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The Agathas



KATHLEEN GLASGOW
& LIZ LAWSON

BOOKS BY KATHLEEN GLASGOW

Girl in Pieces

How to Make Friends with the Dark

You'd Be Home Now

BOOKS BY LIZ LAWSON

The Lucky Ones

The Agathas

KATHLEEN GLASGOW
& LIZ LAWSON

DELACORTE PRESS

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Contents

[Cover](#)

[Books by Kathleen Glasgow and Liz Lawson](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Map](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-one](#)

[Chapter Twenty-two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-eight](#)

[Chapter Twenty-nine](#)

[Chapter Thirty](#)

[Chapter Thirty-one](#)

[Chapter Thirty-two](#)

[Chapter Thirty-three](#)

[Chapter Thirty-four](#)

[Chapter Thirty-five](#)

[Chapter Thirty-six](#)

[Chapter Thirty-seven](#)

[Chapter Thirty-eight](#)

[Chapter Thirty-nine](#)

[Chapter Forty](#)

[Chapter Forty-one](#)

[Chapter Forty-two](#)

[Chapter Forty-three](#)

[Chapter Forty-four](#)

[Chapter Forty-five](#)

Chapter Forty-six

Epilogue

Where to Get Help

Acknowledgments

About the Authors

To best friends/teen detectives everywhere!

