



THE TUESDAY NIGHT CLUB

Agatha Christie

Here we go again. More Agatha Christie. We started by publishing her 1922 Tommy and Tuppence Beresford origin story, *The Secret Adversary*, in the 2021 *Green Bag Almanac & Reader*, warts and all.¹ Response was exceedingly positive. Readers called on us to print more about the Beresfords. And since we aim to please, we did, in the Summer 2021 issue of the *Green Bag*.² In response to yet more demand for Christie we published an early Hercule Poirot story in our Summer 2022 issue, and said, “Okay, but this is the last taste, for a while at least.”³ What were we thinking? Or, rather, why weren’t we paying attention to copyright duration and the status of Christie’s third great creation, Miss Jane Marple? Moreover, how could we have forgotten that in her first appearance, she outperformed a stereotypical lawyer? The first Miss Marple story, *The Tuesday Night Club*, was published in 1927, in *The Royal Magazine*. Here it is.

– The Editors

Agatha Christie (1890-1976) was a prolific and popular writer of mystery fiction.

¹ See Agatha Christie, *The Secret Adversary*, 2021 *Green Bag Alm.* 108, 202, 292, 370; *id.* at 411 n.31 (annotation by Alexis Romero); see also Ross E. Davies, *Many Friends and a Secret Adversary*, 2021 *Green Bag Alm.* 1, 2; cf. *Our Mistake*, 24 *Green Bag* 2d 287 (2021).

² See Agatha Christie, *Publicity*, 24 *Green Bag* 2d 343 (2021).

³ See Agatha Christie, *The Case of the Missing Will*, 25 *Green Bag* 2d 341 (2022). We had printed a couple of Christie’s Poirot stories – *The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding* and *Mr. Davenby Dispppears* – earlier, in the 2019 and 2020 editions of our *Re-readings* series of little books. Cf. Ross E. Davies, *An Ursine Foot Note*, 5 *Re-readings* 1, 4 (2020).



“UNSOLVED MYSTERIES.”
Raymond West blew out a cloud of smoke and repeated the words with a kind of deliberate, self-conscious pleasure. “Unsolved mysteries.”

He looked round him with satisfaction. The room was an old one with broad black beams across the ceiling. By profession Raymond was a writer, and he liked his atmosphere to be flawless. His Aunt Jane’s house always pleased him as the right setting for her personality. He looked across the hearth to where she sat erect in the big grandfather chair.

Miss Marple wore a black brocade dress, very much pinched in round the waist. Mechlin lace was arranged in a cascade down the front of the bodice. She had on black lace mittens, and a black lace cap surmounted the piled-up masses of her snowy hair. She was knitting – something white and soft and fleecy. Her faded blue eyes, benignant and kindly, surveyed her nephew and her nephew’s guests with gentle pleasure. They rested first on

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Raymond himself, self-consciously debonair, then on Joyce Lempriere, the artist, with her close-cropped black head and queer hazel green eyes, then on that well-groomed man of the world, Sir Henry Clithering. There were two other people in the room, Dr. Pender, the elderly clergyman of the parish, and Mr. Petherick, the solicitor, a dried-up little man with eyeglasses, which he looked over and not through. Miss Marple gave a brief moment of attention to all these people, then returned to her knitting with a gentle smile upon her lips.

Mr. Petherick gave the dry little cough with which he usually prefaced his remarks.

“What is that you say, Raymond? Unsolved mysteries? Ha, and what about them?”

“Nothing about them,” said Joyce Lempriere. “Raymond just likes the sound of the words and of himself saying them.”

Raymond West threw her a glance of reproach, at which she threw back her head and laughed.

“I know just the sort of thing you mean, dear,” said Miss Marple. “For instance, Mrs. Carruthers had a very strange experience yesterday morning. She bought two gills of picked shrimps at Elliott’s. She called at two other shops, and when she got home she found she had not got the shrimps with her. She went back to the two shops she had visited, but these shrimps had completely disappeared. Now that seems to me very remarkable.”

