



Whispers in the Dark

Jonathan Aycliffe

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In this second chilling novel by Jonathan Aycliffe, orphaned Charlotte Metcalf arrives on the doorstep of her relatives, the mysterious Ayrtons, in the hope of locating her younger brother Arthur. Their home, Barras Hall, is at first a welcome refuge, until Charlotte realizes that the manor has become her prison, and that she is surrounded by a horror she cannot escape.

Whispers in the Dark Details

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Author : Jonathan Aycliffe

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From Reader Review Whispers in the Dark for online ebook

Tamara says

2.5 stars

I got what I expected, a nice gothic ghost story and a haunted mansion. Unfortunately the plot was very predictable and the main character was very bland. I liked Caroline more as an old woman, the glimpses we catch of her at the beginning of the story instead of the boring pretty girl we follow through her predicament. Her older self showed more emotion and wit in one page than we get in the whole novel and it's disappointing.

Mike says

Not one of Aycliffe's best and definitely does not bear comparison with Naomi's Room.

Saying that, it was still an engrossing read. Very Gothic (with a capital C), very dark and depressing. And very predictable.

I felt the ending was rushed with no sense of resolution. But that's possibly what Mr Aycliffe wanted to achieve.

Emily Crow says

Boilerplate gothic suspense--sometimes you can judge a book by its cover. Predictable creepy elements, mild violence, no romance.

Sara says

Slow burning true gothic horror.. a delicious read .

Kagama-the Literaturevixen says

The book starts with a letter from a man named John Simpkins to his friend Norman telling him that he has found a strange journal among his deceased fathers possessions.

His father was a country doctor and one of his patients suffered from severe depression so he asked her to write about what troubled her. Simpkins is forwarding the journal because he believes it to be true even if the recollections are very disturbing.

Then we switch to the journal of the woman Charlotte Metcalf she was born in 1887 and two years later her beloved brother.

Together with their parents they live a charmed Life- her family is very wealthy her mother a heiress but without close relatives since her grandparents, parents and cousins all drowned in a horrific accident.

Her father does have relatives but he is estranged from them and one the one occasion when Charlotte brings it up he becomes very angry and upset. But this is only a minor thing in her life and she soon forgets about it.

But then her father dies and there are enormous debts, even her mother's fortune had been spent.

They are ruined and the few friends and distant relatives they have either are unable or refuse to help, so in the end there is no other place for them to go but the workhouse. The final disgrace is that the few possessions they have left is taken away from them locked away in a chest. Even the doll of Charlotte.

But worst of all she and her mother are separated from Arthur who is taken away to the men's wing of the workhouse. Their mother doesn't last long and soon dies. Charlotte consoles herself with that as long as her brother is alive and she will be able to see him again some day she can endure.

She goes into training to be a maid and when she is assigned a place on the outside she asks to see her brother but is told he "is gone." At first she thinks it means he died but the cruel woman who runs the workhouse tells her that:

"Brother? What brother? Your brother's gone long ago," she said.

Her words hit me like one of the blows she liked to deal out. The blood rushed from my face. I do not know why I did not faint, for the fear I had felt that first moment of her arrival had returned with redoubled force. I was certain for a moment that she meant he was dead.

"Gone?" It was all I could do to force the question out.

“Yes, of course. Did you think he’d stay on here forever, maybe just to wait for his big sister? This isn’t a hotel, you know. Our inmates don’t pay for their keep like decent folks. Your brother was found a place and sent to it like any other lad his age.”

Charlotte is sent away to find her own way to her new employers house but her faint hope that it will be any better is soon squashed and her station in Life cruelly driven into her when she notices a photograph with her deceased father on a mantelpiece. Tearfully she reveals who she is to the lady of the house who appears sympathetic but in the end does nothing for her.

Charlottes old friend from the workhouse arrives to be ladies maid at the same house and tells Charlotte that she know where her brother is. Instead of going to the metal foundry where he was supposed to work he ran away to seek out their fathers distant relatives-the Ayrton at Barras Lodge.

After learning this she start to have strange dreams about her brother where he is asking for her help and trying to get to her. Soon she makes her escape.

