The Case of Charles Dexter Ward

By

H. P. LOVECRAFT

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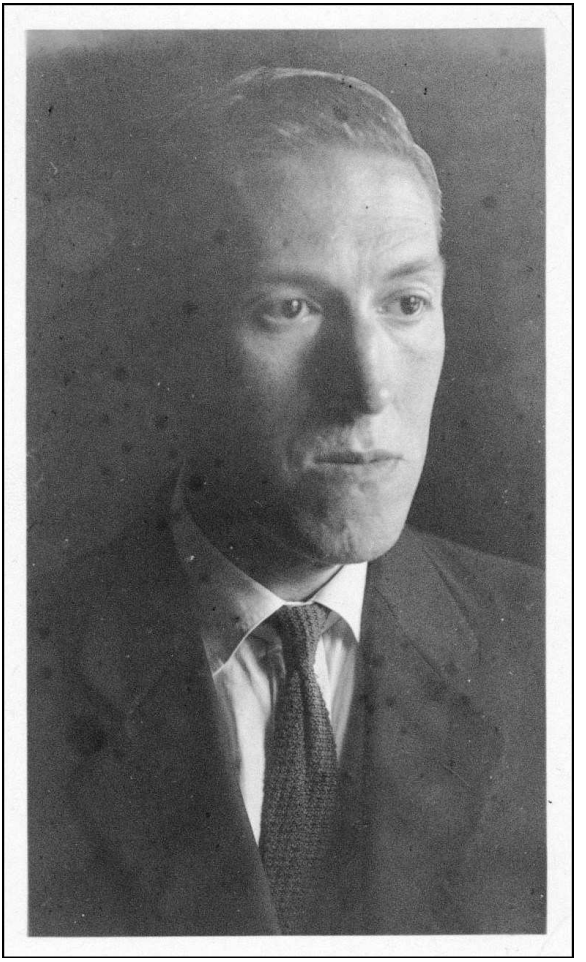


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ABOUT AUTHOR



H. P. Lovecraft: "*The Pioneer of Cosmic Horror*"

He was born on August 20, 1890, in Providence, Rhode Island, Howard Phillips Lovecraft led a life deeply marked by tragedy, isolation, and financial hardship. Raised by a troubled family after both of his parents suffered mental breakdowns and died in psychiatric care, Lovecraft grew up as a sickly, reclusive child plagued by vivid night terrors. He spent most of his youth immersed in dark literature and science, which heavily shaped his grim view of the world. Despite his immense talent, he lived much of his adult life in near-total poverty, working primarily as a ghostwriter and editor for pulp magazines like *Weird Tales*. He died of cancer in 1937 at the young age of 46, completely unrecognized by the mainstream literary world.

Following his death, Lovecraft's work underwent a massive global revival, permanently altering the landscape of modern fiction. He became the undisputed pioneer of "Cosmic Horror," a revolutionary subgenre that blended gothic horror with science fiction. Unlike classic tales of ghosts, vampires, or demons, Lovecraft introduced the philosophy of cosmicism: the terrifying idea that human beings are completely insignificant in a cold, vast universe ruled by ancient, uncaring alien deities. His creation of the "Cthulhu Mythos"—a shared universe of forbidden books like the

Necronomicon and colossal monsters—redefined how writers approach the fear of the unknown.

Today, Lovecraft is celebrated as one of the most influential horror authors of all time, standing alongside Edgar Allan Poe. His immense impact on world literature has inspired legendary creators like Stephen King, Guillermo del Toro, and Neil Gaiman, while his concepts continue to heavily shape modern cinema, video games, and pop culture. His unique style of blending psychological dread with alien existentialism was so groundbreaking that his very name became an official literary adjective worldwide: "Lovecraftian."

Literary Innovation: Cosmic Horror

- **Pioneer:** Invented the genre known as **Cosmic Horror**.
- **Philosophy:** Believed humanity is insignificant in the universe.
- **Themes:** Focused on forbidden knowledge and cosmic madness.
- **Subgenre:** Blended traditional gothic horror with modern science fiction.

- **Fear Factor:** Replaced ghosts and vampires with alien gods.
- **The Mythos:** Created the famous and terrifying **Cthulhu Mythos**.

