

CHAPTER ONE: OLD WOUNDS

She dreamed of mud, and rain, and the sweet-sour stench of dead men opened and left to rot.

She dreamed of a labyrinth cut from the ground, an insane sprawl of chasms and towers that stretched for miles across a torn and desolate plain. The city had been scoured by years of war, shattered by tons of explosives and poisoned by vast banks of black vapor that drifted across the land and tore at the lungs. It was a place where nothing moved, where every creature that had walked or swam or crawled was dead. Only when the suns were gone did life return, drifting down from the sky on leathery wings to feast on the spoiled carcasses below.

She dreamed of being blind, and deaf. Unable to taste or smell or touch, severed from every physical sense, a thing of pure, unhindered thought. And yet somehow aware that she was being carried at unimaginable speeds, across endless gulfs of space, and that her destination was a place so awful, so utterly terrifying that to even know its name was death.

And then the bus hit a rut in the road, and the jolt woke her, and she remembered that those were not her dreams, but those of a dead man.

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The bus arrived almost two hours behind schedule. There had been bad weather on the road up from Boston—first driving rain, and then, as the highway snaked north, white curtains of fog that had forced the driver to slow to little more than walking pace. The fog had been so thick that Carolyn Fern didn't realize that she was nearing Arkham until she was already within its boundaries.

She knew that there were dozens of small farmsteads surrounding the city, but she hadn't seen any of those, nor the outlying suburbs. Only when the bus turned north and into the denser parts of town did Carolyn notice the first houses—flat grey silhouettes drifting past her window, silent and strange amid the featureless white air.

The bus station was in the north of Arkham, on the corner of High Lane. By the time the bus pulled up at its stand the air had largely cleared, the fog replaced by a thin, high cloud that filtered the sunlight into a smoky haze. It also stole whatever warmth that sun might have offered; as soon as Carolyn stepped down off the running board she felt a chill, and found herself very glad she had worn her winter coat and hat. Arkham in November was, it seemed, far cooler than Providence had been, or even Boston. The little city had a climate all its own.

She picked up her overnight bag from the luggage rack and crossed the sidewalk to the steps of the bus station. It was a big building, larger than she'd been expecting, a wide two-story brownstone with a line of bus stands in front and a paved parking lot to the left. Carolyn could see that the lot was half full of buses, lined up silent and empty. They would be pressed back into service once evening came, and the working population of Arkham emerged to seek their myriad ways home.

The bus engine behind her clattered to a stop, leaving a sudden, oppressive quiet. Carolyn walked along to the end of the steps, partway around the corner of the building. Only there did she feel secluded enough to stop and stretch.

The journey had been twice as long as she had allowed for. Not only was her schedule ruined, but it felt like her spine was, too. When she tipped her head back, her neck crackled alarmingly.

She put her head down, readjusted her spectacles, and then glanced up and down the street, trying to get her bearings. In

one direction the road stretched away between clustered houses and looming, grimy apartment blocks before meeting a distant junction. In the other it shelved downhill to the river, the great, slow Miskatonic that curved its steady way through the city and out toward the sea. Carolyn could smell its waters, could hear the chuff and hoot of cargo boats clustering around the docks, the far-off hammer of steam cranes, all softened by distance and the cool damp air into a faint, discordant chanting.

If the bus had not been so slow, Carolyn might liked to have seen the river.

But her appointment with Dr. Hardstrom was due at half past twelve, and it was already noon. Carolyn had planned to seek out a night's lodgings upon her arrival, and take a few minutes to freshen up and gather her thoughts before the meeting. Now, she calculated, peering rather sorrowfully at her wristwatch, she had no choice but to go straight to him.

She sighed. That would mean visiting the director of Arkham Asylum in the clothes she had traveled in, crumpled and saddle-sore, and almost entirely unprepared for the encounter. It was not how she had hoped the day would go.

Still, there was nothing to be gained from regrets. Carolyn squared her shoulders, pushed her cloche hat a little further down onto her head, and went into the bus station to phone for a cab.

