



Some Must Watch

Ethel Lina White

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Also published as The Spiral Staircase. This book has been the inspiration behind three movies.

As Professor Sebastian Warren battens down the shutters and locks all the doors of their isolated country house, the eight occupants start to feel safe. Somewhere outside lurks a murderer of young girls, the latest only an earshot away. Is there really safety in numbers and what happens when their numbers start to dwindle?

Some Must Watch Details

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Kirsty says

Whenever I cannot decide on which genre I want to read, I tend to be selecting mysteries at the moment. I have really enjoyed a couple of White's books to date, but was rather disappointed by the last which I read. Still, I had rather high hopes for *Some Must Watch*. White writes wonderfully, and I found the novel engaging from its first page. I love country house mysteries, and this is one of the better ones which I have read for a while. The real strength here, aside from the well developed and engaging cast of characters, is the atmosphere which White creates; the novel is incredibly creepy at times because of it. White's work is nowhere near as quaint as that of a lot of her contemporaries, and there are plenty of twists and turns here to satisfy every reader.

Bev says

As Helen opened the door of Miss Warren's room, a small incident occurred which was fraught with future significance.

It was a dark and stormy night....no, really, it was. Fortunately, Ethel Lina White was a much better author than the potboiler creators who are generally credited with starting their books in such fashion. The Spiral Staircase (1933; originally titled *Some Must Watch*) is a suspense thriller with a damsel in distress that makes excellent use of the dramatic storm-tossed night to provide a top-notch novel filled with Had-I-But-Known moments.

She was visited by no prescience to warn her that--since her return--there had been certain trivial incidents which were the first cracks in the walls of her fortress. Once they were started, nothing could stop the process of disintegration; and each future development would act as a wedge, to force the fissures into ever-widening breaches letting in the night.

Things start off calmly enough. Helen Capel is over-joyed to find a position as lady's help at the Summit, Professor Warren's remote estate on the Welsh border. After all, apart from the loneliness of the locale, the post is a very good one--offering her a very nice room and sitting room of her own, good food, and she's even allowed to take her meals with the family. It is a bit worrisome that there is a murderer loose in the countryside. A mysterious killer who has chosen as his prey young women who work for their living. Some think he may be a man who believes these women have taken jobs away from men.

But, reasons Helen, all the girls who have been killed have been alone. And the murders have taken place at a good distance from the Summit. Surely she, and the others in the house, will be safe if they keep the place shuttered and bolted at night and they all stay inside. Yes, she's sure of it. Until a victim is strangled in a house just five miles away. Until the next victim is found murdered just on the other side of the estate. Death and terror creep closer to the Summit, but still Helen feels safe...until the stormy night when she bolts herself in the house only to find that the danger was somewhere inside and had chosen her as the next target.

White also provides the typical suspense-thriller heroine in Helen Capel, a self-identified independent-minded young woman who none-the-less does remarkably silly things for someone who suspects she's in danger. Through various plausible-sounding means, several of the inmates leave the house, a few of them are

drugged, drunk or otherwise incapacitated, and Helen promptly goes about alienating one of the few people who couldn't possibly be the killer--thereby setting herself up to slip into the maniac's clutches.

White manages to bring about a quite nifty ending--I won't spoil it by giving even a hint of what I mean. The book is a classic example of good suspense done right without blood and gore or explicit scenes. It is also a terrific character study with plenty of misdirection to allow the reader to question each person's motives and whether they are really what they seem. A very good read for a dark and stormy night of your own. Just make sure to lock all the doors. You might want to check under all the beds first, though.

First posted on my blog My Reader's Block. Please request permission before reposting. Thanks.

``Laurie Henderson says

In the mood for a good old-fashioned gothic, damsel in distress read? Then this is the book for you. The scene is set in 1930's England at the mansion of the aristocratic Warren family, in a remote location bordering on Wales.

Newly hired maid young Helen, all alone in the world, is delighted to have landed any job and just can't believe her good luck to finally find employment, even if the mansion is in a desolate location.

She just can't understand why they have problems keeping any help in the first place. Well, she's about to find out and it's not very pretty either.

