

Acting Edition

Agatha Christie's The Mirror Crack'd

A New Adaptation by
Rachel Wagstaff

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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THE MIRROR CRACK'D premiered at Salisbury Playhouse on 15 February 2019, followed by a UK tour. It was a Wales Millennium Centre and Wiltshire Creative co-production, directed by Melly Still. Original Theatre then toured the UK with a new production, directed by Philip Franks, from October 2022 to February 2023.

SALISBURY PLAYHOUSE CAST:

MISS JANE MARPLE	Susie Blake
CHERRY BAKER	Katie Matsell
CHIEF INSPECTOR DERMOT CRADDOCK	Simon Shepherd
HEATHER LEIGH	Katherine Manners
CYRIL LEIGH	Colin R Campbell
DOLLY BANTRY	Julia Hills
MARINA GREGG	Suzanna Hamilton
JASON RUDD	Joe Dixon
ELLA ZIELINSKY	Davina Moon
LOLA BREWSTER	Gillian Saker
GIUSEPPE RENZO	Huw Parmenter

ORIGINAL THEATRE CAST:

MISS JANE MARPLE	Susie Blake
CHERRY BAKER	Mara Allen
CHIEF INSPECTOR DERMOT CRADDOCK	Oliver Boot
HEATHER LEIGH	Jules Mevin
CYRIL LEIGH	David Partridge
DOLLY BANTRY	Veronica Roberts
MARINA GREGG	Sophie Ward
JASON RUDD	Joe McFadden
ELLA ZIELINSKY	Sarah Lawrie
LOLA BREWSTER	Chrystine Symone
GIUSEPPE RENZO	Lorenzo Martelli

CHARACTERS

MISS JANE MARPLE

CHERRY BAKER

CHIEF INSPECTOR DERMOT CRADDOCK

HEATHER LEIGH

CYRIL LEIGH

DOLLY BANTRY

MARINA GREGG

JASON RUDD

ELLA ZIELINSKY

LOLA BREWSTER

GIUSEPPE RENZO

Other parts are played by members of the company

SETTING

St Mary Mead, a little English village. The village has always been a sleepy, respectable place but has recently been modernised with a new development, to the horror of the older inhabitants. Even more recently, the village has been thrown into a frenzy by the news that the Manor House has been bought by a famous couple from Hollywood.

TIME

July 1962

NOTES ON SCRIPT

/ indicates where a line overlaps

... indicates a trailing off, or a pause for thought

– indicates an interruption

ADAPTOR'S NOTE

The first play I ever (co-) wrote was with Isabella Sharp. We were both eight at the time and best friends at primary school. We called the play *Never Two Without Three* and, as our title might reveal, it was a clumsy homage to an Agatha Christie short story (a Miss Marple, of course. For me, it was always Miss Marple).

Our only audience was Izy's patient mother. Perhaps the real wonder is that it has taken me so many years to dramatise my second Miss Marple. My own beloved mother has most (all?) of Agatha Christie's books and I think I had read every single one before I was ten! It was a much-loved family ritual, for us all to settle down to Joan Hickson's Miss Marple or to David Suchet's Poirot at the weekend. Even the opening few notes to either theme tune instantly takes me back to that living room, and the thrill of anticipation of a world gone by where good (nearly) always triumphs. My teacher was less than impressed when I wrote in my school diary that watching "Sleeping Murder" had given me nightmares... but I was not to be deterred and so hid that particular reprimand from my parents, for as long as I could. Till now, perhaps! So when I was first approached by Nick Frankfort (to Nick, huge thanks) to adapt *The Mirror Crack'd*, I was as delighted as I was apprehensive. To have loved something for so long makes you very aware of how much it must mean to others too. But it has been such a pleasure, working on this incredible story over many years, on and off! Having the generous support of Agatha Christie's grandson, Mathew Prichard, and, more latterly, great-grandson, James Prichard, has felt akin to having the blessing of Agatha Christie herself. Many thanks to James, Mathew and Lucy for their support, contributions and wonderful warmth and hospitality over the years. I am also deeply indebted to Julia Wilde at ACL, who has been both brilliant and incredibly supportive throughout. To Julia and to all at ACL, sincere gratitude.

