

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



Phillip Shandler
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March 12, 1930

Dear Thomas,

As you know, perhaps the best way to get me to do something is to tell me not to do it. A bit over a month ago, I got a mysterious telephone call telling me to stay away from Fiona Carlisle, a woman who has been in a mysterious coma for months. I won't go into how I think I have seen this woman in my dreams and how I think her dead great-grandfather was the one that phoned me to ward me away. You probably already question my sanity a bit on those issues.

In any event, I've been in Boston standing vigil over Fiona for the last month. Well, that's not completely accurate. Actually, I've been doing all I can to learn more about her—but I stop by every day, at the rest home, just to check on her. She seems so calm and peaceful lying in that bed, Thomas. And so beautiful. Sometimes, I almost find myself wishing that she wouldn't awaken. That she would just stay like that, forever. Outlast us all, probably. I know that's wrong, somehow, but, I do think it. I'd only ever confide that in you, though, Thomas.

As you can imagine, what with her staying under professional care all this time, Fiona comes from money. Her parents have passed, and she lived alone until she was struck down in the street by an automobile. Now the facilities where she stays draws off her trust fund to pay for her care, all worked out by her attorneys. There's little danger of the money running out any time soon.

I followed up on the accident, and was able to track down the driver, a man with the curious name of Easter. Charles Easter. He was not charged for the incident because witnesses claim they saw her jump in front of the vehicle. Easter himself, however, maintains that his auto never actually hit Fiona at all. He says that she collapsed in front of him, and that he managed to stop before touching her. This is not corroborated by the witnesses, according to the police reports, nor by her doctors. The witnesses on the street say that she was clearly hit, and then knocked to the ground. Medical evidence regarding the injuries she received suggests the same. The police do

mention that one witness, however, claimed that Fiona was not struck by the car, but by something unseen, "like the wind." This force knocked her into the street, in front of the car. This witness was discounted, however, because he was a derelict street peddler. The report doesn't even mention his name.

Whatever the case, she has long since healed from the injuries of the accident. However, she remains in a comatose state. The doctors say that she experienced some severe trauma to the head. "In cases like these," one doctor told me, "you just never know. She might awaken tomorrow, or she might lie there forever."

Forever.

She does seem at peace, and despite her wealth, I wonder if she did awaken, if her life would be all that wonderful for her.

You see, Thomas, it appears that her great-grandfather, Simon, left the family in Boston back in 1841. He traveled west. Simon Carlisle had estranged himself from his wife and two sons to lead the "Fellowship of the Risen God," apparently a small independent church denomination. According to accounts I found in the library (I've mentioned my love of the extensive libraries in Boston before, I believe), Carlisle's flock entered into scandal early that year. I had some difficulty getting a clear picture of what actually happened, but apparently one or more of the members of the Fellowship kidnapped two young boys and, according to the boys—who escaped—meant them some harm. The boys, clearly upset by the whole ordeal, apparently kept talking about some strange figure they saw in the Fellowship hall called "Gnarl Throw-Step."

You're a smart man, Thomas. You don't need me to point out the similarity of the boy's strange words with Nyarlathotep, the dark occult name that keeps surfacing no matter which direction this investigation takes.

The Fellowship of the Risen God left Boston in the middle of this whole scandal. Simon Carlisle left his family without a word. His wife, however, was well cared for by a vast inheritance, and she never remarried. Her son Eustice had a son named Ronald, who was Fiona's father.

However, apparently a bit of real madness runs through the Carlisle line, because Eustice



committed suicide early after Ronald was born, and Fiona's father himself put a strong taint of disgrace on his family as well. Like I said, Fiona's life, it seems, was not all that pleasant even when she was awake. Ten years ago, Ronald Carlisle financed the construction of a large building here in Boston. As it was finished, and the dedication ceremony commencing, the building collapsed, killing over a dozen people and injuring scores.

