

Dig Me Up

My name is Alexander Hostler of Wilmington North Carolina. I am the favored son of one of the most prominent families in the region. But this story is not so much about me as it is about my dear friend, Samuel Jocelyn. The story I am about to tell you seems altogether too fantastic to be the truth. I can only wish that it was fabricated but, alas, I will swear on my immortal soul that it is true and happened just as I describe it.

Samuel Jocelyn Jr. was also from a most distinguished and wealthy Wilmington family. He was my friend, a well educated and intelligent fellow. He had earned his law degree and in the footsteps of his father Samuel Jocelyn Sr. he had plans to open his own law firm.

We often met over dinner at one of the local inns and enjoyed many serious discussions about things of this life and of the next. It was during one of these deep discussions we made a pact. Whichever of us died first would return and communicate with the other, so as to settle the troublesome and 'oft debated question of life after death.

Samuel had introduced me to his fiance, Mary Ann Simpson. At once I felt a deep dislike of the lady and now regret having not shared my misgivings with my friend. I am a man of decorum and decided it best to hold my tongue, knowing that my opinion would have not in the least dissuaded Samuel from marriage. He was deeply in love with Miss Simpson and that proved to be his undoing.

On July 13th 1809 they married in an elaborate ceremony at St. James Church. To the rest of the world their marriage must have seemed idyllic, but I had seen enough of the bride's quarrelsome nature, and knew my friend well enough to know

that he was desperately unhappy. Later he confided to me that they quarreled often and he could not seem to please his wife, even in the smallest things. In the unusually, cold March of 1810 it all came to a tragic end.

The couple were staying, along with friends, at a hunting lodge when they had a massive argument and shouting match. Samuel stormed out and jumped on his horse. He rode away in a rage and never came back. The horse was found and two days later Samuel's body was found where the horse apparently had thrown him. He was in a shallow creek, frozen to death.

The funeral was the next day, at St. James church, attended by many friends of the family. I was deeply grieved by the loss of my friend and could not find any peace or sleep that night as my thoughts were centered on him and the great pity of a fine life lost in its prime.

The night after his funeral I was in my study, lost in thought and the grief of my heart. A strange light gradually increased and in the middle of that light Samuel appeared. I was truly shocked and dismayed at the sight of him. He was wearing the suit he was buried in, every detail was plain, the chain of his pocket watch, his wedding ring.

"Alexander, why did you let them bury me when I wasn't dead?" he asked.

Joy at seeing my friend again gave way to fear. I couldn't believe I was conversing with a ghost.

"But you were dead, Samuel. I saw for myself. You were frozen to death."

"I was not dead. They buried me alive, why did you let them do it, Alexander?"

As suddenly as he appeared the spectre was gone, leaving me greatly shaken and afflicted with dark thoughts.

What if he had been buried alive?

The thought of it sickened me and multiplied my grief.

These appearances continued and repeatedly Samuel told me he was buried alive. Finally during an appearance he demanded,

“Then go to the graveyard and dig me up, see for yourself.”

Nothing in me wanted to dig up a grave and look at a decomposing corpse but the appearances had continued until I could endure them no more. I confided my experience to one of our mutual friends, Lewis Tumor, who said,

“Don't you remember that pact you and Sam made, that whoever died first would appear to the other one. Well, I say let's go dig him up. Let's see if there is any truth in these visitations or if they're only the imagination of a grieving friend.”

Though filled with dread, I agreed to go. The next night we and a few others went to the graveyard after dark. We took turns digging the dirt from Samuel's grave. Each shovel full that was removed increased my sense of dread. Even if he had been dead when buried I didn't want to look upon a body of one who was like a brother to me, riddled with worms and decay. Finally the shovel struck the top of the wooden coffin. Chills shook my body. When the entire coffin was uncovered we attached ropes and pulled it up onto the grass. Lewis and another began to pry the top off with bars. When the nails were pulled loose they lifted the top. A rush of fetid air, the stench of death caused us all to pull out our handkerchiefs and hold them over our noses. We held the lanterns near the coffin so we could see the contents.

“Jesus, Joseph and Mary,” I screamed as I looked upon the ravished body inside the coffin.

Samuel was lying on his stomach, not at all in the position for burial. A pool of blood was beneath him and splatters were all over the linen lining and across the wood top. His fingernails were embedded in the wood. I was thankful to God that his face was turned away and I was not forced to see the agony reflected in his once, fine features. We quickly said prayers and reburied the tragic figure.

The sights and sounds of that fateful night have never left my memory, nor has the memory of the ghostly appearances of my dead friend.

Samuel has never appeared to me again. His spirit has been seen by many, beyond the gates of the graveyard, moving among the gravestones or leaning against his own. His family finally had his gravestone removed to quell the crowds of the curious who began to visit in hopes of seeing his ghost.

I know I shall see that horrible scene of live burial in my memory and grieve this tragic ending of my friend, until my last day of this life. I know Samuel waits for me somewhere beyond and the surety of life after death is the only thing that has made this unfortunate experience bearable.