

# Four Tales of Cthulhu

**H. P. Lovecraft for  
Young Readers**

H. P. Lovecraft

edited and abridged by Matthew MacDonald

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*The Outsider*, *The Cats of Ulthar*, and *The Shadow Out of Time*  
are abridged versions of stories by H. P. Lovecraft.  
*A Gift From the Deep* is an original story by Matthew  
MacDonald.

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# THE OUTSIDER



I do not know where I was born, only that I lived in a castle that was infinitely old and infinitely horrible.

## THE OUTSIDER

I sat in dark halls that were thick with cobwebs and shadows. I wandered in crumbling corridors, over stones that were cold and sickeningly damp. The smell of mold and decay was everywhere.

Thick trees grew around the castle, rising above all but the tallest tower. The trees choked out the sunlight, keeping the castle in an endless night. Sometimes I would light a candle to comfort myself, and watch its tiny flame flicker in the dark.

I must have lived years in this place, but I had no way to measure the time. Someone must have cared for my needs, but I cannot remember any person except myself, or anything alive except the scurrying rats and the silent spiders.

I think the person that cared for me must have been very old. The first image I have of a living person is someone that looked like me but was distorted, shriveled, and decaying like the castle.

## THE OUTSIDER

I learned about the outside world from the old books in the library.



There was no teacher to guide me. In fact, I do not remember hearing any human sound in all those years. I did not even hear my own voice, because I had never thought to try to speak. Nor did I think about my appearance, because there were no mirrors in the castle. But I knew, by instinct, that I was like the young children I saw drawn in the books.

Often, I would lie outside, across the putrid moat and under the dark mute trees, and dream for hours about what I read in the books.

I would picture myself in happy crowds in the sunny world beyond the endless forest. And then a deep longing would fill my heart to leave the castle and join the outside world.

Once I tried to escape by crossing the forest that encircles the castle. But as I went farther from the castle walls, the shade grew deeper and the air became thick and forbidding. I felt a growing fear that I would lose my way in the silence, and that fear rose into a panic, until I ran frantically back to the safety of the crumbling castle.

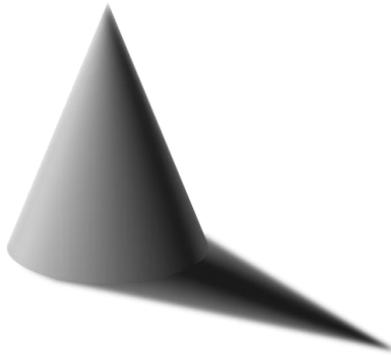
For endless days I dreamed and waited, but I did not know what I waited for.

In the castle, there was one black tower that reached above the trees into the unknown sky, but its staircase was crumbling and ruined. The only way to reach the top of the tower was



*amnesia:* a loss of memory, a gap in a  
person's memory

## THE SHADOW OUT OF TIME



## **Part 1. My Strange Amnesia**

My name is Nathan Peaslee. My childhood was an ordinary childhood. My life was a quiet life. I married a good woman and had three dear children. I was a respected professor of economics at Miskatonic University.

And then a shadow fell upon me.

It was on May 14 that the amnesia struck. I was teaching a class at the university when I began to see strange shapes drift before my eyes. My head ached, and I had a feeling as though someone else was trying to take control of my thoughts. The students saw that something was gravely wrong and they called for help. Then I slumped to the ground, unconscious.

It would be five years before I would see the world again.

But my body did not remain still for those years. Though I have no memory of that time, others have told me what happened. Shortly

after I fell, doctors brought me to my house, where I was given the best possible medical care. The doctors agreed that I seemed physically unharmed, but no one could wake me.

The next day, at 3 a.m., a change took place. First, my eyes flew open and I began to speak. Those who heard me knew at once that something unnatural had happened. I spoke with great effort, as though I was unfamiliar with my lips and tongue. But even as my speech improved, I did not sound like the man my friends and family had known before. I used old and outdated words, as though I had learned English using a dusty dictionary from a distant generation. My pronunciation was odd, and my accent sounded like a traveler from no earthly land.

I quickly regained my strength, but me—or the *me* that was *not me*—used my hands and legs clumsily. On the first day of my waking, I

walked, stumbled, and touched my face as though I was unfamiliar with my own body.

