

It was into the 20th hour of July 1891 when I noticed a change in the air. At first I thought it was the recent rains. Maybe it was the railroad, or it might be the mixing up between indians and regular joes like me... maybe it was something that rode in with the chinese labor, or the booming population in Donkeytown. Beats me. All I know is it did not feel good. I was headed back to my hamlet after my shift in the mine the first time I cognized it, but I swear it had been getting into me since last spring. The closest thing I would compare it to is a smell. It's not any scent that a nose can recognize, but when it got through the coal dust into my sinuses it reckoned to my brain that it something was amiss. It was not a sound, but when it mixed with the blasts of Edward Gillette's railroad operation my ears swore they heard something. It was like a flavor today, but all my tongue knew was that I'd burnt it on my coffee yesterday and it was probably mixing things up. Beats the hell outta me what it is, but I ain't crazy yet despite the endless, lightless days spent underground, and I don't figure on going nuts anytime soon. That's why I haven't told anyone about it. They'd have me run out of town in 10 minutes. We're not snobs here but we are proud of a few things. There is a chill in my bones while the sun beats the life-blood out of anything with water in it. There's a shadow behind my back wherever I go, and in the stillness of night I know something is out there. I listen for other people to say something that would invite my comments on something that doesn't exist, but I don't think anyone has noticed. Except maybe Billy Masterson's kid. He started carrying a pretty big knife in his belt, and he's always been a gentle soul. I figure he's just trying to impress a young lady though. I think that I will have to talk to somebody about the stench that nobody seems to smell. If it doesn't go away with the first snow, I may talk to my sister and Big Ron. Before my sister Sarah married Ron, she and I were pretty close. She is older than me, but not a whole lot. We buried our parents together when I was 7 and she was 14. My older brother Amos died after that. Sarah always said it was because we buried dad too close to the well. We moved after that, not caring to see if it was true. We lived off aunt Jean's garden until she died, and after that Sarah married Ron and I inherited Jean's onion patch. Onions don't like to grow here, but I get some, and I started cultivating tomatoes.

Today I thought again about switching jobs. CB&Q pays better than my old hole in the ground, and since they came up from Merino, business has been strong. They've about reached Donkeytown, and I guess they are aiming toward Sheridan. I was thinking about becoming a track-layer because that ill ease is worsening by the hour. I sometimes dismiss the ominous feeling as a sinus infection, but my orifices all seem good to me. I remember before dad died from that sickness, his lungs were full of coal dust. Most of my memories of him include his huge, black cough. He coughed so hard one time, we thought he'd never catch his breath. Maybe that's what I've got. I guess I never felt this weird before. It could be all the extra folks we've got around here now. We don't live in Donkeytown proper anymore. We are a community a mile up Donkey Creek, mostly clustered at the bottom of Masterson's ranch. We don't have as many new neighbors as some. I'm glad I don't live in Donkeytown proper. We used to be included and now we're what they call a suburb. Kinda strange how more people in one area makes a town feel smaller. If it gets too busy I'll curse the railroad and relocate.

We had an egyptologist come through last spring and he annex'd some of us mining folks to help him dig up some bones and chattel a few miles off the base of the mountains. He was real excited about a bunch of dusty detrii. I wish I could feel that way about my occupation. It's kind of what I do too, but what I find gets burned at the temperature of hell, and I'll never see any of it. When that man found what he was looking for, he dusted it off and picked at it with small blades, then it got packed up with layers of fat cotton and canvas rags. It was babied with oilskins to keep the rain off, and it was transported quickly back to the East Coast or wherever the heck that fellow was living. He was a strange one though. He didn't talk much except about where he'd been and seen. He had a bag stuffed with currencies from all over the world. He liked to stay in his own tent, and when we were done digging for the day he'd go in there and keep his light burning long into night. He said his name was Linton, but I didn't believe him. I've known a few Lintons and he looked nothing like them. Maybe it was an Eastern-coast complexion, but his skin didn't look like what the folks have around here. I sometimes wondered if he was mulatto. He wasn't hard on the eyes, but something about his appearance made me wonder if he was from a country a little more east than the Atlantic coast of the Continental United States. I never put my finger on it, but I don't think I was able to believe a single word he spoke. I wasn't even sure he was looking for what he said he was. Artifacts. Sure, found some of those, and he was not over excited. At the time, I thought it was probably because he's seen many curio shinier and older than some proto-arapahoe arrowheads and old-time critter tusks, but now I believe he was searching for something specific.

