

Agatha Raisin
AND THE

WITCH
OF
WYCKENHADDEN



A Spell of Trouble by the Sea Side...

M.C. Beaton

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

Table of Contents

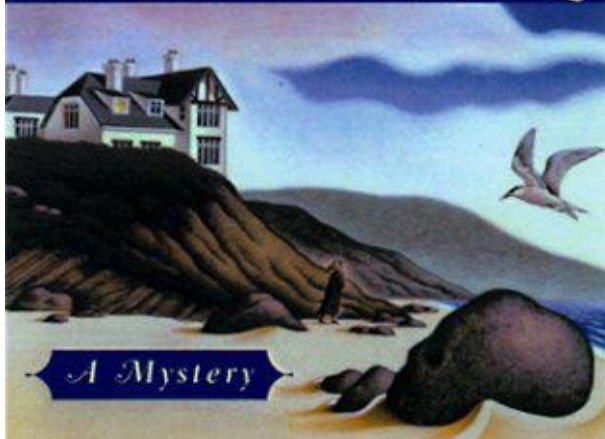
[Front](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

AGATHA
RAISIN

*and the Witch
of Wyckhadden*

M.C. BEATON



A Mystery

M.C. Beaton

The Witch of Wyckhadden

Agatha Raisin #9

1999, EN

In order to recuperate from her last escapade and re-grow some hair, Agatha Raisin goes on holiday to the seaside town of Wyckhadden. However, the holiday is not what Agatha hoped for. The weather is crummy, all five of her fellow hotel guests are elderly, and time hangs heavy. A chance discussion with a fellow guest leads her to the door of Francie Juddle, a local woman who claims to have the power of witchcraft. Agatha is not impressed with Francie, but does buy a hair potion and a love potion.

That same night, Agatha sets out to visit Francie and accuse her of fraud. Agatha walks into the cottage unannounced and discovers a very dead witch. The police, in the form of handsome officer Jimmy Jessop, bring her in for questioning and request that she stay in town.

Agatha does so because it is apparent to her that one of the hotel guests must be the killer. Her use of the love potion on Jimmy Jessop yields surprising results. When another murder occurs and Agatha finds herself the center not of danger but of amour, she realizes that there may just be a future for her in Wyckhadden.

Table of contents

[1](#) · [2](#) · [3](#) · [4](#) · [5](#) · [6](#) · [7](#) · [8](#) · [9](#) · [10](#)

1

There is nothing more depressing for a middle-aged lovelorn woman with bald patches on her head than to find herself in an English seaside resort out of season. Wind ripped along the promenade, sending torn posters advertising summer jollities flapping, and huge waves sent spray high into the air.

Agatha had lost her hair when a vengeful hairdresser had applied depilatory to it rather than shampoo. It had grown back in tufts but leaving distressingly bare patches of scalp. Not wishing the love of her life, James Lacey, to return from his travels and find her in such a mess, Agatha had fled from Carsely to this seaside resort of Wyckhadden to wait for her hair to grow.

She had booked into the Garden Hotel, advertised as small but exclusive. She now wished she had chosen somewhere plastic and bright and modern. The Garden Hotel had not changed much since Victorian times. The ceilings were high, the carpets thick, and the walls very solid, so that it was as hushed and quiet as a tomb. The other residents were elderly, and no one feels more uncomfortable among the elderly than a middle-aged woman who is rapidly approaching that stage of life herself. Agatha could suddenly understand why middle-aged men often blossomed out in jeans, high boots and leather jackets and went looking for a young thing to wear on their arm. She walked a lot, determined to lose weight and remain supple.

One look around the dining-room of the Garden at her fellow guests made her start to ponder the sense of getting a face-lift.

The town of Wyckhadden had prospered during a boom in the late nineteenth century, and its popularity had continued well into the twentieth, but with the advent of cheap foreign travel, holiday-makers had declined. Why holiday in Britain in the rain when sunny Spain was only an hour's plane flight away?

So on this windy day, two days after her arrival, she was charging along a deserted promenade, head down against the wind, wondering how soon she could find a sheltered spot to enjoy a cigarette and get some of the excess of oxygen out of her lungs.

