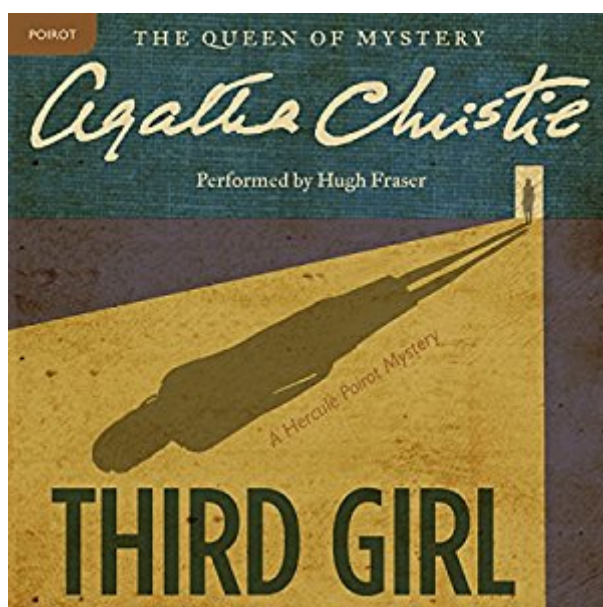


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Third Girl: A Hercule Poirot Mystery



Synopsis

Three young women share a London flat. The first is a coolly efficient secretary. The second is an artist. The third interrupts Hercule Poirot's breakfast, confessing that she is a murderer - and then promptly disappears. Slowly, Poirot learns of the rumors surrounding the mysterious third girl, her family, and her disappearance. Yet hard evidence is needed before the great detective can pronounce her guilty, innocent, or insane.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Whose work are we actually reading at this point? There were major differences in punctuation, word choices, and scene breaks between the original Collins and Dodd Mead editions of this novel. There were further differences between the Dodd Mead editions republished by Random House/Avenel and the Dodd Mead editions republished by Simon & Shuster/Pocket. There are further additions still in the recent Signet, Berkley, and Leventhal and Black editions. For every publishing house putting out her works, there seem to be a new batch of editors altering Agatha Christie's words and the sound of her voice. Here the publishers at Collins, dissatisfied with their own earlier efforts, put still more distance between author and public with a "New Ed" edition. What's the matter with these publishers? Whose voice do they think we want to hear when we sit down to a novel by Agatha Christie? And what will she sound like twenty years from now? It's frightening that her estate has failed to see the importance of guarding her words as she wrote them. Please tell me I'm not the only one here who senses that a crime has been committed.

This book, first published in 1966, gives us a very different look at London than the wonderful novels Christie wrote in the 40's did. Poirot amongst the swinging Bohemians? Well, it happens. Christie and Poirot both changed with the times and the result is interesting, although probably not her best work. The term "third girl" refers to a way of leasing flats, very similar to the term "roommates" in the US. One girl rents a flat, then advertises for a second and third girl to share accommodations and expenses. Ariadne Oliver once more assists Poirot in this tale of impersonation, drugs, smuggling, forgery, blackmail, and a young girl who can't remember committing a murder. This is a great commentary on English life in the sixties and, as always, excellent plotting and character development in the Christie tradition.

By the time *Third Girl* came out, in 1966, even the author recognized that her books were not as good as they used to be. Christie's alter ego, the scatty mystery writer Ariadne Oliver, plays a large role in *Third Girl*, and in one scene Mrs. Oliver addresses an imaginary publisher about her latest manuscript: "There you are, and I hope you like it! *I* don't. I think it's *lousy*!" One can imagine that Christie is addressing her reading public through Mrs. Oliver. Nevertheless, even with Christie's powers on the wane, *Third Girl* is an agreeable read, a comfortable book for an afternoon spent on the couch by the fire. It begins with an idea that is most intriguing: a young woman comes to Poirot and is not sure if she has committed a murder or not. Of course, we all have to wonder, how is it possible that she does not know? There are a few twists and turns and there is also Christie's take on life in the early sixties, which is interesting in itself. Unfortunately, *Third Girl* lacks the crisp writing that can be found in many of Christie's earlier books. The dialogue rambles, and both Poirot and Oliver and even some of the other characters sound like garrulous, disapproving old ladies. There may even be some holes in the plot: How did Poirot get Restarick's stationery? And why had Norma never seen the earlier portrait? Still, *Third Girl* is a pleasant way to spend the afternoon, especially if you're already familiar with many of her other novels. But I recommend that you don't begin with this book.

Third Girl is a late Agatha Christie murder mystery novel being published in 1966. It would make a fine introduction to Christie and Poirot for someone who has never perused one of Dame Agatha's many novels. The Plot: A young plain girl named Norma Restarick knocks on the door of Hercule Poirot's quarters one fine morning when the Belgian detective is enjoying a superb breakfast. Norma tells Poirot she believes she has murdered someone but cannot remember the heinous act. Norma lives with two other young women in a London flat. These women are named: Claudia Reece

Holland and Frances Carey. Claudia is a well organized person who works for Norma's father who is a wealthy businessman; Frances is a socialite who works at an art gallery and pals around with beatniks. Her boyfriend is David Baker whose nickname is the "Peacock." He has a record of petty crime and dresses like a Regency buck. Norma's stepmother Mary was almost poisoned to death with weed killer. A middle-aged woman in the apartment flat where the three girls live jumps out of a window. Who pushed her out of the window? A young Doctor named Stillingfleet falls in love with Norma. He seeks to prove her innocent of murder. Poirot is ably assisted in this case by Ariadne Oliver a detective novelist who closely resembles Agatha Christie. The plot deals with drugs, forgery, false identity and murder. It is an intriguing case showing Agatha Christie could produce a top notch murder mystery into the 1960s. I picked up this novel feeling blue one Saturday morning and read it in one day. It cheered me up as I marveled at the ability of Christie to tell a great story featuring two of my favorite of her characters: Poirot and Oliver. Marvelous fun!

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