

THE WORLD OF AGATHA CHRISTIE

SOLVE

location puzzles

EXPLORE

the impact of war

READ

escapist stories

DELVE

into a delicious recipe



N or M?

AN EXTRACT [1941]

'My dear Beresford, amateur status is just what is needed. The professional is handicapped here. You'll take the place of the best man we had or are likely to have.'

Tommy looked a question. Grant nodded.

'Yes. Died in St. Bridget's Hospital last Tuesday. Run down by a lorry—only lived a few hours. Accident case—but it wasn't an accident.'

Tommy said slowly: 'I see.'

Grant said quietly:

'And that's why we have reason to believe that Farquhar was on to something—that he was getting somewhere at last. By his death that wasn't an accident.'

Tommy looked a question.

Grant went on:

'Unfortunately we know next to nothing of what he had discovered. Farquhar had been methodically following up one line after another. Most of them led nowhere.'

Grant paused and then went on:

'Farquhar was unconscious until a few minutes before he died. Then he tried to say something. What he said was this: N or M. Song Susie.'

'That,' said Tommy, 'doesn't seem very illuminating.'

Grant smiled.

'A little more so than you might think. N or M, you see, is a term we have heard before. It refers to two of the most important and trusted German agents. We have come across their activities in other countries and we know just a little about them. It is their mission to organise a Fifth Column in foreign countries and to act as liaison officer between the country in question and Germany. N, we know, is a man. M is a woman. All we know about them is that these two are Hitler's most highly trusted agents and that in a code message we managed to decipher towards the beginning of the war there occurred

'You'll take the place of the best man we had'

this phrase—*Suggest N or M for England. Full powers—*

'I see. And Farquhar—'

'As I see it, Farquhar must have got on the track of one or other of them. Unfortunately we don't know which. Song Susie sounds very cryptic—but Farquhar hadn't a high-class French accent! There was a return ticket to Leahampton in his pocket which is suggestive. Leahampton is on the south coast—a budding Bournemouth or Torquay. Lots of private hotels and guesthouses. Amongst them is one called *Sans Souci—*

Tommy said again:

'Song Susie—Sans Souci—I see.'

Grant said: 'Do you?'

'The idea is,' Tommy said, 'that I should go there and—well—ferret round.'

'That is the idea.'

Tommy's smile broke out again.

'A bit vague, isn't it?' he asked. 'I don't even know what I'm looking for.'

'And I can't tell you. I don't know. It's up to you.'

Tommy sighed. He squared his shoulders.

'I can have a shot at it. But I'm not a very brainy sort of chap.'

'You did pretty well in the old days, so I've heard.'

'Oh, that was pure luck,' said Tommy hastily.

'Well, luck is rather what we need.'

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1940s & 50s Writing

FACT FILE

As well as providing entertainment, Christie's stories give readers an insight into social history. In this period there were plenty of world events and societal movements that she subtly documented in her fiction.

During World War Two Agatha worked in the dispensary at University College Hospital, London, while her husband Max was posted overseas. While few of her books are overtly about the war, many mention it, and Agatha's lived experience emanates throughout. Mrs Folliat's sons in *Dead Man's Folly* (1956) served in the war and a wealthy patriarch's home is bombed in *Taken at the Flood* (1948), suffering a similar fate to Agatha and Max's own house. In *After the Funeral* (1953), one character's tearoom failed, estates have gone to seed and taxation is high. *A Murder Is Announced* (1950) details the on-going rationing, black market bartering, and foreign refugees like Mitzi are living, grief-stricken in rural villages. False identities and ruptured communities are also themes in *Mrs McGinty's Dead* (1952).

Espionage and the 'enemy within' were very real threats and in *N or M?* (1941) Tommy and Tuppence must search for double agents in an English seaside town. One of the characters, Major Bletchley, almost got Agatha in trouble as it was thought she knew about the top-secret work of code-breakers at Bletchley Park (in fact, she had seen

the name while passing through its station!). Ten years later, *They Came to Baghdad* (1951) follows the adventures of heroine Victoria Jones as she journeys to Iraq and gets mixed up with international spies.

