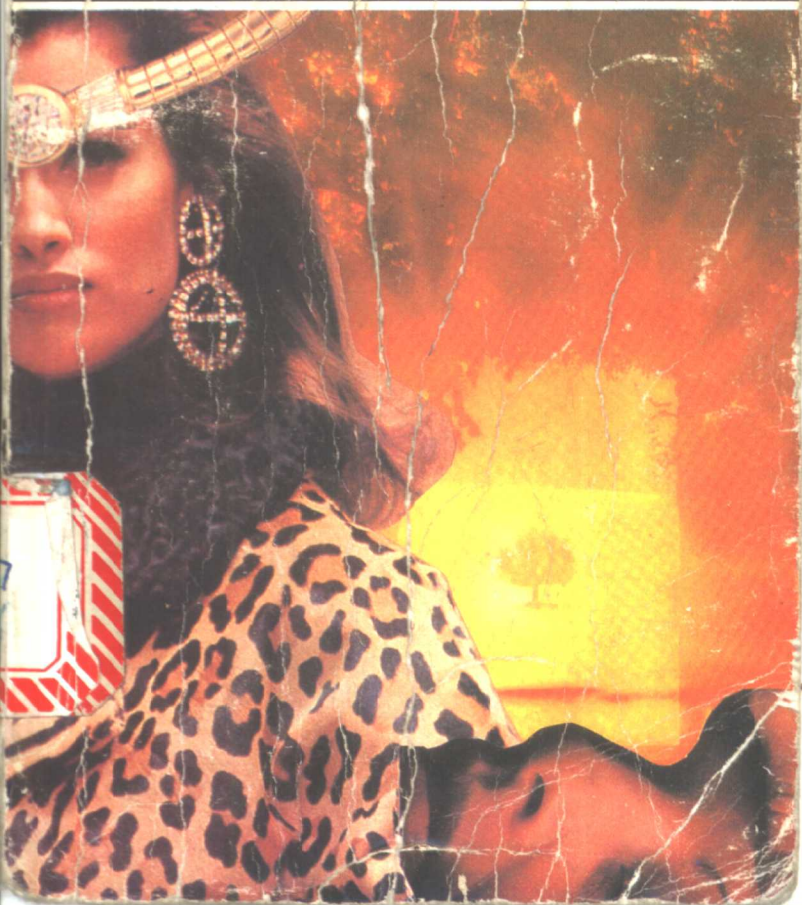


世界著名侦探小说

AFTER THE FUNERAL

AGATHA CHRISTIE



世界著名侦探小说

葬礼之后

阿加莎·克里斯蒂 著

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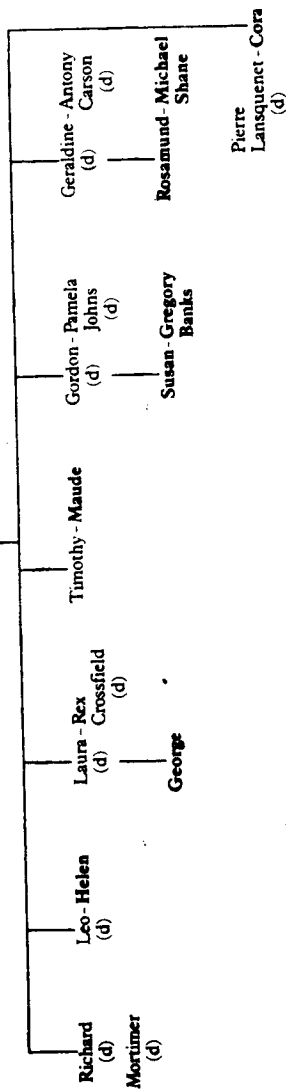
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FOR JAMES
*in memory of happy days
at Abbey*

Cornelius Abernethie - Coralie Bassington



The Abernethie Family

Those designated in bold were present at the funeral of
Richard Abernethie

CHAPTER 1

Old Lanscombe moved totteringly from room to room, pulling up the blinds. Now and then he peered with screwed up rheumy eyes through the windows.

Soon they would be coming back from the funeral. He shuffled along a little faster. There were so many windows.

