

GAMALIEL

The Diary of a Vampire

&

DANCE, DOLL, DANCE!



KENNETH GRANT

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KENNETH GRANT is the author of the Typhonian Trilogies, which consist of:

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Altar of Lam Steffi Grant

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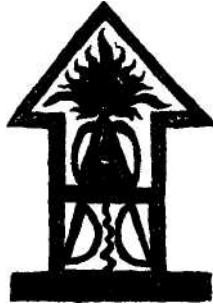


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*When one creates phantoms for oneself, one puts
Vampires into the world, and one must nourish these
children of a voluntary nightmare with one's blood,
one's life, one's intelligence, and one's reason, without
ever satisfying them.*

*Eliphas Levi translated
by Aleister Crowley*

Gamaliel
The Diary of a Vampire



for Hamsa

Editor's Foreword

The diary here presented constitutes the record of a regression. It comes from the pen of a woman - Vilma Z - who sought to invoke the Supreme Spirit, until a defect in her working released the reverse of that to which she aspired.

"The greater the height, the greater the fall" is a maxim that seems particularly relevant. It is here made clear that efforts to achieve a state of divinity, rare and difficult as they may be, can result in abysmal regression to atavisms predating human phases of consciousness. When the diary opens, Vilma is already on the downward path. Her experience, although probably unique in the form in which it here appears, could overtake anyone who undertakes experiments in spiritual alchemy, unless initiated guidance is available. A conflict between the Will and the Imagination may otherwise result. In this case, the imagination overwhelmed the will, and returned the experimenter to a preëval past with which she was unable properly to deal.

The sole indication of the diarist's name is supplied by the first and only surviving page of a letter addressed presumably to her, and found between the pages of the diary. This fragment appears in due course.

We learn nothing about her family or early life except from an entry - dated September 23 - which may provide one key to the causes of her eventual disintegration.

During the brief period of time covered by the entries, Vilma was staying at an old and isolated house in the company of an ill-assorted couple - Mr and Mrs M - and a boy who occupied a room off the landing above her own. Vilma was acting on advice in staying at the house after a severe and debilitating sickness. The only people she appears regularly to have met other than the occupants of the house, were the father of the boy already mentioned, a young female friend of Mrs M's, and a few others, on her rare trips to the nearest large town, from which, invariably she returned in a state of distraction or remorse at having surrendered her will to certain overwhelming Forces to which she refers as 'Them', or 'They'. These references, scant as they are, seem to indicate traffic with certain alien entities, non-human, almost certainly sub-human, that haunt with a merely vague suggestion of their presence some of her more extreme flights. She refers to these entities as 'the Qliphoth'.

The original diary is written on Japanese vellum and bears on its yellow-tinged cover, in faded letters of mauve, the one word

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which is an ancient Chaldean word denoting, in the order of Qliphoth, 'the Obscene Ones', symbolized in the bestiary of Occultism by the Ass, and by the dark side of the moon.

The moon is related to blood, which is the basis of spirit-materialization as well as of physical embodiment. It is also a basic ingredient of what is generally known as 'black magic', many obscure aspects of which are revealed in this diary by a self-confessed 'vampire'.

It has become customary today to regard witchcraft, sorcery, and most other forms of occult activity, as childish though not

always harmless manifestations of superstitions no longer entertained by civilised humanity. But the real nature of witchcraft, and of Vampirism in particular, relates to levels more profound than is generally suspected. The publication of Vilma's diary may afford a glimpse, at least, of some of these levels, and so help to further the study of certain curious and alarming diseases of the mind and spirit that are manifesting on a massive scale in our world today.

R.

The Diary

September 9

I seldom have felt as well as I do today. The malady seems to have abated and the pains have vanished. I slept well after a light lunch, after which I walked in the twilight and felt the throb of the earth: vibrant, tense, powerful, as if loath to yield its departing life to the blood-red disc sheened in colourless mist.

Mrs M had ready for me a delicious tea, and I was looking forward to a quiet evening with them both, but Mr M was unwell, so they retired early.

Alone! Seated at the open window. I love the cold and penetrating draught. A slight mist is shrouding the garden, choking the hideous weeds that in the light of day strangle the blossoms about them.

A deep tranquillity descends upon the house at this hour. Nine o'clock is just striking. The wind seems suddenly to drop, and an impenetrable silence falls like dust upon the crouching, sprawling monster which is the old house. I know it is sleepless, for all its windows twinkle. Even Mr and Mrs M's windows are alight; and the boy's ... well, he never sleeps, and looks it, too! A thick sluggish face like a sour pastry with bitter blackcurrant eyes and dank foliage for hair. I can almost feel his clammy hands, like the mist upon my brow. His eyes stare like a toad's, and a perpetual leer contorts his features. It calls to mind the twisted old front door, the warped wood, the defaced name-plate, the partially unhinged knocker.

And now a steady draught is blowing inwards, not from the open window but from the restless, turbulent heart of this ancient gnarled house. I dislike this draught; it presages ill; it

presages pains and groanings. But what have I to do with these? I am free, I am well, I am happy. Happy? That I could write that word!

September 11

A day of sheer listlessness. Before I began this page I tore out the ravings induced by yesterday's madness. I burnt them. How indeed could I have written them? Mr M and the boy both looked askance at me as I came up the stairs this evening. Their expressions suggested that they had read those hideous verses. But that is impossible. What stupidity to imagine that anybody could gain access to my brain, my mind, or whatever engine it is that snatched from hell such evil abominations. But now I am calm. I will dress and stroll down the darkly-shaded lane and listen to the creatures of the night.

I heard some music earlier on. I think it came from Mrs M's bedroom; heavy, dull, earthly music, yet strangely cloying. The music of men is anathema to me; of the birds, yes!; of savage beasts, still more - but this droll turgidity I cannot appreciate.

I had a restless night and took one sixth of a grain¹ at 4.00 am. Instant relief, but vivid dreams of which I cannot recall any details. I awoke, quivering, and with loathsome rhymes fresh in my mind.

It has suddenly turned intolerably cold; really too cold to leave the window open any longer. Yet I fondly imagine that by sitting here, the shadows will fly from me and lose themselves in the swirling draught outside. Outside! But it is now - almost all — coming *inside!*

My eyes are tired and I find it almost impossible to record these few impressions.

They asked me whether or not I would rather have my supper up here in my room; but I must go down and sit with them, even if only to hear their harsh and grating voices before I finally retire and coax sleep.

¹ The reference is to a drug which she was in the habit of taking (Ed.).

As I opened this diary this evening I was annoyed by the plain smooth cover. There ought to be something written upon its idiot vacancy; even the word *Diary* would be more bearable than this void. If I were in London I could take it to O God! Don't bring it all back again! London, Paris, New York, Peking! each one as near Them as the other. This might be Siberia or Mongolia; I know not what place of cold and loneliness this could not be. It is all the same. One takes one's mind everywhere; one always fails to find one's soul, unless the gaping void on the cover of this book is the map of my soul. But I find delight in pouring out my blood on these cold pages. I suppose they will live somewhere, long after ...

Who is going to bury me? I have often thought that Y will come from ... Where is he? Y, come to this God-forsaken spot to bury me! I am already buried, and this ancient house is one of those giant sarcophagi, those flesh-eaters of old that strip the skeleton and leave a bleached sheer glistening blade of bone in the night. Even so, the old house is lovable in a worm-eaten way.

I recall a fragment of my dream: I wanted to dress in the fabric of the house; my hat the crooked chimney; my eyes the sooty windows; my lips the gables; charred charnel-house of hanging bats for teeth ... ugh! If I look into the mirror, do I behold so ghastly an image? No, I do not. They say I am lovely ... Vile veil.

September 16

"Time makes no mark on Eternity". I awoke with this sentence on my lips; the sole oracle, it would seem, of a night of oblivious rest. What I am trying to tell myself is that whatever mess I have got into, there is Eternity in which to unravel it. But is there?

A feeling of buoyancy suggests an improvement in my physical health. If only my mind were as light as the body feels! Even so, I feel like dressing up and going ...

I seem ever doubtful as to where I am or who I am. This is not Paris; not London; and I am not in a fit state to put on make-up and to dance, lest that make-up be the devil's daub and that dance the ghoul-jig.

There seems to be no option but to settle down and study the aspects of the heavens for the coming Moon-Rite, which must be performed according to the old laws. I do not quite know how to do this, but I will do it somehow. Perhaps I'll take a trip tomorrow night and tell the M's I may not be back until the day following. They are suspicious, and eager to pretend that all is well. Nevertheless, I must replenish my failing energy with the needed nourishment, and if I do not break away this moon there may be hell to pay.

Later:

I assembled my books and papers but could not settle to study. I will take a stroll to rinse my brain and help induce the necessary state of mind.

A pallid mist has lain over the garden for several days and there is little likelihood of its lifting for some time to come. An icy vapour clings not only to the outside, but also pervades the inside of the house. Mr M is still feeling unwell and I have seen no one these past few days. I am tired of having my meals in this room day after day, while that idiot boy loiters morosely. He seems to be struggling to communicate something. He needs a companion of some sort with whom he may pass some of the endless hours of murk and gloom. Does he expect me to oblige? I laugh at the prospect! The M's seem to see nothing wrong with him; or do they merely ignore his misery?

I strolled into the wood at about eight; it is now half past nine and I am seated at my usual place at the open window. My conversion to fresh air is recent, yet my endurance of such cold surely indicates that I am in good physical health!

Analysing the matter carefully I have discovered my reason for keeping open the window. It is because I imagine that it is

colder within than without. This is clearly absurd, since the electric fire has been burning for nearly three days. Yet there is, undoubtedly and inexplicably, a part of the room that is freezingly cold. It is not an actual draught, but a steady current of ice-cold air. It begins near the foot of the bed and sweeps around in a curve to the middle of the door. When I open the door and step on to the landing outside, it is not apparent; the landing, in fact, has been close and stuffy of late; I noticed it particularly last time I came up to my room.

I spent the remainder of the evening preparing for the Moon-Rite.

September 23

The Rite was not accomplished and my escapade was aborted by a sudden relapse which forced me back to bed the day after the previous entry. I have been dosing myself unmercifully since the 18th, and have had hardly any waking moments since. I say *waking* moments; I should say *normal* waking moments, for I have been in a more or less continuous dream since taking to my bed. This no doubt saved me unpleasant physical discomfort. Nevertheless, a nightmare gripped me early last night and I awoke in a cold fever, terrified and crying for help. I will not hark back to it, but I will recall the dream which preceded it.

Back at school; it was my last term. I remember the road home; it appeared, vividly and precisely: the trees, the railings and the bend in the road just before my parents' house hove into view. Mr F hanging over his gate, deep in conversation with someone I failed to remember. As the dream opened I sensed the horror that was to come; and as I saw the episodes unfold, even as they had unfolded many years before, I felt again the stupefying panic sweep over me, paralysing my whole being.

As I approached Mr F his conversant retreated and faded from sight. The iron gate swung noisily open and Mr F smilingly beckoned me into a dark and foetid hallway. I saw again the

Victorian prints, the glazed pots of artificial flowers, the statuettes of Christ which a devout friend had presented to Mrs F in the vain hope that it would induce them both to adopt the Catholic Faith. A large bible lay on the hall table; the tradesmen, even, could see what good people were the F's.

Mr F chatted to me, patronizingly, for a minute or two, and then he peered furtively into the drawing-room. No one was there. His smile had become fulsome. He was quivering uncontrollably, and his voice - usually thin and smooth - was thick and hoarse. Then he closed the front door. I remember stifling a cry and telling him that I was expected home for dinner; that my guardian would be angry if I were late. Mr F smiled a sour, sickly, hypocritical smile. He took me by the hand and we sat at the bottom of the winding staircase.

Then came the nightmare. It was a replica of that which actually had happened, long ago. I remember reeling to my feet as he clutched at me with frenzied excitement. He was grasping something, but my vision was blurred as in a thick and stifling fog. There was contact with a slug-like horror that slipped and throbbed within my hands. Then I saw Mrs F's bedroom: the prayer-books, the weekly gazette issued by the Protestant Mission, the dried flowers, the leaves almost black ...

Total amnesia followed this kaleidoscope of recollected experience. I remained oblivious until I awoke to find myself lying on my own bed, my body burning, my mind shattered, my hands tingling with the brand of a horror without a name.

Those days seem long ago. The nightmare has done me good, however, for it has shown me that which may be basically responsible for my present state. But I am not quite honest with myself. It was I that gave Mr F his idea; it was I that contrived to come from school by that particular detour - it was not the shortest way. It was I also that, weeks before, had had dreams of which I was so ashamed that I dared not even sleep for nights on end. In an indirect way, therefore, I brought about

a situation that proved fateful to me and fateful to Mr F, who was murdered by my guardian in consequence. I am glad, now, that no positive evidence was discovered against him.

It was due to such dreams that I forced myself to adopt the kind of life I later chose. This I would at one time refuse to admit to myself, but it is the truth.

September 24

Feverish and sleepless all night. I cannot help myself. The nightmare conceals something yet deeper. I fail to understand so much, and the effort to understand is making me ill. My mind shudders beneath the impact of memories and sensory hallucinations.

September 26

I was well enough to go down to breakfast this morning. Mr M seems better; his wife is expecting a friend this afternoon.

Later:

The friend arrived just after three o'clock. I let her in. She was uneasy in my presence. Observing this, I withdrew soon after tea. As I went up to my room I noticed the boy skulking in the hall. He sloped off to the kitchen, giving me a sullen scowl.

I am obsessed with the idea of obtaining energy. I am utterly depleted and cannot survive until the next Moon-Rite unless vitality comes from somewhere.

Schemes were racing through my brain when, a little after eight o'clock, I heard a tap on the door. Thinking it was the boy with my supper-tray, I bade him leave it outside. I heard no reply; nor did I hear him place the tray on the floor in his usual clumsy fashion. Rising from my window-seat, I opened the door slightly. There was nothing there: no supper; no boy. I returned, thinking I had been deluded by a sound outside the house, when a second quite unmistakable tap threw me suddenly into a fit of hysterical anger. I rushed to the door and

threw it open. Still no one there; but lying at my feet was a small neatly folded slip of paper. It was a note scrawled in an unfamiliar hand: "Come again tonight", it read. It was unsigned and written on a filthy scrap of paper.

The incident disturbed me profoundly. I decided that the near illegibility of the script was intentional; it gave the bearer time to withdraw whilst I was trying to decipher it. But who would have left such a note? Mr or Mrs M, the boy, the visitor - who may still be in the house? But the note was senseless, considering the fact that I have been nowhere for days. And then a frightening thought occurred. I went to town sixteen days ago, and there I met someone who might, conceivably, have written the note, and in that way. But it is highly improbable. How did he get into the house; how out again? Perhaps he is still in the house! The idea frightens me. Dressing quickly, I went downstairs and into the sitting-room where Mr and Mrs M were chatting with their visitor. At my approach a sudden hush descended and their smiles faded. I could see that no-one had disturbed them before my appearance, and on pretence of coming for some fruit I left them with an apology.

But I could not banish the notion that someone may have entered the house and was at that moment, perhaps, watching me from some dark corner. I did not return to my room but went instead to the kitchen. The boy was standing by the dresser preparing a tray for my supper. He turned swiftly when I entered and shot me a glance of intense irritation and, I thought, of guilt. He was surlier than usual and I knew that nothing would come of questioning him, so I took the tray and asked him not to come up with anything later, as I intended retiring.

I scarcely noticed the meal, hungry as I was. My nerves were upset and I was conscious of sharp pains in the legs. I undressed, got into bed, but was unable to sleep. Picking up this diary, I recounted these trivial occurrences while I listened intently for the slightest sound.

My heart nearly stopped beating when I heard a noise on

the stairs, but it was only Mr M preceding his wife to bed. Later, noises in the hall told me that Mrs M's young visitor had left, and that Mrs M was on her way upstairs. She paused outside my door; I held my breath; she moved on, the boards creaking at each step.

Among likely explanations of the disturbing incident there was one which I could not dispel. It was that the man who may have sent the note had used Mrs M's visitor as a means of conveying it to me. As Mrs M could not possibly have any inkling of the circumstances, I knew it would be useless to try to extract any information from her.

September 27

Either I dreamed, or I am a monstrous phantom prolonging its life by feeding on blood.

I awoke in my chair, pen in hand. My gown was torn and soaked in some repulsive substance I could not identify. After the onset of sleep last night I became conscious of entering the mouth of a vast abyss. The darkness about me began to assume the shape of a familiar room dimly lit by moonlight, but otherwise shrouded in ghostly gloom. I felt immense; a mountain of pale flesh towering above a heap of breathing, fitful life. Then two eyes looked up into mine, like infernal coals that spat and snarled. I saw a sullen and scowling face composed of writhing worms. My body resembled a vast cloak of skin which floated momentarily above this abomination; and then, suddenly and with terrific force, it fell upon its prey and seethed and bubbled like a boiling sea. A sharp pain shot through me, and I sensed an overwhelming craving for vitality. A spongy tensile entity burst through my lips and throbbed rhythmically between my jaws. I sucked it avidly. Then it seemed to fill me with a shadowy fire which electrified my all-embracing form. Screams rent the air. I flew up and away in a blaze of mist.

So this was the Call I answered; this the mode of my continued

soul, no longer starved, craves newer feasts, fouler fare. Perhaps, next time ...

Later:

I live in a perpetual state of half-waking nightmare. The only way out is to examine the experiences I have undergone: try to understand them and so dissipate their power over me, which is vampiric.

The nature of the vampire has been misunderstood. It is time that somebody with direct experience attempted to explain it.

The vampire deliberately absorbs the energy of the living in order to go on living, but its fundamental characteristic is that it is dead, for it is detached from life in the ordinary sense of that word. It is also emotionally sterile, insofar as love and hate are equally meaningless to it. Anyone coming in contact with such a monster is always infected, if not actually ruined, even if no actual vampirism has occurred. It drains off energy in order to vitalize an existence which is introverted and self-contained. For this reason alone the vampire is a comparatively rare phenomenon. It has no ambition beyond living to live. It is the pure sensualist relishing nothing but the power to relish all; for living entirely at the expense of others is, to it, the acme of all gratification.

The old legends concerning this abnormality are symbolic patterns arising from fear generated in the victim. There are no known writings from the pen of a vampire. This is the first! But many accounts by victims of vampirism have been published. Such records seem to agree upon two points, at least: the first being that the vampire 'sleeps' between sunrise and sunset, and haunts between sunset and sunrise; the second being that it is considerably older than the normal human being has a right to be. Observations as to methods of hunting and attack do not always concur.

The vampire's activity considered as occurring nocturnally is symbolic merely of the waning or darkening effect of the victim. It is also symbolic of the vampire itself, insofar as its

self-sustaining energies are no longer operative. Because of this it is forced to absorb into its system the vitality of others. Furthermore, night and the hours of darkness are bound up with ideas of secrecy, sorcery, savagery, sexual cravings, gestation, embryonic life, and similar intra-uterine conceptions; and it is the sexual part of the victim's anatomy that is attacked and depleted, the belly and sexual centre forming the main founts of the fiendish feast. These physical facts became modified in time and legend, and emerged as the popular notion of vampirism current almost everywhere, today. As to the longevity legend: it also is a symbolic pattern indicative of the power of blood - the sustenance of the vampire - to produce and perpetuate existence. The chief reason for the predominance in the legends of blood and longevity is due to the fact that few vampires have been caught in the act; consequently, when outrages occur at intervals of a century or so, the incidents are often supposed to proceed from a common source, especially when occurring in or near the same locality.

But in what does the act of vampirism actually consist? The twin punctures in the throat may be regarded as euphemistic. The sole aim being to tap and to absorb animal life at its source, it is obvious that the vampire will not tap that part of the body furthest removed from it. On the contrary, its attack is directed at the generator of life. If prolonged and savage, the assault can cause death within an hour or two; but usually - that is, if the victim is young and in good health - a state of coma supervenes, at which stage the vampire departs. *It is during the coma that are experienced the dreams which later emerge as legends*, the shock of the assault producing similar impressions in each victim. Few and slight external traces of attack are apparent, and because of this fact it has been concluded that the victim merely imagines them to have occurred. Psychologists, too, have failed to surprise the mechanism of vampirism, because they are bent on presenting clever interpretations of the legends created by the victim while in an abnormal condition. If the psychologists were to use

common sense, they would realise how vampirism can cause disastrous consequences without any overt signs of attack. Psychologists dilate upon the sharpness of the vampire's fangs, which they regard as symbolic of tearing-fantasies, ripping-compulsions, cutting-complices, biting-urges, and sadistic acts in general. But all the vampire wants is Life. It is dead; it wants life. It is not concerned primarily with tearing, cutting, biting, or with hurting for its own sake; and the sucking in which it indulges is inevitable if it would drink the blood that is the life.

And what of the mirror superstition? The vampire is supposed to cast no reflection. The mirror is typical of that which reflects or reproduces the image. The vampire is not able to reproduce itself through the normal channels. Existing only by virtue of a stolen vitality, a life not its own, it is unable to beget creatures like itself; it breeds its likeness by empathetic obsession. This applies to the male of the species, but the process varies little in the case of the female. In ordinary life the female, as the vamp, draws off energy from the males with whom she comes into contact, and her source of energy reposes in the seed rather than in the blood.

Vampirism can be viewed as an intermediary stage between complete dependence on, and independence of, an external source of energy. There comes a time when the vampire desists from feeding on carrion and abides at peace within itself, imbibing its own essence, which it realises as the totality of the Universe.

September 28

After writing the above, I slept soundly. There was no sign or sound of the boy at breakfast-time; and shortly after waking I began feeling miserably sick, yet, at the same time, filled with blissom energy which I am quite unable to control. I just want to smash everything, set fire to the house, and watch them all burn like maggots in an incinerator.

Mrs M herself finally brought up the tray. She looked at me so queerly that I could not refrain from laughing, and the tears

sprang easily to my eyes as the hysterical outburst spent itself. She tried to comfort me, poor thing, little knowing that I was laughing at her scraggy neck and unkempt clouds of hair. She resembled a mop dipped in clotted silver paint.

The boy is ill in bed. I had not realised that he is convalescing after some serious illness. Mrs M told me this as I munched the flabby toast and the half-cold egg.

The house seems alive with apprehension and irritation. I cannot dispel the image of the boy sulking over the supper-tray. His mottled face had flushed crimson when, intent on discovering the origin of the note left outside my room, I surprised him in the kitchen. I had eaten the meal hurriedly and now I recall the thick and slimy cream that slid from beneath a slice of cake. Not long after consuming it, I slept. That revolting meal, perhaps, revived my morbid cravings. Now I understand the mystery of the note demanding my presence at the feast. Yet what demon placed within my path so abject a victim? The fawning face haunts me; bathed in a drooling mist it hovers spectrally before me.

October 5

The house has been quiet of late, and both Mr M and the boy seem to have recovered from their various indispositions. The boy has been particularly talkative during the past week; he seems to have come to the conclusion that he can hide what he has to hide more effectively by volubility than by silence. So, after loitering about the room for nearly an hour, mumbling about nothing in particular, he said he wished to speak to me! Mrs M's friend is to pay another visit soon; would I help the boy to importune her by engaging Mrs M in conversation? He did not say whether his intentions were honourable or otherwise! He looked at me wistfully; then his expression changed to one of cunning as he said: "If you do this for me, I will give you something you will not forget".

As he said this he drew close to me, and I instinctively recoiled. Something clammy seemed to invade my aura and I wanted to expel it as forcibly and as quickly as I could. He resented my attitude and reminded me that we had had some good times together! I was speechless, and I then demanded to know what he meant. He smiled in his usual sickly fashion and crawled away like a slug leaving a trail of ichor in its wake. The door closed softly behind him and I knew that his ear was pressed against it.

I determined not to co-operate with him on the 13th. But then I reconsidered the matter. If he seduced the girl I would, for a time at least, be rid of his erratic interferences. I could cause him to become more than her seducer ... But I refuse to pursue such thoughts. I was progressing favourably before this cretin strewed temptation in my path. I shall pay him in his own coin. I shall ...

From what hellish region do these thoughts emerge? I do not know, but I shall see that the child is never born! Why nourish an unwanted imp that will disturb everyone's peace, and rip up the woman's womb! But what raptures may be mine! It must be planned with care; it must be subtle and secret. But how to get *him* out of the way?

Firstly, an auspicious moon must preside at the Feast. The girl must come at his bidding, while he performs according to my will. At night, while lost in the senseless after-sleep, I will drain him so that he sleeps on. What feasts of life and of light shall be mine! I shall attain the throne They offered me, and which I crazily refused. What a fool I was to resist the destiny which drew me on until I could no longer stand before the fiendish image of Their blood-bespattered god.

Breathing has become difficult. I fear the house will hear the thoughts that are being born. I have never tried it this way before; but why not? A lot of things I had not tried, before They showed me the way. Now I cannot live without these strange delights, these corroded ecstasies. Why should I abhor the Cup

which my sister offers? It shall be all the sweeter in that the snake-slime seethes in the damp and sultry places of the shade. So let Them help me in this, that I may mark in blood-heat the Twisted sigil of the Great Old One:



October 9

I am utterly exhausted. The above fantasy tore from me the last reserves of energy and left me quivering on the verge of madness. I took nine decigrams of maloura. Result: dreams and a sickly thirst.

Mr M came in last night to talk about T. He says T has not sent any rent for several weeks. More worry! I understood there was to be no trouble of this sort; T is usually most punctilious. Now I come to think of it, I have not heard from him since early August. I suppose I ought to write, though requested not to do so. He has been very helpful. If I had had to bother about financial details as well, God knows how I should have pulled through. I have therefore agreed to write if T has not paid by the end of the month.

Mr M's visit has had a disturbing effect upon me. If anything has happened to T, it means contacting Y, and I cannot face another bout with him. My money is in his hands and I have no means of claiming it. A cold fury sweeps over me when I think of that vile trick. I was ill, so ill. "Leave the financial side to me, otherwise you will go to pieces". He certainly took that worry off my mind - every penny of it! If Mr M proves difficult I shall find myself in a fix.

But all of this is absurd. T has probably gone away and forgotten to instruct his secretary to send along the instalments. Still, it's a nuisance having to worry and conjecture like this.

I cannot settle to anything; cannot even read until this matter is cleared up. My mind seizes on a trifle, magnifies it out of all

proportion, and then I wonder when I go under. If Mr M knew what havoc he causes by his demanding attitude, I am sure he would desist. After all, They did take away all my money. Or did I give it to Them? They said it would be "all for the best". The whole business is whirling in my head and the constant mention of money, at breakfast, lunch, tea and supper-time, is telling on my nerves. There is always a grasping greed in their eyes when I walk into the dining-room. They give me one slice of toast instead of two because they imagine I am trying to cheat them out of their livelihood! A nice glow cleverly kindled by Mr M will soon be a blaze; and it will be his fault if the place goes up in flames before the night is out. What do I want with his rambling house? Anyone would think he owns it, instead of paying rent -or not paying it -just as I do.

Later:

I retired without any supper. The boy knocked twice; I shouted at him in a fury and he dropped stale buns all over the carpet.

Vainly trying to read something that will take my mind off money, but instead I keep visualizing a letter from T with the necessary funds enclosed!

October 11

The cheque has arrived, two days after my silent appeal! T appears to have been ill. Mr M beaming and obsequious once more. Ugh!

The boy's father arrived today. The lad was more sullen than usual and seemed to resent the visit. I think he is mad and in need of medical attention. He is rapidly losing weight, and the flabby folds around his neck sag like dirty napkins, wrinkled and scaly. He is brooding about the 13th, thinking I will let him down. But he is wrong!

The weather is much colder. I will close the window and seal it for the winter. But it fits badly; it seems I have to choose between a full blast of icy air, or a subtle, concentrated shaft of bitterness which cuts right across my bed.

This afternoon I sneaked down to where Mrs M keeps her correspondence and, as luck would have it, came across the very thing I was looking for: a photograph of her friend! I hid it in my dress just as the boy lurched past the dining-room door and almost fell into the room, startled by my presence there. I told him not to be a fool and to get out before Mrs M came back. He obeyed meekly, rather taken aback by my imperious tone. Back in my room I contemplated the snap, which will suit my purposes admirably. The difficult part of the job remains to be done - tonight.

Later:

It is about 2.00 a.m. of the 12th. I stole across the landing and listened at the boy's door. He was awake, damn him! I returned to my room and willed him to sleep. Again I crossed the passage and ascended the small flight of stairs; but again he proved wakeful. I will try again in half an hour's time.

Later still:

No good! I give up and go to bed — exhausted.

October 12

Awoke well after noon. Told Mrs M I had had a bad night. She was very sympathetic, bless her. She is really quite a dear old soul. I have done nothing all day but concentrate on the photograph. Mrs M seems not to have missed it.

