

Agatha

by

Nebojša Pop Tasić

Characters:

Agatha Christie, crime fiction writer

Karlo Jederman, writer

The scene is set in the working cabinet of Karlo Jederman, writer. There is a door to the left of the stage. At centre stage there is a table with a lamp on top and a computer/writing machine. There are two office chairs. The table is strewn with small heaps of paper sheets filled with writing. On the right there is a small table topped with empty cans, wine and whiskey bottles, glasses, a dirty plate, a water heater, teacups and coffee cups, spoons, a knife, a sugar container, lemons, apples etc. To the left, beside the door, there is a folding bed with a small pillow and a blanket.

JEDERMAN

My name is Karlo, Karlo Jederman. I am a writer, a freelance artist as we say nowadays. A couple of months ago I was commissioned by a theatre house to write a play about Agatha Christie, the greatest crime story writer ever. Wow! My first thought was: How interesting. A crime story writer must have an interesting biography. What I mean is, to begin with, she is *the woman* who managed to become a synonym for detective stories, right? It's not the first time I'm dealing with the life story of a great woman. I wrote about the life of Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich... But Agatha Christie is more than just a woman, I presume. She is a woman with a secret killer instinct. A woman who spent her life writing exclusively about murdering people, about poisoning, stabbing, shooting someone and then covering it up and, of course, a woman with a sense of crime and – punishment, which means that regardless of the fact that a murderer may be evil, wicked, devious and vicious he is to be defeated by ethics, morals, courage and – mind.

Well, those were my first simple and innocent thoughts and expectations. In general, I am not a crime story fan. I read a few novels by Arthur Conan Doyle alias Sherlock Holmes and, of course, seen the TV serials about Poirot and Miss Marple.

Earlier on, when dealing with biographies I set to myself a basic rule: I write or interpret mostly what a person wishes to divulge about him or herself. It means

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that I do not deal with gossip, scandals, sexual perversions or anything else that average readers are interested in. That is the job for the yellow press and people who want to make a great deal of money by writing pulp fiction. I was mostly interested in the intimate, human, tragic and poetic streaks in a person's life; the point where everybody is innocent simply because we are – human.

Consequently, I earnestly started reading Agatha Christie's autobiography. It is an ample book, some 350 pages of it. And babble, babble, babble. I don't really know what to say. First she was a child, well, that was interesting. She had a father, who didn't work, then a mother, a sister, a brother, a housekeeper, nannies, a parrot and a rhododendron. Then she was an adolescent girl. They had money problems, so they had to move to a mountain hotel in the south of France. When her father died they had to reduce their lobster helpings. Awesome! She spent a few years in a boarding school for girls in Paris. She sang a little, played the piano, she fell in love and got married, had a baby, travelled around the world, she even wrote a boring book about it. Then she realized that her husband was being unfaithful to her. She divorced him and found herself another husband. With him she even visited Bled and then went on a trip along the Adriatic coast. That was it. Considering all that, I believe there might be something – how did I put it? – intimate, human, poetic in it; not that I'd noticed anything like that. I'd never read a duller autobiography in my life. It was very odd indeed. Then I went on to read her crime stories, and gradually despair began to overcome me. Her novels had no personal streak either, no author's voice, thought or vibration. Where shall I start looking for Agatha? Inside detective Poirot, this ridiculous figure who is neither male nor female but a lump of brain with a moustache? Perhaps she was more like Miss Marple, a weary pensioner who keeps peeking innocently out of the window of her weary life, brightened up by an occasional murder. I sought out Agatha's photographs, hoping to find some facial line, some slender sign, something in her eyes. There was nothing. Even her photographs were purified, detached and impersonal like pictures of the English queen mother, such as are being sent to the soldiers at the front in order to present them with the image of their mother country. In short: there was nothing at all.

I was almost on the verge of insanity. I felt completely helpless. I began to think that if I cannot find her, feel her as a real woman, then I must invent her. I rejected all my principles and respect for the real character I was looking for. Something will sprout forth, a story, a myth, a comedy, a satire.

Cynically.

“Agatha-Pagatha my black hen,

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She lays eggs for gentlemen,
She laid six and she laid seven,
And one day she laid eleven!”

I started exactly where everybody else began before me – at the only gap in her biography. Her first husband sued for divorce, she disappeared; everybody believed she’d committed suicide, but she didn’t. She was in a hotel at a spa, presumably having experienced amnesia; she didn’t know what her name was. Then I decided to put on an act.

Let’s presume I’m a hotel detective, for in those days they actually existed. It’s a cliché, but what can I do. I’m trying to adapt to the style of English crime fiction. Consequently I, hotel detective, notice that one of the female guests is behaving in a curious way. She is wearing black and sports a little black hat on her head. Her face is hidden by a veil of black lace, and she keeps looking round as if she is afraid of something. She reminds me of some widow who is afraid her departed husband may call upon her to join him in his grave.

I follow her to her room. I watch as she tries to unlock the door. She cannot find the lock. Her hands are shaking. I approach her, saying:

Good morning, madam. Excuse me for being so bold, but I was standing in the hall and I believe you are in need of help.

AGATHA

I... I cannot...

JEDERMAN

Please allow me.

He takes the key from her trembling hand and unlocks the door.

JEDERMAN

Here you are, Missus...

His intonation shows that he wishes to know her name.

AGATHA

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Miss Amory. Blanche Amory, stepdaughter to Sir Francis Cleverling, baronet and Member of Parliament. I am betrothed to Arthur Pendenis of the old noble family of the Pendenis. Do you follow?

JEDERMAN

I do follow. Are you all right? May I...

AGATHA

No, I am not all right.

She is standing there motionless, bowing her head, her arms hanging loose, but some faint movement of her veil indicates that her body is shaking. Then she makes a step forward, obviously to open the door, but her foot staggers as if it slipped over the edge of an invisible precipice. Jederman catches her and clasps her in his arms.

JEDERMAN

It's all right, lady. Take it easy. I will help you.

Jederman brings her into the room, which proves to be his office, and helps her sit on a chair.

JEDERMAN

May I offer you some tea, madam?

Agatha does not say anything. She suddenly bursts into tears.

AGATHA

Who would have expected it! Nobody could have had an inkling of it. We all believed he was dead. We were hoping he was dead! (*Not plaintively any longer, but furious instead.*) Still, if you want somebody to be dead you must bury him. Bury him in person. Particularly if the dead man happens to be your husband. Or your father. Or your friend. The fact that he isn't dead is not the worse problem.

JEDERMAN

But who is not dead if I may ask?

