



Susan Kandel

Christietown
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Q: How did you come up with the idea of including the real-life story of Agatha Christie's 11-day disappearance in Christietown? Did you have to do a great deal of research for it?

A: I always do a great deal of research for my books. At a minimum, I read all of the author's fiction, as much criticism of the literature as exists, and whatever biographies or biographical information is available. For me, this is the fun part; I lie in bed with a yellow highlighter and a box of candy and spend hours and days and weeks just reading. When I started researching Christie's life, I didn't know about the 11 day disappearance, and as you might imagine, it struck me like a bolt from the blue. Once I learned Agatha disappeared on the heels of her husband's request for a divorce, I realized it could have great resonance in terms of Cece's own checkered romantic history and insistent self-doubts. It seemed like the perfect hook for my novel. I also enjoyed switching back and forth between the present day narrative and Agatha's narrative of the 11 missing days. More escaping into the past...

Q: What is your favorite Agatha Christie mystery, and why? Which of her mysteries do you think are must-reads for mystery lovers?

A: I love all the Agatha Christie mysteries, but I'm probably with everybody else in voting for *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* as the best of a very good lot. It provides the classic example of a twist ending, and surprisingly for this genre, holds up to multiple readings. *Sleeping Murder*, Christie's last book, is also excellent. I'm a sucker for mysteries about newlyweds. *And Then There Were None* is a must-read; it is deservedly her most famous book because you never do see what's coming. *Death in the Clouds* is another essential Christie, a clever variation on her isolated country house formula. I am very partial to *The Body in the Library*; it may be my favorite. I don't want to give anything away, but a sensitivity to fashion and the psychology of self-presentation will help you figure this one out.

Q: In the Cece Caruso series you often reference classic mystery characters, such as Nancy Drew in *Not a Girl Detective*, Perry Mason in *I Dreamed I Married Perry Mason*, and Miss Marple in *Christietown*. Is Cece a direct descendant of these famous sleuths?

A: Cece grew up wanting to be Nancy Drew: a dead mother, an indulgent father, and a housekeeper who could pack your suitcase for a European jaunt or make you a homemade pudding at a moment's notice. But Nancy was a professional; Cece's decidedly an amateur, which makes her more like Miss Marple, though with a more developed fashion sense (no gray cardigans ever).

Q: Do you personally share some aspects of Cece's character, such as her taste for vintage clothing and fascination with old films?

A: Like Cece, I love vintage clothing, but being five-foot-eleven—as Cece knows (we are the same height)—is a bit of a problem on this count. All vintage clothing aficionados should actually be the size of my twelve-year-old daughter, who had her pick of 50s day dresses when she was choosing an elementary school graduation dress (she wound up with an adorable, blue-striped Jonathan Logan dress with a twirly skirt and matching Eisenhower jacket). Women were definitely smaller back then—or else the big ones shredded their clothes when they were done with them. Besides a passion for fashion, Cece and I share a perverse sense of humor and that's about it. She is an Italian Catholic ex-beauty queen from New Jersey who was pregnant at 17 and never made it to college; I'm a Jewish girl from Beverly Hills who had barely dated by 17, and cried when I had to leave grad school. Cece has terrible luck with men; I've been married (to the same person) for 16 years.

Q: What's up next for Cece?

A: The next Cece Caruso mystery is called *Vertigo A-Go-Go*, and in it, Cece is embroiled in Alfred Hitchcock's life. Without giving too much away, let's just say that she finds out what it's like to be Kim Novak in *Vertigo* (i.e., the subject of someone's obsession) and Cary Grant in *North by Northwest*—in the wrong place at the wrong time.