



Gorgeous George and the Giant Geriatric Generator

By Stuart Reid



Chapter 1 – The Shadows

George lay wide awake.

There was a thick fog outside which seemed to glimmer orange in the streetlights. The glow was twinkling through the frost that was forming on the outside of the window and George lay in his bed, mesmerised by the sparkles through the crack in the curtains.

Almost hypnotised, George slipped out of bed, crept toward the window and parted the curtains ever so slightly. The street outside was wrapped in a cold blanket of mist and only the streetlights could be seen, like large balls of flickering amber. The rest of the street was either painted with a light orange glow, or hidden in pitch black shadow.

George sat for a long time and watched the icicle shapes grow on his window. The crystal fingers stretched inwards from the edges of the glass; crisp and sharp, forming intricate designs as tiny droplets of water began to freeze and expand with the rapidly dropping night-time temperatures.

There was no noise in the street; it was completely silent as if the fog had smothered any sound that dared to creep out from the darkness.

But if George strained his ears hard enough and closed his eyes tightly, there, right on the corner of his imagination he was certain he could hear a low humming noise. Not quite a groaning or a growling but a soft humming whirl coming from outside.

His house was silent. Everyone would be sleeping soundly, the heating had switched itself off hours ago and all the plugs were pulled out of their sockets. Apart from George, nothing moved inside his house. The noise had to be coming from outside.

The humming sound was darting along the edges of his imagination now. Curiosity and intrigue dared George to open the window, just a tiny bit, to hear the sound a little clearer.

As he quietly pushed the window an icy blast of cold air rushed into his bedroom and he shivered inside his pyjamas. George's breath blew puffy clouds out towards the small gap in the window frame and George pulled his arms tightly around his body. He settled down on his knees in the cold air, closed his eyes again and concentrated on the humming sound.

The noise was definitely not in his imagination now; it was outside, down the bottom of the street and coming closer. George opened his eyes and strained to see through the amber mist into the darkness beyond. The humming was always there.

At the very bottom of the street, where the houses meet the park and the large trees and hedges absorb all the streetlights, George saw two eyes approaching through the darkness. These eyes burned softly with a bluey-white radiance that split through the orange fog.

As these two eyes slid closer up the street, George saw that they were the headlights of a small truck; an almost silent little box on four wheels, painted a dull black colour which soaked up all the light around it.

And as the little black truck coasted up the middle of the road, George realised that this was where the humming noise was coming from.

It wasn't a noisy petrol motor like a car or a coughing spluttering diesel engine that was powering the black truck; it seemed to George that a noiseless, unseen hand was pushing the strange vehicle along.

It was a milk float!

But nobody in Little Pumpington gets milk delivered to their doorstep now, not unless it's been ordered online and usually comes along with lots of other groceries from the big supermarket inside your computer. And nobody has their shopping delivered at one o'clock in the morning.

So George was pondering the mystery of a midnight milk merchant when the truck bumped up onto the pavement and stopped outside old Mr Swan's house.

Mr Swan was a grouchy old man who smelled a little bit like wee and a lot like stale beer. George's dad said that when Mr Swan dies, they'd better not cremate him or he'll go up like Guy Fawkes although George wasn't quite sure what he'd meant.

Mr Swan always wore three jerseys and a cardigan. In the winter he'd wear special gloves with the fingertips cut off them. George thought that this was so Mr Swan could keep his hands warm and still pick his nose properly.

George watched the two enormous shadows step out of the black truck and go through the front door of Mr Swan's house. These shadows lurched, rather than walked and had a sinister sense of purpose about their heaving swagger.

Two minutes later the shadows returned, this time staggering more than swaggering as they carried a large, black sack. They disappeared behind the truck and the back doors opened, then softly closed again. One of the dark shadows appeared, opened the driver's door and stopped. The shadow looked up at the George's window and their eyes met. George held his breath.

Holding his breath seemed a good idea because George thought that maybe the shadow had seen the warm, cloudy air billowing out from his mouth and escaping through the gap in the window that was still open a few inches. Gulp!

The shadow lifted its large club of a clenched fist and with a stiff, dagger-like thumb drew its hand across its neck. George didn't hear if this was accompanied with a creaking, tearing sound from the back of the shadow's throat but it should've been and probably was; only the fog had overwhelmed and stifled it.

'GEORGE!'

