



Watch the Wall, My Darling

Jane Aiken Hodge

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Only a deathbed promise to her dying father could force Christina Tretton to travel to Tretteign Grange, the 'Dark House', and meet her estranged family for the first time. Having to fast-talk her way out of an encounter with smugglers on the way is only the beginning. Waiting for her is flighty aunt Verity, her two very different cousins ? the stoic Ross and fawning Richard ? and her formidable grandfather, who changes his Will every few days.

Taking the neglectful servants in hand, Christina is soon managing the house, proving herself invaluable in her grandfather's eyes. This backfires when he decides he wants her as his heir, and only on the condition that she marries Ross or Richard. Outraged, she swears she will marry neither, but her cousins have different ideas. Should she marry the cousin she is drawn to, even if he appears to have no true feelings for her? Hanging over them is the constant threat of invasion, as Dark House looks over the sea to France, and Napoleon. When cousin Ross disappears, it is up to Christina to stand in his stead and take on the running of the estate - amongst some of his more disreputable duties. For as soldiers work to fortify the coast, Christina finds herself in the twisted intrigues of smugglers and spies.

Watch the Wall, My Darling first published in 1966, is another great historical romance from the master of the genre ? Jane Aiken Hodge.

Watch the Wall, My Darling Details

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From Reader Review Watch the Wall, My Darling for online ebook

Hannah says

Although billed as a gothic, there really wasn't much of the gothic about this story set during the Napoleonic Wars.

Better than average writing for this genre, but the story felt too modern to have taken place in the early 1800's, and I wasn't much impressed with the hero or the romance.

OK overall. Hence the 2-stars. Would try more by Hodge to see if this book is just a one-off.

Kim Kaso says

A fun re-read, a solid 4 for me at this time of my life, I liked it better in memory than in reality. I cannot imagine my newly-minted adolescent self appreciated the author throwing so many impediments between the hero and the heroine, but I had less to compare it to then. I appreciated the setting and the historical frame of the story, but am amazed how grudgingly she gave us any romantic pay-off. Well written, as most books with the name "Aiken" are, must be in their DNA. Very quick and enjoyable read, may have suffered a bit from being read in conjunction with Mary Stewart. It is certainly better than most historical romantic suspense on the market. I think the title always draws me in, makes me think of something more or other happening than occurs in the book. More Daniel Day-Lewis embracing Madeleine Stowe on the walls of the fort in *The Last of the Mohicans* than squelching through the marshes of Sussex in stocking feet. I enjoyed it, but probably my 13-year old self was more easily pleased. Glad to have found Jane Aiken Hodge on Kindle, and intend to keep reading and re-reading her this year.

Laylah says

A too-perfect heroine surrounded by two-dimensional cast of characters. The reason is easily explained. When all other characters are self-centered, incompetent, unreasonable and shrill, the only character who is not all that can't help but look god-like.

The element of intrigue is adequate, but the attempt on romantic front fails miserably. First and foremost, I just don't see what Christina sees in Ross. Second, the way that the author creates a competition for the hero's heart at very late in the story makes his intellect, judgment and loyalty even more questionable - not that they're remotely admirable in the first place.

Cphe says

An historical romantic suspense with an eye catching title. A lot to enjoy about this novel, a dark, gloomy and isolated manor, smugglers, a heroine who is a strong and determined character and a dark and brooding hero.

Found the story did lag in places and didn't really feel any spark between the main characters Chris and Ross. Felt the chemistry between them to be lacklustre at times. Remember reading the novel as a teenager and thoroughly enjoying it but found this novel to be a bit weaker over time with a second reading.

Lesley says

Christina Tretton comes back to her family estate after being born and raised in the savage new world of the American wilderness. In an Indian conflict, her father is mortally wounded in the rugged frontier backwoods and his dying wish is that she return to the austere, dark abbey on the marshes of Sussex. This sets the stage for a fascinating tale of smuggling, ambiguous characters and relationships, and heroic courage on the part of Christina.

