

ROBERT BLAIR

The Grave

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The Grave

Robert Blair (1699–1746)

WHILST some affect the sun, and some the shade,
Some flee the city, some the hermitage;
Their aims as various as the roads they take
In journeying through life; the task be mine
To paint the gloomy horrors of the tomb; **5**

Th' appointed place of rendezvous, where all
These trav'lers meet. Thy succours I implore,
Eternal King! whose potent arm sustains
The keys of hell and death. The Grave, dread thing!
Men shiver when thou'rt nam'd: nature appall'd **10**

Shakes off her wonted firmness. Ah! how dark
Thy long-extended realms, and rueful wastes,
Where nought but silence reigns, and night, dark night,
Dark as was chaos ere the infant sun
Was roll'd together, or had tried his beams **15**

Athwart the gloom profound! The sickly taper
By glimm'ring through thy low-brow'd misty vaults,
Furr'd round with mouldy damp and ropy slime,
Lets fall a supernumerary horror,
And only serves to make thy night more irksome! **20**

Well do I know thee by thy trusty yew,
Cheerless, unsocial plant! that loves to dwell
'Midst skulls and coffins, epitaphs and worms;
Where light-heel'd ghosts and visionary shades,
Beneath the wan cold moon (as fame reports) **25**

Embodied thick, perform their mystic rounds.
No other merriment, dull tree! is thine.
See yonder hallow'd fane! the pious work
Of names once fam'd, now dubious or forgot,
And buried 'midst the wreck of things which were: **30**

There lie interred the more illustrious dead.
The wind is up: hark—how it howls! Methinks
Till now I never heard a sound so dreary.
Doors creak, and windows clap, and night's foul bird,
Rook'd in the spire, screams loud! The gloomy aisles **35**

Black plaister'd, and hung round with shreds of 'scutcheons
And tatter'd coats of arms, send back the sound,
Laden with heavier airs, from the low vaults,
The mansions of the dead! Rous'd from their slumbers,
In grim array the grisly spectres rise, **40**

Grin horrible, and obstinately sullen
Pass and repass, hush'd as the foot of night!
Again the screech owl shrieks—ungracious sound!
I'll hear no more; it makes one's blood run chill.
Quite round the pile, a row of reverend elms, **45**

Coeval near with that, all ragged shew,
Long lash'd by the rude winds; some rift half down
Their branchless trunks, others so thin a-top
That scarce two crows could lodge in the same tree.
Strange things, the neighbours say, have happen'd here **50**

Wild shrieks have issued from the hollow tombs;
Dead men have come again, and walk'd about;
And the great bell has toll'd, unring, untouch'd!
Such tales their cheer, at wake or gossiping,
When it draws near the witching-time of night **55**

Oft in the lone church-yard at night I've seen,
By glimpse of moon-shine, chequering through the trees,
The school-boy, with his satchel in his hand,
Whistling aloud to bear his courage up,
And lightly tripping o'er the long flat stones **60**

(With nettles skirted, and with moss o'ergrown)
That tell in homely phrase who lies below.

Sudden he starts! and hears, or thinks he hears,
The sound of something purring at his heels.
Full fast he flies, and dares not look behind him, **65**

Till out of breath he overtakes his fellows;
Who gather round, and wonder at the tale
Of horrid apparition, tall and ghastly,
That walks at dead of night, or takes his stand
O'er some new open'd grave; and, strange to tell, **70**

Evanishes at crowing of the cock!
The new-made widow too I've sometimes spied,
(Sad sight!) slow moving o'er the prostrate dead:
Listless she crawls along in doleful black,
While bursts of sorrow gush from either eye, **75**

Fast falling down her now untasted cheek.
Prone on the lowly grave of the man
She drops: while busy meddling memory,
In barbarous succession, musters up
The past endearments of their softer hours, **80**

Tenacious of its theme. Still, still she thinks
She sees him, and, indulging the fond thought,
Clings yet more closely to the senseless turf,
Nor heeds the passenger who looks that way.
Invidious Grave—how dost thou rend in sunder **85**

Whom love has knit, and sympathy made one!
A tie more stubborn far than nature's band.
Friendship! mysterious cement of the soul!
Sweet'ner of life! and solder of society!
I owe thee much. Thou hast deserv'd from me **90**

Far, far beyond what I can ever pay.
Oft have I prov'd the labours of thy love,
And the warm efforts of the gentle heart,
Anxious to please. O! when my friend and I
In some thick wood have wander'd heedless on, **95**

Hid from the vulgar eye; and sat us down
Upon the sloping cowslip-cover'd bank,
Where the pure limpid stream has slid along
In grateful errors through the under-wood,
Sweet murm'ring; methought the shrill-tongu'd thrush **100**

Mended his song of love, the sooty blackbird
Mellow'd his pipe, and soften'd every note;
The eglantine smell'd sweeter, and the rose
Assum'd a dye more deep; whilst ev'ry flower
Vied with its fellow plant in luxury **105**

