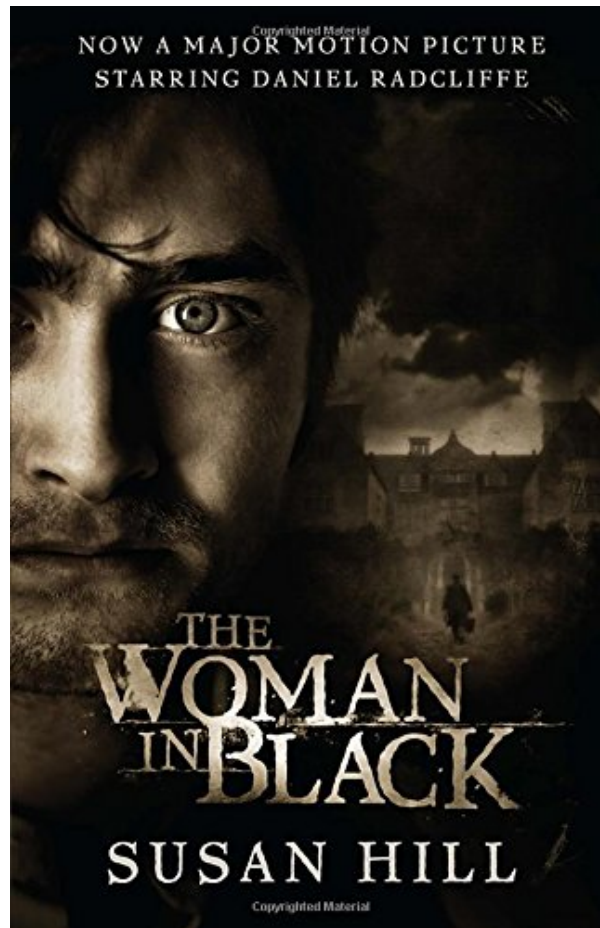
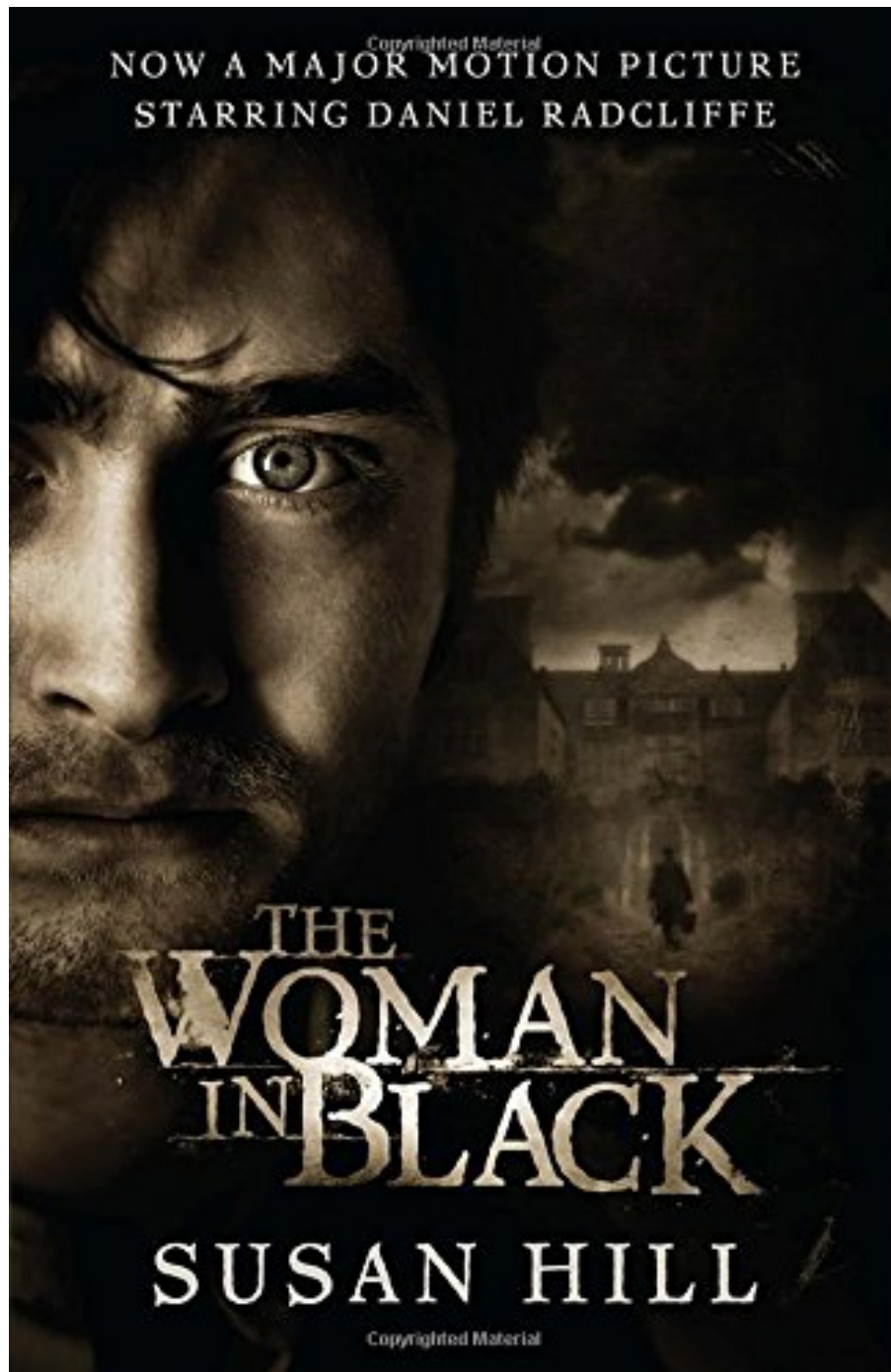


