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## Eyes In The Road

by Richard Lewis

Percy drove the mountain road home, through the foggy, starless night, from the Old Dolphin pub in Queensbury.

Street lights were rarer than hen's dentures and the mischievous moon was nowhere to be seen. He'd probably had one too many but there were no drink drive laws back in 1935.

Percy hadn't realised but the car had drifted to the wrong side of the road and was in danger of being dragged over the edge, a two-hundred-foot drop to the valley below. Ahead of him, two eyes appeared, reflecting the headlights of the car. He hit the brakes, causing the car to swerve, skidding to a halt, his heart beating like an Arabian drum.

The incident was etched on his mind, those eyes boring into him like lasers. 'Somehow,' he thought, 'it must be possible to use reflecting light to guide traffic by night, reducing accidents and saving lives.'

Percy grew up in poverty. Born in Halifax, the eleventh child, his father laboured at the local mill for £1 a week. Percy followed at the age of thirteen, to work for crumbs.

Some years later, due to the closure of the mill, his father set up a workshop repairing household implements. Percy, who loved to tinker and loose himself with mechanical things, joined his father and discovered a talent for inventing new devices.

That foggy night's drive that almost ended in disaster, warned by an innocent creature, led to the invention of the 'Cat's Eye'.

There were many setbacks and frustrations along the way, bringing his invention to fruition. Sometimes it felt like scrambling up a mountain with a monstrous weight attached to his back, only to slither back to the bottom, having to start all over again. But Percy had a secret weapon, dogged perseverance.

Business was initially poor but events came to the rescue during WW2. With much of the country blacked out, something was needed to improve road safety. Sales figures rocketed and soon the factory was making a million cat's eyes a year and exporting them world-wide. No doubt saving numerous lives.

Percy was an eccentric character, who never really escaped the poverty of childhood. Though wealthy, it was a spartan existence, living in the same house almost all his life, without carpets or curtains. He never married, had no children and never went on holiday. But he kept open house, where every evening he entertained friends, providing food and beer, perhaps answering a need for company, filling the house again as it had been during his crowded childhood.

The only real indulgence Percy enjoyed was owning two Rolls Royce Phantom cars, one kept as a spare when the other was being serviced and now, with those blind eyes lighting the way, they always found the route home from the pub, on a dark, foggy night.

