

Themes: *Dances, Proposals, Transport, Poetry, Writing, Courtship*

Summary

When her mother Clara's health declines, Agatha accompanies her to Egypt for the winter. In Cairo, she enters a lively social scene, attending frequent dances and navigating the rituals of flirtation. She recalls, with humour, a series of unsuitable marriage proposals, certain that some men would have been disappointed if she were to *actually* accept.

Back in England, she enjoys her round of country house visits, relishing new freedoms: motorcar journeys, horse riding, and, eventually, an enthusiasm for horse racing. In 1911, she experiences her first flight, an unforgettable five minute ride in an aeroplane.

Agatha also reflects on her early writing. Encouraged by her mother while recovering from illness, she writes her first short story, *The House of Beauty*. Soon after, she attempts to write a novel, seeking advice from neighbour and writer Eden Phillpotts.

Her romantic life proves unsettled. She breaks off an engagement to one man after realising their dissimilarities, then enters an 'understanding' with another. Soon after, she meets Archie Christie. Their relationship is passionate but turbulent, marked by repeated separations and reconciliations amid financial worries. As 1913 unfolds, Agatha notes how few expected the coming war, as she begins her First Aid and nursing training.

Quotes

"Women, when they fall in love, look ten times as good-looking as normally: their eyes sparkle, their cheeks are bright, their hair takes a special glow."

"There always has to be a lapse of time after the accomplishment of a piece of creative work before you can in any way evaluate it."

"About then I had two near escapes from getting married. I call them near escapes because, looking back now, I realise with certainty that either of them would have been a disaster."

"From that moment I was fired by the determination that I would write a detective story."

Questions

- What do you make of the dances, and flirtation conventions described?
- How do you think Agatha's early travels influenced her?
- Is there anything that surprises you about the romantic relationships in this section?
- Is there anything that stands out about her first attempts at writing? What did you think of the ways her mother and sister motivated her?
- What do you think of Agatha Christie's style of writing her autobiography, so far? What are you enjoying, or wish to read more about?

Glossary

Banns: *Wedding banns are public announcements in church of two people's intention to marry*