

DARK ADVENTURE RADIO THEATRE:
A SOLSTICE CAROL

Written by

Sean Branney & Andrew Leman

Based on
"The Festival", "Pickman's Model" & "The Outsider"
By H. P. Lovecraft

And

A Christmas Carol
By Charles Dickens

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SFX: static, radio tuning, snippet of '30s song, more tuning, static dissolves to:

Dark Adventure Radio THEME MUSIC.

ANNOUNCER

Tales of intrigue, adventure, and the mysterious occult that will stir your imagination and make your very blood run cold.

MUSIC CRESCENDO.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

This is Dark Adventure Radio Theatre, featuring our guest host, Barnaby Dickens. Today's special holiday episode: "A Solstice Carol".

THEME MUSIC DIMINISHES. A MOURNFUL minor key CHRISTMAS CAROL plays in the background. Barnaby Dickens is a fine narrator wrapping us in a warm blanket of Britishness and occasionally scaring the bejeezus out of us.

DICKENS

Good evening, devoted listeners. My name is Barnaby Dickens. Your usual host is enjoying a holiday vacation with his family, and your good friends at Dark Adventure Radio Theatre allowed me to take the opportunity to bring you a seasonal treat to enjoy on a dark winter's eve. Solstice, after all, is the longest night of the year, and to celebrate the season we bring you a dark tale brimming with nameless cults, charnel creatures, and one of our listeners' favorite authors himself: H.P. Lovecraft. But first, a word from our yuletide sponsor.

A few piano notes herald a plug from a new sponsor.

NEWJEFREW SPOKESMAN

Friends, at this very special time of year we celebrate with our loved ones, and remember those who are most important to us.

(MORE)

NEWJEFREW SPOKESMAN (CONT'D)

And there's no more sincere and meaningful way to tell someone, "I've been thinking of you" than with a delicious holiday fruitcake. Each Newjefrew yule cake features a special blend of exotic candied fruits and crunchy tropical nuts blended with our special flavorings to capture the true meaning of Christmas in every magical bite. Our fruitcakes are made with care by Cistercian monks in scenic Mt. Laurel, and shipped by mail all across the world. And they won't take up room in your ice box, 'cause Newjefrew cakes stay fresh for weeks right out on the counter. Order one for everyone on your holiday list. Kids love them!

SMARMY CHILD

Mummy, can I have some more fruitcake?

INDULGENT MOTHER

Of course, darling.

DOTING DAD

Say, cut me a slice too.

They laugh as only people who are smashed on rum-soaked fruitcake can.

NEWJEFREW SPOKESMAN

Feel the true spirit of the season; give a Newjefrew fruitcake.

ANNOUNCER

This message brought to you by our sponsor: The New Jersey Fruitcake Company.

Trailing jingle.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

And now, Mr. Barnaby Dickens returns to the microphone to present his eldritch holiday tale: "A Solstice Carol".

MUSICAL swell.

DICKENS

I have endeavoured in this spirited little story to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my listeners out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly. And in incorporating the esteemed Mr. Lovecraft into my tale, not the slightest disrespect is intended. We celebrate the man, his work, and the sentiments of the season.

Stave One - Farley's Ghost.

Old Mason Farley was dead as doornail, as the saying goes. He shuffled off his mortal coil some eighteen months past, and since then the writer of strange tales of mystery and imagination had been sorely missed. During his life, his name appeared on the covers of all of the most daring pulp magazines, often more than once. His stories had been translated into French, German, even Swedish, and they were collected into books with thrilling cover art. He was rich, famous, and he lived... well, let us say, a life of worldly hedonism, for his success ensured that all worldly temptations were readily available to him. And yet, in spite of his riches and travels, his publishers and women, Farley was now most decidedly dead and would write no more.

2

MAGAZINE STAND

2

We hear the scene Dickens describes.

DICKENS

It was rather a cold and blustery Christmas Eve when young Howard Phillips Lovecraft - or H.P., as he preferred to be known in literary circles - wended his way down College Hill in Providence, Rhode Island.

(MORE)

DICKENS (CONT'D)

He made his modest living as an editor and reviser of other people's fiction, but he was himself an author, and like Farley a writer of strange stories of a macabre bent. But he could only dream of the success enjoyed by his famous elder. Lovecraft's stories seemed unsalable, even in the pulp magazines for whom strange and ghoulish tales were actively sought. Worse still, of late Lovecraft had found himself the victim of the author's cruellest torment: a crippling case of writer's block. And so, in search of distraction, if not inspiration, he ventured to his neighborhood newsstand...

We hear the cold winter wind and passing automobiles. Perhaps the sound of distant carolers.

JASPER

(counting out change for a customer)

...eight, nine and ten. Ah, Mr. Lovecraft, always a pleasure.

LOVECRAFT

Jasper.

JASPER

Ah, I know what you're after. They came in this morning. *Astonishing Tales!* Let me get you one.

LOVECRAFT

Dare I ask whose story made the cover?

JASPER

Do you need to? It's a Mason Farley!

LOVECRAFT

Of course it is.

JASPER

"The Panther Lady of Aquelva". They just keep publishing 'em.

LOVECRAFT

The man's in his grave more than a year and he's still selling them stories.

JASPER

Your stories not selling, Mr. L?

LOVECRAFT

It's rejection after rejection. I embrace the styles of the masters, Poe, Blackwood, Dunsany, Machen, but nothing lands. Nothing finds a place with these... editors!

JASPER

Shucks. Maybe it's time to try something new?

LOVECRAFT

Like what?

JASPER

Write one in your style: Lovecraft style!

LOVECRAFT

Ha! That'd surely be even more disastrous than my other efforts. The public loves these Farley stories. It seems the more inane and hopelessly contrived they are, the more these lowbrow morons like them.

A customer, CURTIS, approaches. He is a lowbrow moron.

JASPER

Ah, good afternoon Curtis. I know what you're here for: *Astonishing Tales*. Just came in.

CURTIS

Hot potatoes! A new Farley story? This is great! Oh, you've got it too, eh buddy?

LOVECRAFT

Um, yes.

CURTIS

There's nobody like Farley, eh?

LOVECRAFT

Lucky for us.

CURTIS

Huh? Oh I get it. Ha, ha! Merry Christmas, buddy.

LOVECRAFT

Christmas? Bah! Another lowbrow contrivance! Don't you know that Christmas is just the pale imitation of an older, darker, more interesting holiday? An ancient ritual of life and death, now covered in tinsel and candy canes!

CURTIS

Whatever you say, pal. I like it. See ya', Jasper!

Curtis lumbers off with his copy of *Astonishing Tales*.

LOVECRAFT

See what I mean?

JASPER

Chin up, Mr. L. Stick with it. I bet you'll get more stories published.

LOVECRAFT

I take no comfort in your baseless optimism.

JASPER

(taking it well)
Anything else for you?

LOVECRAFT

I can afford naught else, Jasper. I can barely afford my next meal. I'm saving up for a new thesaurus.

JASPER

Used up all the words in the old one, eh?

LOVECRAFT

(unamused)
Very droll. Your nickel, sir.

JASPER

Thank you, sir... Hey, merry Christmas anyway!

LOVECRAFT

Bah. Christmas is a humbug!

The wind whips up, crossfading into transition MUSIC.

DICKENS

More despondent than ever, our
beleaguered writer indulged himself
in a holiday treat suited to his
humble means.

3

COFFEE SHOP

3

The bell at door of the coffee shop JINGLES as the door
closes behind Lovecraft, shutting out the chill winter wind.
He walks to the counter and sits. A PHONOGRAPH is playing JOY
TO THE WORLD in the background.

HARRIET

Oh my, it's really blowing out
there.

LOVECRAFT

It is indeed inclement.

HARRIET

Well, at least we'll have a white
Christmas!

LOVECRAFT

Bah...

HARRIET

Now, Howard, no need to be like
that. What can I get you? The
usual?

LOVECRAFT

If you would.

HARRIET

Ah, got your funny book there?

LOVECRAFT

It is not a "funny book," Harriet.
Astonishing Tales is an anthology
of weird fiction.

HARRIET

Oh. Okay.

She pours him a cup of coffee.

LOVECRAFT
 (to himself)
 The panther lady...

The doorbell rings and wind blows until the door closes.

THURBER
 There you are, Lovecraft! I was
 looking for you at home.

LOVECRAFT
 Hello, Thurber.

HARRIET
 Why, Howard, do you have a friend?

LOVECRAFT
 No, he's my neighbor.

HARRIET
 Well it's nice to meet you. Coffee?

THURBER
 Oh no, thanks. I thought I'd try
 you here. Don't tell me you're
 having your usual coffee and
 doughnut on Christmas Eve?

LOVECRAFT
 Why not? There's nothing so very
 special about Christmas Eve.

THURBER
 Ah, Lovecraft. No particular plans
 for tomorrow, I suppose?

LOVECRAFT
 No. I'll just be working. I have a
 ghost-writing client that needs...

THURBER
 Well, we can't have that! Come with
 me tomorrow. A little outing up to
 Boston.

LOVECRAFT
 Boston?

THURBER
 I'm going to go see my pal Richard
 up there. He's an artist. Quite a
 guy, some really creepy and
 sinister stuff, just like those
 stories you write.

(MORE)

THURBER (CONT'D)
 You two will hit it off like
 gangbusters! What do you say?

Harriet returns with Howard's donut.

HARRIET
 You should go, Howard. Here's your
 donut.

LOVECRAFT
 I'm afraid I cannot.

THURBER
 Oh, come on, Howard. I already
 talked to your aunts about it. They
 thought it was a swell idea. And
 I'm telling you, you're going to
 love Richard's paintings. There's a
 couple of them, that, well, they'd
 even give YOU the heebie-jeebies.

LOVECRAFT
 Bah...

THURBER
 Howard, it'll be fun. It's
 Christmas!

LOVECRAFT
 What does Christmas have to do with
 anything? That which men call
 Christmas is an ancient thing. The
 Yuletide - it's older than
 Bethlehem. It's older than Babylon
 or Memphis. You can keep your
 Christmas. Give me the Solstice!

THURBER
 Hey I was just--

LOVECRAFT
 I'm a night owl and the Solstice is
 my favorite day of the year because
 it has the longest night! The dark,
 the cold, and the solitude are my
 companions. I'll be working until
 dawn, and not taking any trips on
 the morrow, thank you. Providence
 is my home, my very soul, and I
 have no wish to leave it.

