

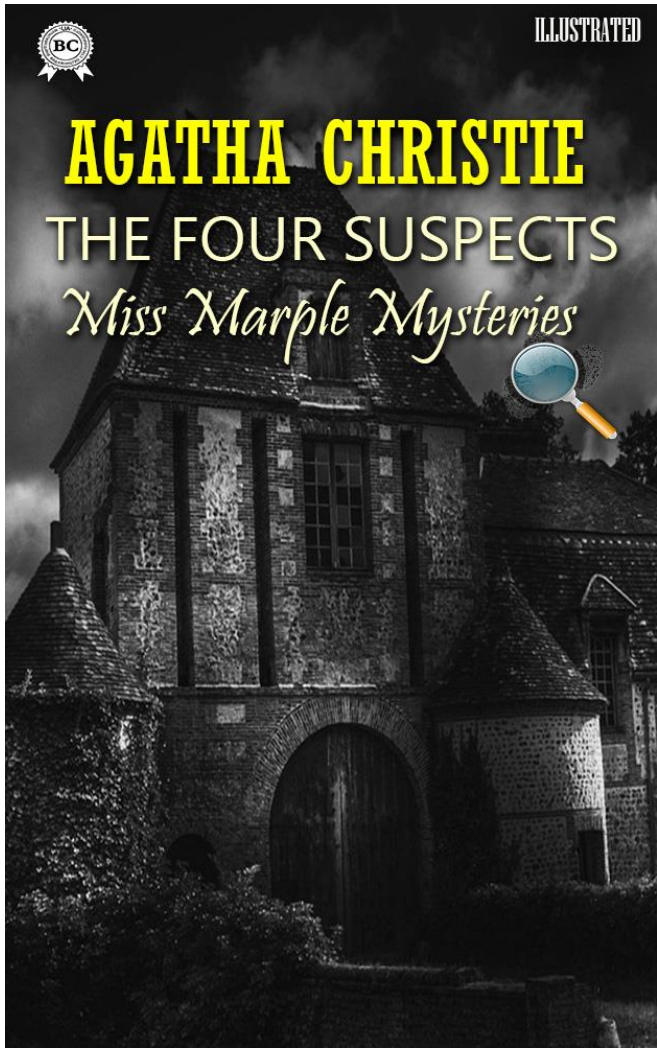


ILLUSTRATED

AGATHA CHRISTIE

THE FOUR SUSPECTS

Miss Marple Mysteries



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The conversation hovered round undiscovered and unpunished crimes. Everyone in turn vouchsafed their opinion: Colonel Bantry, his plump amiable wife, Jane Helier, Dr Lloyd, and even old Miss Marple. The one person who did not speak was the one best fitted in most people's opinion to do so. Sir Henry Clithering, ex-Commissioner of Scotland Yard, sat silent, twisting his moustache - or rather stroking it - and half smiling, as though at some inward thought that amused him.

'Sir Henry,' said Mrs Bantry at last. 'If you don't say something I shall scream. Are there a lot of crimes that go unpunished, or are there not?'

'You're thinking of newspaper headlines, Mrs Bantry. SCOTLAND YARD AT FAULT AGAIN. And a list of unsolved mysteries to follow.'

'Which really, I suppose, form a very small percentage of the whole?' said Dr Lloyd.

'Yes; that is so. The hundreds of crimes that are solved and the perpetrators punished are seldom heralded and sung. But that isn't quite the point at issue, is it? When you talk of *undiscovered* crimes and *unsolved* crimes, you are talking of two different things. In the first category come all the crimes that Scotland Yard never hears about, the crimes that no one even knows have been committed.'

'But I suppose there aren't very many of those?' said Mrs Bantry.

'Aren't there?'

'Sir Henry! You don't mean there *are*?'

'I should think,' said Miss Marple thoughtfully, 'that there must be a very large number.'

The charming old lady, with her old-world unruffled air, made her statement in a tone of the utmost placidity.

