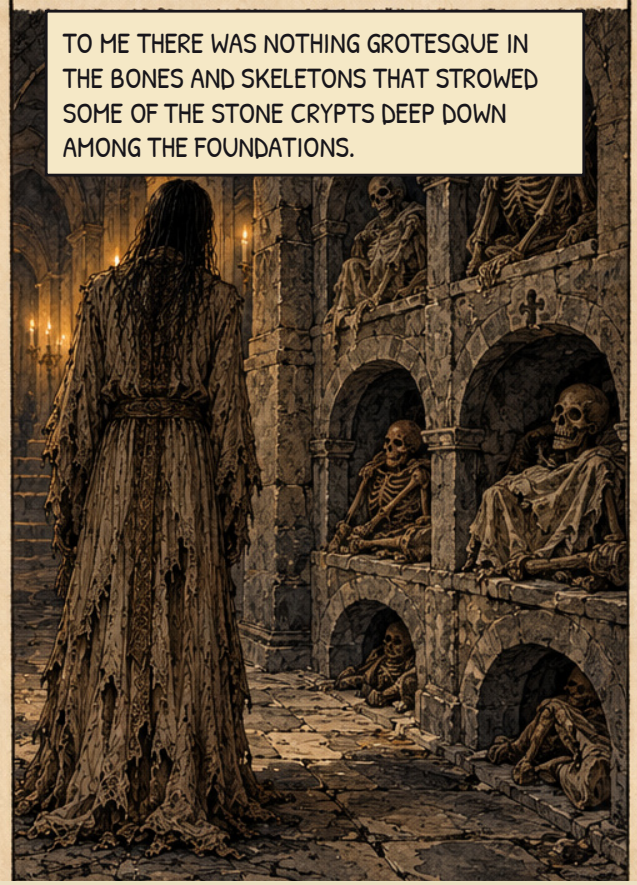
THE OUTSIDER



FROM SUCH BOOKS I LEARNED ALL THAT I KNOW. NO TEACHER URGED OR GUIDED ME...



TO ME THERE WAS NOTHING GROTESQUE IN THE BONES AND SKELETONS THAT STROWED SOME OF THE STONE CRYPTS DEEP DOWN AMONG THE FOUNDATIONS.



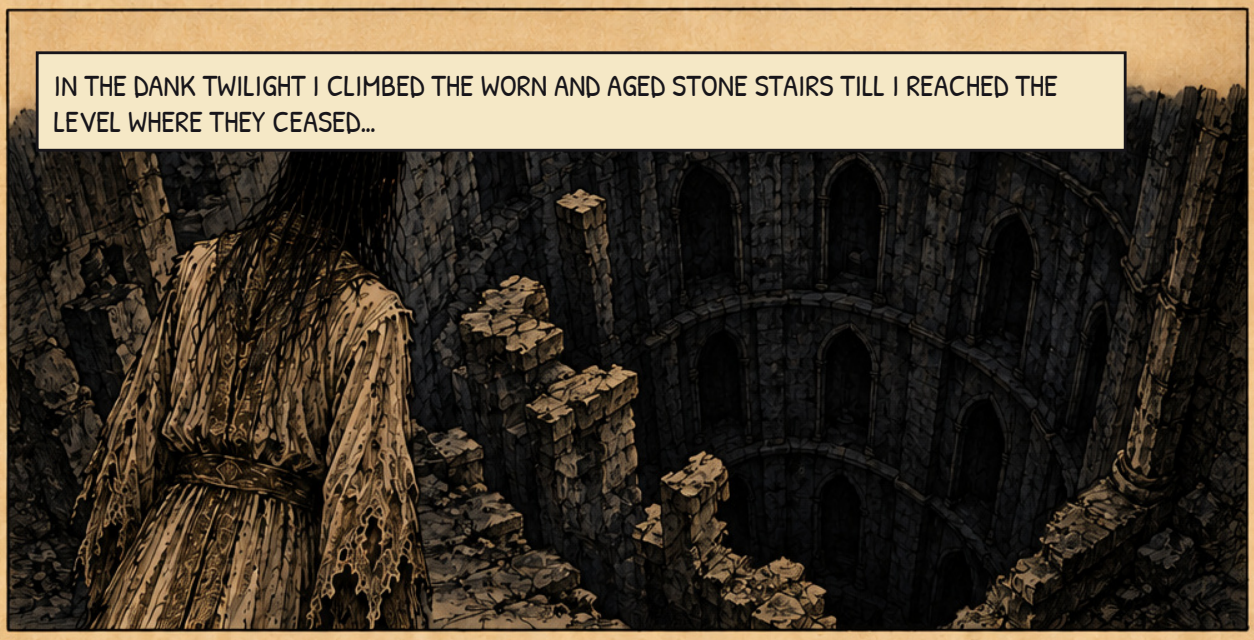
...I MERELY REGARDED MYSELF BY INSTINCT AS AKIN TO THE YOUTHFUL FIGURES I SAW DRAWN AND PAINTED IN THE BOOKS.

