

偵探小說

POINTMENT WITH DEATH

AGATHA CHRISTIE



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**APPOINTMENT
WITH DEATH**

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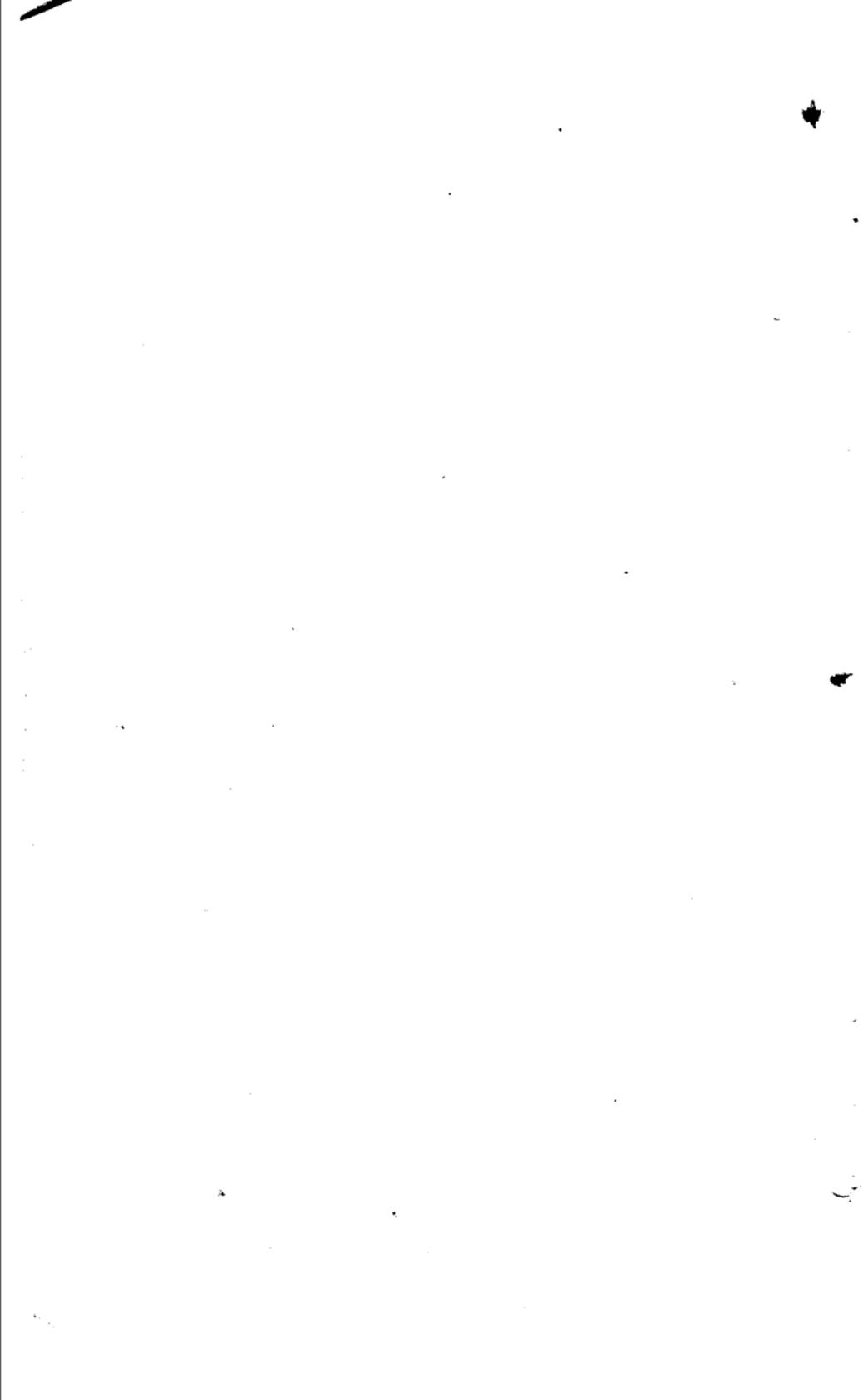
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PART I



CHAPTER 1

'You do see, don't you, that she's got to be killed?'