The Mirror Crack'd has always had a special place in my heart. I can't say why without what would be called a "spoiler alert" but it was a story that resonated deeply with my family. The typical brilliance of Christie's plotting combined with such a compelling motive has been a real gift. I knew right away that I wanted to play and re-play the murder from different perspectives as characters conjure up what they remember, or claim to remember, for an out-of-action Miss Marple. I also wanted to delve deeper into Jane Marple herself, a character who has always fascinated me.

An older lady, sidelined both metaphorically and literally in this case; an underestimated “spinster”, who had the bad luck to live during a time when she could never have been a Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard and yet, just happened to be the most astute of us all... Inevitably, I have had to elide certain characters to make it work on stage, also re-ordering events where necessary to make sure that key characters get to meet in the denouement but, at every stage, I have endeavoured to be true to my favourite of Agatha Christie’s extraordinary thrillers.

I am hugely indebted to Melly Still, who originally dramaturged the play and directed the original production, for her self-declared forensic approach, dedication and care. Likewise to Philip Franks, who directed the second production. His intelligence, knowledge and sensitivity meant the process was a joy throughout. You always learn a great deal from watching a show on stage, particularly from listening to the audience, and I have very much enjoyed reworking the show for, during and after both productions!

Speaking of productions, many thanks to Pádraig Cusack, the Wales Millennium Centre and Wiltshire Creative for the first production and for taking it to NCPA in Mumbai. Sincere thanks too to Alastair Whatley and to his Original Theatre company, for breathing fresh life into the play with their UK tour.

I would also like to thank the team at Concord, particularly Steven Greenhalgh, Emma Anacootee and Ben Keiper, for their excellent work.

Grateful thanks too to the casts and crews from each workshop and production. Your insights, generosity of spirit and talent helped to bring the script to life as it evolved over the years.

And finally, heartfelt thanks to my family and friends for their support throughout; likewise, to my writer pals, Mike Bartlett and Sam Adamson, and to my brilliant agent, Dan Usztan, who might love Agatha Christie even more than I do!

Rachel Wagstaff, April 2024

ACT ONE

Scene One

(1962. Sunday morning. Late July.)

(MISS MARPLE sleeps in her chair, a blanket over her. Her ankle is bandaged.)

(We see Miss Marple's dream, in which Marina Gregg appears, trapped in a glass box.)

(MARINA steps out of the box. Every inch the Hollywood star. Out of reach.)

(Police sirens, morphing into the sound of a telephone ringing.)

(MISS MARPLE wakes. She tries to get up but suddenly feels the pain of her ankle.)

MISS MARPLE. Oh, bugger!

Cherry?

(MISS MARPLE looks at her watch.)

Cherry?!

(The telephone stops ringing.)

(Silence.)

(The telephone rings again. MISS MARPLE tries to get up again but she can't.)

(The telephone stops ringing. MISS MARPLE tries to retrieve her bag but it's out of reach. As are her crutches. Suddenly, the sound of the front door opening, slamming shut.)

MISS MARPLE. Cherry? Is that you?

(CHERRY rushes in.)

CHERRY. Sorry I'm late.

I can't think of an excuse.

(Taking off her coat.) Were you all right, on your own?

MISS MARPLE. Of course.

CHERRY. I was worried about you. Stuck down here all night.

MISS MARPLE. It made a nice change.

CHERRY. I'll do your bandage first, shall I? And then I'll do your face.

MISS MARPLE. I'm not an invalid.

I couldn't reach my bag, that's all.

CHERRY. Oh. Sorry.

(CHERRY fetches Miss Marple's bag.)

Won't be a sec.

(CHERRY goes. MISS MARPLE takes out her powder. Powders her face. She suddenly notices the silence.)

(CHERRY returns, holding a bandage.)

MISS MARPLE. Is something wrong?

CHERRY. Eh?

MISS MARPLE. Usually, you sing, as you dash around.

CHERRY. Do I?

You should've said, if you minded.

MISS MARPLE. I don't mind.

CHERRY. Right.

(CHERRY sits to change MISS MARPLE's bandage.)

Does it hurt?

(CHERRY is yanking MISS MARPLE's foot onto a stool.)

MISS MARPLE. Only when you do that!

CHERRY. Sorry. I'm all fingers and thumbs today.

