

The Lizard of Ooze

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IT'S A CITY IN A GREAT, DEEP HOLE, Ooze is, a pit black as any mine. Roads, buildings and towers cling to the walls like children trapped at the bottom of a well. Sunlight leaks in at the top, a little, a few hours a day, and darkness fills the rest, down to the monster-haunted depths.

I live between the light and darkness. I hunt what doesn't belong on our laddered stairs and narrow, pit-girdling streets. I am a Shadow of the Shadow stirps, a quiet brotherhood no better defined than smoke, no easier caught than steam.

Ooze is among the darkest of the Dark Towns, those cities hidden within the blank spaces of the map. For all that good Kentucky bluegrass grows far above our heads we may as well be worms in a cave.

Which suits me fine, pale as I am.

I was sidling along one of the streets of the Mycotic Level one night, leaning past the outflung beams of the growing trays, when I heard shouting from somewhere above me, perhaps the fifth or sixth ladderway descending from the Seats of Ease, which are the next higher level.

Quickly I scuttled up a side-ladder. Shouting is not common in Ooze – echoes have a way of reaching far into the inky depths and returning in the mouths of strange creatures that then must be Shadow-hunted. Lives can be lost, and the bounties due to my stirps are never cheap.

The Seats of Ease are great banks of limestone panels set in ells, a high back and a narrower bench, with polished oval voids carved out of them, where the folk of Ooze meet to relieve their bowels and discuss

politics, sex, and dancing. There are usually chattering groups there, or young folk with their robes hitched around their waists holding hands and kissing.

Tonight there was a mob, a group of Fine-Icers and some several folk from smaller stirpes, and even a few limerocks, those sad neutrals who hold no real place in the pageant of our city's life. They were crowded around the base of the fifth ladderway, shouting and shoving. They were mobbing someone to death.

And to sunlight with that, I thought. If anyone's to be killed here, it's me going to do the killing. I stroked my shadow suit into noctilucence and drew the Blades Sinister and Truth. Roaring with the voice of winds all Shadows know, I stormed the crowd from behind. "Stand free, there, or I'll cut you open and charge by the slice!"

The crowd parted as crowds will at such sound and fury, though I was smaller than almost all of them. I let the Blades dance, my hands spinning, so that the bright blur of my shadow suit would catch their eyes – and turn their knives – while the Blades held their fear.

Their parting pushed back further, making a kind of lane through to a little man, even smaller than I, crouched on the splintered decking of the ladderway's landing. His hands were folded over his head in anticipation of the kicking he had been about to receive and spilled around him was –

"Ah," I said.

No wonder they were ready to kill. This was one of the perverted folk from above, twisted by their sneering little civilization and regimented, line-scarred maps, and he'd brought his *food* with him.

Eating in public was a capital offence here in Ooze. The mob was certainly within the bounds of propriety. Our visitor was already dead, though his sentence had not yet been carried out.

"It's my business now," I announced to the crowd, Blades still dancing. "Get on."

"I'm fetching the Reliables," someone shouted, safely hidden behind several departing Fine-Icers.

"Fetch away, friend," I said with a smile in my voice. The Reliables

were our police stirps, never interested in extra trouble. “They’ll certainly stand aside for a Shadow in this matter.”

Then I crouched beside the dead man, whose cowering head was pointed away from me, and sheathed the Blade Truth. The truth was already known. I steeled my resolve, then sniffed deeply, scenting for his sin.

Something light and earthy...corn meal, perhaps, baked in a cake. A pungent scent, with undertones of sugars and something sharp...beans, in a rich sauce. And finally the rich smell of protein with salty, sweaty overtones. Fish.

I poked the dead man with the Blade Sinister, its tip sliding perhaps a quarter inch into his buttock.

“Hey!” he screeched, jerking his head up from his crouch.

“Hello, dead man,” I said. “What brings you here in your perversions?”

“I...I...fish. I am a fisheater. You cannot touch me.” He looked wildly around, lank, pale hair slapping against his shoulders. Even past the food, I could smell the sour reek of his sweat and the musk of his fear.

“We have no fisheaters here. You mistake us for the drug-crazed visionaries of Cui-ui.” Cui-ui was a Dark Town in distant Nevada whose neutrals assiduously consumed fish, careful to keep the watery reek on their breath at all times for a casual inspection too disgusting to contemplate.