This book covers a long day and even longer night as Helen slowly realizes that the fiend that has previously murdered 4 young ladies in the area might have chosen her as his next victim. To add to the terrifying atmosphere a horrible gale is blowing outside imprisoning the occupants of the mansion whether they want to be there or not.

All of the characters are so well written, they come alive with Helen being a very sympathetic heroine.

The newly arrived nurse who has the difficult task of nursing the ancient, bedridden Lady Warren is a welcome bit of comic relief.

The huge, hulking nurse soon prompts vicious rumors among the help that she is really a man and could be the feared killer as well.

The fact that the poor nurse happens to be just entering a room whenever this gossip is in progress and overhears all of it kept me laughing.

But is she really the insane madman in disguise murdering the hapless local women? You'll just have to read the book to find out. I hope you will enjoy it as much as I did.

Cphe says

A vintage mystery/suspense story that features an isolated mansion, a young inquisitive housemaid an eccentric aristocratic family and a murderer.

I wanted to rate this higher because it had all of the elements that I look for in these type of novels but this one just didn't work for me. Found it to be a bit too repetitive in places and the characters were glossed over in parts. Found it difficult to get a real sense of some of them. The ending was very abrupt with no real sense of closure. Interesting premise but failed to deliver.

Sandy says

There is a word that film buffs like to use to describe a type of motion picture that, because of its tautness and high suspense quotient, almost seems as if it had been directed by the so-called "Master of Suspense" himself, Alfred Hitchcock. The word, naturally enough, is "Hitchcockian," a term that might be fairly applied to such wonderful entertainments as "Gaslight" (both the 1940 and '44 versions), "Charade," "The Prize" and "Arabesque." But of all the pictures that have been honored with the adjective "Hitchcockian" over the years, none, it seems to me, is more deserving than the 1946 RKO film "The Spiral Staircase," and indeed, after 40 years' worth of repeated watches, I have come to deem the picture the greatest horror outing of the 1940s...at least, that wasn't a product of Universal Studios or producer Val Lewton.

Featuring impeccable direction by Robert Siodmak (his close-up shots of the maniac's eyeballs in the film are legendary), who would go on to direct the noir classics "The Killers" and "The Dark Mirror" that same year; sumptuous set design; and spectacularly gorgeous B&W cinematography by Nicholas Musuraca, who would eventually work on no fewer than five of those Val Lewton horror films, the picture is a genuine classic, beloved by millions. A neo-Gothic suspense thriller starring Dorothy McGuire, giving an almost Oscar-caliber performance despite the fact that she only has three or four lines of dialogue, and abetted by a remarkable supporting cast that is just aces (George Brent, Ethel Barrymore, Kent Smith, Elsa Lanchester, Rhonda Fleming et al.), the picture has been one of this viewer's personal Top 100 favorites for decades now, and I have long wanted to read its source novel, Welsh author Ethel Lina White's "Some Must Watch." And fortunately, thanks to the fine folks at Arcturus Publishing, a reasonably priced edition can be easily procured today; "fortunately," I say, seeing that the original hardcover seems to now be completely unobtainable, even on the usually dependable Bookfinder website, and the fact that even the 1946 movie tie-in paperback can be a dicey proposition.

White, I should perhaps mention, was a new author for me. Apparently, White began writing somewhat late in life, and her first novel was not released until 1927, when the budding author was already 51. Over the course of 17 years, until her death in 1944, White came out with 17 novels. "Some Must Watch," her sixth, was released in 1933. Her ninth, incidentally, entitled "The Wheel Spins," was released in 1936 and, two years later, adapted as Hitchcock's "The Lady Vanishes." Ultimately, White would become known as "The Mistress of Macabre Mystery," and I suppose that "Some Must Watch" (an oddly unsatisfying title, for this reader) is a good example of why.

In the book, the reader meets 19-year-old Helen Capel, who has come to the lonely abode known as the Summit, on the Welsh border, to work as a maid in the service of the Warren family. While there, Helen, a diminutive slip of a girl whose small stature is constantly referred to, gets to know the members of this most unusual household: old Lady Warren, a bedridden, cantankerous invalid who is confined to her room upstairs; her stepson, Prof. Warren, an intellectual cold fish; his prissy sister Blanche; his married son Newton; Newton's wife, Simone, who is something of a nymphomaniac; Stephen Rice, who the professor is tutoring and whom Simone has set her sights on; and Mr. and Mrs. Oates, two other house servants. Helen seems happy at her new job, despite the loneliness of the locale, and despite the fact that a series of murders has just transpired in the vicinity. Four young girls have recently been strangled to death by an unknown

madman, the last incident having occurred only a few miles from the Summit itself. And now, as a monstrous thunderstorm commences one evening, a fifth young woman is strangled almost on the very doorstep of the Warren residence! "Some Must Watch" takes place during the 12 or so hours following this last murder, as Helen becomes increasingly distraught. One by one, all the residents in the Warren household are rendered unable to assist (the youngsters, caught in their love triangle, take off for the local pub; Mr. Oates is away on an errand; Mrs. Oates is dead drunk; Prof. Warren has taken too many sleeping pills; Blanche is trapped in her room due to a faulty doorknob; the new nurse, Barker, who may or may not be a man, has vanished; Lady Warren is, of course, too infirm to be of aid), until Helen finds herself quite alone, in the middle of a raging storm, with a homicidal lunatic who has somehow found entry into the house....

Longtime fans of Siodmak's 1946 film may be a bit surprised, after reading White's source novel, to discover just how many changes screenwriter Mel Dinelli made while adapting the author's work. For one thing, while the novel is set in contemporary times (in other words, 1933; both "King Kong," which had just been released, and Cecil B. DeMille's 1932 film "The Sign of the Cross" are mentioned), the film takes place a good 30 years earlier (when we first see Helen in the film, she is watching the silent movie "The Kiss," which had been released in 1896), and in New England. The character named Blanche becomes the professor's secretary in the film; the professor has a stepbrother rather than a sister; and Helen herself, as played by the 5'5" McGuire, is hardly as petite as White had described her. But shockingly, the biggest difference between the book and the film is that whereas Helen in the film is a mute, the result of a traumatic shock at a young age, White's Helen is anything but...she's quite the chatterbox, actually! Also, the jealous dynamic between her and Nurse Barker in the novel is excised in the film (Barker, a lonely and unattractive woman, is inordinately envious of Helen being able to enthrall the young Dr. Parry), and the killer's motivation in the motion picture (that is, the reason why he is compelled to kill physically afflicted women) is completely different, as well. Personally, I find the changes that Dinelli made work marvelously, particularly the idea of having Helen being a mute...most especially since it enables the film to deliver some of the most emotionally affecting closing lines in screen history. So yes, this may very well be one of those rare instances in which the cinematic adaptation eclipses the source material, at least in part. But still, White's book does have much to offer.

As might be expected, the book is genuinely suspenseful, and it really is remarkable how the author ratchets up her tension slowly, over the course of 250 pages. Every single chapter ends in cliff-hanger fashion, keeping the reader primed for anything that might ensue. During the course of her long, stormy evening, Helen is placed into what the author somewhere refers to as "perpetual postponement"; that is, "nerved up to meet an attack which did not come, but which lurked just around the corner." The book can fairly be accused of being all buildup, with not enough in the way of payoff, but trust me, although the novel ends a tad abruptly, the threat that Helen girds herself for is a genuine one; a wackadoodle maniac of the first water. My advice would be to not even try to guess the killer's identity (a simpler guessing game in the movie, I will admit, despite the red herrings), but to just put yourself in Helen's place (a remarkably well-written and likable character, I must say) and hang on tight.

