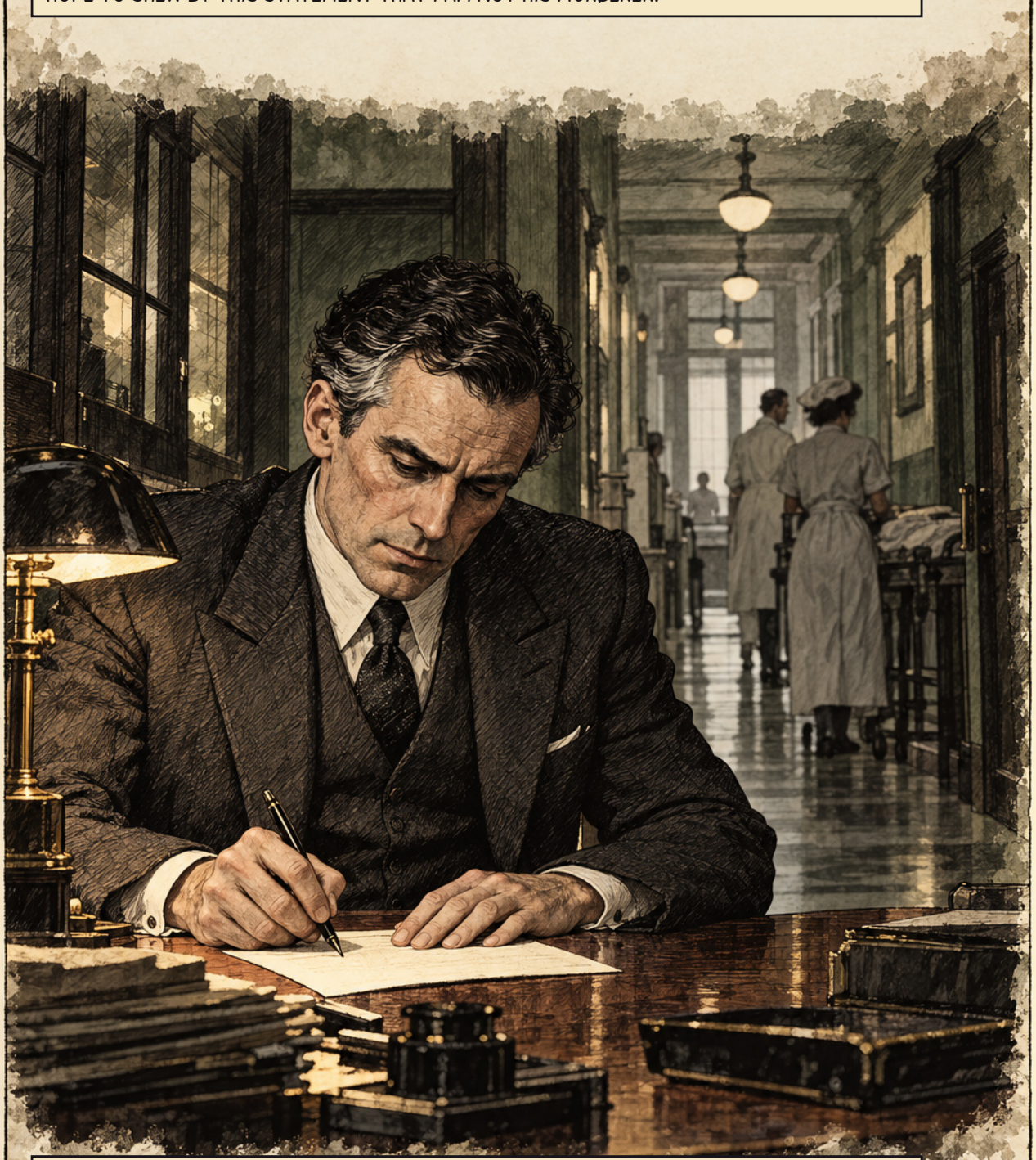
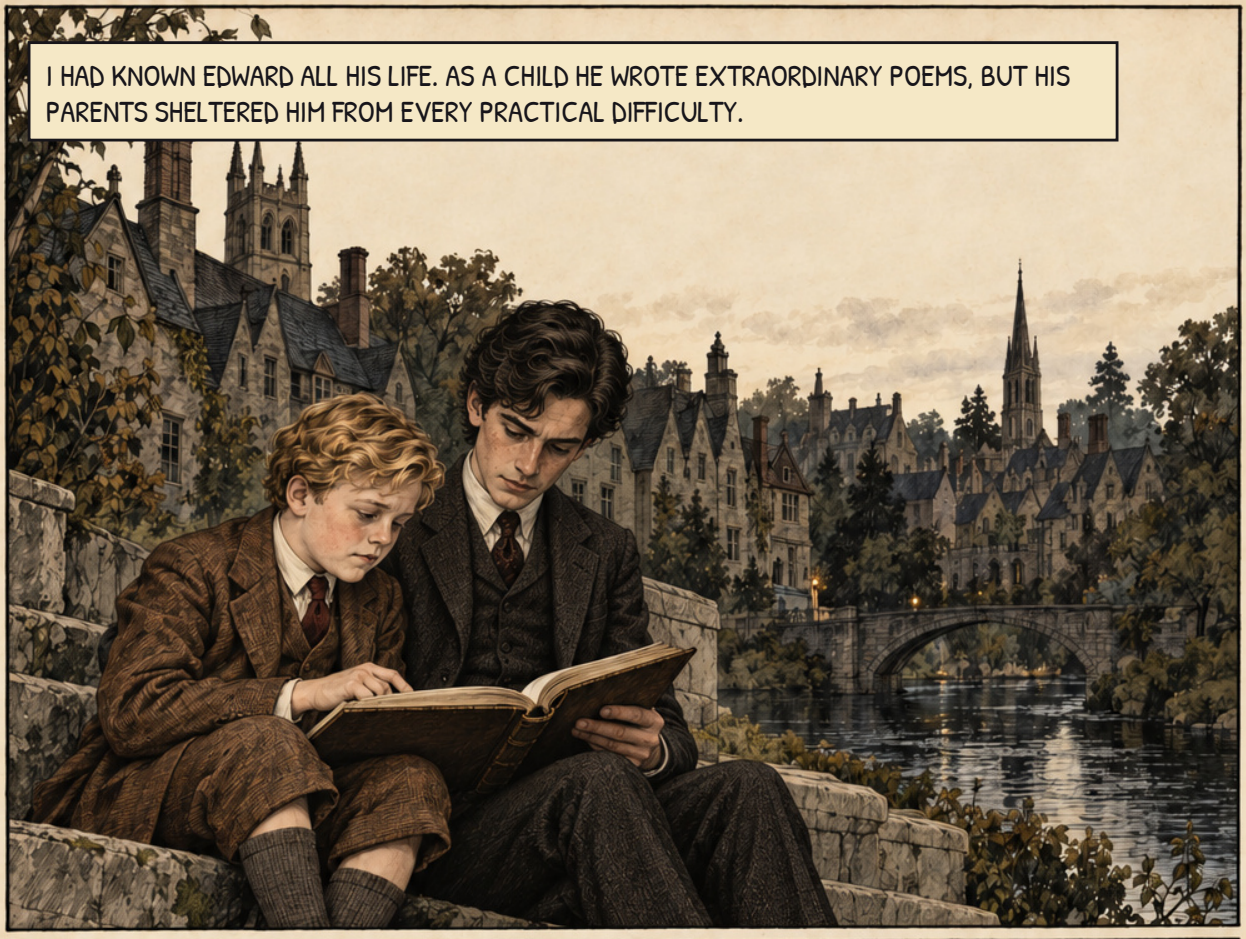
THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP

IT IS TRUE THAT I HAVE SENT SIX BULLETS THROUGH THE HEAD OF MY BEST FRIEND, AND YET I HOPE TO SHEW BY THIS STATEMENT THAT I AM NOT HIS MURDERER.



I MUST EXPLAIN WHY I BELIEVE I AVENGED EDWARD DERBY—AND WHY I STILL FEAR WHAT MAY SURVIVE HIM.

I HAD KNOWN EDWARD ALL HIS LIFE. AS A CHILD HE WROTE EXTRAORDINARY POEMS, BUT HIS PARENTS SHELTERED HIM FROM EVERY PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY.



HIS IMAGINATION MATURED. HIS INDEPENDENCE DID NOT.



I BECAME AN ARCHITECT, MARRIED, AND HAD A SON. EDWARD REMAINED MY CLOSEST FRIEND.



...THE FAMILIAR THREE BRISK STROKES FOLLOWED BY TWO MORE AFTER A PAUSE.



HE STUDIED THE DARKEST BOOKS IN MISKATONIC'S LIBRARY.



AFTER HIS MOTHER'S DEATH, HE BEGAN SEEKING THE COMPANY HIS SHELTERED YOUTH HAD DENIED HIM.

