Danny never cried out. It was too fast, too unexpected. He never believed in what we were doing. He never believed the words as I read them from those medical files. Even though there was no denying that what we were doing and what we were seeing was unmistakably real, I believed, and I knew we should have stopped. I can tell myself it was his fault for convincing me to go inside or for busting in that window, but I know I was to blame. I should have made him leave. We should never have been there.

They still haven't found Danny's body, but they found the blood. I told them everything. I was so scared, they locked me up faster than you can say bat shit crazy, and they did say that. Everyone says that. The prime suspect, yeah, that's me. I don't blame them. A kid goes missing, blood all over the walls of an abandoned building, and the only witness is a teenager saying a monster did it. Bat shit crazy; I'm not worried about the trial or going to prison or being questioned or any of that. I am worried about one thing, whatever it was we found in that place. When it's my blood all over the walls of this padded room, there's going to be a whole lot of people who will be bat shit crazy.

There was something, in those files, something I can't remember. I was so scared. I ran as fast as I could when I heard it. I didn't think to take anything with me. I didn't know I would need proof. Hell, I was the one who brought the police back there and told them something happened to Danny. Prime suspect. I watched a few of those cops puke their guts out after going in there. The look in their eyes, they thought I did it, and they were sickened by me. I had blood all over my clothes. I was ranting like a lunatic. Now they just give me sedatives and keep me locked in this room. Awaiting trial. There will be no trial. It will come for me unless I can remember. I asked for paper and a pencil. If I can write it all down, maybe I can remember. They gave me a black crayon and some loose-leaf paper. My story, my confession, my last will, and testament.

My name is Anthony Micelli, yeah just like the character on that eighties TV show Who's the Boss. Everyone calls me Boss. It's a real laugh riot. Most of those dip shits never even saw that show. I'll come right out and say it because everyone is thinking it. I am the son of a single mom, we don't have much money, I don't have any friends, except Danny, and I'm not what you would consider one of the good kids. Yeah, I've had my share of trouble, mainly dealing with skipping school and smoking weed. I've been in some fights, but I didn't start any of them. People like to pick on me, and I'm not particularly eager to take it. I will never know how all that adds up to me killing my best friend, but that's where I'm at, and there's not one person who will believe what really happened. Maybe it's better if I get pureed in this cell. At least then they won't blame me for Danny.

It was over Spring break that Danny and I found the place. The Pembroke Institute of Psychology was abandoned back in the late sixties. The place stood abandoned for over forty years, covered in thick foliage hidden from casual observers by the dense Michigan forest. Danny and I were wandering the woods looking for a new place to hang out and get stoned. We had nothing to do that day, so we had gone deeper into the forest than we had ever gone before. We stopped to rest, sitting on what we thought was a fallen tree covered in ivy and moss. I can't remember if it was Danny or me who hit the tree with a rock. We turned to look at each other when we heard the hollow metallic sound that rang out. Cutting away the built-up ivy, moss, and dirt, we realized that we were sitting on a fallen sign. It was one of those large signs lit from inside and covered on both sides with thick plastic. The words stenciled onto the plastic were Pembroke Institute of Psychology, black text on a white background. We were both pretty shocked.

Everyone in town knows about the Pembroke Institute. The stories vary from mundane to completely fucked up. Still, everyone agrees that it was a mental institution and research facility that was suddenly closed down without any notice. They just packed up and left. Locked the place up and put a gate on the road that connected it to the rest of the world. Kids would dare each other to jump the fence and try to follow the road up. The road was completely grown over and difficult to follow. Most never found the place, just wandered the woods until they got scared and came back. There are a bunch of stories about what happened to the unfortunate ones that found the place. I always thought it was all bullshit. I didn't even believe the place ever existed until we found that sign.

We realized we were standing in what was probably the parking lot of the place. The trees here were spaced further apart and younger than those we could see at some distance to the right and left. Ahead of us looked like a cliff or hill of some sort, covered in ivy, ferns, and dense foliage. The closer we got, the more it became clear that what we were heading towards was not a cliff at all. It was a large building, covered almost entirely with forest overgrowth.

