



## The Secret of Mirror House

*Jennifer Blake*

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## **The Secret of Mirror House Jennifer Blake**

A Jennifer Blake Classic! Romantic gothic suspense set in the Deep South in the 1870s.

After Amelia Harveston loses her mother to tragic circumstances, she fears she will be forced into poverty and the position of a desperate woman. When distant relatives invite her to live with them at Mirror House, the plantation home built by her grandfather, she readily accepts. Her expectations of a warm family embrace where she'll be loved and protected, though, are soon shattered.

Mirror House is a home haunted by the past, by dark secrets and by the cruel games its inhabitants play. Alone and with no one to confide in, Amelia struggles to unearth the house's secrets. Then the accidents begin, and Amelia knows she's become the target for the hate that infests it.

Out of the despair, two seeming allies appear. Two offers of marriage promise sanctuary. Both men claim to love her. One of them is lying. Amelia must choose the one man whose embrace promises the love and safety her very life depends on. But the house, it seems, has other ideas...

## **The Secret of Mirror House Details**

Date : Published November 26th 2013 by Steel Magnolia Press (first published 1969)

ISBN :

Author : Jennifer Blake

Format : Kindle Edition 140 pages

Genre : Gothic, Romance, Historical Romance, Historical, Gothic Romance

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## From Reader Review The Secret of Mirror House for online ebook

### Sharon says

It's been a very long time since I've read a Gothic novel. This is not my favourite genre but Jennifer Blake writes it well. I especially liked the "Heathcliff" characteristic she put into "Nelville" in this utterance, "But, I don't really care, so why should I trouble deaf heaven with my impenitent remorse."

A number of typing/editing mistakes in this Kindle Edition was particularly distracting; but, I persevered reading, because the chemistry between "Nelville" and "Amelia" was quite entertaining. There was little doubt in my mind that these two characters react to one another; but I was often hard pressed to determine whether or not their relationship was developing positively, when their responses to each other frequently appeared to be negative.

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### A.M. says

Amelia Haverston's mother dies and she receives an invitation from her cousins to live with them in Mirror House. Her grandfather had both a wife and a mistress, but only the mistress had a son. Her father was that child. It's Louisiana in the 1870's; the air is stifling and no one seems particularly welcoming. Still in mourning for her mother, and with nowhere else to go, she desperately tries to work out what has happened to these people to make them all so bitter and manipulative.

Katherine - the eldest cousin and self appointed housekeeper; Sylvester and his wife Reba, his younger brother James with the limp from the war, and Nelville - great-nephew on the other side of her grandfather's wife - sent to live on the plantation as an orphan of eight.

The now dilapidated mansion built for her grandfather's brother, sits on the other side of the lake and looks at the burnt ruins of the original house. The one where her grandfather and his wife died in a fire.

But at night she sees an old woman walking the boards. And she has never been introduced.

Who is the woman? Why is her face covered? And who is trying to harm Amelia?

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This is part of Blake's back catalogue and was originally published in 1970.

I recently read a Dean Koontz writing book and Gothic was one of his categories. This book has ticked every box he mentioned:

*A young heroine, alone in the world and often an orphan, goes to an old and isolated house to live in a house with her last living relatives. Everyone in the house is a stranger to her. At the house, the heroine meets a cast of suspicious characters (servants, the lady of the house, one or two sons) and soon finds herself plunged into some mystery—either of supernatural or more mundane origins, most often concerning the death of someone in the house. Inexplicably, she becomes the target of the supernatural or mundane killer's attacks. Concurrent with the development of this mystery plot is the growth of a romance between the heroine and one of the young men in the household. Either this man is her only safe haven in the dark events of the story—or he is as much a suspect as any of the other characters. The conclusion of a Gothic must*

*always promise marriage or the development of genuine love between heroine and hero.*

This is a perfect example of a Southern Gothic novel. The slaves are almost non-existent; dark figures seen in the fields. A few household servants who deliver spell-bags from the local witch woman that everyone is frightened of. There are scars from the recent 'war of northern aggression'; land prices are low, cotton is still worth something but the estate is indebted and none of the 'gentlemen' would think to work. And the drought hangs over them all.

Being old school there's no sex. Amelia can't possibly be a feminist and pack her bags to leave. She can be feisty, but not that independent. (view spoiler)

I think this edition has been scanned in to Kindle and it shows. There are a lot of errors; missing parts, and wrong word usage. Like this:

"I can't. I was so nearly asleep, you know how opinion is." (Kindle Location 1694)

I think that is meant to be opium. And 'teamed' instead of 'learned'.

But it was a pretty good read.

4 southern Gothic stars

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### **Julie says**

The Secret of Mirror House by Jennifer Blake is a Steel Magnolia Press Publication

In the deep south during the 1870's, Amelia's mother dies and she finds herself nearly destitute. When an invitation is offered from distant relatives for Amelia to come stay with them, she doesn't hesitate to accept the offer.

