

The Woman in Black



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SUSAN HILL

Susan Hill was born and raised in the northeast of England—a location that is integral to many of her novels and works of nonfiction, including her most famous novel, *The Woman in Black*. Hill's novels—though occasionally set in the modern present—are overwhelmingly concerned with Gothic sensibilities and narrative traditions. Many of Hill's novels feature strange, old, and even haunted houses, and examine themes and motifs of claustrophobia, dread, and the desire for escape from one's circumstances. Hill has also written a series of crime novels that marry her Gothic sensibilities with a contemporary take on violence and mystery. In 2012, Hill was awarded a CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) by Queen Elizabeth for her contributions to British literature.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though Susan Hill intentionally never provides readers with a firm date for the events contained within the pages of *The Woman in Black*, it seems likely that the frame story is set roughly in the 1920s, with the main action (the young Arthur Kipps's journey to Crythin Gifford and Eel Marsh House) transpiring sometime in the first decade of the 1900s. Though some characters, such as the wealthy Mr. Samuel Daily, are in possession of automobiles, horses and carriages, it seems that full modernization has not yet come to the countryside. Arthur brings a torch light to Eel Marsh House, but when it breaks, there are only candles left to light his way. This intersection of the "modern" and the antiquated provides the novel with a good deal of tension, and highlights the deeply isolated nature of Mrs. Drablow and her sister Jennet's existence. The Edwardian era—the period of King Edward's brief reign from 1901-1910 in the wake of Queen Victoria's death—would have been in full swing during the events of *The Woman in Black*. The early years of Edwardian era were peaceful and relatively uncomplicated, though political unrest was simmering below the surface of the "golden age" in the years before the First World War broke out in 1914.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As a love letter of sorts to the Gothic horror novel, *The Woman in Black* is chock-full of references both overt and more subtle to other staples of the genre. The arrival of a naïve young solicitor to a haunted and even dangerous mansion is a trope employed most famously in Bram Stoker's [Dracula](#), while

hauntings, possessions, and family curses permeate the atmosphere of Victorian-era novels such as Oscar Wilde's [The Picture of Dorian Gray](#) and Mary Shelley's [Frankenstein](#), as well as more contemporary takes on the genre such as Shirley Jackson's [The Haunting of Hill House](#) and [We Have Always Lived in the Castle](#) and Anastasia Blackwell's *The House on Black Lake*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Woman in Black*
- **When Written:** Early 1980s
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1983
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fiction, horror, mystery, historical fiction
- **Setting:** The fictional town of Crythin Gifford, in Northeast England
- **Climax:** A local man named Samuel Daily narrowly rescues Arthur Kipps from the woman in black—the malevolent spirit that haunts Eel Marsh House and is now bent on Kipps' destruction.
- **Antagonist:** The woman in black (Jennet Humfrye)
- **Point of View:** First person retrospective

EXTRA CREDIT

Highly Adaptable. The hair-raising horror of *The Woman in Black* has proved so captivating that it has been adapted several times for stage, radio, film, and television. The stage play, which still runs today in London's West End, is the second longest-running non-musical play in West End history, while a 2012 film adaptation featuring *Harry Potter* star Daniel Radcliffe as Arthur Kipps debuted to critical and commercial success, becoming the highest-grossing British horror film in several decades.



PLOT SUMMARY

Arthur Kipps is a well-to-do lawyer living in the English countryside. After Christmas Eve dinner, Arthur joins his family in the drawing room, where they are trading ghost stories—an "ancient" tradition. The children urge Arthur to contribute, but Arthur becomes agitated and upset, proclaims that he has no story to tell, and abruptly leaves the room. Alone, Arthur reflects on the very real story of horror and tragedy that took place in his youth. Realizing that these memories keep him from feeling lighthearted even at Christmastime, Arthur decides to write his story down once and for all, hoping that doing so will

exorcise the demons he has been struggling with all his adult life.

Arthur's story begins on a dreary November afternoon. London is ensconced in an oddly thick, sulfurous-smelling **fog**, and has been for days. Arthur does not have any sense of fear or foreboding, though, as he heads for King's Cross station to catch a train north. He has been instructed by his boss at his law firm, Mr. Bentley, to travel to the town of Crythin Gifford, where one of the firm's oldest clients—an odd, reclusive woman named Mrs. Drablow—has recently passed away. The owner of the Eel Marsh House estate—isolated from town by a long, narrow causeway that is completely impassible at high tide—Mrs. Drablow has left behind many papers and important documents in her manor, which Arthur must sort through and send back to London.

The long trip to Crythin Gifford requires Arthur to transfer twice, and by the home stretch of the journey he finds himself feeling cold and weary, alone in a drafty train but for one older, finely dressed man. Arthur and the man—Mr. Samuel Daily—begin making conversation, and Arthur finds that Samuel, a longtime resident of Crythin Gifford, knows a good deal about Mrs. Drablow and her manor, yet seems reluctant to discuss her. As the train nears town, Samuel offers to drive Arthur to the inn where he'll be staying. Arthur enjoys a cozy night at the inn, and finds good company in the landlord. Arthur tells the landlord that he is in town for Mrs. Drablow's funeral—at the mention of the woman's name, the landlord hastily bids Arthur good night. Having now solicited odd reactions from two people at the mention of Drablow's name, Arthur begins to wonder what the deceased woman's story truly is. Arthur sleeps soundly—the last truly undisturbed night's sleep, he reflects from the future, he would ever have.

In the morning, Mr. Jerome, who is to be Arthur's guide in Crythin Gifford and his companion at the funeral, collects him from the inn. They sit quietly through the melancholy funeral service. Near the end, Arthur hears a rustling behind him, and notices that a woman in black has entered the church. She wears old, outdated mourning garb, including a tall bonnet that largely obscures her face. Arthur can nevertheless see that the woman, not much older than thirty, is sickly, pale, and alarmingly thin. The woman attends Mrs. Drablow's burial in the churchyard, but she disappears while Arthur has his eyes closed in prayer. After the service, Arthur mentions the woman to Mr. Jerome, who is terrified. At Jerome's behest, the men hurriedly make their way back into town, where Jerome tells Arthur that a driver named Keckwick will arrive shortly to bring him across the causeway to Eel Marsh House, and then back again each night. When Arthur suggests he stay at Eel Marsh a night or two, Mr. Jerome suggests that Arthur will be much more comfortable at the inn.

Keckwick arrives driving a **pony trap**—a small, two-person, horse-drawn carriage—and takes Arthur across the causeway.

The strange, ghostly allure of the marsh is mesmerizing, and Arthur finds the manor itself to be “rare and beautiful.” Exploring the grounds, Arthur comes upon a graveyard that has fallen into disrepair—he assumes this must be the Drablow family plot. At the edge of the yard, Arthur sees the woman from the funeral one again, still dressed in mourning garb. Arthur feels a “desperate, yearning malevolence” coming from her. Frightened, Arthur runs for the safety of the house and bolts himself inside. He has never believed in ghosts, but now admits that the woman he encountered must be a spirit. Arthur begins combing through the house and discovers that Mrs. Drablow has an enormous amount of papers, many dating back several decades. Still shaken by his encounter with the woman, Arthur decides to start walking down the causeway and meet Keckwick there. As he does so, he hears the sound of a pony trap approaching, but the noise seems to be everywhere and nowhere at once—a thick mist has rolled in, and Arthur can't see a thing. He hears the sound of the pony trap being sucked into the marsh, along with the desperate whinnying of a horse and the horrible cries of a child. Arthur doubles back to the house, where he falls asleep in the drawing room, exhausted and frightened. The doorbell jolts him awake—Keckwick is there, alive and unharmed. Arthur hurries into the carriage, relieved to return to town.

The next day, Arthur explains to Mr. Jerome that he will need an assistant to help sort through all of the papers. Mr. Jerome says that there is no one in town who will consent to cross the causeway to the manor, and Arthur understands how seriously Jerome himself is affected by any mention of Eel Marsh or the woman in black. Arthur returns to the inn and writes to Mr. Bentley, letting him know that he will be in town longer than expected. That afternoon, Arthur takes a bicycle ride to the next town over and feels himself growing refreshed and rejuvenated. He is determined to return to Eel Marsh and confront whatever lies within it—and to finish sorting Mrs. Drablow's papers. On his way back into town, Arthur runs into Samuel Daily, who invites him to dinner. After their meal, Samuel warns Arthur that he would be a fool to return to Eel Marsh House. Realizing he cannot change Arthur's mind, Samuel offers Arthur the company of his terrier named Spider, and Arthur returns to the inn with the little dog in tow.

The next morning, Arthur returns to Eel Marsh. After an unremarkable day sorting papers, Arthur goes to bed, feeling calm and unexcitable. In the middle of the night, however, he is awakened by Spider's low growls—a bumping noise is coming from a room nearby. Arthur creeps down the hall, where he encounters a locked door with no keyhole. Unable to open it, Arthur talks himself down from fear and returns to bed.

The next morning, Arthur cycles back to town for food and supplies, then returns to the manor and continues sorting papers. He comes upon a packet of letters, which are addressed to Alice Drablow from someone named Jennet—clearly a blood

relative of Mrs. Drablow. The letters convey the story of Jennet's illegitimate conception of a son, whom she was forced to give over for adoption to Mrs. Drablow and her husband. The letters are passionate and affectionate, but there is a dark undercurrent—Jennet warns Alice that the boy will never truly be hers. Soon Arthur hears Spider's low growl again, and the bumping noise upstairs. Arthur goes to a shed out back to fetch an axe with which to knock down the locked door, and while he is outside, hears the terrible sounds of the pony trap accident again. He realizes that these noises, like the woman in black, are ghostly apparitions. He returns inside to knock down the door, but finds that it is ajar. He enters and sees a rocking chair in the corner gently swaying back and forth, as if someone has just gotten up out of it. The room is a nursery, immaculately preserved and filled with beautiful toys, clothes, and books. The room has a sad, desolate atmosphere, and Arthur steps back out into the hall, immediately feeling like himself again.

The next morning, Arthur takes Spider out for a walk around the grounds. The sound of a whistle arises from the marsh, and Spider bolts toward it. She becomes stuck in the marsh, and Arthur just barely saves her from sinking forever into the muck. As he carries the frightened dog back up towards the house, he sees the woman in black watching him from the nursery window. Arthur collapses and loses consciousness just as the sounds of a pony trap start up once again. Arthur wakes to find Samuel Daily standing over him. Samuel, unable to stop worrying about Arthur, came to check on him (in his own pony trap) and found him unconscious on the lawn. Samuel tells Arthur to gather his things and prepare to go. Arthur returns to his bedroom, and packs his belongings—but before he heads back downstairs, he cannot resist looking down the passageway towards the nursery. The door is ajar, and when Arthur peers into the room, he sees that someone—or something—has ransacked it entirely, leaving toys and clothes strewn everywhere, and placing the rocking chair at the center of the room. Arthur rushes downstairs, and Samuel drives him and Spider back to his house on the mainland.

Feeling safe in the Dailys' home, Arthur turns back to the packet of letters from Jennet. Three death certificates are attached—one for Nathaniel Drablow, dead at age six of drowning; one for his nanny, dead on the same day of the same cause; and at last one for Jennet Humfrye, who died a spinster in her thirties of heart failure. Arthur realizes that Jennet was Nathaniel's mother, who became ill and possibly mad after the death of her child during a pony trap accident in the marsh. Arthur confesses to Samuel that he feels relieved to be in the "calm after the storm." Samuel, however, remains troubled, and reveals that the story of Jennet is common knowledge. Ever since Jennet's death from a wasting disease, her ghost has haunted the town; what's worse, every time she appears, a child in town dies of a violent accident or sudden illness. Fearful that the woman in black's cycle of violence will never end, Arthur

falls ill with fever; for five days he suffers acute pain and nightmares of the woman in black.

After nearly two weeks, just as he has begun to recover, Arthur's spirits are lifted when his fiancée, Stella, arrives to bring him home to London. Before the two leave, he asks Samuel if any child in town has suffered or died; Samuel replies that none has, and Arthur believes the curse has at last been broken. Stella and Arthur return to London and marry hastily; Arthur has learned to seize upon joy whenever and however he can.

Within a year, they welcome a child, and make Samuel its godfather. A little over a year after their son's birth, Arthur and Stella bring their child to a fair on the outskirts of London, where Stella and the baby take a pony trap ride around the fairgrounds. As Arthur watches them gaily trot around, he spots something lurking behind a tree—the woman in black. Arthur locks eyes with the ghostly figure and feels a horrible malevolence emanating from her. As Stella and the baby make their way back in the pony trap, the woman in black steps out in front of the horse, causing it to rear and run wild; the carriage crashes into a tree, paralyzing Stella and killing the child. Ten months later, Stella, dies of her injuries. The woman in black has gotten her revenge.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Arthur Kipps – Arthur Kipps, the protagonist of the novel, is a successful lawyer with a haunting past. As the frame story gives way to the story of Arthur's past—his fateful visit, as a young and naïve lawyer, to the northeastern town of Crythin Gifford for the purpose of settling the estate of one of his firm's recently-deceased clients—the worried, tetchy, anxious Arthur of the first chapter transforms into an impressionable but confident young man unaware of the horrors in store for him. Through his own portrait of his youth, Arthur explores the frightening events that effectively derailed his life; most notably, his repetitious encounters, during his stay at Eel Marsh House, with the frightful woman in black—the ghost that has haunted the property for decades. As if to force Arthur to witness the horrors of her own past, the ghost seems to take up a personal vendetta against Arthur, determined to frighten him and afflict him with the same horrible suffering she endured in life. When Arthur leaves Crythin Gifford, he believes that her cycle of terror has been broken—but when he returns to his life in London, he finds that the woman in black is not done with him yet. In a horrible denouement, Arthur is forced to watch as his new wife and young child die in a **pony trap** accident—just as Jennet was forced to watch, from Eel Marsh House's nursery window, as her own son drowned in the marsh after a carriage accident of his own. The cyclical nature of the trauma,

violence, and suffering Arthur is forced to endure is Gothic in proportion and horrifying in nature; Arthur's struggles force readers to reckon with the lasting effects of grief, injustice, and the desire for vengeance.

The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye – The titular woman in black appears to Arthur for the first time at the funeral of Mrs. Alice Drablow. Arthur is struck by the woman's antiquated mourning garb and her frightening appearance; though young, the woman is ghastly pale and sickly. When Arthur mentions the woman to his companion at the funeral, Mr. Jerome, Jerome becomes deeply frightened—and Arthur realizes that he was the only one at the service able to see the woman. Arthur encounters her again when he arrives at Eel Marsh House—this time, Arthur knows for sure that the woman must be a ghostly apparition. After Arthur uncovers a parcel of letters written from a woman named Jennet Humfrye to Alice Drablow, the story of the two women's lives becomes more clear: blood relatives and perhaps even sisters, Jennet and Alice were bound forever by a terrible transaction. When Jennet became pregnant with an illegitimate child, she was forced to abandon the baby to Mrs. Drablow's care—she did so only after warning the woman that the child would never truly be hers. Jennet harassed and even stalked the Drablows over the years until she at last secured access to the child; she planned to run away with him, but the child, Nathaniel, sunk into the marsh alongside his nanny in a horrible **pony trap** accident. The woman in black's rage, hatred, grief, and pain are translated into a horrible malevolence as she becomes the figure which haunts Eel Marsh House. Any time she appears, a local child dies—a lingering effect of her obsession with her own lost son.

Samuel Daily – Samuel Daily is the first Crythin Gifford local Arthur meets on his way north. After connecting on the train and realizing that Arthur will be handling the Drablow estate, Samuel offers the young lawyer his card in case of emergency. Though Arthur thinks the gesture strange—and thinks Samuel's unwillingness to engage in conversation about Eel Marsh House even stranger—he accepts the card, not knowing how important Samuel will become to him. As Arthur's stay in Crythin Gifford unfolds, he learns that Daily is a newly moneyed landowner who is buying up several properties in town. Despite his affluence and desire to acquire land, Daily refuses to touch Eel Marsh House. When Arthur goes to Daily's manor for dinner, Daily attempts to dissuade him from returning to Eel Marsh, but Arthur does not heed the man's advice. As a compromise of sorts, Daily offers Arthur the company of his little terrier, Spider. After Arthur and Spider get into even more trouble at Eel Marsh, Samuel comes to their rescue, and shelters Arthur as he recovers from the physical and emotional trauma of his frightening time in the haunted house.

Mr. Bentley – Arthur Kipps's boss at his London law firm, Mr.

Bentley is a businesslike but kind man who unknowingly sends Arthur into a dangerous situation in Crythin Gifford. In the years following Arthur's ordeal with the woman in black, Mr. Bentley assumes a kind of guilt for Arthur's pain and suffering; the two nevertheless enjoy one another's friendship and company.

Mr. Jerome – Mr. Jerome is a real estate agent in Crythin Gifford who is appointed as Arthur's guide in town, and who accompanies him to Mrs. Drablow's funeral. A quiet and nervous man, Jerome deteriorates into full-blown panic when Arthur mentions having seen the woman in black at the funeral service. Arthur attempts to engage Mr. Jerome's help in sorting through the many papers in Eel Marsh House, but Mr. Jerome is so petrified that he refuses to help and warns Arthur that no one else in town will come to his aid, either. It is eventually revealed that Mr. Jerome had a child who died as a result of the woman in black's fearsome curse.

