

Shadows

“Only man, driven by his insatiable hunger for personal glorification, sinful over-indulgence, and his unending crusade to conquer, allows the world around him to deteriorate from his exploitation and over-expansion. He is a victim of his own ignorance and heeds not the cries of death around him, but, rather, continues along his single-minded path of greed down the road to ultimate destruction. The animal world seeks balance and, by sheer instinct, would not allow the necessities of their life to become eradicated; hence, preserving the delicate chain of life.”

Bernard Ellis tossed his glasses onto the desk in front of him, flicked off the desk lamp, and turned away from the computer monitor that he had been busily studying for the past three hours. Fatigue was finally taking hold, and after a long, hard day of writing he covered his weary eyes with his fingers, which were sore from typing. In his study, softly lit by the glow of the computer monitor, he reclined on his swivel chair and finally provided his fatigued body some moments of relaxation.

The article was not progressing as expected and Bernard was becoming consumed with the frustration each writer must endure when confronting a piece of paper that stubbornly remains blank. He knew well the message that he wished to convey, but thus far he had only conjured up phrases and ideas that seemed more cliché than inspirational or educational.

Through the evening hours, his thoughts had remained firmly focused on the article that appeared before him on the computer screen. But as his mind slowly drifted away from his work he suddenly perceived the absolute silence that pervaded his home. The silence somehow ironically epitomized the loneliness that had befallen him – loneliness created by the absence of that certain someone. He struggled not to yield to his unforgiving, unforgetting conscience but his efforts proved futile. His thoughts were returning to the area of his life that he was determined to leave behind.

With his eyes still closed, Bernard recalled Hannah, and the tumultuous divorce that had ended their seventeen years of marriage. Perhaps the memory of his divorce was still too fresh and inhibited his ability to work.

Bernard and Hannah's marriage had always been rocky, but the events that highlighted the final year remained vivid in Bernard's mind. Perhaps if...

His eyes now open, he stared in amazement and trepidation at the floor before him. His heart raced in excitement and bewilderment. In a slow and cautious motion, Bernard reached behind him for the desk light.

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"Now, you're sure this wasn't some kind of natural phenomena," his friend, Professor Cliff Baker inquired of him.

"No, I'm positive it wasn't. I watched them, Cliff. I watched them move – no glide – in irregular movements on my carpet. It lasted several minutes before I turned the lights on."

"And when the lights came on?" Sarah Baker questioned him.

"They scurried back into the dark," Bernard responded in exasperation as he rose from his seat. He began to pace his study as his friends surveyed the floor from their seats. Cliff Baker, an English Professor at the local college, and his wife, Sarah, a French tutor, were close friends of Bernard and were the first ones he called after his encounter.

"I know how this sounds," he continued. "You think I was dreaming or fantasizing this entire incident..."

"Not at all," Cliff assured him. "I've known you far too long to believe you could either conjure up this story, or hallucinate it. In fact, you're one of the most reliable and intelligent people I know. But the question remains: what exactly was it that you saw?"

Sarah observed Bernard's study. The wall opposite his antique oak desk included a well-stocked, old-fashioned, wooden bookcase, filled with classic works of literature, medical journals, encyclopedias, scientific journals, and various works in foreign languages. The windows behind her were adorned with luxurious, velvet drapes. The floor beneath her was covered by a plush Persian rug. An antique Italian lamp with a stained-glass lampshade rested on the wooden table that separated her from her husband. Precious vases, priceless oil paintings, and antique Civil War items embellished the room. The wall across from her consisted of an old, stone fireplace with a white marble mantel. A prize marlin, Bernard had caught several years earlier was proudly displayed above the fireplace. She had always marveled at the eloquent taste of her friend, Bernard Ellis, and was delighted to spend time in his home, despite the lateness of the hour.

Her thoughts returned to the matter at hand. "Why don't we just duplicate the conditions that preceded their appearance? We might be able to force them out again."

"It's late," Bernard replied. "And I'm not sure how long it will take. But if you're willing, I'll certainly try."

"We're here, aren't we?"

Bernard nodded in appreciation. "Alright, then. The only light came from my computer monitor..."

"And what are we looking for?"

"They were shadows. Shadows that moved across the carpet here in my study. They were alive, I swear they were. I suggest that we sit still and remain in total silence. Perhaps the tranquility will draw them from the shadows of the room."