George leapt into air, his heart missing a beat at the shout and he turned toward his bedroom door.

George's mum flew into the room in a flurry, with the frustrated annoyance of a parent who didn't want to get up out of their nice, warm bed but knew that they had too.

'What are you doing out of bed at this time? Why is your window open?' she asked, 'have you been sleep walking again?'

‘No, mum, it’s the shadows,’ George replied sleepily and he turned to the window to see the street, empty, orange and completely quiet again.

‘Shadows? Really, George!’ George’s mum muttered as she stepped over and pulled the window tight shut. ‘Get back into bed and no more silly dreaming. You and your imagination, boy.’ And she bundled George into his bed, pulled the quilt around him and tucked it under his legs.

‘Now go to sleep.’ And she scurried off to her bedroom again, hoping that the duvet was as warm and snuggily as it had been when she’d left it two minutes earlier but knowing that it never was. George closed his eyes and wondered if he really had been dreaming as the swaggering, staggering shadows lumbered around the edges of his mind and he slowly drifted off to sleep.



Chapter 2 – School on Monday Morning

Today, George Hansen lived in the town of Little Pumpington, on the north east coast of England. It always seemed rather odd to George that, although there was a small town called Little Pumpington, there wasn’t a larger town called Big Pumpington or even a city called Great Big Pumpington. He always thought there should be.

George’s Grandpa Jock had once told him that reason why Little Pumpington was called Little Pumpington was because high on the hill overlooking the town was the power plant and every since the plant had been built, on the hour, every hour, one of the three chimneys at the plant would let out a gaseous ‘parp’ of foul smelling steam, which stunk like old cabbages. The factory didn’t make that noise anymore so George wasn’t sure whether to believe his Grandpa Jock or not.

That morning, George had slept in for school. This was probably due to his late night window watching or sleep walking or whatever he had been up to. Had he been dreaming? Now George wasn’t so sure and his memory was as foggy as the street had been last night so maybe his mum was right.

George was now wolfing down his last piece of toast and trying to drink his milk. His mum was thrusting one of his arms into the sleeve of his jacket.

‘Come on, lad. Hurry up,’ said his mum slipping his arm into the second sleeve and hooking the strap from his school bag across his wrist in one swift motion. George’s toast became lost somewhere in the whole whirlwind.

Just then, George’s dad stepped through the back door. ‘Morning all,’ he said cheerily, waving the newspaper at George and his mum. George’s dad always woke up early and went out for a long walk first thing in the morning, before stopping off at the newsagents on the way home.

‘I hear Mr Swan’s off to Florida, dear,’ Mr Hansen said.

‘That’ll be nice for him,’ replied George’s mum, ‘Nice bit of sunshine at this time of year. How did you hear about that then?’

Mr Hansen scratched his head, ‘That’s the funny thing,’ he said, ‘Mr Russell at the paper shop said that one of his paper boys found a note on his doorstep this morning, saying he was off to Florida and to cancel his papers.’

‘That was quick,’ replied Mrs Hansen, ‘but you never can tell with old people these days. It seems as fast as an idea comes into their heads, they’re off. Take Mr Higginbottom, who shot off on a worldwide cruise last year, suddenly decided it was his life-long ambition. And look at old Mrs Davies a few years back. Off to visit her friend in Badger’s Creek. Without even telling anyone! I mean, who would guess that mean old bat had any friends?’

‘Maybe Grandpa Jock might want to rush be off back to Scotland next.’ George’s mum laughed and George thought that she looked a little bit too happy at the prospect.

‘And then there was that coach load of pensioners who wanted to be missionaries in Africa. Remember that, about four or five years ago,’ added George’s dad. ‘They never came back again, did they?’

Then it dawned on George. He stopped in his tracks. ‘Mr Swan’s gone?’ he asked, starting to feel a shiver of concern, ever so slightly, and raising one eyebrow.

‘Yes, apparently,’ said Dad. ‘Left yesterday, according to his note.’

‘But what about the shadows I saw going into his house last night!’ squealed George.

‘Oh, you and your shadows!’ groaned his mother. ‘That imagination will get you in trouble one day, boy.’ And she forced him out of the house whilst pulling out a half-eaten, slightly soggy piece of toast from the hood of George’s jacket.



So, George was running late for school that morning, slightly hungry due to his lack of toast, slightly sleepy due to his late night vigil and slightly grouchy for being rushed out of his house. George was also slightly concerned about Mr Swan.

