

The Woman in Black

Chapter 9 - In the Nursery

What contribution does sound make to the creation of atmosphere in Chapter 9?

'At first, all seemed very quiet, very still...and then, somewhere within the depths of the house, - but somewhere not very far from the room in which I was, I heard a noise. It was a faint noise, and, strain my ears as I might, I could not make out exactly what it was'

'It was a sound like a regular yet intermittent bump or rumble.'

'There were no footsteps, no creaking floorboards, the air was absolutely still, the wind did not moan in the casement'

'It was the sound of something bumping gently on the floor, in a rhythmic sort of way, a familiar sound and yet still one I could not place exactly, a sound that seemed to belong to my past, to waken old, half-forgotten memories and associations deep within me, a sound, that, in any other place, would not have made me afraid but would, I thought, have been curiously comforting.'

'Bump bump. Pause. Bump bump. Pause. Bump bump. Bump bump. Bump bump.'

'Only the muffled noise went on and on...'

'Spider shot ahead and I heard her padding about, sniffing intently at every closed door, still growling and grumbling down in her throat'

'After a while I heard the odd sound again ... it was still impossible to identify'.

'Down below me on the ground floor of the house, silence, a seething, blanketing, almost tangible silence'.

'But at my feet the dog, Spider began to whine, a thin, pitiful, frightened moan.'

'I realised that the sounds had been coming not from within the room but outside it, beyond the window.'

'I heard another, faint sound...it came from behind me... from the front of the house.'

'I was making my way back to the house..I heard the noise and, when I heard it, so close that I thought it was only a few yards from the house, turned back, expecting to greet a visitor...the clip-clop of the pony's hooves and the rumbling and creaking of the trap were coming..the noise was beginning to come from a different direction now, as the pony and trap left the Causeway and struck off across the open marsh.'

'The pony trap was going further away now, the noise of its wheels becoming muffled and then there was the sound of splashing water and churning mud, the noise of the pony plunging about in terror...There was a terrible moment when the waters began to close around it and to gurgle, and then, above it all, and above the whinnying and struggling of the pony, the child's cry, that rose and rose to a scream of terror and was then slowly choked and drowned; and finally silence.'

'Then nothing, save the lap and eddy of the water.'

'I half wondered if I were remembering and reliving a memory, a cry, a child's cry. But no.'

'I stood, helplessly hearing that dreadful sequence of sounds repeated again, as it would be repeated in my head a thousand times forever after.'

'Spider took a couple of steps back and began to howl, a loud, prolonged, agonised and heart-stopping howl.'

'There was no sound in the house at all...Nothing. Absolute silence.'

'I cycled back towards the house, whistling as I went.'

'I could hear it again, the odd, faint rhythmic noise – bump bump, pause, bump bump, pause, bump bump...'

'Within, I could hear both the noise – louder now because the door was open – and the sound of the dog, pattering about and sniffing and snuffling as she went.'

'I had realised at last what the noise within the room was- or, at least, what it reminded me closely of. It was the sound of the wooden runners of my nurse's rocking chair..

'It was the sound that meant comfort and safety, peace and reassurance...that lulled me to sleep..the sound began to exert the same effect upon me until I felt hypnotised by it in to a state of drowsiness..'