

JERUSALEM'S LOT

2 October 1850

DEAR BONES,

How good it was to step into the cold, draughty hall here at Chapelwaite, every bone in an ache from that abominable coach, in need of instant relief from my distended bladder - and to see a letter addressed in your own inimitable scrawl propped on the obscene little cherry-wood table beside the door! Be assured that I set to deciphering it as soon as the needs of the body were attended to (in a coldly ornate downstairs bathroom where I could see my breath rising before my eyes).

I'm glad to hear that you are recovered from the *miasma* that has so long set in your lungs, although I assure you that I do sympathize with the moral dilemma the cure has affected you with. An ailing abolitionist healed by the sunny climes of slavestruck Honda! Still and all, Bones, I ask you as a friend who has also walked in the valley of the shadow, *to take all care of yourself and* venture not back to Massachusetts until your body gives you leave. Your fine mind and incisive pen cannot serve us if you are clay, and if the Southern zone is a healing one, is there not poetic justice in that?

Yes, the house is quite as fine as I had been led to believe by my cousin's executors, but rather more sinister. It sits atop a huge and jutting point of land perhaps three miles north of Falmouth and nine miles north of Portland. Behind it are some four acres of grounds, gone back to the wild in the most formidable manner imaginable - junipers, scrub vines, bushes, and various forms of creeper climb wildly over the picturesque stone walls that separate the estate from the town domain. Awful imitations of Greek statuary peer blindly through the wrack from atop various hillocks - they seem, in most cases, about to lunge at the passer-by. My cousin Stephen's tastes seem to have run the gamut from the unacceptable to the downright horrific. There is an odd little summer house which has been nearly buried in scarlet sumac and a grotesque sundial in the midst of what must once have been a garden. It adds the final lunatic touch.

But the view from the parlour more than excuses this; I command a dizzying view of the rocks at the foot of Chapelwaite Head and the Atlantic itself. A huge, bellied bay window looks out on this, and a huge, toadlike secretary stands beside it. It will do nicely for the start of that novel which I have talked of so long [and no doubt tiresomely].

Today has been grey with occasional splatters of rain. As I look out all seems to be a study in slate - the rocks, old and worn as Time itself, the sky, and of course the sea, which crashes against the granite fangs below with a sound which is not precisely sound but vibration - I can feel the waves with my feet even as I write. The sensation is not a wholly unpleasant one.

I know you disapprove my solitary habits, dear Bones, but I assure you that I am fine and happy. Calvin is with me, as practical, silent, and as dependable as ever, and by midweek I am sure that between the two of us we shall have straightened our affairs and made arrangements for necessary deliveries from town - and a company of cleaning women to begin blowing the dust from this place!

I will close - there are so many things as yet to be seen, rooms to explore, and doubtless a thousand pieces of execrable furniture to be viewed by these tender eyes.

Once again, my thanks for the touch of familiarity brought by your letter, and for your continuing regard.

Give my love to your wife, as you both have mine.

CHARLES

6 October 1850

DEAR BONES,

Such a place this is!

It continues to amaze me - as do the reactions of the townfolk in the closest village to my occupancy. That is a queer little place with the picturesque name of Preacher's Corners. It was there that Calvin contracted for the weekly provisions. The other errand, that of securing a sufficient supply of cordwood for the winter, was likewise taken care of. But Cal returned with gloomy countenance, and when I asked him what the trouble was, he replied grimly enough:

'They think you mad, Mr Boone!'

I laughed and said that perhaps they had heard of the brain fever I suffered after my Sarah died - certainly I spoke madly enough at that time, as you could attest.

But Cal protested that no one knew anything of me except through my cousin Stephen, who contracted for the same services as I have now made provision for. 'what was said, sir, was that anyone who would live in Chapelwaite must be either a lunatic or run the risk of becoming one.'

This left me utterly perplexed, as you may imagine, and I asked who had given him this amazing communication. He told me that he had been referred to a sullen and rather besotted pulp-logger named Thompson, who owns four hundred acres of pine, birch, and spruce, and who logs it with the help of his five sons, for sale to the Mills in Portland and to householders in the immediate area.

When Cal, all unknowing of his queer prejudice, gave him the location to which the wood was to be brought, this Thompson stared at him with his mouth ajar and said that he would send his sons with the wood, in the good light of the day, and by the sea road.

Calvin, apparently misreading my bemusement for distress, hastened to say that the man reeked of cheap whiskey and that he had then lapsed into some kind of nonsense about a deserted village and cousin Stephen's relations -and worms! Calvin finished his business with one of Thompson's boys, who, I take it, was rather surly and none too sober or freshly-scented himself. I take it there has been some of this reaction in Preacher's Corners itself, at the general store where Cal spoke with the shop-keeper, although this was more of the gossipy, behind-the-hand type.

None of this has bothered me much; we know how rustics dearly love to enrich their lives with the smell of scandal and myth, and I suppose poor Stephen and his side of the family are fair game. As I told Cal, a man who has fallen to his death almost from his own front porch is more than likely to stir talk.

The house itself is a constant amazement. Twenty-three rooms, Bones! The wainscoting which panels the upper floors and the portrait gallery is mildewed but still stout. While I stood in my late cousin's upstairs bedroom I could hear the rats scuttering behind it, and big ones they must be, from the sound they make - almost like people walking there. I should hate to encounter one in the dark; or even in the light, for that matter. Still, I have noted neither holes nor droppings. Odd.

The upper gallery is lined with bad portraits in frames which must be worth a fortune. Some bear a resemblance to Stephen as I remember him. I believe I have correctly identified my Uncle Henry Boone and his wife Judith; the others are unfamiliar. I suppose one of them may be my own notorious grandfather, Robert. But Stephen's side of the family is all but unknown to me, for which I am heartily sorry. The same good humour that shone in Stephen's letters to Sarah and me, the same light of high intellect, shines in these portraits, bad as they are. For what foolish reasons families fall out! A rifled *escritoire*, hard words between brothers now dead three generations, and blame-less descendants are needlessly estranged. I cannot help reflecting upon how fortunate it was that you and Join Petty succeeded in contacting Stephen when it seemed I might follow my Sarah through the Gates - and upon

how unfortunate it was that chance should have robbed us of a face-to-face meeting. How I would have loved to hear him defend the ancestral statuary and furnishings!

But do not let me denigrate the place to an extreme. Stephen's taste was not my own, true, but beneath the veneer of his additions there are pieces [a number of them shrouded by dust-covers in the upper chambers] which are true masterworks. There are beds, tables, and heavy, dark scrollings done in teak and mahogany, and many of the bedrooms and receiving chambers, the upper study and small parlour, hold a sombre charm. The floors are rich pine that glow with an inner and secret light. There is dignity here; dignity and the weight of years. I cannot yet say I like it, but I do respect it. I am eager to watch it change as we revolve through the changes of this northern clime.

Lord, I run on! Write soon, Bones. Tell me what progress you make, and what news you hear from Petty and the rest. And please do not make the mistake of trying to persuade any new Southern acquaintances as to your views *too forcibly* - I understand that not all are content to answer merely with their mouths, as is our long-winded friend, Mr Calhoun.

Yr. affectionate friend,

CHARLES

16 October 1850

DEAR RICHARD,

Hello, and how are you? I have thought about you often since I have taken up residence here at Chapelwaite, and had half expected to hear from you - and now I receive a letter from Bones telling me that I'd forgotten to leave my address at the club! Rest assured that I would have written eventually anyway, as it sometimes seems that my true and loyal friends are all I have left in the world that is sure and completely normal. And, Lord, how spread we've become! You in Boston, writing faithfully for *The Liberator* [to which I have also sent my address, incidentally], Hanson in England on another of his confounded jaunts, and poor old Bones in the very *lions lair*, recovering his lungs.