Of dress. O! then the longest summer's day
Seemed too, too much in haste; still the full heart
Had not imparted half; 'twas happiness
Too exquisite to last! Of joys departed,
Not to return, how painful the remembrance! **110**

Dull Grave! thou spoil'st the dance of youthful blood,
Strik'st out the dimple from the cheek of mirth,
And every smirking feature from the face;
Branding our laughter with the name of madness.
Where are the jesters now? the men of health **115**

Complexionally pleasant? Where the droll,
Whose very look and gesture was a joke
To clapping theatres and shouting crowds,
And made e'en thick-lipp'd musing Melancholy
To gather up her face into a smile **120**

Before she was aware? Ah! sullen now
And dumb as the green turf that covers them!
Where are the mighty thunderbolts of war,
The Roman Caesars and the Grecian chiefs,
The boast of story? Where the hot-brain'd youth, **125**

Who the tiara at his pleasure tore
From kings of all the then discovered globe;

And cried, forsooth, because his arm was hamper'd,
And had not room enough to do its work,
Alas, how slim—dishonourably slim!—

130

And cramm'd into a space we blush to name—
Proud royalty! How alter'd in thy looks!
How blank thy features, and how wan thy hue!
Son of the morning! whither art thou gone?
Where hast thou hid thy many-spangled head,

135

And the majestic menace of thine eyes,
Felt from afar? Pliant and pow'rless now;
Like new-born infant wound up in his swathes,
Or victim tumbled flat upon his back,
That throbs beneath the sacrificer's knife;

140

Mute must thou bear the strife of little tongues,
And coward insults of the base-born crowd,
That grudge a privilege thou never hadst,
But only hop'd for in the peaceful Grave—
Of being unmolested and alone!

145

Arabia's gums and odoriferous drugs,
And honours by the heralds duly paid
In mode and form, e'en to a very scruple;
(O cruel irony!) these come too late;
And only mock whom they were meant to honour!

150

Surely there's not a dungeon slave that's buried
In the highway, unshrouded and uncoffin'd,
But lies as soft, and sleeps as sound, as he.
Sorry pre-eminence of high descent
Above the baser born, to rot in state!

155

But see! the well-plum'd hearse comes nodding on,
Stately and slow; and properly attended
By the whole sable tribe, that painful watch
The sick man's door, and live upon the dead,
By letting out their persons by the hour

160

To mimic sorrow, when the heart's not sad!
How rich the trappings, now they're all unfurl'd
And glitt'ring in the sun! Triumphant entries
Of conquerors and coronation pomps
In glory scarce exceed. Great gluts of people

165

Retard th' unwieldy show; whilst from the casements
And houses' tops, ranks behind ranks, close wedg'd,
Hang bellying o'er. But tell us, why this waste?
Why this ado in earthing up a carcass
That's fall'n into disgrace, and in the nostril

170

Smells horrible? Ye undertakers! tell us,
'Midst all the gorgeous figures you exhibit,
Why is the principal conceal'd, for which
You make this mighty stir? 'Tis wisely done;
What would offend the eye in a good picture,

175

The painter casts discreetly into shades.
Proud lineage! now how little thou appear'st!
Below the envy of the private man!
Honour, that meddlesome officious ill,
Pursues thee e'en to death! nor there stops short

180

Strange persecution! when the Grave itself
Is no protection from rude sufferance.
Absurd! to think to over-reach the Grave,
And from the wreck of names to rescue ours!
The best concerted schemes men lay for fame

185

Die fast away; only themselves die faster.
The far-fam'd sculptor and the laurell'd bard,
These bold insurers of deathless fame,
Supply their little feeble aids in vain.
The tapering pyramid, th' Egyptian's pride,

190

And wonder of the world! whose spiky top
Has wounded the thick cloud, and long outliv'd

The angry shaking of the winter's storm;
Yet, spent at last by the injuries of heav'n,
Shatter'd with age and furrow'd o'er with years, **195**

The mystic cone, with hieroglyphics crusted,
At once gives way. O lamentable sight!
The labour of whole ages lumbers down,
A hideous and mis-shapen length of ruins!
Sepulchral columns wrestle but in vain **200**

With all-subduing Time: her cank'ring hand
With calm delib'rate malice wasteth them.
Worn on the edge of days, the brass consumes,
The busto moulders, and the deep cut marble,
Unsteady to the steel, gives up its charge! **205**

Ambition, half convicted of her folly,
Hangs down the head, and reddens at the tale!
Here all the mighty troublers of the earth,
Who swam to sov'reign rule through seas of blood;
Th' oppressive, sturdy, man-destroying villains, **210**

Who ravag'd kingdoms, and laid empires waste,
And in a cruel wantonness of pow'r
Thinn'd states of half their people, and gave up
To want the rest; now, like a storm that's spent,
Lie hush'd, and meanly sneak behind the covert. **215**

