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Matter 6

Summary

The Mirror Crack'd

Account by:	Jane Marple, 85. Retired.
Source:	Carbon papers.
Location:	Harrogate, Yorkshire, England.
Event:	13-16 Jan 1976.
Report:	16 Jan 1976.
Catalogued:	20 Jan 2001

Report

I am a character from a book. I know this to be true, for I have read the book: *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side*, by Agatha Christie.

I am also a character from a number of other books, of course, but those I have not read; given that I myself experienced the content of their pages, I feel rather confident that I have no need to do so. I am also under some pressure of time, the nature of which I shall explain in due course.

If you were paying attention, you will have noted that I said I was a character *from* a book, not a character *in* a book. I was very careful with my

language. Plenty of real people appear in books one way or another, but I myself am a fictional character from a book, become real. Specifically, I am Jane Marple, or Miss Marple as you may know me.

The author who created me died four days ago on January 12th. I awoke in unfamiliar surroundings on January 13th. I do not believe the two events to be unconnected, but I shall come to that in due course, too.

To begin with, though, I shall address your strong suspicion that I am an addled old lady who was so stricken by the death of her literary idol that her broken mind concocted a tale in which she became the living embodiment of her favourite novels' heroine. I shall achieve this by outlining two pieces of evidence in full; I could bore you with more, but these particular ones have some bearing on what I have to say.

The first piece of evidence is the birth certificate in my handbag. I don't know anyone who carries their birth certificate in their handbag, least of all me, but nevertheless let us suppose that the addled old lady who believes herself to be me placed it there.

The certificate states that my name is Jane Marple. It gives my date of birth as 15th September, 1890 – the same as that of my creator, if the newspaper reports of her recent death are to be believed. It states that my place of birth is Cathedral Close, Torquay. Now I did grow up in Cathedral Close, but Mrs Christie neglected to mention the

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city in her works; the town of her own birth, Torquay, appears to have been substituted for the missing information. Given that Torquay has no cathedral, let alone a Cathedral Close, this is an absurd assertion.

My mother is declared to be Clarissa Margaret Miller, who was Mrs Christie's mother. The form leaves the name of my father blank, I presume because if Frederick Alvah Miller was my father then my surname wouldn't be Marple.

The physical condition of the certificate is as one might expect for a document 85 years old: worn and yellowing but still intact and readable. It appears in its format and printing to be genuine, yet how could it be, given that so much of it is nonsensical? It looks to be the work of an expert forger provided with inexpert advice. If the intention of planting it in my handbag was to support the conceit that I am a real person, I'm afraid it has done quite the opposite.

The second piece of evidence that I shall present to persuade you I am not delusional is rather more mundane. When I awoke three days ago in a strange room, I of course made some effort to discover where I might be. It rapidly transpired that I was lodged in a hotel: the Old Swan Hotel in Harrogate, to be precise, where in 1926 one Agatha Christie was eventually located following her sudden and mysterious disappearance.

According to the girl on the desk – a warm-hearted young thing by the name of Sarah – I was

booked in on the 12th for four nights. I am to check out by noon on the 16th, which at the time of writing is to say two hours hence. There is nothing untoward about this thus far, other than the fact that no-one seems to have observed my arrival. It only becomes odd when one notes that the booking is shown to have been recorded by Sarah herself. The young woman has no recollection of making such a booking, yet there it is in her own handwriting. Furthermore, the 12th was a Monday and she has Mondays off; she was visiting family in Knaresborough, and so was in no position to accept a booking for anyone in any capacity, still less one of which she has no memory. When I asked, she insisted that she would have remembered, too, because she has seen Miss Marple in several feature films so knows the name. She professed mild disappointment that I bear scant resemblance to the thespian, Margaret Rutherford.

From the above, I believe it is safe to deduce that I am not a misguided old lady lacking full possession of her mental faculties – a Miss Marple who has lost her marbles, so to speak. I am the genuine article – a fictional character made real. The questions then naturally arise: by whom and for what purpose?

