



A Shilling for Candles

Josephine Tey , Robert Barnard (Introduction)

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When a woman's body washes up on an isolated stretch of beach on the southern coast of England, Scotland Yard's Inspector Alan Grant is on the case. But the inquiry into her death turns into a nightmare of false leads and baffling clues. Was there anyone who didn't want lovely screen actress Christine Clay dead?

A Shilling for Candles Details

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From Reader Review A Shilling for Candles for online ebook

Nancy Oakes says

really, it's around a 3.6 rounded up.

This is my second time with this book, and I got much more out of it this time around than the last, which is generally the case with me; I think the huge difference was that this time I also had more insight into the author herself. I have to be honest -- so far my favorite of the rereads has been her *The Franchise Affair* -- in my very humble opinion, it's among the best of her mysteries and *A Shilling for Candles* doesn't rate as highly as that one. That doesn't mean it's not good, just less enjoyable for me personally.

Having just recently finished Jennifer Morag Henderson's excellent biography of the author, Josephine Tey: *A Life* (which I'll be talking about here very shortly), I find myself completely in agreement with her -- the more a Tey reader understands about her life, the easier it is to appreciate and to understand her work. I wish the biography had come out sooner; now I feel like I ought to go back and reread more of Tey's crime novels for better perspective.

The supposed suicide of actress Christine Clay turns out to be a murder in this novel, and a ready-made suspect is on hand, supposedly making things easy for Inspector Grant. However, the suspect flees, and while the suspect is being hunted, Grant finds himself having to examine different lines of inquiry that move him into the shallow world of celebrity, the dead woman's personal history, religious strangeness, and they even take him into the realm of out-there astrology before the truth is at last revealed. And I have to say, I seriously didn't see that ending coming -- a complete surprise.

Getting back to why knowing something of Tey's life helps to put things into better perspective as a reader, I could easily see how much of Tey's experiences had an impact on her character creations. As just one example (without giving anything away), Tey had made lifelong friends among a group of women in the theater world, women she'd come to know in her work as playwright Gordon Daviot. One of these women was Marda Vanne, whose fictional counterpart Marta Hallard turns up in more than one Tey novel as an actress friend of Grant's. As another example, when Christine Clay's will is read, it turns out that she's left money to the National Trust, "for the preservation of the beauty of England." Tey did the same in her will. Plus, there's the central focus on the pitfalls of fame and fortune in this novel that may play off of Tey's own reluctance to be in the public limelight.

Recommended to people who enjoy vintage crime, but do be aware that many of Tey's ideas in this novel do not conform to modern PC sensitivities. Frankly, I don't really give a fig about whether or not a book written in the 1930s conforms to today's standards of "correctness", but I have read reader responses that include complaints about this issue, so you've been warned. Overall -- a good read, not great, but it was fun getting to the end.

Jaline says

In this outing, Inspector Grant has his work cut out for him. A famous actress is murdered and the suspect list is long. It becomes even longer after her will is read. And the only clue they have is a button.

Once again, Josephine Tey writes a classically woven whodunit with threads of different colors and lengths loosely throwing menace and mayhem in many different directions. As the story proceeds, those threads are gathered tighter and tighter until a design starts to appear.

This was a very enjoyable read – light, but with sufficient heft to set my detecting urges on a jog. I didn't solve this one until Inspector Grant made his arrest, but the good news is, I have 4 more tries in this series to get there before he does!

Damaskcat says

A beautiful film star is found dead at the foot of some cliffs not far from the cottage she is renting for a few weeks. Is it suicide or is it murder? Inspector Alan Grant is puzzled. When his chief suspect - the young man who was staying with Christina Clay in the cottage - goes on the run he believes his suspicions are correct but he reckons without the Chief Constable's young daughter, Erica, who doesn't believe Robert Tisdall is guilty and sets out to prove it.