“A very fishy story,” said Sir Henry Clithering gravely.

“There are, of course, all kinds of possible explanations,” said Miss Marple, her cheeks growing slightly pinker with excitement. “For instance, somebody else –”

“My dear Aunt,” said Raymond West with some amusement, “I didn’t mean that sort of village incident; I was thinking of murders and disappearances – the kind of thing that Sir Henry could tell us about by the hour if he liked.”

“But I never talk shop,” said Sir Henry modestly. “No, I never talk shop.”

Sir Henry Clithering had been until lately Commissioner of Scotland Yard.

“I wonder,” said Raymond West, “what class of brain really succeeds best in unravelling a mystery? One always feels that the average police detective must be hampered by lack of imagination.”

“That is the layman’s point of view,” said Sir Henry dryly.

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“You really want a committee,” said Joyce, smiling. “For psychology and imagination go to the writer –”

She made an ironical bow to Raymond, but he remained serious.

“The art of writing gives one an insight into human nature,” he said gravely. “One sees, perhaps, motives that the ordinary person would pass by.”

“I know, dear,” said Miss Marple, “that your books are very clever. But do you think that people are really so unpleasant as you make them out to be? I mean, so many people seem to me not to be either bad or good, but simply, you know, very *silly*.”

Mr. Petherick gave his dry little cough again.

“Don’t you think, Raymond,” he said, “that you attach too much weight to imagination? Imagination is a very dangerous thing, as we lawyers know only too well. To be able to sift evidence impartially, to take the facts and look at them as facts, that seems to me the only logical method of arriving at the truth. I may add that in my experience it is the only one that succeeds.”

“Bah!” cried Joyce, flinging her black head indignantly. “I bet I could beat you all at this game. I am not only a woman – and, say what you like, women have an intuition that is denied to men – I am an artist as well. I see things that you don’t. And then, too, as an artist I have knocked about among all sorts and conditions of people. I know life as darling Miss Marple here cannot possibly know it.”

“I don’t know about that, dear,” said Miss Marple. “Very painful and distressing things happen in villages sometimes.”

“May I speak?” said Dr. Pender, smiling. “It is the fashion nowadays to decry the clergy, I know, but we hear things, we know a side of human character which is a sealed book to the outside world.”

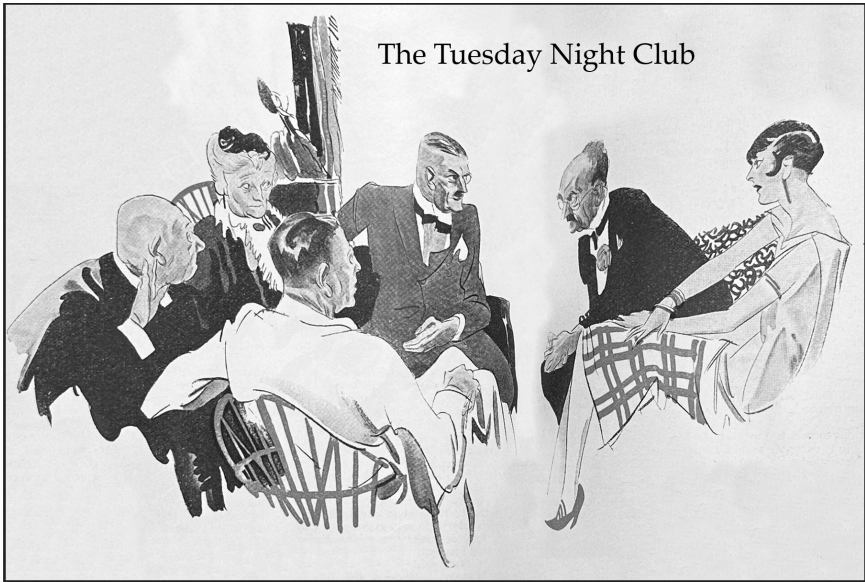
“Well,” said Joyce, “it seems to me we are a pretty representative gathering. How would it be if we formed a club? What is to-day? Tuesday? We will call it The Tuesday Night Club. It is to meet every week, and each member in turn has to propound a problem. Some mystery of which they have personal knowledge, and to which, of course, they know the answer. Let me see, how many are we? One, two, three, four, five. We ought really to be six.”