She has bad feelings about going there but she has to find her brother!

When she arrives at Barras Lodge she expects to be driven away and her claim to be a relative disbelieved. Instead she is embraced by her cousins, a pair of siblings named Anthony and Antonia.

At first everything is wonderful but then Charlotte starts to notice things, how there are no birds in the garden around the house, footsteps passing by her door at night and the scratching at doors at night.

I could not wholly dispel a growing fear that there was something unnatural about Barras Hall and its grounds.

And why are the clothes given to her by her kind cousin Antonia ten years out of date?

This was a really scary book, the creeping kind of horror which is apparent even if the inhabitants of Barras Lodge try to make logical explanations for things.

The ending is a downer. You want good or at least the protagonist to prevail against evil. I was made very uncomfortable with the idea that the evil was still out there ready to emerge.

If you are looking for a book where the main characters overcome all her

This is a recollection of someone who just survived a brush with evil and who despite making a new life for herself with a loving husband and children, still suffered severe PTSD from the events taking place in the book.

If this book has any message at all it's probably that the most evil things aren't perpetrated by something supernatural but by what humans can do to each other. A very bleak outlook.

The diary format at first was a bit offputting because Charlotte complains about modern times and how spoiled her grandchildren are but things got going when she started on the actual story.

Overall I did find myself engrossed in this book and wouldn't mind reading something else from this author. ...preferably in broad daylight though.

Maybe someone cleverer than me would have figured out how things would end before me especially as the last name of Charlotte (which is Metcalf) is so foreshadowing. I didn't even think about her name until I googled it.

I can't feel I spoil anything in revealing this because it's revealed early in the book.

And finally I want to address this book's cover.

Oh my god this book cover....at first glance the cover looks extremely cheesy but when I came to a certain scene in the book I had to admit it didn't seem nearly so cheesy anymore...

One Word though

TERRIFYING.

My thoughts about the cover before I read it "looks pretty generic for a book from the 90s, but not that scary.

My thought after I finished it.

"Well I am glad to see some cover artists read the book"

"That is seriously disturbing"

"I am freaking out over this cover. It's made by some kind of diabolical genius and now it will haunt me forever" OO

Do you want to know what is so disturbing about the cover?

Sheila says

A great horror story--I liked it almost as much as Naomi's Room. This is a very traditional gothic, with almost Lovecraftian plot elements.

Michael says

Don't expect an especially "literary" book, but come prepared for a spine-tingling Gothic chiller. If you're hoping for a few shivers, you're likely to find them here. Is it predictable? Well, yes, but it made me shudder, all the same.

This is my second read of this author, the first being *The Vanishment*, and I hope to read the others, in time. Aycliffe has a writing style that is (generally speaking) effortless to read, which makes the pages fly.

Having said that, the beginning of *Whispers in the Dark* is a little slow, and Charlotte's trials and tribulations before she arrives at Barras Hall are at times a trifle too melodramatic for my tastes-- but the pace soon picks up.

This tale is creepy, dark, and atmospheric. There's not much gore, for those of us who abhor "body horror" or physical horror in general; instead, an abundance of eerie moments provide just the right level of fairly genteel creepiness.

Specifics (with SPOILERS):

--I do like a story told in journal/diary format. This one really takes that trick and runs with it! Frames within frames! We start out with correspondence between a vicar and the son of a doctor who had an elderly patient (Charlotte) with a most unusual personal history. The son sends all relevant papers to his friend, the vicar-- chief among them, Charlotte's memoir/journal. Now, within *that* journal, we are treated to two *other* journals/diaries (view spoiler), which Charlotte somehow remembers word for word after all these years. (Yes, I know. No fair, making fun of a format I've just professed to enjoy!)

--There are things we never learn for certain:
(view spoiler)

----And probably more besides...

