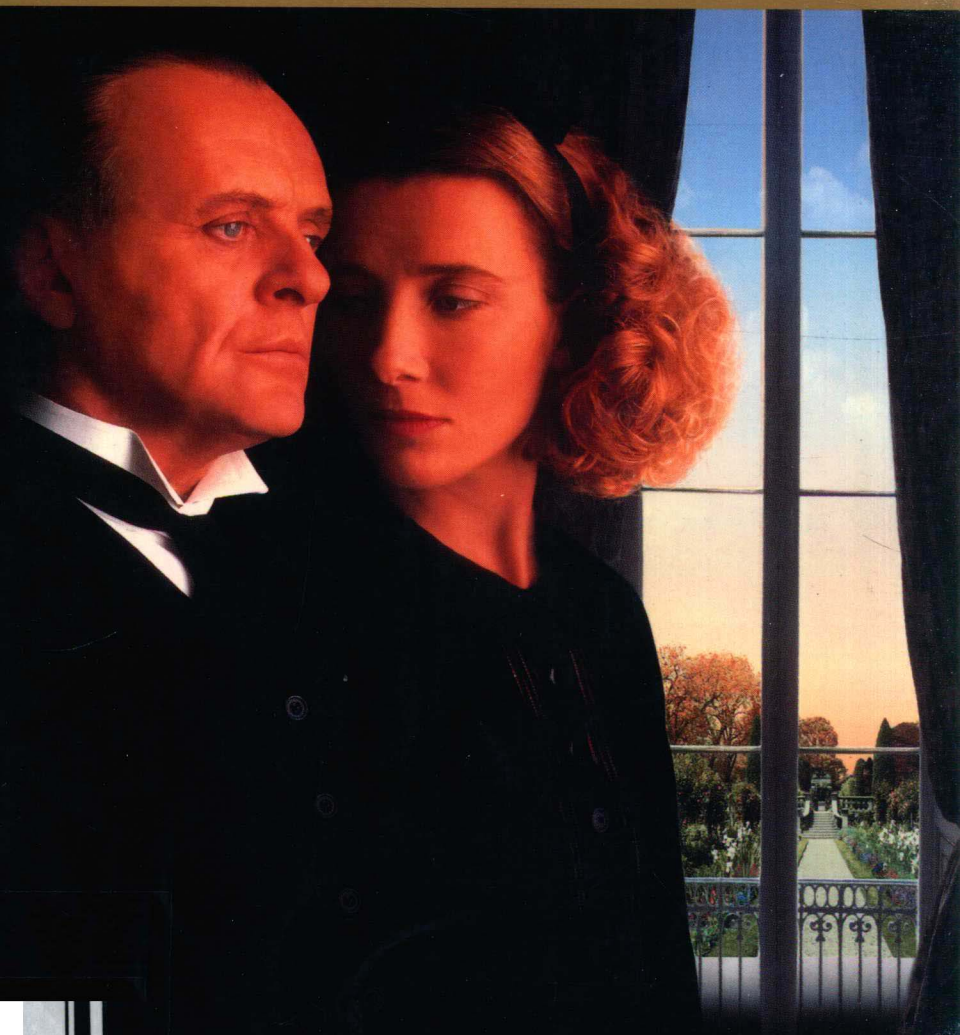


KAZUO ISHIGURO



THE REMAINS OF THE DAY



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*The Remains  
of the Day*

KAZUO ISHIGURO

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Praise for Kazuo Ishiguro's  
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KAZUO ISHIGURO

*The Remains of the Day*

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1954 and moved to Britain in 1960. He attended the University of Kent at Canterbury and the University of East Anglia. He now lives in London. His first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, won the Winifred Holtby Prize of the Royal Society of Literature and has been translated into thirteen languages. His second, *An Artist of the Floating World*, won the 1986 Whitbread Book of the Year Award; it has been translated into fourteen languages. *The Remains of the Day* was awarded the 1989 Booker Prize.



