

AGATHA

CHRISTIE'S

The Murder of Roger  
Ackroyd

Adapted by Lee Wilson

## Cast of Characters

**Dr James Sheppard** (a Narrator)  
**Caroline Sheppard** (Sheppard's sister)  
**Roger Ackroyd** (owner of Fernly Park Estate)  
**Hercule Poirot** (world-renowned retired Detective)  
**Captain Ralph Paton** (20's. adopted son of Roger Ackroyd)  
**Miss "Elizabeth" Russell** (housekeeper at Fernly Park)  
**Flora Ackroyd** (niece of Roger Ackroyd & Ralph's Fiancee)  
**Mrs Ackroyd** (widow of Roger's brother)  
**Major Hector Blunt** (lifelong friend of Roger Ackroyd)  
**"John" Parker** (butler at Fernly Park)  
**Geoffrey Raymond** (20's. Roger Ackroyd's Secretary)  
**Ursula Bourne**  
 (parlormaid at Fernly Park & Ralph's Secret Fiancee)  
**Chief Constable Melrose** (a Colonel)  
**Inspector Davis** (local Police Inspector)  
**Inspector Raglan** (Police Inspector from Cranchester)  
**Charles Kent** (undisclosed son of Miss Russell)  
**Mrs. Folliott** (former employer of Ursula Bourne) at Marby Grange  
**Mr. Hammond** (Ackroyd Family Solicitor)  
**Elsie Dale** (a Housemaid)  
**Miss Gannett** (gossip and Friend of Caroline)  
**Colonel Carter** (friend of James and Caroline Sheppard)  
**Superintendent Hayes** (Liverpool Police. Admires Poirot)

**\*Doubling of parts is possible and encouraged.**

**\*All characters can be any race/ethnicity and gender.**

# Act 1

## CHAPTER 1

### Dr Sheppard at the Breakfast Table

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* Mrs Ferrars died on the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> September - a Thursday. I was sent for at eight o'clock on the morning of Friday the 17<sup>th</sup>. She had been dead some hours. It was just a few minutes after nine when I reached home once more. I opened the front door with my latchkey, and purposely delayed a few moments in the hall, hanging up my hat and the light overcoat that I had deemed a wise precaution against the chill of an early autumn morning. To tell the truth, I was considerably upset and worried. I am not going to pretend that at that moment I foresaw the events of the next few weeks. I emphatically did not do so.

But my instinct told me that there were stirring times ahead.

*Lights start to shift.*

From the dining-room on my left there came the rattle of tea-cups and the short, dry cough of my sister Caroline.

**Caroline** Is that you, James?

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* An unnecessary question, since who else could it be? To tell the truth, it was precisely my sister Caroline who was the cause of my few minutes' delay. Caroline can do any amount of finding out by sitting placidly at home. I don't know how she manages it, but there it is. When she goes out, it is not to gather in information, but to spread it. At that, too, she is amazingly expert. Whatever I told Caroline now concerning the demise of Mrs Ferrars

would be common knowledge all over the village within the space of an hour and a half. Therefore, I have got into the habit of continually withholding all information possible from my sister. Mrs Ferrars' husband died just over a year ago, and Caroline has constantly asserted, without the least foundation for the assertion, that his wife poisoned him. She scorns my invariable rejoinder that Mr Ferrars died of acute gastritis, helped on by habitual overindulgence in alcoholic beverages. The symptoms of gastritis and arsenical poisoning are not, I agree, unlike, but Caroline bases her accusation on quite different lines.

**Caroline** You've only got to look at her.

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* Mrs Ferrars, though not in her first youth, was a very attractive woman, and her clothes, though simple, always seemed to fit her very well, but all the same, lots of women buy their clothes in Paris, and have not, on that account, necessarily poisoned their husbands.

**Caroline** What on earth are you doing out there, James? Why don't you come and get your breakfast?

**Sheppard** Just coming, my dear. I've been hanging up my overcoat.

**Caroline** You could have hung up half a dozen overcoats in this time.

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* She was quite right. I could have.

*He walks into the dining-room, gives Caroline a peck on the cheek, and sits down to eggs and bacon.*

**Caroline** You've had an early call.

**Sheppard** Yes, King's Paddock. Mrs Ferrars.

*(Pause)*

**Caroline** Well?

**Sheppard** A sad business. Nothing to be done. Must have died in her sleep.

**Caroline** I know.

**Sheppard** You can't know! I didn't know myself until I got there and haven't mentioned it to a soul yet. The milkman told me. He had it from the Ferrars' cook.

**Caroline** What did she die of? Heart failure?

**Sheppard** Didn't the milkman tell you that?

**Caroline** *(sarcasm lost on her)* He didn't know.

**Sheppard** She died of an overdose of veronal. She's been taking it lately for sleeplessness. Must have taken too much.

**Caroline** Nonsense. She took it on purpose.

**Sheppard** There you go again. Rushing along without rhyme or reason. Why on earth should Mrs Ferrars wish to commit suicide? A widow, fairly young still, very well off, good health, and nothing to do but enjoy life. It's absurd.

**Caroline** Not at all. Even you must have noticed how different she has been looking lately. She's looked positively hag-ridden. And you have just admitted that she hasn't been able to sleep.

**Sheppard** What is your diagnosis? An unfortunate love affair, I suppose?

**Caroline** Remorse!

**Sheppard** Remorse?

**Caroline** Yes. You never would believe me when I told you she poisoned her husband. I'm more than ever convinced of it now.

**Sheppard** Surely if a woman committed a crime like murder, she'd be sufficiently cold-blooded to enjoy the fruits of it without any weak-minded sentimentality such as repentance.

**Caroline** There probably are women like that - but Mrs Ferrars wasn't one of them. She was a mass of nerves. An overmastering impulse drove her on to get rid of her husband because she was the sort of person who simply can't endure suffering of any kind, and there's no doubt that the wife of a man like Ashley Ferrars must have had to suffer a good deal. And ever since she's been haunted by what she did. I can't help feeling sorry for her.

**Sheppard** I still think the idea is nonsense and we won't arrive at the truth simply by a kind of inspired guesswork. (*Aside to audience*) I wasn't going to encourage that sort of thing. She will go round the village airing her views, and everyone will think that she is doing so on medical data supplied by me.

**Caroline** You'll see. Ten to one she's left a letter confessing everything.

**Sheppard** She didn't leave a letter of any kind.

**Caroline** Oh! So, you did inquire about that, did you? I believe, James, that in your heart of hearts, you think very much as I do.

**Sheppard** One always has to take the possibility of suicide into consideration.

**Caroline** Will there be an inquest?

**Sheppard** There may be. It all depends. If I am able to declare myself absolutely satisfied that the overdose was taken accidentally, an inquest might be dispensed with.

**Caroline** And are you absolutely satisfied?

**Sheppard** (*Aside*) I did not answer.

*He gets up from the table and walks downstage. Lights Shift.*

## CHAPTER 2

### Who's Who in King's Abbot

**Sheppard** Before I proceed further with what I said to Caroline and what Caroline said to me, it might be as well to give some idea of what I should describe as our local geography.

Our village. King's Abbot, is, I imagine, very much like any other village. Our big town is Cranchester, nine miles away.

We have a large railway station, a small post office, and two rival 'General Stores.' Able-bodied men are apt to leave the place early in life, but we are rich in unmarried ladies and retired military officers. Our hobbies and recreations can be summed up in the one word, 'gossip.' There are only two houses of any importance in King's Abbot. One is King's Paddock, left to Mrs Ferrars by her late husband. The other, Fernly Park, is owned by Roger Ackroyd. Ackroyd has always interested me by being a man more impossibly like a country squire than any country squire could really be.

Of course, Ackroyd is not really a country squire. He is an immensely successful manufacturer of (I think) wagon wheels. He is a man of nearly fifty years of age, rubicund of face and genial of manner. He is, in fact, the life and soul of our peaceful village of King's Abbot.

Now when Roger Ackroyd was a lad of twenty-one, he fell in love with, and married, a beautiful woman some five or six years his senior. Her name was Paton, and she was a widow with one child. She succeeded in

drinking herself into her grave four years after her marriage.

In the years that followed, Ackroyd showed no disposition to make a second matrimonial adventure. His wife's child by her first marriage was only seven years old when his mother died. He is now twenty-five. Ackroyd has always regarded him as his own son, and has brought him up accordingly, but he has been a wild lad and a continual source of worry and trouble to his stepfather. Nevertheless, we are all very fond of Ralph Paton in King's Abbot. He is such a good-looking youngster for one thing.

As I said before, we are ready enough to gossip in our village. Everybody noticed from the first that Ackroyd and Mrs Ferrars got on very well together. After her husband's death, the intimacy became more marked. They were always seen about together, and it was freely conjectured that at the end of her period of mourning, Mrs Ferrars would become Mrs Roger Ackroyd. Roger Ackroyd's wife had admittedly died of drink. Ashley Ferrars had been a drunkard for many years before his death. It was only fitting that these two victims of alcoholic excess should make up to each other for all that they had previously endured at the hands of their former spouses.

All the time that Ralph Paton was growing up to manhood a series of lady housekeepers presided over Ackroyd's establishment, and each in turn was regarded with lively suspicion by Caroline and her cronies. It is not too much to say that for at least fifteen years the whole village has confidently expected Ackroyd to marry one of his housekeepers. The last of them, a redoubtable lady called Miss Russell, has reigned undisputed for five years, twice as long as any of her predecessors. It is felt that but for the advent of Mrs Ferrars, Ackroyd could hardly have escaped. That - and one other factor - the unexpected arrival of a widowed sister-in-law with her daughter from Canada. Mrs Cecil Ackroyd, widow of Ackroyd's ne'er-do-well younger brother, has taken up her residence at Fernley Park, and has succeeded, according to Caroline, in putting Miss Russell in her proper place.

Miss Russell goes about with pinched lips, and what I can only describe as an acid smile, and she professes the utmost sympathy for 'poor Mrs Ackroyd - dependent on the charity of her husband's brother. It was clearly to her advantage that Ackroyd should remain unmarried. She was always very charming - not to say gushing - to Mrs Ferrars when they met. Caroline says that proves less than nothing.

Such have been our preoccupations in King's Abbot for the last few years. We have discussed Ackroyd and his affairs from every standpoint. Mrs Ferrars has fitted into her place in the scheme. From a mild discussion of probable wedding presents, we had been jerked into the midst of tragedy.

Revolving these and sundry other matters in my mind, I went mechanically on my round. I had no cases of special interest to attend, which was, perhaps, as well, for my thoughts returned again and again to the mystery of Mrs Ferrars's death. Had she taken her own life? Surely, if she had done so, she would have left some word behind to say what she contemplated doing?

When had I last seen her? Not for over a week. Her manner then had been normal enough considering - well considering everything.

Then I suddenly remembered that I had seen her, though not to speak to, only yesterday. She had been walking with Ralph Paton, and I had been surprised because I had had no idea that he was likely to be in King's Abbot. I thought, indeed, that he had quarrelled finally with his stepfather.

Nothing had been seen of him down here for nearly six months. They had been walking along, side by side, their heads close together, and she had been talking very earnestly.

I think I can safely say that it was at this moment that a foreboding of the future first swept over me. Nothing tangible as yet - but a vague premonition of the way things were setting. That earnest tete-a-tete between Ralph Paton and Mrs Ferrars the day before struck me disagreeably.

I was still thinking of it when I came face to face with Roger Ackroyd.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Sheppard! Just the man I wanted to get hold of. This is a terrible business.

**Sheppard** You've heard then?'

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** (*quietly*) It's worse than you know. Look here, Sheppard, I've got to talk to you. Can you come back with me now?

**Sheppard** Hardly. I've got three patients to see still, and I must be back by twelve to see my surgery patients.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Then this afternoon - no, better still, dine tonight. At 7.30. Will that suit you?

**Sheppard** Yes, I can manage that all right. What's wrong? Is it Ralph? (*Aside*) I hardly knew why I said that - except, perhaps, that it had so often been Ralph.

*Ackroyd stares blankly. Miss Russell enters and Ackroyd exits as lights shift. Sheppard's surgery room.*

**Miss Russell**

Good morning, Dr. Sheppard, I should be much obliged if you would take a look at my knee.

**Sheppard** (*To audience*) I took a look, but, truth to tell, Miss Russell's account of vague pains was so unconvincing that with a woman of less integrity of character I should have suspected a trumped-up tale.

**Miss Russell**

Well, thank you very much for this bottle of liniment, doctor. Not that I believe it will do the least good. I don't believe in all these drugs. Drugs do a lot of harm. Look at the *Cocaine* habit. It's very prevalent in high society. Just tell me this, doctor. Suppose you are really a slave of the drug habit, is there any cure?

**Sheppard** (*To audience*) One cannot answer a question like that off-hand. I gave her a short lecture on the subject. I still suspected her of seeking information about Mrs Ferrars. (*Back to Miss Russell*) Now, veronal, for instance -

**Miss Russell**

Is it true that there were certain poisons so rare as to baffle detection?

**Sheppard** Ah, you've been reading detective stories.

**Miss Russell**

I have.

**Sheppard** The essence of a detective story is to have a rare poison - something obscure to poison arrows with. Death is instantaneous. Is that the kind of thing you mean?

**Miss Russell**

Yes. Is there really such a thing?

**Sheppard** I'm afraid there isn't. There's curare of course.

**Miss Russell**

Do you have any in your poison cupboard?

**Sheppard** I do not.

**Miss Russell**

Oh. Well, then. I must be getting back.

*He shows Miss Russell out the surgery door as the luncheon gong sounds.*

**Sheppard** (to audience) I should never have suspected Miss Russell of a fondness for detective stories. It pleases me very much to think of her stepping out of the housekeeper's room to rebuke a delinquent housemaid, and then returning to a comfortable perusal of *The Mystery of the Seventh Death*, or something of the kind.

### CHAPTER 3

#### The Man Who Grew Vegetable Marrows

*Lights begin to shift as Caroline enters.*

**Sheppard** I shall be dining at Fernly.

**Caroline** Excellent. You'll hear all about it. By the way, what is the trouble with Ralph?

**Sheppard** With Ralph? There isn't any.

**Caroline** Then why is he staying at the Three Boars local inn instead of at Fernly Park?

**Sheppard** (*Aside to audience*) In the surprise of the moment I departed from my valuable rule of never parting with information. (*Back to Caroline*) Ackroyd told me he was in London.

**Caroline** Oh! He arrived at the Three Boars yesterday morning. And he's still there. Last night he was out with a girl.

**Sheppard** (*Aside to audience*) That did not surprise me in the least. Ralph, I should say, is out with a girl most nights of his life. But I did rather wonder that he chose to indulge in the pastime in King's Abbott instead of in the cheerful Metropolis Fernly. (*Back to Caroline*) One of the barmaids?

**Caroline** No. That's just it. He went out to meet her. (*bitterly*) I don't know..who she is. But I can guess..

**Sheppard** His cousin, Flora Ackroyd?

**Caroline** Flora Ackroyd. They are not related, of course, but he is looked upon like her own son.

**Sheppard** But why not go to Fernly if he wanted to see her?

**Caroline** Secretly engaged. Old Ackroyd won't hear of it, and they have to meet this way.

**Sheppard** (*Aside to audience*) I saw a good many flaws in Caroline's theory, but I forebore to point them out to her. An innocent remark about our new neighbour created a diversion. It seems our new foreigner neighbour, Mr Poirot, is interested in the growing of vegetable marrows.

**Caroline** I would like to know where he comes from, whether he is married, what his wife was, or is, like, whether he has children, what his mother's maiden name was, what he *does* - and so on!

**Sheppard** (*Aside to audience*) Somebody very like Caroline must have invented the questions on passports, I think. (*Back to Caroline*) He's a retired hairdresser. Look at that moustache of his.

**Caroline** (*not convinced*) I can't make him out at all. I borrowed some garden tools the other day, and he was most polite, but I couldn't get anything out of him. I asked him point blank at last whether he was a

Frenchman, and he said he wasn't - and, somehow, I didn't like to ask him any more.

**Sheppard** *(Aside to audience)* Somebody capable of shutting up Caroline? I began to be more interested in our mysterious neighbour. *(Aside to audience)* I saw the opportunity of further questioning gleaming from her eye but saw the chance to escape into the garden. *(Caroline Exits and Lights shift)* I was busily exterminating dandelion roots when a shout of warning sounded from close by and a heavy body whizzed by my ears and fell at my feet with a repellent squelch. It was vegetable marrow!

*Mr Poirot appears over the wall. His head is partially covered with suspiciously black hair with two immense moustaches.*

**Poirot** I demand of you a thousand pardons, monsieur. I am without defence. For some months now I cultivate the marrows. This morning suddenly I enrage myself with these marrows. Not only mentally but physically. I seize the biggest. I hurl them over the wall. Monsieur, I am ashamed.

**Sheppard** I sincerely hope that throwing large vegetables over walls is not your hobby.

**Poirot** Ah, no! It is not with me a habit. But you can figure to yourself, monsieur, that a man may work towards a certain object to attain a certain kind of leisure and occupation, and then find that, after all, he yearns for the old busy days, and the old occupations that he thought himself so glad to leave?

**Sheppard** Yes, I fancy that that is a common enough occurrence. I myself am perhaps an instance. A year ago I came into a legacy - enough to enable me to realize a dream. I have always wanted to travel, to see the world. Well, that was a year ago, as I said, and - I am still here.

**Poirot** The chains of habit. We work to attain an object, and the object gained, we find that what we miss is the daily toil. And mark you, monsieur, my work was interesting work. The most interesting work there is in the world.

**Sheppard** Yes? *(Aside to audience)* For the moment the spirit of Caroline was strong within me.

**Poirot** The study of human nature, monsieur!

**Sheppard** Just so.

**Poirot** Also, I had a friend - a friend who for many years never left my side and he was very dear to me.

**Sheppard** He died?

**Poirot** Not so. He lives and flourishes - but on the other side of the world. He is now in the Argentine.

**Sheppard** In the Argentine? (*sighing*) I have always wanted to go to South America.

**Poirot** Will you go there, yes?

**Sheppard** I could have gone. A year ago. But I was foolish and worse than foolish - greedy. I risked the substance for the shadow.

**Poirot** I comprehend. You speculated? Not the Porcupine Oilfields?

**Sheppard** I thought of them, as a matter of fact, but in the end I plumped for a gold mine in Western Australia.

**Poirot** It is fate.

**Sheppard** What is fate?

**Poirot** That I should live next to a man who seriously considers Porcupine Oilfields, and also West Australian Gold Mines. Well, well, we are neighbours. I beg of you to accept and present to your excellent sister my best marrow.

*With a flourish he produces an immense specimen.*

Indeed, this has not been a wasted morning. I have made the acquaintance of a man who in some ways resembles my far-off friend. By the way, I should like to ask you a question. You doubtless know everyone in this tiny village. Who is the young man with the very dark hair and eyes, and the handsome face. He walks with his head flung back, and an easy smile on his lips?

**Sheppard** That must be Captain Ralph Paton.

**Poirot** I have not seen him about here before?

**Sheppard** No, he has not been here for some time. But he is the son - adopted son, rather - of Mr Ackroyd of Fernly Park.

**Poirot** Of course, I should have guessed. Mr Ackroyd spoke of him many times.

**Sheppard** (*surprised*) You know Mr Ackroyd?

**Poirot** My Ackroyd knew me in London - when I was at work there. I have asked him to say nothing of my profession down here.

**Sheppard** I see.

**Poirot** One prefers to remain incognito. I am not anxious for notoriety. I have not even troubled to correct the local version of my name.

**Sheppard** Indeed.

**Poirot** Captain Ralph Paton. And so he is engaged to Mr Ackroyd's niece, the charming Miss Flora.

**Sheppard** Who told you so?

**Poirot** Mr Ackroyd. About a week ago. He is very pleased about it - has long desired that such a thing should come to pass, or so I understood from him. I even believe that he brought some pressure to bear upon the young man. That is never wise. A young man should marry to please himself - not to please a stepfather from whom he has expectations.

**Sheppard** *(to the audience)* I could not see Ackroyd taking a hairdresser into his confidence and discussing the marriage of his niece and stepson with him. I began to think that Poirot couldn't be a hairdresser after all. To hide my confusion, I said the first thing that came into my head. *(back to Poirot)* What made you notice Ralph Paton? His good looks?

**Poirot** No, not that alone - though he is unusually good-looking for an Englishman - what your lady novelists would call a Greek God.

**Sheppard** *(to the audience)* He said the last sentence in a musing tone of voice which made an indefinable impression upon me. It was as though he was summing up the boy by the light of some inner knowledge that I did not share.

**Poirot** No, there was something about that young man that I did not understand.

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* It was that impression that was left with me...

**Caroline** *(from the house)* James!

*Lights shift and Poirot Exits. Dr Sheppard goes into the house to find Caroline with her hat on evidently having just returned from the village.*

**Caroline** I met Mr Ackroyd.

**Sheppard** Yes?

**Caroline** I stopped him, of course, but he seemed in a great hurry, and anxious to get away.

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* I have no doubt but that was the case. Caroline is not easy to shake off.

**Caroline** I asked him at once about Ralph. He was absolutely astonished. Had no idea the boy was down here. He actually said he thought I must have made a mistake.

**Sheppard** A Mistake! Ridiculous. He ought to have known you better.

**Caroline** Then he went on to tell me that Ralph and Flora are engaged.

**Sheppard** I knew that too.

**Caroline** Who told you?

**Sheppard** Our new neighbour. (*To the audience*) She declined the tempting red herring..

**Caroline** I told Mr Ackroyd that Ralph was staying at the Three Boars.

**Sheppard** Caroline, do you never reflect that you might do a lot of harm with this habit of yours repeating everything indiscriminately?

**Caroline** Nonsense. People ought to know things. I consider my duty to tell them. Mr Ackroyd was very grateful to me.

**Sheppard** Well. (*To the audience*) There was clearly more to come.

**Caroline** I think he went straight off to the Three Boars, but if so he didn't find Ralph there.

**Sheppard** No?

**Caroline** No. Because as I was coming back through the wood.

**Sheppard** Coming back through the wood?

**Caroline** It was such a lovely day! I thought I would make a little round. The woods with their autumnal tints are so perfect at this time of year.

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) Caroline does not care a hang for woods at any time of year. No, it was good sound mongoose instinct which took her to our local wood. It is the only place adjacent to the village of King's Abbot where you can talk with a young woman unseen by the whole village. It adjoins the Park of Fernly. (*Back to Caroline*) Well, go on.

**Caroline** As I say, I was just coming back through the wood when I heard voices. One was Ralph Paton's - I knew it at once. The other was a girls. Of course, I didn't mean to listen.

**Sheppard** (*Looks to the audience*) Of course not.

**Caroline** But I simply couldn't help overhearing. The girl said something - I didn't quite catch what it was, and Ralph answered. He sounded very angry. "My dear girl," he said. "Don't you realize that it is quite on the cards the old man will cut me off with a shilling? And we need the dibs, my dear. I shall be a very rich man when the old fellow pops off. He's mean as they make

'em, but he's rolling in money really. I don't want him to go altering his will. You leave it to me, and don't worry." Those were his exact words. I remember them perfectly. Unfortunately, just then I stepped on a dry twig or something, and they lowered their voices and moved away. I couldn't, of course, go rushing after them, so wasn't able to see who the girl was.