It goes as well as can be expected here, Dick, and be assured I will render you a full account when I am not quite as pressed by certain events which are extant here - I think your legal mind may be quite intrigued by certain happenings at Chapelwaite and in the area about it.

But in the meantime I have a favour to ask, if you will entertain it. Do you remember the historian you introduced me to at Mr Clary's fund-raising dinner for the cause? I believe his name was Bigelow. At any rate, he mentioned that he made a hobby of collecting odd bits of historical lore which pertained to the very area in which I am now living. My favour, then, is this: Would you contact him and ask him what facts, bits of folklore, or *general rumour* - if any - he may be conversant with about a small, deserted village called JERUSALEM'S LOT, near a township called Preacher's Corners, on the Royal River? The stream itself is a tributary of the Androscoggin, and flows into that river approximately eleven miles above that river's emptying place near Chapelwaite. It would gratify me intensely, and, more important, may be a matter of some moment.

In looking over this letter I feel I have been a bit short with you, Dick, for which I am heartily sorry. But be assured I will explain myself shortly, and until that time I send my warmest regards to your wife, two fine sons, and, of course, to yourself.

Yr. affectionate friend,

CHARLES

16 October 1850

DEAR BONES,

I have a tale to tell you which seems a little strange [and even disquieting] to both Cal and me - see what you think. If nothing else, it may serve to amuse you while you battle the mosquitoes!

Two days after I mailed my last to you, a group of four young ladies arrived from the Corners under the supervision of an elderly lady of intimidatingly competent visage named Mrs Cloris, to set the place in order and to remove some of the dust that had been causing me to sneeze seemingly at every other step. They all seemed a little nervous as they went about their chores; indeed, one flighty miss uttered a small screech when I entered the upstairs parlour as she dusted.

I asked Mrs Cloris about this [she was dusting the downstairs hall with grim determination that would have quite amazed you, her hair done up in an old faded bandanna], and she turned to me and said with an air of determination: 'They don't like the house, and I don't like the house, sir, because it has always been a *bad* house.'

My jaw dropped at this unexpected bit, and she went on in a kindlier tone: 'I do not mean to say that Stephen Boone was not a fine man, for he was; I cleaned for him every second Thursday all the time he was here, as I cleaned for his father, Mr Randolph Boone, until he and his wife disappeared in eighteen and sixteen. Mr Stephen was a good and kindly man, and so you seem, sir (if you will pardon my bluntness; I know no other way to speak), but the house is *bad* and it always *has been*, and no Boone has ever been happy here since your grandfather Robert and his brother Philip fell out over stolen [and here she paused, almost guiltily] items in seventeen and eighty-nine.'

Such memories these folks have, Bones!

Mrs Cloris continued: 'The house was built in unhappiness, has been lived in with unhappiness, there has been blood spilt on its floors [as you may or may not know, Bones, my Uncle Randolph was involved in an accident on the cellar stairs which took the life of his daughter Maroella; he then took his own life in a fit of remorse. The incident is related in one of Stephen's letters to me, on the sad occasion of his dead sister's birthday], there has been disappearance and accident.'

'I have worked here, Mr Boone, and I am neither blind nor deaf. I've heard awful sounds in the walls, sir, awful sounds - thumpings and crashings and once a strange wailing that was half-laughter. It fair made my blood curdle. It's a dark place, sir.' And there she halted, perhaps afraid she had spoken too much.

As for myself, I hardly knew whether to be offended or amused, curious or merely matter-of-fact. I'm afraid that amusement won the day. 'And what do you suspect, Mrs Cloris? Ghosts rattling chains?'

But she only looked at me oddly. 'Ghosts there may be. But it's not ghosts in the walls. It's not ghosts that wail and blubber like the damned and crash and blunder away in the darkness. It's-'

'Come, Mrs Cloris,' I prompted her. 'You've come this far. Now can you finish what you've begun?'

The strangest expression of terror, pique, and - I would swear to it - religious awe passed over her face. 'Some die not' she whispered. 'Some live in the twilight shadows Between to serve - Him!'

And that was the end. For some minutes I continued to tax her, but she grew only more obstinate and would say no more. At last I desisted, fearing she might gather herself up and quit the premises.

This is the end of one episode, but a second occurred the following evening. Calvin had laid a fire downstairs and I was sitting in the living-room, drowsing over a copy of *The Intelligencer* and listening to the sound of wind-driven rain on the large bay window. I felt comfortable as only one can on such a

night, when all is miserable outside and all is warmth and comfort inside; but a moment later Cal appeared at the door, looking excited and a bit nervous.

'Are you awake, sir?' he asked.

'Barely,' I said. 'What is it?'

'I've found something upstairs I think you should see,' he responded, with the same air of suppressed excitement.

I got up and followed him. As we climbed the wide stairs, Calvin said: 'I was reading a book in the upstairs study - a rather strange one when I heard a noise in the wall.'

'Rats,' I said. 'Is that all?'

He paused on the landing, looking at me solemnly. The lamp he held cast weird, lurking shadows on the dark draperies and on the half-seen portraits that seemed now to leer rather than smile. Outside the wind rose to a brief scream and then subsided grudgingly.

'Not rats,' Cal said. 'There was a kind of blundering, thudding sound from behind the book-cases, and then a horrible gurgling - horrible, sir. And scratching, as if something were struggling to get out. . . to get at me!'

You can imagine my amazement, Bones. Calvin is not the type to give way to hysterical flights of imagination. It began to seem that there was a mystery here after all - and perhaps an ugly one indeed.

'What then?' I asked him. We had resumed down the hall, and I could see the light from the study spilling forth on to the floor of the gallery. I viewed it with some trepidation; the night seemed no longer comfortable.

'The scratching noise stopped. After a moment the thudding, shuffling sounds began again, this time moving away from me. I paused once, and I swear I heard a strange, almost inaudible laugh! I went to the book-case and began to push and pull, thinking there might be a partition, or a secret door.'

'You found one?'

Cal paused at the door to the study. 'No - but I found this!'

We stepped in and I saw a square black hole in the left case. The books at that point were nothing but dummies, and what Cal had found was a small hiding place. I flashed my lamp within it and saw nothing but a thick fall of dust, dust which must have been decades old.

'There was only this,' Cal said quietly, and handed me a yellowed foolscap. The thing was a map, drawn in spider-thin strokes of black ink - the map of a town or village. There were perhaps seven buildings, and one, clearly marked with a steeple, bore this legend beneath it: *The Worm That Doth Corrupt*.

In the upper left corner, to what would have been the north-west of this little village, an arrow pointed. Inscribed beneath it: *Chapelwaite*.

Calvin said: 'In town, sir, someone rather superstitiously mentioned a deserted village called Jerusalem's Lot. It's a place they steer clear of.'

'But this?' I asked, fingering the odd legend below the steeple.

'I don't know.'

A memory of Mrs Cloris, adamant yet fearful, passed through my mind. 'The Worm . . .' I muttered.

'Do you know something, Mr Boone?'

'Perhaps. . . it might be amusing to have a look for this town tomorrow, do you think, Cal?'

He nodded, eyes lighting. We spent almost an hour after this looking for some breach in the wall behind the cubbyhole Cal had found, but with no success. Nor was there a recurrence of the noises Cal had described.

We retired with no further adventure that night.

On the following morning Calvin and I set out on our ramble through the woods. The rain of the night before had ceased, but the sky was sombre and lowering. I could see Cal looking at me with some doubtfulness and I hastened to reassure him that should I tire, or the journey prove too far, I would not hesitate to call a halt to the affair. We had equipped ourselves with a picnic lunch, a fine Buckwhite compass, and, of course, the odd and ancient map of Jerusalem's Lot.