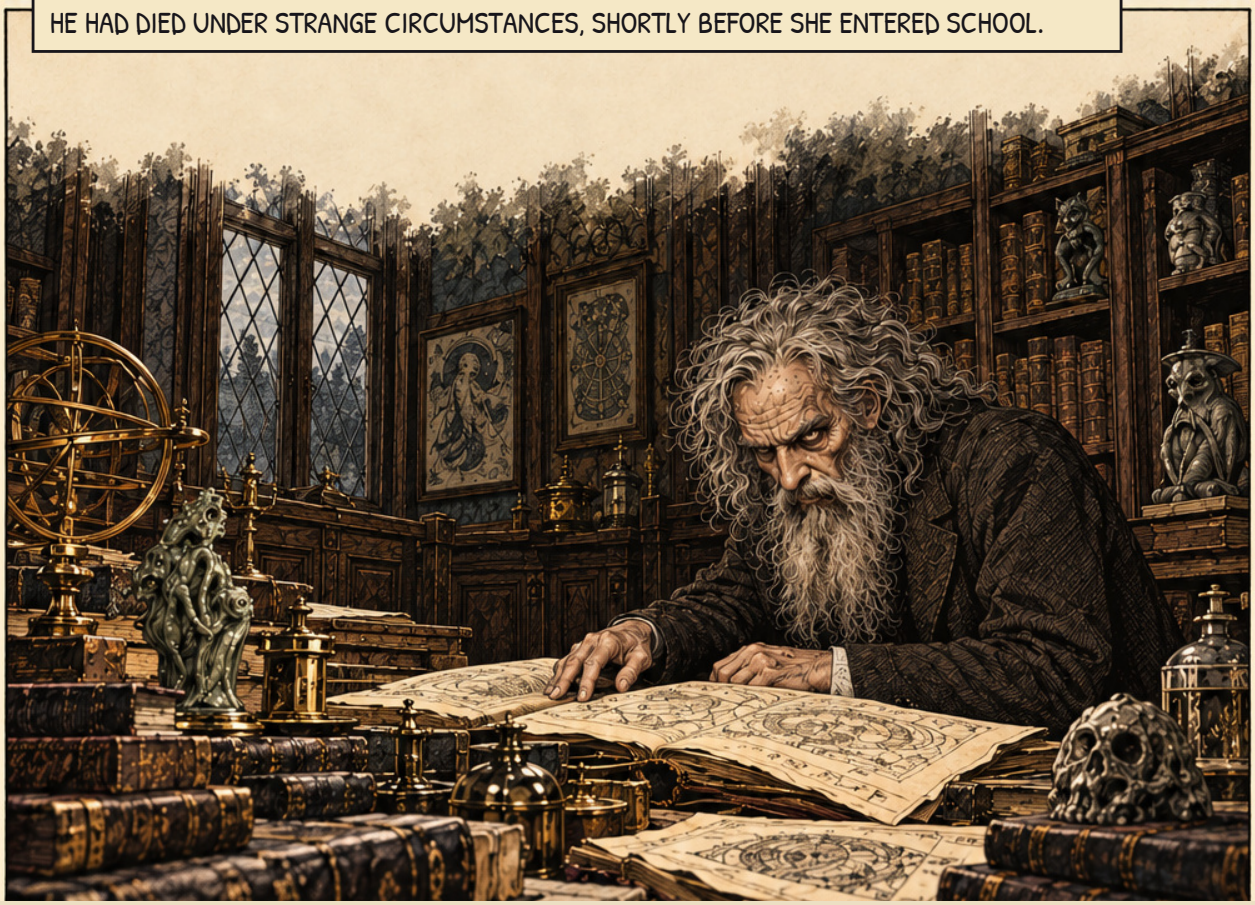



AT THIRTY-EIGHT HE MET ASENATH WAITE, A STUDENT OF MEDIEVAL METAPHYSICS.
SHE UNDERSTANDS EVERYTHING I HAVE STUDIED, DAN. I HAVE NEVER MET ANYONE LIKE HER.

SHE CAME FROM INNSMOUTH. HER FATHER, EPHRAIM WAITE, HAD BEEN A FEARED STUDENT OF MAGIC.



HE HAD DIED UNDER STRANGE CIRCUMSTANCES, SHORTLY BEFORE SHE ENTERED SCHOOL.



HER SCHOOLMATES TOLD OF AN UNNERVING POWER.

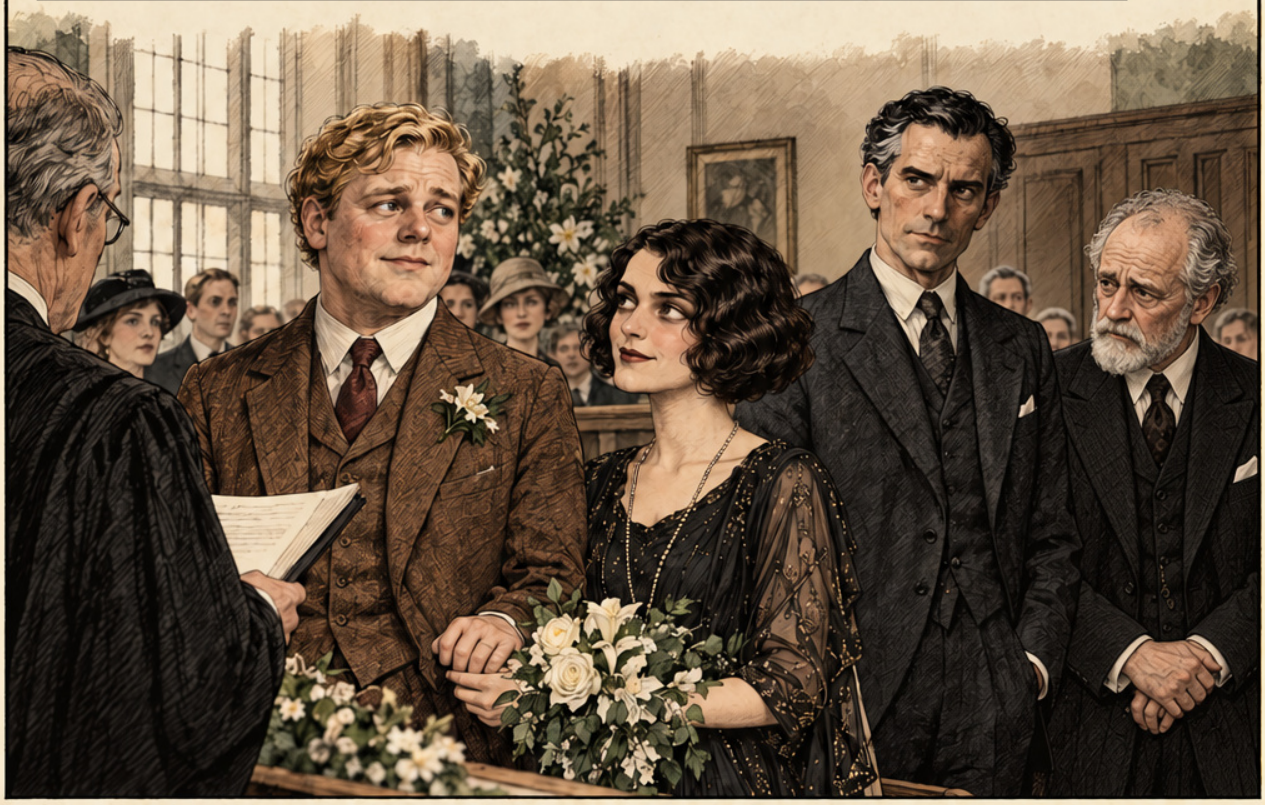


UNDER HER GAZE, SOME FELT THEY HAD CHANGED BODIES WITH HER AND WERE LOOKING ACROSS THE ROOM AT THEMSELVES.

