

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S PREMATURE BURIAL

DARKNESS. GENTLE BREEZES STIRRING VELVET DRAPERIES, THE SLOW, STEADY TICKING OF THE CLOCK. EACH BEAT LINGERS IN THE AIR, AWAITING THE *INEVITABILITY* OF THE NEXT.

LIGHT. THE ORANGE-RED CRACKLING OF THE FIRE, PLEADING DESPERATELY FOR LIFE, BEFORE SETTLING INTO CHARRED, COLORLESS ASHES.

THERE IS *DUALITY* HERE, LIGHT AND DARKNESS, LIFE AND DEATH. AND SOMEWHERE IS A POINT WHERE THE TWO MERGE, WHERE *DEATH* OFFERS NO PROMISE BEYOND ITSELF, AND LIFE WILL DENY EVEN *THAT* MYSTERY. THAT IS THE POINT OF TRUE *DESPAIR*.

THAT IS THE POINT OF *LIVING DEATH*.



SINCE CHILDHOOD, I HAVE SUFFERED FROM **CATALEPSY**... PERIODIC **SEIZURES** WHICH LEAVE MY BODY IN A COLD **CATATONIC STATE**...!



THE MUSCLES BECOME PARALYZED. NOT THE SLIGHTEST **GESTURE** OR **OUTCRY** CAN I MAKE. I AM, BY ALL MEDICAL STANDARDS, **DEAD**.

BUT MY MIND IS EVER **AWAKE**... EVER **AWARE**!



THE SEIZURES MAY LAST FOR **MINUTES**, OR THEY MAY LAST FOR **DAYS**. EACH TIME THEY COME UPON ME, I **PRAY**...

...THAT WHOEVER FINDS ME WILL KNOW OF MY CONDITION ...AND WILL NOT **BURY ME ALIVE**!



I AM CALLED **MORBID** BY SOME, **MAD** BY OTHERS. BUT NOW THAT YOU **KNOW** THE TERRIBLE CURSE I LIVE UNDER, IS IT ANY WONDER I AM **OBSESSED** WITH THE FEAR OF A **PREMATURE BURIAL**?



AAARRGH!

A FEAR THAT HAUNTS BOTH MY **WAKING** AND MY **SLEEPING HOURS**!



JOHN!
JOHN, WHAT IS IT? THE **NIGHTMARE** AGAIN?

YES, SUSAN. IT'S LIKE SOME SORT OF **OMEN**... **WARNING** ME NIGHT AFTER NIGHT OF THE **FATE** THAT AWAITS ME!



DON'T YOU THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME WE CALLED IN DR. ROBERTS? I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT **DOCTORS**, BUT YOU CAN'T GO ON **TORTURING** YOURSELF THIS WAY!

I-I'LL BE ALL RIGHT...

INWARDLY, I KNEW SUSAN WAS **RIGHT**... I **SHOULD** SEE A DOCTOR. YET I DIDN'T **DARE**. PERHAPS I WAS AFRAID OF WHAT HE WOULD **TELL** ME...

...AFRAID I WOULD BE **JUDGED INSANE**.

IN THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOWED,
MY THOUGHTS GREW INCREASINGLY
MORE CHARNEL...!

I TRIED TO REPRESS THEM
THROUGH SOCIAL INTERCOURSE...
CHATting WITH FRIENDS I HAD
LONG IGNORED...!

BUT FEARS AS
DEEP, AS DARK
AS MY OWN ARE
NOT EASILY
REPPRESSED...

...NOR EXPLAINED!

I CANNOT TELL SUSAN, NOR MY
FRIENDS, OF THE THOUGHTS
THAT GNAW AT MY MIND, FOR
THEY ARE BEYOND THEIR SCOPE
OF EXPERIENCE...

... LIKE TRYING TO EXPLAIN
COLOR TO THE BLIND!

BUT AS THE NIGHT DREW ON, I
WAS UNABLE TO CONCENTRATE
ANY LONGER ON THEIR PETTY
SOCIAL BABBLING. I HAD TO
SPEAK...!

