

## CHAPTER TWO

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Rivet guns and the sound of hammers echoed over New York's East River Shipyard, reverberating off the cavernous assembly sheds as waterfalls of sparks fell from acetylene torches welding heavy sheets of steel together. The shipyard employed nearly ten thousand men: fitters, welders, riveters, steelworkers, panel beaters, riggers, glassblowers, surveyors, engineers, electricians, and skilled machine operators.

The vessel currently berthed in dry dock 23F was the DCV *Matilda Rose*, a deepwater construction vessel that was nearing completion. The vessel belonged to the Warren Mining Company, a business that had prospered under the ineffectual presidency of Warren Harding and the benevolence of the corrupt Secretary of the Interior, Albert Fall.

In 1922, the *Wall Street Journal* had uncovered evidence that Fall had leased government petroleum fields at Elk Hills and Teapot Dome to oilmen in return for huge bribes and numerous gifts. One of the benefactors of this had been the oilman Charles Warren, and though the fields at Elk Hills had since been returned to the government, his drilling rigs' brief tenure on the land had made him millions of dollars. Though the ensuing scandal had hit

Warren and the other oilmen hard, America's voracious consumption ensured that their businesses weathered the storm without noticeable ill-effect.

Work on the DCV *Matilda Rose* had begun at the East River Shipyard the year before, and her launch date was set for early November. The foreman of the shipyard was optimistic that he and his work gangs would hit that deadline. Designed to build offshore drilling platforms, the vessel was ungainly and ugly, but would allow Charles Warren's drillers to reach oil fields that had, until now, been inaccessible via conventional means.

Her decks swarmed with workers, mainly steel fabricators and welders fitting the last portions of her deck and winch gear. A giant A-frame crane rose in the middle of the ship, and it was here that Patrick Doyle and his workmate, Martin Quinn, watched the quayside cranes lifting a tarpaulin-covered object onto the forked fantail at the rear of the ship. Patrick and Martin had, together with a veritable army of welders, recently finished attaching a complex series of winches and cable drums to the *Matilda Rose* and were enjoying a well-deserved break.

"So what d'ye reckon that'll be then, Patrick?" asked Martin, carving a slice of his apple with a small pocket-knife and nodding toward the object being maneuvered into position by a gang of foreigners. They were mulattos and oriental-looking types mostly, but among them were a sprinkling of strange looking men of uncommon bulk with skin burnished bronze in distant lands.

"Damned if I know, laddie," shrugged Patrick. He took a drink from an unmarked glass bottle and handed it to Martin. "Here, a drop o' the real stuff. By God, we've earned it."

"Aye, that we have, Patrick," agreed Martin, taking a slug of the Irish whiskey. "Saints alive, Patrick, where did ye get that from? That's whiskey right enough, none of your bathtub shite."

"Sure, didn't I run into a lad from Killarney the other night in Shaughnessy's? Lad's come in from Ellis Island not three nights previous. Come to New York looking for his mother, he says. She came here six months ago, says he. Tells me her name, and I say, as God is my witness, that I knows her. Sends him up to Bowery Mission with a tear in me eye, and isn't he so overcome with gratitude

that he gives me this bottle?"

"Away with ye!" laughed Martin. "That's ten Hail Marys at least."

"Ah, but it's worth it, eh?"

"Sure is, Paddy-boy," said Martin, taking another drink.

The crane lowered its cargo to the deck, and the strange workers began fixing it to the deck plates with rivet guns and long lengths of chain. Whatever it was, they were keen to keep it covered, but the winds whipping in off the East River had other ideas. A gust caught the edge of the tarpaulin as it was lifted aside to enable one of the big men to reach something underneath, and it blew up and over the object.

"Well would ye look at that, Martin?" said Patrick.

Amid shouting voices in a language neither he nor Martin understood, the workers tried to cover the object up again. Patrick saw a flash of bronze metal, curved enough to suggest that what lay beneath was roughly spherical in shape and adorned with gleaming metal protuberances that didn't look like any piece of drilling equipment Patrick had ever seen.

Martin handed the bottle back to him.

"Looks like some kind of diving bell," he said.

"Aye, that it did," said Martin, the matter already slipping from his thoughts. Patrick saw him glance surreptitiously at the bottle and knew he was angling for another drink. Patrick obliged him as the foreman shooed curious riggers away from the freshly covered object.