**Sheppard** I suppose, though, you hurried on to the Three Boars, felt faint, and went into the bar for a glass of brandy, and so were able to see if both the barmaids were on duty?

**Caroline** It wasn't a barmaid. In fact, I'm almost sure that it was Flora Ackroyd, only. Only it doesn't seem to make sense.

**Sheppard** But if it wasn't Flora, who could it have been?

**Caroline** I have a whole list of maidens living in the neighbourhood, with profuse reasons for and against. First-

**Sheppard** I'm sorry I must go see a patient.

*Lights Shift*

(Looks to the audience) I had to take my chance to leave while Caroline paused for a breath. I proposed to make my way to the Three Boars. It seemed likely that Ralph Paton would have returned there by now.

I knew Ralph better, perhaps, than anyone else in King's Abbot, for I had known his mother before him. He had not inherited his mother's fatal propensity for drink, but nevertheless he had in him a strain of weakness. As my new friend of this morning had declared, he was extraordinarily handsome. Perfectly proportioned, with the easy grace of an athlete, Ralph Paton was of those born to charm easily and without effort. He was self-indulgent and extravagant, but he was lovable nevertheless, and his friends were all devoted to him. Could I do anything with the boy? I think I could.

*Lights Shift*

On inquiry at the Three Boars, I found that Captain Paton had just come in. I went up to his room and entered unannounced.

*Lights Shift*

**Ralph Paton**

Why, it's Sheppard! Glad to see you. (*Shakes his hand*)  
The one person I am glad to see in this infernal  
place.

**Sheppard** What's the place been doing?

**Ralph Paton**

(*Laughs*) It's a long story. Things haven't been going  
well with me, doctor. But have a drink, won't you?

**Sheppard** Thanks, I will.

**Ralph Paton**

(*Presses the bell and sits in an armchair*) Nice to  
mine matters. I'm in the devil of a mess. In fact, I  
haven't the least idea what to do next.

**Sheppard** What's the matter?

**Ralph Paton**

It's my confounded stepfather.

**Sheppard** What has he done?

**Ralph Paton**

It isn't what he's done yet, but what he's likely to  
do.

*A knock on the door. Ralph opens the door to receive  
three drinks from a man.*

*Hands Sheppard a drink, downs one and starts drinking the  
other. He sits down again hunching in the armchair.*

**Sheppard** Is it really - serious?

**Ralph Paton**

(*Nods*) I'm fairly up against it this time. In fact, I  
can't see my way ahead... I'm damned if I can.

**Sheppard** If I could help -

**Ralph Paton**

(*Shakes his head decidedly*) Good of you, doctor. But I  
can't let you in on this. I've got to play a lone  
hand...

## CHAPTER 4

### Dinner at Fernly

*Lights Shift. Sheppard grabs his black doctor's bag.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) It was just a few minutes before  
half-past seven when I rang the front doorbell of  
Fernly Park. The door was opened with admirable

promptitude by Parker, the butler. I stepped into the big square hall and Parker relieved me of my overcoat. Ackroyd's secretary, a pleasant young fellow by the name of Raymond, passed through the hall on his way to Ackroyd's study, his hands full of papers.

**Geoffrey**

**Raymond** Good evening, doctor. Coming to dine? (*Sheppard lays down his bag*) Or is this a professional call?

**Sheppard** I am expecting a summons to a confinement case at any moment, and so had to come out prepared for an emergency.

**Geoffrey**

**Raymond** Go into the drawing-room. You know the way. The ladies will be down in a minute. I must take these papers to Mr Ackroyd, and I'll tell him you're here. (*Exits*)

*Sheppard settles his tie in a large mirror hung in the hall and crosses to a door to the drawing-room. As he puts his hand on the handle, we hear the shutting down of a window in the drawing room.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I took that sound as a shutting down of a window, without attaching any importance to it at the time. (*He opens the door and walks in the drawing room*).

*He collides into Miss Russell. Miss Russell is the housekeeper.*

**Sheppard** I'm sorry!

**Miss Russell**

(*Breathing heavily as though she has been running*) The apology is all mine!

**Sheppard** I'm afraid I'm a few minutes early.

**Miss Russell**

Oh! I don't think so. It's gone half-past seven, Dr Sheppard. (*Pause and a tad displeased*) I didn't know you were expected to dinner tonight. Mr Ackroyd didn't mention it.

**Sheppard** How's the knee?

**Miss Russell**

Much the same, thank you, doctor. I must be going now. Mrs Ackroyd will be down in a moment. I-I only came in here to see if the flowers were all right. (*Exits quickly out the room*)

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I strolled to the window, wondering at her evident desire to justify her presence in the

room. As I did so, I saw what, of course, I might have known all the time had I troubled to give my mind to it, namely, that the windows were long French ones opening on the terrace. The sound I had heard, therefore, could not have been that of a window being shut down. What could it have been? Coals on the fire? A drawer of a bureau pushed in? No, not that.

*His eye catches a silver table, the lid of which lifts, and through the glass we can see the contents. He crosses over to it, studying the contents.*

**Sheppard** (To himself) Hm, two pieces of old silver, a baby shoe belonging to King Charles the First, Chinese jade figures, and African implements and curios..

*He lifts the lid, and it slips through his fingers and falls. He recognizes it's the same sound he heard earlier. He repeats the action a couple of times to confirm it was indeed the sound. He lifts the lid to scrutinize the contents. Before he can scrutinize, Flora Ackroyd enters. She is the epitome of health to a doctor. She joins him over the silver table.*

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** I heretically doubt King Charles the First ever wore this baby shoe. And anyway, all this making a fuss about things because someone wore or used them seems to me all nonsense. They're not wearing or using them now. That pen that George Eliot wrote *The Mill on the Floss* with - that sort of thing - well, it's only just a pen after all. If you're really keen on George Eliot, why not get *The Mill on the Floss* in a cheap edition and read it.

**Sheppard** I suppose you never read such old out-of-date stuff, Miss Flora?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** You're wrong, Dr Sheppard. I love *The Mill on the Floss*. You haven't congratulated me yet, Dr Sheppard. Haven't you heard?

*She holds out her left hand to reveal an exquisitely set single pearl on her third finger.*

I'm going to marry Ralph, you know. Uncle is very pleased. It keeps me in the family, you see.

*He takes both of her hands.*

**Sheppard** My dear, I hope you'll be very happy.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** We've been engaged for about a month, but it was only announced yesterday. Uncle is going to do up Cross-stones, and give it to us to live in, and we're going to pretend to farm. Really, we shall hunt all the winter, town for the season, and then go yachting. I love the sea. And, of course, I shall take a great interest in the parish affairs and attend all the Mothers' Meetings.

*Mrs Ackroyd rustles in. She is all chains and teeth and bones. Her eyes are coldly speculative.*

**Mrs Ackroyd** My apologies for being late, Dr Sheppard.

*Dr Sheppard crosses over to her leaving Flora by the window.*

**Mrs Ackroyd**

Have you heard about Flora's engagement?

**Sheppard** I have, indeed.

**Mrs Ackroyd**

The dear young things have fallen in love at first sight. Such a perfect pair, he so dark and she so fair. I can't tell you, my dear Dr Sheppard, the relief to a mother's heart. *(Pause as her eyes remain shrewdly observant of him)*. I was wondering. You are such an old friend of dear Roger's. We know how much he trusts to your judgement. It is very difficult for me - in my position as poor Cecil's widow, but there are so many tiresome things - settlements, you know - all that. I fully believe that Roger intends to make settlements upon dear Flora, but, as you know, he is just a little peculiar about money. I wondered, you know, if you could just sound him on the subject? *(Pause)* Flora is so fond of you. We feel you are quite an old friend, although we have only really known you just over two years.

*The drawing-room door opens, and Hector Blunt enters. He is a man of medium height, sturdily and stockily built. He treads softly on his feet and his eyes give the impression of always watching something that is happening far away. He talks little, and what he does say is said jerkily, as though the words were forced out of him unwillingly.*

**Mrs Ackroyd**

You know Major Blunt, don't you, doctor?

**Sheppard** Yes, indeed. *(To audience)* He has shot more wild animals in unlikely places than any man living. His friendship with Ackroyd has always puzzled me a little. Blunt is perhaps five years Ackroyd's junior and about once in every two years Blunt spends a fortnight at Fernly. An immense animal's head with an amazing number of horns which fixes you with a glazed stare as soon as you come inside the front door, is a permanent reminder of their friendship.

**Major Blunt**

How are you, Sheppard?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Major Blunt, I wish you'd tell me about these African things. I'm sure you know what they all are.

**Sheppard** *(To audience)* I have heard Hector Blunt described as a woman hater, but he joined Flora at the silver table with alacrity.

*Blunt crosses to Flora and with her looks at silver table. Parker enters.*

**Parker** Dinner is served.

*Lights begin to shift.*

**Sheppard** *(To audience)* My place at the table was between Mrs Ackroyd and Flora. Blunt was on Mrs Ackroyd's other side, and Geoffrey Raymond next to him. Dinner was not a cheerful affair. Ackroyd was visibly preoccupied. He looked wretched and ate next to nothing. Mrs Ackroyd, Raymond, and I kept the conversation going. Flora seemed affected by her uncle's depression, and Blunt relapsed into his usual taciturnity. Immediately after dinner Ackroyd slipped his arm through mine and led me off to his study.

*Roger Ackroyd enters and slips his arm through Dr Sheppards. Lights shift again as we enter the study. Bookshelves, a large desk by the window covered in various magazines and papers, and an armchair by a fireplace.*

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Once we've had coffee, we shan't be disturbed again. I told Raymond to see to it that we shouldn't be interrupted.

*Ackroyd Paces the room as Sheppard watches. Parker enters with a coffee tray and Ackroyd sits into the armchair in front of the fire.*

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** I've had a return of that pain after food lately. You must give me some more of those tablets of yours.

**Sheppard** *(To audience)* I played up accordingly. *(To Ackroyd)* I thought as much. I brought some up with me.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Good man. Hand them over now.

**Sheppard** They're in my bag in the hall. I'll get them.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** *(Stops him)* Don't you trouble. Parker will get them. Bring in the doctor's bag, will you, Parker?

**Parker** Very good, sir.

*Parker exits and Sheppard goes to speak...*

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** *(Throws up his hand)* Not Yet. Wait. Don't you see I'm in such a state of nerves that I can hardly control myself? Make certain that window's closed, will you?

*Sheppard crosses to the window. As he closes the window Parker re-enters with Sheppard's bag. Parker gives it to him and exits.*

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** You've put the latch across?

**Sheppard** Yes, yes. What's the matter with you, Ackroyd?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** *(Pause for several seconds)* I'm in hell. No, don't bother with those damn tablets. I only said that for Parker. Servants are so curious. Come here and sit down. The door's closed too, isn't it?

**Sheppard** Yes, nobody can overhear.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Sheppard, nobody knows what I've gone through in the last twenty-four hours. If a man's house ever fell in ruin about him, mine has about me. This business of Ralph's is the last straw. But we won't talk about

that now. it's the other-the other-! I don't know what to do about it. And I've got to make up my mind soon.

**Sheppard** What's the trouble?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Sheppard, you attended Ashley Ferrars in his last illness, didn't you?

**Sheppard** (*Surprised*) Why, yes, I did.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** (*Beat*) Did you ever suspect - I mean, did it ever enter your head - that - well - that he might have been poisoned?

**Sheppard** (*Pause*) I'll tell you the truth. At the time I had no suspicion whatsoever, but since - well, it was mere idle talk on my sister's part that first put the idea into my head. Since then, I haven't been able to get it out again. But mind you, I've no foundation whatever for that suspicion.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** He was poisoned.

**Sheppard** Who by?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** His wife.

**Sheppard** How do you know that?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** She told me so herself.

**Sheppard** When?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Yesterday! My God! It seems ten years ago. (*Beat*) You understand, Sheppard, I'm telling you this in confidence. It's to go no further. I want your advice - I can't carry the whole weight myself. As I said just now, I don't know what to do.

**Sheppard** Can you tell me the whole story? I'm still in the dark. How did Mrs. Ferrars come to make this confession to you?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** It's like this. Three months ago, I asked Mrs. Ferrars to marry me. She refused. I asked her again and she consented, but she refused to allow me to make the engagement public until her year of mourning was up. Yesterday I called upon her, pointed out that a year and three weeks had now elapsed since her husband's death, and that there could be no further objection to making the engagement public property. I had noticed that she had been very strange in her manner for some days. Now, suddenly, without the least warning, she broke down completely. She - she told me everything.

Her hatred of her brute of a husband, her growing love for me, and the - the dreadful means she had taken. (In horror) Poison! My God! It was murder in cold blood. (Beat) Yes, she confessed everything. It seems that there is one person who has known all along - who has been blackmailing her for huge sums. It was the strain of that that drove her nearly mad.

**Sheppard** Who was the man? (To the audience) Supposing - oh! Ralph Paton!? But surely that was impossible...

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** She wouldn't tell me his name. As a matter of fact, she didn't actually say that it was a man. But of course -

**Sheppard** Of course, it must have been a man. And you've no suspicion at all?

*Ackroyd groans and drops his head into his hands.*

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** It can't be. I'm mad even to think of such a thing. No, I won't even admit to you the wild suspicion that crossed my mind. I'll tell you this much, though. Something she said made me think that the person in question might be actually among my household - but that can't be so. I must have misunderstood her.

**Sheppard** What did you say to her?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** What could I say? She saw, of course, the awful shock it had been to me. And then there was the question, what was my duty in the matter? She had made me, you see, an accessory after the fact. She saw all that, I think, quicker than I did. I was stunned, you know. She asked me for twenty-four hours - made me promise to do nothing till the end of that time. And she steadfastly refused to give me the name of the scoundrel who had been blackmailing her. I suppose she was afraid that I might go straight off and hammer him, and then the fat would have been in the fire as far as she was concerned. She told me that I should hear from her before twenty-four hours had passed. My God! I swear to you, Sheppard, that it never entered my head what she meant to do. Suicide! And I drove her to it.

**Sheppard** No, no. The responsibility for her death doesn't lie at your door.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** The question is, what am I to do now? The poor lady is dead. Why rake up past trouble?

**Sheppard** I rather agree with you.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** But there's another point. How am I to get hold of that scoundrel who drove her to death as surely as if he'd killed her? He knew of the first crime, and he fastened on to it like some obscene vulture. She's paid the penalty. Is he to go scot free?

**Sheppard** I see. You want to hunt him down? It will mean a lot of publicity, you know?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Yes, I've thought of that.

**Sheppard** I agree with you that the villain ought to be punished, but the cost has got to be reckoned.

*Ackroyd gets up and walks up and down. After a few crosses he sinks into the chair again.*

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Look here, Sheppard, suppose we leave it like this. If no word comes from her, we'll let the dead things lie.

**Sheppard** (*Curiously*) What do you mean by word coming from her?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** I have the strongest impression that somewhere or somehow she must have left a message for me - before she went. I can't argue about it, but there it is.

**Sheppard** She didn't leave a letter or word though, did she?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** Sheppard, I'm convinced that she did. And more. I've a feeling that by deliberately choosing death, she wanted the whole thing to come out, if only to be revenged on the man who drove her to such desperation. I believe that if I could have seen her then, she would have told me his name and bid me go for him for all I was worth. (*Beat*) You don't believe in impressions?

**Sheppard** Yes, I do, in a sense. If, as you put it, word should come from her -

*Parker enters with a salver on which are letters.*

**Parker** The evening post, sir. (*Hands the salver to Ackroyd*)

*Parker collects the coffee cups and withdraws. Ackroyd lifts a long blue envelope and stares at it like a man turned*

to stone. He drops the other letters and salver to the ground.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** (Whispers) Her writing. She must have gone out and posted it last night, just before - before -

He rips open the envelope and draws out a thick enclosure. He looks at Sheppard sharply.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** You're sure you shut the window?

**Sheppard** Quite sure. (Surprised) Why?

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** All this evening I've had a queer feeling of being watched, spied upon. What's that -

We hear the latch of the door open slightly.

What's that -

They both turn sharply. Sheppard walks across to the door and opens it. Nobody is there.

Nerves. (He unfolds the thick sheets of paper and reads aloud in a low voice)

"My dear, my very dear Roger, a life calls for a life. I see that - I saw it in your face this afternoon. So, I am taking the only road open to me. I leave you the punishment of the person who has made my life a hell upon earth for the last year. I would not tell you the name, this afternoon, but I propose to write it to you now. I have no children or near relations to be spared, so do not fear publicity. If you can, Roger, my very dear Roger, forgive me the wrong I meant to do you, since when the time came, I could not do it after all..." (Beat. He looks up at Sheppard) Sheppard, forgive me, but I must read this alone. It was meant for my eyes, and my eyes only. (He puts the letter in the envelope and lays it on the table) Later, when I am alone.

**Sheppard** No, read it now.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** (Surprised) I beg your pardon.

**Sheppard** I do not mean read it aloud to me. But read it through whilst I am still here.

**Roger**

**Ackroyd** (*Shakes his head*) No, I'd rather wait.

**Sheppard** (*Urges him*) At least, read the name of the man. (*Beat and turns to the audience. Lights begin to shift*) Now Ackroyd is essentially pigheaded. The more you urge him to do a thing, the more determined he is not to do it.

*Lights begin to shift.*

**Sheppard** The letter had been brought in at twenty minutes to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. (*Lights shift more as he heads to the door and exits. Parker startles him and looks embarrassed. Almost like Parker could have been listening to the conversation*). (*Coldly*) Mr Ackroyd particularly does not want to be disturbed.

**Parker** Quite so, sir. I - I fancied I heard the bell ring.

**Sheppard** (*To the audience while Parker grabs Sheppard's overcoat*) This was such a palpable untruth that I did not trouble to reply.

*Parker helps him on with his overcoat and Sheppard steps out into the night. Lights shift.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) The moon was overcast, and everything seemed very dark and still. (*Church clock chimes as a stranger enters wearing a hat pulled down over his eyes and his coat collar turned up*) The village church clock chimed nine o'clock as I passed through the lodge gates.

**Kent** (*In a hoarse voice*) This the way to Fernly Park, mister?

**Sheppard** These are the lodge gates here.

**Kent** Thank you, mister. I'm a stranger in these parts, you see.

*The stranger passes through the gates and Sheppard looks on after him like he recognizes the stranger's voice. Lights shift and Caroline enters.*

**Caroline** Why are you home so early?

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I, of course, had to make up a slightly fictitious account of the evening to satisfy her. It was Friday night, and on Friday night I wind the clocks. I did it as usual, whilst Caroline satisfied herself that the servants had locked up the

kitchen properly. I was just heading up the stairs to bed at a quarter past ten when -

*The phone rings and Caroline answers it.*

**Caroline** Hello.

*Caroline holds the phone up to Sheppard. He grabs the phone.*

**Sheppard** What? What? Certainly, I'll come at once.

*Sheppard runs and grabs his bag. He stuffs a few extra dressings into it as Caroline watches.*

**Sheppard** (Shouts to Caroline) Parker telephoning from Fernly. They've just found Roger Ackroyd murdered.

## CHAPTER 5

### Murder

*Lights shift and we have a quick simulation of Sheppard driving rapidly. He jumps out of the car and rings the bell at the doorway. Nobody comes. He rings again. We hear the rattle of the chain, and the door opens to reveal Parker standing in the doorway.*

**Sheppard** Where is he? (He pushes past Parker)

**Parker** I beg your pardon, sir?

**Sheppard** Your master. Mr. Ackroyd. Don't stand there staring at me, man. Have you notified the police?

**Parker** The police, sir? Did you say the police?

**Sheppard** If, as you say, your master has been murdered -

*Parker gasps.*

**Parker** The master? Murdered? Impossible, sir!

**Sheppard** Didn't you telephone to me, not five minutes ago, and tell me that Mr. Ackroyd had been found murdered?

**Parker** Me, sir? Oh, no indeed, sir. I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing.

**Sheppard** Do you mean to say it's all a hoax? That there's nothing the matter with Mr. Ackroyd?

**Parker** Excuse me, sir, did the person telephoning use my name?

**Sheppard** I'll give you the exact words I heard. "Is this Dr. Sheppard? Parker, the butler at Fernly, speaking. Will

you please come at once, sir Mr. Ackroyd has been murdered."

*They star at each other blankly.*

**Parker** (*Shocked*) A very wicked joke to play, sir. Fancy saying a thing like that.

**Sheppard** (*Suddenly*) Where is Mr. Ackroyd?

**Parker** Still in the study, I fancy, sir. The ladies have gone to bed, and Major Blunt and Mr. Raymond are in the billiard room.

**Sheppard** I think I will just look in and see him for a minute. I know he didn't want to be disturbed again, but this odd practical joke has made me uneasy. I'd just like to know that he's all right.

**Parker** Quite so, sir. It makes me feel uneasy myself. If you don't object to my accompanying you as far as the door, sir?

**Sheppard** Not at all. Come along.

*They walk to Ackroyd's study and tap on the door. No answer. Sheppard turns the handle of the door but it's locked.*

**Parker** Allow me, sir.

*Parker crouches on his knees and peeps through the keyhole.*

**Parker** The key is in the lock alright, sir. Mr. Ackroyd must have locked himself in and possibly just dropped off to sleep.

*Sheppard bends down and peeps through to verify.*

**Sheppard** It seems all right but, all the same, Parker, I'm going to wake your master up. I shouldn't be satisfied to go home without hearing from his own lips that he's quite all right.

*Sheppard rattles the handle and calls out..*

**Sheppard** Ackroyd, Ackroyd, Ackroyd.

*Still no answer.*

**Sheppard** (*looks over his shoulder to Parker*) I don't want to alarm the household.

**Parker** I think it will be all right, sir. The billiard room is at the other side of the house, and so are the kitchen quarters and the ladies' bedrooms.

*Sheppard nods and bangs frantically on the door. He stoops down and calls through the keyhole.*

**Sheppard** Ackroyd, Ackroyd! It's Sheppard. Let me in.

*Silence. Sheppard and Parker glance at each other.*

**Sheppard** Look here, Parker. I'm going to break this door in - or rather we are. I'll take the responsibility.

**Parker** *(Doubtfully)* If you say so, sir.

**Sheppard** I do say so. I'm seriously alarmed about Mr. Ackroyd.

*Sheppard looks around and picks up a heavy oak chair. Parker grabs one side and they both heave ho, once, twice, three times against the lock. On the third blow it gives, and they stagger into the study. Ackroyd is sitting in the armchair as he had been when Sheppard was there. His head has fallen sideways and just below the collar of his coat is a shining piece of twisted metalwork. Parker and Sheppard get closer to him.*

**Parker** Stabbed from behind. Horrible!

*Parker takes a handkerchief and wipes his brow. He reaches out to grab the hilt of the dagger.*

**Sheppard** *(Sharply)* You must not touch that. Go at once to the telephone and ring up the police station. Inform them what has happened. Then tell Mr. Raymond and Major Blunt.

*Parker nods and hurries away.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* I was careful not to disturb the position of the body, and not to handle the dagger at all. Ackroyd had clearly been dead some little time.