“You have forgotten me, dear,” said Miss Marple, smiling brightly.

Joyce was slightly taken aback, but she concealed the fact quickly.

“That would be lovely, Miss Marple,” she said. “I didn’t think you would care to play.”

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“I think it would be very interesting,” said Miss Marple; “especially with so many clever gentlemen present. I am afraid I am not clever myself, but living all these years in St. Mary Mead *does* give one an insight into human nature.”

“I am sure your co-operation will be very valuable,” said Sir Henry, courteously.

“Who is going to start?” said Joyce.

“I think there is no doubt as to that,” said Dr. Pender. “When we have the great good fortune to have such a distinguished man as Sir Henry staying with us —”

He left his sentence unfinished, making a courtly little bow in the direction of Sir Henry.

The latter was silent for a minute or two. At last he sighed and recrossed his legs and began:

“It is a little difficult for me to select just the kind of thing you want, but I think, as it happens, I know of an instance which fits these conditions very aptly. You may have seen some mention of the case I mean in the papers of a year ago. It was laid aside at the time as an unsolved mystery, but, as it happens, the solution came into my hands not very many days ago.

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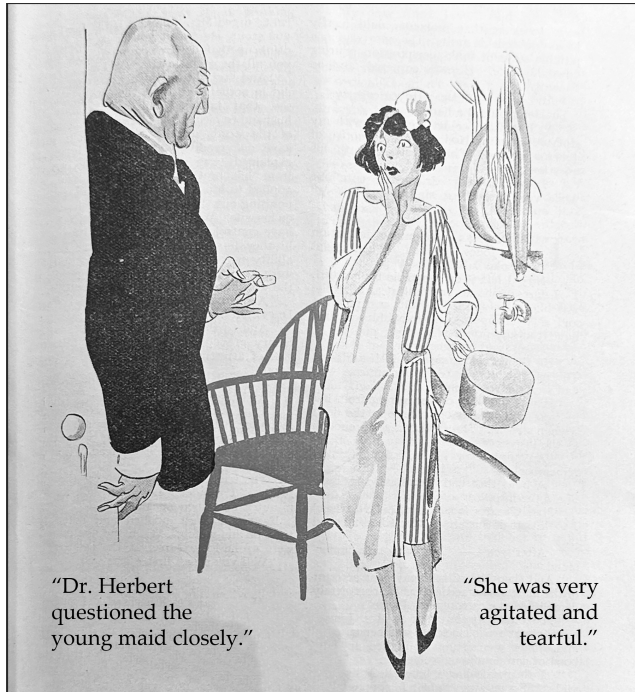
“The scene of the tragedy was a small market town in the Midlands – the kind of place where everyone’s business is known and where everybody gossips about everybody else. In this town there lived a middle-aged couple of the name of Jones. Mr. Jones was a good-looking man in a kind of coarse, florid way, and about fifty. He had a jovial, hearty manner, was hail-fellow-well-met with everyone, and was, on the whole, popular with his fellow-townsmen. His wife was a nondescript, faded woman of forty-five. She took rather more interest in her health than her health warranted. Not exactly a hypochondriac, but on the way to become one. With the Jones lived Mrs. Jones’s companion, a Miss Clarke –”

“Who was young and beautiful,” suggested Joyce. “I’m right, am I not?”

“No, my dear young lady, for once you are wrong. Miss Clarke was an elderly woman of nearer sixty than fifty, stout and cheerful, with a beaming rubicund face. Mrs. Jones was very attached to her and relied on her in every way.

