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Opening Extract from...

Death on the Nile

Written by Agatha Christie

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DEATH ON THE NILE

AGATHA CHRISTIE

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TO

SYBIL BURNETT

WHO ALSO LOVES WANDERING ABOUT

THE WORLD

PART I

CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

CHAPTER ONE

i

LINNET RIDGEWAY!

"That's *Her!*" said Mr. Burnaby, the landlord of the Three Crowns.

He nudged his companion.

The two men stared with round bucolic eyes and slightly open mouths.

A big scarlet Rolls Royce had just stopped in front of the local post office.

A girl jumped out, a girl without a hat and wearing a frock that looked (but only *looked*) simple. A girl with golden hair and straight autocratic features—a girl with a lovely shape—a girl such as was seldom seen in Malton-under-Wode.

With a quick imperative step she passed into the post office.

"That's her!" said Mr. Burnaby again. And he went on in a low awed voice. "Millions she's got. . . . Going to spend thousands on the place. Swimming pools there's going to be, and Italian gardens and a ballroom and half of the house pulled down and rebuilt . . ."

"She'll bring money into the town," said his friend.

He was a lean seedy-looking man. His tone was envious and grudging.

Mr. Burnaby agreed.

"Yes, it's a great thing for Malton-under-Wode. A great thing it is."

Mr. Burnaby was complacent about it.

"Wake us all up proper," he added.

"Bit of a difference from Sir George," said the other.

"Ah, it was the 'orses did for him," said Mr. Burnaby indulgently. "Never 'ad no luck."

"What did he get for the place?"

" A cool sixty thousand, so I've heard."

The lean man whistled.

Mr. Burnaby went on triumphantly :

" And they say she'll have spent another sixty thousand before she's finished ! "

" Wicked ! " said the lean man. " Where'd she *get* all that money from ? "

" America, so I've heard. Her mother was the only daughter of one of those millionaire blokes. Quite like the pictures, isn't it ? "

The girl came out of the post office and climbed into the car.

As she drove off the lean man followed her with his eyes.

He muttered':

" It seems all wrong to me—her looking like that. Money *and* looks—it's too much ! If a girl's as rich as that she's no right to be a good-looker as well. And she *is* a good-looker . . . Got everything that girl has. Doesn't seem fair . . ."

ii

Extract from the social column of the *Daily Blague.*

" Among those supping at Chez Ma Tante I noticed beautiful Linnet Ridgeway. She was with the Hon. Joanna Southwood, Lord Windlesham and Mr. Toby Bryce. Miss Ridgeway, as every one knows, is the daughter of Melhuish Ridgeway who married Anna Hartz. She inherits from her grandfather, Leopold Hartz, an immense fortune. The lovely Linnet is the sensation of the moment, and it is rumoured that an engagement may be announced shortly. Certainly Lord Windlesham seemed very épris ! "

iii

The Hon. Joanna Southwood said :

" Darling, I think it's going to be all perfectly *marvellous ! "*

She was sitting in Linnet Ridgeway's bedroom at Wode Hall.

From the window the eye passed over the gardens to open country with blue shadows of woodlands.

"It's rather perfect, isn't it?" said Linnet.

She leaned her arms on the window-sill. Her face was eager, alive, dynamic. Beside her, Joanna Southwood seemed, somehow, a little dim—a tall, thin young woman of twenty-seven, with a long clever face and freakishly plucked eyebrows.

"And you've done so much in the time! Did you have lots of architects and things?"

"Three."

"What are architects like? I don't think I've ever met any."

"They were all right. I found them rather unpractical sometimes."

"Darling, you soon put *that* right! You are the *most* practical creature!"

Joanna picked up a string of pearls from the dressing-table.

"I suppose these are real, aren't they, Linnet?"

"Of course."

"I know it's 'of course' to you, my sweet, but it wouldn't be to most people. Heavily cultured or even Woolworth! Darling, they really are *incredible*, so exquisitely matched. They must be worth the *most* fabulous sums!"

"Rather vulgar, you think?"

"No, not at all—just pure beauty. What *are* they worth?"

"About fifty thousand."

"What a lovely lot of money! Aren't you afraid of having them stolen?"

"No, I always wear them—and anyway they're insured."

"Let me wear them till dinner-time, will you, darling? It would give me such a thrill."

Linnet laughed.

"Of course, if you like."

" You know, Linnet, I really do envy you. You've simply got *everything*. Here you are at twenty, your own mistress, with any amount of money, looks, superb health. You've even got *brains!* When are you twenty-one ? "

" Next June. I shall have a grand coming-of-age party in London."

