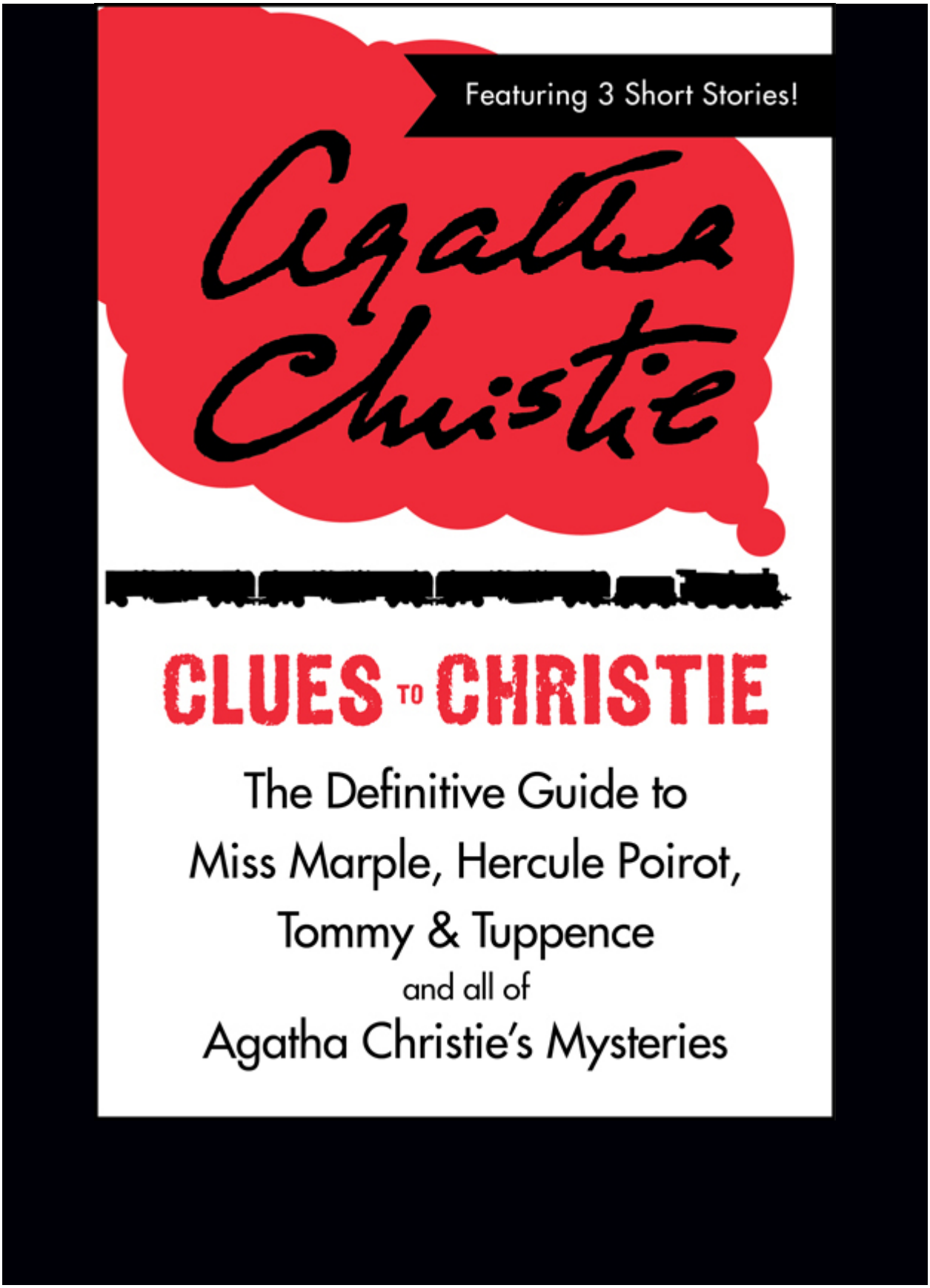
Featuring 3 Short Stories!

Agatha Christie

CLUES TO CHRISTIE

The Definitive Guide to Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot, Tommy & Tuppence and all of Agatha Christie's Mysteries


Featuring 3 Short Stories!
Agatha Christie
CLUES TO CHRISTIE
The Definitive Guide to
Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot,
Tommy & Tuppence
and all of
Agatha Christie's Mysteries

CLUES TO CHRISTIE

The Definitive Guide to Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot, Tommy & Tuppence and All of Agatha Christie's Mysteries

WILLIAM MORROW
An Imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers*

Contents

Agatha Christie: An Introduction

JOHN CURRAN

Who is known as the Queen of Crime, the Mistress of Mystery, the Duchess of Death? Who is the world's most translated writer? Who is the biggest-selling writer in the world, with only Shakespeare and the Bible selling more copies? Who wrote the longest-running stage play—almost sixty years—in the history of the theater? The answer: Agatha Christie.

In a career spanning over fifty years, Agatha Christie transformed detective fiction both on the page and, later, on the stage. Through the creation of a gallery of immortal characters—Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford—she sold more books in more parts of the globe than any crime writer before or since. Almost forty years after her death, her entire output is still available in bookstores and seen in theaters around the world. How did she do it? A look at her life may provide some clues. . . .

Life

The youngest of three children of an American father and English mother, Agatha Miller was born in Torquay, England, on September 15, 1890. Her family home, Ashfield, was a large, comfortable house and her childhood was a very happy one. Although she never went to school, the young Agatha devoured books, many of which—*The Three Musketeers, Vanity Fair, Bleak House*—are mentioned in her *Autobiography* and can be seen to this day on the shelves of her last home, Greenway House.

Her father died unexpectedly when Agatha was eleven and it was subsequently discovered that his investments, the only source of income for the family, were not as gilt-edged as previously supposed. Some economies were necessary, but the young Agatha continued to enjoy a carefree existence, participating in full in the social life of turn-of-the-century Torquay, attending concerts and dances and amateur dramatics, roller-skating on the pier; and eventually travelling to Paris to study music. Luckily for the world of crime fiction, she was too nervous to perform professionally. She retained a love of music, especially the operas of Wagner, throughout her life. A trip to Egypt with her mother, in 1910, provided her with the background for her still-unpublished novel *Snow upon the Desert*. (Twenty years later, in *Death on the Nile,* novelist Salome Otterbourne describes her novel, *Snow on the Desert's Face*: *Powerful—suggestive. Snow—on the desert—melted in the first flaming breath of passion*!)

Although she received more than one offer of marriage, Agatha eventually settled on Archie Christie, a dashing member of the Royal Flying Corps. They married on Christmas Eve 1914 and, after a very brief honeymoon at The Grand Hotel in Torquay, Archie returned to his flying duties in World War I. Agatha also volunteered and, after a brief stint as a nurse, moved to the dispensary of the local hospital, eventually becoming a

qualified dispenser. This gave her a professional knowledge of poisons, which she was to put to good use in her literary career.

As she explains in her *Autobiography*, during this time she read Sherlock Holmes and *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* by Gaston Leroux (later to achieve immortality as the author of *The Phantom of the Opera*) and Anna Katherine Green's *The Leavenworth Case*. In the course of a conversation with her sister Madge, she accepted a challenge to write her own detective story. Further encouraged by her mother, Agatha worked on her novel, eventually taking herself off to a hotel on Dartmoor for an undisturbed period of intense writing. Although she began *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in 1916, it was not published until the end of 1920 in the United States and in early 1921 in the United Kingdom. By then, she was the mother of her only child, Rosalind, born in 1919. Although already working on her third novel (*The Secret Adversary*, her second novel, had been nearly finished before *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was published), Agatha enjoyed homemaking in post-WWI London.

In 1921, Archie's boss, Major Belcher, asked him to participate in a business trip to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, Belcher also arranged for Agatha to join the party and the trio set off on January 20, 1922. This exotic once-in-a-lifetime adventure cemented Agatha's love of travel; her letters and photos from every stage of the trip confirm this; it also provided her the background for her fourth novel, *The Man in the Brown Suit*, much of which was written during the long sea journeys involved in such a trip. The couple arrived home in November 1922 and shortly afterward set up home in Sunningdale, Berkshire, in a house they called Styles, in honor of the success of Agatha's first novel. The dream of happy wife and mother and successful author was not to last.

The first blow was the death, in 1926, of Agatha's beloved mother, and the consequent dismantling of Agatha's idyllic childhood home. Worse was

to follow when, shortly after, Archie asked for a divorce in order to marry his sometime golf partner, Nancy Neele. Within a short time, two of the people Agatha most adored in the world had deserted her, and this combination of emotional shocks precipitated her famous disappearance in December 1926. Although for the rest of her life she never discussed this, there seems little doubt that a breakdown of some sort, coupled with a desire for some time to herself, was the sole motivation behind the bizarre episode, although the newspapers of the time and books and documentaries ever since would lead us to believe otherwise. Agatha was identified in a hotel in Harrogate ten days after leaving home; she immediately retired to Abney Hall, the home of her sister Madge and brother-in-law James Watts, to recover from the ordeal. Her lifelong aversion to the press, and publicity of almost any kind, probably stems from this unhappy experience.

Agatha produced an episodic novel, *The Big Four,* in 1927, with the help of Campbell Christie, her brother-in-law. She used these previously published short-story adventures featuring Hercule Poirot to keep her publishers Collins and her public happy until a new Poirot case, *The Mystery of the Blue Train,* appeared in 1928. Agatha wrote most of this novel while in the Canary Islands, with Rosalind and her faithful secretary, Carlo, during 1927.

In 1930, Collins inaugurated the Crime Club; Agatha Christie would be a prolific contributor to this imprint for the rest of her life. The first Christie title to feature the now-famous hooded gunman logo on its cover was also Miss Marple's first book-length case, *The Murder at the Vicarage*. Thus began Agatha Christie's golden age, in terms of both productivity and ingenuity. For almost the next twenty years she published two novels a year, at least; 1934 saw the publication of five. Most of her classic titles appeared during this period, including *Lord Edgware Dies*, *The A.B.C. Murders, Murder on the Orient Express, Death on the Nile, Hercule Poirot's Christmas, And Then There Were None, The Body in the Library, The*

Labors of Hercules, and *Crooked House.* Dominating the world of detective fiction with enviable ease, she became a favorite not only of magazine editors, but critics, as well as her insatiable public.

In 1930, Agatha married archaeologist Max Mallowan, a man fourteen years her junior, whom she had met while visiting her friends the Woolleys on a dig in southeastern Iraq. Although on the face of it an unlikely alliance, they remained happily married for the next fifty years; for most of that time Agatha accompanied Max every year on his digs, where she lived in a tent, happily cleaning, cataloguing, and photographing the finds. Always one to put an experience to good literary use, she adopted the background for some of her best books—*Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936), *Death on the Nile* (1937), and *Appointment with Death* (1938)—as well as the memoir *Come Tell Me How You Live*. To produce her novels while on a dig, all she needed was a typewriter and a steady table.

Agatha bought Winterbrook House in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, in 1934; this she always considered to be Max's house. In 1938, she bought Greenway House, a Georgian mansion on thirty acres of woodland garden with stunning views over the river Dart which lay just outside her birthplace, Torquay. She had known of this house since childhood and, when it came on the market she viewed it and fell under its spell. It became her holiday home for the rest of her life. Here she entertained family and friends, played tennis and swam in the river, enjoyed afternoon tea on the lawn and sumptuous dinners in the dining room, played the piano in the drawing room, and read her work-in-progress to her family to get their reactions. The US Navy requisitioned the house in 1942, and she was forced to store the furniture and abandon Greenway for the remainder of the war. When she regained possession, life resumed its contented pattern: enjoying long, lazy weeks in the summer, with shorter breaks throughout the year; entertaining her friends and family; her gardener winning prizes at the

flower show; her butler serving the delicious produce from her garden; and making occasional forays to London to enjoy the theater and opera.

In 1956, in recognition of her unique contribution to literature and drama, Agatha Christie received a C.B.E. (Commander of the British Empire) from Queen Elizabeth. In 1961, she was declared by UNESCO the world's most translated writer. She published her eightieth title, *Passenger to Frankfurt*, in 1970. The following year she was created a Dame of the British Empire. The stage adaption of her short story, "Three Blind Mice," called *The Mousetrap*, which opened in 1952, continued to break every known theatrical record. Through all this, Agatha Christie continued to produce her annual novel to the delight of millions of readers the world over. In 1974, the phenomenally successful film version of one of her greatest titles, *Murder on the Orient Express*, was released to worldwide acclaim. Agatha's last public appearance was its London premiere that November.

The following year, Sir William Collins, correctly assuming that the now-frail Dame Agatha would be unable to provide a new book, persuaded her to release *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, which had been written thirty-five years earlier during her time in London during the Blitz. It had been stored ever since in a bank vault. Heralded by a front-page obituary in the *New York Times*, Hercule Poirot, to the chagrin of his legions of fans, had died, but not before solving his most ingenious and shocking case. It was set in Styles Court, the scene of his first triumph over fifty years earlier. Three months later, on January 12, 1976, his creator joined her most famous character; and the world mourned.

In the course of a fifty-year career Agatha Christie created many memorable characters, but the most popular were the following.

Hercule Poirot

When she created Hercule Poirot in 1916, Agatha Christie made only one serious mistake— she made him a retired member of the Belgian police force. This meant that when he died almost sixty years later in *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* (1975), even a conservative estimate must have put his age at 120. Little did she realize, when she wrote in chapter two of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles, "*As I came out again, I cannoned into a little man who was just entering. I drew aside and apologised, when suddenly with a loud exclamation, he clasped me in his arms and kissed me warmly. 'Mon ami Hastings!' he cried. 'It is indeed mon ami Hastings,' " that Hercule Poirot would be with her for the rest of her life. He would become one of the most famous Belgians in history, and the second most famous detective (after Sherlock Holmes) in the world; he would appear in thirty-three novels and over fifty short stories and spawn almost one hundred movies and TV films; or that he would appear on stamps in Nicaragua and Dominica. Captain Hastings, Poirot's faithful partner in crime for many of his early cases, narrated their first adventure together, then met his wife in the course of *The Murder on the Links*, eventually departing to live in Argentina after *Dumb Witness* (1937), and returning only for *Curtain*.

Poirot owes his nationality to the presence of Belgian refugees in Torquay during World War I. Christie also endowed him with an overweening vanity and a neurotic precision, as well as magnificent moustaches and his famous little grey cells. If she could have known at the time how he would come to dominate her life, she might well have amended some of these characteristics. But he, and she, embarked on a career of singular success with little idea that almost a century later the investigations of the little Belgian would still be read in every language in the world.

While he waited for his first full-length case to follow *The Mysterious Affair at Styles,* Poirot solved a series of short investigations in *The Sketch* magazine throughout 1923 and much of 1924. In 1926, he appeared in what

was to become his most famous (some might say infamous) case, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926). In many ways a typical detective story of the time—small village, wealthy landowner found dead in his study, a mysterious butler, a house full of suspects, an incompetent police investigation, all explained satisfactorily in the last chapter—this novel transformed the careers of Christie and Poirot beyond recognition. Considered by many to be the most brilliant detective novel ever written and decried by others as a shameless cheat, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* has divided opinion ever since its first appearance in May 1926. Its stunning last-chapter revelation was a unique and daring masterstroke which shot Christie straight into the upper echelon of crime writing, where she remained for the rest of her life.

For the next fifty years, Poirot solved cases throughout England, in France in *The Murder on the Links* (1923), in Yugoslavia in *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), in Iraq in *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936), in Egypt in *Death on the Nile* (1937), and, in the course of *The Labors of Hercules* (1947), in Ireland, Switzerland, Italy, and Austria. The little Belgian is the most famous export of that country and, thanks to a brilliant television portrayal by David Suchet, is now firmly fixed in the public consciousness and affection for all time.

Miss Marple

Jane Marple made an inauspicious debut in the short story “The Tuesday Night Club,” published in December 1927. There, she is described as dressed completely in black and having “faded blue eyes, benignant and kindly” and she is knitting “something white and soft and fleecy.” Despite being overlooked by the armchair detectives gathered together in her house in St. Mary Mead to discuss unsolved mysteries, she is shown to be the

most acute and observant of them all. Her unorthodox style of detection is based on her village parallels, small and seemingly insignificant events familiar to her from a lifetime of village living, which she adopts as a basis for comparison when faced with more sinister events.

Although her detective career is less extensive than Poirot, covering twelve novels and twenty short stories, Miss Marple's status as the most famous female detective in literature is assured. There was a twelve-year gap, from 1930 to 1942, between her first and second book-length investigations, *The Murder at the Vicarage* and *The Body in the Library*. Her greatest case, *A Murder Is Announced*, was Agatha Christie's fiftieth title and the occasion of a celebratory party at the Savoy Hotel in London in June 1950. Miss Marple travelled to the West Indies for her only foreign case, *A Caribbean Mystery*, in 1964, and to London to solve a murder *At Bertram's Hotel* (1965).

