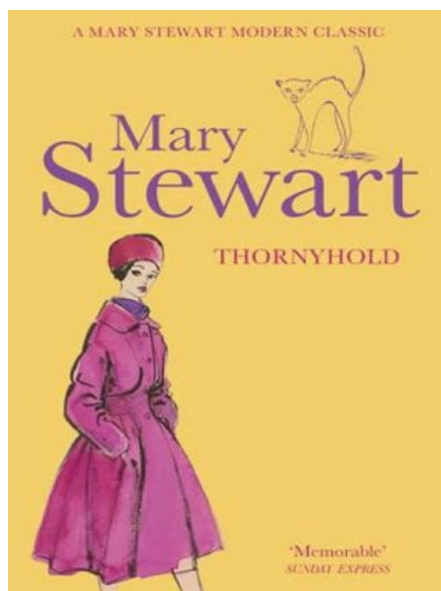




Thornyhold

Mary Stewart

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Thornyhold is a house deep in a wild wood like somewhere out of a fairy tale. To Gilly, it is an enchantment. Her very own enchantment, left to her by the cousin whose occasional magical visits had brightened her childhood. And as she explores, she discovers more about the woman who had come to seem like a fairy godmother for her: her herbalists's skills, her still room, her abilities to foresee and to heal. She discovers also that the local people believe that Gilly has inherited not just the house but the magical spell-weaving powers that live on in the house and garden. Slowly, quietly, she comes to realise that they are right.

Thornyhold Details

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From Reader Review Thornyhold for online ebook

Joanne says

4.5 stars

A lovely reread of an old favorite....a lonely, unloved child with a godmother known as a healer and white witch inherits Thornyhold when the old woman passes away. A gentle, quiet tale of a young woman's transformation as the magic of her country sanctuary and her love of all creatures great and small lead her to find happiness and love. Pure poetry.

Emma Cooper says

This has been one of my favourite books for years, and I have recently re-read it. What I love about it is that it makes magic commonplace, seeing it everywhere in nature. The story is about Geillis (Gilly) Ramsey, who after the death of her parents finds a haven when she inherits a house in the country from her godmother (also called Geillis).

As she brings the house and garden back into good order, Gilly discovers that her godmother was known locally as a witch - and she wasn't the only one. And as Gilly meets and gets to know the locals, she finds something she never thought she would - love.

Although Gilly seems to have something of the 'gift', she herself has no desire to be a witch. However, she has also inherited her godmother's love of the natural world, plants and animals alike, and her joy in her new surroundings comes across in every page.

In 'Thornyhold', author Mary Stewart has produced a lovely, happy, gently magical read.

Marilo Meroño López says

Lo único que no me ha gustado ha sido lo precipitado del final, le hubiera puesto una estrella más si no fuera por ese motivo.

Wealhtheow says

Gilly has a lonely childhood in the north of England between the two WWs, and foresees a long, lonely adulthood for herself. But then her father dies, and her godmother Geillis leaves her a house and garden in Thornyhold. Geillis always had an air of mystery and magic about her, and so does her house. Gilly begins exploring her godmother's herbologies and the woods around the cottage, but interruptions by her various neighbors leave her both unsettled and intrigued. Led by occasional messenger pigeons and flashes of memories that aren't her own, Gilly begins to piece together the puzzle her godmother left behind.

I loved this book. Gilly is a delicately painted, nuanced character who feels perfectly real and quite familiar. The plot dances between moments of darkness and warm bucolic romance. And the setting! I fell absolutely in love with Stewart's England, with its bramble jelly and cats falling asleep in front of the Aga.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

This is between 3.5 and 4 stars for me, but if I'm judging it just as a comfort read, that and my general love for all things Mary Stewart push it to a solid 4 stars. Mary Stewart (perhaps inspired by her Merlin books that she'd been writing) wrote this sweet romance with a dash of magical realism, as our heroine dabbles in white magic of the hedgewitch variety (crystal balls and potions). *Thornyhold* is also a charming ode to the English country life and the healing that a lovely old home can bring to your life.