Communist characters crop up throughout the decades (think Ferguson in *Death on the Nile*, 1937), but one of the most significant nods to the movement comes in *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* (1941). One of the characters is strongly anti-communist and their principal interest is to keep England "free from Dictators – from Fascism and from Communism."

Unrest in the Middle East is the underlying theme of 1959's *Cat Among the Pigeons*, which begins with the death of a young prince from a fictional country. Agatha and Max experienced the turbulent political climate of the Middle East during their archaeological expeditions, ultimately having to pull out.

There was plenty of escapism in Agatha's texts from this period, of course. The delightfully distracting *Evil Under the Sun* (1941) sees Poirot on holiday (somewhat of a busman's holiday!) in Devon; *4.50 from Paddington* (1957) has one of the most iconic introductions when Miss Marple's friend Mrs McGillicuddy witnesses a woman being strangled from an adjacent train; and we also have the colourful fête in *Dead Man's Folly*.

1940s and 50s

A READING LIST



EVIL UNDER THE SUN [1940]

Hercule Poirot's relaxing trip to a sunny coastal town is hampered by the discovery of a body. The beautiful Arlena Stuart is found strangled on a secluded beach.

But with tensions rife between her and many of the hotel guests, any one of them could have a hidden motive for murder. Was it Arlena's quiet husband or her begrudging stepdaughter Linda? Or perhaps her killer was the graceful dressmaker or the tough and athletic Emily Brewster?

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THE BODY IN THE LIBRARY [1942]

'Oh, ma'am, oh, ma'am, there's a body in the library.' This was not the wake up call the Bantrys expected on a crisp autumn morning. The young woman

who was in formal wear and heavy makeup had been strangled. But who was she and how on earth did she end up in the library at Gossington Hall? Mrs Bantry calls on her good friend, Miss Marple, to solve the case.

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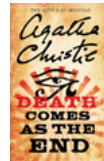
TOWARDS ZERO [1944]

Several seemingly unconnected events all converge towards zero hour, towards murder. At Gull's Point, the clifftop home of the elderly widow Lady Tressilian, a party gathers. Neville Strange, a

famous tennis star who is among the members of the party, invites both his current wife Kay

and his ex-wife Audrey...what could possibly go wrong? Expect rising tensions, ruptured relationships and an explosive denouement.

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DEATH COMES AS THE END [1944]

It is 2000 BC in Ancient Egypt and danger is rife. Nofret, the young and beautiful concubine to a ka-priest lies twisted at the foot of a cliff. Many believe this fatal accident was the work

of fate, but Renisenb, the priest's daughter, suspects foul-play. As she digs into Nofret's death, threatening secrets are exposed and family relationships begin to crumble. Christie wrote this story at the request of renowned Egyptologist and friend Stephen Glanville. The narrative is based on real family letters that had been translated, and Glanville also assisted with authentic details about daily life from the period.

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CROOKED HOUSE [1948]

Killed with a lethal injection, Aristides' demise benefitted each member of the Leonides family thanks to his immense fortune. Naturally, Aristides'

young widow is the first to be suspected. However, with everyone having both motive and opportunity, and none of them having a secure alibi, the case is wide open. Narrator Charles Hayward's pending marriage depends on the outcome of this case.

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THEY CAME TO BAGHDAD [1951]

Victoria Jones, recently dismissed typist, sets off for Baghdad on a whim after a fleeting interaction with a handsome stranger.

Unfortunately for our heroine, this city in the Middle East is the location of a top-secret meeting between three powerful countries, as well as a sinister set of spies who threaten the peace of the world once more. When British Agent Carmichael dies in Jones' hotel room in Iraq, Victoria finds herself in danger.

