

*Agatha Christie*

SAD CYPRESS



PRO-01

## Sad Cypress

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. It is there 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*

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**To Peter and Peggy McLeod**

Come away, come away, death,  
And in sad cypress let me be laid;  
Fly away, fly away, breath!  
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.  
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew  
O prepare it;  
My part of death no one so true;  
Did share it.

*Shakespeare*

## Prologue

*'Elinor Katharine Carlisle. You stand charged upon this indictment with the murder of Mary Gerrard upon the 27th of July last. Are you guilty or not guilty?'*

Elinor Carlisle stood very straight, her head raised. It was a graceful head, the modelling of the bones sharp and well defined. The eyes were a deep vivid blue, the hair black. The brows had been plucked to a faint thin line.

There was a silence – quite a noticeable silence.

Sir Edwin Bulmer, Counsel for the Defence, felt a thrill of dismay.

He thought:

'My God, she's going to plead guilty . . . She's lost her nerve . . .'

Elinor Carlisle's lips parted. She said:

*'Not guilty.'*

Counsel for the Defence sank back. He passed a



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handkerchief over his brow, realizing that it had been a near shave.

Sir Samuel Attenbury was on his feet, outlining the case for the Crown.

‘May it please your lordship, gentlemen of the jury, on the 27th of July, at half-past three in the afternoon, Mary Gerrard died at Hunterbury, Maidensford . . .’

His voice ran on, sonorous and pleasing to the ear. It lulled Elinor almost into unconsciousness. From the simple and concise narrative, only an occasional phrase seeped through to her conscious mind.

‘. . . case a peculiarly simple and straightforward one . . .’

‘. . . It is the duty of the Crown . . . prove motive and opportunity . . .’

‘. . . No one, as far as can be seen, had any motive to kill this unfortunate girl, Mary Gerrard, except the accused. A young girl of a charming disposition – liked by everybody – without, one would have said, an enemy in the world . . .’

*Mary, Mary Gerrard! How far away it all seemed now. Not real any longer . . .*

‘. . . Your attention will be particularly directed to the following considerations:

1. What opportunities and means had the accused for administering poison?

2. What motive had she for so doing?

‘It will be my duty to call before you witnesses who can help you to form a true conclusion on these matters . . .

‘. . . As regards the poisoning of Mary Gerrard, I shall endeavour to show you that *no one had any opportunity* to commit this crime except the accused . . .’

Elinor felt as though imprisoned in a thick mist. Detached words came drifting through the fog.

‘. . . Sandwiches . . .

‘. . . Fish paste . . .

‘. . . Empty house . . .’

The words stabbed through the thick enveloping blanket of Elinor’s thoughts – pin-pricks through a heavy muffling veil . . .

The court. Faces. Rows and rows of faces! One particular face with a big black moustache and shrewd eyes. Hercule Poirot, his head a little on one side, his eyes thoughtful, was watching her.

She thought: He’s trying to see just exactly *why* I did it . . . He’s trying to get inside my head to see what I thought – what I felt . . .

*Felt* . . . ? A little blur – a slight sense of shock . . . Roddy’s face – his dear, *dear* face with its long nose, its sensitive mouth . . . Roddy! Always Roddy – always, ever since she could remember . . . since those days

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at Hunterbury amongst the raspberries and up in the warren and down by the brook. Roddy – Roddy – Roddy . . .

Other faces! Nurse O'Brien, her mouth slightly open, her freckled fresh face thrust forward. Nurse Hopkins looking smug – smug and implacable. Peter Lord's face – Peter Lord – so kind, so sensible, so – so *comforting*! But looking now – what was it – *lost*? Yes – lost! Minding – minding all this frightfully! While she herself, the star performer, didn't mind at all!

Here she was, quite calm and cold, standing in the dock, accused of murder. She was in court.

Something stirred; the folds of blanket round her brain lightened – became mere wraiths. In *court*! . . .  
*People* . . .

People leaning forward, their lips parted a little, their eyes agog, staring at her, Elinor, with a horrible ghoulish enjoyment – listening with a kind of slow, cruel relish to what that tall man with the Jewish nose was saying about her.