Keckwick – Keckwick is the driver who is appointed to ferry Arthur back and forth between the town of Crythin Gifford and the isolated estate of Eel Marsh House via a small, two-person **pony trap**. Keckwick is a man of very few words. It is eventually revealed that Keckwick was the driver in the fatal pony trap accident that claimed the lives of Jennet's son and the boy's nanny.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Landlord – The proprietor of the inn where Arthur stays for part of his trip to Crythin Gifford. The landlord, like many other locals, grows quiet and nervous when Arthur mentions that he is in town to see to Mrs. Drablow's estate, Eel Marsh House.

Stella – Arthur's fiancée, a kind young woman who ultimately meets with a devastating fate as a result of the woman in black's vendetta against Arthur.

Esmé Ainley – Arthur's second wife. A kind, understanding, and fiercely positive woman with four children from a previous marriage.

Isobel Ainley – The oldest of Esmé's children, Isobel is a woman of twenty-four who is married with three children of her own.

Oliver Ainley – Oliver is the oldest of Esmé's sons.

Will Ainley – Esmé's eighteen-year-old son.

Edmund Ainley – At fifteen, Edmund is the youngest of Esmé's four children. Though he is aloof, quiet, and dark-haired—very different from the rest of his siblings—Edmund is Arthur's favorite.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-

coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



GOTHIC HORROR

Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* is saturated with references to popular Gothic horror novels.

Though written in the mid-1980s rather than the late eighteenth century, *The Woman in Black* is in many ways a classic Gothic novel—and a love letter to the genre, which spawned emotionally and atmospherically evocative classics such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Through her reliance upon Gothic horror tropes throughout protagonist Arthur Kipps's story, Hill is able to fulfill and subvert her readers' expectations at alternating turns, and ultimately uses the narrative to suggest that though an audience familiar with the genre may be able to intuit what is coming next, true horror often comes from having one's worst fears confirmed.

Even in moments of happiness throughout the novel, Susan Hill creates an atmosphere of intense foreboding. Such atmospheric dread is a staple of literary horror—and especially of Victorian Gothic literature—and Hill uses it to create an intensifying sense of terror as the story unfolds. At the start of the novel, Arthur is a well-to-do lawyer who lives in a stately country home with his large, happy family. It is Christmas Eve, a time of joy and good tidings; as Arthur celebrates with his wife and stepchildren, though, it becomes clear that he is a man haunted by a painful past. Arthur's family asks him to share a ghost story, and the full force of Arthur's dormant trauma suddenly rears its head. Arthur is rattled by the simple, innocent request for a story; as he removes himself from his family and takes a walk outside, memories of the true ghost story he suffered through as a younger man assault him, and he laments that even at Christmastime he cannot escape his pain. This darkness that looms over Arthur in the beginning of the tale—and the retrospective sense of foreboding his reflections create—echoes the beginnings of novels such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which start off sunnily but disguise a deeper, creeping dread.

Arthur was not always so afflicted by pain and grief—as he recounts the sad tale of the “horror” that assailed him in his youth, he reflects on how naïve, cheerful, and positive he was. After arriving in the insular northeast England town of Crythin Gifford to attend the funeral of a recently deceased client of his law firm, even rumors of the deceased woman's involvement in a shadowy and horrific slice of local lore do not deter Arthur from his confident, sunny outlook on life. After all, Arthur has a beautiful fiancée, a steady job, and an exciting future awaiting him back in London—he is blind to the turmoil lurking just out of sight, and thus becomes an active participant in inviting grief and pain into his life. The beginning of Arthur's recollection of

his younger self is a nod to the opening pages of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*—an 1897 Gothic horror novel considered by many critics to be the epitome of the genre—in which a young English solicitor travels to the home of the ancient, dangerous Count Dracula under the supposition that he will be handling boring legal documents. The young lawyer of course finds himself deep in over his head, pulled into a dark and frightening world of horror and hauntings—very much like a certain Arthur Kipps.

Architecture is an important motif in Gothic horror—from Dracula's castle to the decaying abode in Edgar Allan Poe's “The Fall of the House of Usher,” mansions, estates, family graveyards, and even crumbling ruins serve as physical symbols of the emotional or atmospheric conditions within. In *The Woman in Black*, Susan Hill uses this technique to suffuse Eel Marsh House with an eerie, claustrophobic, isolated sensibility. Cut off from the town of Crythin Gifford by a long causeway traversing a dangerous marsh that floods daily at high tide and is often obscured by sudden **fogs and sea mists**, Eel Marsh House is emblematic of the isolation Mrs. Drablow—and her sister Jennet—suffered during their lives. Jennet was isolated by the shame of bearing an illegitimate child, and having to relinquish that child to her sister's care. Alice Drablow was isolated not just by the physical aspects of her home, but by the knowledge that she had caused her sister such great pain—and had been in charge of Nathaniel when he was killed in a terrible accident. When Arthur comes to Eel Marsh House, he finds it in mild disrepair. However, the nursery, the site of Jennet's most concentrated haunting, is immaculate, suggesting either that Alice Drablow kept the room neat for fear of what her sister's spirit would do should it be disturbed, or that the veil between worlds is thin enough to allow Jennet to influence the physical layout of the room as well as its psychological, emotional atmosphere.

Some of the most frightening scenes of the novel relate directly to the physical layout of Eel Marsh House. A bump in the night, a door suddenly ajar as if of its own volition, an empty rocking chair swaying to and fro, a mysterious presence on the staircase—these moments are predictable but nonetheless hair-raising. When Arthur creeps down the hallway in the middle of the night to the haunted nursery, readers must stand by and watch as he offers himself up to whatever lies within it; the reader's knowledge of horror tropes, especially those related to Gothic novels set in sprawling mansions and haunted houses, heightens the terror of this moment.

In employing Gothic horror tropes throughout her contemporary novel *The Woman in Black*, Susan Hill creates an air of familiarity even for readers who are not avid consumers of Gothic literature. The tropes she employs are familiar to many—a foggy November day in London; an isolated mansion at the edge of the civilization; a slew of frightened townspeople; a silent, haggard cabbie who ferries the protagonist back and forth seemingly between worlds.

Through reliance on these staples of genre, Hill shows how tropes can provide a shorthand for readers and thus actually allow for easier, even effortless engagement with a work—and for an even more total emotional immersion in the moments of pure horror it has to offer.



STORYTELLING

The Woman in Black is a story within a story within a story. The protagonist, Arthur Kipps, is prompted to share a ghost story during his family's Christmas

Eve celebration one year, but the only ghost story he knows is unfortunately true—and more macabre and upsetting than his family is perhaps prepared for. Confronted with an incident from his past he has fought so hard to shake, Arthur realizes he must at last face down his demons and bear witness to his own horrific story—just as he vowed, on his fateful trip to Eel Marsh House so many years ago, to bear witness to the horror within it. Through Arthur's tale, Susan Hill—herself carefully reconstructing the Victorian Gothic genre in order to convey Arthur's frightful tale—illustrates the power of storytelling, ultimately arguing that in the face of pain, trauma, and isolation, sometimes one's story is all they are left with.

At the beginning of the novel, Arthur is hanging onto happiness and stability by a very thin thread. Things as benign as a few days of bad weather upset him and send him reeling back into the depths of his past; an invitation to contribute to a fireside ghost story contest with his family triggers him so deeply that he must remove himself from the room. As Arthur confronts the thin veneer of his happy front and the darkness lurking just beneath it, he realizes that his only chance of moving forward with his life is to tell his story; not for anyone to read or share, but simply for his own peace of mind.

Arthur's story is not the only one that must be “exorcised” from him over the course of the novel—the woman in black's own story, too, is all that remains of her. Jennet's story is revealed in fits and starts—when he arrives in Crythin Gifford, Arthur does not know anything of the woman in black at all. When she first appears to him—and seemingly to him alone—it is at the funeral of Alice Drablow, who will eventually be revealed to be her sister. The woman in black seems to be there to bear witness to Alice's burial as a way of adding to the narrative of her own life—or afterlife. When Arthur mentions the sight of a wasted-faced woman in black to his companion at the funeral, Mr. Jerome, Jerome becomes visibly frightened, and hurries Arthur away from the churchyard. As Arthur begins exploring Eel Marsh House, he finds a packet of letters that tell a story he is intrigued by but does not fully understand. The letters to Alice, from a woman named Jennet, reveal that Jennet bore an illegitimate son and was forced to surrender him to Alice for adoption. Jennet harbored ill will toward her sister, though, and warned her that the child would never truly belong to Alice. Arthur is touched by the story the letters tell, and feels deep

sympathy for Jennet. He does not yet know that she is the terrible woman in black—the malevolent spirit-woman who has haunted Eel Marsh for years and has selected Arthur as the newest object of her hatred.

Arthur at last learns the full extent of the story after he has been rescued from Eel Marsh House. Having had terrible encounters with a ghostly presence in the home's immaculate nursery, Arthur senses that the nursery, the woman in black, and the letters are all somehow related—but does not see how until he discovers three death certificates attached to the letters. The certificates tell their own story, and reveal that Jennet's son, Nathaniel, drowned at the age of six in a **pony trap** accident in the marsh. Arthur thinks he knows the full story—but there is more to learn still. Samuel's one true friend in town, the kindly landowner Samuel Daily, reveals to Arthur that Jennet, deranged by the loss of her child, died at the age of thirty-six and from then on haunted the town; her sporadic appearances always signaled the violent, untimely death of a local child. The full story now revealed, Arthur feels an intense mix of pity for Jennet and fear of her—her complicated and devastating story explains her hateful malevolence and desire for vengeance, but does not exonerate her crimes against the town. In a cruel twist of fate, Arthur—who leaves Crythin Gifford believing he has ended the woman in black's cycle of violence (since no local child died this time) and thus her story as well—becomes another pawn within it. Upon his return to London, all seems well for many months, until the woman in black returns with a vengeance to murder Arthur's wife and child in the very same way her own child was killed—in a pony trap accident. Arthur's story, then, is the story of the woman in black—his and Jennet's narratives are inextricably bound up with one another, and his suffering is begat of her own. All these two poor souls have to cling to—one in death, and one in a cursed, horror-filled half-life—are their stories, and Arthur's fierce protectiveness and secrecy regarding his own story as the years go by reflects Jennet's desire to change the course of her “story” and reclaim control of a narrative which ran away from her.

The layered narrative of *The Woman in Black* reveals the author's faith in the power of storytelling from the outset—and ultimately engenders within its protagonist Arthur Kipps a faith in the power of his own story, even if that power is just to free himself from the torments of his past. Jennet's own story, too, is a story-within-a-story; the “story” of Jennet's sad life, a tragedy and even perhaps an embarrassment to the isolated, afflicted woman, continues past her death as she becomes the tormentor of the town of Crythin Gifford and creates a new narrative. No longer a sickly woman whose child was stolen from her not just once but twice, Jennet rebrands herself as a powerful figure able to steal other people's children away from them at last. Their stories are all Arthur and Jennet have, and in this way, they are bound to each other by more than a mere

haunting.



THE PAST

The past is such a forceful presence within Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* that it is almost a character in and of itself. The novel's frame story forces protagonist Arthur Kipps to mentally return to his own past and confront his time as a young lawyer spending a fateful week at Eel Marsh House; during his tenure in Crythin Gifford, his younger self was similarly forced to confront the dark history of the haunted manor and the plagued town surrounding it. As Hill sends her protagonist tumbling through his own memories—and the collective memories of Crythin Gifford, as well—the novel's bleak argument emerges: no matter how hard one might try to avoid it, the past is inescapable and demands to be reckoned with.

Arthur's inability to escape his own past provides the novel with a feeling of claustrophobia and inevitability that heightens the sense of horror throughout its pages. From the outset of the novel, the reader can see plainly that Arthur is haunted by his past. During Christmas Eve celebrations with his family, Arthur is on edge due to the inclement weather—which, it will soon become apparent, reminds him of the sudden **fogs and sea mists** common in Crythin Gifford. Later, when his stepchildren begin trading ghost stories and ask Arthur to share one as well, he lashes out and abruptly leaves the house to go on a walk. Arthur has created a new life for himself since the horrors that transpired in his past—but though he has moved to the country, taken a new wife, and retired from law, he still cannot escape the memories of his ill-fated trip to Crythin Gifford. Arthur confesses, as he wanders the grounds of his new home in the wake of his outburst, that he has “always known in [his] heart that the experience would never leave him,” and that it was “woven” into the “very fibers” of his life. This demonstrates that Arthur has, for many years, been trying to shut out and avoid recalling his time at Eel Marsh House. Tonight, though, the experience fills his mind “to the exclusion of all else,” and he understands suddenly that his only chance of getting free of it “for whatever life remain[s] for [him] to enjoy” is to write it down and confront it in earnest at last.

At the conclusion of Arthur's story, he at last reveals the great trauma that he has tried to block out for so many years—the fact that the woman in black caused the violent death of his first wife and child in a **pony trap** accident, mirroring the way in which her own child was killed many decades ago. After relaying the incident in stark uncompromising detail, Arthur concludes his narrative by writing: “They asked for my story. I have told it. Enough.” Arthur has at last confronted the demons of his past, and seemingly at a great emotional cost—he seems exhausted and worn down from having relived his horrible memories and committed them to paper. Arthur was reluctant to confront his memories in the first place, and in the novel's

final sentences, he seems to feel that the past has defeated him after all; it has been a force of constriction, claustrophobia, and coercion just as frightening and suffocating as anything Arthur actually encountered in the ghostly Eel Marsh House.

Through Arthur's painful and emotional confrontation with his fraught past, Susan Hill paints a portrait of the vividness of painful memories, the weight of personal history, and the power of the past to warp one's future. As Arthur emerges from his confrontation with his past, he has not necessarily come out a stronger or better man—but he has admitted, at least, that the past demands reckoning, and will cause one perhaps even more suffering should one attempt to ignore it completely.



ISOLATION AND TRAUMA

The story at the dark heart of *The Woman in Black* is that not of protagonist Arthur Kipps, but of Jennet Humfrye—the titular spirit who, after having been forced to give up her illegitimate son to the care of her sister and brother-in-law, now haunts her late sister's isolated estate, Eel Marsh House. As Jennet's chilling, painful story—which culminates in the death of her son and her own descent into madness—emerges piece by piece, Hill demonstrates the isolating nature of trauma, and argues that those who have suffered extreme, deep traumas often feel a strong need to make their pain known and felt more widely—so much so that they traumatize others in the process, creating an endless cycle of isolating traumatization, pain, and suffering.

Arthur is pulled into Jennet's story while clearing out the late Mrs. Drablow's manor, Eel Marsh House. As he sets to work filing through the old woman's things, he has already seen the woman in black twice—though he does not yet know her true story. As the full tale emerges, Arthur realizes that he is already in over his head—and in danger of being yet another one of Jennet's many victims. When Arthur arrives in Crythin Gifford, any mention of Eel Marsh House makes locals quiet and nervous, though Arthur tries not to think too much of his new acquaintances' odd responses to Mrs. Drablow's name. When Arthur attends the old woman's funeral, however, and sees a woman dressed all in black present at the graveside as her coffin is lowered into the ground, he realizes that perhaps something stranger and darker than just a reclusive old woman's reputation as an oddball is afoot. When Arthur mentions the woman in black to his companion at the funeral, local solicitor Mr. Jerome, the man is horrorstruck. His reaction reveals both that Jerome is genuinely fearful of the woman in black, and that Arthur was the only one able to see the woman at the funeral—apart from the children attending the school next-door, who stare into the churchyard rapturously as the service takes place. At first, Arthur thinks the children are simply intrigued by the morbid funeral display; he will later learn that the woman in black has an odd and unsettling effect

on children that relates directly to the core reason for her malevolent haunting of Eel Marsh House. After the funeral, Arthur heads to Eel Marsh, against the advice of nearly everyone in town—including the clearly-traumatized Mr. Jerome. After his own series of ghostly encounters, including another face-to-face confrontation with the woman in black herself, Arthur struggles with whether he will be able to complete the task laid out before him after all. He returns to the mainland, shaken and afraid, but ultimately resolves that he must confront the ghosts in Eel Marsh House. Already, Arthur has been pulled into the cycle of isolation and traumatization by the ghost of Jennet—he alone feels he can confront her, and yet is blind to the ways in which he has already been traumatized, and the many traumas that await him upon his return. After several more encounters with the otherworldly and uncanny, Arthur finds himself staring at the fearsome visage of the woman in black once more—this time, after she has made a direct attempt on Arthur's life.

Arthur at last realizes that he has isolated himself in hopes of confronting an old, mysterious trauma, only to have fallen victim to the cycle of traumatization Jennet longs to perpetuate. Jennet's malevolence, palpable and strong, finally affects Arthur to the point that he loses consciousness and must be rescued by his friend Samuel Daily. After returning to the Dailys' house, Arthur believes he is out of the woods, and his life has been spared from a horrible fate of being victimized endlessly by the ghost of Jennet, who, having been forced in life to give her illegitimate son up for adoption only to lose him to a **pony trap** accident out on the marsh during a **foggy** evening, seeks to violently and malevolently create more and more suffering even from beyond the grave. Samuel, however, reveals that the worst may still be to come; every time Jennet appears, a child dies. This perturbs Arthur so greatly that he falls ill, tormented by a vicious fever and fearsome nightmare of the woman in black. The woman in black has, symbolically at least, defeated Arthur—she has traumatized him and caused him a great deal of painful isolation, as he cannot receive any comfort in the wake of his horrific ordeal and becomes literally quarantined due to his fever. Once Arthur recovers from his illness and returns to London, even more painful trauma is in store for him. Though he marries his fiancée, Stella, and welcomes a baby boy into the world with her, the woman in black is not done with Arthur. When he and his family attend a fair one day, the woman in black is there, and causes the pony trap Stella and the baby are riding in to crash, claiming the life of the little one and fatally wounding Stella. The woman in black has had her revenge, Arthur says—she has succeeded in at last traumatizing him so deeply that he will never escape the pain, in and permanently isolating him from his wife and child the way Jennet was isolated from her own son.

