

Agatha  
Christie



THE  
HOUND OF DEATH

## The Hound of Death

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 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

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The Hound of Death  
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Lord Edgware Dies  
Murder on the Orient Express  
Three-Act Tragedy  
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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

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Taken at the Flood  
Mrs McGinty's Dead  
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A Daughter's a Daughter  
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### *Play Collections*

The Mousetrap and Selected Plays  
Witness for the Prosecution and  
Selected Plays

*Agatha Christie*

**The Hound  
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HARPER

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## **The Hound of Death**





# I

It was from William P. Ryan, American newspaper correspondent, that I first heard of the affair. I was dining with him in London on the eve of his return to New York and happened to mention that on the morrow I was going down to Folbridge.

He looked up and said sharply: 'Folbridge, Cornwall?'

Now only about one person in a thousand knows that there is a Folbridge in Cornwall. They always take it for granted that the Folbridge, Hampshire, is meant. So Ryan's knowledge aroused my curiosity.

'Yes,' I said. 'Do you know it?'

He merely replied that he was darned. He then asked if I happened to know a house called Trearne down there.

My interest increased.

'Very well indeed. In fact, it's to Trearne I'm going. It's my sister's house.'

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‘Well,’ said William P. Ryan. ‘If that doesn’t beat the band!’

I suggested that he should cease making cryptic remarks and explain himself.

‘Well,’ he said. ‘To do that I shall have to go back to an experience of mine at the beginning of the war.’

I sighed. The events which I am relating to took place in 1921. To be reminded of the war was the last thing any man wanted. We were, thank God, beginning to forget . . . Besides, William P. Ryan on his war experiences was apt, as I knew, to be unbelievably long-winded.

But there was no stopping him now.

‘At the start of the war, as I dare say you know, I was in Belgium for my paper – moving about some. Well, there’s a little village – I’ll call it X. A one horse place if there ever was one, but there’s quite a big convent there. Nuns in white what do you call ‘em – I don’t know the name of the order. Anyway, it doesn’t matter. Well, this little burgh was right in the way of the German advance. The Uhlans arrived –’

I shifted uneasily. William P. Ryan lifted a hand reassuringly.

‘It’s all right,’ he said. ‘This isn’t a German atrocity story. It might have been, perhaps, but it isn’t. As a matter of fact, the boot’s on the other leg. The Huns

made for that convent – they got there and the whole thing blew up.’

‘Oh!’ I said, rather startled.

‘Odd business, wasn’t it? Of course, off hand, I should say the Huns had been celebrating and had monkeyed round with their own explosives. But it seems they hadn’t anything of that kind with them. They weren’t the high explosive johnnies. Well, then, I ask you, what should a pack of nuns know about high explosive? Some nuns, I should say!’

‘It is odd,’ I agreed.

‘I was interested in hearing the peasants’ account of the matter. They’d got it all cut and dried. According to them it was a slap-up one hundred per cent efficient first-class modern miracle. It seems one of the nuns had got something of a reputation – a budding saint – went into trances and saw visions. And according to them she worked the stunt. She called down the lightning to blast the impious Hun – and it blasted him all right – and everything else within range. A pretty efficient miracle, that!

‘I never really got at the truth of the matter – hadn’t time. But miracles were all the rage just then – angels at Mons and all that. I wrote up the thing, put in a bit of sob stuff, and pulled the religious stop out well, and sent it to my paper. It went down very well in the States. They were liking that kind of thing just then.

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‘But (I don’t know if you’ll understand this) in writing, I got kinder interested. I felt I’d like to know what really had happened. There was nothing to see at the spot itself. Two walls still left standing, and on one of them was a black powder mark that was the exact shape of a great hound.

‘The peasants round about were scared to death of that mark. They called it the Hound of Death and they wouldn’t pass that way after dark.

‘Superstition’s always interesting. I felt I’d like to see the lady who worked the stunt. She hadn’t perished, it seemed. She’d gone to England with a batch of other refugees. I took the trouble to trace her. I found she’d been sent to Trearne, Folbridge, Cornwall.’

I nodded.

‘My sister took in a lot of Belgian refugees the beginning of the war. About twenty.’