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Agatha puts her veiled hat upon the nearest table.

AGATHA

Bring me that tea already!

Jederman turns on the tea kettle and starts looking for a cup.

AGATHA

He has ruined my life, the villain! He wedded every woman he ever met. He was married seven times. He had seven wives. One in India. Another one in Australia. A third one in Scotland. The fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh one God knows where. In Japan? In the Philippines? In Rhodesia? He should be ashamed of himself!

JEDERMAN

Dog rose berry or mountain tea?

AGATHA

English tea, for God's sake! The rotten villain! Then he left all his women and came to us in order to poison our lives and abuse our trust; in order to blackmail honest people. Oh, yes, it's possible to blackmail honest people, too. We all have our secrets, the things we are ashamed of and do not wish the world to know about. And that is not a crime.

JEDERMAN

Sugar? Lemon?

AGATHA

No, thank you.

JEDERMAN

I'm sorry but I have no milk.

AGATHA

Oh, yes, he knew how to play his game. Handsome, good-looking, with light brown curly hair and a very interesting nose, turning upwards a little all of

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itself, oh, he was so relaxed and self-confident, and I... I... It was his fault that I lost Arthur. I'm lying.

Jederman brings her a cup of tea.

AGATHA

Thank you. I lost Arthur because of Henry. And I lost Henry because of this criminal, this colonel of the Devil's legion. Oh, Blanche, Blanche, your name spells misery. White, cold, pitiless misery.

Agatha sips her tea and pulls a wry face

AGATHA

What is this thing you have given me?

JEDERMAN

It's dog rose berry tea. I have no English tea.

Agatha gazes upon the cup of tea. She becomes silent and stiffens. Then she slowly looks up and glances at his face.

AGATHA

Who are you?

It looks as if her spirit has just left her body. Her lower jaw drops slightly, her look is misty.

JEDERMAN

Ray Chandler, hotel detective. So, Miss...

AGATHA

Theresa. Theresa Neele.

JEDERMAN

I beg your pardon? Are you quite sure?

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AGATHA

What kind of a question is that? Of course I'm sure.

JEDERMAN

You just said your name was Blanche.

AGATHA

What are you saying?

JEDERMAN

Blanche. Blanche Amory.

AGATHA

That's odd. No, I'm not Blanche. Take away the tea, please. It's unpalatable.

Jederman takes her cup and puts it on the table.

JEDERMAN

Do you have some ID? I'm asking you this because I'd like to establish whether you are Blanche Amory posing as Theresa Neele, or are you Theresa Neele who for some reason or other pretends that she is Blanche Amory.

AGATHA

But this is absurd. Blanche Amory is an obscure character in a novel.

JEDERMAN

What novel is that?

AGATHA

I don't remember the title, but I know it was written by William Thackeray.

JEDERMAN

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So you are Theresa Neele. Then why did you pretend you were somebody else?

AGATHA

I don't know... I... I don't remember.

JEDERMAN

Have you had such spells before?

AGATHA

What spells?

JEDERMAN

Episodes of pretending you were somebody else.

AGATHA

No. Well, I did sometimes feel as if I was Alice in Wonderland. You know, me the little girl lost and you the rabbit with a hat on its head, and then...

JEDERMAN

Alice? Rabbit? What...

Agatha's face is back to normal. She gives him a mischievous smile. She continues the conversation with abandon, reminding him of an English lady in her parlour.

AGATHA

I'm joking, my dear man. I have explained it all to you, but you seem to have forgotten. In my *Autobiography* I wrote, I quote: "I remember once I was very nervous. I was signing a cheque and... suddenly I couldn't remember my name. Then I thought: I know my name I'm sure. I am... I am... Blanche Amory? It sounded somewhat familiar. Then I remembered it was a minor character from the novel *Pendennis* by William Thackeray that I'd read some hundred years ago. And then, two or three days later, I tried to crank up my car. In those days we had to do it with a crank, you see. I kept turning the crank but nothing happened. The car wouldn't start, so I started to cry. I went

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back into the house, still crying. And whimpering. Then I said to myself:
Theresa, you are on the brink of a nervous breakdown.

JEDERMAN

(Nervously.) Theresa?

AGATHA

Theresa.

JEDERMAN

Do you know what your real name is, madam?

AGATHA

Of course I do. My name is Agatha. Agatha Christie.

JEDERMAN

Agatha Christie?

AGATHA

Agatha Christie.

JEDERMAN

(Nervously, slightly irritated.) Then I must tell you, lady Agatha Christie, that I am not Ray Chandler either, and I am not a hotel detective. My name is Karlo Jederman. I'm a writer who's trying to write a play about you.

AGATHA

(Laughing openly.) My God, another biographer!

JEDERMAN

No, I'm not a biographer. I'm a writer.

AGATHA

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(With soft irony.) Right. My God, another writer! It sounds almost as uncanny as if you said you were a biographer.

JEDERMAN

(Resolutely, spurned by his hurt.) In your case I'm more of a literary detective. Well, let's start all over again, Mrs. Agatha Christie. Can you please explain to me why somebody should start writing his or her autobiography only to find in the first chapter that it would probably bore the reading public? You are asking yourself why anyone would be interested in the trifles and banalities of your life. If you yourself are putting this question then I am entitled to put it too: Why would I be interested in all the trifles in your life; in the superficial descriptions of your movement through life? At the very beginning you established another important fact, namely that you had been happy all along, that you have had a happy, happy, happy childhood. Good God, your happy childhood really did me in. It is cruel to torment people with one's happy childhood. And then you went on to add to it: Happy people have no history. Consequently you listed all the reasons why you shouldn't have written this book. But you did go on and wrote it all the same, almost 350 pages of it. All along you took no risks having standpoints, worthwhile thoughts, emotion or drama in life. Why not? The only excuse for your writing is the thought that has just come to me: being a crime story writer you wanted to use your autobiography in order to create the conditions for a perfect murder either by boring your reader to death and thus making him hang himself or jump into an abyss. Therefore we'd have a body but no murderer. It's a classical case study of murder by suicide.

Jederman's speech does not dampen Agatha's mood. Her abandon is downright irritating.

AGATHA

Ma dear man, what else did you expect anyway? Literature perhaps? Art? Guns, knives and poisons? In the end it is my life and I can write about it any way I like.

JEDERMAN

Right, it's your life. But most people have bought the book in order to find out more about the famous and mysterious Agatha Christie. And what did you give them? Tittle-tattle, prattle and rattle.

AGATHA

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I'm very sorry you found my life so boring. I hope you don't find your own life so deadly dull.