Enderby Hall was a vast Victorian house built in the Gothic style. In every room the curtains were of rich faded brocade or velvet. Some of the walls were still hung with faded silk. In the green drawing-room, the old butler glanced up at the portrait above the mantelpiece of old Cornelius Abernethie for whom Enderby Hall had been built. Cornelius Abernethie's brown beard stuck forward aggressively, his hand rested on a terrestrial globe, whether by desire of the sitter, or as a symbolic conceit on the part of the artist, no one could tell.

A very forceful looking gentleman, so old Lanscombe had always thought, and was glad that he himself had never known him personally. Mr Richard had been *his* gentleman. A good master, Mr Richard. And taken very sudden, he'd been, though of course the doctor had been attending him for some little time. Ah, but the master had never recovered from the shock of young Mr Mortimer's death. The old man shook his head as he hurried through a connecting door into the White Boudoir. Terrible, that had been, a real catastrophe. Such a fine upstanding young gentleman, so strong and healthy. You'd never have thought such a thing likely to happen to him. Pitiful, it had been, quite pitiful. And Mr Gordon killed in the war. One thing on top of another. That was the way things went nowadays. Too much for the master, it had been. And yet he'd seemed almost himself a week ago.

The third blind in the White Boudoir refused to go up as it should. It went up a little way and stuck. The springs were weak – that's what it was – very old, these blinds were, like everything else in the house. And you couldn't get these old things mended nowadays. Too old-fashioned, that's what they'd say, shaking their heads in that silly superior way – as if the old things weren't a great deal better than the new ones! *He* could tell them that! Gimcrack, half the new stuff was – came to pieces in your hands. The material wasn't good, or the craftsmanship either. Oh yes, *he* could tell them.

Couldn't do anything about this blind unless he got the steps. He didn't like climbing up the steps much, these days, made him come over giddy. Anyway, he'd leave the blind for now. It didn't matter, since the White Boudoir didn't face the front of the house where it would be seen as the cars came back from the funeral – and it wasn't as though the room was ever used nowadays. It was a lady's room, this, and there hadn't been a lady at Enderby for a long time now. A pity Mr Mortimer hadn't married. Always going off to Norway for fishing and to Scotland for shooting and to Switzerland for those winter sports, instead of marrying some nice young lady and settling down at home with children running about the house. It was a long time since there had been any children in the house.

And Lanscombe's mind went ranging back to a time that stood out clearly and distinctly – much more distinctly than the last twenty years or so, which were all blurred and confused and he couldn't really remember who had come and gone or indeed what they looked like. But he could remember the old days well enough.

More like a father to those young brothers and sisters of his, Mr Richard had been. Twenty-four when his father had died, and he'd pitched in right away to the business, going off every day as punctual as clockwork, and keeping the house running and everything as lavish as it could be. A

very happy household with all those young ladies and gentlemen growing up. Fights and quarrels now and again, of course, and those governesses had had a bad time of it! Poor-spirited creatures, governesses, Lanscombe had always despised them. Very spirited the young ladies had been. Miss Geraldine in particular. Miss Cora, too, although she was so much younger. And now Mr Leo was dead, and Miss Laura gone too. And Mr Timothy such a sad invalid. And Miss Geraldine dying somewhere abroad. And Mr Gordon killed in the war. Although he was the eldest, Mr Richard himself turned out the strongest of the lot. Outlived them all, he had – at least not quite because Mr Timothy was still alive and little Miss Cora who'd married that unpleasant artist chap. Twenty-five years since he'd seen her and she'd been a pretty young girl when she went off with that chap, and now he'd hardly have known her, grown so stout – and so arty-crafty in her dress! A Frenchman her husband had been, or nearly a Frenchman – and no good ever came of marrying one of *them*! But Miss Cora had always been a bit – well *simple like* you'd call it if she'd lived in a village. Always one of them in a family.

She'd remembered *him* all right. 'Why, it's Lanscombe!' she'd said and seemed ever so pleased to see him. Ah, they'd all been fond of him in the old days and when there was a dinner party they'd crept down to the pantry and he'd given them jelly and Charlotte Russe when it came out of the dining-room. They'd all known old Lanscombe, and now there was hardly anyone who remembered. Just the younger lot whom he could never keep clear in his mind and who just thought of him as a butler who'd been there a long time. A lot of strangers, he had thought, when they all arrived for the funeral – and a seedy lot of strangers at that!