MISS MARPLE. You're doing a splendid job.

Did you get to see her?

CHERRY. Who?

MISS MARPLE. Marina Gregg.

CHERRY. Oh! Yeah. Yeah, I did.

MISS MARPLE. Is she really as lovely as they say?

CHERRY. ...S'funny. Being so close, I couldn't really look at her.

MISS MARPLE. I dreamt about her last night. I dreamt...

CHERRY. *(Genuinely interested.)* What?

MISS MARPLE. Forgive me. Other people's dreams are even more tiresome than other people's holiday slides.

I did see Miss Gregg onstage once, though. Years ago. I'll never forget it.

CHERRY. What was the play?

MISS MARPLE. I don't remember.

Oh, of course. It was *A Doll's House*. You get so caught up with how very trapped Nora feels that you'd forgive her almost anything. And yet, to walk out on your children...

CHERRY. I've never seen it.

Right. I'll get yer breakfast.

(**CHERRY** *leaves.*)

(*Silence.*)

(**CHERRY** *returns.*)

I thought I'd push the boat out and do your eggs boiled today.

MISS MARPLE. Lovely.

CHERRY. Oh! I forgot your tea.

Sorry. I'm at sixes and sevens today.

MISS MARPLE. Are you all right?

CHERRY. Sorry, Miss, it's just...

MISS MARPLE. What's happened?

(*Pause.*)

CHERRY. I know it's daft but whenever something bad happens... I lost my sister, a few years ago now, mind, and... but it's still her I want to tell, and then, it's like I've lost her, all over again.

MISS MARPLE. Yes.

Grief, it casts such terribly long shadows.

(Beat.)

CHERRY. Them eggs'll be done by now.

(CHERRY goes.)

(Silence.)

(CHERRY returns.)

The eggs have only gone and cracked! I'll have to start again.

MISS MARPLE. Actually, I'm not hungry.

Losing a sister as a child must be terribly lonely.

CHERRY. The thing is, I don't know if I'm making a memory from a photograph or if I actually remember her. I can't even remember what it was like to be held by her, or if she even – sorry. Here's me harping on, and you got enough on your plate, what with your gammy leg...

MISS MARPLE. I've plenty of time to listen.

(Silence.)

CHERRY. It's just, I don't know anyone round here and...

MISS MARPLE. What's happened, dear?

CHERRY. ...I dunno...

MISS MARPLE. You've been here a week. How many people have called round in all that time?

CHERRY. ...?

MISS MARPLE. If you have a secret that's troubling you...
I've no one to tell.

CHERRY. It must be 'orrible, being old.

Not that you're...

MISS MARPLE. I've never felt "old" before. But being stuck in this chair...

It's an awful thing, Cherry dear, to feel alone with your cares.

Tell me what's upset you.

CHERRY. ...It was at the drinks party yesterday. You see –

(The sound of the doorbell.)

MISS MARPLE. It's probably just a travelling salesman. Go on.

CHERRY. Well, thing is –

(The doorbell rings again. Then the sound of the front door opening. CHIEF INSPECTOR DERMOT CRADDOCK appears. CHERRY intercepts him.)

Sorry, can I help you?

CRADDOCK. I'm looking for Miss Marple –

MISS MARPLE. Dermot! What a lovely surprise.

CRADDOCK. You're always so quick to the door. I thought something must have happened to you.

MISS MARPLE. I had a silly fall. This is Cherry. She's been looking after me. Cherry, this is Inspector Craddock.

CHERRY. Inspector...?

MISS MARPLE. His parents were friends of mine.

CRADDOCK. Chief Inspector now, actually!

MISS MARPLE. Oh.

CRADDOCK. What?

MISS MARPLE. No. That's very good news. Just like your father.

(Beat.)

CHERRY. You sure you don't want them eggs?

MISS MARPLE. Perhaps just the tea, dear. And we can talk, again, later...?

*(MISS MARPLE smiles gently at CHERRY.
Beat. CHERRY leaves.)*

CRADDOCK. How bad is it?

MISS MARPLE. Just a sprain.

CRADDOCK. At least you're being looked after.

MISS MARPLE. My nephew insisted on paying for some help... The trouble is, these days, girls aren't trained. Faithful Florence. There was a parlourmaid for you.