'The facts in this case are extremely easy to follow and are not in dispute. I shall put them before you quite simply. From the very beginning . . .'

Elinor thought:

'The beginning . . . The beginning? The day that horrible anonymous letter came! *That* was the beginning of it . . .'

## **Part I**



## Chapter 1

An anonymous letter!

Elinor Carlisle stood looking down at it as it lay open in her hand. She'd never had such a thing before. It gave one an unpleasant sensation. Ill-written, badly spelt, on cheap pink paper.

*This is to Warn You (it ran);*

*I'm naming no Names but there's Someone sucking up to your Aunt and if you're not kareful you'll get Cut Out of Everything. Girls Are very Artful and Old Ladies is Soft when Young Ones suck up to Them and Flatter them What I say is You'd best come down and see for Yourself whats Going On its not right you and the Young Gentleman should be Done Out of What's yours – and She's Very Artful and the Old Lady might Pop off at any time.*

*Well-Wisher*

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Elinor was still staring at this missive, her plucked brows drawn together in distaste, when the door opened. The maid announced, 'Mr Welman,' and Roddy came in.

Roddy! As always when she saw Roddy, Elinor was conscious of a slightly giddy feeling, a throb of sudden pleasure, a feeling that it was incumbent upon her to be very matter-of-fact and unemotional. Because it was so very obvious that Roddy, although he loved her, didn't feel about her the way she felt about him. The first sight of him did something to her, twisted her heart round so that it almost hurt. Absurd that a man – an ordinary, yes, a perfectly ordinary young man – should be able to do that to one! That the mere look of him should set the world spinning, that his voice should make you want – just a little – to cry . . . Love surely should be a pleasurable emotion – not something that hurt you by its intensity . . .

One thing was clear: one must be very, very careful to be off-hand and casual about it all. Men didn't like devotion and adoration. Certainly Roddy didn't.

She said lightly:

'Hallo, Roddy!'

Roddy said:

'Hallo, darling. You're looking very tragic. Is it a bill?'

Elinor shook her head.

Roddy said:

‘I thought it might be – midsummer, you know – when the fairies dance, and the accounts rendered come tripping along!’

Elinor said:

‘It’s rather horrid. It’s an anonymous letter.’

Roddy’s brows went up. His keen fastidious face stiffened and changed. He said – a sharp, disgusted exclamation:

‘No!’

Elinor said again:

‘It’s rather horrid . . .’

She moved a step towards her desk.

‘I’d better tear it up, I suppose.’

She could have done that – she almost did – for Roddy and anonymous letters were two things that ought not to come together. She might have thrown it away and thought no more about it. He would not have stopped her. His fastidiousness was far more strongly developed than his curiosity.

But on impulse Elinor decided differently. She said:

‘Perhaps, though, you’d better read it first. Then we’ll burn it. It’s about Aunt Laura.’

Roddy’s eyebrows rose in surprise.

‘Aunt Laura?’

He took the letter, read it, gave a frown of distaste, and handed it back.



'Yes,' he said. 'Definitely to be burnt! How extraordinary people are!'

Elinor said:

'One of the servants, do you think?'

'I suppose so.' He hesitated. 'I wonder who – who the person is – the one they mention?'

Elinor said thoughtfully:

'It must be Mary Gerrard, I think.'

Roddy frowned in an effort of remembrance.

'Mary Gerrard? Who's she?'

'The daughter of the people at the lodge. You must remember her as a child? Aunt Laura was always fond of the girl, and took an interest in her. She paid for her schooling and for various extras – piano lessons and French and things.'

Roddy said:

'Oh, yes, I remember her now: scrawny kid, all legs and arms, with a lot of messy fair hair.'

Elinor nodded.

'Yes, you probably haven't seen her since those summer holidays when Mum and Dad were abroad. You've not been down at Hunterbury as often as I have, of course, and she's been abroad *au pair* in Germany lately, but we used to rout her out and play with her when we were all kids.'

'What's she like now?' asked Roddy.

Elinor said: