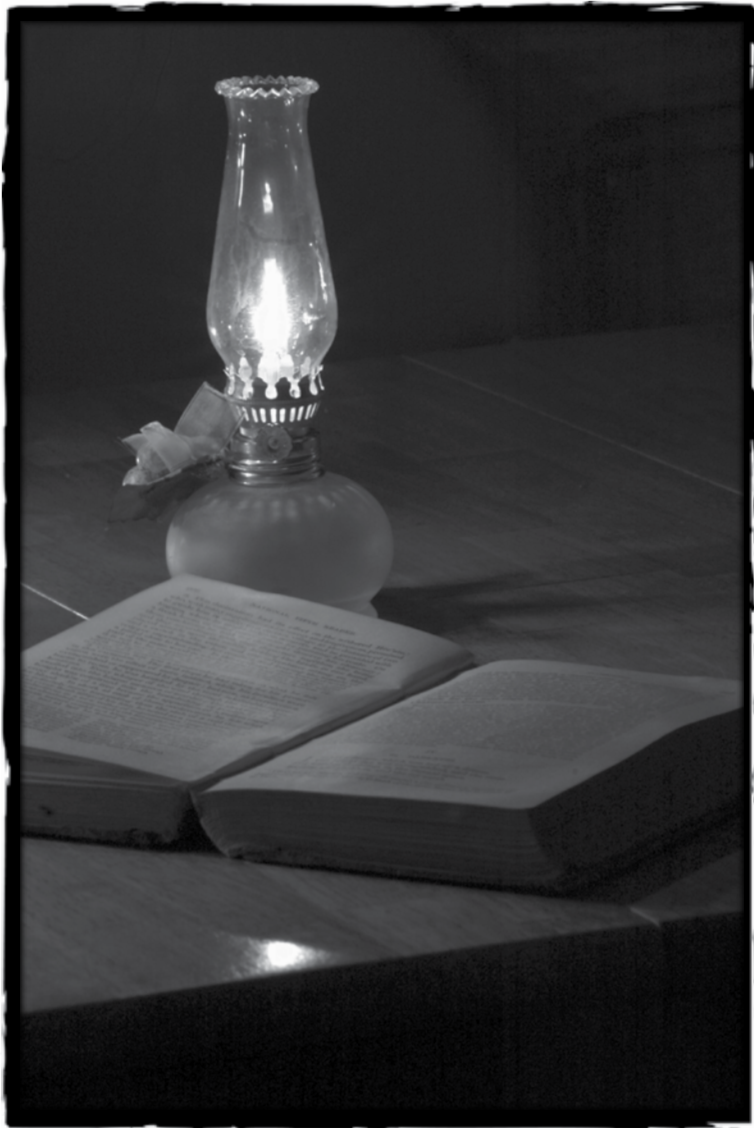


FINIS

*You decide to read the book.*

RORY CLARK

Finding such a volume is a rare occasion, and one cannot pass up the opportunity to learn the secrets of ages past. Why your great-grandfather would have walled up this book is a mystery, and perhaps by reading it you

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can gain some insight into his peculiar character. You seem to recall that he died under somewhat mysterious circumstances that were never fully explained to you, though you do remember your grandmother comparing you to him in a somewhat unfavorable fashion. Regardless, the ancient tome doubtless holds no end of curious stories, and you are determined to explore them.

Leaving the partially renovated basement room where you found the book sealed behind a heavy stone slab, you climb the stairs to the drawing room, where you place the book on a side table while you light a lamp and pour yourself a snifter of brandy. The sun has long since set, and you can see by the flickering light that the cover of the book has a strangely rough quality to it. The pattern is vaguely familiar, but you are unable to place it exactly. Putting it from your mind, you make yourself comfortable in one of the high-backed chairs and open the book before you.

The book is closed and sunlight streams in through the window. Confused, you look around yourself, but nothing seems out of place. The snifter sits empty on the sideboard.

You must have dozed off while reading, and, yet you cannot remember a thing about the book. You long to investigate further, but you recall you have pressing matters that must be dealt with this morning. You rise from the chair, and it is then that you notice the mud on your shoes. You stare down at your feet in surprise. Perhaps it came from the basement? No, the floor down there is stone, and even in the root cellar, where the floor is dirt, it is dry and hard packed. Your breeches are dirty too, and as you look at yourself further, you find that even your fingernails have dirt under them. Perplexed, you notice a spade sitting in the hallway, its blade bearing marks of recent use. You move to examine it further. It is then that you notice the movement in the kitchen.

"Ah, good. You are up and about," says your great-grandfather, maggots falling from his half-rotted arm as he spreads jam on his toast and stuffs it into what remains of his mouth. A half-chewed portion of bread falls out through the festering hole in his neck. "Have some breakfast. We have work to do."