James Shaw looked intensely out his dorm room window to the snowy quad beyond. He could see nothing in the frigid darkness of the evening except the sparsely spaced lamps that lined the snow-covered walkways that spidered throughout the campus. The fuzzy orange glow of the lights dotted the night like unmoving fireflies on a summer evening. Falling snow obscured visibility even further as he scrutinized the area around each lamp. The image he had seen a week ago of the dark shape standing beneath the hazy orange glow of light across from the dormitories was still fresh in his mind. He had not seen the mysterious dark figure since that night, but he could swear he had seen glimpses of him. A dark shape rounding a corner or passing through the crowds of people on a busy street was all he had seen. He could swear that it was the exact figure, though. There was a feeling that accompanied each encounter. A cold chill, like ice water streaming down his back coupled with an intense sense of dread, struck him with each sighting. Convinced that this figure had been following him and possibly the others as well if Cynthia had seen him had James on high alert constantly. He was having trouble focusing on anything else.

He turned from the window and watched Anthony sitting on the single bed across from him, putting on his shoes. Their room was small, only allowing for a bed and serviceable writing desk on either side and a closet in the center of the wall opposite the entry. James liked the spartan accommodations. Most would tell him he was crazy, coming from the spacious living conditions his family's money afforded. But to James, it was the one thing in the world that was all his. Well, his half, as it were. Anthony was his best friend and a great roommate to boot. They were both tidy and kept out of each others way. If you didn't consider the constant pleading to stop studying and have some fun that James incessantly bombarded Anthony with.

"It's snowing," James said, pretending to be surprised and excited.

"No. Are you serious? Let's go make some snow angels." Anthony sarcastically shot back.

"Too bad we don't have one of Isaiah's cars tonight," James added, turning back to look out the window.

"Maybe it's better this way. At least we won't end up in some crazy haunted house that's about to collapse." Anthony had made no mistake about his feelings on their last adventure into the Witch House.

"I don't suspect anyone is keen to go back there any time soon. Well, except for Anita." James continued surveying the darkness outside.

"I'm ready to get going," Anthony said as he stood up. "You think they will have drinks again tonight?"

"I'm sure they will if Mr. Edgerton is there. He barely moved two feet from the wet bar last time." James turned from the window and gave his friend a big smile. "Well, don't you look sharp. It's almost as if you're trying to impress someone." his smile turned to a sly grin. "I think you might do better if you dressed in pages from an old history book." James laughed, brushing a piece of lint from Anthony's shoulder.

"You should talk. I've seen you trying to brush up on your math this last week. There's no use. Evelyn is one of the top mathematical minds in the country, maybe even the world. That's not your in. She doesn't seem to care about money either. I think it might be hopeless, James." Anthony patted James on the shoulder. "Too bad you're so damn ugly."

Both laughed as they grabbed their coats and headed out the door. They were heading to another meeting with the Society of Esoteric Knowledge and Technology, SEKT, as they took to calling it. There was a different feeling in the air tonight, however. Some questions needed answers. James only hoped the professors had some reassuring ones.

Isaiah was struck in the side of the face as he stepped out from the doorway of the small office attached to the garage he lived above. He landed hard on his hands and knees in the gravel, spitting blood on the ground. As his vision came back into focus, he could see two pairs of expensive wingtips. Isaiah knew immediately to whom they belonged. He didn't know their names, but he'd hear one call the other Nicky on the night they murdered his father. It was Nicky who pulled the trigger. Isaiah got to his feet and faced the two men. Both men wore expensive suits. The larger of the two was smoking a cigarette. A jagged red scare ran down his left cheek where Isaiah had hit him with the tire iron. The smaller one, Nicky, was shaking his hand.

"You got a thick skull, boy." The small man said.

"What the hell was that for?" Isaiah protested.

"Just a reminder. You still got our Chrysler, and you weren't here when we came to pick it up yesterday. You're not following the agreement." Nicky smiled. His sharp features reminded Isaiah of a rat. "Did that jog your memory, or do you need more help."

