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SF PERUSALS

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

A Ghost Play

by Stephen Mallatratt
and Susan Hill

SAMUEL FRENCH

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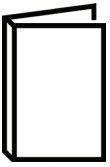
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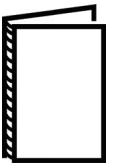
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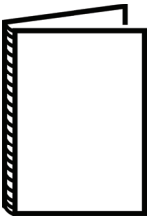
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ADAPTOR'S NOTE

Directors are unlikely to have much experience of ghost plays as there are relatively few around, so at the risk of stating the obvious I think it's worth a word or two concerning staging. I've now seen many productions of *The Woman in Black* around the world, some very effective, others less so.

The intent of the show is to frighten – so if it doesn't, it's nothing. The fear is not on a visual or visceral level, but an imaginative one. There are no gouts of blood nor any but the simplest of special effects.

Darkness is a powerful ally of terror, something glimpsed in a corner is far more frightening than if it's fully observed. Sets work best when they accommodate this – when things unknown might be in places unseen.

I have seen a production where the Woman herself was in full light for all her manifestations, and centre stage. Few things could have been less frightening. In the current London production we deny the audience a satisfying look at her until her final moment, and only then does she appear in all her terrifying despair.

The only aspect of the play that has any claim to complexity is the sound plot. There's also scope, though no obligation, for a wealth of light cues. In general, simple, straightforward staging is the most effective. For example there are one or two moments when just by raising the volume of a sound cue to an unexpected level, the audience can be shocked to screaming pitch.

There are anachronisms and geographical inconsistencies within the text. These are not mistakes, but indications of the neverland we inhabit when involved with the WOMAN in Black.

Stephen Mallatratt
January 1998

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THE WOMAN IN BLACK

First performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, on 11th December, 1987, with the following cast:

ACTOR	Jon Strickland
KIPPS	Dominic Letts
THE WOMAN	Lesley Meade

Directed by Robin Herford | Designed by Michael Holt

It was subsequently presented by the Lyric, Hammersmith, London, by arrangement with Peter Wilson and H. M. Tennent Ltd. on 11th January, 1989, with the following cast:

ACTOR	Charles Kay
KIPPS	John Duttine
THE WOMAN	Nicola Sloane

Directed by Robin Herford | Designed by Michael Holt

The production transferred to the Strand Theatre, London, on 15th February 1989; to the Playhouse, London, on 18th April, 1989 and to the Fortune Theatre, London, on 7th June 1989, with the same cast, where it ran in excess of five years with several cast changes.

CHARACTERS

ACTOR

KIPPS

THE WOMAN

The action takes place in a small Victorian theatre

With special thanks to Peter Lassey
and the Scarborough Innovation Centre

ACT I

A small Victorian theatre.

The proscenium has its gilding and its cherubs, and the curtains are gathered at the sides revealing a stage that is unprepared for performance and devoid of scenery. On the stage is a clutter of cloths, boxes and furniture. This clutter will evolve according to the needs of the performance—though should include a couple of chairs, a rocking chair, a high stool, a blanket and a large skip or trunk. A gauze divides the upstage area from the downstage. Beyond it, though unseen until lit, odd shapes of furniture are shrouded in cloths. The action, until stated, takes place in the downstage area and in the aisle of the theatre. A door is placed at the side of the stage. This door, which is presumably a remnant from some previous production, stands firmly closed.

The house lights remain on and working lights come up on the stage.

A middle-aged man enters. He carries a manuscript. He stands on the stage. This man, whose name is **KIPPS**, *will not be referred to as "***KIPPS***" but as "***ACTOR***" —even though he clearly isn't one.*

At the back of the theatre, in amongst the seats, a young man enters. This man, who is an **ACTOR**, *will not be referred to as "***ACTOR***" but as "***KIPPS***".*

The House lights remain on as the **ACTOR** *on the stage begins to read from his manuscript.*

ACTOR *(reading)* It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve. As I crossed the long entrance hall of my house, on my way from the dining-room, where we had just enjoyed the first of the happy, festive meals, towards the drawing-room and the fire around which my family were now assembled, I paused, and then, as I often do in the course of an evening, went to the front door, opened it and stepped outside.

