

# **The Grey Mist: a ghost story**

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The Grey Mist: a ghost story  
A play in 2 acts

First Published in Great Britain in 2018 by Beercott Books.

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ISBN: 978-1-9997429-4-2

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## CHARACTERS

DR TRENT: Respectable, modest practitioner in his late thirties or early forties

JULIA NORBURY: In her early thirties: neat, efficient, a little prim. She is assistant and administrator at the practice

KATE SIMPKINS: Indeterminate age, but probably in her forties: she is housemaid at the practice, a local with a country accent and a secretive air about her

CORBY: Oddjob man at the practice, of an indeterminate age: a local with a country accent and a blunt manner, shifty sometimes, secretive and dark. He is roughly dressed and unshaven

MRS MUMPKIN: A large and very talkative country woman

MR MUMPKIN: The small and bronchial husband, forever dominated by his wife

MRS PRYMM: An elderly twittering lady: she helps at the church and has an affectionate eye for Dr Trent

DR MORTIMER: Late fifties or early sixties, immaculately dressed senior doctor with an authoritative and supercilious manner

VERITY MANDRAKE: A ghost – in her twenties (when she died)

NARRATOR: In his fifties probably, smartly dressed: beyond this we need know nothing more about him

DENHAM: Doctor Mortimer's secretary: young, quiet and unassuming but efficient

MAUDE: A young lady who briefly passes through the surgery

## SCENES

The play takes place in the consulting room of a small country practice in the 1920s

### ACT 1

SCENE 1: Afternoon, around 4pm

SCENE 2: Morning, the following day

SCENE 3: Late morning, a week later

SCENE 4: Late evening, the same day

SCENE 5: Mid morning, several days later

SCENE 6: Late afternoon, the same day

SCENE 7: Around 10pm, the same day

### ACT 2

SCENE 1: Afternoon, several days later

SCENE 2: Around 10pm, the same day

SCENE 3: Late afternoon, the following day

SCENE 4: Mid morning, the following day

SCENE 5: Evening, some days later

SCENE 6: Morning, the following day

SCENE 7: Mid afternoon, some time later

**ACT 1:****Scene 1**

*The doctor's consulting room of a small country practice in the 1920s. There is a bookshelf on the DR wall containing a number of volumes of medical reference works and a large leather-bound photograph album. UR of the shelves is the doctor's desk with two chairs, one for the doctor and one for the patient. UR of the desk is a tall Grandfather clock, almost in the UR corner. In the corner of the wall, UR, is a narrow door or opening onto the set which should be hidden to the audience by the Grandfather clock.*

*In the rear wall is a double window with working curtains. The window should have handles though does not need to open. Part of a garden can be seen outside the window. There should be sufficient space between the window and backdrop to walk freely. R of the window an ordinary wooden chair stands against the wall. There may be a long wooden trunk below the window which can be used as a seat.*

*Against the wall UL stands a wooden filing cabinet. Down from this is a coat-stand. Down from this is a door, opening inwards and upstage, which leads to a hallway. A tiny portion of the hallway can be seen through the doorway. DL is a small round table with an armchair L and an ordinary wooden chair R. There are several lamps around the room which can be lit independently.*

*On the R stage extension there is an ornate desk. A comfortable-looking period office chair is behind it, its back to the wall. A second more standard chair is in front. There are a telephone, papers and a couple of books neatly stacked on the desk.*

*When the curtain rises the main stage is in semi-darkness. The extension is not lit. Actors on the main stage should already be in position. A single spotlight illuminates the Narrator who is seated on the arm of the easy chair front left. He wears a smoking jacket and addresses the audience.*

NARRATOR: This story is about a haunting. It is a ghost story, if you like – whatever that may mean. I suspect it means

different things to different people, to those who have experienced something and to those who have not. Some people may have naturally highly-tuned senses for these things while others remain in ignorance of them. I don't think it matters whether you believe in ghosts or not. That's just the way it is.

Now I'm a fairly practical sort of man. I would have put myself in the latter category. That's not to say I don't believe in ghosts. It's just that I had never had any experience of them. Well - not then anyway.

This – ghost story – came to me recently. Less than a year ago in fact. Parts of it were told to me. Other parts I discovered here and there, piece by piece. It concerns a doctor in a modest practice in a remote rural area of England in the 1920s. Like myself, I suspect that he was neither a believer or non-believer. He had simply never had cause to give the matter of ghosts and hauntings any thought. But certain circumstances, as you'll see, changed all that. And although these events took place quite recently, the story really begins many years earlier.

