

Both the signalman
and the darkness out
there have
unexpected endings



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The two stories have completely different ways of achieving the same effect of surprising the reader. They both build up suspense and show tension using different methods. Although these methods are different the stories have some similarities, the main one being that the both involve horrific deaths and tragedies. The stories were written in different era for audiences with different ideas about what was seen as 'scary' or interesting. The darkness out there is written in the late twentieth century after the world war.

The author, Penelope Lively, uses a psychological approach to see how people's behaviour is affected by their past. She also expresses her own views in the story to put her point across. On the other hand, The signalman is written in the late nineteenth century. The writer, Charles Dickens in this case uses the audience's interest in ghosts and the supernatural and 'gothic' themes as the base for his story. The Darkness Out There by Penelope Lively was written in the late twentieth century. The story begins with a detailed description of one of the characters, Sandra, walking along a track at the edge of a field.

The field is described as quite picturesque, it says 'She walked through flowers, the girl, ox-eye daisies and vetch parsley' This allows us to imagine a pretty, inviting field, full of colourful flowers. This is quite a laid back, relaxing setting for the start of the story. Next we hear a description of an area at the end of the track known as 'Packer's End'. Packer's end is a place at the end of the track it seems to be an area of scrub, left to waste, where a German war plane crashed. This immediately adds some tension because the idea of death is introduced early in the story.

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We also get more suspense surrounding 'Packer's End' when the girl thinks 'you didn't go by yourself through Packer's End if you could help it'. Also the description of ghosts of the dead German air crew are used to make the area seem spooky and eerie 'people who'd heard them talking still, chattering in German on their radios, Voices coming out of the trees, nasty, creepy. People said'. The fact that she knows it's a bad place to go is emphasised in the next paragraph 'She thought suddenly of blank-eyed helmeted heads, looking at you from among the branches.

She wouldn't go in there for a thousand pounds, not even in bright day like now'. This really shows how fearful she is of the place and how reluctant she is to have anything to do with it. She then describes the place itself, as 'a rank place, all whippy saplings and brambles and brambles and a gully with a dumped mattress and bedstead and an old fridge. 'This is the typical description of a run down ally, with overgrown, scrappy plants.

Then she again adds to the tension created by the image of death, by saying 'and somewhere, presumably, the crumbling rusty scraps of metal and cloth and ... ones?' The question really makes you think about the possibility of the bones of the dead air crew still being there, that is extremely creepy. So far we have a strong image in our minds of the type of place nobody, no matter how fearless really wants to go. Packers End is then described with the fear children have of it, as it is a spooky, dark place, with 'witches, wolves and tigers' then we find out the real reasons she has fear of it, such as rapists and attackers.

The entire image of Packer's End gives us the impression something bad is going to occur, involving Sandra and Packer's End, It turns out not to, it just involves the past from Packer's End. Sandra continues on her way to Mrs. Rutter's house, where she is heading to take part in a help scheme for the elderly. As she nears Packer's End she decides to hurry up a bit, showing again her fear. Then somebody jumps out from beyond a hedge. We assume Sandra is about to be attacked until we find out that the 'assailant' is actually Kerry Stevens, the other person helping out at Mrs.

Rutter's house. Kerry is instantly portrayed as a troublemaker, not only by his actions when he scares Sandra but by the way she describes him. 'Kerry Stevens that none of her lot reckoned much on, with his black licked down hair and slitty eyes.' Sandra's views of Kerry leave the reader expecting him to cause trouble or wreak havoc in some form before the story is over, this adds suspense because we not only wonder what, but when he will do it. We later find out that he is completely different and Sandra changes her mind about her because of his reaction to Mrs.

Rutter's story. Mrs. Rutter is initially described as a typical 'dear' old lady. She is very chatty, and wants to hear all about Kerry and Sandra's lives, she wants to get to know them and is seen as very friendly, her appearance is also a very soft, friendly, and seemingly inviting. 'She seemed composed of circles, a cottage-loaf of a woman, with a face below which chins collapsed one into another, a creamy smiling pool of a face'. I think the one word, which helps to make her seem friendly and warm is 'smiling', it instantly has a effect on your visualisation of her.

The description of her house adds to this feeling, with typical 'old woman style' things such as a collection of ornaments and a linoleum floor, worn away in patches. The way she talks is again typical of an elderly person, using pet names, although she has an air of eccentricity about her already as she is instantly very familiar with Sandra. 'There's only me too see if you're showing a bit of bum.' Mrs. Rutter is shown to be a generic, slightly eccentric old woman, nothing out of the ordinary, nothing to make you think 'oh, hold on a minute! Nothing would lead you to expect what actually happens.

We find out that 'nice old Mrs. Rutter' leaves an injured German pilot for dead, for not one but two nights, this is very unexpected because she is seen as harmless and extremely caring/friendly. Kerry and Sandra are also fooled by her sweet and soft exterior, as the reader is meant to be. The pilot had horrific injuries and was lucky to have survived the initial impact but Mrs. Rutter had lost her husband in the war, and she obviously saw this as a chance for vengeance.

