



TOMMY &  
TUPPENCE

*Agatha  
Christie*

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THE  
HOUSE OF  
LURKING  
DEATH

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A SHORT STORY

# The House of Lurking Death

A Tommy & Tuppence Short Story  
by Agatha Christie

HARPER

NEW YORK • LONDON • TORONTO • SYDNEY

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## The House of Lurking Death

‘The House of Lurking Death’ was first published in *The Sketch*, 5 November 1924. Inspector Hanaud was created by A. E. W. Mason (1865–1948).

‘What –’ began Tuppence, and then stopped.

She had just entered the private office of Mr Blunt from the adjoining one marked ‘Clerks,’ and was surprised to behold her lord and master with his eye riveted to the private peep-hole into the outer office.

‘Ssh,’ said Tommy warningly. ‘Didn’t you hear the buzzer? It’s a girl – rather a nice girl – in fact she looks to me a frightfully nice girl. Albert is telling her all that tosh about my being engaged with Scotland Yard.’

‘Let *me* see,’ demanded Tuppence.

Somewhat unwillingly, Tommy moved aside. Tuppence in her turn glued her eye to the peep-hole.

‘She’s not bad,’ admitted Tuppence. ‘And her clothes are simply the latest shout.’

‘She’s perfectly lovely,’ said Tommy. ‘She’s like those girls Mason writes about – you know, frightfully sympathetic, and beautiful, and distinctly intelligent without being too saucy. I think, yes – I certainly think – I shall be the great Hanaud this morning.’

‘H’m,’ said Tuppence. ‘If there is one detective out of all the others whom you are most unlike – I should say it was Hanaud. Can you do the lightning changes of personality? Can you be the great comedian, the little gutter boy, the serious and sympathetic friend – all in five minutes?’

‘I know this,’ said Tommy, rapping sharply on the desk, ‘I am the Captain of the Ship – and don’t you forget it, Tuppence. I’m going to have her in.’

He pressed the buzzer on his desk. Albert appeared ushering in the client.

The girl stopped in the doorway as though undecided. Tommy came forward.

‘Come in, mademoiselle,’ he said kindly, ‘and seat yourself here.’

Tuppence choked audibly and Tommy turned upon her with a swift change of manner. His tone was menacing.

‘You spoke, Miss Robinson? Ah, no, I thought not.’

He turned back to the girl.

‘We will not be serious or formal,’ he said. ‘You will just tell me about it, and then we will discuss the best way to help you.’

‘You are very kind,’ said the girl. ‘Excuse me, but are you a foreigner?’

A fresh choke from Tuppence. Tommy glared in her direction out of the corner of his eye.

‘Not exactly,’ he said with difficulty. ‘But of late years I have worked a good deal abroad. My methods are the methods of the Sûreté.’

‘Oh!’ The girl seemed impressed.

She was, as Tommy had indicated, a very charming girl. Young and slim, with a trace of golden hair peeping out from under her little brown felt hat, and big serious eyes.

That she was nervous could be plainly seen. Her little hands were twisting themselves together, and she kept clasping and unclasping the catch of her lacquered handbag.

‘First of all, Mr Blunt, I must tell you that my name is Lois Hargreaves. I live in a great rambling old-fashioned house called Thurnly Grange. It is in the heart of the country. There is the village of Thurnly nearby, but it is very small and insignificant. There is plenty of hunting in winter, and we get tennis in summer, and I have never felt lonely there. Indeed I much prefer country to town life.

‘I tell you this so that you may realise that in a country village like ours, everything that happens is of supreme importance. About a week ago, I got a box of chocolates sent through the post. There was nothing inside to indicate who they came from. Now I myself am not particularly fond of chocolates, but the others in the house are, and the box was passed round. As a result, everyone who had eaten any chocolates was taken ill. We sent for the doctor, and after various inquiries as to what other things had been eaten, he took the remains of the chocolates away with him, and had them analysed. Mr Blunt, those chocolates contained arsenic! Not enough to kill anyone, but enough to make anyone quite ill.’

‘Extraordinary,’ commented Tommy.

‘Dr Burton was very excited over the matter. It seems that this was the third occurrence of the kind in the neighbourhood. In each case a big house was selected, and the inmates were taken ill after eating the mysterious chocolates. It looked as though some local person of weak intellect was playing a particularly fiendish practical joke.’

