

Listen to the Dead

Ghosts have been glimpsed as midnight draws near; and the dead speak clearly to the living.
– Ed and Lorraine Warren

Body thrumming, every muscle tense and poised. Eyes darting, though the tomb's interior was barely 100 square feet. There was a stained-glass window on the wall opposite the riveted door inside the mausoleum where I cowered. Somehow the stonemason saw fit to include a glaring structural deficiency in this dwelling for the dead, and I felt certain that, at any moment, a dark shadow would play upon the exterior of that colored glass. But at least the window made for a more livable hideout. *Temporary Housing*, you might call it. You see, I was down and out and living (or at least sleeping) in the historic Mount Auburn cemetery, Cambridge Mass. Just until graduation. But it seems the authorities had become aware of this irregular arrangement, hence the midnight search party out for my arrest.

I had yet to hear human voices, but there was definitely a police dog somewhere outside the tomb. *Why would the police go so far as to muster a canine unit*, I thought? My criminal record, such as it was, comprised a spotty driving record and vehicle registration that only flirted with legality. In any case, I rarely drove and I had no outstanding warrants or parking tickets. I had never been arrested for a violent crime. Yet the sounds outside the tomb felt distinctly *threatening* on that midnight in early October: an animalistic snuffling along the hedges across a tended glen of similarly sized mausoleums. Then, a clearly audible metallic clinking – leash chains or handcuffs. Finally, I heard a low growl as some large animal picked up a scent and its pace. They were looking for someone, judging by the deliberate pace and ferocity of the noises, and the late hour meant that the matter must have been very urgent. I had nowhere to go, so I stayed completely still, and, within an hour, the wind died down outside the tomb along with what could have only been a full-blown manhunt, minus the helicopters.

There was no sign of either man or dog when I finally felt comfortable enough to leave my hiding place to take a look around. By then it was 2am, I guessed. My phone battery was dead, so I couldn't be sure, despite the fact I had fully charged it at the public library branch just down the street from the cemetery, on nearby Aberdeen Avenue, late the previous afternoon. The moon was only a sliver of light in the sky. Everything was still like a photograph and just as noiseless. Odd shadows seemed mismatched with overhead foliage, and those leaf surfaces facing the moon glowed not an expected white, but instead a pale blue. The glen – fronted by a manmade hillside inlaid with large tombs, at the center of the 100-acre cemetery – was also bathed in blue, and I thought myself succumbing to a sort of hysteria. *Too long living in a cemetery, and some sort of blues will take you too.*

I had finished a pint of whiskey at 10pm that evening, but surely that couldn't account for the commotion, nor could the booze account for the dream-like qualities in the glen left in the wake of the phantom search. After all, I finished a pint most nights, and a couple of beers to help it go down easy, and had yet to hallucinate outright. In my defense, *it's boring living in a cemetery*, especially when you had to remain more or less immobile during official "closed" hours. I couldn't even leave a light on to study by, which seemed counter to my goal of graduating.

But the price was right. So, I drank to pass the time and to combat the loneliness that accompanied the prospect of bedding down in any dark place alone. The macabre nature of that particular locale troubled me as well, at least at first. I was admittedly nervous about the thought of sleeping out, seemingly unprotected and surrounded by graves and gravestones, coffins and bodies in various states of decomposition. Is that so surprising? Yet my surroundings ended up bothering me less and less as the days turned to weeks, by which time the desperate nature of my situation proved the more discouraging. *It's temporary*, I repeated the words like a mantra while putting together funds for an apartment. I was constantly reassuring myself that this was not only the most cost-effective living

situation, but the most tranquil as well. Not to mention the convenience – I chose Mount Auburn since it was only a mile and a half from campus, where I was finishing up a bachelors in the English department.

As you can imagine, job prospects were lacking for graduates in my field, but the coursework was fascinating, the faculty engaged, and I planned to double-down on my systems engineering minor by pursuing grad school in the sciences. Moreover, there was *money* in Cambridge for those with a viable business concept. I had been debugging medical visualization software as a side hustle for a couple years and had the chance to meet local angel investors who might fund a full-time business. I saw my living situation as startup story that would someday elicit awe – during the early days of the (by then, tremendously successful) business I was living in the cemetery, folks, or at least it could be a compelling addition to my grad school cover letter. Basically, it was a future talking point, my house tomb. One month in, as the foliage started to turn, is when I first heard dogs and the chains.