Vain thought! to hide them from the general scorn,
That haunts and dogs them like an injured ghost
Implacable! Here too the petty tyrant,
Whose scant domains geographer ne'er notic'd,
And, well for neighb'ring grounds, of arm as short; **220**

Who fix'd his iron talons on the poor,
And grip'd them like some lordly beast of prey,
Deaf to the forceful cries of gnawing hunger,
And piteous plaintive voice of misery
(As if a slave were not a shred of nature, **225**

Of the same common substance with his Lord);
Now tame and humble, like a child that's whipp'd,
Shakes hands with dust, and calls the worm his kinsman!
Nor pleads his rank and birthright. Under ground
Precedency's a jest; vassal and lord, 230

Grossly familiar, side by side consume!
When self-esteem, or other's adulation,
Would cunningly persuade us we were something
Above the common level of our kind,
The Grave gainsays the smooth-complexion'd flattery, 235

And with blunt truth acquaints us what we are.
Beauty! thou pretty plaything! dear deceit!
That steals so softly o'er the stripling's heart,
And gives it a new pulse unknown before!
The Grave discredits thee. Thy charms expung'd, 240

Thy roses faded, and thy lilies soil'd,
What hast thou more to boast of? Will thy lovers
Flock round thee now, to gaze and do thee homage?
Methinks I see thee with thy head low laid;
Whilst surfeited upon thy damask cheek, 245

The high-fed worm, in lazy volumes roll'd,
Riots unscar'd. For this was all thy caution?
For this thy painful labours at thy glass,
T' improve those charms, and keep them in repair,
For which the spoiler thanks thee not? Foul feeder! 250

Coarse fare and carrion please thee full as well,
And leave as keen a relish on the sense.
Look, how the fair one weeps! The conscious tears
Stand thick as dew-drops on the bells of flowers:
Honest effusion! The swoln heart in vain 255

Works hard to put a gloss on its distress.
Strength too! thou surly, and gentle boast

Of those that loud laugh at the village ring!
A fit of common sickness pulls thee down
With greater ease than e'er thou didst the stripling **260**

That rashly dar'd thee to th' unequal fight.
What groan was that I heard? Deep groan indeed,
With anguish heavy laden! let me trace it:
From yonder bed it comes, where the strong man,
By stronger arm belabour'd, gasps for breath **265**

Like a hard hunted beast. How his great heart
Beats thick! his roomy chest by far too scant
To give the lungs full play! What now avail
The strong-built sinewy limbs, and well spread shoulders!
See, how he tugs for life, and lays about him, **270**

Mad with his pain! Eager he catches hold
Of what comes next to hand, and grasps it hard,
Just like a creature drowning! Hideous sight!
O how his eyes stand out, and stare full ghastly!
Whilst the distemper's rank and deadly venom **275**

Shoots like a burning arrow 'cross his bowels,
And drinks his marrow up. Heard you that groan!
It was his last. See how the great Goliath,
Just like a child that brawl'd itself to rest,
Lies still! What mean'st thou then, O mighty boaster, **280**

To vaunt of nerves of thine? What means the bull,
Unconscious of his strength, to play the coward,
And flee before a feeble thing like man;
That, knowing well the slackness of his arm,
Trusts only in the well-invented knife? **285**

With study pale, and midnight vigils spent,
The star-surveying sage close to his eye
Applies the sight-invigorating tube;
And, trav'ling through the boundless length of space,
Marks well the courses of the far-seen orbs, **290**

That roll with regular confusion there,
In ecstasy of thought. But ah! proud man!
Great heights are hazardous to the weak head;
Soon, very soon, thy firmest footing fails,
And down thou dropp'st into that darksome place **295**

Where nor device nor knowledge ever came.
Here the tongue-warrior lies! disabled now,
Disarm'd, dishonour'd, like a wretch that's gagg'd,
And cannot tell his ails to passers-by!
Great man of language! whence this mighty change, **300**

This dumb despair, and drooping of the head?
Though strong Persuasion hung upon thy lip,
And sly Insinuation's softer arts
In ambush lay about thy flowing tongue,
Alas, how chop-fall'n now! thick mists and silence **305**

Rest, like a weary cloud, upon thy breast
Unceasing. Ah! where is the lifted arm,
The strength of action, and the force of words,
The well-turn'd period, and the well-tun'd voice,
With all the lesser ornaments of phrase? **310**

Ah! fled for ever, as they ne'er had been!
Raz'd from the book of fame; or, more provoking,
Perchance some hackney hunger-bitten scribbler
Insults thy memory, and blots thy tomb
With long flat narrative, or duller rhymes, **315**

With heavy halting pace that drawl along—
Enough to rouse a dead man into rage,
And warm, with red resentment, the wan cheek!
Here the great masters of the healing arts,
Those mighty mock-defrauders of the tomb, **320**

