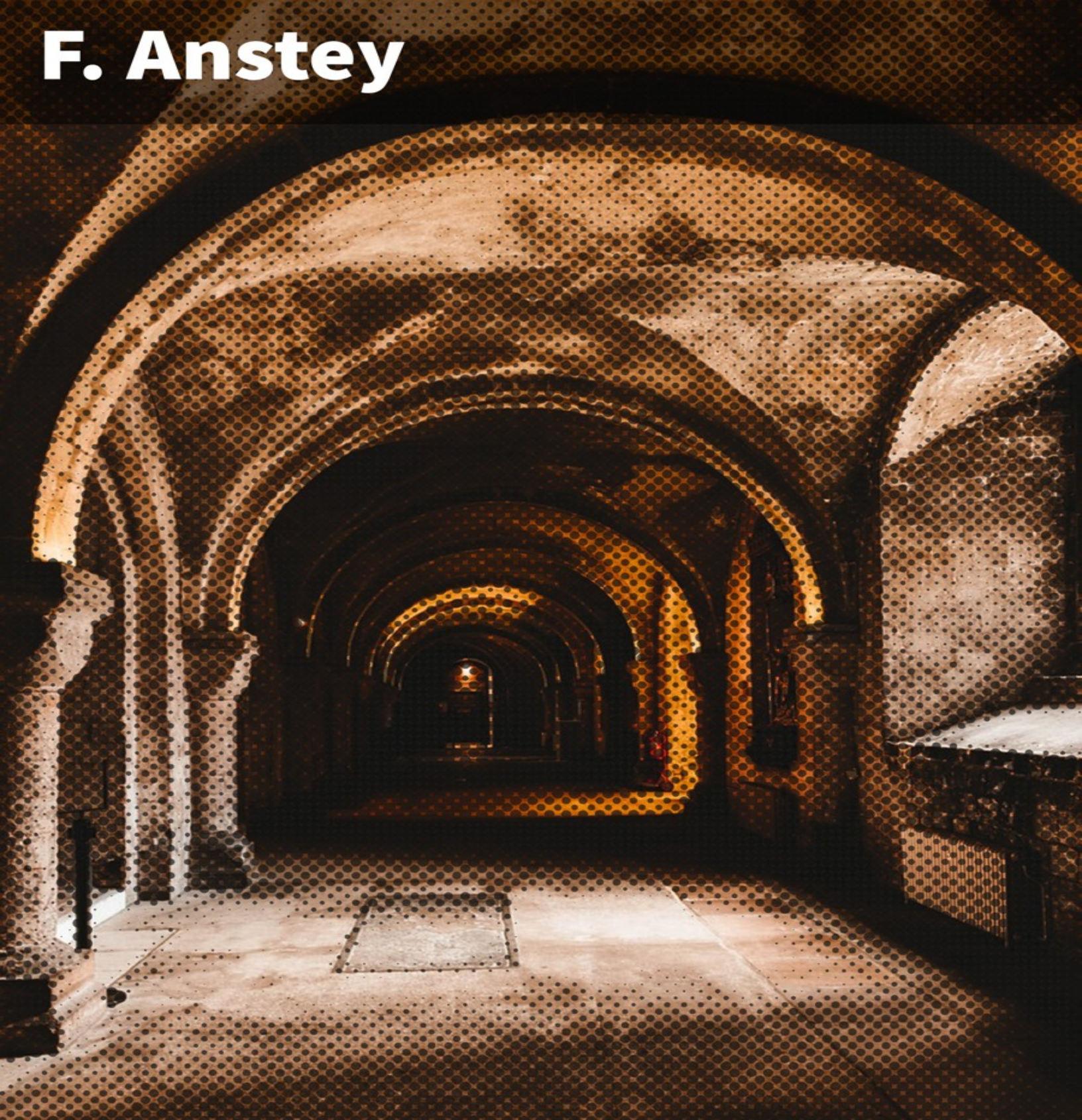


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*The Curse
of the Catafalques*

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The Curse of the Catafalques



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Chapter I](#)

[Chapter II](#)

[Chapter III](#)

[Chapter IV](#)

[THE END](#)

Chapter I

Table of Contents

Unless I am very much mistaken, until the time when I was subjected to the strange and exceptional experience which I now propose to relate, I had never been brought into close contact with anything of a supernatural description. At least if I ever was, the circumstance can have made no lasting impression upon me, as I am quite unable to recall it. But in the "Curse of the Catafalques" I was confronted with a horror so weird and so altogether unusual, that I doubt whether I shall ever succeed in wholly forgetting it--and I know that I have never felt really well since.

It is difficult for me to tell my story intelligibly without some account of my previous history by way of introduction, although I will try to make it as little diffuse as I may.

I had not been a success at home; I was an orphan, and, in my anxiety to please a wealthy uncle upon whom I was practically dependent, I had consented to submit myself to a series of competitive examinations for quite a variety of professions, but in each successive instance I achieved the same disheartening failure. Some explanation of this may, no doubt, be found in the fact that, with a fatal want of forethought, I had entirely omitted to prepare myself by any particular course of study--which, as I discovered too late, is almost indispensable to success in these intellectual contests.

My uncle himself took this view, and conceiving--not without discernment--that I was by no means likely to retrieve myself by any severe degree of application in the