'My dear Miss Marple,' said Colonel Bantroy.

'Of course,' said Miss Marple, 'a lot of people are stupid. And stupid people get found out, whatever they do. But there are quite a number of people who aren't stupid, and one shudders to think of what they might accomplish unless they had very strongly rooted principles.'

'Yes,' said Sir Henry, 'there are a lot of people who aren't stupid. How often does some crime come to light simply by reason of a bit of unmitigated bungling, and each time one asks oneself the question: If this hadn't been bungled, would anyone ever have known?'

'But that's very serious, Clithering,' said Colonel Bantroy. 'Very serious, indeed.'

'Is it?'

'What do you mean! It is! Of course it's serious.'

'You say crime goes unpunished; but does it? Unpunished by the law perhaps; but cause and effect works outside the law. To say that every crime brings its

own punishment is by way of being a platitude, and yet in my opinion nothing can be truer.'

'Perhaps, perhaps,' said Colonel Bantry. 'But that doesn't alter the seriousness - the - er - seriousness - ' He paused, rather at a loss.

Sir Henry Clithering smiled.

'Ninety-nine people out of a hundred are doubtless of your way of thinking,' he said. 'But you know, it isn't really guilt that is important - it's innocence. That's the thing that nobody will realize.'

'I don't understand,' said Jane Helier.

'I do,' said Miss Marple. 'When Mrs Trent found half a crown missing from her bag, the person it affected most was the daily woman, Mrs Arthur. Of course the Trents thought it was her, but being kindly people and knowing she had a large family and a husband who drinks, well - they naturally didn't want to go to extremes. But they felt differently towards her, and they didn't leave her in charge of the house when they went away, which made a great difference to her; and other people began to get a feeling about her too. And then it suddenly came out that it was the governess. Mrs Trent saw her through a door reflected in a mirror. The purest chance - though I prefer to call it Providence. And that, I think, is what Sir Henry means. Most people would be only interested in who took the money, and it turned out to be the most unlikely person - just like in detective

stories! But the real person it was life and death to was poor Mrs Arthur, who had done nothing. That's what you mean, isn't it, Sir Henry?'



'Yes, Miss Marple, you've hit off my meaning exactly. Your charwoman person was lucky in the instance you relate. Her innocence was shown. But some people may go through a lifetime crushed by the weight of a suspicion that is really unjustified.'

'Are you thinking of some particular instance, Sir Henry?' asked Mrs Bantry shrewdly.

'As a matter of fact, Mrs Bantry, I am. A very curious case. A case where we believe murder to have been committed, but with no possible chance of ever proving it.'

'Poison, I suppose,' breathed Jane. 'Something untraceable.'

Dr Lloyd moved restlessly and Sir Henry shook his head.

'No, dear lady. *Not* the secret arrow poison of the South American Indians! I wish it *were* something of that kind. We have to deal with something much more prosaic - so prosaic, in fact, that there is no hope of bringing the deed home to its perpetrator. An old gentleman who fell downstairs and broke his neck; one of those regrettable accidents which happen every day.'

'But what happened really?'

'Who can say?' Sir Henry shrugged his shoulders. 'A push from behind? A piece of cotton or string tied across the top of the stairs and carefully removed afterwards? That we shall never know.'

'But you do think that it - well, wasn't an accident? Now why?' asked the doctor.

'That's rather a long story, but - well, yes, we're pretty sure. As I said there's no chance of being able to bring the deed home to anyone - the evidence would be too flimsy. But there's the other aspect of the case - the one I was speaking about. You see, there were four people who might have done the trick. One's guilty; *but the other three are innocent*. And unless the truth is found out, those three are going to remain under the terrible shadow of doubt.'

'I think,' said Mrs Bantry, 'that you'd better tell us your long story.'

