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CONFESSIONS OF A "HIGH PRIESTESS"
AMERICA'S NOTORIOUS "LOVE CULTS"

BY
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By the Queen of New York's Society "Bee Harem" and Sister of Aleister Crowley's "Scarlet Soul" Girl, Who Reveals the Inner Secrets of Weird Rites Practiced by Cranks, Clairvoyants and the Dupes the World Over Including Fresh _____ on Dowieism, the Omnipotent Oom's Colony of Bluebloods, Charles Garland's "April Farm" and the Black Mass Mystics of Europe.

Beyond any doubt, the two most powerful and outstanding figures in the world's modern secret cults are the famous Gurdjieff and the notorious Aleister Crowley.

Gurdjieff is the mysterious Russian who founded the "Gurdjieff Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man" at Fontainebleau, France, where Katherine Mansfield, the novelist died, and who came to New York a little more than a year ago with a whole boatload of mystics and dancing girls to found an American branch of his institute—which, by the way still flourishes in a certain group of "intellectuals" and restless society women.

Aleister Crowley is the strange Englishman who began his career as a poet, mountain climber and explorer, but who later had a mystic "revelation," proclaimed himself the "Anti-Christ," the "Beast of the Apocalypse," and head of the "O.T.O." cult which has secret branches in every part of the world including New York, Cleveland, and a number of other American cities.

I know them both, and I know their cults.

Though each of these two men—for totally different reasons—will resent the statement bitterly, they have many points in common.

Each of them has extraordinary mental and physical powers. Each of them is profoundly learned—and there is no fake about that—in the secret mysteries of the Orient. Each has an unconquerable and ruthless "will to power." Each regards himself as a sort of superman, almost as a god.

And each of them has what I call the "messianic complex." By that I mean that each is trying to found a new sort of religion which he honestly believes will produce a higher and better and freer humanity.

But how different their methods! Crowley is a disciple of paganism of the Great God Pan, of Satan, the Devil, a practitioner of black magic.

Gurdjieff more nearly derives from Buddha, Laotze, perhaps even Jesus and Confucius, and is a practitioner of white magic.

More of Gurdjieff later—and I shall tell much good of him, for there is some splendid and effective stuff in his teachings.

But in this chapter I want to tell of Aleister Crowley.

Crowley, as I was saying, believed he was a sort of god, and seriously claimed that he could perform miracles. I don't believe in miracles, but he did have supernormal powers.

The most astounding of his "miracles" that I ever saw was the total and complete change he wrought in the character and personality of my sister Lea.

There was something positively nun-like, saintly, about my sister Lea—before she fell under Crowley's spell. She was more than merely conventional and moral. She was quiet, like a mouse. She never wore flashy or fashionable clothes, or bright colors. She was the teacher of a children's school in the Bronx, New York City.

Lea was slender, pale, but beautifully formed, and her face, too, had a sort of quiet, spiritual beauty, a kind of intellectual chastity, an aloofness.

Well, one night, I took her with me to Crowley's big studio, then at No. 1 University Place, on the Northeast corner of Washington Square. All sorts of people went there, conservative people, scholars, famous writers, as well as freaks, and the talk was often brilliant. I felt that Lea was too shut-in, that she would enjoy it.

There were, perhaps a dozen people, men and women, in the long, high-ceilinged room, walls covered with Oriental draperies, and with Crowley's own fantastic paintings. Two or three enormous divans were piled high with pillows. When we arrived, Frank Harris, the critic and author, was discussing Whistler's etchings. His talk was as brilliant as fireworks, but highly egotistical, and he disliked interruption. So there were no introductions. Lea and I just sat quietly and listened. Later the talk ran to Arabic poetry, and Walter Smart, then British vice-consul in New York, now consul general at Damascus and one

of the ablest living Orientalists, got into a long discussion with Crowley.

But in the midst of it, Crowley seemed to lose interest, and I noticed that his peculiar eyes were fixed in a sort of basilisk stare on my sister, Lea.

There she sat, quiet as a mouse, in her gray, frumpy clothes, with her pale, aloof face—so different from the other women, with their jewels, bare arms, exotic glamour and sophisticated poise.

