

Agatha  
Christie

PERIL



AT END  
HOUSE

## Peril at End House

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 novels and short story collections, 17 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 V.A.D. 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  
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*

**Peril at End House**

HARPER

## **HARPER**

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To Eden Philpotts  
To whom I shall always be grateful  
for his friendship and the encouragement  
he gave me many years ago



## Contents

- 1 The Majestic Hotel 9
- 2 End House 25
- 3 Accidents? 43
- 4 There Must Be Something! 57
- 5 Mr and Mrs Croft 67
- 6 A Call Upon Mr Vyse 81
- 7 Tragedy 91
- 8 The Fatal Shawl 101
- 9 A. to J. 113
- 10 Nick's Secret 131
- 11 The Motive 145
- 12 Ellen 153
- 13 Letters 165
- 14 The Mystery of the Missing Will 175



- 15 Strange Behaviour of Frederica 189
- 16 Interview with Mr Whitfield 201
- 17 A Box of Chocolates 217
- 18 The Face at the Window 233
- 19 Poirot Produces a Play 253
- 20 J. 263
- 21 The Person – K. 267
- 22 The End of the Story 273

## Chapter 1

### The Majestic Hotel

No seaside town in the south of England is, I think, as attractive as St Loo. It is well named the Queen of Watering Places and reminds one forcibly of the Riviera. The Cornish coast is to my mind every bit as fascinating as that of the south of France.

I remarked as much to my friend, Hercule Poirot. 'So it said on our menu in the restaurant car yesterday, *mon ami*. Your remark is not original.'

'But don't you agree?'

He was smiling to himself and did not at once answer my question. I repeated it.

'A thousand pardons, Hastings. My thoughts were wandering. Wandering indeed to that part of the world you mentioned just now.'

'The south of France?'

'Yes. I was thinking of that last winter that I spent there and of the events which occurred.'

## Agatha Christie

I remembered. A murder had been committed on the Blue Train, and the mystery – a complicated and baffling one – had been solved by Poirot with his usual unerring acumen.

‘How I wish I had been with you,’ I said with deep regret.

‘I too,’ said Poirot. ‘Your experience would have been invaluable to me.’

I looked at him sideways. As a result of long habit, I distrust his compliments, but he appeared perfectly serious. And after all, why not? I have a very long experience of the methods he employs.

‘What I particularly missed was your vivid imagination, Hastings,’ he went on dreamily. ‘One needs a certain amount of light relief. My valet, Georges, an admirable man with whom I sometimes permitted myself to discuss a point, has no imagination whatever.’ This remark seemed to me quite irrelevant.

‘Tell me, Poirot,’ I said. ‘Are you never tempted to renew your activities? This passive life –’

‘Suits me admirably, my friend. To sit in the sun – what could be more charming? To step from your pedestal at the zenith of your fame – what could be a grander gesture? They say of me: “*That is Hercule Poirot! – The great – the unique! – There was never any one like him, there never will be!*” Eh bien – I am satisfied. I ask no more. I am modest.’

I should not myself have used the word modest. It seemed to me that my little friend's egotism had certainly not declined with his years. He leaned back in his chair, caressing his moustache and almost purring with self-satisfaction.

We were sitting on one of the terraces of the Majestic Hotel. It is the biggest hotel in St Loo and stands in its own grounds on a headland overlooking the sea. The gardens of the hotel lay below us freely interspersed with palm trees. The sea was of a deep and lovely blue, the sky clear and the sun shining with all the single-hearted fervour an August sun should (but in England so often does not) have. There was a vigorous humming of bees, a pleasant sound – and altogether nothing could have been more ideal.

We had only arrived last night, and this was the first morning of what we proposed should be a week's stay. If only these weather conditions continued, we should indeed have a perfect holiday.

I picked up the morning paper which had fallen from my hand and resumed my perusal of the morning's news. The political situation seemed unsatisfactory, but uninteresting, there was trouble in China, there was a long account of a rumoured City swindle, but on the whole there was no news of a very thrilling order.

'Curious thing this parrot disease,' I remarked, as I turned the sheet.

## Agatha Christie

'Very curious.'

'Two more deaths at Leeds, I see.'

'Most regrettable.'

I turned a page.

'Still no news of that flying fellow, Seton, in his round-the-world flight. Pretty plucky, these fellows. That amphibian machine of his, the *Albatross*, must be a great invention. Too bad if he's gone west. Not that they've given up hope yet. He may have made one of the Pacific islands.'

'The Solomon islanders are still cannibals, are they not?' inquired Poirot pleasantly.

'Must be a fine fellow. That sort of thing makes one feel it's a good thing to be an Englishman after all.'

'It consoles for the defeats at Wimbledon,' said Poirot.

'I – I didn't mean,' I began.

My friend waved my attempted apology aside gracefully.

