

JAZZ  
AGE  
CTHULHU



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ETHULHU

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# INTRODUCTION

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The novelette is a somewhat *rāra avis* these days, despite the proliferation of online magazines. One would think an unlimited amount of space would engender more of these works, but it has not been the case.

We are therefore glad to present to you, not one, but three brand new Lovecraftian novelettes, all set during the Roaring Twenties.

Get ready for all that jazz.

And all that Cthulhu.









# DREAMS OF A THOUSAND YOUNG

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JENNIFER BROZEK

**T**he high-pitched noise pulled Helen from unquiet dreams of ancient ruins, a blackened sky, and ... *something*. Her still-sleeping mind shied away from that *something* with a soft moan. Turning over, trying to drown out the faraway shrieking, pain shocked her awake. Helen hurt everywhere. Her arms. Her legs. Even her throat. More than that, she was naked—a thing unthinkable for a woman of her station, even in the privacy of her own bedroom.

Struggling to pull her befuddled mind together, she realized that the noise had not stopped. It was Pria, her maid who made such lovely tea. Her maid was screaming. Why? Helen blinked her eyes open, saw the blood-splattered body next to her on the bed, and added her own screams to the confusion.

It was the body of a dusky man she did not know, dressed in the garb of an Assamese noble. He wore a disheveled *sherwani* and trousers of fine cloth, no head garb, and no shoes. He would have been handsome if it were not for the open staring eyes and blood. His stomach was a mess of stab wounds. Helen shook her head in denial and confusion as she scooted away from the body. Her mind would not work.

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It was more than waking to this horror. It was clouded worse than a laudanum hangover.

Pria ran from the bedroom, screaming for help. Helen tumbled out of bed in an effort to escape the horror of a bloody body next to her. As she hit the floor in a tangle of silk sheets, the pain radiating out from Helen's abused body reminded her that something awful had happened to her as well. Pulling the sheet—mercifully gore-free—to cover her nakedness, Helen searched her memory for clues to how she wound up in this predicament.

New whimpers of pain and fear escaped as she realized the last thing she remembered was tea ... yesterday afternoon? At least she prayed it was only yesterday. The thought of losing more than one day was almost more than she could bear.

Fists clenching the silken sheets, Helen fought for control of herself, her emotions, her fear. She was Lady Helen Keeling, heiress to the Keeling silk empire, and she was not a trembling flower—despite the fact that she *was* trembling. Ignoring the bruises on her wrists and the way her legs protested, Helen stood. She turned from the bed, refusing to look at the body again, and found her night robe, hung properly. Then her coat, crumpled on the floor next to one of her gowns. Helen wanted the comfort, the armor, of well-made clothing, before she faced the pounding of running feet.

Bursting through the bedroom door with weapons drawn, Edward, the house steward, and Gopal, one of the house guards, charged in, looking for something, anything, to deal with. Instead, they found their mistress improbably dressed in a fur coat and tearstained face. Edward saw the

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scene and his expression hardened into something akin to hate mixed with dismay.

Then smoothing his face into something kinder, Edward approached her as one approached a terrified animal. “Lady Helen?”

His tone was so soft and so caring that it broke through Helen’s resolve to not be an hysterical woman. She threw herself into his arms, sobbing. “I don’t know what happened. I don’t know who he is. I don’t know what happened to me.” Her confession made, she held onto the gentleman who had been a friend and tutor for as long as she could remember.

“Get her some clothes. Remove the bed and replace it with another one. Send for Doctor Bannister.” Edward led her from the room as he gave orders to the milling servants. After a moment’s pause, he added, “Send a message to the Commissioner’s Office. Tell them there’s been a crime at the estate.”

Helen could feel the weighted looks that spoke volumes between Edward and those he gave the orders to. Get her some clothes—*we must present a proper face in unpleasant circumstances*. Remove the bed and replace it with another one —*move the body to someplace more appropriate and see to it that Lady Helen has a proper place to sleep*. Send for Doctor Bannister—*let him know the unthinkable may have occurred and discretion is required*. Send a message to the Commissioner’s Office—*the forms must be followed but, again, discretion*.

“And you, Pria. Stop sniveling. It’s unseemly.”

“Yes, *khanasama*.”

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Helen looked up and saw Pria's anguished face. It gave her something to focus on beyond her own pain. Pulling away from Edward, she reached for her maid and was surprised when Pria pulled back. "Shh. It's all right. It's going to be all right. I wasn't ...." Helen paused. She wasn't what? Hurt? Yes, she was. Fine? Most assuredly she was not. "I'm ... I will be fine."

Pria nodded and looped an arm around Helen's waist—both supporting her and being supported. "Yes, *malkin*. I'm sorry I was frightened. That man ...."

