THE STRANGE HIGH HOUSE IN THE MIST

IN THE MORNING MIST COMES UP FROM THE SEA BY THE CLIFFS BEYOND KINGSPORT.



...NORTH OF ARCHAIC KINGSPORT THE CRAGS CLIMB LOFTY AND CURIOUS, TERRACE ON TERRACE, TILL THE NORTHERNMOST HANGS IN THE SKY LIKE A GREY FROZEN WIND-CLOUD.



THE PORTUGUESE SAILORS COMING IN FROM A VOYAGE CROSS THEMSELVES WHEN THEY FIRST SEE IT...



...THE GREY PRIMEVAL ROOF, PEAKED AND SHINGLED, WHOSE EAVES COME NEARLY TO THE GREY FOUNDATIONS...



EVEN THE TERRIBLE OLD MAN... CAN ONLY SAY THESE THINGS WERE THE SAME WHEN HIS GRANDFATHER WAS A BOY...



THEN ONE SUMMER THERE CAME A PHILOSOPHER INTO KINGSPORT. HIS NAME WAS THOMAS OLNEY...



MORNING AFTER MORNING HE WOULD LIE ON THE CLIFFS AND LOOK OVER THE WORLD'S RIM...



THE TERRIBLE OLD MAN WHEEZED A TALE THAT HIS FATHER HAD TOLD HIM, OF LIGHTNING THAT SHOT ONE NIGHT UP FROM THAT PEAKED COTTAGE...



...GRANNY ORNE... CROAKED OVER... SHAPES THAT FLAPPED OUT OF THE EASTERN MISTS STRAIGHT INTO THE NARROW SINGLE DOOR...



...HE SWORE A GREAT OATH TO SCALE THAT AVOIDED NORTHERN CLIFF AND VISIT THE ABNORMALLY ANTIQUE GREY COTTAGE IN THE SKY.



...ONLY THE WESTERN SIDE, INLAND AND TOWARD ARKHAM, REMAINED.

