

## Death on the Nile (1937)

Author: Christie, Agatha

Written by: Amy Lee, First published 27 August 2003

Agatha Christie had an extensive knowledge of Egypt, having travelled there first when she was eighteen and subsequently visited several times with her archaeologist husband. The country features in several of her stories, including *Death on the Nile*, and she weaves some of her personal experience into these stories.

*Death on the Nile* centers on Linnet Ridgeway, a famous American heiress who is generally perceived as one of the luckiest people in the world. She has money, a practical and shrewd business mind, and looks. Her friends and relatives are all envious of her - except for one person, her friend Jackie de Bellefort. Jackie is a very good friend, and although she is not by any means rich, she is deeply in love and therefore considers herself one of the happiest people in the world. One day, Linnet receives a letter from Jackie, asking her to employ Simon Doyle, her fiancé, to handle her land dealings in England. Linnet gladly agrees and asks them to come over to America and stay with her. Seeing Simon and Jackie together, Linnet finally sees what is missing in her life: someone to care for her as much as Simon cares for Jackie.

A few months later, relatives, friends and business partners all receive news from Linnet Ridgeway that she is married to Simon Doyle and they have chosen to spend their honeymoon on a tour of Egypt. Andrew Pennington, Linnet's trustee, receives the news and realizes that her accounts will soon be looked into in view of the change in her marital status. He immediately sets out for Egypt with some documents for Linnet to sign, but when he finds her he pretends that it is a chance meeting. Jim Fanthorp, nephew of the prestigious English solicitor William Carmichael, is also sent to Egypt to do observe Linnet and possibly prevent any crimes that could occur. Another unexpected visitor is Jackie, who appears wherever the newly-weds are as if by chance. Although she behaves with perfect manners to the Doyles, her appearances exert a lot of pressure on Linnet, who feels rather guilty about marrying Jackie's fiancé.

Among the holiday makers aboard the cruise ship is Hercule Poirot, who senses a tension among the visitors, especially among the three young people. He is also concerned because he recognizes Jackie, now alone, as the very deeply in love young woman who he observed sharing her life plans with Simon months ago in the café of a hotel. He sensed tragedy then in Jackie's obsessive love, and senses it even more in the current unfortunate situation. The Doyles know about Poirot, and Simon asks him to persuade Jackie to stop bothering them, as Linnet is obviously breaking down because of the stress. Poirot does speak to Jackie but is sad to find that she is overwhelmed by the desire for revenge and will not listen to reason. Poirot warns her against evil thoughts and leaves it at that.

The tour takes the holiday-makers to the Rameses temple. When Simon and Linnet come out of the temple, a huge boulder suddenly rolls down the cliff and almost hits them. Simon thinks that it is Jackie's doing, but right at that moment she appears from another direction, apparently knowing nothing about the accident. Not long after this, Colonel Race, a friend of Poirot's, joins the tour in pursuit of a dangerous criminal, believed to be in disguise and mixing with the visitors. Poirot and Race begin to pay more attention to the various people in the tour. Among others, there is the outdated romance writer and her worried daughter who is trying to hide her mother's alcoholic outbreaks; the rich but eccentric old lady who has taken her poor cousin and nurse along; a nice lady and her strange grown-up son whose friend moves in Linnet's circle.

As Jackie refuses to budge from her plan to irritate the Doyles, they can only accept that they will have to leave the tour to escape from her. Jackie becomes desperate and reveals that she has a gun and is a good shot, threatening the couple quite openly. **One night, on the deck of the ship, Simon, Linnet and some others are playing bridge, but Linnet retires early because Jackie is sitting nearby and is a bit drunk.** Only Cornelia, the poor cousin of the rich lady tourist, and Fanthorp are left with Simon and Jackie. Cornelia feels uncomfortable about the situation because Jackie keeps talking to her with words meant to get at Simon. In the heat of the moment, Jackie takes out her pistol and shoots Simon in the leg. Seeing that Simon is in great pain, Jackie becomes hysterical. Confusion follows as Cornelia and Fanthorp run to get

help. Finally the nurse takes control of Jackie and stays with her all through the night, while a doctor is asked to examine Simon. He has a broken leg and has to spend the night in the doctor's room. When the action dies down, Fanthorp goes back to the deck to retrieve Jackie's pistol, but cannot find it.

