

Fall for Grace

Jean Cowgill

Characters

Grace – main character. Mid forties, teacher, married with a son.

Jonathan – Choirmaster, late thirties, lives with his mother.

Mrs Helene Fletcher – mother of the above

Trevor – husband of Grace.

Margaret – contralto in the choir.

Sam - Publican of 'The Black Dog'

Because I know and love some of the villages near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, I have made free with their names. Of course, the characters are fictional as are the happenings.

Scene One – St Michael's and All Angels Church

Scene Two – Church Lane

Scene Three – In Jonathan's car

Scene Four – 'The Black Dog Public House', Thurstonland

Scene Five – In Jonathan's car and outside Grace and Trevor's House

Scene Six – Number 4, Church Lane

Scene One: St Michael's and All Angels Church.

(Inside the church the choir rehearsal is nearly at an end. Members sing the final note of the final piece. There is a moment of silence.)

Jonathan: Well done everyone. The last verse was much improved. We are getting somewhere at last...even though there are some notable absentees.

Margaret: I think we deserve a medal for coming out on a night like this, I felt like staying in and keeping the fire warm. It's really cool for the time of year.

Jonathan: Yes, yes of course Margaret. You seem to have shepherded the contraltos magnificently. Shame there weren't many chaps here.

Margaret: They did warn you last time. Rob said there was a special CAMRA meeting at 'The Red Lion'. You simply can't compete with real ale.

Jonathan: *(already thinking about something else)* I don't suppose so. Remember to be here at 10am on Sunday *(groans)* Stephen is getting twitchy...

Margaret: When is our vicar untwitchy?

Jonathan: I'm not sure that is a proper word...no matter. As I was saying be here promptly, Stephen's boss will be here.

Margaret:*(mock seriously)* God is always present. *(laughter from the rest of the choir).*

Jonathan: Very clever. You know perfectly well I mean the bishop. Now let's just tidy up and we'll be on our way rejoicing. The choirboys practised this afternoon so we can put everything away.

Margaret: Why do you say choirboys most of them are girls?

Jonathan: *(ignoring the comment)* ...ship-shape for the weddings tomorrow.

Margaret: Poor things, like lambs to the slaughter. *(Pause)* Grace, are you coming to the pub? All that singing has made my throat parched *(whispers)* did you hear Jonathan 'shame there weren't many chaps here'. I tell you he is as bent as a two-penny watch.

Grace: I don't like that phrase. Don't talk rubbish Margaret, just because he lives with his mother.

Margaret: Exactly.

Grace: It wouldn't matter if he were. I don't know why you are so nosy. All that singing has worn me out. Anyway Margaret, I can't come out with the girls tonight. This extra choir practice clashes with Trevor's pub quiz at Thurstonland. Of course, he needs a driver to get him home *(points to herself)*.

Margaret: Back of beyond is Thurstonland. I used to go out with a farmer from near there. Oh well never mind about the drink...I'll see you on Sunday. How did that song go? 'Only twenty four hours to Tolso...' In our case thirty-six hours to the grand performance...goodbye 'til then.

Scene Two Church Lane

(In the lane outside the church, Grace is standing helplessly by her car. Jonathan starts to walk past. He pauses.)

Jonathan: Are you having car trouble Grace?

Grace: I don't know what's wrong. Little Clio has never let me down before. The engine won't start, she is as dead as a dodo.

Jonathan: Do you need a hand? I can't promise anything though. I know virtually nothing about the combustion engine.

(Grace gulps and nods her thanks)

Jonathan: I'll just put this stuff in my car. Back in a jiffy.

(Jonathan returns, takes the key from Grace, tries to start the engine, grimaces, opens the bonnet of the car).

Jonathan: I know more about piano tuning. All this is a mystery.

Grace: Sorry Jonathan, sorry. You are getting grease all over your hands, *(whispers)* your lovely hands.

Jonathan: Oh dear let's face it we aren't getting anywhere. Do you need to ring a breakdown service? Have you got your mobile?

