

Agatha Christie

MURDER IN THE MEWS



Murder in the Mews

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
 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

**Murder in
the Mews**

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To My Old Friend
Sybil Heeley
With affection

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Murder in the Mews

Chapter 1

I .

‘Penny for the guy, sir?’

A small boy with a grimy face grinned ingratiatingly.

‘Certainly not!’ said Chief Inspector Japp. ‘And, look here, my lad –’

A short homily followed. The dismayed urchin beat a precipitate retreat, remarking briefly and succinctly to his youthful friends:

‘Blimey, if it ain’t a cop all togged up!’

The band took to its heels, chanting the incantation:

*Remember, remember
The fifth of November
Gunpowder treason and plot.
We see no reason*

*Why gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot.*

The chief inspector's companion, a small, elderly man with an egg-shaped head and large, military-looking moustaches, was smiling to himself.

'*Très bien*, Japp,' he observed. 'You preach the sermon very well! I congratulate you!'

'Rank excuse for begging, that's what Guy Fawkes' Day is!' said Japp.

'An interesting survival,' mused Hercule Poirot. 'The fireworks go up – crack – crack – long after the man they commemorate and his deed are forgotten.'

The Scotland Yard man agreed.

'Don't suppose many of those kids really know who Guy Fawkes was.'

'And soon, doubtless, there will be confusion of thought. Is it in honour or in execration that on the fifth of November the *feu d'artifice* are sent up? To blow up an English Parliament, was it a sin or a noble deed?'

Japp chuckled.

'Some people would say undoubtedly the latter.'

Turning off the main road, the two men passed into the comparative quiet of a mews. They had been dining together and were now taking a short cut to Hercule Poirot's flat.

As they walked along the sound of squibs was still heard periodically. An occasional shower of golden rain illuminated the sky.

'Good night for a murder,' remarked Japp with professional interest. 'Nobody would hear a shot, for instance, on a night like this.'

'It has always seemed odd to me that more criminals do not take advantage of the fact,' said Hercule Poirot.

'Do you know, Poirot, I almost wish sometimes that *you* would commit a murder.'

'Mon cher!'

'Yes, I'd like to see just how you'd set about it.'

'My dear Japp, *if* I committed a murder you would not have the least chance of seeing – how I set about it! You would not even be aware, probably, that a murder had been committed.'

Japp laughed good-humouredly and affectionately.

'Cocky little devil, aren't you?' he said indulgently.

II

At half-past eleven the following morning, Hercule Poirot's telephone rang.

'Allo? 'Allo?'

'Hallo, that you, Poirot?'

Agatha Christie

'Oui, c'est moi.'

'Japp speaking here. Remember we came home last night through Bardsley Gardens Mews?'

'Yes?'

'And that we talked about how easy it would be to shoot a person with all those squibs and crackers and the rest of it going off?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, there was a suicide in that mews. No. 14. A young widow – Mrs Allen. I'm going round there now. Like to come?'

'Excuse me, but does someone of your eminence, my dear friend, usually get sent to a case of suicide?'

'Sharp fellow. No – he doesn't. As a matter of fact our doctor seems to think there's something funny about this. Will you come? I kind of feel you ought to be in on it.'

'Certainly I will come. No. 14, you say?'

'That's right.'

III

Poirot arrived at No. 14 Bardsley Gardens Mews almost at the same moment as a car drew up containing Japp and three other men.

No. 14 was clearly marked out as the centre of interest. A big circle of people, chauffeurs, their wives, errand boys, loafers, well-dressed passers-by and innumerable children were drawn up all staring at No. 14 with open mouths and a fascinated stare.

A police constable in uniform stood on the step and did his best to keep back the curious. Alert-looking young men with cameras were busy and surged forward as Japp alighted.

‘Nothing for you now,’ said Japp, brushing them aside. He nodded to Poirot. ‘So here you are. Let’s get inside.’

They passed in quickly, the door shut behind them and they found themselves squeezed together at the foot of a ladder-like flight of stairs.

A man came to the top of the staircase, recognized Japp and said:

‘Up here, sir.’

Japp and Poirot mounted the stairs.

The man at the stairhead opened a door on the left and they found themselves in a small bedroom.

‘Thought you’d like me to run over the chief points, sir.’

‘Quite right, Jameson,’ said Japp. ‘What about it?’

Divisional Inspector Jameson took up the tale.

‘Deceased’s a Mrs Allen, sir. Lived here with a friend – a Miss Plenderleith. Miss Plenderleith was

away staying in the country and returned this morning. She let herself in with her key, was surprised to find no one about. A woman usually comes in at nine o'clock to do for them. She went upstairs first into her own room (that's this room) then across the landing to her friend's room. Door was locked on the inside. She rattled the handle, knocked and called, but couldn't get any answer. In the end getting alarmed she rang up the police station. That was at ten forty-five. We came along at once and forced the door open. Mrs Allen was lying in a heap on the ground shot through the head. There was an automatic in her hand – a Webley .25 – and it looked a clear case of suicide.'

'Where is Miss Plenderleith now?'

'She's downstairs in the sitting-room, sir. A very cool, efficient young lady, I should say. Got a head on her.'

'I'll talk to her presently. I'd better see Brett now.'

Accompanied by Poirot he crossed the landing and entered the opposite room. A tall, elderly man looked up and nodded.

'Hallo, Japp, glad you've got here. Funny business, this.'

Japp advanced towards him. Hercule Poirot sent a quick searching glance round the room.

It was much larger than the room they had just quitted. It had a built-out bay window, and whereas