

Sleeping With Satan

By

Grace Jolliffe

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ABOUT GRACE JOLLIFFE



Grace was born and brought up in Toxteth, Liverpool. This house is where she was born. As well as being born in the upstairs bedroom you see in the photograph, Grace wrote a lot of stories there too.

Her late mother was Liverpudlian and her father an Irish immigrant who took the cattle boat with his brothers, to follow the emigration trail to Liverpool in the 1950's.

The family became returning emigrants when they moved back to Wicklow in Ireland when Grace was a teenager.

Grace now lives with her husband on the Wild Atlantic Way in Galway where she is busy gardening, keeping hens, ducks and writing as always.

Grace has never lost her love for writing. She writes for adults, as well as children and enjoys both equally.

Her first novel, Piggy Monk Square was originally published by Tindal Street Press and was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writer's prize.

Grace's writing has been widely published, in both magazines and newspapers and she has also written for television and film and her short films have won several awards at film festivals.

You can also see all Grace's books on her [Amazon Author Page](#)

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I don't believe in ghosts, ghouls or Satan. So I had no problem agreeing when my mate, Brendan, bet me that I wouldn't spend a night alone in a graveyard. Despite the fact that I am an estate agent I knew for certain that this would be the easiest five hundred euro I was ever going to make.

I felt safe in the knowledge that I could not only spend a night alone in a graveyard without turning a hair, I could dance, do cartwheels, even sing a mixed melody of hits from the current top-twenty while balancing on top of a freshly-dug grave, without having the slightest worry that the dead might arise and get me.

You see, I believe that when you die you stop breathing, stop thinking and are promptly eaten up by worms until all that's left is a set of bones. End of story. At least it would have been if it hadn't been for Brendan's insistence that I film the entire night in the graveyard to prove that I had risen to the challenge.

I've passed the graveyard a million times. It's placed high on a steep hill looking over the Atlantic Ocean, a place which, thanks to some government initiative aimed at encouraging tourists to follow this route, we are learning to call the Wild Atlantic Way.

On a clear day you can see the shape of the tiny islands that add random splashes of green and purple to the dark blue of the ocean. The views are outstanding and I'm not just talking as an estate agent here; the views are genuinely stunning. I often wished I could build a house here myself. But it's hard enough to get around the planning laws when the living are involved but when you bring in the dead there's not a hope in hell.

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It's such a waste of a prime location though. I mean it's not as if any of the current inhabitants could enjoy the view. There are about five hundred of them as far as I can guess. Almost all of their graves are visible from a distance because of their staggered placement on the hill. You know the type of hill I'm talking about, soft green and pretty in that wild, romantic way the tourists love, although fields like that are two a penny in Clare these days.

The graves themselves are in a sorry state. Nobody is left alive to tend them any more so they are spotted with yellow and green from the lichen and moss that also conceals the names of the dead. Many of the graves are sinking - gradually sucked in by soil made soft by years of rain. In another hundred years they might be invisible altogether. Lucky is the estate agent who gets his hands on this prime of primest locations in a future where planners no longer rule.

If I was selling this place I'd describe it as heaven, but then if it was me I wouldn't sell it. I'd buy the whole site myself, ditch the graves, drain it and build a west facing two-storey with views to die for. But that won't happen in my lifetime so for now I must settle for my one night in heaven.

Brendan was impressed that the night I chose to stay in the graveyard was one on which the moon was low and full, allowing the strong shadowy shapes of the graves to stand starkly against the moonlit brightness of the sky. He was equally impressed at my choosing a night famed for the sudden appearance of weeping, wailing and long-toothed-bleeding things: Halloween.

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He hinted that he might just turn up in the early hours with some takeaway food and drink but I knew Brendan wouldn't leave the pub before midnight, nor his bed before morning so I made my own preparations for my long night with the dead.