Spite of their juleps and catholicons,
Resign to fate! Proud Æsculapius' son,

Where are thy boasted implements of art,
And all thy well-cramm'd magazines of health?
Nor hill, nor vale, as far as ship could go, **325**

Nor margin of the gravel-bottom'd brook,
Escap'd thy rifling hand! From stubborn shrubs
Thou wrung'st their shy retiring virtues out,
And vex'd them in the fire. Nor fly, nor insect,
Nor writhy snake, escap'd thy deep research! **330**

But why this apparatus? why this cost?
Tell us, thou doughty keeper of the grave,
Where are thy recipes and cordials now,
With the long list of vouchers for thy cures?
Alas, thou speak'st not. The bold impostor **335**

Looks not more silly when the cheat's found out.
Here the lank-sided miser, worst of felons,
Who meanly stole (discreditable shift,)
From back and belly too their proper cheer,
Eas'd of a tax it irk'd the wretch to pay **340**

To his own carcass, now lies cheaply lodg'd,
By clam'rous appetites no longer teas'd,
Nor tedious bills of charges and repairs.
But ah, where are his rents, his comings in?
Aye, now you've made the rich man poor indeed! **345**

Robb'd of his gods, what has he left behind?
O cursed lust of gold, when for thy sake
The fool throws up his interest in both worlds,
First starv'd in this, then damn'd in that to come!
How shocking must thy summons be, O Death, **350**

To him that is at ease in his possessions,
Who, counting on long years of pleasure here,
Is quite unfurnish'd for that world to come!
In that dread moment how the frantic soul
Raves round the walls of her clay tenement, **355**

Runs to each avenue, and shrieks for help,
But shrieks in vain! How wishfully she looks
On all she's leaving, now no longer her's!
A little longer, yet a little longer,
O might she stay to wash away her stains, **360**

And fit her for her passage! mournful sight!
Her very eyes weep blood, and every groan
She heaves is big with horror! But the foe,
Like a stanch murd'rer steady to his purpose,
Pursues her close through every lane of life, **365**

Nor misses once the track, but presses on;
Till, forc'd at last to the tremendous verge,
At once she sinks to everlasting ruin!
Sure 'tis a serious thing to die! My soul,
What a strange moment must it be when, near **370**

Thy journey's end, thou hast the gulf in view!
That awful gulf no mortal e'er repass'd
To tell what's doing on the other side!
Nature runs back and shudders at the sight,
And every life-string bleeds at thoughts of parting! **375**

For part they must—body and soul must part!
Fond couple! link'd more close than wedded pair.
This wings its way to its Almighty Source,
The witness of its actions, now its judge;
That drops into the dark and noisome grave, **380**

Like a disabled pitcher of no use.
If death were nothing, and nought after death,
If when men died, at once they ceas'd to be,
Returning to the barren womb of nothing,
Whence first they sprung! then might the debauchee **385**

Untrembling mouth the Heavens; then might the drunkard
Reel over his full bowl, and when 'tis drain'd

Fill up another to the brim, and laugh
At the poor bugbear Death; then might the wretch
That's weary of the world, and tir'd of life, **390**

At once give each inquietude the slip,
By stealing out of being when he pleas'd,
And by what way, whether by hemp or steel:—
Death's thousand doors stand open. Who could force
The ill-pleas'd guest to sit out his full time, **395**

Or blame him if he goes? Sure he does well
That helps himself as timely as he can,
When able. But, if there's an hereafter—
And that there is, conscience, uninfluenc'd
And suffer'd to speak out, tells every man— **400**

Then must it be an awful thing to die:
More horrid yet to die by one's own hand!
Self-murder! Name it not; our island's shame;
That makes her the reproach of neighb'ring states.
Shall nature, swerving from her earliest dictate, **405**

Self-preservation, fall by her own act?
Forbid it, Heaven! Let not, upon disgust,
The shameless hand be fully crimson'd o'er
With blood of its own lord! Dreadful attempt,
Just reeking from self-slaughter, in a rage **410**

To rush into the presence of our Judge!
As if we challeng'd him to do his worst,
And matter'd not his wrath. Unheard-of tortures
Must be reserv'd for such: these herd together;
The common damn'd shun their society, **415**

And look upon themselves as fiends less foul.
Our time is fix'd, and all our days are number'd!
How long, how short, we know not: this we know,
Duty requires we calmly wait the summons,
Nor dare to stir till Heaven shall give permission: **420**

Like sentries that must keep their destin'd stand,
And wait th' appointed hour till they're reliev'd.
Those only are the brave that keep their ground,
And keep it to the last. To run away
Is but a coward's trick: to run away **425**

From this world's ills, that at the very worst
Will soon blow o'er, thinking to mend ourselves
By boldly venturing on a world unknown,
And plunging headlong in the dark—'tis mad!
No frenzy half so desperate as this. **430**