Upon arrival however, Amelia begins to regret her decision. She encounters a house full of relatives that do not really seem to like her. Neville, a man who never married, a rude, blunt and even cruel man at times, a cousin, James that seems friendly on the surface, and several other relatives, none of whom are overly friendly. In fact, they are all downright strange with all their secrets and hidden agendas.

The situation Amelia is in becomes a little clearer when she discovers the family would like her to marry either James or Neville. It is obvious they have a preference too. Amelia doesn't want to marry at all and especially not to either one of these two odd ducks.

Tension builds as the family becomes more and more nervous and more and more desperate about Amelia and the threat she represents to their future.

Who can Amelia trust? Will she learn all the secrets of Mirror House?

This book was written back in the hey day of Gothic romance/mystery novels. In the 1960's and 70's and even into the very early 80's, these novels were super popular. Their popularity died out in the wake of the "Bodice Ripper" novel taking romance novels to a different level.

In this case the Gothic mystery has a historical setting which to me makes the story more atmospheric and tense. The hot and humid climate also gives the reader the impression that things are about to boil over. A girl with very little resources, still mourning her mother's death, finds herself in a large plantation house surrounded by people she doesn't really know and who all seem to be on edge. They play mean tricks, lie to her, try to manipulate her and eventually she begins to fear for her safety.

I thought the author did a great job of building the suspense and keeping the reader feeling tense. The romance is limited to kissing, which was common in this genre. There are adult themes but that's about as far

as it ever got.

I am thrilled that these earlier novels by Jennifer Blake are being released in digital format. You can find these at Amazon.com - <http://www.smarturl.it.smp>

This one is an A.

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### **Jo says**

This book is interesting and mysterious. I enjoyed the misadventures of an odd family set in the South after the civil war.

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### **Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says**

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A lot of gothic romance novels have really similar plots, but with THE SECRET OF MIRROR HOUSE, I had an especial case of *deja vu*, because it felt like a mashup of two other gothic romances that I read and enjoyed a lot more: Dorothy Eden's DARKWATER and Jennifer Blake's other book, DARK MASQUERADE. That's never a good sign.

The plot is pretty basic. Following a tragedy (the death of her mother), Amelia comes to live with her relatives at Mirror House. Once there, she realizes that they're all pretty awful people who don't seem to want her to be there, and shortly after her arrival, ends up becoming victim to a number of odd and sinister tricks, including being run down in the woods and nearly being left to drown in a swampy lake. Dun, dun, dun.

The "secret" in this case is with regard to why Amelia was invited to stay at Mirror House in the first place, and the strange, masked woman who roves the halls at night like a ghost. I wanted to be more involved in this mystery than I was, but sadly, the twist was very similar to the one in DARKWATER, down to a very similar character trope. I was also really bored for most of this book. There just wasn't enough happening and I didn't care about any of the characters. Reba and Sylvester were creepy creepsters. James was kind of smarmy. Amelia was bland and a little TSTL. Nelville is the typical Broody McMightBeABadman gothic romance hero, except this being set in Louisiana, he drops a ton of sinister aphorisms that make him sound like a Francis Underwoodesque character who wouldn't be out of place on *House of Cards*.

I think the best thing about this book is the humid, claustrophobic Southern atmosphere and beautiful writing. It's pretty chilly right now, but I could just picture that swampy heat and the sticky sweat pouring down my neck, and you know that's the mark of a talented writer, being able to set the scene like that. I'm

working my way through Jennifer Blake's bodice rippers and gothic romances, and so far I like her bodice rippers more, because I think the temptation with a gothic novel is to be slow in order to draw out the mystery, whereas bodice rippers, as the name implies, are all about the action.

I'm curious if there's a difference between her novels published under the Patricia Maxwell name vs. the Jennifer Blake name, because I really enjoyed the last Blake gothic romance I read, but it was originally a Maxwell title (DARK MASQUERADE). We'll see, I guess!

2 to 2.5 stars

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### **Emily Crow says**

#### **Warning: this review may contain unmarked spoilers!**

I have recently made the wonderful discovery that some kindle unlimited titles also available as an audiobook, and as I have just downloaded the audible app for my phone, I can listen to them at no extra charge. YAY! I'm actually quite excited as I have just about exhausted my tiny library's even tinier audiobook selection, and having to buy enough books to entertain me on my daily commute would get rather expensive. So my general happiness over this may have influenced me to rate this a bit higher than if I'd simply read it. It's a silly story. But it kept me entertained for a few days driving to and from work.

So a poor orphan named Amelia shows up at her cousin's plantation house in Louisiana, a couple decades after the end of the Civil War. Because this is a gothic romance, the plantation is dilapidated and everyone who lives there acts weird and mysterious. When Amelia arrives, she meets her cousin James, a war veteran who is polite and gentlemanly, and a friend of the family named Nelville, who is drunk and belligerent. (view spoiler)

Then she meets the rest of the family--her cousin Catherine who has an unhealthy fixation on James; an opium-addicted cousin named Sylvester and his bitter, barren wife Reba, and a mysterious disfigured old woman who wanders the halls at night. These people alternately play mind games with her and try to convince her how much they want her to live with them happily ever after. You would think eventually Amelia would call them out on their BS, but she doesn't seem to have enough brain power to manage it. (That might have been partly the fault of the narrator, who read all of Amelia's dialogue in a way that made her sound several fries short of a happy meal.)

