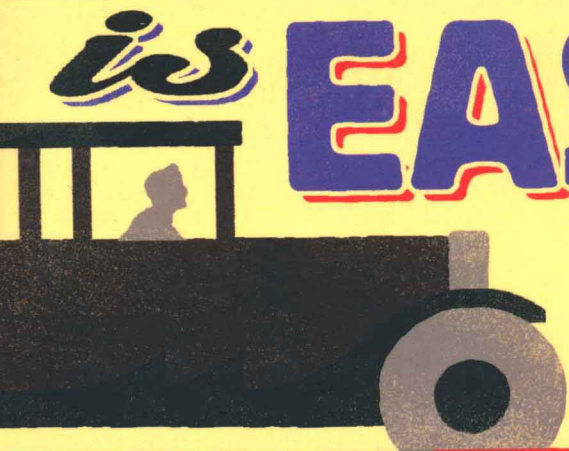


Agatha
Christie
MURDER
is **EASY**



Murder Is Easy

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 is Easy

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**Dedicated to
Rosalind and Susan
the first two critics of this book**

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Chapter 1

A Fellow-Traveller

England!

England after many years!

How was he going to like it?

Luke Fitzwilliam asked himself that question as he walked down the gang-plank to the dock. It was present at the back of his mind all through the wait in the Customs' shed. It came suddenly to the fore when he was finally seated in the boat-train.

England on leave was one thing. Plenty of money to blue (to begin with anyway!), old friends to look up, meetings with other fellows home like himself – a carefree atmosphere of 'Well, it won't be long. Might as well' enjoy myself! Soon be going back.'

But now there was no question of going back. No more of the hot stifling nights, no more blinding sun and tropical beauty of rich vegetation, no more

Agatha Christie

lonely evenings reading and re-reading old copies of *The Times*.

Here he was, honourably retired on a pension, with some small private means of his own, a gentleman of leisure, come home to England. What was he going to do with himself?

England! England on a June day, with a grey sky and a sharp biting wind. Nothing welcoming about her on a day like this! And the people! Heavens, the people! Crowds of them, all with grey faces like the sky – anxious worried faces. The houses too, springing up everywhere like mushrooms. Nasty little houses! Revolting little houses! Chicken coops in the grandiose manner all over the countryside!

With an effort Luke Fitzwilliam averted his eyes from the landscape outside the railway carriage window and settled down to a perusal of the papers he had just bought. *The Times*, the *Daily Clarion* and *Punch*.

He started with the *Daily Clarion*. The *Clarion* was given over entirely to Epsom.

Luke thought: 'A pity we didn't get in yesterday. Haven't seen the Derby run since I was nineteen.'

He had drawn a horse in the Club sweep and he looked now to see what the *Clarion's* racing correspondent thought of its chance. He found it dismissed contemptuously in a sentence.

'Of the others, Jujube the II., Mark's Mile, Santony and Jerry Boy are hardly likely to qualify for a place. A likely outsider is -'

But Luke paid no attention to the likely outsider. His eye had shifted to the betting. Jujube the II. was listed at a modest 40 to 1.

He glanced at his watch. A quarter to four. 'Well,' he thought. 'It's over now.' And he wished he'd had a bet on Clarigold who was the second favourite.

Then he opened *The Times* and became absorbed in more serious matters.

Not for long, however, for a fierce-looking colonel in the corner opposite was so incensed at what he himself had just read that he had to pass on his indignation to his fellow-passenger. A full half-hour passed before the colonel tired of saying what he thought about 'these damned Communist agitators, sir'.

The colonel died down at last and finally dropped off to sleep with his mouth open. Shortly afterwards the train slowed down and finally stopped. Luke looked out of the window. They were in a large empty-looking station with many platforms. He caught sight of a bookstall some way up the platform with a placard: DERBY RESULT. Luke opened the door, jumped out, and ran towards the bookstall. A moment later he was staring with a broad grin at a few smudged lines in the stop press.

Derby Result

JUJUBE THE II.

MAZEPPA

CLARIGOLD

Luke grinned broadly. A hundred pounds to blue! Good old Jujube the II., so scornfully dismissed by all the tipsters.

He folded the paper, still grinning to himself, and turned back – to face emptiness. In the excitement of Jujube the II.'s victory, his train had slipped out of the station unnoticed by him.

'When the devil did that train go out?' he demanded of a gloomy-looking porter.

The latter replied:

'What train? There hasn't been no train since the 3.14.'

'There was a train here just now. I got out of it. The boat express.'

The porter replied austere:

'The boat express don't stop anywhere till London.'

'But it did,' Luke assured him. 'I got out of it.'

'No stop anywhere till London,' repeated the porter immovably.