(MORE)

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

If I crave human companionship, I have a great many correspondents with whom I can visit from the comfort of my own rooms, and for the price of a postage stamp. That's all I want, that's all I need.

HARRIET

It's Christmas. You shouldn't be working alone on Christmas.

LOVECRAFT

At night, when the objective world has slunk back into its cavern and left dreamers to their own, there come inspirations and capabilities impossible at any less magical and quiet hour. No one knows whether or not he is a writer unless he has tried writing at night.

HARRIET

Doesn't sound very festive to me.

LOVECRAFT

Harriet, I have always felt a great relief that you are unable to understand me, and an even greater relief that I am unable to understand you.

HARRIET

You're such a darling.

LOVECRAFT

Humbug!

THURBER

For a young man, you're quite the curmudgeon, Lovecraft.

LOVECRAFT

I shall take that as a compliment.

THURBER

(still cheerful)

Well, it's not too late to change your mind. If you want to come, just knock on my door tomorrow morning. I'm catching the 10:15. Merry Christmas, Lovecraft. And give my greetings to your aunts.

He goes.

LOVECRAFT
 (grumbling sotto voce)
 Keep Christmas in your own way, and
 let me keep it in mine.

He opens his magazine.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)
 Let me see here... "Sheemoo, the
 queen of the panther ladies,
 strutted sinuously as the pounding
 beat of the jungle drums..."
 (sigh)
 Humbug.

COLD WIND and the PHONOGRAPH MUSIC swells into a transition.

DICKENS
 And thus, with tidings of neither
 comfort nor joy did Howard finish
 his donut and coffee as he leafed
 through the pages of Astonishing
 Stories. He then braved the
 elements and returned home to the
 small house on College Hill that he
 shared with his aunts.

4 HOME SWEET HOME

4

Howard kicks the snow off his shoes out on the landing and
 then opens the door to his home. He steps inside.

AUNT LILLIAN
 (off)
 Howard? Howard is that you?

LOVECRAFT
 Yes, Aunt Lillian.

His elderly aunts enter and fuss over him.

AUNT ANNIE
 You've been out so long, and in
 this weather. Here, let me make you
 some cocoa.

LOVECRAFT
 Thank you, no, Aunt Annie.

AUNT LILLIAN
 Did Mr. Thurber find you?

LOVECRAFT

Yes, he did. Never mind about that.

AUNT ANNIE

Here, let me take your coat - oh, a new issue of *Astonishing Tales*. Anything good?

LOVECRAFT

More of the same I fear.

AUNT LILLIAN

Oh, Howard, the postman had a letter for you. It's from True Terror magazine! Here.

LOVECRAFT

Probably another rejection.

AUNT LILLIAN

Now, Howard, you never know...

AUNT ANNIE

Aren't you going to open it?

LOVECRAFT

Very well.

He tears it open and unfolds the letter.

AUNT ANNIE

Well?

LOVECRAFT

"Dear Mr. Lovecraft, thank you for your submission. We find your tale lacks human interest, and your stylistic homage to 19th century writers holds little appeal to modern readers. Further, your overwrought vocabulary is ill suited to ghastly subjects..." etc. etc. More of the same.

AUNT ANNIE

Ohhhh, pooh! What do they know?

AUNT LILLIAN

Which story did you send them?

LOVECRAFT

What does it matter?

AUNT LILLIAN

Ah. Well, I love your stories. Give me those terrifying monsters of yours any day!

AUNT ANNIE

Well that's fine, but I think your sense of cosmic dread is really what sets your writing apart. I think you should go back to that.

LOVECRAFT

I think I should go up to my room.

AUNT LILLIAN

Oh Howard, don't be like that. It's Christmas Eve. You should go with Thurber to--

LOVECRAFT

I'm buried in work. I have to finish revising this client's nonsense story.

AUNT ANNIE

Let me make you a sandwich.

LOVECRAFT

I'll just make myself some beans and toast.

He shuffles away.

AUNT ANNIE

Well at least turn up the heat in there! Your room is colder than Edgar Allan Poe's tomb!

LOVECRAFT

I like it the way it is, thank you.

AUNT LILLIAN

You stick with it, Howard Lovecraft. You'll be a great writer one day. I just know it.

AUNT ANNIE

We believe in you!
(pause)
What about some cake?

LOVECRAFT

Good night!

DICKENS

And thus rebuffing materteral kindness, our author entered his sparsely furnished room and sat heavily in the old wooden chair before his desk. And with his plate of toast and beans to provide sustenance, he worked late into the night. It was no easy feat before him, for his client had sent him a particularly amateurish tale: a formulaic romance in which a drab housewife grappled with perfectly ordinary domestic troubles. Howard toiled on the story into the small hours....

Pen SCRATCHING on paper as HPL works away utterly exhausted.

LOVECRAFT

(reading)

"But I yearn to unchain myself and leap upon my heart's secret desires," expounded Agnes as she folded the dungarees.

(with a yawn, to himself)

Yegad! What am I supposed to do with this drivel? I'm not a miracle worker, I'm just a ghostwriter, (he yawns again) a stupid ghostwriter... ghost... writer....

He begins to SNORE. Eerie TRANSITION MUSIC begins to build.

5 GHOST-WRITER

5

A typewriter strikes a letter. Pause. A short burst of typing.

LOVECRAFT

(confused)

Whazzat?

DICKENS

Lovecraft started at the sound. There was but one typewriter in the house, and it sat in this very room, yea right upon the very desk where he nodded. No one had touched the device, but he had most distinctly heard the sound of fingers striking the keys.

LOVECRAFT

(dismissive)

Hmph. I must have dreamt it.
Dreaming of ghosts - the ghost of
the typewriter....

A faint clanking of chains and bottles climbs up the stairs
outside of Lovecraft's door.

DICKENS

And as the author prepared to move
from his desk and settle properly
into bed, he heard another sound,
distinctly approaching up the
stairs outside his bedroom door.

LOVECRAFT

I must be dreaming still. But this
racket? The hackneyed sound of
ghostly chains? I'm a better
dreamer than that!

DICKENS

Indeed, Lovecraft was a grand
dreamer, with nightly visions of
magnificent architecture in
spectacular realms where the
commonplace was nonexistent. But
not this night. The sound grew
louder, and in a moment its source
entered his room passing straight
through the door. Before young
Lovecraft stood an apparition, a
specter, a ghost, and a
terrifyingly familiar one at that;
bearing the face of Mason Farley.
He had seen this face on the dust
jackets of books, and on countless
pulp adventure magazines. But now,
the dashing face, once so handsome
and self-assured, looked gaunt,
pained, and wracked with untold
agonies. And about this ghastly
apparition was draped a massive
chain to which were fastened many
bottles of liquor, vials of pills,
and countless calendars and clocks.

LOVECRAFT

(genuinely frightened)

What do you want with me?

FARLEY

Much.

LOVECRAFT
Who are you?

FARLEY
Ask me who I was.

LOVECRAFT
Who were you, then?

FARLEY
In life, I was called Mason Farley,
celebrated author of uncanny tales.

LOVECRAFT
(awed in several ways)
Can you sit down?

FARLEY
I prefer to stand. You don't
believe in me.

LOVECRAFT
I don't.

FARLEY
What evidence would you have of my
reality beyond that of your senses?

LOVECRAFT
I don't know.

FARLEY
Why do you doubt your senses?

LOVECRAFT
Because... I am a scientific
materialist. Ghosts are fine if
somewhat clichéd in literature, but
they don't exist in real life.

FARLEY
I see.

The sound follows the narration. The sound might include
Cthulhu's call from the DART show.

DICKENS
At this the spirit raised a
frightful cry, and shook its chain
with such a dismal and appalling
noise, that Lovecraft held on tight
to his chair, to save himself from
falling in a swoon.

LOVECRAFT

Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?

FARLEY

Scientific materialist - do you believe in me or not?

LOVECRAFT

(he does)

For the sake of argument, let's say I do. But why should spirits walk the earth? Why do you come to me?

FARLEY

It is required of every man, that the spirit within him should walk among his fellow men; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world and witness what it might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!

Again Farley howls like Cthulhu and shakes his chain.

LOVECRAFT

(trembling)

You are fettered. Tell me why.

FARLEY

I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard. Propping myself up with drink and drugs. Shallow acquaintances with shallow people. Living to sell my writings, not living to write. And you, young man, are already forging your chain - and from the looks of it, yours shall be far more ponderous.

LOVECRAFT

I don't understand, Mr. Farley. I'm nothing like you.

FARLEY

(thunderously)

No? On what do you toil? In whose voice do you write?

LOVECRAFT

Well, I... No one would like my stories.

FARLEY

So you say.

LOVECRAFT

What should I do? Speak comfort to me, Mr. Farley.

FARLEY

I have none to give. A very little is all that's permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. O, Lovecraft, this mortal life is too short for its vast means of usefulness. No amount of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!

LOVECRAFT

But you were always a popular writer--

FARLEY

Popular! Any man can be popular. The true writer is honest. He is bold. He wrings his very heart to create words upon the page. I did none of this. I was...

(seething)

Popular. "Mason Farley" wasn't even my real name!

DICKENS

The ghost held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

LOVECRAFT

Well, um, being published is...

FARLEY

Hear me! My time is nearly gone.

LOVECRAFT

I will. But don't be hard upon me!

FARLEY

I am here to-night to warn you,
that you have yet a chance and hope
of escaping my fate, Lovecraft.

LOVECRAFT

That is kind of you.

FARLEY

You will be haunted by three
Spirits.

LOVECRAFT

(faltering)
That's your chance and hope?

FARLEY

It is.

LOVECRAFT

I, I think I'd rather not.

FARLEY

Without their visits, your doom is
certain. Expect the first tomorrow,
when the bell tolls One.

LOVECRAFT

Couldn't they come at once and be
done with it?

FARLEY

Expect the second on the next night
at the same hour. The third upon
the next night. Look to see me no
more; and for your own sake, you
remember what has passed between
us!

DICKENS

The apparition walked backward from
him to the now open window. It
beckoned Lovecraft to approach.
When they were within two paces of
each other, Farley's Ghost held up
its hand, warning him to come no
nearer. Lovecraft stopped and
realized he heard confused noises
in the air; incoherent sounds of
lamentation and regret. The
spectre, after listening for a
moment, joined in the mournful
dirge; and floated out upon the
bleak, dark night.

(MORE)

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Lovecraft looked out. The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Farley's Ghost; none were free. Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together; and the night became as it had been when he walked home. Lovecraft closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was shut tight.

LOVECRAFT

Hum...