Thornyhold is on a slightly different wavelength than Stewart's earlier romantic suspense novels; although there are both a mystery and a romance in this book, both are somewhat understated. This book centers around a lovely place where a young woman can finally find herself, and the plot is more location-driven than action-driven. In any case Mary Stewart's penchant for lengthy, lovingly detailed descriptions of scenery is in full bloom here, so to speak.

The main character, Geillis (Jilly), is very sympathetic: the first three chapters relate her lonely childhood, with a distant father and harsh mother. Jilly's life is lightened only by the periodic appearances of her older cousin Geillis, who brings a breath of fresh air, love, a little white magic, and encouragement. Cousin Geillis shows young Jilly a baby insect, a nymph, that "lives at the bottom of the pond in the dark, and feeds on whatever it can get, till one day it finds it can climb out into the light, and grow its wings, and fly. ... Another nymph, another way, another day."

But these lovely stolen moments with cousin Geillis are few and far between, and by the time Jilly/Geillis reaches adulthood in the fourth chapter I was desperately hoping for her to find some happiness. Luckily for both me and Geillis, she inherits Thornyhold from her cousin, which is where she finally finds herself and discovers love. This love isn't just romantic love; it's more love for a home and a place where Geillis can truly find herself.

Thornyhold is a lovely old home, with antique furnishings:

It was a big kitchen, old-fashioned but well enough planned, and after the vicarage kitchen, a delight. Instead of our vast black Eagle range there was a cream-coloured Aga, nestling under the old mantelpiece as if it had been built with the house ... Opposite the fireplace was a tall dresser with rows of pretty plates in white and powder-blue, with cups to match hanging along the fronts of the shelves.

... a still room with medicines and herbs . . .

And there's a cat named Hodge, who comes with the home ...

... not to mention a friendly young neighbor boy and his single father. Drama is supplied by a neighborhood woman who dabbles in witchcraft and hides her jealousy toward Geillis under a layer of overfriendliness.

This is a gentle, thoughtful, feel-good tale with just a little bit of mostly white witchcraft. In general I love Mary Stewart's earlier, more suspenseful reads more than her later books, but this one is a nice comfort read.

Buddy reads with the Mary Stewart group.

Sarah Mac says

I'm not sure what to make of Mary Stewart's oeuvre.

The Ivy Tree was my first MS experience, & I loved it. Spurred by success, I quickly followed with *Nine Coaches Waiting* & *My Brother Michael*, both of which I liked. But then came *Wildfire at Midnight*, which was disappointing. And now...*Thornyhold*.

It's well-written from a technical standpoint; then again, I'd expect nothing less. Stewart always displays a strong command of language & description, while her narrators are prone to quotable insights re: human nature. The heroine of this particular novel is classic Stewart formula -- a young, intelligent Englishwoman, softly spoken & occasionally befuddled, but also a keen observer & easily riled by injustices against the innocents of the universe.

In these respects, *Thornyhold* is no different from the Stewart novels I enjoyed. So what went wrong?

The ending. It was GHASTLY.

Through the first 180-some pages, we've had a romantic suspense novel -- a gentle one, yes, but there is definitely something sinister building in the background. There's a spooky neighbor lady who may or may not be involved in a coven -- the same woman who may or may not have turned her abusive mother into a mindless drone in a rocking chair. A woman who frightens her simple-minded son. A woman who orders said son to chain & starve a dog...because she needs the hair for a sinister love spell, which she then plans to use on the heroine's love interest. But while the heroine is uncovering each layer of her neighbor's creep factor, she's also uncovering each layer of her cousin's white magic -- her medicinal herbs, her treatment of injured animals, her intuitive cat, her undefinable presence in the house.

Oh good, says I. This is setting up for a classy-yet-epic showdown between good & evil. Bring it on!

...That never happened.

(view spoiler)

I can't, guys.

HEAs are well & good, but this one was abrupt & disconnected. I wasn't expecting something on par with *Hell House* -- it's Mary Stewart, after all. But there's no reason why a delicate, gentle story needs to shrug off the struggle between good & evil. WTF was the purpose of the conflict? Why even bother?! If you want to write an English comedy, fine -- but don't milk suspense that serves no purpose. So much atmospheric verbiage was spent on the dog's rescue (poor little Rags <3), the grotesque love spell, the heroine's discomfort at what her neighbor was potentially involved in -- but then it fizzled into *absolutely nothing*.