JEDERMAN

The worst thing is that you simply leave out the most important events that used to echo in society. Do you realize, Mrs. Christie, that the whole of England and most of the world, including me, has been busy with your presumed disappearance for more than eighty years?

AGATHA

(Faking interest.) What disappearance?

JEDERMAN

You left your husband. Nobody knew where you were. Most people presumed you had committed suicide, which proved to be false in due time. Then they said you planned to murder your husband's mistress Nancy Neele. Does that sound familiar to you?

AGATHA

No, it doesn't.

JEDERMAN

The last theory was about you wanting to commit suicide but making it look like murder. The murderer was supposed to be your husband. Or his mistress.

AGATHA

Interesting, very interesting... Do continue. It's a good story.

JEDERMAN

What shall I continue?

AGATHA

What happened in the end? Who killed whom?

JEDERMAN

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You want me to tell you who had murdered whom? But nobody ... You concocted the whole thing, didn't you?

AGATHA

(Becoming serious.) I know nothing about it. It's the first time I hear this story. You're saying that a woman disappeared in order to...

JEDERMAN

Come on, have mercy!

AGATHA

Didn't anybody tell you that I had severe amnesia? Amnesia. As in loss of memory. Therefore I have no idea what you're talking about.

JEDERMAN

It's not true that you have no idea; you just don't want to talk about it

AGATHA

I have no idea and I don't want to talk about it.

JEDERMAN

Even in your autobiography you skipped over the event though everybody knows what was going on. It was in all the newspapers. People even wrote books about it.

AGATHA

(In anger.) So go on and read those books.

JEDERMAN

I don't want to read those books. I want you to tell me about it.

AGATHA

(Heaves a deep sigh, gets up and continues calmly and resolutely like an interrogator.) Have it your way, young man. Let us discuss these things.

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She takes Jederman's hand and pulls him towards the table.

AGATHA

Sit down. Look me in the eye. Do you have a wife? Do you have a mistress? Do you happen to be gay? So, how is your sexual life? Are you highly active or...

JEDERMAN

(He starts avoiding her eyes.) We are not discussing me, mind you. I mean I am not the subject of our conversation.

AGATHA

You are precisely the subject of our conversation. Look me in the eye! Are you married?

JEDERMAN

(Looks up, perplexed.) Yes. No. I used to be. But...

AGATHA

You are divorced, I gather. Tell me more about your failed marriage. I heard it was, how shall I put it, rather piquant.

JEDERMAN

You heard it? Who told you? Who is interested in my marriage and my sexual life?

AGATHA

I am. Along with everybody else.

JEDERMAN

(Bows his head.) I don't want to talk about it.

AGATHA

So you'd like to skip over the whole thing even though everybody knows...

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JEDERMAN

All right, all right, we won't talk about it.

A short pause. Jederman is still sitting down. Agatha walks over to the table, takes an apple, brushes it with her sleeve and bites into it. Then she proceeds to the proscenium, facing the public.

AGATHA

I will tell you nothing about it. But you can ask Celia, maybe she will tell you something.

JEDERMAN

Celia? Who is this Celia all of a sudden?

AGATHA

Celia is my childhood friend. We had a wonderful childhood. We grew up together, attended school dances together, got married almost at the same time. We had our first child almost at the same time... I was her daughter's godmother. Oh, Celia was such a serious girl. But her husband walked out on her, too. Can you imagine that?

JEDERMAN

And where is this Celia now?

AGATHA

Oh, who knows, in India or in America. I don't know. I lost touch with her. You know, her story... is terrible. First her husband walked out on her. Then her aunt, who suffered from a severe mental illness, killed her mother. They were twin sisters and her aunt was in love with her sister's husband. In the end her father killed her aunt and then committed suicide. It was such a terrible thing. And Celia, oh, Celia who had suffered so much was always telling me: "Old sins throw long shadows."

JEDERMAN

What do you mean? Old sins throw long shadows? And this Celia of yours...

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AGATHA

(Her voice is changed, soft and melancholy; she is still facing the public.)

Looong shadows. You know, it is easier to hate somebody whom you once loved than to forget him. I was never lost in dreams, you know, the way young girls usually are. I was actually afraid of dreams. Even as a girl I was not afraid of the dark but rather of dreams. And my dreams were visited by the Murderer. He was not really terrible to look at. He dressed the way French men do: a red waistcoat and blue trousers, light brown curly hair strewn with dust and cobwebs, two stumps in place of hands, and the right stump was holding a gun. But his gun never fired, that much I know. The gun was some sort of a toy, a symbol. Mr. Murderer himself, almost funny in his costume, was not terrible either. But there was one small detail that terrified me: his pale blue eyes, the pure evil in his look. That was awful. But the worst dream was the one where the Murderer didn't even appear. Once I dreamed about a family picnic. We gathered on a lawn by a lake – my mother, daddy, aunt Dolly, my brother Cyril, my sister Maggie, our neighbours the Millers were there as well, along with baby-sitters and maids. Everything was beautiful. There was only one detail that bothered me: I suspected that the Murderer was lurking somewhere in the vicinity. Then, to my dismay, I noticed my aunt's face with the pale blue devilish eyes, and then I realized that the Murderer was inside my aunt, that her body was his. That was the Murderer's topmost ability: he could hide inside any person at all. I woke up, silently repeating to myself: "My aunt is not a murderer! My aunt cannot be a murderer!"

JEDERMAN

Are you still having those bad dreams?

AGATHA

No, I never dreamed about my Murderer ever since I met him in my waking state.

JEDERMAN

Well, who was this murderer?

AGATHA

It was Dermot, my ex husband.

JEDERMAN

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Dermot? Wasn't your husband named Archibald?

AGATHA

No, you must have made a mistake, young man. His name was Dermot. Dermot wanted me to die so that he could marry another woman as soon as possible. *(She continues with increasing emotion, angrily but in tears.)* Oh, how I loved him. I loved him like a dog! But his heart was just a stump. An unfeeling, heartless person he was. When I got pregnant he was angry for having done it to me. That's what he said. He was angry because I was going to busy myself with the child and forget all about him. He was angry because he wanted me to remain beautiful, beautiful just for him. He was angry because I wasn't more careful; because I was stupid. And he didn't like stupid women. He never liked to be touched, except when he was "in an amorous mood". I bored him with my demands for more attention, more tenderness... I was so lonely in the end that I started concocting another life in which I, too, was somebody else. I was alone, completely alone. The friends from my youth were far away. That was when my aunt murdered my mother, the only person who cared about me. Dermot didn't even attend the funeral. He said he couldn't stand people being sick, miserable or dead because it spoilt his mood. A week later he came and asked for divorce. He had met another woman and ... Well, I ought to understand. I did understand. I said: "Wait a little longer, my darling, it may only be a short-lived adventure." Then I added that my daughter and I would be very unhappy if he simply left. My dear Dermot replied: "Not everybody can be happy, Celia." And I was hugging his legs, kissing them in a dog's fashion. I licked his hands and begged him... Then I noticed it. His pale blue eyes acquired an evil shine. The Murdered entered his body.

