

# P R O B L E M A T S E A

## A P O I R O T S H O R T S T O R Y

'Colonel Clapperton!' said General Forbes.

He said it with an effect midway between a snort and a sniff.

Miss Ellie Henderson leaned forward, a strand of her soft grey hair blowing across her face. Her eyes, dark and snapping, gleamed with a wicked pleasure.

'Such a *soldierly*-looking man!' she said with malicious intent, and smoothed back the lock of hair to await the result.

'Soldierly!' exploded General Forbes. He tugged at his military moustache and his face became bright red.

'In the Guards, wasn't he?' murmured Miss Henderson, completing her work.

'Guards? Guards? Pack of nonsense. Fellow was on the music hall stage! Fact! Joined up and was out in France counting tins of plum and apple. Huns dropped a stray bomb and he went home with a flesh wound in the arm. Somehow or other got into Lady Carrington's hospital.'

'So that's how they met.'

'Fact! Fellow played the wounded hero. Lady Carrington had no sense and oceans of money. Old Carrington had been in munitions. She'd been

a widow only six months. This fellow snaps her up in no time. She wangled him a job at the War Office. *Colonel* Clapperton! Pah!' he snorted.

'And before the war he was on the music hall stage,' mused Miss Henderson, trying to reconcile the distinguished grey-haired Colonel Clapperton with a red-nosed comedian singing mirth-provoking songs.

'Fact!' said General Forbes. 'Heard it from old Bassingtonfrench. And he heard it from old Badger Cotterill who'd got it from Snooks Parker.'

Miss Henderson nodded brightly. 'That does seem to settle it!' she said.

A fleeting smile showed for a minute on the face of a small man sitting near them. Miss Henderson noticed the smile. She was observant. It had shown appreciation of the irony underlying her last remark—irony which the General never for a moment suspected.

The General himself did not notice the smile. He glanced at his watch, rose and remarked: 'Exercise. Got to keep oneself fit on a boat,' and passed out through the open door on to the deck.

Miss Henderson glanced at the man who had smiled. It was a well-bred glance indicating that she was ready to enter into conversation with a fellow traveller.

'He is energetic—yes?' said the little man.

'He goes round the deck forty-eight times exactly,' said Miss Henderson. 'What an old gossip! And they say we are the scandal-loving sex.'

'What an impoliteness!'

'Frenchmen are always polite,' said Miss

Henderson— there was the nuance of a question in her voice.

The little man responded promptly. 'Belgian, mademoiselle.'

'Oh! Belgian.'

'Hercule Poirot. At your service.'

The name aroused some memory. Surely she had heard it before—? 'Are you enjoying this trip, M. Poirot?'

'Frankly, no. It was an imbecility to allow myself to be persuaded to come. I detest *la mer*. Never does it remain tranquil—no, not for a little minute.'

'Well, you admit it's quite calm now.'

M. Poirot admitted this grudgingly. 'A *ce moment*, yes. That is why I revive. I once more interest myself in what passes around me—your very adept handling of the General Forbes, for instance.'

'You mean—' Miss Henderson paused.

Hercule Poirot bowed. 'Your methods of extracting the scandalous matter. Admirable!'

Miss Henderson laughed in an unashamed manner. 'That touch about the Guards? I knew that would bring the old boy up spluttering and gasping.' She leaned forward confidentially. 'I admit I *like* scandal—the more ill-natured, the better!'

Poirot looked thoughtfully at her—her slim well-preserved figure, her keen dark eyes, her grey hair; a woman of fortyfive who was content to look her age.

Ellie said abruptly: 'I have it! Aren't you the great detective?'

Poirot bowed. 'You are too amiable, mademoiselle.' But he made no disclaimer.

'How thrilling,' said Miss Henderson. 'Are you "hot on the trail" as they say in books? Have we a criminal secretly in our midst? Or am I being indiscreet?'

'Not at all. Not at all. It pains me to disappoint your expectations, but I am simply here, like everyone else, to amuse myself.'

He said it in such a gloomy voice that Miss Henderson laughed.

'Oh! Well, you will be able to get ashore tomorrow at Alexandria. You have been to Egypt before?'

'Never, mademoiselle.'

Miss Henderson rose somewhat abruptly.

'I think I shall join the General on his constitutional,' she announced.

Poirot sprang politely to his feet.

She gave him a little nod and passed on to the deck.

A faint puzzled look showed for a moment in Poirot's eyes, then, a little smile creasing his lips, he rose, put his head through the door and glanced down the deck. Miss Henderson was leaning against the rail talking to a tall, soldierly-looking man.

Poirot's smile deepened. He drew himself back into the smoking-room with the same exaggerated care with which a tortoise withdraws itself into its shell. For the moment he had the smoking-room to himself, though he rightly conjectured that that would not last long.

It did not. Mrs Clapperton, her carefully waved platinum head protected with a net, her massaged



and dieted form dressed in a smart sports suit, came through the door from the bar with the purposeful air of a woman who has always been able to pay top price for anything she needed.

She said: 'John—? Oh! Good morning, M. Poirot—have you seen John?'

'He's on the starboard deck, madame. Shall I—?'

She arrested him with a gesture. 'I'll sit here a minute.' She sat down in a regal fashion in the chair opposite him. From the distance she had looked a possible twenty-eight. Now, in spite of her exquisitely made-up face, her delicately plucked eyebrows, she looked not her actual forty-nine years, but a possible fifty-five. Her eyes were a hard pale blue with tiny pupils.

'I was sorry not to have seen you at dinner last night,' she said. 'It was just a shade choppy, of course—'

'*Précisément*,' said Poirot with feeling.