'I needn't make it so very long after all,' said Sir Henry. 'I can at any rate condense the beginning. That deals with a German secret society - the Schwartz Hand - something after the lines of the Camorra or what is most people's idea of the Camorra. A scheme of blackmail and terrorization. The thing started quite suddenly after the War, and spread to an amazing extent. Numberless people were victimized by it. The authorities were not successful in coping with it, for its secrets were jealously guarded, and it was almost impossible to find anyone who could be induced to betray them.

'Nothing much was ever known about it in England, but in Germany it was having a most paralysing effect. It was finally broken up and dispersed through the

efforts of one man, a Dr Rosen, who had at one time been very prominent in Secret Service work. He became a member, penetrated its inmost circle, and was, as I say, instrumental in bringing about its downfall.

'But he was, in consequence, a marked man, and it was deemed wise that he should leave Germany - at any rate for a time. He came to England, and we had letters about him from the police in Berlin. He came and had a personal interview with me. His point of view was both dispassionate and resigned. He had no doubts of what the future held for him.

"They will get me, Sir Henry," he said. "Not a doubt of it." He was a big man with a fine head, and a very deep voice, with only a slight guttural intonation to tell of his nationality. "That is a foregone conclusion. It does not matter, I am prepared. I faced the risk when I undertook this business. I have done what I set out to do. The organization can never be got together again. But there are many members of it at liberty, and they will take the only revenge they can - my life. It is simply a question of time; but I am anxious that that time should be as long as possible. You see, I am collecting and editing some very interesting material - the result of my life's work. I should like, if possible, to be able to complete my task."

'He spoke very simply, with a certain grandeur which I could not but admire. I told him we would take all precautions, but he waved my words aside.

"Some day, sooner or later, they will get me," he repeated. "When that day comes, do not distress yourself. You will, I have no doubt, have done all that is possible."



'He then proceeded to outline his plans which were simple enough. He proposed to take a small cottage in the country where he could live quietly and go on with his work. In the end he selected a village in Somerset - King's Gnaton, which was seven miles from a railway station, and singularly untouched by civilization. He bought a very charming cottage, had various improvements and alterations made, and settled down there most contentedly. His household consisted of his niece, Greta, a secretary, an old German servant who had served him faithfully for nearly forty years, and an outside handyman and gardener who was a native of King's Gnaton.'

'The four suspects,' said Dr Lloyd softly.

'Exactly. The four suspects. There is not much more to tell. Life went on peacefully at King's Gnaton for five months and then the blow fell. Dr Rosen fell down the stairs one morning and was found dead about half an hour later. At the time the accident must have taken place, Gertrud was in her kitchen with the door closed and heard nothing - so *she* says. Fräulein Greta was in the garden planting some bulbs - again, so *she* says. The gardener, Dobbs, was in the small potting shed having his elevenses - so *he* says; and the secretary was out for a walk, and once more there is only his own word for it. No one has an alibi - no one can corroborate anyone else's story. But one thing is certain. No one from outside could have done it, for a stranger in the little

village of King's Gnaton would be noticed without fail. Both the back and the front doors were locked, each member of the household having their own key. So you see it narrows down to those four. And yet each one seems to be above suspicion. Greta, his own brother's child. Gertrud, with forty years of faithful service. Dobbs, who has never been out of King's Gnaton. And Charles Templeton, the secretary - '

'Yes,' said Colonel Bantry, 'what about him? He seems the suspicious person to my mind. What do you know about him?'

'It is what I knew about him that put him completely out of court - at any rate at the time,' said Sir Henry gravely. 'you see, Charles Templeton was one of my own men.'

'Oh!' said Colonel Bantry, considerably taken aback.

'Yes. I wanted to have someone on the spot, and at the same time I didn't want to cause talk in the village. Rosen really needed a secretary. I put Templeton on the job. He's a gentleman, he speaks German fluently, and he's altogether a very able fellow.'

'But, then, which do you suspect?' asked Mrs Bantry in a bewildered tone. 'They all seem so - well, impossible.'

