

Cemetery Folklore – The Lighter Side of the Grave

One man's superstitions are another man's beliefs. Many old world traditions and beliefs strictly followed in the past have fallen out of common practice in today's society. Although some of these beliefs have been dismissed as superstition, others may still be followed but in a more relaxed manner.

- **Passing a cemetery.** A person must hold their breath when passing a cemetery or they will breathe in the spirit of someone who has recently died. Tuck your thumbs into your fists when passing a cemetery to protect your parents.
- **A bird in the house.** If a red-breasted robin flies into a room through a window then death will follow shortly.
- **A clock.** If a clock which has not been working suddenly chimes there will be a death in the family. You will have bad luck if you do not stop the clock in the room when a death occurs.
- **Open a window.** All windows should be opened at the moment of death so the soul may have a speedy journey to the other side.
- **Lighting of candles.** On the night after November 1st a candle should be lit for each deceased relative and placed in a window.
- **Mirrors.** Mirrors in the house with a corpse should be covered or the person who sees himself will die next. If a mirror should fall from the wall and breaks itself then someone in the house will die soon.
- **Eye twitching.** If a person's left eye twitches there will soon be a death in the family.
- **Thunder.** Thunder following a funeral means the person's soul has reached heaven.
- **Pregnant women.** Pregnant women attending a funeral and walking on the grave will result in a child with club feet.
- **Grave.** If the person lived a good life, flowers will grow on the grave. If the person was evil, weeds will grow.
- **Photograph.** If three people are photographed together the one in the middle will die first.
- **Thirteen.** If thirteen people sit down at a table to eat one of them will die before the year is over.
- **Umbrella.** Dropping an umbrella on the floor means there will be a murder in the house.
- **Hearse.** A hearse stopping at someone's door on the way to the funeral is a death omen for the householder.
- **Collecting epitaphs.** Collecting epitaphs from tombstones is unlucky and will result in losing your memory.
- **Cures.** Being near or in an open grave cures all manner of illness including toothache, boils, and incontinence.
- **Order of burial.** The first person buried in a cemetery is unlucky. The last person buried in a cemetery must forever have their spirit stand watch over all the others.
- **Plants.** Tying a piece of black ribbon around plants on someone's death will prevent the plant from dying too.
- **Speaking ill of the dead.** Never speak ill of the dead or their spirit will come back to haunt you.
- **Witch.** A witch must be buried face down to prevent the community further supernatural spells. If this doesn't work, unbury them and turn their clothes inside out, then re-bury them face down. This should do the trick.
- **Crows.** One crow = Bad luck. Two crows = Good luck. Three crows = Health. Four crows = Sickness. Five crows = Death.
- **Dog howling.** If a dog howls three times it means someone is going to die. If a dog howls at night when someone in the house is sick it is a bad omen. This omen can be reversed by reaching under the bed and turning over a shoe.
- **Bell ringing.** When a bell rings it means an angel received their wings.

- **Dish.** An old Mexican belief is that if a dish or pot falls and breaks for no reason, someone in your family is dead.
- **Removing a corpse.** A corpse should be removed from the house feet first to prevent their spirit from looking back into the house and beckoning another member of the family to follow.
- **Bells on grave.** The fear of someone being buried alive led coffin makers to design caskets with an internal chain attached to a bell on the grave. If the person should awake they would pull the bell and alert the community to their premature burial. Hence the saying “For Whom the Bell Tolls.”
- **Wakes.** Bodies were watched over every minute for 3-4 days after death to prevent a premature burial for someone who might simply be in a coma rather than actually dead.
- **Placement of burial.** The deceased lies with their head to the West and their feet to the East. This very old custom comes from both the Pagans who worship the rise and setting of the sun and the Christians who believe the final summons of Judgment will come from the East.
- **Yawning.** Always cover your mouth when yawning to prevent your spirit from leaving and the devil entering.
- **Procession.** It is bad luck to meet a funeral procession head on. If it cannot be avoided then hold onto a button until the procession passes. A funeral procession should never return from the cemetery the same way they came to prevent the spirit of the deceased from following them home again.
- **Three knocks of death.** If you hear three knocks and no one is there it means someone close to you has died.
- **Spine chills.** When you experience a chill up your spine someone has just walked over your future grave site.
- **Shoes on the table.** Leaving shoes on the table will bring sickness and possibly death by hanging.
- **Hen.** Hearing a hen crow means death unless you kill the hen. (Who knew a hen could crow!)
- **Coffee grounds.** If coffee grounds in the bottom of a cup form a long straight line you can anticipate a funeral.
- **Touching the deceased.** If you touch a loved one who has died you won't have dreams about them.
- **Tombstones.** Some cultures believe placing a tombstone on the grave keeps the ghosts weighed down.
- **Mazes.** Mazes were placed at some cemetery entrances to prevent spirits from returning to the world as it was known that ghosts could only travel in a straight line.

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