

The Unexpected Mrs. Pollifax Study Guide

The Unexpected Mrs. Pollifax by Dorothy Gilman

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Plot Summary

Mrs. Emily Pollifax is a widow struggling to find meaning in her life. When she goes for a doctor's appointment, he notes that she seems somewhat depressed and asks if she is alright. She gives him only a brief overview, enough for him to know that she needs something to spark some excitement, and he encourages her to find that thing. What she does not tell him is that she had been to the point of suicide at one point, considering that it would not be such a bad fate to throw herself off the edge of her roof. With the doctor's advice and her memories of a woman who had taken to the stage at an advanced age, Mrs. Pollifax decides that she will do something to make her life exciting. Toward that end she travels to Fairfax, Virginia, to the CIA headquarters and asks to see Mr. Mason. At that moment, Mr. Mason is expecting to interview a young agent for a courier mission and the head of the department, Mr. Carstairs, assumes Mrs. Pollifax is that woman. Mr. Carstairs hires her and, despite her lack of training, sends her on what they both believe will be a three-week stay in Mexico City with the opportunity to sight-see and orders to pick up a package that contains microfilm from another agent.

Mrs. Pollifax arrives as expected and locates the book store where she is supposed to pick up the package. On impulse she goes inside and meets the proprietor who gives her a book on *solitaire* and a deck of cards. She does not realize until her eventual return to the United States that the film is in the deck of cards. On the appointed day, she returns to the store and finds the proprietor gone. She drops the code words to the man who claims he owns the store and the man drugs her. When she next wakes, she is tied to another spy, Johnny Farrell, and on a plane. She is drugged again and wakes on another plane. She eventually discovers that she and Farrell have been taken to Albania, the one strong-hold of Communism in Europe, where they are held in a remote compound. There she finds her natural tendency to make friends and trust people tested, but continues to see the best in everyone she encounters, including her captors.

Farrell is injured early on in an attempt to kill himself to keep his secrets from his captors, but Mrs. Pollifax insists on medical attention and he is soon on the mend though suffering the effects of a severely broken leg. Mrs. Pollifax eventually earns the respect of a Russian spy who lends help as she and Farrell make plans to escape. On impulse, Mrs. Pollifax talks to a Chinese prisoner also being held in the compound and he turns out to be a kidnapped scientist who helps Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell on their quest for freedom. The three encounter many dangers as they make their escape, but do make it out to sea where they are picked up by a ship. Mrs. Pollifax returns home with her friends and family none the wiser about her recent adventure.



Chapters 1 through 7

Chapters 1 through 7 Summary

In chapter one, Mrs. Emily Pollifax is in the doctor's office and her doctor, a young man, says that she seems depressed. He asks about her interests and she says that she is involved in a great many clubs and activities but seems to lack enthusiasm about any of them. He asks if there is anything she really wants to do and she admits that, as a child, she had intended to become a spy. He laughs at her and does not encourage that avenue, but does tell her that she should find something that interests her and pursue it. The doctor points out that no one can be happy trying to pretend to be someone she is not, and Mrs. Pollifax realizes that she has never been a "sensible person" and so is not happy trying to live the life of a sensible person. She then gives examples of her lack of sensible actions.

Mrs. Pollifax goes home to her apartment and encounters Mrs. Grace Hartshorne. Mrs. Hartshorne is a seasoned traveler and always seems to look down on Mrs. Pollifax. Mrs. Pollifax admits that Mrs. Hartshorne makes her feel inadequate and reminds of her the feeling of letting down a teacher.

Mrs. Pollifax recalls the story of an older woman who had gone to try her luck on the stage. The woman is given a part and she attributes this to the lack of women her age available. She says that the casting director called her "unexpected." Armed with this story and her desire to be a spy, Mrs. Pollifax makes plans to travel to Langley, Virginia, by way of Washington, D.C. In Washington, she requests a letter of introduction from her Congressman. He complies and she takes the letter to Langley where she goes to the Central Intelligence Agency and tells Jasper Mason that she wants to be a spy. Mr. Mason says that this is not the proper way to apply and Mrs. Pollifax argues that no one has come to ask her if she would like to be a spy, so she felt she had no other option. Mr. Mason is called away for a phone call.

In chapter two, Carstairs, an official with the CIA, is questioning the situation involving an operative named Tirpak who is supposed to be sending a package to Mexico City. Carstairs says that he has to have a courier and says that he is looking for someone who will absolutely blend in. Mrs. Pollifax is still waiting for Mr. Mason's return when Mr. Carstairs walks in. He is taken with her appearance at once and says that he wants to use her as a courier from Mexico City. She agrees and they arrange to meet again the following morning at nine. Carstairs finds out that she is not an operative only after she leaves the building and tells his staff that they have to have a full background check on her before the meeting scheduled for the following morning. It is noted that he has a sense about people and he does not change his mind about using Mrs. Pollifax, even when he learns that she is not an operative.

In chapter three, Mrs. Pollifax leaves her apartment at the Hemlock Apartments in New Brunswick, New Jersey and boards the plane for the Hotel Reforma Intercontinental in



Mexico City. On the flight, she remembers the situation that brought her to this point. She is told that she will go to the Parrot Bookstore in Mexico City where she will tell the proprietor, Senor R. DeGamez, that she wants "A Tale of Two Cities." She is then to mention the author Madam Defarge which confirms that she is the person who is supposed to pick up the package. She does not know what the package will look like or what it is, but is told she will have no trouble clearing customs.

Mrs. Pollifax tells Jane of her plans to visit Mexico City and Jane objects, saying that Mrs. Pollifax should come with her to Canada. Roger, Mrs. Pollifax's son, tells her to have a good time. She is supposed to spend three weeks in Mexico City and is not to pick up the package until nearly time to return home. She does make certain she can find the Parrot Bookstore and one day decides that she wants to go in and buy a book. She does not believe it will hurt anything and goes inside.

In chapter four, she enters the store and looks around while Senor DeGamez waits on other customers. She picks a book and is about to pay for it when she hears a parrot. She and Senor DeGamez begin talking about the parrot. He says the store was named for the parrot and that he does not know what he will do if something happens to the bird. As she is about to leave, Senor DeGamez asks if she plays solitaire. She says that she has not since she was a child and he gives her a book on solitaire as a gift. She thanks him and as she is about to leave, he tosses a deck of cards to her, saying that the book would be of little use without the cards. Outside, she realizes that this is the Senor DeGamez that Carstairs instructed her to contact and she is nervous. She says that she had not intended to talk to him or interact with him and hopes it will not be a problem when she returns to pick up the package.

