



By the Pricking of My Thumbs

Agatha Christie

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While visiting Tommy's Aunt Ada at Sunny Ridge Nursing Home, Tuppence encounters some odd residents including Mrs. Lancaster who mystifies her with talk about "your poor child" and "something behind the fireplace".

When Aunt Ada dies a few weeks later, she leaves Tommy and Tuppence a painting featuring a house, which Tuppence is sure she has seen before. This realization leads her on a dangerous adventure involving a missing tombstone, diamond smuggling and a horrible discovery of what Mrs. Lancaster was talking about.

By the Pricking of My Thumbs Details

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From Reader Review By the Pricking of My Thumbs for online ebook

Jim says

The title comes from Shakespeare's Macbeth, "By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes". This is the first Tommy and Tuppence novel I have read but it won't be the last. Tommy and Tuppence Beresford visit Tommy's Aunt Ada in a retirement home called Sunny Ridge. While Tommy is visiting with his Aunt, Tuppence goes to another room where she meets and has a conversation with another resident Mrs. Lancaster. Mrs. Lancaster unexpectedly says "Was it your poor child? There behind the fireplace". Three weeks later Aunt Ada dies of natural causes. Tommy and Tuppence return to Sunny Ridge to make arrangements for Aunt Ada's possessions and find that Mrs. Lancaster left suddenly and unexpectedly. Among Aunt Ada's possessions is a picture that Mrs. Lancaster had given her. The picture is of a house by a canal with a bridge. The painting reminds Tuppence of a house she had seen and liked.

While Tommy is away for short trip so Tuppence decides to do some investigating to try and find the house in the painting. She finds the house near a small English village named Sutton Chancellor. The house is divided into two. The back part is occupied by a couple named Alice and Amos Perry. The front part has been unoccupied for years. The Perry's think that an actress or dancer used to live there. In Sutton Chancellor Tuppence also finds an elderly vicar, a talkative landlady at the B&B where she is staying, and Miss Bligh who seems to run the parish and most other things in the village.

When Tommy returns from his business trip he finds that Tuppence is missing. She was supposed to have returned home the same day he did. He starts doing his own investigating. He finds the painting was done by an artist called Boscowan. The artist has died but Mrs. Boscowan tells him there is something "odd" about the painting. There is a boat on the bank of the canal that someone added. He also received a telephone call from the doctor at Sunny Ridge asking if they can meet. There is something he wants to discuss but not over the phone. One of the other residents recently died and an autopsy was done. The cause of death was an overdose of morphine. There are a couple of other deaths that the doctor thinks might be suspicious.

There is a lot going on here. The sudden disappearance of Mrs. Lancaster, unexplained deaths at Sunny Ridge, unsolved murders of children years ago in Sutton Chancellor, a gang of thieves that used rented houses, a doll containing uncut diamonds. I thought the ending was terrific. A total surprise. I am going to have to check out the other Tommy and Tuppence novels. If you like Agatha Christie and haven't read this do so! If have never read an Agatha Christie novel there are many great ones to chose from. I don't think you would be disappointed in this one.

?lkim says

Yine çok iyi yaz?lm??, ürkütücü bir hikaye.

Deborah Ideiosepius says

Another off the Agatha Christie list as I continue my voyage of rediscovery, cruising down the long long

river of books I read in my teens and have almost forgotten.

'Pricking of my Thumbs is, as GR says, #4 in the Tommy and Tuppence theme and as these were my very favourite of Christie's characters it was kind of a given that I was going to enjoy it.

This one is set after WWII, so our heroes are middle aged now, with grown and married children but still with indomitable characters and Tuppence has every bit of the energy she used to create the young adventurers back in WWI. And, it is worth bearing in mind that Tommy and Tuppence were the main characters of Christie's that aged in a linear and believable fashion; Miss Marple was pretty much unchanged for almost all her entire (very extensive) career. Poirot was said to age, but in practice very little changed for him over the course of his novels until right at the end of Christie's career. Whereas Tommy and Tuppence, perhaps because they had so many fewer novels written about them, with much wider gaps between stories aged and developed quite believably.

In this story, the two visit Tommy's great aunt Ada, in a nursing home and as she is waiting for him Tuppence is asked the strangest question by one of the other residents, a question that leads to the pricking in her thumbs. A while later, aunt Ada dies of apparently natural causes, Tuppence hopes to have another word with the same resident she had encountered earlier but that lady has been taken out of the home by her relations, leaving only a painting that she had given to Ada. This leads, eventually into a long and futile search for the missing old lady, the house in the painting and sundry other suspicious events.... No spoilers.

