

POIROT

THE QUEEN OF MYSTERY

# Agatha Christie



Lord  
Edgware  
Dies

Previously published as  
Thirteen at Dinner

A Hercule Poirot Mystery

**Agatha Christie**

**Lord Edgware Dies**

**A Hercule Poirot Mystery**

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## **Dedication**

*To Dr. and Mrs. Campbell Thompson*

## Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[1](#) A Theatrical Party

[2](#) A Supper Party

[3](#) The Man with the Gold Tooth

[4](#) An Interview

[5](#) Murder

[6](#) The Widow

[7](#) The Secretary

[8](#) Possibilities

[9](#) The Second Death

[10](#) Jenny Driver

[11](#) The Egoist

[12](#) The Daughter

[13](#) The Nephew

[14](#) Five Questions

[15](#) Sir Montagu Corner

[16](#) Mainly Discussion

[17](#) The Butler

[18](#) The Other Man

- [19](#) A Great Lady
- [20](#) The Taxi Driver
- [21](#) Ronald's Story
- [22](#) Strange Behaviour of Hercule Poirot
- [23](#) The Letter
- [24](#) News from Paris
- [25](#) A Luncheon Party
- [26](#) Paris?
- [27](#) Concerning Pince-Nez
- [28](#) Poirot Asks a Few Questions
- [29](#) Poirot Speaks
- [30](#) The Story
- [31](#) A Human Document

[About the Author](#)

[Other Books by Agatha Christie](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

## One

### A THEATRICAL PARTY

The memory of the public is short. Already the intense interest and excitement aroused by the murder of George Alfred St. Vincent Marsh, fourth Baron Edgware, is a thing past and forgotten. Newer sensations have taken its place.

My friend, Hercule Poirot, was never openly mentioned in connection with the case. This, I may say, was entirely in accordance with his own wishes. He did not choose to appear in it. The credit went elsewhere—and that is how he wished it to be. Moreover, from Poirot's own peculiar private point of view, the case was one of his failures. He always swears that it was the chance remark of a stranger in the street that put him on the right track.

However that may be, it was his genius that discovered the truth of the affair. But for Hercule Poirot I doubt if the crime would have been brought home to its perpetrator.

I feel therefore that the time has come for me to set down all I know of the affair in black and white. I know the ins and outs of the case thoroughly and I may also mention that I shall be fulfilling the wishes of a very fascinating lady in so doing.

I have often recalled that day in Poirot's prim neat little sitting room when, striding up and down a particular strip of carpet, my little friend gave us his masterly and astounding résumé of the case. I am going to begin my narrative where he did on that occasion—at a London theatre in June of last year.

Carlotta Adams was quite the rage in London at that moment. The year before she had given a couple of matinees which had been a wild success. This year she had had a three weeks' season of which this was the last night but one.

Carlotta Adams was an American girl with the most amazing talent for single-handed sketches unhampered by makeup or scenery. She seemed to

speaking every language with ease. Her sketch of an evening in a foreign hotel was really wonderful. In turn, American tourists, German tourists, middle-class English families, questionable ladies, impoverished Russian aristocrats and weary discreet waiters all flitted across the scene.

Her sketches went from grave to gay and back again. Her dying Czecho-Slovakian woman in hospital brought a lump to the throat. A minute later we were rocking with laughter as a dentist plied his trade and chatted amiably with his victims.

Her programme closed with what she announced as "Some Imitations."

Here again, she was amazingly clever. Without makeup of any kind, her features seemed to dissolve suddenly and reform themselves into those of a famous politician, or a well-known actress, or a society beauty. In each character she gave a short typical speech. These speeches, by the way, were remarkably clever. They seemed to hit off every weakness of the subject selected.

One of her last impersonations was Jane Wilkinson—a talented young American actress well-known in London. It was really very clever. Inanities slipped off her tongue charged with some powerful emotional appeal so that in spite of yourself you felt that each word was uttered with some potent and fundamental meaning. Her voice, exquisitely toned, with a deep husky note in it, was intoxicating. The restrained gestures, each strangely significant, the slightly swaying body, the impression even, of strong physical beauty—how she did it, I cannot think!

I had always been an admirer of the beautiful Jane Wilkinson. She had thrilled me in her emotional parts, and I had always maintained in face of those who admitted her beauty but declared she was no actress, that she had considerable histrionic powers.

It was a little uncanny to hear that well-known, slightly husky voice with the fatalistic drop in it that had stirred me so often, and to watch that seemingly poignant gesture of the slowly closing and unclosing hand, and the sudden throw back of the head with the hair shaken back from the face that I realized she always gave at the close of a dramatic scene.

Jane Wilkinson was one of those actresses who had left the stage on her marriage only to return to it a couple of years later.

Three years ago she had married the wealthy but slightly eccentric Lord Edgware. Rumour went that she left him shortly afterwards. At any rate

eighteen months after the marriage, she was acting for the films in America, and had this season appeared in a successful play in London.