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A DAUGHTER'S A DAUGHTER [1952]

This story, in three parts, explores Sarah and her mother Anne's relationship. Sarah, 19, is keen to embrace adulthood in the post-war era, but fearful of

leaving her mother. Anne is open to a second chance at love, but shocked when her daughter rejects her choice of a husband. The two bicker, join forces, and divide once more, leaving resentment in their wake. Will either of them find happiness? Perhaps the kindly servant Enid, and the stern words of Dame Laura might be able to help...

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THE MOUSETRAP [1952]

The proprietors of the newly opened guest house, Monkswell Manor, are nervously awaiting their first residents. The Ralstones hadn't expected to contend with a snowstorm,

a flighty daily woman and a visit from a policeman in their opening period. Determined to make a go of things, the married couple must contend with a varied assortment of guests who face being snowed in together. Will Sergeant

Trotter be able to uncover who is hiding in plain sight?

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4.50 FROM PADDINGTON [1957]

Miss Marple's strength might be waning, but her mind is still razor sharp in this Christie favourite. As she tries to put a friend's mind at rest after

witnessing a crime, Jane recruits the ever-efficient Lucy Eyelesbarrow to find a body. Lucy, who has gone into domestic service after the war to earn a better wage, thinks nothing of cooking up curry for the Crackenthorpe family whilst snooping around their grounds for the suspected victim.

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ORDEAL BY INNOCENCE [1958]

An unexpected witness turns up to upset the strained peace of the Argyle family. Two years after the murder of Rachel Argyle, the adoptive mother of five, scientist

Arthur Calgary believes he is doing the right thing by proving that Jacko Argyle was innocent of the crime. But with Jacko and Rachel dead, what will the impact of reopening old wounds be? A taut, impressive exploration of family ties, loss, and suspicion.

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Have we included one of your favourite stories from this period? Get in touch with us via email (generalenquiries@agathachristie.com) or our social media channels to let us know.

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Five Little Pigs

AN EXTRACT [1942]

The famous K.C. looked thoughtfully at his companion.

‘I’ve always thought you were an honest man, Poirot. What are you doing? Trying to make money by playing on a girl’s natural affections?’

‘You do not know the girl. She is an unusual girl. A girl of great force of character.’

‘Yes, I should imagine the daughter of Amyas and Caroline Crale might be that. What does she want?’

‘She wants the truth.’

‘Hm—I’m afraid she’ll find the truth unpalatable. Honestly, Poirot, I don’t think there’s any doubt about it. She killed him.’

‘You will forgive me, my friend, but I must satisfy myself on that point.’

‘Well, I don’t know what more you can do. You can read up the newspaper accounts of the trial. Humphrey Rudolph appeared for the Crown. He’s dead—let me see, who was his junior? Young Fogg, I think. Yes, Fogg. You can have a chat with him. And then there are the people who were there at the time. Don’t suppose they’ll enjoy your butting in and raking the whole thing up, but I dare say you’ll get what you want out of them. You’re a plausible devil.’

‘Ah yes, the people concerned. That is very important. You remember, perhaps, who they were?’

Depleach considered.

‘Let me see—it’s a long time ago. There were only five people who were really in it, so to speak—I’m not counting the servants—a couple of faithful old things, scared-looking creatures—they didn’t know anything about anything. No one could suspect them.’

‘There are five people, you say. Tell me about them.’

‘Well, there was Philip Blake. He was Crale’s greatest friend—had known him all his life. He

was staying in the house at the time. He’s alive. I see him now and again on the links. Lives at St George’s Hill. Stockbroker.

Plays the markets and gets away with it. Successful man, running to fat a bit.’

‘Yes. And who next?’

‘Then there was Blake’s elder brother. Country squire—stay-at-home sort of chap.’

A jingle ran through Poirot’s head. He repressed it. He must not always be thinking of nursery rhymes. It seemed an obsession with him lately. And yet the jingle persisted.

‘This little pig went to market, this little pig stayed at home...’

