THE MOON-BOG

SOMEWHERE, TO WHAT REMOTE AND FEARSOME REGION I KNOW NOT, DENYS BARRY HAS GONE.



THEY FOUND ME AT DAWN WANDERING MINDLESS NEAR BALLYLOUGH...



I HAD KNOWN DENYS BARRY WELL IN AMERICA, WHERE HE HAD GROWN RICH...



...THE GREY CASTLE WAS RISING TOWER BY TOWER TO ITS ANCIENT SPLENDOUR...



...HE WAS LONELY IN THE CASTLE WITH NO ONE TO SPEAK TO SAVE THE NEW SERVANTS AND LABOURERS HE HAD BROUGHT FROM THE NORTH.



BARRY'S MOTOR HAD MET ME AT THE BALLYLOUGH STATION, FOR KILDERRY IS OFF THE RAILWAY.



...THE PEASANTS AT BALLYLOUGH HAD WARNED ME AGAINST IT AND SAID THAT KILDERRY HAD BECOME ACCURSED...



THE PEASANTS HAD GONE FROM KILDERRY BECAUSE DENYS BARRY WAS TO DRAIN THE GREAT BOG.



...THE PEASANTS FIRST REFUSED TO HELP, AND THEN CURSED HIM AND WENT AWAY TO BALLYLOUGH WITH THEIR FEW BELONGINGS...



IN THEIR PLACE HE SENT FOR LABOURERS FROM THE NORTH, AND WHEN THE SERVANTS LEFT HE REPLACED THEM LIKEWISE.



...SOME PREPOSTEROUS LEGEND OF THE BOG, AND OF A GRIM GUARDIAN SPIRIT THAT DWELT IN THE STRANGE OLDEN RUIN ON THE FAR ISLET...



...ONE CITY WAS OVERLOOKED SAVE BY ITS PATRON MOON-GODDESS; SO THAT ONLY THE WOODED HILLS BURIED IT WHEN THE MEN OF NEMED SWEPT DOWN FROM SCYTHIA IN THEIR THIRTY SHIPS.



...MY ROOM, WHICH WAS IN A REMOTE TOWER OVERLOOKING THE VILLAGE, AND THE PLAIN AT THE EDGE OF THE BOG, AND THE BOG ITSELF...



...I FANCIED I HEARD FAINT SOUNDS FROM THE DISTANCE; SOUNDS THAT WERE WILD AND HALF MUSICAL...



...A STATELY CITY IN A GREEN VALLEY, WHERE MARBLE STREETS AND STATUES, VILLAS AND TEMPLES...SPOKE IN CERTAIN TONES THE GLORY THAT WAS GREECE.



FOR THE SIXTH TIME THEY HAD ALL OVERSLEPT, WAKING VERY SLOWLY AND DAZEDLY, AND ACTING AS IF THEY HAD NOT RESTED...



...MOST OF THEM SEEMED UNEASY OVER SOME DREAM WHICH THEY HAD HAD, YET WHICH THEY TRIED IN VAIN TO REMEMBER.



...THEY SEEMED TO REMEMBER WEIRD SOUNDS, TOO.



...HE WOULD BEGIN THE DRAINAGE IN TWO DAYS.



...UPON THE CITY IN THE VALLEY I SAW A PESTILENCE DESCEND, AND THEN A FRIGHTFUL AVALANCHE OF WOODED SLOPES...



...LEFT UNBURIED ONLY THE TEMPLE OF ARTEMIS ON THE HIGH PEAK, WHERE THE AGED MOON-PRIESTESS CLEIS LAY COLD AND SILENT WITH A CROWN OF IVORY ON HER SILVER HEAD.



...I HEARD A CLOCK FROM SOME REMOTE LANDING BELOW STRIKE THE HOUR OF TWO, AND I KNEW I WAS AWAKE.



ONLY BY CHANCE DID I GO TO THE NORTH WINDOW AND LOOK OUT UPON THE SILENT VILLAGE AND THE PLAIN AT THE EDGE OF THE BOG.



...HALF OF THESE TIRELESS, MECHANICAL DANCERS WERE THE LABOURERS WHOM I HAD THOUGHT ASLEEP...



...THE OTHER HALF WERE STRANGE AIRY BEINGS IN WHITE, HALF INDETERMINATE IN NATURE...



