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Sparkling Cyanide: A BBC Radio 4 Full-Cast Drama



Synopsis

"Rosemary for Remembrance." Published in 1945, *Sparkling Cyanide* is all about remembrance. It begins with six characters recalling the horrific death of Rosemary Barton, a beautiful but shallow young heiress poisoned by a cyanide-spiked glass of champagne while celebrating her birthday at a smart London restaurant. Rosemary haunts all six characters, each of them a suspect, throughout the story—and it's not until her killer is found and her ghost laid to rest that the group can move on, though they will never forget. With a distinguished cast including Naomi Frederick, Peter Wight, and Sean Baker, this wonderfully entertaining production retains the thrill of Agatha Christie's clever, compulsive story.²

CDs. 1 hr 30 mins.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The denouement will probably come as a surprise to nine readers out of ten" *New York Times*

"SPARKLING CYANIDE is the one ... which I should take with me to a desert island; for I find in it a seriousness and a psychological insight unparalleled in the author's other works.' *Times Literary Supplement* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Six people sit down to a sumptuous meal at a table laid for seven. In front of the empty place is a sprig of rosemary—"rosemary for remembrance." A strange sentiment considering no one is likely to forget the night, exactly a year ago, that Rosemary Barton died at exactly the same table, her beautiful face unrecognizable, convulsed with pain and horror. But then Rosemary had always

been memorable – she had the ability to arouse strong passions in most people she met. In one case, strong enough to kill. . . . --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I thought I had it figured out, almost put the book down because of the fact it seemed so obvious. The only reason I continued is because I know Agatha Christie is anything but predictable. Let's just say there's a nice surprise for you at the end and you definitely won't expect it. I can honestly say she never disappoints. I prefer her writing to modern mysteries any day. On another note- This isn't in my top favorites by AC, but it's still a good (& quick) read. It also is not a Poirot or Marple mystery, for those wondering.

Christie pulls out all the stops in this one. The story is told mostly in flashbacks or remembrances of the main characters. They are all the suspects in the death of Rosemary Barton, a beautiful socialite who seems to have everything. There are many plot twists in this one all centering around a dinner party given at a famous London restaurant. Rosemary has money and beauty, her little sister has none of these. Rosemary is in love with a married man, does his wife know, does her husband know? There's a darkhorse character whom she gets the goods on. Is he angry enough to kill her? Rosemary's husband's secretary is secretly in love with him. Is she the killer? Just when you think you have it figured out, Christie turns the tables.

This work is also sold under its original U.S. title, *A Remembered Death* (original British Title - *Sparkling Cyanide*), a fact Christie fans find irritating as publishers have changed titles on a number of her popular books - this unnecessary practice has led to considerable confusion for readers. I'm reviewing the original U.S. title here, a 1964 7th printing Pocket Books paperback edition (first appearing in 1947) which sports the cool black, red, and school bus yellow cover, 214 pages. I should also mention that some of these publishers have more recently begun editing, redacting, and even (unscrupulously) re-writing some of Christie's actual words which is why I much prefer the older editions. But the one I've cited as reviewing here is terrific if you can find it. **THE STORY:** A young heiress of stunning appearance weds an older gentleman, a man blinded by love, who is thus unable to recognize his lovely bride's personal failings as a wife. She soon expands her illicit romantic activities with her enthusiastic, dynamic, and passionate paramours. But she doesn't get to engage in her concupiscent behavior for too long because, during an elaborate birthday supper sponsored by her generous husband at a high-end restaurant, she drops dead of cyanide