He murmured:

‘He stayed at home—yes?’

‘He’s the fellow I was telling you about—messed about with drugs—and herbs—bit of a chemist. His hobby. What was his name now? Literary sort of name—I’ve got it. Meredith. Meredith Blake. Don’t know whether he’s alive or not.’

‘And who next?’

‘Next? Well, there’s the cause of all the trouble. The girl in the case. Elsa Greer.’

‘This little pig ate roast beef,’ murmured Poirot.

Depleach stared at him.

‘They’ve fed her meat all right,’ he said. ‘She’s been a go-getter. She’s had three husbands since then. In and out of the divorce court as easy as you please. And every time she makes a change, it’s for the better. Lady Dittisham—that’s who she is now. Open any Tatler and you’re sure to find her.’

‘And the other two?’

‘There was the governess woman. I don’t remember her name. Nice capable woman. Thompson—Jones—something like that.’

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Story Settings

A QUIZ

Match these Christie stories to their settings.
Note: All settings appear in more than one book.



English Village



English Coast



International



London



Country House

Death Comes as the End
Destination Unknown
They Came to Baghdad
Sparkling Cyanide

One, Two Buckle My Shoe
Evil Under the Sun
Towards Zero
The Moving Finger

A Pocket Full of Rye
A Murder is Announced
The Hollow
Crooked House



Agatha Christie Trivia

300 killer questions on the Queen of Crime

This new trivia game is perfect for a gathering of sleuths. Challenge friends with three difficulty ratings to choose from across ten Christie categories.
RRP: \$24.99, £20

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ANSWERS - English Coast: Evil Under the Sun, Towards Zero; English Village: The Moving Finger, A Pocket Full of Rye, A Murder is Announced; London: Sparkling Cyanide, One, Two Buckle My Shoe; International: Death Comes as the End, Destination Unknown, They Came to Baghdad; Country House: The Hollow, Crooked House; Towards Zero

A Murder is Announced

AN EXTRACT [1950]

'Letty—Letty—have you seen this? Whatever can it mean?'

'What's the matter, Dora?'

'The most extraordinary advertisement. It says Little Paddocks quite distinctly. But whatever can it mean?'

'If you'd let me see, Dora dear—'

Miss Bunner obediently surrendered the paper into Miss Blacklock's outstretched hand, pointing to the item with a tremulous forefinger.

'Just look, Letty.'

Miss Blacklock looked. Her eyebrows went up. She threw a quick scrutinizing glance round the table. Then she read the advertisement out loud.

'A murder is announced and will take place on Friday, October 29th, at Little Paddocks at 6.30 p.m. Friends please accept this, the only intimation.'

Then she said sharply: 'Patrick, is this your idea?'

Her eyes rested searchingly on the handsome devil-may-care face of the young man at the other end of the table.

Patrick Simmons' disclaimer came quickly.

'No, indeed, Aunt Letty. Whatever put that idea into your head? Why should I know anything about it?'

'I wouldn't put it past you,' said Miss Blacklock grimly.

'I thought it might be your idea of a joke.'

'A joke? Nothing of the kind.'

'And you, Julia?'

Julia, looking bored, said: 'Of course not.'

Miss Bunner murmured: 'Do you think Mrs Haymes—' and looked at an empty place where someone had breakfasted earlier.

'Oh, I don't think our Phillipa would try and be funny,' said Patrick. 'She's a serious girl, she is.'

'But what's the idea, anyway?' said

Julia, yawning. 'What does it mean?'

Miss Blacklock said slowly, 'I suppose—it's some silly sort of hoax.'

'But why?' Dora Bunner exclaimed. 'What's the point of it? It seems a very stupid sort of joke. And in very bad taste.'

Her flabby cheeks quivered indignantly, and her shortsighted eyes sparkled with indignation.

Miss Blacklock smiled at her.

'Don't work yourself up over it, Bunny,' she said. 'It's just somebody's idea of humour, but I wish I knew whose.'