“Well, there were the actors in the drama. Now to the drama itself. The local doctor, Dr. Herbert, was summoned hastily one night at about midnight and arrived to find both Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Miss Clarke suffering from the same symptoms after having partaken, among other things, of tinned lobster for supper. Whilst Mr. Jones and Miss Clarke were only slightly affected, the doctor realised at once that the condition of Mrs. Jones was far more serious and might prove fatal. She was in severe pain, and to allay this he sent back to his dispensary for some opium pills. In spite of all he could do, however, she grew steadily worse and died in a few hours time. There appeared to have been no doubts raised in the good doctor’s mind. Such cases of ptomaine poisoning are not uncommon. He considered death to have been due to a form of botulism and gave a certificate accordingly. He questioned the young maid, Gladys Linch, closely as to what had been eaten that fatal night. Supper had consisted of tinned lobster, salad, trifle, bread and cheese – and everybody pointed to the tinned lobster as the cause of the tragedy. Unfortunately the tin had been thrown away, and so could not be examined, but Gladys Linch declared again and again that it had not been distended in any way, and that the lobster it contained had appeared to her in perfectly good condition. She was very agitated and tearful and terribly upset, but she seemed clear enough on this point.

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"Dr. Herbert, at any rate, had no doubts. He signed the certificate and the victim was duly buried. Small paragraphs appeared in some of the papers – paragraphs such as one reads every day: *'Victim of Tinned Lobster' – 'Three people taken ill: Two recover – One Dies'* – and so on and so on. You know the kind of thing. I mention it because it was just one of those paragraphs that gave rise to the next phase of the affair. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred that would have been the end of the business, and no suspicion of foul play would ever have arisen, but this was the hundredth time, for a chambermaid at a small commercial hotel in Birmingham chanced to read the paragraph, and it set her thinking.

"On the night before the tragedy, Mr. Jones had been staying at this hotel, where he had often stayed before, and where he was well known by sight.

"It happened that the blotting paper in the blotting book had been put in fresh that day, and the chambermaid, having apparently nothing better to do, amused herself by studying the blotter in the mirror just after Mr. Jones had been writing a letter there. When a few days later she read the report in the papers of the death of Mrs. Jones, it set her mind to work,

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and she imparted to her fellow-servants the words that she had deciphered on the blotting pad. They were as follows: '*entirely dependent on my wife ... when she is dead I will ... hundreds and thousands.*'

“**Y**ou may remember that there had recently been a case of a husband poisoning his wife with arsenic. It needed very little to fire the imagination of these maids. They chatted to each other and the story grew apace. Mr. Jones had planned to do away with his wife and inherit hundreds of thousands of pounds! As it happened, one of the maids had relations living in the small market town where the Joneses resided. She wrote to them, and they in return wrote to her. Mr. Jones, it seemed, had been very attentive to Dr. Herbert's daughter, a good-looking young woman of thirty-three. Scandal began to hum. Soon the whole of the market town where the Joneses resided was in a ferment. The Home Secretary was petitioned, numerous anonymous letters poured into Scotland Yard, all accusing Mr. Jones of having murdered his wife.

“Now I may say that not for one moment did we think there was anything in it except idle village talk and gossip. Nevertheless, to quiet public opinion, an exhumation order was granted. It was one of these cases of popular superstition based on nothing solid whatever which proved to be so surprisingly justified.

“As a result of the autopsy sufficient arsenic was found to make it quite clear that the deceased lady had died of arsenical poisoning. It was for Scotland Yard, working with the local authorities, to prove how that arsenic had been administered and by whom.”

“Ah!” said Joyce. “I like this. This is the real stuff.”

“Suspicion naturally fell on the husband. He benefited by his wife's death. Not to the extent of the hundreds of thousands romantically imagined by the hotel chambermaid, but to the very solid amount of £8000. He had no money of his own apart from what he earned, and he was a man of somewhat extravagant habits, with a partiality for the society of women. We investigated as delicately as possible the rumour of his attachment to the doctor's daughter, but while it seemed clear that there had been a strong friendship between them at one time, there had been a most abrupt break two months previously, and they did not appear to have seen each other since. The doctor himself, an elderly man of a straightforward and unsuspecting type, was dumbfounded at the result of the autopsy.