*From outside we hear young Raymond's voice.*

**Raymond** *(Offstage)* What do you say? Impossible! Where's the doctor?

*Raymond walks into the room and stops dead. Hector Blunt runs*

*in past him.*

**Raymond** My God! It's true, then.

*Blunt goes over to the chair and bends over to look at dagger. He goes to touch it as well but Sheppard draws him back with one hand.*

**Sheppard** Nothing must be moved. The police must see him exactly as he is now.

*Blunt nods and Geoffrey Raymond joins them near the body.*

**Raymond** *(In a low voice)* This is terrible.

*Raymond takes off his pince-nez and begins polishing it. Sheppard notices that his hands are shaking.*

**Raymond** Robbery, I suppose. How did the fellow get in? Through the window? Has anything been taken?

*Raymond moves towards the desk.*

**Sheppard** You think it's burglary?

**Raymond** What else could it be? There's no question of suicide, I suppose?

**Sheppard** No man could stab himself in such a way. It's murder right enough. But with what motive?

**Blunt** Roger hadn't an enemy in the world. It must have been burglars. But what was the thief after? *(Looking around the room)* Nothing seems to be disarranged?

*Raymond begins sorting through papers on the desk.*

**Raymond** There seems nothing missing, and none of the drawers show signs of having been tampered with. It's very mysterious.

**Blunt** There are some letters on the floor here.

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* Three or four letters still lay where Ackroyd had dropped them earlier. But the blue envelope containing Mrs. Ferrar's letter had disappeared -

*A sound of a bell cuts Sheppard off. We hear murmured voices offstage. Parker, the local inspector Davis, and a police constable Jones enter the room.*

**Davis** Good evening, gentlemen. I'm terribly sorry for this! A good kind gentleman like Mr. Ackroyd. The butler says it's murder. No possibility of accident or suicide, doctor?

**Sheppard** None whatever.

**Davis** Ah! A bad business.

*Davis goes and stands over the body.*

**Davis** (*Sharply*) Has he been moved at all?

**Sheppard** Beyond making certain that life was extinct-an easy matter- I have not disturbed the body in any way.

**Davis** And everything points to the murderer having got clear away-for the moment, that is. Now then, let me hear all about it. Who found the body?

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I explained the circumstances carefully.

**Davis** A telephone message, you say? From the butler?

**Parker** A message that I never sent. I've not been near the telephone the whole evening. The others can bear me out that I haven't.

**Davis** Very odd, that. Did it sound like Parker's voice, doctor?

**Sheppard** Well-I can't say I noticed. I took it for granted, you see.

**Davis** Naturally. Well, you got up here, broke in the door, and found poor Mr. Ackroyd like this. How long should you say he had been dead, doctor?

**Sheppard** Half an hour at least-perhaps longer.

**Davis** The door was locked on the inside, you say? What about the window?

**Sheppard** I myself closed and bolted it earlier in the evening at Mr. Ackroyd's request.

*Davis walks over to the window and throws back the curtain.*

**Davis** Well, it's open now, anyway.

*Sheppard moves closer to see this. Davis produces a pocket torch and flashes it along the sill outside.*

**Davis** This is the way he went all right, and got in. See here.

*Sheppard leans in.*

**Sheppard** Footmarks. They look like those ones with the rubber studs in the soles. One pointed inwards and the other pointed outwards.

**Davis** Plain as a pikestaff. Any valuables missing?

*Raymond shakes his head.*

**Raymond** Not so far that we can discover. Mr. Ackroyd never kept anything of particular value in this room.

**Davis** Hm, man found an open window. Climbed in, saw Mr. Ackroyd sitting there-maybe he'd fallen asleep. Man stabbed him from behind, then lost his nerve and made off. But he's left his tracks pretty clearly. We ought to get hold of him without much difficulty. No suspicious strangers been hanging about anywhere?

**Sheppard** Oh!

**Davis** What is it, doctor?

**Sheppard** I met a man this evening-just as I was turning out of the gate. He asked me the way to Fernly Park.

**Davis** What time would that be?

**Sheppard** Just nine o'clock. I heard it chime the hour as I was turning out of the gate.

**Davis** Can you describe him?

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* I did so to the best of my ability.

**Davis** *(To Parker)* Anyone answering that description come to the front door?

**Parker** No, sir. No one has been to the house at all this evening.

**Davis** What about the back?

**Parker** I don't think so, sir, but I'll make inquiries.

*Parker goes to move towards the door, but the inspector holds up his hand.*

**Davis** No, thanks. I'll do my own inquiring. But first of all, I want to fix the times a little more clearly. When was Mr. Ackroyd last seen alive?

**Sheppard** Probably by me. When I left at-let me see-about ten minutes to nine. He told me that he didn't wish to be disturbed, and I repeated the order to Parker.

**Parker** Just so, sir.

**Raymond** Mr. Ackroyd was certainly alive at half past nine, for I heard his voice in here talking.

**Davis** Who was he talking to?

**Raymond** That I don't know. Of course, at the time I took it for granted that it was Dr. Sheppard who was with him. I wanted to ask him a question about some papers I was

engaged upon, but when I heard the voices, I remembered that he had said he wanted to talk to Dr. Sheppard without being disturbed, and I went away again. But now it seems that the doctor had already left?

**Sheppard** Yes, I was home by a quarter past nine. I didn't go out again until I received the telephone call.

**Davis** Who could have been with him at half past nine? It wasn't you, Mr-er-

**Sheppard** Major Blunt.

**Davis** Major Hector Blunt? Ah yes, I think we've seen you down here before, sir. I didn't recognize you for the moment, but you were staying with Mr. Ackroyd a year ago last May.

**Blunt** June.

**Davis** Just so, June it was. Now, as I was saying, it wasn't you with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty this evening?

**Blunt** (*Shakes his head*) Never saw him after dinner.

*The inspector turns to Raymond.*

**Davis** You didn't overhear any of the conversation going on, did you, sir?

**Raymond** Sure, I did catch just a fragment of it and, supposing as I did that it was Dr. Sheppard who was with Mr. Ackroyd, that fragment struck me as distinctly odd. As far as I can remember, the exact words were these. Mr. Ackroyd was speaking. "The calls on my purse have been so frequent of late"-that is what he was saying- "of late, that I fear it is impossible for me to accede to your request..." I went away again at once, of course, so I did not hear any more. But I rather wondered because Dr. Sheppard-

**Sheppard** -Does not ask for loans for himself or subscriptions for others.

**Davis** Hm, a demand for money. It may be that here we have a very important clue. You say, Parker, that nobody was admitted by the front door this evening?

**Parker** That's what I say, sir.

**Davis** Then it seems almost certain that Mr. Ackroyd himself must have admitted this stranger. But I don't quite see-

*He cuts himself off and goes into a daydream for several seconds.*

**Davis** One thing's clear. Mr. Ackroyd was alive and well at nine-thirty. That is the last moment at which he is known to have been alive.

*Parker coughs apologetically.*

**Davis** Well?

**Parker** If you'll excuse me, sir. Miss Flora saw him after that.

**Davis** Miss Flora?

**Parker** Yes, sir. About a quarter to ten that would be. It was after that that she told me Mr. Ackroyd wasn't to be disturbed again tonight.

**Davis** Did he send her to you with that message?

**Parker** Not exactly, sir. I was bringing a tray with soda and whisky when Miss Flora, who was just coming out of this room, stopped me and said her uncle didn't want to be disturbed.

*The inspector looks at Parker with closer attention than before.*

**Davis** You'd already been told that Mr. Ackroyd didn't want to be disturbed, hadn't you?

**Parker** *(Stammering and hands shaking)* Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Quite so, sir.

**Davis** And yet you were proposing to do so?

**Parker** *(Shaking and twitching all over)* I'd forgotten, sir. At least I mean, I always bring the whisky and soda about that time, sir, and ask if there's anything more, and I thought-well, I was doing as usual without thinking.

**Davis** Hm, I must see Miss Ackroyd at once. For the moment we'll leave this room exactly as it is. I can return here after I've heard what Miss Ackroyd has to tell me. I shall just take the precaution of shutting and bolting the window.

*The inspector shuts and bolts the window. He leads them out of the room, glances up at the little staircase and looks at the constable.*

**Davis** Jones, you'd better stay here. Don't let anyone go into that room.

**Parker** If you'll excuse me, sir. If you were to lock the door into the main hall, nobody could gain access to this part. That staircase leads only to Mr. Ackroyd's bedroom and bathroom. There is no communication with

the other part of the house. There once was a door through, but Mr. Ackroyd had it blocked up. He liked to feel that his suite was entirely private.

*They move through into the large hall and the inspector locks the door behind him, slipping the key into his pocket. He whispers into Jones' ear.*

**Davis** We must get busy on those shoe tracks but, first of all, I must have a word with Miss Ackroyd. She was the last person to see her uncle alive. *(To Raymond)* Does Miss Ackroyd know yet?

*Raymond shakes his head.*

**Davis** Well, no need to tell her for another five minutes. She can answer my questions better without being upset by knowing the truth about her uncle. Tell her there's been a burglary and ask her if she would mind dressing and coming down to answer a few questions.

*Raymond goes upstairs.*

*Flora Ackroyd descends the staircase wrapped in a pale pink silk kimono. She is anxious and excited. The inspector steps forward.*

**Davis** Good evening, Miss Ackroyd. We're afraid there's been an attempt at robbery, and we want you to help us. What's this room—the billiard room? Come in here and sit down, will you?

*They enter the Billiard Room. Flora sits down on a wide divan which runs along the wall.*

**Flora Ackroyd** I don't quite understand. What has been stolen? What do you want me to tell you?

**Davis** It's just this, Miss Ackroyd. Parker here says you came out of your uncle's study at about a quarter to ten. Is that right?

**Flora Ackroyd** Quite right. I had been to say goodnight to him.

**Davis** And the time is correct?

**Flora Ackroyd** Well, it must have been about then. I can't say exactly. It might have been later.

**Davis** Was your uncle alone, or was there anyone with him?  
**Flora**  
**Ackroyd** He was alone. Dr. Sheppard had gone.  
**Davis** Did you happen to notice whether the window was open or shut?  
**Flora**  
**Ackroyd** I can't say. The curtains were drawn.  
**Davis** Exactly. And your uncle seemed quite as usual?  
**Flora**  
**Ackroyd** I think so.  
**Davis** Do you mind telling us exactly what passed between you?  
**Flora**  
**Ackroyd** *(Pause as she recollects)* I went in and said, 'Goodnight, Uncle, I'm going to bed now. I'm tired tonight'. He gave a sort of grunt, and-I went over and kissed him, and he said something about my looking nice in the frock I had on, and then he told me to run away as he was busy. So I went.  
**Davis** Did he ask specially not to be disturbed?  
**Flora**  
**Ackroyd** Oh! Yes, I forgot. He said, "Tell Parker I don't want anything more tonight, and that he's not to disturb me". I met Parker just outside the door and gave him Uncle's message.  
**Davis** Just so.  
**Flora**  
**Ackroyd** Won't you tell me what it is that has been stolen?  
**Davis** *(Hesitantly)* We're not quite certain.  
**Flora**  
**Ackroyd** *(Alarmed)* What is it? You're hiding something from me?

*Blunt moves between her and the inspector. Flora half stretches her hand, and he takes it in both of his hands.*

**Blunt** *(Quietly)* It's bad news, Flora. Bad news for all of us. Your Uncle Roger-  
**Flora**  
**Ackroyd** Yes?  
**Blunt** It will be a shock to you. Poor Roger's dead.

*Flora draws away from him in horror.*

**Flora**  
**Ackroyd** *(Whispers)* When? When?  
**Blunt** *(Gravely)* Very soon after you left him, I'm afraid.

*Flora raises her hand to her throat and gives a little cry. Sheppard hurries to catch her as she faints. Blunt and Sheppard begin to carry Flora to lie down as Sheppard speaks to the audience. Lights begin to shift.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* I asked Blunt to wake Mrs. Ackroyd and tell her what happened. Flora soon revived and I brought her mother to her, telling her what to do for the girl. As I hurried downstairs again, I met the inspector coming from the door which leads into the kitchen.

## CHAPTER 6

### The Tunisian Dagger

**Davis** How's the young lady, doctor?

**Sheppard** Coming round nicely. Her mother's with her.

**Davis** That's good. I've been questioning the servants. They all declare that no one has been to the back door tonight. Your description of that stranger was rather vague. Can't you give us something more definite to go upon?

**Sheppard** *(Regretfully)* I'm afraid not. It was a dark night, you see, and the fellow had his coat collar well pulled up and his hat squashed down over his eyes.

**Davis** Hm, looked as though he wanted to conceal his face. Sure it was no one you know?

**Sheppard** I don't think so. He had a rough, uneducated voice, I would say. Almost exaggerated.

**Davis** Disguising his voice?

**Sheppard** Yes, maybe.

**Davis** Do you mind coming into the study with me again, doctor? There are one or two things I want to ask you.

**Sheppard** *(Reluctantly)* Sure.

*They begin to walk into Ackroyd's study and the inspector locks the door behind them.*

**Davis** *(Grimly)* We don't want to be disturbed. And we don't want any eavesdropping either. What's all this about blackmail?

**Sheppard** *(Startled)* Blackmail!

**Davis** Is it an effort of Parker's imagination? Or is there something in it?

**Sheppard** If Parker heard anything about blackmail, he must have been listening outside this door with his ear glued against the keyhole.

**Davis** (*Nods*) Nothing more likely. You see, I've been instituting a few inquiries as to what Parker has been doing with himself this evening. To tell the truth, I didn't like his manner. The man knows something. When I began to question him, he got the wind up, and plumped out some garbled story of blackmail.

**Sheppard** I'm rather glad you've brought the matter up. I've been trying to decide whether to make a clean breast of things or not. I'd already practically decided to tell you everything, but I was going to wait for a favourable opportunity. You might as well have it now. (*To the audience*) And then and there I narrated the whole events of the evening as I have set them down here (*References his note pad. Davis sits at the desk chair*). The inspector listened keenly, occasionally interjecting a question.

*Pause.*

**Davis** Most extraordinary story I ever heard. And you say that letter has completely disappeared? It looks bad-it looks very bad indeed. It gives us what we've been looking for-a motive for the murder. You say that Mr. Ackroyd hinted at a suspicion he had that some member of his household was involved? Household's rather an elastic term.

**Sheppard** You don't think that Parker himself might be the man we're after?

**Davis** It looks very like it. He was obviously listening at the door when you came out. Then Miss Ackroyd came across him later bent on entering the study. Say he tried again when she was safely out of the way. He stabbed Ackroyd, locked the door on the inside, opened the window, and got out that way, and went round to a side door which he had previously left open. How's that?

**Sheppard** (*Slowly*) There's only one thing against it. If Ackroyd went on reading that letter as soon as I left, as he intended to do, I don't see him continuing to sit on here and turn things over in his mind for another hour. He'd have had Parker in at once, accused him then and there, and there would have been a fine old uproar. Remember, Ackroyd was a man of choleric temper.

**Davis** Mightn't have had time to go on with the letter just then. We know someone was with him at half past nine. If that visitor turned up as soon as you left, and after he went. Miss Ackroyd came in to say goodnight-well, he wouldn't be able to go on with the letter until close upon ten o'clock.

**Sheppard** And the telephone call?

**Davis** Parker sent that all right-perhaps before he thought of the locked door and open window. Then he changed his mind-or got it a panic-and decided to deny all knowledge of it. That was it, depend upon it.

**Sheppard** (*Doubtfully*) Yes.

**Davis** Anyway, we can find out the truth about the telephone call from the exchange. If it was put through from here, I don't see how anyone else but Parker could have sent it. Depend upon it, he is our man. But keep it dark-we don't want to alarm him just yet, till we've got all the evidence. I'll see to it he doesn't give us the slip. To all appearances we'll be concentrating on your mysterious stranger.

*The inspector rises from the chair belonging to the desk and crosses over to the still form in the armchair.*

The weapon ought to give us a clue. It's something quite unique-a curio, I should think, by the look of it.

*The inspector bends down, surveys the handle attentively, and gives a grunt of satisfaction. Then, very gingerly, he presses his hands down below the hilt and draws the blade out from the wound. It is a narrow, tapering blade with a hilt of elaborately intertwined metals of curious and careful workmanship. Still carrying it so as not to touch the handle, he places it in a wide china mug which adorns the mantelpiece.*

**Davis** Yes, quite a work of art. There can't be many of them about (*he touches the blade gingerly with his finger testing its sharpness*). Lord, what an edge. A child could drive that into a man-as easy as cutting butter. A dangerous sort of toy to have about.

**Sheppard** May I examine the body properly now?

**Davis** Go ahead.

*Sheppard performs a thorough examination of the body.*

**Davis** Well?

**Sheppard** I'll spare you the technical language. We'll keep that for the inquest. (*Confidently*) The blow was delivered by a right-handed man standing behind him and death must have been instantaneous. By the expression on the dead man's face, I should say that the blow was quite unexpected. He may have died without knowing who his assailant was.

**Davis** Butlers can creep about as soft-footed as cats. There's not going to be much mystery about this crime. Take a look at the hilt of that dagger.

*Sheppard looks closely at the hilt.*

**Davis** I dare say they're not apparent to you, but I can see them clearly enough. (*Lowering his voice*) Fingerprints.

**Sheppard** Yes, I have read detective stories.

*The inspector picks up the china mug.*

**Davis** Follow me into the billiard room, Sheppard. I want to see if Mr. Raymond can tell us anything about this dagger.

*The inspector locks the outer door behind them again. They enter the billiard room. Geoffrey Raymond is there, and the inspector holds up his exhibit.*

**Davis** Ever seen this before, Mr. Raymond?

**Raymond** Why-I believe-I'm almost sure that is a curio given to Mr. Ackroyd by Major Blunt. It comes from Morocco-no, Tunis. So the crime was committed with that? What an extraordinary thing. It seems almost impossible, and yet there could hardly be two daggers the same. May I fetch Major Blunt?

*Without waiting for an answer, he hurries off.*

**Davis** Nice young fellow that. Something honest and ingenuous about him.

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I had to agree. In the two years that Geoffrey Raymond has been secretary to Ackroyd, I have never seen him ruffled or out of temper. And he has been a most efficient secretary.

*Raymond returns with Blunt.*

**Raymond** (Excitedly) I was right! It is the Tunisian dagger.  
**Davis** (Objecting) Major Blunt hasn't looked at it yet.  
**Blunt** Saw it the moment I came into the study.  
**Davis** You recognized it, then?  
**Blunt** I did.  
**Davis** (Suspiciously) You said nothing about it.  
**Blunt** Wrong moment. A lot of harm done by blurting out things at the wrong time.

*The inspector grunts and brings the dagger over to Blunt.*

**Davis** You're quite sure about it, sir. You identify it positively?  
**Blunt** Absolutely. No doubt whatever.  
**Davis** Where was this-er-curio usually kept? Can you tell me that, sir?  
**Raymond** In the silver table in the drawing room.  
**Sheppard** What?  
**Davis** (Encouraged) Yes, doctor?  
**Sheppard** It's so trivial. Only that when I arrived last night for dinner I heard the lid of the silver table being shut down in the drawing room.  
**Davis** (With suspicion) How did you know it was the silver table lid?  
**Sheppard** (To the audience) I was forced to explain in detail a long, tedious explanation which I would infinitely rather not have had to make.  
**Davis** Was the dagger in its place when you were looking over the contents?  
**Sheppard** I don't know. I can't say I remember noticing it-but, of course, it may have been there all the time.  
**Davis** We'd better get hold of the housekeeper (*he pulls the bell*).

*Miss Russell enters a few moments later.*

**Davis** Miss Russell, I was wondering if you happened to notice whether this dagger was in the silver table in the drawing room last night?  
**Miss Russell**  
 I don't think I went near the silver table. I was looking to see that all the flowers were fresh. Oh, yes, I remember now. The silver table was open-which it had no business to be, and I shut the lid down as I passed.

**Davis** I see. Can you tell me if this dagger was in its place then?

*She looks at the weapon composedly.*

**Miss Russell**

I can't say I'm sure. I didn't stop to look. I knew the family would be down any minute, and I wanted to get away.

**Davis** Thank you.

*Miss Russell accepts the words as a dismissal and glides out of the room.*

**Davis** (*Looking after her leaving*) Rather a Tartar, I should fancy, eh? Let me see. The silver table is in front of one of the windows, I think you said, doctor?

*Raymond interrupts.*

**Raymond** Yes, the left-hand window.

**Davis** And the window was open?

**Raymond** They were both ajar.

**Davis** Well, I don't think we need to go into the question much further. Somebody-I'll just say somebody-could get that dagger any time he liked, and exactly when he got it doesn't matter in the least. I'll be coming up in the morning with the chief constable, Mr. Raymond. Until then, I'll keep the key to that door. I want Colonel Melrose to see everything exactly as it is. I happen to know that he's dining out the other side of the county, and, I believe, staying the night...

*The inspector takes up the jar.*

I shall have to pack this carefully. It's going to be an important piece of evidence in more ways than one.

*The inspector exits. We see inspector Davis inviting Parker's opinion of a small pocket diary. Raymond puts his hand on Sheppard's arm and chuckles.*

**Raymond** (*Murmuring*) A little obvious. So, Parker is the suspect, is he? Shall we oblige Inspector Davis with a set of our fingerprints also?

*Raymond takes two cards from the card tray, wipes them with*

*his silk handkerchief, and hands one to Sheppard and keeps one for himself. He then hands them both to the inspector.*

**Raymond** Souvenirs. Number 1 Dr. Sheppard. Number 2 my humble self. One from major Blunt will be forthcoming in the morning.

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* Youth is very buoyant. Even the brutal murder of his friend and employer could not dim Geoffrey Raymond's spirits for long. Perhaps that is as it should be. I do not know. I have lost the quality of resilience long since myself.

*Lights begin to shift.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* It was very late when I got back, and I hoped Caroline would have gone to bed. I might have known better.

*Caroline enters and serves Sheppard with hot cocoa.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* She extracted the whole history of the evening from me. I said nothing of the blackmailing business but contented myself with giving her the facts of the murder.

*Sheppard sips the hot cocoa.*

**Sheppard** The police suspect Parker. There seems a fairly clear case against him.

**Caroline** Parker! Fiddlesticks! That inspector must be a perfect fool. Parker indeed! Don't tell me.

*Caroline exits as Sheppard falls asleep in the chair. The lights shift to morning.*

## CHAPTER 7

### I Learn My Neighbour's Profession

*Once morning is established, Caroline enters again.*

**Caroline** *(Excited whisper)* Flora Ackroyd is here!

**Sheppard** *(Concealing surprise)* What?

**Caroline** She's very anxious to see you.

*They both exit into a small sitting room. Flora is sitting by the window. She is in black and sits nervously twisting her hands together.*

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Composed now*) Dr. Sheppard, I have come to ask you to help me?

**Caroline** Of course he'll help you, my dear.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Aware of Caroline's presence but doesn't want to waste time*) I want you to come to The Larches with me.

**Sheppard** (*Surprised*) The Larches?

**Caroline** To see that funny little man?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Yes. You know who he is, don't you?

**Sheppard** We fancied that he might be a retired hairdresser.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Surprised they don't know*) Why, he's Hercule Poirot!  
(*Beat*) You know who I mean-the private detective. They say he's done the most wonderful things-just like detectives do in books. A year ago he retired and came to live down here. Uncle knew who he was, but he promised not to tell anyone, because Poirot wanted to live quietly without being bothered by people.

**Sheppard** (*Slowly*) So that's who he is.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** You've heard of him, of course?

