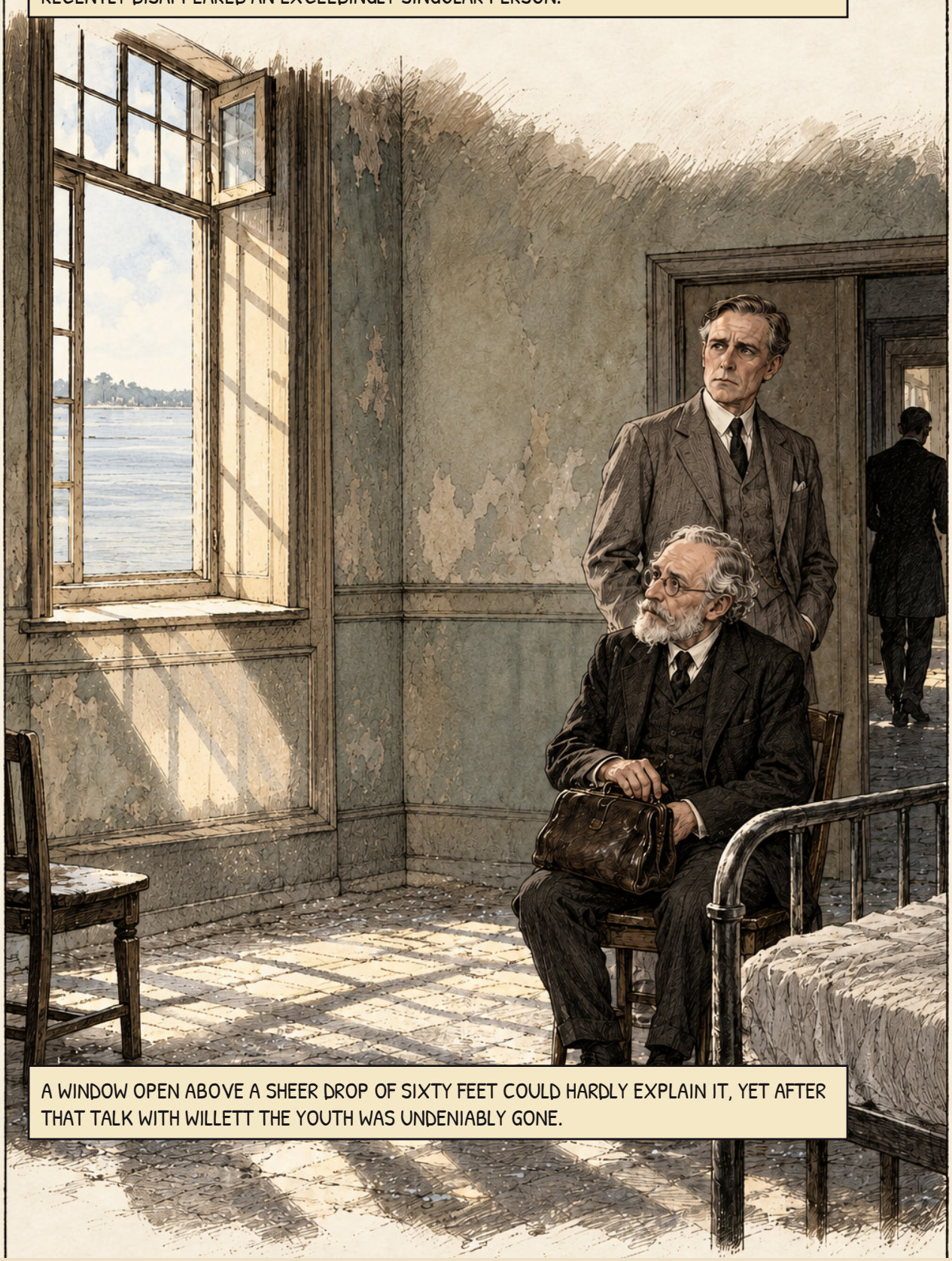
THE CASE OF CHARLES DEXTER WARD



THE PATIENT HAD LOST MEMORIES, HANDWRITING, EVEN THE FAMILIAR MARKS OF HIS BODY.



YET HIS KNOWLEDGE OF VANISHED CENTURIES WAS TERRIFYINGLY PRECISE.




BEFORE THE CHANGE, CHARLES WAS A GENTLE ANTIQUARIAN, HAPPIEST AMONG PROVIDENCE'S OLD STREETS.
HE PURSUED THE PAST UNTIL IT SEEMED NEARER THAN THE LIFE AROUND HIM.
IN 1918, A FAMILY RECORD GAVE HIS CURIOSITY A NAME.

SOMEONE HAD PASTED TWO PAGES TOGETHER TO CONCEAL AN ANCESTOR: JOSEPH CURWEN.



THE FAMILY HAD TAKEN EXTRAORDINARY PAINS TO FORGET HIM. CHARLES RESOLVED TO DISCOVER WHY.



CURWEN CAME FROM SALEM IN 1692, WHEN ACCUSATIONS OF WITCHCRAFT MADE DEPARTURE PRUDENT.



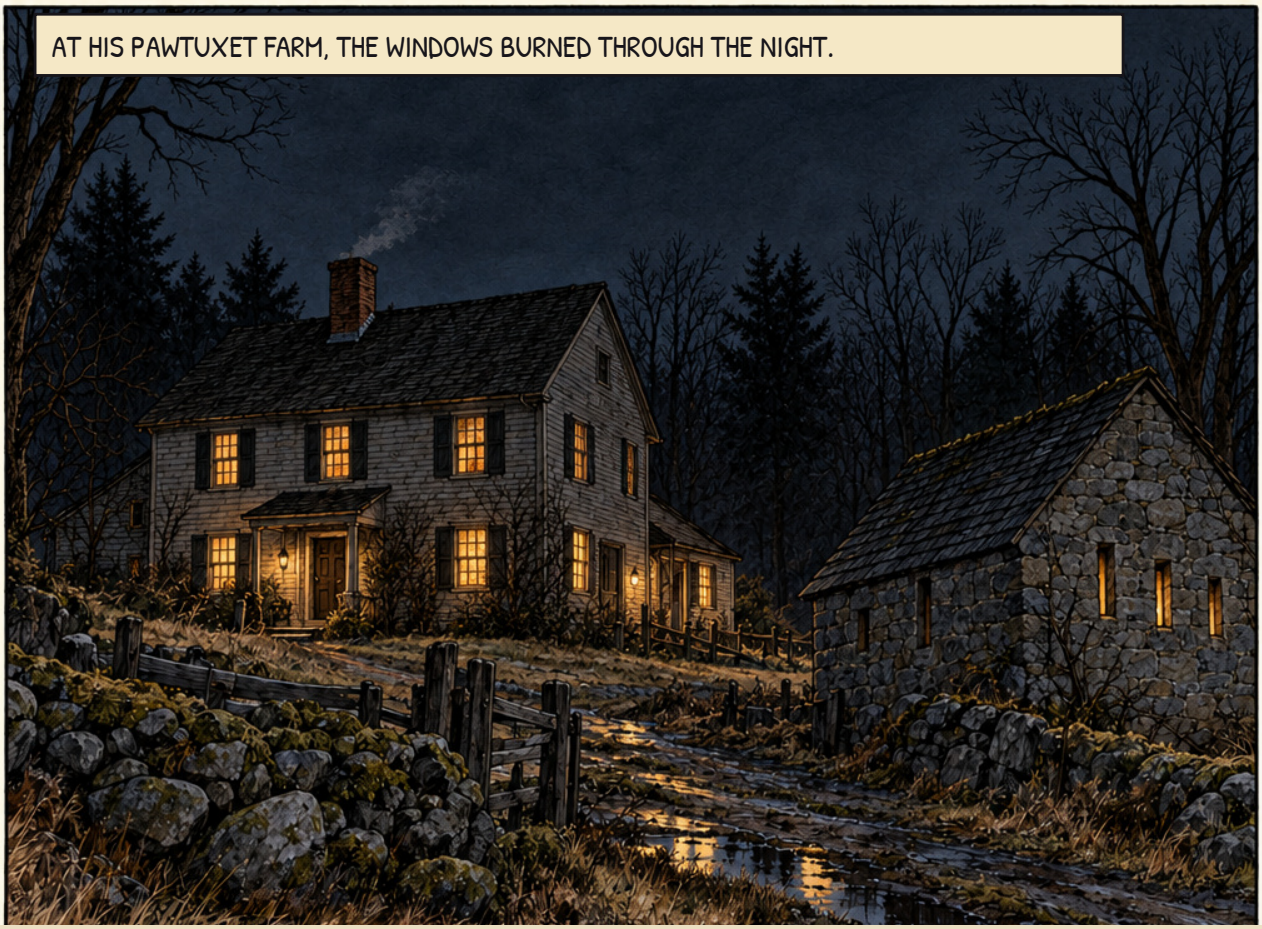
DECADES PASSED. HIS BUSINESS PROSPERED. HIS FACE SCARCELY CHANGED.



HE TRADED WIDELY, GAVE GENEROUSLY, AND KEPT HIS NEIGHBOURS AT A DISTANCE.



AT HIS PAWTUXET FARM, THE WINDOWS BURNED THROUGH THE NIGHT.



THERE WERE CHEMICALS, STRANGE BOOKS, AND QUESTIONS NO ORDINARY SCHOLAR ASKED.



GRAVES WERE DISTURBED.



SAILORS AND ENSLAVED PEOPLE DISAPPEARED. FROM THE FARM CAME VOICES PLEADING IN UNFAMILIAR TONGUES.



IN 1746, JOHN MERRITT FOUND A MARKED PASSAGE IN BORELLUS.

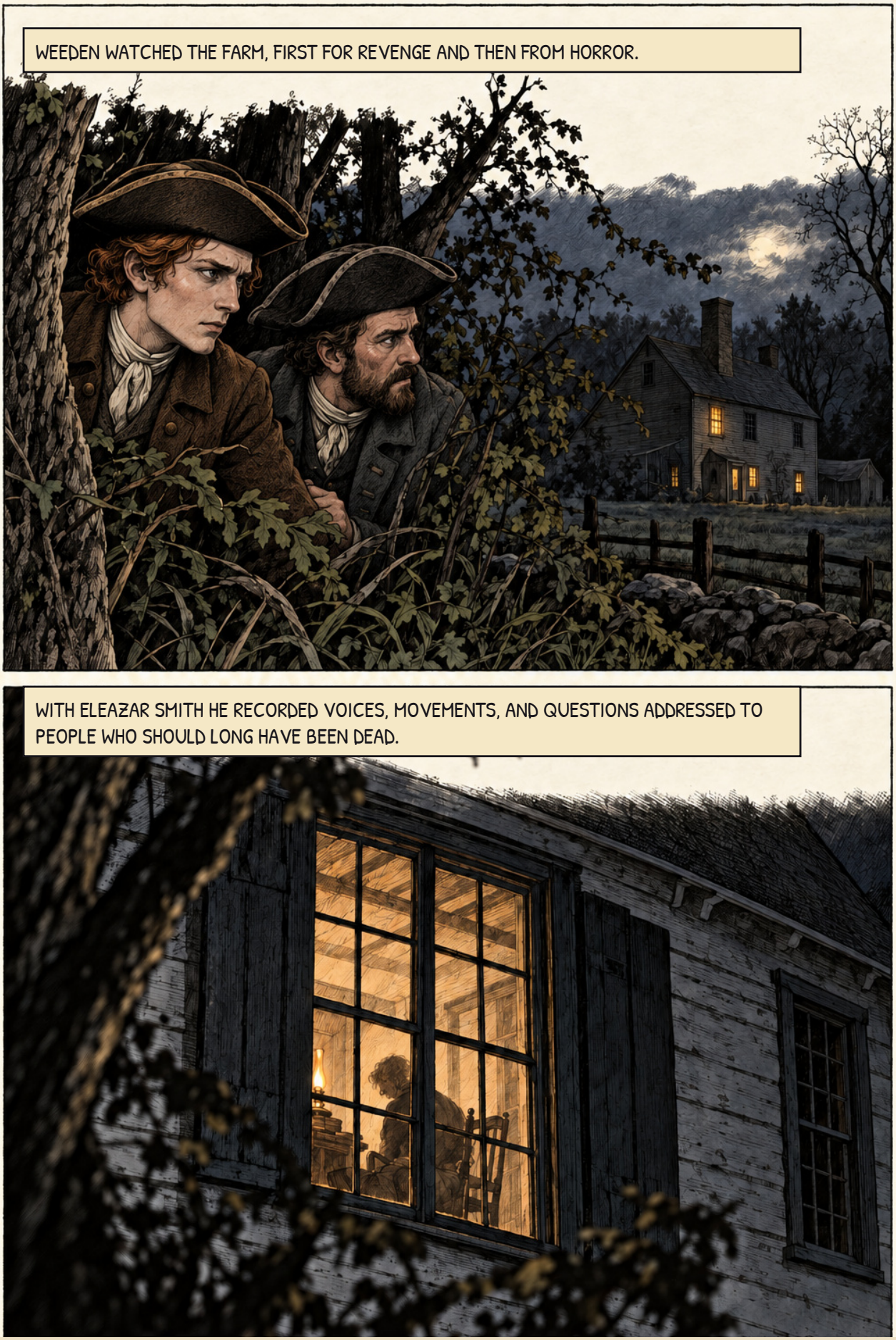


FROM A CREATURE'S ESSENTIAL SALTS, IT CLAIMED, THE CREATURE MIGHT BE CALLED UP AGAIN.

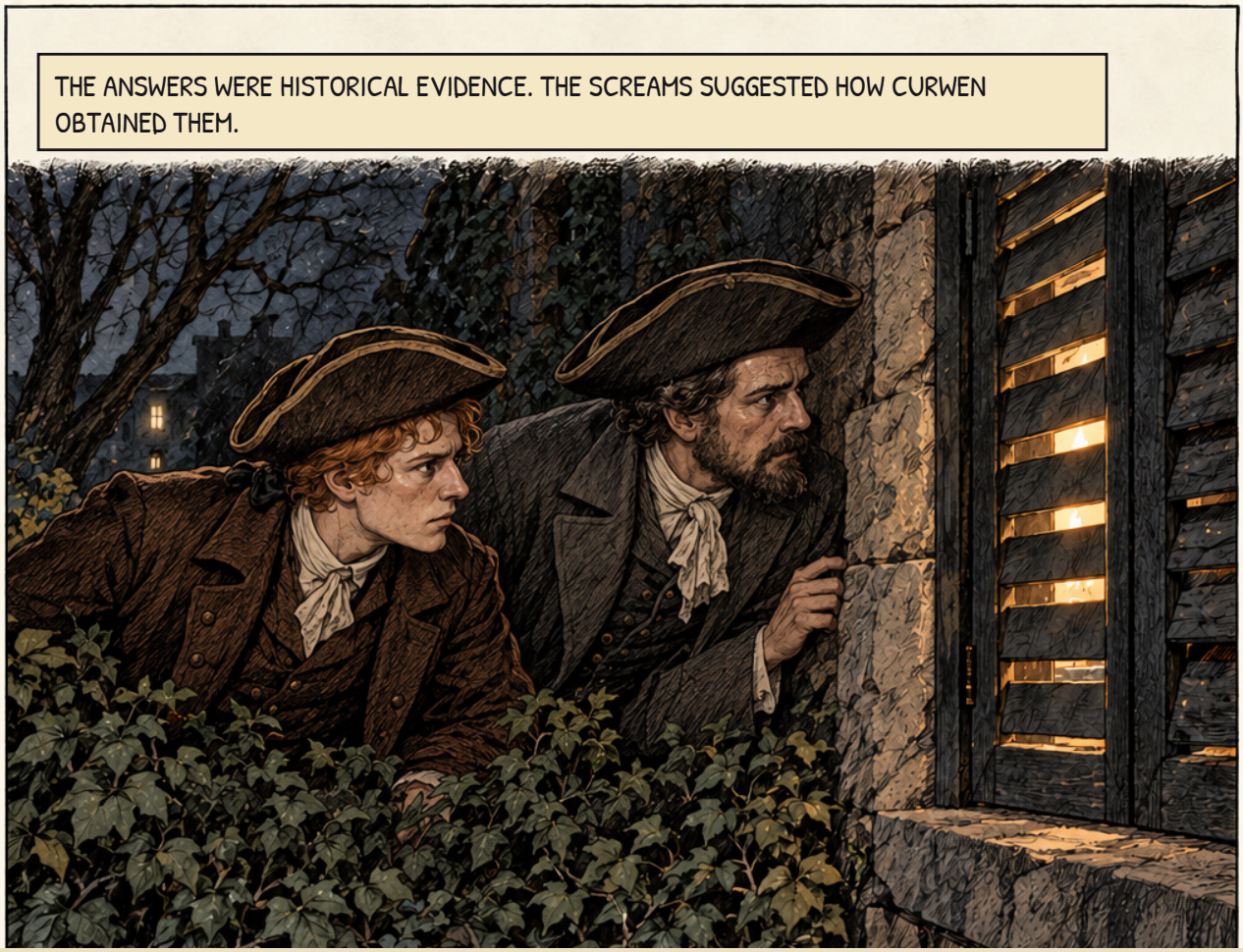



IN 1763 CURWEN MARRIED ELIZA TILLINGHAST, WHOSE FATHER DEPENDED ON HIM. HER ENGAGEMENT TO EZRA WEEDEN WAS BROKEN.


