



## The Damned

*Algernon Blackwood*

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## **The Damned** Algernon Blackwood

And instinctively, once alone, I made for the places where she had painted her extraordinary pictures; I tried to see what she had seen. Perhaps, now that she had opened my mind to another view, I should be sensitive to some similar interpretation--and possibly by way of literary expression. If I were to write about the place, I asked myself, how should I treat it? I deliberately invited an interpretation in the way that came easiest to me--writing.

## **The Damned Details**

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Author : Algernon Blackwood

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## From Reader Review The Damned for online ebook

### Mike McArtor says

This wasn't bad, but it lacks action. The narrator himself, and I kid you not, mentions several times that "nothing happens" and the lack of things happening is a central aspect of the story. Up until the narrator starts pounding into us that nothing happens there's a hope that the constant buildup of tension will find a release. But no. That doesn't happen. Because nothing actually happens.

This is an atmospheric piece and it is at its best when indulging in the slow and steady construction of atmosphere and tension. I'd recommend it to Gothic horror writers who want to see a pretty good example of how to build atmosphere but I'd warn them off emulating its storytelling and lack of direct conflict.

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### Portia S says

This was alright. The point of the book I think was that horror is not always one that peaks to the point of ultimate terror, but sometimes there are several layers of the haunted area which are fighting for complete control. Yet they cannot have it, and in the end, only the seeming ascension of something that is about to happen occurs, however nothing really happens. I know, sort of confusing isn't it?

The book is about a brother and sister, Bill and Frances who visit a friend of theirs, Mabel(a widow)at her home called the Towers. I gather it was quite the estate with lovely gardens and a large house. However, Mabel's late husband was a very religious man who spoke of damnation all the time and from what I gather is that he scared Mabel into these beliefs, and her fear in these beliefs allowed the supernatural "minerals" buried beneath the soil to come "unearthed" where some occurrences that could not be rendered as normal would come to pass.

Another theme of this book is the power of belief, and how the simple act of believing in something that was fed to you over a period of time could have so much power as to burst forth and scare you. Which sucks, cause sometimes I wonder if ghosts are real and then I freak out at everything -\_-

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### Mat says

So abstract and vague as to be incomprehensible. Incoherent, painfully boring gibberish...

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### Christopher Henderson says

As several other reviews already mention, this is perhaps not a book for modern sensibilities. There is little in the way of action and no neat little bows in which to tie up plot threads.

Instead, there is the exquisite tension of relentlessly building horror that refuses to offer relief, and there are ambiguities that will haunt your thoughts long after you have read the final page.

'Nothing happened,' the narrator tells us again and again. Usually such a passive statement, here it often feels as if it should be understood in an active sense. Nothing *is* happening, and it is happening all around the characters. Meanwhile, something is building in that house, something dreadful, something awful and immense and powerful - and it continues to build and build until the imminence is unbearable, but the storm refuses to break.

It's like a nightmare. As if you have become trapped inside some ghastly balloon, the skin of which is stretched so taut that it is barely there any longer. It's about to burst, and you dread the explosion - even as you pray for it to happen, to release you at last - but it doesn't come. You remain trapped, and each breath you exhale fills the balloon just that tiny bit more, increasing the pressure and the violence of what must surely happen any moment now, and as you exhale another breath the skin stretches just that little bit more

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... and nothing continues to happen.

It's horrible. Blackwood was a master.

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### **Ryan McCarthy says**

This longer story (or is it a novella?) would be a great exhibit of Blackwood's mastery of nameless dread if one could just ignore the denouement. Like in his better work, such as "The Willows," Blackwood is able to conjure all shades of terror from subtle impressions and details, made all the more intense because of the inability to define it or explain it away. The atmosphere through the middle of the tale is therefore classic Blackwood. The problem arises when an explanation begins to surface and the story becomes more or less an advertisement for the Theosophical Society or what might be termed "New Age" thought today. The society is not mentioned by name but their motto- "There is no religion higher than Truth"- is the motto of the benevolent community that takes custody of the cursed house and exorcises it abruptly through their practice of tolerance and compassion, and their generous faith in universal salvation. You see, the apparent haunting of the house is after all just the psychic residue of lots of mean, intolerant dogmatists of various creeds(Druid, Roman, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant) who have occupied the site throughout history. Some might accuse me of throwing a spoiler into my review by revealing all this, but the neat explanation is really not what makes this story worthwhile- it's a bit like when some editor decides to append a glib moral to a bewildering and surreal fairy tale. For readers unfamiliar with Blackwood's horror fiction, you'd better start with his better work, such as "The Willows" or "The Wendigo."

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### **Christina says**

I have found a new author to love. An excellent ghost story...

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### **Paige Ziolkowski says**

The start of this story was so intriguing. The fact that he only assumes something is wrong at the house (from a letter), is quite unsettling. When he arrives he feels uncomfortable—like he can't settle down or start something productive. His sister can't sleep one wink at night, while their hostess seems like a lifeless shell

of a person. It's clear something is wrong here, but it can't be pinned down.

The one thing I am highly impressed by is the theory our narrator and his sister come up with about the house. This theory being that the house is haunted by many beings—all of them fighting for dominance. That is why each person in this equation is effected differently by the house. Whichever influence they are most susceptible to is the one that takes over their thoughts and feelings. I absolutely love this idea!

However, I found this book hard to get through towards the end. The whole “nothing happened” thing only kept me interested for so long.

The plot as a whole is not bad at all—it's just the length of it. If it was shorter by just a bit we could still catch the whole drift without all the extra dull bits.

