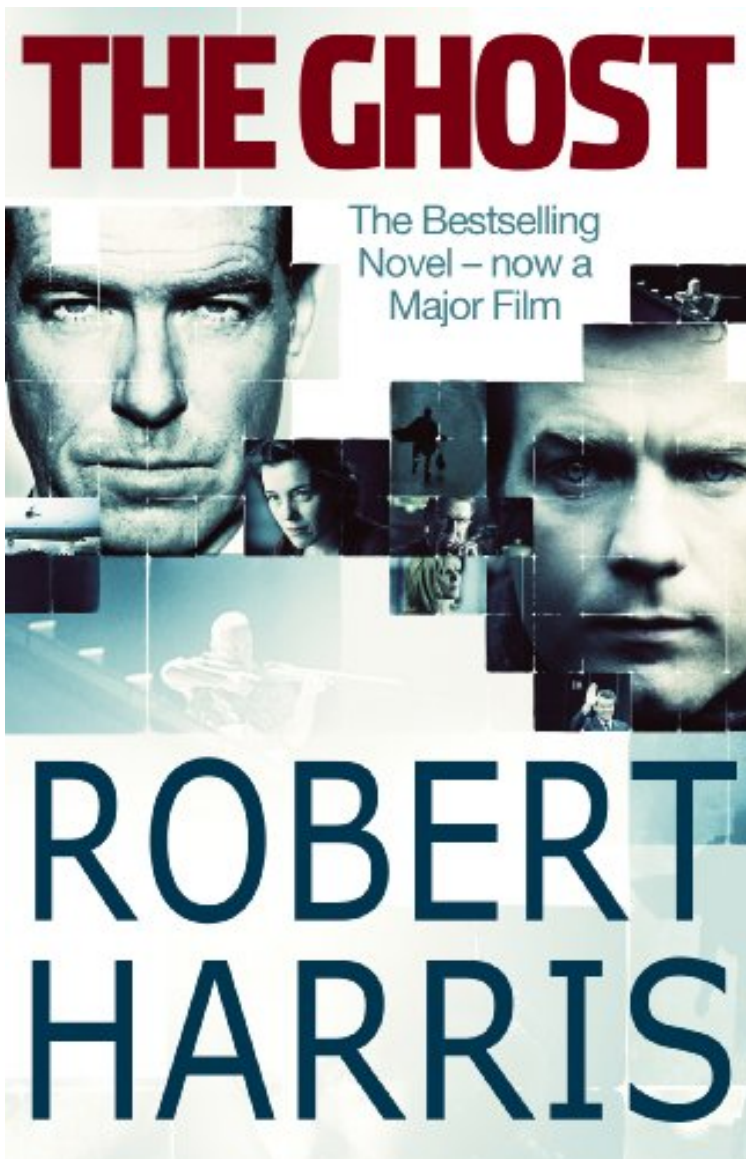


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The Ghost



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Par Robert Harris : The Ghost before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Ghost:

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Description : Description du produitThe stunning new novel from the No. 1 bestselling author of Fatherland, Enigma, Archangel, Pompeii and Imperium.

Prsentation de l'diteurA tie-in edition of the Sunday Times bestselling contemporary thriller, to coincide with the release of the Golden Globe award-winning film directed by Roman Polanski; starring Pierce Brosnan and Ewan McGregor.'The moment I heard how McAra died I should have walked away. I can see that now...'The narrator of Robert Harris's gripping new novel is a professional ghostwriter - cynical, mercenary, and with a nice line in deadpan humour. Accustomed to working with fading rock stars and minor celebrities, he jumps at the chance to ghost the memoirs of Britain's former prime minister, especially as it means flying to the American resort of Martha's Vineyard in the middle of winter and finishing the book in

the seclusion of a luxurious house. But it doesn't take him long to realise he has made a terrible mistake. His predecessor on the project died in circumstances that were distinctly suspicious, and the ex-prime minister turns out to be a man with secrets in his past that are returning to haunt him - secrets with the power to kill. The Times has called Robert Harris 'the leading current exponent of the intelligent literary thriller'. The Ghost is his most compelling novel yet.