In chapter five, Mrs. Pollifax gets up on "the day" she is to pick up the package and is excited. She has breakfast then goes to the bookstore where she discovers a different man. The man offers to help her and she hesitates, then asks for the man who had been in the store a few days earlier. The man, who introduces himself as the owner, says that the other man was a relative. Mrs. Pollifax asks for "A Tale of Two Cities" and works the words Madam Defarge into the conversation. The man seems to understand and invites her into the back of the store for tea. There, she thinks over the situation and wonders about the man she had believed to be Senor DeGamez. She sees the empty birdcage and begins to realize that something is wrong. By then, she has had some tea and is feeling very woozy. She collapses.

Someone slaps her awake and she discovers that she is tied up, is on a plane, and that she is back-to-back with a man who is also tied up. They are later released from their bonds and given food which they both realize much too late is also drugged. She makes certain this time to sit so that she does not fall to the floor.

In chapter six, Carstairs receives a communiqué that indicates that the real Senor DeGamez's body has been found. He also learns that an operative, Johnny Farrell, did not open his art gallery as usual and then discovers that Mrs. Pollifax's room has been thoroughly searched. Carstairs is immediately concerned for Mrs. Pollifax but believes



that she has not a chance of survival. He expects that General Perdido is at the heart of the kidnapping.

In chapter seven, John Farrell introduces himself to Mrs. Pollifax. He says that he is forty-one, that he had helped smuggle guns in to Castro, and that women "fall at my feet." He asks if she knows what has happened and she wants to lie, but is tired of acting innocent. The two captives talk and Farrell realizes that they are not on the same plane as when they had initially wakened. They figure that a day has passed while they were out and Farrell considers where their captors could be taking them.

Chapters 1 through 7 Analysis

Mrs. Pollifax does not tell the doctor how deep her depression has been. She admits only silently that she had been standing on her roof when she had stepped near the edge and searched "for one good reason why she should not take a step forward into oblivion." It does not seem that she had really been intent on suicide so much as looking for meaning and purpose in her life.

Mrs. Pollifax's children, Jane and Roger, are introduced early on. They seem to be opposite in personalities though they play very minor roles in the story and their characters are not greatly developed. However, Mrs. Pollifax recalls an incident in which a con-artist had come around selling crocheted doilies with an incredible tale of hardship. Mrs. Pollifax had purchased several though she knew the story was false. When she gives the woman advice on how to make the story better, the woman tells her real story which Mrs. Pollifax finds even better than the made-up one. This is an example of Mrs. Pollifax's personality. She is not judgmental but she seems to expect that Jane will get the same enjoyment from the story. When Mrs. Pollifax tells Jane about the woman, Jane is upset and says that Mrs. Pollifax should have called the police. Roger, on the other hand, is more laid back. This is seen when Mrs. Pollifax later announces her intention of taking a trip to Mexico City. Jane objects while Roger tells her to have a good trip and to call if she gets into any trouble.

Tirpak is an undercover agent who is working on a project to prove how Communists are planning to get a foothold in America. The plot revolves around the existence of Communism which dates the setting to around the time of the writing in the 1960s.

Mrs. Pollifax has an indomitable spirit that is seen early on. Soon after her kidnapping, she feels fear—as would be normal for anyone in that situation. However, she does not give in to it. Instead, she reminds herself that she had wanted to have some adventure and that she is certainly embroiled in an adventure now. She also finds that she has a strong will to live. In her words, there is a great deal of difference between standing on the roof of her building while considering stepping off and having someone else make that decision for her. Another interesting aspect of her personality is that she wants things to be bigger than life. For example, she believes from her first meeting with Farrell that he is something of a romantic, adventurous figure. She asks what he has

done and is "hoping that he wasn't going to disappoint her." She really wants him to be a rogue.



Chapters 8 through 13

Chapters 8 through 13 Summary

It is nighttime when they begin their descent and Farrell looks out to see mountains. He tries to put together the landscape with possible landing sites and comes up with one possibility, Albania. Farrell says that Albania would be one of the few places where the "Red Chinese" would be welcome, referring to those promoting Communism. Farrell offers some history of Albania, including past rulers and countries that have been in control over recent years. After Farrell's explanation, Mrs. Pollifax recalls that Roger had said that she should send a telegram if she found herself "in a jam." She says that this is a very "sticky jam" and that there is no way for her to send a wire. Mrs. Pollifax has discovered that her purse was searched but that she still has her cards. She has played several games of solitaire whenever she was not drugged. After they land, Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell are told to get on donkeys for the next leg of their trip. Mrs. Pollifax says she cannot but Farrell tells her she will have to and she manages to do so. She says that riding a donkey side-saddle is very uncomfortable and that it takes a great deal of energy to remain upright.

After riding for a long time, they arrive at a desolate compound with buildings made of stone. She asks a guard for an aspirin, citing a headache, but the guard refuses. She and Farrell are left in a cell together for awhile and then a guard comes to get Mrs. Pollifax. When she is taken into an interrogation room, she finds the man who had been at the Parrot Bookstore and addresses him as "Senor DeGamez." He smiles at that and introduces her to General Hoong. The man she had thought was Senor DeGamez is really General Raoul Perdido and he tells her that they have some things to discuss, "pleasantly or unpleasantly." Mrs. Pollifax realizes that she is really not particularly afraid and tells herself that the only threat this man has over her is the "cessation of life." She also realizes that she has nothing to hide and for a moment wishes she did. She asks Perdido why he felt the need to abduct her and he counters that he had hoped for "more intelligent" conversation. She says that she has many complaints, that she was abducted from a vacation in Mexico City and that he could easily have asked his questions without flying her to Albania.

Mrs. Pollifax denies being a spy, scoffing at the idea in a very believable manner. She then learns that Perdido's men have gone through her room and are examining the books she had gotten from the Parrot Book Store in search of the package she was to have picked up there. Mrs. Pollifax is indignant again, accusing Perdido of stealing from her room. When Perdido asks about the questions Mrs. Pollifax had posed on her second trip to the book store, she tells him that she had found the real Senor DeGamez very "charming" and had hoped that he would be equally so. She says that she was trying to be polite, as is expected of the United States government when one is traveling abroad. Perdido explodes and yells at Mrs. Pollifax to go back to her cell. She says that she will but asks again for an aspirin.



In chapter nine, Mrs. Pollifax asks Farrell if he believes the cell might be bugged. He seems amazed that she would think to ask that. She tells Farrell that she is a spy, though not the dangerous kind, and that she knows that their captors cannot possibly allow her to just leave. Farrell then confides that he also knows Carstairs and has been a spy since 1947. He then says that he cannot allow his captors to question him. He says a person cannot hold out against torture forever and that he will have to commit suicide before he can be questioned. He tells Mrs. Pollifax that he plans to make a run for it when he is taken from the cell and that he will hope one of the guards shoots him. They have a meal before a guard comes to take Farrell and Mrs. Pollifax does receive an aspirin as requested.