# THE WOMAN IN BLACK: A GHOST STORY BY SUSAN HILL



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## Christmas Eve

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I have always liked to take a breath of the evening, to smell the air, whether it is sweetly scented and balmy with the flowers of midsummer, pungent with the bonfires and leaf-mold of autumn, or crackling cold from frost and snow. I like to look about me at the sky above my head, whether there are moon and stars or utter blackness, and into the darkness ahead of me; I like to listen for the cries of nocturnal creatures and the moaning rise and fall of the wind, or the pattering of rain in the orchard trees, I enjoy the rush of air toward

me up the hill from the flat pastures of the river valley.

Tonight, I smelled at once, and with a lightening heart, that there had been a change in the weather. All the previous week, we had had rain, chilling rain and a mist that lay low about the house and over the countryside. From the windows, the view stretched no farther than a yard or two down the garden. It was wretched weather, never seeming to come fully light, and raw, too. There had been no pleasure in walking, the visibility was too poor for any shooting and the dogs were permanently morose and muddy. Inside the house, the lamps were lit throughout the day and the walls of larder, outhouse and cellar oozed damp and smelled sour, the fires sputtered and smoked, burning dismally low.

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I first saw Monk's Piece one afternoon in high summer, when out driving in the trap with Mr. Bentley. Mr. Bentley was formerly my employer, but I had lately risen to become a full partner in the firm of lawyers to which I had been articled as a young man (and with whom, indeed, I remained for my entire working life). He was at this time nearing the age when he had begun to feel inclined to let slip the reins of responsibility, little by little, from his own hands into mine, though he continued to travel up to our chambers in London at least once a week, until he died in his eighty-second year. But he was becoming more and more of a country-dweller. He was no man for shooting and fishing but, instead, he had immersed himself in the roles of country magistrate and churchwarden, governor of this, that and the other county and parish board, body and committee. I had been both relieved and pleased when finally he took me into full partnership with himself, after so many years, while at the same time believing the position to be no more than my due, for I had done my fair share of the donkey work and borne a good deal of the burden of responsibility for directing the fortunes of the firm with, I felt, inadequate reward-at least in terms of position.

