

**FILE NAME:** The Diary of "I.E."

**DATE:** 1903

**NOTES:** Most of the manuscript appears to have been burnt. All known surviving fragments have been transcribed here.

[GAP IN TEXT DUE TO BURNT PAGE] ...stuffed creatures warping into demonic figures, the mounted animal heads on the wall baring their teeth and snarling at me. It is always the same dreadful nightmare, and no doubt linked in some way with my principal disorder.

...

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> February 1903

Seeking help for my worsening condition, I reluctantly visited the doctor this morning and described to him my most acute symptoms, which consist of frequent blackouts, memory lapses, and a growing sense of unreality.

Dr Morris was his usual helpful self, scheduling an appointment at the hospital for me to undergo a round of tests to identify the cause of my hypomnesia and confusion; but despite the fact that I nodded and smiled politely the whole time he was explaining the various physiological factors that would be investigated during the referral, I was only miming the part of the obedient patient so as not to arouse any suspicion.

I, of course, have no intention of going to the hospital, for I already think I know where my troubles originate from, and it's a sphere of life very much outside the domain of medical science. I reached out to my doctor in the hope of simply being provided with some sort of quick fix to cancel out my recollective deficits and allow me to continue with the abnormal practices that are probably responsible for getting me into this mess in the first place.

'Let's hope I don't forget to turn up to my appointment,' I joked, picking up my hat and... [GAP IN TEXT DUE TO BURNT PAGE]

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[GAP IN TEXT DUE TO BURNT PAGE] ...realising the place where I walk most Saturday afternoons would once have been populated not just by countless oak and hornbeam trees, but by birds, wolves, boars and snakes, when the Great North Wood covered huge parts of Kent, Surrey and the County of London.

...

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> February 1903

Although I can produce no other evidence than what others would call the indicia of a serious mental disorder, I am convinced that I have lived a much longer life than the one I am currently able to recall, and I am equally sure that it was all documented at some point in the missing parts of this diary.

Sometimes, especially in moments like the present one, when I am writing by candlelight, I gaze into the flame and experience flickers of remembrance, brief but bright flashes of lucidity which vanish almost as soon as they appear.

It is therefore important that I write down, once again, the most important details of this half-remembered personal history before they disappear for what may be the last, but certainly not the first, time...

My problems began immediately after I met A.C., a man of questionable character who popped up seemingly out of nowhere and handed me his business card in the street one day (I say business card, but now I think about it, the item could have been a tarot card with his details scrawled over it as all I can clearly recall is the image of “The Fool”).

I also remember the moment – or at least I remember recording it in one of my now absent diary entries – when A.C. made me an offer which, after much hesitation, I accepted. He promised to help me broaden my mental horizons to such an extent that I would be able to perceive the “dawning of an inner sun” and see my “true self” illuminated by it – quite a claim indeed! I know that I would not normally take such talk seriously, but there was something so peculiar about the circumstances in which it occurred that meant I completely forgot about applying my usual rules.

Thinking at the time that I had more to lose by turning down a potentially valuable offer than accepting a bogus one, I agreed to give A.C. what he wanted in return for his psychic services; and the fact that I cannot for the life of me remember what form that payment took makes me think, as preposterous as it seems, that it may have consisted of my memories. Not only is the available information convincing – particularly the more recent assertion by my unreliable psychic guide that future progress always requires a sacrifice of one’s past self – but the absence of additional data also serves to substantiate the hypothesis.

I do recall making a deal with A.C., and then taking part in all the strange procedures that that entailed, but I now

fear that I may have been hoodwinked by the very person who was supposed to be showing me the light, a man who after promising to reveal new parts of my self seems to be turning my mind into a blank slate and transforming me into the figure of the Zero or Fool from his so-called “point-blank” business card.

...

Monday 9<sup>th</sup> February 1903

Today I met my contact at the Horniman Museum and went through the same ritual I have experienced many times before in my rapidly retreating past: I join A.H. at the prearranged meeting point, in front of the stuffed half-mammal/half-fish creature in the northeastern corner of the building, where we engage in a well-rehearsed exchange about the stuffed curiosity before us, and then conclude our theatrical performance with a scene in which A.H. points out that I have dropped my satchel on the floor, prompting me to bend down to retrieve it.