It was a strange and brooding day; not a bird seemed to sing nor an animal to move as we made our way through the great and gloomy stands of pine to the south and east. The only sounds were those of our own feet and the steady pound of the Atlantic against the headlands. The smell of the sea, almost preternaturally heavy, was our constant companion.

We had gone no more than two miles when we struck an overgrown road of what I believe were once called the 'corduroy' variety; this tended in our general direction and we struck off along it, making brisk time. We spoke little. The day, with its still and ominous quality, weighed heavily on our spirits.

At about eleven o'clock we heard the sound of rushing water. The remnant of road took a hard turn to the left, and on the other side of a boiling, slaty little stream, like an apparition, was Jerusalem's Lot!

The stream was perhaps eight feet across, spanned by a moss-grown footbridge. On the far side, Bones, stood the most perfect little village you might imagine, understandably weathered, but amazingly preserved. Several houses, done in that austere yet commanding form for which the Puritans were justly famous, stood clustered near the steeply-sheared bank. Further beyond, along a weed-grown thoroughfare, stood three or four of what might have been primitive business establishments; and beyond that, the spire of the church marked on the map, rising up to the grey sky and looking grim beyond description with its peeled paint and tarnished, leaning cross.

'The town is well named,' Can said softly beside me.

We crossed to the town and began to poke through it -and this is where my story grows slightly amazing, Bones, so prepare yourself!

The air seemed leaden as we walked among the buildings; weighted, if you will. The edifices were in a state of decay - shutters torn off, roofs crumbled under the weight of heavy snows gone by, windows dusty and leering. Shadows from odd corners and warped angles seemed to sit in sinister pools.

We entered an old and rotting tavern first - somehow it did not seem right that we should invade any of those houses to which people had retired when they wished privacy. An old and weather-scrubbed sign above the splintered door announced that this had been the BOAR'S HEAD INN AND TAVERN. The door creaked hellishly on its one remaining hinge, and we stepped into the shadowed interior. The smell of rot and mould was vaporous and nearly overpowering. And beneath it seemed to lie an even deeper smell, a slimy and pestiferous smell, a smell of ages and the decay of ages. Such a stench as might issue from corrupt coffins or violated tombs. I held my handkerchief to my nose and Cal did likewise. We surveyed the place.

'My God, sir -' Cal said faintly.

'It's never been touched,' I finished for him.

As indeed it had not. Tables and chairs stood about like ghostly guardians of the watch, dusty, warped by the extreme changes in temperature which the new England climate is known for, but otherwise perfect - as if they had waited through the silent, echoing decades for those long gone to enter once more, to call for a pint or a dram, to deal cards and light clay pipes. A small square mirror hung beside the rules of the tavern, *unbroken*. Do you see the significance, Bones? Small boys are noted for exploration and vandalism; there is not a 'haunted' house which stands with windows intact, no matter how fearsome the eldritch inhabitants are rumoured to be; not a shadowy graveyard without at least one tombstone upended by young pranksters. Certainly there must be a score of young pranksters in Preacher's Corners, not two miles from Jerusalem's Lot. Yet the inn-keeper's glass [which must have cost him a nice sum] was intact - as were the other fragile items we found in our pokings. The only damage in Jerusalem's Lot has been done by impersonal Nature. The implication is obvious:

Jerusalem's Lot is a shunned town. But why? I have a notion, but before I even dare hint at it, I must proceed to the unsettling conclusion of our visit.

We went up to the sleeping quarters and found beds made up, pewter water-pitchers neatly placed beside them. The kitchen was likewise untouched by anything save the dust of the years and that horrible, sunken stench of decay. The tavern alone would be an antiquarian's paradise; the wondrously queer kitchen stove alone would fetch a pretty price at Boston auction.

'What do you think, Cal?' I asked when we had emerged again into the uncertain daylight.

'I think it's bad business, Mr Boone,' he replied in his doleful way, 'and that we must see more to know more.'

We gave the other shops scant notice - there was a hostelry with mouldering leather goods still hung on rusted flatnails, a chandler's, a warehouse with oak and pine still stacked within, a smithy.

We entered two houses as we made our way towards the church at the centre of the village. Both were perfectly in the Puritan mode, full of items a collector would give his arm for, both deserted and full of the same rotten scent.

Nothing seemed to live or move in all of this but ourselves. We saw no insects, no birds, not even a cobweb fashioned in a window corner. Only dust.

At last we reached the church. It reared above us, grim, uninviting, cold. Its windows were black with the shadows inside, and any Godliness or sanctity had departed from it long ago. Of that I am certain. We mounted the steps, and I placed my hand on the large iron door-pull. A set, dark look passed from myself to Calvin and back again. I opened the portal. How long since that door had been touched? I would say with confidence that mine was the first in fifty years; perhaps longer. Rust-clogged hinges screamed as I opened it. The smell of rot and decay which smote us was nearly palpable. Cal made a gagging sound in his throat and twisted his head involuntarily for clearer air.

'Sir,' he asked, 'are you sure that you are

'I'm fine,' I said calmly. But I did not feel calm, Bones, no more than I do now, I believe, with Moses, with Jeroboam, with Increase Mather, and with our own Hanson [when he is in a philosophical *temperament*], that there are spiritually noxious places, buildings where the milk of the cosmos has become sour and rancid. This church is such a place; I would swear to it.

We stepped into a long vestibule equipped with a dusty coat rack and shelved hymnals. It was windowless. Oil-lamps stood in niches here and there. An unremarkable room I thought, until I heard Calvin's sharp gasp and saw what he had already noticed.

It was an obscenity.

I daren't describe that elaborately-framed picture further than this: that it was done after the fleshy style of Rubens; that it contained a grotesque travesty of a madonna and child; that strange, half-shadowed creatures sported and crawled in the background.

'Lord,' I whispered.

'There's no Lord here,' Calvin said, and his words seemed to hang in the air. I opened the door leading into the church itself, and the odour became a miasma, nearly overpowering.

In the glimmering half-light of afternoon the pews stretched ghostlike to the altar. Above them was a high, oaken pulpit and a shadow-struck narthex from which gold glimmered.

With a half-sob Calvin, that devout Protestant, made the Holy Sign, and I followed suit. For the gold was a large, beautifully-wrought cross - but it was hung upside-down, symbol of Satan's Mass.

'We must be calm,' I heard myself saying. 'We must be calm, Calvin. We must be calm.'

But a shadow had touched my heart, and I was afraid as I

had never been. I have walked beneath death's umbrella and thought there was none darker. But there is. There is.

We walked down the aisle, our footfalls echoing above and around us. We left tracks in the dust. And at the altar there were other tenebrous *objets d'art*. I will not, cannot, let my mind dwell upon them.

I began to mount to the pulpit itself.

'Don't Mr Boone!' Cal cried suddenly. 'I'm afraid -'

But I had gained it. A huge book lay open upon the stand, writ both in Latin and crabbed runes which looked, to my unpractised eye, either Druidic or pre-Celtic. I enclose a card with several of the symbols, redrawn from memory.

I closed the book and looked at the words stamped into the leather: *De Vermis Mysteriis*. My Latin is rusty, but serviceable enough to translate: *The Mysteries of the Worm*.

As I touched it, that accursed church and Calvin's white, upturned face seemed to swim before me. It seemed that I heard low, chanting voices, full of hideous yet eager fear -and below that sound, another, filling the bowels of the earth. An hallucination, I doubt it not - but at the same moment, the church was filled with a very real sound, which I can only describe as a huge and macabre *turning* beneath my feet. The pulpit trembled beneath my fingers; the desecrated cross trembled on the wall.