The question floated out into the still night air, seemed to hang there a moment and then drift away down into the darkness towards the Dead Sea. 吹散

Hercule Poirot paused 停顿 a minute with his hand on the window catch. 皱眉 Frowning, he shut it decisively, thereby excluding any injurious night air! Hercule Poirot had been brought up to believe that all outside air was best left outside, and that night air was especially dangerous to the health.

As he pulled the curtains neatly over the window and walked to his bed, he smiled tolerantly to himself. 安详

'You do see, don't you, that she's got to be killed?'

Curious words for one Hercule Poirot, detective, to overhear on his first night in Jerusalem. 侦探

'Decidedly, wherever I go, there is something to remind me of crime!' he murmured to himself. 提醒

His smile continued as he remembered a story he had once heard concerning Anthony Trollope the novelist. Trollope was crossing the Atlantic at the time and had overheard 听到 two fellow-passengers discussing the last published instalment of one of his novels. 他们正在讨论

'Very good,' one man had declared. 'But he ought to kill off that tiresome old woman.' 宣布

With a broad smile the novelist had addressed them:

'Gentlemen, I am much obliged to you! I will go and kill her immediately!'

Hercule Poirot wondered what had occasioned the words 特指那个场景

he had just overheard. A collaboration, perhaps, over a play or a book.

He thought, still smiling: 'Those words might be remembered, one day, and given a more sinister meaning.'

There had been, he now recollected, a curious nervous intensity in the voice, a tremor that spoke of some intense emotional strain: A man's voice - or a boy's . . .

Hercule Poirot thought to himself as he turned out the light by his bed: '*I should know that voice again . . .*'

Their elbows on the window-sill, their heads close together, Raymond and Carol Boynton gazed out into the blue depths of the night. Nervously, Raymond repeated his former words: 'You do see, don't you, that she's got to be killed?'

Carol Boynton stirred slightly. She said, her voice deep and hoarse: 'It's horrible . . .'

'It's not more horrible than *this!*'

'I suppose not . . .'

Raymond said violently: 'It can't go on like this - it can't . . . We *must* do something . . . And there isn't anything else we *can* do . . .'

Carol said - but her voice was unconvincing and she knew it: 'If we could get away somehow -?'

'We can't.' His voice was empty and hopeless. 'Carol, you know we can't . . .'

The girl shivered. 'I know, Ray - I know.'

He gave a sudden short, bitter laugh.

'People would say we were crazy - not to be able just to walk out -'

Carol said slowly: 'Perhaps we - are crazy!'

'I dare say. Yes, I dare say we are. Anyway, we soon shall be . . . I suppose some people would say we are already - here we are calmly planning, in cold blood, to kill our own mother!'

Carol said sharply: 'She isn't our own mother!'

'No, that's true.'

There was a pause and then Raymond said, his voice now quietly matter-of-fact: 'You do agree, Carol?'

Carol answered steadily: 'I think she ought to die – yes . . .'

Then she broke out suddenly: 'She's mad . . . I'm quite sure she's mad . . . She – she couldn't torture us like she does if she were sane. For years we've been saying: "*This can't go on!*" and it *has* gone on! We've said, "*She'll die some time*" – but she hasn't died! I don't think she ever will die unless –'

Raymond said steadily: '*Unless we kill her . . .*'

'Yes.'

She clenched her hands on the window-sill in front of her.

Her brother went on in a cool, matter-of-fact tone, with just a slight tremor denoting his deep underlying excitement.

'You see why it's got to be one of us, don't you? With Lennox, there's Nadine to consider. And we couldn't bring Jinny into it.'

Carol shivered.

'Poor Jinny . . . I'm so afraid . . .'

'I know. It's getting pretty bad, isn't it? That's why something's got to be done quickly – before she goes right over the edge.'

Carol stood up suddenly, pushing back the tumbled chestnut hair from her forehead.

'Ray,' she said, 'you don't think it's really *wrong*, do you?'

He answered in that same would-be dispassionate tone. 'No. I think it's just like killing a mad dog – something that's doing harm in the world and must be stopped. This is the only way of stopping it.'

Carol murmured: 'But they'd - they'd send us to the chair just the same . . . I mean we couldn't explain what she's like . . . It would sound fantastic . . . In a way, you know, it's all in our own *minds*!'

Raymond said: 'Nobody will ever know. I've got a plan. I've thought it all out. We shall be quite safe.'

Carol turned suddenly round on him.

