

The Graveyard Book

Neil Gaiman

Bod was a quiet child with sober grey eyes and a mop of tousled, mouse-coloured hair. He was, for the most part, obedient. He learned how to talk, and, once he had learned, he would pester the graveyard folk with questions.

‘Why amn’t I allowed out of the graveyard,’ he would ask, or ‘How do I do what *he* just did?’ or ‘Who lives in here?’

The adults would do their best to answer his questions, but their answers were often vague, or confusing, or contradictory, and then Bod would walk down to the old chapel and talk to Silas.

He would be there waiting at sunset, just before Silas awakened.

His guardian could always be counted upon to explain matters clearly and lucidly and as simply as Bod needed in order to understand.

‘You aren’t allowed out of the graveyard – it’s *aren’t*, by the way, not *amn’t*, not these days – because it’s only in the graveyard that we can keep you safe. This is where you live and this is where those who love you can be found. Outside would not be safe for you. Not yet.’

‘*You* go outside. You go outside every night.’

‘I am infinitely older than you, lad. And I am safe wherever I am.’

‘I’m safe there too.’

‘I wish that that were true. But as long as you stay here, you are safe.’

Or:

‘How could you do that? Some skills can be attained by education, and some by practice, some by time. Those skills will come if you study. Soon enough you will master Fading and Sliding and Dreamwalking. But some skills cannot be mastered by the living, and for those you must wait a little longer. Still, I do not doubt that you will acquire even those, in time.’

'You were given the Freedom of the Graveyard, after all,' Silas would tell him. 'So the graveyard is taking care of you. While you are here, you can see in the darkness. You can walk some of the ways that the living should not travel. The eyes of the living will slip from you. I, too, was given the Freedom of the Graveyard, although in my case it comes with nothing but the right of abode.'

'I want to be like you,' said Bod, pushing out his lower lip.

'No,' said Silas firmly, 'you do not.'

Or:

'Who lives there? You know, Bod, in many cases it is written on the stone. Can you read yet? Do you know your alphabet?'

'My what?'

Silas shook his head, but said nothing. Mr and Mrs Owens had never been much for reading when they were alive, and there were no alphabet books in the graveyard.

The next night, Silas appeared at the front of the Owenses' cosy tomb carrying three large books – two of them brightly coloured alphabet books ('A is for Apple, B is for Ball') and a copy of *The Cat in the Hat*. He also had paper, and a packet of wax crayons. Then he walked Bod around the graveyard, placing the boy's small fingers on the newest and clearest of the headstones and the plaques, and taught Bod how to find the letters of the alphabet when they appeared, beginning with the steeple of the capital A.

Silas gave Bod a quest – to find each of the twenty-six letters in the graveyard – and Bod finished it, proudly, with the discovery of Ezekiel Ulmsley's stone, built into the side of the wall in the old chapel. His guardian was pleased with him.

Every day Bod would take his paper and crayons into the graveyard and he would copy names and words and numbers as best he could, and each night, before Silas would go off into the world, Bod would make him translate the snatches of Latin which had, for the most part, baffled the Owenses.