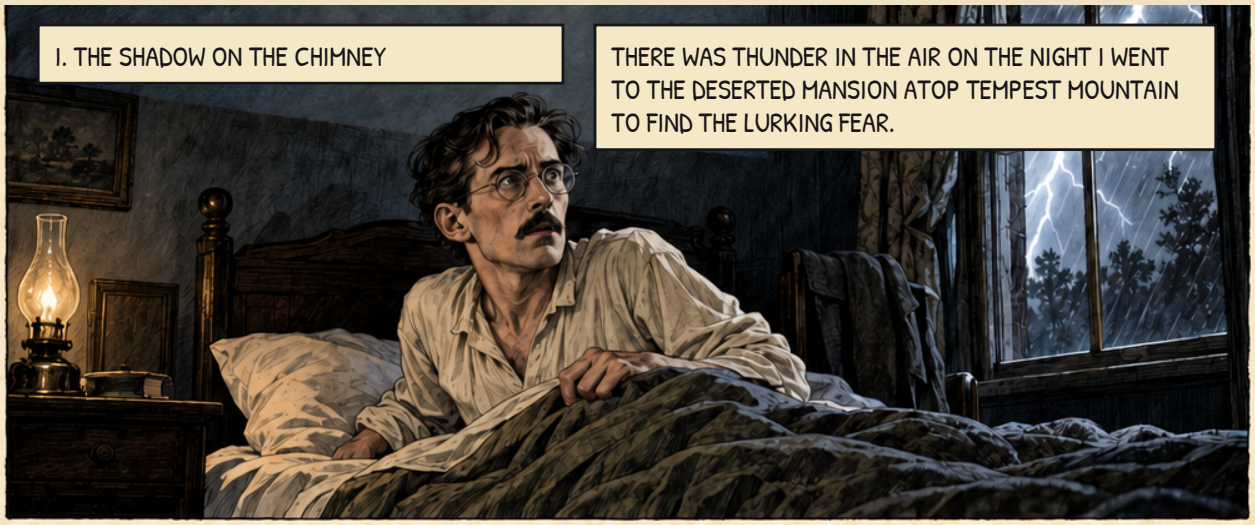
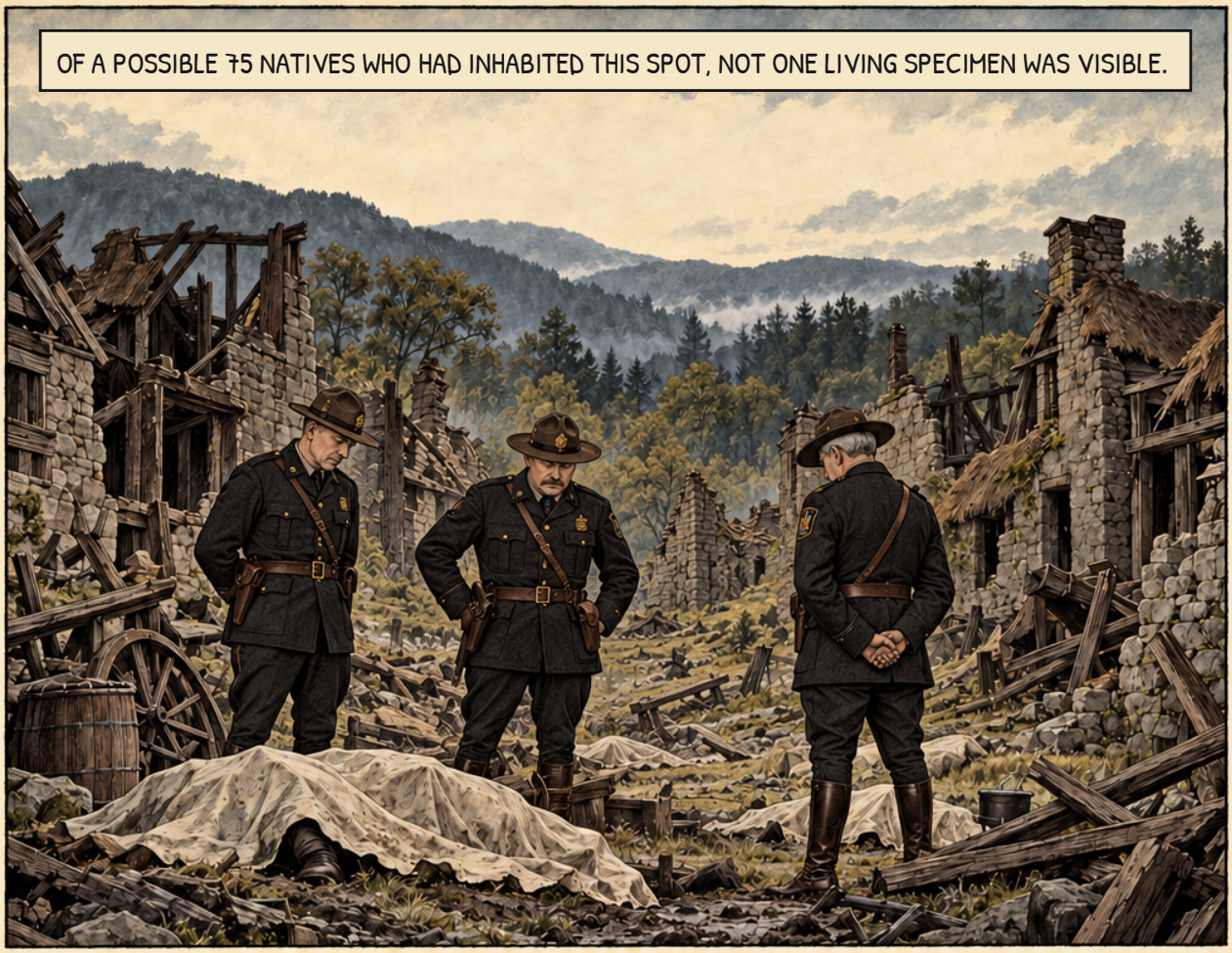
THE LURKING FEAR

