

ROSES & DUST & ASHES

Written &
illustrated by
Stacey Williams-Ng

pocket guidebook

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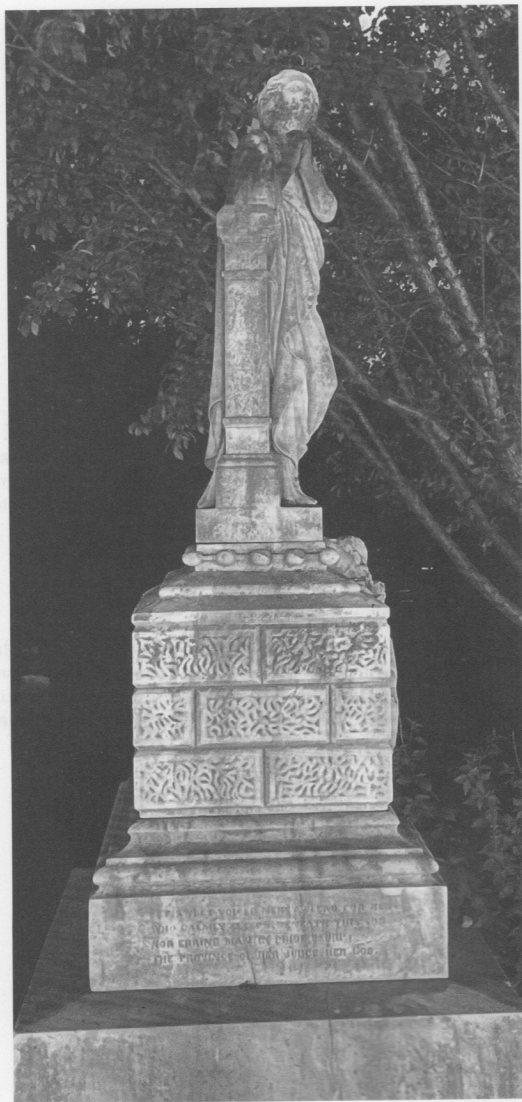


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At left: a statue of a weeping child next to a draped column at Elmwood Cemetery. Next page, also at Elmwood: A Celtic Cross adorned with symbols and figures from the New Testament.



INTRODUCTION



Have you ever walked through a historic cemetery and wondered about the art on the stone monuments and markers? The weeping angels, the anchors, the scrolls and doves...what do they all mean, aside from being beautiful ways to wish a loved one farewell? The markers in Victorian-era cemeteries often carry powerful stories about the deceased, and were never meant to be mysterious. In their time, they were a common language of expression, but as trends have changed and modernity has set in, we no longer find them common or clear. Like the loopy cursive handwriting of times past, these symbols seem pretty hard to read.

If you're willing to learn the meanings of a handful of symbols, you will find layers of cultural history in those shapes and figures. Being receptive to them is like hearing the dead speak.

The cemeteries that inspired me are predominantly from late 19th century America, in the Southern states, although there are examples of symbols that were popular in other American regions as well as in Great Britain. In the American South during that time period, there were overlapping spheres of culture, all of which influenced the symbols on our ancestors' grave markers. The time period that the English called "Victorian," e.g. the time of the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), encompassed three major tumultuous upheavals here in America: The Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction. As in any period of great violence, cultural change and renewal, the people

from this place and time left a notable impact on our nation's identity in ways that we are still grappling with.

About this booklet

I will begin with descriptions of the oracle cards in the deck "Roses, Dust and Ashes." After the card entries, you will find a glossary of common Victorian and post bellum grave symbols. It is my hope that this little booklet gets carried around as a handy guide in people's pockets for cemetery visits.

I will use the term "Victorian" to indicate that a symbol was fashionable throughout the English-speaking world of the late 19th century, and may be a motif that one might see equally in American, British and even Irish or Scottish graveyards.

If I refer to a symbol or motif as "post bellum" or Reconstruction, it is a more narrow and specific reference. This is a Latin term meaning "after the war," and it is a common shorthand for the years immediately following America's Civil War, which lasted from 1861–1865. The two decades following 1865 are called the post bellum years, or alternatively, Reconstruction.

Storytelling with pictures

Today most cemeteries are full of flat headstones, with nothing more than names, birth dates, and death dates. But in years past, families spent as much as they could afford to leave lasting memorials that honored the stories of their departed loved ones.

Sometimes the most interesting question you can ask when looking at a grave is, I wonder if the deceased chose this marker themselves, or was this

a sculpture commissioned by the surviving loved ones? Either way, the motive behind the design is intriguing. When the marker is made by the loved ones, it shows a truer picture, you might say, of how deeply the person was loved and cherished, as well as aspects of their character. Its grandeur, or lack of it, can also reveal cultural and socioeconomic realities.

As you can imagine, people have a lot of things to say about their beloved dead, and in their messages we also learn about the bereaved. This inspired me in classic cemetery symbolism for an oracle deck, because symbols are the way we communicate with one another across language and time, when words fail us. Symbols can connect us to our ancestors, and they are also the key to divination.

As you look through the symbolism portrayed in this card deck, and the next time you stroll through a classic cemetery, allow your mind to settle on an image and make free associations with what messages or ideas you might perceive in the flowers, animals, icons and figures that you see.

How graveyards became cemeteries

A graveyard is not the same thing as a cemetery. We often use these words interchangeably today, but let's clarify the correct context behind each of them.

Any burial ground can be considered a graveyard, including those private family plots you might find on historic farmland. Public graveyards came before cemeteries, and were not designed to be beautiful or welcoming at all—they were a practical reality for interring the dead. Before the 1800s, the rich in Europe and early America would pay handsomely to be buried in the churchyard if they could afford it, preferably on the East side,

in order to be the first ones to greet Christ on his second coming. The next-best plots were on the South side of the church. Strangers to the town, single women and stillborn babies were buried on the North side. Those who could not afford a headstone received a plain wooden cross as a marker. As cities grew, however, the churches did not have the space to accommodate the indigent and unattached, so graveyards had to be set aside for practical reasons.

Needless to say, all of the above examples were reserved only for those privileged enough to have a grave marker at all. Untold thousands of people, probably the majority of all human burials in fact, were unmarked during this time period.

At the dawn of the 19th century, a new kind of “graveyard” was established in Paris, and it was the first to be called a modern cemetery. Père-Lachaise Cimetière was opened to the public in 1803, and it was designed with such elegance that it became the model for the urban city park of modern times, with majestic trees, sculptures, walkways, and benches. By the 1830s this gorgeous park-cemetery had become so famous that nineteenth-century tourists would sometimes explore the cemetery before sightseeing the rest of Paris. In the 1830s, Boston created a near-replica of it with the Mount Auburn Cemetery, and after that, no one wanted plain old graveyards ever again. As city after city in 19th-century America established park-cemeteries, the term “cemetery” became commonplace.

How the Victorians viewed death and grieving

The word cemetery comes from Greek *koimētērion*, the word for “sleeping place” or dormitory. This aligns with a trend that developed through-

out the Victorian period: assigning kinder words and concepts around death, such as “resting,” and “sleeping,” and “meeting place.” The Victorians, not unlike the ancient Egyptians, had the mindset that if you lived your life right, death was not to be thought of as grim, but rather a sacred transition into a beautiful afterlife.

In America, the Southern states were living in a miasma of extreme violence, disease, political strife, war and sexual politics. No matter who you were in the American South, your faith would have been heavily tested amid such brutality. Southern white women viewed themselves (often patronizingly so) as the keepers of Christian culture, as Evangelism swept the nation. The double standard of trying to hold themselves up as unblemished, pure vessels of Christian morality was a constant struggle—both philosophically and practically—in an arrangement that relied on severe brutality to hold other human beings as chattel. The uglier it got, the more extreme the declarations of virtue were extolled. Thus on many of the gravestones you will see the frequent placement of lilies, cherubs, angels and white roses as symbols of female purity, an obsession among Southerners. There was no greater flattery for women and girls in those days than to be called virtuous.

The gender divide was vast, and completely binary. Men were more often remembered as powerful, strong and resilient in the American South, whereas in New England there might be more declarations of wisdom or virtuosity.

According to the Victorian culture of domesticity, women were supposed to possess four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. The idea revolved around the woman being the heart and moral compass of the family; she was considered the light of the home. Women’s

grave markers from this period very often feature symbols that celebrate their virtues in this way.

Men's grave markers were more likely to feature symbols of power: columns, lions, spires, tree trunks, podiums, even pyramids. Interestingly, men's markers are also a poignant legacy of women, as it was more often the women of the family designing or commissioning the markers for the men who died.

Because women were viewed as the "true vessels of grief," periods of mourning were among the rare times that women were able to express themselves with any level of authenticity; hence the blossoming art forms, fashion, rituals, and rules of death that emerged from the Victorians. Think of everything that we currently call "goth," and you'll almost always be able to trace a straight line back to this period, also called "the cult of death."

Why Oracle Cards?

Oracle cards, like Tarot cards, are used in a variety of ways but most commonly for fortune-telling. Some people like to use them daily for affirmations and inspiration, drawing a card to guide them on their journeys. For fortune-telling, readers often use card spread layouts to give their card pulls a new layer of meaning. For example, pulling three cards is meant to symbolize past, present, future. Later in this book I will provide card spread ideas for you to use and enjoy.