This is the point at which, for me, the lights go out and the production ends with a bang, although I strongly suspect it is the moment when the *real* drama begins, when A.H. and her shadowy associates act out another, more powerful ceremony in private, possibly involving me – and I suspect this because the next thing I remember each time is waking up in a heap in the museum gardens, with an hour having passed since the time my meeting began but no recollection of how it was spent.

Although I am sure I have done this many times before, I feel compelled to write down the parts of this process that I can remember now, in the hope that they will not follow their earlier equivalents into amnesic oblivion. In fact, a significant detail has just this moment returned to me, almost as if I'm restoring my memory by writing this!

I don't know how I ever could have forgotten such an important piece of information, but I now recall that whenever I meet A.H., I am carrying this diary with me in my satchel, and the moment I awaken in a stupor among the vegetation in the grounds of the museum after losing an hour of my life is also when I notice that more pages of this book have gone missing.

I sincerely hope that such a crucial piece of evidence will be able to survive the next meeting, along with the equally notable detail, which I record here for what *seems* like the first ever time, about how the surreal ordinances I have to observe every week are connected with the most unearthly... [GAP IN TEXT DUE TO BURNT PAGE]

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[GAP IN TEXT DUE TO BURNT PAGE] ...as if a huge black disc passed over London Road, blocking out the sun in the middle of the day, but no one else seemed to see it.

...

Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February 1903

Since it is such a struggle to recall anything from the past week, it was difficult to believe it was already time for me to return to the Horniman for another meeting today. Nonetheless, off I went to the museum after breakfast, with the aim of trying to remember as much as I could about the recurring historical re-enactment of my forgetfulness. This was something I hoped to achieve by deviating slightly from the script at certain key points and establishing a mental foothold by which I could push myself up towards a new level of comprehension, or at the very least, stop myself sinking back down into the Lethean depths.

‘I intend to work it out,’ I announced after A.H. delivered her well-rehearsed line about the mystery surrounding the stuffed creature that served as our regular meeting point.

‘Y-you... mean, um... work out where the merperson came from?’ she responded, evidently taken aback by my unscripted utterance.

‘No, I mean I intend to find out if it is in fact what it appears to be, whether this is a genuine zoological curiosity before us, or whether it’s just the top half of a monkey stitched onto the bottom half of a fish.’

‘You... what? W-what are you talking about?’

‘I’m talking about distinguishing what’s real from what’s not, about achieving *lucidity now* – or, if not now, then very soon.’

As I was speaking, I seemed to have control of the situation and was able take everything in with a mental

clarity that was previously inaccessible. This allowed me to observe everything from what seems to be the same perspective from which I am recollecting it now...

I could, and still can, very clearly perceive A.H. puffing hastily on her cigarette and looking around nervously with bulging eyes as she searched for a way to get the performance back on track; while behind me, from an area of the building I never normally look at, I could, and still can, see two men approaching me, one with a hood in his hands, and the other a club.

The sight is sufficiently menacing for me to quickly lose my focus and become distracted by my theatrical partner informing me that I have dropped my satchel on the floor. As I bend down to pick it up, the scene suddenly goes blank and I can remember nothing more until I awake in the gardens an hour later.

...

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 1903

As I read the newspaper at breakfast this morning, a strange entry in the obituaries section caught my eye. It contained so many curious details that I wondered if it was a coded message of some sort. The subject was a gentleman who had travelled all over the world in search of exotic creatures, so there was a vague chance I might have encountered him and his work at some point; as I read on, however, I found his life story to be rather mysterious and contradictory, and the repeated mentions of "the Baconian cipher" suggested there was more to the notice than... [GAP IN TEXT DUE TO BURNT PAGE]



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[GAP IN TEXT DUE TO BURNT PAGE] ...at every turn I encounter hybrid creatures like wolves with the legs of spiders and birds with the fangs of snakes, all waiting to devour my soul. This nightmare clearly has something to do with the zoological curiosities and out-of-place artefacts I've inspected as part of my recent work (especially the recurring scene with the bird-of-paradise dissolving into tiny blue squares that glow with an otherworldly light), but there seems to be a lot more to it that I'm yet to decipher.