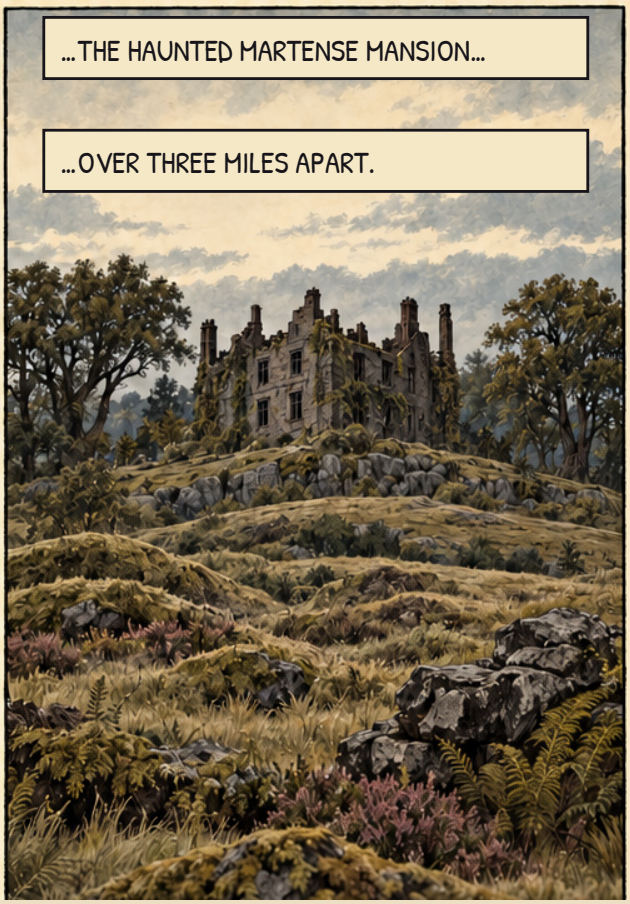







OF A POSSIBLE 75 NATIVES WHO HAD INHABITED THIS SPOT, NOT ONE LIVING SPECIMEN WAS VISIBLE.


...THE RAVAGES OF DAEMON TEETH AND TALONS; YET NO VISIBLE TRAIL LED AWAY FROM THE CARNAGE.


...THE HAUNTED MARTENSE MANSION...
...OVER THREE MILES APART.

...ON AUGUST 5TH, 1921, I REGISTERED AMONG THE REPORTERS WHO CROWDED THE HOTEL AT LEFFERTS CORNERS...



SOME SAID THE THUNDER CALLED THE LURKING FEAR OUT OF ITS HABITATION, WHILE OTHERS SAID THE THUNDER WAS ITS VOICE.



THREE WEEKS MORE, AND THE DISPERSAL OF THE REPORTERS LEFT ME FREE TO BEGIN A TERRIBLE EXPLORATION...



...MEN LONG ASSOCIATED WITH ME IN MY GHASTLY EXPLORATIONS BECAUSE OF THEIR PECULIAR FITNESS.