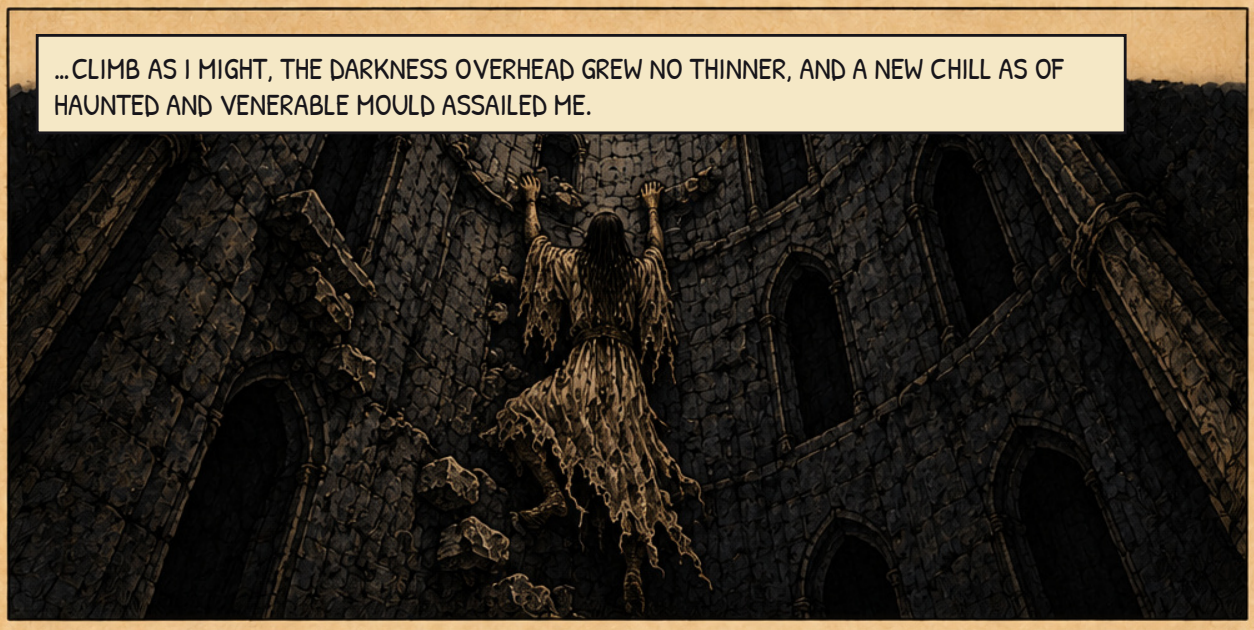



MY ASPECT WAS A MATTER EQUALLY UNTHOUGHT OF, FOR THERE WERE NO MIRRORS IN THE CASTLE...


ONCE I TRIED TO ESCAPE FROM THE FOREST, BUT AS I WENT FARTHER FROM THE CASTLE THE SHADE GREW DENSER AND THE AIR MORE FILLED WITH BROODING FEAR...