Cliff and Sarah nodded in agreement, the lights were turned off, and the three of them waited in eager anticipation for the emergence of the shadows. Fifteen minutes of silent vigilance passed without any evidence to confirm the existence of the mysterious creatures. Bernard began to grow paranoid. He wondered what his friends really thought of his account of the story. Had he been dreaming? Had the strain of his divorce finally begun to affect his senses? Before they began this vigilance he was certain of what he had seen. But with each passing second, misgivings involving his sanity only grew and he did not want the charade to continue any longer.

"I say we end it for the night," Bernard declared abruptly, rising from his chair. "Whatever it was that brought them out is not being recreated here and now. Perhaps if and when I see them again..."

"We're willing to wait longer," Cliff offered, reassuringly.

"Absolutely," Sarah added. "Why don't we go down to the kitchen and put on a pot of coffee. We'll talk for a while and come up here later. That might give them time to reemerge."

"I guess it's possible," Bernard replied in relief. Apparently, they still believed his story, which indicated that his choice of friends had been excellent. "We'll leave the room just as it is. After an hour or so, we'll quietly come back up the steps and examine the room. Hopefully, I haven't brought you two here on a wild goose chase."

Cliff rose from his seat and headed towards the door. "I already told you that we believe your story. But I still would not rule out natural

phenomena, Bernie. There are many strange happenings in this world and you may have just stumbled upon something unique – but not alive.”

They continued their conversation as they walked down the open stairwell. “I guess it’s possible that it’s something natural. But it just didn’t seem it. You had to be there, Cliff. No, it had to be alive. I’m almost sure of it.” They came to the bottom of the steps, turned left, and walked through the hallway that led to the kitchen. Cliff and Sarah seated themselves at the table and Bernard put on water for coffee.

“I want to thank you two for coming over at this time of the night. It’s already past two and frankly I’m embarrassed for having dragged you over here to see nothing. If I wasn’t positive of what I saw I assure you that I would have never bothered you.”

“Nonsense, Bernie,” Cliff responded as he thumbed through the evening paper that rested on the table. “There’s no classes tomorrow so I’ll just sleep in an extra hour or two. Besides how often does one have the opportunity to witness a new form of life?”

Bernie smiled in thankfulness. “I’m out of sugar. Why don’t you wait here, I’ll be right back. I just have to go to the pantry.”

“You needn’t bother,” Sarah noted. “I don’t add sugar to my coffee.”

“I know Cliff does.”

Sarah gazed warily at her husband. “I don’t believe Cliff needs any sugar either.”

“Oh, a little sugar never hurt anyone.”

“I told you to cut down on that stuff. You have enough diabetics in the family already.”

“If you’ll excuse me,” Bernie interrupted and then exited the kitchen.

“I’ll just add a teaspoon,” Cliff promised her.

“Never mind that,” Sarah whispered. “What do you think of all this?”

“The shadows? I’ve known him for twenty years and I guarantee you he is not seeing things.”

“But living shadows? Come on, Cliff, doesn’t that unnerve you just a bit?”

“It is difficult to accept and I’m not convinced that what he saw was

alive. He said he had been engrossed in his article for several hours. It's just possible that these shadows appeared to move. You know, like when you stare at a light for a length of time and then turn your eyes away from it. It does appear to move."

"So you think it's something natural?"

"That's my guess. But let's play it out. He is my best friend and he's been going through a difficult period with the divorce and all... I think the coffee's ready."

"I got it," Sarah said as she rose from the kitchen table.

"No, no. I got it," Bernie corrected her as he reentered the room with a box of unrefined sugar. Coffee was poured and they each sat around the table unsure of what to conclude from the proceedings of the night.

Sarah was the first to speak and she did so hoping to abandon the subject of the shadows. "I enjoyed your article in this month's magazine, Bernie. Tell me, is that what you're working on now – part two?"

Bernie nodded. "I had hoped to finish the second part of the article this weekend. But as you can see, I've been sidetracked. Next month's issue is going to the presses already on Wednesday, so I don't have much time to finish it."

"Do you mind if I ask you some questions pertaining to the article? There are some issues that have troubled me."

"Not at all," Bernie replied in sincerity. "Most writers become offended when their work is questioned – and I'm no better. But I've grown accustomed to your interrogations after each work of mine is published and you're generally fair in your appraisals."

"You ought to be used to it by now," Cliff grumbled. "She questions every article ANYONE writes."

Sarah smiled, displaying her unwavering self-confidence. "I'm not one to accept conventional wisdom. Anyway..."

"If you're going to discuss environmental issues I hope you'll pardon me and allow me to read the paper. I've had my full of my environmental discussions lately."