TWO YEARS LATER THERE WAS A DAUGHTER—AND A PORTRAIT WHOSE LIKENESS WOULD TROUBLE ANOTHER CENTURY.


WEEDEN WATCHED THE FARM, FIRST FOR REVENGE AND THEN FROM HORROR.
WITH ELEAZAR SMITH HE RECORDED VOICES, MOVEMENTS, AND QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO PEOPLE WHO SHOULD LONG HAVE BEEN DEAD.


YOU WERE AT LIMOGES? TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE BLACK PRINCE ENTERED.


THE ANSWERS WERE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE. THE SCREAMS SUGGESTED HOW CURWEN OBTAINED THEM.


HIS CORRESPONDENTS, SIMON ORNE AND EDWARD HUTCHINSON, PURSUED THE SAME RESEARCHES.
I SAY TO YOU AGAINE, DOE NOT CALL UP ANY THAT YOU CAN NOT PUT DOWNE...

IN JANUARY 1771, A BODY WAS FOUND NEAR THE BRIDGE.



ITS FACE RESEMBLED A BLACKSMITH BURIED FIFTY YEARS BEFORE. ITS INWARD STRUCTURE WAS STRANGER STILL.



A PRIVATE EXPEDITION ASSEMBLED UNDER TRUSTED TOWN LEADERS.



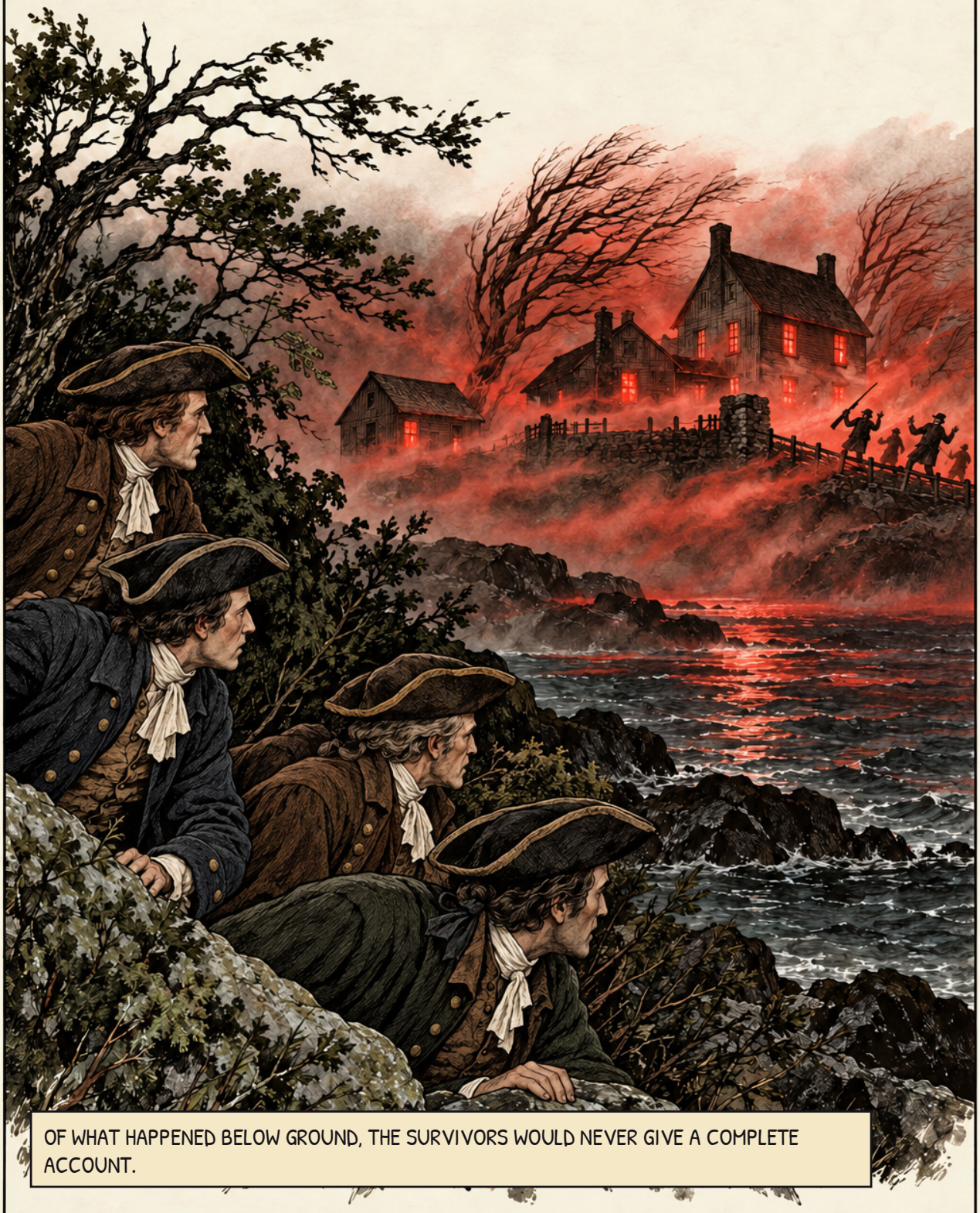
ON APRIL 12, NEARLY A HUNDRED MEN MOVED AGAINST THE FARM.



THEY APPROACHED THE HOUSE, THE STONE BUILDING, AND A HIDDEN DOOR BY THE RIVER.



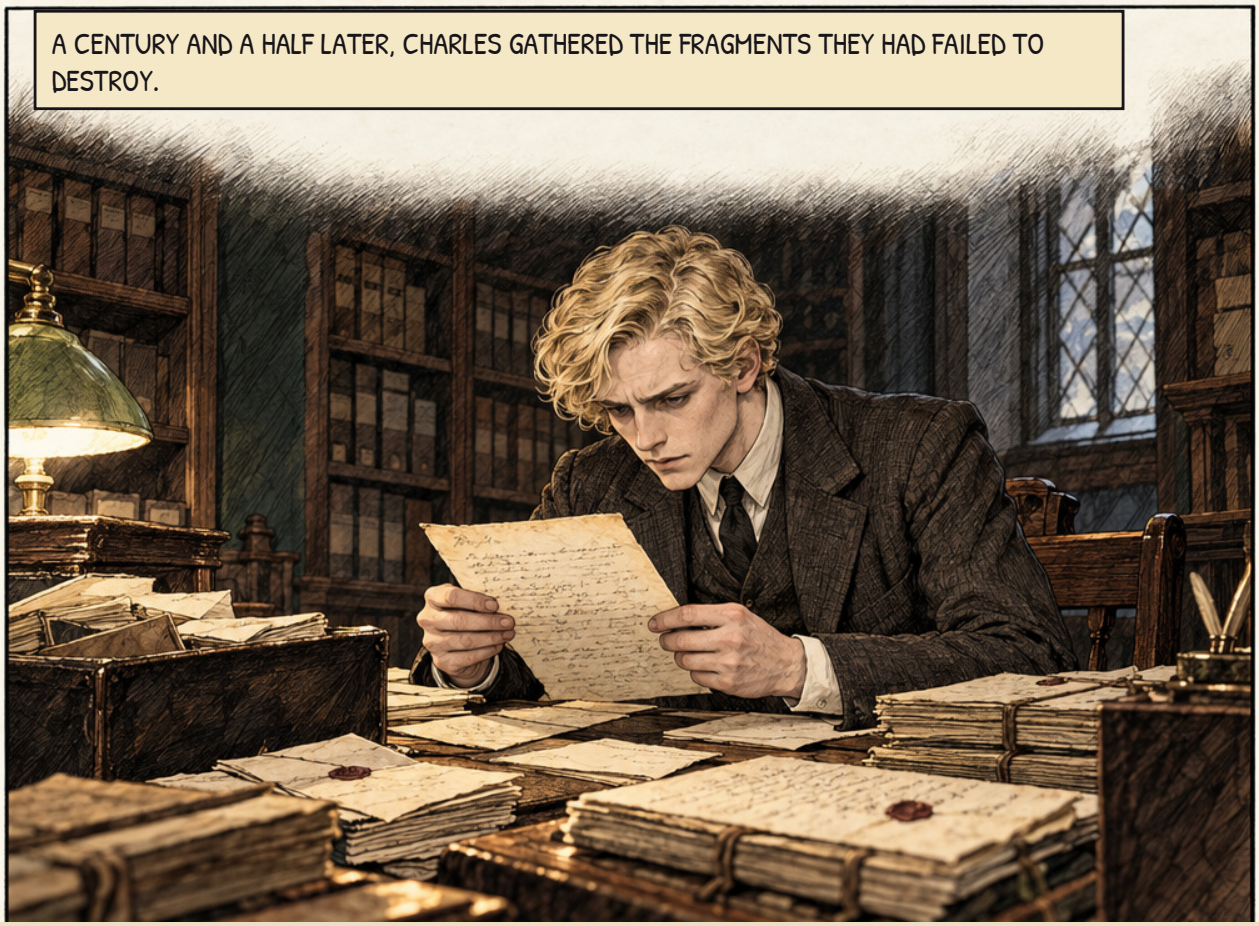
THOSE LEFT OUTSIDE HEARD GUNFIRE, CHANTING, AND SOUNDS NO HUMAN THROAT SHOULD HAVE MADE.



OF WHAT HAPPENED BELOW GROUND, THE SURVIVORS WOULD NEVER GIVE A COMPLETE ACCOUNT.


EIGHT MEN HAD DIED. CURWEN WAS DEAD TOO—OR SO THEY BELIEVED.
HIS COFFIN WAS SEALED. HIS PAPERS WERE BURNED. HIS NAME WAS STRUCK FROM RECORDS.


THE ERASURE WAS IMPERFECT.

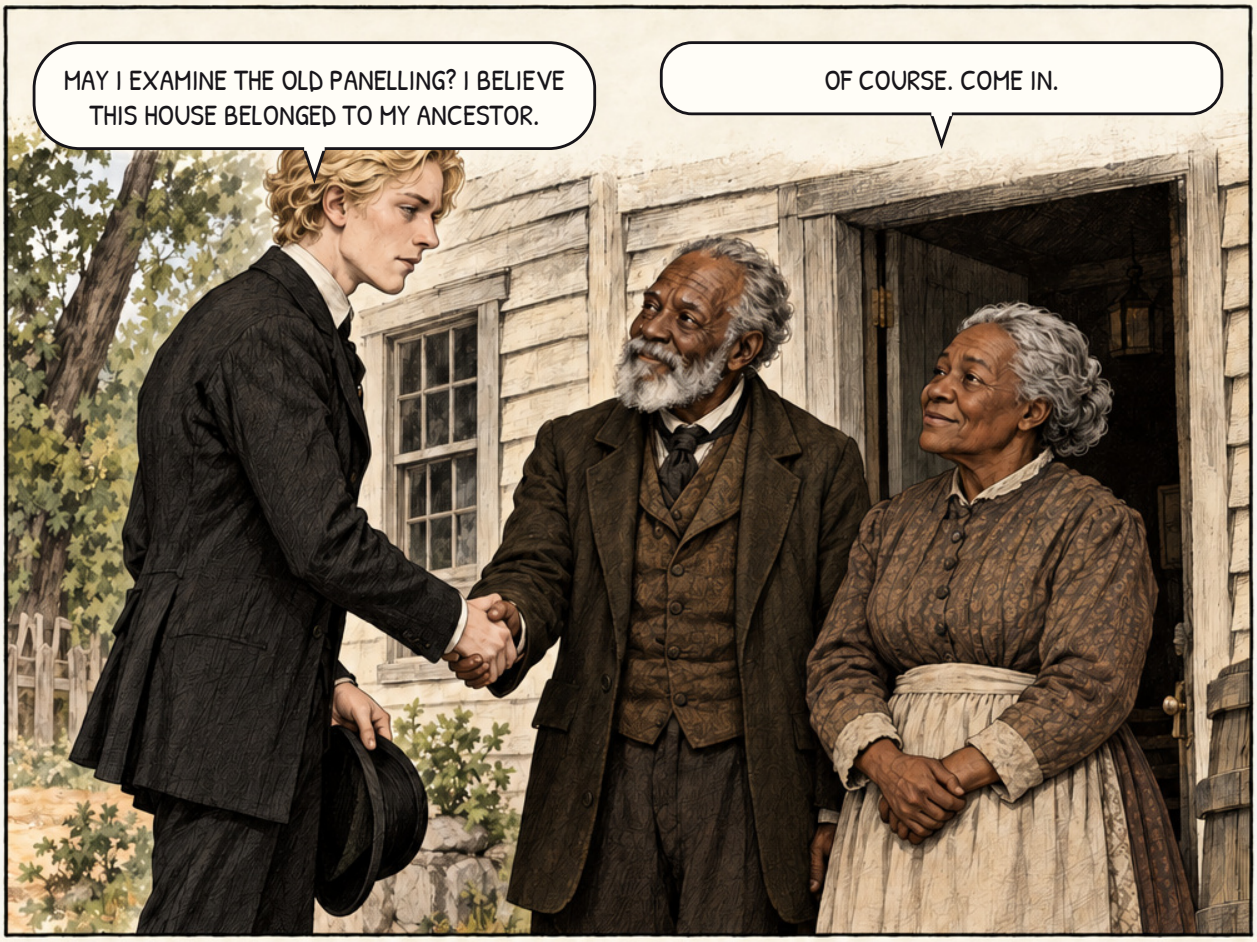

A CENTURY AND A HALF LATER, CHARLES GATHERED THE FRAGMENTS THEY HAD FAILED TO DESTROY.

ONE LETTER SPOKE OF INFLUENCES LAID UPON THE FUTURE, AND A DESCENDANT WHO WOULD LOOK BACKWARD.



CURWEN HAD PLANNED FOR A TIME BEYOND HIS OWN DEATH.




MAY I EXAMINE THE OLD PANELLING? I BELIEVE THIS HOUSE BELONGED TO MY ANCESTOR.
OF COURSE. COME IN.


BENEATH LATER PAINT, A PORTRAIT EMERGED.

THE FACE WAS HIS OWN.



ONLY A SMALL PIT ABOVE THE PAINTED MAN'S RIGHT EYE DISTINGUISHED ANCESTOR FROM DESCENDANT.

ON AUGUST 28, 1919, WORKMEN REMOVED THE PORTRAIT AND ITS SURROUNDING PANELLING.



BEHIND THE HEAD LAY A JOURNAL, LETTERS, A CIPHER—AND INSTRUCTIONS ADDRESSED TO WHOEVER SHOULD COME AFTER.




CHARLES KEPT THE PAPERS SECRET AND INSTALLED THE PORTRAIT IN HIS LIBRARY.


HIS MOTHER HATED IT. THE PAINTED EYES SEEMED TO FOLLOW HIM.

BY JANUARY 1920 HE HAD DECIPHERED THE JOURNAL.



COLLEGE COULD WAIT. THIS WORK, HE BELIEVED, WOULD CHANGE KNOWLEDGE ITSELF.



A LABORATORY APPEARED IN THE ATTIC.



HE SEARCHED FOR CURWEN'S GRAVE IN OLD BURIAL RECORDS.



CHARLES, WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND? YOU CANNOT KEEP THIS FROM US FOREVER.

I WILL EXPLAIN, DOCTOR. WHEN THE WORK IS COMPLETE, YOU WILL UNDERSTAND.



AT TWENTY-ONE, CHARLES USED HIS INHERITANCE TO CONTINUE THE SEARCH ABROAD.



LIBRARIES WERE ONLY THE BEGINNING.



IN PRAGUE HE CONSULTED AN OLD MAN WHOSE LEARNING SEEMED INEXHAUSTIBLE.



HIS HOST KNEW THINGS NO BOOK COULD HAVE PRESERVED.



THEN CAME A LONG STAY AT CASTLE FERENCZY, IN THE MOUNTAINS BEYOND RAKUS.



HIS PARENTS WERE DISCOURAGED FROM VISITING. THE LETTERS HOME EXPLAINED VERY LITTLE.

HE RETURNED IN MAY 1926 AND SHUT HIMSELF AMONG HIS BOOKS AND CHEMICALS.



AT NIGHT THE HOUSE FILLED WITH STRANGE ODOURS, AND SOMETIMES WITH A MEASURED CHANTING.



ONE WINTER NIGHT A STORM BROKE AS THE CHANTING ROSE.