We exited together, Cal and I, leaving the place to its own darkness, and neither of us dared look back until we had crossed the rude planks spanning the stream. I will not say we defiled the nineteen hundred years man has spent climbing upwards from a hunkering and superstitious savage by actually running; but I would be a liar to say that we strolled.

That is my tale. You mustn't shadow your recovery by fearing that the fever has touched me again; Cal can attest to all in these pages, up to and including the hideous *noise*.

So I close, saying only that I wish I might see you [knowing that much of my bewilderment would drop away immediately], and that I remain your friend and admirer,

CHARLES

17 October 1850

DEAR GENTLEMEN:

In the most recent edition of your catalogue of household items (i.e., Summer, 1850), I noticed a preparation which is titled Rat's Bane. I should like to purchase one (1)5-pound tin of this preparation at your stated price of thirty cents (\$.30). I enclose return postage. Please mail to: Calvin McCann, Chapelwaite, Preacher's Corners, Cumberland County, Maine.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

I remain, dear Gentlemen,

CALVIN McCANN

19 October 1850

DEAR BONES,

Developments of a disquieting nature.

The noises in the house have intensified, and I am growing more to the conclusion that rats are not all that move within our walls. Calvin and I went on another fruitless search for hidden crannies or passages, but found nothing. How poorly we would fit into one of Mrs Radcliffe's romances! Cal claims, however, that much of the sound emanates from the cellar, and it is there we intend to explore tomorrow. It makes me no easier to know that Cousin Stephen's sister met her unfortunate end there.

Her portrait, by the by, hangs in the upstairs gallery. Marcella Boone was a sadly pretty thing, if the artist got her right, and I do know she never married. At times I think that Mrs Cloris was right, that it *is* a bad house. It has certainly held nothing but gloom for its past inhabitants.

But I have more to say of the redoubtable Mrs Cloris, for I have had this day a second interview with her. As the most level-headed person from the Corners that I have met thus far, I sought her out this afternoon, after an unpleasant interview which I will relate.

The wood was to have been delivered this morning, and when noon came and passed and no wood with it, I decided to take my daily walk into the town itself. My object was to visit Thompson, the man with whom Cal did business.

It has been a lovely day, full of the crisp snap of bright autumn, and by the time I reached the Thompsons' homestead [Cal, who remained home to poke further through Uncle Stephen's library gave me adequate directions] I felt in the best mood that these last few days have seen, and quite prepared to forgive Thompson's tardiness with the wood.

The place was a massive tangle of weeds and fallen-down buildings in need of paint; to the left of the barn a huge sow, ready for November butchering, grunted and wallowed in a muddy sty, and in the littered yard between house and outbuildings a woman in a tattered gingham dress was feeding chickens from her apron. When I hailed her, she turned a pale and vapid face towards me.

The sudden change in expression from utter, doltish emptiness to one of frenzied terror was quite wonderful to behold. I can only think she took me for Stephen himself, for she raised her hand in the prong-fingered sign of the evil eye and screamed. The chicken-feed scattered on the ground and the fowls fluttered away, squawking.

Before I could utter a sound a huge, hulking figure of a man clad only in long-handled underwear lumbered out of the house with a squirrel-rifle in one hand and a jug in the other. From the red light in his eye and unsteady manner of walking, I judged that this was Thompson the Woodcutter himself.

'A Boone!' he roared. 'G- d-n your eyes!' He dropped the jug a-rolling and also made the Sign.

'I've come,' I said with as much equanimity as I could muster under the circumstances, 'because the wood has not. According to the agreement you struck with my man -'

'G- d-n your man too, say I!' And for the first time I noticed that beneath his bluff and bluster he was deadly afraid. I began seriously to wonder if he mightn't actually use his rifle against me in his excitement.

I began carefully: 'As a gesture of courtesy, you might -'

'G- d-n your courtesy!'

'Very well, then,' I said with as much dignity as I could muster. 'I bid you good day until you are more in control of yourself.' And with this I turned away and began down the road to the village.

'Don'tchee come back!' he screamed after me. 'Stick wi' your evil up there! Cursed! Cursed! Cursed!' He pelted a stone at me, which struck my shoulder. I would not give him the satisfaction of dodging.

So I sought out Mrs Cloris, determined to solve the mystery of Thompson's enmity, at least. She is a widow [and none of your confounded *matchmaking*, Bones; she is easily fifteen years my senior, and I'll not see forty again] and lives by herself in a charming little cottage at the ocean's very doorstep. I found the lady hanging out her wash, and she seemed genuinely pleased to see me. I found this a great relief; it is vexing almost beyond words to be branded pariah for no understandable reason.

'Mr Boone,' said she, offering a half-curtsey. 'If you've come about washing, I take none in past September. My rheumatiz pains me so that it's trouble enough to do my own.'

'I wish laundry *was* the subject of my visit. I've come for help, Mrs Cloris. I must know all you can tell me about Chapelwaite and Jerusalem's Lot and why the townfolk regard me with such fear and suspicion!'

'Jerusalem's Lot! You know about *that*, then.'

'Yes,' I replied, 'and visited it with my companion a week ago.'

'God!' She went pale as milk, and tottered. I put out a hand to steady her. Her eyes rolled horribly, and for a moment I was sure she would swoon.

'Mrs Cloris, I am sorry if I have said anything -'

'Come inside,' she said. 'You must know. Sweet Jesu, the evil days have come again!'

She would not speak more until she had brewed strong tea in her sunshiny kitchen. When it was before us, she looked pensively out at the ocean for a time. Inevitably, her eyes and mine were drawn to the jutting brow of Chapelwaite Head, where the house looked out over the water. The large bay window

glittered in the rays of the westering sun like a diamond. The view was beautiful but strangely disturbing. She suddenly turned to me and declared vehemently:

'Mr Boone, you must leave Chapelwaite immediately!'

I was flabbergasted.

'There has been an evil breath in the air since you took up residence. In the last week - since you set foot in the accursed place - there have been omens and portents. A caul over the face of the moon; flocks of whippoorwills which roost in the cemeteries; an unnatural birth. You *must* leave!'

When I found my tongue, I spoke as gently as I could. 'Mrs Cloris, these things are dreams. You must know that.'

'Is it a dream that Barbara Brown gave birth to a child with no eyes? Or that Clifton Brockett found a flat, pressed trail five feet wide in the woods beyond Chapelwaite *where all had withered and gone white*? And can you, who have visited Jerusalem's Lot, say with truth that nothing still lives there?'

I could not answer; the scene in that hideous church sprang before my eyes.

She clamped her gnarled hands together in an effort to calm herself. 'I know of these things only from my mother and her mother before her. Do you know the history of your family as it applies to Chapelwaite?'

'Vaguely,' I said. 'The house has been the home of Philip Boone's line since the 1780's; his brother Robert, my grand-father, located in Massachusetts after an argument over stolen papers. Of Philip's side I know little, except that an unhappy shadow fell over it, extending from father to son to grandchildren - Marcella died in a tragic accident and Stephen fell to his death. It was his wish that Chapelwaite become the home of me and mine, and that the family rift thus be mended.'

'Never to be mended,' she whispered. 'You know nothing of the original quarrel?'

'Robert Boone was discovered rifling his brother's desk.'

'Philip Boone was mad,' she said. 'A man who trafficked with the unholy. The thing which Robert Boone *attempted* to remove was a profane Bible writ in the old tongues -Latin, Druidic, others. A hell-book.'

'De Vermis Mysteris.'

She recoiled as if struck. 'You know of it?'

'I have seen it. . . touched it.' It seemed again she might swoon. A hand went to her mouth as if to stifle an outcry. 'Yes; in Jerusalem's Lot. On the pulpit of a corrupt and desecrated church.'

