

CHAPTER 1

Overture

In the afternoons it was the custom of Miss Jane Marple to unfold her second newspaper. Two newspapers were delivered at her house every morning. The first one Miss Marple read while sipping her early morning tea, that is, if it was delivered in time. The boy who delivered the papers was notably erratic in his management of time. Frequently, too, there was either a new boy or a boy who was acting temporarily as a stand-in for the first one. And each one would have ideas of his own as to the geographical route that he should take in delivering. Perhaps it varied monotonously for him. But those customers who were used to reading their paper early so that they could snap up the more saucy items in the day's news before departing for their bus, train or other means of progress to the day's work were annoyed if the papers were late, though the middle-aged and elderly ladies who resided peacefully in St Mary Mead often preferred to read a newspaper propped up on their breakfast table.

Today, Miss Marple had absorbed the front page and a

few other items in the daily paper that she had nicknamed 'the Daily All-Sorts', this being a slightly satirical allusion to the fact that her paper, the *Daily Newsgiver*, owing to a change of proprietor, to her own and to other of her friends' great annoyance, now provided articles on men's tailoring, women's dress, female heart-throbs, competitions for children, and complaining letters from women and had managed pretty well to shove any real news off any part of it but the front page, or to some obscure corner where it was impossible to find it. Miss Marple, being old-fashioned, preferred her newspapers to *be* newspapers and give you news.

In the afternoon, having finished her luncheon, treated herself to twenty minutes' nap in a specially purchased, upright armchair which catered for the demands of her rheumatic back, she had opened the *Times*, which lent itself still to a more leisurely perusal. Not that the *Times* was what it used to be. The maddening thing about the *Times* was that you couldn't *find* anything any more. Instead of going through from the front page and knowing where everything else was so that you passed easily to any special articles on subjects in which you were interested, there were now extraordinary interruptions to this time-honoured programme. Two pages were suddenly devoted to travel in Capri with illustrations. Sport appeared with far more prominence than it had ever had in the old days. Court news and obituaries were a little more faithful to routine. The births, marriages and deaths which had at one time occupied Miss Marple's attention first of all owing to their prominent position had migrated

to a different part of the *Times*, though of late, Miss Marple noted, they had come almost permanently to rest on the back page.

Miss Marple gave her attention first to the main news on the front page. She did not linger long on that because it was equivalent to what she had already read this morning, though possibly couched in a slightly more dignified manner. She cast her eye down the table of contents. Articles, comments, science, sport; then she pursued her usual plan, turned the paper over and had a quick run down the births, marriages and deaths, after which she proposed to turn to the page given to correspondence, where she nearly always found something to enjoy; from that she passed on to the Court Circular, on which page today's news from the Sale Rooms could also be found. A short article on Science was often placed there but she did not propose to read that. It seldom made sense for her.

Having turned the paper over as usual to the births, marriages and deaths, Miss Marple thought to herself, as so often before:

'It's sad really, but nowadays one is only interested in the *deaths!*'

People had babies, but the people who had babies were not likely to be even known by name to Miss Marple. If there had been a column dealing with babies labelled as grandchildren, there might have been some chance of a pleasurable recognition. She might have thought to herself,

'Really, Mary Prendergast has had a *third* granddaughter!', though even that perhaps might have been a bit remote.

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She skimmed down Marriages, also with not a very close survey, because most of her old friends' daughters or sons had married some years ago already. She came to the Deaths column, and gave that her more serious attention. Gave it enough, in fact, so as to be sure she would not miss a name. Alloway, Angopastro, Arden, Barton, Bedshaw, Burgoweisser—(dear me, what a *German* name, but he seemed to be late of Leeds). Carpenter, Camperdown, Clegg. Clegg? Now was that one of the Cleggs she knew? No, it didn't seem to be. Janet Clegg. Somewhere in Yorkshire. McDonald, McKenzie, Nicholson. Nicholson? No. Again not a Nicholson she knew. Ogg, Ormerod—that must be one of the aunts, she thought. Yes, probably so. Linda Ormerod. No, she hadn't known her. Quantril? Dear me, that must be Elizabeth Quantril. Eighty-five. Well, really! She had thought Elizabeth Quantril had died some years ago. Fancy her having lived so long! So delicate she'd always been, too. Nobody had expected *her* to make old bones. Race, Radley, Rafiel. Rafiel? Something stirred. That name was familiar. Rafiel. Belford Park, Maidstone. Belford Park, Maidstone. No, she couldn't recall that address. No flowers. Jason Rafiel. Oh well, an unusual name. She supposed she'd just heard it somewhere. Ross-Perkins. Now that might be—no, it wasn't. Ryland? Emily Ryland. No. No, she'd never known an Emily Ryland. *Deeply loved by her husband and children*. Well, very nice or very sad. Whichever way you liked to look at it.