"Cliff isn't much for the environment."

"Who is? The only thing I hear being recycled is rhetoric. Now, if

you'll excuse me..." Cliff returned his focus to the paper before him as he sipped on his coffee.

Sarah turned her full attention to Bernard. "I'm afraid I disagree with the basic premise of your argument: that only man is imprudent enough to destroy that which he needs to sustain life. I agree that man has been foolish and has acted only out of self-indulgence, however, I also believe that if you examine the animal kingdom more closely you will observe that same degree of ignorance and selfishness."

"You must be joking! Where in the animal kingdom do you witness such total disregard for the environment? For thousands of years, animal species have coexisted among each other. Where do you find the gross overpopulation? Where's the degradation of the ozone layer? Where's the self-induced Green House Effect? Where's the deterioration of the oceans and the rivers? What other animal clears the forests for housing and grazing like we do?"

"What about beavers? They chop down trees to dam the stream where they live. Isn't that altering the environment? Doesn't that have its consequences?"

"Yes, but when have you ever seen beavers slash and burn thousands of acres of timber just to build their dam? Their effects are minimal, I assure you, making your comparison flawed to say the least. Can you name me just one species that damages their environment to the extent of man? Name just one."

"What about locusts?"

"Locusts?"

"Yes, Locusts. They travel in enormous swarms destroying hundreds and even thousands of acres of crops. They do not stop to consider the consequences of their actions, which are staggering..."

"You're going to compare the intelligence and foresight of an insect that's the size of my thumb to mankind? You're just reinforcing my argument."

"Not at all. Your argument is that only man's interaction with the environment has catastrophic effects. I have just identified another species whose actions also has a catastrophic impact on the environment."

"Yes, but to compare locusts and man..."

"Let's compare them, Bernie. The only thing that prevents locusts from destroying the entire earth is their short lifespan. What if locusts lived to be seventy years of age like man? The earth's vegetation would be ravaged bare within a few months destroying the planet's food chain. Natural calamity would result. And as far as your argument about animals coexisting, I'd like to make a point on that, too..."

"Naturally," Cliff snickered cynically as he turned a page.

Sarah ignored her husband and continued. "Some animals do coexist peacefully. Others even enter a symbiotic relationship, whereby they depend on each other's existence. But it's also true that no predator ever considers the consequences of its actions. If a lion was hungry and there was only one zebra alive in all of Africa, it wouldn't know enough not to eat it. And even if it did somehow know, it wouldn't matter to the lion. That zebra is food and the lion would not leave its belly hungry in some compassionate or enlightened action.

"You're right, Bernie. Man is ignorant about such matters. But to raise the animal kingdom to some Utopian level whereby all other creatures interact only with love and goodwill to each other is mistaken. Like I've already stated: if locusts possessed a longer lifespan they would devour the entire earth."

Bernard finished his coffee, ran his fingers through his hair, and chuckled in amazement. "Sometimes I wonder why you're just teaching French," he complemented her. Sarah smilingly nodded in satisfaction.

"Did you read the paper tonight?" Cliff interrupted.

"I haven't had a chance," Bernard replied.

"This deep drilling they're doing outside the city is fascinating. This is already the second deepest penetration in history. And they expect to surpass the current record by the end of next week."

"But for what?" Bernard countered, shrugging his shoulders in apathy. "Some corporate scientist believes there's the possibility of vast reserves of oil buried deep in the earth's crust and so they spend millions of dollars just to drill and find nothing – which is what they've found so far. I say it's a waste of money. They'd been better off giving the money as a bonus to their employees."

"It doesn't seem scientifically possible for oil to form in the area they're drilling," Sarah noted. "The geological time periods are all wrong."

Appearing to be distressed by a sudden thought, Cliff rested the paper

back down on the table. Concern filled his weary eyes. "Drilling that deep, into a layer of rock that hasn't been exposed to the sun – at least theoretically – for hundreds of millions or even billions of years..." He paused in contemplation.

"Yeah, go on," Bernard entreated him.

"Nothing. Let's go back up to your study, Bernie. I believe we've given them sufficient time to reemerge."

"Alright," Bernard agreed as they rose from their seats. "But I implore you to remain in absolute silence." The couple nodded, showing their willingness to comply and followed Bernard up the steps.

They approached the doorway to the study. An ominous atmosphere seemed to pervade the dimly lit room. In total silence and absolute astonishment they stared down at the carpet. Shadows were moving throughout the room.