'Ray - somehow or another - you're different. Something's *happened* to you . . . What's put all this into your head?'

'Why should you think anything's happened to me?'

He turned his head away, staring out into the night.

'Because it has . . . Ray, was it that girl on the train?'

'No, of course not - why should it be? Oh, Carol, don't talk nonsense. Let's get back again to - to -'

'To your plan? Are you sure it's a - good plan?'

'Yes. I think so. . . . We must wait for the right opportunity, of course. And then - if it goes all right - we shall be free - all of us.'

'Free?' Carol gave a little sigh. She looked up at the stars. Then suddenly she shook from head to foot in a sudden storm of weeping.

'Carol, what's the matter?'

She sobbed out brokenly: 'It's so lovely - the night and the blueness and the stars. If only we could be part of it all . . . If only we could be like other people instead of being as we are - all queer and warped and *wrong*.'

'But we shall be - all right - when she's dead!'

'Are you *sure*? Isn't it too late? Shan't we always be queer and different?'

'No, no, no.'

'I wonder -'

'Carol, if you'd rather not -'

She pushed his comforting arm aside.

'No, I'm with you – definitely I'm with you! Because of the others – especially Jinny. We *must* save Jinny!'

Raymond paused a moment. 'Then – we'll go on with it?'

'Yes!'

'Good. I'll tell you my plan . . .'

He bent his head to hers.

CHAPTER 2

Miss Sarah King, M.B., stood by the table in the writing-room of the Solomon Hotel in Jerusalem, idly turning over the papers and magazines. A frown contracted her brows and she looked preoccupied. 入神的

The tall middle-aged Frenchman who entered the room from the hall watched her for a moment or two before strolling up to the opposite side of the table. When their eyes met, Sarah made a little gesture of smiling recognition. She remembered that this man had come to help her when travelling from Cairo and had carried one of her suitcases at a moment when no porter appeared to be available.

'You like Jerusalem, yes?' asked Dr Gerard after they had exchanged greetings.

'It's rather terrible in some ways,' said Sarah, and added: 'Religion is very odd!'

The Frenchman looked amused.

'I know what you mean.' His English was very nearly perfect. 'Every imaginable sect squabbling and fighting!'

'And the awful things they've built, too!' said Sarah.

'Yes, indeed.'

Sarah sighed.

'They turned me out of one place today because I had on a sleeveless dress,' she said ruefully. 'Apparently the Almighty doesn't like my arms in spite of having made them.'

Dr Gerard laughed. Then he said: 'I was about to order some coffee. You will join me, Miss -?'

'King, my name is. Sarah King.'

'And mine - permit me.' He whipped out a card. Taking it, Sarah's eyes widened in delighted awe.

★ 'Dr Theodore Gerard? Oh! I *am* excited to meet you. I've read all your works, of course. Your views on schizophrenia are frightfully interesting.'

好容易
'Of course?' Gerard's eyebrows rose inquisitively.

Sarah explained rather diffidently. *不好意思地*

'You see - I'm by way of being a doctor myself. Just got my M.B.'

'Ah! I see.'

Dr Gerard ordered coffee and they sat down in a corner of the lounge. *咖啡, 休息* The Frenchman was less interested in Sarah's medical achievements than in the black hair that rippled back from her forehead and the beautifully shaped red mouth. He was amused at the obvious awe with which she regarded him. *佩服*

'You are staying here long?' he asked conversationally. *住多久*

'A few days. That is all. Then I want to go to Petra.' *地*

'Aha! I, too, was thinking of going there if it does not take too long. You see, I have to be back in Paris on the fourteenth.'

'It takes about a week, I believe. Two days to go, two days there and two days back again.'

'I must go to the travel bureau in the morning and see what can be arranged.'

A party of people entered the lounge and sat down. Sarah watched them with some interest. She lowered her voice.

'Those people who have just come in, did you notice them on the train the other night? They left Cairo the same time as we did.'

Dr Gerard screwed in an eyeglass and directed his glance across the room. 'Americans?'

Sarah nodded.

'Yes. An American family. But – rather an unusual one, I think.'

'Unusual? How unusual?'

'Well, look at them. Especially at the old woman.'

Dr Gerard complied. His keen professional glance flitted swiftly from face to face.

