
THE ACCIDENTAL GATECRASHER

by

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Also published in the collection
Ghosts, Resolution & Revenge

The Accidental Gatecrasher:
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The Accidental Gatecrasher

‘For you, Miss.’ A huge bouquet that almost dwarfed the man holding it, was brandished at me through the open door.

‘No, it can’t be for me,’ I protested, for nobody knew I was there except Diane, the friend who had lent me her flat for the weekend, and I had only decided to take up her offer at the last minute.

‘Flat 2, Canterbury Mansions. That’s ‘ere innit?’

‘Yes, but--’

‘Sign please,’ he urged, impatiently thrusting a small hand-held device at me, ‘I’m double parked, don’t want to get a ticket.’

Assuming with a touch of envy that the bouquet was for Diane, I scribbled my signature then carried the flowers into the kitchen. I was about to put them in water when I noticed a small envelope attached to the cellophane wrapper. Removing it, I saw with exasperation that the address written on it wasn’t 2 but *12* Canterbury Mansions, which must be on one of the upper floors of the block. As I replaced the envelope, my stomach started to grumble. I hadn’t eaten anything since the previous evening and there was hardly any food in Diane’s tiny kitchen. Seeing that it was nearly midday, I decided to take the bouquet to its rightful owner, then find somewhere in the vicinity to have lunch.

Flat 12 was on the third floor. Exiting from the lift, I could hear a loud buzz of conversation punctuated by bursts of merriment. I quickly discovered that the noise was coming from Flat 12. The door was ajar and a blue and gold balloon inscribed with the number 50 was attached to the handle.

I rang the bell and waited. As no-one answered, I entered and found myself in a small anteroom full of coats, bags and shoes. Opposite the outer door was an inner one which was wide open. I crossed to it and stood uncertainly on the threshold, surveying the scene in front of me: a spacious and elegantly furnished room in which groups of people holding champagne glasses were chatting animatedly around a table laden with bowls and dishes of food. Balloons dangled from an enormous twinkling chandelier. A flotilla of greeting cards covered the top of a massive antique sideboard that took up almost the whole of one side of the room.

A woman with improbable orange hair and huge chandelier earrings bore down on me. She was wearing a turquoise catsuit of a kind called a *onesie*. It had very wide trouser legs.

She gazed at me for a second then shrieked, ‘Anna?’

I was taken aback. How did she know my name?

‘How *lovely* to see you!’ She beamed at me, revealing prominent teeth, then to my astonishment, swept me into an embrace and kissed me on both cheeks before plucking the bouquet from my hands. ‘These are *gorgeous*. So kind, darling! You shouldn’t have.’

‘No,’ I stuttered, ‘I’m sorry, they’re not from me...’

But she had already turned away and was thrusting the bouquet at a dumpy woman in

a frilly purple dress standing behind her. 'Be a darling, Monica. Put these in water for me, will you?'

'Of course, Gloria. What beautiful flowers!' Monica trotted obligingly away with the bouquet.

The woman called Gloria took me by the arm and drew me into the room. 'So tell me, darling, when did you arrive?'

'Late last night,' I answered truthfully.

She patted me on the cheek. 'And how was your journey? Not too tiring?'

I was surprised. The short train journey to Victoria Station had been crowded but not particularly arduous. 'No, it was fine, thank you.'

Her voice dropped to a whisper. 'I heard about your bit of trouble, Anna. I'm glad you're no longer with that bastard of a husband.'

I winced with embarrassment. Diane must have told her that Robert had left me for one of my closest friends. 'Well, it's over now,' I muttered. 'I've started divorce proceedings.'

'Good for you, darling!' she boomed. 'A clean slate is always best! And ...' she tapped her nose conspiratorially, '...a little bird told me someone else is already in the picture!'

I felt myself blush. Had Diane mentioned my revenge fling with Andy, Robert's personal trainer? How could she have been so indiscreet?

Gloria thrust a champagne flute into my hand. 'Have some champers, darling. Good for the soul!'

I took a sip and the cool liquid fizzed pleurably in my throat.

'How's your father?' she asked.

I was amazed. How did Gloria know my father? 'He's very well, thank you.'

She winked at me. 'He's a dark horse!'

'Is he?' Bewildered, I pictured my father in his flat cap, pottering around his allotment.

'An eye for the ladies, I've heard, since your mother died.'

I nearly choked on my champagne. My father - a widower for the last twelve years - always seemed more interested in his leeks and onions than "the ladies". Had he been leading a secret life I didn't know about?

Gloria drew me towards the buffet table. 'Do have something to eat, darling. Then you can tell me all about your exciting life!'

"Exciting" wasn't how I would have described my existence as a dental receptionist in Haywards Heath, but I didn't like to contradict her. I eyed the buffet longingly: a whole salmon, slices of cold chicken, a ham, delicious-looking quiches, colourful salads, bowls of dips, cheeses, different types of bread, savoury biscuits...