After the second time the mysterious search party visited my shady glen, I ventured forth. There was some evidence that the ground along the hedges opposite my tomb had been disturbed, and, strangely, that reassured me. Unnatural patterns formed from fallen leaves and exposed topsoil - Someone *had* undoubtedly been by; the phenomenon was real. But those disturbances could have also happened earlier, when the birders invaded the area in search of an eagle of some sort that had been sighted atop a tombstone (engraved *Bancroft*). They had tromped around for nearly an hour, delaying my own homecoming in the process. It wouldn't do to be seen up close – identifiable - so I watched on, from the "Indian Ridge" trail at the top of the hill while these birders scurried around for hours. My outfit was in line with the season though (a Patagonia vest over plaid with jeans), so I could have passed as a birder from afar, and they ultimately paid me no mind. The birders trickled out of the glen around 6:30, shortly before the gates locked, and I made my way down the hill to my tiny home.

I read for a bit, by twilight, but nothing seemed to stick. So, I sought out \$10 worth of company from my dear friends, John Jameson and Sons, and started sipping to pass the time. I was out cold (literally, given the stone floor beneath me) by about 11pm, tired from a full work day and from most of the bottle, but I awoke with a start at midnight exactly. It happened every night that week – chains clinking and various undefinable animal noises, always at midnight. Smells too, like a damp basement, mostly, or a faint animal musk, like a dead deer carcass might smell if you had caught a whiff a mile away. By Friday, this phantasmagoria had me desperate to get out of the tomb, if only to achieve a good night's sleep, so I asked Christine if I could stay over at her place.

Christine was the first one who suggested the possibility of paranormal activity in the cemetery. Despite sleeping in a tomb, the thought hadn't occurred to me. Or I wouldn't let it occur to me. I assumed it was some combination of financial stress and boozy dreams that echoed against the stonework mausoleums in the glen. Natural phenomena, basically – like swamp gas.

II.

“Some people can see what you are only hearing”, Christine said in a tone that suggested seriousness.

We were sprawled out on the carpet in her living room. Although it was a humble one bedroom, it felt like the great hall in a mansion compared to a sleeping bag on a granite floor, and I splayed my limbs out indulgently in a way that my filthy mummy bag couldn't accommodate. Christine hadn't laughed at me when I told her what was going on at Mount Auburn, but she hadn't agreed to sleep over and see for herself either. She wasn't religious, or especially interested in ghosts and goblins, but she wasn't in a rush to experience the cemetery at midnight. I guess I didn't blame her, after spending time in her climate-controlled slice of 3rd-floor-walk-up heaven and contemplating the midnight festivities I could expect upon returning to my ghoulish home the following night.

“You could recruit a clairvoyant, or a sensitive, or whatever they call it...some sort of mystic”, she went on, her earnestness bringing me back to the warmth of the room and her company. The whole prospect sounded absurd, not to mention expensive, but we were having a fun evening just laying around and drinking from a red wine jeroboam. So I humored her: “Craigslist?”

“No, that’s way too open ended – and you’re not taking this seriously. You realize auditory hallucinations are diagnosable, right?” The conversation had taken a turn that I would just as soon prefer we avoided. She knew that my grandmother was kept heavily medicated towards the end of her adult life. It was lithium, I believe, in those days, but now that my own mother was beginning to show signs of a reality disconnect, talk of even the mildest mood-stabilizers was anathema.

“Probably I was just dreaming,” I countered. The defensiveness in my tone was more obvious than I had planned and Christine backed off that line of discussion, bless her.

“How about *Raven Books*?”, she said instead. “They have psychic readings, and tons of new age-y literature. Let’s get creative – let’s do something fun tonight”.

So, the next morning, we made our way to Central Square; first to Kinkos then to Raven. From our first stop we brought 50 rectangular bookmarks (the smallest number available for a single purchase), custom-designed in a Tempranillo haze the previous evening. A border of stars and moons encompassed a 48 pt. header: “YOU’VE BEEN SELECTED,” and a date a time followed a vague description of my midnight visitations and what sort of services might be required of the ideal candidate. Essentially, it was a job ad for a ghost hunter.

But Christine was right; we would be less susceptible to con artists if our psychic recruits were self-selecting. Who goes to an alternative book store, and seeks out a book on demonology - or ghost hunting, or spell casting – with the goal of executing a scam, after all? If we were going down the road of the supernatural, we wanted only true believers by our side. All told, twenty of our bookmarks were surreptitiously deployed, in two browsing sessions (before and after lunch), and it wasn’t until the

proprietor finally got off their phone and began circling the stacks that we decided we had pushed our luck enough. It was kind of fun to make and set out the bookmarks, like a date, and I even got a kick out of the books on the shelves, sometimes stopping to read a passage or two after tucking in a bookmark. I learned about the psychic experiments that permeated the back rooms and black budgets of the cold war, and began to wistfully hope that Uri Geller would turn out to aid our little experiment.¹