I enjoyed reading this well written crime novel. I liked the characters and thought they were very well drawn - especially Erica who proves herself extremely resourceful. I thought the book was well plotted with plenty of suspects and plenty of clues and red herrings. I didn't work out who the murderer was but when I looked back over the book the clues were there - I'd simply not given them the importance they actually had.

This book is part of the Alan Grant series but the books in this series can be read as standalone novels and read in any order.

Roman Clodia says

Not my favourite Tey as bits of the story feel under-written and the solution is a cliché of crime fiction (and what was the motive, again?). All the same, for writing, for characterisation and sheer readability, Tey is one of my favourites for light and unchallenging reading which is still assured and intelligent.

Matthew Gatheringwater says

I picked up *A Shilling for Candles* because *Young and Innocent*, one of my favorite early Hitchcock films, is based on it. I was surprised to realize, however, that the film is only very loosely adapted from the book, Hitchcock having lifted a single idea from the plot: a man, who may or may not be innocent, is a fugitive from the law and finds assistance from a young woman who may or may not be in love with him. People who've watched the film shouldn't have their experience of the book spoiled, since *A Shilling for Candles* is full of twists and even the solution to the mystery is different to that which ends the film. Both are good fun for people who like classic British mysteries.

Kim says

I wish I hadn't left getting better acquainted with Josephine Tey's writing for quite so long. In this novel, Tey's second, Inspector Alan Grant investigates the murder of a famous actress, whose death by drowning had been predicted by a celebrity clairvoyant. In her characteristically elegant prose, Tey not only delivers an interesting piece of Golden Age crime fiction, she also explores the concept of celebrity. That Tey's observations on this particular issue still seem fresh today is both a testament to the strength of the writing and to the fact that some things never change.

Overall, this was a fun read. Alan Grant is a thoughtful and engaging detective, who makes mistakes and sometimes misjudges people and situations in a very realistic way. The secondary characters are also interesting and well-drawn, particularly the wonderful Erica Burgoyne. The mystery at the centre of the novel is engaging enough, with multiple red herrings and a satisfactory resolution. However, the novel does contain multiple instances of the casual anti-semitism which is a recurrent feature of pre-WWII British crime fiction. It is jarring and unpleasant to a contemporary reader, but something which I can generally cope with in this genre.

My enjoyment of this novel was increased by it being a buddy read with my friend Jemidar, who correctly identified the culprit very early on. Once Jemidar picked the murderer, all Inspector Grant had to do was work out how the murder was committed. A solid 3-1/2 to 4 star read.

Lady Clementina ffynch-farrowmore says

The second book featuring Inspector Allan Grant was a group read with the *Reading the Detectives* group here. The body of a young woman is found washed up on the beach, and while briefly thought to be a swimming accident, soon enough, some things begin to puzzle the local police and the Yard is called in, Grant leading the investigation. The victim turns out to be Christine Clay, a well known actress who'd been living in a small village for a while to get away from things in London. She doesn't seem to have any obvious enemies but there is an actress who will step into her shoes once she's out of the way, a possible lover, and a good-for-nothing brother, who few knew she had—he's been involved in various suspicious activities, and there was no love lost between the two. Then there is also a penniless young man, Robert Tisdall, who had squandered away his own fortune, and who Chris took pity on and took in, but what motive could he possibly have? But most surprising of all, an astrologer of sorts had predicted nearly a year ago that Christine's end was near. Grant tracks down and interviews various people connected with Chris—her husband, co-actors, so-called friends, and digs into her past looking for possible suspects and motives, in a sense making it more on the lines of a police procedural. As in the first book, he does start off on the wrong track, acting contrary to his own intuition. He loses his chief suspect who gives him the slip quite easily—Tey seems to suggest that criminals DON'T usually escape Grant which seems a bit odd since the main suspect in book 1 managed to do this too. Grant is no extraordinary Sherlock Holmes or Poirot type detective. He is an ordinary but efficient policeman, reasonably clever pursuing every lead and interpreting what he finds to solve his case. The denouement here was interesting and not as abrupt as in the first book. Another surprise reveal at the end was a bit abrupt though—there was some background for it but not enough for one to guess.