**Sheppard** I'm rather an old fogey, as Caroline tells me, but I have just heard of him.

**Caroline** Extraordinary!

**Sheppard** You want to go and see him? Now why?

**Caroline** (*Sharply*) To get him to investigate this murder, of course. Don't be so stupid, James.

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I was not really being stupid. Caroline does not always understand what I am driving at. (*To Caroline and Flora*) You haven't got confidence in Inspector Davis?

**Caroline** Of course she hasn't. I haven't either.

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) You would have thought it was Caroline's uncle who had been murdered. (*To Caroline and Flora*) And how do you know he would take up the case? Remember he has retired from active work.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Simply*) That's just it. I've got to persuade him.

**Sheppard** (*Gravely*) You are sure you are doing wisely?

**Caroline** Of course she is. I'll go with her myself if she likes.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Being direct*) I'd rather the doctor came with me, if you don't mind, Miss Sheppard. (*Tactfully*) You see, Dr. Sheppard being the doctor, and having found the body, he would be able to give all the details to Poirot.

**Caroline** (*Grudgingly*) Yes, I see that.

**Sheppard** (*Beat*) Flora, be guided by me. I advise you not to drag this detective into the case.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Springing to her feet*) I know why you say that but it's exactly for that reason I'm so anxious to go. You're afraid! But I'm not. I know Ralph better than you do.

**Caroline** Ralph! What has Ralph got to do with it?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Ralph may be weak. He may have done foolish things in the past-wicked things even-but he wouldn't murder anyone.

**Sheppard** No, no, I never thought of him.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Demanding*) Then why did you go to the Three Boars last night? On your way home-after Uncle's body was found?

**Sheppard** (*Stunned*) How did you know about that?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** I went there this morning. I heard from the servants that Ralph was staying there-

**Sheppard** (*Interrupting*) You had no idea that he was in King's Abbot?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** No, I was astounded. I couldn't understand it. I went there and asked for him. They told me, what I suppose they told you last night, that he went out at about nine o'clock yesterday evening-and-and never came back. (*A Beat. Defiantly*) Well, why shouldn't he? He might have gone-anywhere. He may even have gone back to London.

**Sheppard** (*Gently*) Leaving his luggage behind?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Stamping her foot*) I don't care. There must be a simple explanation.

**Sheppard** And that's why you want to go to Hercule Poirot? Isn't it better to leave things as they are? The police

don't suspect Ralph in the least, remember. They're working on quite another tack.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** But that's just it. They do suspect him. A man from Cranchester turned up this morning—Inspector Raglan, a horrid, weaselly little man. I found he had been to the Three Boars this morning before me. They told me all about his having been there, and the questions he had asked. He must think Ralph did it.

**Sheppard** That's a change of mind from last night, if so. He doesn't believe in Davis's theory that it was Parker then?

**Caroline** (*Snorting*) Parker indeed.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Dr. Sheppard, let us go at once to this Mr. Poirot. He will find out the truth.

**Sheppard** My dear Flora, are you quite sure it is the truth we want?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Nodding her head*) You're not sure. I am. I know Ralph better than you do.

**Caroline** Of course he didn't do it. Ralph may be extravagant, but he's a dear boy, and has the nicest manners.

*Lights begin to shift as Sheppard speaks.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I wanted to tell Caroline that large numbers of murderers have had nice manners, but the presence of Flora restrained me. The girl was determined so I was forced to give in.

*Poirot enters.*

**Poirot** Monsieur le docteur. (*Bows to Flora*) Mademoiselle.

**Sheppard** Perhaps you have heard of the tragedy which occurred last night.

**Poirot** (*Gravely*) But certainly I have heard. It is horrible. I offer mademoiselle all my sympathy. In what way can I serve you?

**Sheppard** Miss Ackroyd wants you to-to-

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** To find the murderer.

**Poirot** I see. But the police will do that, will they not?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** They might make a mistake. They are on their way to make a mistake now, I think. Please, Mr. Poirot, won't you help us? If-if it is a question of money-

*Poirot cuts her off by raising his hand.*

**Poirot** Not that, I beg you, mademoiselle. Not that I do not care for money. Money, it means much to me and always has done. No, if I go into this, you must understand one thing clearly. I shall go through with it to the end. The good dog, he does not leave the scent, remember. You may wish that, after all, you had left it to the local police.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** I want the truth.

**Poirot** All the truth?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** All the truth.

**Poirot** Then I accept. And I hope you will not regret those words. Now, tell me all the circumstances.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Dr. Sheppard had better tell you. He knows more than I do.

*Poirot goes to sit down as Sheppard speaks.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* I plunged into a careful narrative, embodying all the facts I have previously set down. I brought my story to a close with the departure of the inspector and myself from Fernly Park the previous night.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** And now, tell him all about Ralph.

*Sheppard hesitating.*

**Poirot** You went to this inn-this Three Boars-last night on your way home? Now exactly why was that?

**Sheppard** *(Carefully)* I thought someone ought to inform the young man of his uncle's death. It occurred to me after I had left Fernly that possibly no one but myself and Mr. Ackroyd were aware that he was staying in the village.

**Poirot** *(Nodding)* Quite so. That was your only motive in going there, eh?

**Sheppard** *(Stiffly)* That was my only motive.

**Poirot** It was not to-shall we say-reassure yourself about ce jeune homme?

**Sheppard** Reassure myself?

**Poirot** I think, Monsieur le docteur, that you know very well what I mean, though you pretend not to do so. I suggest that it would have been a relief to you if you had found that Captain Paton had been at home all the evening.

**Sheppard** (*Sharply*) Not at all.

**Poirot** (*Shakes his head*) You have not the trust in me of Miss Flora. But no matter. What we have to look at is this—Captain Paton is missing, under circumstances which call for an explanation. I will not hide from you that the matter looks grave. Still, it may admit of a perfectly simple explanation.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Eagerly*) That's just what I keep saying.

**Poirot** I suggest we take an immediate visit to the local police. Flora, you return home and Sheppard you accompany me there and introduce me to the officer in charge of the case.

*Flora and Sheppard nod as the lights begin to shift. Davis, The Colonel Melrose, and Raglan enter as Sheppard speaks.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) We found inspector Davis outside the police station looking very glum indeed. With him was Colonel Melrose, the Chief Constable, and another man whom, from Flora's description of "weaselly", I had no difficulty in recognizing as Inspector Raglan from Cranchester. (*To Poirot and Melrose*) Monsieur Poirot, may I introduce Colonel Melrose. (*To the audience*) I explained the situation as best I could.

**Raglan** The case is going to be plain as a pikestaff. Not the least need for amateurs to come butting in. (*A vengeful glance at Davis*) You'd think any fool would have seen the way things were last night, and then we shouldn't have lost twelve hours.

**Melrose** Mr. Ackroyd's family must, of course, do what they see fit. But we cannot have the official investigation hampered in any way. (*Courteously*) I know Mr. Poirot's great reputation, of course.

**Poirot** It is true that I have retired from the world. I never intended to take up a case again. Above all things, I have a horror of publicity. I must beg, that in the case of my being able to contribute something to the solution of the mystery, my name may not be mentioned.

*Raglan's face lightens a little.*

**Melrose** I've heard of some very remarkable successes of yours.  
**Poirot** I have had much experience, but most of my successes have been obtained by the aide of the police. I admire enormously your English police. If Inspector Raglan permits me to assist him, I shall be both honoured and flattered.

*Colonel Melrose draws Sheppard aside.*

**Melrose** From what I hear, this Poirot has done some really remarkable things. We're naturally anxious not to have to call in Scotland Yard. Raglan seems very sure of himself, but I'm not quite certain that I agree with him. You see, I-er-know the parties concerned better than he does. This fellow doesn't seem out after kudos, does he? Would work in with us unobtrusively, eh?

**Sheppard** (Solemnly) To the greater glory of Inspector Raglan.  
**Melrose** (In a louder voice) Well, well, we must put you wise to the latest developments, Monsieur Poirot.

**Poirot** I thank you. My friend, Doctor Sheppard, said something of the butler being suspected?

**Raglan** (Instantly) That's all bunkum. These high-class servants get in such a funk that they act suspiciously for nothing at all.

**Sheppard** (Hinting) The fingerprints?

**Raglan** Nothing like Parker's. (With a faint smile) And yours and Mr. Raymond's don't fit either, doctor.

**Poirot** (Quietly) What about those of Captain Ralph Paton?

*A look of respect creeps into the inspector's eye.*

**Davis** I see you don't let the grass grow under your feet, Mr. Poirot. It will be a pleasure to work with you, I'm sure. We're going to take that young gentleman's fingerprints as soon as we can lay hands upon him.

**Melrose** (Warmly) I can't help thinking you're mistaken, Inspector. I've known Ralph Paton from a boy upward. He'd never stoop to murder.

**Davis** Maybe not.

**Sheppard** What have you got against him?

**Davis** Went out just on nine o'clock last night. Was seen in the neighbourhood of Fernly Park somewhere about nine-thirty. Not been seen since. Believed to be in serious money difficulties. I've got a pair of his shoes here—shoes with rubber studs in them. He had two pairs, almost exactly alike. I'm going up now to compare them

with those footmarks. The constable is up there seeing that no one tampers with them.

**Melrose** We'll go at once. You and Mr. Poirot will accompany us, will you not?

*As Sheppard speaks the scene changes. Lights shift.  
Parker enters the scene.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* We assented, and all drove up in the colonel's car. The inspector was anxious to get at once to the footmarks and asked to be put down at the lodge. About halfway up the drive, on the right, a path branched off which led round to the terrace and the window of Ackroyd's study.

**Melrose** Would you like to go with the inspector, Mr. Poirot? Or would you prefer to examine the study?

**Poirot** I would prefer to examine the study.

*Parker opens the outer door for them. Colonel Melrose takes a key from his pocket and unlocks the door which leads into the study.*

**Melrose** Except for the removal of the body, Monsieur Poirot, this room is exactly as it was last night.

*Door, small table, grandfather chair, chair in which Ackroyd was found, fireplace, desk and chair, chair in which Sheppard sat.*

**Poirot** And the body was found—where?

**Sheppard** This armchair in front of the fire.

*Poirot walks over and sits down in the armchair.*

**Poirot** The blue letter you speak of, where was it when you left the room?

**Sheppard** Mr. Ackroyd had laid it down on this little table at his right hand.

**Poirot** *(He nods)* Except for that, everything was in its place?

**Sheppard** Yes, I think so.

**Poirot** Colonel Melrose, would you be so extremely obliging as to sit down in this chair a minute. I thank you. Now Monsieur le docteur, will you kindly indicate to me the exact position of the dagger? *(Sheppard does)* The hilt of the dagger was plainly visible from the door then. Both you and Parker could see it at once?

**Sheppard** Yes.

*Poirot walks over to the window.*

**Poirot** The electric light was on, of course, when you discovered the body?

*Sheppard joins Poirot where he is studying the marks on the windowsill.*

**Poirot** (*Quietly*) The rubber studs are the same pattern as those in Captain Paton's shoes.

*Poirot walks to the middle of the room searching everything in the room.*

**Poirot** Are you a man of good observation, Doctor Sheppard?

**Sheppard** (*Surprised*) I think so.

**Poirot** There was a fire in the grate, I see. When you broke the door down and found Mr. Ackroyd dead, how was the fire? Was it low?

**Sheppard** (*A vexed laugh*) I-I really can't say. I didn't notice. Perhaps Mr. Raymond or Major Blunt-

**Poirot** (*Shakes his head*) One must always proceed with method. I made an error of judgement in asking you that question. To each man his own knowledge. You could tell me the details of the patient's appearance- nothing there would escape you. If I wanted information about the papers on that desk, Mr. Raymond would have noticed anything there was to see. To find out about the fire, I must ask the man whose business it is to observe such things.

*He moves swiftly to the fireplace and rings the bell. After a moment, Parker appears.*

**Parker** You ring, sir.

**Melrose** Come in, Parker. This gentleman wants to ask you something.

**Poirot** Parker. When you broke down the door with Dr. Sheppard last night, and found your master dead, what was the state of the fire?

**Parker** (*Immediately*) It had burned very low, sir. It was almost out.

**Poirot** (*Triumphantly*) Ah! Look round you, my good parker. Is this room exactly as it was then?

*Parker looks around and stops on the windows.*

**Parker** The curtains were drawn, sir, and the electric light was on.

**Poirot** (*Nodding in approval*) Anything else?

**Parker** Yes, sir, this grandfather chair left to the door and between the window was drawn out a little more.

**Poirot** Just show me.

*Parker draws the chair in question out a good two feet from the wall, turning it so that the seat faces the door.*

**Poirot** Voila ce qui est curieux! No one would want to sit in a chair in such a position, I fancy. Now who pushed it back into place again, I wonder? Did you, my friend?

**Parker** No, sir. I was too upset with seeing the master and all.

*Poirot looks at Sheppard.*

**Poirot** Did you, doctor?

*Sheppard shakes his head.*

**Parker** It was back in position when I arrived with the police, sir. I'm sure of that.

**Poirot** Curious.

**Sheppard** Raymond or Blunt must have pushed it back. Surely it isn't important?

**Poirot** It is completely unimportant. (*Softly*) That is why it is so interesting.

**Melrose** Excuse me a minute.

*Melrose leaves the room with Parker.*

**Sheppard** Do you think Parker is speaking the truth?

**Poirot** About the chair, yes. Otherwise, I do not know. You will find Monsieur le docteur, if you have much to do with cases of this kind, that they all resemble each other in one thing.

**Sheppard** What is that?

**Poirot** Everyone concerned in them has something to hide.

**Sheppard** (*Smiling*) Have I?

**Poirot** (*Attentively and quietly*) I think you have.

**Sheppard** But-

**Poirot** Have you told me everything known to you about this young man Paton? (*Beat*) Oh, do not fear! I will not press you. I shall learn it in good time.

**Sheppard** (*Hastily*) I wish you'd tell me something of your methods. The point about the fire, for instance?

**Poirot** Oh! That was very simple. You leave Mr. Ackroyd at-ten minutes to nine, was it not?

**Sheppard** Yes, exactly, I should say.

**Poirot** The window is then closed and bolted, and the door unlocked. At a quarter past ten when the body is discovered, the door is locked, and the window is open. Who opened it? Clearly only Mr. Ackroyd himself could have done so, and for one of two reasons. Either because the room became unbearably hot, but since the fire was nearly out and there was a sharp drop in temperature last night, that cannot be the reason, or because he admitted someone that way. And if he admitted someone that way, it must have been someone well known to him, since he had previously shown himself uneasy on the subject of that same window.

**Sheppard** It sounds very simple.

**Poirot** Everything is simple if you arrange the facts methodically. We are concerned now with the personality of the person who was with him at nine-thirty last night. Everything goes to show that that was the individual admitted by the window, and though Mr. Ackroyd was seen alive later by Miss Flora, we cannot approach a solution of the mystery until we know who that visitor was. The window may have been left open after his departure and so afforded entrance to the murderer, or the same person may have returned a second time.

*Colonel Melrose enters in an animated manner.*

**Poirot** Ah! Here is the colonel who returns.

**Melrose** That telephone call has been traced at last. It did not come from here. It was put through to Dr. Sheppard at 10:15 last night from a public call office at King's Abbot station. And at 10:23 the night mail leaves for Liverpool.

*Poirot and Sheppard look at each other.*

## CHAPTER 8

## Inspector Raglan is Confident

**Sheppard** You'll have inquiries made at the station, of course?  
**Melrose** Naturally, but I'm not over sanguine as to the result. You know what that station is like.  
**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* I did. King's Abbot is a mere village, but its station happens to be an important junction. It has two or three public telephone boxes. At that time of night, three local trains come in close upon each other to catch the connection with the express which comes in at 10:19 and leaves at 10:23. The chance of catching that one person on the phone or seeing them get into the express are very small indeed.  
**Melrose** But why telephone at all? That is what I find so extraordinary. There seems no rhyme or reason in the thing.  
**Poirot** Be sure there was a reason.  
**Melrose** But what reason could it be?  
**Poirot** When we know that, we shall know everything. This case is very curious and very interesting.

*Poirot moves to the window, stands there, and looks out.*

**Poirot** You say it was nine o'clock Dr. Sheppard, when you met this stranger outside the gate?  
**Sheppard** Yes. I heard the church clock chime the hour.  
**Poirot** How long would it take him to reach the house—to reach this window, for instance?  
**Sheppard** Five minutes at the outside. Two or three minutes only if he took the path at the right of the drive and came straight here.  
**Poirot** But to do that he would have to know the way. How can I explain myself?—it would mean that he had been here before—that he knew his surroundings.  
**Melrose** That is true.  
**Poirot** We could find out, doubtless, if Mr. Ackroyd had received any strangers during the past week?  
**Sheppard** Young Raymond could tell us that.  
**Melrose** Or Parker.  
**Poirot** *(Smiling)* Ou tous les deux.

*Melrose exits to search for Raymond. Sheppard rings the bell once for Parker. After a few moments, Melrose returns with Geoffrey Raymond. Raymond*

*is delighted to meet Poirot. As Raymond speaks, Poirot draws out the armchair until it stands in the position Parker had indicated.*

**Raymond** No idea you'd been living among us incognito, Mister Poirot. It will be a great privilege to watch you at work-Hallo, what's this? (*Poirot has armchair in place*) (*With humour*) Want me to sit in the chair whilst you take a blood test? What's the idea?

**Poirot** Monsieur Raymond, this chair was pulled out-so-last night when Mr. Ackroyd was found killed. Someone moved it back again into place. Did you do so?

**Raymond** (*Without hesitation*) No, indeed I didn't. I don't even remember that it was in that position, but it must have been if you say so. Anyway, somebody else must have moved it back to its proper place. Have they destroyed a clue in doing so? Too bad!

**Poirot** It is of no consequence. Of no consequence whatever. What I really want to ask you is this, Monsieur Raymond: did any stranger come to see Mr. Ackroyd during this past week?

*Raymond pauses. After several beats, Parker appears at the door.*

**Raymond** No. I can't remember anyone visiting. Can you, Parker?

**Parker** I beg your pardon, sir.

**Raymond** Any stranger come to see Mr. Ackroyd this past week?

**Parker** (*Beat*) There was the young man who came on Wednesday, sir. From Curtis and Troute, I understand he was.

**Raymond** (*Shrugs this off with his hand*) Oh, yes, I remember, but that is not the kind of stranger this gentleman means. (*Turns to Poirot*) Mr. Ackroyd had some idea of purchasing a Dictaphone. It would have enabled us to get through a lot more work in a limited time. The firm in question sent down their representative, but nothing came of it. Mr. Ackroyd did not make up his mind to purchase.

**Poirot** (*Turns to Parker*) Can you describe this young man to me, my good Parker?

**Parker** He was fair-haired, sir, and short. Very neatly dressed in a blue serge suit. A very presentable young man, sir, for his station in life.

**Poirot** (*To Sheppard*) The man you met outside the gate, doctor, was tall, was he not?

**Sheppard** Yes. Somewhere about six feet, I should say.

**Poirot** There is nothing in that, then. I thank you, Parker.

**Parker** (To Raymond) Mr. Hammond has just arrived, sir. He is anxious to know if he can be of any service, and he would be glad to have a word with you.

**Raymond** I'll come at once.

*Raymond hurries out and Poirot looks inquiringly at Melrose.*

**Melrose** The family solicitor, Monsieur Poirot.

**Poirot** It is a busy time for this young Mr. Raymond. He has the air efficient, that one.

**Melrose** I believe Mr. Ackroyd considered him a most able secretary.

**Poirot** He has been here-how long?

**Melrose** Just on two years, I fancy.

**Poirot** His duties he fulfils punctiliously. Of that I am sure. In what manner does he amuse himself? Does he go in for le sport?

**Melrose** (Smiling) Private secretaries haven't much time for that sort of thing. Raymond plays golf, I believe. And tennis in the summertime.

**Poirot** He does not attend the courses-I should say the running of the horses?

**Melrose** Race meetings? No, I don't think he's interested in racing.

*Poirot nods and glances slowly around the study.*

**Poirot** I have seen, I think, all that there is to be seen here.

*Sheppard looks around too.*

**Sheppard** (Murmurs) If those walls could speak.

**Poirot** (Shakes his head) A tongue is not enough. They would have to have also eyes and ears. But do not be too sure that these dead things (He touches the top of a round table with books and magazines upon it. His fingers linger there on an empty spot on the table for several seconds) are always dumb. To me they speak sometimes-chairs, tables-they have their message.

**Sheppard** What message? What have they said to you today?

**Poirot** An opened window. A locked door. A chair that apparently moved itself. To all three I say 'Why?' and I find no answer.

*Pause. Melrose and Sheppard have a moment of whether Poirot is even a good detective or not. Unsure. Poirot shakes his*

*head and puffs out his chest.*

**Melrose** Anything more you want to see, Monsieur Poirot?

**Poirot** You would perhaps be so kind as to show me the silver table from which the weapon was taken? After that, I will trespass on your kindness no longer.

*They exit to the drawing room. The constable interrupts the colonel. They have a muffled conversation and the colonel excuses himself and exits. Sheppard shows Poirot the silver table and lifts the lid letting it fall. He does it again. Poirot pushes open the window and steps out on the terrace. Sheppard follows him. Inspector Raglan enters.*

**Raglan** So there you are, Monsieur Poirot. Well, this isn't going to be much of a case. I'm sorry, too. A nice enough young fellow gone wrong.

**Poirot** *(Mildly)* I'm afraid I shall not be able to be of much aid to you, then?

**Raglan** *(Soothingly)* Next time, perhaps. Though we don't have murders every day in this quiet little corner of the world.

**Poirot** *(With and admiring quality)* You have been of a marvellous promptness. How exactly did you go to work, if I may ask?

**Raglan** Certainly. To begin with-method. That's what I always say-method!

**Poirot** Ah! That, too, is my watchword. Method, order, and the little grey cells.

**Raglan** The cells?

**Poirot** The little grey cells of the brain.

**Raglan** Oh, of course; well, we all use them, I suppose. First of all, method. Mr. Ackroyd was last seen alive at a quarter to ten by his niece. Miss Flora Ackroyd. That's fact number one, isn't it?

**Poirot** If you say so.

**Raglan** Well, it is. At half past ten, the doctor here says that Mr. Ackroyd had been dead at least half an hour. You stick to that, doctor?

**Sheppard** Certainly. Half an hour or longer.

**Raglan** Very good. That gives us exactly a quarter of an hour in which the crime must have been committed. I make a list of everyone in the house, and work through it, setting down opposite their names where they were and what they were doing between the hour of 9:45 and 10 p.m.

*Raglan hands a piece of paper to Poirot. Sheppard reads it over Poirot's shoulder. Poirot reads the following out loud:*

**Poirot** (Reading) Major Blunt in Billiard room with Mr. Raymond. Raymond confirms.

Mr. Raymond Billiard room. See above.

Mrs. Ackroyd 9:45 watching billiard match. Went up to bed 9:55. Raymond and Blunt watched her up the staircase.

Miss Ackroyd went straight from her uncle's room upstairs. This was confirmed by Parker and the housemaid, Elsie Dale.

Servants: Parker went straight to butler's pantry. This was confirmed by the housekeeper, Miss Russell, who came down to speak to him about something at 9:47, and remained at least ten minutes.

Miss Russell as above.

Spoke to housemaid, Elsie Dale, upstairs at 9:45.