An effective oracle deck offers a wide variety of feelings and experiences for readers to draw from. "Roses, Dust & Ashes" is not a card deck that is only about death and sorrow. If a deck of cards only contains messages about love and joy, or only about death and sorrow, then it's ineffective. Instead, I draw from the myriad of emotions and



*Adolph family tomb in the Lake
Lacien Metairie Cemetery in
New Orleans, Louisiana.*

messages that people feel when they lose someone special to them. I have taken 36 wishes and ideas, and I have mapped those various concepts onto oracle cards for you in order for you to draw inspiration and meaning.

Interestingly, oracle cards also have their origins in 19th century Europe. The first non-Tarot fortune telling card deck was le Grand jeu de Mlle Lenormand, published in France in 1845. The colorful deck was one of the first examples of lithographic printing in France.

This deck is a useful tool for readers who are looking to explore the various aspects of grief and loss, or those with a penchant for the macabre. Many of the cards express sadness and pain, which will make the cards a helpful key for shadow work. I also hope you will simply enjoy them as a little stack of art prints, with a handy booklet that can be toted easily in a pocket on a cemetery visit. Use them however you like, I always say.

Trust your intuition.

GUIDE TO THE CARDS



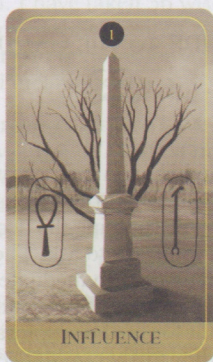
Oracle cards can help you gain clarity on a situation or make an important decision. To read oracle cards, start by shuffling the deck and focusing on the question you want to ask. Then, draw a card and take some time to meditate and reflect on the meaning of the card. You can use the card as a starting point for further exploration or use it as a sign to look for further guidance.

An oracle deck is similar to a Tarot deck in how it is used to seek out answers to personal or spiritual inquiries. However, with oracle decks there are no rules, and no agreed-upon subjects for the cards to address within one's spiritual journey. Even the numbering of cards varies from deck to deck.

Use this section as a reference when you pull cards from **Roses, Dust & Ashes**. Following this section are a few suggestions for card layouts/spreads if you prefer to try more complex readings with multiple cards at once.



1. INFLUENCE



The obelisk is a common sight at Victorian cemeteries, and is usually a marker for a man, or for a whole family led by a strong patriarch. Many argue that its obvious phallic shape is the reason for its effectiveness as a sign of male power, and the bigger the better.

This card represents power, stature and influence. These tall, four-sided spires come from the architectural designs of ancient Egypt, and in Egyptian mythology they honored the sun god, Ra, like a “frozen” beam of sunlight. The energy is powerful, straight and true.

Take this card as confirmation of your personal power and influence, which you may not be fully aware of. To conquer obstacles, you must harness your inner strength to assert command. This card symbolizes the strong, radiant power of the sun; this energy is able to burst out, straight and hot, to provide nothing short of life itself.

2. PASSION



Psyche is the Greek goddess of the soul and often represented with butterfly wings. Statues of her appear on graves throughout the Victorian world, although she is more common in English cemeteries than in American ones due to her pagan origins. People often mistake her for an angel.

Psyche was a tragic figure, shot with Cupid's arrow, tormented, murdered and reborn, and therefore a very dramatic symbol of passionate love that transcends death. She was also a legendary beauty, hated by the Goddess of Love herself (Venus) because of it.

The Passion card indicates the fires within you. It can represent the undying devotion of a lover, as in the tragic myth of the Greek Goddess, but it can also be an analogy for other aspects of fiery determination. The message from this card is to burst into life and listen to the fire in your belly. Is there something you're dying to pursue?

3. FREEDOM



The butterfly has been a symbol of death and resurrection in cemeteries since the late 19th century. The butterfly's short life-cycle and its transformation from a caterpillar to a beautiful winged creature is often seen to represent the process of death and resurrection.

The butterfly also symbolizes the spiritual journey from the physical realm to the spiritual one. It is believed to be a representation of the soul's journey from death to a new life, and because of its ephemeral flying pattern, many people believe a live butterfly sighting is a visit from a loved one who has passed over.

The Freedom card is a reminder that you are untethered to this world, and your day-to-day worries are of no long term consequence. You are in the process of a very significant transformation, and as you grow your wings and fly, you will see this change more clearly, and embrace your newfound freedom.

4. ATTACHMENT

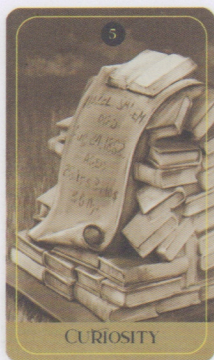


Ivy is seen as a symbol of eternity and everlasting life, as it is an evergreen plant that can live for many years. Ivy also symbolizes loyalty and fidelity due to its ability to cling tightly to its host. Ivy is often used to adorn cemetery markers and monuments, representing the strong bond between the living and the dead.

Soon you will find a strong connection and bond in one of your closest relationships. You will feel deeply connected to your loved ones, and this bond will bring you much joy and comfort.

The Attachment card can be interpreted as a person or an idea to which the reader is clinging tightly, or it can work in tandem with another card in the reading. It could mean that you are fixed on an idea which may not be the right path for you. Examine the ways in which you are affixing your attention to various interests in your life and choose your attachments with open eyes.

5. CURIOSITY



When it appears on old grave markers, a book is often seen as a symbol of knowledge and learning. This is often associated with the idea of a person's life story being written in a book, and that their life should be remembered and celebrated. The book may also represent the idea of a person's life as a journey, and the book holds the record of the journey they have taken.

The cemetery itself is a place of reflection and inquiry. It is of course a place where people pay their respects and grieve, but also a place brimming with stories, where one can take time to reflect on the lives of those who have gone before. It is a place of remembrance, where memories and stories can be shared and passed down through generations.

You will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for life's mysteries. Through your curiosity, a whole new world of possibilities will open up to you. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, you must take risks and embrace change with an open heart.

6. INNOCENCE



A cherub is a type of juvenile angelic figure often seen as a representation of innocence and purity. The cherub is usually depicted as a chubby, winged infant or child, often holding a flower or a symbol of innocence. In Christian art, they are often seen hovering near Jesus or the Virgin Mary, representing divine protection and guardianship. In cemetery symbolism, the cherub is often used as a symbol of hope, love, and comfort, representing the cycle of life and the promise of eternal life.

Cherubs were also seen as the bearers of God's throne. The word "cherub" derives from the Assyrian word *karibu* meaning "one who intercedes." Big job for a chubby baby. As you may have guessed, they are usually on children's graves.

This card does not literally symbolize death or foreboding for a child, but rather it takes the essence of the idea of Innocence and presents it to you as an insight into your own journey right now. The Innocence card is a marker of new beginnings, opportunity and potential.

7. THE PORTAL



The very wealthy often splurged on giant, life-sized displays for their funerary monuments, and the archway might be the first example of an “interactive” sculpture for visitors to literally pass through, mimicking the journey of the deceased into the afterlife. It was meant to be a representation of the passage from life to death.

Doors and archways symbolize both physical and spiritual passageways. They are often seen as a bridge between the mundane and spiritual realms. They can also represent new opportunities, and the willingness to step knowingly into change.

The Portal can be seen as a way to move beyond the self and into a more expanded state of consciousness. In your case it may represent the end of a cycle and the start of a new one. Be prepared to step beyond the current situation and explore the unknown. Allow yourself to be open-minded to mysterious new realities.

8. STRENGTH



The Lion has been a powerful symbol throughout art history and its image has always been synonymous with strength and power. Its image can be seen in a range of different cultures, from Africa to Europe to China, and it has been used in sculptures, tapestries, and paintings to represent royalty and power.

In Ancient Egypt, the Lion was seen as a symbol of nobility and strength. It was believed to be a protector of the Pharaoh and a symbol of the divine. The Victorians loved Egyptian art and motifs, so the lion is but one of many symbols they borrowed for its powerful meaning.

The Strength card calls for courage, inner strength, and resilience. It can represent the ability to overcome obstacles, to stay in touch with your resolve, and to stay determined and focused on your goals. This card can also represent the courage to take risks, face challenges, and stand up for what you believe in.

9. WISDOM

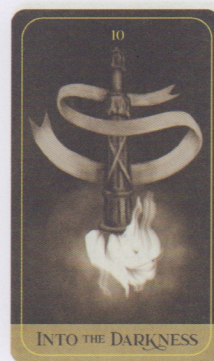


The oil lamp, or “Aladdin’s Lamp,” is an iconic symbol in art history and cultural symbolism. Originating in the Middle East, the oil lamp is often seen as a symbol of good luck and fortune, and is commonly used in decorative art and jewelry. It is more rare on a gravestone but when it appears, it most likely stands for insight or wisdom.

The lamp and the act of rubbing it has also come to represent wishes and dreams. Perhaps the deceased’s loved ones might choose this icon to say something about how their beloved was able to make dreams come true.

