

A Fearful Fog: Beatrice Yell

While living in London, years ago, I shared a flat with three other Aussie girls in West Hampstead. One evening, a flat-mate and I decided to go to a screening of a new film. There was an excellent cinema only about ten minutes away by bus, so off we went to the Golders Green theatre.

But, when we came out after the film was over, a dense London fog muffled all sounds. There were no buses as they'd all been cancelled of course. So we found our way to the nearest Underground station, carefully feeling our way along brick fences and iron gates beside the footpath as visibility was nil. It was all too easy to wander onto the street, I discovered, after nearly being run over by a car I didn't hear and I couldn't see its headlights until it was almost on top of me. So scary!

The infamous London 'pea-souper' had plunged us into an eerie, spooky world, completely out of touch with reality and it was frightening as we tried to come to terms with it. We found we had to travel twenty-two stops on two or three lines to get home, which took about three-quarters of an hour.

Coming out of the station, the fog swirled around us and we could just make out a familiar street. But as we walked, our footsteps echoed strangely in the mist. Every time we stopped the footsteps also stopped. Was somebody following us? We were thoroughly spooked. Alarmed and fearful, stories about Jack the Ripper, Sweeney Todd and other macabre Londoners came to mind.

All the shops were closed at this late hour and the streets were apparently deserted. There was no police station in the area; what could we do? We decided to run as fast as we could to our flat, bursting in panting and breathless to be greeted by:

'What kept you?'