



Garden of Lies

By Amanda Quick

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The Kern Secretarial Agency provides reliable professional services to its wealthy clientele, and Anne Clifton was one of the finest women in Ursula Kern's employ. But Miss Clifton has met an untimely end—and Ursula is convinced it was not due to natural causes.

Archaeologist and adventurer Slater Roxton thinks Mrs. Kern is off her head to meddle in such dangerous business. Nevertheless, he seems sensible enough to Ursula, though she does find herself unnerved by his self-possession and unreadable green-gold eyes...

If this mysterious widowed beauty insists on stirring the pot, Slater intends to remain close by as they venture into the dark side of polite society. Together they must reveal the identity of a killer—and to achieve their goal they may need to reveal their deepest secrets to each other as well...

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Editorial Review

Review

“Amanda Quick is an exceptional storyteller.” —*Los Angeles Daily News*

“One of the most creative, inventive storytellers in the field, Quick infuses her own addictive brand of breathless, sexy adventure with dashes of vengeance, greed, and violence and a hefty splash of delectable, offbeat humor.” —*Library Journal*

— **eloquence quotes**

About the Author

Amanda Quick is a pseudonym for Jayne Ann Krentz, the author of more than fifty *New York Times* bestsellers. She writes historical romance novels under the Quick name, contemporary romantic suspense novels under the Krentz name, and futuristic romance novels under the pseudonym Jayne Castle. There are more than 35 million copies of her books in print.

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PROLOGUE

Slater Roxton was examining the strangely luminous paintings on the wall of the ornate burial chamber when the tomb trap was triggered.

Impending destruction was telegraphed in an ominous rumble and the aching groan of ancient machinery locked deep in the stone. His first thought was that the volcano that loomed over Fever Island was erupting. But one by one, massive sections of the ceiling of the passageway that led to the entrance of the temple complex slid open. Boulders rained down.

Brice Torrence's voice echoed from the far end of the corridor near the entrance.

“Slater, get out of there. Hurry. Something terrible is happening.”

Slater was already moving. He did not waste time collecting the lanterns, his sketches or the camera. He ran to the doorway of the chamber but when he looked into the long, twisting stone corridor that led to the entrance he saw at once that it was too late to escape.

More sections of the corridor ceiling slid open as he watched. Countless tons of the terrible hail crashed into the passage. The stones piled up rapidly, filling the tunnel. He knew that if he tried to make a dash to safety he would be crushed beneath the falling rocks. He had no choice but to turn back and retreat deeper into the unexplored maze of the tomb caverns.

He rushed across the chamber, grabbed the lanterns and headed into the nearest adjoining passage. The corridor twisted away into dense, unexplored night but no boulders rained down from above.

He ran a short distance into the passage and stopped, aware that if he went deeper he would soon get lost. He

and Brice had not even begun to chart the complex of burial caves carved into the base of the volcano.

He hunkered down against one wall, bracing himself. The glary light of the lantern illuminated an eerie painting, a scene depicting an ancient, catastrophic eruption of a volcano. Destruction rained down on an elegant city built of white marble. It was, Slater thought, far too close to what was happening at that moment.

Clouds of dust wafted down the tunnel. He covered his mouth and nose with his shirt.

There was nothing for it but to wait for the thundering to stop. Dread swirled like acid through his veins. At any moment the ceiling of the cavern in which he was sheltering might give way, burying him in the rubble. At least it would all be over in seconds, he thought. He was not sure he wanted to contemplate his immediate future if he did survive. For whatever time he had left he would be trapped in a brilliantly engineered maze.

The storm of rock and stone seemed to go on forever. But eventually the temple caves fell silent. It was another eternity before the dust finally settled.

Warily, he got to his feet. He stood still for a moment, listening to the shattering silence, waiting for his pulse to calm. After a while he went to look out into the vaulted chamber in which he had been standing when the rock trap released its deadly cargo. Small stones littered the floor of the room but it appeared that they had bounced and rolled into the chamber from the massive heap that now sealed the passage that led back to the entrance.

He had survived, which meant that he was now entombed alive.

He began to calculate his odds in a surprisingly academic fashion. He concluded that he was still too shaken to absorb the enormity of his predicament.

