

Three the Lighthouse

by **Fiberglass**

It was just past eight, and there was nary a cloud in the sky.

Little Maurice emerged from his bedroom, dressed in a loose-fitting polo shirt and a pair of clamdiggers, a picnic basket and a fluffy beach towel in his hands. He strode eagerly down the long hallway, sandals slapping softly against the threadbare rug, until he reached the study.

The door was open, but the curtains were drawn. A lit candelabrum sat atop the desk in the back of the room. The boy knew he would find his father there. The man practically never slept anymore. A welter of hardcover books, all quite old, which he had presumably been going through the night before, covered the davenport like a growth of lichen.

The man himself stood facing the empty fireplace, drumming his fingers on the mantle. He was wearing the same clothes as the day before: a vermilion smoking jacket, a pair of faded tan slacks, and dark green slippers. All three articles had seen better days. Little Maurice couldn't tell for certain, but it seemed to him that some of the hair around the perimeter of his head had fallen out.

“Good morning, father. Is there any chance that we'll go to the lighthouse today?”

George Wrathschild, chewing on an antique Calabash pipe, kicked the hearth in frustration. “No, you fool!”

“But you promised.”

“Your *mother* promised. I just happened to be standing there.”

“You nodded your head.”

“I was probably nodding about something else.”

“You're not going to honor *her* promise?”

“That's not how these things work. Furthermore, in case you haven't noticed, all that's left of your mother is a decomposing forearm gripping a sage broom.”

“What happened to the rest of her?”

“I couldn’t say. Also, just between you and me, I suspect that the bit that remains has taken leave of its senses.”

“With all due respect, what are you doing today that’s so important? Can’t we just go? I’ve been trying to get you to take me for months.”

“Lighthouses are stupid!”

“What’s stupid about them?”

“Everything.”

“They’re not stupid, I assure you. We can take the boat right over to the island and make a day of it. It’ll be great.”

“Make a day of it? Doing what, exactly?”

“I don’t know. Sitting on the beach. Enjoying the sunshine. Taking a walk along the shore. Maybe doing a bit of angling.”

“Frankly, that all sounds terrible. I can’t believe you suggested it.”

“Why do you even live near the ocean if you’re not interested in enjoying it?”

“There used to be a really good arcade here, but it shut down ten years ago. I can’t determine an effective way to get out of the mortgage.”

He took the pipe out of his mouth, examined it, and returned to his drumming, having clearly moved on from the conversation.

Little Maurice set his stuff down and parted the curtains. Through the dingy window, the outside world looked vaguely eerie. The lighthouse stood on the edge of the bluff, not unlike a svelte young maiden in a long white dress that had a widow’s walk and a cupola rather than a head.

He stared longingly at it, and his mind began to drift around inside his skull, gently banging against the osseous outcroppings, inspiring strange thoughts.

* * * * *

That summer I decided to rent a small cottage on the beach. An article in *The Journal of Things You Might Wish to Know* had convinced me that the sea air would do me some good, though it didn't provide any specific metrics. Perhaps I didn't have enough airborne bacteria in my lungs. Maybe there was some value to be gained from watching seagulls steal food and valuables from hapless vacationers. Perhaps my automobile wasn't rusty enough.

I couldn't move into a cottage right away because none of the ones I could afford were available. I had to pitch a tent in the woods behind the sand dunes while I waited for a vacancy. It's an unwritten rule that you have to eat camp food while you're residing in a tent, so I consumed nothing but trail mix and sardines in mustard sauce for three weeks. When I tried to light a fire on a particularly chilly night, I was harshly reprimanded by what appeared to be an avatar of Hephaestus, but now that I think about it that could have just been a vivid hallucination brought on by excessive mustard intake.