Someone tells Amelia of her convoluted family history -- to be honest, my mind kind of wandered at that point so I'm not sure exactly what it was. (I blame the traffic! And why should I try to be smarter than Amelia anyway? That would take away all the fun.)

Catherine announces that Amelia really needs to marry either James or Nelville...or else. For some reason, Amelia doesn't say, "You mean you want me to pick either the rude drunk or the guy who spends all his time locked up in his study claiming he's writing his top secret memoir? No, thanks!" Instead she dithers.

At some point an old woman from the bayou named Granny Salome wanders into the story for long enough to give Amelia a good luck charm and some cryptic warnings. Then the mysterious disfigured lady in the house speaks up to add her own cryptic warnings to the mix. Amelia, you are in danger here! I'm not sure why Amelia didn't say, "I guess that explains all the weird 'accidents' I've been having lately!" Nope, she just lets people push her out of the window and then drinks mysterious cordials that Catherine gives her for her "health."

Then things get even weirder and crazier for a couple of chapters, and then it ends. Honestly, for what it was, I did find it mildly entertaining!

Read (or rather listened to) for Unapologetic Romance Readers 2018 Challenge: Gothic Category

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### **Whitebeard Books says**

Without giving away any secrets, pun intended, the overall notion of mirror houses is so Southern sounding that I trust it was probably done. Got your interest yet? This is a well written, spooky and suspenseful combination of whodunit, historical romance and well, you read it and decide. I certainly enjoyed the tale.

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### **Gwenn Wright says**

Meh. The plot itself was all right but the execution of it didn't do much for me. I didn't hate it but I'm glad to be done with it.

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### **Gloriamarie says**

Really enjoyed this. I started reading and was trying to finish it before I went to bed, looked up, and discovered it was 3AM. So I put it down and went to bed. The characters are vividly drawn. I like how I thought I knew most of them when subtle changes occurred. The reason I did not give it five stars, though, is the fact that it is advertised to have a romantic relationship within the book but the author did not live up to that.

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### **L. (Vacation All I Ever Wanted) says**

Large house with a tragic past - check.

Beautiful damsel alone in the world with no choice but to come live at said large house with tragic past - check.

Inhabitants of said house acting all secretive/borderline threatening towards the damsel - check.

Damsel is attracted to creepiest inhabitant of the house - check.

Several attempts are made on the damsel's life that she dismisses as accidents because she wouldn't know a red flag if it was shoved up her nose - check.

Pseudo voodoo that you do so well - check.

Lots of nocturnal activity that *isn't* of the sexual kind - check.

Yep, this is a Gothic, alright.

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### **Julie says**

The Secret of Mirror House by Jennifer Blake is a 2013 Steel Magnolia Press publication. (Original publication date: 1969)

I love these classic Gothic novels!!

After her mother's death, Amelia finds herself nearly destitute, so when distant relatives extend an invitation for her to come stay with them, she doesn't hesitate to accept.

However, Amelia begins to regret that decision almost immediately, when she encounters a house full of relatives who seem to dislike her on sight.

She is particularly shaken by the response she receives from Neville, a man who has never married, is rude, blunt, and even cruel at times.

But, at least her cousin, James is friendly... On the surface, at least.

But, Amelia is doubly shocked when it becomes clear her relatives want her marry one of these gentlemen, the sooner the better. Not only that, they seem to have a preference. But, Amelia has no interest in marriage, much less to either of these two men.

The tension mounts as the family seems to become more desperate and worried about the threat Amelia represents for their future.

Is there anyone in the house Amelia can trust? Will she learn the secrets of Mirror House?

This book was written at the height of the Gothic mystery/romance craze, but boasts a historical setting which gives it a more sinister atmosphere, as does the Southern locale. The extreme heat and humidity that hangs in the air intensifies the feeling of hostility and increases the level of suspense.

The author did a very good job of capturing the true Southern Gothic tones, building the tension at just the right pace. Because the story was set in the 1870's, a time when women had few options, Amelia could have become a stereotypical 'damsel in distress', but instead, she stands her ground, even when she was subjected to numerous mind games and trickery, displaying bravery, even when she began to fear for her life.

The romance is clean, and while there are some adult situations, anyone can enjoy these stories.

So, although this book was originally published back in the late sixties, it manages to stand the test of time for the most part.

I was so excited to see these books out there in the digital market because they are very hard to find in paperback. For people like myself, who loved borrowing these books from their mothers, it is so nice to be able to buy them , re-read them, and keep them forever. It is also a chance for readers to discover them anew and gain a new audience.

A wonderful and rare Gothic Classic- 4 stars

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### **Anne says**

Although I finished this book it was not the type of book I usually like. Too many weird characters.

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