"It looks like a diving bell, right enough," said Patrick. "But you and I both fitted those bloody big cable drums for that frame, and as sure as me father was the best pub fighter in Cork, I know for a fact there's thousands of meters of cable stored below decks."

"So?"

"So I ask you, Martin Quinn, what sort of diving bell goes down that deep?"

"I dunno, Patrick," replied Martin. "What kind?"

"No kind," said Patrick. "I can't be sure what that thing is, but it ain't no diving bell."

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The athletics field was now a crime scene. The area around the body had been roped off and two police Model Ts were parked on either side of the running track. Crowds of rubberneckers had already begun to gather on the bleachers, ghouls hoping for a better look at the body. Dr. Vincent Lee climbed out of his car and nodded to one of the young cops, a rookie he hadn't seen before, and made his way toward the roped off area of the track. Luther Harden was already there, kneeling beside the body and lifting strips of black material to get a better look.

"Please don't do that, Detective Harden," said Vincent. "No one should touch the remains until I have had a chance to examine them."

Harden looked up, the brim of his trilby pulled down over his forehead and his ever-present cigar rolling at the corner of his mouth. His complexion was ruddy, and his eyes regarded Vincent as though he were a potential suspect. In his mid-forties, Harden was—as far as Vincent could tell—an honest cop, but one who didn't suffer fools and always looked for the simplest explanation. Blue smoke coiled from the stogie and Harden wiped his hands on his trousers before holding one out to Vincent. As his jacket shifted, Vincent saw the butt of a department-issue revolver.

"Whatever you say, Doc," said Harden.

Vincent declined to shake Harden's hand, finding the man's lack of respect for the dead distasteful. He nodded toward the stained patch of ground behind the man and said, "The same as the others?"

"Sure seems like it," agreed Harden.

"Who found her?"

"A student from Miskatonic," said Harden, consulting a black notepad. "A Bayou girl out running."

"Does she have a name, this student?"

Once again Harden consulted his pad, though Vincent found it hard to believe he could have forgotten the girl's name after such a short time. Harden was nothing if not formal.

"Rita Young, athletics scholarship from New Orleans," said

Harden. "She's down at the station now. Harrigan's taking her statement."

"New Orleans? She's a long way from home," observed Vincent absently, moving past Harden and kneeling beside the bloodied remains wrapped in the torn black dress.

"Looks like wild animals got her," said Harden, the words a statement, not a question.

"I'll be the judge of that," replied Vincent.

"Sure, Doc," said Harden. "Just get this wrapped up pronto, huh? I got a dozen other things I could be doing today, and believe me, this is another mess I don't need."

"I'm sure this poor girl felt the same way," mused Vincent, letting his eyes roam the body.

The girl was in her early twenties and dressed in a fashionably short dress that exposed her knees and left her arms bare. Was she one of the flappers who danced and smoked and drank at the speakeasies and dance halls that were springing up all over America? The sober, God-fearing people of Arkham had resisted the incursion of jazz, and the grasping celebrity-obsessed culture of the times as best they could, but youngsters seized onto these new crazes like a drowning man holding onto a kisby ring. The dress was lightweight and barely decent, typical of what the youth of today were wearing in search of excitement. This girl had certainly found excitement of a darker sort than she'd been expecting.

She had been pretty in life, with a slender face and high cheekbones. Her hair was cut in a short bob, like Colleen Moore in *The Perfect Flapper*, and though glassy in death, her eyes were a vivid shade of green. The girl's skin had been drained of color, and she was quite probably from a good family, though she bore none of the hallmarks of Arkham breeding.

Her left leg was bent underneath her pelvis, and a gleaming heeled shoe lay next to her ravaged body. The lower portion of her right leg was missing below the knee, and her right arm was likewise absent. Her left had been stripped of flesh from the shoulder down, and only the last remnants of connective tissue and sinew held it to the body.

"Yeah," said Harden, spitting a brown stream of tobacco saliva.

"Wild animals."

"If you're so sure about that, why did you call me?" asked Vincent, growing tired of Harden's observations.

"I need you to write up cause of death on the death certificate."

"I'll do that once I've actually determined cause of death."

"Just make it quick, okay?"

"Is Asa here?" asked Vincent, hoping Arkham's Chief of Police could rein in his more aggressive underling. Asa at least understood the value of professional courtesy.

"You're kidding, right?" said Harden. "He'll still be in his pajamas eating toast and drinking coffee. The chief doesn't like to hear about crime beyond bootleggers, gamblers, and drunks."