There is a pause. Agatha continues, her voice the same as before: the voice of an English jabbering lady.

AGATHA

A cool story, isn't it?

JEDERMAN

I beg your pardon?

AGATHA

(She turns towards Jederman and continues to eat her apple.) I'm saying it's a cool story.

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JEDERMAN

And then what happened?

AGATHA

What happened? The father killed the aunt who had murdered her mother; then he committed suicide and Celia went mad. She kept walking around the house, talking to her dead mother. At times she didn't know who or where she was, or she didn't recognize her daughter. The neighbours saw her wander in the forest in the direction of the marshes, trying to commit suicide as well. Things like that. Then she divorced her husband, left her daughter with her sister, packed her bags and disappeared. I hope she found her happiness somewhere in the world.

There is a pause.

AGATHA

Your office is not exacty... How shall I put it? Not suitable. It could use some tidying up.

JEDERMAN

I have no time for tidying up.

AGATHA

You don't look very good either. You should pay more attention to your health.

JEDERMAN

I don't look good because I've been occupying myself exclusively with you for six months. I can say that you're looking well, considering...

AGATHA

Considering my demise?

JEDERMAN

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Yes, that's what I meant. But all right, you look well because that's how I imagined you when you were younger. Your photographs went on my nerves, so I started imagining you more like Vanessa Redgrave.

AGATHA

That's very gentlemanly of you, young man. What about your work?

JEDERMAN

What work? At the moment it's all about you.

AGATHA

What were you writing about before you started busying yourself with me?

JEDERMAN

(He looks perplexed.) I don't know. I wrote some adaptations for the stage, some dramatizations. I also wrote two biographic plays. I like poetry.

AGATHA

Go ahead, read me something. That way we might get to know each other better.

JEDERMAN

(Modestly.) Of course, even though I... I understand all that in a different way.

AGATHA

What different way? Are you ashamed of your writings?

JEDERMAN

Well, I am at times. I mean I'm very self-critical.

AGATHA

As well you should be, for an honourable, honest, modest and self-critical person does not take an interest in writing. But the trouble is that being ashamed is the essence of writing, the essence of art. You start asking

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yourself: What am I ashamed of? The truth is something like the compost that helps a flower sprout. Well?

Jederman walks to the table and pours himself a glass of whiskey. He drinks it in a gulp, changes his posture and voice in order to avoid talking about his work.

JEDERMAN

So in your detective stories you dug up all that muck, I mean those countless murders, child-murders, suicides, in order to – what? Find the truth?

AGATHA

(She sits back.) Oh, no, I simply established the truth that I'd found out about when I was a little girl. And the truth is that the Murderer can settle in anybody. Ah, what a murderous breed men are! Secretly, every person wishes to experience a murder, particularly those who maintain that they could never kill a fly. Those are truly lethal. They murder in their thoughts. The world is full of good people who do terrible, dreadful things. Be so kind as to give me another apple.

Jederman brings her an apple. Again, Agatha brushes it against her sleeve and bites into it. Jederman pours himself another drink.

JEDERMAN

You're right. Even the good old detective Hercule Poirot killed a man in your latest novel, thus becoming a murderer in the name of justice and not truth.

AGATHA

Oh, the poor Poirot! His story is very unusual, you know. He was born old, for he was 85 on the day of his birth. He died twice: first in 1940, but my publisher was against it and I had to bring Poirot back to life. As Poirot might say: "You cannot regulate life according to your will. Life may be a lot of things, but logical it is not." And so, when the *New York Times* published his obituary I was glad. He was 130 years old. He was racked with arthritis. He was wearing a wig and pasted a fake moustache on his face. He was obnoxious and rude to his friends. He kept telling them they were stupid while he would continue to be intelligent until his dying day. And then he killed a man because his guilt couldn't be proved in court. I suffered a lot because of him. Oh how I hated him at times!

JEDERMAN

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(Speaking with more self-confidence.) So you're saying that the Murderer can settle into anybody? If he settled in Poirot he could very well settle in you as well?

AGATHA

He would have a hard time settling in me because I murdered so many people in my books that I no longer hanker for a real murder.

JEDERMAN

(With more enthusiasm.) But death is the principal source of your wealth. Death feeds you, clothes you, it buys houses and jewellery for you. You turned your childhood fear of death into merchandise.

AGATHA

My dear young man, do not be overly emotional. You know, actually I am a woman with no formal education. I have no degree or college certificate to prove that I am qualified for any work at all. Not even for writing. I was taught by my mother. My professors were my nursery governesses. The rest I learned from life. You who dislike any happy childhood may not even believe that such a thing is possible; you mostly see childhood as a forgotten game, as lost time, a time passed in becoming grown-ups. But for me, childhood is the basic condiment.

JEDERMAN

(He starts pacing up and down the stage, speaking with increasing enthusiasm.) And all that time the colonial England, Sir and Lady so-and-so, no matter where you went, you personally or in your books, you found this colonial world as if you'd never left the 1930s. The English in France, the English in Turkey, the English in Egypt and Iraq...

AGATHA

Unfortunately, my dear young man, that was the only world I knew.

JEDERMAN

Your detective stories prove that you are a very intelligent woman, although...

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AGATHA

Although?

JEDERMAN

Although when one reads more than one of your stories in a short period of time they almost feel like a routine endeavour. And almost all of them have the same structure, which means that they really are a routine endeavour, and the whole thing becomes...

AGATHA

It becomes tedious?

JEDERMAN

Yes, tedious. And your style, which is...

AGATHA

It is tedious?

JEDERMAN

Yes, it gradually becomes tedious in a way, even though there are novels that surpass this...

AGATHA

This tediousness?

JEDERMAN

Yes, they surpass this tediousness. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, for example...

AGATHA

What are you playing at, young man? Are you posing as a literary Poirot?

JEDERMAN

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(His answer turns into an avalanche of words.) Of course I am. There are good passages here and there, like in the first chapter of *The Man in the Brown Suit* where you explain that monkeys developed from humans and not vice versa... Or the typical British humour where Lady Angkatell in *The Hollow* says that a murder is a very inconvenient incident: it disturbs the servants, suspends the routine, and it's even worse when they serve duck for dinner.