'Luckily, I am an excellent sailor,' said Mrs Clapperton. 'I say luckily, because, with my weak heart, seasickness would probably be the death of me.'

'You have the weak heart, madame?'

'Yes, I have to be *most* careful. I must *not* overtire myself!

*All* the specialists say so!' Mrs Clapperton had embarked on the—to her—ever-fascinating topic of her health. 'John, poor darling, wears himself out trying to prevent me from doing too much. I live so intensely, if you know what I mean, M. Poirot?'

'Yes, yes.'

'He always says to me: "Try to be more of a

vegetable, Adeline." But I can't. Life was meant to be *lived*, I feel. As a matter of fact I wore myself out as a girl in the war. My hospital—you've heard of my hospital? Of course I had nurses and matrons and all that—but / actually ran it.' She sighed.

'Your vitality is marvellous, dear lady,' said Poirot, with the slightly mechanical air of one responding to his cue.

Mrs Clapperton gave a girlish laugh.

'Everyone tells me how young I am! It's absurd. I never try to pretend I'm a day less than forty-three,' she continued with slightly mendacious candour, 'but a lot of people find it hard to believe. "You're so *alive*, Adeline," they say to me. But really, M. Poirot, what would one *be* if one wasn't alive?'

'Dead,' said Poirot.

Mrs Clapperton frowned. The reply was not to her liking.

The man, she decided, was trying to be funny. She got up and said coldly: 'I must find John.'

As she stepped through the door she dropped her handbag. It opened and the contents flew far and wide. Poirot rushed gallantly to the rescue. It was some few minutes before the lipsticks, vanity boxes, cigarette case and lighter and other odds and ends were collected. Mrs Clapperton thanked him politely, then she swept down the deck and said, 'John—'

Colonel Clapperton was still deep in conversation with Miss Henderson. He swung round and came quickly to meet his wife. He bent over her protectively. Her deck chair—was it in the right place? Wouldn't it be better—? His manner

was courteous—full of gentle consideration. Clearly an adored wife spoiled by an adoring husband.

Miss Ellie Henderson looked out at the horizon as though something about it rather disgusted her.

Standing in the smoking-room door, Poirot looked on.

A hoarse quavering voice behind him said: 'I'd take a hatchet to that woman if I were her husband.' The old gentleman known disrespectfully among the younger set on board as the Grandfather of All the Tea Planters, had just shuffled in. 'Boy!' he called. 'Get me a whisky peg.'

Poirot stooped to retrieve a torn scrap of notepaper, an overlooked item from the contents of Mrs Clapperton's bag. Part of a prescription, he noted, containing digitalin. He put it in his pocket, meaning to restore it to Mrs Clapperton later.

'Yes,' went on the aged passenger. 'Poisonous woman. I remember a woman like that in Poona. In '87 that was.'

'Did anyone take a hatchet to her?' inquired Poirot.

The old gentleman shook his head sadly.

'Worried her husband into his grave within the year.'

Clapperton ought to assert himself. Gives his wife her head too much.'

'She holds the purse strings,' said Poirot gravely.

'Ha, ha!' chuckled the old gentleman. 'You've put the matter in a nutshell. Holds the purse strings. Ha, ha!'

Two girls burst into the smoking-room. One had

a round face with freckles and dark hair streaming out in a windswept confusion, the other had freckles and curly chestnut hair.

'A rescue—a rescue!' cried Kitty Mooney. 'Pam and I are going to rescue Colonel Clapperton.'

'From his wife,' gasped Pamela Cregan.

'We think he's a *pet*...'

'And she's just awful—she won't let him do *anything*,' the two girls exclaimed.

'And if he isn't with her, he's usually grabbed by the Henderson woman...'

'Who's quite nice. But terribly *old*...'

They ran out, gasping in between giggles. 'A rescue—a rescue...'

That the rescue of Colonel Clapperton was no isolated sally, but a fixed project was made clear that same evening when the eighteen-year-old Pam Cregan came up to Hercule Poirot, and murmured: 'Watch us, M. Poirot. He's going to be cut out from under her nose and taken to walk in the moonlight on the boat deck.'

It was just at that moment that Colonel Clapperton was saying: 'I grant you the price of a Rolls-Royce. But it's practically good for a lifetime. Now my car—'

'My car, I think, John.' Mrs Clapperton's voice was shrill and penetrating.

He showed no annoyance at her ungraciousness. Either he was used to it by this time, or else—

'Or else?' thought Poirot and let himself speculate.



'Certainly, my dear, *your* car,' Clapperton bowed to his wife and finished what he had been saying, perfectly unruffled.

'*Voilà ce qu'on appelle le pukka sahib,*' thought Poirot.

'But the General Forbes says that Clapperton is no gentleman at all. I wonder now.'

There was a suggestion of bridge. Mrs Clapperton, General Forbes and a hawk-eyed couple sat down to it. Miss Henderson had excused herself and gone out on deck.

'What about your husband?' asked General Forbes, hesitating.

'John won't play,' said Mrs Clapperton. 'Most tiresome of him.'

The four bridge players began shuffling the cards.

Pam and Kitty advanced on Colonel Clapperton. Each one took an arm.

'You're coming with us!' said Pam. 'To the boat deck.'

There's a moon.'

'Don't be foolish, John,' said Mrs Clapperton. 'You'll catch a chill.'

'Not with us, he won't,' said Kitty. 'We're hot stuff!' He went with them, laughing.

Poirot noticed that Mrs Clapperton said No Bid to her initial bid of Two Clubs.

