

I walked whilst I had breath; 30
But that is past, and I am now
A-walking after Death!

‘No, murder, though, I come to tell
By base and bloody crime;
So Phœbe, dear, put off your fits 35
Till some more fitting time:
No Crowner, like a boatswain’s mate,
My body need attack,
With his round dozen to find out
Why I have died so black. 40

‘One Sunday, shortly after tea,
My skin began to burn
As if I had in my inside
A heater, like the urn.
Delirious in the night I grew, 45
And as I lay in bed,
They say I gather’d all the wool
You see upon my head.

‘His Lordship for his doctor sent,
My treatment to begin — 50
I wish that he had call’d him out,
Before he call’d him in!
For though to physic he was bred,
And pass’d at Surgeons’ Hall,
To make his post a sinecure, 55
He never cured at all!

‘The Doctor look’d about my breast,
And then about my back,
And then he shook his head and said,
“Your case looks very black.” 60
And first he sent me hot cayenne,
And then gamboge to swallow, —
But still my Fever would not turn
To Scarlet or to Yellow!

‘With madder and with turmeric 65

He made his next attack;
But neither he nor all his drugs
 Could stop my dying black.
At last I got so sick of life,
 And sick of being dosed, 70
One Monday morning I gave up
 My physic and the ghost!

‘Oh, Phœbe, dear, what pain it was
 To sever every tie!
You know black beetles feel as much 75
 As giants when they die —
And if there is a bridal bed,
 Or bride of little worth,
It’s lying in a bed of mould,
 Along with Mother Earth. 80

‘Alas; some happy, happy day,
 In church I hoped to stand,
And like a muff of sable skin
 Receive your lily hand;
But sternly with that piebald match 85
 My fate untimely clashes —
For now, like Pompe-double-i,
 I’m sleeping in my ashes!

‘And now farewell! a last farewell!
 I’m wanted down below, 90
And have but time enough to add
 One word before I go —
In mourning crape and bombazine
 Ne’er spend your precious pelf —
Don’t go in black for me, — for I 95
 Can do it for myself.

‘Henceforth within my grave I rest,
 But Death, who there inherits,
Allowed my spirit leave to come,
 You seemed so out of spirits: 100
But do not sigh, and do not cry,
 By grief too much engross’d, —

Nor, for a ghost of colour, turn
The colour of a ghost!

‘Again farewell, my Phœbe dear! 105

Once more a last adieu!

For I must make myself as scarce

As swans of sable hue.’

From black to gray, from gray to nought,

The Shape began to fade, — 110

And, like an egg, though not so white,

The Ghost was newly laid!

1840

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