaining satisfactory friends and lovers

While the author cannot offer an opinion as to whether any person deserves to suffer during his or her lifetime, the author *will* say with utter certainty that Lady Calipash endured more on account of her Twins than any good woman should expect when she finds herself in the happy condition of motherhood. Their easy birth and her quick recovery were the end of Lady Calipash's maternal bliss, for not long after she could sit up and cradle her infant son in her arms, she was informed that a new wet-nurse must be hired, as the old had quit the morning after the birth.

Lady Calipash was never told of the reason for the nurse's hasty departure, only that for a few days her newborns had been nourished with goat's milk, there being no suitable women in the neighborhood to feed the hungry young lord and his equally rapacious sister. The truth of the matter was that little Rosemary had bitten off the wet-nurse's nipple not an hour after witnessing her first sunrise. When the poor woman ran out of the nursery, clutching her bloody breast and screaming, the rest of the servants did not much credit her account of the injury; when it was discovered that the newborn was possessed of a set of thin, needle-sharp teeth behind her innocent mouth, they would have drowned the girl in the well if not for Mr. Villein, who scolded them for peasant superstition and told them to feed the babes on the milk of the nanny goat who had borne the two-headed kid until such a time when a new wet-nurse could be hired. That the wet-nurse's nipple was never found became a source of ominous legend in the household, theories swapped from servant to servant, until Mr. Villein heard two chambermaids chattering and beat them both dreadfully in order that they might serve as an example of the consequences of idle gossip.

This incident was only the first of its kind, but alas, the chronicles of the sufferings of those living in or employed at Calipash Manor after the birth of the Infernal Twins (as they were called by servant, tenant farmer, villager and gentleperson alike, well out of the hearing of either Lady Calipash or Mr. Villein, of course) could comprise their own lengthy volume, and thus must be abridged for the author's current purposes. Sufficient must be the following collection of vignettes:

From the first morning, Basil's cries sounded distinctly syllabic, and when the vicar came to baptize the Twins, he recognized the future Lord Calipash's wailing as an ancient language known only to the most disreputable sort of cultist.

On the first dark of the moon after their birth, it was discovered that Rosemary had sprouted pale greenish webbing between her toes and fingers, as well as a set of pulsing gills just below her shell-pink earlobes. The next morning the odd amphibious attributes were gone, but to the distress of all, their appearance seemed inexorably linked to the lunar cycle, for they appeared every month thereafter.

Before either could speak a word, whenever a person stumbled or belched in their presence, one would laugh like a hyena, then the other, and then they would be both fall silent, staring at the individual until he or she fled the room.

One day after Basil began to teethe, Rosemary was discovered to be missing. No one could find her for several hours, but eventually she reappeared in Basil's crib apparently of her own volition. She was asleep and curled against her brother, who was contentedly gnawing on a bone that had been neatly and inexplicably removed from the lamb roast that was to have been Lady Calipash and Mr. Villein's supper that night.

Yet such accounts are nothing to the constant uproar that ensued when at last Basil and Rosemary began to walk and speak. These accomplishments, usually met with celebration in most houses, were heralded by the staff formally petitioning for the Twins to be confined to certain areas of the house, but Mr. Villein, who had taken as much control of the business of Calipash Manor as he could, insisted that they be given as much freedom as they desired. This caused all manner of problems for the servants, but their complaints were met with cruel indifference by their new, if unofficial, master. It seemed to all that Mr. Villein actually delighted in making life difficult at Calipash Manor, and it may be safely assumed that part of his wicked tyranny stemmed from the unwillingness of Lady Calipash to put aside her mourning, and her being too constantly occupied with the unusual worries yielded by her motherhood to consider entering once again into a state of matrimony, despite his constant hints.

For the Twins, their newfound mobility was a source of constant joy. They were intelligent, inventive children, strong and active, and they managed to discover all manner of secret passageways and caches of treasure the Lady Calipash never knew of and Mr. Villein had not imagined existing, even in his wildest fancies of sustaining this period of living as a gentleman. The siblings were often found in all manner of places at odd times—after their being put to bed, it was not unusual to discover one or both in the library come midnight, claiming to be “looking at the pictures” in books that were only printed text; at cock-crow one might encounter them in the attic, drawing betentacled things on the floorboards with bits of charcoal or less pleasant substances. Though they always secured the windows and triple-locked the nursery door come the dark of the moon, there was never a month that passed without Rosemary escaping to do what she would in the lakes and ponds that were part of the Calipash estate, the only indication of her black frolics bits of fish-bones stuck between her teeth and pond-weed braided through her midnight tresses.

Still, it was often easy to forget the Twins' wickedness between incidents, for they appeared frequently to be mere children at play. They would bring their mother natural oddities from the gardens, like a pretty stone or a perfect pine cone, and beg to be allowed to help feed the hunting hounds in the old Lord Calipash's now-neglected kennels. All the same, even when they were sweet, saddened Lady Calipash that Basil was from the first a dark and sniveling creature, and pretty Rosemary more likely to bite with her sharp teeth than return an affectionate kiss. Even on good days they had to be prevented from entering the greenhouse or the kitchen—their presence withered vegetation, and should one of them reach a hand into a cookie jar or steal a nibble of carrot or potato from the night's dinner, the remaining food would be found fouled with mold or ash upon their withdrawing.

Given the universal truth that servants will gossip, when stories like these began to circulate throughout the neighborhood, the once-steady stream of visitors who had used to come to tour Calipash Manor decreased to a trickle, and no tutor could be hired at any salary. Lady Calipash thanked God that Mr. Villein was there to conduct her children's education, but others were not so sure this was such a boon. Surely, had Lady Calipash realized that Mr. Villein viewed the Lady's request as an opportunity to teach the Twins not only Latin and Greek and English and Geography and

Maths, but also his sorcerous arts, she might have heeded the voices of dissent, instead of dismissing their concerns as utter nonsense.

Though often cursed for their vileness, Basil and Rosemary grew up quite happily in the company of Mr. Villein, their mother, and the servants, until they reached that age when children often begin to want for society. The spring after they celebrated their eighth birthday they pleaded with their mother to be allowed to attend the May Day celebration in town. Against her better judgment, Lady Calipash begged the favor of her father (who was hosting the event); against *his* better judgment, Mr. Fellingworth, who suffered perpetual and extraordinary dyspepsia as a result of worrying about his decidedly odd grandchildren, said the Infernal Twins might come—if, and *only* if they promised to behave themselves. After the incident the previous month, at the birthday party of a young country gentleman, where the Twins were accused to no resolution of somehow having put dead frogs under the icing of the celebrant's towering cake, all were exceedingly cautious of allowing them to attend.

This caution was, regrettably, more deserved than the invitation. Rosemary arrived at the event in a costume of her own making, that of the nymph Flora; when Mr. Villein was interrogated as to his reasoning for such grotesque and ill-advised indulgence of childish fancy, he replied that she had earlier proved her understanding that May Day had once been the Roman festival of Floralia, and it seemed a just reward for her attentiveness in the schoolroom. This bit of pagan heresy might have been overlooked by the other families had not Mr. Villein later used the exact same justification for Basil's behavior when the boy appeared at the celebration later-on, clad only in a bit of blue cloth wrapped about his slender body, and then staged a reenactment for the children of Favonius' rape of Flora, Rosemary playing her part with unbridled enthusiasm. Mr. Villein could not account for the resentment of the other parents, nor the ban placed on the Twins' presence at any future public observances, for, as he told Lady Calipash, the pantomime was accurate, and thus a rare educational moment during a day given over to otherwise pointless frivolity.