Global Influence on World Literature

- **Posthumous Fame:** Achieved worldwide recognition only after death.
- **Cultural Icon:** Transformed modern horror, fantasy, and sci-fi.
- **Inspirations:** Directly shaped authors like Stephen King and Neil Gaiman.
- **Media Impact:** Influenced countless movies, video games, and board games.
- **Legacy:** His name became an official adjective: **"Lovecraftian."**

Here are H. P. Lovecraft's most essential masterpieces that shaped the cosmic horror genre and heavily influenced world literature:

- **The Call of Cthulhu (1926):** The most iconic story that laid the foundation for the Cthulhu

Mythos, introducing the colossal, ancient alien deity sleeping at the bottom of the ocean.

- **At the Mountains of Madness (1931):** A brilliant blend of sci-fi and horror, this novella follows an Antarctic expedition that discovers the ruins of a monstrous alien civilization predating humanity.

- **The Shadow over Innsmouth (1931):** Lovecraft's most suspenseful and cinematic tale, focusing on a decaying, sinister port town inhabited by a mutated race of half-human, half-fish hybrids.

- **The Colour Out of Space (1927):** Lovecraft's personal favorite story, detailing a meteorite that crashes into a farm and poisons the surrounding nature and human minds with an incomprehensible alien color.

- **The Dunwich Horror (1928):** A core Mythos tale about a deformed boy's attempts to use the *Necronomicon* to summon a terrifying cosmic god (Yog-Sothoth) into our world.

- **The Case of Charles Dexter Ward (1927):** Lovecraft's only full-length novel, exploring themes of alchemy, necromancy, and a young man who becomes dangerously possessed by the spirit of his wizard ancestor.

- **The Whisperer in Darkness (1930):** An early sci-fi horror classic involving a fungal alien race (the Mi-Go) hiding in the mountains of Vermont, capable of extracting human brains into metal cylinders for space travel.
- **The Shadow Out of Time (1934):** A mind-bending tale of psychological dread and time travel, where a professor's mind is swapped across millions of years with a member of a prehistoric alien race.

PREFACE

An Obsession with the Past.

A Centuries-Old Curse.

A Descent into Cosmic Madness.

In the quiet city of Providence, Rhode Island, a brilliant young antiquarian named Charles Dexter Ward becomes dangerously consumed by the history of his distant ancestor, Joseph Curwen. Curwen was a mysterious and hated man who fled Salem during the witch trials, rumored to practice dark alchemy, grave-robbing, and horrific rituals to summon things from beyond the stars. Driven by an unhealthy curiosity, Charles begins to dig into his forefather's hidden papers, unlocking secrets that should have remained buried forever.

As Charles replicates his ancestor's sinister experiments, a terrifying transformation begins. His speech changes, his personality darkens, and his home fills with the stench of ancient dust and a bizarre, chanting voice. When Charles vanishes from his locked room, only to be found in a state of

apparent madness, his desperate family physician, Dr. Willett, launches a breathless investigation. To save the young man, the doctor must descend into a labyrinth of hidden catacombs, where he faces a truth far more ghastly than mere insanity.

Experience H.P. Lovecraft's only full-length novel and a towering masterpiece of gothic horror and cosmic dread. Masterfully blending historical suspense, occult science, and psychological terror, this definitive story explores the dangerous line between ancestral heritage and demonic possession, proving that some secrets are too dark for the human mind to bear.

PROLOGUE

Here is THE CASE OF CHARLES DEXTER WARD—the last, and many think the best, the most exciting—of all H. P. Lovecraft's superb weird fantasies.

Discovered after years of difficult search—and pieced together with as much careful patience as Charles Ward puts into his terrifying researches in the story—August Derleth and Donald Wandrei at long last had all the scattered pages of Lovecraft's novel complete.

The manuscript, gathered over the course of many years from attics, forgotten strong boxes and old bureaus, is published now—in Weird Tales.

In it you are going to read again of Cthulhu and the fearful Necronomicon; in these pages you will also find a perfect wealth of new thrills. In *Charles Ward* you will read ... but why go on, when you're just raring to get ahead with the story?

So just turn the page—and on with the show!

The essential Saltes of Animals may be so prepared and preserved, that an ingenious Man may have the whole Ark of Noah in his owne Studie and raise the fine shape of an Animal out of its Ashes at his Pleasure; and by the lyke method from the essential Saltes of humane Dust, a Philosopher may, without any criminal Necromancy, call up the Shape of any dead Ancestour from the Dust whereinto his Bodie has been incinerated.

BORELLUS.