A short time after Farrell is taken from the building, Mrs. Pollifax hears gunfire and shouts. She forces herself to remain away from the windows and to not look toward the commotion out of respect for Farrell. Suddenly, there is the sound of men entering the building and the guards reappear, bringing an injured and bloody Farrell back inside. Farrell tells Mrs. Pollifax that he had thought for sure he would kill himself by jumping off a cliff but that he had only broken his leg upon landing. He also has a bullet in his arm. After he tells her this, he passes out.

In chapter ten, Mrs. Pollifax is helpless to ease Farrell's suffering as night falls. When a guard returns to the building, she asks again for water and bandages and a short time later a guard who introduces himself as Lulash arrives. He confirms their location though he says Albania is also known as "Shkyperi." He tells a little of his life, saying that most young men have two options—to join the secret police unit known as Sigurimi or perform manual labor for a living. He says he and his cousin learned English from a man who stayed with their tribe and that this man wrote a book about the country. Lulash says that he is not a doctor but has some medical training and he helps Mrs. Pollifax set Farrell's leg. He takes her back out into an outer room and she sees that there is a key in a cabinet and opening it, discovers ammunition. She cannot bring herself to steal any, knowing that if it is discovered missing Lulash will be punished for allowing her to take it.

In chapter eleven, Carstairs is talking over the "Mexico City fiasco" with others in the CIA and looking for information. He says that he wants to know for sure that Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell are dead before he decides how to proceed. He is obviously feeling guilty for having gotten Mrs. Pollifax into the situation. He says that they will have to arrange some scenario that her children will accept to explain her death and says that it might be to arrange it to look as if she drowned and her body never discovered. Meanwhile, they have sent a telegram to both her son and daughter, saying that she is having a good time and plans to stay a little longer in Mexico City.

In chapter twelve, Perdido comes into the cell and brutally beats Farrell. Mrs. Pollifax uses all her willpower to remove herself from the situation in order to endure it. After Perdido leaves, Farrell marvels at her strength. They are then joined by another man who appears to be a prisoner. He indicates that he does not speak English but Farrell tricks him and they discover that he does understand what is being said. Lulash returns and brings Mrs. Pollifax the book written by the English-speaking writer. He says that he



carries it with him always and presents it to her to learn more about his country. She accepts though she doubts there can be anything interesting because the book, "Albania: Land of Primitive Beauty" was written years earlier. She soon discovers that she is wrong and that the map in the book will help her discover where they are being held and which direction to travel in order to reach help. She still has not admitted that she is considering escape.

In chapter thirteen, Lulash tells Mrs. Pollifax that she is going to be allowed to walk around outside in order to get some exercise. Lulash is amazed when he discovers that she has already read a great deal of the book. She is allowed to walk around the compound under Lulash's watchful eye. She considers the landscape and tries to match it to the mountain ranges she has seen in Lulash's book. When it is time to go in, she steps into the building ahead of Lulash and discovers Major Vassovic, another of the officers in the compound, bending over to plug into an outlet. He appears awkward and Mrs. Pollifax discovers that "cold has settled" in his back. She calls on Lulash to translate for her and tells Vassovic to take off his shirt and bend over the desk so that she can massage him. Vassovic does and is so relieved at the lessening of pain that he asks if she will meet him for another massage the following day. They have a drink of brandy afterwards and Mrs. Pollifax finds the opportunity to open the cabinet and take several clips of ammunition. While she, Lulash and Vassovic are talking, the conversation turns to her fate and she explains the democratic justice system of judges and jurors in the United States. Lulash is amazed and has lots of questions.

Back in her cell, she hides the shells in various places. Farrell, seeing the shells, says that she "can't possibly" be thinking of trying to escape. Mrs. Pollifax notes that she cannot bring herself to remind him of the alternative. She tells him that they will escape together and will not listen to his arguments that he will not be able to walk, let alone run. Using her newfound relationship with Vassovic, she is granted a penknife, boiling water and bandages, and uses the equipment to remove the bullet from Farrell's arm. Her swift action garners admiration from their cellmate who says his name is Adhem Nexdht. As she thinks about the certain death that awaits them in the cell, she knows that she cannot consider "if" they will escape, but when and how.

Chapters 8 through 13 Analysis

Mrs. Pollifax's reaction when Farrell says that they are probably landing in Albania is typical of her personality and attitude. She almost seems indignant that the kidnappers did not ask her where she wanted to be taken. She says that the "idea" of going to Albania is "preposterous," apparently at least partly because she does not know anything about Albania.

The reader has to keep in mind the time frame of this story. It is the 1960s and there is an almost irrational fear that Communism is about to take over the United States. There is also a great deal of emerging awareness about nuclear and long-range weapons and the buildup of arms by countries that are promoting Communism.



There is some discussion of the timeline leading up to Mrs. Pollifax's kidnapping. He knows that Senor DeGamez is killed two days before the date Mrs. Pollifax is to pick up the package and that General Perdido keeps the book store open for the next two days. Two days later, Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell both go to the book store and both disappear. That day or the next, Mrs. Pollifax's room is searched. This makes Carstairs wonder where the package is. He knows that if the kidnappers had found what they were looking for when they killed DeGamez, they would have simply left. If they had found it when they kidnapped Mrs. Pollifax, they would have had no need to search her room. If they had found it in her room, they would have had no need to kidnap her.

The fact that Mrs. Pollifax has her cards is significant. She continually plays with the cards, going through the various kinds of solitaire she has learned to play. She notes that playing calms her though she plays a lot over the days of her incarceration. It will later be revealed that the cards hold the microfilm that she had been sent to pick up.



Chapters 14 through 17

Chapters 14 through 17 Summary

In chapter fourteen, Mrs. Pollifax continues to read Lulash's book and notes all the Albanian words she finds. Farrell continues to improve and it seems clear that he will live. Mrs. Pollifax says that she has not saved him just to allow Perdido to kill him and renews her vow to escape. One day Colonel Adhem Nexdht takes Mrs. Pollifax for her daily walk. As they make their way around the compound, he takes her farther afield than she has been allowed when Lulash is watching. When she sees what is obviously a construction site, she asks what they are building and he seems almost disinterested, but says that it is a missile site. Mrs. Pollifax is immediately intrigued with the information. She believes if she can return to the United States and Mr. Carstairs with information about a Chinese missile site, it will make up for not bringing the package home from the book store. As they turn to go back to the compound, Mrs. Pollifax tries to commit the location of the missile site to memory so that she can locate it later on a map. The Colonel tells her that the Chinese are quickly becoming an influence in Europe.