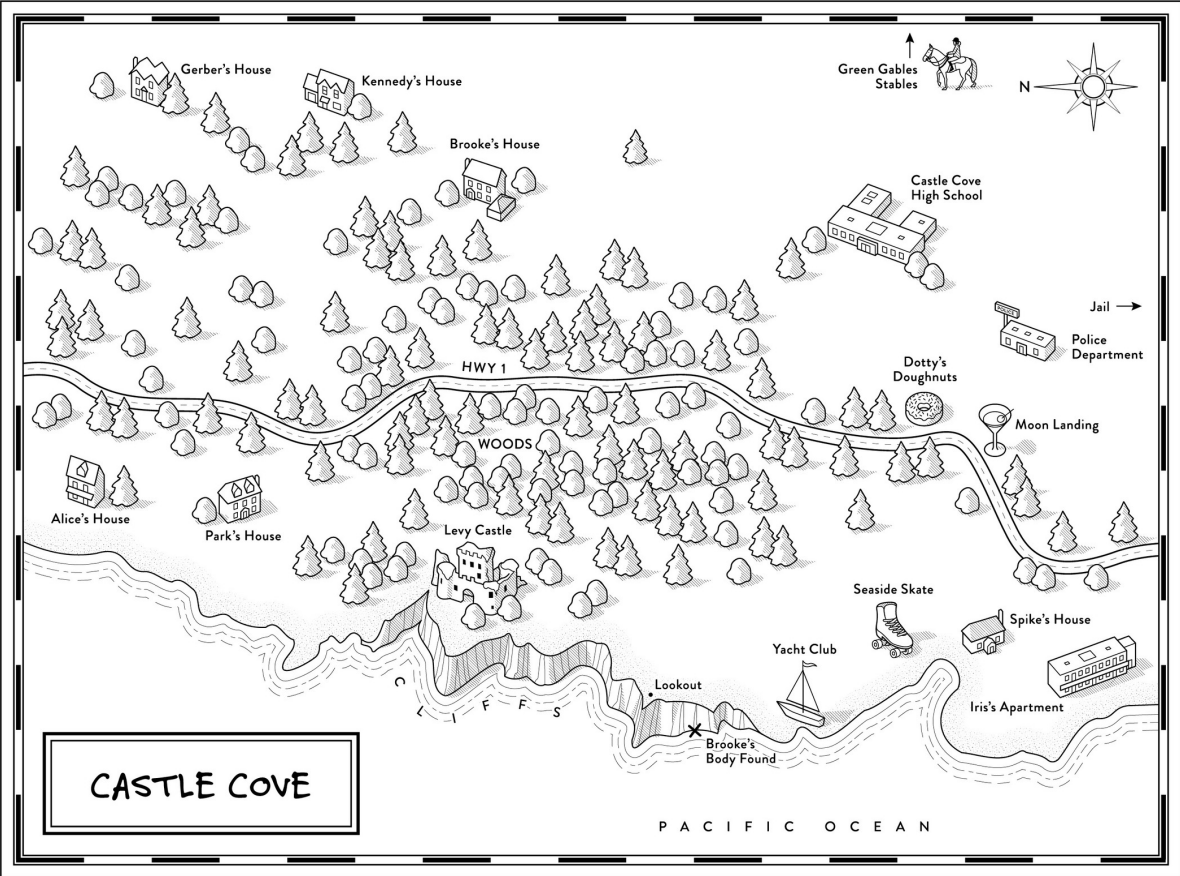
Agatha Christie

AKA Dame Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie, Lady Mallowan, DBE (née Miller;
15 September 1890–12 January 1976)

An English writer known for her 66 detective novels and 14 short story
collections.

Also known as the bestselling author of all time.

Also, one bad bitch.



CHAPTER ONE

ALICE OGILVIE

OCTOBER 31

7:50 A.M.

"These blondes, sir, they're responsible for a lot of trouble."

—AGATHA CHRISTIE, *THE LABOURS OF HERCULES*

ALICE OGILVIE IS CRAZY.

The words are huge, written across my locker in thick black marker, impossible to miss. I see them from down the hall as I approach, the words like a pin to the eye. My first day back from house arrest, and this is what greets me. I can't say I'm surprised.

Rebecca Kennedy snickers from across the hall, where she stands watching with Helen Park and Brooke Donovan. My former friends. My former *best* friends.

I wonder if one of them wrote this. Not Brooke; she would never do something like this, but I wouldn't put it past Kennedy. This is *exactly* something she'd do. A small ache starts in my center, but I think to myself: What would Agatha Christie do right now? Would she let them get to her? Run out of the school? Is that what she did when her first husband cheated on her? Hell no. She squared her shoulders and became a multinational bestselling author.

I whirl around and level a glare at the three of them. Kennedy's smirk sags.

"Can I *help* you?" I say in my most bored voice. The last thing I want is for them to know I care.

Park, of course, sinks back against the lockers, pretending she's not involved, letting her straight, shiny black hair curtain her face. She's terrible at confrontation. Kennedy rolls her eyes. And Brooke...well, her red-painted lips tremble like *I'm* the one who did something wrong.

"Alice," Brooke says softly, like she's about to get into things—things that I would much prefer *never* to get into, thank you very much. I force myself to meet her eyes, and it's only then that I notice what she's wearing. I glance around at the other kids in the hall and confirm that, yup—*everyone* is wearing them. Except for me.

Costumes. Because today is Halloween. Great. My reentrance to social life at Castle Cove High School is already crashing and burning.

Brooke and Kennedy and Park are dressed as bloody cheerleaders. How *original*. The three of them are decked out in short blue-and-white pleated skirts, hair curled to perfection, blood all over their clothing but none on their faces. Wouldn't want to actually commit to the costume *too* much and mess up their makeup.

I, on the other hand, look foolish. I am the only person in this hallway—perhaps the entire school—who is not dressed to the nines in a costume.

As if I needed yet another reminder about how I no longer fit in, the universe apparently decided to make that fact *explicit*. I clear my face of emotion, toss my hair over my shoulder, and unlock my locker door. I know everyone is watching. Waiting to see what I'll do. If I'll react.

But I won't.

Because *I don't care*.

—

I'm struggling to stay awake in third-period math when the door to the classroom swings open and some freshman child pops his head in, face flushing as every head swivels in his direction simultaneously.

"Uh," he says, voice cracking. "Uh, sorry. I have a note?" He hurries over to Ms. Hollister and holds it out to her, but before she can take it, the paper slips from between his fingers and floats to the ground. The kid

flushes an even brighter shade of red as he scrambles to grab it before it hits the linoleum floor. “Sorry, sorry. Here,” he mutters, and thrusts it into Hollister’s hand, then darts out of the room. What a production. At least it stopped Hollister’s droning about pre-calc.

Hollister opens the note and reads it, and then her gaze falls squarely on me.