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Some years later, he did so. I contacted the agents that same day and hours later, without so much as returning to see it again, I had offered for it, and my offer was accepted. A few months prior to this, I had met Esmé Ainley. Our affection for one another had been increasing steadily, but, cursed as I still was by my indecisive nature in all personal and emotional matters, I had remained silent as to my intentions for the future. I had enough sense to take the news about Monk's Piece as a good omen, however, and a week after I had formally become the owner of the house, traveled into the country with Esmé and proposed marriage to her among the trees of the old orchard. This offer, too, was accepted and very shortly afterward we were married and moved at once to Monk's Piece. On that day, I truly believed that I had at last come out from

under the long shadow cast by the events of the past and saw from his face and felt from the warmth of his handclasp that Mr. Bentley believed it too, and that a burden had been lifted from his own shoulders. He had always blamed himself, at least in part, for what had happened to me-it had, after all, been he who had sent me on that first journey up to Crythin Gifford, and Eel Marsh House, and to the funeral of Mrs. Drablow.

But all of that could not have been further from my conscious thought at least, as I stood taking in the night air at the door of my house, on that Christmas Eve. For some fourteen years now Monk's Piece had been the happiest of homes-Esmé's and mine, and that of her four children by her first marriage, to Captain Ainley. In the early days I had come here only at weekends and holidays but London life and business began to irk me from the day I bought the place and I was glad indeed to retire permanently into the country at the earliest opportunity.

And, now, it was to this happy home that my family had once again repaired for Christmas. In a moment, I should open the front door and hear the sound of their voices from the drawing room-unless I was abruptly summoned by my wife, fussing about my catching a chill. Certainly, it was very cold and clear at last. The sky was pricked over with stars and the full moon rimmed with a halo of frost. The dampness and fogs of the past week had stolen away like thieves into the night, the paths and the stone walls of the house gleamed palely and my breath smoked on the air.

Upstairs, in the attic bedrooms, Isobel's three young sons-Esmé's grandsons-slept, with stockings tied to their bedposts. There would be no snow for them on the morrow, but Christmas Day would at least wear a bright and cheerful countenance.

There was something in the air that night, something, I suppose, remembered from my own childhood, together with an infection caught from the little boys, that excited me, old as I was. That my peace of mind was about to be disturbed, and memories awakened that I had thought forever dead, I had, naturally, no idea. That I should ever again renew my close acquaintance, if only in the course of vivid recollections and dreams, with mortal dread and terror of spirit, would have seemed at that moment impossible.

I took one last look at the frosty darkness, sighed contentedly, called to the dogs, and went in, anticipating nothing more than a pipe and a glass of good malt whisky beside the crackling fire, in the happy company of my family. As I crossed the hall and entered the drawing room, I felt an uprush of well-being, of the kind I have experienced regularly during my life at Monk's Piece, a sensation that leads on naturally to another, of heartfelt thankfulness. And indeed I did give thanks, at the sight of my family ensconced around the huge fire which Oliver was at that moment building to a perilous height and a fierce blaze with the addition of a further great branch of applewood from an old tree we had felled in the orchard the previous autumn. Oliver is the eldest of Esmé's sons, and bore then, as now, a close resemblance both to his sister Isobel (seated beside her husband, the bearded Aubrey Pearce) and to the brother next in age, Will. All three of them have good, plain, open English faces, inclined to roundness and with hair and eyebrows and lashes of a light chestnut brown-the color of their mother's hair before it became threaded with gray.

At that time, Isobel was only twenty-four years old but already the mother of three young sons, and set fair to produce more. She had the plump, settled air of a matron and an inclination to mother and oversee her husband and brothers as well as her own children. She had been the most sensible, responsible of daughters, she was affectionate and charming, and she seemed to have found, in the calm and level-headed Aubrey Pearce, an ideal partner. Yet at times I caught Esmé looking at her wistfully, and she had more than once voiced, though gently and to me alone, a longing for Isobel to be a little less staid, a little more spirited, even frivolous.

In all honesty, I could not have wished it so. I would not have wished for anything to ruffle the surface of that calm, untroubled sea.

Oliver Ainley, at that time nineteen, and his brother Will, only fourteen months younger, were similarly serious, sober young men at heart, but for the time being they still enjoyed all the exuberance of young puppies, and indeed it seemed to me that Oliver showed rather too few signs of maturity for a young man in his first year at Cambridge and destined, if my advice prevailed with him, for a career at the Bar. Will lay on his stomach before the fire, his face aglow, chin propped upon his hands. Oliver sat nearby, and from time to time a scuffle of their long legs would break out, a kicking and shoving, accompanied by a sudden guffawing, for all the world as if they were ten years old all over again.

