The dreams are coming more frequently now. What was once an occasional horror has truly descended upon my life in a way that my former self would struggle to comprehend. I don't know how much longer I can last.

I dread the night. I always have. The darkness holds many things that one is right to be afraid of: accidents, incidents, crimes, but truly the worst aspect of the night is the change in state of mind it causes.

During the day we look around us, we enjoy the sights, we interact with others. However, when night falls, we pull within. Who is that person walking alone at night? Its best not to trust them. What was that sound? Don't investigate. It might not be safe. In total, all of human nature changes. During the day we are bold. During the night we are craven. During the day we are outside ourselves. During the night, all we have is our own bodies and minds. Especially our minds.

The dreams started one afternoon. I had just returned from a fascinating lecture. Dr. Westham had just returned from his expedition to the mountains and had returned with a great many interesting geological specimen. For a student of geomorphology, such a hands on lesson was quite unique and I made sure to attend, in fact arriving earlier than any other student.

There was one specimen in particular, a simple crystalline inclusion that caught my attention. I'm not sure why, but there was something about its translucence that caught me. The specimen was almost half a foot at the widest and was large enough to hint at some structure change further within. The light played around its structured edges but the interior was hard to discern, the light was forced into prismatic diffraction. It would not yield its secrets through sight alone.

After the lecture I asked Dr. Westham about the specimen. He said that it had caught his eye as well, and that even the story of its acquisition was something of a tale. He promised to tell me more about about it the following week if I was still interested and had the time.

I went to bed with neutral thoughts. I was mostly content. There were no major worries. My studies were going well and it was hinted that I perhaps would be able to assist the professors. It would be the last time my worries were so distant.

That night a front came in with dark grey billowy clouds and they descended upon the town. In my attic I was renting could hear the sounds of the wind and rain as they started. About half way through the night, the curtains to the dormer window, the only source of light into the room, burst open, along with the shudders themselves.

I arose with some fright, disoriented from my sleep. Instantly however, I could feel the cold wind and rain coming in from the open window and ran to close it.

As I did so, a fork of lightening struck from the heavens. The bolt flashed brilliantly and lit the whole night sky allowing me to see the whole town, right up to the north port. It connected briefly with the iron cross of the church steeple.

Shadows danced in the cold raw night. I could see very alley, every dim road and every blackened window. It was as if I had, for just a brief moment been transported to a shadow world, appearing as our own in every way, but lacking any tiniest hint of humanity.

The world was devoid of color. Here only grey and black lived. The emptiness of the scene struck me greatly. Not only were there no people to be seen, but in that very instant, I was assured that this world had *never* seen people. The houses and buildings were old and ancient, more like ruins, or monuments than dwellings men would build. Their dark and hollow openings horrified me.

The instant then faded. The world pitched back into blackness as the light disappeared.

Disturbed, I closed the window as fast as I humanly could and tried not to think too hard about what I had just seen. Its was all perception after all. It was the city at night. Anything more than that was simply my own mind projecting feelings and images onto an unchanged world. The world of light would be there in the morning. I just had to wait. Or sleep rather.

I climbed into bed.

Then the dreams started.

But the strange thing was that at first I could not even remember them. I awoke the next morning, feeling very much like the sight outside my window: cold, gray and dreary.

However, in addition to the discomfort of the night, I also was left with a vague feeling of unease, as if something very important, and very wrong had happened while I was in my bed, and which my mind had completely blocked from its memory.

It remained a nagging, troubling sensation even as I gathered myself and departed for the university.

The university was, as it always has been, located on a small hill atop the town, right by the coast. One could sit on some of the balconies of that stone structure and look out at the incoming ships. If the wind was right, somethings you could catch the smell of the ocean and the hint of salt on the wind. It also commanded a view of most of the town, not unlike the creaky sixth floor attic that I was currently renting on the hilly outskirts.

I had started making it my morning routine to stop by the market square on my way to the university, rather than traversing around the side. I would usually pick up bread or fruit, or whatever my meager stipend could afford that week.

While I was threading my way through the maze of old streets, slick from last nights rain, I heard a commotion originating from a few streets over. I had arose early so I had some time before I was needed at the university, and so I went to see what the matter was.

Up until then, I had mostly forgotten the ghastly sight I had seen the last night, and the feeling of dread which it had imparted on me. We were, after all, in the land of the day. The occurrences of the night were fleeting things which had no strength under even the dim sun of the clouded sky.

Yet as I stepped out onto the square which held the church, the feeling from earlier returned. A vague and disquieting sense of unease. There was something I had missed. There was something I had forgotten. Something bad.