Sadly, it wasn't realistic to convene our practitioners at midnight, when most of the activity had occurred. First, I didn't want to compromise my accommodations, and it wasn't clear whether the sorts of people that follow an anonymous bookmark to a cemetery would turn out to be particularly stealthy. So, we chose dusk (the proverbial witching hour) to meet the candidates, which seemed suitably meaningful given our own purposes and what we had read about in our time at Raven. Three people showed up. Rachel arrived first, with a young man who turned out to be her boyfriend, Jaime. That spoke in her favor, to my mind, as she wasn't so naïve to turn up unaccompanied to meet strangers. Sadly, that display of reason represented the extent of Rachel's successes. She may have been psychic, but we learned nothing useful from Rachel, who claimed that the sheer number of spirits "interfered" with her abilities. Too much noise in the silent cemetery, I guess. We thanked her for trying and Jaime for being a good sport. His gait was noticeably bouncier when they finally decided to head home.

Daniel came alone shortly before Rachel and Jaime left, and I can imagine that he had picked their departure as his point of appearance and also that he stayed alone as much as he could. His countenance broadcast *darkness*, a darkness which extended to his wardrobe, including a full-length trench coat and black fedora as well as bug-eyed women's sunglasses. All of this might have come across as eccentric to the point of cringe, especially on a 20-something face and frame, but Daniel didn't crack a smile and I soon began to take him seriously. He didn't say much, but it was obvious that the area in and around the glen made him particularly uncomfortable. His man-in-black façade began to break

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/national/13inmate_ProjectMKULTRA.pdf

down when we reached the upturned earth left from a recent midnight visitation, although I hadn't mentioned to Christine or anyone else the importance of the spot. He stopped when he reached that hedges, and his legs twitched, involuntarily I think. The abrupt motion suggested he wanted to crouch down but was too scared to do so. He stopped walking briefly, before backtracking to where Christine and I stood transfixed by his efforts.

"There's nothing here", Daniel spoke softly. His tone of his voice wasn't frail, only his delivery. He seemed to be exerting quite a bit of effort to stay in control. He turned to leave, but Christine stopped him before he could take off towards the parking lot.

"How can we reach you", Christine asked. The question was posed bluntly, and – knowing my girlfriend's various tones – I could sense she was taking Daniel's performance seriously. So was I, honestly. He was young, but he wasn't selling anything. He seemed scared.

"You can DM me @dmv2200", Daniel spoke, clearly, before he picked up his pace and exited the scene. Rachel and Jaimie were long gone and we decided to call it a day. That's when our third recruit appeared.

Celeste wasn't like Rachel or Daniel, and I was delighted to see there were psychics of various sorts, like school teachers or librarians or auto repair mechanics. She was calm and confident, and – like Daniel – Celeste came alone. She was somewhat older than both the others, in her 40s, I think, and dressed in earth tones. Like Daniel, Celeste made her way towards the far edge of the glen, where I had found trace evidence of physical activity in the form of disturbed ground. But, unlike Daniel, Celeste stopped and bent down to examine the earth.

After handling a twig like a playing card between her fingers, she commented: "There's a spring 15 feet down". Despite the theatrics, her tone suggested it wasn't especially important. Indeed, the short grass and weeds near that spot seemed to interest her more. Small blue flowers were blossoming

from one low-slung divot, in a patch that fronted the tomb exactly opposite my home. She leaned in close, closed her eyes, and appeared to take a deep breath.

“The dead are speaking”, she said. “Listen to the dead”. With that she turned and left us, and this time Christine was too dumfounded to think to ask for contact information.

Midnight following the departure of our would-be ghost hunters, the noises changed, and became decidedly less threatening. I was too distracted to drink that evening, which I think had something to do with the downshift. Detox had always triggered fevered dreams for me, although that mostly came from cutting weed. (Cutting back on coffee, another vice, only resulted in headaches). I hadn't gotten felt the urge to get high in some time, so this was to be an alcohol detox, which, while less common, was no less jarring. Sobriety was my only drug that night, and it proved to be quite potent.

In my dream, I had unzipped my sleeping bag and left the tomb, all but gliding across the glen towards what I guessed to have been the eastern border of Mount Auburn, where the cemetery bordered Coolidge Avenue. There the houses there were almost as historic as the adjacent tombs (and many shared family names), and it was there that I beheld, in my dream, another mausoleum. It stood alone, amongst tombstones, and this one was marked “Crane”. The clarity of that memory and the accompanying name is what prompted me to retrace my steps in daylight later that morning.

