

## Chapter 2: Necronomicon

The old university library was the oldest stone structure in Arkham. Originally, the fortified building served as a refuge in times of danger. Beneath it lay a cellar with a tunnel that led all the way to *Hangman's Hill*, west of the city. Shortly after the university was founded, the vast central hall of the building had been converted into a library, though over the years it proved too small for the ever-growing collection of volumes.

In the weeks leading up to the centennial celebration, the books were removed from their stately shelves and transferred to the new library.

The emptied building—with its rows of bare bookcases and dust-coated planks—became the ideal playground for April, May, and June.

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"Eight, nine, ten," April counted. "Ready or not, here I come."

She didn't have to search long for May. April caught sight of her sister's reflection in the glass of a display cabinet.

Together, they began combing the labyrinth of empty shelves and dusty bookcases for June.

"June, where are you?" they called after walking down every row.

There was no answer.

"She's not here," May said. "Maybe she went down to the basement."

"She knows she's not allowed down there," April muttered. "Father made that very clear."

"At one time, that tunnel was an escape route in case of emergency," May argued.

"This isn't an emergency," April replied. "We're just playing hide-and-seek."

She walked past a row of shelves pressed against the wall when she heard something. A muffled, plaintive meowing, as though coming from behind a cabinet door.

She stopped. "Did you hear that?"

May nodded. "It's coming from over there."

She pointed to a bookcase that looked different from the rest. One of its side panels was crooked and did not quite fit in place.

April carefully slid the panel aside.

There sat June, crouched low, a look of triumph and mischief mingling on her face.

Clutched in her arms was Brutus, the tomcat with whom the youngest Lovecraft shared an inseparable bond.

"At last you found me!" June exclaimed. Her voice trembled with excitement. "And look what I found."

Resting in her lap was a bundle wrapped in cloth that had once been red but had faded to brown. Through the fabric, black, cracked leather showed. Strange symbols were etched into the cover, symbols that seemed to shift if one stared at them for too long.

"What is that?" April asked sharply. She wrinkled her nose. The smell rising from the book was dry and musty, like the stale breath of a grave.

"It says *Necronomicon*<sup>8</sup> on the cover: νεκρός, death; νόμος, law; εἰκών, image," June replied, clearly pleased

to demonstrate how attentively she had followed her Greek lessons.

"I know the separate words too," May scoffed. "But what do they mean together?"

"Maybe the book illustrates the laws of death," June ventured. "Let's see what it says."

In a clear voice, she began to read aloud.

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*"For ten years, the poet Abdul Alhazred wandered the Rub' al Khali. Slanderers claim he was mad when he returned to the inhabited world. Feverishly, he wrote down all he had learned during his journey through the desert.*

*He named the work Al-Azif, after the Arabic word for the dreadful sound a djinn makes at night. He did not live long thereafter. In the year of Our Lord 738, he died under mysterious circumstances. Witnesses claimed that he was torn apart by invisible claws in the marketplace of Damascus, and that his screams echoed through the city for weeks.*

*In 950, Theodorus Philetos,<sup>9</sup> a scholar from Constantinople, translated Al-Azif into Greek, giving it the title by which it would become both known and infamous.*

*Necronomicon.*

*In the century that followed, this Greek translation inspired countless experiments—many disastrous, some even fatal. To prevent further calamity, Michael Caerularius,<sup>10</sup> Patriarch of Constantinople, banned the book. In 1050, all known copies were destroyed.*

*By a miracle, I was able to obtain a forgotten copy that escaped the flames. I have now translated the Greek text into Latin. I wish to emphasize that I accept no responsibility for the wisdom—or madness—that may arise from it.*

*Olaus Wormius<sup>11</sup> scripsit, Anno Domini 1228."*

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