

**PROLOGUE**

KANCHEN JUNGA MOUNTAIN 1922



The jagged peaks of Nepal rise out of a sea of cloud. Swooping down through the clouds into the darkness a raging blizzard bellows. Miniscule ant-like figures stagger up the grey snowfield. Raw hands clutch the frozen lifeline linking them. The wind rips at their frostbitten faces, their primitive defence of balaclavas, dark linen jackets and high leather boots are scant protection. A Sherpa stumbles and collapses, his impossibly heavy burden falls in the snow. In front, the leader jerks on the rope in frustration. He pivots revealing his nametag 'CROWLEY'. Furious he cuts through the deep snow until he stands over the man.

"Up!" he demands with the authority of an English Public schoolboy. The other climbers pause for breath in astonishment.

"Get UP!"

Without warning Crowley raises his silver handed walking stick and savagely brings it down on the hapless Sherpa.

"Do what I say you feeble excuse..."

He raises the stick again. The rest suddenly stunned into action push Crowley off and huddle around the groaning Sherpa.

Mitchell shouts through the wind, "For God's sake... his leg's gone."

"If he doesn't walk on it then he'll die."

"We can carry him."

“No!” orders Crowley. “I am the leader of this expedition, if he doesn’t get up we will leave him.”

The decomposing group regards Crowley with obvious disgust.

“You are out of your mind, we will do no such thing.”

Crowley looks down on them with loathing and announces with utter certainty, “Then you will all die.”

He pulls out a knife and severs the frozen hemp rope from around his middle. The slack drops at Mitchell’s feet like a lifeless serpent; when he looks back up he is stunned to see Crowley trudging off into the grey blizzard, above.

Slowly the determined figure disappears into the storm.

A raging night of tempestuous winds and whipping snow descends on the peaks. A tent, impossibly situated 20,000 feet high on a precipitous ledge, withstands the screaming torment’s attempt to dislodge it. An oil lamp vainly glows through the canvas. Within the cramped confines, Aleister Crowley shivers and rasps in the grip of an asthma attack. Glimpses flash through his tortured mind, ghosts of young Crowley’s vicarious past.

Images of Hell – as portrayed by his Plymouth Brethren parents from the Darbyite creed, who believed literally in the truth of every word of the Holy Book and chosen by God himself as the only worthy community to inhabit Heaven.

Images of Death – the final convulsive throws of his eccentric father leaving the eleven year old in the grip of a bigoted mother.

“You beast! You Beast!” she screams at the evil child.

Her death elicits his poem:

In her hospital bed she lay  
Rotting away!  
Cursing by night and cursing by day,  
Rotting away!  
The lupus is over her face and head,  
Filthy and foul and horrid and dead,

And her shrieks they would almost wake the dead;  
Rotting away!  
In her horrible grave she lay,  
Rotting away!  
Rotting by night, and rotting by day,  
Rotting away!  
In the place of her face is a gory hole,  
And the worms are gnawing the tissues foul,  
And the Devil is gloating over her soul,  
Rotting away!

Images of sadism – thwack! The perverted headmaster of Malvern school viciously thrashes his naked bottom.

Images of lust – the creatures of the night, stripped and thrusting vampires who gave the youth the naked sores that erupted from his illicit pleasure.

Alone as the violent winds thrash the tent, in a mad frenzy the Apostate is locked in a perilous struggle with self. For three long hours God and Satan fight for Aleister Crowley's eternal soul. Then as the howling winds calm, God finally conquers. Now the only doubt left in Crowley's tortured mind is, which of the two is God.

The tormented night gives way to a bright, blinding day. The precarious tent flaps open and the *Chosen One*, Aleister Crowley, crawls bleary eyed into the snowy glare. He accepts the Lords have chosen him even from birth as he bore on his body, the three most important distinguishing marks of the Buddha. He was tongue-tied and on the second day of his incarnation a surgeon cut the fraenum linguae. He also had phimosis, the membrane of his foreskin of the penis could not be fully retracted and necessitated an operation some three lusters later. Lastly, he had upon the centre of his heart four hairs curling from left to right in the exact form of a Swastika.

Leaving behind His belongings He trudges the last hundred feet towards the peak, oblivious that the thin air was tearing at His lungs. With each breathless step He pants rhythmically – couplets

from Richard the Third.

“Go Gentlemen, every man to his charge.  
Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls.  
For conscience is a word that cowards use,  
Devised at first to keep the strong in awe.  
Let strong arms be our conscience sword our law.  
March on join bravely let us to it pell-mell.  
If not to heaven then hand in hand to HELL.”

At length He stands triumphantly high above the forgotten world. Exhilarated He tears off His goggles and gloves then strips to the waist, falling on His knees in the snow before the rising sun. The Son of the sun always knew the Universe was invented for Him to suck. Now He grows delirious as He contemplates the delicious horrors that are to unfold His life. Passionately His croaking voice calls out in ecstatic impudence.

“Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.”

In the stratospheric stillness, an echo returns across the astral plain.

“Love is the law, love under will.”

