

leaf that lay withered on the floor, and that it was its rolling along the flags. I felt then the force of Shelley's beautiful expression, which I always thought strange before; it is when he says that the passing of the spirits to and fro was like the light footfalls of the driven leaves. I quote from memory, and most probably inaccurately—but no matter—I felt it then. I forgot, it is true, that at the time there was not a breath of wind to stir the leaves. Again the same soft sound came close to me. It seemed as if a soft tread passed the entrance to the chancel, at the same moment the light of a lamp gleamed on the wall opposite me. I could not move. I looked fearfully through a broken crevice in the wall, and there I saw passing slowly outside a figure wrapped in a cloak, with a lamp and a large key in its hand; its head was bowed down, so that I could not catch the features, but the general outline bore an indistinct likeness of the present owner of the demesne, but the figure was larger, and I thought that of an older man. I remembered to have heard that he was very like his deceased relative.

I could hear the throbbing of my heart distinctly against the cold stone on which I leaned—I almost fancied that its pulsations could be heard by the mysterious being upon which I gazed. The figure reached the low and narrow door that led into the chancel in which I stood. It paused and seemed about to enter. The light of the lamp fell upon the features, but my eyes were getting dim, and a vapor floated along before them—I could distinguish nothing but that the features were ghastly pale. I knew no more until I saw that the figure had turned from the chancel and was moving down the roofless corridor that led to the vault. I was relieved. The light of the lamp guided my eye in watching its movements. It unlocked the large iron door of the vault—the bolt shot with a heavy and a dismal sound—the echo rang strangely through the silence—the figure disappeared into the vault, and all again was still.

I now breathed freer. I could not be sure that it was not all an illusion. I looked round fearfully through the chancel—all was just as before, and the stone bars of the great window were still intercepting the flood of silver light that poured in through every interstice. I moved, I put my hand upon everything near me to be sure that all was not a dream. I awoke as it were to the consciousness of material things. I laughed at my folly. I felt convinced that it was all a spectre of my own mind. I remembered that the phantom had not unlocked the door of the vault, and I determined to test its reality by an examination whether the state of the door would correspond with this. I left my nook and walked slowly and stealthily along.

My heart misgave me as I entered the corridor. In vain I summoned my scepticism to my aid—in vain I argued to my fears that, even if it were a spirit,

'Soul and body on the whole
Were odds against a disembodied soul'

There is in the human mind a natural and instinctive dread of meeting with a departed spirit, and where we are to act from the impulse of the moment, the conclusions of the intellect avail but little against the unreasonable instincts of the heart.

I approached the iron door—it was more than half open. I put my hand forward to touch it—it came in contact with a large key which the mysterious visitant had left in the lock. I do not know how it was, but the touch unquestionably tended to dissipate my fears. I felt, certainly, that it was not an illusion of my own fancy that had conjured up the spectre, but strange to say there was even in that feeling a relief, and whether it was that the necessity which the apparition evidently found for opening the door suggested some doubts as to its immateriality, or that the passion for exploring the mysterious became too strong to permit any other feeling to act, I know not; but certain I am that fear was almost, if not altogether, lost in curiosity as I gently pushed wider open the iron door, so as to admit me inside.

It opened on a dark gloominess, in which, looking before me I could see nothing but blackness—from the right, however, there streamed a faint and indistinct light. I recollected the light which was carried by the apparition, and felt satisfied that it had gone in the direction from which the light came. I soon found that the door opened not on the vault itself, but a species of anti-chamber like a reception room. The darkness prevented me ascertaining either its nature or its dimensions—a narrow passage led from this to the right—guided by the glimmering I had seen, I made my way cautiously along this dark passage—a few steps brought me to another aperture through which I had a view of the interior of the vault itself. I saw a view, for as my readers have no doubt anticipated, both the ghost and its lamp were there. I looked some minutes before I could be satisfied that all was real before I could divest my mind of the real effect of the first general impression to examine the strange minutiae in detail. It was a long, low, and narrow apartment, arched at top with stone. Down the centre was placed a stone table which ran the entire length of the apartment—and across this were placed the coffins quite close to each other—the centre table was full—and it seemed as if a side table had been spread for the repast of death—at the far extremity of the chamber, a smaller table had been set, and on this lay one solitary coffin—beside this, on the table, sat the being whose steps I had followed—the lamp was placed so as to throw its full light on the coffin. I was startled by the appearance of another standing upright against the wall close behind; but, on looking again, I perceived the lid was removed from the coffin, beside which the apparition sat, and had been placed

against the wall—the being thus strangely occupied was gazing earnestly upon the uncovered remains which it contained.