He strolled out on to the promenade deck. Miss Henderson was standing by the rail. She looked round expectantly as he came to stand beside her and he saw the drop in her expression.

They chatted for a while. Then presently as he fell silent she asked: 'What are you thinking about?'

Poirot replied: 'I am wondering about my knowledge of English. Mrs Clapperton said: "John won't play bridge."

Is not "can't play" the usual term?'

'She takes it as a personal insult that he doesn't, I suppose,' said Ellie drily. 'The man was a fool ever to have married her.'

In the darkness Poirot smiled. 'You don't think it's just possible that the marriage may be a success?' he asked diffidently.

'With a woman like that?'

Poirot shrugged his shoulders. 'Many odious women have devoted husbands. An enigma of nature. You will admit that nothing she says or does appears to gall him.' Miss Henderson was considering her reply when Mrs Clapperton's voice floated out through the smoking-room window.

'No—I don't think I will play another rubber. So stuffy. I think I'll go up and get some air on the boat deck.'

'Good night,' said Miss Henderson. 'I'm going to bed.'

She disappeared abruptly.

Poirot strolled forward to the lounge—deserted save for Colonel Clapperton and the two girls. He was doing card tricks for them and noting the dexterity of his shuffling and handling of the cards, Poirot remembered the General's story of a career on the music hall stage.

'I see you enjoy the cards even though you do not play bridge,' he remarked.

'I've my reasons for not playing bridge,' said Clapperton, his charming smile breaking out. 'I'll

show you. We'll play one hand.'

He dealt the cards rapidly. 'Pick up your hands. Well, what about it?' He laughed at the bewildered expression on Kitty's face. He laid down his hand and the others followed suit. Kitty held the entire club suit, M. Poirot the hearts, Pam the diamonds and Colonel Clapperton the spades.

'You see?' he said. 'A man who can deal his partner and his adversaries any hand he pleases had better stand aloof from a friendly game! If the luck goes too much his way, ill-natured things might be said.'

'Oh!' gasped Kitty. 'How *could* you do that? It all looked perfect ordinary.'

'The quickness of the hand deceives the eye,' said Poirot sententiously—and caught the sudden change in the Colonel's expression.

It was as though he realized that he had been off his guard for a moment or two.

Poirot smiled. The conjuror had shown himself through the mask of the pukka sahib.

The ship reached Alexandria at dawn the following morning.

As Poirot came up from breakfast he found the two girls all ready to go on shore. They were talking to Colonel Clapperton.

'We ought to get off now,' urged Kitty. 'The passport people will be going off the ship presently. You'll come with us won't you? You wouldn't let us go ashore all by ourselves? Awful things might happen to us.'

'I certainly don't think you ought to go by yourselves,' said Clapperton, smiling. 'But I'm not sure my wife feels up to it.'

'That's too bad,' said Pam. 'But she can have a nice long rest.'

Colonel Clapperton looked a little irresolute. Evidently the desire to play truant was strong upon him. He noticed Poirot.

'Hullo, M. Poirot—you going ashore?'

'No, I think not,' M. Poirot replied.

'I'll—I'll—just have a word with Adeline,' decided Colonel Clapperton.

'We'll come with you,' said Pam. She flashed a wink at Poirot. 'Perhaps we can persuade her to come too,' she added gravely.

Colonel Clapperton seemed to welcome this suggestion. He looked decidedly relieved.

'Come along then, the pair of you,' he said lightly. They all three went along the passage of B deck together.

Poirot, whose cabin was just opposite the Clappertons', followed them out of curiosity.

Colonel Clapperton rapped a little nervously at the cabin door.

'Adeline, my dear, are you up?'

The sleepy voice of Mrs Clapperton from within replied:

'Oh, bother—what is it?'

'It's John. What about going ashore?'

'Certainly not.' The voice was shrill and decisive. 'I've had a very bad night. I shall stay in bed most of the day.'

Pam nipped in quickly. 'Oh, Mrs Clapperton, I'm



so sorry. We did so want you to come with us. Are you sure you're not up to it?'

'I'm quite certain.' Mrs Clapperton's voice sounded even shriller.

The Colonel was turning the door-handle without result.

'What is it, John? The door's locked. I don't want to be disturbed by the stewards.'

'Sorry, my dear, sorry. Just wanted my Baedeker.'

'Well, you can't have it,' snapped Mrs Clapperton. 'I'm not going to get out of bed. Do go away, John, and let me have a little peace.'

'Certainly, certainly, my dear.' The Colonel backed away from the door. Pam and Kitty closed in on him.

'Let's start at once. Thank goodness your hat's on your head. Oh, gracious—your passport isn't in the cabin, is it?'

'As a matter of fact it's in my pocket—' began the Colonel.

Kitty squeezed his arm. 'Glory be!' she exclaimed. 'Now, come on.'

Leaning over the rail, Poirot watched the three of them leave the ship. He heard a faint intake of breath beside him and turned to see Miss Henderson. Her eyes were fastened on the three retreating figures.

'So they've gone ashore,' she said flatly.

'Yes. Are you going?'

She had a shade hat, he noticed, and a smart bag and shoes.

There was a shore-going appearance about her. Nevertheless, after the most infinitesimal of

pauses, she shook her head.

'No,' she said. 'I think I'll stay on board. I have a lot of letters to write.'

She turned and left him.

Puffing after his morning tour of forty-eight rounds of the deck, General Forbes took her place. 'Aha!' he exclaimed as his eyes noted the retreating figures of the Colonel and the two girls. 'So *that's* the game! Where's the Madam?'

Poirot explained that Mrs Clapperton was having a quiet day in bed.