As with cemetery spirits, I had no predilection for visions or premonitions taken from dreams. This felt different. You could say Crane encouraged me to find a physical counterpart to an imagined sight. I found it a truism that letters and numbers were always fluctuation, in dreams, and double-takes at dreamtime watch faces, or computer screens, or street signs revealed completely different characters. Indeed, it was a litmus test I had employed to test my own wakefulness at times, and this time I had passed. There was more to know about the dream and the place and the name in question.

As you may have guessed, Aloysius Crane's tomb was there, just like in the dream. But I wasn't frightened, like I had been with the phantom search party, only confused. I had no history of sleep walking and the family name Crane was meaningless to me. It seemed worth a look though, so I poked around the tomb, which was locked, and at the fence line immediately beyond. What wasn't there in the dream, but was quite prominent from a waking perspective, was the architectural wonder undergoing some sort of restoration immediately outside this stone and wrought-iron topped fence that sat immediately behind Crane's tomb. The main house sat some ways back from the cemetery border, on a massive lot. Its mansard roofline pushed the hulking structure to what looked like 4 full stories, not counting a basement and the tower over one corner. All the Victorian flourishes were accounted for. The only modern touch was the high contrast black-and-white paint and trim combo and the matching Tesla roadster in the driver, which I could only just make out through iron fencework. There was no visible activity in or around the house, nor were the lights on, but I decided to investigate.

III.

As curious as the sleepwalking episode had made me I knew better than to walk straight out of the cemetery. It wouldn't do to be seen leaving without having entered, day after day. So, I did what I usually do and found a tour group, or birding group, or larger family unit, and followed them out, oftentimes employing a bit of friendly banter to blend in. This too I considered professional experience. Chit-chat is something they didn't teach us up the road at the University, but it could help you get your foot in the door when I left the neighborhood of the dead. Thankfully the Kelsie family was from Iowa, not Maine, which means they were plenty talkative, and I waltzed out of Mount Auburn looking like an uncle or cousin rather than a bedraggled college kid who slept on the grounds most nights. Handshakes, quick goodbyes, and I was looping around the perimeter fence and up the block to Coolidge Ave.

The houses on the street parallel to the cemetery were all historic Victorians, registered as nationally historic for the associated tax write-off, and built at the turn of the previous century by professors and banks, surgeons and lawyers; all manner of upper class professionals. It reeked of old, Boston Brahmin money on that street. Nothing was out-of-place. There were no children’s bicycles in the yards. The Tesla I had glimpsed from the rear of the house was glinting in the early November sun, as was the two-tone paint job that had shutters and trim popping against an eggshell white exterior of the house. It sat as far from the street as it had from the cemetery fence line – a massive lot beneath a mansion. Still, there was no sign of life. Whoever lived there was new.

I didn’t learn much from the first walk-by, except that the owner was someone of means, but I had the address and the wherewithal to dig deeper. From Coolidge Ave I backtracked to the public library, which had power and WiFi. Zillow informed me that the house had sold earlier that year for an eye-popping \$7.2 million, and the very handy City of Cambridge Property Database informed me that the new owner was a Mr. Leach.² The name was familiar sounding enough for me to go ahead and try a general search as well, and *Bingo*, I had him. As it happens, Mr. Leach was a controversial telecom magnate who had profited from what the press labeled “questionable” ties to the CCP. There were endless forum threads dedicated to discussing the seemingly deliberate vulnerabilities of his company’s smartphone modems. All of this meant very little to me when I left the library, and I considered it little more than an oddity to be “living next door to a billionaire”, despite the notable differences in our rent.

But the ghosts of Mount Auburn just wouldn’t let up. It wasn’t dogs and chains or sleepwalk dreams that I heard most nights that November, but the sounds of digging. Or more like *mining*, with picks and shovels moving dirt and the occasional sharp ping of a tooltip striking the buried stone. There were even sounds of dragging, as if ore was being moved from the midnight dig site, and a mechanical squeaking or

² <https://www.cambridgema.gov/propertydatabase>

grinding that I took to be the movement of an old-fashioned cart on a narrow-gauge track. Some nights, I would burst from my sleeping bag, crouched low, hoping to catch a glimpse of the action, but the glen was always deathly still and permeated with that pale blue moonlight. The ground cover - pale blue flowers that clairvoyant Celeste had noticed, and which grew in small patches, like weeds - accentuated the effect. Some nights, that light hung heavy, almost like a mist, and I couldn't make out the sky, nor the ground for more than a few feet outside the entrance to the mausoleum.

