

# H. P. Lovecraft

## The Very Old Folk

Thursday

[November 3, 1927]

*Dear Melmoth:-*

. . . So you are busy delving into the shady past of that insufferable young Asiatic Varius Avitus Bassianus? Ugh! There are few persons I loathe more than that cursed little Syrian rat!

I have myself been carried back to Roman times by my recent perusal of James Rhoades' *Aeneid*, a translation never before read by me, and more faithful to P. Maro than any other versified version I have ever seen—including that of my late uncle Dr. Clark, which did not attain publication. This Virgilian diversion, together with the spectral thoughts incident to All Hallows' Eve with its Witch-Sabbaths on the hills, produced in me last Monday night a Roman dream of such supernal clearness and vividness, and such titanic adumbrations of hidden horror, that I verily believe I shall some day employ it in fiction. Roman dreams were no uncommon features of my youth—I used to

follow the Divine Julius all over Gallia as a *Tribunus Militum* o' nights-but I had so long ceased to experience them, that the present one impressed me with extraordinary force.

It was a flaming sunset or late afternoon in the tiny provincial town of Pompelo, at the foot of the Pyrenees in Hispania Citerior. The year must have been in the late republic, for the province was still ruled by a senatorial proconsul instead of a *prætorian* legate of Augustus, and the day was the first before the Kalends of November. The hills rose scarlet and gold to the north of the little town, and the westering sun shone ruddily and mystically on the crude new stone and plaster buildings of the dusty forum and the wooden walls of the circus some distance to the east. Groups of citizens-broad-browed Roman colonists and coarse-haired Romanised natives, together with obvious hybrids of the two strains, alike clad in cheap woollen togas-and sprinklings of helmeted legionaries and coarse-mantled, black-bearded tribesmen of the circumambient Vascones-all thronged the few paved streets and forum; moved by some vague and ill-defined uneasiness.

I myself had just alighted from a litter, which the Illyrian bearers seemed to have brought in some haste from Calagurris, across the Iberus to the southward. It appeared that I was a provincial *quæstor* named L. Cælius Rufus, and that I had been summoned by the