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MURDER ON THE NILE

by Agatha Christie

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-01298-3

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IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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Murder on the Nile opened in the West End on March 19, 1946. The Director was Claude Gurney with sets by Danae Gaylen. The cast was as follows:

1ST BEADSELLER Richard Spranger
2ND BEADSELLER Christmas Grose
STEWARD James Roberts
MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES Helen Haye
CHRISTINA GRANT Joanna Derrill
SMITH Ronald Millar
LOUISE Jacqueline Robert
DR. BESSNER Hugo Schuster
KAY MOSTYN Rosemary Scott
SIMON MOSTYN Ivan Brandt
CANON PENNEFATHER David Horne
JACQUELINE DE SEVERAC Vivienne Bennett
MCNAUGHT Walter Lindsay

Under the title *Hidden Horizon*, the play opened at the Plymouth Theatre in New York on September 19, 1946. The Director was Albert de Courville. The cast was as follows:

1ST BEADSELLER David Andrews
2ND BEADSELLER Monty Banks, Jr.
STEWARD C. K. Alexander
MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES Eva Leonard-Boyne
CHRISTINA GRANT Joy Ann Page
SMITH David Manners
LOUISE Edith Kingdon Gould
DR. BESSNER Peter Von Zerneck
KAY MOSTYN Barbara Joyce
SIMON MOSTYN Blair Davies
CANON PENNEFATHER Halliwell Hobbes
JACQUELINE DE SEVERAC Diana Barrymore
MCNAUGHT Winston Ross

CHARACTERS

1ST BEADSELLER

2ND BEADSELLER

STEWARD

MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES

CHRISTINA GRANT

SMITH

LOUISE

DR. BESSNER

KAY MOSTYN

SIMON MOSTYN

CANON PENNEFATHER

JACQUELINE DE SEVERAC

MCNAUGHT

POLICE OFFICIAL

NOTES ON CASTING

1ST BEADSELLER may double with **MCNAUGHT**.

2ND BEADSELLER may double with **POLICE OFFICIAL**.

Minimum number of performers: 12

SETTING & TIME

The scene is laid throughout in the observation saloon of the paddle steamer Lotus on the Nile between Shellal and Wadi Halfa.

ACT I

At Shellal. Late afternoon.

ACT II

Scene One: By the Temple of Abu Simbel, three days later. Evening, after dinner.

Scene Two: The same. Five minutes later.

ACT III

The same. The next morning.

NOTES ON SENSITIVE TERMINOLOGY

Language used by the author in her stage directions and by her characters to describe mental and physical conditions and disabilities is of the period in which the play was first performed. We are confident that the author's intention was to be neutral within the stage directions – not to convey anything other than the facts of the characteristics relevant to a character's portrayal. The dialogue, however, is the embodiment of the character speaking and must express his or her intentions at that point in the play. This means that the author will have chosen terminology to be spoken with varying degrees of precision, sensitivity and, possibly, deliberate insensitivity according to the character and the circumstances in which he or she is speaking.

In our published version, therefore, we have applied the following logic:

- In stage directions, we have used terminology which is as neutral and factual as can be conceived, knowing that this will sometimes still fail.
- In dialogue, we have preserved the author's words as originally written.

We license this play on the basis that terms used in dialogue relevant to the physical and mental conditions of these characters may be changed in production to whichever best convey the author's intention for the audience. Sometimes this will be a neutral term, sometimes it will be a term which reflects the character's personality and/or the context in which they are speaking. Which of these applies is for directors and actors to interpret.