In any event, I eventually procured a rental cottage and took a part-time job in a convenience store with a tackle shop in the back. It wasn't really the sort of job I wanted, but I thought it might take my mind off the recent death of my doppelganger. (In case you're curious, he was devoured by a colony of fire ants posing as a chiropodist. I have no idea why he was not deterred by the fact that the guy's name was Dr. Colony-of-Fire-Ants. That's even how it was printed in the yellow pages, and the ad itself was filled with the kinds of typographical errors that ants are known to make.)

I went in knowing nothing at all about fishing, as I had grown up in a town where, due to a unique geological event, the water in the lakes and streams had all been replaced with something remarkably similar to Big Red soda (Deliciously Different Since 1937!), which was uninhabitable to all but a few of the most resilient species of aquatic creatures, but the manager, Ted, was more than happy to teach me enough to allow me to convince people that I knew what I was talking about. When business was slow, I'd study the lures, hooks, rods, and rigs, trying to make sense out of an affair which was wholly outside of my comprehension. I liked to eat fish, sure, but I had never given any consideration to capturing them.

I had been there for about a month when Ted pulled his truck up to the back of the store and unloaded a long glass tank. He beckoned me over, and I helped him carry it into the tackle shop.

"What's this for?" I asked once we had set it down.

"According to my sources," he explained, "the fishermen are becoming really keen on using live bait. The artificial lures just aren't working as well as they used to. So I've decided to put in this tank and fill it with the kind of stuff they like to use."

“Wait a second. You mean, I’m going to have to fish live bait out of a tank?”

“I have a net you can use. It’s not like you’ll have to catch them bare handed.”

“What kind of, um, things are we talking about here?”

He produced a measuring tape and walked over to the wall. “Well, I was initially going to go with eels, but I’ve found something better.”

“I’m almost afraid to ask.”

“They’re these little squid-like things.” He pulled a slip of paper out of his pocket and squinted at it. “I’m not sure how the name is pronounced. ‘Spawn of Cath...ooh...luh...’”

“Cthulhu?”

“Yeah, you’ve heard of it?”

I searched my memory but could only come up with vague echoes.

“I’ve run across the word before, but I can’t remember where.” I ran a finger along the edge of my jaw, where I had cut myself shaving the day before. “There’s something kind of ominous about it, don’t you think?”

He laughed and put the paper back in his pants. “What difference does it make to me? If the fishermen will buy it, I’ll stock it.”

By the time I got to work the next day, he had finished installing the tank and filling it with water, though he hadn’t put any bait in it yet. He wasn’t around, so I guessed that he had gone out to get it. I busied myself by dusting the high-dollar reels and counting the sinkers for most of the afternoon. When he finally returned, he wheeled in several Styrofoam ice chests strapped to a dolly.

“Is this them?” I asked.

“They.”

“What?”

“It should be, ‘Is this *they*?’”

“I never realized you were such a stickler for grammar.”

“Normally I’m not, but that one bugs me.”

“So, anyway, is this they?”

“Yep. They’re on ice for the moment; it calms them down. We’ll have to get them into the tank while they’re still docile.”

He removed the straps and opened the topmost chest. Atop a bed of ice sat seven or eight sandwich bags filled with strange, green creatures. Ted had described them as being similar to squids, but they looked more like cuttlefish to me. Cloudy eyes bulged from their bloated, veiny, tentacled heads.

“Are you sure you want to sell these things?” I asked. “They’re pretty creepy.”

“Pretty much *everything* in the sea is creepy,” he said. “The deeper you go, they weirder they get, and these things, as I understand it, come from really deep down.”

He carefully lifted one of the bags, opened the top, and eased the things into the tank. The water seemed to rejuvenate them, and they began swimming around, ebulliently acclimating themselves to their new home.

“What do they eat?” I asked as he grabbed another bag.

“Plankton, I guess.”

“You *guess*?”

“The guy wasn’t specific about it.”

“What guy?”

“He calls himself Big Maurice. He catches and sells them out of the back of a van parked down by the pier.”

“You trust a guy who sells stuff out of a van?”

“It’s just the most economical way for him to do it. He travels up and down the coast selling his baits. Makes a lot more sense than opening a physical location.”