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The classic ghost story from the author of *The Mist in the Mirror*: a chilling tale about a menacing spectre haunting a small English town. Now a major motion picture starring Daniel Radcliffe.

Arthur Kipps is an up-and-coming London solicitor who is sent to Crythin Gifford—a faraway town in the windswept salt marshes beyond Nine Lives Causeway—to attend the funeral and settle the affairs of a client, Mrs. Alice Drablow of Eel Marsh House. Mrs. Drablow's house stands at the end of the causeway, wreathed in fog and mystery, but Kipps is unaware of the tragic secrets that lie hidden behind its sheltered windows. The routine business trip he anticipated quickly takes a horrifying turn when he finds himself haunted by a series of mysterious sounds and images—a rocking chair in a deserted nursery, the eerie sound of a pony and trap, a child's scream in the fog, and, most terrifying of all, a ghostly woman dressed all in black. Psychologically terrifying and deliciously eerie, *The Woman in Black* is a remarkable thriller of the first rate.

- Sales Rank: #193883 in Books
- Brand: Vintage
- Model: 9780307745316
- Published on: 2012-01-03
- Released on: 2012-01-03
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .56" w x 5.17" l, .39 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 164 pages

## Features

- Great product!

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Christmas Eve

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I have always liked to take a breath of the evening, to smell the air, whether it is sweetly scented and balmy with the flowers of midsummer, pungent with the bonfires and leaf-mold of autumn, or crackling cold from frost and snow. I like to look about me at the sky above my head, whether there are moon and stars or utter blackness, and into the darkness ahead of me; I like to listen for the cries of nocturnal creatures and the moaning rise and fall of the wind, or the pattering of rain in the orchard trees, I enjoy the rush of air toward me up the hill from the flat pastures of the river valley.

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Oliver Ainley, at that time nineteen, and his brother Will, only fourteen months younger, were similarly serious, sober young men at heart, but for the time being they still enjoyed all the exuberance of young puppies, and indeed it seemed to me that Oliver showed rather too few signs of maturity for a young man in his first year at Cambridge and destined, if my advice prevailed with him, for a career at the Bar. Will lay on his stomach before the fire, his face aglow, chin propped upon his hands. Oliver sat nearby, and from time to time a scuffle of their long legs would break out, a kicking and shoving, accompanied by a sudden guffawing, for all the world as if they were ten years old all over again.

Most helpful customer reviews

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A modern novel written in a classic style... and NOT the movie

By Aisling D.

I bought this after seeing the movie starring Daniel Radcliffe. I wanted to see what the director and scriptwriters had started with.

I was astonished. This book could have been written in the mid-20th century, or much earlier. The style is very gothic and dark, and -- in some ways -- a throwback to the 19th century. I liked it.

In fact, I liked it better than the movie, though the film was extremely stylish and Daniel Radcliffe did a remarkable job with a role involving little dialogue.

The book is a different story. It contains similar elements, and shares a lot of plot elements with the movie, but... it's a different story with a different outcome.

If you're a fan of gothic novels by Mary Stewart, Victoria Holt, Phyllis A. Whitney, and so on, you'll probably like this book, too. It doesn't have the romance of those authors, but the darkness and suspense are definitely in the same genre.

This story is told in the first person, with considerable style. Some sentences run on forever. Others are clipped short. The emotions are conveyed as much by the words as the writing style itself.

This book isn't for everyone. If you hate, say, Dickens or novels by the Brontes, this may not be your cup of tea.

Otherwise, if you like dark tales and sweeping gothic suspense, this is a good choice.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Feels like an antique, though it isn't

By Cynthia

Though apparently this was first published in 1983, it's written in the style of a late-nineteenth-century novel. This isn't necessarily a good thing. At times I felt I was wading through an over-complicated story. The story is atmospheric; it's easy to feel that you are shut in to this old house along with the characters. I liked the little dog, and was impressed that he wasn't killed off just because that's a popular thing to do in spooky stories. At times I found the lead character rather obtuse. Not a bad book, and smoother reading than novels that really ARE nineteenth-century publications, but if you lack patience with that sort of writing, you may want to just settle for watching the movie.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Darn good spooky story

By Radar626

After seeing the movie, I bought the book to see how it compared. In this rare instance, I have to say that the movie was an improvement on the book.

