



A Pocket Full of Rye

Agatha Christie

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A handful of grain is found in the pocket of a murdered businessman! Rex Fortescue, king of a financial empire, was sipping tea in his 'counting house' when he suffered an agonising and sudden death. On later inspection, the pockets of the deceased were found to contain traces of cereals. Yet, it was the incident in the parlour which confirmed Jane Marple's suspicion that here she was looking at a case of crime by rhyme!

A Pocket Full of Rye Details

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From Reader Review A Pocket Full of Rye for online ebook

Susan in NC says

Unbelievable- I found a Miss Marple I don't recall reading! Or if I did, I was very young...either way, I know I've seen the BBC version at some point. Not sure if it was my beloved Joan Hickson or one of the other Marples.

I enjoyed this book thoroughly and read it through in one rainy, cloudy, frigid winter Sunday - perfect! The local library has a beautiful collection of Christie books so I am able to indulge my current reading project of finishing Miss Marple in order and then Poirot - a much bigger challenge because of the number of books he starred in! I see a visit to the used book store in my future...

This book opens in a London business office as morning tea is being served; the secretaries suffer through another serving of weak tea (the junior typist/tea maker never can get the water boiling), but Rex Fortescue, head of the firm and sometimes shady tycoon, is of course enjoying his own perfectly prepared tea. Miss Grosvenor is the ultimate glamorous office accessory - looks the part, classy, cool, calm and collected, makes perfect tea, offers the requisite "yes, Mr. Fortescue" as expected - but when her boss collapses in a fit after she serves his tea, she loses her cool immediately. As Fortescue struggles to breathe he chokes out, "The tea - what the hell did you put in the tea!" Of course attention first falls on the secretary - but was she more than that?

Inspector Neele of Scotland Yard is soon called in when taxine, a slow-acting poison derived from yew trees, is found in Fortescue's system. Now that it's a poisoning death, the action of course swiftly shifts to his home - the taxine had to be introduced at breakfast, so off Neele goes to Surrey to look for the poison source at Fortescue's home - yup, none other than Yewtree Lodge!

Too fun - and Christie, the master at misdirection and interesting characters continues in that vein; we have the twin to the glamorous secretary in the blonde, beautiful, 30-years-younger former manicurist second wife - a real "sexy piece" and definitely not too broken up over becoming a widow...in fact, the inspector and household staff have a hard time even tracking her down to give her the tragic news as she's out "golfing" with the local gigolo...eldest son Percival, prim, proper and cheap to the point of meanness, is off in the north of England on business for the family firm, but Neele soon learns that the firm was in big trouble and coming close to going bust; Percy and the old man were fighting regularly over Fortescue's erratic behavior and borderline illegal and risky business deals. So much so that the old man called back Lancelot, the black sheep second son and junior partner, back from his African exile to come back and maybe help push Percy out?

Motives abound but Neele soon sees his way clear - the bombshell wife, Adele, stood to inherit a fortune and had love letters from her golf-playing lover hidden away in a secret drawer; it seems an open and shut case. But he's back to square one when she's found poisoned from afternoon tea and the housemaid is found strangled. Where to turn in this seemingly impossible case? Lucky for Neele, the sad, silly housemaid Gladys once worked for Miss Marple, who has seen the sensational news stories about the triple murder and feels compelled to come see what she can do to help.

That's why I love her so - she is truly nemesis personified. Yes, Gladys was silly and stupid and gullible and not very good at her job, but she had worked for and lived with Miss Marple right out of the orphanage and Miss M feels responsible for her. Finally, the murderer, in a cruel and twisted bit of spite, pinched the

victim's nose with a clothespin from the laundry- that nasty impulse signals the murderer's end, did he or she but know it..."That's what made me so angry...It was such a cruel, contemptuous gesture. It gave me a kind of picture of the murderer...It's very wicked, you know, to affront human dignity. Particularly if you've already killed", Miss Marple explains. The more I reread of her adventures, the more I appreciate that Christie truly created an amazing character here, and I look forward to rediscovering all of her stories.

