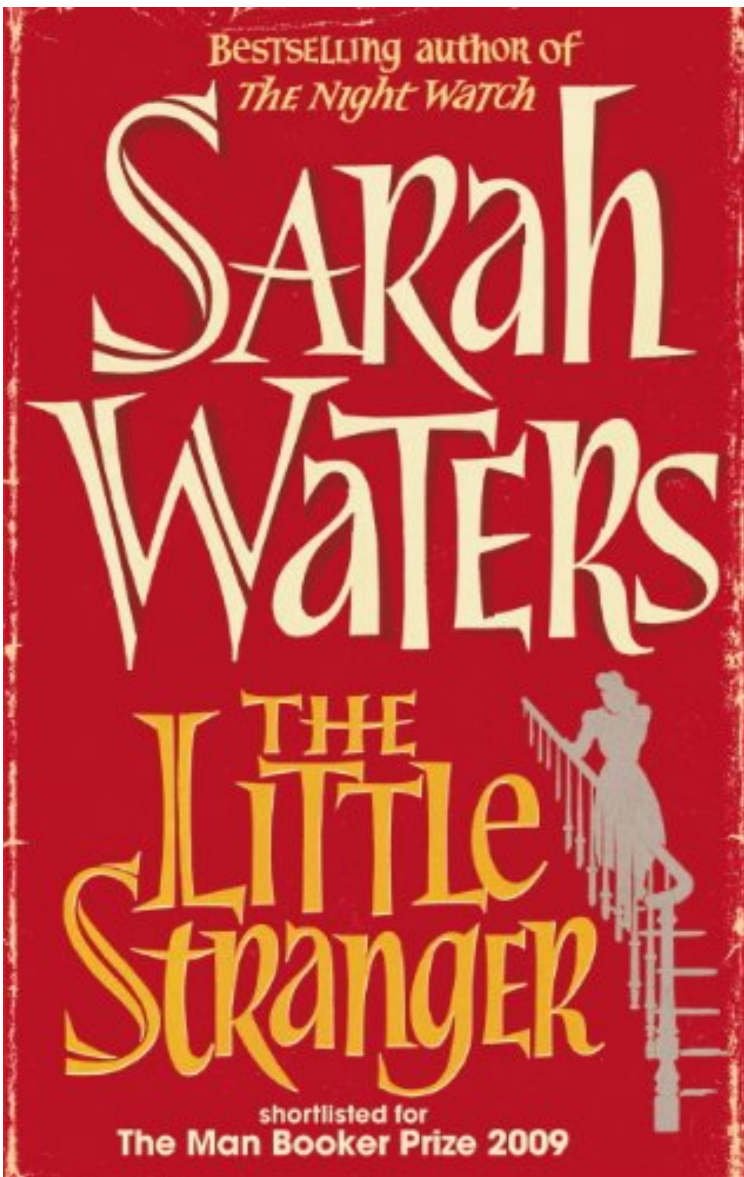


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The Little Stranger (English Edition)



Par Sarah Waters
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(Mobile ebook) The Little Stranger (English Edition)

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAfter her award-winning trilogy of Victorian novels, Sarah Waters turned to the 1940s and wrote THE NIGHT WATCH, a tender and tragic novel set against the backdrop of wartime Britain. Shortlisted for both the Orange and the Man Booker, it went straight to number one in the bestseller chart. In a dusty post-war summer in rural Warwickshire, a doctor is called to a patient at Hundreds Hall. Home to the Ayres family for over two centuries, the Georgian house, once grand 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. 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 entwined with his. Prepare

