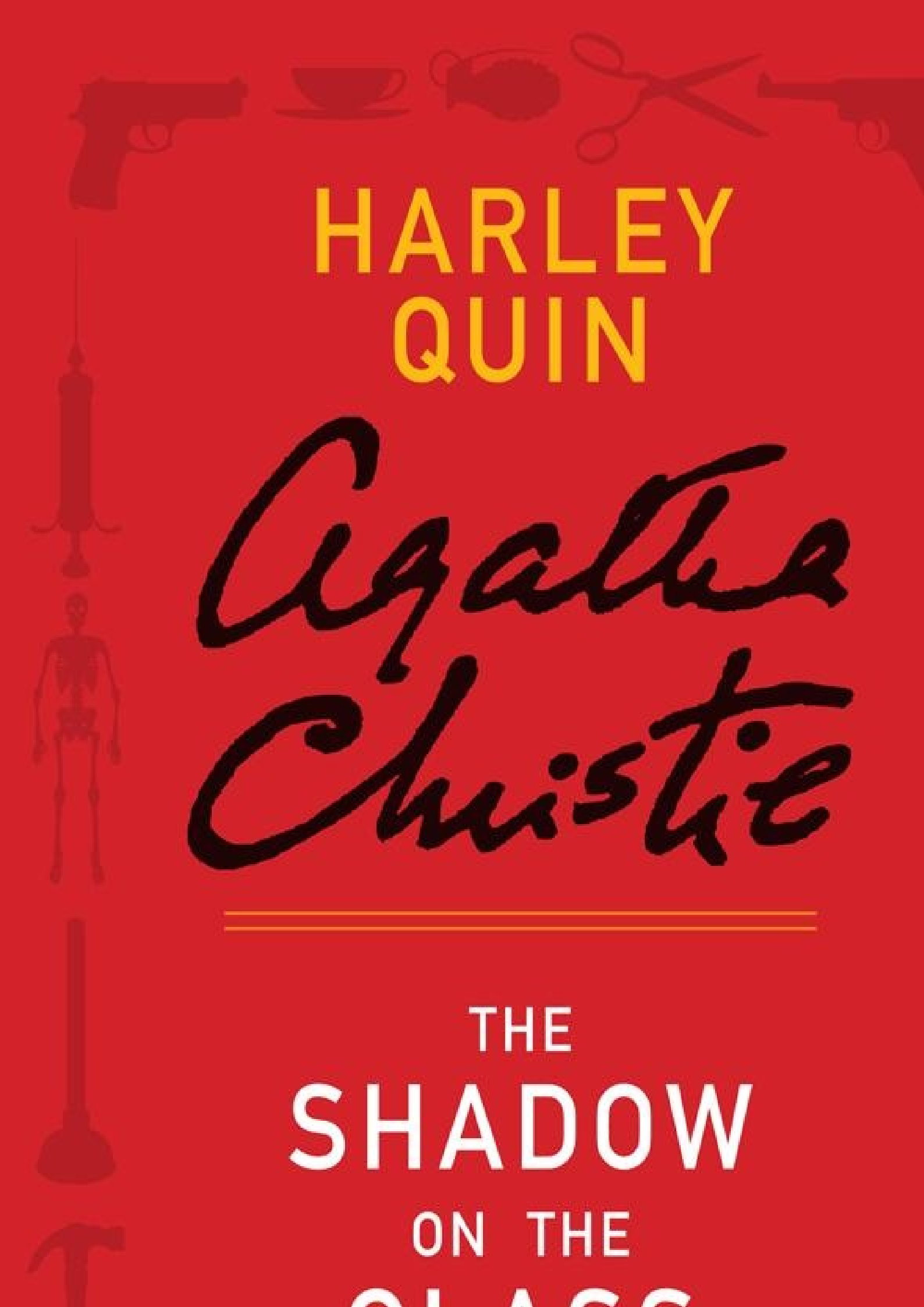
HARLEY
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Agatha Christie
THE
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The Shadow on the Glass

A Harley Quin Short Story

by Agatha Christie

WILLIAM MORROW
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Contents

The Shadow on the Glass

‘The Shadow on the Glass’ was first published in *Grand Magazine*, October 1923.

‘Listen to this,’ said Lady Cynthia Drage.

She read aloud from the journal she held in her hand.

‘Mr and Mrs Unkerton are entertaining a party at Greenways House this week. Amongst the guests are Lady Cynthia Drage, Mr and Mrs Richard Scott, Major Porter, D.S.O., Mrs Staverton, Captain Allenson and Mr Satterthwaite.’

‘It’s as well,’ remarked Lady Cynthia, casting away the paper, ‘to know what we’re in for. But they *have* made a mess of things!’

Her companion, that same Mr Satterthwaite whose name figured at the end of the list of guests, looked at her interrogatively. It had been said that if Mr Satterthwaite were found at the houses of those rich who had newly arrived, it was a sign either that the cooking was unusually good, or that a drama of human life was to be enacted there. Mr Satterthwaite was abnormally interested in the comedies and tragedies of his fellow men.

Lady Cynthia, who was a middle-aged woman, with a hard face and a liberal allowance of make-up, tapped him smartly with the newest thing in parasols which lay rakishly across her knee.

‘Don’t pretend you don’t understand me. You do perfectly. What’s more I believe you’re here on purpose to see the fur fly!’

Mr Satterthwaite protested vigorously. He didn’t know what she was talking about.

