

Appointment with Death

By Agatha Christie

The Story Thus Far:

DYING, Elmer Boynton, governor of an American state, leaves his entire fortune to his widow (his second wife). From that time on, his children—Raymond, Carol and Lennox, born of his first marriage, and their half-sister Ginevra—are dependent upon Mrs. Boynton. The old woman—fat, grim-visaged, tyrannical—rules her household (which presently includes Nadine, Lennox's wife) with a rod of iron.

On Mrs. Boynton's orders, the entire family starts on a tour of the Near East. Journeying along the same route are Dr. Theodore Gerard, a noted French alienist, and Sarah King, a charming English girl. Both are struck by the very obvious unhappiness of all the Boyntons. And presently they discover the cause of that unhappiness: Mrs. Boynton was once the wardress of a prison; she is still a wardress to her children—she will tolerate no outside contacts by any of them!

In Cairo, Sarah King exchanges a few casual words with Raymond; and, unsuspected by her, the boy falls in love with her. But from that moment on, due to Mrs. Boynton's hostility, there are no further meetings. Nor will the old tyrant even permit Carol and Sarah to meet. Nevertheless, for some curious reason, Mrs. Boynton accepts the friendly advances of Mr. Cope, a dignified, middle-aged American; and he attaches himself to her party.

In Jerusalem, Gerard and Sarah go to the Solomon Hotel. The Boyntons are also there. When the Americans leave, Sarah steps up to Mrs. Boynton and gives her a brief lecture on the subject of civility. Mrs. Boynton freezes; then (not looking at Sarah, but over her shoulder) she gives utterance to a cryptic pronouncement: "I never forget. Remember that I've never forgotten anything—not an action, not a name, not a face! . . ."

Accompanied by Dr. Gerard, Lady Westholme (an English personage who is accustomed to dominate everyone about her) and Miss Amabel Pierce, an English spinster, Sarah goes to the fascinating ancient city of Petra. The first person she sees on her arrival is—Mrs. Boynton! An hour or so later, Raymond Boynton summons up the courage to speak to her; he tells her that he loves her: "If I pass you by or cut you," he adds—and he explains his predicament.

Sarah likes the boy. "You'll have more courage now, I am sure," she tells him.

For answer, Raymond bends, touches her hand with his lips—and strides rapidly away.

IV

SARAH went down to the big marquee. She found her three fellow travelers there. They were sitting at table, eating. The guide was explaining that there was another party here.

"They came two days ago. Go day after tomorrow. Americans. The mother, very fat, very difficult get here! Carried in chair by bearers—they say very hard work—they get very hot—yes."

Sarah gave a sudden spurt of laughter. Of course, take it properly, the whole thing was funny!

The fat dragoman looked at her gratefully. He was not finding his task too easy. Lady Westholme had contradicted him out of Baedeker three times that day and had now found fault with the type of bed provided. He was grateful to the one member of his party who seemed to be unaccountably in a good temper.

"Ha!" said Lady Westholme. "I think these people were at the Solomon. I recognized the old mother as we arrived here. I think I saw you talking to her at the hotel, Miss King."

Sarah blushed guiltily, hoping Lady Westholme had not overheard much of that conversation.

"Really, what possessed me?" she thought to herself in an agony.

In the meantime Lady Westholme had made a pronouncement.

"Not interesting people at all. Very provincial," she said.

Miss Pierce made eager, sycophantish noises and Lady Westholme embarked on a history of various interesting and prominent Americans whom she had met recently.

The weather being so unusually hot for the time of year, an early start was arranged for the morrow.

The four assembled for breakfast at six o'clock. There were no signs of any of the Boynton family. After Lady Westholme had commented unfavorably on the absence of fruit, they consumed tea, tinned milk and fried eggs in generous allowances of fat flanked by extremely salt bacon.

Then they started forth, Lady Westholme and Dr. Gerard discussing with animation on the part of the former the exact value of vitamins in diet and the proper nutrition of the working classes.

Then there was a sudden hail from the camp and they halted to allow another person to join the party. It was Mr. Jefferson Cope who hurried after them, his pleasant face flushed with the exertion of running.

"Why, if you don't mind, I'd like to join your party this morning. Good morning, Miss King. Quite a surprise meeting you and Dr. Gerard here. What do you think of it?"

He made a gesture indicating the fantastic red rocks that stretched in every direction.

"I think it's rather wonderful and just a little horrible," said Sarah. "I always thought of it as romantic and dreamlike—the 'rose-red city.' But it's much more *real* than that—it's as real as—as raw beef."

"And very much the color of it," agreed Mr. Cope.

