

AN EXTRACT FROM
MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

100
YEARS OF

Agatha Christie
STORIES

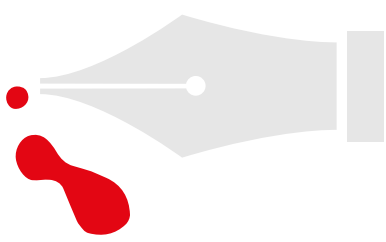
CHAPTER I

An Important Passenger on the Taurus Express

It was five o'clock on a winter's morning in Syria. Alongside the platform at Aleppo stood the train grandly designated in railway guides as the Taurus Express. It consisted of a kitchen and dining-car, a sleeping-car and two local coaches.

By the step leading up into the sleeping-car stood a young French lieutenant, resplendent in uniform, conversing with a small lean man, muffled up to the ears, of whom nothing was visible but a pink-tipped nose and the two points of an upward curled moustache.

It was freezingly cold, and this job of seeing off a distinguished stranger was not one to be envied, but Lieutenant Dubosc performed his part manfully. Graceful phrases fell from his lips in polished French. Not that he knew what it was all about. There had been rumours, of course, as there always were in such cases. The General—his General's—temper had grown worse and worse. And then there had come this Belgian stranger—all the way from England, it seemed. There had been



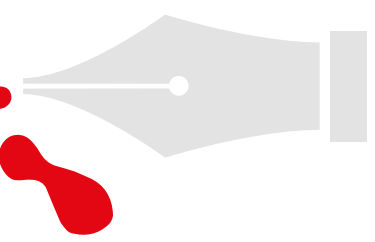
a week—a week of curious tensivity. And then certain things had happened. A very distinguished officer had committed suicide, another had resigned— anxious faces had suddenly lost their anxiety, certain military precautions were relaxed. And the General—Lieutenant Dubosc's own particular General—had suddenly looked ten years younger.

Dubosc had overheard part of a conversation between him and the stranger. 'You have saved us, mon cher,' said the General emotionally, his great white moustache trembling as he spoke. 'You have saved the honour of the French Army—you have averted much bloodshed! How can I thank you for acceding to my request? To have come so far—'

To which the stranger (by name M. Hercule Poirot) had made a fitting reply including the phrase, 'But indeed do I not remember that once you saved my life?' And then the General had made another fitting reply to that disclaiming any merit for that past service, and with more mention of France, of Belgium, of glory, of honour and of such kindred things they had embraced each other heartily and the conversation had ended.

As to what it had all been about, Lieutenant Dubosc was still in the dark, but to him had been delegated the duty of seeing off M. Poirot by the Taurus Express, and he was carrying it out with all the zeal and ardour befitting a young officer with a promising career ahead of him.

'Today is Sunday,' said Lieutenant Dubosc.
'Tomorrow, Monday evening, you will be in Stamboul.'



It was not the first time he had made this observation. Conversations on the platform, before the departure of a train, are apt to be somewhat repetitive in character.

'That is so,' agreed M. Poirot.

'And you intend to remain there a few days, I think?'

'Mais oui. Stamboul, it is a city I have never visited. It would be a pity to pass through—comme ça.' He snapped his fingers descriptively. 'Nothing presses—I shall remain there as a tourist for a few days.'

'La Sainte Sophie, it is very fine,' said Lieutenant Dubosc, who had never seen it.

A cold wind came whistling down the platform. Both men shivered. Lieutenant Dubosc managed to cast a surreptitious glance at his watch. Five minutes to five—only five minutes more!

Fancying that the other man had noticed his surreptitious glance, he hastened once more into speech.

'There are few people travelling this time of year,' he said, glancing up at the windows of the sleeping-car above them.

'That is so,' agreed M. Poirot.

'Let us hope you will not be snowed up in the Taurus!'

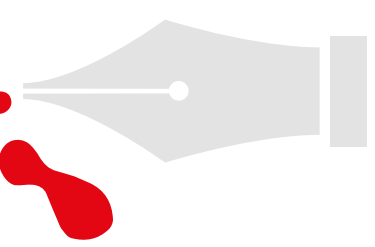
'That happens?'

'It has occurred, yes. Not this year, as yet.'

'Let us hope, then,' said M. Poirot. 'The weather reports from Europe, they are bad.'

'Very bad. In the Balkans there is much snow.'

'In Germany too, I have heard.'



'Eh bien,' said Lieutenant Dubosc hastily as another pause seemed to be about to occur. 'Tomorrow evening at seven-forty you will be in Constantinople.'

'Yes,' said M. Poirot, and went on desperately, 'La Sainte Sophie, I have heard it is very fine.'

Magnificent, I believe.'

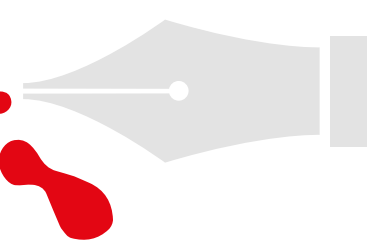
Above their heads the blind of one of the sleeping car compartments was pushed aside and a young woman looked out.

Mary Debenham had had little sleep since she left Baghdad on the preceding Thursday. Neither in the train to Kirkuk, nor in the Rest House at Mosul, nor last night on the train had she slept properly. Now, weary of lying wakeful in the hot stuffiness of her overheated compartment, she got up and peered out.

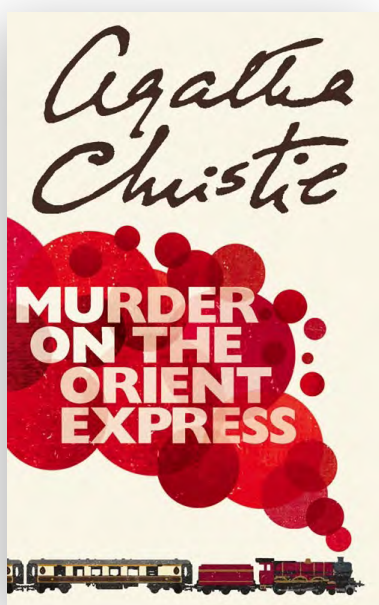
This must be Aleppo. Nothing to see, of course. Just a long, poor-lighted platform with loud furious altercations in Arabic going on somewhere. Two men below her window were talking French. One was a French officer, the other was a little man with enormous moustaches. She smiled faintly. She had never seen anyone quite so heavily muffled up. It must be very cold outside. That was why they heated the train so terribly. She tried to force the window down lower, but it would not go.

The Wagon-Lit conductor had come up to the two men.

The train was about to depart, he said. Monsieur had better mount. The little man removed his



hat. What an egg-shaped head he had. In spite of her preoccupations Mary Debenham smiled. A ridiculous-looking little man. The sort of little man one could never take seriously.



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