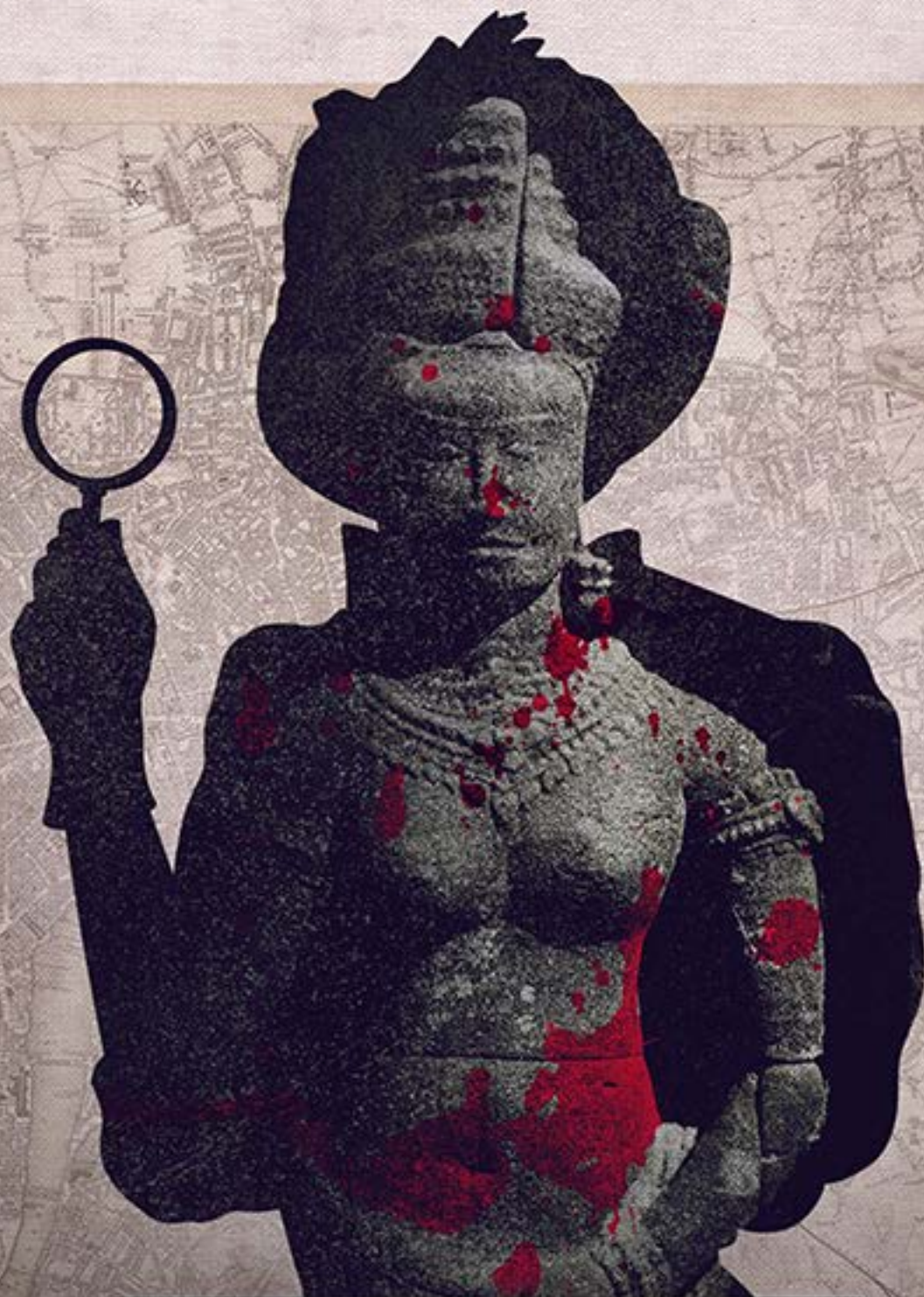


**AGATHA CHRISTIE**  
**The Idol**  
**House of Astarte**



**MISS MARPLE MYSTERIES**

# Chapter 1

‘And now, Dr Pender, what are you going to tell us?’

The old clergyman smiled gently. ‘My life has been passed in quiet places,’ he said. ‘Very few eventful happenings have come my way. Yet once, when I was a young man, I had one very strange and tragic experience.’

‘Ah!’ said Joyce Lempreie`re encouragingly.

‘I have never forgotten it,’ continued the clergyman. ‘It made a profound impression on me at the time, and to this day by a slight effort of memory I can feel again the awe and horror of that terrible moment when I saw a man stricken to death by apparently no mortal agency.’

‘You make me feel quite creepy, Pender,’ complained Sir Henry.

‘It made me feel creepy, as you call it,’ replied the other. ‘Since then I have never laughed at the people who use the word atmosphere. There is such a thing. There are certain places imbued and saturated with good or evil influences which can make their power felt.’

‘That house, The Larches, is a very unhappy one,’ remarked Miss Marple. ‘Old Mr Smithers lost all his money and had to leave it, then the Carslakes took it and Johnny Carslake fell downstairs and broke his leg and Mrs Carslake had to go away to the south of France for her health, and now the Burdens have got it and I