When Mrs. Pollifax goes back into the cell, she finds Farrell in a foul mood. He has been worried about her extended absence and is even angrier when she tells him that she, Lulash and Vassovic are planning a party the following evening. She also shows Farrell that she has managed to get some paper so that Farrell can trace the map in Lulash's book and that she has traded lipsticks for a compass they can use to help guide their way. She also tells Farrell about another prisoner in their building. She had heard him slapping at the walls on a previous evening and had slapped back but they had not been able to communicate. She tells Farrell that she has dropped a note through his window. She and Farrell then discuss all the other things they will need to man an escape, including a crutch for Farrell.

The next day, Mrs. Pollifax tells Lulash that she feels sorry for Farrell and that she wants to take some green branches into the cell to help Farrell's mood. Both Lulash and Vassovic agree to go into the edge of the forest with her to collect branches. Once there, she sees a small evergreen and says she wants to take that in instead of branches. They argue briefly but she tells them that she will not be around to see another Christmas and asks that they do this favor for her. Lulash caves immediately and he and Vassovic twist the tree up by the roots and carry it into the cell. There, Mrs. Pollifax tells Farrell that her performance was coquettish and sickening but that they now have the material for a crutch. She says that all they need now is a knife to cut the trunk. Farrell says that while she was gone, a note written in Chinese was tossed through their window. They assume it is from the other prisoner but do not read Chinese.

In chapter fifteen, Farrell and Mrs. Pollifax consider their situation and their chance at a successful escape. She has managed to get two rocks into the cell and has been



hoarding tiny bits of food and says they have enough bread and cheese for "two pygmies." They consider how they might get out of the cell and decide that they will need to hit someone over the head, probably when a guard comes in to light the candles in the evening. Mrs. Pollifax says that she cannot possibly be the one to hit one of the guards, especially Lulash, and asks that Farrell hit "gently." As they talk about other conditions and necessities, Farrell says that the two rocks she was able to bring in were like "two miracles." He goes on to say that they cannot keep asking for miracles and that some of this escape plan has to be up to them. Farrell also points out that he is now feeling better and will be able to help more with the planning.

At the party that evening, Mrs. Pollifax is looking for a knife to be used to whittle the tree into a crutch but finds only forks and spoons. She secrets a couple of forks, just in case they can be used somehow. Lulash sings a mournful song and there is quite a bit of liquor shared by all. General Hoong arrives and Lulash begins a subversive song. To cover for him, Lulash moves closer to General Hoong and engages him in conversation. He fires a gun into the ceiling saying that there should be noise at a party. She admires the gun and he allows her to look at it, saying that it is acceptable because it is not loaded. She discovers that it is a gun that matches one of the clips she has stolen and lays it carefully on the table between her seat and the General's. She manages to get the gun again a short time later and takes it with her back to the cell as she leaves. That night as they prepare for sleep, Adhem Nexdht arrives and both Farrell and Mrs. Pollifax note that he is wearing a rather large knife in a sheath at his waist. Farrell motions that Mrs. Pollifax will have to be the one to steal the knife and she waits until she hears both Farrell and Nexdht snoring, though she knows that Farrell's snores are faked. Believing Nexdht to be actually sleeping, she slips from her bed and takes the knife. He does not stir.

In chapter sixteen, Mrs. Pollifax wakes knowing that Nexdht will notice the knife missing and that he will know she took it. After he is gone, they talk about what else they will need for the crutch. She says that she will take horsehair from her mattress and wrap it in her petticoat. She tells Farrell that she is not really very domestic and that her petticoat straps are pinned up, therefore the pins can be used to fasten the material around the makeshift crutch. Farrell tells her that he still cannot walk and is weak and asks if she will consider leaving him behind. She absolutely refuses. She says that she doubts her ability to make it on her own, and that if she did she would only live her life regretting that she left him behind, eliminating any happiness she might ever feel.

Lulash arrives and tells her that she can go for her morning walk. They are allowing her to walk around on her own now, apparently trusting that she will not walk off or that she would not get far. As she is walking on this particular morning, she hears a noise that she cannot quite identify. She continues walking toward the sound and discovers that it is static from a radio. She finds Nexdht talking on a radio and he seems very upset to see her. She is angry and immediately accuses him of reporting to General Perdido. She says that she now understands that he is telling Perdido everything that happens during Perdido's absence. Back in the cell, she tells Farrell that Nexdht is a spy for Perdido and it is obvious that she is upset though Farrell says that he has never trusted



Nexdht at all anyway. That evening, Nexdht tells them that Perdido is due to arrive on Thursday, in two days time.

On the day of the escape, Nexdht says that there are guards posted in several specific spots, and that they need to hurry and finish the crutch they are making. He also asks that they leave the knife they took from him because it has meaning for him. Farrell quickly figures out that Nexdht is actually a Russian spy.

Just then Major Vassovic arrives to light the candles, saying that Perdido is to arrive shortly and there will not be time then. Though it is earlier than they had planned, Mrs. Pollifax realizes that they will have to take their chances. However, she has both the rocks on her cot and cannot get them to Farrell without being seen. She says to herself that she has never hit anyone in her life but takes the rock and hits Vassovic, who falls to the floor. She hopes that she has not caused him to reinjure his back. Nexdht asks that they go ahead and tie him up, saying that he has become "somewhat alarmed" at the situation. Mrs. Pollifax rushes to the office and brings back rope then rushes out again, ostensibly in search of another gun, as Farrell ties up the men.

Mrs. Pollifax admits that she has been incredibly curious about the other prisoner and when she returns to the cell, she has a small Chinese gentleman in tow. The man apparently speaks no English and Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell briefly argue about whether it is wise to take the man along. Farrell says they cannot even ask the man if he wants to escape with them and Mrs. Pollifax says it is nonsense, and that everyone wants to escape. Farrell finally gives in and the three of them leave the building. They encounter Perdido and Lulash just outside the door and he ushers them back inside.

In chapter seventeen, Mrs. Pollifax throws the keys to the cell as unobtrusively as possible and no one seems to hear them strike the rocks as they land some distance away. Lulash discovers that the cell doors are locked and Mrs. Pollifax admits to having thrown the keys. Perdido tells Lulash to search the three and Lulash seems to put himself between Farrell and Perdido. When Lulash tells Farrell to turn to the wall and Farrell hesitates, Lulash threatens to shoot if he does not hurry. Farrell takes the cue from Lulash and grabbing his gun, shoots Perdido and then strikes Lulash over the head, knocking him to the floor. The three run again but Farrell says he did not kill Perdido and that Perdido will be prompting a pursuit within moments. They discover two donkeys and Mrs. Pollifax, knowing some of the terrain in the area, leads the donkeys in the direction she believes they are to go. It is very dark and she misjudges, hurtling them all over the edge of the cliff. The two men and the donkeys land on a ledge just a short drop down and Mrs. Pollifax is hung up in a tree for long minutes until Farrell helps her. The guards search for them but they hide under an overhang and the searchers move away. Mrs. Pollifax sleeps the entire night.