OF WILD CREATURES THERE WERE NONE—THEY ARE WISE WHEN DEATH LEERS CLOSE.
WE WILL WATCH FROM JAN MARTENSE'S ROOM.
...THE OLD ROOM OF JAN MARTENSE, WHOSE MURDER LOOMS SO GREAT IN THE RURAL LEGENDS.


IF IT COMES FROM THE HOUSE, USE THE LADDERS.


IF IT CAME FROM WITHIN THE HOUSE, WE HAD THE WINDOW LADDERS; IF FROM OUTSIDE THE DOOR AND THE STAIRS.


I WAS BETWEEN MY TWO COMPANIONS, GEORGE BENNETT BEING TOWARD THE WINDOW AND WILLIAM TOBEY TOWARD THE FIREPLACE.


IT IS CURIOUS HOW INTENTLY I HAD BEEN WATCHING THAT FIREPLACE.


I WATCHED FROM MIDNIGHT TO ONE O'CLOCK, WHEN... I FELT SINGULARLY DROWSY.
TOBEY... YOUR WATCH.
ONCE I PARTLY AWAKED, PROBABLY BECAUSE THE SLEEPER TOWARD THE WINDOW HAD RESTLESSLY FLUNG AN ARM ACROSS MY CHEST.

THERE WAS NO LIGHT, BUT I KNEW FROM THE EMPTY SPACE AT MY RIGHT THAT TOBEY WAS GONE... ACROSS MY CHEST STILL LAY THE HEAVY ARM...



...THE SHADOW ON THAT CHIMNEY WAS NOT THAT OF GEORGE BENNETT OR OF ANY OTHER HUMAN CREATURE...




IN ANOTHER SECOND I WAS ALONE IN THE ACCURSED MANSION, SHIVERING AND GIBBERING.
BENNETT! TOBEY!
GEORGE BENNETT AND WILLIAM TOBEY HAD LEFT NO TRACE, NOT EVEN OF A STRUGGLE. THEY WERE NEVER HEARD OF AGAIN.

II. A PASSER IN THE STORM. FOR DAYS AFTER THAT HIDEOUS EXPERIENCE... I LAY NERVOUSLY EXHAUSTED IN MY HOTEL ROOM...



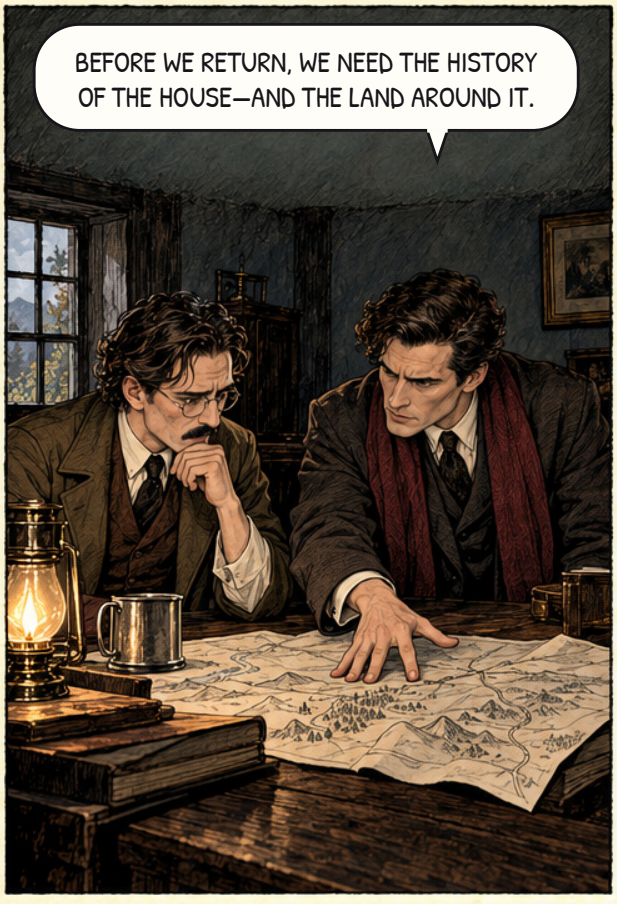
...WHY HAD IT PICKED THEM, AND LEFT ME FOR THE LAST?

