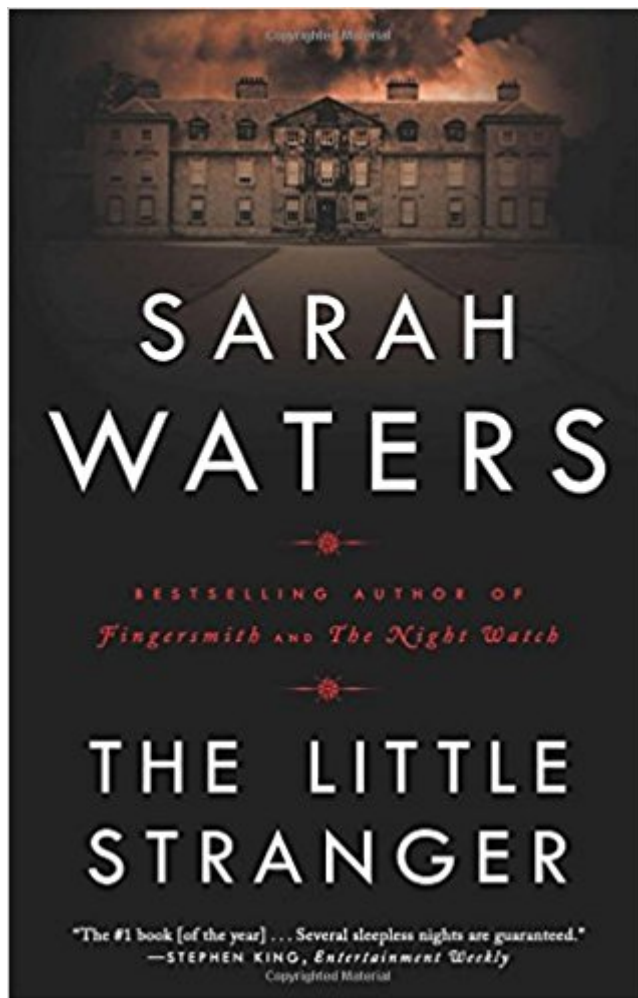




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The Little Stranger



Synopsis

"The #1 book of 2009...Several sleepless nights are guaranteed." —Stephen King, *Entertainment Weekly* One postwar summer in his home of rural Warwickshire, Dr. Faraday, the son of a maid who has built a life of quiet respectability as a country physician, is called to a patient at lonely Hundreds Hall. Home to the Ayres family for over two centuries, the Georgian house, once impressive and handsome, is now in decline, its masonry crumbling, its gardens choked with weeds, the clock in its stable yard permanently fixed at twenty to nine. Its owners—mother, son, and daughter—are struggling to keep pace with a changing society, as well as with conflicts of their own. But are the Ayreses haunted by something more sinister than a dying way of life? Little does Dr. Faraday know how closely, and how terrifyingly, their story is about to become intimately entwined with his.

Book Information

Paperback: 528 pages

Publisher: Riverhead Books; 1 Reprint edition (May 4, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1594484465

ISBN-13: 978-1594484469

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 459 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #54,082 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Horror #458 in Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Historical #2363 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Horror

Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Waters (*The Night Watch*) reflects on the collapse of the British class system after WWII in a stunning haunted house tale whose ghosts are as horrifying as any in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. Doctor Faraday, a lonely bachelor, first visited Hundreds Hall, where his mother once worked as a parlor maid, at age 10 in 1919. When Faraday returns 30 years later to treat a servant, he becomes obsessed with Hundreds's elegant owner, Mrs. Ayres; her 24-year-old son, Roderick, an RAF airman wounded during the war who now oversees the family farm; and her slightly older daughter, Caroline, considered a natural spinster by the locals, for whom the doctor develops a particular fondness. Supernatural trouble kicks in after Caroline's mild-mannered black

Lab, Gyp, attacks a visiting child. A damaging fire, a suicide and worse follow. Faraday, one of literature's more unreliable narrators, carries the reader swiftly along to the devastating conclusion. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

At its core, *The Little Stranger* is an old-fashioned ghost story, complete with spooky house, eccentric inhabitants, an air of general madness and malcontent, and a narrator who may not be as mild-mannered as he seems. What elevates this novel from the crowded genre is Waters's ability to evoke the subtleties of the past as she skillfully weaves tension and dread into each paragraph. The reviewer from *Newsday* likened this tale to the psychological classic *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson. Perhaps the critic from the *Telegraph* (who voiced only a very minor complaint about the ending) summed up the reviewers' opinions best of all by hailing this novel as a genuinely creepy story "guaranteed to make anyone with a pulse gibber in fright." Copyright 2009 Bookmarks Publishing LLC