He emptied another bag into the tank and closed the lid of the chest. I could tell that there was going to be no changing his mind.

“Here,” he said, producing a little net. “I’ll show you how to catch them.”

Kathryn Wrathschild walked along the deserted beach as evening descended. In the dying rays of the sun, the sea was a warm, salty claret that churned into a nauseating froth and drunkenly crashed against the shore.

She didn’t know how long she had been living in the lighthouse, but it wasn’t strange to her. In fact, it was a fairly comfortable life. All she knew was that she had to keep herself hidden within its walls. As such, she only ventured out to find sustenance at night. This, fortunately, never proved to be a problem for her.

She looked up at the rising moon as a colony of bats exploded in front of it. The lighthouse, silhouetted against the darkening sky, appeared like a monolith rather than a man-made structure of brick and iron.

She waded out into the water, her long dress clinging to her shapely legs in the surf, and a host of fish immediately congregated around her. She seized one and stuffed it into her hungry mouth without even deigning to look at it, her fangs glistening in the moonlight as they sank into its scaly flesh.

* * * * *

A couple of weeks later, Ted called from the hospital and told me that he’d been in an accident. He’d been carrying a sack of groceries up to his fifth-floor apartment and had fallen down a flight of stairs. He’d broken some 58 bones.

“No matter how many times you fall on concrete,” he said, “you just never develop an immunity to it.”

“This isn’t your first time, then?”

“Not by a long shot.”

He clearly wasn’t going to be able to work for a while and asked me to take over management of the store. I was fine with this, as he had taught me everything he knew and had left me in charge on several occasions. It wasn’t a large store, so there wasn’t really a lot to worry about anyway. The extra money would come in handy, as well.

A few days into it, I was sweeping up an hour or so before closing when a couple entered the store. The man was tall, nearly seven feet by my estimation. He was

wearing a red-and-blue *luchador* mask. The woman was of average height. She wore a billowy, white dress, and had long, dark hair. Her arm was in a sling. They didn't notice me right away, so I kept my distance and watched them in the security mirror. I was concerned by the fact that his face was concealed, as this is often how robberies go down. Outside of his unusual height, though, there didn't appear to be anything suspicious about them. They just stood in front of the counter, waiting for someone to attend them. After some twenty seconds of observing them, I propped my broom against the wall and approached the counter.

"Someone told me you sell Cthulhu Spawn here," the man said flatly.

"Yes, sir. They're excellent bait. Are you interested in purchasing some?"

He looked down at the woman. She did not meet his gaze.

"Possibly. Could I have a look at the tank?"

"Certainly."

I led them back to the tackle shop. Our footsteps rattled the titanium lures as we passed the racks. The hum of the filtration system seemed to close around us like a diaphanous cloth as we approached the tank. When I turned on the light, the Spawn scattered.

"They're very active," the man remarked, going down on one knee and pressing his palm against the glass.

"They're certainly hard to catch."

"How do you catch them?"

"I use this net," I said, showing it to him, "and when I catch one I put it in a plastic bag. They thrash around like crazy, though."

"Well," he said, "I'm sure it's quite traumatic for them."

"I'd imagine so."

The woman had remained silent during the entire exchange. She kept her face turned away, and it appeared that all of her attention was focused on her wounded arm. She gently stroked it with the fingers of her other hand in an almost mesmerizing rhythm. I wondered what sort of injury the sling was hiding, but I certainly wasn't going to ask.

“Can I see you take one out?” the man asked.

The Spawn, having adjusted to the light, had settled down. They allowed the current created by the filter to carry them along. There were about thirty remaining at this point. They had been selling well, especially at ten dollars a pop, and I knew I'd have to get in touch with Big Maurice before long for a restock, which I wasn't looking forward to. Over time, I had gotten used to dealing with them, but I still wasn't crazy about it. A pall of malevolence hung over that tank.

“Honestly, I'd prefer not to unless you're going to buy it.”