In places, gaps in the vines revealed exposed red brick. Once we realized this was a building, shapes that looked previously like dense forest now revealed themselves as windows and doorways. It was hard to tell just how far in each direction the building extended. The woods obscured visibility for much more than about forty feet or so. It was an eerie place. It was an assurance that the earth would reclaim itself once we were gone. We believe we are so powerful that we can bend our surroundings to our will. But here, not much more than forty years of neglect have resulted in the near-complete eradication of an entire hospital, forgotten.

We started to walk around the building. We pulled off sections of vines and found brick beneath. We cleared the vines away from a doorway; the doors were locked up tight and chained. It was apparent that no one had been here for a long time. The vines went all the way to the roof. It looked like the building was three or four stories tall. On the ground, dirt, moss, and a thick layer of leaves had taken over. The asphalt was covered entirely. It was surprising that no one had found this place since the sixties. At least no one had talked about it. It wasn't that far into the woods. I would have expected that some kids would have found this and turned it into a party spot by now.

We walked around for a while, uncovering windows and doors; all of them were locked and chained. Many windows were boarded up from the inside. Others were so covered in dust that there was no way to look in. We were there for almost an hour just walking around when Danny found a small window that wasn't covered by vines. Before I noticed what he was doing, he picked up a baseball-sized rock and threw it at the window. The thick pane of glass shattered but didn't break inward. Once he saw the thing shatter, he got excited like he expected the window to be impenetrable. Grabbing a sizable fallen tree branch, he made his way to the window. I protested because I knew what was coming next. If he got that window open, he would want us to go in there, which was the last thing I wanted to do. Sure enough, he got to the window and took a swing with the branch. After four swings, the glass started falling inward. A few more swings and the window was gone leaving only a square black opening. Danny smiled at me, and I just stood there, shaking my head.

I told him to go first. There was no way in hell I was going in there before him. I half hoped he would chicken out so we could leave. He didn't, though; he sat down in front of the opening then went in legs first. I could hear the echo as he landed on the concrete floor inside. I couldn't see him at all. I could only see a swirling of dust coming from the opening and hear the sound of his feet echoing as he moved around. Then his head popped up at the opening. "Come on!" he said, taunting me to come in or be a baby. After a few minutes of that crap, I went in. I remember looking at the trees as I slid myself into the darkness. If I had only left, told Danny to come up out of there and go, he would still be alive. Peer pressure is a bitch; I didn't like being called a baby.

Once I was inside, I could see Danny walking around using the flashlight on his phone, so I pulled mine out and did the same. We were in a storeroom. There were shelves full of various supplies. I recognized some of them, like cleaning products and hospital supplies. All of them were from the sixties. There was a ton of stuff in there. I thought it was strange to leave all of it and not try and sell it off. Then Danny found the door and opened it. The door opened into a bigger room. It was nearly pitch black inside since the windows were either boarded up or covered with vines. The flashlight apps on our phones were pretty bright so that we could see most of the room, and of fucking course, it was a morgue. There were two metal tables in the center with drains in them and a wall with two rows of metal doors, six in total. The other walls had cabinets and shelves with various things. Danny started over to the metal doors when I stopped him. I said that since all the other stuff was left here, what if bodies were left as well? Danny reassured me that there is no way they would leave bodies behind and casually opened the first door. It was empty. I wasn't convinced, and I headed for the door on the far side of the room, which lead further into the hospital. I could hear Danny open another of the metal doors as I walked out into the wide hallway outside of the room. He called me a pussy and said he would put me in one of those lockers, but he followed me out after opening the second door.

The hallway was doublewide, and about twenty feet long. I could see the double doors at the far end. There were only two other doors, one on each side of the hallway. We checked them out and found that one was a janitor's closet, and the other was a small office. The office still had files and what seemed to be everything that would have been there when the place was operational. I mentioned that to Danny, and he said that maybe the stories were true.