I did not believe at first she was even aware that he was staring at her. But finally she returned his look, fixedly, without lowering her eyes. Both of them seemed in a sort of trance, though I doubt whether anyone else in the room remarked it. Crowley sometimes had long periods of silence, and when he was so, people let him alone. The general talk simply went on without him. As for Lea, she hadn't opened her mouth the whole evening.

About midnight, as one or two other guests were leaving, I went over to Lea and whispered that we had better be going also.

To my utter astonishment, Lea replied quietly:

"I remain here."

It was uncanny. It was unnatural. But it was final. And I have never been one who seeks to interfere with the actions of another, when fate calls.

Four days passed, and then she telephoned me. I have so much to tell—things happened too fast—that I must plunge right in without wasting words.

When I got to Crowley's studio, Lea was alone, bare-footed, in a flowing robe of scarlet silk. "What has happened?" I cried.

She stood before me, proudly, like a queen, and drew back the scarlet robe from her throat. There branded on her chest, was a great star inside a double circle. It was no child's-play—no trickery—nothing that would wash off. It was branded deeply into the flesh—for life. The scar, indeed, had scarcely healed.

I shuddered with horror. Yet I felt her enormous courage and her pride. There was a new light in her eyes. A "dead soul" had awakened—whether for good or evil it was not for me to judge.

She told me briefly what had happened. From the time Crowley had begun to stare at her, she felt herself absolutely in his power and was happy to be so. She felt she had met her

mate—more than her mate—she felt that she had found at last the purpose for which she had been born.

When Crowley told her that she was to be his high priestess, his goddess, she did not demur. Kneeling in a chalked circle on the floor she had him brand his symbol on her with the point of a red-hot dagger. He, the "Beast of the Apocalypse," and she, his bride the Scarlet Woman of Babylon. Of course, by "scarlet woman," Crowley did not mean the common thing the phrase has come to mean in the newspapers. It is simply, mystically, the apotheosis of the Madonna, just as the "Beast of the Apocalypse" is the antithesis of the deity.

Mind you, this astounding thing happened in the city of New York, in a modern studio in a fashionable district of the city, with a policeman not ten yards away on the corner, automobiles passing every moment. I have told you that amazing things actually happen in these mystic love cults in our great modern cities—things the conservative world scarcely dares to recognize or know.

A week later I went back, to one of Crowley's weird religious ceremonies, the first at which Lea officiated as high priestess. I promised that this story would be uncompromising truth, so I am not going to add any dramatic touches—just tell it as it was.

Lea, my once nun-like sister, sat on a raised platform, like a throne, placed before heavy, black velvet curtains. She was nude except for the flowing scarlet robe, which just revealed the star and circle.

Crowley, in a robe of black, stood before her, with a tall pointed lance, and behind him stood one of his acolytes bearing a silver goblet of red wine.

Some twenty or thirty men and women knelt in the dimly lighted studio.

There was a long ritual which I shall not repeat in full. Some of it was beautiful. None of it was obscene. I shall tell you enough to give you an idea.

Crowley said, in a sort of chant, like a priest, to the kneeling people:

"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law."

And they intoned:

"Love is the law. Love under will."

Then Crowley said:

"Every man and woman is a star."

Then my sister Lea spoke, as the goddess:

"I am Nuit, lady of the starry heavens. Come forth, O Children, under the stars and take your fill of love. My joy is to be your joy.

"Be ye goodly, therefore, dress ye all in fine apparel, eat rich food and drink sweet wines, and wines that foam. Also take your fill and will of love, when, where and with whom ye will, but always unto me—that your every act may be a ritual, an act of worship, a sacrament.

"Live as the kings and princes, crowned and uncrowned, of this world have always lived, as masters always live, but let not this be self-indulgence.

"Keep pure your highest ideal; strive ever toward it without allowing aught to stop you or turn you aside, even as a star sweeps upon its incalculable and infinite course of glory, and all is love. The law of your being becomes light, life, love and liberty.

"Is not this better than the death-in-life of the slaves of the slave-gods, as they go oppresses by the consciousness of sin, wearily seeking or simulating tedious virtues?"