Unfortunately for the Twins, the result of that display was total social isolation—quite the opposite of their intention. From that day forward they saw no other children except for those of the staff, and the sense of rank instilled in the future Lord Calipash and his sister from an early age forbade them from playing with those humble urchins. Instead, they began to amuse themselves by trying out a few of the easier invocations taught to them by Mr. Villein, and in this manner summoned two fiends, one an amorphous spirit who would follow them about if it wasn't too windy a day, the other an eel with a donkey's head who lived, much to the gardener's distress, in the pond at the center of the rose garden. Rosemary also successfully reanimated an incredibly nasty, incredibly ancient goose when it died of choking on a strawberry, and the fell creature went about its former business of hissing at everyone and shitting everywhere until the stable boy hacked off its head with a the edge of a shovel, and buried the remains at opposite ends of the estate.

Unfortunately, these childish amusements could not long entertain the Twins once they reached an age when they should, by all accounts, have been interfering with common girls (in Lord Calipash's case) or being courted by the local boys (in Rosemary's). For his part, Basil could not be bothered with the fairer sex, so absorbed was he in mastering languages more *recherché* than his indwelling R'lyehian or native English, or even the Latin, Hebrew, and Assyrian he had mastered before his tenth birthday (Greek he never took to—that was Rosemary's province, and the only foreign tongue she ever mastered). Truth be told, even had Basil been interested in women, his slouching posture, slight physique, and petulant mouth would have likely ensured a series of speedy rejections. Contrariwise, Rosemary was a remarkably appealing creature, but there was something so frightening about her sharp-toothed smile and wicked gaze that no boy in the county could imagine comparing her lips to cherubs' or her eyes to the night sky, and thus she, too, wanted for a lover.

Nature will, however, induce the most enlightened of us to act according to our animal

inclinations, and to that end, one night, just before their fifteenth birthday, Rosemary slipped into her brother's chambers after everyone else had gone to bed. She found Basil studying by himself. He did not look up at her to greet her, merely said *fhtagn-e* and ignored her. He had taught her a bit of his blood-tongue, and their understanding of one another was so profound that she did not mind heeding the imperative, and knelt patiently at his feet for him to come to the end of his work. Before the candle had burned too low, he looked down at her with a fond frown.

"What?" he asked.

"Brother," said she, with a serious expression, "I have no wish to die an old maid."

"What have I to do with that?" said he, wiping his eternally-drippy nose on his sleeve.

"No one will do it to me if you won't."

Basil considered this, realizing she spoke, not of matrimony, but of the act of love.

"Why should you want to?" asked he, at last. "From everything I've read, intercourse yields nothing but trouble for those who engage in libidinous sport."

Rosemary laughed.

"Would you like to come out with me, two nights hence?"

"On our birthday?"

"It's the dark of the moon," said she.

Basil straightened up and looked at her keenly. He nodded once, briskly, and that was enough for her. As she left him, she kissed his smooth cheek, and at her touch, he blushed for the first time in his life.

Before progressing to the following scene of depravity that the author finds it her sad duty to relate, let several things be said about this History. First, this is as true and accurate account of the Infernal Twins of Ivybridge as anyone has yet attempted. Second, it is the duty of all historians to recount events with as much veracity as possible, never eliding over unpleasantness for propriety's sake. Had Suetonius shied away from his subject, we might never have known the true degeneracy of Caligula, and no one could argue that Suetonius' dedication to his work has allowed mankind to learn from the mistakes made by the Twelve Caesars. Thus the author moves on to her third point, that her own humble chronicle of the Ivybridge Twins is intended to be morally instructive rather than titillating. With this understanding, we must, unfortunately, press on.

The future Lord Calipash had never once attended his sister on her monthly jaunts, and so it must be said that, to his credit, it was curiosity rather than lust that comprised the bulk of his motivation that night. He dressed himself warmly, tiptoed to her door, and knocked very softly, only to find his sister standing beside him in a thin silk sheath, though her door had not yet been unlocked. He looked her up and down—there was snow on the ground outside, what was she about, dressing in such a nymphean manner?—but when she saw his alarm, given his own winter ensemble, she merely smiled. Basil was in that moment struck by how appealing were his sister's kitten-teeth, how her ebon tresses looked as soft as raven-down in the guttering candle-light. He swallowed nervously. Holding a single slender finger to her lips, with gestures Rosemary bid him follow her, and they made their way down the hallway without a light. She knew the way, and her moist palm gripped his dry one as they slipped downstairs, out the servant's door, and into the cold, midwinter night.

Rosemary led her brother to one of the gardens—the pleasure-garden, full of little private grottoes—and there, against a tree already familiar with love's pleasures, she kissed him on the mouth. It was a clumsy kiss. The Twins had been well-tutored by the Greeks and Romans in the theory, but not the practice of love, and theory can take one only so far. To their observer—for indeed they were observed—it seemed that both possessed an overabundance of carnal knowledge, and thus it was a longer encounter than most young people's inaugural attempts at amatory relations. Rosemary was eager and Basil shy, though when he kissed her neck and encountered her delicate sea-green gill pulsating

against her ivory skin, gasping for something more substantial than air, he felt himself completely inflamed, and pressed himself into the webbed hand that fumbled with his breeches buttons in the gloaming.

The Twins thought themselves invisible; that the location which they chose to celebrate their induction into Hymen's temple was completely obscure, and thus they were too completely occupied with their personal concerns to notice something very interesting—that Calipash Manor was *not* completely dark, even at that early hour of the morning. A light shone dimly from the tower bedroom where a lone figure, wracked with anger and jealousy and hatred, watched the Twins from the same window where he had observed two other individuals fornicate, perhaps somewhat less wantonly, almost sixteen years earlier.

III.

Containing more of the terrible wickedness of Mr. Villein—a record of the circumstances surrounding the unhappy separation of the Ivybridge Twins—how Rosemary became Mrs. Villein—concluding with the arrival of a curious visitor to Calipash Manor and the results of his unexpected intrusion

Mr. Villein's pursuit of the Lady Calipash had lasted for as many years as Rosemary remained a child but when the blood in her girl's veins began to quicken and wrought those womanly changes upon her youthful body so pleasing to the male eye, Mr. Villein found his lascivious dreams to be newly occupied with daughter rather than mother. Since the time, earlier in the year, when Rosemary had finally been allowed to dress her hair and wear long skirts, Mr. Villein started paying her the sort of little compliments that he assumed a young lady might find pleasing. Little did he imagine that Rosemary thought him elderly, something less than handsome, a dreary conversationalist, and one whose manners were not those of a true gentleman; thus, when he watched the virginal object of his affection sullied enthusiastically by her ithyphallic brother, the indecent tableau came as substantial shock to Mr. Villein's mind.

