

KILL GRIM

by

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Character

YOU - Any age, any gender. Though the metaphor for Everyman's life may be abundantly transparent, YOU should still portray a distinct personality akin to the actor's. Each and every version of YOU is shaped by the people YOU knew and the experiences YOU shared - so what is left of YOU without that network? Death is no stranger to YOU; there is fear of the unknown, not a fear of pain.

Setting

An empty graveyard in the dead of night. It's midnight on some late summer, early fall day. The weather is ominous but not uncomfortable. An ever-present wind howls through the gravestones and the bell of the distant, small church building occasionally echoes on the edge of perception. The gravestones are nondescript but pristinely maintained - any foliage such as flowers, grass, trees, etc are just shy of perfect. It's clear that the graveyard is cared for. That doesn't, however, distract from its ominous feeling of loneliness in the dark.

Sound

An emphasis should be placed on the soundscape and how it can represent the Grim. Though the Grim is never heard, their presence should be felt: the wind "howling" through the graveyard, the nature that slowly fades from reality. Find ways to create audible responses from the Grim for YOU to interpret. The soundscape should perform with the actor.

Magical Realism

This script was originally written as a radio drama to be performed only by audio. If performed live, consideration should be given to the use of "magical realism," specifically concerning the creation of the gravestones. Endeavour to find creative means of unfolding events in front of the audience's eyes - magnets, tensioned hinges, etc. Build as much as the world, the Grim, the graveyard, as your production sees fit.

Context

Many have heard the term "graveyard watch." Graveyards are a unique backdrop for so many tales of horror; they encompass people's fear of the dark, their fear of isolation, and their fear of death. It is worth noting that, while "graveyard" and "cemetery" are often used interchangeably, the former defines a burial ground accompanying a churchyard or religious building, the latter is purely a burial site.

The "Church Grim" is a unique figure in English folklore that ties into graveyards. With strong roots in 19th-century Christian beliefs, the Church Grim is known by several other names: *Kirk Grim* in English folklore, *Kyrkogrim* in Swedish, *Kirkonavi* in Finnish. There is even a bridge tied to this folklore in North Yorkshire, the "Kilgram" bridge, coined from the sacrifice of a shepherd's dog named Grim, killed by the devil. In any iteration, tales of the Church Grim often depict a large black dog, perhaps spectral in nature, destined to safeguard the churchyard from vandalism and desecration. Some stories depict other quadrupedal animals like horses while some others depict avian creatures like ravens. Still some more, specifically in Scandinavia, attribute ghostly human-like features to the spirit.

The differences in presentation come from the specific "ritual" with which a Church Grim is created. Generally, underneath the cornerstone or north side of a church, a creature - most often a dog - would be buried, potentially alive. So many believed that the first soul buried in a churchyard had to protect the area forevermore, so to prevent a human soul having to perform this duty, a dog would be entrusted with the "job." Nowadays, the Church Grim's *faire chladh* (Gàidhlig: "graveyard watch") is a macabre welcoming for new souls. The Grim could be seen looking out from church towers at night welcoming the souls of recently deceased on the start of their journey towards the afterlife.

One can hone-in on any part of the Church's Grim lore to enhance our horror of graveyards: Dark, rainy, windy, and thunderous weather often accompany signs of the Church Grim and he is attributed with ringing the church bell at midnight to signal that a death would ensue the following day. Beyond these facts, however, one thing prevails, and that is that he only bears ill-will towards those that seek to profane his domain. At its core, the lore of a Church Grim shows pure human hope; that at the end of our life, the first thing we'll be greeted with is "man's best friend."

SCENE

In the dark, there is the distant howl of dogs, drowned out by ominous weather, perhaps a droning wind. Equally distant, a church bell chimes, signalling the time: midnight. Before it is resolved, however, the sound of YOU running on, perhaps even climbing a metal fence, is heard, along with a muffled dial tone underneath:

YOU: Come on, come on, come on, pick up, pick up, pick--

YOU ducks behind a gravestone. Muffled from the cellphone there is a generic robotic voicemail greeting. "Hello. We are not available now. Please leave your name and phone--"

YOU: Damnit, mom, the one time you don't--

The voicemail chime beeps.