ACT I

(The forward observation saloon of the steamer "Lotus" at Shellal. Late afternoon. The saloon is glass enclosed so as to give a full view of the river panorama. Doorways right and left give access to the decks. Next to them are more windows through which those about to enter can be seen. The decks and cabins run aft [rear] and fore [forward] of the saloon, but not round the bow [front] of the steamer. There is a gangway to the shore off for all new arrivals. The saloon is arranged like a lounge with wicker chairs grouped round tables. A passenger list is pinned up with various travel folders and posters attractively displayed. TWO BEADSELLERS, laden with flywhisks, beads, postcards, and scarabs, are chatting in Arabic with a NUBIAN STEWARD, who wears long white robes and a tarboosh. He is always smiling and amiable, and understands about a quarter of what the passengers say to him. All three are in fits of laughter. Suddenly the STEWARD straightens up and shoos away the BEADSELLERS as the noise of approaching porters is heard off. The 1ST BEADSELLER exits to the gangway, the 2ND BEADSELLER exits to the left deck. MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES and CHRISTINA GRANT enter from the gangway with 1ST BEADSELLER in close attendance. MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES is wearing a topee and tourist clothes. She is sixty, snobbish, and bad-tempered. CHRISTINA is a nice, sensible girl with an amazingly

equable temper. She is carrying Miss Ffoliot-ffoulkes's coat and dressing case, which she deposits on a table.)

STEWARD. Good afternoon, ladies. Good afternoon. Welcome to *Lotus*.

(The 1ST BEADSELLER approaches MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES.)

1ST BEADSELLER. See, lady – see! Lapis – real lapis – real amber – very nice, very cheap. Look, lady, real scarab, big King Rameses!

(MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES waves him away. He transfers to CHRISTINA.)

MISS FFOLIOT. Miss Ffoliot-ffoulkes and Miss Grant.

STEWARD. Oh, yes, I have very nice cabins for you. Fifteen and sixteen. Nicest cabins on boat.

MISS FFOLIOT. Take us there, please. Christina, you've not dropped my coat?

(CHRISTINA quickly picks up the coat from the table. The STEWARD attempts to take it from her.)

Don't let him have it. Carry it yourself.

CHRISTINA. I have it.

(The 1ST BEADSELLER turns back to MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES.)

1ST BEADSELLER. Look, lady – real lapis – scarab. King Rameses!

MISS FFOLIOT. No, no, I don't want anything.

1ST BEADSELLER. *(Unperturbed.)* You go donkey riding when you come back? I give you card. I got very good donkey. My donkey "Whisky and Soda" – that very good donkey.

(He tries again with CHRISTINA.)

You like postcard? I got all kinds of postcards. You English lady? King George, Queen Elizabeth – hip, hip,

hooray! Very nice postcard – Temple of Philae, Tomb King Tutankhamen, English Church Cairo...

*(The **STEWARD** speaks in furious Arabic to the **FIRST BEADSELLER** who goes off to the gangway.)*

STEWARD. You come this way.

*(He exits to the left deck. **MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES** and **CHRISTINA** follow. **SMITH** enters from the gangway followed by the **1ST BEADSELLER**. **SMITH** is a rather dirty-looking young man in grey flannel trousers and an open shirt. His voice belies his appearance. As he enters he waves the **1ST BEADSELLER** aside.)*

1ST BEADSELLER. Very hot postcards? You like see girls dancing – real native dance? I take you duck shooting? Good sport? You English gentleman? American? Parley Francais? German? Italian? Russian? Swiss? Yugoslavian? No?

*(**SMITH** shakes his head impatiently, making his way to the left deck.)*

What you nationality?

SMITH. Japanese!

*(He exits to the left deck. The **1ST BEADSELLER** remains with his mouth open.)*

1ST BEADSELLER. *(Perplexed.)* Japanese?

*(**LOUISE**, a good-looking French maid, enters from the right deck.)*

You like nice beads? Very cheap? Très gentille. Très chic.

LOUISE. No, no, I do not want anything.

*(The **1ST BEADSELLER** exits to the gangway. **MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES** and **CHRISTINA** enter from the left deck still carrying the dressing case and coat. **LOUISE** discreetly exits to the right deck.)*

MISS FFOLIOT. It's absurd to say those are the best cabins on the boat. I don't believe it. You haven't left my little dressing case behind?

CHRISTINA. No, Aunt Helen, I have it here.

(SMITH enters from the left deck and sits at a table with a magazine. MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES looks him over as though he were a vaguely distasteful beetle.)

MISS FFOLIOT. I suppose this is where the passengers sit most of the time. Reserved, I presume, for the use of *first class* passengers.

(She looks purposefully at SMITH.)

SMITH. All one class on this boat.

