

*Agatha Christie*

MURDER IN MESOPOTAMIA



## Murder in Mesopotamia

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  
Mesopotamia**

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Dedicated to  
My many archaeological friends  
in Iraq and Syria



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## **Foreword**

*by Giles Reilly, MD*

The events chronicled in this narrative took place some four years ago. Circumstances have rendered it necessary, in my opinion, that a straightforward account of them should be given to the public. There have been the wildest and most ridiculous rumours suggesting that important evidence was suppressed and other nonsense of that kind. Those misconstructions have appeared more especially in the American Press.

For obvious reasons it was desirable that the account should not come from the pen of one of the expedition staff, who might reasonably be supposed to be prejudiced.

I therefore suggested to Miss Amy Leatheran that she should undertake the task. She is obviously the person to do it. She had a professional character of the highest, she is not biased by having any previous connection with the University of Pittstown Expedition

## Agatha Christie

to Iraq and she was an observant and intellectual eye-witness.

It was not very easy to persuade Miss Leatheran to undertake this task – in fact, persuading her was one of the hardest jobs of my professional career – and even after it was completed she displayed a curious reluctance to let me see the manuscript. I discovered that this was partly due to some critical remarks she had made concerning my daughter Sheila. I soon disposed of that, assuring her that as children criticize their parents freely in print nowadays, parents are only too delighted when their offspring come in for their share of abuse! Her other objection was extreme modesty about her literary style. She hoped I would ‘put the grammar right and all that.’ I have, on the contrary, refused to alter so much as a single word. Miss Leatheran’s style in my opinion is vigorous, individual and entirely apposite. If she calls Hercule Poirot ‘Poirot’ in one paragraph and ‘Mr Poirot’ in the next, such a variation is both interesting and suggestive. At one moment she is, so to speak, ‘remembering her manners’ (and hospital nurses are great sticklers for etiquette) and at the next her interest in what she is telling is that of a pure human being – cap and cuffs forgotten!

The only thing I have done is to take the liberty of writing a first chapter – aided by a letter kindly supplied

by one of Miss Leatheran's friends. It is intended to be in the nature of a frontispiece – that is, it gives a rough sketch of the narrator.



## Chapter 1

### Frontispiece

In the hall of the Tigris Palace Hotel in Baghdad a hospital nurse was finishing a letter. Her fountain-pen drove briskly over the paper.

. . . Well, dear, I think that's really all my news. I must say it's been nice to see a bit of the world – though England for me every time, thank you. The *dirt* and the *mess* in Baghdad you wouldn't believe – and not romantic at all like you'd think from the *Arabian Nights*! Of course, it's pretty just on the river, but the town itself is just awful – and no proper shops at all. Major Kelsey took me through the bazaars, and of course there's no denying they're *quaint* – but just a lot of rubbish and hammering away at copper pans till they make your headache – and not what I'd like to use myself unless I was sure about the cleaning. You've got to be so careful of verdigris with copper pans.

I'll write and let you know if anything comes of the job that Dr Reilly spoke about. He said this American gentleman was in Baghdad now and might come and see me this afternoon. It's for his wife – she has 'fancies', so Dr Reilly said. He didn't say any more than that, and of course, dear, one knows what that *usually means* (but I hope not actually D.T.s!). Of course, Dr Reilly didn't *say* anything – but he had a look – if you know what I mean. This Dr Leidner is an archaeologist and is digging up a mound out in the desert somewhere for some American museum.

Well, dear, I will close now. I thought what you told me about little Stubbins was simply *killing*! Whatever did Matron say?

No more now.

Yours ever,

Amy Leatheran

Enclosing the letter in an envelope, she addressed it to Sister Curshaw, St Christopher's Hospital, London.

As she put the cap on her fountain-pen, one of the native boys approached her.

'A gentleman come to see you. Dr Leidner.'

Nurse Leatheran turned. She saw a man of middle height with slightly stooping shoulders, a brown beard and gentle, tired eyes.

Dr Leidner saw a woman of thirty-five, of erect,

confident bearing. He saw a good-humoured face with slightly prominent blue eyes and glossy brown hair. She looked, he thought, just what a hospital nurse for a nervous case ought to look. Cheerful, robust, shrewd and matter-of-fact.

Nurse Leatheran, he thought, would do.



