

The Willows

BY

Algernon Blackwood

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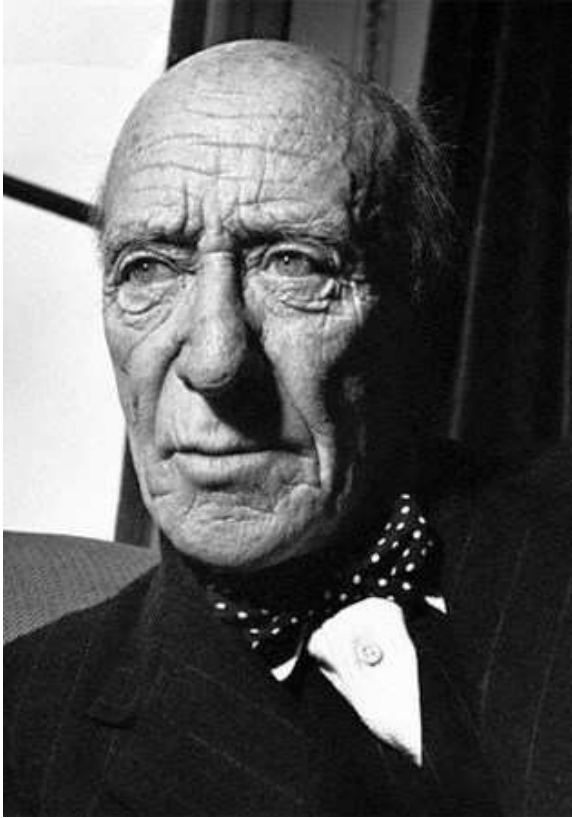
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ABOUT AUTHOR



Algernon Blackwood (1869 – 1951) was one of the most prolific and pioneering English authors of weird fiction and ghost stories. He developed a unique style exploring the uncanny powers of nature, mysticism, and the dark boundaries of human psychology.

If you enjoy horror / thriller in the style of Stephen King or H. P. Lovecraft, the true father of the genre is Algernon Blackwood. Even Lovecraft said, "*He is the greatest master of supernatural horror ever.*"

Life and Personality

- **Strict Upbringing:** Raised in a highly conservative Calvinist household, which triggered his lifelong pursuit of alternative mysticism.
- **Adventurous Youth:** Spent years in Canada and the United States working diverse jobs, including milk farming, journalism, and bartending.
- **Occult Interests:** Joined the famous **Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn** due to his deep fascination with the supernatural.
- **Media Career:** Became a popular broadcaster for the BBC in his later years, narration-style reading his own ghost stories on radio and television.

📖 Major Works

Blackwood excelled at transforming natural elements into sources of terror. His most notable works include:

- **The Willows:** Follows two friends canoeing down the Danube River who encounter sinister, non-human forces. H. P. Lovecraft praised it as the greatest weird fiction story ever written.
- **The Wendigo:** A classic horror tale set in the Canadian wilderness, based on the Native American myth of a cannibalistic forest spirit.
- **John Silence Series:** A collection of stories featuring a "psychic detective" who uses occult knowledge to solve supernatural mysteries.

➡ Literary Style

- **Cosmic Horror:** Focuses on the insignificance of humanity and the terrifying scale of the universe, rather than typical monsters.
- **Atmospheric Nature:** Forests, rivers, and desolate landscapes are not just settings, but active, living, and threatening characters.

PREFACE

A Desolate River. A Whispering Forest.
The Cosmic Terror Beyond Human Sight.

Two adventurous friends launch a canoe trip down the remote, untamed waters of the Danube River, seeking the absolute peace of nature. Deep within a desolate, flooded wilderness of shifting sandbanks, they decide to camp on a lonely island surrounded entirely by thousands of low, twisting willow trees. But as the sun goes down and a fierce, unnatural wind begins to shake the landscape, the quiet sanctuary transforms into a stage for a relentless, claustrophobic nightmare.

