

The Glass Door

Those of us who have looked into a frosted, pebble glass window, even momentarily, will have seen glimpses of a distorted, moving picture. The slightest movement of the hand can make many different shape and colours. One sees an eye, a left eye or a right eye, but never the two together, giving the picture a faintly odd and rather disturbing appearance. One might be looking at a picture of an eye in the left hand corner of the glass and be disturbed by a passing shadow and the picture would move swiftly into the top right hand corner.

Or so Gertrude thought, as she came down the stairs with a suitcase in each hand and her handbag over her shoulder. She put them down by the front door, her handbag on the hall table, then sat down on the bottom step to wait for the taxi to take her to the station. She was a half hour too early, but felt the need to be ready. She felt drained and beaten. The last few months had been fraught with anxiety and very traumatic. Her hair that had once been a rich, dark, brown was now streaked with grey and getting thin. Every little thing seemed to build up into an almost unbearable weight. The house claimed all her attention, so that she felt she was not free to go and come as she pleased. She refused invitations from friends in case the house was burgled while she was out. She was very tired.

Gertrude was a slim woman in her early sixties, and, as a rule, quite active. She lived alone in her small terraced house that she had bought after Tommy, her husband, had died fifteen years ago. She had been quite happy in the old home with its memories of the children when they were small, until she started to have bad dreams at night. She started to fancy that Tommy was still in every room she went into, and fond of him as she was, she found this feeling of his continuous presence so unnerving that she decided to move away.

So, now she lived in this small house, with its pleasant garden and atmosphere. There were several trees in the garden; an overgrown yellow plum tree, two silver birches, and a laburnum at the bottom. The first Sunday she was there she was awakened by the church bells from the parish church a few hundred yards away. It was all so peaceful and calm.

Then she had met Robert. They began their friendship by comparing prices in the local supermarket. They met again quite by chance a few days later and their friendship grew from there. They met for morning coffee, and sometimes for afternoon tea, in one of the local tea rooms. Gertrude found his soft Scottish accent soothing. It amused her when he called her "young woman".

"You know", he said, "when you grow older there is no one left around to think of you as 'young' any more. I was always 'Young Robert'".

"At home we were always called 'little Gertrude', or 'little Helen'" said Gertrude. "We were probably quite spoiled."

And they both laughed at the happy memories of their childhood.

Gertrude and Robert took trips to Covent Garden, and to the Barbican. They went to shows in the Festival Hall. They exchanged gifts on their respective sixty-eighth birthdays.

It was nearing the first Christmas of their friendship when they were walking through the local park that Robert complained of not feeling well, and being strangely tired. They sat down on seat with "IN MEMORY OF ---" on it. Robert said he could not go on. He had a gripping pain in his chest, then sank down from the seat to the ground. People came running to help and within twenty minutes he was in hospital. But his heart had given out, and he never returned.

Gertrude was stunned. Somehow she managed to get through the following days. Once again she felt the warm presence of Tommy, and found it very disturbing. She now felt she could

bear things no longer, so she put her house on the market and prepared to move to Dorset with her brother.

Now she was waiting for the taxi to take her to the station.

"I may as well make a cup of tea while I am waiting," she thought.

She went the kitchen to put the kettle on. She plugged it in and put the teapot over the spout to warm up, then returned to the stairs.

From the corner of one eye she thought she saw movement on the glass door. She looked again and saw the eyes were upon her. There were bright, merry eyes with large, deep blue pupils of grey-green eyes.

She saw her father's eyes, light blue dreamy eyes. When they twinkled, they lit up his face. He had been a gentle father, loving his own children dearly, but none too keen on other children. He would say to his children when they had friends round,

"You harbour the kids around here."

Memories of him came flooding back to her. One of her earliest was of one Christmas time when he dressed up as a ghost complete with phosphorus paint on his face that shone in the darkened room. Another memory of him was of a certain Easter time when they were very small. It was early morning and they were all in bed when a shout came from below in the front garden. Father opened the window of the bedroom and a large bag of hot cross buns came sailing in, thrown by the baker's boy.

Then came another memory of him of a time when his eyes clouded over, saddened by Life's knocks, of which we children had no knowledge, being too young. When asked what was wrong, he said with misty eyes,

"I wish I could wake up and find it was all a dream and I was home again with my mother".