Stewart wimped out. End of story.

3 stars.

Judith says

I loved this book!

The setting of Thornyhold is post WWII England. Young Geillis, known as Jilly has had a quietly miserable vicarage childhood raised by a stern mother and a gentle Vicar father. Her sad childhood is occasionally relieved by visits from her mother's Cousin Geillis, a world traveler, herbalist, and Jilly's sponsor/godmother. Jilly is gentle, intelligent and lonely, and the infrequent visits from Cousin Geillis have a magical quality for the lonely child. Cousin Geillis pays her school fees, so she is sent away to school and then to university. When her mother dies, Jilly has to leave the university early to look after her newly widowed father, and when he dies she finds herself with no money and no job. The timely inheritance of Cousin Geillis cottage, Thornyhold, gives her new hope for her lonely life. The solicitors also inform her that her cousin has left her enough money to live on, together with all of Thornyhold's furniture contents and Hodge, the cottage cat. Those contents include the still room filled with herbs, potions and books and, Jilly also discovers, Cousin Geillis's reputation as a witch and a healer. Gilly settles in to Thornyhold and her life begins to change.

My thoughts:

Geillis Ramsey is not Mary Stewart's typical heroine, the career girl on vacation who stumbles into a mystery and danger. Geillis is alone in the world, gentle, reflective artistic, and lacking in self confidence. At Thornyhold, she must deal with finding her place in this new community and the new people she meets who will change her life forever, Mrs Trapp, Jessamy, William, and Christopher John.

As usual, Mary Stewart's writing is lyrical. Her descriptions of the cottage, the still room, the woods, plants and places are wonderfully evocative. Her characters come alive before our eyes, and Gilly, in particular, is very likable. Although she had a miserable childhood she never comes across as self pitying. In a matter of fact way, (through the power of Mary Stewart's writing) she tells us of her love for her new home, her desire to fit in, and of the small strange happenings in her life. The setting, close to Stonehenge in Wiltshire, with its green English splendor is gorgeous. The small hints of some "practical magic" add a touch of suspense to the story. The love story doesn't come until we are well into the book, but when it comes it's as Geilly says, "love at first sight".

The over all tone of the book is peaceful, yet with strong hints of otherworldly menace and undercurrents of the romance that is to come. Above all, though, it is the rich descriptions that make this book so enjoyable.

If you need a lovely place to escape to, if you need a romantic cottage full of magic, a gentle story filled with life and love, then I recommend you visit Thornyhold. You'll love it there.

Highly recommended

Susan Albert says

I've loved Mary Stewart's romantic mysteries for decades, and I go back to them often. I picked up a digital copy of THORNYHOLD recently. I enjoy Stewart's characterizations but most of all, her descriptions of Thornyhold and its gardens. And of course, there's a stillroom. Any book that includes an herbalist, a stillroom, and a bit of witchery wins my heart.

Sara says

Would it seem a little too precious if I said this book is bewitching? Seriously, it is. Thornyhold itself is so charming and alluring, with hidden staircases in cupboard doors and walled gardens in varying states of disarray.

It had a mediaeval look, like the jewelled, out-of-perspective illuminations in a tale like The Romance of the Rose. Within the irregular circle of ancient walls and vegetable plot someone, a long time ago, had made a garden within a garden. At its center stood a well, ancient and canopied, and knee-deep in bushes of lavender and sage and lady's love."

Conjures up every lovely English garden I have ever adored, from the childhood haunts of Frances Hodgson Burnett to the other Cornwall beauties of Rosamunde Pilcher. I wish nothing more than to know all the plants and their uses when I visit a garden with Stewart! I can see her explosions of color and smell delicious fragrances on the gentle winds.

There is a strong theme of connections to nature that runs through this novel. Geillis Ramsey is in tune with her surroundings, including the animals that share her world. The cat, Hodge, and the dog, Rags, are central to the story and add much to how affected we are by the human characters. I am a huge believer in being able to judge a person's true worth by how they treat animals and small children.