Extrait The Ghost ONE Of all the advantages that ghosting offers, one of the greatest must be the opportunity that you get to meet people of interest. Andrew Crofts, Ghostwriting THE MOMENT I HEARD how McAra died, I should have walked away. I can see that now. I should have said, Rick, Im sorry, this isnt for me, I dont like the sound of it, finished my drink, and left. But he was such a good storyteller, Rick I often thought he should have been the writer and I the literary agent that once hed started talking there was never any question I wouldnt listen, and by the time he had finished, I was hooked. The story, as Rick told it to me over lunch that day, went like this: McAra had caught the last ferry from Woods Hole, Massachusetts, to Marthas Vineyard two Sundays earlier. I worked out afterward it must have been January the twelfth. It was touch-and-go whether the ferry would sail at all. A gale had been blowing since midafternoon and the last few crossings had been canceled. But toward nine oclock the wind eased slightly, and at nine forty-five the master decided it was safe to cast off. The boat was crowded; McAra was lucky to get a space for his car. He parked belowdecks and then went upstairs to get some air. No one saw him alive again. The crossing to the island usually takes forty-five minutes, but on this particular night the weather slowed the voyage considerably: docking a two-hundred-foot vessel in a fifty-knot wind, said Rick, is nobodys idea of fun. It was nearly eleven when the ferry made land at Vineyard Haven and the cars started up all except one: a brand-new tan-colored Ford Escape SUV. The purser made a loudspeaker appeal for the owner to return to his vehicle, as he was blocking the drivers behind him. When he still didnt show, the crew tried the doors, which turned out to be unlocked, and freewheeled the big Ford down to the quayside. Afterward they searched the ship with care: stairwells, bar, toilets, even the lifeboats nothing. They called the terminal at Woods Hole to check if anyone had disembarked before the boat sailed or had perhaps been accidentally left behind again: nothing. That was when an official of the Massachusetts Steamship Authority finally contacted the Coast Guard station in Falmouth to report a possible man overboard. A police check on the Fords license plate revealed it to be registered to one Martin S. Rhinehart of New York City, although Mr. Rhinehart was eventually tracked down to his ranch in California. By now it was about midnight on the East Coast, nine p.m. on the West. This is the Marty Rhinehart? I interrupted. This is he. Rhinehart immediately confirmed over the telephone to the police that the Ford belonged to him. He kept it at his house on Marthas Vineyard for the use of himself and his guests in the summer. He also confirmed that, despite the time of year, a group of people were staying there at the moment. He said he would get his assistant to call the house and find out if anyone had borrowed the car. Half an hour later she rang back to say that someone was indeed missing, a person by the name of McAra. Nothing more could be done until first light. Not that it mattered. Everyone knew that if a passenger had gone overboard it would be a search for a corpse. Rick is one of those irritatingly fit Americans in their early forties who look about nineteen and do terrible things to their body with bicycles and canoes. He knows that sea: he once spent two days paddling a kayak the entire sixty miles round the island. The ferry from Woods Hole plies the strait where Vineyard Sound meets Nantucket Sound, and that is dangerous water. At high tide you can see the force of the currents sucking the huge channel buoys over onto their sides. Rick shook his head. In January, in a gale, in snow? No one could survive more than five minutes. A local woman found the body early the next morning, thrown up on the beach about four miles down the islands coast at Lamberts Cove. The drivers license in the wallet confirmed him to be Michael James McAra, age fifty, from Balham in south London. I remember feeling a sudden shot of sympathy at the mention of that dreary, unexotic suburb: he certainly was a long way from home, poor devil. His passport named his mother as his next of kin. The police took his corpse to the little morgue in Vineyard Haven and then drove over to the Rhinehart residence to break the news and to fetch one of the other guests to identify him. It must have been quite a scene, said Rick, when the volunteer guest finally showed up to view the body: I bet the morgue attendant is still talking about it. There was one patrol car from Edgartown with a flashing blue light, a second car with four armed guards to secure the building, and a third vehicle, bombproof, carrying the instantly recognizable man who, until eighteen months earlier, had been the prime minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. THE LUNCH HAD BEEN Ricks idea. I hadnt even known he was in town until he rang me the night before. He insisted we meet at his club. It was not his club, exactly he was actually a member of a similar mausoleum in Manhattan, whose members had reciprocal dining rights in London but he