We children thought about this for a moment, then said,

"You would not have had us then!"

He smiled his slow smile then putting his arms around us said,

"No, I wouldn't, would I? My beloved little daughters."

Gertrude recalled the love in his eyes as he said this, and smiled back at the reflection in the door; then she closed her eyes that were, as she had been told so many times before, so like his own.

"Keep young and beautiful if you want to be loved."

Gertrude opened her eyes wide. This was the song her mother had sang when she was in her seventies, her bright blue eyes under their thick dark brows shining with mischief. Mother went everywhere at the trot. Upstairs and downstairs, in and out of the garden, she tripped and trotted. Gertrude saw her mother's eyes brimming with fun as she squeezed water from a sponge onto the up-turned face of one of her sons-in-law to waken him. Mother's eyes twinkled brilliantly from the glass door. She had so much love in her that she readily gave up her war time butter ration to her two little grand-daughters when they were small, calling it 'Granny's Marger'. Her eyes were so seldom sad that it was with surprise that the children found her in tears one day and crying out,

"I want my mother! Oh, I want my mother!"

She would have been about forty at the time, and her mother had been dead for about ten years. Father and mother must have been going through a rough patch at that time. But those bright, merry blue eyes laughed their way through eighty-four years before they finally closed.

At this moment the sun shone through the glass door making it twinkle like a rainbowed prism. The eyes danced and changed places, sending ripples of colour on to the cream walls of the hall-way. Gertrude took off her hat and put it on the hall stand where it looked like a bunch of for-get-me-nots. When she and Tommy were first married they had a patch of for-get-me-nots

just outside the back door. After a while Gertrude had wanted to clear them away, as she considered them untidy, but Tommy liked them and asked her to leave them there. She saw his eyes now, on the bottom left hand corner of the glass door, mild, hazel eyes with a darker brown rim around the iris. They seemed to be puzzled, as if they did not know what to do. They seemed to be saying,

"Why, Gertrude, why?"

Gertrude got up and walked to the door, placing her hands on the glass, and rested her head on them. After a while, there came a warmth and a tingling sensation which travelled through her body from her head to her toes, giving her strength. She burst into tears.

"Oh, Tommy! Oh, Robert! Don't leave me! Don't leave me!"

She felt the glass get warm, so warm, that when she tried to take her hands away she found she could hardly move them. Some power was holding them there. It was as if someone was holding her hands. She felt the strength of a pair of masculine hands. There was the smell of tobacco smoke and garden coats. She held on to the warmth in her grasp, the tears falling down her face like rain. She felt her hands lose their grip and then drop to her sides. For a moment she stood there until the shaking of her body was stilled. Then, suddenly a blaze of strong sun lit the hall in the hall-way through the glass door, sending the colours dancing with joy. Calmer now, Gertrude went to the front door, picking up her hat as she did so. She tried to open the door but the barrier of colour and sun light made her lightheaded, and the myriad of eyes that were watching her lovingly shone like a cascade of many jewels, amethysts, amber, topaz and opals.

Gertrude reached up to touch the top left hand corner of the glass. To her surprise she saw that it was cracked like the rays of the sun and in the middle of the cracks was a small, round hole which she had not noticed before. It was as if a sharp pointed object had been pushed through the door.

"I must get a new piece of glass put in this door," she said to herself. As she said this, Gertrude also realised that she was about to leave this house with the hole in the glass door. She slowly took off her coat and threw it over the newel post at the bottom of the stairs. She slipped off her shoes and padded in stockinged feet into the kitchen. The kettle was just boiling, so she made the tea, and arranged the cup and saucer, milk, and sugar, on a little tray. She looked into the garden where the late spring sunshine slowly spread over the grass and dappled the leaves in the trees.

"How lovely it all is..."

She thought of her little greenhouse coming to life with baby plants and seedlings. She turned round, and going into the hall, looked at the glass door. It was a plain pebbled frosted glass door with the sun streaming through a small hole in the top left hand corner. She smiled at the door and gave it a friendly wave of her hand. Then she lifted the telephone to call the estate agent, asking them to take her house off the market. She phoned to cancel the taxi. She then collected her tea-tray from the kitchen, bringing it into the hall, and sat down on the bottom stair with a cup of tea in her hand. With the warmth of the sun's rays, and the feeling of being surrounded by so much love, she felt utterly at peace.