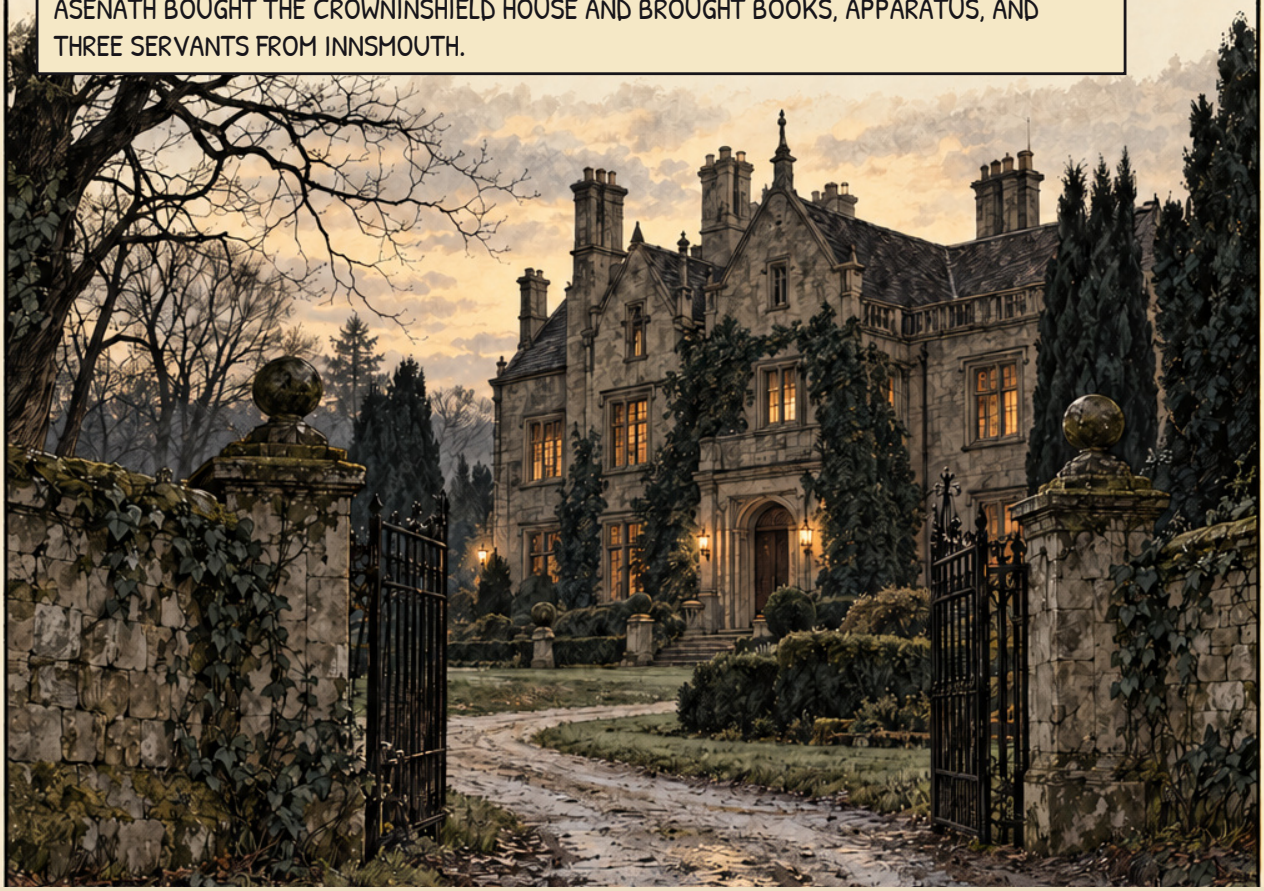



WHEN EDWARD BROUGHT HER TO MY HOUSE, I SAW THAT HER INTEREST WAS EQUALLY INTENSE.
CAN YOU PERSUADE HIM TO LEAVE HER? HE LISTENS TO YOU.
I FEAR HE HAS ALREADY MADE HIS CHOICE.

THEY MARRIED A MONTH LATER.



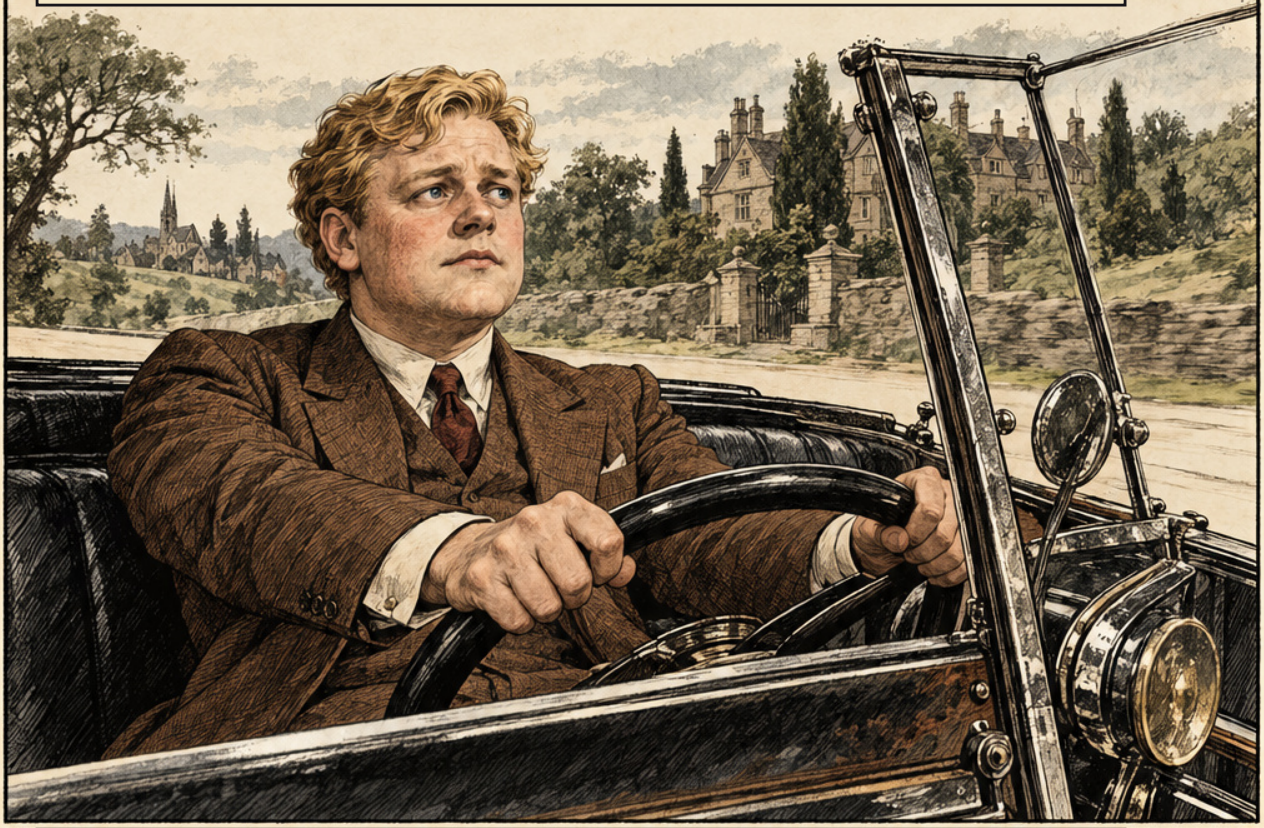
ASENATH BOUGHT THE CROWNINSHIELD HOUSE AND BROUGHT BOOKS, APPARATUS, AND THREE SERVANTS FROM INNSMOUTH.




EDWARD'S FIRST VISITS AFTER THE MARRIAGE SEEMED ALMOST HOPEFUL.
SHE HAS SHOWN ME EXTRAORDINARY THINGS. SOME EXPERIMENTS I CANNOT DESCRIBE YET.

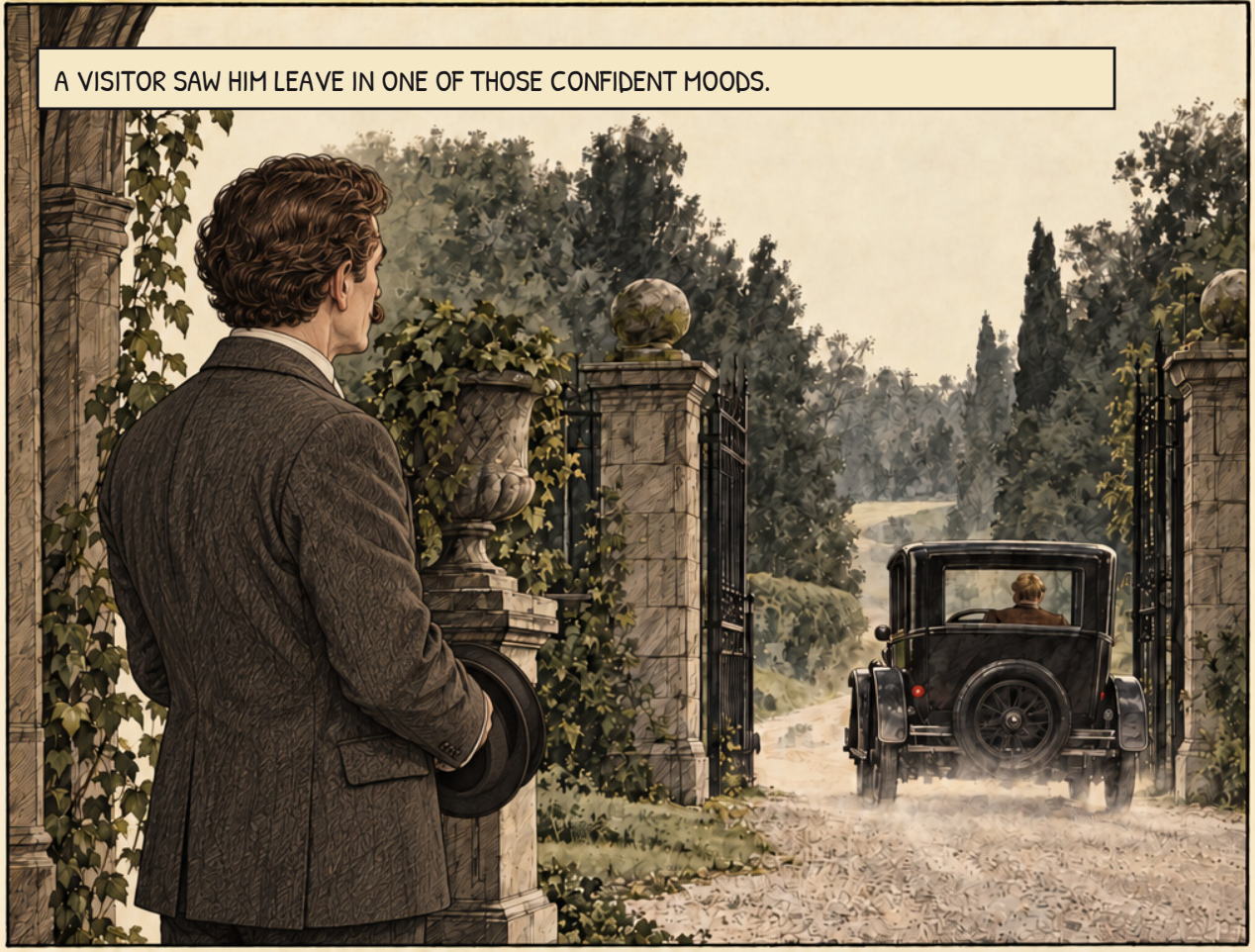

OVER TWO YEARS, HIS VISITS GREW RARER.
SHE SEEMED TO AGE; HE BECAME MORE HELPLESS, EXCEPT DURING PECULIAR INTERVALS OF FORCE AND CONFIDENCE.