‘I’m talking about Richard Scott. Do you pretend you’ve never heard of him?’

‘No, of course not. He’s the Big Game man, isn’t he?’

‘That’s it – “Great big bears and tigers, etc.” as the song says. Of course, he’s a great lion himself just now – the Unkertons would naturally be mad to get hold of him – *and* the bride! A charming child – oh! quite a charming child – but so naïve, only twenty, you know, and he must be at least forty-five.’

‘Mrs Scott seems to be very charming,’ said Mr Satterthwaite sedately.

‘Yes, poor child.’

‘Why poor child?’

Lady Cynthia cast him a look of reproach, and went on approaching the point at issue in her own manner.

‘Porter’s all right – a dull dog, though – another of these African hunters, all sunburnt and silent. Second fiddle to Richard Scott and always has been – life-long friends and all that sort of thing. When I come to think of it, I believe they were together on that trip –’

‘Which trip?’

‘*The* trip. The Mrs Staverton trip. You’ll be saying next you’ve never heard of Mrs Staverton.’

‘I *have* heard of Mrs Staverton,’ said Mr Satterthwaite, almost with unwillingness.

And he and Lady Cynthia exchanged glances.

‘It’s so exactly like the Unkertons,’ wailed the latter, ‘they are absolutely hopeless – socially, I mean. The idea of asking those two together! Of course they’d heard that Mrs Staverton was a sportswoman and a traveller and all that, and about her book. People like the Unkertons don’t even begin to realize what pitfalls there are! I’ve been running them, myself, for the last year, and what I’ve gone through nobody knows. One has to be constantly at their elbow. “Don’t do that! You can’t do this!” Thank goodness, I’m through with it now. Not that we’ve quarrelled – oh! no, I never quarrel, but somebody else can take on the job. As I’ve always said, I can put up with vulgarity, but I can’t stand meanness!’

After this somewhat cryptic utterance, Lady Cynthia was silent for a moment, ruminating on the Unkertons’ meanness as displayed to herself.

‘If I’d still been running the show for them,’ she went on presently, ‘I should have said quite firmly and plainly: “You can’t ask Mrs Staverton with the Richard Scotts. She and he were once –”’

She stopped eloquently.

‘But were they once?’ asked Mr Satterthwaite.

‘My dear man! It’s well known. That trip into the Interior! I’m surprised the woman had the face to accept the invitation.’

‘Perhaps she didn’t know the others were coming?’ suggested Mr Satterthwaite.

‘Perhaps she did. That’s far more likely.’

‘You think –?’

‘She’s what I call a dangerous woman – the sort of woman who’d stick at

nothing. I wouldn't be in Richard Scott's shoes this week-end.'

'And his wife knows nothing, you think?'

'I'm certain of it. But I suppose some kind friend will enlighten her sooner or later. Here's Jimmy Allenson. Such a nice boy. He saved my life in Egypt last winter – I was so bored, you know. Hullo, Jimmy, come here at once.'

Captain Allenson obeyed, dropping down on the turf beside her. He was a handsome young fellow of thirty, with white teeth and an infectious smile.

'I'm glad somebody wants me,' he observed. 'The Scotts are doing the turtle dove stunt, two required, not three, Porter's devouring the *Field*, and I've been in mortal danger of being entertained by my hostess.'

He laughed. Lady Cynthia laughed with him. Mr Satterthwaite, who was in some ways a little old-fashioned, so much so that he seldom made fun of his host and hostess until after he had left their house, remained grave.

'Poor Jimmy,' said Lady Cynthia.

'Mine not to reason why, mine but to swiftly fly. I had a narrow escape of being told the family ghost story.'

'An Unkerton ghost,' said Lady Cynthia. 'How screaming.'

'Not an Unkerton ghost,' said Mr Satterthwaite. 'A Greenways ghost. They bought it with the house.'

'Of course,' said Lady Cynthia. 'I remember now. But it doesn't clank chains, does it? It's only something to do with a window.'

Jimmy Allenson looked up quickly.

'A window?'

But for the moment Mr Satterthwaite did not answer. He was looking over Jimmy's head at three figures approaching from the direction of the house – a slim girl between two men. There was a superficial resemblance between the men, both were tall and dark with bronzed faces and quick eyes, but looked at more closely the resemblance vanished. Richard Scott, hunter and explorer, was a man of extraordinarily vivid personality. He had a manner that radiated magnetism. John Porter, his friend and fellow hunter, was a man of squarer build with an impassive, rather wooden face, and very thoughtful grey eyes. He was a quiet man, content always to play second fiddle to his friend.

And between these two walked Moira Scott who, until three months ago, had been Moira O'Connell. A slender figure, big wistful brown eyes, and golden red hair that stood out round her small face like a saint's halo.

'That child mustn't be hurt,' said Mr Satterthwaite to himself. 'It would be abominable that a child like that should be hurt.'

Lady Cynthia greeted the newcomers with a wave of the latest thing in

parasols.

‘Sit down, and don’t interrupt,’ she said. ‘Mr Satterthwaite is telling us a ghost story.’

‘I love ghost stories,’ said Moira Scott. She dropped down on the grass.

‘The ghost of Greenways House?’ asked Richard Scott. ‘Yes. You know about it?’

Scott nodded.

‘I used to stay here in the old days,’ he explained. ‘Before the Elliots had to sell up. The Watching Cavalier, that’s it, isn’t it?’

