

## The Woman in Black.

### Chapter 9 – In the Nursery

#### Spider

The dog has been loaned to him by Samuel Daily as a companion. Samuel is worried about Kipps' return to Eel Marsh House and had previously tried to persuade him not to return.

The dog alerts Kipps to the strange noises that he hears. She confirms for the reader that the noises are real and not just something that Arthur is dreaming. If it wasn't for the dog this part of the story would become less plausible.

Spider is made into a believable character at the beginning of the chapter where she is described as:

*Lively and alert...highly intelligent.. I thought I was going to be very glad of her'*

She is exactly the sort of dog the reader would expect him to take on such an adventure.

He immediately sets out to make himself at home at Eel Marsh House and Spider is part of the scene of domestic contentment that is created:

**'with a pot of tea at my right hand and the dog spider at my feet...'**

The reader is lulled into a false sense of security by this description, which makes the goings-on later in the chapter all the more frightening because of their contrast. Hill uses familiar objects and scenes to create a calm atmosphere here.

Hill continues to build on this scene of domestic bliss and normality further into the chapter. She has created a sense of security inside the house, now she uses the dog as a reason for Arthur to venture outside the house, where he has previously seen the woman in black.

At this point tension rises as the dog runs off into the graveyard where he saw her, the reader full expecting her to be there. However, Hill pulls the reader back from the obvious and describes instead :

*'Spider dashed in and out, searching for real or imaginary rabbits, digging occasionally in a frantic burst with her front paws and then bounding excitedly away'*

This is the sort of exuberant behaviour the reader would expect from a dog that has been confined to the house all morning and is completely natural and reassuring.

It also helps to further heighten the atmosphere of suspense as the reader is aware that the woman still has to appear. It is a sense of delayed anticipation that Hill creates in this part of the Chapter.

She extends the feeling of peace and tranquillity when Kipps next mentions Spider at night:

*'Spider was an excellent companion and I was glad of the sound of her gentle breathing, her occasional scratching or clattering about in that big, empty house'*

Kipps has convinced himself that the house has an air of sadness about it, not because anything supernatural is lurking within its walls but because it has been a lonely and uncared for place during the final years of Alice Drablow's life there. The description of Spider is used to confirm the sense that there is nothing malevolent lurking there – other-wise the dog would surely have sensed it.

Kipps even goes on to imagine having a dog like Spider when he and Stella are married, perhaps even one of Spider's puppies.

Hill creates a stark contrast with her next description of Spider, when Kipps is woken during the night:

*'Spider was up and standing at the door. Every hair of her body was on end, her ears were pricked, her tail erect, the whole of her tense, as if ready to spring.'*

Part of the reason for the inclusion of the dog is so that Hill can give a description to the physical reaction to fear – something that is different to human reaction. It is Spider who has woken Kipps up and she is at the door eager to see what is happening on the other side of it.

Kipps takes in the state of the dog which then prompts his own fearful reaction before he realises what has woken them both – the sound of the rocking chair. All senses other than hearing seem to have been suspended at this point and this sense heightens because of the darkness. The description of Spider's reaction continues with:

*'The dog continued to stand, bristling at the door, now putting her nose to the gap at the bottom and snuffling along, now taking a pace backwards, head cocked.'*

The use of the verb bristling shows how frightened the dog is. It also suggests alert anger as if she is desperate to get to whatever is on the other side of the door. All this is instinctive behaviour for the dog and the reader gets the sense that it is the dog, not Kipps who is leading the story at this point. If he opens the door it will be to satisfy the curiosity of the dog more than himself.

Kipps actually states that the dog is the reason he was able to go and investigate:

*'because nothing else happened and because I did have the dog to take with me...'*

Spider's reaction when released is instinctive and fearless:

*'Spider shot ahead...'*

When they reach the locked door her reaction becomes more extreme:

*'her body grew rigid, her growling grew louder...I stroked the rough, short hair, as much for my own reassurance as for hers. I could feel the tension in her limbs and body and it answered to my own.'*

Each short description of the fear they both feel serves to heighten the tension in the scene yet further. Layers of tension are created each time the dog is mentioned. Their roles are finally reversed as the noise inside the locked room continues:

*'Spider began to whine, a thin, pitiful moan, and to back away from the door a little and press against my legs.'*

The tension is added to again here. It is now the dog who is the more scared of the two and seeks Kipps' protection.

Tension is finally released in the scene when they return to the bedroom and Spider's reaction signals the end of their terror:

*'When I stroked her, I realised she was calm again, her body relaxed, her ears down.'*

In the morning all seems still to be well and Kipps and Spider take a walk outside, where everything still seems perfectly normal. They return to the inn for more supplies and the reader begins to feel that the events of the night before were the stuff of nightmares.

The arrival of one of the sea fretts when they arrive back at the house prompts Kipps to make the decision to return to the village despite the ominous nature of

the weather. He realises when he goes outside that crossing the causeway would not be possible and they retreat to the house.

He is once again alerted to the noise in the house by Spider:

*I saw that her hackles were up..at once Spider shot out of the room'*

"The description is almost identical to that of the night before with the dog alerting Kipps to danger then darting out of the room ahead of him to investigate.

When Kipps goes around to the front of the house, suspecting to find a visitor there he first hears the sound of the pony and trap. Spider follows him this time. She stands beside him, obviously having heard the noise too. This noise makes the reader more expectant, as if it heralds in some way the arrival of the woman in black and at this point the reader expects her to be revealed at the end of the chapter.

Spider is again used to make the tension mount still further. Her own fear is now beyond her hackles being raised or her fur bristling. She responds to the sounds with her own cry of terror:

*'She half lifted her paws off the ground and began to howl, a loud, prolonged, agonised and heart-stopping howl.'*

The dog has gone completely back to animal instincts in response to what she has heard. It is almost like the howl of a wolf and just as spine-chilling. The fact that the howl is prolonged makes it even more wolf-like. She even has to be carried inside. Rather than the dog comforting Kipps it is now the other way round. He has to be brave because the dog is frightened. Her behaviour forces him to confront his fear and go back to the nursery fully expecting to see the woman in black there.

Spider is part of the anti-climax, when, upon entering the room Kipps finds nothing apart from a well-ordered Nursery. He realises the sound he has heard was the sound of the rocking-chair.

*'The dog was sitting quietly now on the rag rug beside the child's bed.'*

Spider could even be part of the nursery scene herself, perhaps belonging to the little boy. Kipps knows that there was something there and whatever it was has disappeared leaving another scene of domesticity behind it, right down to the dog sat quietly beside the bed.

