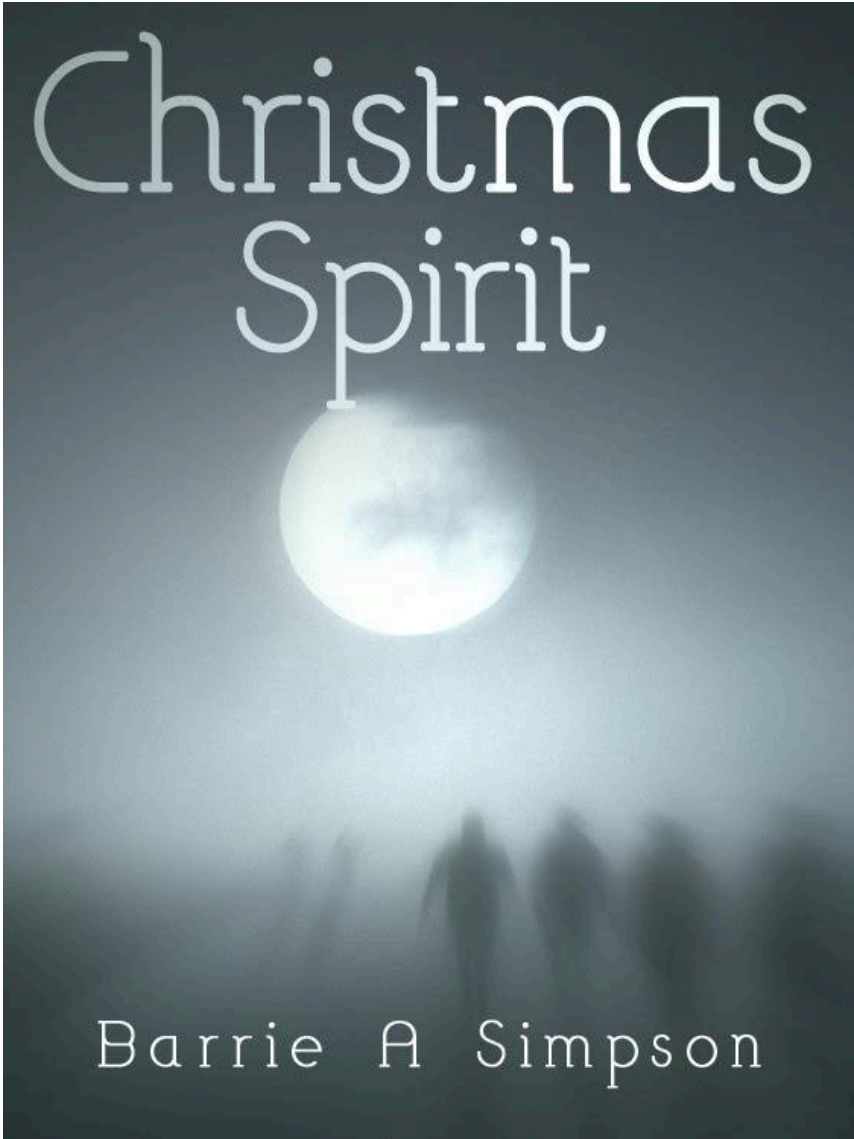


Christmas Spirit

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric photograph. A large, bright full moon is centered in the upper half of the image, casting a soft glow. Below the moon, the silhouettes of several people are visible, appearing to walk or stand in a misty or foggy environment. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Barrie A Simpson

Christmas Spirit

By Barrie A. Simpson

Edited by Chris J. Simpson

On the fifth day of Christmas;

A group of five friends are meeting in the room above an old English pub. The kind publican has laid out a spread of food and drink for them fit for a King and his royal family. These lively friends do the same thing each year you see, for it is there that they have the most fun...

Only not this year.

This year, they are strangely subdued. Just can't get into the spirit of things. You see...

On the twelfth day of Christmas;

The group had been not five but six great friends. But on that day, a beloved member of the group had tragically died. He always came to these gatherings. He always got the party started.

Back on the fifth day of Christmas;

Without their old friend there they are like a car without an engine, a hand without a glove, and all they want to do is munch a few small offerings, drink their sorrows away, and talk quietly to one another.

But then, on this day of Christmas, to their utter amazement, something remarkable happens.

The friend they believed had died...

Appears suddenly in the doorway.

The group now six again are filled with joy, yet also disbelief.

"We thought you were dead!", exclaims one.

"So did I!", replies the friend.

Nervous laughter ascends into raucous bellows. And it is then that their previously subdued mood changes to one of fun, and jokes, and Christmas spirit. The room becomes filled with laughter, noise, and happy voices

once more. And then...

On the fourth day of Christmas;

At the chime of midnight to be precise, it is time to leave the fine establishment.

They had all arrived in one car, and though it would be a tight squeeze, they of course ask their dear friend if he requires a lift in their vehicle.

"No", he says. "I'm going the other way".

And so he does.

Still laughing and chortling merrily, the five happy friends meander down the dark, misty, country lane, heading for where their car is parked.

As they turn a bend in the lane, their car begins to appear ahead, partly hidden by the trees and shrubs on the edge of the road.

And as they walk away, their laughter becomes quieter... almost seeming to echo...

And their bodies seem to become iridescent in the mist.

Almost transparent.

In the distance now, they reach the car. They open the doors.

Yet there are already five people inside the car.

"How can this be!", you might ask. But not they.

Instead the transparent forms of these five great friends just climb into the occupied seats regardless.

And as they sit down, their forms merge into the bodies of the car's five existing passengers.

That is, the car's five, once existing, but now quite lifeless passengers.

Five friends.

Now, as the mist clears, there just in front of the car becomes visible a concrete barn, bricks and hay strewn

across the car's mortally wounded bonnet.

In fact the mist was not mist at all, but the final gasps of steam escaping from the engine compartment.

And back in the pub, on this fourth day of Christmas, the publican walks upstairs and enters the room where the six friends had been.

But it is there that he sees that the food and drinks he had caringly layed out, are still on the side.

Entirely untouched.

For the six friends it was, and is...

The end.

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