“I see.” He eased his hand away from the glass and stood up. “That's fair, I suppose. We'll be taking our leave, then.”

“Come back any time,” I said.

“I've heard that kind of talk before,” he said. “It's a waste of breath.”

“All right.”

I watched them leave and disappear into the darkness. Their visit had made me uneasy, and since no one else was in the store I decided to close early.

* * * * *

Little Maurice stood at the desk in the study, perusing a large, open book in the light of the candelabrum. In his right hand, he held the pen he had found on the rug. There was dried blood on its metal nib. He laughed. The whole affair seemed terribly trite to him, but at this stage in the game there were few options left to him or, indeed, to any of us.

To his left, the velvet curtains stirred in the breeze from the open window. He glanced at them and then dropped the pen into an empty coffee mug.

“That's it, then,” he said. “There's nothing else to be done.”

“Well,” a voice replied, “there is that one thing.”

“What thing?”

“You know. The *thing*.”

It dawned on him what the voice was alluding to. “Ixnay on the ingthay.”

“What?”

“I said, ‘Ixnay on the ingthay.’”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“For crying out loud! Don’t you understand pig Latin?”

“Sorry. I took German.”

“German? What do you think you are, a Teutonic Knight?”

He took a candle from the dripping array, walked over to the window, and looked down at the terrible mess on the flagstones. He wasn’t surprised at how things had turned out, really. In fact, there was a part of him that found it all very satisfying.

Fifty-seven percent, to be exact.

* * * * *

Ted called Big Maurice for me and found out that he was going to be set up in his usual spot the following week. I drove the truck down to the pier early and spotted his van parked across three spaces. It had the words “Big Maurice’s Exotic Baits” emblazoned on the side. He had a table set up next to it stacked with ice chests. A figure, presumably the man himself, sat behind the table writing on a clipboard and drinking from a Styrofoam cup.

“You must be Big Maurice,” I said.

“That’s me. What can I do for you?”

“I work for Ted. I’ve come about getting some more Cthulhu Spawn.”

“Ah, yes. He told me about you.” He set down his clipboard and slapped a chest to his right. “This is the last batch I have, I’m afraid. They’ve become elusive lately.”

I nodded. I was actually relieved. Perhaps this bizarre charade would soon be reaching its conclusion.

He set down the cup, slid the chest across the table, and opened the lid. My left shoulder twitched as plethora of cold, white eyes stared up at me. I hoped he hadn’t noticed.

“Looks good,” I said.

I was tempted to ask him where they came from and how he caught them, but he didn't look like he was particularly in the mood for a discussion on the matter.

"Can I interest you in anything else?" he asked.

"No, thank you. This will do."

I wrote him a check and put the chest in the passenger's seat. I sat and studied it for a moment before turning the ignition. It was like a coffin filled with living creatures, and I wasn't fond of the idea of having it in the truck. The sooner I could get it back to the store with it the better.

As I drove away, I watched Big Maurice rise from his seat in the rearview mirror. As his name suggested, he was unusually tall.

It wasn't until several hours later that I was struck by this.

* * * * *

"Mother," the boy called, "are you there?"

"Yes," the shadow replied, "but I'm not the woman you remember."

"I know."

"What are you doing out? There's a storm brewing."

"I have to tell you something."

"I'm listening."

"Father was driven mad by forbidden knowledge," he said. "He must have run across something in his reading. I knew those old books were bad news. After you left, he became increasingly unhinged. Any time I tried to talk to him, he'd either pepper the conversation with non sequiturs or go off on some nonsensical diatribe."

"Perhaps not as nonsensical as you think."

"Three nights ago he climbed up to the roof and threw himself from the parapet."

"Well," she said, "that's how things play out. You move into a house with a parapet, sooner or later you're going to throw yourself off."

“He never did like the beach,” the boy said.

“At least he didn’t complain about it. Not much anyway.”

“All he wanted to do was play *Major Havoc* or *Dragon’s Lair*, but when the arcade closed he had no recourse. I guess we shouldn’t be surprised that he delved into works of the arcane.”