'Still there; still there, then.' She rocked in her chair. 'I had hoped God in His wisdom had cast it into the pit of hell.'

'What relation had Philip Boone to Jerusalem's Lot?'

'Blood relation,' she said darkly. 'The Mark of the Beast was on him, although he walked in the clothes of the Lamb. And on the night of 31 October 1789 Philip Boone disappeared . . . and the entire populace of that damned village with him.'

She would say little more; in fact, seemed to know little more. She would only reiterate her pleas that I leave, giving as reason something about 'blood calling to blood' and muttering about 'those who *watch*

and those who *guard'*. As twilight drew on she seemed to grow more agitated rather than less, and to placate her I promised that her wishes would be taken under strong consideration.

I walked home through lengthening, gloomy shadows, my good mood quite dissipated and my head spinning with questions which still plague me. Cal greeted me with the news that our noises in the walls have grown worse still- as I can attest at this moment. I try to tell myself that I hear only rats, but then I see the terrified, earnest face of Mrs Cloris.

The moon has risen over the sea, bloated, full, the colour of blood, staining the ocean with a noxious shade. My mind turns to that church again and

(here a line is struck out)

But you shall not see that, Bones. It is too mad. It is time I slept, I think. My thoughts go out to you.

Regards,

CHARLES

(The following is from the pocket journal of Calvin McCann.)

20 October 1850

Took the liberty this morning of forcing the lock which binds the book closed; did it before Mr Boone arose. No help; it is all in cypher. A simple one, I believe. Perhaps I may break it as easily as the lock. A diary, I am certain the hand oddly like Mr Boone's own. Whose book, shelved in the most obscure corner of this library and locked across the pages? It seems old, but how to tell? The corrupting air has largely been kept from its pages. More later, if time; Mr Boone set upon looking about the cellar. Am afraid these dreadful goings-on will be too much for his chancy health yet. I must try to persuade him - But he comes.

20 October 1850 BONES,

I can't write I cant [*sic*] write of this yet I I I

(From the pocket journal of Calvin McCann)

20 October 1850

As I had feared, his health has broken -Dear God, our Father Who art in Heaven!

Cannot bear to think of it; yet it is planted, burned on my brain like a tin-type; that horror in the cellar -!

Alone now; half-past eight o'clock; house silent but -Found him swooned over his writing table; he still sleeps; yet for those few moments how nobly he acquitted himself while I stood paralyzed and shattered!

His skin is waxy, cool. Not the fever again, God be thanked. I daren't move him or leave him to go to the village. And if I did go, who would return with me to aid him? Who would come to this cursed house?

O, the cellar! The things in the cellar that have haunted our walls!

22 October 1850

DEAR BONES,

I am myself again, although weak, after thirty-six hours of unconsciousness. Myself again . . . what a grim and bitter joke! I shall never be myself again, never. I have come face to face with an insanity and a horror beyond the limits of human expression. And the end is not yet.

If it were not for Cal, I believe I should end my life this minute. He is one island of sanity in all this madness.

You shall know it all.

We had equipped ourselves with candles for our cellar exploration, and they threw a strong glow that was quite adequate - hellishly adequate! Calvin tried to dissuade me, citing my recent illness, saying that the most we should probably find would be some healthy rats to mark for poisoning.

I remained determined, however; Calvin fetched a sigh and answered: 'Have it as you must, then, Mr Boone.'

The entrance to the cellar is by means of a trap in the kitchen floor [which Cal assures me he has since stoutly boarded over], and we raised it only with a great deal of straining and lifting.

A fetid, overpowering smell came up out of the darkness, not unlike that which pervaded the deserted town across the Royal River. The candle I held shed its glow on a steeply-slanting flight of stairs leading down into darkness. They were in a terrible state of repair - in one place an entire riser missing, leaving only a black hole - and it was easy enough to see how the unfortunate Marcella might have come to her end there.

'Be careful, Mr Boone!' Cal said; I told him I had no intention of being anything but, and we made the descent.

The floor was earthen, the walls of stout granite, and hardly wet. The place did not look like a rat haven at all, for there were none of the things rats like to make their nests in, such as old boxes, discarded furniture, piles of paper, and the like. We lifted our candles, gaining a small circle of light, but still able to see little. The floor had a gradual slope which seemed to run beneath the main living-room and the dining-room - i.e., to the west. It was in this direction we walked. All was in utter silence. The stench in the air grew steadily stronger, and the dark about us seemed to press like wool, as if jealous of the light which had temporarily deposed it after so many years of undisputed dominion.

At the far end, the granite walls gave way to a polished wood which seemed totally black and without reflective properties. Here the cellar ended, leaving what seemed to be an alcove off the main chamber. It was positioned at an angle which made inspection impossible without stepping around the corner.

Calvin and I did so.

It was as if a rotten spectre of this dwelling's sinister past had risen before us. A single chair stood in this alcove, and above it, fastened from a hook in one of the stout overhead beams, was a decayed noose of hemp.

'Then it was here that he hung himself,' Cal muttered. 'God!'

'Yes. . . with the corpse of his daughter lying at the foot of the stairs behind him.'

Cal began to speak; then I saw his eyes jerked to a spot behind me; then his words became a scream.

How, Bones, can I describe the sight which fell upon our eyes? How can I tell you of the hideous tenants within our walls?

The far wall swung back, and from that darkness a face leered - a face with eyes as ebon as the Styx itself. Its mouth yawned in a toothless, agonized grin; one yellow, rotted hand stretched itself out to us. It made a hideous, mewling sound and took a shambling step forward. The light from my candle fell upon it -*And I saw the livid rope-burn about its neck!*

From beyond it something else moved, something I shall dream of until the day when all dreams cease: a girl with a pallid, mouldering face and a corpse-grin; a girl whose head lolled at a lunatic angle.

They wanted us; I know it. And I know they would have drawn us into that darkness and made us their own, had I not thrown my candle directly at the thing in the partition, and followed it with the chair beneath that noose.

After that, all is confused darkness. My mind has drawn the curtain. I awoke, as I have said, in my room with Cal at my side.

If I could leave, I should fly from this house of horror with my nightdress flapping at my heels. But I cannot. I have become a pawn in a deeper, darker drama. Do not ask how I know; I only do. Mrs Cloris was right when she spoke of blood calling to blood; and how horribly right when she spoke of those who *watch* and those who *guard*. I fear that I have wakened a Force which has slept in the tenebrous village of 'Salem's Lot for half a century, a Force which has slain my ancestors and taken them in unholy bondage as *nosferatu* - the Undead. And I have greater fears than these, Bones, but I still see only in part. If I knew. . . if I only knew all!

CHARLES

Postscriptum - And of course I write this only for myself; we are isolated from Preacher's Corner. I daren't carry my taint there to post this, and Calvin will not leave me. Perhaps, if God is good, this will reach you in some manner.

C.

(From the pocket journal of Calvin McCann)

23 October 1850

He is stronger today; we talked briefly of the *apparitions* in the cellar; agreed they were neither hallucinations nor of an *ectoplasmic* origin, but *real*. Does Mr Boone suspect, as I do, that they have gone? Perhaps; the noises are still; yet all is ominous yet, o'ercast with a dark pall. It seems we wait in the deceptive Eye of the Storm .

Have found a packet of papers in an upstairs bedroom, lying in the bottom drawer of an old roll-top desk. Some correspondence & receipted bills lead me to believe the room was Robert Boone's. Yet the

most interesting document is a few jottings on the back of an advertisement for gentlemen's beaver hats. At the top is writ:

Blessed are the meek.