The lamp is also seen as a symbol of light and knowledge, with its flame symbolizing enlightenment. This card suggests you should take some time to reflect on your life and the decisions you have made, and consider how you can make positive changes.

10. INTO THE DARKNESS



In Greek mythology, the inverted torch of Thanatos symbolizes death and mortality. Thanatos was the personification of death; the son of Nyx, the goddess of night. His torch is a reminder that death is inevitable and that all living things will eventually succumb to it. The torch also serves as a reminder that death is not the end, but merely a transition to something else.

In art history, the inverted torch is often used as a symbol of despair, death, and the end of hope. It can be seen in many works of art from the Baroque and Romantic periods, and is typically associated with images of sorrow, grief, and the passing of time.

This card appears when you are emerging from a significant period of sorrow or sadness. Perhaps you are feeling it right now. This dark chapter in your life is not the end, but rather a time when your flame can still stay alight no matter what. Your light does not go out, even when turned upside down.

11. GRACE



In philosophy, grace refers to a sense of beauty, elegance, or harmony that is present in the natural world or in human experience. Grace is often associated with qualities such as balance, symmetry, and proportion, and it is seen as a manifestation of order and beauty in the universe.

Overall, the nature of grace in Christianity is one of unmerited favor, love, and mercy from God towards humanity. It is through grace that Christians believe they can receive salvation and forgiveness. This is why the angel is a profound symbol, because he or she represents an extension of God's favor.

When you draw this card, think of ways that you are being called to open your heart to difficult situations. By embodying humility, kindness, and compassion, you can cultivate a sense of grace in your interactions with others.

12. NEVER FORGOTTEN



"Unforgettable," sang Nat King Cole in 1951, "that's what you are. Unforgettable, though near or far."

Forget-me-nots are small, delicate flowers that are often associated with remembrance and lasting love. Legend has it that a knight and his lady were walking along a riverbank when he spotted a cluster of these blue beauties. As he bent down to pick them, his armor weighed him down and he fell into the water. Before he went under, he threw the flowers to his love and cried out, "Forget me not!" Since then, Forget-me-nots have been seen as a symbol of true love and undying affection.

There are some people in our lives who leave an indelible mark on our hearts. Memories, they say, are our most prized possessions. The act of remembrance is a deeply personal thing. This card is a symbol of your own process with those memories.

13. SACRIFICE



This kind of cross design is called a Celtic cross. It features a circle around the intersection of the crossbars, and often decorative features such as Biblical motifs. It represents the unity of all things, both spiritual and physical. The circle often has an infinity knot pattern as a backdrop.

The Sacrifice card is a reminder that sometimes we must make sacrifices in order to achieve our goals. This willingness to give up something valuable for a greater good can be a pretty tough pill to swallow for most of us.

Look beyond your immediate desires and consider the long-term benefits of making trade-offs. This card suggests that by giving up something in the present, you can create a better future for yourself and those around you. It is a powerful reminder that sacrifice is not easy, but it is fundamental for personal and spiritual growth.

14. PURITY



It is no coincidence that this card is #14, the same number as Temperance in a tarot deck. The Temperance card in tarot is often associated with purity, balance, and harmony. In those cards, a central figure is often depicted pouring water between two cups, representing the blending of opposites in a harmonious way.

In this card deck, Purity is represented using the Victorian language of flowers with the Lily. During this time, lilies were a popular symbol of purity, innocence, and beauty. The use of lilies in Victorian culture reflected the societal values of the time, which placed a high emphasis on morality and traditional gender roles. Today, the lily remains a popular flower for weddings and other special occasions, often chosen for its elegant appearance and symbolic meaning.

By striving for purity in our thoughts and actions, we can find greater inner peace and clarity.

15. SORROW



Weeping Angels were a popular choice for grave memorials because they were associated not just with mourning but with contemplation. These graceful giants evoke a sense of sadness and loss, making them a fitting symbol for the departed.

Sorrow can lead to personal growth and transformation, as individuals often reflect on their experiences and learn valuable lessons from them. This sentiment is not much comfort, however, when you're right in the throes of the grief.

Are there signs and triggers around you that remind you of sorrowful things from your life?

Often when we are badly hurt, we get stuck in the grieving process and find ourselves over-examining our own role in attracting bad luck or even tragedy. We try to imagine ways we might have been able to steer our lives into a better place. Rather than focusing on the past, try to look beyond the signals into the new horizon that awaits you.

16. SAFE JOURNEY



Seashells are found washed up on the shore, having made a long and arduous journey across turbulent waters to reach the land. This physical journey is seen as a metaphor for the spiritual journey of the soul as it navigates the trials and tribulations of life to ultimately find its way home.

This illustration is one I made of a real monument located in Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis, Tennessee. It is a beautiful example of one of America's great garden cemeteries. It marks the resting place of two very young sisters who died within a week of one another.

Seashells are associated with the element of water, which is associated with emotions and the unconscious mind. By collecting and meditating upon seashells, individuals can tap into their own inner depths and explore the hidden corners of their psyche, leading to a heightened sense of self-awareness and spiritual growth.

17. RESILIENCE



The Resilience card is a symbol of endurance and perseverance.

In many post bellum cemeteries in America, you will find grave markers carved to resemble real tree trunks. The people buried with them were often members of a fraternal organization called the Woodmen of the World, although this does not mean that the deceased was actually a woodworker. WOW was a fraternal organization popular in the late 1800s. It was an offshoot of the Rustic Movement, which represented a yearning to reconnect with nature.

Sometimes grave markers were made to look like trees or stumps for more decorative and personal reasons, such as making a tree-stump marker for a youth whose life was cut short abruptly, and far too soon. Like a tree trunk that has been battered by wind and rain, you have faced your own share of trials and tribulations. But just as the oak's trunk continues to stand tall, so too can you rise above any challenge that comes your way.

18. UNTOLD STORY



When a scroll is carved into a classical grave monument, it serves as a timeless and classical motif that we all associate with ancient times. And while it is true that Victorians loved the Greco-Roman motifs, the scroll also has a subtle message about a story being left untold. Why? Because the bottom part of the scroll is still left unrolled.

We've all experienced the frustration that comes with leaving something meaningful unfinished. Whether it's a creative project, a personal goal, or a relationship, the feeling of incompleteness can weigh heavily on our minds and hearts. It's a nagging sensation that follows us around, a constant reminder of what could have been if only we had pushed through to the end.

Try to stop playing the scenario on repeat in your mind, wondering what you could have done differently. Things happen in their own perfect time. Maybe now you can funnel that frustration into energy to finish the job.

19. INSIGHT



Just as a key is used to open a locked door, spiritual seekers use meditation, prayer, and other practices to unlock their own inner wisdom. The key is also seen as a symbol of initiation, representing the moment when a seeker is ready to move from one level of understanding to the next.

In alchemy, for example, the key represents the philosopher's stone, a mythical substance that can transmute base metals into gold. In the Christian tradition, the key is often associated with Saint Peter, who was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven by Jesus.

The Insight card symbolizes a shift in perspective. It is a reminder to look beyond the surface and tap into your intuition to gain a deeper understanding of a situation. This card encourages you to be open-minded and receptive to new ideas and perspectives. Embrace your curiosity and trust your inner wisdom to guide you towards greater insight and understanding.

20. CONNECTION



Clasped hands were a common motif on gravestones for a very long time. One reason for this is that they symbolize the bond between loved ones. The clasping of hands represents the connection between two people, even in death. It is a way of saying that the deceased are not alone, but are still connected to those they loved in life.

Shaking hands also symbolize the idea of farewell. The gesture of clasping hands is often associated with saying goodbye, and so it is fitting that it would be used on gravestones as a way of saying farewell to those who have passed away. It is a way of acknowledging the finality of death while also honoring the memory of the deceased.

This card can stand for the union of any two entities—people, groups, ideas, or talents. In readings, the Connection Card tells you to look for connections in your life, especially those that are one-on-one. It is time to join with another and work as a partnership.

21. PEACE



Most readers will know the legend of the dove from the Noah's ark story. But did you know that the dove is symbolic of peace in many cultures around the world?

Many Native American stories feature a white bird in their folklore. The Blackfoot people assigned the dove as protector of their warriors, ensuring that they would return unharmed after a battle. Archaeologists believe the Aztec people would use doves in wedding rituals to represent love and steadfastness. In Islam, doves were believed to have assisted the prophet Muhammed.

This near-universal signifier of peace and love was much revered by the Victorians, with their obsession with purity. It's on a lot of grave markers. This card represents emotional fulfillment and contentment, which are key ingredients for a peaceful state of mind. It suggests that by focusing on our blessings and being grateful for what we have, we can find peace in the present moment.

22. STILLNESS



The anchor is often used as a symbol of hope, steadfastness, and stability. On a grave, it can represent the idea that the deceased has found a safe harbor in the afterlife and that their soul is at rest. Anchors may also suggest that the loved ones left behind will find comfort in their memories.

Stillness promotes self-awareness: In our busy lives, it can be easy to lose touch with our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. By taking the time to be still, we can tune in to our inner world and become more aware of our own needs and desires. This can help us make better decisions and live more fulfilling lives.

By seeking stillness, we can cultivate a sense of mindfulness that allows us to be more fully present in our relationships and in the world around us. This can lead to greater intimacy, understanding, and compassion.

