

Penguin



Readers

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THE
TURN
OF
THE
SCREW

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CHAPTER ONE

An old manuscript

I first heard the story that you are going to read one Christmas in the 1890s, when I was a guest at a large house in the country. A group of us used to sit round the fire in the sitting room each evening and frighten each other by telling ghost stories. We always did this at Christmas. After a **particularly** horrible story about a boy and his mother, we agreed that the extra **terror** came from the story being about a child. My friend Douglas then said, "If we agree that a ghost story with a child in it gives another turn of the screw to the terror, what do you say about a story with two children in it?"

"We say, of course," somebody cried, "that having two children gives two turns of the screw! And we also say that we want to hear the story!"

In my mind, I can see Douglas now, standing with his hands in his pockets and his back to the fire, looking down at the person who had spoken. "Nobody but me, till now, has ever heard this story," he said. "It's too horrible."

"Oh, how wonderful!" cried one of the women.

Douglas did not seem to hear her; he **shivered** and put one hand in front of his eyes. "It's a **dreadful**, dreadful story."

"Well then," I said, "you had better sit down and begin!"

Douglas turned round to the fire and kicked a piece of wood,

watching the **flames** for a moment. Then, he turned to **face** us again and said, “I can’t begin yet because the story is written down. It is in a locked cupboard in my London house. I need to send a letter and the key to my London house and ask one of the **servants** to send me a **manuscript**.”

Everybody **groaned** because of course they wanted to hear the story straight away. However, we had to agree to be patient until the manuscript arrived.

“Did you write the manuscript?” someone asked.

“No, I did not,” he replied. “A woman wrote it.” He **paused**, then spoke again. “It is written in **faded** ink in the most beautiful handwriting, and the woman has been dead for twenty years. She sent me the manuscript before she died. She was my younger sister’s **governess** when I was at university forty years ago. I spent time with her during a long, hot summer holiday. We used to walk in the gardens together after she had finished work for the day. She was clever and nice – the most **charming** woman I’ve ever met that did that kind of job. I can see you smiling – and, yes, you’re right! I don’t mind admitting that I liked her very much, and I think that she liked me, too. If she hadn’t liked me, she wouldn’t have told me her story. I’m sure that she had never told anyone before me. I remember sitting on the grass under the branches of a huge tree one long, hot summer afternoon when she told me it. Although the day was so hot, I shivered as I listened.”

He left the fire and sat down again in his chair.

“So you will **receive** the manuscript on Thursday, the day after tomorrow?” I said.

“I think so,” Douglas replied. “Will you all meet me here after dinner?”

A number of voices replied, “I will! I will!”

“Now, I must go to bed,” said Douglas, quickly standing up and picking up a **candle**.

When he had gone, one of the women said, “I think he was in love with this governess.”

We all agreed, and I felt that this was the **reason** that she had left her manuscript to him.

The next evening, Wednesday evening, Douglas told us some more about the woman. She was the youngest daughter of a poor **parson** and had left the small country **parsonage** when she was twenty to look for a job as a governess. Although she had never had a job before, she had applied for one advertised by a **gentleman** in London. When she went to his house for an **interview**, she discovered that he was rich and handsome, and he treated her very kindly.

He had become the **guardian** of his niece and nephew, after the **tragic** death of his brother, a soldier, two years before, and then the death of his parents. The children had lived in India with the gentleman’s parents, their grandparents, since their father’s death. Now, they were living at the gentleman’s house in the country, a place called Bly in Essex, where the **housekeeper**, Mrs Grose, was looking after them. There had been a **previous**

governess, but she had died, so the older child, a boy of ten, was sent away to school. Now, the girl, who was eight, needed teaching, too.

One of the other guests **interrupted** Douglas as he was telling us this, asking, “What did the other governess die of?”

“You will learn more about the other governess tomorrow,” replied Douglas. Then, he continued.

“The salary the rich gentleman offered was extremely good, but there were strange **conditions** attached to the job. The new governess was going to be **in charge** at Bly, and she must never write to the guardian or contact him in any way. In fact, he never wanted to hear from her again. The young woman was nervous about taking a very responsible job, but the salary was very good. And, after a couple of days thinking about it, she accepted the job.”

“She had fallen in love with the guardian, of course,” I said.

Douglas got up and did as he had done before. He turned round to the fire and kicked a piece of wood, watching the flames that rose up. Then, he faced us again and said, “She only met him twice, but yes, she had fallen in love with him. Other women had applied for the job but had been afraid to accept his conditions. She promised to do what he asked, and he was very pleased. When he held her hand, and thanked her, she felt very happy because he made her feel special.”

“But did her happiness continue?” one of the women asked.

“She never saw him again,” was the answer.

Douglas did not say any more that night. The next night, he sat down by the fire, facing us, holding a thin book with a faded red cover. It was this book that came to me some years later, left to me by my friend Douglas when he died.

“What’s the title of your story?” a woman asked.

“I haven’t one,” replied Douglas.

“Oh, *I* have,” I said.

But Douglas, without answering, opened the book and began to read.

For Review Only

CHAPTER TWO

Bly

In the days before my journey to Bly, my feelings had changed many times. I had been happy after I had accepted my new job as governess, but then I had had many **doubts** about what I had done. Had I made a mistake? My employer's conditions were so strange. Could I do my **duty** as he had asked?

During the long journey by carriage on that beautiful June day, my doubts came and went. I was still **anxious** when the carriage stopped and I got out. Would I be able to do the job well? Would I become friends with the housekeeper, Mrs Grose?

However, after I got into the smaller carriage that had come to collect me from the village near Bly, I began to feel better. It was nearly the end of the afternoon on a peaceful summer day. I remember arriving at a very large country house with two tall square towers, like the towers of a castle. It was a fine house with windows that opened on to a terrace and a beautiful garden with a big, green lawn and bright flowers. Beyond the garden, there was a park with a lake, and I could hear the sound of birds in its tall trees. It was very different from the small country parsonage that I was used to.

I was met at the front door by Mrs Grose and the little girl, Flora. Mrs Grose welcomed me as if I were an important visitor, and the child was charming. Mrs Grose was a large, comfortable-