Menia says

B.R.A.C.E. 2018 δε?τερο βιβλ?ο για την τετρ?δα των συγγραφ?ων διαφορετικ?ς εθνικ?τητας αν και δεν μου αρ?σουν οι ιστορ?ες της Μις Μαρπλ, ευτυχ?ς εδ? εμφαν?ζεται ελ?χιστα ;)

Niveditha R says

I hadn't read a Miss Marple mystery in quite a long time. Glad I chose this one. I partly worked it out by paying careful attention, but as usual Agatha Christie succeeded in befuddling me in some aspects!

What I love about Miss Marple is the way she compares character traits to someone she knows/ knew personally. Also, the way she uses her age and dithering manner to gain a level of comfort with the suspects is remarkable. Obviously us readers can see through her tricks! She's pink and cute and fluffy and my favourite Christie sleuth!

However in this case, Miss Marple makes her appearance about 40% into the book and is not a constant presence through the remaining pages, so I found it hard to believe when she reveals the name of the murderer in the end.

That apart, it is a quick read and an interesting murder mystery which I would recommend to all Christie fans.

Hafsa Sabira says

Not the best Miss Marple I have read.

Melindam says

*Sing a song of sixpence,
A pocket full of rye.
Four and twenty blackbirds,
Baked in a pie.*

*When the pie was opened
The birds began to sing;
Wasn't that a dainty dish,
To set before the king.*

*The king was in his counting house,
Counting out his money;
The queen was in the parlour,
Eating bread and honey.*

*The maid was in the garden,
Hanging out the clothes,
When down came a blackbird
And pecked off her nose.*

The title and parts of the plot of the novel refer to the nursery rhyme quoted above.

Originally I gave this book 3 stars, but upon re-reading I decided it deserves a 4th. :)

The only problem I have with the book is that almost all characters are unlikeable. Apart from Miss Marple, Inspector Neele and Pat Fortescue (view spoiler) , the rest are a nasty, unsympathetic bunch. (OK, maybe Elaine Fortescue is just simply pathetic, but still unlikeable.) They are very well described: precisely and concisely and you can imagine any of them doing the killing all right.

And hats off to Agatha Christie's brilliancy, for queerly enough, she manages what no others (according to my limited knowledge) can, namely, making the first victim's dying and the subsequent pathological consultation the funniest part of the book. This she does, not with malice or morbidity, but with an irresistible, gentle irony, concentrating on the various reactions of the other people around: a bunch of secretaries and typists at a loss what to do in time of crisis and the professional satisfaction the pathologist takes in the "unusual" method of poisoning.

Miss Marple does her usual stuff to satisfaction: knitting baby-things, drawing references to characters of her native village St. Mary Mead & eventually finding the murderer.

Stephanie Anze says

"Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,
Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king.

The king was in his counting house, counting out his money,
The queen was in the parlour eating bread and honey.
The maid was in the garden hanging out the clothes,
When there came a litte dickey bird and nipped off her nose."

When Rex Fortescue suddenly falls ill after drinking his regular cup of tea at his office and dies shortly after, the police suspect foul play. Inspector Neele visits Yewtree Lodge, Mr. Fortecue's home, to interview the family and staff. Between a younger second wife, an son with which Mr. Fortescue was currenty at odds with, a daughter who wished to marry but the fiance was not aproved by dad and a whole slew of characters with the staff, inspector Neele has no shortage of suspects and an abundance of motives. As the investigation progresses, Miss Marple inserts herself into the case and soon links the murder to a rhyme. Uncovering a complex plot, Miss Marple unmasks the culprit.

