

**NAXOS**  
AudioBooks

Daphne du Maurier  
**The House on the Strand**

Read by **Michael Maloney**

**CLASSIC  
FICTION**



NA434112D

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1	The first thing I noticed was the clarity of the air...	4:13
2	I might have stood for ever, entranced...	4:41
3	The rush-strewn floor was littered...	5:29
4	It must have taken the best part of ten minutes...	5:59
5	He had gone. I was left holding the receiver...	4:03
6	It rained the following day...	3:54
7	The entrance gate at the far end...	5:29
8	The Bishop, keen-eyed, alert, was missing nothing.	4:58
9	There had been no perceptible transition.	4:11
10	I dialled the number of Magnus's flat...	5:36
11	There was an airmail letter from Vita...	3:23
12	I packed up bottle B with great care...	3:16
13	This time, sitting motionless...	5:20
14	November...May...Six months must have passed...	5:04
15	She pushed aside her frame...	5:18
16	Feeling had returned to my limbs...	4:19
17	The telephone started ringing...	5:03
18	When I had dressed I went to the garage...	4:43
19	I had hardly put down the receiver...	3:39
20	The kitchen itself had become the living quarters...	4:11

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21	'Enter, sir, and welcome...'	4:20
22	We came to the other side of the house...	3:48
23	'Hi, Dick,' called the boys...	5:20
24	I noticed an unopened letter on my desk.	4:21
25	The next day being Sunday...	4:29
26	'Let me stay another night...'	5:06
27	She did not look at him...	5:19
28	If Magnus had wanted to drop a deliberate brick...	7:31
29	There was just enough breeze...	3:27
30	The moon awakened me.	4:44
31	The monk, despite his preoccupation...	5:51
32	They were too intent upon their task...	6:32
33	I lay there waiting for the nausea...	6:15
34	It was like cutting off the only link...	4:52
35	I did not wake up until after ten...	5:32
36	Why the hell hadn't Magnus telephoned...	5:18
37	I went along to my dressing-room...	3:53
38	There was a police car drawn up outside...	4:03
39	It would make sense to no one.	3:47
40	The next morning she took the boys...	5:11

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41	I went back into the house...	4:38
42	Magnus's lawyer, Herbert Dench...	5:26
43	It was snowing.	5:03
44	Isolda was standing by the window...	5:30
45	Roger, opening the hall-door...	3:16
46	Self-preservation is common to all living things...	4:28
47	The date of the inquest was fixed...	3:27
48	The inquest was over...	3:02
49	I heard her walk through the hall to the kitchen...	5:59
50	He lifted his head and listened.	4:09
51	I knew it must happen, and it did.	3:33
52	There was nothing I could do.	5:20
53	The depth of an abyss...	4:19
54	I had the impression that everything...	4:38
55	We sat in the lounge at Exeter airport...	4:59
56	He shook his head...	5:01
57	There can have been no one in the loft...	6:12
58	I could not remember any more...	4:04

**Total time: 4:36:07**

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## Daphne du Maurier

# The House on the Strand

*The House on the Strand* was written at a time of domestic crisis for its author Daphne du Maurier. For twenty-five years her home had been Menabilly House in Cornwall, the house and the countryside around it being an inspiration to her. But in 1966 her lease on the property expired and, with much agony at the thought of change, she moved into the smaller dower house on the Menabilly estate: Kilmarth.

Du Maurier was also suffering an artistic crisis; at the age of 60 she wondered if her creative powers were waning and if she would ever write another novel, and coupled with this fear was an anxiety about money, despite the fact that her novels were in print and continued to sell well; particularly *Rebecca* published more than thirty years earlier.