I suppose that the obvious answer to the question "by whom" is "God". I have been led to believe, however, that God is a perfect being; His working in mysterious ways aside, it does not seem likely that He would make such a hash of my

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supposed birth certificate in His attempt to persuade the world that I am meant to be here. Neither, I suggest, would He have allowed so many other discrepancies of my existence to have come to my attention.

Could, then, a scientist or government agency perhaps have created me? The girl Sarah – I'm afraid I don't know her surname, but she isn't married – might have been bribed or blackmailed to falsify a booking, but I don't believe her to be a good enough actress to disguise the fact. Again, although I could conceivably entertain the notion that I am a sophisticated automaton unaware of the fact, I find it difficult to accept that anyone with even a basic knowledge of British bureaucracy could have littered a birth certificate with so many errors. Bringing me into being the very day after the author who created me died is in exceedingly poor taste, too.

As for a foreign power, well if it hoped to foist a replica of a human being on the British public, I submit that there are better choices than a fictional character whose factual knowledge of her past is restricted to that presented in the works in which she appears. You'll have to take my word for this, but whereas most people's memories of their childhood are great in number, mine are almost entirely absent. I remember my sister and my aunt, but not my parents. Why would someone go to the trouble of creating a thinking simulacrum of a human being yet not furnish her with basic (albeit

invented) memories to fill in any large gaps? It's as if the books constituted the only source material available, and whoever introduced me to reality was either unwilling or unable to stray beyond them except by providing me with general knowledge (I am fully aware that Harold Wilson is the Prime Minister).

It is my conclusion, therefore, that I was brought into being by some power not of this Earth.

Creatures from another planet may have devised advanced technology capable of fabricating me, perhaps. I entertained this possibility for a good portion of yesterday, but have concluded that it can be ruled out. This is because certain aspects of my personality and background are not evident in the books, yet are evident to me – and, until January 12th, would also have been evident to Agatha Christie. While her stories provide the background that flesh out my existence, they do not reveal the essence of who I am. That intelligence was singularly realised in Mrs Christie's imagination – the only place where, until three days ago, I truly lived.

Now much as I can accept the contingency that alien beings might have comfortable access to published works, I cannot accept that they might have access to the constructs of the human mind. I only existed in my author's imagination when she was thinking about me; to be able to fashion a working model from such thoughts-in-action

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would, I advance, require complete moment-to-moment access to the author's entire brain.

I adjudge this to be an impossibility. I am happy to defer to any physicist who chances to read this, of course, but then would put to that same physicist the question of how I materialised in the first place. Matter at a human scale is not wont to appear out of nothing, and even a birth certificate or a line in a hotel ledger would, I suggest, have to have been accompanied by much more of a fanfare than appears to have been the case.

My existence would seem therefore to be a supernatural phenomenon; furthermore, because of the attempts to provide credence for it, one resulting from intent. I am here because a being from another dimension meant for me to be here.

Let us now address the question of this being's motivation.

My appearance followed the death of Agatha Christie so swiftly that I am tempted to suppose that the latter triggered it. It's also possible that Mrs Christie's death merely presented an opportunity to make a fictional character real, which was seized upon merely because it was timely.

If my author's death caused me to come into existence, then what could my purpose be? Am I an alarm, intended to catch the attention of an extra-dimensional being? Am I a probe, to absorb information in a controlled fashion that can later be dissected and analysed? Perhaps I am a combination: brought automatically into existence at the

detection of a fault, to collect details about the world that may lead to the fault's correction. I do have something of a reputation for possessing unusually potent observational powers, so this suggestion does seem reasonable.

Of course, I have no evidence that I am the *only* fictional character to have been made real upon Mrs Christie's death, and I confess to feeling a little put out to learn from her obituary that she also wrote extensively about one Hercule Poirot. For all I know, he may also be out there somewhere, methodically deducing that he ought not to exist. Come to that, there could be other Miss Marples scattered around the shires, too, in locations as important to Mrs Christie's history as was the Hydro in Harrogate. However many of me there are, though, it's safe to say that there's at least one more than there should be.