For me, the heart of this book was Dr. Faraday. Without him, the story would have been too dark. He's a caring country doctor. I fell in love with him the way I fell in love with the English veterinarian, James Herriott, who would be called out at various times of the day and night to treat animals. Dr. Faraday becomes involved with a family when he is called to their mansion to treat their servant. He's so innocent and honest and ethical. These people become his friends. He truly cares for them. But soon it becomes obvious that this is no ordinary family when a series of inexplicable events befall them. One wants to warn the kind doctor--you fear for his life, his heart, his mind. Maybe you will become attached to the inhabitants of the house--the young brooding man, the young mysterious spinster, and their elderly moody mother. I was interested in them, but I was suspicious of them. It was hard to fall in love with them. I did identify with the mother primarily because I am a mother. But the doctor had me in his pocket. I read the last half of the book in one sitting because I just had to know the fate of the characters but primarily the doctor's fate because I fell in love with him and wanted the best for him. The story is told in the first person--my favorite way of telling a story. I could read a sequel to this story. I'm missing Dr. Faraday! He was delightful. But this book is missing the joy of some of Sarah Waters' other books. It has more technical detail than her other books. With every incident there is a post-mortem. For the detectives, lawyers, and mystery lovers among us, the technical details involved in the series of incidents will pique their interest. For me, the abundance of technical details made for dry reading, and I longed to get back to going on

rounds with Dr. Faraday. I'm more of a people person. If you love gothic mysteries, this might be your cup of tea, but don't expect complete closure because, although there are some answers to the mysteries, Waters leaves many questions unanswered.

When I read - somewhere- that this book was compared to Shirley Jackson's "The Haunting of Hill House" I just knew I had to read it! For those of you who saw the movie ever so many years ago you will remember that it was the house that was haunted - and not so much the people. A strange tale, indeed. "The Little Stranger" is not -- well, not as "strange" as "Hill House" - at least not in quite the same way. It is a tale that comes across as being much more plausible. It is an intriguing tale of an English manor home fallen upon hard times and the high-society folks who live within its walls. It is a story of strange happenings within the walls, of a proud family struggling to keep their heads above water after the war and the kindness of the local country doctor who befriends them and is ultimately drawn into all of the mysterious happenings. Right from the first page the author begins to establish a sense of time and place - characters that are so well fleshed out you easily envision each one. The writing flows so well and is so entriging you find yourself quickly reading on to learn more and more. By the end of the book you feel as though the characters are your own neighbors and forelorn friends. The "haunting" aspect of the story is quite subtle -- just the way I like it. Written for "thinking adults" and not necessarily those who want to be left shaking in their boots with fear as they turn each page, you are made to think about what is going on - left to puzzle out the strangeness of what occurs - just as the characters are doing. I can still envision the manor home, the class differences in society, and I still feel the emotions of each person involved. The strangeness of what occurs gives you an uneasy feeling - a touch of fear - a sense of foreboding. I felt that weird type of fear that leaves you wanting a bit more of it - the puzzlement of what is actually going on in that home. To say much more will give away too much of the plot but just let me say this: the ending will forever haunt you -- it will leave you wondering and thinking about every little detail that transpired between the covers of this book. I will definitely wait about a month and then re-read this one! It is that well crafted - it is that good. My friends who have read this book each have a different conclusion about the end -- it is definitely a book for those who "think". If I could give this book a million "stars" for pleasure I certainly would. I highly recommend reading this tale of a very, very strange haunting and hope that the author crafts another equally brilliant - soon.

This is a beautifully written book, highly descriptive and wonderfully nuanced. It revolves around a Georgian manor called Hundreds Hall in rural England. The manor has been inhabited by the Ayres

family for over two centuries but is now in decline. After World War I, Hundreds Hall was fully staffed, the Ayres family was still wealthy, and class distinctions were still in effect. Shortly after World War II, where most of this novel takes place, Hundreds Hall is in decline, as is the Ayres family, who are barely able to keep up appearances. Gone is the staff, and the family, mother, son, and daughter, live in penurious splendor, hanging on as best they can. Moreover, the gentry is no longer a force with which to be reckoned, as class distinctions are swiftly eroding. No one knows this better than Dr. Faraday, whose mother was once a maid at Hundreds Hall. Now, he is called to tend to the family. In doing so, he finds himself drawn in into something that defies reason. This book does call to mind Henry James and *The Turn of the Screw*, as there are similarities. The author, however, succeeds in making this genre her own. Her narrative is rich and evocative, chilling the reader as the house seems to take on a life of its own. What happens is mind boggling, but so wonderfully told that it captivates the reader, who will find it positively spooky and creepy, indeed. My only criticism is the seeming lack of a satisfying resolution at the end.

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