'Yes, so it appears. But you can look at the thing from another angle. Fräulein Greta was his niece and a

very lovely girl, but the War has shown us time and again that brother can turn against sister, or father against son and so on, and the loveliest and gentlest of young girls did some of the most amazing things. The same thing applies to Gertrud, and who knows what other forces might be at work in her case. A quarrel, perhaps, with her master, a growing resentment all the more lasting because of the long faithful years behind her. Elderly women of that class can be amazingly bitter sometimes. And Dobbs? Was he right outside it because he had no connection with the family? Money will do much. In some way Dobbs might have been approached and bought.

'For one thing seems certain: Some message or some order must have come from outside. Otherwise why five months immunity? No, the agents of the society must have been at work. Not yet sure of Rosen's perfidy, they delayed till the betrayal had been traced to him beyond any possible doubt. And then, all doubts set aside, they must have sent their message to the spy within the gates - the message that said, "Kill".'

'How nasty!' said Jane Helier, and shuddered.

'But how did the message come? That was the point I tried to elucidate - the one hope of solving my problem. One of those four people must have been approached or communicated with in some way. There would be no delay - I knew that - as soon as the command

came, it would be carried out. That was a peculiarity of the Schwartze Hand.

'I went into the question, went into it in a way that will probably strike you as being ridiculously meticulous. Who had come to the cottage that morning? I eliminated nobody. Here is the list.'

He took an envelope from his pocket and selected a paper from its contents.

'The butcher, bringing some neck of mutton. Investigated and found correct.

'The grocer's assistant, bringing a packet of cornflour, two pounds of sugar, a pound of butter, and a pound of coffee. Also investigated and found correct.

'The postman, bringing two circulars for Fräulein Rosen, a local letter for Gertrud, three letters for Dr Rosen, one with a foreign stamp, and two letters for Mr Templeton, one also with a foreign stamp.'

Sir Henry paused and then took a sheaf of documents from the envelope.

'It may interest you to see these for yourself. They were handed me by the various people concerned, or collected from the waste-paper basket. I need hardly say they've been tested by experts for invisible ink, etc. No excitement of that kind is possible.'



Everyone crowded round to look. The catalogues were respectively from a nurseryman and from a prominent London fur establishment. The two bills addressed to Dr Rosen were a local one for seeds for the garden and one from a London stationery firm. The letter addressed to him ran as follows:

My Dear Rosen - Just back from Dr Helmuth Spath's. I saw Edgar Jackson the other day. He and Amos Perry have just come back from Tsingtau. In all Honesty I can't say I envy them the trip. Let me have news of you soon. As I said before: Beware of a certain person. You know who I mean, though you don't agree.

—

Yours, Georgine.

'Mr Templeton's mail consisted of this bill, which as you see, is an account rendered from his tailor, and a letter from a friend in Germany,' went on Sir Henry. 'The latter, unfortunately, he tore up whilst out on his walk. Finally we have the letter received by Gertrud.'

Dear Mrs Swartz, - We're hoping as how you be able to come the social on friday evening, the vicar says has he hopes you will - one and all being welcome. The resipy for the ham was very good, and I thanks you for it. Hoping as this finds you well and that we shall see you friday I remain. - Yours faithfully, Emma Greene.

Dr Lloyd smiled a little over this and so did Mrs Bantry.

'I think the last letter can be put out of court.' said Dr Lloyd.

'I thought the same,' said Sir Henry; 'but I took the precaution of verifying that there was a Mrs Greene and a church social. One can't be too careful, you know.'

'That's what our friend Miss Marple always says,' said Dr Lloyd, smiling. 'You're lost in a daydream. Miss Marple. What are you thinking out?'

Miss Marple gave a start.

'So stupid of me,' she said. 'I was just wondering why the word Honesty in Dr Rosen's letter was spelt with a capital H.'

Mrs Bantry picked it up.

'So it is,' she said. '*Oh!*'

'Yes, dear,' said Miss Marple. 'I thought you'd notice!'

'There's a definite warning in that letter,' said Colonel Bantry. 'That's the first thing caught my attention. I notice more than you'd think. Yes, a definite warning - against whom?'

