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Christie*

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THE
THIRD-FLOOR
FLAT

HERCULE
POIROT

Agatha Christie
The Third-Floor Flat: A
Hercule Poirot Short Story

Аннотация

A classic Agatha Christie short story, available individually for the first time as an ebook. Locked out of her apartment, a woman tries to gain entry from the flat downstairs – where she discovers a dead body. Fortunately, a Belgian detective is renting a flat in the same building...

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The Third-Floor Flat
A Short Story
by Agatha Christie



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Copyright

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The Third-Floor Flat

‘The Third-Floor Flat’ was first published in *Hutchinson’s Story Magazine*, January 1929.

‘Bother!’ said Pat.

With a deepening frown she rummaged wildly in the silken trifle she called an evening bag. Two young men and another girl watched her anxiously. They were all standing outside the closed door of Patricia Garnett’s flat.

‘It’s no good,’ said Pat. ‘It’s not there. And now what shall we do?’

‘What is life without a latchkey?’ murmured Jimmy Faulkener.

He was a short, broad-shouldered young man, with good-tempered blue eyes.

Pat turned on him angrily. ‘Don’t make jokes, Jimmy. This is serious.’

‘Look again, Pat,’ said Donovan Bailey. ‘It must be there somewhere.’

He had a lazy, pleasant voice that matched his lean, dark figure.

‘If you ever brought it out,’ said the other girl, Mildred Hope.

‘Of course I brought it out,’ said Pat. ‘I believe I gave it to one of you two.’ She turned on the men accusingly. ‘I told Donovan to take it for me.’

But she was not to find a scapegoat so easily. Donovan put in

a firm disclaimer, and Jimmy backed him up.

‘I saw you put it in your bag, myself,’ said Jimmy.

‘Well, then, one of you dropped it out when you picked up my bag. I’ve dropped it once or twice.’

‘Once or twice!’ said Donovan. ‘You’ve dropped it a dozen times at least, besides leaving it behind on every possible occasion.’

‘I can’t see why everything on earth doesn’t drop out of it the whole time,’ said Jimmy.

‘The point is – how are we going to get in?’ said Mildred.

She was a sensible girl, who kept to the point, but she was not nearly so attractive as the impulsive and troublesome Pat.

All four of them regarded the closed door blankly.

‘Couldn’t the porter help?’ suggested Jimmy. ‘Hasn’t he got a master key or something of that kind?’

Pat shook her head. There were only two keys. One was inside the flat hung up in the kitchen and the other was – or should be – in the maligned bag.

‘If only the flat were on the ground floor,’ wailed Pat. ‘We could have broken open a window or something. Donovan, you wouldn’t like to be a cat burglar, would you?’

Donovan declined firmly but politely to be a cat burglar.

‘A flat on the fourth floor is a bit of an undertaking,’ said Jimmy.

‘How about a fire-escape?’ suggested Donovan.

‘There isn’t one.’

‘There should be,’ said Jimmy. ‘A building five storeys high ought to have a fire-escape.’

‘I dare say,’ said Pat. ‘But what should be doesn’t help us. How am I ever to get into my flat?’

‘Isn’t there a sort of thingummybob?’ said Donovan. ‘A thing the tradesmen send up chops and brussels sprouts in?’

‘The service lift,’ said Pat. ‘Oh yes, but it’s only a sort of wire-basket thing. Oh wait – I know. What about the coal lift?’

‘Now that,’ said Donovan, ‘is an idea.’

Mildred made a discouraging suggestion. ‘It’ll be bolted,’ she said. ‘In Pat’s kitchen, I mean, on the inside.’

But the idea was instantly negated.

‘Don’t you believe it,’ said Donovan.

‘Not in *Pat’s* kitchen,’ said Jimmy. ‘Pat never locks and bolts things.’

‘I don’t think it’s bolted,’ said Pat. ‘I took the dustbin off this morning, and I’m sure I never bolted it afterwards, and I don’t think I’ve been near it since.’

‘Well,’ said Donovan, ‘that fact’s going to be very useful to us tonight, but, all the same, young Pat, let me point out to you that these slack habits are leaving you at the mercy of burglars – non-feline – every night.’

Pat disregarded these admonitions.

‘Come on,’ she cried, and began racing down the four flights of stairs. The others followed her. Pat led them through a dark recess, apparently full to overflowing of perambulators, and

through another door into the well of the flats, and guided them to the right lift. There was, at the moment, a dustbin on it. Donovan lifted it off and stepped gingerly on to the platform in its place. He wrinkled up his nose.

‘A little noisome,’ he remarked. ‘But what of that? Do I go alone on this venture or is anyone coming with me?’

‘I’ll come, too,’ said Jimmy.

He stepped on by Donovan’s side.

‘I suppose the lift will bear me,’ he added doubtfully.

‘You can’t weigh much more than a ton of coal,’ said Pat, who had never been particularly strong on her weights-and-measures table.

‘And, anyway, we shall soon find out,’ said Donovan cheerfully, as he hauled on the rope.

With a grinding noise they disappeared from sight.

‘This thing makes an awful noise,’ remarked Jimmy, as they passed up through blackness. ‘What will the people in the other flats think?’

‘Ghosts or burglars, I expect,’ said Donovan. ‘Hauling this rope is quite heavy work. The porter of Friars Mansions does more work than I ever suspected. I say, Jimmy, old son, are you counting the floors?’

‘Oh, Lord! No. I forgot about it.’

‘Well, I have, which is just as well. That’s the third we’re passing now. The next is ours.’

‘And now, I suppose,’ grumbled Jimmy, ‘we shall find that Pat

did bolt the door after all.'

But these fears were unfounded. The wooden door swung back at a touch, and Donovan and Jimmy stepped out into the inky blackness of Pat's kitchen.

'We ought to have a torch for this wild night work,' exclaimed Donovan. 'If I know Pat, everything's on the floor, and we shall smash endless crockery before I can get to the light switch. Don't move about, Jimmy, till I get the light on.'

He felt his way cautiously over the floor, uttering one fervent 'Damn!' as a corner of the kitchen table took him unawares in the ribs. He reached the switch, and in another moment another 'Damn!' floated out of the darkness.

'What's the matter?' asked Jimmy.

'Light won't come on. Dud bulb, I suppose. Wait a minute. I'll turn the sitting-room light on.'

The sitting-room was the door immediately across the passage. Jimmy heard Donovan go out of the door, and presently fresh muffled curses reached him. He himself edged his way cautiously across the kitchen.

'What's the matter?'

'I don't know. Rooms get bewitched at night, I believe. Everything seems to be in a different place. Chairs and tables where you least expected them. Oh, hell! Here's another!'

But at this moment Jimmy fortunately connected with the electric-light switch and pressed it down. In another minute two young men were looking at each other in silent horror.

This room was not Pat's sitting-room. They were in the wrong flat.

To begin with, the room was about ten times more crowded than Pat's, which explained Donovan's pathetic bewilderment at repeatedly cannoning into chairs and tables. There was a large round table in the centre of the room covered with a baize cloth, and there was an aspidistra in the window. It was, in fact, the kind of room whose owner, the young men felt sure, would be difficult to explain to. With silent horror they gazed down at the table, on which lay a little pile of letters.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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