When Dr. Linton loosened up a little he would talk to us. He told us a story about a place he went to dig. I forgot the name now because I don't think I ever learned it before, but he made it sound distant. He painted up a righteous vision of statues as tall as mountains, cylinders of rock, rivers of blood and glittering treasures with rare stones set in pure gold. He told us about women he had met in the villages he saw, new contraptions he'd witnessed, old contraptions he'd resurrected, and best of all, he started to tell of a beast they kept locked away in a cage someplace. I am mostly certain he made up every word, but he was very good at lying if that is what it was. He began his story like always, after a day digging when we sat at the fire and got heated up before sleeping. He came out of wherever he'd been, and he sat down. When he was satisfied that he had our attention, he started by spreading both his hands. The firelight glowed off his palms turning them orange, and they were so bright it was about all we could see of his body. We'd all had some whiskey and I guess he had some too because he forgot to be as guarded. He asked if we wanted to know about his most exciting discovery. He'd just gotten to the part about what the beast looked like when Jerry Laramie started a small grass fire outside his tent. We never heard the end of the story. The mysterious Linton left the next day. He left without notice, and in a big hurry. I ended up helping him pack up his things, since I was the only one awake in time to catch him. I'd never gotten to see the inside of his tent before, but when he told me to help him get some crates out to his transportation I saw a few remnants of the lifestyle he had maintained for the last weeks. There were some red scarves and colored neckties hanging up and canvases poking out from under covers. Most

interesting to me was what seemed to be in the boxes I was carting out. They clinked when they moved, so I wondered if he had brought and been using a whole set of fine dining wears, like glass balloons and chalices or what not. He was a classy type of fellow, the sort who brings his plantation china to a dirt-hole like ours, and the idea of him requiring fancy dishes on his travels wasn't an outlandish prospect. One crate had a hole in it, so I peeked in when he wasn't watching me. Beakers. He was a scientist, after all, but what was he doing with beakers at a dig site? I am nobody's scientist, but I figured what we were doing was all dry stuff. Dead remains and ancient chattel. Beakers are for wet stuff. Living things. Maybe he had a medical problem and he was studying his own whizz, but I remember something about that striking me as peculiar, in part because he left in a rush. That was the last I've seen of Mr. orange palms.

AUGUST 2

I went to church today. It was a nice, still morning and the bosses at the mine don't have us work on the sabbath. This time, instead of getting drunk with Tim, I went to the religious confab they have at the old station. I think down the creek there's a bigger congregation and a wild-on-fire preacher from Indiana, but we don't like to move around that much on Sunday. We stay with the five people left here. My sister always wants me to go, but I don't usually come unless I want to talk to her. Aside from Sunday dinner (which I've noticed I only get invited to if I go to church), I don't see her much. Big Ron keeps a pretty short leash on her and I don't worry. Not like I used to. She is prone to wander. She got hit hard with some dark moods after she had her first child and she'd go on long walks. One day, Big Ron got back from herding some cattle on the Masterson ranch and couldn't find his wife. He came home to a hungry-ass kid and a dirty, empty kitchen. Sis had gone wandering. She must have left pretty early in the morning, because we couldn't find her till Billy came riding up and said he spotted somebody in a white dress on his northern hills earlier that day. Took us till midnight to catch up, and when we did she was in a kind of daze, cold and tired and sunburned. After some food and coffee she got better, but she's funny that way. Since then Ron's had her on a type of chain. Not physically, but he got all his neighbors on alert. She can't take a stroll without people shaking their fingers and wagging their tongues at one another, so she doesn't walk around anymore. I guess I should visit more often. Frankly, I'm usually too sore after digging up crud for 12 hours a day to walk across the field, even if she's made some food. I guess I usually live on coffee and coal dust unless I visit sis.

