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Devastated by tragedy, Dr. Sam Hatch is a shadow of his former self. He travels the byroads of America, running away from a past he cannot escape. There is no salvation for him.

And then he sees the house. Like a siren, it calls to him. Yet the house is not what it appears to be. Is it a blessing, a gift...or a curse?

The Mourning House Details

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Author : Ronald Malfi

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Review of The Mourning House by Ronald Malfi

5 Stars

This novella is perfect, compact, and complete. A strong plot line, a couple of back stories, good characterizations, and an old abandoned house which is a character all in itself. Yes, the title does play out in the course of the story, although the working out is subtle. In general, this story is all about subtlety: no bludgeoning nor splatterpunk here. This is the work of an accomplished author (and I knew to expect that after reading Mr. Malfi's novels "The Floating Staircase" and "Snowblind" in 2012).

A former surgeon who considers himself responsible for the death of his wife and infant daughter goes "on the road" for an extended period, not to find himself but to continue to mourn. Somehow he is "drawn" to find an isolated, abandoned, spooky, falling-in house on a dusty back road in Maryland, not too far from Chesapeake Bay. The house is problematical: it has caused troubles and terrors to exploratory kids. It will come to trouble Sam as well.

Paul Nelson says

Sam Hatch has the perfect life, successful, lots of friends, lovely family, all until a car crash robs him of everything, with his family gone he's now a shadow of the man he was and tormented to the point of drifting through life with no destination and no dreams.

During his travels a strange compulsion draws him to an old ruined house overlooking the Chesapeake Bay and astonishingly enough he buys the property.

He starts to renovate the house and pretty soon weird things start to happen, objects move and funny noises etc. Now I'm not a massive fan of haunted house novels or films but this is skilfully told. He wakes each morning to something seriously different and it's a little disturbing.

The house morphs into something from his past, something he'll never forget and the author manages to create just the right atmosphere and creepiness. The ending was, I have to say perfect leaving you in two minds, crazy or that damn house.

Ronald Malfi is a decent story teller, a few quotes that I remembered, "Fear tightened a cold hand around his heart" and "how sometimes the harder you stared at something the less you actually saw it."

I've enjoyed the two novella's I've read so far, the Mourning House & Skullbelly, I've also got Snow, Floating Staircase and The Narrows waiting. Need to move these up the old tbr pile.

Jason says

This is the first book I've read in 2013, and talk about starting the year with a bang! Sam Hatch has just suffered a serious tragedy and has found himself wandering the country. He finally stumbles upon a house in a small town and immediately buys it. He's not sure why the house speaks to him so much, but the residents of the small town all think that the it's haunted.

And maybe it is.

Because Sam begins to hear noises in it late at night, and when he goes searching for the sources, digging through the floorboards and plaster, he finds relics and items from his old, dead life.

What I enjoyed most about this story is that it reminded me a lot of classic weird/horror fiction by the likes of M. R. James and maybe Arthur Machen. It's a short and fun read filled with real characters, great dialogue, and a creepy atmosphere. Recommended!

Bandit says

The more I read Malfi, the more I like him. The man surpasses any genre limitations/expectations and never take an easy way out. His horror is literary, intelligent, moving and exceptionally well written. So much more than another book about haunted real estate, this is a story of loss, sadness and despair, of a man drowning in it all and a house that serves as his sinking hole. Short read, only took an hour, but extremely satisfying. Thank you Charlene for my first ever Kindle loan. Deeply depressing, darkly atmospehric and profoundly haunting, this claustrophobic tale is Malfi at his best. Highly recommended.

Kascha says

The Mourning House is one of the first short stories to make its way into my tablet via Kindle, and as such, it would have had to have been fantastically bad to fail me. The whole new approach to books is really addicting so, fair warning. May contain undue bias.

With that out of the way, let me say that there could have been few better welcomes to my new reading reality than this. I am a long time fan of the genre; particularly ghost stories and the afterlife. but I am accustomed to far more runup to the meat of these stories and was very pleasantly surprised at how immediately this story began to create discomfort. There was just enough back story to understand the frame of mind we find the main protagonist Sam, in as we join his story, and then it's quite instantly on with "what's wrong".

Good stories with houses as leading characters fail all the time by not bringing the house sort of "around" the reader, like it has replaced current surrounds. No such issues here. The house was instantly foreboding, but not in a terror producing way. Again, just a feeling of profound unease. That eerie thing that Kubrick understood with The Shining that others miss again and again, and this understanding of how much more frightening "eerie and just not right" is can be felt all over this book.

As many other reviewers have said, things get worse and worse gradually. Harder and harder to feel comfortable about, and as Sam finds out more and more from a few of the locals in the area, what is happening slowly reveals itself. There is a tip over point; something that really sheds tons of light on what is going on and lets you know sort of how far off you are in comprehension, and once that occurs, you can almost predict what sort of direction things will take. But that doesn't detract one bit from the actual reveals.

The subtle way things are connected and resolved for Sam save the hair raising until dead last each time and remind you of what it's like when being right is the worst thing that could happen.