loved it all the same. At lunchtime only men were admitted. Each wore a dark blue suit and was over sixty; I hadn't felt so young since I left university. Outside, the winter sky pressed down on London like a great gray tombstone. Inside, yellow electric light from three immense candelabra glinted on dark polished tables, plated silverware, and rubied decanters of claret. A small card placed between us announced that the club's annual backgammon tournament would be taking place that evening. It was like the changing of the guard or the houses of parliament's foreigner's image of England. I'm amazed this hasn't been in the papers, I said. Oh, but it has. Nobody's made a secret of it. There've been obituaries. And, now I came to think of it, I did vaguely remember seeing something. But I had been working fifteen hours a day for a month to finish my new book, the autobiography of a footballer, and the world beyond my study had become a blur. What on earth was an ex-prime minister doing identifying the body of a man from Balham who fell off the Marthas Vineyard ferry? Michael McAra, announced Rick, with the emphatic delivery of a man who has flown three thousand miles to deliver this punch line, was helping him write his memoirs. And this is where, in that parallel life, I express polite sympathy for the elderly Mrs. McAra (such a shock to lose a child at that age), fold my heavy linen napkin, finish my drink, say good-bye, and step out into the chilly London street with the whole of my undistinguished career stretching safely ahead of me. Instead I excused myself, went to the club's lavatory, and studied an unfunny Punch cartoon while urinating thoughtfully. You realize I don't know anything about politics? I said when I got back. You voted for him, didn't you? Adam Lang? Of course I did. Everybody voted for him. He wasn't a politician; he was a craze. Well, that's the point. Who's interested in politics? In any case, it's a professional ghostwriter he needs, my friend, not another goddamned politico. He glanced around. It was an iron rule of the club that no business could be discussed on the premises—a problem for Rick, seeing as he never discussed anything else. Marty Rhinehart paid ten million dollars for these memoirs on two conditions. First, it'd be in the stores within two years. Second, Lang wouldn't pull any punches about the war on terror. From what I hear, he's nowhere near meeting either requirement. Things got so bad around Christmas, Rhinehart gave him the use of his vacation house on the Vineyard so that Lang and McAra could work without any distractions. I guess the pressure must have gotten to McAra. The state medical examiner found enough booze in his blood to put him four times over the driving limit. So it was an accident? Accident? Suicide? He casually flicked his hand. Who'll ever know? What does it matter? It was the book that killed him. That's encouraging, I said. While Rick went on with his pitch, I stared at my plate and imagined the former prime minister looking down at his assistant's cold white face in the mortuary—staring down at his ghost, I suppose one could say. How did it feel? I am always putting this question to my clients. I must ask it a hundred times a day during the interview phase: How did it feel? How did it feel? And mostly they can't answer, which is why they have to hire me to supply their memories; by the end of a successful collaboration I am more them than they are. I rather enjoy this process, to be honest: the brief freedom of being someone else. Does that sound creepy? If so, let me add that real craftsmanship is required. I not only extract from people their life stories, I impart a shape to those lives that was often invisible; sometimes I give them lives they never even realized they had. If that isn't art, what is? I said, Should I have heard of McAra? Yes, so let's not admit you haven't. He was some kind of aide when Lang was prime minister. Speechwriting, policy research, political strategy. When Lang resigned, McAra stayed with him, to run his office. I grimaced. I don't know, Rick. Throughout lunch I'd been half watching an elderly television actor at the next table. He'd been famous when I was a child for playing the single parent of teenage girls in a sitcom. Now, as he rose unsteadily and started to shuffle toward the exit, he looked as though he'd been made up to act the role of his own corpse. That was the type of person whose memoirs I ghosted: people who had fallen a few rungs down the celebrity ladder, or who had a few rungs left to climb, or who were just about clinging to the top and were desperate to cash in while there was