


POIROT

THE QUEEN OF MYSTERY

# Agatha Christie



## SAD CYPRESS

*A Hercule Poirot Mystery*

**Agatha Christie**

**Sad Cypress**

**A Hercule Poirot Mystery**

HARPER

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## Dedication

*To Peter and Peggy McLeod*

## Epigraph

Come away, come away, death,  
And in sad cypress let me be laid;  
Fly away, fly away, breath!  
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.  
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew  
O prepare it;  
My part of death no one so true;  
Did share it.

*Shakespeare*

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## Prologue

*“Elinor Katharine Carlisle. You stand charged upon this indictment with the murder of Mary Gerrard upon the 27th of July last. Are you guilty or not guilty?”*

Elinor Carlisle stood very straight, her head raised. It was a graceful head, the modelling of the bones sharp and well-defined. The eyes were a deep vivid blue, the hair black. The brows had been plucked to a faint thin line.

There was a silence—quite a noticeable silence.

Sir Edwin Bulmer, Counsel for the Defence, felt a thrill of dismay.

He thought:

*“My God, she’s going to plead guilty... She’s lost her nerve....”*

Elinor Carlisle’s lips parted. She said:

*“Not guilty.”*

Counsel for the Defence sank back. He passed a handkerchief over his brow, realizing that it had been a near shave.

Sir Samuel Attenbury was on his feet, outlining the case for the Crown.

*“May it please your lordship, gentlemen of the jury, on the 27th of July, at half past three in the afternoon, Mary Gerrard died at Hunterbury, Maidensford....”*

His voice ran on, sonorous and pleasing to the ear. It lulled Elinor almost into unconsciousness. From the simple and concise narrative, only an occasional phrase seeped through to her conscious mind.

*“...case a peculiarly simple and straightforward one...*

*“...It is the duty of the Crown...prove motive and opportunity...*

*“...No one, as far as can be seen, had any motive to kill this unfortunate girl, Mary Gerrard, except the accused. A young girl of a charming disposition—liked by everybody—without, one would have said, an enemy in the world....”*

*Mary, Mary Gerrard! How far away it all seemed now. Not real any longer....*

“...Your attention will be particularly directed to the following considerations:

1. What opportunities and means had the accused for administering poison?
2. What motive had she for so doing?

“It will be my duty to call before you witnesses who can help you to form a true conclusion on these matters....

“...As regards the poisoning of Mary Gerrard, I shall endeavour to show you that *no one had any opportunity* to commit this crime except the accused....”

Elinor felt as though imprisoned in a thick mist. Detached words came drifting through the fog.

“...Sandwiches...

“...Fish paste...

“...Empty house...”

The words stabbed through the thick enveloping blanket of Elinor’s thoughts—pin-pricks through a heavy muffling veil....

The court. Faces. Rows and rows of faces! One particular face with a big black moustache and shrewd eyes. Hercule Poirot, his head a little on one side, his eyes thoughtful, was watching her.

She thought: He’s trying to see just exactly *why* I did it... He’s trying to get inside my head to see what I thought—what I felt....

*Felt...?* A little blur—a slight sense of shock... Roddy’s face—his dear, *dear* face with its long nose, its sensitive mouth... Roddy! Always Roddy—always, ever since she could remember...since those days at Hunterbury amongst the raspberries and up in the warren and down by the brook. Roddy—Roddy—Roddy...

Other faces! Nurse O’Brien, her mouth slightly open, her freckled fresh face thrust forward. Nurse Hopkins looking smug—smug and implacable. Peter Lord’s face—Peter Lord—so kind, so sensible, so—so *comforting!* But looking now—what was it—*lost?* Yes—lost! Minding—minding all this frightfully! While she herself, the star performer, didn’t mind at all!

Here she was, quite calm and cold, standing in the dock, accused of murder. She was in court.

Something stirred; the folds of blanket round her brain lightened—became mere wraiths. In *court!...People...*

People leaning forward, their lips parted a little, their eyes agog, staring at her, Elinor, with a horrible ghoulisn enjoyment—listening with a kind of slow, cruel relish to what that tall man with the Jewish nose was saying about her.

“The facts in this case are extremely easy to follow and are not in dispute. I shall put them before you quite simply. From the very beginning...”

Elinor thought:

“The beginning... The beginning? The day that horrible anonymous letter came! *That* was the beginning of it....”

## PART I