There was a crowd gathered around the foot of the church. I could make out the shapes of several policemen keeping the men and women at bay. I jostled closer to see what was going on.

Next to the policemen was the fire chief and the head of the church. The fire shief was a stout man and wore red and dark blue uniform complete with a white cap. The priest was a thin tall man who wore only black. For some reason, the sight of them, two different body types together was very humourous, like something out of a farce.

They regarded the object on the ground, and it took me a moment to understand that this was what the crowd was inspecting.

On the ground in front of the church lay the massive iron cross which used to sit atop the steeple. It had fallen from its perch and smashed into the street below, embedding itself in the ground a good foot or so. And if that were it, it would have been alarming but hardly out of the ordinary.

However, not only had the cross fallen, but it was the state of the cross which truly disturbed me. It length was made of black iron and was easily twice the size of a person. Its shape was no longer recognizable. The head of the cross along with the body had been twisted hideously out of shape, as if suddenly the whole item had been made a liquid for a second, only to be frozen after. The arms were deformed at odd angles, one from falling, the other almost completely broken off on impact.

It was then that I remembered the vision I had seen the night before. The lightening had come from the sky and struck the church.

I looked down at the cross and frowned. It wasn't right.

I had to back away suddenly from the sight and left the scene to the other passerbys. I felt somewhat sick to my stomach, and ended up not taking breakfast at all.

I found that I did not want to think about what I had just seen. I hurried to the university as fast as I could so that I could immerse myself in my studies and therefore rid my mind of these uneasy thoughts.

The loomed before me, its dark cut stone always a stark contrast against the blue of the sky and ocean. Today however, its dark grey nestled easily into the somber weather. As I finally arrived before the main gates the sky open up yet again, threatening to soak anyone who dared be tardy.

I slipped into the building just as the worst of it started to come down.

I stepped into blackness for a moment and let my eyes adjust to the dim light of the main hall. The dark wood and deep green carpet practically absorbed the feeble oil latern light inside the entrance way. The reason for the lack of illumination had been explained to me when I had started my courses, the university held many manuscripts and paintings in its halls and rooms. Many of them were fragile to the very light itself.

I did not overly mind the somber tone of the instituion, in fact quite the opposite; during the years in which I had called this place home, I had come to find the subdued lighting homey and comforting. Its mute and lack of flashy apparel was quite at odds with the current fashion, and represented the sensibilities of a previous age, one which I found myself more acquinted to than the current.

With these thoughts, I passed through the practically deserted halls towards the small lecture room in which my classmates and I attended class.

The day's lesson went quickly, and soon I found myself forgetting about the whole morning.

At least until Dr. Westham pulled me aside after the lesson.

He had somehow slipped into the class while the professor was talking, but he had done so silently, or I had been so wrapped up in the lecture that I hadn't noticed.

He skipped pleasantries and invited me back to his office. He wanted to show me the specimen from his trip and talk about the specifics of how he had found them. He said that I would find it enlightening.

And so there I was, face to face with the same uncut crystal from before.

It sat atop his table on a purple cloth. I remembered staring at it for quite a long time. For some reason, that one in particular really had caught my eye.

Dr. Westham cleared the table of the others.

He complimented me on my intuition. Of all the specimen, this was by far the most interesting. And then he proceeded to tell me how he had acquired it. As he slipped further and further into his story I became enraptured with his drive and motivation. His words formed visions in my head and I listened intently.

The expedition to the mountains had been only somewhat successful at first. The doctor was trying to put together the final touches on his attempt to assign an age to the mountain range itself. The new invention of radiometric dating was revolutionizing the field, and the doctor had no intention of falling behind: the lumbering, exquisitely expensive machine in the lab next store was proof of that.

Therefore he had acquired every kind of rock he could kind on the range. During this first cursory search, he had come across a chip of the kind of rock before us. Despite his extensive knowledge, he could not identify it. He became convinced that it had come from deep underground.

And so he had not been satisfied. Although the university lacked the budget to fund his own dig, he had to find a way into the heart of the mountain and he vowed to do this task himself.

He consulted with every geological survey he could find, descended into every crevice and valley until his funds started to run dry.

Still, caught by a sudden obsession, he delved deeper. The faculty threatened to cut him off completely. His clothing became torn and tattered. He ran out of money for food, yet refused to sell the rocks and crystals he had found. In his time as a destitute, he made friends with the people who lived in the mountains.

They were an odd bunch who kept to themselves. He had worked around them for months now, but, seeing his horrible condition even in comparison to their own poverty, they took him in.

While in their care, he learned some stories about the last turn of the century, when the land was still unknown, and the people were still adventurous and dangerous. The original settlers were convinced that the mountains held gold in them, and dug tunnels deep into the moutains, they told him.

