

# MURDERGHOSTS

A Short Story by James Rickard



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As with all of my short stories I never seem to be happy with them. This is no exception.

Two years ago I was watching Strip Search (<http://penny-arcade.com/strip-search>) and started following Alexandra Douglass (<https://twitter.com/Lexercise>) on twitter. On 20th July 2013 she posted about a dream she had (<https://twitter.com/Lexercise/status/358510924564414465>) and followed up with a drawing (<https://twitter.com/Lexercise/status/358509248478597120>).

What follows is a short story I wrote with that drawing in mind. I wrote it two years ago, but never got it finished, because I am lazy. The last edit was done in May 2014, so I blew the dust away and read it again.

Today is Halloween in Canada, and I thought it a fitting place to finish it off, because tonight will be the first time we go trick-or-treating in the neighbourhood.

**James Rickard**

31st October 2015

This story is written by James Rickard. There are more of my stories up at:

<http://frodosghost.com/stories>

The source and changes have been put into GitHub, you can see changes to the text and different drafts as they have been made.

<https://github.com/frodosghost/murderghosts>

The drawing was done by Alexandra Douglass, you should check out her art - it is fantastic.

<http://www.alexandra-douglass.com>



# MURDERGHOSTS

*James Rickard*

*Writer and Scared of @Lexercise's Dreams*

And it smiled at me sweetly. Like a ghost that had no lower jaw.

**“ Sometimes you forget things you should be taking notice of. They slip through the cracks, and you end between the worlds.”**

I don't know how she knew it all, but she did. Sometimes you forget things you should be taking notice of. They slip through the cracks, and you end between the worlds. Yet with the outstretched arms and the blistering cold I wasn't thinking. I should have been thinking.

Her long blond hair bouncing as she skipped. A short, old dress that came down to her knees and some spotted socks in t-bar leather school shoes. She smiled sweetly and turned her hair to the side when she was thinking. Innocence is so persuasive. I saw her first as she skipped through the peat, her shoes were not very damp. “Watch out for the Murderghosts.” Her voice was clear. She stopped and looked at me. “You're pretty.”

I furrowed my brow and spoke slowly, “Thanks. I guess.” People don't call me pretty, I am driven and focused - definitely not pretty.

“Watch out for the Murderghosts.” She said again, a cheery voice in the damp moors.

“Uh.” I paused. “Where are your parents?”

“Oh, they are in the castle over there.” She pointed to the castle that was upon a rise not too far away. “That is where his great grandfather used to live. We are on holidays.”

“That sounds nice. Holidays in a castle.” It did sound nice, if you like the cold.

“Do you know that ghosts can't make a noise. They also cannot touch anything in our world, for they live between worlds. And they want everyone who lives in this world to join theirs. They live between life and death.” She was chirpy as an early morning bird, singing in the clear and bright day. “Would you like to see one?”

“Not really.” I said.

“Awwwww. But they are funny.” She smiled innocently and tilted her head toward her left shoulder. “I saw one that couldn't smile.”

“Where are your parents?”

“They are in the castle. Like I said before.” She said, simply. “Would you like to see them?”

I cut more heather and placed into a small plastic bag, with the word ‘Lochaber’ in black writing, and shoved it into my leather satchel. It was the end of a long day, and I was collecting the last of my samples. I stood and surveyed the land, maybe one last sample.

“They have Visibles, the Murderghosts do.”

“What are Visibles?” I asked. We were walking through the moors, there was a fog coming down as the sun closed toward the horizon. I should have wondered why she wasn't feeling the cold.

“They are the people the Murderghosts take into the World Between the Worlds. A Visible is like a puppet. I once had a puppet, it was a bunny rabbit, brown with a pink nose. I put it on my hand and scared the cat with it.

“Do you have a puppet?” She asked a lot of questions.

“No.” I said. “I do have a cat though, his name is Dodger.”

“They also have long arms for choking people. Not your cat named Dodger, the Murderghosts.” She was so matter-of-fact with what she was saying. I had no questions. I wanted to talk of happier subjects, but she continued.

“They want everyone to join them, in the World Between the Worlds.”

“Aren't you cold?”

"I am not cold, I have been skipping. Do you know that you can't feel the cold in the World between the Worlds, but it is cold all the time. A 'sunk-in-your-bones' type of cold too."

A happy girl talking about creepy things. "What is your name?" I asked, trying to change the subject.

"Samantha, but my friends call me Sam." She said.

"And what are you doing here?"

She sighed and grunted in frustration. "Like I said, my family and I came for a holiday. My father was born up here near the Rannoch, somewhere in Lochaber. So we came up for holidays."