DICKENS

He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose, he went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

MUSIC transition.

6

STAVE TWO - A FESTIVAL OF SOLSTICE PAST

6

DICKENS

Stave Two - The Ghost of Solstice Past

The church bells begin to chime.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Lovecraft awoke, and it was so dark that, looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. The chimes of St. Stephen's church struck.

The church bell strikes One.

LOVECRAFT

The ghost warned me that a visitation would come when the clock struck one. So like Farley to spout such nonsense.

DICKENS

But just then a soft light flashed in the room. Lovecraft sat up in a half-recumbent attitude and found himself face to face with an unearthly visitor. It was a strange figure - like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old woman, yet not so like an old woman as a partially decomposed human being. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it. The arms were very long and sinewy; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch with five twigs emerging from it, three above and two below. Even this, though, when Lovecraft looked at it with increasing steadiness, was not its strangest quality. The figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness: being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body: of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away.

LOVECRAFT

Are you the Spirit whose coming was foretold to me?

The SPIRIT'S VOICE is soft and gentle.

SOLSTICE PAST

I am!

LOVECRAFT

Who, and what are you?

SOLSTICE PAST
I am the Ghost of Solstice Past.

LOVECRAFT
My past?

SOLSTICE PAST
Your ancestral past.

LOVECRAFT
Ah. What brings you here?

SOLSTICE PAST
Your welfare!

LOVECRAFT
Ah, that's most kind. But a night
of unbroken rest might have...

DICKENS
The spirit thrust out its strong
hand and clasped Lovecraft gently
by the arm.

SOLSTICE PAST
Rise and walk with me.

DICKENS
The grasp, though gentle as a
woman's hand, was not to be
resisted. He rose: but finding that
the Spirit made towards the window,
stopped suddenly.

LOVECRAFT
I am a mortal, and liable to fall.

SOLSTICE PAST
Bear but a touch of my hand upon
your heart and you shall be upheld
in more than this!

MUSICAL thrill.

DICKENS
As the words were spoken, they
passed through the wall, and stood
upon an open country road, covered
in shallow new-fallen snow.
Providence had entirely vanished.
Not a vestige of it was to be seen.
(MORE)

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Ahead of them lay a great hill
where the twisting willows writhed
against the clearing sky and the
first stars of evening.

Distant waves POUND on an unseen rocky shore.

LOVECRAFT

That sound. The sea... Where are
we?

SOLSTICE PAST

Do you not know it?

LOVECRAFT

(excited)

It's... it's Kingsport! A very
ancient town I've never seen but
often dreamed of. The sea town
where in dreams my people dwelt and
kept festival in the elder time
when festival was forbidden. Is it
real?

SOLSTICE PAST

Men of broader intellect know that
there is no sharp distinction
betwixt the real and the unreal.

LOVECRAFT

The festival! My ancestors bade
future generations to keep
festival.

SOLSTICE PAST

It is true. They commanded their
sons to keep festival once every
century, that the memory of primal
secrets might not be forgotten.
Yours were an old people, and were
old even when this land was settled
three hundred years before. And now
they were scattered, and shared
only the rituals of mysteries that
none living could understand.
Come. Let us see.

MUSIC BED.

DICKENS

Beyond the hill's crest they looked upon Kingsport outspread frostily in the gloaming, with its ancient vanes and steeples, ridgepoles and chimney-pots, wharves and small bridges; endless labyrinths of steep, narrow, crooked streets; antiquity hovering on grey wings over winter-whitened gables and gambrel roofs; fanlights and small-paned windows one by one gleaming out in the cold dusk to join Orion and the archaic stars. Beside the road a still higher summit rose, bleak and windswept: a burying-ground where black gravestones stuck ghoulishly through the snow like the decayed fingernails of a gigantic corpse.

The WIND blows through, carrying on it a distant horrible creaking as of a gibbet in the wind.

SOLSTICE PAST

You're trembling. You know this place?

LOVECRAFT

They hanged four kinsmen of mine for witchcraft in 1692, but I never imagined just where. Please, good Spirit, lead me where you will!

SOLSTICE PAST

You know the way.

LOVECRAFT

No, but... I'm sure I can find it. It's as if they're waiting for me.

DICKENS

They walked together as the road wound down the seaward slope and into snow-blanketed Kingsport.

LOVECRAFT

It's so very quiet. But these are old Puritan folk. Perhaps they have Yuletide customs strange to me, and full of silent hearthside prayer.

We hear the footsteps of Lovecraft making his way through the vacant snowy streets. MUSIC BED swells gently.

DICKENS

The two kept on down past the hushed lighted farmhouses and shadowy stone walls to where the signs of ancient shops and sea-taverns creaked in the salt breeze, and the grotesque knockers of pillared doorways glistened along deserted, unpaved lanes in the light of little, curtained windows. Just then, Lovecraft espied a lone figure, walking toward the seventh house on the left in Green Lane.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit! Look there, approaching that house with the diamond window panes! Can it be? I'd swear it was my thrice-great grandfather, Jebediah Phillips! I've seen his portrait. But... he's so young!

SOLSTICE PAST

So it would seem.

LOVECRAFT

He's reaching for the iron knocker on that door. Can we follow him?

SOLSTICE PAST

These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us.

Phillips sounds the archaic iron knocker.

LOVECRAFT

My ancestral home. I almost dread to see who will answer.

The door creaks open.

DICKENS

A thrill of cold fear passed through Lovecraft as the door opened to reveal a gowned, slippered old man, but the bland face reassured him.

LOVECRAFT

Why, he's mute! See, Spirit, how he gestures, and writes a quaint and ancient welcome with the stylus and wax tablet he carries.

DICKENS

The old man beckoned Phillips to enter, with Lovecraft and the Spirit invisibly close behind. The door opened into a low, candle-lit room with dark, stiff, sparse furniture of the seventeenth century. There was a dark and cavernous fireplace and a spinning-wheel at which a bent old woman sat back toward him, silently spinning despite the festive season.

LOVECRAFT

It's so damp and cold! You'd think a fire should be blazing on such a night!

DICKENS

Despite the patent antiquity, Lovecraft did not like everything about what he saw. A creeping sense of dread grew stronger, and the more Lovecraft looked at the old man's bland face the more its very blandness terrified him.

LOVECRAFT

His eyes never move, Spirit, and the skin is too like wax. I don't believe it's a face at all, but a fiendishly cunning mask! And those flabby hands, curiously gloved--

SOLSTICE PAST

See, he writes a message to your grandfather on the tablet!

LOVECRAFT

(reading)

"You must wait a while before you can be led to the place of festival."

DICKENS

Because an old tradition had summoned him to strange feastings, Lovecraft's thrice-great grandfather resolved to expect queer things, and silently took a seat to wait. But Lovecraft looked about the room.

The wind BLOWS outside, signs creak and the spinning wheel whirs.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit! Look at these books! Morryster's wild *Marvells of Science...* *Saducismus Triumphatus* of Joseph Glanvill, published in 1681... *Daemonolatreia* of Remigius, printed in 1595 at Lyons... Good lord! *The Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred! In Wormius' translation! Look here: thoughts and legends too hideous for sanity or consciousness!

(reading)

"The nethermost caverns are not for the fathoming of eyes that see, for their marvels are strange and terrific...."

Under Lovecraft's reading, the window softly shuts and there's a whir unlike that of the spinning wheel. An AGED CLOCK STRIKES ELEVEN.

DICKENS

(over the clock)

No one spoke. Lovecraft thought the room and the books and the people very morbid and disquieting, and it was certainly nervous waiting.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, I'm not sure I like this place.

Slow PLODDING FOOTSTEPS approach.

SOLSTICE PAST

See here returns the old man.

DICKENS

The old man now wore a hooded cloak, and draped another round the old woman, who ceased her monotonous spinning. Then they both started for the outer door; the woman lamely creeping, and the old man, after picking up the very book Lovecraft had been reading, beckoned to Phillips as he drew his hood over that unmoving face or mask.

(MORE)

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Lovecraft's thrice-great
grandfather rose and silently
joined them, seeming to know their
purpose.

Cold exterior NIGHT sound.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, are we going to the
festival? This isn't what I
expected.

SOLSTICE PAST

The past never is.

MUSIC BED. The quiet footsteps of the hushed throng make
their way up the snowy hill.

DICKENS

They went out into the moonless and
tortuous network of that incredibly
ancient town; went out as the
lights in the curtained windows
disappeared one by one, and the Dog
Star leered at the throng of
cowled, cloaked figures that poured
silently from every doorway and
formed monstrous processions up
this street and that, threading
precipitous lanes where decaying
houses overlapped and crumbled
together, gliding across open
courts and churchyards where the
bobbing lanthorns made eldritch
drunken constellations. Following
close behind his ancestor,
Lovecraft was pressed amid the
crowds.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, these voiceless guides
trouble me! Their bodies seem
abnormally pulpy and soft. And
their hooded cloaks! I see never a
face and hear nary a word.

SOLSTICE PAST

But we'll follow them all the same.

DICKENS

Up, up, up the eerie columns
slithered, and he saw that all the
travellers were converging toward
the top of a high hill in the
centre of the town, where perched a
great white church.

The WIND blows harder here, atop the hill.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

There was an open space around the
church; partly a churchyard with
spectral shafts, and partly a half-
paved square swept nearly bare of
snow by the wind. Death-fires
danced over the tombs, revealing
gruesome vistas, though queerly
failing to cast any shadows, of the
throng that was now slipping
speechlessly into the church.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, I... don't want to go.
Look! Even my great grandfather
Phillips doesn't want to go. See
how he hangs back?

SOLSTICE PAST

These are things past. The past
cannot hurt you.

LOVECRAFT

So there's no need for him to be
afraid?

SOLSTICE PAST

Oh, I didn't say that.

DICKENS

Lovecraft's thrice-great
grandfather waited till the crowd
had oozed into the black doorway,
and till all the stragglers had
followed. The old man was pulling
at his sleeve, but he was
determined to be the last. Then he
finally went, the sinister man and
the old spinning woman before him,
and Lovecraft and the Spirit close
behind.

Fabric rustles quietly in the church interior.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Crossing the threshold into that swarming temple of unknown darkness, Lovecraft turned once to look at the outside world as the churchyard phosphorescence cast a sickly glow on the hill-top pavement. And as he did so he shuddered.

LOVECRAFT

(sotto voice)

Spirit, look. The snow, outside the door. There's no footprints in it. And we just, I mean I just...

