

The Engines of Sacrifice

James Chambers



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...those first men formed the cult around tall idols which the Great Ones showed them; idols brought in dim eras from dark stars. That cult would never die till the stars came right again, and the secret priests would take great Cthulhu from His tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth. The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and reveling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft,
"The Call of Cthulhu"

Investigation 37

November 12, 1972

From the Office of Chuck Biro, Investigator
New York, NY

To: Mr. Stefan Mason

Re: Case File #37/MP: Ms. Mason, Bonnie

Enclosed is the final report of my investigation into your granddaughter's disappearance in October 1971. I am afraid it raises more questions than it answers. It can be difficult if not impossible to find runaways like Ms. Mason, and with regrets I report her case is no exception, that it is, in fact, the most difficult and strangest case I have ever encountered. Despite my best efforts I can provide only an account of Ms. Mason's life from when she left Saratoga Springs to when she was last reported being seen. I have exhausted all viable leads, and therefore I consider my investigation into Ms. Mason's disappearance to be concluded if not closed.

Per the terms of our contract, all original documents and transcripts are provided in full when possible, as are several hours of interviews on audio cassettes. The excerpts most relevant to your granddaughter's case are highlighted in the attached summary.

Much of the evidence I found is based on superstition and circumstance and will carry no weight with the authorities. I considered burning it all and refunding your money, minus expenses. Instead, I deferred to your insistence that I not withhold even the most outlandish information or possibility in your granddaughter's case. If you know more than I do about such things then maybe you will understand the significance of some detail or scrap of information that I have overlooked. I can no longer trust my judgment where this case is concerned. My investigation led me to experiences that have shaken my sense of reality, which you will understand only after you have read my report. It will also explain my silence for the past nine months, a circumstance which was beyond my control.

In New York, Ms. Mason became involved with groups of amoral,

criminal, or deranged people dedicated to witchcraft, pagan rites, Satanism, and occult beliefs, including one group reputed to have ties to Charles Manson's "Family," which committed the 1969 Tate-LaBianca murders. Some are rumored to be well established in New York, New England, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, part of a secret network of occult adherents around the world. I am sad to admit how readily I believe that.

Too many young people today have abandoned all standards of common sense and civility. They thumb their noses at honorable traditions and indulge in drugs and casual sex in search of unobtainable fulfillment. They call this freedom and believe they have escaped a prison society built for them. Rather, they are as easily duped by themselves as they are by charlatans and con men. I asked myself many times during this investigation if these were the freedoms I fought for through three tours in Vietnam. I do not think they are. They are traps, into which Ms. Mason stumbled. When she ran away from home, she was driven by grief over the loss of her brother in December 1970 and her fiancée in January 1971, both casualties of the war in Vietnam. Because of this, she ruined herself in search of something impossible.

Without proof, I cannot be certain, but in my opinion, in October 1971, your granddaughter arrived in Knicksport, Long Island, the last of several visits she made there, but she never again left that town. My conclusion—and I express this with my deepest wishes that it were otherwise—is that most likely Ms. Mason was killed there and her body hidden or destroyed.

If you decide to continue this investigation, Detective Powell Ames of the Knicksport police department will open an inquiry at your request. But I warn you to limit your efforts to locating Ms. Mason's remains in Knicksport or to finding proof that she left there after October 1971. Any lines of evidence beyond that may lead you to disaster.

During this investigation my life was threatened and I was attacked. Now the secret people are watching me. Their shadow lingers by my window. And they will come for you and your family if you look too closely at their business. I hope that if I leave well enough alone, they will forget I exist. I hope you will forget too. Upon submitting this report, I consider my contract fulfilled and our business ended. Please make no attempt to contact me in the future.

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1. Lavender May in New York

Ms. Bonnie Mason left Saratoga Springs and arrived in Manhattan via Greyhound Bus (see enclosed ticket stub) on April 21, 1971. She was calling herself Lavender May. She told one acquaintance she was looking for “peace, love, and good times.” In fact, I believe she wanted to escape a town where grief and painful memories had driven her to a mental breakdown. She told the same acquaintance that a secret friend who spoke to her through dreams was guiding her toward “perfect peace.” She went to New York to meet a man “who would help her fulfill her innate potential for spreading love and harmony in the world.”

Although months had passed, Mr. Julio Ortega, bus driver, remembered Ms. Mason. Upon seeing her picture, he recalled her asking him for directions to The Growing Tree Coffee Shop in the West Village. He suggested she take a cab because she did not know the city and had arrived at Port Authority Bus Station on 42nd Street. Ms. Mason stood out among his passengers because she was dressed in bright colors, wearing oversized sunglasses painted with peace symbols, and a necklace of artificial poppy flowers. Before she disembarked the bus, she took Mr. Ortega’s pen from his shirt pocket and used it to draw hearts and a flower on the palm of his hand, which she then kissed.

Mr. Ortega, a gruff, chain-smoking man in his fifties, struck me as the living definition of a working stiff. He claimed that Ms. Mason left him feeling light and relaxed, and that he slept better that night than he had in years. The next day a pain in his back that had bothered him for months was gone. He said this was because of how Ms. Mason had touched his hand. I asked him how that was possible. He did not know, other than that she made him feel good and he liked her.