I enjoyed the writing and the characterisation of the main and secondary players of this story, the descriptions of back lands and tiny towns in the English countryside, I enjoyed the convoluted and many layered plot and how it unfolded.

As a historic novel; published in the 60's which does not seem so very long ago, there are a few interesting and significant differences between the society described and the modern one. The main one that struck me is that, despite both Beresfords, Tommy AND Tuppence, having done sterling work for the various defense agencies and persons of England, in BOTH wars, now only Tommy is employed by whichever mysterious agencies which employ him. Nor even the very modern and feisty Tuppence remarks on the fact that she is given no such work, though she had an equal part in Tommy's adventures and successes. I thought that was quite interesting. The manner in which Christie writes about older people too, I suppose indicative of her own era, implies that old old people are at least slightly mad, just by virtue of being old and no one can expect them to be normal. Thank goodness for the revised attitudes of our day!

Very enjoyable and curious novel, was very glad to read (or possibly re-read, I didn't actually remember it well) this great classic story.

Medini says

A recipe for one of Agatha Christie's most creepy, atmospheric thrillers:

A senile old lady's mysterious words.

A sudden disappearance.

An oil painting of a house which invokes an unexpected sense of *déjà vu*.

A dead body walled off behind a fireplace.

A stuffed, glassy-eyed, broken doll.

A string of unsolved child murders.

A missing grave.

A killer in a home for elderly ladies.

A cache of precious stones.

All these set in a picturesque setting, along with a sprinkling of gossipy middle aged villagers, shifty lawyers and secret drawers are stirred up to put forth an old fashioned mystery, that is spell-binding in its quaint peculiarity.

It is not always blood and gore and drugs and open violence that make up a thriller. Sometimes, a quiet, slow paced story with a gradual build up can be just as eerie.

A book extremely different from all the Agatha Christies that I've read, but highly recommended.

Hannah says

This was an incredibly chilling mystery; I had the cover image and the creepy, insane mutterings of the killer burnt into my mind and preventing me from falling asleep. Scary.

Agatha Christie has produced yet another brilliant mystery, one that is intense and possesses gripping tension throughout the entire novel as the detectives attempt to solve the puzzle. Tommy and Tuppence are back again, now very much advanced in age, but still as spirited as ever. The light romance between the two is very sweet, particularly considering their old-couple status.

Greg says

I'm working my way through all of Dame Christie's works (she's my favorite author in a comfort book/food way) and thought I'd try one presented to us rather late in her career (the 1960s). Forty years after Christie first presented that dynamic spy duo, Tommy and Tuppence, to us in the 1920s, they are back at it, this time investigating a murder at a "home for old ladies." (Let's all just get it over with, roll our eyes at this sad cliché - two old detectives at an old folks home, which thankfully are now referred to as assisted living facilities - and get on with the review.) The solution involves a modified painting, smugglers, a child murderer, secret passages, questionable identities and perhaps every trope in this genre. To me, this novel was good enough for a one-sit reading: I'm visiting old friends and Christie is serving high tea (real tea, not Kerouac/Ginsberg tea, but that probably would have made this story/visit a bit more interesting). I recommend this only to those readers who are devoted to Agatha Christie: if this is the first Christie you read, it might be the only Christie you read and that's a shame. Dame Agatha is at the top of the "cozy murder mystery" genre when she visits a well-moneyed country house for a weekend of fun and games. But

the further she strays from the fogged-in/creepy/guests-with-secrets sanctuary, the less effective are her works. Still, I have about forty more of her novels to go, and I'm going to read them all. Because when Christie is great, no one else comes close.

Amy says

This book took me *months* to read. I do not think I have ever struggled through an Agatha Christie novel the way I struggled through this one. I picked it up and put it down...picked it up and put it down...picked it up... But that ending.

Wow.

Agatha Christie went *creepy*. It is wonderful. I added another star for the twist. I think I need to re-read this one someday, just in one sitting. Tuppence and her muddled brain and intuitive leaps really keeps things confusing (though doesn't push the plot far)

Not my favorite Tommy and Tuppence Mystery, but what an ending!

Shiloah says

Definitely a darker more sinister story worth a more complicated plot than some of her others. Loved it!

Mansuriah Hassan says

This is the first Tommy and Tuppence series I have read but it definitely won't be the last. **By The Pricking Of My Thumbs** offers the sense of adventure, wit and charm from the main characters, husband and wife duo, *Tommy Beresford* and *Tuppence Beresford*. This novel possesses a chilling tone that intensifies as the story progresses.

There are practically no dead bodies, only the shady disappearance of an old lady. The story finds Tuppence interested in a painting of a country house that is inherited from Tommy's aunt. Convinced that she has seen the original subject, she decides to track it down. When she does, she stumbles into stories of a series of unsolved child murders that occurred in the district many years before.

