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What we told the police wasn't the truth. How could we tell the truth when it sounded so ludicrous. None of the people who were involved believed it, and the ones who lived through it...Well...Lived through it. Only Melanie and I believed it, and Mel was the only one of us who really understood all of it. To this day I believe her claim that I don't want to understand it...That once it was over we should try to just walk away and never look back. But it's hard for me to forget, and considering the nightmares she's been having lately, I'd say it's hard for Mel too. So I look back now, to write this down, so that others can know, and that maybe someone out there who understands completely can help us. Because something is after us, and we can only run so long.

It began, quietly enough, on the thirtieth of October six years ago. The day is burned into my memory because it had been an unnaturally warm autumn, which had given our little ocean-side town a much-needed boost. Not only that, but the day itself had started so beautifully that it had almost been painful. The reds and oranges of the sunrise were...But I digress. We...Melanie and I...Had been swimming and sunning ourselves since early in the morning, when we saw a thick fog rolling in towards shore. We decided we'd had enough sun for one day anyway, and headed back to our cottage along the beach.

Let me tell you a bit about the town itself before I continue, since it plays an important part in the beginning of our story. It (and no, I will not tell you its name) was a fairly typical fishing town, relying as so many do these days on the income gathered by selling trinkets to vacationers. That's why the extended summer had been such a boon to our town. You could find any number of identical towns up and down the east coast...Which is maybe why our town, so anonymous in its normality, was chosen for...But that comes later.

The fog rolled in quickly, thick, heavy, and gray-green. It was upon us with a speed that was both unusual for fog and quite disturbing. We barely made it into our house before the fog reached us, feeling an odd urgency to be inside when it arrived. We were right.

All through that long afternoon and into the evening the fog remained around us, blanketing the town, making it impossible to see. If the old cliché "can't see your hand in front of your face" ever applied to anything, it was to that fog. No cars were heard moving about that evening in a town that was usually active well past midnight, something that was doubly odd because of the extended warm season which had attracted so many people. It was impossible to sleep because the air itself had taken on a thick quality, as though it was

gaining substance, and the humidity had risen sharply...So sharply that everything seemed covered in a thin layer of moisture.

Mel and I entertained ourselves by playing board games and listening to the weatherman on the radio tell us that this fog wasn't even remotely strange, and that he saw things like this every summer. Neither of us believed him. Not really. Why would we? We'd been living in this house since we'd gotten married almost six years earlier. Neither of us had even seen anything like this fog during *any* season.

I suppose I should tell you a little bit more about Mel and myself. Mel was a professor of archaeology and anthropology at a nearby college, and I was a professor of archaeology and mythology at the same school. We'd been happily married, as I said, for nearly six years. Almost twelve now. Still happy together, even if we are running scared. We've never had any children, not that we haven't tried. We've never had time to stop for tests, but we're both quite certain that there's nothing wrong with either of us, which adds another layer of disquiet to our chase. As if something doesn't want us to reproduce, if you'll forgive my paranoia. But I'm digressing again.

The fog finally rolled back out to sea, on little cat feet (as the old saying goes), sometime between midnight and dawn. I always loved that "little cat feet" expression because it brings such a wonderful image to mind. So wonderful that it's almost inappropriate to use to describe this fog. Better to say that this fog crept back out to sea on the feet of something sinister. Something that raised the hairs on the back of your neck and made you feel like you were being watched, even though you couldn't see anything when you looked around.

As soon as the fog was gone the air cleared, returning to the usual light, salty smelling cool air we were used to. But it left a malaise hanging over the town. For the next two days everyone moved about like they were in a trance. Lethargic, slow. Few people smiled, but everyone greeted everyone else cheerily enough, even if it was forced. When that finally lifted, the bodies began to show up.

The first one looked like a simple murder, and the state police came in to help the town police deal with it since there hadn't been a murder there in almost thirty years. The victim, a man who everyone recognized from around town but no one seemed to know, and whose name no one knew, had had his throat slit and had apparently bled to death. His time of death was believed to be sometime around midnight on the night the fog was there. The police said that the fog would have made a perfect cover for any number of other illegal activities, and that we were lucky that only this had happened. Lucky for us. Not so lucky for him.

Of course, we should have known at the time that it just couldn't be that easy. In retrospect (and hindsight, as they say, is always 20/20) we should have expected something more. But at that point Mel and I didn't have all the facts, so we had no chance to expect what happened. Over the next four days, four more bodies were found around town. All of them had been killed the same way and, judging by their state of decomposition (which, in the case of the last one, was rather hideous), at roughly the same time as the first.

I know that by now you're saying to yourself: "How does he know so much about the murders?" Let me tell you.

Something was found with the bodies which the police, both state and local, were completely unable to identify. With each of the bodies, a medallion was found...Medallions with engravings so odd as to defy description, depicting a city made up of bizarrely angled buildings, overlaid by a symbol which was almost, but not quite, a pentagram. Where the star would have been closed, this symbol looped off to the side and around the bottom of itself, ending in a tiny circle.