I have been casting about for a couple of years to find SOMEONE whose writing style approaches the quality, verve, and piquancy of Georgette Heyer -- lo and behold, here is Jane Aiken Hodge. I have already ordered two more of her books. I enjoyed very much the language--so deeply British, thank you. And the sense of place was outstanding -- I really felt the salt sea air and the marsh grasses underfoot.

I found a couple of misspellings, but I'll fault the editors (not Hodge) for example, instead of the word "salver," the word slaver (what is that?) was used. But I can get past these speed-bumps fairly easily. The only other thing that grated on me a bit was the mental (testosterone-induced?) density of Christina's love interest, Ross ... I mean, he falls for her prettier younger sister, even briefly? What a blockhead. But the longsuffering Chris--well, I won't say any more. This is a really good book; read it.

Helen says

I had never heard of *Watch the Wall, My Darling* until it started appearing in my recommendations on Goodreads, and with such an intriguing title I knew it was a book I would have to consider reading eventually! First published in 1966, it seems to be out of print now in paperback or hardback format, but used copies are available and an ebook version has also been released.

Watch the Wall, My Darling is a gothic romantic suspense novel set on the south-east coast of England during the Napoleonic Wars. As the story begins, Christina Tretton, a young American woman whose father has recently died, is returning to her family's ancestral home, Tretteign Grange. After encountering a gang of smugglers on the journey, Christina arrives at the Grange – also known as the Dark House – and is met by her Aunt Verity, her invalid grandfather and her handsome cousin, Ross.

Settling into her new home, Christina quickly takes control of the management of the house and the servants. Impressed with his granddaughter, old Mr Tretteign decides to change his will and leave the Grange to Christina – on the condition that she must marry either Ross or her other cousin, Richard. Christina insists that she has no intention of marrying either of them, but her two cousins, who each have their own reasons for wanting the Grange, have other ideas. Despite herself, she finds herself drawn to Ross, but soon discovers that he is involved in something very dangerous – and with England expecting a French invasion at any moment, the lives of everyone at the Dark House could be at risk.

I enjoyed this book – it was a fun, undemanding read with plenty of adventure and intrigue and a touch of

romance. I kept being reminded of Daphne du Maurier's Jamaica Inn, Georgette Heyer's Cousin Kate and Mary Stewart's Nine Coaches Waiting, though this is not as well written or memorable as any of those, in my opinion. The historical background didn't feel particularly strong and Christina felt more like a woman of the 1960s than the 1800s, while I didn't find Ross quite as fascinating and attractive as she did. The introduction of two new characters towards the end of the book didn't really add anything to the story either. Still, with smugglers, soldiers and spies, a crumbling abbey believed to be haunted, family secrets and an inheritance to be decided, there was more than enough to keep me happy!

And if you're wondering, the title comes from a poem by Rudyard Kipling called A Smuggler's Song:

"Five and twenty ponies
Trotting through the dark
Brandy for the parson,
'Baccy for the clerk;
Laces for a lady; letters for a spy,
And watch the wall, my darling, while the gentlemen go by!"

Maureen Carden says

I was going to be clever and in my review compare the prospective of reading of this book between my young self and my fifty-year-old self. (Whoa how the heck did that happen) Um, no. Just about every other reviewer has done so.

Obviously curiosity was one of the main motivators in rereading Watch the Wall, My Darling (WtW,MD), along with a strong remembered fondness. When I was trying to reconstruct my reading history for Goodreads, Jane Aiken Hodge (JAH) was one of the first authors I pulled up, and WtW,MD one book that I remembered adoring.

I am thrilled to say I have no reason to make fun of my twelve year old self. I still love it.