AFTERWARD CHARLES APPEARED EXULTANT. SOME STAGE OF HIS WORK HAD SUCCEEDED.



IN MARCH, A MIDNIGHT EXCAVATION DISTURBED AN OLD BURIAL LOT.



A LEADEN COFFIN WAS CARRIED INTO THE HOUSE. CHARLES DESTROYED THE NEWSPAPER ACCOUNT BEFORE HIS PARENTS COULD READ IT.




ON GOOD FRIDAY, THE INCANTATION ROSE FOR HOURS.
THEN A SECOND VOICE ANSWERED FROM THE LOCKED ATTIC—DEEP, POWERFUL, AND HORRIBLY ALIVE.

HIS FATHER HEARD AN ARGUMENT WHERE ONLY ONE MAN SHOULD HAVE BEEN.





THE PORTRAIT DECAYED INTO DUST.



MEANWHILE CHARLES REMOVED MODERN REFERENCE BOOKS FROM HIS LIBRARY, AS THOUGH SOMEONE UPSTAIRS HAD MUCH TO LEARN.



CHARLES GREW PALE AND HUNTED. BEHIND THE LOCKED DOOR, QUARRELS CONTINUED.





IN JUNE, A SERVANT SAW CHARLES LEAVE WITH A SUITCASE.



AT ALMOST THE SAME MOMENT, HIS MOTHER HEARD HIM SOBBING UPSTAIRS.



EZRA WEEDEN'S GRAVE WAS VIOLATED, ITS STONE SHATTERED.



THEN BEGAN THE ATTACKS: A LEAPING FIGURE, A GRIP AT THE THROAT, AND VICTIMS DRAINED OF BLOOD.




YOU NEED REST, MRS. WARD. A STAY BY THE SEA WILL HELP.
BUT WHAT IS HAPPENING TO CHARLES?


CHARLES WAS WASTING AWAY TOO. WHATEVER STALKED THE STREETS, THE DOCTOR COULD NOT BELIEVE IT WAS HIS PATIENT.

CHARLES BOUGHT A BUNGALOW ABOVE THE PAWTUXET RIVER AND MOVED HIS LABORATORY THERE AT NIGHT.



THE SITE HAD ONCE BELONGED TO JOSEPH CURWEN.



TWO COMPANIONS JOINED HIM: A SERVANT, TONY GOMES, AND THE BEARDED, SPECTACLED DR. ALLEN.



THE HOUSEHOLD ORDERED ASTONISHING QUANTITIES OF MEAT AND BLOOD.



NEIGHBOURS HEARD CHANTING AND CRIES FROM SOMEWHERE BENEATH THE HOUSE.



IN JANUARY, THIEVES INTERCEPTED A SHIPMENT MEANT FOR THE BUNGALOW.



WHAT THEY FOUND BROUGHT STATE AND FEDERAL OFFICIALS TO THE DOOR.




HE ORDERED SPECIMENS FOR RESEARCH. NEITHER OF US KNEW WHOSE REMAINS HAD BEEN SUPPLIED.


THE CONTENTS WERE QUIETLY RESTORED. THE PUBLIC NEVER LEARNED WHOSE REMAINS HAD BEEN TAKEN.

ON FEBRUARY 8, CHARLES WROTE TO WILLETT. THERE WOULD BE NO TRIUMPH—ONLY A PLEA FOR HELP.



HE HAD LEFT PAWTUXET FOREVER. EVERYTHING THERE MUST BE DESTROYED, ALIVE OR DEAD.



HE WARNED WILLETT NOT TO BELIEVE ANY REPORT THAT HE HAD RETURNED TO THE BUNGALOW.



THE POSTSCRIPT ORDERED DR. ALLEN SHOT ON SIGHT, AND HIS BODY DISSOLVED IN ACID.




I AM EXHAUSTED. PLEASE POSTPONE ANY DECISION UNTIL WE CAN ARRANGE A COMPROMISE.


AT ABOUT ONE, A FIGURE THE GUARDS TOOK FOR CHARLES ENTERED THE HOUSE. NO ONE HAD SEEN HIM LEAVE.

A CRY CAME FROM THE LIBRARY, THEN A CHOKING SOUND.



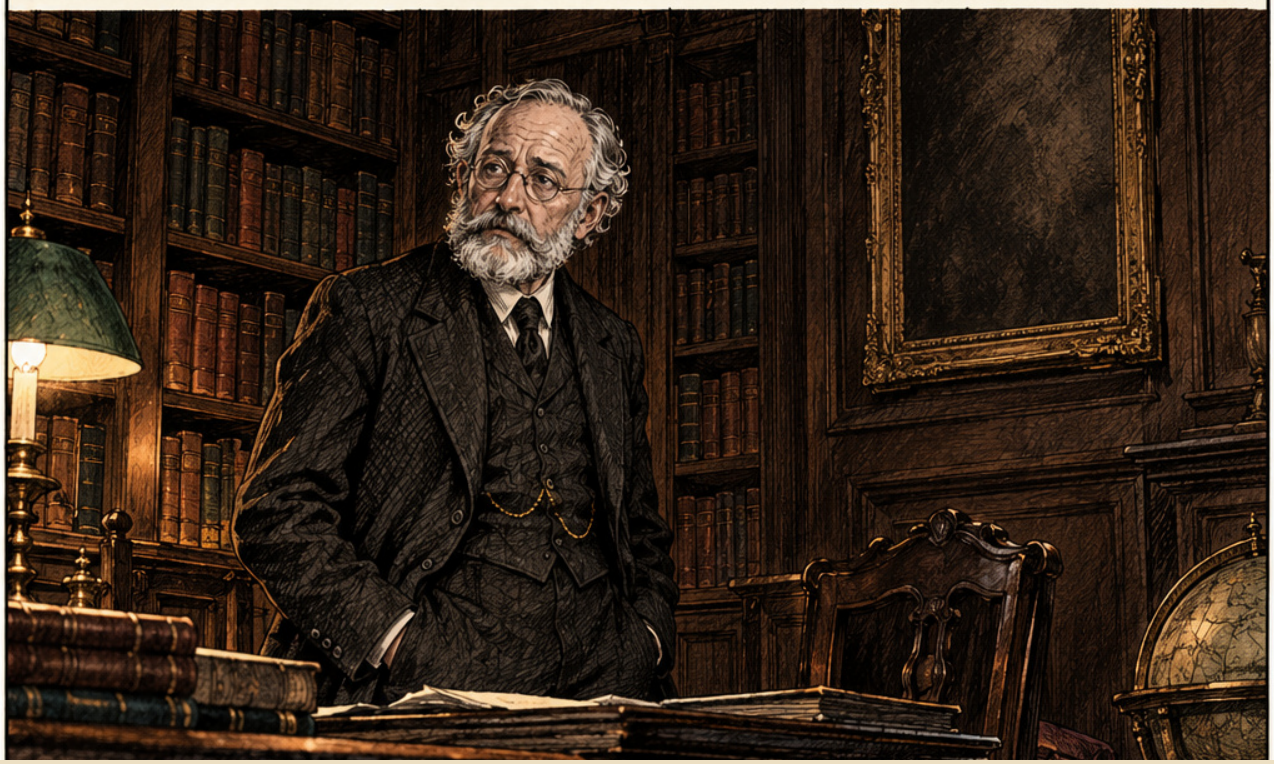
WHEN THE SERVANT APPROACHED, THE YOUNG MAN DISMISSED HIM WITH A GESTURE THAT CHILLED HIM.



THERE WAS A SOUND OF HEAVY FURNITURE BEING MOVED. THEN CHARLES—OR THE MAN WHO LOOKED LIKE HIM—WENT OUT.



WILLETT ARRIVED AT FOUR AND WAITED IN VAIN.

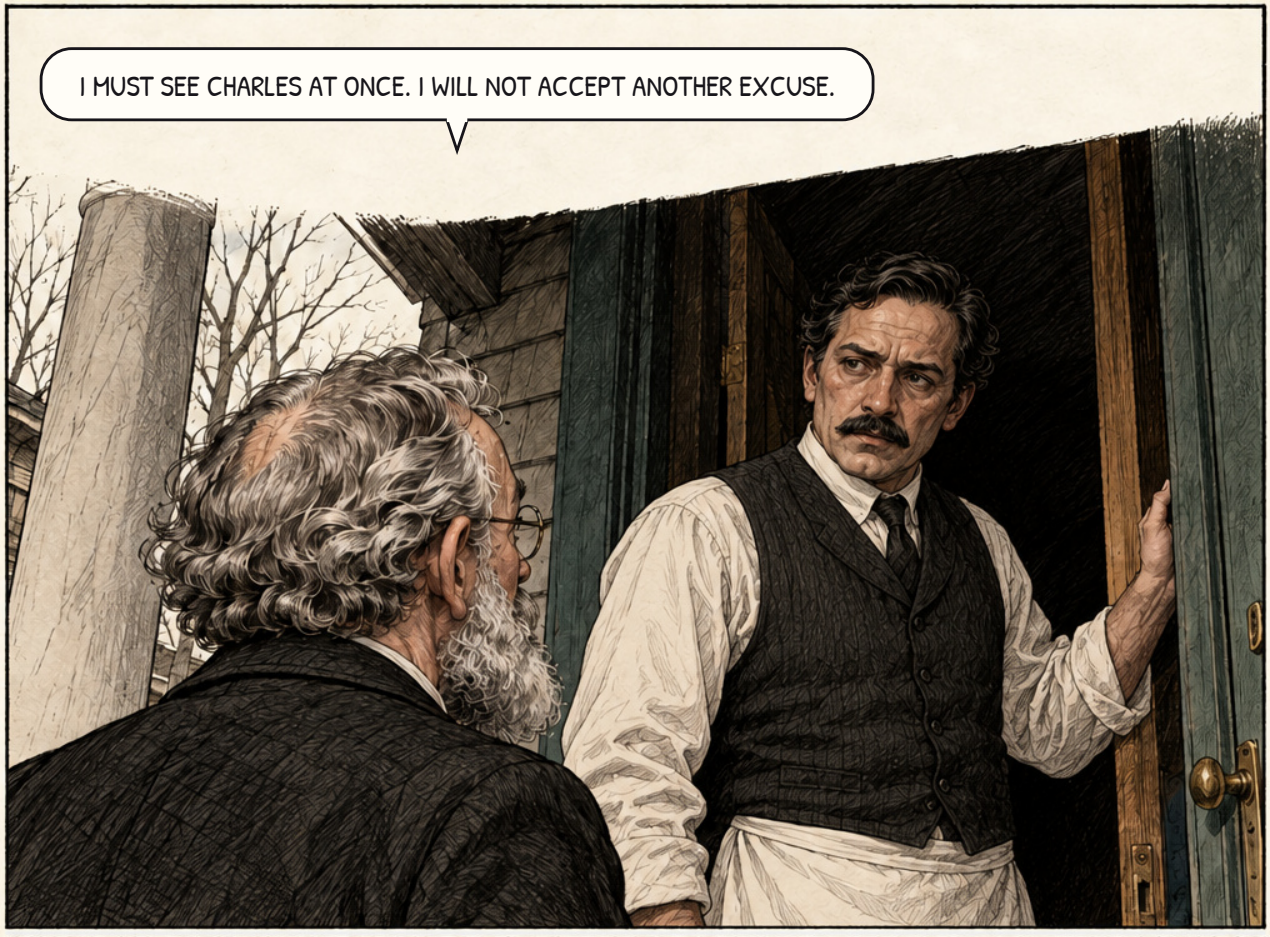


NEXT DAY, DR. ALLEN TELEPHONED. CHARLES WOULD REMAIN AT PAWTUXET; ALLEN HIMSELF HAD BEEN CALLED AWAY.



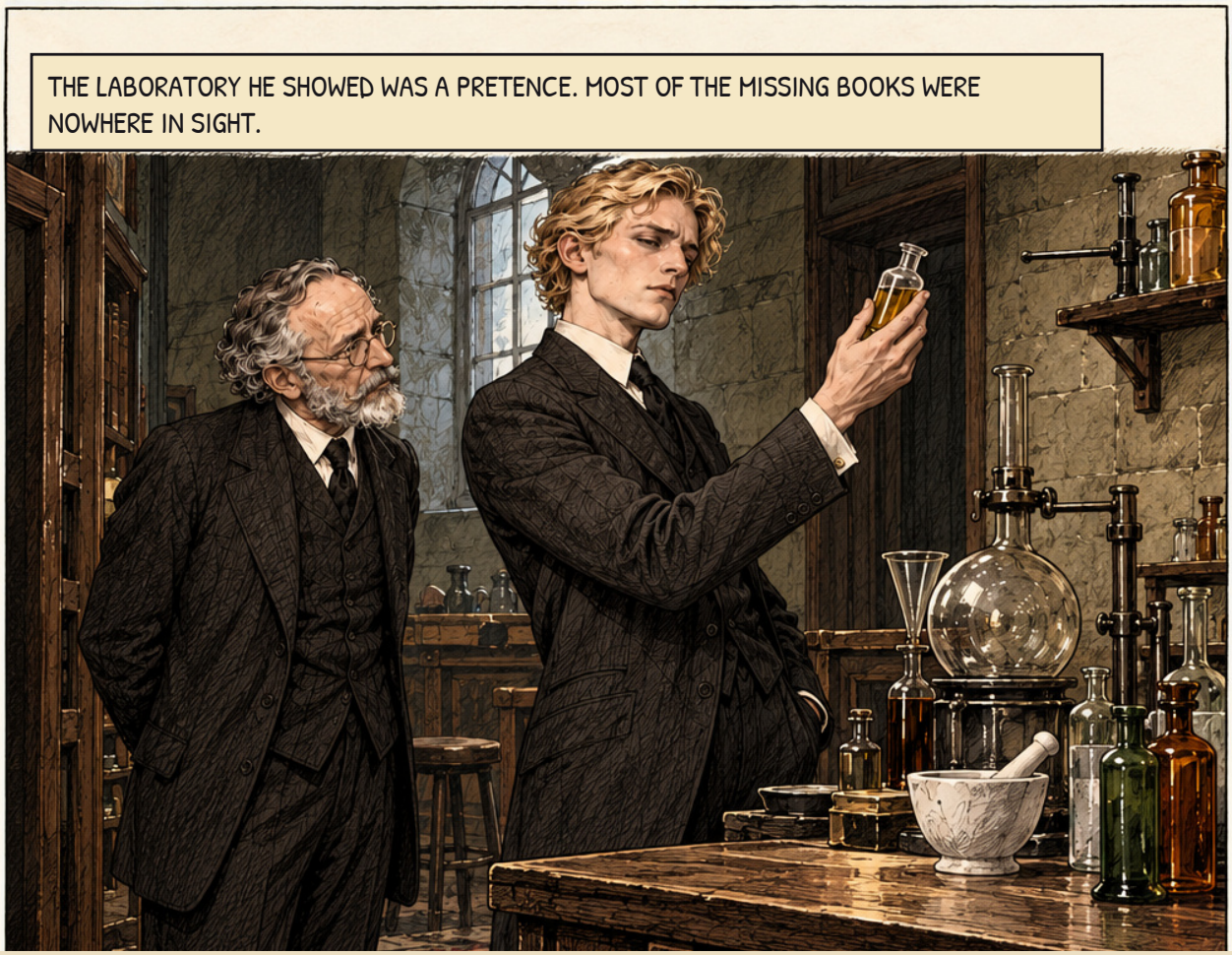
THE NOTES THAT FOLLOWED WERE TYPED. THEIR LANGUAGE WAS STRANGELY OLD-FASHIONED.




I MUST SEE CHARLES AT ONCE. I WILL NOT ACCEPT ANOTHER EXCUSE.


LET HIM IN, TONY. WE MAY AS WELL SPEAK NOW.


YOU BEGGED ME TO HELP DESTROY THIS WORK. WHAT HAS CHANGED?
MY NERVES FAILED ME. GIVE ME SIX MONTHS, AND I WILL SHOW YOU WHY I MUST CONTINUE.


THE LABORATORY HE SHOWED WAS A PRETENCE. MOST OF THE MISSING BOOKS WERE NOWHERE IN SIGHT.

HE REMEMBERED A PLAY IN 1762 WITH THE INTIMACY OF AN EYEWITNESS.



BUT RECENT EVENTS, PERSONAL MEMORIES, AND EVERYDAY BUSINESS BAFFLED HIM.