KIPPS *(from the body of the theatre)* This is intended to be of interest, I take it?

ACTOR Why, yes, of course.

KIPPS They why announce it as if it were the fatstock prices?

ACTOR I'm afraid I don't understand.

KIPPS Let us *see* this entrance hall, let us *see* this house, let us taste and smell this happy, festive meal!

ACTOR But that's impossible.

KIPPS No, sir! Draw on your emotions, and on our imaginations.

ACTOR Forgive me, I am not an actor.

KIPPS No. *(Pause)* Again. Try it again.

ACTOR *(reading)* It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve. As I crossed the long entrance hall of my house, on my way from the dining-room, where we had just enjoyed the first of the happy, festive meals—

KIPPS You will excuse me. I know that what you read holds particular significance for you. That it is possible it will cause you some distress. But I must implore you: have sympathy for your audience.

ACTOR Sir?

KIPPS Just now we are alone here in this theatre. These rows of empty seats are unlikely to protest as you hum and mumble through your lines. But believe me, sir—speak them thus before an audience and you'll see them one by one expire with boredom.

Pause.

ACTOR It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve. As I crossed the long entrance hall of my house, on my—

KIPPS *Long* entrance hall?

ACTOR That's right.

KIPPS Why long?

ACTOR Because it is.

KIPPS Have sympathy for your audience. Are they interested in its length?

Pause.

ACTOR I apologize. I am clearly wasting your time. *(He puts his manuscript in his pocket and moves to leave)*

KIPPS Stay where you are.

ACTOR This is a foolish adventure. I should never have come.

KIPPS You did, however. And you have paid me for the day. I have no intention of not giving you full value.

ACTOR Please, I—

KIPPS No, sir. Attempt to leave and I will leap upon you and compel you to recite the Sonnets in their entirety!

ACTOR I—

KIPPS No! We'll make an Irving of you yet.

ACTOR I have no desire to be an Irving. All I wish, implore, is that this tale of mine be told. Be told and—laid to rest. God willing. So I may sleep without nightmares.

KIPPS Which is why you came to me.

ACTOR Yes.

KIPPS As one practised in these things.

ACTOR Yes.

KIPPS As one who will impart to you the rudiments of public speaking, who will offer advice as to *expression* and *delivery*, and, above all, instill in you the *confidence* to stand up and make a go of it!

ACTOR Confidence?

KIPPS Yes, *confidence*! Now then. Nine-thirty. Christmas Eve. Excitement Anticipation. Crisp air. Crackling fires. Children asleep with stockings by their beds, a happy family, content, delighted, and above all—*at peace.*

Pause. The **ACTOR** *summons up his energies.*

ACTOR It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve. As I crossed the long—the—entrance hall of my house, on my way from—on my way... *(Pause)* It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve. *(Pause)* It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve—

KIPPS What time was it?

ACTOR Nine-thirty—

KIPPS Not on Christmas Eve by any chance? Good gracious!

ACTOR I'm very sorry, this clearly isn't a success, I—

KIPPS You see, it doesn't come in five minutes. You think to stand up, recite your tale, and have your audience hang upon your words. As if that's all it takes. In which case, why d'you come to me for help? So that I'll say, "yes, wonderful, without a flaw"? Believe me, sir, performing is an art acquired with *tears* and *time.* I would be encouraged, sir, if every time I offered some advice you would not put up your manuscript and make to stalk out of the theatre!

ACTOR Advice?

KIPPS Yes! *Advice*!

ACTOR It sounds more like reproval.

KIPPS I promise you that as the day goes on it's likely to sound more so.

ACTOR May I just say—it is not a *performance* that I wish to give. No. I think we are at a misunderstanding in that respect. I wish to—speak it No more. For my family, only. For those who need to know. I am not a performer—I have no pretensions to be—nor inclination—but—those terrible things that happened to me—they must—I *have* to—let them be told. For my health and reason.

KIPPS You say you're not a performer.

ACTOR Oh truly.

KIPPS In your hand is a manuscript which, on estimate, will take five hours to read. If you, as an acknowledged non-performer, should stand before an audience, however friendly, and drone at them for longer than it takes to play *King Lear*, I trust you will be unsurprised if by the end of it they're either fast asleep or at your throat.

ACTOR Five hours?