CRADDOCK. Why don't you ask her back?

MISS MARPLE. Faithful Florence is fifty-five and has gout.

CRADDOCK. I can't get used to girls in trousers.

*(MISS MARPLE raises an eyebrow. Craddock
so behind the times.)*

MISS MARPLE. What's happened?

CRADDOCK. Can't I just come to see you?

MISS MARPLE. It was at the drinks party.

CRADDOCK. What have you heard?

MISS MARPLE. Nothing, yet.

CRADDOCK. You don't by any chance know a Mrs Heather Leigh?

MISS MARPLE. Has something happened to her?

CRADDOCK. So, you did know her? I thought she was from the dreaded Development.

(CHERRY has entered, carrying a tray. She puts it down emphatically.)

MISS MARPLE. Thank you, Cherry.

(Frostily, CHERRY pours the tea, hands them both a cup. She puts the tea cosy back on the pot, leaves.)

...Cherry lives on the Development. Dolly thinks I'm mad – not that she's met Cherry yet, but... You remember Dolly Bantry. She and the Colonel owned Gossington Hall. Actually, I'm not sure Dolly's quite forgiven you for accusing her husband of murder.

CRADDOCK. We found the body of a young girl in his library!

MISS MARPLE. If you bludgeoned a young lady to death, would you leave her lying in your library?

CRADDOCK. Well. We cleared it up nicely in the end.

MISS MARPLE. Yes. We did.

CRADDOCK. You were saying, you knew Heather Leigh?

MISS MARPLE. I was going for a quiet walk, minding my own business, when –

CRADDOCK. You just happened to walk past the Development.

MISS MARPLE. *(Smiles wryly.)* It was my own fault. I didn't see the loose paving stone –

(MISS MARPLE falls. HEATHER LEIGH appears. Back in time a week, the scene reconstructed.)

HEATHER. Here, let me help you.

MISS MARPLE. It's my ankle.

(HEATHER examines it.)

HEATHER. It's not broken. Well, that's a relief! You old folk do suffer with your bones. I should know, with my training. I'm the new chair of the local branch of St John Ambulance. Heather Leigh. I expect you've heard of me.

MISS MARPLE. I'm afraid I –

HEATHER. Come and have a nice cup of tea, and then my husband will run you home.

*(MISS MARPLE tries to get up. It's too painful.
HEATHER intercedes.)*

You just stay put, dear, and I'll see to it.

(Calling.) Cyril! Cyril! Put the kettle on!

What's your name?

MISS MARPLE. Jane Marple. I'm from the village.

HEATHER. Oooh! Are you going to the drinks party at Gossington Hall?

MISS MARPLE. I'm afraid I haven't been invited.

HEATHER. I'm going on behalf of St John Ambulance. I'll be so nervous, mingling with all those stars, I expect I won't be able to get a word out!

MISS MARPLE. I'm sure you'll manage.

Thank you for looking after me.

HEATHER. Anyone would have done the same.

Cyril! Cyril!

Honestly, that man...

(CYRIL LEIGH appears with a tray. HEATHER takes it from him.)

(Adding sugar to a cup.) Four sugars should do the trick –

MISS MARPLE. Actually, I don't take –

HEATHER. Sugar's terribly good for the shock. Now, you get that down you and you'll be right as rain.

(MISS MARPLE takes a sip. Tries not to grimace. She turns back to CRADDOCK.)

MISS MARPLE. Heather Leigh was kindness itself, though she only saw the world from her point of view...

(HEATHER leaves with the tray. Taking the cup from MISS MARPLE as she goes. MISS MARPLE and HEATHER exchange a small smile.)

I suppose she is dead.

CRADDOCK. You know I'm not allowed to...

MISS MARPLE. One always suspects the husband first but –

(We see CYRIL again, helping MISS MARPLE into her chair.)

CYRIL. The doctor's on his way.

MISS MARPLE. Thank you.

You've been very kind. You and your wife.

CYRIL. That's my Heather. She'd do anything for anyone. Whether they like it or not!

(They smile.)

Do you have someone to look after you?

MISS MARPLE. I'll call my nephew. Raymond. He's very good to me. He's a writer, and he's made a fortune on his books – so...

CYRIL. Of course.

(CYRIL lingers.)