

Agatha Christie

**why
didn't
they
ask
evans?**

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Books

Why Didn't They Ask Evans?

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 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
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

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
The Hollow
The Labours of Hercules
Taken at the Flood

* novelised by Charles Osborne

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

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Ask Evans?**

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To Christopher Mallock
in memory of Hinds

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Chapter 1

The Accident

Bobby Jones teed up his ball, gave a short preliminary waggle, took the club back slowly, then brought it down and through with the rapidity of lightning.

Did the ball fly down the fairway straight and true, rising as it went and soaring over the bunker to land within an easy mashie shot of the fourteenth green?

No, it did not. Badly topped, it scudded along the ground and embedded itself firmly in the bunker!

There were no eager crowds to groan with dismay. The solitary witness of the shot manifested no surprise. And that is easily explained – for it was not the American-born master of the game who had played the shot, but merely the fourth son of the Vicar of Marchbolt – a small seaside town on the coast of Wales.

Bobby uttered a decidedly profane ejaculation.

He was an amiable-looking young man of about eight

and twenty. His best friend could not have said that he was handsome, but his face was an eminently likeable one, and his eyes had the honest brown friendliness of a dog's.

'I get worse every day,' he muttered dejectedly.

'You press,' said his companion.

Dr Thomas was a middle-aged man with grey hair and a red cheerful face. He himself never took a full swing. He played short straight shots down the middle, and usually beat more brilliant but more erratic players.

Bobby attacked his ball fiercely with a niblick. The third time was successful. The ball lay a short distance from the green which Dr Thomas had reached with two creditable iron shots.

'Your hole,' said Bobby.

They proceeded to the next tee.

The doctor drove first – a nice straight shot, but with no great distance about it.

Bobby sighed, teed his ball, reteed it, waggled his club a long time, took back stiffly, shut his eyes, raised his head, depressed his right shoulder, did everything he ought not to have done – and hit a screamer down the middle of the course.

He drew a deep breath of satisfaction. The well-known golfer's gloom passed from his eloquent face to be succeeded by the equally well-known golfer's exultation.

'I know now what I've been doing,' said Bobby – quite untruthfully.

A perfect iron shot, a little chip with a mashie and Bobby lay dead. He achieved a birdie four and Dr Thomas was reduced to one up.

Full of confidence, Bobby stepped on to the sixteenth tee. He again did everything he should not have done, and this time no miracle occurred. A terrific, a magnificent, an almost superhuman slice happened! The ball went round at right angles.

'If that had been straight – whew!' said Dr Thomas.

'If,' said Bobby bitterly. 'Hullo, I thought I heard a shout! Hope the ball didn't hit anyone.'

He peered out to the right. It was a difficult light. The sun was on the point of setting, and, looking straight into it, it was hard to see anything distinctly. Also there was a slight mist rising from the sea. The edge of the cliff was a few hundred yards away.

'The footpath runs along there,' said Bobby. 'But the ball can't possibly have travelled as far as that. All the same, I did think I heard a cry. Did you?'

But the doctor had heard nothing.

Bobby went after his ball. He had some difficulty in finding it, but ran it to earth at last. It was practically unplayable – embedded in a furze bush. He had a couple of hacks at it, then picked it up and called out to his companion that he gave up the hole.

The doctor came over towards him since the next tee was right on the edge of the cliff.

The seventeenth was Bobby's particular bugbear. At it you had to drive over a chasm. The distance was not actually so great, but the attraction of the depths below was overpowering.

They had crossed the footpath which now ran inland to their left, skirting the very edge of the cliff.

The doctor took an iron and just landed on the other side.

Bobby took a deep breath and drove. The ball scudded forward and disappeared over the lip of the abyss.

'Every single dashed time,' said Bobby bitterly. 'I do the same dashed idiotic thing.'

He skirted the chasm, peering over. Far below the sea sparkled, but not every ball was lost in its depths. The drop was sheer at the top, but below it shelved gradually.

Bobby walked slowly along. There was, he knew, one place where one could scramble down fairly easily. Caddies did so, hurling themselves over the edge and reappearing triumphant and panting with the missing ball.

Suddenly Bobby stiffened and called to his companion.

'I say, doctor, come here. What do you make of that?'

Some forty feet below was a dark heap of something that looked like old clothes.

The doctor caught his breath.

'By Jove,' he said. 'Somebody's fallen over the cliff. We must get down to him.'

Side by side the two men scrambled down the rock, the more athletic Bobby helping the other. At last they reached the ominous dark bundle. It was a man of about forty, and he was still breathing, though unconscious.

The doctor examined him, touching his limbs, feeling his pulse, drawing down the lids of his eyes. He knelt down beside him and completed his examination. Then he looked up at Bobby, who was standing there feeling rather sick, and slowly shook his head.

'Nothing to be done,' he said. 'His number's up, poor fellow. His back's broken. Well, well. I suppose he wasn't familiar with the path, and when the mist came up he walked over the edge. I've told the council more than once there ought to be a railing just here.'

He stood up again.

'I'll go off and get help,' he said. 'Make arrangements to have the body got up. It'll be dark before we know where we are. Will you stay here?'

Bobby nodded.

'There's nothing to be done for him, I suppose?' he asked.

Agatha Christie

The doctor shook his head.

‘Nothing. It won’t be long – the pulse is weakening fast. He’ll last another twenty minutes at most. Just possible he may recover consciousness before the end; but very likely he won’t. Still –’

‘Rather,’ said Bobby quickly. ‘I’ll stay. You get along. If he does come to, there’s no drug or anything –’ he hesitated.

The doctor shook his head.

‘There’ll be no pain,’ he said. ‘No pain at all.’

Turning away, he began rapidly to climb up the cliff again. Bobby watched him till he disappeared over the top with a wave of his hand.

Bobby moved a step or two along the narrow ledge, sat down on a projection in the rock and lit a cigarette. The business had shaken him. Up to now he had never come in contact with illness or death.

What rotten luck there was in the world! A swirl of mist on a fine evening, a false step – and life came to an end. Fine healthy-looking fellow too – probably never known a day’s illness in his life. The pallor of approaching death couldn’t disguise the deep tan of the skin. A man who had lived an out-of-door life – abroad, perhaps. Bobby studied him more closely – the crisp curling chestnut hair just touched with grey at the temples, the big nose, the strong jaw, the white teeth just showing through the parted lips. Then the

broad shoulders and the fine sinewy hands. The legs were twisted at a curious angle. Bobby shuddered and brought his eyes up again to the face. An attractive face, humorous, determined, resourceful. The eyes, he thought, were probably blue –

And just as he reached that point in his thoughts, the eyes suddenly opened.

They *were* blue – a clear deep blue. They looked straight at Bobby. There was nothing uncertain or hazy about them. They seemed completely conscious. They were watchful and at the same time they seemed to be asking a question.

Bobby got up quickly and came towards the man. Before he got there, the other spoke. His voice was not weak – it came out clear and resonant.

'Why didn't they ask Evans?' he said.

And then a queer little shudder passed over him, the eyelids dropped, the jaw fell . . .

The man was dead.