The novel is filled with neat mixture of characters and the plot is very original, with an ending you will never be able to guess (trust me on this). The very nature of the ending comes as a great shock to me, as it is completely unexpected and terrific! The entire novel, in fact, carries an underlying tone of omnipresent evil, foreboding and fear, which serves to create a wonderful atmosphere.

A definite must-read for any mystery fan, especially Agatha Christie fans!!

I am going to check out the other Tommy and Tuppence series.

Henry Avila says

Agatha Christie's leisurely murder mystery, begins in an old ladies home. Tommy Beresford is visiting his Aunt Ada, at Sunny Ridge. The spinster is 80 and still tough, she likes tormenting Tuppence the nephew's wife, who has come along. (Ada needs some fun in her sedentary life) Tuppence befriends Mrs. Lancaster, an inmate. This woman, who seems slightly confused, always talking about a dead child! Miss Packard, who runs this peaceful establishment, doesn't take Mrs. Lancaster seriously. Three weeks later Aunt Ada dies and Mrs. Lancaster is suddenly taken away, from Sunny Ridge. Tommy inherits a painting from his aunt, originally owned by Mrs. Lancaster. Tuppence being a generous woman, insists on giving back the picture. Problem is, Mrs. Beresford can't locate the lady. Unexplained deaths happen at Sunny Ridge. Dr. Murray, the nursing home's physician, asks Tommy for help. The trail eventually leads to a village, where child murders had occurred 20 years ago, in rural England. Many suspects are still around and a house considered haunted by the locals, also. The surprise conclusion makes this a fun book, not counting all the killings!

Summer says

I'm hovering in between a 4 and 5 star rating on this right now, so we'll just say 4.5 for now.

Oh my goodness, Agatha Christie is brilliant! The only other book I've read by her is *And Then There Were None*, which I deeply enjoyed, too, but I actually kind of guessed the end of that one (like I wasn't 100% confident, but when it was revealed, I was like yeah, I should've run with that thought). This mystery was much more complicated, though, because there were red herrings all over the place and a lot more characters in the story that fell under suspicion, and the reveal just blew my mind! I didn't expect it at all!

This book was also of a lighter nature than *And Then There Were None*. Tommy and Tuppence are just a cute married couple that find themselves in these precarious situations (haven't read any other Tommy & Tuppence novels, but I'm just assuming) due to Tuppence's curiosity.

Anyway, highly recommend, and I'm very excited now to get to the rest of the Agatha Christie on my shelf!

Bookworm says

I feel an explanation is required since really, I would have thought NO ONE could rate a Tommy and Tuppence one star, but there you have it.

I'm just not into her mental-murder mysteries, and while I enjoyed 3/4 of it comfortably, by the fourth I was uncomfortable and the last two chapters were just ghastly. It was, to be brief, too much for me-I prefer a mystery with a detective who quietly goes about arranging clues in order and making observations, with a less psychotic murderer.

Santiago says

Picture Tuppence sitting in front of a fireplace at Sunny Ridge, as Tommy is upstairs visiting his old aunt.

Beside her sits an old and kind woman drinking hot milk. Then she asks Tuppence, lost in thought: 'Was it your poor child?'

Tommy and Tuppence books are somewhat more of adventure than Poirot's and Mrs. Marple's. This one is great. They inherit a picture of a house from an old aunt of Tommy and Tuppence decides she has seen that house somewhere in England and goes looking for it. This crazy search leads her to a house with a dark past and strange present.

'By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes'

Agatha Christie always delivers and she has created two lovable characters in Tommy and Tuppence. I hope to read more from them in the future.

Marika Oksa says

Puoleen väliin asti kirja oli puisevaa luettavaa, lopulta alkoi sentääni hieman tapahtua. Englantilainen maaseutu kätki jälleen sisäänsä epäuskottavuuden rajoilla häilyvän tapauksen... ei ollut murhamamman parhaimmista tämä tapaus.

Meave says

Oh Aggie, your mind really must have been going to have written this and considered it a complete novel. It doesn't make sense! It's terribly disappointing, especially because Tommy and Tuppence are usually so delightful. But in this mystery not only do they lack believable motivation for taking any action, they don't get to do much of anything together, and their chemistry is all wonky, which was the most depressing part.

I'll take some of the blame for not understanding the plot, as I did fall asleep reading it maybe three times, but not much blame. I mean, there's intentional ambiguity, and then there's throwing in plot points at random and forcing the reader to make sense of something is straight-up nonsensical.