A young American woman, Christina Tretton, travels to the wild harsh coast of Sussex, England where smugglers hold sway and the marsh people who eke out a hard existence live under the fear of the smugglers and threat of invasion from Bonaparte. She is there to meet her grandfather and to make peace with him, since her father who recently died had escaped the old man's iron rule.

It is currently 91 degrees out and I want to huddle under blankets, and put on every light in the house due to JAH's descriptive powers. No basement to scream warnings about, Just a gloomy seaside house, Tretteign Grange, with cloisters open to the sky and with hidden rooms.

Her characters are so finely drawn that I could tell you most everything about them including everything JAH didn't even get to describing. I realize now one of the characters is most likely gay, but fifty years ago she couldn't write that in a Regency and I was mostly too dumb to understand. However it was an important part of the story, not her strike for LGBT rights.

The story, the romance, is mostly satisfying. Of course I wish it was just a bit hotter, but then I wished that fifty years ago too.

I highly recommend this to new readers. I really needed a break after the books I've read this week, as much as I loved them. (This has been a great week for reading). It was just nice to sit back with a mostly relaxing book. It certainly did have times of suspense, but with these older books you always know all will come well in the end.

Thank you to NetGalley for an ARC and a chance to return in time, in exchange for a fair and honest review.

Lady Domino says

I have read and re-read this book so many times that my copy has now fallen to pieces (does anyone know if its available as an ebook?)

I fall in love with Ross every time. I want to be Christina.

Deanne Patterson says

Watch the Wall, My Darling was originally published in 1966.

Should we judge books by their cover? I've heard we should not but I do anyway. This cover really drew me in. This is a suspenseful historical gothic romance. The suspense really built up for me and I wasn't sure what to expect in this darkly atmospheric book.

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Thank you to NetGalley and Bloomsbury Reader for a review copy in exchange for my honest review.

Maysam Aloush says

This author was truly talented and I am so happy that her books have been brought out in ebook form to be forever cherished. This is gothic romance at the highest level.

Be says

Well it certainly wasn't a gothic romance (at all) the only thing dark about it was the house , always referred to as "The Dark House" but it turned out to be a pretty good read. I love when the hero feels he's in love with someone else (on account of her beauty) then discovers there's no depth of character , and ends up truly caring for the woman that blends in with the wall (so to speak). I flew through the last few chapters , I wish the whole book was more like that.....action!

I would have loved an epilogue.....something! The 4 stars are mainly for the last quarter of the book.

Sherry says

My favorite JAH book. I first read this as a teenager and have read it several times since. The whole historical romance, spys and fear of "Boney" invading England are a favorite theme for me. Jane Aiken Hodge wrote so many good books, weaving real people and facts into her stories. She passed away in 2009, and I have read her books so often, I feel like I lost a friend, though I obviously never met her.

Moonlight Reader says

This was entirely delightful. I've never read anything by Jane Aiken Hodge, although I've read *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* by her sister, Joan.

I finally broke down and bought this book for the kindle after reading my second Phyllis Whitney reissue, *Black Amber*, which I've not yet reviewed over here, but which I actually enjoyed even more than Hunter's *Green*. This book continually popped up in my also boughts, so I've been eyeing it for a couple of years.

And, oh my, how delicious it was! The heroine, Christina Tretton, lately of backwoods America, currently of Dark House in Cornwall, was wonderful. Independent, capable, and handy with a pistol. The hero, Ross Tretteign, born on the right side of the blanket, but everyone knows that he's a cuckoo in the family nest, is a bit swoony, a patriot, smuggler, 100% masculine.

The book is set during the Napoleonic wars, when Boney is threatening an invasion. There's lots of midnight ramblings, a bullying grandfather, a silly French girl who nearly proves Ross's undoing, a neurotic mother, and a French spy.

There are no supernatural overtones to this one, just a good old-fashioned historical romance set in the marshlands, with a wonderful, strong heroine who is most emphatically not TSTL and who is resourceful and fully capable of rescuing herself. One of the most enjoyable books I've read this year, frankly, and quite a surprise.