By creating a vicious cycle of pain, trauma, and isolation, Susan Hill invokes a swirling vortex of misery that cannot be avoided.

Though Arthur does indeed go on to find happiness with his second wife, Esmé, the events that took place at Eel House Manner continue to haunt him—and isolate from the rest of the family despite his best efforts to forget the traumas that have plagued him since his youth.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



FOG AND MIST

Throughout the novel, fog and mist symbolize impending disaster. At the start of the novel (in the frame story, which shows Arthur Kipps as an older man, retired to the countryside) Arthur is perturbed by the dreary, foggy weather as Christmas approaches. Though he does not admit it to himself, the misty weather no doubt reminds him of the odious, densely foggy London day on which his fateful trip to Crythin Gifford began—and the sudden sea mists that assaulted him there and contributed greatly to his sense of isolation at Eel Marsh House. Anytime fog or mist rolls in throughout the text, it is Hill's way of warning her readers—and perhaps even Arthur himself—that trouble is on the horizon.



PONY TRAPS

Pony traps, which are small, two-person horse-drawn carriages, symbolize a traversal—physically, emotionally, or psychologically—between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Arthur's appointed driver in Crythin Gifford, Keckwick, ferries him back and forth down the Nine Lives Causeway to and from Eel Marsh House in a pony trap. In this way, Keckwick is reminiscent of the Greek mythological figure of Charon, who ferries souls across the River Styx and into the realm of the dead. Eel Marsh House—haunted by the ghost of Jennet and the site of Mrs. Drablow's recent death—is a place consumed by the malevolent energy of the woman in black. While there, Arthur confronts visual, emotional and auditory hauntings. One of the most chilling "hallucinations" Arthur is subjected to is the sound of a pony trap being pulled into the sticky marsh; he can hear, but never see due to the marsh's thick **fog**, the sounds of a pony's distressed neighing and a woman and child's horrible cry as the trap is sucked down into the muck (it is eventually revealed that Keckwick himself was the driver of the fateful accident that killed Jennet's son Nathaniel and his nanny.) Significantly, Arthur's beloved wife Stella and the couple's infant son also both die in a pony trap; in London, nearly two years after Arthur departs Crythin Gifford, Stella and the baby take a ride in a pony trap at a fair and are waylaid by the woman

in black, who forces their carriage to crash, maiming Stella and killing the child instantly.

Arthur's frequent traversal of the Nine Lives Causeway in a pony trap suggests that he is leaving the realm of the "normal" and entering that of the supernatural; the pony trap accident he is forced to listen to again and again while trapped by the high tide at Eel Marsh House indicates that the spirit realm has completely enveloped him; the pony trap's seemingly benign but ultimately fatal reappearance at the London fair in the novel's closing shows that the spirit realm works in mysterious ways, and that certain malevolent beings can travel between worlds and see their darkest wills done.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Woman in Black* published in 2011.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ I had always known in my heart that the experience would never leave me, that it was now woven into my very fibers, an inextricable part of my past, but I had hoped never to have to recollect it, consciously, and in full, ever again. Like an old wound, it gave off a faint twinge now and again, but less and less often, less and less painfully, as the years went on and my happiness, sanity and equilibrium were assured. Of late, it had been like the outermost ripple on a pool, merely the faint memory of a memory. Now, tonight, it again filled my mind to the exclusion of all else. I knew that I should have no rest from it, that I should lie awake in a chill of sweat, going over that time, those events, those places. So it had been night after night for years.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In the first chapter of the novel, Hill introduces her protagonist, Arthur Kipps, as a man who seems stable but is actually nursing a host of terrors, traumas, and anxieties. When his family—his second wife and her four children from a previous marriage—begin sharing ghost stories around the fireplace one Christmas eve, Arthur becomes upset and flees the room when asked to contribute to the game. Wandering the grounds of his stately country home, Arthur reflects on the very real ghost story he experienced as a younger man—and admits that it has calibrated his life in ways he'd care to avoid admitting. Though Arthur refers

to the experience he suffered through as an "old wound" and a "ripple" at the edge of his thoughts, he has clearly been rattled into his old fear and re-traumatized tonight. This intense emotionality sets up the novel's frame story; Arthur must return to the past, the place within his own mind he has tried so hard to abandon, if he is ever to make peace with the literal ghosts that haunt him.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Fog was outdoors, hanging over the river, creeping in and out of alleyways and passages, swirling thickly between the bare trees of all the parks and gardens of the city and indoors, too, seething through cracks and crannies like sour breath, gaining a sly entrance at every opening of a door. It was a yellow fog, a filthy, evil-smelling fog, a fog that choked and blinded, smeared and stained. [...]

Sounds were deadened, shapes blurred. [...] it was menacing and sinister, disguising the familiar world and confusing the people in it, as they were confused by having their eyes covered and being turned about, in a game of Blind Man's Buff.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 20-21

Explanation and Analysis

In the first pages of the inner story of the novel—the beginning of the younger Arthur's exploits—Arthur is a young lawyer living and working in London. When the story begins, a thick fog has enveloped the city. Though "foggy London-town" is a well-known stereotype of the metropolis, the fog that has descended upon London in the novel's early pages is no ordinary fog. It is "filthy" and "evil-smelling," and has a "sinister" effect that "deadens" and "blurs" all it touches. Throughout the novel, fog and mist will come to serve as symbols of dread and foreboding, warning that something terrible is about to unfold. In this passage, the particularly malodorous and thick fog that has ensconced London seems to be warning Arthur that trouble is on the horizon; perhaps the fog, despite its seemingly sinister nature, is even trying to keep Arthur safe in London and obscure the world beyond in order to protect him.

☛ The business was beginning to sound like something from a Victorian novel, with a reclusive old woman having hidden a lot of ancient documents somewhere in the depths of her cluttered house. I was scarcely taking Mr. Bentley seriously.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), Mr. Bentley

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 26-27

Explanation and Analysis

In the middle of the foggy day, Arthur is called to the office of his boss, Mr. Bentley, and sent off on a mission. A longtime client of the firm, the eccentric Alice Drablow, has just passed away at the age of eighty-seven, leaving behind a large manor—Eel Marsh House, in the northeastern town of Crythin Gifford—and within it, no doubt, a trove of important documents which must be attended to. Mr. Bentley, as a busy partner of the firm, instructs his young mentee Arthur to take on the task of traveling up north and sorting through the Drablow estate. Mr. Bentley warns Arthur that the large, isolated house is sure to be in disarray, as Mrs. Drablow was something of an oddball and a recluse.

As Arthur absorbs all this information, he thinks—pointedly and ironically—that what Mr. Bentley is describing sounds “like something from a Victorian novel.” As Susan Hill, the author of *The Woman in Black*, is herself pulling the strings of a mock-Gothic-horror story which utilizes several tropes and stereotypes of the genre, this passage is a pointed reference to the ways in which works that rely heavily on tropes can often be deceptively “unserious.” Hill’s goal, with this novel in particular, is to deepen the Gothic kind of horrors that have become rote or immediately recognizable through the years—Arthur’s unwillingness to take his own circumstances seriously is a sort of warning to her readers that despite the familiarity and “silliness” of the genre, there is actually much to be feared.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ It was true that neither Mr. Daily nor the landlord of the inn seemed anything but sturdy men of good common-sense, just as I had to admit that neither of them had done more than fall silent and look at me hard and a little oddly, when the subject of Mrs. Drablow had arisen. Nonetheless, I had been left in no doubt that there was some significance in what had been left unsaid.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), Samuel Daily,

The Landlord

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

As Arthur has made the long and at times arduous journey north from London to the marshy, damp town of Crythin Gifford, he has encountered two men—separately—who have grown quiet, touchy, and even seemingly disturbed at the mention of the reason for Arthur’s visit: to see to the Drablow estate. Arthur himself is hardly taking his mission seriously, but even he is starting to admit that perhaps something serious is indeed afoot. What Samuel Daily and the landlord of the Gifford Arms have left “unsaid” speaks volumes more than their words actually could; their reluctance to discuss Mrs. Drablow or Eel Marsh House sets Arthur on edge for the first time, and causes him to realize that he is indeed in very unfamiliar territory.

☛ I can recall it still, that sensation of slipping down, down into the welcoming arms of sleep, surrounded by warmth and softness, happy and secure as a small child in the nursery [...] Perhaps I recall those sensations the more vividly because of the contrast that presented with what was to come after. Had I known that my untroubled night of good sleep was to be the last such that I was to enjoy for so many terrifying, racked and weary nights to come, perhaps I should not have jumped out of bed with such alacrity, eager to be down and have breakfast, and then to go out and begin the day.

[...] I do not believe I have ever again slept so well as I did that night in the inn at Crythin Gifford. For I see that then I was still all in a state of innocence, but that innocence, once lost, is lost forever.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 38-39

Explanation and Analysis

As the older Arthur tells the story of his visit to Crythin Gifford, he occasionally interrupts the narrative in order to insert, from the vantage point of the future, his own editorializing of the past. In this passage, as Arthur recalls falling asleep the first night in Crythin Gifford, safe at the plush Gifford Arms inn, he reveals that he has never again in

his life had a sleep as untroubled and peaceful again. The older Arthur, perturbed by the horrors he encountered at Eel Marsh House, laments that his “innocence” was soon to be lost, and yet despite all of the warning signs—the dense fog, the wary locals—he pushed onward and thus changed the course of his life forever, and for the worse.

“Well,” I said, “if he’s buying up half the county I suppose I may be doing business with him myself before the year is out. I am a solicitor looking after the affairs of the late Mrs. Alice Drablow of Eel Marsh House. It is quite possible that her estate will come up for sale in due course.”

For a moment, my companion still said nothing, only buttered a thick slice of bread and laid his chunks of cheese along it carefully. I saw by the clock on the opposite wall that it was half past one, and I wanted to change my clothes before the arrival of Mr. Keckwick, so that I was about to make my excuses and go, when my neighbor spoke. “I doubt,” he said, in a measured tone, “whether even Samuel Daily would go so far.”

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), Keckwick, Samuel Daily

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 52-53

Explanation and Analysis

As Arthur’s stay in Crythin Gifford progresses, he attempts to make light of his role in the closure of the Drablow estate—despite increasingly horrific signs that something in town, and at Eel Marsh House more specifically, is terribly wrong. At Mrs. Drablow’s funeral, Arthur saw a wasted-faced woman all in black whom no one else (except the schoolchildren) could see; the mere mention of the woman brought terror into the heart of his companion, Mr. Jerome. Now, at a luncheon following a large auction in town, Arthur continues trying to discuss his impending business with other locals, but finds that even local farmers know that Eel Marsh House is virtually untouchable. The news that Samuel Daily—who seems, to the farmers’ dismay, to be buying up all the spare property in town—would not go near the estate with a ten-foot pole is yet another warning sign that Arthur should stay away from the house—and yet, of course, readers know that he will not.

Chapter 5 Quotes

“No car appeared. Instead, there drew up outside the Gifford Arms a rather worn and shabby pony and trap. It was not at all out of place in the market square—I had noticed a number of such vehicles that morning and, assuming that this one belonged to some farmer or stockman, I took no notice, but continued to look around me, for a motor. Then I heard my name called.

The pony was a small, shaggy-looking creature, wearing blinkers, and the driver with a large cap pulled down low over his brow, and a long, hairy brown coat, looked not unlike it, and blended with the whole equipage.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), Keckwick

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Keckwick, the man who arrives to bring Arthur over the long stretch of empty causeway to Eel Marsh House is a peculiar figure indeed. He is a man of very few words driving a slightly antiquated pony trap—a two-person horse-drawn carriage—instead of a car. Keckwick is to ferry Arthur across the causeway, which runs through the damp, expansive, fog-prone marsh—much like Charon, in Greek myth, the ferrier of dead souls across the River Styx. What awaits Arthur on the other side of the causeway is, unbeknownst to him, as good as hell or the underworld—the terrifying, isolated Eel Marsh House.

●● Suddenly conscious of the cold and the extreme bleakness and eeriness of the spot and of the gathering dusk of the November afternoon, and not wanting my spirits to become so depressed that I might begin to be affected by all sorts of morbid fancies, I was about to leave [...] But, as I turned away, I glanced once again round the burial ground and then I saw again the woman with the wasted face, who had been at Mrs. Drablow's funeral. [...] As I stared at her, stared until my eyes ached in their sockets, stared in surprise and bewilderment at her presence, now I saw that her face did wear an expression. It was one of what I can only describe—and the words seem hopelessly inadequate to express what I saw—as a desperate, yearning malevolence; it was as though she were searching for something she wanted, needed—*must have*, more than life itself, and which had been taken from her. And, toward whoever had taken it she directed the purest evil and hatred and loathing, with all the force that was available to her.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 62-63

Explanation and Analysis

As Arthur arrives at Eel Marsh House, he is entranced by the strange, stark beauty of the landscape (and the manor itself) and unable to see what the fuss has been all about. Though isolated, the grounds seem innocent enough, and Arthur bravely decides to explore them—one of the many instances where his stubbornness and confidence gives way to sheer foolishness. Soon, however, he comes upon the wasted-faced woman in black in the Drablow family burial ground, and begins at last to see for himself just what makes the place so feared. While the woman's bizarre and unsettling appearance is one thing, the sheer malevolence and dark desperation emanating from her chills Arthur to the bone. The stubborn, rational Arthur now sees that there is an evil and a hatred at the heart of Eel Marsh House, and that he is, unfortunately, defenseless and right in the center of it.

Chapter 6 Quotes

●● So I thought that night, as I laid my head on the soft pillow and fell eventually into a restless, shadowy sleep, across which figures came and went, troubling me, so that once or twice I half-woke myself, as I cried out or spoke a few incoherent words, I sweated, I turned and turned about, trying to free myself from the nightmares, to escape from my own semi-conscious sense of dread and foreboding, and all the time, piercing through the surface of my dreams, came the terrified whinnying of the pony and the crying and calling of that child over and over, while I stood, helpless in the mist, my feet held fast, my body pulled back, and while behind me, though I could not see, only sense her dark presence, hovered the woman.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the narrative, Arthur has spent an afternoon and evening at Eel Marsh House and at last discovered its horrors. In addition to the haunting specter of the terrifying woman in black, there is another ghostly mystery that unsettles Arthur even more deeply: out on the causeway, he heard the eerie, omnipresent, almost otherworldly sounds of a child and a pony struggling in the muck and perishing in a terrible accident. Now, though he is safe in bed at the Gifford Arms, Arthur—for all his “unserious” attitudes toward the town of Crythin Gifford and the local hysteria surrounding Eel Marsh House and Mrs. Drablow herself—is unable to shake the sense of “dread and foreboding” the house inspired in him, nor the visceral fear of the woman in black's uncanny, unnerving presence.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ "It seems to me, Mr. Daily," I said, "that I have seen whatever ghost haunts Eel Marsh and that burial ground. A woman in black with a wasted face. Because I have no doubt at all that she was whatever people call a ghost, that she was not a real, living, breathing human being. Well, she did me no harm. She neither spoke nor came near me. I did not like her look and I liked the... the power that seemed to emanate from her toward me even less, but I have convinced myself that it is a power that cannot do more than make me feel afraid. If I go there and see her again, I am prepared."

"And the pony and trap?"

I could not answer because, yes, that had been worse, far worse, more terrifying because it had been only heard not seen and because the cry of that child would never, I was sure, leave me for the rest of my life.

I shook my head. "I won't run away."

Related Characters: Samuel Daily, Arthur Kipps (speaker), The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 99-100

Explanation and Analysis

Despite the terrible horror he experienced the night before, by the day after his first afternoon at Eel Marsh House, Arthur experiences a newfound sense of determination to return to the Eel Marsh House, confront what lies within it, and complete the task he has come to Crythin Gifford to do: sort through Mrs. Drablow's papers. As he relays all of this to his new friend in town, Mr. Samuel Daily, Arthur at once puts on a brave face and admits that the things he has seen in just a few short hours there already bear the weight of unforgettable horrors which will remain with him "the rest of [his] life." Many times throughout the novel, Arthur feels or puts on a show of false confidence, and each time it is shattered by his next visit to the manor, emphasizing his helplessness and frailty in the face of the malicious woman in black.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ As soon as I awoke, a little before seven, I felt that the air had a dampness in it and that it was rather colder and, when I looked out of the window, I could hardly see the division between land and water, water and sky, all was a uniform gray, with thick cloud lying low over the marsh and a drizzle. It was not a day calculated to raise the spirits and I felt unrefreshed and nervous after the previous night. But Spider trotted down the stairs eagerly and cheerfully enough and I soon built up the fires again and stoked the boiler, had a bath and breakfast and began to feel more like my everyday self.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Arthur survives his first frightening night at Eel Marsh House—in this passage, he has just awoken after a long night of investigating ominous bumps in the night and mysterious locked doors with only the dog Spider at his side. Now, in the light of morning, despite his sense of well-being and return to his "everyday self," Arthur finds that a thick mist has settled over the property—a sure sign of worse things to come. Arthur, either ignorant or willfully blind to the message the mist seems to carry, decides to proceed with his job at Eel Marsh House—soon, though, he will surely regret not heeding the fog's symbolic warning.

☞ In Scotland, a son was born to her and she wrote of him at once with a desperate, clinging affection. For a few months the letters ceased, but when they began again it was at first in passionate outrage and protest, later, in quiet, resigned bitterness. [...]

"He is mine. Why should I not have what is mine? He shall not go to strangers. I shall kill us both before I let him go."