KIPPS At least.

ACTOR Good heavens. *(Pause)* I'd no idea—I—five *hours*? *(Pause. He slumps into a chair)* I cannot possibly. *(Pause. At length he looks up. Addressing* **KIPPS***)* It must be told. I cannot carry the burden any longer. It *must* be *told.*

Black-out. When the lights return, the house lights stay off. **KIPPS** *is now on the stage, with the manuscript.* **KIPPS** *reads it rather well. A bit actorish, certainly, but with enthusiasm and skill. The* **ACTOR** *walks to the back of the theatre to listen.*

KIPPS *(reading)* It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve. As I opened my front door and stepped outside I smelled at once, and with a lightening heart, that there had been a change in the weather. All the previous week we had had thin chilling rain and a mist that lay low about the house and over the countryside. My spirits have for many years been excessively affected by the weather. But now the dampness and fogs had stolen away like thieves into the night, the sky

was pricked over with stars and the full moon rimmed with a halo of frost. Upstairs, three children slept with stockings tied to their bedposts. There was something in the air that night. That my peace of mind was about to be disturbed, and memories awakened that I had thought forever dead, I had, naturally, no idea. That I should ever again renew my acquaintance with mortal dread and terror of spirit, would have seemed at that moment impossible. I took a last look at the frosty darkness, sighed contentedly, and went in, to the happy company of my family. At the far end of the room stood the tree, candlelit and bedecked, and beneath it were the presents. There were vases of white chrysanthemums, and in the centre of the room a pyramid of gilded fruit and a bowl of oranges stuck all about with cloves, their spicy scent filling the air and mingling with the wood-smoke to be the very aroma of Christmas. I became aware that I had interrupted the others in a lively conversation. "We are telling ghost stories—just the thing for Christmas Eve!" And so they were—vying with each other to tell the horridest, most spine-chilling tale. They told of dripping stone walls in uninhabited castles and of ivy-clad monastery ruins by moonlight, of locked inner rooms and secret dungeons, dank charnel houses and overgrown graveyards, of howlings and shriekings, groanings and scuttlings. This was a sport, a high-spirited and harmless game among young people, there was nothing to torment and trouble me, nothing of which I could possibly disapprove. I did not want to seem a killjoy, old, stodgy and unimaginative. I turned my head away so that none of them should see my discomfiture. "And now it's your turn." "Oh no," I said, "nothing from me." "You must know at least one ghost story, everyone knows *one*." Ah, yes, yes, indeed. All the time I had been listening to their ghoulish, lurid inventions, the one thought that had been in my mind, and the only thing I could have said was "No, no, you have none of you any idea. This is all nonsense, fantasy, it is not like this. Nothing so blood-curdling and becreepered and crude—not so…so laughable. The truth is quite other, and altogether more terrible." "I am sorry to

disappoint you," I said. "But I have no story to tell!" And went quickly from the room and from the house. I walked in a frenzy of agitation, my heart pounding, my breathing short. I had always known in my heart that the experience would never leave me, that it was woven into my very fibres. Yes, I had a story, a true story, a story of haunting and evil, fear and confusion, horror and tragedy. But it was not a story to be told around the fireside on Christmas Eve.

Pause. **KIPPS** *looks out to the* **ACTOR** *at the back of the theatre.*

And then I thought you might recite the piece from Hamlet.

ACTOR *Hamlet*?

KIPPS "Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes..."

ACTOR Oh yes, of course. *(A beat)* You then, for the purpose of the reading, become me?

KIPPS Quite so. And you—for the purpose of the *performance*—you draw on your remembrance, to be the people that you met, those that played their parts in your story.

ACTOR Sir, I am not a performer.

KIPPS Sir, I know.

ACTOR And this must *not* be entertainment. Those most horrible events will *not* be treated as amusement or diversion. I *insist*, sir!

KIPPS And *I* insist, that you consider your audience. No matter how horrible, if your tale is to be heard, it must be offered in a form that is remotely palatable. You have come for advice and assistance, you must trust me. *(Pause)* From here, if you please.

The **ACTOR** *climbs reluctantly on to the stage.*

And let us show that we mean business...

KIPPS *switches off the workers, leaving them in a performance state.*

So your cue is "...fear and confusion, horror and tragedy. But it was not a story to be told around the fireside on Christmas Eve."