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### **Sistermagpie says**

Interesting book by Algernon Blackwood! A brother and sister spend some time with a recently widowed friend. Her deceased husband was a strict fire and brimstone preacher who damned everyone who didn't believe like him to hell. His less strong-willed wife fell under his spell, but now the house seems to be haunted by...a shadow? Goblins? Ghostly pagans? Or many different things at once.

It's an interesting concept, a house possessed by the strong beliefs of those who lived there before. I imagine Unitarians especially would enjoy coming off well in it! The most interesting thing is the supernatural element, how the narrator becomes aware of "layers" outside the house that each present their own spiritual view forever at war with each other. The haunting doesn't produce dread so much as a frustrated desire for something to happen. Definitely unique!

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### **Elleigh says**

This gave me the s\$&ts mainly because of the perpetual rise to climax that grew on you the entire story whilst getting steadily creepier

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### **Axslin gin says**

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!" Algernon Blackwood beat Walter Gibson to the punch with this meme, albeit *nothing actually happened* with Blackwood's shadow.

What is terror? Is it a physical calamity the evokes the stultifying, and sometimes maligned emotion? No, it the portentous foreboding that something might or could happen, of something just around the corner—or right behind you, dredged up from the accumulated recesses of your mind. It is the fear of the unknown and the expression of such that the mind tries to form. And that is where Algernon Blackwood takes you in this story.

A distraught woman invites two friends to spend time with her at *the towers*, a mammoth estate that is too big and too much for her to bear alone. Her late husband made the place his own, in that everything in it and about it was a reflection of him, not her. Gone, but not forgotten, the old maid on the property was there to keep his *ghost* alive.

The two friends, brother and sister, soon begin to feel the uneasiness of their host. The late fire and brimstone husband had unwittingly tormented his wife and induced a kind of psychosis, that spread like a blanket over the two guests. But, as reiterated numerous times in the book, *nothing happened*. But that isn't exactly true. Plenty happened, but if you were expecting an action-packed horror story, you will be disappointed.

Without going over the tale top to bottom, the story reads like an allegory, Frances and Bill, the guests, melding into a single mind with Mabel, the host. Frances was half-way between sanity and Mabel's condition, while Bill was the level headed one, although even he felt uncomfortable to the point where he was unable to relax at all.

Bill is the storyteller here, but Blackwood explores the fears of all three characters, a dynamic of one mind unsettled with fears quite possibly adopted in childhood (even alluded to in the story), with the house itself seeming being that part of the mind serving as a prison for that part of the mind that is looking for an escape.

In the end, a casting off of irrational fears and beliefs can work wonders seems to be the message. Unfortunately, many of us never achieve that; we can only assume that it happened here. But we'll never know for sure.

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### **Abi\_88 says**

This story held me captive from beginning to end. The struggle of beliefs and fears seemed very real to me.

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### **Jack says**

This is one of those books that gets hurt by modern horror writing. The atmosphere is creepy and there is a constant sense of dread throughout. You constantly expect something horrible to happen, and it never really does. A lot of reviewers on this site have used that as a criticism. They say nothing really happens, which was exactly the point of the book, even going so far as being explicitly stated.

The characters do not trust that their feelings are genuine. They want to leave, but they feel foolish being driven out by their own shadows, so to speak. They want something to happen. They crave it, if only so they know that their terror is legitimate.

Modern haunted house stories, which so often would have someone killed by some monster or another within ten pages, could learn something from this novella. Blackwood creates tension, and keeps it there, which little more than atmosphere for 115 pages. How many writers could do the same? Not many.

This book was written in 1914 and is one of the great, original haunted house stories. I highly recommend it for horror literature lovers. Blackwood is a legend within the genre and inspired countless writers, including H.P. Lovecraft and Caitlin Kiernan.

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### **John Wiltshire says**

I'm giving this three stars, mainly for the quality of the writing. The plot was a little confused, mainly I suspect because the philosophical underpinnings of the premise are too antiquated for modern readers. Well, for me, anyway. A brother and sister go to stay with the sister's newly widowed friend in her country mansion. He writes, she paints. The widow was married to a hellfire preacher--not the snake-wrangling American kind, but the very English, Victorian, temperance no-fun kind. His spirit quashed his wife's and appears to linger in the house. He espoused damnation for all mankind except his select few saved congregation. There's something in the house, both brother and sister sense it, but it never comes to anything--the missed sneeze syndrome. The nothingness is oppressive and terrifying.

The sense of wrongness is layered. Other tyrannical sects apparently owned the house--from Druids (well, not the house, obviously, the land it stands on), to Romans, to the Catholic inquisition--and all these joy-killers have sucked the life out of the place.

The solution eventually comes by selling the house to...well, this is where I lost the plot a little. I'm assuming the author created a scientific, atheist, rationalist solution. Benign atheist buys the house, all the terrible superstition and supernatural occurrences desist. Sam Harris would enjoy this.

As I say, the writing is terrific if you like nineteenth century literature. This is about as horrific as finding out you've run out of milk when you want a cup of tea (less so, actually), but I do recommend it for those who like their horror extremely gentle, just a little bit creepy. Pour yourself some red wine, light the fire and curl up with a good story that takes no more than an evening to read.

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### **John Gillespie says**

A great haunted house story along the lines of *Turn of the Screw* and *The Haunting of Hill House*. This is my first time reading Algernon Bloackwood, and I hope his other works as as subtle and well-written.

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### **? Irena ? says**

Compared to today's horror stories, *The Damned* would disappoint you if you want and expect things to jump at you.

Bill and Frances are visiting their widowed friend, who has just come back home. Her home, the Towers, seems to have kept her bigoted preacher husband's essence.

Nothing ever happens in the Towers. The thing is, the most frightening thing here is the wait. They constantly expect something, *anything* really, to make itself known. That lack of action is the actual story and its essence is in its atmosphere.

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