He didn't like Mr Swan much, and might even be slightly scared of him, (though George would never admit to that) but he didn't like the thought of someone being dragged out of the house in the middle of the night, in an old sack by two shadowy thugs.

It didn't seem likely. It didn't seem possible. But it seemed less likely and more impossible that Mr Swan had been kidnapped from his own bed by two masked hoods driving the stealth bomber equivalent of a milk-float; these things just don't happen in towns like Little Pumpington, or anywhere else for that matter.



'Good *afternoon*, George,' Mrs Watt spat out sarcastically. 'Sit down immediately and try to arrive here on time tomorrow.' George was last into the class room but the bell had only rung 30 seconds ago so he felt that Mrs Watt was being a little unfair.

Mrs Watt was George's teacher. Or Evil old bag-face Watt, as some people called her. Mrs Moaning-Faced-Sucking-on-a-Lemon-would-be-an-improvement-and-probably-too-good-for-her-Watt, as only George liked to call her.

Mrs Petunia Watt wasn't actually *that* old, she just seemed to have been around forever and had done her very best, throughout her career as a teacher, to suck all the fun and enjoyment out of every subject and student that came within a ten metre radius of her classroom, leaving nothing but a shrivelled, dry husk of educated matter. Mrs Watt's idea of good schooling was to educate a child to within an inch of their life, whether they wanted to be taught or not. George had even overheard Mrs Watt telling one of the student teachers that 'doing away with the cane was the worst education decision ever. The cane only forces the knowledge deeper,' she announced with some passion.

Now again, Grandpa Jock's knowledge of all things ancient helped George out with this one. George had never heard of *the cane* before. Apparently the cane was a piece of bamboo about one metre long and it made a vicious whippy sound when you swooshed it around. The cane, or in Scotland where Grandpa Jock went to school, a leather belt, was used to beat small children who talked in class or didn't understand the

question or spelt a word wrong on their homework. Bad teachers used the cane all the time to prove how much discipline and education they were instilling in their pupils. Grandpa Jock said good teachers didn't really use the cane much but some of them liked to keep it on display, as a constant threat.

George sat down in his regular seat at the back of the classroom. He sat on his own at a double desk in the corner and George liked sitting at the back because if he stayed quiet and kept his head down, Mrs Watt would sometimes forget he was there and he could allow his thoughts to day dream off to the bottom of the ocean or to outer space where he could conjure up new creatures, living in strange lands or anywhere George's imagination wanted to take him.

This morning however, Mrs Watt stood at the front of the class, tall and very slim, with her beady eyes peering out over the top of her half moon glasses, staring at George.

'Boys and girls,' she began, making the words sound like poop on her shoe, 'this is Allison, Allison Lansbury. Now Allison and her mother have just moved to Little Pumpington and she'll be joining this class. Make her feel welcome or else.'

Allison had short brown hair and big blue eyes. Her skin was slightly tanned and she held her head straight up looking at the back of the class and not wishing to make eye contact with anyone. She sighed with a bored expression on her face which changed immediately when Mrs Watt looked down at her. Suddenly Allison smiled sweetly and Mrs Watt's puzzled eyes couldn't be quite sure if she was being made a fool of.

'You can sit at the back, beside George. Off you go.' said Mrs Watt shoving Allison through the first row of desks. Allison breathed heavily again and sat down behind George.

'Hi,' she said quietly to George, and sitting down on the empty chair.

'Hi you,' said George, not wishing to be rude but secretly annoyed that his empty, peaceful double desk was now shared with a girl.

'Is she always such a stuck-up dragon?' whispered Allison.

George sniggered loudly and Mrs Watt threw a marker pen at him, which bounced off his head and hit the window.

'Stop that nonsense, George,' yelled Mrs Watt, her face turning from its usual pale yellow colour to a more purple tinge, as the broken veins in her cheeks filled up blood furiously. 'You are to look after the new girl, not to show her how badly you can behave.'

Now George really was starting to lose his patience. Today was not turning out to be a good day since he got out of bed, on the right side but at the wrong time. He hadn't been able to finish his toast, his mum didn't believe him about Mr Swan's shadows, he'd lost his spacious double desk and now the lump on his head was starting to throb.

He'd rather be listening to Grandpa Jock's bagpipes than this nonsense!

