

Agatha
Christie

A decorative border of small, realistic-looking red berries with green leaves is arranged in a slightly curved line across the middle of the cover.

HERCULE
POIROT'S
CHRISTMAS

Hercule Poirot's Christmas

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 WAD. 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 a gap of 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

**Hercule Poirot's
Christmas**

HARPER

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An imprint of HarperCollins *Publishers*
77–85 Fulham Palace Road,
Hammersmith, London W6 8JB
www.harpercollins.co.uk

This *Agatha Christie Signature Edition* published 2001
7

First published in Great Britain by Collins 1938

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www.agathachristie.com

ISBN 13: 978 0 00 712069 7

Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Grangemouth, Stirlingshire

Printed in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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My dear James

You have always been one of the most faithful and kindly of my readers, and I was therefore seriously perturbed when I received from you a word of criticism.

You complained that my murders were getting too refined – anaemic, in fact. You yearned for a ‘good violent murder with lots of blood’. A murder where there was no doubt about its being murder!

So this is your special story – written for you. I hope it may please.

Your affectionate sister-in-law

Agatha

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Part 1

December 22nd

Stephen pulled up the collar of his coat as he walked briskly along the platform. Overhead a dim fog clouded the station. Large engines hissed superbly, throwing off clouds of steam into the cold raw air. Everything was dirty and smoke-grimed.

Stephen thought with revulsion:

‘What a foul country – what a foul city!’

His first excited reaction to London, its shops, its restaurants, its well-dressed, attractive women, had faded. He saw it now as a glittering rhinestone set in a dingy setting.

Supposing he were back in South Africa now . . . He felt a quick pang of homesickness. Sunshine – blue skies – gardens of flowers – cool blue flowers – hedges of plumbago – blue convolvulus clinging to every little shanty.

And here – dirt, grime, and endless, incessant crowds

– moving, hurrying – jostling. Busy ants running industriously about their ant-hill.

For a moment he thought, ‘I wish I hadn’t come . . .’

Then he remembered his purpose and his lips set back in a grim line. No, by hell, he’d go on with it! He’d planned this for years. He’d always meant to do – what he was going to do. Yes, he’d go on with it!

That momentary reluctance, that sudden questioning of himself: ‘Why? Is it worth it? Why dwell on the past? Why not wipe out the whole thing?’ – all that was only weakness. He was not a boy – to be turned his this way and that by the whim of the moment. He was a man of forty, assured, purposeful. He would go on with it. He would do what he had come to England to do.

He got on the train and passed along the corridor looking for a place. He had waved aside a porter and was carrying his own raw-hide suitcase. He looked into carriage after carriage. The train was full. It was only three days before Christmas. Stephen Farr looked distastefully at the crowded carriages.

People! Incessant, innumerable people! And all so – so – what was the word – so *drab*-looking! So alike, so horribly alike! Those that hadn’t got faces like sheep had faces like rabbits, he thought. Some of them chattered and fussed. Some, heavily middle-aged men, grunted. More like pigs, those. Even the girls,

slender, egg-faced, scarlet-lipped, were of a depressing uniformity.

He thought with a sudden longing of open veldt, sun-baked and lonely . . .

And then, suddenly, he caught his breath, looking into a carriage. This girl was different. Black hair, rich creamy pallor – eyes with the depth and darkness of night in them. The sad proud eyes of the South . . . It was all wrong that this girl should be sitting in this train among these dull, drab-looking people – all wrong that she should be going into the dreary midlands of England. She should have been on a balcony, a rose between her lips, a piece of black lace draping her proud head, and there should have been dust and heat and the smell of blood – the smell of the bull-ring – in the air . . . She should be somewhere splendid, not squeezed into the corner of a third-class carriage.

He was an observant man. He did not fail to note the shabbiness of her little black coat and skirt, the cheap quality of her fabric gloves, the flimsy shoes and the defiant note of a flame-red handbag. Nevertheless splendour was the quality he associated with her. She *was* splendid, fine, exotic . . .

What the hell was she doing in this country of fogs and chills and hurrying industrious ants?

He thought, 'I've got to know who she is and what she's doing here . . . I've got to know . . .'

II

Pilar sat squeezed up against the window and thought how very odd the English smelt . . . It was what had struck her so far most forcibly about England – the difference of smell. There was no garlic and no dust and very little perfume. In this carriage now there was a smell of cold stuffiness – the sulphur smell of the trains – the smell of soap and another very unpleasant smell – it came, she thought, from the fur collar of the stout woman sitting beside her. Pilar sniffed delicately, imbibing the odour of mothballs reluctantly. It was a funny scent to choose to put on yourself, she thought.

A whistle blew, a stentorian voice cried out something and the train jerked slowly out of the station. They had started. She was on her way . . .

Her heart beat a little faster. Would it be all right? Would she be able to accomplish what she had set out to do? Surely – surely – she had thought it all out so carefully . . . She was prepared for every eventuality. Oh, yes, she would succeed – she must succeed . . .

The curve of Pilar's red mouth curved upwards. It was suddenly cruel, that mouth. Cruel and greedy – like the mouth of a child or a kitten – a mouth that knew only its own desires and that was as yet unaware of pity.

She looked round her with the frank curiosity of a child. All these people, seven of them – how funny they were, the English! They all seemed so rich, so prosperous – their clothes – their boots – Oh! undoubtedly England was a very rich country as she had always heard. But they were not at all gay – no, decidedly not gay.

That was a handsome man standing in the corridor . . . Pilar thought he was very handsome. She liked his deeply bronzed face and his high-bridged nose and his square shoulders. More quickly than any English girl, Pilar had seen that the man admired her. She had not looked at him once directly, but she knew perfectly how often he had looked at her and exactly how he had looked.

She registered the facts without much interest or emotion. She came from a country where men looked at women as a matter of course and did not disguise the fact unduly. She wondered if he was an Englishman and decided that he was not.

‘He is too alive, too real, to be English,’ Pilar decided. ‘And yet he is fair. He may be perhaps Americano.’ He was, she thought, rather like the actors she had seen in Wild West films.

An attendant pushed his way along the corridor.

‘First lunch, please. First lunch. Take your seats for first lunch.’

The seven occupants of Pilar's carriage all held tickets for the first lunch. They rose in a body and the carriage was suddenly deserted and peaceful.

Pilar quickly pulled up the window which had been let down a couple of inches at the top by a militant-looking, grey-haired lady in the opposite corner. Then she sprawled comfortably back on her seat and peered out of the window at the northern suburbs of London. She did not turn her head at the sound of the door sliding back. It was the man from the corridor, and Pilar knew, of course, that he had entered the carriage on purpose to talk to her.

She continued to look pensively out of the window.

Stephen Farr said:

'Would you like the window down at all?'

Pilar replied demurely:

'On the contrary. I have just shut it.'

She spoke English perfectly, but with a slight accent.

During the pause that ensued, Stephen thought:

'A delicious voice. It has the sun in it . . . It is warm like a summer night . . .'

Pilar thought:

'I like his voice. It is big and strong. He is attractive – yes, he is attractive.'

Stephen said: 'The train is very full.'

'Oh, yes, indeed. The people go away from London, I suppose, because it is so black there.'