An Unfortunate Assignment

I am writing this in the hope that the next person charged with handling this case will read these notes before doing any research or work with this estate. I beg of you, leave this now, for in trying to right the wrongs contained herein you will only seal your certain demise, as I have done. I will provide a full account of my findings, which I hope, will satisfy your curiosity enough and give an adequate amount of evidence with which to bury this case file so deep that it will never again be brought to the attention of anyone. Let this file fall away and be forgotten, let the house which it suggests fall to ruin and be claimed by the earth and do not, under any circumstances, attempt to contact poor Agatha.

My name is Johnathan Crown, and I have worked for this firm these last five years with the intent of one day becoming a full partner. I have given my best efforts to every client and case file that has come across my desk and I have done so happily and with out any complaints. I came to the firm after graduating head of my class and with many recommendations from professors and firms, which I had interned for during my years as a student. Billings and Lafayette hired me under advisement from several noteworthy sources and I have been told many times that I am in line to be made full partner. I tell you this not to prop myself up but to assure whom ever reads this that I do not put forth this assessment due to dissatisfaction with the firm or my employment within it. This is not the rantings of a disgruntled or abused man wanting to disparage the good name of Billings and Lafayette. No, I write this as a warning, to the one who will come after me. Do not dig deeper, do not read the journal, do not go to that cursed house.

I found this file waiting for me on my desk, just three weeks ago, February 17th 1922. I saw clients name and, from research I had done prior to taking my position with the firm, knew it to be the first and most fortuitous acquisitions the firm held. In fact the money payed to handle this estate opened the doors of Billings and Lafayette and has kept them open for many years. The McGinnly estate was taken on by the firm with an initial fee that far exceeded any other of it’s kind for it’s time, even today the sum initially put forward would be considered extravagant to say the least. From my initial research it was clear that Mr. Stewart Billings and Mr. Bernard Lafayette were college friends of Mr. Colton McGinnly and it was perceived that it was this friendship that prompted such an exorbitant initial infusion of capital into what was yet to be a law firm. Nevertheless the McGinnly estate became the first in a long line of real estate and financial holdings the firm would base its practice on and be the foundation of which the firm would stand. Knowing how important this particular client was, it was of the utmost importance that I handle this estate with care and expertise.

Before delving too deeply into the files I thought I would do a bit of research on the men who began this all those years ago. I knew that Billings, Lafayette and McGinnly were old school chums and so I decided to start there. All three attended Harvard University and it was not at all difficult to find information in the schools archives to corroborate their friendship. They graduated in 1852, Billings and Lafayette in law and McGinnly in history. I found it interesting to note that two other men were frequently mentioned and featured in photographs, a Mr. Wesley Lawton a student of medicine and a Mr. Danforth Phillips a student of philosophy. I was able to divulge from old year book photos, student newspaper articles and the local papers from the time that group of men were part of a club of sorts which was documented in the schools archives and from all accounts the men were inseparable. It was three weeks after graduation that an indecent involving Mr. Lawton and Mr. Phillips would break apart the group and prompt Mr. McGinnly to offer a large sum of money to the two law students to handle his estate. Lawton and Phillips both were lost in an accident while spelunking caverns in northern Massachusetts, buried alive with no hope of rescue. The other three men who were with them gave statements that a cave-in had separated the two men from the others and they were presumed dead.

This event took its toll on the three men. McGinnly became reclusive and guarded, spending most of his time in the large house that he purchased before graduation. Located several miles outside of Boston, nestled in the forests of rural Massachusetts, this large three-story dwelling was his last connection to the group of friends that he cherished so dearly before the accident. McGinnly was the only son of a prominent manufacturing tycoon who had died before his last year at Harvard, leaving the business and all the family holdings to Mr. McGinnly. After setting up the estate with Billings and Lafayette very little was done with the family assets for some time. After was would appear to be a grieving period Mr. McGinnly began to take more of an active roll in the family business and began taking many trips abroad, presumably striking new partnerships overseas. After some years, McGinnly married and fathered two sons, Charles and Christopher. It seemed as though the sadness that had consumed him after the deaths of his friends was finally lifted. He moved his wife and two children into the house outside of Boston. With the business doing well they lived without incident for some time.