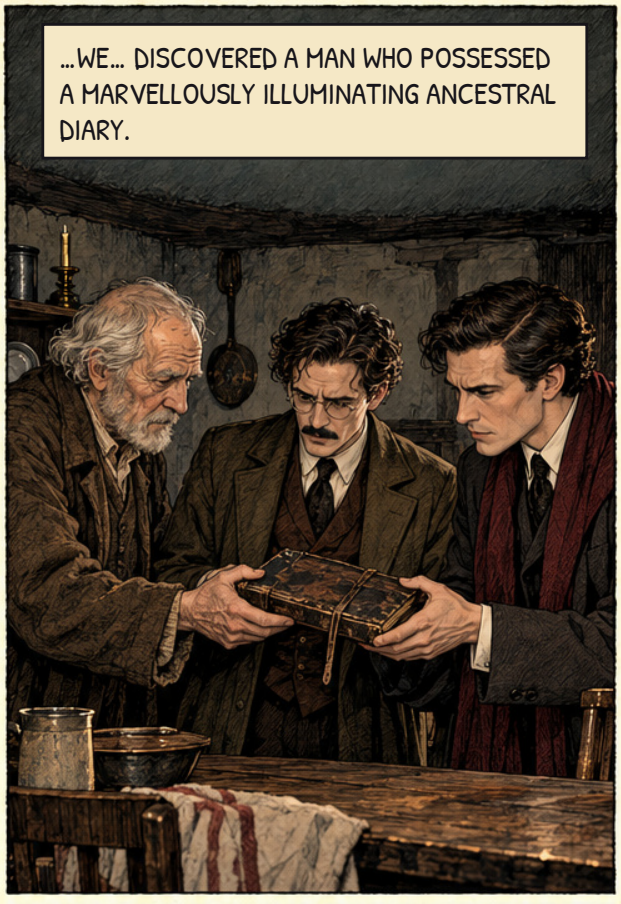


ON AN AFTERNOON IN EARLY SEPTEMBER, ARTHUR MUNROE LISTENED TO MY STORY.

TELL ME EVERYTHING.




BEFORE WE RETURN, WE NEED THE HISTORY OF THE HOUSE—AND THE LAND AROUND IT.


...WE... DISCOVERED A MAN WHO POSSESSED A MARVELLOUSLY ILLUMINATING ANCESTRAL DIARY.


THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE, WARY AT FIRST, HELPED US PATIENTLY.


MOST ATTACKS FOLLOWED THE WOODS AROUND THE MANSION. BUT NOT ALL.



...WE BEAT DOWN ALL THE THICKETS AND TORE OUT ALL THE PARTITIONS OF THE MANSION IN OUR SEARCH FOR THE LURKING FEAR.



CLEAR NIGHTS BROUGHT NO ATTACKS. BY MID-OCTOBER WE FEARED WINTER WOULD END THE SEARCH.




...WE HEARD THE RUMBLE OF A THUNDERSTORM GATHERING OVER TEMPEST MOUNTAIN.
INSIDE—QUICKLY!
...THE LEAST POROUS CABIN OF THE LOT... WHOSE STILL EXISTING DOOR AND SINGLE TINY WINDOW BOTH FACED MAPLE HILL.

IT WAS DISMAL SITTING THERE ON RICKETY BOXES IN THE PITCHY DARKNESS, BUT WE SMOKED PIPES...