1. A Result and a Prologue

From a private hospital for the insane near Providence, Rhode Island, there recently disappeared an exceedingly singular person. He bore the name of Charles Dexter Ward, and was placed under restraint most reluctantly by his grieving father.

The patient seemed oddly older than his twenty-six years would warrant; his face had taken on a subtle cast which only the very aged usually acquire. While his organic processes showed a certain queerness of proportion which nothing in medical experience can parallel. Respiration and heart action had a baffling lack of symmetry, the voice was lost, so that no sounds above a whisper were possible, digestion was incredibly prolonged and minimized. The skin had a morbid chill and dryness, and the cellular structure of the tissue seemed exaggeratedly coarse and loosely-knit. Even a large olive birthmark on his right hip had disappeared, whilst there had

formed on his chest a very peculiar mole or blackish spot of which no trace existed before.

Psychologically, too, Charles Ward was unique. His madness held no affinity to any sort recorded in even the latest and most exhaustive of treatises, and was conjoined to a mental force which would have made him a genius or a leader had it not been twisted into strange and grotesque forms.

Only Dr. Willett, who brought Charles Ward into the world and watched his growth of body and mind ever since, seemed frightened at the thought of his future freedom. He had had a terrible experience and had made a terrible discovery which he dared not reveal to his skeptical colleagues. Willett, indeed, presents a minor mystery all his own in his connection with the case. He was the last to see the patient before his flight, and emerged from that final conversation in a state of mixed horror and relief which several recalled when Ward's escape became known three hours later. That escape itself is one of the unsolved wonders of Dr. Waite's hospital. A window open above a sheer drop of sixty feet could hardly explain it, yet after that talk with Willett the youth was undeniably gone.

He had found Ward in his room, but shortly after his departure the attendants knocked in vain. When they opened the door the patient was not there, and

all they found was the open window with a chill April breeze blowing in a cloud of fine bluish-gray dust that almost choked them. True, the dogs had howled some time before; but that was while Willett was still present, and they had caught nothing and shown no disturbance later on. Ward's father was told at once over the telephone, but he seemed more saddened than surprised. By the time Dr. Waite called in person, Dr. Willett had been talking with him, and both disavowed any knowledge or complicity in the escape. Only from certain closely confidential friends of Willett and the senior Ward have any clues been gained, and even these are too wildly fantastic for general credence. The one fact which remains is that up to the present time no trace of the missing madman has been unearthed.

Charles Ward was an antiquarian from infancy, no doubt gaining his taste from the venerable town around him, and from the relics of the past which filled every corner of his parent's old mansion in Prospect Street on the crest of the hill. With the years his devotion to ancient things increased; so that history, genealogy, and the study of Colonial architecture, furniture, and craftsmanship at length crowded everything else from his sphere of interests. These tastes are important to remember in

considering his madness. One would have fancied the patient literally transferred to a former age through some obscure sort of auto-hypnosis. The odd thing was that Ward seemed no longer interested in the antiquities he knew so well. He had, it appears, lost his regard for them through sheer familiarity; and all his final efforts were obviously bent toward mastering those common facts of the modern world which had been so totally and unmistakably expunged from his brain. His whole program of reading and conversation was determined by a frantic wish to imbibe such knowledge of his own life and of the ordinary practical and cultural background of the twentieth century as ought to have been his by virtue of his birth in 1902 and his education in the schools of our own time. Alienists are of the dominant opinion that the escaped patient is "lying low" in some humble and unexacting position till his stock of modern information can be brought up to the normal.

The beginning of Ward's madness is a matter of dispute among alienists. Dr. Lyman, the eminent Boston authority, places it in 1919 or 1920, during the boy's last year at the Moses Brown School, when he suddenly turned from the study of the past to the study of the occult, and refused to qualify for college

on the ground that he had individual researches of much greater importance to make.

It is, broadly speaking, undeniable that the winter of 1919-20 saw a great change in Ward; whereby he abruptly dropped his general antiquarian pursuits and embarked on a desperate delving into occult subjects both at home and abroad, varied only by this strangely persistent search for his fore-father's grave.

From this opinion, however, Dr. Willett substantially dissents, basing his verdict on his close and continuous knowledge of the patient, and on certain frightful investigations and discoveries which he made toward the last.

Those investigations and discoveries have left their mark upon him; so that his voice trembles when he tells them, and his hand trembles when he tries to write of them.

