

# Ghosts

a short story by

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It was one of the coldest nights so far that year. Georgette Blakely was tired having driven through the vile weather for the last four hours. The falling snow was dancing before her eyes now, casting strange patterns on her retinas. "Boy I'm tired," she said to herself, "I'm starting to see faces in the snow." She smiled a wry smile because she was talking to herself. The smile lingered some time on her face before dying. A yawn came, closely followed by another. She knew she had to stop soon for her own safety, but where?

The miles dragged on without any signs of a refuge. The snow wasn't sticking, so she knew she was not in danger from drifts. It was windy out there all right, but the wind was blowing the snow away, rather than into piles. Georgette contemplated sleeping in the car. It would quickly get cold with the engine off, but she had a rug on the back seat, and a coat that she always carried with her. As she drove, she weighed up the idea. It wasn't ideal, but as a last resort she would pull into a lay-by and climb into the back seat. "Ten more miles," she said out loud, "I'll give it ten more miles. If I don't see anything by then, I'll stop." From then on, her eyes danced between the falling snow and the mileometer. Two, three... Five, seven, nine... Inwardly, she had everything crossed. She even sent up a silent prayer.

Ten. "Right, next lay-by and I'm in." Within a minute or so of saying it, she saw a lay-by. She pulled in. The slip road led off the dual carriageway behind some trees. "Good," She said, "they will hide me from any passing fruit cakes." She really didn't relish the idea of sleeping in the car, but tiredness had caught up with her, and she knew she couldn't go on any further without risking life and limb.

She climbed into the back of the car and stretched out across the back seat. Lying down was uncomfortable without a pillow, so she scrunched the coat up and put it under her head. The car was still warm, so the rug was more than enough to keep her warm for now. Georgette closed her eyes and tried her best to let all the stress of driving drain from her weary body. She imagined a tap slowly opening, and water starting to flow out of it relieving the pressure as it did so. The trick worked. Within seconds she was relaxed and on her way to sleep.

Georgette began to dream of warmer climes. Blue sea, soft sand and gentle guitar music. The breeze causing the palms to bend slowly high above her, the sun warm and soothing on her body. She slept on.

Some hours later Georgette awoke. It was cold and she was shivering. She pulled the rug up around her head to gain more warmth from it, only to uncover her feet. A quick jerk of her knees brought the naked feet up under the rug again, but the sudden movement caused a bitterly cold draught to enter her world under the rug. She shivered all the more. What little heat she had built up was now gone. "Bother!" She exclaimed loudly, knowing that the rug was not now man enough for the job. There was nothing for it other than to put the coat on, and try to settle back down without a pillow. She thought of using her handbag instead, but it was cold hard leather and no help at all.

She lay back down and made a real effort to get back to sleep, but it was no use. The

discomfort she was in was too strong for her will to over rule. She lay there wondering if she should get back into the driving seat and continue her journey. "I've had some sleep." She said after looking at her watch. The idea didn't really appeal to her, though she didn't know why. The back seat was uncomfortable, but the driving seat was too. "Damn!" She spat out, and went silent again.

It was in the silence that she thought she heard a noise. She knew she was parked near some trees, so she should expect the odd noise or two, but there was something about this noise that unnerved her. It hadn't sounded like a branch creaking in the wind, it was more like a low rumble. "Perhaps it was a lorry going past," she told herself, "they make low rumbling sounds sometimes." Silence again, and she almost willed herself to hear the noise again. She wasn't disappointed, it came, and was louder than before. The hairs went up on the back of her neck. It came again. Georgette sat bolt upright and looked out of the side window. It was still snowing. Even more now than before, and everywhere she looked there was a blanket of snow at least a foot deep. A sense of fear gripped her hard as she frantically peered out of all the windows in turn. The road was no longer visible. Neither was the slip road into or out of the lay-by. She was stuck and she knew it.

Georgette sat in silence considering her options. Driving now seemed out of the question. The snow was deepening all the time at quite an alarming rate. It was obvious that the car would be buried in a few hours or so... "What to do?" She thought frantically. "If I get out and walk, I'll almost certainly die of cold. I'm miles from anywhere and this coat is no match for this weather. If I stay in the car, I'll be buried alive and might not be found for days..."

Georgette thought long and hard before deciding to stay in the car. "The longer I can stay alive, here, the more chance I have of being rescued," she said. She knew that running the engine wouldn't help. Once the exhaust is covered, the fumes would feed back into the car and poison her. A quick glance out of the window told her that it already was. She leaned over to the front and opened both front windows a quarter of an inch to allow fresh air to flow through the car. The wind howled through the narrow gaps eerily, but she knew she had to put up with it. One last look out and she settled back down to sleep, if she could.

