

Ah, Lexington! barren land of spiritual delights, which through suffering openeth us to the joys of the Kingdom! Long have I trodden alongside its deadly streets, laid by the Enemy's counsel to hinder us poor pedestrians, while steel mockeries of Behemoth roar spitefully at us from their hindquarters. I have gazed upon the temples and monuments of avarice, and I have spurned the miserable patches of captive life conceded to us captives by our devilish overseers. I have shuddered at the soul-destroying words and deeds of the incontinent, even as I have slain my own soul in secret. But without suffering no one can be saved, and had I remained in my native land I would have contented myself with it and died like a dog in my pleasure. For the like purpose was Adam expelled from Eden.

I apologize for the above. I'm very cowardly about revealing my true nature, and so I've acquired a great fondness for affectation. It's easier to be impressive when one is inhuman; working, having a family, even being born, are all things that subtly degrade the majesty of a storyteller, and that's not to mention the more ridiculous character flaws like lust and greed. The Greeks knew this, which is why they masked all their actors. Nonetheless, honesty is better for my purpose. My readers are unlikely to believe me if I exaggerate or aestheticize a story that already strains credulity. But in a certain sense, it's more honest for me to preserve what was to be the original beginning of this story as a sample of my instinctive rhetorical posture, and in any case, I'm too fond of it to discard it.

Now, as a child—and this is relevant to what happened later—as a child, I wanted to be a black magician. That is, I wanted to acquire power over the natural world, but I wasn't willing to submit to the unexplained but experimentally ascertainable aspects of God's will that condition such power. People who do that are called scientists. It's really the same thing to transmute lead into gold through elemental magic or nuclear physics, only the nuclear physicist, by virtue of his honest engagement with

the manifestation of God's ordinary providence, has acquired the humility to sin in a way that will actually work. I was too proud for that. But the upshot is that to understand the old alchemical treatises, I learned Latin, which I found very useful during the events of which I'm about to tell you.

There is in Lexington a burgeoning movement of young people with ideas unacceptable to the prevailing orthodoxy of liberal-democratic America. To be clear, this is not the "Society of Societies," but another nameless group. I don't mind associating with them because I'm half Jewish by blood, so if anyone on the outside accuses me of anti-Semitism, I can play the ancestry card—you see now the sort of people I'm talking about. But, mind you, these aren't neo-Nazis properly so called. The greater part of them see the Nazi stuff as an edgy joke to weed out the "normies." What they're more interested in is esoteric Western philosophy. If you know about the Neoplatonists, Proclus and Plotinus, that's the kind of thing I mean. A lot of them are Eastern Orthodox too—we usually just call ourselves "Orthodox"; "Eastern" is a label applied to us by Western Christians—so you see some discussion of St. Gregory Palamas, St. Isaac the Syrian, St. Symeon the New Theologian, those sorts of people. I understand many of my readers won't know those names, but for those who do, it's an easy shorthand for what goes on.

Of course, what the young men are really interested in, many of them, is getting wives for themselves. It's an unfortunate distraction, especially since I don't think any of them will succeed, but a lot of the supposed philosophy they talk is fatuous anyway. Like we have anything to add to what the Church Fathers have said.

But I've been going on long enough. You started reading this expecting a story about a secret society, and I'll give it to you. It may seem stupid at first, but it eventually memes itself into profundity.