‘The Watching Cavalier,’ said his wife softly. ‘I like that. It sounds interesting. Please go on.’

But Mr Satterthwaite seemed somewhat loath to do so. He assured her that it was not really interesting at all.

‘Now you’ve done it, Satterthwaite,’ said Richard Scott sardonically. ‘That hint of reluctance clinches it.’

In response to popular clamour, Mr Satterthwaite was forced to speak.

‘It’s really very uninteresting,’ he said apologetically. ‘I believe the original story centres round a Cavalier ancestor of the Elliot family. His wife had a Roundhead lover. The husband was killed by the lover in an upstairs room, and the guilty pair fled, but as they fled, they looked back at the house, and saw the face of the dead husband at the window, watching them. That is the legend, but the ghost story is only concerned with a pane of glass in the window of that particular room on which is an irregular stain, almost imperceptible from near at hand, but which from far away certainly gives the effect of a man’s face looking out.’

‘Which window is it?’ asked Mrs Scott, looking up at the house.

‘You can’t see it from here,’ said Mr Satterthwaite. ‘It is round the other side but was boarded up from the inside some years ago – forty years ago, I think, to be accurate.’

‘What did they do that for? I thought you said the ghost didn’t walk.’

‘It doesn’t,’ Mr Satterthwaite assured her. ‘I suppose – well, I suppose there grew to be a superstitious feeling about it, that’s all.’

Then, deftly enough, he succeeded in turning the conversation. Jimmy Allenson was perfectly ready to hold forth upon Egyptian sand diviners.

‘Frauds, most of them. Ready enough to tell you vague things about the past, but won’t commit themselves as to the future.’

‘I should have thought it was usually the other way about,’ remarked John Porter.

‘It’s illegal to tell the future in this country, isn’t it?’ said Richard Scott. ‘Moira persuaded a gypsy into telling her fortune, but the woman gave her her shilling back, and said there was nothing doing, or words to that effect.’

‘Perhaps she saw something so frightful that she didn’t like to tell it me,’ said Moira.

‘Don’t pile on the agony, Mrs Scott,’ said Allenson lightly. ‘I, for one, refuse to believe that an unlucky fate is hanging over you.’

‘I wonder,’ thought Mr Satterthwaite to himself. ‘I wonder …’

Then he looked up sharply. Two women were coming from the house, a short stout woman with black hair, inappropriately dressed in jade green, and a tall slim figure in creamy white. The first woman was his hostess, Mrs Unkerton, the second was a woman he had often heard of, but never met.

‘Here’s Mrs Staverton,’ announced Mrs Unkerton, in a tone of great satisfaction. ‘All friends here, I think.’

‘These people have an uncanny gift for saying just the most awful things they can,’ murmured Lady Cynthia, but Mr Satterthwaite was not listening. He was watching Mrs Staverton.

Very easy – very natural. Her careless ‘Hullo! Richard, ages since we met. Sorry I couldn’t come to the wedding. Is this your wife? You must be tired of meeting all your husband’s weather-beaten old friends.’ Moira’s response – suitable, rather shy. The elder woman’s swift appraising glance that went on lightly to another old friend.

‘Hullo, John!’ The same easy tone, but with a subtle difference in it – a warming quality that had been absent before.

And then that sudden smile. It transformed her. Lady Cynthia had been quite right. A dangerous woman! Very fair – deep blue eyes – not the traditional colouring of the siren – a face almost haggard in repose. A woman with a slow dragging voice and a sudden dazzling smile.

Iris Staverton sat down. She became naturally and inevitably the centre of the group. So you felt it would always be.

Mr Satterthwaite was recalled from his thoughts by Major Porter’s suggesting a stroll. Mr Satterthwaite, who was not as a general rule much given to strolling, acquiesced. The two men sauntered off together across the lawn.

‘Very interesting story of yours just now,’ said the Major.

‘I will show you the window,’ said Mr Satterthwaite.

He led the way round to the west side of the house. Here there was a small formal garden – the Privy Garden, it was always called, and there was some point in the name, for it was surrounded by high holly hedges, and even the

entrance to it ran zigzag between the same high prickly hedges.

Once inside, it was very charming with an old-world charm of formal flower beds, flagged paths and a low stone seat, exquisitely carved. When they had reached the centre of the garden, Mr Satterthwaite turned and pointed up at the house. The length of Greenways House ran north and south. In this narrow west wall there was only one window, a window on the first floor, almost overgrown by ivy, with grimy panes, and which you could just see was boarded up on the inside.

‘There you are,’ said Mr Satterthwaite.

Craning his neck a little, Porter looked up.

‘H’m I can see a kind of discolouration on one of the panes, nothing more.’

‘We’re too near,’ said Mr Satterthwaite. ‘There’s a clearing higher up in the woods where you get a really good view.’

He led the way out of the Privy Garden, and turning sharply to the left, struck into the woods. A certain enthusiasm of showmanship possessed him, and he hardly noticed that the man at his side was absent and inattentive.

‘They had, of course, to make another window, when they boarded up this one,’ he explained. ‘The new one faces south overlooking the lawn where we were sitting just now. I rather fancy the Scotts have the room in question. That is why I didn’t want to pursue the subject. Mrs Scott might have felt nervous if she had realized that she was sleeping in what might be called the haunted room.’

‘Yes. I see,’ said Porter.

