

Letter to August Derleth

by H. P. Lovecraft

December 11, 1919

Before quitting the subject of Loveman and horror stories, I must relate the frightful dream I had the night after I received S.L.'s latest letter. We have lately been discussing weird tales at length, and he has recommended several hair-raising books to me; so that I was in the mood to connect him with any thought of hideousness or supernatural terror. I do not recall how this dream began, or what it was really all about. There remains in my mind only one damnably blood-curdling fragment whose ending haunts me yet. We were, for some terrible yet unknown reason, in a very strange and very ancient cemetery - which I could not identify. I suppose no Wisconsinite can picture such a thing - but we have them in New England; horrible old places where the slate stones are graven with odd letters and grotesque designs such as a skull and crossbones. In some of these places one can walk a long way without coming upon any grave less than an hundred and fifty years old. Some day, when Cook issues that promised MONADNOCK, you will see my tale "The Tomb", which was inspired by one of these places. Such was the scene of my dream - a hideous hollow whose surface was covered with a coarse, repulsive sort of long grass, above which peeped the shocking stones and markers of decaying slate. In a hillside were several tombs whose facades were in the last stages of decrepitude. I had an odd idea that no living thing had trodden that ground for many centuries till Loveman and I arrived. It was very late in the night - probably in the small hours, since a waning crescent moon had attained considerable height in the east. Loveman carried, slung over his shoulder, a portable telephone outfit; whilst I bore two spades. We proceeded directly to a flat sepulchre near the centre of the horrible place, and began to clear away the moss-grown earth which had been washed down upon it by the rains of innumerable years. Loveman, in the dream, looked exactly like the snapshots of himself which he has sent me - a large, robust young man, not the least Semitic in features (albeit dark), and very handsome save for a pair of protruding ears. We did not speak as he laid down his telephone outfit, took a shovel, and helped me clear away the earth and weeds. We both seemed very much impressed with something - almost awestruck. At last we completed these preliminaries, and Loveman stepped back to survey the sepulchre. He seemed to know exactly what he was about to do, and I also had an idea - though I cannot now remember what it was! All I recall is that we were following up some idea which Loveman had gained as the result of extensive reading in some old rare books, of which he possessed the only existing copies. (Loveman, you may know, has a vast library of rare first editions and other treasures precious to the bibliophile's heart.) After some mental estimates, Loveman took up his shovel again, and using it as a lever, sought to pry up a certain slab which formed the top of the sepulchre. He did not succeed, so I approached and helped him with my own shovel. Finally we loosened the stone, lifted it with our combined strength, and heaved it away. Beneath was a black passageway with a flight of stone steps; but so horrible were the miasmic vapours which poured up from the pit, that we stepped back for a while without making further observations. Then Loveman picked up the telephone output and began to uncoil the wire - speaking for the first time as he did so.

"I'm really sorry", he said in a mellow, pleasant voice; cultivated, and not very deep, "to have to ask you to stay above ground, but I couldn't answer for the consequences if you were to go down with me. Honestly, I doubt if anyone with a nervous system like yours could see it through. You can't imagine what I shall have to see and do - not even from what the book said and from what I have told you - and I don't think anyone without iron-clad nerves could ever go down and come out of that place alive and sane. At any rate, this is no place for anybody who can't pass an army physical examination. I discovered this thing, and I am responsible in a way for anyone who goes with me - so I would not for a thousand dollars let you take the risk. But I'll keep you informed of every move I make by the telephone - you see I've enough wire to reach to the centre of the earth and back!"

I argued with him, but he replied that if I did not agree, he would call the thing off and get another fellow-explorer - he mentioned a "Dr. Burke," a name altogether unfamiliar to me. He added, that it would be of no use for me to descend alone, since he was sole possessor of the real key to the affair. Finally I assented, and seated myself upon a marble bench close by the open grave, telephone in hand. He produced an electric lantern, prepared the telephone wire for unreeling, and disappeared down the damp stone steps, the insulated wire rustling as it uncoiled. For a moment I kept track of the glow of his lantern, but suddenly it faded out, as if there were a turn in the stone staircase. Then all was still. After this came a period of dull fear and anxious waiting. The crescent moon climbed higher, and the mist or fog about the hollow seemed to thicken. Everything was horribly damp and bedewed, and I thought I saw an owl flitting somewhere in the shadows. Then a clicking sounded in the telephone receiver.

"Lovecraft - I think I'm finding it" - the words came in a tense, excited tone. Then a brief pause, followed by more words in a tone of ineffable awe and horror.

"God, Lovecraft! If you could see what I am seeing!" I now asked in great excitement what had happened. Loveman answered in a trembling voice: "I can't tell you - I don't dare - I never dreamed of this - I can't tell - It's enough to unseat any mind - wait - what's this?" Then a pause, a clicking in the receiver, and a sort of despairing groan. Speech again - "Lovecraft - for God's sake - it's all up - Beat it! Beat it! Don't lose a second!" I was now thoroughly alarmed, and frantically asked Loveman to tell what the matter was. He replied only "Never mind! Hurry!" Then I felt a sort of offence through my fear - it irked me that anyone should assume that I would be willing to desert a companion in peril. I disregarded his advice and told him I was coming down to his aid. But he cried:

"Don't be a fool - it's too late - there's no use - nothing you or anyone can do now." He seemed calmer - with a terrible, resigned calm, as if he had met and recognised an inevitable, inescapable doom. Yet he was obviously anxious that I should escape some unknown peril.

"For God's sake get out of this, if you can find the way! I'm not joking - So long, Lovecraft, won't see you again - God! Beat it! Beat it!" As he shrieked out the last words, his tone was a frenzied crescendo. I have tried to recall the wording as nearly as possible, but I cannot reproduce the tone. There followed a long - hideously long - period of silence. I tried to move to assist Loveman, but was absolutely paralysed. The slightest motion was an impossibility. I could speak, however, and kept calling excitedly into the telephone - "Loveman! Loveman! What is it? What's the trouble?" But he did not reply. And then came

the unbelievably frightful thing - the awful, unexplainable, almost unmentionable thing. I have said that Loveman was now silent, but after a vast interval of terrified waiting another clicking came into the receiver. I called "Loveman - are you there?" And in reply came a voice - a thing which I cannot describe by any words I know. Shall I say that it was hollow - very deep - fluid - gelatinous - indefinitely distant - unearthly - guttural - thick? What shall I say? In that telephone I heard it; heard it as I sat on a marble bench in that very ancient unknown cemetery with the crumbling stones and tombs and long grass and dampness and the owl and the waning crescent moon. Up from the sepulchre it came, and this is what it said:

"YOU FOOL, LOVEMAN IS DEAD!"

Well, that's the whole damn thing! I fainted in the dream, and the next I knew I was awake - and with a prize headache! I don't know yet what it was all about - what on (or under) earth we were looking for, or what that hideous voice at the last was supposed to be. I have read of ghouls - mould shades - but hell - the headache I had was worse than the dream! Loveman will laugh when I tell him about that dream! In due time, I intend to weave this picture into a story, as I wove another dream-picture into "The Doom that Came to Sarnath". I wonder, though, if I have a right to claim authorship of things I dream? I hate to take credit, when I did not really think out the picture with my own conscious wits. Yet if I do not take credit, who'n Heaven will I give credit tuh? Coleridge claimed "Kubla Khan", so I guess I'll claim the thing an' let it go at that. But believe muh, that was some dream!

Lovecraft wrote [The Statement of Randolph Carter](#) based on this dream.

The Lovecraft Library wishes to extend its gratitude to Richard Spires for transcribing this text.