

Agatha Christie

**DEAD MAN'S
FOLLY**



КАРО
Санкт-Петербург

УДК 372.8
ББК 81.2 Англ-93
К82

AGATHA CHRISTIE
DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

*В оформлении обложки использован
фрагмент орнамента Уильяма Морриса.*

Кристи, Агата.

К82 Причуда мертвеца : книга для чтения на английском языке. — Санкт-Петербург : КАРО, 2024. — 288 с. — (Detective Story).

ISBN 978-5-9925-1563-3.

Перед вами одна из самых запутанных историй от королевы классического детектива Агаты Кристи. Гениальный сыщик Эркюль Пуаро сталкивается с непростой задачей. На веселой сельской ярмарке происходит предумышленное убийство, а одна из героинь пропадает без вести. Дело осложняется тем, что никто не понимает, жертва она или преступница. Пуаро неоднократно сбивается в своем расследовании, но каждый раз нить рассуждений приводит его к загадочному летнему домику под названием «Причуда».

Неадаптированный текст романа на языке оригинала снабжен комментариями и словарем.

УДК 372.8
ББК 81.2 Англ-93

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To Peggy and Humphrey Trevelyan

Agatha Christie

CHAPTER 1

It was Miss Lemon, Poirot's efficient secretary, who took the telephone call.

Laying aside her shorthand notebook, she raised the receiver and said without emphasis, "Trafalgar 8137."

Hercule Poirot leaned back in his upright chair and closed his eyes. His fingers beat a meditative soft tattoo¹ on the edge of the table. In his head he continued to compose the polished periods of the letter he had been dictating.

Placing her hand over the receiver, Miss Lemon asked in a low voice:

'Will you accept a personal call from Nassecombe, Devon?'

Poirot frowned. The place meant nothing to him.

'The name of the caller?' he demanded cautiously.

Miss Lemon spoke into the mouthpiece.

'*Air-raid?*' she asked doubtfully. 'Oh, yes—what was the last name again?'

Once more she turned to Hercule Poirot.

'Mrs Ariadne Oliver.'

Hercule Poirot's eyebrows shot up. A memory rose in his mind: windswept grey hair... an eagle profile...

¹ **to beat a tattoo** — барабанить, отбивать такт

He rose and replaced Miss Lemon at the telephone.

'Hercule Poirot speaks,' he announced grandiloquently.

'Is that Mr Hercules Porrot speaking personally?' the suspicious voice of the telephone operator demanded.

Poirot assured her that that was the case.

'You're through to Mr Porrot,' said the voice.

Its thin reedy accents were replaced by a magnificent booming contralto which caused Poirot hastily to shift the receiver a couple of inches farther from his ear.

'M. Poirot, is that really *you*?' demanded Mrs Oliver.

'Myself in person, Madame.'

'This is Mrs Oliver. I don't know if you'll remember me—'

'But of course I remember you, Madame. Who could forget you?'

'Well, people do sometimes,' said Mrs Oliver. 'Quite often, in fact. I don't think that I've got a very distinctive personality. Or perhaps it's because I'm always doing different things to my hair. But all that's neither here nor there. I hope I'm not interrupting you when you're frightfully busy?'

'No, no, you do not derange me in the least.'

'Good gracious—I'm sure I don't want to drive you out of your mind. The fact is, I *need* you.'

'Need me?'

'Yes, at once. Can you take an aeroplane?'

'I do not take aeroplanes. They make me sick.'

'They do me, too. Anyway, I don't suppose it would be any quicker than the train really, because I think the only airport near here is Exeter which is miles away. So come

by train. Twelve o'clock from Paddington to Nassecombe. You can do it nicely. You've got three-quarters of an hour if my watch is right—though it isn't usually.'

'But where are you, Madame? What is all this *about*?'

'Nasse House, Nassecombe. A car or taxi will meet you at the station at Nassecombe.'

'But why do you need me? What is all this *about*?' Poirot repeated frantically.

'Telephones are in such awkward places,' said Mrs Oliver. 'This one's in the hall... People passing through and talking... I can't really hear. But I'm expecting you. Everybody will be *so* thrilled. Goodbye.'

There was a sharp click as the receiver was replaced. The line hummed gently.

With a baffled air of bewilderment¹, Poirot put back the receiver and murmured something under his breath. Miss Lemon sat with her pencil poised, incurious. She repeated in muted tones the final phrase of dictation before the interruption.

