

marsh An area of low-lying land that generally remains flooded all year round.

nook and cranny An idiom pair that means every possible place.

nostalgically Thinking about a pleasure from the past.

banshee In Irish folklore, a female spirit whose wailing warns of an impending death.

anguish Severe mental or physical suffering.



▲ Susan Hill's ghost stories are distinctive for their creation of suspense.

conjecture An opinion formed on the basis of incomplete information.

Mrs. Drablow Owner of Eel Marsh House; it was to sort out the legal matters arising from her death that the narrator had come to Crythin Gifford.

retainer A person attached or owing service to a household; a servant.

open **marsh**. Windows were rattling everywhere and there was the sound of moaning down all the chimneys of the house and whistling through every **nook and cranny**.

At first I was alarmed. Then, as I lay still, gathering my wits, I reflected on how long Eel Marsh House had stood here, steady as a lighthouse, quite alone and exposed, bearing the brunt of winter after winter of gales and driving rain and sleet and spray. It was unlikely to blow away tonight. And then, those memories of childhood began to be stirred again and I dwelt **nostalgically** upon all those nights when I had lain in the warm and snug safety of my bed in the nursery at the top of our family house in Sussex, hearing the wind rage round like a lion, howling at the doors and beating upon the windows but powerless to reach me. I lay back and slipped into that pleasant, trance-like state somewhere between sleeping and waking, recalling the past and all its emotions and impressions vividly, until I felt I was a small boy again.

Then from somewhere, out of that howling darkness, a cry came to my ears, catapulting me back into the present and banishing all tranquility.

I listened hard. Nothing. The tumult of the wind, like a **banshee**, and the banging and rattling of the window in its old, ill-fitting frame. Then yes, again, a cry, that familiar cry of desperation and **anguish**, a cry for help from a child somewhere out on the marsh.

There was no child. I knew that. How could there be? Yet how could I lie here and ignore even the crying of some long dead ghost?

'Rest in peace,' I thought, but this poor one did not, could not.

After a few moments I got up. I would go down into the kitchen and make myself a drink, stir up the fire a little and sit beside it trying, trying to shut out that calling voice for which I could do nothing, and no one had been able to do anything for... how many years?

As I went out onto the landing, Spider the dog following me at once, two things happened together. I had the impression of someone who had just that very second before gone past me on their way from the top of the stairs to one of the other rooms, and, as a tremendous blast of wind hit the house so that it all but seemed to rock at the impact, the lights went out. I had not bothered to pick up my torch from the bedside table and now I stood in the pitch blackness, unsure for a moment of my bearings.

And the person who had gone by, and who was now in this house with me? I had seen no one, felt nothing. There had been no movement, no brush of a sleeve against mine, no disturbance of the air, I had not even heard a foot step. I had simply the absolutely certain sense of someone just having passed close to me and gone away down the corridor. Down the short narrow corridor that led to the nursery whose door had been so firmly locked and then, inexplicably, opened.

For a moment, I actually began to **conjecture** that there was indeed someone – another human being – living here in this house, a person who hid themselves away in that mysterious nursery and came out at night to fetch food and drink and to take the air. Perhaps it was the woman in black? Had **Mrs Drablow** harboured some reclusive old sister or **retainer**, had she left behind her a mad friend that no one had known about? My brain span all manner of wild, incoherent fantasies as I tried desperately to provide a