'There's rather a curious point about that letter,' said Sir Henry. 'According to Templeton, Dr Rosen opened the letter at breakfast and tossed it across to him saying he didn't know who the fellow was from Adam.'

'But it wasn't a fellow,' said Jane Helier. 'It was signed "Georgina".'

'It's difficult to say which it is,' said Dr Lloyd. 'It might be Georgey; but it certainly looks more like Georgina. Only it strikes me that the writing is a man's.'

'You know, that's interesting,' said Colonel Bantry. 'His tossing it across the table like that and pretending he knew nothing about it. Wanted to watch somebody's face. Whose face - the girl's? or the man's?'

'Or even the cook's?' suggested Mrs Bantry. 'She might have been in the room bringing in the breakfast. But what I don't see is... it's most peculiar - '

She frowned over the letter. Miss Marple drew closer to her. Miss Marple's finger went out and touched the sheet of paper. They murmured together.

'But why did the secretary tear up the other letter?' asked Jane Holier suddenly. 'It seems - oh! I don't know - it seems queer. Why should he have letters from Germany? Although, of course, if he's above suspicion, as you say - '



'But Sir Henry didn't say that,' said Miss Marple quickly, looking up from her murmured conference with Mrs Bantry. 'He said *four* suspects. So that shows that he includes Mr Templeton. I'm right, am I not, Sir Henry?'

'Yes, Miss Marple. I have learned one thing through bitter experience. Never say to yourself that *anyone* is above suspicion. I gave you reasons just now why three of these people might after all be guilty, unlikely as it seemed. I did not at that time apply the same process to Charles Templeton. But I came to it at last through pursuing the rule I have just mentioned. And I was forced to recognize this: That every army and every navy and every police force has a certain number of traitors within its ranks, much as we hate to admit the idea. And I examined dispassionately the case against Charles Templeton.

I asked myself very much the same questions as Miss Helier has just asked. Why should he, alone of all the house, not be able to produce the letter he had received - a letter, moreover, with a German stamp on it. Why should he have letters from Germany?

The last question was an innocent one, and I actually put it to him. His reply came simply enough. His mother's sister was married to a German. The letter had been from a German girl cousin. So I learned something I did not know before - that Charles Templeton had relations with people in Germany. And that put him definitely on the list of suspects - very much so. He is my own man - a lad I have always liked and trusted; but in common justice and fairness I must admit that he heads that list.

'But there it is - I do not know! I do not *know*... And in all probability I never shall know. It is not a question of punishing a murderer. It is a question that to me seems a hundred times more important. It is the blighting, perhaps, of an honourable man's whole career... because of suspicion - a suspicion that I dare not disregard.'

Miss Marple coughed and said gently:

'Then, Sir Henry, if I understand you rightly, it is this young Mr Templeton only who is so much on your mind?'

'Yes, in a sense. It should, in theory, be the same for all four, but that is not actually the case. Dobbs, for instance - suspicion may attach to him in my mind, but it will not actually affect his career. Nobody in the village has ever had any idea that old Dr Rosen's death was anything but an accident. Gertrud is slightly more affected. It must make, for instance, a difference in Fräulein Rosen's attitude toward her. But that, possibly, is not of great importance to her.

'As for Greta Rosen - well, here we come to the crux of the matter. Greta is a very pretty girl and Charles Templeton is a good-looking young man, and for five months they were thrown together with no outer distractions. The inevitable happened. They fell in love with each other - even if they did not come to the point of admitting the fact in words.

'And then the catastrophe happens. It is three months ago now and a day or two after I returned, Greta Rosen came to see me. She had sold the cottage and was returning to Germany, having finally settled up her uncle's affairs. She came to me personally, although she knew I had retired, because it was really about a personal matter she wanted to see me. She beat about the bush a little, but at last it all came out. What did I think? That letter with the German stamp - she had worried about it and worried about it - the one Charles had torn up. Was it all right? Surely it *must* be all right. Of course she believed his story, but - oh! if she only *knew*! If she knew - for certain.