Not Mrs Leo – she was different. She and Mr Leo had come here off and on ever since Mr Leo married. She was a nice lady, Mrs Leo – a *real* lady. Wore proper clothes and did her hair well and looked what she was. And the master

had always been fond of her. A pity that she and Mr Leo had never had any children . . .

Lanscombe roused himself; what was he doing standing here and dreaming about old days with so much to be done? The blinds were all attended to on the ground floor now, and he'd told Janet to go upstairs and do the bedrooms. He and Janet and the cook had gone to the funeral service in the church but instead of going on to the Crematorium they'd driven back to the house to get the blinds up and the lunch ready. Cold lunch, of course, it had to be. Ham and chicken and tongue and salad. With cold lemon soufflé and apple tart to follow. Hot soup first – and he'd better go along and see that Marjorie had got it on ready to serve, for they'd be back in a minute or two now for certain.

Lanscombe broke into a shuffling trot across the room. His gaze, abstracted and uncurious, just swept up to the picture over this mantelpiece – the companion portrait to the one in the green drawing-room. It was a nice painting of white satin and pearls. The human being round whom they were draped and clasped was not nearly so impressive. Meek features, a rosebud mouth, hair parted in the middle. A woman both modest and unassuming. The only thing really worthy of note about Mrs Cornelius Abernethie had been her name – Coralie.

For over sixty years after their original appearance, Coral Cornplasters and the allied 'Coral' foot preparations still held their own. Whether there had ever been anything outstanding about Coral Cornplasters nobody could say – but they had appealed to the public fancy. On a foundation of Coral Cornplasters there had arisen this neo-Gothic palace, its acres of gardens, and the money that had paid out an income to seven sons and daughters and had allowed Richard Abernethie to die three days ago a very rich man.

Looking into the kitchen with a word of admonition, Lanscombe was snapped at by Marjorie, the cook. Marjorie was young, only twenty-seven, and was a constant irritation to Lanscombe as being so far removed from what his conception of a proper cook should be. She had no dignity and no proper appreciation of his, Lanscombe's, position. She frequently called the house 'a proper old mausoleum' and complained of the immense area of the kitchen, scullery and larder, saying that it was a 'day's walk to get round them all'. She had been at Enderby two years and only stayed because in the first place the money was good, and in the second because Mr Abernethie had really appreciated her cooking. She cooked very well. Janet, who stood by the kitchen table, refreshing herself with a cup of tea, was an elderly housemaid who, although enjoying frequent acid disputes with Lanscombe, was nevertheless usually in alliance with him against the younger generation as represented by Marjorie. The fourth person in the kitchen was Mrs Jacks, who 'came in' to lend assistance where it was wanted and who had much enjoyed the funeral.

'Beautiful it was,' she said with a decorous sniff as she replenished her cup. 'Nineteen cars and the church quite full and the Canon read the service beautiful, I thought. A nice fine day for it, too. Ah, poor dear Mr Abernethie, there's not many like him left in the world. Respected by all, he was.'

There was the note of a horn and the sound of a car coming up the drive, and Mrs Jacks put down her cup and exclaimed: 'Here they are.'

Marjorie turned up the gas under her large saucepan of creamy chicken soup. The large kitchen range of the days of Victorian grandeur stood cold and unused, like an altar to the past.

The cars drove up one after the other and the people

issuing from them in their black clothes moved rather uncertainly across the hall and into the big green drawing-room. In the big steel grate a fire was burning, tribute to the first chill of the autumn days and calculated to counteract the further chill of standing about at a funeral.

Lanscombe entered the room, offering glasses of sherry on a silver tray.

Mr Entwistle, senior partner of the old and respected firm of Bollard, Entwistle, Entwistle and Bollard, stood with his back to the fireplace warming himself. He accepted a glass of sherry, and surveyed the company with his shrewd lawyer's gaze. Not all of them were personally known to him, and he was under the necessity of sorting them out, so to speak. Introductions before the departure for the funeral had been hushed and perfunctory.

Appraising old Lanscombe first, Mr Entwistle thought to himself, 'Getting very shaky, poor old chap - going on for ninety I shouldn't wonder. Well, he'll have that nice little annuity. Nothing for *him* to worry about. Faithful soul. No such thing as old-fashioned service nowadays. Household helps and baby sitters, God help us all! A sad world. Just as well, perhaps, poor Richard didn't last his full time. He hadn't much to live for.'