“What, because there’s only one letter difference between them?”

“You’ve seen his notebooks. They’re filled with associations like that. He was never one to take the logical route to anything.”

She paused, as if in thought. “And what about you?”

“I think you already know the answer to that.”

She paused again, processing this. “Isn’t the moon lovely tonight?”

“I can’t see it. It’s behind the clouds.”

“You will learn to see the world with new eyes, but it will take time.”

“Last spring, we had ‘Rat Day’ at school. It was very exciting. The principal released four thousand starved rats into the hallways. He was trying to make learning fun, but it kind of backfired. The rats ate everything in the cafeteria and then stole all the buses. Needless to say, no one got home on time. An inside source revealed that the rats intended to flee to Italy, but if you ask me that was a doomed enterprise from the get-go.”

“You should be getting back now, but I hope you’ll come see me again.”

“I will try, but I have new responsibilities now, and things have changed in many other ways, as well.”

“I’m sure they have.”

* * * * *

The man in the *luchador* mask returned a week later. He was alone this time.

“Do you have any Cthulhu Spawn left?” he asked. The lack of inflection in his voice was unsettling, but it confirmed my suspicions.

I pulled a carton of cigarettes from beneath the counter, tore it open, and slid each of the packs into the overhead in turn. “A few.”

“How many, exactly?”

“I don’t have an exact count. Fifteen or twenty.”

“How many do you sell in a given day?”

“That’s an odd question.”

He raised his hand and made a strange gesture, as if he were throwing pixie dust at me. I instinctively took a step back.

“I’d argue,” he said, “that those are the best kind. I’m sure you get tired of hearing the same questions all the time.”

“At least I know how to answer them.”

He nodded. “Tell me, what sort of training does a person have to go through to get a job in a place like this?”

“None, really.”

“I’m surprised. I thought you’d have to have a specialist degree or at the very least some sort of certificate.”

“No. You just have to put in an application and hope for the best.”

“That’s pretty irresponsible on the part of the owner.”

I hadn’t planned on confronting him, but his impudence and blatant disregard for customer protocol (yes, there is such a thing, though most people choose to ignore it) was really beginning to annoy me, so I decided to just come out with it.

“I find it strange that you’re in here asking me about the Spawn when you’re the one who sold them to me in the first place.”

His eyes narrowed. “I beg your pardon?”

“Oh, come on,” I said. “It wasn’t terribly hard to figure out. What I can’t understand is what you’re up to.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I’ve heard that kind of talk before,” I said, parroting him. “It’s a waste of breath.”

Without warning, he dashed back to the tackle shop and thrust his hand into the tank. By the time I reached him, he had bagged several of the Spawn. He was having a much easier time of it than I ever had. It was as if they were drawn to him.

“I’m going to need you to put those back, sir.”

“You really don’t understand what’s going on here, do you?”

“I told you that earlier.”

“There are forces at work far beyond your feeble ken.” He held the bag up and shook it. “These are the offspring of immortal Cthulhu, our lord from beyond the stars, and you’ve been selling them as fish bait. Little did you know that in doing so you were playing right into his hands.”

“Put them back in the tank *now*.” I honestly couldn’t believe how brave I was acting in the presence of a seven-foot-tall zealot of some weird celestial deity. It’s not something I would have normally done.

“You are truly pathetic.”

“You’re the one wearing a wrestling mask.”

“So what?”

“Are you a wrestler?”

“Not exactly.”

“Then you’re a poser, and there’s nothing more pathetic than that.”

“Fool! If only you could see the world through my eyes!”

Ever since Ted had brought that tank into the shop, I had suspected that something like this was going to happen. I just didn’t know in what manner it would go down.

Before I could react, he grabbed a fishing pole from a nearby rack and began striking me in the head. I threw my hands up to deflect the blows and collapsed to the floor.

By the time I regained my senses he was gone, having taken every remaining Spawn with him.

