

New Cthulhu fiction! Supernatural skullduggery runs amok in this continuing series of writings culled from the archives of occult investigator Phillip Shandler, as transcribed by *Call of Cthulhu* author Monte Cook.

## SHANDLER INVESTIGATIONS



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Dear Thomas,

Happy New Year! Happy New Decade! I know, you insist that the new decade doesn't begin until next year, but I still like the sound of it. 1930. It's like we are living in the future.

I have returned to Providence after a short stop in Boston. If you have caught up on reading my past correspondence, you probably remember that after the strange attack that one night, and the damage caused to the rooms I rented from Mrs. Dawson, I've been living out of my office. It's not so bad. And it saves me money as well. Now that I have returned, I'm gathering all my notes regarding this Nyarlathotep cult to send to you. Once you are feeling up to it, I could really use your help in learning more.

It probably will not surprise you to learn that more strange things have happened.

Remember the dreams that I wrote to you about? Perhaps you have not yet had the time to read my previous letters. But if you have, you know that in them I dreamt of a woman named Fiona. After waking, much to my surprise I learned that she was a real woman, in Boston. She had been in a coma for some time. I felt compelled to learn more about her, to see if she was really the woman I saw in my dreams.

On the train from St. Louis to Boston, I tried to relax after the whole harrowing experience with the Silver Moon Society. The skies were gray and overcast, but the weather held and we made good time. A porter I chatted with mentioned a coming snowstorm, but thought we would make it into Boston before it hit. Mostly, I wanted to sleep.

But I could not find rest. I felt uncomfortable and I wasn't sure why. I looked around the car at the holiday travelers and noted a peculiar young girl of perhaps seven or eight who seemed to have taken some sort of interest in me. Normally, I find the attention and company of children charming but there was something odd in the way she looked at me. Eventually, she came to stand next to my seat.

"Hello," I greeted her with a smile.

She said nothing. Her large, dark eyes were enough to make me believe she had knowledge beyond her years. I realized, though, that such

thoughts were more a product of my recent experiences than of the appearance of what I was sure was a sweet little girl.

"What's your name?"

It appeared that again she would remain silent, but suddenly she spoke with a soft voice: "Simon."

Now, obviously this struck me as strange. A little girl named "Simon?" Perhaps she was playing a child's pretend game.

I smiled, and groped for some response. "I see. Well, 'Simon,' what are you up to?"

"For now," she whispered, "I just watch." And then she walked back to her seat.

I must admit, that was a little unnerving. Still, I chalked it up to some game she was playing, and tried to put it out of my mind. Later, at a short stop, I got out of the train to stretch my legs. I saw the little girl near a woman, whom I presumed to be her mother.

As I walked back to the train, I passed by. I patted her on her blonde head and said "Hello there, 'Simon.'"

She looked at me with surprise and curious confusion. "My name is Emily, Mister," she said, with that chiding voice that only a little girl can muster. Her mother gave me a suspicious look (that perhaps only mothers can muster), so I just smiled and walked sheepishly away.

Back on the train, the little girl was paying attention to me again. I tried to ignore her and look out the window. There was something different about her, though. Something brighter. Eventually, she came up to my seat again.

"Mister, why did you call me Simon?" She had a red ball in her hands.

"Isn't that your pretend name," I asked.

"No," she stated flatly.

I struggled for something to say when she continued. "That's the name of the man in my dreams."

Now, again, Thomas, if you've managed to get through my past letters you know that I've had some odd experiences with dreams of late, so this did catch my attention.

"A man in your dreams? Who is he?"

She shrugged casually. "A man from Wyoming."

How's that for an odd answer, I thought.

"That's a long way away. How do you know him?"

She shook her head. "I don't know him," she said, "I see him in my dreams." And then she walked off again. I tried to think of something more to say but I was a little dumbfounded. I thought about following her, to ask her more, but what could I ask? I was a fool. I tried to put it out of my mind.

Much later, I watched as the snow began to fall out the window. It was morning, and I'd had a fitful sleep in my seat. I turned to stand up and stretch when I saw Emily standing next to my seat, watching me. Her expression was cold and blank.

"Oh, hello Emily."

She stared at me.

"Excuse me, honey. I need to get up," I motioned to indicate that she blocked the aisle between the seats.

"We know you," she whispered.

I thrust myself back into the seat. "What do you mean?"

"We are watching you for now."

"Simon?"

She smiled. This was no little girl smile, however. It was the wide grin of something terrible. She continued. "The shambler that was sent to you that night was a warning. A display. You should help us, Phillip, not oppose us."

"Who are you?"

"I was sent by the Crawling Chaos. The Destroyer and Abductor of Lastbridge. The Dark Man of the Witch Cult."

"Nyarlahotep!"

She smiled that terrible smile again.

"He is the harbinger of those who once lived, and shall live again. The Old Ones. His mere presence in the world means their return is imminent."

These whispered phrases were not the sort of thing one normally expects an eight year old girl to say, and I cannot begin to tell you of the chill that gripped my heart as she spoke them, even if I did not know exactly what they meant.

Suddenly, a woman—her mother—was standing behind the little girl. The mother was looking at me with tight lips and a narrowed gaze. "Come along, Emily, dear," she said, still looking at me. "Don't bother the nice man."

Emily—Simon—gave me one long, last lingering look with cold dark eyes, but then allowed the woman to usher her down the aisle back to their seats.

I didn't see the little girl or her mother the rest of the trip. I suppose the woman found different seats in a car farther away from me. When we arrived in Boston, the snow was heavy, but I made my way to the library there. I was going there anyway, for I had some research to do. It was late, but I knew I wouldn't be able to get in the following day, which was New Year's Day. I was going to look up some other topics, having to do with the strange coven in Arkham and the Silver Moon Society, as well as some unrelated case matters. The library there, as I am sure you remember, has an extensive newspaper collection.

However, the things that the little girl said preyed on my mind. I found myself unable to think of little else. On a hunch, I looked through records regarding Wyoming, specifically using a name that Simon had mentioned that I did not understand: "Lastbridge."

Eventually, just before the place was going to close, I found it. Eighty five years ago, there was a small town in Wyoming called Lastbridge. Settled by a small group of religious fundamentalists, the leader of the small community was its pastor.

His name was Reverend Simon Carlisle.

After only a year, however, the entire town was completely destroyed in a tornado. There were no survivors.

Thomas, I am sure I do not have to tell you how curious this all was. Another coincidence? I began to think there was no such thing.

I took the train to Providence as quickly as I could. I needed to get my feet onto some familiar surroundings. My office did indeed provide me with that. Call me a coward, but I just could not finish my business in Boston.

My business, of course, was to investigate the woman that I had seen in my own dreams, Fiona.

Fiona Carlisle.

This is getting far too strange for me, Thomas.

Sincerely,



Phillip Shandler