The Portrait:

Upon the last leg of my late spectral journey, I found that I would not be able to reach my destination before the road was lost to dark. Fortunately, I stumbled upon a small chateau nestled deep in the woods, that, despite its decrepit and neglected manner, offered me satisfactory harborage to tide me over into the morrow. Diverging off the main road, I crept stealthily around the back of the short, stone-laden structure. Seeing as my pockets were just as barren as the chatter from my lips, I thought I would be none too much a burden if ever I merely slept and left in the morning. Thus, I pushed open a pane and slid myself inside the backroom, away from the chilling fever of the night.

The interior revealed to me a plentitude of dark-wooded arabesques and architectural reliefs that guarded an ever-rich display of the arts—paintings and sculptures of forgotten origin. These works soothed my stubborn eyes and captivated my mind like none before. Their wild beauty invoked a likeness to herbal medicine or the well sought land of dreams. My body lay down on the sheep-skin cot and fumbled about with my belongings, but my mind wandered not. It remained fixated on each crevice of the dark-wooded walls. They were unheard tunes played to me through lifetimes long along, through the faculty of memories.

Long, long did I gaze at these models of the mind. So long that it was knee deep into midnight before my mind sputtered to a restful reverie and desired to sleep once again. I could see, through the dim shine of the high casted moon, my reflection across the room. Comfort had been my enemy these past weeks during my journey, and the small oval mirror revealed to me my thin and withered state. My gaunt cheeks formed a bony chasm for which lay my weary bloodshot eyes. My lips seemed to be in a state of fearful hypothermia, their blue-gray hue contrasting on my pale white skin, so thin it appeared I rather had been mummified by sun stricken papyrus. And after staring at my gloomy gaze for nearly half an hour I committed to gain what little rest I could before the morrow’s demands.

The sun met me early through the small rimmed pane. As I hurried with my preparations I couldn’t help but become saddened by the new perspective of the room. It seemed its nocturnal mysticism had been lost—or rather locked away, in a night long ago.

But, just as I was slipping through the pane, my own gaze caught my eye, the reflection of my midnight man. Walking closer I could see that, unlike the other art, my reflection still revealed to me that gaunt and bony chasm of the night before. His bloodshot eyes still pierced my own and his skin grew ever-paler with the sun. And to my harrowing realization, as I touched that forbidden reflection, I found that it was not the glass of a mirror, but the canvas of a *portrait*.