During the winter of 1864 an unfortunate accident took the life of Mr. McGinnly’s wife Bethany. She was found at the foot of the basement stairs with her neck broken. The police report states that she slipped on a frozen step while going down into the basement early in the morning. It was her husband who found her after coming down to breakfast and noticing the basement door ajar. Mr. McGinnly told police that the basement stairs freeze on cold nights because of improperly sealed windows that he grieved over not having had time to fix. The death was deemed accidental and the funeral services were handled a week after. Mr. McGinnly hired a small staff to take care of the house and the two children ages two and four. It was noted in various journals and found within the estate documents that McGinnly became an almost complete recluse at this point, spending most of his time locked in his study or taking trips abroad for what appeared to be no reasonable goal. Several newspaper articles from this period speak of the unease from the investors of the company, as the figurehead seemed to be in a downward spiral.

Three years later in the summer of 1867 the youngest boy Charles went missing and was found dead in an exposed well five days later. The boy was reported missing on a Sunday when he did not come in for lunch; he had been playing in the fields behind the home and did not return with his brother when the boys were called in. Mr. McGinnly was frantic and immediately put together a search party. The local police advised McGinnly to wait and see if the boy would turn up, but he would not be dissuaded and a search party was formed. The offer of a five thousand dollar reward was put up and the locals were stirred into a frenzy looking for the boy. After an exhaustive search a hole in the ground was found some distance behind the house, which was mostly covered in leaves and branches. When investigated it was found that the hole opened up into an old dry well that had been buried for years. The spring rains must have uncovered the well and after noticing an odor coming from the within the search party uncovered the rest of the well and found the young boys body broken and twisted fifty feet down at the bottom.

Mr. McGinnly continued in his strange and eccentric ways for years following the death of his youngest child. Strangely enough it did not seem to create a closer bond with the older boy, on the contrary it only served to have them drift further apart. In 1878 the oldest son Meacham left the home for college at the nearby Miskatonic University. It was a year later in 1879 that Colton McGinnly, standing in front of the large bay window at the front of the house, with the curtains open for all to see, used his thirty eight caliber revolver to take his own life.

I was taken aback by the amount of tragedy that had befallen the McGinnly family over the years since Colton McGinnly inherited the family estate, but in my years at Billings and Lafayette I had seen much tragedy and loss in the cases I worked on. After a thorough examination of the estate’s holdings, assets and stipulations I was ready to take action on the transition of the estate to the new beneficiary. There was nothing out of the ordinary in the documentation with the exception of two stipulations that were listed as the most stringent of the requests. The first, which did not strike me as odd, knowing the tragic tale of Mr. McGinnly’s college friends, was the oder of inheritance. The estate would be passed on to the last surviving and capable dependent of the McGinnly family. If there were no surviving descendents the estate and all holdings and assets would be transferred to the last surviving and capable dependents of Wesley Lawton, and if none could be found in the Lawton line all would pass on to the descendants of Danforth Phillips. If no surviving person could claim the inheritance, the entire estate would be liquidated and donated to the Miskatonic University. I found it strange that the money should go to the small mystery shrouded school in Arkham, instead of McGinnly’s alma matter Harvard. The other stipulation, which was, worded so strongly that it made me take pause. The house outside of Boston at 1747 Waverley Oaks Road in Waltham, the house at which all of the families tragedy had taken place, the very house were Colton McGinnly took his own life, was never to be sold or torn down. It was so emphatically stated that the house must never be sold outside of the three families who would be beneficiaries of the estate and even then was never to be torn down or otherwise demolished except of its own decay over the years. This stipulation was the one worry I had in being the executor of this estate, I was worried that it would be difficult to keep whom ever was to take it over from simply selling or tearing down the house to rebuild on the property.