‘Quite so, Miss Hargreaves.’

‘Dr Burton put it down to Socialist agitation – rather absurdly, I thought. But there are one or two malcontents in Thurnly village, and it seemed

possible that they might have had something to do with it. Dr Burton was very keen that I should put the whole thing in the hands of the police.'

'A very natural suggestion,' said Tommy. 'But you have not done so, I gather, Miss Hargreaves?'

'No,' admitted the girl. 'I hate the fuss and the publicity that would ensue – and you see, I know our local Inspector. I can never imagine him finding out anything! I have often seen your advertisements, and I told Dr Burton that it would be much better to call in a private detective.'

'I see.'

'You say a great deal about discretion in your advertisement. I take that to mean – that – that – well, that you would not make anything public without my consent?'

Tommy looked at her curiously, but it was Tuppence who spoke.

'I think,' she said quietly, 'that it would be as well if Miss Hargreaves told us *everything*.'

She laid especial stress upon the last word, and Lois Hargreaves flushed nervously.

'Yes,' said Tommy quickly, 'Miss Robinson is right. You must tell us everything.'

'You will not –' she hesitated.

'Everything you say is understood to be strictly in confidence.'

'Thank you. I know that I ought to have been quite frank with you. I have a reason for not going to the police. Mr Blunt, that box of chocolates was sent by someone in our house!'

'How do you know that, mademoiselle?'

'It's very simple. I've got a habit of drawing a little silly thing – three fish intertwined – whenever I have a pencil in my hand. A parcel of silk stockings arrived from a certain shop in London not long ago. We were at the breakfast table. I'd just been marking something in the newspaper, and without thinking, I began to draw my silly little fish on the label of the parcel before cutting the string and opening it. I thought no more about the matter, but when I was examining the piece of brown paper in which the chocolates had been sent, I caught sight of the corner of the original label – most of which had been torn off. My silly little drawing was on it.'

Tommy drew his chair forward.

'That is very serious. It creates, as you say, a very strong presumption that the sender of the chocolates is a member of your household. But you will forgive me if I say that I still do not see why that fact should render you indisposed to call in the police?'

Lois Hargreaves looked him squarely in the face.

‘I will tell you, Mr Blunt. I may want the whole thing hushed up.’

Tommy retired gracefully from the position.

‘In that case,’ he murmured, ‘we know where we are. I see, Miss Hargreaves, that you are not disposed to tell me who it is you suspect?’

‘I suspect no one – but there are possibilities.’

‘Quite so. Now will you describe the household to me in detail?’

‘The servants, with the exception of the parlourmaid, are all old ones who have been with us many years. I must explain to you, Mr Blunt, that I was brought up by my aunt, Lady Radclyffe, who was extremely wealthy. Her husband made a big fortune, and was knighted. It was he who bought Thurnly Grange, but he died two years after going there, and it was then that Lady Radclyffe sent for me to come and make my home with her. I was her only living relation. The other inmate of the house was Dennis Radclyffe, her husband’s nephew. I have always called him cousin, but of course he is really nothing of the kind. Aunt Lucy always said openly that she intended to leave her money, with the exception of a small provision for me, to Dennis. It was Radclyffe money, she said, and it ought to go to a Radclyffe. However, when Dennis was twenty-two, she quarrelled violently with him – over some debts that he had run up, I think. When she died, a year later, I was astonished to find that she had made a will leaving all her money to me. It was, I know, a great blow to Dennis, and I felt very badly about it. I would have given him the money if he would have taken it, but it seems that kind of thing can’t be done. However, as soon as I was twenty-one, I made a will leaving it all to him. That’s the least I can do. So if I’m run over by a motor, Dennis will come into his own.’

‘Exactly,’ said Tommy. ‘And when were you twenty-one, if I may ask the question?’

‘Just three weeks ago.’

‘Ah!’ said Tommy. ‘Now will you give me fuller particulars of the members of your household at this minute?’

‘Servants – or – others?’

‘Both.’

‘The servants, as I say, have been with us some time. There is old Mrs Holloway, the cook, and her niece Rose, the kitchenmaid. Then there are two elderly housemaids, and Hannah who was my aunt’s maid and who has always been devoted to me. The parlourmaid is called Esther Quant, and seems a very nice quiet girl. As for ourselves, there is Miss Logan, who was Aunt Lucy’s companion, and who runs the house for me, and Captain Radclyffe – Dennis, you know, whom I told you about, and there is a girl called Mary Chilcott, an old school friend of mine who is staying with us.’