"Oh my God," Sarah whispered. "What are they?"

Bernard shook his head in anger, as he had demanded absolute silence.

"No, it's alright," Cliff observed in a normal tone of voice. "They don't appear to notice us."

"Or they're choosing to ignore us," Sarah countered.

"Alright, now you see for yourself. I am NOT crazy."

"I never said you were. This is incredible, Bernie. This is the find of the century!"

"Yeah, well, the find of the century happens to be sharing my study with me. In fact, it's possessing my study all to itself. Are we going to stand here all night or are we going to go in?"

"Wait a minute," Sarah warned them. "If we go in now they may return to the natural shadows of the room. That's the last thing we want. Let's just observe them for a while. We might be able to understand what they're doing."

"Didn't you say you originally saw just two of them?"

"That's right, just two."

"Look at them now."

Directionless in their jerky movements, eight shapeless shadows glided

along the floor. "They're either reproducing or their friends have followed them." Cliff crouched down at the doorway as one of the shadows neared him. The shadow stopped abruptly and remained motionless, appearing to survey the situation. It measured about eight inches in diameter and, like an amoeba, its perimeter (outer membrane?) consisted of impermanent pseudopods that seemed to appear and disappear at random. There was no thickness to the shadow yet the carpet beneath it was totally obstructed by its impenetrable darkness. "I think we're the one's being watched now," Cliff declared in surprise. "It seems to be aware of us."

"I'm not so sure of that," Bernard argued. "Remember, the first time I saw them they quickly retreated back into the shadows when I turned on the desk light. What may be keeping them from this doorway is the light coming from the hallway. They may still be oblivious to us."

"Then it may be surveying the brightness of the light..."

"Or adjusting to it," Sarah observed.

"Something else," Bernard added with uncertainty. "Although I can't be sure of this, the shadows appear to be darker."

"Darker? They're pitch black. You can't even see the carpet under them."

"Yes, I know, Cliff. But it seems to me that they weren't pitch black before. I'm sure I could see beneath them, that's why I said they appeared to be shadows. They were darker than the lit area around them but you could still see through them. These shadows here are opaque."

"Interesting."

"What do you think it means?"

"I think they're growing stronger," Cliff replied in trepidation. "And they might be reproducing. I'm going to try something..." He removed the watch from his wrist and slowly lowered it onto the ground before the shadow nearest him.

"Honey, this is awfully dangerous."

"Don't worry, I can pull back quickly if I have to."

"Just lay it flat down, Cliff. See if the shadow goes over it."

The watch rested within millimeters of the perimeter of the stationary shadow until a pseudopod formed and reached out to touch it. The nucleus of the shadow then advanced toward the watch, appearing to

move with caution. Within several seconds the watch was blanketed in total darkness. Although the contour of the watch remained distinguishable, no details could be seen through the shadow.

"There goes my watch."

"Don't worry, we'll get it back when I turn on the lights."

"Yes, please, Bernie. I've seen enough of these things already."

Cliff rose off the ground and agreed, "Let's turn the lights on."

Bernard reached around the doorway and turned on the overhead chandelier, anticipating the shadows to scurry towards the natural shadows of the room. This time, however, they were slow to respond.

"I thought you said they're afraid of the light."

"They are... or they were."

"There goes one of them," Sarah pointed as a shadow lethargically moved under Bernard's desk. Minutes passed before the other shadows slowly relocated towards the darker locations in the room until none remained in the more intense light.

"They didn't appear to be as afraid this time," Bernard acknowledged as they entered his study. He flicked the switch on the surge protector to his personal computer, shutting it down. "Alright, you saw them now. What on earth is going on?"

"It's become clear..." Cliff began.

"Wait a minute," Sarah interrupted. She was crouched down, looking under the wooden table that was adorned with the antique Italian lamp. "Look at this."

The shadow hiding under the table was still visible to them, its total blackness clearly distinguishing it from the natural gray shadows around it. The shadow resided at the edge of the natural shade and was extending one of its pseudopods into the carpeted area where light spilled, carefully keeping its nucleus in the darker area.

"What's it doing?" Bernard asked Sarah.

"I'm not sure. Could it be using the light as a source of energy?"

Cliff handed his watch to Bernard and both men observed how cold it had become. "I suggest we keep this room well lit, that may keep them at bay for now. Let's go back down to the kitchen. There's an article

in the paper that I want to reread.”

“Should I close the door?” Bernard asked Cliff as they departed the study.