INTERNATIONAL

*by the same author*

**A PALE VIEW OF HILLS**

**AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD**



LITERATURE

*In memory of*

*Mrs Lenore Marshall*

*Darlington Hall*

PROLOGUE · JULY 1956

## *Darlington Hall*





It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days. An expedition, I should say, which I will undertake alone, in the comfort of Mr Farraday's Ford; an expedition which, as I foresee it, will take me through much of the finest countryside of England to the West Country, and may keep me away from Darlington Hall for as much as five or six days. The idea of such a journey came about, I should point out, from a most kind suggestion put to me by Mr Farraday himself one afternoon almost a fortnight ago, when I had been dusting the portraits in the library. In fact, as I recall, I was up on the step-ladder dusting the portrait of Viscount Wetherby when my employer had entered carrying a few volumes which he presumably wished returned to the shelves. On seeing my person, he took the opportunity to inform me that he had just that moment finalized plans to return to the United States for a period of five weeks between August and September. Having made this announcement, my employer put his volumes down on a table, seated himself on the *chaise-longue*, and stretched out his legs. It was then, gazing up at me, that he said:

'You realize, Stevens, I don't expect you to be locked up here in this house all the time I'm away. Why don't you take the car and drive off somewhere for a few days? You look like you could make good use of a break.'

Coming out of the blue as it did, I did not quite know how to reply to such a suggestion. I recall thanking him for his

consideration, but quite probably I said nothing very definite, for my employer went on:

'I'm serious, Stevens. I really think you should take a break. I'll foot the bill for the gas. You fellows, you're always locked up in these big houses helping out, how do you ever get to see around this beautiful country of yours?'

This was not the first time my employer had raised such a question; indeed, it seems to be something which genuinely troubles him. On this occasion, in fact, a reply of sorts did occur to me as I stood up there on the ladder; a reply to the effect that those of our profession, although we did not see a great deal of the country in the sense of touring the countryside and visiting picturesque sites, did actually 'see' more of England than most, placed as we were in houses where the greatest ladies and gentlemen of the land gathered. Of course, I could not have expressed this view to Mr Farraday without embarking upon what might have seemed a presumptuous speech. I thus contented myself by saying simply:

'It has been my privilege to see the best of England over the years, sir, within these very walls.'

Mr Farraday did not seem to understand this statement, for he merely went on: 'I mean it, Stevens. It's wrong that a man can't get to see around his own country. Take my advice, get out of the house for a few days.'

As you might expect, I did not take Mr Farraday's suggestion at all seriously that afternoon, regarding it as just another instance of an American gentleman's unfamiliarity with what was and what was not commonly done in England. The fact that my attitude to this same suggestion underwent a change over the following days – indeed, that the notion of a trip to the West Country took an ever-increasing hold on my thoughts – is no doubt substantially attributable to – and why should I hide it? – the arrival of Miss Kenton's letter, her first in almost seven years if one

discounts the Christmas cards. But let me make it immediately clear what I mean by this; what I mean to say is that Miss Kenton's letter set off a certain chain of ideas to do with professional matters here at Darlington Hall, and I would underline that it was a preoccupation with these very same professional matters that led me to consider anew my employer's kindly meant suggestion. But let me explain further.

The fact is, over the past few months, I have been responsible for a series of small errors in the carrying out of my duties. I should say that these errors have all been without exception quite trivial in themselves. Nevertheless, I think you will understand that to one not accustomed to committing such errors, this development was rather disturbing, and I did in fact begin to entertain all sorts of alarmist theories as to their cause. As so often occurs in these situations, I had become blind to the obvious – that is, until my pondering over the implications of Miss Kenton's letter finally opened my eyes to the simple truth: that these small errors of recent months have derived from nothing more sinister than a faulty staff plan.

It is, of course, the responsibility of every butler to devote his utmost care in the devising of a staff plan. Who knows how many quarrels, false accusations, unnecessary dismissals, how many promising careers cut short can be attributed to a butler's slovenliness at the stage of drawing up the staff plan? Indeed, I can say I am in agreement with those who say that the ability to draw up a good staff plan is the cornerstone of any decent butler's skills. I have myself devised many staff plans over the years, and I do not believe I am being unduly boastful if I say that very few ever needed amendment. And if in the present case the staff plan is at fault, blame can be laid at no one's door but my own. At the same time, it is only fair to point out that my task in this instance had been of an unusually difficult order.