To Mr Entwistle, who was seventy-two, Richard Abernethie's death at sixty-eight was definitely that of a man dead before his time. Mr Entwistle had retired from active business two years ago, but as executor of Richard Abernethie's will and in respect of one of his oldest clients who was, also a personal friend, he had made the journey to the North.

Reflecting in his own mind on the provisions of the will, he mentally appraised the family.

Mrs Leo, Helen, he knew well, of course. A very charming woman for whom he had both liking and respect. His eyes dwelt approvingly on her now as she stood near one of the windows. Black suited her. She had kept her figure

well. He liked the clear cut features, the springing line of grey hair back from her temples and the eyes that had once been likened to cornflowers and which were still quite vividly blue.

How old was Helen now? About fifty-one or -two, he supposed. Strange that she had never married again after Leo's death. An attractive woman. Ah, but they had been very devoted, those two.

His eyes went on to Mrs Timothy. He had never known her very well. Black didn't suit her – country tweeds were her wear. A big sensible capable-looking woman. She'd always been a good devoted wife to Timothy. Looking after his health, fussing over him – fussing over him a bit too much, probably. Was there really anything the matter with Timothy? Just a hypochondriac, Mr Entwhistle suspected. Richard Abernethie had suspected so, too. 'Weak chest, of course, when he was a boy,' he had said. 'But blest if I think there's much wrong with him now.' Oh well, everybody had to have some hobby. Timothy's hobby was the all absorbing one of his own health. Was Mrs Tim taken in? Probably not – but women never admitted that sort of thing. Timothy must be quite comfortably off. He'd never been a spendthrift. However, the extra would not come amiss – not in these days of taxation. He'd probably had to retrench his scale of living a good deal since the war.

Mr Entwhistle transferred his attention to George Crossfield, Laura's son. Dubious sort of fellow Laura had married. Nobody had ever known much about him. A stockbroker he had called himself. Young George was in a solicitor's office – not a very reputable firm. Good-looking young fellow – but something a little shifty about him. He couldn't have too much to live on. Laura had been a complete fool over her investments. She'd left next to nothing when she died five years ago. A handsome romantic girl she'd been, but no money sense.

Mr Entwhistle's eyes went on from George Crossfield.

Which of the two girls was which? Ah yes, that was Rosamund, Geraldine's daughter, looking at the wax flowers on the malachite table. Pretty girl, beautiful, in fact – rather a silly face. On the stage. Repertory companies or some nonsense like that. Had married an actor, too. Good-looking fellow. 'And knows he is,' thought Mr Entwhistle, who was prejudiced against the stage as a profession. 'Wonder what sort of a background *he* has and where he comes from.'

He looked disapprovingly at Michael Shane with his fair hair and his haggard charm.

Now Susan, Gordon's daughter, would do much better on the stage than Rosamund. More personality. A little too much personality for everyday life, perhaps. She was quite near him and Mr Entwhistle studied her covertly. Dark hair, hazel – almost golden – eyes, a sulky attractive mouth. Beside her was the husband she had just married – a chemist's assistant, he understood. Really, a chemist's assistant! In Mr Entwhistle's creed girls did not marry young men who served behind a counter. But now of course, they married *anybody*! The young man, who had a pale nondescript face and sandy hair, seemed very ill at ease. Mr Entwhistle wondered why, but decided charitably that it was the strain of meeting so many of his wife's relations.

Last in his survey Mr Entwhistle came to Cora Lansquenet. There was a certain justice in that, for Cora had decidedly been an afterthought in the family. Richard's youngest sister, she had been born when her mother was just on fifty, and that meek woman had not survived her tenth pregnancy (three children had died in infancy). Poor little Cora! All her life, Cora had been rather an embarrassment, growing up tall and gawky, and given to blurting out remarks that had always better have remained unsaid. All her elder brothers and sisters had been very kind to Cora, atoning for her deficiencies and covering her social