*The NARRATOR breaks off. He is still and silent for a moment. Suddenly he emits a fearful gasp and stands. He shivers.*

NARRATOR: It's coming now. Yes, it's coming. I can feel it. It's like ice-cold fingers brushing against my spine. Like an icy draft breathing on my neck. It's coming. Yes. It's beginning now...

*Spotlight blacks out and the NARRATOR exits as the lights come up on the main stage. JULIA NORBURY is alone in the consulting room, making final adjustments to various items: straightening items on the desk, re-angling a picture slightly on the wall, touching at the curtains to correctly align them.*

*JULIA is in her early thirties, neat, efficient and a little prim. She is assistant and administrator at the practice.*

*She runs a finger along the window-sill, notices dust and is not pleased.*

*KATE SIMPKINS enters from the LH door. KATE is the housemaid. Her age is indeterminate, probably forties. She is local and speaks with a country accent. She has a generally secretive air at all times.*

JULIA: Simpkins, the window sill has not been dusted properly.

KATE: No, miss?

JULIA: No. It's thick with dust.

KATE: Yes, miss?

JULIA: Well see to it now.

KATE: Yes, miss.

*KATE pulls a duster from her pocket and goes to the window. She glances slyly at Julia to be sure she is unobserved, then gives the sill a few insolent flicks. JULIA is examining the room.*

JULIA: What time is it, Simpkins?

KATE: Just before four, miss.

JULIA: Have you got the tea things ready?

KATE: Yes, miss.

JULIA: Dr Trent will be glad of refreshment when he arrives. It's such a tedious train journey up from London and then quite a walk from the station.

KATE: Could have sent Corby to the station to fetch him in the dog-cart.

*JULIA gives KATE a look of contempt at the idea.*

JULIA: Yes, well hardly. In any case Dr Mortimer said in his letter that Dr Trent would be quite happy to walk.

KATE: Well that settles the matter then, don't it, miss?

JULIA (*glancing around again anxiously*): I do hope everything is in order.

KATE: What's he like, miss? This Dr Trent.

JULIA: I know little more than what Dr Mortimer put in his letter. He's young, unmarried, currently a junior doctor attached to Dr Mortimer's practice. (*Pause*) I know I haven't been here very long myself –

KATE: Four months, b'ain't it, miss?

JULIA: Yes, about that. But something puzzles me.

KATE: What's that then, miss?

JULIA: Well the former doctor, Dr Evans –

KATE: God rest his soul.

JULIA: Yes. Quite. Well he was supplied by Dr Mortimer's London practice too, wasn't he?

KATE (*suddenly evasive*): I don't think he worked for the practice...

JULIA: No, possibly not, but his post here was arranged through Dr Mortimer, I understand.

KATE: Maybe...

JULIA: I'm certain it was. He mentioned it once, I'm sure.

KATE: Couldn't say, miss.

JULIA: Not that I had much chance to get to know him, poor man. He seemed nice enough but something played on his mind.

KATE: Can't say I noticed, miss.

JULIA: He began to look quite haggard – almost haunted – by the end...

*KATE looks at her sharply but says nothing.*

JULIA: I often wonder what could have been worrying him so much. Surely not the running of this practice. It's hardly onerous work after all. A nice country practice. Gentle flow of patients. Still, I suppose one never really knows another person that well.



KATE: No, miss.

*JULIA comes from her reverie and pulls herself together.*

JULIA: Well. This isn't getting things done. What time is it now?

KATE: Just on four, miss.

JULIA: Then we can expect Dr Trent at any moment.

*The sound of a door-knocker is heard.*

KATE: Spect that'll be new doctor now, miss.

JULIA: Prospective new doctor, Simpkins.

KATE: Yes, miss. I'll let him in.

*KATE exits via the LH door. JULIA quickly checks around the room once more. She glances into a mirror and minutely adjusts her hair.*

*A moment later DR TRENT is shown into the room by KATE. He is pleasant-looking, aged in his thirties or early forties.*

KATE: Dr Trent.

*TRENT steps forward and shakes hands with JULIA. KATE watches from just inside the door.*

TRENT: Miss Norbury?

JULIA: Dr Trent. How do you do?

TRENT: How do you do?

JULIA: I hope you had no trouble finding us.

TRENT: No, none at all. It's a straight walk from the railway station.

JULIA: And how was your train journey?

TRENT: Well, you know what these branch line railways are like.