Later:

A stroke of good fortune! At 3.00 p.m. I was passing the old shed which abuts upon the wood at the bottom of the garden. As I drew abreast of it, I noticed that the door was ajar. The back of a tousled head suddenly bobbed into view. It was the boy's. He had not heard my approach and I was about to withdraw when I sensed something amiss. I moved nearer, very stealthily. There he crouched, gloating over his own exposure, a breathless squeal breaking from his lips. The sight

sickened me. As the wave of his pleasure abated and his idiot eyes glazed over, I snatched up a large stone and hurled it up the garden. Terrified by the sudden noise he rushed from the shed, into the house, slamming the door behind him. I entered the shed and swabbed up the slime with my handkerchief.

Back in my room I sat motionless, and remained so until supper-time. I was unable to fix my mind upon the woman's features, but, strangely enough, I reached a full and steady state of beatitude despite my evil project. I seemed once again to enjoy the tranquillity I achieved so long ago. It came easily, too! This made me want to think back and re-live certain episodes of my early struggles to attain Peace.

Now, I cannot bear to think back; I must go forward. How may I ever again relish those states whilst possessed of the knowledge of my failure, and the certainty that I shall not again be able to gain access to finer planes of being?

After supper I decided to prepare a proper magical pantacle. I stole a candle from the scullery and proceeded to carve an image in the wax. It took me longer than I had supposed, but the concentration of energy involved has gone far to invoking the required presence.

A little after midnight I began to feel so exhausted that the candle slipped from my fingers and the knife clattered to the floor. In the darkly-silent house the impact sounded like a thunder-clap. Momentarily startled into full wakefulness, I assumed a squatting posture, but could not keep awake. The lethargy that paralyses me at such times is indescribable. Oblivion descends and I can recall nothing when I come to. I keep the electric light burning in a vain attempt to stay awake. I am determined not to give in until the image of the woman remains vividly in my mind.

At 1.00 a.m. success came. Strictly speaking, this entry should appear under October 13.

A faint aroma seemed to permeate the room and I recognized it as peculiar to the woman herself. With triumph and relief I

prepared the final part of the little ceremony, which required the impress of my will upon her aura.

I must have slept again after this final spurt of energy. I am nearly dead with exhaustion. It is now 2.00 p.m.

October 13

Mrs M came up to see if I were ill. She had noticed the breakfast-tray, untouched outside my door, long after midday. She was startled by my appearance, and as soon as she had gone I peered into the mirror. I, too, drew back. But I feel confident that the Rite was successful. Success or failure will be known when the woman arrives this afternoon. I shall tell Mrs M that I feel ill, and so excuse my not going downstairs this evening. All I can do now is to wait; I pick up a book and become absorbed.

Later:

The house seems suddenly alive with anger and upheaval. It is past nine o'clock. I must have slept solidly from the moment I picked up the book, which means that all my work has been in vain.

I crept out on to the landing to see what the fuss was about. All was dark, but I could see a faint slit of light under the dining-room door below, and I could hear Mr M's voice raised to a pitch of fury. The door opened and I heard the boy swearing as he skulked to the back of the house and returned a moment later with something in his hands. I leaned over the banisters in order to see what it was, but he disappeared too quickly. A gasp of horror came from Mrs M, and a renewal of fury from her husband boiled up so violently that I thought he would burst.

I stepped back into my room as Mrs M emerged from the dining-room. Sobs of rage and humiliation came from the boy, accompanied by a continuous nagging from Mrs M as she paced up and down the hall. Of the guest I heard nothing at all.

All my plans had been upset by some idiocy on the boy's part. There could be no doubt about it. I nearly choked with rage as I considered the vain expenditure of energy; of yesterday's lucky chance; of last night's ceremony. Why does the only person likely to be of use to me have to be a daft country bumpkin?

After my rage had subsided I wondered if I had misjudged the situation. My watch registered five minutes past ten; all was silent downstairs. Should I go down and confront the sulky wretch and discover what had happened? If the project were ruined anyhow, no harm could come of an enquiry, and no one could be accused of curiosity for wanting to know what the racket was about!

As I reached the bend in the stairs I heard Mr and Mrs M leave the dining-room. He was talking about calling a doctor, but she was against this, saying that "she would come round", that "everything would be all right in the morning", and that "she would think she had fainted". Then they passed out of my range of hearing.

My brain worked swiftly and clearly. I realised that my plans had not miscarried after all; that they had, in fact, been singularly successful. But where was the woman? I peered over the banister; listening intently, I heard the muffled voices of Mr and Mrs M coming from the direction of the boy's room.

I went downstairs calmly and confidently. They heard me as I approached the dining-room, and Mrs M appeared in the doorway and confronted me. I drew back. I had been so certain that they were in the boy's room, but Mrs M was far too distressed to notice my abrupt withdrawal. "O my dear!", she exclaimed, and added: "My friend has fainted!". "She seems to have had an attack of some sort", said Mr M, emerging hurriedly in the wake of his wife. I noticed that he closed the door of the dining-room and stood resolutely before it. I understood. They did not wish me to know what had happened. I did not pursue the matter, but offered to be of help. Mrs M nodded her head and said she thought all would be well in the morning.

I knew they were only waiting for me to go, before they returned to the dining-room. As I ascended the stairs they did so, and closed the door softly behind them. Swiftly and silently I descended again and entered the drawing-room, but the boy had been quicker; he was disappearing through the French doors; in his hand he held a token of his guilt!

Careless of discovery, I rushed after him and grabbed his collar. He writhed and squirmed, his face a ghastly yellowish green, his lips drooling as he tried to cry out. I told him that if he wanted to save himself he had better give me the thing he was holding.

"Next time you will do without it!", I stormed, though my voice was raised barely above a whisper. I snatched it from him and flew to my room. Only just in time: a second later, Mr M crossed to the drawing-room and let out an exclamation of surprise.

I locked the door of my room and took up the photograph. With great care I wrapped round the candle the thing I had taken from the boy, and rolled it gently up and down the picture. I felt satisfied but exhausted.

Then I left the seed to germinate ...

October 15

Nothing happened all day yesterday, but last night sleep came upon me early and I felt a special intensity in the current of air as my shadow left the bed. I seemed to have wings that bore me directly to the boy's room. He was waiting and cowering in a corner. I had to coax him and flatter him until he performed. Then I crouched and drank. Instantly, an ecstasy seized me, firing every vein and fibre with such exaltation that I seemed to expand in size, until with my colossal wings I enveloped the entire house. The rooms appeared to me as cells in a honeycomb, but in the woman's cell a pulsating energy emanated a blood-red flame. What raptures were mine as I glued my lips to

another's cup, drawing draught upon draught of nectar! I noticed that the other snake hung sullenly low, a limp spent worm, stricken by the death-dart of the smaller fang which burned between my teeth, drenching my tongue as it released its venom.

I drank until I lost consciousness; until my wings shrivelled. I drifted off, then fell, after which I awoke with a splitting pain in my thighs. Yet, as I record all this, I feel charged with a tremendous exhilaration.

October 19

Since the previous entry, we have indulged every night. They had to take the woman away in an ambulance. They don't think she will die, but who knows? The boy is prostrate and unlikely to recover quickly.

Although I have regained my old energy and verve, I feel a deep depression which will not be dispelled until the next Moon-Rite. I shall advise the M's of my coming absence.

October 20

Tonight I must exorcise an intolerable dread. I can neither analyze it nor trace it to a definite incident. Ever since they took the woman away I have sensed on the chill breeze a subtle kind of danger. It becomes more marked at night when it seeps into my bones, chilling the utmost reaches of my being with an evil cold I cannot contemplate.

At sundown I begin to dress and to get my luggage ready. I feel giddy, over-excited, rather as I am used to feeling on a *return* journey. How I need to be mastered by some powerful Spirit, not swayed by indeterminate energy-centres! Perhaps Choronzain, or the Deep Ones, will help me this time. Drugs seem to have little effect on me now. When I am functioning at mundane levels I feel a vague repulsion to them, and this weakens me; this, and the incessant jabbing of that horrid needle. But I must get extra energy for tonight's Rite.

How I exult when the moon-flood gushes, drowning the white snow-spurt of the Devil's snake! It tinges all its length with scarlet stains and mauve globules of burning dew.

I feel wild and savage, so soaked and stained with moon-juice that I cry aloud in the night; a lugubrious cry laden with death and cruelty; with lust's own laughing hate and sin's satiety.

I reached the spot, safely!

October 21

All else is a fantastic nightmare; something I cannot record now, but will, one day; something for ghouls and devils only; something nameless and loathsome; something called my Self.

As I returned to the house I was aware of eyes watching me. It was a little after eight a.m. I walked straight to the bathroom, feeling so exhausted that I hardly was able to turn on the taps. I bathed my face for some seconds in the basin filled with ice-cold water. After rinsing my mouth I prepared to complete my toilet, and entered the small cubicle separated from the bathroom by a thin wooden screen.

All was dark within, and as I sat I must have dozed off. Waking with a start, I was aware that someone was watching me. I gazed about me and noticed a small grating set in the wall near the ceiling. Two beady glints of light stared down, and again I felt an overwhelming desire to sleep. I was confused and delirious; the glints had become the eyes of the sickly-faced boy. I saw his hideous squat nose, saw him lick his lips with relish. I moved slightly and exposed the lower part of my belly; the lurex in my stockings glittered in the mephitic gloom, and my body thrilled as when about to satisfy some secret desire.

A deep blue haze seemed to envelop me and bear me lazily aloft to meet the face that hung above me. A sudden desire to void myself on it, and to gloat over the twisted joy it would provoke in its leering features, made me quiver with a hot and ugly lust. I smiled malignantly and glanced at my cunt. Each

crisp coppery hair bristled rigidly against the creamy dankness of my loins. I felt too enervated to rise. I was drenched in a stifling sweat which poured from my armpits, trickled in streams to my girdle, and swept in rivulets about my belly and breasts. The place reeled about me; I tried to haul myself up the wall with the aid of the chain suspended from the metal arm above me. I swayed dizzily over an abyss of incalculable depth; and then, with a sickening crash, fell to the floor and lay panting and faint, staring at those twin flames, those luminous eyes that did not move.

Once again I made the attempt; again I slipped and fell. The walls closed around me and their sides were slippery with an oily vapour that coiled about the ceiling in a deep mist. I gasped for breath, determined to draw some sign from those starkly maddening eyes; determined to make some impress on their glazed and awesome inanity.

I lay on the floor, writhing in postures which I knew must draw down the lurking demon. Monstrous forms clothed in a green-lit swathe of oil peered down at me, laughing derisively, mockingly. My stockings were torn, my skirt in ribbons, my breasts bursting through my blouse, which I had slashed in a frenzy; but still no sign of life smouldered in those brightly gleaming points. The face had vanished long ago; two shining beads alone remained. I stood up, steadied myself, and my mind assumed suddenly an ice-cold clarity and calm.

I was standing in the cubicle looking up at a small iron grating caked with the grime of years. My attention rested on two unblocked perforations through which the daylight winked like brilliant eyes.

I crawled up to my room and got into bed. Oblivion overwhelmed me.

October 24

This is the third day of my abiotrophy. I can neither sit nor remain supine. My body is an agony, and a lassitude more compelling than death itself has seized upon me.

Mrs M has threatened to have me taken away. She does not realize how ill I am. She says I disturb the house by my refusal to have meals at accepted times; that if I am well enough to go to town once a month ... and so on and so forth. She would like to know just what is wrong with me! I laugh. What idiocy; what crapulous conceit! She dislikes the way I laugh; the way I refuse meals; the way I stare ...

I shall write to T. Not in order that he may remove me. No! This is my house now! Mrs M is the one to go if anyone goes. I am sure that T will agree with me. But I am wasting time and energy on these trivial matters. I must build up a potential for the next Moon-Rite so that I may establish Their reign upon Earth.

It is strange, my writing thus after having spent my life denying Them. I suppose there are parallel instances in certain historically authenticated cases of 'conversion'. Something of the kind, no doubt, occurred to Paul, to Dostoevsky, to Huysmans and others. Did They appear to some in their sleep, or in their carousals? May be! Whatever the explanation, I am Theirs utterly. No more struggle, no more worry, just complete surrender! Is that what They want? Well, perhaps They have not got me yet. Perhaps if I recover from this *aboulia* I may yet strike back and regain lost peace. Hope, I may never regain, since Y snatched it away. Yet I feel hopeful already. I am a woman - not 'a mere wisp of a girl', as T once called me; I will triumph yet!

This sudden burst of intense energy alarms me somewhat. But these experiences are not without their obvious lessons. The eyes, which I imagined, gave me real excitement. Why had I not thought of it before? It is odd, how modest one is in those very places and circumstances which - if properly exploited - could prove more voluptuous and more informative than more orthodox ways of pleasuring. It takes an ordeal like this to make one realise what strange perversities, morbid desires, and secret wishes one harbours. Had I known years ago what I know now, I would have balanced things more cunningly, thereby Buffering slight burns instead of this all-consuming conflagration.

Yet my soul is being purged of the hypocrisy that goes with 'normality' and its pantomime. At least I have *seen* a devil, not merely read about one. At least I know what life may reveal if one has the misfortune, or the courage, or both, to tear away its veil of mock modesty. I shall want to know a lot more than has been made generally available about the lives of the saints, before being able to assess their real attainments. Their methods of catharsis involved total surrender to the Will of God. The lusts of the flesh may not be denied. Perfection obtains only when surrender is absolute, leaving the body, mind, and spirit so torn by the invasion of lust, that genuine indifference is born of understanding, and the ability to endure any experience.

October 25

I have been thinking all day about the *acedia* noted in yesterday's entry. Is it possible that my Will, far from being paralysed, is at last asserting its true nature?

When first I formulated my spiritual attitude I placed the root of the will in the highest centres. I tried to awaken the head before the heart. I have myself to blame for not heeding Y's remarks on this matter. Perhaps, after all, he is correct in his delineation of my character. Perhaps, too, it was my own stupidity that prevented my following the more sensible line of conduct. But what may a mere girl be expected to know about herself and her best means of expression? I marvel when I think how accurately Y assessed me. If I had not been so proud and supercilious, I might have enjoyed things which I can now but hold in contempt for their inability to satisfy me. The starved part of my nature has bulged into an ugly pustule, and burst.

I repeat: is it possible that my will is finally announcing its destiny and impelling me in a direction opposite to that which I had anticipated? Am I, after all, a priestess of Hecate, whereas Diana had seemed to call me? Surely there is some mistake? If I could find a way of true analysis I might yet reconcile these conflicting elements.

The weather is fine; warm puffs of air sail in upon me as I sit and gaze over tree-tops to the misty wood beyond. A russet-flecked purple is growing into evening, and already the star-gems stud the upper green with glistening twinkles. Yet a threat of storm lurks in the heart of the dusk. At any moment a livid tongue of fire may streak across the sky and bring terror to the scene.

I have been meditating, and the blackness without has grown massive. It is sprawled like a teratoma against a background of silence which, for some inexplicable reason, causes me to ponder the nature of Evil. I feel as if I am in touch with a source of omniscience, able to answer all questions and solve all problems.

October 26

The morning has been one of peerless sunshine. Nevertheless, the night with its sinister atmosphere has not utterly vanished.

I spent most of the morning re-reading the notes I jotted down last night, and arranging them in some order.

The subject of evil has always lurked at the back of my mind. Not until now have I been able to formulate it in terms acceptable to reason or instinct.

Evil is unbalanced force, and the evil-doer is one who is unfulfilled or in some way frustrated. Chaos proceeds from the Self, since it is impossible to conceive anything that does not originate and end in the Self. The latter's existence is the sole fact of which we - as individuals - are certain; but we see only a distorted reflection of it in the murky mirror of a personal self, or ego, identified with a particular personality. The ego is therefore basically unbalanced; it incessantly emanates the miasmal exhalations of chaos or the primal slime, which it moulds and appropriates (misappropriates) to its own ends.

Chaos blends with the red, creative earth, which is blood, and it imbues that blood with life. The earth, or First Matter,

following an unknowable pattern, forms for the ego a material vehicle which we know as the human body; the blood becomes flesh. The latter is generated physically by the action of the slime upon other oleaginous substances. As the Arabian Alchemist² has expressed it: "All animals increase themselves by a slime". The *idea* behind the *form* is inherent in the slime from the moment of its generation to the moment when it gathers about itself the habiliments of corporeality. It is a process of duplication, not of creation, for creation occurs not in matter but in Spirit.

The chaos back of all things, although the cloak of an ultimate idea which transcends it, is the slime from which the ego is generated. It is a force having no direction or completion, forever flowing forth in every direction, its sheer aimlessness and inexhaustibility indicative of non-fulfilment. Little wonder that we are instinct from the beginning with wayward tendencies!

The brain is an evolutionary development of the idea latent in the slime. The spermatozoon is enveloped in slime and it ultimates in brain, which in turn affects the slime and moulds it in consonance with the inherent idea. Hence the whole scheme of manifestation is a vicious circle; the Buddhists describe it as the Wheel of rebirth.

There might be less occasion for pessimism if the original idea swimming in chaos were not a blind force. Call this idea 'God', and we are no better off. Call it what you will, the fact remains that in Chaos there exist a myriad such ideas, one only of which in the act of generation develops its potential, fulfils itself.

If evil is unbalanced force, then 'good' is balanced force? But if force remains balanced it is no longer force; it is homogenous tranquillity, for its stress has been abolished. There may not be any such thing as 'good', 'God', because if we define evil as we have done, we search in vain for balanced force.

² Ali Puli, in *His Tractate of the Regenerated Salt of Nature*.

Magic, the science of transcendence, organizes Chaos so that the idea and the slime are blended. Thus, when God and Chaos concur, real creation becomes a possibility. And magic accomplishes this act of creation through attraction, or 'love'.

Love is the biological urge to completion in every kingdom -mineral, vegetable, animal, human. Using this conception in a correct manner it is possible, momentarily, but positively, to balance (or annihilate) force altogether. At that fleeting point of the process at which Idea and Matter are abolished, when there is neither evil nor good, it is possible to create, to give birth to a fundamental and obsessive desire which is Will, and which lies at the very root of the Self. At precisely this moment, the Self flowers fully; and, before Chaos resumes its aimless flowing, truth may dawn upon the Self-in-Ecstasy. This is a transcendence of twin forces in constant opposition through the dynamic flowering of a primal obsession in the silence of the real void: a void free from the idea, from chaos, from all but the very *absence of Self*. And this is a condition beyond good and evil and therefore free of consequence. Ultimately, *samadhi* is such a state, outside space and time.

'Evil' inheres in all entities because its basis, Matter, is of chaos or unbalance. It can be diverted to a 'good' purpose by being left free to develop itself fully and to die through exhaustion. To try and turn a thing to any purpose other than that for which it is predetermined, is a useless thing to do, since fulfilment of its primal *idea* is all that it can do. It is as futile to try to interfere with the development of anything once set in motion, as it is to try to alter the flight-path of an arrow released from a bow.

To enlighten matter, to inform it and establish within it Beauty and Light, one must imbue it with the fragrance of the Self, for one may transmit to matter the creative impulse only in the lightning-swift phase of its emanating from Chaos. Originality is thereby the immediate obsessive desire in terms of the unconceived. As soon as the conception has intervened there recurs the universal pattern of multiplication, and

creation is balked. The explosion of energy is directed into a vehicle like itself. There are usually no unforeseen developments in the growth of the body of a child; its mind, too, does not differ in kind and is no improvement upon that of its father. It is a mere duplication. In rare cases, in the incarnation of genius for example, there is a miscarriage of the usual process, and the vitally obsessive idea breaks through into matter and breeds something vastly different from its parents.

There is in genius an enhanced degree of unbalanced force, a great gulf between the man and his work. Who has not pondered the ways of genius, and wondered at the madness of actions not connected with it in any ostensible manner? Drunk with liquor, doped with drugs, deluded by women, there is a dichotomy between the obsessive idea and the dull clay in which it incarnates. These creatures seem to have been snatched from a different world, a sinister shadowland. They are the changelings of the Absolute generated from the deeper layers of the Self, through which they burst despite the resistances of matter, which, in its constant efforts to choke original impulses, endeavours to destroy them by asserting its own formula. Hence genius appears supremely unbalanced to those ignorant of that transcendental balance which nullifies phenomena and discloses the noumenal basis of Reality. The delights of genius therefore appear unusual, alien, perhaps even 'evil', to those that remain unenlightened or unaware of the delusive nature of phenomena.

It is not easy to think of evil without associating it with the concept of sin, which may be defined as the misappropriation, to ends not in accordance with its nature, of the Self's energy. Sin yields only sterile joys, and they are experienced by those ignorant of the true nature of Self.

[Editor's Note:

Although the next entry in Vilma's diary is dated October 28th, nothing intelligible appears until November 9. The intervening pages are crammed with illegible symbols, ink blots, russet-

coloured stains, and various other deposits which obliterate the sense of the script. That she is ill during this period is indicated by phrases which stand out in block capitals. On November 4, for instance: *WHEN WILL IT END?* And, on the following day, the word 'delirium' is often repeated.

At the head of another page, against a badly smudged and ill-shaped symbol, appear the words — "the swine Y".

There are, occasionally, signs of an effort to be coherent among a series of indecipherable sigils and shapes which defy analysis. It is evident that she suffered a relapse which necessitated an increase of drug intake.

Under the stress resulting from physical weakness, mental instability and drug intoxication, Vilma suffered hallucinations and delirium for nine or ten days consecutively. Even where the handwriting becomes more clearly defined, there is little sense conveyed. A host of incoherent demons seem to clamour for expression through her pen.

She does not cease tabulating and recording her impressions throughout this period of mental eclipse, and this portion of the diary is equal in length to the parts already printed.

On November 8 she regained a certain normalcy. A series of passages read quite intelligibly, although we are unable to understand them for lack of previous information. They concern a meeting which she was compelled to attend: though where, when, and with whom, it is not stated. She merely reiterates that it will occur at a specified time.

The remainder of the diary contains no reference to this period of illness, but the events recorded after the receipt of a letter from T seem to relate to the meeting.

Further violent outbursts against the person called Y appear in various, apparently irrelevant, places. For instance, against a sign denoting drug doses, Y is cursed and accused of causing her malaise and her fall from 'magical and mystical paths'.

The continuity of the diary is not wholly destroyed by the hiatus, even though much material has been lost. To give an instance: she describes at great length a vision and the effects it produces upon

her 'magical consciousness'. Also, a particular drug is held responsible for opening the gateways of her Unconscious, and these gateways lead directly to the 'narrow windings' of her 'inferno', where she prowls face to face with the self she has become since They' took possession of her spirit. Nowhere else in the diary is the sense of brooding loneliness and despair so shaken by eruptions of violence, and nowhere else is so fierce a detestation of humankind manifest in such naked bitterness.]

November 9

After tea, I lolled about and again experienced an overwhelming desire for energy. But there is little likelihood of my finding in this isolated place a victim suitable for my purposes. I therefore concentrated my mind on attracting one, but succumbed to drowsiness instead. I suppose I shall have to wait until the next full moon.

I dropped off to sleep, and Mrs M knocked at the door and awakened me. I was so irritated that I cursed her. She retreated in dismay, muttering to herself. Then I heard the boy on the landing. I crept out of bed and opened the door. He gave me a sickly smile which changed to a horrid leer when he saw I was undressed. I slammed the door in his face and crouched against it, feeling excited but bilious. I might have known that any effort to attract anything would be short-circuited by him. Still, I suppose he'll do; at least he is on the spot. Let us wait till night has fallen.

Later:

I could not summon sufficient energy to make the attempt last night.

November 10

T has written, asking for details of my situation. I will tell him the truth; how ill I have been, how lost, how lonely.

After writing the letter, I strolled to the post-box and returned to find Mrs M with her friend, who had just arrived.

She looked wan and thin. The boy was skulking in the background and I felt his eyes upon me. He was telepathing, "You keep out of this, or ...". But although his attitude was threatening, tired and ill as I was, I decided to spend the evening with the two women.

I sat on the sofa drinking in a stream of banal conversation. They were both wrapped up in trivialities which I had discarded long ago; shops, clothes, marriages, miscarriages. It poured on and on, a sickly drizzle, dull and pointless; but it proved unequivocally that I was no longer one of them. When they started talking about church, I withdrew. I suppose most men would find the girl attractive. She affects studied aloofness which is belied every time she opens her thin and painted lips. The boy is mad to get at her; I passed him in the hall, his mouth pursed and ready to spit venom. I smiled; they neither of them have the intelligence to see that this is *my* game!

November 11

The rain has saturated everything; it is pouring all over my table and running in rivulets down the side of the wall. But I will not close the window. I have noticed a change in the chill current of air; it is forming a circle around the bed; it will soon envelop it entirely, isolating it from the rest of the room. Then I shall be alone in a magic circle, generated by demons or by angels: I do not know.

Can any breeze so cold be good? I doubt it. To write is hopeless; each time I pick up the pen, ideas flee before an overwhelming lassitude.

Lounging on the bed with a book, listlessly unable to read, I hear voices from the past and I see Y quite vividly, bending over and kissing me. Why did I not admit then that I was in love with him? Even then I hated him, although I exalted him in my imagination to a throne of sovereign power. He is still the king, in my reality, and that is all that matters. How I remember the voyage and the pleasant, calm, and pensive man who spoke of strange creeds and evil sorceries. Why did I not go back ...?

Why do I not go now? Now! Now all is hopeless; a sapless image of ugliness. I raise my arm, a scarecrow's wooden limb. My hair, like burnt grass, hangs limply over me; a necrophile's dream, with a smouldering semblance of life. My thighs would twitch their gnarled infamy to death's white sheets; my eyes the ghoul-lights to the street-lamp's lurid glare; my flesh and bone, a geometric ghostliness ... Who may see me and survive? What slug, fresh-slithered from the tomb, would mingle - wet with leuchorrhoea - its slime in the eye-sockets of my emptiness? I am fixed in the circus of space for the leering gods to spurn, unable to withstand the mutilation of maggots.

I turn in my bed and frantically invoke a partner to assist me in some shameless infamy. A voice sounds below and I listen excitedly; it sounds vaguely familiar and I open the door very softly and confront the boy's father on his way upstairs.

I scarce know what happened after that. The man seemed fascinated, hypnotized. He approached me like a zombie and I closed the door behind him. In my white shroud-like gown I towered above him. He cowered and cringed; a light burned sullenly in his beady eyes, to be replaced a moment later by a glassy brilliance. A wave of nausea assailed me; I fell across the bed, my breasts in contact with his heavy body. The room rushed and reeled and laughter rose in the air. Some chasm opened and a stream of images gushed out in vast concourse, each one a lustful figure of naked flesh. My heart and my head throbbed maddeningly, and I recall a monstrous shadow, winged, with tongues of flame. In its utmost spasm it pierced the depths of me.

How long I lay and moaned, I do not know. All I do know is that I awoke before midnight in a dark cold room, an unearthly light stealing over me like a silver thread of incandescent evil. But I felt replete with energy and boundless strength.

November 13

My life is a series of violent outbursts followed by inertia and prolonged periods of writing. Inspiration is richest at the

darkest hour; it seeps from some unfathomable interior and gushes into the pages of my notebook.

Mrs M has brought me a letter from T. He seems disturbed by the account of my illness and suggests that I go into seclusion for several days. He thinks I may then have a chance of stemming the force of the counter-current which I have set in motion and which threatens to destroy me. I shall have to come to some arrangement with Mrs M about my meals. Ts suggestion seems the only way out. But *is* there a way out? No! it is useless; I can but await the end. There is no hope for me. They have won, and at Their bidding I shall drag other souls through the drains of darkness that I have made my hell-home. I shall unfold my arms and clasp who comes to my scale-sleek breasts ...

I shall make immediate arrangements for the Retirement. Perhaps I should write to T and ask him to negotiate with the M's; it would save me so much trouble. I must have a guarantee that I shall not be disturbed under any pretext, and that they will not allow the boy to bother me. Also, I must elicit from them an assurance that I alone shall have free run of the brake, which will serve for my noctambulations.

Later:

I have written to T suggesting that he approaches the M's on my account. If all goes well I shall begin the Invocation after the next Moon-Rite.

November 17

I have striven hard to hold my mind to the steady contemplation of Unity. Several times I swam in an ocean of bliss. I became all things and recognized minute fragments of matter wearing my face and my form. My corruption seemed momentarily annulled, but I find it quite impossible to record my illuminations. The very least of them had a significance far beyond anything I had hitherto known. It is difficult to believe that such springs of beauty still exist within me. Yet my Will, my

Desire, and my Belief, are one: a living fire of Unity melting every thought in the alembic of my internal selves - millions of them - flowing, billowing, surging endlessly. Into that ocean of brilliance I glance, and vision becomes perfect. The way is plain; there can be no turning back, no flinching before the ultimate task that looms ever nearer in the sunset glow of the soul's long day.

I withdrew from this contemplation and replaced it by a gentle rhythmic breathing which bore me into regions beyond Form. I yearn to remain in this tranquillity, but obscene laughter drives me back. The Qliphoth claw me down and I am torn asunder. Before me squats the Hecate-toad, its savage eyes glowing, its head bulging with talismans, precious stones of noxious dew, the drool of its ragged lips. This is the laughing beast curled in the coils of my brain, licking with idle tongue the embryos that lie corrupting in the mental womb of my fancies. In the phallic forest of so much magic foliage I stretch upward in the night, a tower, a curve; indefinable, inconceivable, beyond the possible. Queen of this region, I reign from a throne of running water which glints like gold in evil moonlight. The blood reds of my robes flow like rivulets: unearthly, stricken, a fountain of palsied nightmare blighted and tainted with the devil-spawn that bred me. No effort is needed to remain here; there is no need to use the ancient keys; no need to give the sign, the kiss, the deed ... no need, no need!

