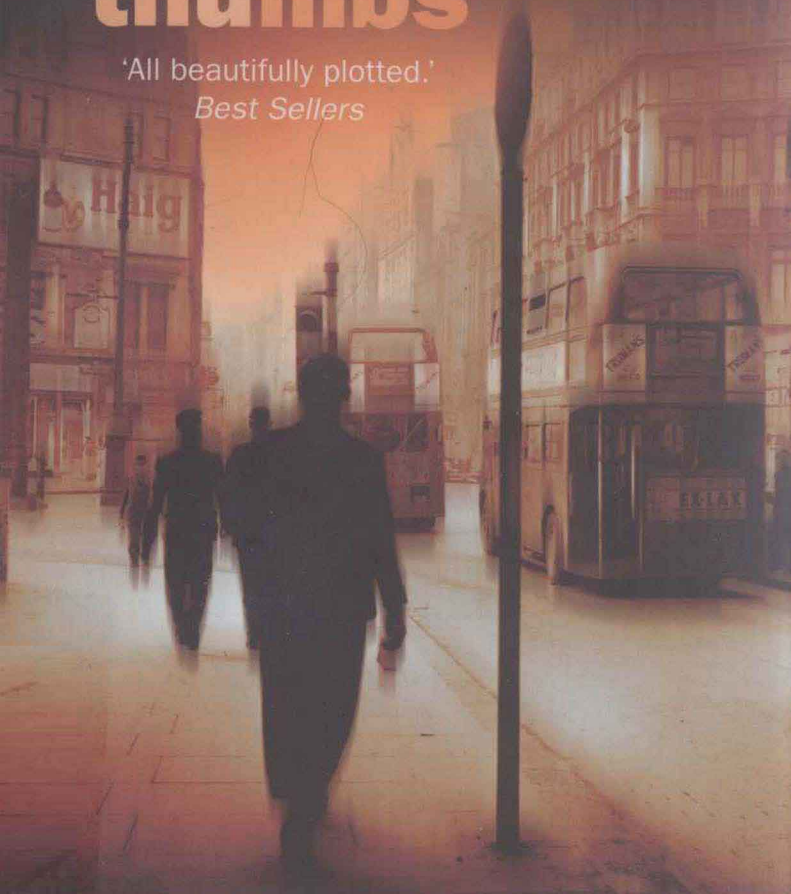


Agatha Christie

by the pricking of my thumbs

'All beautifully plotted.'

Best Sellers



By the Pricking of My Thumbs

Agatha Christie is known throughout the world as the Queen of Crime. Her books have sold over a billion copies in English with another billion in 100 foreign languages. She is the most widely published author of all time and in any language, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. She is the author of 80 crime novels and short-story collections, 16 plays and six novels written under the name of Mary Westmacott.

Agatha Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was written towards the end of the First World War in which she served as a VAD. In it she created Hercule Poirot, the little Belgian detective who was destined to become the most popular detective in fiction since Sherlock Holmes. It was eventually published by The Bodley Head in 1920.

In 1926, after averaging a book a year, Agatha Christie wrote her masterpiece. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was the first of her books to be published by Collins and marked the beginning of an author-publisher relationship which lasted for 50 years and well over 70 books. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was also the first of Agatha Christie's books to be dramatized – under the name *Alibi* – and to have a successful run in London's West End. *The Mousetrap*, her most famous play of all, opened in 1952 and is the longest-running play in history.

Agatha Christie was made a Dame in 1971. She died in 1976, since when a number of books have been published posthumously: the bestselling novel *Sleeping Murder* appeared later that year, followed by her autobiography and the short story collections *Miss Marple's Final Cases*, *Problem at Pollensa Bay* and *While the Light Lasts*. In 1998 *Black Coffee* was the first of her plays to be novelized by another author, Charles Osborne.

The Agatha Christie Collection

The Man In The Brown Suit
The Secret of Chimneys
The Seven Dials Mystery
The Mysterious Mr Quin
The Sittaford Mystery
The Hound of Death
The Listerdale Mystery
Why Didn't They Ask Evans?
Parker Pyne Investigates
Murder Is Easy
And Then There Were None
Towards Zero
Death Comes as the End
Sparkling Cyanide
Crooked House
They Came to Baghdad
Destination Unknown
Spider's Web *
The Unexpected Guest *
Ordeal by Innocence
The Pale Horse
Endless Night
Passenger To Frankfurt
Problem at Pollensa Bay
While the Light Lasts

Poirot

The Mysterious Affair at Styles
The Murder on the Links
Poirot Investigates
The Murder of Roger Ackroyd
The Big Four
The Mystery of the Blue Train
Black Coffee *
Penil at End House
Lord Edgware Dies
Murder on the Orient Express
Three-Act Tragedy
Death in the Clouds
The ABC Murders
Murder in Mesopotamia
Cards on the Table
Murder in the Mews
Dumb Witness
Death on the Nile
Appointment With Death
Hercule Poirot's Christmas
Sad Cypress
One, Two, Buckle My Shoe
Evil Under the Sun
Five Little Pigs

* novelised by Charles Osborne

The Hollow
The Labours of Hercules
Taken at the Flood
Mrs McGinty's Dead
After the Funeral
Hickory Dickory Dock
Dead Man's Folly
Cat Among the Pigeons
The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding
The Clocks
Third Girl
Hallowe'en Party
Elephants Can Remember
Poirot's Early Cases
Curtain: Poirot's Last Case