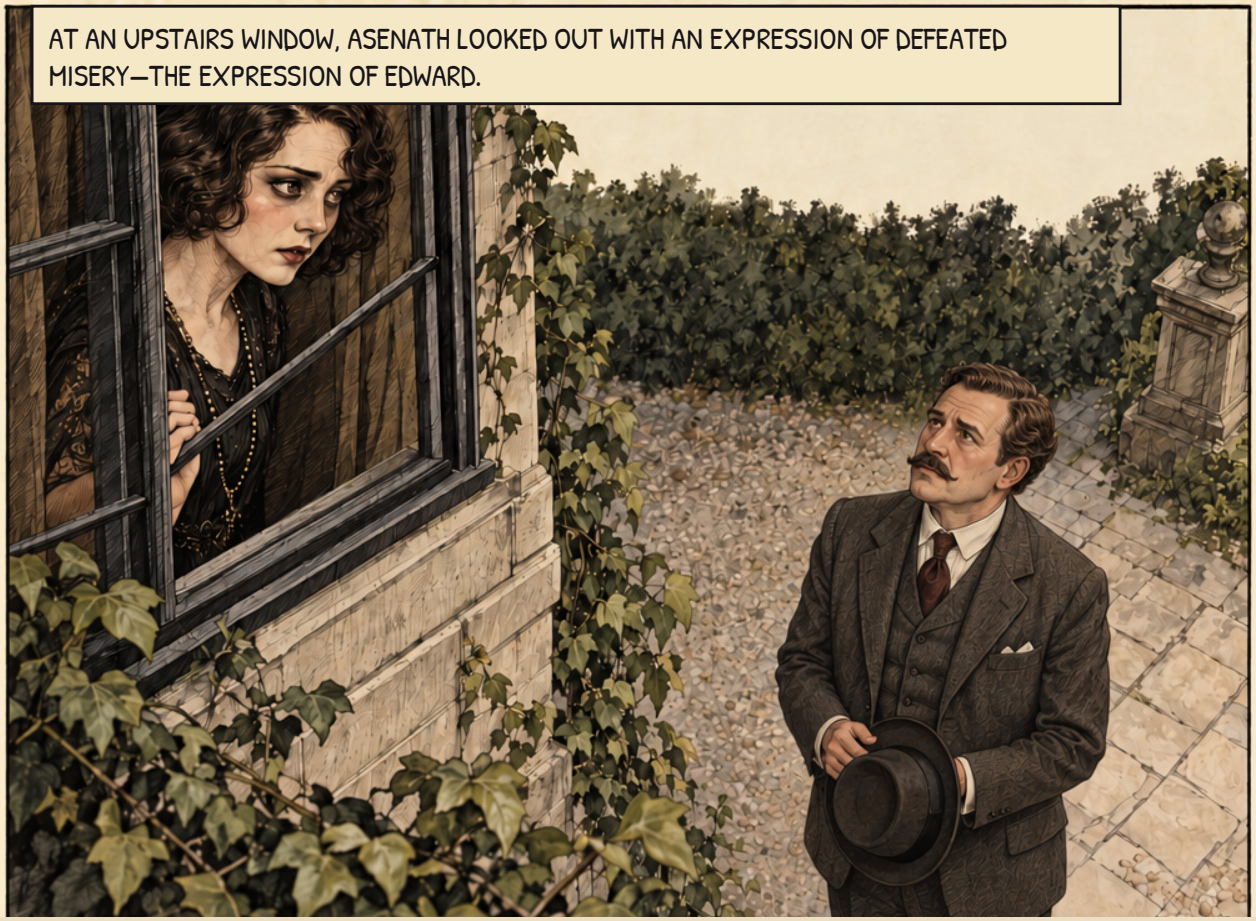
EDWARD HAD NEVER LEARNED TO DRIVE. YET PEOPLE SAW HIM HANDLING ASENATH'S PACKARD WITH EXPERT ASSURANCE.



HOURS LATER HE MIGHT RETURN IN THE BACK SEAT, DEPENDENT ON A HIRED DRIVER.




A VISITOR SAW HIM LEAVE IN ONE OF THOSE CONFIDENT MOODS.


AT AN UPSTAIRS WINDOW, ASENATH LOOKED OUT WITH AN EXPRESSION OF DEFEATED MISERY—THE EXPRESSION OF EDWARD.


IT HAS GONE TOO FAR, DAN. I MUST SAVE MY IDENTITY.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, EDWARD?


HE SHOWED ME OBJECTS WHOSE SHAPES AND SUBSTANCES DEFEATED EXPLANATION.


SOMETIMES HIS CONFIDENCES STOPPED ABRUPTLY.


HE COULD VISIT MOST FREELY WHEN ASENATH WAS AWAY—IN HER OWN BODY, AS HE ONCE PUT IT.

ONE AUGUST DAY A TELEGRAM CAME FROM CHESUNCOOK, MAINE.






DAN—FOR GOD'S SAKE! THE PIT OF THE SHOGGOTHS! DOWN THE SIX THOUSAND STEPS... THE ABOMINATION OF ABOMINATIONS...
YOU ARE SAFE WITH ME NOW. TELL ME SLOWLY.


A MOMENT BEFORE, HE SAID, HE HAD BEEN LOCKED IN HIS LIBRARY. THEN HE WAS THERE—IN THE PLACE TO WHICH HIS BODY HAD BEEN TAKEN.


ON THE JOURNEY HOME HE EXPLAINED THE EXCHANGES.
SHE TAKES MY BODY AND LEAVES ME LOCKED IN HERS. WHEN HER HOLD FAILS, I WAKE WHEREVER SHE HAS GONE.


SHE HOLDS ON LONGER EACH TIME. ONE DAY SHE WILL NOT LET ME BACK.
HE BELIEVED SHE MEANT TO DISPOSSESS HIM PERMANENTLY AND LEAVE HIM TRAPPED IN HER BODY.


WAS IT OLD EPHRAIM'S SOUL THAT WAS LOCKED IN? WHO LOCKED IN WHOM?


WHO HAD REALLY DIED IN THE OLD MAN'S BODY? WHOSE MIND HAD BEEN IMPRISONED IN THE ATTIC?

HIS VOICE STOPPED AS THOUGH CUT OFF.



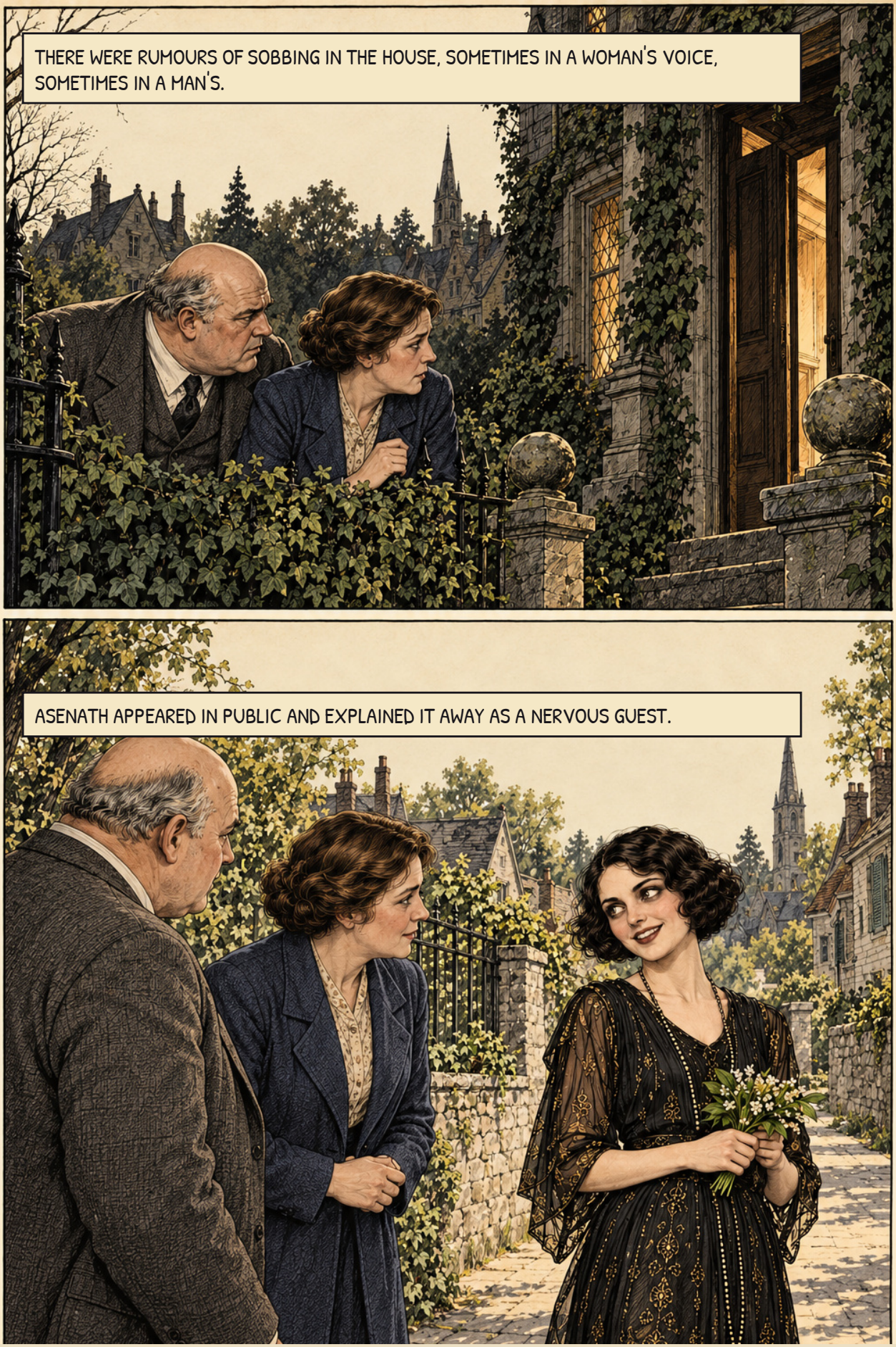
HIS WHOLE BEARING ALTERED. BEFORE I COULD UNDERSTAND, HE HAD ORDERED ME ASIDE AND TAKEN THE WHEEL.