ACTOR *(reading from a copy of the manuscript)*

"Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes

Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,

This bird of dawning singeth all night long.

And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,

The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,

No Fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm

So hallowed and so gracious is that time."

KIPPS Those lines came into my head as if from heaven, and a great peace came upon me. I recalled that the way to banish an old ghost that continues its hauntings is to exorcise it. Well, then. Mine should be exorcised. I should tell my tale. I should set it down on paper, with every care and in every detail. I would write my own ghost story, and then, that they might know and that I might be forever purged of it, relive it through the telling. I prayed a heartfelt, simple prayer for peace of mind, and for strength and steadfastness to endure while I completed the most agonizing task. The first part, the writing, I have done. Now comes the telling. I pray for God's protection on us all.

Black-out.

The **ACTOR** *exits.*

The lights come up. It's the worker state again, though the house lights are now down and remain so for the rest of the evening. **KIPPS** *is on stage, arranging the*

clutter of furniture into some order that can pass for a solicitor's office. The skip suggests a large partners' desk.

The **ACTOR** *enters.*

Good-morning!

ACTOR Good-morning.

KIPPS I trust you slept well?

ACTOR Thank you, yes.

KIPPS No nightmares?

ACTOR Not too bad, I thank you.

KIPPS Ah. So we are not clear of it yet?

ACTOR I fear I never will be.

KIPPS We'll have you playful as a lamb again, you mark my words. Did you study as I asked you?

ACTOR As best I can—you must excuse me, it is not my...forte.

KIPPS We'll make an Irving of you yet.

ACTOR *(irritably)* I have no wish to be an Irving.

KIPPS No. But for the sake of our audience, let us at least try.

ACTOR This audience you speak of—it is to be just my family and friends? You don't intend to make a public spectacle—

KIPPS Good heavens, no. Your family, your friends. Perhaps the odd theatre manager, but... Now then—scene: London. Interior of the offices of solicitors Bentley, Haigh, Sweetman and Bentley. And I have a little surprise for you.

ACTOR What's that?

KIPPS Thank you, Mr Bunce! *(He clicks his fingers to the back of the theatre)*

Instantly come the sound effects of a London street: cars, horses, shouts from street vendors, etc. The **ACTOR** *is momentarily amazed. He listens for a while, then...*

ACTOR Recorded sound!

KIPPS Precisely. A remarkable invention, is it not?

ACTOR Extraordinarily true to life! I could swear I was in a London street, attempting to negotiate the thundering traffic!

KIPPS And so, Mr Kipps, will our audience. No need to speak of cars and trams and horses, smoke and grime. No need in fact, for words. Just let the recorded sound be heard and they are there. Transported.

ACTOR But the scene is to be in an office, is it not? Why do we have London's traffic flowing through an office?

KIPPS Why indeed? Mr Bunce! *(He clicks his fingers again)*

At once the traffic sound begins to fade and dissolves into the sonorous ticking of a long-case clock.

ACTOR *(listening with a certain amount of awe)* Remarkable.

The clock fades out. The street sounds return.

KIPPS *(with a superior smile)* The miracle of science, the hands of Bunce. He is particularly good at this sort of thing. And so to work. I am you, you are your clerk. I enter briskly, you are already at work.

ACTOR *(preparing to perform)* You must forgive me, this is not—

KIPPS —your forte. Quite. And it won't become so unless you attempt it. Begin, just as we went through it all last night. *(Calling to the back of the theatre)* I thank you!

The London street sound gives way to the sonorous clock.

KIPPS *exits.*

The **ACTOR**, *alias* **TOMES** *the clerk, stands working at a ledger. His desk might be the stool, or a pile of boxes. Whatever, it suggests discomfort.*

KIPPS *enters briskly. He tosses his briefcase on to the desk and sits.*

KIPPS *has learnt his part. The* **ACTOR** *struggles manfully, reading from the manuscript. The conceit is that although the* **ACTOR** *is unaccomplished, his enthusiasm for the task will grow through the early part of the enactment, in spite of his protestations.*

A foul day, Tomes.

TOMES Yes, Mr Kipps. *(He sniffs)*

KIPPS November. The drearest month of the year. Lowering to the spirits.

