

## THE CRY IN THE DARKNESS

By Richard Baron

Mamie Bishop and I had been courting for a number of years before I proposed. I think that we would still be courting now had it not been for the incident involving that local misfit, Wilbur Whateley. The details of which are too vast and unsettling to go into here - only have it known that following his disappearance, a gloom seemed to settle over the town. Inhabitants unwilling to discuss the event hid away behind closed doors, avoiding each other's gaze for fear that mentioning "the unspeakable name" of *Whateley* would bring some unknown terror lumbering to their door. For Mamie, who had visited their residence on past occasions, the effects were far more pronounced.

She became withdrawn, her skin affecting a sickly pallor. More than once she was found walking alone in the hills at night, her head tilted up to the sky as though she was searching for some sign or movement in the clouds. Naturally, I became concerned, and after ushering her back to her parents' home following one of those midnight jaunts, I sat her down and poured out my heart. Racked as I was with worry, I would say, and do, anything in my power to help alleviate whatever concerns gave her cause to act in such a manner. Anything to have the Mamie I loved safe.

I will never forget the way she looked at me then.

Her face wet with tears, black hair raining down upon her brow, she raised her head and said, "A child, Earl. I want a child."

Later, as she lay deep in sleep, I pondered over what she had asked. Her father, his advanced age bowing his back under his nightshirt, heard my concerns with little response, but allowed me to stay in their parlor for the evening. My thoughts, shared but still weighing heavily upon me, kept me awake. Could it be that a child would bring Mamie stability? I confess, her request made little sense to me, but perhaps having an affectionate and rosy-cheeked child to fill her time would keep Mamie's apparent mental decline at bay. The depth of my love seemed to have no bearing upon her mood of late, though she oft confessed that her heart was mine alone. The arrival of our child would perhaps increase the recently tenuous bond between us and Mamie, the dear sweet Mamie that I had thought lost, would surface once again.

There was another issue that had to be confronted, though. Our courtship was no secret but a swell in her belly would inevitably raise questions in town. Unbetrothed women bearing children were not only frowned upon in Dunwich, but shown the kind of disgust usually reserved for the diseased and the mad. Through the years I had seen young girls, barely budding into womanhood, removed from their place amongst our population, sometimes by physical force. Confused and tearful, these unwanted mothers were forced to walk shamefacedly past as their neighbors, and

sometimes their own flesh and blood, poured scornful epithets upon them. Those who did not leave peacefully were dragged from their homes and pushed out toward the hills in the middle of the night. I know not what befalls those poor creatures - only that I would not give cause for Mamie to be judged in the same manner. So it was that as soon as she rose from her slumber, while the morning mist was still low upon the ground, I knelt before my love and asked for her hand.

The wedding was a small affair. I suspect those who stayed away did so because of the ridiculous rumors swirling around, whispers which suggested Mamie was present at the death of that creature, Whateley. More than once I had heard the mutterings of gossipy old women as I went from shop to shop, purchasing as many items as I could afford, to create a glad air and a joyful space for our nuptials. Those that did attend did their best to keep our spirits high but I was glad when the day was over and we were able to retire. As we lay in what was now our cottage for the first time as man and wife, I remember thinking that this was a new start and with Mamie resting beside me, I dared hope that the troubles unsettling her were behind us.

I have only scant recollection of the weeks that followed. We ate, laughed and made love as though the world outside mattered not; all that we required could be found in each other's embrace. When our honeymoon ended and the day came for me to resume my duties at the Corey farm, I

whistled a cheery tune as I walked. Even the darkness of the waters that flowed through Bishops Brook, whose blackened banks wind between my home and my employer's, did little to dispel my lightness of mood. The spring is a notoriously unforgiving time for labor upon the farm but I worked with exuberance, turning and sowing the soil, fully aware of the similarities between earth and man; for had I not also planted a seed that would spring to life, a life that would grow as surely as the crops beneath my feet in the coming months?

I have since come to learn that there are no certainties. A crop may fail for no apparent reason no matter how much care is taken. And this is as true for man as it is for the land. Come the autumn, Corey's farm fielded the poorest yield its previously fecund lands had seen in recent years, and Mamie showed no signs of being with child.

As the nights drew in, melancholy seemed to befall our home. The bright wildflowers that Mamie had earlier that summer picked to decorate our bedroom now lay shriveled in their vases. Dust lay undisturbed upon each surface where I now laid my hand. Mamie too seemed to wither, in sympathy with her surroundings. Her skin, which had gained color following our marriage, once again paled and her eyes, which only months before had enticed me with their bright allure, now lay deep in her sockets. At night she rejected my advances, sighing that the act of love was pointless, since my sweat and labors yielded no

reward.

More than once she cursed me for my inadequacies.

In time she gave up sleeping in our marital bed altogether.

Instead, the place of her choosing was the wide bench under our single wide window, her eyes looking to the hills that rose as blackened waves under a gibbous moon, seemingly searching for... what? I can only wonder as to why the child she so desired eluded her. My attempts to reason with her were always met with vehement denials of my logic. She would shout and curse, blaspheming at the Lords name, using words that I care not to repeat and on occasion it seemed as though she was taken by some kind of madness, ushering sounds and words that made little sense to me until at last the apparent fever broke and she would fall, unconscious, upon the floor. It became a habit of mine to allow her this fearful expression until her waking self passed from the world. Her sleeping self could then, and only then, be coaxed back into our bed.