She turned away from the restless sound of the heaving sea and made her way up a narrow cobbled street where the original fishermen's cottages had now all been painted pastel colours like in an Italian village and had cute

names like Home At Last, Dunroamin, The Refuge and so on, showing that they had been bought by retired wealthy people. Tourism might be on the wane, but property prices in seaside resorts in the south of England were high.

She came to a tea-shop and was about to go in when she saw the non-smoking sign on the door. The government was planning to ban smoking in pubs, Agatha had read in the newspapers. Not a word about the dangers of alcohol, she thought, as a particularly strong gust of wind sent her reeling. People who smoked did not drive off the road or go home and beat up their wives. Drunks did. And with the fumes from more and more cars polluting the air, she thought that smoking had become a political issue. The left were anti-smoking, the right pro-smoking, and the lot in the middle who had given up smoking wanted everyone to suffer.

She saw a pub on the corner called the Dog and Duck. It looked old and pretty, whitewashed with black beams and hanging baskets which swung in the wind. She pushed open the door and went in.

Inside belied the outside. It was dark and gloomy: stained tables, linoleum on the floor, and if there was any heating at all she could not feel it.

She had wanted a coffee, and pubs these days sold coffee, but she felt so low she ordered a double gin and tonic instead. "We don't have ice," said the bartender.

"You don't need it," snapped Agatha. "This place is freezing."

"You're the only one that's complained," he said, scooping up her money.

Should be written on the British flag, thought Agatha sourly. "You're the only one that's complained" was always the answer to the slightly less than timid customer who dared to complain about anything.

Perhaps she should admit defeat and go home. She lit a cigarette. The pub was nearly empty. There was only she herself and a couple talking in low voices in a corner, holding hands and looking at each other with the sad intensity of adulterers. They probably met here, thought Agatha, knowing that no one they knew would see them.

There must be some sort of life in this town.

The pub door swung open and a tall man came in. Agatha studied him as he went up to the bar. He was wearing a long dark overcoat. He had a lugubrious face and large pale eyes under heavy lids. His hair was black, like patent leather, smooth across his head. He ordered a drink and then turned and looked curiously at Agatha. He was far from an Adonis, and yet Agatha was suddenly conscious of her face, reddened by the wind, and her head tied up in a headscarf because she had not wanted to wear her wig.

He walked up to her table and loomed over her. "Are you visiting?" he

asked.

“Yes,” said Agatha curtly.

“You’ve picked a bad time of year for it.”

“I’ve picked a bad place,” retorted Agatha. “I think people only come here to die.”

His pale eyes gleamed with amusement. “Oh, we have our fun. There’s dancing in the pier ballroom tonight.” He sat down opposite her.

“How on earth do people get to it?” asked Agatha. “Surely anyone trying to get along the pier in this weather would be blown away.”

“I tell you what. I’ll take you.”

“I don’t know you!”

He held out a hand. “Jimmy Jessop.”

“Well, Mr Jessop...”

“Jimmy.”

“Jimmy, then. I’m a bit old to be picked up in a crummy pub by someone I don’t know.”

He seemed amused by her glaring eyes and haughty manner. “If you normally go on like this you can’t have any fun at all. If you go to a dance with me, what terrible thing could happen to you? I am probably the same age as you, so I’m hardly going to try to take off my clothes and rape you.”

“You don’t need to take off all your clothes to rape someone.”

“I wouldn’t know, never having tried it.”

Agatha suddenly thought of another gloomy evening alone at the Garden.

“Oh, why not. I’m Agatha Raisin. Mrs Agatha Raisin. I’m staying at the Garden Hotel.”

“And is there a Mr Raisin?”

“Dead.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’m not.”

He looked surprised but then he said, “I’ll pick you up at eight o’clock. The pier’s close to your hotel, so we can walk. Want another one?” He pointed to her empty glass.

“No, I’d best get back.” Agatha just wanted to escape from him, to return to the hotel and figure out whether she should really go. If she changed her mind, she could always ask reception to tell him that she was indisposed.