Grace: Yes, I always have it with me at night. But I can't wait for the RAC to come out, I have to collect my husband. I should think my car would be safe enough left here outside the church. I'll sort everything out tomorrow, good job it's Saturday. Oh dear, perhaps I should get a taxi.

Jonathan: No need for that. I can give you a lift but I'll have to phone mother and tell her I'll be late. *(telephones)* Hello, yes it's me...sorry I'll be a bit late, I'm giving someone a lift home....yes, I know we'll miss the programme...you watch it, it's recorded so I'll see it later...I know it's not the same watching on your own...sorry...see you soon, bye, bye. OK Grace off we go.

Scene Three in Jonathan's Car

Grace: *(she is thinking about Jonathan's house and the number of times she passed the end of his road – much to her son's astonishment)* I do hope I'm not taking you too far out of your way.

Jonathan: Don't know where we are going yet but it doesn't matter. So, where too madam?

Grace: I'm afraid it's 'The Black Dog' at Thurstonland. Back of beyond but Trevor always drinks there.

(they set off)

Jonathan: It has a nice little church no longer in use of course, such a shame when it closed. I played the organ at the very last funeral service there. ..very moving. Pews were packed.

Grace: Shame the services weren't as well attended. It might have stayed open.

Jonathan: Even so Steven hadn't got the time to keep the church going. He had already taken on Lower Cumberworth, Shepley and Thunderbridge.

Grace: I know. He is forever chasing his tail. At least Ruth keeps things on an even keel. They are so well suited. By the way, have you seen the Thurstonland church lately?

Jonathan: Yes, I would hardly recognise it now, all glass and security lighting. One of the incomers from Manchester bought it I understand.

Grace: I've come across him at the pub quiz. We all call him 'Mr Smarty Pants Pemberton'.

(they travel in silence for a few minutes).

Grace: I can't get over how clean you keep your car. Mine is a disgrace; full of toffee papers, empty coke cans and piles of homework sleeping on the back seat. Here, I feel as though I'm being given a test drive in a new car.

Jonathan: One of the benefits of not having children.

Grace: Actually, the piles of homework belong to me. Keeping on top of marking is like pushing the proverbial boulder uphill.

Jonathan: Of course, you teach at Ingbirchworth don't you?

Grace: For my sins. At least it keeps the wolf from the door.

Jonathan: What does your husband do?

Grace: Self employed plumber when he can be bothered to get out of bed.

Jonathan: I thought plumbers made a lot of money.

Grace: Most do, but as I tell everyone, I was plumbing the depths when I married Trevor. Needs must at the time. At least I've got Tom he's the one good thing to come out of my marriage... we get on quite well. He seems to be through the terrible teens.

Jonathan: Isn't it the terrible twos?

Grace: Believe me most parents will tell you it is the 'teens'. You need to take the next left...sorry I forgot you know where the village is.

Scene 4 The bar of the Black Dog Public House.

Five minutes later, they enter a noisy pub. Being quiz night the place is bursting at the seams. The publican is also the quizmaster. Trevor is cross at the interruption as the quiz had reached a critical point.

Trevor: Oh you are here at last...late as usual, we have answered all the questions. Sit down. You can't have a drink. Sam is just about to declare the winner. Who is this?

Grace: Jonathan, he is the choir-master...gave me a lift because the car is playing up.

Jonathan: *(offering his hand)* Please to meet...

Trevor: *(ignores him)* Quiet. Here comes Sam. Think we've done well this time guys and gals.

(His team look unimpressed. They are used to his misplaced optimism. The landlord, Sam, rings the bell.)

Sam: OK ladies, and gentlemen if you please. I have checked your marking and made some corrections *(glares at a table of young men)*. Tonight for the first time in over a year *(dramatic pause)* we have a tie.

(There are groans of frustration throughout the bar.)

Sam: Two teams have thirty-eight out of a possible forty points. Mr Pemberton and Trevor's teams will have to answer the tiebreak question. Remember take your time. If you give me a wrong answer, your team will be disqualified. OK? Right. *(clears his throat)* Tonight's tiebreak question is on the subject of geography, geography.

