

*The Journal of Thomas Cavanaugh,
Immortal Poet of the Realm and
Willing Host of the Muses Whose
Gifts Have So Often Enlightened the
Dark Ages of Man*

August 9th, 1880

After the unfortunate death of Lord Melroy, I find myself without any true patron. And, one would argue, without any true purpose. My father's latest letter encourages me to return to Belfast, a prospect which my soul loathes but to which I may nevertheless be driven by the utterly banal practicalities of corporeal flesh.

August 14th, 1880

Ah! Salvation! My bags were packed and I was ensnapt in the contemplation of purchasing my tickets for Belfast - indeed, I would have been aboard the train itself if I had not spent the past day, soaked in whiskey, contemplation of my grim fate - when a letter arrived from my old friend Gilbert. It seems that he has decided to abandon the salons of Paris and seek his fortune, much like myself, as far from figures of parental authority, as possible. He has apparently purchased a number of lovely, if somewhat dilapidated, properties along a lake in the country near Brichester. And, having heard through mutual acquaintances of my destitute state in the wake of Lord Melroy's unfortunate accident, he has suggested that I take up residence in one of the houses in exchange for some moderate caretaking duties. "It shall give you an opportunity to become inspired by the pastoral woods and placid waters," he writes. Just as in school, Gilbert Celeste is a celestial god-send!

August 20th, 1880

Gilbert apologized profusely for the state of the houses. There are six of them standing side-by-side, each with an absolutely stunning view over the lake. They were apparently built sometime late in the last century, but have stood derelict for the past few decades. His apologies are unnecessary, of course! Everything here is a thing of beauty and utter tranquility!

December 7th, 1880

My poetic muse remains distant. I worry, at times that she remained somehow about Lord Melroy's estates when I came here. But my eye remains filled with the dark and tempestuous visions I have seen in my dreams, despite my inability to put description to them through my pen. Nor can I seem to turn my poetic vision to some other sight. Instead, I find myself simply staring into the dark lake, my limpid eyes fogged by the murky-mirror depths.

February 28th, 1882

Despite the frigid and unforgiving weather, the Grays have remained steadfast in their desire to abandon House #15. I even offered them significant forgiveness of their rents if they would stay through the spring when it would be easier to find new tenants for the property, but they are adamant. It seems almost as if they are driven by some force which they cannot (or will not) clearly communicate.

Celeste is frustrated, of course. He had anticipated little difficulty in renting these pleasant homes and yet now over half of them stand empty.

June 28th, 1886

Alphon the night of Midsummer's I seemed suddenly struck, after a drought so long I found myself no longer thinking myself a poet, by an inspiration. A torrent of words seemed to pour forth onto the page. For a full week I felt stirred in ways more carnal than any act of love.

Today I awoke light-headed. And, upon reviewing the papers, I burned them. The words I had written were... disturbing. Deeply so, but in a way that I cannot adequately describe. Those bleak descriptions of the wind-savaged plains of Eond and the stark gulfs which stand guardian upon cornetary bastions seemed not to be my words at all. They were possessed of an alien quality, as if one had looked into a mirror and seen eyes shifted to one side.

November 17th, 1888

Celeste's dealings in Yorkshire seem to have turned quite sour, although I cannot get him to confide any of the matter to me. But what other explanation there be for him shuttering the home he loves, placing it upon the market, and "retiring" (as he refers to it) here to one of his lakeside properties?

November 22nd, 1888

Gilbert drank rather too much wine tonight. He raged that these "thrice-damned houses" were somehow the source of his financial difficulties. I comforted him as best I could, but, despite the difficulty in retaining tenants, I don't see how these houses could be any source of fiscal distress. If they are, as he says, among the last properties to which he has a right and full claim, does that not suggest that they are jewels to be preserved?

January 5th, 1890

This time I am certain: It was no glimmer of moonlight or trick of fern-shadow. There was a growth of sorts near the center of the lake (although slightly off towards the southern end). And as I walked I was almost certain that it turned to follow my perambulation, almost like a sunflower in pursuit of Aurora's rays.

March 6th, 1890

Around 10 o'clock in the morning I noticed that the door to Mrs. Ryan's house was slightly ajar. I called out to her, but it seems that she had gone into town. I make a note here to make certain that I speak to her about the need to secure her doors and windows. Mr. Stuart has complained again of foxes somehow getting into the basement of his house. I am certain the wild creatures are starving after the poor harvests and weather of last autumn, but we cannot encourage their infestation.

March 7th, 1890

Anne-Marie did not return to her house last night. Growing concerned this morning, I contacted constables in Brichester. They attempted to convince me that it was a matter for Pulton, but I assured them that the houses - although not remote - were much of Brichester's concern. I opened the house for them. In the den there was a single chair with its right rear leg snapped cleanly off, but not other signs of violence. They have opened an inquiry, but suggest that there is little or no cause for alarm. It is more than possible that Mrs. Ryan has simply called upon a friend or relative in one of the many villages in the region.

April 10th, 1891

I had hoped that by laying aside all writing besides this journal that the dreams would cease. But it seems that palliative has been purely temporary in nature. The nightly visions have returned. I wake almost expecting to see the beast pressing upon my windows or crouching at the foot of my bed. Even during the daylight hours, I seem to see gleaming spears of silver lancing towards me out of the corner of my eyes.

April 19th, 1891

In the midst of my great weariness, my concentration slipped and I mentioned my dreams to Gilbert. I haven't done that since frightening Mrs. Bowen so firmly that she and her husband departed at the end of their leave.