I knew there were stories about the Pembroke Institute, but Danny had lived here longer than I had, so I asked him what he meant. He told me that the institute used to be a big deal, it was created sometime in the mid-fifties, and it was a teaching hospital. Patients came from all over. They were usually unique in some way or at least extreme. Doctors would come here for clinical study and trials, looking for the next breakthrough in treatments for various disorders. Graduate students would also come here to study hands-on. Anyhow, the stories go that something happened with a patient named Mathers Cope. I guess there were several ideas about what happened. All the stories tend to agree that after the incident, the hospital closed down. It would seem that after only forty-some years, the story would be fresh in people's minds. Still, Danny said that many of the people involved and many of the people who lived around here were bought off and told to move away. There are probably some holdouts that know what happened, but it was enough to make the story die out. I had heard a few things about some secret hospital in the woods, but I chalked it up to urban legends or just bullshit ghost stories. Now standing in the actual place, I wondered what the real story was.

Danny didn’t seem as spooked by the place as I was. He headed straight for the double doors at the end of the hall. I followed him through the doors and into the darkness beyond. Our footsteps echoed through the blackness as we moved deeper into the building. A thick coat of dust covered everything. We kicked up clouds of it as we walked through the hallways. The walls were a mess of chipped and peeling paint, occasionally taken over by water damage and mold. It was dead silent and pitch black, the light from our phones casting a small radius of visibility around us for about ten feet. It was an eerie feeling not to have visibility ahead or behind. The walls on both sides were dimly visible to see when we would pass doors and when other hallways extended out into the darkness. I was worried that our phone batteries would die and we would be lost entirely in darkness. It was daytime, so this was as light as it would ever be in here. I told Danny we should turn back and return tomorrow more prepared. I had almost convinced him when we reached a set of closed double doors with the words “Violent Offenders Ward” written on them.

I was hit with a sudden shiver of fear, reading the words stenciled onto the doors' windows. Of course, this only served to pique the interest of Danny. He tried the handle of the door, and to my surprise and horror, they were not locked. Danny pushed open the right side door and started to walk through. I told him we shouldn't go in. We should go back and get better prepared. I said we should be marking our path so that we can find our way back. Danny just laughed and called me a baby. He said we could easily follow our footprints in the dust and that it was just an abandoned old building. It didn't seem like anyone could get in here, so we wouldn't even have to worry about bums or druggies or anything. He managed to calm me down, and I finally agreed to keep going. Danny said that we were here, for one thing, to find the room of Mathers Cope. If we told the kids at school, we stood in his room in the middle of this abandoned hospital. We would have badass cred until graduation. Not to mention how the girls would think we were fearless. I had to admit he was on to something, and we were already inside. It was not like it was going to get any scarier from here.

The violent offender's ward looked identical to the other areas that we had walked through. I don't know why I expected it to look different. The only real difference was that there were no windows on the doors to the patient's rooms. They were all equipped with a sliding door that revealed a slot with a small shelf used to pass food into the room. We tried a few of the doors and found them to be unlocked. We walked through, looking into rooms, not knowing how we would identify Cope's when we saw what looked like one of the doctors' offices. The room was covered in dust like the others. A large ornately carved wooden desk and various diplomas, accreditations, and plagues that hung on the walls identified the room as Dr. Albert Kittredge's office. Everything was still in its place like the man had taken nothing with him when the building was closed down. I thought this was very strange, it is one thing to leave supplies and everyday items behind, but much of the items in the room looked like the personal effects of Dr. Kittredge. Why would he leave all of that behind?

Danny didn't seem interested in the doctor's office and was trying to get me to leave. I told him he could go on by himself if he wanted, but if we were going to find out which room was Cope's, we would have to look through the doctor's files. If I had only gone with him, if I had only left without getting into those files, we would have a story to tell the kids at school, nothing more. I was opening the top drawer of a tall single-wide file cabinet as Danny grudgingly agreed and came back into the room. He plopped down into the doctor's chair and put his feet up on the desk. The light from our phones lit up most of the small office, but the door to the hallway was a deep black rectangle. It was like looking out into space. I began looking through the files in the drawer. My heart skipped a beat when the name appeared on the file folders tab, written in black ink on a white, adhesive strip with a red line at the top, M, Cope. He was real. My hands shook as I lifted the folder out of the drawer and brought it to the desk. It was thick but not completely filled with papers. Once I opened it, I saw the two real-to-real tapes that were inside along with other paperwork. Reading the name on one of the documents confirmed it ultimately. The heading on the top paper read "Psychiatric evaluation of Cope, Mathers." Danny began walking around the office as I sat in the vacated chair and began to read.