The premise is of course the same. An apprentice attorney is sent to Crythin Gifford, a black and dreary town, to settle the affairs of a deceased client named Alice Drablow. Mrs. Drablow was the resident of a large, dark, bleak house named Eel Marsh House. The only way to get to it is via a drive that ends up covered under several feet of water, effectively stranding anyone at the home from the rest of the world.

Arthur Kipps, the young attorney, thinks that this will be an easy business trip. He knows little of the stories or mysteries surrounding Eel Marsh House, and is ill prepared for the increasingly eerie events he experiences while working on the vast piles of paperwork Mrs. Drablow left behind. He befriends a local man, Samuel Daily, a seemingly jovial local who becomes entangled in the goings-on at Eel Marsh House as well.

Books like this are a hard review to write. How can I give enough details to hook potential readers without giving away the best parts of the book? Though I did like the movie better than the book, the book was still a taut read. When left up to the imagination, the *Woman in Black* is creepier when left up to the imagination than what was shown in the movie. I was able to give myself a few whopper nightmares thanks to the extra creepies I added to the *Woman in Black*. Most of the heebie-jeebies you get from reading will come from your own mind, which I love in a book. And if you enjoy this book, another like this is *House on Haunted Hill*.

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# THE WOMAN IN BLACK: A GHOST STORY BY SUSAN HILL PDF

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## Review

"A rattling good yarn, the sort that chills the mind as well as the spine." --The Guardian

"Excellent. . . . magnificently eerie. . . . compulsive reading." --Evening Standard

"The most brilliantly effective spine chiller you will ever encounter." --The Daily Telegraph

"[A] highly efficient chiller. . . . Nerve shredding." --The Daily Express

## About the Author

Susan Hill has been a professional writer for over fifty years. Her books have won the Whitbread, the John Llewellyn Prize, and the W. Somerset Maugham Award, and have been shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Her novels include *Strange Meeting*, *I'm the King of the Castle* and *A Kind Man*, and she has also published collections of short stories and two autobiographies. Her ghost story, *The Woman in Black*, has been running in London's West End since 1988. Susan is married with two adult daughters and lives in North Norfolk.

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## Christmas Eve

It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve. As I crossed the long entrance hall of Monk's Piece on my way from the dining room, where we had just enjoyed the first of the happy, festive meals, toward the drawing room and the fire around which my family were now assembled, I paused and then, as I often do in the course of an evening, went to the front door, opened it and stepped outside.

I have always liked to take a breath of the evening, to smell the air, whether it is sweetly scented and balmy with the flowers of midsummer, pungent with the bonfires and leaf-mold of autumn, or crackling cold from frost and snow. I like to look about me at the sky above my head, whether there are moon and stars or utter blackness, and into the darkness ahead of me; I like to listen for the cries of nocturnal creatures and the moaning rise and fall of the wind, or the pattering of rain in the orchard trees, I enjoy the rush of air toward me up the hill from the flat pastures of the river valley.

Tonight, I smelled at once, and with a lightening heart, that there had been a change in the weather. All the previous week, we had had rain, chilling rain and a mist that lay low about the house and over the countryside. From the windows, the view stretched no farther than a yard or two down the garden. It was

wretched weather, never seeming to come fully light, and raw, too. There had been no pleasure in walking, the visibility was too poor for any shooting and the dogs were permanently morose and muddy. Inside the house, the lamps were lit throughout the day and the walls of larder, outhouse and cellar oozed damp and smelled sour, the fires sputtered and smoked, burning dismally low.

My spirits have for many years now been excessively affected by the ways of the weather, and I confess that, had it not been for the air of cheerfulness and bustle that prevailed in the rest of the house, I should have been quite cast down in gloom and lethargy, unable to enjoy the flavor of life as I should like and irritated by my own susceptibility. But Esmé is merely stung by inclement weather into a spirited defiance, and so the preparations for our Christmas holiday had this year been more than usually extensive and vigorous.