“Alice,” she says in her nasally voice, fingering the oddly expensive-looking necklace she’s wearing. My back stiffens. Three hours back at school, and I’m already in *trouble*? Good lord, I’ve barely had time to pee. “You’re wanted in Ms. Westmacott’s office.”

My stomach sinks. I’m not in trouble. It’s much, much worse than that. I’m being called to the guidance counselor’s office.

—

I knock softly on the door, hoping against hope that maybe Ms. Westmacott won’t be there. But almost immediately I hear an overeager “Yes?”

I’ve never had the displeasure of being inside Westmacott’s office before, but I’ve heard rumors. When I push the door open, I see all of them are true. She truly does have her name spelled out in gigantic gold sparkly letters on the wall behind her desk. There really is a bulletin board on the wall called the *Feelings Board*. And that corner that everyone talks about? The one set up with the beanbags so she can have “jam sessions” with students?

That’s a real thing, too.

No wonder Brooke didn’t want her dad to marry this lady.

“Hello!” she cries. “Come in!” She waves me in, and I comply, mostly because I don’t have a choice. “Shall we sit over there?” She motions to the beanbags.

Um, no. “My…knees are bad,” I lie. There is no way I am sitting on a beanbag. “The chair is fine.” I take a seat before she can protest.

After a moment’s hesitation, she slides into her chair, folds her hands on the desk, and leans forward.

“We’re glad to have you back, Alice.” She’s wearing a tunic with a bunch of weird shapes glued around the neckline and has her brown hair pushed back with a headband. Not a cool headband, mind you, but one of those thick ones that I’ve seen in pictures of people from the 1990s. “We know things have been...rough over the past few months.” She makes a sympathetic face, and my stomach turns. I know what’s coming. “We all thought it would be best if you and I had some time to chat.” She raises her eyebrows like it’s a question, but I know it’s not a question. I know I don’t have a choice.

“We can just jam, talk about how things are going. How school’s treating you. Stuff like that!” She smiles.

“Uh-huh” is the best I can manage in reply.

She ignores my lack of enthusiasm and continues, “To get started: Let’s talk about Brooke and Steve. They’re dating. How are you dealing with it? Clearly, it hasn’t been easy on you....”

Jesus, she’s really going there? She’s the first person to directly mention the two of them to me since everything happened. Brooke was my best friend since birth, so I always knew she wasn’t the perfect angel she would have you believe (two words: Cole Fielding). I used to appreciate it; you need a little spice to keep things interesting. But I never expected her to steal my *boyfriend* right out from under my *nose*.

Steve and I started dating my sophomore year, his junior, when he became the breakout star on the varsity basketball team. He’d always been in the background before that, spending a lot of his time at training camps that his mom worked two jobs to afford, but I guess they paid off, because one day I heard these girls talking about him in the bathroom, about how random it was that some kid no one had ever heard of was carrying the team, and I knew I had to have him. We started dating a few weeks later. I gave him popularity. A social life. Access to my *world*. And what did he give me in return? He *dumped me*.

So, back in June, after he told me he wanted to break up because I was too bossy (rude), I went to Egypt with my mom to visit the set of some movie she was working on. My dad was out of town working, like he is 99

percent of the time, and Brenda's first grandchild was due and she went down to San Diego for that, so it was either go with my mom or mope around the house, alone. I thought it would be a good distraction, maybe make Steve miss me, and that while I was gone, I could figure out how to patch things up with him. Also, if I'm going to be totally honest, which I am usually not about *feelings*, I thought maybe my mom and I could have, you know, fun together.

Well, to no one's great surprise, it ended up being yet another trip where she worked twenty-four hours a day and I sat in a hotel room alone. Thank god for room service and the Agatha Christie novels I found in the lounge.

Let's just say that my mom and I didn't bond, but Brooke and Steve certainly did.

I shiver at the memory of Brooke showing up at my house to tearfully inform me that she never meant for it to happen—she never meant to *fall in love with Steve*. When Steve and I were dating, he and Brooke always got along—something that I was stupid enough to think was a *good* thing—but clearly wasn't.