"The car is ready. It's in the garage. You can take it now." Isaiah motioned for the large garage door. "Let me just open the door."

The larger man whose head seemed to be attached directly to his shoulders added. "You made us come back a second time. Do you think we have nothing better to do?"

"I was working at the hospital. I couldn't get back here on time." Isaiah said, wiping the blood from his lip.

"Aint you gonna say you're sorry?" The rat-faced man asked.

"You killed my father," Isaiah answered, shaking with rage.

"What are you gonna do, boy? You want to end up like your papa?" Nicky smiled and opened his coat, revealing the .45 caliber in its holster. "I wish I hadn't. Your pop was always here when we came to pick up and drop off. Good work ethic, you could take a lesson. Now, don't you have something to say?"

"I'm sorry." Isaiah didn't know how long he could hold back.

"There's a good boy. You wouldn't want anything to happen to that girl of yours we saw you with the other night. Hey, you think you could put a good word in for Sam here." Nicky jerked his thumb at the larger man, who started to laugh.

"Let me open the doors and get the keys." Isaiah didn't wait for him to say another word, walking back into the office to retrieve the keys.

"We have this one for you to fix up. We'll take the Chrysler." Sam said, motioning to a grey Ford that was parked a few feet away.

Isaiah went to the large garage door and unlocked it, then pulled it open. The only car in the garage was the Chrysler he had taken out last Friday night. He handed the keys to Nicky and backed away.

"Look's like business is slow these days," Nicky commented, looking around the empty garage as he got into the car. "You better keep the payments rolling in, or Big Danny's gonna have us do more than give you a little love tap." He shut the door to the car and rolled the window down. "You'll need these." He finished tossing the keys to the other car onto the ground at Isaiah's feet. "We'll pick it up next Friday, and you better be here when we do."

Isaiah bent down to pick up the keys as the two men drove off. He watched the taillights disappear into the darkness. Well, he thought, at least he wouldn't have to walk to the meeting tonight.

Opening the worn wooden door of the Oak and Dagger, the sound of laughter greeted Isaiah. The place was hazy with smoke and smelled like musty old wood. He had to smile at how out of place his new friends looked huddled around a table in this place that time forgot. Everyone seemed to be laughing at Evelyn's story as she was standing at the head of the table, arms raised. She noticed him first and smiled warmly. Isaiah made his way over to the table. The man behind the bar nodded to him. Isaiah was surprised the man acknowledged him at all, judging from the icy hospitality they had received the last time they were here. Everyone stood up as he approached and greeted him enthusiastically.

"What happened to your face?" Cynthia asked.

"It's nothing. I slipped in the bathroom." Isaiah gave her a look that said he would tell her bout it later. Cynthia nodded. She knew what had happened. Isaiah had been visited by those two thugs from the speakeasy.

After exchanging pleasantries and a few more off-color stories from Evelyn, they made their way upstairs. Even now that they knew what to expect, the contrast from the dingy common room to the elegant second story was shocking. Making their way to the same elaborately carved door, they entered as if they had come here a dozen times. The awkwardness of the first meeting was gone. They had all become fast friends since their last visit to the Oak and Dagger and tonight promised to be an interesting night of conversation.

As before, the professors and their associates were already in the room. Professor Berlioux stood behind the large table at the front of the room, looking over a collection of musty old papers. Mr. Edgerton and Dr. Norris were in their usual places beside the drink table, and Professor Templeton was sitting on one of the cushioned chairs in the back of the room. All of them looked up and smiled as the group entered.

"Good evening." Thomas Edgerton announced, raising his glass.

"Yes, please everyone, make yourselves comfortable. I don't think we need to be as formal this time around. It's good to see all of you again." Professor Berlioux greeted the newcomers.

The room began to buzz with conversation as they exchanged pleasant hellos. There was a tangible feeling of ease in the room, which was a welcome change from the stiff awkwardness of the first meeting, Isaiah thought. There had even seemed to be a bridge achieved between the students and the professors. In this room, they were all considered equals in pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment. Thomas noticed the busted lip that Isaiah was sporting and gave him a nod of recognition. Anthony and Evelyn headed straight to the brandy while Cynthia, Anita, and Professor Templeton discussed something or other. James sat uncharacteristically silent in one of the cushioned armchairs contemplating the others. Professor Berlioux returned to the table at the head of the room and began organizing the materials he had laid out. Isaiah decided to make his way to Mr. Edgerton.