SOLSTICE PAST

Time to go now. Follow your grandfather.

MUSIC BUILDS TENSION.

DICKENS

The church was scarce lighted by all the lanthorns that had entered it, for most of the throng had already vanished. They had streamed up the aisle between the high white pews to the trap-door of the vaults which yawned loathsomely open just before the pulpit, and were now squirming noiselessly in. Lovecraft followed dumbly down the footworn steps and into the dank, suffocating crypt. The tail of that sinuous line of night-marchers seemed very horrible, and as he saw them wriggling into a venerable tomb they seemed more horrible still. In a moment all descended an ominous staircase of rough-hewn stone; a narrow spiral damp and peculiarly odorous, that wound endlessly down into the bowels of the hill past walls of dripping stone blocks and crumbling mortar. It was a silent, shocking descent.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, the walls - they've been chiselled from solid rock.

SOLSTICE PAST

That troubles you?

LOVECRAFT

There's no sound. All these
footfalls and there's no sound. And
these passages going off - what are
they, some kind of burrow?

SOLSTICE PAST

They are indeed numerous.

LOVECRAFT

Excessively numerous! Like impious
catacombs of nameless menace; and
their pungent odour of decay grows
unbearable. We must have passed
down through the mountain and
beneath the earth of Kingsport
itself. I cannot believe that a
town should be so aged and maggoty
with subterranean evil.

An insidious lapping of sunless waters echoes in a chamber.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

Why have you brought me here?

SOLSTICE PAST

Shh. Behold!

DICKENS

Suddenly there spread out before
him the boundless vista of an inner
world - a vast fungous shore litten
by a belching column of sick
greenish flame and washed by a wide
oily river that flowed from abysses
frightful and unsuspected to join
the blackest gulfs of immemorial
ocean.

Lovecraft GASPS. The sick greenish flame BURNS. The eerie
FLUTE plays.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

He looked at that unhallowed Erebus
of titan toadstools, leprous fire,
and slimy water, and saw the
cloaked throngs forming a
semicircle around the blazing
pillar. And his own thrice-great
grandfather joined them.

LOVECRAFT

(awed)

Spirit, it's the Yule-rite.

SOLSTICE PAST

Indeed. Older than man and fated to survive him; the primal rite of the solstice and of spring's promise beyond the snows; the rite of fire and evergreen, light and music.

DICKENS

And in the Stygian grotto he watched them do the rite, and adore the sick pillar of flame, and throw into the water handfuls gouged out of the viscous vegetation which glittered green in the chlorotic glare. And he saw something amorphously squatted far away from the light, piping noisomely on a flute.

A noxious muffled FLUTTERING sounds.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Things moved in the darkness, but what frightened him most was that flaming column; spouting volcanically from depths profound and inconceivable, casting no shadows as healthy flame should, and coating the nitrous stone above with a nasty, venomous verdigris. For in all that seething combustion no warmth lay, but only the clamminess of death and corruption. The old man who had led him now squirmed to a point directly beside the hideous flame, and made stiff ceremonial motions to the semicircle he faced. At certain stages of the ritual they did grovelling obeisance, especially when he held above his head that abhorrent Necronomicon he had taken with him. Then the old man made a signal to the half-seen flute-player in the darkness.

The flautist changes its feeble drone to one scarce louder but in a another key.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit! That accursed flute! I feel that it calls to something. Something horrible!

SOLSTICE PAST

Behold!

A flopping horde of byakhee emerge from the darkness. The FLUTE plays more wildly.

DICKENS

Lovecraft sank to the lichened earth, transfixed with a dread not of this nor any world, but only of the mad spaces between the stars. Out of the unimaginable blackness beyond the gangrenous glare of that cold flame, out of the Tartarean leagues through which that oily river rolled uncanny, unheard, and unsuspected, there flopped rhythmically a horde of tame, trained, hybrid winged things that no sound eye could ever wholly grasp, or sound brain ever wholly remember. They were not altogether crows, nor moles, nor buzzards, nor ants, nor vampire bats, but something Lovecraft would never wish or be able to recall. They flopped limply along, half with their webbed feet and half with their membraneous wings; and as they reached the throng of celebrants the cowled figures seized and mounted them, and rode off one by one along the reaches of that unlighted river, into pits and galleries of panic where poison springs feed frightful and undiscoverable cataracts. The old spinning woman had gone with the throng, and the old man remained alone with Lovecraft's grandfather.

The FLUTE PLAYER trails off.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

The old man produced his stylus and tablet and Lovecraft was close enough to read what it said.

LOVECRAFT

"I am the true deputy of your fathers who had founded the Yule worship in this ancient place.

(MORE)

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

It was decreed I should come back,
and that the most secret mysteries
were yet to be performed."

DICKENS

And then the old man pulled from
his loose robe a seal ring and a
watch, both bearing Lovecraft's
family arms.

LOVECRAFT

But... I know from family papers
that these tokens were buried with
my great-great-great-great-
grandfather in 1698!

DICKENS

Then the old man drew back his hood
to reveal his face, but Lovecraft
only shuddered.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit! No, it's merely a waxen
mask, devilishly crafted to bear a
family resemblance! The ring and
watch are horrible proof. I wish to
see no other!

SOLSTICE PAST

Why? Do you not relish the ancient
ways? See now your eldest ancestor!

MUSIC THRILL.

DICKENS

And with a sudden motion the mute
old man dislodged the waxen mask
from what should have been his
head.

Lovecraft SHRIEKS in horror.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, remove me from this place!

SOLSTICE PAST

I told you these were shadows of
the things that have been, that
they are what they are, do not
blame me!

LOVECRAFT

Remove me! I cannot bear it! Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!

MUSICAL transition.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

No, let me... let me... oh! At last. My own room. Spirit? Ha! Gone at last.

Lovecraft jumps out of bed, terrified and thrilled.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

Oh! What a marvelous vision, what a tale. This is what I needed. Where's my pen? I must write...

His voice trails off as he frantically sets the dream to paper.

Transition MUSIC.

7

STAVE THREE. THE GHOULS OF SOLSTICE PRESENT

7

DICKENS

Stave Three. The second of the three spirits.

The church clock strikes One.

LOVECRAFT

Huh? The haunting hour again? Have I slept all through the day and into another night? What shall I face now?

DICKENS

Now, being prepared for almost anything, Lovecraft was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the bell had struck and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. All this time, he sat at his desk writing feverishly. But with each passing minute he was sorely vexed with the notion that some apparition would come for him.

(MORE)

DICKENS (CONT'D)

The notion gained in strength until at length he became convinced that some ghost must surely be waiting outside his door in the hall, or was perhaps ever so slowly creeping up the stairs. At length he arose, went to his door and stepped out onto the landing, his door, as was its habit, swinging shut behind him. He was greeted only by darkness.

LOVECRAFT

(quietly)

Aunt Lillian? Aunt Annie?

DICKENS

He returned to his room, and as his hand reached for the knob he heard a voice....

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Lovecraft, enter!

HPL opens the door and steps in.

DICKENS

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove; from every part of which bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light; and a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, donuts, eclairs, cupcakes, and heaps of ice creams in a glorious array of colors. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Lovecraft, as he came peeping round the door.

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Come in! Come in and know me
better, man!

DICKENS

Lovecraft entered timidly, looking
past the feast which now filled his
room. And though the Spirit's eyes
were clear and kind, he did not
like to meet them.

SOLSTICE PRESENT

I am the Ghost of Solstice Present.
Look upon me!

DICKENS

Lovecraft reverently did so. It was
clothed in one simple green robe,
or mantle, bordered with white fur.
Its feet, observable beneath the
ample folds of the garment, were
also bare; and on its head it wore
no other covering than a holly
wreath. Its dark brown curls were
long and free; free as its genial
face, its sparkling eye, its open
hand, its cheery voice, its
unconstrained demeanor, and its
joyful air.

SOLSTICE PRESENT

You have never seen the like of me
before!

LOVECRAFT

Certainly not. Spirit, conduct me
where you will. I went forth last
night on compulsion, and received
an extraordinary inspiration for a
tale. Perhaps tonight will be as
favorable!

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Perhaps. Touch my robe!

DICKENS

Lovecraft did as he was told and
held it fast.

Transition MUSIC as he's whisked away.

LOVECRAFT

We're flying! We're flying through
the night sky! This is marvelous!

SOLSTICE PRESENT

We're going on a journey.

LOVECRAFT

To where?

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Do you not recognize it?

LOVECRAFT

That city... no, it's not
Providence. The harbour, that must
be the Charles there! We've come to
Boston.

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Right you are.

LOVECRAFT

It's magnificent. I don't get out
of Providence much. But why Boston?

SOLSTICE PRESENT

I am the ghost of Solstice Present.
I am charged with showing that
which is.

LOVECRAFT

But why Boston? I don't know that
building.

SOLSTICE PRESENT

You might have.

LOVECRAFT

(reading)

The Boston Fine Arts Club. No,
spirit, I don't...

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Say, who are those chaps who
approach this fine Christmas day?

The voices fade in as they walk up the snow covered street.
They are RICHARD UPTON PICKMAN, the sometimes celebrated
Boston artist, and his friend THURBER.

PICKMAN

... so I said to her, I'm sorry it wasn't turpentine, but my brush has never been cleaner!

They LAUGH.

THURBER

You cad!

LOVECRAFT

Why, that's my neighbor, Harry Thurber. And that must be the artist friend he mentioned. What was that name...?

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Richard Upton Pickman.

PICKMAN

So glad you could make it up, today, Thurber. I've some new works I'm eager to show you and I've missed the pleasure of your company.

THURBER

Ha! I tried to get my neighbor, the one I told you about, Lovecraft, to come up for the trip too. I think you two would have hit it off.

PICKMAN

Ah, family obligations?

THURBER

Not at all. No wife or children, and his parents are dead. He has two lovely aunts but he can't be bothered with them. I sometimes think he's the sort who would rather sit alone with his pen and write his friends letters rather than see them in person.

PICKMAN

Poor chap! His loss, eh? Well, here we are.

He BUZZES the door.

THURBER

I'm surprised they'd be open Christmas day.

PICKMAN

Oh, it's always open to members.
Some of wiggy-wigs here, you'd
think they never go home.

The door opens and they enter.

PICKMAN (CONT'D)

Ah, Callhan, my man. Take our
coats, will you? This is my guest,
Mr. Thurber.

CALLHAN

(chilly)
Sir.

PICKMAN

I thought I'd show him some of my
new paintings I'd sent over.

CALLHAN

Very good, Mr. Pickman.