The following day found Mr. Villein in a state of unwellness, plagued by a fever and chills, but he appeared again the morning after that. The Infernal Twins enquired kindly of his health, and Mr. Villein gave them a warm smile and assured them as to his feeling much better. He was, indeed, so very hale that he should like to give them their birthday presents (a day or so late, but no matter) if they might be compelled to attend him after breakfast? The Twins agreed eagerly—both *loved* presents—and midmorning found the threesome in Mr. Villein's private study, formerly that of St. John Fitzroy, Lord Calipash.

"Children," said he, "I bequeath unto you two priceless antiques, but unlike most of the gifts I have given you over the years, what is for one is not to be used by the other. Rosemary, to you I give these—a set of tortoiseshell combs carved into the likeness of Boubastos. To Basil, this bit of ivory. Careful with it, my dearest boy. It was the instrument of your father's undoing."

Basil, surprised, took the handkerchief-swaddled object, and saw it was the carven head of a young man, crowned with a wreath of laurel-leaves. As Rosemary cooed over her gift and vowed to wear the combs in her hair every day thereafter, Basil looked up at his tutor inquisitively.

"How—what?" he asked, too surprised to speak more intelligently.

"The idol's head was given to me by a youth of remarkable beauty whilst I was abroad in Greece," said Mr. Villein. "I have never touched it. The young man said that one day I should encounter the one for whom it was truly intended, the new earthly manifestation of the ancient god which it represents, and that I must give it to him and him alone. Given your abilities, Basil, I believe *you* are that

manifestation. I made the mistake of showing it to your father, and he coveted it from the moment he saw it—but when he touched the effigy, I believe the god drove him mad to punish him. I have never told you this, but your father took his own life, likely for the heinous crime of—of *besmirching* that which was always intended for other, wiser hands.”

Basil clutched the fetish and nodded his deep thanks, too moved by Mr. Villein’s words to notice the agitated tone in which the last sentiment was expressed. That he was the embodiment of a deity came as little surprise to Basil—from an early age, he had sensed he was destined for greatness—but he found it curious that Mr. Villein should have failed to tell him this until now.

The ivory figurine occupied his thoughts all during the day, and late that same night, after a few hours spent in his sister’s chambers, during which time they successfully collaborated on a matter of urgent business, Basil unwrapped the icon and touched it with his fingertips. To his great frustration, nothing at all happened, not even after he held it in his palm for a full quarter of an hour. Bitterly disappointed, Basil went unhappily to bed, only to experience strange dreams during the night.

He saw a city of grand marble edifices, fathoms below the surface of the sea and immemorably ancient, and he saw that it was peopled by a shining dolphin-headed race, whose only profession seemed to be conducting the hierophantic rites of a radiant god. He walked unseen among those people, and touched with his hands the columns of the temple which housed the god, carved richly with scenes of worship. A voice called to him over and over in the language he had known since his birth, and he walked into the interior of the fane to see the god for himself, only to realize the face was already known to him, for it was the exact likeness of the ivory idol! Then the eyes of the god, though wrought of a glowing stone, seemed to turn in their sockets and meet his gaze, and with that look Basil understood many things beyond human comprehension that both terrified and delighted him.

The future Lord Calipash awoke the next morning bleary-eyed and stupid, to the alarm of both his sister and mother. He was irritable and shrewish when interrogated as to the nature of his indisposition, and his condition did not improve the following day, nor the following, for his sleep was every night disturbed by his seeking that which called to him. He would not speak to any body of his troubles, and when his ill humor still persisted after a week, Rosemary and Lady Calipash agreed on the prudence of summoning the doctor to attend the future Lord. Basil, however, turned away the physician, claiming that he was merely tired, and, annoyed, left to take a long walk in the woods that comprised a large part of the Calipash estate.

Let it be noted here that it was Mr. Villein who suggested that Basil’s room be searched in his absence. There, to the family’s collective horror, a ball of opium and a pipe were discovered among Basil’s personal effects. The doctor was quite alarmed by this, for, he said, while tincture of opium is a well-regarded remedy, smoking it in its raw state was a foul practice only undertaken by degenerates and Orientals, and so it was decided that Basil should be confined to his room for as long as it took to rid him of the habit. Upon the lad’s return there was a sort of ambush, comprised of stern words from the doctor, disappointed head-shakes from Mr. Villein, tears from Lady Calipash, and, for Rosemary’s part, anger (she was, frankly, rather hurt that he hadn’t invited her to partake of the drug). Basil insisted he had no knowledge of how the paraphernalia came to be in his room, but no rational person would much heed the ravings of an opium-addict, and so he was locked in and all his meals were sent up to his room.

A week later Basil was not to be found within his chambers, and a note in his own hand lay upon his unmade bed. His maid found it, but, being illiterate, she gave it over to Lady Calipash while the lady and her daughter were just sitting down to table. Scanning the missive brought on such a fit of histrionics in Lady Calipash that Mr. Villein came down to see what was the matter. He could not get any sense out of the Lady, and Rosemary had quit the breakfasting room before he even arrived, too private a creature to show anyone the depth of her distress, so Mr. Villein snatched the letter away

from the wailing Lady Calipash and read it himself. He was as alarmed by its contents as she, for it said only that Basil had found his confinement intolerable, and had left home to seek his fortune apart from those who would keep him imprisoned.

The author has heard it said that certain birds, like the canary or the nightingale, cannot sing without their mate, and suffer a decline when isolated. Similarly, upon Basil's unexpected flight from Calipash Manor, did Rosemary enter a period of great melancholy, where no one and nothing could lift her spirits. She could not account for Basil's behavior—not his moodiness, nor his failure to take her with him—and so she believed him cross with her for her part in his quarantine, or, worse still, indifferent to her entirely. Seasons passed without her smiling over the misfortunes of others or raising up a single spirit of the damned to haunt the living, and so, upon the year's anniversary of Basil's absence, Mr. Villein sat down with Lady Calipash and made a proposal.

“My lady,” he said, “Rosemary has grown to a pretty age, and I believe her state of mind would be much improved by matrimony and, God willing, motherhood. To this end, I appeal to you to allow me to marry her, whereupon I shall endeavor to provide for her as the most dotting of husbands.”

Lady Calipash was at first disturbed by this request, as she had long assumed that Mr. Villein's affections were settled upon her and not her daughter, but when Mr. Villein mentioned offhandedly that, with Basil absent, he was the only known male heir to the Calipash estate, and should he marry outside the family, neither Lady Calipash nor Rosemary would have any claim to the land or money beyond their annuities, the Lady found it prudent to accept Mr. Villein's suit on Rosemary's behalf.

Mr. Villein expected, and, (it must be admitted) rather ghoulishly anticipated Rosemary's disinclination to form such an alliance, but to the surprise of all, she accepted her fate with a degree of *insouciance* that might have worried a mother less invested in her own continued state of affluence. Without a single flicker of interest Rosemary agreed to the union, took the requisite journey into town to buy her wedding clothes, said her vows, and laid down upon the marriage bed in order that Mr. Villein could defile her body with all manner of terrible perversions, a description of which will not be found in these pages, lest it inspire others to sink to such depths. The author will only say that Rosemary found herself subjected to iterations of Mr. Villein's profane attentions every night thereafter. If any good came out of these acts of wickedness performed upon her person, it was that it roused her out of her dysthymia and inspired her to once again care about her situation.