As would be expected, "Some Must Watch" is a very British type of novel, employing any number of English expressions ("bally rot," "dripping toast," "one over the eight") and referencing then-popular English entertainers (such as the singer Al Bowlly, as well as bandleader Jack Hylton); yes, using the Interwebs as a recourse here might not be a bad idea. The book is often slyly self-aware, and Helen repeatedly thinks to herself that the situations she finds herself in, such as with the thunderstorm and the cut telephone wires, are like the "faithful accompaniment to the thrill-drama." White, as it turns out, was a very fine writer, especially when it comes to sharp and witty dialogue, but still, a close reading will reveal some unfortunate gaffes on her part. For example, in one late section, Lady Warren refers to Newton as her nephew, whereas he is in actuality her step-grandson. Her late husband is referred to as Sir Roger in some chapters and Sir Robert in

others. The author tells us that Helen was "reliant and conscientious" when she obviously meant to say "reliable," and shows herself capable of turning an ungrammatical phrase, such as "Helen crossed to the walnut sideboard, where the glass and silver was kept," instead of "were kept." Still, quibbles aside, some very impressive and highly atmospheric work here.

During the course of her novel, White shows us Stephen trying to forget his troubles and tension "in the excitement of a thrill-novel," only to become aware, presently, that "his attention was no longer gripped." A pity, then, that he did not have a book such as "Some Must Watch" to flip through, a novel that I personally found quite gripping and almost nerve-wracking (and that's a good thing!). As a matter of fact, I enjoyed reading this one so much that I now find myself wanting to take in White's 10th novel, 1937's "The Third Eye," which is supposedly another neo-Gothic thrill ride of sorts. Stay tuned....

(By the way, this review originally appeared on the FanLit website at <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/> ... a very fine destination for all fans of scary books in general....)

Michael says

Auf die Autorin Ethel Lina White bin ich erst vor ein paar Tagen gestoßen (worden), und um die Zeit bis zur Ankunft von Wax zu überbrücken, habe ich mir das Hörspiel DIE WENDELTREPPE angehört. Den zugrundeliegenden Roman kenne ich nicht, aber die Verfilmung von Robert Siodmak aus dem Jahr 1946 (übrigens sehr sehenswert).

Nun also das Hörbuch. Die Story ist eingedampft auf 60 Minuten Laufzeit, da bleibt keine Zeit zum Luftholen, geschweige denn für lange Weile.

Ein Frauenmörder treibt sein Unwesen und die junge Hausangestellte Helen verbringt ihre erste Nacht im abgelegenen, sturmumtosten Haus ihres neuen Arbeitgebers. Lange Schatten und klappernde Fensterläden untermauern den Leitsatz, der bei Akte X seine größte Bekanntheit erlangt hat: Traue niemandem!

Nun handelt es sich zwar bei DIE WENDELTREPPE um einen frühen Thriller, aber die Verknüpfung zum Mystery-Genre mit übernatürlichen Anteilen ist gar nicht so unpassend, wie ich finde.

Denn so, wie in der Hörspielfassung die arme Helen Schlag auf Schlag mit neuen Gefahren konfrontiert wird und jeder, aber auch jeder im Haus der Mörder sein könnte, musste ich an die Weird Fiction eines Arthur Leo Zagat aus den 30er Jahren denken. In seinen Pulp-Texten wird der Leser genauso durch die Handlung gepeitscht, weiß nicht, was er glauben soll, bis sich am Ende alles überraschend auflöst und es eine natürliche Erklärung gibt.

Wie immer Whites Roman sein mag: In dieser Hörspielfassung hat er die Qualität eines guten Pulp-Krimis.

Zur Hörspielproduktion ist zu sagen, dass die Sprecher sehr gut und die Tonqualität schlichtweg herausragend ist.

Richard says

One of those rare books that genuinely deserves the epithet 'unputdownable' - and yet it's so restrained and small scale. All the action takes place in one evening and almost entirely in the one house. It's not a detective

yarn but there is a mystery at the heart of it (several, actually). Even though it involves a homicidal maniac and the gothic staple of young girl as heroine in a house full of eccentrics it remains thoroughly believable. Most of White's books are out of print but this one was reprinted this year, so hopefully more are on the way.

