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The Mysterious Affair At Styles: A Hercule Poirot Mystery



Synopsis

Captain Arthur Hastings, invalided in the Great War, is recuperating as a guest of John Cavendish at Styles Court, the "country-place" of John's autocratic old aunt, Emily Inglethorpe - she of a sizeable fortune, and so recently remarried to a man 20 years her junior. When Emily's sudden heart attack is found to be attributable to strychnine, Hastings recruits an old friend, now retired, to aid in the local investigation. With impeccable timing, Hercule Poirot, the famous Belgian detective, makes his dramatic entrance into the pages of crime literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Meet Hercule Poirot. This is the story that introduces Christie's most represented character. Poirot is certainly one of the most preferred of her characters and Christie returns to to him many times over. This mystery occurs in a slower part of the countryside, where the recent Great War is still felt. We also meet Captain Hastings here, recuperating from wounds received in the war, visiting with the family of an old friend. His friend lives with his wife in the home of his mother, her recently acquired much younger, and rather poorly liked, husband, a brother and other assorted guests of the family. Once the tensions in the household become more pronounced, it should come as no surprise that murder follows. While everyone seems stunned, most have their own suspicions about who "done it." From the village nearby appears the Belgian wonder, Poirot, and what happens next is what you might expect. Hastings seems sure he can solve this case easily, and it's great fun to see the little man with the "gray cells" show him that there is more than meets the eye. It's no wonder that Agatha came back so many times to use Poirot in so many stories.

This book is a bit different from other Christie's that I have read in that the detective, Poirot, doesn't appear until several chapters in and almost seems to be a secondary character. It's a point of view that I found intriguing, and hilarious! The narrator absolutely cracked me up! He is so dismissive of that 'funny little' Poirot, sure that the man is either crazy or absurd and equally sure that he himself will solve the crime. The mystery takes place at a country manor home that is complete with servants and where no one seems to have to work for a living--so very British! The murder suspect seems to be ironclad guilty but leave it to Poirot to find that sliver of doubt. There were so many red herrings in the book that I totally gave up on trying to solve the mystery. Poirot certainly does nothing to help, agreeing with every ridiculous notion that the narrator has and leaving the readers to wonder what solution is untangling in his genius brain or if he is indeed the nitwit the narrator makes him out to be. Still, I was shocked by the ending. Truly never even saw it coming and that is what makes Christie, still, the Grandest Dame of them all! Jolly good show.

The wealthy Mrs. Emily Inglethorp is the center of her universe. On her estate, the Styles, there is, of course, her husband Alfred. Actually he is her second husband; her first husband had passed on, leaving her with his estate and two sons: Lawrence and John. Both are grown up now, but are still living with her. Lawrence is the younger son, is somewhat taciturn, remains single, and once was a student of medicine ... John seems unimaginative, is unhappy about the size of his allowance, and is married to Mary. Unfortunately, their marriage is showing signs of fracture - Mary has been spending a lot of time with that mysterious doctor Bauerstein who specializes in poisons ... Emily is quiet fond of Cynthia: her protegee. Cynthia was a poor orphan, but now she is all grown up and works as a nurse in a dispensary which is well stocked with poisons ... And then there is Evelyn - Emily took her on to do odd jobs. Much to Emily's annoyance, Evelyn begins filling her ear with poisonous talk about her husband's trysts ... And lastly, there is Mr. Hastings. He is taking advantage of his convalesce from the war to visit his old friend John. Luckily, he had arrived just in time for Emily's big charity event for the war. For the affair, Emily had invited a group of Belgian refugees to attend. As it often happens in life, one of Hastings' dear old friends - whom he hadn't seen in years - M. Poirot, the famous private detective, is among them. The planned charity affair will go off without a hitch, unfortunately, there is a second planned event about to befall someone in a most convulsive way ... Overall, this is a wonderfully complex story. There are clues and red herrings galore.

I read this years ago and didn't keep the book then. I used to go through many used books (e.g.,

from donation sites) and would only keep or buy newer books in great condition if I really liked the book and wanted it available to reread any time night or day. The problem is that I have gone through probably at least 5000 books since high school and can't remember all, so now I document what I have read and why I didn't keep the book. Agatha Christie wrote so many books that some are much better than others and I only want to keep those of hers that I really enjoy and want to reread mainly because of space and I love a variety of authors' works. This book is NOT one of her better books, which is understandable because this was her first published book. Most if not all authors improve their writing styles when writing books over time; Christie was one of these. Her Poirot was more interesting in her later books. Also using Hastings as the primary isn't so good; he is too obtuse and seems to complain about it, which is irritating. He is smarter in the books than the person presented in the BBC productions, but still he is one reason I prefer non-Poirot books.

This is the celebrated author's first novel. Her later work is crafted better, but I still enjoyed this. The PBS television adaptation is very faithful to the book, by the way. The Kindle edition includes a bonus book about two young amateur detectives which is not as good.

Agatha Christie's first Poirot novel, "The Mysterious Affair at Styles" is the first of her books that I've read. And, an excellent book it is. Wonderful writing, descriptions, characters, and plot. Lots of little twists and turns. An Excellent 5 stars out of 5. Note: the particular Kindle version that I got here at back in April of 2012 has no illustrations. There are several places in the book where Poirot is showing people pieces of paper that we're supposed to see. And we don't. It looks like there have been oodles of new versions here, so maybe that's been fixed by now (though my version was free and the others here are not).

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