Anyway, I had a swim in the stream; something I can't usually do except for this time of year when it is less cold, and I tried to get some coal dirt out of my fingernails before heading down main street to the "church." Sis was there, already singing with Big Ron. I sat next to them, and after the service we walked to her place. We were all pretty quiet, and I was thinking about how to bring up the smell in the air, but I got distracted by Billy

Masterson hollering and screeching at his boy. Bill is usually an upstanding man, but I don't like the way he sometimes treats his son. Maybe the boy is as bad as his punishment, but I ain't sure. He was probably messing around with Suzie Jentel. Halfway to my sis's house I decided to quit their walking party and join Timmy after all. He was nicely intoxicated by then, as always, but I like to chat with him when he's like that because unlike other guys he doesn't get angry when he's had a few. When Timmy is drunk, he sits and he listens. He doesn't get those inebriated crying bouts either, he just becomes real content. He also has fairly good advice, which is why I sit with him whether I'm drinking or not. Instead of telling my sis about my observations like I planned to, I went an even safer rout and confided in Tim. Even if he thought I'd gone crazy, nobody would believe a drunk Tim. May as well try out my idea on someone before publicly declaring myself bonkers. I looked at him for a while before taking the empty stool next to his. I felt nervous for some reason, got kind of shaky and had a black licorice to calm my nerves. Finally, when I was sure he knew it was me sitting next to him, I told him about the bad smell in the air, the feeling in my spine, the ideas in my head. There's nothing specific about my creeps, I just have em. He listened, and he said:

"Blood chill."

"Pardon?" I wasn't sure I heard him correctly. He finally turned toward me.

"Well I don't know what you're feeling, but it reminds me of that itch I had right before I ate that bad meat and got real sick. Like a foreboding."

He told me to pay attention and smell what I ate before I ate it.

"Iffin yer meat stanks..."

He wandered away into his thoughts, his eyes drifting toward Mrs. Jentel a little too obviously. I bought myself some barley juice and forced my body to stop trembling. That didn't go so bad. For some reason, I figured people would get excited if I mentioned that I sense a stench that nobody else can smell, probably say I had a demon or somesuch, but I guess it isn't that alarming to get premonitions. It probably runs in the family. Probably, nobody will take me seriously, except maybe sis. Next time I go to church I'll talk to her. I can see by looking at the sky that tomorrow will be a wet day. I'm probably going to want to dig out my thicker shirt for the trek to work, but maybe not. It always ends up tied around my waist once I'm down there.

August 9

Maybe the stink is passing through. I don't think I sensed anything all week. Everyone around town seems fine, except the kids are being disciplined again. Seems to come in waves. The schedule indicates community culpability and it's pretty clear all the young people here are partners with one another in minor crime. Although, Billy Masterson's boy got it again today after church and I heard Ron say Masterson was accusing his boy of laziness these days, like he's lost his drive. Is that a crime? It's my guess

that he has girl troubles. When I was his age, I couldn't have girl troubles. The only girl where we lived was my sister's age, and when a girl is friends with your sister, she tends not to be interested in you. That's what Tim had said at the time. Now I know it was probably more of a situation where even though I was the only son of a bitch her age, she didn't want anything to do with me, and probably still wouldn't if I were the last man on earth. I was always thinking and wandering around. I guess I was doing it before my sis. I should have gone with her to church. I don't know why I didn't.

August 11

Guess who showed up in town? I took the long way back from work and saw something moving in the gulley. I don't know why I didn't think it was just an animal, but I kept going, finding it odd that something was moving around the doc's old dig site. Seems like animals keep away from it pretty good, so I thought it was strange. I got closer and saw a hat lying on a shovel and just as I got near enough to see Dr. Linton, he spotted me and the damn fellow turned tail and ran as fast as a jackrabbit. I didn't think I could give him such a scare, but for some reason he didn't feel like socializing. When I got home, I wondered if I was having daydreams, but when I walked past yesterday, I saw he left his hat. I brought it back just to prove to Tim he was still in town, but when I got to the saloon, I saw Dr. Linton had beat me there. He stared at me as I entered. I felt kind of creepy for a second, but decided he probably just wanted his hat back. He made me feel shy and embarrassed, but I think he should be the one feeling like that, having such bad manners earlier. I gave him his hat, and he took it with what felt like caution. I disregarded him as best as I could and sat a way down the bar, behind the gaggle of miners talking with the strange Dr. Linton. He had been popular among the men who got on his crew. Now that he was back, I think most of them wanted him to finish his stories. To me, he seemed different. Maybe it was just me. Timmy didn't think anything was strange, so I watched for a while and went home. I couldn't shake the feeling that Linton's eyes were glued on my back. I hear the wind blowing out there. I locked my door tonight, and I ain't sure why.