'It says today,' pointed out Miss Bunner. 'Today at 6.30 p.m. What do you think is going to happen?'

'Death!' said Patrick in sepulchral tones.

'Delicious death.'

'Be quiet, Patrick,' said Miss Blacklock as Miss Bunner gave a little yelp.

'I only meant the special cake that Mitzi makes,' said Patrick apologetically. 'You know we always call it delicious death.'

Miss Blacklock smiled a little absent-mindedly.

Miss Bunner persisted: 'But Letty, what do you really think—?'

Her friend cut across the words with reassuring cheerfulness.

'I know one thing that will happen at 6.30,' she said dryly. 'We'll have half the village up here, agog with curiosity. I'd better make sure we've got some sherry in the house.'

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Delicious Death Chocolate Cake

A RECIPE BY JANE ASHER

MAKES: 12-16 SLICES

INGREDIENTS:

FOR THE SPONGE: 175g dark chocolate chips, 100g butter, 100g caster sugar, 5 large eggs, ½ tsp vanilla extract, 100g ground almonds, ½ tsp baking powder

FOR THE FILLING: 150ml rum, brandy or orange juice, 150g raisins, 55g dark brown sugar, 6-8 glacé cherries, 4-6 pieces crystallised ginger, 1 tsp lemon juice

FOR THE ICING: 175g dark chocolate chips, 150ml double cream, 2 tsps apricot jam, 10g edible flowers (optional), gold leaf (optional)

EQUIPMENT:

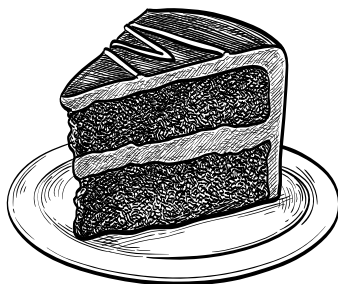
Round cake tin (8" or 20cm), baking parchment, saucepan, spatula or wooden spoon, heatproof bowl, large mixing bowl, whisk (electric preferable), cooling rack, palette knife (optional), serrated knife, piping bag and star nozzle (optional)

METHOD:

Preheat the oven to 135° fan/gas 2. Grease and line the cake tin with baking parchment. Combine all the ingredients in a saucepan, and stir over heat until the mixture is bubbling. Allow to simmer gently, while stirring, for 2 minutes, or until the mixture thickens. Leave to cool.

In a small heatproof bowl, melt the chocolate over simmering water or in a microwave, being careful not to let it overheat. Set aside to cool for a few minutes.

Cream the butter and sugar in a large bowl until pale and fluffy. Separate the eggs, setting aside



the whites. Add 4 of the yolks, one by one, to the butter/sugar mix, beating well in between. Fold the melted chocolate then stir in vanilla extract. In a separate bowl mix together the almonds and baking powder then stir into the cake mix.

Whisk the egg whites until peaks form, then fold gently into the cake mix. Spoon the mix into the cake tin and bake for 55-65 minutes (or until firm and well risen). Allow the cake to cool in the tin for 10 minutes before turning it onto a rack to cool completely.

Using a serrated knife slice the cake in half horizontally. Spread the cooled filling onto one half, and sandwich them back together.

Put the chocolate and cream into a heatproof bowl and melt them together over simmering water or in a microwave. Spread warmed apricot jam all over the cake and place on a rack.

Keeping back a couple of tablespoons, pour the icing over the cake covering the top and sides. Scoop any remainder from the tray and add back into the kept back icing. Transfer the cake to a cake board or serving plate.

Once the reserved icing is firm enough to pipe, place it in a piping bag with a star nozzle and pipe a scrolling line around the top and bottom edges of the cake and leave to set.

