

## A HAUNTING XMAS. \_\_\_\_\_

The Moors with the winter wind howling like a banshee, enough to wake the dead, and those that aren't. Snow had been falling for many days covering the hills and Moors in a white blanket. The animals now safe and warm back on their farm, before getting cut off in the deep snow drifts. Now the weather is getting really bad the small villages are cut off.

There is one big hotel called The Grange in a desolate part of the Moor very popular with visitors in the Summer time who stay, and go on rambling trips. It so happens the hotel still has visitors, and now with this unexpected blizzard they are all marooned and gloomily gaze out of the windows at the fury of the snow as it piles up into drifts and even sticks to the window panes.

Every now and again the lights flicker on and off, the manager assured everyone "Not to worry we have a backup generator, and the phones are working at the moment if you need to send messages, I've informed the police who are here so that if our phones stop working, they will pass information on, and when it's possible they will send rescue parties out."

Some of the visitors that had mobile phones were busy tapping out messages. A gong sounded in the reception area. "Dinner is now being served in the dining room." There was a lot of muttering and mumbling going on while the guests had their meal, one of the women wanted to know. "Are we going to be stuck here for Christmas?" another said "

"It looks like it, the weather report on my mobile reckons there's no let up for some days this snow is coming from Alaska and no sign of stopping for a while." A moan went round the room. "What are we going to do now?" The door opened and a waitress came to clear the table. "There are drinks tea and coffee in the lounge." "Is the television still working?" "Yes madam that is while the signal is."

They all walked into the welcoming lounge with its cosy armchairs arranged by the roaring wood fire. The room had been, decorated ready for Christmas the big fir tree in the corner beautifully decorated with small silver bells. The room had the aroma of pine wafting from the Christmas tree, aided by the warmth of

the fire. "Oh isn't it beautiful I for one am going to enjoy being stuck here because I would have been on my own at home."

The atmosphere in the room was now changing to that of a party." A man stood up. "I know you are sorry not to be at home with your families, but we are lucky to be where we are safe. The landlord and his staff I know will try their best to look after us so let's make merry and have a good Christmas here, I'm sure there are things to do, as they do have special Christmas weekends."

The door opened the landlord followed by staff carrying trays of hot toddies and sandwiches. "My staff and I always come in here on Christmas Eve, it's a tradition we keep for Sir James Grandfield who built this house a 100 years ago. He loved Christmas and always comes back on Christmas Eve to make sure we have the biggest tree we can find." It was shock horror! From the women in the room. "Do you mean a GHOST!!!! " "Yes madam and don't worry he is very friendly."

"How do you know about that is it true?" "Yes Sir James put it in his will and since the house has been a hotel it has always been the tradition of the tree." Some of the women were getting jittery. "I can assure you ladies there is nothing to be scared off." "How do you know he's here, can you see him?"

The landlord and the girls laughed. "Do you see the silver bells on the tree they will start to jingle when he is here with a few friends. The glasses and a jug on the tray clink and move around, we sometimes see him sitting by the fire or over by the bar smoking a long white clay pipe filling the room with a pleasant smell of cigars we often find pipes on the hearth, Christmas morning

The grandfather clock in the hall started to chime the hour. The landlord moved an empty chair by the fire. "Now everyone we must be quiet, and later I'll give a toast to Sir James." They were all scared and excited at the same time as the tree started to move a little the silver bells started to jingle as a cold chill came into the room. The glasses on the tray began moving with a clink now and then.

The armchair by the fire with it's back to the visitors slowly turned round and to their amazement! The figure of a jolly gentleman in old fashioned clothes and white wig smiled and bowed to the landlord, who raised his tankard to greet Sir

James. "We wish you a merry Christmas Sir James." All the visitors did the same. "Merry Christmas Sir James."

The chair slowly turned back as he waved, the bells on the tree stopped jingling also the glasses on the tray and the room felt warm again. The room buzzed with excitement, all talking at once to the landlord wanting to know more about the hotels Christmas Ghost "As far as the story goes I know Sir James, built this house and had a large family we think some of the children come with him every year to see the big tree. He held many parties in the great hall and always had the biggest tree he could find, so that is way we have to keep up the tradition every year,"

"I am so glad we saw Sir James that has made the most wonderful Christmas I've ever had." The landlord held up his tankard. "As a special treat on this occasion. The police can't get here so the bar is open and drinks all round are from Sir James. Wishing a Merry Christmas to all."