

The Dweller In The Lake

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I am not certain that the *mal de tete* which I suffered was brought about by the force which drew me from the party into the wintry garden that fateful eve some twenty years ago, but I do know that what I saw that night in the gardens of Filigree Frost was not of a nature that I have ever encountered, prior to or hence, in all of my studies and travels as field biologist and curator for the Wexford Zoological Museum. For the events which I witnessed have shaken my soul free from its skeletal berth, and haunt me to this day in my dreams and my inner waking thoughts. Had I not abandoned the scene when I did that chill December eve, I surely would not be here today to relate the happenings which have tormented me for a score of sleepless years.

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I had never been to the estate of Mr. Filigree Frost, the noted philanthropist whose endowments have sustained Wexford for nearly fifty years, only heard of its dynastic splendor and of its acres of wild English gardens, its towering Gothic spires and its effervescing fountains. I had, however, made the acquaintance of the estate's owner on several occasions, during his visits to the museum and at a number of promotory dinners over the span of my eleven-year tenure as the museum's chief curator. Mr. Frost was a tall, spindly man of about seventy-five years, each month of which seemed to have added a certain amount of strength to his frame, the kind of strength which is betrayed not by musculature, but by a kind of aura that emanates from a man's features, a beam which leaps from his eyes and slices the protective armour of those around him, a power which Filigree Frost wielded with a kind of suave agility that made him all at once admirable and deplorable. His skin clung to his bones, yet he looked more like a healthy skeleton than a thin old man. His well-groomed hair was the color of his last name, and his always sombre attire mocked his first. There were tales of his being everything from a mad old hermit to a powerful warlock, and all believable, owing to his skeletal appearance, as well as the fact that he rarely was seen in public, and then only at night. But the thing which made Filigree Frost a household name was not what he was, but

where he lived. The estate, which is known the world over, is one of the few of its kind which is still lived in and operated as a private home. The building itself is a Gothic colossus which covers nearly three acres of the estate's seven hundred. From a distance it is often mistaken for a cathedral, due to its four massive towers which rise some one-hundred and twenty feet above the landscape. The construction was begun when Mr. Frost was still in school and took some thirty-one years to complete. He now oversees a staff of twelve maids, fifty-seven gardeners and three butlers. His meals are prepared by a French chef, whom rumours say turned down two-thousand dollars a week to cook for the Frost estate. The Herculean structure is surrounded by a twenty-foot wide clover-shaped moat, a branch of which bisects the building and runs beneath a glass-floored dining room (which seats sixty people!) and through an indoor arboretum which houses some forty-three different species of birds. Yet the most remarkable feature of the estate, from a biologist's point of view, is the six-hundred and fifty acre garden, which Mr. Frost has populated over the years with thousands of species of exotic flora and fauna, including a herd of thirty brindled gnus and one of three known specimens of the once-thought extinct woolly rhinoceros. There are tales of sea serpents living in the perpetually mist-filled hundred-acre lake, as well as stories about unusual cries heard emanating from the depths of the master's playground. Indeed, only a select few have tread the halls of the castle, and fewer still have ventured into the realm beyond the iron gates which separate the grounds from the rest of the known world. Had I any idea of what secrets lay hidden in that alien landscape where I found myself wandering alone that chill night a score of years ago, then I would surely never have trespassed beyond the towering gates into that land, and probably would not have attended the New Year's Eve party at the invitation of Mr. Filigree Frost, one of only thirty guests at the estate that night, and perhaps the only one who wishes never to return.

I felt a sense of dread upon first entering the castle, which was done by tressing a drawbridge of sorts from the drive, where a man in a black tuxedo had taken my car to a parking lot, the whereabouts of which I know not still. No sooner had I passed through the threshold of the place, an elaborately carved doorway complete with two stone serpents and a gargoyle, then I became aware of a high-pitched sound - barely audible, yet ... somehow piercing. It did not abate as I moved about the premises that evening, mingling with the guests, some of whom had come from as far as

Australia, and one man from a high monastery in Tibet, yet never did it increase in strength or change in pitch. It merely whined somewhere in the back of my skull in a monotonous drone, making the blood in my veins pulse abnormally, and causing my head to ache with growing intensity as the party went on, until at last I was drawn to leave the building and seek fresh air as a remedy to the pounding on my brain.