Ursula Bourne, the parlourmaid, was in her own room until 9:55. Then in Servants' Hall.

Mrs. Cooper, the Cook, in Servants' Hall.

Gladys Jones, the second housemaid, in Servants' Hall.

Elsie Dale Upstairs in bedroom. She was seen there by Miss Russell and Miss Flora Ackroyd.

Mary Thrupp, the kitchenmaid, in Servants' Hall.

The cook has been here seven years, the parlourmaid eighteen months, and Parker just over a year. The others are new. Except for something fishy about Parker, they all seem quite all right.

A very complete list (*Poirot hands the list back to Raglan*). (*Gravelly*) I am quite sure that Parker did not do the murder.

**Sheppard** So is my sister. And she's usually right.

**Raglan** (*Ignoring him*) That disposes pretty effectually of the household. Now we come to a very grave point. The woman at the lodge—Mary Black—was pulling the curtains last night when she saw Ralph Paton turn in at the gate and go up towards the house.

**Sheppard** (*Sharply*) She is sure of that?

**Raglan** Quite sure. She knows him well by sight. He went past very quickly and turned off by the path to the right, which is a short cut to the terrace here.

**Poirot** And what time was that?

**Raglan** Exactly twenty-five minutes past nine.

*Silence.*

**Raglan** It's all clear enough. It fits in without a flaw. At twenty-five minutes past nine. Captain Paton is seen passing the lodge; at nine-thirty or thereabouts, Mr. Geoffrey Raymond hears someone in here asking for money and Mr. Ackroyd refusing. What happens next? Captain Paton leaves the same way—through the window. He walks along the terrace, angry and baffled. He comes to the open drawing room window. Say it's now a quarter to ten. Miss Flora Ackroyd is saying goodnight to her uncle. Major Blunt, Mr. Raymond, and Mrs. Ackroyd are in the billiard room. The drawing room is empty. Paton steals in, takes the dagger from the silver table, and returns to the study window. He slips off his shoes, climbs in, and—well, I don't need to go into details. Then he slips out again and goes off. Hadn't the nerve to go back to the inn. He makes for the station, rings up from there—

**Poirot** (*Softly interrupting*) Why?

*Poirot leans forward to listen. Raglan taken aback.*

**Raglan** It's difficult to say exactly why he did that. But murderers do funny things. You'd know that if you were in the police force. The cleverest of them make stupid mistakes sometimes. But come along and I'll show you those footprints.

*They follow him round the corner of The Terrace to the study window. Raglan produces the shoes which had been obtained from the local inn. Raglan lays them over the footprints.*

**Raglan**     *(Confidently)* See? They're the same. That is to say, they're not the same pair that actually made these prints. He went away in those. This is a pair just like them, but older-see how the studs are worn down?

**Poirot**     Surely a great many people wear shoes with rubber studs in them?

**Raglan**     That's so, of course. I shouldn't put so much stress on the footprints if it wasn't for everything else.

**Poirot**     *(Thoughtfully)* A very foolish young man, Captain Ralph Paton. To leave so much evidence of his presence.

**Raglan**     Ah, well, it was a dry, fine night, you know. He left no prints on the terrace or on the gravelled path. But, unluckily for him, a spring must have welled up just lately at the end of the path from the drive. See here.

*Poirot follows the small, gravelled Path that joins the terrace.*

**Poirot**     The ground is wet and boggy, indeed. Yes, I see more footsteps, and amongst them, the shoes with rubber studs. *(Suddenly)* You noticed the women's footprints?

**Raglan**     *(Laughs)* Naturally. But several different women have walked this way-and men as well. It's a regular short cut to the house, you see. It would be impossible to sort out all the footsteps. After all, it's the ones on the windowsill that are really important.

*Poirot nods.*

**Raglan**     It's no good going farther. It's all gravelled again here, and hard as it can be.

*Poirot nods again. Raglan exits towards the house. Poirot's eyes catch a small garden house up the path ahead.*

**Poirot**     You must have indeed been sent from the good God to replace my friend Hastings. I observe that you do not quit my side. How say you, Doctor Sheppard, shall we investigate that summerhouse? It interests me.

*Poirot walks toward the Summerhouse and opens the door. Inside, the place is very dark. There are one or two rustic seats, a croquet set, and some folded deck chairs. Poirot drops to his hands and knees crawling about the floor. Occasionally, he shakes his head as though not satisfied.*

**Poirot**       *(Sitting back on his heels)* Nothing. Well, perhaps it was not to be expected. But it would have meant so much-

*He cuts himself off seeing something on the side of one of the rustic chairs. He reaches out his hand and detaches it.*

**Sheppard**    What is it? What have you found?

*Poirot smiles and opens his hand to reveal a scrap of stiff white cambric. Sheppard takes it from him and looks at it curiously. He hands it back to Poirot.*

**Poirot**       *(Eyeing him keenly)* What do you make of it, eh, my friend?

**Sheppard**    *(Shrugs)* A scrap torn from a handkerchief.

*Poirot picks up a small goose quill close by.*

**Poirot**       *(Triumphantly)* And that? What do you make of that?

*Sheppard stares at the goose quill. Poirot slips the quill into his pocket and looks at the scrap of white cambric again.*

**Poirot**       *(Musing)* A fragment of a handkerchief? Perhaps you are right. But remember this—a good laundry does not starch a handkerchief.

*Poirot nods triumphantly and puts away the scrap carefully in his pocketbook. Lights shift.*

## CHAPTER 9

### The Goldfish Pond

*Poirot and Sheppard walk back to the house together. Poirot pauses on the Terrace and stands with his back to the house, slowly turning his head from side to side.*

**Poirot**       *(Appreciatively)* Une belle propriete. Who inherits it?

**Sheppard**    *(taken aback)* Inheritance?

**Poirot**       It is a new idea to you, that. You had not thought of it before-eh?

**Sheppard**    *(Truthfully)* No. I wish I had.

**Poirot**       *(Looking at him curiously)* I wonder just what you mean by that. *(Sheppard goes to speak but is cut off)* Oh, no! Inutile! You would not tell me your real thought.

**Sheppard** (*Smiling*) Everyone has something to hide.

**Poirot** Exactly.

**Sheppard** You still believe that?

**Poirot** More than ever, my friend. But it is not easy to hide things from Hercule Poirot. He has a knack of finding out. Let us walk a little. The air is pleasant today.

*They walk through the Garden and come to a seat by a Pond of goldfish. The view is stunning. Poirot looks over the pond to the countryside.*

**Poirot** England is very beautiful. (*Smiling and in a lowered voice*) And so are English girls. Hush, my friend, and look at the pretty picture below us.

*Flora is walking along the path Poirot and Sheppard just came from. She crosses to the Other Side of the goldfish Pond. She is wearing a black dress and hums a little snatch of a song. Her step is more dancing than walking and she does a sudden pirouette on her toes expressing joy and laughter. As she finishes the pirouette, Hector Blunt steps out from the trees. She is startled and her expression changes.*

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** How you startled me-I didn't see you.

*Blunt says nothing but stands there staring at her. Silence.*

*(A touch of malice)* What I like about you is your cheery conversation.

**Blunt** (*With a sort of humility*) Never was much of a fellow for talking. Not even when I was young.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** That was a very long time ago, I suppose (*Laughs*)

**Blunt** Yes, it was.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** How does it feel to be Methuselah? (*Laugh is more apparent*)

**Blunt** Remember the johnny who sold his soul to the devil? In return for being made young again? There's an opera about it.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Faust, you mean?

**Blunt** That's the beggar. Rum Story. Some of us would do it if we could.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Half vexed and half amused*) Anyone would think you were creaking at the joints to hear you talk.

*Blunt says nothing and looks out into the landscape (the audience).*

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Are you going on another expedition in Africa—shooting things?

**Blunt** Expect so. Usually do, you know—shoot things, I mean.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** You shot that head in the hall, didn't you?

**Blunt** (*Nodding*) Care for some decent skins any time? If so, I could get 'em for you.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Oh, please do. Will you really? You won't forget?

**Blunt** I shan't forget. Time I went. I'm no good in this sort of life. Haven't got the manners for it. I'm a rough fellow, no use in society. Never remember the things one's expected to say. Yes, time I went.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** But you're not going at once. No—not while we're in all this trouble. Oh, please! If you go— (*she turns away a little*)

**Blunt** You want me to stay?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** We all—

**Blunt** (*Deliberately, simply, and direct*) I meant you personally.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Turns back and looks him in the eyes*) I want you to stay. If—if that makes any difference.

**Blunt** It makes all the difference.

*Silence. They both sit down on a stone by the goldfish pond.*

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** It-it's such a lovely morning. You know, I can't help feeling happy, in spite—in spite of everything. That's awful, I suppose?

**Blunt** Quite natural. Never saw your uncle until two years ago, did you? Can't be expected to grieve very much. Much better to have no humbug about it.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** There's something awfully consoling about you. You make things seem so simple.

**Blunt** Things are simple as a rule.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Not always.

**Blunt** (*Abruptly*) I say, you know, you mustn't worry. About that young chap, I mean. Inspector's an ass. Everybody knows-utterly absurd to think he could have done it. Man from outside. Burglar chap. That's the only possible solution.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Turning to him*) You really think so?

**Blunt** Don't you?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** I-oh, yes, of course.

*Silence.*

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** I'm-I'll tell you why I felt so happy this morning. However heartless you think me. I'd rather tell you. It's because the lawyer has been-Mr. Hammond. He told us about the will. Uncle Roger has left me twenty thousand pounds. Think of it-twenty thousand beautiful pounds.

**Blunt** (*Surprised*) Does it mean so much to you?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Mean much to me? Why, it's everything. Freedom-life-no more scheming and scraping and lying-

**Blunt** Lying?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Taken aback and uncertain*) You know what I mean. Pretending to be thankful for all the nasty cast-off things rich relations give you. Last year's coat and skirts and hats.

**Blunt** Don't know much about ladies' clothes; should have said you were always very well turned out.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*In a low voice*) It cost me something, though. Don't let's talk of horrid things. I'm so happy. I'm free. Free to do what I like. Free not to- (*She stops suddenly*)

**Blunt** (*Quickly*) Not to what?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** I forget now. Nothing important.

*Blunt picks up a stick and thrusts it into the pond, poking at something.*

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** What are you doing, Major Blunt?

**Blunt** There's something bright down there. Wondered what it was-looks like a gold brooch. Now I've stirred up the mud and it's gone.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Perhaps it's a crown. "Like the one Melisande saw in the water."

**Blunt** *(Reflectively)* "Melisande"-she's in an opera, isn't she?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** Yes, you seem to know a lot about operas.

**Blunt** *(Sadly)* People take me sometimes. Funny idea of pleasure-worse racket than the natives make with their tom-toms.

*Flora laughs.*

I remember Melisande. Married an old chap old enough to be her father.

*(With a change of manner, he turns to Flora)* Miss Ackroyd, can I do anything? About Paton, I mean. I know how dreadfully anxious you must be.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** *(In a cold voice)* Thank you. There is really nothing to be done. Ralph will be all right. I've got hold of the most wonderful detective in the world, and he's going to find out all about it.

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* For some time I had felt uneasy as to our position. We were not exactly eavesdropping, since the two in the garden below had only to lift their heads to see us. Nevertheless, I should have drawn attention to our presence before now, had not my companion put a warning pressure on my arm. Clearly, he wished me to remain silent.

*Poirot quickly rises to his feet and clears his throat.*

**Poirot** *(With volume to Flora)* I demand pardon. I cannot allow mademoiselle thus extravagantly to compliment me, and not draw attention to my presence. To spare my blushes, I must join you and apologize.

*Poirot hurries down the path towards Flora and Blunt*

*while Sheppard follows close behind him.*

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** This is Monsieur Hercule Poirot. I expect you've heard of him.

*Poirot bows.*

**Poirot** (*Politely*) I know Major Blunt by reputation. I am glad to have encountered you, monsieur. I am in need of some information that you can give me. When did you last see Monsieur Ackroyd alive?

**Blunt** (*Inquiringly*) At dinner.

**Poirot** And you neither saw nor heard anything of him after that?

**Blunt** Didn't see him. Heard his voice.

**Poirot** How was that?

**Blunt** I strolled out on the terrace-

**Poirot** Pardon me, what time was that?

**Blunt** About half past nine. I was walking up and down smoking in front of the drawing room window. I heard Ackroyd talking in his study-

**Poirot** Surely you couldn't hear voices in the study from that part of the terrace.

*Sheppard notices Blunt flush.*

**Blunt** (*Unwillingly*) Went as far as the corner.

**Poirot** Ah! Indeed?

**Blunt** Thought I saw-a woman disappearing into the bushes. Just a gleam of white, you know. Must have been mistaken. It was while I was standing at the corner of the terrace that I heard Ackroyd's voice speaking to that secretary of his.

**Poirot** Speaking to Mr. Geoffrey Raymond?

**Blunt** Yes-that's what I supposed at the time. Seems I was wrong.

**Poirot** Mr. Ackroyd didn't address him by name?

**Blunt** Oh, no.

**Poirot** Then, if I may ask, why did you think-?

**Blunt** Took it for granted that it would be Raymond, because he had said just before I came out that he was taking some papers to Ackroyd. Never thought of it being anybody else.

**Poirot** Can you remember what the words you heard were?

**Blunt** Afraid I can't. Something quite ordinary and unimportant. Only caught a scrap of it. I was thinking of something else at the time.

**Poirot** It is of no importance. Did you move a chair back against the wall when you went into the study after the body was discovered?

**Blunt** Chair? No, why should I?

*Poirot shrugs his shoulders and turns to Flora.*

**Poirot** There is one thing I should like to know from you, mademoiselle. When you were examining the things in the silver table with Dr. Sheppard, was the dagger in its place, or was it not?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Resentfully*) Inspector Raglan has been asking me that. I've told him, and I'll tell you. I'm perfectly certain the dagger was not there. He thinks it was, and that Ralph sneaked it later in the evening. And—and he doesn't believe me. He thinks I'm saying it so—to shield Ralph.

**Sheppard** And aren't you?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** (*Stamping her foot*) You, too, Dr. Sheppard! Oh, it's too bad.

**Poirot** (*Tactfully making a diversion*) It is true what I heard you say, Major Blunt. There is something that glitters in this pond. Let us see if I can reach it.

*Poirot kneels down by the pond, lowers his arm in, but is forced to draw his arm out again empty-handed because of the mud. Sheppard offers him his handkerchief to clean the mud off his arm. Blunt looks at his watch.*

**Blunt** Nearly lunch time. We'd better be getting back to the house.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** You will lunch with us, Monsieur Poirot? I should like you to meet my mother. She is—very fond of Ralph.

**Poirot** (*Bowing*) I shall be delighted, mademoiselle.

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** And you will stay, too, won't you Dr. Sheppard? (*Sheppard hesitates*) Oh, do!

*All four make their way towards the house. Flora and Blunt walk in front. Poirot and Sheppard follow behind.*

**Poirot** *(To Sheppard in a low tone about Flora)* What hair! The real gold. They will make a pretty couple. She and the dark, handsome Captain Paton. Will they not? *(He wipes water off his sleeve)*

**Sheppard** *(Sympathetically)* And all for nothing, too. I wonder what it was in the pond?

**Poirot** Would you like to see? *(Sheppard stares at him and Poirot nods)* My good friend, Hercule Poirot does not run the risk of disarranging his costume without being sure of attaining his object. To do so would be ridiculous and absurd. I am never ridiculous.

**Sheppard** *(Objecting)* But you brought your hand out empty.

**Poirot** There are times when it is necessary to have discretion. Do you tell your patients everything-but everything, doctor? I think not. Nor do you tell your excellent sister everything either, is it not so? Before showing my empty hand, I dropped what it contained into my other hand. You shall see what that was.

*Poirot holds out his left hand, palm open. A little circlet of gold, a woman's wedding ring, sits on his hand. Sheppard takes it from him.*

**Poirot** Look inside.

**Sheppard** *(Looking inside Ring and reading closely)* It's very fine writing. From R. March 13<sup>th</sup>.

*Poirot is busy inspecting himself in a tiny pocket glass paying particular attention to his moustache. Lights shift.*

## CHAPTER 10

### The Parlourmaid

*Poirot and Sheppard find Mrs. Ackroyd in the hall. With her is a small, aggressive, little man. He is, of course, a lawyer.*

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Mr. Hammond is staying to lunch with us. You know Major Blunt, Mr. Hammond? And dear Doctor Sheppard-also a close friend of poor Roger's. And, let me see-*(She pauses surveying Poirot in some perplexity).*

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** This is Monsieur Poirot, Mother. I told you about him this morning.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Oh! Yes, of course, my dear, of course. He is to find Ralph, is he not?

**Flora**

**Ackroyd** He is to find out who killed uncle.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Oh, my dear! Please! My poor nerves. I am a wreck this morning, a positive wreck. Such a dreadful thing to happen. I can't help feeling that it must have been an accident of some kind. Roger was so fond of handling queer curios. His hand must have slipped, or something.

*Mrs. Ackroyd, Flora, and Blunt step into the Dining Room. Silence. Poirot edges up to the lawyer and speaks to him confidentially. They move aside. Sheppard joins them hesitatingly in the Hall.*

**Sheppard** Perhaps I'm intruding.

**Poirot** (*Heartily*) Not at all. You and I, Monsieur le docteur, we investigate this affair side by side. Without you I should be lost. I desire a little information from the good Mr. Hammond.

**Hammond** (*Cautiously*) You are acting on behalf of Captain Ralph Paton, I understand.

**Poirot** (*Shakes his head*) Not so. I am acting in the interests of justice. Miss Ackroyd has asked me to investigate the death of her uncle.

**Hammond** (*Taken aback*) I cannot seriously believe that Captain Paton can be concerned in this crime, however strong the circumstantial evidence against him may be. The mere fact that he was hard pressed for money-

**Poirot** (*Quickly*) Was he hard pressed for money?

**Hammond** (*Shrugging his shoulders*) It was a chronic condition with Ralph Paton. Money went through his hands like water. He was always applying to his stepfather.

**Poirot** Had he done so of late? During the last year, for instance?

**Hammond** I cannot say Mr. Ackroyd did not mention the fact to me.

**Poirot** I comprehend. Mr. Hammond, I take it that you are acquainted with the provisions of Mr. Ackroyd's will?

**Hammond** Certainly. That is my principal business here today.

**Poirot** Then, seeing that I am acting for Miss Ackroyd, you will not object to telling me the terms of that will?

**Hammond** They are quite simple. Shorn of legal phraseology, and after paying certain legacies and bequests-

**Poirot** Such as-?

**Hammond** (*Surprised*) A thousand pounds to his housekeeper, Miss Russell; fifty pounds to the cook, Emma Cooper; five hundred pounds to his secretary, Mr. Geoffrey Raymond. Then to various hospitals-

**Poirot** (*Holds up his hand*) Ah, the charitable bequests, they interest me not.

**Hammond** Quite so. The income on ten thousand pounds worth of shares to be paid to Mrs. Cecil Ackroyd during her lifetime. Miss Flora Ackroyd inherits twenty thousand pounds outright. The residue-including this property, and the shares in Ackroyd and Son-to his adopted son, Ralph Paton.

**Poirot** Mr. Ackroyd possessed a large fortune?

**Hammond** A very large fortune. Captain Paton will be an exceedingly wealthy young man.

*Silence. Poirot and Hammond look at each other for a few seconds.*

**Mrs.**  
**Ackroyd** (*From the Dining Room*) Mr. Hammond.

*Hammond goes to Mrs. Ackroyd. Poirot and Sheppard follow into the Dining Room. Poirot immediately takes Sheppard's arm and takes him to the window.*

**Poirot** (*Loudly and squeezing Sheppard's arm*) Regard the irises. Magnificent, are they not? A straight and pleasing effect. (*In a low tone to Sheppard*) Do you really wish to aid me? To take part in this investigation?

**Sheppard** (*Eagerly*) Yes, indeed. There's nothing I should like better. You don't know what a dull old fogey's life I lead. Never anything out of the ordinary.

**Poirot** Good, we will be colleagues then. In a minute or two I fancy Major Blunt will join us. He is not happy with the good mamma. Now there are some things I want to know-but I do not wish to seem to want to know them. You comprehend? So it will be your part to ask the questions.

**Sheppard** (*Apprehensively*) What questions do you want me to ask?

**Poirot** I want you to introduce the name of Mrs. Ferrars.

**Sheppard** Yes?

**Poirot** Speak of her in a natural fashion. Ask him if he was down here when her husband died. You understand the

kind of thing I mean. And while he replies, watch his face without seeming to watch it. C'est compris?

*Blunt leaves the others abruptly and joins Poirot and Sheppard.*

**Sheppard** Shall we take a stroll on the terrace?

**Poirot** Please excuse me. I shall stay behind.

*Sheppard and Blunt head out on the terrace.*

**Sheppard** How things change in the course of a day or two. I was up here last Wednesday, I remember, walking up and down this same terrace. Ackroyd was with me—full of spirits. And now—three days later—Ackroyd's dead, poor fellow. Mrs. Ferrars dead—you knew her, didn't you? But of course you did. (*Blunt nods*) Had you seen her since you'd been down this time?

**Blunt** Went with Ackroyd to call. Last Tuesday, think it was. Fascinating woman—but something queer about her. Deep—one would never know what she was up to.

**Sheppard** I suppose you'd met her before?

**Blunt** Last time I was here—she and her husband had just come here to live. (*Pause*) One thing, she had changed a lot between then and now.

**Sheppard** How changed?

**Blunt** Looked ten years older.

**Sheppard** (*Casually*) Were you down here when her husband died?

**Blunt** No. From all I heard it would be good riddance. Uncharitable, perhaps, but the truth.

**Sheppard** Sure. (*Cautiously*) Ashley Ferrars was by no means a pattern husband.

**Blunt** Blackguard, I thought.

**Sheppard** No, only a man with more money than was good for him.

**Blunt** Oh, money! All the troubles in the world can be put down to money—or the lack of it.

**Sheppard** Which has been your particular trouble?

**Blunt** Enough for what I want. I'm one of the lucky ones.

**Sheppard** Indeed.

**Blunt** I'm not too flush just now, as a matter of fact. Came into a legacy a year ago, and like a fool let myself be persuaded into putting it into some wild-cat scheme.

**Sheppard** (*Sympathizing*) I have had the same difficulties.

*The lunch gong rings, and they begin to exit inside. Poirot draws Sheppard back a little.*

**Poirot** Eh bien?

**Sheppard** He's all right. I'm sure of it.

**Poirot** Nothing-disturbing?

**Sheppard** He had a legacy just a year ago. But why not? Why shouldn't he? I'll swear the man is perfectly square and above board.

**Poirot** (*Soothingly*) Without doubt, without doubt. Do not upset yourself.

*Lights shift. They grab lunch in the Dining Room and Mrs. Ackroyd takes Sheppard aside and sits down with him on a sofa.*

**Mrs. Ackroyd** (*She produces a handkerchief*) I can't help feeling a little hurt. Hurt, I mean, by Roger's lack of confidence in me. That twenty thousand pounds ought to have been left to me-not to Flora. A mother could be trusted to safeguard the interests of her child. A lack of trust, I call it.

**Sheppard** You forget, Mrs. Ackroyd, Flora was Ackroyd's own niece, a blood relation. It would have been different had you been his sister instead of his sister-in-law.