PICKMAN

Where'd they hang them?

CALLHAN

(with hesitation)
The Mather Salon, sir. I'll let Mr.
Bosworth know you're here.

They stroll through the club, heading for the gallery.

PICKMAN

This way. A bit of a let down they
put them in here. Hardly enough
room get them all up. Here we are--

The salon door swings open.

THURBER

(gobsmacked)
Pickman! Your painting... Great
god!

DICKENS

It takes profound art and profound
insight into Nature to create work
such as Thurber, and Lovecraft, now
beheld.

(MORE)

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Any magazine-cover hack can splash paint around wildly and call it a nightmare or a Witches' Sabbath or a portrait of the devil, but only a great painter can make such a thing really scare or ring true. That's because only a real artist knows the actual anatomy of the terrible or the physiology of fear - the exact sort of lines and proportions that connect up with latent instincts or hereditary memories of fright, and the proper color contrasts and lighting effects to stir the dormant sense of strangeness. Anyone can feel it: a Fuseli really brings a shiver while a cheap ghost-story frontispiece merely makes us laugh.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, I've never seen anything like it! This Pickman is a genius.

DICKENS

But Pickman was not happy with what he saw in that salon....

PICKMAN

This is an outrage. Thurber, wait here!

Pickman storms out of the room.

LOVECRAFT

There's something he's caught - beyond life - that he's able to make us catch for a second. Doré had that quality. Sime has it. Angarola of Chicago has it. And Pickman has it.

Pickman squabbles with Bosworth, Minot and Dr. Reid as they come down the hall and enter the room.

PICKMAN

...none of the other pieces?

DR. REID

Sir, those paintings were blasphemies!

MINOT

Appalling, if you ask me!

PICKMAN

I didn't ask you! Gentlemen, may I introduce Harrrison Thurber, a collector from Providence.

DR. REID

Dr. Eustace Reid. I'm on the club's board.

MINOT

Joe Minot, the Club Curator.

BOSWORTH

Nicholas Bosworth, Club President.

THURBER

What seems to be the problem--

PICKMAN

The problem? They're refusing to display my newest works. They only put this one up in this shuttered closet--

DR. REID

And I objected to that!

PICKMAN

You would!

MINOT

The technique in this piece is extraordinary, Pickman, but the subject matter is--

PICKMAN

Too much for you?

BOSWORTH

Pickman, see here, other members find your work objectionable. You've been warned on many occasions.

PICKMAN

Yes, yes, I know. "Pickman, they're too morbid. Pickman, they're ungodly!"

DR. REID

Your paintings do not please the eye, sir, they are made merely to shock and horrify!

MINOT

Naturalism is not suited to such ghastly subjects. This, "Ghoul Feeding" is it? It's clearly the imaging of a diseased fancy. A weak mind pleading for help.

LOVECRAFT

That criticism sounds familiar....

PICKMAN

What would you know? You wouldn't know truth in painting if it crawled off the canvas and bit you on the--

THURBER

Richard!

MINOT

How dare you, sir!

BOSWORTH

Mr. Pickman, we know that neither you nor your works are suitable for this establishment!

PICKMAN

I couldn't agree more.

DR. REID

Get out, sir. And take this necrophagous--

MINOT

You are barred, Pickman! Callhan, fetch Mr. Pickman's coat and show these gentlemen the door.

PICKMAN

(softly)

Harry, take the painting, will you?

THURBER

Certainly.

PICKMAN

Gentlemen, I cannot describe the pleasure I take in severing my connection with this organization.

Musical STING. Followed by a door slamming.

THURBER

Awfully sorry, Pickman. Not much of the milk of human kindness flowing in there.

PICKMAN

Ha! Cretins. I'm glad to be rid of them. If those paintings made them shudder, imagine if they'd seen some of my more important work.

THURBER

(uneasy)

Yes. Indeed. Still...

PICKMAN

Come on, old boy. What do you say we head back to my place? We'll have a bite and I'll show you the studio. I think you'd enjoy the pictures, for as I said, I've let myself go a bit there. It's no vast tour - but it's best we go on foot. We can take the shuttle at the South Station for Battery Street, and after that the walk isn't much.

THURBER

Oh yes, that would be grand.

PICKMAN

Come on.

Transition MUSIC.

9

THE ARTIST'S STUDIO

9

Pickman and Thurber make their way across town. The sounds of high-class Christmas traffic and caroling give way to a more working-class soundscape as they go.

THURBER

Pickman, I thought you had a studio near here, with the fashionable Newbury Street crowd.

PICKMAN

Ha! There are things that won't do for Newbury Street - things that are out of place here, and that can't be conceived here, anyhow.

(MORE)

PICKMAN (CONT'D)

It's my business to catch the overtones of the soul, and you won't find those in a parvenu set of artificial streets on made land.

THURBER

Back Bay's too new?

PICKMAN

If there are any ghosts here, they're the tame ghosts of a salt marsh and a shallow cove; and I want human ghosts - the ghosts of beings highly organised enough to have looked on hell and known the meaning of what they saw.

THURBER

I see.

PICKMAN

The place for an artist to live is the North End. God, man! Don't you realize that places like that weren't merely made, but actually grew? Generation after generation lived and felt and died there, and in days when people weren't afraid to live and feel and die. I can shew you houses that have stood two centuries and a half and more; houses that have witnessed what would make a modern house crumble into powder.

LOVECRAFT

You know, spirit, I rather like this fellow.

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Mmmm. Pity you didn't come to meet him.

PICKMAN

What do moderns know of life and the forces behind it? You call the Salem witchcraft a delusion, but I'll wager my four-times-great-grandmother could have told you things. Look here, do you know the whole North End once had a set of tunnels that kept certain people in touch with each other's houses, and the burying-ground, and the sea?

(MORE)

PICKMAN (CONT'D)

Let them prosecute and persecute
above ground - things went on every
day that they couldn't reach, and
voices laughed at night that they
couldn't place!

THURBER

There's a tunnel system in North
Boston?

PICKMAN

Why, man, out of ten surviving
houses built before 1700 I'll wager
that in eight I can shew you
something queer in the cellar.
There's hardly a month that you
don't read of workmen finding
bricked-up arches and wells leading
nowhere in this or that old place.

THURBER

But why? I mean, what are they for?

PICKMAN

There were witches and what their
spells summoned; pirates and what
they brought in from the sea;
smugglers; privateers - and I tell
you, people knew how to live, and
how to enlarge the bounds of life,
in the old times! This wasn't the
only world a bold and wise man
could know!

LOVECRAFT

Ha! I agree! Spirit, I'm sure this
Pickman and I could be great
friends.

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Alas, you cherish your solitude.

PICKMAN

And to think of today in contrast,
with such pale-pink brains that
even a club of supposed artists
gets shudders and convulsions if a
picture goes beyond the feelings of
a Beacon Street tea-table!

THURBER

Yes, they can't handle more than
bowl of fruit or a vase of lilies!

PICKMAN

See here, you understand me. In my studio at my home, I can catch the night-spirit of antique horror and paint things that I couldn't even think of in Newbury Street.

THURBER

Of course. An artist must have inspiration!

PICKMAN

Just so! I decided long ago that one must paint terror as well as beauty from life, so I did some exploring in places where I had reason to know terror lives.

They are now in a dangerous part of town.

LOVECRAFT

He's right, Spirit. We seem to be passing into a very... unsavory neighborhood. These people are--

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Never fear, Lovecraft. They can't see you.

PICKMAN

It isn't so very far as distance goes, but it's centuries away as the soul goes. I took it because of the queer old brick well in the cellar - one of the sort I told you about. The windows are boarded up, but I like that all the better, since I don't want daylight for what I do. I paint in the cellar, where the inspiration is thickest, but I've other rooms furnished on the ground floor. Not much further now...

SOLSTICE PRESENT

You like the setting, Lovecraft?

LOVECRAFT

(positively giddy)

These ancient houses... they must have been standing in Cotton Mather's time. Look there - see that?

(MORE)

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

It's the peaked roof-line of the almost forgotten pre-gambrel type, though antiquarians tell us there are none left in Boston.

SOLSTICE PRESENT

Hmm. Interesting.

LOVECRAFT

They're going to that house. Look, a worm eaten ten-panelled door! O Spirit, why did I not go with Thurber?

10 PICKMAN'S STUDIO

10

The door creaks open.

PICKMAN

Hold on, let me light a lamp.
(strikes match)
There we are! Make yourself at home, Thurber. Here, I'll pour us a drink. You can take a gander at some of the paintings.

Pickman rummages about in the kitchen as Thurber walks about the house, looking at the paintings. He GASPS aloud.

THURBER

Pickman... my god...

PICKMAN

(off)
You like them?

THURBER

Well... I can see why you can't exhibit them. I thought I was "hard boiled" but this...

PICKMAN

Ha, ha, yes. I've always liked that one. Here, have some brandy.

THURBER

Thank you.
(drinks)
Hmm, now let me see more...

Thurber GASPS again. Pickman CHUCKLES quietly.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, they're astonishing.

DICKENS

The awful, the blasphemous horror, and the unbelievable loathsomeness and moral foetor of the paintings came from simple touches quite beyond the power of words to classify. The backgrounds were mostly old churchyards, deep woods, cliffs by the sea, brick tunnels, ancient panelled rooms, or simple vaults of masonry. The madness and monstrosity lay in the figures in the foreground - for Pickman's morbid art was pre-eminently one of demoniac portraiture. These figures were seldom completely human, but often approached humanity in varying degree. Most of the bodies, while roughly bipedal, had a forward slumping, and a vaguely canine cast. They were usually feeding - I won't say on what.

THURBER

Ugh!

PICKMAN

Alright there, Thurber? I'll have supper on in a moment.

THURBER

Supper? How can I eat, seeing these creatures of yours... eating.

PICKMAN

I didn't take you as one to be squeamish, Harry.

THURBER

I'm not a three-year-old kid, Pickman, but these faces, those accursed faces, they leer and slaver out of the canvas with the very breath of life! You've waked the fires of hell in pigment.

PICKMAN

Why thank you. Looks like you could use a refill.

THURBER

Now this one...

PICKMAN

Ah, "The Lesson" - yes?

THURBER

It's, well... are you implying that... oh dear lord.

Pickman laughs.

DICKENS

The canvas before them showed a squatting circle of nameless dog-like things in a churchyard, teaching a small child how to feed like themselves. The price of a changeling: the old myth about how the weird people leave their spawn in cradles in exchange for the human babes they steal. Pickman was showing what happens to those stolen babes - how they grow up.