" And then are you going to marry Charles Windlesham ? All the dreadful little gossip writers are getting so excited about it. And he really is frightfully devoted."

Linnet shrugged her shoulders.

" I don't know. I don't really want to marry any one yet."

" Darling, how right you are ! It's never quite the same afterwards, is it ? "

The telephone shrilled and Linnet went to it.

" Yes ? Yes ? "

The butler's voice answered her.

" Miss de Bellefort is on the line. Shall I put her through."

" Bellefort ? Oh, of course, yes, put her through."

A click and a voice, an eager, soft, slightly breathless voice.

" Hallo, is that Miss Ridgeway ? *Linnet!* "

" *Jackie darling!* I haven't heard anything of you for ages and *ages!* "

" I know. It's awful. Linnet, I want to see you terribly."

" Darling, can't you come down here ? My new toy. I'd love to show it to you."

" That's just what I want to do."

" Well, jump into a train or a car."

" Right, I will. A frightfully dilapidated two-seater. I bought it for fifteen pounds and some days it goes beautifully. But it has moods. If I haven't arrived by tea-time you'll know it's had a mood. So long, my sweet."

Linnet replaced the receiver. She crossed back to Joanna.

" That's my oldest friend, Jacqueline de Bellefort. We were together at a convent in Paris. She's had the most terribly bad luck. Her father was a French Count, her mother was American—a Southerner. The father went off with some woman, and her mother lost all her money in the Wall Street crash. Jackie was left absolutely broke. I don't know how she's managed to get along the last two years."

Joanna was polishing her deep blood-coloured nails with her friend's nail pad. She lent back with her head on one side scrutinising the effect.

" Darling," she drawled, " won't that be rather *tiresome* ? If any misfortunes happen to my friends I always drop them *at once* ! It sounds heartless, but it saves such a lot of trouble later ! They always want to borrow money off you, or else they start a dress-making business and you have to get the most terrible clothes from them. Or they paint lampshades, or do Batik scarves."

" So if I lost all my money, you'd drop me to-morrow ? "

" Yes, darling, I would. You can't say I'm not honest about it ! I only like successful people. And you'll find that's true of nearly everybody—only most people won't admit it. They just say that ' really they can't put up with Mary or Emily or Pamela any more ! Her troubles have made her so *bitter* and peculiar, poor dear ! ' "

" How beastly you are, Joanna ! "

" I'm only on the make, like every one else."

" *I*'m not on the make ! "

" For obvious reasons ! You don't have to be sordid when good-looking, middle-aged American trustees pay you over a vast allowance every quarter."

" And you're wrong about Jacqueline," said Linnet. " She's not a sponge. I've wanted to help her but she won't let me. She's as proud as the devil."

" What's she in such a hurry to see you for ? I'll bet she wants something ! You just wait and see."

" She sounded excited about something," admitted

Linnet. " Jackie always did get frightfully worked up over things. She once stuck a penknife into some one ! "

" Darling, how thrilling ! "

" A boy who was teasing a dog. Jackie tried to get him to stop. He wouldn't. She pulled him and shook him but he was much stronger than she was, and at last she whipped out a penknife and plunged it right into him. There was the *most* awful row ! "

" I should think so. It sounds most uncomfortable ! "

Linnet's maid entered the room. With a murmured word of apology, she took down a dress from the wardrobe and went out of the room with it.

" What's the matter with Marie ? " asked Joanna. " She's been crying."

" Poor thing. You know I told you she wanted to marry a man who has a job in Egypt. She didn't know much about him so I thought I'd better make sure he was all right. It turned out that he had a wife already—and three children."

" What a lot of enemies you must make, Linnet."

" Enemies ? " Linnet looked surprised.

Joanna nodded and helped herself to a cigarette.

" Enemies, my sweet. You're so devastatingly efficient. And you're so frightfully good at doing the right thing."

Linnet laughed.

" Why, I haven't got an enemy in the world ! "

iv

Lord Windlesham sat under the cedar tree. His eyes rested on the graceful proportions of Wode Hall. There was nothing to mar its old-world beauty, the new buildings and additions were out of sight round the corner. It was a fair and peaceful sight bathed in the autumn sunshine. Nevertheless, as he gazed, it was no longer Wode Hall that Charles Windlesham saw. Instead, he seemed to see a more imposing Elizabethan mansion, a long sweep of park, a bleaker back-