September 21st

I have a lot to record. I couldn't bring myself to it till now. Today is a Sunday, but I haven't darkened the door of the church for three weeks. I guess it started about a week after Linton showed up. He took the room at Shane's hotel and as far as I know, he's still there. Beats me why. He's not digging. He doesn't seem to enjoy being in town. When I go past, I think I see him in the window sometimes, but he doesn't let me see him clearly. The

buzz he caused when he reappeared had died down. The men gave up after a few times of shouting up at his window. He is definitely changed from his previous countenance. I stopped caring along with the rest, but I could not shake the chilly feeling that he was keeping tabs on me. I don't know why he would. Maybe he knows about the smell. That gives me an idea. I should ask Linton if he's smelling something fishy too. The problem, more than his inaccessibility is my fear. I don't like him anymore, and I don't want to get closer to him than the length of one of my rifles. That's ONE weight on my mind. More than Dr. Linton is the smell. It's strong. Nobody else has noticed, to my knowledge, and we've had a tragedy that I can't help but connect to the "Blood Chill," as Timmy called it. It was September 18th. I was heading into town after work, thinking about some whiskey when something zipped by me at the speed of a train. Billy's son was rip-roaring toward the west end. I wouldn't have believed he could run that fast except that I tend to believe my own eyes. He left a trail of dust so thick it took a second to see which way he'd gone. Masterson pulled his horse up in front of the saloon to get a few guys to go after his son with him. Bill Masterson looks angry most of the time, but you always know he's not. Except this time I knew he was. His wife told Sarah once that he is not a mean man as long as his eyes are shining, and I'd never seen them stop before. That night, there was no twinkle, but he didn't look angry. For the first time, I think I saw him afraid. I ran to Steve Jentel's wagon and we started to follow the dust trail. He's not my boy, and it didn't feel like my business, but if Masterson lost both his twinkle and his angry face in the same day, I felt I had to know why.

The kid was headed in the direction of my house. We knew because he'd been hauling his hunting bag with him and there was some kind of dead meat inside that left drips in the street every few yards or so. We found his game bag on my front porch, but the remains of a rabbit were its sole contents.

"Why would he go to your place?" Steve asked me.

"I ain't got the slightest."

I got out of the carriage and tried my door. It was still locked from when I left that day. As I said, it's not a habit of mine, but the chill makes me lock it now. I think I'm the only one who even put a lock on his house around here. Masterson had dismounted and stood at a distance, his back facing us and his arms akimbo. He seemed deep in thought. Jentel and I watched him for a bit then I decided to go inside and see if he'd made it through a window. They went with me, but we found no trace of him. Steve spoke:

"I'm heading back to town. I'll tell the folks to keep an eye out for him."

"You do that." Masterson talked in my direction "staying here?"

I nodded.

"I'm home, now, after all. If he comes back here I'll nab him for you. Let me know if you don't find him by sunrise."

Masterson nodded. I thanked Steve for the ride and they left. I locked my door. An hour later, the sun was thoroughly hidden by the dark outlines of hills, and I thought to check my cellar. It was a sort of trap door in the back of the house, not obvious to a passer-by. We hadn't checked it, since my door was locked and Masterson's kid wouldn't have known it was there unless he found it by mistake. I stopped short when I bent to put a thumb

through the pull-hole. There was a drop of blood on the floor. Thinking back, I know I should have gone to get Masterson or SOMEBODY, and I surely thought about it, but I didn't want the kid to escape. I told myself I had nothing to be afraid of. I yanked on the door. At first I didn't see him, but I knew he was there, probably messing up my miniscule crop yields.

“Why you in my cellar boy? Don't your momma feed ya?”