I only hope I can soon find a way to take control of my dream narrative and finally see the wood for the trees, so to speak.

...

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> February 1903

Today was the day I was meant to go to the hospital to be tested for whatever it is the doctors think could be the cause of my memory problems. The possible explanations are too numerous to count, yet still they amount to very little in my estimation because they're restricted to that which is of a purely physical nature.

If there's one thing that my recent experiences have taught me, it's that the material world is an inherently unstable place, thoroughly undeserving of its reputation for solidity – at any given moment, a face may dissolve, a diary decompose, an entire scene in a forest or a museum may break apart without warning and give way to catastrophic uncertainty.

And it was into that same abyss of doubt that I stared today, as I remained at home watching the dials stutter for a time over the clock face before finally reaching the point where the booking my doctor made for me was pronounced a thing of the past, another item turned over to the dustheap of my memory.

So now, with night having fallen, the time has come for me to set fire to everything on the pile of remembrance by trying to stimulate brief flashbacks here and there, to shed a little light on the mass of decayed instants that constitute my past.

In these fleeting moments of illumination, I am able to catch glimpses of my entire life, as if it has already been lived, from birth to old age, with memories both before and after this point. I can't be sure whether I'm gradually recapturing these images of a pre-experienced history or whether I'm seeing them in their last throes, like dying embers, before they blink out of existence forever; but I can be certain that there's a much bigger picture that I'm currently not able to view, and I feel that the manipulative A.C. occupies the threshold between *this me* and *that broader vision*... either as a potential guide or as a guardian.

I therefore intend to arrange another encounter with that master of secret ceremonies as soon as possible in order to quiz him further on the matter and hopefully reach a definitive conclusion about his true allegiances and the exact nature of the payment he's taking from me. I know from experience, however, that he's very difficult to get hold of when you want to, so it may take some time.

...

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1903

After waking up this morning, exhausted and bleary-eyed from yet another night of disturbing dreams about hybrid beasts, I set to work on the task of trying to locate the relevant details to set up a meeting with the elusive A.C.; but no sooner had I started searching the house for his business card than a flamboyant series of knocks was made upon the front door.

Upon responding to them, I discovered that the knocks signalled the seemingly magical arrival of the man himself, which was both unexpected yet totally typical of A.C., as he always seemed to pop up in the most unlikely places.

‘Good heavens!’ he smirked as I opened the door. ‘You look exhausted.’

‘That’s because I am,’ I responded gloomily. ‘I’ve been having problems with my sleep.’

‘Problems waking up in what we call the dream world?’

‘No, problems staying asleep in the dream world, because of nightmares.’

‘I’m not sure if the real problem is quite what you imagine it to be,’ he said. ‘Anyway... I suppose you’re wondering what I’m doing here on your doorstep, aren’t you?’

‘Yes, I am rather. Did you somehow know that I wanted to speak with you today?’

‘Uh... let’s just say I had an intuition, and my intuition has never let me down. Well? Aren’t you going to invite me in?’

‘Oh, yes, of course,’ I said, motioning him into the house. ‘You’ve saved me a lot of time by turning up now. Do come in.’

As I showed my guest to the front room, I kicked myself after realising that instead of questioning him about his original purpose for visiting, I had simply told him about my situation, thus giving him the perfect opportunity to claim he was here because he had read my mind. Once again, I was unable to tell if an apparently miraculous appearance by that self-proclaimed mentor and mage was due to his abilities as a seer, or as a liar.

I therefore tried to keep my cards as close to my chest as possible while we spoke about my recent experiences, but it wasn’t long before my desire for clarification won out and forced my hand to be exposed.

‘Look,’ I said sternly. ‘I’ll cut to the chase... I need some answers from you about this shady business you’ve roped me into. You can’t keep me in the dark any longer.’

‘I don’t intend to keep you anywhere, old chap. You must choose of your own free will where you wish to be. But, if you want my advice, then being in the dark is a pretty good place to begin to understand what you call “shady business”; it’s the darkness of ignorance in which you’ll find the answers you’re searching for.’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘I’m talking about knowing thyself,’ intoned A.C., evidently enjoying the sound of his voice. ‘The Fool and the Magician are different stages of the same person. You just need to fill in the gaps between them.’