23. VANITY

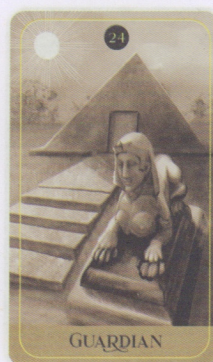


The daffodil appears on many Victorian grave markers as it was seen as a symbol of spring (rebirth) and beauty. Sometimes it may have simply been a more personal dedication, perhaps if the deceased had a particular fondness for spring daffodils in her own garden.

But consider this: The daffodil, which is also known as the narcissus, was named after the self-obsessed Greek character because of the way its head bobs down to the water. Thus, the flower became associated with vanity and narcissism. Could some of these markers be the surviving lover's way of throwing some shade on their partner in death?

Things are changing in your world, and you may be experiencing a potent personal adjustment that is making you glow from within. Be prepared for a corresponding burst of confidence that will allow you to manifest new things in your life, which in turn will make you reflect proudly on your accomplishments. Don't take it too far.

24. GUARDIAN

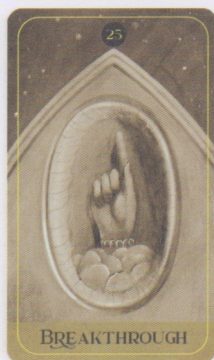


This illustration is a drawing of an Egyptian-inspired pyramid monument for Major Eugene Lewis at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Nashville, Tennessee. It's a perfect example of Egyptomania, the term coined for the huge fad in the Western world during the late 1800s for anything and everything Egyptian.

Sphinx are seen as guardians. Think about this for a moment — protection is a crucial aspect of human life. Protection can take many forms, such as physical protection, emotional protection, or financial protection. It is a fundamental human need and a basic right. Protection is essential for individuals to feel secure and safe in their daily lives, whether it's in their homes, workplaces, or communities.

When you draw this card, ask yourself, are you the guardian, or are you the one who might need to reach out and seek help? Being a guardian is a privilege, but it comes with great responsibility to care for yourself.

25. BREAKTHROUGH

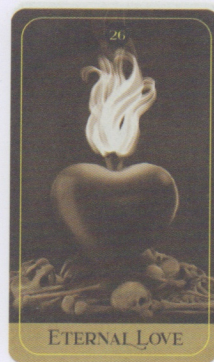


Hands that point up symbolize that the deceased has gone to Heaven, a confirmation of life after death for the faithful. They have broken through the veil, so to speak, and passed into a higher, eternal life. This is such a wonderful analogy for how those of us still alive on Earth might aspire to make a huge breakthrough from something ordinary to something amazing.

A creative breakthrough especially is one that leads to new ideas, innovative solutions, and improved ways of doing things. If you have ever experienced it, it is a thrilling pinnacle of mental achievement—or at least it feels that way on the inside. But an idea is nothing until it is made real.

Take your breakthrough and have the confidence to bring it to life. Breathe life into your idea, and do not be afraid to fail! Failure is certainly possible, but it is simply not at all a good enough reason not to try. Only those who make moves get to reap the rewards.

26. ETERNAL LOVE



The heart with flames shooting out from the top is known in Christian tradition as the Sacred Heart, and it represents the hot, flaming heart of Jesus.

The Sacred Heart is often depicted in Christian art shining with divine light, and sometimes it is embellished with the crucifixion sword thrust into it, or encircled by the crown of thorns, and bleeding. Sometimes, the image is shown shining within the bosom of Christ with his wounded hands pointing at the heart.

This illustration takes inspiration from that motif but this flaming heart rests atop a pile of bones, signifying the way it feels to love someone so much that you truly believe to your soul that the strength of your love for one another will outlast death. The ancient Greeks named seven different kinds of love, and of these, Eros is the one that represents the fiery passion of romantic love. Love reminds us of the nature of true beauty; that even the physical can lead us closer to spiritual transcendence.

27. READINESS



An urn draped with a cloth is an antique cemetery symbol you don't see much anymore. They were sort of a nod to cremated remains, although in those days cremation was not a popular choice. Instead it was meant to symbolize that we all return to dust and ashes (hence the name of this card deck). The cloth laid gently across the top probably symbolized the "veil" between the living and the dead.

A person who dies with the belief that they have lived their life well is said to experience a sentiment of readiness when their final day arrives. It's hard to imagine being ready to die but we have all heard stories.

By cultivating a mindset of readiness, you can reduce stress and anxiety, and approach challenges with a sense of calm and purpose. Readiness means being curious and adaptable, always willing to learn and grow. By embracing readiness as a virtue, you can live a more fulfilling life and achieve your goals with greater ease.

28. REBIRTH



Cradle graves are a popular sight in the cemeteries of the Reconstruction-era South. Sometimes called "bathtub graves" or "garden plots" affectionately by the community, they are a truly inspiring idea because not only do they symbolize the idea of rebirth in death, or like the old phrase "cradle to the grave," they also serve as flower garden planters.

At Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis, as well as I'm sure many other cemeteries in the South, green-thumbed volunteers sign up to maintain the ancient garden plots as a way to honor those whose surviving family members either do not exist, or do not know or care to plant flowers in their great-great-great-grandmother's cradle frame.

And speaking of the American South, you may only associate the spiritual meaning of rebirth with the Evangelical Christian concept of "being born again." Know that spiritual rebirth can take many, many forms and they are each deeply personal. Allow your ego to dissolve and embrace a new way of being.

29. HAPPINESS



Are you surprised to find a card about happiness in a deck dedicated to the art of mourning symbols? The beauty of the language of symbolism is that it transcends language and allows us to express many complex feelings.

The lily of the valley is yet another flower that we find in Victorian floriography, the language of flowers. In German pagan mythology, lily of the valley flowers were associated with the gorgeousness and purity of the spring goddess Oestara. In Greek mythology, the flower was believed to have sprung from the tears of the Greek goddess Maia, who wept tears of happiness when she gave birth to the god Hermes.

For centuries, lily of the valley has been associated with happiness and joy, and its beauty and fragrance continue to inspire and uplift people today. Whether given as a gift or simply enjoyed in a garden or bouquet, lily of the valley is a symbol of hope, renewal, and the happiness that comes with new beginnings.

30. FAMILY

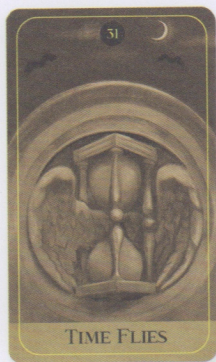


Where to begin on trying to describe in words the profound sense of loss and trauma that the surviving family feels upon the death of one of their own? Family can mean a lot of things beyond the confines of blood relations, as we all know, and the word itself evokes big emotions. The strength of the family bond can be incredibly powerful, even in the face of unimaginable adversity.

This card represents the celebration and unity that comes from strong family bonds. It symbolizes the sense of community that is created within a family, and the joy that comes from coming together to celebrate milestones and accomplishments.

Community is the glue that binds us all together in times of joy and sorrow. If your community is healthy it will provide you with a deep well of love, support, and inspiration. Does yours? Know that a dysfunctional family is more the norm than a healthy one, but we all must find ways to surround ourselves with compassion and support.

31. TIME FLIES



Where does the time go? Time flies! Who has time? Turn back time. Living in borrowed time. Time is running out.

English, like so many other languages, has a lot of idioms about the fleeting nature of our lives on Earth. It sure seems long when you're young, and then at some point for all of us, we realize it's definitely going to come to an end, much sooner than we would like.

Author Kazuo Ishiguro wrote, "We all live inside bodies that will deteriorate. But when you look at human beings, they're capable of very decent things: love, loyalty. When time is running out, they don't care about possessions or status. They want to put things right if they've done wrong."

The flying hourglass was a popular symbol of "tempus fugit" (time flies) for our ancestors. What will you do with the limited hours and minutes you have left in this world? Turn your attention away from material accomplishments and focus on the things that really matter to you.

32. ETERNITY

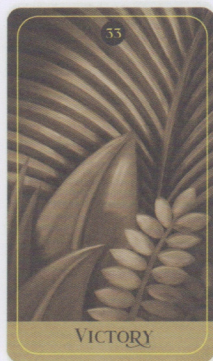


The Celts, as early as the 8th century AD, used the pattern of a looped knot to signify eternity, because it has no start or finish. This in turn is meant to symbolize the eternity of life.

Eternity is often thought of as an infinite amount of time, but it can also refer to a timeless state of being. In this sense, eternity is not just a duration of time, but a mode of existence that transcends time altogether. This concept of eternity can be applied to one's spiritual life by recognizing that the ultimate goal is not just to live forever, but to attain a state of being that is beyond the limitations of time and space.

By cultivating a spiritual practice that focuses on the present moment and the *eternal now*, one can experience a taste of eternity in the *here and now*.

33. VICTORY



Palm leaves appear on grave markers as Christian symbols of Christ's victory over death. In the legend of Palm Sunday, the people waved palm leaves at Jesus as he rode a donkey into Jerusalem. Palm branches were considered symbols of victory and triumph at the time of the writing of the Scriptures. The Victorians were nothing if not eager students of the Bible and all its symbols, especially when it came to death and mourning.