Not unexpectedly, Rosemary's emotional rejuvenation compelled her to journey down paths more corrupt than any the Twins had yet trod. Her nightly, nightmarish trysts with Mr. Vincent had driven her slightly mad, as well as made her violently aware that not all lovers are interested in their partner's pleasure. Remembering with fondness those occasions when her brother had conjured up from the depths of her body all manner of rapturous sensations, in her deep misery Rosemary concocted a theory drawn as much from her own experience as from the works of the ancient physician Galen of Pergamon. As she accurately recalled, Galen had claimed that male and female reproductive systems are perfect inversions of one another, and thus, she deduced, the ecstasy she felt whilst coupling with her brother was likely due to their being twins and the mirror-image of one another.

To once again achieve satisfactory companionship Rosemary therefore resolved upon creating a companion for herself out of the remains housed in the Calipash family crypt. By means of the necromancies learned in her youth, she stitched together a pleasure-golem made of the best-preserved parts of her ancestors, thanking whatever foul gods she was accustomed to petitioning for the unusually gelid temperature of that tomb. Taking a nose that looked like Basil's from this corpse, a pair of hands from that one, and her father's genitalia, she neatly managed the feat, and, dressing the creature in Basil's clothing, slipped often into that frigid darkness to lie with it. Sadly, her newfound happiness with her ersatz brother was, for two reasons, imperfect. The first was that none of the voca

chords she could obtain were capable of reproducing Basil's distinctively nasal snarl, and thus the *doppelgänger* remained mute, lest an unfamiliar moan ruin Rosemary's obscene delights. The second trouble was more pernicious: she realized too late she had been unable to entirely excise the putrefaction wrought by death upon the limbs of her relations, and thus she contracted a form of gangrene that began to slowly rot her once-pristine limbs.

For another year did this unhappy *status quo* persist, until one dreary afternoon when Rosemary, returning from a long walk about the grounds, noticed a disreputable, slouching individual taking in the fine prospect offered by the approach to Calipash Manor. Unafraid, Rosemary advanced on him, noticing the burliness of the man's figure, the darkness of his skin, and the shabby state of his long overcoat.

"Are you in want of something?" she called to the stranger, and he looked up at her, his face shaded by a mildewing tricorn. "There is scant comfort to be found here at Calipash Manor, but if you require any thing, it will be given to you."

"To whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?" queried he in the rasping accent of a white Creole all the while stealing polite glances of her slightly moldy countenance.

"I am the daughter of the lady of this house," answered Rosemary.

"Then thank you, my lady," said the man. "My name is Valentine, and I have only just returned from Jamaica to find my family dead and my house occupied by those with no obligation to provide for me."

"Have you no friends?"

"None, not being the sort of man who either makes or keeps them easily."

"Come with me, then," said Rosemary, admiring his honesty. She led Valentine up to the house and settled them in her private parlor, whereupon she bid the servants bring him meat and drink. As he ate, he seemed to revive. Rosemary saw a nasty flicker in his eyes that she quite liked, and bid him tell her more of himself. He laughed dryly, and Rosemary had his tale:

"I'm afraid, Lady, that I owe you an apology, for I know one so fine as yourself would never let me into such a house knowing my true history. I was born into the world nothing more than the seventh son of a drunk cottar, and we were always in want as there was never enough work to be had for all of us. I killed my own brother over a bite of mutton, but given that we were all starving, the magistrate saw it fitting that I should not be hanged, but impressed to work as a common hand aboard a naval ship bound for the West Indies. I won't distress you by relating the conditions I endured, suffice it to say I survived.

"When I arrived at our destination, however, I found that it was not my fate to remain in the navy for my sea-captain promptly clapped me in irons and sold me as a white slave, likely due to my being an indifferent sailor and more likely to start riots among the men than help to settle them. I was bought by a plantation-owner who went by the name of Thistlewood, and this man got what labor he could out of me for several years, until I managed to escape to Port Royal with only the clothes on my back and a bit of food I'd stolen. There I lived in a manner I shan't alarm you by describing, and only say that having done one murder, it was easy to repeat the crime for hire until I had enough coin to buy passage back to England—but as I said earlier, when I returned home, I found every living person known to me dead or gone, except those with long memories who recalled enough of my character to kick me away from their doorsteps like a dog."

Rosemary could not but be profoundly moved by such a tale, and she felt her dormant heart begin to warm anew with sympathy for this stranger. She assured him that he should have some work on her estate, and Valentine was so overcome that he took Rosemary's hand in his—but their mutual felicity was interrupted by Mr. Villein, who chose that inopportune moment to enter Rosemary's chambers uninvited.

“What is the meaning of this treachery?” cried Mr. Villein, for though he often engaged in infidelities, the notion that his bride might do the same did not sit well with him, being that he was a jealous man by nature. “Release my wife, foul vagabond!”

“Wife!” exclaimed Valentine, his yellowish complexion turning gray. “How is it that I return home, only to find myself betrayed by one whom I thought harbored love for me?”

It would be impossible to guess whether Rosemary or Mr. Villein was more confused by this ejaculation, but neither had time to linger in a state of wonder for very long. The man withdrew a veritable cannon of a flintlock, and cast off his wretched, threadbare overcoat to reveal that beneath it he wore a rich emerald-green brocade vest threaded through with designs wrought in gold and silver, and his breeches were of the finest satin. When he looked down his nose at them like a lord instead of lowering his eyes like a cottar’s son, they saw he had all the bearing of a gentleman of high rank. Recognizing him at last, Rosemary shrieked, and Mr. Villein paled and took a step back. Though strangely altered by time, the man was unmistakably Basil Vincent, Lord Calipash, returned at last to reclaim by force what should have been his by right of birth!

IV.

The conclusion, detailing the reunion of the Ivybridge Twins—an account of the singular manner in which Rosemary defeated the gangrene that threatened her continued good health—what the author hopes the reader will take away from this Infernal History

“You!” cried Mr. Villein in alarm. “How *dare* you? How *can* you? They said the navy would keep you at least a decade in the service of this country!”

“*They?*” demanded Rosemary. “Who?”

“The press gang!” blustered Mr. Villein. “For the sum I paid them, I’ll have them—”

But the Infernal Twins never discovered what Mr. Villein’s intentions were regarding the unsatisfactory press gang, for Rosemary, overcome with grief and rage, snatched the flintlock pistol out of Basil’s grasp and shot Mr. Villein through the throat. A fountain of blood gushed forth from just above Mr. Villein’s cravat-pin, soaking his waistcoat and then the carpet as he gasped his surprise and fell down dead upon the ground.

“Basil,” she said. “Basil, I’m so—I didn’t—”

“You *married* him?”

“It was all Mother’s doing,” said Rosemary, rather hurt by his tone.

“But—”

“You were gone,” she snapped, “and lest Mr. Villein marry some common slut and turn Mother and myself out of our house . . .”