* * * * *

Judging from her appearance, no one would ever have believed that Kathryn Wrathschild was nearly ninety years old. Her eyes were young and lively, her skin supple and flawless. Her curvaceous form was free of wrinkles, blemishes, or cellulite. Not a single strand of gray could be found among her gorgeous locks of raven hair.

Unless she happened to part her lips, you wouldn't even be able to tell that her mouth was filled with jagged fangs with which she tore sea bass apart on a nightly basis.

The only unusual feature of her body was her left arm. It was, indeed, the chief reason that she was unable to mingle with the populace unless special measures were taken. From shoulder to elbow, it was normal, but from elbow to wrist it was monstrous.

One chilly October night some sixty years ago, she had been driving down the beach road after a party when her right rear tire exploded. The car left a shower of sparks in its wake as it tore across the asphalt and broke through the bridge railing, plummeting into the ravine below. Remarkably, she managed to escape with only minor injuries, but when she dragged herself out of the wreckage she found herself in endless darkness. It seemed to her that she should have been able to at least see the stars or the Moon when she looked up, but there was no light of any kind visible.

She began to worry that the accident had blinded her, but her fears were allayed when she spotted a small, red point of luminescence in the distance. She began to slosh through the turbid, knee-deep water at the base of the ravine, arms stretched out in front of her. The light grew larger as she moved toward it.

Twenty minutes later she found herself in the presence of a thing that every fiber of her being told her should not exist. A towering, winged thing of unfathomable origin that threatened to turn her brain inside out.

She knew from the moment she glimpsed its silhouette, framed by a preternatural red glow, that there was no going back. She would be in its thrall forever.

Speaking directly into her mind, it told her that it would release her unharmed but that it would summon her when the time was right, that it had a special role for her to play in the future. Hours later she awoke in her bed, wondering whether she had dreamt the whole thing.

As time went on, the incident gradually faded from her memory. She married, bore a child, and settled into a relatively normal life.

Then, one morning, just as she was straightening up the kitchen after breakfast, its voice, the clarion call of madness itself, overtook her thoughts, instructing her to come to the lighthouse and to leave one of her forearms behind. Moments before, she had been her own woman, completely in command of her destiny, but she now belonged to Cthulhu alone.

Without hesitation, she wrapped her fingers around the broom she had been using and grabbed a steak knife from the drawer.

Standing now in the shadow of the lighthouse as night came upon her, she looked across the waves to the mainland, to the place she had once called home. The memory of it was vague to her, twisted and distorted by her broken mind.

In the salty breeze, the tentacle that had replaced her forearm flailed about like the tail of an agitated cat.

* * * * *

After closing up I walked over to the beach to clear my head.

I scaled the rocks and sat down with my back against the living stone, watching the last of the fishing boats disappear into the night.

I couldn't even imagine what Big Maurice was doing with the Spawn. He had remarked that we had played into Cthulhu's plans by selling them. But what on earth did that mean? The fact that he had sold them to us in the first place and then come to the store after the fact and harassed me about it was particularly bewildering.

And what was the deal with the mask?

Behind me loomed the dreary Wrathschild manse, precariously situated on a flat expanse in the cliffs, which seemed perpetually vexed by its presence and would gladly sacrifice themselves in a rock slide just to be rid of it.

The largest structure in town, it had attracted my attention as soon as I arrived. I asked some of the locals about its history, but no one could tell me much other than the fact that it had once been the home of George Wrathschild, his wife, and their son. According to the postman, they had received of a lot of strange mail, whatever that meant.

George had apparently passed away two decades ago; no one was sure what became of the others. It was thought to be abandoned, but a few folks reported to have seen lights in the windows on occasion. Typical creepy house stuff. It wasn't the sort of community where people cared much about such things, though, which was refreshing in a way.

After about thirty minutes I decided to head home. As I stood to leave, I noticed that the beacon of the lighthouse on the island was lit. I had never seen it lit before. I glanced back at the manse and saw that one of the upper-floor windows was likewise lit. Strange. It was almost as if they were communicating.

