

## **Contents**

About Agatha Christie

The Agatha Christie Collection

E-Book Extras

Foreword

- 1 The Letter 11
- 2 *Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative* 21
- 3 Andover 23
- 4 Mrs Ascher 33
- 5 Mary Drower 41
- 6 The Scene of the Crime 51
- 7 Mr Partridge and Mr Riddell 65
- 8 The Second Letter 73
- 9 The Bexhill-on-Sea Murder 85
- 10 The Barnards 97
- 11 Megan Barnard 105
- 12 Donald Fraser 113
- 13 A Conference 119
- 14 The Third Letter 129

15	Sir Carmichael Clarke	139
16	<i>Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative</i>	151
17	Marking Time	155
18	Poirot Makes a Speech	165
19	By Way of Sweden	181
20	Lady Clarke	187
21	Description of a Murderer	201
22	<i>Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative</i>	209
23	September 11th. Doncaster	217
24	<i>Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative</i>	229
25	<i>Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative</i>	233
26	<i>Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative</i>	237
27	The Doncaster Murder	241
28	<i>Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative</i>	251
29	At Scotland Yard	263
30	<i>Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative</i>	269
31	Hercule Poirot Asks Questions	273
32	And Catch a Fox	283
33	Alexander Bonaparte Cust	293
34	Poirot Explains	303
35	Finale	327

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About the Publisher

## **Foreword**

*By Captain Arthur Hastings, O.B.E.*

In this narrative of mine I have departed from my usual practice of relating only those incidents and scenes at which I myself was present. Certain chapters, therefore, are written in the third person.

I wish to assure my readers that I can vouch for the occurrences related in these chapters. If I have taken a certain poetic licence in describing the thoughts and feelings of various persons, it is because I believe I have set them down with a reasonable amount of accuracy. I may add that they have been ‘vetted’ by my friend Hercule Poirot himself.

In conclusion, I will say that if I have described at too great length some of the secondary personal relationships which arose as a consequence of this strange series of crimes, it is because the human and personal elements can never be ignored. Hercule Poirot once taught me in a very dramatic manner that romance

*Agatha Christie*

can be a by-product of crime.

As to the solving of the ABC mystery, I can only say that in my opinion Poirot showed real genius in the way he tackled a problem entirely unlike any which had previously come his way.

## Chapter 1

### The Letter

It was in June of 1935 that I came home from my ranch in South America for a stay of about six months. It had been a difficult time for us out there. Like everyone else, we had suffered from world depression. I had various affairs to see to in England that I felt could only be successful if a personal touch was introduced. My wife remained to manage the ranch.

I need hardly say that one of my first actions on reaching England was to look up my old friend, Hercule Poirot.

I found him installed in one of the newest type of service flats in London. I accused him (and he admitted the fact) of having chosen this particular building entirely on account of its strictly geometrical appearance and proportions.

‘But yes, my friend, it is of a most pleasing symmetry, do you not find it so?’

## *Agatha Christie*

I said that I thought there could be too much squareness and, alluding to an old joke, I asked if in this super-modern hostelry they managed to induce hens to lay square eggs.

Poirot laughed heartily.

‘Ah, you remember that? Alas! no – science has not yet induced the hens to conform to modern tastes, they still lay eggs of different sizes and colours!’

I examined my old friend with an affectionate eye. He was looking wonderfully well – hardly a day older than when I had last seen him.

‘You’re looking in fine fettle, Poirot,’ I said. ‘You’ve hardly aged at all. In fact, if it were possible, I should say that you had fewer grey hairs than when I saw you last.’

Poirot beamed on me.

‘And why is that not possible? It is quite true.’

‘Do you mean your hair is turning from grey to black instead of from black to grey?’

‘Precisely.’

‘But surely that’s a scientific impossibility!’

‘Not at all.’

‘But that’s very extraordinary. It seems against nature.’

‘As usual, Hastings, you have the beautiful and unsuspecting mind. Years do not change that in you! You perceive a fact and mention the solution of it in the same breath without noticing that you are doing so!’

I stared at him, puzzled.

Without a word he walked into his bedroom and returned with a bottle in his hand which he handed to me.

I took it, for the moment uncomprehending.

It bore the words:

*Revivit.* – To bring back the natural tone of the hair.  
*Revivit* is *not* a dye. In five shades, Ash, Chestnut, Titian, Brown, Black.

‘Poirot,’ I cried. ‘You have dyed your hair!’

‘Ah, the comprehension comes to you!’

‘So *that’s* why your hair looks so much blacker than it did last time I was back.’

‘Exactly.’

‘Dear me,’ I said, recovering from the shock. ‘I suppose next time I come home I shall find you wearing false moustaches – or are you doing so now?’

Poirot winced. His moustaches had always been his sensitive point. He was inordinately proud of them. My words touched him on the raw.

‘No, no, indeed, *mon ami*. That day, I pray the good God, is still far off. The false moustache! *Quel horreur!*’

He tugged at them vigorously to assure me of their genuine character.

## Agatha Christie

‘Well, they are very luxuriant still,’ I said.

‘*N’est ce pas?* Never, in the whole of London, have I seen a pair of moustaches to equal mine.’

A good job too, I thought privately. But I would not for the world have hurt Poirot’s feelings by saying so.

Instead I asked if he still practised his profession on occasion.

‘I know,’ I said, ‘that you actually retired years ago –’

‘*C’est vrai.* To grow the vegetable marrows! And immediately a murder occurs – and I send the vegetable marrows to promenade themselves to the devil. And since then – I know very well what you will say – I am like the prima donna who makes positively the farewell performance! That farewell performance, it repeats itself an indefinite number of times!’

I laughed.

‘In truth, it has been very like that. Each time I say: this is the end. But no, something else arises! And I will admit it, my friend, the retirement I care for it not at all. If the little grey cells are not exercised, they grow the rust.’

‘I see,’ I said. ‘You exercise them in moderation.’

‘Precisely. I pick and choose. For Hercule Poirot nowadays only the cream of crime.’

‘Has there been much cream about?’

‘*Pas mal.* Not long ago I had a narrow escape.’

‘Of failure?’



‘No, no.’ Poirot looked shocked. ‘But I – I, *Hercule Poirot*, was nearly exterminated.’

I whistled.

‘An enterprising murderer!’

‘Not so much enterprising as careless,’ said Poirot. ‘Precisely that – careless. But let us not talk of it. You know, Hastings, in many ways I regard you as my mascot.’

‘Indeed?’ I said. ‘In what ways?’

Poirot did not answer my question directly. He went on:

‘As soon as I heard you were coming over I said to myself: something will arise. As in former days we will hunt together, we two. But if so it must be no common affair. It must be something’ – he waved his hands excitedly – ‘something *recherché* – delicate – *fine . . .*’ He gave the last untranslatable word its full flavour.

‘Upon my word, Poirot,’ I said. ‘Anyone would think you were ordering a dinner at the Ritz.’

‘Whereas one cannot command a crime to order? Very true.’ He sighed. ‘But I believe in luck – in destiny, if you will. It is your destiny to stand beside me and prevent me from committing the unforgivable error.’

‘What do you call the unforgivable error?’

‘Overlooking the obvious.’

I turned this over in my mind without quite seeing the point.