“Cui-ui,” he whispered. “I *am* of Cui-ui. What is this place?”

I studied him carefully. Narrow face, dark protuberant eyes glinting in my city’s dim shadows. No body hair at all, skin slick as skimmed fat. And he was dressed in lumpy gray robes no more attractive than his person. His breath certainly stank of fish.

“Perhaps you are of Cui-ui,” I said, “but that buys you no right of passage in Ooze. If your story is worthy, I might listen to it, but first you must rid yourself of perversion.”

At Sinister’s point, I forced him to clean up the disgusting but strangely alluring food – the smells tempted me toward his sweet filth – dumping it back into a little box that had broken open in a tumble

he seemed to have taken down the fifth ladderway. When he was done I dimmed my shadow suit's noctilucence, sheathed the Blade Sinister, and nudged my little Cui-ui dead man into motion. We would go talk awhile, in a place where my eventual slitting of his throat would be less work for me or the Blade Sinister.

He was a pervert – I would take him to a comestitorium.

“We were sent to Paducah,” said the little dead man huddled on the bench. “Something there was wanted by Silver-scales stirps back in Cui-ui. They chose fisheaters for the journey.”

He shivered, hunched even smaller in the tight, curtained confines of the comestitorium stall. We shared the space, he and I, a tiny hard bench with a little hinged shelf, hung with heavy curtains designed to block both smell and sound.

Some acts, like eating and murder, are best committed alone.

“I have been Above,” I said, surprising myself with a twinge of sympathy. “The world of the map is...challenging.”

“Inside a little truck alone among ourselves it was not so bad,” he admitted, looking up at me. “Until we stopped to ea – ” He caught his words.

“You learn fast.” An easy lie. He was a fool.

“Ooze is not unknown in Cui-ui.”

“The rest of the world takes a different view than we do here of certain bodily functions,” I said, “but I am of a progressive bent, and traveled besides. You have nothing more to fear for your words.”

“Just my life,” the fisheater said, hunching tighter. “A clown attacked us in the parking lot of Denny’s, killed two of my fellows, then dropped me down here. As I fell I thought I would die, wondered why I already hadn’t. Then I bounced through nets and webbing, which finally stopped my fall. It took a while, but I struggled through that tangled mess to the streets. You know the rest.” He paused, then shivered. “I just want to go home.”

No wonder those Fine-Icers wanted to kill him at the Seats of Ease, I thought. His story reeks of their negligence. No one should have escaped the capture nets unobserved. “Tell me more about this clown.”

“He was terrible, pale and fat, and he moved like an eel. Teeth like one, too.”

“Did he say anything?”

The little dead man actually smiled there, his teeth gleaming slightly in the dark of the booth. “Aaaarrgh,’ mostly. But he said it a lot. Until he threw me down this hole. As he did it, he yelled, ‘Tell the Lizard I’m coming.’”

“Hmm.” My left hand drifted to the hilt of the Blade Sinister. This would be the time to kill my visitor, and sluice the resultant mess through the cloaca in the floor of our comestitorial stall.

But why would a clown threaten our Lizard? The greatest monster of our Stygian depths, within whose jaws we all dwell, the Lizard of Ooze is older than the rocks around it and more terrible than the fires of the sun.

His story bore further investigation. As a result, it bought him some more life. “We must go to the Gillikins,” I announced.

“Does this mean I live?” Hope crept into the little dead man’s voice.

“Doubtful,” I said. “The Gillikins are the stirps charged with propitiating the depths.” The same depths in which we Shadows hunted monsters. We of Ooze are ever practical, ready to rely on one solution when another fails.

He gathered his little food box and followed me.

In my grandfather’s time an itinerant window dresser found his way to Ooze from the Cities of the Map. Such a thing is rare but not unknown, though Ooze gets fewer visits than more accessible Dark Towns. Being somewhat more persuasive of the value of his life than most outsiders, he was interrogated by the West Witches in lieu of being killed, then lived among the Gillikin priests for a while. Finally he made a spirit journey to see the Lizard, from which he never returned to us.

Our names, though, have come back to us from above in other books and stories. Grandfather always held that somehow this mouthy little man with a talent for words had talked his way past even our greatest guardian-monster and on into the outside world.