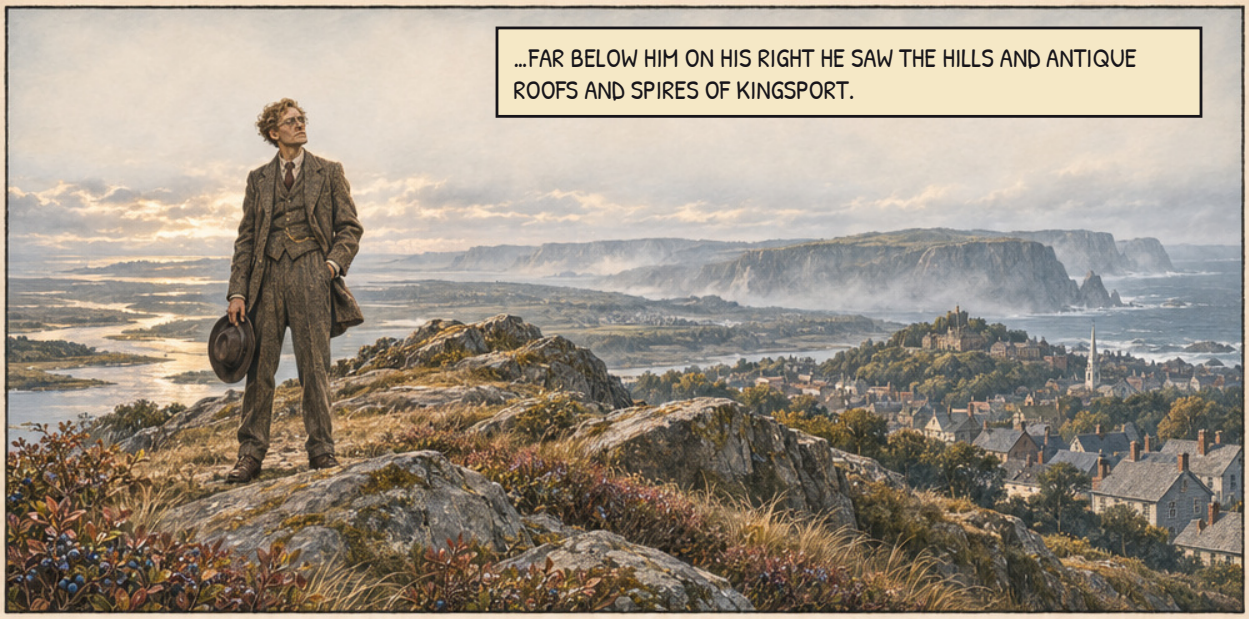


ONE EARLY MORNING IN AUGUST OLNEY SET OUT TO FIND A PATH TO THE INACCESSIBLE PINNACLE.



HERE HE FOUND A SHADY ROAD TO ARKHAM, BUT NO TRAIL AT ALL IN THE SEAWARD DIRECTION HE WISHED.




...FAR BELOW HIM ON HIS RIGHT HE SAW THE HILLS AND ANTIQUE ROOFS AND SPIRES OF KINGSPORT.


...A GREAT CHASM OPENED BEFORE HIM, TEN FEET DEEP, SO THAT HE HAD TO LET HIMSELF DOWN BY HIS HANDS...


...AND THEN CRAWL PERILOUSLY UP A NATURAL DEFILE IN THE OPPOSITE WALL.

...THERE WAS NO DOOR ON THIS LANDWARD END, BUT ONLY A COUPLE OF SMALL LATTICE WINDOWS...



...THE SINGLE NARROW DOOR WAS NOT TO BE REACHED SAVE FROM THE EMPTY AETHER...



...OLNEY CREPT AROUND TO THE WINDOWS ON THE NORTH AND WEST AND SOUTH SIDES, TRYING THEM BUT FINDING THEM ALL LOCKED.



HE HEARD A LOCK RATTLE AND BOLT SHOOT, AND A LONG CREAKING FOLLOW...



IT WAS PLAIN THAT THE OWNER HAD COME HOME; BUT HE HAD NOT COME FROM THE LAND...



STUCK OUT OF A WEST WINDOW WAS A GREAT BLACK-BEARDED FACE WHOSE EYES SHONE PHOSPHORESCENTLY...



...A BROWN HAND REACHED OUT TO HELP HIM OVER THE SILL AND INTO THAT LOW ROOM OF BLACK OAK WAINSCOTS AND CARVED TUDOR FURNISHINGS.



...HE WAS STRANGE AND KINDLY, AND FILLED WITH THE MAGIC OF UNFATHOMED VOIDS OF TIME AND SPACE.



THAT BEARDED HOST SEEMED YOUNG, YET LOOKED OUT OF EYES STEEPED IN THE ELDER MYSTERIES...



...THE KINGS OF ATLANTIS FOUGHT WITH THE SLIPPERY BLASPHEMIES THAT WRIGGLED OUT OF RIFTS IN OCEAN'S FLOOR...



...THE PILLARED AND WEEDY TEMPLE OF POSEIDONIS IS STILL GLIMPSED AT MIDNIGHT BY LOST SHIPS...



...THE HOST GREW TIMID WHEN HE SPOKE OF THE DIM FIRST AGE OF CHAOS BEFORE THE GODS OR EVEN THE ELDER ONES WERE BORN...



IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT THERE CAME A KNOCKING ON THE DOOR... BEYOND WHICH LAY ONLY THE ABYSS OF WHITE CLOUD.



WHAT HE SAW HE DID NOT LIKE, SO PRESSED HIS FINGERS TO HIS LIPS...



...AND TIPTOED AROUND TO SHUT AND LOCK ALL THE WINDOWS...



...A QUEER BLACK OUTLINE AS THE CALLER MOVED INQUISITIVELY ABOUT BEFORE LEAVING...