Unable to identify them, and unable to think of anything else to do to learn what they were, the police sent one of them to be analyzed. What they got back was hardly what they had expected. The report they received stated that not only had carbon dating tests determined the age of the medallions to be over three thousand years old, but that they were composed of some material that had never been seen before.

That's when Mel and I were called in. The police believed that by working with us, both of us archaeologists with other talents, they could perhaps identify the medallions which (they said) might give them a possible motive, or even lead them to the killer. Mel and I thought it highly unlikely that there was anything we could tell them about the medallions that they didn't already know, but we'd been following the story in the papers and on the radio, and were quite curious. Curiosity, as the saying goes, killed the cat. It hasn't killed us yet, but it might as well have.

Be that as it may, the police loaned us one of the medallions, along with a complete copy of the analysis they'd had run on the medallions. We saw almost immediately that the tests had been strikingly comprehensive...Better by far than anything we could have had done with our limited contacts. So we decided that rather than try to continue to figure out specifically why they were found with the bodies, we would instead attempt to determine where they had come from, and what meaning was behind their strange, almost inhuman engravings.

It wasn't hard to get permission from the school to put much of our non-class related work put on hold for the time being. After all, the local chief of police himself had asked for our assistance. This was a big deal, the biggest (and most frightening) thing that had ever happened in our sleepy little town. It took only a little more doing to get permission to use the school's facilities for our research.

At first, the medallion completely defied all explanation. We tried to identify the odd star-shaped symbol, and came up empty-handed. The strangely non-geometrical city depicted on it bore some resemblance to the work of both M.C. Escher and H.R. Geiger (more the former than the latter, thankfully), but again defied definition. We ignored the material composition for the time being, since the police workup had been so thorough.

Mel became increasingly frustrated with the whole thing, and finally seemed to slip the bonds of rational thought for a time as she went hunting through the library's musty old basement in search of some half-remembered rumored archive of arcane books and relics. I went with her on her ramblings through the library basement, as much for the sake of taking a break from the research as to keep a slightly worried eye on my dearest love.

Just as Mel was about to concede defeat (after three days of searching the surprisingly expansive basement), we ran across a stairwell going down. It was about as far away from the stairs back up into the main library as you could get and not be in the basement of the nearest building, and was unlabeled, and unlocked. There was nothing for it but to go down, and see what was there. We had nothing to lose...So we thought, at the time.

At the bottom of the stairs was a small room, the front half of which was almost completely filled by a large desk, behind which sat a tired-looking grey man. I say he was grey because, in a very real way, he was...He wore a grey suit, had grey hair and colorless eyes. Even his skin seemed to have faded into a dusty grey color. Presumably he'd been there for a long time. Behind him was a heavily reinforced vault door. It was a rather ominous image, all-together, and I almost picked Mel up, tossed her over my shoulder, and headed back out of there without a word.

I dearly wish I had.

The man didn't seem terribly surprised to see us, saying only that it was about time we arrived, and that he'd been waiting for several days. Mel, always the more adventurous, ignored this, peering eagerly at the vault door. I was deeply unsettled, but said nothing, knowing how important our research might be to the police.

After a few moments of vaguely pleasant chit-chat, the man unlocked the vault door and let us in, with a brief warning that continues to haunt us today.

“Most of the books and relics within are harmless; but take care, children...Some of the things within are far more dangerous than they appear, and can tell stories that mankind was never meant to know.”

We both looked at him a little oddly, suspecting that his time stuffed away in this odd little sub-basement had turned him a bit strange in the head. It didn't occur to me, at the time, to ask why he didn't just turn us away if what was in there was so inimical to human life. I asked later, but I'll get to that in due course.

At the time, we were like little kids in a candy shop. That vault vindicated so many theories that we'd both held but never been able to prove about the pre-history of our world. As we searched for information about the medallion, we read all sorts of mad things... Strange creatures inhabiting the Earth long before the dinosaurs roamed; things coming down from beyond the stars and slowly corrupting and destroying small farms in Massachusetts; people whose personalities changed radically, then changed back to normal a year later, after which they claimed to have swapped bodies with creatures that lived before recorded human history...And so much more.

And everywhere we looked, that strange star-shaped symbol. Eventually, we ran across a passage that referred to it as the Elder Sign, which led us to a tome called *Cults of the Ghoul*. The book described, in far-too graphic detail, a multitude of strange cults from around the world, many of which used the Elder Sign as a protective ward against the (ominous thunder, please) Forces of Darkness.

Sounds pretty absurd, doesn't it? In the light of day, when the rational mind holds sway, it still seems to sometimes. But at night, when the darkness can press in on you like a living entity, and even the most mundane noises can sound strange and otherworldly...Well...That's a whole other story, isn't it.