Then the tone changed. "'What else can I do? I am quite helpless. If you and M are to have him I shall mind it less.'" And again, "I suppose it must be."

But at the end of the last letter of all was written in a very small, cramped hand: "Love him, take care of him as your own. But he is mine, mine, he can never be yours. Oh, forgive me. I think my heart will break. J."

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 114-115

Explanation and Analysis

As Arthur begins sorting through Mrs. Drablow's papers more carefully, he investigates a packet of very old letters addressed to the woman that paint a sad picture. A woman named Jennet—a relative and likely even a sister of Mrs. Drablow—bore an illegitimate son and was forced to surrender him to Mrs. Drablow and her husband. The sad, plaintive tone of the letters is shot through with desperation and at times even pure viciousness. This viciousness echoes the malevolent energy of a certain woman Arthur has already encountered several times in the last few days. Though Arthur has not yet put the mystery together out of ignorance or sheer willful blindness, an uncanny parallel emerges between the voice of the letters and the “voice” of the woman in black herself.

☝ I picked things up, stroked them, even smelled them. They must have been here for half a century, yet they might have been played with this afternoon and tidied away tonight. I was not afraid now. I was puzzled. I felt strange, unlike myself, I moved as if in a dream. But for the moment at least there was nothing here to frighten or harm me, there was only emptiness, an open door, a neatly made bed and a curious air of sadness, of something lost, missing, so that I myself felt a desolation, a grief in my own heart. How can I explain? I cannot. But I remember it, as I felt it.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

On his second night in Eel Marsh House, Arthur finds himself again investigating a series of strange, unsettling noises coming from a locked room at the end of the hallway upstairs. This time, though, Arthur finds that the door has been opened wide, as if inviting him inside. Arthur enters the room and finds that it is an immaculately preserved children's nursery. Though Mrs. Drablow lived in the house alone for many years, the objects in the nursery seem new

and carefully kept—suggesting that either Mrs. Drablow or another presence in the house has been looking after them meticulously. The other uncanny thing Arthur finds in the nursery is something intangible—an air of desolation so penetrating that he feels it in his very soul.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ But she was alive and so was I and, gradually, a little warmth from each of our bodies and the pause revived us and, cradling Spider like a child in my arms, I began to stumble back across the marshes toward the house. As I did so and within a few yards of it, I glanced up. At one of the upper windows, the only window with bars across it, the window of the nursery, I caught a glimpse of someone standing. A woman. That woman. She was looking directly toward me. Spider was whimpering in my arms and making occasional little retching coughs. We were both trembling violently. How I reached the grass in front of the house I shall never know but, as I did so, I heard a sound. It was coming from the far end of the causeway path which was just beginning to be visible as the tide began to recede. It was the sound of a pony trap.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Arthur Kipps—who has suspected that the hauntings he's been subjected to during his stay at Eel Marsh House have been more or less “quirks” of the manse—realizes that the woman in black is blatantly targeting him, attempting not just to terrify him but indeed to murder him—and his little dog, too. What's also confirmed in this passage is that the nursery is indeed the very epicenter of the woman in black's malicious reign over the house; it is the place she most frequently occupies and the place from which she seems to draw her power. As Arthur, overwhelmed by fear and physically exhausted from the struggle he has just endured to pull Spider from the marsh—and save himself from drowning, as well—collapses onto the ground in front of Eel Marsh House, he hears the familiar sound of a pony trap approaching. Believing that the auditory hallucination of the terrible accident is about to begin again, Arthur blacks out, perhaps surrendering to whatever forthcoming assaults the woman in black is

executing upon him.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ [...] I had been growing more and more determined to find out what restless soul it was who wanted to cause these disturbances and *why, why*. If I could uncover the truth, perhaps I might in some way put an end to it all forever.

But what I couldn't endure more was the atmosphere surrounding the events: the sense of oppressive hatred and malevolence, of someone's evil and also of terrible grief and distress. [...] But I was worried, not wanting to leave the mystery unexplained and knowing, too, that at the same time someone would have to finish, at some point, the necessary work of sorting out and packing up Mrs. Drablow's papers.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), Samuel Daily, The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

Luckily, after his horrific encounter with the woman in black out on the marsh, Arthur is saved by Mr. Samuel Daily—who came to the rescue, fittingly, in a pony trap, a symbol for the bridging of worlds. As Arthur recovers from his ordeal, he struggles between his desire to flee the house forever and his reluctance to leave. In fleeing, not only will he have failed to complete the task assigned to him—but he will also be leaving it for some other poor soul to take up, possibly at the risk of that person's own life. Arthur's desire to face down the house's demons and obtain closure will come back to haunt him in the most terrible way—though he of course cannot know this yet.

☞ The door was ajar. I stood, feeling the anxiety that lay only just below the surface begin to rise up within me, making my heart beat fast. Below, I heard Mr. Daily's footsteps and the pitter-patter of the dog as it followed him about. And, reassured by their presence, I summoned up my courage and made my way cautiously toward that half-open door. When I reached it I hesitated. She had been there. I had seen her. Whoever she was, this was the focus of her search or her attention or her grief—I could not tell which. This was the very heart of the haunting. [...] It was in a state of disarray as might have been caused by a gang of robbers, bent on mad, senseless destruction.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), Samuel Daily, The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

Before leaving Eel Marsh House for good, Arthur cannot resist taking one last look into the nursery—the epicenter of the woman in black's power and the site of so much of his own horror and despair during his stay here. Once again, Arthur tempts fate by willingly putting himself in the center of the chilling occurrences at Eel Marsh. The nursery, which had been surprisingly neat and orderly—immaculate, even—despite decades of disuse has now been ransacked. The woman in black herself is obviously behind the destruction—and the likely cause for her violent anger, which Arthur has not yet seen on this scale, is her inability to defeat him out on the marsh, coupled with his decision to leave the house behind forever.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ I began to run crazily and then I heard it, the sickening crack and thud as the pony and its cart collided with one of the huge tree trunks. [...]

They lifted Stella gently from the cart. Her body was broken, her neck and legs fractured, though she was still conscious. [...]

Our baby son had been thrown clear, clear against another tree. He lay crumpled on the grass below it, dead. This time, there was no merciful loss of consciousness, I was forced to live through it all, every minute and then every day thereafter, for ten long months, until Stella, too, died from her terrible injuries.

I had seen the ghost of Jennet Humfrye and she had had her revenge.

They asked for my story. I have told it. Enough.

Related Characters: Arthur Kipps (speaker), Stella, The Woman in Black / Jennet Humfrye

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's final passage, the woman in black at last takes her revenge on Arthur Kipps. The woman in black's exact

vendetta against Arthur, at least while he was at Eel Marsh House, seemed undefined though palpable. Now that Arthur is married with a child, however, Arthur has the very thing Jennet was denied in life—a stable family and a close relationship with a child of his own blood. Jennet’s spirit travels all the way to London just to ruin Arthur’s life, doing so in a way that is all the more resonant for the uncanny similarity it bears to the tragic death of her own child. A pony trap, which has throughout the novel been symbolic of a traversal of realms, now reemerges as a potent symbol of

Jennet’s literal carrying-off of Arthur’s child—and indeed, in a few months’ time, his wife—to the spirit realm, never to be encountered again. Arthur’s resigned, defeated tone in his last few sentences signals that though he has accomplished the goal of telling his story—something he felt was cathartic and necessary to do at the start of the novel—the experience has drained him rather than liberated him, and left him perhaps even more shaken, traumatized, and isolated than he was before setting it to paper.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: CHRISTMAS EVE

It is nine thirty at night on Christmas Eve, and Arthur Kipps and his family have just finished a happy, festive meal at their country home, Monk's Piece. The rest of the family is gathered around the fire in the drawing room, but, before joining them, Arthur decides to step out for a moment and take in some fresh air. As Arthur takes in the night, he is relieved to find that the chilling rain and **fog** that have made the house feel gloomy even in the days leading up to Christmas have dissipated—the night is cold and clear. Arthur states that his spirit has been “excessively affected by the ways of the weather” for many years.

Though Monk Piece is only two miles from a good-sized village and seven from a larger market town, there is “an air of remoteness and isolation” to the place. Taking in his beautiful estate, Arthur recalls the first time he ever saw it. One afternoon, many years ago, Arthur was driving through town in a **pony trap**—a small, two-wheeled, horse-drawn carriage—with his partner at his law firm, Mr. Bentley. Having reached old age, Mr. Bentley lived primarily in the country and came to London for business only once or twice a week, and had suggested that Arthur—then thirty-five and a widower for twelve years, self-admittedly growing old before his time—acquire a country home as well.

While driving along, Arthur spotted Monk's Piece and was immediately certain that the home would one day be his. He stopped the carriage and spent a moment looking at the handsome stone house, trying to deflect the “extreme emotions” he was feeling at the sight of the place and yet yearning to look at it longer. Arthur settled into the feeling that one day, the property will be his, and felt suddenly lighthearted. Before returning to London, Arthur asked Mr. Bentley to let him know if the house ever went up for sale.

The novel opens on Christmas Eve, a festive and joyous occasion. Nevertheless, The Woman in Black is a horror novel, and as such there is an atmosphere of creeping dread from the outset. Throughout the novel, fog will function as a symbol of impending peril, disaster, or doom—and Arthur is perhaps more sensitive and easily affected than he lets on.



Throughout the novel, pony traps symbolize of transition between realms or worlds. As Arthur reflects on how he came to live in the country, his pony trap ride with his business partner Mr. Bentley bridges his life in London to his dreams of life in the country—however, as the novel progresses, pony traps will take people to much farther, darker places than that.



Arthur's experience with extremities of emotion, too, will come into play as the novel progresses. Here, he heeds his heart and his head, and decides to pursue the opportunity to take up a residence in the country. This allegiance to his internal compass is something which, readers will come to see, Arthur has had to consciously develop over a long period of time.



Some years later, the house became available, and Arthur made an offer on it, which was accepted quickly. A couple of weeks later, Arthur brought the woman he was courting, Esmé Ainley, out to see the house, and there proposed to her. Very shortly afterward, Arthur and Esmé moved to Monk's Piece; on moving day, Arthur felt he had "at last come out from under the long shadow cast by the events of the past." Arriving in town and greeting his new neighbor, Mr. Bentley, Arthur saw that Bentley, too, seemed to have had a burden lifted from his own shoulders—Bentley, Arthur knew, had always blamed himself for everything that had happened to Arthur up in Crythin Gifford at Eel Marsh House.

None of the darkness in Crythin Gifford, though, is near Arthur's mind as he takes in the night air now, on the clear, crisp Christmas Eve. For fourteen years, Monk's Piece has been the "happiest of homes" for Arthur, Esmé, and her four children from her first marriage. Though Arthur used the house only as a weekend home for many years, he retired permanently to the country at the earliest opportunity, and now lives here full-time. Arthur thinks about his family, sitting snug and warm inside the house—Esmé's oldest daughter Isobel's three young sons are asleep in the attic, and tomorrow will enjoy a bright and cheerful Christmas Day.

Arthur heads back inside, looking forward to sitting quietly with his family and smoking a pipe. He enters the drawing room, where Esmé is sitting with her four children—Isobel, Oliver, Will, and Edmund—and Isobel's husband. Isobel is twenty-four, with a matronly air. Oliver is nineteen and Will is eighteen, and both are still slightly childish despite already being off at college. Edmund, the youngest at fifteen, is sullen and reserved, with dark black hair and a private nature. Arthur loves Edmund best of all.

Arthur sits down in his armchair in the cozy drawing room adorned with Christmas decorations, and begins lighting a pipe, but soon realizes that there is a pause in the room, as if he has walked in on the middle of the conversation. When he asks what's going on, Oliver stands up and begins turning out the lights; he reveals that they are about to start telling ghost stories.

As Oliver, Edmund, and Will compete with one another to tell the "most spine-chilling tale," they pile on ridiculous details and horror-story clichés, until the stories they are telling become as wild and silly as they are lurid. Arthur is amused, at first, but as the game goes on, he begins feeling anxious and uneasy. He knows it is nothing but a game, and does not want to dampen their fun, but he is having trouble disguising how uncomfortable he is.

The country house has long been a symbol of renewal and rebirth for Arthur, who, in this passage, reveals that he suffered a great trauma sometime in his past—a misery so large and enveloping that Mr. Bentley, too, felt responsible for it.



It seems as if nothing could go wrong as Arthur prepares to enjoy a fun and meaningful Christmas celebration with his family. This is a Gothic novel, though—horror and fear are lurking around every corner, and Arthur's carefully constructed world of happiness, bliss, and family togetherness will soon come crumbling down.



The circumstances that led to Arthur's marriage to a woman with a family of her own are unclear, though such an arrangement was clearly not the norm at the time. Despite this, Arthur clearly loves and cherishes Esmé's children as his own; he knows them well, and loves being together with them. It's surprising that Arthur's favorite child is the one who is sullen and reserved—perhaps this points to Arthur's own nature.



Ghost stories are an odd tradition for Christmas for some, but a classic staple of the holiday for many. It seems, from Arthur's uncertainty about what is going on, that this is not a tradition in their family—and the new activity will soon be shown to have rather an ill effect on poor Arthur.



Arthur's growing discomfort with the ghost-story game is clearly tied to whatever happened in his past, at Crythin Gifford. He is so deeply traumatized, though, that he cannot even pretend to cast his pain aside and enjoy the family fun—despite the boys' over-exaggerated and clearly parodic tale, something about the activity deeply troubles him.



Edmund and Esmé urge Arthur to take part in the game, but Arthur refuses. It is all too much for him—none of them have any idea what real horror is. Unable to bear it any longer, Arthur proclaims that he has no story to tell, and leaves the room—and the house—abruptly. After taking a long walk in the orchard and steadying his pulse and breathing, Arthur worries that he has upset his family. He does, in fact, have a story to tell—a horrific true story of haunting, evil, and tragedy, but it is not appropriate for a Christmas Eve fireside game. Arthur has long been unable to shake the memory of his terrible past and is distraught that he cannot be free of it even at Christmastime.

Arthur realizes that he must tell his tale after all—not around the fireside, as a “diversion for idle listeners,” but written down on paper in great detail. Perhaps doing so, he thinks, will exorcise the demons he has been struggling with for many years. Arthur looks up at the moon and the bright stars one last time, and prays for peace of mind and the steadfastness needed to endure the “agonizing” task ahead of him.

CHAPTER 2: A LONDON PARTICULAR

The narrative flashes back to the beginning of Arthur’s terrible tale. It is a Monday afternoon in November, and though it is only three o’clock in the afternoon, it is already growing dark. London is enveloped in a thick **fog**, and has been for three days. It is a “filthy, evil-smelling fog”—neither sight nor sound can penetrate it. The fog is menacing and sinister and turns the city into a veritable maze.

The **fog**, however, does not give Arthur a sense of foreboding as he makes his way in a carriage through London towards King’s Cross station. Mr. Bentley, his boss (Arthur has not yet been made partner at the firm) has sent him out on a journey to a remote part of England. Arthur is barely twenty-three, and is excited by the prospect of a journey by train.

Earlier that morning, Arthur was summoned to his boss Mr. Bentley’s office, where Bentley began telling Arthur about “the extraordinary Mrs. Drablow” of Eel Marsh House. Mrs. Alice Drablow has recently died at eighty-seven years old, but was a loyal client of the firm for many, many years. An odd woman, she lived in an equally odd house in a small market town called Crythin Gifford—a house only accessible at low tide after crossing the Nine Lives Causeway. When the tide comes in, Bentley says, one is “cut off” until it goes out again. Bentley informs Arthur that Arthur is to travel to Crythin Gifford to represent the firm at Mrs. Drablow’s funeral, and must then go on to Eel Marsh House to locate the “disorganized” Mrs. Drablow’s private papers and bring them back to London.

Arthur finally reveals that he is so deeply traumatized by his past that the mere mention of a ghost story sets him on edge and even forces him to return to his previous fright. His children have been playing games and riling one another up—but apparently Arthur’s true story is so horrific that it cannot be shared even in a contest of scares.



Arthur, ashamed and upset by his own behavior, decides that the only way to exorcise his demons is to confront them. As the frame story gives way to the story of Arthur’s past, the man clearly dreads revisiting his youth, and the traumas that he experienced as a young man.



Just as in the start of the frame story, the story of Arthur’s youth begins with a thick blanket of fog. The fog in this passage, however, is odious and sinister—it clearly signifies doom and horror, and seems to be cloaking London in an attempt, perhaps, to keep Arthur from travelling out of town and exposing himself to danger.



Arthur is so excited to take a train trip that he ignores the poor weather and the danger the fog presents, and presses on happily. Already, young Arthur seems much more cheerful and naïve than the aging Arthur in the frame story—it seems that whatever is about to unfold at Crythin Gifford is responsible for this change.



As Mr. Bentley describes the mission he is about to send Arthur on, his assessment of Crythin Gifford and the odd Mrs. Drablow ring of familiar Gothic tropes: a large manor, cut off from the town around it; an old woman, confined to her manse; and a mysterious set of papers, necessary but hidden in a veritable maze.



Mr. Bentley assures Arthur that the business will take a day or two at most. Arthur is amused by the idea of a “reclusive old woman having hidden a lot of ancient documents” in her old, creaky house; he thinks the assignment sounds like something out of a Victorian novel. Mr. Bentley, too, encourages Arthur to “treat the whole thing as a jaunt.” Mr. Bentley tells Arthur to stay in a hotel this evening and be ready to attend the funeral tomorrow morning at eleven—a local man will help Arthur from there. Arthur asks for more details, but is hurried out when a client of Mr. Bentley’s arrives for a meeting. Arthur gathers his things and leaves the office, heading out into the “choking” **fog**.

