# THE FESTIVAL

...MY PEOPLE HAD... COMMANDED THEIR SONS TO KEEP FESTIVAL ONCE EVERY CENTURY, THAT THE MEMORY OF PRIMAL SECRETS MIGHT NOT BE FORGOTTEN.

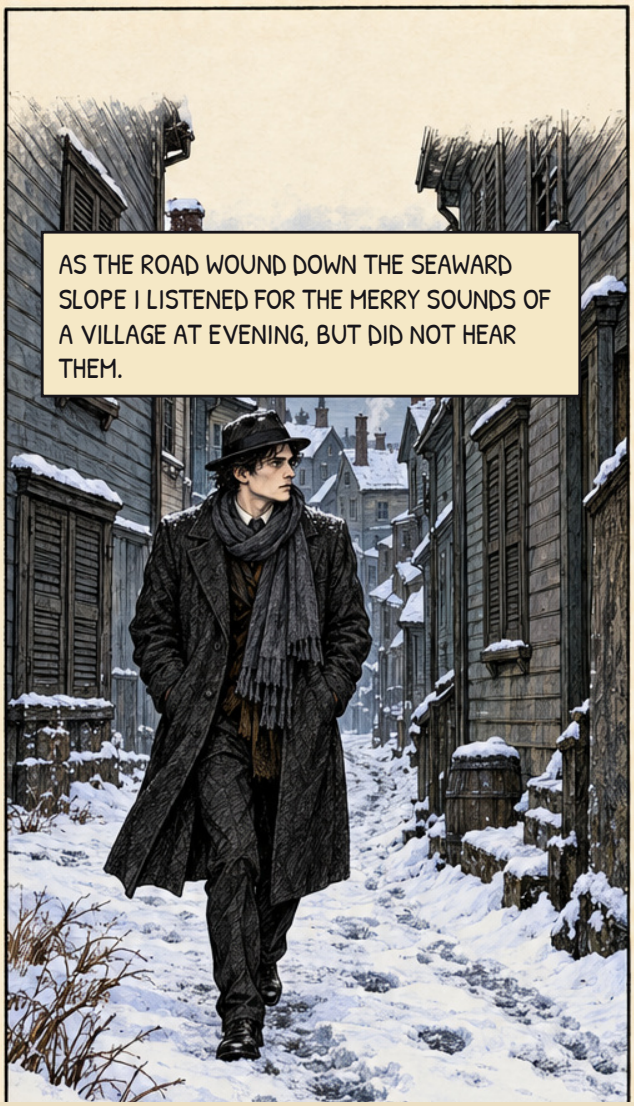


I WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAME BACK THAT NIGHT TO THE OLD FISHING TOWN AS LEGEND BADE, FOR ONLY THE POOR AND THE LONELY REMEMBER.

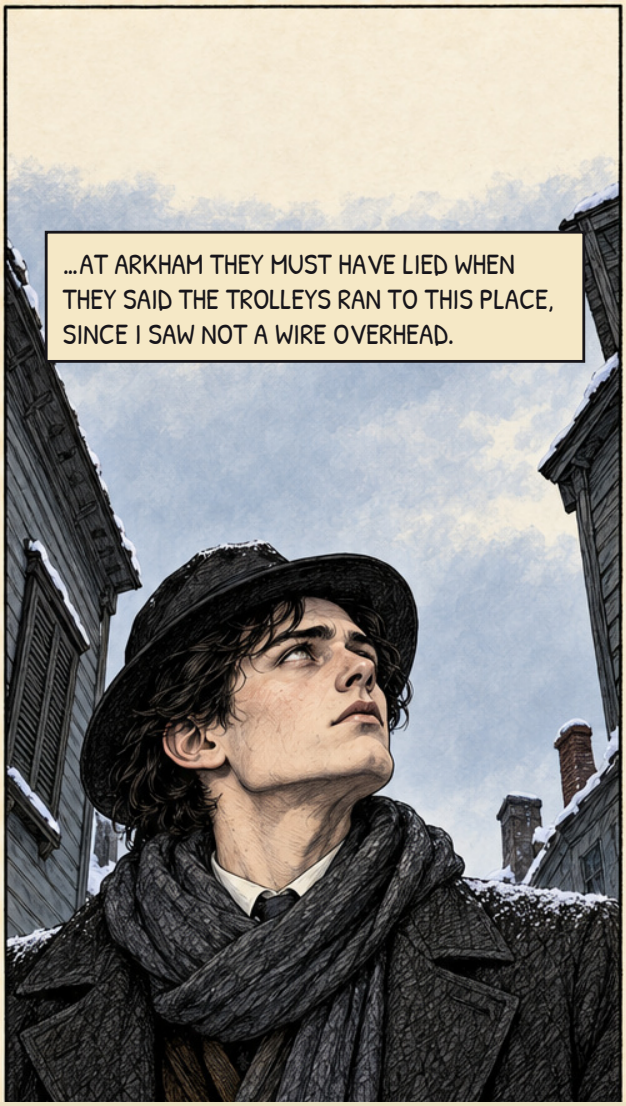
THEY HAD HANGED FOUR KINSMEN OF MINE FOR WITCHCRAFT IN 1692, BUT I DID NOT KNOW JUST WHERE.