‘But what do I fill them with?’

‘With light, that’s all; then you’ll see what they contain. It’s the same with the gaps in your memory...’

‘How do you know about my memory gaps? I haven’t mentioned them yet.’

‘Did you not? Well, I know about them, so it must be that you’ve forgotten about telling me... either that or I’m a mind reader.’

The man seemed to be playing serious mental games by attempting to convince me he *wasn’t* psychic after having just tried to do the exact opposite. If his aim was to disconcert me, he had succeeded. His advice seemed to make sense on some level, but that was as confusing as it was helpful. It wouldn’t surprise me in the slightest if he tried to lead me up the garden path with a few crumbs of truth, but it would also be a textbook A.C. manoeuvre to make me doubt everything he said the moment before he delivered a genuine piece of wisdom.

‘You need to see the lightlessness for what it is,’ he said. ‘The earth seems to go dark each night because it sits in its own shadow, but the sun goes on shining behind it. The same applies to both the body and the mind – they never really go dark, they only get stuck in their own shade.’

‘So the light that’s behind this mental darkness of mine, it’s the same light in which I’ll be able to see my true self?’

‘Whether or not you *will* isn’t for me to say.’

‘Yes, yes, I appreciate that,’ I responded. ‘But it’s what I need to aim for, correct?’

‘It would not be completely inaccurate to say that.’

‘But how do I achieve it? I feel like I’m getting further and further away from any insight into my situation the more I go on.’

‘You know my answer to that, and it’s that only you have the answer,’ stated A.C. ‘You must find your own Way – and that’s Way with a capital ‘W’. As I told you before, you need to allow your drama with A.H. to run its course, so you can see the final scene and understand the meaning of all that came before it. You will already have begun to suspect this, so I’m not giving anything away if I say that you are on the right track when you deviate from the script.’

Much of what was discussed earlier today seems to have faded away with the light, but this part of the discussion has remained as clear as day, so I have transcribed it here before going to bed, in order to preserve it and remind myself, before my next meeting at the museum tomorrow, of what may in fact be very good advice.

The rest of A.C.’s pronouncements that have not yet slipped from my memory consist mainly of deliberately vague and evasive responses to my questions about his ultimate purpose, but there is one further thing he said that stands out as worthy of mention as it triggered a peculiar emotional response in me.

Just as he was leaving, A.C. pointed out that the initials of my name (I.E.) are most commonly used to stand for ‘that is’ or ‘in other words’ in Latin (*id est*) and that if this is used as a starting point, it may be possible for me to figure out the other words that *I* stand for if I ‘make an example’ of myself, if, *exempli gratia*, I think about who I am in a completely new way.

What he then said seemed to set off within me what I can only describe as a momentary eruption of remembrance, as if I could see through the gaps in my memory for a split second – or, more precisely, as if a light was suddenly shone in through them to allow me to catch a glimpse of something about my life that had been long forgotten.

Unfortunately, I cannot now recall what I saw, but there are still traces of the curious feeling within me, and I can stir them up again by repeating A.C.'s enigmatic words, which were:

'Farewell, Green – and, remember, that's 'Green' with a capital 'G.'

...

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1903

Today was the day I have been waiting a long time to experience, a day of fulfilment and realisation. Words won't do it justice, but it's essential that I record it nonetheless...

It began, as every day should, with a clearly formed intention, which in this case was to go to the Horniman Museum and see the drama staged there through to its conclusion and experience whatever denouement Fate had in store for me.

As usual, I headed to the stuffed mercreature in the northeastern corner of the building to meet A.H. Once both of us were in position, we made a few opening remarks – about the weather, the latest developments in

the theatre industry and her probable resignation from a certain secret society – before getting down to business.

‘What business?’ she asked, seemingly in response to me writing this entry.

‘The business of tying up the timelines, of seizing the moment and making it coincide with its description in this diary.’

‘Which diary?’

‘*This* one,’ I said, picking up my satchel from the floor and removing the book that now contains the description of me doing this. ‘You’re responding to it now.’