Periodically, she opened her eyes to see if the snow was up the windows. It wasn't long before it was, and as it crept higher, the car became more and more dark. There was only moon light outside, but the snow caused it to be much brighter than it would normally have been. As the snow deepened, the light faded. Strangely, the car warmed up as the snow outside acted as an insulator against the wind. Though she was cold, her meagre body heat was slowly heating the interior of the car. She had stopped shivering some time ago and was slowly starting to feel warmer. The snow was not yet up to the top of the windows, so fresh air was still getting into the car. Georgette knew that carbon dioxide would become an enemy once this supply was cut off. Basic chemistry at school had taught her that.

She lay back down again and dozed. Her mind desperately trying to get back to the beach in her first dream, but never quite making it. Her thoughts wandered without settling for long on any one topic. Then she heard the voices. Half asleep, she mumbled, "I'm in here." But it was feeble. Then suddenly, she was wide awake and breathing heavily. The car was pitch black, she couldn't see a thing. In panic she reached out to the front windows to feel for the gap. She couldn't find one. She reached down to the window winder and lowered one window. Running her hand up the door she soon found the cold hard packed snow where the glass had been. She pushed against it but it gave little. She reached up higher to find the very top of the window where the snow should be thinnest. She pushed again, but the snow was just as solid there. Now she knew that the car was buried deep under the snow, and would be totally invisible to anyone passing by. She was trapped.

"But the voices!" she said out loud, "what about the voices? HELLO," she shouted.

"HELLLLOOOOOO." Only silence followed. A tear began to run down her cheek, and she began to wonder why she had ever set out on this trip. Her wonderings were cut short however by the low rumbling sound. This time there was no mistake, the whole car shook. Fear gripped her and Georgette screamed. The voices grew louder and with each low rumble, the car shook ever more violently. In blind panic, Georgette made a grab for the door handle and tried to get out of the car. The door wouldn't budge, and she screamed at it in frustration, pushing and banging it with her fist.

The voices outside became deafeningly loud, and the car reverberated with them leaving her no place to escape. The car lurched to the left as though a great weight had been placed on one side of it. Georgette peered into the darkness to see something against the car. It looked like a tree trunk. She reached out to touch it through the still open window. Her hand withdrew sharply at its touch. It wasn't bark she had touched, but hair. There was something huge leaning against the car that was covered with hair.

The car lurched again, only this time to the right and much further over than before. Half crazed with fear, Georgette looked to the window. The thing was gone and light was streaming in on the side. Quickly, she leaned over and looked up into the light. It was moonlight, and several feet above the top of the car. The car lurched even more violently and went down at the front as though something huge had stood on the bonnet. A second later, the car sank back down at the rear and bounced twice. Georgette was thrown against the back sill and ended up kneeling in the foot well behind the front passenger seat. She looked up again into the moon light, and screamed at what she saw. High above the snow there was a huge head, covered with long black hair that was blowing in the wind. Snow, caught up in it had formed matted tufts that were blowing to and fro. Huge eyes were looking frantically all around, as if the beast was looking for something lost. Fortunately, it didn't look down or it would have seen her there trapped and helpless. The beast opened it's mouth and strange voice like sounds came from it. Low pitched and unintelligible. It was talking, but to what?

The car bounced violently again, both front and back, and snow cleared from the rear windows. Georgette froze, afraid to even breath. There, above her came a second beast. It lurched at the first in what looked like a fight. The car was pounded again and again until Georgette fainted.

"There there now miss, we've got you." Slowly Georgette's eyes opened and came into focus. She jerked loose from the fireman's grasp and frantically tried to get out of the car. "Miss, miss, it's alright, you are safe now. We'll have you out in a jiffy." Georgette saw the friendly face and stopped fighting. She tried to speak, but nothing came out. "It's OK miss, you've been trapped here in your car for two days." "Two days..." She whispered. "Have they gone?" She asked with panic in her voice. "Gone miss?" The fireman asked looking puzzled. "Yes, them... The monsters... Have they gone?" The fireman smiled warmly at her. "Yes, they've gone miss." He said, knowing she wouldn't accept any other answer.

Georgette relaxed and tears flooded out. The fireman withdrew his head, and a loud crunching noise filled the air. A few seconds later, the door was removed and Georgette was pulled gently from the car into the open daylight and fresh air. The ambulance men put her on a stretcher and covered her with a warm blanket. "Don't worry miss, well soon get you warm again." They loaded her into the waiting helicopter, and they were soon in the air high above the scene below. Georgette could see through a side window and she looked down on what remained of her car. "You were very lucky miss." The ambulance man said. "I've been to lots of motorists trapped in the snow in my time, but I've never seen a car so badly damaged as yours before." Together they looked down on the wreck below them. It was only then, from above, that they could see the huge foot prints in the mangled metal. "It looks more like you were covered by Elephants than snow miss." "Yes," Georgette said, "only Elephants don't have long black hair, do they?" The ambulance man looked at her in surprise, as she held up a

thick clump of long black matted hair. It stood out in marked contrast to her own, Natural blonde.