The seventh book in the Miss Marple series, 'A Pocket full of Rye' was originally published in 1953. Rex Fortescue is a ruthless business man with questionable practices. Accustomed to having a cup of tea at work, he falls ill quite suddenly and dies. A handful of rye is found in his pocket and soon his death is a confirmed case of poisoning through taxine. Inspector Neele is assigned to the case which leads him to Yewtree Lodge, the home of the the Fortecues. The house is surrounded by the plant needed to get taxine and now inspector Neele has a household full of suspects. Miss Marple reads about the murder in the papers and after another twist in the case, gets involved. As per usual with Christie, there were plenty of red herrings and misdirections. I greatly enjoyed the way in which the plot unravelled and found the characters intriguing and entertaning (especially Miss Ramsbottom, the sister of Mr. Fortecue's first wife). I love how the rhyme was incorporated into the narrative and how the culprit came to be revealed. This book is yet another favorite by Miss Christie and I absolutely love it. This book is a crime by rhyme and it was done masterfully. Highly recommended!

Elham says

Although Miss Marple is always the one who finally finds the truths, too bad she's not herself a real detective. I think I must look for such character in radical science-fiction dystopian feminist novels.

Lydia Dyslin says

Just what. I thought I had it all figured out. And I did, to some extent. But I definitely did NOT get the murder right. The one character I liked in this book (besides Miss Marple and Inspector Neele, obviously) did it?!?!?! I WAS SO WRONG. I DIDN'T BELIEVE THE WORST IN PEOPLE, WHICH I SHOULD OBVIOUSLY DO. Miss Marple says it herself. EVERYBODY is a suspect in these books. EVERY. BODY. GOT THAT???

Even that inconspicuous museum guard. He probably did it. Don't think "Oh the guard never does it" BECAUSE HE DOES IT IN THIS BOOK OK (Metaphorically)

Lady Clementina ffinch-ffarowmore says

Book 12 for the Miss Marple Challenge. When I picked up my copy of this one, I found the first couple of pages has fallen out?so I used for the first time, the "preview" feature on GR to read the missing bit?so very glad this was available.

The wealthy Rex Fortescue, a shrewd but unscrupulous man, is poisoned, falling ill just after having tea in

his office, his pocket full of rye. While Mr Fortescue's name and circumstances of his death merely hinted at the rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence", before long there are other deaths, the similarities with the rhyme no longer coincidental. But one of the people killed, the young maid Gladys Martin happened to be Miss Marple's former maid, and the cruel circumstances of her death bring Miss Marple to the Fortescues' residence Yewtree Lodge, where Inspector Neele, in charge of the case, and a bit out of his depth with it, finds himself relying on her skills before long. Mr Fortescue has some skeletons in his closet, and not all is right with his current life either?his second wife, the glamorous Adele, thirty years his junior is in love with another man, his elder son Percival is worried about Mr Fortescue's sudden tendency to speculate with his wealth and mounting losses, his daughter has a suitor he disapproves of, while his younger son Lance, who Mr Fortescue had kicked out some years ago over a forged cheque seems to be returning expecting a reconciliation. Miss Marple once again relies on her age, and indeed the stereotypes associated with it (gossiping) to obtain an insight into all those involved, and her skills of finding parallels for character in people she has known in St Mary Mead too come to her aid. Christie as usual, surprises us with how the murders were committed, whodunit, and what it was that the maid Gladys saw or heard that led her to lose her life. This was another enjoyable Marple mystery, with plenty of secrets even if not as many plot twists as some others. I enjoy mysteries in country house settings, and this was again one such. Great (re)read.

Susan says

As anybody who reads the Miss Marple books knows, she often trains young housemaids, so they can go into service. When Miss Marple reads that one of the young maids she trained, Gladys Martin, has been found strangled - a clothes peg left on her nose - in the garden of the house where she worked, she sets off at once to see who did such a wicked thing. Murder had already visited the family, as the head of the household, Mr Rex Fortecue, was poisoned at work and, in his pocket, was a handful of rye...