Miss Marple laid down her paper, glancing idly through the crossword while she puzzled to remember why the name Rafiel was familiar to her.

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‘It will come to me,’ said Miss Marple, knowing from long experience the way old people’s memories worked.

‘It’ll come to me, I have no doubt.’

She glanced out of the window towards the garden, withdrew her gaze and tried to put the garden out of her mind. Her garden had been the source of great pleasure and also a great deal of hard work to Miss Marple for many, many years. And now, owing to the fussiness of doctors, working in the garden was forbidden to her. She’d once tried to fight this ban, but had come to the conclusion that she had, after all, better do as she was told. She had arranged her chair at such an angle as not to be easy to look out in the garden unless she definitely and clearly wished to see something in particular. She sighed, picked up her knitting bag and took out a small child’s woolly jacket in process of coming to a conclusion. The back was done and the front. Now she would have to get on with the sleeves. Sleeves were always boring. Two sleeves, both alike. Yes, very boring. Pretty coloured pink wool, however. Pink wool. Now wait a minute, where did that fit in? Yes—yes—it fitted in with that name she’d just read in the paper. Pink wool. A blue sea. A Caribbean sea. A sandy beach. Sunshine. Herself knitting and—why, of course, Mr Rafiel. That trip she had made to the Caribbean. The island of St Honoré. A treat from her nephew Raymond. And she remembered Joan, her niece-in-law, Raymond’s wife, saying:

‘Don’t get mixed up in any more murders, Aunt Jane. It isn’t good for you.’

Well, she hadn’t *wished* to get mixed up in any murders, but it just happened. That was all. Simply because of an

elderly Major with a glass eye who had insisted on telling her some very long and boring stories. Poor Major—now what was *his* name? She'd forgotten that now. Mr Rafiel and his secretary, Mrs—Mrs Walters, yes, Esther Walters, and his masseur-attendant, Jackson. It all came back. Well, well. Poor Mr Rafiel. So Mr Rafiel was dead. He had known he was going to die before very long. He had practically told her so. It seemed as though he had lasted longer than the doctors had thought. He was a strong man, an obstinate man—a very rich man.

Miss Marple remained in thought, her knitting needles working regularly, but her mind not really on her knitting. Her mind was on the late Mr Rafiel, and remembering what she could remember about him. Not an easy man to forget, really. She could conjure his appearance up mentally quite well. Yes, a very definite personality, a difficult man, an irritable man, shockingly rude sometimes. Nobody ever resented his being rude, though. She remembered that also. They didn't resent his being rude because he was so rich. Yes, he had been very rich. He had had his secretary with him and a valet attendant, a qualified masseur. He had not been able to get about very well without help.

Rather a doubtful character that nurse-attendant had been, Miss Marple thought. Mr Rafiel had been very rude to him sometimes. He had never seemed to mind. And that, again, of course was because Mr Rafiel was so rich.

'Nobody else would pay him half what I do,' Mr Rafiel had said, 'and he knows it. He's good at his job, though.'

Miss Marple wondered whether Jackson?—Johnson? had stayed on with Mr Rafiel. Stayed on for what must

have been—another year? A year and three or four months. She thought probably not. Mr Rafiel was one who liked a change. He got tired of people, tired of their ways, tired of their faces, tired of their voices.

Miss Marple understood that. She had felt the same sometimes. That companion of hers, that nice, attentive, maddening woman with her cooing voice.

‘Ah,’ said Miss Marple, ‘what a change for the better since—’ oh dear, she’d forgotten *her* name now—Miss—Miss Bishop?—no, not Miss Bishop. Oh dear, how difficult it was.

Her mind went back to Mr Rafiel and to—no, it wasn’t Johnson, it had been Jackson, Arthur Jackson.

‘Oh, dear,’ said Miss Marple again, ‘I always get *all* the names wrong. And of course, it was Miss *Knight* I was thinking of. Not Miss *Bishop*. Why do I think of her as Miss Bishop?’ The answer came to her. Chess, of course. A chess piece. A knight. A bishop.

‘I shall be calling her Miss Castle next time I think of her, I suppose, or Miss Rook. Though, really, she’s not the sort of person who would ever rook anybody. No, indeed. And now what was the name of that nice secretary that Mr Rafiel had? Oh yes, Esther Walters. That was right. I wonder what has happened to Esther Walters? She’d inherited money? She would probably inherit money now.’