The point of view and pace in this book are pretty much perfect. The length of these novellas can be a detriment to a story not planned for them, leading them to feel palpably abrupt and confusing at the end. This does not happen here because not only does the story and its ending lend itself to what was done, but the point of view is expertly switched to one which is not privy in real time to much immediately before that point and so the story's progression from there is perfectly natural. Another way of putting it is that due to the author's control over his plot and pacing, he graced himself with an ending that neatly writes itself with little hope of underwhelming or failing readers.

Overall, I was very impressed with this book. It is a novella done right by an author very much aware of his To Do list and the boundaries in which he must work, and I will be looking for more of his books on Kindle. Additionally, it is very apparent that he is writing at this length because he chooses to and not because he can't carry a longer novel, so I would be very interested in finding out what he could do with say, Stephen King's page limits. Recommended!

Mike says

This story is about a man named Sam Hatch who loses his wife and daughter in a car accident. Then decides to drive and leave everything behind. He comes upon this old beat up abandoned house (The Mourning House). He decides to buy it and fix it up to live in. This is when he starts seeing and hearing and finding strange things in the house. I did enjoy this quick read. It was not one of RM best, but still a good read. I gave it 3 1/2 stars.

Bark says

I often find something to bitch about when reading short stories and novellas because *usually* something is missing or lacking or characterization gets shafted in exchange for less words. Or, perhaps the worst sin of short stories, the ending is rushed. Don't you hate that? The Mourning House is an example of how to do the novella the right way. It has a very small cast of characters, doesn't attempt more than it should, builds with a slow, creeping sense of dread that slowly leads up to the non-rushed ending and the author doesn't waste any words on unimportant filler. And best of all? Its main character is a sympathetic guy you get to know pretty intimately.

Sam Hatch was once a happily married successful doctor with a beautiful baby daughter. Now he's an unwashed drifter who is filled with regret and guilt and has walked away from everything that reminds him of his previous life. Something compels him to stop at a creepy run-down house and beckons him to enter.

Oh Sam you should've kept driving!

He doesn't. He stops. He moves in. Strange things begin to happen. He has to face down his demons and we get to watch it all unfold and it's gloriously unsettling. The reader sees Sam's sanity start to slip the longer he resides in the house but he can't leave for long because he *needs* to go back. It's that compulsion again. Is it real or is it in his head? I loved not knowing and held my breathe throughout most of it. This story reminded me a wee bit of The Red Tree by Caitlin Kiernan which is one of my favorite books that examines madness, grief, pain and the haunted. If you haven't read it you really should.

As I said, I felt for the main character. In a few short paragraphs I was easily able to understand his plight, even though many details were not yet revealed. The author also has a knack for evoking a scene and an emotion with only a few well-chosen words. *“When he awoke, darkness had its face pressed against the windows.”* How dreadful is that?

This is one of those stories that will likely haunt me for a good long while and is definitely worth seeking out and reading. I don't give out fives easily (I'm stingy like that) but this one is deserving of my highest rating. It's the kind of story that makes me glad I'm a reader and gives me hope that there are still gems out there after I've read one too many “meh” books in a row.

* I received a copy of this novella from the Publisher via NetGalley. The FTC made me say that.

Carl Alves says

As the name would suggest, *The Mourning House* is a bit of a dreary and depressing novel. The novel starts off with Dr. Sam Hatch getting into a car accident that kills his wife and young daughter. That starts a downward spiral for Sam as he abandons his life and becomes a drifter. He winds up buying a house in the middle of nowhere that has some mysterious and mystical properties. The house “calls” to Sam, and he begins renovations on it. Without going into spoiler territory, things get weird after that.

The writing had a seriously dark quality to it. It was moody and atmospheric, I think in the way the author intended it to be. Sam Hatch is a realistic character with some depth to him. He has a hard time coping with loss as many others do in similar situations. His dropping out of society might be a bit extreme, but it works in the context of this story. I thought at times it was a bit too depressing for my liking, and I would have liked it to be more uplifting. For instance, a relationship between Sam and a waitress at a restaurant nearby the Mourning House was teased but it never evolved. Perhaps that could have brightened things a bit. Overall, I liked this book. I read it one sitting on a plane ride, and it's the sort of book that you could devour pretty quickly.

Carl Alves - Battle of the Soul

Rob Twinem says

I am a great fan of Ronald Malfi and think his writing is full of eloquence and heartbreaking moments. He has a descriptive style that is very easy to read and always draws the reader in. In *The Mourning House* we meet Sam Hatch a deeply disturbed and unhappy individual who has moved to an isolated dwelling following the tragic death of his wife and daughter. We soon learn that Sam is emotionally upset and his state of mind is spiralling out of control as he attempts to come to terms with his loss. The starkness and isolation of the house is the perfect setting for the author to explore the sadness and loneliness of Sam's mind tragically leading to the inevitable outcome. As an example of Malfi's style just look at his descriptive powers when he describes the cancerous pain of “the woman in the headscarf” in the opening pages....