Arthur himself finds Mr. Bentley’s description to be something out of fiction—this causes him to gravely and foolishly underestimate the seriousness of the quest he is about to set out on, and to ignore the potential warning signs along the way. Meanwhile, the sinister nature of the fog intensifies, indicating that Arthur is getting closer and closer to his doom.



CHAPTER 3: THE JOURNEY NORTH

Arthur excitedly arrives at the train station and finds a seat in an empty compartment. He loves train travel, and feels cheery and cozy as the train departs London. After changing trains twice, heading northeast all the while, Arthur begins to feel uncomfortable—the air is cold and gusty, and the train he transfers to for the tail end of the journey is far less comfortable than the train that shuttled him out of London.

Though Arthur’s journey starts out pleasantly enough, as it goes on, Arthur is forced to endure increasingly uncomfortable conditions—the second sign, counting the fog, that Arthur’s journey is misguided and will be more difficult than imagined.



Arthur settles into his new compartment, and soon another man joins him inside. The two make small talk about the weather, and Arthur confesses he is saddened to find he traded **fog** for rain. The man warns Arthur that he has not escaped the fog—in this part of the country, “terrible” sea-mists roll up out of nowhere often, though the worst of them don’t reach Crythin Gifford. Arthur mentions that he’s staying at the Gifford Arms this very evening, but then, not wanting to discuss his business any further, begins reading his newspaper.

The fact that fogs and sea-mists roll up suddenly in this part of the country, creating blindness and isolation, is yet another warning sign about the place Arthur is travelling to. He chooses to ignore this, however, just as he has ignored everything else, and regards the man informing him of the place he’s travelling to as something of a nuisance.



Arthur’s companion suddenly says “Mrs. Drablow” aloud. Arthur is startled, and then realizes that his companion has read the name “Drablow” off a large envelope of papers on the seat beside Arthur. The man asks Arthur if he is related to Mrs. Drablow, but Arthur says he’s only her solicitor. Arthur’s companion asks if he is bound for the funeral, and speculates that Arthur will be about the only one there. Arthur, curious to know more about the mysterious Mrs. Drablow, asks his companion whether she was truly a recluse.

Arthur’s companion’s knowledge about Mrs. Drablow shows both just how small a town Arthur is headed to—and how large Mrs. Drablow’s reputation within it truly was.



The man, realizing he and Arthur are heading into a deeper conversation, introduces himself as Samuel Daily. Daily tells Arthur that when someone lives in such a place as Eel Marsh House, growing eccentric becomes “a good deal easier.” Arthur, spooked by the idea of such a house, changes the subject, and asks how far there is to go—Daily answers that there are about twelve miles left to Crythin Gifford, a “far-flung” and marshy town. Despite its obscurity, Daily insists, the town is a hospitable place. He offers to drop Arthur at the inn, Gifford Arms, on his way back into town, and Arthur accepts the offer.

When Daily begins revealing the details of Mrs. Drablow’s curious existence, Arthur finds himself unsettled despite knowing very little, and previously having seen her whole existence as so ridiculous it seemed to come from a novel. Arthur eagerly accepts Daily’s offer of kindness—perhaps realizing that having a friend in this peculiar place would not be a bad idea.



CHAPTER 4: THE FUNERAL OF MRS. DRABLOW

Samuel Daily takes Arthur to the Gifford Arms in his shining, spacious car. As he drops Arthur off, Samuel hands him his card; though Arthur doubts he will need it during his brief stay, he tucks it into his pocket. Inside the inn, Arthur is pleased to find that it is warm and inviting. He feels as if he is on a holiday, not in town to attend a funeral for business. Arthur drinks a glass of mulled wine and enjoys supper by the fire; after eating, Arthur prepares to head up to bed. The landlord, clearing away Arthur’s dishes, asks if Arthur is in town for the auction. When Arthur asks him to clarify what he means, he informs Arthur that tomorrow at eleven, several farms south of town are being auctioned off—afterward, there is a great luncheon and an open market.

Arthur is quite enjoying himself in the little town of Crythin Gifford, despite the uneasy train journey and the odd feeling he got towards the end of it when talking to Samuel Daily about the late Mrs. Drablow. The idea that there is a lively community here, and several events going on in the next days, bolsters Arthur’s sense of security and excitement.



Arthur tells the landlord that he regretfully won’t be able to attend the auction or the market—he is attending the funeral of Mrs. Drablow of Eel Marsh House. At the mention of the woman’s name, Arthur sees something like alarm or suspicion flash across the landlord’s face. Arthur tells the landlord he’s just Mrs. Drablow’s solicitor, and has heard she kept very much to herself. The landlord remarks that living where she lived, “she could hardly do otherwise.” The landlord bids Arthur goodnight.

The landlord’s reaction to Arthur’s mention of Mrs. Drablow’s name is similar to Samuel Daily’s. Both seem to have a certain wariness about them where Mrs. Drablow is concerned, and both note her extreme isolation out at Eel Marsh House.



Arthur chalks up the landlord’s odd behavior to the claustrophobic nature of local “silliness” and small-town rumors grown out of proportion. Any “poor old woman,” Arthur thinks, would have a hard time in this dreary town being seen as anything other than a witchy character. Despite his attempts to reassure himself, Arthur senses that because the landlord and Mr. Daily both reacted oddly to the mention of Mrs. Drablow, there must be “some significance” in what each man left unsaid at the sound of her name.

Despite having solicited two odd reactions when describing his connection to Mrs. Drablow, Arthur chooses to see things in the unserious light in which he originally saw them, back in Mr. Bentley’s office. Nevertheless, he cannot shake the feeling that the two men’s odd reactions are connected, and that perhaps there is indeed something strange about Mrs. Drablow and her manor.



After a cozy and warm night's sleep, Arthur leaps from bed the next morning, ready to greet the day. Had he known, he says now, that that night was to be his last untroubled night for a long while, he might not have jumped out of bed so soon or been so eager to get to the funeral. Even now, safe with his family at Monk's Piece, Arthur knows deep down that he has never in his life slept as soundly as he did that night at the Gifford Arms. Soon after, he says, his innocence was "lost forever."

Arthur eats breakfast and sets out to explore the town of Crythin Gifford. It is a beautiful day, and Arthur finds the town quite cheerful—though when he heads away from the central square, he is surprised by how small the town is and how flat and quiet the surrounding open country. Arthur realizes that the town must be quite dreary in inclement weather, but as he believes he is only staying for a day or two, he feels quite comfortable as he takes it all in.

Arthur returns to the inn to find a note from Mr. Jerome—the man Mr. Bentley arranged to be Arthur's companion at the funeral and guide in Crythin Gifford—stating that he will collect Arthur at ten-forty and bring him to the funeral. At the appointed time, Mr. Jerome arrives, and as the two make their way through the streets towards the funeral, Arthur observes the man. Mr. Jerome is short and middle-aged, blandly formal and "shuttered," though courteous and conversational.

As the men approach the church, Arthur asks if Mrs. Drablow is to be buried in the churchyard or a family plot. Mr. Jerome is silent for a moment, and then admits that though there is a family grave, it is not in the churchyard—and is "unsuitable" for present use, anyway. The men are the first to arrive at the church, and wait solemnly for the funeral car—Arthur resisting all the while the urge to ask more about the Drablow family and their mysterious burial ground.

The funeral is melancholy, and Arthur finds himself "inexpressibly sad." Towards the end of the funeral, Arthur hears a rustling behind him. He turns and catches a glimpse of a woman dressed head-to-toe in black. Arthur notes that her elaborate mourning garb has "rather gone out of fashion." Arthur cannot see the woman's face clearly due to her bonnet-style hat, but senses that she is suffering a "terrible wasting disease," as she is very pale, with sunken eyes. Arthur has heard of conditions which waste one away, but is surprised to see that despite the woman's frailty she does not look very old—perhaps thirty years of age. As the services conclude, the woman slips out to the churchyard, and leans against a headstone near Mrs. Drablow's open grave.

The older Arthur's editorial interjection in this passage demonstrates that he laments the loss of his innocence greatly, and sees this as the last truly pure, happy moment he ever had. Such an idea is quite bleak, but gives his audience an idea of just how traumatizing an ordeal he is in for.



Arthur sees the town as a strange, intriguing, and slightly amusing oddity. He seems grateful to only be here for a short while, and disdainful of daily life here—little does he know that this town will come to figure in his consciousness very greatly.



Mr. Jerome, like Daily and the landlord, seems to be closed-off in a noticeable way. There is something odd about this town indeed—Arthur just hasn't been able to put his finger on what it is quite yet. With each new character Arthur meets, Susan Hill deepens the story's sense of creeping dread.



Mr. Jerome clearly does not want to discuss Mrs. Drablow, her family, or her estate—Arthur notes the man's touchiness, but still burns with questions about the odd woman's life and the dark cloud that seems to surround any mention of her.



Arthur feels sad for the titular woman in black rather than horrified. Rational and unassuming, Arthur chalks up her horrific appearance to illness, and attributes the sense of emptiness and dread beyond words he feels during the service—and in the woman's close proximity—to sadness at the idea of someone's life ending. The woman is clearly a ghostly or at least uncanny presence, but Arthur does not seem to realize this yet.



Arthur, Jerome, and the rest of the gathered mourners join the woman in black at the graveside, and Arthur finds he cannot look away from the woman, who, despite her current affliction, bears “some lingering hint of a not inconsiderable former beauty.” As Mrs. Drablow’s coffin is lowered into the ground, Arthur bends his head and shuts his eyes in a brief prayer. When he looks up again, the service is over, and the sick-looking woman is nowhere to be seen.

While talking with the other mourners at the church gate, a strange sight catches Arthur’s eye. There is a school next to the church and, lined up along the iron railing which separates the church from the school, are twenty or so children standing silent and motionless, presumably having watched the entire outdoor portion of the service. Arthur attempts to smile at one of the children, but the boy does not smile back.

As Mr. Jerome and Arthur depart the churchyard, Arthur remarks that he hopes the “dreadfully unwell” woman in black from the service can find her way home all right. Mr. Jerome frowns, uncertain of whom Arthur is talking about. Arthur asks Jerome if he saw the wan-looking woman in the tall bonnet, but Mr. Jerome is silent, and actually turns pale. Arthur asks Mr. Jerome if he is all right, and Mr. Jerome answers only that he did not see a young woman.

Arthur looks over his shoulder, back towards the churchyard; the woman in black is there again, standing at the edge of the grave. Arthur supposes she must have concealed herself until the procession left the yard so that she could be alone at the grave. Arthur wonders fleetingly what connection the two women have, and then points the woman out to Mr. Jerome with his finger. Jerome grabs Arthur’s wrist in a tight grip. Arthur wonders if Jerome is having some kind of seizure, and asks him to release his grip. Mr. Jerome quickly apologizes for his “passing faintness,” and suggests the two walk back towards his own office.

By the time the men get back to town, Arthur notices that Mr. Jerome is looking much better. Arthur asks if Jerome is going to accompany him over to Eel Marsh House, but Jerome declines. He advises Arthur to cross the causeway any time after one o’clock in the afternoon—a man named Keckwick, who has always been the “go-between” to the estate, will come and collect him, and then bring him back to the inn in the evening. Arthur tells Jerome that there is quite a bit of business to attend to at the house, and suggests he might just stay at the house for the sake of convenience; Mr. Jerome “carefully” suggests that Arthur will be more comfortable at the inn. The two men shake hands, and Arthur goes off to the great luncheon.

Arthur is studying the woman very closely—and so it is odd when he does not even notice her slipping away during the service. Something is strange about this woman, and yet Arthur continues to justify the odd, uncanny nature of both her looks and her presence.



The children in the schoolyard next door deepen the sense of dread and terror—clearly, the children have seen the woman, too, and are transfixed and mortified by her. Again, Arthur comes up with a rational explanation, believing they have simply been struck by watching the funerary services.



Mr. Jerome’s intense fear in this passage clearly comes from the fact that he knows exactly what Arthur is talking about—without, obviously, having seen the woman at all. The idea that she appeared only to Arthur and the children marks her as a ghostly presence, even if Arthur is not yet ready to admit this.



Arthur is spooked by the woman’s sudden reappearance—but, again, chooses to find a way in the depths of his mind to rationalize her odd behavior. Mr. Jerome can barely control his traumatized reactions to any mention of the woman. It is unclear whether he can see her when Arthur points her out, but what is obvious is that he wants to get away from her as soon as possible and prevent Arthur from drawing attention to her—or perhaps drawing attention from her.



Though Jerome is feeling better himself, he is still guarded when it comes to talk of Eel Marsh House. He will not tell Arthur what is wrong, but instead cautiously and indirectly suggests Arthur avoid spending any length of time at the manor. Arthur, despite having witnessed Jerome’s intense terror, seems as if he will not exactly heed the man’s advice—though Jerome’s past clearly involves prior experience with the mysterious woman in black.



The lunch is a joyous, noisy occasion, and though Arthur initially feels out of place in his stuffy funeral garb, the farmers make him feel right at home. One tells Arthur that Samuel Daily purchased a very big parcel of land at the auction earlier—Daily is a large landowner, and is, the farmer implies, disliked throughout town due to this fact. Arthur proudly states that as he is the solicitor looking after the affairs of Mrs. Drablow, he may very well be selling her estate to Daily sometime soon. To this proclamation, the farmer says nothing.

Arthur notices the time, and makes to get up to head back to the inn and change before it is time to head over to Eel Marsh. His neighbor solemnly speaks up and warns him that Arthur will not find anybody in town—not even Samuel Daily—who will have anything to do with Eel Marsh House, or any of Mrs. Drablow’s assorted other properties. Sick of everyone’s “dark mutterings” on the subject of Mrs. Drablow and Eel Marsh, Arthur impatiently asks why that might be. The farmer does not answer, though, and instead turns away.

CHAPTER 5: ACROSS THE CAUSEWAY

Keckwick pulls up outside the Gifford Arms in a shabby **pony trap**. Arthur was expecting a car and driver, but is equally eager to take a ride in the small buggy. He climbs up in alongside Keckwick and the two make their way out of the square and down the lane leading to the church. As they pass it, Arthur remembers the sick-looking woman in black, but his thoughts drift elsewhere as the journey continues.

Beyond town, Arthur can see hardly anything but the bright clear sky and the “sheer and startling” beauty of the marshes. As the **pony trap** draws near to the Nine Lives Causeway, Arthur realizes it is little more than a narrow strip of land lapped at on either side by water. Halfway across, Arthur can see Eel Marsh House rising in the distance—it is perched on a spit of land situated a bit higher than the causeway, so that during high tide it effectively becomes an island.

The carriage arrives at Eel Marsh House, and Arthur feels a blend of excitement and alarm. Arthur hops out of the cart and asks Keckwick how long before high tide—Keckwick says it comes in at about five in the evening. Arthur asks if Keckwick will wait outside the house for him while he works inside, but as his answer, Keckwick pulls on his pony’s rein and heads back across the causeway.

This passage establishes that the farmers, though convivial and friendly, see Samuel Daily as a bigwig and even a little bit of a threat. Arthur, sensing this, attempts to joke about becoming involved in a transaction with Mr. Daily, as he himself is in charge of settling up Eel Marsh House. The joke falls on deaf—or frightened—ears, however, as the farmers barely acknowledge his statement.



It is clear from this interaction that something very terrible is preventing everyone in town from openly discussing Eel Marsh House—it is obvious to everyone but Arthur that the house should not even be mentioned, let alone visited, bought, or sold.



Throughout the novel, pony traps indicate travel between worlds—Keckwick’s arrival in a pony trap to take Arthur to Eel Marsh House signifies that the manor is part of a different realm which Arthur cannot—or should not—enter alone.



The marshes themselves seem to be a sort of transition between worlds. They are certainly otherworldly in appearance—though flat, strange, and potentially dangerous, though, they strike Arthur as beautiful and ethereal.



Keckwick is a man of few words—his sole purpose, it seems, is to ferry souls between “worlds,” even if only the world of Crythin Gifford and the world of Eel Marsh House. It is also significant that Keckwick seems to be the only local willing to even venture this close to Eel Marsh House.



Before going inside, wanting to take in the “mysterious, shimmering beauty” of the land, Arthur decides to explore. As he walks about, he feels his senses becoming heightened, and thinks that if he were to stay for any length of time, he would grow “addicted” to the solitude and serenity. He spots some ruins in the distance, and ventures toward them. As Arthur grows closer, he realizes that they are the ruins of an old chapel; exploring the area, he comes upon a small burial ground containing about fifty gravestones. There is a decayed, abandoned air about the graveyard, and Arthur turns to head up to the house—as he does, he takes one final glance around the burial ground and spots the wasted woman in black from the funeral.

The woman in black is dressed in the same mourning garb she wore earlier—her bonnet has been pushed back, though, and Arthur can see that her face quite resembles bare bone, and bears an expression of “desperate, yearning malevolence”; she seems to be searching for something she wants, which has been taken from her. Arthur intuits that whoever took this thing from her is the object of her hatred and loathing. As Arthur stares at the woman, he becomes possessed by fear in a way he never has been. He longs to run, but feels paralyzed by fright—just as he fears he will drop dead of terror, the woman slips behind a gravestone, goes through a gap in the low stone wall around the burial ground, and disappears from sight.

Arthur feels his strength flooding back—he is actually angry with the woman in black for inspiring such fear in him, and decides to follow her, ask some questions as to who she is, and get to the bottom of everything. He follows her through the gap, but comes out on the other side to find that the grass of the yard meets with the sand which separates the estate from the water of the marsh. There is no sign of the woman—nor of any place she might have concealed herself. Arthur feels frightened one again, and begins running, longing to put the graveyard, the ruins, and the woman as far behind him as he can. He does not look back until he reaches the house.