Unlike Poirot, the last glimpse we have of the elderly sleuth is of her alive and well, sitting on the terrace of Torquay's Imperial Hotel at the conclusion of *Sleeping Murder*, explaining, for the last time, the intricacies of murder.

Tommy and Tuppence

Tommy and Tuppence Beresford are the only Christie characters to age gradually, as they did between their first appearance in 1922, in Christie's second published novel, to their last adventure in 1973. Beginning as bright young things in the aftermath of World War I, they track down *The Secret Adversary* (1922) before marrying and opening a detective agency in the short story collection *Partners in Crime* (1929), in which they investigate crimes in the manner of famous detectives such as Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown. Their final investigation, "The Man Who Was No. 16," is, in

a nice example of self-parody, solved in the style of that famous Belgian sleuth, Monsieur Hercule Poirot!

By the time of the WWII thriller, *N or M?* (1941), Tommy and Tuppence are the parents of twins (and also adopt a baby at the end of that novel), and as *By the Pricking of My Thumbs* (1968) opens they are a middle-aged couple reminiscing about their adventurous youth and investigating a sinister retirement home. Finally, we meet them as a retired couple moving into a new house with a mysterious past in *Postern of Fate* (1973), the last novel Christie wrote.

Stand-alone titles

Although she achieved her greatest fame as the creator of Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, some of Agatha Christie's best books are to be found among her stand-alone titles. These included traditional whodunits, domestic and international thrillers, and a few unclassifiable items. Through her life she experimented with the crime novel and, as Ellery Queen once wrote of her, "the only thing you can expect from Agatha Christie is the unexpected."

Without doubt her most famous title, and the bestselling crime novel of all time, is *And Then There Were None* (1939). Part detective story and part thriller, this novel first appeared in print in the *Saturday Evening Post* beginning at the end of May 1939. It received rapturous reviews on both sides of the Atlantic when it was published in book form at the end of that year. The much-copied plot concerns the fate of ten characters invited to an island off the coast of southern England, where, over the course of a weekend, they are all systematically killed in line with the macabre nursery rhyme that hangs in each of their bedrooms. The Christie twist is that the

killer is one of the ten. It has been brought to the screen countless times, the best version being the famous 1945 Rene Clair film.

Years before the historical murder mystery became popular, Christie published *Death Comes as the End* (1945), a domestic murder mystery set in Egypt in 2000 B.C. This fascinating novel of mass murder in a family consumed with greed and jealousy, living on the banks of the Nile, was written at the suggestion of an archaeologist friend of her husband Max Mallowan. In 1949, she published *Crooked House*, very much a typical Christie—large family living in a rambling house with a poisoner at work—until the last chapter, which propounded such a shocking solution that her publishers asked her to change it; she refused and it remains one the Christie classics. Two of her strongest and most unexpected titles appeared in the last chapter of her writing life: *The Pale Horse* (1961) concerns a murder-to-order venture with suggestions of black magic, while *Endless Night* (1967), with its stunning surprise in the last chapter, is often considered her last great novel.

Thrillers, both international—*The Man in the Brown Suit* (1924), *They Came to Baghdad* (1951), *Destination Unknown* (1954), *Passenger to Frankfurt* (1970)—and domestic—*The Secret of Chimneys* (1925)*, The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929), *The Boomerang Clue* (1934)—appeared periodically throughout her writing life and Christie considered these a holiday from the clues-and-alibis plotting of her detective fiction. With an emphasis on physical rather than cerebral activity, these thrillers all show the Christie magic at work. Stolen jewels, missing state papers, unidentified spies, and criminal masterminds jostle for attention in plots involving organized anarchy and international terrorism. Almost all of these titles feature young women—Lady Eileen (Bundle) Brent, Lady Frances (Frankie) Derwent, Anne Beddingfeld, Victoria Jones—who are in the mold of Tuppence Beresford: brave, resourceful, enterprising, and incurably inquisitive.

Dotted throughout her classic period Christie also wrote, with enviable ease, non-Poirot and non-Marple whodunits. *The Sittaford Mystery* (1931) begins with a séance accurately foretelling a murder; *Murder Is Easy* (1939) is regular Christie territory—a country village with a suspiciously high number of unexplained deaths; *Sparkling Cyanide* (1945) features subtle characterization with the personal reminiscences of the suspects involved in a poisoning drama at a fashionable nightclub. One of her most intriguing titles is *Towards Zero* (1944), where we are introduced to a collection of characters months before the approaching zero hour of the inevitable murder. *Ordeal by Innocence* (1958) is both a deeply felt exploration of the consequences of a possible miscarriage of justice and a clever whodunit.

Christie also wrote a number of short stories that achieved fame in their own right, including "Witness for the Prosecution." First published in 1925 under the title "Traitor Hands," almost thirty years later it became not just Christie's best stage play, but also one of the best courtroom dramas ever. "Philomel Cottage," also a short story from the 1920s, became the stage play and film *Love from a Stranger*. And, of course, before its incarnation as a play, *The Mousetrap* had been a short story, "Three Blind Mice."

Christie the Dramatist

Agatha Christie is still the only crime novelist to achieve equal fame as a crime dramatist. The first stage play based on her writing was *Alibi*, an adaptation, but not by the author herself, of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which opened in London in 1928. That year she also adapted her 1925 novel, *The Secret of Chimneys*, as a three-act play but failed to have it staged. She then wrote an original script, *Black Coffee* (1930), in which Poirot is summoned to find a missing document vital to the country's security, but finds himself investigating a murder at the home of Sir Claud

Amory. A further adaptation of *Peril at End House* followed in 1940, but Christie was disappointed with adaptations of her stories by other hands. So she adapted her own novel *And Then There Were None* in 1943 and it had a successful run of almost a year in London's West End, despite the destruction of its theatrical home during the height of the Blitz, and a transfer to another.

Spurred on by this success, she adapted *Appointment with Death* and *Murder on the Nile* in 1945 and 1946. Miss Marple made her stage debut in 1949 in *Murder at the Vicarage.* The 1950s was Christie's golden age of theater. Beginning with *The Hollow* (1951)*,* and followed by *Witness for the Prosecution* (1953), *Spider's Web* (1954)*, Towards Zero* (1956)*, Verdict* (1958)*,* and *The Unexpected Guest* (1958)*,* this impressive roster of dramas contributed to her unique theatrical success. To this day, she is the only female playwright to have had three plays running simultaneously in the West End.

In 1952, the most famous stage play in the world, *The Mousetrap*, began its inexorable advance to the status of national institution. Originally written as a radio play to celebrate the eightieth birthday of Queen Mary, it was subsequently adapted as a novella and, finally, as the stage play that is now older than most of the UK population. This theatrical landmark celebrates its sixtieth birthday in 2012.

In 1962, another experiment, *Rule of Three,* debuted on the London stage. Although not well received by the critics, it remains fascinating to fans as each of the three one-act plays, totally different in style and plot, display aspects of Christie not hitherto seen on the stage. *The Rats* is a claustrophobic will-they-get-away-with-it? play; *Afternoon at the Seaside* is a very funny sketch involving missing jewelry with a surprise revelation in the last moments; and *The Patient* is an ingenious whodunit with an artfully concealed central clue. As late as 1972, Christie's love of the theater is evident in *Fiddlers Five*, or, as it later became, *Fiddlers Three*. Although it

did not receive a West End production and, compared to her earlier theatrical hits, is, despite its many clever ideas, disappointing, it is clear that her love of playwriting remained with Christie until the end of her life.

Other Works

Interspersed with her detective fiction, Christie also experimented with noncrime material, showing an aspect of her imagination not obvious from her crime fiction alone. In 1924, she published *Road of Dreams,* a poetry collection, and six years later published *Giant's Bread,* the first of six Mary Westmacott novels to appear over the next thirty years. Best described as bittersweet love stories, these titles show glimpses of the real Agatha Christie and mirror many situations in her own life. *Giant's Bread* centers on the composer Vernon Deyre and reveals Christie's lifelong love of music; two years later, *Unfinished Portrait* contains, consciously or otherwise, many elements from Christie's own life, including a marriage, idyllic at the start but later ruined by infidelity, culminating in divorce; an unhappy wife who takes up writing; and a subsequent mother/daughter relationship. A similar theme is also explored, even more devastatingly, in the 1952 novel, *A Daughter's a Daughter.* In her *Autobiography*, Christie describes how she wrote *Absent in the Spring* (1934) over a single weekend; in it, Joan Scudamore, trapped by bad weather in a remote area of Turkey, spends four days examining her life and conscience before resolving to transform herself. The Westmacott pseudonym remained a secret for many years and Christie was always very pleased that the books were accepted for publication and reviewed on their merits alone, not because they were written by a famous crime writer. The final Westmacott, *The Burden* (1956), explores the love between two sisters.

In 1946, she published *Come Tell Me How You Live*, a rambling memoir of day-to-day life on an archaeological dig written to answer the innumerable questions of friends and acquaintances. Although her publishers would have preferred a whodunit, her love of this life shines through every page of the book. In 1937, she wrote *Akhnaton*, a play based on the life of the doomed Egyptian king. Although it has never received a professional performance, the script was published in 1973 and proved to be a well-researched and poignant play; although essentially a noncrime title, it does feature a poisoning and the unmasking of a killer in the final scene. *Star Over Bethlehem* (1965) is, as the name suggests, a religious-themed collection of very short stories and poems.

Finally, the year after her death, *An Autobiography* was published. Christie had worked on this for over fifteen years, beginning in Baghdad in 1950 where, she explains in the foreword, she was suddenly overtaken by the urge to write down the story of her life. After her death, it fell to her daughter and an editor at Collins to reduce the vast amount of material to a manageable size, and the book was published in October 1977 to international acclaim. As easily readable as all of her writing, *An Autobiography* is a fascinating look at the woman who wrote the world's bestselling books, but there is little in the way of solid information about the creation of any particular title. She does give an account of the creation of Hercule Poirot and a less detailed one for Miss Marple, but the genesis of most of her books remains as mysteriously elusive as the books themselves.

The Legacy

Almost forty years after her death, Agatha Christie's name is still synonymous with the very best detective fiction. She refined an already existing template, and for over a half-century, she expanded and

experimented with it to produce a body of work that continues to transcend every known border of age, sex, race, background, and level of education. Her entire output is still available in every language and she is read avidly from Melbourne to Moscow, from Iceland to India. She is enjoyed by teenagers and pensioners; she is studied by academics and linguists and social historians. Her work provides a regular source for film and TV adapters, for computer game developers, for animators, and graphic-novel artists. Quite simply, in the field of detective fiction no other writer ever did it as often, as well, or for as long. Agatha Christie remains unique and, thus far, immortal.

John Curran is the Agatha, Anthony, and Macavity award-winning author of Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks *and* Agatha Christie: Murder in the Making. *A recognized expert on the life and works of Agatha Christie, he is a frequent speaker and contributor to programs about her. He lives in Dublin, where he is writing a doctoral thesis on Christie.*

The Hercule Poirot Mysteries

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
Peril at End House
Lord Edgware Dies
Murder on the Orient Express
Three Act Tragedy
Death in the Clouds
The A.B.C. 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
The Hollow
The Labors of Hercules
Taken at the Flood
The Under Dog and Other Stories
Mrs. McGinty's Dead
After the Funeral
Hickory Dickory Dock
Dead Man's Folly
Cat Among the Pigeons
The Clocks
Third Girl
Hallowe'en Party
Elephants Can Remember
Curtain: Poirot's Last Case

"Why not make my detective a Belgian? . . . I could see him as a tidy little man, always arranging things, liking things in pairs, liking things square instead of round. And he should be brainy—he should have little grey cells of the mind."

–AGATHA CHRISTIE, from *An Autobiography*

The Affair at the Victory Ball

From *The Under Dog and Other Stories*

Pure chance led my friend Hercule Poirot, formerly chief of the Belgian force, to be connected with the Styles Case. His success brought him notoriety, and he decided to devote himself to the solving of problems in crime. Having been wounded on the Somme and invalided out of the Army, I finally took up my quarters with him in London. Since I have a first-hand knowledge of most of his cases, it has been suggested to me that I select some of the most interesting and place them on record. In doing so, I feel that I cannot do better than begin with that strange tangle which aroused such widespread public interest at the time. I refer to the affair at the Victory Ball.

Although perhaps it is not so fully demonstrative of Poirot's peculiar methods as some of the more obscure cases, its sensational features, the well-known people involved, and the tremendous publicity given it by the Press, make it stand out as a *cause célèbre* and I have long felt that it is only

fitting that Poirot's connection with the solution should be given to the world.

It was a fine morning in spring, and we were sitting in Poirot's rooms. My little friend, neat and dapper as ever, his egg-shaped head tilted on one side, was delicately applying a new pomade to his moustache. A certain harmless vanity was a characteristic of Poirot's and fell into line with his general love of order and method. The *Daily Newsmonger*, which I had been reading, had slipped to the floor, and I was deep in a brown study when Poirot's voice recalled me.

"Of what are you thinking so deeply, *mon ami*?"

"To tell you the truth," I replied, "I was puzzling over this unaccountable affair at the Victory Ball. The papers are full of it." I tapped the sheet with my finger as I spoke.

"Yes?"

"The more one reads of it, the more shrouded in mystery the whole thing becomes!" I warmed to my subject. "Who killed Lord Cronshaw? Was Coco Courtenay's death on the same night a mere coincidence? Was it an accident? Or did she deliberately take an overdose of cocaine?" I stopped, and then added dramatically: "These are the questions I ask myself."

Poirot, somewhat to my annoyance, did not play up. He was peering into the glass, and merely murmured: "Decidedly, this new pomade, it is a marvel for the moustaches!" Catching my eye, however, he added hastily: "Quite so—and how do you reply to your questions?"

But before I could answer, the door opened, anour landlady announced Inspector Japp.

The Scotland Yard man was an old friend of ours and we greeted him warmly.

"Ah, my good Japp," cried Poirot, "and what brings you to see us?"

"Well, Monsieur Poirot," said Japp, seating himself and nodding to me, "I'm on a case that strikes me as being very much in your line, and I came

along to know whether you'd care to have a finger in the pie?"

Poirot had a good opinion of Japp's abilities, though deploring his lamentable lack of method, but I, for my part, considered that the detective's highest talent lay in the gentle art of seeking favours under the guise of conferring them!

"It's the Victory Ball," said Japp persuasively. "Come, now, you'd like to have a hand in that."

Poirot smiled at me.

"My friend Hastings would, at all events. He was just holding forth on the subject, *n'est-ce pas, mon ami?*"

"Well, sir," said Japp condescendingly, "you shall be in it too. I can tell you, it's something of a feather in your cap to have inside knowledge of a case like this. Well, here's to business. You know the main facts of the case, I suppose, Monsieur Poirot?"

"From the papers only—and the imagination of the journalist is sometimes misleading. Recount the whole story to me."

Japp crossed his legs comfortably and began.

"As all the world and his wife knows, on Tuesday last a grand Victory

Ball was held. Every twopenny-halfpenny hop calls itself that nowadays, but this was the real thing, held at the Colossus Hall, and all London at it—including your Lord Cronshaw and his party."

"His *dossier*?" interrupted Poirot. "I should say his bioscope—no, how do you call it—biograph?"

"Viscount Cronshaw was fifth viscount, twenty-five years of age, rich, unmarried, and very fond of the theatrical world. There were rumours of his being engaged to Miss Courtenay of the Albany Theatre, who was known to her friends as 'Coco' and who was, by all accounts, a very fascinating young lady."

"Good. *Continuez!*"

“Lord Cronshaw’s party consisted of six people: he himself, his uncle, the Honourable Eustace Beltane, a pretty American widow, Mrs Mallaby, a young actor, Chris Davidson, his wife, and last but not least, Miss Coco Courtenay. It was a fancy dress ball, as you know, and the Cronshaw party represented the old Italian Comedy— whatever that may be.”

“The *Commedia dell’Arte*,” murmured Poirot. “I know.”

“Anyway, the costumes were copied from a set of china figures forming part of Eustace Beltane’s collection. Lord Cronshaw was Harlequin; Beltane was Punchinello; Mrs. Mallaby matched him as Pulcinella; the Davidsons were Pierrot and Pierrette; and Miss Courtenay, of course, was Columbine. Now, quite early in the evening it was apparent that there was something wrong. Lord Cronshaw was moody and strange in his manner. When the party met together for supper in a small private room engaged by the host, everyone noticed that he and Miss Courtenay were no longer on speaking terms. She had obviously been crying, and seemed on the verge of hysterics. The meal was an uncomfortable one, and as they all left the supper-room, she turned to Chris Davidson and requested him audibly to take her home, as she was ‘sick of the ball.’ The young actor hesitated, glancing at Lord Cronshaw, and finally drew them both back to the supper-room.