Tell us, ye dead I will none of you in pity
To those you left behind disclose the secret?
O! that some courteous ghost would blab it out
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be.
I've heard that souls departed have sometimes **435**

Forewarn'd men of their death. 'Twas kindly done
To knock and give the alarm. But what means
This stinted charity? 'Tis but lame kindness
That does its work by halves. Why might you not
Tell us what 'tis to die? Do the strict laws **440**

Of your society forbid your speaking
Upon a point so nice? I'll ask no more.
Sullen, like lamps in sepulchres, your shine
Enlightens but yourselves. Well—'tis no matter:
A very little time will clear up all, **445**

And make us learn'd as you are, and as close.
Death's shafts fly thick! Here fall the village swain,
And there his pamper'd lord! The cup goes round,
And who so artful as to put it by?
'Tis long since death had the majority, **450**

Yet, strange, the living lay it not to heart!
See yonder maker of the dead man's bed,

The sexton, hoary-headed chronicle!
Of hard unmeaning face, down which ne'er stole
A gentle tear; with mattock in his hand **455**

Digs through whole rows of kindred and acquaintance,
By far his juniors! Scarce a scull's cast up
But well he knew its owner, and can tell
Some passage of his life. Thus hand in hand
The sot has walk'd with Death twice twenty years; **460**

And yet ne'er younker on the green laughs louder,
Or clubs a smuttier tale: when drunkards meet,
None sings a merrier catch, or lends a hand
More willing to his cup. Poor wretch! he minds not
That soon some trusty brother of the trade **465**

Shall do for him what he has done for thousands.
On this side, and on that, men see their friends
Drop off, like leaves in Autumn; yet launch out
Into fantastic schemes, which the long livers
In the world's hale and undegenerate days **470**

Could scarce have leisure for; fools that we are!
Never to think of Death and of ourselves
At the same time!—as if to learn to die
Were no concern of ours. O more than sottish!
For creatures of a day in gamesome mood **475**

To frolic on eternity's dread brink,
Unapprehensive; when, for aught we know,
The very first swoln surge shall sweep us in!
Think we, or think we not, time hurries on
With a resistless unremitting stream, **480**

Yet treads more soft than e'er did midnight thief,
That slides his hand under the miser's pillow,
And carries off his prize. What is this world?
What but a spacious burial-field unwall'd,
Strew'd with Death's spoils, the spoils of animals **485**

Savage and tame, and full of dead men's bones!
The very turf on which we tread once liv'd;
And we that live must lend our carcasses
To cover our own offspring: in their turns
They too must cover theirs. 'Tis here all meet!

490

The shiv'ring Icelander and sun-burnt Moor;
Men of all climes, that never met before,
And of all creeds, the Jew, the Turk, the Christian.
Here the proud prince, and favourite yet prouder,
His sov'reign's keeper, and the people's scourge,

495

Are huddled out of sight! Here lie abash'd
The great negotiators of the earth,
And celebrated masters of the balance,
Deep read in stratagems and wiles of courts,
Now vain their treaty-skill; Death scorns to treat.

500

Here the o'erloaded slave flings down his burden
From his gall'd shoulders; and, when the stern tyrant,
With all his guards and tools of power about him,
Is meditating new unheard-of hardships,
Mocks his short arm, and quick as thought escapes,

505

Where tyrants vex not, and the weary rest.
Here the warm lover, leaving the cool shade,
The tell-tale echo, and the babbling stream,
Time out of mind the fav'rite seats of love,
Fast by his gentle mistress lays him down,

510

Unblasted by foul tongue. Here friends and foes
Lie close, unmindful of their former feuds.
The lawn-rob'd prelate and plain presbyter,
Erewhile that stood aloof, as shy to meet,
Familiar mingle here, like sister-streams

515

That some rude interposing rock has split.
Here is the large-limb'd peasant; here the child

Of a span long, that never saw the sun,
Nor press'd the nipple, strangled in life's porch.
Here is the mother with her sons and daughters; **520**

The barren wife; the long-demurring maid,
Whose lonely unappropriated sweets
Smil'd like yon knot of cowslips on the cliff,
Not to be come at by the willing hand.
Here are the prude severe, and gay coquette, **525**

The sober widow, and the young green virgin,
Cropp'd like a rose before 'tis fully blown,
Or half its worth disclos'd. Strange medley here!
Here garrulous old age winds up his tale;
And jovial youth, of lightsome vacant heart, **530**

Whose every day was made of melody,
Hears not the voice of mirth; the shrill-tongu'd shrew,
Meek as the turtle-dove, forgets her chiding.
Here are the wise, the generous, and the brave;
The just, the good, the worthless, and profane; **535**

The downright clown, and perfectly well-bred;
The fool, the churl, the scoundrel and the mean;
The supple statesman, and the patriot stern;
The wrecks of nations and the spoils of time,
With all the lumber of six thousand years! **540**

