

So, this is what happened in the other ending...

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When *And Then There Were None* first played in London's West End in 1943 it became known for its final scene, which diverges radically from the original novel. The ending of the poem at the center of the mystery, "One little soldier boy left all alone / He went and hanged himself, and then there were none" reflects the novel's finale. There is, however, an alternative version of the poem that concludes, "He got married and then there were none." Christie references this happier ending in her novel, and decided to use this to give her own 1943 stage adaptation of her book a brighter final scene. This change is commonly attributed to the fact that the play premiered in the middle of World War Two, and Christie decided that audiences would prefer to leave the theater after watching a romantic conclusion, rather than three violent deaths in a row.

An alternative conclusion to the play, more closely reflecting the novel's original closing, was commissioned and written in 2015 and production companies are now able to choose which ending they would prefer to use. It was exciting for the *And Then There Were None* company that New Stage Theatre made the decision not to choose one but to offer both endings. One audience saw the 1943 ending and the next audience experienced the 1939 conclusion.

In the 1943 ending, Lombard shoots Wargrave and the show ends with Vera and Lombard sharing a kiss. The audience is left to assume that both Vera and Lombard were innocent of the crimes for which there were accused of by Wargrave.

In the alternate ending, Vera shoots Lombard, Wargrave appears, plays on Vera's guilt and she hangs herself. The audience hears an offstage gunshot as Wargrave kills himself AND THEN THERE WERE NONE.

I was stopped in Office Depot the other day by one of our patrons who wanted to tell me how much she enjoyed the show. She proceeded to say, "I thought the murderer was Wargrave, but I changed my mind halfway, so I got it wrong!" It was fun for New Stage Theatre's team to see which character audience members selected as the murderer on the suspect photos bookmark distributed before each performance. We were also intrigued by the audience responses to the alternate endings.

As Mississippi's professional theatre we are always seeking ways to raise the artistic bar and challenge ourselves to achieve something no other theatre has done before. Our professional theatre representative at Samuel French, the licensor for *And Then There Were None*, has confirmed that New Stage Theatre is the first professional theatre to alternate endings.

Cliff Bowen, who played Armstrong in the show, shared an audience member's comments about the show's alternate endings.

She said, "At the end of the play, when Vera shoots Lombard, I assumed it was the same play I'd seen. The judge emerges from his hiding place, and I sat back comfortably, watching my kids enjoy the play. The gunshot killing the judge caused me to sit straight up and exclaim "WHAT?" I was stunned. I never saw it coming and the emotional surge was the most fun. This will sound so weird, but I had tears in my eyes because of the adrenaline rush! It was an absolute shock, and I loved it. Please tell the cast and crew thank you for such an enjoyable experience. My parents were with me yesterday and they loved it as well. My

daughter, who read the book first, was breathless and speechless at the end. I'm so glad you guys chose to do both endings!"

Did you see both endings? What did you think? We would love to hear from you. Our representative at Samuel French is very interested in your reactions and I plan to send her audience responses. Email me your thoughts to submissions@newstagetheatre.com

Francine Reynolds
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