I have stood upon one of the Lizard’s crystalline teeth and smelled

the slow, planetary cycle of its breath, scented as it is with cold granite, hot rock, and the nostalgic odor of time. I even saw the blink of one eye, lid crashing like a landslide down a glistening curved wall riven with more colors than even the flowers of the sunlit earth might know.

And still it took all my skill, wit, weaponry and luck to escape with my life, to become a Shadow of the Shadow stirps. I do not believe any single man unaided and unprepared can stand before the Lizard, least of all some bobble-headed wordsmith who got lost on his long, slow way to Kansas.

Nor some little fisheater from Cui-ui in distant Nevada.

I grinned at the thought of seeing the dead man try.

The Gillikin priests lived in a daub-and-wattle temple clinging to the base of one of Ooze's deepest towers, far down in permanent shadow. It was a great messy affair, most resembling a giant agglomeration of bug spit and bird shit, constantly maintained by slaves and limerocks who climb about it unharnessed. If one falls, and damages the wall on the way down, their family is fined the cost of repairs.

Other than the temple itself, the fungal glow of the lower walls of Ooze and the very faint stirrings of sun and moonlight from high above are the only illumination permitted within the temple precincts.

The temple entrance was a triangular gate of bones, thin and graceful, relics of some ice-age teratornis that had once flown proud over the glaciers of Kentucky in the early days of Ooze. Small rivets were set into the rising legs of the gate, each tiny metal head looped back to support silver chains interlinked with black opals and bluish amber, which in turn glittered from the flickering light of oil lamps within, so the Gillikin temple was warded by a curtain of stars.

We passed through the silver-chained curtain, my little dead man and I, and presented ourselves to Brother Porter. He was a wrinkled man, longer in body than I by a head and more, but bent beneath age and long service so we saw eye to eye, his bristly, rheumy-eyed head swinging on the bone-knobbed crane of his neck. His rough linen robe matched the dried-mud interior of the antechamber, which was lit by flickering oil lamps.

“Here there then, little Shadow man,” he said to me, his voice raddled as his face and body. “The Lizard’s writ runs here more than its blood.” One quavering hand poked toward my Blades. “What would you be having of us, Mister Two-Knives? None enters here without price.”

I bowed, brushing my hands across the Blades Sinister and Truth before presenting empty palms. “A stranger is come among us, with a message for Its Scaliness. I thought to present him to the priesthood rather than sending the wretch straight down the hole on his own. He is my blood price.”

“Kindness in generosity, Shadow,” muttered Brother Porter. He swung to face the Cui-ui fisheater, whose face had grown blank with a whole new layer of terror. “And you are wanting to die slow or fast, in glory or in peace?”

“Please, sir,” said the little dead man. “I’d prefer not to die at all.”

“Coward,” said Brother Porter.

“Easily said at your age,” I told him. “Please ring up Wall-Eye or Thintail. Not one of the scalebrains.”

Scalebrains were Gillikin priests so far descended into contemplation of the Lizard of Ooze that they had achieved permanent communion with the great old reptile, and were not much good anymore for conversation, let alone enlightenment. For one, they often tried to bite people who spoke to them.

“Aye, and before ya I’ll place them.” Brother Porter shuffled off behind a leather curtain, speaking in some gravelly place deep within his throat that produced no more words, only a sense of pained finality. There followed a muffled echoing of bells, different pitches and tempi, part of the secret language of the Gillikin priests of which I knew only a little.

I understood him to warn someone of visitors, then made a request I could not follow – sending for one of the priests, I presumed. Bells answered, Brother Porter coughed, the antechamber fell silent except for the whimpered breathing of the little dead man.

After a while the leather curtain stirred, and Wall-Eye stepped into the antechamber. Wall-Eye was my favorite Gillikin priest, a man with whom I could almost have a normal conversation, a man who seemed to understand more of the world than what lay before his eyes.

A man who'd once pulled me out of a bad scrape in the far depths below Ooze, for no better reason than curiosity.

He was tall, thin like a razor, his left arm and leg made of metal, as well as the conical plate atop his skull – all legacies of the Lizard – dressed in a robe sewn from dozens of little diamond-shaped scraps of fabric in imitation of the outer curtain of the temple.

On seeing me, Wall-Eye's smile opened, the leather strips woven into each of his lips crackling as he grinned. One eye glinted dark in the oil lamps, the other was milky-white and rolling wildly. "Shadow Astur, as I still breathe. And you have brought me a guest." Hands of flesh and metal rubbed together while a tongue that seemed as dry and rough as his lip-leather licked about the corners of his mouth.

