



Agatha Christie

postern
of fate

'Effortlessly convincing.'
New York Times

Postern of Fate

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 crime 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 dramatized – 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 novelized 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

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Postern of Fate

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For Hannibal and his master

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Four great gates has the city of Damascus . . .
Postern of Fate, the Desert Gate, Disaster's Cavern,
Fort of Fear . . .
Pass not beneath, O Caravan, or pass not singing.
Have you heard
That silence where the birds are dead, yet something
pipeth like a bird?

from *Gates of Damascus* by James Elroy Flecker

Book I

Chapter 1

Mainly Concerning Books

'Books!' said Tuppence.

She produced the word rather with the effect of a bad-tempered explosion.

'What did you say?' said Tommy.

Tuppence looked across the room at him.

'I said "books",' she said.

'I see what you mean,' said Thomas Beresford.

In front of Tuppence were three large packing cases. From each of them various books had been extracted. The larger part of them were still filled with books.

'It's incredible,' said Tuppence.

'You mean the room they take up?'

'Yes.'

'Are you trying to put them all on the shelves?'

'I don't know what I'm trying to do,' said Tuppence. 'That's the awkward part of it. One doesn't know ever, exactly, what one wants to do. Oh dear,' she sighed.

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‘Really,’ said her husband, ‘I should have thought that that was not at all characteristic of you. The trouble with you has always been that you knew much too well what you *do* want to do.’

‘What I mean is,’ said Tuppence, ‘that here we are, getting older, getting a bit – well, let’s face it – definitely rheumatic, especially when one is stretching; you know, stretching putting in books or lifting things down from shelves or kneeling down to look at the bottom shelves for something, then finding it a bit difficult to get up again.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Tommy, ‘that’s an account of our general disabilities. Is that what you started to say?’

‘No, it isn’t what I started to say. What I started to say was, it was lovely to be able to buy a new home and find just the place we wanted to go and live in, and just the house there we’d always dreamt of having – with a little alteration, of course.’

‘Knocking one or two rooms into each other,’ said Tommy, ‘and adding to it what you call a veranda and your builder calls a lodger, though I prefer to call it a loggia.’

‘And it’s going to be very nice,’ said Tuppence firmly.

‘When you’ve done it I shan’t know it! Is that the answer?’ said Tommy.

‘Not at all. All I said was that when you see it finished

you're going to be delighted and say what an ingenious and clever and artistic wife you have.'

'All right,' said Tommy. 'I'll remember the right thing to say.'

'You won't need to remember,' said Tuppence. 'It will burst upon you.'

'What's that got to do with books?' said Tommy.

'Well, we brought two or three cases of books with us. I mean, we sold off the books we didn't much care about. We brought the ones we really couldn't bear to part with, and then, of course, the what-you-call-'ems – I can't remember their name now, but the people who were selling us this house – they didn't want to take a lot of their own things with them, and they said if we'd like to make an offer they would leave things including books, and we came and looked at things –'

'And we made some offers,' said Tommy.

'Yes. Not as many as they hoped we would make, I expect. Some of the furniture and ornaments were too horrible. Well, fortunately we didn't have to take those, but when I came and saw the various books – there were some nursery ones, you know, some down in the sitting-room – and there are one or two old favourites. I mean, there still are. There are one or two of my own special favourites. And so I thought it'd be such fun to have them. You know, the story of Androcles and the

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Lion,' she said. 'I remember reading that when I was eight years old. Andrew Lang.'

'Tell me, Tuppence, were you clever enough to read at eight years old?'

'Yes,' said Tuppence, 'I read at five years old. Everybody could, when I was young. I didn't know one even had to sort of learn. I mean, somebody would read stories aloud, and you liked them very much and you remembered where the book went back on the shelf and you were always allowed to take it out and have a look at it yourself, and so you found you were reading it too, without bothering to learn to spell or anything like that. It wasn't so good later,' she said, 'because I've never been able to spell very well. And if somebody had taught me to spell when I was about four years old I can see it would have been very good indeed. My father did teach me to do addition and subtraction and multiplication, of course, because he said the multiplication table was the most useful thing you could learn in life, and I learnt long division too.'

'What a clever man he must have been!'

'I don't think he was specially clever,' said Tuppence, 'but he was just very, very nice.'

'Aren't we getting away from the point?'

'Yes, we are,' said Tuppence. 'Well, as I said, when I thought of reading *Androcles and the Lion* again – it came in a book of stories about animals, I think,