The undercurrent of witchcraft and that creepy, uncomfortable feeling that makes you fear for the central character but which you cannot quite get a hold on are supremely done. It is a short tale and not one that can be discussed in any depth without ruining the story for others, so I will not elaborate. I will say that if anything disappoints it is that the punishment does not, in the end, fit the crime.

Thank you so much, Mary Stewart, for all the joy you have brought to my life. I have been losing myself in your stories since I was a girl, and I always feel at home the moment I open the book and stroll into an English world that I have never seen but that fills me with familiarity and nostalgia none the less.

Hana says

Three and a half stars. I think this is one book that should have been about a hundred pages longer. It got off to a very promising start but then sort of petered out into nothing much. I really enjoyed the story of Gilly Ramsey's lonely childhood and the bright moments of connection with her godmother. When Gilly inherits Thorneyhold I was delighted with both the house and all the mysterious goings on: flashes of intuition, cats, dogs, pigeons appearing, locked rooms and herb lore. And then...the book ends. Everything gets resolved and largely demystified and the romance just happens all in about twenty pages.

I loved Gilly as a character and really enjoyed the hedge-witch lore; I wish that she'd developed her vocation as an animal healer, but she seems to have given it all up for reasons that are unclear. Not as good as Rose Cottage, the only other cozy village Mary Stewart that I've read, and nowhere near as much fun as the romantic adventure stories for which she is best known.

Elements of her Arthurian saga found their way into this book. I'm something of an outlier among Mary Stewart fans because I love her Merlin stories, particularly The Crystal Cave--that's the one I'll go back to

when I'm in mood for more magic.

Content warning: Suggested paranormal happenings and witchcraft, but pretty tame. Otherwise a clean read.

Ashley says

Years ago, I had a recurring dream that I was driving through residential streets in a sprawling neighborhood on a hillside. Not much ever happened in these dreams, but they always left me with a wonderful feeling of peacefulness. I can still picture some of them—big oak trees, cul-de-sacs here and there, lights twinkling from the houses as dusk fell.

Thornyhold is like one of those dreams—cozy and enchanting and deliciously serene. It's a light read, but for what it is, it's perfect. Loved it.

Lori says

Okay, this is literary guilty pleasure at it's best! I really liked this book, but I think it garners four stars instead of five. *Thornyhold* encompasses many of my favorite things - England, a black cat, magic, a house with a mysterious past, and a garden! Not quite as polished as Mary Stewart's Arthurian saga, but I still found it to be a very enchanting story!

I know I have many classics on my shelf waiting to be read, but it's summer and this book is simply delicious! And, weren't novels considered a guilty pleasure once upon a time anyway? Go ahead! Get a copy of this book and make it your summer indulgence! I know I plan to read this again next summer, maybe I'll take it to the beach!

Jane says

I loved 'Thornyhold' every bit as much as I had expected. And maybe even a little more.

Geillis was a lonely child, the only daughter of undemonstrative parents, but her godmother, a herbalist and maybe a white witch, understood and showed her the magic in the world that she had always wanted to see:

"Everything, suddenly, seemed outlined in light. The dog-daisies, white and gold, and taller than I was, stirred and swayed above my head as if combed through by a strong breeze. In its wake the air stilled again, thick with scents. The birds stopped singing, the grasshoppers were silent. I sat there, as still as a snail on the stem, in the middle of a full and living world and saw it for the first time, and for the first time knew myself to be a part of it.

She sank down beside me on the grass. She seemed to manage it without disturbing the dog-daisies. she ran a forefinger up the stem of one daisy, and a ladybird came off it on the finger and clung there.

"Look," she said. "Quickly. count the spots."

I had loved Gilly from the start, and I was as captivated by her godmother and by the magic in the world as

she was.

visit was magical, but life was difficult.

Gilly had to leave university early to look after her newly widowed father; and when he died she found herself alone in the world, with no job, little money, and no idea how she should live.

Until, that is, she inherited Thornyhold, her godmother's woodland cottage, and just enough money to live on.