I made arrangements to hire an accountant to look through the businesses books and take a look at the families assets to determine what could be sold off and what could be salvaged. The companies ledgers were sent to my office along with several other boxes of paperwork accumulated over the years, the sum of which invaded nearly half of the space provided by my cramped corner office. I hired an old friend, Stanley Brookes, who I knew from school and who I had worked with several times in the past. Stanley was a no nonsense type of man with a strong work ethic and a keen attention to detail. I felt comfortable that Mr. Brookes would make the correct recommendations and afford the best return on the estates investments. He was to meet me at my office the next morning to begin to wade threw the sea of disorganized paper work that had been dropped off earlier in the day. I also took the liberty of acquiring the services of a Ms. Agnis Waterford, a local antiquarian whose eye for expensive antiques and amassed knowledge of local history were unmatched. She would be invaluable in appraising the various items that would no doubt be uncovered once we evaluated the McGinnly home. With all of that squared away I settled in for a long night of research into the family line, to find a surviving descendant.

I worked into night accompanied only by the ticking of my wall clock and the glow of the street lamp outside my office window. It seemed that the tragedy that befell the McGinnly family did not end with the death of Colton McGinnly. His son Christopher, after graduating with masters in linguistics, went abroad for the following four years. It was within the estate records where I found traces of his adventures. Transfers of money into foreign bank accounts, passage on ships and trains throughout Europe and the African continent. Christopher returned to the states in 1888 and it seemed a transformation had taken place. He began taking an active hand in the family business and for the first time in many years it began to make more than it was losing. Two years later in 1890 he was married to a Ms. Claudette Morrow. Their first born, a daughter, Agatha McGinnly was born in 1892 and a son William in 1894, it looked as though the family was shrugging off the weight of their rocky past. Things changed in 1896 when it is recorded in the estates file that Christopher McGinnly requested the key to a safe deposit box that his father had acquired at the bank. The contents of the safe deposit box were not recorded anywhere in the files and there only remained a key and a number within the estates records.

In the winter of 1897 Mrs Claudette McGinnly fell from a second story window landing poorly and breaking her neck. Her body was found in front of the large bay window that fronts the house. Mr. McGinnly was away at the time of the accident, traveling for business purposes in Egypt. The McGinnly’s four-year-old daughter Agatha was found walking down the road holding her two year old brother and murmuring about a beast, which had thrown her mother from the window. The house was thoroughly searched and nothing could be found that resembled the young girls ramblings. The description in the police report, which I found later, was as such. Agatha described a large creature that had to stoop down to fit in the confines of the house, it had dark green skin which glistened as if covered with some sort of mucus or slime. She saw it from behind and so did not get a look at the face of the thing but noted that it walked on two legs and had multiple appendages coming off the torso, which she took for arms. These arms however did not appear to be jointed as she described them as waving like hair in the wind. The thing had her mother tangled in its multiple appendages and was pulling her close to its body. She described a loud sucking sound and finally the sound of something ripping open. After that she stated that the thing flung her mother out the window and she had ran before it could turn to see her behind it. She grabbed the baby and ran from the house. Needless to say Agatha was institutionalized after this incident and a trust was formed as part of the estate to pay for her continued care. I noted that Agatha was still alive and jotted down the location of the hospital so that I could visit her and establish if she was in a good enough mental state to receive the inheritance.

Like his father before him Christopher was rocked by the lost of his wife and became more withdrawn and reclusive. He hired on some staff to help him with the day-to-day management of the house and the care of the two year old Peter. Again the pattern emerged of unsubstantiated trips to various exotic locals. Among the notable locations which both his father and now Christopher visited Egypt, Italian North Africa, various locations in central and south America and Russia. In 1913 his son Peter left the home for college at the Miskatonic University, which his father also attended. During Peter’s sophomore year, after returning home from Arkhangelisk Russia, Christopher McGinnly added a sealed letter to the estates documents, which is oddly enough missing from the current file, returned the safe deposit box key, and proceeded to hang himself. Mr. McGinnly corpse was found hanging, prominently displayed in the large bay window, which dominates the front of the home, two days later.