That much was true. Asa Nichols was an honest cop, but he hadn't quite grasped the way the world had changed in the wake of the Great War. Despite the number of strange deaths and mysterious occurrences that plagued Arkham, the Chief of Police hadn't yet woken up to the new reality of the world. A time of innocence had ended in the wake of that globe-spanning conflict, and the world was still in a state of shock. The youth of the nation were reacting to the psychic scars the Great War had left with a desperate zest for life that laughed in the face of the horrors wreaked on the European battlefields.

"So what do you think, Doc?" said Harden, leaning over his shoulder and blowing a cloud of toxic smoke into his face. "Wild animals, right?"

Vincent coughed and lifted the skeletal arm. He peered at a number of deep striations in the bone.

"It certainly looks like something ate the flesh directly from the bones, but the bite marks don't look like any animal I know that would devour a human being."

"So don't keep me in suspense, Doc. What *do* they look like?"

Vincent hesitated. Though he was no stranger to the darker underside of Arkham, he knew better than to draw unnecessary attention to it. Yet this was the sixth body to be discovered like this in the last few years.

"They look like bite marks from a human jaw," he said.

"Human? You mean a person did this? No way, Doc. I don't buy it."

"It's not about whether you buy it, Detective Harden," pointed out Vincent. "The evidence is right here in front of us. The facts speak for themselves, no matter how impossible they might seem."

"What are you, Sherlock Holmes?" snapped Harden. "I don't need this. Have you any idea what will happen if it gets out that there's a maniac killing and eating young girls? There'll be a panic. Lynch mobs. Street justice. The townsfolk won't stand for it."

"They've stood for much more, believe me," said Vincent before he could stop himself. Immediately, Harden was in his face.

"You trying to be smart with me, Doc?" he said, jabbing his smoldering cigar at Vincent's face. "You might have come up from Boston with your fancy Yale degree, but this is my town, and I don't like it when outsiders try and mess with me. You understand?"

"I'm not sure I do, to be honest," said Vincent. "I am just telling you what I find."

"Yeah, well get her bagged up and taken down to Eleazar's."

Vincent nodded, having expected as much. Jaspar Eleazar ran a low rent funeral home in the lower Southside and wasn't too picky when it came to how a person had met their end. The other dead girls had been taken there, and no autopsies had been performed as far as Vincent knew. Like many other things in Arkham, this would be quietly buried, and a highly evolved desire not to face the facts would allow the townsfolk to pretend they lived somewhere normal.

Harden turned and beckoned a patrolman, the rookie Vincent had nodded to as he arrived.

"Muldoon, right? Lend a hand to the Doc here," ordered Harden. "Make sure he gets the body to Eleazar's, you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Muldoon, saluting crisply.

Harden shook his head and said, "You Boston types," before walking away.

The rookie held a hand out to Vincent. "Tommy Muldoon," he said. "I'm kinda new here."

"Vincent Lee, and aren't we all?"

"Sir?"

"Don't mind me, Tommy," said Vincent. "Death has a habit of making me surly."

"Heck, I don't blame you, sir. I ain't never seen nothing like this, neither," said Muldoon, his face as blanched of color as the dead girl's. "The instructors at the Police Academy told us we might see some hinky stuff, but this...this is just about as nasty as I could imagine."

"Trust me," said Vincent. "This is Arkham. You'll see nastier and stranger before long."

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Oliver Grayson's office at Miskatonic University was located on the third story of the Liberal Arts building in the Department of Anthropology. Situated on the southeastern corner, it had a pleasant view over the Copley memorial bell tower and its surrounding parkland. The red brick form of the west dormitory could be seen through the trees, and beyond that was the three-story gothic structure of the university library. Constructed from locally quarried granite in 1888, the Miskatonic library was the kingdom of Dr. Henry Armitage, keeper of all the secrets held within its echoing hallways and close-packed stacks of papers, books, and pamphlets.

The office was stuffy and as Oliver waited for the telephone operator to connect him with the Jesuit College of San Francisco, he levered the window open a fraction, keeping the earpiece pressed to his ear with his shoulder. Cold air sighed into the room, but it was welcome, and helped diminish the smell of ashes and burnt offerings that had clung to his senses ever since leaving Henry at the asylum.

