**The Mystery of Bleak Cliff Manor**

**Chapter 1:**

Outside, the sky was already a depressing gray, ‘already’ being a lose term as the sky rarely strayed from a pallet exclusively of muted values. This day was, in that way, much like any other with lack of a sun for an instinctual clock, trust and visibility dictating whether it was feasible for people to participate in their daily activities. Jacob’s activities had consisted of packing, meeting an insufferably late and unapologetic driver, and trundling out of Innsmouth to Bleak Cliff manor which had turned out to be a deceptively long drive.

This may have been caused by a number of reasons, or combination of thereof, Jacob deduced. The road from Innsmouth to Bleak Cliff was no common route, seemingly purpose built to be inconvenient and useless for any purpose other than to get to Bleak Cliff. This combined with the popularity of the small settlement, or lack of such, likely contributed to the derelict condition of the road, which may have been considered paved in a forgotten past. The driver, who hadn’t uttered a word since undertaking this trek must have been paid by the hour or for his silence. Not having the slightest sense of urgency as the sky dimmed and commanding the car at speeds slower than necessary. The atmosphere was unkind to the senses as well. Clammy and decrepit, the slight fishy odor emanating most likely from the driver, and the unused but thoroughly worn seat Jacob found himself in.

Gazing from his lap, out the window didn’t bring much respite from the deductive condition of his mind. Endless chaotic brambles and seemingly dead and rotting trees brought the landscape into dreary balance with the clouds and sky above. It was an incredible feat, Jacob thought, that any sane individual could exist happily and healthy here, let alone choose to. But eventually the landscape lightened and steadily cleared as the road left ground level and began ascending an impressively natural land bridge.

Peering through the windshield, he caught his first glance of Bleak Cliff. Starkly healthy and kept, Jacob had to admit he was relieved to be approaching an area that might house more friendly stock than his driver, who must have been a product of his environment.

Once the obstruction of the remaining foliage had passed, the sight was remarkable. It was as if Bleak Cliff soared out of the ocean on a pilar of water-beaten rock. The sheer slopes creating a nearly ninety-degree angle with the traversable ground of the monolith that held the small settlement. Water must have worn the cliffs since the dawn of time, countless jutting spires of stone protruding from water surrounding the pseudo-island, where water found a crack, eons ago and carved away until it appeared detached from the mass.

As the scene pieced itself together, Jacob began to feel intimidated by the place. Certainly, there was no hope of swimming through the surf without being dashed on the wreath of spines surrounding Bleak Cliff and, as far as he could see, one route on and off the place.