

*Buried Alive*  
by “Delta”

One evening in midwinter, the residence of Doctor Sharpe was occupied by a merry party, consisting of the Sharpes’ relatives and friends, met to commemorate the diamond wedding of the doctor and his bride, who was still beautiful with that beauty which a pure soul always gives to its possessor.

The dance was over—a social hop, got up chiefly for the young folks. So was the supper—a comfortable affair—which made every one feel at peace with all the world. Speeches had been made—prospective and retrospective, complimenting and congratulating the worthy host and hostess, who smilingly graced either end of the social board. There was now a lull, in anticipation of a reply from the doctor.

“Either a speech or a story, grandpa,” suggested a favorite granddaughter.

“I think I shall tell you a story,” said Dr. Sharpe, presently. “Many of you have heard it already; but it will be new to the young folks.”

“Hurrah, grandpa; a story—a story!” shouted the little ones, and the old doctor began.

“This party—to commemorate our diamond wedding—reminds me of a story about the valuable diamond ring now glittering on your grandmother’s finger, which was once buried with its owner.”

“Grandma buried?” said several little ones, derisively.

“Yes—buried alive. It was the diamond ring that saved her. It happened when I was quite a young man, and the city much smaller than it is now. Madison Square was far in the country; Canal street was a ditch. A young doctor who had recently settled in the city was called one night to see a patient in the outskirts of the town—for it did not hold a higher rank then. As he was returning home, along a solitary road that skirted a churchyard, which stood well beyond the main mass of the township, he was somewhat astonished to see a light glimmering through one of the windows of the sacred edifice. With roused curiosity, which made him wonder who could be there at two o’clock in the morning, he leaped the fence, walked up the pathway, and peeped through one of the windows. Familiarity with dead bodies and dissecting-rooms had made him fearless.

“To his surprise he saw two men, with blackened faces, one carrying a dark lantern, moving toward the chancel; from which they removed the carpet and then carefully examined the floor. The chancel was used as a burying vault. What could be their object? Were they resurrectionists bent on getting a dead body for dissection? This was an unlikely supposition; for who could want a subject when the hospitals were full—deaths frequent, and bodies plentiful? Clearly, they were there for some other and probably a sinister motive. What could it be?

“Presently they stopped in their search, and with a crowbar lifted the stone which gave access to

the vault. On turning it back it fell with a loud, hollow noise, which startled them so that they were evidently inclined to run. Then they looked at one another as if ashamed of their fears, listened, and peered into the dark vault below. At last they plucked up courage and descended, one after the other.

“Determined to fathom the mystery, the young doctor quietly opened one of the windows, noiselessly crept into the church, then on to a corner, where he could see the two worthies at work, and be himself unseen. Their first exploit was to pick the lock of a casket which had been placed there only twelve hours before. He had seen the funeral, and heard the singular story of the buried lady—a young widow, who had lately arrived while travelling, partly for health, and partly to soften the sorrow of her recent bereavement. The newspapers of the days were full of the affair. She had been found lying inanimate on a lounge in a room of her hotel, and among her papers there was one giving her address, and directions in the event of her death to have a costly ring—her husband’s gift—buried with her. This had been scrupulously followed. Remembering this it was not difficult to arrive at the conclusive that it was the lady’s jewelry that the thieves were after.

“The doctor felt that it would be madness to interfere with their design, as both were powerful men, and armed with bowie-knives, while he was weaponless; and so he resolved to keep in concealment. But scarcely had he arrived at this decision when events took a sudden and unexpected turn.

“Having forced the casket open, and brought the lady’s body into view, they pulled out her right arm, on one finger of which the magnificent diamond flashed brilliantly as the light of the lantern fell on its different facets. How the eyes of the two rascals glistened as they saw it! They tried to pull it off the finger. But the latter was swollen, and it wouldn’t move. With a muttered curse, one of them took a penknife out of his pocket and gave the finger a fierce gash—intending to cut the ring off, and, if necessary, the finger.

“The cut—which penetrated to the bone—was rapidly made; for the fellows were in a hurry to secure the booty and be off. No sooner had the steel entered the flesh, however, than the presumed corpse gave a start—then a prolonged yell—and rose to the sitting posture!

“Horror-struck, the two rascals rushed to the ladder, striving who should be up first and run fastest, leaving their lantern and tools behind them. The doctor thought it wise to let them go, under the circumstances. His professional knowledge came handily to his assistance, just then, and enabled him to divine what had happened. The lady had really been buried alive while in a cataleptic trance. The robbers had been the means of saving her life. The sudden pain and shock of the cut restored her consciousness and dispelled the dream-like trance in which she knew, saw and heard all that was going on, but was powerless to help herself.

“In a twinkling the robbers had escaped from the church. There was little fear of their return. The doctor, therefore, revealed himself to the resuscitated lady.

“‘Calm yourself, madam,’ he said, ‘Those two worthies are gone. You are now safe.’

“‘Thank God,’ replied the lady. ‘I can see that you are a friend.’

“‘Allow me, madam—as I am a medical man—to bind up that ugly cut. After all, these fellows—when you look at the matter from a different point of view—have done you a service.’

“‘True, they have saved my life.’

“The lady, who had seen the robbers’ blackened faces, and knew at once that the doctor was not one of them, gladly accepted the proffered assistance. With his help—after dressing her wound—she got out of her casket, stretched her stiffened limbs, ascended the ladder, and walked in her grave clothes to the city, where she was put in charge of a lady friend of her deliverer’s.

“This affair was a stroke of good luck for the young doctor, and proved the making of him in more ways than one. An affection sprung up between him and the pretty young widow who had been so nearly buried alive, and soon after they married. She was not only fascinating, but wealthy, and while her money enabled him to wait for practice, the former gift brought him patients. His professional success dates from this curious episode.”

“So you have been telling us your own story, grandpa,” said one of the children, clapping her hands at having made a discovery.

“And is that the identical ring on grandma’s finger?” asked another.

“Yes, and I dare say she can show where her finger was cut.”

“Weren’t you afraid to marry grandma, lest she should do the same thing again?” asked another.

“Well,” answered the doctor, “there was a certain amount of risk. But, knowing her case, I put her under treatment, and she has not had another attack. And thus children,” continued Dr. Sharpe, “you may look on grandma as one of the wonders of the world. There are few who, while living, can say they already have been in their graves.”

“Were the robbers ever caught?” asked some one.

“Yes—the dark lantern betrayed them. It was new, and bought in New York. The man from whom it was purchased recognized the two tramps to whom he had sold it; and they ultimately confessed the crime. With grandma’s aid, however, they suffered a nominal penalty of a month’s imprisonment; after which she procured them situations. They are now respectable, married working-men. Your grandmother saved them from moral and social ruin, as they had—though inadvertently—saved her from a horrible death by suffocation.”

“Where are they now, grandpa?”

“In this city—but I won’t divulge their names.”

“Thank you, grandpa,” said the children, in a chorus, as they separated for the night, delighted

with the diamond story, so appropriate on the occasion of a diamond wedding.

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