

An excerpt from
Bloodless: The Trial of Burke and Hare
 by Joseph Aragon



Joseph the Miller's room. JOSEPH is asleep on a cot.

HARE: *(pounds on the door)* Joseph! Joseph, open the door, we need to talk. *(pounds)* Joseph!

HARE unlocks the door, and he and BURKE enter.

BURKE: Is he dead?

HARE: No, just drunk. I know how he's like. Joseph! *(shakes him)* Nah, there's no waking him. See, he's still breathing.

BURKE: So he is. Well, you can't blame a man for hoping.

HARE: What?

2

THE BUGGER IS BETTER OFF DEAD

BURKE: Well . . . come on, Hare, we made four pound off old Donald. You're telling me you didn't see him lying there and thinking . . . maybe . . .

HARE: Well he's not dead yet!

BURKE: No, no, of course he's not.

**But he does have one foot in the grave, don't you think?
 Do you really believe that he's gonna get better?
 I mean, look at him! Drinking himself to a stupor,
 clinging to life like a trooper, but what kind of life is he living?
 I'm telling ya,
 he hasn't a prayer, the fecker is barely keeping his wits.
 Succumbing to sin with whisky and gin
 when his wallet permits.
 And forever he sneezes, he hacks and he wheezes,
 he pukes and he shits—
 Tell me, what kind of life is that?
 What kind of life is that?**

Ah, but dead!

HARE: Dead?

- BURKE: Dead, aye! **The bugger is better off dead!**
Best to end the strife when your wretched life
is hanging by a thread.
So sound the final clarion,
'cuz the fella's well-nigh carrion.
Now I know it sounds barbarian,
but the bugger is better off dead!
- HARE: You're not thinking of doing what I think you're thinking of
doing!
- BURKE: **As if you didn't think it yourself, boyo.**
Times are desperate and I'm only being pragmatic.
You see, I believe that a fellow must serve an objective,
and once you become ineffective
you give up your right to existence.
Take Joseph here:
In life he would labour
and help out his neighbour whenever he can.
Content now to linger,
but can't lift a finger or bloody well stand.
All this time he unknowingly
thwarts the ongoing endeavour of man!
Tell me, what is he good for now?
What is he good for now?
- Ah, but dead!
- HARE: Dead?
- BURKE: Dead, aye! **The bugger is better off dead!**
He would be a gift to scientific industry instead.
Think of the lads at the academy,
poking 'round in Joe's anatomy.
Now you still may think it's mad of me,
but the bugger is better off dead!
- See how he lies there, fighting for every single breath,**
never to rise again, the poor old sod.
- HARE: I suppose . . .
- BURKE: **See in his eyes there the ever-encroaching glint of death,**
begging us to commend his soul to God.
- HARE: I suppose . . .
It would make a noble sacrifice the likes of no one else's.
- BURKE/HARE: **And unite him with the angels singing "glory in excelsis!"**

HARE: **A gesture none the braver!**

BURKE: Soon he'll join his dear departed!

HARE: **We'd be doing him a favour!**

BURKE: Right then, boyo, let's get started—

HARE: **What a bold and selfless act!**

BURKE: Grand! Are you with me then?

HARE: **In fact, I'm concurring with exactly what you said!**

JOSEPH stirs and grunts. BURKE and HARE freeze.

(quieter) He's better off dead!

BURKE: Dead?

HARE: Dead, aye! **The bugger is better off dead!**

BURKE: Good! **Now you hold square the body there,
while I attend the head.
I'll plug his mouth and nose now,
so no abrasion shows now.
He'll be thrashing 'round in throes now . . .**

*JOSEPH starts to writhe while BURKE smothers him
and HARE pins him down.*

. . . so hold him secure to the bed till we're sure that he's dead!

HARE: Dead!

BURKE: Dead, aye!

BURKE/HARE: **The bugger is better off dead!**

BURKE: **Just keep him pinned till the tint of the skin
you see no trace of red!**

HARE: **Miller Joe, we hardly knew ya . . .**

BURKE: **But it's time now to subdue ya!**

BURKE/HARE: **Singing glory alleluia!**

They hold the last note as JOSEPH thrashes and struggles, until finally JOSEPH goes limp. BURKE and HARE release him, panting from the struggle (and the held note). They stare at JOSEPH a short while.

HARE: So. How much will we get?

BURKE: Eight pound, I would bet.

BURKE/HARE: **The bugger is better off dead!**

They shake hands.



End of Excerpt