Tommy thought for a moment.

‘That all seems fairly clear and straightforward, Miss Hargreaves,’ he said after a minute or two. ‘I take it that you have no special reason for attaching suspicion more to one person than another? You are only afraid it might prove to be – well – not a servant, shall we say?’

‘That’s it exactly, Mr Blunt. I have honestly no idea who used that piece of brown paper. The handwriting was printed.’

‘There seems only one thing to be done,’ said Tommy. ‘I must be on the spot.’

The girl looked at him inquiringly.

Tommy went on after a moment’s thought. ‘I suggest that you prepare the way for the arrival of – say, Mr and Miss Van Dusen – American friends of yours. Will you be able to do that quite naturally?’

‘Oh, yes. There will be no difficulty at all. When will you come down – tomorrow – or the day after?’

‘Tomorrow, if you please. There is no time to waste.’

‘That is settled then.’

The girl rose and held out her hand.

‘One thing, Miss Hargreaves, not a word, mind, to anyone – anyone at all, that we are not what we seem.’

‘What do you think of it, Tuppence?’ he asked, when he returned from showing the visitor out.

‘I don’t like it,’ said Tuppence decidedly. ‘Especially I don’t like the chocolates having so little arsenic in them.’

‘What *do* you mean?’

‘Don’t you see? All those chocolates being sent round the neighbourhood were a blind. To establish the idea of a local maniac. Then, when the girl was really poisoned, it would be thought to be the same thing. You see, but for a stroke of luck, no one would ever have guessed that the chocolates were actually sent by someone in the house itself.’

‘That was a stroke of luck. You’re right. You think it’s a deliberate plot against the girl herself?’

‘I’m afraid so. I remember reading about old Lady Radclyffe’s will. That girl has come into a terrific lot of money.’

‘Yes, and she came of age and made a will three weeks ago. It looks bad – for Dennis Radclyffe. He gains by her death.’

Tuppence nodded.

‘The worst of it is – that she thinks so too! That’s why she won’t have the police called in. Already she suspects him. And she must be more than half in love with him to act as she has done.’



‘In that case,’ said Tommy thoughtfully, ‘why the devil doesn’t he marry her? Much simpler and safer.’

Tuppence stared at him.

‘You’ve said a mouthful,’ she observed. ‘Oh, boy! I’m getting ready to be Miss Van Dusen, you observe.’

‘Why rush to crime, when there is a lawful means near at hand?’

Tuppence reflected for a minute or two.

‘I’ve got it,’ she announced. ‘Clearly he must have married a barmaid whilst at Oxford. Origin of the quarrel with his aunt. That explains everything.’

‘Then why not send the poisoned sweets to the barmaid?’ suggested Tommy. ‘Much more practical. I wish you wouldn’t jump to these wild conclusions, Tuppence.’

‘They’re deductions,’ said Tuppence, with a good deal of dignity. ‘This is your first *corrida*, my friend, but when you have been twenty minutes in the arena –’

Tommy flung the office cushion at her.

‘Tuppence, I say, Tuppence, come here.’

It was breakfast time the next morning. Tuppence hurried out of her bedroom and into the dining-room. Tommy was striding up and down, the open newspaper in his hand.

‘What’s the matter?’

Tommy wheeled round, and shoved the paper into her hand, pointing to the headlines.

## **MYSTERIOUS POISONING CASE DEATHS FROM FIG SANDWICHES**

Tuppence read on. This mysterious outbreak of ptomaine poisoning had occurred at Thurnly Grange. The deaths so far reported were those of Miss Lois Hargreaves, the owner of the house, and the parlourmaid, Esther Quant. A Captain Radclyffe and a Miss Logan were reported to be seriously ill. The cause of the outbreak was supposed to be some fig paste used in sandwiches, since another lady, a Miss Chilcott, who had not partaken of these was reported to be quite well.

‘We must get down there at once,’ said Tommy. ‘That girl! That perfectly ripping girl! Why the devil didn’t I go straight down there with her yesterday?’

‘If you had,’ said Tuppence, ‘you’d probably have eaten fig sandwiches too for tea, and then you’d have been dead. Come on, let’s start at once. I see it

says that Dennis Radclyffe is seriously ill also.'