At the front door, Arthur fumbles with the key, but soon gets inside and slams the great door shut behind him. Arthur does not move for a long while—he wants company, light, warmth, and an explanation above all. He is more curious than afraid, now, and feels “consumed with desire” to understand who or what he saw in the graveyard. Arthur has never believed in ghosts until this day—after his encounter with the woman in black, however, and sensing something emanating from her presence, Arthur finds himself converted. He knows that though he does not believe in ghosts or spirits, there is no other explanation for the woman’s presence.

Arthur, intrepid as ever, decides to do some exploring and figure out what’s what at Eel Marsh House. Though the mention of a Drablow burial plot clearly spooked Mr. Jerome, when Arthur comes upon a graveyard, he goes for it headlong—only to wind up face-to-face with the terrifying visage of the woman in black, who has seemingly followed Arthur here—or perhaps it is he who has followed her.



This encounter with the woman reveals more about her than the previous encounter at the graveside. Arthur can now sense something terrible emanating from the woman—whereas at the funeral he thought his sudden sadness and rush of emotion was due to the nature of the event, he now realizes that the woman carries a dark, hateful energy. Although it’s unclear what the woman’s story is or why she’s wandering around the manor, this encounter begins to explain why Jerome was so terrified by the mere mention of her.



As soon as the woman is gone, Arthur feels like himself again. This strange effect she has on him mirrors but does not exactly imitate the effect she had on the children in the schoolyard. Despite the sense of dread and despair she inspired in him, Arthur is—foolishly, no doubt—determined to follow her and learn more about her, before realizing that to see her again would be to surrender to the paralyzing fear she created within him, and deciding to flee instead.



Arthur’s fear has again dissipated, and he is overcome with a rational need to know the truth. All the strangeness he has encountered in Crythin Gifford thus far—and all the fear and suspicion surrounding Eel Marsh House—seems to be directly connected to this ghostly woman.



Somewhere in the house, a clock strikes, dragging Arthur from his thoughts of the woman in black. He begins moving through the house, turning his mind to the business at hand—uncovering Mrs. Drablow’s important documents. Arthur had created an image in his mind of a cobwebbed, filthy house stuffed top to toe with “the debris of a recluse”—but as he wanders through the house, he finds that it is mostly in order, though there is the smell of damp and must everywhere.

Arthur unlocks several bookcases, desks, and bureaus—all of which are stuffed with bundles and boxes of papers. Arthur becomes overwhelmed as he realizes that Mrs. Drablow has kept meticulous hold on receipts, letters, legal documents, and notebooks that will take forever to sort through—everything, no matter how worthless-looking, must be examined. Arthur realizes that it is pointless to start going through it all now so late in the day, and instead walks through the house, looking through each room. He begins to wonder how Mrs. Drablow endured such isolation here—his previous fantasies of enjoying the silence and stillness evaporate. He has had enough solitude for one day, and though there is an hour before Keckwick’s return, Arthur decides to begin walking back towards town rather than linger in the house any longer.

CHAPTER 6: THE SOUND OF A PONY AND TRAP

Arthur walks quickly down the drive, glancing over his shoulder to see if the woman in black is following him. At the same time, though, he has half-persuaded himself that there is a logical reason for the woman’s presence both at Mrs. Drablow’s funeral and her mansion, and that she is flesh and blood rather than a ghost.

Arthur sets off down the causeway and finds that though underfoot the path is dry, the tide is indeed beginning to come in. Arthur feels small and insignificant against the expansive marsh landscape, and becomes lost in his own thoughts. He does not realize immediately that he can no longer see very far in front of him; he turns around to look back toward Eel Marsh House, but finds that a thick **sea-mist** has come up and obscured both the path ahead and the way behind. Arthur walks slowly onward, until he realizes that the most “sensible” thing to do is to retrace his steps back toward the house and wait there until the mist clears, or Keckwick returns to fetch him.

Arthur seems to work himself up about the wrong things. He’d conjured an image in his mind of Eel Marsh House being dirty, drab, and odious; however, the physical atmosphere of the house appears to be the least of his worries.



As Arthur pokes around the house, he realizes that Mrs. Drablow was perhaps just an oddball after all—she has kept meticulous hold on some very unnecessary things. The way Mrs. Drablow held onto receipts, notebooks, and documents mirrors how the woman in black herself is holding onto some things, too—even from beyond the grave. Arthur’s fear at realizing how deeply isolated he is here at Eel Marsh creeps into his bones, and he experiences an intense desire to leave—as he sets out onto the marsh, he decides it’s better to face whatever lies out there than whatever lurks in here.



Arthur is both traumatized and desperate to convince himself that the fear he feels is unfounded. He searches over and over again for logical explanations, even though so much of what he has heard and witnessed in Crythin Gifford speaks to the contrary—and to the existence of spirits, ghosts, and haunts.



One of the sudden sea-mists Samuel Daily warned Arthur about has rolled in—of course, portending trouble and doom. Arthur, however, stubborn and ignorant as ever, decides to press onward—until even he is forced to admit that the fog combined with the threat of the rising marsh water poses a physical challenge he cannot overcome.



The walk back is a nightmare—Arthur focuses on putting one foot in front of the other, and tries not to look up, as each time he does he becomes disoriented. Before long he begins to hear the sound of Keckwick’s **pony trap** coming towards him and feels relieved, but soon realizes that the sound seems to be moving farther away instead of nearer. After a few minutes, he hears the unmistakable sound of the “neighing and whinnying of a horse in panic,” followed by the sobs of a young child. Arthur realizes that Keckwick must be ferrying a child with him, and has become stuck in the marsh, dragged under by the pull of the incoming tide.

Arthur begins shouting, and tries to run forward, but knows that to move farther down the causeway would be to risk his own life—he may not be able to help Keckwick or the child even if he finds them, and may even be sucked into the marsh himself. He decides to return to Eel Marsh House, light all the lamps, and try to signal the stranded travelers from there.

As soon as Arthur is back inside the house, he collapses into a chair and begins sobbing. After some time, he gets up and goes about the house, switching on every light he can find. He finds himself some brandy, pours a drink, and lingers in the sitting room to try and calm himself. Eventually, he falls asleep, and sometime later is awoken by the clangorous ringing of a bell. He is unsure of how long he has slept—he has lost all sense of time. He realizes that someone is ringing the bell at the front door. He stumbles through the hall and answers the door—he is shocked to see that Keckwick is standing there, and, behind him on the driveway, is the **pony trap**. The marshes are still and silent, and there is no trace of **fog** or dampness in the air.

Keckwick laments that the only thing to do when such a **fog** rolls in is to wait it out. He explains his lateness: after he waited for the fog to dissipate, he had to wait for the tide to change. Arthur is stunned. He checks his watch and sees that it is nearly two o’ clock in the morning; the tide has begun to recede, and the causeway is visible again. Arthur feels sick and weary, disoriented by the odd hours of his nap. He thanks Keckwick for coming all the way out at this hour, but Keckwick insists he never would have left Arthur overnight.

Arthur begins to ask Keckwick how he got unstuck from the marsh, but then the horrible realization that someone other than Keckwick—someone with a child—must have been what he heard drowning in the marsh earlier. He wonders who in the world had been driving through such a treacherous place—and why.

Arthur’s desperate plan to get out of Eel Marsh House and across the causeway as soon as possible is failing him. He has encountered something frightening and even dangerous—and has isolated himself by ignoring the warning signs of the sea-mist and progressing into unknown territory, where a terrible accident seems to have taken place. Arthur realizes that if what he is hearing is really happening, he will be stranded at Eel Marsh House even longer.



Arthur is distressed and worried, but is so isolated by the thick fog and the dangerous causeway that he cannot be of any help.



Arthur is deeply distressed by what he has heard. He believes—rationally as ever—that he has just on some level been witness to a horrible accident, and the loss of innocent life; unable to bear the pain, he drinks himself to sleep, only to wake up and find that Keckwick made it across the causeway after all. Arthur realizes that what he heard must have either been a hallucination or some other trick of the marsh.



Keckwick is well-versed in traversing the causeway; he knows its secrets and tricks, and knows just as well that to leave someone overnight at Eel Marsh House is a great cruelty—and perhaps even a great danger.



Arthur understands that Keckwick was never the noise he heard at all—which makes him wonder who was trying to cross the causeway. Though clearly spooked, Arthur still stubbornly assumes that the noises were coming from real-life people and not ghosts.



Arthur shuts off all the lights in the house and then gets into the **pony trap**. He and Keckwick make their way across the causeway, and Arthur falls into an uneasy half-sleep. He thinks of the horrible things he has seen and heard all in one day, and realizes that the woman in black must be a ghostly spirit after all. He wonders if the pony and carriage he heard sinking in the marsh were ghostly apparitions long-dead, as well. Arthur convinces himself that this is the case, and it actually allows him to feel calmer knowing that he has heard ghosts. Though he does not want to return to Eel Marsh House the following day, he decides to wait until the morning to figure out how to broach the topic with Mr. Bentley.

Back at the inn, Arthur crawls into bed. The landlord, relieved to have Arthur back even at such a late hour, has promised him he will not be disturbed early in the morning. Arthur lies down and falls into a restless sleep, suffering all night horrible dreams of the terrified whinny of the pony, the calling of the ghostly child, and the dark, hovering presence of the woman in black.

CHAPTER 7: MR. JEROME IS AFRAID

When Arthur awakes in the morning, he feels weary and ill—his nerves and imagination are on edge. He rises from bed, takes a hot bath, and begins feeling a little bit better. As he eats breakfast, he reflects on the previous evening. Coming back from the marsh, he swore he would have nothing more to do with the Drablow estate at all, and would return to London at first opportunity. Now, in the light of day, he does not feel inclined to run away.

The landlord comes to clear away Arthur's dishes, and Arthur apologizes for coming in so late the previous evening. The landlord says that Arthur's late arrival was better than "an uncomfortable night anywhere else." Arthur tells the landlord he wants to take a long walk; the landlord suggests Arthur borrow a bicycle, and Arthur is cheered by the idea of bicycling. First, however, he wants to speak with Mr. Jerome about sending an office boy to Eel Marsh with Arthur so that he does not have to face the manor alone again. Arthur vows to return to the house only to sort through the papers inside, returning well before dark and not exploring the grounds any further under any circumstances.

At last, Arthur is no longer trying to make rationally minded justifications for the horrific and unsettling things he has seen; he accepts that there are spirits in and around Eel Marsh House, and that he has been victimized by the woman in black. He is unsure of what to do or who to tell now that he has admitted the truth to himself, but as he returns to the "real" world across the causeway, it becomes clear that Arthur has been changed by the things he's seen.



Arthur has been deeply traumatized by the things he has experienced at Eel Marsh House. His distress is palpable to the landlord as well, who clearly has some understanding of what Arthur has been through just by knowing he visited Eel Marsh House.



Things are always more frightening at night—in the light of day, Arthur second-guesses the intensity of his fears and the depths of his trauma, and tries to convince himself that things at Eel Marsh House weren't all that bad, and that to run away would be cowardice.



Despite the wild horror he experienced the previous evening, Arthur believes that he can work up the courage—and manipulate time in his favor—and visit Eel Marsh House once more. He is determined to complete his work, out of his own sense of pride and out of an obligation to his employer and his firm alike.



Arthur arrives at Mr. Jerome's office and knocks at the door. Mr. Jerome answers; it is clear from the look on his face that he is not pleased to see Arthur, but lets him in nonetheless. Arthur explains that there is a massive amount of paperwork inside the Eel Marsh House, and that in order to prevent taking up residence in Crythin Gifford for a long time, he requires some help sorting through it. Mr. Jerome tells Arthur that he cannot help him—he is on his own at the office. Arthur inquires whether there is any young man in town who wants to earn some money by assisting him, but Jerome insists there is no one suitable.

Arthur tells Mr. Jerome that he understands what Jerome is getting at—there is not a soul in town or out of it willing to spend any time at all at Eel Marsh House “for fear of encountering what [Arthur has] already encountered.” Arthur reveals that he saw the woman in black again, and asks if the graveyard outside of Eel Marsh House is the Drablow family plot. Jerome's face has taken on a sickly gray pallor, and Arthur understands how seriously Jerome is affected by any mention of the woman in black. Arthur considers asking Jerome to tell him more about her, and about what horrors Jerome has seen or heard of at the house, but decides against it—he knows that when he returns to Eel Marsh, he will have to rely on his own senses, and nothing more.

Arthur takes his leave, and Mr. Jerome expresses the hope that Arthur will not encounter the woman in black again. Arthur, putting on a show of carefree cheerfulness, urges Jerome not to worry about him, and hurries from the office.

Arthur returns to the inn and composes a letter to Mr. Bentley. He reveals that he has discovered a hoard of papers in the old house and will be in town for longer than expected—perhaps the whole week. He makes an offhand remark about Eel Marsh House's “bad reputation,” and warns Mr. Bentley that this will make it difficult to secure any help. He puts the letter on a table in the lobby, with outgoing mail, and then takes the landlord's bicycle out for a ride.

Arthur cycles out of town, intending to go straight to the next village over to have lunch at another country inn. Once out of town, though, he cannot help looking back at the beautiful marshes, which hold a strange allure despite the horrors he knows lurk within them. Arthur understands that his emotions have become volatile and extreme in the short time since he arrived, and wonders whether his friends and family will notice the change within him when he returns to London.

Arthur wants to casually ask Mr. Jerome for some help up at the manor, but has underestimated the power of the horrors there to intimidate the town into paralysis and fear. Eel Marsh House's reputation has isolated it from the rest of town—no one will even set foot there for fear of whatever deep terrors lie within it.



Arthur attempts to call Mr. Jerome's bluff, in a way, and reveal the horrors of what he has seen as a way of leveling with the man—but Arthur soon realizes that taking this tack only isolates him from Jerome even more. Jerome is seriously, deeply disturbed by any mention of the woman in black—and this terrifies Arthur, who believes that he must return to the manor and face it, even if it means encountering the woman again and subjecting himself to his own worst, most morbid fears.



Arthur senses how deeply perturbed Mr. Jerome is—but to properly acknowledge Jerome's fear would be to acknowledge his own, and jeopardize his mission.



Rather than writing to Mr. Bentley to express the sense of distress he feels and ask for help, Arthur acts like everything is all right—if a little tedious and vaguely spooky. This demonstrates his reluctance to admit even to himself the magnitude of horror he has faced down in Crythin Gifford.



Arthur attempts to lighten his day—and his mood—with a jaunt through the countryside, but is psychologically pulled back to the marshy, damp, eerie world of Eel Marsh House. He knows that an irreversible change has taken place within him, and on some level fears that this will isolate him from the people he knows in London upon his return.



CHAPTER 8: SPIDER

After a four-hour jaunt to the next town over, Arthur returns to Crythin Gifford feeling positively aglow. He feels like a new man—he is not just ready, but eager to face down the Drablow house again. In his defiant mood, he is hardly paying attention to where he’s going, and nearly steers his bike straight into Samuel Daily’s motor car.

Samuel Daily lowers the window and asks Arthur if he has been out to Eel Marsh; Arthur proudly answers that he has. There is a brief silence between the two men before Arthur begins insisting that he is “enjoying” the challenge of cleaning out the house. Daily warns Arthur that he is “whistling in the dark,” and invites him over to dinner at seven o’clock that evening. He urges Arthur to get instructions to his house from the landlord, and then sits back as his driver pulls away.

Back at the hotel, Arthur begins making arrangements for the next day or so—he asks for the landlord to ready a basket of food for him to take over to Eel Marsh, and procures from town some tea, coffee, bread, biscuits, and matches himself. He purchases a torch lantern and heavy rain boots, wanting to be prepared for anything. When he tells the landlord that he plans to spend tomorrow night and the night after at Eel Marsh, the landlord is silent; Arthur knows that they are both remembering the frenzied state in which Arthur returned to the inn just the previous evening.

Arthur arrives at Samuel Daily’s house for dinner and is impressed by the imposing estate. He thinks that both Daily and his wife seem “ill at ease” in their grand home—they clearly do not come from money, and now that they have a lot of it, they seem unsure of what to do with it all. Nevertheless, they serve Arthur a delicious meal, and Arthur himself feels very at home. Daily is downright gleeful as he recounts the tale of his “rising fortune” to Arthur over dinner, and Arthur begins confiding in Daily about his own life back in London.

After dinner, Mrs. Daily goes up to bed, and Arthur and Samuel Daily drink port and whiskey in the study. As Daily pours Arthur’s first drink, he warns Arthur that he’d be a “fool” to go on with his business at Eel Marsh. Arthur replies that he’d never “turn tail and run” from a job, but Daily grows serious, asking Arthur if he experienced anything strange at the house. Arthur launches into the full story of his experience the day before, but concludes that he is more than prepared to return to the manor—and to encounter the ghost of the wasted-faced woman in black again.

Arthur has, over the course of a few short hours, convinced himself that he is powerful and capable enough to return to Eel Marsh House and conquer whatever lies within it.



Arthur, fresh off an enjoyable bike ride to the next town over, feels emboldened when he runs into Daily again. He is proud to share the “challenges” he has faced at Eel Marsh House—and at the same time, no doubt subconsciously desperate for connection with a familiar face in light of the fear and horror he has recently experienced.