JULIA: Yes. Quite. I expect you would like some tea.

TRENT: Yes, tea would be very nice, thankyou.

JULIA: Simpkins?

KATE: Yes, miss.

*KATE gives them one final quick searching glance then leaves the room. JULIA and TRENT stand in brief awkward silence alone in the room.*

JULIA: Please, let me take your coat.

TRENT: Thankyou.

*He removes his overcoat which Julia takes to hang on the coat-stand next to the LH door. As she returns she begins to point out features of the room.*

JULIA: This is the consulting room. The medicine chest. The examination couch. Shelves of reference books. Your – that is, the doctor’s chair and desk.

TRENT: It all looks very organised.

*Trent goes to the bookshelves and briefly scans some of the titles.*

TRENT: Plenty of reading matter here.

JULIA: I’m afraid each doctor tends to bring his own collection with him and then they just get left –

*JULIA stops herself, as if she has realised she was about to say something unadvisable.*

JULIA: The shelves could do with a good clear-out, I expect.

TRENT: Yes, I'm sure.

*Another brief silence between them.*

TRENT: You received Dr Mortimer's letter?

JULIA: Yes. He told us to expect you.

TRENT: I have to let him know my decision tomorrow. Though in actual fact I don't really think –

*He is interrupted by KATE's return with a tray of tea things. While she and JULIA arrange them on the small table front left, TRENT drifts to the window to look out. He notices the window sill, wipes his finger along it and then inspects the dust on his finger. He glances quickly back at the two ladies then hurriedly wipes the dust from his finger on his jacket.*

*By now the tea things are placed and JULIA dismisses KATE.*

JULIA: Thankyou, Simpkins.

*KATE executes a half-hearted curtsy and leaves the room. She has a good look at TRENT as she goes.*

JULIA: Please come and sit down, Dr Trent.

TRENT: Thankyou.

*They seat themselves either side of the small table. JULIA pours tea while they talk.*

TRENT: Are there many staff here?

JULIA: Other than myself there is just Kate Simpkins who you just met...

TRENT: Housemaid, I imagine?

JULIA: That's right, and general domestic duties. She's a local, been here for years. Efficient enough. (*TRENT glances discreetly at the windowsill then quickly back to JULIA.*)

JULIA: The only other is Mr Corby. He's – well – a handyman, I suppose you'd call him. Oddjob man. Tends the garden, does repairs – that sort of thing. Another local who's been here as long as Simpkins, if not longer... He's a – well a strange sort – but useful to have around and he does his job well so...

*TRENT notices the slight hesitation in JULIA's manner during this.*

TRENT: I suppose it takes the locals some time to get used to outsiders. Something I shall have to prepare myself for, if I decide to take up the position.

JULIA: They can be a close-knit lot to begin with.

TRENT: How long have you been here, Miss Norbury?

JULIA: About four months only. I'm still an outsider too, you see.

TRENT: Yes. Well I shall look forward to meeting Mr Corby from what you say.

JULIA: Yes. (*Pause*) You were beginning to say just now about deciding if you would accept the offer...?

TRENT: Oh yes. I was a little surprised when Dr Mortimer made the suggestion I come out here. I am only a meagre cog in the works of his practice. I haven't been there long. I would have expected him to offer this chance to one of his more experienced doctors. Unless, of course, he just wants to get rid of me.

*They laugh.*

JULIA: I'm sure it isn't that.

TRENT: Probably not. But all the same I was a little puzzled at his choosing me.

JULIA: Perhaps you can ask him about it tomorrow.

TRENT: Yes, perhaps I will. Although he is not really the sort of man you question lightly. I got the distinct feeling that if I refused he'd put me on the back shelf for good.

JULIA: Oh I'm sure he wouldn't do that.

TRENT: You don't know him. What is the practice like – the patients, I mean?

JULIA: They're mostly typical country folk, nice enough on the whole.

TRENT: And one or two...?

JULIA: Well one or two who may take a bit of getting used to, yes. Most of them visit during surgery hours, though you'll be expected to make some house-calls as well.

TRENT: I'm sure I can cope with that. I imagine most of them are from the village I saw near the railway station.

JULIA: If you can call it a village. It's little more than a few houses really, and a shop and a public house. There are a few farms too.

TRENT: It all sounds quite manageable.

JULIA: Yes...

*There is a moment's silence. They finish their tea.*

JULIA: Perhaps you would like to see the rest of the house now?

TRENT: Yes, thank you.