YOU: Hey! Mom, it's me, just calling to, you know, check in, see how you're doing, tell you how funny it is that you scold me for not answering the phone when it's important. Yeah. Well, anyway, I'm just walking home from work, hiding in a graveyard because some freak in a dog mask is chasing me, you know, same-old-same-old. Call me when you get this! Love ya, bye! God. OK. Whatever, 9 - 1 - 1.

A muffled disconnect tone is heard, followed by the robotic "We're sorry, you have reached a number that has been disconnected or is no longer in service."

YOU: What the hell? Did I--

As YOU tries to redial, the same disconnect tone is heard, but the message is altered. "We're sorry, you-- is no longer in service." The message repeats, warping further, perhaps reversed, reverbed, or filtered. Standing up and speaking over it:

YOU: Ah, OK, this is a prank. Real funny guys! You can come out now. Which one of you was wearing the mask? Guys? What did you do to my phone, how did you-- Guys you can come out now. This isn't funny!

YOU silences the phone. Faint murmurs still echo, fading into the wind.

YOU: You got me. When I said I wasn't afraid of anything, I didn't think to put "six-foot tall wolf-face weirdos walking slowly behind me" on my list. Ha ha, now come out, it's fucking cold. No service now, great.

YOU crouches behind the gravestone once more.

YOU: OK. This is a voice memo, recording this so that I have proof of what's going on and can justify my self defense if someone ends up hurt tonight, friend or stranger. I was walking home alone - yeah, yeah, "don't walk alone" "get some mace" whatever, I was walking home alone when I noticed some person following me. Not running, not even walking fast. I ran, though, and I'm hiding in a graveyard now. I honestly don't even know where; not my normal route home. I was going to just wait it out but I just yelled like an idiot so I'm sure he found me.

There's a shed or a church or something nearby, I doubt anyone's there this late at night, it's probably locked. I see the graveyard's front gate - I could make a run for it but I don't know if the coast is clear. I don't know; if I die, I guess, the perpetrator is, like, six-foot tall, wearing this black cloak, and he has this dog mask on. I didn't get close enough to-- Oh holy shit I think I see him... he's here. If I can get around him I'll run, or I'll fight him. If this is the police listening to this and I'm dead, if he killed me, I'll have made sure to get a picture of his face. Look through my camera.

I can't tell if he knows I'm-- What the fuck is he doing? He's just standing there. He's staring right at the grave I'm hiding behind. He's just trying to freak me out. I'm ending the voice memo here so I can open the camera. Let's do this, I'll play your little game.

YOU stands up and steps in front of the grave.

YOU: What do you want, freak? Huh? I've got 911 on the line-- on speaker, here... they know where I am. Yeah, that's what I thought, not so keen on getting near me now, huh? I dare ya, take a step closer. Take off that mask, let's see that face of yours. Yeah, operator? I'm getting a good look at him. Forget the "six-foot" thing, he must be on stilts, I don't see any feet under the cloak. That why you were walkin' so slow, freak? It's not just a mask, he's got these weird gloves, long fake nails, and fake fur fingers-- or, sorry, do you prefer I say "claws"? How about I just snap a picture? Bright light in three, two-

As the camera flashes, the soundscape picks up; wind and unnatural noises, perhaps an echo of the "click". The phone is tossed from YOU's hand.

YOU: My phone!

YOU scrambles towards it and picks it up.

YOU: Got the picture. You picked the wrong person, bud. I'm not afraid of werewolves or whatever you're trying to be. Count Dracula's deranged dog. The glowing eyes are a nice touch. Bet they show up real well on your mugshot here. You're not in the photo. Hold on, no, I--

YOU takes another photo. Several.

YOU: What the hell. Why can't I take a picture of you? I was kidding about the Dracula thing. How are you... Why aren't you showing up on...

I... had this all wrong. Listen. Listen. OK. A ghost, whatever, great, cool. Yeah, sure, I believe. So many religions. Anything is possible. You're home now, right? Is this graveyard your home? Sorry to bother you, I'll leave. That's what I've been trying to do, anyway. I was lying about the 911 thing, by the way, if you're, like, an angel of God or something. I've got people, they're probably worried about me. Sorry for this misunderstanding.