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The vehicles of the Arkham Checkered Cab Company were painted to ape the famous Yellow and Checker taxies so popular in the big cities, but the cab itself was a rather battered Hudson built six years previously. The machine had no side windows and a canvas roof, which Carolyn might have appreciated more had she visited Arkham in the summer.

Her driver was a tall, spindly man with a flat cap pulled down low over his forehead, shadowing his face from the low sun. He got out to open the door for her, so Carolyn guessed that the company was still in its infancy. The drivers in Providence didn't do that.

The journey itself was uneventful, if less than comfortable. Had the weather been warmer, or the cab's interior more protected

from the elements, Carolyn would have taken more notice of her surroundings. Usually it was a rare pleasure to sit in the back of a taxi and watch the world go by. Today, though, she hunched in the Hudson and alternated between stuffing her hands under her arms for warmth, or holding tightly onto the door to avoid sliding around on the shiny leather bench seat.

Finally, after several freezing minutes, the cab took a rapid series of corners and then slowed alongside a long, high wall. Carolyn put her head out above the door and saw, a hundred yards away, what looked like a wrought-iron gate set between two massive gateposts. "Oh, are we here?"

"Yes, ma'am." The driver pulled up, then got out and opened her door. She handed him the overnight bag and reached for her purse.

"How much is that?"

"We didn't cross any bridges. A quarter."

Carolyn climbed out of the cab, then fished in her purse for the money, plus a decent tip. She still had a little cash left from her savings.

As she handed him the coins he tipped his head back slightly, and under the shadow of his hat brim she saw that his left eye was a sunken socket, covered with blank white skin and framed by deep creases that spoke of old and terrible scars. He saw her looking at the injury immediately, and held her gaze, as if daring her to look away.

Carolyn supposed most people did, but she had seen far worse. "Thank you for the ride, sir. I hope the company can afford custom cabs soon."

The corner of his mouth quirked up in something close to a smile. "Me too, ma'am. And remember to call us when you get out, okay? You don't want to be walking at this end of town on your own."

* * *

The cab had dropped Carolyn a short distance away from the gate, probably so as not to linger where it could be seen from within the asylum. She brushed herself down, straightening her coat as best she could and adjusting her hat, then picked up the bag and walked toward the gateposts she had seen.

The gates between them were securely locked. There was a gatehouse to one side, but when Carolyn stood on her toes and peered into its window, she saw only an empty chair and, upturned and flattened messily onto the counter, a very ill-treated copy of Mann's *Der Zauberberg*.

There was an electric bell on her side of the counter. Carolyn pressed it firmly and heard a distant chiming.

Through the thick bars of the gate, Arkham Asylum was a darkness against the sky. Its outline was jagged: five stories of stark masonry and pointed roofs and narrow, barred windows. In a while, she hoped, someone would emerge from that gloomy edifice and let her in, but the path between the gate and the building was long. Carolyn prepared herself for a few more minutes standing in the cold.

She resisted the urge to look at her watch again.

There was no one about, and the street was very quiet. If Carolyn listened closely she could hear the sounds of distant traffic, but there were no cars in sight. There was no breath of wind, no voices, no birdsong. Just a flat, cold stillness. She could understand that the street in front of the sanitarium would not be a place to find an abundance of casual passersby, but even so, the silence was unnerving.

A shadow crossed her, something high and hazy that fluttered as it dipped below the opposite row of buildings. Carolyn looked up, trying to see what kind of bird it might have been, but it was already gone.

When she turned back to the gate, there was a man standing behind it.

Carolyn started slightly. She was certain that there had been no one in sight when she had rung the bell. Either the man had moved supernaturally fast, or he had been deliberately keeping out of sight.

Neither thought gave her much comfort.

The man was dressed in the plain uniform of an asylum orderly. He was big, wide across the shoulders and a solid foot taller than Carolyn. She was perhaps five foot two in good heels. The orderly looked as though he could have picked her up and snapped her in half.