What made this book enjoyable for me was Erica Burgoyne, the sixteen- (in some places in the book

seventeen) year old daughter of the Chief Constable who is spunky, clever, and resourceful and plays quite an active role in the investigation, at least part of it—it is Grant who finally solves the case, though. I only just found that this book was the basis for a Hitchcock film where the romance angle between Tisdall and Erica is played up—from the book though, I felt she admired Grant, not Tisdall.

Overall, this one proved to be a far more interesting and enjoyable read for me than the first Inspector Grant book.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

Josephine Tey is one of my favorite mystery authors--easily top five. This isn't a favorite book among her works though. Sadly, she only wrote eight. The introduction to the latest editions by Robert Barnard name *The Daughter of Time*, *The Franchise Affair* and *Brat Farrar* as the standouts; I'd add *Miss Pym Disposes* to that list of her best. *A Shilling for Candles* is only her second book and her two earliest books are indeed imo her weakest, though I like *A Shilling for Candles* better than her first mystery featuring Inspector Alan Grant of Scotland Yard, *The Man in the Queue*. The strength of most Tey's, including this one, isn't in a tidily plotted whodunnit with clues giving you a fair chance at the solution and a particularly clever twist. The introduction points particularly to *A Shilling for Candles* in that regard as an example, saying that Tey was not interested "in that kind of game."

So what are this novel's particular pleasures? Well, her prose for one. Lively, full of wry insights, humor, an apt way with descriptions. Her characters for another, and in this case I definitely thought this cast was more memorable than in her first Grant novel. There is an odious reporter, an eccentric astrologer, egotistical show business people and the delightful Erica Burgoyne, teen detective, who arguably proves better at the business than Inspector Grant. Grant isn't along Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot or even Lord Peter Wimsey lines. He laments that himself at one point that he's "just a hard-working, well-meaning ordinarily intelligent detective." Barnard accuses Tey of anti-Semitism in his introduction, but doesn't cite examples, and I have to wonder if it's he just doesn't get that Grant isn't meant to be a Holmes or Poirot. I don't think we're to take his beliefs as that of the author. He's fallible. It may be that anti-Jewish lines are excised from the later or American editions, or that I have yet to find them in my reread of Tey with 3 more novels to go. Unless I missed it because it's encoded as "Eastern European" in this book. But I find it telling that in the first two books, every time Grant expresses a prejudice and makes assumptions based upon it, he's proven wrong--and the character of Eastern European origin in this book doesn't fit any negative stereotype. It could be I'm giving Tey too much credit for being subtle. Maybe. But I suspect Barnard doesn't give Tey enough credit.

I think what I found most poignant in this book though was the portrait of the murder victim we can only get to know through others--film actress Christine Clay. What emerges is a very sympathetic portrait, a vivid one both of her and the prices of celebrity.

Dorothy says

I enjoyed this book very much.

It is the second book in the Inspector Grant series and features the death of a very talented, popular movie

star. There are few clues at the scene, since she was drowned at a secluded beach and the tide has obliterated anything of use. One suspect delivers himself up immediately, but claims to be innocent. The evidence, however circumstantial, all points to him and he is arrested.

The quickness and cleanliness of the arrest pleases everyone: the press, the public, and the constabulary all the way up to the Commissioner. Grant also acknowledges that it is “a good enough case”. But. Grant has a niggling feeling, based on a small anomaly. Why can’t he let this go, as everyone advises? Is it just his liking for the suspect getting in the way of the facts? Tey does a brilliant job of outlining the competing forces pulling at Grant: the conviction of his superiors about the solidity of the case versus his “feeling”.

This book also has a very interesting character in Erica Burgoyne, the 17-year-old daughter of the Chief Constable. At points the book breaks briefly to tell the story from her point of view before returning to Grant’s pursuits. She is unconventional, forthright, and has a keen intellect. I am hoping to see more of her in subsequent books!