For some, victory may be defined by material success, such as wealth or status. For others, it may be more personal, such as overcoming a fear or achieving a long-held dream. Regardless of the definition, the journey towards victory or achievement is often marked by hard work, dedication, and perseverance.

This card signifies the end of a difficult journey and the beginning of a new, brighter chapter in life. You have achieved your goals and now you can bask in the joy of your accomplishments.

34. HOPE



Women have been used as human symbols of spiritual concepts for as long as we have had Western art. The four cardinal virtues of Temperance, Prudence, Fortitude and Justice originated from Plato in the 400s AD. If you've ever passed by or into a courthouse, you've probably seen the Lady Justice sculpture.

Similarly, the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity also made their way into female figures (the three virtues are named in the Bible verse 1 Corinthians 13:13). The women are represented with a cross, an anchor and a heart respectively. The one with the anchor is Hope, although these statues are often mistaken for angels.

The symbol of hope with an anchor continues to resonate with people today, serving as a reminder that even in the midst of chaos and uncertainty, there is always a source of strength and security to be found. As we navigate the challenges of life, may we hold onto the anchor of hope and find comfort in knowing that it will guide us safely through the storms.

35. HUMILITY



The giant eye that we see atop the pyramid on the American dollar bill is the classical Eye of Providence, or the all-seeing eye of the Divine, Who is Always Watching.

Humility, in this context, means recognizing our limitations as human beings and accepting that we cannot fully comprehend the mysteries of the universe. It means acknowledging that there are forces and phenomena in the universe that are beyond our understanding, and that we are but a tiny part of a much larger whole.

Humility does not mean resignation, smallness or defeat. Rather, it is an idea that can inspire us to continue exploring and learning about the universe, to discover new wonders and insights, and to appreciate the beauty and complexity of the cosmos.

It should also remind us to treat each other and our planet with respect and care, recognizing that we are all part of the same interconnected web of life.

36. PURPOSE



Many gravestones feature symbols of a person's career or calling in life, such as the Freemason symbol pictured here. A grave marker with the capital G with the square and compass indicates that the person was a member of a Masonic Lodge. This trend in gravestone memorials really took off in the 20th century, as Americans especially started to define themselves by their pastimes; today, if someone invests in a custom-carved gravestone, it's as likely as not going to feature a dog, an artist's palette, or even a motorcycle.

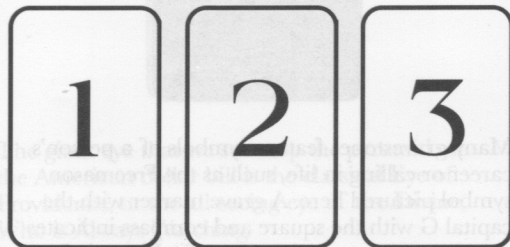
Purpose will be unique for everyone; what you identify as your path will by definition be different from anyone else's. Plus, your purpose can actually shift and change throughout your life in response to the evolving priorities and fluctuations of your unique experiences.

What is your purpose in life? If money were no object, and you had to decide today, what would be the symbol on your headstone?

SUGGESTED CARD SPREADS



The classic three-card spread is a nice way to get a quick overview of a situation with some dimension to it. Shuffle the deck well and pull three cards at random.



The 1-2-3 cards can represent any of the following, or you can come up with your own interpretations:

past • present • future

challenge • idea • move forward

you • (the relationship) • your partner

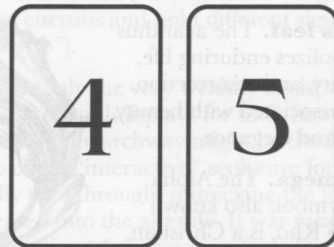
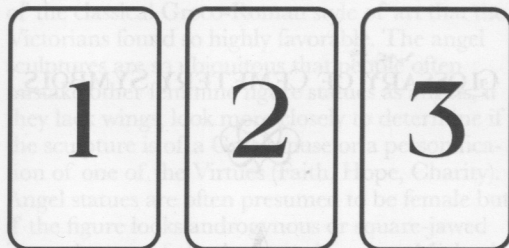
contributing factor 1 • (the issue) • contributing factor 2

situation • action • outcome

physical state • emotional state • mental state

basis of grief • what to focus on • best path forward

strength • weakness • opportunity



A five-card spread provides more clarity and more chances for you to make connections between and among multiple cards. Choose one of these layouts or design your own.

State of Mind Spread

1. Past situation or feeling that impacted my current self
2. My current state of mind
3. Where I am headed on this trajectory
4. The connection between 1 & 2
5. The "why" card to clarify the progression from 2 to 3

Recovery Spread

1. Past situation I hold on to
2. The nature of my trauma or loss
3. What goes well for me
4. What I could do better at
5. Who or what will help me through this

GLOSSARY OF CEMETERY SYMBOLS



A

Acanthus leaf. The acanthus leaf symbolizes enduring life, immortality, and resurrection. It is also associated with beauty, strength, and elegance.

Alpha omega. The Alpha Omega symbol, also known as the Chi Rho, is a Christian symbol that represents the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It is often used as a symbol of Christ, who is considered the beginning and the end of all things. When seen on gravestones, it generally symbolizes the deceased's belief in Christ as the beginning and the end of their life journey.

Anchor. The anchor is often used as a symbol of hope, steadfastness, and stability. On a grave, it can represent the idea that the deceased has found a safe harbor in the afterlife and that their soul is at rest. If a grave is more modern, it is probably less esoteric; it probably simply means the deceased was a fisherman. If shown with an angelic-looking woman, she's not an angel, she is the human symbol of Hope the virtue.

Angel. Monumental sculptures of angels were a popular monument choice in Victorian times, not only because they were a testament to the



deceased's faith in God but also were a reflection of the classical Greco-Roman style of art that the Victorians found so highly favorable. The angel sculptures are so ubiquitous that people often mistake other feminine figure statues as angels; if they lack wings, look more closely to determine if the sculpture is of a Greek muse or a personification of one of the Virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity). Angel statues are often presumed to be female but if the figure looks androgynous or square-jawed it may be one of the Archangels such as Michael, Raphael or Gabriel. Baby/juvenile winged figures are called cherubs and hold different significance (see "Cherub").

Archway. Only the very wealthy could afford giant, architectural displays for their funerary monuments. The archway might be the first example of an "interactive" sculpture for visitors to literally pass through, mimicking the journey of the deceased into the afterlife. It was meant to be a representation of the passage from life to death. Doors and archways symbolize both physical and spiritual passageways. They are often seen as a bridge between the mundane and spiritual realms.

Arrow. Like the ladder, the arrow is a symbol of interconnectedness between heaven and earth. Arrows point, so broadly speaking they are simply a means to direct the viewer's gaze, and on a gravestone that direction is most often heavenward. In some cases, arrows may indicate military service or other forms of achievement.

Axe. Axes often appeared on the grave markers of the Woodmen of the World, a fraternal organization that eventually became a life insurance company. An axe or hammer could also indicate a profession or trade, such as a carpenter or blacksmith. As a tool that has been used to clear a path or overcome obstacles, it may emphasize the individual's determination and strength.

B

Baby sleeping. During Victorian times, innocence and purity were a near-obsession. It was during this time that childhood was culturally separated from adulthood as a time of innocence, and with the waves of Evangelical fervor throughout America, children were seen as the ultimate example of Christ's purity. The sight of a baby sleeping universally pulls at our heartstrings, but the concept of "she's merely sleeping" is meant to be a testament to the Christian faith of the parents, who are making a statement that the child is not truly gone, but rather awaiting them in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Bible. Represents the deceased's faith in God, and their unwavering belief in the authority of the Scriptures.

Bird. Birds in nearly all cultures represent freedom. People have always imagined the blissful feeling of flying and singing when we observe birds in nature, so the generic shape of a bird represents the freedom of the soul, having "flown away" from the body. Specific birds such as owls and eagles carry their own individual meanings, such as wisdom and strength, respectively. In America an eagle also might signify patriotism.

Book. Often an open book on a pedestal is meant to represent the Bible, although depending on context, books can represent knowledge or authority. If the book is not a Bible, or if there are multiple books shown in a stack, they represent a love of learning and/or a high degree of education.

Bouquet. A bouquet of flowers is evocative of femininity, and is more often seen on the graves of women and young girls as a sign of their beauty and the fleeting nature of their lives.

We all know how quickly bouquets fade and wilt in real life, and also how highly prized they are in weddings and other occasions. The Victorians would carefully choose the flowers both in real bouquets as well as stone-carved ones, because they enjoyed floral symbolism as a way to convey various messages of love and friendship. Therefore a bouquet was a catch-all way to convey a celebration of beauty, and many happy years of love and friendship, in a world where life is all too fleeting and fragile.

Bugle (see "Trumpet")

Butterfly. There are two aspects that give the butterfly its symbolism: its light airy movements, and the fact that it emerges from a chrysalis. The former often symbolizes the beautiful lightness of the soul, and the latter represents the profound transformation from the life of the flesh to the life of the spirit. Other insects that transform in a similar way include the cicada, the moth and the dragonfly, which also symbolize profound transformation. In Greco-Roman mythology it was believed that the soul literally left the body in the form of a butterfly, so the superstition that seeing a butterfly was a sighting of a passed loved one persists to this day among many people.