The following morning, Farrell argues her into scaling down the cliff. It is quite a climb and she initially refuses but he points out that they have to do something. When the three finally reach the bottom, they discover that there is a woman watching from the doorway of a nearby house.



Chapters 14 through 17 Analysis

When Colonel Nexdht points out the missile site, it is almost as if he had not given the facts much thought, that he did not care if Mrs. Pollifax sees it and that it does not really matter to him at all. However, it will later be revealed that he was very impressed by Mrs. Pollifax's willingness to remove the bullet from Farrell's arm. He is so impressed that he decides at this time that he will provide whatever help he can in aiding their escape. It is with the hope that she will be able to escape that he tells her about the missile site. His motivation in this is that he is a Russian spy and he wants to keep the microfilm out of the hands of the Chinese and wants to make the Americans aware that they cannot disregard the Chinese threat with regard to arms.

Lulash arrives in the cell the morning after the party and tells Mrs. Pollifax that she makes him "feel human." This is an aspect of her personality that seems to shine through virtually every situation. No matter what adversity she is facing at any given time, she finds herself able to smile, charm those around her, and lend an air of respectability to every situation.

Nexdht explains that his interest in the situation is that he would rather help America against China than to allow China to gain handholds in Latin America that could be a problem for the Russians. Mrs. Pollifax correctly guesses then that it is a simple matter of Russia being more wary of the Chinese than of the Americans. Nexdht tells them that he will not help them escape but that he also will not interfere with their plan. Mrs. Pollifax asks that he be sure to "shoot to kill" if they are captured rather than letting them fall back into the hands of Perdido and Nexdht agrees, saying that he cannot let them survive if they are captured during their escape attempt.



Chapters 18 through 23

Chapters 18 through 23 Summary

In chapter eighteen, Farrell almost shoots the woman in the doorway but Mrs. Pollifax intervenes. They go to the house and the woman disappears inside. They follow and find there is a man and a young boy at the house as well. The woman feeds the three and provides clothing. Though there is a language barrier, they come to understand that Mrs. Pollifax, the Chinese man who escaped with them and the man of the house are going to crawl in the midst of the herd of goats to the lower pasture, which is out of sight of the compound on the cliff above. Anyone watching from there will see only a man and a boy driving the goats as is their typical morning ritual. Farrell, who cannot crawl because of his splints, will be dressed in the man's clothing and will walk. They make the trip and stop to rest several times. Mrs. Pollifax is initially horrified but comes to accept the situation. They arrive out of site of the compound and the three set off walking toward what they believe to be freedom.

They walk for a long time and suddenly arrive at the site of road work and realize that they will have to go miles to get around the crew. The Chinese man suddenly rushes toward the crew and Farrell and Mrs. Pollifax believe he is going to betray their position to his countrymen. They know they are too weak to get away and Farrell agrees to shoot Mrs. Pollifax before killing himself. He is just about to pull the trigger when the Chinese man arrives in a car and flings himself at Farrell, stopping him. Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell, at the Chinese man's motions, get up and get into the car. Once inside, the Chinese man uses Farrell's gun to shoot the driver of the car, throwing him out the door and then taking the wheel himself. The man then, in "perfect English," says he believes they had better hurry and leave the scene.

In chapter nineteen, the three discuss where they should go and know that they cannot stay in the car for long because they will be caught. However, they want to use it while they can because they make faster progress. When it is obvious they are going to be caught, they manage to get a little ahead, let Farrell and Mrs. Pollifax out, then the Chinese man crashes into a tree. He then sets the car on fire and they run in another direction, hoping to throw their pursuers off for at least a few minutes. They find a small cart loaded with hay and the two men get inside. Mrs. Pollifax takes the front of the cart and starts pulling. Dressed in the clothing from the woman at the base of the cliff, she seems to draw no notice. She watches as a plane circles and realizes it is a sea plane, which means there has to be water nearby.

In chapter twenty, they decide to abandon the cart at the edge of a cornfield. One of the guards from the compound walks upon Mrs. Pollifax and she shoots and kills him. They make their way to a lake and the Chinese man finds a cave in the bank. The three manage to squeeze in but are completely submerged each time a search boat goes by the entrance. They emerge when it seems clear and plan to use a log as a raft to take them across the lake to Yugoslavia. It is about this time that Mrs. Pollifax asks the



Chinese man what his name is. He says it is safer if she does not know and that his family has given him up for dead two years earlier anyway. She says that she was not trying to pry but was thinking about notification of his next of kin, should something happen to him.

In chapter twenty-one, Carstairs works on intelligence reports in an effort to figure out where Perdido took Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell. He comes to the conclusion that she must be in Albania. He also learns that there is a great deal of activity going on in the area of a lake near the Yugoslavian border. Carstairs immediately picks up on the hope that this might be Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell and sends agents along the border. Unfortunately, Mrs. Pollifax, the Chinese man who will soon be identified as Dr. Lee Tsung Howell, and Farrell have faced a headwind and are blown deeper into Albania. They believe that they are on a river and that if they follow it they will arrive at the Adriatic Sea. Toward that goal, they decide they have to steal a boat. Howell goes to accomplish that and Mrs. Pollifax notes that they seem to be working as a team at all aspects of their journey. She says that whenever one of them is simply too tired to go on, one of the others takes the lead.

In chapter twenty-two, they are almost stopped but manage to evade capture and reach the open sea. There they see a man preparing to get underway in a sail boat and Howell paddles desperately in that direction. The man, realizing that the group of three is being chased, abandons his ship. The three make it on board and set sail. Farrell shoots the two men and they make their escape, though Howell is seriously wounded and Farrell is failing quickly. That evening they are picked up by the *Persephone*. Mrs. Pollifax sends a message to Carstairs and they are met at dock by agent Ben Halstead. It is Halstead who recognizes the Chinese man as Dr. Howell, a scientist who was working on a way to extract protein from plants and who has been in captivity for about two years.

In chapter twenty-three, Farrell and Mrs. Pollifax are in Carstairs' office. Carstairs says he wants them to put the basic facts on tape immediately and that they will follow up with a more in-depth briefing later. It is during this narrative that Mrs. Pollifax admits that she had gone to the book store two days earlier than the date for picking up the package. She remembers that Senor DeGamez had tossed her the deck of cards. Carstairs says that DeGamez knew what Mrs. Pollifax looked like and that he probably gave her the package early, knowing that he was in danger. They examine the cards and discover the microfilm is hidden between two cards that are encased in plastic so that they seem to be a single card.

Back in New Jersey, Mrs. Pollifax encounters Mrs. Hartshorne. Mrs. Pollifax invites Mrs. Hartshorne in for tea and explains that she was much too busy having fun to take any slides of her trip. As the teapot sings out that the water is boiling, the phone rings and Mrs. Hartshorne agrees to make the tea. Mrs. Pollifax answers the phone and reassures Roger that she is fine.