“But all his efforts to secure a reconciliation were unavailing, and he accordingly got a taxi and escorted the now weeping Miss Courtenay back to her flat. Although obviously very much upset, she did not confide in him, merely reiterating again and again that she would ‘make old Cronch sorry for this!’ That is the only hint we have that her death might not have been accidental, and it’s precious little to go upon. By the time Davidson had quieted her down somewhat, it was too late to return to the Colossus Hall, and Davidson accordingly went straight home to his flat in Chelsea, where his wife arrived shortly afterwards, bearing the news of the terrible tragedy that had occurred after his departure.

“Lord Cronshaw, it seems, became more and more moody as the ball went on. He kept away from his party, and they hardly saw him during the rest of the evening. It was about one-thirty A.M., just before the grand cotillion when everyone was to unmask, that Captain Digby, a brother officer who knew his disguise, noticed him standing in a box gazing down on the scene.

“ ‘Hullo, Cronch!’ he called. ‘Come down and be sociable! What are you moping about up there for like a boiled owl? Come along; there’s a good old rag coming on now.’

“ ‘Right!’ responded Cronshaw. ‘Wait for me, or I’ll never find you in the crowd.’

“He turned and left the box as he spoke. Captain Digby, who had Mrs. Davidson with him, waited. The minutes passed, but Lord Cronshaw did not appear. Finally Digby grew impatient.

“ ‘Does the fellow think we’re going to wait all night for him?’ he exclaimed.

“At that moment Mrs. Mallaby joined them, and they explained the situation.

“ ‘Say, now,’ cried the pretty widow vivaciously, ‘he’s like a bear with a sore head tonight. Let’s go right away and rout him out.’

“The search commenced, but met with no success until it occurred to Mrs. Mallaby that he might possibly be found in the room where they had supped an hour earlier. They made their way there. What a sight met their eyes! There was Harlequin, sure enough, but stretched on the ground with a table-knife in his heart!”

Japp stopped, and Poirot nodded, and said with the relish of the specialist: “*Une belle affaire!* And there was no clue as to the perpetrator of the deed? But how should there be!”

“Well,” continued the inspector, “you know the rest. The tragedy was a double one. Next day there were headlines in all the papers, and a brief

statement to the effect that Miss Courtenay, the popular actress, had been discovered dead in her bed, and that her death was due to an overdose of cocaine. Now, was it accident or suicide? Her maid, who was called upon to give evidence, admitted that Miss Courtenay was a confirmed taker of the drug, and a verdict of accidental death was returned. Nevertheless we can't leave the possibility of suicide out of account. Her death is particularly unfortunate, since it leaves us no clue now to the cause of the quarrel the preceding night. By the way, a small enamel box was found on the dead man. It had *Coco* written across it in diamonds, and was half full of cocaine. It was identified by Miss Courtenay's maid as belonging to her mistress, who nearly always carried it about with her, since it contained her supply of the drug to which she was fast becoming a slave."

"Was Lord Cronshaw himself addicted to the drug?"

"Very far from it. He held unusually strong views on the subject of dope."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

"But since the box was in his possession, he knew that Miss Courtenay took it. Suggestive, that, is it not, my good Japp?"

"Ah!" said Japp rather vaguely.

I smiled.

"Well," said Japp, "that's the case. What do you think of it?"

"You found no clue of any kind that has not been reported?"

"Yes, there was this." Japp took a small object from his pocket and handed it over to Poirot. It was a small pompon of emerald green silk, with some ragged threads hanging from it, as though it had been wrenched violently away.

"We found it in the dead man's hand, which was tightly clenched over it," explained the inspector.

Poirot handed it back without any comment and asked: "Had Lord Cronshaw any enemies?"

“None that anyone knows of. He seemed a popular young fellow.”

“Who benefits by his death?”

“His uncle, the Honourable Eustace Beltane, comes into the title and estates. There are one or two suspicious facts against him. Several people declare that they heard a violent altercation going on in the little supper-room, and that Eustace Beltane was one of the disputants. You see, the table-knife being snatched up off the table would fit in with the murder being done in the heat of a quarrel.”

“What does Mr. Beltane say about the matter?”

“Declares one of the waiters was the worse for liquor, and that he was giving him a dressing down. Also that it was nearer to one than half past. You see, Captain Digby’s evidence fixes the time pretty accurately. Only about ten minutes elapsed between his speaking to Cronshaw and the finding of the body.”

“And in any case I suppose Mr. Beltane, as Punchinello, was wearing a hump and a ruffle?”

“I don’t know the exact details of the costumes,” said Japp, looking curiously at Poirot. “And anyway, I don’t quite see what that has got to do with it?”

“No?” There was a hint of mockery in Poirot’s smile. He continued quietly, his eyes shining with the green light I had learned to recognize so well: “There was a curtain in this little supper-room, was there not?”

“Yes, but—”

“With a space behind it sufficient to conceal a man?”

“Yes—in fact, there’s a small recess, but how you knew about it—you haven’t been to the place, have you, Monsieur Poirot?”

“No, my good Japp, I supplied the curtain from my brain. Without it, the drama is not reasonable. And always one must be reasonable. But tell me, did they not send for a doctor?”

“At once, of course. But there was nothing to be done. Death must have been instantaneous.”

Poirot nodded rather impatiently.

“Yes, yes, I understand. This doctor, now, he gave evidence at the inquest?”

“Yes.”

“Did he say nothing of any unusual symptom—was there nothing about the appearance of the body which struck him as being abnormal?”

Japp stared hard at the little man.

“Yes, Monsieur Poirot. I don’t know what you’re getting at, but he did mention that there was a tension and stiffness about the limbs which he was quite at a loss to account for.”

“Aha!” said Poirot. “Aha! *Mon Dieu!* Japp, that gives one to think, does it not?”

I saw that it had certainly not given Japp to think.

“If you’re thinking of poison, monsieur, who on earth would poison a man first and then stick a knife into him?”

“In truth that would be ridiculous,” agreed Poirot placidly.

“Now is there anything you want to see, monsieur? If you’d like to examine the room where the body was found—”

Poirot waved his hand.

“Not in the least. You have told me the only thing that interests me—Lord Cronshaw’s views on the subject of drug taking.”

“Then there’s nothing you want to see?”

“Just one thing.”

“What is that?”

“The set of china figures from which the costumes were copied.”

Japp stared.

“Well, you’re a funny one!”

“You can manage that for me?”

"Come round to Berkeley Square now if you like. Mr. Beltane—or His Lordship, as I should say now—won't object."

We set off at once in a taxi. The new Lord Cronshaw was not at home, but at Japp's request we were shown into the "china room," where the gems of the collection were kept. Japp looked round him rather helplessly.

"I don't see how you'll ever find the ones you want, monsieur."

But Poirot had already drawn a chair in front of the mantelpiece and was hopping up upon it like a nimble robin. Above the mirror, on a small shelf to themselves, stood six china figures. Poirot examined them minutely, making a few comments to us as he did so.

"*Les voilà!* The old Italian Comedy. Three pairs! Harlequin and Columbine, Pierrot and Pierrette—very dainty in white and green—and Punchinello and Pulcinella in mauve and yellow. Very elaborate, the costume of Punchinello—ruffles and frills, a hump, a high hat. Yes, as I thought, very elaborate."

He replaced the figures carefully, and jumped down.

Japp looked unsatisfied, but as Poirot had clearly no intention of explaining anything, the detective put the best face he could upon the matter. As we were preparing to leave, the master of the house came in, and Japp performed the necessary introductions.

The sixth Viscount Cronshaw was a man of about fifty, suave in manner, with a handsome, dissolute face. Evidently an elderly roué, with the languid manner of a poseur. I took an instant dislike to him. He greeted us graciously enough, declaring he had heard great accounts of Poirot's skill, and placing himself at our disposal in every way.

"The police are doing all they can, I know," Poirot said.

"But I much fear the mystery of my nephew's death will never be cleared up. The whole thing seems utterly mysterious."

Poirot was watching him keenly. “Your nephew had no enemies that you know of?”

“None whatever. I am sure of that.” He paused, and then went on: “If there are any questions you would like to ask—”

“Only one.” Poirot’s voice was serious. “The costumes—they were reproduced *exactly* from your figurines?”

“To the smallest detail.”

“Thank you, milor’.” That is all I wanted to be sure of. I wish you good day.”

“And what next?” inquired Japp as we hurried down the street. “I’ve got to report at the Yard, you know.”

“*Bien!* I will not detain you. I have one other little matter to attend to, and then—”

“Yes?”

“The case will be complete.”

“What? You don’t mean it! You know who killed Lord Cronshaw?”

“*Parfaitement*.”

“Who was it? Eustace Beltane?”

“Ah, *mon ami*, you know my little weakness! Always I have a desire to keep the threads in my own hands up to the last minute. But have no fear. I will reveal all when the time comes. I want no credit—the affair shall be yours, on the condition that you permit me to play out the *dénouement* my own way.”

“That’s fair enough,” said Japp. “That is, if the *dénouement* ever comes! But I say, you *are* an oyster, aren’t you?” Poirot smiled. “Well, so long. I’m off to the Yard.”

He strode off down the street, and Poirot hailed a passing taxi.

“Where are we going now?” I asked in lively curiosity.

“To Chelsea to see the Davidsons.”

He gave the address to the driver.

“What do you think of the new Lord Cronshaw?” I asked.

“What says my good friend Hastings?”

“I distrust him instinctively.”

“You think he is the ‘wicked uncle’ of the story-books, eh?”

“Don’t you?”

“Me, I think he was most amiable towards us,” said Poirot noncommittally.

“Because he had his reasons!”

Poirot looked at me, shook his head sadly, and murmured something that sounded like: “No method.”

The Davidsons lived on the third floor of a block of “mansion” flats. Mr. Davidson was out, we were told, but Mrs. Davidson was at home. We were ushered into a long, low room with garish Oriental hangings. The air felt close and oppressive, and there was an overpowering fragrance of joss-sticks. Mrs. Davidson came to us almost immediately, a small, fair creature whose fragility would have seemed pathetic and appealing had it not been for the rather shrewd and calculating gleam in her light blue eyes.

Poirot explained our connection with the case, and she shook her head sadly.

“Poor Cronch—and poor Coco too! We were both so fond of her, and her death has been a terrible grief to us. What is it you want to ask me? Must I really go over all that dreadful evening again?”

“Oh, madame, believe me, I would not harass your feelings unnecessarily. Indeed, Inspector Japp has told me all that is needful. I only wish to see the costume you wore at the ball that night.”

The lady looked somewhat surprised, and Poirot continued smoothly: “You comprehend, madame, that I work on the system of my country. There we always ‘reconstruct’ the crime. It is possible that I may have an actual

représentation, and if so, you understand, the costumes would be important."

Mrs. Davidson still looked a bit doubtful.

"I've heard of reconstructing a crime, of course," she said. "But I didn't know you were so particular about details. But I'll fetch the dress now."

She left the room and returned almost immediately with a dainty wisp of white satin and green. Poirot took it from her and examined it, handing it back with a bow.

"*Merci, madame!* I see you have had the misfortune to lose one of your green pompons, the one on the shoulder here."

"Yes, it got torn off at the ball. I picked it up and gave it to poor Lord Cronshaw to keep for me."

"That was after supper?"

"Yes."

"Not long before the tragedy, perhaps?"

A faint look of alarm came into Mrs. Davidson's pale eyes, and she replied quickly: "Oh no—long before that. Quite soon after supper, in fact."

"I see. Well, that is all. I will not derange you further. *Bonjour, madame*."

"Well," I said as we emerged from the building, "that explains the mystery of the green pompon."

"I wonder."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"You saw me examine the dress, Hastings?"

"Yes?"

"*Eh bien*, the pompon that was missing had not been wrenched off, as the lady said. On the contrary, it had been *cut* off, my friend, cut off with scissors. The threads were all quite even."

"Dear me!" I exclaimed. "This becomes more and more involved."

"On the contrary," replied Poirot placidly, "it becomes more and more simple."

“Poirot,” I cried, “one day I shall murder you! Your habit of finding everything perfectly simple is aggravating to the last degree!”

“But when I explain, *mon ami*, is it not always perfectly simple?”

“Yes; that is the annoying part of it! I feel then that I could have done it myself.”

“And so you could, Hastings, so you could. If you would but take the trouble of arranging your ideas! Without method—”

“Yes, yes,” I said hastily, for I knew Poirot’s eloquence when started on his favourite theme only too well. “Tell me, what do we do next? Are you really going to reconstruct the crime?”

“Hardly that. Shall we say that the drama is over, but that I propose to add a—harlequinade?”

The following Tuesday was fixed upon by Poirot as the day for this mysterious performance. The preparations greatly intrigued me. A white screen was erected at one side of the room, flanked by heavy curtains at either side. A man with some lighting apparatus arrived next, and finally a group of members of the theatrical profession, who disappeared into Poirot’s bedroom, which had been rigged up as a temporary dressing-room.

Shortly before eight, Japp arrived, in no very cheerful mood. I gathered that the official detective hardly approved of Poirot’s plan.

“Bit melodramatic, like all his ideas. But there, it can do no harm, and as he says, it might save us a good bit of trouble. He’s been very smart over the case. I was on the same scent myself, of course—” I felt instinctively that Japp was straining the truth here “—but there, I promised to let him play the thing out his own way. Ah! Here is the crowd.”

His Lordship arrived first, escorting Mrs. Mallaby, whom I had not as yet seen. She was a pretty, dark-haired woman, and appeared perceptibly nervous. The Davidsons followed. Chris Davidson also I saw for the first

time. He was handsome enough in a rather obvious style, tall and dark, with the easy grace of the actor.

Poirot had arranged seats for the party facing the screen. This was illuminated by a bright light. Poirot switched out the other lights so that the room was in darkness except for the screen. Poirot's voice rose out of the gloom.

"Messieurs, mesdames, a word of explanation. Six figures in turn will pass across the screen. They are familiar to you. Pierrot and his Pierrette; Punchinello the buffoon, and elegant Pulcinella; beautiful Columbine, lightly dancing, Harlequin, the sprite, invisible to man!"

With these words of introduction, the show began. In turn each figure that Poirot had mentioned bounded before the screen, stayed there a moment poised, and then vanished. The lights went up, and a sigh of relief went round. Everyone had been nervous, fearing they knew not what. It seemed to me that the proceedings had gone singularly flat. If the criminal was among us, and Poirot expected him to break down at the mere sight of a familiar figure the device had failed signally—as it was almost bound to do. Poirot, however, appeared not a whit discomposed. He stepped forward, beaming.

"Now, messieurs and mesdames, will you be so good as to tell me, one at a time, what it is that we have just seen? Will you begin, milor'?"

The gentleman looked rather puzzled. "I'm afraid I don't quite understand."

"Just tell me what we have been seeing."

"I—er—well, I should say we have seen six figures passing in front of a screen and dressed to represent the personages in the old Italian Comedy, or —er—ourselves the other night."

"Never mind the other night, milor'," broke in Poirot. "The first part of your speech was what I wanted. Madame, you agree with Milor' Cronshaw?"

He had turned as he spoke to Mrs. Mallaby.

"I—er—yes, of course."

"You agree that you have seen six figures representing the Italian Comedy?"

"Why, certainly."

"Monsieur Davidson? You too?"

"Yes."

"Madame?"

"Yes."

"Hastings? Japp? Yes? You are all in accord?"

He looked around upon us; his face grew rather pale, and his eyes were green as any cat's.

"And yet—*you are all wrong*! Your eyes have lied to you—as they lied to you on the night of the Victory Ball. To 'see' things with your eyes, as they say, is not always to see the truth. One must see with the eyes of the mind; one must employ the little cells of grey! Know, then, that tonight and on the night of the Victory Ball, you saw not *six* figures but *five*! See!"

The lights went out again. A figure bounded in front of the screen—Pierrot!

"Who is that?" demanded Poirot. "Is it Pierrot?"

"Yes," we all cried.

"Look again!"

With a swift movement the man divested himself of his loose Pierrot garb. There in the limelight stood glittering Harlequin! At the same moment there was a cry and an overturned chair.

"Curse you," snarled Davidson's voice. "Curse you! How did you guess?"

Then came the clink of handcuffs and Japp's calm official voice. "I arrest you, Christopher Davidson—charge of murdering Viscount Cronshaw—anything you say will be used in evidence against you."

It was a quarter of an hour later. A recherché little supper had appeared; and Poirot, beaming all over his face, was dispensing hospitality and answering our eager questions.