The crimes in this novel are all lined to the nursery rhyme, "Sing a song of sixpence..." and yet it all seems unbelievable to Detective Inspector Neele, who is sent to investigate. However, as Miss Marple points out to him, there must be blackbird and, indeed, there are blackbirds. She quickly gets to know the members of the family and, of course, manages to unravel the reasons behind the murders. Meanwhile, D.I. Neele, having heard of Miss Marple's reputation, is quite happy to listen to what she has to say.

This is one of my favourite Miss Marple mysteries. I love the opening of the book, the characters and the way Christie deftly creates the various plot twists. Miss Marple is also very involved in the storyline and her outrage on Gladys behalf is wonderful to see. Although never emotional, she is obviously quite attached to those young girls who pass through her little cottage in St Mary Mead, and she is determined to see justice done.

Mansuriah Hassan says

Agatha Christie is definitely one of my favourite author. I immensely enjoyed this book - an innocent cup of tea leads the reader on a path of exploration into the world of a very dysfunctional family. This is a good Miss Marple mystery. Even though Miss Marple was not mentioned as often as I had expected.

A Pocket Full of Rye contains many of the very best elements of Agatha Christie: vivid and interesting

characters, a great set-up, and the clever "gimmick" of three murders all being cleverly tied together by a child's nursery rhyme. Miss Marple comes to the conclusion that, similarly to what we have read in 'And Then There Were None', they are dealing with a crime by rhyme.

First, I really enjoyed the manner in which the plot is unraveled in the book. We have been introduced to the murder very quickly and the investigation starts from the second chapter itself. Second, the way we are introduced to the characters. Christie also made sure that all the characters in this book blend into the main plot, which is really nice. Third, the plot of the story is believable, murders felt real and not at all far-fetched.

However, if you are a Miss Marple fan, I have to disappoint you. Although it is a Marple mystery, most of the investigation process is done by the police. As always, she holds the key to the whole business but she doesn't get involved until the very end. The ending for me was a great surprise – a very witty and cleverly done business and I have to admit I suspected someone else all along. The murderer turned out to be someone I did not want it to be.

To sum up, it is a well written work and is hard to put down once the first victim dies. You cannot help being involved in the story and keep investigating with Inspector Neele all along. I can guarantee that you will not be disappointed.

BrokenTune says

It was Miss Somers' turn to make the tea. Miss Somers was the newest and the most inefficient of typists. She was no longer young and had a mild worried face like a sheep. The kettle was not quite boiling when Miss Somers poured the water on the tea, but poor Miss Somers was never quite sure when a kettle was boiling. It was one of the many worries that afflicted her in life.

She poured out the tea and took the cups round with a couple of limp, sweet biscuits in each saucer.

That quote has very little to do with the plot of A Pocket Full of Rye, but it does set the tone of this story. There is something edgy and sinister about A Pocket Full of Rye. This is not a "cozy" mystery. Sure, there is not blood or gore, but there is darkness, thirst for revenge, and calculating human horribleness.

And that's what I see in the mention of tepid tea and limp biscuits. No, I kid. But I do see in this opening that there is something just not right, and it is this feeling that runs through this story.

I can't say that I liked this story a lot, and I can't even put my finger on why this is. Maybe it is because of the murder method causes me to have questions, maybe it because the police investigation misses the mark so often, or maybe it is because of that horrible children's rhyme that is the basis for this story, but it is not a story that I enjoy re-reading a lot.

Nevertheless, I recommend it. The different relationship angles in this story are fascinating. Dark, but benefiting from Christie's acute eye for suffering that can be caused by family.

Approach with strong tea, and sweet, rich, fresh biscuits.

Kavita says

A Pocketful of Rye is yet another murder mystery based on a nursery rhyme, one was one of my favourite ones. A businessman called Rex dies. His body is found with a few grains of rye in his pocket. Then comes the death of the 'queen in the parlour eating bread and honey.' And finally, the 'maid in the garden hanging out the clothes'. Even the blackbird pecking off her nose was implied by a clothes clip on her nose.