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“The whole ground had to be gone over again. The young maid, Gladys Linch, was questioned by the police, but was in too hysterical a state to be of any great assistance. Still, one fact emerged clearly enough. If Jones had feloniously administered arsenic to his wife, it seemed clear that it could not have been done in any of the things eaten at supper, as all three persons had partaken of the meal. And there was another point – he had only returned from Birmingham just as supper was being brought in, so that in any case he would have had no opportunity of doctoring any of the food beforehand.

“It was at this point that we turned our attention to the companion, Miss Clarke. She, without doubt, could have tampered with the food had she wished to do so. But again the same objection held. All three persons had eaten the meal, and while enough arsenic might have been incorporated in any dish to cause the minor symptoms, it seemed impossible to ensure that one person, and one person only, should receive a fatal dose.

“Also, there seemed no motive by which Miss Clarke might be actuated. Mrs. Jones left her no legacy of any kind. The companion had nothing to gain and everything to lose by her employer’s death; and in actual fact, the net result of Mrs. Jones’s death was that Miss Clarke had to seek for another situation, not an easy thing to obtain at her time of life. No, we soon relinquished the idea of Miss Clarke being concerned in the crime, and turned our attention once more to Jones.

“We had a very good man on the case, Inspector Hodges (a real human ferret if ever there was one), and sure enough, after nosing around for some time, he ferreted out a fact of paramount importance, no less than this: that at half-past ten that night Jones had gone down to the kitchen and had demanded a bowl of cornflour for his wife. He explained that she was not feeling well. He had waited in the kitchen while Gladys prepared it, and then *carried it up to his wife’s room himself*.

“I cannot tell you how elated we were over this piece of evidence. It really seemed to clinch the case.”

The lawyer nodded.

“Motive,” he said, ticking off each point on his fingers. “Opportunity. Then, as a traveller for a firm of druggists, easy access to the poison – that is a very important point.”

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“And a man, unfortunately, of weak moral fibre,” said the clergyman gravely.

Raymond West was staring at Sir Henry.

“There is a catch in this somewhere,” he said. “Why did you not arrest him?”

Sir Henry smiled rather wryly. “Let’s go on with my story.

“On being taxed by the inspector, Jones admitted the fact with a great show of frankness.

“You’re quite right,’ he said. ‘Extraordinary how it should have slipped my memory. I *did* go down and order a bowl of cornflour for poor Mary that night.’

“‘And took it to her yourself?’

“‘Yes, now you come to mention it, I believe I *did*.’

“Clearly, although endeavouring to pass it off, Jones was very upset. His usual gaiety of manner was only assumed with an effort. The impression he made upon Inspector Hodges was a very unfortunate one.

“‘I – I never thought,’ he stammered. ‘I never dreamed – Oh, my God, this is frightful!’ And then suddenly, with a resumption of the old blustering manner: ‘And anyway, what about it? Why the hell shouldn’t I take a bowl of slops to my wife? You’re trying to frighten me for some reason.’

“At that moment the thing seemed an absolute clinch. We’d got him! Inspector Hodges assures me that anyone who had seen Jones at that moment could hardly have doubted his guilt. The man was in a pitiable state of funk, perspiration pouring down his face. He was cornered and he knew it.”

“And yet –” began Joyce eagerly.

Sir Henry raised a hand.

“As I said before, let me go on with my story. Inspector Hodges took no notice of Jones’s blustering, but proceeded with his questions.

“‘Did your wife drink the cornflour while you were there, sir?’

“**T**here was a momentary hesitation before Jones answered. When he did he spoke sulkily:

“‘No; I left it on the table by her bed. I – I daresay she never drank it at all. She was like that – fancied a thing one moment and then changed her mind and wouldn’t have it at any price.’