"But it's marvelous, too," admitted Sarah.

The party began to climb. Two Bedouin guards accompanied them. Tall men, with an easy carriage, they swung upward unconcerned in their hobnailed boots, completely foot-sure on the slippery slope. Difficulties soon began. Sarah had a good head for heights and so had Dr. Gerard. But both Mr. Cope and Lady Westholme were far from happy, and the unfortunate Miss Pierce almost had to be carried over the precipitous places, her eyes shut, her face green, while her voice rose ceaselessly in a perpetual wail:

"I never could look down places. Never—from a child."

Once she declared her intention of going back, but, on turning to face the descent, her skin assumed an even greener tinge, and she reluctantly decided that to go on was the only thing to be done.

Dr. Gerard was kind and reassuring. He went up behind her, holding his stick between her and the sheer drop like a balustrade and she confessed that the illusion of a rail did much to conquer the feeling of vertigo.

Sarah, panting a little, turned to the dragoman, Mahmoud, who in spite of his ample proportions showed no signs of distress.

"Don't you ever have trouble getting people up here?" she asked. "Elderly ones, I mean."

"Always—always we have trouble," agreed Mahmoud serenely.

"Do you always try to take them?" Mahmoud shrugged his thick shoulders.

"They like to come. They have paid money to see these things. They wish to see them. The Bedouin guides are very clever, very sure-footed—always they manage."

They arrived at last at the summit. Sarah drew a deep breath.

ALL around and below stretched the blood-red rocks, a strange and unbelievable country unparalleled anywhere. Here in the exquisite pure morning air they stood like gods, surveying a baser world, a world of flaring violence.

Here was, as the guide told them, the "Place of Sacrifice"—the "High Place."

He showed them the trough cut in the flat rock at their feet.

Sarah strayed away from the rest, from the glib phrases that flowed so readily from the dragoman's tongue. She sat on a rock, pushed her hands through her thick black hair, and gazed down on the world at her feet.

Presently she was aware of someone standing by her side. Dr. Gerard's voice said:

"You appreciate the apposition in the devil's temptation in the New Testament. Satan took Our Lord up to the summit of a mountain and showed him the world. 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.' How much greater the temptation up on high to be a God of Material Power."

Sarah assented, but her thoughts were so clearly elsewhere that Gerard observed her in some surprise.

"You are pondering something very deeply," he said.

"Yes, I am." She turned a perplexed face to him. "It's a wonderful idea—to have a place of sacrifice up





"There's something I have to say and do," he said. "Once I've proved that I'm not a coward, then I shan't be ashamed to come to you"

ILLUSTRATED BY MARIO COOPER

here. I think, sometimes, don't you, that a sacrifice is necessary. . . . I mean, one can have too much regard for life. Death isn't really so important as we make out."

"If you feel that, Miss King, you should not have adopted our profession. To us, Death is and must always be the Enemy."

Sarah shivered. "Yes, I suppose you're right. And yet, so often, death might solve a problem. It might mean, even, fuller life. . . ."

"It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people," quoted Gerard gravely.

Sarah turned a startled face on him.

"I didn't mean—"

She broke off. Jefferson Cope was approaching them.

"Now this is really a most remarkable spot," he declared. "Most remarkable, and I'm only too pleased not to have missed it. I don't mind confessing that though Mrs. Boynton is certainly a most remarkable woman—I greatly admire her pluck in being determined to come here—it does certainly complicate matters traveling with her. Her health is poor, and I suppose it naturally makes her a little inconsiderate of other people's feelings, but it does not seem to occur to her that her family might like occasionally to go on excursions without her. She's just so used to them clustering round her that I suppose she doesn't think—"

Mr. Cope broke off. His nice, kindly face looked a little disturbed and uncomfortable.

"You know," he said, "I heard a piece of information about Mrs. Boynton that disturbed me greatly."

SARAH was lost in her own thoughts again. Mr. Cope's voice just flowed pleasantly in her ears like the agreeable murmur of a remote stream, but Dr. Gerard said:

"Indeed? What was it?"

"My informant was a lady I came across in the hotel at Tiberias. It concerned a servant girl who had been in Mrs. Boynton's employ. This girl, I gather, was—had—"

Mr. Cope paused, glanced delicately at Sarah and lowered his voice: "She was going to have a child. The old lady, it seemed, discovered this but was apparently quite kind to the girl. Then a few weeks before the child was born she turned her out of the house."

Dr. Gerard's eyebrows went up. "Ah," he said reflectively.