The things like the fact that she cheered as the plane went down and that dot said 'Bang go some more of the bastards' instantly change our views of Mrs. Rutter, she is now seen as evil, full of hatred, and even dangerous. This story shows that you should never base your opinions on first impressions because things can change pretty quickly. The Signalman by Charles Dickens was written much earlier than The Darkness Out There The story is extremely descriptive right from the start the cutting in which the story is set is described in great detail which set the atmosphere very well.

The cutting is described as 'extremely deep, and unusually precipitous' the use of the more descriptive words is excellent because it allows us to visualise the scene where the story takes place in greater detail. He describes the 'jagged rocks' and the 'clammy' and 'oozier' 'dripping wet' walls and the 'dismal', 'forbidding' and 'gloomy' conditions. One word again sticks out and adds the most tension/suspense is 'deadly' its immediately makes us wonder just how deadly the cutting is, could something bad be about to happen down there?

To find out that someone is living in such unpleasant conditions and has done for some time now gives us an early insight into the character of the Signalman himself. He is described quite vividly as 'a dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. 'Instantly the image of quite a hard wearing, rugged man appears, he also is made to seem solemn and primitive by his looks. These looks could also be perceived as making him seem concerned, as if his mind were on something else.

He is also seen as not having much in the way of personality, and not being a very cheery person. This is probably because he spends most of his days in the cutting. The first impressions of the man put him over as creepy, not only his primitive, eerie looks but also because he doesn't reply to the man shouting from below, just seems to notice him then do what he was doing. His character being so strange makes you wonder if he was always like that, or, if being isolated for so long has changed him, which we find out it has.

He was a 'student of natural philosophy and had attended lectures; but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down, and never risen again'

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this shows it as a form of self punishment, he regrets misusing his chances and is punishing himself for it now. The description of the cutting, added to that of the only person there, makes it all seem very eerie and strange. This leads us to wonder what could happen, the weird conditions and some strange man, what is going to have happened, or what is going to happen? At the very start of the story, the visitor shouts “ Halloa!

Below There! “, that phrase is repeated a number of times throughout the story, to reinforce its importance which later becomes clear. The signalman seems to be shaken by the words as he asks what exactly made the visitor say that phrase. This creates an uneasy feeling between the characters and shows us the importance of the sentence once again but we are still left wondering why? During the conversation between the two men we see that both men are wary of each other, they seem to be curious as of the way each other act and exactly what they do and say.

They even feel slightly threatened by each other, as if both were scared for some reason. These makes the readers think that they have reasons for this and thus makes us wonder what those reasons are. We also hear of the Signalman’s strange behaviour, which makes him seem even more weird than he already is. We hear how he looks towards a small bell used to attract his attention when it isn’t ringing and he goes a pale colour as he does it. This seems weird, as if he is imagining it ringing. And then he would go out into the dismal conditions and look towards the tunnel at the end of the cutting.

Suspense is shown here because we want to know why he acts so oddly and what makes him look at the bell. During the story, both men mistake each other for ghosts. The signalman believes the visitor is the ghost he sees at the end of the tunnel, when the bell only rings in his head, because the visitor acts exactly as the ghost does, from his actions at the top of the cutting. The visitor believes the signalman is a ghost because of his odd looks and behaviour. Throughout the story most of the questions regarding the two men are left unanswered until the very end.

Questions like who is the ghost? Whether the signalman is a threat? What are they going to do to each other? What is the ghost warning them of? By leaving these answers to be explained at the end the suspense and anxiety can last for the entire story. Both of the stories I have looked at are similar and dissimilar in many ways. The characters turn out to be very different to our original impressions, and the endings are both very unexpected. The friendly old lady turns out to be a vengeance-ridden evil woman because she chose not to save the life of a man, although he was a German soldier.

The signalman on the other hand seems like he is crazy but ends up being correct because he is warned by the visions that something bad will happen involving a train but he doesn't know what and can't be prepared for it. Both Mrs. Rutter and the Signalman change as the stories go on, and the characters become the opposite of what they were first seen as. By changing a character's personality so much the reader is left to wonder how they were originally sucked into believing the first images of them.

I think that the two characters build up tension by changing so much. But the two places where they are set, Packer's End and The Cutting are described so vividly that we get the feeling of something bad happening from both and I thought that this was the most useful factor in building up tension and suspense. I preferred the signalman because I thought the description of the cutting was extremely good, and helped to set an already spooky atmosphere, which was added to by the goings on in the story.

The darkness out There had Packers End, which yes was described well and added suspense but because they didn't actually go into the area, they just talked about it, so it wasn't as scary as it could have been. I also thought that the Signalman was more interesting because it was easier to visualise due to more extensive descriptions. Both stories built up suspense and tension right through them by using a combination of character traits and atmospheric descriptions. Both were used to great effect by each writer and each was successful in having a tense, surprising, gripping ending.