It was revealed that Ronald Carlisle had instructed the workers to make strange alterations in the building's structure—alterations which caused it to collapse. Whether out of incompetence, madness, or penny-pinching greed, Ronald Carlisle was clearly responsible for the tragedy. He was imprisoned, and his family forced to pay reparations. His wife Marie threw herself from a bridge and Ronald himself died in prison under strange circumstances. The remaining family fortune, which was still considerable, was left in Fiona's hands.

A sad tale indeed.

Thomas, I trust you are in good health now. I appreciate the letters you sent. Perhaps you'd like to come up for a visit sometime this year. I'd enjoy seeing you again, my friend. Sincerely,

Phillip

March 16, 1930

Dear Thomas,

Last month, the groundhog saw his shadow and told us of six more weeks of winter, but it has been six weeks and still Boston is cold and blustery. The sky threatens another snowfall when we should be seeing the return of the robin and signs of Spring.

I'm afraid I'm feeling a bit dour, Thomas, and I am also afraid that we'll have to postpone that visit I mentioned in my last letter. I'm leaving Boston soon. But I'll get to that in a moment.

I hope you remember my writing to you about Ronald Carlisle, Fiona's father and the financier blamed for the building collapse here in Boston. I've done more investigation on that topic. Two days ago I spoke with the engineer and architect that he worked with, who also spent some time in jail due to criminal negligence in the fiasco. This man's name was James Alyea. I found him in his home here in Boston, where he, surprisingly enough, once again works as an architect.

His home was nice enough, but the dark, unmelted snow around it gave it a dirty appear-



ance. I suppose I was no better, my boots caked with the mud and slush of tromping around the city all day, as I approached the door.

Alyea himself answered. He had a curious foreign look to him that I could not place. The house was cramped, dark, and filled with books and papers on shelves and stacked on dark wood tables. I told him that I was not interested in implicating him in any wrongdoing but needed to know about Carlisle.

Not surprisingly, Alyea wasn't too interested in talking to me, particularly about the tragedy. He made it clear that the changes to the building's foundations were all required by Carlisle and that was all there was to it.

"But why?" I asked. "You're an architect and an engineer. What could such changes have been for?"

"I don't know," he said with a shrug. "He never explained to me what the machine would do." "Machine?"

At that point, he tried desperately to change the subject, and disavowed any knowledge of Carlisle's plans. I couldn't get him to mention a "machine" again. At that point, rather than try to get more out of him that I knew would not come, I instead gave him a way out and asked for a glass of water. He was visibly relieved to break away from the questions, as I figured he would be, and went off to get me what I asked for. When he left the room, I took a closer look at something that caught my eye during the conversation. On the top of a stack of books rested a very old leather-bound copy of the Holy Bible. It was filled with hand-written loose sheets. I glanced at it, saw immediately that my initial hunch was correct, and shoved the bible in my coat.



When Alyea returned, I sipped my water and asked a few general questions about Carlisle before leaving, pretending to be satisfied.

The bible was embossed with the words "Fellowship of the Risen God" on the cover. When I got back to the boarding house where I was staying—near Fiona's rest home of course—I began to page through the book. Lines crossing out passages and marginalia filled the holy book. Sometimes whole pages had been torn out and replaced. There were frequent references to the Dark Man, and to Nyarlathotep, and to things I did not understand. I wish you could see it. You would certainly be able to make better sense of it than I can.

You know Thomas, only as I write these words do I realize that I stole a Holy Bible. It's defaced and profaned like no bible I've ever seen, but a bible nonetheless. It was not too long ago that I would not have stole anything like that—let alone a bible—in an investigation without great guilt. Yet even now I feel none.

In any event, I have decided to take the train out west. I'm convinced that the Fellowship of the Risen God is some important key in all of this, and I wish to see the place called Lastbridge, Wyoming, where they ended up. I leave tomorrow morning.

I wanted to ask you, however, if when you read my account of the conversation I had with Mr. Alyea if you were struck by the reference to the mysterious machine at the bottom of the building. It certainly reminded me of Silver Moon Society and their dire machine. The one you helped build. I may need to know more about that experience before this is done, Thomas.

Please think on that, and I'll contact you when I reach Wyoming.

Sincerely,

Philip.