

# The HOLLOW

by Hagar Christie

**SYNOPSIS**

Elderly Lady Lucy Angkatell discussed the problem of entering the incompatible group of guests she had invited to The Hollow for the coming week-end with young Midge Hardcastle, a distant relative. Outside of attractive Dr. John Christow and Gerda, his incredibly dull wife, the others were all members of the Angkatell clan: kindly Henrietta Savernake, successful sculptress; serious-minded young David Angkatell, university student; and quiet Edward Angkatell, whose unrequited love of Henrietta blinded him to the charms of Midge, who had adored him since childhood. Meanwhile, in their London studio, Henrietta was in the throes of completing her latest masterpiece—the blind Nausicaa. The search for just the right model had been long and arduous and, although the features of the girl she had finally chosen were perfect, the sordidness of her character had somehow managed to creep into Henrietta's finished work. Not even thoughts of John Christow, with whom Henrietta had been in love for the past six months, dispelled her dissatisfaction with the statue, and reluctantly, she destroyed it. In his Harley Street consulting room, John Christow sat pondering the cause of his increasing lassitude and irritability. Following lunch with the children, he and Gerda would drive to The Hollow . . . and Henrietta. His thoughts went back to an earlier chapter in his life, fifteen years ago, when he had been madly in love with glamorous Veronica Cray, rising young motion picture actress. He had broken their engagement when she refused to give up her career, and shortly after had married the prosaic Gerda, whose slavish devotion to him through the years had enabled him to pursue his beloved profession in peace.

**CHAPTER SIX**

In the dining room of the flat above the consulting room, Gerda Christow was staring at a joint of mutton.

Should she or should she not send it back to the kitchen to be kept warm?

If John was going to be much longer it would be cold—congealed, and that would be dreadful.

But, on the other hand, the last patient had gone, John would be up in a moment, if she sent it back there would be delay—John was so impatient. "But surely you knew I was just coming . . . There would be that tone of suppressed exasperation in his voice that she knew and dreaded. Besides, it would get overcooked, dried up—John hated overcooked meat.

But on the other hand he disliked cold food very much indeed. At any rate, the dish was nice and hot.

Her mind oscillated to and fro and her sense of misery and anxiety deepened.

The whole world had shrunk to a leg of mutton getting cold on a dish.

On the other side of the table her son Terence, aged twelve, said:

"Boric salts burn with a green flame, sodium salts are yellow."

Gerda looked distractedly across the table at his square freckled face. She had no idea what he was talking about.

"Did you know that, Mother?"

"Know what, dear?"

"About salts."

Gerda's eyes flew distractedly to the salt cellar. Yes, salt and pepper were on the table. That was all right. Last week Lewis had forgotten them and that had annoyed John. There was always something.

"It's one of the chemical tests," said Terence in a dreamy voice. "Jolly interesting, I think."

Zena, aged nine, with a pretty, vacuous face, whimpered:

"I want my dinner. Can't we start, Mother?"

"In a minute, dear; we must wait for Father."

"We could start," said Terence. "Father wouldn't mind. You know how fast he eats."

Gerda shook her head.

Crave the mutton? But she never could remember which was the right side to plunge the knife in. Of course, perhaps Lewis had put it the right way on the dish—but sometimes she didn't—and John was always annoyed if it was done the wrong way. And Gerda reflected desperately, it always was the wrong way when she did it. Oh, dear, how cold the gravy was getting—a skin was forming on the top of it—she must send it back—but then if John were just coming—and surely he would be coming now—

Her mind went around and

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