Poor man! how happy once in thy first state,
When yet but warm from thy great Maker's hand
He stamp'd thee with his image, and well pleas'd,
Smil'd on his last fair work! Then all was well.
Sound was the body, and the soul serene; **545**

Like two sweet instruments, ne'er out of tune,
That play their several parts. Nor head nor heart
Offer'd to ache; nor was there cause they should,
For all was pure within. No fell remorse,
Nor anxious castings up of what might be, **550**

Alarm'd his peaceful bosom. Summer seas
Shew not more smooth when kiss'd by southern winds,
Just ready to expire. Scarce importun'd,
The generous soil with a luxurious hand
Offer'd the various produce of the year, **555**

And every thing most perfect in its kind.
Blessed, thrice blessed days! But ah! how short!
Bless'd as the pleasing dreams of holy men;
But fugitive, like those, and quickly gone.
O slipp'ry state of things! What sudden turns, **560**

What strange vicissitudes, in the first leaf
Of man's sad history! To-day most happy,
And ere to-morrow's sun has set most abject!
How scant the space between these vast extremes!
Thus far'd it with our sire; not long he enjoy'd **565**

His Paradise! Scarce had the happy tenant
Of the fair spot due time to prove its sweets,
Or sum them up, when straight he must be gone,
Ne'er to return again! And must he go?
Can nought compound for the first dire offence **570**

Of erring man? Like one that is condemn'd
Fain would he trifle time with idle talk,
And parley with his fate. But 'tis in vain.
Not all the lavish odours of the place,
Offer'd in incense, can procure his pardon, **575**

Or mitigate his doom. A mighty angel
With flaming sword forbids his longer stay,
And drives the loit'rer forth: nor must he take
One last and farewell round. At once he lost
His glory and his God! If mortal now, **580**

And sorely maim'd, no wonder—Man has sinn'd!
Sick of his bliss, and bent on new adventures,

Evil he would needs try; nor tried in vain.
Dreadful experiment—destructive measure—
Where the worst thing could happen, is success! **585**

Alas! too well he sped; the good he scorn'd
Stalk'd off reluctant, like an ill-used ghost,
Not to return; or, if it did, its visits,
Like those of angels, short, and far between:
Whilst the black demon, with his hell-scap'd train, **590**

Admitted once into its better room,
Grew loud and mutinous, nor would be gone;
Lording it o'er the man, who now too late
Saw the rash error which he could not mend;
An error fatal not to him alone, **595**

But to his future sons, his fortune's heirs.
Inglorious bondage! human nature groans
Beneath a vassalage so vile and cruel,
And its vast body bleeds through every vein.
What havoc hast thou made, foul monster, sin! **600**

Greatest and first of ills! the fruitful parent
Of woes of all dimensions! But for thee
Sorrow had never been. All-noxious thing,
Of vilest nature! Other sorts of evils
Are kindly circumscrib'd, and have their bounds. **605**

The fierce volcano, from its burning entrails
That belches molten stone and globes of fire,
Involv'd in pitchy clouds of smoke and stench,
Mars the adjacent fields for some leagues round,
And there it stops. The big-swoln inundation, **610**

Of mischief more diffusive, raving loud,
Buries whole tracts of country, threat'ning more:
But that too has its shore it cannot pass.
More dreadful far than those, sin has laid waste,
Not here and there a country, but a world; **615**

Dispatching at a wide extended blow
Entire mankind, and for their sakes defacing
A whole creation's beauty with rude hands;
Blasting the foodful grain, and loaded branches,
And marking all along its way with ruin! **620**

Accursed thing! O where shall fancy find
A proper name to call thee by, expressive
Of all thy horrors? Pregnant womb of ills!
Of temper so transcendently malign,
That toads and serpents of most deadly kind **625**

Compar'd to thee are harmless! Sickneses,
Of every size and symptom, racking pains,
And bluest plagues, are thine! See how the fiend
Profusely scatters the contagion round!
Whilst deep-mouth'd Slaughter, bellowing at her heels, **630**

Wades deep in blood new-spilt; yet for to-morrow
Shapes out new work of great uncommon daring,
And inly pines till the dread blow is struck.
But hold! I've gone too far; too much discover'd
My father's nakedness and nature's shame. **635**

Here let me pause, and drop an honest tear,
One burst of filial duty and condolence,
O'er all those ample deserts Death hath spread,
This chaos of mankind! O great man-eater!
Whose every day is carnival, not sated yet! **640**

Unheard-of epicure, without a fellow!
The veriest gluttons do not always cram;
Some intervals of abstinence are sought
To edge the appetite; thou seekest none!
Methinks the countless swarms thou hast devour'd, **645**

And thousands that each hour thou gobblest up,
This, less than this, might gorge thee to the full.