Arthur has a fastidious, almost manic excitement about him as he prepares for his grand return to Eel Marsh House. Arthur is going to do things “right” this time—he is bringing along provisions and emergency supplies, and has convinced himself that he is capable and prepared for anything. The quiet moment of shared understanding with the landlord, however, reveals that there is a voice inside Arthur that knows better—a voice he is not listening to.



Daily himself is a stock character of the Victorian Gothic genre; a kindly, wealthy benefactor of sorts who guides the protagonist along his way. Hill uses Daily to represent the ease Arthur could enjoy if only he would give up on Eel Marsh House; Arthur, though, will of course return to the manor, even against the advice of the wealthy, powerful, and knowledgeable mentor figure Samuel Daily.



Daily wants to warn Arthur of just how bad things are at Eel Marsh, and even attempts to belittle him to keep him from returning. Arthur, though, will not abandon his pride. As he recounts the horrors he faced at the manor, he is almost bragging to Daily, attempting to assert the fact that he remains in control of the situations there.



Unable to change Arthur's mind, Samuel Daily offers to have his driver bring Arthur back to the inn; Arthur says he prefers to walk. Daily tells Arthur to take his dog, Spider—a small but sturdy terrier—back to the manor with him in case of trouble. At Daily's command, Spider sticks close to Arthur's heels and follows him all the way back to the inn. In a strange way, Arthur is looking forward to tomorrow.

Arthur has had a pleasant day today, away from Eel Marsh House and even from Crythin Gifford—this, along with Daily's hospitality, comfortable home, and offer of Spider, has lulled Arthur into a false sense of security. Hill uses his contentment and even excitement to build further upon her readers' sense of dread.



CHAPTER 9: IN THE NURSERY

Arthur awakes the next morning having slept fitfully—Spider has been at the foot of the bed the whole night through, and Arthur predicts he will be very glad of her company once they arrive at Eel Marsh. At nine, the landlord informs Arthur he has a phone call—it is Mr. Bentley, who tells Arthur that despite the odd-sounding tone of his letter, he must stay and continue work at the Drablow house until he has made some sense of the papers. By nine thirty in the morning, Arthur has packed up his bicycle basket and is on the road to Eel Marsh.

The day begins normally enough, though Arthur, despite his cushy night at the inn, has barely slept. The phone call from Mr. Bentley makes him feel as if he has to return to Eel Marsh House and must push away whatever doubt or dread had poked through in the night.



Back at the manor, Arthur works at creating a more “domestic” environment for himself to work in. He washes and dries some cutlery, stores his provisions in the pantry, and airs out some clean linens and blankets. He opens some windows and sets up a bin for disposing of unimportant papers, and sits down at a desk with a pot of tea to begin working. It is tedious sorting through all of Mrs. Drablow's papers, which include receipts, prescriptions, letters, Christmas cards, and even shopping lists. Arthur tosses everything but the letters, and, at around two o'clock in the afternoon, takes Spider outside for a little break.

Arthur is determined to conquer Eel Marsh House, and as soon as he returns he sets to making it a more hospitable environment. He is doing so partly to stave off the creeping dread and sense of horror the house engenders within him, to convince himself that he can assert control over his narrative rather than fall victim again to fear.



The air is crisp and fresh, and, feeling emboldened, Arthur returns to the little graveyard. He wanders among the headstones, trying to read some of the names, but everything is so weathered he can hardly make heads or tails of them. He is able to read “Drablow” on a couple of newer stones, and understands that this is the family plot Jerome spoke of.

Arthur is brave (or foolish) enough to return to the burial ground—the place where he last encountered the horrifying woman in black. He is toying with fate, and tempting trouble in doing so, adding to the slow build of dread and horror despite the seemingly uneventful day Arthur is having so far.



Arthur returns to the house, brews some more tea, and settles down again to his dull papers. As the evening settles in and the sky grows dark, Arthur lights more fires and lamps but continues working into the night. At the rate he's going, he thinks, he will be through by the end of another day and a half at the most. After eating a simple dinner, he locks up the windows throughout the house and heads to bed.

Everything at Eel Marsh House is—at least for the afternoon—more or less normal. Arthur even feels optimistic about the work, and tells himself that he will not have to stay at Eel Marsh much longer and will in fact be able to complete the task he set out to do.



As Arthur prepares for sleep, he feels in a rather calm and unexcitable state of mind. The previous day's events have nearly left his mind, and he is bolstered by the rather pleasant and uneventful day he's just had. Arthur begins reading, and the dog settles down to sleep on a rug. At some point, he drifts off, and is awoken by a strange noise some time later. He realizes that the strange noise is Spider—she is at the door, every hair on her body standing on end, and she is emitting a low growl. Arthur sits up in bed, frightened, and as he does, he hears a faint, muffled bumping noise coming from somewhere else inside the house.

Arthur gets out of bed, though he feels shaky and nervous. He musters all his courage and opens the bedroom door—Spider takes off running down the hall, sniffing at each door, grumbling in her throat. Arthur hears the bumping sound again, at the far end of the hallway. He and Spider make their way down the hall to the end of the passageway; at the door, Spider again grows tense and begins growling. The door has no keyhole—Arthur has not opened it yet, and has no idea what's inside. He hears the sound inside of something gently bumping on the floor. It is a familiar sound, but one that Arthur cannot quite place. He tells himself that there is simply a rat or bird in the room, which has fallen down the chimney and cannot get out.

Arthur hears another, fainter sound behind him, this time towards the front of the house. He turns away from the locked door and goes back towards his bedroom—there is nothing disturbed within it at all. He realizes that the sound is coming from outside—he looks out the window, but can't see or hear anything but the ruffling of the breeze in the reeds.

Arthur returns to the locked door, but finds that the room has gone silent. Arthur tries to open the door, but finds that it is still locked. He returns to bed and reads two more chapters of his book—he cannot, however, fall back asleep.

In the morning, the weather has changed—the air is damp and cold, and a thick **fog** has settled around the house. Arthur lets Spider out, builds a fire, takes a bath, and begins feeling like his “everyday self.” He goes back to the locked room, but hears no strange sound coming from within. At nine in the morning, Arthur takes his bicycle and goes back into town for more food. He speaks pleasantly with Mr. Jerome on the street and does not mention Eel Marsh House. At the inn, he receives a fond letter from Stella, and by the time he cycles back to the marshes he is whistling and feeling fine.

Just as Arthur tried to convince himself that the woman in black was not an apparition, he now tries to convince himself that because he has not seen or heard anything strange at the house all day that the terrors are over. All of this is quickly dashed in the middle of the night, when Spider—her heightened animal senses engaged—detects something dangerous somewhere in the house.



Hill builds a sense of visceral, spine-chilling horror here through Arthur, who is narrating his memories from a time in the future—a time when he has just listened to his own step-children's hair-raising ghost stories. The metatextual work happening in this passage as Arthur revisits one of the most terrifying moments of his life makes this moment's creeping Gothic dread stand out.



The house—or whatever or whoever haunts it—seems to be playing tricks on Arthur, attempting to blindside him and wear him out.



The terror is over, but Arthur is so traumatized that he is robbed of sleep. No longer is Arthur excited or confident about his stay at the house.



A fog has rolled in to Eel Marsh House, once again portending trouble and even doom—yet Arthur remains oblivious to this sign, and even feels cheerful as he goes about his day. The high of having survived a night at Eel Marsh House gives him a boosted but false sense of confidence.



Back at the manor, Arthur returns to Mrs. Drablow's papers. He has found one interesting-looking packet of documents, and as he reads through them, he finds that they are all written in the same hand. They are letters dated between February sixty years ago and the summer of the following year. The letters are often addressed to "Dearest Alice" and signed "J" or "Jennet." The letters reveal that Jennet, a young woman and a blood relative of Mrs. Drablow, was unmarried and with child. She was sent away, and rarely made mention of her child's father. In Scotland, she bore a son, and wrote of him with "desperate, clinging affection." The letters ceased for several months, but started up again in "passionate outrage" as Jennet faced pressure to give up her child for adoption. Jennet revealed her desire to "kill us both before I let him go."

The letters soften as time goes on—Arthur intuits that Alice and her husband agreed to take in Jennet's child and raise him as their own. The final letter urges Alice to love the child, but to remember that he belongs to Jennet alone, and will "never" truly be Alice's. In the same packet of letters, Arthur finds a legal document declaring that the son of Jennet Humfrye—Nathaniel Pierston—had been adopted by Alice and her husband, Morgan Thomas Drablow. Arthur is about to open the rest of the documents in the packet when he hears Spider's low growl again.

Arthur turns around and sees Spider at the door, tense and growling. He is terrified, but remembers his decision to confront the ghosts of Eel Marsh House—he is afraid that the harder he runs from them, the more they will come for him. Arthur opens the parlor door and Spider runs up the staircase, growling all the way, to the locked room at the end of the hall. The bumping noise is coming from within once again. Arthur is determined to break in, but cannot find anything to get through the door with. He steps outside with his torch to look for an axe he spotted earlier in the outhouse.

Arthur retrieves the axe, and is making his way back to the house when he hears the sound of pony's hooves. He goes around to the front of the house, and the noise intensifies—Arthur realizes that the sound of the **pony trap** drowning in the muck he heard before was indeed a ghostly apparition. Arthur stands still waiting out the pattern of noises—the hooves, the squelching of the muck, the crying of a child, and a woman's scream of terror.

The "desperate, clinging affection" contained within the letters Arthur finds are reminiscent, in a strange, through-the-looking-glass way, of the passion and desperate need Arthur sensed when he encountered the woman in black in the Drablow family burial ground. The murderous desires within the later letters contribute to the uncanny sense of familiarity between Jennet and the wasted-faced woman, causing Arthur, perhaps, to wonder—or to willfully ignore—the similarities.



The letters vacillate between sadness, empathy, and violence rather unpredictably, and the last letter's tone suggests that, whoever Jennet was—and whatever she has become—a lingering desire for revenge and justice usurped whatever emotions of goodwill and love were once within her.



Arthur is so determined to confront the ghosts of Eel Marsh House that, here, his bravery begins to slip into foolishness. Despite Spider's clear warnings that something terrible is afoot, Arthur worries that ignoring the haunting will only worsen it. Rather than simply extricating himself from the situation and preventing further harm, Arthur seeks to traumatize himself further.



Even though this time Arthur knows what is coming and has nearly memorized the sequence of noises associated with the pony trap accident, the moment is perhaps even more horrific for this reason; the event is repeating itself over and over on a loop as if to preserve the memory of the event in a twisted, repetitious ode.



Arthur is deeply distressed by the realization that such a dreadful thing did actually take place on Eel Marsh, and that the event repeats itself over and over in some ghostly realm. Arthur realizes that Spider is at his side when she lets out a long howling call. Arthur attempts to get Spider to come back inside, but she will not be called; Arthur picks her up and carries her back in, and when they are back inside the house, Spider fearfully sticks to Arthur's heels. Spider's fear motivates Arthur to remain in control of his own emotions. He pets the dog to soothe her, but soon she bolts back upstairs. Arthur follows her down the hall to the locked room at the end—and finds that the door is standing wide open.

Arthur can still hear the bumping noise in the room, but is too afraid to proceed down the hall. After standing immobile for several minutes, he identifies the sound—it is a rocking chair. The sound of a rocker, Arthur notes, ordinarily signifies comfort, safety, and routine—even now, the noise seems to hypnotize him into state of drowsiness and rest. Recalling the comfort of his own childhood nursery drives away just for a moment the sinister, evil nature of the house.

Arthur musters the courage to go into the room and face whatever is in there. He lights his torch and heads inside—it is indeed a child's nursery. In the corner, the rocking chair is rocking gently and with gradually decreasing speed, as if someone has just got up out of it. Arthur shines his torch around the room, and is surprised to find that it is in immaculate order. There are finely laid-out clothes in the chest of drawers, as well as beautiful and numerous toys in a wardrobe. Everything is in pristine condition—not as if it has been sitting dusty and untouched for fifty years, but as if it was all just played with that very day. Though Arthur moves through the room and realizes that though there is nothing inside it to harm him, he feels a profound sense of desolation and grief.

Unable to bear the sad atmosphere any longer, Arthur leaves the room and closes the door behind him. He pours himself a brandy and goes up to bed—the nursery at the end of the hall is silent for the rest of the night.

The traumas and horrors at Eel Marsh House are throwing themselves at Arthur unceasingly, almost as if to point out how foolish he was to have come at all. As Arthur confronts the realization that a deeper, more pervasive kind of haunting is at work—one that rends the very fabric of space and time—he becomes less and less certain of his ability to conquer the manor's demons.



In this passage, Susan Hill's authorial inversions of Gothic horror narratives are at work. As Arthur slowly begins to understand what is inside the room, the horror of the moment comes not from the discovery of a monster, beast, or ghost, but from the unsettling and overturning of a deeply held comfort.



As Arthur enters the nursery for the first time, he is confronted with a confusing tableau. The horrific image of the rocker moving back and forth of its own accord unsettles his positive, comforting connotations with the object; the pristine nature of the room suggests that someone or something has preserved it for many years out of reverence for whatever child once occupied it. This cacophony of distress and tenderness is further complicated by the overwhelming atmosphere of despair in the room, which suggests something terrible happened inside of it—or to its prior occupant.



Arthur has been shaken by the night's events, but at least takes comfort in the fact that whatever is haunting the nursery seems to be done with him—for now.



CHAPTER 10: WHISTLE AND I'LL COME TO YOU

Arthur awakes abruptly in the early hours of the morning to find that a strong wind has picked up on the marsh—the windows throughout the house are rattling, wind moans and whistles through the chimneys, and the marsh is barely visible for all the **fog**. Arthur manages to doze off again, until he is catapulted back to wakefulness by the sound of a crying child somewhere out on the marsh. Arthur tells himself that there is not really a child stranded in the muck—it is a ghostly apparition—but still has trouble ignoring the cries of the long-dead ghost.

Arthur gets out of bed and goes out into the hall, preparing to go downstairs and make himself a strong drink. As he walks out onto the landing, he has the impression that someone has just gone past him on the stairs, though he has heard not even a footstep. Arthur wonders if there is in fact another human living in the house as he tries desperately to come up with a rational explanation for the strange things happening to him. He eventually settles into the knowledge that there is no one else living in the house—whoever was in the rocker and whoever just passed by him on the stairs is not “real.” At this thought, Arthur begins to wonder what “real” even means to him anymore.

Arthur, realizing he needs some light, goes back to his bedroom and retrieves the torch. He stumbles over Spider, however, and drops it—the glass within breaks. Arthur feels frustrated and comes close to weeping. He begins banging his fists on the floor until they throb. Spider comes over to him and scratches at his arm; Arthur wraps her in a hug and is comforted by her presence. Arthur knows there is a candle on the table near the bed in the nursery, and struggles to muster the courage to go down the hall, into the haunted room, and retrieve it. As he wrestles with his terror, he realizes that it will either escalate until he grows mad, or he will be able to topple it and become in even greater possession of himself than he has ever been.

Arthur gets to his feet, goes to the nursery, and retrieves the candle. Though there is nothing terrifying awaiting him in the nursery, he feels intense feelings of grief, sadness, and despair again—it is though he has, in entering the room, become another person, or at least been flooded by another person's feelings. As soon as he steps out of the room, he feels like himself again.

Arthur has been through a lot this evening—but the sudden rolling in of wind and fog suggest that there are more terrible things to come.



As the frights, horrors, and traumas Arthur is experiencing continue to escalate, his rational mind searches incessantly for factual reasons for the strange noises, feelings, and sights to no avail. Arthur has begun to accept that the nature of his reality has shifted, and will perhaps never be the same.



Arthur is beginning to lose his grip on his emotions in small ways. Shattering the torch flattens him—he is so terrified and so worn down by the fear of isolation and further traumatization that the smallest inconvenience in the “real” world becomes a life-or-death situation in the world of Eel Marsh House. Arthur worries that his condition will worsen, but tries to bolster his mood by reassuring himself that he may yet emerge from this harrowing experience stronger than ever.



There is no doubt that nursery is the epicenter of the house's haunting—it is the only room where Arthur feels an icy dread and despair, as if something (or someone) is reaching into his very soul and attempting to break him down. This mirrors the way that Arthur instantly feels dread and terror in the presence of the woman in black but feels like himself again once she's out of sight.



Arthur returns to his room and lights the candle. According to his watch, it is barely three o'clock in the morning, and he desperately hopes that the candle will last until the light of dawn. He begins reading and falls asleep eventually, waking up into a watery dawn at the sound of Spider's whines—she needs to go outside.

Arthur takes Spider out the front door. As he stands waiting for her to finish relieving herself, he decides to put on a coat and boots and go for a walk. Just then, he hears the sound of someone whistling—as if to summon a dog. Spider sets off as if after a hare, running away from the safety of the yard and into the wet marsh. Arthur knows there is no one out on the marsh whistling for Spider—it is yet another nonhuman apparition.

Arthur watches in horror as Spider is pulled into the mud. He takes off after her, risking his own life to save hers. Realizing that if he is not careful, he, too will be pulled into the muck, Arthur lies down so as to distribute his weight across the earth more evenly, and, with great difficulty, wrestles Spider from the quicksand-like mud. He eventually heaves Spider onto his chest, and the two of them lie silently, recovering from their frightening ordeal. As Arthur regains his strength, he slowly gets up and scoops Spider up in his arms. As he approaches Eel Marsh House, he looks up; in one of the upper windows, he sees the wasted-faced woman in black peering down at him. Exhausted and terrified, Arthur collapses on the front lawn as the sound of an approaching **pony trap** echoes down the causeway.