"Can we not?" My voice shakes. I clamp my lips together. Get yourself under *control*, Ogilvie.

Westmacott's eyes soften. "Of course. Why don't we start with homeschooling? Tell me how you've been over these past few months, homeschooling when you were on...er..."

"House arrest?" I finish for her.

"Um, yes."

"It was fine." I cross my arms tight against my chest.

"I imagine it might have been a little lonely."

"It was *fine*," I say. God, why is she so intent on pressing this? "My parents got me a horse," I add, for no reason other than to keep her quiet for a few more seconds. "For my birthday, a few months ago. Right before..." I trail off.

Her eyes light up. "A horse! That's fantastic! What breed?"

It's really *not* fantastic. It's more exactly what my parents do: buy me something—something I cannot stand—because it's expensive. I shrug. "Um, brown?"

"Are you boarding her at the Green Gables Stables?"

I nod. A perfectly silly name for a place with perfectly monstrous beings. Although apparently my parents don't know this, I've hated horses ever since the summer after fourth grade, when my mom decided that having a daughter who rides would be good for her image and signed me up for horseback riding camp. I went along with it, because at least she had temporarily remembered I existed. It wasn't too terrible...until it was.

The last day of camp, we were showing our horses when Marinda Kelly fell off hers and tumbled to the ground, breaking her hip and both her legs. Talk about traumatizing. The ambulance had to come. After that mess, I vowed never to go within thirty feet of a horse again. A vow my parents clearly did not remember.

"I love that place! I board my Oliver there!" Westmacott says this as if we're about to bond over a shared love of horses.

Of course she's a horse lady. Of course she is.

"Cool." What kind of horse name is Oliver? I keep my thoughts to myself, though. The last thing I need is to get suspended from school the first day I'm back. I plaster on a smile.

She chats on about her favorite horses, her riding schedule, but at least she's stopped asking me questions about myself.

The bell finally rings, marking the end of the period and my chance to escape. I rise to stand, but she stops me. "Wait, wait," she says, smacking her hand against her forehead. "I forgot to tell you one of the reasons I called you here in the first place! Since you missed the first few months of school, we've set you up with a tutor." She pauses. "Well, your *parents* set it up. I'm the go-between."

A *tutor*? "I'm good," I protest. "I don't need—"

"Alice." She raises an eyebrow under her thick-rimmed glasses. "Your at-home efforts were...let's just say we found them wanting. The only subject you've kept up in is French. Consider this not so much a suggestion

as a requirement.” Her smile drops away and her too-cheery voice grows hard. Something pricks along my back. “Okay?”

I blink and nod.

“Great!” She claps her hands, voice returning to its overly enthusiastic pitch, like she wasn’t just growling at me. “We’ve assigned you to Iris Adams.”

“Who?”

“Iris Adams. You don’t know her?”

I shrug. A lot of kids go here. How am I supposed to know all of their names?

Westmacott raises her eyebrows. “You’ve gone to school together since kindergarten,” as if that’s supposed to jog my memory.

I shake my head.

She looks down at the slip of paper in her hand. “Well, here’s all the info. She’s going to come to your house after school today. We all agreed to set it up that way because—”

“Great.” I cut her off. I grab the piece of paper from her hand. “Thanks.”

I see a flash of irritation in her face before her smile reappears. “Okay. Perfect. Oh, and Alice?”

“Yeah?”

“Life gives you lemons, but you can make lemonade!”

I give her a thumbs-up.

I can hardly wait.

CHAPTER TWO

IRIS ADAMS

OCTOBER 31

11:45 A.M.

THERE ARE MANY PERKS to being invisible.

I don't mean the *actual* kind of invisible, like the whole vaporous thing in the movies. I mean being the type of person that people simply don't really see, because the type of person you are (the type of person they *think* you are) is not one that interests them. Because people don't see you, you have free rein to listen in on conversations, observe behavior, and learn patterns. All of these things are essential to surviving life, particularly high school.

For instance, I was able to divert Kennedy—first name: Rebecca, but all the Main Kids at Castle Cove High refer to each other by their last names, which I think is a curious and loathsome habit and makes them sound like male stockbrokers on an ill-advised bourbon bender—from some routine mean-girl behavior in AP Biology today by dropping some information I'd gleaned while dressing for PE.