I took a step or two out from under the shadow of the house so that I could see around me in the moonlight. Monk's Piece stands at the summit of land that rises gently up for some four hundred feet from where the little River Nee traces its winding way in a north to south direction across this fertile, and sheltered, part of the country. Below us are pastures, interspersed with small clumps of mixed, broadleaf woodland. But at our backs for several square miles it is a quite different area of rough scrub and heathland, a patch of wildness in the midst of well-farmed country. We are but two miles from a good-sized village, seven from the principal market town, yet there is an air of remoteness and isolation which makes us feel ourselves to be much further from civilization.

I first saw Monk's Piece one afternoon in high summer, when out driving in the trap with Mr. Bentley. Mr. Bentley was formerly my employer, but I had lately risen to become a full partner in the firm of lawyers to which I had been articled as a young man (and with whom, indeed, I remained for my entire working life). He was at this time nearing the age when he had begun to feel inclined to let slip the reins of responsibility, little by little, from his own hands into mine, though he continued to travel up to our chambers in London at least once a week, until he died in his eighty-second year. But he was becoming more and more of a country-dweller. He was no man for shooting and fishing but, instead, he had immersed himself in the roles of country magistrate and churchwarden, governor of this, that and the other county and parish board, body and committee. I had been both relieved and pleased when finally he took me into full partnership with himself, after so many years, while at the same time believing the position to be no more than my due, for I had done my fair share of the donkey work and borne a good deal of the burden of responsibility for directing the fortunes of the firm with, I felt, inadequate reward-at least in terms of position.

So it came about that I was sitting beside Mr. Bentley on a Sunday afternoon, enjoying the view over the high hawthorn hedgerows across the green, drowsy countryside, as he let his pony take the road back, at a gentle pace, to his somewhat ugly and over-imposing manor house. It was rare for me to sit back and do nothing. In London I lived for my work, apart from some spare time spent in the study and collecting of watercolors. I was then thirty-five and I had been a widower for the past twelve years. I had no taste at all for social life and, although in good general health, was prone to occasional nervous illnesses and conditions, as a result of the experiences I will come to relate. Truth to tell, I was growing old well before my time, a somber, pale-complexioned man with a strained expression-a dull dog.

I remarked to Mr. Bentley on the calm and sweetness of the day, and after a sideways glance in my direction he said, "You should think of getting yourself something in this direction-why not? Pretty little cottage-down there, perhaps?" And he pointed with his whip to where a tiny hamlet was tucked snugly into a bend of the river below, white walls basking in the afternoon sunshine. "Bring yourself out of town some of these Friday afternoons, take to walking, fill yourself up with fresh air and good eggs and cream."

The idea had a charm, but only a distant one, seemingly unrelated to myself, and so I merely smiled and



breathed in the warm scents of the grasses and the field flowers and watched the dust kicked up off the lane by the pony's hooves and thought no more about it. Until, that is, we reached a stretch of road leading past a long, perfectly proportioned stone house, set on a rise above a sweeping view down over the whole river valley and then for miles away to the violet-blue line of hills in the distance.

At that moment, I was seized by something I cannot precisely describe, an emotion, a desire-no, it was rather more, a knowledge, a simple certainty, which gripped me, and all so clear and striking that I cried out involuntarily for Mr. Bentley to stop, and, almost before he had time to do so, climbed out of the pony trap into the lane and stood on a grassy knoll, gazing first up at the house, so handsome, so utterly right for the position it occupied, a modest house and yet sure of itself, and then looking across at the country beyond. I had no sense of having been here before, but an absolute conviction that I would come here again, that the house was already mine, bound to me invisibly.

To one side of it, a stream ran between the banks toward the meadow beyond, whence it made its meandering way down to the river.

Mr. Bentley was now looking at me curiously, from the trap. "A fine place," he called.

I nodded, but, quite unable to impart to him any of my extreme emotions, turned my back upon him and walked a few yards up the slope from where I could see the entrance to the old, overgrown orchard that lay behind the house and petered out in long grass and tangled thicket at the far end. Beyond that, I glimpsed the perimeter of some rough- looking, open land. The feeling of conviction I have described was still upon me, and I remember that I was alarmed by it, for I had never been an imaginative or fanciful man and certainly not one given to visions of the future. Indeed, since those earlier experiences I had deliberately avoided all contemplation of any remotely nonmaterial matters, and clung to the prosaic, the visible and tangible.