Peter McGinnly inherited the estate at that point and completed his degree in anthropology. After which he traveled abroad for several years. The company fell to ruin as it was completely ignored by Peter and the family’s assets were being slowly siphoned off by his frequent and extravagant trips around the globe. It was after a trip to, again the last place his father had visited, Arkhangelisk Russia that Peter McGinnly returned home. As his father before him he requested the key to the safe deposit box and was not seen or heard from for the next two months. He resurfaced after two months and came again to the firm, he added a folded note to the estate’s documents, returned the key, and hung himself in the exact spot which his father had eight years prior. This was only four weeks ago and it is the singular incident that brought me to write this testament for the next unfortunate soul to wade through the tragic history of the McGinnly estate.

The note left by Peter remained in the file, it was a single small sheet of paper folded in half, and written in a cramped disorganized hand. The note read as follows “It wont be dismissed, let the Phillips line take on this burden, it was Phillips who cursed us to begin with”. I did not understand what this could mean but judging from the state of mind Peter must have been in before his suicide, it could only be deemed the writings of a man whose mind was on the brink of collapse.

The night’s research had taken its toll and I was to meet Mr. Brookes early the next day, so I decided to sleep in the office on a small but fairly comfortable couch that I had acquired to accommodate larger groups of clients if the need arose. I woke in the morning to the sound of Mrs. Lampton opening up the office and getting things ready for the start of the business day. As prompt as ever Mr. Brookes entered my office at the exact agreed upon time and with a slightly disguised sigh, began to dig through the unorganized pile of paperwork provided by McGinnly Manufacturing Inc. I asked Mr. Brookes if there was anything I could help with knowing full well that he would not let me anywhere near the documents as he worked. After setting the man up with everything he needed for a days work I excused my self to head off to my meeting with Ms. Waterford. We would be meeting at the bank to check on the state of any accounts held and to examine the contents of the safe deposit box. I decided to take Ms. Waterford along in case there were any items of importance contained within the safe deposit box that she should identify and appraise.

As planed I met Ms. Waterford at the bank at 10 am and we quickly set to the task at hand. After speaking with the bank manager and getting the the information about the various accounts attached to the estate I was pleased to find that a respectable sum remained. The inheritor of these funds would be pleased indeed. With the accounts in order we then proceeded to investigate the contents of the safe deposit box. Ms. Waterford and I were escorted to a private room in which to unlock the twelve by twelve inch metal box containing the treasured possessions of the McGinnly family. To our surprise there were only three items in the box. A thin leather bound journal which seemed old but unremarkable, a key which looked old as well, and finally a smooth white stone with a symbol carved into it. The stone was the size of a fist, smooth and stark white. Chiseled onto one side and filled with some type of dark ink was the symbol, a oddly asymmetric five pointed star with a flaming eye in its center. The symbol looked like the pentacles depicted on various pagan artifacts and my initial thought was that this might have been some sort of religions relic that held some sort of value. Ms. Waterford could not afford any deeper information about the stone but dated the key and journal at around seventy or more years old. The journal contained mostly illegible text, which seemed to be in many different languages. The only legible text appeared on the first page, it was written in the same hand as the rest of the book but this was in English and was short but coherent.

The text read as follows;

“Dear Colton,

Everything has been set in motion and we are close to embarking on a fabulous journey. All is in place, there is nothing to stop us now, I only hope that the others will be willing to embrace the transformation and can see it for the truly astounding achievement that it is. I know there is apprehension but I believe after this weekend there will be no question of the importance of our endeavor. This book is the key, without it nothing would be possible. Your contributions have been great and will not go unrewarded. Keep this safe for it took great effort to create it. Come this weekend everything will change, the anticipation is overwhelming. Our work over this last year has now come to its triumphant conclusion.

I will see you this weekend,

D.P.