“‘I see,’ said the inspector.

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“He then went in search of Miss Clarke. The next point was to find some one who had seen the bowl empty.

“It was she who, on recovering from her indisposition, had taken charge in the dead woman’s room. She replied readily enough to the inspector’s question.

“‘An empty bowl? No, I don’t think I remember —’

“‘A bowl that had contained cornflour,’ urged the inspector.

“Miss Clarke’s face cleared. ‘Oh, that! I took it downstairs — after I had finished it.’

“‘After *you* — I don’t quite understand.’

“And then Miss Clarke gave her account of the matter — an account which completely demolished the case against Jones.

“It seems that she went to Mrs. Jones’s room about ten o’clock, as was her custom. Mrs. Jones was sitting up in bed and the bowl of cornflour was beside her.

“‘I am not feeling a bit well, Milly,’ she said. ‘Serves me right, I suppose, for touching lobster at night. I asked Albert to get me a bowl of cornflour, but now that I have got it I can’t seem to fancy it.’

“‘A pity,’ commented Miss Clarke. ‘It is properly made, too. No lumps. Gladys is really quite a nice cook. Very few girls nowadays seem to be able to make a bowl of cornflour nicely. I declare I quite fancy it myself; I am so hungry.’

“‘I should think you were, with your foolish ways,’ said Mrs. Jones.

“‘I must explain,’ broke off Sir Henry, “that Miss Clarke, alarmed at her increasing stoutness, was doing a course of what is popularly known as ‘banting.’

“‘It is not good for you, Milly; it really isn’t,’ urged Mrs. Jones. ‘If the Lord made you stout, He meant you to be stout. You drink up that bowl of cornflour. It will do you all the good in the world.’

“And straightaway Miss Clarke set to and did in actual fact finish the bowl. So, you see, that knocked our case against the husband to pieces. Asked for an explanation of the words on the blotting-book, Jones gave one readily enough. The letter, he explained, was in answer to one written from his brother in Australia who had applied to him for money. He had written, pointing out that he was entirely dependent on his wife. When his wife was dead he would have control of money and would assist his brother

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if possible. He regretted his inability to help, but pointed out that there were hundreds and thousands of people in the world in the same unfortunate plight.”

“And so the case fell to pieces?” said Dr. Pender.

“And so the case fell to pieces,” said Sir. Henry gravely. “We could not take the risk of arresting Jones with nothing to go upon.”

There was a silence, and then Joyce said:

“And that is all, is it?”

“That is the case as it has stood for the last year. The true solution is now in the hands of Scotland Yard, and in two or three days’ time you will probably read of it in the newspapers.”

“The true solution,” said Joyce thoughtfully. “I wonder. Let’s all think for five minutes and then speak.”

Raymond West nodded and noted the time on his watch. When the five minutes were up he looked over at Dr. Pender.

“Will you speak first?” he said.

The old man shook his head. “I confess,” he said, “that I am utterly baffled. I can but think that the husband in some way must be the guilty party, but how he did it I cannot imagine. I can only suggest that he must have given her the poison in some way that has not yet been discovered, although how, in that case, it should have come to light after all this, time I cannot imagine.”

“Joyce?”

“The companion!” said Joyce decidedly. “The companion every time. How do we know what motive she may have had? Just because she was old and stout and ugly it doesn’t follow that she wasn’t in love with Jones herself. She may have hated the wife for some other reason. Think of being a companion – always having to be pleasant and agree and stifle yourself and bottle yourself up. One day she couldn’t bear it any longer and then she killed her. She probably put the arsenic in the bowl of cornflour, and all that story about drinking it herself is a lie.”

“Mr. Petherick?”

