

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

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KIPPS: A thick, damp, sea-mist. Damp, clinging, cobwebby, fine and impenetrable. The sea-fret Mr Daily talked of.

ACTOR: He must turn, retrace his steps to the house, and wait till Keckwick comes for him.

KIPPS turns, and starts laboriously walking back. The lights have dimmed to virtual darkness

KIPPS: The mist was salty, light and pale and moving in front of my eyes all the time. I felt confused, teased by it, as though it were made up of millions of live fingers that crept over me, hung on to me and then shifted away again.

ACTOR: Step by slow step he goes, baffled by the moving, shifting mist, praying to reach the house. A nightmare walk, until...

Fade up sound of a pony and trap. KIPPS halts, turns in evident relief, as the sound fades down, changes its apparent direction, swirls and fades as if carried on the mist

KIPPS: Keckwick!

The sound grows near, then recedes. KIPPS is baffled by it, at one moment seems to locate it in the fog, at the next is utterly disorientated. At length, the noise of the pony and trap fades altogether, and away on the marsh is a draining, sucking, churning sound, which goes on, together with the shrill neighing and whinnying of a horse in panic. And then another cry: a shout, a terrified sobbing – it is hard to decipher, though it is clear it comes from a young child. Kipps struggles blindly forward a few steps

OH NO – OH NO ... (*Screaming out*) NO? NOL NOT KECKWICK!

Black-out. In the darkness, we hear the front door slam. When the Lights return, Kipps is on stage in the house, clearly in shock. From the skip he takes out the bottle of brandy and a glass and pours himself a largish measure. He sits for a moment. He jumps up and feverishly starts to walk about the house again, rummaging through rooms and furniture

ACTOR: In despair and fearfulness he goes about the house, switching on every light he can make work – in the vain hope that their glow might be seen across the misty wasteland.

KIPPS: (*pacing restlessly*) Every door was open, every room orderly, dusty, bitterly cold and damp and yet also somehow stifling.

KIPPS arrives at the closed door. He stops

ACTOR: One door is locked.

KIPPS: At the far end of a passage that led away from three bedrooms on the second floor.

There was no keyhole, no bolt on the outside. *(He rattles it and kicks at it angrily, beating it with his fists. Then, as his anger subsides, he slides, sobbing, to the floor)*

THE ACTOR is now dressed as KECKWICK. He stands at the foot of the steps, as the doorbell rings. KIPPS slowly comes out of his sleep, evidently unrefreshed, stiff in his limbs, staggering to answer the bell. The light outside is now full moonlight which shines on to the causeway and the actors. KIPPS, on seeing KECKWICK, seems bewildered.

KECKWICK: You have to wait for a fret like that to clear itself. There's no crossing over while a fret's up. Unlucky for you that was. And after that there's the wait for the tide. Awkward place. You'll be finding that out fast enough.

KIPPS: What time is it?

KECKWICK: Nigh on two.

KIPPS: I wouldn't have expected you to come back at this hour. It's very good of you.

KECKWICK: I wouldn't have left you over the night. Wouldn't have done that to you.

KIPPS: *(suddenly)* But what happened to you, how do you manage to be here – how did you get out?

KERKWICK looks a long moment into KIPPS's face. Then he climbs on the trap once more. KIPPS climbs up. We hear the pony and trap set off

(As he is carried on the trap) I fell into a sort of trance, half sleeping, half waking, rocked by the motion of the cart. I knew I had entered some hitherto unimagined realm of consciousness and there was no going back. That the woman by the graves had been ghostly I now – not believed, no knew, for certainty lay deep within me. And I began to suspect that the pony and trap, the pony and trap with the child who had cried out so terribly and which had been sucked into the quicksands, they too had not been real, not there, present, not substantial, but ghostly also. What i had heard, I had heard as clearly as I now heard the roll of the cart and the drumming of the pony's hooves, and what I had seen – the woman with the pale, wasted face, by the grave of mrs drablow and again in the old burial ground – I had seen. I would have sworn that on oath. Yet they had been, in some sense I did not understand, unreal, ghostly; things that were dead.