

Agatha Christie

Appointment with Death

Collins

Part I

Chapter 1

‘Don’t you agree that she’s got to be killed?’ The words seemed to hang in the still night air, before disappearing into the darkness.

It was Hercule Poirot’s first night in the city of Jerusalem, and he was shutting his hotel-room window – the night air was a danger to his health! – when he overheard these words. He smiled. ‘Even on holiday, I am reminded of crime,’ he said to himself. ‘No doubt someone is talking about a play or a book.’

As he walked over to his bed, he thought about the voice he had heard. It was the voice of a man – or a boy – and had sounded nervous and excited. ‘I will remember that voice,’ said Hercule Poirot to himself, as he lay down to sleep. ‘Yes, I will remember.’

In the room next door, Raymond Boynton and his sister Carol looked out of their window into the dark-blue night sky. Raymond said again, ‘Don’t you agree that she’s got to be killed? It can’t go on like this – it can’t. We must do something – and what else can we do?’

Carol said in a hopeless voice, ‘If only we could just leave somehow! But we can’t – we can’t.’

‘People would say we were crazy,’ said Raymond bitterly. ‘They would wonder why we can’t just walk out –’

Carol said slowly, ‘Perhaps we *are* crazy!’

‘Perhaps we are,’ agreed Raymond. ‘After all, we are calmly planning to kill our own mother!’

‘She isn’t our real mother!’ said Carol. ‘She’s our stepmother!’

There was a pause. ‘Do you still think she has to die?’ asked Raymond quietly.

‘Yes, I do,’ said Carol. ‘She’s mad – she must be. She – she wouldn’t treat us so badly, torture us like this if she wasn’t mad. It’s lasted for years and years, and I don’t think it will ever stop. We keep saying, “She’ll die some time” – but she hasn’t died! I don’t think she will *ever* die, unless –’

‘Unless we kill her,’ said Raymond. ‘And you or I must do it – not our brother Lennox, or our sister Ginevra. They mustn’t be involved.’

‘And we must do it quickly,’ said Carol, ‘I’m really worried about Ginevra – she’s getting worse.’

‘And it’s not really wrong,’ said Raymond. ‘It’s just like killing a mad dog, before it hurts anyone else.’

Carol stood up suddenly, pushing back her red-brown hair from her face. ‘But we would still be sent to prison if we were found out. How could we explain what mother is like? It would sound crazy – as if we were imagining it.’

‘Nobody will know,’ said Raymond. ‘I’ve got a plan. We’ll be safe.’

‘Ray,’ said Carol, ‘you’re different in some way. Something’s happened to you. Was it that girl you met on the train?’

‘No, of course not,’ said Raymond. ‘Carol, don’t talk nonsense. Let’s talk about my plan.’

‘Are you sure it will work?’ asked Carol.

‘Yes, I am,’ replied her brother. ‘We must wait for the right opportunity, of course. And then – we’ll all be free.’

‘Free?’ Carol looked up at the stars. Then suddenly she started to cry. ‘It’s such a lovely night, with the stars in the sky. If only we could be part of it all, like other people. But instead we are

strange and twisted and wrong. Even if mother dies – isn't it too late for us to change?’

‘No, Carol, it's not too late,’ said Raymond. ‘But if you don't want to –’

‘I do want to – we must do it,’ said Carol. ‘Because of the others – and especially Ginevra. We must save Ginevra!’

Raymond paused a moment. ‘All right, we'll do it,’ he said. ‘I'll tell you my plan.’

CHARACTER LIST

Hercule Poirot: the famous Belgian detective, who is on holiday

Mrs Boynton: an old woman from America, who has lots of money and is travelling with her family

Lennox Boynton: the elder stepson of Mrs Boynton, who is married to Nadine

Nadine Boynton: a distant relative of the Boyntons, who is married to Lennox

Raymond (Ray) Boynton: the younger stepson of Mrs Boynton

Carol Boyton: the elder stepdaughter of Mrs Boynton

Ginevra Boynton: the younger daughter of Mrs Boynton

Sarah King: a young woman who has just qualified to be a doctor

Dr Theodore Gerard: a famous French doctor

Jefferson Cope: an American friend of the Boynton family, who knew Nadine before she was married

Lady Westholme: a well-known British Member of Parliament

Miss Amabel Pierce: a middle-aged woman, who used to teach very young children before she could afford to travel

Mahmoud: a tourist guide, who looks after people travelling to and staying at Petra

Colonel Carbury: the person in charge of running the local area that includes Petra

CULTURAL NOTES

Palestine and Trans-Jordan

This story takes place in Palestine and Trans-Jordan in the 1930s, and in the early twentieth century there were many political changes in this area.

For hundreds of years before World War I (1914–1918) most of the countries in this area had been controlled by powerful Turkish rulers, called sultans. The whole area of land they controlled was called the Ottoman Empire.

After the end of World War I in 1918, the League of Nations (the international body that preceded the United Nations) decided that Britain and France would jointly control the region. Trans-Jordan (modern Jordan) and the newly-created Palestine, where most of the story takes place, were controlled by the British.

At the time of the story, the British army was still based in the area, and was responsible for administration and foreign affairs. This is why Colonel Carbury is in charge of the local area around Amman, and is responsible for dealing with the death of an American citizen.

Sights on the journey to Petra

Even today it can be a long journey to reach Petra, and at the time of the story only a few adventurous tourists made the difficult journey across the desert. On the way to Petra, Sarah King and her travelling companions visit the Dead Sea, Jericho and Amman.

The story starts in the historic city of Jerusalem, where there are many famous religious buildings. The next stop is the Dead Sea – famous for its warm salty water. It has ten times more salt than normal seawater. The salt makes it very easy for people to swim and float in the Dead Sea.

Map of British-controlled 'Palestine' and 'Trans-Jordan' in the 1930s, showing the route taken by Poirot and his travelling companions



GLOSSARY

Key

n = noun

v = verb

phr v = phrasal verb

adj = adjective

adv = adverb

excl = exclamation

exp = expression

affair (n)

an event, when you are talking about it in a general way

alibi (n)

proof that you were somewhere else when a crime was committed

archaeologist (n)

someone who studies the past by examining the remains of things such as buildings, tools, and other objects

beige (adj)

pale brown in colour

bitterly (adv)

in an angry and resentful way

boldly (adv)

in a way that shows you are not afraid to do things that involve risk or danger