

Wisps from the Dazzling Darkness

by Anne Whitaker

Life has a rich dimension of mystery to it, inexplicable in conventional terms. It would be good if we feared that less, and were more open about it. Why should clairvoyants, palmists, astrologers, mediums, clergy, or psychical researchers be the only people with whom we generally feel it is acceptable to discuss experiences which do not fit the conventional frame? There are so many important aspects of living which we simply do not talk about for fear of being thought odd, or strange. Well – I have come to realise that “strange” is a very important part of normal life!

My main aspiration is that my experiences should add to the already very large and well documented body of **experiential** evidence confirming that this material world bounded by the five senses does not provide anything like the whole story of who we are, or what our lives are for.

I do hope you enjoy this extract from “Wisps from the Dazzling Darkness” then feel inspired to read the rest of the book!

Part Three: Ghosts

“Ghosts seem harder to please than we are; it is as though they haunted for haunting's sake – much as we relive, brood, and smoulder over our pasts....on the whole, it would seem they adapt themselves well, perhaps better than we do, to changing world conditions – they enlarge their domain, shift their hold on our nerves, and, dispossessed of one habitat, set up house in another. The universal battiness of our century looks like providing them with a propitious climate....”

Elizabeth Bowen

Definition of a ghost: *“the soul of a dead person which supposedly manifests itself to the living visibly (as a shadowy apparition), audibly etc.” (p 356, The Oxford English Reference Dictionary, Oxford University Press 1996)*

An imaginative child, I found going upstairs to bed scary most nights, having probably heard too many ghost stories as I grew up in the storm-tossed Outer Hebrides – home to many a Celtic tale of the otherworld of the supernatural.

There was the spectral woman wrapped in plaid who jostled my maternal grandfather in the winter dark as he traversed the remote, eerie Uig Glen. There was my maternal great-grandmother's hearing the wheels of lorries rumbling through her remote village toward a deserted headland – many years before they actually came, bearing the materials to build an RAF station there. There was at least one ghost car. There were the shades of the dead appearing to those few in possession of the Sight – sure harbingers of imminent family death. There were ghostly lights luring sailors to their deaths in stormy seas. More has been forgotten than I could ever now recall.

Fortunately for me, vivid imagination has always sat in tandem with a strongly empirical streak. So I was a true sceptic –inclined to disbelieve in the absence of proof – until the day I saw a ghost for myself....

Perthshire, Scotland, Autumn 1977

It was the autumn of 1977. My twenties had been turbulent. Restless wandering – from one career to another, one city to another, one set of friendships to another, and one dwelling place to another – characterised the whole decade. Now, I was in a mood to settle. Time to face my dissatisfactions, rather than running away when novelty wore off and disillusion set in.

Resolution thus colouring my mood, I left Dundee in September 1977 to do my social work training at Glasgow University. Having been such a hippie in my twenties, all I owned could be fitted into several boxes and stowed in the back of my old blue Morris Traveller. Laughing to myself, I recalled the occasion when, in my role as unqualified social worker, I had called by my flat in a poor area of Dundee to collect something I had forgotten. Accompanying me was the hard bitten female client I was accompanying on a visit to Dundee's Family Planning Centre. "For f--s sake!" she remarked, quickly scanning my accommodation whilst I hunted for the forgotten item. "Your standard of living's even worse than mine!"

Thus in transition, I set off to spend a night or two, en route to my new abode in Glasgow, with my boyfriend at the time who lived in the scenic market town of Perth, half way between Dundee and Glasgow. The Dundee to Perth road was mostly dual carriageway, and a distance of about twenty five miles. I drove happily through the area known as the Carse of Gowrie, which grew the best raspberries in Britain. "Pity I'm in a hurry", I thought. "A few raspberries for supper would be nice." It was a clear evening, around seven pm, growing dusk. There was very little traffic on the road. A few miles outside Perth, my headlights picked out a male cyclist on a racing bike, a little way ahead of me. I pulled into the overtaking lane to pass him – and he vanished.

I arrived at Peter's flat somewhat shaken by this experience. "I can't believe I imagined it. What I saw was definitely a cyclist. He was as substantial on that road as you are, standing right now in your kitchen!"

Peter was quiet for a few moments. He looked thoughtful, as if trying to decide whether to say something or not. At last he told me that a young male cyclist had been killed on that stretch of road a year or so previously. This was something of which I had no knowledge. Why should his ghost appear to me?

"Firstly, because you're so sensitive anyway. Cast your mind back to some other odd happenings which have occurred since we've been together. Secondly, your life is in transition. I think at those times, normal consciousness is more porous, as it were. Impressions from other layers of 'reality' find it easier to seep through...."

I remember feeling quite relieved that I wouldn't be travelling on that stretch of road for the foreseeable future....