He stayed quiet. I went to get my lantern and climbed down the short stairs hewn from dirt. I can't stand up really straight down there, so I stayed stooped over and went to look behind one of my barrels. There were two dark corners, each of which I'd conveniently left a barrel in. That's why Sarah keeps things together, I guess. She doesn't want to lose her kids behind randomly placed items. I heard, naw, more like felt Masterson's kid move from the other dark corner. I'd picked wrong. I swung around and hit my head on the ceiling, and by then the shadow had torn its way up the stairs. I felt for a second that he was getting ready to pounce on me, and I had felt his breath on my neck, but it only lasted a part of a second. He was gone when I made it up the stairs, but I ran outside and started shouting. I don't live really close to anybody, but Sarah could hear me. She came out on their stoop and watched me shouting and waving my arms. I think big Ron knew about Masterson's kid, because when he ran out and looked where Sarah was pointing, he jumped on his horse and rode into town, shouting to meet him if I didn't see anything in an hour. I didn't know why Masterson's son had run away. I guessed at the time that we were looking for him because he was acting criminally. Maybe he'd broken into someone else's cellar and eaten up their pantry. Sarah seemed to think so too; she had her pistol out. It didn't occur to me that he could be in danger. I ran back into town and told everyone what I'd seen. There was a search party assembling, and everyone who wasn't going to look was headed back, each to his own house, probably to guard their cellars. The main street cleared out in short order. I was left alone. I thought for a minute about going to see if Dr. Linton really was still up there in his room, but the chills got the better of me, and I set my mind on where I'd go if I were the Mastersons kid. I was unintentionally walking back home at that point, and I realized that's probably where most kids go when they've run out of cellars to rob. I took into consideration that Masterson probably wasn't expecting him to come back, so I put myself to use and headed to Billy's Ranch. It was very dark by the time I made it there. Like I thought, nobody was around, so I sat down next to his barn and waited. I couldn't stay forever, and I was just starting to head back home, dismissing the boys actions as those of a troubled youngster when something made me pause. I could hear Masterson coming back from north of the ranch. I rose and stiffened. There was a dimmed lantern hanging in the yard behind the barn. I wouldn't have noticed the light it cast but for the shadow created by it. There was movement. I decided I'd probably found him. I contemplated waiting for Masterson, but he would be hot on my heels to house his horse for the night. Something drew me toward the motion. I edged up to the corner of the barn and peered around. I will attempt to describe to you the scene, but words fail me when I try to voice my appall. Masterson's horse Jenny was on the ground. It lay in a circle of darkened dust. Some of her muscles were twitching, and there was a hole torn deep in her belly. I saw some of Jenny's intestines falling out, and gnawing through the gore was Masterson Junior. I must have

gasped or made some noise to notify the young man of my presence. The kid rose from his meal of horse. He was staring at me. There were entrails spilling out of his maw and a mess down his shirt, and the strangest part of the scene was his expression. He looked utterly petrified.

I just stood where I was. I felt an unnatural calm wash over me, knowing somehow that the monster before me was more afraid than I was. I didn't move because I held onto the goal of catching him. I whistled softly.

"You've made a mess of Jenny, son."

He took a step back. I didn't move.

"Don't be afraid. I'm not here to hurt you."

I thought his eyes had been as wide as they could get, but I was wrong. Afraid his eyes would fall out of his head, I stayed where I was, and maintained my gaze. It never occurred to me that I could blink. He wasn't blinking either as his eyes shifted. He was staring at something behind me. I turned to look, and felt him pounce toward me, taking advantage of my averted gaze, but before he could get to me there was a controlled explosion behind and he stood still. The poor kid fell to his knees before me, still looking over my shoulder at the man who had felled him. Bill Masterson had shot his own son.

"Good job" is not the sentence you expect to hear a man speak when he's ended a manhunt for his own flesh and blood, but Masterson had said it, and he had given me his gun. He seemed stunned. He turned away and started walking. I didn't stop him. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't just leave the kid for Mrs. Masterson to find in the morning. The horse would not be a welcome sight either. I decided to put the kid behind the hay pile, then thought better of it. If he was diseased, we didn't want him passing it to the animals. I found a box crate that would have to serve as a temporary coffin, and I began work on the mess of Jenny. I was too stunned to check and see if Billy's son was actually done breathing, but Jenny definitely was, and I got her hitched up and slid away to where the wild would ravage her. When I finished shoveling the bloodied dirt out of the barnyard, I went home. The sun was up before I knew it, and I hadn't had a bit of sleep.