THURBER

And this one... my god, that's you, Pickman.

DICKENS

It was an ancient Puritan interior with the family sitting about while the father read from the Scriptures. Every face but one shewed nobility and reverence, but that one reflected the mockery of the pit. It was that of a young man in years, and no doubt belonged to a supposed son of that pious father, but in essence it was the kin of the unclean things. It was their changeling - and in a spirit of supreme irony Pickman had given the features a very perceptible resemblance to his own.

PICKMAN

Come on, now, enough of colonial New England. Take a look at my modern studies in here.

The door CREAKS open. Thurber steps into the room. A moment later he SCREAMS.

PICKMAN (CONT'D)
You alright there, old man?

THURBER
I... ah, yes... oh...

Pickman CHUCKLES again.

PICKMAN
I'm glad you find them moving.

LOVECRAFT
God, how that man can paint!

DICKENS
There was a study called 'Subway Accident,' in which a flock of the vile things were clambering up from some unknown catacomb through a crack in the floor of the Boston Street subway and attacking a crowd of people on the platform. Another showed a dance on Copp's Hill among the tombs with the background of today. Then there were any number of cellar views, with monsters creeping in through holes and rifts in the masonry and grinning as they squatted behind barrels or furnaces and waited for their first victim to descend the stairs.

PICKMAN
Shall I bring you a touch more brandy, Thurber?

THURBER
Hmm? They're terrifying... because of...

PICKMAN
Yes?

THURBER
...the utter inhumanity and callous cruelty that must live in you. You'd have to be a relentless enemy of all mankind to take such glee in the torture of brain and flesh and the degradation of the mortal tenement.

Pickman chuckles rather menacingly.

THURBER (CONT'D)

They're terrifying because of their very greatness. You hide nothing. Nothing is blurred, distorted, or conventionalized; outlines are sharp and life-like, and details are almost painfully defined. And the faces! You've captured pandemonium itself, crystal clear in stark objectivity. That's it! You're not a fantaisiste or romanticist at all. No, you've coldly and sardonically reflected some stable, mechanistic, and well-established horror-world that you see fully, brilliantly, squarely, and unflinchingly. Lovecraft would have loved this!

LOVECRAFT

He's right, Spirit. One thing is clear: Pickman is in every sense - in conception and in execution - a thorough, painstaking, and almost scientific realist. Were it not for my penury, I would become his chief patron!

PICKMAN

Enough now. Come, let's eat. We'll see the studio after. Come in, sit down. Here, I'll pour you another.

Thurber stumbles into the kitchen. A wee KITTEN MEWS.

THURBER

Ah, and who's this? I wouldn't have taken you as the type for pets, Pickman.

PICKMAN

Ah, a little black kitten with the one white paw. Yes, he turned up one day. He's quite friendly, and I'm glad to have his help with the rats. I call him Tiny Tim.

THURBER

Why, hello, Tiny Tim.

Tiny Tim purrs angelically.

LOVECRAFT

(melting)

Awww...

(composing himself)

I am very fond of cats, spirit.

They EAT and DRINK and have a grand time.

THURBER

Oh, I do wish Lovecraft had come along for all this. Your work, well, it's challenging to me, but he's the sort for whom no morbid horror is too much. I've read a couple of his stories. You'd love them, Pickman, his tales are as atmospheric as your paintings. He could stand to rein in his rather stilted vocabulary, but I think he's really got potential.

PICKMAN

Well, where is he? He should have come up!

THURBER

Oh, he's one of those folks who wants to sit in a chair and watch life pass him by.

LOVECRAFT

No, I'm not!

SOLSTICE PRESENT

If only they could hear you.

THURBER

Maybe one of these days he'll come around. I hope he will.

PICKMAN

Would you care for some ice cream? I have some in the ice box.

THURBER

Marvelous!

LOVECRAFT

Ice cream? My favorite! Spirit, show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?

SOLSTICE PRESENT

There is more to see.

DICKENS

And on this word, Lovecraft found himself suddenly in the cellar with Pickman and Thurber, their holiday feast over.

Pickman turns on an acetylene gas lamp which lights the studio. There is the scurrying of rats, and the sharp MEOW of Tiny Tim as he chases one away.

PICKMAN

My studio!

THURBER

Ah, you've got a lot of pieces in the works. I see, so you draw them out on the canvas, create your composition, like this one. Very precise.

PICKMAN

That's right.

THURBER

What's the camera for?

PICKMAN

I use it in taking scenes for backgrounds, so that I can paint them from photographs in the studio instead of carting my outfit around the town for this or that view. A photograph can be quite as good as an actual scene or model for sustained work. I use them often. Are you alright? Here, tell me what you think of this one.

Pickman whisks the cover off of a new canvas. Thurber SCREAMS then crumples onto the ground gibbering in horror. Tense MUSIC begins.

DICKENS

It was a colossal and nameless blasphemy with glaring red eyes, and it held in bony claws a thing that had been a man, gnawing at the head as a child nibbles at a stick of candy. Its position was a kind of crouch, and as one looked one felt that at any moment it might drop its present prey and seek a juicier morsel.

(MORE)

DICKENS (CONT'D)

But, it wasn't even the fiendish subject that made it such an immortal fountainhead of all panic. Not that, nor the dog face with its pointed ears, bloodshot eyes, flat nose, and drooling lips. It wasn't the scaly claws nor the mould-caked body nor the half-hooved feet.

Thurber yelps again in fear. The sound of something MOVING nearby, something TOO BIG to be a rat. Tiny Tim HISSES.

PICKMAN

Thurber, try to contain yourself. It's best not to yell down here.

SOLSTICE PRESENT

It's not the painting that has Thurber so frightened, Lovecraft.

LOVECRAFT

No? What then?

SOLSTICE PRESENT

See that curled photograph, thumb tacked to the--

PICKMAN

(to Thurber)

Shh. Silence damn you!

Thurber whimpers quieter as Pickman pulls out a revolver and COCKS it. He opens the studio door.

THURBER

(terrified)

Where are you going? What is that gun for?

PICKMAN

Shhhh. This cellar has a lot of... vermin. Stay here.

He shuts the door. A faint scurrying sound comes through the door, followed by a series of squeals or bleats. Then a subdued clatter.

LOVECRAFT

The photograph? Let me see it....

Then a louder clatter not unlike a wooden cover falling off of the top of a well leading to charnel tunnels.

THURBER
Pickman! Come back!

LOVECRAFT
Spirit, this isn't a photo of any
background. It's the creature! This
was Pickman's model! Standing in
this very room!

Pickman SHOUTS in gibberish. Tiny Tim SCREECHES. BLAM, BLAM,
BLAM, BLAM, BLAM, BLAM.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)
Spirit, this... this is a
photograph from life!

Lovecraft GASPS! Musical THRILL! Theatrical WOOSH and MUSIC.

11 HOME AGAIN

11

DICKENS
And in an instant, Lovecraft found
himself returned to his own bedroom
in Providence. Lovecraft looked
about for the ghost but saw it not.
And just as quickly, he was back at
his desk, pen in hand, eager to
record the tale of Boston's
ghoulish artist.

The church bell chimes one again.

DICKENS (CONT'D)
As the stroke of the bell ceased to
vibrate, he remembered the
prediction of old Mason Farley, and
lifting up his eyes, beheld a
solemn Phantom coming towards him.

12 STAVE FOUR - THE LAST OF THE FOUR SPIRITS

12

MUSIC.

DICKENS
Stave Four - The Last of the Four
Spirits.

The Phantom slowly, gravely,
silently approached. Its form was
blacker than the darkest night,
gaunt, tall and rubbery.

(MORE)

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Upon its head were two curving black horns, and behind it a long thin tail undulated. But most troubling of all is that where its face should have been, the features were but flat and smooth - a faceless face. When it came near him, Lovecraft bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery. It was tall and stately when it came beside him, and its mysterious presence filled Lovecraft with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

LOVECRAFT

Am I in the presence of the Ghost of Solstice Yet To Come?

AN EERIE MUSICAL CUE serves as the voice of the Nightgaunt.

DICKENS

The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand.

LOVECRAFT

You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us. Is that so, Spirit?

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE is the only answer.

DICKENS

Although well used to ghostly company by this time, Lovecraft feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. Lovecraft was thrilled with a vague uncertain horror to know that somehow this ghost looked upon him without any eyes, while he, though he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a face of featureless black.

LOVECRAFT

Ghost of the Future! I fear you more than any spectre I have seen.

(MORE)

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

But as I know your purpose is to do me good, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

No mouth, of course. Well, lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!

DICKENS

The Phantom moved toward Lovecraft and in a moment, its hugely strong arms gripped him tight, strong fingers tickling against his ribs. And in a moment they were gone.

Music TRANSITION.

13

CASTLE DOWN BELOW

13

DICKENS

The two emerged from a vortex of swirling mists on the inside of a great stone castle of tremendous age.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, where are we? This looks more like the past than...

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

DICKENS

The ghost raised its shiny black hand and Lovecraft was silent. Before them, a lone figure moved slowly down the corridor, speaking quietly. A hooded cloak concealed the speaker's face, but its words were unmistakable.

The Outsider's voice is familiar yet old, his speech slightly awkward from having spent a lifetime speaking only to himself.

THE OUTSIDER

Unhappy is he to whom the memories of childhood bring only fear and sadness.

(MORE)

THE OUTSIDER (CONT'D)

Wretched is he who looks back upon
 lone hours in vast and dismal
 chambers with brown hangings and
 maddening rows of antique books, or
 upon awed watches in twilight
 groves of grotesque, gigantic, and
 vine-encumbered trees that silently
 wave twisted branches far aloft.
 Such a lot the gods have given to
 me - to me, the dazed, the
 disappointed; the barren, the
 broken.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, he speaks to himself. Has
 he no one with whom he can share
 his thoughts?

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

THE OUTSIDER

I know not where I was born, save
 that the castle was infinitely old
 and infinitely horrible, full of
 dark passages and having high
 ceilings where the eye could find
 only cobwebs and shadows. The
 stones in the crumbling corridors
 seemed always hideously damp, and
 there was an accursed smell
 everywhere, as of the piled-up
 corpses of dead generations. It was
 never light, so that I used
 sometimes to light candles and gaze
 steadily at them for relief, nor
 was there any sun outdoors, since
 the terrible trees grew high above
 the topmost accessible tower. There
 was one black tower which reached
 above the trees into the unknown
 outer sky, but that was partly
 ruined and could not be ascended
 save by a well-nigh impossible
 climb up the sheer wall, stone by
 stone.