Chapters 18 through 23 Analysis

When Mrs. Pollifax asks the Chinese man for his name, he refuses to tell her. He says that there is no reason for her to know and she responds that she had wanted to know in case she needed to notify his next of kin. The interesting thing here is that Mrs. Pollifax is obviously considering that the Chinese man might not make it out of their situation alive but that she plans to.

This teamwork exhibited by Howell, Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell is interesting in that any one of them could have taken off on their own or put their own interests before that of the group, but none of them does. Mrs. Pollifax pulls the cart when both Howell and Farrell are too tired to go on. Howell takes it upon himself to steal a boat and even then, with the opportunity to simply go off on his own, he returns to pick up Farrell and Mrs. Pollifax. At the point when they are about to get into the board, Farrell tells Mrs. Pollifax that she should cut cross country which they believe to be the safer route, but she refuses to leave him.

The situation between Mrs. Pollifax and Mrs. Hartshorne is dramatically changed upon Mrs. Pollifax's return from Mexico. Prior to the trip, she admits to always feeling that she is lacking in some way when she and Mrs. Hartshorne are together. Now she takes control of the situation and refuses to bow down to what Mrs. Hartshorne says should be the case. For example, Mrs. Hartshorne says that Mrs. Pollifax will be too tired to entertain on the day she arrives home but Mrs. Pollifax insists that they have tea. Then as the tea water is ready, she asks Mrs. Hartshorne to finish making the tea. She is not rude, but she is suddenly acting more like an equal to Mrs. Hartshorne. What is interesting is that Mrs. Hartshorne obviously likes the situation and tells Mrs. Pollifax to call her by her first name, Grace.



Characters

Mrs. Emily Pollifax

Mrs. Pollifax is a widow in her sixties trying to find meaning in her life. She has two grown children and some grandchildren but none are nearby. She belongs to several organizations and groups, such as the garden club, but admits that she does not find joy in these memberships. When Mrs. Pollifax learns that a woman of about her age has been discovered as an actress, simply because of her age, Mrs. Pollifax comes up with an idea of her own. Armed with nothing to help her on her quest except a letter of introduction from her Congressman, she arrives at the CIA headquarters and volunteers to be a spy. The man she talks to first is dismissive but a department head, Mr. Carstairs, sees her and realizes she is the epitome of the tourist that he is looking to recruit for an upcoming mission to pick up microfilm in Mexico City. With little more than a cursory explanation and a fast background check, Mrs. Pollifax is a courier for the CIA. Through a series of mistakes, she is abducted by members of the Communist Party who believe that she either has possession of the package she was supposed to pick up, or that she knows where it is. Another CIA operative, Johnny Farrell, is also captured and the two are taken to Albania. Though Farrell believes he has no choice but to commit suicide, his attempt fails and he and Mrs. Pollifax are left alone for several days for him to recover. During that time, Mrs. Pollifax begins working on an escape plan. Though Farrell tells her that she should go without him, she refuses. With the sympathy of a Russian spy, accompanied by a Chinese scientist, and armed with a few provisions and a lot of luck, Mrs. Pollifax sets out and completes her escape. Upon her return to the United States, she figures out that she has possession of the package she was supposed to retrieve in the form of a deck of playing cards, and surprises Mr. Carstairs with her knowledge of a Chinese missile site under construction in Albania.

Johnny Farrell

An operative of the CIA, he is an artist and self-proclaimed playboy. He is captured by the same organization that captures Mrs. Pollifax in the hope that he has information about the package she was to have retrieved. Farrell has a cyanide pill with him but it is taken from him before he can swallow it. It is Farrell who first figures out that they have been taken to Albania. He matter-of-factly tells Mrs. Pollifax that he cannot allow himself to be questioned upon his arrival and sets out to commit suicide by throwing himself off a cliff. Mrs. Pollifax believes that he is dead until he is brought back into the cell a short time later, battered and with a broken leg and a bullet in his arm, but alive. Farrell believes their chances for survival are very slight and initially tells Mrs. Pollifax that she will have a better chance of success if she makes the attempt alone. She refuses and he agrees to go with her. He makes that same offer later, when he is at the end of his strength and their pursuers are closing in, but she again refuses. Farrell greatly enjoys the looks on the CIA men's faces when he and Mrs. Pollifax return to the United States and she tells the story of their capture and escape. Having come to realize that Mrs.



Pollifax is not as she appears, he seems to take a proprietary pride in her accomplishments.

Dr. Lee Tsung Howell

A Chinese-American scientist, he was captured some two years prior to Mrs. Pollifax being captured. He was working on a way to extract proteins from specific plants, making it possible to feed millions, when he was abducted. He pretends to speak no English when he is taken from his cell by Mrs. Pollifax and she and Farrell come to refer to him as "Genie." Dr. Howell tells her that his relatives all believe he is dead already. He kills a man, steals a car and then a boat in his efforts to help the escape plan succeed.

Mr. Carstairs

The CIA department head who sees Mrs. Pollifax and hires her to be the courier to Mexico City. Mr. Carstairs believes that Mrs. Pollifax is probably dead a short time after her abduction and begins to make arrangements for a situation that will seem she died accidentally, probably at sea. He is surprised when she returns and that Farrell gives her credit for much of the success of the escape.

Adhem Nexdhet

A military official, he is also a Russian spy. He puts himself in the cell with Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell, and listens in on them remotely when he is not there. He makes certain that Mrs. Pollifax knows about the missile site, assuming that she will tell the American officials if she manages to escape. While he insists that he is not helping them, he arranges for them to have a knife, a gun and the information necessary to make their escape.

Roger Pollifax

Mrs. Pollifax's son, Roger tells his mother that traveling to Mexico City is a wonderful idea and urges her to have a good time. He does tell her to call on him if she gets into any kind of jam and admits upon her return to being somewhat worried about her.

Jane Kempf

Mrs. Pollifax's daughter. Jane is against Mrs. Pollifax making the trip to Mexico City and urges that she come visit with Jane and her family instead. She is married and lives in Arizona.



Lulash

The soldier who is charged with guarding Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell part of the time. He is soon very fond of Mrs. Pollifax and hates his duty as her guard. He is impressionable and seems very interested in the idea of democracy. He gives Farrell the opportunity to hit him and escape.

Senor R. DeGamez

The man who owns the Parrot Bookstore, he is actually a CIA operative and recognizes Mrs. Pollifax on the day she first goes into the store, several days ahead of schedule. He is murdered by the organization trying to find the microfilm he had been instructed to send by Mrs. Pollifax. It is not until the end of the book that it is revealed that DeGamez had actually realized he was in danger and had given Mrs. Pollifax the film hidden in a deck of cards on her first stop at the store.