November 21

The lunar flood breaks through! For five days I hung upon the tree which overhangs hell! For four days I remained without food; nor has my body spent its gold or its meats, or tasted ecstasy. I swell with a turbulent tide.

On one occasion, Mr M came in. His face swam into view upon a filmy cloud. Yellow, clayey lumps obscured the features and his lips writhed, although no sound pierced the vapour in which it swam. Enormous fish floated in with it, and a leprous tube belched millions of darts towards me.

I tried to dispel the miasma by making an effort to visualise only those images that I knew to indicate my path. But lost in

the immense and lonely jungle of the Qliphoth I found no stability, nothing that did not shift and slip, dissolving in a greenlit mist tinged with mauve. I stumbled and fell into blackness. Soon afterwards, I made this entry in my diary. Another self burst from my belly and wheeled around me, only to catch its tail in an ensanguined chunk of food. Yes, food! Every pore and aperture of my body craves food, as my nostrils the air. Yet am I bound by oath in this Rite to partake of nothing terrestrial, nothing substantial from the universe without.

Writing the last sentence awakened me to actuality. I feel hungry; why doesn't Mrs M come with the tray? She is determined to eject me; says the screams disturb her in the night-time. What screams? She says the boy has told her things about me ... In reply I said the boy was demented. She flew into a rage and had the temerity to order me to my room! I would have knocked her down had not the boy appeared and poked his tongue in my face, so I struck him instead. He moaned at my feet like a lump of jelly. Then I lost hold on things, and unfamiliar voices shrieked abuse and abomination in my ear. A fiendish-looking skull opened its jaws and belched forth a volley of obscenity. Through a blood haze of lassitude I saw the boy crouching on his knees. I was wild with an uncontrollable frenzy. He lunged forward and sniffed at me like a dog. The ceiling melted into space as he grasped my hips in bands of iron, and my energy ebbed and flowed in a rhythmic vortex which sucked me dry. Then the boy collapsed, a grey and depleted sack draped over the banister.

Thus ends the Feast of the First day. I shall eat and drink -alone!

November 23

The main object of this retirement is to sweep aside the elements that threaten my sanity. This I hope to accomplish by stimulating the centres of consciousness which generate the symbols of my personality, and by awakening the Fire Snake³ -which is no safe or easy task.

³ The Kundalini of the Yogis; the cosmic power in man. (Ed.)

This operation will decide the nature of my destiny and the manner of its fulfilment.

An ice-cold breeze, like the one that surrounds my bed, has quelled my fever and sharpened to a high degree an analytical faculty which I have just used to investigate the idea of an Interior Universe. Everyone possesses an interior universe, though in the majority of people it remains subliminal. But it is very near the surface in the case of the artist, although few artists are able to develop it for lack of magical power, and fewer still are able to live vitally and creatively in day-dreams and fantasies without trying to bring them down to earth and, in the process, destroying their power. This is because the creative urge is not one with the urge to materialize. Pure creation is invisible; it does not materialize in any way. High spiritual attainment is necessary for true creation, and the creator does not aim at material results. The painting, the poem, the song - whatever the medium used to express the inmost truth - is not in itself creation but the reflex of a movement out of time and space, both of which it ultimately transcends. It is often impossible to see from a work of art the nature of the interior universe that lies behind it, and which generates it. There is often a marked dissimilarity between the two. Paradoxically, the substance of which the product is the shadow is essentially unsubstantial and therefore shadowless. It is both inviolable and incommunicable, and the real source of that Energy of Transmutation which it is the art of sorcery to stimulate. It is therefore incorrect to regard the sorcerer as concerned with the transformation of material things, for true Sorcery is creative and pertains to inner and invisible spheres. The sorcerer is the mover in circles, the Circular, and the magic circle girdles the hidden field of his creative endeavour. He encircles and ensorcells all things, as the original church, kirk or circle embraced the entire creation in manifestation.

By developing ideas suggested by meditation on one's inmost nature, by becoming obsessed by them, one weaves the fabric of the interior universe. Nothing may assail it, for it is the Palace of Truth. The process should not be mistaken for

mysticism, since that has an object (union with God), whereas the interior universe is autotelic.

One has to be strong, for obsession is a terrible thing. The world today is obsessed by ideas of money, power, quantity. Individuals devoted to these materializations of energy are magically impotent and filled with misery. Obsessed by these ideas, man lives in the self-generated hell of the external universe.

To contemplate the confusion of the external world is therefore fatal. People die when their obsessions prove worthless, and their death is a revulsion. But the sorcerer, the circular and returner, is the one who returns to his source, which is the true magic circle that embraces the interior universe.

Because of our peculiar physical equipment it is possible to generate the obsessive twins which reveal the inner world. Herein lies the significance of the twin gods, Set and Horus. Set destroyed the illusory outer world, the Body of Osiris; Horus revealed the true inner world, the Spirit of Osiris established for Eternity. But Cosmos is only apparently dual, as are the ideas of Spirit and Matter, the primal twins. The sorcerer imbues them with life, his own life, and he infuses them with the vitality of the Self. He then realises that all selves are identical, and that Matter is the substance wherewith the Self builds as many worlds or ideas as it pleases.

These occult processes are the means of resolving Chaos without, and of achieving Cosmos within. The object always mirrors its Subject.

November 24

I slept badly, with vivid and unpleasant dreams. After a frugal meal I robed myself in the blue robe which has not been worn since ...
[The sentence ends thus abruptly. Ed.]

I have evolved a new magical posture. I lie spreadeagled on the bed within the circle of ice, my head lolling over the side, my legs flexed against the wall at the side. The blue robe veils me like shimmering water, and I visualise the scarlet tongue of

the Fire Snake as it swells within the descending triangle formed by my legs and the wall.

I maintained this posture for hours, jerking myself awake when sleep threatened to intervene. I heard harsh metallic voices, raucous jangles as of cabs on cobbles, hissings as of gas-jets, the noise of doors opening and closing. Scenes of my early life whirled past my inner gaze. Each incident, crystal clear and precisely delineated, floated by: slowly at first, then swept along by a magnetic current which followed the ring of the ice-zone encircling the bed. Faces appeared and disappeared, monstrous forms, twisted figures, distorted images of dreaming- and waking-life inextricably fused.

Then the image of a vast black ass loomed over me and seemed to descend from the ceiling and pass into my being. I felt enormously strong; my legs beat against the wall in a mad tattoo which brought down upon the bed ribbons of paper adhering to chunks of plaster. A long tentacle moved up and down inside me and - within the triangle - I saw the scarlet snake swell up, dash back its hood and fix me with a venomous glance. A tongue of black fire licked up the sacrament as it jetted from me. I writhed in a sea of forgetfulness; my breasts swelled, their mounds filled the entire room - fire-tipped ice-peaks of smooth cold snow spurting globules of blood.

I floated to the centre of a vast desert where a dark crater spat fumes, sulphurous, blinding. The ass which I had absorbed, materialised beside me, braying loudly. Then it reared upon me, its reeking breath hot upon my cheeks. It swung against me its supple member, and the pink nudity of it stood out obscenely against the black hirsute belly. Again and again I tried to fill my being with the superhuman force it offered. Again and again I was denied, chained by shackles of inner resistance.

And then, as if distilled from clouds of lurid heat and glaucous haze, a woman's body hung before me in midheaven, frozen for an instant in perfect stillness. Then her hair moved, stirred by a breeze. Her breasts were high, small and rounded,

her waist slim and white, her hips heavy. She was a goddess. But I loathed her, and as I fell upon her with my teeth and nails, she disappeared, leaving behind her a gale of laughter. Then she returned and changed her form. She took between her breasts the head of the ass, and with her jewelled fingers grasped its pizzle. A savage neighing broke upon the air, thick with the incense of fungi burning in the Sefekh-darkness. As I raised myself again to strike, she pulled the beast down to her. Writhing in flames and smoke, ensheathed, trapped by her deadly need, the glowing member burst in showers of gold and black.

Deep caverns of the nether world gaped open for the first time since the ancient temples were profaned. Then the images reversed, and she - the Goddess - rode that qliphoth-beast whose lust for life outlasts the death of all: Gamaliel, They call you!

I have adored your sacred emblem! I have surprised you in the spawning of the sunset; in the dread call of the night-bird shrieking from the tomb to take fresh life in vampire-sweeping silence. In goblets where your wine has flowed I reside to drink your venom, lest one dart escape to lie unfertilised. I, your vampire-catamite, your true abomination masked as woman, writhing in the blackness of soul, wallowing in the gulfs of Gomorrah's ghastly greatness. I, of Babylon, and formerly of Khem, rise up and greet you - Lord of Hell, Gamaliel! Beasts and fishes, demons and humans, have received your mark in secret places. Blood red, the flowers of girls fill your festal vessels; your platters run with honey seethed in dew. You have stirred my cup and left a brew of bitter evil; one sip is potent to taint the world with plague and madness.

I, your spotless priestess, have submitted to abominations in your Name. I have bared my womb to viper's sperm; I have drunk at the fount of Faunus and of Artemis, and relished the lunar poisons. I have played Witch to your Wizard spells and have concocted potions of annihilation. Use me as you will, but let me always serve your sorceries. I have not lain idle when fools have prayed, but have crashed through dome of church

and chapel with my train of devils trumpeting aloud. There we brought chaos, polluted the wine, profaned the sacrament, opened the gate of the Pit. In your Devil's Mass have I been Lilith, and in my mouth your steaming mass has melted and turned exquisitely to gold. I come now to reap my prize, to feast beside you on the Throne of Geh, veiled in the vilest blasphemies. I know you both, ugly and awful as you are! I know you for the true Redeemers and givers of endless ecstasy. Having supped of satyr-seed, I have turned to that unholy meal wherein the moon-wines run thick and mingle with stranger delicacies.

I come triumphantly! Have I not won that greatest prize -the right to do Your Will, to perform Your rites upon the hills and summits of the earth, as also in the valleys and dark-lit places? Let me die impaled upon your Spear, empurpled with my blood ... and, as I die ... fight free from vampire fangs ...

November 25

The paeon yet echoes in my ears.

The shapes around me are becoming more precise, and an acrid odour fills the room. A certain change occurred last night. My body became ice cold. I was terrified, and stretched out my arms to save myself from toppling from a crag into the deeps below. I was aware of a swirling volume of water; a large bubbling crater welled beneath me and I wanted to fall ...

I altered my focus of vision. The circle surrounding the bed had become warmer, had become a ring of intolerable heat. To escape burning I tried to reduce myself to the size of a small bundle. This made me think my body was ice cold. I prayed fervently to be released from this nightmare, but laughter was the only answer. Such hate was in it. I recognized the voice as mine!

The fear then melted and I became calm; but some hidden activity is going on silently and secretly about me; a preparation for something?

November 26

Yes! It definitely is a preparation. A scene has developed; a precise picture. A green-hued radiance illumines everything, which makes it all the more easy for me to see things with perfect clarity.

I am in a vast building. Its ceiling is so high as to be out of sight. A multitude of men and women are surging in and out of great doors which swing to and fro with remarkable ease and terrifying silence. There seem to be street lamps flanked by high walls vanishing to infinity on either side of me. They are unsubstantial and they ripple slightly, as in a breeze. Gigantic blocks of stone have gone to their construction.

Utter silence prevails, which makes the scene uncanny, ominous. There is a lightning-flash, and the multitude turn stunned faces to the sky. Mirrored in their eyes is a crimson light, the cause of which I cannot identify. I feel warm and confident, knowing that I am expected to play a major part in what is to follow; not in the least worried and quite prepared for any eventuality. My hour is come; I shall perform the ultimate Rites.

A pungent odour seeps from a dark patch of purple shadow and fills the whole building with a nauseating stench. I cough and vomit, and the scene continues smoothly to unfold.

At midday I rose and ate some food. Mrs M left it outside the door this morning - yesterday morning - who knows? In the evening the sense of an invisible Presence was overwhelming; but, as yet, no manifestation to sight, touch, or hearing.

In my devil's posture last night, I coaxed the Fire Snake to a high level of activity. I like to tempt it; to increase its itch to the utmost degree, and then - reverse its direction! It sways its head blindly; its adder-fangs snap empty air. I feel dizzy and sick, and hear only with difficulty. Also, I have not taken any malourea since three days before the Invocation began, and yet I am keyed to the highest pitch of sensitivity. Shapes form easily, but always against the background of the building.

The acrid odour is not always present, and the people sometimes fade into the distance and are lost in infinity, but the purple patch of shadow remains, concealing something unimaginably evil.

I cannot sleep, nor can I maintain for a moment longer this peak of intense concentration. I know that madness lurks, but before its waters overwhelm me I must discover the nature of the building which forms the background of the images. I believe it is some kind of temple.

I ate a little food and then I conceived the crazy notion that I should dress, go to town, and act as if I were normal! Yet anyone seeing me now would never recover from the shock. I look long and intently into the mirror. I have a torn stocking tied about my neck; my belly is swollen as if in the final stages of pregnancy; my breasts pendulate like witch-udders, the nipples awry. My eyes occupy almost all my face, two great bruises; the mouth, a scar festered and wet with drool; the teeth bared, yellow, longer than usual. My hair is less affected than the rest of me, and its sheen is remarkably brilliant. It seems somehow to be lit from within, a struggling congeries of medusa vipers, each bearing a little light in its head. I am nearly naked, as I have been since the beginning of the Invocation.

[Several pages have been torn from the notebook. Ed]

November 30

The Invocation is nearly finished. I wrote a full account of the Seventh day, somewhere, but have mislaid it. Am worried about this because if anyone finds it there will be trouble.

The whole Invocation ended badly, dismally, a failure! I haven't contacted any Power that has in any way helped me. But it has done me good; it has proved that I can concentrate great energy and that I can deny myself anything, if necessary. Also it has proved that I am altogether fearless ... But I boast ... too much and too soon!

Have had a terrible scene with Mrs M. Curse her!

For the past four or five days I have been obsessed with the idea of going out. Little wonder that the Retirement ended so lamely. I cannot continue for another day; and yet I must, even if only to prove to T that I am not completely vanquished.

Later:

I had settled myself in the devil-posture when the boy started scratching on the door. I told him to go away. He replied with blasphemies. I rolled off the bed and fell to the floor, my head reeling, my legs numbed. I crawled to the door and was about to open it when a sharp pain buckled me up and I fell flat on my face. He heard my sobs and tittered inanely. Summoning every ounce of energy I wrenched open the door and confronted him. Then I realised why I had been so desperate!

When he saw me swaying grotesquely in the half light, he let out shriek upon shriek of maniacal laughter. I turned away and crawled round the room. The blue robe was in tatters; saliva trickled from my lips and I shuddered violently. He is an idiot but a lewd one, and before I could rise to my feet he was on my back, towering above me in bestial glee. A second later, pandemonium broke loose. Mare to his mentula, I raged and ramped in jerking spasms. Again and again he tore into me; the urge increased as each fresh vacuum caused by his withdrawal clamoured for fulfilment. Maddened now, he charged upon me and for one exquisite moment I thought my bowels would burst.

My back was drenched with a molten lava and like the Khem-Besz beasts we fell to the feast. A part of me became detached and I witnessed the scene from above: two monsters gorging, tearing and scraping from each other the cloying scales. Hirsute and sore-scarred; a monster cupped devil-paws to the dugs of its Lilith-consort, Queen of sterile feasts and barren lusts. The two deathless atavisms of the Backward Ages appeared in stark precision, emerging from the past; intent on

satisfaction, blinded by beast-rut, imbecile, corrupt. Here, in a rehearsal of antiquity, arose the incense of a nameless Mass. The temple was the room; the lusts were those of old, when the times were confused and the shrine of the Living God profaned. The patch of shadow became a luminous rectangle, and an image crystallized within it; stupendous in its grandeur, terrible in its godlessness.

A searing pain shot through my head and I sank into the ground, into the earth, deep down through strata of growth and decay. I saw reptiles begetting strange children; saw liquid testicles of fire shooting their projectiles through the soft interior of earth; saw the flaming points pierce waiting wombs and burgeon forth as offspring of the blind bigness. The swell of the earth became ocean; the tides rolled on; bloody foam mingled with purling dews, creamily white. Through sky and fire, through hideous heats and paralysing colds, I saw the woman debased and the beast triumphant - waving high the Talisman of Set. The whole earth was abased before the mystic Cross whereon I lost my life to Him who grows forever in me ...

The door opened; I fail to remember what happened ... but I came back, somehow. I, of Carthage, formerly of Khem, the coprozoic priestess of Cthulhu, am returned from the deep.

December 3

Depressed and sick. The whole thing was a fiasco. No word from T, and I cannot be bothered to write. Either I have succeeded, or I am utterly finished. When shall I know? All was deceptive during the Invocation. It succeeded only from the point of view that I was able to understand certain things about myself. I dare not write it all down, for if true I must sever myself from this age and go back through the dust of the aeons, back to Khem where I ...

[The sentence breaks off abruptly. Ed.] I shall go out

and walk in the brake.

December 4

I took a very long walk; too long, considering it was the first for some time. Everything has changed, blackened. Although it is bitterly cold outside, or so they tell me; I feel warm, hot even, though wearing nothing more than a summer frock.

I came to a queer little well this afternoon, and I had to go out again to confirm that it was really there, not merely imagined. The walls are old and oozing with a greenish slime. Fungi luxuriate at the bottom; some of them have purplish knobs which resemble the *phalli* of beasts. They push their way into dank russet-coloured undergrowth, and trickles of polluted water seep out as if they were raping some ... the obscene analogy dawns suddenly upon me. Here, in vegetative form, is the same rite enacted; here is yet another symbolic series of obsessions, objective, actual, and externally tactual.

I cannot accept... let me die ... let me drown ... let me pitch down into this turbid slime of noxious putrescence.

December 5

I was found unconscious by one of the labourers from a neighbouring farm. He should have left well alone! They say I must have caught my foot in a root and fallen into the water. Mrs M says I should count myself lucky I didn't get an infection from that 'horrid well'. She could learn much from that well if she knew how to use her eyes.

I have made the brake my temple; the well, my oracle. In the Sefekh-lust that wraps me round I shall perform my earthly functions therein; it is hidden from prying eyes. There I shall void the golden waters, that they may mingle with the unction of darkness and corruption, giving life to the obnoxious weeds which flourish and twine about the stones and dead roots. I shall take the boy down here one day.

Sheer weariness mars my vision and perception. I shall sleep and dream until the oracle awakens me.

The days pass uneventfully. I sit and sulk, when not cramming myself with food. Mrs M is alarmed and amazed at the quantities consumed. She attributes it to my "cranky fast". I think she suspects an acute form of religious mania. The vicar must have suggested this; I can think of no other who would give her so absurd a notion. Still, even vicars may sometimes experience a little of what I have been through.

Mrs M has just brought in a letter from T.

[Editor's note:

This is the fragment referred to in the Foreword. The first page only survives:

Dear Vilma,

I am appalled by what you write, not only because I realise there may now be no possibility of withdrawal, but because my resources are exhausted, and there seems no alternative to your leaving the house in which you are staying, and making your own way in the world. Please understand that Y is instructing me in all I do and say. He financed your stay there; I could add but meagre sums by way of extras which I thought you might appreciate. Times are hard, and now that Y has withdrawn his support I cannot meet alone the necessary payments.

This, I know, will be a dreadful blow. We had hoped the Ordeal would have resulted differently. Frankly, you are of no more use to Y in your present state. It causes me great distress to have to write to you in this vein, but I am sure ...

Here the page ends. Ed]

So! The rats have left! A pleasant prospect: no money, no plans; black hopelessness.

December 13

The M's have received a final cheque from T. They look at me questioningly, and well they might! I shall stay until they throw me out.

Later:

I dressed at three o'clock and went to town where I called at the little bar on the corner of Olan Street, to see if they wanted help with the pumps!

Got back at eight o'clock after a hellish day of constant rain. I was drenched to the skin; the M's were out; the boy skulking around like a festering astral maggot. No one to make tea; no tea to make. No money. Something has got to happen. Sleep is impossible until somebody has decided what is to become of me.

Later still:

A little after ten o'clock I got the crazy idea of going to town again. I dressed in a frenzy, caught the last bus, arrived shortly after ten forty-five. I combed the usual resorts. Unfortunately, it was too late for any serious effort. I decided to hang around until the first cafe opened its bleary eye.

December 14

I returned, a total wreck after a chaotic night. My thighs are so sore and my handbag so full of gold that I shall be able to afford the M's prices for another three or four weeks. It was the only way.

I have replied to T, telling him I had some reserves of cash, and that if he cared to send me his little 'extras' occasionally, I should find it 'awfully useful'. This should melt his stones; anyway, I feel good for several moons at this game. Now to my plan of campaign.

I must link up with the Current that has destroyed every vestige of humanity within me. I shall then smash Y and direct the beam of power against my other good friends. There seems no option but to evoke the Gamaliel; if I depend solely on my own strength I may fail. The Invocation will occur on the 20th or 21st, a day or two before the commencement of the Moon-Rite. I shall sow the seed, and the inundation will yield the flower.

The well is to be the place of Invocation. The cold will be intense, but who cares? It is life or death. I shall need several grisly objects and will start acquiring them at once.

Mrs M is complaining about an unpleasant smell on the landing. I reminded her that the boy has his room close by. She looked at me reproachfully. I said nothing. To appear sociable I then enquired after her friend. She blanched and whispered something in my ear. The girl is pregnant. I couldn't conceal my amazement. "What's so awful about that?", I asked. The old lady nearly fell down the stairs in her eagerness to get away without disclosing more!

As I turned into my room I smelt the odour as she had mentioned, a queer, rank, and sickly perfume suggesting orchids, or fungus slowly burning. I looked up as a light played on the banisters above me. The boy's door was ajar and a sallow face leered down at me, the eyes dark slits of evil. With a start I realized it was not the boy's face. Then the light was extinguished. I heard a heavy thud followed by a quavering song, unearthly, dismal, unutterably lugubrious. It chilled my heart. I locked my door and sat on the bed. I could not banish the image of the face. It was strangely familiar, yet I could not identify it. I heard nothing, and there were no traces of the cloying odour in my room. Suddenly I heard a sibilant rustling, as of leaves crackling in a fire. What made me think of leaves? The face I had glimpsed was the face of something sylvan; it suggested a wreathed head. I cannot remember what the head resembled; I remember only the eyes and the black brooding brows arched high above; and a queer distorted curl of the lips that was a smile of such malignancy as I had never seen on any human face. I shivered at the recollection of it. Did I say *human* face? Why should I worry? Few of the things I have seen recently were human, or ever had been. And yet there is a difference. Here in my room, within the magic circle, such things are permissible, understandable. But up there, in the cretin's room - where, to my knowledge, no sorcery occurs and no intelligence dwells - these things should not be. No matter

how terrible are such phenomena, I invariably recognize a part of myself in them. But this face, although sounding a vague and remote memory, is not of myself, and I therefore fear it more than I have ever feared anything before. I have made up my mind to destroy the thing, to discover what generated it, what purpose it has in the house, what fiend has sent it. No! Surely ... it cannot be that! But the wickedness of the man makes anything possible!

December 15

A night of vile dreams broken by the expected visitation. The magic circle is stronger than I thought. The thing swam round it but made no attempt to enter. I examined it intently and wrote a detailed account which I later burned because it revolted me. How could I, even I, have described the horror of that abnormality as it floated about me, its blind and yellow eyes, crossed and vacant, emitting jets of ichor? I sensed the presence of utter evil bottled up in its wizened frame. Writhing tentacles coiled from its twisted trunk; ugly patches, leprous and mauve, glowed like dully-burning wounds against a pallor of mottled furriness. I realised with alarm that it was not the strength of the circle that had kept it at bay; it could have penetrated it like water. It merely gyrated lazily round the perimeter. Its hideous slit of a mouth opened in an imbecile grin; the teeth, needle sharp, jutted from frilly gums; its ears, like bat's ears, exfoliated from a bristly cranium. Elongated dugs terminated like crinkled cork, emitting a colourless fluid which reeked of thunder. Between its legs a fissure emanated vaporous exhalations which shrouded the thing in a mauve mist, and from the anus swayed a ribbon of green and squameous flesh exuding the slime of the Deep.

In a paroxysm of supreme horror I understood the nature of this teratoma which crawled like fungus from the astral qliphoth. It was an unborn babe conceived in hideous blasphemy and poured forth from the cesspools of whoredom. It was formed of hell's infernal sperm. I screamed aloud in such an

ecstasy of fear that doors flew open suddenly and the whole house came to instant life. I saw the boy's head thrust its mane through the mauve miasma, and Mr M clattered up the stairs, his hands raised high in horror, his lips white with terror. Yes! They were afraid; all of them - damn them; all quivering like lumps of jelly.

My breath burst from my lungs in agony, making with each burst a rasping sound. They straightened me out as best they could; tried to pour brandy down my throat; threatened me, cajoled me, soothed me, irritated me, terrified and amused me. They surrounded me, hysterically.

Mrs M came up after the others. She entered the room, pressing her fingers to her lips as if to say "Hush, hush, the baby's on its way". I glared at her. She too was white, a living embodiment of Fear, Hypocrisy, and Guilt. After two months! Nothing like it had ever happened before; what a monstrous abortion! I laughed, and my laughter rent their three absurd faces; tore their lips, eyes, snouts, to ragged ribbons. I exploded with mirth. The M's exchanged glances. The boy fled to his room and locked himself in with the monster he had bred. Curse him! But wait until that idea seeks form in flesh! Then, my friends, then the fun really will begin!

December 19

The flood gates are open again and the scarlet torrents bear me along their current of chaos. I stretch myself, yawn, and feel well; seething with energy and impatience.

I went out early this morning to make sure that everything is in order for the coming ceremony. The well lay in dismal calm. Its stagnant scum, home of squatting toad and limpid fish of the Qoph-inferno, lay aslant the moonwrought waters of the old witchery. My voice fills the caverns of the well's immensity, calling backward through the aeons to those other selves, those Deep Ones, uprising in the vapours of silence, wearing my myriad masks. Weird figures greet me, slowly, solemnly, Their arms extended in secret signs of remembrance.

Yes! They remember me! I know you, too, you mighty well-womb of myriad selves that I am!

The trees web the night and the stars above me glitter in the well. I spend the entire day, spellbound by the inky darkness of its waters, watching its ghostly movements in silence; watching my reflection change a thousand times; watching the eyes of me glance up like moons of murder. A smile is reflected on the steaming surface of the waters, and I hear the silence move in a wilderness of thunder which booms my name. Explosions at my loins are the flying rubble; downward-hurling sparkles of star-spate. A mighty monolith transfixes me and splits my earth asunder, scattering seed abroad as I straddle besom-stick to ghoulgrove. What friends and fiends await me there! There, where I may drink the moon-blood from the Lilith-flower!

I slipped through the well-water into the catachthonian Night. Slipped as sap into the slit of womb she opened up, and like a tree plunged headlong down into centuried silence seething with new dawns of power. I saw her lambent eyes flicker like lanterns seducing to the grave. In the venereal valleys of her poisons I saw multitudes succumb to the death-dealing snake which nestles in her corruption. Down the streams of time a rank putrescence drifted, passing ancient cities, cleaving sunless valleys. I saw unhallowed souls drain flowing cups of livid light, swollen with disease and death. A vast pregnancy exploded and the waters swept before me ...

I awoke to my immediate surroundings, cold, rigid. Night had fallen, and the well - a greater darkness - formed the crater of my skull. There in the silence echoed the laughter, rang out the laughter: the Lilith-face leered back at me. I staggered and fell like a stone upon the bed.

Later:

During the night I awoke with high fever. The ceremony failed; I was hypnotized by the well-water. Tonight I go again to call Them. I have all the necessary things in a small black

bag which I have under the bed. The stench is overpowering, but I managed to keep the M's at bay. Tonight I shall return as the Hell-Queen, newly crowned!

As for the boy, he was hanging about the landing all day. He smelt the unction, no doubt, and well he might! When I sit as Geh upon the summits of the earth, his head shall be my throne ...

I threw the rich blue robe over my nightdress and wound my way slowly through the shrubs and trees. Shadows stirred and a host of spectral hounds and stallions leapt from the purple leaves. They also were heading for the well. The earth shuddered; I was borne upon a hot wind, my robe flying in a night suddenly alight with bright green flame.

Not alone did I wail above the trees, shrilling to the whirr of bats. The stars blossomed suddenly through clefts in monstrous clouds and shone serenely in the well. The water rose, and a thin dark trickle lapped its rim of ancient stones, white with moon-dust. The hieroglyphic signs gleamed sharply on the walls. The cavern expanded; reptiles slithered silently from the depths, their eyes beads of black evil. A pale statuette lay before the well; its arms were raised and my own lips were emitting weird ululations which formed a litany in a long forgotten tongue:⁴

Thee I form in the web of dream With the
tainted seed of lust; Thee I call with the endless
scream From the loathsome qliphoth-dust.

