

THE CALL OF HASTUR

by

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The moonlight glinted off the water, turning the ferry's wake into a glittering trail of liquid diamonds. Standing at the ferry's gunwale, Phelicity breathed in the night air and the spray from the Providence River. In the fog-shrouded distance, she could just descry the imposing black shape of Hastur Manor, revealing itself like one of the eternal creatures out of the mists of time from the cosmic horror stories that Asher liked.

Asher, Phelicity's boyfriend, settled beside her, resting his hands on the railing, his shoulder lightly brushing hers.

"There it is!"

Phelicity felt his excitement transferred through their light touch. "Mmhmm."

"I've wanted to visit for years. I know Cthulhu isn't your thing, but I'm really glad you came." Asher wrapped his arm around Phelicity's shoulders. The heat of that embrace not only comforted against the chill February night but spread a warmth beneath her chest as well.

Contrasted with Asher's black T-shirt depicting an, admittedly, creepy squid-like creature, Phelicity wore, beneath an unbuttoned, long-sleeved, flannel shirt, a light blue tee that reproduced the cover of Nirvana's album *Nevermind*.

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Phelicity rested her head on his shoulder. “I’ve never been to anything like this, so, who knows, maybe it’ll be my thing.”

The ferry docked along a quay extending from the island on which Hastur Manor was the only structure. The manor sat atop a low, stony hill not far from the rocky shore; the remainder of the island was covered in loose stone, grass, and sporadic trees.

Dressed in smart blue slacks and a clean, white, short-sleeved Polo, a crewmember on the ferry opened a gate set into the bulwark and lowered a short plank onto the concrete-piled quay. The passengers began to disembark.

Phelicity and Asher walked hand-in-hand, each pulling a single, wheeled suitcase along the short pier. From the dock, a simple, paved path led up the stony slope and to the manor.

Phelicity shivered. “Did it seem to just get much colder?”

Asher shrugged. “Must have been the wind.”

The throng of excited con-goers crowded around them and, eager to enter the manor, passed them. Asher squeezed Phelicity’s hand, looking at her and smiling his goofy, enthusiastic smile. Just off the path before reaching the front doors of the manor was a rectangular plaque, set at a vertical slant atop a squat pedestal. Phelicity paused to read the plaque in the glow of the single light ensconced above the door:

Hastur Manor was home to Randolph Carter (born 1874), founder of the Lovecraftian Association. Upon Carter’s death in 1980, in accordance with his will, the annual conventions of the association, previously closed to all but inducted members, were opened to the public, and Hastur Manor was converted into a hotel to accommodate the increased guests.

“Huh.”

“What?” Asher prompted.

“This place has a long history is all. I didn’t expect that.”

“See?” Asher flashed a wide smile. “I knew you’d start to like it.”

Phelicity chuckled. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.”

The two large black doors of the hotel were embossed with a black sigil that appeared like three angular tentacles extending from a central oval. With the hotel’s construction of black stone, crossing the threshold gave Phelicity the impression of entering the maw of some awesome stony beast.

“The Sign of Koth,” Asher said, nodding his chin toward the sigil.

“Huh?”

“It’s used to seal doors against unwanted entry,” he explained as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

Phelicity didn’t know how to reply to that, so she allowed the silence to stretch until offering a response would have been more awkward than not. In any case, Phelicity became distracted by the architecture and décor within the hotel. The flooring comprised boarding of plain dark wood, and matching wainscotting covered the walls. Light came from black-iron wall sconces and matching chandeliers in the form of hideous beasts that appeared to be nightmarish interpretations of real-world animals—bulls, monkeys and gorillas, vultures, hyenas. Wrought, black-iron balustrades, which showed intricate designs like those of the sconces, lined the curving, wooden staircases. The ground floor was open and spacious, though higher stories had narrower hallways and lower ceilings.

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After checking in at the front desk, Phelicity and Asher took the stairs to the third floor—the manor-turned-hotel had no elevator—and settled in to their quaintly appointed room of old-style carpeting and simple furniture for a short nap.