

## **The Sower of Oblivion**

Ilumar-Mai didn't know who he was. He walked stiffly down the street, a snick-snick-snick of footfalls following like the insidious patter of some black doom.

Ilumar risked a hurried glance over one shoulder. Blue and crimson neon reflected in sinister patterns off the sleek, wet pavement, and a figure in shadow stalked his path. It was a momentary glance, all he could manage in the near-paralyzing fear that seized him, yet the form of the stalker was plain: the man strode with a terrible and inexorable purpose, his attire, polished black shoes, a finely tailored suit, and a grey fedora pulled low over the forehead. The predator walked with lowered head so that the visage was apparent only below the level of the eyes, where chiseled cheekbones and a square jaw loomed like the carven angles of a grave stone.

Ilumar quickened his pace, but with each backward glance the stranger with features cold and stark as hammered granite advanced, step by step. Panic tickled the hairs on the back of his neck, but somehow he refrained from breaking into a delirious, out-of-control run--he knew that his pursuer would simply increase its implacable gait.

In desperation, he ducked around a corner and unexpectedly found himself in a narrow, shadow-haunted alley. Drab brick walls rose to a thin ribbon of starless

sky overhead. The lane before him devolved into inky shadows.

Snick-nick, snick-nick, snick-nick.

Sweat beaded his forehead despite the chill night. He looked back, and the figure in grey rounded the corner into the alley. The eyes were still hidden, but Ilumar could see thin lips that looked like grey, dead worms. The lips didn't smile, nor did fangs sprout from the sickly mouth, but red neon from the main street stained the lower jaw so that it seemed to run with blood.

Now he did run, but it was like moving in the slow-motion of dreams, his legs pliant rubber.

Before him the alley narrowed and became tomb-like, until suddenly it ended in a pile of trash beneath a smooth, obsidian wall.

Snick-nick, snick-nick, snick-nick.

The footsteps echoed off the walls of the trap and reverberated sickeningly in his head. He froze, could not turn. Something stopped right behind him. Cold air caressed the nape of his neck like a breath from the grave. There was a sound, a small sibilance that took him some seconds to recognize as a lifeless giggle. The laughter was humorless and devoid of soul--a mere hiss, like fingers run through the lank hair of a corpse.

Ilumar's knees buckled as oblivion reared.

It laughed--again--and that decided Ilumar: he turned and faced the shadow.

It stood there like a statute, and there was a stench like the fetid air of a charnel house. Its lips did not move, nor did the granite countenance alter. Then slowly, slowly, the fedora rose, and the eyes were revealed--utterly vacant, twin black holes that opened on the Void.

Ilumar struck it with a fist born of fear and hate. The skin on the left cheekbone tore in a thin strip, but no blood appeared--there was just a long wound of grey flesh. A maggot crawled out of the cut. Ilumar screamed.

That insidious giggle, then iron hands seized his throat and squeezed like a machine. Its face seemed to melt, and then a long proboscis emerged from the stinking corpse to caress Ilumar's lips. He struggled without effect, and then his urine let go when the thing forced the crawling protuberance into his mouth and down his throat.

There came a rushing in his ears like a mountain torrent, then a feeling of utter dislocation, as if he had never been conceived.

Sometime later, he reacquired a sense of identity, his first perception the sound of a gentle breeze through silken leaves.