**Mrs. Ackroyd** (*Touching her eyelashes gingerly with the handkerchief*) As poor Cecil's widow, I think my feelings ought to have been considered. But Roger was always most peculiar-not to say mean-about money matters. It has been a most difficult position for both Flora and myself. He did not even give the poor child an allowance. He would pay her bills, you know, and even that with a good deal of reluctance and asking what she wanted all those fal-lals for-so like a man-but-now I've forgotten what it was I was going to say! Oh, yes, not a penny we could call our own, you know. Flora resented it-yes, I must say she resented it-very strongly. Though devoted to her uncle, of course. But any girl would have resented it. Yes, I must say Roger had very strange ideas about money. He wouldn't even buy new face towels, though I told him the old ones were in holes. And then, to leave all that money-a thousand pounds, fancy, a thousand pounds! -to that woman.

**Sheppard** What woman?

**Mrs. Ackroyd** That Russell woman. Something very queer about her, and so I've always said. But Roger wouldn't hear a

word against her. Said she was a woman of great force of character, and that he admired and respected her. He was always going on about her rectitude and independence and moral worth. I think there's something fishy about her. She was certainly doing her best to marry Roger. But I soon put a stop to that. She always hated me. Naturally. I saw through her.

*Mr. Hammond crosses over to them.*

**Hammond** I didn't want to be rude and leave without saying goodbye.

**Sheppard** (*Rising*) About the inquest. Where would you prefer it to be held? Here, or at the Three Boars?

*Mrs. Ackroyd stares at Sheppard with a dropped jaw.*

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** The inquest? But surely there won't have to be an inquest?

**Hammond** (*Coughs*) Inevitable. Under the circumstances.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** But surely Dr. Sheppard can arrange-

**Sheppard** There are limits to my powers of arrangement.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** If his death was an accident-

**Sheppard** (*Brutally*) He was murdered, Mrs. Ackroyd.

*Mrs. Ackroyd gives a little cry.*

**Sheppard** No theory of accident will hold water for a minute.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** (*Distressed*) If there's an inquest, I-I shan't have to answer questions and all that, shall I?

**Sheppard** I don't know what will be necessary. I imagine Mr. Raymond will take the brunt of it off you. He knows all the circumstances and can give formal evidence of identification.

**Hammond** I really don't think there is anything to dread, Mrs. Ackroyd. You will be spared all the unpleasantness. Now, as to the question of money, have you all you need for the present? I mean, ready money. Cash, you know. If not, I can arrange to let you have whatever you require.

**Raymond** (*Who was standing by*) That ought to be all right. Mr. Ackroyd cashed a cheque for a hundred pounds yesterday.

**Hammond** A hundred pounds?  
**Raymond** Yes. For wages and other expenses due today. At the moment it is still intact.  
**Hammond** Where is this money? In his desk?  
**Raymond** No, he always kept his cash in his bedroom. In an old collar box, to be accurate. Funny idea, wasn't it?  
**Hammond** I think we ought to make sure the money is there before I leave.  
**Raymond** Certainly. I'll take you up now... Oh! I forgot. The door's locked.

*They all head towards the bedroom as Sheppard speaks to the audience.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* Inquiry from Parker elicited the information that Inspector Raglan was in the housekeeper's room asking a few supplementary questions. A few minutes later the inspector joined the party in the hall, bringing the key with him. He unlocked the door and we passed into the lobby and up the small staircase. At the top of the stairs the door into Ackroyd's bedroom stood open. Inside the room it was dark, the curtains were drawn, and the bed was turned down just as it had been last night.

*The inspector draws the curtains, letting in the sun, and Geoffrey Raymond goes to the top drawer of a rosewood bureau.*

**Raglan** He kept his money like that, in an unlocked drawer?  
**Raymond** *(Hotly)* Mr. Ackroyd had perfect faith in the honesty of all the servants.  
**Raglan** Oh, quite so!

*Raymond opens the drawer and takes out a thick wallet.*

**Raymond** *(Taking out a fat roll of notes)* Here is the money. You will find the hundred intact, I know, for Mr. Ackroyd put it in the wallet in my presence last night when he was dressing for dinner, and of course it has not been touched since.  
**Hammond** *(Takes the roll from him and counts it)* Wait a second... *(He looks up sharply)* A hundred pounds you said? But there is only sixty here.  
**Raymond** *(Staring at him for a beat or two)* Impossible. *(He takes the notes back and starts counting them out*

loud). 5, 10, 20, 25, 35, 40, 55, 60... (*Bewildered*)  
But-I can't understand it.

**Poirot** You saw Mr. Ackroyd put this money away last night when he was dressing for dinner? You are sure he had not paid away any of it already?

**Raymond** I'm sure he hadn't. He even said, "I don't want to take a hundred pounds down to dinner with me. Too bulgy".

**Poirot** Then the affair is very simple. Either he paid out that forty pounds some time last evening, or else it has been stolen.

**Raglan** (*Agreeing*) That's the matter in a nutshell. (*Turning to Mrs. Ackroyd*) Which of the servants would come in here yesterday evening?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** I suppose the housemaid would turn down the bed.

**Raglan** Who is she? What do you know about her?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Elsie Dale. She's not been here very long, but she's a nice ordinary country girl.

**Raglan** I think we ought to clear this matter up. If Mr. Ackroyd paid that money away himself, it may have a bearing on the mystery of the crime. The other servants all right, as far as you know?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Oh, I think so.

**Raglan** Not missed anything before?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** No.

**Raglan** None of them leaving, or anything like that?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** The parlourmaid is leaving.

**Raglan** When?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** She gave notice yesterday, I believe.

**Raglan** To you?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Oh, no. I have nothing to do with the servants. Miss Russell attends to the household matters.

**Raglan** (*Pausing in thought*) I think I'd better have a word with Miss Russell, and I'll see the girl Dale as well.

*Lights shift as we move to the housekeeper's room. Miss Russell enters when Sheppard says "The last girl in the world"*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) Elsie Dale had been at Fernly five months. A nice girl, quick at her duties, and most

respectable. Good references. The last girl in the world to take anything not belonging to her.

**Raglan** What about the parlourmaid?

**Miss Russell**

She, too, was a most superior girl. Very quiet and ladylike. An excellent worker.

**Raglan** Then why is she leaving?

**Miss Russell**

*(Pursing her lips)* It was none of my doing. I understand Mr. Ackroyd found fault with her yesterday afternoon. It was her duty to do the study, and she disarranged some of the papers on his desk, I believe. He was very annoyed about it, and she gave notice. At least, that is what I understood from her, but perhaps you'd like to see her yourselves?

*Lights shift and Ursula Bourne enters.*

**Raglan** You are Ursula Bourne?

**Ms. Bourne**

Yes, sir.

**Raglan** I understand you are leaving?

**Ms. Bourne**

Yes, sir.

**Raglan** Why is that?

**Ms. Bourne**

I disarranged some papers on Mr. Ackroyd's desk. He was very angry about it, and I said I had better leave. He told me to go as soon as possible.

**Raglan** Were you in Mr. Ackroyd's bedroom at all last night? Tidying up or anything?

**Ms. Bourne**

No, sir. That is Elsie's work. I never went near that part of the house.

**Raglan** I must tell you, my girl, that a large sum of money is missing from Mr. Ackroyd's room.

**Ms. Bourne**

*(Roused and horrified)* I know nothing about any money. If you think I took it, and that that is why Mr. Ackroyd dismissed me, you are wrong.

**Raglan** I'm not accusing you of taking it. No need to flare up so.

**Ms. Bourne**

*(Coldly and disdainfully)* You can search my things if you like, but you won't find anything.

**Poirot** It was yesterday afternoon that Mr. Ackroyd dismissed you-or you dismissed yourself, was it not? (*She nods*) How long did the interview last?

**Ms. Bourne**  
The interview?

**Poirot** Yes, the interview between you and Mr. Ackroyd in the study?

**Ms. Bourne**  
I-I don't know.

**Poirot** Twenty minutes? Half an hour?

**Ms. Bourne**  
Something like that.

**Poirot** Not longer?

**Ms. Bourne**  
Not longer than half an hour, certainly.

**Poirot** Thank you, mademoiselle.

*Poirot begins to rearrange a few objects on the table, setting them straight with precise fingers, as Sheppard looks curiously at him.*

**Raglan** That'll do.

*Ursula Bourne exits and Raglan turns to Miss Russell.*

**Raglan** How long has she been here? Have you got a copy of the reference you had with her?

*Miss Russell moves to an adjacent bureau, opens one of the drawers, and takes out a handful of letters. She selects one and hands it to Inspector Raglan.*

**Raglan** Hm, reads all right. Mrs. Richard Folliott, Marby Grange, Marby. Who's this woman?

**Miss Russell**  
Quite good country people.

**Raglan** (*He hands back the letter and Elsie Dale enters as he speaks this next line*) Well, let's have a look at the other one, Elsie Dale.

*Lights shift. Elsie Dale is being questioned by Raglan as Sheppard speaks to the audience.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) Elsie was a pleasant girl but didn't seem very smart. She answered our questions readily enough and showed much distress and concern at the loss of the money.

*Elsie exits.*

**Raglan** I don't think there's anything wrong with her. What about Parker? (*Miss Russell purses her lips again*) I've a feeling there's something wrong about that man. The trouble is that I don't quite see when he got his opportunity. He'd be busy with his duties immediately after dinner, and he'd got a pretty good alibi all through the evening. I know, for I've been devoting particular attention to it. Well, thank you very much, Miss Russell. We'll leave things as they are for the present. It's highly probable Mr. Ackroyd paid that money away himself.

**Miss Russell**

(*Dryly*) Good afternoon. (*She exits*)

*Lights shift. Raglan exits and Sheppard and Poirot are now on the street.*

**Sheppard** I wonder what the papers the girl disarranged could have been for Ackroyd to have got into such a state about them? I wonder if there is any clue there to the mystery.

**Poirot** (*Quietly*) The secretary said there were no papers of particular importance on the desk.

**Sheppard** Yes, but-

*Pause.*

**Poirot** It strikes you as odd that Ackroyd should have flown into a rage about so trivial a matter?

**Sheppard** Yes, it does rather.

**Poirot** But was it a trivial matter?

**Sheppard** Of course. We don't know what those papers may have been. But Raymond certainly said-

**Poirot** Leave Monsieur Raymond out of it for a minute. What did you think of that girl?

**Sheppard** Which girl? The parlourmaid?

**Poirot** Yes, Ursula Bourne.

**Sheppard** (*Hesitatingly*) She seemed a nice girl.

**Poirot** She seemed a nice girl-yes.

*Beat. Poirot takes a piece of paper from his pocket and hands it to Sheppard.*

**Poirot** See, my friend, I will show you something. Look there. This was handed to me this morning and compiled by the inspector. Look where there is a small cross marked in pencil...

*Sheppard follows his fingers down the paper.*

**Poirot** You may not have noticed it at the time, my good friend, but there was one person on this list whose alibi had no kind of confirmation. Ursula Bourne.

**Sheppard** You don't think-?

**Poirot** Dr. Sheppard, I dare to think anything. Ursula Bourne may have killed Mr. Ackroyd, but I confess I can see no motive for her doing so. Can you? *(Beat and looking at Sheppard with great intensity)* Can you?

**Sheppard** *(Firmly)* No motive whatsoever.

**Poirot** *(Relaxes and frowns)* Since the blackmailer was a man, it follows that she cannot be the blackmailer, then-

**Sheppard** *(Coughing)* As far as that goes-

**Poirot** *(Spinning around quickly to him)* What? What are you going to say?

**Sheppard** Nothing, nothing. Only that, strictly speaking, Mrs. Ferrars in her letter mentioned a person-she didn't actually specify a man. But we took it for granted, Ackroyd and I, that it was a man.

**Poirot** *(Half listening)* But then it is possible after all-yes, certainly it is possible- but then-ah! I must rearrange my ideas. Method, order, never have I needed them more. Everything must fit in-in its appointed place-otherwise I am on the wrong track. *(Whirling around to Sheppard again)* Where is Marby?

**Sheppard** It's on the other side of Cranchester.

**Poirot** How far away?

**Sheppard** Oh, fourteen miles, perhaps.

**Poirot** Would it be possible for you to go there? Tomorrow, say?

**Sheppard** Tomorrow? Sunday. Yes, I could arrange it. What do you want me to do there?

**Poirot** See this Mrs. Folliott. Find out all you can about Ursula Bourne.

**Sheppard** Very well. But-I don't much care for the job.

**Poirot** A man's life may hang on this.

**Sheppard** *(Sighing)* Poor Ralph. You believe him to be innocent, though?

**Poirot** *(Gravely)* Do you want to know the truth?

**Sheppard** Of course.

**Poirot** Then you shall have it. My friend, everything points to the assumption that he is guilty.

**Sheppard** What!

**Poirot** (*Nodding*) Yes, that stupid inspector—for he is stupid—has everything pointing his way. I seek for the truth—and the truth leads me every time to Ralph Paton. Motive, opportunity, means. But I will leave no stone unturned. I promised mademoiselle Flora. And she was very sure, that little one. But very sure indeed.

*Lights begin to shift and we arrive at Marby Grange.*

## CHAPTER 11

### Poirot Pays a Call

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I was slightly nervous when I rang the bell at Marby Grange (*rings bell*) the following afternoon. I wondered what Poirot expected to find out. Why did he entrust me with the job? Was it because, as in the case of questioning Major Blunt, he wished to remain in the background? (*The door opens*) I was ushered into a big drawing room by a new parlourmaid, and looked around curiously as I waited for the mistress of the house. A large bare room, some good bits of old china, and some beautiful etching's, shabby covers and curtains. A lady's room in every sense of the term.

*Mrs. Folliott enters with a winning smile.*

**Mrs. Folliott**

(*Hesitatingly*) Dr. Sheppard..

**Sheppard** That is my name. I must apologize for calling upon you like this, but I wanted some information about a parlourmaid previously employed by you, Ursula Bourne.

**Mrs. Folliott**

(*Smile vanishing from her face and becoming uncomfortable*) Ursula Bourne?

**Sheppard** Yes, perhaps you don't remember the name?

**Mrs. Folliott**

Oh, yes, of course. I-I remember perfectly.

**Sheppard** She left you just over a year ago, I understand?

**Mrs. Folliott**

Yes. Yes, she did. That is quite right.

**Sheppard** And you were satisfied with her whilst she was with you? How long was she with you, by the way?

**Mrs. Folliott**

Oh, a year or two-I can't remember exactly how long. She-she is very capable. I'm sure you will find her quite satisfactory. I didn't know she was leaving Fernly. I hadn't the least idea of it.

**Sheppard** Can you tell me anything about her?

**Mrs. Folliott**

Anything about her?

**Sheppard** Yes, where she comes from, who her people are-that sort of thing?

**Mrs. Folliott**

*(Frozen)* I don't know at all.

**Sheppard** Who was she with before she came to you?

**Mrs. Folliott**

*(Nervously)* I'm afraid I don't remember. *(With a spark of anger)* Is it necessary to ask all these questions?

**Sheppard** *(Surprised)* Not at all. *(Apologetically)* I had no idea you would mind answering them. I am very sorry.

**Mrs. Folliott**

*(Changing her tone)* Oh! I don't mind answering them. I assure you I don't. Why should I? it-it just seemed a little odd, you know. That's all. A little odd.

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* One advantage of being a medical practitioner is that you can usually tell when people are lying to you. A child could have seen through her. Whatever the mystery centring round Ursula Bourne might be, I was not going to learn it through Mrs. Folliott. *(To Mrs. Folliott)* I apologize for disturbing you, Mrs. Folliott. Good afternoon.

*Lights shift and Mrs. Folliott exits.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* I went to see a couple of patients and arrived home about six o'clock. Caroline had that look of suppressed exultation on her face which I know only too well. I wondered whether it was the sign of either getting or the giving of information.

**Caroline** I've had a very interesting afternoon.

*Sheppard sits and stretches his feet out towards the fireplace.*

**Sheppard** Have you? Miss Gannett drop in to tea? *(To the audience)* Miss Gannett is one of the chief of our newsmongers.

**Caroline** Guess again! *(Pause)* Monsieur Poirot! Now, what do you think of that?

- Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I thought a good many things of it, but I was careful not to say them to Caroline. (*To Caroline*) Why did he come?
- Caroline** To see me, of course. He said that, knowing my brother so well, he hoped he might be permitted to make the acquaintance of his charming sister.
- Sheppard** What did he talk about?
- Caroline** He told me a lot about himself and his cases. It's very interesting to hear about these things from the inside.
- Sheppard** And after all this, I suppose you were ready to eat out of his hand?
- Caroline** (*Pushing her spectacles up*) You seem very grumpy, James.
- Sheppard** (*Beat*) Did you talk about the murder at all?
- Caroline** Well, naturally, James. What else is there to talk about locally? I was able to set Monsieur Poirot straight upon several points. He was very grateful to me. He said I had the makings of a born detective in me—and a wonderful psychological insight into human nature.
- Sheppard** (*To the audience*) Caroline was like a cat overflowing with rich cream. She was positively purring.
- Caroline** He talked a lot about the little grey cells of the brain, and of their functions. His own, he says, are of the first quality.
- Sheppard** (*Bitterly*) He would say so. Modesty is certainly not his middle name.
- Caroline** I wish you wouldn't be so horribly American, James. (*Sheppard gives a look to the audience and then goes back to Caroline*) He thought it very important that Ralph should be found as soon as possible and induced to come forward and give an account of himself. He says that his disappearance will produce a very unfortunate impression at the inquest.
- Sheppard** And what did you say to that?
- Caroline** I agreed with him. And I was able to tell him the way people were talking already about it.
- Sheppard** (*Sharply*) Caroline, did you tell Monsieur Poirot what you overheard in the wood that day?
- Caroline** (*Complacently*) I did.

*Sheppard gets up from the chair.*

- Sheppard** You realize what you're doing, I hope. You're putting a halter round Ralph Paton's neck as surely as you're sitting in that chair.

**Caroline** Not at all. I was surprised you hadn't told him.  
**Sheppard** I took very good care not to. I'm fond of that boy.  
**Caroline** So am I. That's why I say you're talking nonsense. I don't believe Ralph did it, and so the truth can't hurt him, and we ought to give Monsieur Poirot all the help we can. Why, think, very likely Ralph was out with that identical girl on the night of the murder, and if so, he's got a perfect alibi.  
**Sheppard** If he's got a perfect alibi, why doesn't he come forward and say so?  
**Caroline** (*Sapiently*) Might get the girl into trouble. But if Poirot gets hold of her, and puts it to her as her duty, she'll come forward of her own accord and clear Ralph.  
**Sheppard** You seem to have invented a romantic fairy story of your own. You read too many trashy novels, Caroline. I've always told you so.

*He drops into his chair again.*

**Sheppard** (*Inquiring*) Did Poirot ask you any more questions?  
**Caroline** Only about the patients you had that morning.  
**Sheppard** (*Unbelievably*) The patients?  
**Caroline** Yes, your surgery patients. How many and who they were.  
**Sheppard** Do you mean to say you were able to tell him that?  
**Caroline** (*Triumphantly*) Why not? I can see the path up to the surgery door perfectly from this window. And I've got an excellent memory, James. Much better than yours, let me tell you.  
**Sheppard** (*Mechanically*) I'm sure you have.  
**Caroline** (*Checking the names on her fingers*) There was old Mrs. Bennett, and that boy from the farm with the bad finger, Dolly Grice to have a needle out of her finger; that American steward off the liner. Let me see-that's four. Yes, and old George Evans with his ulcer. And lastly-

*She pauses.*

**Sheppard** Well?  
**Caroline** (*Hisses it*) Miss Russell! (*She sits back in her chair and looks at him meaningly*)  
**Sheppard** (*Untruthfully*) I don't know what you mean. Why shouldn't Miss Russell consult me about her bad knee?  
**Caroline** Bad knee. Fiddlesticks! No more bad knee than you and I. She was after something else.

**Sheppard** What?

**Caroline** (*Admitting she doesn't know*) But depend upon it, that was what he was trying to get at—Monsieur Poirot, I mean. There's something fishy about that woman, and he knows it.

**Sheppard** Precisely the remark Mrs. Ackroyd made to me yesterday. That there was something fishy about Miss Russell.

**Caroline** Ah! Mrs. Ackroyd! There's another.

**Sheppard** Another what?

*Caroline doesn't speak, rolls up her knitting, and exits. Sheppard stays staring into the fire.*

**Sheppard** (*To himself*) Had Poirot really come to gain information about Miss Russell? Or was it only Caroline's tortuous mind that interpreted everything according to her own ideas? (*To the audience*) There had certainly been nothing in Miss Russell's manner that morning to arouse suspicion. At least—I remember her persistent conversation on the subject of drug-taking—and from that she had led the conversation to poisons and poisoning. (*To himself*) But there was nothing in that. (*To the audience*) Ackroyd had not been poisoned. Still, it was odd...

*Lights shift.*

## CHAPTER 12

### Round the Table

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) A joint inquest was held on Monday. I gave evidence as to the cause of Ackroyd's death and the probable time. The absence of Ralph Paton was commented on by the coroner, but not unduly stressed.

*Poirot and Raglan enter and join Sheppard.*

**Raglan** It looks bad, Monsieur Poirot. I'm trying to judge the thing fair and square. I'm a local man, and I've seen Captain Paton many times in Cranchester. I'm not wanting him to be the guilty one—but it's bad whichever way you look at it. If he's innocent, why doesn't he come forward? We've got evidence against him, but it's just possible that the evidence could be

explained away. Then why doesn't he give an explanation?

- Sheppard** *(To the audience)* A lot more lay behind the inspector's words than I knew at the time. Ralph's description had been wired to every port and railway station in England. The police everywhere were on the alert. With such a cordon it seemed impossible that Ralph should be able to evade detection. He had no luggage, and, as far as anyone knew, no money.
- Raglan** I can't find anyone who saw him at the station that night. And yet he's well known down here, and you'd think somebody would have noticed him. There's no news from Liverpool either.
- Poirot** You think he went to Liverpool?
- Raglan** Well, it's on the cards. That telephone message from the station, just three minutes before the Liverpool express left-there ought to be something in that.
- Poirot** Unless it was deliberately intended to throw you off the scent. That might just possibly be the point of the telephone message.
- Raglan** *(Eagerly)* That's an idea. Do you really think that's the explanation of the telephone call?
- Poirot** My friend, I do not know. But I will tell you this: I believe that when we find the explanation of that telephone call, we shall find the explanation of the murder.
- Sheppard** *(Curiously)* You said something like that before, I remember.
- Poirot** *(Nodding)* I always come back to it.
- Sheppard** It seems to me utterly irrelevant.
- Raglan** I wouldn't say that. But I must confess I think Mr. Poirot here harps on it a little too much. We've better clues than that. The fingerprints on the dagger, for instance.
- Poirot** *(Excitedly)* Monsieur l'Inspecteur, beware of the blind-the blind-comment dire?- the little street that has no end to it.
- Sheppard** *(Quickly)* You mean a blind alley?
- Poirot** That is it-the blind street that leads nowhere. So it may be with those fingerprints-they may lead you nowhere.
- Raglan** I don't see how that can well be. I suppose you're hinting that they're faked?