His face was angular, his hair cropped to nothing. He was

standing perfectly still, regarding Carolyn with calm, hooded grey eyes.

There was a name tag on his uniform that read *Groves*.

Several seconds passed while she waited for the orderly to say something. When it became clear that he wasn't going to, Carolyn cleared her throat. She had a sudden, unbidden vision of a yellow duckling, standing in front of a silent and hungry wolf.

She shook the thought away. "Good afternoon, sir. My name's Carolyn Fern. I have an appointment with Dr. Hardstrom at twelve thirty."

Carolyn called most people *sir*, or *ma'am*, unless she knew them. It was an affectation she had learned from her mother, who was from Georgia, and most of her colleagues thought it unfashionably servile. It often served to put people at their ease, though.

If it had an effect on Groves, he didn't show it. He merely stood where he was, slightly hunched, with his big coarse hands curled loosely at his sides.

Carolyn was beginning to think that she was being tested, somehow. She drew herself up a little taller. "Mr. Groves, my appointment with the director is in less than five minutes, and I'd very much like to be on time. Would you kindly open the gate?"

Groves blinked lazily, then reached into his trouser pocket. Carolyn saw him rummage there for a few worrying seconds, then slowly, link by link, draw out a length of chain.

There was a key on the end of it. Carolyn stepped back as he unlocked the gate and pulled it open. The hinges protested, forcing out a long, pained squeal.

She stepped through the gap. "Much obliged, sir."

Groves pushed the gate closed behind her. Carolyn heard him re-lock it and then he was shouldering past her, stuffing the key back into his pocket as he strode up the gravel path. She watched his retreating back and, just before she ran to catch him up, decided that she really didn't like Mr. Groves very much.

She walked behind him along the path, her shoes crunching softly on the pale gravel. To either side of her, neatly clipped lawns spread around the dark brick walls of the asylum, scattered with wooden benches where less troubled patients might sit and take the air, at least on warmer days. There were, she noticed, no

trees on the asylum grounds, nor shrubs, nor statues. Nothing that anyone could hide behind.

Even though the asylum had not been originally built for its present purpose, it had been adapted with considerable care.

Groves stopped at the bottom of the steps. Carolyn thanked him again as she went past him, not too coldly, and trotted up to the main entrance. The oak door was closed, but not locked. Carolyn turned the handle and stepped through.

The door shut behind her, and when it did Groves was still on the other side. Carolyn wasn't displeased about that.

She had entered the asylum's atrium, a wide space with high ceilings and a gleaming tiled floor. A curved oak desk was set against the far wall. Carolyn walked across the hall to it, very much aware of the echoes her footsteps struck from the marble, and announced herself to the nurse who sat there.

The nurse raised her grey head and fixed Carolyn with a fish-like stare. "You are almost late," she said. Her voice spooled out slowly, word by word, as though she were speaking for a gramophone recording.

"Well, yes," Carolyn replied. "Almost."

"Dr. Hardstrom values punctuality."

"An admirable quality, ma'am, and one I share. Perhaps you could show me to his office?"

The nurse reached for a bell set into the desktop. "I shall call Groves."

"On second thought," Carolyn smiled, her hand darting out to cover the button, "maybe you could just tell me where it is?"

* * *

Hardstrom's office was small, very tidy, and almost unbearably warm.

Following the reception nurse's maddeningly slow and precise directions, Carolyn had climbed to the asylum's third floor and negotiated her way through a small labyrinth of tiled corridors. Finally she had arrived at Hardstrom's office, only to find the door firmly shut. However, true to his reputation, he had been waiting for her, exactly on time, and as soon as she knocked he had called her through.

She had opened the door onto a wall of dry heat.

After the coolness outdoors, and the clean ceramic chill of the asylum's corridors, the warmth of the room was a shock to her system. It had stolen the breath from her. Carolyn had had to fight off a wave of disorientation as she had stepped in, and her glasses had steamed up in seconds.