This triple murder came to Miss Marple's notice because she had trained the maid and looked out for her. She comes to the house and begins her investigations in her fluffy and twittering manner. The suspects are many for reasons of greed or love, but could it be just more obvious than that? Of course, there was the old Blackbird Mine scandal, which could have motivated revenge. Which was it?

This is pretty delightful in many ways. Sadly, the murderer is the one I didn't specifically want it to be. Oh, well! The book also doesn't anymore have surprises for me because I have read it multiple times. Now, it's just a comfort read.

?Emily says

[Gladys (hide spoiler)]

Sophie Hannah says

Loved this - brilliantly surprising ending, and one of those ideal Christie solutions where everything turns on its head at the end and all the same facts suddenly look completely different. I would have given it four stars, except that Miss Marple didn't really (as far as I can see) have enough clues to lead her to the truth. She seemed to have magicked the truth out of nowhere. I know she's a genius about human nature, but I'd have liked a couple of more concrete clues to set her on the right path. Still...it's a novel by Agatha, and therefore in a league way above most books!

Vichy says

Ποιος σκ?τωσε το Ρεξ Φ?ρτεσκιου; Η δεσποιν?ς Γκρ?σβενορ, ιδιαιτ?ρα γραμματ?ας του; Η γυνά?κα του Αντ?λ και ο εραστ?ς της Β?βιαν Ντυμπου?; Η κ?ρη του Ελ?ιν; Ο γιος του Π?ρσιβαλ ? η γυνά?κα του Τζ?νιφερ; Ο γιος του Λ?νσελοτ; (η Παμ, η σ?ζυγος του Λ?νσελοτ, αποκλε?εται) Η οικον?μος Μά?ρη Νταβ ; Η μαγε?ρισσα Κραμπ ? ο ?ντρας ο Μπ?τλερ; η υπηρ?τρια Γκλ?ντυς Μ?ρτιν; ? η υπηρ?τρια ?λλεν; Η δεσποιν?ς Ραμσμπ?τομ, αδελφ? της πρ?ην (πεθαμ?νης πια) γυνά?κας του;

Ο επιθεωρητ?ς Νηλ της Σκ?τλαντ Γυαρντ και ο αρχιφ?λακας Χά?ν αν δεν ε?χαν τη βο?θεια της Μις Μαρπλ ακ?μα θα ?ψαχναν...

Ε?χα να το διαβ?σω πολλ? χρ?νια. Αγκ?θα Κρ?στι: εγγ?ηση απολαυστικ?ς αστυνομικ?ς λογοτεχν?ας, σ?ντομη ιστορ?α μα δεμ?νη και στιλ?τη.

(view spoiler)

Jeff says

It's been a long time since I've read any Agatha Christie and it's easy to let one's brain flow back into her story telling style. Her books do have a comforting familiarity. Dry humor to set the scene; the murder; the investigation; more dead bodies; the red herrings; the revealing.

No heavy lifting required. Like a pleasant spring day. This one is a Miss Marple and a decent read. It also provides an unexpected and emotional denouement.

Here's the kicker for me: I find it very quaint that the British police force let an old lady (their term: old pussy. Yikes!) wander into a crime scene and start sorting things out and offering clues. Here's the way it would go down in America: Old lady wanders onto multiple murder scene, annoys American cops, American cops plant crack pipe on old lady, subject her to a strip search and interrogation, drop her 20 miles outside of town, murder, of course, remains unsolved. If this were James Ellroy, they'd slip her a mickey and film her having sex with a camel, just for good measure.

Adrian says

Without a doubt this has been one of my favourite books in the Miss Marple challenge. It is not a novel I remembered reading and so it was wonderful to experience for the first time (maybe ?)

As with a lot of the novels, Miss M is in it only fleetingly, but each appearance is worth waiting for in terms of insight and revelation, and yes I still see Joan Hickson every time.

Leslie says

3.5* for this audiobook edition

Miss Marple plays a smaller role in this book than she did in the Joan Hickson dramatization, which I found disappointing. However, Richard Grant does an excellent narration.

Raya ???? says

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