

The Watchful Man



A Short Children's Story Written by: Melody Dorney-Thornhill

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Foreword

It's 1851, 12 years after the coronation of Queen Victoria. The Armstrong-Trent family, brothers and sister's James 12, Charlotte 11, Sara 9 and Edward 6, were coming to terms with the sad loss of their mother, who had died 4 months previously. They had been to stay with their aunt Beatrice, their late mother's sister some 80 miles away in the small market town of Elmersdale.

After travelling through a tempestuous storm the night before, they are looking forward to being back at their ancestral home, Fairmead Hall. But, after the arrival of a new governess, it's only a matter of weeks after their return home that things begin to change with dire consequences. Mrs Burbridge, their loyal and trusted housekeeper of some 25 years is accused of stealing a valued pearl necklace and is dismissed and sent away from the house. But stranger still, is the man on horseback, wearing a black hat and cloak that keeps appearing mysteriously on the horizon!

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THE WATCHFUL MAN

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This book is entirely fictitious
Characters, Places and Happenings
is all the imaginative work of the author alone?
Any similarities to people living or dead is
unintentional. It's purely coincidence, on the author's part.

Chapter 1 ~ The Storm

The thunder crashed, Edward awoke startled and afraid! Charlotte stroked her little brother's cheek reassuringly and said, "Don't worry my angel, all will be well soon." Wide eyed with fear he asked, "Is it much further?" "No, not much longer, only a couple of hours?" she replied. "Close your eyes, go back to sleep now, and by the time you wake up, we shall be home once more, promise!" Reassured, Edward was soon asleep again.

The whip cracked, the horses' hooves were thunderously hitting the ground until eventually the monotony became too much even for Charlotte; she glanced over at James who seemed quite disconcerted by the thunder and the lightning and said, "I wonder when this maelstrom will cease? It will be such a relief to get home. Thank goodness Sara didn't wake up too. It's bad enough having Edward frightened let alone Sara as well." James laughed and said, '*tongue in cheek*,' "Yes, but I don't think there's much fear of that, even if there were a gigantic earthquake she still wouldn't stir." Charlotte smiled; looked at Sara

affectionately and said, "Well, I think that's a slight exaggeration, but I know what you mean."

"Mind you I have to admit, even I can't wait to get back to Fairmead Hall," James confessed. "Me neither", she replied. I have missed home these past 4 months since mother died. "Yes, poor mother!" he replied, "It won't ever be quite the same without her". "It was very good of Aunt Beatrice to allow us to stay for so long." Aunt Beatrice lived some 80 miles away in the small market town of Elmersdale. "It must have been quite hard for her to take all four of us; what with having two children of her own to care for too. "Yes, but it was nice to see cousin's Isaac and Phoebe again," she said. "Yes," he replied wistfully; he was still thinking about the fishing and riding expeditions that he and cousin Isaac had enjoyed together.

Chapter 2 – Fairmead Hall

The horses pulled up sharply, Charlotte and James woke up with a start, they could hear Tom patting their backs, talking to them in his deep rustic tones, “Well done me ‘booties’, yer weathered the storm, yer got us ‘ome safely. Well done, me booties!”

They stepped down from the coach, their shoulders and limbs stiff from sitting in the confines of the coach for so long. Nothing had changed; the house still looked the same, warm and welcoming as ever with the early morning sun flatteringly casting rays of light over its white walls, even the gargoyles seemed to be smiling down at them. The storm had finally abated; it was turning out to be a beautiful morning, considering it was early March. “Mmm” said Charlotte, yawning and stretching at the same time, “It smells so fresh, how good it feels to be home at last and to be out of that stuffy coach.”

A welcoming party awaited them at Fairmead Hall headed by their father, Richard Armstrong-Trent, followed by, Mrs Burbridge the housekeeper, Martha the cook, and Baxter and Tosca their two loyal

golden retrievers. The two dogs were barking, running towards them excitedly. "Down boys," James said affectionately, patting them gently on the head as he raced with them towards the house.

Father was first to speak, "How are you all, I have missed you terribly. I trust you were well behaved at Aunt Bea's house?" "Yes father, we were," said James, "But we are so glad to be home with you once again." "It's good to see all of you too," he replied, "But come now, you must be hungry, let's all go into the dining room, breakfast is ready."