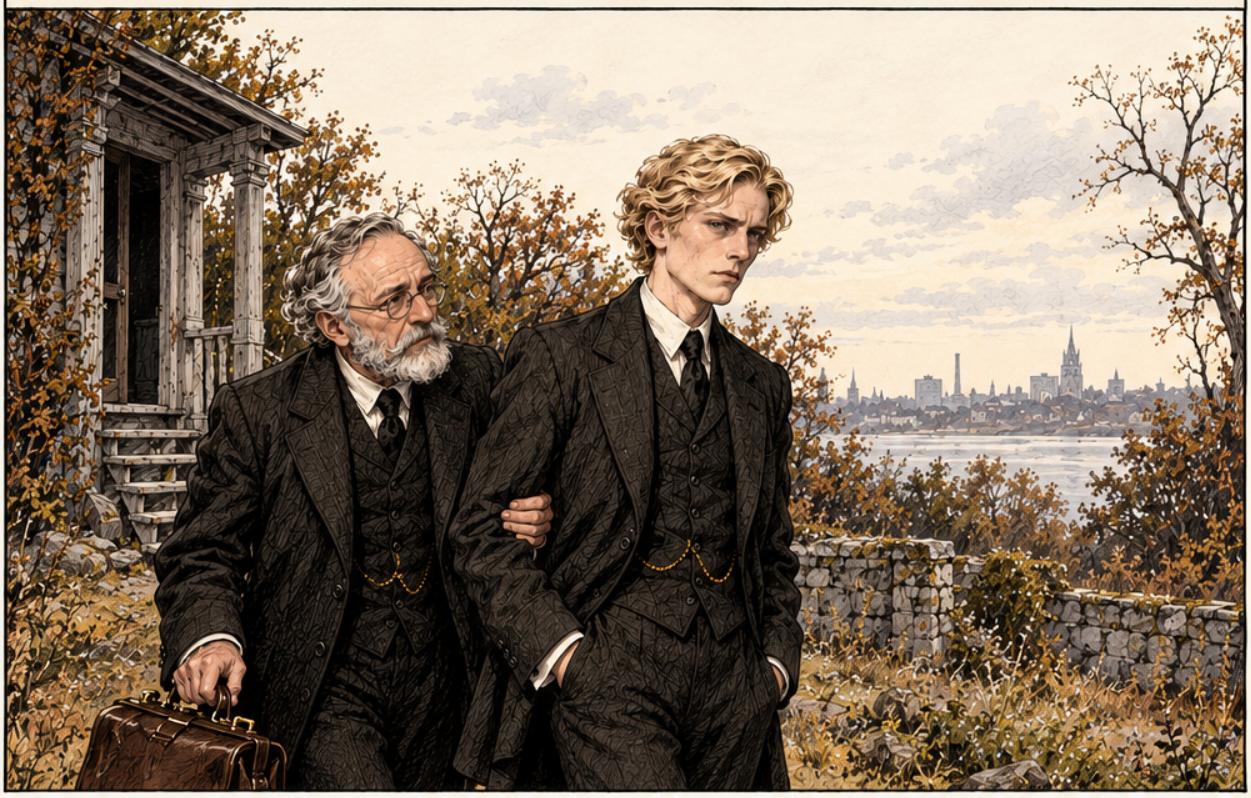


IN MARCH, THE BANKS QUESTIONED HIS SIGNATURES. THE OLD HANDWRITING HAD VANISHED.

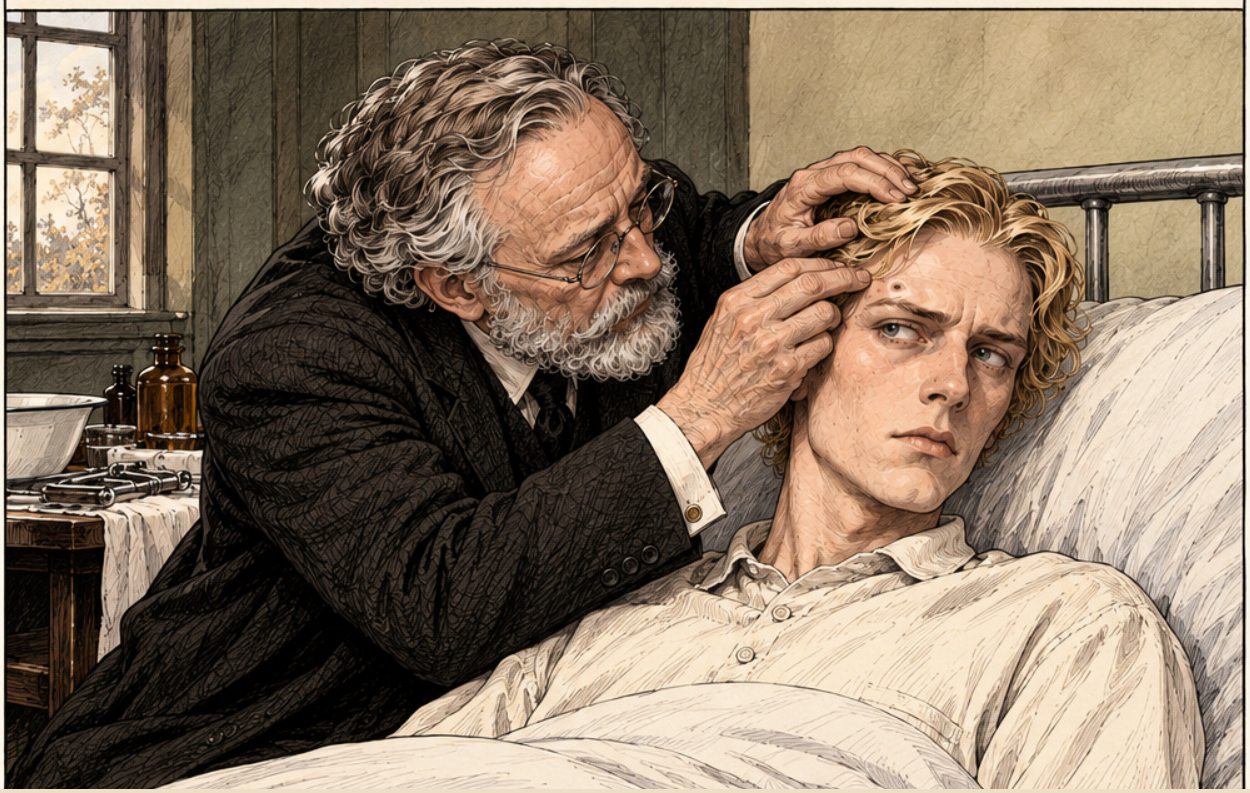




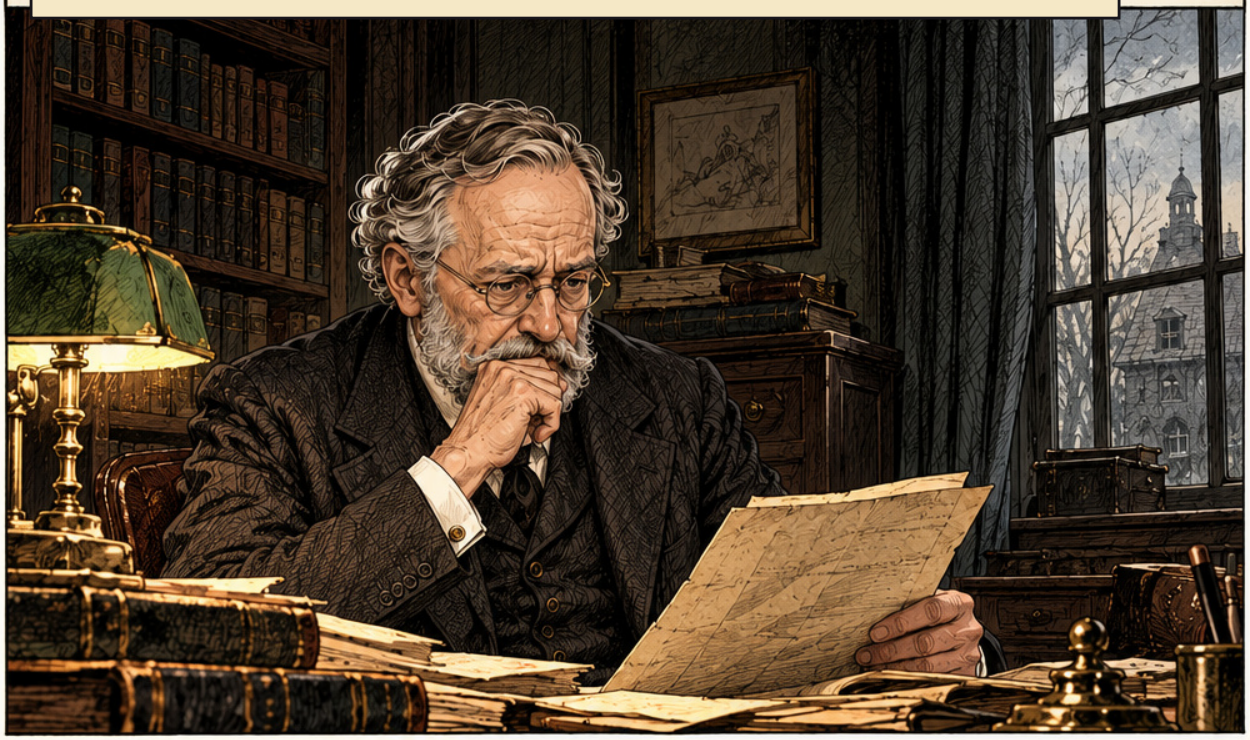
ON MARCH 8 HE ENTERED DR. WAITE'S HOSPITAL WITHOUT RESISTANCE.



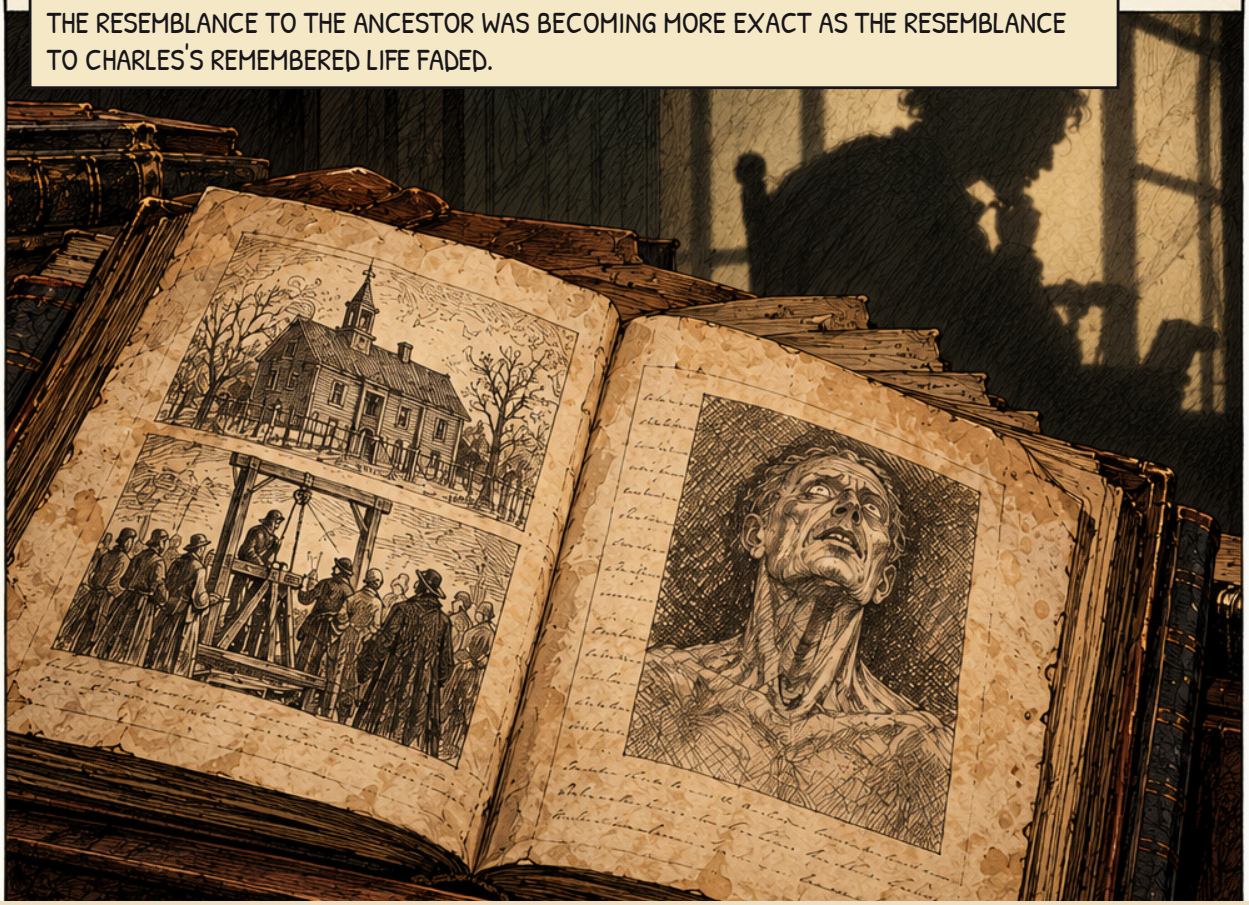
WILLETT FOUND A NEW SCAR ABOVE THE RIGHT EYE—THE PRECISE MARK IN CURWEN'S PORTRAIT.



OTHER FAMILIAR MARKS HAD DISAPPEARED; AN UNFAMILIAR BLACK MARK HAD APPEARED ON HIS CHEST.



THE RESEMBLANCE TO THE ANCESTOR WAS BECOMING MORE EXACT AS THE RESEMBLANCE TO CHARLES'S REMEMBERED LIFE FADED.



A LETTER FOR DR. ALLEN ARRIVED FROM PRAGUE, ADDRESSED TO MR. J. C.



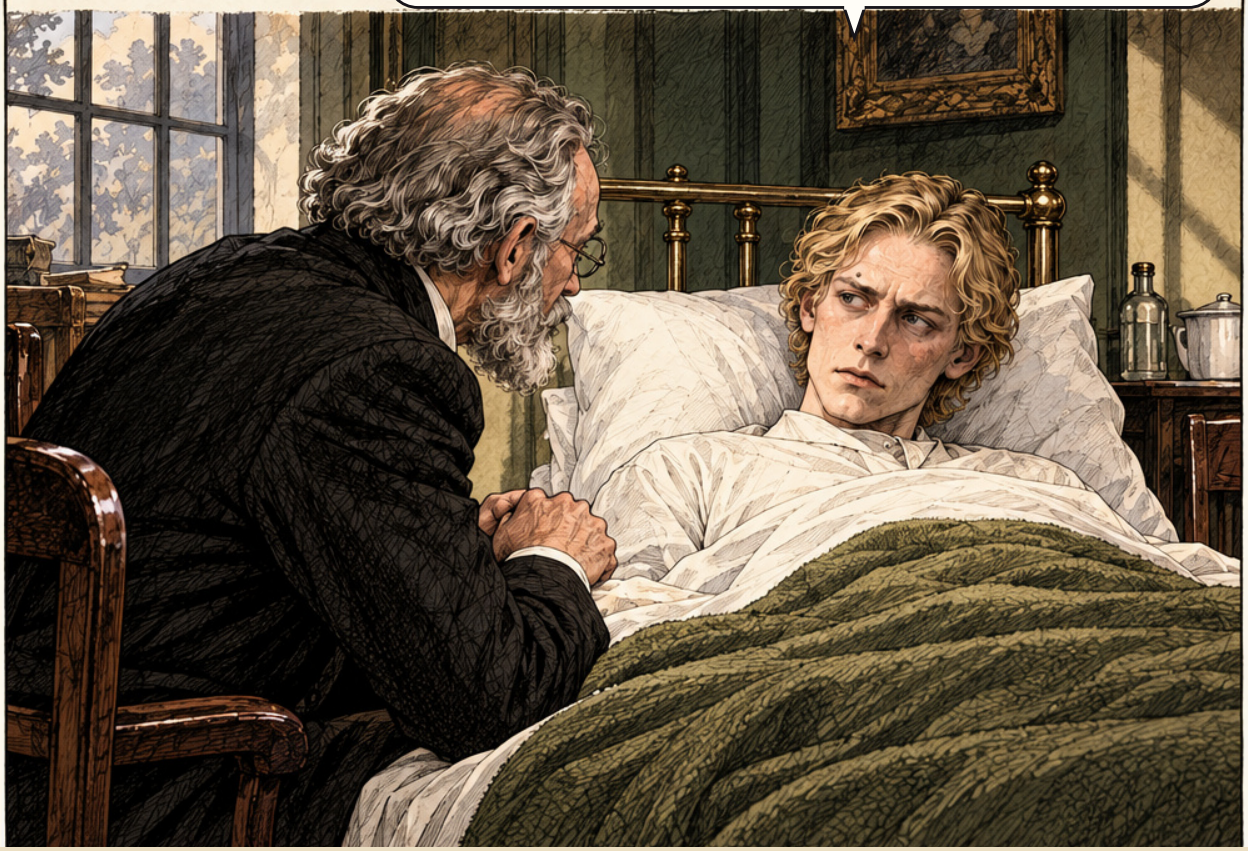
ITS WRITER SPOKE OF EXCHANGED SALTS, MISTAKEN GRAVESTONES, AND THE DANGER OF RAISING SOMEONE TOO POWERFUL.