CHRISTINA. There's another lounge at the back of the boat.

SMITH. Stern.

MISS FFOLIOT. But this is where one will get the best view.

(She finds the pinned up paper.)

Ah, a list of passengers. One likes to know who are going to be one's fellow travellers. On a boat like this one can't get away from people. So it means one has to be very careful.

SMITH. *(Cheerfully.)* Or else one may get contaminated.

(MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES turns a cold eye on him.)

Don't mind me. I'm afraid I've got a habit of butting in.

MISS FFOLIOT. *(Reading.)* Now let me see. Canon Ambrose Pennefather. That sounds quite nice. I wonder if he's one of the Yorkshire Pennefathers? Of course one never knows in the Church nowadays. Hm! Dr. Bessner – foreign! Mr. William Smith –

SMITH. Negligible!

(CHRISTINA nearly laughs.)

MISS FFOLIOT. Miss Ffoliot-Ffoulkes – dear me, they've spelt it with a big "F."

(**SMITH** *shakes his head gently.*)

SMITH. Lèse-majesté.

MISS FFOLIOT. Miss Christina Grant. Mr. and Mrs. Simon Mostyn and maid – why – I do believe that must be Kay Ridgeway!

CHRISTINA. Oh, Aunt Helen, how exciting! Do you think it's really her?

MISS FFOLIOT. On her honeymoon, I suppose.

CHRISTINA. That must be it. The wedding was a fortnight ago. I read all about it in *The Tatler* at the hotel.

MISS FFOLIOT. Well really, that will be *most* interesting. They say she threw over Lord Edgbaston to marry this young Mostyn. He is one of the Devonshire Mostyns – poor as a rat.

(*The STEWARD enters from the right deck.*)

Steward, come here. I don't like my cabin.

STEWARD. (*Smiling.*) Very nice cabin. Very good. Get all afternoon sun.

MISS FFOLIOT. That's exactly what I complain of. It will be too hot.

STEWARD. No, no, very nice breeze when boat go. Very pleasant.

MISS FFOLIOT. I want cabins on this side of boat.

(*She points to the right deck.*)

STEWARD. All right. I show you.

MISS FFOLIOT. Stay here, Christina. I don't want my things left.

(*She moves to the right deck door, followed by the STEWARD.*)

Is all the drinking water on this boat very fresh – is it boiled?

(*They exit to the right deck. There is a pause.*)

SMITH. Too bad they spelt your aunt's name with a large "F."

CHRISTINA. Oh, that's always happening. It's not really sensible when you come to think of it, to spell a name with two small "f's."

SMITH. It's one of our incomprehensible English whimsies. *(Pause.)* Are you going to Wadi Halfa and back for the trip, or on to Khartoum?

CHRISTINA. Oh, just for the trip. It's all so picturesque, and I love the donkeys and all the beads and things.

(She takes a large plaster scarab out of her bag.)

I bought this yesterday. The man said it was a real sacred scarab. Is it?

(SMITH examines it.)

SMITH. The curious thing is that you couldn't buy one of these in Birmingham if you tried.

CHRISTINA. Oh, is that where it comes from?

SMITH. I've always understood they were made in Birmingham for the export market, but it *may* be Sheffield.

CHRISTINA. *(Downhearted.)* I paid five piastres for it.

SMITH. Anyway, it's a lovely specimen. So *naïve*, if you know what I mean.

(There are noises off from the gangway. The BEADSELLERS can be heard among them. CHRISTINA goes to have a look.)

CHRISTINA. Somebody else is coming on board. I wonder if it's her?

SMITH. You are expecting a friend?

CHRISTINA. Oh, no. I meant Mrs. Mostyn. She's on her honeymoon. You must have read about her: Kay Ridgeway. Her father was the great financier. They say she's the richest girl in England.

SMITH. That must be very bad for her.

CHRISTINA. She's not only rich. She's absolutely lovely! And she's just made a romantic marriage. *(Ecstatically.)*

Think of being rich, and lovely, and having everything in the world you want!

SMITH. I'd rather not think of it. It makes me feel sick.

CHRISTINA. There have been pictures of her in all the papers.