The true madness, he is certain, came with a later change; after the Curwen portrait and the ancient papers had been unearthed; after a trip to strange foreign places had been made, and some terrible invocations chanted under strange and secret circumstances; after certain *answers* to these invocations had been plainly indicated, and a frantic letter penned under agonizing and inexplicable

conditions; after the wave of vampirism and the ominous Pawtuxet gossip; and after the patient's memory commenced to exclude contemporary images whilst his voice failed and his physical aspect underwent the subtle modification so many subsequently noticed.

It was only about this time, Willett points out with much acuteness, that the nightmare qualities became indubitably linked with Ward, and the doctor feels shudderingly sure that enough solid evidence exists to sustain the youth's claim regarding his crucial discovery. There were the mysteries and coincidences of the Orne and Hutchinson letters, and the problem of the Curwen penmanship and of what the detectives brought to light about Dr. Allen; these things, and the terrible message in mediaeval minuscules found in Willett's pocket when he gained consciousness after his shocking experience.

And most conclusive of all, there are the two hideous *results* which the doctor obtained from a certain pair of formulae during his final investigations; results which virtually proved the authenticity of the papers and of their monstrous implications at the same time that those papers were borne for ever from human knowledge.

One must look back at Charles Ward's earlier life as at something belonging as much to the past as the antiquities he loved so keenly.

His home was a great Georgian mansion atop the well-nigh precipitous hill that rises just east of the river, and from the rear windows of its rambling wings he could look dizzily out over all the clustered spires, domes, roofs and skyscraper summits of the lower town to the purple hills of the countryside beyond. Here he was born, and from the lovely classic porch of the double-bayed brick façade his nurse had first wheeled him in his carriage; past the little white farmhouse of two hundred years before that the town had long ago overtaken, and on toward the stately colleges along the shady, sumptuous street, whose old square brick mansions and smaller wooden houses with narrow, heavy-columned Doric porches dreamed solid and exclusive amidst their generous yards and gardens.

He had been wheeled, too, along sleepy Congdon Street, one tier lower down on the steep hill, and with all its eastern houses on high terraces. The small wooden houses averaged a greater age here, for it was up this hill that the growing town had climbed. One of the child's first memories is of the great westward sea of hazy roofs and domes and steeples and far hills which he saw one winter

afternoon from that great railed embankment, all violet and mystic against a fevered, apocalyptic sunset of reds and golds and purples and curious greens. The vast marble dome of the State House stood out in massive silhouette, its crowning statue haloed fantastically by a break in one of the tinted stratus clouds that barred the flaming sky.

When he was larger his famous walks began; first with his impatiently dragged nurse and then alone in dreamy meditation. One may picture him yet as he was in those days; tall, slim, and blond, with studious eyes and a slight stoop, dressed somewhat carelessly, and giving a dominant impression of harmless awkwardness rather than attractiveness.

He would seek for vivid contrasts; spending half a walk in the crumbling colonial regions northwest of his home, where the hill drops to the lower eminence of Stampers Hill with its ghetto and Negro quarter clustering round the place where the Boston stagecoach used to start before the Revolution, and the other half in the gracious southerly realm about George, Benevolent, Power, and Williams Streets, where the old slope holds unchanged the fine estates and bits of walled garden and steep green lane in which so many fragrant memories linger.

Dr. Willett is certain that, up to this ill-omened winter of first change, Charles Ward's

antiquarianism was free from every trace of the morbid. Graveyards held for him no particular attraction beyond their quaintness and historic value, and of anything like violence or savage instinct he was utterly devoid. Then, by insidious degrees, there appeared to develop a curious sequel to one of his genealogical triumphs of the year before; when he had discovered among his maternal ancestors a certain very long-lived man named Joseph Curwen, who had come from Salem in March of 1692, and about whom a whispered series of highly peculiar and disquieting stories clustered.

Ward's great-great-grandfather Welcome Potter had in 1785 married a certain "Ann Tillinghast, daughter to Mrs. Eliza, daughter to Capt. James Tillinghast," of whose paternity the family had preserved no trace. Late in 1918, whilst examining a volume of original town records in manuscript, the young genealogist encountered an entry describing a legal change of name, by which in 1772 a Mrs. Eliza Curwen, widow of Joseph Curwen, resumed, along with her seven-year-old daughter Ann, her maiden name of Tillinghast; on the ground "that her Husband's name was become a public Reproach by Reason of what was knowne after his Decease; the which confirming antient common Rumour, tho' not