C

Calla Lily (see "Lily")

Candle/Flame. Flames signify the soul, as in one's "inner light." With candles, the wax serves as an apt analogy to the flesh, melting away a little bit each day, and the flame represents the energy and light of the spirit.

Chain/Links. Three chain links alone is the main logo of the Independent Order of Odd

Fellows, and its presence on a cemetery monument indicates that the deceased belonged to this organization. The three Odd Fellows links represent friendship, love and truth. Chains can also be a symbol of eternal life or the unbreakable bond between the deceased and their loved ones. A short, broken chain indicates a life cut short.

Chalice. A chalice is a vessel, and like The Holy Grail it is almost always meant to be a symbol of the blood of Christ. The holy grail was the mythologized cup that Jesus passed around at the last supper. In a Christian context, the chalice is therefore meant to depict the cup of eternal life, or immortality. Earlier depictions of any vessel were usually a sign of fertility or the womb, the vessel that brings forth life. In Celtic mythology, a cup of wine or mead was meant to represent sovereignty.

Cherub. Baby angel sculptures were very popular in the 19th century, as they tapped into two of Victorian America's favorite subjects: innocence and religion. A cherub is a type of angel, typically depicted in art and literature as a winged, chubby-faced child with a divine nature. In some religious traditions, cherubim (the plural of "cherub") are associated with the highest ranks of angels and are often depicted as guardians or messengers of God. Cherubim are commonly featured in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic art, as well as in works of fiction and fantasy. In cemeteries, they more often than not represent a child who passed away in infancy or toddlerhood.

Chi ro/Chrisma (see "Alpha Omega")

Clover/Shamrock. The shamrock symbolizes the Holy Trinity in Christianity. It is also a symbol of Irish heritage and culture. On a gravestone, the shamrock may represent the deceased's Irish heritage or their Christian faith.

Column. Columns are Greco Roman in design, and classical architecture was highly fashionable among Victorians. When one thinks about the kinds of buildings that are held up by columns, the examples are court houses, churches, mansions and other grand institutional structures. Accordingly, a column serves as a strong and sturdy symbol of upholding a tradition. Columns are also great bases to build upon, so artists would often use a column as a handy backdrop for doves, scrolls, flowers and other symbols. Often in Victorian cemeteries one will spot broken columns, and many modern folks assume that they are ruins of a long ago past; however, broken columns were a common (and purposeful) motif. **Broken columns** were meant to symbolize a life that has been cut short, or the death of someone in the prime of a successful career.

Compass. With a "G." The Masonic symbol consists of three core elements: the square, the compass, and the letter "G." The square and compass are considered to be the tools of the mason or the architect. In Freemasonry, the square represents the rigid, straight lines of right and wrong morals. The compass

is an analogy for drawing a boundary line around one's animal desires to avoid overindulgence. The G stands for God and Geometry. When this symbol appears on a grave marker, the deceased was a member of the fraternal (men-only) order of Free and Accepted Masons, the largest worldwide secret society.

Conch shell. The seashell, especially in the coastal South, is a powerful symbol of deliverance to the afterlife. Shells were adopted cross-culturally in Southern cemeteries to represent the voyage from the world of the flesh to the world of the

spirit. Scallops, conchs, and other shells are symbols of a person's Christian pilgrimage or journey through life, and of baptism in the church.

Cradle. Cradle graves were a popular choice in Southern garden cemeteries during the late 19th century, the heyday of Victorian sensibilities. They resemble large bathtubs submerged in the earth, and served as garden plots for the grave site.

Crocus. The crocus flower was a common symbol in Victorian times, representing cheerfulness, youthfulness, and gladness. It was associated with the arrival of spring. The crocus was also considered a symbol of hope and optimism, reminding people that even in the darkest of times, there is always the possibility of new beginnings and fresh starts.

Cross. The various cross styles that one might find on grave markers and what they each mean are:

Latin Cross: This is a plain cross that represents the crucifixion of Jesus.

Celtic Cross: This is a cross with a circle around the intersection of the crossbars. It represents the unity of all things, both spiritual and physical.

Orthodox Cross: This is a cross with three bars instead of two, and the bottom bar is slanted.

Maltese Cross: This is a cross with four arms that are shaped like V's. It represents bravery, courage, and protection.

Budded Cross: This is a cross with three buds or leaves at the end of each arm. It represents the Holy Trinity and new life.

Iron Cross: This is a cross with four arms that are equal in length, and it is often associated with military service. It represents strength, honor, and bravery.

D

Daffodil. These spring flowers were associated with the Greek myth of Narcissus, who was transformed into a flower after falling in love with his own reflection. The flower was seen as a symbol of vanity and self-love, but also of transformation and beauty. If you see one of these on a grave marker, you have to wonder if perhaps it was a hidden accusation of vanity.

Daisy. In Victorian times, daisies were often used as symbols of innocence, purity, and childhood. Therefore, it was common to see daisies on the gravestones of children who had passed away. The daisy was a fashionable flower and was often used in decorative arts, thus making it a good choice for the markers of women who may have held it in favor during their lives.

Death's head. The winged skull is a common symbol found on gravestones and represents mortality and the inevitability of death. It serves



as a reminder that death is an inevitable part of life, and that life is fleeting. The use of skulls on gravestones was popular during the 17th and 18th centuries when Puritanism was prevalent. Puritan beliefs emphasized the concept of death and the afterlife, and the skull served as a reminder of the mortal flesh. In the 19th century, the use of skulls on gravestones declined as Victorian-era attitudes towards death shifted towards a more sentimental and romanticized view of eternal life.

Dog. Dog grave markers are likely the portraits of the pet lying in the grave beneath, as some loyal animal companions were lucky enough to be admitted into cemeteries to lie next to their beloved masters for all eternity. Otherwise their presence is a cenotaph (a marker made in absence of the remains of the deceased) to commemorate the joy that the dog brought its master during its life on earth.

Dogwood blossoms. This is but one of many flowers on this list, as the Victorians were very fond of using flowers as symbols of love and friendship. Dogwood trees are often mythologized as the tree from which Jesus' cross was made, and as the story goes, God cursed the tree forevermore with its small crooked stature, and put the four wounds of Jesus on the flower's four petals.

Dove. The dove is a classical symbol of peace. A dove descending represents the Holy Spirit. When climbing it indicates peace, innocence.

Door or gate (see "Archway")

Draped urn, drapery. The drape, carved in stone, is a decorative motif to represent the veil between the physical world and the spiritual realm.

E

Eagle. On a modern grave, this is likely a symbol of American patriotism, but if on a 19th century grave or earlier it is probably a symbol of acuity and leadership. If it is pictured with the other figures of a man, a calf and an eagle, these are the four evangelists (with John as the eagle).

Eye. The giant eye that we see atop the pyramid on the American dollar bill is the classical Eye of Providence, or the all-seeing eye of the Divine, Who is Always Watching.

F

Fern leaf. The fern was symbolic of everlasting youth, and also humility, because the fern thrives while growing in the shadows, away from the limelight.

Finger pointing (see "Hands")

Fish. If you are familiar with the Ichthus fish icon (the one on bumper stickers), that is an unlikely symbol in a Victorian cemetery; but on a modern monument it symbolizes Christ. In a Jewish cemetery, two fish swimming together represent the month of Adar, which is the month when Purim is celebrated. The constellation of Pisces represents Judea.

Flame. The torch of eternal life.

Fleur de lis. This stylized iris flower has been associated with French royalty for many centuries, and often is meant to convey French ancestry.

Flowers (see "Bouquet")

Forget-me-nots. Legend has it that a knight and his lady were walking along a riverbank when he spotted a cluster of these blue beauties. As he bent down to pick them, his armor weighed him down and he fell into the water. Before he went under, he threw the flowers to his love and cried out, "Forget me not!"

G

Garland (see "Wreath")

Grapes. Fertility and richness. To put this on someone's grave would be a way to validate that their life was rich with the bounty of all that life has to offer.

Grim reaper. This very dark symbol fell out of favor in Victorian times so when you see this it is probably a very old grave from the 1700s, when themes of "life is short" were the norm. The epitaphs on these graves tended to be warnings to the living to get their lives together before time ran out.

H

Hands. There are many different hand poses you will see on Victorian grave markers, as hands can be very expressive both in portraiture and in symbolism.

Clasped hands. The bond between loved ones, or the connection between two people, even in death. It is a way of saying that the deceased are not alone, but are still connected to those they loved in life.

Hand with Finger Pointed Up. Put simply, "They're in Heaven." Also a reminder to the living to keep their eyes upward, toward God's path for them.

Hand holding a flower. Grief of the loved ones left behind.

Prayer hands. A symbol of Christian faith.

Harp. A harp or lyre indicates the kind of praise music that one might encounter in heaven; so, the meaning points to rejoicing in the afterlife.

Heart. Hearts were more common in the early 1800s and earlier, almost always meant to symbolize the Sacred Heart of Christ in a Catholic context. They skipped the Victorians for the most part and started reappearing on modern graves as more of a Valentine to the deceased.