*They stand.*

JULIA: There are the out-buildings and the garden. And then, I expect, you'll be wanting to start back.

TRENT: There are still plenty trains to London.

JULIA: (*indicating the window*) Yes, but it's starting to get dark already. And you have that walk to the station.

TRENT: I don't mind walking in the dark.

JULIA: The road to the station is little more than a narrow lane in places and quite unlit. It can be quite – treacherous – in darkness. The tour will not take long and then you can be on your way.

TRENT: Very well. Lead the way.

*JULIA goes to the LH door. TRENT follows, taking his overcoat from the stand. He pauses in the doorway after Julia has exited and glances back around the room. His brief smile suggests that he is taking to the idea of working here. He exits.*

*There are a few moments of stillness. The lighting will dim very slowly throughout this next sequence as if dusk is drawing in outside. KATE enters the room from the LH door and sees that it is empty. She goes towards the table bearing the tea things and begins to collect them up onto a tray. Then she hesitates. She looks towards the bookshelves beyond the desk then goes uncertainly over to them. Her manner is both furtive and nervous. She pauses in front of the shelves, glances back to the door to be certain she is alone, then very gingerly pulls a large leather-bound photograph album from its place on the second shelf. She holds it nervously, staring at it as if afraid of it, then summoning her courage lays it carefully on the desk. She hesitates again. Then she opens the cover, and slowly turns some pages as if frightened of what she may see.*

*The voices of TRENT and JULIA are heard suddenly off.*

TRENT (*off*): Thankyou for showing me around, Miss Norbury. And for the tea. I'm sure I shall see you again soon.

JULIA (*off*): Goodbye, Dr Trent. Please take care on your way back to the station.

*The sound of the front door closing is heard.*

*KATE closes the photograph album hurriedly and quickly returns it to the shelf. She looks around in panic as JULIA's footsteps are heard returning, and hurries to stand behind the*

*LH door. JULIA enters through this door a moment later. The room has grown dim. JULIA does not notice KATE. JULIA moves to the centre of the room and stands smiling with gentle satisfaction, thinking of DR TRENT. Then realises how dark the room has become and comes from her reverie. She goes to the desk and turns on a lamp. She notices the tea things still uncollected on the table, tuts to herself and goes over to the table.*

KATE: I were just clearing those away, miss.

*Julia lets out a short scream of fear and surprise.*

JULIA: Simpkins! What are you doing here?

KATE: Just drawing the curtains, miss.

JULIA: Well I wish you wouldn't creep around like that!

*KATE draws the curtains while JULIA tries to control her breathing. KATE comes to the table and finishes collecting the tea things onto the tray.*

KATE: That Dr Trent – he's quite a looker, b'ain't he? Is he going to take the job?

JULIA (*frostily*): He hasn't made up his mind yet. We shall just have to wait and see.

KATE: Yes, miss.

JULIA: Now get those tea things cleared away and then find Corby if you would and tell him we shall need more logs for the fire.

KATE: Yes, miss.

*KATE bobs a slightly sarcastic curtsy, then leaves the room with the tray.*

*JULIA watches her go. Then her haughty expression becomes wistful as she moves to the centre of the room and tilts her head to one side.*

JULIA (*softly to herself*): Quite a looker.



**Scene 2**

*Lights fade on main stage and come up on Dr Mortimer's Office set on the LH extension.*

*The office comprises an impressive oak desk, a chair to either side. Some papers, books and a telephone are on the desk. A large portrait of an austere and somewhat rakish Victorian gentleman hangs on the wall. DR MORTIMER is seated behind his desk, writing a report, when TRENT enters. Mortimer is in his late fifties, immaculately dressed and supercilious and authoritative in manner.*

*There is a brief knock at a door and DENHAM enters. He is Mortimer's secretary, smartly dressed, quiet in disposition but efficient.*

DENHAM: Dr Trent is here, Dr Mortimer.

MORTIMER: Very well, Denham. Show him in.

DENHAM: Very well, sir.

*DENHAM exits. MORTIMER seems ill at ease. He glances at the portrait on the wall. He straightens an item or two on his desk nervously, then with a visible effort composes himself.*

*DENHAM enters with TRENT.*

DENHAM: Dr Trent, sir.

MORTIMER: Thank you, Denham.

DENHAM: Will that be all, sir?

MORTIMER: Tea, if you'd be so kind..

DENHAM: Very good, sir. For two?

MORTIMER: For one.

*DENHAM throws a brief doubtful glance between MORTIMER and TRENT then exits.*