

Agatha  
Christie

A glass is tipped over, spilling a red liquid that pools on the surface below. The liquid has a jagged, splattered edge. The background is a warm, light brown color.

*Three Act  
Tragedy*

## Three Act Tragedy

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 countries. 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 a long gap, she wrote another novel, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which was 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

\* novelised by Charles Osborne

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*

**Three Act  
Tragedy**

HARPER

## **HARPER**

An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers  
77-85 Fulham Palace Road,  
Hammersmith, London W6 8JB  
[www.harpercollins.co.uk](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk)

This *Agatha Christie Signature Edition* published 2002  
8

First published in Great Britain by Collins 1935

Copyright © 1934 Agatha Christie Limited  
(a Chorion company). All rights reserved.  
[www.agathachristie.com](http://www.agathachristie.com)

ISBN 13: 978-0-00-712090-1

Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,  
Grangemouth, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

**Dedicated to**  
**My Friends, Geoffrey and Violet Shipston**



# **Contents**

## **First Act**

### **Suspicion**

- 1 Crow's Nest 13
- 2 Incident Before Dinner 27
- 3 Sir Charles Wonders 35
- 4 A Modern Elaine 45
- 5 Flight From A Lady 55

## **Second Act**

### **Certainty**

- 1 Sir Charles Receives A Letter 67
- 2 The Missing Butler 83
- 3 Which Of Them? 97



- 4 The Evidence Of The Servants 105
- 5 In The Butler's Room 119
- 6 Concerning An Ink-Stain 131
- 7 Plan Of Campaign 141

### **Third Act**

#### **Discovery**

- 1 Mrs Babbington 157
- 2 Lady Mary 167
- 3 Re-Enter Hercule Poirot 179
- 4 A Watching Brief 185
- 5 Division of Labour 197
- 6 Cynthia Dacres 209
- 7 Captain Dacres 219
- 8 Angela Sutcliffe 229
- 9 Muriel Wills 235
- 10 Oliver Manders 247
- 11 Poirot Gives A Sherry Party 253
- 12 Day At Gilling 265
- 13 Mrs De Rushbridger 277
- 14 Miss Milray 287
- 15 Curtain 295

**Directed by**

Sir Charles Cartwright

**Assistant Directors**

Mr Satterthwaite

Miss Hermione Lytton Gore

**Clothes by**

Ambrosine Ltd

**Illumination by**

Hercule Poirot

■



First Act

**Suspicion**



## Chapter 1

### **Crow's Nest**

Mr Satterthwaite sat on the terrace of 'Crow's Nest' and watched his host, Sir Charles Cartwright, climbing up the path from the sea.

Crow's Nest was a modern bungalow of the better type. It had no half timbering, no gables, no excrescences dear to a third-class builder's heart. It was a plain white solid building – deceptive as to size, since it was a good deal bigger than it looked. It owed its name to its position, high up, overlooking the harbour of Loomouth. Indeed from one corner of the terrace, protected by a strong balustrade, there was a sheer drop to the sea below. By road Crow's Nest was a mile from the town. The road ran inland and then zigzagged high up above the sea. On foot it was accessible in seven minutes by the steep fisherman's path that Sir Charles Cartwright was ascending at this minute.

Sir Charles was a well-built, sunburnt man of middle age. He wore old grey flannel trousers and a white sweater. He had a slight rolling gait, and carried his hands half closed as he walked. Nine people out of ten would say, 'Retired Naval man – can't mistake the type.' The tenth, and more discerning, would have hesitated, puzzled by something indefinable that did not ring true. And then perhaps a picture would rise, unsought: the deck of a ship – but not a real ship – a ship curtailed by hanging curtains of thick rich material – a man, Charles Cartwright, standing on that deck, light that was not sunlight streaming down on him, the hands half clenched, the easy gait and a voice – the easy pleasant voice of an English sailor and gentleman, a great deal magnified in tone.

'No, sir,' Charles Cartwright was saying, 'I'm afraid I can't give you any answer to that question.'

And swish fell the heavy curtains, up sprang the lights, an orchestra plunged into the latest syncopated measure, girls with exaggerated bows in their hair said, 'Chocolates? Lemonade?' The first act of *The Call of the Sea*, with Charles Cartwright as Commander Vanstone, was over.

From his post of vantage, looking down, Mr Satterthwaite smiled.

A dried-up little pipkin of a man, Mr Satterthwaite,

a patron of art and the drama, a determined but pleasant snob, always included in the more important house-parties and social functions (the words 'and Mr Satterthwaite' appeared invariably at the tail of a list of guests). Withal a man of considerable intelligence and a very shrewd observer of people and things.

He murmured now, shaking his head, 'I wouldn't have thought it. No, really, I wouldn't have thought it.'

A step sounded on the terrace and he turned his head. The big grey-haired man who drew a chair forward and sat down had his profession clearly stamped on his keen, kindly, middle-aged face. 'Doctor' and 'Harley Street'. Sir Bartholomew Strange had succeeded in his profession. He was a well-known specialist in nervous disorders, and had recently received a knighthood in the Birthday Honours list.

He drew his chair forward beside that of Mr Satterthwaite and said:

'What wouldn't you have thought? Eh? Let's have it.'

With a smile Mr Satterthwaite drew attention to the figure below rapidly ascending the path.

'I shouldn't have thought Sir Charles would have remained contented so long in – er – exile.'

'By Jove, no more should I!' The other laughed,



throwing back his head. 'I've known Charles since he was a boy. We were at Oxford together. He's always been the same – a better actor in private life than on the stage! Charles is always acting. He can't help it – it's second nature to him. Charles doesn't go out of a room – he "makes an exit" – and he usually has to have a good line to make it on. All the same, he likes a change of part – none better. Two years ago he retired from the stage – said he wanted to live a simple country life, out of the world, and indulge his old fancy for the sea. He comes down here and builds this place. His idea of a simple country cottage. Three bathrooms and all the latest gadgets! I was like you, Satterthwaite, I didn't think it would last. After all, Charles is human – he needs his audience. Two or three retired captains, a bunch of old women and a parson – that's not much of a house to play to. I thought the "simple fellow, with his love of the sea," would run for six months. Then, frankly, I thought he'd tire of the part. I thought the next thing to fill the bill would be the weary man of the world at Monte Carlo, or possibly a laird in the Highlands – he's versatile, Charles is.'

The doctor stopped. It had been a long speech. His eyes were full of affection and amusement as he watched the unconscious man below. In a couple of minutes he would be with them.