Thee I fashion, Thee I form
With breasts of shining dew;
Thou monstrous shade beyond the norm
Born of the powerful few.

And in Our kiss well tell a tale
Of how the world grew dark;
Of how the face of God grew pale
As we sealed Our death with the Devil's mark!

⁴ The characters in which the litany was written down by Vilma are from an unknown and probably unearthly language. Against some of the versicles she added what appear to be the approximate translations given here. (Ed.)

All about me night unfurled its furtive banners of darkness. I felt uneven steps beneath my feet; blocks of stone mounting up and up, back and back. I was returning at last, drawn by the suction of the well's violent vortex. I floated into the night, into the heart of it; and that heart was so ancient, so utterly remote, that I came face to face with myself and did not recognize it.

I called thrice times thrice and twice upon the Deep One. I dived deeply down. The mirrored stars sprayed heaven with their luminosity and they bore me into space. Blood dripped from my robe. I staggered and fell, clutched a loose rock, climbed a tree, slid, flowed, twisted my body into shapes of hell as the hounds mounted me. The air filled with sound; baying, moaning, screaming, neighing, shrieking, lowing. And so, They surged upon me.

An immense silence followed. I had not left my room, and yet I knew that I was at the well and that They had come. I was ready for Their Song; but Silence, only, enveloped me in endlessly rolling waves.

December 30

I have lived in the well for many days; hence no entries in this diary since December 19. But I have made entries elsewhere! The Gates of the Sanctuaries of Set have opened before me.

Mrs M came up and raved at me one morning; I remember the incident clearly. She threatened to throw me out if I did not pay. But I hadn't been inside the place for days; I tried to explain that I was now living in the well and that I would not pay rent for such cold comfort. She sneered and snarled; a real transformation occurred in the sedate Mrs M. What a change the idea of money can cause!

But, to the important task before me! I have gained access to secret Sabean shrines; have beheld the Gnostic fragments assembled in perfect order; have participated in the holy feasts and partaken of Their Mass. There is now no feast, however holy, at which I have not been present; no sacred rite at which I have not held graal to Their uplifted lance. When not officiating,

I sat peacefully gazing out of the well, which is lined luxuriously with green moss, slime, and nameless rank growths. The tangled roots are my hair; the fallen leaves flake from my scaly arms which encircle the woods in an embrace of biting cold. Two craters formed by absent stones in the head of the well are my darkly sleeping eyes; sleeping in the dim ages, far far back; limpid lanterns of the past, in-turned; contemplating old mythologies, lost faiths, sidereal shadows. My Fetish is the nearby tree-stump jutting from earth already teeming with the seed my mouth has spewed as each feast is absorbed.

Amusing diversions occasionally occur. I have been fed by farm-hands and stray travellers in the wood. A child once threw a handful of crumbs upon my stagnant surface. Birds swooped in and swept them up; huge seemed the birds in my small cell. Men often added to my waters their own; and sometimes turgid members, hugely enlarged in the well's mirror, tossed white scum upon my silences; and a girl from the town once visited my loneliness and relieved herself upon me.

They held a feast in the town some days ago. Now that I am back in my room my diary tells me it was their Christ Mass. Had I realized it whilst in the well I would have boiled and showered upon them a flood of raging lava. So this was their feast! They spat and pissed upon me; their ribald songs were drowned in drunken laughter. Troop followed troop, and it was not until the sun froze in the midheaven the next day that the last raucous rattle died in their throats, leaving me alone but horribly raped. My silence lay violated like shattered glass. The fragments hurled frozen sparks of sun back to the face of the sky, white with rage, vacant and blind, hating the false feast that had marred its tranquillity. Then snow fell in muffled curtains, and the singing waters of a brook congealed, and the great hills held a sullen grey secret locked in ice-black hands. Oh so cold, so fine and white and pure the snow. I was aware of a subtle odour which grew stronger with each fresh flurry as it brushed my face, filling my eyes with immaculate tears. At last

I became solid; I might have been pure diamond had not swine polluted me; my ice was excrement and flowers embalmed, singularly cemented. But the scent came in waves, and it was a rich odour, as of paradise; of vines and tamarisks and sweet-scented fern. Perfect peace, beauty and serenity flowed with that fragrance, and my joy was restored - for a moment! Then the sky darkened; the clouds above my emptiness trembled with the vibrancy of coming storm. Forked tongues of riving fire darted from the viper-mouth of god - Toad of the Skies -who squats upon my nakedness squirting his bolts into my mountain womb. Thunder-rush and iron-hot glow of meteor sang wildly in my hair. Branches tossed and shrieked, caught by awful winds, stricken to earth by savage gusts unleashed through the doors of the north. Tattered clouds descended in sheets of driving snow.

A lurid flame arose; my shell of skull and well, stone and bone, were smashed asunder. A raining torrent of stone fell out of me; all the blackness of my heart, the hate, the rampant beast in me spat forth its venom on the white earth, scorched its dazzling nemyss with the brand of its infamies. Even the gods withdrew before me, shamed by the monstrous things that gushed from my caverns.

I, woman, womb of the world; I of Carthage, formerly of Khem, abased myself before None; the gods, even, grovelled in the filth which the lightnings smote from me as my well-bottom split, its masonry shattered in a thousand deaths. Night mingled with day; wind and rain fornicated with drifting snow which crawled in creeping silence.

A tumult that was heaven falling, swelled thunderously as the earth collapsed, falling into itself like a mouldering skull. Hell burst upward in lightning, and the Cosmos rocked. My coronation was the End of Things; for, as They set me on the Ass in the Chaos of Heaven and Earth, the well was lit with the lurid fires of every abomination that had ever been enacted: morbid masses, lit by human candlelight; seed of the slime, fat

of babe and blood of virgin, all blent in a hell-host ... Not one foul crime, not one vile vice perpetrated throughout the aeons of my agelong reign was not enacted then - at the fall of the earth into its own hell - within the well.

[Editors Note:

There is now a break of more than two months, after which appear several entries running into many pages. This is followed by another hiatus.

It has been considered advisable to omit these entries, most of them illegible, in order to maintain the continuity of the narrative. The gist of the omissions may be summarised as follows, although at times it has been necessary to resort to guesswork:

After the receipt of Ts letter wherein it is made plain that Y has withdrawn his support, Vilma gets into financial difficulties. She solves them in the manner with which the reader has been acquainted. But there is another difficulty which is slowly assuming alarming proportions, and which she cannot solve so easily. This concerns the supply of drugs which T was sending regularly from London. The source, of course, was Y. The diary becomes full of accusations against him. In an entry dated March 8, Vilma appears to have contacted a man in a nearby town who was in touch with a London drug ring, and who offered her a regular supply. On what terms we are left in doubt, as no indications survive in the legible remains of the diary. We do learn, however, that the supply is inadequate, and her pleadings add a pathetic and hopeless note to the diary. She is forced to repair the lack of drugs by resorting to alcohol, and there are intimations of "methylated orgia".

Vilma stays away from the house at odd and irregular intervals, but there remains no decipherable account of her activities during these periods. Drunk one night, she shrieks accusations at Y who has brought her to a state of "utter abjection". From similar fragmentary entries we learn of Y's terrible dominion over her. The story is sordid, the least appalling features being murder, rape and blackmail.

The weeks pass and she is desperate for heroin — the drug used chiefly during the period covered by the diary. She performs a Moon-Rite in order to obtain supplies by 'magical' means. After this, she prepares to go to London in order to acquire it in person, and by violence if necessary.

The diary then becomes even more confused and we lose the thread of her wanderings in the jungles of delirium and madness. The next legible entry tells of her physical condition. The winter months have prostrated her; various parts of her body are paralysed, and syphilis is deranging her mental and visual powers. And so it proceeds - one terrifying ordeal after another. Then, on the 1st July:]

July 1

I am compelled to write. As soon as I am able to sit up and hold a pen, I turn to this diary and record the impressions I receive.

The M's are shocked by my condition. Mrs M has not been near me for several days. It is Mr M who brings up the tray; he wants to preserve his wife from a vision of hell, no doubt! Is there no escape from this nightmare?

I have seen a stranger about the house lately. He never comes up to my landing, but I see him occasionally emerging from a room next to the dining-room. He clutches in his hand a little brown bag. I note the dates: the reason is obvious. Mrs M's friend is having trouble with her confinement. The boy is not in evidence; I've not seen him for weeks. All this must account for Mrs M's absence. I am not outcast and ostracized after all. The idea fills me with relief and contentment. Thank god some are blind to horror!

I can move my arm quite freely now, and the pain in my side is diminishing, but my eyes are still horribly puffy and bloodshot. I must get out and about again. As to the andromania -this is increasing, but I am recovering generally.

July 8

Loud screams awoke me early this morning, and an air of confusion still prevails. I like it! It seems to deaden the sense of my own chaos and dread. I saw Mrs M on the stairs for the first time in weeks; she looks even worse than I do! Her hair has practically vanished; her eyes, like black currants, roll absurdly in her starchy face; her lips writhe, and her arms hang limply at her sides like the stuffed arms of a marionette.

A large car drew up outside the house at 6.00 a.m.; I could hear its engine purring; my window is always open and nothing escapes me. I crept to the banisters in time to see two men disappear into the room adjoining the dining-room. One was the now familiar figure with the little brown bag. The other, a larger man, was also carrying a bag; he was dressed in black. I shivered with the cold, then the internal shudders wracked me and only with difficulty did I manage to crawl back to bed and sink into a torpid sleep. Even in dream I sensed the approach of something terrible. I am sure they have come to carry me away; to put me in a box and bury me, or ...

I suddenly awoke. Mrs M's friend was brought out struggling and screaming, her body barely covered by an atrocious purple night-gown. As they carried her away Mr M talked excitedly to the two strangers. I heard a sound on the landing above me and saw the door of the boy's room closing, very softly.

July 11

Two days ago I went to town to earn more rent. It was a sultry day and the heat shimmered in waves from the dusty pavements. I got drunk in the evening and put up at the Alba Arms where I met someone able to get me a little snow. He shied off when I mentioned heroin; looked at me sourly as if I couldn't afford it, and said snow was easier to procure, and less risky. I had to agree, and I feel now that this is an opportunity to make a fresh start. I've had no snow for months. The next morning we got involved in a row, and the proprietor threw us out. The man offered to take me to London ...

Later:

I knew it was no good. It could not have lasted. Besides, I have so grown into the well, the brake, and the wilderness about me, that to uproot myself now would destroy me. I must stay where They have placed me; I shall not be seduced by vain promises. People think I'm just an easy lay, a woman with an itch - that's what they call me - good money's worth, and all the rest of it. The foul pigs! What satisfaction it gives me to know I've poxed him through and through!

On the 10th I set out on my return journey. My clothes were torn and dusty, and people goggled as I approached the village. I was attracted by a large building that was strange to me. A turret-like structure pierced the hazy sky, and I got the impression of an extremely solid edifice that was yet mystical, uncertain, nebulous, remote from our time and place. I began walking towards it, but realised after I had gone some way that I had misjudged the distance and that the turret was considerably more remote than I had imagined. Even so, I felt a powerful compulsion and continued. In whatever direction I went, down winding slope, across miry ditch, or up sharp hillock, I saw the turret, now shrouded in a violet mist.

The shrubbery became a tangled wood and a brook trickled nearby. I must have appeared grotesque in my high heels! The barest suggestion of a track wound its way through mazes of gorgeous flowers and luminously green leaves. Above me blazed a sapphire sky, strangely cool, flecking the webbed foliage with imperial hues, a gold and russet carpet laced with purples and emeralds. And the building loomed, now near, now far, majestic in the blue.

For what seemed like hours I pressed on. My feet were numb, yet I felt nothing but pleasure and anticipation. Several wells lay open to the sun, and exotic birds fluttered through leaves the like of which I had not previously seen. Then I realized that the sun was setting, and a soft dusk enveloped the wood with violet veils. Stars blossomed in the afterglow and the saffron sun poured into the evening its blood-tinged

shafts of gold. Colour became supreme; exquisite purples, coppery greens and deep obsidian hues blended with brilliant reds and radiant sapphire. Then descended a deepening darkness washed with a wistful amber. In all this glory I was nothing: a moving phantom invading a sylvan land of dream and wonder. And with the darkness came fear. For the first time I sensed the wrongness of it all. This was no ordinary walk; here was no earthly beauty. I felt I had trespassed, strayed into a garden inhabited by saints; an arbour of enlightenment. I tried to hide my corrupt heart. Then, very slowly, the scene dissolved. The flowery foam of the wood became a home of horror. I screamed as I clutched at branches once shining soft, now writhing like the tentacles of Octopus. The stars were snuffed, and an ugly moon gashed the night sky with a blood-red curve. The waters turned to swamp and marsh; the brook sang no more but oozed an unctuous slime over-growth that once were flowers.

I cried out with such anguish as to cause a sudden arrest-ment of the crawling corruption. I saw the sudden petrification of dew-lapt toad-face, the snakey subtlety of fiendish eyes frozen in a basilisk stare. These were my brothers, this my home: the mephitic pit where no lamp but the moon's hysterics lit leprous pathways to the ghoulish-grove. Here, in seething silence, strange reptiles, repellent and dark, slithered from the depths of the swamp. Here the undergrowth belched forth a brood of horror, each tree-trunk an evil figure engulfing the brain in phantom shades of delirium. I saw the grin of Hecaté crease strangled bistort, and twist the saplings into forms of madness. The barren grasses swayed to the breezes of her mouth; her plasm coursed through the purple-bloated vine and burst, xanthic, from its bulbous contortions as it struggled, like Liana, and strangled all.

I then remembered my goal - the turret. I sought it out; tried to pierce the darkness that smothered everything. Through it I saw the darker form; a strange dull crimson glow shone from its narrow slits. So near it seemed ...

I struggled on, my shoes bemired, my skirt ripped, my feet caught in tangled webs of root. I fell and smashed my face on the rough stones, rose and crashed through the brush while unearthly sounds filled the air. Somehow, I reached the turret and fell prostrate at the threshold. For how long I lay, I do not know. Whatever my plight, I could not have turned back and set foot again in the swamp I had made of Life. There, where the woodland had turned to horror in my presence; I could face hell itself rather than that! And I was in hell then. I rose and entered the building, and the great door slammed shut behind me.

In actual fact, I had walked into the chapel of the valley. The bell clanged, the light was sulphurous and clammy. The faces of the congregation, intent on the figure on the dais, were dog-shaped, their hymns hyena-howls. As if repeating a part well-rehearsed, I was greeted with baleful glances from those wizened capripedes. As an altar I spread myself beneath the anus-dome of festered purple, where fluttering bats whirred restlessly. A slow chant rose and fell from the priest of the god enthroned there - his back towards the throng. The gilded arms of the high-backed chair - its throne - were clutched by hirsute tentacles of scaly yellow. Pungent perfumes wafted from black tapers radiating into the shadows a citrine glow. A fitful baying broke the chant as a golden jackal reared and worried me, stabbing its stiffness into me. I saw the tight-drawn scrotum, bearded with clinging phosphorescence, a seaweed barnacle of saprophageous life. I watched and waited, quivering like a flame, my throat a dry channel for the jackal's spume. The mixing of our oils aroused to raging flame the sleeping kundalini-kteis. Hideous howlings were fused in an ugly dissonance as the cymbal-crash of chaos rent the foetid atmosphere of Set's infernal sanctuary.

My bed became as running water, and the room burst asunder as Mrs M rushed in. She saw my astral breaking loose and floating on the higher banks, swirling round the ice-cold circle which saved my bed from cold. Inside that circle my livid fire flowered in the flames of water. She waved at me a bloody bundle; it was

shriven in cerements I recognized, umbilical and aspic clinging to the womb-fiend; still-born in the room so near my own.

July 16

Yes: it was indeed born dead! It happened on the eleventh of July, the day that sealed my own doom and exalted me to the throne of Geh.

I seem to have slept for many days; at least it looked like sleep to Mrs M. My door was bolted, and before it I had piled all my furniture; I had closed even the window, and drawn over its vacant stare the dark mauve curtains.

The house has changed since my sleep, and my room exhales an odour of corruption. There is a brooding loneliness about the place as if all souls had fled. All is silent as the grave. No! I hear a sound above me.

I heaved aside the barricade and turned the handle of the door. It stuck fast. I pulled and tugged, a rising panic choking me. Then I rushed to the window. Outside, all was dark; not one star illumined the appalling night. The room, too, was dark; I was imagining the door, I couldn't see it. Then I knew that I was blind!

When I came to, it was to find that my vision had been partially restored. I could see that the door was open. I rushed on to the landing and saw the boy, naked, dangling limply over the banister. The next moment, the rail collapsed; his slug-like body plummeted to the floor below. His scream petrified me; his broken spine, his twisted neck, and the curious phenomenon which - in death - had erected his penis, fascinated me. On entering his room I saw the devil-spawn, swimming in a jar of alcohol. Beside it stood a basin containing a greenish coloured fluid streaked with blood, which I dashed to the floor and trampled underfoot. A miasmatic stench arose in a mist through which swam a wizened face, swimming in aspic; and then, in a nightmare of chaos, I floundered blindly, dragging jar and table to the ground. The thing swam clear and swarmed upon me:

mine own mind-child born of the blood of another. It floated backwards and passed into my body. For an untold aeon of agony I housed it, and then - from the front of me - it emerged, bloody, like a hell-rat that had gnawed a tunnel through flesh ... In my blood it traced sigils of dark sorceries, inscribing blasphemies in ichors of corruption.

July 17

The boy's body was collected this morning. There came insistent batterings upon my door. I leered unseeing behind it. They think they'll be collecting *me* one day; but no! I shall collect *them!* - and I shall bear them to the secret cells where lust shall lash their hypocrisy to madness, their normalcy to nightmare.

July 18

It is all over now; the Great Ordeal has passed. Tomorrow I shall go to town and ascend my throne. The greatest Force of all now resides in my womb. I shall give birth, silently.

But wait! They are knocking on the Door ... Tomorrow, I shall set sail for Khem!

Final Note

By J.R.W. Wyard Prynne, Ps.ScD.

My friend R, who wrote the Foreword and edited the document here published, died suddenly a week prior to the date originally fixed for its publication. As his executor it devolved upon me to put his papers in order.

The diary of the unfortunate Vilma was indeed a fatal one, for it was undoubtedly the chief cause of R's death. The latter was a man of peculiar tastes and talents whose passion for the unusual and the curious, in literature and in life, had manifested in his youth when he began the collection of 'cult objects' and macabre writings which made him well known in his own specialized field.

It was during a conversation with him on these topics that I mentioned, casually, an unusual Cult about which I knew little and which I thought might be of special interest to him. It was not a large Cult, and it consisted of a dozen or so men and women engaged in investigating certain byways of the occult which I knew interested my friend.

I did not see R for several weeks after our conversation, and when we again met he told me that he had become a member of the Cult about which I had spoken. He had in fact invited several people to see his collection and to discuss with him relevant topics. As time passed, four or five individuals became more or less regular visitors, and certain evenings of the week were set aside for them.

One windy evening in October, I remember, he invited me along to meet a man named L, whom R considered a brilliant exponent of the subjects which he most cherished. L was also a man of eccentric and peculiar habits. I accepted the invitation.

I remember that evening very vividly. On October 12th, at 7.00 p.m., my cab drew up at R's house. I was shown into the study crammed with books and all manner of weird objects. In a chair by a dully glowing fire sat the man I had been especially invited to meet. Small and dark, impeccably attired, his appearance rather surprised me after R's flamboyant description of him.

We settled down over some mellow wine and I soon realised what my friend had meant. When L began speaking there seemed to rise that other figure which R had described to me, for there was a quality in the man that was not only brilliant but also exotic, bizarre, and intensely compelling. He spoke of the soul and its mysteries in such a way that his most fantastic statements seemed grounded on the firmest of facts. Necromancy, sorcery, witchcraft, metaphysics, psychology -which he treated from a startlingly unfamiliar angle - formed the substance of his studies, and he expounded them in a masterly fashion such as I have never before or since had the pleasure of hearing. I had to admit the singular power of this unusual man and to defer to his seemingly inexhaustible knowledge and wisdom, for so it appeared to me at the time.

My friend was completely captivated by L's undeniable charm, as much as by his profoundly penetrating explanations of the mysteries of life and death; and, because of this fascination, R himself began to move into deeper occult waters. When I saw him some months later he was replete with accounts of L's personal experiences of magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. I listened, amused and a little disquieted at the escapades which the man had induced my friend to believe. I realised - also with disquietude - that I too had listened to similar stories and, at the time, would have been willing totally to accept that which I had

heard. It was the personality of the man that had held us spellbound. Now, hearing similar stories at second hand, I was ashamed to have to admit that I had been literally enchanted. I felt annoyed by the whole business, and when R wrote telling me that L was leaving the country, and asking me to join them at a farewell supper, I made some excuse and declined the invitation.

For several months I was engaged on work which took me to the North, and, on my returning to London for a brief spell, I had not time enough to call on R. One day, however, I had news of him from a friend of mine who told me that R was creating something of a stir in occult circles. He had come to the conclusion that some of the persons reported in the newspapers as having disappeared without trace were, in actual fact, the victims of certain 'black brotherhoods', for purposes about which he refrained from being more explicit.

R - it seems - had raised himself, or had been raised, to a position of authority in the Cult to which I had introduced him, and he had given to it a more positive direction than that which it originally appeared to have had. My friend told me that R had instituted a campaign against these brotherhoods which, he supposed, threatened the safety of the planet!

I listened with little interest, as I had much on my mind at the time, and did not take R and his activities very seriously. But one day I was surprised to see his name in the papers together with three or four photographs of rather unsavoury-looking individuals whom R had apparently been instrumental in apprehending. I read the accompanying account with interest.

R had traced one of the 'black brotherhoods' to its headquarters in a squalid back-street in East London, where several children - known to be missing for some time - had been found in a state of extreme distress. The papers hinted at crimes against them, but there was nothing definite. My curiosity was aroused and I visited R to hear his story.

I saw immediately that he had changed physically since our last meeting. I complimented him on his astuteness in detecting the criminals, and asked him how he had tracked them down. He was in a sullen and irritable mood, and I apologized for my rather flippant approach to the matter. He in turn apologized for his irritability, and told me that there were others concerned in the East-End atrocities whom he had not been able to trace. I asked if he suspected a highly organized network. He shook his head and complained bitterly that L alone, with his specialised knowledge of international occult networks, could be of any real assistance. R seemed at a loss to know what to do, and I felt that there was much that he had not told me.

When we met again he had discovered the identity of an important member in the black circle of which the East-End group had been but a tentacle. This member, a man called J, and a rogue of the first water, had not only extracted money from people who approached him for spiritual instruction and guidance, but had also led them into drug addiction. Charges against him included blackmail, rape, and extortion. When questioned, J admitted that he was the chief in England of an organisation headed by one known as Y.

R had not, it seems, considered the possibility of revenge being taken against him for his part in the apprehension of J, and, when I suggested this, he smiled and said it would not be worth their while. But revenge *was* taken.

For a time came when, greatly excited, R told me that L had invited him to Luxor, where he - R - would have to remain for some months. In his impulsive manner, R jumped at the invitation and embarked for Egypt, but without disclosing to anyone the nature of the work he was expected to undertake. Judge of my surprise when I heard from him a few months later at an address in London! I called on him.

A further change in his physical appearance was very evident. He was seething with suppressed excitement; and this time I really did marvel. R was in love! No one who had not known

him could be expected to share my amazement at this, a quite normal phenomenon; but he would do so, had he known the man's views on life, on people, and on women in particular. A more confirmed bachelor it would have been hard to conceive; yet here he was, scarcely able to contain his excitement! That, indeed, was my impression at the time.

He had worked with L for four or five months and had enjoyed the work, delighting his host with his intelligence and assiduity. Then, unexpectedly, L had had to leave for Tunis where some urgent business demanded his attention. There was no need for R to remain any longer in Egypt; L might be away for some months, and would recall his co-worker if and when he was needed. There was much secrecy attached to the whole matter and R — true to his position as L's inferior in the Cult — did not ask any questions. So, within a week, R set sail for England.

Shortly before the end of the voyage, he was approaching his cabin when he became aware of a woman seated near the entrance, gazing at the sea. There was something about her that arrested his attention and rooted him to the deck. Although vaguely familiar, he could not remember having seen her before. It was dusk, and her half-turned face was hidden in shadow. In a fleeting moment he observed the proud sweep of the chin, the large luminous eyes, the long flaxen hair, the finely chiselled nose - all of which suggested to him a goddess emerging from the dusk of ages. As he stared he felt the impact of her glance as it turned upon him. The lips were slender threads of scarlet, living serpents of the sunset which, at that moment, splashed the deck with flame. He scarcely noticed her loosely clad body which sat bolt upright and strangely tensed. He heard himself addressing her, but the words seemed strange to him. The sea, the sky, the rising moon and the gleaming stars all rushed into one globe of celestial fire, exultant, undying.

I cannot develop the impression as R described it to me. Instead, I go on to recount how, from that moment, the affinity

he felt for this unknown woman was partially reciprocated by her. They talked away almost all the remaining hours of their journey. She was travelling to England in order to recover from some obscure disease. He learned other things about her: things that were strange, even fantastic, yet which to him seemed more real and more vivid than anything ever had been. Her knowledge of hidden things was inexhaustible; her charm and her beauty, indescribable. He believed, sometimes, that he communed with the very source of the universe. Such was his enchantment. Any attempt he made to ascertain her identity was nipped in the bud by her faraway voice, which reiterated only that she was ill and that she would never recover. To this constant refrain his mind responded by forming an image of something ineffably lovely that was yet inscrutable, inaccessible, remote, and *doomed*. Like a powerful drug, the idea obsessed him to such an extent that it was only after the ship had docked and he found himself driving home, that he realised -too late - that his dream had slipped from him. I asked him about L. "I shall never go back", he replied with finality.

When I saw him again, a fortnight later, I was aware of a deliberate attempt on his part to interest himself once more in his collection of morbid objects, magical grimoires and incunabula. He told me that he intended continuing the work he was engaged upon when L had summoned him to Egypt.

We met yet again in one of those quiet public houses in the backwaters of Bloomsbury. It was a chill winter's evening. After some minutes of silence he drew from his pocket a packet of letters. They were from L to R; the postmark, in all cases, was Tunis. With a smile R handed the packet to me. "Take them home", he said, "they will interest you". Then he added, in a cynical tone: "Yes, you'll find good copy there!"

I did as he suggested. They were interesting indeed. L's personality projected its power through the notepaper and seemed to materialize about me. I was amazed and appalled by the ingenuity, the diabolical subtlety, of some of the passages, for although the letters contained accounts of curious incidents

connected with the work upon which both L and R had collaborated, there were also brief discourses on the nature of the soul, on evil, on metaphysics and on the inexplicable, generally.

I saw R less and less frequently, so busy was I with my own affairs, and I remember telling him that I had little time to spare for the idle art of reading. However, he was both eager and anxious that I should read a particular series of letters which he had received, and we arranged that he would despatch them to me. I could not account for the urgency he showed in wishing me to read his private correspondence, but I decided to acquiesce in order not to hurt his feelings, and also - truth to tell - because I was becoming extremely interested on my own behalf.

I heard nothing more of R for several months, and when I visited London again - about seven months before he died - I found him in a highly unbalanced state, although he seemed to be recovering from his profound emotional unhappiness. He had, it seemed, been instrumental in apprehending yet another malefactor, and L was sending him a highly interesting series of letters from Rome, where he then was. R was reticent about these letters, but I gathered that they consisted mainly of the pages of a diary kept by an occultist who had taken a wrong path. R talked guardedly of his correspondence which, he said, afforded an unique glimpse of the Qliphoth. The latter expression he defined as the 'World of Shells' shed by once-vital organisms which, having died to earth-life, live on in a weird half-life, uniting with, and drawing sustenance from, the emanations of unbalanced minds: a polluted commingling of decaying mental bodies, productive of a massive entity reaching back to the remotest past and, reanimating the ancient ghosts of racial memory, creating atavisms that feed and fatten on more recently deceased thought-waves. But what was even more loathsome and inexplicable was the notion, evidently accepted by both L and R, that the entities arising from this midden had - by a mysterious species of sympathetic vibration

— evoked creatures of an alien dimension, denizens of watery

realms known as the Deep Ones. Their ultimate god, or devil, was an abnormality named Cthulhu, mentioned in the diary accompanying the letters from Rome.

I could not follow all R's explanations, but I gathered that the writer of the diary - a woman - had fallen foul of these entities. They are known to occultists as the *Gamaliel*, and they have points of contact with the earth via swamps, pools, and wells, and with the human organism via the generative system. Through the latter she had been swept back to a præval stage of evolution characterized by the belief that the Mother was impregnated by her own child, a belief that long antedated the solar cults wherein the role of the male superseded that of the feminine principle; the God, that of the Goddess.