I HOPE YOU'LL FORGET MY ATTACK BACK THERE, UPTON... THAT'S WHAT COMES FROM OVERSTUDY IN A FIELD LIKE MINE.


THE FACE BELONGED TO MY FRIEND. THE PRESENCE BESIDE ME SEEMED UTTERLY FOREIGN.


AFTERWARD I SAW MORE OF THIS CONFIDENT STRANGER AND LESS OF EDWARD.
WHEN HE CAME FOR SOME BOOKS, HE DID NOT USE OUR OLD SIGNAL.


THERE WERE RUMOURS OF SOBBING IN THE HOUSE, SOMETIMES IN A WOMAN'S VOICE, SOMETIMES IN A MAN'S.
ASENATH APPEARED IN PUBLIC AND EXPLAINED IT AWAY AS A NERVOUS GUEST.


IN OCTOBER, THE FAMILIAR THREE-AND-TWO SOUNDED AGAIN.
ASENATH HAS GONE, DAN. I FOUND A DEFENCE SHE DID NOT KNOW. SHE HAS PROMISED TO LEAVE ME ALONE.


HE HAD DISMISSED THE SERVANTS TOO.
I HOPE THEY'LL LET ME ALONE—I DIDN'T LIKE THE WAY THEY LAUGHED WHEN THEY WALKED AWAY.


...SHE ISN'T ASENATH AT ALL, BUT REALLY OLD EPHRAIM HIMSELF.

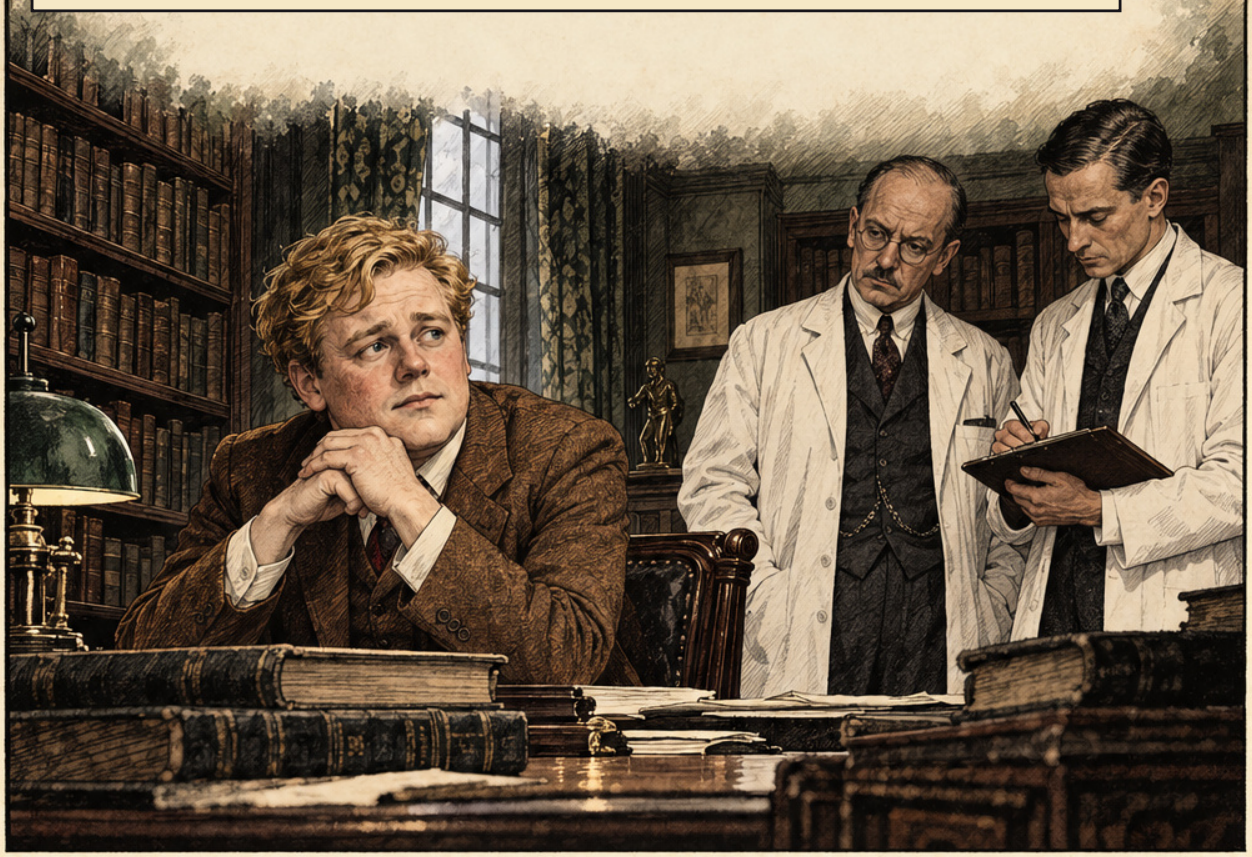

THE OLD MAN HAD TAKEN HIS DAUGHTER'S BODY, HE SAID, AND POISONED THE BODY IN WHICH HE HAD IMPRISONED HER.


YOU CAN STAY HERE TONIGHT. WE WILL HAVE YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE READY FOR YOU.
YES. I MUST LEAVE THAT PLACE.
WE PLANNED HIS RETURN TO HIS FAMILY HOME AND A SUMMER JOURNEY WITH MY SON.


YET EDWARD WAS SENDING MONEY TO THE DISMISSED SERVANTS.
AND ALTHOUGH HIS OLD HOME WAS READY, HE CONTINUALLY POSTPONED LEAVING CROWNINSHIELD.

