

Excerpt from: A Mother's Omen and the Gypsy Curse

It just plain ain't *fair*, Asia, thirteen-year-old John Wilkes Booth complained to his sister. Ned gets a good-luck caul and I got nuttin' but an evil gypsy curse.

Do not use 'ain't,' Johnny, the girl, almost three years older than he, admonished him. Use the proper form, 'is not.'

Well, all the *other* fellows use 'ain't,' he sulked.

You are not the 'other fellows,' Johnny. You are special. You are a Booth, and the handsomest one at that!

I am *special*, all right! A curs-*ed* special.

That is nonsense, and you know it.

What about Ned's caul and my gypsy curse? And how about Ma's old dream about me--what she saw in the fireplace? Remember?

Asia knew what her brother was talking about. Their brother Edwin, 'Ned' to the family, had been born the night of November 13, 1833, amid a shower of meteors. As the sky flashed and baby boy emerged from the womb to take his first breath and utter the cry of life, some of the amnion that encircles a child's head at birth came with him.

This was the caul of which Johnny spoke, a phenomenon that mystics over the centuries deemed to be luckier than even the shooting stars that already covered the night sky, a most fortuitous sign for any child's future. As he grew older, Edwin naturally kept the dried piece of caul with him at all times for luck and personal safety. It was best not to tempt the spirits by scoffing at such things. The local African Americans, whether slave or free, swore by such omens.

The niggers and gypsies know all about stuff like that. They understand those things better than normal folk. . . . You know what I mean? Johnny entreated his pensive sister.

Oh, hush Johnny! Asia snapped back, as she mulled over Mary Ann Holmes Booth's prayer for a similar sign for Johnny. And the vision had come. His mother had seen it in the light and shadows of the crackling, blazing hearth fire. It was the avenging arm of a man, superimposed over the word 'Country,' that evolved into the letters of her youngest son's name, 'John,' in blood red!