Let us suppose that I am unique. Why, I then ask, of all the characters, real or fictional, ever to appear in books, would I be selected to be rendered human? In part it must be because my occupation involves finding things out, but in that case why am I not Sherlock Holmes? Why am I not Phillip Marlowe? Why am I not Father Brown, or Nancy Drew, or Lord Peter Wimsey? Why am I not Inspector Hanaud? If they are significant enough for my worldly knowledge to have been fleshed out to include them then surely they must also have been candidates the unasked-for fate that was eventually mine.

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I feel that the answer must be that I am believable. Agatha Christie was the world's best-selling author, and her leading characters are well-known. If a being with an incomplete understanding of our world required a near fully-formed individual with investigative powers to show up for a few days, I would be an attractive choice.

Ah, yes – “for a few days”.

To keep me around for a lengthy period would be to invite attention. I am meant to be discreet, to blend into the background, so as not to tip off humanity to the possibility that it may be the plaything of a greater power. I cannot be suffered to exist indefinitely. I am told that I must check out of the Old Swan Hotel by noon today, but I have nowhere to go. I am therefore of the opinion that at noon today I will cease to be. My memories may continue to exist unchanging in a different dimension, to be picked over and studied either immediately or when someone gets around to it, but my time in the real world will almost certainly end.

I will have existed for too short a time to have gathered a great deal of information. I believe, therefore, that I am an experiment. If I work, so to speak, then I suppose I could subsequently be granted a second helping of reality, but I feel it's more likely that the opportunity will go to someone else. Whoever made me real did not want their presence announced to the world, yet that is

precisely what I am in the process of doing right now; this fact will doubtless not sit well with them.

I expect that all evidence of my existence will go with me. My room will return to how it was on the 12th, calendar and all. My clothes and other belongings will cease to be. The line in the ledger that records my booking will be blank. My signature in the copy of *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side*, which I borrowed from the hotel library, will be erased. Nothing that could inconveniently prove I had ever spent time on Earth will be allowed to persist. It will be expunged as efficiently as it was created.

The one exception, I have reason to hope, will be that Sarah on the front desk will yet remember me. Any power with a preference to create a proxy to observe the world lacks either the will or the ability to look into the mind of a living person. If Sarah's memories could be selectively cleared, then surely they could be collectively read, in which case what would be the point of creating me? My author's mind was read in the instant of her death, and from its contents I was formed. Sarah is very much alive.

If I am certain that all physical evidence of my existence is shortly to be consigned to oblivion, it may seem somewhat contrary for me to be sitting in the hotel library writing this. Surely these pieces of paper, with my neat, ballpoint script adorning their faces, will evaporate when I, too, evaporate.

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I'm sure they will. However, before they do so I shall hand them to Sarah. I doubt that any copy she made would survive noon either, but it's clear that those who wish to learn about our world must have only partial knowledge of its details – otherwise, why am I here?

Sarah is a clever girl; she reminds me of my household help, Cherry Baker, but is not a carbon paper copy of her. I am confident that she is capable of making her own deductions.

My time was never long, but it is now very short. Nevertheless, I do feel that I can make a contribution. If humanity is indeed the plaything of a greater power, it needs to know it.

I shall pass this letter to Sarah while there is time enough for the poor girl to read it, then retire to my room. When the clock strikes twelve and I am no more, it would be most impolite for there to be witnesses.

Notes

Sarah Gunwell took a photocopy of Miss Marple's statement. This, along with the statement itself and the carbon copy Miss Marple had left in the library, went blank at noon on 16 Jan 1976.

However, Miss Marple had chosen to use a fresh sheet of carbon paper for each page; Miss Gunwell checked these and discovered that the impressions

made upon them had remained intact. She subsequently typed up a transcript from these mirror images.

Miss Gunwell reports having sent a copy of the transcript to the police. She was told there would be an investigation but heard nothing thereafter.

The carbon paper was exhibited at the Old Swan Hotel on the 25th anniversary of Dame Agatha Christie's death. It was presented as a work of fiction that had been left by an unknown guest. It was electronically scanned with Sarah Gunwell's permission.