Helena says

This one is more of a Thriller than a murder/mystery, and it kept me wondering who was the evil in the shadows. It had to be someone I wasn't counting on, and for once I didn't get it until the end. So that's cool! :)

Anna Dowdall says

Purely delicious had-she-but-known Gothic thriller of the (much) better sort written in the 1930s. A type of unJane Eyre, Helen Capel finds herself an upper crust dogsbody in a big house across the Welsh border that holds an even bigger secret. It is a dark and stormy night--and one by one those who might save her from the serial killer who has just killed a young working woman nearby leave or are foiled/incapacitated. The tension is masterful but it's the relations among the female characters that held me in this extraordinary book. There is a lot of thematic focus on working women and the choices economically vulnerable women faced in the thirties. Helen is a particularly appealing and stereotype-defying instance of what were once called "surplus women," women who weren't born with silver spoons and who had to work, but weren't trained for a profession. The denouement, which for some reason I just had to read at the witching hour of three am, is excellent: satisfying from a plot perspective as well as capturing the women-fight-back aspect of the story. I picked up the paperback for 50 cents in a dodgy thrift store on the wrong side of town. Why are people reading Gone Girl etc when they could be reading the awesome Ethel Lina White?

Nancy Oakes says

This book was so much fun to read and it hit all of my classic mystery reading buttons -- an isolated family home, a murderer on the prowl and all of it set against the proverbial dark and stormy night, complete with banging shutters and an elderly bedridden woman predicting doom and gloom. How could it possibly be any better??? Having said that, I don't think it's a 5-star read but I definitely had a great time with it. In fact, just thinking about it right now makes me want to do that evil villain laugh, the "muah-hah-hah-hah-hah" reminiscent of the old Shadow radio show opening because this is just that type of book. And while I thought it was clever and well paced, with ratcheting tension that continues throughout the night making me flip pages in a frenzy, I see that some readers weren't so crazy about it. Well, it sort of goes with Ethel Lina White territory that there are a lot of psychological observations from the characters in her work, so here the talky parts didn't bother me at all. Personally, I think the dynamics among the characters are just as much a part of this story as the mystery, so I quite enjoyed it.

There's more, of course, at my reading journal . On the whole -- not great literature, but definitely a fun read, one right up my old-school mystery-reading alley.

Elisabeth says

I saw the movie based on this book (*The Spiral Staircase*) several years ago and enjoyed it, and I liked the book just as well. In spite of some pretty significant changes—the setting moved from the Welsh border in the 1930s to Edwardian-era America, for instance; and character names and relationships being shuffled around—the main structure of the story and most of the key events are remarkably similar. The biggest difference, of course, is that in the book, heroine Helen Capel is most definitely not mute. I really took to the book-Helen, with her curious interest in people's behavior, her zest for life and delight in details and little changes from ordinary routine. I knew the solution to the mystery going into it (assuming that the movie hadn't changed it; it took me a little while to decide that it hadn't), but it didn't spoil my enjoyment of the book at all—I enjoyed White's writing, the back-and-forth struggles between the clashing personalities of the characters, and the vividly-evoked atmosphere of the isolated old Victorian mansion lashed by a storm. It's almost more suspense than traditionally clued murder-mystery; for most of the book equal consideration seems given to the theories of whether the murderer is really an unknown lurking outside, or whether one of the people shut up in the house has something to do with it. The subtle clues are there to follow, though. In any case, I found it a good read and I'm looking forward to trying more of White's books.

Bettie? says

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hwzw...>

Description (from wiki): *In early 20th century New England, a serial killer murders disabled young women in the community. His next victim apparently is Helen (McGuire), a mute girl working as a live-in companion for the wealthy, bedridden Mrs. Warren (Barrymore). Mrs. Warren urges her to leave the house, as does Dr. Parry, who knows the reason for Helen's loss of speech and hopes to help her get her voice back. Rounding out the household are Mrs. Warren's son and stepson, her verbally abused nurse, a secretary, a handyman and his wife, a housekeeper with a taste for brandy.*