'Don't you believe it!' the old warrior closed one knowing eye. 'She'll be up for tiffin—and if the poor devil's found to be absent without leave, there'll be ructions.'

But the General's prognostications were not fulfilled. Mrs Clapperton did not appear at lunch and by the time the Colonel and his attendant damsels returned to the ship at four o'clock, she had not shown herself.

Poirot was in his cabin and heard the husband's slightly guilty knock on his cabin door. Heard the knock repeated, the cabin door tried, and finally heard the Colonel's call to a steward.

'Look here, I can't get an answer. Have you a key?'

Poirot rose quickly from his bunk and came out into the passage.

The news went like wildfire round the ship. With horrified incredulity people heard that Mrs Clapperton had been found dead in her bunk—a native dagger driven through her heart. A string of

amber beads was found on the floor of her cabin.

Rumour succeeded rumour. All bead sellers who had been allowed on board that day were being rounded up and questioned! A large sum in cash had disappeared from a drawer in the cabin! The notes had been traced! They had not been traced! Jewellery worth a fortune had been taken! No jewellery had been taken at all! A steward had been arrested and had confessed to the murder!

'What is the truth of it all?' demanded Miss Ellie Henderson waylaying Poirot. Her face was pale and troubled.

'My dear lady, how should I know?'

'Of course you know,' said Miss Henderson.

It was late in the evening. Most people had retired to their cabins. Miss Henderson led Poirot to a couple of deck chairs on the sheltered side of the ship. 'Now tell me,' she commanded.

Poirot surveyed her thoughtfully. 'It's an interesting case,' he said.

'Is it true that she had some very valuable jewellery stolen?'

Poirot shook his head. 'No. No jewellery was taken. A small amount of loose cash that was in a drawer has disappeared, though.'

'I'll never feel safe on a ship again,' said Miss Henderson with a shiver. 'Any clue as to which of those brutes did it?'

'No,' said Hercule Poirot. 'The whole thing is rather— strange.'

'What do you mean?' asked Ellie sharply.

Poirot spread out his hands. '*Eh bien*—take the facts. Mrs Clapperton had been dead at least five

hours when she was found. Some money had disappeared. A string of beads was on the floor by her bed. The door was locked and the key was missing. The window—*window*, not porthole—gives on the deck and was open.'

'Well?' asked the woman impatiently.

'Do you not think it is curious for a murder to be committed under those particular circumstances? Remember that the postcard sellers, money changers and bead sellers who are allowed on board are all well known to the police.'

'The stewards usually lock your cabin, all the same,' Ellie pointed out.

'Yes, to prevent any chance of petty pilfering. But this—was murder.'

'What exactly are you thinking of, M. Poirot?' Her voice sounded a little breathless.

'I am thinking of the *locked door*.'

Miss Henderson considered this. 'I don't see anything in that. The man left by the door, locked it and took the key with him so as to avoid having the murder discovered too soon. Quite intelligent of him, for it wasn't discovered until four o'clock in the afternoon.'

'No, no, mademoiselle, you don't appreciate the point I'm trying to make. I'm not worried as to how he got *out*, but as to how he got *in*.'

'The window of course.'

'*C'est possible*. But it would be a very narrow fit—and there were people passing up and down the deck all the time, remember.'

'Then through the door,' said Miss Henderson impatiently.



'But you forget, mademoiselle. *Mrs Clapperton had locked the door on the inside.* She had done so before Colonel Clapperton left the boat this morning. He actually tried it—so we *know* that is so.'

'Nonsense. It probably stuck—or he didn't turn the handle properly.'

'But it does not rest on his word. We actually heard *Mrs Clapperton herself say so.*'

'We?'

'Miss Mooney, Miss Cregan, Colonel Clapperton and myself.'

Ellie Henderson tapped a neatly shod foot. She did not speak for a moment or two. Then she said in a slightly irritable tone: 'Well—what exactly do you deduce from that? If Mrs Clapperton could lock the door she could unlock it too, I suppose.'

'Precisely, precisely.' Poirot turned a beaming face upon her. 'And you see where that leaves us. *Mrs Clapperton unlocked the door and let the murderer in.* Now would she be likely to do that for a bead seller?'

Ellie objected: 'She might not have known who it was. He may have knocked—she got up and opened the door—and he forced his way in and killed her.'

Poirot shook his head. '*Au contraire.* She was lying peacefully in bed when she was stabbed.'

Miss Henderson stared at him. 'What's your idea?' she asked abruptly.

Poirot smiled. 'Well, it looks, does it not, as though she *knew* the person she admitted...'

'You mean,' said Miss Henderson and her voice sounded a little harsh, '*that the murderer is a passenger on the ship?*'

Poirot nodded. 'It seems indicated.'

'And the string of beads left on the floor was a blind?'

'Precisely.'

'The theft of the money also?'

'Exactly.'

There was a pause, then Miss Henderson said slowly: 'I thought Mrs Clapperton a very unpleasant woman and I don't think anyone on board really liked her—but there wasn't anyone who had any reason to kill her.'

'Except her husband, perhaps,' said Poirot.

'You don't really think—' She stopped.

'It is the opinion of every person on this ship that Colonel Clapperton would have been quite justified in "taking a hatchet to her". That was, I think, the expression used.'

Ellie Henderson looked at him—waiting.

'But I am bound to say,' went on Poirot, 'that I myself have not noted any signs of exasperation on the good Colonel's part. Also what is more important, he had an alibi. He was with those two girls all day and did not return to the ship till four o'clock. By then, Mrs Clapperton had been dead many hours.'

There was another minute of silence. Ellie Henderson said softly: 'But you still think—a passenger on the ship?'

