

# The SEVEN DIALS MYSTERY

By Agatha Christie

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## INSTALMENT IX.

Bundle turned to Loraine. "You were just going to tell me—"

"Oh, yes. First, about the letter." She spoke to Jimmy. "Gerry left a letter. Lady Eileen—"

"Bundle."

"Bundle found it." She explained the circumstances in a few words. Jimmy listened, keenly interested. This was the first he had heard of the letter. Loraine took it from her bag and handed it to him. He read it, then looked across at her.

"This is where you can help us. What was it Gerry wanted you to forget?"

Lorraine's brows wrinkled a little in perplexity.

### A Letter to Gerry

"It's hard to remember exactly now. I opened a letter of Gerry's by mistake. It was written on cheap sort of paper. I remember, and very illiterate handwriting. It had some address in Seven Dials at the head of it. I realized it wasn't for me, so I put it back in the envelope without reading it."

"Sure?" asked Jimmy very gently.

Lorraine laughed for the first time.

"I know what you think, and I admit that women are curious. But, you see, this didn't even look interesting. It was a kind of list names and dates."

"Names and dates," said Jimmy thoughtfully.

"Gerry didn't seem to mind much," continued Loraine. "He laughed. He asked me if I had ever heard of the Mafia, and then said it would be queer if a society like the Mafia started in England—but that that kind of a secret society didn't take on much with English people. 'Our criminals,' he said, 'haven't got a picturesque imagination.'"

Jimmy pursed up his lips into a whistle.

"I'm beginning to see," he said. "Seven Dials must be the headquarters of some secret society. As he says in his letter to you, he thought it rather a joke to start with. But evidently it wasn't a joke—he says as much. And there's something else; his anxiety that you should forget what he'd told you. There can be only one reason for that—if that society suspected that you had any knowledge of its activity, you too would be in danger. Gerald realized the peril, and he was terribly anxious—for you."

He stopped, then he went on quietly:

"I rather fancy that we're all going to be in danger—if we go on with this."

"If—?" cried Bundle indignantly.

"I'm talking of you two. It's different for me. I was poor old Ronny's pal. He looked at Bundle. "You've done your bit. You've delivered the message he sent me. No; for God's sake keep out of it, you and Loraine."

### How to Begin?

Bundle looked questioning at the other girl. Her own mind was definitely made up, but she gave no indication of it just then. She had no wish to push Loraine Wade into a dangerous undertaking. But Loraine's small face was alight at once with indignation.

"You say that! Do you think for one minute I'd be contented to keep out of it—when they killed Gerry—my own dear Gerry, the best and dearest and kindest brother any girl ever had. The only person belonging to me I had in the whole world!"

Jimmy cleared his throat uncomfortably. Loraine, he thought, was wonderful; simply wonderful.

"Look here," he said awkwardly, "you mustn't say that. About being alone in the world—all that rot. You've got lots of friends—only too glad to do what they can. See what I mean?"

It is possible that Loraine did, for she suddenly blushed, and to cover her confusion began to talk nervously.

"That's settled," she said. "I'm

going to help. Nobody's going to stop me."

"And so am I, of course," said Bundle.

They both looked at Jimmy.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Yes, quite so."

They looked at him inquiringly.

"I was just wondering," said Jimmy, "how we were going to begin."

### PLANS

Jimmy's words lifted the discussion at once into a more practical sphere.

"All things considered," he said, "we haven't got much to go on. In fact, just the words Seven Dials. As a matter of fact I don't even know exactly where Seven Dials is. But, anyway, we can't very well comb out the whole of that district, house by house."

"We could," said Bundle.

"Well, perhaps we could eventually—though I'm not so sure. I imagine it's a well-populated area. But it wouldn't be very subtle."

The word reminded him of the girl Socks and he smiled.

"Then, of course, there's the part of the country where Ronny was shot. We could nose around there. But the police are probably doing everything we could do, and doing it much better."

"What I like about you," said Bundle sarcastically, "is your cheerful and optimistic disposition."

"Never mind her, Jimmy," said Loraine softly. "Go on."

"Don't be so impatient," said Jimmy to Bundle. "All the best sleuths approach a case this way, by eliminating unnecessary and unprofitable investigation. I'm coming now to the third alternative—Gerald's death."

"Now that we know it was murder—by the way, you do both believe that, don't you?"

"Yes," said Loraine.

"Yes," said Bundle.

"Good. So do I. Well, it seems to me that there we do stand some faint chance. After all, if Gerry didn't take the chloral himself, someone must have got into his room and put it there—dissolved it in the glass of water, so that when he woke up he drank it off. And of course left the empty box or bottle or whatever it was. You agree with that?"

"Ye-es," said Bundle slowly.

"But—"

### How About Servants

"Wait. And that some one must have been in the house at the time. It can't very well have been some one from outside."

"No," agreed Bundle, more readily this time.

"Very well. Now, that narrows down things considerably. To begin with, I suppose a good many of the servants are family ones they're your lot, I mean."

"Yes," said Bundle. "Practically all the staff stayed when we let it. All the principal ones are there still—of course, there have been changes among the underservants."

"Exactly—that's what I am getting at. You"—he addressed Bundle—"must go into all that. Find out when new servants were engaged—what about footmen, for instance?"

"One of the footmen is new. John, his name is."

"Well, make inquiries about him. And about any others who have come recently."

"I suppose," said Bundle slowly, "it must have been a servant. It couldn't have been one of the guests?"

"I don't see how that's possible."

"Who were there exactly?"

"Well, there were three girls—Nancy and Helen and Socks—"

"Socks Daventry? I know her."

"May have been. Girl who was always saying things were subtle."

"That's Socks all right. Subtle is one of her words."

"And then there were Gerry Wade and me and Bill Eversleigh and Ronny. And, of course, Sir Oswald and Lady Cootie. Oh! and Pongo."

"Who's Pongo?"

"Chap called Bateman—secretary to old Cootie. Solemn sort of cove but very conscientious. I was at school with him."

"There doesn't seem anything very suspicious there," remarked Loraine. "As you say, we'll have to look among the servants. By the way, you don't suppose that clock being thrown out of the window had anything to do with it?"

"A clock thrown out of the win-

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dow," said Jimmy, staring. It was the first he had heard of it.

### The Seven Clocks

"I can't see how it can have anything to do with it," said Bundle. "But it's odd somehow. There seems no sense in it."

"I remember," said Jimmy slowly. "I went in to—see poor old Gerry, and there were the clocks ranged along the mantelpiece. I remember noticing there were only seven—not eight."

He gave a sudden shiver and explained himself apologetically.

"Sorry. But somehow those clocks have always given me the shivers. I dream of them sometimes. I'd hate to go into that room in the dark and see them there in a row."

"You wouldn't be able to see them if it were dark," said Bundle practically. "Not unless they had luminous dials—oh!" She gave a sudden gasp and color rushed into her cheeks. "Don't you see? Seven Dials!"

The others looked at her doubtfully but she insisted with in-

creasing vehemence.

"It must be. It can't be a coincidence."

"You may be right," said my Thesiger at last. "It's dashed odd."

Bundle started questioning eagerly.

"Who bought the clocks?"

"All of us."

"Who thought of them?"

"All of us."

"Nonsense, somebody must have thought of them first."

(To Be Continued Tomorrow)

## BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus

