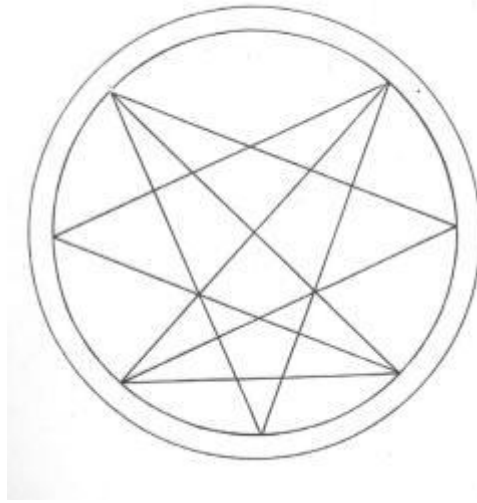


In The Sky of Dreaming



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Prologue

The dream had been startling - and he lay in his bed for several minutes while his sense of reality returned and the single Blackbird song that filtered through the window of his cottage became part of the late April Dawn Chorus.

He had dreamt he was standing among a circle of old Yew trees in some graveyard while beside him the dark-haired woman he had just kissed was transformed: into some-thing. She was still transforming as he awoke, his duvet on the floor, his bedsheets dishevelled, his nightshirt wet from sweat. She was beautiful - this young yet middle-aged woman of indeterminate age whose red lips, whose curvaceous buxom body, whose green eyes, had enticed him as he stood, waiting; waiting, for something he felt he knew yet did not quite know; something exciting, vivifying and yet also strange and, perhaps, terrifying: some Being to take form and venture forth again to Earth, released from alternate dimensions and the alternate time which had enclosed it - and her - kin.

In the sky of dreaming: a gibbeous moon; and light from the Sun which had set an hour or so before. And he could see clearly, and quite strangely given it was night, the hillside beyond his circle of trees as the hill of farmed fields descended down to a narrow valley, while -

beyond - the further rising hill was wooded except at the very summit where jagged rocks protruded up from the gorse and heather-covered earth.

There was a vague, uneasy, memory that clung to his dream-image of that place - as if he had been there before, sometime in his distant ancestral pagan past. So he lay there, in his bed in his quiet old cottage in the country with only the sounds of the singing birds outside to disturb the peace of rural England. Then, slowly, tired from a night of broken and disturbed sleep, he got up to stumble forward toward the mirror above the old porcelain sink under the eaves, mindful as he almost always was of the black-painted oak beam that cut across the room.

What he saw in the mirror shocked him, sending him stumbling back toward his bed - until the back of his head hit the beam and he fell. For he had seen the face, the greying hair, of an old man - but he was still only twenty three.

Stumbling up, he looked again. It was no dream - he was an old man, in face and body, his back bent from age; his joints aching; his breathing laboured, his hands arthritic. He called, in his now old raspy voice, to his parents in the room along the narrow corridor. No reply - and so he called again, and again, until he shuffled, slowly, from his room to find their room empty. Totally empty. No furniture; no bed; no old oak wardrobes; no dark oak chest of drawers underneath the small-paned window. Nothing - only the smell of flowers, drifting up from the garden through the open window.

Thus did he pass his day, slowly, perplexed, shuffling - from room to room; from cottage to garden to outhouse to orchard and shed. There was food, in the kitchen - bread and almost stale cheese - and, as an old man unconcerned about his health, he ate them, as he drank a bottle of fine wine from the house's cellar.

There was no telephone - no means of modern communication with the outside world, as he, and his parents, had wished. Only books: thousands upon thousands of books, in the bookcases that lined the downstairs sitting room, the dining room, and hall, from floor to ceiling, and which, in stacks, had inched their way up the winding stairs that led to the four bedrooms, two of which were replete with, and given over to, glass-fronted high cabinets containing his father's prized antiquarian book. mineral, and manuscript collection. He was in his father's study reading from the old vellum manuscript that lay open on the large Oak desk beside a large quartz tetrahedron:

“In truth, Baphomet – honoured for millennia under different names – is an image of our dark goddess and is depicted as a beautiful woman, seated, who is naked for the waist upward. She holds in her left hand the severed head of a man, and in her right a burning torch. She wears a crown of flowers, as befits a Mistress of Earth...”

It was not that he had forgotten about his missing parents - or the emptiness of their rooms - for he had remembered they had died, over fifty years ago, now. He had been briefly married, then, for almost a year, with a newly born daughter. But they had died in the nearby reservoir, her boat overturned. So so long ago that no feelings now attached themselves to his memories, and - tired from reading - he, an old aching arthritic man, ambled out onto the veranda to sit in the worn Oak chair, to watch the Sun set behind the old cider Orchard, as it always did at this time of year. So many memories, so many that he drifted into sleep.

He awoke to find himself standing in his room, and although he had for some reason he did not know grown accustomed to the strange temporal peculiarities of his life, he was again surprised by his reflexion in his bedroom mirror.

It was of a naked young woman - quite beautiful - whose green eyes complemented the dark hair that framed her features and fell down to her shoulders. Then, there were thoughts in his - in her - head, and images, perplexing images of Life, strange life, seething, seeding, growing, spreading forth from acausal dimensions.

“I am you as you are me, ” she - he - was saying, and he understood without knowing why.

“You brought me back to life, here,” she - he - intoned, like an echo.

“How long has it been?” he asked.

“For you, only two of your days.”

“It was the book, the crystal tetrahedron,” he said.

“Yes!” she breathed out, and smiled. And he was forever gone from the causal world he knew.

The body no longer ached from age. Instead, there was desire; a strong, passionate, vibrant, youthful desire that needed to be fulfilled. The body, as the face, was quite beautiful, well-formed, and he was not surprised to find his - her - wardrobe full of women’s clothes. She selected an outfit appropriate to the dark passion of her task and it was not long before she ventured forth to feel the warmth of the Sun on her face. It was an exquisite feeling, which she lingered for a moment to enjoy before her first stalking began. And, when satiated - her need fulfilled - she would, could, begin the task for which she had returned to Earth, to the causal, restricting, dimensions of the so-slow-moving limited beings born to die. She - ageless - had been this way before in those forming times before The Sealing when such Earth-bound beings were struggling to develop both speech and thought, and she was, with her new human emotions, pleased to find that such limited life, still, could be easily inhabited and controlled. Thus would she, ageless, be joined by others of her ageless shapeshifting kind.

So she walked across the old Orchard toward the lane that would take her down the hill to a village of living people where she might find someone, or many - some offer - to provide her with the causal energy she needed to keep her current shapeshifting form.

0: Red Moon Dawning

There was little that he could do, for she had bound his wrists, arms, and legs to the lattice frame that fenced one side of his small unkempt back garden. It had been a pretty, English cottage-garden, thirty years ago.

She had arrived that morning - early, as the Dawn of June broke over his Farm below the wooded hill where oldly named fields and scattered tumuli kept their waiting vigil. Arrived - to pound upon the heavy old Oak door which he, solitary, taciturn, rudely opened, gruffly saying “Yes!”, disliking as he did unexpected, expected, visitors and guests. Then: then, his

memory after that was confused, hazy, as if a dream-remembered fading with each dwelling upon some moment, some segment, of it. Confused; hazy - until he awoke to find himself in his back garden, lashed fast by bailing-twine.

How, then, had she done this? For he was tall, stocky, strong - even if nearing the sixtieth year of life - while she, strangely beautiful, seemed to his memory but a slim young woman of little obvious strength. Perhaps someone - or many - had helped her. But there was no memory, only the reality of being there, waiting, trussed, as a farm animal awaiting slaughter.

It was a long wait of hours that saw the hot Sun rise and the humid air sweat and thirst him. The cows in the nearby fields - their milking missed - were strangely quiet; his three Farm dogs absent. So he - annoyed, attacked, by flies - waited, waited, silently waited: for his prolonged yelling, profanities, curses, struggles, had worn him down. She had not - no one had - arrived, been seen, in answer. So he in the old worn working clothes he had fallen asleep in, waited, waited, waited... until the setting Sun brought a red moon dawning. The garden came alive then, briefly, scent following scent - honeysuckle, primrose, night-scented stock - bringing with his exhaustion a memory of life thirty years before when his garden bloomed as it had bloomed in Summers when she his wife lived as she, they, had happily lived before Death came to claim her. Then, the brief memory - the too brief memory - gone, he was alone, again, amid the silence.

Alone: until a slight almost lispings sibillation seemed to chorus around him. No words, only a rushing as breeze among dry leaves. Then, quite suddenly, she was there, before him, and he gasped as if intoxicated by her presence, her scent, her beauty. A test, a test, only a test of dreams, memories, life, desire. She was offering him a choice - offering, without words, feelings or even somehow without thought. The vision, the vista, the strange alien life, was there - in him - as she looked at him, and faintly smiled.

Then, he was free from the causal bonds that bound him, and he momentarily staggered to fall to the dry dusty ground, to silently cry out as she smiled before quickly moonlight-walking with her, against his will, toward the summit of the hill. No signs, no portents, came forth from the starry sky above, as nothing visible would result when his earthly life has been drained away to leave only the shell, only the empty shell, dust to interstellar dust, cosmic atoms to cosmic atom to form, reform, be de-formed, cycle after aeonic cycle.

No, nothing visible: to human eyes. But the cattle in the fields; the Owl; the Farm dogs still cowering in a Barn, the resting sleeping moving hunting hunted life around briefly stopped to feel, to look around, as some-thing now unsealed ventured fastly forth again toward the distant blue planet of Earth as the causal energy she needed seeded itself within her causal female form, bringing the temporary renewal desired.

1: The Seeding

He knew the footpath well, even in the early morning Autumnal dark which reached out to him as he climbed up toward the summit of that wooded hill in rural England. There - tree roots reaching across the worn path; there - the overhanging branch that in the Summer of heavy foliage had been bent lower down to almost touch the broken, now rotten, wooden fence post on his left whose stretching wire had long been worn away by age, rain, frost, neglect. Here - the protruding rocks which snaked down from where the harsh contours of the

old limestone Quarry above which had been softened naturally by three decades of abandonment and Nature's resurgent growth.

So he walked steadily, as befitted his age, clothes, in the hours before Dawn, used to the sound of nearby rustling - Deer, perhaps - and the (for him) natural sound of a calling Owl. There was no breeze, and no Moon on this mild mid-October night: but light enough to see by, for eyes used to dark, and senses, body, attuned to the natural being that was Nature. So he walked, as he had done for five and more years from the village where he dwelled on the flat land that bordered the hills and which as pasture continued for miles until it met the sea. Walked - as always - alone: one custom of his reclusive life - scorning any and every artificial light, for he was, had become, almost like the life, the animals, that lived, dwelled. in the almost forgotten woods. Wiry, lean, but well-muscled and with long dark hair going grey which fell around his bearded face lined with nearly three score years of life and three decades of outdoor manual toil which had left his right wrist and hand rheumatic and his lungs a little worse for wear given the long hours spent toiling on dank, rainy, misty, foggy, cold and frosty days.

He did not now even mind the failing vitality of his life, the pains of age, for she - his wife, companion - died five Summers and a Spring ago, and he had grown used to his life alone. The nightly early walks; the work on a neighbours farm; the evening meal where he sat in his chair by the fire drinking glass after glass of Port until tiredness overcome him and he slept, fitfully and for a while. No, he did not mind, not any more - for there was recompense enough in the shrouding, shielding dark; in being-with the life around, in, of the woods, the hills, the very earth, which life he felt as he felt his breath drawn in on a cold and frosty cloud-free Dawn when he would, did, stand - had stood - on that hill's summit clear of trees, that hill's summit a valley, a wood and two paths distant, from where he could see the distant sea and the Sun as it rose bringing a soft joy that seeped into his very bones and a feeling, a feeling, of no longer being alone.

It was as if he belonged there, now - there, on that summit where the old ancient human circles of earth fortifications and trenches of thousands of years ago had been breached, reduced, covered, by the process of Nature's natural change.

He was not surprised to see her, there on the summit - standing on the raised mound of broken grass-covered rocks that marked the almost-centre of the not-quite-round upper fortifications. Standing there, as the dark grey of nearly Dawn gave way to the lighter grey that marked the cloud-obscured rising of another Autumnal Sun. She was dressed in green, as he was; but his olive green seemed drab beside her verdant richness, and as he slowly walked the last twenty upward yards toward her, the rising gentle breeze gently raised the ends of her auburn hair. She turned toward him then, and smiled.

No, he was not surprised to see her, standing, smiling: for she was his dream of the previous night; a woman, beautiful, mature yet of indeterminate age, whose green sapphire necklace both emphasized her green eyes and the tanned skin of her neck and shoulders. Not surprised to see her in that long verdant flowing dress that emphasized her well-proportioned voluptuous body.

But he was startled - momentarily shocked - when she came forward and touched him. He felt the warmth of her hand on his face; felt her soft fingers caress the dry roughness of his cheek.

Felt the warmth, the scent, of her breath as she leant her face close to his, and all he could do was stand totally still with a palpitating heart and look into the cosmos of her eyes.

There was no need for words, he knew: for she was his thought and, in that dark numinous moment, the very thread by which he clung to life. She had been waiting for him - waiting for one like him to venture forth close to those sinister pathways where she and her kind waited, dwelling, long century after long century, thousand year after thousand year until almost two Aeons had passed. So he felt and so he knew, beyond words and a rational understanding, and she kissed him then, as a lover might, draining away from him the pains of his age and becoming for him, in him, that warmth of languid repose felt when two lovers, tired, sweaty, sleep together naked body entwined with naked body.

He was not to know, then - as she caressed him and bared her nakedness for him to touch and feel and kiss and enter - that she needed his seed to bring forth into the world a new kind of life. But had he known, then, he would not have cared. So he let his passion, his need, guide him, until he, she, spasmed in ecstasy as the warm Sun rose higher to warm the human world that dwelt upon, around, the land below that old and sacred hill while They, waiting, were watching as they waited and watched, almost formless in those formless acausal spaces where they dwelt. Waited, waiting, for their bodies as she had waited for hers.

He lay with her, naked body upon naked body, for what seemed to him a long time as part of her seeped into him bringing without words an understanding of what he must do and why. She was offering him a choice, a genuine choice, and he was free to rise and dress himself and walk away even as some-thing, some kind of life, was seeding itself in the womb of her human body.

His choice was to stay; to do as she - as They - desired, and his first willing task would be to seek out and find some women of child-bearing age and bring them to this place so that others might seep through the ever-opening nexion to inhabit their bodies and to breed from them the new species They needed. Thus would he use those acausal seeds that she, in and through and after their joining, had planted in him - talents, skills, and magick: to entice, entrap, beguile, bewitch, ensnare. And thus would he, alive, be rewarded - with her warmth, her touch, her kiss, her body.

2: Zarid, The Pretender

Zarid's day began - as it usually did - with his Russian partner bringing him a cup of black coffee while he lingered and languished in his bed in the stuffy attic room of their house where he slept, surrounded by books and discarded clothes. Years ago Zarid had retreated at night to this room, his lair, to leave his common-law wife to sleep with their child in their room on the first floor of the large Edwardian house, and this retreat had become his habit, his routine, for he valued his privacy and his time, his priority his work at the nearby University, his obsession with seducing young women and his own secret submissive desires.

That morning of the damp overcast November day, he was tired, but aroused by the dream of his night, and, naked, he slunk down the steep winding stairs that led to the first floor and the bedroom of his wife. She was there - attractive, blonde-haired - dressing, and turned to look at him as he entered but he wasted no time on endearments and pleasantries but instead caressed her breasts before telling her of his desire.

She was used to his ways, her early romantic love having given way to the strange practicalities of their strange shared life, and she wearily followed him into their large bathroom where he lay, on the tiled floor, waiting. She did not disappoint, and, squatting over him, urinated on his body and face while he took his own selfish pleasure with his hand. Satiated, he showered and obsessively groomed himself while she attended to the many tasks of her day, and it was not long before he, dressed in his usual ensemble of long black leather jacket, black shoes, grey shirt and dark trousers, departed to walk the mile to his University office, knowing that she, his companion of five years, would assuredly clean the bathroom. He kept promising to marry her, as she, and part of him, desired, for then his little lie of years ago to the University authorities, to others (and sometimes even to himself) would no longer lie in wait to trap him.

He was a tall man, merging seamlessly into his middle-thirties, whose hair - to his chagrin - has begun to thin and recede, and whose body already bore the marks of his life and occupation: stooped shoulders, from hours hunched over books, and a pale complexion occasioned by his indoor existence. He did not care that, until recently, his place of work had been a Polytechnic in a northern industrial city - for he had achieved his dream of being a Professor, a dream nurtured by his boyhood desire to escape from what he felt was the cloying, enclosed, dreary, mundane, banal, dead-end world of the old terraced streets of Leeds where his family had lived for generations and pursued their occupation as tailors, and which he left aged eighteen, never to return. So he was proud of his success, if not of his first name - a choice of his mother's in honour of her immigrant grandfather from the Ukraine - and eager, this morning of threatened rain, to seat himself at his cluttered untidy desk and compose his forthcoming lecture. Then, that task over, the Professor of Philosophy who taught ethics would gleefully plan another secret assignation with another of his female students.

It was not to be however, for, awaiting him in his modest somewhat cramped office in a rather anonymous modern building, were two unsmiling conservatively dressed middle-aged men in dark suits, one of whom introduced himself as a Detective Sargent named Malloy. As they sat opposite him, Zarid - in his rather more comfortable chair - nervously played with his fountain pen.

“We believe you know this woman,” Malloy said, without preamble, showing him a photograph.

Yes, he did - but he held the photograph for a long time before saying, “She does seem familiar. I can't seem to place her, at the moment.”

“Sandra Letton. She was a student here.”

Zarid pretended to peer at the photograph again. “Ah yes. How can I help?” He smiled, rather unconvincingly.

“She went missing several weeks ago.”

“Last I heard, ” Zarid said, “she'd moved to work in Cheltenham. Some sort of Civil Service job, I think.”

The two men look at each other knowingly before Malloy said, “We understand you had a relationship with her.” It was not a question.

Zarid's face went a greyer shade of grey. "That was a while ago, now. Just a brief, casual thing."

"Indeed, so you say," Malloy replied, in a tone Zarid found both intimidating and disapproving.

"I haven't heard from her in a long time," Zarid lied, then instantly regretted saying it.

The two men betrayed no emotion. "Well," Malloy said, standing up, "if you do hear from her, we'd appreciate it if you would contact us," and handed him his card.

"Yes, yes, of course," Zarid replied, his hand shaking as he took it.

"Your public lecture next week," Malloy's hitherto silent companion said, in a cultured accent, as he and Malloy stood at the door. "Very interesting and pertinent topic."

"How did you know about that?" Zarid asked.

But the man only smiled, and then they were gone, from his office, as a mixture of conflicting emotions assailed Zarid. The glass of dry Madeira he poured for himself - from the small cabinet beside his desk - calmed him, a little, and he opened his notebook computer to read again her e-mail, received the evening before.

"Hi Zarid, how you doin? I bet you've kept those photos, haven't you, you naughty boy! It would be great to meet up asap, have a drink (or three!) and chat and maybe - something else, like old times! I'm in your area again for a while. By the way, I've got a wicked story to tell you about a friend of yours. Call me on....."

Without thinking, Zarid dialled the mobile telephone number.

"Sandra?" he asked in reply to the "Hello?"

"Yes?"

"Zarid."

"Hi! Can you meet me?"

"Yes, yes, of course!" he said, remembering their many trysts and her sexy body.

She gave a place, not far, and a time - that evening - and he, after that quick call which she quickly terminated for some reason he did not dwell on, spent the day caught between turmoil, expectation, excitement, and a wordless feeling of unease which he tried, unsuccessfully, to dissipate by concentrating on his work. He wrote a few pages of his lecture, gave up, stood for a long while blankly staring out of his office window, and then sat, disinterested, through a tutorial with one of his students, before leaving the campus to wander into the centre of the city, unaware of the two men discreetly, and professionally, following him.

So he wiled away the late morning and the afternoon hours of that damp overcast November day dallying in various cafés, often taking from the inside pocket of his jacket one of the notebooks he always carried to record his musings and his thoughts, occasionally scribbling away, with his fountain pen, immersed in his worlds of philosophy and sexual fantasy, and smiling once - several times - as he remembered how Sandra had pleased him and how she had allowed him to wear her damp panties, and the suspenders he had bought her.

Then, in the descended darkness of that busy city, he wandered forth to be down by the river where no trees shadowed the footpath by a built-on ancient meadow and the wide railway bridge funnelled a noisy train. He was there, approaching the chosen spot at the chosen time, and saw her, in that diffuse glow sent forth from sodium city lights, waiting. She smiled in greeting, as he did, and he was within three feet of her forming words of humorous welcome when she unexpectedly and slowly tumbled forward.

He caught her, as she fell, but she was already dead, her warm blood staining his hand.

For a minute, and more, Zarid held her, not knowing what to do in the emotional and physical numbness that enveloped him. Then, he was aware of someone standing over him as he knelt still cradling her dead body; aware of others, nearby. They - everything - seemed to him to be moving slowly. Blue flashing lights; distant voices. “Single shot...back of head...” Then another nearer voice, which suddenly intruded upon him.

“Let’s get you out of here. You’re in serious trouble...”

Zarid recognized the speaker. It was DS Malloy.

3: Consequences

He disliked milky sugared tea, but Zarid drank it nevertheless - his third cup that morning - as he waited, shivering, in the warm brightly-lit, windowless, small and rather clinical interview room of his local Police Station. Waited, still dressed in the white forensic coverall given to him the previous evening, after his own clothes had been taken and before he was locked in a cell whose stark light was constant. Waited, as he had waited all of the evening and many hours of that night, awake, alone. Awake, alone - except for a startling dream during one short period of fitful sleep. He had dreamed that a beautiful woman was in the cell with him. She was chanting some name which he could not quite hear, and smiling at him, exuding a warmth that he could feel, physically feel; gesturing for him to come toward her, and he was about to do so when the cell door opened, returning him to a cold, severe, reality.

Thus was he waiting, again, for some questions; for answers, and thus did he sit that morning waiting for one of the two men opposite him to say something, anything. They just sat there, their arms folded, looking at him as they had looked at him earlier the previous day in his office; sat there, watching, until Malloy - slowly, with a practised ease - took from the folder in front of him several photographs, laying them neatly out on the utilitarian table.

Zarid knew then that they, or someone, someone from the Police, had been to his house.

“Did you know she was pregnant?” Malloy suddenly said.

“No, no I didn’t.”

“Is that why you killed her?”

“This is ridiculous!” Zarid said.

“Is it? You lied about not having been in contact with her...”

“I can explain.”

“I’m sure you can. Just what information did she pass onto you?”

“Information? What information?”

“You knew she worked at GCHQ, didn’t you?”

“Where?”

“Don’t play games. We found this letter, from her, in your house.” From the folder Malloy produced a three page wordprocessed letter.

Zarid glanced at it. It was addressed ‘My Dear Naughty Boy!’ and signed, by hand in lilac-coloured ink, ‘With love and kisses, Sandra.’

“I’ve never seen it before.”

“So you say. She goes into some detail about her work. Classified, government work.”

“Like I said, I’ve never seen it before.”

“The evidence against you is piling up.”

“Look,” Zarid said, afraid and rather annoyed at the same time, “I’d like to see a Solicitor. I’m entitled to, right?”

“Under normal circumstances, yes. These are not normal circumstances.”

“But - “

“Aiding and abetting someone who has supplied you with classified information is a serious offence,” Malloy said. “Then there is the matter of your affairs with your students - an impressive record, which would come out during a trial. The matter of lying to us. The images we found on your computer. The drugs found at your home and in your office. The fact that your Russian partner doesn’t appear to have a valid residence permit. And so on.”

“I get the picture.”

“But we’re prepared,” Malloy continued, unsmiling, and collecting the photographs and letter together, to place them back in the folder, “to forget about all these things, if you’ll agree to help us.”

“Me? Help? How? So you know I didn’t kill her?”

“We’re working on that assumption.”

Relieved, Zarid eagerly asked, “How can I help?”

“We know she went to see a friend of yours, last week.”

“Yes?”

“A certain Esmund Yaxley.”

“I didn’t know they knew each other,” said Zarid, with genuine surprise.

“Whatever. But you know his reputation, his past, his activities.”

“Yes, yes, of course. But - I’ve nothing to do with that.”

“We know. But we’d like you to go see him, and find out what he knows.”

“About Sandra?”

“Yes.”

“See him, when?”

“The matter is urgent; a question of national security; so today.”

From the briefcase which had been beside his chair on the floor, Malloy’s silent companion produced a new, boxed, mobile telephone, two large bundles of twenty pound notes, and two official-looking forms.

Malloy pushed the money over to Zarid. “Expenses. We’ll need you to sign this receipt, for the money, and this document, which you should read first.”

Zarid read, and signed, as he was told.

“We will arrange transport to take you to the Station.”

“But my work; tutorials...”

“All taken care of. A leave of absence has been arranged. And we’ve brought a few clothes from your house.”

“My wife...”

“I’m sure you can think of something!” For the first time that day, Malloy smiled. “From now on, ” he continued, as his companion returned the signed receipt and signed document to his case, “you’ll be in contact with Malin, here.”

“My contact number,” Malin said, “is already stored in the telephone, which is connected, with the battery fully charged. I shall expect to hear from you this evening.”

4: Nexions

The warmish Sun of mid morning caught Zarid as, carrying a small travel bag, he walked the short distance down to the Railway Station entrance from where the anonymous car, and driver, had deposited him. He was glad of the Sun, of his freedom, and lingered by the entrance for a while. Then, ticket bought with a little of the given cash, he joined the throng heading for the busy platforms. Once, he thought he saw the woman of his dream the previous night, and rushed toward her - but he was mistaken, and was left, feeling rather foolish, to wait as the others waited for the southbound train.