'You see? The same feeling: the wish to trust - but the horrible lurking suspicion, thrust resolutely to the back of the mind, but persisting nevertheless. I spoke to her with absolute frankness, and asked her to do the same. I asked her whether she had been on the point of caring for Charles, and he for her.

"I think so," she said. "Oh, yes, I know it was so. We were so happy. Every day passed so contentedly. We knew - we both knew. There was no hurry - there was all the time in the world. Some day he would tell me he loved me, and I should tell him that I too - Ah! But you can guess! And now it is all changed. A black cloud has come between us - we are constrained, when we meet we do not know what to say. It is, perhaps, the same with him as with me... We are each saying to ourselves, 'If I

were *sure!*" That is why, Sir Henry, I beg of you to say to me, 'You may be sure, whoever killed your uncle, it was not Charles Templeton!' Say it to me! Oh, say it to me! I beg - I beg!"

'And, damn it all,' said Sir Henry, bringing down his fist with a bang on the table, 'I couldn't say it to her. They'll drift farther and farther apart, those two - with suspicion like a ghost between them - a ghost that can't be laid.'

He leant back in his chair, his face looked tired and grey. He shook his head once or twice despondently.

'And there's nothing more can be done, unless - ' He sat up straight again and a tiny whimsical smile crossed his face - 'unless Miss Marple can help us. Can't you, Miss Marple? I've a feeling that letter might be in your line, you know. The one about the church social. Doesn't it remind you of something or someone that makes everything perfectly plain? Can't you do something to help two helpless young people who want to be happy?'

Behind the whimsicality there was something earnest in his appeal. He had come to think very highly of the mental powers of this frail old-fashioned maiden lady. He looked across at her with something very like hope in his eyes.

Miss Marple coughed and smoothed her lace.

'It does remind me a little of Annie Poultny,' she admitted. 'Of course the letter is perfectly plain - both to Mrs Bantry and myself. I don't mean the church social letter, but the other one. You living so much in London and not being a gardener, Sir Henry, would not have been likely to notice.'

'Eh?' said Sir Henry. 'Notice what?'

Mrs Bantry reached out a hand and selected a catalogue. She opened it and read aloud with gusto:

'Dr Helmuth Spath. Pure lilac, a wonderfully fine flower, carried on exceptionally long and stiff stem. Splendid for cutting and garden decoration. A novelty of striking beauty.

'Edgar Jackson. Beautifully shaped chrysanthemum-like flower of a distinct brick-red colour.

'Amos Perry. Brilliant red, highly decorative.

'Tsingtau. Brilliant orange-red, showy garden plant and lasting cut flower.

'Honesty - '

'With a capital H, you remember,' murmured Miss Marple.

'Honesty. Rose and white shades, enormous perfect shaped flower.'

Mrs Bantry flung down the catalogue, and said with immense explosive force:

'Dahlias!'

'And their initial letters spell "DEATH",' explained Miss Marple.

'But the letter came to Dr Rosen himself,' objected Sir Henry.

'That was the clever part of it,' said Miss Marple. 'That and the warning in it. What would he do, getting a letter from someone he didn't know, full of names he didn't know. Why, of course, toss it over to his secretary.'

'Then, after all - '



'Oh, *no!*' said Miss Marple. '*Not* the secretary. Why, that's what makes it so perfectly clear that it *wasn't* him. He'd never have let that letter be found if so. And equally he'd never have destroyed a letter to himself with a German stamp on it. Really, his innocence is - if you'll allow me to use the word - just *shining*.'