Poirot bowed his head.

Ellie Henderson laughed suddenly—a reckless defiant laugh. 'Your theory may be difficult to prove, M. Poirot. There are a good many passengers on this ship.'

Poirot bowed to her. 'I will use a phrase from one of your detective stories. "I have my methods, Watson."'

The following evening, at dinner, every passenger found a typewritten slip by his plate requesting him to be in the main lounge at 8.30. When the company were assembled, the Captain stepped on to the raised platform where the orchestra usually played and addressed them.

'Ladies and gentlemen, you all know of the tragedy which took place yesterday. I am sure you all wish to co-operate in bringing the perpetrator of that foul crime to justice.' He paused and cleared his throat. 'We have on board with us M. Hercule Poirot who is probably known to you all as a man who has had wide experience in—er—such matters. I hope you will listen carefully to what he has to say.'

It was at this moment that Colonel Clapperton, who had not been at dinner, came in and sat down next to General Forbes. He looked like a man bewildered by sorrow—not at all like a man conscious of great relief. Either he was a very good actor or else he had been genuinely fond of his disagreeable wife.

'M. Hercule Poirot,' said the Captain and stepped down. Poirot took his place. He looked comically self-important as he beamed on his audience.

'*Messieurs, mesdames,*' he began. 'It is most kind of you to be so indulgent as to listen to me. *M. le Capitaine* has told you that I have had a certain



experience in these matters. I have, it is true, a little idea of my own about how to get to the bottom of this particular case.' He made a sign and a steward pushed forward and passed on to him a bulky, shapeless object wrapped in a sheet.

'What I am about to do may surprise you a little,' Poirot warned them. 'It may occur to you that I am eccentric, perhaps mad. Nevertheless I assure you that behind my madness there is—as you English say—a method.'

His eyes met those of Miss Henderson for just a minute. He began unwrapping the bulky object.

'I have here, *messieurs* and *mesdames*, an important witness to the truth of who killed Mrs Clapperton.' With a deft hand he whisked away the last enveloping cloth, and the object it concealed was revealed—an almost life-sized wooden doll, dressed in a velvet suit and lace collar.

'Now, Arthur,' said Poirot and his voice changed subtly—it was no longer foreign—it had instead a confident English, a slightly Cockney inflection. 'Can you tell me—I repeat— can you tell me— anything at all about the death of Mrs Clapperton?'

The doll's neck oscillated a little, its wooden lower jaw dropped and wavered and a shrill high-pitched woman's voice spoke:

*'What is it, John? The door's locked. I don't want to be disturbed by the stewards...'*

There was a cry—an overturned chair—a man stood swaying, his hand to his throat—trying to speak—trying... Then suddenly, his figure seemed to crumple up. He pitched headlong.

It was Colonel Clapperton.



Poirot and the ship's doctor rose from their knees by the prostrate figure.

'All over, I'm afraid. Heart,' said the doctor briefly.

Poirot nodded. 'The shock of having his trick seen through,' he said.

He turned to General Forbes. 'It was you, General, who gave me a valuable hint with your mention of the music hall stage. I puzzle—I think—and then it comes to me. Supposing that before the war Clapperton was a ventriloquist. In that case, it would be perfectly possible for three people to hear Mrs Clapperton speak from inside her cabin *when she was already dead...*'

Ellie Henderson was beside him. Her eyes were dark and full of pain. 'Did you know his heart was weak?' she asked.

'I guessed it... Mrs Clapperton talked of her own heart being affected, but she struck me as the type of woman who likes to be thought ill. Then I picked up a torn prescription with a very strong dose of digitalin in it. Digitalin is a heart medicine but it couldn't be Mrs Clapperton's because digitalin dilates the pupils of the eyes. I have never noticed such a phenomenon with her—but when I looked at his eyes I saw the signs at once.'

Ellie murmured: 'So you thought—it might end—this way?'

'The best way, don't you think, mademoiselle?' he said gently.

He saw the tears rise in her eyes. She said: 'You've known. You've known all along... That I cared... But he didn't do it for *me*... It was those girls—youth—it made him feel his slavery. He

wanted to be free before it was too late... Yes, I'm sure that's how it was... When did you guess—that it was he?'

'His self-control was too perfect,' said Poirot simply. 'No matter how galling his wife's conduct, it never seemed to touch him. That meant either that he was so used to it that it no longer stung him, or else—*eh bien*—I decided on the latter alternative... And I was right...

'And then there was his insistence on his conjuring ability—the evening before the crime he pretended to give himself away. But a man like Clapperton doesn't give himself away. There must be a reason. So long as people thought he had been a *conjurer* they weren't likely to think of his having been a *ventriloquist*.'

'And the voice we heard—Mrs Clapperton's voice?'

'One of the stewardesses had a voice not unlike hers. I induced her to hide behind the stage and taught her the words to say.'

'It was a trick—a cruel trick,' cried out Ellie.

'I do not approve of murder,' said Hercule Poirot.