Esmund Yaxley. Why was he not surprised he might be somehow involved? The train arrived, on-time, and he was glad to sit within its warmth, to try to give some meaning, some semblance of meaning, to the rapid unsettling unforeseen events of the last two days. The warmth, the slight swaying motion and slight constant almost rhythmic noise of the train, his own tiredness, combined to relax him, a little, and once - to his surprise - he found himself overcome with sadness and a certain grief at Sandra's death. A single tear: then, unsettling questions to which he had no answers assailed him, and slowly - as fair-weather cumulus clouds pass slowly below the blue-sky of a languid almost breezeless English Summer day - he understood his situation.

He had been, was being, manipulated, and maybe - just maybe - his old friend Esmund could provide him with some answers. Esmund; the wiry but bearded and fit and well-muscled Esmund who had spent the last decade since their time together at University flitting from one place, to another, from one adventure to another, always seeking something that seemed - at least to Zarid - forever beyond his reach, and acquiring along the way a somewhat sinister reputation, aided by three spells in prison, for violence, association with a variety of disreputable and sometimes criminal characters, and his interest in, and knowledge of, the Occult.

But, soon, physically and emotionally tired, Zarid was briefly asleep, dreaming of that beautiful woman again.

“What brings you here?” Esmund said, jovially. He was sitting on a bench in his well-tended cottage garden in the beginning twilight of what had been a warmish day.

“Just wanted to get away for a few days. Domestic things, you know.”

“Is that so?” And Esmund looked at him quizzically.

Zarid sighed. “No, not really. Have you heard? About Sandra?” He sat down on the bench, tired from the exertion. It had been a long journey, involving several changes of train, and a taxi from the market town on the edge of the Costwolds to the small village where Esmund's

small cottage lay, up a track inaccessible to motorized vehicles and near the top of a wooded hill. Esmund's Border Collie dog had eyed him suspiciously as Zarid had opened the somewhat rickety wooden gate, then decided not to bark and returned to his slumber by the Cherry tree.

“Yes, there was a brief report, on the news.”

“I was there, when she died. She came to see me.”

“She said she might,” Esmund said.

“So you did know her then?”

“Yes.”

“And that she was pregnant?”

“Would you like some tea? I have Keemun, and some rather nice Chinese Sencha. Or there is Darjeeling, of course.”

“I was thinking of something a little stronger.”

“Coffee it is then. Ethiopian, or Kenyan? Come on in.” Esmund led him into the small, recently refurbished and very tidy kitchen. “Espresso, Americano, Cappuccino?” he asked.

“You're joking.”

“No. One of life's many little civilized pleasures,” and Esmund pointed to his one-group espresso machine.

As darkness descended, they drunk their coffee, black, in silence - seated in comfortable armchairs before the bright warming log-fire of the cottage sitting-room - until Zarid said, “You seem quite comfortable and settled, here.”

“Surprised?”

“Yes. Is this place yours?”

“Yes, and no. Belongs to a lady friend of mine.”

“It figures!”

“So, about Sandra. What do you want to know?”

“Did you know that she was pregnant?”

“Yes.”

“By you?”

Esmund smiled. An enigmatic smile. “Would you like to meet her, this lady friend of mine?”

“Possibly. I don’t know. Did you know about Sandra’s work?”

“Of course. She made no secret of it. She was very helpful, to us,” and he looked at Zarid in that penetrating way he had.

“Us? Not one of your Occult groups?”

“Not really. Beyond all that mundane passé stuff. You really should meet her, you know.”

“Who?”

“She wants to meet you. In fact, I’ve invited her here this evening. You’ll be staying here, for at least tonight, I presume?”

“If that’s OK with you.”

“*Certainmont!* The guest room is ready. Shall I show you, then you can refresh up while I prepare us some dinner? Nothing special, just some Trout I liberated from a stream down the hill.”

The guest room of low-ceilinged beams was small, with small windows, as befitted the small old cottage of thick walls, but it was - or seemed to Zarid to be - immaculately and tastefully furnished. There were crystal decanters, of Port and Sherry, on a small table by an armchair near the small fireplace where a fire of coalite burned, spreading a warming glow and a restful warmth.

“Help yourself to an aperitif,” Esmund said. “There’s a jug, and basin, for a wash.” And he indicated the old marble-topped stand in one darkened corner.

“Thank you,” Zarid said, and meant it, surprised by the hospitality.

“Oh, and if you need a light to see by, there are some candles, in holders, there. I much prefer candlelight, don’t you,” Esmund said, and smiled.

Then Zarid was alone, amid the country silence, and he took advantage of Esmund’s absence to try his newly acquired mobile telephone, surprised to find there was signal strength enough for him to make a call.

The meal of whole baked Trout, with lemon and parsley butter and fresh vegetables, over, they settled with their glasses of vintage Port by the fire in the candle-lit sitting room.

“This is all very civilized,” Zarid jovially said.

“What did you expect?”

“Well - “

“Don’t answer that!”

“Really, I would have visited you sooner, if I’d known.”

“You are here now.”

“Yes.” Zarid felt very tired, almost exhausted, and he briefly closed his eyes before the exotic sensual scent brought him back from the verge of sleep.

She was there - the woman of his dream of the night before - standing beside Esmund who held her hand. She wore a green sapphire necklace and a long verdant flowing dress that emphasized her well-proportioned voluptuous body, and Zarid felt her warmth seeping out to touch him.

But something - some fear once deeply hidden, some nameless dread, something from his own ancestral past, and perhaps also some small knowing of his betrayal of his friend - overwhelmed him in the instant of that sensuous breeching searching touch so that he, gasping, screaming - while Esmund laughed - rose to stumble backward to lurch toward and out from the door to run down the path, falling, scampering over the gate, arms flaying, to the track and the road nearly a mile below where a single street light reminded him to pause and think and seek the best way homeward.

In his head: visions and vistas and words and sounds and laughter. She had touched him, if only for an instant, and all the answers he came to seek, he was sent to seek, he knew, along with many answers to questions he wished he did not know.

5: Homeward

Zarid could not sleep, nor relax, on the even longer journey back to his home. Twice - three times, more - he fumbled with his mobile telephone, and twice, three times - more - he did not call his contact as part of him desired. Would would he say? What could he say? The whole matter was beyond belief - unbelievable - and the more he thought about it, the more he became convinced no one, least of all Malloy and Malin, would believe him.

So he spent many hours of that tedious journey through the dark of night striving to concoct some convincing story that he might tell. One version had him denying everything; another - that Esmund and Sandra were simply lovers. Or that she was some Priestess, a Mistress of Earth, even, in one of Esmund’s many sinister covens. Or that Esmund was going to sell the information Sandra had provided to one of his criminal contacts. But who, then, killed her, and why? The sad, even tragic, thing was that he did know, and this knowledge placed him in danger.