Marple

The Murder at the Vicarage
The Thirteen Problems
The Body in the Library
The Moving Finger
A Murder is Announced
They Do It With Mirrors
A Pocket Full of Rye
The 4.50 from Paddington
The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side
A Caribbean Mystery
At Bertram's Hotel
Nemesis
Sleeping Murder
Miss Marple's Final Cases

Tommy & Tuppence

The Secret Adversary
Partners in Crime
N or M?
By the Pricking of My Thumbs
Postern of Fate

Published as Mary Westmacott

Giant's Bread
Unfinished Portrait
Absent in the Spring
The Rose and the Yew Tree
A Daughter's a Daughter
The Burden

Memoirs

An Autobiography
Come, Tell Me How You Live

Play Collections

The Mousetrap and Selected Plays
Witness for the Prosecution and
Selected Plays

Agatha Christie

**By the Pricking
of My Thumbs**



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This book is dedicated to the many readers in this and other countries who write to me asking: 'What has happened to Tommy and Tuppence? What are they doing now?' My best wishes to you all, and I hope you will enjoy meeting Tommy and Tuppence again, years older, but with spirit unquenched!

Agatha Christie

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By the pricking of my thumbs
Something wicked this way comes.

Macbeth

Book 1

Sunny Ridge

Chapter 1

Aunt Ada

Mr and Mrs Beresford were sitting at the breakfast table. They were an ordinary couple. Hundreds of elderly couples just like them were having breakfast all over England at that particular moment. It was an ordinary sort of day too, the kind of day that you get five days out of seven. It looked as though it might rain but wasn't quite sure of it.

Mr Beresford had once had red hair. There were traces of the red still, but most of it had gone that sandy-cum-grey colour that red-headed people so often arrive at in middle life. Mrs Beresford had once had black hair, a vigorous curling mop of it. Now the black was adulterated with streaks of grey laid on, apparently at random. It made a rather pleasant effect. Mrs Beresford had once thought of dyeing her hair, but in the end she had decided that she liked herself better as nature had made her. She had decided instead to try a new shade

of lipstick so as to cheer herself up.

An elderly couple having breakfast together. A pleasant couple, but nothing remarkable about them. So an onlooker would have said. If the onlooker had been young he or she would have added, 'Oh yes, quite pleasant, but deadly dull, of course, like all old people.'

However, Mr and Mrs Beresford had not yet arrived at the time of life when they thought of themselves as old. And they had no idea that they and many others were automatically pronounced deadly dull solely on that account. Only by the young of course, but then, they would have thought indulgently, young people knew nothing about life. Poor dears, they were always worrying about examinations, or their sex life, or buying some extraordinary clothes, or doing extraordinary things to their hair to make them more noticeable. Mr and Mrs Beresford from their own point of view were just past the prime of life. They liked themselves and liked each other and day succeeded day in a quiet but enjoyable fashion.

There were, of course, moments, everyone has moments. Mr Beresford opened a letter, glanced through it and laid it down, adding it to the small pile by his left hand. He picked up the next letter but forbore to open it. Instead he stayed with it in his hand. He was not looking at the letter, he was looking at the toast-rack. His wife observed him for a few moments before saying,

‘What’s the matter, Tommy?’

‘Matter?’ said Tommy vaguely. ‘Matter?’

‘That’s what I said,’ said Mrs Beresford.

‘Nothing is the matter,’ said Mr Beresford. ‘What should it be?’

‘You’ve thought of something,’ said Tuppence accusingly.

‘I don’t think I was thinking of anything at all.’

‘Oh yes, you were. Has anything happened?’

‘No, of course not. What should happen?’ He added, ‘I got the plumber’s bill.’

‘Oh,’ said Tuppence with the air of one enlightened. ‘More than you expected, I suppose.’

‘Naturally,’ said Tommy, ‘it always is.’

‘I can’t think why we didn’t train as plumbers,’ said Tuppence. ‘If you’d only trained as a plumber, I could have been a plumber’s mate and we’d be raking in money day by day.’

‘Very short-sighted of us not to see these opportunities.’

‘Was that the plumber’s bill you were looking at just now?’

‘Oh no, that was just an Appeal.’

‘Delinquent boys – Racial integration?’

‘No. Just another Home they’re opening for old people.’

‘Well, that’s more sensible anyway,’ said Tuppence,

‘but I don’t see why you have to have that worried look about it.’

‘Oh, I wasn’t thinking of that.’

‘Well, what *were* you thinking of?’

‘I suppose it put it into my mind,’ said Mr Beresford.

‘What?’ said Tuppence. ‘You know you’ll tell me in the end.’

‘It really wasn’t anything important. I just thought that perhaps – well, it was Aunt Ada.’

‘Oh, I see,’ said Tuppence, with instant comprehension. ‘Yes,’ she added, softly, meditatively. ‘Aunt Ada.’

Their eyes met. It is regrettably true that in these days there is in nearly every family, the problem of what might be called an ‘Aunt Ada’. The names are different – Aunt Amelia, Aunt Susan, Aunt Cathy, Aunt Joan. They are varied by grandmothers, aged cousins and even great-aunts. But they exist and present a problem in life which has to be dealt with. Arrangements have to be made. Suitable establishments for looking after the elderly have to be inspected and full questions asked about them. Recommendations are sought from doctors, from friends, who have Aunt Adas of their own who had been ‘perfectly happy until she had died’ at ‘The Laurels, Bexhill’, or ‘Happy Meadows at Scarborough’.

The days are past when Aunt Elisabeth, Aunt Ada