YOU gets no further than a step forward before a gravestone springs to life in front of them.

YOU: Cool. Yeah. OK just summon a gravestone right in front of me, yeah, no, I get your message loud and clear. I'm setting the phone down, no more threats, let's talk about this. You showed up outside of the graveyard, so... are you haunting me specifically? Yes? No? Did I disturb you somewhere, did I accidentally desecrate something? Any kind of response at all would be super helpful. The unblinking eyes and muzzle are really, just... The way I see it, there are two options: either you're haunting me or want to kill me, and since you haven't done the latter... Good, OK... Just keep floating there, unmoving. Were you leading me here? Is there something only I can do that will help you? This gravestone? Is there something important about it?

YOU goes to touch the first gravestone. A flurry of sound - potentially even motion - stops them in their tracks.

YOU: Nope! OK! Not touching it! Look, not touching it! Put your-- no, no, put your claw down. Sorry for calling that a glove, yeah, yeah OK OK. Um. I ditched the phone. Not touching your graves-- *Your* graves? Are you buried here? Can you... talk? Yes-or-no? No, none of that? OK. Look, I'll work with you here, I just need to know what you're after. Are you buried here?

Some sort of motion from the Grim.

YOU: The church? Are you pointing to the building? Oh, are you-- is this what your after? You want me to go to church.

Motion once more from the Grim.

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YOU: At least give me *someone*. This person. Kyrkogrim. Who are you? Wake up! I'll dig you up. Join me up here. Did you hear me? Wake up! I'm dead too, but here I am! Moving! Breathing! So where are you all, huh? What about you? I'll dig you up if you help me out!

Or, or... bring me down there. Please. Anywhere. I'm not going to just sit here and watch an empty eternity unfold. Watching over your grave, you, and you... Is that what the dog did? Kilgram. Church grim. No, oh, no, wait... they buried dogs under churches, back, a while ago, to watch over the dead. That *is* what the dog was doing, damn it. Where'd he go. Please. Come back!

I'm just a body, now, but even this body, one body, any body. I can't... not alone. Please. This is worse than leaving me with nothing! Take it all, take everything, I'd prefer nothing! I didn't know... what you were! Who you were! I know now.

There's a hole. Not a grave. I wish it was a grave. A hole. I'm not whole-- there IS a hole, and it's pulsing like a heart-- my chest. The only thing left is this feeling. Why do I get to keep my body? My body, my voice, and this feeling? Is that really all that's left-- forever?

The church bell finishes sounding but continues to echo, fading. The Grim returns. Perhaps the following is underscored by the most realistic soundscape yet; a dog and a distant destination.

YOU: You're back. These are you, aren't they? These are all... the story of you. So why are you here, then? Not right now, I mean, here, here. You didn't want this. Someone buried you-- why?

It's funny, I almost remember you standing up; I was picturing you on two legs. A big, scary dog. But you're no scarier than-- Woah, watch the tail, you could down a tree with that. Good boy.

Are you lost? You don't have a tag... Did you have an owner? They probably miss you, wherever they are. But I'm glad I found ya, at least! Here, of all places. It's funny how things work out. I wonder if I left anyone like you behind. Maybe they'll help someone else out like you're helping me.

What is it you want? I don't have any treats, I'm sorry, I wish I could find a stick for you. What is it? Alright, alright, calm down boy, yes! You want to go for a walk? Sure. I don't know where I'm going so... why don't you lead the way?

YOU follows the Grim offstage.

END

Kill Grim

A 15-Minute play for 1 performer

"A freak in a dog mask", a canine stalker... You're walking home late at night, alone. At least, that's what you think! You're not truly alone. If you have your phone with you, nearly everyone you know is with you, right at your fingertips! You could call your family, text your friends... You're always surrounded by people. That includes, of course, the six-foot tall cloaked black-fur dog following you in the distance. He's always going to be there with you. Eyes glowing yellow, fingers outstretched with long pointed nails. Unless, of course, you'd prefer to be alone...