Most disturbing of all, I seemed to have a new personality. I became aggressive and adventurous. I craved knowledge as though it was a sumptuous feast, and I a starving man. I did many things that I still do not understand.

My family could not live with stranger I had become. After two years, my wife left me. I have never seen her since, nor have I had any contact with my elder son or my small daughter.

But none of these changes troubled my new personality. Instead, I began a mission to study the world's greatest scholarly works. I researched feverishly. I seemed to have an intelligence far beyond my usual abilities. I could read entire books at inhuman speed, and memorize every detail. I could grasp complex figures and mathematics at a glance. I sought out the most famous academic libraries across the globe, and I devoured their contents.

I also took to visiting many remote and desolate places. I spent a month in the Himalayas, and then took a camel trip into the unknown deserts of Arabia. During the following summer, I took a ship and sailed into the far reaches of the Arctic. But each time I returned seemingly disappointed. Whatever I was searching for, I did not find it.

In the last year of my amnesia, I began to build a strange machine in my study. I kept it carefully hidden from most people, but those who did see it—a workman, a servant, and the new housekeeper—say that it was an odd mixture of rods, gears, and lenses.

I do not know what I did with this creation. But I believe it had something to do with the end of my amnesia, on September 26. That day I was seen meeting with an odd stranger no one seemed to know. After that, the lights were left on in my study until late in the night. Someone—I do not know who—

phoned the police and told them that they should check on me at once.

When the police arrived at my house, they found a curious scene. The mysterious machine was gone. Every scrap of paper I had written on over the past five years had been burned to ashes in the fireplace. And I was found unconscious once more, in an easy chair in my study.

And so I remained for many hours, until around noon the following day. Then, the doctors who were watching heard me babbling nonsense:

“... of the economists of that period. Jevons’ attempt to link the commercial cycle of prosperity with the physical cycle of the solar spots ...”

The words were from my Thursday morning lecture to the economics class, the lecture that had been interrupted five years ago when I tumbled to the ground.

I, Nathan Peaslee, had returned just as suddenly as I had left.

## **Part 2. The Dreams Begin**

I tried to return to normal life, but that was more difficult than I expected.

When others told me what I had done during my amnesia, I was shaken. I tried to continue teaching, but strange ideas haunted my days, and strange dreams clouded my nights.

My sense of time was subtly disordered. I felt like I was living in many places at once. It was as though my mind was drifting to other ages, traveling at once deep into the past and far into the future.

Haunted by the idea that someone else had inhabited my body, I searched for any scrap of information that could tell me what had happened in those five dark years. I also set out to find if my case was unique, or if

other people had experienced similar episodes. I hunted through medical literature, reading about every case of amnesia, schizophrenia, and split personality that I could find. Then, I looked farther back, into old historical texts to find the stories that historians had called demonic possession or witchcraft.

I found that most cases of amnesia were very different. However, there was a small number of stories that were shockingly similar to my own. Some of them were bits of ancient folklore, others were medical reports, and still more were tales buried deep in old history books. These cases were spread across hundreds of years, reaching back to the very beginning of recorded time.

In each case, the story was the same. A person—usually a brilliant scholar, scientist, or artist—suddenly began a strange second life. The change started with vocal and bodily awkwardness, followed by a frantic hunger for knowledge. Some time later, the person's

rightful mind returned as suddenly as it had left. But the sufferer would be forever haunted by strange dreams that seemed like the fragments of buried memories.

What to make of this? If the stories were true, then my experience was part of something larger, something more sinister, something that stretched out across the ages of human history. But what this could be, I did not know.

When I was not researching, I struggled to cope with the dreams. I had never before been a vivid dreamer. But now I was overwhelmed by nightly visions that seemed more real than the experiences of my waking life.

At first, these dreams were strange rather than horrible. I drifted through time, seeing the hot swamps of a hundred and fifty million years ago, when dinosaurs and other enormous beasts roamed the Earth. I saw a future where

no humans remained, only giant beetle-like creatures scurrying over cold and barren rock.

One dream occurred more frequently than all the others. In this dream, I would find myself in an enormous hall. There were colossal round windows and high arched doors, and tables as tall as an ordinary room.



It was as though I were in a castle of giants.

When I approached the walls I saw that they were built from huge blocks of granite. Many of the blocks were carved with letters from a language I had never seen before. I can still picture the shape of these strange, curving symbols.



