

# Ghost Story

## Things that go *bump* in the night

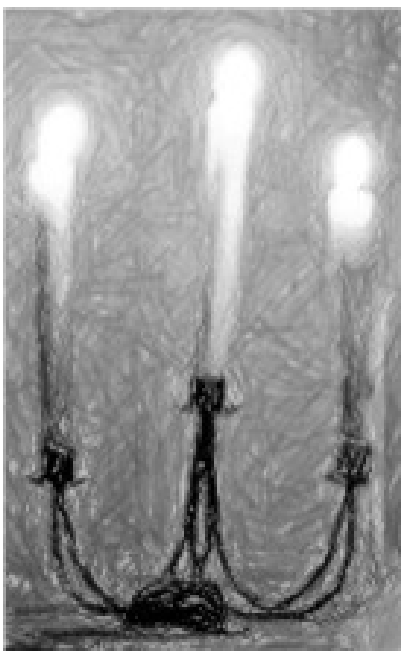
It was one of those Saturday afternoons in Greenford. Friends were getting together for a short time whilst their kids played in the garden. A few drinks, of course. Time slips imperceptibly by and without realising it, darkness has fallen and they are now in an animated conversation while the children lounge on the sofa watching TV.

As our story starts, gathered in the garden of the Cleminshaw's with Derek and Rhonda were Malcolm Ede, Emma and Andy Cumming and another person who shall for the purpose of this story remain anonymous and be referred to as "Bill." The Cleminshaw's, the Cumming's and Malcolm were all members of the congregation of Holy Cross Church but Bill, although well known to everyone was an atheist and sceptical about religion. He enjoyed teasing his "churchy" friends about their "Sunday activities" but it was always with a good nature. On this occasion, Ronnie and Derek had suddenly provided an impromptu supper as well as seemingly endless bottles of wine. The late November air was cool but it was still just possible to enjoy sitting on the sheltered area of the patio. For some reason, the conversation turned to ghosts and the supernatural. Bill said "You churchgoers are just chasing things that don't exist like ghosts and things that go bump in the night." "I don't believe in ghosts either" said Emma. "I do" said Andy. "I've been in some very spooky places in my time and I know how scared I felt!" Malcolm interjected "You know, the Old Church at Holy Cross is said to be haunted." "Who by" asked Derek. "There you go" said Bill, laughing. "Haunted! What hallucinations have you been experiencing in there?" "Well, the Rector wrote a story about Bridget Coston walking through the church wall, didn't he?" said Ronnie. "Yes" said Emma. "That is precisely what it was, a story, nothing more." "Well, I wouldn't want to spend a night in there alone, no fear!" "Nor me" said Derek. Andy's comment changed the mood. Malcolm said "I don't think anyone would willingly agree to spend a whole night alone in the church, not even the most sceptical among us." They all suddenly looked at Bill. Was it the drink? Was it a sense of bravado or a fear of losing face? Bill replied "Well, I wouldn't be afraid of that, no way." Malcolm chipped in with a wicked glint in his eye, "I bet you wouldn't!" Bill responded "How much?"



And so, this strange story continued into its second phase. "How much?" The words would eventually galvanise a rambling conversation into an action plan. "You don't mean it?" said Emma. "He does, he really does" said Ronnie. Derek tried to cool the matter, "Well it's a great idea, but impossible to achieve. Its just not practical." "Well, not so, it could be quite easily achieved" said Malcolm. Emma intervened, "How do you mean Malcolm?" "What I mean is that it would be quite easy for Bill or anyone else to spend a night in the church. I have a key! No problem!" "But the rector wouldn't allow it" said Emma. "He needn't know a thing. I know we are only talking theory here, but what could be simpler? Bill can be let into the church at, say, 11pm and then let out again at 7am. Eight hours of testing to see if there really is a ghost!" "But," said Emma, trying to be practical, "Won't Neil be going into the church at all that evening?" "Not if we choose a Friday! He'll be drinking whisky in the Legion in the evening, and probably won't see the light of day until 9 o'clock on Saturday morning." Suddenly, Bill stood up and said, "I'm up for it. Count me in. I'll show you that there is nothing to be scared of in that place."

Everyone looked at Bill with a mixture of apprehension and amusement. "Good on ya. Go for it!" said Ronnie in her best down-under voice. Emma, on the other hand, advised caution. "I'm not so sure. We are only talking here tonight. Reality is a different matter. It isn't really a good idea, is it Bill!" "It's a bloody good idea!" said Andy. "We can all take part in a scientific experiment; rational Bill versus the ghosts and ghouls of the Old Church." "Come on, Andy, time to go home. We must put Megan to bed before midnight!" "Yeah, and we should be getting James and Hannah to bed soon" said Ronnie. "Hang on a minute" said Malcolm. "Have we got a deal and a plan?" "Yes," said Bill. "I will spend a whole night alone in the church. But what about the bet?" "How do you mean?" "Its got to have some edge to it, after all. I am not simply doing this for fun. I bet you lot fifty pounds that all will be well in the morning." Emma looked uncomfortably at Andy, who said "Fifty quid it is! Count me in." "I'm up for it too," said Malcolm. "What about you Ronnie?" "Yes, we're in too." "Well, as I am the Treasurer, I will hold the stakes until the bet is won or lost. If Bill chickens out, or if the ghosts get him in the middle of the night, we all get fifty quid from Bill." "No" said Emma, "that's not fair. Lets have a kitty of 200 pounds. If Bill can't stay put, we share his 50 between us. If he does stay put until 7am, he gets 200 pounds. OK?" So the money changed hands there and then and



