

Themes: *Prosperity, Freedom, Grief, Isolation, Heartbreak, Self-Discovery*

Summary

After suffering serious injuries in Africa, Agatha's brother Monty returned to Ashfield to recover. His unconventional lifestyle proved challenging for the family, and eventually Agatha and Madge helped him settle into a bungalow on Dartmoor. Meanwhile, Agatha, Archie and Rosalind embarked on their move to a new, bigger flat in Sunningdale.

It was around this time that Christie took on Charlotte Fisher (known later as 'Carlo') to act as both a governess for Rosalind and as a secretary and typist. With life feeling settled and happy, her writing flourished, and the success of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* brought greater financial security, enabling the family to purchase a house they named Styles, after her first novel.

Then, news came of her mother's death, and with Archie in London, Agatha was left to deal with Ashfield and its contents largely alone. During this isolated period, Archie confessed he had fallen in love with another woman, and asked for a divorce.

As Rosalind prepared to start boarding school, Agatha sought an escape through travel. She initially planned a trip to the Caribbean, but hearing of the prospect of reaching Baghdad via the Orient Express, she was captivated and changed her plans at once.

Quotes

"It was by now just beginning to dawn on me that perhaps I might be a writer by profession. I was not sure of it yet. I still had an idea that writing books was only the natural successor to embroidering sofa-cushions."

"So, after illness, came sorrow, despair and heartbreak. There is no need to dwell on it. I stood out for a year, hoping he would change. But he did not."

"I had been round the world with Archie; I had been to the Canary Islands with Carlo and Rosalind; now I was going by myself."

Questions

- Which happy moment stands out to you from the Christie family's period of contentment?
- How do you think that Christie's happiness is reflected in the novels she was writing at that time?
- What role do you think houses play in this section, from Ashfield to Styles?
- How does it feel to read Christie's sentiments on the profession and finances of being a writer? What about her feelings towards each of her early novels?
- Travel emerges as a recurring theme in Christie's life. What do you think it meant to her?