Mr Rafiel, she remembered, had told her something about that, or she had—oh, dear, what a muddle things were when you tried to remember with any kind of exactitude. Esther Walters. It had hit her badly, that business in the Caribbean, but she would have got over it. She’d been

a widow, hadn't she? Miss Marple hoped that Esther Walters had married again, some nice, kindly, reliable man. It seemed faintly unlikely. Esther Walters, she thought, had had rather a genius for liking the wrong kind of men to marry.

Miss Marple went back to thinking about Mr Rafiel. No flowers, it had said. Not that she herself would have dreamed of sending flowers to Mr Rafiel. He could buy up all the nurseries in England if he'd wanted to. And anyway, they hadn't been on those terms. They hadn't been—friends, or on terms of affection. They had been—what was the word she wanted?—allies. Yes, they had been allies for a very short time. A very exciting time. And he had been an ally worth having. She had known so. She'd known it as she had gone running through a dark, tropical night in the Caribbean and had come to him. Yes, she remembered, she'd been wearing that pink wool—what used they to call them when she was young?—a fascinator. That nice pink wool kind of shawl-scarf that she'd put round her head, and he had looked at her and laughed, and later when she had said—she smiled at the remembrance—one word she had used and he had laughed, but he hadn't laughed in the end. No, he'd done what she asked him and therefore—'Ah!' Miss Marple sighed, it had been, she had to admit it, all very exciting. And she'd never told her nephew or dear John about it because, after all, it was what they'd told her not to do, wasn't it? Miss Marple nodded her head. Then she murmured softly,

'Poor Mr Rafiel, I hope he didn't—suffer.'

Probably not. Probably he'd been kept by expensive

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doctors under sedatives, easing the end. He had suffered a great deal in those weeks in the Caribbean. He'd nearly always been in pain. A brave man.

A brave man. She was sorry he was dead because she thought that though he'd been elderly and an invalid and ill, the world had lost something through his going. She had no idea what he could have been like in business. Ruthless, she thought, and rude and over-mastering and aggressive. A great attacker. But—but a good friend, she thought. And somewhere in him a deep kind of kindness that he was very careful never to show on the surface. A man she admired and respected. Well, she was sorry he was gone and she hoped he hadn't minded too much and that his passing had been easy. And now he would be cremated no doubt and put in some large, handsome marble vault. She didn't even know if he'd been married. He had never mentioned a wife, never mentioned children. A lonely man? Or had his life been so full that he hadn't needed to feel lonely? She wondered.

She sat there quite a long time that afternoon, wondering about Mr Rafiel. She had never expected to see him again after she had returned to England and she never *had* seen him again. Yet in some queer way she could at any moment have felt she was in touch with him. If he had approached her or had suggested that they meet again, feeling perhaps a bond because of a life that had been saved between them, or of some other bond. A bond—

'Surely,' said Miss Marple, aghast at an idea that had come into her mind, 'there can't be a bond of *ruthlessness* between us?' Was she, Jane Marple—could she ever be—

ruthless? ‘D’you know,’ said Miss Marple to herself, ‘it’s extraordinary, I never thought about it before. I believe, you know, I *could* be ruthless . . .’

The door opened and a dark, curly head was popped in. It was Cherry, the welcome successor to Miss Bishop—Miss Knight.

‘Did you say something?’ said Cherry.

‘I was speaking to myself,’ said Miss Marple, ‘I just wondered if I could ever be ruthless.’

‘What, you?’ said Cherry. ‘Never! You’re kindness itself.’

‘All the same,’ said Miss Marple, ‘I believe I *could* be ruthless if there was due cause.’

‘What would you call due cause?’

‘In the cause of justice,’ said Miss Marple.

‘You did have it in for little Gary Hopkins I must say,’ said Cherry. ‘When you caught him torturing his cat that day. Never knew you had it in you to go for anyone like that! Scared him stiff, you did. He’s never forgotten it.’

‘I hope he hasn’t tortured any more cats.’

‘Well, he’s made sure you weren’t about if he did,’ said Cherry. ‘In fact I’m not at all sure as there isn’t other boys as got scared. Seeing you with your wool and the pretty things you knits and all that—anyone would think you were gentle as a lamb. But there’s times I could say you’d behave like a lion if you was goaded into it.’