To keep the expansion of my belly under control I usually follow a low carb diet, at least during the week, but I figured a night in a grave yard needed a bit more sustenance than a tin of tuna and a box of wilted salad put together by that bony-fingered red-head in the service station, so I bought a long crunchy roll and got the red-head to butter it thickly then fill it with cheese and ham. For a side I bought a family bag of six packets of cheese and onion crisps. I thought I might need a bit of extra crunch – given the night that was in it.

Speaking of crunch, I did notice as I made my way through the graveyard that the sounds of gravel underfoot seemed louder than I expected it to be. However, I have a lot of experience visiting empty houses and barren locations, so I also knew that any sound emanating from a silent place was bound to seem unusually loud.

The night was still and calm and the only thing creepy was the creeping briar that had over years, become liberated from the hedgerow and was now evident everywhere, crawling along the ground and curling around the graves to form thorny tripwires for the unwary.

I was wary and so, treading carefully to avoid tripping, I picked my way towards the highest ground in the graveyard and chose a sheltered spot beneath a large yew tree to pitch my tent.

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I ignored my sister Jane's instructions to avoid pitching the tent anywhere near a yew tree, especially in a grave yard where she claimed they were only planted for their corpse-eating purposes. Jane talks a lot of rubbish. In my opinion she reads too much. I wouldn't have told her anything about my little excursion only I didn't have a tent and she, being a bit on the hippy-dippy side, had one to spare.

I left the tent flaps open to better enjoy the outstanding view, unrolled my sleeping bag, fixed my camera on its tripod and settled down. I was confident knowing the only problem I would have that night was the boredom of having to pass a quiet and uneventful evening relatively sober.

And it was boring. So boring I would have loved to be able to say that in the darkness of that grave yard a thousand spirits danced and screeched, or that a wailing she-ghost enticed me into her wispy lair, or even that Satan chased me round the yew tree, but none of that happened.

The only sound I heard was the munching of the crisps I had jammed between the two layers of my crunchy bread and the only terrifying sight were the crumbs left in the bread wrapper when I realized that the empty hours of the long night were making me hungry and that I should have bought two of those rolls. Apart from that, there were no problems that night. No, the problems started later, much later.

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Brendan and I watched the footage from that night many times. I had been very careful to replace the almost drained batteries for the fully charged ones I'd had the foresight to bring, so barely a minute went unrecorded. What I had filmed that night could therefore accurately be described a whole lot of nothing, unless you count me eating a roll and reading some dog-eared men's mags from a beige file labeled *Contracts Pending* that I keep locked away in my brief case - there was nothing in that footage of interest. Of that we were absolutely certain.

That is why I am at a loss to explain what happened a month later. It was a Friday night after work and as usual we had spent the evening in Reilly's pub and had gone back to Brendan's place to watch the footage I had shot at Mick from marketing's stag night.

I had set it up myself, Brendan having got himself tangled in the leads when he tried, so there was no chance of sabotage - even if Brendan had been capable. I thought it strange, even for Brendan, the way he had gone from mildly inebriated to absolutely ossified in about ten seconds but what was really strange was that there was no sign of Mick on the footage at all.

What was on the footage was difficult to explain logically. Instead of a shot of Mick tied up naked outside the pub - it in itself a horrifying sight given the fact of his acne vulgaris, we were presented with a toothless, hairless monster with skin so raw it looked like suppurating liver with pipes. It grinned out at us from a crescent-moon shaped mouth and every time it exhaled it blew out puffs of pus-coloured breath.

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We knew that the only people left standing after that stag night were me, Brendan, and Mick, and he was only standing because he was securely attached to the lamppost. The others had wimped out on their twenty-second slammer. What ever that hideous creature was it definitely hadn't been there that on the stag night.

I told Brendan we were just seeing things that weren't there, probably because of the effects of some small blue tabs of dubious quality. We'd taken them before we left the pub to set us up for the road home. But they had been supplied by Derek, our accountant, a man of dubious character with dubious sources. Brendan, angry at the idea of paying for a bad trip, agreed and said he'd ask Derek for a refund.