'Probably shamming, the dirty blackguard.'

They arrived at the small village of Thurnly about midday. An elderly woman with red eyes opened the door to them when they arrived at Thurnly Grange.

'Look here,' said Tommy quickly before she could speak. 'I'm not a reporter or anything like that. Miss Hargreaves came to see me yesterday, and asked me to come down here. Is there anyone I can see?'

'Dr Burton is here now, if you'd like to speak to him,' said the woman doubtfully. 'Or Miss Chilcott. She's making all the arrangements.'

But Tommy had caught at the first suggestion.

'Dr Burton,' he said authoritatively. 'I should like to see him at once if he is here.'

The woman showed them into a small morning-room. Five minutes later the door opened, and a tall, elderly man with bent shoulders and a kind, but worried face, came in.

'Dr Burton,' said Tommy. He produced his professional card. 'Miss Hargreaves called on me yesterday with reference to those poisoned chocolates. I came down to investigate the matter at her request – alas! too late.'

The doctor looked at him keenly.

'You are Mr Blunt himself?'

'Yes. This is my assistant, Miss Robinson.'

The doctor bowed to Tuppence.

'Under the circumstances, there is no need for reticence. But for the episode of the chocolates, I might have believed these deaths to be the result of severe ptomaine poisoning – but ptomaine poisoning of an unusually virulent kind. There is gastro-intestinal inflammation and haemorrhage. As it is, I am taking the fig paste to be analysed.'

'You suspect arsenic poisoning?'

'No. The poison, if a poison has been employed, is something far more potent and swift in its action. It looks more like some powerful vegetable toxin.'

'I see. I should like to ask you, Dr Burton, whether you are thoroughly convinced that Captain Radclyffe is suffering from the same form of poisoning?'

The doctor looked at him.

'Captain Radclyffe is not suffering from any sort of poisoning now.'

'Aha,' said Tommy. 'I –'

'Captain Radclyffe died at five o'clock this morning.'

Tommy was utterly taken aback. The doctor prepared to depart.

‘And the other victim, Miss Logan?’ asked Tuppence.

‘I have every reason to hope that she will recover since she has survived so far. Being an older woman, the poison seems to have had less effect on her. I will let you know the result of the analysis, Mr Blunt. In the meantime, Miss Chilcott, will, I am sure, tell you anything you want to know.’

As he spoke, the door opened, and a girl appeared. She was tall, with a tanned face, and steady blue eyes.

Dr Burton performed the necessary introductions.

‘I am glad you have come, Mr Blunt,’ said Mary Chilcott. ‘This affair seems too terrible. Is there anything you want to know that I can tell you?’

‘Where did the fig paste come from?’

‘It is a special kind that comes from London. We often have it. No one suspected that this particular pot differed from any of the others. Personally I dislike the flavour of figs. That explains my immunity. I cannot understand how Dennis was affected, since he was out for tea. He must have picked up a sandwich when he came home, I suppose.’

Tommy felt Tuppence’s hand press his arm ever so slightly.

‘What time did he come in?’ he asked.

‘I don’t really know. I could find out.’

‘Thank you, Miss Chilcott. It doesn’t matter. You have no objection, I hope, to my questioning the servants?’

‘Please do anything you like, Mr Blunt. I am nearly distraught. Tell me – you don’t think there has been – foul play?’

Her eyes were very anxious, as she put the question.

‘I don’t know what to think. We shall soon know.’

‘Yes, I suppose Dr Burton will have the paste analysed.’

Quickly excusing herself, she went out by the window to speak to one of the gardeners.

‘You take the housemaids, Tuppence,’ said Tommy, ‘and I’ll find my way to the kitchen. I say, Miss Chilcott may feel very distraught, but she doesn’t look it.’

Tuppence nodded assent without replying.

Husband and wife met half an hour later.

‘Now to pool results,’ said Tommy. ‘The sandwiches came out for tea, and the parlourmaid ate one – that’s how she got it in the neck. Cook is positive Dennis Radclyffe hadn’t returned when tea was cleared away. Query – how did *he* get poisoned?’

‘He came in at a quarter to seven,’ said Tuppence. ‘Housemaid saw him from one of the windows. He had a cocktail before dinner – in the library. She

was just clearing away the glass now, and luckily I got it from her before she washed it. It was after that that he complained of feeling ill.'