"Good evening, sir." Isaiah addressed Thomas stiffly.

"You can call me Thomas, Isaiah. I'm not that much older than you. Besides, I'll soon be calling you Doctor. Sir indeed." Thomas gave Isaiah one of his winning smiles. There was something about the man that made Isaiah feel at ease. Edgerton did not seem to hold much stock in social hierarchies. He treated everyone as an equal, with a smile and a wink for each.

"What's on the agenda for this evening?" Isaiah asked.

"Oh, I don't know, books, books, books, facts, facts, facts, and some boring story about someone who died hundreds of years ago. Standard fair, really." Thomas took a healthy sip from his glass of brandy.

Isaiah laughed. "You don't care much for the academics?"

"I leave that to those who are better suited to it. That lip has my interest peaked, though. Danny's boys?" Edgerton raised a questioning eyebrow.

Isaiah nodded. "They dropped a new car off tonight. I don't know when I'll have time to work on it."

"When do they want it back?" Thomas lowered his voice.

"Next Friday." Isaiah was glad that Thomas seemed to understand he didn't want the details of his predicament to become public knowledge.

"Do me a favor. Let Daniel and I take it back to Big Danny. I assume you're too proud to let me cover your debt for you." Thomas motioned to the quiet man in the wrinkled brown suit with a turn of his head.

Isaiah suddenly noticed Dr. Norris sitting close to them. Close enough to overhear everything they were saying. The man was a mystery. A doctor, but you wouldn't know it to look at him. His shabby suit, missing tie, and the top button of his shirt undone gave him the appearance of a worn-out private eye who'd spent too many nights sleeping in his car. Dr. Norris was staring at Professor Templeton, who was engaged in what looked like an earnest discussion with Cynthia and Anita.

"I can't let you, Thomas. It's my burden." Isaiah gave Thomas a knowing look.

"At least let us take the car back for you. Let him know you have people. Maybe it will get him to pull in the reigns on his gorillas a bit." Thomas motioned to the front of the room, where Professor Berlioux seemed to be preparing to address the room. Isaiah nodded to Thomas and took a seat.

"Welcome back, everyone. I see we have lost a few prospects from last week. No matter. The Society takes those who wish to be taken. As I have said, there are no hard feelings. You may leave at any time, with the understanding that you keep our discussions discreet. But it is good to see you all back. I believe we are building something here that will be mutually beneficial for us all." Berlioux fidgeted with the papers in front of him for a moment.

"So, we were discussing evil last week, more precisely the alleged evil of Arkham's most famous witch, Keziah Mason." Berlioux paused for a moment as he noticed the slight reaction to the name from the students. "I continued my research into her past and have uncovered some mentions of her in town records from Salem. Nothing too compelling. However, there was one mention from three years before her trial. The account was that of a young boy who came upon Keziah Mason's cabin on the outskirts of town as he was bringing in his flock of sheep for the night. The boy heard strange noises coming from the cabin and an awful-smelling smoke billowing from the chimney. Believing that she may be in trouble, he went to the place to help. By the time he reached the porch, he could hear her wailing inside. When he opened the door, he was struck by the sight of a fully nude Keziah covered head to toe in blood. His first reaction was that she was seriously injured until he noticed a bowl before her that contained the blood and several twisted bodies of rats. She turned to him and spoke in some foreign tongue, and the boy ran. Wild tales like this are familiar when delving into the testimony brought up in trials like this, but a small thing caught my eye. The boy mentioned that she had a book on a table in front of her. Its title was in German, which the boy recognized but could not read. It's a small thing, but I wondered if the book in question could be none other than the Unaussprechilichen Kulten by Friedrich Wilhelm von Junzt. The Unnamable Cults is the translated title, and we have a copy in our own Oren Library. Unfortunately, our esteemed head librarian Professor Armitage is reluctant to allow me to study the copy he has in the restricted section." The professor again shuffled the papers in front of him. "I trust that you all have been doing some research yourselves. Has anyone found any interesting mentions?"