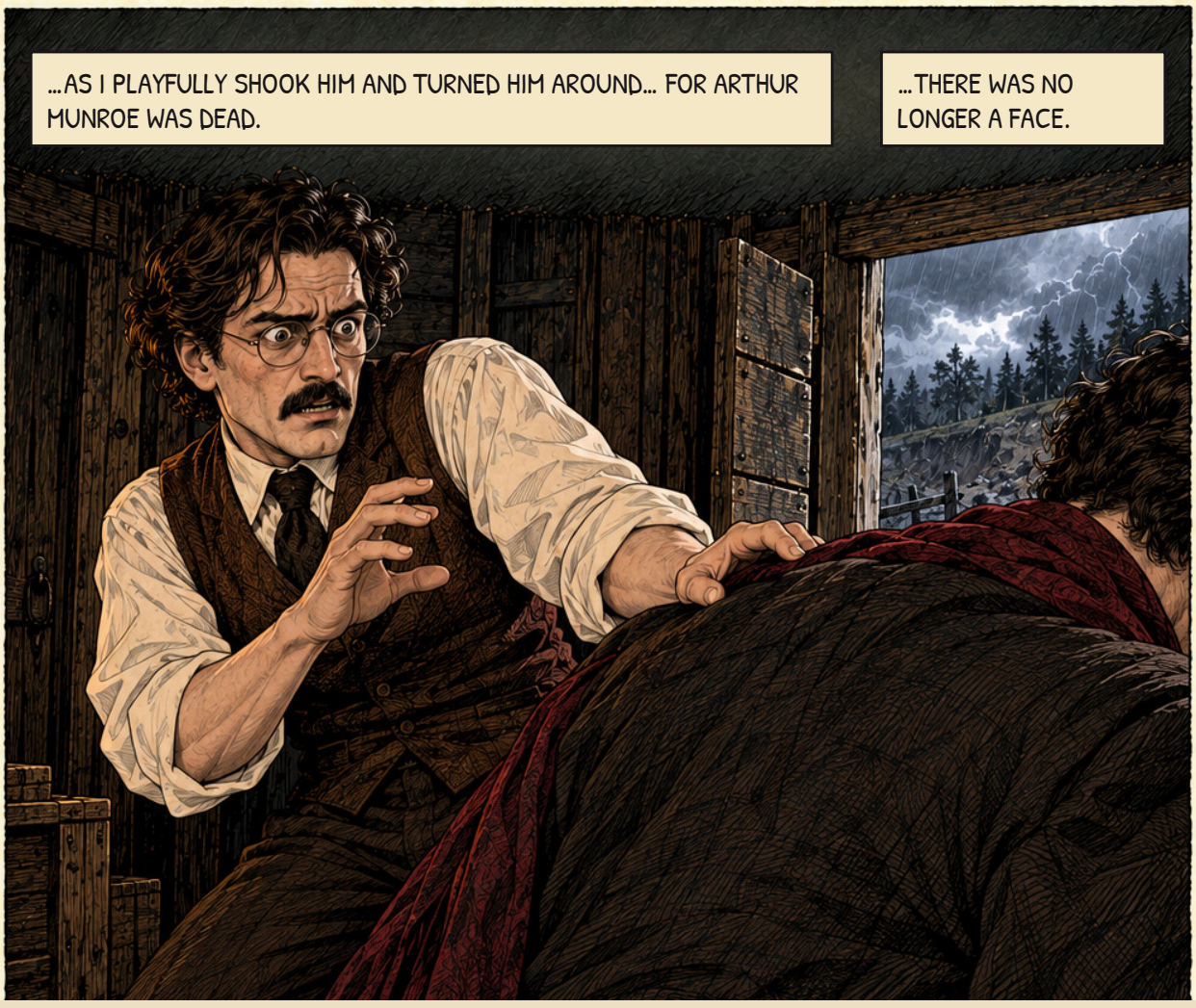
...AGAIN I WONDERED WHY THE DAEMON... HAD BEGUN WITH THE MEN ON EACH SIDE AND LEFT THE MIDDLE MAN TILL THE LAST...






...I COULD NOT HEAR WHAT HE SAID; BUT I WAITED WHILE HE LEANED OUT AND TRIED TO FATHOM NATURE'S PANDEMONIUM.
...A FURTIVE SUNBEAM FROM A KNOTHOLE BEHIND ME...
WE CAN GET SOME LIGHT NOW, ARTHUR.


ARTHUR?


...AS I PLAYFULLY SHOOK HIM AND TURNED HIM AROUND... FOR ARTHUR MUNROE WAS DEAD.
...THERE WAS NO LONGER A FACE.


AFTER THAT THING I HAD DUG A GRAVE FOR ONE WHOSE DEATH I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND.


I KNEW THAT OTHERS COULD NOT UNDERSTAND EITHER, SO LET THEM THINK ARTHUR MUNROE HAD WANDERED AWAY.


...A QUEST WHICH THE FATE OF ARTHUR MUNROE MADE ME VOW TO KEEP SILENT AND SOLITARY.

III. WHAT THE RED GLARE MEANT. ON THE TEMPEST-RACKED NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 8, 1921… I STOOD DIGGING ALONE AND IDIOTICALLY IN THE GRAVE OF JAN MARTENSE.



THE MARTENSE MANSION WAS BUILT IN 1670 BY GERRIT MARTENSE, A WEALTHY NEW-AMSTERDAM MERCHANT WHO DISLIKED THE CHANGING ORDER UNDER BRITISH RULE…



…HE FITTED UP A CELLAR INTO WHICH HE COULD RETREAT FROM THEIR WILDEST PANDEMONIUM.



IN APPEARANCE ALL WERE MARKED BY A PECULIAR INHERITED DISSIMILARITY OF EYES; ONE GENERALLY BEING BLUE AND THE OTHER BROWN.