Scatter crushed flower petals over the top. Use a cocktail stick to pull off small flakes of gold leaf and add them gently too. **SERVE!**

An Autobiography: Mary Westmacott

AN EXTRACT [1977]

Shortly after that, I wrote the one book that has satisfied me completely. It was a new Mary Westmacott, the book that I had always wanted to write, that had been clear in my mind. It was the picture of a woman with a complete image of herself, of what she was, but about which she was completely mistaken. Through her own actions, her own feelings and thoughts, this would be revealed to the reader. She would be, as it were, continually meeting herself, not recognising herself, but becoming increasingly uneasy. What brought about this revelation would be the fact that for the first time in her life she was alone - completely alone - for four or five days.

I had the background now, which I had not had in my mind before. It would be one of those resthouses on journeys through Mesopotamia, where you are immobilised, you cannot travel on, there is no one there but natives who hardly speak English - who bring you meals and nod their heads and agree to what you say. There is nowhere to go, no one to see, and you are stuck there till you can go on. So you sit and think about yourself, having read the only two books you have with you. You think about yourself. And my starting point - I had always known what that would be - was when she was leaving Victoria, going out to see one of her daughters who was married abroad, looking back as the train moved out of the station, at her husband's back retreating up the platform, and the sudden pang it gave her as he went striding along, striding along just like a man who was terrifically relieved, who was released from bondage, who was going to have a holiday. It was so surprising that she could hardly believe her eyes. Of course she was mistaken, of course Rodney was going to miss her terribly, and yet - that little seed - it would stay in her

mind worrying her; and then, she was all alone and began thinking, the pattern of her life would unroll little by little. It was going to be technically difficult to do, the way I wanted it; lightly, colloquially, but with a growing feeling of tension, of uneasiness, the sort of feeling one has - everyone has, sometime, I think - of *who am I?* What am I like *really*? What do all the people I love think of me? Do they think of me as I think they do? The whole world looks different; you begin to see it in different terms. You keep reassuring yourself, but the suspicion, the anxiety comes back. I wrote that book in three days flat. On the third day, a Monday, I sent an excuse to the Hospital, because I did not dare leave my book at that point - I had to go on until I had finished it. It was not a long book - a mere fifty thousand words - but it had been with me a long time. It is an odd feeling to have a book growing inside you, for perhaps six or seven years knowing that one day you will write it, knowing that it is building up, all the time, to what it already is. Yes, it is there already - it just has to come more clearly out of the mist. All the people are there, ready, waiting in the wings, ready to come on to the stage when their cues are called - and then, suddenly, one gets a clear and sudden command: *Now!*

Now is when you are ready. Now, you know all about it. Oh, the blessing that for once one is able to do it then and there, that *now* is really *now*. I was so frightened of interruptions, of anything breaking the flow of continuity, that after I had written the first chapter in a white heat, I proceeded to write the last chapter, because I knew so clearly where I was going that I felt I must get it down on paper.

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Witness for the Prosecution

A WORD SEARCH

Hidden in the grid are 15 words or phrases relating to the stage play *Witness for the Prosecution*. How long will it take you to spot them all?

C O K D L E O N A R D V O L E J
O T R K X P S Q J P T Q Y Y S U
U H F J D Y K S U R S Q U F V R
R E F D R J R M S O A E U U F Y
T A S J T Y E K T S U L N M D W
R T R O T H D O I E D O D M G I
O R O I W N R P C C I V E N Y T
O E T M R S U O E U E E F V S N
M V C E V P M H V T N N E E J E
D P A O B P F E N I C I N G Q S
R G R P L C R F Q O E A C D A S
A Z R W H D I I M N M M E U J R
M T R F I R D S E E G O E J N P
A K Z C F S K O L G D R A O F G
C V T J L L A H Y T N U O C W Y
C X Z Z I B Y I G O N K C G F W

ACTORS
AUDIENCE
COUNTY HALL
COURTROOM DRAMA
DEFENCE

JUDGE
JURY
JUSTICE
LEONARD VOLE
MURDER

PROSECUTION
ROMAINE VOLE
THEATRE
VERDICT
WITNESS



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1940s *and* 1950s

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