AS THE ROAD WOUND DOWN THE SEAWARD SLOPE I LISTENED FOR THE MERRY SOUNDS OF A VILLAGE AT EVENING, BUT DID NOT HEAR THEM.



...AT ARKHAM THEY MUST HAVE LIED WHEN THEY SAID THE TROLLEYS RAN TO THIS PLACE, SINCE I SAW NOT A WIRE OVERHEAD.




I HAD SEEN MAPS OF THE TOWN, AND KNEW WHERE TO FIND THE HOME OF MY PEOPLE.
...I WOULD HAVE RELISHED IT BETTER IF THERE HAD BEEN FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW...

...THOUGH HE MADE SIGNS THAT HE WAS DUMB, HE WROTE A QUAINT AND ANCIENT WELCOME WITH THE STYLUS AND WAX TABLET HE CARRIED.



...A BENT OLD WOMAN IN LOOSE WRAPPER AND DEEP POKE-BONNET SAT BACK TOWARD ME, SILENTLY SPINNING...



THE EYES NEVER MOVED, AND THE SKIN WAS TOO LIKE WAX.



...WORST OF ALL, THE UNMENTIONABLE NECRONOMICON OF THE MAD ARAB ABDUL ALHAZRED...



...I FANCIED I HEARD THE CLOSING OF ONE OF THE WINDOWS THAT THE SETTLE FACED... AFTER THAT I LOST THE FEELING THAT THERE WERE PERSONS ON THE SETTLE...




WHEN ELEVEN STRUCK, HOWEVER, THE OLD MAN STOOD UP... AND GOT TWO HOODED CLOAKS...
...THE OLD MAN, AFTER PICKING UP THE VERY BOOK I HAD BEEN READING, BECKONING ME...
...SEEING NEVER A FACE AND HEARING NEVER A WORD.


...THE THRONG OF COWLED, CLOAKED FIGURES THAT POURED SILENTLY FROM EVERY DOORWAY AND FORMED MONSTROUS PROCESSIONS...
...JOSTLED BY ELBOWS THAT SEEMED PRETERNATURALLY SOFT, AND PRESSED BY CHESTS AND STOMACHS THAT SEEMED ABNORMALLY PULPY...

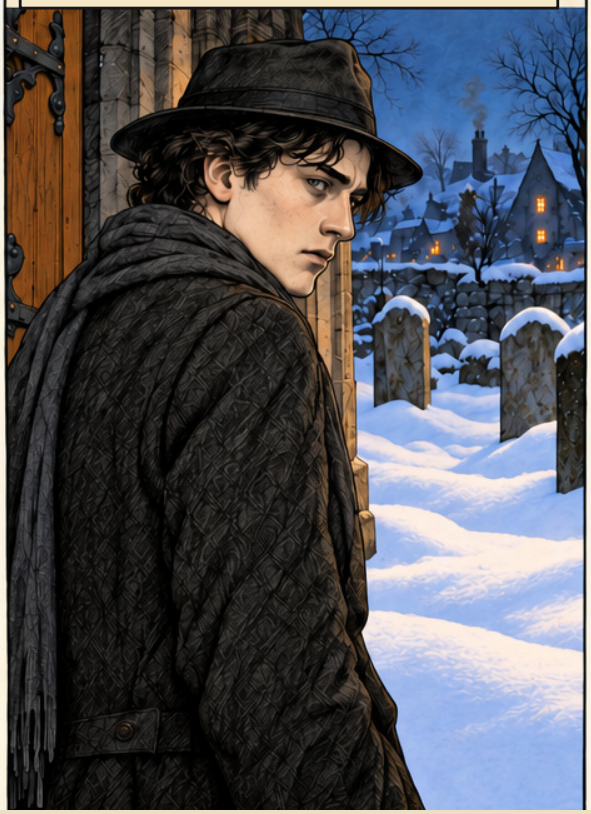
I WAITED TILL THE CROWD HAD OOZED INTO THE BLACK DOORWAY, AND TILL ALL THE STRAGGLERS HAD FOLLOWED.