SMITH. (*Furiously.*) Why should there be? Why should anyone want to look at pictures of an idle, useless girl who's never done a hand's turn in her life? Faugh! Why not pictures of decent factory girls going to their day's work?

CHRISTINA. (*Amused.*) Who'd want to look at pictures of them? I wouldn't.

SMITH. Do you despise the workers of the world?

CHRISTINA. Not at all. I'm one myself. I work in an office in Edinburgh as a shorthand typist. But I wouldn't pay good money for a paper to look at pictures of shorthand typists or factory girls.

SMITH. You've no proper sense of the dignity of labour.

CHRISTINA. Do you do such an awful lot of work yourself?

SMITH. (*Disconcerted.*) I'm studying conditions at the moment. I intend to work extremely hard.

CHRISTINA. Well, maybe when you do, you'll understand that there's such a thing as romance. And when a rich girl like Kay Ridgeway, who might have married anybody, marries a young man with no money at all and very good-looking, and they're on their honeymoon and going to be on the same boat – well, it's just too thrilling for words.

SMITH. I see. You've got what used to be called the novelette mind.

CHRISTINA. (*Placidly.*) There's no call to be *rude*.

(**DR. BESSNER** enters from the gangway. He is a stout middle-aged man with spectacles. He has a marked foreign accent and is earnestly attempting to repel the two **BEADSELLERS**.)

DR. BESSNER. No, I do not want them. Those beads you have there, they are a very bad imitation – very bad, indeed.

(The STEWARD suddenly appears from the right deck and drives off the BEADSELLERS.)

Very troublesome they are, these people. It is like the flies. All the time they are saying “Baksheesh! Baksheesh!”

(Turning to SMITH.)

Dr. Bessner.

SMITH. William Smith.

(DR. BESSNER bows then looks to CHRISTINA.)

Miss?

CHRISTINA. Grant.

(He bows, looking at her with approval.)

DR. BESSNER. It is the first time you make upon the Nile this so agreeable voyage?

CHRISTINA. Yes, it is the first time I’ve ever been in Egypt.

DR. BESSNER. There is in Egypt much of interest to be seen. The civilisation of Egypt was fine, very fine, and owing to action of sand and dry climate, much has been preserved to us. We will make stops and go on the shore and interesting temples visit. My Baedeker if you like I lend you.

(He beams at CHRISTINA.)

SMITH. There’s a thrilling offer for you.

CHRISTINA. Thank you very much. That’s very kind of you.

DR. BESSNER. A pleasure it will be.

(LOUISE enters from the left deck. She looks round briefly, then exits to the right deck, flinging a provocative glance at SMITH as she does so.)

SMITH. Ah! Luscious female with the glad eye. I'm glad someone appreciates me.

(MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES enters from the right deck. She heads straight for CHRISTINA.)

MISS FFOLIOT. I've got a much better cabin now. I *know* that man was trying to do for me. The one for you next door is rather small – but it will do quite well.

(DR. BESSNER grabs CHRISTINA's attention.)

DR. BESSNER. Present me, please.

CHRISTINA. *(Nervously.)* Er – er, Mr. B-b-besser, my aunt.

DR. BESSNER. Doctor Bessner.

(MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES gives him a cold look and the smallest of bows. She then turns her back on him and leads CHRISTINA away.)

MISS FFOLIOT. I'm not at all satisfied with what that man says about the water. I don't believe they *do* boil it. He had a very shifty look in his eye. I've ordered some Evian – but I sometimes suspect that they just fill those up from a *tap*. You'll have to boil some on the spirit lamp, Christina.

CHRISTINA. Yes, Aunt Helen.

MISS FFOLIOT. You can unpack for me presently.

CHRISTINA. I'll go and start now.

MISS FFOLIOT. Certainly not. It's safer to keep the cases locked until the boat starts. There are some suspicious looking characters hanging about.

CHRISTINA. Just as you like.

MISS FFOLIOT. And don't take out too much – until we see whether the stewards are honest.

(The STEWARD enters from the left deck and crosses to the right. MISS FFOLIOT-FFOULKES stares at him. He exits. DR. BESSNER approaches them again with a kindly manner.)

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