

The Paying Guests

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2026-06

Synopsis

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inLanguagei¼š	english

Winner of AudioFile Earphones Award 2014

There came the splash of water and the rub of heels as Mrs Barber stepped into the tub. After that there was a silence, broken only by the occasional echoey plink of drips from the tap....

Frances had been picturing her lodgers in purely mercenary terms - as something like two great waddling shillings. But this, she thought, was what it really meant to have paying guests: this odd, unintimate proximity, this rather peeled-back moment, where the only thing between herself and a naked Mrs Barber was a few feet of kitchen and a thin scullery door. An image sprang into her head: that round flesh, crimsoning in the heat.

It is 1922, and London is tense. Ex-servicemen are disillusioned, the out-of-work and the hungry are demanding change. And in South London, in a genteel Camberwell villa, a large silent house now bereft of brothers, husband, and even servants, life is about to be transformed, as impoverished widow Mrs Wray and her spinster daughter, Frances, are obliged to take in lodgers.

For with the arrival of Lilian and Leonard Barber, a modern young couple of the 'clerk class', the routines of the house will be shaken up in unexpected ways. And as passions mount and frustration gathers, no one can foresee just how far-reaching, and how devastating, the disturbances will be.

This is vintage Sarah Waters: beautifully described with excruciating tension, real tenderness, believable characters, and surprises. It is above all a wonderful, compelling story.

2015, Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction, Long-listed

2015, The Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, Long-listed

2015, IBW Book Award, Winner

2016, IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, Long-listed

Reader's comments

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