Kennedy isn't happy to be my lab partner, even though I'm carrying her to an A in this class. Every lab day, she looks at me and sighs, rolling her neck like I've sliced her carotid, and then says, "Flannel, *again?*" If I wanted my clothes critiqued, I'd sit with the Stitch Bitches during lunch. They make their own clothes, which is admirable, but makes for tedious conversation. And please, of all people, Kennedy should not be critiquing

my clothes when today she's dressed like some sort of dead cheerleader. It's Halloween, but still.

Usually, I let it ride. I can tune people out pretty well, but today was not the day, because all day I'd been confronted with the painful return of Alice Ogilvie, and what that was going to mean for me.

I'm sorry, *Ogilvie*, as her clan calls her.

Kennedy was starting in on my hair when I decided to cut her off while slicing open the abdomen of our frog, which made her grow very pale.

"Rebecca," I said. "I'm so sorry to hear about Cole. What a blow that must be."

She fanned her face. "It's *Kennedy*. And *what* are you talking about?"

I fixed my face into a perfect, sympathetic shape: lips slightly pursed, chin tucked, head tilted. "Oh wow, no, sorry, I thought you *knew*."

"What the f," she said. "What the f are you talking about, Eileen?"

"Iris," I reminded her firmly. I carefully spread the skin of the frog so she could get a good look at its gleaming, spongy insides. The insides of things are so much different than the outsides. Most people don't care to find that out.

"He's going with Madison—I mean, *Fletcher*, to the regatta ball. Wasn't that supposed to be you?"

It's like dealing with little kids, really. You have to distract them from whatever it is you don't want them to be doing. Offer a chocolate, a brightly colored game on your phone, and there you are: crisis averted. I knew mentioning this would sit poorly with Kennedy; all the Mains adore the annual regatta ball at the Yacht Club. It's their time to buy obscenely expensive gowns and pretend they're some kind of local royalty while chugging back bottles of booze that cost so much they could pay for an entire year of college tuition.

I handed Kennedy the scalpel and sat back.

It really was quite a joy to watch Kennedy annihilate that poor frog. Good thing it was already dead.

At lunch I take my usual spot in the back of the cafeteria with Spike and the rest of the Zoners. That's our allotted spot. The social layout of the Castle Cove cafeteria is strictly adhered to. Zoners at the back, in the last tables. Punks to the right, by the exit doors, in case one of the more athletic Mains decides to mess with them; they need a quick exit. To the left of us are the Stitch Bitches, nestled in a clump of hemp clothing and messy buns pulled together with vintage pins. The front of the cafeteria is taken over by the APs, iPads out and glasses smudged. Dance team is next to them, almost to the center, gleaming and perky. The athletic Mains, all gusto and swears and decked-out team tees, scatter the left tables, two trays of food each. And in the center, the very center, because the rest of us revolve around their brilliance, are the main Mains. Glossy and full of health and money, they ooze easy life. The center is the best place for them; that way, whatever they do, they have us, a willing (or not) audience.

The Zoners are the friends I have at Castle Cove, and we've been thrown together mostly out of necessity our whole lives. Because, and get ready for it: we are *poor*.

My mother works in a bar. It would be different if she owned the bar, and especially if it was a nice one, but she doesn't. She's the one at the Moon Landing who slops the drinks and dries your tears and holds your damp, crumpled bills up to the fan to dry them off, because we need that money. In Castle Cove, you are either the served or the server. Spike's dad is one of the janitors at Castle Cove High. You want your palatial seaside home polished and sparkling? That's how five of the Zoners' parents pay their rent.

I mean, to me, some of us scrape by and some of us are fine, but compared to everyone else in this cozy coastal town and school, we're at the bottom.

Spike and the other Zoners are deeply involved in a conversation about who's going to be the next Dungeon Master. I pull out my sandwich. Down at the end of the table, Cole Fielding is napping, his tousled blond head nestled on his arms. Even sleeping, he's distractingly attractive.

Zora catches me looking and giggles.