

POIROT

THE QUEEN OF MYSTERY

Agatha Christie



**APPOINTMENT
WITH DEATH**

A Hercule Poirot Mystery

Agatha Christie

Appointment with Death

 HarperCollins e-books

To Richard and Myra Mallock to remind them of their journey to
Petra

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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.

Hercule Poirot paused a minute with his hand on the window catch. 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.

'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.

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

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 two fellow passengers discussing the last published installment of one of his novels.

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

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 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...*’

II

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?’