Mr Satterthwaite looked at him sharply, and realized that the other had not heard a word of what he was saying.

‘Very interesting,’ said Porter. He slashed with his stick at some tall foxgloves, and, frowning, he said: ‘She ought not to have come. She ought never to have come.’

People often spoke after this fashion to Mr Satterthwaite. He seemed to matter so little, to have so negative a personality. He was merely a glorified listener.

‘No,’ said Porter, ‘she ought never to have come.’

Mr Satterthwaite knew instinctively that it was not of Mrs Scott he spoke.

‘You think not?’ he asked.

Porter shook his head as though in foreboding.

‘I was on that trip,’ he said abruptly. ‘The three of us went. Scott and I and Iris. She’s a wonderful woman – and a damned fine shot.’ He paused. ‘What made them ask her?’ he finished abruptly.

Mr Satterthwaite shrugged his shoulders.

‘Ignorance,’ he said.

‘There’s going to be trouble,’ said the other. ‘We must stand by – and do what we can.’

‘But surely Mrs Staverton –?’

‘I’m talking of Scott.’ He paused. ‘You see – there’s Mrs Scott to consider.’

Mr Satterthwaite had been considering her all along, but he did not think it necessary to say so, since the other man had so clearly forgotten her until this minute.

‘How did Scott meet his wife?’ he asked.

‘Last winter, in Cairo. A quick business. They were engaged in three weeks, and married in six.’

‘She seems to me very charming.’

‘She is, no doubt about it. And he adores her – but that will make no difference.’ And again Major Porter repeated to himself, using the pronoun that meant to him one person only: ‘Hang it all, she shouldn’t have come …’

Just then they stepped out upon a high grassy knoll at some little distance from the house. With again something of the pride of the showman, Mr Satterthwaite stretched out his arm.

‘Look,’ he said.

It was fast growing dusk. The window could still be plainly descried, and apparently pressed against one of the panes was a man’s face surmounted by a plumed Cavalier’s hat.

‘Very curious,’ said Porter. ‘Really very curious. What will happen when that pane of glass gets smashed some day?’

Mr Satterthwaite smiled.

‘That is one of the most interesting parts of the story. That pane of glass has been replaced to my certain knowledge at least eleven times, perhaps oftener. The last time was twelve years ago when the then owner of the house determined to destroy the myth. But it’s always the same. *The stain reappears* – not all at once, the discolouration spreads gradually. It takes a month or two as a rule.’

For the first time, Porter showed signs of real interest. He gave a sudden quick shiver.

‘Damned odd, these things. No accounting for them. What’s the real reason of having the room boarded up inside?’

‘Well, an idea got about that the room was – unlucky. The Eveshams were in it just before the divorce. Then Stanley and his wife were staying here, and

had that room when he ran off with his chorus girl.'

Porter raised his eyebrows.

'I see. Danger, not to life, but to morals.'

'And now,' thought Mr Satterthwaite to himself, 'the Scotts have it … I wonder …'

They retraced their steps in silence to the house. Walking almost noiselessly on the soft turf, each absorbed in his own thoughts, they became unwittingly eavesdroppers.

They were rounding the corner of the holly hedge when they heard Iris Staverton's voice raised fierce and clear from the depths of the Privy Garden.

'You shall be sorry – sorry – for this!'

Scott's voice answered low and uncertain, so that the words could not be distinguished, and then the woman's voice rose again, speaking words that they were to remember later.

'Jealousy – it drives one to the Devil – it *is* the Devil! It can drive one to black murder. Be careful, Richard, for God's sake, be careful!'

And then on that she had come out of the Privy Garden ahead of them, and on round the corner of the house without seeing them, walking swiftly, almost running, like a woman hag-ridden and pursued.

Mr Satterthwaite thought again of Lady Cynthia's words. A dangerous woman. For the first time, he had a premonition of tragedy, coming swift and inexorable, not to be gainsaid.

Yet that evening he felt ashamed of his fears. Everything seemed normal and pleasant. Mrs Staverton, with her easy insouciance, showed no sign of strain. Moira Scott was her charming, unaffected self. The two women appeared to be getting on very well. Richard Scott himself seemed to be in boisterous spirits.

The most worried looking person was stout Mrs Unkerton. She confided at length in Mr Satterthwaite.

'Think it silly or not, as you like, there's something giving me the creeps. And I'll tell you frankly, I've sent for the glazier unbeknown to Ned.'

'The glazier?'

'To put a new pane of glass in that window. It's all very well. Ned's proud of it – says it gives the house a tone. I don't like it. I tell you flat. We'll have a nice plain modern pane of glass, with no nasty stories attached to it.'

'You forget,' said Mr Satterthwaite, 'or perhaps you don't know. The stain comes back.'

'That's as it may be,' said Mrs Unkerton. 'All I can say is if it does, it's

against nature!’

Mr Satterthwaite raised his eyebrows, but did not reply.

‘And what if it does?’ pursued Mrs Unkerton defiantly. ‘We’re not so bankrupt, Ned and I, that we can’t afford a new pane of glass every month – or every week if need be for the matter of that.’

Mr Satterthwaite did not meet the challenge. He had seen too many things crumple and fall before the power of money to believe that even a Cavalier ghost could put up a successful fight. Nevertheless, he was interested by Mrs Unkerton’s manifest uneasiness. Even she was not exempt from the tension in the atmosphere – only she attributed it to an attenuated ghost story, not to the clash of personalities amongst her guests.