...THE BEARDED MAN MADE ENIGMATICAL GESTURES OF PRAYER, AND LIT TALL CANDLES IN CURIOUSLY WROUGHT BRASS CANDLESTICKS.



...A SINGULAR RAPPING WHICH MUST HAVE FOLLOWED SOME VERY ANCIENT AND SECRET CODE.




...THERE FLOATED INTO THAT ROOM FROM THE DEEP ALL THE DREAMS AND MEMORIES OF EARTH'S SUNKEN MIGHTY ONES.

...UPON DOLPHINS' BACKS WAS BALANCED A VAST CRENULATE SHELL WHEREIN RODE THE GREY AND AWFUL FORM OF PRIMAL NODENS, LORD OF THE GREAT ABYSS.



THEN HOARY NODENS REACHED FORTH A WIZENED HAND AND HELPED OLNEY AND HIS HOST INTO THE VAST SHELL...



AND OUT INTO THE LIMITLESS AETHER REELED THAT FABULOUS TRAIN...



AND OLNEY'S CHILDREN AND STOUT WIFE PRAYED... AND HOPED THAT THE TRAVELLER WOULD BORROW AN UMBRELLA AND RUBBERS UNLESS THE RAIN STOPPED BY MORNING.



...WHEN TOWARD THE SMALL HOURS THE LITTLE DIM WINDOWS WENT DARK THEY WHISPERED OF DREAD AND DISASTER.



THEN DAWN SWAM DRIPPING AND MIST-WREATHED OUT OF THE SEA...



...OLNEY, DRY AND LIGHT-FOOTED, CLIMBED DOWN FROM THE CLIFFS TO ANTIQUE KINGSPORT... HE COULD NOT RECALL WHAT HE HAD DREAMED IN THE SKY-PERCHED HUT...



...THE TERRIBLE OLD MAN... VOWING THAT THE MAN WHO CAME DOWN FROM THAT CRAG WAS NOT WHOLLY THE MAN WHO WENT UP...



...THERE LINGERED STILL THE LOST SPIRIT OF HIM WHO WAS THOMAS OLNEY.



...THE PHILOSOPHER HAS LABOURED AND EATEN AND SLEPT AND DONE UNCOMPLAINING THE SUITABLE DEEDS OF A CITIZEN.



THEY HAVE A TRIM BUNGALOW NOW AT BRISTOL HIGHLANDS, WHERE NO TALL CRAGS TOWER, AND THE NEIGHBOURS ARE URBAN AND MODERN.



...OLD FOLK TELL OF PLEASING VOICES HEARD SINGING THERE, AND OF LAUGHTER THAT SWELLS WITH JOYS BEYOND EARTH'S JOYS...



...THE FIERCE AURORA COMES OFTENER TO THAT SPOT, SHINING BLUE IN THE NORTH WITH VISIONS OF FROZEN WORLDS...



...KINGSPORT'S YOUNG MEN... GROW PRONE TO LISTEN AT NIGHT TO THE NORTH WIND'S FAINT DISTANT SOUNDS.



...THEY THINK A LIGHT MAY BE GONE FROM THEIR EYES, AND A WILL FROM THEIR HEARTS.



...STILL OTHER VOICES WILL BRING MORE MISTS AND MORE LIGHTS, TILL PERHAPS THE OLDEN GODS... MAY COME OUT OF THE DEEP AND FROM UNKNOWN KADATH IN THE COLD WASTE AND MAKE THEIR DWELLING ON THAT EVILLY APPROPRIATE CRAG...



...THE TERRIBLE OLD MAN OFTEN RECALLS WHAT OLNEY SAID ABOUT A KNOCK THAT THE LONE DWELLER FEARED...



...KINGSPORT, NESTLING UNEASY ON ITS LESSER CLIFFS BELOW THAT AWESOME HANGING SENTINEL OF ROCK, SEES OCEANWARD ONLY A MYSTIC WHITENESS... AND THE SOLEMN BELLS OF THE BUOYS TOLLED FREE IN THE AETHER OF FAERY.