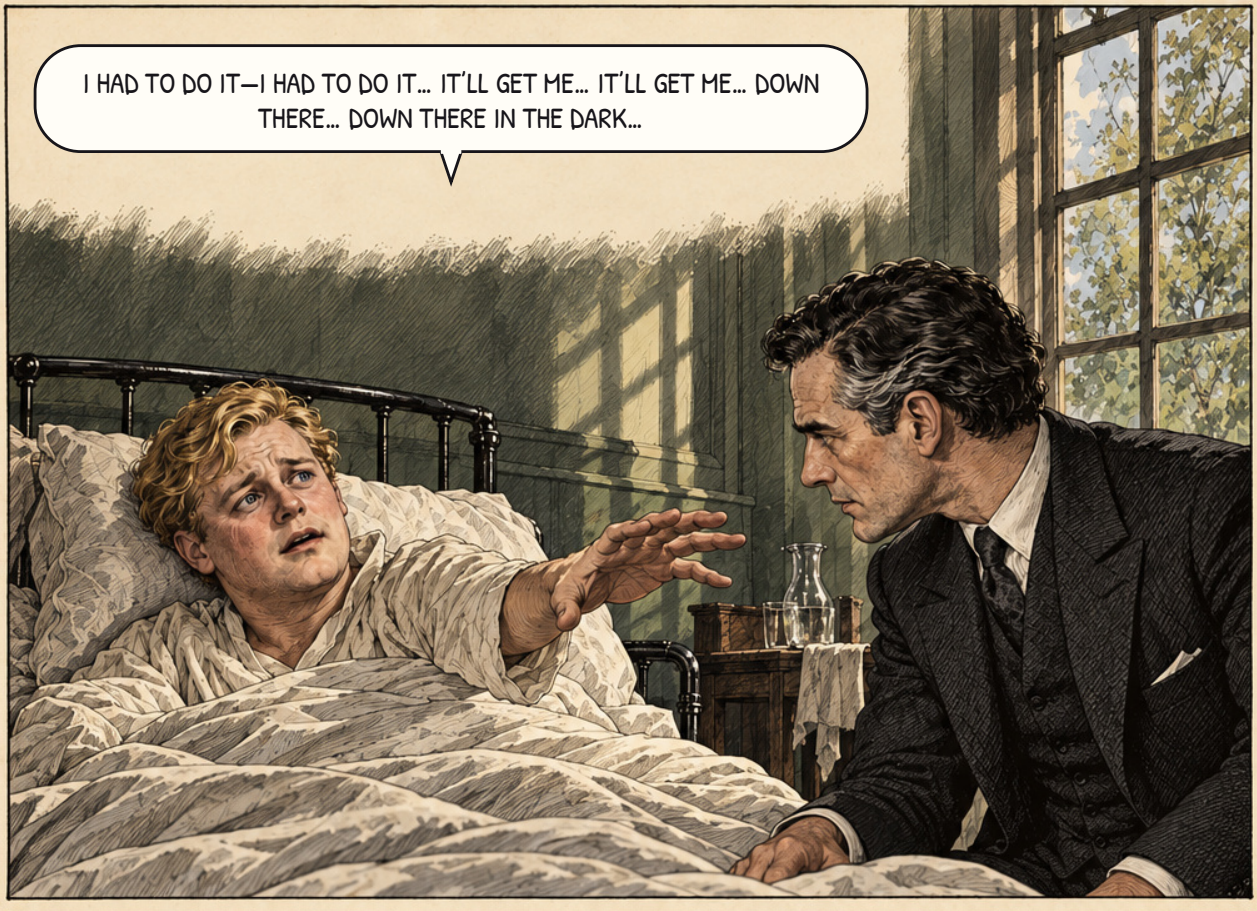

MY BRAIN! MY BRAIN! GOD, DAN—IT'S TUGGING—FROM BEYOND—KNOCKING—CLAWING...
EDWARD, LOOK AT ME. YOU ARE HERE WITH ME.
...NOTHING CAN STOP THAT FORCE; NOT DISTANCE, NOR MAGIC, NOR DEATH...

HIS CONDITION DETERIORATED UNTIL THE DOCTORS COULD NO LONGER LEAVE HIM AT HOME.



I BECAME HIS GUARDIAN AND VISITED HIM TWICE A WEEK.



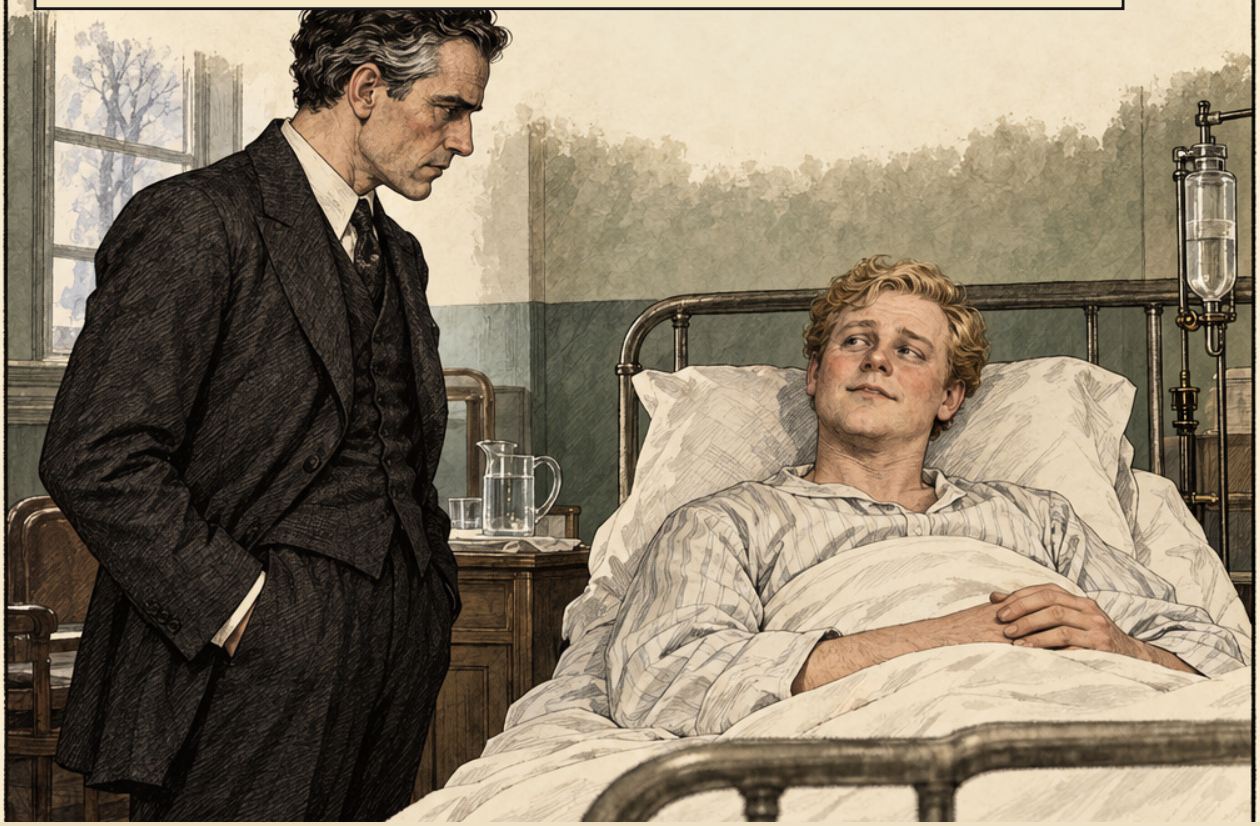

I HAD TO DO IT—I HAD TO DO IT... IT'LL GET ME... IT'LL GET ME... DOWN THERE... DOWN THERE IN THE DARK...


I PREPARED HIS FATHER'S HOUSE FOR HIS RECOVERY AND LEFT CROWNINSHIELD ALMOST UNTOUCHED.

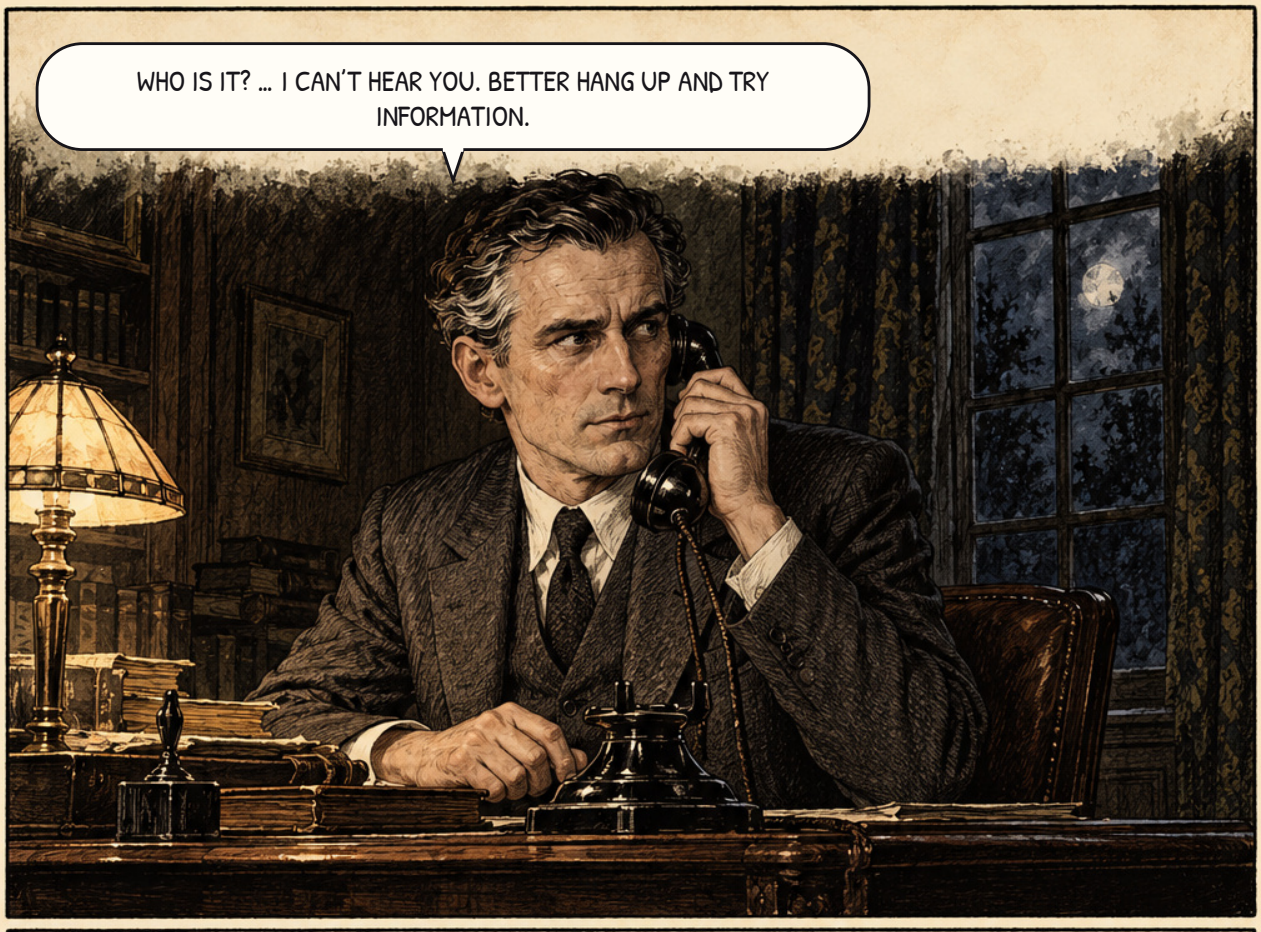
THEN THE HOSPITAL REPORTED A SUDDEN RECOVERY.