October 1

It's been over a week since the failure of life at Masterson's ranch. I don't want to call it a murder... Bill killed his son, but I have a suspicion that if he had waited to fire, I would have been killed first. Bill couldn't live with a murderer for a son. If losing his son wasn't enough, Bill's out a horse too. Jenny had been mated with a fine stallion not too long ago and we were expecting her to be pregnant. Even though it isn't being talked about, the events of that night have quieted the town. Only the Mastersons and I know what really happened, but everyone knows the kid and the horse are dead. Nobody, including Masterson and me knows *why* it happened, and that's worse than witnessing it. Something

inside me is convinced it has something to do with the blood chill. Before last week, I alone knew about the chill and it seemed to only affect me. It was an invisible enemy without form or function except to be ominous. I can live with that. But now, I believe it has reached out its arm and grabbed at the real and the physical. I wonder if its next step will be to assume a form itself: will it require sacrifices? Is it a god or a demon against whom we have no power? My mind gets to wandering. It's probably still my imagination. Bad things happen. People go crazy. These are facts of life.

Oct. 22

Horseshit smells better than me. I've been on the run. Have not slept or eaten for 2 days. I've been camping about 8 miles west, waiting to see if anyone followed me. Last time I wrote I was more right than wrong about the connection between the chill and the kid, but I was ill-educated, I see that now, and I am starting to wrap my mind around the situation. There is a sickness afoot, and it's catching. Between the Masterson ranch incident and now, the whole town has gone crazy. It all started when I was coming off of a shift. I had mostly made up my mind to throw in my pickaxe and explosives and start laying down pieces of track for the CB&Q. I guess it showed. A few guys asked if I was alright for several days in a row, almost like they could sense I was going to desert them. By the end of the week, I was tired of it all. I left my helmet at work, just in case I decide never to go back. Walking home, I got stares. I thought at the time that they all knew I'd left my helmet. That's the action of a forgetful mine worker, not deserving of stares. Since I had no plans to do mine work again, I set about finding the railroad crew to see if I could start with them the next day, but they weren't in town.

All the way up and down the street, as I inquired about where to find the CB&Q folks, people were acting strange. Mrs Jentel scurried her daughter inside, and everyone else looked strangely dull and simultaneously energetic, like they saw something really mundane earlier and it had stayed in front of them all day, but they irritated by it. By the time I'd gotten home, it dawned on me. Many people were starting to look a little like Masterson's kid right before he was shot. Scared, maybe, but dull too. Inert and clueless why. They seemed to all walk like they thought they were machines. Stiff. Straight. Fast, like they were all in a hurry. I decided the stink had reached other townspeople, and it was probably time for me to talk about it. I decided to go to Sarah's house that night. Since it wasn't Sunday, I found the last of the tomatoes that frost hadn't killed and put them in a sack. It was getting dim by the time I walked over, and I could see Sarah on the porch. She noticed me and stood up straight, like I surprised her. She ran inside and I kept walking. She came out with Big Ron. When I got closer, I realized they were not themselves. They looked afraid. Ron told me to stop right where I was, and I did. I held up the tomatoes and told them I had the last of my garden for them. Sarah started to approach me, but Ron held her back. She looked ill. I tossed to tomatoes toward her as gently as I could.

"Say, sis, you don't look so good."

She looked perfectly sick, in fact, and Ron appeared to have lost his mind. Good lord, I thought, the stink had already gotten to them. Sarah was mouthing words at me while Ron Reached for his rifle. He aimed it at me and told me to get the hell off his property. Sarah grabbed at her husband and shouted:

“Run! Run while you still can! Escape, NOW!”

I did. I ran like my life depended on it. I ran toward town and caught up with Timmy as he headed to the bar. He looked surprised to see me and backed away. I was breathless.

“Something weird is going on here Tim. Everyone seems to have lost his mind...” I didn’t finish, because Tim ran inside and poked his head out a window. He whispered:

“You’d better pack up and get out now sunnyboy. Don’t let anyone see you.”

“Why? What’s going on?”

