



Christietown

By Susan Kandel
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Introduction

A new Agatha Christie-themed housing tract on the edge of the Mojave Desert is about to open, and who better to help promote the Cotswold-cozy development than mystery biographer extraordinaire, Cece Caruso? For the grand opening weekend, Cece is staging a play featuring the beloved sleuth Miss Marple. Of course, everything goes wrong—including a leading lady who ends up dead.

All is not well in Christietown. The developer, an Englishman who claims to be a descendent of the Grand Dame of Mystery herself, has ruthless investors breathing down his neck. Meanwhile, Cece's got a wedding to plan and a baby shower to give, just as her ex-husband shows up on her doorstep with his fiancée and future mother-in-law in tow.

As Cece soon discovers, Christietown's secrets are as complicated as the truth behind Agatha Christie's real-life disappearance. When another body surfaces, the intrepid amateur sleuth knows she must play the famed detective for real—or suffer the same mysterious fate.

Questions for Discussion

1. Cece Caruso loves old clothes, old movies, old houses, and dead authors. What in her life experience or character might account for this attraction to the past?
2. What role does fashion play in Cece's solving of the mystery of Liz's death?
3. To what extent does *Christietown* mimic the tone, style, or structure of an Agatha Christie whodunit? How might *Christietown* be read differently by long-standing Christie fans as opposed to those less familiar with Christie's work?
4. The author interweaves Cece's present-day mystery with the mystery of Agatha Christie's 11 day disappearance. What do you think was the purpose of this strategy? How effective is it? How do the Christie sections impact you as a reader?
5. How does Richard's bombshell revelation about Cece's past change your perception of Cece? Does it complicate your sense of her as a reliable narrator of her own past? How might this reverberate with the bombshell revelation in Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*?
6. Cece is a biographer, but she traffics in intuition as much as cold hard data. How do you view the biographer's role? Is the truth to be found in fact, fiction, or somewhere in between?
7. Do you consider Cece a feminist? Why or why not? How about Agatha Christie?
8. What do you make of the parallels between Agatha and Archie, Lou and Liz, and Cece and her ex-husband, Richard? What does *Christietown* have to say about the self-deceptions and/or glories of romantic love and marriage?
9. What is the importance in *Christietown* of secondary characters like Dot and Silvana? Are they merely comic relief, or do they add texture and richness to the story?
10. How do you assess Ian Christie's guilt? Is he a villain, or fatally flawed? Is there a difference?
11. What odds do you give Cece and Gambino of making it to the altar?
12. Beyond the title, how does *Christietown* echo the 1974 film *Chinatown*?

About the Author

Susan Kandel is a former art critic for the *Los Angeles Times*. She has taught at New York University and UCLA, and served as the editor of the international journal *artext*. She lives with her family in West Hollywood, California.