Malcolm pocketed it deeply in his jacket. "Now, we must get going, Andy" "Hang on Emma, we need ground rules." "Ground rules?" everyone repeated! "Yes, for example, is he allowed a torch?" "No," said Malcolm. "If the beams of the torch are seen from outside someone may well come and investigate, or even alert the Police. And I don't think he should have a mobile phone either. This is Bill, on his own, against the forces of darkness, literally!!" "I think he should be locked in, as well. No easy way out" said Andy. "No" said Emma, "He needs a way out or how else are we going to win the bet?" "Another thing," said Ronnie, "how is he going to sleep. The chairs and pews are so uncomfortable." Malcolm suggested a way forward. "Bill, I'll provide you with a sleeping bag and an air bed. As we start, we will light some candles by the statue of the BVM, and these will be your only light, apart from the sanctuary candle. We will shut you in at 11pm and then I will come back at 7am to check all is well and give you the money as I witness your exit." "I'm coming too" said Emma. "Me too" said everyone else. "So lets all meet at my place, next Friday night at 10pm. We can then finalise the plans before we walk down to the church together and quietly get started without anyone even noticing."

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So it was that on the following Friday, Emma, Derek and Bill were sat at Malcolm's house assessing the plan again. It was just after 10.30pm and everyone was looking a little sheepish. Emma said "Are you sure you want to go ahead, Bill? I'm quite happy to cancel the whole thing and give everyone back their money, you know." "Well," said Malcolm, "everything is set ready. I took all the sleeping gear and hid it in the cleaning cupboard during the week." To be truthful, Bill did now feel rather less confident than a week before during the evening when the little plan was hatched at the Cleminshaw's. However, something inside him was curious to know if he did have the bottle to go through with it. Also, he didn't want to lose face with his friends. He asked Malcolm, "What happens if someone comes to the church and asks me what I am doing?" "Oh, that's easy. Tell them your on an all-night vigil for world peace or something. Tell them you have permission off the Parish Sexton to be there. That should do the trick." Emma asked Bill, "Have you been drinking much this evening? You do know that there is no toilet in the old church, don't you?" Bill got up. "Better use Malcolm's facilities, then before we go." "What about spiders? There are lots of spiders in the Church, you know?" "No, I am not afraid of spiders, Emma!" So, with a growing sense of excitement, they walked down Oldfield Lane together. The mood lightened and something of the banter of the previous Saturday returned. "Its like escorting a condemned man to his cell" said Derek. Emma was trying to be helpful. "You do know that there are many sources of noise in the

Church, Bill? The heating of course, but squirrels, foxes, birds all make strange noises in the churchyard which can be heard inside.” “Thank you Emma. If that’s all I have to worry about, I’m home and dry!”



As they entered the Churchyard, the bright autumn moonlight showed up the outline of the headstones and Bill knew that the unlit church would be far from dark well into the night. He was now regaining his confidence and anxious to get on with it. “In you go” said Malcolm, opening the door with his keys. In fact, they all went in and Malcolm quickly found the sleeping gear and gave it to Bill. Suddenly, the atmosphere became electric. Was Bill really going to do it? Would he suddenly relent and go home? Emma thought, “surely he will just turn round and say ‘fooled you’!” But no, there were 200 pounds staked on this little escapade. Malcolm lit 6 candles at

the shrine to the Virgin Mary and said, “OK, Bill? Here is your only light allowance, plus the sanctuary lamp which will shine all night. When these 6 candles are out, you must stay in the dark until morning. Bill gestured to the windows, “Its almost as light as day in here anyway. The moon is huge and makes the place quite pleasant. I think the appointed hour has come, has it not?” Malcolm checked his watch. “Yes, it is almost 11, so, see you tomorrow Bill, hopefully! Here is the Church key. I am putting it here on this nail in the frame of the door where you can see it clearly. If you use it, you lose the bet. All the other doors are locked. OK?” Bill said, “Great! I will just make my little bed and see you all at 7am. Good night” They all shouted good night, and Emma, Derek and Malcolm left the church, closing the door behind them. Bill sat down on a chair near the candle light. He waited patiently for about three minutes. Then, he heard a rattling of door knobs and an owl hooting and a ghastly moaning voice just outside the window. Bill smiled. “Thanks, Malcolm, thanks Derek, now just go home will you?” A muffled wave of laughter could be heard retreating down the church pathway towards the street as the trio went on their separate ways home. Bill sat still and thought, now I really am alone. What a crazy idea! I must be mad to be doing this. He set about the task of seeing what he could see in the unlit church which looked and felt quite different to the church in daylight. He found his bearings and although experiencing a frisson of excitement, Bill remained calm and confident. He felt inside his pocket. To comfort him and to encourage the onset of sleep, Bill had brought two hip flasks of whisky, without mentioning this to anyone. He opened the first flask and drank deeply from it. The soothing feeling which followed was good and Bill decided to get straight into his camp bed. As he got in, fully dressed in jogging clothes, Bill realised that nobody had mentioned the question of heating. It was, after all, the end of November and the nights were quite cold. “One more tot of whisky” Bill said to himself and then he pulled the sleeping bag over his body and round his neck. He closed his eyes and listened to the sounds all around him. The A40 was droning on in the background, a permanent way, a permanent noise, a back-drop against which everything else was demanded to be audible. Bill heard the footsteps of people walking past the church, some chattering, others laughing. He could hear the ticks and clicks of the wood in the church, the beams, the chairs. Bill knew that the heated period of the day caused expansion of the wood and as it cooled down, the noises were quite loud and could cause alarm if unexpected. He lay quietly and found his eyes opening. Sleep was proving a little elusive. On the north wall of the church he could see the outline of the Coston Memorial as the moonlight poured in, very brightly now.



***To be continued in the January Magna – Don’t miss it!***

***All will be revealed.....***