“Would it matter? If they want to leave they can always go under the door.”

“I’m shutting it anyway.”

Suddenly energized by some unknown clue, Cliff quickly headed down the steps and into the kitchen with determination. Bernard and Sarah lagged behind, remaining at the top of the stairway staring through the large, hallway window down at the sleeping city in the valley below them.

“The city sleeps peacefully tonight,” Bernard commented. Still a prisoner of clichés, he thought to himself in dissatisfaction. Not even his speech was capable of displaying originality.

“Wait until morning when we notify the authorities of your discovery. We’ll see how peaceful they’ll remain. I will say though you do have a beautiful view up here, Bernie. If the Rosen’s ever decide to sell that house up the road from here, I think Cliff and I would like to join your neighborhood.”

“It is breathtaking,” he agreed. “Especially during...”

“Hey, you guys coming down here or what?” Cliff yelled irately from the kitchen.

They smiled nervously at each other and headed down the steps. They entered the kitchen and discovered Cliff reading the evening paper. He had managed to put water on for more coffee during the short time they lagged behind.

“What’s so important down here?” Sarah questioned her husband, yawning from the lateness of the hour.

“This!” he declared forcefully as he displayed the headline of the article he was reading.

“That drill site? So what? What does that have to do with us?”

“Sit down, both of you.”

They again seated themselves at the kitchen table, but Sarah quickly argued, “Cliff it’s past four o’clock already. Can’t this wait until we get some sleep?”

"Sleep? How can you even consider going to sleep at a time like this? Don't you realize the significance of what we've found here?" Cliff appeared to be fueled by nervous energy as he regained the alertness and excitement that he normally displayed only during the day.

"I'm sorry, honey. You're right, go on."

"O.K. When I read this article about the drill site earlier, something struck me and I'm now convinced that those shadows came from deep underground – from the site of the drilling."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because the site is located only a few miles from here beyond this hill. It's the only logical possibility. Look, they begin drilling deeper into the earth than anyone ever has before and shortly thereafter a strange new lifeform is discovered only miles away. It makes sense! Our demand for new sources of oil has uncovered a lifeform that may date back billions of years – to the beginning of earth's creation."

"It's a good theory," Bernard acknowledged. "But even if it's correct, it doesn't tell us how to deal with what we've found."

"Maybe it does. You saw the way that last shadow kept one of its – for lack of a better word – appendages in the light. I believe that they use light as a source of energy. It feeds them – allows them to reproduce. Earlier you said there were only two of them and they were somewhat translucent – you were able to see through them. Well now look at them. We counted eight this time and they were so dark you could only see the outline of my watch when one of them covered it. I'm going to guess the translucent state is a state of weakness; the dark opaque state is a state of strength. They've grown stronger from the time you first saw the two shadows.

"And they seem to have grown accustomed to the light. Earlier you said the light shocked them and they quickly retreated to the shadows of the room. This time we switched on the brighter overhead light and they barely seemed to notice it..."

"Yes, but they did retreat," Bernard noted. "So light can still be used as an effective weapon against them."

"Weapon?" Sarah cried out. "What are we talking about here? You can't possibly be thinking of destroying those things."

"If need be, we may have to kill them all," Cliff continued. "They've already multiplied fourfold in a matter of hours. But let me get back

to the subject of light. True enough, Bernie, light was effective this past time, also. But I'm telling you they're growing accustomed to it. Those appendages they leave in the light when they hide in the shadows may be acting as some sort of buffer. They not only absorb it, they are becoming less sensitive to it. Remember they've been trapped deep in the earth for billions of years in total darkness. It will take time for them to adjust, but you've seen it already: they are adjusting."

"This IS just a theory."

"A theory, yes. But it's all we have to go on."

"And the light?" Sarah asked. "What would they use it for?"

"Food. Reproduction. Who knows what else."

"Now wait a minute," Bernard stated calmly as he poured them coffee. "You're saying this species lived underground for millions of years, right?"

"That's my guess."

"How did it live? What did it eat?"

"I don't know the answer to any of those questions. But please allow me to continue. Alright, now remember you originally saw two of them in dim light several hours ago..."

"More like half a day ago."

"Whatever. They moved into the dim light, absorbing the energy. You switched on a brighter light and they headed for darker areas. The next time they were seen there were eight of them. You know what this is leading to, don't you?"

"They're using the light for energy to reproduce in the darkness," Sarah replied apprehensively.

"Exactly."