In each of Tey’s books that I’ve read, she can in a few strokes give a realistic and detailed picture of a section of English society: touts at the racetrack, shopkeepers opening up on a Monday morning, London theatre-goers. The social satire is gentle but hits true even today. In one instance, she makes sharp observations about the symbiotic relationship between the sensationalist celebrity-obsessed press and its readers. Here is an excerpt, where a reporter (Jammy Hopkins) laments being chastised for printing hearsay:

“Jammy consigned them all to perdition...What did the Yard want to take it like that for? Everyone knew that what you wrote in a paper was just eye-wash. When it wasn’t bilge-water. If you stopped being dramatic over little tuppenny no-account things, people might begin to suspect that they were no-account, and then they’d stop buying papers....You’d got to provide emotions for all those moribund wage-earners who were too tired or too dumb to feel anything on their own behalf. If you couldn’t freeze their blood, then you could sell them a good sob or two.” (p.172)

In this novel, Tey shows the dogged, unglamorous work that policemen have to do to track down clues and gather evidence. What could be dry in other hands is smooth in Tey’s and does not slow down the story; rather, it gives a deeper dimension to Grant’s character.

Though it is second in the Grant series, this can be read out of order from the first book (Man in the Queue) with no harm.

Elizabeth (Alaska) says

I like Inspector Alan Grant. He isn't a puffed up egotist like Hercule Poirot or Nero Wolfe. Of course, those two are private investigators and Alan Grant is Scotland Yard. Grant has to work through the crime whether he likes it or not - no picking and choosing crimes for him. Still, he uses his own little grey cells, like Poirot, and also allows himself to get actively engaged in the investigation, unlike Wolfe.

I'm not sure, however, that the mystery is the point for reading Josephine Tey. Sure, there is the mystery. Even in this one there is more than one plot line. She comes much closer to literature than the normal mystery, with good prose and characterization.

I look forward to more of this series, but also for her stand alone titles. I started to give this only 3-stars, due to genre. As she is more than just genre, I'm bumping it to 4-stars.

Carol ?? says

4.5★ Can't make it 5★as the clues weren't there for the reader to solve themselves (although Tey did lead one up the garden path! I *do* love a good garden path wander!)

Mysterious and charismatic actress Christine Clay is found drowned. Initial evidence points a charming young wastrel that Clay recently befriended - but is Robin Tisdall the guilty party? Or is it someone from the past that Clay has been reinventing?

And she used to tell a different story each time. When someone pointed out that that wasn't what she had said last time, she said: 'But that's so dull! I've thought of a much better one.'

I'm glad I read this on my kindle as I was constantly looking up different words & expressions. I now know that rend-me-downs are the same as hand-me-downs. But I'm hoping someone from the *Reading the Detectives* group can explain the significance of a King's Writ!

This novel was also wittier than the other Tey's I have read;

And Hopkins, seeing that Tisdall was unaware of Grant's identity, rushed in with glad maliciousness. "That is Scotland Yard," he said. "Inspector Grant. Never had an unsolved crime to his name." "I hope you write my obituary," Grant said. "I hope I do!" the journalist said, with fervor.

Tey also seemed to be exploring the injustices of the class system and racism rather than condoning it.

At a scant 195 pages this was told at a brisk pace. I very much prefer this to some of the bloated modern mysteries.

Abigail Bok says

This is my second recent Inspector Grant whodunit by Josephine Tey, and I have to confess myself underwhelmed. The prose is pleasant to read, but the characters are not very engaging for me, and Tey cheats a bit on the mystery in my view. I have adored other books by her, notably *Brat Farrar*, but this series, full of empty Bright Young Things, is not doing it for me. Dorothy Sayers does the BYTs in a much more interesting fashion.