...I DROPPED SUDDENLY IN A DREAMLESS SWOON, OUT OF WHICH THE HIGH SUN OF MORNING AROUSED ME.



...SLEPT VERY LATE AND RECALLED NOTHING OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT SAVE MISTY DREAMS OF SHRILL SOUNDS.



...THE GREAT WORK WHICH WAS TO BEGIN ON THE MORROW...



...DID NOT DARE CONTINUE AFTER HE GAVE HIS RESOUNDING LAUGH.



...KILDERRY BLAZED ALL RED AND GOLD IN A FLAME THAT SEEMED A PORTENT.



...THE MOON WAS NOW WELL IN THE WANE, AND WOULD NOT RISE TILL THE SMALL HOURS.



...THE CITY IN THE VALLEY, COLD AND DEAD UNDER A SHROUD OF HIDEOUS SHADOW.



TERRIBLE AND PIERCING WAS THE SHAFT OF RUDDY REFULGENCE THAT STREAMED THROUGH THE GOTHIC WINDOW...



...I KEPT MY EYES FROM THE WINDOW IN PANIC FEAR, AND CLUMSILY DREW ON MY CLOTHING WITH SOME DAZED IDEA OF ESCAPE.



I REMEMBER SEIZING MY REVOLVER AND HAT, BUT BEFORE IT WAS OVER I HAD LOST THEM BOTH WITHOUT FIRING THE ONE OR DONNING THE OTHER.



...IT SEEMED TO RISE MAJESTIC AND UNDECAYED, SPLENDID AND COLUMN-CINCTURED...



...I CROSSED THE CIRCULAR ROOM TO THE NORTH WINDOW FROM WHICH I COULD SEE THE VILLAGE AND THE PLAIN AT THE EDGE OF THE BOG.



...BECKONED IN UNCANNY RHYTHM TO A THRONG OF LURCHING LABOURERS WHO FOLLOWED DOG-LIKE WITH BLIND, BRAINLESS, FLOUNDERING STEPS...



...A NEW LINE OF STUMBLING STRAGGLERS ZIGZAGGED DRUNKENLY OUT OF THE CASTLE...



...I RECOGNISED THE UGLY AND UNWIELDY FORM OF THE COOK, WHOSE VERY ABSURDNESS HAD NOW BECOME UNUTTERABLY TRAGIC.



...THE NAIADS REACHED THE WATER AND MELTED ONE BY ONE INTO THE ANCIENT BOG; WHILE THE LINE OF FOLLOWERS...SPLASHED AWKWARDLY AFTER THEM...



...AS THE LAST PATHETIC STRAGGLER, THE FAT COOK, SANK HEAVILY OUT OF SIGHT...



...THE FLUTES AND THE DRUMS GREW SILENT, AND THE BLINDING RED RAYS FROM THE RUINS SNAPPED INSTANTANEOUSLY OUT...



...I FELL TO THE FLOOR; NOT FAINTING, BUT PHYSICALLY HELPLESS. THEN I FELT THE ICY BLAST FROM THE EAST WINDOW WHERE THE MOON HAD RISEN...



...BEGAN TO HEAR THE SHRIEKS IN THE CASTLE FAR BELOW ME. ...ALL I CAN SAY IS THAT THEY CAME FROM SOMETHING I HAD KNOWN AS A FRIEND.



...RACING MADLY THROUGH INKY ROOMS AND CORRIDORS AND OUT ACROSS THE COURTYARD INTO THE HIDEOUS NIGHT.



THE STAGNANT WATERS, LATELY QUITE DEVOID OF ANIMAL LIFE, NOW TEEMED WITH A HORDE OF SLIMY ENORMOUS FROGS...



I FOLLOWED THE GAZE OF ONE VERY FAT AND UGLY FROG, AND SAW THE SECOND OF THE THINGS WHICH DROVE MY SENSES AWAY.



...A BEAM OF FAINT QUIVERING RADIANCE HAVING NO REFLECTION IN THE WATERS OF THE BOG.



CRAZED AS I WAS, I SAW IN THAT AWFUL SHADOW A MONSTROUS RESEMBLANCE—A NAUSEOUS, UNBELIEVABLE CARICATURE—A BLASPHEMOUS EFFIGY OF HIM WHO HAD BEEN DENYS BARRY.