Kim says

I just finished reading *Some Must Watch* by Ethel Lina White, and I loved it. Most of the time anyway. It is also known as *The Spiral Staircase*, I don't know why, and it has been filmed as *The Spiral Staircase* and I don't know why to that either, I've never seen the movie. As for the book there are plenty of people going up and down staircases, more than one, but there are also plenty of people going in and out of bedrooms, kitchens, and basements. Also, there are plenty of people going in and out of the front and back doors, until the Professor demands that no one leave or enter the house anymore that is. So the staircase didn't seem all that special to me. The next time they film it I think it should be called "Lady Warren's bedroom", they all seemed to spend a lot of time in there. But most of the action, the murders I mean, happened away from the house, so I give up on the name. This is a mystery, so of course we need someone to get murdered, and we get that, only this time we get five murders and all but one of those takes place before the story begins, the last one is in one of the first chapters. There is someone out there killing women, young women, five of

them, and every time a murder is committed it is closer to The Summit, the place we are during the story. At the Summit is our main character, Helen Capel, who answered an advertisement for a lady-help at the home of Professor Warren, she realizes once she arrives why it is no woman ever stays there long.

Her one dread was being out of work. She could estimate, therefore, the scores of replies which had probably been received as a result of the advertisement for a lady-help at Professor Warren's country house; and, as soon as she arrived, at the Summit, she realized that its very loneliness had helped to remove her from the ranks of the unemployed.

It was tucked away in a corner, somewhere at the union of three counties, on the border-line between England and Wales. The nearest town was twenty-two miles away—the nearest village, twelve. No maid would stay at such a forsaken pocket—a pocket with a hole in it—through which dribbled a chronic shrinkage of domestic labor.

The only other help there is Mr. and Mrs. Oates, Mrs. Oates I don't believe has ever left the kitchen, and her husband does all of those jobs the husband of Mrs. Oates would do. Here are the rest of the people currently living at the Summit:

The Warren family possessed some of the elements of drama. The Professor, who was a widow, and his sister and housekeeper—Miss Warren—were middle-aged to elderly. Helen classified them as definite types, academic, frigid, and well-bred, but otherwise devoid of the vital human interest.

Their step-mother, however, old Lady Warren—the invalid in the blue room—was of richer mold. Blood and mud had been used in her mixture, and the whole was churned up, thrice daily, by a dose of evil temper. She was the terror of the household; only yesterday, she had flung a basin of gruel at her nurse's head.

Besides this low-comedy relief, Helen suspected the triangle situation, as represented by the Professor's son (Newton), his daughter-in-law (Simone), and the resident pupil (Stephen), whom the Professor was coaching for the Indian Civil Service. The son—a clever, ugly youth—was violently and aggressively in love with his wife, Simone. She was an unusually attractive girl, with money of her own, and a wanton streak in her composition. To put it mildly, she was an experimentalist with men. At present, she was plainly trying to make sentimental history with the pupil, Stephen Rice—a good-looking casual young sprig, rejected of Oxford. Helen liked him instinctively, and hoped he would continue to resist the lady.

That's everyone living in the house until the new nurse, the one replacing the girl who had a basin thrown at her arrives. Dr. Parry, the local doctor is there pretty often, he is described as clever, young and unconventional. There could be a romance beginning between him and Helen, it moves rather slowly though since eventually he gets locked out of the house and under the Professor's order they can't let him in, so the romance will have to wait until the killer is captured. Unless he's killed that is. Or is the killer I suppose. And they are all our characters, I think, except for the dead people of course. The first two murders didn't bother them at the Summit much since they both happened in town, that far away town remember? But the next one was closer, it was in the country, and the fourth was only about five miles from the Summit and happened in the girl's own bedroom. They had all been strangled, no one heard anything, and now they are locking their doors, everyone is, every door. But now, the fifth murder is committed. The girl murdered is a local girl and she was killed on their land. We have this warning from Dr. Parry:

Dr. Parry groaned. "Haven't you enough wit to realize that there's a human tiger waiting to turn you into—what's left of Ceridwen. If you'd seen what I've just seen—"

“Oh, don’t,” wailed Helen, her face suddenly pinched.

“But I want to frighten you. This sort of lunatic is usually normal in between his fits...of mania. He might be living in this house with you, and you’d accept him, just as you accept—young Rice or the Professor.