AGATHA

You may be looking for more than those stories can offer. Are you looking for literature, perhaps?

JEDERMAN

I am, by all means. Among other things I'm looking for some sort of a social-political or philosophical or simply human point of view. After all, I'm looking for something that would ensure that the story offered some pleasure in reading. Your style is always the same. The structure is mainly the same. The time is more or less the same. No, no, what you write is not literature. You write – crossword puzzles.

AGATHA

(In a very, very angry voice.) Listen to me, young man. You will not talk to her in this manner.

JEDERMAN

(Surprised and confused.) I beg your pardon?

AGATHA

(She turns into a manlike woman, gets up and starts approaching Jederman until she's almost touching his face.) You will not talk to her in this manner, I tell you. Who are you anyway? What right do you have to criticize the woman who has sold more books than anyone else in the world? The woman described by the top-level French philosopher Roland Barthes as being "brilliant", and by Umberto Eco as "an absolutely exceptional creature"? Who gave you the right to criticize the woman admired by Billy Wilder and Michel Houellebecq? Who are you?

JEDERMAN

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I beg your pardon?

AGATHA

I'm asking you who you are.

JEDERMAN

I... I am...

AGATHA

(She turns away from him and energetically bites into her apple; she chews, emphatically moving her jaws left and right.) You don't need to introduce yourself. Because you are – a nobody! That's who you are. Do you now, my dear Nobody, that the Jews incarcerated in the Buchenwald concentration camp during the 2nd World War dramatized Agatha's novel *Ten Little Indians* and played it – in the concentration camp? Those who survived later explained that it helped them keep their will to live. You are criticizing the woman whose play has been running in a West End theatre continuously for over sixty years? Do you know that the Uruguayan guerrilla fighters, the Tupamaros, made Miss Marple their honorary leader because to them she was the embodiment of justice? *(She turns to Jederman again and continues in a sharp voice.)* Are you aware of all that?

JEDERMAN

I am. I am not.

AGATHA

(She quietens down a little, but her poise remains overly self-confident or overbearing.) Do you happen to have a cigarette?

Jederman takes a box of cigarettes from his pocket and offers her one. Agatha takes the cigarette and sits down again. Jederman takes a cigarette as well, he first lights Agatha's cigarette and then his own.)

AGATHA

Agatha is too shy and inclined to self-criticism, so I am going to tell you about her. You believe that writing crime fiction is easy. Well, my dear Nobody, first you have to think the whole thing over. And thinking can be deadly dull. That is strictly prohibited.
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why it is so difficult. Then you have to write the whole thing down, which is even duller, particularly if grammar is not your strong point. I'm telling you this from experience. Nothing can be done about it. Once I hired a secretary to type out my texts, but the problem was that she continued correcting my grammar and thus made me feel utterly incompetent. Then I went on to hire a less educated secretary, which was even worse. You couldn't even read what she typed out. Well, people start writing books when they are inspired to do so and then they believe to be geniuses touched by God himself; it is true of some of them, but real geniuses are so rare you can count them on the fingers of one hand. People never pause to think that first they have to learn the trade and become honest, genuine craftsmen. Only then, my dear Nobody, can you start using ideas. And as a craftsman you must realize that nowadays a novel of 30.000 words is hard to sell. A cabinetmaker wouldn't make a chair with the seat six feet high in the air, would he? It is necessary to consider the reader, and readers have their rights. There are those who read and those who buy books. Being a craftsman you must therefore consider the market. Yet geniuses do not consider the market, so they easily go mad and die. I bet you are a genius. It is evident from the untidiness of your room, the cans, the cheap tobacco and whiskey, and your pale skin...

JEDERMAN

Excuse me, madam...

AGATHA

Miss Oliver. Ariadne Oliver. You can call me Ariadne, even though I don't like you. And you are?

JEDERMAN

I'm Jederman, Karlo Jederman.

AGATHA

Well then, I was right to insult you, you see. In German your name means "everyman". So, Mr. Everyman or Mr. Nobody, take your pick, Agatha is very humble, very shy – and a woman. I'm emphasizing this fact because she made it in an explicitly male society without copying well-known detective formulas. That's what makes her so brilliant. For God's sake, she was the product of pure Victorian upbringing! Do you know what that means? No, you don't; you were born in a period of permissive upbringing and for you everything was a matter of course. Girls were brought up so that one day they

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would become ideal wives, dedicated to their God – the husband – and their family. It meant that they didn't have a life of their own; they lived only for the benefit of the husband and the family. Agatha freed herself from those chains all by herself in order to become a free woman and live off the proceeds of her work. That's why I cannot accept criticism of Agatha from those who assume they know something about the art of writing.

JEDERMAN

Mrs. Christie...

AGATHA

Of course it doesn't mean that I generally reject any criticism, for I am critical myself. Once I found it quite unnatural to have five or six people come together at the exact moment when Mr. Edgware or Sir Mortimer or Abercrombie were murdered, and that all these people had a motive for killing them, except if above mentioned Mr. Edgware Mortimer Abercrombie was an extremely unpleasant and vile individual, in which case nobody cared whether he was alive or dead, and even less do we care who killed him. The clock is slowly ticking away and by the grace of God...

JEDERMAN

(Louder.) Mrs. Christie!

AGATHA

Ariadne, as I have already told you...

JEDERMAN

(Louder still.) Mrs. Christie!

AGATHA

Ariadne Oliver!

JEDERMAN

(He shouts out.) Mrs. Christie!!!

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Agatha shuts up and glares at Jederman; her facial muscles relax. She shuts her eyes and then reopens them.

AGATHA

(Sleepily.) There's no need to shout, young man. I must have dozed off.

JEDERMAN

(Incensed.) No, you did not doze off. A minute ago you were shouting at me, introducing yourself as Miss Oliver.

AGATHA

(Her voice is slightly tinted by age.) Oliver? Ariadne Oliver?

JEDERMAN

Yes, Ariadne Oliver, a character from your novels. I find it a bit sick.

AGATHA

Please give me some tea. What did Ariadne say to you?

Jederman looks at her perplexedly, then he turns to search for a teacup.

JEDERMAN

Don't you remember?

AGATHA

No, I don't. What were you talking about?

He brings her a cup of tea.

JEDERMAN

I was talking about your writing, your points of view.

AGATHA

You were probably rather critical. *(She takes a sip of tea.)*

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Disgusting, the tea you drink in this country. And it's cold, too.

JEDERMAN

Yes, I was critical but...