At the time of her move, she was engaged in writing a travel book – *Vanishing Cornwall* – which was turning out to be a tribute to the county she loved, and had done so much in her novels to glorify. The research into Cornish history and legend awoke in her a fascination for the

connections between place and history – and her new home Kilmarth, which itself had a long history, became a focus for this enthusiasm. Meetings with local history groups revealed that the surrounding area had been known in medieval times as Tywardreath, and a Priory had stood there, of which there was now no trace. Further research revealed the name of the most influential family, the Carminowes, which included the enigmatic Isolda. When she also discovered that Kilmarth's most recent tenant had been a professor, with bottles in the cellar containing animal embryos, her creative imagination was once again sparked, and the seed of an idea for a novel was well and truly sown. Just as Menabilly House had been the inspiration for Maxim de Winter's home, Manderley, in her most successful novel *Rebecca*, so now Kilmarth became the setting for her last success, *The House on the Strand*.

Du Maurier was largely regarded as a 'romantic' novelist; a term that became increasingly debased in her lifetime, causing her literary reputation to suffer. The sale of

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her books however did not suffer, the public kept on buying; for she was always so much more than a writer of 'women's fiction' as romantic novels came to be known. Suspense, terror and mystery were also her stock-in-trade. Her skill in keeping the reader eager to know what will happen next ensured a loyal public.

Rebecca's success was largely due to the tension that existed throughout the book between Maxim and his wife whose name we are never told. It is resolved in a romantic way, but, thirty years later, in *The House on the Strand*, which has a similar tension between Dick, the main character, and his wife, Vita, the resolution is bleak. Will Dick Young rid himself of a drug-induced fantasy, come back to the real world and make his marriage with Vita work? Du Maurier leaves us guessing.

Du Maurier shows great skill in creating her male characters, though they are largely unsympathetic, and could be seen as anti-heroes. Maxim de Winter is cold and remote, and Dick Young is shown to be an unlikeable self-centred egoist, with an inferiority complex about his old friend, the scientist Magnus. Vita too, though seen through Dick's unsympathetic eyes, is presented as a crass, insensitive American

trampling over the finer feelings of her husband in order to get him a more lucrative job in New York. Du Maurier identified so strongly with Dick Young that on occasions she claimed she had suffered his bouts of nausea during the writing.

It could be said that du Maurier, who was a grandmother in the 1960s when she wrote *The House on the Strand*, was trying to shake off her image as a romantic novelist by writing a racy, realistic, modern 60s-style novel, including in it broken relationships, a central character who is trying to 'find' himself, and the then fashionable obsession with recreational drugs, when rock groups openly talked of 'tripping' on LSD. It is a tribute to her talent as a writer that she produced such a gripping example of the genre that is still widely read today.

Her literary instinct was to write escapist novels spawned by her vivid imagination. In *The House on the Strand* she shows the would-be modern novelist that realism and imagination can be an effective mix. It is the power of du Maurier's imagination in the historical scenes that wins the day against the dull, grey life led by Dick Young with his wife Vita.

In some ways *The House on the Strand*

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could be seen as an anti-romantic novel. It is a love story, but an unfulfilled one. A man dissatisfied with his relationship, feeling threatened, and at a crisis point in his life, falls for a phantom, a twelfth-century beauty called Isolda. Is it cynical to suggest that his obsession with a beautiful, unattainable young woman is the ultimate middle-aged man's fantasy? Here, realism beats imagination and du Maurier seems to be sneering at the shallowness of much cheap late twentieth-century romantic fiction.

Running through the book is a scientific debate current at the time of writing – is it merely hallucination or another form of reality that Dick experiences when he takes Magnus' drug? Du Maurier sounds a warning note familiar to twenty-first-century ears, that science's capacity to promise much may also ultimately destroy.

*The House on the Strand* was du Maurier's last success, although she continued to publish until 1977. As a novel that successfully combines suspense and romance, it is worthy to stand beside her greatest creation *Rebecca*. Her creative powers were undiminished, and she herself was aware that she was producing something 'unusual...and a bit frightening'.

