



YOU DARE NOT AWAKE

Karlis Rusa

Dark. The window curtains are drawn, and there are but a few shadows, for clouds obscure the moon. Yet, a blacker and more solid shadow than the others is creeping almost imperceptibly toward someone who sleeps on a bed. No restful sleep is this, but one tensed in some ever present fear. I, who am watching, also feel that all is not well.

Quiet. It is a time of night when not even the floor creaks,

when everything is drugged with somnolence. Yet, three are awake—I, the watcher; the moon, evilly smirking through the cloud-layer; and the noiseless black figure that has now stopped by the bed and is staring at the sleeper. Malignity and ghastly glee are in that intense stare. The sleeper as well no doubt senses it, for he shivers inadvertently. The figure bends over him and gazes directly into his visage.

(The clouds are aimlessly moving and hovering about the moon.)

What can he be dreaming of? I shall pass into his mind and see But not for long can I endure the unspeakable phantasms, the abysmal wastes, the tenebrous charnel pits that I find there. Such things ought not to be, not even in dreams.

Now, deep within the sleeper there begins to grow another fear, no longer mercifully vague; it soon dispels all dreams and drives relentlessly on toward waking. He stirs uneasily. Each moment the fear becomes more specific until it forms a Face, one which he strangely knows and dreads. He shudders again, more violently. A train of half-dreaming thought forms, and he again beholds scenes and other faces that are a part of his fear. But superimposed on all is *the* Face.

"Do not wake!" I cry to him; but he does not hear. After all, am I really there? In truth, *who* am I? But it does not matter.

(The moon glows through the clouds with a sick pallor.)

The man on the bed is nearly awake. His drowsy vision still is haunted by the Face—then an overwhelming rush of incomprehensible terror shakes him, and his mind, perhaps hearing my warning at last, shouts, No, no, I will *not* open my eyes, I must not, 'll cover my head!

Suddenly his eyes are open, but for a moment he does not realize it, until, in a dreadful flash, comes searing understanding: The Face really *is* before him, with the blotched features (dimly seen by me) expressing mad, triumphant malice. And the thing to whom belongs this Face raises its clawlike hands, poised to pounce, and the Face is ever coming closer, closer, still closer—

(The clouds have parted, and the moon grins insanely.)

The man on the bed shrieks hoarsely as the thing lunges at him, and all around rings horrendous laughter.

Morning. Silence reigns in the room, and sunlight is pouring through the curtained window. Someone is on the bed, without motion or life, the limbs contorted grotesquely. It is the sleeper, but for some reason I do not want to look upon his face.