Now, thankfully, her coat and hat were on a hook beside the door, and she was sitting in front of Hardstrom's desk, polishing her spectacles while the director rearranged his paperwork.

Unlike most medical men of Carolyn's acquaintance, Eric Hardstrom kept a scrupulously tidy workspace. The leather surface of the desk was home to nothing except a small electric reading lamp with a green glass shade, a brass writing set, and a rack of trays. The trays faced away from Carolyn, so she couldn't see whether they were labeled or not, but she would have wagered good money that they were, and probably to some exacting personal system.

Hardstrom was tall, slightly stooped over his desk, his forehead high and gleaming under an edge of receding hair. He took two manila folders from the rack, placed them on the desk, and straightened them so their edges lined up perfectly. "You look wan, Doctor," he said, without looking up. "Perhaps you would like some tea."

"No thank you, sir." Carolyn wanted, at that moment, a very tall, very cold glass of lemonade, but she doubted it was on offer. "Ah, are those files on my patient?"

"One of them is." Hardstrom sat back. "The other is on you."

She replaced her glasses, blinking as her eyes refocused. "Excuse me?"

"I had your records sent over by telegraph. Sorry if that sounds a little untrusting, but in my position I have to be cautious."

There was a weariness to his words, a quiet weight of resignation in his voice. He reached for one of the files, spread it open, and lifted a sheet of paper from inside. Carolyn could see typing through it.

"This," Hardstrom began, "is an impressive resume, for a woman of your age."

"Thank you, sir," said Carolyn, although she could tell he wasn't complimenting her. "Rhode Island Hospital has an exceptional training program."

"Given how quickly you seem to have gained your degree, I can only imagine." His eyes flicked up to her, dark and sad, then back down to the paper. "Then a year's training in psychiatry at Butler, after which you were accepted by the Lemarchand Institute for your residency. Of which you are still in your first ten months." He set the paper down. "Remarkable."

Carolyn sat very still. "There was no preferential treatment, sir." "I didn't suggest there was."

"No, sir," Carolyn replied, very quietly. "You did not."

Still, the implication would always be there. Carolyn had been the only woman in her classes for much of her medical life. Ever since the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment six years earlier, the number of women training to become doctors had gone into a steep decline. In the field of allopathic psychiatry, she was almost unique.

As a result, she had been forced to work twice as hard as her male counterparts, for twice as long, and for half the recognition. If she had not been as driven as she was she would have crumbled long before. Little wonder, on balance, that she had been treating patients almost unsupervised in her last few months at Lemarchand.

Plus, of course, there were a lot of patients to treat. The Great War had been over for eight years, but it had left a lot of mental scars in its wake.

Hardstrom tapped the paper with a fingertip. "Your supervising physician has added a personal note, Dr. Fern. Seems he considers you something of a prodigy."

"Dr. Spencer is a very kind man."

"It would carry more weight with me if you were still under his supervision," said Hardstrom flatly. He set the paper down. "But you're not, are you?"

"That's correct, sir."

"In fact, you've been suspended from the institute pending an investigation."

Carolyn stiffened. "Forgive me, Doctor, but that's not the case. I have *not* been suspended. I voluntarily removed myself from duty after the incident."

"Ah. Yes." Hardstrom's head tipped slightly. "You understand that I was very distressed to hear about that."

"I do, sir, and thank you."

"Even after so long, the death of any patient..." For a moment, he seemed to stoop just a little lower, as if the weight of the event had been added to that of all the other woes under his roof. "Always a tragedy. Always."

Carolyn kept her voice low. "How long did you treat Malachi for, sir?"

"Two years and seven months." Hardstrom straightened almost imperceptibly. With that, his moment of vulnerability was done. "He didn't talk about his time here, I assume."

"He was very reticent about his past in general, sir. To be honest, I didn't know he'd been a patient here until after his death." Carolyn frowned, remembering. "Even during hypnotic regression, he kept so much locked away."

"A talent he displayed here, too." Hardstrom narrowed his eyes slightly. "Dr. Fern, I have to admit I'm still rather at a loss as to what you want from me. Tragic though it is, my involvement in this case ended more than seven years ago."