The document was dated September 16th, 1968, written by Dr. Albert Kittredge, and contained basic information on the patient. Name, Mathers Cope, age fourteen, birthdate October 3rd, 1953, birthplace Chicago Illinois, mother Irene Cope, Father Jonathan Cope. Cope was physically ordinary except for a deformity on his right hand. His pinky finger and half of his ring finger were missing due to underdevelopment at birth. I could feel the tension building in my muscles as I read on. I had only heard passing stories about the infamous Mathers Cope. I believed them to be made up urban legends with no basis in truth. But now, I was sitting at the desk of Dr. Kittredge with this document in my hands. Nervous excitement gripped me as I read the confirmation of those stories, proof that the man and his horrendous deeds were real. The document stated that Mathers Cope was arrested, tried, and convicted for the murders of fifteen individuals, including his mother and father. He was admitted to the Pembroke Institute due to his age and because of his testimony. Mathers Cope confessed to the murder of his father, Jonathan Cope but claimed that he did not commit any of the other murders. He maintained throughout the trial that his father and older brother were responsible. Because the physical evidence was stacked heavily against this claim and that he did not have an older brother, several court-appointed psychologists concluded that the boy was undeniably insane.

I read aloud as Danny wandered around the office, opening drawers and cabinets, looking for god knows what. The doctor had regular sessions with Mathers. He hoped to get the boy to admit what he had done and feel remorse for the crimes. Dr. Kittredge believed that Mathers was fabricating his brother's story because he could not rationalize the horrible crimes he had committed. His delusions were so vivid and complete. The doctor had never experienced such full manipulation of memories in all of his fifteen years in the profession.

The police were called to the cope home by Mathers himself. He stated on the phone that he had killed his father and he needed help. The officers found the boy in his father's study with a bloody letter opener in his hand. His father lay face down on the writing desk, seated in his chair. Mathers had stabbed him in the throat with the letter opener. His father had bled out onto the desk. It must have taken several minutes while Mathers watched and did not call for help. A search of the home found the remains of fourteen other bodies in a concealed room behind the furnace in the basement. The bodies were dismembered, and the parts were riddled with bite marks, which matched the approximate size and shape of Mathers Cope's bite pattern. Irene Cope was found among the bodies and was the most recent death behind Jonathan Cope.

There was other evidence that the doctor did not divulge in his assessment. Still, it was clear that the evidence against Mathers was pretty complete. Mathers maintained that his father had kept his brother, who would have been one year older, in the basement's concealed room, hidden away because of his deformities. He insisted that his father had killed most of the other victims and that the ones he did not his brother had. According to Mathers, his father was feeding these unfortunate souls to his brother in the attempts to fulfill some sort of ancient dark ritual. The boy testified that he and his mother had found out what his father was doing, and his mother had confronted Mr. Cope the night before his murder. Mathers heard the struggle from his room and knew that his mother had been killed. The next morning he went to his father's study and, before he could say a word in protest, plunged the letter opener into his throat. He then called the police and ended up at Pembroke Institute.

I read the final section of the report and was about to close the folder when I noticed a hastily scrawled note at the bottom of the document. It was written in black ink across the official seal stamped on the record, confirming this as the doctor's final assessment of Mathers Cope. The handwriting was shaky and frantic looking; the words written sent a shock of terror through me as I mouthed them aloud. "Mathers was right. God help us all".