There was no reason for Brice and the rest of the expedition team to believe that he had survived; nothing they could do to save him, even if they had some hope. Fever Island was an uninhabited chunk of volcanic rock covered in unexplored jungle. It was situated a few thousand miles from civilization.

The only resources available were limited to the supplies and equipment on board the ship anchored in the island's small, natural harbor. There was no way to acquire the machinery and the manpower required to remove the vast quantity of rock that clogged the temple entrance.

Brice would consult with the ship's captain, Slater thought. They would conclude that he was dead and they would pray that was true because there was nothing they could do to save him.

He put out one of the lanterns to conserve the fuel. Holding aloft the second lantern, he started walking into the maze. There were, he decided, only two possibilities. The first—and most likely—was that he would wander in the temple complex until he died. He could only hope that death would come before the never-ending darkness drove him mad.

The second possibility—extremely remote—was that he might blunder into a passage that would take him outside into the sunlight. But even if he was so fortunate it was unlikely that he would be able to find his way back to the ship before it sailed. They had been running low on supplies when they finally found the damned island after being thrown off course by a violent storm. The captain was convinced that another tempest was on the way. He would want to start the return trip to London as soon as possible. He had to think of his crew and the other men on the expedition.

Slater knew that if he managed to escape the maze he would find himself stranded on an island that was not a

regular port of call for any known vessel. It could be years before another ship arrived, if ever.

He walked on into the night-bound caverns, his only guide the temple paintings left behind by the artists of an ancient civilization that had long ago been buried beneath rivers of molten lava.

He did not know exactly when he began to understand the meaning of the paintings, if, indeed, he actually did perceive the intent of the stories. He reminded himself that there was a very good possibility that he was already slipping into madness. The eternal darkness and the mesmerizing artwork were disorienting. A man in his situation could easily begin to hallucinate.

But eventually he thought he detected three distinct legends. He stopped when it dawned on him that each tale was a different path into the maze. One series of paintings depicted a tale of war. The second was a story of vengeance.

In the end he chose the third legend.

He never knew how long he walked or how far. At times he stopped, exhausted, and sank into a slumber that was splintered with images from the wall paintings that were his only guide. Occasionally he stumbled across small underground streams. He stopped to drink deeply from them. He tried to make the cheese and bread in his pack last but eventually they were gone.

He kept walking because there was nothing else to do. To stop would be an act of total surrender.

In the end when he staggered out of the caverns into a stone circle illuminated with daylight he almost continued walking because he was certain that he was hallucinating.

Sunlight.

Some part of his mind registered the reality of what he was seeing.

In disbelief he looked up and saw that the hot, tropical sunshine was slanting through an opening in the rocks. A series of steep stone steps had been cut into the rock. A long black cord dangled from the opening.

Calling on the last of his reserves, he grasped the rope and tested it to make certain it would hold his weight. When he was satisfied that it was secure he started up the ancient staircase, using the rope as a handrail.

He reached the opening, scrambled out of the temple caves and collapsed on the stone floor of an open-air temple. He had been so long in the shadows that he had to close his eyes against the brilliant sunlight.

Somewhere nearby a gong boomed. The sound echoed endlessly through the jungle.

He was not alone on the island.

—

A YEAR LATER another ship dropped anchor in the small harbor. Slater was on board when it sailed. But he was not the same man that he had been when he arrived on Fever Island.

Over the course of the next several years he became a legend in certain circles. When he finally returned to London he discovered the great curse that befalls all legends: There is no place to call home.

ONE

I can't believe Anne is gone." Matty Bingham blotted her eyes with a handkerchief. "She was always so spirited. So charming. So full of life."

"Yes, she was." Ursula Kern tightened her grip on the umbrella and watched the gravediggers dump great clods of earth on the coffin. "She was a woman of the modern age."

"And an excellent secretary." Matty tucked her handkerchief into her satchel. "A credit to the agency."

Matty was in her mid-thirties, a spinster without family or connections. Like the other women who came to work at the Kern Secretarial Agency, she had abandoned any hope of marriage and a family of her own. Like Anne and the others, she had seized the promise that Ursula offered—a respectable career as a professional secretary, a field that was finally opening up to women.