"Yes, but his treatment here had to be a significant factor in his psyche."

"Seven years is a long time." He sat back, placing his hands flat on the desktop, the tips of his fingers just touching the files, as if claiming dominion over them by contact alone. "You feel that you're not in possession of all the facts, and so do I. *Quid pro quo*, Dr. Fern. I want your version of this man's case history before I give you mine."

Carolyn opened her mouth to protest, but then realized she didn't have anything valid to say on the matter. Professional conduct aside, if she wanted sensitive information from Eric Hardstrom, she could hardly refuse him the same.

So she settled herself in the hard chair and tried to ignore the heat while she proceeded to relate, in detail, her treatment of Malachi Farrow.

* * *

Arkham Asylum, like many of the older generation of sanitariums, was beginning to be regarded within the psychiatric community as something of a blunt instrument. Its basic purpose

was to take in patients with all manner of insanities and incarcerate them until they were no longer a danger to themselves or the public at large. There were treatments available, of course, but the primary purpose of the asylum was to remove the insane from society.

Carolyn and her fellow doctors at the Lemarchand Institute, however, did their best to cure, rather than imprison. And their results were good. Using a combination of Freudian regression and somewhat experimental hypnotherapy, Carolyn herself had overseen the successful treatment of seven patients within the past six months.

There were always failures, though. Malachi James Farrow was the one that haunted Carolyn more than any other.

Farrow had been admitted to the Lemarchand Institute in the late spring of 1926, suffering from night terrors and a crippling melancholia. Unlike many of Carolyn's patients, he had not been brought to the institute by worried friends or exhausted family members. He had simply walked in of his own accord, offering what little money he had been able to scrape together and asking, in his strange, indefinable accent, for whatever help he could afford.

He had no family, or at least none that he would speak of.

Farrow was not an easy patient. He could spend days without speaking, and when he did talk he was often secretive and evasive. But, as the weeks went on, he opened up a little, both in his conscious conversations with Carolyn and under hypnosis, letting her tease apart the threads of his depression, to explore the nightmares that robbed him of sleep, to learn about the life he had led before Providence and the cold corridors of the institute.

He had been a soldier, he admitted, but had not been able to fight in the trenches. He had been injured in an earlier war: the brief, brutal debacle in Mexico that had tried, and utterly failed, to capture Pancho Villa. While his fellows sailed off to the mud-died horrors of France and Belgium, Farrow lay wracked with pain and nightmare visions in a Boston hospital. Even when his body had healed, his mind had still not recovered from what he had witnessed in the Sierra Madres.

“Ran into some bad fellers, ma’am. Real monsters. Carved up the whole squad, except me and one other guy. But you don’t wanna know about that.”

Carolyn was patient, and persistent, and skilled. She had started to make real progress with Malachi Farrow, even to the point where he had been able to sleep for an hour or more each night. And then, very early one morning in October, he had packed his few belongings and left the institute without warning or a word of explanation.

Three days later, Carolyn was informed by the police that a body had been found in an alleyway in the town of Arkham, rent by stab wounds they could only describe to her as "horrible." The cadaver was identified as Malachi Farrow, and there were no suspects.

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"Dr. Hardstrom, I oversaw almost every facet of his treatment. I explored his dreams under hypnosis, I prescribed the sedatives to try and help him sleep. And now he's..." She looked down at her own hands. She hadn't been aware that her fingers were knotting together. "*Primum non nocere*, sir."

"The Oath is not a stick to beat ourselves with, Doctor." Hardstrom's long fingers stroked the manila cover. "I am certain that you do everything within your power to help your patients."

"I may have put him in the way of harm."

"From what I recall, he was more than capable of finding his own way into danger. You are aware that he was a fighting man."

"I know he used to be a soldier, but so did many of my patients." She shook her head. "Dr. Hardstrom, I understand what you're saying. But I can't accept that what he did in wartime makes him somehow responsible for what happened."