Tim pointed a shaky finger at the end of town. A few men on horses were riding toward me with their guns out, all of them aiming at me. It must have been the start of the end of the world. Some spirit had floated in and eaten everyone’s brains, leaving me as the sole representation of sanity. I had been the only one with the chill; maybe that was a defense against the illness. I knew I should try to find Linton and figure out if he knew anything about this phenomenon, but I had to disappear before they shot me, or before they all started eating horses. I beckoned to Tim.

“Come with me Timmy! They’ll get you too!”

He shook his head violently and disappeared into the darkness of the saloon. I ducked and ran. I heard gunshots but they missed, and I ran all the ways I knew it was hard for horses to go. After waiting for a while behind some eroded banks, I changed directions and kept running. Now, here I am, camped out and waiting for night so I can sneak back into town, get some belongings from my home, and try to find Linton.

October.. .

Can’t even recall what day it is. I found Linton. I’m aloft in the rafters of the hotel, watching a town meeting going on. It’s the oddest sight seeing all the townsfolk having a civilized meeting in their current physical state. It’s almost comical. Though their minds are estranged to them, business continues as normal. Clearly, bureaucracy does not require competence to exist; it can spin its wheels as usual, merely requesting ready and willing bodies to carry out its vision. The strangest part to me is that not one of them seems to see the illness or know they have it, yet they are aware that people outside of their circle have it. They opened the meeting before I crawled all the way up from the back of the structure, and right now they’re discussing the railroad shutting down because of the illness. It got to some of the chinamen workers, and Mr. Gillette had a fit and was reconsidering pushing through Wyoming, thinking that it might be too diseased and God-forsaken to be a good business venture. Rather than getting through Montana country from tracks at Sheridan, he’d just go back to the dakota area and head northwest. That would cut off the production on the Platte river and leave the trona to cart itself. The sick and delusional were talking

this way... they must have heard reports from folks who had seen the affected individuals, but they have not realized they have the same illness.

Finally, I see someone entering. It's Dr. Linton. That's why I'm up here; I was hoping to catch a glimpse of him. I tried his window earlier but found it firmly latched and his room's contents inaccessible. I can't tell if he is also diseased. He's the sort of fellow that would pretend to be like the others and blend in enough to make observations. I am convinced that Dr. Linton is the only other person who has knowledge of the chill, but he's been hiding it for some reason. Is it possible that he's been experimenting on us? In him I have placed all hope. I *must* talk to him. Maybe he has an antidote that I could give to my sister. I think I have to catch him now while I can, though, since I may have no other chance. I face the idea of showing myself. I will risk my life to learn the truth, but it is my only option. I shall find the truth. I will go into the light.

My brother died the evening of October 25th.

Like Masterson's son, John, he fell to a strange and foreign affliction. I knew he had it before anyone else did, but I had hoped he'd either pass peacefully in his sleep or be remedied. He did not. He tried to give me a bag of tomatoes, but I knew he was too far gone to cure. He walked with a limp like his bones were broken but his ligaments were pulling his body around. His face was riddled with black scabs and his skin had turned grey. His eyes were yellowed, his speech nonsensical, and he had a horrid smell. The tomatoes were a pulp of mold. I marvel that he had the sense and strength to write this journal. It must have been a desperate grab of his true self to document his passing. He always kept a journal. I suppose old habits die last. He wrote right up to when we had to kill him when he fell from the ceiling onto our meeting. Bill is suffering from what we think is a broken tibia from when he had a chair swung at his leg, and Dr. Linton is deceased. My brother pounced in such a way that he landed straight on top of Linton. He proceeded to gnaw on the poor man's head and neck and just about bit it off. Nobody knew what to do. I used my pistol to stop the attack on Dr. Linton. I think my brother was "dead" long before I shot him though. It was not like my brother to fall out of the sky and bite visitors. We burned him to avoid polluting the ground, and for fear that the headshot had not actually killed him. Bill's son was still breathing until we burned him too. Hopefully, with their bodies and the bodies of

other victims of the plague we have ended this episode and purged our community of disgrace.

Mr. Gillette is reinstating his crews now that we said we'll name the town after him. The official reason is that he saved a lot of money on construction.

May God rest his soul.