Trevor: Oh heck, I hate geography. Come on Grace this reckons to be your subject.

Sam: Now listen up. What is the name of the main fault-line that travels down the west coast of North America?

Trevor: Does he mean the USA or what? Gracie...what's the answer?

Grace: *(with confidence)* The San Andreas Fault.

Trevor: *(shouts)* The San Andr...thingy, whatever she said.

Grace: The San Andreas Fault.

(Trevor sits back and awaits the plaudits of his team)

Sam: Sorry Trevor, wrong answer I'm afraid. The correct answer is....The Californian Fault Line. Mr Pemberton's team take the gallon of ale. Don't drink it all at once sir.

(Forced laughter greets this remark. Mr Pemberton is not well liked although he often stood a round of drinks. Many resented the loss of church, although few could explain why.)

Trevor: You silly mare. What a useless lump of lard you are, you've cost us the quiz.

(Trevor stares remorsefully into his empty pint glass.)

Grace: Sorry, Trev. I know that I'm correct. The San Andreas Fault is in California. I remember when I was at 'uni'...

Trevor: *(mimics)* When I was at 'uni'. What rubbish. You can't even admit when you are wrong. The least you can do now is buy us a round.

(the other three members of the team exchange glances and leave the pub).

Grace: Surely, you've had enough. Jonathan is going to drive us home now.

Trevor: *(mimics)* Jonathan is going to drive us home now. Like hell he is. Get me a pint of 'Old Peculier' and whatever your fancy man is drinking.

Jonathan: Keep a civil tongue in your head. I'm not drinking anything thank you.

Trevor: Gracie...

Grace: OK but we can't stay long. Jonathan's mother will be getting anxious.

(she goes to the bar).

Trevor: Your mother? *(looks closely at Jonathan)* You aren't still in short trousers are you?

(As Trevor is already well in his cups Jonathan does not reply. He accepts a fruit juice when Grace returns. There is little conversation. Grace is upset by Trevor's remarks. Jonathan is conscious that this is a brand new world for him and not one he would inhabit by choice. After three more rounds, paid for by Grace, the evening draws to a close)

Sam: Time gentlemen please....*(rings the bell)* come on let's be having you.

Grace: Come on Trevor, time to go home,

Trevor: *(slurring his words)* Gracie, Gracie, just another little one for the road. A little inkie binkie...

Grace: Sorry Jonathan, I know he will not move, would you mind giving me a hand.

(The two of them manage to half carry a muttering, incoherent Trevor through the bar and out to Jonathan's car. Trevor lies slumped along the back seat.)

Scene Four: The journey home

Trevor: *(sings)* Take me back to the black hills, the black hills of.....where Gracie? Sorry I forgot, no good asking you, you always get things wrong.

Jonathan: So home James and don't spare the horses. Where do you live Grace?

Grace: Lower Cumberworth, turn left at the main cross roads. After half a mile, you'll see the first road on the right – Blackstone Avenue.

Jonathan: I know it. I teach piano at number 23. Small world isn't it? Is he alright, your husband?

Trevor: *(five minutes into the journey)* I don't feel very well.

Jonathan: I'm stopping the car Grace...get him onto the verge.

Grace: Too late Jonathan. This is a nightmare. I've a good mind to leave him here. Oh, your lovely car I'll pay for a valet.

Jonathan: Don't be silly. We'll just get him back to your house.

(mercifully Trevor has fallen into a deep, troubled sleep. From the back seat, they hear stentorian snores, their other senses are assailed by vomit and stale ale.)

Grace: Par for the course. I've had twenty years of this *(pulls a face.)*

Jonathan: Poor you.

Grace: As I said before the only positive is my son Tom.

Jonathan: I remember Tom from choir. How is he getting on?

Grace: He has forgotten more about computers than I'll ever know. He is away on a Duke of Edinburgh camping weekend. Wilds of Derbyshire...pull up there on the left. See the garden with the diamond patterned bedding plants.

Jonathan: Colourful at least.

Grace: Trevor's idea. You should see it in winter when Trevor has cleared everything away. Looks like a grey version of the Gobi Desert. If you can just help me get him out of the car, I'll manage the rest.