I was at odds as to what course of action to take. I dared not instill the help of doctors for fear that Mamie would be taken from me, but I privately acknowledged that her unstable mood could be a sign of madness. She needed help but I knew not how to provide it.

Fear led me to choose the path of making no choice at all.

I set about my normal duties as best I could,

working at the farm during the day, taking care of her in the evening. I did our laundry and attempted to be something of a cook as well, so that when we fetched food and supplies from town on the week's end, no one would suspect our life together was out of sorts. I lived always in the hope that whatever madness had seized her would soon pass. It was a foolish endeavor though, for having worked later than usual one evening, I returned home to find the house totally empty. Fearing some ill fate had befallen my wife, I quickly searched the surrounding fields but with darkness fast approaching, I was forced to return home in search of a lantern. I ignored the house and went straight to rummage in the woodshed... it was then I happened to look up at the bedroom finding it brightened by the warm yellowness of candlelight. Mamie was lying sound upon the bed when I burst into the room; her hair spread upon the pillow, arms crossed to her stomach and a small but welcome smile playing upon her features. I breathed a sigh of relief, grateful that she was safe. Perhaps I had been mistaken and she hadn't left the house at all but was merely out of sight; in the basement perhaps, though I knew not why. But then I looked down and saw the dirt at her feet, her toes blackened with mud, the mess of it all staining the sheets upon which she lay.

At breakfast the next morning I asked of her excursion but she seemed without knowledge of it and I quickly found that pursuing the matter only aggravated her. Unsure as to a reason for this new

development in her behavior, I put it down to an act of sleepwalking, that absurd condition I had heard the good Dr. Armitage speak of. Thus decided, I tried to dispel the incident from my mind. As I passed Mamie her toast and jam I made a lewd remark about her nightdress being too dirty to wear at the dinner table, and was rewarded as my wife allowed me to remove it from her in a most charming fashion!

Yet the following night unsettling events happened to raise my concern over Mamie's wanderings. I was woken from my slumber by what sounded like the loud cry of an animal. I bolted upright and looking around the room found Mamie to be gone. Again the cry came, its sound piercing the cool night air, causing me to move to the window in an attempt to gauge its whereabouts. At first I could see little, yet as I stood with my vision straining against the darkness, the moon (which had previously been obscured by clouds) broke free from its cover. The brief incandescent sliver allowed me to take in a good view of the surrounding hills.

For a moment I was unsure at to what I was seeing, or sure that light and shadow were playing tricks on my sight, but no; there above the peak of Sentinel Hill a vast silhouette was moving against the sky, its flank lined with uncountable appendages. I stood transfixed as the giant shape moved in a rhythmic motion to and from the ground as though in performance of some ritual. Then the piercing cry sounded again and the

vision was gone, as quickly as it had appeared, swallowed by the arrival of the very clouds whose brief retreat had granted me sight.

I remained motionless, unable to believe what I had witnessed, yet the animal sound continued to rise in volume for some time before finally extinguishing itself. The silence brought me to my senses and a sudden fear gripped me. Mamie was alone in the night. I dare not entertain the thought that she had fallen prey to the thing I had seen upon the hill, and only hoped that wherever her nocturnal travel had taken her it was far from the beast I heard sounding in the dark. I ran downstairs, this time grabbing a lantern before leaving the house, and holding it aloft I began calling her name into the night. I do not know how long I searched but it seemed like more hours than a normal night contains. Surroundings I knew all too well by the light of day became alien to me as my feet sought hold amongst the shadows. Briars grabbed at my ankles, branches lined with thorns tugged at my clothes, tearing my face and hands, and all the while my heart thundered loudly in my chest for fear that I may actually encounter the thing I had glimpsed. It was as I finally reached the base of Sentinel Hill that I was finally given a respite from my worries for there, appearing out of the dark, moving towards me like a moth to a flame, was my Mamie. I ushered her home and though I questioned her on her whereabouts she remained silent as though under some kind of slumbering spell; the only recognition that she

heard my words a smile upon her face which appeared in an almost mocking manner.

As I lay her upon the bed my eyes strayed in the candle light to her nightclothes and I felt a chill descend upon me. The white of her gown was stained here and there with darkened residue and once again her feet were soiled with mud from where she had traveled, but this was as nothing to the horror I felt when I removed her garment. Though I had before taken advantage of her nocturnal stillness as a welcome chance to find my own release against her soft flesh, this time as I raised the fabric from her sleeping body I came across a moist sticky substance that lay upon her skin. It pooled in the center of her stomach and smeared down the pale expanse of her thighs in thick globulous streams. She had fallen into a bog, perhaps, there in the darkness, or in her desire to find her way home had clambered unseeing through a pool of algae-covered rainwater.

Heaven knows what may have befallen her.

