

Agatha Christie

THE MYSTERY OF THE BLUE TRAIN



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Agatha Christie is known throughout the world as the Queen of Crime. Her books have sold over a billion copies in English with another billion in 100 foreign languages. She is the most widely published author of all time and in any language, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. She is the author of 80 crime novels and short story collections, 19 plays, and six novels written under the name of Mary Westmacott.

Agatha Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was written towards the end of the First World War, in which she served as a VAD. In it she created Hercule Poirot, the little Belgian detective who was destined to become the most popular detective in the fiction since Sherlock Holmes. It was eventually published by The Bodley Head in 1920.

In 1926, after averaging a book a year, Agatha Christie wrote her masterpiece. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was the first of her books to be published by Collins and marked the beginning of an author-publisher relationship which lasted for 50 years and well over 70 books. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was also the first of Agatha Christie's books to be dramatised – under the name *Alibi* – and to have a successful run in London's West End. *The Mousetrap*, her most famous play of all, opened in 1952 and is the longest-running play in history.

Agatha Christie was made a Dame in 1971. She died in 1976, since when a number of books have been published posthumously: the bestselling novel *Sleeping Murder* appeared later that year, followed by her autobiography and the short story collections *Miss Marple's Final Cases*, *Problem at Pollensa Bay* and *While the Light Lasts*. In 1998 *Black Coffee* was the first of her plays to be novelised by another author, Charles Osborne.

The Agatha Christie Collection

The Man In The Brown Suit
The Secret of Chimneys
The Seven Dials Mystery
The Mysterious Mr Quin
The Sittaford Mystery
The Hound of Death
The Listerdale Mystery
Why Didn't They Ask Evans?
Parker Pyne Investigates
Murder Is Easy
And Then There Were None
Towards Zero
Death Comes as the End
Sparkling Cyanide
Crooked House
They Came to Baghdad
Destination Unknown
Spider's Web *
The Unexpected Guest *
Ordeal by Innocence
The Pale Horse
Endless Night
Passenger To Frankfurt
Problem at Pollensa Bay
While the Light Lasts

Poirot

The Mysterious Affair at Styles
The Murder on the Links
Poirot Investigates
The Murder of Roger Ackroyd
The Big Four
The Mystery of the Blue Train
Black Coffee *
Peril at End House
Lord Edgware Dies
Murder on the Orient Express
Three-Act Tragedy
Death in the Clouds
The ABC Murders
Murder in Mesopotamia
Cards on the Table
Murder in the Mews
Dumb Witness
Death on the Nile
Appointment With Death
Hercule Poirot's Christmas
Sad Cypress
One, Two, Buckle My Shoe
Evil Under the Sun
Five Little Pigs

* novelised by Charles Osborne

The Hollow
The Labours of Hercules
Taken at the Flood
Mrs McGinty's Dead
After the Funeral
Hickory Dickory Dock
Dead Man's Folly
Cat Among the Pigeons
The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding
The Clocks
Third Girl
Hallowe'en Party
Elephants Can Remember
Poirot's Early Cases
Curtain: Poirot's Last Case

Marple

The Murder at the Vicarage
The Thirteen Problems
The Body in the Library
The Moving Finger
A Murder is Announced
They Do It With Mirrors
A Pocket Full of Rye
The 4.50 from Paddington
The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side
A Caribbean Mystery
At Bertram's Hotel
Nemesis
Sleeping Murder
Miss Marple's Final Cases

Tommy & Tuppence

The Secret Adversary
Partners in Crime
N or M?
By the Pricking of My Thumbs
Postern of Fate

Published as Mary Westmacott

Giant's Bread
Unfinished Portrait
Absent in the Spring
The Rose and the Yew Tree
A Daughter's a Daughter
The Burden

Memoirs

An Autobiography
Come, Tell Me How You Live

Play Collections

The Mousetrap and Selected Plays
Witness for the Prosecution and
Selected Plays

Agatha Christie

**The Mystery of
the Blue Train**



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To the two
distinguished members
of the O.F.D.
Carlotta and Peter

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Chapter 1

The Man with the White Hair

It was close on midnight when a man crossed the Place de la Concorde. In spite of the handsome fur coat which garbed his meagre form, there was something essentially weak and paltry about him.

A little man with a face like a rat. A man, one would say, who could never play a conspicuous part, or rise to prominence in any sphere. And yet, in leaping to such a conclusion, an onlooker would have been wrong. For this man, negligible and inconspicuous as he seemed, played a prominent part in the destiny of the world. In an Empire where rats ruled, he was the king of the rats.

Even now, an Embassy awaited his return. But he had business to do first – business of which the Embassy was not officially cognizant. His face gleamed white and sharp in the moonlight. There was the least hint of a curve in the thin nose. His father had been a

Polish Jew, a journeyman tailor. It was business such as his father would have loved that took him abroad tonight.

He came to the Seine, crossed it, and entered one of the less reputable quarters of Paris. Here he stopped before a tall, dilapidated house and made his way up to an apartment on the fourth floor. He had barely time to knock before the door was opened by a woman who had evidently been awaiting his arrival. She gave him no greeting, but helped him off with his overcoat and then led the way into the tawdrily furnished sitting-room. The electric light was shaded with dirty pink festoons, and it softened, but could not disguise, the girl's face with its mask of crude paint. Could not disguise, either, the broad Mongolian cast of her countenance. There was no doubt of Olga Demiroff's profession, nor of her nationality.

'All is well, little one?'

'All is well, Boris Ivanovitch.'