mistakes. It had never really occurred to anyone that Cora would marry. She had not been a very attractive girl, and her rather obvious advances to visiting young men had usually caused the latter to retreat in some alarm. And then, Mr Entwhistle mused, there had come the Lansquenet business – Pierre Lansquenet, half French, whom she had come across in an Art school where she had been having very correct lessons in painting flowers in water colours. But somehow she had got into the Life class and there she had met Pierre Lansquenet and had come home and announced her intention of marrying him. Richard Abernethie had put his foot down – he hadn't liked what he saw of Pierre Lansquenet and suspected that the young man was really in search of a rich wife. But whilst he was making a few researches into Lansquenet's antecedents, Cora had bolted with the fellow and married him out of hand. They had spent most of their married life in Brittany and Cornwall and other painters' conventional haunts. Lansquenet had been a very bad painter and not, by all accounts, a very nice man, but Cora had remained devoted to him and had never forgiven her family for their attitude to him. Richard had generously made his young sister an allowance and on that they had, so Mr Entwhistle believed, lived. He doubted if Lansquenet had ever earned any money at all. He must have been dead now twelve years or more, thought Mr Entwhistle. And now here was his widow, rather cushion-like in shape and dressed in wispy artistic black with festoons of jet beads, back in the home of her girlhood, moving about and touching things and exclaiming with pleasure when she recalled some childish memory. She made very little pretence of grief at her brother's death. But then, Mr Entwhistle reflected, Cora had never pretended.

Re-entering the room Lanscombe murmured in muted tones suitable to the occasion:

'Luncheon is served.'

CHAPTER 2

After the delicious chicken soup, and plenty of cold viands accompanied by an excellent Chablis, the funeral atmosphere lightened. Nobody had really felt any deep grief for Richard Abernethie's death since none of them had had any close ties with him. Their behaviour had been suitably decorous and subdued (with the exception of the uninhibited Cora who was clearly enjoying herself) but it was now felt that the decencies had been observed and that normal conversation could be resumed. Mr Entwhistle encouraged this attitude. He was experienced in funerals and knew exactly how to set correct funeral timing.

After the meal was over, Lanscombe indicated the library for coffee. This was his feeling for niceties. The time had come when business – in other words, The Will – would be discussed. The library had the proper atmosphere for that with its bookshelves and its heavy red velvet curtains. He served coffee to them there and then withdrew, closing the door.

After a few desultory remarks, everyone began to look tentatively at Mr Entwhistle. He responded promptly after glancing at his watch.

'I have to catch the 3.30 train,' he began.

Others, it seemed, also had to catch that train.

'As you know,' said Mr Entwhistle, 'I am the executor of Richard Abernethie's will –'

He was interrupted.

'I didn't know,' said Cora Lansquenet brightly. 'Are you? Did he leave me anything?'

Not for the first time, Mr Entwhistle felt that Cora was too apt to speak out of turn.

Bending a repressive glance at her he continued:

'Up to a year ago, Richard Abernethie's will was very simple. Subject to certain legacies he left everything to his son Mortimer.'

'Poor Mortimer,' said Cora. 'I do think all this infantile paralysis is dreadful.'

'Mortimer's death, coming so suddenly and tragically, was a great blow to Richard. It took him some months to rally from it. I pointed out to him that it might be advisable for him to make new testamentary dispositions.'

Maude Abernethie asked in her deep voice:

'What would have happened if he *hadn't* made a new will? Would it – would it all have gone to Timothy – as the next of kin, I mean?'

Mr Entwhistle opened his mouth to give a disquisition on the subject of next of kin, thought better of it, and said crisply:

'On my advice, Richard decided to make a new will. First of all, however, he decided to get better acquainted with the younger generation.'

'He had us upon appro,' said Susan with a sudden rich laugh. 'First George and then Greg and me, and then Rosamund and Michael.'

Gregory Banks said sharply, his thin face flushing:

'I don't think you ought to put it like that, Susan. On appro, indeed!'

'But that was what it was, wasn't it, Mr Entwhistle?'

'Did he leave *me* anything?' repeated Cora.

Mr Entwhistle coughed and spoke rather coldly:

'I propose to send you all copies of the will. I can read it to you in full now if you like but its legal phraseology may seem to you rather obscure. Briefly it amounts to this: After certain small bequests and a substantial legacy to Lanscombe to purchase an annuity, the bulk of the estate – a very considerable one – is to be divided into six equal portions. Four of these, after all duties are paid, are to go to Richard's brother Timothy, his nephew George Crossfield,