Christine says

My goodness I loved this book. It is without a doubt this is my favorite Tommy and Tuppence story. It is brilliantly creepy and perfectly engaging. Tuppence gets caught up in a mystery that is about the old, the young, what time can do to a person, and how you never quite know if your perception of something is the right one. It has nothing to do with war (which I prefer as I'm not big on their wartime stories) and everything to do with the pasts of people you wouldn't think had things to hide.

I have mentioned in other reviews that I prefer younger Tommy and Tuppence to older them, but this is the exception. Despite their "older age" they are both mentally spry and as on their game as in their earlier days. Tuppence continues to be possibly my favorite mystery-solver.

It was the only book of theirs that I could have easily read in one sitting if I'd been lucky enough to have the time because it was a layered, exciting read where the ending wasn't obvious from the beginning and that made the conclusion even more menacing.

Laurel Young says

I'm going to go ahead and give this five stars, because it is fairly rare for Dame Agatha to go all-out creepy with her books and I'm amazed at how well she does it here! I read this book a very long time ago and never forgot the image of the old lady calmly saying that the milk is not poisoned TODAY and inquiring about the body walled up in the fireplace. Gave me shivers! So I had a sense of happy deja-vu when I read the first chapter and realized that this was *that* book...so many of Christie's titles are interchangeable ("murderous" literary allusions) that I had no idea. The creepiness was back in full force on re-reading, and I had forgotten the twist that occurs in the denouement and was very startled and unnerved by it!

So, five stars for atmosphere, but also for another reason: I love the way Tommy and Tuppence have aged in this novel. Unlike the perennially elderly Miss Marple and later-middle-aged Poirot, T&T age convincingly over the long span of Christie's career and it is a real pleasure to see that they are still devoted to each other and still fond of sleuthing. Christie portrays their marriage wonderfully; it is not overdone, just a portrait of a fond couple who are very "settled in" together and have mutual affection and respect. Very sweet. I also like that Albert is still with them and provides a bit of domestic comic relief.

One more reason to admire this novel is the way that Christie sets herself a difficult challenge and lives up to it--rather like Nemesis, the mystery starts with almost no clues to go on, and the characters must think well outside the box to get on the right trail. Any decent mystery writer can start with a dead body and go from there, but only Christie could start with a harmless painting of a pretty house with something ever so slightly "off" about it and develop the plot in the fascinating way that she does here. Highly recommended.

Lina Mouloudj says

sigh! i'm so disappointed..

well, this is a summary about how did the "adventure" started:

Tommy and Tuppence went to an old age home called Sunny Ridge to visit Tommy's ant, Ant Ada.. while Tommy was talking to his old ant, Tuppence sat with Mrs Lancaster who also resides at Sunny Ridge, suddenly Mrs Lancaster asked Tuppence "was it your poor child? there behind the fireplace", those words sticks in Tuppence's mind...

after a few weeks And Ada died, so Tommy and Tuppence went to Sunny Ridge to get Ant Ada's belongings, which includes a desk and a painting of a lovely house by a river, that painting was a gift from Ms Lancaster to Ant Ada, Tommy liked the desk and decided to take it, while Tuppence felt that she saw the house in that painting somewhere, she wanted to take it, but first she thought that it would be better to ask Mrs Lancaster's permission because the painting belongs to her at the first place, but Miss Packard told her that a lady called Mrs Johnson took her back, BUT Tuppence fear that Mrs Lancaster has been kidnapped.

Tommy went to a conference, so he was absent for a few days, so during that time Tuppence did her best to remember where did she saw that house at the painting..

will Tuppence be able to find Mrs Lancaster and solve the mystery of the painting?

well, THAT is the stupid rediculous reason that made Tuppence start investigating (without Tommy, poor old Tommy was very much the minor player)

the ending wasn't only nonsense and boring but also completely wrong!

well, i didn't read "Partners in Crime" and "Postern of Fate" yet, but i can list "By the Pricking of My Thumbs" as the weakest Tommy and Tuppence novel which is so disappointing for me, first because they are my favorite characters and second because "The Secret Adversary" was the first book i read of Agatha Christie, which i enjoyed lot...

what bothers me (beside the nonsense story) is that Tommy and Tuppence used to investigate together, but here we see Tuppence doing it all alone, while Tommy just sat there worrying about her, had no idea where is she...

i always enjoy a good Agatha Christie book, unfortunately "By the Pricking of My Thumbs" is not a good Agatha Christie.

i read a good review of a reader who has a good advice about this book, so i'd like to quote him; "i would not advice anyone to read this novel, but if you still do, please keep in mind that Agatha Christie wrote some brilliant novels that cannot be compared to this debacle".

Annina says

Überzeugte mich leider nicht.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

By the Pricking of My Thumbs (Tommy and Tuppence, #4)

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