

## *Someone Who Might've Been*

(or The Phantom at the Grave)

While I said my prepared eulogy  
And the family shared their pain  
He stood silently among the graves  
A phantom in drizzling rain  
Like me, he too, was dressed in black  
Like us, his head was bowed  
But he did not come to join us  
And mingle with the crowd  
The service was concluding  
As I said my closing prayer  
We walked away but I turned and saw  
The phantom standing there  
He stood beneath the canopy  
By the silent metal shell  
And what the phantom's thoughts might be  
Was more than I could tell  
To offer solace is part of my job  
So I reached and touched his sleeve  
"Can I do something for you, son,  
to console you as you grieve?  
Did you know her well?" I asked  
"She had so many friends."  
His whispered response was "No, I'm just  
Someone who might've been."

"I trust you can keep a confidence,"  
That phantom said to me,  
"When I explain I'm someone  
Who's not supposed to be.  
I'm just a specter from 'what-if'  
A ghost from Maybe-land  
An unseized opportunity  
An 'I don't understand.'  
I never was her husband –  
At least not in this life –  
But in my heart these many years  
I've loved her as my wife.  
I never caressed her silky hair  
Nor touched her tender breast.  
Another may have held her hand  
But 'twas I who loved her best."  
He raised his head and turned to me  
And I felt my blood run cold  
His face was young, but my God, his eyes...  
His eyes were impossibly old!  
His eyes were dark as a winter sea  
As I stared, the visions came  
I saw the marching Nazi troops  
Heard Diogenes call my name  
I smelled the heat of Vesuvius  
The night she buried Pompeii  
I heard the scurrying of verminous claws  
As Europe screamed in the grip of plague  
I stood on the deck of the Nina  
I could taste the ocean's mist  
I saw Caesar with his thumb up-raised

And turning down his fist  
I heard the roar of chariot wheels  
And the crack of an Egyptian whip  
I knelt beneath the Savior's cross  
And watched His pure blood drip.  
Then in my heart I knew this man  
Had lived through every age  
Seen history unfold as another man  
Might turn a textbook's page  
At last he said, "Now you understand.  
A hundred lifetimes gone  
And in every one she was my love  
My heart, my night, my dawn.  
In a hundred lives I've buried her.  
In a hundred she's mourned me.  
And this is just the latest time.  
Another wave on an endless sea.  
Somehow, this time we missed each other  
Such a cruel master is Fate.  
And by the time I tracked her down  
I arrived a bit too late.  
She'd already given her heart away  
Built a life and bore a son  
And I could not ask her to leave behind  
The path she'd already begun  
I would not make her leave her life  
And I? I wanted no other.  
Instead I waited, became her friend  
And, in my heart, her lover.  
As I said, we never touched  
The sin was only mine  
But I loved her once more, as I have done  
Since the very dawn of time."

Then the phantom touched my shoulder.  
"I'm sorry," he whispered to me,  
"But mortal men must never know  
That some live eternally."  
Then I looked into his old, gray eyes  
And all the world went black.  
I later awoke on the rain-soaked grass  
Lying flat on my sodden back.  
How long I'd lain there, I still don't know  
The man and my memory were gone.  
Soaking wet, I found my car,  
And somehow made it home.  
For two full days I tried to recall  
But the memory wouldn't take shape.  
Until the day I started my notes  
And began to play the tape.  
Yes, the tape I make whenever I preach  
For reviewing later on  
So if there's anything I might want later  
I can jot it down  
Old men's memories can go astray  
Thoughts get out of order

So in my pocket I always carry  
A digital recorder.  
The recording that day caught every word  
The rain-wet phantom said  
And how I gasped as I described  
The visions in my head.  
But what became of the strange, dark man  
Whose eyes were incredibly old?  
That's a secret I'm afraid  
Will never, ever be told.  
But in this business I deal each day  
With immortality  
So I cannot doubt there can be a love  
That endures eternally  
A dozen times I've replayed that tape  
And a dozen times I've cried  
For that lonely man I met at the grave  
Where he mourned his forever bride  
And I wonder if, when the trumpet sounds,  
And the Savior comes again,  
And the age of man draws to its close,  
Will he finally be with her then?  
If God is just and merciful,  
When they meet on Canaan's shore,  
The phantom will hold his lady at last  
And be parted, nevermore.

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