As I roamed the great hall, I discovered more rooms, each as huge as the last. In every room, vast shelves lined the walls, holding what seemed to be thousands of book-like metal boxes.

There were no chairs in these massive halls, but the tops of the towering tables had books, papers, and what seemed to be writing materials—oddly shaped jars with a purplish substance, and rods with stained tips. As tall as the tables were, I was able to look down upon them from an even greater height.

I seemed to be a prisoner in this grand place. But I was not afraid—at least, not at first.

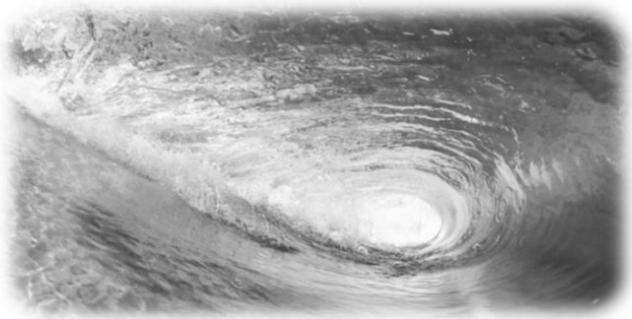
### **Part 3. The Great Race of Yith**

The real horror began that summer, when I first saw the living things.

My mind was tired from months of disturbed sleep. I began to see great clouds of vapor in the halls of the giant city that lived in my dreams. Night after night, these clouds grew steadily more solid, until I could see the monstrous outlines of alien creatures.



## A GIFT FROM THE DEEP



I remember two things about that time, each equally distinct in my mind. I remember the pure happiness I felt when Tasi invited me to spend a summer month with her family on the coast of the Ipswitch Bay. And I remember the horror that swallowed us both, before I truly understood the meaning of my discoveries on the beach.

At the beginning, the trip was a blissful dream. Me—a twelve-year-old girl—roaming the sandy beaches and rocky coast with my dearest friend! Jumping from one sun-bleached rock to the next, breathing salty air, hearing the calls of sea birds spiraling above us. After a dreary year of school in a dull and drizzly town, there was no better escape.

But even from the beginning, there were some hints that my month in paradise was not going to unfold exactly as I thought. The town of Innsmouth, where we were staying, was not at all as I had imagined. The wooden buildings sagged under years of decay. Every window was streaked with grime, and I could see the rotted old door frames splintering apart under layers of paint. It seemed like a place people came not to live, but to be forgotten.

The people that we saw in the town were not friendly. They stared at us suspiciously as we wandered the empty streets. When we went too close, or if we dared to call out a friendly

greeting, they would silently slip back into their dim and neglected houses.



Tasi's father told us not to worry about the peculiar villagers. Douglas Seaton—or Mr. Seaton, as I knew him—had lived in Innsmouth a lifetime ago. He told us that the once bustling town had been devastated by a strange sickness. Decades later, it was still recovering.

As Mr. Seaton told it, he had been roughly our age when his family fled the diseased town. He was reluctant to say more, but I learned later of many disturbing things that had happened in Innsmouth during his childhood. Those stories hinted at why Mr. Seaton would have left in such a hurry—and also raised the question of why he would ever dare to return.

The ultimate goal of our vacation was a fishing adventure. Tasi's father was an accomplished fisherman who had not set sail for many years, and he was looking to pick up the sport again. But when we arrived in Innsmouth, our plans shifted.

It seemed the winds were wrong, or the waters were wrong, or perhaps all these things were ways of describing—or disguising—the true concerns. For the villagers had seen some unnatural signs that were warning them not to intrude on the deep waters of the sea.

Tasi and I learned about all this by eavesdropping on the whispered conversations between her father and the grim-faced locals. With our fishing adventure delayed, we set out to explore up and down the craggy coast. Each morning we would eat a hurried breakfast in our worn and mildewy seaside cottage. Then we would rush out one after the other, shouting wildly, to spend another day scampering over warm rocks and burnt sand.

We had been there three days when I made my first discovery on the beach.

I remember the moment clearly. Tasi and I were taking turns running ahead over the rocks and through shallow pools of water. The noonday sun was hot on my face. I leapt ahead onto a rough patch of sand and stopped suddenly.

On the ground in front of me was a long eel-like creature. Its body was deep gray, thick and glistening, like an uncoiled muscle in the