THE OLD MAN WAS PULLING AT MY SLEEVE, BUT I WAS DETERMINED TO BE THE LAST.

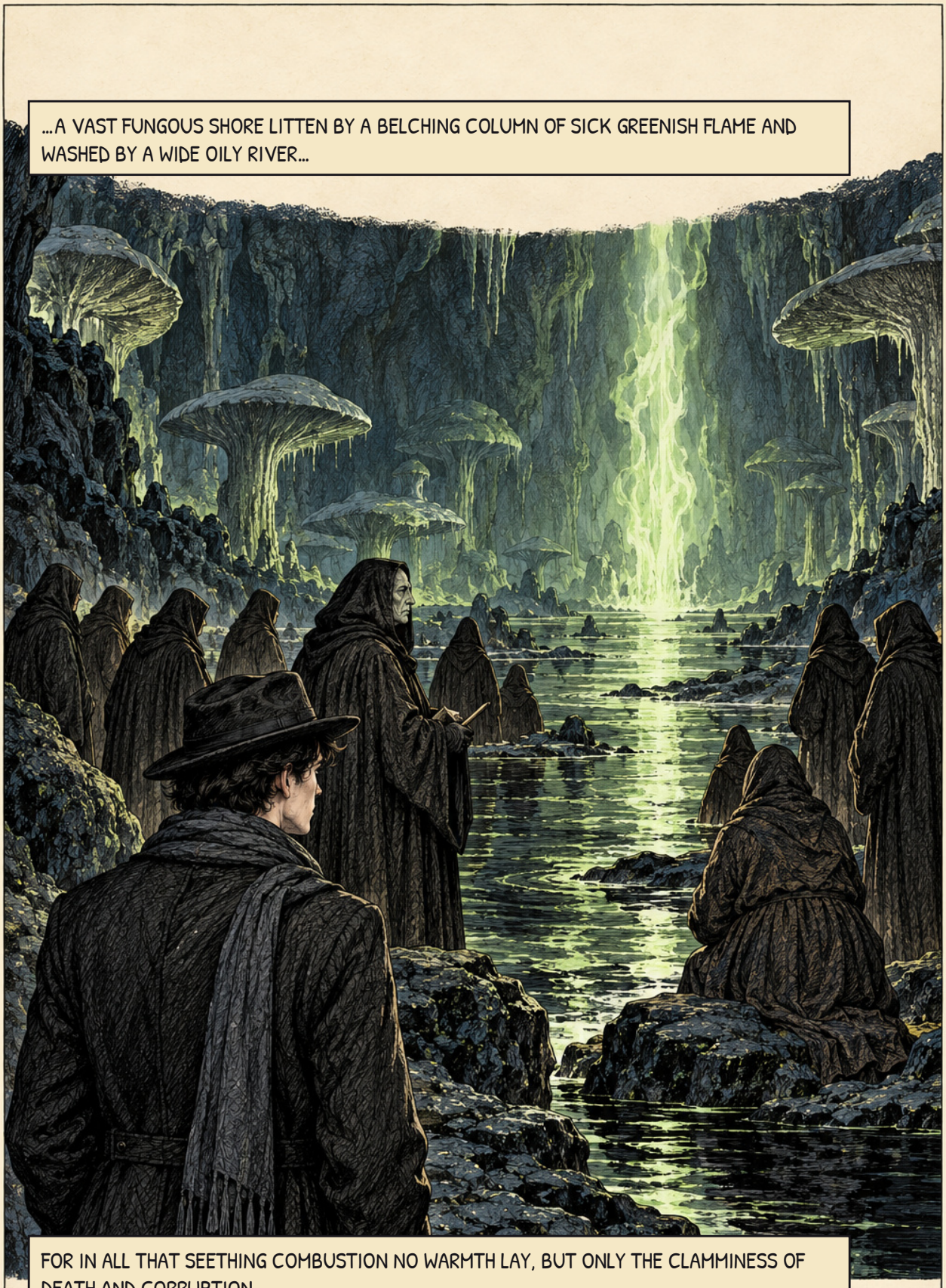


...IN THAT FLEETING BACKWARD LOOK IT SEEMED TO MY TROUBLED EYES THAT THEY BORE NO MARK OF PASSING FEET, NOT EVEN MINE.