This glorious Son raises His arms and shouts back. “I am the beast – the beast incarnate! My laws alone will govern my life and all the lives before me. Stab your demoniac smile to my brain; Soak me in cognac, love and cocaine.”

Below, beneath the veil of storm clouds, obscene shapes of bodies are scattered in the agony of death. Mitchell, his mouth frozen open, the icy rope connecting the others, all frozen, all dead.

20,000 feet below them the inhabitants having just finished one world war mercilessly, murder each other a second time.

## EPILOGUE

HASTINGS 1947



Grey bleached sky over dormant fields, gnarled trees scratch the winter skyline. Suddenly flapping black shapes scare into the air. The sound of a car, revving fast, the speedo trembles at 65 mph, a gloved hand turns the wheel, a foot pressed down hard on the pedal and a Cambridge scarf flaps violently to the speed. The sports car forks suddenly down towards the grey sea and white seaside houses of Hastings. The two pubescent Cambridge Students drive towards the first landing place of their ancient ancestors.

Norman forefathers of both Alex and Symons disembarked at Hastings in 1066, defeated the English Troops (Angles Saxon and Jutes) and conquered this fertile realm decisively. These French, Lords and their Squires ruled over the Germanic English, who had 500 years earlier defeated the British, pushing them westward into Wales. The Norman Lords exploited the English mercilessly starving them with impossible work schedules and outlawing hunting. For their gratification they imposed the right to rape their peasants' newly married maidens. During this time the modern English language was fashioned from the Norman, French and the peasant Germanic. The food on the table is in the Lords language – Beef, Mutton and Pork and the food in the field in the Peasant Germanic – cow, sheep, pig. When the Germanic peasants attempted to use French words when pleading for clemency, they would wrongly use

the word 'Mercy', giving it new meaning from its original French 'thank you'.

Alex and Symons in their expensive sports car are natural inheritors of the privileges of this deep-seated Norman Class system that would soon be threatened by the rise of the meritocracy, triggered by the reforms encapsulated in the 1944 Education Act.

The empty roads will also be threatened by the rise of mass production manufacturing but now the roads are their racing circuit with only the odd hop wagon trundling on.

Close to the outskirts of Hastings, Symons spins the wheel and veers up 'The Ridge' that circles to the east of the town. After a mile the car slows and turns on to a gravel drive, pulling up outside Netherwood House, a large sombre building shaded by a massive oak. The hot, vibrating engine is finally silenced and the young students stretch out and crunch across the gravel to the boarding house.

"I can't wait to meet the wickedest man in the world," quips Alex.

"Alex, you promised to behave yourself," warns Symons.

"Does that mean I have to be good or bad?"

"Don't play games Alex. He's powerful and dangerous if you cross him."

Alex rolls his eyes in mock fear as Symons pulls the bell. The door is opened by the landlord in carpet slippers, the racing post under his arm and his glasses perched on his head.

"Ah, Master Symons, he's upstairs in his room."

He opens the door further to allow them to enter.

The hallway is as cold and gloomy as a funeral parlour. The landlord picks up a couple of letters from the sideboard. "Take his post up will you, my legs..."

He is interrupted by the radio suddenly announcing 'they're off' at the 3.30 at Aintree and the slippers race back towards the light, warmth and excitement of the back kitchen.

On the stairs a black cat watches the youths climb the stairs to the landing dominated by a large stiff aspidistra. The dark brown

wallpaper is rather tattered and the paintwork peeling, reflecting the shortages and rationing of post war Britain.

Alex looks around disparagingly. "Come on Symons, look at this dump. He's the forgotten man of magic."

"Not so forgotten." Symons shows Alex one of the letters with a US post-mark. "He still gets post from followers in America."

Alex dismisses this with a sniff and glances at a framed sign that reads: 'Guests are requested not to tease the ghosts.' And another, 'Breakfast will be served at 9am to survivors of the night.'

Alex makes a silly ghost impression. Symons shakes his head disapprovingly.

"You can't really take this stuff seriously?" huffs Alex.

"Those signs are jokes," says Symons. "Jokes and ridicule are used against the ignorant because the truth is complicated."

"Complicated, I see," says Alex sarcastically.

"Look Alex, you have no idea what you are dealing with here..."

Symons gives up as he reaches the door on the upper landing and knocks. Silence. They look at each other; he knocks again. A thin voice responds, 'It's open'. Symons turns the handle slowly.

The light from the window hardly penetrates the room, which is cluttered with books, paintings and an unkempt bed in the corner. Sitting alone in a tattered, winged armchair by the glow of the smoky coal fire is a frail old man. His skin like yellowed parchment, his hair, thin grey wisps, across a fragile skull, his eyes yellowed by life's impurities. This is the aging shell of the once notorious occultist, Aleister Crowley, now nearing the end of his existence. In the corner is his magic wand, which has been idle for years.

His voice croaks ritualistically. "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law."

Symons responds, "Love is the law. Love under will."

Crowley takes out a gold pocket watch, flicks it open and checks the time.

"Midday."