'Help yourself, darling.' Gloria plonked a plate in my hand then rushed to the door to greet some new guests.

Gratefully I piled the plate with food.

'More champagne?' A smiling man refilled my glass.

I was munching contentedly by the table when Gloria materialised again by my side.

'Don't stand there on your own, Anna. Let me introduce you to...' She marched me up to a group of people whose names I didn't catch. 'This is Anna...' she began, and I nearly choked on my mouthful of salmon when I heard what she said next. 'She's my cousin's

daughter, haven't seen him for years, lives in Peru, married a local woman; emailed to say Anna was coming to London, so I invited her to my party. So delighted she could come...'

The members of the group eyed me curiously.

'No,' I stammered, 'I'm not--'

'Isn't it *marvellous*,' Gloria continued, 'Only just arrived in the country and she's come to my party.'

Her statement was greeted with approving noises.

'Peru! How interesting,' cooed a plump woman in an unflattering white trouser suit. 'Is this your first time in England, Anna?'

'No!' I answered truthfully, then turned back to Gloria, 'I'm really sorry, but I'm afraid I'm not...' However Gloria had already moved away and was circulating among her guests.

A stout, red-faced man leaned towards me. 'I've never been to Peru.'

Before I could say *neither have I*, he added, 'What kind of political system do you have over there?'

I realised this was the moment when I should admit that I wasn't Gloria's cousin's daughter, but he was gazing at me so earnestly, I couldn't face the embarrassment. 'It's erm... a bit... shaky,' I stuttered.

He nodded with satisfaction. 'Thought so, notoriously unstable, some of those South American countries. Oh, hello, Peter'.

As the man turned to acknowledge an acquaintance, I put down my plate and tried to edge surreptitiously away, but my way was immediately barred by a very stout woman wearing enormous spectacles with red frames. She gazed at me eagerly. 'Do tell us about your life in Peru, Anna. It must be so fascinating.'

I gazed up at the birthday balloons searching for inspiration. 'Well, it's certainly... very different... different from here, I mean.'

I looked desperately around, wondering how to make my escape, but before I could make a move, my champagne glass was refilled and I drained it nervously in one go. By now the alcohol was beginning to make me feel slightly inebriated, and as the woman was still looking at me expectantly, I thought, *What the hell? If they want me to be Anna from Peru instead of Anna from Haywards Heath, that's who I'll be.*

But what did I actually know about Peru? Not very much - Lima ... Andes Mountains... Machu Pichu... alpacas and llamas... black-haired ladies wearing brightly coloured woven shawls and embroidered skirts.

I took a deep breath and let my imagination take over. 'Well...' I began. I invented a white, Spanish-style house on the outskirts of Lima, its inner courtyard resplendent with fountains, statues, exotic flowers and shrubs. I described a drama-filled childhood amidst an improbable Peruvian family: a grandmother who created magic potions and put curses on those unfortunate enough to cross her; an aunt whose lover was pursued at knifepoint round the city by her enraged husband; an uncle who was kidnapped in the mountains by bloodthirsty bandits; a cousin who died after being bitten by a monkey and another who was carried off by an obscure flesh-eating disease.

I threw in the few Spanish words I knew for good measure, hoping that there weren't any fluent Spanish-speakers present, and in between embroidering extravagant yarns, demolished a second plateful of food and downed yet another glass of champagne. I had

started to enjoy being my *alter ego*.

I was still in full flow when I realised that a hush had fallen over the room. Most of the guests had gathered around me and were listening, transfixed, to my absurd tales, uttering occasional gasps of wonder and amazement. By now, however, I was running out of ideas and feeling decidedly the worse for wear from the effects of the alcohol. Pleading jetlag, I made my excuses and started making unsteady progress towards the open door. But Gloria swooped on me before I could get there.

‘You can’t go yet, darling, we haven’t had the birthday cake. Monica made it – chocolate and strawberries - absolutely yummy.’

‘Sorry, Gloria,’ I stuttered, ‘but it was such a long journey...’

She nodded sympathetically. ‘Of course, darling, I do understand. It’s wonderful that you managed to come at all.’ She enveloped me in a tight embrace. ‘Do come and visit me again tomorrow morning after you’ve had a nice rest. I know the Savoy is very comfortable. We’ll have a nice long chat, just you and me, and you can tell me all about your new lovair!’ (She pronounced the word as a French person would.)

‘Yes...of course. Lovely party, Gloria, thank you.’ I backed away from her towards the door, adding a quick, ‘Muchas gracias’ to give my farewell a touch of authenticity.

‘You’re welcome, dar --’ She broke off to address someone behind me. ‘Can I help you, dear?’

Turning, I saw a dark-haired young woman carrying an enormous backpack standing hesitantly on the threshold. ‘Is thees the apartment of Senora Gloria Munro?’ she enquired in a strong Spanish accent. ‘I ‘ave just arrived. She invite me to her party.’