Looking out over the campus, Oliver watched students walking in groups toward their classes. Gray strips of cloud clawed the sky like gouges and the threat of heavy rain and snow was very real. A brooding melancholy hung over the streets and parks of the campus, which Oliver attributed to the approach of winter, though he knew, on some fundamental level, that there was more to it than



that. He was out of sorts, but then he was always out of sorts after he came back from seeing Henry. That such a brilliant scholar could be so debilitated by the horrors of the Great War was galling enough, but that Oliver hadn't seen the damage Henry's service had wrought was a guilty thorn in his side.

Oliver idly flicked through some test papers he had yet to grade and lesson plans for the day's lectures. He saw the words, but they didn't penetrate his consciousness. He reclined on his creaking leather chair, listening to the hums, clicks, ghostly burbles, and whispers of distant conversations on the line.

Bookshelves lined opposite walls of his office, anthropological texts including all twelve volumes of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Kroeber's *On the Super-Organic*, photostats of Margaret Meade's preliminary findings after her fieldwork in Samoa, together with numerous texts by the father of American anthropology, Franz Boas: *Folk-tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes*, *Mythology and Folk-Tales of North American Indians*, *The Mind of Primitive Man*. Mixed in with the required reading of any serious student of anthropology was Margaret Murray's fanciful *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*.

The latter volume was a curio, as Murray's findings were largely discounted by the anthropological community as being selective and over-stretching the limits of her accumulated data. It had amused Oliver to read it, before he realized that the various denunciations of her work were appearing in obscure academic journals unlikely to be read by the public. Such nonsense was gaining credence in the wider world, and he and his fellow professors of anthropology would need to fight against such sensationalist nonsense.

A measure of how he viewed Murray's work could be read in their placement alongside Oliver's treasured volumes of Jules Verne. Dozens of the fantasist's books lined the lower shelves, including precious first editions of *From the Earth to the Moon*, *The Mysterious Island*, and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. As a child, Oliver had loved the work of Verne, and though the expense of acquiring these texts had been ruinous, he had not heeded the cost when the Baltimore auction house had telegraphed him with news of the books' appearance under the hammer.

His own published works, detailing the cultural practices of the indigenous tribes of America, Alaska, and the Pacific Islands were modestly gathered above these books, alongside his copious research findings from the Yopasi expeditions. An entire shelf of books and papers was dedicated to the three years he'd spent with the Pacific Island tribe: drawings and monographs on language, belief systems, and physiological data. Given the disappearance of the Yopasi, none of that work would see the light of day in any academic publication of note, and Oliver felt the familiar bitterness at the sight of the shelf of wasted work.

On the wall behind his desk were his diplomas from Brown University, one in Cultural Anthropology, the other in Ancient Languages, with specializations in Latin and Arabic. Framed in dark walnut, the gold leaf of the lettering caught the reflected light from the window. His qualifications were hard-earned and the result of many years of study and fieldwork. It seemed they were looking down at him like some kind of joke now, colorful titles that weren't worth the embossed paper they were printed on.

A tired-sounding female voice crackled from the earpiece of his telephone.

"Professor Grayson," she said. "I have your other party on the line."

"Ah yes, excellent," said Oliver, turning his attention back to the telephone. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," said the operator, her voice disappearing with an electric click.

"Hello?" said a cultured, English voice. "Oliver, are you there?"

"William," said Oliver. "Lovely to speak to you again."

"Indeed, old chap," said Professor William Hillshore, resident psychologist, lecturer, and acting rehabilitation physician of the Jesuit College of San Francisco. Oliver had met William Hillshore in 1920 at Cambridge University while he had been a visiting professor, delivering lectures on linguistic relativity. Oliver and Hillshore had sparred good-naturedly in the staff common rooms in regards to his findings, and their friendship had firmly established itself in the pubs and smoking houses of that ancient city.

Many years of friendship and correspondence had followed.

"It's an absolute pleasure to hear from you," said Hillshore, "It's been far too long. How the devil are you?"

"Well," said Oliver. "Still at Miskatonic and still underpaid, but 'he is richest who is content with the least.'"

"The life of a scholar, dear chap," agreed Hillshore. "But Socrates? Really? How unoriginal of you, Oliver. I would have chosen Epictetus: 'the hopes of the instructed are better than the wealth of the ignorant' or perhaps something by Plutarch."

"You always did have the edge over me on the old philosophers."