'—allow me to assure you, my dear sir, that the hypothesis you have advanced...'

Poirot waved aside the advancement of the hypothesis.

'That was Mrs Oliver,' he said. 'Ariadne Oliver, the detective novelist. You may have read...'. But he stopped, remembering that Miss Lemon only read improving books and regarded such frivolities as fictional crime with contempt.

¹ **with a baffled air of bewilderment** — с выражением замешательства и недоумения на лице

‘She wants me to go down to Devonshire today, at once, in’—he glanced at the clock—‘thirty-five minutes.’

Miss Lemon raised disapproving eyebrows.

‘That will be running it rather fine,’ she said. ‘For what reason?’

‘You may well ask! She did not tell me.’

‘How very peculiar. Why not?’

‘Because,’ said Hercule Poirot thoughtfully, ‘she was afraid of being overheard. Yes, she made that quite clear.’

‘Well, really,’ said Miss Lemon, bristling in her employer’s defence. ‘The things people expect! Fancy thinking that you’d go rushing off on some wild goose chase¹ like that! An important man like you! I have always noticed that these artists and writers are very unbalanced—no sense of proportion. Shall I telephone through a telegram: *Regret unable leave London?*’

Her hand went out to the telephone. Poirot’s voice arrested the gesture.

‘*Du tout!*’² he said. ‘On the contrary. Be so kind as to summon a taxi immediately.’ He raised his voice. ‘Georges! A few necessities of toilet in my small valise. And quickly, very quickly, I have a train to catch.’

II

The train, having done one hundred and eighty-odd miles of its two hundred and twelve miles journey at top speed, puffed gently and apologetically through the last

¹ **wild goose chase** — сумасбродная затея

² **Du tout!** — (*фр.*) Не надо!

thirty and drew into Nassecombe station. Only one person alighted, Hercule Poirot. He negotiated with care a yawning gap between the step of the train and the platform and looked round him. At the far end of the train a porter was busy inside a luggage compartment. Poirot picked up his valise and walked back along the platform to the exit. He gave up his ticket and walked out through the booking-office.

A large Humber¹ saloon was drawn up outside and a chauffeur in uniform came forward.

‘Mr Hercule Poirot?’ he inquired respectfully.

He took Poirot’s case from him and opened the door of the car. They drove away from the station over the railway bridge and turned down a country lane which wound between high hedges on either side. Presently the ground fell away on the right and disclosed a very beautiful river view with hills of a misty blue in the distance. The chauffeur drew into the hedge and stopped.

‘The River Helm, sir,’ he said. ‘With Dartmoor in the distance.’

It was clear that admiration was necessary. Poirot made the necessary noises, murmuring *Magnifique!*² several times. Actually, Nature appealed to him very little. A well-cultivated neatly arranged kitchen garden was far more likely to bring a murmur of admiration to Poirot’s

¹ **Humber** — «Хамбер», марка легкового автомобиля с вместительным кузовом.

² **Magnifique!** — (*фр.*) Великолепно!

lips. Two girls passed the car, toiling slowly up the hill. They were carrying heavy rucksacks on their backs and wore shorts, with bright coloured scarves tied over their heads.

‘There is a Youth Hostel next door to us, sir,’ explained the chauffeur, who had clearly constituted himself Poirot’s guide to Devon. ‘Hoodown Park. Mr Fletcher’s place it used to be. The Youth Hostel Association bought it and it’s fairly crammed in summer time. Take in over a hundred a night, they do. They’re not allowed to stay longer than a couple of nights—then they’ve got to move on. Both sexes and mostly foreigners.’

Poirot nodded absently. He was reflecting, not for the first time, that seen from the back, shorts were becoming to very few of the female sex. He shut his eyes in pain. Why, oh why, must young women array themselves thus? Those scarlet thighs were singularly unattractive!

‘They seem heavily laden,’ he murmured.

‘Yes, sir, and it’s a long pull from the station or the bus stop. Best part of two miles to Hoodown Park.’ He hesitated. ‘If you don’t object, sir, we could give them a lift?’

‘By all means, by all means,’ said Poirot benignantly. There was he in luxury in an almost empty car and here were these two panting and perspiring young women weighed down with heavy rucksacks and without the least idea how to dress themselves so as to appear attractive to the other sex. The chauffeur started the car and came to a slow purring halt beside the two girls. Their flushed and perspiring faces were raised hopefully.

