

THE QUEEN OF MYSTERY

Agatha  
Christie

TOWARDS  
ZERO

# **Agatha Christie**

# Towards Zero

HARPER

NEW YORK • LONDON • TORONTO • SYDNEY

To Robert Graves

Dear Robert,

Since you are kind enough to say you like my stories, I venture to dedicate this book to you. All I ask is that you should sternly restrain your critical faculties (doubtless sharpened by your recent excesses in that line!) when reading it.

This is a story for your pleasure and *not* a candidate for Mr. Graves' literary pillory!

Your friend,

*Agatha Christie*

# Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Prologue: November 19th](#)

[“Open the Door and Here are the People”](#)

[Snow White and Red Rose](#)

[A Fine Italian Hand...](#)

[Zero Hour](#)

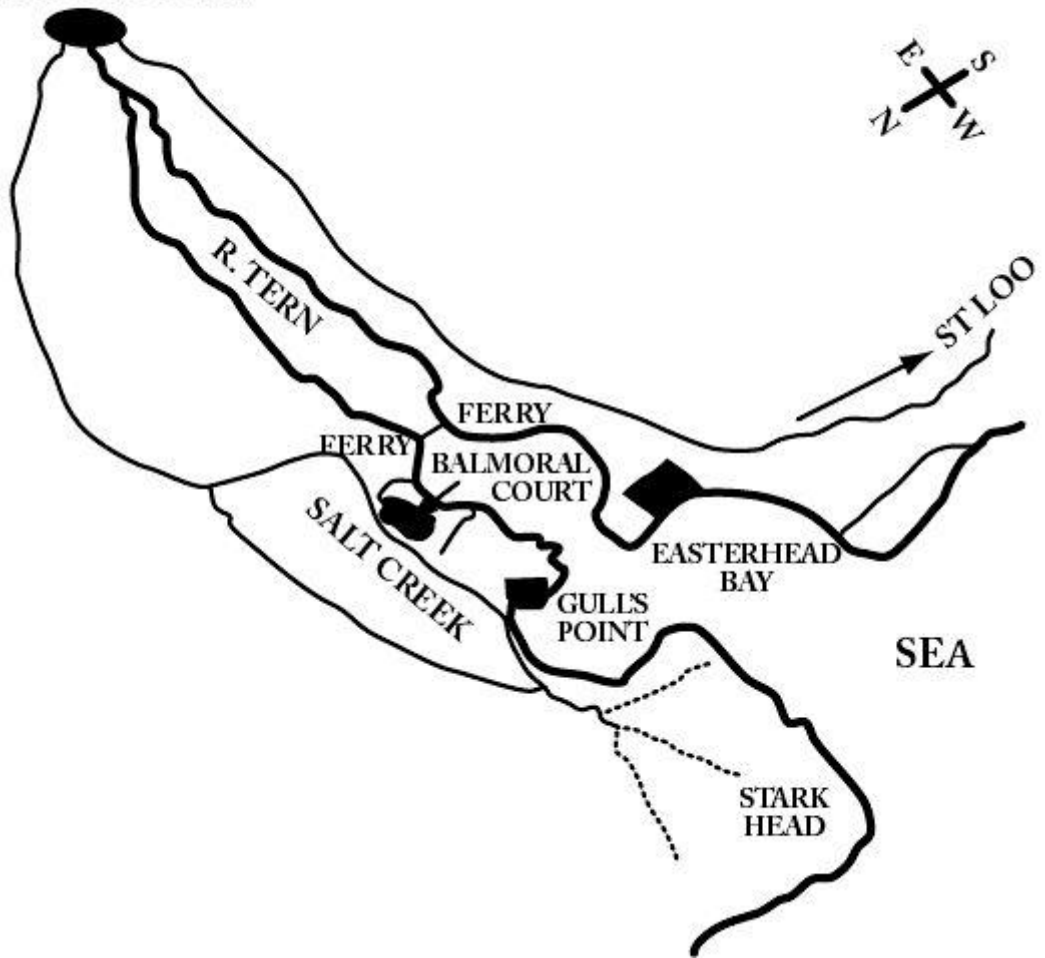
[About the Author](#)

[Other Books by Agatha Christie](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

SALTINGTON



SEA

STARK  
HEAD

## Prologue

**NOVEMBER 19TH**

The group round the fireplace was nearly all composed of lawyers or those who had an interest in the law. There was Martin-dale the solicitor, Rufus Lord, KC, young Daniels who had made a name for himself in the Carstairs case, a sprinkling of other barristers, Mr. Justice Cleaver, Lewis of Lewis and Trench and old Mr. Treves. Mr. Treves was close on eighty, a very ripe and experienced eighty. He was a member of a famous firm of solicitors, and the most famous member of that firm, he was said to know more of backstairs history than any man in England and he was a specialist on criminology.

Unthinking people said Mr. Treves ought to write his memoirs. Mr. Treves knew better. He knew that he knew too much.

Though he had long retired from active practice, there was no man in England whose opinion was so respected by the members of his own fraternity. Whenever his thin precise little voice was raised there was always a respectful silence.

The conversation now was on the subject of a much talked of case which had finished that day at the Old Bailey. It was a murder case and the prisoner had been acquitted. The present company was busy trying the case over again and making technical criticisms.

The prosecution had made a mistake in relying on one of its witnesses—old Depleach ought to have realized what an opening he was giving to the defence. Young Arthur had made the most of that servant girl's evidence. Bentmore, in his summing up, had very rightly put the matter in its correct perspective, but the mischief was done by then—the

jury had believed the girl. Juries were funny—you never knew what they'd swallow and what they wouldn't. But let them once get a thing into their heads and no one was ever going to get it out again. They believed that the girl was speaking the truth about the crowbar and that was that. The medical evidence had been a bit above their heads. All those long terms and scientific jargon—damned bad witnesses, these scientific johnnies—always hemmed and hawed and couldn't say yes or no to a plain question—always “in certain circumstances that might take place”—and so on!

They talked themselves out, little by little, and as the remarks became more spasmodic and disjointed, a general feeling grew of something lacking. One head after another turned in the direction of Mr. Treves. For Mr. Treves had as yet contributed nothing to the discussion. Gradually it became apparent that the company was waiting for a final word from its most respected colleague.

Mr. Treves, leaning back in his chair, was absentmindedly polishing his glasses. Something in the silence made him look up sharply.

“Eh?” he said. “What was that? You asked me something?”

Young Lewis spoke.

“We were talking, sir, about the Lamorne case.”

He paused expectantly.

“Yes, yes,” said Mr. Treves. “I was thinking of that.”

There was a respectful hush.

“But I'm afraid,” said Mr. Treves, still polishing, “that I was being fanciful. Yes, fanciful. Result of getting on in years, I suppose. At my age one can claim the privilege of being fanciful, if one likes.”

“Yes, indeed, sir,” said young Lewis, but he looked puzzled.

“I was thinking,” said Mr. Treves, “not so much of the various points of law raised—though they were interesting—very interesting—if the verdict had gone the other way there would have been good grounds for appeal. I rather think—but I won't go into that now. I was thinking, as I say, not of the points of law but of the—well, of the *people* in the case.”

Everybody looked rather astonished. They had considered the people in the case only as regarding their credibility or otherwise as witnesses. No one had even hazarded a speculation as to whether the prisoner had been guilty or as innocent as the court had pronounced him to be.

“Human beings, you know,” said Mr. Treves thoughtfully. “Human beings. All kinds and sorts and sizes and shapes of 'em. Some with brains and a good many more without. They'd come from all over the place, Lancashire, Scotland—that restaurant proprietor from Italy and