He nodded, murmuring: 'I do not think I have been followed.'

But there was anxiety in his tone. He went to the window, drawing the curtains aside slightly, and peering carefully out. He started away violently.

'There are two men – on the opposite pavement. It looks to me –' He broke off and began gnawing at his nails – a habit he had when anxious.

The Russian girl was shaking her head with a slow, reassuring action.

‘They were here before you came.’

‘All the same, it looks to me as though they were watching this house.’

‘Possibly,’ she admitted indifferently.

‘But then –’

‘What of it? Even if they *know* – it will not be *you* they will follow from here.’

A thin, cruel smile came to his lips.

‘No,’ he admitted, ‘that is true.’

He mused for a minute or two, and then observed,

‘This damned American – he can look after himself as well as anybody.’

‘I suppose so.’

He went again to the window.

‘Tough customers,’ he muttered, with a chuckle.

‘Known to the police, I fear. Well, well, I wish Brother Apache good hunting.’

Olga Demiroff shook her head.

‘If the American is the kind of man they say he is, it will take more than a couple of cowardly apaches to get the better of him.’ She paused. ‘I wonder –’

‘Well?’

‘Nothing. Only twice this evening a man has passed along this street – a man with white hair.’

‘What of it?’

‘This. As he passed those two men, he dropped his glove. One of them picked it up and returned it to him. A threadbare device.’

‘You mean – that the white-haired man is – their employer?’

‘Something of the kind.’

The Russian looked alarmed and uneasy.

‘You are sure – the parcel is safe? It has not been tampered with? There has been too much talk . . . much too much talk.’

He gnawed his nails again.

‘Judge for yourself.’

She bent to the fireplace, deftly removing the coals. Underneath, from amongst the crumpled balls of newspaper, she selected from the very middle an oblong package wrapped round with grimy newspaper, and handed it to the man.

‘Ingenious,’ he said, with a nod of approval.

‘The apartment has been searched twice. The mattress on my bed was ripped open.’

‘It is as I said,’ he muttered. ‘There has been too much talk. This haggling over the price – it was a mistake.’

He had unwrapped the newspaper. Inside was a small brown paper parcel. This in turn he unwrapped, verified the contents, and quickly wrapped it up once more. As he did so, an electric bell rang sharply.

‘The American is punctual,’ said Olga, with a glance at the clock.

She left the room. In a minute she returned ushering in a stranger, a big, broad-shouldered man whose transatlantic origin was evident. His keen glance went from one to the other.

‘M. Krassnine?’ he inquired politely.

‘I am he,’ said Boris. ‘I must apologize for – for the unconventionality of this meeting-place. But secrecy is urgent. I – I cannot afford to be connected with this business in any way.’

‘Is that so?’ said the American politely.

‘I have your word, have I not, that no details of this transaction will be made public? That is one of the conditions of – sale.’

The American nodded.

‘That has already been agreed upon,’ he said indifferently. ‘Now, perhaps, you will produce the goods.’

‘You have the money – in notes?’

‘Yes,’ replied the other.

He did not, however, make any attempt to produce it. After a moment’s hesitation, Krassnine gestured towards the small parcel on the table.

The American took it up and unrolled the wrapping paper. The contents he took over to a small electric lamp and submitted them to a very thorough examination. Satisfied, he drew from his pocket a thick leather

wallet and extracted from it a wad of notes. These he handed to the Russian, who counted them carefully.

‘All right?’

‘I thank you, Monsieur. Everything is correct.’

‘Ah!’ said the other. He slipped the brown paper parcel negligently into his pocket. He bowed to Olga. ‘Good evening, Mademoiselle. Good evening, M. Krassnine.’

He went out, shutting the door behind him. The eyes of the two in the room met. The man passed his tongue over his dry lips.

‘I wonder – will he ever get back to his hotel?’ he muttered.

By common accord, they both turned to the window. They were just in time to see the American emerge into the street below. He turned to the left and marched along at a good pace without once turning his head. Two shadows stole from a doorway and followed noiselessly. Pursuers and pursued vanished into the night. Olga Demiroff spoke.

‘He will get back safely,’ she said. ‘You need not fear – or hope – whichever it is.’

‘Why do you think he will be safe?’ asked Krassnine curiously.

‘A man who has made as much money as he has could not possibly be a fool,’ said Olga. ‘And talking of money –’

She looked significantly at Krassnine.

‘Eh?’

‘My share, Boris Ivanovitch.’

With some reluctance, Krassnine handed over two of the notes. She nodded her thanks, with a complete lack of emotion, and tucked them away in her stocking.

‘That is good,’ she remarked, with satisfaction.

He looked at her curiously.

‘You have no regrets, Olga Vassilovna?’

‘Regrets? For what?’

‘For what has been in your keeping. There are women – most women, I believe, who go mad over such things.’

She nodded reflectively.

‘Yes, you speak truth there. Most women have that madness. I – have not. I wonder now –’ She broke off.

‘Well?’ asked the other curiously.

‘The American will be safe with them – yes, I am sure of that. But afterwards –’

‘Eh? What are you thinking of?’

‘He will give them, of course, to some woman,’ said Olga thoughtfully. ‘I wonder what will happen then . . .’

She shook herself impatiently and went over to the window. Suddenly she uttered an exclamation and called to her companion.

‘See, he is going down the street now – the man I mean.’

They both gazed down together. A slim, elegant figure was progressing along at a leisurely pace. He wore an opera hat and a cloak. As he passed a street lamp, the light illuminated a thatch of thick white hair.