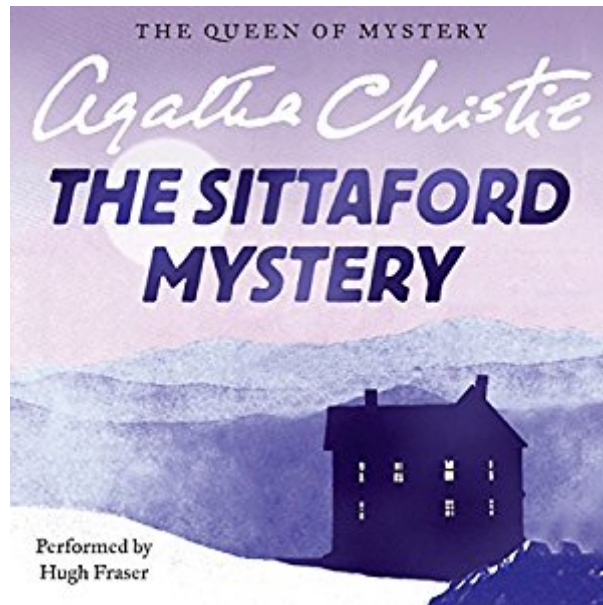


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The Sittaford Mystery



Synopsis

In a remote house in the middle of Dartmoor, six shadowy figures huddle around a table for a seance. Tension rises as the spirits spell out a chilling message: "Captain Trevelyan... dead... murder." Is this black magic or simply a macabre joke? The only way to be certain is to locate Captain Trevelyan. Unfortunately, his home is six miles away and, with snowdrifts blocking the roads, someone will have to make the journey on foot.... This title was previously published as *The Murder at Hazelmoor*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Sittaford Mystery (American title: *Murder at Hazelmoor*) opens on a wintry afternoon at the large mansion known as Sittaford House. The entertainment for the day is a seance which suggests that Captain Trevelyan, owner of the house, may be dead. The Captain has leased his home to a Mrs. Willett and her daughter Violet. These South African women had been so insistent on spending a typical British winter in the home that they convinced Trevelyan to move into a smaller home in nearby Exhampton. Major Burnaby, a friend of Trevelyan's, is present at the seance. Although he does not believe in spiritualism, he decides to check up on his friend and finds that Trevelyan has been murdered. From this intriguing beginning the story moves to Trevelyan's sister, two nephews, and niece, all of whom had motive and opportunity to commit the crime. Also, a convict has escaped from a nearby prison and is added to the list of suspects along with the mysterious Willetts. Christie weaves the murder beautifully into the novel's second plot which is the unexplained presence of the

Willets in Sittaford. This book, notable for its outstanding description of the stark and isolated setting, also introduces a gimmick that Christie will use again in her novella "Three Blind Mice."

US readers used to know this one as "Murder at Hazelmoor," but nowadays they call it by the name Christie used, "The Sittaford Mystery." What a dull title! I guess the experience of slow sales with "The Listerdale Mystery" didn't teach her much, for this one also seems often to fall between the cracks when fans compile lists of Christie's best books, and I think it's the colorless title that does it, for otherwise this book is nearly the equal of the two midperiod masterpieces that followed it, CARDS ON THE TABLE and DEATH ON THE NILE. It lacks the complete assurance of the sleight-of-hand play of CARDS, and of course it is entirely missing the tragic dimension of the opera that is DEATH ON THE NILE, but THE SITTAFFORD MYSTERY is indeed a wonderful treat for Christie readers. I wonder, if Poirot was in it, if it would be better known? Instead we have the admirable Inspector Narracott, and his opposite number, the inventive, spirited, dazzling heroine Emily Trefusis, a sparkling Katharine Hepburn type no man can resist or outwit. Things look bleak of Emily at the beginning of the story as her sad sack boyfriend, Jim Pearson, is arrested for the murder of his uncle, Captain Trevelyan, in a little English village near Dartmoor--Sittaford--or Hazelmoor--one of them, I suppose. All I remember is that the book begins with a spooky seance of table turning, when the table raps, raps, raps, revealing Trevelyan's name and to the surprise of almost everyone present, the spirit voices say he has died! Six miles away, his body lies on the floor of his home, sandbagged, in the middle of a ferocious, historic blizzard. Several other rough things happen to Emily during the course of the story, but she never loses heart, or if she does, it's only momentarily, and her common sense and high spirits come to her rescue, as she attempts to clear Jim's name and to free him from prison, even as he's battling an open and shut case against him. Everyone in Sittaford has a secret. I've read the book a good dozen times over the years, and still the utter simplicity, daring, and good humor of Christie's writing dazzles me every time I plunge in again. In some ways, this is the book to recommend to those who don't like Agatha Christie. It has everything Jane Austen has, and a little bit more.

Ahhh. This is more like! A mystery reader/fan must, every now and then, return to the books of the great Dame Agatha. Yet, it becomes harder and harder to find one that perhaps hasn't been read for a while. It's important also, not to get sucked into a recently read title now masquerading under a new name. I'm sure that at some time in my past, I've read The Murder at Hazelmoor, but not recently enough to have given the subsequently-named The Sittaford Mystery a familiar aura.

S'wonderful, indeed.No one captured the thirties quite so eloquently as did Christie, and this book is a prime example of her art. There is no Miss Marple or Hercule Poirot in this episode, however. Rather we have an intrepid young woman named Emily Trefusis, who has the misfortune to be engaged to the nephew of a man who is found murdered, after his death had been exposed by a 'table turning.' This is a version of the Ouija Board, which was enormously popular in the first decades of the 20th century.Captain Trevelyan, who was rather fond of money, had been prevailed upon to let out his own Sittaford House to a widow and her daughter, apparently just arrived from South Africa. Never married, the Captain had few heirs: one sister and the three children of another, now deceased. It is James Pearson, one of this latter group, who has captured the fair Emily, and finds himself in jail under suspicion of having done in his uncle.Emily knows better, however, and with the aid and assistance of a live-wire newspaper reporter, Charles Enderby, sets out to prove his innocence. Emily and Charles quite put in me mind of Tommy and Tuppence with their humorous bantering. (Perhaps they were the inspiration for Dame Agatha, as well.)The prevalence and importance of trains and their schedules take one back to that time when almost no one owned an auto of their own, and walking twelve miles (round-trip, to be sure) for a visit was hardly any kind of bother at all. If one was fit, that is.Village life along the moors is captured perfectly, along with the various eccentrics who reside there. It's a cracking good puzzle, with all the clues neatly laid out for the intrepid sleuth. A visit to Agatha Christie's England is good for us all every now and then. I'm looking forward to the next one!

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