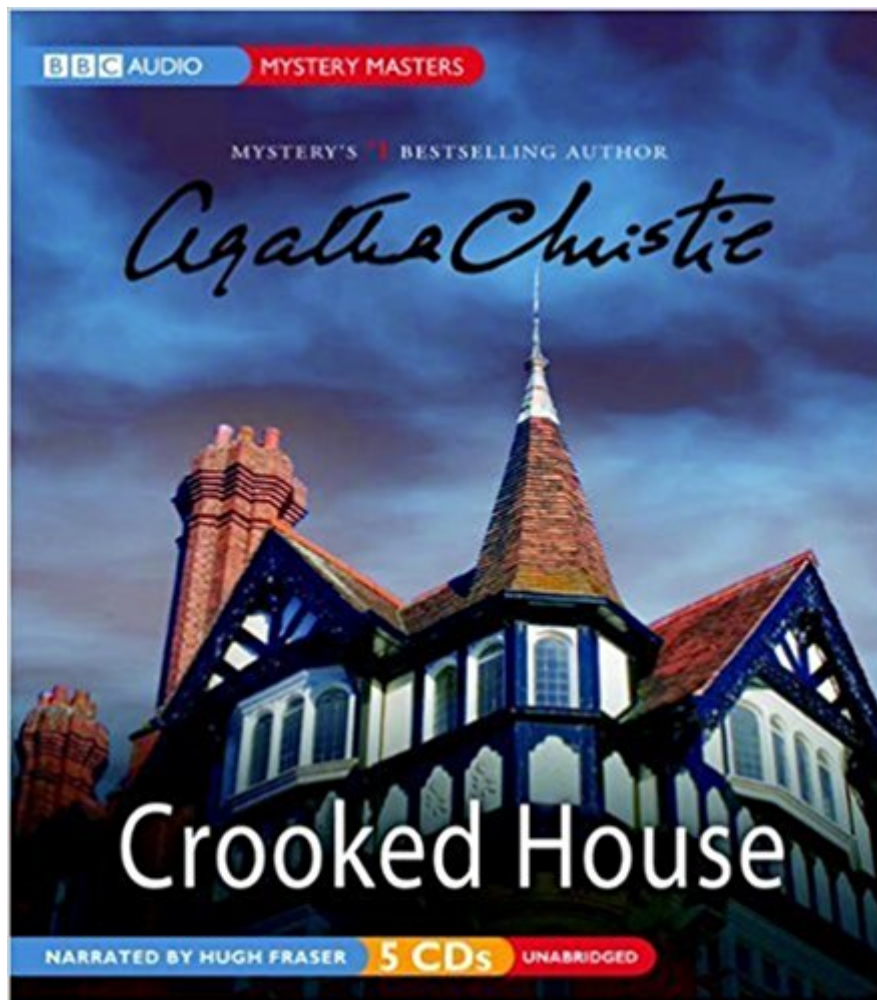


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Crooked House (Mystery Masters)



Synopsis

In a sprawling mansion in affluent Swinly Dean, Aristide Leonides lies dead from barbiturate poisoning. An accident? Not likely. In fact, suspicion has already fallen on his luscious widow, a cunning, much-younger beauty rumored to have been engaged in an illicit affair. But criminologist Charles Hayward, who's in love with the dead man's granddaughter Sophia, has his suspicions about the whole unsavory Leonides clan. Can he solve the puzzle without implicating Sophia? Christie considered this novel, dramatically read by Hugh Fraser, one of her best.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'Writing Crooked House was pure pleasure and I feel justified in my belief that it is one of my best.' Agatha Christie 'Her sleight of hand is impeccable.' New Statesman 'Knock-out!' Saturday Review of Literature

The Leonides are one big happy family living in a sprawling, ramshackle mansion. That is until the head of the household, Aristide, is murdered with a fatal barbiturate injection. Suspicion naturally falls on the old man's young widow, fifty years his junior. But the murderer has reckoned without the tenacity of Charles Hayward, fiancé of the late millionaire's granddaughter.

This is a period book written in post-war Britain. The book is written in first person from the view of a man in love with a woman whose grandfather has recently been murdered. She and her entire

family fervently hope the killer is the young wife of the grandfather, but they also harbor an equally fervent belief that the killer is actually one of them. The young woman will not marry until the cloud over the family is dispelled, so her lover, along with Scotland Yard, must solve the murder mystery.