Even with such reasonable excuses, it was some time before Rosemary could adequately cajole Basil out of his peevish humor; indeed, only when Rosemary asked if Basil had lived as a monk during the years of their estrangement did he glower at her as he had used to do and embraced her. They sat companionably together then, and Basil gave her a truer account of his absence from Calipash Manor.

“The carven ivory head which our loathsome former tutor bequeathed unto me on the fifteenth anniversary of my birth was the instrument, strangely, of both my undoing and my salvation,” said Basil. “Mr. Villein lied to me that I was the manifestation of the old god which it represents—indeed I believe now that his intention was to take me away from you so that he might have you for his own, that I, like my father before me, would be driven to suicide by the whispered secrets of that divine entity. Little did he know that while I am not some sort of fleshly incarnation of that deity, I was born

with the capacity to understand His whispered will, and walk along the sacred paths that were more often trod when His worship was better known to our race.

“I believe once Mr. Villein saw that I was only mildly troubled by these new visions, he concocted a plot to be rid of me in a less arcane manner. The night before you discovered my absence, he let himself into my chambers and put a spell upon me while I slept that made me subject to his diabolical will. I awoke a prisoner of his desire, and he bade me rise and do as he wished. Dearest sister, I tell you now that you did not detect a forgery in my note, for it was written by none other than myself. After I had penned the false missive, Mr. Villein bade me follow him down to Ivybridge, whereupon he put a pint of ale before me and compelled me, via his fell hold upon me, to act in the manner of a drunken commoner, brawling with the local boys until the constable was called and I was thrown in jail. Not recognizing me, due to my long isolation, my sentence was as I told you—that of forced conscription into the navy.

“To a certain point, my tale as I told it to you whilst in the character of the scoundrel Valentine was true—I suffered much on my voyage to Jamaica, and was subsequently sold as a slave. What I did not tell you was the astonishing manner of my escape from that abominable plantation. My master hated me, likely because he instinctively sensed his inferiority to my person. My manners mark me as a noble individual, even when clad in rags, and being that he was a low sort who was considered a gentleman due to his profession rather than his birth, my master gave to me the most dangerous and disgusting tasks. One of his favorite degradations was to station me at the small dock where the little coracles were tied up, so that I could be given the catches of fish to clean them, constantly subjected to wasp stings and cuts and other indignities of that sort.

“Yet it was this task that liberated me, for one afternoon I arrived at the dock to see the fishermen in a tizzy, as one had the good fortune of catching a dolphin. The creature was still alive, incredibly, and I heard its voice in my mind as clearly as I heard their celebration. *Save me, and I shall save you.* it said unto me in that language that has always marked me as bacchant to the god of which I earlier spoke. I picked up a large stick to use as a cudgel and beat the fisherfolk away from their catch, telling them to get back to work as the cetacean was of no use to our master, he should want snapper or jackfish for his dinner rather than oily porpoise-flesh. They heeded me, for they were a little afraid of me—often, as you might imagine, dear sister, bad things would happen to those who chose to cross me in some way—and I heaved the dolphin back into the sea. At first I thought it swam away and that it had merely been sun-madness that had earlier made me hear its voice, but then, after the fishermen had paddled out of sight, the dolphin surfaced with a bulging leather satchel clutched in its beak. It contained gold and jewels that my new friend told me were gathered from shipwrecks on the ocean floor, and that I should use this wealth to outfit myself as a gentleman and buy passage back to England. The creature’s only caveat was that upon my arrival I must once again visit the sea, and return to one of its kin the ivory head, as our tutor had not, as it turns out, been given the object. Rather, it seems that Mr. Villein defiled an ancient holy place near Delphi during his travels in Greece by stealing the artifact away from its proper alcove.

“I agreed to these terms and, after waiting at the docks for a little longer so I might poison the fish it was my duty to clean, and thus enact a paltry revenge upon my tyrannical master, hastened back to Devonshire, as I knew nothing of your situation, but feared much. Upon returning home I assumed the persona of Valentine as a way of ascertaining if, in my absence, your sentiments had changed toward your long-absent brother and the manner in which we were accustomed to living with one another. Seeing your heart go out to such a picaroon assured me of your constancy, and I regret very much that I earlier so impugned your honor. But sister, now that you know of my distresses, you must tell me of yours—pray, how did you come to be married to Mr. Villein and so afflicted by the disease that I see nibbles away at your perfect flesh?”

Rosemary then recounted what has already been recorded here, and she and Basil resolved upon a course of action that shall comprise the *denouement* of this chronicle. Both were determined that the gangrenous affliction should not claim Rosemary, but until Lady Calipash, wondering why her daughter did not come down to dinner, intruded into the parlor where the siblings colluded, they could not see how. The idea occurred to the Twins when Lady Calipash's alarm at seeing Mr. Villein's corpse upon the carpet was so tremendous that she began to scream. Basil, fearing they should be overheard and the murder discovered before they had concocted an adequate reason for his unfortunate death, caught Lady Calipash by the neck when she would not calm herself. As he wrapped his fingers about her throat, Basil noticed the softness of his mother's skin, and, looking deeply into her fearful eyes, saw that she was still a handsome creature of not five-and-thirty.

"Sister," he began, but Rosemary had already anticipated his mind, and agreed that she should immediately switch her consciousness with Lady Calipash's by means of witchcraft she and Basil had long ago learned (and once utilized in their youthful lovemaking) from the donkey-headed eel-creature they had conjured, and henceforth inhabit her own mother's skin. This was done directly, and after securely locking Rosemary's former body (now occupied by their terrified mother) into the family crypt, along with Mr. Villein's corpse, mother and prodigal son, rather than brother and sister had the carriage made ready, and they drove to the head of the River Plym, whereupon Basil summoned one of the aquatic priests of his god, and handed over the relic that has figured so prominently in their narrative.

To conclude, the author hopes that readers of this History will find this account entirely mortifying and disgusting, and seek to avoid modeling any part of his or her behavior upon that of the Infernal Ivybridge Twins—though to be fair, it must be recorded that, for all the duration of their cacodemoniactal lives, the Twins preserved the tenderest affection for each other. Still, there has never been found anywhere in the world a less-worthy man or woman than they, and, until the moonless night when the Twins decided to join the ranks of the cetaceous worshipers of their unholy deity—Lord Calipash being called thence, his sister long-missing her former amphibious wanderings—there was not a neighbor, a tenant, or a servant who did not rue the day they came into the company of Basil and Rosemary.

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The Sign in the Moonlight

David Tallerman

You will have heard, no doubt, of the Bergenssen expedition—if only from the manner of its loss. For a short while, that tragedy was deemed significant and remarkable enough to adorn the covers of every major newspaper in the civilised world.

At the time, I was in no position to follow such matters. However, in subsequent months I've tracked down many journals from that period. As I write, I can look up at the wall to see a cover of the *New York Times* I've pinned there, dated nineteenth of May 1908, bearing the headline, "Horror in the Himalayas: Bergenssen five reported lost in avalanche."