The following morning everyone is greeted with a shock. When her maid goes to wake her up, Linnet is found shot to death at close range in her own room. On the wall is a letter "J" drawn with her blood. The doctor is asked to examine her and establishes the time of death. The murder weapon is very likely a small pistol such as that owned by Jackie. In fact Jackie is the obvious suspect but she has an alibi, as the nurse was with her all that night. The letter on the wall also acts in her favour, as she would hardly sign her own name if she had committed the murder. It seems to Poirot that Linnet had another enemy on board, who overheard a private conversation between himself and Jackie when she expressed the wish to kill Linnet. When questioned, Linnet's maid reveals that there is a Mr. Fleetwood who has a grudge against Linnet because she would not allow a former maid of hers to marry him.

Every passenger on board has to give an account of their whereabouts that night between midnight and two o'clock, the probable time of the murder. Many of them heard the gunshot and also a splash, as if someone has dropped something into the sea at about the same time. There is disagreement, however, as to whether the splash occurred before or after the shot, and where it came from. The maid also reports that a string of pearls is missing from Linnet's room. Poirot orders a sudden search to be made during meal time when the passengers do not have time to hide things. Interesting facts come to view as the nurse comes forward with a string of pearls, saying that her old lady patient is actually a kleptomaniac, and pleading with Poirot to hush up the matter. On close inspection, though, the pearls are found to be imitations only, quite different from Linnet's real ones. Poirot realizes that there is a professional jewellery thief on board. Back in Linnet's room, Poirot discovers two bottles of nail varnish, one full, and one almost empty, with only a small amount of what smells like red ink inside.

Not long after, Linnet's maid is found stabbed in her own room, her right hand still clutching the corner of a piece of bank note. It is possible that she had seen something and had tried to blackmail the murderer. The lady romance writer suddenly announces that she knows who the murderer is and demands to talk to Poirot. Just before she announces the names, however, someone shoots her from behind. The murder weapon is a Colt revolver, owned by Andrew Pennington, who kept it inside his drawer. The case is getting more and more complicated but the murderer is also showing more of him- or herself. Poirot has pieced together the clues and arrives at the truth. Tim Allenton, the strange young man with a nice mother, is in fact an experienced jewellery thief, working in close co-operation with a friend of Linnet's. He admits to stealing her pearls and substituting them with fake ones, but agrees to return them if Poirot will let him go. Pennington's scheme is exposed and he admits that he set out to Egypt hoping to make Linnet sign some papers in order to cover up his misuse of funds.

As to the murders, they were committed by not one person, but two. Jackie was the brains behind the plan, but only because she was so much in love with Simon that she was prepared to do whatever he wanted. He wanted Linnet's money, so Jackie staged the whole event of Linnet meeting Simon, being attracted to him, and then stealing him from Jackie and marrying him. This gives Jackie a clear motive for murder, but she also ensures she has an alibi. On the night when Jackie shot Simon on the deck, the gun was actually empty. The blood coming from Simon's leg was red ink. When Jackie broke down and the others went for help, Simon quickly ran to Linnet's room, shot her at close range, then ran back to the deck, shot himself in the leg, and dropped the pistol into the sea. So when the doctor came, what he saw was real blood and a real injury. Unfortunately the maid saw Simon go into Linnet's room. She tried to blackmail Simon, so Jackie had to kill her. The lady romance writer saw this and tried to tell Poirot, so Jackie had to act quickly and went into Pennington's room, which was nearby, took his revolver, and shot her.

Poirot tells his story and Simon confesses to the crime. Jackie also sees that she has done wrong by letting evil enter her heart. When the ship goes ashore, Jackie seizes an opportunity and shoots Simon before killing herself. She had a pair of pistols with her, and although Poirot was aware of this, he let her choose this way out.

**Director: John Guillermin**

**Agatha Christie wrote the novel.**

**Anthony Shaffer wrote the screenplay**

**First Showing: 1978**

**Cast overview, first billed only:**

Peter Ustinov played Hercule Poirot

Louise Bourget played Jane Birkin

Linnet Ridgeway Doyle played Loise Bourget

Bette Davis played Marie Van Schuyler

Mia Farrow played Jacqueline De Bellefort

John Finch played James Ferguson

Olivia Hussey played Rosalie Otterbourne

George Kennedy played Andrew Pennington

Angela Lansbury played Salome Otterbourne

Simon MacCorkindale played Simon Doyle

David Niven played Colonel Johnny Race

Maggie Smith played Miss Bowers

Jack Warden played Doctor Ludwig Bessner