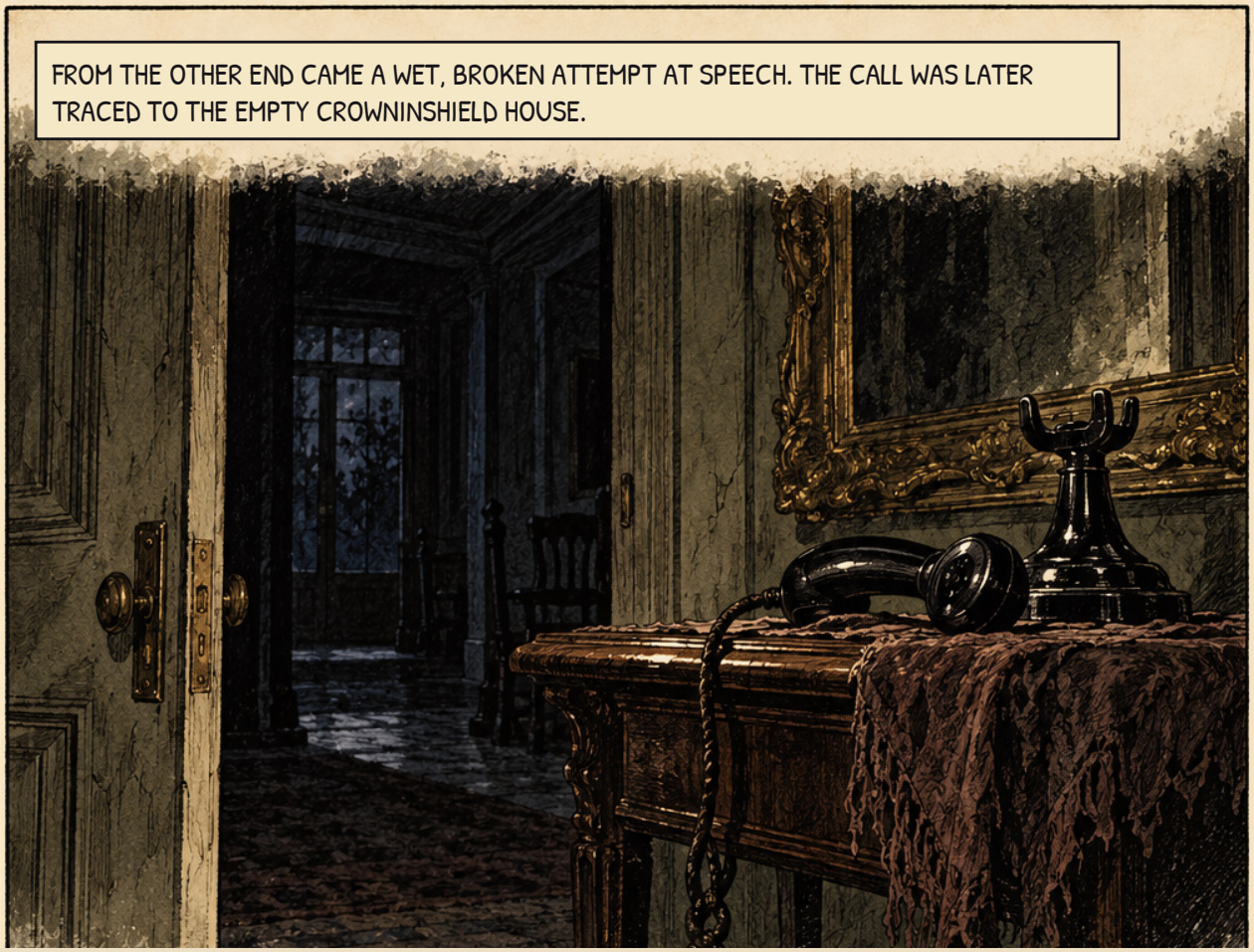


I ARRIVED FULL OF HOPE—AND FOUND THE PERSONALITY THAT HAD DRIVEN MY CAR THROUGH THE NIGHT.




THEY TELL ME I SHALL BE FREE IN A WEEK. WE MUST ARRANGE EVERYTHING.
I COULD NOT SAY HE WAS INSANE. I COULD NO LONGER BE SURE HE WAS EDWARD.


WHO IS IT? ... I CAN'T HEAR YOU. BETTER HANG UP AND TRY INFORMATION.


FROM THE OTHER END CAME A WET, BROKEN ATTEMPT AT SPEECH. THE CALL WAS LATER TRACED TO THE EMPTY CROWNINSHIELD HOUSE.

AT ABOUT TWO, THE BELL AND KNOCKER SOUNDED ALTERNATELY IN WEAK, URGENT BURSTS.



THREE STROKES, A PAUSE, THEN TWO. I THOUGHT MY FRIEND HAD RETURNED.




THE CALLER HAD ON ONE OF EDWARD'S OVERCOATS—ITS BOTTOM ALMOST TOUCHING THE GROUND...
IT COULD NOT SPEAK. ON THE END OF A PENCIL, IT OFFERED ME A CLOSELY WRITTEN SHEET.

BEYOND QUESTION, IT WAS IN EDWARD'S SCRIPT.



DAN—GO TO THE SANITARIUM AND KILL IT... SHE GOT ME—IT'S ASENATH—AND SHE HAS BEEN DEAD THREE MONTHS AND A HALF.



HE HAD KILLED HER BEFORE SHE COULD MAKE THE EXCHANGE PERMANENT.



HE BURIED THE BODY BENEATH THE CELLAR STOREROOM AND TOLD ME SHE HAD GONE AWAY.



BUT THE WILL INHABITING HER SURVIVED THE BODY'S DEATH.