Poirot opened the door and the girls climbed in.

‘It is most kind, please,’ said one of them, a fair girl with a foreign accent. ‘It is longer way than I think, yes.’ The other girl, who had a sunburnt and deeply flushed face with bronzed chestnut curls peeping out beneath her headscarf, merely nodded her head several times, flashed her teeth, and murmured, *Grazie*¹. The fair girl continued to talk vivaciously.

‘I to England come for two week holiday. I come from Holland. I like England very much. I have been Stratford Avon, Shakespeare Theatre and Warwick Castle. Then I have been Clovelly, now I have seen Exeter Cathedral and Torquay—very nice—I come to famous beauty spot here and tomorrow I cross river, go to Plymouth where discovery of New World was made from Plymouth Hoe.’

‘And you, signorina?’ Poirot turned to the other girl. But she only smiled and shook her curls.

‘She does not much English speak,’ said the Dutch girl kindly. ‘We both a little French speak—so we talk in train. She is coming from near Milan and has relative in England married to gentleman who keeps shop for much groceries. She has come with friend to Exeter yesterday, but friend has eat veal ham pie not good from shop in Exeter and has to stay there sick. It is not good in hot weather, the veal ham pie.’

At this point the chauffeur slowed down where the road forked. The girls got out, uttered thanks in two languages

¹ **Grazie.** — (um.) Спасибо.

and proceeded up the left-hand road. The chauffeur laid aside for a moment his Olympian aloofness and said feelingly to Poirot:

‘It’s not only veal and ham pie—you want to be careful of Cornish pasties¹ too. Put *anything* in a pasty they will, holiday time!’

He restarted the car and drove down the right-hand road which shortly afterwards passed into thick woods. He proceeded to give a final verdict on the occupants of Hoodown Park Youth Hostel.

‘Nice enough young women, some of ’em², at that hostel,’ he said; ‘but it’s hard to get them to understand about trespassing. Absolutely shocking the way they trespass. Don’t seem to understand that a gentleman’s place is *private* here. Always coming through our woods, they are, and pretending that they don’t understand what you say to them.’ He shook his head darkly.

They went on, down a steep hill through woods, then through big iron gates, and along a drive, winding up finally in front of a big white Georgian house³ looking out over the river.

The chauffeur opened the door of the car as a tall black-haired butler appeared on the steps.

¹ **Cornish pasties** — корнуэльские пирожки (жареные пирожки с разнообразной начинкой).

² **’em** = (здесь) *them*

³ **Georgian house** — дом в георгианском стиле (кирпичный дом с минимальным декором), этот стиль появился в правление короля Георга I (нач. XVIII в.).

‘Mr Hercule Poirot?’ murmured the latter.

‘Yes.’

‘Mrs Oliver is expecting you, sir. You will find her down at the Battery. Allow me to show you the way.’

Poirot was directed to a winding path that led along the wood with glimpses of the river below. The path descended gradually until it came out at last on an open space, round in shape, with a low battlemented parapet. On the parapet Mrs Oliver was sitting.

She rose to meet him and several apples fell from her lap and rolled in all directions. Apples seemed to be an inescapable *motif*¹ of meeting Mrs Oliver.

‘I can’t think why I always drop things,’ said Mrs Oliver somewhat indistinctly, since her mouth was full of apple. ‘How are you, M. Poirot?’

‘*Très bien, chère Madame*²,’ replied Poirot politely. ‘And you?’

Mrs Oliver was looking somewhat different from when Poirot had last seen her, and the reason lay, as she had already hinted over the telephone, in the fact that she had once more experimented with her *coiffure*³. The last time Poirot had seen her, she had been adopting a windswept effect. Today, her hair, richly blued, was piled upward in a multiplicity of rather artificial little curls in a pseudo Marquise style. The

¹ **motif** — (фр.) мотив, причина

² **Très bien, chère Madame.** — (фр.) Очень хорошо, дорогая леди.

³ **coiffure** — (фр.) прическа

Marquise effect ended at her neck; the rest of her could have been definitely labelled 'country practical,' consisting of a violent yolk-of-egg rough tweed coat and skirt and a rather bilious-looking mustard-coloured jumper.

'I knew you'd come,' said Mrs Oliver cheerfully.

'You could not possibly have known,' said Poirot severely.