'Good,' said Tommy. 'I'll take that glass along to Burton, presently. Anything else?'

'I'd like you to see Hannah, the maid. She's – she's queer.'

'How do you mean – queer?'

'She looks to me as though she were going off her head.'

'Let me see her.'

Tuppence led the way upstairs. Hannah had a small sitting-room of her own. The maid sat upright on a high chair. On her knees was an open Bible. She did not look towards the two strangers as they entered. Instead she continued to read aloud to herself.

*'Let hot burning coals fall upon them, let them be cast into the fire and into the pit, that they never rise up again.'*

'May I speak to you a minute?' asked Tommy.

Hannah made an impatient gesture with her hand.

'This is no time. The time is running short, I say. *I will follow upon mine enemies and overtake them, neither will I turn again till I have destroyed them.* So it is written. The word of the Lord has come to me. I am the scourge of the Lord.'

'Mad as a hatter,' murmured Tommy.

'She's been going on like that all the time,' whispered Tuppence.

Tommy picked up a book that was lying open, face downwards on the table. He glanced at the title and slipped it into his pocket.

Suddenly the old woman rose and turned towards them menacingly.

'Go out from here. The time is at hand! I am the flail of the Lord. The wind bloweth where it listeth – so do I destroy. The ungodly shall perish. This is a house of evil – of evil, I tell you! Beware of the wrath of the Lord whose handmaiden I am.'

She advanced upon them fiercely. Tommy thought it best to humour her and withdrew. As he closed the door, he saw her pick up the Bible again.

'I wonder if she's always been like that,' he muttered.

He drew from his pocket the book he had picked up off the table.

'Look at that. Funny reading for an ignorant maid.'

Tuppence took the book.

'Materia Medica,' she murmured. She looked at the flyleaf, 'Edward Logan. It's an old book. Tommy, I wonder if we could see Miss Logan? Dr Burton said she was better.'

'Shall we ask Miss Chilcott?'

'No. Let's get hold of a housemaid, and send her in to ask.'

After a brief delay, they were informed that Miss Logan would see them. They were taken into a big bedroom facing over the lawn. In the bed was an old lady with white hair, her delicate face drawn by suffering.

‘I have been very ill,’ she said faintly. ‘And I can’t talk much, but Ellen tells me you are detectives. Lois went to consult you then? She spoke of doing so.’

‘Yes, Miss Logan,’ said Tommy. ‘We don’t want to tire you, but perhaps you can answer a few questions. The maid, Hannah, is she quite right in her head?’

Miss Logan looked at them with obvious surprise.

‘Oh, yes. She is very religious – but there is nothing wrong with her.’

Tommy held out the book he had taken from the table.

‘Is this yours, Miss Logan?’

‘Yes. It was one of my father’s books. He was a great doctor, one of the pioneers of serum therapeutics.’

The old lady’s voice rang with pride.

‘Quite so,’ said Tommy. ‘I thought I knew his name.’ he added mendaciously. ‘This book now, did you lend it to Hannah?’

‘To Hannah?’ Miss Logan raised herself in bed with indignation. ‘No, indeed. She wouldn’t understand the first word of it. It is a highly technical book.’

‘Yes. I see that. Yet I found it in Hannah’s room.’

‘Disgraceful,’ said Miss Logan. ‘I will not have the servants touching my things.’

‘Where ought it to be?’

‘In the bookshelf in my sitting-room – or – stay, I lent it to Mary. The dear girl is very interested in herbs. She has made one or two experiments in my little kitchen. I have a little place of my own, you know, where I brew liqueurs and make preserves in the old-fashioned way. Dear Lucy, Lady Radclyffe, you know, used to swear by my tansy tea – a wonderful thing for a cold in the head. Poor Lucy, she was subject to colds. So is Dennis. Dear boy, his father was my first cousin.’

Tommy interrupted these reminiscences.

‘This kitchen of yours? Does anyone else use it except you and Miss Chilcott?’

‘Hannah clears up there. And she boils the kettle there for our early morning tea.’

‘Thank you, Miss Logan,’ said Tommy. ‘There is nothing more I want to ask you at present. I hope we haven’t tired you too much.’

He left the room and went down the stairs, frowning to himself.