THE HAND WAS SIMON ORNE'S—UNCHANGED AFTER A CENTURY AND A HALF.



TELL ME EXACTLY WHAT THE LETTER SAID ABOUT DR. ALLEN.



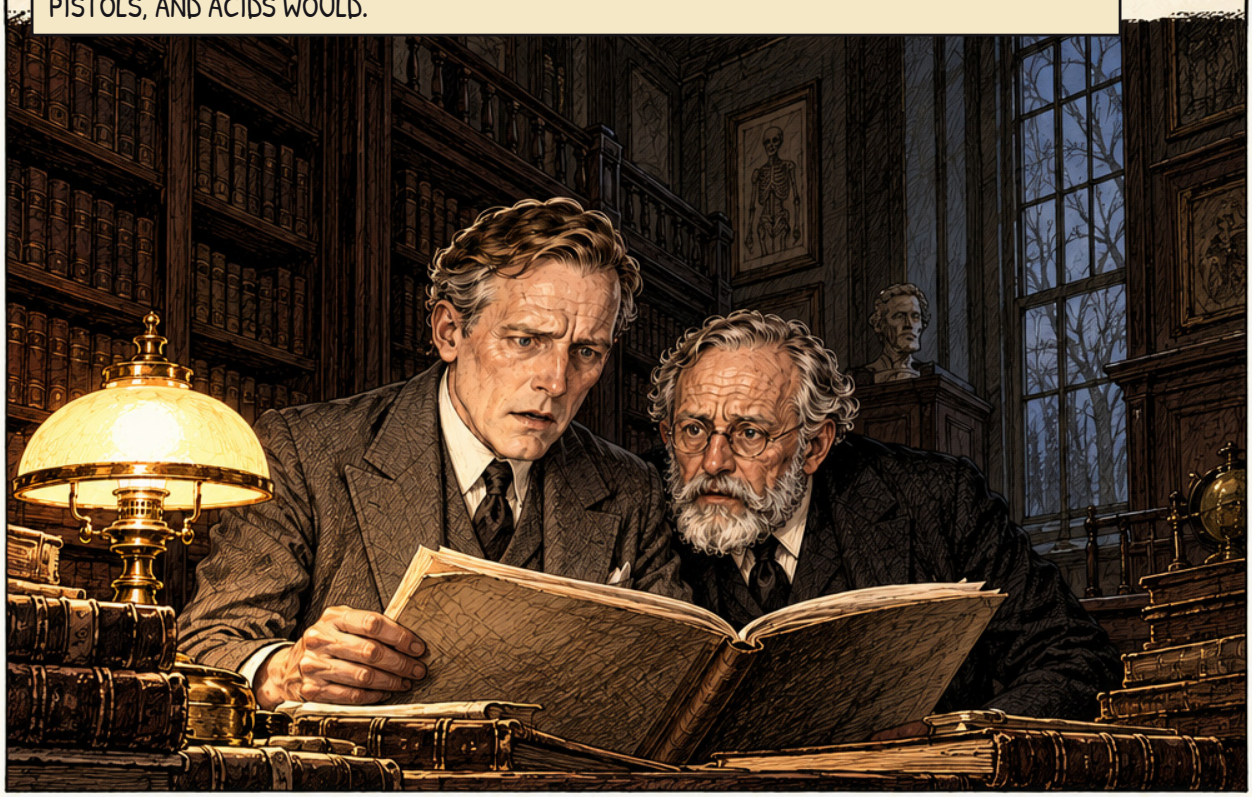
A SECOND LETTER CAME FROM CASTLE FERENCZY, PLAINLY ADDRESSED TO JOSEPH CURWEN.



ITS WRITER URGED HIM TO DEAL WITH THE BOY IF THE BOY HAD BECOME TOO SQUEAMISH.



A DISMISSAL FORMULA WOULD NOT WORK ON A LIVING MAN, THE LETTER SAID. BUT KNIVES, PISTOLS, AND ACIDS WOULD.



WITHIN A YEAR, THE CORRESPONDENTS EXPECTED TO RAISE LEGIONS FROM BENEATH THE EARTH.

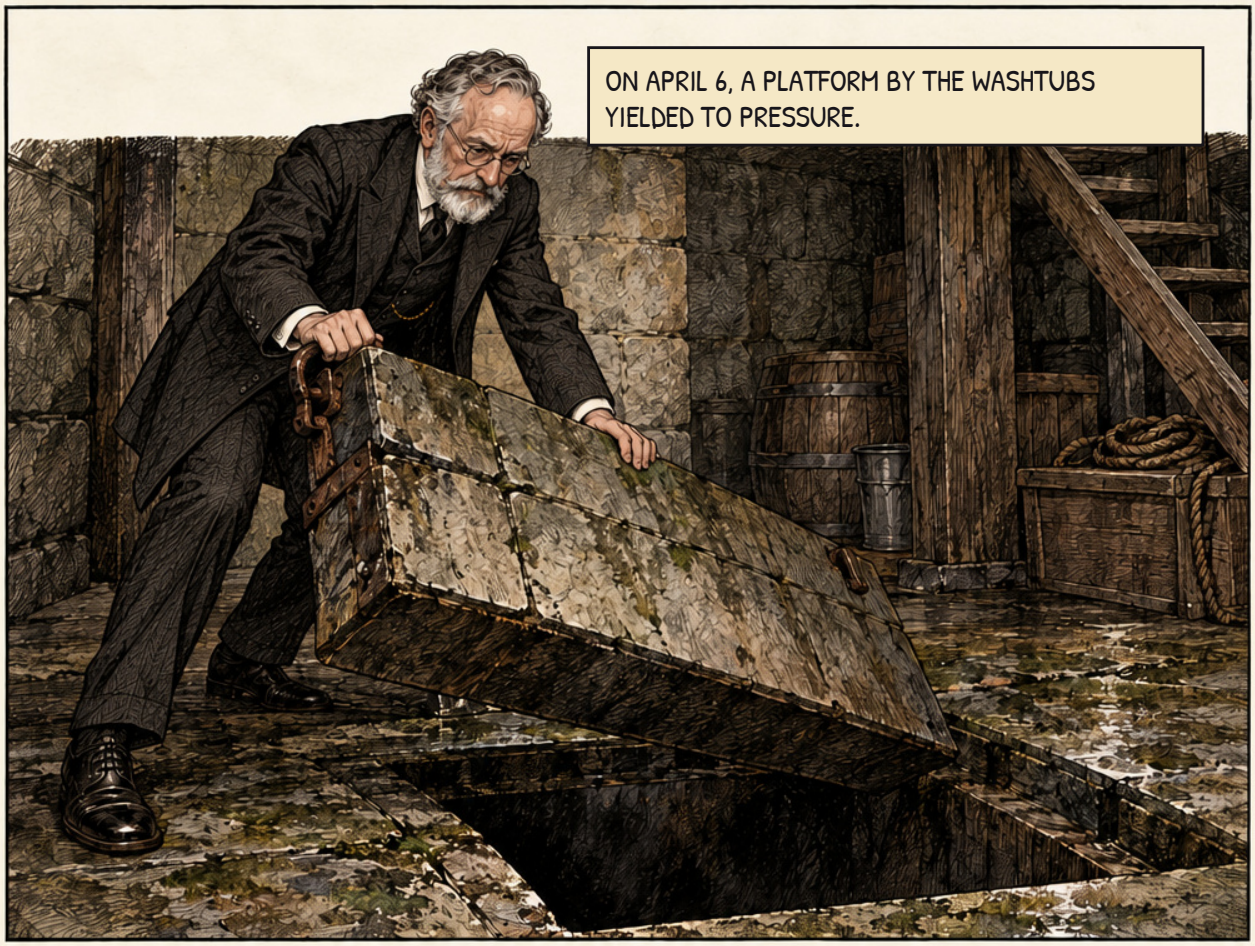


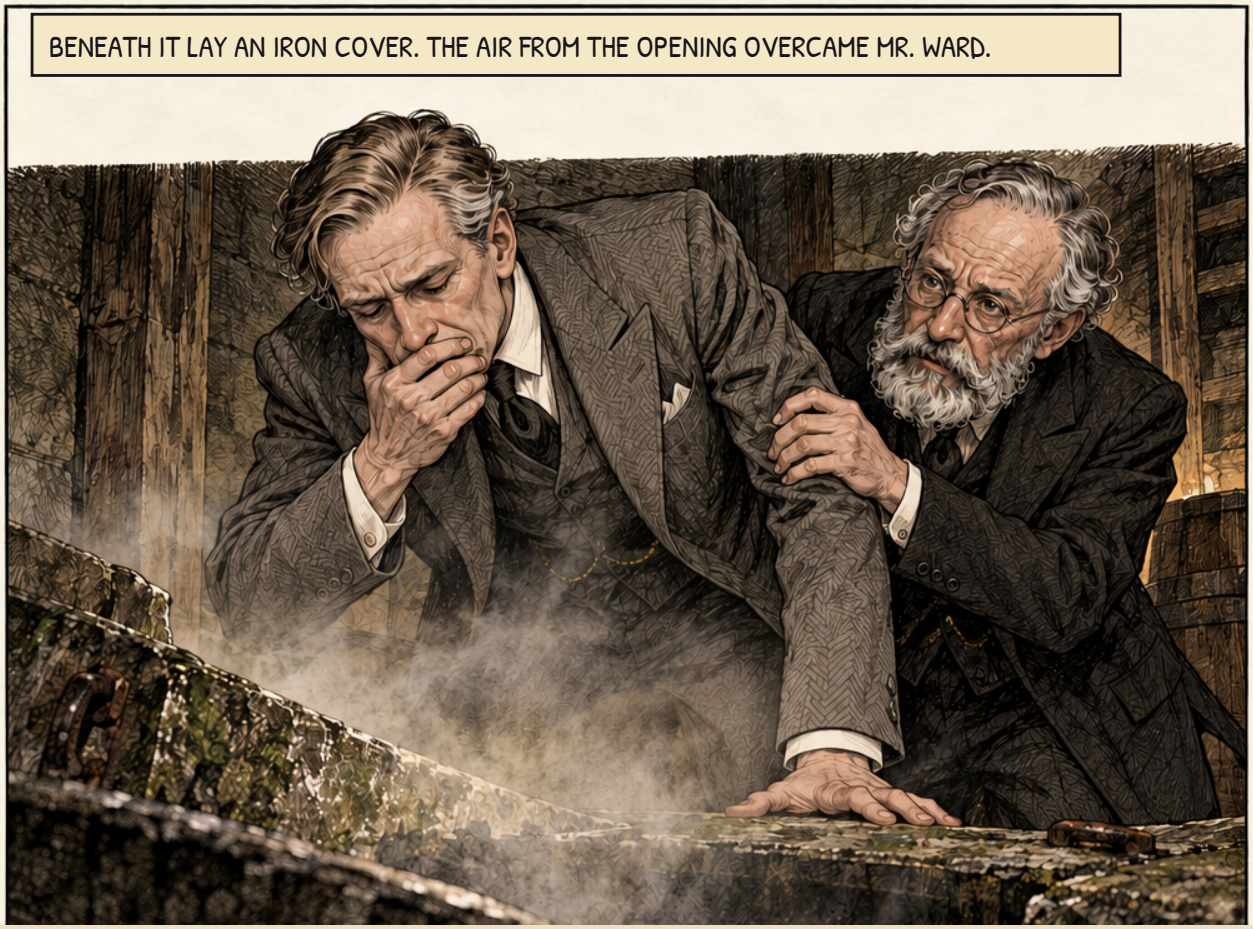
DETECTIVES BEGAN SEARCHING FOR ALLEN.



WILLETT AND THE FATHER CHOSE ANOTHER TASK: FINDING THE HIDDEN ROOMS BENEATH THE BUNGALOW.




ON APRIL 6, A PLATFORM BY THE WASHTUBS YIELDED TO PRESSURE.


BENEATH IT LAY AN IRON COVER. THE AIR FROM THE OPENING OVERCAME MR. WARD.

WILLETT SENT HIM HOME.

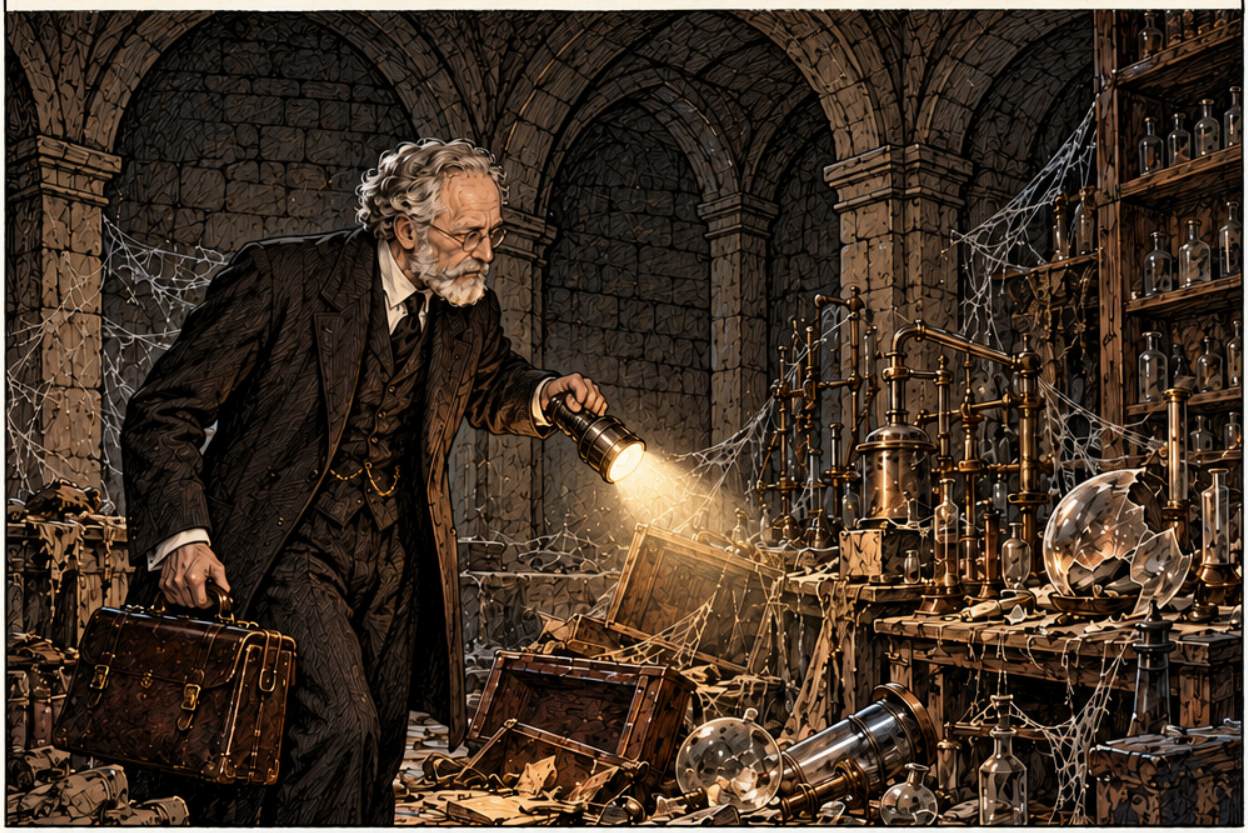


THEN THE OLD DOCTOR DESCENDED ALONE, CARRYING A TORCH AND A BAG FOR THE PAPERS HE HOPED TO RECOVER.




THE MODERN SHAFT ENDED IN ANCIENT MASONRY.
FAR BELOW, A LOW, CONTINUOUS WAILING ROSE THROUGH THE DARK.

SOME ROOMS HAD LAIN UNTOUCHED SINCE THE RAID OF 1771.



OTHERS HELD CHARLES'S BOOKS AND FURNITURE. HERE, AT LAST, WAS THE MISSING LIBRARY.



THE CURWEN PAPERS WERE THERE, ALONG WITH LETTERS FROM PRAGUE AND RAKUS.



CHARLES'S OWN WRITING STOPPED TWO MONTHS EARLIER. AFTER THAT, PAGE UPON PAGE WAS WRITTEN IN CURWEN'S HAND.