THERE WAS ONE BLACK TOWER WHICH REACHED ABOVE THE TREES INTO THE UNKNOWN OUTER SKY...
...IT WERE BETTER TO GLIMPSE THE SKY AND PERISH, THAN TO LIVE WITHOUT EVER BEHOLDING DAY.


IN THE DANK TWILIGHT I CLIMBED THE WORN AND AGED STONE STAIRS TILL I REACHED THE LEVEL WHERE THEY CEASED...


...CLIMB AS I MIGHT, THE DARKNESS OVERHEAD GREW NO THINNER, AND A NEW CHILL AS OF HAUNTED AND VENERABLE MOULD ASSAILED ME.


...I FELT MY HEAD TOUCH A SOLID THING, AND I KNEW I MUST HAVE GAINED THE ROOF, OR AT LEAST SOME KIND OF FLOOR.

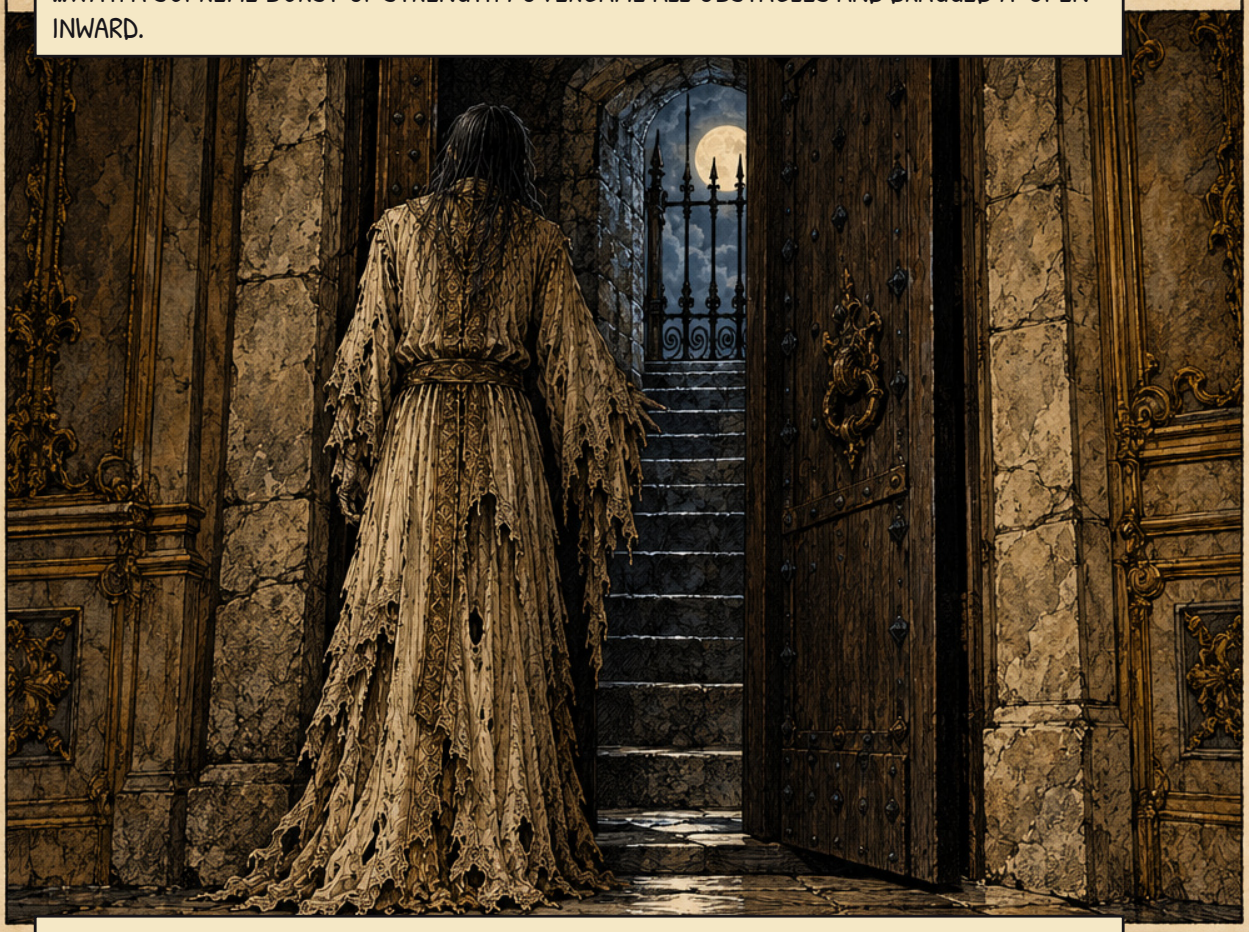
I CRAWLED THROUGH CAREFULLY, AND TRIED TO PREVENT THE HEAVY SLAB FROM FALLING BACK INTO PLACE; BUT FAILED IN THE LATTER ATTEMPT.