He noticed first a tall rather loose-boned man – age about thirty. The face was pleasant but weak and his manner seemed oddly apathetic. Then there were two good-looking youngsters – the boy had almost a Greek head. 'Something the matter with him, too,' thought Dr Gerard. 'Yes – a definite state of nervous tension.' The girl was clearly his sister, a strong resemblance, and she also was in an excitable condition. There was another girl younger still – with golden red hair that stood out like a halo, her hands were very restless, they were tearing and pulling at the handkerchief in her lap. Yet another woman, young, calm, dark-haired with a creamy pallor, a placid face not unlike a Luini Madonna. Nothing jumpy about her! And the centre of the group – 'Heavens!' thought Dr Gerard, with a Frenchman's candid repulsion. 'What a horror of a woman!' Old, swollen, bloated, sitting there immovable in the midst of them – a distorted old Buddha – a gross spider in the centre of a web!

To Sarah he said: '*La Maman*, she is not beautiful, eh?' And he shrugged his shoulders.

'There's something rather – sinister about her, don't you think?' asked Sarah.

Dr Gerard scrutinized her again. This time his eye was professional, not aesthetic. Dropsy – cardiac – he added a glib medical phrase.

'Oh, yes, *that!*' Sarah dismissed the medical side.

'But there is something odd in their attitude to her, don't you think?'

'Who are they, do you know?'

'Their name is Boynton. Mother, married son, his wife, one younger son and two younger daughters.'

Dr Gerard murmured: '*La famille Boynton* sees the world.'

'Yes, but there's something odd about ~~the way~~ they're seeing it. They never speak to anyone else. And none of them can do anything unless the old woman says so!'

'She is of the ^{maternal} matriarchal type,' said Gerard thoughtfully.

'She's a complete tyrant, I think,' said Sarah.

Dr Gerard shrugged his shoulders and remarked that the American woman ruled the earth – that was well known.

'Yes, but it's more than just that.' Sarah was persistent.

'She's – oh, she's got them all so *cowed* – so positively under her thumb – that it's – it's indecent!'

'To have too much power is bad for women,' Gerard agreed with sudden gravity. He shook his head.

'It is difficult for a woman not to abuse power.'

He shot a quick sideways glance at Sarah. She was watching the Boynton family – or rather she was watching one particular member of it. Dr Gerard smiled a quick comprehending Gallic smile. Ah! So it was like that, was it?

He murmured tentatively: 'You have spoken with them – yes?'

'Yes – at least with one of them.'

'The young man – the younger son?'

'Yes. On the train coming here from Kantara. He was standing in the corridor. I spoke to him.'

There was no self-consciousness in her attitude to life. She was interested in humanity and was of a friendly though impatient disposition.

'What made you speak to him?' asked Gerard.

Sarah shrugged her shoulders.

'Why not? I often speak to people travelling. I'm interested in people – in what they do and think and feel.'

'You put them under the microscope, that is to say.'

'I suppose you might call it that,' the girl admitted.

'And what were your impressions in this case?'

'Well,' she hesitated, 'it was rather odd . . . To begin with, the boy flushed right up to the roots of his hair.'

'Is that so remarkable?' asked Gerard drily.

Sarah laughed.

'You mean that he thought I was a shameless hussy making advances to him? Oh, no, I don't think he thought that. Men can always tell, can't they?'

She gave him a frank questioning glance. Dr Gerard nodded his head.

'I got the impression,' said Sarah, speaking slowly and frowning a little, 'that he was - how shall I put it? - both excited and appalled. Excited out of all proportion - and quite absurdly apprehensive at the same time. Now that's odd, isn't it? Because I've always found Americans unusually self-possessed. An American boy of twenty, say, has infinitely more knowledge of the world and far more *savoir-faire* than an English boy of the same age. And this boy must be over twenty.'

'About twenty-three or four, I should say.'

'As much as that?'

'I should think so.'

'Yes . . . perhaps you're right . . . Only, somehow, he seems very young . . .'

Maladjustment mentally. The "child" factor persists.'

'Then I *am* right? I mean, there is something not quite normal about him?'

Dr Gerard shrugged his shoulders, smiling a little at her earnestness.

'My dear young lady, are any of us quite normal? But I grant you that there is probably a neurosis of some kind.'

'Connected with that horrible old woman, I'm sure.'