As I watched A.H. looking confused and hurriedly lighting a second cigarette, I enjoyed a strong sense of composure which allowed me to focus on enacting the scene my Way – and, yes, that’s Way with a capital ‘W’.

Remembering myself writing this in the future and therefore knowing exactly what to do in the present, I turned to face the two men with the club and the hood, who were attempting to creep up on me from behind. I clutched this diary tight to my chest and found the strength to rise above my fear, as words of assurance seemed to be whispered through these pages and resonate in my chest.

Seconds after catching wind of the message, I heard a roar of thunder between my ears caused by the first man’s club coming down on my skull with considerable force. I fell immediately to my knees but my mind remained firm, and I was able to hold onto my newfound lucidity, just as I held onto this book, while the hood was clumsily pulled over my head by the second man.



Soon after, I was raised up by the two heavies, who gripped me by the arms and led me to a door which I heard being unlocked and creaking open very close to where the mercreature was located. I was then conducted down a flight of stairs, into an atmosphere that was much cooler and damper than the one in the main part of the building.

The three of us – without A.H., as she was presumably the one who slammed the door shut behind us – continued walking for some time through a long and winding passageway which seemed to take us beyond the boundary of the museum walls above.

‘Where am I?’ I asked.

‘You are in darkness,’ said the man on my left.

‘Where am I going?’

‘Into the light,’ replied the man on my right.

True to his word, my right-hand escort removed my hood as we came to a halt, allowing me to perceive a tiny slither of luminosity which issued from a hole directly above me in the otherwise murky tunnel.

‘There,’ my other escort grunted, loosening his hold on me and pointing to a rickety spiral staircase leading up to the source of light. ‘That’s the way to Stent Lodge.’

Without hesitation, I stepped forward and ascended the stairs until I was able to inspect the hole from which the light issued. It was a small, round aperture, about the size of an eye, in the middle of a five-pointed star. I knew exactly what to do next because I remembered writing it here, and I am writing it here because I clearly remember doing it: I raised my hand and pushed the star shape up

and over like a manhole cover, which allowed me to climb through the luciferous portal and emerge into a hall arranged and decorated for ceremonial use, with an altar, candles, red curtains and a large blue veil on display.

My head poked up from the centre of a chequered floor, midway between two pillars, one of which was white, the other black. Above me seemed to be a repeat of what was below, namely a five-pointed star with a hole in the middle, through which peered a very lifelike, although unblinking, eye; while in front of me stood two birdlike women, each holding a flaming sword, on either side of an extremely tall and grey-skinned figure in Elizabethan clothing.

Despite there being many extraordinary things around me, once I laid eyes on the central figure, I couldn't take them off him (if "him" is even the right word for such a bizarre being). Without speaking, the bulbous-headed entity seemed to beckon me; and without hesitating, I followed, raising myself up through the hole and walking slowly across the black and white squares on the floor.

As I did so, more visual details arose within my fixed gaze, including a large white quill and a vial of mysterious black liquid on a table; then, as I stopped a few feet before the otherworldly eminence in period costume, I noticed that he was surrounded by numerous pieces of paper, very much like diary pages which had been torn and partially burnt, and when I saw what was on them I experienced another eruption of remembrance, but this time an enduring one, in which a brilliant light shone through all the gaps in my memory and illumined new vistas of reality.

In that moment, which is also this moment and every other moment, I understood the meaning of the gaps; how a self-sacrifice at the altar of a being who is worshipped in silence transforms a life story into a *mutus liber*, the only book capable of speaking the truth; I also understood how the Fool's numerical position at Zero is the key to him realising his potential; and why the scene that confronted me would be recreated again and again in the future, for... [GAP IN TEXT DUE TO BURNT PAGE]

...

[UNDATED DIARY FRAGMENT]

One walks down Queen's Road from Taymount, turns left along London Road, then right up Honor Oak Road so a memory is just a thought travelling backwards in time, to the moment when Queen Elizabeth I sat beneath the Oak of Honor to consume a Bacon sandwich. With this key, it is possible to find one's Way through the tangle of centuries, to follow the breadcrumbs backwards or forwards and deliver a message to personages normally rendered unreachable by the limitations of space and time.

...