In a sense, I suppose, it's a spirit of morbidity that draws me back to those days upon the mountains and their awful finale, which I failed to witness only by the purest chance. Equally, there's a macabre humour in the thought that to almost all the world I am dead, my body shattered and frozen in the depths of some crevasse. But what draws me most, I think, is the memory of what I saw after I left Bergenssen and the others—that knowledge which is mine uniquely. It's without disrespect to the *Times* that I say they know nothing, nothing whatsoever, of the horror of Mount Kangchenjunga. Likely, there is no one else alive who does.

No rival can rightly be offended when I say that Bergenssen was the finest mountaineer of his generation. No other but that fierce and hardy Swede would have considered an expedition upon Kangchenjunga after the dramatic failure of the first attempt, and the very suspect circumstances of that failure.

I recollect clearly how we spoke of the matter, when he first proposed the climb to me. Coincidence had brought us together in a London gentleman's club that I favoured whenever I was there on business. His tone was scathing as he cried, "Aleister Crowley, that self-publicising fool? The man's as much a mountaineer as I am Henry Ford."

"You can't deny that Dr. Jacot-Guillarmod knows his business."

"Pah! I'll deny what I like. I doubt if they ever left Darjeeling."

"Then how do you explain the death of Alexis Pache and those three porters?"

Bergenssen furrowed his brows. "Must I explain it? Perhaps what they say about Crowley is true. Perhaps those unfortunates were sacrificed to whatever ghoulish spirits the man had devoted himself to that week. More likely, he plied Pache with alcohol, drugs, or some yet darker vice and the man remained in India to indulge himself. Even if it's true, a better climber would have known the warning signs of an avalanche and avoided it accordingly."

With retrospect, those words seem bitter with irony, but at the time, I was caught up by the Swede's immense self-confidence and courage, which were as infectious as any cold. "Then you really think it's possible? Freshfield and Sella confirmed the findings of the Great Trigonometric Survey—truly is the third-highest peak on Earth. It would be a grand achievement."

"I believe there's nothing to be lost in the trying."

"Nothing except our lives."

"Well, of course." He grinned, baring perfectly even white teeth. "So are you with me?"

I was violently tempted to agree on the spot. Instead, I prevaricated, knowing in my heart that I was little more than a hobbyist and, in the final analysis, not fitted to such a venture. Bergenssen's dream was a marvellous one, but outside the smoky environs of the club it would evaporate, and though I might think of our conversation with a certain wistfulness, that would soon pass.

I was wrong. That month brought both personal and business misfortunes, and with each fresh trial, my mind called back to Bergenssen and to misty, snow-clad vistas. By the end of February,

almost in despair, I wrote a brief note and mailed it immediately. If the offer still stood, then I was in

~~Bergenssen's reply came three weeks later, by telegram to my offices. Aside from the date, time and place for our rendezvous it bore only a simple message: GOOD TO HAVE YOU SIR.~~

I won't trouble the reader with facts that can be gleaned elsewhere, and which have no bearing upon the substance of my tale. The details of our preparation are common knowledge, and the names of our three companions may be found from many sources, not least the May obituaries.

Bergenssen—somewhat contradicting his earlier comments to me—thought it wise to follow the route established by Crowley and Jacot-Guillarmod, and if we didn't all agree with his logic then there was no question of debate. He was our leader absolutely, and no one would have suggested the excursion become a democracy.

Therefore, after much prevarication on the part of the local authorities, we began in India, and approached our object via the Singalila Ridge in West Bengal. From Ghum, we trekked through Jorpakri, Tongly, Sandakphu and Falut, in an unremitting downpour of the most torrential rain I've known.

There's little else to tell of those days, except that Bergenssen travelled under something of a funk which in turn infected the rest of our party, even down to our squadron of porters. He avoided any questions as to what had put him out of sorts, and so I took it for a mood of grim determination, or perhaps mere consequence of the abysmal weather, leaches, and other hardships.

In any case, we made good progress. We proceeded in short order through Gamotang, whence the work of mountaineering began in earnest, and on through successive camps until—late of an afternoon, with violet hints already softening the robust blue of the Himalayan sky—we came upon camp five.

In my mind's eye, I'd expected some place remarkable, befitting the violence that had occurred nearby. In fact, it was nondescript, nothing more than a small mound nestled in the shadow of one minor peak. Strangely, this disappointment didn't so much mitigate my sense of nervous excitement as increase it—as though I'd unconsciously decided to seek elsewhere for the tragic drama the scene failed to provide.

We were all of us very quiet, however, and Bergenssen seemed practically catatonic, having said not a word all through the afternoon. By the time we'd pitched our tents and retired, the sky was a dark and livid purple that made the snow seem almost black, and my excitement had risen nearly to fever pitch—though I still couldn't say why, or what might possibly relieve it.

Rather than settle down to sleep, I sought out Bergenssen, and was pleased to find him in better cheer than he'd been throughout the day. Without to-do, I said, "This is the point where the Crowley expedition floundered, isn't it? Do you think we're in any danger?"

"If Crowley's to be believed then no, none whatsoever. He blamed the matter entirely on Tartarin and Righi's incompetence, as I'm sure you know."

I detected a note in Bergenssen's tone. "And if he *isn't* to be believed?"

"Well . . . it's all very strange, you know." He lapsed into silence, and for a while it seemed this cryptic statement would be his last word on the matter. Finally he continued, "One newspaper claimed that he heard their screams but chose to stay in his tent, drinking tea rather than hurrying to their aid. There was a quote I memorised: 'A mountain accident of this sort is one of the things for which I have no sympathy whatever,' he said. Can you believe it?"

"If there's anything in the rumours about him, I can. They refer to him in certain circles as 'the wickedest man in Britain.' Do you really think it's strange that he'd let his fellows go to their deaths unaided?"

"That? No, that isn't it."

There followed another long pause. These silences unsettled me more than anything because they were so out of keeping with Bergenssen's characteristic bluster. What he eventually said, however, was nearly as unexpected. "You know, I suppose, what Kangchenjunga means?"

I'd passed a few hours in research before we set out. "The Five Treasures of Snows. . .the natives associate the five peaks with the five repositories of their god."

"Did you know that Crowley claimed the porters were willing to continue—the next morning, that is, after the accident? He said they told him that the spirits of the mountain had been propitiated. One death for every peak."

"But every account reports only four deaths, those of Pache and three of the porters."

Bergenssen looked away, to stare distractedly at the wall of the tent. "Yes. I know."

I sensed that his brief spell of loquacity had come to an end. I bid him goodnight and retired to my own small shelter. Feeling suddenly exhausted, I climbed straight into my sleeping bag and extinguished my lamp.

Yet sleep was not forthcoming. As often happens, bodily tiredness served only to exacerbate the activity of my mind. Outside, the wind ranged between eerie soughing and a penetrating, almost feline screech. Every so often, a crash marked the passage of some loose snow bank into the abyss.

As I lay staring into perfect darkness, I thought upon the rumours I'd heard of Aleister Crowley, tales he seemed to delight in and even propagate. I wondered what succour such a man could hope to find amidst the soul-wrenching desolation and wild beauty of the Himalayas. I imagined myself at that very spot where Crowley had sat, listening as his colleagues were torn from the mountain face, sipping tea as they tumbled down and down toward horrific deaths.,

I don't remember falling asleep, but I have vague recollections of dreams in which I was led not by the hardy Bergenssen but by Crowley himself, who beckoned me through the most hazardous of routes, paths he crossed effortlessly only to laugh and caper when I couldn't follow with the same ease.