Nevertheless, I was quite unable to escape the belief- nay, I must call it more, the certain knowledge- that this house was one day to be my own home, that sooner or later, though I had no idea when, I would become the owner of it. When finally I accepted and admitted this to myself, I felt on that instant a profound sense of peace and contentment settle upon me such as I had not known for very many years, and it was with a light heart that I returned to the pony trap, where Mr. Bentley was awaiting me more than a little curiously.

The overwhelming feeling I had experienced at Monk's Piece remained with me, albeit not in the forefront of my mind, when I left the country that afternoon to return to London. I had told Mr. Bentley that if ever he were to hear that the house was for sale, I should be eager to know of it.

Some years later, he did so. I contacted the agents that same day and hours later, without so much as returning to see it again, I had offered for it, and my offer was accepted. A few months prior to this, I had met Esmé Ainley. Our affection for one another had been increasing steadily, but, cursed as I still was by my indecisive nature in all personal and emotional matters, I had remained silent as to my intentions for the future. I had enough sense to take the news about Monk's Piece as a good omen, however, and a week after I had formally become the owner of the house, traveled into the country with Esmé and proposed marriage to her among the trees of the old orchard. This offer, too, was accepted and very shortly afterward we were married and moved at once to Monk's Piece. On that day, I truly believed that I had at last come out from under the long shadow cast by the events of the past and saw from his face and felt from the warmth of his handclasp that Mr. Bentley believed it too, and that a burden had been lifted from his own shoulders. He had always blamed himself, at least in part, for what had happened to me- it had, after all, been he who had sent me on that first journey up to Crythin Gifford, and Eel Marsh House, and to the funeral of Mrs. Drablow.

But all of that could not have been further from my conscious thought at least, as I stood taking in the night air at the door of my house, on that Christmas Eve. For some fourteen years now Monk's Piece had been the happiest of homes-Esmé's and mine, and that of her four children by her first marriage, to Captain Ainley. In the early days I had come here only at weekends and holidays but London life and business began to irk me from the day I bought the place and I was glad indeed to retire permanently into the country at the earliest opportunity.

And, now, it was to this happy home that my family had once again repaired for Christmas. In a moment, I should open the front door and hear the sound of their voices from the drawing room-unless I was abruptly summoned by my wife, fussing about my catching a chill. Certainly, it was very cold and clear at last. The sky was pricked over with stars and the full moon rimmed with a halo of frost. The dampness and fogs of the past week had stolen away like thieves into the night, the paths and the stone walls of the house gleamed palely and my breath smoked on the air.

Upstairs, in the attic bedrooms, Isobel's three young sons-Esmé's grandsons-slept, with stockings tied to their bedposts. There would be no snow for them on the morrow, but Christmas Day would at least wear a bright and cheerful countenance.

There was something in the air that night, something, I suppose, remembered from my own childhood, together with an infection caught from the little boys, that excited me, old as I was. That my peace of mind was about to be disturbed, and memories awakened that I had thought forever dead, I had, naturally, no idea. That I should ever again renew my close acquaintance, if only in the course of vivid recollections and dreams, with mortal dread and terror of spirit, would have seemed at that moment impossible.

I took one last look at the frosty darkness, sighed contentedly, called to the dogs, and went in, anticipating nothing more than a pipe and a glass of good malt whisky beside the crackling fire, in the happy company of my family. As I crossed the hall and entered the drawing room, I felt an uprush of well-being, of the kind I have experienced regularly during my life at Monk's Piece, a sensation that leads on naturally to another, of heartfelt thankfulness. And indeed I did give thanks, at the sight of my family ensconced around the huge fire which Oliver was at that moment building to a perilous height and a fierce blaze with the addition of a further great branch of applewood from an old tree we had felled in the orchard the previous autumn. Oliver is the eldest of Esmé's sons, and bore then, as now, a close resemblance both to his sister Isobel (seated beside her husband, the bearded Aubrey Pearce) and to the brother next in age, Will. All three of them have good, plain, open English faces, inclined to roundness and with hair and eyebrows and lashes of a light chestnut brown-the color of their mother's hair before it became threaded with gray.

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