I felt the blood run cold to my heart—I had read of ghouls and vampires that come to feed upon the dead. I almost felt myself in the presence of one of these terrible creatures, and I trembled as I thought myself the only human being that had ever surprised them in their fearful feast. The delusion, however, was but momentary. I soon recognised, in the being that thus alarmed me, the owner of the place—the last descendant of the mighty dead who slept in that chamber. I thought of the tales that I had heard of his grief for his betrothed bride. Was it possible that he had thus followed her almost like Orpheus to the realms of death? Could the lover thus bear to gaze upon the mouldering remnants of the features that once had charmed him.

I soon found it was all possible—it was the only construction I could place upon his appearance there at that hour. A projecting piece of masonry screened me from the light of the lamp, and in the shadow I could watch him without being observed myself. The lamp but ill lit the gloomy chamber, and the coffins lay there half shrouded in terrible obscurity—half revealed by a faint light more ghastly than darkness. A damp chill pervaded the heavy and oppressive air—and I could just see round the bowed roof, and down the sides of the chamber, the dews of the charnel-house gathering here and there in humid concretions upon the walls. Some ugly insect things were moving lazily along the wall, and seemed vexed that any living thing but themselves and their loathsome kindred should intrude upon their dreary abode. And yet now and then a deep and heavy buzz went along the air from some winged thing. I fancied that I felt the hideous inmates crawling slowly along my skin. But there sat the bereaved lover, apparently unconscious of the loathsome horrors that surrounded him. He gazed into the lidless coffin as if within it was all that he cared for on earth. My soul sickened when I thought of what met his eye—but he gazed with all the devotion of the lover. It was terrible to see the adoration of that lover—its scene the dismal charnel-house—its object the mouldering corpse. I thought it was the love of insanity.

I was soon satisfied that it was. A loud laugh rang terribly along the dismal vault—one would have thought it might have startled the silent dead from their repose—it was the fearful laugh of the maniac. I now remembered the wild expression of the eye that, amid all his vacuity and intelligence, had so often startled me—the vacant and yet impatient stare with which he seemed often to look for the coming of something that no one saw but himself. He was mad, and his madness still saw in the coffin all that once had been his idol.

And yet how many who are accounted wise in their generation are really devoting themselves to a worship as insane! How many an immortal soul, engaged in the pursuit of all that worldlings prize, is flinging from it its high destiny—and bowling down amid the corruptions of a moral charnel-house, before idols which its distempered imagination has conjured up of objects as loathsome and as perishable as the corpse!

As I gazed upon that maniac, I scarcely knew whether I should pity or envy him. There is always a melancholy in contemplating under any circumstances the aberration of human intellect. It is a melancholy that comes home to our heart's core—it thrills us with the fearful thought how poor the reason on which we pride ourselves—how soon it may be shattered, and all of high imagination or of deep thought, that now we prize, be jumbled up into the grotesque fancies into which its broken fragments may be shaped! There is nothing so fearful to human sensibility—nothing so humiliating to human pride as the ravings of a madman.

I felt all this as I looked upon the maniac in that vault. But yet there was something touching in the constancy, the love, that was his madness. The world had forgotten her with whom he sat—the place that had known her knew her no more—but he still remembered her; it seemed scarcely an act of memory—she was still present with him. He could not bear that the form which he had loved so tenderly should now be left all alone to the grave—and he had followed her with the love that passeth death to bear her company even there. He talked to her—he called upon her name with a startling loudness—nothing answered but the shrill echoes of the vault—he then stooped down into the coffin, and he whispered tenderly her name—he put his ear in the attitude of listening for her reply—and it seemed as if he heard one—then he would talk wildly, and he asked of the dead why she had left him and had chosen to dwell there? And his voice assumed the tone of entreaty as he besought of her to come back—and then suddenly he screamed and gasped for breath. I thought returning consciousness was revealing the reality—but no—he looked earnestly in the coffin, and he told her not to gaze so wildly—then he shrank back with horror and told her she was mad—and it was madness that had made her leave her comfortable home and fix her abode in that chamber—and then he seemed to reason with her upon the folly of a vow which he had imagined she had taken—of eternal celibacy and confinement to that place—and when he found her inexorable in her determination—he groaned, and he lay down upon the cold, damp floor—and still he addressed her in the tone of supplication. But I could bear no more. I rushed from my hiding-place as unobserved as I had come. I felt it a desecration to intrude upon the solemn privacy of that interview with the dead. When I once more reached the open air I felt the halm of the night breeze a relief after the atmosphere I had left. The moon was sinking fast