Miss Marple looked a little doubtful. She could not quite see herself in the rôle in which Cherry was now casting her. Had she ever—she paused on the reflection, recalling various moments—there had been intense irritation with Miss Bishop—Knight. (Really, she must *not* forget names

in this way.) But her irritation had shown itself in more or less ironical remarks. Lions, presumably, did not use irony. There was nothing ironical about a lion. It sprang. It roared. It used its claws, presumably it took large bites at its prey.

‘Really,’ said Miss Marple, ‘I don’t think I have ever behaved *quite* like that.’

Walking slowly along her garden that evening with the usual feelings of vexation rising in her, Miss Marple considered the point again. Possibly the sight of a plant of snap-dragons recalled it to her mind. Really, she had *told* old George again and again that she only wanted sulphur-coloured antirrhinums, *not* that rather ugly purple shade that gardeners always seemed so fond of. ‘Sulphur yellow,’ said Miss Marple aloud.

Someone the other side of the railing that abutted on the lane past her house turned her head and spoke.

‘I beg your pardon? You said something?’

‘I was talking to myself, I’m afraid,’ said Miss Marple, turning to look over the railing.

This was someone she did not know, and she knew most people in St Mary Mead. Knew them by sight even if not personally. It was a thickset woman in a shabby but tough tweed skirt, and wearing good country shoes. She wore an emerald pullover and a knitted woollen scarf.

‘I’m afraid one does at my age,’ added Miss Marple.

‘Nice garden you’ve got here,’ said the other woman.

‘Not particularly nice now,’ said Miss Marple. ‘When I could attend to it myself—’

‘Oh I know. I understand just what you feel. I suppose

you've got one of those—I have a lot of names for them, mostly very rude—elderly chaps who say they know all about gardening. Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't know a thing about it. They come and have a lot of cups of tea and do a little very mild weeding. They're quite nice, some of them, but all the same it does make one's temper rise.' She added, 'I'm quite a keen gardener myself.'

'Do you live here?' asked Miss Marple, with some interest.

'Well, I'm boarding with a Mrs Hastings. I think I've heard her speak of you. You're Miss Marple, aren't you?'

'Oh yes.'

'I've come as a sort of companion-gardener. My name is Bartlett, by the way. Miss Bartlett. There's not really much to do there,' said Miss Bartlett. 'She goes in for annuals and all that. Nothing you can really get your teeth into.' She opened her mouth and showed her teeth when making this remark. 'Of course I do a few odd jobs as well. Shopping, you know, and things like that. Anyway, if you want any time put in here, I could put in an hour or two for you. I'd say I might be better than any chap you've got now.'

'That would be easy,' said Miss Marple. 'I like flowers best. Don't care so much for vegetables.'

'I do vegetables for Mrs Hastings. Dull but necessary. Well, I'll be getting along.' Her eyes swept over Miss Marple from head to foot, as though memorizing her, then she nodded cheerfully and tramped off.

Mrs Hastings? Miss Marple couldn't remember the name of any Mrs Hastings. Certainly Mrs Hastings was not an

old friend. She had certainly never been a gardening chum. Ah, of course, it was probably those newly built houses at the end of Gibraltar Road. Several families had moved in in the last year. Miss Marple sighed, looked again with annoyance at the antirrhinums, saw several weeds which she yearned to root up, one or two exuberant suckers she would like to attack with her secateurs, and finally, sighing, and manfully resisting temptation, she made a detour round by the lane and returned to her house. Her mind recurred again to Mr Rafiel. They had been, he and she—what was the title of that book they used to quote so much when she was young? *Ships that pass in the night*. Rather apt it was really, when she came to think of it. Ships that pass in the night . . . It was in the night that she had gone to him to ask—no, to demand—help. To insist, to say no time must be lost. And he had agreed, and put things in train at once! Perhaps she *had* been rather lion-like on that occasion? No. No, that was quite wrong. It had not been anger she had felt. It had been insistence on something that was absolutely imperative to be put in hand at once. And he'd understood.

Poor Mr Rafiel. The ship that had passed in the night had been an interesting ship. Once you got used to his being rude, he might have been quite an agreeable man? No! She shook her head. Mr Rafiel could never have been an agreeable man. Well, she must put Mr Rafiel out of her head.

*Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in
passing;*

Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness.

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She would probably never think of him again. She would look out perhaps to see if there was an obituary of him in the *Times*. But she did not think it was very likely. He was not a very well known character, she thought. Not famous. He had just been very rich. Of course, many people did have obituaries in the paper just because they were very rich; but she thought that Mr Rafiel's richness would possibly not have been of that kind. He had not been prominent in any great industry, he had not been a great financial genius, or a noteworthy banker. He had just all his life made enormous amounts of money . . .

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