All this nocturnal industry had ceased to frighten me, but it wreaked havoc on my sleep cycle, the effects of which became an increasingly noticeable problem as finals approached. I knew I had to do something. It wasn't the season for apartment hunting, nor did I have the requisite 5 figures set aside just to secure a rental unit in the Boston metro housing market. Christine was generous with her bed but had obligations of its own and our mis-aligned school and work schedules would mean inflicting upon her the same disruption that my phantom neighbors were now causing me. Christine *did* push me to keep investigating Leach though, after I told her what little I had uncovered about the mansion on Coolidge Ave behind Crane's tomb. I had assumed that my due diligence was over, having followed up briefly on the contents of that sleepwalking episode or fugue state, or whatever it was that led me across the cemetery at midnight. The evidence of my success was a shift in from threatening to merely disrupting midnight activities. I assumed the dead, or the flowers, or whomever, had been satiated. Christine suggested that there was more to learn, more to do. I began digging deeper, so to speak.

The Cambridge City Council meeting minutes, published online, were a revelation. Apparently, Leach had petitioned the council that same June to construct an extension to the basement of his newly purchased Victorian on Coolidge. The justification documented in the June meeting minutes discussion concerning a certain, "Wine cellar", which didn't win much sympathy from the council, I guessed, since the application was rejected on the basis of structural instability, proximity to the cemetery, and the restrictive (albeit arbitrarily interpreted) nature of the code of the historic register itself. But I had

noticed construction materials – pallets of brick and stone, timber and shrink-wrapped objects in the shape of doors – behind his house. Interestingly, none of this was visible from the street, nor did I witness any construction actually taking place. I would notice the gradual shifting of the material pile, however, so I decided to go over the fence one night, into Leach’s backyard.

On Tuesday, November 19, 2019, I recruited Christine to stand guard while I infiltrated the Leach estate. We dressed all in black; outfitted for B&E. Black jacket – Rouge Denim; my own personal suit of armor – and black denim jeans. I’d worn a similar outfit out to departmental gatherings, and it wasn’t commented upon. I was confident that, if I was stopped on the street, I would come across as a fashionable college kid and not a burglar. The black balaclava put me over the top, but I kept that folded up, like a beanie. My equipment budget was nil, so no night vision, grappling hooks, etc., but I tended to carry a penlight in those days (which was helpful when working behind the bulky medical equipment in the lab, or settling into my sleeping bag), as well as my trusty Leatherman. So that was it: clothes, light, and a knife - Time to see what Leach was really up to inside his newly acquired Coolidge Ave. mansion.

The fence behind Crane’s tomb was nearly 10 feet tall, and topped with ornamental spikes, but there were stone columns every few feet grounding the ornate metalwork, so I got up and over in 20 seconds flat. Nerves helped. There were no lights on anywhere nearby, except for the half moon and what few stars you could see from downtown Boston. A quick glance backwards assured me that Christine was taking her duty seriously, crouched in the shadow behind Crane’s mausoleum, scanning. Fortunately, Tuesday nights were quiet in this neighborhood, on both sides of the cemetery fence, and it was that silence that allowed me to hear voices before making it half way across Leach’s backyard. They were coming from below the ground, it seemed, *underneath his backyard*. It was past 2am, which meant to me that what I was hearing wasn’t a dinner party. Not to mention the house was completely dark

from the outside. The grass was slick with dew, so I slowed my approach even more, so as not to trip and fall and alert my quarry by accidentally thumping the ground.

Hooking right, to the side of the house opposite the driveway, I made my way between tall hedges. The rows were untrimmed and overhung the narrow walkway. As soon as I rounded the corner (finally losing sight of Christine), I saw why these scrubs were deliberately allowed to prosper. Leach had undoubtedly told the landscapers to ignore that side of the house so his midnight work crew could get in and out of the house incognito. There was a light on; a side entrance. Creeping closer, keeping low to the ground and avoiding anything that looked like it might pop or squeak, I made my way to the side door. After pulling the balaclava down over my face, I peeked in. No movement, but that door was in use. Many of the side and back entrances on the old Victorians were painted shut, covered with cobwebs and dust. This door looked to be in regular use, given the polished brass doorknob and the faint boot prints on the ground just outside. Craning to see evidence of a security system gave me a few breaths to build up the courage to test the door knob. I gingerly tried the handle. It turned easily, without noise, further evidence that someone had been in and out recently, most likely to gather materials from the pile pushed close against the back of the house.

Directly ahead, I could see through a mudroom into the kitchen. Stainless steel caught the moonlight and I took it as a sign that major interior updates were meant to complement the newly painted exterior. Immediately to my right, just inside the side door, was a secondary stairwell descended steeply before an abrupt left in five of six steps. From below, down the stairs, I could hear both muted voices and the low twang of FM music. This was no time to back out. It might be months before I would have the courage to again attempt so brazen an entry, so I tested the first step to see if it squeaked. Nothing; I was in luck. Leach was just as concerned with noise as I was. We were both then in the business of masking our movements. Venturing forward, to the elbow six steps down, I could see to the

basement. The chatter grew louder, and I could make out specific words, but not the conversation. It was Spanish I was hearing from below.