”When he turned, the woman in the headscarf was standing directly before him. This close, he could see how the cancer had sunken her eyes and jaundiced her flesh, robbing her of life even though her heart still beat. The pores in her flesh looked overlarge, like strawberry seeds, and her thin lipless mouth appeared as nothing more than a scalpel's hasty incision in the taut putty of her face.”

If I had one small criticism I would simply say that I prefer the authors longer novels and in particular Floating Staircase and Cradle Lake. They both explore similar themes in greater depth thus allowing the author more time to develop his characters which makes for a greater reader experience and a deeper understanding of his anguished but beautiful prose.

Majanka says

The Mourning House is a sad, haunting, emotional story about a man who's lost it all. Sam lost his wife and baby daughter in a terrible accident that's haunted him ever since. He can't stand to live in his house anymore, an empty shell, a memory of his life long gone. He walks through empty rooms and hears his wife's voice or his daughter's cries. He runs away from the tragedy, and spends a year traveling from place to place, a refugee without any place to call home. Until he comes upon a creepy old house he instantly feels an attraction to. If it's because the house seems just as lost as he is, or an entirely different reason, he has no clue, and quite frankly, he doesn't care. Sam decides to buy the house and starts to renovate. But the more time he spends inside the house, the more he grows convinced he's not the only one there. He finds his tools in other places that he left them. He hears cries coming from inside the walls. When he tears down the floor, he comes upon the same floor he used to have in his old house. The house is like a puzzle, and Sam is forced to put the pieces together and solve the mystery.

The prose in The Mourning House is sublime. The shrill contrast between the way the first chapter, when life is still happy and good, and the prose in the later chapters, when Sam is on the verge of depression, is amazing. The author did an excellent job portraying Sam's slow descent into madness from the moment he steps into the creepy, old house. As I read through the novella, I felt the house come to life page by page. The constant question troubling me was: is the house haunted, or is just a puzzle? Is it perhaps all in Sam's mind? Or maybe even both? I love stories that keep me guessing, and this certainly did. Sam's thoughts are, at moments, all over the place, juggling between the past and present, and this intrigued me endlessly. I still don't know absolutely sure what was for real, and what was a trick of Sam's imagination, but that doesn't bother me in the slightest.

The atmosphere of the house was well-executed as well. At first, it didn't seem that terrifying: just a creepy old house that somehow called out to Sam. But the longer he spend in the house, the more claustrophobic it became, as if it was closing in on him, and as a reader, I could feel this as well: in the dialogue, in the narrative, in the general vibe I got from reading. By the time I finished reading, I had the feeling the walls of my bedroom were closing in on me. That's the difference between a great author and an excellent author, and in my opinion, Ronald Malfi, definitely ranks in the latter category.

I recommend this book to all haunted house fans. It's a must read, if not for the lyrical prose or the intriguing main character, then at least for the creepy subtleness of the horror in The Mourning House.

Chris says

Another fine novella from Darkfuse.

To those who read lots of dark fiction, and ghost stories in particular, this is familiar territory. We even feel like we have been in this house before. Yes, there is the creaking floorboard and the shadow moving in the next room. Wasn't the staircase over there? Let's find the closets, because as we all know, a lot of things

happen in closets and basements. Oh never mind. That doesn't matter.

While this story will definitely feel familiar, what isn't so common is the quality of the writing and the depth of the characters. Ghost stories should be creepy and unnerving, and this one sure is; but the very good ones are often sad--filled with the heartbreak of loss of loved ones and the anguish of those left behind.

Malfi delivers. We feel deeply for these characters. We appreciate the texture and depth of his narration and description. And even though we have been here before, we still feel the chill to the spine and the tug to the heart.

I guess that is why we will always read ghost stories. Particularly really good ones like this.

Char says

This was an excellent haunted house story.

Dr. Hatch has lost his family. Broken by the weight of his guilt, he decides to leave the family home and wander aimlessly. Until he comes upon an abandoned house. The Mourning House.

I have read a few great haunted house stories in the last few weeks. This one stands right up there with the best of them.

Marie says

This was a short spooky read about a man that loses his family in a horrific accident and moves out to a house in the woods to get away from it all. The house is haunted as he soon finds out and the house weaves itself around the man as he explores not only his inner self but the rooms of the house. Giving it five stars for keeping me entertained and spooked.

Ken says

"The Mourning House" is a very creepy haunted house tale.

Dr. Sam Hatch suffers the loss of his young family in a brutal automobile accident. Dropping out of life, Sam begins a decline that may be the side effects of anxiety meds, insanity or a haunting.

Malfi keeps you on the edge of your seat wondering what is coming next and keeps the reader in dread of what the next piece of the puzzle to fall in place will be.

4 STARS

Timothy Ward says

I could give all of Ronald Malfi's books five stars. His characters move into your soul and make you endure their story through his poetic, haunting, and suspenseful tales. He's my favorite horror author and this one was just what I was hoping for. It's a shorter length story, but that doesn't take away from its power. A doctor has a terrible accident, becomes a drifter and winds up at an old house with eerie powers. He intends to fix it up, but the house develops a hold on him that is beyond belief. The Mourning House explores pockets of believable terror in a way that makes you long to hold your loved ones.