To tell the truth I forgot all about the whole thing until two weeks later when Jane dropped in to collect her tent. She brought her small daughter, Jacinta. I quite like small children, especially my six-year-old niece. She is a funny, inquisitive little thing who enjoys running round my apartment looking for the small change that falls from my trouser pockets like little drops of jangling rain whenever I crash after a pint or twelve. It keeps her quiet.

On this particular day, Jacinta proudly informed me that she had managed to collect the sum of two euro and forty-three cent. She had stood with her hand outstretched offering it to me, knowing full well that the 'finders-keepers' rule means she always got to keep whatever she found - someone's got to teach kids the value of money.

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I was just about to go through our usual routine, the one where I pretended that I was short of cash and badly needed that two euro and forty-three cent when my sister interrupted.

She wanted to capture the moment on film; saying that when we were all old and grey, moments like these would be priceless treasured memories.

I didn't tell her that if when I was old and grey the only treasured video moments were ones starring a gap toothed six year old, I would lose the will to live. Instead, like a dutiful uncle, I fetched the camera, and placed it in Jane's willing hands.

Little Jacinta looked especially sweet in her yellow tee shirt and jeans. Her pudgy hand was steady as she held out the coins and said, 'here, uncle Brian, look what I got.' I played well too, answering, 'Well Jacinta, just as well you found that money, I don't have a cent to my name...'

A more touching scene couldn't have been played better by two professional actors, and Jane, understandably, couldn't wait to see it full size on my sixty-five inch TV. I hooked it up and the three of us sat in front of the screen and waited. First of all the screen was completely black. It stayed like that for a full minute, something I couldn't understand, as there had been enough light in the apartment but still we waited, and eventually the show began.

Jane, who did a media course before she discovered vegetables, had first of all done a quick pan around my apartment to get an establishing scene. This consisted of a close up of my marble sink and a wide shot of my big glass table.

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The next shot was me - hamming it up, pretending to rifle through my pockets. That shot was a bit close for my liking. I don't know what Jane was trying to say but I don't go in for all that Cinéma vérité film school stuff especially when she had lined up the camera so close to my face that you could see the veins on the end of my nose.

I dreaded seeing the next shot of me and Jacinta together. I had a horrible feeling my sister would zoom in even closer to bag herself a full beauty and the beast shot. Before that Jane pulled back and got some random shot of the floor and then we heard Jacinta: 'here, Uncle Brian, look what I got.' Her little voice is sweet and has the tiniest squeak and it sounded so lovely that Jane and I exchanged a grin as we anticipated her cute little face making its appearance in the next shot.

But there was nothing cute about the creature that walked into that shot. It was bald for a start and it was also completely skinless. Like the drug-propelled vision we saw on the stag-night footage, this creature had liver-like skin, with pipes so deep you could insert an entire finger, not that you would want to. The only resemblance between this creature and Jacinta was the fact that they were both small and both wore a yellow tee shirt and jeans.

I quickly turned it off. 'Oh shit,' I said, as casually as I could. 'I knew I shouldn't have bought that cheap camera from Brendan, it's obviously faulty.'

'But uncle Brian, that was a monster on the telly, a really scary monster,' cried poor little Jacinta, while her mother struggled to find her voice.

'No it wasn't silly-face, that was just a bit of...'

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‘Interference,’ said Jane. ‘That was interference and also, er, somebody used the camera before you and they must have used it to record an amateur dramatics version of a er... puppet show.’

I had to hand it to my sister. She’s a great mother. I’d never would have thought that one up, at least not right away. Little Jacinta believed her and to distract her further we all went to ‘Funnyland’ and spent a lot more than two euro and forty three cents on as many rides as it took to make little Jacinta forget all about the scary monster on the telly.

It seemed to work and little Jacinta fell asleep only moments after we got back. Jane though was far from tired. Like the good mother she was she had hidden her shock from her child and it was only when we were alone that she allowed her rising hysteria to envelop me in a whirl of questions.