Six more steps, and I was still not quite to the bottom of the stairs, but I was far enough to see what was happening beneath the house on Coolidge Ave. Leach's "crew" was indeed digging out a wine cellar. I couldn't make out everyone involved, but it looked to be three guys, in Carhart and knee pads, dust flying out in all directions. They were tunneling, not with picks and shovels, but with electric jackhammer-type power tools and pick-axes. They were at least 20 feet under the backyard, heading in the direction of the cemetery, and the entire excavation measured about 15x15 square. The finished portions of the basement was upscale – wood paneling and crown molding – but covered in dust and debris. Leach was obviously intent on finishing this moonlight construction quickly. Given such recklessness, and the direction the work crew was digging, I could see then why the dead were concerned and it was they who had been keeping me up at night.

I left the Coolidge Ave. house much quicker than I had entered, and the top stair wasn't quiet on the way back up. The creak didn't appear to stop activity below, but I noticed a third-floor light on when I turned around briefly to climb the fence back over to the cemetery. There's no way...

Stringers, I guess you'd call them. Cemetery staff who Leach had paid off to inform him about any and all atypical activities happening around Mount Auburn Cemetery. It was easier for the staff to report on me than the ghosts, and it paid better. Administrative staff – the people who offered tissues in waiting rooms to next of kin – people like that would call the cops, not a billionaire, and they didn't know a thing anyways, since they were generally home by 5pm, but the grounds staff knew that someone was living onsite, and, moreover, they had an idea who it was. That guy who always left alone. That guy who was always looking around nervously. That guy who pissed in the same spot off mausoleum row so that the grass didn't have a chance to grow back. Bottom line: I wasn't as careful as I

should have been and Leach found out about me. Three days later, when I made my way back over the wall to take pictures of the illicit construction for Cambridge City Council, the PD, and the Boston Globe, he was waiting. Leach leaned against a stone pillar that supported my ascent on the opposite side of the fence, casually hidden. At first, I only noticed the ember of a cigarillo set beneath a black beret. He glanced over as I touched grass.

“Freeze”, he commanded, in a deep tone but without affect. I did as he commanded. “You are under arrest”, his follow-up wasn’t as confident, and I turned my head to see what sort of authority I was dealing with. Square jaw; blonde hair; green velvet smoking jacket. He didn’t look able to physically restrain me, so I turned and questioned him directly, eye to eye.

“Why are you digging at midnight”, I found my voice and let the accusatory tone build.

“Smart boy”, he commented, as if naming rather than complimenting me. “If you call the cops I’ll tell them what you’re up to”, I continued.

He pulled a pistol. It had a long, naked barrel, like a Luger, but I couldn’t testify to the caliber given my frantic state. He raised the pistol, which was a bolder move than most causal citizens are capable, escalating charges from brandishing to attempted murder. He didn’t seem to care, although I assumed someone with his range of federal indictments was conversant in the subtleties of the law. I got back over that wall double quick, without hearing a shot or feeling a bullet, and I didn’t come back. Not that it mattered. Leach would send guys to finish me. That’s why he let me escape. He wanted me to know he knew. But he wouldn’t tolerate loose ends, and now he knew then that I could be spooked.

IV.

Shortly after that face-to-face confrontation, when Leach got desperate and sent some contract men to kill me, it finally clicked: The dead were using that floral ground cover in my shady glen to mentally influence the only living tenant. That realization saved me. It was 1am – not the typical midnight – when

I heard a commotion across the glen. The sound was like a boot scraping a wet leaf across the concrete path; hardly blip compared to the relative ruckus of a phantom search party or Mexican mining crew, but it immediately spiked my heart rate. I knew better than to try to open the tomb door, and risk alerting someone, but I crept across the tomb in my pajamas (long underwear and a t-shirt) and put my ear against the wall.

Things began to change then. First, I began to notice individual motes of dust and what looked like sand hovering in the moonlight that lit the inside of the tomb, then the air itself seemed to heat and dry. When tension peaked, and the sound of gunfire finally erupted, I forced the door open.

What I saw was not the familiar sight of a New England cemetery in November, but a sort of hazy desert-scape, like a mirage but close enough to reach out and touch. Tall dunes now surrounded the glen, and perched above them I could make out palm silhouettes standing in the place of native Eastern pine. The air too was like that of the desert, and my lips and tongue were immediately parched. It was an idyllic scene, but the intruders across the glen were experiencing things differently. Three men in tactical gear were crouched behind different headstones, exchanging small arms fire with one another and yelling obscenities.