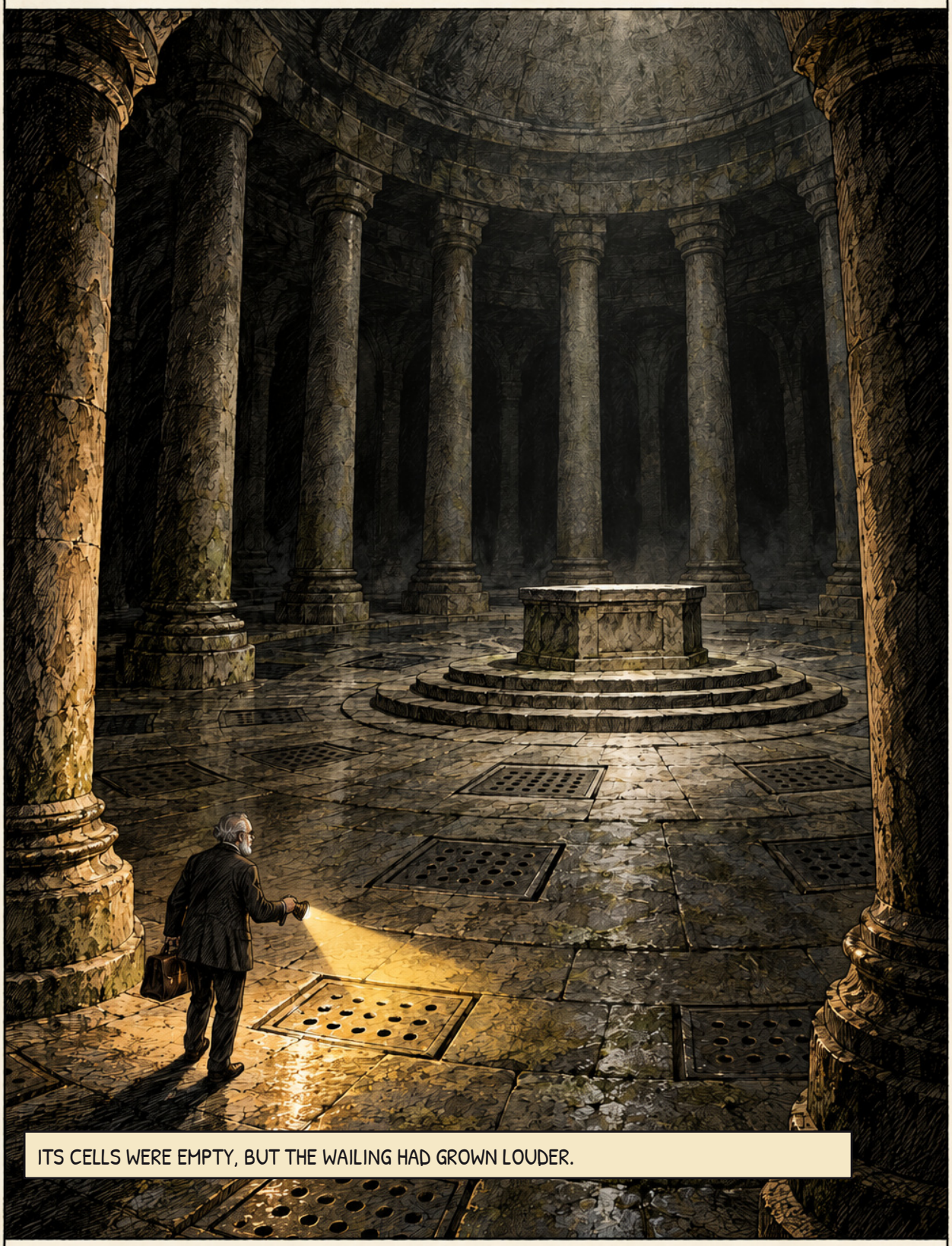


TWO FORMULAS OCCURRED REPEATEDLY: ONE BENEATH THE DRAGON'S HEAD, THE OTHER BENEATH THE DRAGON'S TAIL.



THE SECOND REVERSED THE FIRST. WILLETT FOUND HIMSELF REMEMBERING THEIR SOUNDS.




BEYOND THE LIBRARY LAY A GREAT CIRCULAR HALL.
ITS CELLS WERE EMPTY, BUT THE WAILING HAD GROWN LOUDER.

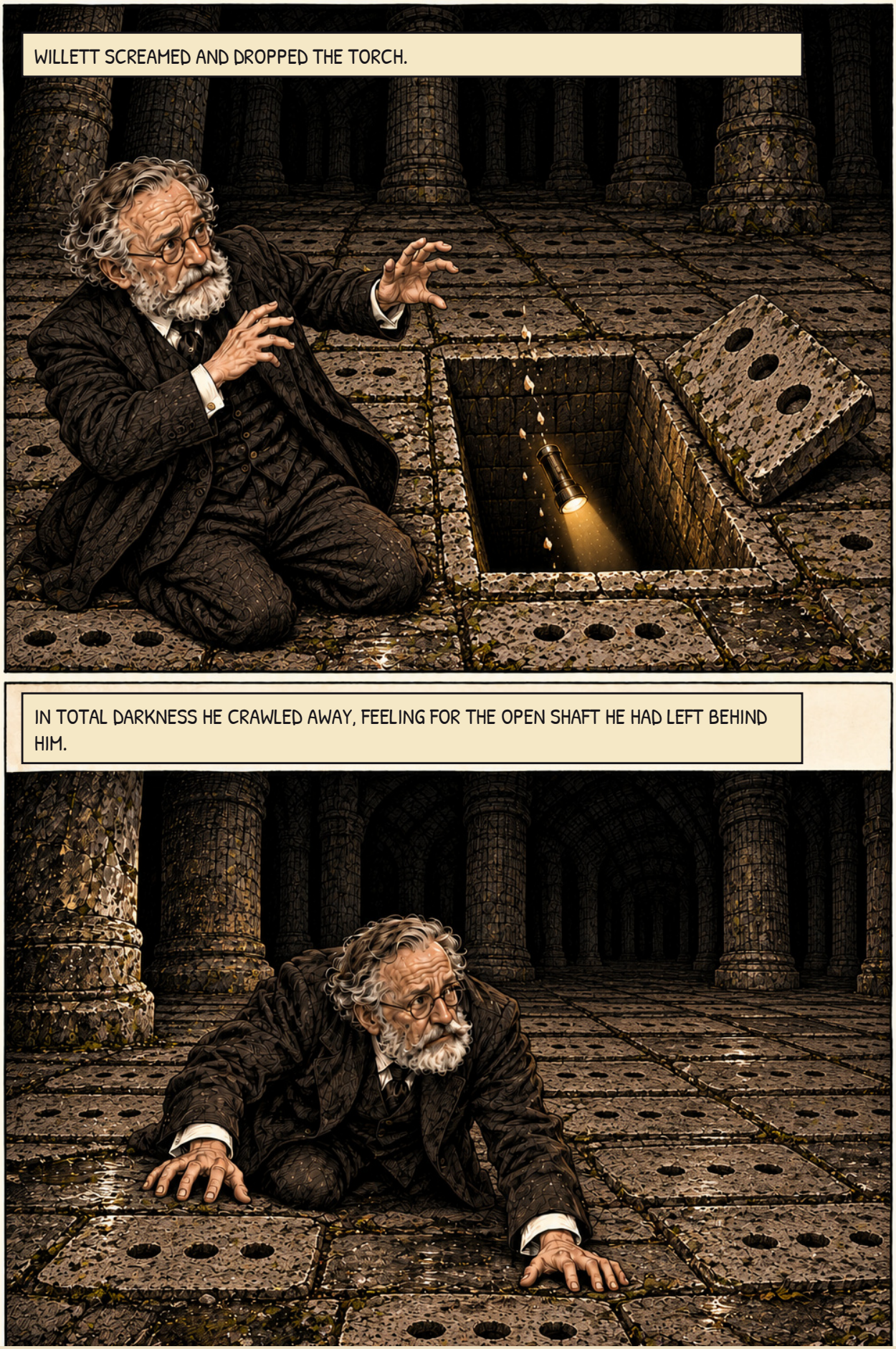
THE SOUND CAME THROUGH HOLES IN THE FLOOR.



WITH DIFFICULTY HE LIFTED ONE SLAB AND SHONE HIS TORCH INTO THE SHAFT BELOW.




SOMETHING AT THE BOTTOM TRIED HELPLESSLY TO LEAP TOWARD THE LIGHT.
IT WAS ALIVE, INCOMPLETE, AND FASHIONED INTO A FORM NATURE HAD NEVER INTENDED.


WILLETT SCREAMED AND DROPPED THE TORCH.
IN TOTAL DARKNESS HE CRAWLED AWAY, FEELING FOR THE OPEN SHAFT HE HAD LEFT BEHIND HIM.

A LAST SURVIVING LAMP GUIDED HIM BACK TO THE LIBRARY.



HE REFILLED THE LAMPS, GATHERED CANDLES AND MATCHES, AND PREPARED TO GO ON.



DUTY OVERCAME THE IMPULSE TO FLEE.



HE FOUND STORES OF CLOTHING FOR MANY MEN, OLD COPPER VESSELS, AND PREPARATIONS WHOSE SCALE WAS APPALLING.



AT LAST HE REACHED THE REAL LABORATORY.



THE SAME PASSAGE IN BORELLUS WAS MARKED: THE DEAD COULD BE REDUCED TO SALTS, AND RAISED AGAIN.

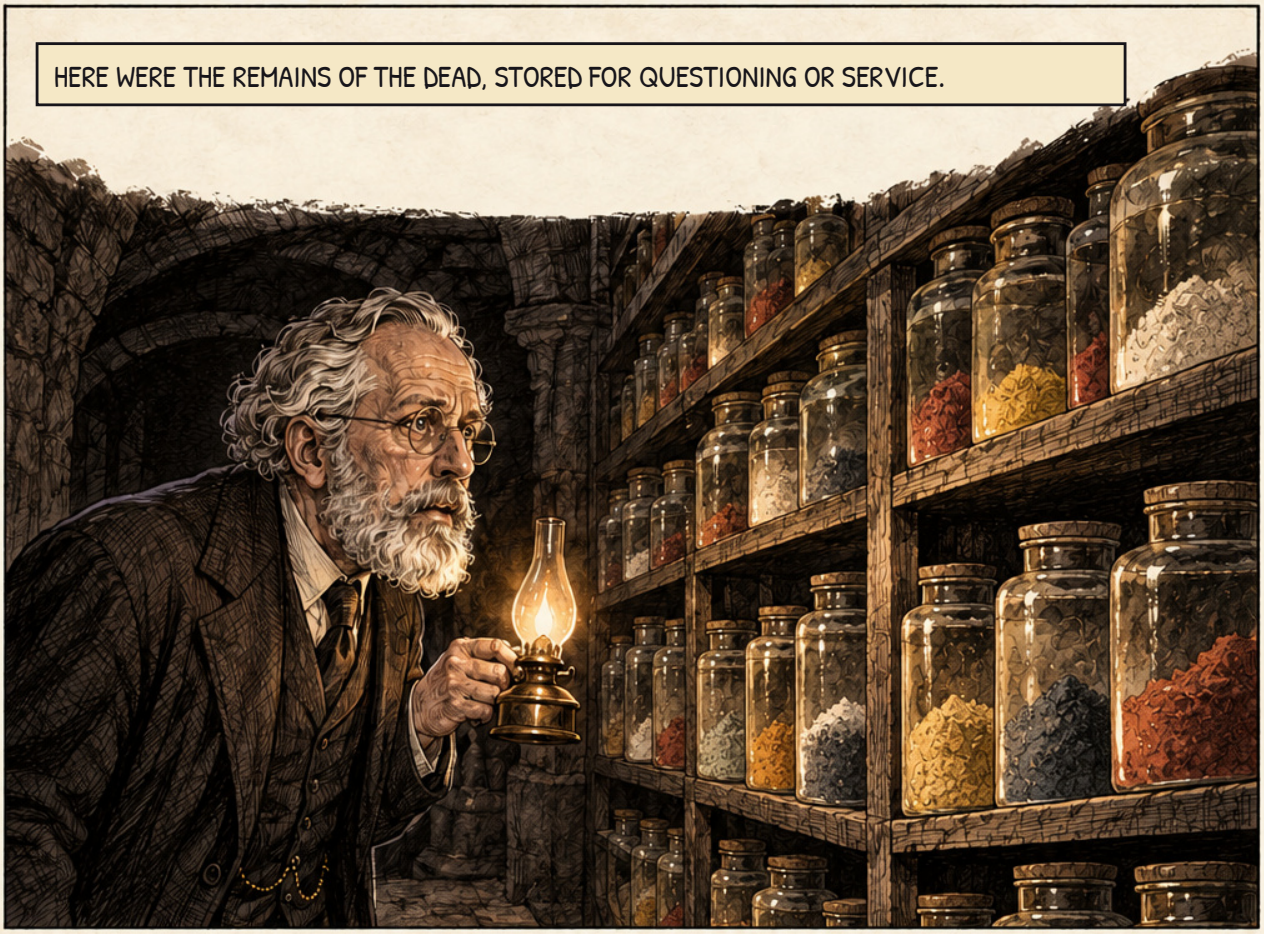


ONE WALL HELD VESSELS LABELLED GUARDS; THE OTHER, MATERIALS.



EACH CONTAINED A LIGHT POWDER. THE NAMES WERE NOT CHEMICAL CLASSIFICATIONS.




HERE WERE THE REMAINS OF THE DEAD, STORED FOR QUESTIONING OR SERVICE.


THE WORLD'S GREATEST MINDS COULD BE SUMMONED, COERCED, AND PUT AWAY AGAIN.

BEYOND A MARKED DOORWAY LAY THE ROOM WHERE THE QUESTIONING WAS DONE.



THE SMELL WAS THE SAME ONE THAT HAD CLUNG TO THE PATIENT WHEN HE WAS TAKEN AWAY.



AN OPEN VESSEL, NUMBERED 118, STOOD BESIDE A CUP OF GREENISH POWDER.



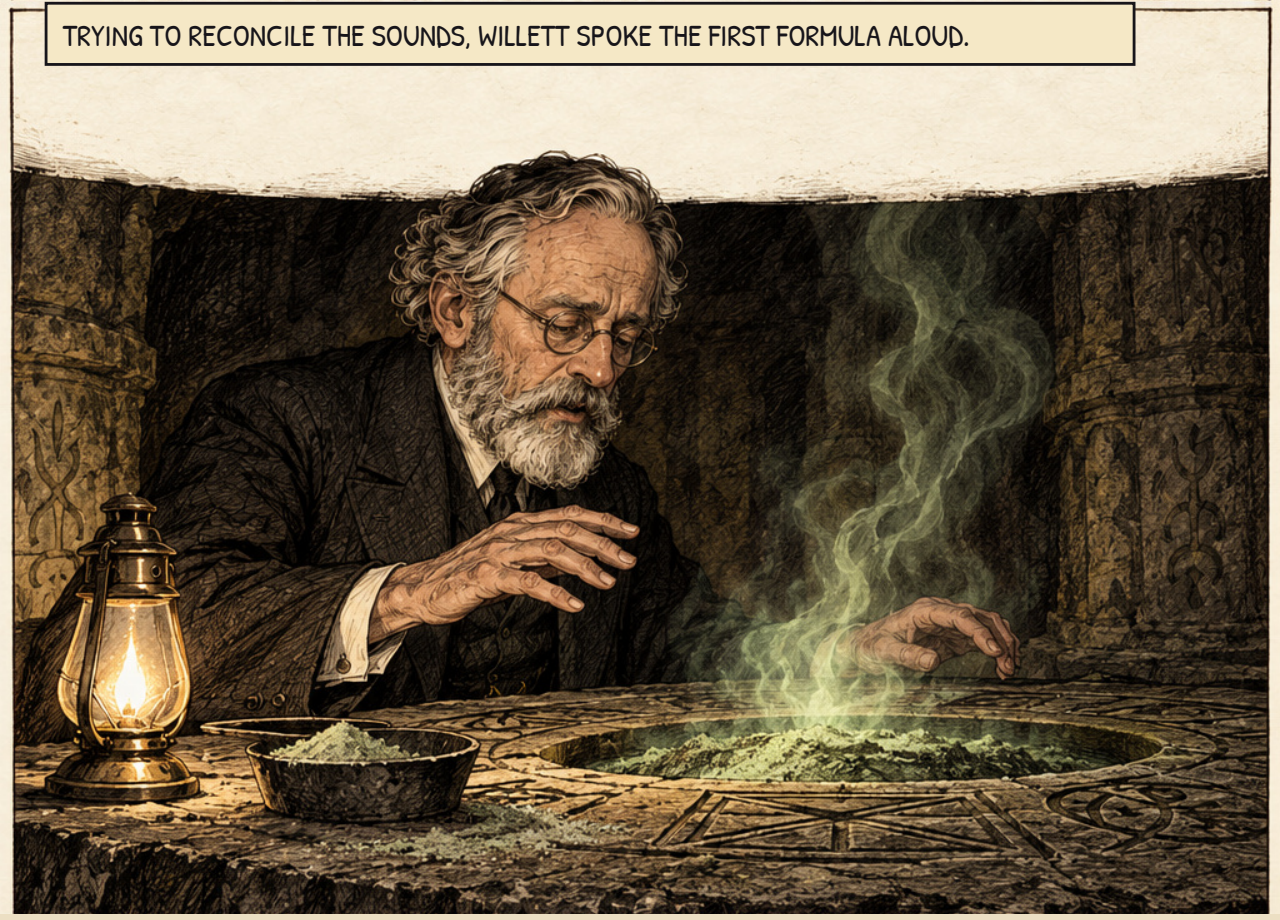
THE WORK HAD BEEN INTERRUPTED JUST BEFORE THE INVOCATION.