TOMES Yes, Mr Kipps. *(He sniffs)* This fog don't help.

KIPPS *(looking up from his desk to address the audience)* The thickest of London pea-soupers. A yellow fog. A filthy, evil-smelling fog, a fog that choked and blinded, smeared and stained. I worked at some dull details of the conveyancing of property leases, forgetful for the moment of it pressing against the window like a furred beast at my back.

TOMES *leaves his ledger, moves to* **KIPPS***'s desk and knocks on it.* **KIPPS** *looks up.*

TOMES Mr Bentley wishes to see you, sir.

KIPPS Straight away?

TOMES Straight away, sir, if you would. *(He sniffs)*

KIPPS *(addressing the audience)* That sniff, incidentally, occurred every twenty seconds, for which reason Tomes was confined, in general, to a cubbyhole in an outer lobby.

KIPPS *stands.*

ACTOR What now?

KIPPS Now you become Bentley.

ACTOR Oh yes, of course. *(A beat)* Do I do all right? Will it pass?

KIPPS Excellent. We'll make an Irving of—

ACTOR *(angrily)* Will you be quiet about Irving!

KIPPS Apologies. Carry on.

The **ACTOR** *sits the other side of the desk from* **KIPPS**, *becoming* **MR BENTLEY** *as he does so. He polishes his glasses.*

BENTLEY Sit ye down, Arthur, sit ye down.

KIPPS *sits.* **BENTLEY** *spreads himself in a relaxed way, taking his time before he speaks.*

I don't think I ever told you about the extraordinary Mrs Drablow?

KIPPS *shakes his head.*

Mrs Drablow. *(He takes out her will and waves it at* **KIPPS***)* Mrs Alice Drablow of Eel Marsh House. Dead, don't you know.

KIPPS Ah.

BENTLEY Yes. I inherited Mrs Drablow from my father. The family has had their business with this firm for...oh... *(He waves his hand, signifying ages)*

KIPPS Oh yes?

BENTLEY A good age. Eighty-seven.

KIPPS And it's her will you have there, I take it?

BENTLEY Mrs Drablow was, as they say, a rum 'un. Have you ever heard of the Nine Lives Causeway?

KIPPS No, never.

BENTLEY Nor ever of Eel Marsh in—shire?

That the written convention of "—shire" might be vocalized, I suggest that the **ACTOR** *mumbles and coughs through the "—".*

KIPPS No, sir.

BENTLEY Nor, I suppose, ever visited that county at all?

KIPPS I'm afraid not.

BENTLEY Living there, anyone might become rum.

KIPPS I've only a hazy idea of where it is.

BENTLEY Then, my boy, go home and pack your bags, and take the afternoon train from King's Cross, changing at Crewe and again at Homerby. From Homerby you take the branch line to the little market town of Crythin Gifford. After that, it's a wait for the tide!

KIPPS The tide!

BENTLEY You can only cross the causeway at low tide. That takes you on to Eel Marsh and the house.

KIPPS Mrs Drablow's?

BENTLEY When the tide comes in you're cut off until it's low again. Remarkable place. *(He stands to look out of the window)* Years since I went there, of course. My father took me. She didn't greatly care for visitors.

KIPPS Was she a widow?

BENTLEY Since quite early in her marriage.

KIPPS Children?

BENTLEY Children. *(He rubs at the window panes as a church bell tolls in the distance. He turns)* According to everything we've been told about Mrs Drablow, no, there were no children.

KIPPS Did she have a great deal of money or land?

BENTLEY She owned her house, of course, and a few properties in Crythin Gifford—shops with tenants, that sort of thing; there's a poor sort of farm, half under water. And there are the usual small trusts and investments.

KIPPS Then it all sounds pretty straightforward.

BENTLEY It does, does it not?

KIPPS May I ask why I'm to go there?

BENTLEY To represent this firm at our client's funeral.

KIPPS Oh yes, of course. I'll be very glad to go up to Mrs Drablow's funeral, naturally.

BENTLEY There's a bit more to it than that.

KIPPS The will?

BENTLEY I'll let you have the details to read on your journey. But, principally, you're to go through Mrs Drablow's documents—her private papers…whatever they may be. Wherever they may be…and to bring them to this office.

KIPPS I see.