Horse. Equestrian buried here. If it is a whole life-sized portrait monument of the deceased in glory on horseback, it is a military memorial and may or not be a grave at all.

Hourglass. Time is running out; life is short. A message to the living that they should seize the moment while they still can.

I - K

Ivy. Because ivy clings to the surface, it is a symbol of loyalty and steadfastness. Ivy is a very popular choice on grave markers and generally indicates friendship and fidelity.

Key(s). In alchemy, the key represents the philosopher's stone, a mythical substance that can transmute base metals into gold. In the Christian tradition, the key is often associated with Saint Peter, who was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven by Jesus, symbolizing the power of spiritual authority. The key is also seen as a symbol of initiation, representing the moment when a seeker is ready to move from one level of understanding to the next.

Knot. This is a motif that is ubiquitous on Irish and Irish-American graves, as it is a sign of proud Celtic heritage. The knots also represent eternity because they have no beginning and no end.



L

Lamb. Innocence. Almost always indicates a child's grave marker, as innocent children are often likened to "lambs." In Christianity, the lamb represents Christ as both suffering and triumphant; it is typically a sacrificial animal, and may also symbolize gentleness, innocence, and purity.

Ladder. The stairway to heaven.

Lamp. Wisdom. The light of the intellect, shining a brilliance in the darkness. Knowledge "sheds light."

Lily. Lilies symbolize purity, which was a highly prized virtue among the Victorians. Often lilies were sculpted on women's grave markers to convey their feminine grace and piety. Lilies are also well known as an Easter flower because they symbolize the resurrection of Christ. Lilies were associated with the concept of rebirth and new beginnings, as they bloom in the springtime.

Lion. Strength and courage. Because the lion protects the lamb in the Bible, it's also a symbol of God's power. If the lion has wings, it is meant to signify Mark the evangelist, and will be pictured with the other three apostles: Matthew as a man, Luke as a calf, and John as an eagle.

Log. See "tree trunk"

M – O

Lyre. See "harp"

Morning glory. Morning glory vines have been pictured growing on headstones, a symbol of mourning, short life and in some cases, even resurrection. To the Victorians, the flower symbolized love in vain.

Mortar and pestle. A professional symbol of a pharmacist, possibly a doctor.

Oak leaf. The oak is a symbol of wisdom, strength and endurance. Additionally in the Southern United States, oaks grow everywhere and so their pervasive presence makes them a well loved icon.

Obelisk. Power, stature and influence. The obelisk is a common sight at Victorian cemeteries, and is usually a marker for a man, or for a whole family led by a strong patriarch. Many argue that its obvious phallic shape is the reason for its effectiveness as a sign of male power, and the bigger the better. In Egyptian mythology they honored the sun god, Ra, like a "frozen" beam of sunlight.

Olive Branch. See "Dove"

P

Palm. Symbolizes the triumph of life over death through resurrection, martyrdom, peace and the reward of the righteous. Think of the people waving palm leaves at Christ in the story of Palm Sunday.

Peacock. Beauty and pride, especially male beauty. In the Southern United States, it could also be a personal emblem, as peacocks were popular pets for the very rich in those days.

Pentagram. Many folks assume that the 5-pointed star is associated with evil or witchcraft, but that's not the case at all. Grave stones marked with the upside down pentagram which also have the



letters F.A.T.A.L. is an emblem. It stands for "Fairest Among Ten-thousand All-together Lovely." It was a slogan for The Order of the Eastern Star, a women's Christian organization, and the deceased was a member of it.

Pick or spade. Tools of the trade.

Pine. A pine branch can symbolize longevity and even immortality. Often shown with the pine cone which is associated with perception and vision.

Pineapple. This is a very uncommon symbol but it does occasionally appear, like grapes, to symbolize perfection or fertility. Also when a symbol is unique it can simply be assumed to be a personal emblem that only the deceased and their community might have shared.

Pitcher. To Jews, the pitcher connotes a person who descended from the Hebrew tribe of Levi. Often in a Jewish cemetery the image is of a hand pouring water from the pitcher in anticipation of a worship ceremony, to wash the rabbi's hands.

Pyramid. With the translation of the Rosetta Stone in the early part of the 1800s, the understanding of ancient Egypt grew, and soon spilled over into popular culture. By the century's end, the design features and styles of historical Egypt

had become a visible part of Victorian art, public and domestic life. The pyramid was essentially an ostentatiously fashionable choice for powerful men to liken themselves to pharaohs.

Q - R

R.I.P. From the Latin *Requiesce in pace* or in English, Rest In Peace.

Rope. A rope in a circle represents eternity, everlasting life. Depending on how it is portrayed, it could be a prop for another symbol, such as an anchor to signify hope, or more literally a legacy as a sailor. Ropes bind and connect things, so it is a handy shorthand for these concepts when paired with other symbols.

Rose. The red rose was the ultimate symbol of love in the Language of Flowers. Roses are a well-loved symbol of true love and have been so for a very long time so they appear on many graves, especially those of women. A rosebud: a young life lost before it reached full bloom. An open rose flower: a mature, beautiful woman. A wilted rose: grief.

S

Scales of Justice. The deceased was most likely a lawyer or judge.

Scroll. Often used as a classical motif to show epitaph, representing a sacred message delivered. The scroll also has a subtle message about a story being left unfinished, because the bottom part of the scroll is still left unrolled.

Scythe. The Grim Reaper, the Harvester of Death and the Collector of Souls, carried a scythe to cut and collect souls from this earth, to deliver them to the afterlife. The scythe represents Death itself: the thing that cuts us away from our lives.

Seashell. A safe journey to the afterlife. Seashells are found washed up on the shore, having made a long and arduous journey across turbulent waters to reach the land. This journey is seen as a metaphor for the spiritual path of the soul as it navigates the trials of life to ultimately find its way home.

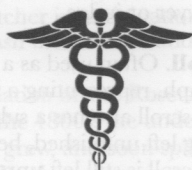
Shamrock/Clover. Like the Celtic knot, a three-leaf clover often marks the final resting place of someone of Irish heritage. The three leaves can also serve as a Christian symbol of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which connects spiritual symbolism to growth from the natural world.

Skull (see “Death’s Head”)

Snake. The snake as a symbol is more common in Europe than in America, since Americans were more likely to associate it with the Devil. However, in Europe the snake symbolizes rebirth, because of how it sheds its skin. If it is biting its own tail in a circle shape, that is called an ouroboros and means infinity. Two snakes curled around a staff is called a caduceus, and symbolizes the medical field; the deceased was likely a physician.



ouroboros



caduceus

Star. Stars generally symbolize hope, dreams and life everlasting. However depending on the star's shape it can also be an emblem representing that person's cultural affiliation.

Five pointed star: (see “Pentagram.”) A five pointed star could represent the Star of Bethlehem, or the five wounds of Christ. Inverted, it could be the logo for the Order of the Eastern Star.

Six pointed (round) star: In Hinduism and Eastern religions, this star represents creation.

Six pointed star, intersecting triangles: The Star of David, the symbol of Judaism. The triangle pointing up represents the good deeds people do for God, while the triangle pointing down shows the goodness and holiness God gives to people.

Sun. The sun is a very ancient symbol linked with death (sunset) and resurrection (sunrise). It speaks to the passing over from this life into the next. The sun is also the source of life and energy, so it also is an acknowledgement that this person was once bursting with life, like you and me. Most Christian cemeteries are designed so that the graves are facing the east in view of the rising sun, in order to rise and meet Christ on his second coming.

Sword(s). A sword symbolizes the deceased's military service. A broken sword symbolizes a life cut short, whereas crossed swords symbolize that the deceased died in battle.

T - U

Torch. The torch is a light in the darkness; the never-ending flame of the soul.

Torch Inverted. In Greek mythology, the inverted torch of Thanatos symbolizes death and mortality. It is a reminder that death is inevitable and that all living things will eventually succumb to it. A light that cannot be extinguished.

Tree. Generally a tree symbolizes strength and fortitude. If the whole gravestone is shaped like a tall tree stump, it may be a symbol of the Woodmen of the World (see "Tree stump"). If it is sculpted to look like a low tree stump, it symbolizes a life cut short. See also "Oak," "Pine," and "Weeping Willow."

Tree stump. Tree trunk gravestones were a signature of the fraternal group Woodmen of the World (WOW). The trunk was festooned with symbols of WOW including axes, mauls, and other woodworking instruments. Often you may see a dove of peace with an olive branch. Sometimes the phrase "Here Rests a Woodman of the World" is carved somewhere on the stump.

Trumpet. Trumpets are symbols of victory and resurrection. Sometimes the trumpeters are angels announcing resurrection morning, calling the people to gather and rejoice.

Urn. See "Draped urn"

V - Z

Vine. See "Ivy"

Virtues. The seven heavenly virtues combine the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude with the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. All or any of these can be represented by a female figure,

such as the Lady Justice statues seen in front of courthouses. Often when these personified virtues appear as statues in cemeteries people mistake them for angels; however if there are no wings, the Greco-Roman figure you see is probably one of the Virtues.

Weeping willow tree. A symbol of mourning, because of the sad way the branches droop, as though weeping.