"Is that any more unlikely than believing that *you* are responsible?"

"Maybe while I was exploring his dreams I reached back too far, unleashed a buried memory. Maybe I triggered something." Carolyn shrugged helplessly. "Sir, I just don't know. That's the whole issue. That's why I can't keep treating patients, not until I'm certain that my therapy wasn't a contributing factor in his death."

Hardstrom sighed. "The *only* factor, as far as I'm concerned, was whoever took a knife to him. But I can see you require more." He paused for a few moments, as though making up

his mind. "Carolyn, we're doctors. Overconfidence in our abilities can be catastrophic. But so can a *crisis* of confidence, to ourselves and our patients. Which is why, against my better judgment and quite possibly Arkham Asylum policy, I'm going to give you this file."

He lifted the folder and passed it to her. "Have it back to me by noon tomorrow, please. I am sure you will have discovered all there is to know about Mr. Farrow by that time."

* * *

An hour later, Carolyn found herself sitting in a small diner on Curwen Street. The folder lay on the table in front of her, unopened.

She had left the asylum in something of a daze. The suddenness of Hardstrom's decision, not to mention his dismissal of her, had set her badly off balance. Before that point she had been absolutely certain that he would refuse her access to Farrow's records. After all, even if she'd been actively practicing he would have been under no obligation to show her anything. The transfer of medical records from one hospital to another could be a haphazard process at the best of times, and in the case of those undergoing psychiatric treatments it occurred very much at the discretion of asylum directors. Carolyn's own self-imposed exile from the profession had made her request seem even more hopeless.

And yet, in the blink of an eye, the folder had been there, held perfectly level in the space between them. Carolyn had stared at it for several seconds before taking it and thanking Hardstrom for his time. To her shame, she had kept checking the folder was still in her bag as she made her way out of the asylum, just to make sure that the meeting had actually happened and was not the result of a minor psychotic break.

Carolyn took a sip of the coffee she had bought, and opened the folder.

It was the first time she had done so. The urge to find out what lay within the manila cover had been almost overpowering, and if Carolyn had been anywhere else but Arkham Asylum she would have stopped to read it as soon as she had found

a place to sit. But, if she was honest with herself, something about the atmosphere within those high dark walls unsettled her, and she had left as quickly as possible, even to the point of ignoring the driver's advice and going on foot. She hadn't wanted to use the reception phone to call a cab, not while the nurse was still there. That cold, unblinking gaze would have been one strangeness too much.

It had taken her half an hour to find her way to a more populous area of Arkham, and longer still to track down somewhere that she could sit and read uninterrupted. But a long walk in the cold air had turned out to be welcome. It had cleared her head.

The diner was comfortably warm and quiet, perhaps a quarter full. A couple in the next booth along were keeping their conversation low, too low for Carolyn to properly make out what they were saying, although she could detect a smiling note of risk in the woman's voice. Beyond them a dark-haired woman, perhaps in her early thirties, sat alone and picked nervously at a sandwich. Some Miskatonic University students had positioned themselves along the counter, their textbooks messily piled. If anyone noticed Carolyn at all, she guessed, they would probably take her for a student, too. She was often told she looked younger than she really was, and she really was quite young.

"Refill, honey?"

She looked up to see a waitress, plump and kind, coffee pot in hand, and flicked the folder closed. "Why thank you, yes."

"Can I get you something to eat?"

Carolyn considered her dwindling finances. The Institute wasn't in the habit of paying doctors who refused to treat their patients. "I'd better not. Maybe—"

A sudden clatter cut through her words and made the stream of coffee from the pot waver and cease. The dark-haired woman had set her cup down wrong, and it had tipped, emptying its dregs into the saucer. Carolyn watched the woman dabbing at the mess with a napkin.

Her hands, very pale and slender, were shaking.

She tilted slightly, peering past the couple to see the brunette's face. Unexpectedly the woman met her gaze and held it, eyes dark with a nervous intensity. Then the waitress was at her side. "Let me get that."