"Our guest bears a threat against the Lizard," I said. Behind the curtain, Brother Porter stopped his rustling about, but I went on. "I felt that you should hear it from his own lips before I dispose of him."

Wall-Eye leaned back slightly, tilting his head to study the fisheater. "He looks healthy enough."

"For one, he does not belong here. He was practicing his perversions in public to boot."

"Ah," said Wall-Eye. "There you have it. Tell me your story, then, fisheater."

The little dead man glanced at me, took a deep breath, and stammered through his brief tale once more.

"The clown concerns me," said Wall-Eye. He and I stood on the narrow platform just outside the glowing curtain of the Gillikin temple. Inside, Brother Porter kept an eye or two on the fisheater.

"Why?"

"There are stirpes within stirpes, as you well know. The College of Clowns is one of the oldest stirpes, and they may have gone feral."

There were feral individuals, and rarely, feral stirpes, and even a few feral Dark Towns. New Orleans, for one, born in twisted shadow and the eternal power and pain of the Dark Towns, only to come into the light when it revealed itself to the Frenchman Bienville, who was canny

enough to claim its founding. A wild city gone tame, its coiled natural violence straightened in service of ordinary men.

But most ferals simply faded. “Then let them be,” I said. “I do not see how a few simple threats concern us.”

Wall-Eye shook his head, staring out into the gloaming. “The college prospers and grows, feeding on the Dark Towns the way our towns feed on the Cities of the Map. But their painted eyes have never before turned towards Ooze.”

“A strange look it is they cast upon us, if they favor us with that little whiner by way of introduction.”

“Perhaps it is an accident.” He smiled at me, the leather laces of his lips creaking. “Perhaps there is more to our little friend. We will take the little fisheater to see the Lizard. Let it decide. Are you prepared to wager life and limb on this little jaunt?”

We. I drew a deep breath. A Shadow is supposed to fear nothing, least of all the Lizard. But I know my own heart; beneath my shadow suit I am a man. The pit below frightened me, where shadows had teeth and the rocks sometimes walked. Fear twisted in my gut like a snake swallowed whole.

Easier to shiv the little fisheater and have done with him.

But that was my fear speaking.

I looked up from staring at my chest to meet Wall-Eye’s gaze. His milky eye seemed to see right through me. The old priest knew what was in my heart.

“I...” *Quiet*, I told myself, then gently stroked my shadow suit. It was my lot in life to be without fear, even though it was a lie. Besides which, I had brought this on myself. I would never have come this deep if a simple death were all our visitor warranted.

“Life is risk,” I finally said.

Wall-Eye nodded. He did not condemn me for what was in my heart, and I silently blessed him for that.

And so I mounted the Descending Stair for the second time in my life, to walk the depths armed only with the Blades Sinister and Truth, and my voice of winds. Like blades made flesh, Wall-Eye walked to my

left, just behind my shoulder, while the little dead man walked behind me to my right.

I fancied I could hear their hearts pounding as loud as my own.

Past the Gillikin temple, it is a terrible journey further down the hole of Ooze. The priests generally make the trip in rope-slung baskets, though that seems far too much like Lizard bait for my ease. The Descending Stair is in part carved out of the walls of Ooze's shaft, and in part hammered together from scrap lumber, rope, and softer things, so that it slings outward in a certain dark grandeur of swaying rot.

An unfortunate circumstance, for the sake of one's footing.

We passed through ruined decking, layers of the greatness that once was Ooze still filling this hole like a leg fills a stocking – shattered balconies and mud walls, great burn scars and empty spaces where people betimes walked and talked and lived their lives deep in shadow. All of it dead beyond years, nothing more now than memories scarcely discernible even by the light of our torches.

Down there, the air is hot and still, water is scarce despite the cloying damp, and rumblings can be heard from farther below. I know the Lizard lives at the bottom of this great, deep hole. Our great monster is as big as it needs to be. Some have told of resting an arm upon the cracked dome of its wizened skull, while others have danced along its teeth and dodged between legs the size of watchtowers. Still others have seen that great eye, huge and patient as years, that would bespeak a body the size of mountains.

It is real, the Lizard of Ooze, as real as we, for all that its form is mutable to the point of imaginary. The Lizard's shape and size follow no logic but that of fear and desire. I was reminded of this, because above all memory and reason, we could hear its roar as we descended. My heart raced, but I marched onward.