Gilly fell in love with her home, and so did I, as Mary Stewart described everything that she saw, everything that she felt so beautifully.

I would love to curl up and read in the bedroom:

"After what I had seen downstairs, the bathroom was a surprise. It was a big room with two tall windows giving on the back, or south side of the house. In each with a wide window seat, set in the depth of the wall. The fireplace was delicate, with pretty flowered tiles. A bow-fronted chest did duty as a dressing-table, and a deep cupboard beside the fireplace stood open, showing the hanging-room of a big wardrobe. The bed was double, and high. The carpet was a soft green, lining the room, as it were, with the woods outside. By one of the windows was an easy chair. A lovely room."

I would love to step outside:

"All that remained of the original plan was the broad flagged wall that ran straight from the house, bisecting the lawn, to a belvedere at the river's edge. This was a paved half-moon, edged with a low balustrade, holding a pair of curved stone benches. Between these a shallow flight of steps led down to the water where just below the surface could be seen a row of stepping-stones that would, in summer or a low water, be uncovered. On the opposite bank willows trailed their hair in the shallows, and golden flakes of fallen leaves turned idly on the current before floating downstream. Coppices of hazel framed the entrance to an overgrown forest ride stretching up through the trees."

Gilly's story works wonderfully as an 'inheriting a house book' and could stand happily alongside books like 'The Scent of Water' by Elizabeth Goudge, 'The House on the Cliff' by D E Stevenson, 'The Heir' by Vita SackvilleWest and if you can think of others that I might not have read I'd love to know

This is one of Mary Stewart's later works, and there is less action and intrigue than there is in her earlier works of romantic suspense, but the more thoughtful, more contemplative feel of this book works wonderfully.

There is a little mystery.

Gilly finds that she has inherited a book of spells and a black cat named Hodge. Was her godmother really a witch? Why is the housekeeper so interested? What is happening in the house?

There is a little romance too.

It's engaging, but it does become a little silly at times, and the plot is not quite as strong as the writing in the latter part of the story.

I loved following Gilly's progress, I loved seeing the world through her eyes, and the way that the pieces fell into place was wonderful.

I suspect that there were loose ends, and unanswered questions, but I'm not going to worry about them; because I loved that heart and soul of this book.

Hannah says

Those readers who love the vivid, lyrical prose of Stewart's novels shouldn't be disappointed in this offering, although be warned, it does differ from her earlier works.

Thornyhold is a more subtle and contemplative story than you might be used to when it comes to reading Stewart. After all, she was in her 70's when she wrote this, and I imagine she was harkening back to her youth while penning *Thornyhold*. Generally absent is the suspense and romance so magically woven throughout in *The Moonspinners*, *Madam*, *Will You Talk* or *This Rough Magic*. Instead, there is a magic of another kind here: a gentle, hearth-and-home-loving tale of a house well loved and much desired, and an ode to the beauty of a time and place now gone but fondly remembered by the author.

I can't really put into words how much this story affected me. It was as if Stewart had looked into my heart much like cousin Geillis looked into Gilly's heart and provided the nourishment for her soul that she craved.

...and Stewart did the same for me with *Thornyhold*.

MomToKippy says

This is simple perfection in descriptive poetic writing. Not earth shattering or life-changing, just a magical ride to another time and place chock full of imagery and tactile experience. If you enjoy exploration of nature and discovery of nooks and crannies in historical old estates, quirky mysterious characters, with a little witchery thrown in, this is for you. The characters are colorfully drawn and feel real all the way down to the animals and birds. There are many quaint phrases that I really enjoyed - I assume they are typical of the era and place -1940s, England. Interesting that this was written in the 1980s - it has such a wonderful vintage feel. But Mary Stewart is of another era so she really handles this time period so well. We see the heroine evolve from a child with a troubled, bleak childhood to a woman who discovers herself through the inherited property of her elder cousin and godmother who's special "talents" encourage her to recognize her own. We've got the insta-love thing here again - seems to be a thing in Stewart's novels. It wasn't quite as unbelievable as in the others I read because there was a little magic or purposeful direction involved that made some sense, so I'll take it. I actually wish this had been longer. 4.5