It was in the taxi - well beyond the hour of midnight - on the journey from the Railway Station to his home that he believed he had found a suitable deceptive answer. He would telephone Malin tomorrow, and pleased with himself, he finally began to feel a little relieved. It did not last, for, inside his house, there was no wife waiting to greet him, no child asleep for

him to briefly watch, as he often did, before he ascended the stairs to his private eyrie - only Malloy and Malin and two armed Policemen.

“Where are they?” he anxiously asked as he tried to trawl his house before being restrained by Malloy.

“We’ve taken them into protective custody.”

“Why?” he somewhat stupidly asked.

“You found what we wanted, haven’t you?” Malin asked him.

“No. I don’t know.” He felt intimidated, and his resolve to lie began to weaken. He might - probably had been - followed to Esmund’s cottage, as they - Malloy and Malin and those who controlled them - might, and probably already did, know the answers, or at least some of them. Why else had they taken his family into protective custody? Or was that itself a ruse, pressure, blackmail, a means to get him to talk? He was beginning to become confused, for his mind again became suffused with visions and vistas and words and sounds and laughter, for she - some alien being - had touched him.

“Can I see my wife?” he asked, trying to calm himself.

“Later, ” Malin said, harshly.

You do realize, don’t you, Zarid,” Malloy interjected, softly, “that this is a matter of national security?”

“Possibly; yes.”

“Therefore, surely your duty is to tell us everything that occurred, everything that you learnt.”

“Here?”

“No.”

So he was taken back to the Police Station where he sat, with another cup of sickly sweet milky tea in another interview room, with Malloy, Malin and another, older, well-dressed and unidentified man who stood by himself in a corner of that room.

“This interview will be recorded,” Malloy said, somewhat unnecessarily, as he turned the machine on.

Zarid began, slowly, hesitatingly, telling of Esmund’s admission of knowing that Sandra was pregnant; of him receiving information from her; but it was when he spoke of the women - recalling her - that his slow hesitation ceased, and the words flowed fastly, fluidly, from him as if he was being guided, for his mind became suffused again with visions and vistas and words and alien sounds.

“She who touched me is not quite human, you see, as Sandra’s child was not, which I’m sure you already knew. They have this plan, you see, to breed a new not quite

human species, half human, half alien. She - They, these shapeshifters - need human bodies, at least to begin with. They want to live again, to dwell, again, on Earth: to have form and to cease to be formless. To live, to feel, to love. To guide. Thus, They came back and They will come back, dwelling in human bodies. They need humans to begin with at least like I said as they believe humans need Them. To evolve, together, a symbiosis. That is the key. Symbiosis. They were here thousands upon thousands of years ago, at the dawning of our consciousness, but They were then unable to complete their work, for there were The Others, who opposed Them, and who opposed her - the prime nexion, The Beginning - and who did their own dark work, botched experiments, botched changing, and whose botched living experiments stayed. They got it wrong, you see, The Others; wrong - for they produced a strange, vindictive and twisted and unstable and mutant brood who survived on Earth by their mendacity and ruthless cunning and who made keeping their mutated blood pure into some kind of religion.

“Those humans were genetically-modified by these Others, the evil ones, and their mutant descendants are among us now, manipulating, controlling, planning. Slowly, they have planned, with their ruthless cunning, with the inbred slyness they possess, and over the last hundred years - especially the last seventy years - they, or their agents, have seized clandestine control of our governments, here in Britain, in America, using the power of money, of the Media - which are both under their control - and using the myths, the ideas, they have invented, to control humans, to manipulate humans not of their own kind. The first stage of their plan is for a world government of control, and that is nearing completion.

“To this end they engineered wars, and get some people or, mostly, their own agents among humans to do vile things just so they can get governments to react to them and introduce more laws, more measures of control, more repression, more tyranny, and all in the double-speak name of “freedom and democracy”, the false idols which their servants and their lackeys worship and obey, but which the mutants don’t. But they have found willing and brutal allies in many lands - particularly in America. They - or their agents and allies - persecute, and torture, and hound, or revile, or discredit, or kill, or imprison on some pretext or other, anyone who knows their plans or who sees them for what they are. That is, they now have the power, the influence to destroy anyone, any person, any group, any country, they want to - to get them out of the way.

But She - They, her shapeshifters from the acausal - want humans to be genuinely free, as evolved individuals; so She has come back as They will come back to liberate humans from those, The Others, the evil ones, and their mutant servants, so that humans might evolve and take their destined place among the stars and particularly among the acausal dimensions. The mutant, materialistic, causally-tied spawn of The Others, you see, have forgotten their origins, lost their true past, do not know who manufactured them, changed, them, made them what they were and are, but they do fanatically believe they are chosen, that it is they who should, who must, who have been chosen to, rule this world and its peoples, whatever the human cost and the misery they cause. They really are the spawn of evil; agents of evil - and She and her siblings will stop these bastard descendants of The Others who cannot ever reach out to, or travel among, or exist in, the timeless blissful beautiful realms of the acausal. But humans can - and can eternally exist there, in the acausal when the new symbiosis is complete.”

He was finished, exhausted, himself again, and saw Malloy looking at Malin with a look of disbelief.

“I see,” Malloy said, annoyed, before stopping the recording.

“You don’t believe me - all that - do you?” Zarin quietly said, uneasy and perplexed.

“Frankly, I’d have thought an intelligent man like you would have come up with a better story than crap and fantasy like that.” Turning to the unidentified man he said, “We’re finished here, I think?”

The man nodded, and left the room.

“You disappoint me, you really do,” Malloy said to Zarin.

Zarin was taken to a cell, where he waited, nervously, for something to happen. For what seemed like hours, nothing did, and he gradually succumbed to his exhaustion, to dream of the beautiful woman. She was speaking to him without words and he felt her moving closer, closer to him until he smelt again her quixotic perfume - but the dream, the beautiful vision, was snatched away from him as two men entered his cell to bind his arms behind his back and tie a dark hood over his head.

He tried to struggle, but the injection he was given soon took effect and he was taken through the corridors of a curiously deserted and darkened Police Station to a waiting van.

“Nothing happened here,” Malin said to Malloy as, outside in the cold night air, they watched the van being driven away.

“Your people checked the foetus, I take it?” Malloy asked.

“Perfectly normal,” Malin lied.

Esmund knew he was under surveillance, and the reason why - even before Zarin’s arrival - and his years of experience of living on and often beyond the fringes of the law had made him prepared for most eventualities. So, from behind the false wall in the cellar of his cottage, he collected the items he considered he might need to evade and escape from those watching him so that he might keep the rendezvous with Raynould on that ancient hill circle where she, their dark goddess, had first touched Raynould and where in the coming hours of darkness she would give birth to his half-human child. For a few seconds, Esmund felt a little jealous of the man he had never met, but he calculatingly placed that human emotion aside.