...ALL THAT I FOUND WERE VAST SHELVES OF MARBLE, BEARING ODIOUS OBLONG BOXES OF DISTURBING SIZE.



...WITH A SUPREME BURST OF STRENGTH I OVERCAME ALL OBSTACLES AND DRAGGED IT OPEN INWARD.

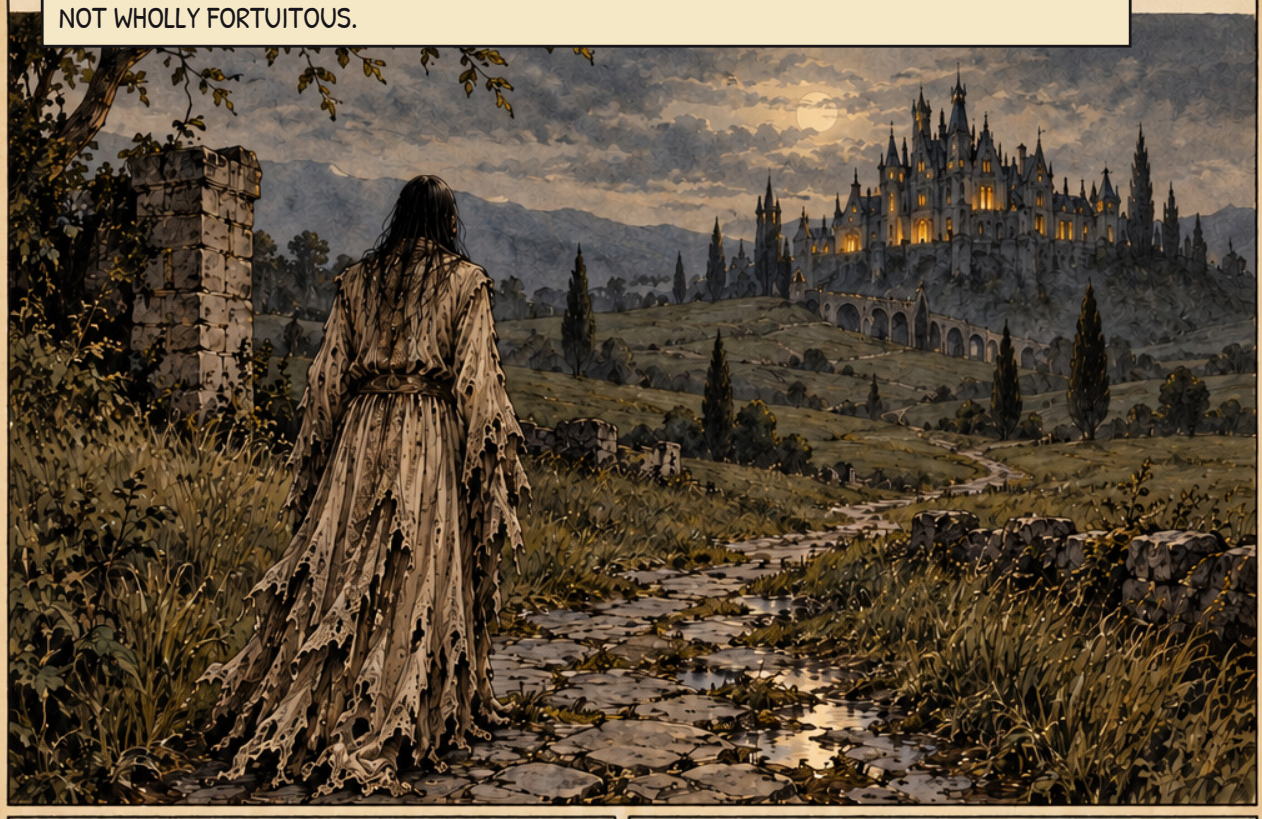


...THE RADIANT FULL MOON, WHICH I HAD NEVER BEFORE SEEN SAVE IN DREAMS AND IN VAGUE VISIONS I DARED NOT CALL MEMORIES.




...I DID NOT OPEN FOR FEAR OF FALLING FROM THE AMAZING HEIGHT TO WHICH I HAD CLIMBED. THEN THE MOON CAME OUT.
...THERE STRETCHED AROUND ME ON A LEVEL THROUGH THE GRATING NOTHING LESS THAN THE SOLID GROUND...

...I BECAME CONSCIOUS OF A KIND OF FEARSOME LATENT MEMORY THAT MADE MY PROGRESS NOT WHOLLY FORTUITOUS.