'Oh, yes, I did.'

'I still ask myself *why* I am here.'

'Well, I know the answer. Curiosity.'

Poirot looked at her and his eyes twinkled a little. 'Your famous woman's intuition,' he said, 'has, perhaps, for once not led you too far astray.'

'Now, don't laugh at my woman's intuition. Haven't I always spotted the murderer right away?'

Poirot was gallantly silent. Otherwise he might have replied, 'At the fifth attempt, perhaps, and not always then!' Instead he said, looking round him:

'It is indeed a beautiful property that you have here.'

'This? But it doesn't belong to *me*, M. Poirot. Did you think it did? Oh, no, it belongs to some people called Stubbs.'

'Who are they?'

'Oh, nobody really,' said Mrs Oliver vaguely. 'Just rich. No, I'm down here professionally, doing a job.'

'Ah, you are getting local colour for one of your *chefs-d'oeuvre*¹?'

¹ **chefs-d'oeuvre** — (*фр.*) шедевр

‘No, no. Just what I said. I’m doing a *job*. I’ve been engaged to arrange a murder.’

Poirot stared at her.

‘Oh, not a real one,’ said Mrs Oliver reassuringly. ‘There’s a big *fête*¹ thing on tomorrow, and as a kind of novelty there’s going to be a Murder Hunt. Arranged by me. Like a Treasure Hunt, you see; only they’ve had a Treasure Hunt so often that they thought this would be a novelty. So they offered me a very substantial fee to come down and think it up. Quite fun, really—rather a change from the usual grim routine.’

‘How does it work?’

‘Well, there’ll be a Victim, of course. And Clues. And Suspects. All rather conventional—you know, the Vamp and the Blackmailer and the Young Lovers and the Sinister Butler and so on. Half a crown² to enter and you get shown the first Clue and you’ve got to find the Victim, and the Weapon and say Whodunnit³ and the Motive. And there are Prizes.’

‘Remarkable!’ said Hercule Poirot.

‘Actually,’ said Mrs Oliver ruefully, ‘it’s all much harder to arrange than you’d think. Because you’ve got to allow for real people being quite intelligent, and in my books they needn’t be.’

¹ **fête** — (*фр.*) вечеринка, праздник

² **Half a crown** — полкроны (крона — английская монета, чеканилась с начала XVI в., равнялась 5 шиллингам, или $\frac{1}{4}$ фунта стерлингов).

³ **whodunnit** = who has done it — (*досл.*) тот, кто это сделал; подозреваемый

‘And it is to assist you in arranging this that you have sent for me?’

Poirot did not try very hard to keep an outraged resentment out of his voice.

‘Oh, *no*,’ said Mrs Oliver. ‘Of course not! I’ve done all that. Everything’s all set for tomorrow. No, I wanted you for quite another reason.’

‘What reason?’

Mrs Oliver’s hands strayed upward to her head. She was just about to sweep them frenziedly through her hair in the old familiar gesture when she remembered the intricacy of her hair-do. Instead, she relieved her feelings by tugging at her ear lobes.

‘I dare say I’m a fool,’ she said. ‘But I think there’s something wrong.’

VOCABULARY

A

abrupt — (*adj*) внезапный, резкий

accost — (*v*) обращаться (*к кому-л.*), приставать

acid — (*adj*) зд. едкий, язвительный

acquire — (*v*) приобретать, достигать

acumen — (*n*) пронизательность, сообразительность

adjoin — (*v*) примыкать, граничить

affair — (*n*) зд. любовная связь, роман

agreeable — (*adj*) приятный; соответственный

alarm — (*n*) зд. смятение, страх

alteration — (*n*) изменение; зд. перестройка

aloofness — (*n*) отчужденность, равнодушие

ambiguous — (*adj*) двусмысленный, неопределенный

amicably — (*adv*) мирно, дружелюбно

anxiety — (*n*) тревога, беспокойство

apparent — (*adj*) видимый; очевидный

artificial — (*adj*) искусственный, притворный

asinine — (*adj*) глупый, упрямый

assault — (*n*) нападение, атака

asset — (*n*) имущество, ценный вклад

attire — (*v*) одевать, наряжать

autopsy — (*n*) вскрытие (*трупна*)

avowedly — (*adv*) явно, нарочито

B

batch — (*n*) партия, группа

battlemented — (*adj*) зд. зубчатый

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