

THE GEOMANCER

Book II MORTIFICATIO

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An Occult Noir Novel
By Lewis L Mason

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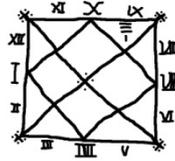
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...a negotio perambulante in tenebris... *suus* est...

PROLOGUE

Or
Tristitia in the Ninth House



“Sheweth that he that is absent shall perish in his journey; or signifies that some evil mischance shall happen unto him; causeth journeys to be very unfortunate, but declareth men to be of good Religion, devout, and profound Scholars...”

- Tristitia, the Ninth House

Eric Laurent sank deeper and deeper into meditation, his chest rising and falling in a slow, regular rhythm. His torso, arms and legs all felt like leaden weights under his black silk robe. In his darkened temple room, nothing stirred beyond the gentle snapping of the candlewicks.

Seven secret Geomantic Invocations were given to him by his private tutor in the occult, Professor Reynard Gottschalk – he chose the first Invocation in the sequence, called ‘*The Earthly Invocation of the Intelligence of Intelligences of Luna, of The Crowd and the Way*’ – a complex rite full of new physical movements, and the drawing of unusual sigils in the air and on the body. Now he waited to see what would occur.

Eric felt himself vibrating. At first it was gentle, all over the edges of his body. Then it focussed around his throat and the back of his neck, becoming stronger. Deep inside, Eric felt expectant. It’s happening, he thought, trying to keep himself as calm and indifferent as possible; it’s happening just as Gottschalk promised.

I’m leaving my physical body.

Eric felt himself *dissolving*, like sodium in water, his bodily awareness becoming numb and shapeless until he couldn’t tell where his thoughts ended and his sensations began. There was the feeling of a sudden shift. He opened his eyes.

He was staring at himself from across the room. There was his own body, sitting on the chair in absolute stillness. He looked down at himself from his new perspective – he was nothing but a *vagueness* - an amorphous smoke that could see, hear and feel.

And he was being drawn upwards, leaving the confines of his temple and his body far below, up and up into a cloudy space of shifting planes and subdued light.

All around him were fluidic shapes, passing in choirs and clusters through an expanse of silver light. The light shone above, within and *through* everything – it was a part of him, and yet he knew it to be only one small part of his entire existence.

What would you see?

A great Voice spoke through the silvery radiance, a Voice that was a union of many, many voices. It was the collective sound of a great mass, a heaving crowd of planetary size, every individual speaking in perfect sync.

Suddenly Eric saw image after image of beauty and splendour... great geometric palaces of golden light... clusters of undulating beauties in flowing drapery... caverns full of sumptuous treasures... rolling oceans of gemstones... glass mountains of impossible height... flaming chariots with their wheels made of galaxies... thrones of stars...

Eric was overwhelmed, until gradually he realised that all of this was fantasy; a beautiful illusion, a fever dream, worth nothing if unrepresentative of something absolute, self-existent and true.

“I, Frater Caelus, seek the Truth!” Eric cried, his voice echoing flatly against the banks of Aether, “Intelligence of Intelligences, thou great power of the Moon - show me the Truth.”

The splendid visions faded, and the Voice made of many voices laughed gently.

Very well, Caelus. In Truth, I will show you a Wonder and a Blessing. Return.

And then Eric was falling from the silvery plane, falling through clouds and mist, condensing and becoming confined.

With a start, Eric woke from his meditation. His body was slick with a fine cold sweat. He raised his face, and gasped in wonder.

The atmosphere of his temple room was illuminated by a fine silvery mist, gathered in a swirling bank across the ceiling. Laughing cherubic faces formed and faded within it, hazy mirages, as the mist reflected a familiar blue-white light around the sealed, curtained and windowless room. It was moonlight; an impossible moonlight.

Fine glittering dew fell gently upon the floor, and upon Eric’s upturned face, filling the air with the scent of lilies.

*

Michael Evans poked his head cautiously around the edge of his front door, and turned on the hall lights with a flinch. This was the *worst* thing about going to visit someone, he thought irritably, even my best friend Joy Hope; I have to come back home again.

His mother’s grey apparition had made no appearance for the past few days. And this made Michael more anxious as he turned on every downstairs light. He knew she *would* be back – but where and when? How? Each time he saw her now, she appeared to be *ageing*. Would she *continue* to age? What fresh horror then?

Michael locked up the front and back doors and went straight to the kitchen drawer. He pulled out a black resin crucifix on a beaded chain and looked at it for a moment. Then he gave a great sigh.