I exited the building through an open French pavilion at the rear of the structure, which led onto a stone patio overlooking the entrance to the famed gardens, a huge iron gate which was wrought with the shapes of tiny demons and creatures of the night and seemed to act as a ward against any random intrusion into the place. The strange sound seemed to diminish as I left the confines of the Gothic structure, and in fact grew weaker the further from the facade I progressed, and it was this fact, in addition to my immense curiosity of the gardens of Mr. Filigree Frost, which prompted me to venture beyond the gates and into the place where my story becomes so horrid that it is with great difficulty I relay it to you now.

I felt as though I were in a different world the instant I traversed the iron threshold. Strange plants grew in the dark of that December night, and it felt as though their tendrils were reaching across the ground and wrapping themselves about my legs, pulling me deeper into the gardens, along paths of dirt and stone which twisted maze-like this way and that, until before I could halt my random steps, I had become lost among the Acacia trees and the huge ferns in a place that looked almost prehistoric. I could hear the sounds of creatures in the distance, and from time to time I thought I felt eyes upon me; and on several occasions I heard movement in the vegetation around me or saw giant leaves rattling from the passing by of some animal. I was able to identify a large number of the species of plant which grew about me, yet there were some the likes of which I had never seen before, or at least only in sketches from fossilized remains of the Cambrian Era. In fact, I was puzzled by the variety of flora which thrived here, in a climate that was not at all compatible to their biology – as if they were being kept alive by some form of magic. I suddenly became panicked, and turned to leave the place, only I could not determine which direction I should go. The paths wound about in every direction, and I had not been keeping track of which way I had turned or for how long I had been walking.

I knew that the gates were situated on the northern edge of the gardens, and so I sought a break in the overgrowth through which I might

discern Polaris, and head at least in the direction I knew to be correct. This proved to be no easy task, for the foliage in the area seemed to grow together above me, entrapping me in a reticulum of spindly branches and snake-like vines — the taller trees, which appeared to be ginkgoes, covering the openings which the former left plain. At last, I spied a glade ahead of me where I hoped I would find a lacuna baring the night sky to my thirsty eyes, and indeed it seemed that a fountain of moonlight poured into the clearing. As I crept hastily into the space, I glanced to where the moonlight fell, and stopped in my tracks abruptly, being startled by the vision which appeared before me to my surprise and ghastly horror. There on the cracked and pallid earth, blazen by the searing beam of moonlight which fell upon it, lay the carcass of a small animal — an animal the likes of which I had never seen, but which made my skin crawl by virtue of its grotesque features, which were made all the more hideous by the voracious teeth of maggots and worms. The thing which lay before me was nothing which I could describe as one of the known classes of animal. It had a body which seemed to have been covered in scales, indeed it seemed the scales of a fish — yet from it protruded three legs on each side of its body, which met their terminus with single-clawed feet. From where I assumed its head should be instead emerged several muscular tentacles, with suckers along the length of their insides. Overall, the thing, which was scarcely the size of a small dog, had the appearance of something alien, and indeed the thought crossed my mind as I stood in the pale light of distant stars that the creature *was not of this earth*. Yet for all of the horror that the sight of this thing aroused from the depths of my mind, it was merely a passing clown in the parade of horrors which was yet to come.

Somehow, I managed to avert my gaze from the horrid creature, seeking with a newfound sense of urgency the north star, that I might escape from this frightful place with all haste. What I saw in the night sky above me chilled me to the bone — not by the artistry of the vision itself, for it was beautiful indeed, but by the unfathomable displacement which the sight imbued upon me. For there above the sinister gardens wherein I found myself lost and misgiving, *two moons shone in the heavens, gazing upon me as though the eyes of space itself*.

It was then that I began to doubt my own sanity. It was not as though I felt I had lost all sense of what was real, but that my mind was now playing tricks upon my conscious by allowing me to see things which were

not there. The corpse could very well have been that of a fox or badger, eroded into an indistinguishable form by parasites, the moonlight causing it to glisten as though covered in scales. And the sight of two moons could clearly be a simple case of *double vision*, caused by the headache which I was suffering, and common among cases of delirium and victims of fatigue, the likes of which I could at the time have been considered among. Yet these symptoms can not account for that for which I was yet to be privy. A debilitation of the mind might justify the feeling of tendrils around my limbs and body as I ran aimlessly from the glade. The shadows of ghastly shapes which followed me as I paced a random retreat through lanes of death-scented trees and mocked my fear just beyond the corner of my vision may surely be attributed to a combination of lassitude and panic. But what befallen pathways in the confines of my mind could have conjured the image I saw when I finally broke free from the prehistoric jungle and onto the shore of the fabled lake which was the center of the famous gardens of Filigree Frost? If I had not reason to doubt my sanity before, then now it became crystalline knowledge that my patterns of thought were not as those of other men.