She gathered up her handbag and gloves. He stood up and held the door open for her.

“Till tonight,” he said. Agatha mumbled something and scurried out past him.



Back in her hotel room, she stood before the long glass on the wardrobe door and studied her reflection to see if there was anything about her that should make some strange man invite her out. Her head was tightly wrapped in a headscarf, her face without make-up was shiny and her nose was still pink with the cold. Her eyes looked even smaller than usual. She took off her coat and unwound her headscarf and looked dismally at the tufts of hair on her head. No, he must be weird. She would not go. She looked at her watch. It was nearly lunch-time. She washed her face and then sat down at the dressing-table – kidney-shaped, with a triple mirror and a green silk flounce to match the slippery green silk cover on the large bed. A flapper's dressing-table, thought Agatha. She wondered whether there was any new furniture in the hotel at all. She carefully applied make-up and then put on a glossy brown wig. Not bad, she thought. Now if Jimmy Jessop had seen her looking like this...

She gathered up her handbag again and then a paperback as a barrier in case any of the geriatrics in the dining-room tried to start up a conversation, and made her way down the thickly carpeted stairs with their brass risers. A fitful gleam of sunshine stabbed down through a large stained-glass window on the landing, chequering the Turkey-red carpet on the stairs with harlequin colours.

The dining-room was high-ceilinged with long windows overlooking the sea.

She took a table in the corner and covertly surveyed the other diners. There was an elderly man whom the waitresses addressed as Colonel. He had a good head of snowy-white hair and a lined, tanned face. He was tall and upright and wearing an old but well-cut tweed jacket. Glancing over at him and obviously trying to catch his attention was a lady with improbably blonde hair. She was heavily powdered and her lipstick was a screaming red. She was wearing a low-cut blouse which showed too much shrivelled and freckled neck. There was another man, small and crabby-looking with a dowager's hump. Then two elderly women, one tall and masculine in tweeds, the other small, weedy and rabbity-looking.

What an advertisement for euthanasia, thought Agatha sourly.

The food when it arrived was good, solid English cooking. That day the main course was pork tenderloin glazed with honey, served with apple sauce, onions, roast potatoes, boiled potatoes, cauliflower cheese and peas.

It was followed by toffee pudding and lashings of Devon cream. Agatha ate the lot, and she groaned as she could feel the band of her skirt tightening.

She would need to go for another long walk or she would feel lethargic and heavy for the rest of the day.

This time, as the tide had gone out, she went down on to the shingly beach where great grey-green waves crashed and surged.

She had a sudden memory of a piece of poetry learned at school.

But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world

Agatha brightened. It was grand to be able to remember things, if only a fragment of poetry. That was one of her fears, that her memories would be lost to her one day.

There was something hypnotic about the rise and fall of the waves. The wind was slowly dropping and pale sunlight gilded the restless sea. She walked miles before she turned back to the hotel, feeling energetic and refreshed. She may as well go to the dance on the pier with the mysterious Jimmy Jessop. It was unexpected, a little adventure.

Her mind was thoroughly made up when the blonde woman met her in the reception area and fluted, "We haven't been introduced. I am Mrs Daisy Jones."

Agatha held out her hand. "Agatha Raisin."

"Well, Miss Raisin..."

"Mrs."

"Mrs Raisin. The colonel, that is dear Colonel Lyche, has suggested we all get together after dinner for a game of Scrabble. There are so few of us. Miss Jennifer Stobbs and Miss Mary Dulsey are very keen players. And Mr Harry Berry usually beats us all."

"Too kind," said Agatha, backing away, "but I've got a date."

"I thought you were a business woman when I saw you. I said to the colonel –"

"I mean a date. A fellow."

"Oh, really. Another time, then."

Agatha escaped up to her room. Surely a dance on the pier was infinitely preferable to an evening playing Scrabble with that lot!

At seven o'clock, she picked up the phone and ordered sandwiches and a bottle of mineral water to be served to her in her room.

When the elderly waiter creaked in with it ten minutes later, Agatha