April says

This story had many gothic elements that I enjoyed - the dark ancestral home, Tretteign Grange, on Romney Marsh near the coast of England, once an abbey and now considered to be haunted; a resourceful heroine come from America to meet the grandfather she's never known because she promised her father on his deathbed she would; and as the title suggests, smuggler's are lurking about while everyone worries about Napoleon's next move.

Set in the late 19th century, this novel was predictable but pleasantly so as I'm sure I wouldn't be happy if it turned out any other way. I truly enjoyed Christina Tretton's no-nonsense attitude and her deft handling of her bullying grandfather; her high-handed, silly aunt and her devil-may-care cousin and love interest, Ross. The conversations between Christina and Ross were believable and lively. I found myself smiling at their banter with each other. I was also very much amused by the fact that Christina had to be kidnapped and nearly killed before Ross, who in a day did a lifetime's worth of thinking and came to the realization that she was the one he needed, confessing that it was only when he found her missing and thought he'd never see her again that this suddenly became quite clear to him.

A fun, light-hearted read that proved very satisfying.

Naksed says

I have no issue with the style of writing, which is adequate, or the historical setting, which is extremely convincing. What I could not abide was the personal story between the protagonists and secondary characters. Too many abrupt about-faces, where a character just veers 180 degrees in personality overnight with no plausible explanation. Too much of a martyr syndrome in the heroine. And a very predictable and disappointing "twist" ending.

It is the early 1800s. Napoleon and Josephine's reign is triumphant. England, particularly the regions on the coast, is frantic, expecting an invasion any minute. Smugglers and spies abound, some pushed by hunger, others by greed, rebellion, or pursuit of power. It is in this hotbed that our American heroine lands, to meet the family that disinherited her father upon his marriage with a French woman.

The book begins with quite a lot of excitement, as Christina is held hostage at night on her way to her grandfather's manor by a band of ruthless smugglers who grope and threaten her. Only to find out the next morning that her own cousin, Ross, is their Captain. An unforeseen intimacy ignites between them, spurred on by Gramps, who hopes to force them into marriage through his will.

Problem is, Ross has no feelings at all for Chris except as one might have towards an amusing acquaintance. He has contempt for the entire female gender (mommy issues) and prefers to style himself as some sort of romantic figure fighting against old Boney's threats and saving his country and his people from being sentenced to a lifetime of Napoleon pastries rather than Beef Wellington.

Ross is a terrible "hero." He honestly has no redeeming qualities that I can see. Foolhardy, uncaring of the safety and reputation of others in his vain pursuit of glory, quite cruelly callous to Christina's obvious feelings for him, yet falling head over heels for her flighty, younger sister. He thinks nothing of breaking the convenient betrothal with Christina, then publically and quite pathetically pursuing her sister to Christina's complete humiliation, then changing his mind again when little sister turns out to be a hysterical shrew, and deciding he is now head over heels for Christina, the only woman he can respect. Excuse me if I don't believe in an HEA to be shared by a monumentally inconsistent, self-centered, foolish fop.

Yet Christina is no better as a heroine, at least for me, because there is nothing I detest more than doormat-martyr heroines. Christina, with her devotion to become housekeeper, nurse, savior, and even intrepid action-hero in a nest of snakes who neither deserve her attention nor do they like it, had me contemplating the empty-headed little sister as the more sympathetic character.

Apart from these issues, there were long stretches of time in the book that were dreary and tedious, with little action, and uninteresting dialogue. The book picks up a bit towards the end, presenting us with an implausible suspense mini-plot designed to conveniently allow the hero to rescue his damsel like a white knight.

The ending of the book, with Christina doing her Big Reveal that the reader had guessed at from the first couple of chapters, is a Big Nothing.

My money on Ross cheating on Christina with her sister (or some other frilly OW) within six months of their "lurve" match.