“Writing *Crooked House* was pure pleasure and I feel justified in my belief that it is one of my best.” (Agatha Christie) I agree with Christie here. “*Crooked House*” is one of her best. One thing that Christie always excelled at was portraying the interaction between members of a group, be it the Leonides family in “*Crooked House*,” the “guests” in [book:*And Then There Were None*|16299], or the tourists in [book:*Evil Under the Sun*|16305]. These aren’t mindless stereotypes - they are people. “*Crooked House*” is a non-series novel - no Poirot, Miss Marple or (thank heavens!) Tommy and Tuppence. The story is narrated by Charles Hayward, who is engaged to Sophia Leonides, granddaughter of Aristide Leonides, a Greek who came to England decades earlier and made a fortune. He married the daughter of an English squire and had eight children. At the time of the events in “*Crooked House*,” only two sons - Roger and Philip are still live. In addition to Aristide, the residents of the household are his young second wife, Brenda; Edith de Haviland, his first wife’s sister; Roger and his wife Clemency, a scientist; Philip, his wife Magda, an actress, and their three children - Sophia, Eustace, and Josephine; Laurence Brown, the children’s tutor; and Nannie, nanny to the Aristide’s children and now his grandchildren. Sophia describes her grandfather to Charles: “He’s rather a person, my grandfather. He’s over eighty, about four foot ten, and everybody else looks rather dim beside him.” Charles asks if she likes her grandfather. “Better than anyone in the world,” said Sophia. Aristide is devoted to his family and does everything he can for them. He places Roger at the head of the family business and settles money on him and Philip. The family members want for nothing - which is probably part of the problem. They have nothing to strive for. Consider Magda: “She’s been able to pick and choose, and to go where she likes and occasionally to put up the money to finance a show where she’s fancied a certain part - usually the last part in the world to suit her.” She’s not the only one. As for her husband Philip: “Writes books. Can’t think why. Nobody wants to read them. All about obscure historical details.” (Edith de Haviland, his aunt) Roger has no mind for business and has run the family business into ruin. His wife Clemency is jealous of Aristide’s interference in their life and wants Roger all to herself. When Aristide is killed, suspicion naturally falls upon his young wife Brenda, thirty-four to his eighty-five. She gave him his regular injections of insulin. It was the last injection that killed him - instead of insulin, it contained eserine, which came from his eye drops. Brenda also appears to be infatuated with Laurence Brown, the children’s tutor, who is considerably closer in age to her. Of course, she’s

also the outsider in the family - much younger than her late husband, obviously married him for his money, and has never fit in. Like Sophia says, "...it won't matter - so long as the right person killed him." The right person meaning, of course, Brenda. However, when Charles arrives at the family home, Three Gables, and actually meets Brenda, he does not believe she could kill anyone. He also does not think Laurence Brown, the tutor, whom Sophia describes as a "scared rabbit" is capable of such a thing. Charles begins his own investigation with the help of Chief Inspector Taverner and Detective Sergeant Lamb. Meanwhile, little Josephine Leonides, Sophia's younger sister, listens at doors, takes notes, and sees and hears a great deal more than she should. The killer is not finished yet. There is another murder and an attempted murder - and then the stark, awful truth is revealed. I've read most of Christie's books, but "Crooked House" has the most chilling, shocking murderer of them all. This one will really stay in your mind. Very recommended.

This is my all-time favorite Christie and I've read it several times over the years. I was pleased to read in this edition that Dame Agatha also considered this to be one of her best. I bought this copy for my husband, who loves her books but had never read this one. He has mentioned it over and over since finishing it. It is truly one of a kind and if you like her writing you should get ready to see a particularly dark corner of her mind.

I used to love Dame Agatha when I was a teenager. Back in the day, she used to easily fool and astonish me with the big reveal. In "Crooked House", however, she practically screams who the culprit is less than halfway through the book. I'm not saying I "guessed" whodunnit; I mean she laid it on so thick, it was hard to miss, if you were paying attention to the details at all. Oh, well. Maybe I've grown more sophisticated, or maybe she lost her touch in this later book-- dunno. At least, Agatha doesn't "cheat" by hiding necessary clues. And the writing is fluid, and the characters moderately interesting. Worth reading if you're bored and it's on sale.

"Writing Crooked House was pure pleasure and I feel justified in my belief that it is one of my best," said Dame Agatha about this book CROOKED HOUSE. How can you not want to read this book with that introduction? If you are looking for a "comfort read" which for me are English mysteries à la Christie, this one shouldn't disappoint. The rather eccentric Patriarch of an extended family dies suddenly and the son of the local detective, who is engaged to the granddaughter of the Patriarch, is asked by his father to get the inside information on the family as they think it's an inside job. Many of the family members have the motive and means for murder, but Christie leaves some telling clues

to point to the actual killer. I suspected about everybody, but found it satisfying that there were reasons to suspect the real killer above other suspects. I can see why Christie found this a fun book to write--it is fairly straightforward but imaginative in its plot. Glad Christie found so much joy in writing it. You will probably find joy in reading it if you want to escape to the English Countryside and solve a crime with Dame Agatha dropping clues for you.

Certainly not one of the best of hers that I have read. I was anxious for it to be over.

Crooked House by Dame Agatha Christie appeared in 1948. The novel concerns the murder of a wealthy Greek restaurant owner Aristide Leonides. The old chap had married a much younger woman Brenda who was a waitress at the time of their nuptials. The book is narrated by Charles Hayward a Scotland Yard criminologist whose father is also a policeman involved in the case. Charles is in love with Sophie Leonides one of old Aristide's grandchildren. Her family is eccentric to say the least. The family consists of her ineffectual father Phillip and his older brother of whom he is jealous. Crooked House is an evil place and the murderer is hard to discover. The book is written in Christie's simple style and required only a few hours of reading. If you want a short mystery novel to while away a few hours this Christie classic will fit your needs to a tee!

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