As the words left my mouth, Danny approached the desk with something in his hands. I couldn't see what it was initially but noticed immediately as he put the shoebox-sized object on the desk in front of me that it was a nineteen sixties-style tape recorder. The kind with large buttons and two empty silver pins where the tape reels should go. I looked up at Danny in the darkness, and I could barely see him nodding towards the two tape reels on the desk. I picked up the reel labeled "Mathers #1" and began to set up the recorder. I had played with my father's old reel-to-reel tape recorder before, so I knew how to fix the tape onto the machine. Danny put his finger on a section of the document in the folder, "Room 104," he said.

Danny waited in silence as I rigged up the machine. It didn't take me long, and we both huddled close as I pressed play. The recorded voices sounded so loud in the deathly silent blackness of the decrepit withering building. Danny took a seat on the desk, and I leaned back into the doctor's chair.

(Defendants testimony omitted in lieu of the actual transcribed recording)

#### Transcripts from Exhibit F, audio tape labeled “Mathers #1” ####

Interview with Mathers Cope session 1

Dr. Kittredge (after labeled K): Hello, Mathers.

Mathers Cope: (after labeled M): Hello, doctor.

K: Do you know why you are here?

M: Everyone thinks I am crazy.

K: You disagree?

M: You can ask me what you want to. I have talked to so many of you. I am going to tell you the same thing.

K: I am not here to talk about your innocence or guilt. Mathers, I am here to help you.

M: Help me, how?

K: Help you come to grips with what you have done.

M: I killed my father; I know that I have come to grips with it. He was a horrible man doing horrible things, and I stopped him.

K: There were others, Mathers, the evidence…

M: Yeah, sure, the evidence shows that I am to blame. I have been through this in court, and I know what the evidence says. They put me in here. They decided I killed all those people, killed my mother. But they are all wrong; I won't stop telling you people what really happened, the truth. Would you rather I lie to you?

K: Sometimes, our minds provide us with alternatives to reality if reality is too painful. Our minds can create situations that help us cope. They seem real, and maybe portions of them are, but the full truth, the unbearable parts, are distorted. I am here to help you separate the fact from fantasy.

M: I know the truth. I don’t need your help.

K: And what is the truth, Mathers?

M: My father and my brother killed those people. I killed my father to stop them. I hoped the police would find my brother, but they didn't.

K: This is one of the problems, Mathers. You have no brother.

M: You want to help me?

K: Yes, yes, I do.

M: Go to my house and burn it down. Make sure it is nothing but a pile of ashes. That’s how you can help me.

K: I can see your upset; we will end our session for today. I look forward to speaking with you again.

Interview with Mathers Cope session 2

K: Hello again, Mathers. I hope you enjoyed the things I brought from your home. I tried to pick the books and items that seemed to have the most use. Hopefully, I picked some of your favorites.

M: Did you burn it?

K: Burn what?

M: The house, did you burn it down?

K: Of course not. I brought you some things to make you feel more at home.

M: Thank you, doctor.

K: If there is anything else I can get you, please let me know.

M: You can find my father's journal. It's all there, you can see for yourself.

K: The police would have it if it were in the house, I can ask, but I don't believe they will release evidence to me.

M: They don’t have it.

K: How do you know?

M: It is hidden well, they would have to know where to look, and blind chance would be unlikely.

K: I see. You seem very well educated, Mathers. Did you go to a private school?

M: No, my father would teach me, along with my regular studies, which failed to challenge me.

K: Well, that is good. You are very well-spoken.

M: Thank you, doctor.

K: So, where is this journal?

M: The northeast corner of my father's study. Count five wooden planks from the corner, then at around knee-high, press on the left side of the plank. It will reveal a small compartment. The journal is there.

K: I will see what I can do.

M: if you want to know the truth, you will find it there. Or you could burn the house down and remove this all from the face of the earth.

K: I can’t do that.

M: If you knew you could.

K: Let's try not to focus on this type of destruction. Let's talk about you.

M: OK.

K: Do you have any friends at school?

M: Yes. I have a girlfriend too. I am not some social pariah who is lashing out at the world or something. You have it all wrong. It is not me you should be looking into. It is my father.

K: I have looked into your father. He was an upstanding member of the community, from what I gather.