Mr Satterthwaite was fated to hear yet another scrap of conversation which threw light upon the situation. He was going up the wide staircase to bed, John Porter and Mrs Staverton were sitting together in an alcove of the big hall. She was speaking with a faint irritation in her golden voice.

‘I hadn’t the least idea the Scotts were going to be here. I daresay, if I had known, I shouldn’t have come, but I can assure you, my dear John, that now I am here, I’m not going to run away –’

Mr Satterthwaite passed on up the staircase out of earshot. He thought to himself: ‘I wonder now – How much of that is true? Did she know? I wonder – what’s going to come of it?’

He shook his head.

In the clear light of the morning he felt that he had perhaps been a little melodramatic in his imaginings of the evening before. A moment of strain – yes, certainly – inevitable under the circumstances – but nothing more. People adjusted themselves. His fancy that some great catastrophe was pending was nerves – pure nerves – or possibly liver. Yes, that was it, liver. He was due at Carlsbad in another fortnight.

On his own account he proposed a little stroll that evening just as it was growing dusk. He suggested to Major Porter that they should go up to the clearing and see if Mrs Unkerton had been as good as her word, and had a new pane of glass put in. To himself, he said: ‘Exercise, that’s what I need. Exercise.’

The two men walked slowly through the woods. Porter, as usual, was taciturn.

‘I can’t help feeling,’ said Mr Satterthwaite loquaciously, ‘that we were a little foolish in our imaginings yesterday. Expecting – er – trouble, you know. After all, people have to behave themselves – swallow their feelings and that sort of thing.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Porter. After a minute or two he added: ‘Civilized people.’

‘You mean –?’

‘People who’ve lived outside civilization a good deal sometimes go back. Revert. Whatever you call it.’

They emerged on to the grassy knoll. Mr Satterthwaite was breathing rather fast. He never enjoyed going up hill.

He looked towards the window. The face was still there, more life-like than ever.

‘Our hostess has repented, I see.’

Porter threw it only a cursory glance.

‘Unkerton cut up rough, I expect,’ he said indifferently. ‘He’s the sort of man who is willing to be proud of another family’s ghost, and who isn’t going to run the risk of having it driven away when he’s paid spot cash for it.’

He was silent a minute or two, staring, not at the house, but at the thick undergrowth by which they were surrounded.

‘Has it ever struck you,’ he said, ‘that civilization’s damned dangerous?’

‘Dangerous?’ Such a revolutionary remark shocked Mr Satterthwaite to the core.

‘Yes. There are no safety valves, you see.’

He turned abruptly, and they descended the path by which they had come.

‘I really am quite at a loss to understand you,’ said Mr Satterthwaite, pattering along with nimble steps to keep up with the other’s strides. ‘Reasonable people –’

Porter laughed. A short disconcerting laugh. Then he looked at the correct little gentleman by his side.

‘You think it’s all bunkum on my part, Mr Satterthwaite? But there are people, you know, who can tell you when a storm’s coming. They feel it beforehand in the air. And other people can foretell trouble. There’s trouble coming now, Mr Satterthwaite, big trouble. It may come any minute. It may –’

He stopped dead, clutching Mr Satterthwaite’s arm. And in that tense minute of silence it came – the sound of two shots and following them a cry – a cry in a woman’s voice.

‘My god!’ cried Porter, ‘it’s come.’

He raced down the path, Mr Satterthwaite panting behind him. In a minute they came out on to the lawn, close by the hedge of the Privy Garden. At the same time, Richard Scott and Mr Unkerton came round the opposite corner of the house. They halted, facing each other, to left and right of the entrance to

the Privy Garden.

‘It – it came from in there,’ said Unkerton, pointing with a flabby hand.

‘We must see,’ said Porter. He led the way into the enclosure. As he rounded the last bend of the holly hedge, he stopped dead. Mr Satterthwaite peered over his shoulder. A loud cry burst from Richard Scott.

There were three people in the Privy Garden. Two of them lay on the grass near the stone seat, a man and a woman. The third was Mrs Staverton. She was standing quite close to them by the holly hedge, gazing with horror-stricken eyes, and holding something in her right hand.

‘Iris,’ cried Porter. ‘Iris. For God’s sake! What’s that you’ve got in your hand?’

She looked down at it then – with a kind of wonder, an unbelievable indifference.

‘It’s a pistol,’ she said wonderingly. And then – after what seemed an interminable time, but was in reality only a few seconds, ‘I – picked it up.’

Mr Satterthwaite had gone forward to where Unkerton and Scott were kneeling on the turf.

‘A doctor,’ the latter was murmuring. ‘We must have a doctor.’

But it was too late for any doctor. Jimmy Allenson who had complained that the sand diviners hedged about the future, and Moira Scott to whom the gypsy had returned a shilling, lay there in the last great stillness.

It was Richard Scott who completed a brief examination. The iron nerve of the man showed in this crisis. After the first cry of agony, he was himself again.

He laid his wife gently down again.

‘Shot from behind,’ he said briefly. ‘The bullet has passed right through her.’

Then he handled Jimmy Allenson. The wound here was in the breast and the bullet was lodged in the body.

John Porter came towards them.

‘Nothing should be touched,’ he said sternly. ‘The police must see it all exactly as it is now.’