BENTLEY Mrs Drablow was—somewhat…disorganized, shall I say? It may take you a while.

KIPPS A day or two?

BENTLEY At least a day or two, Arthur.

KIPPS Will there be anyone there to help me?

BENTLEY I've made arrangements. There's a local man dealing with it all—he'll be in touch with you.

KIPPS But presumably she had friends…or even neighbours?

BENTLEY Eel Marsh House is far from any neighbour.

KIPPS And being a rum 'un she never made friends, I suppose?

BENTLEY *(chuckling)* Come, Arthur, look on the bright side. Treat the whole thing as a jaunt.

KIPPS *stands.*

(waving his hand towards the window) At least it'll take you out of all this for a day or two. You'll reach Crythin Gifford by late this evening, and there's a small hotel you can put up at for tonight. The funeral is tomorrow morning at eleven.

BENTLEY *stands up and moves away from the desk.*

KIPPS *(clearing the desk)* I had to inform my landlady that I would be away a couple of nights, and to scribble a note to my fiancée Stella, to whom I hoped to be married the following year. After that I was to catch the afternoon train to a remote corner of England of which, until a few moments ago, I had barely heard.

The **ACTOR**, *now as* **TOMES**, *approaches* **KIPPS** *with a thick brown envelope marked "Drablow".*

TOMES The Drablow papers, sir.

KIPPS Thank you. *(He takes them)* I must say, Tomes, for all it's a strange part of the world I'm going to, that it's a relief to be leaving this appalling fog and unhealthy atmosphere.

TOMES *sniffs and goes. Pause.* **KIPPS** *looks across at the* **ACTOR.**

(calling) And you still feel unsure whether to go through with this?

ACTOR Oh, certainly.

KIPPS In spite of having just performed as you have done?

ACTOR There are so many things we cannot represent. How do we represent the dog, the sea, the causeway? How the pony and trap?

KIPPS With imagination, Mr Kipps. Our's, and our audience's.

ACTOR I would be obliged if you would inform me how imagination will create a pony and trap upon this stage.

KIPPS, *with alacrity, swings the skip into a position end on to the audience.*

KIPPS Here, trap! *(Indicating the space in front of it)* Here, pony! What could be clearer?

A pause as the **ACTOR** *surveys it dubiously.*

ACTOR It doesn't instantly say "trap" to me.

KIPPS But you *ride* it, don't you? And with a whip! And with recorded sound of a pony's hooves, I promise, *nothing* in the *world* could say it clearer.

ACTOR Except a pony and trap.

KIPPS Let us not be finicky, Mr Kipps.

Pause.

ACTOR I have to own, the recorded sound is splendid. It was a great surprise to me.

KIPPS And it does not stop now. There shall be more, much more. Tomorrow we are on the train. With more surprises. So now to work. *(He hands him some pages)* You will study these, I have divided up the lines again. And you will see I have cut much of the descriptive passages.

ACTOR But—

KIPPS Recorded sound, Mr Kipps. Recorded sound!

The lights fade to black-out. When they come up again, **KIPPS** *has a travelling bag, and from the sounds of steam trains and general bustle we are aware he is in King's Cross Station. The* **ACTOR** *reads from his manuscript now with more confidence.*

ACTOR Nothing could raise his spirits more than the sight of this great cavern of a railway station, glowing like the interior of a blacksmith's forge.

KIPPS *arranges his compartment and sits. He reads a newspaper.*

Beyond the windows it is quickly dark, and when the carriage blinds are down all is as cosy and enclosed as some lamplit study.

There are sounds of a steam train heading north. **KIPPS**, *in great contentment, reads his newspaper, and looks out of the window. After a while, the train slows down and draws to a halt as we hear "This is Crewe! Crewe Station! Passengers for Homerby please change here!" During the next speech, the* **ACTOR** *puts on a great-coat and hat.*

At Crewe he changes with ease,

KIPPS *swaps his seat.*

and continues on his way, noting that the track begins to veer towards the east as well as heading north. It is only when he comes to change again,

KIPPS *swaps his seat again.*

on to the branch line at the small station of Homerby, that he begins to be less comfortable, for here the air is a great deal colder and blowing in gusts from the east with an unpleasant rain upon its breath, and the train in which he is to travel the last hour of his journey is ancient and comfortless.