Wheat. A sheaf of wheat can symbolize the body of Christ, as wheat crackers are used as the bread in Holy Communion. Wheat therefore symbolizes immortality and resurrection to a Christian. Wheat can also represent a long life, usually more than three score and ten, or seventy years. This comes from the Bible, Psalm 90, verse 10: "The days of our years are three score and ten."

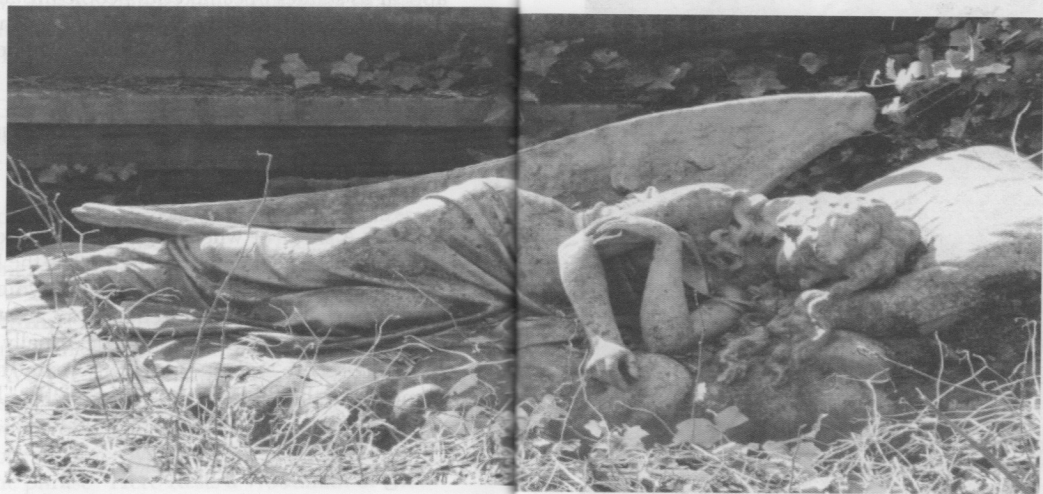
Winged Face (see "Cherub")

Winged Hourglass (see "Hourglass")

Wings on a figure. If the wings are very large like eagle's wings, it's an angel. If the wings are tiny and look like fairy or butterfly wings, it's meant to represent the Greek figure Psyche, goddess of the soul.

§§§

PHOTO GALLERY

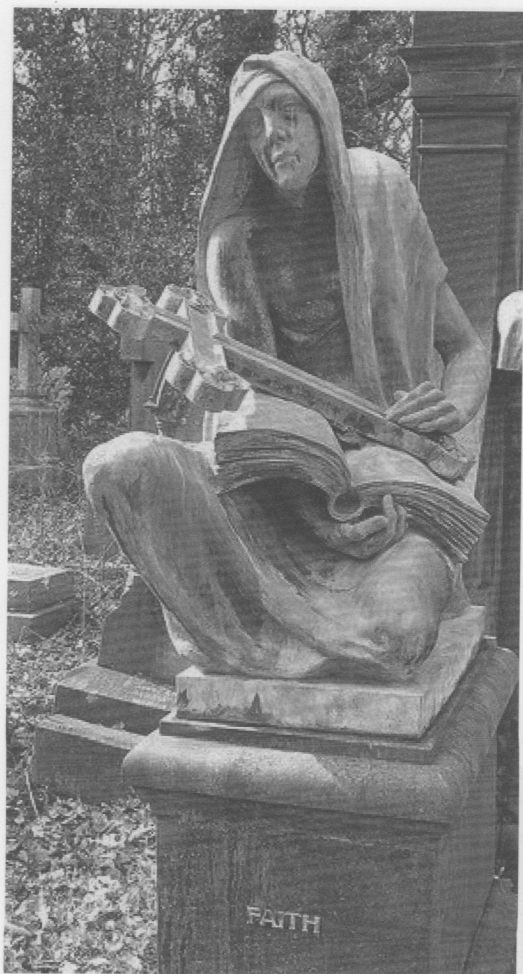


Three angels from London's Highgate Cemetery.

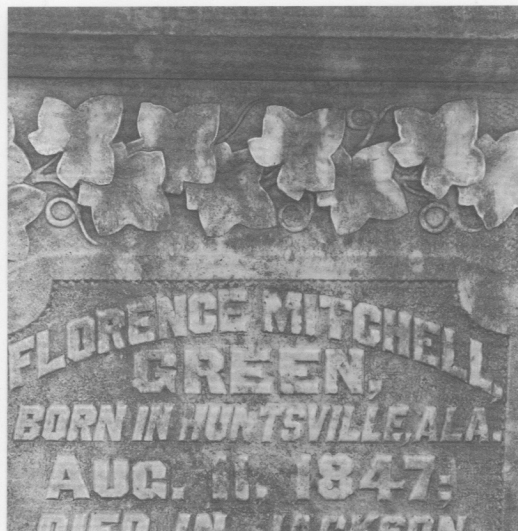
Top, the sleeping angel on the grave of a young wife and mother named Mary, as described in the inscription.

The angel at left also honors a deceased young woman, Amy was her name; the sculpture may actually be a likeness of her.

Next page: This kneeling angel holds a seashell, a reminder of the journey of the soul. The ivy added itself—it is really growing on the statue.



In Leeds, England, a figure with a cross and book is a personification of the virtue Faith.



All photos on this page were taken in Jackson, Mississippi at Greenwood Cemetery. Above, a beautiful carving of ivy runs horizontally across a tombstone. Below, the finger pointing to heaven with a very simple epitaph: Mamie.



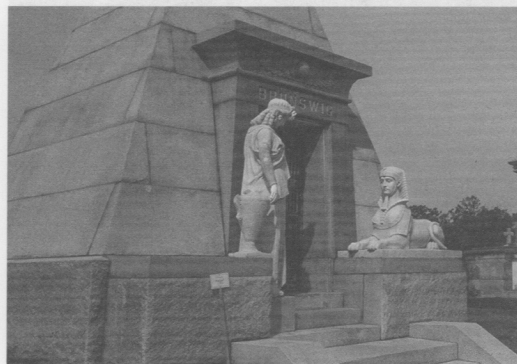
Below: This tree-trunk Woodmen of the World grave marker (detail shot) features a scroll for the epitaph, ivy to indicate fidelity, fern leaves to symbolize humility, and lily of the valley for joy.



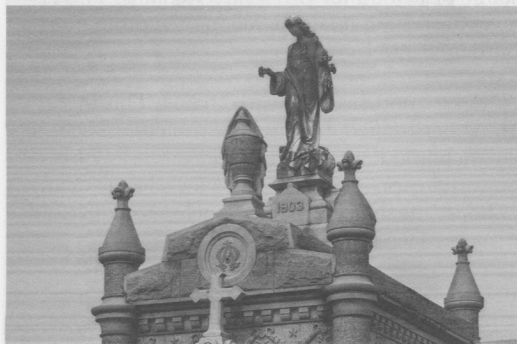


Above: inverted torches flank the opening to this family vault in New Orleans.

All photos on this page were taken in New Orleans, Louisiana, where above-ground tombs are the norm. Because Southern Louisiana is on swampland, the buried coffins were floating to the surface and so vaults became preferable.



Above: a pyramid, grieving maiden and sphinx in Metairie Cemetery.



This vault is loaded with symbols: the draped urn, the cross, the Alpha and Omega, garlands too. The figure holds lilies so she is possibly the personified virtue of Chastity.



Both photos on this page were taken in Nashville's Mount Olivet Cemetery. Above, a very unique statue of a youthful girl in heavy chains. This is a very arresting image signifying the profound burden of grief.

At right, another figure with chains: This is Hope personified, because she is pictured with an anchor at her feet. Her expression is such a powerful expression of what it feels like to "cling to hope," as she clings to the anchor's chains and casts her face upward.

In both pictures, note the obelisks in the background. The obelisk grave marker is very common in historic Southern cemeteries where the wealthy are interred.



Delicate hands holding flowers of mourning drape over the gravestones of departed children in this family grouping.

The photos on these last four pages were taken at Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis, Tennessee.



Above: sometimes in lieu of symbols, grieving survivors chose to depict their loved ones in a portrait. Here, two little sisters.



The oak tree to the left of this child's tiny grave was probably no more than a sapling at the time of its burial; now the roots have lifted the cradle.



The Snowden angel is perhaps the most famous sculpture in Elmwood Cemetery. It is a life-sized bronze of an angel with a palm branch in the left hand and an inverted torch in the right.

The bronze has developed a beautiful green patina over the years.

The snow den and a
perhaps the most famous
sculpture in Elmwood
Country. It is a life-sized
figure of an angel with
arms spread in the air.
It is made of wood.



*Though my soul may set in
darkness, it will rise in perfect
light —
I have loved the stars too fondly
to be fearful of the night.*

from "the Old Astronomer to his
Pupil" by Sarah Williams



Have you ever walked through a historic cemetery and wondered about the art on the monuments and markers? The weeping angels, the anchors, the scrolls and doves...what do they all mean?

If you're willing to learn the meanings of a few symbols, you will find layers of cultural history in those shapes and figures. Being receptive to them is like hearing the dead speak.