I could only assume that the “D.P” must be the initials of Danforth Phillips and the weekend he was referring to must have been the tragic weekend in which Mr. Phillips and Mr. Lawton lost their lives. I could not fathom what this book would have to do with cave exploration but it seemed to be connected in some way. At any rate it had no bearing on the estates finances or assets and I shrugged it off as a footnote in the strange story of the McGinnly estate. Ms. Waterford seemed interested in the strange stone and so I gave it to her for further study, she could not make anything of the book but did verify its age and apparent authenticity. I arranged to have Ms. Waterford meet me at the home on Waverley Oaks road the next day and bid her goodbye. Before returning to the office I wanted to take the opportunity to research the family lines of Lawton and Phillips. Lawton would be the next in line for inheritance if Agatha McGinnly was not of sound mind and I thought it prudent to find the descendant of the Phillips family as well, incase there was trouble transferring the estate to the Lawton’s.

I ran the usual gambit of newspaper morgues, libraries and police files and turned up the last descendants of each family. The Lawton’s were simple to track down and in fact the last descendants still lived in Boston. Mr. Gerald Lawton an alienist of some repute and Mrs. Colleen Lawton a nurse at Boston General Hospital. I would contact them tonight and see if they were available to meet at the property outside of Boston tomorrow. I hoped that it would not be too short of notice but I needed to get the home appraised and the paperwork started for the transfer of assets to the Lawton family.

The Phillips line was a bit more challenging. Danforth Phillips had two older sisters and one younger brother. The oldest sister was never married, and the other sister was married but was never able to bear children. The younger brother married and had three children. Of the three children only one survived to adult hood. The other two died in a tragic fire that took the lives of the mother, father and two children. The middle son, Theodor Phillips survived the fire and was a key witness in the murder trial of Langford Potts who was convicted of setting the fire that killed the family based on the testimony of Theodor. Mr. Potts last words after the sentencing were “I put them down in the name of God, my only failure is that I didn’t get them all”. Theodor Philips married and had a son and daughter. The only living descendant of the Philips line is Martin Phillips. Martin Phillips was the sole survivor of the family after his father murdered the mother and daughter with a wood axe before taking his own life with a double-barreled shotgun in the barn. Martin was found in the house hiding, which saved his life. He has spent several years in a sanitarium after wards and then lived in a Boston orphanage until he was of age. He now lives in Waltham Massachusetts, which coincidentally is the same town that the McGinnly hose is in.

Now that I had detailed information about the two persons who could lay claim to the inheritance I needed to make a visit to the Roxbury Sanitarium to visit Agatha McGinnly and determine if she would be fit to make her claim on the estate. Before heading back to the office to find out how Mr. Brookes was coming along with the companies books, I made a trip to the sanitarium to interview Agatha.

Agatha McGinnly was now thirty years old, having lived twenty five years in the institution. I met with Agatha in her room escorted by an orderly who remained in the room while we spoke, for my safety, the attending doctor insisted. Agatha was drawing at a desk when I entered the room. I called to her quietly at first and more loudly when she did not respond. I moved over to get a closer look at what she was drawing and was taken back by what I saw. The drawing depicted a black spiral design which at first seemed like the mad scrawling of a lunatic but upon closer scrutiny I was able to see smaller patterns in the spiral lines which made up the whole design. I could see that she had been completely focused on the drawing and didn’t notice me until I got closer to inspect the drawing. She looked up from her work and I asked her what it was she was drawing.

She responded “This is the end.”

To which I asked “The end of what Agatha?”

She paused at that and looked me in the eyes. I could see it then and I knew that I need not interview her any further for the vacancy behind those eyes, as if she was looking right through me into some other dimension that I could not fathom. I could see in those eyes an unending terror, as if she could see some terrible cataclysmic event occurring as we spoke.

She paused for a time and said, “The end of us.”

“Can you tell me about the night your mother died?” I probed, more from curiosity than to determine her mental well being.

“She let it out, it called to her, we weren’t supposed to go in there, but she did and it made her do it.” she said dryly through quivering lips.

“How did she let it out?” I pressed on.

“She used the magics it taught us, it always wants out, it calls to you until you can’t resist. Daddy was going to fix it but he was too late. I

don’t think it can be fixed, I know, it will devour the world, it won’t stop.” as she spoke the last words, I could see a change in her eyes, as if some force not her own had taken residence there. In an instant she lunged at me, swinging the pencil toward my neck, the orderly stepped in immediately and restrained her, I took one last look and saw rage and hatred in her eyes. She looked as a woman possessed, and as I stumbled fearfully from the room I could hear her scream, “You’ll be the next, it will call to you, don’t let it out.”