“Michael Evans, the super-sceptic, wearing a crucifix for *protection*,” He muttered to himself bitterly, “Well. No-one needs to know my dirty little secret.”

He grabbed a two-pint plastic cup with a secure lid from the cupboard, and then went to pull a bottle of wine out of the tall wrought-iron wine rack standing on the marble kitchen surface. It was at least three foot high and stacked in rows of four. It looked rather Gothic in his utilitarian kitchen, but that made him love it all the more. For several months after he bought it, he kept humming *Love Will Tear Us Apart* every time he used it.

As he pulled out the bottle of vintage Malbec, the rack began to slide smoothly towards the edge of the surface. He pushed it back with a sigh. Penny Ross was always warning him that the rack would fall on the tiles unless he secured it somehow. He agreed to use blue tack, but he kept forgetting to do it. He emptied the entire bottle into the cup, threw the bottle in the recycling bin and turned out the kitchen light.

Michael climbed into the linen cupboard that he had turned into a makeshift bedroom and sanctuary, and locked the square door from the inside. He lay on his stomach and read some of the *Bell Jar* on his mobile, giggling to himself at Plath’s irony and bitter humour, and taking warming draughts of the Malbec against the cold feelings inside him. He looked up at the white square of the locked door and nodded to himself.

His mother could never get to him in there, although sometimes he could *feel* her standing just outside. Being inside the cupboard was a great temporary solution; it gave him some feeling of safety. Michael sighed, tapping his heels against the ceiling of the cupboard, and drained the last of the wine; he pulled a small cord to turn off the interior light and laid back to check his mobile for calls.

He had heard nothing from his workmates for some time. He *had* spoken to Penny Ross, his boss at *Brevis Media*; but neither of his two colleagues Mick Leighton and Dudley ‘Dudders’ Corbey was answering his calls. Perhaps they were both angry that Michael had nearly lost them both their jobs by breaking into the home of Krishnaraj, the super-guru-cum-Satanist, even though they’d managed to break up a satanic ritual and rescue a young teenage boy from harm.

Michael sighed again, and turned off the interior light, leaving his mobile light on.

“Oh, well. Sorry guys. Goodnight anyway.”

He turned off the mobile light, wrapped himself in the duvet and fell quickly to sleep.

And Michael dreamed.

...he mustn't let her catch him... he ran and ran and ran... across abandoned wastelands of burnt grass... through broken skeletal warehouses, and fields of abandoned cars... under a blackened sky of thundering clouds, he ran away... away from her... the impossibly tall woman with the ebony mask, whose hair was a nest of serpents... he could see her behind him on the horizon, driving on her hordes of howling and faceless things that ran on two legs... he found an abandoned cottage in a dell of stunted trees... he must hide, hide away from the advance of the woman... as he passed into the cottage he saw Mick Leighton laying on the floorboards, covered in lipstick marks from a thousand kisses... he called, but Mick couldn't hear... he was asleep... he turned into a damp passage, and passed Dudders Corbey standing in a corner, facing the wall... he pulled him away and saw his staring eyes, his mouth masked behind a bloody pelt ... he called, Dudders couldn't hear... he was asleep... then he found a cupboard at the back of the cottage, a perfect hiding place... he opened the panelled door, and saw the interior walls were crawling with so many black centipedes... and deep inside, waiting for him, was his mother... how black her eyes, he thought... how black her eyes... as she stroked his hair so tenderly... as she lunged forward to embrace him... to kiss him with her wet, wet mouth...

Michael woke with a start in the darkness of his linen cupboard, sweat crawling down his forehead. He grasped his mouth in disgust. All around him was the pungent, oily stench of rotten meat. Cold, rotten meat.

“Ugh. What the *fuck*...?”

Then he could feel something stroke against the side of his head. He brushed himself.

Then he felt it again. And again. And again.

Something, stroking his hair.

Something *dry*.

Michael hurriedly grasped at the small dangling cord switch, and turned on the light in the cupboard.

The face stared down from above, not five inches from his own, screaming silently as its blackened eyes rolled up into dry worm-eaten sockets, shrivelled fingers catching in the hair of his temples. The grey parchment skin clung to the skull, mottled with white mould, peeling in rotten strips along the jaw-line. Foetor poured forth in an ice-cold stream from the gaping cadaver mouth. Withered vocal cords clicked in a parched gullet, working beneath a puckered molasses tongue.

‘*Michael...*’ It whispered.

Even before he began to scream, Michael recognised his mother’s decaying smile.

