

Selected Stories

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The Virgin and the Gipsy

1 Yvette is the rector's younger daughter. She is beautiful like her mother, Cynthia, and careless like her too. Cynthia had run away from her family to be with a younger man. The rector spoils Yvette and she does exactly as she likes.

One day, when Yvette needs some money, she 'borrows' it from the Church Window Fund. She says that she will pay it back, but her father is angry. He thinks that Yvette is as careless and as thoughtless as her mother. Later on, Yvette becomes friendly with Mrs Fawcett, who has left her rich husband to live with her boy-friend, Major Eastwood, who is some years younger. Yvette thinks that the Eastwoods, as she calls her new friends, are unusual and interesting people. But the rector thinks that they are dishonest and bad. Mrs Eastwood is behaving exactly as his wife, Cynthia, had done. He threatens to kill Yvette if she behaves like her mother. He says that Yvette must give up her new friends or leave the house.

2 The superstition is that if you break a mirror, you will bring bad luck into the house and to everyone living there.

3 The old gipsy woman says, 'There's a dark man who never lived in a house.' That is the dark young gipsy, who lives in a caravan. Yvette is also told that other people are treading on her heart and have almost killed it. Yvette understands that these people are her Granny, her Aunt Cissie and her father, the rector. They have almost destroyed all the love in her heart. Even her friend, Leo, does not understand her feelings. Yvette likes him, but she does not love him.

The old gipsy also says that the dark young man loves Yvette and will wake up her heart with his love. Later on, the old gipsy has a dream and sends Yvette another message. 'Be braver in your body or your luck will leave you.' Then she adds, 'Listen for the voice of water.'

When the flood comes, the dark young man is there to save Yvette as she hears the voice of water. He takes her up to her bedroom where they are safe. Unafraid, Yvette obeys the young gipsy when he tells her to take off her wet clothes and get into bed. There he makes love to the virgin. When she wakes up, the gipsy has gone. Yvette escapes from the house by climbing down a dangerous ladder and so she is 'brave in her body' once more.

The Lovely Lady

1 Pauline Attenborough is the lovely lady. She is seventy-two years old, but she looks much younger. She is beautiful, rich and she has a very strong character. Pauline has collected beautiful pictures and paintings all her life. Her house is full of beautiful things and she has become rich by selling them too.

Her younger son, Robert, and her niece, Cissie live with Pauline. Robert works, but he does not get much money. Cissie has no money and no home of her own. So they are both dependent on Pauline because they are living in her house. Cissie does have her own flat, but the three of them always have dinner together.

Robert gets on well with his mother, but he does everything that she wants him to do. Pauline loves having power over people. We are told that both Robert and Cissie are shy. Robert's mother had left his father many years before and his older brother is dead. Robert has no confidence in himself, because his mother is so strong. Cissie is shy too. She is not beautiful like her Aunt Pauline and she always does what her aunt wants. She has no friends of her own, but she loves her cousin, Robert. Cissie cannot believe that anyone would love her and she does not show Robert her true feelings.

2 After the summer storm, Pauline goes mad. She wears black clothes and looks old and ugly. She had been frightened by Cissie when her niece shouted down the drain-pipe, pretending to be dead people. Then the storm comes and Pauline is afraid of it. But Cissie is happy. She puts on a white dress and wears flowers when she dresses for dinner. After dinner, Pauline tells Robert who his father was. She looks with hate at her son and niece and tells them that they are not cousins and should get married. Then Pauline goes back to her room. Robert and Cissie now spend a lot of time together, but Cissie does not tell Robert about how she frightened Pauline. Robert tells Cissie that he has always hated his mother. Pauline dies, but she has her revenge on Robert and Cissie. She leaves Robert one thousand pounds and Cissie only one hundred. The rest of Pauline's money and all her beautiful things go to the museum she had built.

The Rocking Horse Winner

- (a) The voices in the house are important to the children, because they hear them all the time. Hester has a husband and three beautiful children. She lives with them in a beautiful house, but she is not happy. The family spends too much money and they never have enough. The children's parents are always talking about it. So the house seems to be full of voices whispering, 'There must be more money.' Paul, Hester's son, asks his mother why they are poor. She tells him that to be rich, you must be lucky. She also says that her husband is not lucky. Paul says that he is a lucky person. He will try to find luck, to help his family. And he is sure that his rocking horse can help him. He rocks on it, faster and faster, in his search for luck. He wants to stop the whispers.
- (b) Paul finds that he can say which horse will win a race. Then, with the help of Bassett the gardener, he bets on the horse and wins. Paul's uncle finds out about this and decides to become Paul's partner. He will make a bet when Paul gives him the winner's name. Paul is sure that a horse called Lively Spark will win the big race called the Leger. The horse comes in first and Paul and his Uncle Oscar make thousands of pounds. Paul is saving the money to give to his mother.
- (c) Paul gives the money to his mother and she wants more. Now the boy hears the voices shouting, 'There must be more money.' He is frightened and becomes ill. He is not sure about the winner of the Grand National. He bets on the wrong horse and loses money. Paul knows that he must pick the Derby winner. He has his rocking horse moved into his bedroom. Paul thinks that when he 'rides' the horse, it will tell him the next winner – of the Derby. But this idea is making the boy very ill. Two nights before the big race, Hester feels very worried about her son. She goes to his bedroom and hears a strange sound. When she opens the door, she sees Paul riding his wooden horse, faster and faster. He is screaming out the name of a horse, 'It's Malabar!' he shouts in a strange, mad voice. Then he falls down on the floor. Oscar bets a thousand pounds on Malabar and it wins the Derby. Bassett bets on the horse too. He tells Paul that he now has eighty thousand pounds. Paul is mad with excitement. He tells his mother that he is lucky. If he can ride his rocking horse, he will always find the winner. Then, in the night, Paul dies. Hester has a lot of money now, but she has lost her son. Paul will never ride his rocking horse again. He will never pick another rocking horse winner.

Love Among the Haystacks

- 1 During two weeks in July, the Wookey brothers – Geoffrey and Maurice – are harvesting their hay and making it into two big haystacks.
- 2 Geoffrey is not as handsome as his younger brother, Maurice, and he does not have his confidence. Geoffrey becomes very jealous when he hears that a girl has been with Maurice during the night, when he was watching the haystacks.
- 3
 - (a) The young woman is called Paula Jablonowsky. She works at the nearby vicarage as governess to the vicar's children. She comes to the haystacks at night to see Maurice, because they love each other. Paula also comes to the haystacks during the day, when Maurice falls from the haystack and Geoffrey shouts for help. Later on, she brings Maurice some chicken to eat. Paula talks to his father and tells him about herself. She says that she would like to be a farmer's wife.
 - (b) The cold, pale man is the vicar, who hates Paula. He also hears the shouts when Maurice falls from the haystack. He runs across the field to help him.
 - (c) The small, thin man is a tramp. He comes into the field with the haystacks, looking for work. There isn't any, but he is given some food and some tobacco.
 - (d) The man on the bicycle is Geoffrey. He comes at night to help his brother put the stack-cloth on the second stack, because it is raining. Geoffrey hears Paula, who is on top of the stack with his brother. Geoffrey is jealous and he feels very lonely. He goes into the shed, because it is raining heavily.
 - (e) The woman with calm, golden-brown eyes is the tramp's wife. She first comes to the haystacks during the day looking for her husband. Geoffrey and the woman look at each other with understanding. Later, she comes to the haystacks at night, when Geoffrey is in the shed. The woman is looking for her husband again, but she hates him. Geoffrey is very sorry for her. They stay together all night and make love.