

ardent advice on
heartfelt affairs

ARKHAM
HORROR

LOVELORN

EDITOR'S NOTE: Some say that the irregular appearance of "Lovelorn"—our advice column for those in romantic straits and other relationship dilemmas—is governed by the phases of the moon and astrological dictates, but the truth is far simpler and more harrowing. When a plea for advice is received by the editors of our sister publication, *Tales from Cupid's Bow*, and found to be altogether too grisly for their pleasant pages, it falls to Lovelorn to answer their questions here...



Dear Lovelorn,
Well, this is just ducky. Now that I've finally convinced myself to put pen to paper, I hardly know what to write. Honestly, I wasn't going to write at all, but I've heard from certain individuals at Velma's Diner that you're the one to go to when it comes to figuring out solutions to... rather *particular* kinds of problems in your love life.

And boy, do I have a problem right now. It might not be the kind you've ever heard of before, but I'm desperate enough to pull my own curls out at this point, Lovelorn. I don't know what to do, but I've got to do something.

You're going to have to bear with me while I lay it all out for you.

It... it doesn't seem real. Even now, after everything I've seen, after knowing how he's changed, after facing his eerie silence day after day and then watching what came out of his mouth, the truth is still hard to comprehend. I feel like I'm trapped in a nightmare.



That's probably why I'm writing from the diner—even on a slow shift like tonight, I can feel the liveliness in the air. There are smells of clam chowder and hot java. I can hear Denny telling Agnes for probably the third time this week that we need to get a soda fountain at the diner, and hey, did we know he sells them? He'll make us a real nice deal. Agnes says he needs to take it up with Velma, not the waitresses.

It's good. It's grounding for me to listen to people going on with their lives like nothing is wrong. It helps me remember that I'm not fooling myself, which is where my head goes sometimes when I'm on my own at the boarding house. Something is wrong, Lovelorn, something big, and I need help to figure out what to do next.

See, there's a problem with my fiancé, whom I'll call Bradley Johnson here. A big one.

I know what you're probably thinking. The answer is no. Brad's heart has been true since the day we met. Or, if anyone else owns a piece of it, it's certainly not some good-time gal. It's the sea. He's... well, let me start at the beginning.

Brad's a sailor, just like his daddy. He's been working on the big steamers since he was young, going all around the world with the merchantmen. He's never met a face he wouldn't smile at, a hand he wouldn't shake, or a food he wouldn't try. The first time I ever met him was in a music

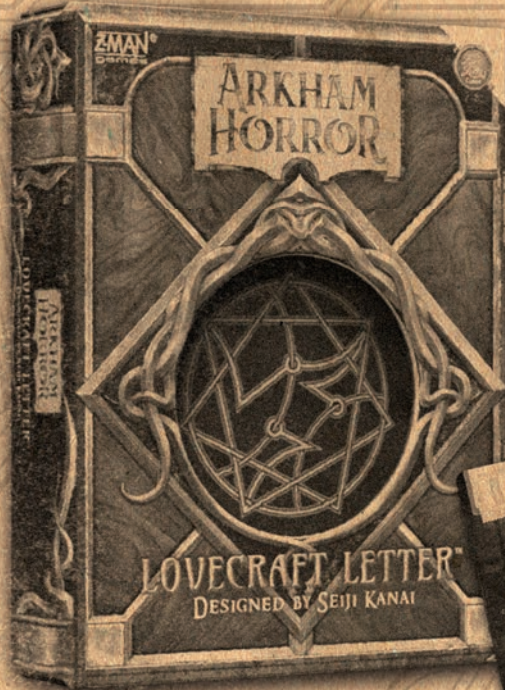
hall where he showed off a dance he learned in India. He got everyone in the place clapping to a whole new beat. Then, he threw his hands up in the air, belted out a song, and shook his hips in a way that would have made Miss Marie Lambeau jealous. It was so much fun! Before the end of the night, he bought me a drink and asked if he could walk me home.

That's the kind of man



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Brad is. I need you to understand that. It's the kind of man he's always been: good-hearted, fun-natured, with a real sense of adventure. But he always knew he wanted to settle down someday. When he proposed to me last year before heading off on a long voyage, he said I was the one he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. I believed him. Brad's never lied to me, never, not even about silly things like whether my pin curls were tight enough, or if he thought the Countess looked pretty tonight.

"They look a little low, honey," he told me, "let me do 'em up for you."

Or, "Course she's pretty, but she can't hold a candle to you, Merry Mary."

See? It's all silly stuff, sweet stuff, and he never bothered



to lie, not even to make me feel better. He could make me feel better without that. He wanted to.