"The benefits of a classical education, dear boy," said Hillshore, and Oliver heard the scratch and hiss of a striking match. He could picture the Englishman in his office, smoking on his pipe and enjoying a pot of Earl Grey amid his books and wax cylinders, upon which he insisted on recording his patient interview sessions, despite the availability of more modern equipment.

"Yes, I suppose I'll have to muddle through with my poor colonial education."

"We must all make sacrifices, Oliver," said Hillshore. "That is why I now find myself on your side of the Atlantic, trying to educate the good people of this nation on the intricacies of the mind and its attendant foibles. The theories of Herr Freud have barely reached these shores, and there is a great deal of work to be done."

"You're still working at the Letterman?" asked Oliver, remembering that Hillshore had been volunteering his expertise at the Letterman General Hospital in the Presidio for a time. Originally built to care for wounded veterans of the Spanish-American War, it now catered to servicemen suffering mental trauma inflicted during the Great War.

"Sadly, yes," said Hillshore. "Such suffering as you would hope never to believe existed in this world. War may break the bodies of soldiers, but we are only now beginning to understand how much it scars the mind. Though, of course, you will be only too well aware of this."

"Regrettably so, William," said Oliver. "You received the photostats I sent you?"

"I did indeed," confirmed Hillshore. "Marvelous thing this transcontinental airmail, I must say. A courier delivered them from Crissy Field just yesterday, so you understand I have only had the chance for a cursory examination of your colleague's pathology."

"Of course."

"I must say, it makes for fascinating reading, though. A decorated veteran of the United States Marines, and a hero of 1918 whose unit was instrumental in helping stem the German Spring Offensive. Quite a remarkable man."

"He is that," agreed Oliver.

"And yet five years after returning from Europe, he was convicted of multiple counts of arson and incarcerated at Arkham Asylum. Of course, I shall have to peruse Dr. Hardstrom's notes more fully before I can offer a professional diagnosis, though my first thought is that I see no correlation between his diagnosis and the presented symptoms."

"Do you think you can help him?"

"I'm almost certain of it," said Hillshore, and Oliver smiled at the confidence and certainty in Hillshore's voice. It had been the right decision to contact the Englishman, and Oliver felt his lingering sense of melancholy begin to lift.

They spoke briefly about trivial matters for a few minutes longer, before the clicks and buzzes on the line told them they were reaching their allotted time limit.

"It's been swell to speak to you again, William," said Oliver.

"A pleasure as always, Oliver," agreed Hillshore. "I shall be in touch directly when I have had a chance to fully digest Henry's case notes. Perhaps I might even come out to you in Massachusetts; I've a hankering to plunder that Miskatonic library of yours. I'm told you have some quite juicy texts there."

"That would be very kind of you, William."

"Nonsense. As a wise man said, 'men who wish to know about the world must learn about it in its particular details.'"

"Heraclitus?"

"Very good, Oliver," laughed Hillshore. "I'll make an Englishman out of you yet."

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The light was fading as Rex Murphy scribbled his impressions of the athletics field into his battered notepad.

*It was a creepy place, surrounded by dark forest that seemed too thick to be healthy. Like it was closing in.*

That was dumb. Of course it wasn't closing in, but with the sun fading behind the hills to the west and the shadows lengthening, it sure was hard to shake the idea from his head. He took down a few more impressions, really trying to capture the feel of the place for his story.

*Spooky.*

*Threatening.*

*Overgrown. Like the world wants this part back again.*

*Like it's being reclaimed by something older.*

He looked at that last bit again, wondering where it had come from. He often had flashes of insight he couldn't explain, and didn't question, but this seemed like it came from somewhere outside, as though the impression had been placed in his head. Rex smiled and shook off such a crazy notion, tipping his hat back and pulling out a pack of Chesterfields from his rumpled coat.

When things went his way, which wasn't often these days, Rex was a good reporter, with a nose for a story and an eye for detail that really sold it to Joe Average. A contact in the Arkham telephone exchange had tipped him off to this one, a call coming into the police station that a dead girl had been found at the university athletics ground off the Aylesbury pike. Rex had called Minnie and they'd burned rubber to get here, arriving just as they took the body away. By now she would be riding a slab at Whitechapel Mortuary or Eleazar's, though Rex's money was on the latter.

He lit up and the tip glowed as Rex inhaled, casting an orange glow over his notebook.

"Those things'll kill you, honey," said Minnie, collapsing the trellis struts of her Autographic Kodak camera. "And they stink."