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Wedged between a grocery and a stationary store, The Growing Tree Coffee Shop fills a narrow storefront with four small booths and six seats along a lunch counter. It is on Seventh Avenue, not far from the heart of Greenwich Village. The workers there would not identify Ms. Mason from my description or her picture. The owner, Mr. Nick Gianpoulos, said that his staff turnover was so frequent that anyone who might have waited on her no longer worked for him. Mr. Gianpoulos struck me as a dishonest man. His coffee shop catered to a crowd that did not come for the quality

of the food. I observed the Growing Tree for several days and learned that it was a front for sales of marijuana and other drugs as well as a meeting place for prostitutes.

Squirrel, a long-haired, young man, who favored paisley shirts, spent hours each day in the diner, drinking coffee and reading *Rolling Stone* and the *Village Voice*. At night he delivered food and drugs. I followed Squirrel on one of his delivery runs. After his last drop off, I approached him and diverted him into a nearby alley. Following some assertive persuasion on my part, Squirrel admitted to knowing Ms. Mason. He had, in fact, been involved with her for several weeks.

When he first met her at the Growing Tree, he had an experience like Mr. Ortega's. He was drawn to her, and said, "Whenever she was around, she made my soul radiate." According to Squirrel, an old woman had told Ms. Mason in a dream that at the Growing Tree she would meet the man who would "guide her toward love and harmony." Squirrel was not that man, but Ms. Mason accepted his offer to crash with him until she found an apartment. During this time, the two engaged in a sexual relationship.

Ms. Mason often went sleepwalking around Squirrel's apartment and talked to people who were not there. Squirrel did not understand what she said because she spoke in "some crazy, backwards-sounding language." Three times near the end of Ms. Mason's stay with him, Squirrel found that she had gotten up and left the apartment in the middle of the night. She went out barefoot, leaving her shoes behind on the floor. More puzzling, the chain on the door was still in place, suggesting she had gone out by the fire escape. Each time she returned before morning. At first she denied having left. Then she claimed not to remember where she had gone or what she had done. She said that on the nights she was out, she dreamt of "some trippy space place like from a sci-fi story, all green and orangey, covered with an endless city of stone towers." Squirrel did not question her further because, as he told me, "I didn't own her or nothing."

Ms. Mason soon rented an apartment and moved out, but Squirrel remained her drug supplier, and the two continued to have regular sexual rendezvous. According to Squirrel, Ms. Mason had similar relationships with several other men. During this time she entered into occult circles and witchcraft covens, seeking one that would "blesh" with her spiritual desires. Squirrel ended his affair with her when she joined the Coven of the Right Stars sometime in July. This group had been active in the neighborhood for about two years. Despite his lack of superstition, Squirrel said the coven "scared the piss" out of him. Almost overnight, it

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changed Ms. Mason from a mellow, soft-spoken girl “with stars in her eyes and flowers in her hair” into a reckless woman contemptuous of anyone outside the coven. Squirrel heard rumors the group was involved in more than black masses and orgies, but he had not witnessed anything firsthand. He worried Ms. Mason’s recklessness would bring the police down on him.

The head of the coven, a man named Redcap, was the man whom Ms. Mason had come to meet at the Growing Tree, and she did, in fact, meet him there. Squirrel knew little about him but did not like him. When our interview ended, Squirrel gave me two addresses where he had often delivered drugs to Ms. Mason.

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The first address was a third-floor studio on Sullivan Street, where a woman named Sue Calabrese had been tenant since November 1, 1971. She did not know Lavender May or Bonnie Mason. She thought from my description that she sounded like the woman who had rented the apartment before her. I had already confirmed this with the superintendent, who spoke only enough English to tell me Ms. Mason had left owing two month’s rent, but he would be happy if he never saw her again because she scared him. He blessed himself in Spanish then slammed the door in my face.

Ms. Calabrese had boxed up several items left behind by Ms. Mason, including a small photo album (enclosed), which held several pictures of Ms. Mason from before her time in New York. Either Ms. Mason’s brother or her fiancée appeared in almost every one of the pictures, and sometimes they were in pictures together. All of the pictures looked like happy occasions. Ms. Calabrese gave me the boxed items. She had been holding them for the landlord to pick up, but she thought he never would. Ms. Calabrese, who wore a gold cross around her neck, found the left-behind items disturbing and was glad to be rid of them.

In the box were several ordinary things: three scarves, two pairs of sunglasses, various pieces of costume jewelry, a copy of *Naked Lunch* by William Burroughs, and the small photo album. The items that troubled Ms. Calabrese were two books on witchcraft and the occult; a fetish pouch packed with dirt, salt, and bird bones; three black candles; a silver amulet engraved with a pentagram; a small crystal ball and brass claw stand; a deck of tarot cards; and two small knives engraved with ornate scrollwork,

both crusted with dried blood. Ms. Mason left these things behind, probably because by the end of that summer she knew enough of the occult to know they were mere baubles. I cannot guess why she abandoned an album of photos of the two people who were most important to her.

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Read more in *The Engines of Sacrifice* by James Chambers, published by Dark Regions Press, Copyright 2011 by James Chambers.