

Mist

Now, I am not afraid of the dark, but I do not find it particularly pleasant to be in total darkness, the sort of blackness that seems to wrap one in a soft, woolly blanket. I do not draw the curtains across the windows at night, as I like to see a gleam of the outside world as I lie in bed. I usually read for a while before I turn out the light. As my bedroom is at the back of the house, and the house backs on to a golf course where there are plenty of tall trees, I can sink back under the covers and open my current library book. I cannot be seen unless there is a 'Peeping Tom' sitting in one of the trees with a telescope.

There is a wardrobe with a mirror in it standing in an alcove by the window and in this alcove I see a reflection of the outside world, making my room seem twice as large.

The only light I do not appreciate shining into my room is the moon. For some reason that I cannot explain, I have always had a fear of the moon, especially a full moon. All the romance and love songs about it have not cured me of this awful dread of looking at the full moon.

Another fear of mine was the searchlights during the World War 2. The raids did not frighten me so much as these lights moving their long, finger-like movements across the sky, even though I knew they were there for my protection. This did nothing for me as I crept along the unlit roads trying to find my own front door.

Now they are gone and I have only the moon with which to contend.

Which brings me to my Ring of Mist.

About twenty five years ago, I had an invitation from my sister-in-law, Maggie, to stay with her for a few days. She was feeling very distressed and in need of comforting, as her husband was in hospital after having a stroke. I understood her needs; my own husband had died just three years earlier. So, I packed my bags and went so that she would not be alone. We spent the first afternoon talking and even found quite a lot to laugh over, about things that had happened in the past.

Maggie's bungalow had two bedrooms with twin beds in each room.

Although I had always had a room on my own up to now, she suggested that we share one room during my stay. She said she would like to sleep in the same room with me, to which I agreed.

When the time came for bed, she drew the curtains across the windows so that we could sit up in bed reading for a while in privacy. We were warm and comfortable and enjoyed each others company until came time for "lights out".

Then we were plunged into the thickest blackness I have ever known. I laid there for a while, then asked if I could have the curtains open just a little, but the fear of someone looking in through the window was too much for Maggie, so I did not press the matter. It took me some time to get to sleep but did manage it after a long while.

I was awakened at six o'clock by Maggie holding a cup of morning tea. The night before was forgotten and the day showed promise of being warm and sunny, so we made our plans to walk to Littlehampton after lunch. Our path took us past corn fields on one side and the sea not far from us on our left side.

The memory of that walk is with me today, although so many years have passed into limbo.

That night the curtains were drawn as tightly as before, so not a gleam of light could penetrate the gloom. The darkness could be cut with a knife, and I wondered how long I could stand the intense discomfort of this heavy blackness. It was like a weight on my eyes. The

darkness seemed to swell and move in a spiral towards the ceiling. I tried to pierce the unrelieved fog that had settled on me so heavily that I almost began to have difficulty in breathing, and in moving my limbs. I felt I was being overpowered by an unseen force beyond my reckoning.

"This is no good!" I thought, "Take hold of yourself! There is nothing here but darkness caused by having the curtains drawn over the windows. Sit up in bed!"

I must have spoken aloud for Maggie awoke asking what was wrong. I passed it off as a bad dream, which made her tell me of the dreams she had been having about her husband, Jack. She cried bitterly.

"Oh, Irene. Irene! He mustn't leave me! I can't take it!"

I forget the darkness as I tried to comfort her with soothing words, and taking her hands in mine. I felt a great need for words of solace myself. After a while we both calmed down and drifted off to sleep still holding hands.

When we awoke it was half past six and the sun was beginning to rise. Maggie opened the curtains and switched on the teasmaid for a cup of tea. We smiled at one another but neither of us mentioned the night of misery. I looked around the room at all the familiar objects shining brilliantly as their polished surfaces caught the bright, morning sun. The scent of ozone blowing from the sea a half mile away was very strong and heady.

We made more plans for this day, the first being to visit Jack in hospital in the afternoon. I had not seen him for some while so was deeply shocked at his appearance. He was sitting in the middle of the ward with twenty other men, all with various degrees of fear in their eyes. Jack's speech was very slurred and difficult to follow but I managed somehow to hold a conversation with him. He was trying to tell me something that seemed to be rather important to him. I let him think I understood what it was that he wanted me to know. All I could really understand was the word "light".

That evening at Maggie's home was spent with some of her friends. We chatted and played cards, reminiscing over our coffee about old times, trying to keep Maggie's mind off what might happen to Jack.

When in bed that night I was more than a little upset. As Maggie switched off the light plunging the room into total darkness, I found I could not get warm, and my limbs were shaking so much that I could not get comfortable.

After about an hour I began to panic. I closed my eyes to pray for relief, and when I opened them again there was a glow above my head, not so much a light as an uneven ring of misty light coming through a frosted glass window. I turned my head to look at the wall behind me, although I knew full well that there was no window. I thought of Jack and his "light" that I had dismissed as incomprehensible. It was here! It was here to comfort me through the darkness of the night. I sat up in bed, took a sip of water, closed my eyes, and blinked several times, yet the light was still there! I soon slept with a calmness that I had never felt before, or since that night.

Jack died three weeks later, but, although I have never seen it again the thoughts of his "light" has comforted me many times. Whenever I retell this story I get odd looks, but I know what I know.

I saw a Ring of Mist three foot by two foot hovering above me as if coming through a frosted glass window.