‘The police,’ said Richard Scott. His eyes lit up with a sudden flame as he looked at the woman standing by the holly hedge. He made a step in that direction, but at the same time John Porter also moved, so as to bar his way. For a moment it seemed as though there was a duel of eyes between the two friends.

Porter very quietly shook his head.

‘No, Richard,’ he said. ‘It looks like it – but you’re wrong.’

Richard Scott spoke with difficulty, moistening his dry lips.

‘Then why – has she got that in her hand?’

And again Iris Staverton said in the same lifeless tone: ‘I – picked it up.’

‘The police,’ said Unkerton rising. ‘We must send for the police – at once. You will telephone perhaps, Scott? Someone should stay here – yes, I am sure someone should stay here.’

In his quiet gentlemanly manner, Mr Satterthwaite offered to do so. His host accepted the offer with manifest relief.

‘The ladies,’ he explained. ‘I must break the news to the ladies, Lady Cynthia and my dear wife.’

Mr Satterthwaite stayed in the Privy Garden looking down on the body of that which had once been Moira Scott.

‘Poor child,’ he said to himself. ‘Poor child …’

He quoted to himself the tag about the evil men do living after them. For was not Richard Scott in a way responsible for his innocent wife’s death? They would hang Iris Staverton, he supposed, not that he liked to think of it, but was not it at least a part of the blame he laid at the man’s door? The evil that men do –

And the girl, the innocent girl, had paid.

He looked down at her with a very deep pity. Her small face, so white and wistful, a half smile on the lips still. The ruffled golden hair, the delicate ear. There was a spot of blood on the lobe of it. With an inner feeling of being something of a detective, Mr Satterthwaite deduced an ear-ring, torn away in her fall. He craned his neck forward. Yes, he was right, there was a small pearl drop hanging from the other ear.

Poor child, poor child.

‘And now, sir,’ said Inspector Winkfield.

They were in the library. The Inspector, a shrewd-looking forceful man of forty odd, was concluding his investigations. He had questioned most of the guests, and had by now pretty well made up his mind on the case. He was listening to what Major Porter and Mr Satterthwaite had to say. Mr Unkerton sat heavily in a chair, staring with protruding eyes at the opposite wall.

‘As I understand it, gentlemen,’ said the Inspector, ‘you’d been for a walk. You were returning to the house by a path that winds round the left side of what they call the Privy Garden. Is that correct?’

‘Quite correct, Inspector.’

‘You heard two shots, and a woman’s scream?’

‘Yes.’

‘You then ran as fast as you could, emerged from the woods and made your way to the entrance of the Privy Garden. If anybody had left that garden, they could only do so by one entrance. The holly bushes are impassable. If anyone had run out of the garden and turned to the right, he would have been met by Mr Unkerton and Mr Scott. If he had turned to the left, he could not have done so without being seen by you. Is that right?’

‘That is so,’ said Major Porter. His face was very white.

‘That seems to settle it,’ said the Inspector. ‘Mr and Mrs Unkerton and Lady Cynthia Drage were sitting on the lawn, Mr Scott was in the Billiard Room which opens on to that lawn. At ten minutes past six, Mrs Staverton came out of the house, spoke a word or two to those sitting there, and went round the corner of the house towards the Privy Garden. Two minutes later the shots were heard. Mr Scott rushed out of the house and together with Mr Unkerton ran to the Privy Garden. At the same time you and Mr – er – Satterthwaite arrived from the opposite direction. Mrs Staverton was in the Privy Garden with a pistol in her hand from which two shots had been fired. As I see it, she shot the lady first from behind as she was sitting on the bench. Then Captain Allenson sprang up and went for her, and she shot him in the chest as he came towards her. I understand that there had been a – er – previous attachment between her and Mr Richard Scott –’

‘That’s a damned lie,’ said Porter.

His voice rang out hoarse and defiant. The Inspector said nothing, merely shook his head.

‘What is her own story?’ asked Mr Satterthwaite.

‘She says that she went into the Privy Garden to be quiet for a little. Just before she rounded the last hedge, she heard the shots. She came round the corner, saw the pistol lying at her feet, and picked it up. No one passed her, and she saw no one in the garden but the two victims.’ The Inspector gave an eloquent pause. ‘That’s what she says – and although I cautioned her, she insisted on making a statement.’

‘If she said that,’ said Major Porter, and his face was still deadly white, ‘she was speaking the truth. I know Iris Staverton.’

‘Well, sir,’ said the Inspector, ‘there’ll be plenty of time to go into all that later. In the meantime, I’ve got my duty to do.’

With an abrupt movement, Porter turned to Mr Satterthwaite.

‘You! Can’t you help? Can’t *you* do something?’

Mr Satterthwaite could not help feeling immensely flattered. He had been

appealed to, he, most insignificant of men, and by a man like John Porter.

He was just about to flutter out a regretful reply, when the butler, Thompson, entered, with a card upon a salver which he took to his master with an apologetic cough. Mr Unkerton was still sitting huddled up in a chair, taking no part in the proceedings.

‘I told the gentleman you would probably not be able to see him, sir,’ said Thompson. ‘But he insisted that he had an appointment and that it was most urgent.’

Unkerton took the card.

‘Mr Harley Quin,’ he read. ‘I remember, he was to see me about a picture. I did make an appointment, but as things are –’

But Mr Satterthwaite had started forward.