At the center of my sense of hollowness is Inspector Grant himself. He doesn't appear to have any life

beyond detecting, and his presence on the page is therefore a tad bland. He is one of the well-brought-up types who seem essential to British mysteries of this era (published in 1936)—authors of this vintage seem to want to have their cake and eat it too, wallowing in the muck of police work but keeping their protagonist's nose firmly in the fresh air of an upper-crust atmosphere. And the other characters, with one or two exceptions feel like little more than sketches.

As to the resolution: (view spoiler)

All in all, it was a pleasant diversion but not ultimately satisfying.

Bill Kerwin says

Not far from the Channel, near Westover, a woman's body is washed ashore. First thought an accident, then a suicide, it is soon deemed a murder—and a puzzling one, at that. But when the dead woman is identified as Christine Clay, famous British actress and Hollywood star, Inspector Grant's task, already quite a puzzle, becomes an ordeal.

This second Inspector Grant mystery is better than the first, but it would still take more than ten years before Tey would include him in her first masterpiece, *The Franchise Affair*. Still, this too is a very good book. Unlike her first effort, *The Man in the Queue*, there are no bravura passages here, for the simple reason that Tey has progressed beyond *bravura* passages; she writes well all the time, with precision and wit, and without unnecessary display. The elegant and likable inspector is off-stage for much of the action, but his creator has by this time become so adept at tale-telling that the reader scarcely feels his absence.

The primary reasons for the reader's satisfaction are the points of view Tey uses to tell the rest of her story. Gossip maven Jammy Hopkins gives us the celebrity reporter's perspective, but even more interesting is the police superintendent's daughter Erica Burgoyne, a fearless tomboy not only half in love with Grant and but also with Robert Tisdall the prime suspect too! This intelligent young lady does her share of investigating, and her vulnerability—and our fears for her—add a good deal to the suspense.

If you get the chance, watch the 1937 Hitchcock film based on this book: *Young and Innocent* (U.S. title: *The Girl Was Young*). Hitchcock and his writers altered a lot of the plot—including eliminating Grant entirely and changing the identity of the murderer—but it is a charming and memorable film nonetheless, one of the best of the director's British period. And it stars, as Erica Burgoyne, the first utterly captivating Hitchcock heroine, the—ah, my queen of Hitchcock trivia!—the charming, forgotten Nova Pilbeam.

Ellie says

I was both thrilled and dismayed to discover that in compiling my seemingly endless list of "books read" I somehow missed one of my most favorite British mystery writers ever-Josephine Tey. Thrilled to have the opportunity to share this outstanding writer & dismayed because, put simply, it meant I had to go back to work on my list:). Nevertheless, I'm delighted to share this great writer with others. It hardly matters which of her books you being with (although I would personally recommend , her view on the historically portrayed but not necessarily accurate King Richard III or her more typical mystery)

But it doesn't matter where you begin-you run the risk of becoming addicted to Tey smooth, deceptively simple brilliance: of writing, characterization and stories.

is no exception. Another of her wonderfully written stories. This is an entry in a series involving her Detective Alan Grant and concerns a murder off a romantically beautiful and dangerous coast of England of a beautiful woman. As always with Tey, an outline of her plot does not being to do just to her handling of it.

Recommended: as always, those who enjoy British cozies and/or outstanding writing, characters, and simple but amazingly well-handled storylines.

Hana says

Group read with English Mysteries Club, June 2014.

What a joy it is to spend a couple of days with Inspector Grant and Josephine Tey. Grant is the antithesis of the hard-boiled detective. My grandmother would say 'he's a lovely man', a *gentle* man, a bit of a worrier, someone who instinctively likes people. Grant sees his world and its varied and colorful inhabitants with keen insight and good humor.

Even beyond the pleasure of Grant's company, *A Shilling for Candles* has such a deliciously likeable cast of characters: the hapless young man who is the first suspect and can't even remember his own name; dear Erica Burgoyne, the chief constable's daughter; 'Jammy' Hopkins, the indefatigable reporter, forever in search of the big scoop; theater types from leading ladies, to dumb blonds and chatty song writers. It's all so very *English*, very 1954 and a good deal of fun.