I remember how I raged at him—and how my cries only made him laugh the harder.

I woke late. It was that, I suppose, that saved my life.

I transitioned abruptly from deep sleep into wakefulness, and realised the sounds from outside were my colleagues preparing for our departure. Yet I had no urge at all to move. I felt cold beyond belief, and it was more than I could do to control my shivering. Nevertheless, I struggled into my coat and boots, whilst the urge to vomit rose in my gullet.

The moment I stepped outside, Bergenssen rushed over. "My God, man, are you all right? You look like death! Can you stand?"

I struggled to control my thoughts. "I had the malaria," I said. "Last year, in Egypt. I think perhaps it's back." I brushed a palm across my brow, found it clammy. "I'm afraid I'll be going nowhere today."

"Not to worry, old man," Bergenssen said—though in fact, he looked more dejected even than I felt. "It's a poor time for a delay, though."

I couldn't see how this was true. The wind was high, visibility was poor, and in all it promised to be a bad day for mountaineering. When I pointed this out, he said, "Yes, but we have a while yet. I wanted badly to make camp six."

I was startled by the lack of sympathy in his tone. It was a sort of childish spite that made me say "You should go on. I'll be better soon, I'm sure." Then, beginning to realise how foolishly I was jeopardising myself, I added, "If you rope the worst parts and send someone back in a day or two, I'll be able to catch up."

Bergenssen nodded vigorously. I could see that he very much wanted to believe me. "Yes, I

suppose that's the only way. You can manage, can't you? I'd leave one of the porters, you know . . ."

"Yes?" "I said, with sudden hope.

"But we'll need them all at six, you see."

My heart sank. I felt a flush of horror at the thought that the man before me was nothing like the Bergenssen I knew; that no words I could say would move him. "Don't worry," I told him. "What's the worst that can happen to me here?"

So they set out, and I watched until they disappeared. Had I any premonition? I remember being in a state of ease, but of course there was the sudden rush of sickness, my half-remembered nightmares, and Bergenssen's uncharacteristic behaviour. With all that, it was easy to dismiss any doubts as fanciful.

Yet very soon, I had graver reasons for concern. The weather worsened drastically: the wind rose in a matter of minutes, until soon it was a gale, flinging pirouettes of snow and wailing banshee-like across the cliffs. It wasn't long before I was driven back into my tent, where I huddled shivering, hoping against hope to hear the sounds of their return.

What I heard instead was the worst thing I could have expected—a colossal crash that seemed to go on for minutes before it subsided into a low muttering.

It could only be an avalanche.

I think I grew feverish then, if I hadn't been already. I know it wasn't long after the avalanche that I convinced myself my companions would not be returning. They were gone, and I was alone.

I shouted and raved for a while. Afterwards, I imagined I'd returned to lucidity. The truth was that my temporary madness had taken a different turn. I was sure I should go outside and start back to camp four, where a portion of our entourage was waiting with supplies. If I didn't, I would be buried—as Bergenssen and the others had been buried.

I staggered outside. The storm was like nothing I'd seen. Visibility was non-existent, except when a flash of lightning offered brief and violent illumination. Other than that, there was only darkness and snow, mixed inseparably, an ever-shifting funnel that howled around my every step.

In a minute, I'd lost all trace of my tent. On one level I realised I was as likely to blunder off a cliff as to come anywhere near our last camp, but that realisation did nothing to slow my steps. Increasingly, I was unsure of where I was going, or why. Was something pursuing me? Yes, that was it—now that I thought, I could hear it, hear its measured steps through the bludgeoning of the gale. Was it a thing or a man? Perhaps it was something of both.

I stumbled often and fell more than once, but I seemed to have grown oblivious to pain, or sense, or anything but my fear. I reeled without direction, with no sense of time, unaware even of the storm.

I don't remember finding the valley. All I recollect is a change in the pitch of the wind, a relaxing in the lash of the snow against my back. It seemed quite abrupt. There was light, for the first time in ages. At first, I thought it was artificial. Then I recognised the pallid glow of the moon. It hung low and gigantic, as though I'd scaled a peak that had somehow brought us face to face. It was bright enough for me to see the crevasse walls to either side—and ahead, the building that rose where those walls met.

I thought it must be a monastery, but it looked as much like a fortress, with four windowless tiers raised on columns, each level roofed in the peculiarly sharp and steep Tibetan style. The wide doors were of plain, black wood, and there was none of the usual ornamentation, except for one detail—the huge, golden pentagram mounted high upon the fourth storey.

At that sight, though I might rationally have assumed myself rescued and safe, my fear redoubled. I managed one more step, before all the strength left my body at once.

I pitched forward. The blackness took me, and—God help me—I was grateful.

I woke by stages.

For some immeasurable period, I'd been aware of sensations—motion, and later, the cool of water on my brow—but had lacked any understanding of what those feelings meant or how they came to be. I was oblivious to the passage of time. Regardless of whether my eyes were open or closed, they were met by the same ruddy gloom. I was afraid, but in an indistinct way, as one might fear the concept of dying more than the prospect itself. I've no doubt that my fever was still raging, for I remember phases of awful cold and enormous heat.

Eventually, I examined my surroundings with something like clarity. I was muddled, the effort of moving my neck made it ache cruelly, and my inner clothes were moist with sweat, but I was lucid enough for curiosity. However, the room I was in was very plain. I lay on a low, hard bed, and the other furnishings were a stool in the opposite corner, a small table beside me, and a narrow brazier. I thought it might be a cell, though there was no indication of a lock on the door. Then I remembered the building I'd seen, and how I'd thought it must be a monastery. The chamber was plain enough to be a monk's.

Yet that was strange in itself. If Crowley had been correct then we'd reached to around twenty-five thousand feet; even a conservative estimate placed us at well above twenty-thousand. Such a height was tremendously isolating, far too much so for any regular supply or communication from the outside world.

I thought back to the research I'd done before I'd joined with Bergenssen. There'd been one sect in particular who considered Kangchenjunga sacred, and who might very well have built a monastery high amongst its peaks. What were they called? The Kirati, that was it—descendants of an ancient local people, practitioners of a religion rife with shamanism and ancestor-worship. If I remembered rightly, their god was "Tagera Ningwaphuma," called the Supreme Knowledge. Perhaps here, high upon the mountain, I had come upon one of their extreme outposts.

Then I remembered the pentagram above the door. Maybe it wasn't the Kirati after all—or if it was, some even more obscure offshoot cut off from the rest. *Five points*, I thought, *five points for five peaks*, and something in the notion made me shudder.

I climbed unsteadily to my feet. The effort made my head spin, and only a hand outstretched to the wall kept me standing. After a minute, however, the dizziness began to pass. I crossed the stone floor by small steps and tested the door. Sure enough, there was no lock. It swung open freely.