Mrs. Grace Heartshorne

The woman who lives just down the hall from Mrs. Pollifax, she is widely traveled and intimidates Mrs. Pollifax. Mrs. Pollifax likens it to disappointing a childhood teacher in that she feels she has done something always to earn Mrs. Heartshorne's disapproval. The attitudes of the two women change after Mrs. Pollifax's return, probably because Mrs. Pollifax has a new lease on life and a new sense of self-confidence.



Objects/Places

Hemlock Apartments

The name of the apartments where Mrs. Pollifax lives.

New Brunswick, New Jersey

Where Mrs. Pollifax lives.

Langley, Virginia

Where Mrs. Pollifax goes to the CIA headquarters.

The Parrot Bookstore

The store in Mexico City where Mrs. Pollifax was supposed to pick up the package.

Mexico City

Where Mrs. Pollifax is to go as a courier for the CIA.

The Hotel Reforma Intercontinental

The hotel Mrs. Pollifax is to stay at in Mexico City.

Albania

Where Farrell and Mrs. Pollifax are taken after being taken captive.

Sigurimi

The name of the military group Lulash and the other soldiers belong to.

Albania: Land of Primitive Beauty

The name of the book Lulash lends to Mrs. Pollifax and where she gets information about the topography of the land.

The Adriatic Sea

The sea where Mrs. Pollifax, Dr. Howell and Farrell believe they are picked up after their escape.



Themes

The Will to Survive

While the characters show the will to survive during their captivity and the escape, it is also notable that Mrs. Pollifax begins this incredible adventure because of her own will to survive. She admits that she has been so near despair that she almost committed suicide. She says that it would have been a relief to end her life by stepping off the roof of her apartment building. It is the realization that she has to do something in order to get a grip on this situation that puts her in the position of working for the CIA in the first place.

Once in Mexico City, she is absolutely happy and, at this point, her will to survive is renewed. Once captured, the will to survive changes to more of a primal instinct. She does come to realize that she might die at the hands of the captors and says that she would rather die in a failed escape attempt than to sit idly by and wait for death. It is toward that end that she begins an impossible quest to gain the things she and Farrell believe they need in their escape attempt. An interesting aspect of this theme recurs as they face the hardships of their escape. Mrs. Pollifax says that she cannot possibly climb down the face of the cliff but realizing that her life—and the lives of Dr. Howell and Farrell—hang literally in the balance, she does climb down. She believes she cannot face crawling for an hour among a herd of goats, but does it because she sees it as the only plan available to her in order to survive. This will to survive is also seen in other characters. Farrell faces down several severe injuries and still manages to accompany Mrs. Pollifax on her escape attempt. Most notably, Dr. Howell has survived in prison for some two years.

Teamwork

Almost from their first meeting, Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell are working together, the two of them benefitting from the strengths of the other. Though it might be expected that Mrs. Pollifax would be the weaker of the two, she has traits that make her an ideal complement to Farrell's character. What is interesting is that they are joined by the third person being held in the compound, a Chinese scientist named Dr. Howell who initially pretends he cannot speak English and who quickly becomes an integral part of the team's efforts to escape to safety.

Mrs. Pollifax realizes that the three mesh very well together and takes advantage of it. When Farrell is struggling just to keep moving and they are faced with a large river, it is Dr. Howell who takes over and steals a boat so that they can move farther from their pursuers. When they are confronted with the opportunity to escape and Mrs. Pollifax is the only one with a weapon, she strikes the soldier with a large rock. Later, she kills a man. She carries food that she shares equally with the other two. This teamwork is so evenly meshed that Mrs. Pollifax gives in to the desire to rest several times, reasoning



that it is someone else's turn to be strong. Invariably, the one who needs the strength at any given moment exhibits that necessary strength and becomes the leader. It takes every bit of this teamwork for them all to survive. Another aspect of this is that none of them thinks of leaving the others behind. When Dr. Howell finds a cave in the bank of the lake, he urges that all three hide there when he might just as easily have left Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell to face the soldiers. When Farrell urges Mrs. Pollifax to attempt her escape without him, she refuses, knowing that she cannot possibly enjoy her freedom if it is bought at the price of leaving him behind.

Coming of Age

It may seem strange that this book has a coming of age theme, considering that the main character is more than sixty years old as the book begins. Still, the book contains many elements of the coming of age theme, seen most clearly as Mrs. Pollifax interacts with people from her home in New Jersey. As the story opens, Mrs. Pollifax is clearly seen as a woman who is somewhat timid in the presence of Mrs. Heartshorne. Mrs. Pollifax notes that whenever Mrs. Heartshorne talks to her, she feels as if she is a child in school and Mrs. Heartshorne is the teacher who is disappointed in her performance in math. Mrs. Pollifax gives in to this feeling of inferiority and inadequacy whenever she is in Mrs. Heartshorne's presence. What is interesting is that her attitude has changed dramatically upon her return after her trip to Mexico. Mrs. Heartshorne is almost literally waiting in the hall for Mrs. Pollifax and takes the role of the seasoned traveler, telling Mrs. Pollifax that she knows how it feels to return from a lengthy trip. Mrs. Heartshorne's attitude is condescending, but this seems to be her nature rather than any pointed attempt to slight Mrs. Pollifax. Mrs. Pollifax's first reaction is to take on that mantle of inferiority but she quickly recovers and takes control of the situation. She tells Mrs. Heartshorne that she must come in for tea, ignoring the fact that Mrs. Heartshorne believes Mrs. Pollifax should be too tired to entertain. This attitude is apparently sensed by Mrs. Heartshorne who almost immediately accepts Mrs. Pollifax as an equal.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in third person from an omniscient point of view. The perspective is limited only to the author's provision of what is important to the reader. For example, the reader learns that members of the CIA are worried about Mrs. Pollifax and that Mr. Carstairs has apparently given her up as dead soon after her abduction. It is also revealed that the CIA sent out telegrams to her daughter and son, explaining her delay in returning to the states. This information is important to the reader in explaining why the son and daughter do not come looking for Mrs. Pollifax. However, there is no indication of what the reaction of the son and daughter are upon receiving the telegrams. The story is divided between dialogue and exposition. Both are written in a straight-forward style and are believable for the time, place and characters involved. The entire book covers only a few weeks in time. The passage of time is expressed through Mrs. Pollifax's thoughts and words.

Setting

The book has several distinct settings, beginning at Mrs. Pollifax's apartment in New Jersey. She then travels to Washington, D.C., and to Fairfax, Virginia, where she visits the CIA headquarters. Mrs. Pollifax later goes to Mexico City and then to Albania, the final major setting. Each of the settings is distinct in that there are specific actions that occur there. The majority of the action happens in Albania and Mexico City, those being the locations where Mrs. Pollifax spends most of her time.