AGATHA

(She sips her tea while she speaks, and every time she takes a sip her lips contort.) Then I am not surprised that Ariadne should speak up. As far as I'm concerned it is like this: if some people tell you that you're a bad writer, others tell you you're a genius, somebody else that you are a sexist or a feminist, political or non-political, either a master of plotting or a dull author, then you gradually lose interest in all those labels.

Jederman starts fidgeting nervously.

AGATHA

After all, by occupying themselves with me they are simply occupied with themselves. I tried just to live my own life. To a certain extent I obviously succeeded. However, you think that I must be what you yourself think I should be. Oh, but you are not the only one to have that opinion. It is a general human trait. In the end, everybody only looks for what he wants to look for. It's utterly disgusting, this tea of yours. What's the matter with you?

Jederman is rubbing his legs together.

JEDERMAN

Excuse me, I must go... *(He gestures he has to use the toilet.)*
It's been a while.

AGATHA

Go ahead, go ahead.

Jederman pulls a face and starts to go off the stage. Then he stops as if he wants to tell her something.

AGATHA

Go no, go on. I'm not going to run away...

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Jederman goes off the stage.

AGATHA

From your head.

Agatha is left alone on the stage. She looks around Jederman's room. She takes a couple of empty cans and throws them in the garbage bag.

AGATHA

The poor boy. How can he even think in such untidiness? His mind is full of empty cans, cheap liquor and fear.

Then she starts rummaging through the papers on his desk.

AGATHA

Well, let's see what the young colleague writes about.

She starts reading in a loud voice.

AGATHA

The title is... "A Word About Love". It doesn't sound very promising.

*In my dreams I never
understood the word love.
I have been loved far and wide,
by people living and dead,
by men, women, children, family,
friends, school-friends, colleagues,
by fellow citizens, insurance
agents, merchants, corporations,
humanitarian organizations, high officials,
allies and enemies,
by those I loved
and those I hated.*

*And all the people in my dreams
who used this word
wanted me to do
what I never wanted to do.*

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*They loved me and wanted to
tame me as if I were
a wild beast.*

*They loved me and wanted me
to be quiet as if I were unable to speak.*

*They loved me and said
the things they wanted to hear,
things they wanted me to say.*

*They loved me and wanted to
subdue me as if I were
an obedient slave.*

*They loved me and wanted me
to love what they loved.*

*They loved me and despised me
as if I were worthless.*

*They loved me and tore up my heart
as if I had none.*

*They loved me and hated me
as if they never loved me at all.*

*In my dreams, this word forced me
to do the things I never wanted
to do.*

I cried when I wanted to laugh.

I screamed when I wanted to whisper tender words.

I thrashed when I wanted to caress.

I cut with a knife when I wanted to touch.

I ran when I wanted to stroll.

I fell down when I wanted to stand up.

I moaned when I wanted to sing.

I strangled when I wanted to hug.

And I hugged as I was strangling.

Pause.

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The poor man. Another potential Murderer. "The things we do for love, the things we do for love," as Miss Marple would say.

Jederman comes back. He sees Agatha with a sheet of paper in her hands.

JEDERMAN

(Taken aback.) What are you doing?

AGATHA

(Calmly.) I'm reading.

JEDERMAN

(Angrily.) Who has given you permission?

AGATHA

All right, all right, I apologize. On the other hand I must add that you have no reason to feel ashamed.

JEDERMAN

(Surprised.) What do you mean? Did you like it?

AGATHA

No, I didn't like it.

JEDERMAN

(Offended.) What are you playing at? Shame on you! You're rummaging through somebody else's papers.

He starts taking the papers from the table and putting them in a heap.

AGATHA

I liked the fact that I didn't like it.

JEDERMAN

(Not understanding her.) I beg your pardon?

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AGATHA

Your poem is unpleasant.

JEDERMAN

(Continues putting his papers away; haughtily, offended.) Of course it is. It's meant to be unpleasant.

AGATHA

And I like that. Unpleasant poetry. True nevertheless. No matter how ugly and cruel truth may be, it is attractive and beautiful to those who seek it. Isn't it, my dear young man? Has someone hurt you in a bad way? It's painful, isn't it?

JEDERMAN

(Through gritted teeth.) It's all over now.

AGATHA

Oh no, it isn't over yet. And it won't be over for some time to come. Not soon, anyway. I can see you are not a happy man.

JEDERMAN

(Ill at ease.) Come on, forget about happiness! What would you have me do? Tell you about my "unhappy childhood"?

AGATHA

But you can also find happiness in the things that cannot be changed.

JEDERMAN

(Cynically.) I find it hard to believe in this definition of happiness. What you're explaining to me is some sort of a conservative, Christian discipline. A person is supposed to renounce everything and accept only what "God" decides to give him or her.

AGATHA

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And you, of course, don't believe that "God" exists.

JEDERMAN

(Energetically.) I hate that word.

AGATHA

It's better to hate that word than to hate your close relatives. What is your poem about?

JEDERMAN

(Wearily.) It says in the title: it's about love.

AGATHA

No, my dear young man, your poem is about being loved. To love and be loved: the one sometimes get mistaken for the other. To love means to burden someone with your love. And to be loved means to carry a heavy burden. When a person is loved to excess he begins to feel hatred. We both know that. It cannot be helped: truth never knocks on the door but rather hides like a criminal, it beats you on the head, it cuts you straight to the heart. It is often obvious and mundane; there is nothing "poetic" about it. It destroys illusions. You never know whether it will free you or, on the contrary, enslave you, shut you in, pull you away from the world and from people. Truth is a remedy and a poison. Too much truth can kill you. That is why oblivion is such a gift from heaven.

JEDERMAN

(Ironically.) You mean amnesia?

AGATHA

I mean selective amnesia. Oblivion is always selective.

JEDERMAN

So is memory.

AGATHA

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*I am tired of the past that clings around my feet,
I am tired of the past that will not let life be sweet,
I would cut it away with knife and say:
Let me be myself – reborn – today.*

*But I am afraid of the past - that it will creep back to my feet
And look in my face and say: 'You laugh and eat
But I am here with you yet ...
You would not remember – but I will not let you forget ...
What is or is not courage? Who shall say?
Shall I be brave or base if I cut the past away?*

*Sometimes I have dreamed that you have stood and said:
'I too have sometimes long to be freed from the dead
Burden of our remembrance, free from your sorrow.'
Let there be no yesterday and no tomorrow,
Let there be for us only today,
Ride it – ride it through time and away.*

While Agatha is reciting the poem Jederman calms down and listens attentively.