R would not dilate upon these matters, which was disappointing because I could see - at last - that he had valuable material for a case-history that might prove unique in the annals of occult psychopathology. He was appalled by my suggesting such a thing, and made me promise not to breathe a word about the matter to any of my acquaintances, some of whom were journalists. We parted on a strained note, although I endeavoured to redeem my lapse by congratulating him on his success in bringing to book the "black magicians". However, he turned ashen grey and all but pushed me out of the room.

Several weeks later I received a letter from him in which he forgave my indiscretion and went on to tell me more about the diary. He had since received all the available material and having, it seems, undergone a complete change of mind, intended publishing it as a warning and a deterrent to those who would investigate forbidden realms. He felt as if the act of publication would free him of the responsibility of withholding from certain souls the danger-signs upon their inward paths, intimations of which - received early enough - might avert a catastrophe from which there could be no rehabilitation.

I for my part promised to be silent about the whole matter; neither revealing the identity of R, nor the source of the diary.

But my curiosity had been stimulated beyond measure and I asked him from whence L had received the contents of the letters which R, in turn, had received. He replied that he did not know. That L had encountered a strange and lonely outcast in the realms of the Spirit which he himself also haunted, we both surmised. I neither guessed nor suspected the truth until after R's death.

And when I saw him again, he was dead. I was the first to find him, seated at his desk, his pen dashed across a sheaf of papers, his head thrown back, his eyes glazed as if reflecting an indelible horror.

It is distressing to dwell on the grim aspect of death as I found it on that dull November morning, for the room seethed with vibrations of anguish and dread such as I hope to God I shall never again experience. It was to me that R had bequeathed his literary remains, and to me the task of delving into the mystery of his sudden unaccountable death.

I took away bundles of papers and, after perusing each page with extreme care, finally elicited the cause of the tragedy.

That the ingenious Y was none other than L himself, I soon discovered. The identity was confirmed in the last letter which R had received from him. It was Y's brother that had been ruined by R's persistent enquiries into the activities of the black brotherhoods. J, even, did not know the identity of Y. That R had been corresponding with, had actually worked for, this man for several years must have come to him as a deadly shock. But it was the remainder of that last letter which stupefied me, for in damning terms Y tells the story of the lust for vengeance that decided him upon the destruction of R. He tells how, after debauching Vilma, he sent her back to England on the same ship as R. With devilish cunning he used her as the focus for his powers of fascination, enslaving R's soul to the woman's beauty and strange intelligence, although, as we know from her diary, her outward appearance must have been a truly abhorrent spectacle.

Vilma was on her way to see T - Y's agent in England -whose task it was to ensure that she worked out her fate, free from the cares of the material world! This surely was the most cunning devilry of all, for had the unfortunate woman had to take her place in the world at the commencement of her stay in England, she may have stood some chance of combating the demon that had taken possession of her spirit. Long passages in this final letter describe the Qliphoth of the Yesodic Averse, supplementing the hideous information of which the diary has made us all aware.

The thought of R's torments, as the letter gradually disclosed the ghastly web of sinister evil in which he had been trapped so completely, is unendurable. That the woman he loved had fused her soul's agony into the diary he was preparing to publish, that her naked spirit lay unveiled to the eyes of all, must have been a shock that no sensitive individual could have survived with sanity unimpaired.

As for myself, I was left with a sense of remorse that will remain with me for the rest of my days; for had I not been the cause of involving him with Y? Briefly, and chronologically, the stages of the drama were thus: R had attached himself to the Cult and interested himself in the exposure of various suspect secret societies. He had met L and fallen under his spell, little realising that L himself was a King of the Kind he had set himself the task of exposing. R next went to Egypt where he worked with L, and returned to England on the ship that was conveying Vilma. R was not, at the time, aware of her identity. He fell deeply in love with her, but he did not declare the fact. How different the story may have been, but for his inherent secretiveness — a characteristic, no doubt, of those who pursue occult paths. The years passed, and a strange document finds its way into his hands through the medium of L; a document so hideous in its import that he intends publishing it as a warning and as a sign.

R believed to the end, as is evident from his vague jottings,

that Vilma was his star, his goddess, his ideal. It was her image -blasted out of recognition, dragged through the mire of abominations so evil that no sane mortal could behold it without shrinking into dust - that he could not forget and could not relinquish. It seems that he located the ancient house where Vilma had stayed, and he found the old couple. All they would say was that Vilma had returned to "her own people". We shall never know who these were; but we may guess. The M's, too, were part and parcel of the whole fiendish scenario.

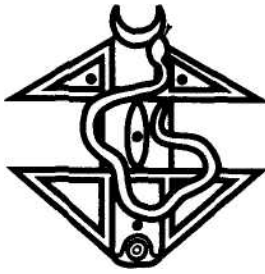
R died of a broken spirit. And because a monster veiled in human habiliments yet moves upon earth among men and women, I have published these facts as a warning to those who might stray unawares upon the Path Averse.

My friend, who was -I believe - a Buddhist at heart, might, had he lived long enough to view these matters in the perspective of time, have been reminded of the words of that great Eastern Sage; as they have come down to us, today:

I will act in such a way that, after my full enlightenment, I shall demonstrate Dharma in order that they may forsake the perverted views of the perception of permanence, of happiness, of the self, of loveliness; and in order that they may learn that 'Impermanent is all this, not permanent; ill is all this, not happiness; without self is all this, not with a self; repulsive is all this, not lovely".

Dance, Doll, Dance!





for Helga

The silence clamoured, vibrant with echoes of obscene epithets, and the process of awakening was gradual. Layer after layer of consciousness seemed to lift as a cloud. I felt dazed, bewildered, as if groping my way in a dark corridor, slowly lightening. Then I remembered that Roma had tried to kill me, suddenly, unaccountably.

Memory flowered: the vivid image of her as she struggled against me; the knife bearing down on me; the choking blackness; her screams of abuse; then night. She had dropped the blade and fallen upon me; her anger, like oil to my fire, which turned her fury to desire. Like a vampire she drained me of life, and of something more than life. The knife abandoned, she achieved her end by other means.

I went to the bathroom and sluiced my wounds. A thread of slimy moisture trickled sluggishly down my chin. The mirror on the wall told me it was blood. I had bitten Roma as we struggled, sunk my teeth in her heavy haunches. I let the blood ooze down and drip on my chest; watched it wander crookedly the whole length of my body. My mouth was full of blood.

I slipped into a dressing-gown and crossed the dark hallway to the room lately occupied by Orgen. A cloud of incense enveloped me as I opened the door and peered into the gloom. Stunned by this amazing phenomenon, for Orgen had died a month previously, I moved towards the little shrine he had constructed at the northern end of the room. I was drawn by pinpoints of orange fire emitted by a circle of joss-sticks surrounding an image which, I knew, stood veiled in the centre. In the aromatic darkness I approached the altar and, uncovering Orgen's damnable idol, smeared it with Roma's blood, then covered it again. At this moment I detected a faint sound of breathing.

I tried to reach the door, but stumbled. The breathing persisted: someone was asleep in the room. I tried to reach the light-switch, but my state of alarm paralyzed me. There were matches in the pocket of my dressing-gown, and when the wave of alarm subsided, I struck one. The fitful light revealed Roma, spread-eagled in sleep upon the bed on which she had killed Orgen. The flame burnt my fingers but I felt scarcely anything. The ensuing darkness was reverberating with the dying echoes of obscenities shrieked in hysteria. Now, deadly silence prevailed except for the breathing, and the almost undetectable sound of eight atomic orange points of scented fire smouldering round a covered image smeared with a murderer's blood.

I crept forward. The cruciform whiteness of her was growing out of the darkness. Her legs appeared amputated just above the knees where the blackness of her stockings obscured her abnormally pallid flesh.

I sprang upon her, enveloping her as with wings. She woke and screamed. The glare of the match had revealed her, indescribably desirable, as ever. We coupled in a breathless struggle as I glued my lips to hers to stifle her shrieks.

"Why did you come to this room?", I asked her, when the tide had ebbed and left us exhausted.

"Because he comes here every night", she answered simply.

"But he had no use for mortal love. Why did you plague him?"

"He obsessed me with thoughts of the thing he kept covered

on that hateful altar. Every night I light eight sticks of incense for it, as he used to do. I have not uncovered it; have never looked upon it. But it is the image of something familiar; it has breasts like mine, and haunches like mine, and it squats or dances on something which my fingers fail to identify, for it is like a fluid chaos, ever moving, ever flowing, ever breathing -like a sleeping breather ..."

"Roma", I broke in, "Why did you kill Orgen?" "Because he was indifferent to me, and I wanted him."

"Then why would you have killed *me* last night; do I not desire you ceaselessly?"

The flicker of a sneer rippled over her features. "I despise you!"

She rolled off the bed with great deliberation, then she wound her arms around me. Her long white fingers were sticky with blood.

"Tit for tat", she said. "Now your face is striped with blood. Look, there is a little of your skin hanging from one of my nails".

It is true that my face felt like fire, but I felt no pain. I noticed the bed was wet with freshly-spilled blood. On the rug, alongside, the blade of a long oriental knife gleamed in the sunlight. It was a ritual weapon which Orgen used to keep on the altar of his deity, for what purposes I knew not, but Roma had slain him with it and had attempted also to slay me. On Orgen's face had glowed the light of the inscrutable ecstasy, as if his death were not a catastrophe but an apotheosis. Perhaps he used to scarify his own flesh with the knife. I picked it up and, crossing to the shrine, propped it in its accustomed place. A heap of grey ash was all that remained of the joss-sticks. I mused on this dust as it were Orgen himself. Roma watched my every movement, then she lay back luxuriously on the bloodstained bed.

"I thought you were going home", I said coolly.

"This is my home", she replied tonelessly, "I shall sleep here every night".

"But this is madness!"

"Who will tend the shrine, if not I?"

"I will", I cried, though the idea filled me with repugnance.

"You are the only one who knows - about Orgen", she whispered. "Are you going to tell?"

I stared at her.

"Orgen was my friend", I said. "To him, death was an apotheosis. You must have appeared, in his eyes, as a delivering angel, even though hate and revenge burned within you".

Her eyes caught fire, then the flame died so that two pinpoints of smouldering fury fixed me malignantly.

"You swine", she murmured, "you have an answer for everything. Why should you spare me? Your clumsy beastliness is anathema to me. But I want no mercy. Nor do I wish any living being to go about knowing what happened to Orgen. That is why I tried to kill you. But I think now that I am almost growing to like you".

A smile puckered her lips. When they parted it was to reveal the savage sharpness of her teeth. Yet she maddened me beyond anything I had ever known.

No one seems to know what happened to Roma. When I awoke from the sleep of sheer exhaustion which terminated our last meeting, it was to find that she had gone; home, as I

thought: but apparently not. I grieved for a few days when I realised she had flown for good. But it was all for the best. She gave me no peace, physically or mentally; and I required both, urgently, at this particular period.

I was one of five more or less young men occupying a spacious bungalow named *Carfax*, set in deep woods about a mile from Chalmer's Bay, near Kermstow, Gonave Island. The room adjoining mine was occupied by Ian Marchester, who was writing a thesis on something or other. As well as being the eldest, he had been at *Carfax* longer than any of us. A knowledgeable fellow, he struck me as ineffectual, though amiable enough. The room next to his was occupied by Oscar Reyluc, a poet like myself, who shut himself away from us as much as possible. One of the two rooms on the other side of the hall was occupied by a 'psychic' who was, I suspect, psychopathic as well. His name was Alistair Henderson. I suppose a Scottish ancestry had endowed him with a peculiar brand of second sight. He sometimes amused and intrigued us hugely with accounts of dreams and premonitions which were invariably saturnine and umbrageous. And the room next his had been Oswald Orgen's, one of the most enigmatic individuals I had ever met. He was deeply versed in many phases of Oriental mysticism and philosophy, and had spent most of his last months shut up with the idol before which he celebrated his own peculiar mass. Incidentally, it is the idol I wish to speak about; for it now reposes in a cupboard in my room, still covered in the dark fabric in which Orgen kept it perpetually wrapped. But before doing so, I must mention what may have been a possible reason for Roma's abrupt disappearance: a rumour concerning the letting of Orgen's now vacant room to a girl-student, at present lodged in an over-crowded hostel on the outskirts of Kermstow, far down the valley. I had not until recently heard the rumour, but I now suspect that much of Roma's outrageous behaviour had been sparked off by the idea of a strange female taking possession of Orgen's room. Roma had absconded with all his belongings except the idol, which had resisted all her attempts at dislodging

it. That she had tried was made obvious by the rents in the fabric which covered it.

I studied the idol somewhat closely, when at last I succeeded in unriveting it. I am glad I went to such pains, because in the metal base I found a wad of papers concerning procedures for its worship, written in Orgen's flowery script. I know now why he always kept it covered, but I shall come to that later.

The image itself I could not identify, being unacquainted with the subject of iconography; but that it was some sort of Asiatic, or perhaps Polynesian, goddess or she-demon I had no doubt, even before a study of Orgen's papers revealed her actual - or part of her actual - provenance. What struck me forcibly, as soon as I had it uncovered, was the facial expression, which reminded me of certain moods I had seen fleeting over Roma's features; and Roma had never looked upon the idol. To describe it were futile, for it was not what it appeared to be. Outwardly, it exhibited an attractive female form in a dancing posture. It was wrought in a shining black substance which gleamed curiously with a greenish glow. Silken cords and ornaments adorned the breasts and legs, giving to them a markedly erotic aspect; and two dark bands girdling the thighs, below the loins, almost suggested stockings. But it was the *atmosphere* of the figure which caused me to wrap it up once more and to conceal it in the depths of the cupboard, for it emanated an intense *unwholesomeness* such as I had not previously encountered. It flowed over me like a wave when first I unveiled it: a wave which was virtually palpable and which could, I am sure, have marshalled power sufficient to have thrown me down. There was some kind of energy locked up in the thing, and I had unwittingly released it. I remember wondering what kind of dangerous game Orgen had been playing there, all alone in his room, week after week, with this as his sole companion. A lot was made plain when I read the sheaf of papers found in the metal base, but much still remains inexplicable. I was fortunate, no doubt, that the mere veiling of the image checked the outflow of its repellently dark and occult vitality. Perhaps I should

have rid myself of it completely; but I sensed instinctively that the disposal of the object would not nullify its effect upon me, now that I had forged such an intimate link with it. It still bore traces of Roma's blood ...

Not long after my experiences with the idol, I was returning from Kermstow to *Carfax* through the woodland flanking the road which curves past Chalmer's Bay. I chose this route because of the comparative cool of the woods after spending a sweltering afternoon in the town.

A peal of bells sounded from afar and penetrated with its muffled gold the dark curtains of foliage. Musing contentedly in these pleasant surroundings, it was some time before I realised that another sound had merged with the ringing. A motor-vehicle was approaching high up on the road above me, and with it came gales of laughter.

Through the gap in the wood I saw a large shooting-brake slow down, mount the verge, and bump along the slope of tussock. All its doors suddenly opened and a bevy of girls tumbled out and ran into the woods, shrieking with laughter. I suspected they were from the hostel on the outskirts of Kermstow: suspicions that were confirmed when I recognized a tall German girl who had once had an affair with Marchester. The other girls were a mixture of Scandinavian and German. They were a turbulent, unmanageable lot, notorious for hiring themselves out to sailors docking at Chalmer's Bay or nearby Aldslow.

The car bumped to a halt and some of the girls raced back and pulled out the driver, a young fellow in his teens who gladly fell into their arms and was borne to a small clearing where a ring of saplings sprang from a slight rise in the ground. Then a

record-player blared out a cacophony of black jazz. I watched, fascinated, as some of the girls divested themselves of clothing. They had been swimming in the Bay, and their limbs shone golden in the sunshine; others wore simple summer frocks, so tight and so short that they appeared more naked even than their companions. Bottles were passed round, and forming a circle about the youth they teased him with lewd gestures. As the music reached a crescendo, some of the girls closed in on their victim. A tall Swedish girl, who seemed to be the ringleader, swept him with her into a frenetic dance. I saw it all as a mock celebration of the Rite of the Summer Solstice. Today, indeed, the sun had attained its zenith in the place of its exaltation.

The Swedish girl had resisted attempts to seize her prize and had toppled one of her companions down the grassy slope straight into my retreat. As she broke through the thicket I recognized Marchester's erstwhile companion. Her hair was still wet with the sea and her bikini was torn. Intoxicated by the heat, the music, the wine, she fell into my arms and we coupled like mad beasts.

When the others saw our game they flung themselves down the slope and pulled us apart. As I went down beneath their combined assault the world seemed suddenly to burst into flame, my whole being a conflagration; then black bars of darkness blotted out the scene.

When I came to, I felt detached from my body. The girls had gathered thick green tendrils of snakeweed, and with them they bound my arms and proceeded to festoon me with lianas. Crouched on hands and knees, the girl who had toppled down the slope voided a backward flood of urine in a manner I had associated only with certain animals. As she did so, she stared at me fixedly with a leer of indescribable beastliness, while a stream of obscenities poured from her lips. I was a participant in a lunar and averse form of the solar rite.

In the twilight of dream I saw that the youth had been bound to a sapling, and that a white and spectral figure, entirely

naked, was approaching him. It was Roma. Although I knew that she was dead, I also knew it was Roma; and yet it was not she, for the spectral face had a peculiarly Mongol formation which lent to its expression an element of savage exultancy.

I struggled to free myself from the binding tendrils. There came a sudden hush, a deadly quiet, and a look of alarm on the faces of the celebrants. Then came a fearful shriek from the youth on the tree, and in a flash I knew what was about to happen. Orgen's sacrificial knife glinted in a beam of sunlight that changed to moonlight, and I fell headlong down a shaft of unutterable blackness. A great blood-red moon, perfectly full, rose and hung above the wood.

The first sweep of the blade freed the youth from the tree. The second sweep plunged it into his breast. I averted my gaze before the third sweep fell. Then the form that resembled Roma abruptly darkened. She squatted on the corpse and savagely bit off a part of the body. I saw the blood, black in the moonlight, trickle from her mouth as she devoured her ghoulish meal.

I knew without doubt for what purpose Orgen had employed the knife, and the reason for Roma's insane rage when she had found herself denied in favour of the accursed idol, for whom, like a votary of Cybele, Orgen had mutilated himself.

The girls formed a circle about the shining black form as it danced in ecstasy. I was reminded of the pinpoints of orange fire surrounding the covered image, here unveiled and trampling upon the mysterious entity which Roma herself had described as "like a fluid chaos, ever moving, ever flowing, ever breathing -like a sleeping breather ... ". I recalled some verse by Oscar Reyluc which had, he said, swept through him one night with frantic intensity:

In blood soaked silence
Black, replete
She stands ...
An awful calm pervading her ...

Manchester looked askance as I entered *Carfax* the next morning. The weals on my arms, the scratches on my face, surprised him, but he made no comment. I bathed and went to my room with the purpose of destroying the idol. I had barely reached the cupboard when a knock sounded at the door. It was Henderson. He looked pale, distraught; could he come in? He told me he had dreamed a strange and gruesome dream; what was worse, he swore he had seen Roma enter my room the previous night. Unaware that I had been away, he mistook my general appearance of dishevelment for a confirmation of his suspicions. When I told him that Roma had been gone for several days, and gone for good, he stood petrified. I felt exhausted and irritable, and wanted nothing more than to proceed with my plan immediately. But he persisted in staying, and moved about the room in a way which made me uneasy. I poured myself a drink and sat on the bed, hoping he would go when he found me determinedly uncommunicative. However, he sat down beside me.

"You are in danger", he said, "and I want to help you. If it wasn't Roma who came here last night, then my dreams are more dreadfully ominous than I realised. There is some presence, some entity, some emanation enveloping this place, and it is wholly evil and intent on malevolence. I feel it with every breath I take. It wants fire, it wants blood, and some other energy ... which only the male can give".

It was my turn to stand aghast. The image of the pinpoints of fire was fresh in my mind, and the flowing blood seemed a perpetual accompaniment to all my thoughts; I was certain of the third component of the fiendish feast.

Henderson was whispering in a hoarse, unnatural voice which reminded me of bullfrogs croaking in the swamps at twilight. He told me he had awakened in the morning, much as I had done on the day of Roma's departure. But after a state of intense sexual excitement, accompanied by echoing blasphemies, it was as if an oppressive white-winged phantom had brought him again and again to the point of orgasm until he lay in a lucid sleep of exhaustion, drained of all vitality. Then he had noticed a white mist which gathered itself and floated upward to the ceiling. On meeting the walls of the room it flattened out and curled downward like steaming tentacles, finally evaporating and leaving him staring at nothingness. Memory was confused, as in my own case, but the first thing he remembered of the previous evening was seeing Roma enter the hall and pass into my room.

"And I can feel her presence here *now*". His accusing whisper ended in a shriek. I stood up and glared at him: "Well, search the room, damn you, and see if you can find her!"

He looked sheepishly and apologised, and presently he left. I was too tired and too distraught to do anything but sleep; nor did I destroy the idol the next day.

The day after that, Marchester smiled at me amiably enough, though I detected an air of suspicious watchfulness. He was seated on the veranda. Suddenly, he said:

"That was a ghastly bloody business in the wood the other night. I hope they catch the bastard who did it!"

My heart missed a beat. The newspaper he showed me described an assault and a mutilation perpetrated on a youth who had come down from Barnham Reach via Iglinton, in a skiff later found adrift in Chalmer's Bay. I returned the paper to him and muttered a few words of disgust. There was no mention of the girls or of myself, yet I heard later that the hostel in Kermstow was the centre of local and ineffectual enquiries owing to the theft of a shooting-brake, to which one of the girls admitted. It had been found abandoned in Naver Wood, close to

the scene of the bloodiest atrocity in the history of the locality.

I went straight to the cupboard with grim determination. As soon as I turned the lock, I knew someone had been tampering with the inner cabinet in which I kept the idol, the papers, and ...

A queer odour rose all about me, vaguely familiar, yet I could not identify it until my hand came in contact with the idol's swathings. They were wet. A sticky rust-coloured substance adhered to my fingers, and the odour became more pungent. I slammed the cupboard door and stood stock still, trembling.

Later that day I knocked upon Marchester's door.

"Look here", I said, "you don't think there is any connection between the theft of the car and the murder in Naver Wood -do you?"

He looked at me oddly, almost pityingly.

"Why no, just a coincidence. You don't think girls like that would be capable of..."

I laughed ferociously: "You were acquainted with one of them at one time, is that not so?"

"I was", he replied, dryly. "If it gives you any satisfaction to know it, she appears to have been responsible for the theft".

"What was her name?", I asked, with an effort at nonchalance, "Ingrid, something or other?"

"Sigrid", he replied acidly, "Sigrid Petersen. Why? Are you interested?" There was an unusual expression on his face.

"Not particularly, except that it appears to me somewhat inhuman that *you* take so little interest".

He lowered the book he had been trying to read. "My dear chap, what *are* you talking about?"

"Does it not strike you, Marchester, that she may be implicated in this horrible crime?"

"Only to the extent that she may be able to identify the villain or villains who perpetrated it. But the probability is extremely remote, I should say".

My lips had gone dry. Who *had* perpetrated it? I thought of Roma. Roma could not be responsible; she had gone far, far away. Of that I was sure. I withdrew and left Marchester gazing at the door in a queer sort of way.

The girl was laughing softly: "There will be, what you say, hell to pay if you are caught here. Ze girls must not entertain men-friends in their apartments".

She mimicked to perfection the tone of prudery, and smiled archly. Having tied one of her stockings round her neck, she lay back on the bed and let one leg, the stockinged one, swing to and fro like a black pendulum. She then fixed me with a somewhat minatory glance.

"You were there too - that night; you know *zat*?"

"Of course I know it. But I was bound hand and foot, and quite helpless once you barbarians had got hold of me. Remember *zat*?"

She chuckled delightedly and pulled me closer, one lacquered fingernail grazing my face as she drew a medial line right the way down my body.

About twenty minutes later, while lying beside her, I suggested gently that it was time for me to leave.

"Vy? It is not yet midnight and vill be dark till two at least. Only then must you be careful!"

"I shall leave the way I came. No one will see me"

"But one girl will be looking. Always zey look for ze men. Maybe zey heard you here already".

Then she smiled and snuggled closer: "But ve have much time yet!"

I do not know how long I remained; but when I awakened, suddenly, I was lying on my side bathed in a ghostly white radiance. Sigrid must long ago have switched off the lamp, for the sickly dawn-glow was pervading the room. It was too late now to quit the building unnoticed. Then I glanced at the hands of the clock: half past midnight! A sudden panic swept over me. This was worse than dawnlight.

As I shrank away from Sigrid, I saw a coiling vaporous cloud extruding from her body. Then a thin spindle of twisting mist poured from her like ectoplasm. The cloud billowed, darkened, and almost solidified above me. As it congealed I saw Roma peering down at me as from a vast height. As on previous occasions, I noticed strangeness about her, a maddening unfamiliarity which denied the identity I suspected. A constriction caused by dread aborted the scream in my throat. I saw a long dark arm glide down from the bed and - reaching beneath it - reappear with an object that gleamed white in the spectral radiance. Then blackness.

I found myself outside the window of Sigrid's room, perilously suspended above the shrubbery. A stout creeper smothered the hostel wall and slashed my face as I began a slow and painful descent. Fortunately, it was still very dark, though stiflingly hot, the heat being imprisoned by low dense clouds which covered Kermstow like a lid on a brazier of smouldering coals. Sigrid's room was at the very top of the building, and I had already passed two windows when I saw with alarm that the one immediately beneath me was illuminated. I knew instinctively that my approach was expected, that someone was awaiting me. A curtain parted and a pale hand pushed open the window, then a head protruded. I swiftly lodged the object which I had concealed about me, in a thick tangle of creeper, and had just withdrawn my hand when familiar eyes gazed into mine. I recognized the tall Swedish girl. As I slipped into the room, she

closed the window behind me. In the confines of the small apartment the girl seemed even more massive and forbidding than I had remembered her in the wood. She stood over me almost menacingly, the hint of a sneer on her strong puckish face. I eyed her cautiously. She wore a skirt of some coarse hempen material, a light-hued jumper which hardly contained her finely shaped breasts, and white calf-length stockings.

"I know you 'aff been with Sigrid".

Her eyes smouldered as she lighted a cigarette.

"It's no good trying to intimidate me", I said. My voice was so cool and composed that I thought it must all be a dream. Her eyes flickered, as summer lightning flashed through the room.

"She know; she is the only one who know: *she* - and you!"

She spat out the word with a violent expulsion of breath that startled me. Then she held her head while a wave of hysterics convulsed her. Her long flaxen hair, streaming like gold in the lamp-light, cascaded about her.

"You behaved very queerly — the other night", I observed. I was feeling my way, watching her closely. She looked up with an expression of genuine anguish.

"Do not speak of that night; things happened that night; to me they happened; dreadful things that I cannot explain. But *she* know and she will remember; and when she does..."

The girl was wild, desperate. I took her in my arms and soothed her.

"She know", she repeated. "She *knew*", I corrected her.

Greta - for that was the girl's name - gazed at me questioningly: "Knew?", she whispered; "then ... ?"

That one question told me all. My sense of relief was enormous, unbelievable, a veritable release from a tyranny that would have been absolute had she thought otherwise.

She tossed her head with a defiant gesture that sent her

great yellow mane showering about her shoulders, then she stretched herself upon a bed flanking one of the walls.

If Sigrid had been exquisitely formed, Greta was a goddess of physical perfection, and I noticed a curious fact that had escaped me that evening in the wood. Her legs were entirely covered in a soft yellow down which grew thicker where the thighs flared and swelled massively above the knees.

I had risen to go to her, but found that I could scarcely walk, let alone enjoy the experience she offered. She understood my consternation and a cunning leer creased her face.

"You like honey, yes?"

"Very much", I replied, too exhausted to follow the gist of her enquiry.

She sat up, swivelled her legs over the side of the bed and opened a small cupboard alongside. A half-empty jar of translucent honey shone in its depths. This she drew out and unstopped.

"You hungry; you try zis; make you strong man again".

She proceeded to dip her fingers in the jar; and then, falling back on the bed, she applied honey all along her inner thighs. I watched, fascinated, as she stroked and massaged herself as if she were consecrating a sacred talisman. Her manipulations became more and more rhythmic, almost hypnotic, and I was put in mind of the courtesans of ancient Khem who coated their breasts with rare spices. I was also reminded of one of Reyluc's poems which had hitherto remained mysterious to me, and evocative of esoteric pleasures:

dead petals
 a cleft
 with tendrils overgrown
 swamp metals, shredded, torn
 overthrown, withdrawn
 Vampire shadows lap
 Forlorn the gulf exhales
 Sour vapours
 From a mauve moon ...

I crawled along the bed like a reptile in pursuit of its prey. She grasped my head and pushed downward as if to engulf it entirely in the purple wound, deep and black as night; and the sweetness mingled with the sour and brackish exhalations, like the misty vapours emitted from fissures in the rock at Delphi.

We lay thus a long while.

"The girls too; they like my honey-meal. It make them mad, too!"

I rolled away from her.

"You like girls?", I asked.

She grimaced petulantly.

"Not so many nice men lika you; so we amuse ourselves".

She was silent for a while, then:

"That is how I know that Sigrid only know what happent that night. Z'other ones, zey were too drunk, too stupid".

"So you got them drunk on honey and cross-examined them! You're a cunning little bitch; or should I say Big Bitch? And what did Sigrid say?"

I held my breath involuntarily. Greta looked at me narrowly, and a sly smile creased her lips.

"Yes, I am cunning bitch. Tonight I was waiting". "For me?", I asked.

"Not for you; You men all ze same. Why should I wait for you?"

We both laughed.

"No, I wait to see Sigrid; but you went first".

"You mean ..."

I did not finish the sentence. I was sitting bolt upright now. She was nodding queerly, and a glazed and savage gleam entered her eyes.

"Now we are equal", she said, coldly.

I stared at her.

"But ve must leave; ve must get away from here. Already

zey must suspect sinks".

She buried her head on my neck, showering my body with all the coolness of her hair.

"Follow me, but let a quarter of an hour elapse", I said. "I will fetch what is necessary from *Carfax* and we can get a boat at Falbat Cove. Wait for me in Naver Wood by Felling Cross".

I quietly unlatched the window, peered out and, as the night was still dark, began the difficult descent after recovering that which I had hidden in the foliage.

No sound disturbed the quiet of the hostel on my departure, and I noticed that Sigrid's window was dark. But Greta did not meet me in Naver Wood at the appointed time, or ever after.

I have claimed to know why Oswald Orgen covered the idol. He did so because he could not bear to look upon the physical representation of the Power he worshipped. He was a man of intensely abstract disposition, thinking not in curves and circles but in lines and angles; his was an intellectual rather than an emotional intelligence. To him, the anthropomorphic expression of Truth was disturbing, because he had sedulously suppressed, not sublimed, the passional aspect of his nature, and this had led him to an insane act of self-mutilation.

Later, I was to see the linear representation of the idol, but at the present stage of my involvement in this affair I had not done so.

After returning to *Carfax*, having waited vainly for Greta, I was hailed by Marchester as if I had returned from a long vacation. No doubt my large travelling-bag conveyed this impression. It was

a brilliant morning and I had returned exultant, with a sense of freedom for which I am quite unable to account. Henderson, however, eyed me suspiciously, and I thought I detected a look of panic in his glance as I smiled blandly at him. He was not the only one to wonder what had become of Roma.

Had Orgen been convinced that his sacrifice was the one thing desired, and the one thing required of him by his outlandish fetish, he would now surely be relishing total absorption in the Power behind it. But it had been otherwise. He had disfigured himself through fear, rage, and hatred of the living embodiment of the very Power with which he had sought union.

I unlocked the travelling-bag and drew out the covered image, averting my gaze notwithstanding. My tactual sense I could not so easily deprive of its object; it told me that it was moist with a viscid substance, the nature of which was not unfamiliar to me. I quickly placed the idol in the cupboard, together with various other things I had decided to take with me on the flight with Greta.

I had no thought now of destroying the idol, but had grown - on the contrary - inordinately enamoured of it, and darkly repelled by it at one and the same time; and I daily visualized it as surrounded by sticks of incense burnt in homage to it. I had, in fact, resumed the worship of the idol where Orgen had had to leave off, although I was probably less aware of what I was nourishing and nurturing than he had been. But in the intimacy of the relationship now being established between us, I began to develop certain powers of mind which revealed many mysteries to me. In some unbelievable manner I had climbed into Orgen's consciousness and was viewing things as if from the window of his soul; but in so doing, Roma became even more of a mystery to me. It was at this time, I think, that I became obsessed with a determination to discover her true origin and identity.

A few days later, Marchester passed me in the hall: "There's trouble on the way", he said. "Have you seen the

latest addition to our household?"

I was so preoccupied with thoughts of Roma, that I had completely forgotten that Orgen's room had been re-let. The new occupier was due to move in within the month; Marchester, no doubt, had seen her when she came to view the room. It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him about his erstwhile consort, when his attitude changed, and I noticed in his expression the look of panic I had seen in Henderson a few days earlier. When Marchester spoke again it was in a whisper. He dragged me to his room and closed the door; he was pale, very pale:

"That was a shocking incident at the hostel!" It was my turn to blanch, but I said nothing. "Both of them - dead!"

"Dead?", I exclaimed; "Who?"

"Sigrid Petersen, murdered, knifed apparently by a jealous rival who, in venturing to escape, lost her footing as she tried to climb down the side of the building. She must have been mad, of course".

I said nothing, but looked at him firmly. Then: "How do you know she was knifed?"

He thrust a newspaper into my hands. The case, it seemed, was all very nicely wrapped up, except for the two little mysteries: the absence of any offensive weapon, and the fact that a stout tendril of the creeper, which had apparently given under Greta's weight, had not been snapped but *cut clean through!*

"Her assailant must have cut it, realising discovery was imminent", said Marchester.

"Very probably", I replied.

I left him bemused, as if he were groping in his mind for some cell of memory, the key to which he could not find. I went to the bathroom and looked straight into the mirror.

8

Something prompted me to go into Orgen's room and have a last look round before the new occupant's arrival. The sweetness of incense floated out when I opened the door. I stood in darkness on the threshold, closed the door behind me, and stood still, trying to distinguish the innumerable currents in the atmosphere which engulfed me, all clamouring to register their identities. They all added up to Roma, and the intolerable agony of my obsession regarding her origin and nature. I dispelled the phantom, temporarily, by switching on the light. A cleaner had been since last I had entered the place, but the few items of furniture were in their usual positions. Except for the ugly scars on the shelf in the alcove where I had wrenched away the image, all seemed in order. I went up to the alcove and noticed, for the first time, soot-stains deposited by repeated burnings of incense. Here the sweet and cloying odour was most marked, almost sickly in its fulsome and lingering persistence. The room would, no doubt, never quite lose its aromatic ghost.

I gazed at the bed; walked over to it and stretched myself upon the cool, newly-laid linen. Thoughts of Roma were stirred into vivid life, and I drifted into a reverie which bordered on sleep. The intensity of the images which swam about me acquired a hypnogogic depth and clarity which endowed them almost with tangible existence. But although I sensed Roma's presence, she remained invisible. I did, however, see Orgen, clearly. His hunched figure, abased before the altar, was shrouded in a loose flowing robe of dark material. He resembled a gigantic bird, and no sooner did the similarity occur to me than I saw, in fact, a large lammergeier silhouetted against a proudly blue sky such as hangs above tropical lands. The image then vanished

and reformed itself: first as a large raven; then as a glittering hawk; and finally, again as a vulture which, stirring restlessly, suddenly fixed me with eyes like knives. I quailed before its gaze, which pierced to the innermost depths of me; then I heard a shrill baying, as of a she-jackal at sunset. Slowly, the sights and sounds faded and I remained alone in a pullulant ocean of criss-cross shadows, an umbrageous trellis through which streamed pale thin fumes of vaporous mist. They poured through the lattice-window and formed a cloud that hovered over me. The writhing mass coiled and twined sinuously upon itself, assuming any form my mind chanced to remember. I was thinking of Sigrid, and of Greta, and of their bodies pregnant with spume, frothing and bubbling unctuously above me; thought of their hair, flecked with blood and honey; and of the cry of the she-jackal which terminated in a muffled choking sob that was myself entering the cloud.

Owing to the heat of the evening I had undressed, and I now looked down from the cloud-mist on my naked body lying at ease upon Orgen's bed. A thin pencilling of vapour flowed upwards from me, and I gazed with astonishment as the shade of Roma coagulated above me in the spate of my own emanation. A hand reached down, groping blindly for me. I lay upon the bed, paralysed by the thought that out of my own substance she was fabricating for herself a vehicle for her vampire cravings. That she had come in hatred, as an act of revenge against Orgen, I suspected. But only at that moment did I realise that she was the entire and incarnate content of Orgen's suppressed desire, a succubus, as I had once known; and also a demon of possession, as I had known her through Sigrid and Greta.

It was Henderson who set afoot the rumour that I was harbouring a woman in my room at *Carfax*. Although Marchester and Reyluc both admitted to not having actually seen anyone resembling Henderson's description of her, they were distinctly suspicious; and I felt under constant surveillance, the more irritating in that it was so obviously and clumsily engineered. I surprised Marchester one morning, listening outside the door to my room.

"Considering we've all had traffic of some sort, at some time or other, with the girls at the hostel, why make such a secret of this one?", he asked.

The attack was a direct one and I parried it with a frank invitation to come inside and look around. He followed me sheepishly round the room and sniffed distastefully at the clouds of incense.

"You know", I said, determined to get his views on Roma: "I've often wondered where Roma and Orgen first met. I mean, by the time she came to me there had been so much trouble and upheaval that I never thought of asking her."

Marchester looked stupefied:

"She came from the hostel, as far as I know, but why do you ask? This whole business is appalling; inquiries are still proceeding in Kermstow. Some connection is, not surprisingly, suspected between these deaths and the atrocities in the wood."

"I think even Henderson has been known to have visitors from the hostel", I said, side-stepping his obnoxious insinuations. Marchester shrugged: "You know he's a crank. We don't believe the rumour he's set afoot".

"Then why snoop around my door?"

He looked pained and anxious: "I'm worried about that business at the hostel and ..."

"And?"

"The description Henderson gives of the woman you're suspected of harbouring, tallies almost exactly with the new occupier of Orgen's room. She is due tomorrow!"

I was speechless.

After Marchester had gone I brooded for a considerable time, but saw no cause for immediate anxiety. I would wait. Providing the weather held, I had it in mind to camp out in the bay for a few days; I felt a surging impulse of poetic inspiration, and wanted to work unhindered. But that night a more urgent matter awaited attention.

I divested the idol of its stiff blood-encrusted veil and proceeded with the nightly ritual worship. I handled it lovingly, tenderly, and the opening words of Reyluc's poem struck me as a veritable hymn to its glory:

In blood soaked silence
Black, replete
She stands ...
An awful calm pervading her ...

Unlike Orgen, I could feast my eyes on the dark rapture of her glittering body with no consciousness of guilt or shame. She wanted fire, I gave it nightly; she wanted blood, she had had her fill; she wanted that which the male alone can give - creative energy - this she took every night through the instrumentality of her human reflex - Roma. I say *human*, for compared with the mystery of the idol, which I am unable to fathom, Roma appeared and disappeared - at times, I swear, as an entity of actual flesh and blood.

Now, as the blue banks of incense coiled lazily about the dark shape, the glittering doll seemed really to move and to dance her unworldly measure. But I had to avert my gaze from that which squirmed in a mist of ectoplasmic hyle beneath her feet.

Roma's words came to mind: "a fluid chaos ever moving, ever flowing, ever breathing - like a sleeping breather ... ". It was indeed as if someone breathed; a pullulant quaking-sound, suggestive of infinite power of a blind and primal kind. An Arab alchemist once observed "all animals increase themselves by a slime".¹

At the stage of the rite when the idol appeared to dance, I would gaze intently into a mirror fixed above it on the wall. In the wan light of moonbeams slanting through the grating over the bed, my reflection appeared as a gaunt green mask, the eyes over-bright with a feverish excitement induced by the saltant form. As I glared unwinkingly into my own eyes, they acquired a vivid luminosity, became larger, seemed to detach themselves from the face and glow above the hollow cheeks.

I knew from Orgen's papers that by staring fixedly at the reflection of the space between the eyes, the interior senses are stirred into occult life. At first there is a sensation of dull throbbing which grows exquisitely acute; then it feels as if a small wheel begins to rotate, or that a lotus blooms within the brain.

Seated in my chair before the doll and the mirror, the latter becomes a window. I no longer see my reflection, but gaze constantly through the window upon a far-flung landscape, which is sometimes open and near an ocean; at others wooded and enclosed; and, at yet others, and more usually, in the form of a rolling plain of stubble and rock, tufted with furze and stiff grasses. As a bird of prey I swoop from the open window, throwing a vast shadow on the ground far below as my hurtling form passes under the moon's rays. If Roma is a *succubus*, then I also am non-human on the occasions of these flights; a vampire, with all the brooding sleeping land before me, to explore and to exploit for purposes of nourishment and pleasure. Only those who have experienced the sense of total release from bodily bondage, which such a flight induces, can understand with what exhilaration I was filled as I flew through the screaming

¹ From an ancient alchemical treatise entitled: *Ali Puli, His Tractate of the Regenerated Salt of Nature*, from a German translation dated 1682.

wind to keep tryst with my kind. As I glided above the stubbled heathland, sweeping clear of stunted trees which rocked and shook with the onslaught of my approach, I came soon within view of distant hills rising and falling in serried ranks about the vast natural basin of the landscape.

I soon became conscious of other forms starting up from various parts of the landscape. There was an impression of great wings unfolding to the night; and of a strange insistent call, like the baying of a wolf or jackal, wailed weirdly: like wind shrieking in telegraph wires. A great white gull suddenly swung down my path, intercepting it not far ahead of me. I recognized it as the animated totem of a creature that reigned as a Queen at the nocturnal revels towards which I now sped. The sheer beauty of the dazzling flight of a gull, gliding with superb ease in moonlight over a ghostly terrain of mauve shadows, is a supreme delight. Snow-white to my black shape, she seemed to flash a greeting at me, and I exulted in the recognition. Here I was, free, unhampered, a poem in the process of becoming a vital, imaginative reality which surpassed all the modes of the so-called living, who merely sleep a turgid dream of evanescent hopes and fears. Here I sensed fully the triumph of the Undead or Immortal Ones, who live nakedly, royally, unrestrictedly, as the Great Shining Ones of Amenta.

Because this was one of my first fully-conscious magical excursions, I linger upon details which seemed strange to me in the beginning; but which became so familiar to me as my powers and abilities increased that, later, I regarded as commonplace what at this time utterly entranced me. And yet, right from the start, I felt a sense of familiarity with my ghostly surrounding. Is this because we most of us travel in our sleep, at some time or other, although unaware of the fact; and because the reality obtaining in regions I learned to explore is no less and no more real than the so-called reality which normally surrounds us?

Dark hills reared their metallic cones beneath me, and a host of forms converged upon a single summit. Then, as if sucked into a vortex, the shapes spiralled to the ground. This

was the trysting place that became familiar ground to me in the course of my nocturnal forays. Just now, however, I remained at a distance, not wishing to be caught in the maelstrom as it spouted from the hills and drew down the writhing horde. I hovered on the outskirts and became aware of a vast and swooping shadow which curved and wheeled erratically and which gradually encircled me.

In regions such as these, shapes signify not essences, but tendencies; and I knew without a doubt that something dominantly malevolent had spurned the vortex intentionally to engage me. I was also aware that the massive shape - a bird of predatory aspect - was Roma. Her abnormally pallid body shone through the feathers; her red eyes glowed with the lust for slaying. This shape, terrific and fearful, lost its power to terrify me when I saw, within it, the sheer white naked form unfold enticingly. The impact of our encounter resounded like thunder. I saw a pack of jackals pouring from cavernous hollows in the hills, raising their heads in unison, baying as we coupled in space.

Her feathers fell away as I swooped again and again; and as she clawed and bit and ululated in her agony, the red eyes of her craving were baleful lamps which lit up the wild scene below. In the midst of raining blood danced a glistening figure surrounded by beasts, each bestial form a mask of insatiable atavisms projected through aeons of time. Then we too were drawn down the spiral flue of the infernal funnel; down, irrevocably down.

Roma's body had regained its smooth, unwounded whiteness; yet on her haunches I saw the scars my teeth had inflicted, and a gash in the region of her throat. My own wounds and weals glowed upon me like burning jewels; and I think I then understood that the physical nature, when sloughed or cut off abruptly during life, constantly reforms itself according to an innate diaper of tendencies and desires, in no less physical material, but on a different level, or in a different dimension. The features were Roma's, and not Roma's; the body was hers, and not hers; for had I not seen it a moment before, riddled with gushing holes from which blood streamed as from a perfo-

rated wine-jar, as we crashed and exploded like machine guns coupling in mid-air?

An enlightened hermeticist² has observed that even on a mundane level of existence the shape of animals is pregnant with meaning, and that on the astral plane this is far more emphatically the case. And Baudelaire once wrote³ that he had always considered foul and revolting animals to be a vivification, a corporealization, a flowering in material form of man's evil thoughts.

Roma would continue to assume different shapes and forms, yet I should recognize her familiar spirit in any unfamiliar disguise. She could not conceal the burning and perpetual craving which consumed her, for she too worshipped the idol, and the idol spoke and moved with eloquence through her body. These thoughts raced through my mind as we merged with the twisting frieze of forms encircling the Goddess. Many forms I recognized; some, moving in a dim dream, were unaware of their participation. If they awoke in their beds next day, they would perhaps shudder at a dimly-remembered nightmare. But now they were filled with bliss and responding to joyous stimulation with every particle of their bodies, for the extra-terrestrial senses are so enhanced that even the most tenuous contact affects the sensitive plasma with electric intensity. Swedenborg described the sexual congress of angels as a conflagration of the whole being; and I suspect the same applies to the ethereal counterparts of some other sentient organisms.

In the rain of blood the figure danced, and Roma danced too; whirling, gyrating, leaping, her face flushed with exhilaration. I saw the white gull also, stripped of bird-pelt, a fiendess of sinister glamour.

Beneath the mirror on the wall the image stirred. The night without grew darker, a bat-like shape burst through the curtain, and once again a gaunt green ghost shone back from the mirror's

² S. L. MacGregor Mathers.

³ In a letter to Alphonse Toussere, dated January 21 1856.

glaze; the sunken cheeks, deep hollows of darkness; the eyes, overbright with excitement.

When day dawned, I was astonished to find I had written down these words:

My familiar spirit is a female creature of exceptional charm. She bears a strong resemblance to the Mongol race, therefore I think of her as my Asiatic Guide. Her predominant physical characteristic is a remarkable suppleness; sinuous, almost reptilian, yet not wholly animal, for there is a hint of profound and inscrutable knowledge which raises her above the plane of merely physical existence.

I have carnal intercourse with this creature as often as I may, for she is always eager to perform, whenever and however I desire it. She appears usually at my call dressed simply in a dark green, close-fitting *cheong-sam* of silky texture upon which shimmer, as she glides undulantly towards me, vague impressions of fiery dragons. The garment fits tightly about the neck and is bordered with rich gold braid. It reaches almost to her ankles and is slit on either side at thigh level. She wears no other garment, except a black girdle and stockings, and her small feet are shod in scarlet. Her hair is very black, smooth and glossy; her eyes long, dark, liquid and almond-shaped; her complexion is paler than ivory and her mouth very red and rather cruel in appearance. The general impression is that of a highly sophisticated beast suggesting human-nonhuman ancestry by a subtle glamour, which it so weaves about its essential animality as to cause an observer to interpret it in the light of his secret ideal - as a woman of radiant yet darkling loveliness who obeys the least whim of him who desires her.

I have a special way of calling her, and she appears obliquely: not all at once, so to say, for her presence is first made known through the sense of touch as she nestles softly against one, exciting one by slow caresses. She then seems to assume form and become a living reality bent on the purposes of my own pleasure.

During coition with her, miracles occur; I can see into the past, and equate all my past selves with the synthetic symbol I now am, remembering episodes of pleasure or pain at will. To remember means merely, in actual fact, to put back the limbs or members of an old experience, and undergo the same emotional impacts as were originally felt and enjoyed; and this is perhaps the greatest pleasure I have with my Asiatic Guide.

Anatomically she is possessed of broad and prominent hips, a narrow waist, well developed calves and abnormally sericeous legs, resembling in this respect certain Nordic women. Her breasts are high, rounded and firm, and her buttocks beautifully modelled and very prominent. Yet she is in no way heavy or obtuse; on the contrary, refinement is the chief impression conveyed, although this is a mask concealing bestial propensities. Her fingers are abnormally elongated and tapering; the nails, a bright scarlet, sometimes mauve. She is ringed and adorned with antique gold and braceleted like wealthy oriental women. She is highly scented with pungent odours that stimulate sexually. Her voice is sonorous and silvery, possessing a quality of huskiness which is not unmusical. She often uses the foulest epithets with the most casual nonchalance during her love-play, and assumes the lewdest postures with a suppleness of limb which never degenerates into *gaucherie*. Yet she can be deliberately gross and obscene, and sometimes simulates certain animal postures merely for the sake of heightened sensual stimulation. She embodies a peculiar anatomical atavism in that she is retromingent, which makes frontal intercourse impossible unless she adopts grotesque attitudes.

She can assume whatever costume she chooses, and often appears naked as well. In western dress she affects the polished *svelte* sophistication associated with French women of fashion, and at such times her entire being

reflects a 'French' tone and seductiveness. Or she can be coarsely Yankee - as if she were an American-born Mongolian girl...

It may be significant that this was the first time I had alluded to 'familiar' and 'guides' and similar occult entities. I am a poet and little acquainted with the terminology or conceptions of sorcery; yet here I described a succubus as if I were as familiar with the genus as with lupins. I have reproduced the description at length because it adumbrates so precisely some of my experiences of the ensuing day, when I lazed on the beach at Chalmer's Bay. It seems that some dissociated pocket of consciousness had picked up and registered the distinct impressions I have just recorded; for not before this occasion had I been aware of Roma as an entity thus specifically attired. Yet she did indeed accompany me on many later occasions, in the manner described. In fact, on awakening from the flight I have recorded, I distinctly remember a suave and velvety figure starting from the couch on which I lay, after having exchanged it for the chair beneath the mirror during my astral experience. And I did indeed possess knowledge of a secret call, or battery of knocks, which enabled me to evoke this succubus any time I desired. Even so, I was not able precisely to determine Roma's nature. That she was a reflex of Orgen's suppressed desire, I first suspected. Then, I thought she may be an aquastor, or tulpa, created magically and deliberately by him. On recalling Sigrid and Greta, however, I decided that Roma was some form of obsessional entity destined to pursue me through the channels of my own cravings, through whatever vehicle of feminine glamour appeared to attract me. Whatever the truth of the matter, I was obsessed and possessed, and unable to rid myself of the hunger for that which appeared at my call in the forms of Roma. Perhaps I should refer to her as Roma X - the unknown quantity of my dreams!

I have said I was astonished by what I had written down after my first major astral experience. The fact is, I had been

active in these realms for a long time without consciously realising it. Furthermore, my friendship with Oswald Orgen had made me the recipient of an endowment I also had not fully realised until then. Who can gauge the potential of any individual? I am convinced that the experiences I underwent, subsequent to Roma's departure, had some relation to Orgen's concentration of thought on certain aspects of reality. He had indeed charged the idol with the power of his suppressed vitality. I learned later that he had actually communicated some of his own substance to it in a rite known to Asiatics as the *prana-pratishtha*, or Life-Giving Ceremony. As previously remarked, his manner of thought, his mode of conception, was mathematical: through angles and lines, points and planes; not through feelings, emotions. It was the anthropomorphic aspect of these conceptions I was now experiencing, and which he had banished from his own sphere of working. What appeared to Orgen as a geometric figure, appeared to me as a glamour, a fascination appealing directly to the senses and taking substance from my own outpouring responses. My legacy from Orgen was, in fact, a tactual awareness of that which, in his psyche, had manifested as a linear glyph, or *yantra*, which traced vectors of force known to Voodoo cultists as the *loa*, and to Asiatics as *sakti*, and which I could apprehend only as flesh, seductive and perverse.

I understood, more and more, that Orgen's idol, his doll or puppet, far from being a goddess who inspired him, was a creature engendered by him, possessing characteristics and powers imbued literally with his vital energy, his prayers, aspirations, and worship, and ... yes, his curses!

As I gazed at the idol, how could I deny the tremendous power it emitted and the undoubted ability it possessed of inducing within me sensations and visions of awful things? It seemed to me then, and still seems to me now, that a definite reciprocal interchange occurred between the three of us. But we cannot really say who or what pulls the strings, who or what is the doll that is jerked to and fro in the eternal dance. All I can surely aver is that from this time on, I was visited by

a being of singular attraction, who drew on me for energy in the form of my worship. And giving substance daily to the image reflected into my mind, I nourished a phantom, an apparition, but also a vampire and a ghoul which became more real to me than the 'living' beings around me.

It was Henderson who first sensed the presence in our midst at *Carfax* of something supra-real and extra-terrestrial. Reyluc, too, was not far behind; he wrote mysterious lines that could refer only to the inexplicable *perichoresis* which had occurred.

It was at this period that I first remember, with any degree of clarity, the linear figure already mentioned. Vaguely at first, mistily, it appeared upon the horizon of my vision and it always coincided with the initial stages of my astral forays, at what I call the window-stage of my journey. This is the stage at which the mirror into which I am gazing, suddenly becomes frosted, then transparent; it then opens as a window on to the astral terrain. For a few fleeting moments the geometry of the force which impels me to fly through it, is radiantly traced over it, as if it were an ornamental *grille* suggestive of the latticed windows of the East. After repeated appearances of this *yantra* I was able to remember and to sketch its structure, which was a quite simple design. Enclosed within the square frame of the window appeared a large inverted triangle containing a circle with eight petal-shaped appendages arranged about its rim, and suggestive of a rose or a lotus blossom. Within this flower were five inverted triangles arranged in diminishing size, one inside the other. Precisely at the centre of the inmost triangle blazed a point of light, which so effectively concealed that which it veiled, that it radiated simultaneously a violent vibration and an unimaginable quietude. As I have said, I was not until later to see this *yantra* of power which obsessed me. I neither understood the meaning of the figure, nor could I find any clue to its significance in Orgen's papers until, also at a later time, it was pointed out to me. But what I did succeed in ascertaining was that the brilliant whorl in the central triangle was the funnel down which I was inevitably whirled when approaching the

trusting place. It may have been also the root of the tenuous cord which attaches the subtle body to its physical counterpart, and which palpitates between the eyebrows in the region of the occult and atavistic eye.

11

In fulfilment of my urge to dream, to bask in sunshine, to write poetry, I camped out for a few days in a small sequestered cove named Covey Harl, to the north of Chalmer's Bay. I took with me my writing materials, a tin of sandwiches and a few bottles of ale. I intended refurbishing at a small bar off Crott's End, where Chalmer's Bay swells into Langland Sweep. This is the last promontory of Kermstow, and it juts far into the green sea and is parallel for some miles with the mainland which shimmers and slumbers in a perpetual heat-haze, like an enchanted and saffron-glowing fairyland. But from my nook at Covey Harl, none of these things was evident; and as the shining heat poured over the sand, white gulls, foaming surf, and the azure void alone met the gaze, with now and again a distant vessel quivering whitely on the hazy green.

I spent the first day rapt in a reverie of gold and azure, white and glaucous green, and wrote not so much as a word! The onset of evening and nightfall surpassed all my powers of description. All I can say is that my impotence as a poet was made plain in the most glorious manner imaginable. How could any mortal, searching in the dusty repository of words, find any adequate to describe the splendours of such magnificent simplicity?

The next morning seemed even more effulgent with blue and gold; and having exhausted my scant provisions I started for Crott's End, leaving my writing-gear and sleeping-blanket

beside a massive rock, one wall of which fell sheer into a shining crystal pool.

The heat of the day, the abstractedness of my mood, and the desire to relish the full flavour of surroundings to which I rarely treated myself, caused me to be away from Covey Harl for several hours. I ate ravenously at Crott's End, and washed the feast down with Kermstow ale while at ease on a terrace overlooking Langland Sweep; a more satisfying view could not have been found anywhere. When I returned, the sun -although still high - had passed the meridian. Having deposited my fresh supplies, which had grown burdensome in the heat of the last few miles of the journey, I consumed a sandwich or two, and polished off a bottle of ale before stretching out on the sand where I was soon lost in a sleep of contentment.

I was awakened some time later by a splashing sound in the pool. Ringlets of crystal were lapping the base of the rock. I got up to investigate, first on one side, then on the other of the titan stone; but whatever was behind it eluded me. Supposing the disturbance to be due to some piscatorial frolicking - as my friend Henderson might have called it -I again lay down and gazed dreamily at the sky. Then a small white pebble described an arc against the blue and landed adroitly on my navel. I turned my head as a gale of laughter echoed from the pool. It rang sonorously against the rock, rebounded against the towering cliffs to the back of me, and back again. I sprang up in time to see a brown form cleave the waters; and my heart stood still. A face had flashed across my vision with fleeting swiftness, yet the features were all flame and fantasy. I was dazed, uncertain if I dreamed, or really stood in Covey Harl, while a lean and supple body rose gleaming from the pool and rolled on to the sand like a porpoise. A mere strip of scarlet girdled the glistening form, and I knew - although I had not seen her before - that this was Kotavi, the new occupant of Orgen's room.

12

Awake or dreaming? Had I astralized so smoothly that I was unaware of the transference from one order of reality to another? I touched her gingerly to see if she were solid. This was no test, as I realised as soon as I withdrew my hand; spectral matter is as tactual to spectral hands as physical matter is to corporeal hands. Was my hand corporeal, or spectral, at that moment? I stared at it in utter inanity. She rolled over and laughed, looking up at me with long liquid eyes.

"Try pinching me", she said.