### **The history behind Dick's journeys into the fourteenth century**

King Edward II (1307-27) was a weak king who surrounded himself with favourites, notably Piers Gaveston. When he travelled to France to marry Isabella, the daughter of the King of France, Edward left Gaveston as regent, but he mismanaged and abused his power to such an extent that the nobles seized and beheaded him. On Edward's return the nobles insisted that a committee was established to ensure that the country was well-governed, and that parliament would be called on an annual basis. Edward, however, continued to show no sign of leadership, and his continued dalliance with his favourites led to a rebellion by the nobles, led by the Earl of Lancaster in 1322.

Edward roused himself from his lethargy, and defeated the nobles at Boroughbridge in Yorkshire. In the novel, Otto Bodrugan had taken part in this uprising, which led to his being considered untrustworthy by his family. One noble, Roger Mortimer, Lord of Wigmore, escaped to France and, meeting Isabella, Edward's estranged wife, combined with her army and returned to England, nominally to free the country from tyranny and secure the kingdom for her fourteen-

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year-old son, Prince Edward. Edward II was captured and imprisoned, compelled to abdicate in favour of his son and, when an uprising in his favour seemed imminent, was secretly and cruelly murdered in Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire, on Mortimer's orders.

It was 1327, and the country was in a delicate state: the King was a boy of fourteen, and the real power was being exercised by his mother, Isabella, and her unscrupulous lover, Roger Mortimer. Civil war was inevitable as the nobility scrambled for power.

In the novel, Otto Bodrugan, who had already showed himself to be a supporter of the Queen's cause in 1322, tries to persuade the nobles of Cornwall to join him. The steward Roger Kilmarth puts forward persuasive arguments, but the balance of power moves against them.

The young King Edward, showing the potential for government he was to display throughout his long reign, seized Mortimer in 1330, who was condemned to death by parliament and executed; whilst his mother, Isabella, Edward imprisoned in her castle at Risings, for life.

Edward III's reign of fifty years (1327-77) was marked by long wars in France, and the devastating Black Death or bubonic plague

during the years 1348 to 1351, which destroyed at least a third of the population. It had begun in the plains of Western Asia and swept across Europe causing devastation in its wake, and ending, for the time being, the quarrels between the French and English kings. In the novel, the plague's effects on the countryside around Tywardreath are shown, as well as its being the cause of death of Dick Young's alter-ego Roger Kilmarth.

**Notes by David Timson**



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**The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue**

ELGAR STRING QUARTET in E minor Maggini String Quartet	8.553737
ELGAR PIANO QUINTET in A minor Magini String Quartet	8.553737
Chominciamento di Gioia Ensemble Unicorn, Vienna	8.553131

**Music programmed by Sarah Butcher**

French illumination, c.1416  
'Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry' (illuminated by the Limburg Brothers).  
Excursion of a courtly party to the countryside. Chantilly, Musee Conde.  
Photo: akg-images

# Daphne du Maurier

## The House on the Strand

Read by **Michael Maloney**

Dick Young stays in his friend Professor Magnus Lane's house in Cornwall, on the understanding he will be a guinea pig for a new drug that Magnus has developed. As a result of the experiment he is transported back to fourteenth-century Cornwall. With each 'trip' he becomes more and more involved with medieval intrigue, adultery and murder. Is it merely hallucination; a subconscious escape from his own complicated life, or a real journey into the past?

He becomes obsessed with the world he visits, and past and present eventually become inextricably and perilously mixed.



**Michael Maloney's** many Shakespearean roles on the London stage include Edgar in *King Lear*, the title roles in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, Prince Hal in *Henry IV Parts 1 & 2*; on film he has appeared in Branagh's productions of *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, as well as in Parker's *Othello*. Other notable films include Minghella's *Truly, Madly, Deeply*. He frequently performs on radio and TV. He has been involved in other Naxos AudioBooks' productions including *King Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Poets of the Great War*. He has also played the part of George Tesman in *Hedda Gabler* and read *Selections from The Diary of Samuel Pepys* and *The Physician's Tale* from *The Canterbury Tales III* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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