The man who waited outside, who turned at the sound of the door's opening, was swathed in robes of deep crimson. He looked like any other priest of the region, except for two details: his robe was hooded and the hood drawn up, so that I could see only a crude hint of features, and in his hand he gripped a wooden staff which he clearly didn't require for support.

He moved to bar my way. He was smaller than I was, but agile. He said something I didn't understand; it didn't sound like any dialect of Tibetan I'd heard. Something in the words and in his stance made me nervous.

"I'm grateful for your hospitality," I said, "but I won't impose any further." I don't know if I really expected him to understand English. When he evidently didn't, I added in broken Tibetan something to the effect of, "Now I must go."

He pressed closer, with the staff upraised, as if herding me back into my cell. He spoke again, this time more abruptly.

"No," I said, reverting to English, "my friends . . . on the mountain . . ." I'd suddenly thought of Bergenssen, and the previously unconsidered possibility that someone might have survived. "Thank you, I must be leaving."

This time he spoke loudly, and waved one hand close to my face as though swatting at an insect. Suddenly, I felt terribly afraid. I pushed him away. At that, he looked as though he'd shout along the passage for help. In panic, I grabbed for his staff, and had it away from him before he even

realised what was happening. He took a swift step back. I swung clumsily. The blow caught his shoulder. In a crouch, he backed off again, and I knew he was preparing to run. I struck again. This time, he slipped backward and his balance went. His head struck the wall with a ghastly slap.

I stood panting for a while, staring down in uncomprehending horror. Finally, I realised the dark trickle pooling between the cobbles was blood. Was he dead? I dared not check. But he wasn't moving, and I could hear no sound of breathing.

It had been an accident.

Or had it?

In either case, how could I explain it?

I'd committed an abominable deed. I had killed a man on the most tenuous of grounds. Yet all I felt was fear, so profound that it swallowed every other sensation or possibility, morality included.

I decided I must hide the body. That might forestall any suspicion until I could get out of there. Setting the staff down, I grasped under his shoulders and, with much clumsy effort, managed to manoeuvre him into the room where I'd awoken.

I tried to drag him onto the bed, but it was too difficult. I let him flop to the floor instead. As I did so, his hood fell back, and I finally saw his face. He was slim-featured, quite young, and unexceptional—except for the scar on his cheek.

It was a perfect pentagram of whitened skin.

I shuddered with a feeling far worse than fever. Something was terribly wrong here, and in that moment, the fact I'd killed a man didn't seem the worst of it. What had I stumbled onto here, high upon Kangchenjunga?

If I was under threat and had no means to reason with my captors, if I was already responsible for the death of one of their number, there could be no question but that I'd be safer even in the tempest outside. I returned to the corridor and considered it properly. It was very plain, and so long that I thought it might stretch the entire length of the building. Spaced along its length were other rooms or cells at roughly even intervals. At the far ends were double doors, each pair like those I'd observed from the outside.

It seemed a safe assumption that one set led out to the valley from whence I'd arrived. But which?

I settled on the nearest. In the interest of covertness, and also because its tip was sodden with blood, I abandoned the staff, choosing to support myself against the wall instead. I moved softly, on the very border of panic, convinced I'd be discovered at any instant.

In fact, I reached the doors without incident. After much nervous hesitation, I pushed one slightly open. Only blackness lay beyond. I pushed harder. Crouched low, I eased through the gap.

I was aware of a large space, then of light at its centre, and finally of figures standing within the illumination. Cockroach-like, I scurried through the shadows, hoping for some intense dark to conceal me. I was sure I'd be seen. Yet when I paused to look, the figures were still absorbed.

That calmed me fractionally—enough that I could take in the scene about me. I crouched at the edge of a large, circular chamber cleanly split into halves. The inner portion, where I knelt, was bordered only by plain stone walls. The other, however, presented a series of arches to the most astonishing vista. Evidently we were perched on the very edge of the mountainside, because the view was horizonless and dizzying.

At the centre of the room, directly above the point where the figures were gathered, a narrow well in the domed ceiling let in a beam of scintillating moonlight. Beneath, borne on a low pedestal, sat a large, pentangular dish of crystalline filigree, so delicate and translucent that it might have been carved from ice. So much did it glow and its surface ripple that it seemed to have been filled by the rays shining from on high.

I could make no sense of it all, except to find it strange and frightening. Nor had I time to

consider. Suddenly the figures, who previously had appeared sunken in reverie, began to mill about and to converse in that clipped tongue the monk had employed. I feared I'd been discovered, and tensed instinctively. But none of them were looking in my direction.

It occurred to me they must be wondering after their missing companion, and this was confirmed when a delegation hurried out through the double doors. A minute later came shouts, and a second party followed the first. For a while, there was much activity. I was sure that at any instant one of them would penetrate the shadows and discover me. Yet, though they had time to scour the place, not one seemed to consider that I might have penetrated their sanctum. Eventually they reconvened, and allowed myself the faintest release of held breath.

My relief was premature—and hopelessly misjudged.

The gathering split into two factions. Five of the monks surrounded the pentangular dish, whilst the others retreated to form a crescent round it, with the open side in the direction of the doors. Immediately they set up a chant, in a language just as unfamiliar but quite different from the one they'd employed before.

The words played havoc on my nerves, and brought incomprehensible images into my mind—as though I was perceiving something I couldn't rationally grasp. As the chant heightened, raising towards crescendo, so the slant of moonlight seemed to brighten, and then, to pulse. At last, it was as though a column of brilliant, throbbing whiteness fell through the centre of the room. Though it scorched my eyes, it never occurred to me to look away. The dish seemed full almost to overflowing, as though brimming with fluid light.

The five monks assigned to its pentagonal tips, who so far had played no part, lurched abruptly to life as if galvanised. Each grasped his respective point and heaved with all his might. Slowly, the bowl began to tip.

As impossible as I knew it to be, I expected its contents to run out, to splash like mercury over the floor. Instead, just as impossibly, they were projected—in a manner that bore no resemblance to the projection of light. The flow seemed to crawl and seethe through the air. It fell upon the door, where splashed like thrown paint.

When it settled, a glimmering pentagram hung upon the boards.

I'd barely registered all this when the chant adopted a new tone, shifting register without any loss of intensity. My attention was focused entirely on the doors. They looked soft and unreal under the stamp of fluid moonlight.

They seemed to shudder—once, twice, and a third, most violent, time.

With a force that made wood shiver like paper, they sprang open.

I fell backwards. I think I even cried out. If I did, it drew no attention. All thought was devoted to that hideous mantra—which seemed now like a wail of condensed experience, of horrible knowing borne by unfathomable words.

All eyes hung on the open doorway.

I couldn't help but look.

My first thought was of a mirror, so similar was the scene beyond. There was the circular chamber there the arches opening onto inconceivable space, the pedestal, the figures clustered about it.

Yet almost straight away, I perceived a difference. The view through the distant arcade was not the one behind me. Those stark grey pinnacles were unlike any on Earth.

Then it struck me. They weren't of Earth at all.

If they were, what could explain the blue-green orb hung in the sky behind? I knew with absolute certainty that I looked upon a world not my own. More, I felt sure it was our moon, the very same that cast its rays through the ceiling—whose radiation had somehow riven a path through untraversable space.

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