As the fourth hour of our descent came to a close, Wall-Eye called a halt. "Each to his own needs," he said quietly, loathe to stir echoes. This was our time to eat, covering our respective shame with a headcloth, and chewing as quietly as anatomy and hunger would allow. I shooed the fisheater a dozen steps further down, then covered myself to suckle

on a salted stick of pork fat and mushroom. Though I closed my ears from decent necessity, the hideous smack of the stranger's enjoyment echoed up the steps.

I kept my anger inside and my hands away from my Blades. This was an outlander, dead but still walking, and there was no point. He was not a hole-dweller like us, his entire life inverted as I understood the life of Ooze to be. The stirpes liked to say it made us better than the world, but having been Above I had my doubts. Different is not always superior.

After satisfying the base lusts of our guts, we cleaned ourselves and resumed our journey. The Lizard thrashed and roared far below, but the fisheater seemed resigned to his fate, and demonstrated no alarm. Eventually the noises settled, combining with the echo of rushing water to seem natural, until the walkway let us out on a round-shouldered ledge past which streamed a cataract, its foam glowing in the dark.

I did not remember this ledge or the waterfall from my initiatory journey as a Shadow, but this was the nature of Ooze—to change, and change again, so that with a turn of the head the world would be different.

Who would want to live in a ruler-straight city girded by concrete and stone, when this life was before them?

“Water,” said the fisheater. “Blood and bone of Cui-ui.” He grinned, his teeth sparkling in our torchlight, somehow straighter and taller now in the presence of his totemic element. “Even here you cannot escape the power of the fish.”

Then the water spoke, as did the stones, and the very air itself.

“Who-o-o-o-o?” it said, slow and low.

My heart raced anew, and my legs felt soft and weak. But Wall-Eye bowed toward the darkness of the pit to our right, the hole in which the Lizard dwelt. “We come in simplicity, seeking wisdom,” he called in a clear voice. “We come in fear, seeking hope. We come in humility, seeking pride.”

Out in the darkness, something flashed, a fang as tall as I. Blood would be spilled, likely mine. My breath caught in my throat. Courage did not lie in lack of fear, rather it lay in passing fear by.

“Why-y-y-y-y?”

“One was sent.”

Then the fisheater screamed and leapt across the torrent, vanishing into a darkness ever more glittering with tall, toothy knives.

Wall-Eye spun, jabbed me in the chest with his metal arm that clattered with the motion. “What is this insanity?” he demanded.

“I do not know!” I understood my duty – to leap screaming after the fisheater. My legs would not move.

The Gillikin priest shoved me in the chest. “You are the Shadow. Stalk the darkness.”

Not trusting myself to words, I nodded, then drew the Blades Sinister and Truth. My legs wobbled, then strength returned with a settling of my heart as I took a running jump past my slinking sense of fear into the darkness after my little dead man.

Into the maw of the Lizard.

The Dark Towns can be seen as imagined involutions of heat and pain and flickering life. Perhaps they arose from the dreaming mind of Earth, perhaps from our own whirling distractions. Perhaps they simply willed themselves into being. In either case, Dark Towns are where the real and the dream are woven into a single fabric, a continuum of sensibility that scales quickly past reason in times of deep shadow or blood-boiling fear. The Dark Towns are the night mind of the world.

Right now the night mind was in a killing mood.

We tumbled, the Lizard, the fisheater and I, within a fountain of water. One moment the air was firm like a stepping stone, then it was a falling sinkhole the next. Small as I had ever heard it to be, the Lizard flashed, scales dark to the point of nothingness, teeth now gleaming fire-bright. It was no bigger than a man, no bigger than I. The fisheater flew as if he had been born a bird, swelling in his flight, his skin rippling, his robes bursting at the seams.

As Wall-Eye had suspected, this was no terrified little pervert from the surface. I tumbled toward the invader, trying to reach him before he did some greater damage. My life was no longer at issue – the Lizard was under direct attack.

An attack I had brought to bear.

I had failed as a Shadow.

Even as I snagged the hem of the fisheater's robe, it tore loose. His sallow skin and straggled hair rippled and shredded away into something bright and terrible. It was like seeing a jeweled beetle erupt from a rotten pupa – where there had been a little man, lost and afraid, there was now a ruby-suited clown with the head of a black dog and hands made from dozens of knives.