Below, the following apparent nonsense is writ:

bke dshdermthes eak

elmsoerare shameded

I believe 'tis the key of the locked and coded book in the library. The cypher above is certainly a rustic one used in the War for Independence known as the *Fence-Rail*. When one removes the 'nulls' from the second bit of scribble, the following is obtained:

besdrteek

lseaeahme

Read up and down rather than across, the result is the original quotation from the Beatitudes.

Before I dare show this to Mr Boone, I must be sure of the book's contents

24 October 1850

DEAR BONES,

An amazing occurrence - Cal, always close-mouthed until absolutely sure of himself [a rare and admirable human trait!], has found the diary of my grandfather Robert. The document was in a code which Cal himself has broken. He modestly declares that the discovery was an accident, but I suspect that perseverance and hard work had rather more to do with it.

At any rate, what a sombre light it sheds on our mysteries here!

The first entry is dated 1 June 1789, the last 27 October 1789 - four days before the cataclysmic disappearance of which Mrs Cloris spoke. It tells a tale of deepening obsession - nay, of madness - and makes hideously clear the relationship between Great-uncle Philip, the town of Jerusalem's Lot, and the book which rests in that desecrated church.

The town itself, according to Robert Boone, pre-dates Chapelwaite (built in 1782) and Preacher's Corners (known in those days as Preacher's Rest and founded in 1741); it was founded by a splinter group of the Puritan faith in 1710, a sect headed by a dour religious fanatic named James Boon. What a start that name gave me! That this Boon bore relation to my family can hardly be doubted, I believe. Mrs Cloris could not have been more right in her superstitious belief that familial blood-line is of crucial importance in this matter; and I recall with terror her answer to my question about Philip and *his* relationship to 'Salem's Lot. 'Blood relation,' said she, and I fear that it is so.

The town became a settled community built around the church where Boon preached - or held court. My grandfather intimates that he also held commerce with any number of ladies from the town, assuring them that this was God's way and will. As a result, the town became an anomaly which could only have existed in those isolated and queer days when belief in witches and the Virgin Birth existed hand in hand: an interbred, rather degenerate religious village controlled by a half-mad preacher whose

twin gospels were the Bible and de Gourdge's sinister *Demon Dwellings*; a community in which rites of exorcism were held regularly; a community of incest and the insanity and physical defects which so often accompany that sin. I suspect [and believe Robert Boone must have also] that one of Boon's bastard offspring must have left [or have been spirited away from] Jerusalem's Lot to seek his fortune to the south - and thus founded our present lineage. I do know by my own family reckoning, that our clan supposedly originated in that part of Massachusetts which has so lately become this Sovereign State of Maine. My great-grandfather Kenneth Boone, became a rich man as a result of the then-flourishing fur trade. It was his money, increased by time and wise investment, which built this ancestral home long after his death in 1763. His sons, Philip and Robert, built Chapelwaite. *Blood calls to blood*, Mrs Cloris said. Could it be that Kenneth was born of James Boon, fled the madness of his father and his father's town, only to have his sons, all-unknowing, build the Boone home *not two miles from the Boon beginnings*? If tis true, does it not seem that some huge and invisible Hand has guided us?

According to Robert's diary, James Boon was ancient in 1789 - and he must have been. Granting him an age of twenty-five in the year of the town's founding, he would have been one hundred and four, a prodigious age. The following is quoted direct from Robert Boone's diary:

4 August 1789

Today for the first time I met this Man with whom my Brother has been so unhealthily taken; I must admit this Boon controls a strange Magnetism which upset me Greatly. He is a veritable Ancient, white-bearded, and dresses in a black Cassock which struck me as somehow obscene. More disturbing yet was the Fact that he was surrounded by Women, as a Sultan would be surrounded by his Harem; and P. assures me he is active yet, although at least an Octogenarian

The Village itself I had visited only once before, and will not visit again; its Streets are silent and filled with the Fear the old Man inspires from his Pulpit: I fear also that Like has mated with Like, as so many of the Faces are similar. It seemed that each way I turned I beheld the old Man's Visage. . . all are so wan; they seem Lack-Lustre, as if sucked dry of all Vitality, I beheld Eyeless and Noseless Children, Women who wept and gibbered and pointed at the Sky for no Reason, and garbled talk from the Scriptures with talk of Demons P wished me to stay for Services, but the thought of that sinister Ancient in the Pulpit before an Audience of this Town's interbred Populace repulsed me and I made an Excuse .

The entries preceding and following this tell of Philip's growing fascination with James Boon. On 1 September 1789, Philip was baptized into Boon's church. His brother says: 'I am aghast with Amaze and Horror - my Brother has changed before my very Eyes - he even seems to grow to resemble the wretched Man.'

First mention of the book occurs on 23 July. Robert's diary records it only briefly: 'P. returned from the smaller Village tonight with, I thought, a rather wild Visage. Would not speak until Bedtime, when he said that Boon had enquired after a Book titled *Mysteries of the Worm*. To please P.I promised to write Johns & Goodfellow a letter of enquiry; P. almost fawningly Grateful.'

On 12 August, this notation: 'Rec'd two Letters in the Post today. . . one from Johns & Goodfellow in Boston.

They have Note of the Tome in which P. has expressed an Interest. Only five Copies extant in this Country. The Letter is rather cool; odd indeed. Have known Henry Goodfellow for Years.'

13 August:

P. insanely excited by Goodfellow's letter; refuses to say why. He would only say that Boon is *exceedingly anxious* to obtain a Copy. Cannot think why, since by the Title it seems only a harmless gardening Treatise .

Am worried for Philip; he grows stranger to me Daily. I wish now we had not returned to Chapelwaite. The Summer is hot, oppressive, and filled with Omens .

There are only two further mentions of the infamous book in Robert's diary [he seems not to have realized the true importance of it, even at the end]. From the entry of 4 September:

I have petitioned Goodfellow to act as his Agent in the matter of the Purchase; although my better Judgement cries against It. What use to demur? Has he not his own Money, should I refuse? And in return I have extracted a Promise from Philip to recant this noisome Baptism.

yet he is so Hectic; nearly Feverish; I do not trust him. I am hopelessly *at Sea* in this Matter .

Finally, 16 September:

The Book arrived today, with a note from Goodfellow saying he wishes no more of my Trade. . . P. was excited to an unnatural Degree; all but snatched the Book from my Hands. It is writ in bastard Latin and a Runic Script of which I can read Nothing. The Thing seemed almost warm to the Touch, and to vibrate in my Hands as if it contained a huge Power. . . I reminded P. of his Promise to Recant and he only laughed in an ugly, crazed Fashion and waved that Book in my Face, crying over and over again: 'We have it! We have it! The Worm! The Secret of the Worm!'

He is now fled, I suppose to his mad Benefactor, and I have not seen him more this Day

Of the book there is no more, but I have made certain deductions which seem at least probable. First, that this book was, as Mrs Cloris has said, the subject of the falling-out between Robert and Philip; second, that it is a repository of unholy incantation, possibly of Druidic origin [many of the Druidic blood-rituals were preserved in print by the Roman conquerors of Britain in the name of scholarship, and many of these infernal cook-books are among the world's forbidden literature]; third, that Boon and Philip intended to use the book for their own ends. Perhaps, in some twisted way, they intended good, but I do not believe it. I believe they had long before bound themselves over to whatever faceless powers exist beyond the rim of the Universe; powers which may exist beyond the very fabric of Time. The last entries of Robert Boone's diary lend a dim glow of approbation to these speculations, and I allow them to speak for themselves:

26 October 1789 A terrific Babble in Preacher's Corners today; Frawley, the Blacksmith, seized my Arm and demanded to know 'What your Brother and that mad Antichrist are into up there.' Goody Randall claims there have been *Signs* in the Sky of *great impending Disaster*. A Cow has been born with two Heads.

