

The Unfinished Clue (Country House Mysteries, 3)

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A houseful of people he loathes is not Sir Arthur's worst problem?

It should have been a lovely English country-house weekend. But the unfortunate guest-list is enough to exasperate a saint, and the host, Sir Arthur Billington-Smith, is an abusive wretch hated by everyone from his disinherited son to his wife's stoic would-be lover. When Sir Arthur is found stabbed to death, no one is particularly grieved—and no one has an alibi. The unhappy guests find themselves under the scrutiny of Scotland Yard's cool-headed Inspector Harding, who has solved tough cases before—but this time, the talented young inspector discovers much more than he's bargained for.

PRAISE FOR GEORGETTE HEYER:

"Miss Heyer has the delightful talent of blending humor with mystery."
Boston Evening Transcript

"Heyer is an author to read?this means you!"
New York Herald Tribune

"Miss Heyer's characters and dialogue are an abiding delight to me... I have seldom met people to whom I have taken so violent a fancy from the word 'Go.'"
Dorothy L. Sayers

The late Georgette Heyer was a very private woman. Her historical novels have charmed and delighted millions of readers for decades, though she rarely reached out to the public to discuss her works or personal life. She was born in Wimbledon in August 1902, and her first novel, *The Black Moth*, published when she was 19, was an instant success.

Heyer published 56 books over the next 53 years, until her death from lung cancer in 1974. Her work included Regency novels, mysteries and historical fiction. Known also as the Queen of Regency romance, Heyer was legendary for her research, historical accuracy and her extraordinary plots and characterizations. Her last book, *My Lord John*, was published posthumously in 1975. She was married to George Ronald Rougier, a barrister, and they had one son, Richard.

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It was apparent to Miss Fawcett within one minute of her arrival at the Grange that her host was not in the best of tempers. He met her in the hall, not, she believed, of design, and favoured her with a nod. 'It's you, is it?' he said ungraciously. 'Somewhat unexpected, this visit, I must say. Hope you had a good journey.'

Miss Fawcett was a young lady not easily discouraged. Moreover, she had been General Sir Arthur Billington-Smith's sister-in-law for five years, and cherished no illusions about him. She shook him briskly by the hand, and replied with perfect equanimity: 'You know quite well it's impossible to have a good journey on this rotten line, Arthur. And how you can say I'm unexpected when I sent an expensive telegram to prepare you both for the joy in store for you -'

The General's scowl deepened. 'Short notice, you'll admit!' he said. 'I suppose you've brought a ridiculous quantity of baggage?'

'Something tells me,' remarked Miss Fawcett intelligently, 'that I'm not really welcome.'

'Oh, I've no doubt Fay's delighted!' replied the General, with a short laugh. 'Though where she is I don't know. She packs the house with visitors, but can't trouble herself to be here when they arrive.'

At this moment his erring wife came down the stairs. 'Oh, darling!' she said in a voice that held a plaintive note. 'How lovely to see you! How are you?'

Miss Fawcett embraced her warmly. 'Hullo, Fay! Why didn't you send a wire to put me off? Arthur's all upset about it.'

The large, rather strained blue eyes flew apprehensively to the General's face. 'Oh, no!' Fay said. 'Arthur doesn't mind having you, Dinah. Do you, Arthur dear?'

'Oh, not at all!' said the General. 'You'd better take her up to her room instead of keeping her standing about in the hall.'

'Yes, of course,' Fay said. 'You'd like to come up, wouldn't you, Dinah?'

This was said a trifle beseechingly, and Miss Fawcett, who wore all the signs of one about to do battle, relaxed, and agreed that she would like to go up to her room.

'I've had to put you in the little west room,' Fay told her. 'I knew you wouldn't mind. We're - we're rather full up.'

'Yes, so I gathered,' said Dinah, rounding the bend of the staircase. 'It seems to be worrying little Arthur.'

She had a clear, carrying voice. Fay glanced quickly down the stairs. 'Dinah, please!' she begged.

Dinah threw her a glance of slightly scornful affection, and replied incorrigibly: 'All right, but it's putting an awful strain on me.'

They ascended the remaining stairs in silence, but as soon as the door of the west room was securely shut on them Dinah demanded to know what was the matter with Arthur.

Lady Billington-Smith sank down on to a chair, and put up one of her thin hands to her head, pushing the pale gold hair off her brow in a nervous gesture peculiar to her. 'Something dreadful has happened,' she answered. 'It has upset Arthur terribly.'

'Ha!' said Dinah, casting her hat on to the bed. 'The cook burned his Sacred Porridge, I suppose.'

A slight smile flickered across her sister's face. 'Oh, don't be an ass, Dinah, for heaven's sake!'

'Well, that was it the last time I came,' said Dinah, hunting in her dressing-case for a comb.

'This is much worse. It's Geoffrey.'

'Dipped again?' inquired Miss Fawcett sympathetically. 'Worse than that, even. He's engaged to be married. At least, he says he is.'

Miss Fawcett combed out her short brown locks, and began to powder her nose. 'Barmaid, or tobacconist's assistant?' she asked, as one versed in the follies of young men.

'Neither. She's a cabaret dancer.'

Miss Fawcett gave a crow of laughter. 'Oh, no! No cabaret dancer would fall for Geoffrey.'

'Well, this one has. And it isn't even as though she's English. She's a Mexican.' Lady Billington-Smith allowed this piece of information to sink in, and followed it up by a final announcement. 'And he's bringing her here to spend the week-end.'

'But how rich! how luscious!' exclaimed Dinah. 'I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Has Geoffrey gone mad, do you suppose? Who is the girl?'

'Her name,' replied Fay, 'is Lola de Silva. It sounds awfully improbable, doesn't it? It - it put Arthur off right away. I've had rather a dreadful time with him, because Geoffrey wrote to me, not to his father, and - and asked me to break the news. I'm afraid Geoffrey's quite infatuated. He seems to think Arthur has only to see this Lola person and he'll fall for her.'

'The joys of being a stepmother,' commented Dinah. 'Is that what Arthur meant when he said that you'd packed the house full of people?'

'Partly, I expect. But he's blaming me for having the Hallidays now, just because he'd rather they weren't here when Geoffrey comes.'

'And who,' asked Dinah, 'are the Hallidays? Kindly enumerate.'

'People we met in the south of France,' replied Fay, a little guardedly. 'He was knocked up in the War, and she's - she's rather pretty, and smart.' She raised her eyes to her sister's face and coloured faintly. 'Well, you're bound to see it. Arthur flirts with her. That's why they're here.'

'More fool you to invite them,' said Dinah sternly.

'You don't understand. Arthur made me.' Dinah snorted.

'It's no good, Dinah. You're the fighting sort, and I'm not. Anyway, it doesn't matter. He doesn't mean anything serious, and if it keeps him in a good temper I don't mind.'

'Anyone else here?' asked Dinah, abandoning a hopeless topic.

'Yes, Francis. He arrived in time for lunch.'

Dinah grimaced. 'If I'd known he was going to be here I wouldn't have come. What's he turned up for? To touch dear Uncle Arthur? That'll make it a very merry party. Anyone else?'

Fay got up, apparently to rearrange the flowers that stood in a vase on the dressing-table. 'Only Stephen Guest,' she replied. 'He said he'd be here in time for tea.'

'Oh!' said Dinah.

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