still time. I was abruptly overwhelmed by the ridiculousness of the whole idea that I might collaborate on the memoirs of a prime minister. I don't know I began again, but Rick interrupted me. Rhinehart Inc. are getting frantic. They're holding a beauty parade at their London office tomorrow morning. Maddox himself is flying over from New York to represent the company. Lang's sending the lawyer who negotiated the original deal for him—the hottest fixer in Washington, a very smart guy by the name of Sidney Kroll. I've other clients I could put in for this, so if you're not up for it, just tell me now. But from the way they've been talking, I think you're the best fit. Me? You're kidding. No. I promise you. They need to do something radical—take a risk. It's a great opportunity for you. And the money will be good. The kids won't starve. I don't have any kids. No, said Rick with a wink, but I do. WE PARTED ON THE steps of the club. Rick had a car waiting outside with its engine running. He didn't offer to drop me anywhere, which made me suspect he was off to see another client, to whom he would make exactly the

same pitch he had just made to me. What is the collective noun for a group of ghosts? A train? A town? A haunt? At any rate, Rick had plenty of us on his books. Take a look at the bestseller lists: you would be amazed how much of it is the work of ghosts, novels as well as nonfiction. We are the phantom operatives who keep publishing going, like the unseen workers beneath Walt Disney World. We scuttle along the subterranean tunnels of celebrity, popping up here and there, dressed as this character or that, preserving the seamless illusion of the Magic Kingdom. See you tomorrow, he said, and dramatically, in a puff of exhaust fumes, he was gone: Mephistopheles on a fifteen percent commission. I stood for a minute, undecided, and if I had been in another part of London it is still just possible things might have gone differently. But I was in that narrow zone where Soho washes up against Covent Garden: a trash-strewn strip of empty theaters, dark alleys, red lights, snack bars, and bookshops so many bookshops you can start to feel ill just looking at them, from the tiny little rip-off specialist dealers in Cecil Court to the cut-price behemoths of Charing Cross Road. I often drop into one of the latter, to see how my titles are displayed, and that was what I did that afternoon. Once inside, it was only a short step across the scuffed red carpet of the Biography Memoir department, and suddenly I had gone from Celebrity to Politics. I was surprised by how much they had on the former prime minister's entire shelf, everything from the early hagiography, *Adam Lang: Statesman for Our Time*, to a recent hatchet job titled *Would You Adam and Eve It? The Collected Lies of Adam Lang*, both by the same author. I took down the thickest biography and opened it at the photographs: Lang as a toddler, feeding a bottle of milk to a lamb beside a drystone wall, Lang as Lady Macbeth in a school play, Lang dressed as a chicken in a Cambridge University Footlights revue, Lang as a distinctly stoned-looking merchant banker in the nineteen seventies, Lang with his wife and young children on the doorstep of a new house, Lang wearing a rosette and waving from an open-topped bus on the day he was elected to parliament, Lang with his colleagues, Lang with world leaders, with pop stars, with soldiers in the Middle East. A bald customer in a scuffed leather coat browsing the shelf next to me stared at the cover. He held his nose with one hand and mimed flushing a toilet with the other. I moved around the corner of the bookcase and looked up McAra, Michael in the index. There were only five or six innocuous references no reason, in other words, why anyone outside the party or the government need ever have heard of him, so to hell with you, Rick, I thought. I flicked back to the photograph of the prime minister seated smiling at the cabinet table, with his Downing Street staff arrayed behind him. The caption identified McAra as the burly figure in the back row. He was slightly out of focus a pale, unsmiling, dark-haired smudge. I squinted more closely at him. He looked exactly the sort of unappealing inadequate who is congenitally drawn to politics and makes people like me stick to the sports pages. You'll find a McAra in any country, in any system, standing behind any leader with a political machine to operate: a greasy engineer in the boiler room of power. And this was the man who had been entrusted to ghost a ten-million-dollar memoir? I felt professionally affronted. I bought myself a small pile of research material and headed out of the bookshop with a growing conviction that maybe Rick was right: perhaps I was the man for the job. It was obvious the moment I got outside that another bomb had gone off. At Tottenham Court Road people were surging up above ground from all four exits of the