'It stopped at this very platform and I got out of it, I tell you.'

Faced by facts, the porter changed his ground.

‘You didn’t ought to have done,’ he said reproachfully. ‘It don’t stop here.’

‘But it did.’

‘That ’twas signal, that was. Signal against it. It didn’t what you’d call “stop”.’

‘I’m not so good at these fine distinctions as you are,’ said Luke. ‘The point is, what do I do next?’

The porter, a man of slow ideas, repeated reproachfully: ‘You didn’t ought to have got out.’

‘We’ll admit that,’ said Luke. ‘The wrong is done, past all recall – weep we never so bitterly we can never bring back the dead past – Quoth the raven “Nevermore” – The moving finger writes; and having writ moves on, etc., etc., and so on and so forth. What I’m trying to get at is, what do you, a man experienced in the service of the railway company, advise me to do now?’

‘You’re asking what you’d better do?’

‘That,’ said Luke, ‘is the idea. There are, I presume, trains that stop, really officially stop, here?’

‘Reckon,’ said the porter. ‘You’d best go on by the 4.25.’

‘If the 4.25 goes to London,’ said Luke, ‘the 4.25 is the train for me.’

Reassured on that point, Luke strolled up and down the platform. A large board informed him that he was at Fenny Clayton Junction for Wychwood-under-Ashe,

and presently a train consisting of one carriage pushed backwards by an antiquated little engine came slowly puffing in and deposited itself in a modest bay. Six or seven people alighted, and crossing over a bridge, came to join Luke on his platform. The gloomy porter suddenly awoke to life and began pushing about a large truck of crates and baskets, another porter joined him and began to rattle milk cans. Fenny Clayton awoke to life.

At last, with immense importance the London train came in. The third-class carriages were crowded, and of firsts there were only three and each one contained a traveller or travellers. Luke scrutinized each compartment. The first, a smoker, contained a gentleman of military aspect smoking a cigar. Luke felt he had had enough of Anglo-Indian colonels today. He passed on to the next one, which contained a tired-looking genteel young woman, possibly a nursery governess, and an active-looking small boy of about three. Luke passed on quickly. The next door was open and the carriage contained one passenger, an elderly lady. She reminded Luke slightly of one of his aunts, his Aunt Mildred, who had courageously allowed him to keep a grass snake when he was ten years old. Aunt Mildred had been decidedly a good aunt as aunts go. Luke entered the carriage and sat down.

After some five minutes of intense activity on the part

of milk vans, luggage trucks and other excitements, the train moved slowly out of the station. Luke unfolded his paper and turned to such items of news as might interest a man who had already read his morning paper.

* He did not hope to read it for long. Being a man of many aunts, he was fairly certain that the nice old lady in the corner did not propose to travel in silence to London.

He was right – a window that needed adjusting, dropped umbrella – and the way the old lady was telling him what a good train this was.

‘Only an hour and ten minutes. That’s very good, you know, very good indeed. Much better than the morning one. That takes an hour and forty minutes.’

She went on:

‘Of course, nearly every one goes by the morning one. I mean, when it is the cheap day it’s silly to go up in the afternoon. I meant to go up this morning, but Wonky Pooh was missing – that’s my cat, a Persian, such a beauty only he’s had a painful ear lately – and of course I couldn’t leave home till he was found!’

Luke murmured:

‘Of course not,’ and let his eyes drop ostentatiously to his paper. But it was of no avail. The flood went on.

‘So I just made the best of a bad job and took the afternoon train instead, and of course it’s a blessing in one way because it’s not so crowded – not that that

matters when one is travelling first class. Of course, I don't usually do that. I mean, I should consider it an *extravagance*, what with taxes and one's dividends being less and servants' wages so much more and everything – but really I was so upset because you see, I'm going up on very important business, and I wanted to think out exactly what I was going to say – just quietly, you know –' Luke repressed a smile. 'And when there are people you know travelling up too – well, one can't be unfriendly – so I thought just for once, the expense was *quite permissible* – though I do think nowadays there is so much waste – and nobody saves or thinks of the future. One is sorry the seconds were ever abolished – it did make just that little difference.

'Of course,' she went on quickly, with a swift glance at Luke's bronzed face, 'I know soldiers on leave have to travel first class. I mean, being officers, it's expected of them –'

Luke sustained the inquisitive glance of a pair of bright twinkling eyes. He capitulated at once. It would come to it, he knew, in the end.

'I'm not a soldier,' he said.

'Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean – I just thought – you were so brown – perhaps home from the East on leave.'

'I'm home from the East,' said Luke. 'But not on leave.' He stalled off further researches with a bald statement. 'I'm a policeman.'