"It was all very simple. The circumstances in which the green pompon was found suggested at once that it had been torn from the costume of the murderer. I dismissed Pierrette from my mind (since it takes considerable strength to drive a table-knife home) and fixed upon Pierrot as the criminal. But Pierrot left the ball nearly two hours before the murder was committed. So he must either have returned to the ball later to kill Lord Cronshaw, or—*eh bien*, he must have killed him before he left! Was that impossible? Who had seen Lord Cronshaw after supper that evening? Only Mrs. Davidson, whose statement, I suspected, was a deliberate fabrication uttered with the object of accounting for the missing pompon, which, of course, she cut from her own dress to replace the one missing on her husband's costume. But then, Harlequin, who was seen in the box at one-thirty, must have been an impersonation. For a moment, earlier, I had considered the possibility of Mr. Beltane being the guilty party. But with his elaborate costume, it was clearly impossible that he could have doubled the roles of Punchinello and Harlequin. On the other hand, to Davidson, a young man of about the same height as the murdered man and an actor by profession, the thing was simplicity itself.

"But one thing worried me. Surely a doctor could not fail to perceive the difference between a man who had been dead two hours and one who had been dead ten minutes! *Eh bien*, the doctor *did* perceive it! But he was not taken to the body and asked, 'How long has this man been dead?' On the contrary, he was informed that the man had been seen alive ten minutes ago, and so he merely commented at the inquest on the abnormal stiffening of the limbs for which he was quite unable to account!

"All was now marching famously for my theory. Davidson had killed Lord Cronshaw immediately after supper, when, as you remember, he was

seen to draw him back into the supper-room. Then he departed with Miss Courtenay, left her at the door of her flat (instead of going in and trying to pacify her as he affirmed) and returned post-haste to the Colossus—but as Harlequin, not Pierrot—a simple transformation effected by removing his outer costume."

The uncle of the dead man leaned forward, his eyes perplexed.

"But if so, he must have come to the ball prepared to kill his victim. What earthly motive could he have had? The motive, that's what I can't get."

"Ah! There we come to the second tragedy—that of Miss Courtenay. There was one simple point which everyone overlooked. Miss Courtenay died of cocaine poisoning—but her supply of the drug was in the enamel box which was found on Lord Cronshaw's body. Where, then, did she obtain the dose which killed her? Only one person could have supplied her with it—Davidson. And that explains everything. It accounts for her friendship with the Davidsons and her demand that Davidson should escort her home. Lord Cronshaw, who was almost fanatically opposed to drug-taking, discovered that she was addicted to cocaine, and suspected that Davidson supplied her with it. Davidson doubtless denied this, but Lord Cronshaw determined to get the truth from Miss Courtenay at the ball. He could forgive the wretched girl, but he would certainly have no mercy on the man who made a living by trafficking in drugs. Exposure and ruin confronted Davidson. He went to the ball determined that Cronshaw's silence must be obtained at any cost."

"Was Coco's death an accident, then?"

"I suspect that it was an accident cleverly engineered by Davidson.

She was furiously angry with Cronshaw, first for his reproaches, and secondly for taking her cocaine from her. Davidson supplied her with more, and probably suggested her augmenting the dose as a defiance to 'old Cronch'!"

“One other thing,” I said. “The recess and the curtain? How did you know about them?”

“Why, *mon ami*, that was the most simple of all. Waiters had been in and out of that little room, so, obviously, the body could not have been lying where it was found on the floor. There must be some place in the room where it could be hidden. I deduced a curtain and a recess behind it. Davidson dragged the body there, and later, after drawing attention to himself in the box, he dragged it out again before finally leaving the Hall. It was one of his best moves. He is a clever fellow!”

But in Poirot’s green eyes I read unmistakably the unspoken remark: “But not quite so clever as Hercule Poirot!”

The Miss Marple Mysteries

The Murder at the Vicarage
The Body in the Library
The Moving Finger
A Murder Is Announced
They Do It with Mirrors
A Pocket Full of Rye
4:50 from Paddington
The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side
A Caribbean Mystery
At Bertram's Hotel
Nemesis
Sleeping Murder
Miss Marple: The Complete Short Stories

“If I was born again, I would like to be a woman—always!”

–AGATHA CHRISTIE

Greenshaw's Folly

From *Miss Marple: The Complete Short Stories*

The two men rounded the corner of the shrubbery.

"Well, there you are," said Raymond West. "That's it."

Horace Bindler took a deep, appreciative breath.

"But my dear," he cried, "how wonderful." His voice rose in a high screech of 'sthetic delight, then deepened in reverent awe. "It's unbelievable. Out of this world! A period piece of the best."

"I thought you'd like it," said Raymond West, complacently.

"Like it? My dear—" Words failed Horace. He unbuckled the strap of his camera and got busy. "This will be one of the gems of my collection," he said happily. "I do think, don't you, that it's rather amusing to have a collection of monstrosities? The idea came to me one night seven years ago in my bath. My last real gem was in the Campo Santo at Genoa, but I really think this beats it. What's it called?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Raymond.

“I suppose it’s got a name?”

“It must have. But the fact is that it’s never referred to round here as anything but Greenshaw’s Folly.”

“Greenshaw being the man who built it?”

“Yes. In eighteen-sixty or seventy or thereabouts. The local success story of the time. Barefoot boy who had risen to immense prosperity. Local opinion is divided as to why he built this house, whether it was sheer exuberance of wealth or whether it was done to impress his creditors. If the latter, it didn’t impress them. He either went bankrupt or the next thing to it. Hence the name, Greenshaw’s Folly.”

Horace’s camera clicked. “There,” he said in a satisfied voice. “Remind me to show you No. 310 in my collection. A really incredible marble mantelpiece in the Italian manner.” He added, looking at the house, “I can’t conceive of how Mr. Greenshaw thought of it all.”

“Rather obvious in some ways,” said Raymond. “He had visited the châteaux of the Loire, don’t you think? Those turrets. And then, rather unfortunately, he seems to have travelled in the Orient. The influence of the Taj Mahal is unmistakable. I rather like the Moorish wing,” he added, “and the traces of a Venetian palace.”

“One wonders how he ever got hold of an architect to carry out these ideas.”

Raymond shrugged his shoulders.

“No difficulty about that, I expect,” he said. “Probably the architect retired with a good income for life while poor old Greenshaw went bankrupt.”

“Could we look at it from the other side?” asked Horace, “or are we trespassing!”

“We’re trespassing all right,” said Raymond, “but I don’t think it will matter.”

He turned towards the corner of the house and Horace skipped after him.

“But who lives here, my dear? Orphans or holiday visitors? It can’t be a school. No playing-fields or brisk efficiency.”

“Oh, a Greenshaw lives here still,” said Raymond over his shoulder.

“The house itself didn’t go in the crash. Old Greenshaw’s son inherited it. He was a bit of a miser and lived here in a corner of it. Never spent a penny. Probably never had a penny to spend. His daughter lives here now. Old lady —very eccentric.”

As he spoke Raymond was congratulating himself on having thought of Greenshaw’s Folly as a means of entertaining his guest. These literary critics always professed themselves as longing for a weekend in the country, and were wont to find the country extremely boring when they got there. Tomorrow there would be the Sunday papers, and for today Raymond West congratulated himself on suggesting a visit to Greenshaw’s Folly to enrich Horace Bindler’s well-known collection of monstrosities.

They turned the corner of the house and came out on a neglected lawn. In one corner of it was a large artificial rockery, and bending over it was a figure at sight of which Horace clutched Raymond delightedly by the arm.

“My dear,” he exclaimed, “do you see what she’s got on? A sprigged print dress. Just like a housemaid—when there were housemaids. One of my most cherished memories is staying at a house in the country when I was quite a boy where a real housemaid called you in the morning, all crackling in a print dress and a cap. Yes, my boy, really—a cap. Muslin with streamers. No, perhaps it was the parlourmaid who had the streamers. But anyway she was a real housemaid and she brought in an enormous brass can of hot water. What an exciting day we’re having.”

The figure in the print dress had straightened up and had turned towards them, trowel in hand. She was a sufficiently startling figure. Unkempt locks of iron-grey fell wispily on her shoulders, a straw hat rather like the hats that horses wear in Italy was crammed down on her head. The coloured

print dress she wore fell nearly to her ankles. Out of a weather-beaten, not-too-clean face, shrewd eyes surveyed them appraisingly.

"I must apologize for trespassing, Miss Greenshaw," said Raymond West, as he advanced towards her, "but Mr Horace Bindler who is staying with me—"

Horace bowed and removed his hat.

"—is most interested in—er—ancient history and—er—fine buildings."

Raymond West spoke with the ease of a well-known author who knows that he is a celebrity, that he can venture where other people may not.

Miss Greenshaw looked up at the sprawling exuberance behind her.

"It *is* a fine house," she said appreciatively. "My grandfather built it—before my time, of course. He is reported as having said that he wished to astonish the natives."

"I'll say he did that, ma'am," said Horace Bindler.

"Mr. Bindler is the well-known literary critic," said Raymond West.

Miss Greenshaw had clearly no reverence for literary critics. She remained unimpressed.

"I consider it," said Miss Greenshaw, referring to the house, "as a monument to my grandfather's genius. Silly fools come here, and ask me why I don't sell it and go and live in a flat. What would *I* do in a flat? It's my home and I live in it," said Miss Greenshaw. "Always have lived here." She considered, brooding over the past. "There were three of us. Laura married the curate. Papa wouldn't give her any money, said clergymen ought to be unworldly. She died, having a baby. Baby died too. Nettie ran away with the riding master. Papa cut her out of his will, of course. Handsome fellow, Harry Fletcher, but no good. Don't think Nettie was happy with him. Anyway, she didn't live long. They had a son. He writes to me sometimes, but of course he isn't a Greenshaw. *I*'m the last of the Greenshaws." She drew up her bent shoulders with a certain pride, and readjusted the rakish angle of the straw hat. Then, turning, she said sharply,

“Yes, Mrs. Cresswell, what is it?”

Approaching them from the house was a figure that, seen side by side with Miss Greenshaw, seemed ludicrously dissimilar. Mrs. Cresswell had a marvellously dressed head of well-blued hair towering upwards in meticulously arranged curls and rolls. It was as though she had dressed her head to go as a French marquise to a fancy-dress party. The rest of her middle-aged person was dressed in what ought to have been rustling black silk but was actually one of the shinier varieties of black rayon. Although she was not a large woman, she had a well developed and sumptuous bust. Her voice when she spoke, was unexpectedly deep. She spoke with exquisite diction, only a slight hesitation over words beginning with “h” and the final pronunciation of them with an exaggerated aspirate gave rise to a suspicion that at some remote period in her youth she might have had trouble over dropping her h’s.

“The fish, madam,” said Mrs. Cresswell, “the slice of cod. It has not arrived. I have asked Alfred to go down for it and he refuses to do so.”

Rather unexpectedly, Miss Greenshaw gave a cackle of laughter.

“Refuses, does he?”

“Alfred, madam, has been most disobliging.”

Miss Greenshaw raised two earth-stained fingers to her lips, suddenly produced an ear-splitting whistle and at the same time yelled:

“Alfred. Alfred, come here.”

Round the corner of the house a young man appeared in answer to the summons, carrying a spade in his hand. He had a bold, handsome face and as he drew near he cast an unmistakably malevolent glance towards Mrs. Cresswell.

“You wanted me, miss?” he said.

“Yes, Alfred. I hear you’ve refused to go down for the fish. What about it, eh?”

Alfred spoke in a surly voice.

“I’ll go down for it if you wants it, miss. You’ve only got to say.”

“I do want it. I want it for my supper.”

“Right you are, miss. I’ll go right away.”

He threw an insolent glance at Mrs. Cresswell, who flushed and murmured below her breath:

“Really! It’s unsupportable.”

“Now that I think of it,” said Miss Greenshaw, “a couple of strange visitors are just what we need aren’t they, Mrs. Cresswell?”

Mrs. Cresswell looked puzzled.

“I’m sorry, madam—’

“For you-know-what,” said Miss Greenshaw, nodding her head. “Beneficiary to a will mustn’t witness it. That’s right, isn’t it?” She appealed to Raymond West.

“Quite correct,” said Raymond.

“I know enough law to know that,” said Miss Greenshaw. “And you two are men of standing.”

She flung down her trowel on her weeding-basket.

“Would you mind coming up to the library with me?”

“Delighted,” said Horace eagerly.

She led the way through french windows and through a vast yellow and gold drawing-room with faded brocade on the walls and dust covers arranged over the furniture, then through a large dim hall, up a staircase and into a room on the first floor.

“My grandfather’s library,” she announced.

Horace looked round the room with acute pleasure. It was a room, from his point of view, quite full of monstrosities. The heads of sphinxes appeared on the most unlikely pieces of furniture, there was a colossal bronze representing, he thought, Paul and Virginia, and a vast bronze clock with classical motifs of which he longed to take a photograph.

“A fine lot of books,” said Miss Greenshaw.

Raymond was already looking at the books. From what he could see from a cursory glance there was no book here of any real interest or, indeed, any book which appeared to have been read. They were all superbly bound sets of the classics as supplied ninety years ago for furnishing a gentleman's library. Some novels of a bygone period were included. But they too showed little signs of having been read.

Miss Greenshaw was fumbling in the drawers of a vast desk. Finally she pulled out a parchment document.

"My will," she explained. "Got to leave your money to someone—or so they say. If I died without a will I suppose that son of a horse-coper would get it. Handsome fellow, Harry Fletcher, but a rogue if there ever was one. Don't see why *his* son should inherit this place. No," she went on, as though answering some unspoken objection, "I've made up my mind. I'm leaving it to Cresswell."

"Your housekeeper?"

"Yes. I've explained it to her. I make a will leaving her all I've got and then I don't need to pay her any wages. Saves me a lot in current expenses, and it keeps her up to the mark. No giving me notice and walking off at any minute. Very la-di-dah and all that, isn't she? But her father was a working plumber in a very small way. *She's* nothing to give herself airs about."

She had by now unfolded the parchment. Picking up a pen she dipped it in the inkstand and wrote her signature, Katherine Dorothy Greenshaw.

"That's right," she said. "You've seen me sign it, and then you two sign it, and that makes it legal."

She handed the pen to Raymond West. He hesitated a moment, feeling an unexpected repulsion to what he was asked to do. Then he quickly scrawled the well-known signature, for which his morning's mail usually brought at least six demands a day.

Horace took the pen from him and added his own minute signature.

"That's done," said Miss Greenshaw.

She moved across to the bookcase and stood looking at them uncertainly, then she opened a glass door, took out a book and slipped the folded parchment inside.

"I've my own places for keeping things," she said.

"*Lady Audley's Secret*," Raymond West remarked, catching sight of the title as she replaced the book.

Miss Greenshaw gave another cackle of laughter.

"Best seller in its day," she remarked. "Not like your books, eh?"

She gave Raymond a sudden friendly nudge in the ribs. Raymond was rather surprised that she even knew he wrote books. Although Raymond West was quite a name in literature, he could hardly be described as a best seller. Though softening a little with the advent of middle-age, his books dealt bleakly with the sordid side of life.

"I wonder," Horace demanded breathlessly, "if I might just take a photograph of the clock?"

"By all means," said Miss Greenshaw. "It came, I believe, from the Paris exhibition."

"Very probably," said Horace. He took his picture.

"This room's not been used much since my grandfather's time," said Miss Greenshaw. "This desk's full of old diaries of his. Interesting, I should think. I haven't the eyesight to read them myself. I'd like to get them published, but I suppose one would have to work on them a good deal."

"You could engage someone to do that," said Raymond West.

"Could I really? It's an idea, you know. I'll think about it."

Raymond West glanced at his watch.

"We mustn't trespass on your kindness any longer," he said.

"Pleased to have seen you," said Miss Greenshaw graciously. "Thought you were the policeman when I heard you coming round the corner of the house."

“Why a policeman?” demanded Horace, who never minded asking questions.

Miss Greenshaw responded unexpectedly.

“If you want to know the time, ask a policeman,” she carolled, and with this example of Victorian wit, nudged Horace in the ribs and roared with laughter.

“It’s been a wonderful afternoon,” sighed Horace as they walked home. “Really, that place has everything. The only thing the library needs is a body. Those old-fashioned detective stories about murder in the library—that’s just the kind of library I’m sure the authors had in mind.”

“If you want to discuss murder,” said Raymond, “you must talk to my Aunt Jane.”

“Your Aunt Jane? Do you mean Miss Marple?” He felt a little at a loss.

The charming old-world lady to whom he had been introduced the night before seemed the last person to be mentioned in connection with murder.

“Oh, yes,” said Raymond. “Murder is a speciality of hers.”

“But my dear, how intriguing. What do you really mean?”