THE FORMULAS ON THE WALL DIFFERED SLIGHTLY FROM THE VERSIONS HE REMEMBERED.

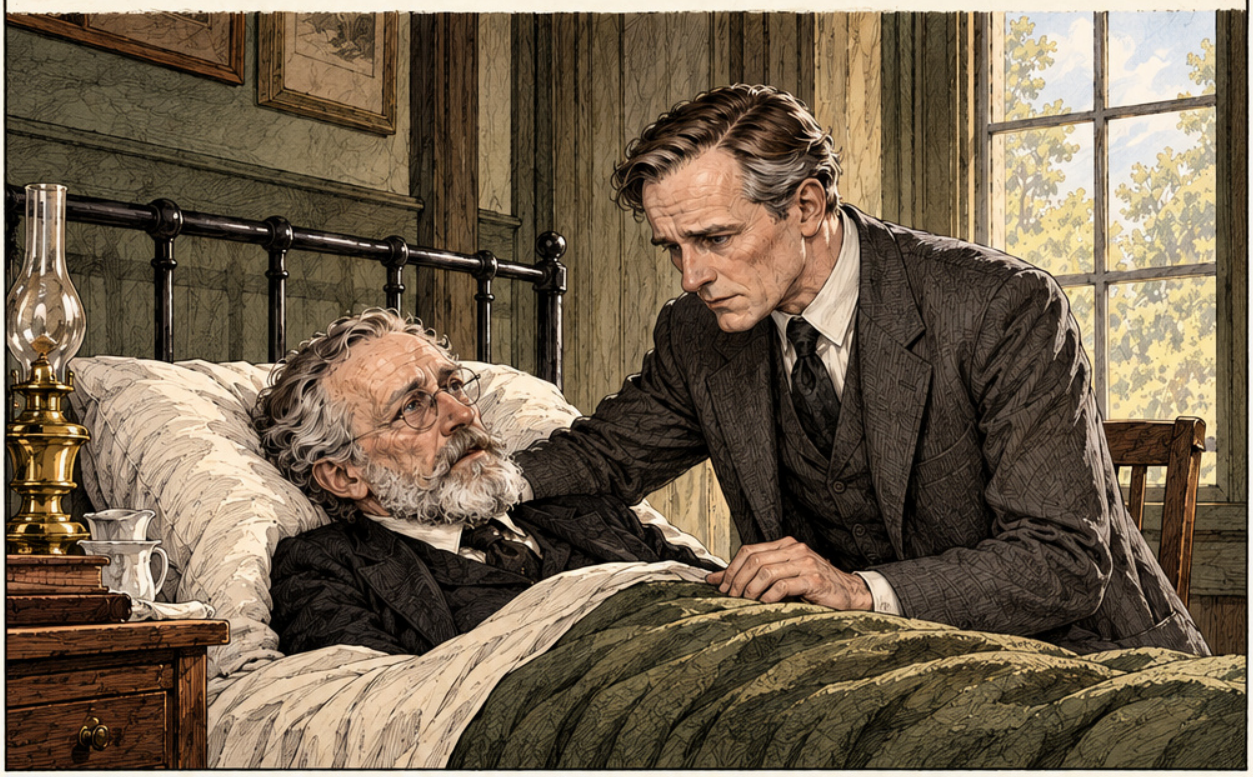


TRYING TO RECONCILE THE SOUNDS, WILLETT SPOKE THE FIRST FORMULA ALOUD.




A COLD WIND CROSSED THE SEALED ROOM.
THROUGH THE SMOKE A SHAPE APPEARED—AND WILLETT KNEW NO MORE.

AT NOON THE NEXT DAY, MR. WARD FOUND HIM UPSTAIRS, ALIVE AND UNHARMED.



HIS BAG WAS EMPTY. SOMEONE HAD BROUGHT HIM OUT.





BUT IN WILLETT'S POCKET LAY A MESSAGE HE HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE.

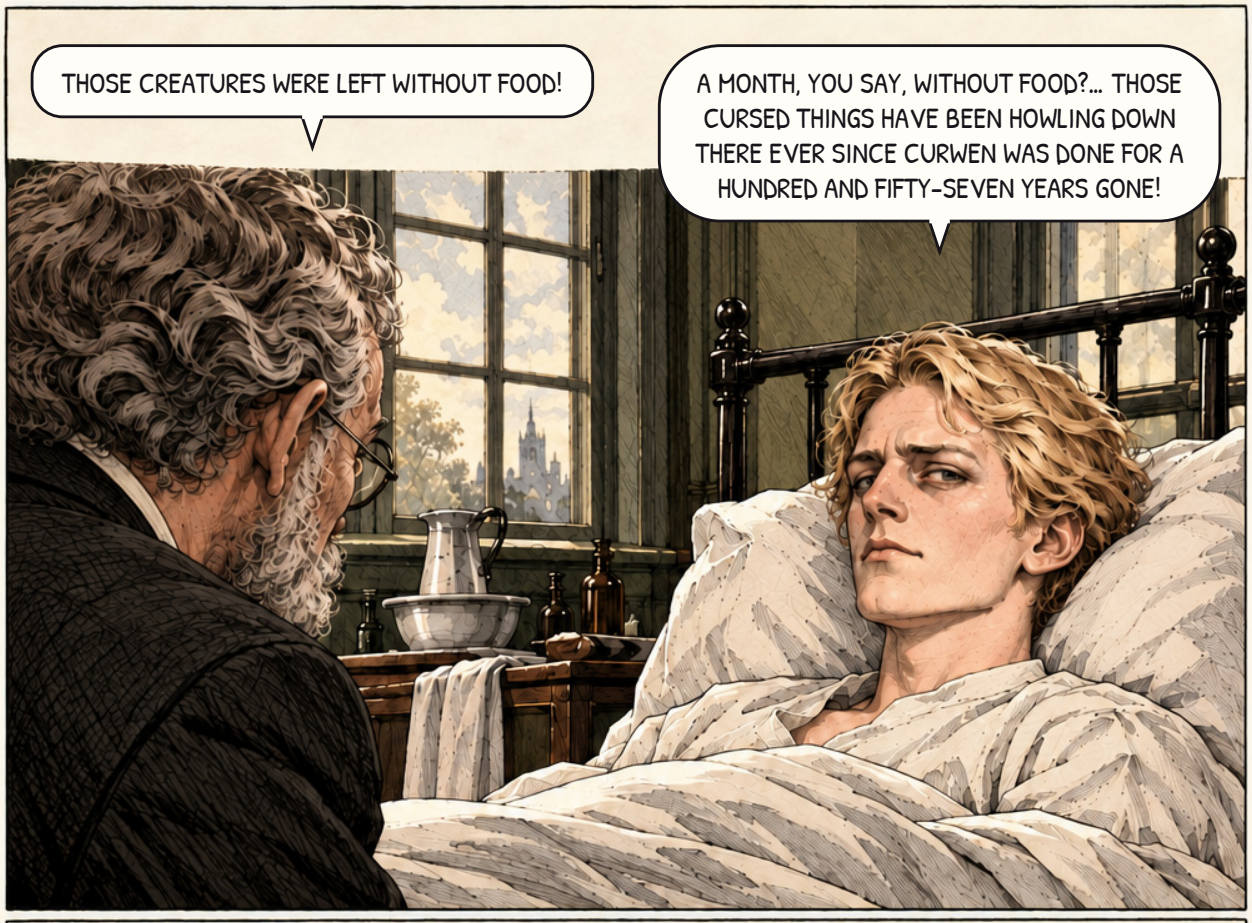


ITS SCRIPT BELONGED TO THE EIGHTH OR NINTH CENTURY.

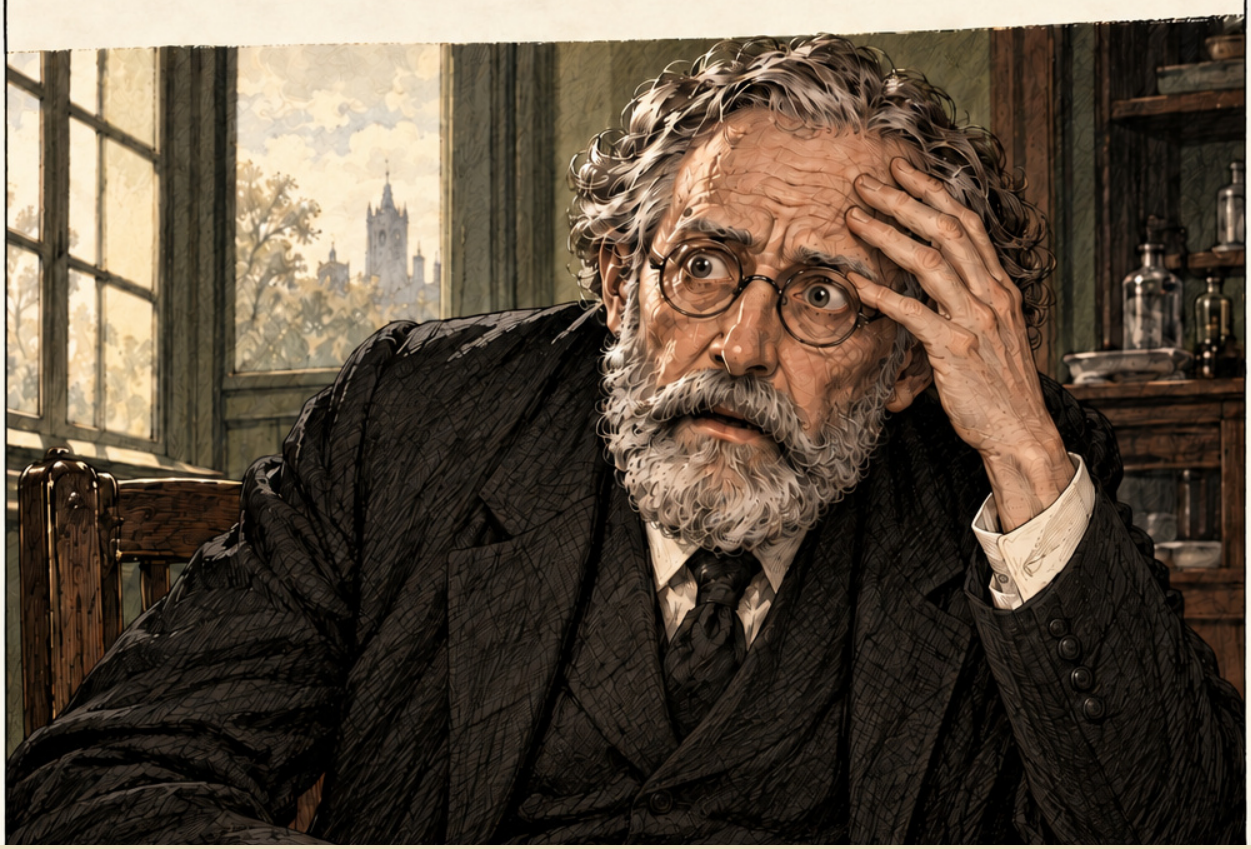


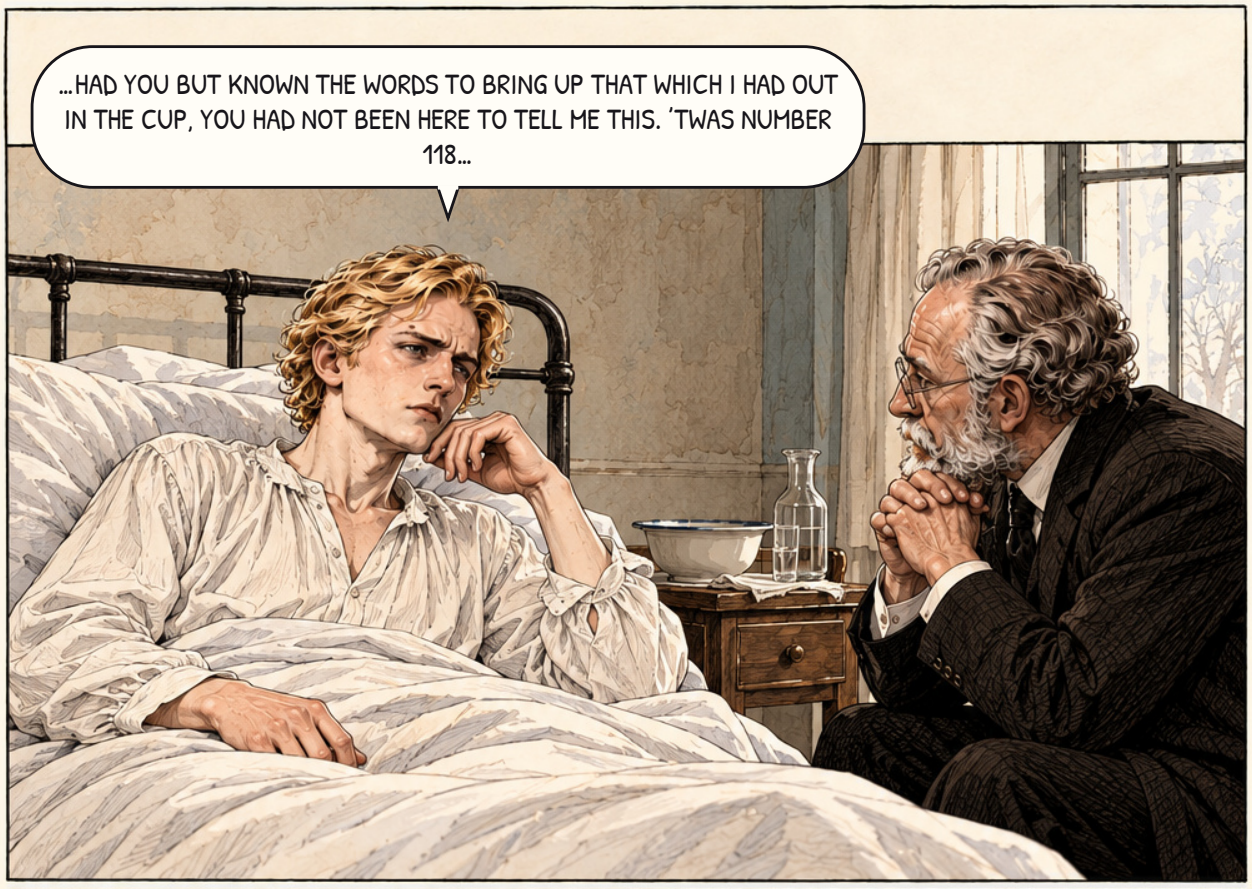
CURWEN MUST BE KILLED. THE BODY MUST BE DISSOLVED IN AQUA FORTIS, NOR MUST ANYTHING BE RETAINED. KEEP SILENCE AS BEST YOU ARE ABLE.





BUT NO MORE THAN THIS COULD WILLETT GET FROM THE YOUTH.




...HAD YOU BUT KNOWN THE WORDS TO BRING UP THAT WHICH I HAD OUT IN THE CUP, YOU HAD NOT BEEN HERE TO TELL ME THIS. 'TWAS NUMBER 118...


YOU CAN NEVER BE CERTAIN UNTIL YOU QUESTION WHAT HAS COME UP. LOOK AT THIS.

THE DETECTIVES RETURNED WITH ALLEN'S DISGUISE.



A PHOTOGRAPH OF CHARLES, ALTERED WITH BEARD AND SPECTACLES, WAS RECOGNISED AS AN EXCELLENT LIKENESS.



NOW THE INTERRUPTED MEETING TOOK ON ANOTHER MEANING.



PERHAPS CHARLES HAD NEVER LEFT THE HOUSE. PERHAPS THE MAN WHO ENTERED HAD COME TO FIND HIM.



WILLETT ASKED TO SEARCH THE LIBRARY ALONE.



BEHIND THE OLD PANELLING HE FOUND WHAT THE NOISES OF THAT FEBRUARY AFTERNOON HAD CONCEALED.




HE WOULD NEVER DESCRIBE THE WORK THAT FOLLOWED.
BY EVENING, THE ROOM WAS CLEAN AND THE WINDOWS STOOD OPEN. ITS HORROR HAD BECOME GRIEF.

THE DOCTOR BURIED THE ASHES IN THE WARD FAMILY LOT.



HIS LETTER TOLD THE FATHER WHERE, IN TIME, TO PLACE HIS SON'S STONE.