Overjoyed, he promised them he would return with gifts to thank them for their generousity.

He prepared what little tools he had left and ventured into the abandoned mining system.

At this point Dr. Westham stopped to catch his breath.

I rocked back, enraptured, eyes wide. He was a man who had turned what many regarded as a boring and pampered pursuit into a true life or death venture of discovery.

A glass of water appeared in his hand and he raised his eyebrows at me as he was drinking.

As he finished he asked if he was broing me. His eyes strayed momentarily to the crystal before him, before returning, pericingly to mine.

I actually laughed despite myself and waved the worry away as I leaned in. It was actually fascinating, please continue!

He nodded and continued.

The tunnels ran deep under the mountains dating back hundreds of years. The entrances were large, large enough to drive a truck into, although the mountain people did not frequently use such things in their excavation. The tunnels were a human endevour. And in venturing deeper and deeper, and watching to light of the entrance fade behind him, he began to appreciate that much more.

It took a long while to gain enough depths to understand the strata in more detail, so for the first few minutes, the professor had focused on the method by which the tunnels were created.

Every inch of the tunnels had been hewn straight from the stone. Billions of strokes over hundreds of years. Generations upon generations all contributing, pushing the depths further and further. His hand trailed on the wall, it was rough, and hand hewn. One could make out the individual cuts. No machine has touched this.

As the years had gone by, the techniques for cutting and mining the stone had changed slightly and it was possible to tell where power tools and newer alloys had been introduced. For this reason, the professor had expected for the cutting technique to serve as a sort of dating mechanism. The deeper cuts would be newer as they were only possible to be reached through the older, less extensive tunnels.

However, such a neat methodology was quickly obliterated. The tunnels were to be sure, *tunnels.* There was no main entrance. There was no main passage. They were a bizarre warren of branching and looping interconnected corridors, raising and lowering as they liked as the miners sought to trace the veins.

Thus, new and old, up and down melded in a hideously confusing manner. There was no system. There was no easy way to date the corridors except for by thorough investigation.

And it was only after passing a collection of abandoned mining equipment that the professor had realized that he was in danger of getting lsot within the tunnels.

He had looked back the way he had come and with a sinking feeling, he understood that in his exuberance, he had no idea how to get out.

The several months of working his goal had skewed his priorities horribly and instead of understanding the severity of his situation, he vowed to finish his mission regardless the cost. He ventured deeper into the tunnels.

As he delved deeper, he collected samples which he safely stowed in his backpack. Finally, the strata had started to show itself as the tunnels traversed the depth layers.

Minutes turned into hours.

The professor was operating on pure instinct now. His pack was full. His hands skimmed over the rock and stone which now held him bodily. His feet followed no path but ther own.

And he went deeper.

He had no concept of day or night, and although he had a limited amount of food and water, his tourch had enough power for several days if not weeks.

He must have slept but he recalled no such thing. The tunnels became tighter and smaller and less structured as he went on until finally at several points he had to get onto his hands and knees to crawl through smaller sections.

He was sleep deprived, hungry and lost. Yet he went further deeper still.

He was forced to stoop permanently, he wore holes through his pants. The tunnels closed around him. The very stone which he had intended to study closed around him. And for all the twisting black side passages, it might have been the stone itself studying him.

At this point, obviously very emotional, the professor stopped again.

He looked at me as if to gauge my reaction t his story. I was horrified. He had essentially just thrown himself into the tunnels with no clear way out. Even worse, there seemed to be no scientific basis to any of the things he had done. Although the trip was a clear feat of will and endurance, there was no clear purpose to it.

I hesitated to say these things to the professor. He had clearly been through so much and I didn't want to insult him. The specimen he had collected had been done at honestly insane personal cost. But no methodology… how was anything to be replicated?

He clearly saw my hesitation and through some unknown mechanism surmised my thoughts.

He flashed a smile and nodded. He explained that it had been an exceedingly rash and unscientific venture.

He continued in rationalizing that it had resulted in wonderful specimen and the evidence for further, more methodical study.

But he added that he had not finished his story, nor explained where he had collected the most important sample. As he said that, he gestured towards the crystal which has so easily captured my eye.

Now that I had thought of it, none of the other specimen looked anything like it, and I told him as much.

He nodded and finished his story.

After many days of being underground, forced to crawl through lsot tunnels, he realized that, seemlessly at some point, the tunnels had given way to natural occurring tunnels, ancient before even the first man rose from Africa.

It was in these that he spent his most desperate hours.

There was no food left. There was precious little water. He had no sense of out or in, of night or day, of which path he had traveled that that which lay unexplored.