CAN'T YOU
IMAGINE
WHAT IT'S LIKE...
BOUND BY THE
TRAPPINGS OF
DEATH, YET
UNABLE TO KNOW
ITS PEACE...

...LYING BENEATH
SIX FEET OF DIRT
AND FILTH...
SUFFOCATING
CLAWING AT THE
LID OF A PINE
PRISON!

I - I'M SORRY...
I DON'T
UNDERSTAND
WHAT'S COME
OVER ME!

IT'S ALL RIGHT,
DARLING! PERHAPS
YOU'D BETTER LIE
DOWN AND GET
SOME REST...!

I'D BETTER BE
GOING, STILL,
I THINK IT'D BE
WISE IF YOU
CONSULTED A
DOCTOR ABOUT
THIS CONDITION,
JOHN.

IT DIDN'T BOTHER ME THAT
I WAS ALONE. I WAS USED
TO THAT.

BUT IT HURT ME FOR
SUSAN'S SAKE.

FOR HER LOVE
IS THE ONLY
THING THAT
KEEPS ME
FROM GOING
COMPLETELY
MAD.

MY THOUGHTS GREW DARKER, MORE TROUBLED WITH EACH PASSING DAY. THE NIGHTMARES INCREASED IN FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY...!

MY OWN INTENSITY BECAME A SORT OF PREMATURE BURIAL!

I DWELT PHYSICALLY IN THE REALM OF THE LIVING, BUT MY THOUGHTS PROBED ONLY THE BOUNDARIES OF THE GRAVE...!

THERE WERE TIMES WHEN THE FANTASIES BECAME SO VIVID, I COULD NOT DISTINGUISH THEM FROM WHAT WAS ACTUALLY AROUND ME...!

COME, MORTAL! COME INTO THE WORLD THAT AWAITS YOU...!

THERE WERE TIMES TOO WHEN I HEARD DEATH SPEAK!


NO, DEATH! I WILL NOT FOLLOW YOU... FOR I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE PLANNING...

...TO TAKE ME HALFWAY BETWEEN YOUR WORLD AND MINE... AND DESERT ME!

HAVEN'T YOU PRESUMPTUOUS MORTALS LEARNED YET...?

"...NOT ONE OF YOU HAS THE POWER TO DENY DEATH! WHEN I CONFRONT YOU, THERE IS ONLY ONE THING YOU MAY DO..."

...TRUST ME!



MY SENSES WERE AFLAME
WITH SIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS
THAT WERE FOUL AND PUTRID...

MY HEAD THROBBED WITH A
PAIN ALMOST BEYOND
HUMAN ENDURANCE, UNTIL
I SWORE MY **BRAIN**
WOULD BURST FORTH
FROM THE **SKULL**...!

MY **STOMACH** WAS KNOTTED
TOO TIGHTLY TO EVEN **VOMIT**...

... AND ONCE AGAIN...
DEATH SPOKE...!

SEE IT THEN...
SEE WHAT YOU
WASTE YOUR
PRECIOUS HOURS
CONTEMPLATING!

IS **THIS** THE WORLD
YOU WOULD CHOOSE,
MORTAL? YOU WHO
HAVE BEEN GRANTED
THE GREATEST
BLESSING OF ALL...
LIFE!

I HAD TO FIND A WAY TO
END THIS MADNESS...
LEST I SHOULD BE
TRAPPED FOREVER
ON THE WRONG SIDE
OF REALITY!

SO I ENDED
IT THE ONLY
WAY I KNEW
HOW...!

I **SCREAMED!**

HOW LONG AFTERWOOD I LAY THERE UNCONCIOUS, I COULD NOT BE CERTAIN....!



JOHN?



IT WAS THE NIGHTMARE AGAIN, WASN'T IT, JOHN?

NO, NOT THE SAME! DIFFERENT! WORSE! FAR WORSE!



YOU LOOKED SO COLD AND PALE...! FOR A MOMENT, I WAS AFRAID YOU WERE --



OH, JOHN... I LOVE YOU...!



MASTER JOHN, I HAVE SOMETHING I WISH TO SHOW YOU!