There is next to no suspense here, no chills or thrills (except for a few mild frissons on a midnight stake out) and the murderer is found in the end almost by accident. But Josephine Tey is a master of the craft; she draws even the smallest character with care, sketches an interaction with a few witty lines of dialog, and plants us firmly in a place and time with the most beautiful and economical prose.

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Eleanor says

I enjoyed it, but unfortunately remembered "who dunnit" so that spoiled the fun a bit.

Tracey says

Another excellent example of "not your ordinary mystery novel". A body is discovered on a beach, and the

immediate assumption of suicide is soon contradicted by the evidence. (I have to say I'm a little impressed that the article found with the body which indicates murder is never mentioned in anything I've read online about the book (and in fact morphed into something else for the film adaptation (1937's *Young and Innocent*, said to be Hitchcock's personal favorite among his British films); I'm glad to continue to keep the secret.) The most obvious suspect isn't after all so obvious – and turns up missing – and what for about a minute seemed neat and tidy turns out to be a tangled ball of false confessions, astrology, suspects requiring delicate handling, and wardrobe searches. Alan Grant's presence in this book is somewhere between that in *The Franchise Affair* – peripheral – and his greater omnipresence in *The Man in the Queue* – in addition to his there are many points of view, beautifully handled and rewarding, but he is in the forefront here.

The cover, I have to say, is odd. Pamela Patrick created a beautiful set of artwork for the Ballantine editions, and there can be no denying that her severely foreshortened corpse here is extremely well done. It's the sort of tour de force that Andrea Mantegna painted almost just to show he could (only Patrick's subject is prone rather than supine, and divine rather than Divine) – foreshortening is a bear. So as far as technique and visual appeal it's wonderful. Unfortunately, the woman depicted is brunette where Christine Clay was blonde, and while I suppose the tarot cards scattered about are a reference to a prediction that Clay would drown (etc.), all of that was couched in astrology, not the tarot. Still, nit-picking.

The plot is gripping; the characterizations natural; if the solution to the mystery is not necessarily one that can be worked out by the armchair detective, that isn't really the point of the book anyway – the impression is that *A Shilling for Candles* wasn't written primarily as a puzzle to solve. It was, I think, written more as a psychological exercise, an exploration of personality and the consequences of celebrity and of being involved in a homicide. There is the contrast of the rather extraordinary ordinary girl, Erica, with the glitter and sparkle and hollowness of the celebrities. And Alan Grant is a star, in all the best senses of the word.

Great line: "I'll take my alfred davy she never did."

A word I saw used in a summary of one of Miss Tey's other books used the word "excoriating" and it suits here as well. That reference was in regards to the attitude in *To Love and Be Wise* toward modern writers; here the recipient of the book's scorn is The Public, that seething mindless mass of neediness. The murder victim, Christine, was a star of the first magnitude, and thus even had it been natural her death is not something that could be quietly mourned in private by those closest to her. Her celebrity and the circumstances of her death break it wide open, making both privacy and quiet impossible. Since I read this, Whitney Houston died, and the constant invasion into her family's lives was appalling, down to disruptions of her teenaged daughter's life and, I believe, publication of photos of the nude corpse (see also Marilyn Monroe). I thought the menace of inexcusable paparazzi and the public appetite that allows for them was a more recent development; I honestly don't know if I'm relieved or saddened that it's always been this way.