The settings are described to an appropriate degree. The holding compound and the countryside of Albania are described in great detail. Mrs. Pollifax spends a lot of time walking around the compound where she is held in Albania and describes the country as somewhat desolate. She notes the large number of rocks and the lack of color in the area where they are being held and later describes the green valley, the lake and the cornfield they encounter as they escape. The settings overall are real, though the specific places are probably figments of the author's imagination. For example, Albania is a real place but the small compound described in such detail is not. The realistic settings help bring some sense of reality to the story, adding at least some level of credence to the otherwise unbelievable story line.

Language and Meaning

The overall tone of the book is one of hope though this hope is shrouded in danger and suspense. It must be noted that the book was copyrighted in 1966. The story reflects this rather old-fashioned writing style. The book is written in a straight-forward manner though there are words and phrases that are typical of the time and may be unfamiliar to some readers. The author uses several literary devices, including the effort to



misdirect and foreshadow. This is seen clearly when Farrell is taken away for questioning the first time after their arrival in Albania. Farrell explains to Mrs. Pollifax that he plans to get himself killed somehow and when she hears the gunshots, the reader will probably accept that Farrell is dead, leaving Mrs. Pollifax on her own. However, a short time later the guards reappear with Farrell, who is injured but alive. The book depends on suspense but the modern reader who is typically accustomed to modern suspense techniques may find a lack of suspense in this story. The ending is predictable to a great degree, though the identity of the man Mrs. Pollifax helps rescue is a surprise.

The book can be read in a few hours. Readers who get caught up in Mrs. Pollifax's adventures may find they want to complete the book. Though the ending is predictable, the twists of the plot getting Mrs. Pollifax and Farrell to safety are not so predictable and help retain interest. The book has only a few curse words and those are very mild and seldom used. In fact, the final scene involving curse words is when Mrs. Pollifax says "hell." At her use of the word, Farrell admonishes her not to curse anymore and Mrs. Pollifax admits that it only came out because she has been around those who use the foul language.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-three chapters and has just over two hundred pages. The majority of the chapters are between six and sixteen pages, with most of them ranging between ten and twelve pages. Chapters are identified by number only. There are no titles and no hint as to what is to come in that chapter. The chapters tend to cover one particular sequence of events. For example, the first chapter introduces Mrs. Pollifax and brings her to the decision to volunteer as a spy. The second chapter covers the CIA's selection of her to carry out a mission. In chapter three, Mrs. Pollifax travels to Mexico City and recalls during the flight how she came to be selected. The plot of the novel is simple—an older woman who wants to do something useful with her life is accidentally selected as a CIA agent. There is, however, a convoluted subplot involving Communism, spies and covert espionage. These subplots are necessary to the plot only in that they provide the reason for the CIA's involvement and therefore, Mrs. Pollifax's presence. The subplots are believable in this timeframe. The plot—that the CIA would choose someone so randomly for even a routine assignment—is not.



Quotes

"I gather then, that this package of yours is dynamite—not literally, of course, but figuratively—and that you are therefore reduced to being terribly ingenious and circumspect, but that the job is not dangerous so long as said tourist is utterly unknown to them," (Chapter 2, p. 12).

"Never mind if most of the women looked sleek and Parisian and the men dressed exactly like Americans—this was Mexico because she had seen a sombrero," (Chapter 3, p. 23).

"She was not a woman of the world, nor was she even aware of General Perdido's kind of world, and although he did not want to be ungallant, she was an old woman with neither the stamina nor the nerves to withstand these ruthless people. He had unwittingly sent a lamb into a wolves' den, a fluffy, innocent, trusting white lamb, and the wolves would make short work of devouring his lamb," (Chapter 6, p. 43).

"'But I don't want to be in Albania,' Mrs. Pollifax told him despairingly. 'I don't know anything about Albania, I've scarcely even heard of the place, the idea's preposterous,'" (Chapter 8, p. 52).

"A comfortable little woman in her sixties, with a charmingly direct way of going about things. Asked Mason if there was something she could do for us, rather like volunteering for work at a charity fete," (Chapter 11, p. 78).

"'It is obvious to me,' she said in her most imperious Woman's Club voice, 'that he will die if the bullet is not removed,'" (Chapter 13, p. 96).

"Next she wondered where to hide them and she decided upon diversification; she placed one in her purse, another inside her underclothes in a time-honored place of concealment, a third she trusted to a hole in her mattress and the fourth she hid in Farrell's mattress," (Chapter 13, p. 97).

"'Nobody can ask for more than two miracles, the rest is up to us. 'I could ask for another,' said Mrs. Pollifax tartly," (Chapter 15, p. 115).

"It could not be more than eight o'clock but the cell door would not be opened again unless to admit General Perdido and she was sitting here like a brook-hen on the rocks that Farrell ought to have if he was to hit Major Vassovic over the head," (Chapter 16, p. 134).

"Mrs. Pollifax, surrounded by so much masculine profanity, said firmly, 'Hell no,'" (Chapter 19, p. 150).

"In what other world had she yearned for cool water to drink—and to bathe in? Now she was sated with it, and she kept recalling an old saying that one should never wish too hard for something lest the gods bestow it," (Chapter 20, p. 171).



"Farrell and second companion in need of medical attention. Have no passport or money and request some help otherwise it has been a most interesting trip. Sincerely yours, Emily Pollifax," (Telegram sent to Carstairs upon Mrs. Pollifax's rescue by the Persephone, Chapter 22, p. 191).



Topics for Discussion

Describe Emily Pollifax. How does she come to be associated with the CIA? What are her strengths in this role as a spy? What are her weaknesses? Why does she survive? What is the change of attitude she exhibits upon her return home?

Who is Johnny Farrell? How does he come to be involved in Mrs. Pollifax's situation? What kind of person is he? What are his strengths? His weaknesses? Is he a believable character? Support your answers.

Describe Mrs. Pollifax's attitude during her time in captivity. What happens to gain her the sympathy of some of the captors? What do her captors think of her?

Who is Mr. Carstairs? How does he come to be involved with Mrs. Pollifax? Who is Dr. Lee Tsung Howell? How does he become involved with Mrs. Pollifax? How does he initially mislead her? What is his fate?

Who is Senor DeGamez? What is Mrs. Pollifax's initial impression of him? What is his fate? Does he succeed in his part of the mission? How?

What is the package Mrs. Pollifax is supposed to be picking up? Does she believe she has it while she is being held by kidnappers? What other information does she provide to Carstairs? How does she come to be in possession of that information?

What is the subject of the microfilm Mrs. Pollifax is supposed to pick up? How does this fit into the fears and beliefs of the time period? Were these fears founded? Support your answer.