yourself. From this wonderful writer who continues to astonish us, now comes a chilling ghost story. Extrait Chapter 1, Part 1I first saw Hundreds Hall when I was ten years old. It was the summer after the war, and the Ayreses still had most of their money then, were still big people in the district. The event was an Empire Day fte: I stood with a line of other village children making a Boy Scout salute while Mrs Ayres and the Colonel went past us, handing out commemorative medals; afterwards we sat to tea with our parents at long tables on what I suppose was the south lawn. Mrs Ayres would have been twenty-four or -five, her husband a few years older; their little girl, Susan, would have been about six. They must have made a very handsome family, but my memory of them is vague. I recall most vividly the house itself, which struck me as an absolute mansion. I remember its lovely ageing details: the worn red brick, the cockled window glass, the weathered sandstone edgings. They made it look blurred and slightly uncertain like an ice, I thought, just beginning to melt in the sun. There were no trips inside, of course. The doors and French windows stood open, but each had a rope or a ribbon tied across it; the lavatories set aside for our use were the grooms and the gardeners, in the stable block. My mother, however, still had friends among the servants, and when the tea was finished and people were given the run of the grounds, she took me quietly into the house by a side door, and we spent a little time with the cook and the kitchen girls. The visit impressed me terribly. The kitchen was a basement one, reached by a cool vaulted corridor with something of the feel of a castle dungeon. An extraordinary number of people seemed to be coming and going along it with hampers and trays. The girls had such a mountain of crockery to wash, my mother rolled up her sleeves to help them; and to my very great delight, as a reward for her labour I was allowed to take my pick of the jellies and shapes that had come back uneaten from the fte. I was put to sit at a deal-topped table, and given a spoon from the familys own drawer a heavy thing of dulled silver, its bowl almost bigger than my mouth. But then came an even greater treat. High up on the wall of the vaulted passage was a junction-box of wires and bells, and when one of these bells was set ringing, calling the parlourmaid upstairs, she took me with her, so that I might peep past the green baize curtain that separated the front of the house from the back. I could stand and wait for her there, she said, if I was very good and quiet. I must only be sure to keep behind the curtain, for if the Colonel or the missus were to see me, thered be a row. I was an obedient child, as a rule. But the curtain opened onto the corner junction of two marble-floored passages, each one filled with marvellous things; and once she had disappeared softly in one direction, I took a few daring steps in the other. The thrill of it was astonishing. I dont mean the simple thrill of trespass, I mean the thrill of the house itself, which came to me from every surface from the polish on the floor, the patina on wooden chairs and cabinets, the bevel of a looking-glass, the scroll of a frame. I was drawn to one of the dustless white walls, which had a decorative plaster border, a representation of acorns and leaves. I had never seen anything like it, outside of a church, and after a second of looking it over I did what strikes me now as a dreadful thing: I worked my fingers around one of the acorns and tried to prise it from its setting; and when that failed to release it, I got out my penknife and dug away with that. I didnt do it in a spirit of vandalism. I wasnt a spiteful or destructive boy. It was simply that, in admiring the house, I wanted to possess a piece of it or rather, as if the admiration itself, which I suspected a more ordinary child would not have felt, entitled me to it. I was like a man, I suppose, wanting a lock of hair from the head of a girl he had suddenly and blindingly become enamoured of. Im afraid the acorn gave at last, though less cleanly than Id been expecting, with a tug of fibre and a fall of white powder and grit; I remember that as disappointing. Possibly Id imagined it to be made of marble. But nobody came, nobody caught me. It was, as they say, the work of a moment. I put the acorn in my pocket, and slipped back behind the curtain. The parlourmaid returned a minute later and took me back downstairs; my mother and I said goodbye to the kitchen staff, and rejoined my father in the garden. I felt the hard plaster lump in my pocket, now, with a sort of sick excitement. Id begun to be anxious that Colonel Ayres, a frightening man, would discover the damage and stop the fte. But the afternoon ran on without incident until the bluish drawing-in of dusk. My parents and I joined other Lidcote people for the long walk home, the bats flitting and wheeling with us along the lanes as if whirled on invisible strings. My mother found the acorn, of course, eventually. I had been drawing it in and out of my pocket, and it had left a chalky trail on the grey flannel of my shorts. When she understood what the queer little thing in her hand was, she almost wept. She didnt smack me, or tell my father; she never had the heart for arguments. Instead she looked at me, with her tearful eyes, as if baffled and ashamed. You ought to know better, a clever lad like you, I expect she said. People were always saying things like that to me when I was young. My parents, my uncles, my schoolmasters all the various adults who interested themselves in my career. The words used to drive me into secret rages, because on the one hand I wanted desperately to live up to my own reputation for