JEDERMAN

Whose poem is it?

AGATHA

You haven't recognized it?

JEDERMAN

No.

AGATHA

It is Mary's.

JEDERMAN

Mary's?

AGATHA

Mary's.

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JEDERMAN

This Mary is you all over again.

AGATHA

Of course I am. Why do you find it strange? Your thinking is too trivial, young man.

JEDERMAN

(Wearily.) I don't even know who I'm talking to any more.

AGATHA

Come on, young man, concentrate. You are talking to Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie...

While she goes on to enumerate her names Jederman becomes visibly nervous. He gets up, starts crumpling the papers on the desk and throwing them into the wastepaper basket.

JEDERMAN

No more names!

AGATHA

Née Miller. You can simply call me Agatha.

JEDERMAN

Agatha?

Jederman walks to the table with bottles of hard liquor, pours himself another glass and lights a cigarette. He is smoking nervously.

AGATHA

Agatha. Mind you, Agatha is a very prudent, dissociated person, but she is also practical and enterprising. Agatha does what needs to be done. You must never question Agatha about the things she wants to forget.

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JEDERMAN

What about Blanche, Theresa, Celia, Ariadne, Mary...

AGATHA

Blanche, Blanche, Blanche... As far as I remember this woman had four husbands and at least that many lovers. In her life she sinned a great deal. She wanted a great deal which means that she lived a daring life. She could be blatantly honest and honestly vile. Her life was a story. I never possessed enough courage for such a story.

Theresa was a failed experiment at becoming the twin sister of her husband's mistress; a sick and painful experiment; a dead end street. That is all I can remember. It escapes my memory.

Celia was a sensitive girl who swam the turbulent waters of life. She was a girl in the process of becoming a woman. I know it sounds pathetic but Celia was an innocent, delicate and guileless, unprotected creature. She was a flower, and a flower is just a flower, utterly charming, just like a silk glove, the sweetest ice-cream, a word that melts in your mouth. And that is why she was unhappy.

Ariadne, just like me, was a crime story writer and her mistakes were of great help to me. She was a direct, brave and very articulate woman with a big heart. She was simply my friend, someone who was always there when you needed her.

And Mary... Mary was an unusual woman. I mean unusual with regard to your conception of women.

JEDERMAN

Whose? Mine?

AGATHA

I'm speaking of men in general. Mary was an avant-garde woman. Just think: Mary lived with a ten feet python! Can you imagine that? Mary was a woman who drank whiskey and smoked cigarettes. She was the reason I decided to try my luck at tobacco and hard liquor. Mary was a woman who wrote poetry,

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prose and political speeches. Mary was a woman fighter. Oh, Mary would show you what a real woman is. Mary would make you... keep your trap shut!

JEDERMAN

(He stares at Agatha for a moment then he starts laughing.) I beg your pardon?

AGATHA

(She clears her throat and continues in a different voice, very articulately and energetically, with no pathos, as if she were standing on a podium; she speaks facing the public.) Who has turned the woman into a humble, wicked, disdained creature who torments her own soul? Who has loaded the woman's poor heart with this burden? Who has restrained her? Who has caged her? Was it divine providence? Was it nature? No, it was her old enemy! Men! Yes, men, you and your little friends! A woman is an enduring memorial to male selfishness! We women demand absolute equality. Equality to the last detail. There has been enough ape-like snivelling about what is unsuitable, improper, inaccessible and forbidden to women. It has all been fabricated in order to stop women from interfering with the affairs of "men". Is doing the dishes, sewing and cleaning forever to remain something only a woman does? Women ought to be independent. They ought to be educated and professionally employed, have the same rights as men in every respect. It is the holy truth, the kind of truth we must disseminate.

I shall go and promulgate such equality everywhere, particularly where I shall be least welcome: in the parliament, at universities, in taverns and men's clubs, at horse-races.

Agatha turns her gaze upwards for a moment then she turns to Jederman and continues to speak in the prattling style of a typical English tea party.

AGATHA

Have I told you how Mary came to meet her second husband?

JEDERMAN

(He laughs as if her role playing was entertaining to him.) I don't even know how she came to meet her first husband.

AGATHA

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The first one was not important. The first one always exists because of the second one. (*She turns to face the public again.*) Well then, after Mary's first marriage failed she packed her bags and travelled to the Middle East. To Egypt, Iraq, Syria... Can you imagine? All alone she went off to those wild and exotic places. In Baghdad she met Mrs. Wooley, a very disagreeable woman I must admit, but her husband was an extremely pleasant man, archaeologist by profession. He was in Iraq in order to study Sumerian civilization. He had a young assistant working for him named Max who was even more charming. He was tall, slender, sparing of words but whenever he said something it was appropriate and opportune. Whenever he did something it was exactly what needed to be done at the moment. Then Max offered to take Mary on a sight-seeing tour around Baghdad. They rented a car and off they went. After a week of rambling around the desert they arrived to Karbala with its magnificent mosque. They had to spend the night at the police station for there was no hotel at Karbala at the time. Besides, Karbala was said to be a dangerous city. They were received by the duty officer and placed in the prison ward. Max and Mary each got their own cell. But there were no toilets in the cells. And in the evening when Mary had to go to the toilet, you see, Max and the policeman escorted her to the make-shift toilet, i. e. the hole where she had to crouch and do her thing, all for safety's sake. In the evening they were served dinner at the police station courtyard. It was a beautiful evening, there was a full moon climbing up to the sky. The Iraqi policeman never said much until then, and whatever he said was in Arab. All of a sudden he began to speak in perfect English:

*Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert –
That from heaven or near it
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.
Higher still and higher
From the Earth thou springest,
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.
In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
Thou dost float and run,
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.
The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;*

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*Like a star of Heaven,
In the broad daylight
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy sheer delight –
Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear,
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.*

He paused for a moment and then explained that Shelley's *Ode to a Skylark* seemed to him appropriate to the moment. Next he went on to recite Khayyam and Hafiz in Arab and the whole evening turned to a concert because their host, the Iraqi policeman, recited, sang and intoned while the moon, yellow like a lemon, dissolved in the depth of the azure sky. Then next morning when the two set out to Baghdad Max stopped the car in the middle of the desert and said: "My dear Mary, will you marry a man who makes his living by digging up bodies and looking for dead souls?" Mary looked at him lovingly and replied: "I adore bodies and dead souls." They fell into each other's arms and kissed for the first time right there under the hot desert sun.

JEDERMAN

(He yawns in boredom.) And they lived happily until the day they died.

AGATHA

Exactly.

JEDERMAN

More fairy tales.