Yet nothing terrified him, nothing scared him to the core like the last thing which he had yet to lose: his light.

The battery power held for a day more, an extra set of batteries having fallen out of his pack some time ago.

He held the torch like a drowning man to a branch, for without it he would be in true darkness, and lost for sure.

And then it flickered. It threatened.

He recalled pleading with it. Praying then, deep below the earth with all his might that this one tiny light would not extinguish.

But of course, it did go out.

There was a break in narration. The professor did not remember what had occurred at this point, but the shock of being in darkness alone was likely to have been a terrible one.

He wandered in the dark for an unknowable time, lost, completely and utterly.

And then, just as his hopes were about to fade completely, he fell into a strange chamber. The floor of the tunnel had given out and emptiness had engulfed him, the ink blackness embracing him. He felt a sudden sharp painful impact and he lost consciousness.

It was likely that he should have died at this moment, weak as he was from his months of little food and days wandering the tunnels. However, he did not. And recalling the incident, he could not explain why. His recollection of the event was lacking but he swore he was in there for weeks even after his food ran out. Instead, he stirred and got to his feet.

He was in a chamber. It was covered with dark crystals. Each one was mammoth in dimension. They were taller than the highest building of London, and multifaceted. They were larger than a human easily, and he had found himself lying on one. The surface was mirror smooth.

Although he had gotten to his feet, he was now terrified, since between the crystals, which jutted each and every way, there was simply darkness. If he had lost his footing at this point, he would have fallen into the space between the crystals and certainly been killed. Somewhere, his mind told him, the extent of the crystals must end, since he must be in a cavern. But its size must have been gargantuan because he could make out no end to it in any direction. There was no floor to the place, nor ceiling or walls. It was a very frightening feeling, even after everything he had been through and elicited a disturbing feeling of otherworldliness and detachment.

He had no light, but the cave was nevertheless illuminated ever so slightly by some indirect source. So, from this diffuse source he navigated carefully down the length of the crystal.

Despite his best effort, he looked over the edge at one point.

His stomach clenched in his chest. He could see no end to the darkness below him and in that moment of sudden terror he began to doubt that there was even an end at all. And something of that idea solidified, crystallized in a very unsettling manner in his mind: that there was in fact no walls to this place, that there was no end, and the blackness simply was the whole world, interspersed with the crystals.

Where was his place then, in this matrix of darkness and silicon? He did not belong here, in this place of darkness. He and his scurrying were merely a dislocation, an imperfection within its uniformness.

He struggled to try to find a way out.

He got to the edge of the crystal he had woke on, and ran his hand over its conjunction with its neighbor, which ran at a crazed vertical slant. The did not seem to be any way to mount it, and he had lost his climbing gear a long time ago.

In fact, running his hand across his back, he found that his whole pack was gone. This did not surprise him, but it did decrease the likelihood of him ever being able to get out of this mess.

He reached up towards the crystal nonetheless and tried to find some handhold on it, but he was disappointed. There was none. Its surface was perfect. In fact, it was too perfect. Peering closer at it, he became convinced that not an inch of it was out of place. A chill ran through him. He had never seen anything like this before.

He tried one more attempt, using the friction of his shoes to clamber up. But this too was met with failure, and in coming down he almost lost his balance. He clung to the crystal with the frenzied strength of the terrified.

So he could not go up. Which was just as well, since although he must have fallen in from above there was no assurance that he could find that spot or even get to it. Furthermore, even if he did, he had been lost before he fell. So he might as well see what lay at the bottom and if there was an exit there.

Down could be easier than up. But it also held the same risk of falling…

He went to the other end of the crystal and tried to figure out where he could clamber to.

He spied another crystal not too far down that connect below the one he was on.

He continued like this, choosing his path at random, sometimes having to walk what seemed like endless lengths trying to find an intersection he could access.

But finally his luck escaped him. He had chosen a crystal too far down and with too sharp of an incline. When navigating down to it, he lost his footing against the sheer side and slipped.

He cried out as he slammed back first into the crystal and then started to slide.

He gained speed, even with his lengs flailing uselessly against the smooth surface. Then the world dropped out from under him.

He was falling now, but slowly, excrusiatingly, through space. Around him, the crystals fled upwards. He turned to look downwards and the world went black for an instant.

The pain was indescribable. He gagged and reeled but was unable to even move. He had stopped breathing, but his eyes refused to close. A choking gasping noise escaped his mouth, and echoed into that monsterous hall.

He felt a fire, a burning sensation in his head and his body, searing through him, like an electric current. But whatever sensation his was feeling wasn't solely within him, when the feeling reached his extremes it continued out from him, running through the crystals and illuminating them in a sickening purple light.