

THE QUEEN OF MYSTERY

Agatha
Christie

ENDLESS
NIGHT



Agatha Christie

Endless Night

HARPER

NEW YORK • LONDON • TORONTO • SYDNEY

*To Nora Prichard
from whom I first heard
the legend of Gipsy's Acre*

Every Night and every Morn
Some to Misery are born.
Every Morn and every Night
Some are born to Sweet Delight,
Some are born to Sweet Delight,
Some are born to Endless Night,

William Blake
Auguries of Innocence

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BOOK ONE

One

In my end is my beginning... That's a quotation I've often heard people say. It sounds all right—but what does it really mean?

Is there ever any particular spot where one can put one's finger and say: "It all began that day, at such a time and such a place, with such an incident?"

Did my story begin, perhaps, when I noticed the Sale Bill hanging on the wall of the George and Dragon, announcing Sale by Auction of that valuable property "The Towers," and giving particulars of the acreage, the miles and furlongs, and the highly idealized portrait of "The Towers" as it might have been perhaps in its prime, anything from eighty to a hundred years ago?

I was doing nothing particular, just strolling along the main street of Kingston Bishop, a place of no importance whatever, killing time. I noticed the Sale Bill. Why? Fate up to its dirty work? Or dealing out its golden handshake of good fortune? You can look at it either way.

Or you could say, perhaps, that it all had its beginnings when I met Santonix, during the talks I had with him; I can close my eyes and see: his flushed cheeks, the over-brilliant eyes, and the movement of the strong yet delicate hand that sketched and drew plans and elevations of houses. One house in particular, a beautiful house, a house that would be wonderful to own!

My longing for a house, a fine and beautiful house, such a house as I could never hope to have, flowered into life then. It was a happy fantasy shared between us, the house that Santonix would build for me—if he lasted long enough....

A house that in my dreams I would live in with the girl that I loved, a house in which just like a child's silly fairy story we should live together

“happy ever afterwards.” All pure fantasy, all nonsense, but it started that tide of longing in me. Longing for something I was never likely to have.

Or if this is a love story—and it *is* a love story, I swear—then why not begin where I first caught sight of Ellie standing in the dark fir trees of Gipsy’s Acre?

Gipsy’s Acre. Yes, perhaps I’d better begin there, at the moment when I turned away from the Sale board with a little shiver because a black cloud had come over the sun, and asked a question carelessly enough of one of the locals, who was clipping a hedge in a desultory fashion nearby.

“What’s this house, The Towers, like?”

I can still see the queer face of the old man, as he looked at me sideways and said:

“That’s not what us calls it here. What sort of a name is that?” He snorted disapproval. “It’s many a year now since folks lived in it and called it The Towers.” He snorted again.

I asked him then what *he* called it, and again his eyes shifted away from me in his old wrinkled face in that queer way country folk have of not speaking to you direct, looking over your shoulder or round the corner, as it were, as though they saw something you didn’t; and he said:

“It’s called hereabouts Gipsy’s Acre.”

“Why is it called that?” I asked.

“Some sort of a tale. I dunno rightly. One says one thing, one says another.” And then he went on, “Anyway, it’s where the accidents take place.”

“Car accidents?”

“All kinds of accidents. Car accidents mainly nowadays. It’s a nasty corner there, you see.”

“Well,” I said, “if it’s a nasty curve, I can well see there might be accidents.”

“Rural Council put up a Danger sign, but it don’t do no good, that don’t. There are accidents just the same.”

“Why Gipsy?” I asked him.

Again his eyes slipped past me and his answer was vague.

“Some tale or other. It was gipsies’ land once, they say, and they were turned off, and they put a curse on it.”

I laughed.

“Aye,” he said, “you can laugh but there’s places as *is* cursed. You smart-Alecks in town don’t know about them. But there’s places as *is* cursed all right, and there’s a curse on this place. People got killed here