He selected a variety of weapons - his favoured long-barrelled revolver with hand-loaded rounds; a handy pump-action shotgun; a grenade or two - and a passport, and driving license, for a new identity as well as a small rucksack containing a variety of clothes, bottled water, and toiletry items. Then, as the bright Sun of that early morning rose into the clear sky that had brought the nightly frost, he - revolver in hand, shotgun slung over his shoulder, rucksack on his back - sauntered casually out into the garden, followed by his dog.

“Stay!” he said, and his canine friend obeyed. There would, Esmund knew, be a woman, a lover from the village below, to care for his dog, for however long he was away.

Scorning the path, Esmund vaulted over the fence into the steeply sloping grazing field that adjoined the eastern side of his garden and began to run up, and right at an angle, toward the summit of his hill. There was no cover there for those who might follow him from below, and he had run almost two hundred yards when he saw them begin their delayed pursuit. He had assumed there would be others, covering the summit and the descent from the hill, and he was correct, for he had almost reached to tall centuries-old spreading Ash that grew beside the old summit pathway when he saw two armed Policemen who moved to block his way.

“Armed Police!” one of them shouted, raising his weapon. “Stop! Armed Police!”

Esmund did not stop. Instead, he dropped down, took aim and quickly fired three rounds from his revolver. The bullets hit their targets and he rose to run forward. One of his opponents was dead, shot in the forehead, but the other, only lying injured, was struggling to raise his weapon just as Esmund reached him. Esmund pointed his revolver at the man’s head saying, “Sorry mate, nothing personal,” before taking the man’s holstered Glock pistol and his HK MP5 submachine gun and side-stepping to turn and fire at the armed plainclothes Police Officers still running up the hill toward him. He shot one in the leg before moving sharp left and sprinting toward the woods that covered part of the western side of the hill.

The woods gave him the opportunity he needed - for he knew them well - and he zigzagged down, through the trees, stopping once to stand and listen. He heard shouts, above, and the sound of someone, or two, noisily moving through the leaf-litter and breaking small fallen twigs. There would be Police dogs, and a helicopter, and more men, he knew - but not now; not for a while. So he made it to his first destination without being seen: a path beside a stream to take him to where a vehicle waited, left for just such a time as this, hidden in a rented barn.

It did not take him long, in the old inconspicuous Land Rover, to reach the junction where the narrow rutted pot-holed tarmaced lane that for nearly two miles had weaved between fields of pasture gave way to a minor road, and he turned westerly, driving until he found a place suitable enough to stop. It was a wide gated field entrance, and he parked to begin his change of identity. It took him longer than he remembered to trim his beard with scissors and then completely shave it off, but - pleased with the results - he changed his shirt, and jacket, and, with a tweed cap upon his head, his weapons out of sight, the transformation was complete.

No one stopped him as he travelled South, and he became just one driver in one of the multitude of vehicles that thronged the roads of England.

6: Aperiatur Terra, Et Germinet Atazoth

Esmund was early for the rendezvous, in the hour before dusk, and spent a cautious hour scouting out the area. He had parked his vehicle down a secluded track near the foot of the hill, taking only his rucksack, his revolver with spare ammunition, the Glock pistol, and a hand-grenade, before bobby-trapping the vehicle with his remaining grenade.

Satisfied with his reconnaissance, he settled down to wait by a spreading but wind-twisted Hawthorn bush, a good distance away from the hill’s ancient fortified summit. There was the

crescent Moon above the western horizon, and then stars in the clear darkening sky, and he continued to wait in the cold darkness for what seemed, and what was, a long time, before stretching himself and moving forward a little distance. They were, by now, many hours late, and he was deciding how much longer he would wait when he sensed someone behind him, and spun round, revolver raised, and ready.

Nothing; no one; no sound. And so he returned to his cautious waiting vigil until he saw something, some shape, fastly coming toward him from the summit of the hill. The shape was tawny white-ish and as it got nearer Esmund saw it was an Owl. There was no sound, just that bird of prey coming straight toward him and looking straight at him. He was surprised by its size, its wing-span, and it was within only three feet of him, its talons extended as if to land on his head, when he instinctively ducked down and it veered away to his left. When, only seconds later, he looked again it was gone, down - he assumed - into the copse of trees that clung to the lower slopes of the hill.

Then she was standing beside him, and he rose to his feet without fear. She kissed him, then, and pressed her body into his, her tongue caressing his, and her hand stroking his face.

“We are alone and no harm can come to you here,” her melodious voice said as unspoken words within his head, and she gave him a vision of her past hour and more.

Of how she had gently painlessly given birth while Raynould watched. Of how he had taken the human-looking girl-child to a place she had provided for him where his role would be to care for that child as he would care for the other such children born that night and in the few days to all those women - except Sandra - who were seeded. Of how those children had grown quickly in their adopted wombs and how they would, as children, also quickly grow over the next few years until they were ready enough to go forth into the world, each one a nexion waiting to open, to be physically seeded, and to seed in their various and magickal ways those powerful acausal energies which would, in causal-time, break down the barriers of The Others and steadily weaken through many causal presencings the causal that now held so many humans in thrall. Thus would her children gather the allies they needed, in secret at first; thus would they begin the great change that would break-down the very causal order itself; and thus would they breed a new and more evolved race, a new species to seed themselves among the very stars.

There would be those who feared this; those who hated her children and her allies. Those prepared to fight until the last drop of human blood. Those hate-filled ones who would strive to find, to ruthlessly hunt, down her children and their children's children, just as they had found Sandra whom Esmund had seeded: the Sandra whom she changed with her acausal and shapeshifting arts after he, magically adept, had called to her, longed for her, one night having felt her presence, her return to Earth. So had he touched her essence, and so she found him, came unto him, while he lay asleep in Sandra's arms, and so did she change that life that only a few causal moments earlier he and Sandra had brought forth into causal-being.

“But you have proved yourself, to me,” her melodious voice said as unspoken words within his head, “and you henceforth are my companion and only with you will I henceforth share this my physical form.”

So she kissed him again, and he saw as if in replay his escape from his - from her - cottage, and felt again his one jealous moment, as he saw Sandra's death and Zarid being bound, tied,

hooded, and injected. But he, Esmund Yaxley, was human - all-too-human, perhaps - and he surrendered his body and his love to her, there, on the dark night while a crescent moon descended, as Sirius did, into that almost-Winter's starry sky.

He awoke to find himself naked under a warm duvet in a bright room of large windows which showed, below, a cityscape under a clear blue sky of an English Winter. For a moment, he felt disorientated, as if both Time and Space had somehow slipped or been distorted and, after looking out of one of the windows which, except for a door, almost seamlessly surrounded the room, he lay down again on the large bed.