"I'm fine." The reply was brusque; not quite a snap, but close.

Carolyn frowned. The woman was plainly frightened, but doing everything she could to keep the fear under control. It put the edge in her voice, the tremor in her fingers. Carolyn had seen hidden fear often enough to recognize it at a distance.

The woman slid out of the booth. She wore a long, dark coat, unbuttoned, and no hat. She stared at Carolyn for a moment and then whirled away, practically running out of the diner.

The door clattered shut behind her, the bell above it chiming tinnily.

Carolyn shook herself. The waitress caught her eye, smiled apologetically, and then collected the upturned cup and saucer.

"Odd town," Carolyn muttered under her breath. "Very odd town."

She returned her attention to the folder, opening it again and flattening the cover with the heel of her hand. The first document inside was a plain sheet of Arkham Asylum letter-head, signed by Eric Hardstrom and bearing a single word in red rubber stamp. *Closed.*

Carolyn lifted the sheet away, and almost gasped when she saw what lay beneath it.

She glanced about, quickly, to make sure no one was within reading distance of the paper-clipped stack of pages in front of her, then lifted it up and turned it over, studying it from every angle. It seemed genuine, which made Carolyn wonder just how Hardstrom had managed to lay hands on it at all.

What she held was a clear carbon copy of the police report on Malachi Farrow's murder.

The reason it was in the file made perfect sense, given the asylum director's passion for organization. He must have secured a copy of the report as a means of closing Farrow's case. *I am sure you will have discovered all there is to know about Mr. Farrow*, he had told her. As if there simply wasn't much to know about him at all.

Well, it would seem she was about to learn more than she'd expected. Carolyn took a gulp of cooling coffee, and read on.

Farrow had been discovered at dawn on the twenty-ninth of October, in an alley off Federal Street, dead of multiple stab wounds. The alley had been in disarray, and the man had dozens of defensive injuries on his hands and arms. He had fought for his life.

Distressingly little police time had been devoted to the case. Once it was determined that Farrow had been undergoing psychiatric treatment it seemed that the forces of law simply washed their hands of him and walked away. Farrow's death remained unexplained, although robbery or a spontaneous act of violence was considered most likely. There were no witnesses, no serious suspects, no murder weapon.

Farrow had been buried in a pauper's grave. No one attended his funeral

And that, for most people, had been the last of Malachi James Farrow, the man who had dreamed of monsters.

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Carolyn sighed. There was little in the report that she had not been told at the time. The next two pages were almost blank, a few sparse lines of accounting to tie up Farrow's pitiful finances. It was only when she turned these sheets over that she found the coroner's report.

The starkness of it was shocking. There, scrawled hurriedly on an outline drawing of a generic human figure, were the wounds that had killed Malachi Farrow. One was circled, labeled in a spidery, untidy hand as the probable cause of death: a knife blow that had entered through Farrow's left eye and exited the back of his skull.

Carolyn scanned further down the page. Much of the information was academic, completely in keeping with the state of a man who had endured a sustained and brutal knife attack, and who had finally succumbed to a sickening brain injury. It was the coroner's opinion that the man would have been dead within minutes of that final blow, due to neural shock and blood loss. Carolyn hoped he had not been conscious for any of that time.

What was more of a concern to the coroner, however, was the nature of the weapon Farrow had been attacked with. All that he

had been able to surmise was that the instrument of death had been "multi-bladed."

Carolyn sat back, staring at the page. Suddenly the diner wasn't warm anymore.

Without warning, Farrow's voice was in her ears, as plainly and clearly as if he had been sitting opposite her, his strange drawl stretched and distorted by the drowsiness of hypnotic regression. He was telling her about his dreams.

"*Sometimes they come at me with knives,*" he murmured. "*Funny knives, like a pepper shaker full of...*" He chuckled. "*...full of razors. I think they want something out of me.*"

"Multi-bladed," she breathed.

Carolyn shook herself back to the present and raised a hand for more coffee. She had a lot of reading to do.