LOVECRAFT

He's an outsider. I feel for him,
 Spirit.

THE OUTSIDER

I must have lived years in this
 place, but I cannot measure the
 time.

(MORE)

THE OUTSIDER (CONT'D)

Beings must have cared for my needs, yet I cannot recall any person except myself. I think that whoever nursed me must have been shockingly aged, since my first conception of a living person was that of somebody mockingly like myself, yet distorted, shrivelled, and decaying like the castle. To me there was nothing grotesque in the bones and skeletons that strewed some of the stone crypts deep down among the foundations. I fantastically associated these things with everyday events, and thought them more natural than the colored pictures of living beings which I found in many of the mouldy books. From such books I learned all that I know. No teacher urged or guided me, and I do not recall hearing any human voice in all those years. My aspect was a matter equally unthought of, for there were no mirrors in the castle, and I merely regarded myself by instinct as akin to the youthful figures I saw drawn and painted in the books. I felt conscious of youth because I remembered so little.

LOVECRAFT

What a pitiable soul, spirit. But why can I not see his face?

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

DICKENS

At this, the gaunt, black ghost merely raised its hand to cease Lovecraft's questioning.

MUSIC BED begins.

THE OUTSIDER

Outside, across the putrid moat and under the dark mute trees, I would often lie and dream for hours about what I read in the books; and would longingly picture myself amidst gay crowds in the sunny world beyond the endless forests.

(MORE)

THE OUTSIDER (CONT'D)

Once I tried to escape from the forest, but as I went farther from the castle the shade grew denser and the air more filled with brooding fear; so that I ran frantically back lest I lose my way in a labyrinth of nighted silence. Then in the shadowy solitude my longing for light grew so frantic that I could rest no more, and I lifted entreating hands to the single black ruined tower that reached above the forest into the unknown outer sky. And at last I resolved to scale that tower, fall though I might; since it were better to glimpse the sky and perish, than to live without ever beholding day.

We hear his footsteps ascending the stone stairs, bats, etc.

THE OUTSIDER (CONT'D)

In the dank twilight I climbed the worn and aged stone stairs till I reached the level where they ceased, and thereafter clung perilously to small footholds leading upward. Ghastly and terrible was that dead, stairless cylinder of rock; black, ruined, and deserted, and sinister with startled bats. I shivered as I wondered why I did not reach the light, and would have looked down had I dared.

All at once I felt my head touch a solid thing, and I knew I must have gained the roof, or at least some kind of floor. In the darkness I raised my free hand and tested the barrier, till finally I found a trapdoor leading to a level stone surface of greater circumference than the lower tower, no doubt the floor of some lofty and capacious observation chamber. I pushed it open and crawled through carefully, and the heavy slab fell back into place.

The stone trapdoor thunders shut and The Outsider slumps to the ground.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, what is this awful place?

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE. MUSIC bed continues.

THE OUTSIDER

Believing I was now at a prodigious height, far above the accursed branches of the wood, I dragged myself up from the floor and fumbled about for windows, that I might look for the first time upon the sky, and the moon and stars of which I had read. But on every hand I was disappointed; since all that I found were vast shelves of marble, bearing odious oblong boxes of disturbing size. More and more I reflected, and wondered what hoary secrets might abide in this high apartment so many aeons cut off from the castle below. Then unexpectedly my hands came upon a doorway, where hung a portal of stone, rough with strange chiselling.

He pulls upon the door, but it is locked. With a supreme burst of strength he pulls it open and GASPS.

THE OUTSIDER (CONT'D)

It was the purest ecstasy I have ever known; for shining tranquilly was the radiant full moon, which I had never before seen save in dreams and in vague visions I dared not call memories. A passing cloud veiled the beautiful moon, and it was still very dark when I reached a grating - which I tried carefully and found unlocked, but which I did not open for fear of falling from the amazing height to which I had climbed. Then the moon came out.

(MORE)

THE OUTSIDER (CONT'D)

The sight itself was as simple as it was stupefying, for it was merely this: instead of a dizzying prospect of treetops seen from a lofty eminence, there stretched around me beyond the grating nothing less than the solid ground, decked and diversified by marble slabs and columns, and overshadowed by an ancient stone church, whose ruined spire gleamed spectrally in the moonlight.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, the whole castle was beneath...

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE. A gust of wind shushes Lovecraft.

THE OUTSIDER

Half unconscious, I staggered out upon the white gravel path that stretched away in two directions. My mind, stunned and chaotic as it was, still held the frantic craving for light. I neither knew nor cared whether my experience was insanity, dreaming, or magic; but was determined to gaze on brilliance and gaiety at any cost. I knew not what my surroundings might be; though as I continued to stumble along I became conscious of a kind of fearsome latent memory. Hours must have passed before I reached what seemed to be my goal, a venerable ivied castle in a thickly wooded park, maddeningly familiar, yet full of perplexing strangeness to me.

The sound of the gayest REVELRY fades up as he approaches the castle.

THE OUTSIDER (CONT'D)

But what I observed with chief interest and delight were the open windows - gorgeously ablaze with light and sending forth sounds of the gayest revelry. Advancing to one of these I looked in and saw an oddly dressed company indeed; making merry, and speaking brightly to one another.

(MORE)

THE OUTSIDER (CONT'D)

I had never, seemingly, heard human speech before and could guess only vaguely what was said. Some of the faces seemed to hold expressions that brought up incredibly remote recollections, others were utterly alien.

LOVECRAFT

At last, Spirit, this poor soul...

THE OUTSIDER

I now stepped through the low window into the brilliantly lighted room, stepping as I did so from my single bright moment of hope to my blackest convulsion of despair and realization.

He steps into the room and immediately, the MUSIC STOPS and is followed by a wave of terror overcoming the room. People shriek and flee in maddened fright, grabbing friends, falling over furniture, etc...

THE OUTSIDER (CONT'D)

The cries were shocking; and as I stood in the brilliant apartment alone and dazed, listening to their vanishing echoes, I trembled at the thought of what might be lurking near me unseen. At a casual inspection the room seemed deserted, but when I moved towards one of the alcoves I thought I detected a presence there - a hint of motion beyond the golden-arched doorway leading to another and somewhat similar room. As I approached the arch I began to perceive the presence more clearly.

He utters a ghastly and revolting ululation of abject fright.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit! That archway doesn't lead to another room. That reflection, it's a--

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

THE OUTSIDER

I beheld in full, frightful
vividness the inconceivable,
indescribable, and unmentionable
monstrosity which had by its simple
appearance changed a merry company
to a herd of delirious fugitives. I
cannot even hint what it was like,
for it was a compound of all that
is unclean, uncanny, unwelcome,
abnormal, and detestable. It was
the ghoulish shade of decay,
antiquity, and dissolution; the
putrid, dripping eidolon of
unwholesome revelation, the awful
baring of that which the merciful
earth should always hide. God knows
it was not of this world - or no
longer of this world - yet to my
horror I saw in its eaten-away and
bone-revealing outlines a leering,
abhorrent travesty on the human
shape.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit no, it's a mirror - he's
seen himself. That face, can, can
it be?

THE OUTSIDER

I did not shriek, but all the
fiendish ghouls that ride the
nightwind shrieked for me as in
that same second there crashed down
upon my mind a single fleeting
avalanche of soul-annihilating
memory. I recognized, most terrible
of all, the unholy abomination that
stood leering before me as I
withdrew my sullied fingers from
its own.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, it is my face! I see, I
see. The case of this unhappy man
might be my own. My life tends that
way, now - alone and isolated. Say
it shall not be so, I beg you.

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

DICKENS

And in a heartbeat, the Ghost fell upon Lovecraft, clutching him in his fearsome jet black fingers. In an instant they were transported to another abandoned churchyard. There, among the weed-choked tombstones, the black figure stood among the moonlit graves and, at length, pointed his long slender arm to one.

LOVECRAFT

Which of these poor souls would you have me look upon, Spirit. Ah--
(moved)
Richard Upton Pickman. Here? A man of such talents? Unknown and forgotten? Left to moulder in this dismal field....

DICKENS

Next to Pickman's slab, Lovecraft espied a tiny pile of delicate bones, surmounted by a feline skull.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, no! These are the bones of Tiny Tim! That faithful kitten. O spirit, say it is not so!

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

DICKENS

The implacable spirit merely pointed to the broken off end of Pickman's slab, where steps leading into the charnel darkness were revealed.

LOVECRAFT

Spirit, do you mean for me to enter this grave?

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

DICKENS

And though the spirit had no face,
the meaning of his gesture could
not be misconstrued, and Lovecraft
steeled himself and slowly began to
descend into the crypt.

We hear the echo of his steps and the distant MEEPING of the
graveyard's denizens.

LOVECRAFT

I've often imagined such things,
Spirit, but to enter this
necropolis in person...

DICKENS

And as the darkness enveloped
Lovecraft, he was in another
instant fully transported.

Music THRILL

15

SWAN POINT

15

LOVECRAFT

Where have you brought me? Dawn is
breaking. Wait, I know this place.
Swan Point Cemetery - we're in
Providence! And, ah yes, the graves
of my poor parents.

(choked up)

I... wish I had known you better.
I'm sorry I've failed you. I know
you wanted me to make something of
myself. I'm a failure as a writer.
I wish I had...

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

Spirit, what marker do you point to
now? "Howard Phillips Lovecraft".
Spirit, this holds no fear to me,
for all men must--

DICKENS

But at this the gaunt and faceless
black figure pointed again more
insistently at the simple granite
marker.

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

LOVECRAFT

"I am Providence"? I must say it's a pleasing epitaph.

(discovering as he goes)

What's this? A book? "The Outsider and Other Tales" by H.P. Lovecraft. And this? It's like a green slipper with eyes and tentacles... Pages of sheet music - marked "Thank you H.P.". Hmm, a prismatic silver disc with a central hole, "an all-talking H.P. Lovecraft *motion picture*"? Clearly this is the future!

DICKENS

Lovecraft's mind reeled as he absorbed what appeared to tokens of respect and admiration left upon his grave.

LOVECRAFT

Could this be true? Spirit, tell me, I implore you: these visions, have you shown me what WILL be or what MAY be?

THE NIGHTGAUNT CUE.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

Spirit! Hear me! I am not the man I was. You have shown me this - there must be hope for me. You have shown me pity. Assure me that I yet may achieve these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!