cleverness; and on the other it seemed very unfair, that that cleverness, which I had never asked for, could be turned into something with which to cut me down. The acorn was put on the fire. I found the blackened nub of it among the clinker, next day. That must have been the last grand year for Hundreds Hall, anyway. The following Empire Day fete was given by another family, in one of the neighbouring big houses; Hundreds had started its steady decline. Soon afterwards the Ayreses daughter died, and Mrs Ayres and the Colonel began to live less publicly. I dimly remember the births of their next two children, Caroline and Roderick but by then I was at Leamington College, and busy with bitter little battles of my own. My mother died when I was fifteen. She had had miscarriage after miscarriage, it turned out, all through my childhood, and the last one killed her. My father lived just long enough to see me graduate from medical school and return to Lidcote a qualified man. Colonel Ayres died a few years later an aneurism, I think. With his death, Hundreds Hall withdrew even further from the world. The gates of the park were kept almost permanently closed. The solid brown stone boundary wall, though not especially high, was high enough to seem forbidding. And for all that the house was such a grand one, there was no spot, on any of the lanes in that part of Warwickshire, from which it could be glimpsed. I sometimes thought of it, tucked away in there, as I passed the wall on my rounds picturing it always as it had seemed to me that day in 1919, with its handsome brick faces, and its cool marble passages, each one filled with marvellous things. So when I did see the house again almost thirty years on from that first visit, and shortly after the end of another war the changes in it appalled me. It was the purest chance that took me out there, for the Ayreses were registered with my partner, David Graham; but he was busy with an emergency case that day, so when the family sent out for a doctor the request was passed on to me. My heart began to sink almost the moment I let myself into the park. I remembered a long approach to the house through neat rhododendron and laurel, but the park was now so overgrown and untended, my small car had to fight its way down the drive. When I broke free of the bushes at last and found myself on a sweep of lumpy gravel with the Hall directly ahead of me, I put on the brake, and gaped in dismay. The house was smaller than in memory, of course not quite the mansion I'd been recalling but I'd been expecting that. What horrified me were the signs of decay. Sections of the lovely weathered edgings seemed to have fallen completely away, so that the house's uncertain Georgian outline was even more tentative than before. Ivy had spread, then patchily died, and hung like tangled rats-tail hair. The steps leading up to the broad front door were cracked, with weeds growing lushly up through the seams. I parked my car, climbed out, and almost feared to slam the door. The place, for so large and solid a structure, felt precarious. No one appeared to have heard me arrive, so after a little hesitation I went crunching over the gravel and gingerly climbed the cracked stone steps. It was a hot, still summer's day so windless that when I tugged on the tarnished old brass and ivory bell-pull I caught the ring of it, pure and clear, but distant, as if in the belly of the house. The ring was immediately followed by the faint, gruff barking of a dog. The barks were very soon cut off, and for another long minute there was silence. Then, from somewhere to my right, I heard the scrape of an irregular footstep, and a moment later the son of the family, Roderick, appeared around the corner of the house. He squinted over at me with some suspicion, until noticing the bag in my hand. Drawing a collapsed-looking cigarette from his mouth he called, 'You're the doctor, are you? We were expecting Dr Graham.' His tone was friendly enough, but had a touch of languor to it; as if he were bored by the sight of me already. I left the steps and went over to him, introdu... *Revue de presse* [The Little Stranger] 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*. Publishers Weekly Pick of the Week (starred review) Waters pulls such a sensational sleight of hand that you can get to the last page of this novel, sigh contentedly, and immediately turn to the first page and begin reading a story that resonates in a completely different register. Delightfully eerie. A welcome addition to the Waters canon, confirming her place as one of the best of our contemporary historical novelists. *The Gazette* (Montreal) A full-on, down-the-hatches ghost story. Hundreds Hall is as much a character as any of the humans in the book, animated by Waters' masterful, highly visual descriptions. If you read only one ghost story this summer, make it this one. *The Toronto Star* This novel belongs in an 18th-century tradition, the Gothic line timeless. *The Globe and Mail* Closer to Henry James than Stephen King. Waters is a great stylist and a master storyteller. *Winnipeg Free Press* A deliciously creepy tale haunted by the spirits of Henry James and Edgar Allan Poe. A ghost story as intelligent as it is stylish. [Faraday] calls to mind Patricia Highsmith's clever psychopath, Tom Ripley. Waters has made old bones dance again. *Washington Post* Completely absorbing [and] full of mystery. At the end of the book, Waters delivers a real shock. Hundreds Hall is a pretty gloomy place, but I was thrilled to spend time there, under the guidance of this supremely gifted storyteller. *Newsday* Sarah

Waters has renewed a chilling genre. Just don't read her new book in the house on your own at night. Evening Standard Terrific. [Waters] tells a story like no one else. NOW magazine Masterly, enthralling. Waters has managed to write a near-perfect gothic novel while at the same time confidently deploying the form into fresher territory. Its an astonishing performance, right down to the books mournful and devastating final sentence. Salon.com A stunning ghost story that nurtures Turn of the Screw style ambiguities. TimeOut New York The spookiest book I've read in a long time. The ending is perfect, leaving just enough to the imagination, and sending echoes back through all that has come before. Columbus Post-Dispatch A classic gothic page-turner. USA Today Sarah Waters is an excellent, evocative writer, and this is an incredibly gripping and readable novel. The New York Times Waters has yet again written a classic thriller, styled as a classic thriller. It can be only a matter of time before a latter-day Hitchcock turns it into a film. The Independent Waters's masterly novel is a perverse hymn to decay, to the corrosive power of class resentment as well as the damage wrought by the war. She deploys the vigour and cunning one finds in Margaret Atwoods fiction. She has the same narrative ease and expansiveness, and the same knack of twisting the tension tighter and tighter within an individual scene. Hilary Mantel, in The Guardian Waters is clearly at the top of her game, with few to match her ability to bring the past to life in a fully imagined world. Tracy Chevalier, in The Guardian Two novels under one cover. One of these is a shrewd and highly readable social history of the late 1940s [the other] is a classic ghost story of the haunted house, Edgar Allan Poe variety. Fay Weldon, in The Financial Times Again displaying her remarkable flair for period evocation, Waters re-creates back-water Britain just after the second world war with atmospheric immediacy. Timesonline.co.uk