Also by V K McGivney:

Ghosts, Resolution and Revenge

A Collection of varied and original Short Stories.

A lost hat, a free lunch, a bullied schoolgirl, a piano that plays itself, an old man's secret, a downtrodden wife's revenge - these are some of the themes of the short stories in this rich and varied collection.

The eleven tales in the anthology employ a mixture of humour, pathos, mystery and the supernatural to present a range of intriguing and challenging human situations. Some explore the decisions made by people at crisis moments in their life; others have plot twists and turns that the reader won't see coming.

A superb and rich collection of very short stories. Miriam Smith.

A fantastic selection of short stories, covering different genres of writing (...) It is a true art form to be able to leave someone feeling for the characters in such a short space of time when you don't have a whole book to set the scene. Kelly M.

This has all that you need for a little shiver, a little nod of recognition and a little escapism. SkullWitchery.

[Purchase *Ghosts, Resolution and Revenge* here](#)

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Aftermath Series Book One: **Aftermath of a Murder**

A gripping psychological thriller

Why was accountant Howard Armstrong murdered when he was leaving his office one afternoon?

After her husband is gunned down by an unknown assailant, his traumatised widow, Karen, is left to bring up three children on her own. The marriage had not been happy and as the investigation into his murder gets underway, she is horrified to discover that Howard had been leading a secret life of which she was totally unaware. Each new revelation hits her like a seismic shock, but she is determined to keep her children from learning the terrible truth about their father. She takes them on a trip to Wales where she experiences a peace and sense of freedom that formerly eluded her. On their return she

sinks into depression and is persuaded to join a therapy group. Here she finds a vital clue leading to the discovery of the identity of Howard's murderer.

A great plot that leads the reader deeper and deeper into the secrets and lies on which the main character's life has been unknowingly based. A gripping read that was very hard to put down. Amazon Customer.

Page-turning murder mystery with a gripping plot and a heart moving family story to go with it - highly recommend and an excellent first novel. Jules Cav.

[Purchase *Aftermath of a Murder* here.](#)

* * *

Aftermath Series Book Two:
Aftermath of a Party

A gripping psychological thriller

When a birthday turns out to be a death day...

Hanna Walker wakes up in a hospital bed but has no memory of what has happened to her. When questioned by the police, she is devastated to learn that her lifelong friend, Stella, has been murdered and she herself left for dead, after Stella's recent birthday party.

During the murder investigation Stella's ex husband and several of her former lovers fall under suspicion. When Stella's own activities in the period leading up to the party also come under the spotlight, Hanna is forced to revise her opinion of the woman she thought was her closest friend.

But was Stella a real friend?

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Inheritors of the New Kingdom

An exciting thriller

After witnessing an extraordinary object in the sky, research student Richard Jarman learns that the greenbelt around London has been partially devastated by fire. Convinced that what he saw was responsible, he confides his suspicions to Fiona, a beautiful single mother and to an elderly nun who witnessed the same phenomenon.

As the trail of destruction spreads across the globe, Richard becomes obsessed with finding the cause. The nun disappears in mysterious circumstances and he embarks on a dangerous mission to find her. He falls into the brutal clutches of a shadowy cult whose

terrifying leader, Abraham R, seems to have a connection with the spate of disasters occurring around the world.

When the planet is threatened by an even greater peril, Richard and Fiona consult a famous medium, Morgana Delph and believe they have found an explanation for what is happening. But is it the right one?

The novel beautifully juxtaposes a so-called normal reality with other worlds that are often tangential to that normalcy. Brutalising cults, extraterrestrial invasion, mediums -- all cast a lengthening shadow over the fragile surfaces of culture and civilisation. And until almost the last page, it is unclear which of these impulses will prevail. (...) a highly inventive and engrossing piece of writing, which I can warmly recommend to any reader.
Amazon customer.

A considered and well-paced story which evolves towards a very thought-provoking ending. If you enjoy science fiction, I can't recommend this highly enough. It's an absolute corker of a tale. Ignite.

[Purchase *Inheritors of the New Kingdom* here](#)

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A Reluctant Hero

What can a man do when his life reaches an impasse?

Harry Saunders is unhappily married, in a job he hates and has a Big Birthday looming.

A passionate cinephile, he uses films as an escape from dreary reality, viewing the people and situations he meets through the prism of classic movies.

Harry is resigned to a bleak future until a sudden and unpremeditated act of courage propels him into a succession of sometimes absurd, sometimes dangerous, but ultimately life-changing situations.

Just the sort of book for a relaxing holiday. It has humour, a plot, a likeable hero and a satisfactory outcome. Janet Mary Tomson.

Gently paced, full of humour and pathos, the character is extremely likeable if a little hapless. I'd really recommend this as a holiday read - it passes the hours very nicely indeed. Peagreen.

[Purchase *A Reluctant Hero* here](#)

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