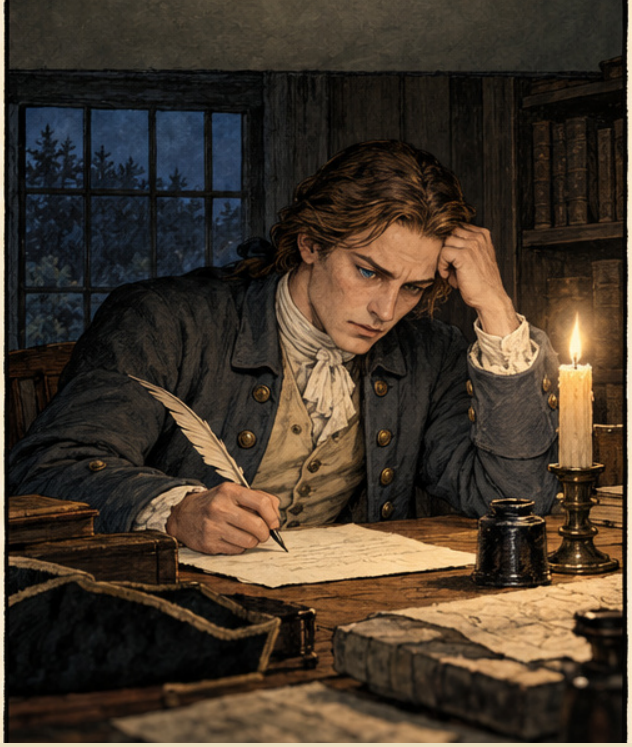
...YOUNG JAN MARTENSE... JOINED THE COLONIAL ARMY WHEN NEWS OF THE ALBANY CONVENTION REACHED TEMPEST MOUNTAIN.



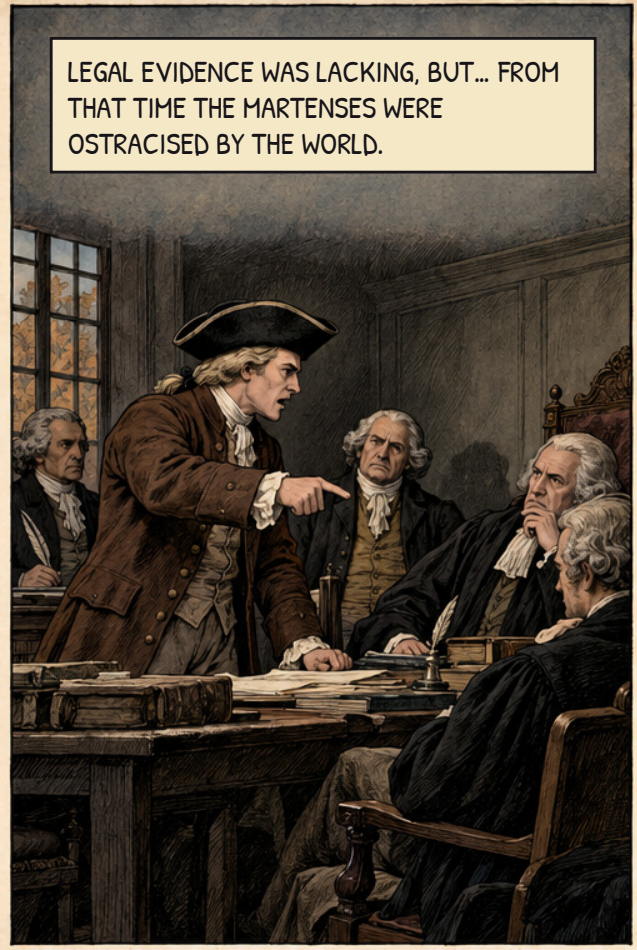
...WHEN HE RETURNED IN 1760 AFTER SIX YEARS OF CAMPAIGNING, HE WAS HATED AS AN OUTSIDER...