--The darkest element of the novel would have to be the repeated insistence that (view spoiler)

--There's one thing above all others that I simply can't understand about this book, and that is this: Why would Charlotte ever have willingly had children, knowing (and believing in) the curse that flows through her bloodline? Her husband, we know, would also have been familiar with at least some of her frightening past. Wouldn't they have discussed it and come to the conclusion that they should not have children of their own? Why not adopt, instead? Or would she have decided that adopting children would still confer the curse upon them? Maybe she figured that if she didn't tell them about their family history-- if they never knew it and never visited the family land-- they would live normal lives and be no more doomed than anyone else. (I assume she believes that all people are doomed to an eternity in hell. That certainly seems to be the implication, though it doesn't fit with Mrs. Manners' typical messages from beyond the grave. Those, we are told, are usually words of comfort and reassurance that all is well.) However, *still*, that doesn't explain why she would have children. It seems a very selfish decision, and it simply doesn't make sense to me. (Of course, the *real* reason for it is that it makes an ominous ending for the novel, with Charlotte's grandson on the verge of rebuilding the cursed hall and unwittingly exposing more people to the evils that still haunt the surrounding land.)

--Some of the covers of Ayckiffe's paperbacks are atrocious! There's one cover for this book that depicts a young woman in anachronistic garb standing between two of the closest-set eyes you ever did see. Amusingly, there's another of his books with a very similar cover. A different woman in different clothes, but still standing between hilariously close-set eyes. Crazy...

Simon says

simply glorious

Omaina says

This author has a pattern that's very distinguishable. But the horror is top notch.

Lynn Spencer says

I read a lot of romance, so I feel like I need to post a disclaimer here - this book isn't even vaguely a romance. It's pretty much straight gothic horror.

This Edwardian-set tale focuses on the trials and trevails of 14 year old Charlotte Metcalf. Raised in a successful merchant family, her father's death and a series of bad investments leaves her, her mother and brother in ever-decreasing circumstances until they finally wind up in a grim workhouse. When sent out to work as a teenager, Charlotte learns that her brother has disappeared from his work site with a vague tale of going to seek aid from distant cousins at their estate.

Charlotte sets off in search of her beloved brother, and when she arrives at Barras Hall, her cousins do indeed welcome her. However, readers will quickly figure out that something seems a bit off. And indeed, Charlotte starts to feel uneasy as well. Unfortunately, her life at Barras Hall quickly becomes that of cherished ward/prisoner. The author does a great job of showing the walls closing in around Charlotte and also of amping up the tension as vaguely creepy incidents and remarks evolve into more definite forms of terror. The climax of the story is downright horrifying, and left me quite unsettled. Overall, while the early parts of the book move a little too slowly, this is an intensely chilling tale.

Kimberly van Pinxteren says

Let me start by saying that I am a huge Jonathan Aycliffe fan, have read all of his books and this without doubt is my favorite. I might just call it the scariest book I have ever read. Mr. Aycliffe is a master in ghost story telling, and here he does it with such a force that this tale turns into an experience. He has a gift of writing in such a way that whatever the main character sees, you see, whatever she touches, you touch, whatever frightens her, frightens you. I have read this multiple times and it never fails to chill me right to the bone. A certain scene made me put the book down and quickly turn to bed, but was afraid of every shadow I saw along the way. I cannot stress enough how brilliant this is. Charlotte Metcalf went through the scariest moments I have ever read, hearing children singing will never be the same again.

Sue Bridehead (A Pseudonym) says

Very readable and gripping gothic novel, with an unsatisfyingly vague ending similar to those of several other novels by Mr. Aycliffe.

Andrew says

What a terrific ghost story! I loved the use of sensory details Aycliffe added to this story - lots of sound and smell - it gave the story an old school feel and the account based prose reminded me of Dolores Claiborne. Definitely worth a read for anyone who enjoys classic tales of the supernatural or ritualistic lore based plots. The characters were well structured and left just enough questions on the fringe of perception to allow for a story line that didn't stray away from the main plot in order to explain their peculiar personalities. Overall it was well paced and a good, quick read.

4/5

Shaweta says

Consumed this super fast. Thoroughly creepy.

Jennifer Kennedy says

Really great yarn. The tension is built up beautifully and it was great to read at night time if you like to be spooked occasionally. Aycliffe drags you in with vivid descriptions and interesting characters.

It is a little old-fashioned, a typical ghost story but that was not a problem for me and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Read it in two sittings.