'Then who - '

'Well, it seems almost certain - as certain as anything can be in this world. There was another person at the breakfast table, and she would - quite naturally under the circumstances - put out her hand for the letter and read it. And that would be that. You remember that she got a gardening catalogue by the same post - '

'Greta Rosen,' said Sir Henry, slowly. 'Then her visit to me - '

'Gentlemen never see through these things,' said Miss Marple. 'And I'm afraid they often think we old women are - well, cats, to see things the way we do. But there it is. One does know a great deal about one's own sex, unfortunately. I've no doubt there was a barrier between them. The young man felt a sudden inexplicable repulsion. He suspected, purely through instinct, and couldn't hide the suspicion. And I really think that the girl's visit to you was just pure *spite*. She was safe enough really, but she just went out of her way to fix your suspicions definitely on poor Mr Templeton. You weren't nearly so sure about him until after her visit.'

'I'm sure it was nothing that she said - ' began Sir Henry.

'Gentlemen,' said Miss Marple calmly, 'never see through these things.'

'And that girl - ' he stopped. 'She commits a cold-blooded murder and gets off scot-free!'

'Oh! no, Sir Henry,' said Miss Marple. 'Not Scot free. Neither you nor I believe that. Remember what you said not long ago. No. Greta Rosen will not escape punishment. To begin with, she must be in with a very queer set of people - blackmailers and terrorists - associates who will do her no good, and will probably bring her to a miserable end. As you say, one mustn't waste thoughts on the guilty - it's the innocent who matter. Mr Templeton, who I daresay will marry that German cousin, his tearing up her letter looks - well, it looks *suspicious* - using the word in quite a different sense from the one we've been using all the evening. A little as though he were afraid of the other girl noticing or asking to see it? Yes, I think there must have been some little romance there. And then there's Dobbs - though, as you say, I daresay it won't matter much to him. His elevenses are probably all he thinks about. And then there's that poor old Gertrud - the one who reminded me of Annie Poultny. Poor Annie Poultny. Fifty years faithful service and suspected of making away with Miss Lamb's will, though nothing could be proved. Almost broke the poor creature's faithful heart; and then after she was dead it came to light in the secret drawer of the tea caddy where old Miss Lamb had put it herself for safety. But too late then for poor Annie.

'That's what worries me so about that poor old German woman. When one is old, one becomes embittered very easily. I felt much more sorry for her

than for Mr Templeton, who is young and good looking and evidently a favourite with the ladies. You will write to her, won't you, Sir Henry, and just tell her that her innocence is established beyond doubt? Her dear old master dead, and she no doubt brooding and feeling herself suspected of... Oh! It won't bear thinking about!

'I will write, Miss Marple,' said Sir Henry. He looked at her curiously. 'You know, I shall never quite understand you. Your outlook is always a different one from what I expect.'

'My outlook, I am afraid, is a very petty one,' said Miss Marple humbly. 'I hardly ever go out of St Mary Mead.'

'And yet you have solved what may be called an International mystery,' said Sir Henry. 'For you *have* solved it. I am convinced of that.'

Miss Marple blushed, then bridled a little.



I was, I think, well educated for the standard of my day. My sister and I had a German governess - a Fräulein. A very sentimental creature. She taught us the language of flowers - a forgotten study nowadays, but most charming. A yellow tulip, for instance, means

Hopeless Love, whilst a China Aster means I die of Jealousy at your feet. That letter was signed Georgine, which I seem to remember is Dahlia in German, and that of course made the whole thing perfectly clear. I wish I could remember the meaning of Dahlia, but alas, that eludes me. My memory is not what it was.'

'At any rate it didn't mean DEATH.'

'No, indeed. Horrible, is it not! There are very sad things in the world.'

'There are,' said Mrs Bantry with a sigh. 'It's lucky one has flowers and one's friends.'

'She puts us last, you observe,' said Dr Lloyd.

'A man used to send me purple orchids every night to the theatre,' said Jane dreamily.

'"I await your favours," - that's what that means,' said Miss Marple brightly.

Sir Henry gave a peculiar sort of cough and turned his head away.

Miss Marple gave a sudden exclamation.

'I've remembered. Dahlias mean "Treachery and Misrepresentation. "'

'Wonderful,' said Sir Henry. 'Absolutely wonderful.'

And he sighed.

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