CHAPTER 11: A PACKET OF LETTERS

Arthur feels a bright light boring through his eyes, straight to his brain. The light disappears, and he opens his eyes; he is propped up on the couch in the parlor, and Samuel Daily's concerned face is looming over him. Arthur sits up, but the room spins, and he is forced to lie back down. He remembers the events of the morning; chasing Spider across the marsh, struggling to free her, and at last spying the woman in black at the nursery window.

Samuel Daily hands Arthur a glass of water and confesses that he was so worried about Arthur he could not rest, and drove his own **pony trap** out to check up on him. Arthur is relieved that the sound of the pony trap he heard coming down the causeway was real after all. Arthur is grateful, and Daily tells him to rest a bit—once he is feeling better, he should gather his things and prepare to leave. Daily insists that he will not leave Arthur alone in the house even a moment longer.

Despite his fear, Arthur is able to fall asleep for a little while. In the morning, Spider is not on edge—she is behaving like any other dog, and this brings Arthur hope that they have both made it through the night and will soon be free.



As someone—or something—in the distance calls out to Spider, it is evident that it is yet another trick of whatever haunts Eel Marsh House. This makes it seem suspicious, even malevolent—as if something is trying to take Spider away from Arthur and isolate them both.



Arthur's worst fears are confirmed—the woman in black, who up to this point seemed only to inspire dread and fear in Arthur, has now made a direct attempt on his and his companion's lives. Shattered by this knowledge, Arthur collapses, and is so deeply petrified and downtrodden that even the sound of the pony trap accident looping once more does not affect him any longer.



Arthur has survived his hellish morning, and though he is certainly worse for wear, he at last has company at Eel Marsh House. Samuel Daily has proven himself a true friend and, apart from Arthur, the bravest resident of Crythin Gifford by coming out the Marsh to rescue Arthur.



Arthur had been so traumatized by the awful sound of the ghostly pony trap accident that when he heard the approach of hooves, he resigned himself to believing that the loop had begun repeating himself, and that he would be doomed to re-experience it again and again forever. The symbol of the pony trap as a bridge between worlds works both ways—in this case, Samuel brought “reality” across the causeway to disrupt the hauntings at Eel Marsh House, if only for a moment, and save Arthur.



Arthur lies back on the sofa and wishes he could uncover the reason behind the terrible ghostly hauntings he has encountered at Eel Marsh House; more than that, he wishes he could understand how the hatred, malevolence, grief, and despair of someone else could so easily enter his own soul. Arthur does not want to leave the mystery unexplained—especially because he knows that at some point, some other poor soul will have to come back to the house and finish the work Arthur could not.

Arthur stands and begins walking around the room in an attempt to get his bearings. He confesses to Samuel Daily that he is grateful to leave the house and all the papers within it behind—though he does, for the sake of his own curiosity, wish to bring the packet of letters he was looking over the previous night along with him. With that, Daily goes through the downstairs, shutting up the windows and putting out the lamps and fires; Arthur retrieves the packet of letters and his few belongings from upstairs, no longer afraid now that he knows he is leaving Eel Marsh House. Though he is uncertain of whether he will ever return, he knows at least one thing—he will not come back here alone.

Arthur packs his belongings and leaves the bedroom—but before heading back downstairs, he cannot resist looking back down the passageway to the nursery, where the door is ajar. Reassured by Samuel Daily's presence downstairs, Arthur peers inside. The room is in a state of disarray "as might have been caused by a gang of robbers, bent on mad, senseless destruction." The bedclothes have been disturbed, the toys have been thrown about, and the clothes have been dragged from their drawers. The rocking chair, which was once in the corner, is now at the very center of the room.

Arthur climbs up into Samuel Daily's **pony trap**, and Daily sets Spider on Arthur's lap. As they move across the causeway, Arthur sits very still, as if in a trance. He looks back only once at Eel Marsh House, and does not see the woman in black in the nursery window. He faces front again, turning his eyes away from the house for what he "fervently pray[s]" is the very last time.

Back at the Daily house, Arthur finds that a large room has been prepared for him. Samuel Daily helps Arthur to bed and lets him sleep for the rest of the morning. Spider is bathed and groomed and sent up to Arthur's room to keep him company. Arthur rests, but cannot sleep; he is too disturbed by all that has befallen him. He writes a "guarded" letter to Mr. Bentley and a more detailed one to Stella, informing them of what has happened to him, though he does not reveal the full extent of his distress to either.

Arthur feels a mix of stubborn resistance and deep guilt over leaving Eel Marsh House with his job still incomplete. He does not want the cycle of terror and violence to be thrust upon some other poor soul—nor does he want to flee back to London with nothing to show for all he has endured, and with no guarantee that anyone outside of Crythin Gifford will even believe him.



Arthur, despite his twinge of reluctance, prepares to leave Eel Marsh House. Samuel Daily's quick and efficient shutting up of the house shows that he is in fact fairly desperate to leave the house quickly, whereas Arthur, it seems, still wouldn't mind tempting fate and lingering a bit longer.



Arthur, for all the trauma he has suffered in the last few days, cannot resist one last chance to confirm that all the things that have been happening to him are in fact real. The destruction of the nursery—and the open door beckoning him to bear witness to the chaos within—signal the woman in black's fury at having failed to beat Arthur. The rocking chair is placed defiantly in the middle of the room as if to symbolize the way in which his time at Eel Marsh House will come to centrally occupy Arthur's own life.



For all his curiosity, his final viewing of the interior of the nursery has rattled Arthur deeply, as evidenced by his desire to turn away from Eel Marsh House and never look back.



Even though Arthur is now safe at the Dailys' expansive, comfortable home, he remains rattled and unsettled. His letters to his familiars in London, however, are purposefully restrained; perhaps Arthur is afraid of being disbelieved, or perhaps he simply doesn't want to traumatize his boss and his fiancée in the way he himself has been.



At lunch, The Dailys are attentive and kind to Arthur, and insist that he stay with them a day or two longer and recover before returning to London. Arthur now feels no shame about leaving his job unfinished; when a man is physically threatened, he believes, to flee is cowardice, but when the supernatural threatens his very soul and sanity, retreat is “the most prudent course” by far. Though he is unashamed, Arthur does feel angry that his arrogance and confidence were proven wrong, and that whatever malevolent force haunts Eel Marsh House has bested him.

After lunch, Arthur returns to the packet of letters and begins sorting through them. He attempts to deduce who Jennet was—he realizes she must have been a blood relative of Mrs. Drablow, as evidenced by her surrender of her own child to the woman, and was likely even Alice’s sister. As Arthur reads Jennet’s letters again, he feels deeply sorry for her. After rereading them, he turns to the rest of the papers in the packet—they are three death certificates. The first is of the boy, Nathaniel Drablow, who died at six years old of drowning. The next, bearing exactly the same date, belongs to a woman named Rose Judd—the Drablows’ nurse.

Arthur feels a sickening sensation rise up from his stomach, and yet forces himself to look at the last death certificate. It belongs to Jennet Humfrye, who died a spinster at age thirty-six of “heart failure.” Agitated, Arthur calls for Spider and goes out to take a long turn outdoors. As he walks, he concentrates on the papers he has just read, and the story they illuminate. He now understands that the **pony trap** carrying Nathaniel and his nursemaid had somehow veered off into the marsh and been swallowed up. Now, on the marshes, the chilling event repeats itself again and again.

Jennet, the boy’s mother, Arthur realizes, must have died of a wasting disease twelve years later. The child’s memory was preserved in the nursery, and Jennet, in death, began haunting the room, distilling the full intensity of her grief, hatred, and desire for revenge within it. Arthur remains troubled by the force of the ghost’s emotions, and determines to relay the full story to Samuel Daily after dinner.

Back in the study after supper, Arthur finishes illuminating the tale of Eel Marsh House to Samuel Daily. He confesses that though it has been just a few days since he arrived in Crythin Gifford, he feels like “another man.” Daily admits that Arthur has been through some rough seas, and Arthur expresses his relief to be “in the calm after the storm.” Daily’s face, however, is still troubled.

Though Arthur was reluctant to leave Eel Marsh House behind even after spotting the woman in black in the nursery window, his final encounter with her spirit in the nursery seems to have rattled him out of the illusion that leaving the job behind entirely was in any way shameful.



As a fuller portrait of the story told by the letters begins to emerge, Arthur comes face to face with the complete truth of the nightmare he has just experienced. As the truth washes over him, all of the ghostly horrors and lingering trauma and grief he encountered at Eel Marsh House start to make sense—but whether this will calm or further agitate Arthur remains to be seen.



Arthur is so overwhelmed by the information the death certificates reveal that he is forced to take a walk to soothe his spirit. As the full realization of the horrors that haunt Eel Marsh House crashes over him, he comes to understand that the property is a veritable vortex of anguish and trauma that drives any who approach it mad by sucking them into its depths—much like the marsh, a force of nature which has claimed so many lives.



Though Arthur now understands the mechanics of Jennet’s story, the overwhelming power of her emotions—her anguish and malevolence—still deeply unsettle and unnerve him.



Arthur brings his story to his friend Mr. Daily at least half-hoping that Daily will share in his relief at having figured the mystery out. Daily, however, is still uneasy—and Arthur realizes with creeping dread that perhaps there is still more to be ascertained.



Arthur feels that Samuel Daily is holding something more back—perhaps more information about the house and the Drablow family. Arthur pressures Daily to tell him the full truth, and Daily says sadly that though Arthur gets to return to London tomorrow and leave the whole thing behind, the town of Crythin Gifford has to live with “whatever will surely follow.” For fifty years, many denizens of the town—including Jerome and Keckwick—have suffered the curse of Eel Marsh House.

Samuel Daily reveals that after giving her child to her sister, Jennet became inconsolable. She took up residence in Crythin Gifford, away from the house, and begged her sister to have contact with young Nathaniel. Alice Drablow eventually consented after Jennet threatened violence against their family. As Jennet visited with the boy more and more over the years, he developed an attachment to her, and Jennet planned to take him away; before she could do so, though, Keckwick—the family’s driver—steered his **pony trap** carrying Nathaniel and the boy’s nursemaid into the marsh during a sudden fog. Jennet watched the whole incident from an upper window. Only Keckwick survived.

After the bodies were recovered, Jennet began to go mad. On top of her mental instability, she suffered physically, and developed a disease that caused her to waste away. When she walked through the streets of town, she terrified young children, and eventually died “in hatred and misery.” Since her death, the town has been plagued by hauntings. Arthur speculates that now that Mrs. Drablow, the object of Jennet’s hatred, is dead, the hauntings will cease. Samuel Daily, however, continues on with his story.

Wherever the woman in black has been seen, Samuel Daily says, there has been “one sure and certain result”—after a sighting, a child in town has always died in some “violent or dreadful circumstance,” often in an accident or an illness. Mr. Jerome’s own child, Daily reveals, was a victim of the woman in black. Arthur wonders whether the deaths are a coincidence, but Mr. Daily says he holds no doubts that the woman in black causes them. Arthur, seeing Samuel’s assurance, says he believes him, and the two sit in silence.

Daily is not exactly holding information back on purpose—he is rather sadly reflecting on the fact that though Arthur gets to solve the mystery and go home (perhaps, he thinks, like a hero in a novel,) the residents of Crythin Gifford must continue to live in fear of the woman in black’s wrath.



Jennet’s violence and malevolence is rooted in her obsession with securing her connection to her child after being forcibly isolated from him, and the emotional toll this took on her. Her already suspicious and unstable mental state was tipped into madness when she witnessed the death of her child, causing her an even greater trauma and sense of isolation than she had ever known. Keckwick’s role in the ordeal explains his stoic air and his willingness to approach Eel Marsh House—he has conquered it before, and knows clearly what lies within it.



In a cruel twist of fate, Jennet—who only ever seemed to love and crave the returned love of children—became frightening and odious to them as she grew sicker and sicker, and this perhaps explains her continued preoccupation with the nursery—and the dark, horrifying curse that Daily is about to reveal.



Jennet has chosen to take her revenge on the world that treated her so cruelly by harming children. She could never have children in life—so she collects them, as victims, in death.



Arthur goes up to bed, ready to return to London in the morning. All night, though, he suffers turbulent nightmares and awful sweats; when he wakes up, he is nauseated and feverish, and becomes confined to bed for several days. The delirium passes by the end of the week, and though Arthur is left exhausted and weak, he begins returning to himself. The worst part of the illness, he remembers now, was not the physical torment, but the psychological distress—he felt as he lay in his sickbed that the woman in black was haunting him even there, and his ears constantly rang with the sounds of Nathaniel's cries as he drowned.

After twelve days, Arthur has recovered completely. As he sits one day in a chair after lunch near the drawing room window, he watches a robin on a stone urn outside, and delights in the quiet, ordinary nature of the moment. He hears voices at the front of the house, and then footsteps—someone calls his name and he turns, delighted to see his dear fiancée, Stella.

CHAPTER 12: THE WOMAN IN BLACK

The following morning, Stella and Arthur return to London. With Stella by his side, Arthur resolves to put the whole terrible affair behind him. He is sad to part with the Dailys, though, and insists they visit him in London. As Arthur and Stella head for the train station in Samuel Daily's car, Arthur reflects on a question he asked Daily just before leaving. He asked if a child in Crythin Gifford had yet fallen ill or died during the time he was stricken with fever; Samuel answered that nothing had happened to any child—yet. Arthur prayed aloud that the chain of terror had been broken.

Arthur writes that he has only one last thing left to tell—he can scarcely bring himself to write it out, but has summoned up the very last of his strength, which has been depleted in reliving these past horrors, to tell the story all the way through to its end for the first time. Arthur reveals that after returning to London, he and Stella were married within six weeks. They did not want to wait—Arthur had an urgent sense of time in the wake of his ordeal and was determined to seize upon any joy he could find.

A little over a year after their marriage, Stella gave birth to a son whom they named Joseph Arthur Samuel. Samuel Daily was the child's godfather; they saw Mr. Daily in London often, but never spoke of Eel Marsh or Crythin Gifford. Arthur hardly ever even thought of his terrible time there any longer, so happy was he in his life with Stella and their child. He was not prepared, he writes, for what was to come.

Arthur's fragile state, exacerbated by the new horrors revealed to him by Samuel Daily, gives way to a horrible illness. As Arthur takes to bed, it as if the fever he experiences is a culmination of all the terror he faced at Eel Marsh House—or perhaps as if the woman in black is still finding ways to threaten Arthur's life.



At last, there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel. Arthur's ordeal is over, and he is reunited with Stella—a beacon of stability, normalcy, and the life awaiting Arthur back in London.



As Arthur and Stella make their way back home, Arthur is determined to push the horrible events that befell him in Crythin Gifford from his mind. Despite this, he cannot bear the thought that a child has died as a result, however tangential, of his angering Jennet. Upon hearing that no children have been harmed during the time he was ill, Arthur is able to return to London with a sense of relief—and even hope.



Though all that has preceded the final chapter of his "memoir" has been terrifying and unsettling, Arthur warns his readers that the worst is yet to come—the true reason for his trauma (and his marriage, in the "present," to a woman other than Stella) is about to emerge.



Back in London, Arthur allowed himself to be lulled back into a sense of happiness and security. He tried to push his memories of Eel Marsh House from his mind, and focused only on his family—but was blind to the ways in which the past was not yet quite done with him.



When their son was about a year old, Arthur and Stella took him a fair in a large park about ten miles out of London. It was festive and joyful, and rides and games abounded. Stella wanted to take the baby Joseph on a donkey ride, but the baby, afraid, protested, and instead pointed happily to a nearby **pony trap**. Stella took the child for a ride, and Arthur happily watched them trot off around a bend. Looking over the other festival-goers, Arthur spotted a familiar face: the woman in black, standing away from the crowd, hiding behind the trunk of a tree.

Arthur and the woman in black made eye contact, and as she held his gaze, he felt a deep and penetrating fear. He could feel the hatred, bitterness, and malevolence emanating from Jennet just as he did in the nursery back at Eel Marsh House. The **pony trap** came trotting back towards Arthur, and he broke eye contact with Jennet, determined to retrieve Stella and Joseph at once and return home. As they approached, however, Jennet stepped into the pony's path, causing the animal to rear and swerve before taking off on a wild tear. The carriage hit a tree with a sickening crack, and Arthur ran to it.

Bystanders lifted Stella from the cart; her neck had been broken along with her legs, but she was still conscious. Joseph, however, had been thrown against a nearby tree and now laid crumpled and dead in the grass. Ten months later, Arthur reports, Stella died of her injuries; Jennet Humfrye had at last taken her revenge.

As Arthur recalls coming face-to-face with the woman in black on the outskirts of London—far away from her homestead of Crythin Gifford—the terrifying truth of her powers are revealed. The woman in black has nursed her vendetta against Arthur for years—now that he is the parent of a child, her hatred of him has intensified, and she has come back for him.



Arthur knows in the first seconds he sees the woman in black that her hatred and malevolence has not abated—and that the cyclical violence and terror she inflicts on others in pursuit of isolating and traumatizing them the way she was is nowhere near done. In a sickening twist, Jennet attacks and kills Arthur's first child and new wife in the same manner in which her own son was taken from her.



Arthur's resigned, abrupt conclusion to his tale stands in stark contrast to the detailed, even sumptuous prose that characterized the rest of his story. It seems as if the woman has defeated Arthur yet again in making him confront his past—he remains as traumatized, and as isolated due to his trauma, as ever before.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Tanner, Alexandra. "The Woman in Black." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 29 Sep 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tanner, Alexandra. "The Woman in Black." LitCharts LLC, September 29, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020.
<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-woman-in-black>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Woman in Black* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Hill, Susan. *The Woman in Black*. Vintage. 2011.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Hill, Susan. *The Woman in Black*. New York: Vintage. 2011.