"Shh, Pria, shh. It's none of our concern for the moment." Helen glanced up at Edward and was reassured by his nod of agreement. If Helen had learned nothing else, it was the value of trusting your head steward. She smiled, grateful, knowing Edward would take care of things for a time.



Despite being properly dressed, Helen couldn't help but stare at the bruises on her arms. She pushed her sleeves up and looked at the deep, purple welts on her wrists that spoke of too-tight bonds or a panicked struggle. Higher up on her forearms, the outline of fingers were clear. Hands had clenched her arms. She held her left hand against the bruises, twisting her arm this way and that. It was clear that the hands clenching had come from the sides rather than from someone on top of her holding her down.

"I assure you, Doctor, I won't harm Lady Helen. I *am* required by the Chief Commissioner to investigate this

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matter fully. I also assure you that I will use all proper discretion.”

Helen lifted her head at the sound of the stranger’s voice coming from the hallway. She pulled her sleeves down, covering the bruises, and smoothed the cotton fabric. She took two steps closer to the door that led from her sitting room into the hallway.

Doctor Bannister’s voice was as old and gruff as he was. “See that you do, Mister Sorin. Chief Commissioner Bell is one of my lodge companions. I have no qualms about twisting Belly’s ear if you’re at all unseemly.”

Through the cracked door, Helen could see the two of them in conference outside her room. Doctor Bannister was a portly old gentleman with flying white hair, a pressed suit, and a ruddy complexion. He was here at her father’s behest. Baron Edmund George Keeling would not stand for anyone but the family’s long-time physician to see to him or his family in this foreign land of dusky skin and strange religions. At this moment, Helen was more than grateful for her father’s provincial, insistent ways.

The young man next to him looked to be in his late twenties with brown hair, had a quick, perfunctory smile and the deep tan of an Englishman used to the Indian sun, ever present even in winter. His clothing spoke of a working man’s wage but worn in the style of someone of good breeding. It was an interesting contrast.

“I need to know what happened to her, sir.” Sorin lowered his voice as he spoke.

Bannister matched Sorin’s tone. “If you are asking if she was ... *violated* ... no. She appears to have been in a great

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struggle. But that is all.” Doctor Bannister’s voice was as prim as a schoolmarm and twice as hushed.

Sudden rage and fear blotted out what was said next. She *had* been violated. This was something she knew on an instinctive level. It had been more than a great struggle. There was a great yawning pit of blackness and despair in the center of her rage, one that was just out of reach, one that she recoiled from even as she struggled to understand it. Pain pulled her from the precipice and Helen realized she was clenching her arm, her fingernails digging deep into her flesh through the fabric of the blouse.

Then the doctor was knocking. Helen smoothed over her countenance and her blouse as best she could. She took a breath, put on a polite smile, and called, “Yes?”

“Helen, my dear.” Doctor Bannister poked his head in. “Are you feeling well enough to receive a visitor? You need not.”

“No, no. I’m well enough. We do what must be done.” Even as she spoke, Helen felt herself screaming inside. She did not want to speak to anyone.

Doctor Bannister entered with the man from the Commissioner’s Office on his heels. Helen turned to meet them with polite interest. “Lady Helen, this is Special Assistant John Sorin. Mister Sorin, this is Lady Helen Keeling.”

“Mister Sorin ....” She offered him her hand. He took it with a light touch, as if he were afraid of breaking her, and bowed over it.

“Lady Helen, I wish we were meeting in better circumstances.” John stepped back as he released her hand. “I’m afraid I am required to ask you some questions, if you don’t mind?”



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She answered him with a gesture to sit in a chair and turned to Doctor Bannister. “Will you be joining us?” It was an unnecessary question. The doctor had settled into a comfortable lean against the sitting room sideboard.

John waited until Helen sat before he took his seat. He sat on the edge of the high-backed chair as if he were afraid of getting the furniture dirty. As Helen rang a discreet bell and waited, he pulled out a notepad and pencil.

“I’ve been told that you remember nothing of the last day, Lady Helen. What is the last thing you do remember?”

“The last thing I remember is having afternoon tea at the Purple Room.” Helen watched his hand, poised over the notepad. Though he continued to look at her, his hand wrote in an unfamiliar looping script. “I was with Elizabeth Atherton. We ...” Helen faltered. There was something about the conversation that made her pause. Much like her dream and her rage, there was something at the core of it that both enticed and repulsed her.

“Lady Helen?”

Helen shook her head and frowned. “We spoke of society gatherings here in Assam. Despite it being the 1920s, they remain stuffy, staid things.” This rang true, but there was something more. A flash of Lizzy’s wicked smile and promise to show her something amazing.

“And nothing more?”

“No. That’s all I remember. I don’t even know how many days ago that was.”

There was a polite knock on the door and Pria came in with tea service. She did not say anything, but, instead, went about the business of setting up and preparing the tea.