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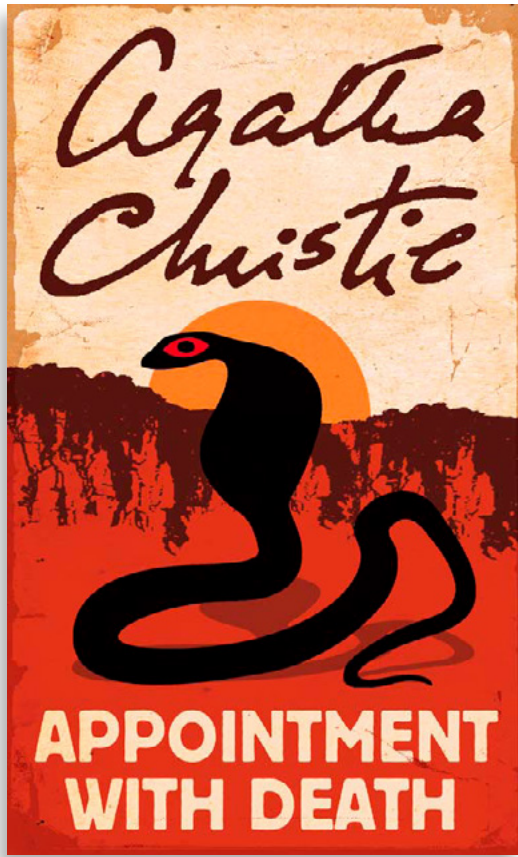
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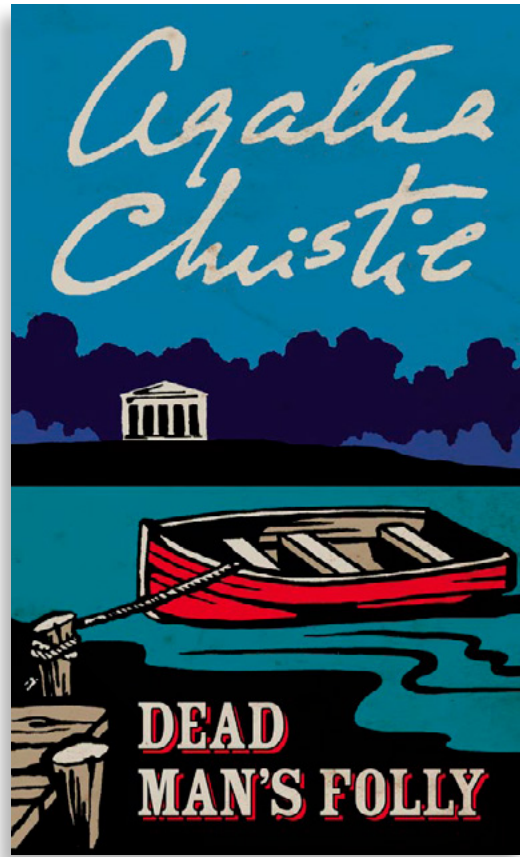
## Spend your Summer with Poirot



### Appointment with Death

Destination: Jordan

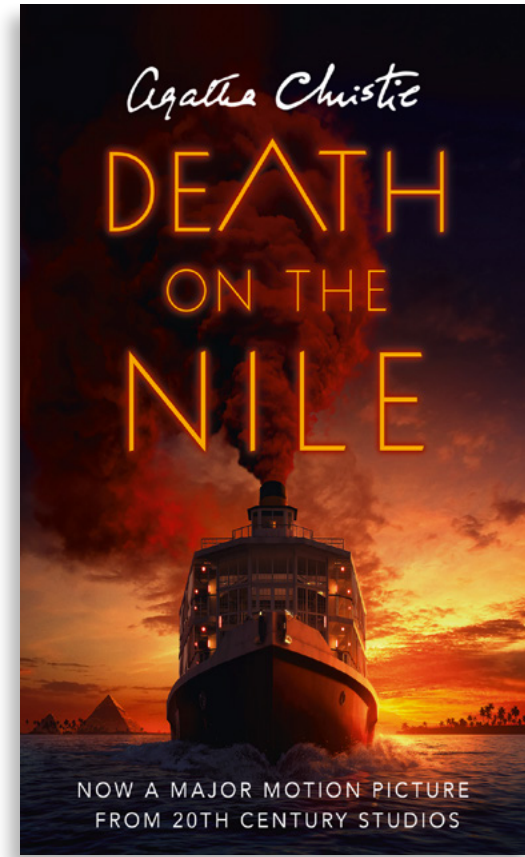
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### Dead Man's Folly

Destination: Devon

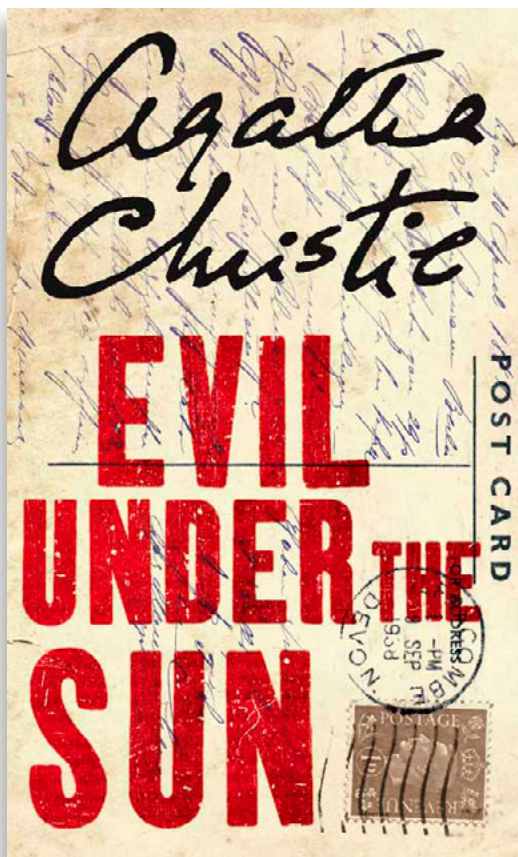
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### Death on the Nile