‘Mr Harley Quin, did you say?’ he cried. ‘How extraordinary, how very extraordinary. Major Porter, you asked me if I could help you. I think I can. This Mr Quin is a friend – or I should say, an acquaintance of mine. He is a most remarkable man.’

‘One of these amateur solvers of crime, I suppose,’ remarked the Inspector disparagingly.

‘No,’ said Mr Satterthwaite. ‘He is not that kind of man at all. But he has a power – an almost uncanny power – of showing you what you have seen with your own eyes, of making clear to you what you have heard with your own ears. Let us, at any rate, give him an outline of the case, and hear what he has to say.’

Mr Unkerton glanced at the Inspector, who merely snorted and looked at the ceiling. Then the former gave a short nod to Thompson, who left the room and returned ushering in a tall, slim stranger.

‘Mr Unkerton?’ The stranger shook him by the hand. ‘I am sorry to intrude upon you at such a time. We must leave our little picture chat until another time. Ah! my friend, Mr Satterthwaite. Still as fond of the drama as ever?’

A faint smile played for a minute round the stranger’s lips as he said these last words.

‘Mr Quin,’ said Mr Satterthwaite impressively, ‘we have a drama here, we are in the midst of one, I should like, and my friend, Major Porter, would like, to have your opinion of it.’

Mr Quin sat down. The red-shaded lamp threw a broad band of coloured light over the checked pattern of his overcoat, and left his face in shadow almost as though he wore a mask.

Succinctly, Mr Satterthwaite recited the main points of the tragedy. Then he paused, breathlessly awaiting the words of the oracle.

But Mr Quin merely shook his head. ‘A sad story,’ he said.

‘A very sad and shocking tragedy. The lack of motive makes it very intriguing.’

Unkerton stared at him.

‘You don’t understand,’ he said. ‘Mrs Staverton was heard to threaten Richard Scott. She was bitterly jealous of his wife. Jealousy –’

‘I agree,’ said Mr Quin. ‘Jealousy or Demoniac Possession. It’s all the same. But you misunderstand me. I was not referring to the murder of Mrs Scott, but to that of Captain Allenson.’

‘You’re right,’ cried Porter, springing forward. ‘There’s a flaw there. If Iris had ever contemplated shooting Mrs Scott, she’d have got her alone somewhere. No, we’re on the wrong tack. And I think I see another solution. Only those three people went into the Privy Garden. That is indisputable and I don’t intend to dispute it. But I reconstruct the tragedy differently. Supposing Jimmy Allenson shoots first Mrs Scott and then himself. That’s possible, isn’t it? He flings the pistol from him as he falls – Mrs Staverton finds it lying on the ground and picks it up just as she said. How’s that?’

The Inspector shook his head.

‘Won’t wash, Major Porter. If Captain Allenson had fired that shot close to his body, the cloth would have been singed.’

‘He might have held the pistol at arm’s length.’

‘Why should he? No sense in it. Besides, there’s no motive.’

‘Might have gone off his head suddenly,’ muttered Porter, but without any great conviction. He fell to silence again, suddenly rousing himself to say defiantly: ‘Well, Mr Quin?’

The latter shook his head.

‘I’m not a magician. I’m not even a criminologist. But I will tell you one thing – I believe in the value of impressions. In any time of crisis, there is always one moment that stands out from all the others, one picture that remains when all else has faded. Mr Satterthwaite is, I think, likely to have been the most unprejudiced observer of those present. Will you cast your mind back, Mr Satterthwaite, and tell us the moment that made the strongest impression on you? Was it when you heard the shots? Was it when you first saw the dead bodies? Was it when you first observed the pistol in Mrs Staverton’s hand? Clear your mind of any preconceived standard of values, and tell us.’

Mr Satterthwaite fixed his eyes on Mr Quin’s face, rather as a schoolboy might repeat a lesson of which he was not sure.

‘No,’ he said slowly. ‘It was not any of those. The moment that I shall

always remember was when I stood alone by the bodies – afterwards – looking down on Mrs Scott. She was lying on her side. Her hair was ruffled. There was a spot of blood on her little ear.'

And instantly, as he said it, he felt that he had said a terrific, a significant thing.

'Blood on her ear? Yes, I remember,' said Unkerton slowly.

'Her ear-ring must have been torn out when she fell,' explained Mr Satterthwaite.

But it sounded a little improbable as he said it.

'She was lying on her left side,' said Porter. 'I suppose it was that ear?'

'No,' said Mr Satterthwaite quickly. 'It was her right ear.'

The Inspector coughed.

'I found this in the grass,' he vouchsafed. He held up a loop of gold wire.

'But my God, man,' cried Porter. 'The thing can't have been wrenched to pieces by a mere fall. It's more as though it had been shot away by a bullet.'

'So it was,' cried Mr Satterthwaite. 'It was a bullet. It must have been.'

'There were only two shots,' said the Inspector. 'A shot can't have grazed her ear and shot her in the back as well. And if one shot carried away the ear-ring, and the second shot killed her, it can't have killed Captain Allenson as well – not unless he was standing close in front of her – very close – facing her as it might be. Oh! no, not even then, unless, that is –'

'Unless she was in his arms, you were going to say,' said Mr Quin, with a queer little smile. 'Well, why not?'

Everyone stared at each other. The idea was so vitally strange to them – Allenson and Mrs Scott – Mr Unkerton voiced the same feeling.

'But they hardly knew each other,' he said.