DICKENS

The rubbery black figure fell upon Lovecraft and in a moment he found himself again alone in his room.

DICKENS

Stave Five - The End of It. Lovecraft looked about in wonderment. Yes! It was his own room. The bed was his own, the typewriter, the desk, all were his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

LOVECRAFT

Spirits, I understand you. Was it all a dream? Or reality? What's the difference? I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future! The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Mason Farley, or whatever your real name is! Festival, Solstice, and Christmas Time be praised for this!

(laughing to himself)

I don't know what to do! I am as merry as a schoolboy. A jolly Solstice and, yes, a merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world.

DICKENS

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!

LOVECRAFT

I don't know what day of the month it is! I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything.

Church bells PEAL in exultation!

DICKENS

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious! Glorious!

LOVECRAFT

(shouting out)

You there! Young man! What's today?

PROVIDENCE BOY

Eh?

LOVECRAFT

What's to-day, my fine fellow?

PROVIDENCE BOY

Today? Why, Christmas Day, you goof!

LOVECRAFT

It's Christmas Day! I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one long night. Young man! Do you know where the drugstore is?

PROVIDENCE BOY

Are you kidding me? Of course I do.

LOVECRAFT

An intelligent boy! Run to the drugstore and bring back tinsel and candy canes! All you can carry! I'll pay you a dollar!

PROVIDENCE BOY

Sure, mister!

LOVECRAFT

We can celebrate Solstice and Christmas both! Oh, Thurber! I hope I'm not too late.

DICKENS

And at this, Lovecraft smashed open his piggy bank, gathered his savings, threw on his best suit and dashed down the stairs.

HPL dashes down the stairs.

AUNT LILLIAN

Howard? Are you alright?

LOVECRAFT

Merry Christmas, my dear Aunt Lillian!

AUNT LILLIAN

Oh, well, thank you Howard.

LOVECRAFT

And the joy of the Solstice season to you, dear Aunt Annie.

AUNT ANNIE

Howard, are you feeling alright? Shall I make you some oatmeal?

LOVECRAFT

I've never felt better. But I must dash out right now to catch my friend.

AUNT LILLIAN

A friend?

AUNT ANNIE

Howard, I'm going to make a special holiday supper! You probably won't--

LOVECRAFT

What? No, no, you shall not! You two take marvelous care of me. Today, I shall prepare our Yuletide feast. Leave everything to me!

AUNT ANNIE

Are you sure you're alright?

LOVECRAFT

Why yes. I'll see you soon, dear Aunt Annie.

He KISSES her.

AUNT ANNIE

Howard!

LOVECRAFT

Anon, dear Aunt Lillian. Here's a dollar for a boy that will be coming by soon. And turn up the heat, won't you? It's freezing in here. From now on I want warmth! Nothing but warmth!

He KISSES her and the door shuts behind him.

AUNT LILLIAN

Well that was disturbing.

AUNT ANNIE

I hope he hasn't gone mad, the poor dear.

Transition music: GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN.

Lovecraft walks down a snowy sidewalk, humming a carol to himself. He knocks on a door. It opens.

THURBER

Ah, Lovecraft, Merry Christmas.
Come in, come in.

LOVECRAFT

I hope I'm not too late.

THURBER

For...?

LOVECRAFT

To join you on the trip up to
Boston. I've been short sighted. I
see now that I should travel more,
for I keep Providence in my heart,
and take it with me anywhere I go.
I'll gladly accompany you to
Boston, or Salem, or even New York,
if we don't stay too long.

THURBER

Ah, well, that's quite a change of
heart, but I'm afraid there's been
a change of plans. Here, let me
take your coat.

LOVECRAFT

Change of...

THURBER

My friend came down to visit me
instead. Lovecraft, may I introduce
you to Richard Peters, one of
Boston's most daring artists.

LOVECRAFT

Peters? Ah, yes, Pickman was but a
dream name.

THURBER

How's that?

LOVECRAFT

Nothing, nothing. Mr. Peters, what
a pleasure to make your
acquaintance. H.P. Lovecraft at
your service.

PETERS

(genial)

How do you do? Thurber's told me
about you and your writings.

A wee cat meows.

LOVECRAFT

Ah, and who's this?

PETERS

Ah, that's my cat. Tiny Tim, meet Mr. Lovecraft.

LOVECRAFT

Tiny Tim? All black with one white paw? It's not possible!

PETERS

Oh yeah, sometimes they have just one spot of color.

Tiny Tim purrs contentedly.

DICKENS

And the tiny cat and Lovecraft looked intently into each others eyes. And Lovecraft would have sworn the cat winked at him.

PETERS

Well, he certainly likes you.

LOVECRAFT

I'm very fond of cats. Where did you get him?

PETERS

Oh my neighbors, the Ulthars, up in Boston had a huge litter. It seems this little fellow adopted me.

THURBER

Well sit you two, have some coffee.

LOVECRAFT

Thank you, Harry. This is delightful. I'm a rather voluminous correspondent - it's quite a treat to sit among friends rather than just writing them.

PETERS

Harry tells me you write uncanny stories too. What are you working on?

LOVECRAFT

(truly happy)

A long night makes for rich dreams,
and I've just had some
extraordinary ones. In one, I
returned to the snow blanketed city
of Kingsport...

Music transition.

18

SHOPPING

18

DICKENS

And among friends old and new,
Lovecraft truly felt the joy of the
season and a wave of inspiration to
seize his own vision and set to
paper something truly
"Lovecraftian". He ended his visit,
inviting Thurber and Peters and
Tiny Tim to join him and his aunts
for the Feast of Saturnalia which
he himself would prepare. And with
a spring in his step and real joy
in his heart, Lovecraft visited the
shops of Providence, buying
ingredients for a banquet quite
beyond his usual repast of beans on
toast. And everywhere he went, a
new Lovecraft greeted the world.

LOVECRAFT

Felicitations, madame! Greetings to
you, good sir.

DICKENS

For a special friend, he procured a
special holiday gift and crowned it
with a Brumalian wish.

Outside, at the news stand. A group of carolers in the
background are singing "Deck the Halls"

LOVECRAFT

Halloo - Jasper. Felicitations of
the season upon thee.

JASPER

Ah, thank you, Mr. Lovecraft.
Didn't expect to see you here
today.

LOVECRAFT

I wanted to bring by a little holiday cheer for you, sir.

JASPER

Oh, you didn't need to...

LOVECRAFT

With my thanks for keeping me well supplied with weird tales and astounding stories.

JASPER

A fruitcake? My favorite! Mr. Lovecraft, you shouldn't have. I thought your budget...

LOVECRAFT

My budget can't be better spent. And I wrote this for you. I guess I had a few extra words after all!

JASPER

"From the damnable shadows of madness, From the corpse-ridden hollow of Weir, comes a horrible message of gladness and a ghost-guided poem of cheer...."

LOVECRAFT

...and a gloom-spouting pupil of Poe sends the pleasantest wish of the year!

JASPER

That's the stuff, Mr. L!

LOVECRAFT

Enjoy the season. And call me H.P.!

Howard approaches the carolers.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

My friends, you sound wonderful! Try these lyrics:

(Lovecraft sings!)

"Dance the cultists in their folly,

CAROLERS

(unsure but going with it)

Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la!

LOVECRAFT

That's it! Wonderful!

Fade out on the singing.

19

CHRISTMAS FEAST

19

DICKENS

And returning home, Howard set to preparing a marvelous feast for his aunts and his friends. And at last, when the goose was roasted, the potatoes mashed, and the apple juice poured, all sat down together to feast.

We hear them all, gathered around the dining room table.

LOVECRAFT

Harry, you sit here, next to Aunt Lillian. Richard, you're there at the end.

PETERS

I just wanted to thank you for inviting us over and I've brought a small gift, I hope you might enjoy.

AUNT LILLIAN

Oh, is it one of your paintings?

AUNT ANNIE

Open it, Howard!

LOVECRAFT

I'm opening. Oh, Richard, it's wonderful.

AUNT ANNIE

Let us see.
(seeing it)
Oh my.

AUNT LILLIAN

Annie, let me - ooh, it's positively sepulchral.

PETERS

I call it "A Feasting of Ghouls." I guess it's not suitable for...

AUNT ANNIE

Mr. Peters, you're going to fit right in in this house.

LOVECRAFT

I love it! Thank you. And now I'd like to propose a toast. I'd like to thank my dear aunts who both look after me and show such faith in me as a writer. I promise to keep writing in my own weird style, come what may, and royalties be damned. I offer my apologies to writers whose work I may have unfairly maligned in the past. As reparations to them, I promise to help any writer I can to find their voice. To my friends, I promise to go forth and enjoy the pleasure of their rich companionship. Now then I...

Tiny Tim MEOWS.

LOVECRAFT (CONT'D)

No, no, I haven't forgotten you, Tiny Tim. Here's a saucer of egg nog for you. May the gods bless us, every one!

Everyone laughs. Fade down on the merry gathering and fade up on a final Solstice carol.

DICKENS

Lovecraft was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more. He became a good friend, a generous mentor, and a dedicated artist, painting word pictures of cosmic fear and pitiless beauty that have yet to be surpassed and will inspire generations. And he had much further intercourse with Spirits, but only in his dreams.

20

CONCLUSION

20

DICKENS

You've been listening to a special holiday edition of Dark Adventure Radio Theatre, brought to you by our sponsor, the New Jersey Fruit Cake Company. Be sure to give the gift of NewJeFrew fruitcakes to your loved ones this Christmas season. They're the nuttiest!

(MORE)

DICKENS (CONT'D)

I'm Barnaby Dickens. Until next week, this is Dark Adventure Radio Theatre reminding you to never go anywhere alone; if it looks bad, don't look; and save the last bullet for yourself.

ANNOUNCER

"A Solstice Carol" was adapted for radio and produced by Sean Branney and Andrew Leman, based on works by H. P. Lovecraft and Charles Dickens. Original music by Troy Sterling Nies. The Dark Adventure Ensemble featured: Leslie Baldwin, Aidan Branney, Sean Branney, Dan Conroy, Chad Fifer, Alaine Kashian, Jacob Lyle, Andrew Leman, Barry Lynch, David Pavao, Josh Thoenke, Eddy Will and Time Winters. Tune in next week for "It Crawled to Stonehenge" a shocking tale of unspeakable archeology. Dark Adventure Radio Theatre is a production of the HPLHS Broadcasting Group, a subsidiary of HPLHS, Inc., copyright 1931...plus eighty-four.

Radio STATIC and fade out.

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