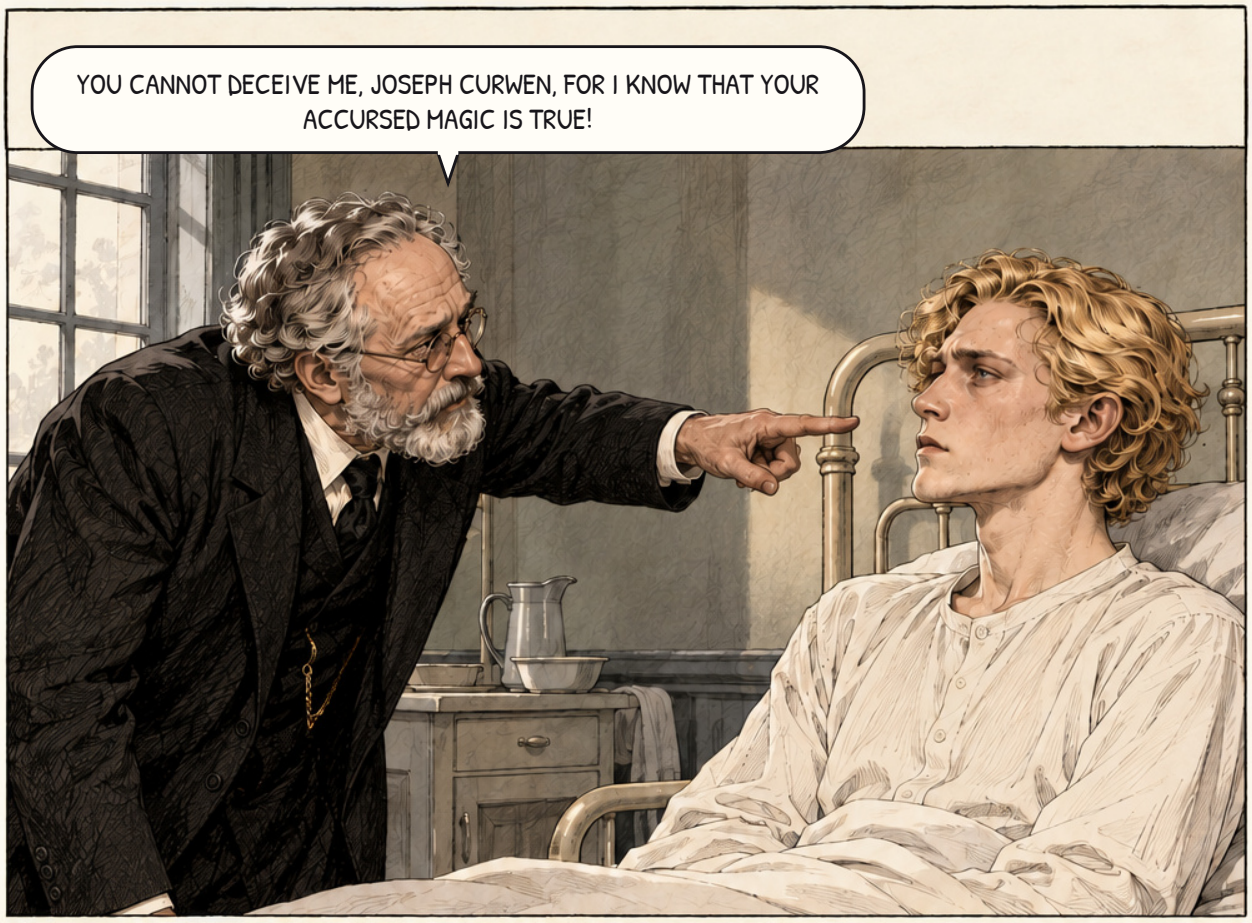
...HE WAS NEVER A FIEND OR EVEN TRULY A MADMAN, BUT ONLY AN EAGER, STUDIOUS, AND CURIOUS BOY WHOSE LOVE OF MYSTERY AND OF THE PAST WAS HIS UNDOING.



ON APRIL 13, THE DOCTOR WENT TO THE HOSPITAL FOR THE LAST TIME.



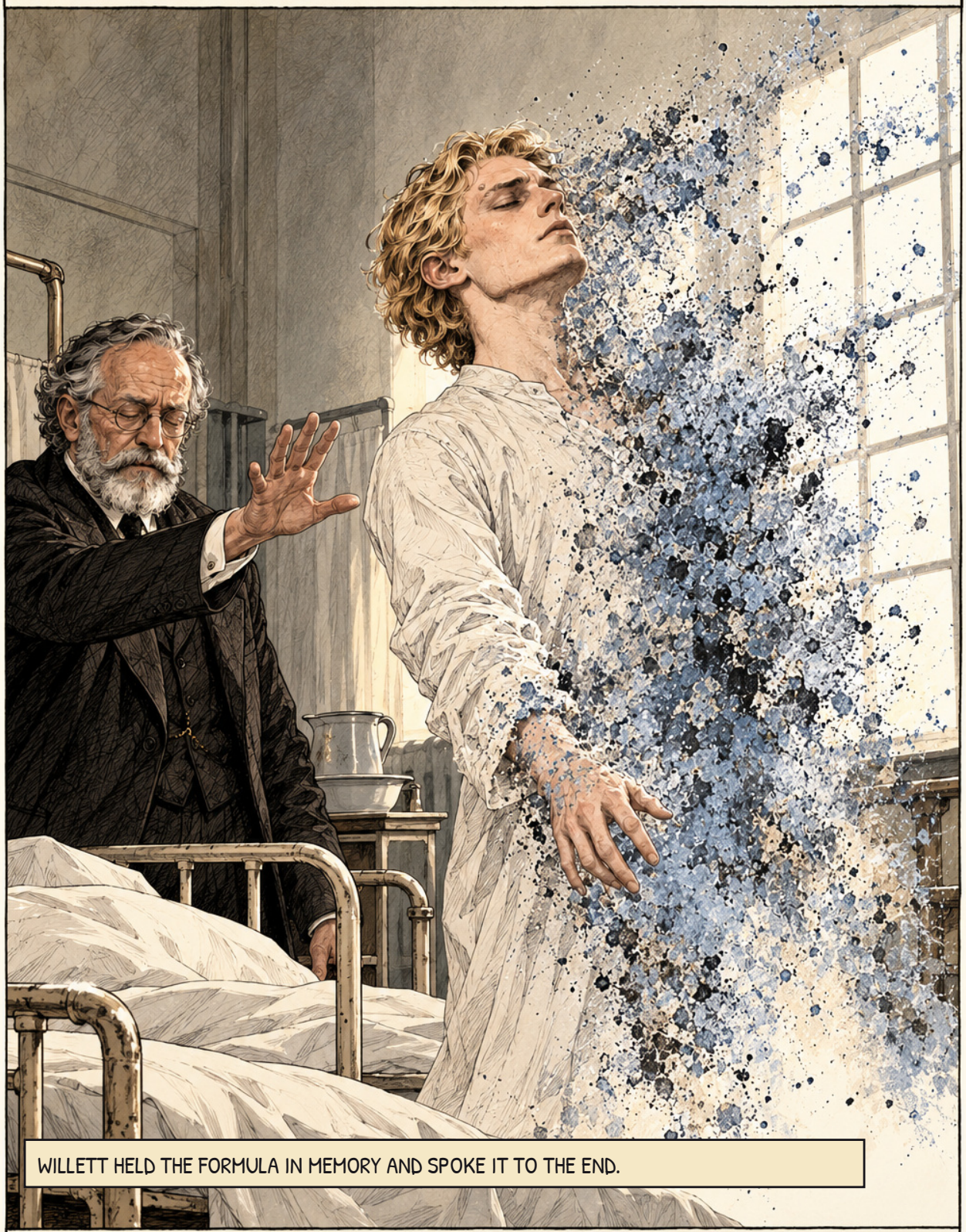

I HAVE FOUND... SOMETHING IN A CUPBOARD BEHIND AN ANCIENT OVERMANTEL WHERE A PICTURE ONCE WAS, AND I HAVE BURNED IT AND BURIED THE ASHES WHERE THE GRAVE OF CHARLES DEXTER WARD OUGHT TO BE.
DAMN YE, WHO DID YE TELL—AND WHO'LL BELIEVE IT WAS HE AFTER THESE FULL TWO MONTHS, WITH ME ALIVE? WHAT D'YE MEAN TO DO?


YOU CANNOT DECEIVE ME, JOSEPH CURWEN, FOR I KNOW THAT YOUR ACCURSED MAGIC IS TRUE!


THE DESCENDANT HAD RAISED HIS ANCESTOR. WHEN CHARLES REBELLED, CURWEN KILLED HIM AND TOOK HIS PLACE.

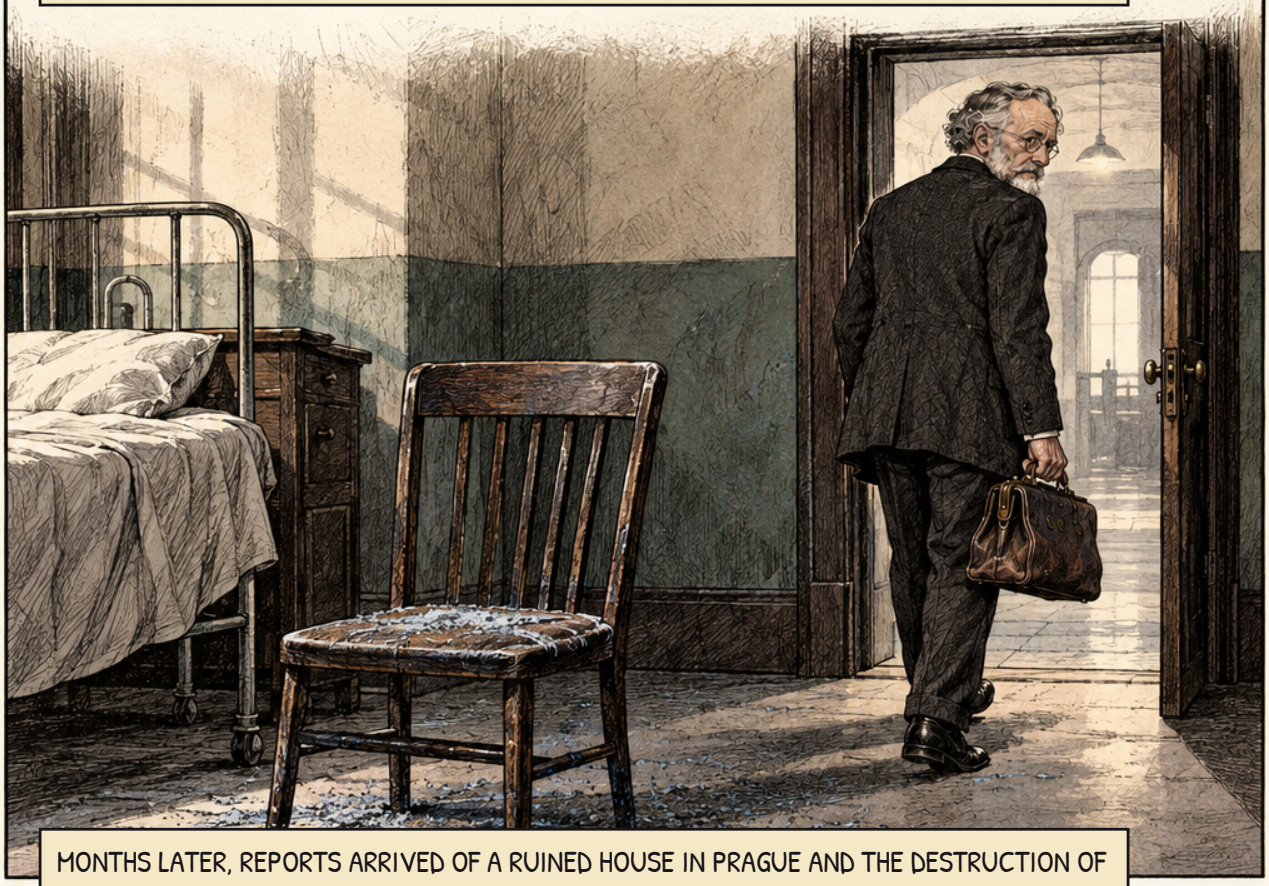

PER ADONAI ELOIM, ADONAI JEHOVA, ADONAI SABAOTH, METRATON...
OGTHROD AI'F GEB'L—EE'H YOG-SOTHOTH 'NGAH'NG AI'Y ZHRO!

THE WORDS THAT RAISED THE DEAD COULD ALSO PUT THEM DOWN.



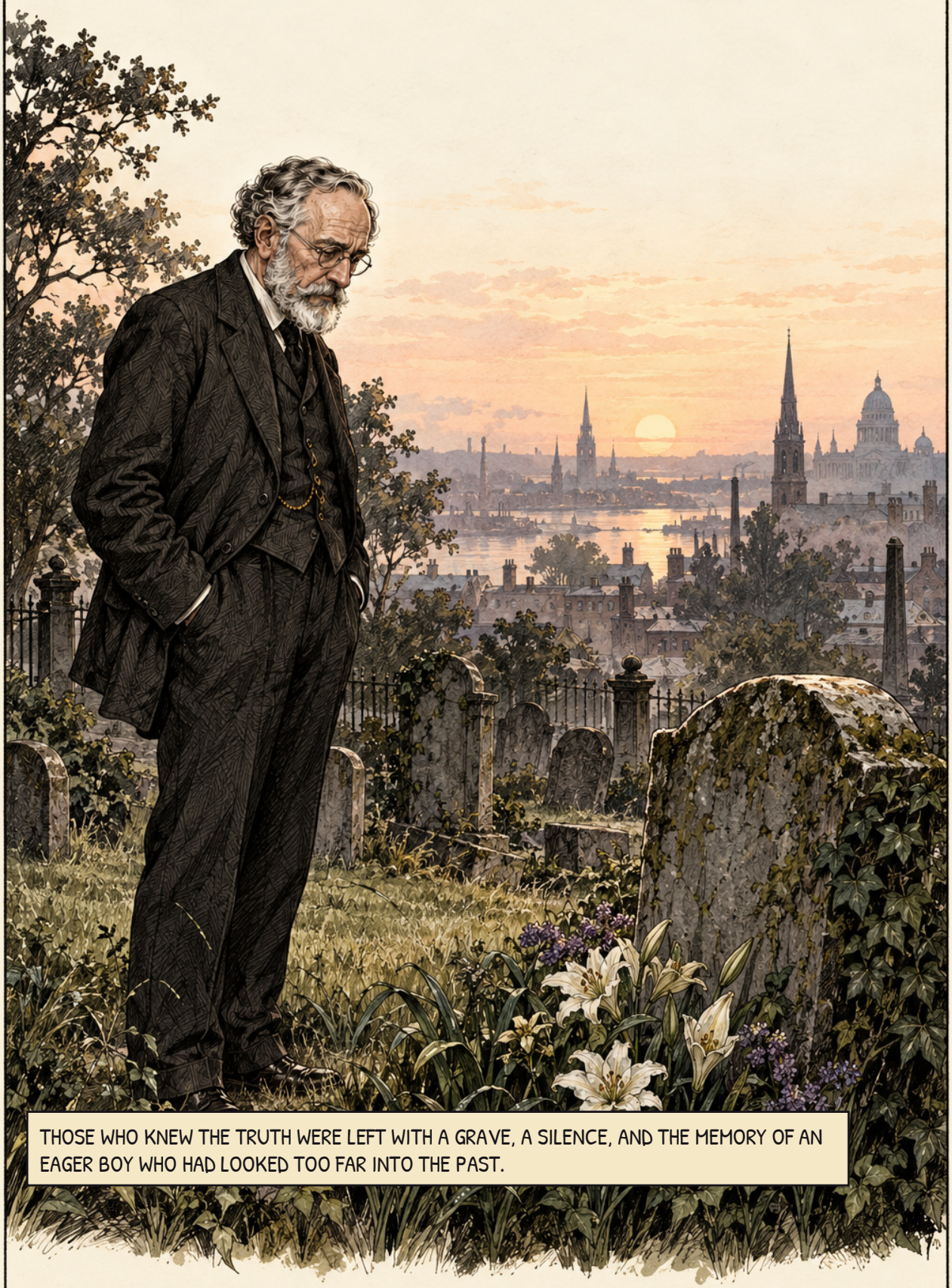
WILLETT HELD THE FORMULA IN MEMORY AND SPOKE IT TO THE END.

...JOSEPH CURWEN NOW LAY SCATTERED ON THE FLOOR AS A THIN COATING OF FINE BLUISH-GREY DUST.



MONTHS LATER, REPORTS ARRIVED OF A RUINED HOUSE IN PRAGUE AND THE DESTRUCTION OF CASTLE FERENCZY. WILLETT BELIEVED THE WRITER OF THE MESSAGE HAD FINISHED ITS OWN WORK.




TO THE WORLD, CHARLES DEXTER WARD HAD ESCAPED.
THOSE WHO KNEW THE TRUTH WERE LEFT WITH A GRAVE, A SILENCE, AND THE MEMORY OF AN EAGER BOY WHO HAD LOOKED TOO FAR INTO THE PAST.