

# The Charnel-House

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By Lafcadio Hearn

## Ghastly Gropings in the Decay of Graves.

It may perhaps be remembered that a Floater was found Friday and hauled ashore near the Two-mile House. The said Floater was in a horrible condition when stranded; the fishes had devoured the cheeks and left the ghastly grinning teeth exposed; the eyeballs were rolled up so as only to show staring spheres of blood-shot yellow-white; the whole body was enormously puffed up, monstrously swollen, covered with gigantic blisters, revolting and unrecognizable, bearing more resemblance to a vast unshelled turtle than to a human body. Coroner Maley, however, succeeded in identifying it at an Inquest, while the jurymen stood afar off with handkerchiefs to their noses; and the friends of the deceased had the remains subsequently exhumed from Potters' Field and buried in the family lot at Spring Grove.

On Monday evening, however, the widow of the deceased called on the Coroner and begged him to accompany her to the cemetery, as she was intending to have the body exhumed, fearing some mistake had been made, and she wanted Dr. Maley to identify the corpse, if possible, which had by that time been two days under ground. The Coroner consented, and performed the grewsome duty yesternoon with a degree of nonchalance which would put a ghoul to the blush. On opening the coffin the frightful, acrid, far-reaching stench drove all but the undaunted Coroner from the scene of action. He, shielding his nose with a pocket-handkerchief, and arming his right hand with a glove, set to work without a shudder among the writhing swarms of white vermin which were preying on the decomposing remains. The body had by that time become far more hideous to look upon, the eyes having fallen out, and the protruding tongue crumbling into black rottenness. Nevertheless, the Coroner plunged his gloved hand in the hideous orifice to examine the teeth, and inspected the foul mass of sweltering, shrinking corruption for marks of identification, while the livid worms traveled all over his broadcloth, and tried to ring themselves about his fingers. Then, having succeeded in identifying the corpse to the satisfaction of every body, he trotted home and ate a hearty dinner. Such is the stuff that Coroners' stomachs are made of.