THEY HAD STREAMED UP THE AISLE... TO THE TRAP-DOOR OF THE VAULTS WHICH YAWNED LOATHSOMELY OPEN JUST BEFORE THE PULPIT...
THEN I NOTICED THAT THE TOMB'S FLOOR HAD AN APERTURE DOWN WHICH THE THRONG WAS SLIDING...


WHAT MAINLY TROUBLED ME WAS THAT THE MYRIAD FOOTFALLS MADE NO SOUND AND SET UP NO ECHOES.
...THE WALLS AND STEPS WERE CHANGING IN NATURE, AS IF CHISELLED OUT OF THE SOLID ROCK.
THEN I SAW THE LURID SHIMMERING OF PALE LIGHT, AND HEARD THE INSIDIOUS LAPPING OF SUNLESS WATERS... THE THIN, WHINING MOCKERY OF A FEEBLE FLUTE...


...A VAST FUNGOUS SHORE LITTEN BY A BELCHING COLUMN OF SICK GREENISH FLAME AND WASHED BY A WIDE OILY RIVER...
FOR IN ALL THAT SEETHING COMBUSTION NO WARMTH LAY, BUT ONLY THE CLAMMINESS OF DEATH AND CORRUPTION.

IT WAS THE YULE-RITE, OLDER THAN MAN AND FATED TO SURVIVE HIM...



...I SHARED ALL THE OBEISANCES BECAUSE I HAD BEEN SUMMONED TO THIS FESTIVAL BY THE WRITINGS OF MY FOREFATHERS.



...THE HALF-SEEN FLUTE-PLAYER... CHANGED ITS FEEBLE DRONE TO A SCARCE LOUDER DRONE IN ANOTHER KEY...




...THERE FLOPPED RHYTHMICALLY A HORDE OF TAME, TRAINED, HYBRID WINGED THINGS...
THEY WERE NOT ALTOGETHER CROWS, NOR MOLES, NOR BUZZARDS, NOR ANTS, NOR VAMPIRE BATS, NOR DECOMPOSED HUMAN BEINGS...


...THE COWLED FIGURES SEIZED AND MOUNTED THEM, AND RODE OFF ONE BY ONE ALONG THE REACHES OF THAT UNLIGHTED RIVER...


THE OLD SPINNING WOMAN HAD GONE WITH THE THRONG...


I CANNOT GO WITH YOU.


...HE WAS THE TRUE DEPUTY OF MY FATHERS... HE PULLED FROM HIS LOOSE ROBE A SEAL RING AND A WATCH, BOTH WITH MY FAMILY ARMS...


...I KNEW FROM OLD PAPERS THAT THAT WATCH HAD BEEN BURIED WITH MY GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER IN 1698.

...THE OLD MAN DREW BACK HIS HOOD AND POINTED TO THE FAMILY RESEMBLANCE...



...DISLODGED THE WAXEN MASK FROM WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN HIS HEAD.



...I FLUNG MYSELF INTO THE OILY UNDERGROUND RIVER...




AT THE HOSPITAL THEY TOLD ME I HAD BEEN FOUND HALF FROZEN IN KINGSPORT HARBOUR AT DAWN...
...THE BROAD WINDOW SHEWING A SEA OF ROOFS IN WHICH ONLY ABOUT ONE IN FIVE WAS ANCIENT, AND THE SOUND OF TROLLEYS AND MOTORS...
YOUR FOOTPRINTS LED TO ORANGE POINT. YOU MUST HAVE FALLEN FROM THE CLIFF.

SO I READ AGAIN THAT HIDEOUS CHAPTER, AND SHUDDERED DOUBLY BECAUSE IT WAS INDEED NOT NEW TO ME.



GREAT HOLES SECRETLY ARE DIGGED WHERE EARTH'S PORES OUGHT TO SUFFICE, AND THINGS HAVE LEARNT TO WALK THAT OUGHT TO CRAWL.