This last murder is enough to make the professor announce that the doors and windows should be locked and no one is to go out or enter again, no matter who or why.

“I have something to say,” he announced, “which applies to everyone. No one is to leave this house tonight.”

Simone flashed a look of triumph at Stephen, who began to splutter:

“Oh, but, sir, I have an important appointment.”

“Then you will not keep it,” the Professor informed him. “But I’m not a baby.”

“Prove it. If you are a man, you will realize that we are faced with a situation of actual danger and that it is the duty of every male member of this household to remain at home.”

Stephen continued to protest.

“I’d stay, like a shot, if there was any sense in it. But it’s such bally rot. Of course, no woman should go out. But they are safe, at home. The chap wouldn’t come inside the house.”

“Have you forgotten the girl who was murdered inside her bedroom?” broke in Miss Warren, in a dead voice.

“Her window was left open,” explained Stephen.

“But you heard what the doctor said?” insisted Miss Warren”.

“And you’ve heard what I’ve said,” remarked the Professor sternly. “I’m master of this house, and I will not have the safety of anyone here imperiled by disobedience.”

Helen felt his glance hover for one moment over her, and her heart throbbed with gratitude.

“There is another precaution I wish observed,” went on the Professor. “No one is to be admitted to the house, tonight. If anyone knocks, or rings, he—or she—will remain outside. I forbid the doors being unbolted, on any pretext whatsoever.”

This time objection came from Newton.

“That’s rather drastic, Chief,” he said. “Anyone might come; the police, or someone with important news.” The Professor took up a paper as though he were weary of the discussion.

During all this we also have Simone chasing after the student Stephen who has given her no reason to chase after him and many reasons not to, for instance there is this conversation:

"Stephen, you've not admired my new dress." Although the, young man had not even noticed her finery, he stressed his admiration for Newton's benefit.

"Well, I'm bowl over. Beautiful—and most revealing. I'll never mistake you for a nun again".....

"I'll take nothing from you," snarled Stephen.

"Not even my wife? Many thanks."

Whistling in apparent unconcern, Newton strolled down the stairs, without a backward glance.

Stephen bristled with defensive instinct, although he knew that Newton's attitude was reasonable.".....

"For Heaven's sake," exclaimed Simone. Tell me if you really like my dress,"

"What there is of it," remarked Stephen, reverting to type, since Newton had gone. "I'm keen on seeing how a boxer strips, when I've backed him; but I don't care about bare backs out of the ring."

And still that doesn't stop her. When he finally manages to leave the house, order or no order, and never return since he is now locked out, upon finding out he is gone Simone follows him, now she's gone too. Then Newton goes after his wife, another one gone, so much for the Professor's order. Mr. Oates had gone on an errand, he isn't back yet, but he won't be able to come in even if he does get there any time soon. So one by one people keep disappearing regardless of the order, let us hope that the killer is outside somewhere instead of the closed up house with only a few women, one of them bedridden, and the professor left in it. And the murders just keep happening. The ending was what I didn't like, that and Helen being terrified every single minute of the book and acting like it. But it ended with too many loose ends. Other than that, I loved it.

Leah says

Amusing in parts...

An insane murderer is rampaging through the countryside, killing young women. Helen, a young woman, has taken a job with the Warren family in their manor house right slap bang in the middle of where the murderer is doing his thing. But she's perfectly safe, because there are lots of other people in the house with her. Except that, for one reason or another, gradually all the other people either leave the house or become incapable of helping. Soon Helen is on her own... or is she??

There are good things about this book and overall it's a light, entertaining read for the most part, although I did find myself beginning to skim in the last third, feeling that I was more than ready for the thriller ending. It has a nice Gothic feel to it, with the rambling old house and a bunch of eccentric and not very likeable upper class characters, whom White, via Helen, has some fun showing up as arrogant snobs and relatively useless members of the human race. The servants come off much better, though they're not exactly saints either. To call Helen curious would be an understatement – she pokes her nose in everywhere and always has

to be where the action is. The cook likes to drink her employer's brandy, while her husband's main feature is his laziness. But still, they all have good hearts, which is more than can be said for the Warrens. On the whole, I enjoyed the characterisations although unfortunately Helen annoyed me intensely throughout.