“You haven't worked it out, have you?”

I looked down and saw someone standing on the beach. The sun had set, leaving the beach in shadow, and the figure was significantly decomposed, but there was no mistaking the resemblance. He was still dressed in the clothes I had been wearing six months earlier, though they were filthy and falling apart.

“I thought you were dead,” I said.

“Oh, I am,” he replied. “The fire ants saw to that.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Just a second,” he said, raising one of his hands to support his jaw. “There. I have to hold this thing in place to keep it from falling off. You wouldn't believe what a pain in the ass decomposition is. Imagine your entire body disintegrating.”

“I'd rather not.”

“To answer your question, I'm here to—how should I say—elucidate you.”

“I guess being a revenant qualifies you to do that.”

“Give me a break. Do you know how far I walked to get here?”

“Sorry.”

He turned his head toward the manse. “Summer is the cruelest season, you know. Eliot wrote that April was the cruelest *month*, but I have no idea what he was talking about. During the summer months, it’s unbearably hot. The sun is literally trying to kill you, and nature is more than happy to join in.”

I wasn’t sure what to say, so I just nodded.

“This place, in case you haven’t noticed, is awash with madness. Many years ago, a visitor from another world came here, and things have never been the same since. While most of the locals were only indirectly affected, the residents of that house bore the brunt of it.”

I followed the doppelganger’s gaze to the house’s dark façade.

“Big Maurice,” I said, realizing. “And the woman with the sling.”

“His mother. I knew I could count on you. I’d applaud, but you know.”

“How can *she* be his mother? She looks way too young.”

“I’m not sure of the specifics, but she’s kind of like a vampire in that respect. I’m glad *I* didn’t come back as one.”

“So what do I do?”

“What makes you think you have to do anything? Ted will be back at work soon, summer is, thankfully, down to its final weeks, and you’ll be going home. It’s not your problem. Just do as The Doors said: Let it be.”

“That was the Beatles.”

“Look who’s an authority on 1960s pop music.” He started toward the ocean and waved his hand in my direction. “Join me, please.”

I descended the rocks and stood beside him. The tide’s tepid, salty fingers clawed at my sandaled feet as it worked its way up the beach. Looking across the water, I could just make out the silhouette of a figure on the island’s shore.

“The lighthouse is the home of Kathryn Wrathschild. She lost her mind, left her family, and became a servant of Cthulhu. He slumbers beneath these waves for now, but one day he will return. Trust me when I say that you don’t want to be around when that happens.”

“And Big Maurice?”

“He got into his father’s weird books. It drove him nuts, caused him to have a split personality. It’s not an *even* split, but it’s close.”

“So he shows his face when he’s running his bait business and puts the mask on when his secondary personality takes over.”

“Right you are.”

“Which one is the *real* Maurice?”

“Ugh. Do you really want to get into that? This is the same type of thing that’s endlessly discussed at comic-book conventions. ‘Bruce Wayne is the mask. Batman is the real guy.’ Blah blah blah.”

“Fair enough.” I paused. “Why a *luchador* mask, though?”

“No idea. I guess he just likes Mexican wrestling.”

Out on the island, Kathryn, having finished her nightly repast, raised her arms to the sky. The lighthouse’s beacon increased in intensity and then winked out. The light in the manse window soon followed suit.

The doppelganger had vanished, swallowed up by the waves. I knelt down and picked up a piece of sea glass that had washed up where he had stood. It glowed eerily in the moonlight. As I studied it, it seemed to look back at me, like an eyeball that could see into my mind.

When I stood up, I felt something shift deep inside my brain, like an overwrought shelf in a bookcase slipping off its pegs.

The stars were full and bright, the Moon looked unusually large, and the sea was the domain of some immortal space creature beyond human understanding.

One thing was for certain: *The Journal of Things You Might Wish to Know* had just lost a subscriber.