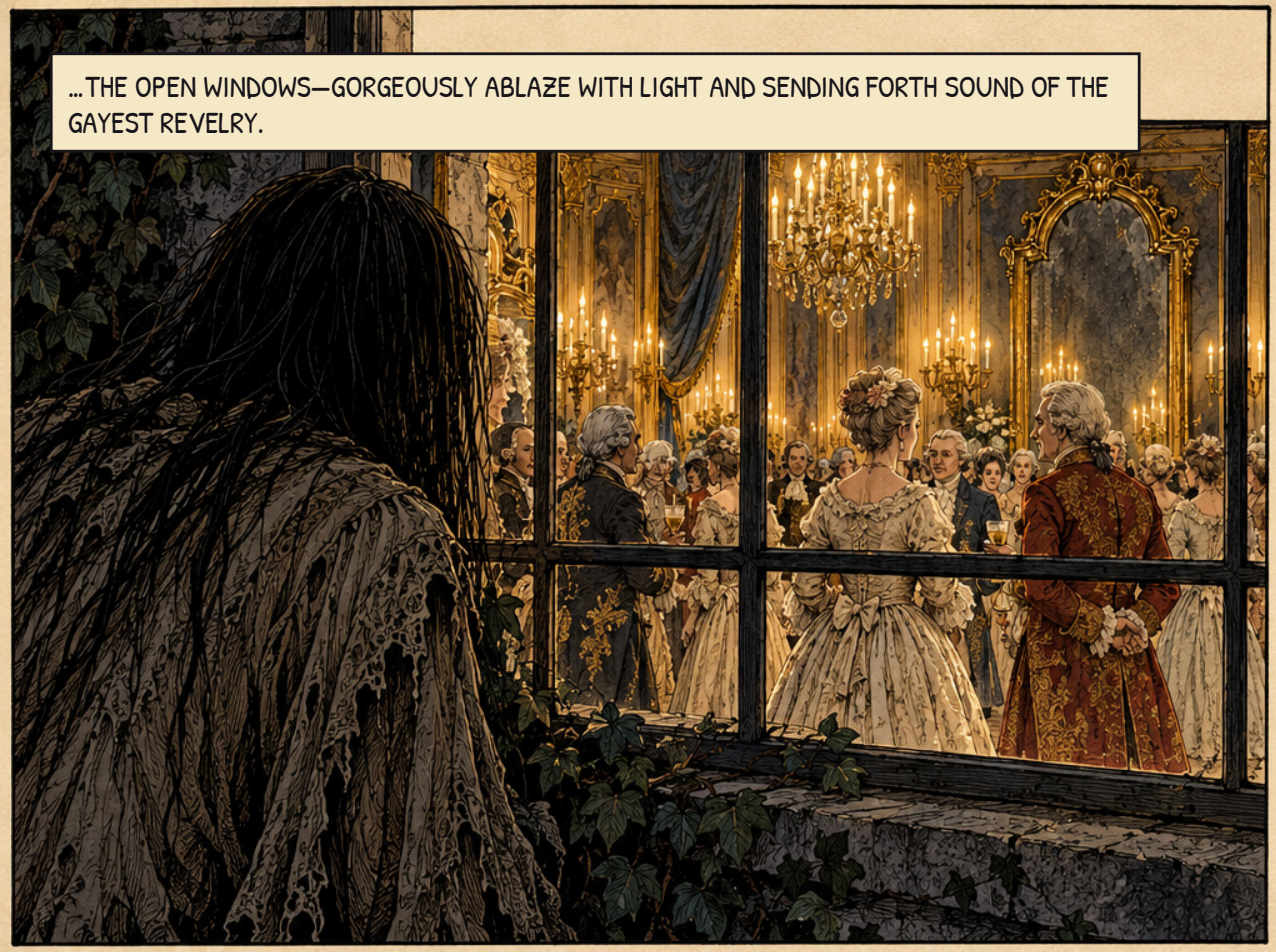


ONCE I SWAM ACROSS A SWIFT RIVER WHERE CRUMBLING, MOSSY MASONRY TOLD OF A BRIDGE LONG VANISHED.



...A VENERABLE IVIED CASTLE IN A THICKLY WOODED PARK; MADDENINGLY FAMILIAR, YET FULL OF PERPLEXING STRANGENESS TO ME.




...THE OPEN WINDOWS—GORGEOUSLY ABLAZE WITH LIGHT AND SENDING FORTH SOUND OF THE GAYEST REVELRY.


I NOW STEPPED THROUGH THE LOW WINDOW INTO THE BRILLIANTLY LIGHTED ROOM...


...THERE DESCENDED UPON THE WHOLE COMPANY A SUDDEN AND UNHERALDED FEAR OF HIDEOUS INTENSITY, DISTORTING EVERY FACE...
...SEVERAL FELL IN A SWOON AND WERE DRAGGED AWAY BY THEIR MADLY FLEEING COMPANIONS.
...I TREMBLED AT THE THOUGHT OF WHAT MIGHT BE LURKING NEAR ME UNSEEN.

...A HINT OF MOTION BEYOND THE GOLDEN-ARCHED DOORWAY LEADING TO ANOTHER AND SOMEWHAT SIMILAR ROOM.



AS I APPROACHED THE ARCH I BEGAN TO PERCEIVE THE PRESENCE MORE CLEARLY...