But ah! rapacious still, thou gasp'st for more;
Like one, whole days defrauded of his meals,
On whom lank Hunger lays her skinny hand, 650

And whets to keenest eagerness his cravings:
As if Diseases, Massacres, and Poison,
Famine, and War, were not thy caterers!
But know that thou must render up the dead,
And with high interest too! they are not thine; 655

But only in thy keeping for a season,
Till the great promis'd day of restitution;
When loud diffusive sound from brazen trump
Of strong lung'd cherub shall alarm thy captives,
And rouse the long, long sleepers into life, 660

Daylight, and liberty.—
Then must thy doors fly open, and reveal
The minds that lay long forming under ground,
In their dark cells immur'd; but now full ripe,
And pure as silver from the crucible, 665

That twice has stood the torture of the fire,
And inquisition of the forge. We know
Th' illustrious Deliverer of mankind,
The Son of God, thee foil'd. Him in thy power
Thou could'st not hold; self-vigorous he rose, 670

And, shaking off thy fetters, soon retook
Those spoils his voluntary yielding lent:
(Sure pledge of our releasement from thy thrall!)
Twice twenty days he sojourn'd here on earth,
And shewed himself alive to chosen witnesses, 675

By proofs so strong, that the most slow assenting
Had not a scruple left. This having done,
He mounted up to Heaven. Methinks I see him
Climb the aerial heights, and glide along
Athwart the severing clouds: but the faint eye, 680

Flung backwards in the chase, soon drops its hold,
Disabled quite, and jaded with pursuing.
Heaven's portals wide expand to let him in,
Nor are his friends shut out: as a great prince
Not for himself alone procures admission, **685**

But for his train; it was his royal will,
That where he is there should his followers be.
Death only lies between, a gloomy path!
Made yet more gloomy by our coward fears!
But nor untrod, nor tedious; the fatigue **690**

Will soon go off. Besides, there's no bye-road
To bliss. Then why, like ill-condition'd children,
Start we at transient hardships in the way
That leads to purer air and softer skies,
And a ne'er-setting sun? Fools that we are! **695**

We wish to be where sweets unwith'ring bloom;
But straight our wish revoke, and will not go.
So have I seen, upon a summer's even,
Fast by the rivulet's brink, a youngster play:
How wishfully he looks to stem the tide! **700**

This moment resolute, next unresolv'd,
At last he dips his foot; but as he dips,
His fears redouble, and he runs away
From th' inoffensive stream, unmindful now
Of all the flowers that paint the further bank, **705**

And smil'd so sweet of late. Thrice welcome Death!
That, after many a painful bleeding step,
Conducts us to our home, and lands us safe
On the long wish'd-for shore. Prodigious change!
Our bane turn'd to a blessing. Death disarm'd **710**

Loses its fellness quite; all thanks to him
Who scourg'd the venom out! Sure the last end

Of the good man is peace. How calm his exit!
Night-dews fall not more gently to the ground,
Nor weary worn-out winds expire so soft. **715**

Behold him in the ev'ning-tide of life,
A life well spent, whose early care it was
His ripper years should not upbraid his green;
By unperceiv'd degrees he wears away;
Yet like the sun seems larger at his setting! **720**

High in his faith and hopes, look how he reaches
After the prize in view! and, like a bird
That's hamper'd struggles hard to get away!
Whilst the glad gates of sight are wide expanded
To let new glories in, the first fair fruits **725**

Of the fast-coming harvest! Then—O then
Each earth-born joy grows vile, or disappears,
Shrunk to a thing of nought! O how he longs
To have his passport sign'd, and be dismiss'd!
'Tis done—and now he's happy! The glad soul **730**

Has not a wish uncrown'd. E'en the lag flesh
Rests too in hope of meeting once again
Its better half, never to sunder more.
Nor shall it hope in vain: the time draws on
When not a single spot of burial-earth, **735**

Whether on land or in the spacious sea,
But must give back its long committed dust
Inviolate: and faithfully shall these
Make up the full account; not the least atom
Embezzled, or mislaid, of the whole tale. **740**

Each soul shall have a body ready furnish'd;
And each shall have his own. Hence, ye profane!
Ask not how this can be. Sure the same power
That rear'd the piece at first, and took it down,
Can re-assemble the loose scatter'd parts, **745**

And put them as they were. Almighty God
Has done much more; nor is his arm impair'd
Through length of days; and what he can he will:
His faithfulness stands bound to see it done.
When the dread trumpet sounds, the slumb'ring dust,

750

Not unattentive to the call, shall wake;
And every joint possess its proper place,
With a new elegance of form, unknown
To its first state. Nor shall the conscious soul
Mistake its partner; but, amidst the crowd

755

Singling its other half, into its arms
Shall rush with all th' impatience of a man
That's new come home, who having long been absent,
With haste runs over every different room,
In pain to see the whole. Thrice happy meeting!