“I mean just that,” said Raymond. He paraphrased: “Some commit murder, some get mixed up in murders, others have murder thrust upon them. My Aunt Jane comes into the third category.”

“You are joking.”

“Not in the least. I can refer you to the former Commissioner of Scotland Yard, several Chief Constables and one or two hard-working inspectors of the CID.”

Horace said happily that wonders would never cease. Over the tea table they gave Joan West, Raymond’s wife, Lou Oxley her niece, and old Miss Marple, a résumé of the afternoon’s happenings, recounting in detail everything that Miss Greenshaw had said to them.

“But I do think,” said Horace, “that there is something a little *sinister* about the whole setup. That duchess-like creature, the housekeeper—

arsenic, perhaps, in the teapot, now that she knows her mistress has made the will in her favour?"

"Tell us, Aunt Jane," said Raymond. "Will there be murder or won't there? What do *you* think?"

"I think," said Miss Marple, winding up her wool with a rather severe air, "that you shouldn't joke about these things as much as you do, Raymond. Arsenic is, of course, *quite* a possibility. So easy to obtain. Probably present in the toolshed already in the form of weed killer."

"Oh, really, darling," said Joan West, affectionately. "Wouldn't that be rather too obvious?"

"It's all very well to make a will," said Raymond, "I don't suppose really the poor old thing has anything to leave except that awful white elephant of a house, and who would want that?"

"A film company possibly," said Horace, "or a hotel or an institution?"

"They'd expect to buy it for a song," said Raymond, but Miss Marple was shaking her head.

"You know, dear Raymond, I cannot agree with you there. About the money, I mean. The grandfather was evidently one of those lavish spenders who make money easily, but can't keep it. He may have gone broke, as you say, but hardly bankrupt or else his son would not have had the house. Now the son, as is so often the case, was an entirely different character to his father. A miser. A man who saved every penny. I should say that in the course of his lifetime he probably put by a very good sum. This Miss Greenshaw appears to have taken after him, to dislike spending money, that is. Yes, I should think it quite likely that she had quite a good sum tucked away."

"In that case," said Joan West, "I wonder now—what about Lou?"

They looked at Lou as she sat, silent, by the fire.

Lou was Joan West's niece. Her marriage had recently, as she herself put it, come unstuck, leaving her with two young children and a bare

sufficiency of money to keep them on.

"I mean," said Joan, "if this Miss Greenshaw really wants someone to go through diaries and get a book ready for publication. . . ."

"It's an idea," said Raymond.

Lou said in a low voice: "It's work I could do—and I'd enjoy it."

"I'll write to her," said Raymond.

"I wonder," said Miss Marple thoughtfully, "what the old lady meant by that remark about a policeman?"

"Oh, it was just a joke."

"It reminded me," said Miss Marple, nodding her head vigorously, "yes, it reminded me very much of Mr. Naysmith."

"Who was Mr. Naysmith?" asked Raymond, curiously.

"He kept bees," said Miss Marple, "and was very good at doing the acrostics in the Sunday papers. And he liked giving people false impressions just for fun. But sometimes it led to trouble."

Everybody was silent for a moment, considering Mr. Naysmith, but as there did not seem to be any points of resemblance between him and Miss Greenshaw, they decided that dear Aunt Jane was perhaps getting a *little* bit disconnected in her old age.

Horace Bindler went back to London without having collected any more monstrosities and Raymond West wrote a letter to Miss Greenshaw telling her that he knew of a Mrs. Louisa Oxley who would be competent to undertake work on the diaries. After a lapse of some days, a letter arrived, written in spidery old-fashioned handwriting, in which Miss Greenshaw declared herself anxious to avail herself of the services of Mrs. Oxley, and making an appointment for Mrs. Oxley to come and see her.

Lou duly kept the appointment, generous terms were arranged and she started work on the following day.

“I’m awfully grateful to you,” she said to Raymond. “It will fit in beautifully. I can take the children to school, go on to Greenshaw’s Folly and pick them up on my way back. How fantastic the whole set-up is! That old woman has to be seen to be believed.”

On the evening of her first day at work she returned and described her day.

“I’ve hardly seen the housekeeper,” she said. “She came in with coffee and biscuits at half past eleven with her mouth pursed up very prunes and prisms, and would hardly speak to me. I think she disapproves deeply of my having been engaged.” She went on, “It seems there’s quite a feud between her and the gardener, Alfred. He’s a local boy and fairly lazy, I should imagine, and he and the housekeeper won’t speak to each other. Miss Greenshaw said in her rather grand way, ‘There have always been feuds as far as I can remember between the garden and the house staff. It was so in my grandfather’s time. There were three men and a boy in the garden then, and eight maids in the house, but there was always friction.’ ”

On the following day Lou returned with another piece of news.

“Just fancy,” she said, “I was asked to ring up the nephew this morning.”

“Miss Greenshaw’s nephew?”

“Yes. It seems he’s an actor playing in the company that’s doing a summer season at Boreham on Sea. I rang up the theatre and left a message asking him to lunch tomorrow. Rather fun, really. The old girl didn’t want the housekeeper to know. I think Mrs. Cresswell has done something that’s annoyed her.”

“Tomorrow another installment of this thrilling serial,” murmured Raymond.

“It’s exactly like a serial, isn’t it? Reconciliation with the nephew, blood is thicker than water—another will to be made and the old will destroyed.”

“Aunt Jane, you’re looking very serious.”

“Was I, my dear? Have you heard any more about the policeman?”

Lou looked bewildered. “I don’t know anything about a policeman.”

“That remark of hers, my dear,” said Miss Marple, “must have meant *something*.”

Lou arrived at her work the next day in a cheerful mood. She passed through the open front door—the doors and windows of the house were always open. Miss Greenshaw appeared to have no fear of burglars, and was probably justified, as most things in the house weighed several tons and were of no marketable value.

Lou had passed Alfred in the drive. When she first caught sight of him he had been leaning against a tree smoking a cigarette, but as soon as he had caught sight of her he had seized a broom and begun diligently to sweep leaves. An idle young man, she thought, but good-looking. His features reminded her of someone. As she passed through the hall on her way upstairs to the library she glanced at the large picture of Nathaniel Greenshaw which presided over the mantelpiece, showing him in the acme of Victorian prosperity, leaning back in a large arm-chair, his hands resting on the gold albert across his capacious stomach. As her glance swept up from the stomach to the face with its heavy jowls, its bushy eyebrows and its flourishing black moustache, the thought occurred to her that Nathaniel Greenshaw must have been handsome as a young man. He had looked, perhaps, a little like Alfred. . . .

She went into the library, shut the door behind her, opened her typewriter and got out the diaries from the drawer at the side of the desk. Through the open window she caught a glimpse of Miss Greenshaw in a puce-coloured sprigged print, bending over the rockery, weeding assiduously. They had had two wet days, of which the weeds had taken full advantage.

Lou, a town-bred girl, decided that if she ever had a garden it would never contain a rockery which needed hand weeding. Then she settled down to her work.

When Mrs. Cresswell entered the library with the coffee tray at half past eleven, she was clearly in a very bad temper. She banged the tray down on the table, and observed to the universe.

"Company for lunch—and nothing in the house! What am *I* supposed to do, I should like to know? And no sign of Alfred."

"He was sweeping in the drive when I got here," Lou offered.

"I dare say. A nice soft job."

Mrs. Cresswell swept out of the room and banged the door behind her. Lou grinned to herself. She wondered what "the nephew" would be like.

She finished her coffee and settled down to her work again. It was so absorbing that time passed quickly. Nathaniel Greenshaw, when he started to keep a diary, had succumbed to the pleasure of frankness. Trying out a passage relating to the personal charm of a barmaid in the neighbouring town, Lou reflected that a good deal of editing would be necessary.

As she was thinking this, she was startled by a scream from the garden. Jumping up, she ran to the open window. Miss Greenshaw was staggering away from the rockery towards the house. Her hands were clasped to her breast and between them there protruded a feathered shaft that Lou recognized with stupefaction to be the shaft of an arrow.

Miss Greenshaw's head, in its battered straw hat, fell forward on her breast. She called up to Lou in a failing voice: " . . . shot . . . he shot me . . . with an arrow . . . get help. . . ."

Lou rushed to the door. She turned the handle, but the door would not open. It took her a moment or two of futile endeavour to realize that she was locked in. She rushed back to the window.

"I'm locked in."

Miss Greenshaw, her back towards Lou, and swaying a little on her feet was calling up to the housekeeper at a window farther along.

"Ring police . . . telephone. . . ."

Then, lurching from side to side like a drunkard she disappeared from Lou's view through the window below into the drawing-room. A moment later Lou heard a crash of broken china, a heavy fall, and then silence. Her imagination reconstructed the scene. Miss Greenshaw must have staggered blindly into a small table with a Sèvres teaset on it.

Desperately Lou pounded on the door, calling and shouting. There was no creeper or drainpipe outside the window that could help her to get out that way.

Tired at last of beating on the door, she returned to the window. From the window of her sitting-room farther along, the housekeeper's head appeared.

"Come and let me out, Mrs. Oxley. I'm locked in."

"So am I."

"Oh dear, isn't it awful? I've telephoned the police. There's an extension in this room, but what I can't understand, Mrs. Oxley, is our being locked in. *I* never heard a key turn, did you?"

"No. I didn't hear anything at all. Oh dear, what shall we do? Perhaps Alfred might hear us." Lou shouted at the top of her voice, "Alfred, Alfred."

"Gone to his dinner as likely as not. What time is it?"

Lou glanced at her watch.

"Twenty-five past twelve."

"He's not supposed to go until half past, but he sneaks off earlier whenever he can."

"Do you think—do you think—"

Lou meant to ask "Do you think she's dead?" but the words stuck in her throat.

There was nothing to do but wait. She sat down on the windowsill. It seemed an eternity before the stolid helmeted figure of a police constable came round the corner of the house. She leant out of the window and he looked up at her, shading his eyes with his hand. When he spoke his voice held reproof.

“What’s going on here?” he asked disapprovingly.

From their respective windows, Lou and Mrs. Cresswell poured a flood of excited information down on him.

The constable produced a notebook and pencil. “You ladies ran upstairs and locked yourselves in? Can I have your names, please?”

“No. Somebody else locked us in. Come and let us out.”

The constable said reprovingly, “All in good time,” and disappeared through the window below.

Once again time seemed infinite. Lou heard the sound of a car arriving, and, after what seemed an hour, but was actually three minutes, first Mrs. Cresswell and then Lou, were released by a police sergeant more alert than the original constable.

“Miss Greenshaw?” Lou’s voice faltered. “What—what’s happened?”

The sergeant cleared his throat.

“I’m sorry to have to tell you, madam,” he said, “what I’ve already told Mrs. Cresswell here. Miss Greenshaw is dead.”

“Murdered,” said Mrs. Cresswell. “That’s what it is—murder.”

The sergeant said dubiously:

“Could have been an accident—some country lads shooting with bows and arrows.”

Again there was the sound of a car arriving. The sergeant said:

“That’ll be the MO,” and started downstairs.

But it was not the MO. As Lou and Mrs. Cresswell came down the stairs a young man stepped hesitatingly through the front door and paused, looking round him with a somewhat bewildered air.

Then, speaking in a pleasant voice that in some way seemed familiar to Lou—perhaps it had a family resemblance to Miss Greenshaw’s—he asked:

“Excuse me, does—er—does Miss Greenshaw live here?”

“May I have your name if you please,” said the sergeant advancing upon him.

“Fletcher,” said the young man. “Nat Fletcher. I’m Miss Greenshaw’s nephew, as a matter of fact.”

“Indeed, sir, well—I’m sorry—I’m sure—”

“Has anything happened?” asked Nat Fletcher.

“There’s been an—accident—your aunt was shot with an arrow—penetrated the jugular vein—”

Mrs. Cresswell spoke hysterically and without her usual refinement:

“Your h’aunt’s been murdered, that’s what’s ’appened. Your h’aunt’s been murdered.”

Inspector Welch drew his chair a little nearer to the table and let his gaze wander from one to the other of the four people in the room. It was the evening of the same day. He had called at the Wests’ house to take Lou Oxley once more over her statement.

“You are sure of the exact words? *Shot—he shot me—with an arrow—get help?*”

Lou nodded.

“And the time?”

“I looked at my watch a minute or two later—it was then twelve twenty-five.”

“Your watch keeps good time?”

“I looked at the clock as well.”

The inspector turned to Raymond West.

“It appears, sir, that about a week ago you and a Mr. Horace Bindler were witnesses to Miss Greenshaw’s will?”

Briefly, Raymond recounted the events of the afternoon visit that he and Horace Bindler had paid to Greenshaw’s Folly.

“This testimony of yours may be important,” said Welch. “Miss Greenshaw distinctly told you, did she, that her will was being made in favour of Mrs. Cresswell, the housekeeper, that she was not paying Mrs.

Cresswell any wages in view of the expectations Mrs Cresswell had of profiting by her death?"

"That is what she told me—yes."

"Would you say that Mrs. Cresswell was definitely aware of these facts?"

"I should say undoubtedly. Miss Greenshaw made a reference in my presence to beneficiaries not being able to witness a will and Mrs. Cresswell clearly understood what she meant by it. Moreover, Miss Greenshaw herself told me that she had come to this arrangement with Mrs. Cresswell."

"So Mrs. Cresswell had reason to believe she was an interested party. Motive's clear enough in her case, and I dare say she'd be our chief suspect now if it wasn't for the fact that she was securely locked in her room like Mrs. Oxley here, and also that Miss Greenshaw definitely said a *man* shot her—"

"She definitely *was* locked in her room?"

"Oh yes. Sergeant Cayley let her out. It's a big old-fashioned lock with a big old-fashioned key. The key was in the lock and there's not a chance that it could have been turned from inside or any hanky-panky of that kind. No, you can take it definitely that Mrs. Cresswell was locked inside that room and couldn't get out. And there were no bows and arrows in the room and Miss Greenshaw couldn't in any case have been shot from a window—the angle forbids it—no, Mrs. Cresswell's out of it."

He paused and went on:

"Would you say that Miss Greenshaw, in your opinion, was a practical joker?"

Miss Marple looked up sharply from her corner.

"So the will wasn't in Mrs. Cresswell's favour after all?" she said.

Inspector Welch looked over at her in a rather surprised fashion.

"That's a very clever guess of yours, madam," he said. "No. Mrs. Cresswell isn't named as beneficiary."

“Just like Mr. Naysmith,” said Miss Marple, nodding her head. “Miss Greenshaw told Mrs. Cresswell she was going to leave her everything and so got out of paying her wages; and then she left her money to somebody else. No doubt she was vastly pleased with herself. No wonder she chortled when she put the will away in *Lady Audley’s Secret*.”

“It was lucky Mrs. Oxley was able to tell us about the will and where it was put,” said the inspector. “We might have had a long hunt for it otherwise.”

“A Victorian sense of humour,” murmured Raymond West.

“So she left her money to her nephew after all,” said Lou.

The inspector shook his head.

“No,” he said, “she didn’t leave it to Nat Fletcher. The story goes around here—of course I’m new to the place and I only get the gossip that’s secondhand—but it seems that in the old days both Miss Greenshaw and her sister were set on the handsome young riding master, and the sister got him. No, she didn’t leave the money to her nephew—” He paused, rubbing his chin, “She left it to Alfred,” he said.

“Alfred—the gardener?” Joan spoke in a surprised voice.

“Yes, Mrs. West. Alfred Pollock.”

“But why?” cried Lou.

Miss Marple coughed and murmured:

“I should imagine, though perhaps I am wrong, that there may have been —what we might call *family* reasons.”

“You could call them that in a way,” agreed the inspector. “It’s quite well known in the village, it seems, that Thomas Pollock, Alfred’s grandfather, was one of old Mr. Greenshaw’s by-blows.”

“Of course,” cried Lou, “the resemblance! I saw it this morning.”

She remembered how after passing Alfred she had come into the house and looked up at old Greenshaw’s portrait.

“I dare say,” said Miss Marple, “that she thought Alfred Pollock might have a pride in the house, might even want to live in it, whereas her nephew would almost certainly have no use for it whatever and would sell it as soon as he could possibly do so. He’s an actor, isn’t he? What play exactly is he acting in at present?”

Trust an old lady to wander from the point, thought Inspector Welch, but he replied civilly:

“I believe, madam, they are doing a season of James Barrie’s plays.”

“Barrie,” said Miss Marple thoughtfully.

“*What Every Woman Knows*,” said Inspector Welch, and then blushed. “Name of a play,” he said quickly. “I’m not much of a theatre-goer myself,” he added, “but the wife went along and saw it last week. Quite well done, she said it was.”