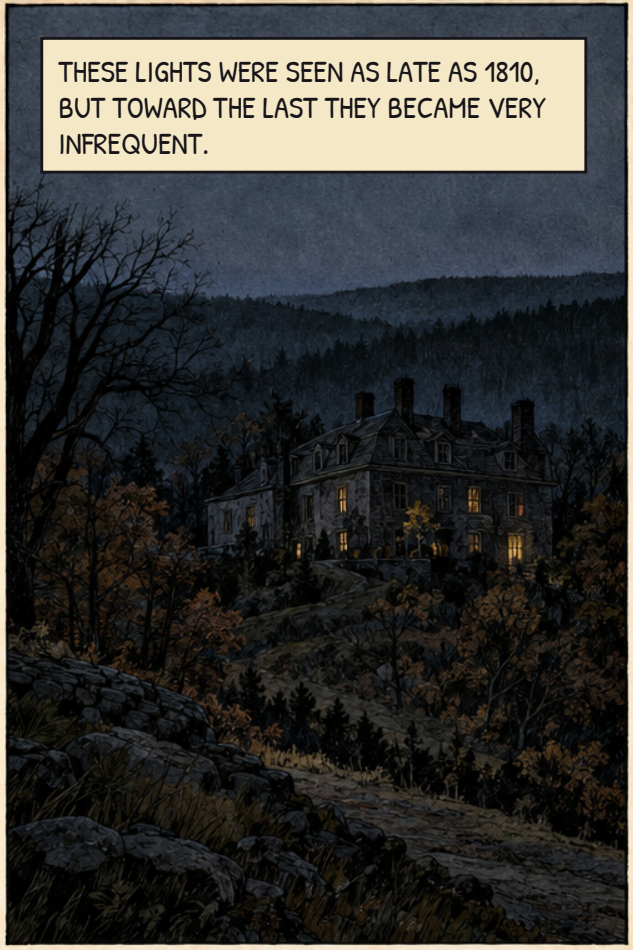


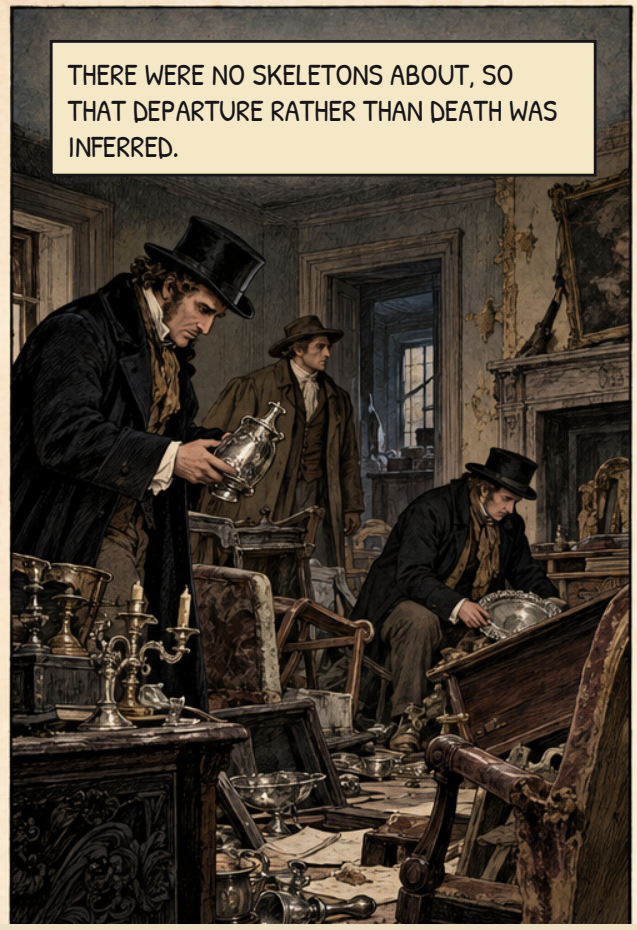
...HE FREQUENTLY WROTE TO A FRIEND IN ALBANY OF PLANS TO LEAVE THE PATERNAL ROOF.




HIS DIARY STATES THAT HE REACHED TEMPEST MOUNTAIN ON SEPTEMBER 20, FINDING THE MANSION IN GREAT DECREPITUDE.
LIGHTNING KILLED JAN LAST AUTUMN. HE IS BURIED THERE.
HE FOUND WHAT HE EXPECTED—A SKULL CRUSHED CRUELLY AS IF BY SAVAGE BLOWS...


LEGAL EVIDENCE WAS LACKING, BUT... FROM THAT TIME THE MARTENSES WERE OSTRACISED BY THE WORLD.


THESE LIGHTS WERE SEEN AS LATE AS 1810, BUT TOWARD THE LAST THEY BECAME VERY INFREQUENT.


THERE WERE NO SKELETONS ABOUT, SO THAT DEPARTURE RATHER THAN DEATH WAS INFERRED.


...I DELVED IRRATIONALLY AND CLUMSILY DOWN BENEATH WHERE HE HAD LAIN.

...I PRODUCED AN ELECTRIC POCKET LAMP AND VIEWED THE SMALL HORIZONTAL TUNNEL WHICH LED AWAY INDEFINITELY IN BOTH DIRECTIONS.



CHOOSING THE DIRECTION TOWARD THE HOUSE, I SCRAMBLED RECKLESSLY INTO THE NARROW BURROW...



I DID IT FOR SO LONG THAT LIFE FADED TO A FAR MEMORY, AND I BECAME ONE WITH THE MOLES AND GRUBS OF NIGHTED DEPTHS.



...MY BATTERY HAD BURNED VERY LOW, WHEN THE PASSAGE SUDDENLY INCLINED SHARPLY UPWARD...



THE EYES APPROACHED, YET OF THE THING THAT BORE THEM I COULD DISTINGUISH ONLY A CLAW. BUT WHAT A CLAW!



WITH CYCLOPEAN RAGE IT TORE THROUGH THE SOIL ABOVE THAT DAMNABLE PIT...




...I SAW THAT I HAD COME TO THE SURFACE IN A FAMILIAR SPOT...
...THERE WAS NOTHING IN THE CHAOS TO SHEW MY PLACE OF EGRESS FROM THE LETHAL CATACOMB.
...AS A DISTANT RED GLARE BURST ON THE LANDSCAPE FROM THE SOUTH...


TWENTY MILES SOUTH. SOMETHING DROPPED FROM A TREE INTO A CABIN.
IT HAD DONE A DEED, BUT THE SQUATTERS HAD FIRED THE CABIN IN FRENZY BEFORE IT COULD ESCAPE.
IT HAD BEEN DOING THAT DEED AT THE VERY MOMENT THE EARTH CAVED IN ON THE THING WITH THE CLAW AND EYES.


IV. THE HORROR IN THE EYES. SOME EXTENSIVE CAVE-IN HAD OBLITERATED ALL TRACE OF THE UNDERGROUND PASSAGE...
...BESIDES THE COMPLETE SKULL OF A HUMAN BEING, THERE WAS ANOTHER BONY FRAGMENT...
THE SQUATTERS SAID THE THING HAD HAD ONLY ONE VICTIM...


...DUSK CAME AS I STOOD ON MAPLE HILL LOOKING DOWN AT THE HAMLET AND ACROSS THE VALLEY TO TEMPEST MOUNTAIN.
THAT SUMMIT WAS UNDENIABLY A CENTRE FROM WHICH THE LINES OR ROWS OF POINTS RADIATED...
MY GOD!... MOLEHILLS...


...THE DAMNED PLACE MUST BE HONEYCOMBED...
...THAT NIGHT AT THE MANSION... THEY TOOK BENNETT AND TOBEY FIRST... ON EACH SIDE OF US...
...DIGGING TO FIND THE CORE AND CENTRE OF THAT MALIGNANT UNIVERSE OF MOUNDS.

...THE HOLE AT THE BASE OF THE OLD CHIMNEY, WHERE THE THICK WEEDS GREW...



...WITH A SENSE OF FATEFUL ALARM I HEARD THE SINISTER AND SIGNIFICANT RUMBLE OF APPROACHING THUNDER.



MY EYES, HOWEVER, NEVER TURNED AWAY FROM THE HORRIBLE OPENING AT THE BASE OF THE CHIMNEY...




...FROM THAT OPENING BENEATH THE CHIMNEY A BURST OF MULTITUDINOUS AND LEPROUS LIFE...
GOD KNOWS HOW MANY THERE WERE—THERE MUST HAVE BEEN THOUSANDS.

...ONE OF THE LAST STRAGGLERS TURNED WITH THE SKILL OF LONG PRACTICE TO MAKE A MEAL IN ACCUSTOMED FASHION ON A WEAKER COMPANION.



...I DREW MY AUTOMATIC PISTOL AND SHOT IT UNDER COVER OF THE THUNDER.



WHAT I SAW IN THE GLOW OF MY FLASHLIGHT AFTER I SHOT THE UNSPEAKABLE STRAGGLING OBJECT...



...A GANG OF MEN TO BLOW UP THE MARTENSE MANSION AND THE ENTIRE TOP OF TEMPEST MOUNTAIN WITH DYNAMITE...



...STOP UP ALL THE DISCOVERABLE MOUND-BURROWS, AND DESTROY CERTAIN OVERNOURISHED TREES...



I CANNOT SEE A WELL OR A SUBWAY ENTRANCE WITHOUT SHUDDERING...



IT HAD LOOKED AT ME AS IT DIED... ONE EYE WAS BLUE, THE OTHER BROWN.

THEY WERE THE DISSIMILAR MARTENSE EYES OF THE OLD LEGENDS...



...AND I KNEW IN ONE INUNDATING CATACLYSM OF VOICELESS HORROR WHAT HAD BECOME OF THAT VANISHED FAMILY...