‘There is something here, my dear Mr Ricardo, that I do not understand.’

‘I hate this house,’ said Tuppence with a shiver. ‘Let’s go for a good long walk and try to think things out.’

Tommy complied and they set out. First they left the cocktail glass at the doctor’s house, and then set off for a good tramp across the country, discussing the case as they did so.

‘It makes it easier somehow if one plays the fool,’ said Tommy. ‘All this Hanaud business. I suppose some people would think I didn’t care. But I do, most awfully. I feel that somehow or other we ought to have prevented this.’

‘I think that’s foolish of you,’ said Tuppence. ‘It is not as though we advised Lois Hargreaves not to go to Scotland Yard or anything like that. Nothing would have induced her to bring the police into the matter. If she hadn’t come to us, she would have done nothing at all.’

‘And the result would have been the same. Yes, you are right, Tuppence. It’s morbid to reproach oneself over something one couldn’t help. What I would like to do is to make good now.’

‘And that’s not going to be easy.’

‘No, it isn’t. There are so many possibilities, and yet all of them seem wild and improbable. Supposing Dennis Radclyffe put the poison in the sandwiches. He knew he would be out to tea. That seems fairly plain sailing.’

‘Yes,’ said Tuppence, ‘that’s all right so far. Then we can put against that the fact that he was poisoned himself – so that seems to rule him out. There is one person we mustn’t forget – and that is Hannah.’

‘Hannah?’

‘People do all sorts of queer things when they have religious mania.’

‘She is pretty far gone with it too,’ said Tommy. ‘You ought to drop a word to Dr Burton about it.’

‘It must have come on very rapidly,’ said Tuppence. ‘That is if we go by what Miss Logan said.’

‘I believe religious mania does,’ said Tommy. ‘I mean, you go on singing hymns in your bedroom with the door open for years, and then you go suddenly right over the line and become violent.’

‘There is certainly more evidence against Hannah than against anybody else,’ said Tuppence thoughtfully. ‘And yet I have an idea –’ She stopped.

‘Yes?’ said Tommy encouragingly.

‘It is not really an idea. I suppose it is just a prejudice.’

‘A prejudice against someone?’

Tuppence nodded.

‘Tommy – did *you* like Mary Chilcott?’

Tommy considered.

‘Yes, I think I did. She struck me as extremely capable and businesslike –

perhaps a shade too much so – but very reliable.’

‘You didn’t think it was odd that she didn’t seem more upset?’

‘Well, in a way that is a point in her favour. I mean, if she had done anything, she would make a point of being upset – lay it on rather thick.’

‘I suppose so,’ said Tuppence. ‘And anyway there doesn’t seem to be any motive in her case. One doesn’t see what good this wholesale slaughter can do her.’

‘I suppose none of the servants are concerned?’

‘It doesn’t seem likely. They seem a quiet, reliable lot. I wonder what Esther Quant, the parlourmaid, was like.’

‘You mean, that if she was young and good-looking there was a chance that she was mixed up in it some way.’

‘That is what I mean,’ Tuppence sighed. ‘It is all very discouraging.’

‘Well, I suppose the police will get down to it all right,’ said Tommy.

‘Probably. I should like it to be us. By the way, did you notice a lot of small red dots on Miss Logan’s arm?’

‘I don’t think I did. What about them?’

‘They looked as though they were made by a hypodermic syringe,’ said Tuppence.

‘Probably Dr Burton gave her a hypodermic injection of some kind.’

‘Oh, very likely. But he wouldn’t give her about forty.’

‘The cocaine habit,’ suggested Tommy helpfully.

‘I thought of that,’ said Tuppence, ‘but her eyes were all right. You could see at once if it was cocaine or morphia. Besides, she doesn’t look that sort of old lady.’

‘Most respectable and God-fearing,’ agreed Tommy.

‘It is all very difficult,’ said Tuppence. ‘We have talked and talked and we don’t seem any nearer now than we were. Don’t let’s forget to call at the doctor’s on our way home.’

The doctor’s door was opened by a lanky boy of about fifteen.

‘Mr Blunt?’ he inquired. ‘Yes, the doctor is out, but he left a note for you in case you should call.’

He handed them the note in question and Tommy tore it open.

*Dear Mr Blunt,*

*There is reason to believe that the poison employed was Ricin, a vegetable toxalbumose of tremendous potency. Please keep this to yourself for the present.*

Tommy let the note drop, but picked it up quickly.