The lawyer joined the tips of his fingers together professionally. “I should hardly like to say. On the facts there seems nothing to be said. It is my private opinion, having seen, alas, too many cases of this kind, that the husband was guilty. The only explanation that will cover the facts seems to

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be that Miss Clarke, for some reason or other, deliberately shielded him. There may have been some financial arrangement made between them. He might realise that he would be suspected and she, seeing only a future of poverty before her, may have agreed to tell the story of drinking the corn-flour in return for a substantial sum to be paid to her privately. If that was the case, it was of course most irregular. Most irregular indeed.”

“I disagree with you all,” said Raymond. You have forgotten the one important factor in the case, *the doctor’s daughter*. I will give you my reading of the case. The tinned lobster was bad. It accounted for the poisoning symptoms. The doctor was sent for. He finds Mrs. Jones, who has eaten more lobster than the others, in great pain, and he sends, as you told us, for some opium pills. He does not go himself, he sends. Who will give the messenger the opium pills? Clearly his daughter. Very likely she dispenses his medicines for him. She is in love with Jones, and at this moment all the worst instincts in her nature rise, and she realises that the means to procure his freedom are in her hands. The pills she sends contain pure white arsenic. That is my solution.”

“And now Sir Henry, tell us,” said Joyce eagerly.

“One moment,” said Sir Henry. “Miss Marple has not spoken yet.”

Miss Marple was shaking her head sadly.

“Dear, dear,” she said, “I have dropped another stitch. I have been so interested in the story. A sad case, a very sad case. It reminds me of old Mr. Hargraves who lived up at the Mount. His wife never had the least suspicion – until he died leaving all his money to a woman he had been living with and by whom he had had five children. She had at one time been their housemaid. Such a nice girl, Mrs. Hargraves always said; thoroughly to be relied upon to turn the mattresses every day – except Fridays, of course. And there was Hargraves keeping this woman in a house in the neighbouring town and continuing to be a churchwarden and to hand round the plate every Sunday.”

“My dear Aunt Jane,” said Raymond, with some impatience, “what has dead and gone Hargraves got to do with the case?”

“This story made me think of him at once,” said Miss Marple. “The facts are so very alike, aren’t they? I suppose the poor girl has confessed now, and that is how you know, Sir Henry?”

“What girl?” said Raymond. “My dear aunt, *what* are you talking about?”

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“That poor girl, Gladys Linch, of course – the one who was so terribly agitated when the doctor and the polic spoke to her. And well she might be, poor thing. I hope that wicked Jones is hanged, I am sure, making that silly, ignorant girl a murderess. I suppose they will hang her too, poor thing.”

“I think, Miss Marple, that you are under a slight misapprehension,” began Mr. Petherick.

But Miss Marple shook her head obstinately and looked across at Sir Henry.

“I am right, am I not? It seems so clear to me. The hundreds and thousands – and the trifle. I mean, one cannot miss it.”

“What about the trifle and the hundreds and thousands?” cried Raymond.

His aunt turned to him.

“Cooks nearly always put hundreds and thousands on trifle, dear,” she said. “Those little pink and white sugar things. Of course, when I heard that they had had trifle for supper, and that the husband had been writing to some one about hundreds and thousands, I naturally connected the two things together. That is where the arsenic was – in the hundreds and thousands. He left it with the girl and told her to put it on the trifle.”

“But that is impossible,” said Joyce quickly. “They all ate the trifle.”

“Oh, no,” said Miss Marple. “The companion was banting, you remember. You never eat anything like trifle if you are banting. And I expect Jones just scraped the hundreds and thousands off his share and left them at the side of his plate. It was a clever idea, but a very wicked one.”

The eyes of the others were all fixed upon Sir Henry.

“It is a very curious thing,” he said slowly, “but Miss Marple happens to have hit upon the truth. Jones had got Gladys Linch into trouble, as the saying goes. She was nearly desperate. He wanted his wife out of the way and promised to marry Gladys when his wife was dead. He doctored the hundreds and thousands and gave them to her with instructions how to use them. Gladys Linch died a week ago. Her child died at birth, and Jones had deserted her for another woman. When she was dying she confessed the truth.”