AGATHA

A fairy tale is a tragedy with a happy ending.

JEDERMAN

(Weary and fed up.) All right, all right, but this is not a story about Mary but rather about you, I mean about Agatha and your second husband Max Mallowan.

AGATHA

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There's no difference. A story is a story is a story. Do you want me to tell you how I happened to meet Max?

JEDERMAN

(Disinterested.) I don't even remember how you happened to meet your first husband.

AGATHA

The first husband is not important. The first one always exists because of the second one.

She walks over to Jederman and starts reciting to him like an excited little girl who has learned her poem by heart. When she comes to the passage when the man answers her voice deepens as if she were playing a man's role.

AGATHA

*I'll tell you everything I can
If you will listen well:
I met an erudite young man
A-sitting on a Tell.
"Who are you, sir?" to him I said,
"For what is it you look?"
His answer trickled through my head
Like bloodstains in a book.*

*He said: "I look for aged pots
Of prehistoric days
And then I measure them in lots
And lots of different ways.*

*But I was thinking of a plan
To kill a millionaire
And hide the body in a van
Or some large frigidaire.*

*His accents mild were full of wit:
"Five thousand years ago
Is really, when I think of it,*

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The choicest age I know.

*But I was thinking how to thrust
Some arsenic in his tea.*

*He was putting shards on the table
And explained the matter to me:*

*"I sometimes dig up amulets
And figurines most lewd,
For in those prehistoric days
They were extremely rude!*

*I heard him then, for I had just
Completed a design
To keep a body free from dust
By boiling it in brine.*

*And now, if e'er by chance I dip
My fingers into acid,
Or smash some pottery (with slip!)
Because I am not placid,
Or if I see a river flow,
And hear a far-off yell,
I sigh, for it reminds me so
Of that young man I learned to know--*

*Whose look was mild, whose speech was slow,
Whose thoughts were in the long ago,
Whose pockets sagged with potsherds so,
Who lectured learnedly and low,
A voice who taught me that things come and go.*

She takes a bow and applauds to herself. Then she sits back in her chair. She puts the hat on her head and covers her face with a veil. There are a few moments of silence. Jederman then pulls a folding bed to centre stage and lies down.

JEDERMAN

(Wearily.) Why can't you narrate all these stories in the first person singular? Why do you need all those fake identities? What are you? A multiple personality?

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AGATHA

(Her voice once more acquires an old age tinge.) We are all multiple personalities, you included. You are not Karlo Jederman.

JEDERMAN

All right, so I'm not. It's my pen name. But at least I know who I am. You, on the contrary, keep talking about yourself in the third, fourth and fifth person.

AGATHA

All those identities help me remain what I am. All those identities are an answer.

JEDERMAN

An answer *(He yawns.)* – to what?

AGATHA

I am the question.

JEDERMAN

(Wearily and fed up.) You are a nightmare.

AGATHA

You are the Murderer!

JEDERMAN

(He yawns again.) Who are you? Who are you really and truly?

AGATHA

(She laughs.) What a question! You have invented me, haven't you? I am – you.

JEDERMAN

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(His eyes and voice are getting sleepier and sleepier.) If you were me ... it would be as if I was living ... with a ten feet python in my head ... fighting ... for women's rights ..., for the rights ... of all women ... who have ever ... abandoned me ... because ... I have ... a stump ... instead of a ...

AGATHA

(She approaches him, sits on his bed and starts stroking his head.) Do you want me to sing you a lullaby?

JEDERMAN

(He mumbles.) Please, nooo!

AGATHA

Music has always been my love. Do you know that I studied music in Paris? My teacher was old Mrs. Legrand who liked to play piano four hands with her pupils. However, since Mrs. Legrand was rather a corpulent lady who liked to spread her elbows wide I often finished the duet on the ground. As a rule, she pushed me away with her elbow. Oh, but it was funny! And when I was very young I dreamed about becoming an opera singer. I had the voice and an ear for music; the only problem was that I had tremendous stage fright. And if one is afraid of going on stage one should better refrain from it. I never stood on a stage. Once, for an anniversary, I was asked to address the members of the Detective Club in London and I refused to do it. No stage, no address, that was out of the question. Later on I was even offered the post of the club president. I agreed on condition that I would not have to appear in public and make speeches. I promised to write them if someone other than me read them. I simply do not like to be stared at.

JEDERMAN

(He raises his head.) Please, I have to get up early tomorrow. I have to complete this text.

AGATHA

It's finished. This is the end. Shall I sing you a lullaby nevertheless? I wrote it myself.

JEDERMAN

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(He mumbles.) Please, do. No.

AGATHA

All right, so I shall.

Agatha starts to sing. During her performance the light is slowly fading so that the song dies away in complete darkness.

AGATHA

*Oh, who shall see the spinners,
The silent white-robed spinners,
The tender cruel spinners
As they spin the thread of dreams?*

*Can you hear the wheel a-whirring?
And the menace of its purring?
See the color of the rainbow as it gleams?
Can you see the shining mesh
That is spun for human flesh?
Can you hear them?
Do you fear them?
Will you dare to wander near them?
The silent white-robed spinners
As they spin the web of dreams ...*

*The conqueror from the battle
By their gleam is led astray,
Where the fragile threads enfold him
There his armour rusts away.
The boy who goes a-ploughing
At the dusky hour of eve
Sees a vision grey and golden
And his furrow he must leave.
And the maiden in the village,
Who has knelt beside the lake
And has seen a dream-face pictured
Goes unwedded for his sake.*

*Oh! If your eyes shall see them
You had better turn and flee them,
For no power born of earth shall hold you then.*

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*And you'll let the world go by,
Seeking beauty till you die!
If you hear them,
Oh! Beware them!
And never venture near them!
The silent white-robe spinners
As they spin the thread of dreams.*

*There are threads of red and golden!
There are threads of grey and green!
There are threads of white and silver.
And they merge in dazzling sheen!
There's a web of wondrous weaving
That is rose and amethyst,
And a purple strand of mystery
That fades into the mist.
And oh! There's love and longing!
There's heart to laugh and grieve,
There's wonder and there's pity
Where the white-robed spinners weave.*

*Oh! Who shall find the spinners,
The silent white-robed spinners,
The tender cruel spinners
As they spin the web of dreams?*

There are few seconds of darkness, but then the light comes on again. Jederman wakes up. He gets up from the folding bed and walks to his desk. There is a heap of folded papers there. He picks them up, leafs through them, then he turns to give the audience a puzzled look. He goes to the proscenium and makes a clumsy bow. Then he walks off stage.

T H E E N D

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