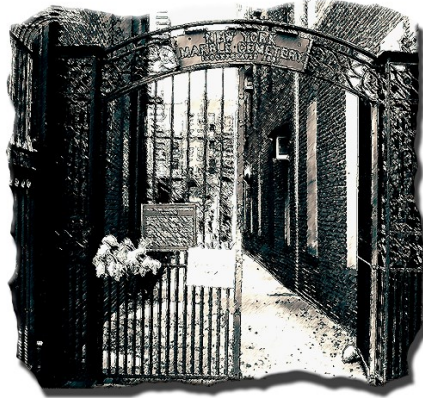


The Past Is the Present

by Richard E. Schiff



Albert Conklin IV stood in the evening in his apartment and read from the letter he received from his Grandmother. He was thirty-five years of age and lived in the oldest corner of Greenwich Village.

It was 1965, and the Village was in it's Bohemian Prime. Albert had just graduated from New York University, with a doctorate as had done his Father, Grandfather and Great Grandfather.

For years he had been told he was the image of his Great Grandfather, and he was shown that in a daguerreotype taken of his namesake in 1850. It was true, he looked exactly like his Great Grandad who had died at thirty-five in 1880. He was

buried not far from where Albert lived, in an old Manhattan cemetery that had opened in 1832. The letter chided him to go visit his namesake and ancestor. His Grandmother felt he should bring flowers to put on the Grave. “Your Father did just that, Albert, and you should follow his fine and loyal example.”

Albert had read this letter the night before and that afternoon he went to a florist and bought a bouquet to lay on Great Grandad’s grave. He planned to go the next morning and had placed the fresh flowers in his fridge to keep them new.

That night, he slept like a baby, but had a strange dream that he was back in 1850 and met his namesake, face to face. “By God, Great Grandpa, I do look just like you, don’t I?”

The eerie look on Great Grandad’s face was frightening. The Great Grandpa’s voice was also like his own. He felt like he was looking in a mirror and hearing his own voice come back to him.

“Albert,” the ghostly image said, “It is true that you do look like me. But how can you be in this room, when I have been dead for

over 100 years?” That was when Albert awoke in a sweat. It was near Halloween, after all, and it was cooling off. “Dreams can cause the sweats!” He thought.

The Sun was already up, and he wanted to get a head start on the day, so he got right up and dashed into the shower. Drying himself, he looked into the mirror, and to his surprise the reflection he saw looking back at him was the Great Grandfather, dressed in the period clothes he wore in the dream. Albert shook his head and when he opened his eyes it was him looking back at himself. “Christ, that was scary.” He said aloud.

“Dreams can come back to you even when you are awake,” he thought. He dried himself and put on a clean shirt and a necktie, and then his new black suit, which he thought was appropriate for a visit to a graveyard. In fact he had not visited a gravesite since his grandfather had passed away.

He felt he looked natty and well groomed. He walked over to the telephone in his parlor and phoned his long-time girlfriend, Eunice Brown. They had met in college and hit it off right away. She was a writer.

“Eunice? It’s Albert, how are you today?”
Albert adjusted his cufflinks.

“Oh fine, Al. So, what’s up with you on this fine Saturday?”

“Oh, my Grandmother haunted me to go leave flowers on my Great Grandad’s grave.” He tugged his jacket sleeves down and straightened his tie.

“Should I come over later? I have the key so maybe I will cook your dinner.”

“Sounds like a deal. I should be back well before 3:pm. There’s a fine steak in the refrigerator and there are potatoes in the veggie bin, if you don’t mind?”

“You got a deal. Have fun at the Cemetery.” She joked and heard him laugh.

He looked at the clock on the wall, and saw it was nearly 12 noon. He had slept late because Saturday was his day for relaxation.

Grabbing the flowers from the refrigerator, he took one last look at himself in the mirror, and left, locking the door behind

him. He loved living in the Village, as it was so safe.

Outside was a sunny day, but there was a slight breeze, but it was still warmish, as October often was in the City. Spotting a cab, he hailed it and climbed in.

“Where to, Bub?” the cabbie asked him.

Albert gave him the address over on 2nd avenue. He knew the Cemetery as the Marble Cemetery and the cabbie seemed to know where it was. There wasn’t much traffic in the City, so it took them only 10 minutes to circumnavigate to 2nd avenue.

The entrance was a huge wrought iron fence that read Marble Cemetery Founded in 1830. The gate was slightly ajar, so paying the cabbie Albert walked though with his flowers.

For some reason, he figured there would be an attendant out there but there was no one in the graveyard but him.

The graves were very few, as the place was quite small. There were no new spaces for graves, and the place was somewhat ill groomed. The grass was long, as though it

was not cut for at least a month, and the graves were marked by flat marble slabs.

All of them were very old and their writing on them quite faded in the city pollution. Even marble wasn't immune from deterioration.

He had to stoop far over and dust off the dirt to read the inscriptions. After 6 or 7 attempts he finally located the grave of his Great Grandfather. There it was cut in Marble, "Albert Conklin."

"Well, Great Grandfather, Grandma got me to come here and place flowers on your grave.

Suddenly the sky turned grey. Albert looked up to see a great cloud cover the whole graveyard. The sky got so black you would expect a thunderstorm, but no rain came.

It was hard to see in the darkness and then a strange feeling came over Albert. He felt like he was going to faint. Finally, he sat down on the marble stone over Great Grandpa's grave.

It only seemed like minutes had passed out but when he came to his watch read 5:pm. “I hope Eunice is not still waiting for me!”

“I must have fallen asleep!” he said out loud.

He heard what sounded like a muffled laugh coning from the grave, and he said, “You have been here too long and it’s starting to spook you. So, he picked himself up and walked, if somewhat unsteadily toward the gate. When he got outside on the street he still felt a little woozy. The sky was already beginning to darken. Summer’s long days were gone, and this was Autumn and the city buildings made it seem even darker at this hour.

Albert decided to walk home and by the time he got to the door of his building, he felt very weak. Slowly he dragged himself up the stairs to his apartment door. Opening it with his key he found it empty. There was a note taped to the lamp in the parlor, which he unfolded and read.

“Had to leave at 5pm as I had a reading of poetry to attend to. Call me tomorrow to

let me know you are alright.” Signed Eunice.

Albert was growing weaker and weaker, so he half crawled into the bathroom and groped blindly for the light switch. It went on and nearly blinded him.

He turned to look into the mirror and there, to his horror, he saw the face of his great grandfather, completely gray and decomposed. He shuddered and right before his eyes he fell to the floor, into a pile of dust and bones.

The mass of his body decayed into a suit of tattered clothing of the 19th century. With that the lights went out forever.

THE GRISLY END



©2018 Richard E. Schiff All Rights Reserved.