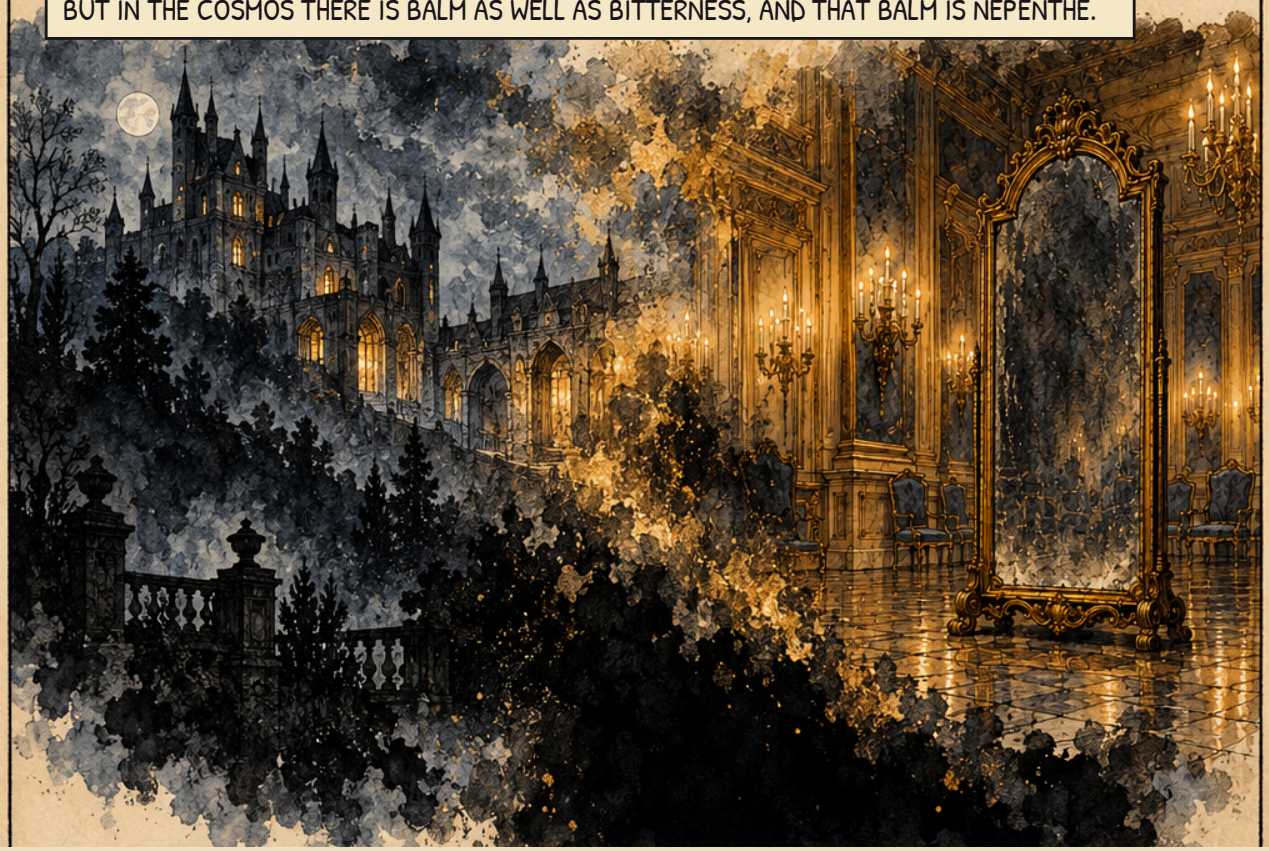



...I SAW IN ITS EATEN-AWAY AND BONE-REVEALING OUTLINES A LEERING, ABHORRENT TRAVESTY ON THE HUMAN SHAPE...
NEARLY MAD, I FOUND MYSELF YET ABLE TO THROW OUT A HAND TO WARD OFF THE FOETID APPARITION WHICH PRESSED SO CLOSE...

I KNEW IN THAT SECOND ALL THAT HAD BEEN; I REMEMBERED BEYOND THE FRIGHTFUL CASTLE AND THE TREES, AND RECOGNISED THE ALTERED EDIFICE IN WHICH I NOW STOOD...



BUT IN THE COSMOS THERE IS BALM AS WELL AS BITTERNESS, AND THAT BALM IS NEPENTHE.



...I FOUND THE STONE TRAP-DOOR IMMOVABLE; BUT I WAS NOT SORRY, FOR I HAD HATED THE ANTIQUE CASTLE AND THE TREES.



NOW I RIDE WITH THE MOCKING AND FRIENDLY GHOULS ON THE NIGHT-WIND...



...AND PLAY BY DAY AMONGST THE CATACOMBS OF NEPHREN-KA IN THE SEALED AND UNKNOWN VALLEY OF HADOTH BY THE NILE.



FOR ALTHOUGH NEPENTHE HAS CALMED ME, I KNOW ALWAYS THAT I AM AN OUTSIDER; A STRANGER IN THIS CENTURY AND AMONG THOSE WHO ARE STILL MEN.



...I STRETCHED OUT MY FINGERS TO THE ABOMINATION WITHIN THAT GREAT GILDED FRAME; STRETCHED OUT MY FINGERS AND TOUCHED A COLD AND UNYIELDING SURFACE OF POLISHED GLASS.