Jonathan: Nonsense, I can't let you do that.

(Together they haul a semi-conscious Trevor from the back of the car. The night air seems to revive him.)

Trevor: What, wha... where are we? Careful, careful I'm standing in the aubr, aubr – the bedding plants.

Jonathan: Come on old man, let's get you into the house.

Trevor: Old man. Who are you calling an old man? Who are you? Don't think much to him Gracie...looks like a, like a...what's the word?

(Before the other two could react, Trevor aims an ill-directed punch in Jonathan's direction. An automatic response from Jonathan connected with Trevor's left eye and he arches clumsily into the aubretia, salvia and begonia.)

Jonathan: Streuth what have I done?

Grace: Oh Jonathan your poor hand *(she takes the swollen knuckles in her hand and puts them to her lips.)*

Jonathan: *(in a panic)* What are you doing?

Grace: It will help the bruising – cool it down. We must go inside and I'll get the first aid box out.

Jonathan: *(looking at the recumbent figure in the garden)* Hadn't we better get him inside and to bed?

Grace: *(in a state of false courage)* I'd rather get you to bed.

Scene Five: Inside No 4 Church Lane

(Two years have elapsed. The time is 11am on a Saturday morning. Present in the sitting room: Grace, Margaret and Jonathan's mother, Mrs Fletcher.)

Grace: Helene, do you remember my friend Margaret? You met her briefly at the wedding.

Mrs Fletcher: Pleased to meet you again Margaret. Grace tells me you've been living in Canada.

Margaret: For my sins. My husband was posted there on short-term secondment. It's good to be back. There is no place like God's county.

(Mrs Fletcher looks puzzled)

Grace: I'm going to make drinks if you'll both excuse me for a moment. Tea for you Helene? Margaret coffee black as night as usual? Helene has made some wonderful shortbread.

Margaret: Thanks Grace *(Grace leaves the room)* what a lovely house Mrs Fletcher. I've always envied people who live here, so handy for church.

Mrs Fletcher: I love it. I don't spend a lot of time in this room. I like to give Jonathan and Grace their own space. He is playing the church organ – yet another wedding. Did you notice the crowds on the way in?

Margaret: Yes, I think I know the bride's mother by sight.

Mrs Fletcher: This is my son's busiest day. I usually have a morning drink with Grace about this time]. Afterwards I'll make myself scarce so that you two can catch up on all your news. Lovely girl is Grace!

I'm the happiest I've been since my husband died. I have a wonderful 'granny flat', although I don't really like the term. It is perfect for me. I even manage to have the Bridge members there once a month. It is a bit of a squash. I hated the thought of moving, but it is well worth it to see Jonathan so happy.

Margaret: Grace as well. I gather from her that Tom stays here more often than he does with his father.

Mrs Fletcher: I'm not surprised there. Poor Grace made a bad choice first time around. Odious man! I really like Tom, although I was nervous of him at first. Teenagers you know. I despaired of becoming a grandmother...Tom seems almost as good...missed the early days of course.

Margaret: That has its ups-and-downs. Nappies and tantrums if my nephews are anything to go by...

Mrs Fletcher: *(dislikes the unsavoury subject)* Yes, well...Tom is a fine young man. He is halfway through his degree course.

Margaret: Yes, Grace told me.

Mrs Fletcher: He has a placement with TWP. They think very highly of him. He hopes to get a permanent job there eventually. Do you not have any children Margaret?

Margaret: *(sadly)* I'm afraid not. We weren't blessed as they used to say.

(After a moment's silence they hear Grace returning with drinks and shortbread)

Margaret: *(a throw away remark)* You know, Mrs Fletcher, I've never understood why Grace's car had broken down on that fateful night after choir practice.

Mrs Fletcher: *(at the same time Grace enters the room)* Cars do break down. What do you mean dear?

Margaret: Well Grace and I went on a car maintenance course together a few years ago. I never really took to it – ruined my nails – but Grace loved it. She serviced both her car and Trevor's van for years.

The End