"Wait, once again, Cliff. If this species is using light as food then how did it survive in darkness all this time?"

"You're thinking of this all wrong. I'm not saying that they only feed on light or that they only can reproduce in darkness. There's more to it than that because everything is magnified a hundred-fold. Look, just think of this as a houseplant – or even a garden. Most plants will grow in regular dirt with just enough water and light to survive.

But what happens when you add some fertilizer? Or what happens if you get a nice period of rain or sunshine? The additional minerals or sunshine will yield rapid growth in the plants. These shadows may be similar. Perhaps they were fairly well-off living in the darkness beneath the earth's crust. But up here there's now an additional source of energy available to them – a source so abundant that it can only lead to their tremendous reproduction and expansion."

"My God, Cliff, that means there's no way to stop them. If there's light, they'll adjust to it sooner or later and use it to store energy. If there's darkness they'll use the stored energy to reproduce. It's an endless cycle."

"And since everything is relative, very soon they will no longer need absolute darkness to reproduce. Simple shading from direct light will do."

"My study! It's well lit at this very moment. What does this mean?"

"By now they've grown accustomed to the light in your study. There may be dozens of them."

"And there's something else," Sarah warily alerted them. "It's nearly dawn. It's already growing light outside. What happens when those things are exposed to the light of the sun?"

"They'll spend the entire day absorbing incredible amounts of energy. And at night or in the shadows... They'll multiply by the hundreds or thousands."

"Or even worse."

An ominous, disturbing silence enveloped the kitchen as the three friends finally became fully aware of the insurmountable task that awaited them. The new species of life that they had at first considered to be the find of the century had become transformed in their minds to a foreboding plague. Cliff was the first to rise from the table.

"Get the brightest flashlights you have, Bernie. We're heading back upstairs."

Armed with flashlights, several pieces of wood, nails, and a hammer, they anxiously ascended the stairway in silence. They arrived at the top of the steps and instantly focused their sights on the closed door of the study. At the bottom of the door, dozens of pseudopods randomly reached out into the bright hallway only to instantly retreat and make room for other pseudopods.

"I was right," Cliff announced as they approached the door. "They have adjusted. Keep the flashlight shining down at them. Maybe that'll push them back and allow me to nail this piece of wood to the bottom of the door." Cliff knelt down and was about to attempt to seal the doorway when Bernie grabbed the doorknob. "What are you doing?"

"There are windows in there. I'll have to pull the heavy velvet drapes to prevent light from entering. Otherwise what we do out here will be futile."

"Alright, but let's be quick about it," Cliff replied with urgency. They opened the door to the study, anticipating dozens of shadows to be moving about the room. Instead, fear gripped them as they witnessed the rapid reproduction capabilities of the shadows. Every book, every painting, every piece of furniture, the walls, the ceiling, the windows, and even the chandelier was completely blanketed in absolute blackness. Not even light could penetrate the opaque creatures that enveloped the room and as they shined their flashlights from wall to wall it was as if they scanned a bottomless pit; nothing was visible.

"This can't be," Bernard gasped in exasperation. "It's only been a few hours."

"We can't wait any longer. Sarah, get downstairs and call for help."

"Help? Help from who? The fire department? The police?"

"I don't care who you call, just call somebody. This is beyond discussion or theories..."

Sarah hurried down the hallway as Bernard and Cliff kept their flashlights pointed at the leading pseudopods at the doorway. "This isn't working anymore," Cliff yelled in anguish as they were forced to back away from the expanding shadows. "They've adjusted to the flashlights."

Cliff suddenly turned and saw Sarah standing motionless in the hallway, staring out the window at the top of the stairway. "What are you doing? Call somebody!"

Sarah maintained her position, intently staring out the window at the city below. She trembled in apprehension, shaking her head in disbelief. "It doesn't matter, Cliff."

"What are you talking about? Call somebody. Hurry!"

"What are you doing, Sarah?" Bernard implored her. "What are you looking at?"

Tears trickled down her soft cheeks and, without turning her head, she softly replied, "Your locusts, Bernie. Your locusts..."

The shadows continued their expansion into the hallway and Bernard dropped his flashlight and hurried towards the window to join Sarah.

"Oh my God!" were his only words.

As the faint light of dawn softly illuminated the valley below them, distinct images of the city were slowly becoming visible to the onlookers. Throughout the buildings, the roadways, the trees, the arclights, and the other physical components of the city, ominous patches of blackness – too many to be counted – were becoming increasingly visible.

And they were expanding everywhere.