My first real problem is with Helen's position in the household. I have no idea what she's actually employed to do. She refers to herself as "the help" but beyond dusting the bannisters occasionally so she can eavesdrop on conversations, I couldn't work out her duties. If she's supposed to do housework, then how come she'd never been in the Professor's study before that night? If she's a maid, she most certainly wouldn't don an evening gown and eat her meals with the family, as she does. In fact, I can't think of any servant other than a governess or a companion who would ever have eaten with the family in a household like this one, and she's neither of those. So right from the start, credibility was gone.

It is assumed by everyone that Helen is to be the murderer's next victim – no idea why. Perhaps she was the only remaining young woman in the district. The assumption is also that he'll come for her this dark and stormy night (despite him having committed another murder just that afternoon – prolific!). So Professor Warren puts all kinds of safety measures in operation which everyone then promptly ignores, even Helen, who doesn't seem to be able to remember basic things like don't open the door to potential murderers late at night. Gradually all the people who could have protected her either leave the house or become incapacitated in one way or another, until she is left only with horrible old Lady Warren, whose hobby is throwing things at menials, and Lady Warren's even more horrible nurse, whose hobby is tormenting Helen. It's a fun premise, but it takes far too long to get there. The ending when it finally came sadly didn't surprise me – it had seemed increasingly obvious as time went on, both whodunit and what form the denouement would take.

I didn't dislike it as much as this critical review is probably suggesting – for the most part, it held my attention and was quite amusing. But I'm afraid my recommendation is half-hearted at best. 2½ stars for me, so rounded up.

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classic reverie says

Suspenseful throughout!

I had seen the classic movie years ago & enjoyed it, but like every movie made from a book there are changes and that is one reason I enjoy reading books that were made into movies. I have usually seen the movie long before reading the book but it only makes it more interesting seeing the difference which there were many but still the same kind of end. Looking for a book uncertain of the direction or even if there is a reason for alarm, this is the book for you. A nice suspenseful thriller about a young girl hired in an uncertain house & waiting until day if it ever comes.

--I always enjoy reading books that were made into classic/older movies that I saw years ago & this is such a book that piqued my interest for that reason. Many times the book has many differences & the director has license to change the story to fit his ideas. The film noir psychological thriller directed by Robert Siodmak did this to Ethel's story. The movie was called "The Spiral Staircase" which RKO released in 1946 & the cast included Dorothy McGuire, George Brent & Ethel Barrymore. "Some Must Watch" novel by Ethel Lina White, an English writer, (1876-1944) was published in 1933. Alfred Hitchcock made a movie with her book, "The Lady Vanishes" (1938) & also on my list. She started writing crime novels in 1931 & in her time,

she was as popular as Agatha Christie & Dorothy L. Sayers. I always enjoy a good mystery & this story is a that & much more. I started out reading a different Kindle version & the mistakes were just too much to deal with because of errors of words & paragraph structure. I tried my current version & that had some mistakes but 95% less than the other but still a little annoying but it did not ruin my enjoyment of the story. I would have had finished this sooner but life was busy & I was just too tired. It can be a quick read. The story without giving the story away is about a young girl, Helen, who has to fend for herself & in a time where it is hard to find a good job. The depression years in the 1930's. She finds a girl helper kind of job in a country mansion far away from other houses. The occupants of the house are a professor & his older children plus his ailing step mother who is bedridden. Murders are taking place around the village & come closer and closer to the mansion. Is there safety in numbers & is it just an active imagination that is distressing Helen? An interesting discussion of faith in Providence & lack of any faith was added to the enjoyment. I had to laugh at Helen in so many thoughts of her were cinema & theater based. She took life as a kind of role in a movie as being center stage or an extra yet she rarely saw movies due to lack of funds, so she must make her own fun. I enjoyed the movie but the book was so much better and generally is filled with much more. The book starts with a passage from "Hamlet" "For Some must watch, while some must sleep: So runs the world away."