poisoning. Even though the death is suspicious and likely suspects abound, the coroner ultimately rules the death a suicide, citing the decedent's depression subsequent to her having suffered from the flu. After a year passes, the husband becomes convinced of two actualities: 1. His wife had been having love affairs behind his back. 2. She was murdered by someone at the dinner table. These epiphanies were chiefly the result of anonymous letters which he began receiving, advising him directly of the latter thought and strongly implying the former. So the distraught husband calls in his lifelong friend and man-of-the-world, Colonel Race, to aid him in trapping the killer. Unfortunately this widower's meticulous plan, which involved a second celebratory dinner with all the same guests present as before and conducted at the same restaurant, gives rise to a second murder. That last comment is not a spoiler as all this is revealed by the book's back cover teaser -- Christie wanted us to know all this up front. The resolution is quite clever and most readers will anticipate neither the murderer nor the method. Christie devotees have previously encountered the fictional Colonel Race, formerly of Great Britain's MI-5 organization, a man who also paired up with the renowned Hercule Poirot in *Cards on the Table* (Hercule Poirot). Race's role is somewhat unique to Christie mysteries in that he functions as a (semi-private) "helper detective" to the primary investigator who in this case is Scotland Yard Inspector Kemp, (whom, it is further noted, had been mentored by the more well-known and now-retired Inspector Battle, ergo: *Towards Zero* (St. Martin's Minotaur Mysteries).) While it is true that even Hercule Poirot serves as a secondary detective to the Scotland Yard one most of the time, (as does Miss Marple, Tommy and Tuppence, etc.), the reader still knows that it will be Poirot, and not the Scotland Yard sleuth, who actually resolves the case. But here, Colonel Race's role is truly a supplemental and secondary one. While this mystery is a pretty good read overall, it's not, from my view, Christie's best effort. But since she generated a total of over eighty mysteries, romance novels, and plays it's logical that not every work can rank among "the very best." Of British cozy murder mysteries in general, (all authors), this one easily falls within the top twenty percent because Christie was simply that skilled in the art. This book was first published in 1945 by Dodd, Mead. For those who are just commencing to explore the plethora of Agatha Christie mysteries there are probably better starting points. I would recommend *Agatha Christie's Mysterious Affair at Styles* (Hercule Poirot Mysteries); *Murder at the Vicarage: A Miss Marple Mystery* (Agatha Christie Collection), or; *By the Pricking of My Thumbs*. Highly recommended for all Christie fans and generally recommended for those who enjoy various authors of the cozy murder genre.

Classic Agatha Christie. Never assume the obvious. I enjoy the early language characteristics and

formal writing Christie uses as that was the norm "back then". And isn't it odd that "back then" continues to sell so many books in whatever form now? She is actually refreshing and uses, I think, a minimum of words for all her work. Sure, she could have flowered up nearly every scene - and your book would weigh 15 pounds printed. But being the master that she was, she wrote in an economical style. Character development was as usual spare to start with and developed as the plot did. Who am I to criticize even one chapter of Dame Agatha Christie's work?

I suppose it was because Colonel Race is the detective featured, but, before checking, I thought this to be quite an early Christie. Not so, of course, although the original, a Hercule Poirot short story entitled, "Yellow Iris", was published in July 1937, giving me half-credit. Never mind, whenever written, it is good, if not the best of, Agatha Christie. The puzzle is an interesting one, the characters well-drawn, and the writing style, of course, authentic Christie. Colonel Race does not possess the color of Poirot or Marple, but he is adequate for the occasion. Christie does give us a number of surprises before the denouement so that there are no dull spots waiting for something to happen. All-in-all a treat for every Christie fan and, I should think, also, for any fan of the classic style mystery.

I love Agatha Christie Books, and I can't say I've ever read one I did not like. So, if you like a good, sometimes suspenseful murder mystery then you should like her books. They are generally set in Europe and are set in the 1930ish - 1960ish? time period. So the way of speaking in the book can (on some of her books) sometimes take some getting used to. But, like I said, pretty good solid murder mystery.

Delightful classic Agatha Christie! She offers all the clues, wonderfully developed characters, and then offers you the reader, a chance to solve it. The reality of her characters never fails to astound me!! I think I may go back and read all of her books!

I have read almost all of Agatha Christie's books but somehow missed this one. What a delight it was to read. And the plot was another diabolically clever twist that she excels at. Thoroughly enjoyed it!

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