KIPPS *turns up his collar and rubs his hands against the cold. The* **ACTOR** *walks along the platform, sees* **KIPPS**, *and climbs in by him as the guard's whistle blows.*

KIPPS *(nodding)* It's a poor night.

SAMUEL DAILY *nods agreement. The* **ACTOR** *is still reading at this stage, though becoming freer in performance.*

It seems I have exchanged one kind of poor weather for another. I left London in the grip of an appalling fog, and up here it seems to be cold enough for snow.

SAM DAILY It's not snow. The wind'll blow itself out and take the rain off with it by morning.

KIPPS I'm very glad to hear it.

SAM DAILY But if you think you've escaped the fogs by coming up here you're mistaken. We get bad frets in this part of the world.

KIPPS Frets?

SAM DAILY Ay, frets. Sea-frets, sea-mists. They roll up in a minute from the sea to land across the marshes. One minute it's as clear as a June day, the next... *(His gesture indicates the suddenness of the frets)* Terrible. But if you're staying in Crythin you won't see the worst of it.

KIPPS I stay there tonight, at the *Gifford Arms*. I expect to go out to see something of the marshes later. *(He picks up his newspaper, nods at* **SAMUEL DAILY***, and begins to read)*

The train puffs on a while.

SAM DAILY Mrs Drablow.

KIPPS *looks up at him.*

Drablow. *(He points at the envelope)*

KIPPS *nods.*

You don't tell me you're a relative.

KIPPS I am her solicitor.

SAM DAILY Ah! Bound for the funeral?

KIPPS I am.

SAM DAILY You'll be about the only one that is.

KIPPS I gather she was something of a recluse? Well, that is sometimes the way with old ladies. They turn inwards—grow eccentric. I suppose it comes from living alone.

SAM DAILY I daresay that it does, Mr—?

KIPPS Kipps. Arthur Kipps.

SAM DAILY Samuel Daily.

They nod.

And when you live alone in such a place as that it comes a good deal easier.

KIPPS *(smiling rather smugly)* Come, you're not going to start telling me strange tales of lonely houses?

Pause.

SAM DAILY *(levelly)* No. I am not.

Pause. **KIPPS** *shudders.*

KIPPS Well, all I can say is that it's a sad thing when someone lives for eighty-seven years and can't count upon a few friendly faces to gather together at their funeral. *(He rubs his hand on the window and peers out)* How far have we to go?

SAM DAILY *(looking through the window)* Twelve miles. It's a far flung part of the world. We don't get many visitors.

KIPPS I suppose because there is nothing much to see.

SAM DAILY It all depends what you mean by "nothing". *(Pause)* But you'll find everything hospitable enough at Crythin, for all it's a plain little place. We tuck ourselves in with our backs to the wind, and carry on with our business. *(He takes a card from his wallet and hands it to* **KIPPS***)* Should you need anyone...

KIPPS Thank you. I doubt I shall. Whatever practical help I need I'm sure the local agent will provide—and I don't intend to be here more than a day or two.

DAILY *looks at him in silence.*

But thanks all the same. *(He puts the card into his waistcoat pocket)*

The train swells to a crescendo as the lights fade to a black-out, then, as it whistles, snaps off. When the lights come up again, **KIPPS** *is arranging the furniture: making a hotel lounge. The* **ACTOR** *has moved to the side of the stage and is donning an apron.*

The *Gifford Arms* was as comfortable a hotel as I could have wished to find.

KIPPS *looks around him approvingly, settles in an armchair and holds his hands to the fire. There is a murmur of voices from the public bar.*

My spirits rose and I began to feel more like a man on holiday than one come to attend a funeral. *(He takes out notepaper and pen and begins to write)* My Dearest Stella—

But at this the **LANDLORD** *enters to interrupt him.*

LANDLORD Are you a friend of Mr Daily's, then, sir?

KIPPS No, no.

LANDLORD Ah. Not meaning to pry, only I saw you arrive in his car.

KIPPS I met him on the train. He was kind enough to bring me from the station.

LANDLORD I see. He's a large landowner is Mr Daily. Buying up half the county.

KIPPS In that case I may be doing business with him myself before the year is out. I am a solicitor looking after the

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