They couldn't have been 15 feet apart. That and their similar outfits suggested they had arrived together. But the camaraderie and training they may have shared was long gone and each seemed intent on killing the other two as quickly and violently as possible. Sirens in the distance jarred me from the bloody scene, which could have been taken from a Gulf War action movie. As I turned to pull my tomb shut, and escape the chaos of local authority, I noticed that the small blue flowers that the psychic Celeste had pointed out to us were still visible, scattered amidst the dunes, and, what's more, they were all standing straight up, as if searching out a spring morning sun and not a November moon.

Some smartass at *The Globe* said it was acute PTSD that caused “The Gunfight at the Auburn Corral”. Three army buddies, recently back from an extended tour in Iraq, had gotten carried away after a few too many beers at the local bar. They had wandered into a locked cemetery, somehow, and started up a game of target practice, just like they used to do overseas. “Boys will be boys” etc., and, since no one was killed (nor was anyone willing to press charges on vets) the incident was soon forgotten. Fine by me, but I couldn’t stay at Christine’s forever. Leach had those gun nuts lawyered up fast. He had also made his point: Despite the incompetence of these first assassins, Leach wasn’t above sending guys with guns to finish me off. I don’t think he really understood what went wrong in the cemetery though, and I silently thanked the dead when I made my way back to the tomb later that week, after the police tape came down. I even took extra care to avoid stepping on the little blue flowers, or any of the lingering flora, all of which had triggered the hallucinations experienced by my attackers.

Instead of staying in my “home” mausoleum though, I spent more time near Crane’s tomb and would sometimes come and go through his back yard, knowing he wouldn’t report my movements and risk an investigation so soon after the gunfight. It seemed wise to vary my routines a bit as well, rather than simply going to and from my tomb and school, constantly being recognized by grounds staff.

The locking mechanism on the Crane tomb itself was ancient, corroded bronze. It was handsomely worked, and strong, as were many of the architectural flourishes adorning the graves departed brahmin on the grounds. To access the tomb, you would lift a brass crucifix on a hinge and insert a comically-sized metal key, if such a key still existed. Alternatively, you could bust through the stained-glass window centered on the back wall, but that would alert grounds staff. The stonework itself was impenetrable. So, I chose to pry the door.

Crowbars aren’t as hard to come by as ornamental mausoleum keys, and a broken door looks a lot like a warped door, if you aren’t studying it too closely. I made sure to clear debris after the door swung free, and took great pains to make sure the door itself would close again completely. I was so

concerned with executing this infiltration quickly and quietly that I nearly knocked over a bust that stood alone at the center of the interior of Crane's tomb. Instead of falling down, the entire structure upon which the bust rested began to slide, and I stood staring down a flight of stairs that descended what looked like a buried hallway *beneath the tomb*. It was good that I didn't fall, since that noise would have echoed down the passageway that led out towards the cemetery perimeter and the Leach property. As it happened, I heard the diggers down that dark corridor before they heard me. Not the dead, but the living crew, commissioned by Leach to excavate his new wine cellar. They were making progress, moving dirt no more than a couple meters adjacent to the passageway beneath Crane's tomb.

It had started to get really cold by then, as it does in New England by mid-December, and I know it wouldn't do to stay in an unheated stone structure until the snow finally thawed for good in April. One day I would wake up dead. (Wouldn't that be convenient). But it didn't feel right leaving either, and I think that feeling had something to do with Leach's ongoing wine cellar project. The midnight chaos had begun to taper off when the frost arrived and destroyed the last vestiges of floral ground cover that the dead had used to trigger my initial hallucinations. I couldn't listen to the dead, then, in the winter, but I still felt they were calling out for protection from such inconsiderate and greedy encroachment, so I decided to "monkey wrench" Leach's illicit operation before departing Mount Auburn forever.

Crane's tomb provided a hidden point of entry that I assumed was unknown to Leach himself and therefore unlikely to be guarded or booby-trapped. Moreover, Leach's crew seemed to be digging roughly in parallel to the Crane tomb tunnel, and I made it a point to venture down there to listen to their nightly progress. I imagined it might be possible to break through the dirt separating our two tunnels in a few hours, between their shifts, if I once again enlisted Christine, and perhaps a third individual. Daniel, the psychic who had stopped by the cemetery briefly while we were trying to figure out the origin of the phantom search party, seemed like a natural third accomplice. He was familiar with

cemeteries, wore black (which was convenient for our purposes), and he was the only one the three psychics that left his contact info - in the form of a username - where we could hope to message him. Most importantly, he seemed to share my reverence for the dead.