Unable to bear the thought of her sleeping through what remained of the night covered in that filth, I gently carried her downstairs. She slumbered upon the living room floor while I heated water, one pot at a time, to fill the bath. As I washed the filth from her body I gave thanks to God for returning her safely to me, adding a prayer for driving whatever it was I saw upon the hill from our midst; the terrible animal sound that chilled my soul did not sound again the remainder of the night.

I would like to tell you my story ends there, and that with the morning the worst of these unfortunate events were behind us. Yet this was but the start of greater horrors I would have to endure. The very next night, exhausted though I was from my wife's recent nocturnal activities, I was stirred from my slumber by the strange sounding in the darkness. Again, I found Mamie missing. The search ended only when I found her at the foot of the hill, caked in the same manner as she was previously.

The ritual was repeated subsequent evenings. Sometimes I would sleep through and wake happily to find her next to me only to glance down and once again find her feet ruined with dirt. More often I awoke alone at night, disturbed from my restless sleep by that terrible sound. I tried locking the doors to the cottage... Mamie's sleepwalking didn't render her without cunning, it seemed, so when this didn't end her wanderings, I set upon a plan of action: I would follow her.

I finished work early at the Corley's farm that day, and knowing of the vigil to come, napped into the early evening. Then, sufficiently rested, I went to bed as normal only this time I feigned sleep. In the oncoming darkness I waited for Mamie to leave. For what seemed like hours, I carried on my charade, nearly succumbing to actual slumber as the moon sailed high into the night sky, but as I was on the cusp of finally surrendering I sensed the motion of my wife rising in a slow deliberate movement towards the door. I waited for only a

few moments before donning my coat and boots and following her out into the darkness.

I took care to obscure myself by using the branches and wild brambles that lined her route as camouflage. I fell behind her at an increasing pace as I tried to mask my presence, flinching as a twig snapped loudly under my foot and ah! I held my breath in fear but as I realized that my wife noticed me not at all, I ignored any further hiding spots and ran after her in earnest.

We reached the hill nearly together and began to ascend to its peak, Mamie apparently unconcerned by its steep incline, her dainty frame moving on and increasing her pace as I alone struggled for breath against its steepness. As I neared its crest I lost sight of her, the undergrowth being at its thickest there. I once reached an impassable section of gnarled oaks and bushes and was forced to backtrack in search of easier access. As I groped my way around in the darkness I was suddenly stilled by that terrible cry, its sharp sound cutting through the night chilling my nerves, and I dare now to admit that for a moment I remained motionless. Was it not for the fear of Mamie's safety I would have retreated in great haste.

I remained strong though the cries continued, and made my way to its source. In time the hill evened out and I found myself looking at a large, moonlit plateau. There on the ground before me was a strip of white I recognized from Mamie's dressing gown. Grasping the retrieved fabric in

one hand, I edged nearer, with those terrible cries gaining frequency as I approached.

As I brushed the last of the branches from my way I came upon a sight that caused me to shriek aloud in horror!

How do I describe the terrifying image before me? How do I put into words the spectacle without resorting to madness myself?

The mass of gray flesh that pulsed along its slug-like body, the myriad of snake-like tentacles (each as thick as oaks) that swarmed in frenzy from its head crowned above an array of beaked mouths that snapped and spitted. The thing was no creature that could be named. The closest resemblance being that of some giant disfigured Octopi... it moved as I had previously witnessed from my room and as I followed the monstrosity's motions, I let out a cry at seeing what had become of Mamie.

There she lay under the head of the monster, her gown lying in a wrinkled mass around her neck, exposing her perfect breasts, upon which eel-like tongues licked. Her legs were spread wide by tentacle appendages that sprang from huge follicles at the creature's sides. Still others erupted from those cloying beaks and traversed eagerly up her moistened thighs. The horror was all encompassing and though I had gone to the hilltop with the intent of protecting Mamie, I must have had some sort of blackout for the next thing I remembered was waking at home, the sun signaling morning, and my wife sleeping soundly

at my side.

Some would say I dreamt those events, and had suffered nothing more than an unusual nightmare. I would like to think this is true. Mamie's sleepwalking ceased that night, as did the crying sounds from the hill, and never again did I see the creature I witnessed upon its peak, though never again will I set foot there.

Whatever the cause of Mamie's odd behavior its effect has apparently passed for good because she seems happier than I have ever known her to be. She rubs her belly each night, content that she has recently started to develop a bump where her blossoming child grows. I smile at her exactly as often as she smiles at me, honestly happy in the pregnancy but secretly grow fearful of what may become of us. I keep telling myself that it was but a dream yet the sound still haunts me.

The terrible sound that reached me in the darkness, that hideous sound that so terrified my nights, did not come from the beast upon the hill. No, not from the throat of some animal, but from that of my wife as she lay beneath that unnameable horror, writhing not in terror... but in ecstasy.

*Wandering Bride*  
by Galen Dara



excerpted from *Cthulhurotica*, edited by Carrie Cuinn

Cthulhurotica © 2010, 2011 Dagan Books  
Stories copyright © 2010, 2011 by the authors.  
Artwork copyright © 2010, 2011 by the artists.

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be  
reproduced in any form  
without written permission from the publisher.

<http://daganbooks.com>