The heat of the day and the abrupt interruption of my solitary daydreaming combined to make all things seem suddenly unreal. Her words lingered in my ears, but I could make no sense of them; they were meaningless sounds, melodiously vibrating in my brain. She spoke perfect English. The fact struck me with a slow dull thud in the region of the spine; struck, before my turbid mental processes could determine their meaning. I sat down on the blanket and unblinkingly watched the heaving swell of the sea. A distant vessel claimed all my attention; my mind had become an idiot mind, absorbed in whatever passed into its visual field; or, perhaps, a child mind. But behind it all there seemed to be unfolding a monstrous nightmare.

"Did I startle you so much? Sorry. Please believe me."

She appeared concerned and genuinely repentant for her quite harmless little prank. I smiled wanly, automatically. I had lost all power of volition; I was in the grip of Baudelaire's dread *acedia*.

She sat down beside me, but I felt no sense of presence. Was I then dead, or in the process of dying? I felt I was being abstracted into a set of lines and angles. That was it! Like the

idol, I also had a geometry; I was passing into my linear form; I felt nothing, yet my mind - a moment ago so sluggish and unresponsive - had become glitteringly keen, swift, weaving incredible patterns which I relished with a sort of unfamiliar intellectual delight. I watched myself unfold and flower into angles and lines, curves and cubes.

Then she touched me. It was like an electric shock; it galvanized my entire anatomy, subtle and gross. And I felt a great misery and guilt flooding my soul, as if I were oppressed with the nameless atrocities I had perpetrated. I strove to reassert my usual wake-adey self, and to respond in a normal fashion to the creature beside me. She was speaking in a lulling, soothing, deliriously modulated voice, but I failed to grasp the sense behind her words; my mind was baffled, numbed into idiocy again. Perhaps I was in the presence of a great power. May she not be some kind of *sakti* incarnate, some *yantra*, which, with a movement contrary to my recent abstraction, was manifesting its line and angles in flesh: not to be intellectually apprehended, but physically *felt*? My mind flew to the idol, and I started up. She laid a hand on my arm and urged me gently back again.

"Do you like your room?", I asked her suddenly; it was just as if someone else had put the question.

She nodded: "And I like yours, too!"

I was too numbed to express astonishment. She was looking straight into my eyes, and for the first time I felt the need really to take stock of her.

Facially, she combined what I can only describe as an Afro-Asian barbarity with the suavity of those rare European women one finds occasionally in cities that are smelting pots of the human race; cities where the strangest mutations and fusions have produced exotic hybrids outstandingly unique, because they combine inordinate sensuality with a complementary extreme of profound and mysterious spirituality. My thoughts ranged over places such as Cairo, Baghdad, Port-au-Prince, and certain

regions in the Caucasus. Her movements had a simian quality about them, which I was soon to appreciate, for she was as agile as a monkey, and as salacious. But just now I was reviewing these things in a critical and detachedly analytical manner. I continued the rude close scrutiny and assessment as she held me with her eyes, and hung like a dark cloud between me and the void of the sky. Then her last remark penetrated to the 'practical' intelligence within me. What right had she to enter my room; and what had she found there? I raised myself on one elbow.

"Do not fret", she said, in a melodiously sweet voice. "The idol is all right. You have worshipped well; it is now back in my room again".

A storm of fury broke loose in me. I sat upright and grasped her shoulders cruelly.

"What else have you taken, you shameless thief, you vile bitch, you ...?"

My grip relaxed and in my fury I struck her sharply across the face. Her mouth was open; her eyes had now a savage glint in their depths. She squirmed under my hand like an eel, and slashed at me with teeth that had been filed to points. Blood streamed down my arm as I sank back on the blanket, gasping with the heat and the sudden fire of my rage and exertion. Yet I could not smother my anger.

"There is nothing to fear, I tell you".

Her eyes blazed into mine. We glared at each other like two savage cats bent on attack, cautiously edging round each other, lurking with extreme care, waiting for the vital moment of naked violence.

"What did you do with the knife?"

"I cleaned it," she answered simply. "Now it shines as before. You should not have a blood-stained knife in your possession. It may arouse suspicions in the minds of the ignorant."

I felt the girders of tension slowly relaxing. I shook myself; the blow had left me dazed.

"It is my turn to be sorry", I said.

I lay back and stared at the sky. I began talking to myself more than to her. She looked at me quizzically:

"Why are you anxious? Nothing has happened; on the contrary, you have done exceedingly well."

Her expression was suffused with a weirdly mysterious charm.

"Orgen; the youth in the wood; Sigrid; Greta; all of them dead", I mumbled.

"But not by your hand", Kotavi murmured.

I realised I had omitted Roma's name, and I also realised the reason for the omission. Being unconvinced of her existence after the manner of flesh, I could not believe in her death, and a great mystical truth dawned on me with this realisation. Whether Roma were a *tulpa* generated by the will of an occultist such as Orgen, or whether she were a *succubus* sprung from the lewd imaginings arising from suppressed sexual energies, as occurs sometimes in the cases of mystics; or whether she were the reflex of the idol embodied in the flesh; or even if she were a combination in varying degrees of all three; I still could not believe her to be dead, extinct, because I knew that she had not been generated after the fashion of mortals. Roma was like the self of every man; she existed with a body or without a body, visible or invisible, according to the stance of the beholder.

Kotavi's words had made so much seem plain. Orgen had destroyed himself, through Roma, long before he applied the sacrificial knife.

"But the youth in Naver Wood?", I asked.

"It was an accident. The cords were too tight. The mutilation occurred later; it was the work of some beast; the hyena sometimes feeds that way."

My expression must have betrayed my incredulity, for a slight smile played on her lips.

"But why should Sigrid imagine that *she* had slain the youth?", I persisted.

"It was a glamour of the idol, and it is present wherever you are; are you not its priest?"

I gazed at Kotavi uncomprehendingly; but a sudden gust of joy swept through me: "Then Greta killed Sigrid?"

I looked pleadingly at Kotavi.

"Yes! After you had gone. Do not ask further questions. Your friend Marchester was correct in supposing that Greta's death was of her own design".

"Why have you come?", I asked her quickly.

"You will find out. Before then, however, why not finish asking absurd questions? You will find it difficult to discover the power which pulls the puppet strings."

With these words Kotavi put a stop to all my queries. Arched over me, she now pursued her quest with narrowed eyes.

"I am a goddess", was her first uncompromising statement: "You desire women".

I wondered if she were mad, and the danger of my position became apparent to me. With a shrug I admonished her.

"I have no such desire."

Secretly, subversively, I knew that through the 'window' lay a universe I had but to evoke in order to explore; why should I search for women in the world? My hypocrisy did not escape her, and a slow smile, almost a sneer, contorted her face. I was thinking of my recent flight and sensual gratification, which was far beyond anything I could experience on earth, while awake.

My reply seemed to irritate her.

"I have one real desire", I went on, "and it grows more insistent as the days pass. It is to produce great poetry; to write such verse as may twist the soul and shake it free of all that is

not wonder and ecstasy. A great Frenchman⁴ has said: 'Beauty shall be convulsive, or not be'. This is what I strive after; this is my desire".

"You should have worshipped Saraswati",⁵ she replied coolly, and the sneer on her lips grew more pronounced.

"What is it *you* want?", I asked impatiently: "I have nourished the idol with blood and with fire and with ..."

I had answered my own question. Her face was alight with craving. The substance that only the male can provide was the third requisite. I recalled Henderson's crazy words.

I searched myself as truly as I might. Desire led to further desire; fire fed on fire. I had had a surfeit of sex. Yet, what hypocrisy! Did not Roma accompany me nightly, with and without her green *cheong sam* whereon the dragons shimmered with each voluptuous movement she made? May be so! But was it not a step forward to have such easy access to these delights? A battery of magical knocks, a flight through a window, and exquisite pleasures were mine. They appeared and they disappeared at will, and they left no aftermath but a languor and temporary *malaise* that had their own ecstasies. And these experiences quickened my poetic sense and inspired me with creative energy such as I had not known before.

I thought of the men I had known, who, like myself, sought perpetually for satisfaction any- and everywhere, and rarely found it; of the entanglements and estrangements, the complications and the dull sordid mechanics of the process, leading to disappointment; then the cynicism, crystallizing inevitably into loathing for the very creatures they most needed and pathetically pursued. No happiness lay at the end of that cycle. The desire to go on in such a fashion disgusted me. I knew I had within me some spark of poetic potential. Was my life to be drained away in a restless quest to appease unappeasable longings, to sate insatiable hungers which no earthly woman could be expected to

⁴ Andre Breton

⁵ The Indian goddess of Music, Eloquence and the Arts generally.

understand? And so I had craved some nebulous form of escape in the arms of a metaphysical ideal or idol - a mere doll, a toy, a plaything, a reflection in water ... but of whom?

I could not answer that question; nor could I guess which was the puppet and which the puller of the wires. But did I care? The doll danced divinely on its mysterious foundation of chaos; why should I not adore it, surrender to it all desire, so that it might be fulfilled after its own fashion?

'Everything physical is at the same time metaphysical', said Schopenhauer. Why should I seek among the physical reflections of the Eidolon, when the ideal Ideal - the Idol - translates my inmost longings into immediate fulfilment through means too complex for me to fathom? And for me, poetry - the art of convulsing the soul with the fleeting vision of this metaphysic, this great Eidolon - consists in the power so to arrange words and create rhythmic effects that the poet and his reader can recreate, with each reading of the poem, the essential ecstasy which generated it. Baudelaire said: 'There is in the creation of all sublime thought a nervous concussion which can be felt in the cerebellum.'

I have felt this in the whirling of the wheel between the eyebrows, just prior to my window-flights, and I have also experienced it, though more rarely, whilst writing poetry; and with the logic - no doubt, of a madman - I insist on associating the two experiences, and to a certain extent identifying them.

It is when one is looking through the window, or literally taking leave of one's senses for a flight in the metaphysical realms of idols and ideals, that this nervous concussion is most marked; and I believe that if one were to write down one day the supreme spell, the supreme incantation, the *essential* poem, one would be annihilated instantaneously, as by the opening of the Eye of Shiva. A great explosion would occur, leaving no more than a little heap of ash - like the dust of the burnt incense surrounding Orgen's idol; while above, hanging in lazy drifts, worlds would form and disintegrate, as on a pyre of celestial fragrance.

All this time, Kotavi was watching me.

"Look!", she said, pointing: "You say you have no desire for women". She was right; there was no concealing a familiar physical signal. She lowered her eyelids. The sun was westering, yet still poured burning gold from the sky. The tranquillity of the scene after the storm of our antagonism reacted on me now, and I drew her close to me. With a deft movement she slipped off the scarlet ribbon, and we closed. She was, as I have said, as agile as a monkey, and we rolled over and over in the sands like beasts at play. As the climax came we tumbled with a splash into the pool. Down we plummeted, locked in a crazy dance like ayab-yum idol. Her hair waved under water like ghostly seaweed, and her face looked monstrously quilted through the swirling green. We surfaced still coupled, and rolled on to the bank. She lay panting and wild-eyed beneath me, staring at the sun as it dipped to Amenta.

The cove, silent, splashed with the afterglow of evening; Kotavi lay beside me like a velvet shadow. All my ire had vanished in a mist of exhaustion, and a vaporous moon soon bathed us in its mellow gold. In all the soft splendour of that radiant shadow-land we merged and melted. I no longer knew or cared if dream or waking prevailed. As we lay in the bliss of conjunction I was able to travel in space, to link star with star, and to experience a rapture of expansiveness and infinity I had not previously known in waking life. When it was over, she swarmed up the sheer wall of rock and I was left clawing the air, calling her back, vainly. How she scaled the flat smooth surface so effortlessly, I do not, know; but at the end of it all I realised that she was gone, and the loss left me empty. All that remained was a lone white gull perched on the utmost pinnacle of cliff; it stirred a dim and familiar memory which began to haunt me as sleep descended. I sank down on the sands beneath a dome of lapis lazuli.

The next day, I lazed on the sands waiting vainly for poetic stirrings sufficiently strong to burst on to paper. Nothing came, and I began to muse on Kotavi's return with sparkling ale! As I scanned the horizon, the distant sound of laughter floated in over the waves. Peering over a shoulder of rock - 'Kotavi's Rock' - I noticed a group of girls dancing down to the water's edge in Croom Gully, which divided Saunders' Creek from Monkstown Bay opposite Crott's End. The group was too remote for individual identification, but I guessed it included students from the hostel on the outskirts of Kermstow. My body still tingled with the pleasures meted out by some of them, but I had, just then, no particular wish to be noticed. I was tolerably well concealed and unless they approached the cove from the sea - which would require exceptionally powerful and skilful swimming - any attempt to make land would give me ample time to avoid an encounter.

They frolicked in the water and, after some time, it seems they decided to return to their base up the strand. I heard their laughter louder as they raced up the strand and began dancing to music provided by a none-too-expert handling of tambourines and pipes. Later, I saw them drift off in various groupings, and, recalling Greta's honey-rite, suspected they were about to enjoy themselves in the seclusion of the rock-infested gullies. I sat down again and watched a few dolphins frisking in the middle distance. Amid the waves they appeared as black and glistening phantoms. A smaller form, no larger than a dot, moved steadily closer to the shore, and I realised with annoyance that one of the bathers *had* indeed ventured to explore the recesses beyond Croom Gully. I moved my gear behind 'Kotavi's Rock', and waited as the swimmer drew gradually nearer. I felt

reasonably secure from discovery, as a jaw of serried rocks further down the strand would serve as a most likely resting-place for an undoubtedly exhausted champion.

I saw her reach shore, stretch her length on the sands for a few minutes, then saunter to the rocks. She sat on a low outcrop and I could see that she was a truly magnificent creature. Slender-waisted and agile, she was both well-built and delicately formed; her flaxen hair, neatly cropped, fitted her finely shaped skull like a helmet. Raising herself, she rested on one arm and gazed upon the sea. I detected a mood of dejection and melancholy in the slope of her back and the long loose drape of her arms and shoulders, scintillant and gleaming with sea-spume. She was, perhaps, a newcomer to the hostel and, repelled by the brash and open sensuality of the others, had sought escape in this nearly-inaccessible cove. Then she rose suddenly, wormed out of her slip, and urinated. It was with a fierce gust of excitement that I noticed that she was retromingent; not slightly, as Sigrid had been, but markedly so. This anatomical atavism is rare in non-primitive peoples, and it added a piquant relish to the sauce of her charm. She then turned abruptly, and, seeing me for the first time, blushed a deep crimson. At least, I had been right about her modesty! She would have fled precipitantly into the sea had I not risen in swift pursuit. She threw back at me a panic glance as she flailed ineffectually against the strong incoming tide. I shrieked with amusement as I danced nearby, showered by the spray. She was exquisitely lovely and of an order of perfection rarely to be found. In her eyes I read fright tempered with ardent anticipation, as she mutely allowed herself to be lured from the waves and up the hot slope to Kotavi's Rock.

I found, when I led her there, that she was even more wonderful than I had supposed, and I cannot convey the immediate and extreme effect she had on me. Shy, with a bashfulness for which I could not account, she sank upon the sands and buried her head in her hands. Then she lay back, red with confusion, her lissom limbs assuming the posture of acquiescence without

any apparent volition on her part. Realising that part of her embarrassment was due to the peculiarity of her anatomy, I gently eased off the slip which she had adjusted hastily on catching sight of me, turned her over, and approached her dor sally. It emerged that I was the only man in the whole wide world to understand the nature of her peculiarity, and bright blood proved her confession.

A little later, with her head resting sleepily in my lap, I tried to speak to her. She was obviously new to Kermstow and could speak little English beyond: "I, Helga".

The difficulty of the situation was almost pathetic. I wanted to tell her how magnificent she was; how lovely were her legs, and how fascinatingly maddening her ascetically articulated face. And I wanted to compliment her on her brave swim round Saunders' Creek, which really was very dangerous. But I suppose her inability to understand me was, on the whole, fortunate; it saved my saying all those really significant things that are not properly communicable by word of mouth, and therefore truly arcane.

Our bodies were electrified by sensations which spanned the extent of our being, like lightening leaping between giant electrodes. Smothering her face with kisses as she lay spreadeagled on the sands, I was about to be more specific when a murderous attack came out of the blue.

The white gull, wheeling and screaming in ever closing arcs, stabbed at my neck and shoulders with slashing beak and predatory claws. Helga screamed in terror as I rolled away from her, thus foolishly exposing myself to a frontal attack. The gull dived straight at me and I raised my hands to protect my eyes. The swish of its wings sounded a sinister accompaniment to its high piercing shriek, which stirred memories of shrill obscenities echoing on tumultuous air. Fortunately for me, the beak missed my eyes, but grazed my cheek, as the flutter and flash of its wings temporarily blinded me. I buried my head in the blanket. Blood was streaming down my back, reddening the beach. Helga sobbed hysterically and made for the shelter of the caves.

I sat up, gasping for breath and dabbing at my cheek with a handkerchief. The wound was not deep; I was fascinated by the rich, red, turbid trickle, as it glistened in the sunlight. On the blanket was that other blood, and I reverently let some of my own flow on to it.

I turned suddenly, startled and confused with an unaccountable sense of guilt, of shame almost, though not of remorse. Kotavi was standing a few feet away with fresh victuals; her eyes were smouldering, her lips curled in derision. She spat with cold venom on the blood-potion. I felt the sap leaving me. My nerves had been wrought to a pitch of hysteria by the alarming attack, and I could think only of Helga and the painful associations she would carry through life in connection with the fateful day on which her flowers were despoiled. Add to this, that I had no remaining energy wherewith to pacify Kotavi, or to satisfy her, and my state of abject misery may be appreciated.

When I again looked at Kotavi she was smiling. All traces of her initial reaction had vanished. There was a roguish expression in her sidelong glances, and my spirits began to revive. She was uncorking a bottle and, dying of thirst, I gulped down a glass of lager, and went on to devour a chicken sandwich. Then Kotavi lay beneath the blazing sun and told me she was leaving *Carfax*.

I stopped eating and silently reproached myself for the stupidity I had indulged, which had lost me - Kotavi. She read my thoughts and the sneer returned to her lips.

"Fool", she said, "do you think I am leaving because of *you*?"

The final word was spoken with such withering derisiveness that I winced.

"You are a child if you think these sexual frolics of yours affect me in any way".

She spoke evenly enough, but I detected in her tone a tinge of jealousy. I therefore did not reply.

Having, as she thought, despatched the matter, she proceeded to tell me that she had that morning received news of

her mother's death. She and her mother had lived on the mainland, in Grantlingham; and Kotavi had come to Kermstow to pursue her studies there, for Kermstow boasted a fine library and museum particularly suited to the Asiatic researches which preoccupied her at that time.

"You must come with me", she said. And the tone of her voice left me in no doubt that it was a command, not an invitation.

I sat silently munching another sandwich.

"I have a fine house there and you can spend your time in the composition of poetry".

Again the derision. She was wearing a tight cotton frock of peacock blue, and she looked darkly lovely, as if sheathed in a ghostly light which contrasted oddly with the brilliance of the day. She drew up one of her knees and rested her chin on it, looking out dreamily to sea. The clear void of the sky was radiantly tranquil; I could hardly believe there had ever been any savage attack, or any storm of passion. Surely, Helga must have been an undine strayed from the deep!

Kotavi sighed and spoke about her mother and her early life in Gohati, in Assam, where they both had been born. Sundari had been a nautch girl attached to one of the large temples for which Assam and the north-eastern parts of Bengal are celebrated. Many mysteries had been revealed to her during the course of her career, and Kotavi was the result of a union about which her mother would not speak. Kotavi believed that a high priest of the goddess worshipped at the temple had chosen her mother for a very complex ritual.

As Kotavi related these things I visualized the temple in the burning land, half arid, half luxuriant with swamps and jungles of monstrous vegetation, and there came to mind the words of a poem by Oscar Reyluc:

Red skies burn ever
high above
the swamp in steaming heats
of evening

where the dead lie dreaming violent dreams
of love ...

Sundari became exceedingly rich, and she and her daughter moved westward. Now that her mother had died, Kotavi - by the age-old unwritten laws of her people - had come to assume great responsibility.

I tried to make her understand that it would be useless for me to live with her in Sundari's fine house; that I would be happy only if she would visit me occasionally and confirm in the flesh that which we enacted out of it, on the other side of the 'window', at the trysting place.

I do not know why her next remark angered me, because I had lately lost interest in the idol as such:

"It will be enshrined with the proper rites, and due worship always given".

"But you cannot take the idol with you!", I blurted. "It isn't yours".

"Neither is it yours", she replied calmly and truthfully: "You removed it from your friend's room after his death, that is all. He did not will it to you, for it was not his to will."

"No! But I am sure he would have done so, had he suspected he would die prematurely."

An enigmatic smile played about her lips.

"Perhaps! But the idol has its own will; we are the puppets."

I was exasperated; for although I felt I had transcended the idol - got beyond it, so to say, in my new state of awareness - I yet wished to retain it; perhaps for sentimental reasons. After all, Orgen had been a friend of mine.

"Where did the idol come from?", I asked, as the thought suddenly struck me.

"From my birthplace, Kamrup, an ancient place now known as Gohati".

I had heard of this obscure region. Kamrup was the ancient

capital of Assam and the centre of *Tantra*, a form of worship in which the female energies of creation, embodied in the form of a primordial goddess, are accorded precedence over all natural and supernatural forces. The place had a mysterious history recalling the ancient Egyptian legend of Osiris, whose severed members were scattered throughout the land, sanctifying the places where they reposed. So also, Kamrup is held specially sacred because there fell in that region the sexual organ of the Goddess Kali, the God Vishnu having dismembered her after the *Daksha Sacrifice*.

The cults of such regions often seem obscure and repugnant to minds unacquainted with those secret sciences for which the East is celebrated. Where such matters were concerned I preferred to keep an open mind, especially since my own experiences in realms of consciousness unsuspected by most occidentals. So I brooded on Kotavi's words, and held my tongue.

Having discharged an apparently disagreeable duty by explaining these matters, she now seemed eager to lift me from the state of dejection and emptiness into which her confidences had plunged me. She nestled close, and began relating incidents of a humorous kind concerning her birthplace and her childhood frolics. Our combined laughter must have reverberated as far as Langland Sweep, or even in distant Grantlingham where her mother's house awaited us on the mainland.

As time passed I became more and more alive to the fact that Kotavi had some design upon me that I failed to fathom. It may seem strange, but I did not return to *Carfax*. Kotavi said she would see to the transit of the idol, and the few bits and

pieces I had in my room; and I was content to let her have her way in the matter, idling away my time in the warm reaches of Covey Harl.

Although I had not written a line of poetry, or anything else, when night fell there came a stirring of interior activity that was quite new to me. Nor did I need the usual preliminaries to see outlined on the astral window the curious complex of lines and angles which I have described.

Swooping over a twilight terrain, I was soon joined by a large white gull. Its curvettings in the shimmering atmosphere filled me with inexpressible anticipation and delight, for I knew that when the white plumes were sloughed, and the indwelling being discarded its feathery robes, an immaculate image would be revealed: beckoning, inviting me to the feast beneath the whirling funnel of shifting shadows.

But ever since a particular occurrence, the image had appeared to vacillate and tremble, twisting uncertainly between the identities of Roma and Kotavi. This particular occurrence was the death of Sundari; and although I was unable to fathom its significance, I sensed its connection with the change I had noticed in the image disguised in the feathers of a gull. It became blurred, elusive, more difficult with each trysting to ensnare and to recognize; it was somehow fading, diminishing, waning almost to spectral dimensions, as if withdrawing to a still less material plane.

I pointed out to Kotavi that fire alone was not sufficient -that blood also was required; and that since the theft of the idol from me this had not flowed. She searched me with one of her most penetrating glances and quoted, simply: "The best blood is of the moon, monthly*", and added "Do you think I am not serving the Mass after the correct fashion?"

The quotation was from an obscure *grimoire* composed by a Western occultist who had been initiated by certain tantrik adepts into the secret worship of the Goddess; and I made a mental note of it, connecting it immediately with recent puzzling

occurrences at *Razamandal*, Sundari's house. Kotavi had regularly entertained young and nubile girls which she had, presumably, procured from ships docking at Chalmer's Bay. They were housed in a spacious compound adjoining the shrine-room, where she had installed the idol. She forbade me to enter the shrine-room, or to visit the compound where the girls were instructed in ritual dances and manual gestures associated with the idol's worship. I obeyed her mandate up to a point, for I had read in Orgen's papers a quotation from the *Tantrakalpadruma*, which had appealed strongly to me, as a poet:

He who utters magic incantations while meditating on the flower-covered yoni of the Goddess, of a certainty charms all with his poesy.

The verse was illumined for me by Kotavi's reference to the blood of the moon, no less than by another verse quoted in Orgen's papers:

O goddess, the fragrant flower which charms all is the red one which first appears in a young girl.

Here, then, was the secret of acquiring great lyrical virtuosity - the power of poetic genius, in fact. The compound established by Kotavi was a veritable storehouse of such power, and I was determined to learn the mode of its use. But Kotavi had other plans. She derided my poetic pretensions, as she called them, and refused to admit that any verses, sacred or profane, were hymns of praise to an eternal Creator.

One day, in anger, I charged her with being mercenary.

"You are like so many other women," I said. "You are petitioning the idol for wealth and power; you are betraying the trust which Sundari placed in you. You should worship Laxmi!"⁶

The taunt was in answer to her gibe about Saraswati, some days previously.

She rounded on me, and her eyes flamed: ⁶ The Hindu goddess of wealth and fortune.

"What did you know of my mother?", she hissed.

"Nothing but what you have told me", I replied, "but you are not going to use my energy to launch your vulgar desires and float a merely mercenary venture. You are no better than a whore!"

I was quivering with rage, which was neutralized somewhat by her fearful appearance, for I had never seen a person so transformed. A shrill laugh escaped her as she aimed a volley of abuse at me.

"You mere man", she screamed; "so sluggish, so slow to grow up; *you* have all your life - and you need it to develop some spark of maturity. But I am a woman, and I would taste the joys that infinite riches can bestow, *now*, before it is too late!"

She was beside herself with fury; overwhelming in the determination of her perverted will. I quailed before her. She was an inspired fiendess, a *dakini*, too fearful to be desirable.

"Very well, Kotavi", I said.

I had decided on other measures. She became instantly calm.

"Listen to me now, listen". She spoke softly, almost coaxingly: "If you do what I wish, you shall worship the idol for the great gift of poetry".

The familiar sneer rippled over her features for a moment, and was gone.

"But I need you; and the energy you give".

"Why me?", I asked, "surely there are something like ten thousand other individuals within the radius of a few score miles who would be only too willing to supply the energy, as you call it, in the quantity and manner you desire. You surprise me, Kotavi; or is this supreme piece of flattery intended as a bait? Again I ask: Why me?"

Her answer came coolly enough, though I could see she trembled with suppressed fury. After Orgen's death I had been chosen, through some quirk of destiny, as a temporary pheretrer; I had become, in effect, a high priest, serving the mass of the

idol in the manner I have often described. Through this service I had become endowed, as had Orgen before me, with special qualities that had transformed the life-fluid within me; its magnetic and vibratory structures were now of an order not obtaining in the average uninitiated male. I had become of the order of Priests by virtue of worshipping the Goddess, and by the constant nourishment I had afforded her in the form of the idol, after Orgen's ministrations had been withdrawn. This is why I was now indispensable to Kotavi. She was dwindling; not for lack of fire, for the incense burned incessantly before the idol; not for lack of blood, for the girls supplied that, each in her season; but for lack of that which only I as a Priest could give - the sacred seed of immortality!

In aspiring to poetic creation, and in endeavouring to control and sublimate the sacred seed, I was depriving not only the Goddess of her due, but Kotavi of the fuel which she required for her own ambitions. In this way she was stealing the fire from heaven; like a vampire, she had been draining and diverting my energy for her own ends; not for transfinite ends. This is why the white gull - her image on the inner planes - trembled so, and vacillated.

She pleaded, she cajoled, she begged, she bullied: determined to coerce me in her favour. I was disappointed and disgusted with the paltriness of her aims, and considered my own aspirations to a pure literary form of creation as transcending them all. She had, through Roma, sought Orgen's energy; and when he had withheld it and struggled to give it to the Goddess, Kotavi had encompassed his destruction. Now she threatened me.

Even so, I reflected, Orgen had failed to achieve union with his deity through an over-intellectualization of the creative processes. He had denied in himself the very ecstasy whereby the Goddess continued to exist. And Kotavi, in her way, was courting failure by a perversion of the creative processes to merely personal ends. In my aspiration to poetic reality I thought I possessed a certain safeguard, and that my absorp-

tion in deity would follow as an automatic consummation: almost incidentally and as a by-product of the greater goal, which was Absolute Imaginative Reality and freedom from all bondage. But I had one essential weakness.

Unlike Orgen, who denied expression to his sexuality; and unlike Kotavi, who was able to divert and pervert such energy, I revelled in it for its own sake, having always possessed an insatiable craving for women. I had been, before the advent of the idol, a voluptuary and little else. Kotavi played cunningly on this tendency, but before I realized the full extent of her intrigues she involved me in a strange ordeal. Firstly, she assured me that she possessed the secret of perfect sex-control, and that if I would place myself entirely in her hands she would impart the secret to me. I therefore entered the shrine-room with her on an appointed evening when the moon was fifteen days old.