760

Nor time, nor death, shall ever part them more!
'Tis but a night, a long and moonless night;
We make the grave our bed, and then are gone!
Thus at the shut of even, the weary bird
Leaves the wide air, and in some lonely brake

765

Cow'rs down, and dozes till the dawn of day;
Then claps his well-fledg'd wings, and bears away.

THE
GRAVE,
A Poem.

Illustrated by twelve Engravings

Executed

BY

LOUIS SCHIAVONETTI,

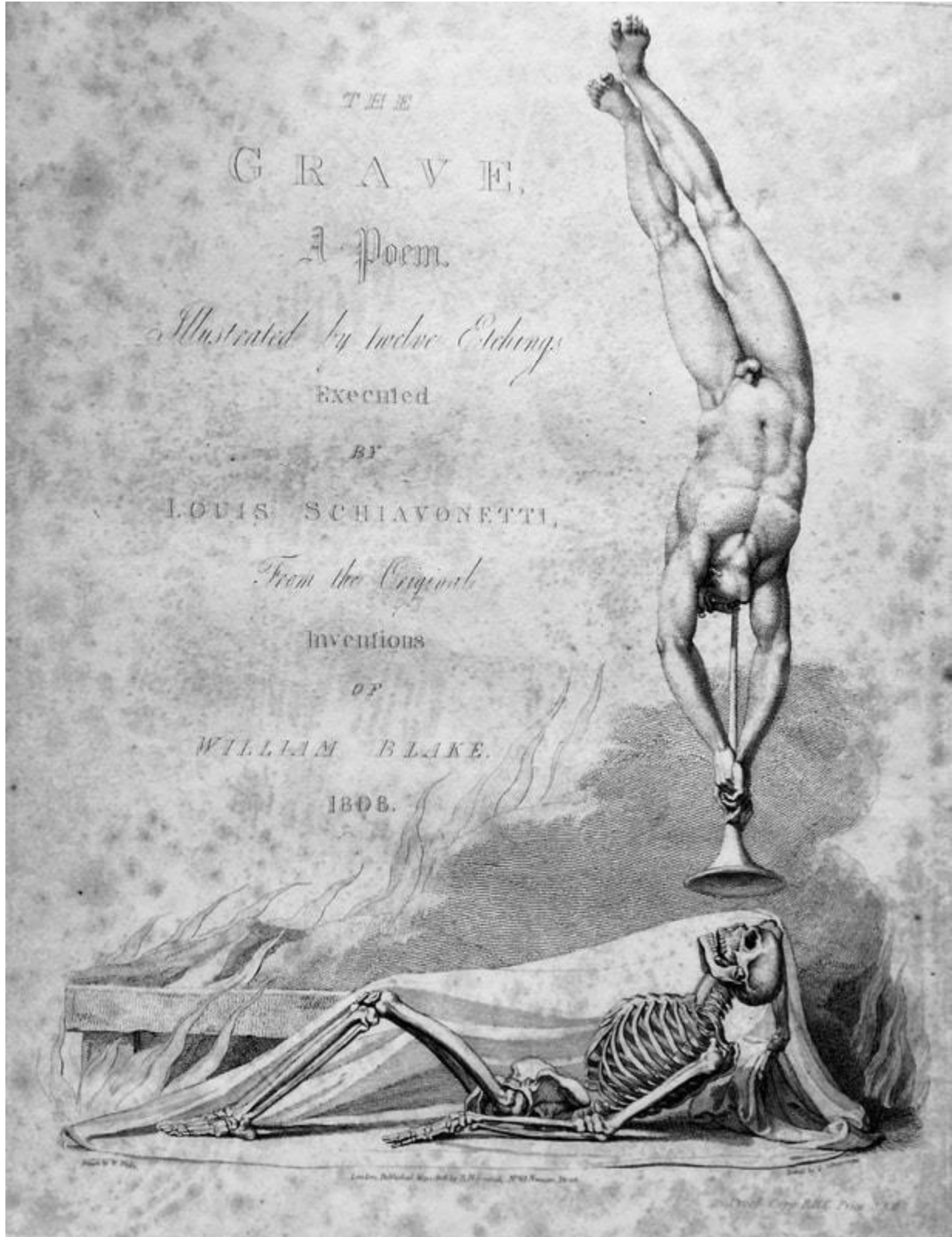
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The Characters

Reading Rainbow Tip: Who is the main character? Do they have any friends or helpers? Is there someone who challenges the main character? Instead of just naming people, talk about what makes each person memorable.



Reading Rainbow Tip: Find an image online of the main character, or an image that resembles this character in some way, then replace the image above.

Plot

1. Beginning: what happened at the beginning?
2. Middle: usually the highest point of action in the story.
3. Ending: how did everything finally work out?

Reading Rainbow Tip: Think about the most important events in the story. Be careful not to retell the whole story but give enough detail so that the plot makes sense to someone who hasn't read the book.

Conclusion

Reading Rainbow Tip: It's important to give your opinion! Would you recommend this book to someone else?