Anita immediately spoke as if the damn had finally broken on information she was dying to reveal. "We went to her house. Last Friday, to her very room." Berlioux gave her an odd look, his face turning serious. "The room was strange. The ceiling and walls were set in odd angles that seemed impossible. The young man who lived there before the house was abandoned still had his things in the room. It was fascinating." Anita was positively giddy to deliver this information to the professor.

Cynthia noticed the Professor Templeton's expression grew stern as well. "The door wasn't locked," she added, stemming the inevitable deluge of words about to spring forth from Anita's mouth. "We were not breaking and entering so much as, entering. It seemed as though someone was squatting in the house, so we left rather quickly." Cynthia hoped to put a less deviant spin on their actions.

Thomas and Daniel seemed concerned as well. Claudia looked disapproving, while Berlioux looked serious but intrigued. "I was hoping you would start with research and leave the fieldwork for a later time. I wouldn't want any of you getting into trouble with the law over our topics of discussion. Be that as it may, did you find anything of interest in the room?" Scholarly interest took over any disapproval that Professor Berlioux may have had.

"The place was a dump. It looked like there hadn't been anyone there in years. It's only been vacant for six or seven months, but you wouldn't have guessed it from the looks of the place." Anthony said, his distaste for the house was evident.

"And the room, you said it's constructed of odd angles?" It was the first time most of them had ever hear Dr. Norris speak.

"Yes, I had classes with Walter Gilman, the former tenant. He mentioned the odd angles in class a few times." Evelyn answered. "It was about the time when he took the room in the house that he began coming up with some fairly unorthodox theories." Evelyn took stock of the room, explaining his theories in detail would likely be lost on the others. "In short, he believed that certain geometric formations could create links between other parallel realities. I was able to gather some notes that he left behind from the room. He was either brilliant or completely unhinged." Evelyn hoped that no one would ask for a deeper explanation of his theories. She found it hard to grasp some of it herself.

"I remember hearing about Mr. Gilman. It was a tragedy, if I recall it. He died, did he not?" Professor Berlioux inquired.

"He did," Evelyn replied.

"And you have his notes? Do you have them with you?" Professor Templeton stood and began moving toward Evelyn.

"No, they are in my room. I have been studying Gilman's work all week. I must say that what I have proofed thus far is sound." Evelyn wondered if Professor Templeton was about to take her by the ear and give her detention.

Claudia moved past Evelyn to the front of the room and leaned against the large table. "What of the room. Was there anything of interest besides these notes?"

Cynthia felt like they were being interrogated. There was something that the professors and their two friends knew that they weren't letting on. "I saw something strange in the wall. Something beyond the cracked plaster as if it were in the wall itself. Something that seemed strangely organic. I started to feel sick while I examined it. It could have been a mold of some sort. Once I started feeling sick, we heard something and left quickly."

"I saw something," James said quietly. It was the first thing he had uttered since they entered the meeting room. Everyone turned expectantly toward him. "I saw a figure in the room. It was in the corner where the angles seem to meet impossibly. A tall, dark figure, jet black yet intricately defined. It seemed to stare right into me. It filled me with a dread that I have never experienced in my life. I could swear that I saw it again by our dormitories before turning in for the night." James trailed off as he said the last, looking down at the burgundy and emerald patterned rug on the floor.