“Barrie wrote some very charming plays,” said Miss Marple, “though I must say that when I went with an old friend of mine, General Easterly, to see Barrie’s *Little Mary*—” she shook her head sadly, “—neither of us knew where to look.”

The inspector, unacquainted with the play *Little Mary,* looked completely fogged. Miss Marple explained:

“When I was a girl, Inspector, nobody ever mentioned the word *stomach*.”

The inspector looked even more at sea. Miss Marple was murmuring titles under her breath.

“*The Admirable Crichton*. Very clever. *Mary Rose*—a charming play. I cried, I remember. *Quality Street* I didn’t care for so much. Then there was *A Kiss for Cinderella*. Oh, *of course*.”

Inspector Welch had no time to waste on theatrical discussion. He returned to the matter in hand.

“The question is,” he said, “did Alfred Pollock know that the old lady had made a will in his favour? Did she tell him?” He added: “You see—there’s

an archery club over at Boreham Lovell and *Alfred Pollock's a member*. He's a very good shot indeed with a bow and arrow."

"Then isn't your case quite clear?" asked Raymond West. "It would fit in with the doors being locked on the two women—he'd know just where they were in the house."

The inspector looked at him. He spoke with deep melancholy.

"He's got an alibi," said the inspector.

"I always think alibis are definitely suspicious."

"Maybe, sir," said Inspector Welch. "You're talking as a writer."

"I don't write detective stories," said Raymond West, horrified at the mere idea.

"Easy enough to say that alibis are suspicious," went on Inspector Welch, "but unfortunately we've got to deal with facts."

He sighed.

"We've got three good suspects," he said. "Three people who, as it happened, were very close upon the scene at the time. Yet the odd thing is that it looks as though none of the three could have done it. The housekeeper I've already dealt with—the nephew, Nat Fletcher, at the moment Miss Greenshaw was shot, was a couple of miles away filling up his car at a garage and asking his way—as for Alfred Pollock six people will swear that he entered the Dog and Duck at twenty past twelve and was there for an hour having his usual bread and cheese and beer."

"Deliberately establishing an alibi," said Raymond West hopefully.

"Maybe," said Inspector Welch, "but if so, he *did* establish it."

There was a long silence. Then Raymond turned his head to where Miss Marple sat upright and thoughtful.

"It's up to you, Aunt Jane," he said. "The inspector's baffled, the sergeant's baffled, I'm baffled, Joan's baffled, Lou is baffled. But to you, Aunt Jane, it is crystal clear. Am I right?"

“I wouldn’t say that, dear,” said Miss Marple, “not *crystal* clear, and murder, dear Raymond, isn’t a game. I don’t suppose poor Miss Greenshaw wanted to die, and it was a particularly brutal murder. Very well planned and quite cold-blooded. It’s not a thing to make *jokes* about!”

“I’m sorry,” said Raymond, abashed. “I’m not really as callous as I sound. One treats a thing lightly to take away from the—well, the horror of it.”

“That is, I believe, the modern tendency,” said Miss Marple, “All these wars, and having to joke about funerals. Yes, perhaps I was thoughtless when I said you were callous.”

“It isn’t,” said Joan, “as though we’d known her at all well.”

“That is *very* true,” said Miss Marple. “You, dear Joan, did not know her at all. I did not know her at all. Raymond gathered an impression of her from one afternoon’s conversation. Lou knew her for two days.”

“Come now, Aunt Jane,” said Raymond, “tell us your views. You don’t mind, Inspector?”

“Not at all,” said the inspector politely.

“Well, my dear, it would seem that we have three people who had, or might have thought they had, a motive to kill the old lady. And three quite simple reasons why none of the three could have done so. The housekeeper could not have done so because she was locked in her room and because Miss Greenshaw definitely stated that a *man* shot her. The gardener could not have done it because he was inside the Dog and Duck at the time the murder was committed, the nephew could not have done it because he was still some distance away in his car at the time of the murder.”

“Very clearly put, madam,” said the inspector.

“And since it seems most unlikely that any outsider should have done it, where, then, are we?”

“That’s what the inspector wants to know,” said Raymond West.

“One so often looks at a thing the wrong way round,” said Miss Marple apologetically. “If we can’t alter the movements or the position of those three people, then couldn’t we perhaps alter the time of the murder?”

“You mean that both my watch and the clock were wrong?” asked Lou.

“No dear,” said Miss Marple, “I didn’t mean that at all. I mean that the murder didn’t occur when you thought it occurred.”

“But I *saw* it,” cried Lou.

“Well, what I have been wondering, my dear, was whether you weren’t *meant* to see it. I’ve been asking myself, you know, whether that wasn’t the real reason why you were engaged for this job.”

“What *do* you mean, Aunt Jane?”

“Well, dear, it seems odd. Miss Greenshaw did not like spending money, and yet she engaged you and agreed quite willingly to the terms you asked. It seems to me that perhaps you were meant to be there in that library on the first floor, looking out of the window so that you could be the key witness —someone from outside of irreproachable good faith—to fix a definite time and place for the murder.”

“But you can’t mean,” said Lou, incredulously, “that Miss Greenshaw *intended* to be murdered.”

“What I mean, dear,” said Miss Marple, “is that you didn’t really know Miss Greenshaw. There’s no real reason, is there, why the Miss Greenshaw you saw when you went up to the house should be the same Miss Greenshaw that Raymond saw a few days earlier? Oh, yes, I know,” she went on, to prevent Lou’s reply, “she was wearing the peculiar old-fashioned print dress and the strange straw hat, and had unkempt hair. She corresponded exactly to the description Raymond gave us last weekend. But those two women, you know, were much of an age and height and size. The housekeeper, I mean, and Miss Greenshaw.”

But the housekeeper is fat!” Lou exclaimed. “She’s got an enormous bosom.”

Miss Marple coughed.

"But my dear, surely, nowadays I have seen—er—them myself in shops most indelicately displayed. It is very easy for anyone to have a—a bust—of *any* size and dimension."

"What are you trying to say?" demanded Raymond.

"I was just thinking, dear, that during the two or three days Lou was working there, one woman could have played the two parts. You said yourself, Lou, that you hardly saw the housekeeper, except for the one moment in the morning when she brought you in the tray with coffee. One sees those clever artists on the stage coming in as different characters with only a minute or two to spare, and I am sure the change could have been effected quite easily. That marquise head-dress could be just a wig slipped on and off."

"Aunt Jane! Do you mean that Miss Greenshaw was dead before I started work there?"

"Not dead. Kept under drugs, I should say. A very easy job for an unscrupulous woman like the housekeeper to do. Then she made the arrangements with you and got you to telephone to the nephew to ask him to lunch at a definite time. The only person who would have known that this Miss Greenshaw was *not* Miss Greenshaw would have been Alfred. And if you remember, the first two days you were working there it was wet, and Miss Greenshaw stayed in the house. Alfred never came into the house because of his feud with the housekeeper. And on the last morning Alfred was in the drive, while Miss Greenshaw was working on the rockery—I'd like to have a look at that rockery."

"Do you mean it was Mrs. Cresswell who killed Miss Greenshaw?"

"I think that after bringing you your coffee, the woman locked the door on you as she went out, carried the unconscious Miss Greenshaw down to the drawing-room, then assumed her 'Miss Greenshaw' disguise and went out to work on the rockery where you could see her from the window. In

due course she screamed and came staggering to the house clutching an arrow as though it had penetrated her throat. She called for help and was careful to say '*he* shot me' so as to remove suspicion from the housekeeper. She also called up to the housekeeper's window as though she saw her there. Then, once inside the drawing-room, she threw over a table with porcelain on it—and ran quickly upstairs, put on her marquise wig and was able a few moments later to lean her head out of the window and tell you that she, too, was locked in."

"But she *was* locked in," said Lou.

"I know. That is where the policeman comes in."

"What policeman?"

"Exactly—what policeman? I wonder, Inspector, if you would mind telling me how and when *you* arrived on the scene?"

The inspector looked a little puzzled.

"At twelve twenty-nine we received a telephone call from Mrs. Cresswell, housekeeper to Miss Greenshaw, stating that her mistress had been shot. Sergeant Cayley and myself went out there at once in a car and arrived at the house at twelve thirty-five. We found Miss Greenshaw dead and the two ladies locked in their rooms."

"So, you see, my dear," said Miss Marple to Lou. "The police constable *you* saw wasn't a real police constable. You never thought of him again—one doesn't—one just accepts one more uniform as part of the law."

"But who—why?"

"As to who—well, if they are playing *A Kiss for Cinderella*, a policeman is the principal character. Nat Fletcher would only have to help himself to the costume he wears on the stage. He'd ask his way at a garage being careful to call attention to the time—twelve twenty-five, then drive on quickly, leave his car round a corner, slip on his police uniform and do his 'act.' "

"But why?—why?"

"*Someone* had to lock the housekeeper's door on the outside, and someone had to drive the arrow through Miss Greenshaw's throat. You can stab anyone with an arrow just as well as by shooting it—but it needs force."

"You mean they were both in it?"

"Oh yes, I think so. Mother and son as likely as not."

"But Miss Greenshaw's sister died long ago."

"Yes, but I've no doubt Mr. Fletcher married again. He sounds the sort of man who would, and I think it possible that the child died too, and that this so-called nephew was the second wife's child, and not really a relation at all. The woman got a post as housekeeper and spied out the land. Then he wrote as her nephew and proposed to call upon her—he may have made some joking reference to coming in his policeman's uniform—or asked her over to see the play. But I think she suspected the truth and refused to see him. He would have been her heir if she had died without making a will—but of course once she had made a will in the housekeeper's favour (as they thought) then it was clear sailing."

"But why use an arrow?" objected Joan. "So very far fetched."

"Not far fetched at all, dear. Alfred belonged to an archery club—Alfred was meant to take the blame. The fact that he was in the pub as early as twelve twenty was most unfortunate from their point of view. He always left a little before his proper time and that would have been just right—" she shook her head. "It really seems all wrong—morally, I mean, that Alfred's laziness should have saved his life."

The inspector cleared his throat.

"Well, madam, these suggestions of yours are very interesting. I shall have, of course, to investigate—"

Miss Marple and Raymond West stood by the rockery and looked down at that gardening basket full of dying vegetation.

Miss Marple murmured:

"Alyssum, saxifrage, cytisus, thimble campanula . . . Yes, that's all the proof *I* need. Whoever was weeding here yesterday morning was no gardener—she pulled up plants as well as weeds. So now I *know* I'm right. Thank you, dear Raymond, for bringing me here. I wanted to see the place for myself."

She and Raymond both looked up at the outrageous pile of Greenshaw's Folly.

A cough made them turn. A handsome young man was also looking at the house.

"Plaguey big place," he said. "Too big for nowadays—or so they say. I dunno about that. If I won a football pool and made a lot of money, that's the kind of house I'd like to build."

He smiled bashfully at them.

"Reckon I can say so now—that there house was built by my great-grandfather," said Alfred Pollock. "And a fine house it is, for all they call it Greenshaw's Folly!"

The Tommy and Tuppence Mysteries

The Secret Adversary
Partners in Crime
N or M?
By the Pricking of My Thumbs
Postern of Fate

“I specialize in murders of quiet domestic interest.”

–AGATHA CHRISTIE

A Fairy in the Flat

From *Partners in Crime*

Mrs. Thomas Beresford shifted her position on the divan and looked gloomily out of the window of the flat. The prospect was not an extended one, consisting solely of a small block of flats on the other side of the road. Mrs. Beresford sighed and then yawned.

"I wish," she said, "something would happen."

Her husband looked up reprovingly.

"Be careful, Tuppence, this craving for vulgar sensation alarms me."

Tuppence sighed and closed her eyes dreamily.

"So Tommy and Tuppence were married," she chanted, "and lived happily ever afterwards. And six years later they were still living together happily ever afterwards. It is extraordinary," she said, "how different everything always is from what you think it is going to be."

"A very profound statement, Tuppence. But not original. Eminent poets and still more eminent divines have said it before—and if you will excuse

me saying so, have said it better."

"Six years ago," continued Tuppence, "I would have sworn that with sufficient money to buy things with, and with you for a husband, all life would have been one grand sweet song, as one of the poets you seem to know so much about puts it."

"Is it me or the money that palls upon you?" inquired Tommy coldly.

"Palls isn't exactly the word," said Tuppence kindly. "I'm used to my blessings, that's all. Just as one never thinks what a boon it is to be able to breathe through one's nose until one has a cold in the head."

"Shall I neglect you a little?" suggested Tommy. "Take other women about to night clubs. That sort of thing."

"Useless," said Tuppence. "You would only meet me there with other men. And I should know perfectly well that you didn't care for the other women, whereas you would never be quite sure that I didn't care for the other men. Women are so much more thorough."

"It's only in modesty that men score top marks," murmured her husband. "But what is the matter with you, Tuppence? Why this yearning discontent?"

"I don't know. I want things to happen. Exciting things. Wouldn't you like to go chasing German spies again, Tommy? Think of the wild days of peril we went through once. Of course I know you're more or less in the Secret Service now, but it's pure office work."

"You mean you'd like them to send me into darkest Russia disguised as a Bolshevik bootlegger, or something of that sort?"

"That wouldn't be any good," said Tuppence. "They wouldn't let me go with you and I'm the person who wants something to do so badly. Something to do. That is what I keep saying all day long."

"Women's sphere," suggested Tommy, waving his hand.

"Twenty minutes' work after breakfast every morning keeps the flag going to perfection. You have nothing to complain of, have you?"

“Your housekeeping is so perfect, Tuppence, as to be almost monotonous.”

“I do like gratitude,” said Tuppence.

“You, of course, have got your work,” she continued, “but tell me, Tommy, don’t you ever have a secret yearning for excitement, for things to *happen*?”

“No,” said Tommy, “at least I don’t think so. It is all very well to want things to happen—they might not be pleasant things.”

“How prudent men are,” sighed Tuppence. “Don’t you ever have a wild secret yearning for romance—adventure—life?”

“What *have* you been reading, Tuppence?” asked Tommy.

“Think how exciting it would be,” went on Tuppence, “if we heard a wild rapping at the door and went to open it and in staggered a dead man.”

“If he was dead he couldn’t stagger,” said Tommy critically.

“You know what I mean,” said Tuppence. “They always stagger in just before they die and fall at your feet, just gasping out a few enigmatic words. ‘The Spotted Leopard,’ or something like that.”

“I advise a course of Schopenhauer or Emmanuel Kant,” said Tommy.

“That sort of thing would be good for you,” said Tuppence. “You are getting fat and comfortable.”

“I am not,” said Tommy indignantly. “Anyway you do slimming exercises yourself.”

“Everybody does,” said Tuppence. “When I said you were getting fat I was really speaking metaphorically, you are getting prosperous and sleek and comfortable.”

“I don’t know what has come over you,” said her husband.

“The spirit of adventure,” murmured Tuppence. “It is better than a longing for romance anyway. I have that sometimes too. I think of meeting a man, a really handsome man—”

“You have met me,” said Tommy. “Isn’t that enough for you?”

“A brown, lean man, terrifically strong, the kind of man who can ride anything and lassoes wild horses—”

“Complete with sheepskin trousers and a cowboy hat,” interpolated Tommy sarcastically.

“—and has lived in the Wilds,” continued Tuppence. “I should like him to fall simply madly in love with me. I should, of course, rebuff him virtuously and be true to my marriage vows, but my heart would secretly go out to him.”

“Well,” said Tommy, “I often wish that I may meet a really beautiful girl. A girl with corn coloured hair who will fall desperately in love with me. Only I don’t think I rebuff her—in fact I am quite sure I don’t.”

“That,” said Tuppence, “is naughty temper.”

“What,” said Tommy, “is really the matter with you, Tuppence? You have never talked like this before.”

“No, but I have been boiling up inside for a long time,” said Tuppence. “You see it is very dangerous to have everything you want—including enough money to buy things. Of course there are always hats.”

“You have got about forty hats already,” said Tommy, “and they all look alike.”

“Hats are like that,” said Tuppence. “They are not really alike. There are *nuances* in them. I saw rather a nice one in Violette’s this morning.”

“If you haven’t anything better to do than going on buying hats you don’t need—”

“That’s it,” said Tuppence, “that’s exactly it. If I had something better to do. I suppose I ought to take up good works. Oh, Tommy, I do wish something exciting would happen. I feel—I really do feel it would be good for us. If we could find a fairy—”

“Ah!” said Tommy. “It is curious your saying that.”

He got up and crossed the room. Opening a drawer of the writing table he took out a small snapshot print and brought it to Tuppence.

“Oh!” said Tuppence, “so you have got them developed. Which is this, the one you took of this room or the one I took?”

“The one I took. Yours didn’t come out. You under exposed it. You always do.”

“It is nice for you,” said Tuppence, “to think that there is one thing you can do better than me.”