He tore out of the cupboard backwards, jumped up from a backwards roll, grabbed his coat from the back of the sofa and ran to the front door, screaming continuously.

As Michael burst out of his front door, he fell into an awaiting murder of crows. The black birds exploded into his face, taking off violently with deafening caws, and as Michael began to beat them off, they pecked spitefully at his head and arms. He ran across the front garden and fell into his small Ford, flailing his arms. The air was full of them.

Michael slammed the car door against the birds as they plunged towards the windscreen, and the last view of his house as he drove off was like a scene from Hitchcock. Every windowsill and every inch of his roof was swarming with the black bodies of crows and rooks.

He drove shakily, all the way into central London, to the Charing Cross office of *Brevis Media*. He parked his car in the underground car park, ran up to his office, crawled shivering under his desk and fell into a fitful sleep.

*

The man sat in the full lotus position, his feet folded under his dark thighs, and swayed on his hips before the partially charred statue of the goddess Kali, his naked body streaming with rivulets of stinking sweat. He muttered chant after chant in Hindi, his brow creased in concentration.

Ruddy coals lit up his brown skin, and the small damp cellar was all copper and shadows. In one hand he held a glossy promotional photograph of Michael Evans. In the other he held an old black-and-white police photograph. It was the defiled and blood-spattered body of a young dark-haired woman, her dress pulled up over her chest, lying in a grassy ditch beside a dirt road.

At the bottom of the image was written '*00201: Maria Evans, rape-homicide, vic seven*' in black permanent marker. As he held the images in his mind, his enormous phallus began to rear into an erection, throbbing in time to his swirling motion.

As the man rocked, he began to giggle to himself. Then he began to laugh.

And as his laughter became uncontrolled and hysterical, he opened his glassy black eyes and cried tears of blood.

MORTIFICATIO, or *Dissolution*

“Therefore Hermes sayeth, what is born of the Crow is the commencement of this Art. Consider that it is by separation of the black, foul and malodorous fume of the Blackest Black that our astral, white, and resplendent Stone is formed...”

The Six Keys of Eudoxus (date unknown)

“Chapter XX. Then double thy care, and thou shalt, at the end of another fortnight, find that the earth hath become quite dry and of the deepest black. This is the Mortification of the compounded thing; the wind hath ceased to blow, and there is great calmness.”

An Open Entrance to the Closed Palace of the King - *Anonymous*, 1645

“The pale things wax black...”

- *Masculinus* in Rosarium Philosophorum – *Anonymous*, 1550

MICHAEL AND ERIC III
Or
Our Trespasses

SEPTEMBER 10TH – SEPTEMBER 19TH

SATURDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER

Eric Laurent fell into the most pleasant sleep he had experienced for some time. It was like sinking into a warm, swirling bath of chocolate. His whole body relaxed, and a delicious slumber passed through him in gentle and constant waves. It was heavenly.

...Eric walked through a wide field of misty grasses... he felt his hand being held in that of another... he looked up and saw a beautiful figure, taller and broader even than Eric, emitting radiance as brilliant as the sun... Eric could see muscular armour and flowing cloaks of scarlet and white... he could see wings on wings of purest white, flecked with scarlet... "Who are you?" Eric asked with a calm interest... "I am the Warrior Angel" the shining figure responded from the Light that was its face... "I walk with you, because you too are a warrior"...

Eric could see himself across the field and years ago, practicing roundhouse kicks with Joe Chiang, his first martial arts teacher... he could see his first regiment taking on an assault course in the cold Welsh rain... he could see himself scouting in the heat and dust of Quli Khish, the small bullet-scarred village twenty miles outside of Kabul... the shining companion brought Eric into a fiery light like a great sphere of radiating flames... it surrounded him, filling his heart with courage... "To be a true warrior means to fight to protect the wellbeing of others, to defend peace in the land"...

...Eric floated in the flaming light, feeling justified, whole, nourished... it was then that he noticed a small door below him... and through the door was the city of London... "Beware," the companion cried, "Beware of that foul dwelling place..."

"But why?" Eric asked dreamily, drawing closer to the door, which grew larger and larger... the companion fell back and cried "It falls, under the influence of the Evil Ones, to the Wanderers in the Outer Darkness...stay! Stay!"

...but it was too late, and as Eric was drawn down towards the yawning portal, he could hear the howling... the howling, monstrous darkness that lay beyond...