M: Yeah, he was. He also had a secret.

K: What secret?

M: Get the book. You will find out.

K: I will try.

M: Please, doctor, if you see it, you will understand. You may even believe me.

K: OK, Mathers, I will try. I think that is enough for today.

The tail of the tape slapped against the recorder as it spun on the second reel, and endless sound lulling me into a trance. I could not believe that I heard the real Mathers Cope on the tape. He sounded so normal. I don't know what I expected, but I did not expect to hear a normal kid. He sounded scared and lonely. I began to feel pity for this notorious murderer whose name parents used to frighten children into cleaning rooms, making beds, and all sorts of unwanted tasks. The second reel lay on the desk in front of me. I removed the first and started rigging up the second. Danny complained that we should go to see Cope's cell instead of listening to these boring conversations. I disagreed. I wanted to know what Mathers believed happened. I wanted to hear what this boy's excuse could be, which drove him to such horrible acts. Secretly I found myself believing, or wanting to believe, his story. I wanted to believe that it was impossible for this boy, two years younger than me, to commit such heinous crimes.

Interview with Mathers Cope session 3:

K: Good morning, Mathers.

M: Did you get it?

K: The journal?

M: Yes.

K: I have not been back to the house. I will try this evening to find it. If it is hidden in the place you described, I should have no trouble.

M: Will you go tonight, doctor? Will you really try and find it?

K: Yes, Mathers, I will.

M: Thank you, doctor. You will see that I am telling you the truth.

K: Are you willing to tell me more about your story?

M: I have told the police, doctors, the judge, what else could you want to know?

K: Tell me the story as if I had never heard it as if we were just two friends telling stories about ourselves.

M: I guess I can do that.

K: Take your time Mathers, tell me anything you feel is essential.

M: Well, let me start by saying… I loved my family, my father and mother were great parents, and I was well cared for. There was nothing in my past that would cause me to harm my parents. No abuse, no resentment, nothing. For most of my life, I thought I was an only child. It was only when I found my father's journal that I found the truth. It wasn't until then that I remembered my imaginary friend from when I was very young.

K: Imaginary friend?

M: Yes, I had memories, very vague, just fragments from when I was young. I must have been between three and five years old. I remembered a heating vent in my room connected straight down to the basement's furnace. At nights I would hear crying or whimpers from the vent. I began to talk with the voice and try to comfort it. It could not speak only to make emotive sounds, but somehow I could understand. The sadness that the voice conveyed was so deep and mournful that I was compelled to offer comfort. Eventually, I communicated with the voice, and I would talk to it at night before going to bed. After some time, it was able to say one word. It's name. "Me." I would try to explain that "Me" was a pronoun we use to refer to ourselves but that it was not a proper name. The response would be "Me," so I began to address the voice by that name. My parents told me that this was my imaginary friend and didn't pay much attention to it. Eventually, I grew older and moved into a different room in the house. Since I no longer heard the voice, I believed that my parents were right, it was an imaginary friend, and now that I was older, it would fade from memory. And it did… fade from memory.

K: You were five when you changed rooms?

M: Yes, years went by, and I no longer spoke with my imaginary friend. I grew up and forgot all about it. Last year after my thirteenth birthday, I was in my old room getting something out of the closet when I heard a scream. It was muffled, but it was the scream of a woman. There were some other scuffling sounds, and then there was the distinct sound of whimpering or crying. I was shocked. It sounded just as I remembered when I was young. I called out at the vent, the sound abruptly stopped.

K: I thought you said it was a brother? You said there was a woman’s scream.

M: Yes, the scream did not come from the voice. It was someone else.

K: Your mother?

M: No, I was not sure. That day I went into the basement, and there was an awful smell. It smelled like old molding clothes mixed with a coppery smell, similar to burning electrical wires. My father found me down there and rushed me out. He told me I shouldn't go down there because the furnace was broken and it was dangerous. After that, my father would lock the door to the basement.

- Long pause -

K: Go on, Mathers… if you can.