‘Ricin,’ he murmured. ‘Know anything about it, Tuppence? You used to be

rather well up in these things.'

'Ricin,' said Tuppence, thoughtfully. 'You get it out of castor oil, I believe.'

'I never did take kindly to castor oil,' said Tommy. 'I am more set against it than ever now.'

'The oil's all right. You get Ricin from the seeds of the castor oil plant. I believe I saw some castor oil plants in the garden this morning – big things with glossy leaves.'

'You mean that someone extracted the stuff on the premises. Could Hannah do such a thing?'

Tuppence shook her head.

'Doesn't seem likely. She wouldn't know enough.'

Suddenly Tommy gave an exclamation.

'That book. Have I got it in my pocket still? Yes.' He took it out, and turned over the leaves vehemently. 'I thought so. Here's the page it was open at this morning. Do you see, Tuppence? Ricin!'

Tuppence seized the book from him.

'Can you make head or tail of it? I can't.'

'It's clear enough to me,' said Tuppence. She walked along, reading busily, with one hand on Tommy's arm to steer herself. Presently she shut the book with a bang. They were just approaching the house again.

'Tommy, will you leave this to me? Just for once, you see, I am the bull that has been more than twenty minutes in the arena.'

Tommy nodded.

'You shall be the Captain of the Ship, Tuppence,' he said gravely. 'We've got to get to the bottom of this.'

'First of all,' said Tuppence as they entered the house, 'I must ask Miss Logan one more question.'

She ran upstairs. Tommy followed her. She rapped sharply on the old lady's door and went in.

'Is that you, my dear?' said Miss Logan. 'You know you are much too young and pretty to be a detective. Have you found out anything?'

'Yes,' said Tuppence. 'I have.'

Miss Logan looked at her questioningly.

'I don't know about being pretty,' went on Tuppence, 'but being young, I happened to work in a hospital during the War. I know something about serum therapeutics. I happen to know that when Ricin is injected in small doses hypodermically, immunity is produced, antiricin is formed. That fact paved the way for the foundation of serum therapeutics. You knew that, Miss Logan. You injected Ricin for some time hypodermically into yourself. Then you let yourself be poisoned with the rest. You helped your father in his work, and



you knew all about Ricin and how to obtain it and extract it from the seeds. You chose a day when Dennis Radclyffe was out for tea. It wouldn't do for him to be poisoned at the same time – he might die before Lois Hargreaves. So long as she died first, he inherited her money, and at his death it passes to you, his next-of-kin. You remember, you told us this morning that his father was your first cousin.'

The old lady stared at Tuppence with baleful eyes.

Suddenly a wild figure burst in from the adjoining room. It was Hannah. In her hand she held a lighted torch which she waved frantically.

'Truth has been spoken. That is the wicked one. I saw her reading the book and smiling to herself and I knew. I found the book and the page – but it said nothing to me. But the voice of the Lord spoke to me. She hated my mistress, her ladyship. She was always jealous and envious. She hated my own sweet Miss Lois. But the wicked shall perish, the fire of the Lord shall consume them.'

Waving her torch she sprang forward to the bed.

A cry arose from the old lady.

'Take her away – take her away. It's true – but take her away.'

Tuppence flung herself upon Hannah, but the woman managed to set fire to the curtains of the bed before Tuppence could get the torch from her and stamp on it. Tommy, however, had rushed in from the landing outside. He tore down the bed hangings and managed to stifle the flames with a rug. Then he rushed to Tuppence's assistance, and between them they subdued Hannah just as Dr Burton came hurrying in.

A very few words sufficed to put him *au courant* of the situation.

He hurried to the bedside, lifted Miss Logan's hand, then uttered a sharp exclamation.

'The shock of fire has been too much for her. She's dead. Perhaps it is as well under the circumstances.'

He paused, and then added, 'There was Ricin in the cocktail glass as well.'

'It's the best thing that could have happened,' said Tommy, when they had relinquished Hannah to the doctor's care, and were alone together. 'Tuppence, you were simply marvellous.'

'There wasn't much Hanaud about it,' said Tuppence.

'It was too serious for play-acting. I still can't bear to think of that girl. I won't think of her. But, as I said before, you were marvellous. The honours are with you. To use a familiar quotation, "It is a great advantage to be intelligent and not to look it."'