Shaken by my meeting with Ms. McGinnly I collected my self and made my leave of the sanitarium. On the ride back to my office I could not stop thinking of those last tormented words that Agatha spoke to me. You’ll be next she said which ran shivers up my spine. I took solace, at the time, in believing these to be the words of an utterly mad woman, whose traumatic experience as a child and a life spent in an institution had warped her sense of reality so severely that she could not longer form any rational thoughts. Still the encounter had pierced my resolve and I was looking forward to the hidden bottle of brandy I had tucked away in my office.

When I returned to my cramped seventh floor corner office on Washington St. Mr. Brookes was still there finishing up for the night. The disorganized pile of boxes containing the companies books was smaller than before and a new pile of orderly boxes had appeared on the other side of the room. It seemed as though Mr. Brookes had made it through a fourth of so of the boxes and files which made up the entirety of the companies financial history. I asked about the progress and was relieved to hear that nothing odd or inappropriate had, as yet, been discovered. Mr. Brookes informed me that he has been through much of the early years of the company and was just beginning the era when Colton McGinnly took over as its head. I bid the stoic accountant farewell and set an early start for the next day. I assumed I would be spending another night in the office and would welcome the early wakeup as I knew his punctuality was second to none.

After Mr. Brookes departed I had a bit of brandy to settle my nerves, making sure there was no one else in the office to see my small indiscretion. Since it was obvious that Agatha McGinnly was completely unstable the estate would move to the Lawton family. Having tracked down the appropriate descendants of Wesley Lawton I set about calling the Lawton’s to let them know the good news. Mr. Thomas Lawton answered the phone and I explained to him the circumstances that had transpired to facilitate the transfer of the McGinnly estate to the Lawton family. Mr. Lawton did not know any of the history connected with the McGinnly family but he was aware of the tragic cave in the claimed the life of his great grand uncle. The Lawton’s had not maintained any connection to the other family’s involved in the odd history of the estate, and I saw no reason to convey some of the unsavory facts of the parties involved. I setup a time to meet at the property in Waltham and Mr. Lawton agreed to the meeting. He seemed excited about the inheritance and the idea of acquiring the property. He let me know that he would be procuring the services of an architect friend of the family and a contractor who he wanted to asses the cost of any construction or repairs that would need to be made.

When I ended the call I felt a sense of relief that this assignment would soon be coming to a close. There was a strange sense of foreboding that was settling in and I wanted to be done with it as soon as possible. It was the words of Agatha McGinnly that repeated in my mind over and over. I am not a man easily shaken, but the encounter with Agatha mixed with the tragic and strange history of the McGinnly family set some seed of malignant malevolence in my mind regarding the estate. I sat at my desk staring at the contents of the safe deposit box which I had laid out on the desk in front of me. The key, which could not be for the doors since I had a set of keys for the property, none of which were similar to this one in age or style. The journal which wtheas completely illegible and so could not be studied to extract its contents. I thought that I might show it to Mr. Brookes to see what he could make of it. There were some pages which had what seemed to be mathematical formulas and so being a man of numbers maybe he could glean something from its pages. Finally the strange stone which Ms. Waterford took for further study. I was hoping that she would have more information for me when we met at the house the next day.

The next morning I woke when Mrs. Lampton opened the office for the day receiving an odd look from the stalwart office assistant but she said nothing. Mr. Brookes showed up promptly as expected and got right down to work on the remaining mountain of paperwork. I showed Mr. Brookes the strange journal to which he took a cursory glance and came to the conclusion that it was some sort of cypher. I was astonished to hear this and as Phillips had refereed to the book as a key it seemed like a logical conclusion. Brookes also divulged that without the corresponding encrypted text it was essentially useless. Putting this to the back of my mind I set out for the trip to the house in an attempt to get to the location before any of the others in case there were issues getting into the home.