‘Well, I always meant, if I had time, to look up the lady. I wanted to hear her own account of the disaster. Then, what with being busy and one thing and another, it slipped my memory. Cornwall’s a bit out of the way anyhow. In fact, I’d forgotten the whole thing till your mentioning Folbridge just now brought it back.’

‘I must ask my sister,’ I said. ‘She may have heard something about it. Of course, the Belgians have all been repatriated long ago.’

‘Naturally. All the same, in case your sister does know anything I’ll be glad if you pass it on to me.’

‘Of course I will,’ I said heartily.

And that was that.

## II

It was the second day after my arrival at Trearne that the story recurred to me. My sister and I were having tea on the terrace.

‘Kitty,’ I said, ‘didn’t you have a nun among your Belgians?’

‘You don’t mean Sister Marie Angelique, do you?’

‘Possibly I do,’ I said cautiously. ‘Tell me about her.’

‘Oh! my dear, she was the most uncanny creature. She’s still here, you know.’

‘What? In the house?’

‘No, no, in the village. Dr Rose – you remember Dr Rose?’

I shook my head.

‘I remember an old man of about eighty-three.’

‘Dr Laird. Oh! he died. Dr Rose has only been here a few years. He’s quite young and very keen on new ideas. He took the most enormous interest in Sister Marie Angelique. She has hallucinations and things,

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you know, and apparently is most frightfully interesting from a medical point of view. Poor thing, she'd nowhere to go – and really was in my opinion quite potty – only impressive, if you know what I mean – well, as I say, she'd nowhere to go, and Dr Rose very kindly fixed her up in the village. I believe he's writing a monograph or whatever it is that doctors write, about her.'

She paused and then said:

'But what do you know about her?'

'I heard a rather curious story.'

I passed on the story as I had received it from Ryan. Kitty was very much interested.

'She looks the sort of person who could blast you – if you know what I mean,' she said.

'I really think,' I said, my curiosity heightened, 'that I must see this young woman.'

'Do. I'd like to know what you think of her. Go and see Dr Rose first. Why not walk down to the village after tea?'

I accepted the suggestion.

I found Dr Rose at home and introduced myself. He seemed a pleasant young man, yet there was something about his personality that rather repelled me. It was too forceful to be altogether agreeable.

The moment I mentioned Sister Marie Angelique he stiffened to attention. He was evidently keenly interested. I gave him Ryan's account of the matter.

'Ah!' he said thoughtfully. 'That explains a great deal.'

He looked up quickly at me and went on.

'The case is really an extraordinarily interesting one. The woman arrived here having evidently suffered some severe mental shock. She was in a state of great mental excitement also. She was given to hallucinations of a most startling character. Her personality is most unusual. Perhaps you would like to come with me and call upon her. She is really well worth seeing.'

I agreed readily.

We set out together. Our objective was a small cottage on the outskirts of the village. Folbridge is a most picturesque place. It lies at the mouth of the river Fol mostly on the east bank, the west bank is too precipitous for building, though a few cottages do cling to the cliffside there. The doctor's own cottage was perched on the extreme edge of the cliff on the west side. From it you looked down on the big waves lashing against the black rocks.

The little cottage to which we were now proceeding lay inland out of the sight of the sea.

'The district nurse lives here,' explained Dr Rose. 'I have arranged for Sister Marie Angeliqne to board with her. It is just as well that she should be under skilled supervision.'



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‘Is she quite normal in her manner?’ I asked curiously.

‘You can judge for yourself in a minute,’ he replied, smiling.

The district nurse, a dumpy pleasant little body, was just setting out on her bicycle when we arrived.

‘Good evening, nurse, how’s your patient?’ called out the doctor.

‘She’s much as usual, doctor. Just sitting there with her hands folded and her mind far away. Often enough she’ll not answer when I speak to her, though for the matter of that it’s little enough English she understands even now.’

Rose nodded, and as the nurse bicycled away, he went up to the cottage door, rapped sharply and entered.

Sister Marie Angelique was lying in a long chair near the window. She turned her head as we entered.

It was a strange face – pale, transparent looking, with enormous eyes. There seemed to be an infinitude of tragedy in those eyes.

‘Good evening, my sister,’ said the doctor in French.

‘Good evening, M. le docteur.’

‘Permit me to introduce a friend, Mr Anstruther.’

I bowed and she inclined her head with a faint smile.

‘And how are you today?’ inquired the doctor, sitting down beside her.