I messaged Daniel and invited him for a drink at Paddy's, a bar on nearby Walden street, which I chose as neutral meeting ground. It was no problem, really – that's where I drank Irish whiskey when I wasn't drinking Irish whisky alone in a cemetery; basically, when I could afford human company. He was a good sport, even upbeat, especially compared to the gallows walker I witnessed when he met us the first time at Mount Auburn earlier that fall. Before we had a chance to order our third round, I outright told him that the cemetery was under attack by a reckless oligarch, and, if we didn't act fast, the ground underneath those many thousands of graves would be hollowed out to make room for sports cars, and game rooms, and modern art collections. I laid it on a little thick, admittedly, and didn't really think that Leach had the free time to oversee the vast labyrinth of underground caves that I was describing. Daniel was polite and paid attention, but when I finally took a breath and a drink he interjected.

"I'll help you, but not to prevent the invasion you are describing". I saw then that he had made up his mind to help me before we had even sat down. I was intrigued.

"I saw something", he muttered softly, "when I came to visit you the last time." His voice, generally soft, began to rise with a force and intensity that I hadn't heard from him before.

"When we came upon the place where the ground was disturbed. You know the spot. I saw, briefly, a small girl – only a child, really - lounging in the grass. She appeared suddenly, and wore period clothing, so I knew she was long gone. That's how you know. Anyways, I chose to ignore her, but I haven't been able to stop thinking about that scene since. The girl was absolutely *serene*, just rolling in the grass, grasping at those small blue flowers sprinkled around the glen. You know the ones? She was smiling at us while she played. I rarely see the dead, anymore, not like when I was a kid, and I've never seen the dead as so young or so happy. Unlike the hauntings and ghosts and demons in my childhood

and in the movies, I felt like an outsider disturbing *her* peace. You and I know better than to disturb the grounds, but I guess Leach will have to be taught a lesson". That settled it – we were going in.

Somehow, Leach was waiting for us, on his side of the roughly three-foot diameter connecting tunnel that Daniel and I excavated between Crane's tomb and the soon-to-be wine cellar. I should have put two and two together, since he seemed to know our every move up to that point. It had to be the semiconductor connection – he obviously had access to my cellphone mic or email, or both. Daniel and I had corresponded to plan the infiltration. In the tunnel beneath the tomb, I reached a leg through the breakthrough hole first, then an arm. My head was still on the tomb side of the tunnel when what felt like handcuffs closed around my right wrist. Leach then pulled me through completely, and I lay, dazed, on the floor of his newly extended basement, dripping blood from where my temple had smashed the roof of the tunnel when he dragged me through. He was stronger than he looked, the playboy oligarch.

Daniel cried out in despair, but didn't otherwise move a muscle. I think he was frightened that *something*, rather than someone, had pulled me through to the other side of the hole. Once the dirt had settled, I could see Leach moving quickly, and he didn't waste any time handcuffing my other hand behind me. First the pistol and now a judo move and closed handcuffs – this guy had some sort of private security training or background, no doubt about it. And it was only after he pull me to my feet, and began shoving me forcefully, away from the cemetery and towards his basement proper, that Daniel came through the hole after us. I don't think Leach thought much of him or expected Daniel to come at all, but all 135 pounds of moody psychic tackled Leach from behind just as we were about to mount the stairs leading up from his basement to what would have undoubtedly been my demise.

It was then Daniel and I who were dragging Leach, rather than the other way around. He was unconscious – out cold from a head wound nastier than my own, inflicted by the flat side of the pick-axe Daniel had found in Leach's wine cellar. We didn't stick around to see him wake up. Rather, we left him

handcuffed to an iron loop – an ornate sconce - in the tunnel beneath Crane’s tomb. Before leaving Leach for good, we caved in the hole connecting the tomb basement to Crane’s unfinished wine cellar and rolled the slab and bust back over the stairwell leading down beneath the tomb from the mausoleum above. There are enough cracks for Leach to breath, but not enough to hear his screams.

I was 3moved out of my tomb by Christmas Eve and lived full-time at Christine’s through graduation, which went off without a hitch. We stayed together another year, but finally broke up once she left to start a PhD in folklore and mythology at Yale. She always loved reminiscing about her time in “the criminal underworld”, as a lookout for a billionaire home invasion. Daniel started adding color to his wardrobe and *living* human beings to his life, mostly barflies at Paddy’s, but that’s a start I guess. Leach was a prisoner of the dead serving out a life sentence without the possibility of parole. Maybe he’s still down there, fed by mushrooms and roots – fruits of the earth that the late Aloysius Crane and his ethereal cohabitants control and sometimes share. He should have listened, when I warned him to stop digging. Of course, I was just the messenger, but still. I listened to the dead, and now we all can rest.