'Tommy,' said Tuppence, 'you're a beast.'

## About the Author

Agatha Christie is the most widely published author of all time and in any language, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare.

Her books have sold more than a billion copies in English and another billion in a hundred foreign languages. She is the author of eighty crime novels and short-story collections, nineteen plays, two memoirs, and six novels written under the name Mary Westmacott.

She first tried her hand at detective fiction while working in a hospital dispensary during World War I, creating the now legendary Hercule Poirot with her debut novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*.

With *The Murder in the Vicarage*, published in 1930, she introduced another beloved sleuth, Miss Jane Marple. Additional series characters include the husband-and-wife crime-fighting team of Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, private investigator Parker Pyne, and Scotland Yard detectives Superintendent Battle and Inspector Japp.

Many of Christie's novels and short stories were adapted into plays, films, and television series. *The Mousetrap*, her most famous play of all, opened in 1952 and is the longest-running play in history. Among her best-known film adaptations are *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) and *Death on the Nile* (1978), with Albert Finney and Peter Ustinov playing Hercule Poirot, respectively. On the small screen Poirot has been most memorably portrayed by David Suchet, and Miss Marple by Joan Hickson and subsequently Geraldine McEwan and Julia McKenzie.

Christie was first married to Archibald Christie and then to archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan, whom she accompanied on expeditions to countries that would also serve as the settings for many of her novels. In 1971 she achieved one of Britain's highest honors when she was made a Dame of the British Empire. She died

in 1976 at the age of eighty-five. Her one hundred and twentieth anniversary was celebrated around the world in 2010.

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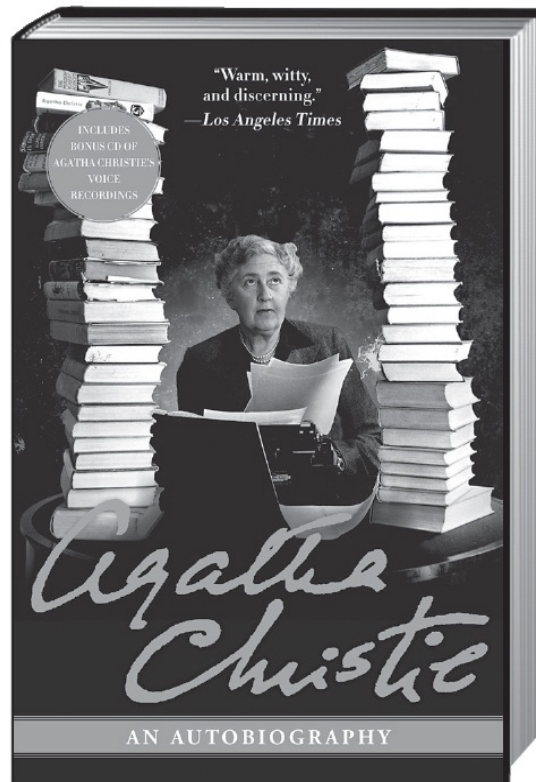
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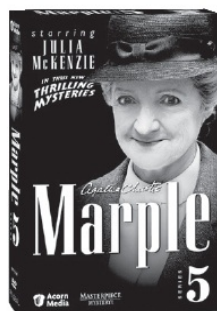
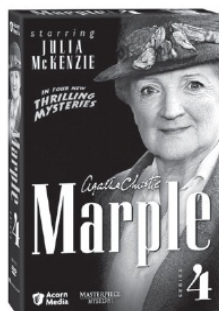
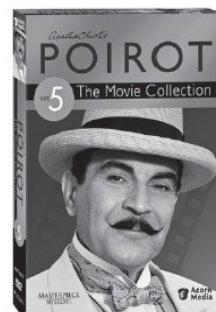
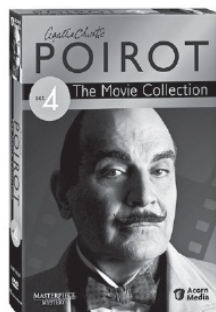
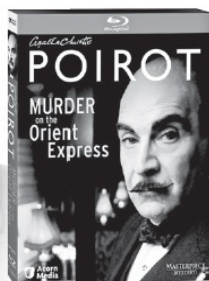
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EPub Edition © 2011 ISBN: 9780062129765

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