This disparagement of the Masses put together with the little I know about Josephine Tey's career as Gordon Daviot, very successful playwright, gives me pause. Much of what I know about this aspect of her life is from the novel which uses her as a character, *An Expert in Murder*, by Nicola Upson; it was not entirely to my taste, but I don't question the research that went into it (though I take everything with a grain of salt, of course, if for no other reason that that I've also read *Daughter of Time*). If I don't plan to use the book as source material for anything, I will take the setting described as something like accurate: in the story, Daviot's play *Richard of Bordeaux* is at its height, and there are people who go to see the play over and over. And over. (In *Daughter of Time*, it is, disarmingly, mentioned that Alan Grant saw it four times.) They sought out the actors and snapped up souvenirs. While Miss Tey/Mr. Daviot might have escaped most of the throng (though for some reason I think the pseudonym was an open secret), she probably had a fair awareness of what it was like for her players, who had no such anonymity. It's sobering to read the following

quote with that in mind; Alan has picked up Champneis, Christine Clay's husband, shortly after the funeral, which despite the precautions they tried to take became a circus:

"Those women. I think the end of our greatness as a race must be very near. We came through the war well, but perhaps the effort was too great and left us – epileptic. Great shocks do, sometimes." He was silent for a moment, evidently seeing it all again in his mind's eye. "I've seen machine guns turned on troops in the open – in China – and rebelled against the slaughter. But I would have seen that sub-human mass of hysteria riddled this morning with more joy than I can describe to you. Not because it was – Chris, but because they made me ashamed of being human, of belonging to the same species."

And I think I'll just let that resonate there without further comment.

Note: I just watched Alfred Hitchcock's *Young and Innocent*, which was in some ways extraordinary. It was rather good – some decent acting by actors completely unknown to me, not a real clunker in the lot; the story, though, was fascinating. Christine Clay is still dead on the beach, but Robert Tisdall, the accused, is introduced by finding the body, and makes his escape through a truly silly sequence of events. Erica, the Chief Constable's daughter, seems a bit older, I think – to make the built-up romance more palatable, perhaps, and much more initially reluctant due to her father's position. Overall, though, much of what was used was kept intact, and everything else was just gone.

Kirsti says

This entertaining mystery was published in Britain in 1936, so it contains a lot of expressions I hadn't heard before or had rarely heard before:

I'll take my alfred davy: I'll swear to it

I'm the original locked casket: I can keep a secret

You're the original camel fly: You're annoying

bags: trousers

charabanc: large bus or wagon used for sightseeing

Why doesn't she turn cartwheels in the Strand?: Why must she make a spectacle of herself?

Susan says

This is the second Inspector Alan Grant novel, following on from "The Man in the Queue." The first novel was written in 1929, while this was published in 1937, which is quite a gap. I must admit that, although a lover of Golden Age detective fiction, I have always struggled a little with Tey; although I enjoyed this more

than the first book.

The mystery begins with the discovery of a body on a beach, which turns out to be that of a successful, and beautiful, actress, named Christina Clay (although, oddly, nobody seems to recognise her at first). Clay has been staying at a cottage, with a man named Robert Tisdall, whom she seems to have just picked up in London and brought along with her. Obviously, Tisdall seems the most obvious suspect, but Erica Burgoyne, daughter of the Chief Constable, believes he is innocent and sets out to clear his name.

As Grant sets out to try to find a case against Tisdall, there are a good range of other suspects – these include Christina's aristocratic husband, a jovial songwriter (victim of some unpleasant anti-Semitic remarks by the author), an actress who would like to step into her shoes and a ne'er do well brother named Herbert Gotobed (understandably, Christina changed her original name of Chris Gotobed, which was probably a good career move!). Add to this the fact that a psychic, named Lydia Keats, had foreseen Clay's death and Grant is plagued by a journalist named 'Jammy' Hopkins, and the scene is set for an interesting mystery.

This is less a 'puzzle' than most Golden Age mysteries and seems more concerned with motives than clues. Grant is a much more grounded detective than others of that era, who worries about things going wrong and does not necessarily know everything automatically. However, I just fail to warm to him and find him something of a cold fish. There is humour in the novel though – having finally made an arrest, his sergeant exclaims that the law should be changed. Shocked, Grant asks whether the man is talking about the death penalty, and then finds that his colleague is bemoaning the licensing laws and the fact that the pubs are closed! Overall, I enjoyed this more than the previous novel, but I doubt Tey will ever become one of my favourite authors.

Rated 3.5