The lake shone within a pale-yellow haze, and beneath that mist could be discerned the reflection of the two moons in the sky above, their brightness diminished only slightly. As a chill breeze swept across the lake, ripples brushed the surface of the water, and began to morph the image into what resembled a painting by Van Gogh. At once the larger of the moons cracked and twisted its shape in an unearthly dance as a vile and dark tentacle breeched the water's surface, sending splintered fingers of moonlight fleeing to the edge of the mere, grasping at my feet. I watched in a frozen state as the moons disappeared completely from view, and a fury of tentacled limbs crashed upwards through the yellow water, followed by the maw of a creature so repulsive in every aspect of its being that an attempt to describe it here would only suffice to diminish its pallor to that of the now distinguished thing which I chanced upon in the glade. A sound filled the air that no earthly manifestation could have emitted — a shrill, droning sound which had qualities of both a clicking and a buzzing, a tone that surely would have driven me mad after merely a moment's listening, had not my mind already departed to nether regions the whereabouts of which I know not still, nor do I wish to discover. A stench was also present in the mist which rolled horribly off the lake — a smell of a singular nature that was in

every way as repulsive and paralyzing as the sound and sight of the creature before me. After an eternity had passed, during which time I was quick to the spot on the edge of the lake, unable to scream or flee, bridled by a fear of unmatched terror that held me in its vile grip, the sound, which had been unintelligible buzzing and humming, began to ring of a familiar quality. The sound itself was still alien in nature, yet somehow the character seemed that of a kind of *voice* — a voice which, though of a clearly unearthly language, I was able to understand. The voice spoke of horrible denizens which lurked in the spaces which flow between all things; of ghostly visions that inhabit planets at the edge of our solar system; of sunken cities where still sleep the gods of ages long since forgotten, waiting to rise and reclaim the thoughts of those who are rightfully theirs; of ancient texts whose names I dare not repeat, where the secrets of the Old Ones may be discovered by those who dare to read them; and at last the creature spoke, if indeed the ghastly emissions which penetrated my brain could be defined as speech, of a time in the far distant future and far distant past which were in fact the same moment in time, and of a certain emissary who would carry the message of eternal life to the gods of time, a page who was in fact a denizen of the planet Earth — and it seemed as though the sound which was conjuring these words upon my brain described a man very near my own description, *and pronounced my own name as that of the emissary to the gods of time.* The very core of my being left me at that moment, as I am sure that it was devoured by the lacustrine dweller which assaulted me then, and had planted such unimaginable horrors upon my mind, and what was left of my frame bolted instinctively upon trembling limbs in a direction which I only know was away from the lake, and I ran a gauntlet that seemed to be governed by a force beyond my comprehension, until at long last, although I am not sure whether I ran for minutes or hours, I reached the gates of the garden, which opened of their own will before me, that I might issue forth from the hellish landscape and escape across the patio at the back of the castle, through the glass doors of the great room, past the gazes of stunned guests, down hallways of red carpet, beyond the orifice which signified the entrance to the house, and into the lamplit streets of the city, looking back only when my hands rested upon the latch of my own door, miles from the estate of Filigree Frost, far from the place where unimaginable horrors swam and fed, still shaking and muttering to myself even as I collapsed and slept upon the bed in my dark room.

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I have only now, some years after that disturbing night, the ability to write down the mere suggestion of these events – the full atrocity of which I could not submit for any sane person to read – without a shudder of such fear and loathing encroach upon my spine that my pen be unable to tread the paper in an intelligible fashion. This passage I put down as a warning to any sane souls who wish to retain the same, that if upon some chill eve you should find yourself inside the estate of Filigree Frost, that no matter how strong the desire to wander beyond those demon-faced gates, do not dare to tread the ground of the garden that glows beneath two moons. And a final word of warning — if ever you should chance upon a pool some dark night, when the mist is still above the water, and you see there the reflection of the moon, do not look long upon the surface of that lake, or upon the reflection of that heavenly orb — lest you learn the secrets which no man should learn, and you may become the emissary of the gods of time, your soul bound on a journey from which there can be no return.