'I don't know,' said Mr Satterthwaite thoughtfully. 'They might have known each other better than we thought. Lady Cynthia said he saved her from being bored in Egypt last winter, and you' – he turned to Porter – 'you told me that Richard Scott met his wife in Cairo last winter. They might have known each other very well indeed out there …'

'They didn't seem to be together much,' said Unkerton.

'No – they rather avoided each other. It was almost unnatural, now I come to think of it –'

They all looked at Mr Quin, as if a little startled at the conclusions at which they had arrived so unexpectedly.

Mr Quin rose to his feet.

‘You see,’ he said, ‘what Mr Satterthwaite’s impression has done for us.’ He turned to Unkerton. ‘It is your turn now.’

‘Eh? I don’t understand you.’

‘You were very thoughtful when I came into this room. I should like to know exactly what thought it was that obsessed you. Never mind if it has nothing to do with the tragedy. Never mind if it seems to you – superstitious –’ Mr Unkerton started, ever so slightly. ‘Tell us.’

‘I don’t mind telling you,’ said Unkerton. ‘Though it’s nothing to do with the business, and you’ll probably laugh at me into the bargain. I was wishing that my Missus had left well alone and not replaced that pane of glass in the haunted window. I feel as though doing that has maybe brought a curse upon us.’

He was unable to understand why the two men opposite him stared so.

‘But she hasn’t replaced it yet,’ said Mr Satterthwaite at last.

‘Yes, she has. Man came first thing this morning.’

‘My God!’ said Porter, ‘I begin to understand. That room, it’s panelled, I supposed, not papered?’

‘Yes, but what does that –?’

But Porter had swung out of the room. The others followed him. He went straight upstairs to the Scotts’ bedroom. It was a charming room, panelled in cream with two windows facing south. Porter felt with his hands along the panels on the western wall.

‘There’s a spring somewhere – must be. Ah!’ There was a click, and a section of the panelling rolled back. It disclosed the grimy panes of the haunted window. One pane of glass was clean and new. Porter stooped quickly and picked up something. He held it out on the palm of his hand. It was a fragment of ostrich feather. Then he looked at Mr Quin. Mr Quin nodded.

He went across to the hat cupboard in the bedroom. There were several hats in it – the dead woman’s hats. He took out one with a large brim and curling feathers – an elaborate Ascot hat.

Mr Quin began speaking in a gentle, reflective voice.

‘Let us suppose,’ said Mr Quin, ‘a man who is by nature intensely jealous. A man who has stayed here in bygone years and knows the secret of the spring in the panelling. To amuse himself he opens it one day, and looks out over the Privy Garden. There, secure as they think from being overlooked, he sees his wife and another man. There can be no possible doubt in his mind as to the relations between them. He is mad with rage. What shall he do? An idea comes to him. He goes to the cupboard and puts on the hat with the brim

and feathers. It is growing dusk, and he remembers the story of the stain on the glass. Anyone looking up at the window will see as they think the Watching Cavalier. Thus secure he watches them, and at the moment they are clasped in each other's arms, he shoots. He is a good shot – a wonderful shot. As they fall, he fires once more – that shot carries away the ear-ring. He flings the pistol out of the window into the Privy Garden, rushes downstairs and out through the billiard room.'

Porter took a step towards him.

'But he let her be accused!' he cried. 'He stood by and let her be accused. Why? Why?'

'I think I know why,' said Mr Quin. 'I should guess – it's only guesswork on my part, mind – that Richard Scott was once madly in love with Iris Staverton – so madly that even meeting her years afterwards stirred up the embers of jealousy again. I should say that Iris Staverton once fancied that she might love him, that she went on a hunting trip with him and another – and that she came back in love with the better man.'

'The better man,' muttered Porter, dazed. 'You mean –?'

'Yes,' said Mr Quin, with a faint smile. 'I mean you.' He paused a minute, and then said: 'If I were you – I should go to her now.'

'I will,' said Porter.

He turned and left the room.

About the Author

Agatha Christie is the most widely published author of all time and in any language, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. Her books have sold more than a billion copies in English and another billion in a hundred foreign languages. She is the author of eighty crime novels and short-story collections, nineteen plays, two memoirs, and six novels written under the name Mary Westmacott.

She first tried her hand at detective fiction while working in a hospital dispensary during World War I, creating the now legendary Hercule Poirot with her debut novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. With *The Murder in the Vicarage*, published in 1930, she introduced another beloved sleuth, Miss Jane Marple. Additional series characters include the husband-and-wife crime-fighting team of Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, private investigator Parker Pyne, and Scotland Yard detectives Superintendent Battle and Inspector Japp.

Many of Christie's novels and short stories were adapted into plays, films, and television series. *The Mousetrap*, her most famous play of all, opened in 1952 and is the longest-running play in history. Among her best-known film adaptations are *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) and *Death on the Nile* (1978), with Albert Finney and Peter Ustinov playing Hercule Poirot, respectively. On the small screen Poirot has been most memorably portrayed by David Suchet, and Miss Marple by Joan Hickson and subsequently Geraldine McEwan and Julia McKenzie.

Christie was first married to Archibald Christie and then to archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan, whom she accompanied on expeditions to countries that would also serve as the settings for many of her novels. In 1971 she achieved one of Britain's highest honors when she was made a Dame of the British Empire. She died in 1976 at the age of eighty-five. Her one hundred and twentieth anniversary was celebrated around the world in 2010.

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