What had occurred was this. Once the transactions were over – transactions which had taken this house out of the hands of the Darlington family after two centuries – Mr Farraday let it be known that he would not be taking up immediate residence here, but would spend a further four months concluding matters in the United States. In the meantime, however, he was most keen that the staff of his predecessor – a staff of which he had heard high praise – be retained at Darlington Hall. This ‘staff’ he referred to was, of course, nothing more than the skeleton team of six kept on by Lord Darlington’s relatives to administer to the house up to and throughout the transactions; and I regret to report that once the purchase had been completed, there was little I could do for Mr Farraday to prevent all but Mrs Clements leaving for other employment. When I wrote to my new employer conveying my regrets at the situation, I received by reply from America instructions to recruit a new staff ‘worthy of a grand old English house’. I immediately set about trying to fulfil Mr Farraday’s wishes, but as you know, finding recruits of a satisfactory standard is no easy task nowadays, and although I was pleased to hire Rosemary and Agnes on Mrs Clements’s recommendation, I had got no further by the time I came to have my first business meeting with Mr Farraday during the short preliminary visit he made to our shores in the spring of last year. It was on that occasion – in the strangely bare study of Darlington Hall – that Mr Farraday shook my hand for the first time, but by then we were hardly strangers to each other; quite aside from the matter of the staff, my new employer in several other instances had had occasion to call upon such qualities as it may be my good fortune to possess and found them to be, I would venture, dependable. So it was, I assume, that he felt immediately able to talk to me in a businesslike and trusting way, and by the end of our meeting, he had left me with the administration of a not inconsiderable sum to meet the costs of a wide range of

preparations for his coming residency. In any case, my point is that it was during the course of this interview, when I raised the question of the difficulty of recruiting suitable staff in these times, that Mr Farraday, after a moment's reflection, made his request of me; that I do my best to draw up a staff plan – 'some sort of servants' rota' as he put it – by which this house might be run on the present staff of four – that is to say, Mrs Clements, the two young girls, and myself. This might, he appreciated, mean putting sections of the house 'under wraps', but would I bring all my experience and expertise to bear to ensure such losses were kept to a minimum? Recalling a time when I had had a staff of seventeen under me, and knowing how not so long ago a staff of twenty-eight had been employed here at Darlington Hall, the idea of devising a staff plan by which the same house would be run on a staff of four seemed, to say the least, daunting. Although I did my best not to, something of my scepticism must have betrayed itself, for Mr Farraday then added, as though for reassurance, that were it to prove necessary, then an additional member of staff could be hired. But he would be much obliged, he repeated, if I could 'give it a go with four'.

Now naturally, like many of us, I have a reluctance to change too much of the old ways. But there is no virtue at all in clinging as some do to tradition merely for its own sake. In this age of electricity and modern heating systems, there is no need at all to employ the sorts of numbers necessary even a generation ago. Indeed, it has actually been an idea of mine for some time that the retaining of unnecessary numbers simply for tradition's sake – resulting in employees having an unhealthy amount of time on their hands – has been an important factor in the sharp decline in professional standards. Furthermore, Mr Farraday had made it clear that he planned to hold only very rarely the sort of large social occasions Darlington Hall had seen frequently in the past. I did then go about the task Mr



Farraday had set me with some dedication; I spent many hours working on the staff plan, and at least as many hours again thinking about it as I went about other duties or as I lay awake after retiring. Whenever I believed I had come up with something, I probed it for every sort of oversight, tested it through from all angles. Finally, I came up with a plan which, while perhaps not exactly as Mr Farraday had requested, was the best, I felt sure, that was humanly possible. Almost all the attractive parts of the house could remain operative: the extensive servants' quarters – including the back corridor, the two still rooms and the old laundry – and the guest corridor up on the second floor would be dust-sheeted, leaving all the main ground-floor rooms and a generous number of guest rooms. Admittedly, our present team of four would manage this programme only with reinforcement from some daily workers; my staff plan therefore took in the services of a gardener, to visit once a week, twice in the summer, and two cleaners, each to visit twice a week. The staff plan would, furthermore, for each of the four resident employees mean a radical altering of our respective customary duties. The two young girls, I predicted, would not find such changes so difficult to accommodate, but I did all I could to see that Mrs Clements suffered the least adjustments, to the extent that I undertook for myself a number of duties which you may consider most broad-minded of a butler to do.