"These?" said Rex, taking another drag. "Nah, haven't you heard the advertisements? Smoking these babies is going to make me like Douglas Fairbanks."

He coughed and Minnie cocked an eyebrow. Petite and curvy, Minnie Klein was a firecracker of a gal, with a butter-wouldn't-melt face and a skewed sense of humor that Rex liked enormously. Dressed in a cornflower-colored dress and with a short haircut like Clara Bow, she was attractive in a fashionably prim way. Sometimes Rex thought she was as pretty as a picture, but other times she looked like a dowdy housewife. Minnie was wise to all the latest crazes, but didn't seem to have any interest in jazz, or smoking, or dancing, which made her an almost polar opposite of Rex.

The *Arkham Advertiser's* go-to gal for creepy photos of the city's underbelly or a particularly gruesome crime scene, Minnie had impressed the paper's owner, Harvey Gedney, enough to get her put on the payroll, much to the chagrin of the stringers that carried a camera around and called themselves photographers. Arkham born and raised, Minnie had an eye for a photograph that had impressed Rex the moment he'd seen her work. Surprisingly, Minnie had read his stories and offered to work with him. They made a hot pairing, bagging some juicy stories and getting some amazing pictures.

"Anyway," continued Rex. "It won't be these that kill me, it'll be Harvey if we don't get some good copy to him by the end of the day."

"You get anything sweet from Harden and the Doc?" asked Minnie, packing the camera away into its padded case.

"Not a bean," said Rex. "All Harden gave me was a glare that would buckle a railway spike, and the Doc wasn't any more helpful. All he said was a young woman got killed."

"Killed? He mean murdered?"

"Wasn't specific," said Rex, spotting one of the young cops coming around a police car, looking like he'd just tossed his cookies in the bushes. Rex didn't know this kid, and bet that would cut both ways. Rookies were always the least guarded of the cops. You could get some real juice from them because they didn't know to watch their mouths. He stuck his pad into the satchel he wore over his shoulder and ran his hand through his unruly hair.

"Come on, Minnie," said Rex, crushing his cigarette beneath his heel. "Let's bag us a rookie."

"Play nice," warned Minnie, hauling the camera case into the back of their car, a battered Ford that looked like it had belonged to a careless drunk. It belonged to Rex, and that impression wasn't far off the mark.

"Hey, don't I always?" said Rex, walking over to the cop with his most winning smile plastered across his genial face. Slim and dressed in a suit two sizes too big for him, Rex cut a disarming figure, and the glasses he wore only reinforced that impression. His tousled brown hair blew in the wind, and a scrap of fuzz on his chin completed his slightly shambolic appearance.

The cop saw him coming and gave him a look Rex had been used to all his life. It was a look that said, *Take a look at yourself and get your act together.*

"Patrolman," said Rex, sticking his hand out toward the cop. "I don't think we've met, have we? I'm Rex, Rex Murphy from the *Advertiser*. And this little bundle of fun is Minnie Klein. Ain't no one with a better eye for a good picture, no sir. She can make Fatty Arbuckle look like Valentino or make your grandmother look like Mary Pickford. No word of a lie."

The rookie took a step back in the face of Rex's verbal barrage, but recovered quickly.

"Patrolman Tommy Muldoon, and I know who you are, sir," said the cop. Rex caught the unmistakable tones of a Bostonian accent. This kid was straight out of Charleston or West Roxbury. And with a name like Muldoon, it didn't get any more obvious where his ancestry lay. Second or third generation Irish at the most.

"Glad to know you, Tommy Muldoon," said Rex, revving up for his machine gun delivery. "So what's going on here, son? A nasty one and no mistake, young girl murdered, cops on the hunt for a killer. Terrible stuff, isn't it? You think things like this only happen in the big city, but they don't, do they? They happen right here, in nice towns with nice people. Horrible, just horrible. So what happened?"

"I don't think I should say, sir."

*Okay, so this one might have a bit of savvy to him.*

Rex briefly entertained the idea of fishing out a few bucks to

grease Muldoon's palm, but suspected that would be a bad play. Best to play on the compassion angle.