'Me,' he announced. 'I am not amphibian, like the machine of the poor Captain Seton, but I am cosmopolitan. And for the English I have always had, as you know, a great admiration. The thorough way, for instance, in which they read the daily paper.'

My attention had strayed to political news.

'They seem to be giving the Home Secretary a pretty bad time of it,' I remarked with a chuckle.

‘The poor man. He has his troubles, that one. Ah! yes. So much so that he seeks for help in the most improbable quarters.’

I stared at him.

With a slight smile, Poirot drew from his pocket his morning’s correspondence, neatly secured by a rubber band. From this he selected one letter which he tossed across to me.

‘It must have missed us yesterday,’ he said.

I read the letter with a pleasurable feeling of excitement.

‘But, Poirot,’ I cried. ‘This is most flattering!’

‘You think so, my friend?’

‘He speaks in the warmest terms of your ability.’

‘He is right,’ said Poirot, modestly averting his eyes.

‘He begs you to investigate this matter for him – puts it as a personal favour.’

‘Quite so. It is unnecessary to repeat all this to me. You understand, my dear Hastings. I have read the letter myself.’

‘It is too bad,’ I cried. ‘This will put an end to our holiday.’

‘No, no, *calmez vous* – there is no question of that.’

‘But the Home Secretary says the matter is urgent.’

‘He may be right – or again he may not. These politicians, they are easily excited. I have seen myself, in the *Chambre des Deputés* in Paris –’

## Agatha Christie

‘Yes, yes, but Poirot, surely we ought to be making arrangements? The express to London has gone – it leaves at twelve o’clock. The next –’

‘Calm yourself, Hastings, calm yourself, I pray of you! Always the excitement, the agitation. We are not going to London today – nor yet tomorrow.’

‘But this summons –’

‘Does not concern me. I do not belong to your police force, Hastings. I am asked to undertake a case as a private investigator. I refuse.’

‘You *refuse?*’

‘Certainly. I write with perfect politeness, tender my regrets, my apologies, explain that I am completely desolated – but what will you? I have retired – I am finished.’

‘You are not finished,’ I exclaimed warmly.

Poirot patted my knee.

‘There speaks the good friend – the faithful dog. And you have reason, too. The grey cells, they still function – the order, the method – it is still there. But when I have retired, my friend, I have retired! It is finished! I am not a stage favourite who gives the world a dozen farewells. In all generosity I say: let the young men have a chance. They may possibly do something creditable. I doubt it, but they may. Anyway they will do well enough for this doubtless tiresome affair of the Home Secretary’s.’

‘But, Poirot, the compliment!’

‘Me, I am above compliments. The Home Secretary, being a man of sense, realizes that if he can only obtain my services all will be successful. What will you? He is unlucky. Hercule Poirot has solved his last case.’

I looked at him. In my heart of hearts I deplored his obstinacy. The solving of such a case as was indicated might add still further lustre to his already world-wide reputation. Nevertheless I could not but admire his unyielding attitude.

Suddenly a thought struck me and I smiled.

‘I wonder,’ I said, ‘that you are not afraid. Such an emphatic pronouncement will surely tempt the gods.’

‘Impossible,’ he replied, ‘that anyone should shake the decision of Hercule Poirot.’

‘*Impossible, Poirot?*’

‘You are right, *mon ami*, one should not use such a word. *Eh, ma foi*, I do not say that if a bullet should strike the wall by my head, I would not investigate the matter! One is human after all!’

I smiled. A little pebble had just struck the terrace beside us, and Poirot’s fanciful analogy from it tickled my fancy. He stooped now and picked up the pebble as he went on.

‘Yes – one is human. One is the sleeping dog – well and good, but the sleeping dog can be roused. There is a proverb in your language that says so.’

‘In fact,’ I said, ‘if you find a dagger planted by your



## Agatha Christie

pillow tomorrow morning – let the criminal who put it there beware!’

He nodded, but rather absently.

Suddenly, to my surprise, he rose and descended the couple of steps that led from the terrace to the garden. As he did so, a girl came into sight hurrying up towards us.

I had just registered the impression that she was a decidedly pretty girl when my attention was drawn to Poirot who, not looking where he was going, had stumbled over a root and fallen heavily. He was just abreast of the girl at the time and she and I between us helped him to his feet. My attention was naturally on my friend, but I was conscious of an impression of dark hair, an impish face and big dark-blue eyes.

‘A thousand pardons,’ stammered Poirot. ‘Mademoiselle, you are most kind. I regret exceedingly – ouch! – my foot he pains me considerably. No, no, it is nothing really – the turned ankle, that is all. In a few minutes all will be well. But if you could help me, Hastings – you and Mademoiselle between you, if she will be so very kind. I am ashamed to ask it of her.’

With me on the one side and the girl on the other we soon got Poirot on to a chair on the terrace. I then suggested fetching a doctor, but this my friend negatived sharply.

‘It is nothing, I tell you. The ankle turned, that is all. Painful for the moment, but soon over.’ He made