Even now, I would not go so far as to say it is a bad staff plan; after all, it enables a staff of four to cover an unexpected amount of ground. But you will no doubt agree that the very best staff plans are those which give clear margins of error to allow for those days when an employee is ill or for one reason or another below par. In this particular case, of course, I had been set a slightly extraordinary task, but I had nevertheless not been neglectful to incorporate 'margins' wherever possible. I was especially conscious that any resistance there may be on the part of

Mrs Clements, or the two girls, to the taking on of duties beyond their traditional boundaries would be compounded by any notion that their workloads had greatly increased. I had then, over those days of struggling with the staff plan, expended a significant amount of thought to ensuring that Mrs Clements and the girls, once they had got over their aversion to adopting these more 'eclectic' roles, would find the division of duties stimulating and unburdensome.

I fear, however, that in my anxiety to win the support of Mrs Clements and the girls, I did not perhaps assess quite as stringently my own limitations; and although my experience and customary caution in such matters prevented my giving myself more than I could actually carry out, I was perhaps negligent over this question of allowing myself a margin. It is not surprising then, if over several months, this oversight should reveal itself in these small but telling ways. In the end, I believe the matter to be no more complicated than this: I had given myself too much to do.

You may be amazed that such an obvious shortcoming to a staff plan should have continued to escape my notice, but then you will agree that such is often the way with matters one has given abiding thought to over a period of time; one is not struck by the truth until prompted quite accidentally by some external event. So it was in this instance; that is to say, my receiving the letter from Miss Kenton, containing as it did, along with its long, rather unrevealing passages, an unmistakable nostalgia for Darlington Hall, and – I am quite sure of this – distinct hints of her desire to return here, obliged me to see my staff plan afresh. Only then did it strike me that there was indeed a role that a further staff member could crucially play here; that it was, in fact, this very shortage that had been at the heart of all my recent troubles. And the more I considered it, the more obvious it became that Miss Kenton, with her great affection for this house, with her exemplary professionalism – the sort almost impossible to find nowadays – was just the factor



needed to enable me to complete a fully satisfactory staff plan for Darlington Hall.

Having made such an analysis of the situation, it was not long before I found myself reconsidering Mr Farraday's kind suggestion of some days ago. For it had occurred to me that the proposed trip in the car could be put to good professional use; that is to say, I could drive to the West Country and call on Miss Kenton in passing, thus exploring at first hand the substance of her wish to return to employment here at Darlington Hall. I have, I should make clear, reread Miss Kenton's recent letter several times, and there is no possibility I am merely imagining the presence of these hints on her part.

For all that, I could not for some days quite bring myself to raise the matter again with Mr Farraday. There were, in any case, various aspects to the matter I felt I needed to clarify to myself before proceeding further. There was, for instance, the question of cost. For even taking into account my employer's generous offer to 'foot the bill for the gas', the costs of such a trip might still come to a surprising amount considering such matters as accommodation, meals, and any small snacks I might partake of on my way. Then there was the question of what sorts of costume were appropriate on such a journey, and whether or not it was worth my while to invest in a new set of clothes. I am in the possession of a number of splendid suits, kindly passed on to me over the years by Lord Darlington himself, and by various guests who have stayed in this house and had reason to be pleased with the standard of service here. Many of these suits are, perhaps, too formal for the purposes of the proposed trip, or else rather old-fashioned these days. But then there is one lounge suit, passed on to me in 1931 or 1932 by Sir Edward Blair – practically brand new at the time and almost a perfect fit – which might well be appropriate for evenings in the lounge or dining room of any guest houses where I might lodge. What I do not