M: A few months went by, and my father had been spending a lot of time in his study. He was staying up late at night as well. One night I was up getting some water when I saw my father coming from the basement. It was late. I wondered what he could be doing down there at this time of night. He didn't see me and went back into his study. I heard other strange sounds in the basement. I know my mother heard them too. She began to look worried all of the time, and she looked tired, like she hadn't slept in days. She seemed relieved when my father said he was going out of town for the weekend.

K: Was it normal for your father to leave town like that?

M: No, he never left before. He told me to say out of his study and locked that door as well. I don't know why but I went that night and tried to pick the lock. A kid from school showed me how to do it a few months back. I was expecting it not to work, but the lock on my father's study must have been a cheap one. When I heard the click, I was surprised. I'm not sure what I expected to find in there; at that point, I still thought we were a nice normal family. I looked through my father's papers and the things on his desk, but nothing was interesting. I had about given up. I slid down, back against the wall so that my knees were up against my chest. I had decided there was nothing there. When I went to get up, my elbow pushed in the secret panel in the wall.

K: The one you told me about? The one containing the journal?

M: Yes, inside there was a journal, a six-inch figurine that looked like those giant heads on Easter Island, and a vial of some milky liquid. I was so intrigued by the fact that my father had a secret hiding place that I didn't even think of the implications of reading my father's private journal. I read portions of it, not cover to cover. What I read shook me to my very core.

Long pause.

M: My father was an anthropologist. He wrote a few pretty popular books.

K: I read them when I was preparing to take your case.

M: In his journal, he wrote about something he did before I was born. He lived with a tribe of natives in Peru. Apparently, they had the secret to prolonged life, or at least my father believed they did. He wrote that the village chief was said to be a few hundred years old. They worshiped some strange god who supposedly granted them near-immortality. The tribe worshiped this god by going to a cave in their territory and drinking from a natural spring inside that was mixed with something else secreted from the rock. They would drink it and perform mating rituals. The children born from this ritual would come of age when they were fourteen years old. Some would be normal, except for an extended life span. The others would be a hybrid of their god and human. These children would wander off into the jungle and protect the tribe.

K: This sounds like an incredible story Mathers, but I don't see how it relates to…

M: Don’t you see doctor? My father performed the ritual to create my brother, then a year later to create me.

K: Mathers, you have to understand that your father studied the tribe and their belief system, not adopting it as his own. It is what an anthropologist does, immersing themselves into a culture to learn about it. You can't honestly believe he attempted to use the rituals to augment your birth in some way?

M: I didn't believe it at first, but when my father came back from his trip, there were more screams. My father was in the basement, more and more. My mother was getting suspicious. My father was nervous and erratic. I saw him one night; he invited a homeless man into the house. I was hiding; he took the man into the basement. I waited, late into the night. It was difficult to stay awake, but I did. I waited until my father came out of the basement alone. This went on until my mother couldn't stay quiet any longer. I heard them arguing that night; she accused him of hiding something in the basement. I heard a scream that night; it was my mother. That was all I needed. I went to my father's study and walked to his desk. He was asking me what I needed when I grabbed the letter opener and…

Long pause, sobbing…

M: Get the journal, doctor. You will see. I am tired; I'm going to my room.

Interview with Mathers Cope session 4

K: Calm down Mathers, the tape is running now.

M: Well, did you?

K: Yes, I found the journal.

M: Did you read it?

K: Yes.

M: And?

K: I am so sorry, Mathers.

M: I…

K: I found something… In 1952 your mother had a miscarriage. When she was in labor, a doctor was called to the house. Your father insisted she have the baby in the home. He refused to get your mother to the hospital, even when complications arose. The doctor reported the baby as stillborn and improperly developed.

M: My brother…

Long pause...

K: This can't be. How can this be? You did it, Mathers. You stopped him.

M: The room in the basement, where they found… everything. It was empty. He was gone. It is not over. I haven't stopped anything.

K: This is… impossible. What can be done? I can go to the police. We can find…

M: Leave it, doctor. I feel safe here. Just leave it.

K: I brought everything. We can find a way. Maybe…

M: What? Did you bring it here? Is the idol here?