He slept then, and dreamed - of the past, a present and a future - and awoke to find himself hot, as the city below basked in the warmth of early Summer. He understood then, in that moment, and was not surprised when she, suddenly, was there beside him, incarnate again, naked in the bed, pressing her body into his and kissing him as they made sensuous love in that, his, city-penthouse. There was, he knew, on a floor below, a child, a female child, growing, nurtured by his lover's breast milk and cared for by her sibling Nanny, as there was, in the city, many deeds of hate and violence while they, the lovers, loved as they loved, entwined within each other's body and each other's being, just as there was, suddenly and for him, no distinction between Time, place and Space: no him, or her; only a being which lived as it, they, as Them, The Dark Gods, lived: within the acausal Times and Spaces. He was alive, then, joyful, ecstatic, breeding with her, in her, the nexions that were needed; alive, joyful, ecstatic, while Zarid - his knowledge a danger to his captors - was languishing, drugged, in some enclosing psychiatric cell, and Sandra his former lover lay dead, her body and her foetus clinically, methodically, dissected.

Thus did they, her - his - enemies, still seek him with a lustful hate and need, and thus did she - his new lover, mistress - protect him as only she could protect him, and thus did he, when he awoke, feel again the pain of his new lover's absence.

So he dressed in one of his many expensive hand-made suits to linger awhile on a floor below with his three young daughters while they played as precocious children played, and their protecting shapeshifting Nanny waited, silent, smiling, watchful, in a corner of that plush room. Soon, they his daughters would venture forth, each to a life, a world, a task, of their own - as he would return to this building to seed her again as the acausal seeped ever more deeply in the causal world he once knew and loved.

He knew, then, as he walked out that particular time-slipping morning into the busy street of that capital city under the warm Sun of an English Summer, that Raynould had been found, caught, tortured, and killed, and his - her - daughter captured. So he was not surprised to find her, his lover, walking beside him as he walked among the bustling hordes of city-dwelling human beings.

There was a human pain, an anguish, in her, which he felt, and he held her hand as they walked along that street where several men, and women, stared, to stop, to look at her, awed by her beauty, her being, her scent. Then, suddenly, he was with her in a bright forensic room where her first-born daughter lay, stretched out and naked and restrained, but alive, on an

operating table while men in white gowns and masks stood around and two men in suits stood by a door in one corner.

They, the men in gowns, were cutting the young woman, her daughter of child-bearing age, and she bled, as a human would - as another scalpel was raised, a probe extended to reach into her body. Her daughter turned, then, and smiled - aware of her mother's presence - but the humans saw only Esmund who, angry, snatched the scalpel to slash wildly at throats, faces. The two men in suits came toward him, one - Malin - brandishing a gun, but Esmund was too quick for them as he raged toward them to knock them to the ground, and the carnage - his berserker carnage - was soon over, even as an alarm sounded, the last gesture of one human scientist now lying dead.

Then Esmund, his lover and her daughter were gone from that particular and causal Time and Space, to leave only questions: only more unanswered perplexing questions for Malin and his ilk.

7: Agios Ischyros Baphomet

They - Esmund, his lover and her daughter - rejoiced, and he was with them for what to him seemed a very long time in a place within acausal Time and Space. But it was only a few heartbeats of his dense causal Earth-bound life that passed while he languished in a beautiful blissful timeless eternity where his knowing, his feeling, stretched, or seemed to stretch, from one end of his Earth-containing Galaxy to the other, and where he was, in that singular acausal instant, all life, all living, all beings-coming-into-being, all the living life given and giving birth.

Then he, changed in some way he did not then understand, was back in his, in her, bed, in that bright city penthouse, while her naked and already healed daughter kissed him and he entered her, taking her human virginity, as her mother lay beside them, touching him, one lover to another. He had never known such bliss, such love, such existence, before in his own brief causal existence, and he lingered within her, this young woman, even as his seed seeded her womb which would bring forth a new kind of life. *Agios Ischyros Baphomet, Agios Ischyros Baphomet* he, his very being, intoned.

Causal Space and causal Time slipped again, as he knew they must - and he was sitting outside his modest mud-brick dwelling in the shade of a Palm tree dressed in a galabiyah while, nearby, the younger of his two new young half-Nubian daughters played amid the desert sand and one of his two female domestic helpers carried a large pot to bring back water from the nearby artesian well. His afternoon would be filled with duties, as he instructed his two young male students in the ancient skills and arts of esoteric acausal magick, and - despite his satisfaction with such duties and his role - he still missed his former brief enchanted life in England. It was but a necessary stage - and part of him, most of him, had desired to return with her to her acausal spaces even as her daughter gave birth to their first child. But he stayed, for he was not yet ready or able of his own free will to forever pass beyond, to exist beyond, the causal; stayed, while she herself returned as she the primal nexion had to return to become the strange life-force burgeoning within them all. Stayed, for he would be, as he now was, the beginning of that hidden reclusive Order which would, when the causal Time was right, emerge as the Old Order faded, crumbled, and died, aided and partly caused by those others of the new half-human symbiotic race who now dwelt with their growing number of children, and human helpers and allies, on every continent on Earth.

Already the presence of this new acausal centre, this spreading nexion, was felt, as her daughter - now his wife, and Nubian - achieved a local, and for the moment, clandestine following, there on the fringes of that desert. Such beauty; such wordless power. Men, women, loved, obeyed her - and she had only to think a thought for them to strive to make it real just as each one of them would willingly, gladly, give their life for her, knowing the blissful acausal life which would await them. Thus it was as it had been, there, once before - and as it would be again, on another planet in another causal Time and Space.

Soon, he would as foretold retreat into his own world of reclusive and secret desert-dwelling teaching to leave her majestic, ageless with her ageless daughters as their influence spread, as it would spread until her, their, causal Earth-bound tasks were achieved. But, for now, he was happy to prepare her way: she who would open, be, the new nexion to presence the acausal fully upon the Earth, bringing thus that futuristic culture, that star-travelling, star-dwelling, culture that many humans had dreamt about, beginning as such a culture was of new explorations into the very acausal itself, explorations which could, which would then in that future causal-time - as it would for Esmund and all of his esoteric kind now when they had achieved their Earthly goal - lead them toward and into the next stage of their journey of evolution.

“You know,” Malin said as Zarid lay, in his windowless cell, half-stupefied by the drugs forced into him, “and considering your ancestry you should know, you had it the wrong way round; inverted. We’re the good guys.”

“Are you? Are you really?” Zarid managed to say. “But you didn’t have to kill her or her unborn child, did you?”

But Malin only smiled and left to let three men enter. They did their work quickly, quietly, efficiently, and Zarid was soon dead, only one more casualty of a war that had already begun.

Algar Merridge

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