I had my Blades two and true to face him, and into battle I pushed through the falling water over the racing of my heart.

The Lizard snapped and roared, turning the water to steam as the ruby-suited clown slashed at its flanks. The clown's suit glowed like bright blood, so I could not see what wounds he might take. I chose instead to slash at his ears, stabbing with the Blade Sinister, catching crosswise with the Blade Truth.

I took a length of steel for my trouble, my shadow suit rippling as it tried to accept the blow before passing the edge through to the skin of my thigh. In this airy place, the battlefield of Ooze's imagination, I rolled away from the cut, receiving a ragged slash in lieu of the muscle-tearing wound intended for me.

My second slash at the ruby-suited clown's ear was more successful, setting a silky, pink-lined flap of fur to float free in the curtain of water. I flipped the Blade Truth in my hand and used my fingers on the hilt to retrieve the scrap, barely escaping disembowelment as I did.

Then the Lizard finally awoke to its task, swelling ever larger with the anger and disease of Ooze's thirty thousand souls to engulf the head of ruby-suited clown within flaring, flaming jaws. I stabbed again at the clown's feet, trying for an Achilles tendon or at least an arch, but the Lizard worried the clown as a rat might worry at a terrier within its jaws. My blow went wild and I tumbled away.

The teeth came for me next, clown lost or forgotten. I rolled, scrambling through the falling water to dodge. I would not fight the Lizard, for the Lizard was Ooze. Though it could kill me, I could no more harm it than harm myself.

The snap of jaws missed me, tearing at the leg of my shadow suit to

raise a shower of pink and yellow sparks. Rolling, I could not see the clown. Absent my target, my fear returned. I could not leave, not yet, for I had to see the Lizard safe.

I twisted away again, readying my blade. The Lizard's jaws yawned tunnel-wide as it swept toward me. A bright spark gleamed deep inside its throat.

The clown.

I took a great breath, faced my fear one last time, and let the Lizard swallow me.

I stumbled on the rough tongue, struggling against the hot gasp of the Lizard's breath, then raced toward the spark. The clown was there, gnawing at the wall of the Lizard's gullet with its dog-headed jaws.

The Lizard could not fight something that attacked from within.

Blades flashing, I broke into a forward roll, letting the brilliance of my shadow suit draw the clown's blow. Steel still struck as it had done before, sprouting from the clown's hand like a thorn from a vine, but in my side rather than my heart.

I accepted the pain, pushed myself down the blade, and set Truth against one of the clown's wild yellow eyes while Sinister came from beneath to cut the strings of his hams.

The clown yowled, his voice a dog's, as he collapsed. His next blow missed me, wide with the loss of his balance. Then I realized the hot wind of the Lizard's breath was blowing in, not out. The tongue beneath my feet rippled, the walls of the throat likewise.

The lizard was swallowing the clown. I had done what I could, it was time to fear for my own life. I gathered myself and shouted in the voice of winds, "Away!"

The Lizard roared, expelling me to tumble upward in the darkness. I had banished myself with my words, and fell onto the ledge at Wall-Eye's feet.

"Fool," said Wall-Eye. He nudged me with a metal toe.

"It is over," I said. The clown's warm dog ear pulsed in my hand, wrapped around Truth's haft.

"The Lizard is Gillikin business, not Shadow business."

I sat up, testing my wounds, inspecting the shadow suit's tears. The

pain wavered through me like the Lizard's peristalsis, threatening to swallow me whole all over again. I needed to hold my own with Wall-Eye, though. Gasping, I said, "I hunt those things which the dark sends us."

"The clown came from above," the priest pointed out.

A great shriek echoed from far below, as the cataract suddenly abated to a mossy dribble. Then a flash of red light pulsed in the darkness.

We smiled at one another. The Lizard had once again defended Ooze, albeit with my help.

"If the clown somehow comes back up," I said, "he is mine." My breathing still labored, I folded the ear into a pouch at my waist – it would count for something if ever another clown came to call.

The old priest helped me to my feet. I saw the Lizard for a moment in Wall-Eye's gaze, and surely he saw the same in mine. We stood with the taste of clown in our mouths before ascending, he with his anger and me with the stumbling, pained gift of my life, in silent brotherhood to the curtained door of the Gillikin priests and all of lovely, dark Ooze beyond.