

Fango Flashback: "THE WOMAN IN BLACK" (1989)

Written by Christine Hadden

Thursday, 02 February 2012 11:02



If you're seeking a good, old-fashioned ghost story that sends chills up your spine and has you calling for your mommy, you could do a lot worse than the 1989 British television production of *THE WOMAN IN BLACK*. With the new movie, co-produced by Hammer Films and starring Daniel Radcliffe of *HARRY POTTER* fame, opening tomorrow, it's a great time to take a glance back at the original film version of Susan Hill's classic ghost novel.



Arthur Kidd (Adrian Rawlins, who in a strange bit of kismet plays Harry Potter's father in the film series) is a young solicitor making his way up through the ranks of his employer's law firm. He is forced by his superior to accept an assignment to close the estate of one Mrs. Alice Drablow, an eccentric old recluse who lived alone on a barren stretch of marshland in coastal Britain. The Eel Marsh House is accessible exclusively by a narrow causeway which is passable only at low tide. Before even reaching the remote place, Kidd is spooked by a woman who shows up at the decedent's funeral services, and then again in the cemetery at the interment. The woman, dressed all in black (what else?), appears at first to be a mourner at the church, but it's clear in the graveyard that she is quite possibly something else.

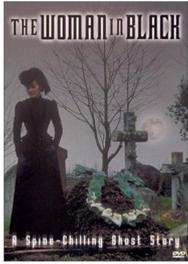
When no one in the nearby small town of Crythin Gifford wants to talk about the woman and she cannot be located upon further investigation, it is obvious to Kidd that there's more to the story. Finally reaching Drablow's isolated residence, he is terrified beyond reason when the aforementioned ghostly woman appears to him when he is wandering the property alone. (This particular scene will make your hair stand on end.) Kidd flees to the safety of the house, only to discover horrifying past secrets that make him question whether or not he should (or can) finish his assignment.

He is then startled by what sounds like a harrowing accident just outside along the adjacent causeway. Rushing out to give aid to what can only be a tragic carriage wreck in the dangerous marsh, he is greeted solely by an enveloping mist and deadly silence. Entrusting his jumbled nerves to a wealthy gentleman in town, Kidd is given details of the dark specter's unfortunate circumstances, and is shocked to realize the ghost's wrath and subsequent curse have reached all the way from the grave to his own happy home.

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Directed by Herbert Wise and scripted by QUATERMASS creator Nigel Kneale, THE WOMAN IN BLACK is difficult to find on DVD, as the more-than-decade-old disc from BFS Entertainment is long out of print. It sells for exorbitant prices here and there on-line, though the movie is readily available (albeit in poor quality) on YouTube and the like. The fact that it's a made-for-TV movie isn't even a factor here, trust me: While it's difficult to imagine that such a production could strike fear into your heart, make no mistake—this film will truly jangle your nerves. It's a spine-tingling study in quiet terror, and if the filmmakers behind the remake can churn one ounce of that foreboding dread into their movie, we're all in for a hell of a ride.