K: Yes, and the vial.

M: No… it is drawn to the idol… we have to leave.

I sat staring at the tape recorder, listening to the slap slap slap of the tape as it spun on the reel. I could barely believe what I had just heard. This had to be a joke, some incredible practical joke that Danny was playing on me. I stopped the recorder and looked up at Danny. He wasn't smiling. In the dim light, I could see the worry on his face.

“Let’s go see the room.”

“Are you fucking kidding me, after that?" I was pointing at the recorder. Danny said that now, even more than ever, we needed to see the room. I tried to convince him to leave, but he was not having it. He found a map of the hospital and identified where room 104 was. It was close to us and straight down the corridor, we had been going down. It would only be a short distance, and we could quickly get there, check it out, then get out of here. I was terrified, but I couldn't show my fear, so I agreed to find the room.

We left the room as it was, just as the police found it. They played the tapes at the trial, but no one believed what was on them. The journal and the other items were never found. We went deeper into the inky blackness of the main corridor, shining our phones in front of us as we went. I could tell Danny was as scared as I was, but we were pushed on by our need to prove that we were tougher than each other. We were both shaking and nearly ready to run out of the place when we found room 104.

The door was closed, pealing yellow paint revealing rusted metal beneath. There was no window in the door, only a slot for passing food into the room. The hallway continued ahead of us into pitch-blackness. Behind us was the same wall of black. We were only about fifteen feet from the double doors that led to the corridor behind us, but the doors were not visible in the darkness. I looked at Danny and nodded to the entryway. His hands were shaking as he tried the handle. It was unlocked and squeaked loudly as he pulled it open. We were not prepared for what we saw as we passed our lights over the contents of the room.

The tiny room contained a toilet, a sink, a rotting bed, and what looked like a large pile of debris in the corner. It was hard in the darkness to see any details of the various items in the room, so we had to investigate. I went to the debris first. I wanted to be sure it wasn't some animal burrow. As I shined my light over the area, I was hit with a sudden chill, like ice water being poured over my head. I could see that it was a pile of various pieces of fabric, padding from old rotten beds, and what looked to be blankets. I was suddenly worried that we had stumbled onto a homeless person's crash spot. I hoped we wouldn't encounter them coming back from an excursion into the outside world. It was then that I heard the sharp intake of breath from Danny. He said my name, and I will never forget the sound. He was so scared. His voice quivered as he called me over to look at what he had found on the bed in the room.

In the bed was a full human skeleton dressed in old crumbling hospital clothes and still strapped to the bed. I passed my light over the right hand, and there it was, the proof we needed. The ring finger was half missing, and the pinky was missing altogether. This was undoubtedly the bones of Mathers Cope. It was then that we heard something in the hallway outside. It sounded like the scraping of feet on the dusty floor. A horrible smell was immediately present, and I recognized it right away, the smell of electrical wires burning.

We rushed from the room and into the hallway; again, we heard a sound ahead of us. We knew that the way we had come was behind us, and I was about to break into a run when I heard Danny call out.

“Who’s there? We are just fucking around! We didn’t touch anything.”

Silence was the only response. The smell was stronger in the hallway, and there was dust was kicked up.

“Who’s there?”

Then out of the darkness came a deep and oddly accented voice. Terror gripped me as I recognized the implication of what that strange otherworldly voice said. Just one word.

“Me”

I turned and ran as fast as my legs would allow. I could feel some liquid splashed all over me. I know now that the warm thick liquid was blood, but at the time, I tried not to think of anything but running. I imagine that I may have broken some sort of record as I ran straight through the hallways smashing against the double doors of each section as I went. In one jump, I dove up through the window we had broken out in the storeroom by the morgue and ran screaming into the forest beyond.

That's it. I've told this story over and over, and now it's written down for all to see. I didn't kill my friend. The fucking thing did, Mathers Cope's brother. Anyone who goes out to that place is in danger. You should burn it to the ground and salt the earth. Keep me locked up forever. I don't care. Just don't let that thing out, don't let it come for me.