He was gone a long time on this last trip. Seven months, longer than me and his folks expected. I got letters as regular as I could expect for the first four, and then nothing. Me and his parents were real worried, but the company told us it was bad storms stirring up the Atlantic, even though it wasn't hurricane season. When we finally got word that the latest cargo ship he'd gone out on had been spotted coming into port, we all ran to meet him. Heck, I even dipped out of work at the diner early (that reminds me, I still owe Agnes a shift). I was so excited to see Brad again I could barely stand still. When he walked off the ship, I threw my arms around his neck. For a second, it was like a dream come true.

Not a long dream, though. He didn't hug me back.

Sure, maybe it was immodest of me to be hugging my fiancé in public, but it never bothered Brad before. His daddy laughed and his mama chided us, and after I let go, he was good enough about hugging his ma, then gave his pa a clap on the back. I figured maybe he was a little shy after being away from me for so long, that's all. I thought he'd at least hold my hand for the walk back to his parents' home. But he didn't do that, either.

"Must have been a rough trip, Mary," Mama Johnson whispered to me as I helped get dinner ready that night. Brad wasn't talking much, not to anyone, not even his pa. "He'll get over it soon enough, though."

I thought she had to be right—she'd know, being married to a merchantman for as long as she was. She made Brad's favorite steak and potatoes, and I cooked up a fresh apple pie—and if you've ever been to Velma's, you know my apple pies are to die for. All this was sure to put him in a better mood.

Lovelorn, he didn't eat a single bite. "Smells burnt," he said about the steak, wrinkling his nose. He didn't touch my pie, just looked at the plate like I'd handed him something diseased, then pushed it away. Brad's never done that before. Even if I'd made something he wasn't keen to eat, he'd at least down a bite before telling me, "Little heavy on the salt, honey." Not this time, though. His mama scolded him for being unkind. All he did was glare at her then take himself upstairs without another word.

It only got worse after that. I stopped by his parents' place every day before my shift and tried to talk to him; but he never had much to say to me. All the stories about



where he'd been and what he'd done—and let me tell you, Lovelorn, Brad could jaw—were gone. He started to look haggard too, gaunt with dark, dark circles under his eyes. He said he didn't feel sick, though, and he refused to go to the doctor. One afternoon, when I was packing up the lunch I'd made him (corned beef, which he usually loves, but I wondered whether he'd even take a bite), and as he was standing watching me in the kitchen, he pulled out a handkerchief and coughed real hard for a long while.

I was worried I'd see blood when he pulled the handkerchief back, but instead there was a worm lying in a puddle of phlegm in the middle of the cloth. Big one, too, nasty and thick-bodied like a real country nightcrawler. Only this worm had a mouth on it I could see from where I stood, round and full of teeth. I nearly screamed, but then Brad picked it up by the tail and put it back in his mouth! It went right down his throat, and I couldn't stifle a retch at the sight. Brad didn't say a word to me. He just... grinned.

I swear, Lovelorn, this truly happened.

I ran out of there, found Mama Johnson, told her she needed to get Brad to the hospital and get rid of whatever parasite he carried. She asked me what I meant, and I described what I saw—right down to the thing's tiny teeth. Her eyes went big, (heck, maybe she thought I should go to



the doctor, instead), but she reassured me that she and Pa Johnson would sit down with Brad that night and straighten him out good, see what was really going on with him.

I believed her. Mama Johnson is a kind woman, but she won't tolerate being ignored in her own home. Even if she didn't believe my tale, it gave her the excuse to sit down with her son and get to the bottom of why he'd changed so much. But when I went back the next day to see how it had gone...

Lord have mercy. All the light had left her eyes. She was cold to me, and that lady hadn't been so from the moment I met her. The second she learned my parents were gone, she told me, "Call me Mama, Mary dear," and took me under her wing. But this time, she wouldn't even let me past the door. Told me, "Brad's not in, come back later," and shut the door in my face.

Here's the real strange part though, Lovelorn. She seemed to have a hard time speaking, like something tickled her throat. Just a cold, I figured, but before she slammed the door, I saw her cheek wriggling, like there was something inside of her mouth trying to get out. The second I did a double take, she swallowed it down.

Now, I know what you're thinking. Time for me to cut ties with the whole family, right? Easier said than done in a town like Arkham where everyone knows you, especially when you work in a job like mine. I swear, I would write them off, if it were just about me saving my pride. I don't care who whispers about me being jilted by my sweetheart, but I don't have it in me to abandon that family after all they've done for me.

