

∞ READING ROUND ∞

My Reading Habits

Fiona Evans

I LOVE AGATHA CHRISTIE, most murder mysteries in fact, and yet I cannot think of the last time I sat down and read one. Work and study have ruined my reading for relaxation. My sit-down, feet-up, book-open-on-the-sofa is a thing of the past, something I yearn for.

I owe my love of all things Christie and mystery to my beloved dad and television. TV shaped our family's reading habits. The few books we had around the house were influenced by TV shows: Catherine Cookson, Jackie Collins and James Herriot.

My love for cosy-ish crime came from a TV-industry strike. The strike disrupted my and my dad's nightly routine: staring at the box, hardly talking except to arrange cups of tea, yet enjoying each other's company all the same.

I was about ten years old when we visited the local library in preparation for the TV strike: a small, pebbledashed flat-roofed building in Silksworth, an ex-colliery village.

I was mooching around the kids' books section, flicking through a wooden box on legs: Miffy, Noggin the Nog. Dad waved me over. I joined him in the fiction section, under 'C'. Dad said I should pick a book. This was the adult section, not the kids! He whispered he'd get it on his ticket — illegal in libraryland. My guilty eyes scanned the shelves, not quite knowing what I should be looking for. Then I spotted it, something familiar, our

∞ READING ROUND ∞

name: *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* A thick red book covered in protective plastic. Dad told me he liked the author: 'she writes really good books with a twist in the tale'. I was intrigued, our name in print — EVANS! The curious title sparked a flurry of other questions: *Who was this Evans? Who was the 'they'? What stopped them from asking Evans?*

For ten days, I sat with Dad in our living room, gas fire burning, TV sleeping, me sat in dad's armchair, him on the settee. We just sat there in each other's company. Reading. Breathing. No TV, just books, just us. In those few days, I fell in love with Agatha Christie and all things murder mystery. It's something that's stayed with me all my life. It's my go-to literature for relaxing. It's my go-to TV programme. It's the thing that connects me to my dad.

Silksworth library is long gone, but my love of Christie remains. Dad's dementia means he cannot read or even enjoy the TV these days. But I might just pick up an Agatha Christie and go and read to him. He might not be able to hear, but he'll sense my presence. I'll hold his hand. He'll feel me breathe. He'll know I'm there.