*Poirot shrugs as Raglan pulls out various enlarged photographs of the fingerprints.*

**Raglan**        (*Annoyed by Poirot*) Come now, you've got to admit that those prints were made by someone who was in the house that night?

**Poirot**        (*Nodding his head*) Bien entendu.

**Raglan**        Well, I've taken the prints of every member of the household, everyone, mind you, from Mrs. Ackroyd down to the kitchen maid. None of them correspond. That leaves us two alternatives. Ralph Paton, or the mysterious stranger the doctor here tells us about. When we get hold of those two-

**Poirot**        You have taken the prints of everyone in the house, you say? Is that the exact truth you are telling me there, Monsieur l'inspecteur? The quick or the dead?

**Raglan**        (*Bewildered*) You mean-?

**Poirot**        The dead, l'Inspecteur. (*Pause*) I am suggesting that the fingerprints on the dagger handle are those of Mr. Ackroyd himself. It is an easy matter to verify. His body is still available.

**Raglan**        What would be the point of it? You're surely not suggesting suicide, Mr. Poirot?

**Poirot**        Ah, no! My theory is that the murderer wore gloves or wrapped something round his hand. After the blow was struck, he picked up the victim's hand and closed it round the dagger handle.

**Raglan**        But why?

**Poirot**        When you were so kind as to show me the dagger and draw attention to the fingerprints, it did occur to me that the position of the prints was somewhat awkward. Not so would I have held a dagger in order to strike. Naturally, with the right hand brought up over the shoulder backwards, it would have been difficult to put it in exactly the right position.

*Raglan stares at Poirot as he flicks a speck of dust from his coat sleeve.*

**Raglan**        (*Kindly patronising*) Well, it's an idea. I'll look into it all right, but don't you be disappointed if nothing comes of it.

*Raglan exits as Poirot watches him go off. Poirot turns to Sheppard.*

**Poirot**        Another time. I must be careful of his amour propre. And now that we are left to our own devices, what do you think, my good friend, of a little reunion of the family?

*Lights shift as we move to the dining room at Fernly.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* The "little reunion" Poirot called it, took place half an hour later. We sat round the table in the dining room at Fernly.

*Poirot takes the head of the table. As Sheppard calls out the names they enter and take a seat.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* The servants were not present, so we were six in all. Mrs. Ackroyd, Flora, Major Blunt, young Raymond, Poirot and myself.

*Poirot rises and waits until everyone has taken their seat.*

**Poirot** Messieurs, mesdames, I have called you together for a certain purpose. *(Pause)* To begin with, I want to make a very special plea to mademoiselle.

**Flora** To me?

**Poirot** Mademoiselle, you are engaged to Captain Ralph Paton. If anyone is in his confidence, you are. I beg you, most earnestly, if you know of his whereabouts, to persuade him to come forward. *(Flora goes to speak)* One little minute-say nothing till you have well reflected. Mademoiselle, his position grows daily more dangerous. If he had come forward at once, no matter how damning the facts, he might have had a chance of explaining them away. But this silence-this flight-what can it mean? Surely only one thing, knowledge of guilt. Mademoiselle, if you really believe in his innocence, persuade him to come forward before it is too late. *(Leaning forward towards her)* I would not seek to entrap you, Mademoiselle. Will you not trust me-and tell me where Ralph Paton is hiding?

**Flora** *(Rising and facing him)* Monsieur Poirot, I swear to you-swear solemnly- that I have no idea where Ralph is, and that I have neither seen him nor heard from him either on the day of-of the murder, or since *(she sits)*.

*Silence. Poirot gazes at her. After a few seconds, he brings his hand down on the table with a sharp rap.*

**Poirot** Bien! That is that. Now I appeal to these others who sit round this table, Mrs. Ackroyd, Major Blunt, Dr. Sheppard, Mr. Raymond. You are all friends and

intimates of the missing man. If you know where Ralph Paton is hiding, speak out.

*Long silence. Poirot looks to each in turn.*

**Poirot**     *(In a low voice)* I beg of you, speak out.

*Silence.*

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd**    I must say that Ralph's absence is most peculiar-most peculiar indeed. Not to come forward at such a time. It looks, you know, as though there were something behind it. I can't help thinking. Flora dear, that it was a very fortunate thing your engagement was never formally announced.

**Flora**       *(Angrily)* Mother!

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd**    *(Taking out her handkerchief)* Flora has been saved a terrible amount of notoriety and unpleasantness. Not for a moment that I think dear Ralph had anything to do with poor Roger's death. I don't think so. But then I have a trusting heart-But, of course, one must remember that Ralph was in several air raids as a young boy. The results are apparent long after, sometimes, they say. People are not responsible for their actions in the least. They lose control, you know, without being able to help it.

**Flora**       Mother, you don't think Ralph did it?

**Blunt**       Come, Mrs. Ackroyd.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd**    *(Tearfully)* I don't know what to think. It's all very upsetting. What would happen to the estate, I wonder, if Ralph were found guilty?

*Raymond pushes his chair away from the table violently.*

*Blunt remains quiet looking thoughtfully at Mrs. Ackroyd.*

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd**    Like shell shock, you know, and I dare say Roger kept him very short of money-with the best intentions, of course. I can see you are all against me, but I do think it is very odd that Ralph has not come forward, and I must say I am thankful Flora's engagement was never announced formally.

**Flora**       It will be tomorrow.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** (Aghast) Flora!

**Flora** Will you send the announcement to the Morning Post? And The Times, please, Mr. Raymond.

**Raymond** If you are sure that it is wise, Miss Ackroyd.

**Flora** (Turning impulsively to Blunt) You understand. What else can I do? As things are, I must stand by Ralph. Don't you see that I must?

*She looks searchingly at Blunt, and after a long pause, he nods abruptly.*

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** But Flora, please. (Beat)

**Raymond** I appreciate your motives, Miss Ackroyd. But don't you think you're being rather precipitate? Wait a day or two.

**Flora** (In a clear voice) Tomorrow. It's no good, Mother, going on like this. Whatever else I am, I'm not disloyal to my friends.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** (Appealing) Monsieur Poirot, can't you say anything at all?

**Blunt** (Interjecting) Nothing to be said. She's doing the right thing. I'll stand by her through thick and thin.

**Flora** (Holding out her hand to him) Thank you, Major Blunt.

**Poirot** Mademoiselle, will you let an old man congratulate you on your courage and your loyalty? And will you not misunderstand me if I ask you—ask you most solemnly—to postpone the announcement you speak of for at least two days more?

*Flora Hesitates.*

**Poirot** I ask it in Ralph Paton's interests as much as in yours, mademoiselle. You frown. You do not see how that can be. But I assure you that it is so. Pas de blagues. You put the case into my hands—you must not hamper me now.

**Flora** (Pause) I do not like it, but I will do what you say.

**Poirot** And now, messieurs et mesdames, I will continue with what I was about to say. Understand this, I mean to arrive at the truth. The truth, however ugly in itself, is always curious and beautiful to the seeker after it. I am much aged, my powers may not be what they were. In all probability this is the last case I shall ever investigate. But Hercule Poirot does not

end with a failure messieurs et mesdames, I tell you, I mean to know. (*Provocatively*) And I shall know-in spite of you all.

**Raymond Poirot** (*Good-humoured*) How do you mean-in spite of us all? But-just that, monsieur. Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me. (*Raises his hand as they protest a little*) Yes, yes, I know what I am saying. It may be something unimportant-trivial-which is supposed to have no bearing on the case, but there it is. Each one of you has something to hide. Come now, am I right?

*Poirot glances around the table and they all drop their eyes. Yes, Sheppard too.*

**Poirot** (*With a chuckle*) I am answered. (*He gets up from his seat*) I appeal to you all. Tell me the truth-the whole truth. (*Silence*) Will no one speak? (*Silence and then a short chuckle again*) C'est dommage.

*Poirot exits as they all watch him leave. Lights begin to shift.*

## CHAPTER 13

### The Goose Quill

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) That evening, at Poirot's request, I went over to his house after dinner. Poirot greeted me hospitably with whiskey and engaged in his favourite beverage which I discovered was hot chocolate. (*Poirot enters with the whiskey and hot chocolate*) He inquired politely about my sister, whom he declared to be a most interesting woman. (*To Poirot*) I'm afraid you've been giving her a swelled head. What about Sunday afternoon?

**Poirot** (*Laughing*) I always like to employ the expert.

**Sheppard** You have all the local gossip anyway. True, and untrue.

**Poirot** And a great deal of valuable information.

**Sheppard** Such as-

**Poirot** (*Shaking his head*) Why not have told me the truth? In a place like this, all Ralph Paton's doings were bound to be known. If your sister had not happened to pass through the wood that day somebody else would have done so.

**Sheppard** (*Grumpily*) I suppose they would. What about this interest of yours in my patients?

**Poirot** (*Twinking*) Only one of them, doctor. Only one of them.

**Sheppard** The last?

**Poirot** I find Miss Russell a study of the most interesting.

**Sheppard** Do you agree with my sister and Mrs. Ackroyd that there is something fishy about her?

**Poirot** Eh? What do you say-fishy?

**Sheppard** Yes, meaning suspicious. Didn't my sister convey as much to you yesterday afternoon?

**Poirot** C'est possible.

**Sheppard** What does my sister know? Suspicious for no reason whatsoever.

**Poirot** Ah, women are marvellous. Instincts are almost always correct! Women observe subconsciously a thousand little details, without knowing that they are doing so. Intuition, I tell you. I am very skilled in psychology. I know these things. (*He takes a small sip of his chocolate, and carefully wipes his moustache*).

**Sheppard** (*Bursting out*) I wish you'd tell me what you really think of it all?

**Poirot** (*Putting down his cup*) You wish that?

**Sheppard** I do.

**Poirot** You have seen what I have seen. Should not our ideas be the same?

**Sheppard** I'm afraid you're laughing at me.

**Poirot** (*Smiling*) You are like the little child who wants to know the way the engine works. So I give you, then, a little lecture. The first thing is to get a clear history of what happened that evening-always bearing in mind that the person who speaks may be lying.

**Sheppard** (*Raising his eyebrows*) Rather a suspicious attitude.

**Poirot** But necessary-I assure you, necessary. Now first-Dr. Sheppard leaves the house at ten minutes to nine. How do I know that?

**Sheppard** Because I told you so.

**Poirot** But you might not be speaking the truth-or the watch you went by might be wrong. But Parker also says that you left the house at ten minutes to nine. So, we accept that statement and move on. At nine o'clock you run into a man-and here we come to what we will call the Romance of the Mysterious Stranger-just outside the Park gates. How do I know that that is so?

**Sheppard** I told you so-

**Poirot** Ah! Eh bien, I am able to tell you that the Mysterious Stranger was not a hallucination on your part, because the maid of a Miss Gannett met him a few minutes before you did, and of her too he inquired the way to Fernly Park. We accept his presence, therefore, and we

can be fairly sure of two things about him—that he was a stranger to the neighbourhood, and that whatever his object in going to Fernly, there was no great secrecy about it, since he twice asked the way there.

**Sheppard** Yes, I see that.

**Poirot** Now I have made it my business to find out more about this man. He had a drink at the Three Boars, I learn, and the barmaid there says that he spoke with an American accent and mentioned having just come over from the States. Did it strike you that he had an American accent?

**Sheppard** Yes, I think he had.

**Poirot** Precisement. There is also this, which, you will remember, I picked up in the summerhouse. (*He holds out the little quill*)

**Sheppard** (*Looking at it curiously*) Wait. You aren't suggesting—

**Poirot** (*Nods*) Yes, heroin, 'snow'. Drug-takers carry it like this, and sniff it up the nose, don't they?

**Sheppard** (*Mechanically*) Diamorphine hydrochloride.

**Poirot** This method of taking the drug is very common on the other side of the world. Another proof, if we wanted one, that the man came from Canada or the States.

**Sheppard** (*Curiously*) What first attracted your attention to that summerhouse?

**Poirot** My friend the inspector took it for granted that anyone using that path did so as a short cut to the house, but as soon as I saw the summerhouse, I realized that the same path would be taken by anyone using the summerhouse as a rendezvous. Now it seems fairly certain that the stranger came neither to the front nor to the back door. Then did someone from the house go out and meet him? If so, what could be a more convenient place than that little summerhouse? I searched it with the hope that I might find some clue inside. I found two, the scrap of cambric and the quill.

**Sheppard** And the scrap of cambric? What about that?

**Poirot** (*Raising his eyebrows*) You do not use your little grey cells. The scrap of starched cambric should be obvious.

**Sheppard** Not very obvious to me. Anyway, this man went to the summerhouse to meet somebody. Who was that somebody?

**Poirot** Exactly the question. You will remember that Mrs. Ackroyd and her daughter came over from Canada to live here?

**Sheppard** Is that what you meant today when you accused them of hiding the truth?

**Poirot** Perhaps. Now another point. What did you think of the parlourmaid's story?

**Sheppard** What story?

**Poirot** The story of dismissal. Does it take half an hour to dismiss a servant? Was the story of those important papers a likely one? And remember, though she says she was in her bedroom from nine-thirty until ten o'clock, there is no one to confirm her statement.

**Sheppard** You bewilder me.

**Poirot** To me it grows clearer. But tell me now your own ideas and theories.

**Sheppard** (*Drawing a piece of paper from his pocket*) I just scribbled down a few suggestions.

**Poirot** Excellent! You have method. Let us hear them.

**Sheppard** Point number 1 - Mr. Ackroyd was heard talking to someone at half past nine. Point number 2 - At some time during the evening Ralph Paton must have come in through the window, as evidenced by the prints of his shoes. Point number 3 - Mr. Ackroyd was nervous that evening and would only have admitted someone he knew. Point number 4 - The person with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty was asking for money. We know Ralph Paton was in a scrape. These four points go to show that the person with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty was Ralph Paton. But we know that Mr. Ackroyd was alive at a quarter to ten, therefore it was not Ralph who killed him. Ralph left the window open. Afterwards the murderer came in that way.

**Poirot** And who was the murderer?

**Sheppard** The American stranger. He may have been in league with Parker, and possibly in Parker we have the man who blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars. If so, Parker may have heard enough to realize the game was up, have told his accomplice so, and the latter did the crime with the dagger which Parker gave him.

**Poirot** Decidedly, in this theory, you have cells of a kind. But it leaves a good deal unaccounted for.

**Sheppard** Such as-

**Poirot** The telephone call, the pushed-out chair-

**Sheppard** Do you really think that latter important?

**Poirot** Perhaps not. It may have been pulled out by accident, and Raymond or Blunt may have shoved it into place unconsciously under the stress of emotion. Then there is the missing forty pounds.

**Sheppard** (*Suggesting*) Given by Ackroyd to Ralph. He may have reconsidered his first refusal.

**Poirot** That still leaves one thing unexplained.

**Sheppard** What?

**Poirot** Why was Blunt so certain in his own mind that it was Raymond with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty?

**Sheppard** He explained that.

**Poirot** You think so? I will not press the point. Tell me, instead, what were Ralph Paton's reasons for disappearing?

**Sheppard** That's rather more difficult. I shall have to speak as a medical man. Ralph's nerves must have gone phut! If he suddenly found out that his uncle had been murdered within a few minutes of his leaving him-after, perhaps, a rather stormy interview-well, he might get the wind up and clear right out. Men have been known to do that-act guiltily when they're perfectly innocent.

**Poirot** Yes, that is true. But we must not lose sight of one thing.

**Sheppard** I know what you are going to say-motive. Ralph Paton inherits a great fortune by his uncle's death.

**Poirot** That is one motive.

**Sheppard** One?

**Poirot** Mais oui. Do you realize that there are three separate motives staring us in the face. Somebody certainly stole the blue envelope and its contents. That is one motive. Blackmail! Ralph Paton may have been the man who blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars. Remember, as far as Hammond knew, Ralph Paton had not applied to his uncle for help of late. That looks as though he were being supplied with money elsewhere. Then there is the fact that he was in some-how do you say-scrape?-which he feared might get to his uncle's ears. And finally, there is the one you have just mentioned.

**Sheppard** Dear me. The case does seem black against him.

**Poirot** Does it? That is where we disagree, you and I. Three motives-it is almost too much. I am inclined to believe that, after all, Ralph Paton is innocent.

*Lights snap to Black.*

## **INTERMISSION**

## ACT 2

### CHAPTER 14

#### Mrs. Ackroyd

*Sheppard walks onto the stage as lights slowly roll up on him.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* After the evening talk I just chronicled, the affair seemed to me to enter on a different phase. I was there the whole time and saw what he saw. I tried my best to read his mind but, as you know, I failed in this latter task. He would throw out hints and suggestions, but beyond that he would not go. I tried playing Watson to his Sherlock. But after Monday our ways diverged. Poirot was busy on his own account. I only heard of what he was doing because King's Abbot you get to hear everything. He did not take me into his confidence but, I too, had my own preoccupations. On looking back, everyone had a hand in the elucidation of the mystery. It was rather a jigsaw puzzle to which everyone contributed their own little piece of knowledge or discovery. It was up to Poirot alone to fit those pieces correctly together. Some incidents seemed irrelevant to me. There was, for instance, the question of the black boots. But that comes later... To take things strictly in chronological order, I must begin with the summons from Mrs. Ackroyd.

*Beat. Lights shift. Mrs. Ackroyd's room. She is in bed. A bar with whiskey and tonic is there as is a chair.*

**Sheppard** My patient sent for me early Tuesday morning, and since the summons sounded an urgent one, I hastened there, expecting to find her in extremis. She was in bed, gave me her bony hand, and indicated a chair drawn up to the bedside. *(To Mrs. Ackroyd)* Well, Mrs. Ackroyd, and what's the matter with you?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** I am prostrated. Absolutely prostrated. It's the shock of poor Roger's death. They say these things often aren't felt at the time, you know. It's the reaction afterwards.

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* It is a pity that a doctor, by his profession, cannot sometimes say what he really

thinks. I would have given anything to answer "Bunkum!" (To Mrs. Ackroyd) Would you like a glass of tonic?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Yes, please.

*He gets up and pours her a tonic. Brings it to her and sits back down. She drinks as he speaks to the audience.*

**Sheppard** (To the audience) Not for a moment did I imagine that I had been sent for because of the shock occasioned by Ackroyd's death. I wondered very much why it was she had sent for me.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** And then that scene-yesterday!

**Sheppard** (Pause) What scene?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Doctor, how can you? Have you forgotten? That dreadful little Frenchman-or Belgian-or whatever he is. Bullying us all like he did. It has quite upset me. Coming on the top of Roger's death.

**Sheppard** I'm very sorry, Mrs. Ackroyd.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** I don't know what he meant shouting at us like he did. I should hope I know my duty too well to dream of concealing anything. I have given the police every assistance in my power.

**Sheppard** Quite so.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** No one can say that I have failed in my duty.

**Sheppard** Of course.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** I am sure Inspector Raglan is perfectly satisfied. I can't think why Flora insisted on bringing Poirot into the case. She never said a word to me about it. Just went off and did it on her own. Flora is too independent. I am a woman of the world and her mother. She should have come to me for advice first. (Beat) What does he think? That's what I want to know. Does he actually imagine I'm hiding something? He-he-positively accused me yesterday.

**Sheppard** (Shrugging his shoulders) It is surely of no consequence, Mrs. Ackroyd. Since you are not concealing anything, any remarks he may have made do not apply to you.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd**

Then of course you know. It was that girl, Ursula Bourne, wasn't it? Naturally-she's leaving. She would want to make all the trouble she could. Spiteful, that's what they are. They're all alike. Now, you being there, doctor, you must know exactly what she did say? I'm most anxious that no wrong impression should get about. After all, you don't repeat every little detail to the police, do you? There are family matters sometimes-nothing to do with the question of the murder. But if the girl was spiteful, she may have made out all sorts of things. (*Taking out a frilled handkerchief and becoming tearful*) I thought, doctor, that you might put it to Monsieur Poirot-explain it, you know-because it's so difficult for a foreigner to see our point of view. And you don't know-nobody could know-what I've had to contend with. A martyrdom-a long martyrdom. That's what my life has been. I don't like to speak ill of the dead-but there it is. Not the smallest bill but it had all to be gone over-just as though Roger had had a few miserly hundreds a year instead of being (as Mr. Hammond told me yesterday) one of the wealthiest men in these parts. (*Dabs her eyes with the handkerchief*) Those dreadful bills. And some I didn't like to show Roger at all. They were things a man wouldn't understand. He would have said the things weren't necessary. And of course they mounted up, you know, and they kept coming in- (*looking at him appealingly*)

**Sheppard**

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd**

(*Agreeing*) It's a habit they have.

(*Tone alters to somewhat abusive*) I assure you, doctor, I was becoming a nervous wreck. I couldn't sleep at nights. And a dreadful fluttering round the heart. And then I got a letter from a Scotch gentleman-as a matter of fact there were two letters-both Scotch gentlemen. Mr. Bruce MacPherson was one, and the other was Colin MacDonald. Quite a coincidence. Ten pounds to ten thousand on note of hand alone. I wrote to one of them, but it seemed there were difficulties. (*Pause*) You see, it's all a question of expectations, isn't it? Testamentary expectations. And though, of course, I expected that Roger would provide for me, I didn't know. I thought that if only I could glance over a copy of his will-not in any sense of vulgar prying-but just so that I could make my own arrangements. (*Beat*) I could only

tell this to you, dear Doctor Sheppard. I can trust you not to misjudge me, and to represent the matter in the right light to Monsieur Poirot. It was on Friday afternoon- (*Swallows uncertainly*)

**Sheppard** Yes. On Friday afternoon. Well?

**Mrs .**

**Ackroyd** Everyone was out, or so I thought. And I went into Roger's study-I had some real reason for going there-I mean, there was nothing underhand about it. And as I saw all the papers heaped on the desk, it just came to me, like a flash: I wonder if Roger keeps his will in one of the drawers of the desk. I'm so impulsive, always was, from a child. I do things on the spur of the moment. He'd left his keys-very careless of him-in the lock of the top drawer.

**Sheppard** (*Helpfully*) I see. So, you searched the desk. Did you find the will?

**Mrs .**

**Ackroyd** Oh! How dreadful it sounds. But it wasn't at all like that really.

**Sheppard** (*Hastily*) Of course it wasn't. You must forgive my unfortunate way of putting things.

**Mrs .**

**Ackroyd** Of course, men are so peculiar. In dear Roger's place, I should have not objected to revealing the provisions of my will. But men are so secretive. One is forced to adopt little superfluges in self-defence.

**Sheppard** And the result of the little subterfuge?

**Mrs .**

**Ackroyd** That's just what I'm telling you. As I got to the bottom drawer, Bourne came in. Most awkward. Of course I shut the drawer and stood up, and I called her attention to a few specks of dust on the surface. But I didn't like the way she looked-quite respectful in manner, but a very nasty light in her eyes. Almost contemptuous, if you know what I mean. I never have liked that girl very much.

She's-odd. There's something different about her from the others. Too well educated, that's my opinion. You can't tell who are ladies and who aren't nowadays.

**Sheppard** And what happened next?

**Mrs .**

**Ackroyd** Nothing. At last, Roger came in. And I thought he was out for a walk. And he said: 'What's all this?' and I said, 'nothing. I just came in to fetch Punch.' And I took Punch and went out with it. Bourne stayed behind. I heard her asking Roger if she could speak to him for

a minute. I went straight up to my room, to lie down. I was very upset.