The day was appropriately funereal in tone—a depressing shade of gray with a steady drizzle of rain. Ursula and Matty were the only mourners present at the graveside. Anne had died alone. No family had come forward to claim the body. Ursula had paid for the funeral. It was, she thought, not just her responsibility as Anne's employer and sole heir, but also a final act of friendship.

A great emptiness welled up inside her. Anne Clifton had been her closest friend for the past two years. They had bonded over the things they had in common—a lack of family and haunting pasts that they had very carefully buried.

Anne might have possessed a few faults—some of the other secretaries at the agency had considered her a fast woman—but Ursula knew there had always been a distinct twist of admiration in the remarks. Anne's bold determination to carve her own path in life against all odds made her the very model of the Modern Woman.

When the coffin vanished beneath the growing mound of dirt, Ursula and Matty turned and walked back across the cemetery.

"It was kind of you to pay for Anne's funeral," Matty said.

Ursula went through the wrought-iron gates. "It was the least I could do."

"I will miss her."

"So will I," Ursula said.

Who will pay for my funeral when the time comes? she wondered.

"Anne did not seem like the type to take her own life," Matty said.

"No, she did not."

—

URSULA DINED IN SOLITUDE, as she usually did. When the meal was concluded she went into her small, cozy study.

The housekeeper bustled into the room to light the fire.

“Thank you, Mrs. Dunstan,” Ursula said.

“You’re certain you’re all right, then?” Mrs. Dunstan asked gently. “I know you considered Miss Clifton a friend. Hard to lose a connection of that sort. Lost a few friends, myself, over the years.”

“I’m quite all right,” Ursula said. “I’m just going to sort through Miss Clifton’s things and make an inventory. Then I’ll go to bed.”

“Very well, then.”

Mrs. Dunstan went quietly out into the hall and closed the door. Ursula waited a moment and then she poured herself a stiff shot of brandy. The fiery spirits took off some of the chill she had been feeling since Anne’s death.

After a while she crossed the room to the trunk that held Anne’s things.

One by one she removed the items that had aroused in her a deep sense of unease—an empty perfume bottle, a small velvet bag containing a few pieces of jewelry, Anne’s stenography notebook and two packets of seeds. Taken individually, each was easily explained. But as a group they raised disturbing questions.

Three days earlier, when Anne’s housekeeper had discovered the body of her employer, she had immediately sent for Ursula. There had been no one else to summon. Initially, Ursula had been unable to accept the notion that Anne had either died of natural causes or taken her own life. She had called in the police. They had immediately concluded that there was no sign of foul play.

But Anne had left a note. Ursula had found it crumpled on the floor beside the body. To most people the marks made in pencil would have looked like random scribbles. Anne, however, was a skilled stenographer who had been trained in the Pitman method. As was the case with many professional secretaries, she had gone on to develop her own personal version of coded writing.

The note was a message, and Ursula knew it had been intended for her. Anne had been well aware that no one else could decipher her unique stenography.

Behind water closet.

Ursula sat down at her desk and drank a little more brandy while she contemplated the items. After a while, she pushed the empty perfume bottle aside. She had found it on Anne’s little writing desk, not with the other things. It was unlike Anne not to have mentioned the purchase of new perfume but aside from that there did not appear to be anything mysterious about it.

The notebook, the jewelry pouch and the seeds, however, were a very different matter. Why had Anne hidden all three items behind the water closet?

After a while she opened the stenography notebook and began to read. Transcribing Anne’s cryptic shorthand was slow-going but two hours later she knew that she had been wrong about one thing that afternoon. Paying for the funeral was not to be her last act of friendship.

There was one more thing she could do for Anne—find her killer.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Latasha Hisle:

As people who live in the particular modest era should be update about what going on or information even knowledge to make these people keep up with the era which can be always change and move forward. Some of you maybe will update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know which you should start with. This Garden of Lies is our recommendation to help you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Jose Laney:

Are you kind of busy person, only have 10 or 15 minute in your day time to upgrading your mind ability or thinking skill actually analytical thinking? Then you are receiving problem with the book compared to can satisfy your short time to read it because all of this time you only find book that need more time to be examine. Garden of Lies can be your answer as it can be read by you who have those short extra time problems.

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