The true terror of the island is not a physical threat, but a profound tear in the very fabric of reality. The two travelers soon realize that the willow trees are not mere vegetation; they are the living, shifting camouflage for an ancient, extra-dimensional force that has spilled into our world. As the ground vibrates with unearthly hums and bizarre, colossal shapes press down against the

sky, the men find their minds systematically targeted by a cosmic malice that demands a human sacrifice.

Experience Algernon Blackwood's absolute masterpiece of cosmic horror and psychological suspense. Widely celebrated as one of the greatest supernatural tales ever written, this definitive classic delivers a chilling exploration of human vulnerability and the terrifying, indifferent forces that wait just outside the boundaries of human intellect.

I.

After leaving Vienna, and long before

you come to Budapest, the Danube enters a region of singular loneliness and desolation, where its waters spread away on all sides regardless of a main channel, and the country becomes a swamp for miles upon miles, covered by a vast sea of low willow-bushes. On the big maps this deserted area is painted in a fluffy blue, growing fainter in color as it leaves the banks, and across it may be seen in large straggling letters the word *Sümpfe*, meaning marshes.

In high flood this great acreage of sand, shingle-beds, and willow-grown islands is almost topped by the water, but in normal seasons the bushes bend and rustle in the free winds, showing their silver leaves to the sunshine in an ever-moving plain of bewildering beauty. These willows never attain to the dignity of trees; they have no rigid trunks; they remain humble bushes, with rounded tops and soft outline, swaying on slender stems that answer to the least pressure of the wind; supple as grasses, and so

continually shifting that they somehow give the impression that the entire plain is moving and alive. For the wind sends waves rising and falling over the whole surface, waves of leaves instead of waves of water, green swells like the sea, too, until the branches turn and lift, and then silvery white as their underside turns to the sun.

Happy to slip beyond the control of the stern banks, the Danube here wanders about at will among the intricate network of channels intersecting the islands everywhere with broad avenues down which the waters pour with a shouting sound; making whirlpools, eddies, and foaming rapids; tearing at the sandy banks; carrying away masses of shore and willow-clumps; and forming new islands innumerable which shift daily in size and shape and possess at best an impermanent life, since the flood-time obliterates their very existence.

Properly speaking, this fascinating part of the river's life begins soon after leaving Pressburg, and we, in our Canadian canoe, with gipsy tent and frying-pan on board, reached it on the crest of a rising flood about mid-July. That very same morning, when the sky was reddening before sunrise, we had slipped swiftly through still-sleeping Vienna, leaving it a couple of hours later a mere patch of smoke against the blue hills of the Wienerwald on the horizon; we had breakfasted below Fischeramend

under a grove of birch trees roaring in the wind; and had then swept on the tearing current past Orth, Hainburg, Petronell (the old Roman Carnuntum of Marcus Aurelius), and so under the frowning heights of Thelsen on a spur of the Carpathians, where the March steals in quietly from the left and the frontier is crossed between Austria and Hungary.

Racing along at twelve kilometers an hour soon took us well into Hungary, and the muddy waters—sure sign of flood—sent us aground on many a shingle-bed, and twisted us like a cork in many a sudden belching whirlpool before the towers of Pressburg (Hungarian, Pozsóny) showed against the sky; and then the canoe, leaping like a spirited horse, flew at top speed under the grey walls, negotiated safely the sunken chain of the Fliegende Brücke ferry, turned the corner sharply to the left, and plunged on yellow foam into the wilderness of islands, sandbanks, and swamp-land beyond—the land of the willows.

The change came suddenly, as when a series of bioscope pictures snaps down on the streets of a town and shifts without warning into the scenery of lake and forest. We entered the land of desolation on wings, and in less than half an hour there was neither boat nor fishing-hut nor red roof, nor any single sign of human habitation and civilization within sight. The sense of remoteness from the world