tube station like storm water from a blocked drain. A loudspeaker said something about an incident at Oxford Circus. It sounded like an edgy romantic comedy: Brief Encounter meets the war on terror. I carried on up the road, unsure of how I would get home taxis, like false friends, tending always to vanish at the first sign of trouble. In the window of one of the big electrical shops, the crowd watched the same news bulletin relayed simultaneously on a dozen televisions: aerial shots of Oxford Circus, black smoke gushing out of the underground station, thrusts of orange flame. An electronic ticker running across the bottom of the screen announced a suspected suicide bomber, many dead and injured, and gave an emergency number to call. Above the rooftops a helicopter tilted and circled. I could smell the smoke an acrid, eye-reddening blend of diesel and burning plastic. It took me two full hours to walk home, lugging my heavy bag of books up to Marylebone Road and then westward toward Paddington. As usual, the entire tube system had been shut down to check for further bombs; so had the main railway stations. The traffic on either side of the wide street was stalled and, on past form, would remain so until evening. (If only Hitler had known he didn't need a whole air force to paralyze London, I thought, just a revved-up teenager with a bottle of bleach and a bag of weed killer.) Occasionally a police car or an ambulance would mount the curb, roar along the pavement, and attempt to make progress up a side street. I trudged on toward the setting sun. It must have been six when I reached my flat. I had the top two floors of a high, stuccoed house in what the residents called Notting Hill and the post office stubbornly insisted was North Kensington. Used syringes glittered in the gutter; at the halal butchers opposite they did the slaughtering on the premises. It was grim.

But from the attic extension that served as my office I had a view across west London that would not have disgraced a skyscraper: rooftops, railway yards, motorway, and sky a vast urban prairie sky, sprinkled with the lights of aircraft descending toward Heathrow. It was this view that had sold me the apartment, not the estate agents gentrification patter which was just as well, as the rich bourgeoisie have no more returned to this area than they have to downtown Baghdad. Kate had already let herself in and was watching the news. Kate: I had forgotten she was coming over for the evening. She was my? I never knew what to call her. To say she was my girlfriend was absurd; no one the wrong side of thirty has a girlfriend. Partner wasn't right either, as we didn't live under the same roof. Lover? How could one keep a straight face? Mistress? Do me a favor. Fiance? Certainly not. I suppose I ought to have realized it was ominous that forty thousand years of human language had failed to produce a word for our relationship. (Kate wasn't her real name, by the way, but I don't see why she should be dragged into all this. In any case, it suits her better than the name she does have: she looks like a Kate, if you know what I mean sensible but sassy, girlish but always willing to be one of the boys. She worked in television, but let's not hold that against her.) Thanks for the concerned phone call, I said. I'm dead, actually, but don't worry about it. I kissed the top of her head, dropped the books onto the sofa, and went into the kitchen to pour myself a whiskey. The entire tube is down. I've had to walk all the way from Covent Garden. Poor darling, I heard her say. And you've been shopping. I topped up my glass with water from the tap, drank half, then topped it up again with whiskey. I remembered I was supposed to have reserved a restaurant. When I went back into the living room, she was removing one book after another from the carrier bag. What's all this? she said, looking up at me. You're not interested in politics. And then she realized what was going on, because she was smarter than I was. She knew what I did for a living, she knew I was meeting an agent, and she knew all about McAra. Don't tell me they want you to ghost his book? She laughed. You cannot be serious. She tried to make a joke of it. You cannot be serious in an American accent, like that tennis player a few years ago but I could see her dismay. She hated Lang, felt personally betrayed by him. She used to be a party member. I had forgotten that, too. It'll probably come to nothing, I said and drank some more whiskey. She went back to watching the news, only now with her arms tightly folded, always a warning sign. The ticker announced that the death toll was seven and likely to rise. But if you're offered it you'll do it? she asked, without turning to look at me. I was spared having to reply by the newsreader announcing that they were cutting live to New York to get the reaction of the former prime minister, and suddenly there was Adam Lang, at