“A foolish remark,” said Tommy, “but I will let it pass for the moment. What I wanted to show you was this.”

He pointed to a small white speck on the photograph.

“That is a scratch on the film,” said Tuppence.

“Not at all,” said Tommy. “That, Tuppence, is a fairy.”

“Tommy, you idiot.”

“Look for yourself.”

He handed her a magnifying glass. Tuppence studied the print attentively through it. Seen thus by a slight stretch of fancy the scratch on the film could be imagined to represent a small winged creature on the fender.

“It has got wings,” cried Tuppence. “What fun, a real live fairy in our flat. Shall we write to Conan Doyle about it? Oh, Tommy. Do you think she’ll give us wishes?”

“You will soon know,” said Tommy. “You have been wishing hard enough for something to happen all the afternoon.”

At that minute the door opened, and a tall lad of fifteen who seemed undecided as to whether he was a butler or a page boy inquired in a truly magnificent manner.

“Are you at home, madam? The front-door bell has just rung.”

“I wish Albert wouldn’t go to the Pictures,” sighed Tuppence, after she had signified her assent, and Albert had withdrawn. “He’s copying a Long Island butler now. Thank goodness I’ve cured him of asking for people’s cards and bringing them to me on a salver.”

The door opened again, and Albert announced: “Mr. Carter,” much as though it were a Royal title.

“The Chief,” muttered Tommy, in great surprise.

Tuppence jumped up with a glad exclamation, and greeted a tall greyhaired man with piercing eyes and a tired smile.

“Mr. Carter, I *am* glad to see you.”

“That’s good, Mrs. Tommy. Now answer me a question. How’s life generally?”

“Satisfactory, but dull,” replied Tuppence with a twinkle.

“Better and better,” said Mr. Carter. “I’m evidently going to find you in the right mood.”

“This,” said Tuppence, “sounds exciting.”

Albert, still copying the Long Island butler, brought in tea. When this operation was completed without mishap and the door had closed behind him Tuppence burst out once more.

“You did mean something, didn’t you, Mr. Carter? Are you going to send us on a mission into darkest Russia?”

“Not exactly that,” said Mr. Carter.

“But there is something.”

“Yes—there is something. I don’t think you are the kind who shrinks from risks, are you, Mrs. Tommy?”

Tuppence’s eyes sparkled with excitement.

“There is certain work to be done for the Department—and I fancied—I just fancied—that it might suit you two.”

“Go on,” said Tuppence.

“I see that you take the *Daily Leader*,” continued Mr. Carter, picking up that journal from the table.

He turned to the advertisement column and indicating a certain advertisement with his finger pushed the paper across to Tommy.

“Read that out,” he said.

Tommy complied.

"*The International Detective Agency, Theodore Blunt, Manager. Private Inquiries. Large staff of confidential and highly skilled Inquiry Agents. Utmost discretion. Consultations free. 118 Haleham St,* W.C."

He looked inquiringly at Mr. Carter. The latter nodded. "That detective agency has been on its last legs for some time," he murmured. "Friend of mine acquired it for a mere song. We're thinking of setting it going again—say, for a six months' trial. And during that time, of course, it will have to have a manager."

"What about Mr. Theodore Blunt?" asked Tommy.

"Mr. Blunt has been rather indiscreet, I'm afraid. In fact, Scotland Yard have had to interfere. Mr. Blunt is being detained at Her Majesty's expense, and he won't tell us half of what we'd like to know."

"I see, sir," said Tommy. "At least, I think I see."

"I suggest that you have six months leave from the office. Ill health. And, of course, if you like to run a Detective Agency under the name of Theodore Blunt, it's nothing to do with me."

Tommy eyed his Chief steadily.

"Any instructions, sir?"

"Mr. Blunt did some foreign business, I believe. Look out for blue letters with a Russian stamp on them. From a ham merchant anxious to find his wife who came as a refugee to this country some years ago. Moisten the stamp and you'll find the number 16 written underneath. Make a copy of these letters and send the originals on to me. Also if any one comes to the office and makes a reference to the number 16, inform me immediately."

"I understand, sir," said Tommy. "And apart from these instructions?"

Mr. Carter picked up his gloves from the table and prepared to depart.

"You can run the Agency as you please. I fancied"—his eyes twinkled a little—"that it might amuse Mrs. Tommy to try her hand at a little detective work."

Stand-Alone Mysteries and Short-Story Collections

The Man in the Brown Suit
The Secret of Chimneys
The Seven Dials Mystery
The Mysterious Mr. Quin
The Sittaford Mystery
Parker Pyne Investigates
Why Didn't They Ask Evans?
Murder Is Easy
The Regatta Mystery and Other Stories
And Then There Were None
Towards Zero
Death Comes as the End
Sparkling Cyanide
The Witness for the Prosecution and Other Stories
Crooked House
Three Blind Mice and Other Stories

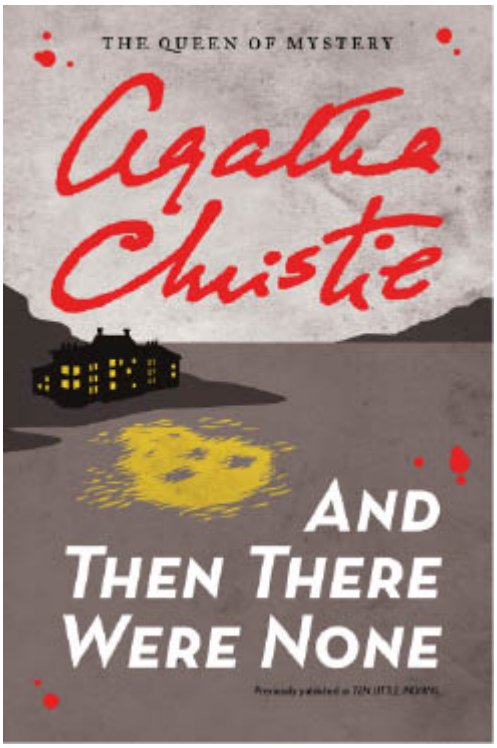
They Came to Baghdad
Destination Unknown
Ordeal by Innocence
Double Sin and Other Stories
The Pale Horse
Star over Bethlehem
Endless Night
Passenger to Frankfurt
The Golden Ball and Other Stories
The Mousetrap and Other Plays
The Harlequin Tea Set and Other Stories

“Every murderer is probably somebody’s old friend.”

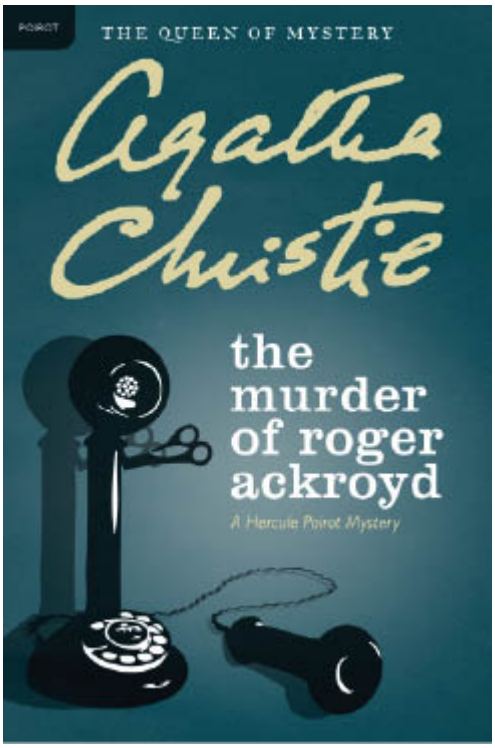
–AGATHA CHRISTIE

The Queen of Mystery's Personal Favorites

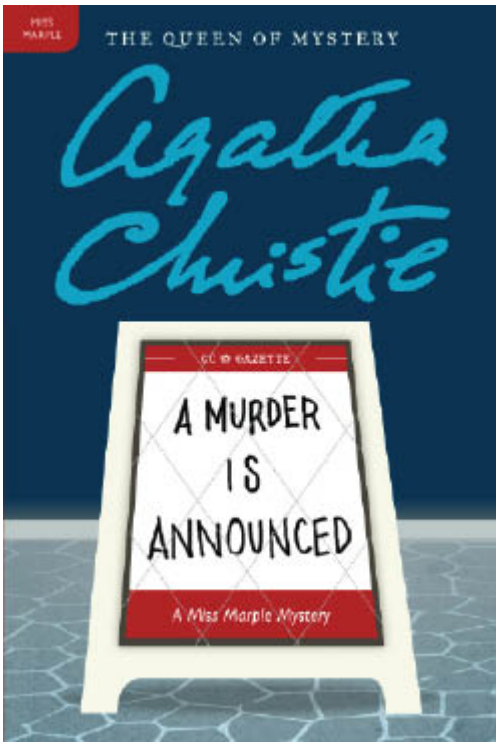
And Then There Were None



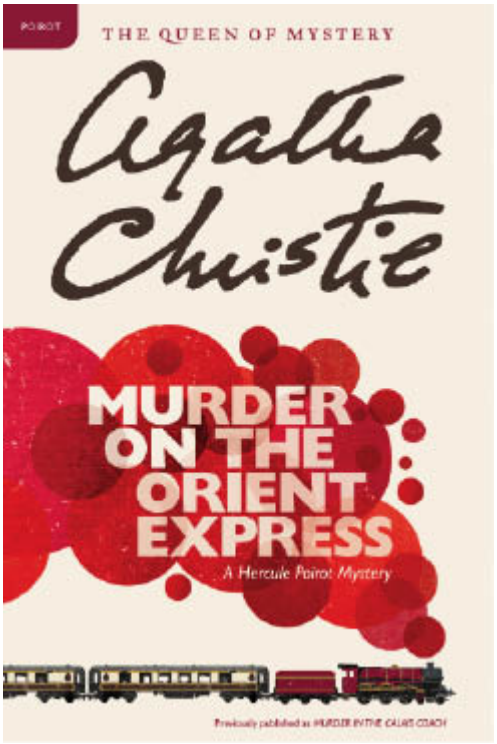
The Murder of Roger Ackroyd



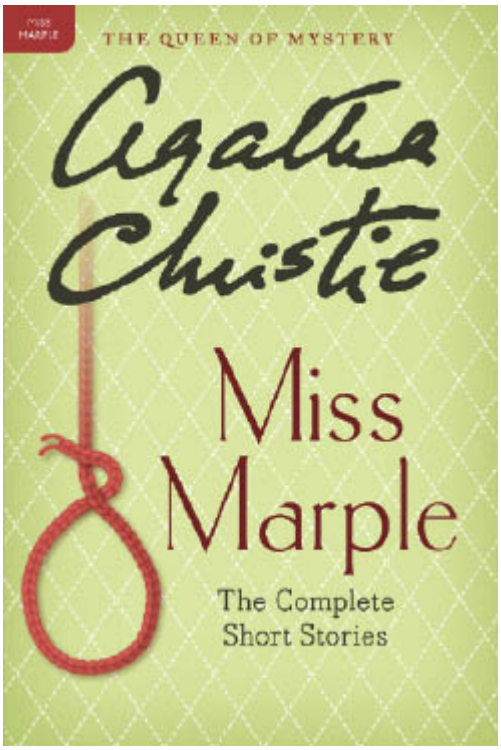
A Murder Is Announced



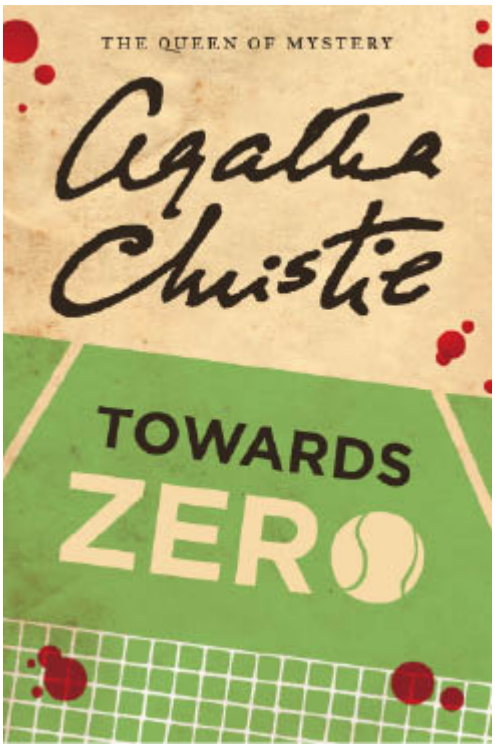
Murder on the Orient Express



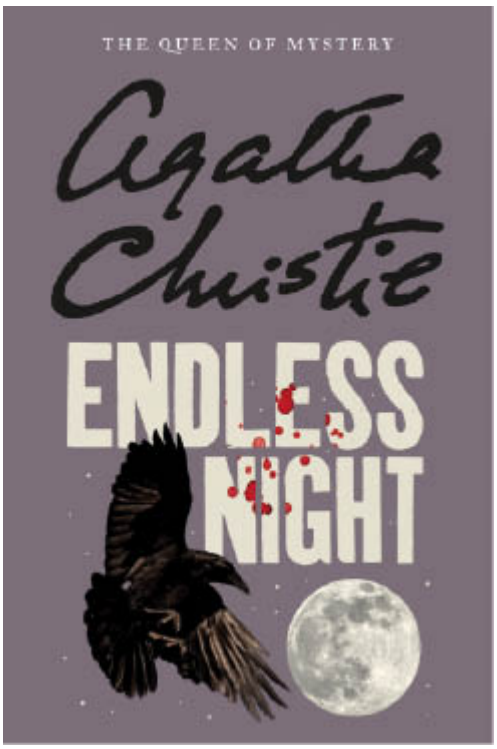
The Thirteen Problems (from *Miss Marple: The Complete Short Stories*)



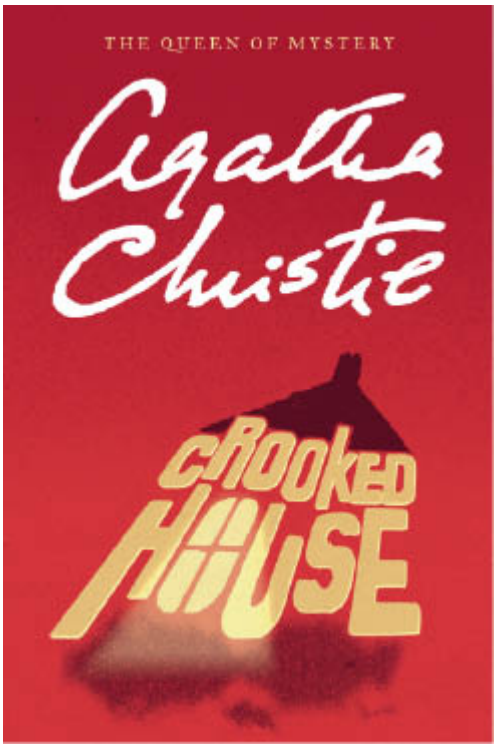
Towards Zero



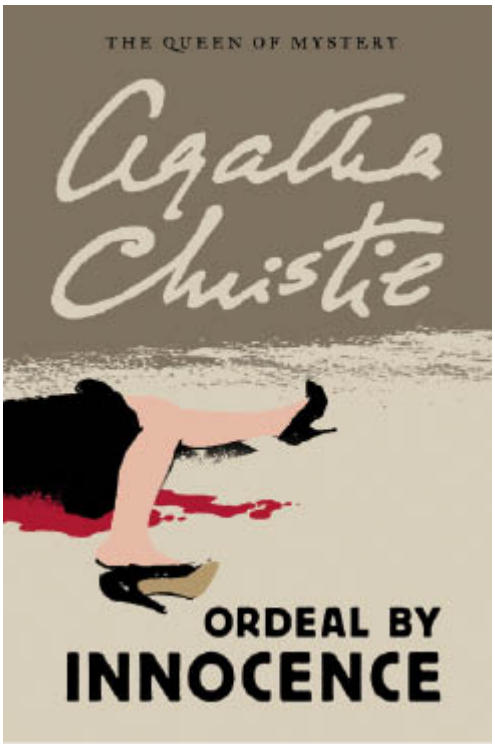
Endless Night



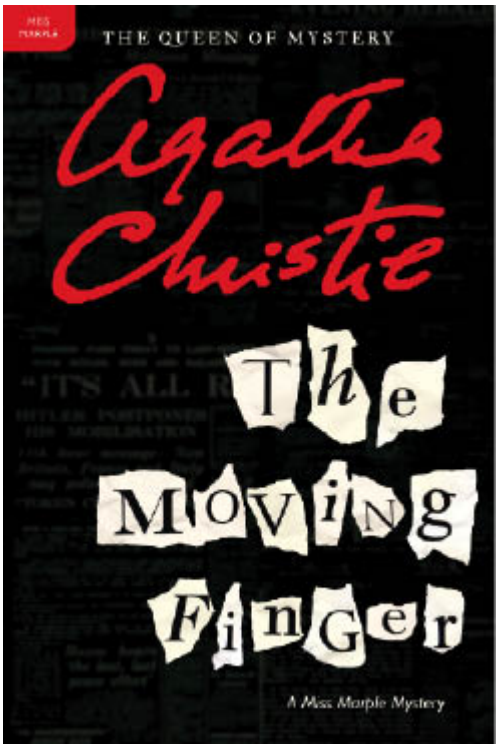
Crooked House



Ordeal By Innocence



The Moving Finger



“I like living. I have sometimes been wildly, despairingly, acutely miserable, racked with sorrow, but through it all I still know quite certainly that just to be alive is a grand thing.”