Destination: Egypt

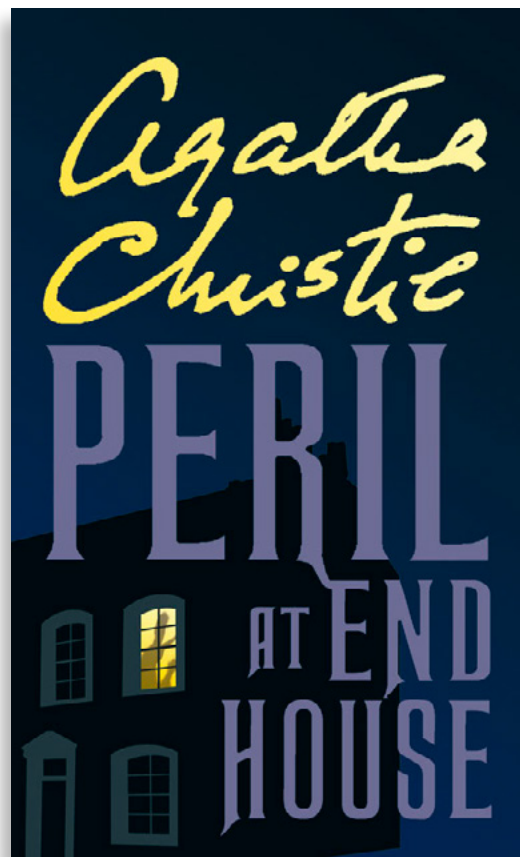
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### Evil Under the Sun

Destination: Devon

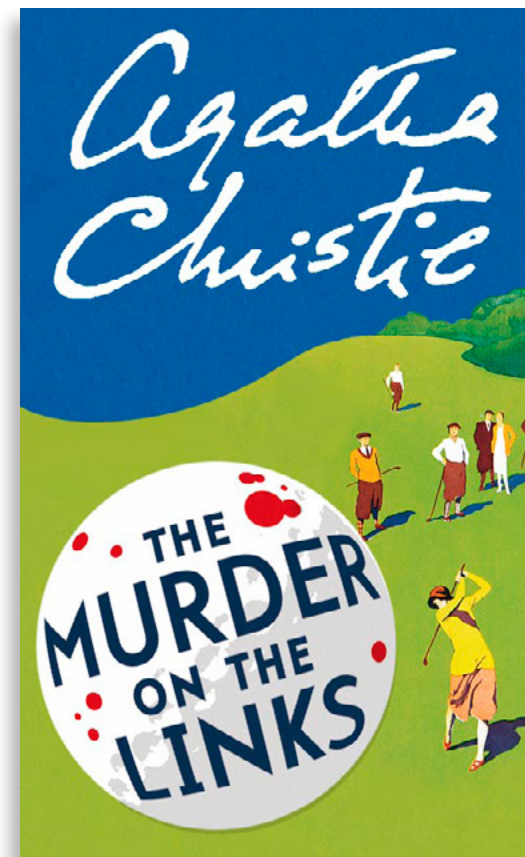
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### Peril at End House

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### The Murder on the Links

Destination: France

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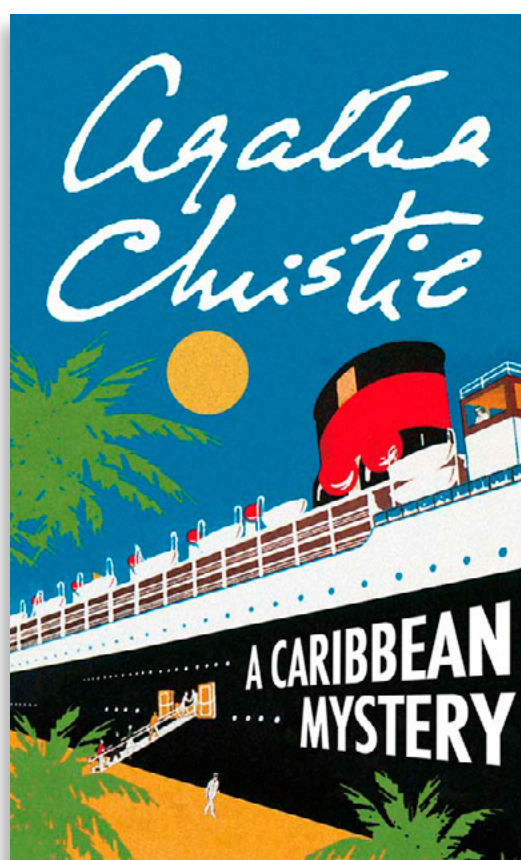
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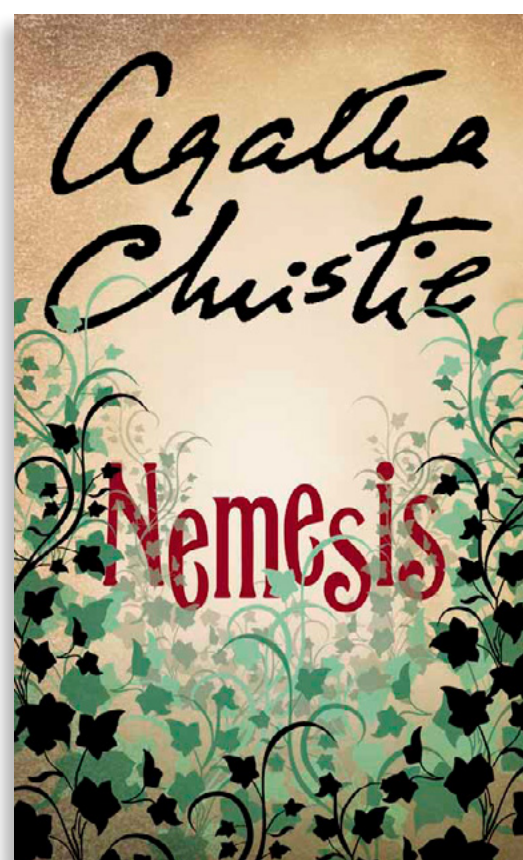
## Perfect Summer Picks



### A Caribbean Mystery

Destination: **The Caribbean**

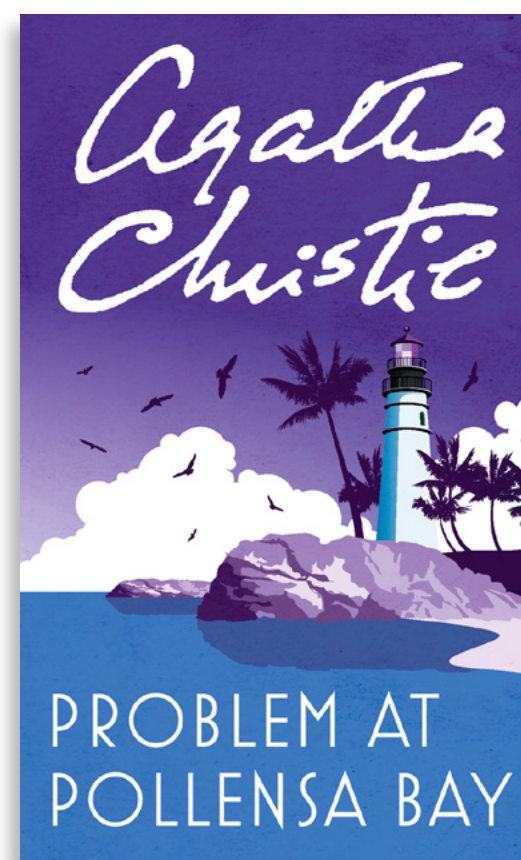
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### Nemesis

Destination: **England**

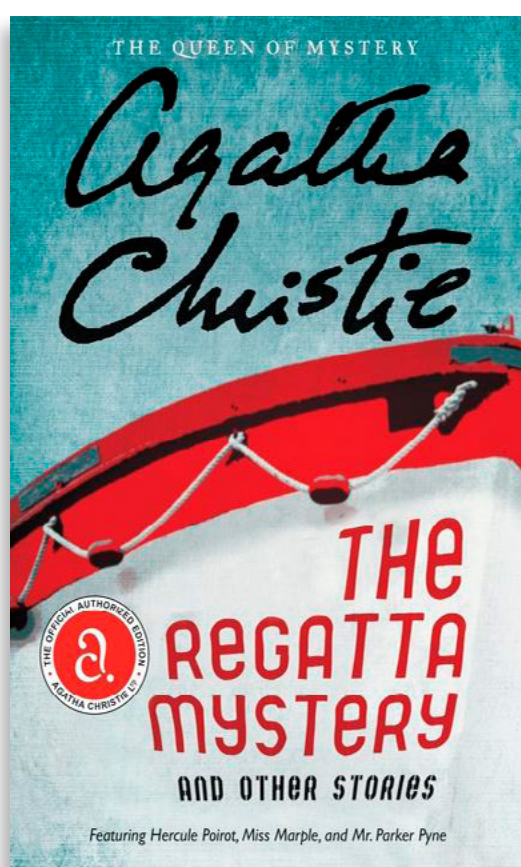
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### Problem at Pollensa Bay & Other Stories

Destination: **Mallorca**

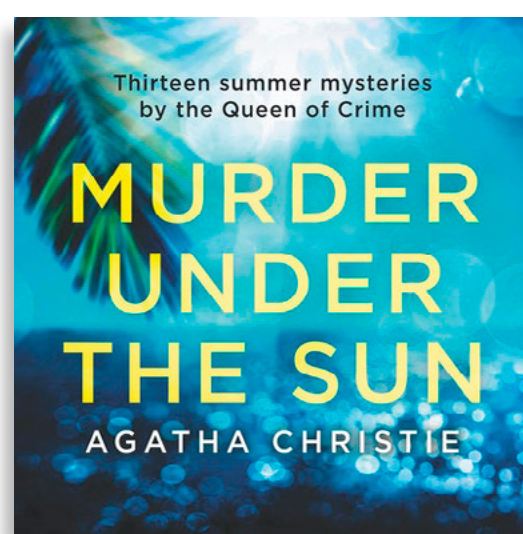
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### The Regatta Mystery & Other Stories

Destination: **Devon**

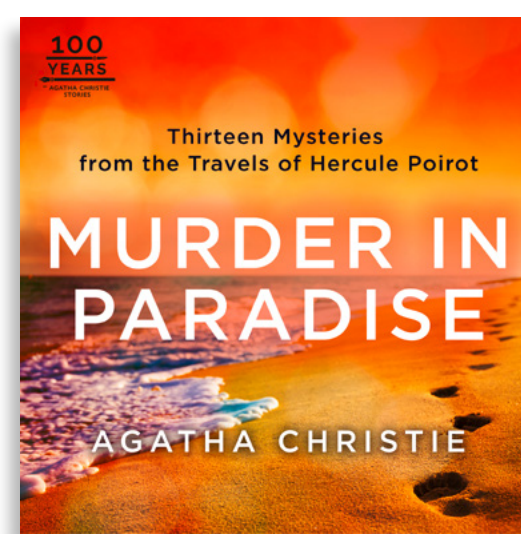
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### Murder Under the Sun (Audio)

Destination: **The Seaside**

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Destination: **The Beach**

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