Watching Carlotta Adams' clever but perhaps slightly malicious imitation, it occurred to me to wonder how much imitations were regarded by the subject selected. Were they pleased at the notoriety—at the advertisement it afforded? Or were they annoyed at what was, after all, a deliberate exposing of the tricks of their trade? Was not Carlotta Adams in the position of the rival conjurer who says: "Oh! this is an old trick! Very simple. I'll show you how this one's done!"

I decided that if *I* were the subject in question, I should be very much annoyed. I should, of course, conceal my vexation, but decidedly I should not like it. One would need great broadmindedness and a distinct sense of humour to appreciate such a merciless exposé.

I had just arrived at these conclusions when the delightful husky laugh from the stage was echoed from behind me.

I turned my head sharply. In the seat immediately behind mine, leaning forward with her lips slightly parted, was the subject of the present imitation—Lady Edgware, better known as Jane Wilkinson.

I realized immediately that my deductions had been all wrong. She was leaning forward, her lips parted, with an expression of delight and excitement in her eyes.

As the "imitation" finished, she applauded loudly, laughing and turning to her companion, a tall extremely good-looking man, of the Greek god type, whose face I recognized as one better known on the screen than on the stage. It was Bryan Martin, the hero of the screen most popular at the moment. He and Jane Wilkinson had been starred together in several screen productions.

"Marvellous, isn't she?" Lady Edgware was saying.

He laughed.

"Jane—you look all excited."

"Well, she really is too wonderful! Heaps better than I thought she'd be."

I did not catch Bryan Martin's amused rejoinder. Carlotta Adams had started on a fresh improvisation.

What happened later is, I shall always think, a very curious coincidence. After the theatre, Poirot and I went on to supper at the Savoy.

At the very next table to ours were Lady Edgware, Bryan Martin and two other people whom I did not know. I pointed them out to Poirot and, as I was doing so, another couple came and took their places at the table beyond that again. The woman's face was familiar and yet strangely enough, for the moment I could not place it.

Then suddenly I realized that it was Carlotta Adams at whom I was staring! The man I did not know. He was well-groomed, with a cheerful, somewhat vacuous face. Not a type that I admire.

Carlotta Adams was dressed very inconspicuously in black. Hers was not a face to command instant attention or recognition. It was one of those mobile sensitive faces that preeminently lend themselves to the art of mimicry. It could take on an alien character easily, but it had no very recognizable character of its own.

I imparted these reflections of mine to Poirot. He listened attentively, his egg-shaped head cocked slightly to one side whilst he darted a sharp glance at the two tables in question.

"So that is Lady Edgware? Yes, I remember—I have seen her act. She is *belle femme*."

"And a fine actress too."

"Possibly."

"You don't seem convinced."

"I think it would depend on the setting, my friend. If she is the centre of the play, if all revolves round her—yes, then she could play her part. I doubt if she could play a small part adequately or even what is called a character part. The play must be written *about* her and *for* her. She appears to me of the type of women who are interested only in themselves." He paused and then added rather unexpectedly: "Such people go through life in great danger."

"Danger?" I said, surprised.

"I have used a word that surprises you, I see, *mon ami*. Yes, danger. Because, you see, a woman like that sees only one thing—herself. Such women see nothing of the dangers and hazards that surround them—the million conflicting interests and relationships of life. No, they see only their own forward path. And so—sooner or later—disaster."

I was interested. I confessed to myself that such a point of view would not have struck me.

"And the other?" I asked.

“Miss Adams?”

His gaze swept to her table.

“Well?” he said, smiling. “What do you want me to say about her?”

“Only how she strikes you.”

“*Mon cher*, am I tonight the fortune-teller who reads the palm and tells the character?”

“You could do it better than most,” I rejoined.

“It is a very pretty faith that you have in me, Hastings. It touches me. Do you not know, my friend, that each one of us is a dark mystery, a maze of conflicting passions and desires and attitudes? *Mais oui, c’est vrai*. One makes one’s little judgments—but nine times out of ten one is wrong.”

“Not Hercule Poirot,” I said, smiling.

“Even Hercule Poirot! Oh! I know very well that you have always a little idea that I am conceited, but, indeed, I assure you, I am really a very humble person.”

I laughed.

“You—humble!”

“It is so. Except—I confess it—that I am a little proud of my moustaches. Nowhere in London have I observed anything to compare with them.”

“You are quite safe,” I said dryly. “You won’t. So you are not going to risk judgment on Carlotta Adams?”

“*Elle est artiste!*” said Poirot simply. “That covers nearly all, does it not?”

“Anyway, you don’t consider that she walks through life in peril?”

“We all do that, my friend,” said Poirot gravely. “Misfortune may always be waiting to rush out upon us. But as to your question, Miss Adams, I think, will succeed. She is shrewd and she is something more. You observed without doubt that she is a Jewess?”

I had not. But now that he mentioned it, I saw the faint traces of Semitic ancestry. Poirot nodded.

“It makes for success—that. Though there is still one avenue of danger—since it is of danger we are talking.”

“You mean?”

“Love of money. Love of money might lead such a one from the prudent and cautious path.”

“It might do that to all of us,” I said.