"Must be nice in a castle. Big beds and huge rooms."

"It's alright, I 'spose. It gets lonely."

"I have come to the Rannoch Moors for my university classes."

"What is University?"

"School." I said and Sam nodded in excitement because she understood. "We are learning how to look after the moors so you can enjoy them when you're older."

Conservation of the moors was part of my biodiversity course at the London University. I don't even know why I was studying it, I guess I wanted to help save the environment in some way. Not the time to be pondering this now.

There was a castle on the horizon that we were walking towards. The peat grew thick, decayed vegetation thick beneath my feet as we walked. It was an ode to my feelings, sinking as we made progress toward a failing landmark.

"My father wanted to visit the castle where his grand father lived. So we drove in the car - a light yellow Ford, with a broken heater and no radio - we drove for half a day before we got here."

"Where are your parents?"

"Oh, they are in the castle. You will meet them when we get there."

"Okay." I smiled. "So you drove all day?"

"No. We drove for half a day. I was freezing in the back. But my father wouldn't do anything about it."

"When we got to the castle we went inside. It was dark and cold. My father took a torch from the wall and lit it with the cigarette lighter from the car. We were lucky he did that. The sun goes down awful early in these parts."

"My father was excited. He took mother and I around the castle, showing us rooms and hallways. Old paintings and chamber rooms. He loved adventuring in here when he was little, and he loved it even more now we were revisiting his past. Well, there was one part of the castle that my father forgot about. The Lower Parts."

The peat ended and we walked onto a narrow pathway.

"We're almost there now." She said. "Past the parking area and up the pathway to the front door. The front was built high up to keep invaders away in the early times."

There was no car out the front of the castle. No tire marks in the mud either, I guessed the car was parked around the back. We walked silently up the pathway. The air was chilly and I drew my coat tighter around me and snuggled into the fur around the collar.

The door was huge and wooden. Large metal bands held the panels of timber close together, it looked like a monstrous mouth that consumed everyone who entered. Lex walked through the open the door. I followed her inside, a shiver ran through my body as we stepped across the threshold.

"Take the torch from the wall. I can't hold it." I lifted a kerosene lamp from a hook on the wall. Shadows shifted

along the walls as I held it I waved my other hand against the light, now that I had control over one of the shadows gave me comfort.

“My mother and father are in the lower parts.”

“You were telling me about them before.”

“Was I? Of course I was. You see, I forget things now. The steps are over this way.” And she started moving, I watched my shadow flicker against the wall.

“You see the Lower Parts was always out of bounds for my father when he was little. He was not allowed to go down there, ever.”

“Have you been down there?”

“Of course. He took us down there when we were on holidays.” I shone the torch down the bluestone walls, trying to see the bottom of the stair case. “Oh, you won’t see the bottom, miss.” Samantha said. “It’s too far away, we will have to walk down to see my parents.”

I realised how scared I was; bluestone steps, heading to the Lower Parts of a castle in the Rannoch Moors, were a scary place to walk. With a little girl leading me, and a lamp painting a failing, yellow light against the wall. I started thinking about why I was here again, trying to investigate the age of peat upon the moors. Why was I walking with a little girl? Why was I here?

Sam whispered now, like her words would break glass. “The Lower Parts are where bad things happen.” A few more steps. “Bad things that happened long ago, and some bad things that were not-so long ago.”

The flames dancing on the narrow stairway, the flickers covered my shaking hands. “Where are your parents, again Sam?”

“Oh, just over here, by the wall.” She pointed and I tried to follow her hand through the shadows and dark. I wanted to see her parents. Comfort of human voices. There was some shoes on the edge of the light, so I took a few steps closer towards them.

They were not sleeping, nor were they sitting. Two bodies, old flesh clung to the bones of the long-since dead. I dropped the torch. “My parents died on holidays. They were scared by what they found in the Lower Parts.” The light shone against the wall a little less, the flame was starting to flicker out against the cold floor. My shadow danced on the wall, a flickering dim-blackness that faded.

It was in the last of the yellow light that I saw the Murderghost. I think it was a Murderghost. It had long arms, that were stretched out towards me, with thin fingers clawing at the end. It had no jaw, only a wordless cry, a shriek that froze my heart, and welcomed me into eternity. A puff of wind, and I felt the cold wrap around my neck. Long, thin and cold.

“This is my friend, Alisa.” The girl said. “She was married to my father’s great grandfather. She was the first be stuck down here.” But I couldn’t see her anymore.

The Murderghost had no eyes. Shadows consumed everything.

A scream started, it sounded like it was from another world.

And then, I could not feel the cold anymore.

*It was not cold anymore.*