We watched it again. The tiny toothless terror was still there in all its glory. It had to be real, there was no denying it. I had consumed nothing more than coffee that day and Jane, who’s such a health freak she won’t even have ice in her spring water had taken nothing at all. There was no other explanation. We were watching the presence of evil and we had no idea what it meant, or what to do about it.

Jane had never been happy about my little sojourn in the graveyard and she wasted no time laying the blame squarely at my feet. Having no other logical explanation and no time to think up one, I had to agree. She made me show the graveyard footage again and we spent the rest of the evening watching and watching and watching while Jacinta continued to sleep in a curled up ball in the corner of my sofa.

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We were on the fiftieth screening when Jane nudged me so hard in the ribs I had to fight to contain the childish urge to pull her hair. But all she had seen was just me opening a pack of crisps and inserting them carefully into a my roll. No big deal about that, I told her.

‘No, not that, you great big idiot,’ she said.

‘It’s what you do with the crisp packet, look,’ she said, freezing the frame and pointing at yours truly poking the empty crisp packet into a small vase. I had borrowed that vase from a nearby grave to use as a bin. In another shot I was tipping the ashes from the end of a joint into it. I’d forgotten about that.

I explained to Jane that I was only trying to be environmentally friendly, something she had asked me to be many times but she decided that despite my green intentions, what she called my ‘plundering of the graves’ must have disturbed a restless spirit - one particularly murky spirit who had somehow managed to exact revenge by taking up residence in my camera.

My first thought was to simply sell the camera. Let some other mug have the pleasure of the toothless terror, at least I’d make some money on it. In fact I could advertise it as haunted! Show potential buyers the footage and make a fortune. But, Jane wasn’t impressed with that idea. She thought that would only further provoke the spirits and probably unleash a whole nest of them and she wasn’t going to put Jacinta at risk. To be honest I wasn’t going to do that either.

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Punctuating her words with several sharp jabs in my funny bone Jane insisted that I return to the grave, remove the crisp-packets from the vase and put everything back the way it was.

Pulling her hair remained out of the question due to her vicious threats to separate my most precious parts from my body with a rusting razor and she was adamant that until peace was restored to the dead there could be no peace for the living. I reluctantly obeyed but how I wish I'd pulled her hair instead.

She wouldn't let me wait for the next Halloween but picked the next full moon for my return to the graveyard. Again the night was calm and still. I removed the crisp packet from the vase and stuffed it in my pocket to dispose of later. Although I carried the vase as carefully as I could, I forgot about the creeping briar until the moment when my foot got caught in one of its thorny loops.

I fell on top of the grave and I knew before it landed on the hard surface that the vase would break so I did my best to catch it. But I missed it by a breath of air and it glanced off my extended hand, bounced on the headstone and shattered into a thousand little pieces.

What happened next happened fast and in the same second I opened my mouth to scream something jumped from those little fragments of vase and into my mouth. Despite its ragged bulk this foul piece of rotting matter made its way down my throat, before settling into my belly. I began to smell decaying flesh and found it was coming from my own mouth.

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It didn't just feel like I had swallowed Satan, but when I staggered out of the graveyard to inspect myself in the car mirror it looked like it as well. For in that mirror I saw my toothless, skinless, hairless head, I saw my skin as raw as suppurating liver with pipes, I saw my crescent-moon-shaped mouth and I felt the heat and smelled the rank odour from every puff of pus-coloured breath I took. A coldness set in around my toes and I rubbed them to warm them up but only succeeded in making them drop off. I looked at the little circle of rotting toes on the ground for a moment then picked up my big toe. The smell, a curious mixture of sulphur, seaweed, maggot-ridden meat and a little bit of hash would have awakened the dead

As I stared at my rotten stinking toe I knew in that moment that no amount of trips to 'Funnyland' would ever cure my beloved niece of the nightmares that even one glimpse of me would cause. I would be here forever. Still it's not quite the end of the world. I have got round the planning laws and there's not too many estate agents can say that. Despite the dead it looks like I'm going to enjoy these outstanding views for a very long time, or at least until hell freezes over.

THE END

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