"Come on, Tommy," said Rex. "I got a nose for a story, and right now the old conk is telling me that this girl met a sticky end. Am I right? I'm right, aren't I? Come on, I've lived in Arkham long enough to know that this ain't exactly the first time something like this has happened, you know? I've seen the files. I've done the digging. I know what's going on here, so you might as well gimme the juice to make sure I get it right. I mean, that young girl's parents are gonna be broken hearted as it is, without a sap like me getting things all turned around. They deserve to know the truth about their little girl don't they?"

It was a bluff, but one Rex calculated Tommy Muldoon's big Irish heart wouldn't see through. Keep 'em on the back foot, keep 'em thinking you know more than you do, and that they're only confirming what you already know. That's the way to get things out of folk who don't want to tell you anything.

"I suppose you're right sir, but you have to keep my name out of it," said Muldoon. "And no pictures, Miss Klein."

"Of course," said Minnie as Rex fished out his pad and pencil.

"So what's the deal here?" he asked.

Muldoon looked around as though nervous and whispered, "A student from Miskatonic was out for a morning run when she found the remains."

"Remains?" interrupted Rex. "She wasn't just, you know, dead?"

"No, sir. Looked like she'd been set on by wild animals."

"Good Christ!" said Rex. "If that don't beat all."

"Quite, sir," said Muldoon. Rex caught the younger man's irritation at his casual blasphemy. "It ain't the first, neither."

"It's not?"

"No, Doctor Lee said it's the sixth. Seems like there have been five others over the last three years."

Rex wrote quickly on his pad, fighting to conceal his excitement. There had been stories, rumors really, that young girls had been going missing, but no one had ever been able to confirm the truth of them. All over America young girls were leaving their



podunk towns for the big cities in search of fame, excitement, and to be part of the burgeoning jazz scene, making it hard to be certain how many of them were disappearing for perfectly innocuous reasons and how many for something darker. To hear this from the mouth of a cop had set Rex's newshound instincts off like a shot of bathtub gin to the gut. He found it hard to breathe.

"That's terrible," said Minnie, seeing his struggle. "Do they know who she was?"

Muldoon shook his head. "Not yet. We're going to canvas the campus to see if anyone's reported a missing person. She was dressed like one of them city girls you see in the movies, like she was from New York or something."

"A flapper?"

"Yes, Miss Klein, just like that," agreed Muldoon. "And though I won't speak ill of the dead, I wish I could say I was surprised to see where such a lifestyle leads. If you drink, smoke, and look for trouble, it's going to find you soon enough."

"I think you're absolutely right," said Minnie with a neutral expression. Rex saw Muldoon glance at her flapper-like haircut.

"Well, thank you very much, Tommy," said Rex, tucking his pencil behind his ear. "I think we got all we need here. You've been a great help, and that poor girl, whoever she was, thanks you for being there for her."

Muldoon nodded, but didn't reply. He turned back to the roped off crime scene, signaling that his patience with Rex had come to an end. Rex and Minnie made their way back to his rusty Ford and tried to contain the excitement of what Muldoon's words potentially meant for their careers.

"Wow," said Rex at last.

"Yeah," agreed Minnie.

Rex looked around the athletics ground and sparked up another cigarette.

"We got to get this written up right now," said Rex. "You got all you need, picture-wise?"

"A few doozies, Rex," said Minnie. "The light's going anyway, and I got some good shots of where they found the body, cops looking clueless, and the sun setting behind the hills. And that

creepy guy over by the bleachers.”

“Good girl,” said Rex. “Wait, what creepy guy?”

“Over there, standing by the Crossley parked up at the bleachers.”

Rex couldn't see who she was looking at until he realized a Crossley was a car, a big ugly car like the army used to drive in the war. Sure enough, there was a guy in a long brown duster and fedora watching what was going on, like some frontier lawman awaiting a gunfight.

“So who do you reckon he is?” asked Rex.

“Beats me, Rex,” said Minnie. “That Crossley's ex-military, so I'd say soldier or private dick. Or maybe he's some sicko that likes to get his ha-has from this kind of thing.”

“Or maybe he was just driving past and wondered what all the fuss was about.”

“Then why's he taking notes?”

Rex peered through his glasses, seeing that Minnie was right; the man was writing something down in a pocket notebook.

“You want to go speak to him, too?” asked Minnie. “Could be something.”

Rex was about to answer her, but seeing that he was being observed, the man climbed into his car and drove away.

“Curiouser and curiouser,” said Rex.

“Don't worry,” said Minnie. “I got the plates.”

“Clever girl,” said Rex, giving her a playful punch to the arm. “My clever, clever girl.”