WHAT IS IT, ROGERS?



SOMETHING WHICH I HOPE WILL SET YOUR MIND AT EASE A BIT, SIR. IT'S A COFFIN!

A COFFIN?



A VERY SPECIAL ONE, SIR!

YOU SEE, IN THE EVENT THAT YOU SHOULD BE BURIED PREMATURELY, YOU HAVE ONLY TO PULL THIS ROPE WITHIN THE COFFIN ITSELF...



WHICH WILL RING THIS ALARM OUTSIDE THE CRYPT!

WHEN IT RINGS, MISTRESS SUSAN OR MYSELF WILL COME RUNNING IMMEDIATELY!

YOU NEEDN'T FEAR BEING TRAPPED ALIVE IN THE GRAVE AGAIN!

THE BUTLER'S DEVICE DID INDEED COMFORT ME FOR SEVERAL WEEKS THEREAFTER. MY NERVES CALMED CONSIDERABLY AND MY THOUGHTS TURNED TO MORE PLEASANT THINGS.

AND WHEN I AWAKENED, THERE WAS BLACKNESS ALL AROUND ME.



AND SILENCE!



I REACHED OUT TO TOUCH THE BLACKNESS...!

IT WAS SOLID.



IN FACT, IT FELT A LOT LIKE WOOD.

THEN ONE NIGHT, IT HAPPENED. I HAD BEEN OVERCOME BY ANOTHER SEIZURE...!

I TRIED TO REMAIN CALM... TO REMEMBER THESE FINAL MOMENTS BEFORE BLACKNESS OVERTOOK ME...!

BUT ONLY ONE THOUGHT COULD I RETAIN.

EVEN KNOWING THE CURSE I LIVED UNDER, THEY WENT AHEAD AND BURIED ME ALIVE!

THE GODDAMN FOOLS!

THE ROPE! WHERE WAS THE ROPE THAT ROGERS HAD MADE FOR ME? MY FINGERS SEARCHED THE DARKNESS, BUT NO TRACE OF IT COULD I FIND.


VAGUELY I REMEMBERED WALKING THROUGH A DISTANT PART OF TOWN JUST BEFORE THE SEIZURE WRACKED MY BODY...!

AND WITH THAT REMEMBRANCE, CAME THE KNOWLEDGE... THE TERRIFYING KNOWLEDGE...

...THAT I WAS NOT BURIED IN MY OWN COFFIN!

THE HORROR OF IT OVERWHELMED ME. I SCREAMED!

AND FROM SOMEWHERE ABOVE ME, THE SCREAM WAS ANSWERED BY A RAY OF LIGHT!



WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE **PROBLEM** NOW, MATE? **RATS** IN THE HOLD, ARE THERE?

W-WHO ARE YOU?



CAPTAIN KLING'S ME NAME! WE DOCKED LAST NIGHT, AND STARTED TO UNLOAD WHEN WE **SPOTTED** YE LAYIN' NEAR THE **WHARFS!**

AYE! THERE WAS A **STORM** BREWIN' SO WE PUT YOU DOWN HERE IN THE **HOLD!**

T-THEN THIS IS A **SHIP**... NOT A **COFFIN?**

INVOLUNTARILY, I HEAVED A SIGH OF **RELIEF**, AND IT SEEMED **YEARS** OF TENSION AND FEAR **DRAINED** FROM MY BODY.

NOW I HAD CONFRONTED DEATH **TWICE**, ONCE IN MY OWN **MIND**...

...AND NOW AGAIN... IN A VERY **REAL**, VERY **PHYSICAL** SENSE! AND BOTH TIMES I HAD **SURVIVED!**



IT'S **OVER**, SUSAN. I KNOW LONGER FEEL **AFRAID** TO LIVE...!

THEN KEEP QUIET AND **DO IT!** VENICE IS THE CITY OF **ROMANCE**, AND I DON'T WANT TO **WASTE** IT BY **TALKING!**

DEEP INSIDE I **KNEW** I WOULD NEVER FEAR THE **GRAVE**...OR **DEATH** AGAIN!