"My informant seemed very positive of her facts. I don't know whether you agree with me, but that seems to me a very cruel and heartless thing to do. I cannot understand—"

Dr. Gerard interrupted him:

"You should try to. That incident, I have no doubt, gave Mrs. Boynton a good deal of quiet enjoyment."

Mr. Cope turned a shocked face on him.

"No, sir," he said with emphasis. "That I cannot believe. Such an idea is quite inconceivable."

Softly Dr. Gerard quoted:

"So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comfort; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comfort. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun . . ."

He broke off and said:

"My dear sir, I have made a life's study of the strange things that go on in the human mind. It is no good turning one's face only to the fairer side of life. Below the decencies and conventions of everyday life there lies a vast reservoir of strange things. There is such a thing, for instance, as delight in cruelty for its own sake. But when you have found that, there is something deeper still. The desire, profound and pitiful, to be appreciated. If that (Continued on page 59)



"Because of that, Peter," she said, "we cannot see each other any more. Not any more"

EARL CORDREY

Life Class

By David Hoadley Munroe

IF YOU dined at the Maisonette Russe in the Rue de Verneuil during the winter of 1926-27, you will remember her—a slim girl, not very tall, with a mass of corn-colored hair and preternaturally grave, midnight-blue eyes in a white face. She sang three times every night, wandering slowly among the tables in a black taffeta dress cut well off the shoulders; and after that winter, when she was not there any more, quite a lot of people stopped going to the Maisonette.

She could not really sing. Although her speaking voice was lovely, with a soft Russian throatiness that curled around the words, warming them, she had no "voice." But the diners ceased talking the moment she appeared, and they listened in pin-dropping silence while she sang weary, sad songs, her voice low and husky, so that people cried. When she had finished you could hear the talk going about the room, of how young she was to be so sad, so serious-minded; and then she would burst into a wild, rapid, leaping song, and break off in the middle to laugh suddenly, a gay, excited laugh that filled the room with a sort of electric vitality; and Americans there would say, "Well, that's the Russian temperament for you!" and, "Why, she's really beautiful when she laughs!"

The story of a girl who placed duty before love—and the man who thought she was doing him a great injustice

Only a few, a very few, ever guessed how hard it was for her to laugh like that, or realized that even while she was laughing she was terribly unhappy.

HER name was Nadya, and she was an aristocrat. Being an aristocrat did not matter much to her now, but it had mattered once: it had put her, in January of 1925, in a Moscow prison. Her father and mother were there too, and her mother was ill. The prison was quite clean, with a good doctor, and it had a window from which they could see a great sign that said, "Comrades! We are the builders of a new life!" But neither the sign nor the doctor nor the cleanness did her mother any good. Her mother died; and next morning, the morning of Nadya's nineteenth birthday, her father was taken out and shot. He had done many things, consciously and intentionally, against the government, so that Nadya never questioned the justice of it; but that didn't make it any easier to bear when the shots came to her faintly

through the cotton she had stuffed in her ears.

For three days, not caring very much, she wondered why she was still alive. On the fourth she found out. He was a commissar, a big, bulky man named Boris Kareshenko, who had been born a peasant in the Ukraine. He told Nadya that perhaps he could get her off. He told her, looking her up and down with his black, round eyes, that if she would marry him, he would give her a divorce at the end of a year, and send her safely out of Russia. If not—he shrugged, and walked stolidly away. He was not an attractive man.

Nadya married him. She found that she didn't want to die, and it was her only chance. Also, eight years of the Revolution had made her a realist. Not bitter, she was never bitter about anything, but a realist, and very practical—so much so that she scarcely blamed Boris. In her experience men took what they wanted if they could get it; she actually felt that Boris had been, in the

circumstances, remarkably generous. He could have taken her quite easily without marriage; and after all, as she said to Peter Browning in Paris, much later, no one had made Boris promise to let her go at the end of a year and certainly no one had made him keep that promise.

Because he did keep it. A month after they were married Boris' government shifted him to Soviet headquarters in Paris; he took Nadya with him and now—it was the spring of 1926—they were in process of being divorced.

PETER BROWNING, of course, blamed Boris rather thoroughly. Life had not made Peter a realist; his twenty-five years had been spent, pleasantly, in America. He was a lanky boy with a dark, quick face, and brown eyes that adored her openly, gaily. But when Nadya told him, smiling a little, that perhaps it was foolish to hate Boris so when he might have done things very much worse, his brown eyes would harden. He would stare straight in front of him, holding his black head rigid, and he would say grimly:

"Yes. He might have done any number of rotten things, some of 'em a lot worse. But that doesn't keep the thing he did do from being rotten."

"But he has been good to me," Nadya