Professor Berlioux's hand, which was holding his chin inquisitively, began to shake. He quickly moved it beneath the table. Dr. Norris mothed something under his breath then stopped himself. Professor Tempelton and Dr. Norris exchanged a concerned glance, then broke it suddenly. Thomas Edgerton took a deep drink of his brandy and said. "A trick of the light. I've spent enough time in run-down old houses and musty tombs in my line of work to recognize the power of environmental suggestion when I see it. I've seen sturdier men than you or I run from a location after hearing the skitter of a rat or the rustling of branches in the wind. Our minds can play tricks on us. I remember one particular occasion when I was cataloging some artifacts for a client that happened to be in a family crypt on his family's estate. The wind gusted up through the entryway and blew out our lantern. Two of his burly workmen and himself all fleed, screaming from the crypt raving about the ghost of his ancestors. Being more accustomed to these types of charnel delvings, I simply re-lit the lantern and continued my work. We all had a good laugh later on at the pub." Thomas smiled at the group reassuringly, but Cynthia noticed that he took another long draw of his brandy. She decided not to bring up her seeing a dark figure as well that night.

Thomas continued to tell colorful anecdotes about his work as an antique dealer. He managed to turn the mood of the room to a more jovial tone. Soon there was laughter echoing down the lavish halls of the Oak and Dagger. There was more talk of Keziah Mason and the historical record of her life, but talk of the excursion into the Witch House was unanimously ignored for the evening. Professors Berlioux and Templeton did have more questions about the notes from Gilman's writing desk, but their interest seemed to be in the location and safekeeping of the notes rather than their contents. Even Dr. Norris seemed to be in an uncharacteristically pleasant mood, offering a few humorous stories of his own. Particularly ones about Professor Berlioux and his childhood. They all had a good laugh at Berlioux's expense when Daniel recounted a time he had to save Berlioux, who had gotten himself stuck in a tree. The evening ended too quickly, it seemed, when Professor Berlioux checked the time and called for the end of their meeting. Everyone began to collect their things and say their goodbyes with smiles and genuine affection.

"Isaiah." Professor Templeton waved as they all began filtering out of the room. "I wanted to let you know about your mother's book. You'll be happy to know that we will be holding on to this family heirloom indefinitely. We will keep it safely tucked away in the Societies archives, but you won't have to sell it off to a stranger." She smiled.

"Oh, so I guess that means..." Isaiah let the rest of the sentence hang.

"It is dangerous." Professor Templeton finished his thought. "It could be, but more to the fact it is nearly priceless. It could be one of a kind. Mr. Edgerton will compensate you handsomely for letting us keep it safely in the archives."

"That's good to hear." Isaiah felt a weight lift from his shoulders. "But what is it?"

"Well, I haven't been able to translate it yet, but preliminary evaluation tells me that this is some sort of ancestral book of lore. It was likely passed down through generations in your family. Its origin is somewhere in central Africa. I will have more information as I study it. I can tell you, though, that your family descended from what one in our society would define as royalty. Or the tribal equivalent, at least." Claudia looked excited as she relayed the information to Isaiah.

"Thank you, professor. I look forward to hearing more about it." Isaiah didn't know what to say. He didn't know his mother. Descended from some kind of royalty was an exciting prospect, but it hadn't helped him out in any way throughout his life. If Edgerton was willing to pay him good money for it, though, it was good enough for him.

The door closed behind Isaiah, who was the last of the students to leave. Only Berlioux, Templeton, Edgerton, and Norris remained. They all remained quiet until they heard the last steps on the stairs to the first floor, then turned to one another with concerning looks.

"You set them up, Alex," Claudia said with acid in her voice.

"I did no such thing. How was I to know they would traipse off to the Witch House after only bringing up the tale of Keziah Mason." Berlioux looked shocked at the accusation.

"What did you think would happen. Telling tails of witches in Arkham and giving them direction to research her in earnest." Daniel looked angry as well. "You practically dared them to seek out that wretched place."

"They were to have free will, Alex. Decide on their own, a luxury that you didn't afford us." Claudia calmed herself down, smoothing the front of her dress.

"He couldn't have known they would go there, Claudia," Thomas interjected. "and even so, how were we to know that the place held any potency?"

"The death of Walter Gilman, for one. Now James sees a dark figure. Do I have to remind any of you..." Claudia was getting heated again.

"No, you don't. You are right. I didn't know they would go this far, but I did lay the foundation." Berlioux ran his hands through is hair. "The information they have uncovered could be important, though. We've not heard a single whisper from him in over a year. One thing is clear, though. He's back."