Then she ended, chanting to Crowley:

"Sing the rapturous love song unto me! Burn to me perfumes! Wear to me jewels! Drink to me, for I love you! I love you! I am the blue-lidded daughter of sunset; I am the naked brilliance of the voluptuous night sky. To me! TO me!"

The end of the ritual came with a ceremony in which Crowley dipped the tip of the lance in the goblet of wine—a very old magical symbol.

What, meantime, was the "domestic" life of Aleister Crowley and my sister Lea? Fantastic beyond belief!

One afternoon I dropped in at tea-time. This is what I saw:

Crowley was absorbed in a game of chess with a man named Seabrook—William Seabrook—who was one of his boon companions, and who sometimes dabbled with him in the worst and most dangerous phases of black magic, while my once quiet and modest sister Lea lay nude on the floor, curled up asleep on a pile of cushions, like a dozing kitten, at Crowley's feet.

Neither man paid the slightest attention to her. She, the "goddess," just lay there like a little placid animal or an Oriental slave.

I disliked this Seabrook at first sight, and the more I saw of him the less I liked him. I think he was American, yet he reminded me of the worst type of Russian peasant of the kind you read about in Dostoevsky—intellectual, well educated, but

with a sort of brutal, heavy, animal quality that made him repellent. I learned later that he had been present, and had looked on calmly—doubtless enjoying the sight—while Crowley was branding my sister Lea.

I wouldn't mention him at all except for a certain phase of Crowley's activities in which he was associated at that time.

Aside from Crowley's "O.T.O." religion, he was deeply interested in devil worship and medieval black magic, the so-called Black Mass, and above all in "invoking the devil," and he and Seabrook were continually carrying out the most fantastic and outrageous experiments along these lines.

The difference in the two men's characters was apparent in the ways they went about it. Crowley, the mystic, really believed that by the repetition of magical formulas it was possible actually to invoke and produce in some physical manifestation the presence of demons, devils, Satan, the Great God Pan.

Seabrook, too, believed in these dark, potent evil forces. But he did not believe they were "spirits" from the outside. He believed they were locked up, hidden deep down, in the human brain, in the human heart, in the subconscious.

He thought the only way to "invoke the devil," or to arouse the Great God Pan," was to do it with some human being as a subject.

Consequently, his experiments were the more evil and dangerous.

But when Crowley worked his way, I never saw anything more exciting or frightful than you might see on a stage—blue lights, and puffs of smoke, and bleatings like those in the fantastic play, "Goat Song."

Seabrook, on the other hand, experimented mostly with human beings.

While all this was going on, I and my whole family were terribly worried about what might happen to Lea.

She gave up her school-teaching, of course, became absolutely absorbed in Crowley, and we felt that in a little while he would tire of her and cast her off as he had done, I am told, more than one other unhappy "high priestess" in England.

When we heard later that Crowley was leaving America, we felt sure that he was deserting her. But real life never works out as one expects it to.

Crowley went, but he took Lea along. The next time I heard from her, she was living in luxury with him in a villa at Cefalu, Sicily, in Southern Italy.

For a while all went well there. Then the London Daily Express started a bitter attack on Crowley, following the death of a young Oxford student, named Loveday or Lovejoy, at Crowley's villa, which he sometimes called "The Abbey of Theleme" and sometimes "The College of the Holy Ghost." It was proved that the student died from natural causes, but the affair raised such a scandal that Crowley was subsequently forced to leave Italy. He and Lea went first to Tunis, then the desert, where Crowley became ill, and both of them nearly starved. They later suffered terrible poverty together in Paris, but now, I believe, Crowley is back on his feet financially, for the time at least, and is reported to be with Lea, in Germany.

I wonder, sometimes, whether I shall ever see my sister Lea again. I shall, perhaps, have more to say of her much later in these articles, but in the next chapter I want to tell about another totally different so-called "love-cult," in no way connected with Crowley or his activities, the famous colony of Omnipotent Oom, otherwise Pierre Bernard, which flourished today, supported by rich society women, at Nyack, near New York City.