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## The Painting of ---ngley Hall – Part 1

Mr S. Williams was a collector of paintings, and his special interest was pictures of old English country houses, English churches and country towns. One day, he received a price list from Mr Britnall's shop, where he often bought paintings.

With the list was a note from Mr Britnall himself, saying that he thought painting number 978 might interest Mr Williams. Although the price seemed rather high, the description of number 978 made Mr Williams keen to see it. He decided to order it at once.

The painting arrived a few days later and Mr Williams tore off the paper, feeling quite excited. What he found was an ordinary picture of a large country house from the century before. The house had three rows of windows, there were tall trees on either side and a garden in front.

The letters A.W.F. were in a corner of the painting, probably for the name of the artist. On the back of the picture was a piece of paper, torn in half, with the words '—ngley Hall, —ssex' on it.

He could not see anything very special about the picture and could not understand why Mr Britnall thought he would like it or why the price was so high. He decided to send it back to the shop the next day.

That evening, a good friend, John Garwood, came to Williams's house and noticed the painting. '

A new one, eh, Williams? Mmm ... I rather like it. The light is very good and I rather like this person at the front,' he said.

'A person?' said Williams, coming closer. 'Oh yes, so there is! I didn't notice it before.'

Only the head of the person could be seen. It was impossible to say whether it was a man or a woman, but it was standing under the dark trees at one side of the picture, looking at the house. 'And I suppose the light is quite good,' Williams went on. 'I still feel it's a bit expensive, though.'

'I was going to send it back tomorrow.' Soon afterwards, the two men went out to dinner with some of their friends from the university and later Williams invited some of them back to his house for a drink. One of them, who was also interested in art, noticed the new painting.

'Quite interesting,' he said, 'but don't you find it rather horrible, Williams? The light is good, but that person standing in front of the house is rather frightening.'

Williams was too busy pouring drinks to look at the painting just then, but later, on his way to bed, he looked at it again and was amazed to see that the person in the picture was now right in front of the house, not to one side under the trees.

The person seemed to be on their hands and knees, moving towards the house. He or she looked extremely thin and was dressed all in

black, except for a white cross on the back.

'Am I going mad?' Williams asked himself. He decided to lock the picture in a cupboard but did not want to go straight to bed. 'I'll write down everything that has happened to the picture since it arrived here.'

Then in the morning 'I won't think this is all a dream,' he thought to himself. And that is what he did. He found it very difficult to sleep that night, and the next morning he decided to ask another friend, Nisbet to come and look at the painting.

'I want you to tell me exactly what you see in the picture, in detail,' he said to Nisbet, showing him the painting. 'I'll explain why afterwards.'

'Well, I can see a country house - English, I think — by moonlight...' began Nisbet.

'Moonlight?' interrupted Williams. 'Are you sure? There was no moon there when I first got it.'

Nisbet looked at his friend strangely. 'Shall I continue? The house has one - two - three rows of windows . . . '

'But what about people?' interrupted Williams again.

'No one at all,' said Nisbet. 'But what *is* all this about. Williams?'

'I'll explain in a moment,' answered Williams. 'Can you see anything more?'

'Well, let me see, the only other interesting detail is that one of the windows on the ground floor is open,' said Nisbet.

'My goodness!' Williams shouted. 'It's inside the house now.'