

A Death In C Minor: How It Came About

In 1999, my husband, David, and I made arrangements to spend three weeks in a picturesque village in Essex, England. On the ride from the station to our home-exchange cottage, the taxi driver told us about a brutal and still unsolved murder that had happened a year before and was still the talk of the village. The new owner of a lavish manor house had been found dead in his kitchen, having been hacked to death with his own cleaver. There were no signs of forced entry, nor any indications of a struggle. Stumped, the local constabulary called in investigators from New Scotland Yard. After an intense investigation, which included sharpshooters posted on roofs of several village cottages, even Scotland Yard came up empty handed.

As the victim was largely unknown to the villagers, they had little idea why he chose to live among them, much less anything about his past. All they knew was that he appeared to be a man of considerable wealth. With Scotland Yard having admitted defeat, the locals feared for their safety, thinking that a serial killer might be loose among them. Who would be next?

One afternoon, during a walk in a fallow field near our cottage, I sat under a solitary tree and pondered the murder of the man nobody knew. Why had Scotland Yard been stymied? Why didn't anyone know anything about the victim? Or did they? Why did the crime stubbornly remain unsolved? Mulling over these questions, I made a vow: I would write a novel about the murder and solve it myself. Sitting under that solitary tree, with only a birdsong to break the silence, the story began to spin in my brain like a frenzied spider's web. And the more my head spun, the closer I got to identifying the killer.