"Save me, Angel!" Eric cried in terror... but he could only see his own image, weeping pitiful tears, looking down sorrowfully upon him... and as Eric looked down upon himself, he could see he was covered in blood... draped in the desecrated bodies of young Ali and Fatima, the two young children he had failed to protect... their dead eyes stared pleading into his own... accusing him... "Why?" mouthed Fatima... "Why, Uncle Eric...?"

Eric woke up with a cry of pain, and immediately threw his head into his hands, and wept.

*

Janet Sergeant batted the blankets behind her as she woke up blearily, her unnaturally blonde hair matted on one side. The other side of the king-size bed was empty and cold to her touch. She heaved herself up on to her elbows, squinting against the morning light.

"Tom? Tom? Where is 'e?"

Slipping awkwardly into an undersized navy blue satin kimono, she glanced at the other side of the bed with a disapproving frown. The pillow was smooth. That side of the bed had not been slept in. Janet crammed her swollen feet into fluffy pink heelless slippers and marched into the bathroom. Under the stark light she tidied her hair with rough mottled hands, running her thick fingers through it, teasing the ends through fuchsia pink nails.

"Sonic the bloody Hedgehog," She muttered to herself, "Why can't I wake up like Marilyn bloody Monroe for a change?"

Janet stomped downstairs, transmitting her disapproval ahead of time. That *Tom* better have a bloody good excuse for staying up all night, she thought huffily. *I* didn't get my Friday night nuptials.

"Tom?" She called, "Tom? Where *are* you, you daft lump?"

The kitchen was quiet. The living room and dining room were empty. The hall was silent, and Tom Sergeant's coat and walking boots were still in their usual place. The front door was still locked up.

A vague uneasiness crossed Janet's heart, which made her even angrier. She gave an exasperated sigh, and spun on her heel.

"That *bloody* workshop!" She said snippily, "He's fallen asleep in *there* again - with his *bloody* boys' toys! Isn't it just *bloody* real?"

Janet found the back door unbolted and unlocked. She tutted as she reached for the brass bar handle; then she paused. All of a sudden, she didn't want to open the door.

A terrible chill ran over her body, and her face dropped. Anger turned so rapidly into fear that she couldn't dismiss it. Tom never, *ever* left the back door unlocked, even when he was in the workshop. He was more paranoid about theft than she was. It was his *past*, she thought warily, when he was a naughty boy. A wide boy; when he used to break into houses himself for a few bob. He knew *all* the tricks – and he always secured their house against every single one of them. Always.

Something was wrong.

Janet swallowed down the lump in her throat and opened the back door. She looked out into the garden, down at the workshop. In the morning light, she could see that it was all in darkness. She blanched.

If Tom had fallen asleep in there as he usually did, the lights would still be on in the morning – if he had woken up to turn them off, he would have come back to bed.

"If he's gone and had a heart attack, I'll *bloody* kill him!"

Janet walked down the garden path, passing the nodding heads of purple Hebe and Agapanthus. She passed the lush rose blooms that Tom had so lovingly cultivated, their lemon-rosy scent teasing her in the chill morning breeze. The petals were glazed with icy dew.

It was still bitterly cold, the lawn white with hoarfrost.

Janet paused at the end of the path, staring wide-eyed at the silent workshop. No snoring. No sounds at all, save muted birdsong in the trees above. Goosebumps ran along her arms and legs. She shivered.

She took a deep breath and walked boldly into the workshop.

Tom Sergeant was turning slowly, anti-clockwise, from a thick noose of twine around his throat. The twine noose was secured on the metal rafter in the roof. His body weight had caused his neck to snap and distend, the head lolling at an unnatural angle and distance above the shoulders, on a purple and elongated neck. Tom's eyes bulged out pale from his vein-congested face, his blackened tongue hanging down the side of his double chin like a large slug crawling half out of his limp mouth. He had voided his bowels at the moment of death, and faecal matter had dried along the inside of his charcoal grey tracksuit trousers. His hands were frozen into claws.

Every single one of his model vehicles – airplanes, boats, ships, trucks – had been meticulously deconstructed. Each individual piece had been stuck either to the flat plane of the pitched ceiling, or glued neatly on to each of the walls. All the surfaces were covered in model parts, except one.

On the only bare grey wall, a jagged writing had been scrawled in a black substance. It read:

To geve no light to them that fitten in derkneffis, and in fchadowe of deeth.

When Janet Sergeant woke up on the path ten minutes later from a dead faint, she crawled back through the open door and looked again at the sight of her Tom swinging on the twine. Her eyes flooded with burning tears, she beat the ground, and she wailed and wailed from the pit of her stomach.

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