But it seems that Gilbert has also been afflicted with disturbing dreams. In fact, he seemed quite excited to discover my own plight, seeing in it the tacit ability to confide. I am not certain I wish to join him in this. It seems to me that dwelling on these things will only cause more of them to haunt our dreams.

May 2nd, 1891

I was woken early, this morning to Gilbert pounding upon my door. He was quite insistent that we evict Mr. Stuart from his home. When I inquired as to his reasons, it seems that he simply wanted access to Mr. Stuart's basement.

But his reason for desiring that access was what disturbed me most. He had dreamed that behind the wall of new brick in that home we would find some additional chamber. Gilbert imagines that it might contain some hidden treasure that would restore his good fortunes. But what struck me was that the dream he described, in which his hands removed the bricks from that terrible wall one at a time, was identical to the that which I had begun to dream even at the moment of his knocking.

May 7th, 1891

With Mr. Stuart's disappearance, the fourth such since Anne-Marie failed to return last spring, the police were much more insistent in their inquiries.

The signs of violence performed upon Mr. Stuart's front door were also alarming. The splintering and cracking of the wood - not consistent, the detectives said, with any, as blow, but rather suggestive of some great bulk hurling itself against it - was a frightening sight in its own right.

May 10th, 1891

Unable to rest, frightened of the ill-named solace of sleep, I rose in the lean hours of the night and decided to walk out amongst the lakeside ferns. I have often sought comfort such. I am not certain I shall find such comfort again.

I fell asleep amidst the ferns (I surely must have) and was immediately visited by one of the strange visions which have previously confined themselves to my bed. A pale light arose on the far side of the lake, flickering amidst the dark boughs of the freshly-leaved trees there. I was drawn towards this light in an unnatural rapture, but thankfully came to my senses as my bare feet splashed into the shallows of the lake.

Looking up again, however, I could see now that there were shadows passing through the light. Or were they perhaps the source of the light? It was difficult to discern at such a great distance, but I was struck by the sense of some funereal procession stalking amidst the trees.

From behind me, beyond the houses, there came the screeching of an owl and I turned in sudden fright. Perhaps that dreadful call had woken me, for when I turned back the light had vanished and the night was still.

May 12th, 1891

Gilbert claims to have seen Anne-Marie Ryan and Richard Stuart in the night. He says that they were standing in the center of the cobblestone lane, their hands clasped together, and their gaze fixed with queer strength upon the window of my bedchamber.

I have urged him in the strongest terms possible not to speak of this with anyone else. Such fantasies will only elicit further speculation and the sort of attention that will make any sort of peaceful life impossible. I hope he will listen. It seems of late that Gilbert has little attention or focus.

Of course, I must be careful of hurling stones which could just as readily be aimed at myself. For example, despite my certainty that I had left this journal upon my desk, I at last found it this morning resting on my chair by the fireplace.

May 14th, 1891

It was not my mistake. Or rather it was my mistake to blame myself. My journal is being moved while I sleep. I suspect that Gilbert is using his set of master keys to slip in during the night. It is disquieting to think of him reading my thoughts. I shall have to find some hiding place or other. A nook or cranny, where he will not think to look. So that my thoughts can rest undisturbed.

June 6th, 1891

I wake standing by the lake. I had fallen asleep in my bed, and so I fear that I must have walked in my sleep down to the water's edge. The dark, unreflective waters seemed seized by a seismic ripples which emanated from somewhere out amidst their depths.

I turned and looked back towards my house only to find, to my immense surprise, that all six of the houses were brightly lit as if occupied. Then, as of one, their doors flew open and I saw men and women dressed in a quaint and archaic fashion march forth through them. And as each passed from the warm lights of the fires behind them, they were clad in a sickly green glow. They fell into a line and came down towards the shoreline, walking directly towards

me and coming almost face-to-face with my
unmoving vision before abruptly turning to their
right and proceeding around the lake.

And as the last of them passed and was gone, I had a
sense of the lake rearing up behind me. Of it grasping
towards the houses. Reaching for a warmth which had
been denied to it.

June 7th, 1891

Despite my cautions, it seems that Gilbert has taken
up residence in Mr. Stuart's former house. He has
locked the doors and refuses any answer to my knocks
or calls. But if I listen carefully, I can hear the
sounds of scraping coming from somewhere beneath
the house.

June 8th, 1891

In my dreams tonight I saw a vortex. It filled my
vision, as if I hovered directly above an eclipsed
whirlpool, suspended like a hawk awaiting its prey.
Or perhaps the reverse of that, for I could not turn my
head nor arrest my gaze in any way. Some titanic
hypnosis grasped my soul.

Perhaps the worst of it was that I was willingly
surrendering to it. The power of it was... seductive.
Salacious. Responsive.

But then I became aware of an oily slick laced atop
those black waters. Something foul and vomitous. I
could see that I would need to pass through that skein
to reach the object of desire beyond and my mind
balked at it. In my dream I wrenched myself back,
throwing my head back with such force that it seemed
as if my neck would crack -

- and in the waking world threw myself bodily
from my bed and towards the window. I looked out
towards the lake and saw the muddy shore was
moving. Shifting. Undulating. Dancing beneath the
moonlight.

And then the horrible optical illusion or delusion
passed with a shuddering heave and the distant sound
of splashing water.

June 9th, 1891

Charlie Lane vanished in the night. The last house of strangers has been emptied, leaving only Gilbert and myself.

I do not know which of us will be taken next. But I fear that it will be me.