a podium marked Waldorf-Astoria, where it looked as though he had been addressing a lunch. You will all by now have heard the tragic news from London, he said, where once again the forces of fanaticism and intolerance. Nothing he uttered that night warrants reprinting. It was almost a parody of what a politician might say after a terrorist attack. Yet, watching him, you would have thought his own wife and children had been eviscerated in the blast. This was his genius: to refresh and elevate the clichés of politics by the sheer force of his performance. Even Kate was briefly silenced. Only when he had finished and his largely female, mostly elderly audience was rising to applaud did she mutter, What's he doing in New York, anyway? Lecturing? Why can't he lecture here? I suppose because no one here would pay him a hundred thousand dollars a throw. She pressed Mute. There was a time, said Kate slowly, after what felt like a very long silence, when princes taking their countries to war were supposed to risk their lives in battle you know, lead by example. Now they travel around in bombproof cars with armed bodyguards and make fortunes three thousand miles away, while the rest of us are stuck with the consequences of their actions. I just don't understand you, she went on, turning to look at me properly for the first time. All the things I've said about him over the past few years war criminal and the rest of it and you've sat there nodding and agreeing. And now you're going to write his propaganda for him, and make him richer. Did none of it ever mean anything to you at all? Hold on a minute, I said. You're a fine one to talk. You've been trying to get an interview with him for months. What's the difference? What's the difference? Christ! She clenched her hands those slim white hands I knew so well and raised them in frustration, half claw, half fist. The sinews stood out in her arms. What's the difference? We want to hold him to account that's the difference! To ask him proper questions! About torturing and bombing and lying! Not How does it feel? Christ! This is a complete bloody waste of time. She got up then and went into the bedroom to collect the bag she always brought on the nights she planned to stay. I heard her filling it noisily with lipstick, toothbrush, perfume spray. I knew if I went in I could retrieve the situation. She was probably expecting it; we'd had worse rows. I'd have been obliged to concede that she was right, acknowledge my unsuitability for the task, affirm her moral and intellectual superiority in this as in all things. It needn't even have been a verbal confession; a meaningful hug would probably have been enough to get me a suspended

sentence. But the truth was, at that moment, given a choice between an evening of her smug left-wing moralizing and the prospect of working with a so-called war criminal, I preferred the war criminal. So I simply carried on staring at the television. Sometimes I have a nightmare in which all the women I have ever slept with assemble together. Its a respectable rather than a huge number were it a drinks party, say, my living room could accommodate them quite comfortably. And if, God forbid, this gathering were ever to occur, Kate would be the undisputed guest of honor. She is the one for whom a chair would be fetched, who would have her glass refilled by sympathetic hands, who would sit at the center of a disbelieving circle as my moral and physical flaws were dissected. She was the one who had stuck it the longest. She didnt slam the door as she left but closed it very carefully. That was stylish, I thought. On the television screen the death toll had just increased to eight. From Publishers Weekly Displaying enviable versatility, Harris, who first achieved acclaim with his alternative history, *Fatherland*, and who more recently showed his mastery of the historical novel in *Pompeii*, hits one out of the park with this dark paranoid thriller. Former British prime minister Adam Lang (clearly modelled on Tony Blair) is up against a firm deadline to submit his memoirs to his publisher, and the project is dangerously derailed when his aide and collaborator, Michael McAra, perishes in a ferry accident off the coast of Marthas Vineyard. To salvage the book, a professional ghostwriter is hired to whip the manuscript into shape, but the unnamed writer soon finds that separating truth from fiction in Langs recollections a challenge. The stakes rise when Lang is accused of war crimes for authorizing the abduction of suspected al-Qaeda terrorists in Pakistan, who then ended up in the CIAs merciless hands. As the new writer probes deeper, he uncovers evidence that his predecessors death may have been a homicide. Harris nicely leavens his cynical tale with gallows humor, and even readers who anticipate the plots final twist will admire the authors artistry in creating an intelligent page-turner that tackles serious issues.