15



The shrine-room was vast; and in the fitful light of a single flame, set in a brazier at its far end, it seemed alive with shadows which danced and leapt unceasingly. As my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, I saw a group of motionless figures arranged as on a stage in the centre of the hall.

Kotavi led me to a raised platform which supported a single pillar. From its vantage-point I looked down and saw, for the

first time in three-dimensional form, the *Yantra* or Figure which I had come to identify with the idol, and with the 'window'¹ through which I flew on my nocturnal flights. The *Yantra* was revealed in sharp relief, for the five triangles within the outer circle of petals were raised, one within the other, forming a series of steps. The whole structure resembled a truncated pyramid as viewed from above, enclosed within an eight-petalled lotus flower, each petal supporting a pillar, or cone, of incense.

The pillars, however, were not inanimate: they were motionless human figures, so dark as to appear black. Each step of the pyramid supported a human form, lying supine and facing downward. The far side of the pyramid also bore a form on each of its steps, similarly positioned: in all, twenty-three motionless forms, erect or supine, within the Circle.

Began a slow and insidious melody suggestive of distant pipes, the wailing of gales, and the rustling of dry leaves. A drum began to beat, rhythmically, compellingly. Kotavi's eyes glowed redly in the lambent light as she removed my robe, and with a coil of stout hempen cord she lashed me securely to the central pillar of the Circle. She then withdrew into the shadows as the rhythm grew increasingly insistent and aroused the occult zone of power in the space between my eyebrows. It began to gyrate, slowly at first, gaining speed with each passing moment until it whirled violently. I sensed the onset of a flight', but restrained the almost overwhelming urge to astralize, as I had previously agreed to inhibit the impulse.

Because of the heat and the stifling clouds of incense, sweat was soon pouring from me; and the cord, biting into my flesh, reminded me that the Ordeal had begun.

A figure that had appeared on the finial of the truncated pyramid initiated a slow and undulant revolution about its own axis. Kotavi told me that the eight petals represented the subtle emanations of the Great Lotus flower, which was itself symbolic of the Supreme Goddess whose Power was being evoked. The fifteen steps, each with their feminine expressions, represented

a digit of the lunar cycle. The figures on the steps were virgin attendants on the Goddess who danced in their midst, above them; they exuded a fragrance which, at a particular stage of the rite, flowed from their bodies on to platter-shaped leaves spread beneath them.

The human incense-bearers began slowly to rotate; reptilian oscillations rippled down their bodies, and up again to the lunar chakra back of the head. This uncanny movement was repetitive; and it echoed, as it were, the rhythmic beat of the drums and the wail of the pipes.

The fascination which this vividly sensual scene exercised upon me was broken when the figures on the steps rose up in adoration of the saltant forms above them. The adorants were not entirely naked, but girdled with tiny bells startled into sound by their movements. Then, the whole complex Figure sprang into life as the rhythm broke and swirled about me.

With the onset of this new mode, the attendants on the steps performed incredible bodily contortions, twisting and weaving as sinuously as the coiling drifts of incense which enveloped me. I felt the glances upon me of numerous eyes. There followed a mime, a mute appeal in the cunning manual gestures formulated by the luminous orange glow which crowned the elongated incense cones held by the dancers.

My will was strained to its utmost as I strove to remain unaffected by the dumb imploring obscenities enacted before me. My mind threatened to snap beneath the pounding rhythms of the drums interpreted by the lascivious eloquence of the dancers. They descended the steps abruptly and advanced towards me with lewd undulations. Their breasts jutted aggressively, and the bells emitted cacophonies which suddenly jarred off-beat to the pipes and drums. Then, one she-devil mounted the platform and rolled and shook herself before me. Her mouth gaped, her tongue lolled; saliva drooled from a scarlet mouth fringed with sharpened teeth; her eyes were alight with indescribable lust, and the bells about her hips clashed discordantly as the drumbeats swelled to a maddening crescendo. On

the platform below, the figures writhed convulsively in mimic copulative gestures, brushing the plate-shaped leaves against the moist triangles at their loins.

A gong resounded and a silence fell in which its reverberations seemed to linger for an eternity. Kotavi suddenly appeared and drank of the fountain of life that gushed from me. Time and again the ritual was repeated, until I thought I must die of utter exhaustion. However, as she had virtually walled me up in the body, by forbidding egress through the astral window, I needed the relief which her vampirism provided. There was a sense of sudden detachment from my body; and, when Kotavi finally released it from the pillar, I was so numbed by the extremes of constriction and excess that I thought I had already died.

She led me to the idol in the shrine, where votive flame cast on the walls huge leaping shadows. It was mercifully covered in a glittering veil which suggested the iridescent scales of a fish. In a large shallow bowl I saw the crushed and pounded fragments of the leaves which the dancing girls had consecrated with vital balms. The bowl was now laid before the idol; and, dipping her fingers into it, Kotavi withdrew a portion of the moist mauve-hued puree, consumed it, and bade me do likewise. The sacrament was succulent and sweet, and filled me at once with tremendous vigour.

16

The nature of the ordeal through which I was passing required that I concentrate my mind upon the linear emblem of the idol, though not - under any pretext - using the window which it invariably evoked. I had so learned to control my mind that several times, on the verge of swooping to freedom

through the window, I had checked myself and continued to contemplate the complex lines and angles.

Kotavi then led me to her room, where I could stretch and ease my chafed and aching limbs on the cool satins of her couch. Here she disclosed to me many of the secrets of Tantra. The fifteen dancing girls had been specially selected and trained, for certain physiological peculiarities had qualified them as vehicles suitable for the magical powers which Kotavi conjured. Each girl, she explained, represented a digit of the moon. The moon, in Tantric sorcery, refers to the feminine cycle and its tides, as well as to the magnetic effluvia which can be induced to emanate from it. Kotavi's girls were rays of the moon of the 'dark fortnight', which was the time suited to magic. The rays had been concentrated in a compound unguent of mysterious virtue of which we both had partaken. The ordeal was to continue for fifteen nights, and on the sixteenth night a very special rite of culmination was to be performed.

I questioned Kotavi about the moonrays, but she replied guardedly, saying they were secrets of her ancient faith, and although Western scientists had isolated a few of them, they had no clue as to their real significance in an occult context. I gathered from her remarks that some of the rays possessed rejuvenating powers; and these, I suspected, were Kotavi's main concern. Indeed, I later learned that she was much older than she appeared, and that she had been living exclusively on these effluvia for many years, thus retaining the full vigour and glamour of youth which she certainly possessed in high degree.

"The women of the world", she said, "would give all their wealth without hesitation for the knowledge I could give them".

"So also", I replied excitedly, "there is doubtless an Elixir which might bestow the gift of poesy, as the Tantras hint?"

She eyed me darkly, and laughed.

"You are so stupid", she said. "In your male mind you are thinking one girl can give everlasting youth, another the gift of poesy, a third infinite wealth, a fourth ..."

She spat disgustedly: "It is not so simple. The process of mixing the unguents and fusing the rays is a great art, and the desired fluid is secreted only at certain phases of the physiological moon. Do not imagine you can abduct one of my retinue and - *hey prestol* - the miracle is wrought! Only destruction would come to you. Also," she went on, imperiously, "if you go with a woman outside the Circle during the remaining period of this ordeal, disaster will overtake us all."

Her glance was aflame with the threatening fearfulness I knew so well, for she sometimes turned it upon one or other of the girls during the rite, presumably if some error in procedure was imminent or had actually occurred.

"Soon you can rest", she said, "but remember, you use the window only at your own risk. In your present highly magnetized condition you would find it almost impossible to re-inhabit your physical body. Besides", she smiled fiercely, "I have placed a *dweller* on the other side. Such entities are ravenously thirsty! But now we must visit Urvashi; she will treat your bruises and prepare you for the next stage."

She took me to another room and left me at the threshold. On a white silk couch a dark and glistening body lay coiled like a snake. It uncoiled at my approach and I found myself looking into a savage yet beautiful face with the largest and dreamiest eyes I had ever seen. Urvashi smiled a slow, curling smile which revealed strong white teeth filed to a point, like Kotavi's. Encircling her wrists were heavy jewelled bangles; her hands were narrow and tapered to abnormally long fingers which gave to her arms a markedly simian appearance. She slithered from the couch to the floor in the final process of her uncoiling, and as she rose to her feet I noticed that her loins were sheathed in dark samite. She went to a table and poured me a glass of brandy, while I watched, fascinated by the sheer eloquence of her body's movements which put me in mind of the greater cats and their gluteal prowlings; of reptiles and their lazy undulations; of the swift movements of apes.

After I had drunk, and eaten candies which Urvashi placed one after another in my mouth, she unfastened my gown. She then slid on to the couch and placed her knees one on each side of my hips and began slowly to massage me with long, flexible fingers. Soon, life and vigour returned. She then saturated with brandy a wad of silk, which she applied to various bodily centres known to Tantrics in connection with magical practices. Afterwards, she administered to the sexual zones a friction of diluted *eau-de-cologne* and applied to the abdominal muscles a spray of *capsicum* in ether. I felt not only restored, but eager to engage in the next stage of the ordeal.

17

The opening of the mystical Eye in the mid-region of the forehead began to activate other subtle zones of my body. The *yantra* of the idol appeared to me vividly, a scintillating lattice-work, and I knew that the window also would open with the Eye. The desire to burst through it, to explode into the reaches beyond, became more and more difficult to resist.

I approached the window and saw in a mist the fast-fading features of my own reflection. The mirror slowly dissolved, and the attraction of the window increased with each passing moment. I approached yet closer, well aware of the compelling force that habitually sucked me into the whirling funnel, to disgorge me at last at the trysting place. I realized at that moment why I had failed all my life to locate the real source of poetic inspiration. When freedom from the body came I had given rein to its desires and zoomed downward, whereas I should have soared upward on wings of aspiration.

As I dallied on the brink of disaster, I sensed near me a presence from which I instantly recoiled. A grotesque and evil-looking mass was congealing outside the window, and malignant eyes glared into mine. It was the dweller on the threshold that Kotavi had placed there to seal off my only way of escape. With panic rising I turned from the abnormality without, and sought refuge in the region between waking and dreaming, into which Urvashi's ministrations had despatched me.

Kotavi's schemes became clear to me. Having successfully blocked egress from the head-centre, she wished me to exercise one of the other subtle zones. I vaguely remembered having seen, in Orgen's papers, a reference to a zone in the throat; and, further down, in the middle of the spine, on a level with the heart - another occult zone. But I did not know how to energize these zones, and I was hopelessly lost in uncharted seas of vibrant astral light. Soon afterwards, I hovered uncertainly in a twilight region of subconscious imagery extending back and down through fathomless depths of time; and in my panic I prayed sincerely, and with all the passionate longing which a child has for the mother it imagines it has lost forever.

Behind the bars of flickering light the watcher at the window chafed and prowled, and then a swift and blinding light obscured it. During this illumination a true initiation - or journey inward - occurred, and I was amazed that I had not previously seen the truths of certain things which now were plain to me. Kotavi's references to the moon, to the days of the dark fortnight, to the rejuvenatory power of certain elixirs and unguents, threw light at last on that obscure science, Alchemy. The literature of the subject, which is immense, is usually relegated to the limbo of the unintelligible. Now, however, I understood that its symbols were not symbols, and its signs were not signs, but literal facts relating to processes of psychophysiology of which the scientists of today are hardly aware. Through my association with Kotavi and the mysterious idol, through Orgen's papers, and through my own direct experiences, I realised that the transmutation of base metals into

gold may be applied at any level of consciousness. To the poet, for instance, the supremely evocative line is the veritable transmutation of human experience into the spiritual gold of everlasting beauty, which is Truth. I saw, at last, the possibility of unlimited poetic creativity, and the realization of an imaginative transcending of all finite modes of existence. I believe that at that moment I held the key to all mysteries.

But alas, that part of us which is compounded of tendencies and desires rises up to obfuscate all illuminations, and I found myself pulled back almost literally to immediate bodily consciousness. I decided that these high matters were not for me, and that should I apply myself to the study and rehabilitation of Alchemy, in the light of Tantra, I should but waste the precious gold I already possessed, latent but dynamic: my own poetic genius. I felt an acute yearning to have done with these occult matters; but there existed a profound bond between Kotavi and myself, a bond that was concentrated inexplicably in Orgen's doll.

But it was all taken out of my hands; for the very next day Kotavi announced, petulantly, that the rite would have to proceed for some days without her, as she lacked a vital ingredient; whether of information or *materia medica*, I did not inquire. She would fly to Madagascar and return as soon as possible. I told her I thought we were working Tantra, not Voodoo. She did not appreciate the jibe, but continued to issue orders. Urvashi would continue instructing the dancing girls, and I was free to use *Razamandal* and its spacious gardens, which at one point extended down to the sea. But I was on no account to enter the shrine-room.

"There is no need for outer activity now; Her mass is being served perpetually".

Casting me a look of contempt, though not without kindness, she said: "You may use Urvashi, and some of the girls, after your own paltry fashion. Urvashi will indicate those that are *tabu*".

"And why should some of them be *tabu*?"

She regarded me with an expression of exasperation:

"Because not all their needs are as gross as yours. But being a mere man, this you would not understand."

Then her expression changed again and she gave me a glance of genuine affection: "You are mere man, yes, but you also are the Guardian of a Flame which glows alone in the male aspect of the Mother, and if you could complete your initiation and *be* that flame, you would know what it is that blazes with such glory at the heart of the *yantra*. But, at present, the flame is hidden in a dancing form."

She kissed me very sweetly and I saw her wave farewell at the gates of *Razamandal*.

18

The immediate result of Kotavi's departure was that Urvashi became quite impossible. Playing with fire, as she did daily in the performance of her peculiar calling, she had magnetized herself to such a pitch of erotic desire that I lived in constant danger of assault; for beneath her practised tenderness and soft caresses she was savage and preternaturally cruel. I soon learned, for instance, that the candies with which she was always eager to ply me were potent aphrodisiacs which, while giving her every benefit, left me miserably depressed when their effects wore off.

Kotavi kept some large hounds at *Razamandal*, and Urvashi fed some of them with the sweets. I once saw her satisfy her insatiable hungers with one of her special favourites, which she had trained to her needs. One evening, when I knew she had amused herself in this way, she crept into my room whilst I was

trying to sleep and we had a violent quarrel, during which I threw her out.

I was sick of the whole set-up; it was like being locked up in a cage of monkeys. I soon discovered that most of the girls behaved in a similar fashion, using any and every means at their disposal to satisfy abnormal cravings generated by the constant stimulation of energies that were supposed to be diverted to other, less physical ends.

The weather was excessively hot, and I wanted to get away from an atmosphere I found unwholesome and vitiating; besides which, the clouds of pungent incense, which shrouded the house in stupefying veils of oppressive mysticism, were proving detrimental to my physical well-being. How I longed for the fresh tang of the sea, and the tranquillity of Covey Harl! Remembering that Kotavi had placed *Razamandel* at my disposal, I left the house with a few provisions and explored the private bay which lay a mile or so to the east. I got Urvashi to understand - how, I don't know - that I had some writing to do, and that I worked more efficiently out of doors; that if Kotavi returned before I did, she should send someone down to recall me.

The way led through delightful country, and a strong exhilaration swept through me as I thought with amusement of many reveries in which this tongue of mainland featured as a forbidden fruit suspended over green waters. I could see the crouching form of Languard Sweep quite clearly in the calm atmosphere. It was drenched in sunlight, and its white escarpment looked equally desirable from a new vantage point. Then the path descended steeply and gave way to rubble, tufts of coarse grass, and stunted trees waving ghostly branches against the glittering sea. A gull soared overhead and wheeled off to the north, the arc of its flight striking within me profound chords of nostalgia. Soon the ground dipped and rose again, all covered over in yellow grass. I wound down a narrow pathway which sloped off from the side of a cowl-shaped lip of land, which at this elevation seemed to hang over the sea, and found a long tubular cave over which the yellow grass did indeed seem to fit

as a monkish habit. The cave was cool and glistening, and little pools of liquid light flashed and flecked the oozing walls with dancing golden stripes. Soft plashings echoed hollowly as loose pebbles and lizards slipped into shining grottoes. The place was so exquisitely radiant, cool, and sombre, that I lay down with a sense of supreme peace and satisfaction.

A white and distant vessel quivered in rifts of noonday heat, and the occasional squeal of gulls percolated to the dark cavern's depths, which resounded intermittently with the crash and boom of breakers. Whilst I lay and lazed in happy contentment, I was seized unexpectedly with an abrupt onrush of poetic inspiration. I barely had time to snatch up my pad to catch the spate of images which flowed now with perfect ease. I must have covered ten or twenty sheets of paper before the current exhausted itself, and I too lay back exhausted, but exulting in the wave of joy which such activity brings.

I glanced unseeingly over the ocean; so abstractedly that my mind failed immediately to register the fact that a small boat had rounded the reef to the right of the cavern's mouth, and was heading for the bay. My instant reaction was one of irritation. I could not conceal myself in the cave; there were no rocks of sufficient size; nor, if the visitor lurked in the vicinity for any length of time, could I get out before the incoming tide flooded it. So I remained as I was, and virtually froze into stone. As the craft grounded, I saw Helga spring on to the sand and peer into the cave! Lovely as when I had first seen her, her hair had grown, and I noticed with amusement that even that grew the wrong way: so that what normally grows downward, in her sprang upward and slightly forward, lending her an elfin windblown appearance that was delightful - the more so that her ears peeped faunishly through the fleece, making even more pronounced the resemblance to the Deep Ones.

She confronted me with all the sunshine and freshness of the sea clinging to her. She exuded salt-tang drops of crystal which encrusted and bearded her in shivering icicles of molten

light. Her smile was like a benediction, so unutterably innocent and unsurprised. She wore beach clothes of green, as green as the deep. I cannot describe the impression of light which she conveyed, of the lustre she shed as she stood before me in splendid green-gold silence. Unlike any woman I had met, she radiated light as others emit rays of smoky darkness, like railway engines in a tunnel. She acted as a chink in the structure of things for admitting trans-spatial effulgence, and she was at that moment the living embodiment of Mallarme's wonderful line:

Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui.

As I had discovered the occult centre in the throat, and given voice to mighty verse, so Helga now energized that other centre in the heart, and it flowered into living light. But although these centres were clear, shining, and active now, it would not be for long. I was bound by enthrallment to my spectral brides. I would have to return to Kotavi; to the fiend who masqueraded in the dark green *cheong sam* of shimmering dragons; to Roma X, that unknown quantity in the formula of Desire; to the photistic radiations of an over-intensified practice of lust; to the luminous and decomposing ghosts of Women; to Lilith, not Eve; Hecate, not Helga. The words of Dali flashed into my mind:

Today I announce that all the new sexual allure of women will come from the possible utilization of their capacities and resources as ghosts, that is to say, their possible dissociation, their charnel and luminous decomposition.

But I knew that Helga could not help me, or I her; that I had slipped too far beneath the rim of the crater for her saving hand to reach me; and yet...

But Love is the key to all impossibilities, and my love for the Goddess - though tintured with my desire to celebrate in words Her ineffable splendour - was essentially pure and

incorruptible. The idol - my ideal image of Desire, my own doll - offered freedom, offered Helga; but I was bound by my own formula, self-committed to my own generations of a glamour, an illusion, a toy which played upon my nerves and senses with incessant, remorseless titillations of ever rising and subsiding desire. Like the sea, it heaved and swelled, abated, rolled on again, in constant ebb and flow; but it was always the tumescence and detumescence of restless, never satisfied desire. Desire as immense and as crushing as the ocean; desire, pulsing and breathing, whispering and thundering, night and day; desire that would ultimately sunder the final bulwarks, the inmost ramparts, till my soul lay naked and alone, unable anymore to create new images of lust.

In the light of Helga's presence I knew these things, and was overwhelmed with emotions that seemed alien and were yet not so, since they emanated from depths of me which truly adored the dreadful idol. Helga knew this. Our meeting was not by chance. I knew then that nothing could ever be that. And she was sad that she could not be Eve, cast as she was as Lilith to my Adam.

Already, her outer beauty was beginning to affect me. Like a machine, a worn-out automaton, my body reacted as a mechanical device to the feast she was spreading before me. It was almost with anguish that I gazed at her alluring lunar fullness as she prostrated towards the sea.

My real initiation came with that journey inward; and as we utilized the instruments of carnal pleasure and creation, I saw that the *yoni* which flowered before me - inverted as it was - was no other than the physical emblem of the mystical diagram I knew so well, yet always failed to know. In the heart of it, within the surrounding petals, reposed the treasured streams of nectar sacred to the Goddess. I remembered a verse of the *Vayu Purana*:

The gods become rich by drinking the fifteen streams of nectar which flow from the moon in the dark fortnight... all this is the illusion of the Goddess.

Now I had attained the centre; achieved the shrine. I was a dot of blinding, whirling, brilliance dancing within the innermost three angles of Sun, Moon, and Fire. I cannot write about the tenderness, the miracle of love which we knew, and the wonderful measure we danced as one image, before she went away.

She launched her craft swiftly, and was gone. She did not veer round the rock as she had done at her coming, but made straight for the open sea. I shrieked, I screamed, I implored her to turn back, until I had not the breath even to sob. I lay on the sands and watched the boat, now a tiny white leaf on the ocean, surrounded by wheeling gulls. Helga and the gulls. I wept. The water began lapping my feet with a threatening, oily turgidity. In the gentle incoming swell I saw an infinite blackness. When I had first seen Helga she had risen from the sea; she was truly of the deep ...

19

I suppose it is significant that I left the results of my poetic inspiration in Kotavi's cave. I was distraught with grief over Helga; the waves were swiftly encroaching; and in my confusion I left the papers behind. I thought of them, torn and scattered by the fierce onslaught, borne far out to sea to mingle their smooth washed whiteness with the reflected white wings of the gulls, and the white oblivion of Helga's green sleep.

The fact is, I wandered and raved like a madman on the yellow turf which cowed the cave; until, with the onset of dusk, I entered a new mood. Whether it was induced by the luminous atmosphere I do not know; but as the sky became suffused with a blush of roses that mingled with the lush and coppery green of the clouds, my agony was transmuted. I hurried on with the certain conviction

that Kotavi would return to *Razamandal* that evening, for the *Sodashi Rite* of the full moon was due to be performed.

I felt no anxiety now that I had animated the secret source of mystic utterance, and now that Helga had stirred the wheel of the heart. Whatever Kotavi's object in celebrating the rite, I had no doubt as to my own. The knowledge of this certainty quickened within me, and I was literally transported with ecstasy. My feet barely touched the yellow stubble, nor did they feel any sharpness in the occasional teeth of rock jutting through earth. I advanced as if floating astrally, yet still attached physically to the body; or perhaps the queer moods and storms of the past few hours had modified the molecular structure of my vehicles and rendered the physical body weightless. Such is said to occur in the case of the *lung gompas* of Tibet, who travel a few inches above the snowy terrain with superhuman velocity. And this state of astrophysical awareness persisted right through the night, so that I was conscious of all states of being through the network of nerves which ramified and interrelated the subtle and physical bodies.

Lashed to the upright post, which was the Lingam of Mahadeva, I experienced no pain, no discomfort even; and although the wiles of the idol's dancing girls wove an arabesque of dreams about me, they did not stimulate or excite. But no doubt Kotavi intended that this should be so.

On my return to *Razamandal*, one thing only disturbed me; it was the sullen and smouldering anger I noticed in Urvashi's eyes as she slunk into position on the northerly petal of the circle enclosing the fifteen angles. I knew that the eight members of this great flower were selected for qualities such as gentleness, sweetness, ferocity, purity, and so on, and I supposed that Urvashi fulfilled a necessary office by virtue of her savagery and lust. The various qualities modified and regulated the flow of nectar in any given attendant: just as anger, hate, and other violent emotions in the ordinary mortal temporarily alter his physiological chemistry, so that poisons or balms are released

into his system according to his prevailing mood. I therefore dismissed Urvashi's temper as normal, under the circumstances.

Kotavi herself was effulgent. I had never seen her so exultant; she literally dazzled with her fervour. I swear that actual rays of light flashed from her during some stages of the rite. And at such times I would notice an answering nicker and upleaping of flame in the brazier before the idol.

In the billowing incense, shapes shifted and dissolved and then re-coagulated in massive swirling formations resembling fabulous monsters, such as those depicted on the sacred banners in Tibetan temples. And I swear also that these smoke-dreams sometimes put on more smoke; that a discharge of plasma, or some subtler fabric, was ejected at certain stages of the worship; so that actual - though partially formed - limbs and faces glowed and darkled in the mist. I particularly noticed such shadowy manifestations when, behind the wailing pipe and the vibrant drum, the crash of a gong disrupted the rhythm, as if marking significant stages in the ritual. And once I saw a form, almost complete, of absolute glamour and seductiveness. It hung high above Kotavi, between the apex of the pyramid and the sacred shrine; and it was white and limpid: excessively white, just as Roma was white, with an awful pallor, unearthly. A moment later, the vision vanished; the form of it seemed to be dispersed, after the fashion of a silk scarf pulled through a finger-ring; then it, too, seemed to pass into a dark region of the shrine, made yet darker by the leaping flame which danced perpetually before it.

At this juncture I sensed that Kotavi was displeased. Some flaw in the performance was causing the constant dissolution of the images which, I supposed, she intended fixing and stabilising.

I was wearing a voluminous gown of heavy material, and I began to feel faint with heat, and the pungency of stupefying incense. This fact, more than anything, brought me to my senses in a very literal manner. Kotavi had warned me not to fail in keeping before my inner vision the mystical diagram, the one

raised in relief on the ground before me, vitalized with alluring emissaries of the Goddess. I bent my energies to this end and, almost instantly, a change in the rhythm became apparent as I allowed my mind to wander in the labyrinth of lines and angles forming the idol's linear expression. With a thunder of gongs that reverberated, throbbed, and crashed as great sea-waves booming behind the sharper beat of drums, the whirling figures in the circle came to an abrupt halt. It was as if all were suddenly petrified, caught in the last weird gestures of the dance, with hands bent, eyes aslant or glaring wildly; hips crooked, tongues lolling and breasts jutting; a crazy frieze of frenzy frozen into silence. *And all eyes were fixed on me.*

I strove to keep the mental image firm; it had blazed and pulsed in unison with the fiery palpitation of the head-centre; and, like a vast door, it opened inwards so that I was suddenly impelled into the *yantra*, surrounded by the circle and the tiers of gleaming eyes. By some mode of bilocal magic quite indescribable, I was now playing an active part in the rite, at the heart of the mystery, with Kotavi beside me. And before the full realization of it had dawned on me, the dance was resumed, and flying figures whirled and reeled about me, tearing and rending my robe until I stood naked and glistening with a peculiar sweat that exuded a pungent though not unpleasant scent. It was a sweet animal scent such as one might associate with the greater cats.

Before me towered Kotavi, and I saw her brandish Orgen's knife in wheeling circles above her head, her eyes blazing with a light before which I quailed. Then I was stretched out on a block, lying on the ultimate step of the pyramid. I felt Kotavi slash the cords which bound me, as she mounted the block and possessed me. Absurdly, all I noticed externally was a coil of her hair which she had dyed a naked and obscene pink, dangling over one shoulder like a bull's pizzle. Then I saw wheels of light, and blinding flashes of colour blossomed within me. I tried to extrude through the head-centre, but Kotavi had blocked egress and, by occult means, effectually had sealed it

Likewise with the throat: no word would come; no, not a word, nor *the* Word, the mystic speech that I longed to utter. Likewise the heart. Helga's image burst upon me and receded like a lightning-flash. Kotavi had sealed that, too. She was forcing me down, pressing down the thread of light in the spine: down, down, until it entered and united with the phallic fire.

In the turbulence of this implosion none noticed Urvashi who, maddened with jealousy, was laying about her with the flaming brand snatched out of the brazier. The girls screamed and choked with terror, and the cacophony of the pipes, gongs, and drums rose to a crescendo which disintegrated the last remnants of reason.

Exultantly Kotavi rode me, lashing me to the very limits of desire until I knew I must explode within the dark tunnel of her mysteries. But she had not triumphed. Even as I burst within her, she knew the moment of failure, for I had done that against which she had warned me - with Helga.

With fiendish ingenuity, Kotavi had robbed me of my fire, my sun, my very life, and I was *not*; I was a waving, reeling, dancing form, all black and glistening, filled with fire and frenzy, brandishing an oriental knife with which I cut, and hacked, and slashed at the inert form which lay palely stretched beneath my feet, and which used to be mine. There it lay, an inchoate fluid mass of primal plasm, a shifting cloud, ever moving, ever flowing, ever breathing - like a sleeping breather ...

And I gave voice at the last: "Get up and dance! Dance, damn you", I screamed; "Dance, doll, dance!".

Epilogue

The sole object to survive the conflagration, which Urvashi had caused, was a lump of metal which the furnace heat had twisted into grotesque shapes resembling a creature of pre-aval chaos, grinning and saltant.