As for Myself, I know not what impends; perhaps 'tis my Brother's Insanity. His Hair has gone Grey almost Overnight, his Eyes are great bloodshot Circles from which the pleasing light of Sanity seems to have departed. He grins and whispers, and, for some Reason of his Own, has begun to haunt our Cellar when not in Jerusalem's Lot.

The Whippoorwills congregate about the House and upon the Grass; their combined Calling from the Mist blends with the Sea into an unearthly Shriek that precludes all thought of Sleep.

27 October 1789

Followed P. this Evening when he departed for Jerusalem's Lot, keeping a safe Distance to avoid Discovery. The cursed Whippoorwills flock through the Woods, filling all with a deathly, psychopompotic Chant. I dared not cross the Bridge; the Town all dark except for the Church, which was litten with a ghastly red Glare that seemed to transform the high, peak'd Windows into the Eyes of the Inferno. Voices rose and fell in a Devil's Litany, sometimes laughing, sometimes sobbing. The very Ground seem'd to swell and groan beneath me, as if it bore an awful Weight, and I fled, amaz'd and full of Terror, the hellish, screaming Cries of the Whippoorwills dinning in my ears as I ran through those shadow-riven Woods.

All tends to the Climax, yet unforeseen. I dare not sleep for the Dreams that come, yet not remain awake for what lunatic Terrors may come. The night is full of awful Sounds and I fear -And yet I feel the urge to go again, to watch, *to see*. It seems that Philip himself calls me, and the Old Man. The Birds

cursed cursed cursed

Here the diary of Robert Boone ends.

Yet you must notice, Bones, near the conclusion, that he claims Philip himself seemed to call him. My final conclusion is formed by these lines, by the talk of Mrs Cloris and the others, but most of all by those terrifying figures in the cellar, dead yet alive. Our line is yet an unfortunate one, Bones. There is a curse over us which refuses to be buried; it lives a hideous shadow-life in this house and that town. And the culmination of the cycle is drawing close again. I am the last of the Boone blood. I fear that something knows this, and that I am at the nexus of an evil endeavour beyond all sane understanding. The anniversary is All Saints' Eve, one week from today.

How shall I proceed? If only you were here to counsel me, to help me! If only you were here!

I must know all; I must return to the shunned town. May God support me!

CHARLES

(From the pocket journal of Calvin McCann)

25 October 1850

Mr Boone has slept nearly all this day. His face is pallid and much thinner. I fear recurrence of his fever is inevitable.

While refreshing his water carafe I caught sight of two unmailed letters to Mr Granson in Florida. He plans to return to Jerusalem's Lot; 'twill be the killing of him if I allow it. Dare I steal away to Preacher's Corners and hire a buggy? I must, and yet what if he wakes? If I should return and find him gone?

The noises have begun in our walls again. Thank God he still sleeps! My mind shudders from the import of this.

Later

I brought him his dinner on a tray. He plans on rising later, and despite his evasions, I know what he plans; yet I go to Preacher's Corners. Several of the sleeping-powders prescribed to him during his late illness remained with my things; he drank one with his tea, all-unknowing. He sleeps again.

To leave him with the Things that shamle behind our walls terrifies me; to let him continue even one more day within these walls terrifies me even more greatly. I have locked him in.

God grant he should still be there, safe and sleeping, when I return with the buggy!

Still later

Stoned me! Stoned me like a wild and rabid dog! Monsters and fiends! These, that call themselves *men!* We are prisoners here -The birds, the whippoorwills, have begun to gather.

26 October 1850

DEAR BONES,

It is nearly dusk, and I have just wakened, having slept nearly the last twenty-four hours away. Although Cal has said nothing, I suspect he put a sleeping-powder in my tea, having gleaned my intentions. He is a good and faithful friend, intending only the best, and I shall say nothing.

Yet my mind is set. Tomorrow is the day. I am calm, resolved, but also seem to feel the subtle onset of the fever again. If it is so, it *must* be tomorrow. Perhaps tonight would be better still; yet not even the fires of Hell itself could induce me to set foot in that village by shadowlight.

Should I write no more, may God bless and keep you, Bones.

CHARLES

Posiscriptum - The birds have set up their cry, and the horrible shuffling sounds have begun again. Cal does not think I hear, but I do.

C.

(From the pocket journal of Calvin McCann)

27 October 1850

He is impersuadable. Very well. I go with him.

4 November 1850

DEAR BONES,

Weak, yet lucid. I am not sure of the date, yet my almanac assures me by tide and sunset that it must be correct. I sit at my desk, where I sat when I first wrote you from Chapelwaite, and look out over the dark sea from which the last of the light is rapidly fading. I shall never see more. This night is my night; I leave it for whatever shadows be.

How it heaves itself at the rocks, this sea! It throws clouds of sea-foam at the darkling sky in banners, making the floor beneath me tremble. In the window-glass I see my reflection, pallid as any vampire's. I have been without nourishment since the twenty-seventh of October, and should have been without water, had not Calvin left the carafe beside my bed on that day.

O, Cal! He is no more, Bones. He is gone in my place, in the place of this wretch with his pipestem arms and skull face who I see reflected back in the darkened glass. And yet he may be the more fortunate; for no dreams haunt him as they have haunted me these last days - twisted shapes that lurk in the nightmare corridors of delirium. Even now my hands tremble; I have splotched the page with ink.

Calvin confronted me on that morning just as I was about to slip away - and I thinking I had been so crafty. I had told him that I had decided we must leave, and asked him if he would go to Tandrell some ten miles distant, and hire a trap where we were less notorious. He agreed to make the hike and I watched him leave by the sea-road. When he was out of sight I quickly made myself ready, donning both coat and muffler [for the weather had turned frosty; the first touch of coming winter was on that morning's cutting breeze. I wished briefly for a gun, then laughed at myself for the wish. What avails guns in such a matter?

I let myself out by the pantry-way, pausing for a last look at sea and sky; for the smell of the fresh air against the

putrescence I knew I should smell soon enough; for the sight of a foraging gull wheeling below the clouds.

I turned - and there stood Calvin McCann.

'You shall not go alone,' said he; and his face was as grim as ever I have seen it.

'But, Calvin -' I began.

'No, not a word! We go together and do what we must, or I return you bodily to the house. You are not well. You shall not go alone.'

It is impossible to describe the conflicting emotions that swept over me; confusion, pique, gratefulness - yet the greatest of them was love.

We made our way silently past the summer house and the sun-dial, down the weed-covered verge and into the woods. All was dead still - not a bird sang nor a wood-cricket chirruped. The world seemed cupped in a silent pall. There was only the ever-present smell of salt, and from far away, the faint tang of woodsmoke. The woods were a blazoned riot of colour, but, to my eye, scarlet seemed to predominate all.

Soon the scent of salt passed, and another, more sinister odour took its place; that rottenness which I have mentioned. When we came to the leaning bridge which spanned the Royal, I expected Cal to ask me again to defer, but he did not. He paused, looked at that grim spire which seemed to mock the blue sky above it, and then looked at me. We went on.

We proceeded with quick yet dread footsteps to James Boon's church. The door still hung ajar from our latter exit, and the darkness within seemed to leer at us. As we mounted the steps, brass seemed to fill

my heart; my hand trembled as it touched the door-handle and pulled it. The smell within was greater, more noxious than ever.

We stepped into the shadowy anteroom and, with no pause, into the main chamber.

It was a shambles.

Something vast had been at work in there, and a mighty destruction had taken place. Pews were overturned and heaped like jackstraws. The wicked cross lay against the east wall, and a jagged hole in the plaster above it testified to the force with which it had been hurled. The oil-lamps had been ripped from their high fixtures, and the reek of whale-oil mingled with the terrible stink which pervaded the town. And down the centre aisle, like a ghastly bridal path, was a trail of black ichor mingled with sinister tendrils of blood. Our eyes followed it to the pulpit - the only untouched thing in view. Atop it, staring at us from across that blasphemous Book with glazed eyes, was the butchered body of a lamb.

'God,' Calvin whispered.

We approached, keeping clear of the slime on the floor. The room echoed back our footsteps and seemed to transmute them into the sound of gigantic laughter.

We mounted the narthex together. The lamb had not been torn or eaten; it appeared, rather to have been *squeezed* until its blood-vessels had forcibly ruptured. Blood lay in thick and noisome puddles on the lectern itself, and about the base of it . . . *yet on the book it was transparent, and the crabbed runes could be read through it as through coloured glass!*

'Must we touch it?' Cal asked, unfaltering.

'Yes. I must have it.'

'What will you do?'

'What should have been done sixty years ago. I am going to destroy it.'

We rolled the lamb's corpse away from the book; it struck the floor with a hideous, lolling thud. The bloodstained pages now seemed alive with a scarlet glow of their own.

My ears began to ring and hum; a low chant seemed to emanate from the walls themselves. From the twisted look on Cal's face I knew he heard the same. The floor beneath us trembled, as if the familiar which haunted this church came now unto us, to protect its own. The fabric of sane space and time seemed to twist and crack; the church seemed filled with spectres and litten with the hell-glow of eternal cold fire. It seemed that I saw James Boon, hideous and misshapen, cavorting around the supine body of a woman, and my Grand-uncle Philip behind him, an acolyte in a black, hooded cassock, who held a knife and a bowl.

'Deum vobiscum magna vermis -,

The words shuddered and writhed on the page before me, soaked in the blood of sacrifice, prize of a creature that shambles beyond the stars -A blind, interbred congregation swaying in mindless, demonic praise; deformed faces filled with hungering, nameless anticipation -And the Latin was replaced by an older tongue, ancient when Egypt was young and the Pyramids unbuilt, ancient when this Earth still hung in an unformed, boiling firmament of empty gas:

'Gyyagin vardar Yogsoggoth! Verminis! Gyyagin! Gyyagin! Gyyagin!'

The pulpit began to rend and split, pushing upwards -Calvin screamed and lifted an arm to shield his face. The narthex trembled with a huge, tenebrous motion like a ship wracked in a gale. I snatched up

the book and held it away from me; it seemed filled with the heat of the sun and I felt that I should be cindered, blinded.

'Run!' Calvin screamed. 'Run!'

But I stood frozen and the alien presence filled me like an ancient vessel that had waited for years - for generations!

'Gyyagin vardar!' I screamed. 'Servant of Yogsoggoth,

the Nameless One! The Worm from beyond Space! Star-

Eater! Blinder of Time! Verminis! Now comes the Hour of

Filling, the Time of Rending! Verminis! Alyah! Alyah!

Gyyagin!'

Calvin pushed me and I tottered, the church whirling before me, and fell to the floor. My head crashed against the edge of an upturned pew, and red fire filled my head -yet seemed to clear it.

I groped for the sulphur matches I had brought.

Subterranean thunder filled the place. Plaster fell. The rusted bell in the steeple pealed a choked devil's carillon in symJ)athetic vibration.

My match flared. I touched it to the book just as the pulpit exploded upwards in a rending explosion of wood. A huge black maw was discovered beneath; Cal tottered on the edge his hands held out, his face distended in a wordless scream that I shall hear for ever.

And then there was a huge surge of grey, vibrating flesh. The smell became a nightmare tide. It was a huge outpouring of a viscid, pustulant jelly, a huge and awful form that seemed to sky-rocket from the very bowels of the ground. And yet, with a sudden horrible comprehension which no man can have known, I perceived *that it was but one ring, one segment, of a monster worm that had existed eyeless for years in the chambered darkness beneath that abominated church!*

The book flared alight in my hands, and the Thing seemed to scream soundlessly above me. Calvin was struck glancingly and flung the length of the church like a doll with a broken neck.

It subsided - the thing subsided, leaving only a huge and shattered hole surrounded with black slime, and a great screaming, mewling sound that seemed to fade through colossal distances and was gone.

I looked down. The book was ashes.

I began to laugh, then to howl like a struck beast.

All sanity left me and I sat on the floor with blood streaming from my temple, screaming and gibbering into those unhallowed shadows while Calvin sprawled in the far corner, staring at me with glazing, horror-struck eyes.

I have no idea how long I existed in that state. It is beyond all telling. But when I came again to my faculties, shadows had drawn long paths around me and I sat in twilight. Movement had caught my eye, movement from the shattered hole in the narthex floor.

A hand groped its way over the riven floorboards.

My mad laughter choked in my throat. All hysteria melted into numb bloodlessness.

With terrible, vengeful slowness, a wracked figure pulled itself up from darkness, and a half-skull peered at me. Beetles crawled over the fleshless forehead. A rotted cassock clung to the askew hollows of mouldered collarbones. Only the eyes lived - red, insane pits that glared at me with more than lunacy; they glared with the empty life of the pathless wastes beyond the edges of the Universe.

It came to take me down to darkness.

That was when I fled screeching, leaving the body of my lifelong friend unheeded in that place of dread. I ran until the air seemed to burst like magma in my lungs and brain. I ran until I had gained this possessed and tainted house again, and my room, where I collapsed and have lain like a dead man until today. I ran because even in my crazed state, and even in the shattered ruin of that dead-yet-animated shape, *I had seen the family resemblance*. Yet not of Philip or of Robert, whose likenesses hang in an upstairs gallery. *That rotted visage belonged to James Boone, Keeper of the Worm!*

He still lives somewhere in the twisted, lightless wanderings beneath Jerusalem's Lot and Chapelwaite - and *It* still lives. The burning of the book thwarted *It*, but there are other copies.

Yet I am the gateway, and I am the last of the Boone blood. For the good of all humanity I must die . . . and break the chain for ever.

I go to the sea now, Bones. My journey, like my story, is at an end. May God rest you and grant you all peace.

CHARLES

The odd series of papers above was eventually received by Mr Everett Granson, to whom they had been addressed. It is assumed that a recurrence of the unfortunate brain fever which struck him originally following the death of his wife in 1848 caused Charles Boone to lose his sanity and murder his companion and longtime friend, Mr Calvin McCann.

The entries in Mr McCann's pocket journal are a fascinating exercise in forgery, undoubtedly perpetrated by Charles Boone in an effort to reinforce his own paranoid delusions.

In at least two particulars, however, Charles Boone is proved wrong. First, when the town of Jerusalem's Lot was 'rediscovered' (I use the term historically, of course), the floor of the narthex, although rotted, showed no sign of the explosion or huge damage. Although the ancient pews *were* overturned and several windows shattered, this can be assumed to be the work of vandals from neighbouring towns over the years. Among the older residents of Preacher's Corners and Tandrell there is still some idle rumour about Jerusalem's Lot (perhaps, in his day, it was this kind of harmless folk legend which started Charles Boone's mind on its fatal course), but this seems hardly relevant.

Second, Charles Boone was not the last of his line. His grandfather, Robert Boone, sired at least two bastards. One died in infancy. The second took the Boone name and located in the town of Central Falls, Rhode Island. I am the final descendant of this offshoot of the Boone line; Charles Boone's second cousin, removed by three generations. These papers have been in my committal for ten years. I offer them for publication on the occasion of my residence in the Boone ancestral home, Chapelwaite, in the hope that the reader will find sympathy in his heart for Charles Boone's poor, misguided soul. So far as I can tell, he was correct about only one thing: this place badly needs the services of an exterminator.

There are some huge rats in the walls, by the sound.

Signed, James Robert Boone 2 October 1971.