They're sick, I know it. Infected with a monstrous parasite that's changed their minds and manners. I need to get those creatures out of them, but I'm not sure how, especially when



I can't get them to eat anything I cook. How am I supposed to dose them with vermifuge when they won't even eat apple pie—tip their chins up and hold their noses? I don't think I have it in me... not to mention, I'm not sure if I care to be alone with them right now. After all, Brad's parents had to get their parasites from somewhere.

What can I do to make this right, Lovelorn? How do I save the man I love and his family from horrible worms when I'm too afraid to be alone with them? I need the most specialized advice you can give me. Y'know, a spell, a potion, some kind of ritual I can perform—even if I have to drop my drawers and dance naked in the middle of Arkham Woods to get the fairies to pay us a visit, I'll do it. Anything to get Brad and his family back to their old selves again.

Sincerely,
Crying for a Cure



Dear Crying,
Good gracious, my dear, you've given me quite a lot to think about over a short period of time. I don't normally allow this column to be infected—*ahem*—with problems of the stomach, rather than the heart, but in this case I'm moved. That being said, first and foremost we must start with what you should not do.

You should not, under any circumstances, allow yourself to be alone with the Johnson family again until they are fully cured. Not one of them alone, not all of them together, none of them. I fear the nature of the infection they're sporting includes a need to spread itself about, and now that your fiancé has, likely forcibly, brought his parents into the fold, so to speak, you are the next and most obvious target. Do not, I repeat, DO NOT allow such a thing to come to happen. Better that you scream your head off and alert the neighbors than care a single jot for your dignity, if such a thing comes to pass.

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Another warning if you do not heed the first: don't attempt to feed them any more food. Clearly, it goes against the nature of these parasites to consume cooked sustenance, and any such presentations will continue to abhor them. I daresay, as long as the neighbors aren't complaining of missing their mousers, likely the number of vermin in their neighborhood has decreased substantially since your fiancé came home.

That being said, what can you do to help your loved ones? Crying, let me be frank. It might already be too late. If they are infected with a, dare I say, otherworldly creature that mimics those we have on this earth, as I fear, there usually comes a point in the little beasts' life where they have consumed such a large proportion of their carrier's internal organs that, even if they are removed, the carrier will still die. If it comes to that, I'm terribly sorry, but the safest thing for you to do is say your goodbyes from a distance and sanitize the situation with fire.

If, however, it is not too late, then getting rid of the parasites should do the trick. Your question about how is a good one, but if you cannot force the infestation out, then you must persuade it. Beasts such as this are frequently in close communion with the natural—and supernatural—world, and deeply connected to the dark, secret places



within it. You must simply give them an option they won't refuse.

There is a ritual which can induce rising tides in a body of water. It does the same thing in a human body, which I'm told is rather uncomfortable. But it should be sufficient to make your fiancé and his family inhospitable homes for these parasites. Once the final moonstone is placed and the incantation finished, the beasts will purge themselves... as long as they have somewhere else life-sustaining to go, which you will provide for them.

I'm talking about offering up a fresh fish, of course. A very large one, mind. Alive might be better, but then it will flop all over the place. Slit open the belly, lay it on a platter, and set it inside the door, but under no circumstances whatsoever should you allow yourself to be within grabbing distance of Brad and his parents.

I know you might feel awkward about this. Who wouldn't balk at having a raw fish left in their front hall? But I assure you, the scent will be agreeable to the beasts and, with the

ritual, encourage them to leave their inhospitable carriers for a new home. At that point, your loved ones with either be cured or, regrettably, deceased. But I say this with all earnestness, my dear—it's far better to be dead sooner rather than later with those things.

After a sufficient amount of time, the fish must be destroyed. Do this first, before checking on the state of your loved ones. Fire is the best way to take care of these sorts of things. You must be thorough.

As for the ritual itself, I gather from your letter that you're an Arkhamite, or at least someone who's been here long enough to know her way around. I don't meet with anyone face-to-face these days, but I will arrange to have four matching moonstones—one to place in each corner outside the house—and the ritual's incantation left behind the counter at Ye Olde Magick Shoppe. Simply give the proprietor your nom de plume and let him know that Lovelorn has left you a gift. He will understand.

And I believe you understand, now, that some problems cannot be handled by normal means.


When it comes to compassion, my dear, let me commend your devotion to your fiancé and his affectionate family. The love you have for them comes across clearly, and I wish you the very best in your rescue. However, please keep in mind that, no matter how dark the horizon might seem at the end of this, it can always get darker. Take care not to allow your tender heart to overwhelm your estimation of your own value, Crying. You are a good person, and one whom I'm sure has many good friends. Rely on them as needed, for I fear trying times are never far away.

Best of luck to you, Crying for a Cure.

Yours in hope,
Lovelorn

Cath Lauria

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