–AGATHA CHRISTIE

Ten Other Ways to Read Agatha Christie

Death in the Middle East

Appointment with Death
Death on the Nile
Destination Unknown
Death Comes as the End
Murder in Mesopotamia
They Came to Baghdad

Death on Holiday

And Then There Were None
Bertram's Hotel
Caribbean Mystery
Death on the Nile
Evil Under the Sun

Mystery of the Blue Train
Nemesis
Passenger to Frankfurt
Peril at End House

Death by Spying

The Big Four
Destination Unknown
N or M?
One, Two, Buckle My Shoe
The Secret Adversary
They Came to Baghdad
Passenger to Frankfurt

Death by Nursery Rhyme

And Then There Were None
By the Pricking of My Thumbs
Five Little Pigs
Hickory Dickory Dock
One, Two, Buckle My Shoe
A Pocket Full of Rye

Death by the Occult

Endless Night
Hallowe'en Party
Murder Is Easy
The Pale Horse
The Sittaford Mystery

Death by the Seven Deadly Sins

Pride (*The A.B.C. Murders*)
Anger (*Five Little Pigs*)
Gluttony (*At Bertram's Hotel*)
Lust (*Evil Under the Sun*)
Envy (A *Murder Is Announced*)
Sloth (*A Pocket Full of Rye*)
Greed (*Death on the Nile*)

Death by Shooting

And Then There Were None
At Bertram's Hotel
Curtain: Poirot's Last Case
Death Comes as the End
Death on the Nile
The Hollow
The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side
The Murder at the Vicarage
A Murder Is Announced

N or M?
One, Two, Buckle My Shoe
Passenger to Frankfurt
Peril at End House
The Secret of Chimneys
The Seven Dials Mystery
They Do It with Mirrors
Why Didn't They Ask Evans?

Death by Stabbing

The A.B.C. Murders
Cards on the Table
Death on the Nile
Hallowe'en Party
Lord Edgware Dies
The Man in the Brown Suit
The Murder of Roger Ackroyd
Murder on the Links
Murder on the Orient Express
Ordeal by Innocence
They Came to Baghdad
Third Girl

Death by Strangulation

4:50 from Paddington

The A.B.C. Murders
The Body in the Library
The Clocks
Dead Man's Folly
Endless Night
Evil Under the Sun
Hallowe'en Party
Mrs. McGinty's Dead
A Murder Is Announced
The Mystery of the Blue Train
Nemesis
A Pocket Full of Rye
Sleeping Murder

Death by Poison

4:50 from Paddington (arsenic in the curry)
After the Funeral (arsenic in the wedding cake)
And Then There Were None (cyanide in a drink)
By the Pricking of My Thumbs (poison in milk)
The Clocks (chloral hydrate in alcohol)
Crooked House (digitalin in cocoa)
Death Comes as the End (poison in wine)
Five Little Pigs (coniine in beer)
Hickory Dickory Dock (morphine in coffee)
The Hollow (poison in tea)
Murder in Mesopotamia (hydrochloric acid in water)
Peril at End House (cocaine in chocolates)
A Pocket Full of Rye (taxine in marmalade)

Sad Cypress (morphine hydrochloride in tea)
The Seven Dials Mystery (morphine hydrochloride in whiskey)
Three Act Tragedy (nicotine in a cocktail)

“Evil is not something superhuman, it’s something less than human.”

–AGATHA CHRISTIE

On Agatha Christie and Poisons

Here is sleep and solace and soothing, of pain—
courage and vigour new!
Here is menace and murder and sudden death!
In these phials of green and blue.

Beware of the Powers that never die
though men may go their way,
The Power of the Drug, for good or ill,
shall it ever pass away?

—from "In the Dispensary" by Agatha Christie

It was while I was working in the dispensary that I first conceived the idea of writing a detective story . . . I began considering what kind of detective story I could write. Since I was surrounded by poisons, perhaps it was natural that death by poisoning should be the method I selected . . .

—from *An Autobiography* by Agatha Christie

Agatha Christie played her part in the war effort during both the First and Second World Wars when she worked as an apothecary in a hospital dispensary. Initially she enlisted as a nurse in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) of the Red Cross hospital in Torquay, but when a dispensary opened she was asked to make the change and embarked upon her pharmaceutical training, eventually gaining her qualifying certificate from the Society of Apothecaries in London. She describes in *An Autobiography*:

> *To be introduced suddenly to the Periodic Table, Atomic Weight, and the ramifications of coal-tar derivatives was apt to result in bewilderment. However, I found my feet, mastered the simpler facts, and after we had blown up our Cona coffee machine in the process of practising Marsh's test for arsenic our progress was well on the way.*

It was during Christie's training that she encountered not only an array of poisons but also some memorable characters; she describes Mr. P. the pharmacist in *An Autobiography*:

> *During the course of my pharmaceutical instruction on Sunday afternoons, I was faced with a problem. It was incumbent upon the entrants to the examination to deal with both the ordinary system and the metric system of measurements. My pharmacist gave me practice in making up prescriptions to the metric formula. Neither doctors nor chemists like the metrical system in operation. One of our doctors at the hospital never learned what "containing 0.1" really meant, and would say, "Now let me see, is that solution one in a hundred or one in a thousand?" The great danger of the metric system is that if you go wrong you go ten times wrong.*
>
> *On this particular afternoon I was having instruction in the making of suppositories, things which were not much used in the hospital, but which I was supposed to know how to make*

for the exam. They are tricky things, mainly owing to the melting point of cocoa butter, which is their base. If you get it too hot it won't set; if you don't get it hot enough it comes out of the moulds the wrong shape. In this case Mr. P. the pharmacist was giving me a personal demonstration, and showed me the exact procedure with the cocoa butter, then added one metrically calculated drug. He showed me how to turn the suppositories out at the right moment, then told me to put them into a box and label them professionally as so-and-so "one in a hundred." He went away then to attend to his other duties, but I was worried, because I was convinced that what had gone into these suppositories was 10% and made a dose of one in ten each, not one in a hundred. I went over his calculations and they were wrong. In using the metric system he had got his dot in the wrong place. But what was a young student to do? I was the merest novice, he was the best known pharmacist in town. I couldn't say to him "Mr. P. You have made a mistake." Mr. P. the pharmacist was the sort of person who does not make a mistake, especially in front of a student. At this moment, re-passing me, he said "You can put those into stock; we do need them sometimes." Worse and worse. I couldn't let those suppositories go into stock. It was quite a dangerous drug that was being used. You can stand far more of a dangerous drug if it is being given through the rectum, but all the same . . . I didn't like it, and what was I to do about it? . . .

There was only one thing for it. Before the suppositories cooled, I tripped, lost my footing, upset the board on which they were reposing and trod on them firmly.

Mr. P., as Christie would later recall, was an unusual man who carried in his pocket a lump of poison called curare, which would be fatal should it enter the bloodstream—apparently it made him feel powerful. Five decades later, Mr. P. would provide the inspiration for a character in *The Pale Horse,*

and curare would feature in a number of other stories, though no character was ever poisoned with it.

The Mysterious Affair at Styles was Christie's first novel and it capitalized on her recent experiences. In it a handful of characters were associated with health care: the murder victim's doctor, Dr. Wilkins; Dr. Bauerstein who Christie describes as "one of the greatest living experts on poisons"; an assistant chemist called Albert Mace; and Cynthia Murdoch—a dispenser/apothecary based on Christie herself.

The murder method? Poison, of course. In this case strychnine, delivered within a heart tonic. The quality of the description of the poison and how it was administered did not go unnoticed and Christie received the rarest of reviews for a piece of literary fiction. *The Pharmaceutical Journal* wrote: "This novel has the rare merit of being correctly written—so well done, in fact, we are tempted to believe either the author had pharmaceutical training or had called in a capable pharmacist to help in the technical part." She could not have received a better promotional activity.

Christie returned to dispensing once again during the Second World War: "On the whole it was much simpler than it had been in my young days, there were so many pills, tablets, powders and things already prepared in bottles."

She continued to maintain her pharmaceutical knowledge long after she stopped dispensing, as it had become such a vital element of her writing. One of her famous notebooks recorded such research:

Ethylene Glycol—colourless sweet taste. Substitute for glycerine—freeze and preserving substance. 100 grams drunk in schnapps was fatal.

Kava-kava— narcotic pepper— produces joyous sensation—drowsiness.

It cannot be disputed that the experience of working in a dispensary was one of the key reasons for Christie's success as a crime writer, but a life in the dispensary would never have been her first choice of career:

> *I can't say that I enjoyed dispensing as much as nursing. I think I had a real vocation for nursing, and would have been happy as a hospital nurse. Dispensing was interesting for a time, but became monotonous—I should never have cared to do it as a permanent job.*

The A to Z of Agatha Christie

A is for Ashfield, the house Agatha Christie was born in

B is for Bingo, Agatha's Manchester Terrier

C is for Churston Church, for which Agatha designed and paid for a stained-glass window

D is for Dickens, the author of *Bleak House* which Agatha wrote a screenplay for but was never filmed

E is for Egypt, where Agatha's mother took her for her debutante season

F is for *[The] Floating Admiral*, a book jointly written by over a dozen members of the Detection Club, including Agatha Christie

G is for Greenway House, the house in Devon Agatha bought in 1938

H is for Harrogate, the town where Agatha was found after she disappeared in 1926

I is for Iraq, where Agatha spent many happy months out of the year helping her archaeologist husband Max Mallowan on his digs

J is for Jack Watts, Agatha's nephew who was born when she was 13, and whom she adored

K is for Kokoschka, the artist whom Agatha sat for when she was almost 80

L is for Lockwood, Margaret, the comedic actress whom Agatha wrote the play *Spider's Web* for; she also included a part for Lockwood's 14-year-old daughter Julia

M is for Mountbatten, Lord Louis, who wrote to Agatha suggesting the plot for one of her most successful novels, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

N is for Nimrud, Iraq, the location of a dig where Agatha would clean and photograph Max Mallowan's discoveries

O is for the Orient Express, a favorite mode of transportation for Agatha and the setting for one of her most famous books

P is for Prichard, Mathew, Agatha's only grandchild, whom she was very close to

Q is for Quin, one of Agatha's favorite characters, Mr. Harley Quin (Harlequin), who pays special attention to the difficulties of lovers

R is for Rosalind, Agatha's only daughter with her first husband Archie Christie

S is for Skye, the island where Agatha, Rosalind, and two friends went to call the banns for Agatha's wedding to Max Mallowan

T is for Torquay, the town where Agatha was born and brought up

U is for Ur, a hugely important archaeological site near Baghdad where Agatha met her second husband Max Mallowan

V is for *Verdict*, probably Agatha's most unusual play, which closed after a month

W is for Wallingford, the village in Oxfordshire where Agatha and Max Mallowan lived in Winterbrook House

X is for Xmas, which Agatha loved spending in Cheshire with her sister Madge's family

Y is for *Yeoman of the Guard*, a Gilbert and Sullivan play that Agatha acted in as a teenager (she played Colonel Fairfax)

Z is for Ziggurat, the striking, three-stage, red-brick temple at Ur which hugely impressed Agatha

To find out more about the life and works of Agatha Christie visit www.AgathaChristie.com

or join our Facebook site at www.facebook.com/officialagathachristie.

The Agatha Christie® Collection

THE HERCULE POIROT MYSTERIES

Match your wits with the famous Belgian detective.

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
Peril at End House
Lord Edgware Dies
Murder on the Orient Express
Three Act Tragedy
Death in the Clouds
The A.B.C. 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
The Hollow
The Labors of Hercules
Taken at the Flood
The Under Dog and Other Stories
Mrs. McGinty's Dead
After the Funeral
Hickory Dickory Dock
Dead Man's Folly
Cat Among the Pigeons
The Clocks
Third Girl
Hallowe'en Party
Elephants Can Remember
Curtain: Poirot's Last Case

Explore more at www.AgathaChristie.com

Agatha Christie®

Short Stories for Your E-Reader

HERCULE POIROT

The Under Dog
Triangle at Rhodes
Yellow Iris
The Mystery of the Spanish Chest
Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds
Poirot and the Regatta Mystery
The Dream
The Second Gong

MISS MARPLE

Strange Jest
Tape-Measure Murder
The Case of the Caretaker
The Case of the Perfect Maid
Sanctuary

PARKER PYNE

The Gate of Baghdad
The House at Shiraz

HARLEY QUIN

The Dead Harlequin
The Love Detectives
The Harlequin Tea Set

TOMMY AND TUPPENCE

The Case of the Missing Lady
The Man in the Mist
The House of Lurking Death

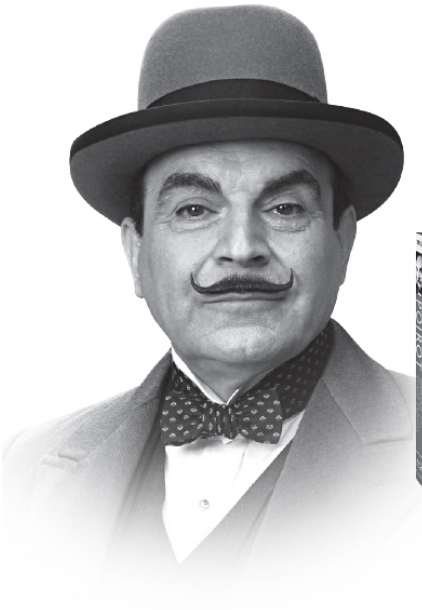
STAND ALONE

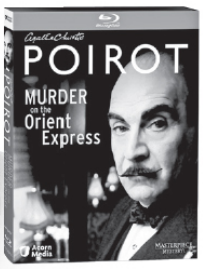
The Witness for the Prosecution
Philomel Cottage
The Red Signal
The Rajah's Emerald

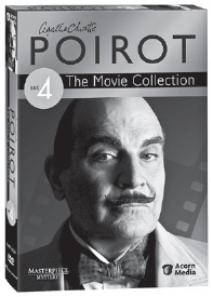
Explore more at www.AgathaChristie.com

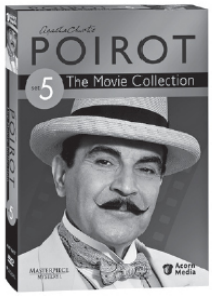
Agatha Christie®

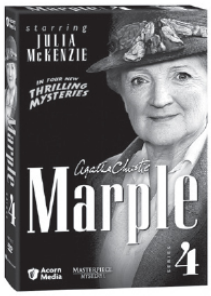
See your favorite detectives come to life on screen!

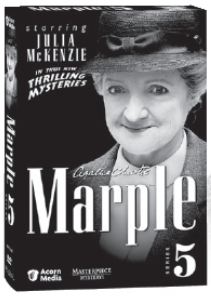












These and other DVDs and downloads available now at:

www.acornonline.com

Acorn Media

Agatha Christie®

Don't forget there are a number of other ways to enjoy Christie's amazing stories:

- Unabridged readings and dramatized versions from BBC Radio
- "Seek and Find" games to play on your PC
- Films to watch on TV, DVD, or to download

For more information on all the above, the latest Christie news, contests, and the chance to talk to other fans, please visit **www.AgathaChristie.com**

Copyright

ISBN: 9780062189387

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

About the Publisher

Australia
HarperCollins Publishers (Australia) Pty. Ltd.
Level 13, 201 Elizabeth Street
Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia
http://www.harpercollins.com.au/ebooks

Canada
HarperCollins Canada
2 Bloor Street East - 20th Floor
Toronto, ON, M4W, 1A8, Canada
http://www.harpercollins.ca

New Zealand
HarperCollins Publishers (New Zealand) Limited
P.O. Box 1
Auckland, New Zealand
http://www.harpercollins.co.nz

United Kingdom
HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.
77-85 Fulham Palace Road

London, W6 8JB, UK
http://www.harpercollins.co.uk

United States
HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
10 East 53rd Street
New York, NY 10022
http://www.harpercollins.com