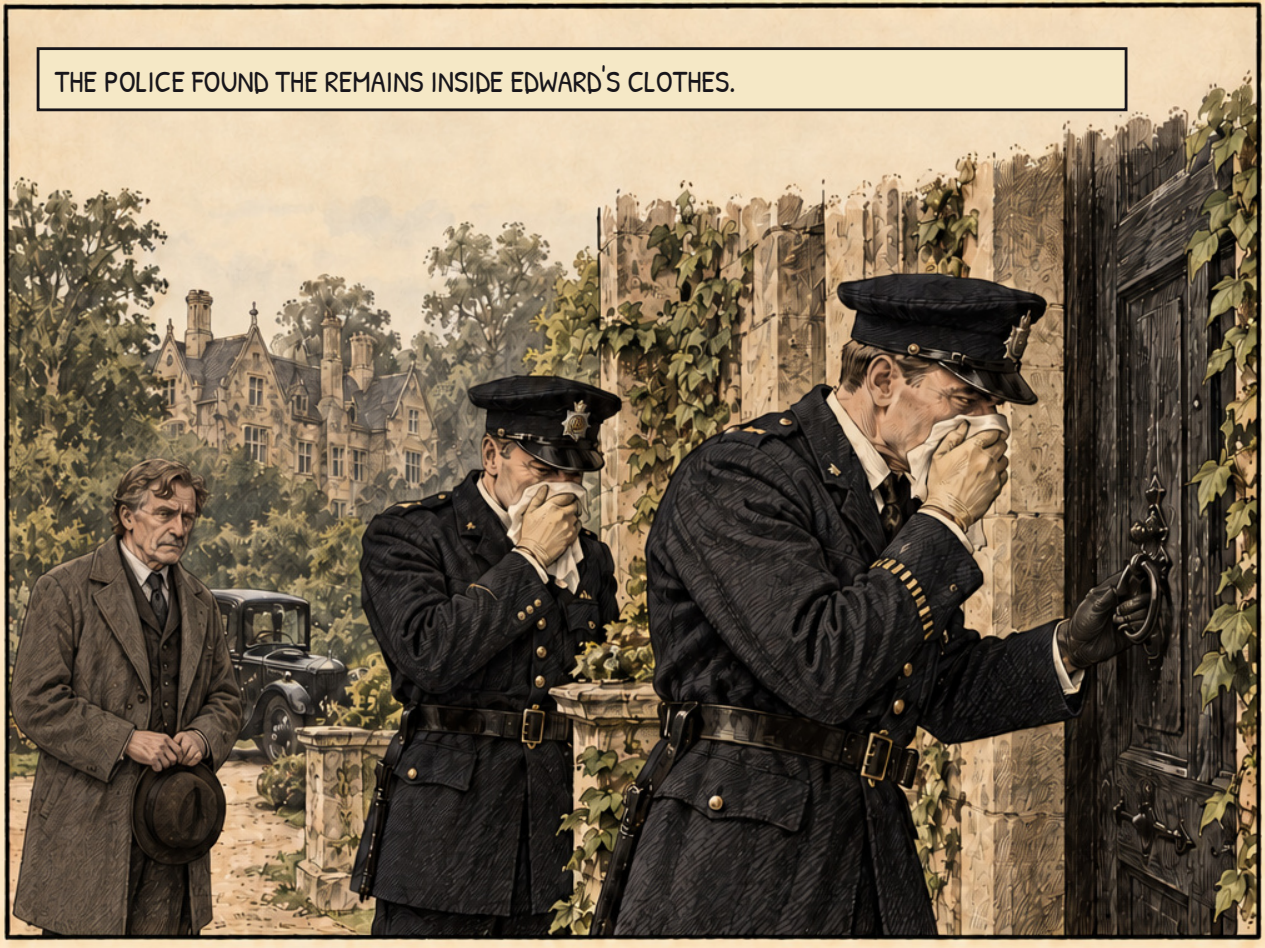


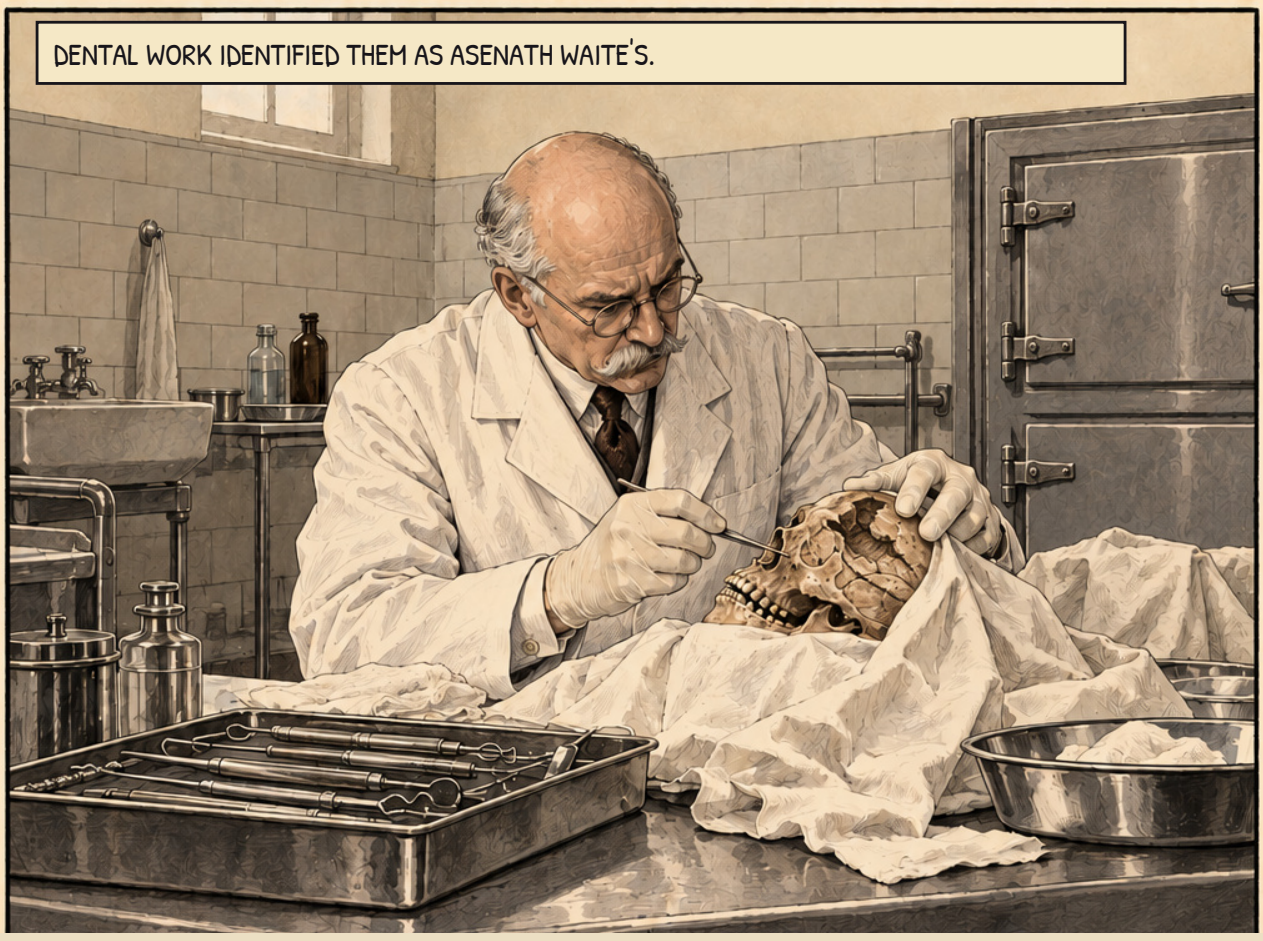
AT LAST IT TOOK EDWARD'S BODY FOR GOOD AND FORCED HIM INTO THE CORPSE BELOW THE HOUSE.




SOMEHOW HE HAD CLAWED HIS WAY OUT.
UNABLE TO SPEAK, HE HAD WRITTEN THIS FINAL WARNING AND CARRIED IT TO MY DOOR.


HE ASKED ME TO HAVE THE HOSPITAL BODY CREMATED, SO THE TRANSFER COULD NOT HAPPEN AGAIN.
WHEN I REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS, THE MESSENGER WOULD NEVER MOVE AGAIN.


THE POLICE FOUND THE REMAINS INSIDE EDWARD'S CLOTHES.


DENTAL WORK IDENTIFIED THEM AS ASENATH WAITE'S.

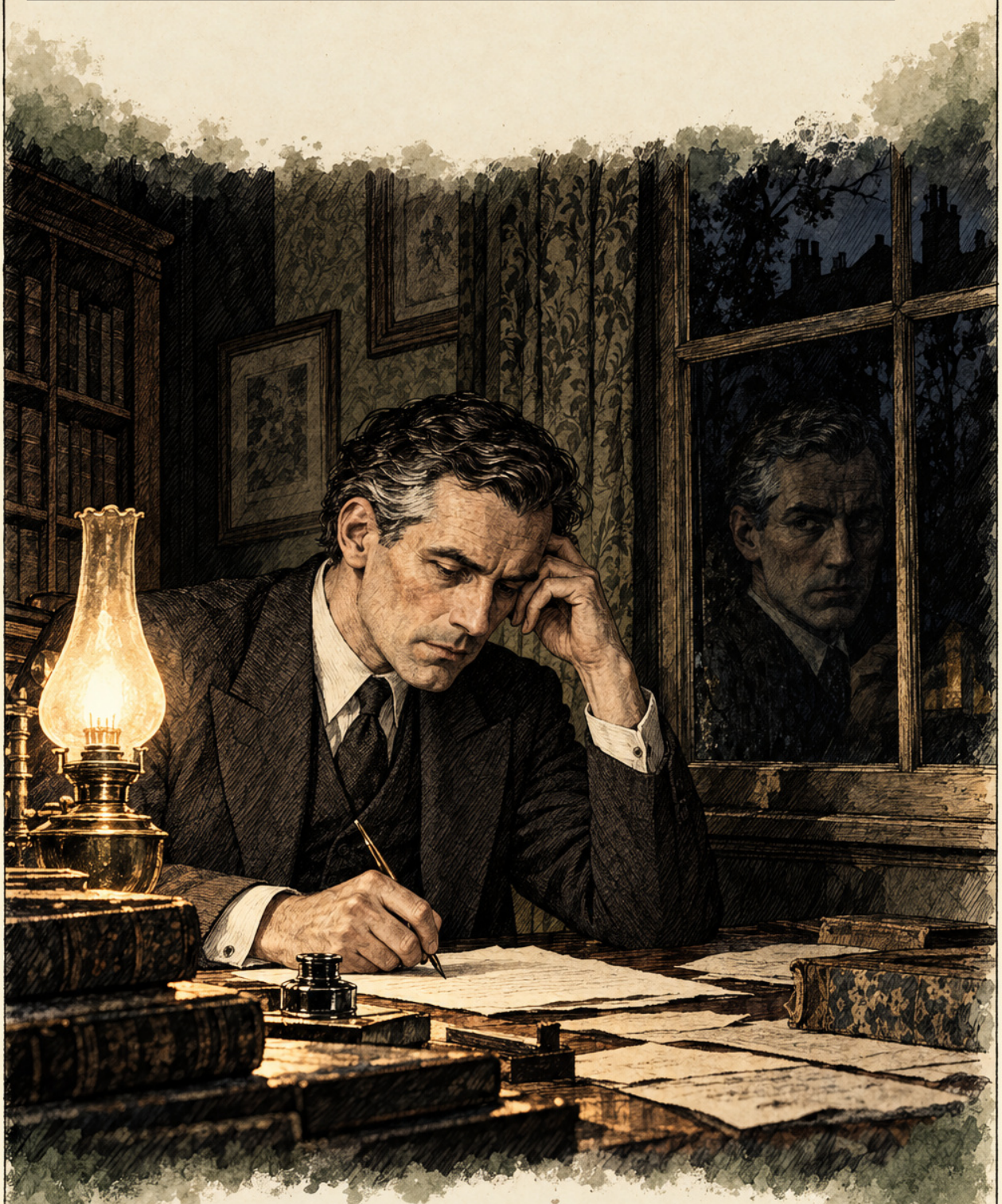
THAT AFTERNOON I WENT TO THE SANITARIUM AND FIRED THE SIX SHOTS.



THEY ARE KEEPING THE BODY FOR SOME SILLY AUTOPSIES BY DIFFERENT DOCTORS—BUT I SAY HE MUST BE CREMATED.



ONE LIFE—EPHRAIM, ASENATH, AND EDWARD—WHO NOW?



BUT MY WILL IS NOT WEAK—AND I SHALL NOT LET IT BE UNDERMINED BY THE TERRORS I KNOW ARE SEETHING AROUND IT.