*Pause.*

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** You will explain to Monsieur Poirot, won't you? You can see for yourself what a trivial matter the whole thing was. But, of course, when he was so stern about concealing things, I thought of this at once. Bourne may have made some extraordinary story out of it, but you can explain, can't you?

**Sheppard** That is all? You have told me everything?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Ye-es. (*Firmly*) Oh! Yes.

*Beat.*

**Sheppard** (*Noting her hesitation*) Mrs. Ackroyd, was it you who left the silver table open?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** (*Whispering*) How did you know?

**Sheppard** It was you, then?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Yes-I-you see-there were one or two pieces of old silver-very interesting. I had been reading up the subject and there was an illustration of quite a small piece which had fetched an immense sum at Christy's. It looked to be just the same as the one in the silver table. I thought I would take it up to London with me when I went-and-and have it valued. Then if it really was a valuable piece, just think what a charming surprise it would have been for Roger.

**Sheppard** (*Beat*) Why did you leave the lid open? Did you forget?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** I was startled. I heard footsteps coming along the terrace outside. I hastened out of the room and just got up the stairs before Parker opened the front door to you.

**Sheppard** (*Thoughtfully*) That must have been Miss Russell.

*Mrs Ackroyd reaches for her tonic and drinks as Sheppard speaks to the audience.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) Mrs. Ackroyd had revealed to me one fact that was extremely interesting. Whether her designs upon Ackroyd's silver had been strictly honourable I neither knew nor cared. What did interest

me was the fact that Miss Russell must have entered the drawing room by the window, and that I had not been wrong when I judged her to be out of breath with running. Where had she been? I thought of the summerhouse and the scrap of cambric. *(To Mrs Ackroyd)* I wonder if Miss Russell has had her handkerchief starched!

*He stands.*

**Mrs .**

**Ackroyd** *(Anxiously)* You think you can explain to Monsieur Poirot?

**Sheppard** Oh, certainly. Absolutely.

*Lights shift. He exits as Bourne enters with Sheppard's overcoat. She helps him put it on. He notices she has been crying and pays extra attention to her.*

**Sheppard** How is it that you told us that Mr. Ackroyd sent for you on Friday to his study? I hear now that it was you who asked to speak to him.

**Bourne** *(Her eyes dropping from his)* I meant to leave in any case.

*He begins to exit the house. Just as he is about to leave, she stops him.*

**Bourne** Excuse me, sir, is there any news of Captain Paton?  
*(He shakes his head)* He ought to come back.

**Sheppard** Indeed.

**Bourne** Does no one know where he is?

**Sheppard** *(Sharply)* Do you?

**Bourne** *(Shaking her head)* No, I know nothing. But anyone who was a friend to him would tell him this: he ought to come back. *(Pause)* When do you think the murder was done? Just before ten o'clock?

**Sheppard** That is the idea. Between a quarter to ten and the hour.

**Bourne** *(Eagerly)* No earlier? Not before a quarter to ten?

**Sheppard** *(Looking at her attentively)* That's out of the question. Miss Ackroyd saw her uncle alive at a quarter to ten.

*Bourne looks away and exits. Lights shift as Sheppard arrives home. Caroline enters.*

**Caroline** I am helping him with the case.

**Sheppard** (*Uneasy*) Are you going round the neighbourhood looking for Ralph Paton's mysterious girl?

**Caroline** I might do that on my own account. No, this is a special thing Monsieur Poirot wants me to find out for him.

**Sheppard** What is it?

**Caroline** He wants to know whether Ralph Paton's boots were black or brown.

**Sheppard** They were brown shoes. I saw them.

**Caroline** Not shoes, James, boots. Poirot wants to know whether a pair of boots Ralph had with him at the hotel were brown or black. A lot hangs on it.

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) Call me dense if you like. I didn't see. (*To Caroline*) And how are you going to find out?

**Caroline** Miss Gannett's maid, Clara. Clara walked out of the Three Boars with the boots. And about those boots of Ralph Paton's.

**Sheppard** What about them?

**Caroline** Poirot thought they were probably brown. He was wrong. They're black. (*She exits*)

**Sheppard** (*To audience*) I was puzzled. I was still wondering what the colour of a pair of Ralph Paton's boots had to do with the case.

*Lights shift as Sheppard continues speaking to the audience.*

## CHAPTER 15

### Geoffrey Raymond

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) I was to have further proof that day of the success of Poirot's tactics. That challenge of his had been a subtle touch born of his knowledge of human nature. A mixture of fear and guilt had wrung the truth from Mrs. Ackroyd. She was the first to react. That afternoon when I returned from seeing my patients, Caroline told me that Geoffrey Raymond had just left. (*To Caroline*) Did he want to see me?

**Caroline** It was Poirot he wanted to see. He'd just come from The Larches. Monsieur Poirot was out. Mr. Raymond thought that he might be here, or that you might know where he was.

**Sheppard** I haven't the least idea.

**Caroline** I tried to make him wait, but he said he would call back at The Larches in half an hour and went away down

the village. A great pity, because Poirot came in practically the minute after he left.

**Sheppard** Came in here?

**Caroline** No, to his own house.

**Sheppard** How do you know?

**Caroline** The side window. Aren't you going across?

**Sheppard** Across where?

**Caroline** To The Larches, of course.

**Sheppard** My dear Caroline, what for?

**Caroline** Mr. Raymond wanted to see him very particularly. You might hear what it's all about.

**Sheppard** (*Coldly*) Curiosity is not my besetting sin. I can exist comfortably without knowing exactly what my neighbours are doing and thinking.

**Caroline** Stuff and nonsense, James. You want to know just as much as I do. You're not so honest, that's all. You always have to pretend.

**Sheppard** Really, Caroline.

*She goes to grab a pot of jam.*

**Caroline** I wonder, James, if you would mind taking this pot of medlar jelly across to Monsieur Poirot? I promised it to him. He has never tasted any home-made medlar Jelly.

**Sheppard** (*Beat*) Very well. But if I take the beastly thing, I shall just leave it at the door. You understand that?

**Caroline** Naturally. Who suggested you should do anything else? If you do happen to see Poirot, you might tell him about the boots.

*Sheppard moves across the stage speaking to the audience. Caroline exits.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) It was a most subtle parting shot. I wanted dreadfully to understand the enigma of the boots. Poirot met me at the door with every appearance of pleasure.

**Poirot** Sit down, my good friend. The room is not too hot, no? (*It obviously is to Sheppard*) The English people, they have a mania for the fresh air. The big air, it is all very well outside, where it belongs. Why admit it to the house? But let us not discuss such banalities. You have something for me, yes?

**Sheppard** Two things. First-this-from my sister. (*Hands over the jelly*)

**Poirot** How kind of Mademoiselle Caroline. She has remembered her promise. And the second thing?

**Sheppard** Information-of a kind. *(To the audience)* Poirot took a seat as I told him of my interview with Mrs. Ackroyd in her bed. He listened with interest, but not much excitement.

**Poirot** It clears the ground. And it has a certain value as confirming the evidence of the housekeeper. She said, you remember, that she found the silver table lid open and closed it in passing.

**Sheppard** What about her statement that she went into the drawing room to see if the flowers were fresh?

**Poirot** Ah, we never took that very seriously, did we, my friend? It was patently an excuse, trumped up in a hurry, by a woman who felt it urgent to explain her presence-which, by the way, you would probably never have thought of questioning. I considered it possible that her agitation might arise from the fact that she had been tampering with the silver table, but I think now that we must look for another cause.

**Sheppard** Yes, whom did she go out to meet? And why?

**Poirot** You think she went to meet someone?

**Sheppard** I do.

**Poirot** *(Nodding)* So do I.

*Pause.*

**Sheppard** By the way, I've got a message for you from my sister. Ralph Paton's boots were black, not brown.

**Poirot** *(Beat)* She is absolutely positive they are not brown?

**Sheppard** Absolutely.

**Poirot** *(Regretfully)* Ah! That is a pity. The housekeeper. Miss Russell, who came to consult you on that Friday morning-is it indiscreet to ask what passed at the interview-apart from the medical details, I mean?

**Sheppard** Not at all. When the professional part of the conversation was over, we talked for a few minutes about poisons, and the ease or difficulty of detecting them, and about drug-taking and drug-takers.

**Poirot** With special reference to cocaine?

**Sheppard** *(Surprised)* How did you know?

*Poirot gets up and walks over to a bunch of newspapers. He brings Sheppard a copy of the Daily Budget dated, Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> September.*

**Poirot** This is what put cocaine into her head, my friend.

*A knock at the door. Poirot opens the door to see Geoffrey Raymond standing there.*

**Raymond**     *(Fresh and debonair)* How are you, Doctor? Monsieur Poirot, this is the second time I've been here this morning. I was anxious to catch you.

**Sheppard**    *(Awkwardly)* Perhaps I'd better be off.

**Raymond**     Not on my account, doctor.

*Poirot invites Raymond to sit down, and he does.*

**Raymond**     No, it's just this. I've got a confession to make.

**Poirot**        En verite?

**Raymond**     Oh, it's of no consequence, really. But, as a matter of fact, my conscience has been pricking me ever since yesterday afternoon. You accused us all of keeping back something, Poirot. I plead guilty. I've had something up my sleeve.

**Poirot**        And what is that Monsieur Raymond?

**Raymond**     As I say, it's nothing of consequence-just this. I was in debt-badly, and that legacy came in the nick of time. Five hundred pounds puts me on my feet again with little to spare. *(Smiling at them both)* You know how it is. Suspicious-looking policemen-don't like to admit you were hard up for money-think it will look bad to them. But I was a fool, really, because Blunt and I were in the billiard room from a quarter to ten onwards, so I've got a watertight alibi and nothing to fear. Still, when you thundered out that stuff about concealing things, I felt a nasty prick of conscience, and I thought I'd like to get it off my mind.

*Raymond stands up.*

**Poirot**        You are a very wise young man. You see, when I know that anyone is hiding things from me, I suspect that the thing hidden may be something very bad indeed. You have done well.

**Raymond**     *(Laughing)* I'm glad I'm cleared from suspicion. I'll be off now.

*Raymond exits.*

**Sheppard**    So that is that.

**Poirot**        Yes. A mere bagatelle-but if he had not been in the billiard room-who knows? After all, many crimes have

been committed for the sake of less than five hundred pounds. It all depends on what sum is sufficient to break a man. A question of relativity, is it not so? Have you reflected, my friend, that many people in that house stood to benefit by Mr. Ackroyd's death? Mrs. Ackroyd, Miss Flora, young Mr. Raymond, the housekeeper, Miss Russell. Only one, in fact, does not. (*Change in tone*) Major Blunt.

**Sheppard** I don't understand you.

**Poirot** Two of the people I accused have given me the truth.

**Sheppard** You think Major Blunt has something to conceal also?

**Poirot** (*Nonchalantly*) As for that, there is a saying, is there not, that Englishmen conceal only one thing—their love? And Major Blunt, I should say, is not good at concealments.

**Sheppard** Sometimes, I wonder if we haven't rather jumped to conclusions on one point.

**Poirot** What is that?

**Sheppard** We've assumed that the blackmailer of Mrs. Ferrars is necessarily the murderer of Mr. Ackroyd. Mightn't we be mistaken?

**Poirot** (*Nodding energetically*) Very good. Very good indeed. I wondered if that idea would come to you. Of course, it is possible. But we must remember one point. The letter disappeared. Still, that, as you say, may not necessarily mean that the murderer took it. When you first found the body, Parker may have abstracted the letter unnoticed by you.

**Sheppard** Parker?

**Poirot** Yes, Parker. I always come back to Parker—not as the murderer—no, he did not commit the murder; but who is more suitable than he as the mysterious scoundrel who terrorized Mrs. Ferrars? He may have got his information about Mr. Ferrars' death from one of the King's Paddock servants. At any rate, he is more likely to have come upon it than a casual guest such as Blunt, for instance.

**Sheppard** Parker might have taken the letter. It wasn't till later that I noticed it was gone.

**Poirot** How much later? After Blunt and Raymond were in the room, or before?

**Sheppard** I can't remember. I think it was before—no, afterwards. Yes, I'm almost sure it was afterwards.

**Poirot** That widens the field to three. But Parker is the most likely. It is in my mind to try a little experiment with Parker. How say you, my friend, will you accompany me to Fernly?

**Sheppard** Absolutely.

*Lights shift as we find ourselves at Fernly. Flora Ackroyd enters.*

**Poirot** Mademoiselle Flora, I have to confide in you a little secret. I am not yet satisfied of the innocence of Parker. I propose to make a little experiment with your assistance. I want to reconstruct some of his actions on that night. But we must think of something to tell him-ah! I have it. I wish to satisfy myself as to whether voices in the little lobby could have been heard outside on the terrace. Now, ring for Parker, if you will be so good.

*Flora exits. Poirot looks at Sheppard. After a beat, Parker enters.*

**Parker** You rang, sir?

**Poirot** Yes, my good Parker. I have in mind a little experiment. I have placed Major Blunt on the terrace outside the study window. I want to see if anyone there could have heard the voices of Miss Ackroyd and yourself in the lobby that night. I want to enact that little scene over again. Perhaps you would fetch the tray or whatever it was you were carrying?

*Parker exits. Poirot and Sheppard move to the lobby outside the study door. Parker appears in the doorway carrying a tray with a siphon, a decanter of whisky, and two glasses on it.*

**Poirot** One moment. We must have everything in order. Just as it occurred.

**Parker** Reconstruction of the crime they call it, do they not?

**Poirot** Ah! He knows something, the good Parker. He has read of these things. Now, I beg you, let us have everything of the most exact. You came from the outer hall-so. Mademoiselle was-where?

**Flora** Here. *(taking up her stand just outside the study door)*

**Parker** Quite right, sir.

**Flora** I had just closed the door.

**Parker** Yes, miss. Your hand was still on the handle as it is now.

**Poirot** Then allez. Play me the little comedy.

*Flora stands with her hand on the door handle. Parker*

*comes stepping through the door from the hall, bearing the tray. Parker stops just inside the door. Flora speaks:*

**Flora** Oh! Parker. Mr. Ackroyd doesn't want to be disturbed again tonight. (*In undertone*) Is that right?  
**Parker** To the best of my recollection, Miss Flora. But I fancy you used the word evening instead of night. (*Raising his voice in a theatrical fashion*) Very good, Miss. Shall I lock up as usual?  
**Flora** Yes, please.

*Parker retires through the door and Flora follows him towards the main staircase. She looks over her shoulder.*

**Flora** Is that enough?  
**Poirot** (*Rubbing his hands*) Admirable. By the way, Parker, are you sure there were two glasses on the tray that evening? Who was the second one for?  
**Parker** I always bring two glasses, sir. Is there anything further?  
**Poirot** Nothing. I thank you.

*Parker exits. Dignified. Poirot stands in the middle of the hall frowning. Flora joins them.*

**Flora** Has your experiment been successful? I don't quite understand, you know-  
**Poirot** It is not necessary that you should. But tell me, were there indeed two glasses on Parker's tray that night?  
**Flora** Hm, I really can't remember. I think there were. Is-is that the object of your experiment?  
**Poirot** (*Grabbing her hand and patting it*) Put it this way. I am always interested to see if people will speak the truth.  
**Flora** And did Parker speak the truth?  
**Poirot** I rather think he did.

*Flora exits.*

**Poirot** Shall we retrace our steps to the village? (*Lights begin to shift*)  
**Sheppard** (*Curiously*) What was the point of that question about the glasses?  
**Poirot** (*Shrugging his shoulders*) One must say something. That particular question did as well as any other. (*Seriously*) At any rate, my friend, I know now

something I wanted to know. (*Sheppard staring at him*)  
Let us leave it at that.

## CHAPTER 16

### An Evening at Mah Jong

*Lights shift as Poirot disappears into the darkness of the wings. Sheppard watches him leave and turns to the audience. The actors in this scene should build the game of Mah Jong around the dialogue with the director. Add in the terms where you see fit (Wind, Mah Jong, Chow, Kong, Pong etc.)*

**Sheppard** That night we had a little Mah Jong party. A good deal of gossip is handed round at these evenings, sometimes seriously interfering with the game. We used to play bridge-chatty bridge of the worst description. We find Mah Jong much more peaceful. This kind of simple entertainment is very popular in King's Abbot. The guests arrive in galoshes and waterproofs after dinner. They partake of coffee and later cake, sandwiches and tea. (*Caroline, Gannett, and Carter begin entering*) On this particular night our guests were Miss Gannett and Colonel Carter, who lives near the church.

**Carter** Very cold evening, eh, Sheppard?

**Sheppard** (*Politely*) Indeed.

**Carter** (*Drinking coffee*) Very mysterious business this about poor Ackroyd. A deuce of a lot behind it—that's what I say. Between you and I, Sheppard, I've heard the word blackmail mentioned! A woman in it, no doubt. Depend upon it, a woman in it.

*Caroline and Miss Gannett join them. Miss Gannett drinks coffee as Caroline opens the Mah Jong box and pours the tiles upon the table.*

**Carter** Washing the tiles. That's right washing the tiles, as we used to say in the Shanghai Club.

*Caroline and Sheppard look at each other in a way that says, "sure he has been there".*

**Caroline** Shall we begin?

*They start playing. Silence. Who can build the wall the quickest!*

**Caroline** Go on, James, you're East Wind.

*Sheppard discards a tile.*

**Gannett** I saw Flora Ackroyd this morning.

**Caroline** Where did you see her?

**Gannett** She didn't see me.

**Caroline** Ah! Chow.

**Gannett** I believe that it's the right thing nowadays to say 'Chee' not 'Chow'.

**Caroline** Nonsense, I have always said 'Chow'.

**Carter** In the Shanghai Club they say 'Chow'.

*Miss Gannett crushed.*

**Caroline** What were you saying about Flora Ackroyd? Was she with anyone?

**Gannett** Very much so.

*The eyes of the two ladies meet.*

**Caroline** Really?

**Carter** We're waiting for you to discard, Miss Caroline.

**Gannett** If you ask me, Flora's been exceedingly lucky. Exceedingly lucky she's been.

**Carter** How's that, Miss Gannett? How do you make out that Miss Flora's been lucky? Very charming girl and all that, I know.

**Gannett** *(With an air of knowing everything)* I mayn't know very much about crime, but I can tell you one thing. The first question that's always asked is 'who last saw the deceased alive?' And the person who did is regarded with suspicion. Now, Flora Ackroyd last saw her uncle alive. It might have looked very nasty for her-very nasty indeed. It's my opinion-and I give it for what it's worth, that Ralph Paton is staying away on her account, to draw suspicion away from her.

**Sheppard** *(Mildly protesting)* Come, now, you surely can't suggest that a young girl like Flora Ackroyd is capable of stabbing her uncle in cold blood?

**Gannett** Well, I don't know. I've just been reading a book from the library about the underworld of Paris, and it says that some of the worst women criminals are young girls with the faces of angels.

**Caroline** That's in France.

**Carter** Just so. Now, I'll tell you a very curious thing—a story that was going round the bazaars in India....

**Caroline** (*Conveniently interrupting*) Mah Jong!

*They start a new hand.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) It was Caroline who brought the colonel's story to a close most fortunately. A story by the colonel of interminable length on a thing that happened in India many years ago cannot compare for a moment with an event that took place in King's Abbot the day before yesterday.

**Caroline** I've got an idea of my own about Ralph Paton. But I'm keeping it to myself for the present.

**Gannett** Are you, dear?

**Caroline** Yes.

**Gannett** Was it all right about the boots? Their being black, I mean?

**Caroline** Quite all right.

**Gannett** What was the point, do you think? I suppose that now the doctor's in with Monsieur Poirot he knows all the secrets?

**Sheppard** Far from it.

**Caroline** James is so modest.

*They play. Silence.*

**Carter** This Poirot, is he really such a great detective?

**Caroline** The greatest the world has ever known. He has to come here incognito to avoid publicity.

**Gannett** Quite wonderful for our little village. I'm sure. By the way, Clara—my maid, you know—is great friends with Elsie, the housemaid at Fernly, and what do you think Elsie told her? That there's been a lot of money stolen, and it's her opinion—Elsie's, I mean—that the parlourmaid had something to do with it. She's leaving at the month, and she's crying a good deal at night. If you ask me, the girl is very likely in league with a gang. She's always been a queer girl—she's not friends with any of the girls round here. She goes off by herself on her days out—very unnatural, I call it, and most suspicious. I asked her once to come to our Friendly Girls' Evenings, but she refused, and then I asked her a few questions about her home and her family—all that sort of thing, and I'm bound to say I considered her manner most impertinent. Outwardly very

respectful-but she shut me up in the most barefaced way.

**Caroline** That Miss Russell, she came here pretending to consult James on Friday morning. It's my opinion she wanted to see where the poisons were kept.

**Gannett** What an extraordinary idea! I wonder if you can be right.

**Carter** Talking of poisons-

**Gannett** Mah Jong!

*Caroline annoyed. Silence and they start a new hand.*

**Caroline** What I was going to tell you just now was this.

**Gannett** Yes?

**Caroline** My idea about Ralph Paton, I mean.

**Gannett** Yes, dear.

**Caroline** Well, I've a pretty shrewd idea where he is.

*They all stop and stare at her.*

**Carter** All your own idea, eh?

**Caroline** Well, not exactly. I'll tell you about it. You know that big map of the county we have in the hall? (*They all nod*) As Poirot was going out the other day, he stopped and looked at it, and he made some remark-I can't remember exactly what it was. Something about Cranchester being the only big town anywhere near us-which is true, of course. But after he had gone-it came to me suddenly-Poirot's meaning. Ralph is in Cranchester.

*Sheppard knocks down the rack that holds his pieces.*

**Caroline** Always so clumsy, James.

**Carter** Cranchester? Surely not. It's so near.

**Caroline** (*Triumphantly*) That's exactly it. It seems quite clear by now that he didn't get away from here by train. He must simply have walked into Cranchester. And I believe he's there still. No one would dream of his being so near at hand.

**Sheppard** It can't be, Caroline.

**Gannett** And you think Monsieur Poirot has the same idea?

**Caroline** It's a curious coincidence, but I was out for a walk this afternoon on the Cranchester road, and he passed me in a car coming from that direction.

*They all look at each other.*

**Carter** You haven't contributed much to the sum of information, Sheppard. You're a sly dog. Hand in glove with the great detective, and not a hint as to the way things are going.

**Caroline** James is an extraordinary creature. He can not bring himself to part with information.

**Sheppard** I assure you that I don't know anything. Poirot keeps his own counsel

**Carter** (*Chuckling*) Wise man. He doesn't give himself away. These foreign detectives are up to all sorts of dodges, I believe.

**Gannett** Mah Jong!

*All annoyed again. Especially Caroline.*

**Caroline** You are too tiresome, James. You sit there like a deadhead and say nothing at all.

**Sheppard** But, my dear, I have really nothing to say-that is, of the kind you mean.

**Caroline** Nonsense! You must know something interesting.

*Beat. Sheppard in suppressed triumph lays his hand face upwards on the table.*

**Sheppard** As they say in the Shanghai Club, Tin-ho-the Perfect Winning!

**Carter** Upon my soul! What an extraordinary thing. I never saw that happen before!

**Sheppard** And as to anything interesting, what about a gold wedding ring with a date and 'From R.' inside.

**Caroline** What was the date?

**Sheppard** March 13<sup>th</sup>

**Caroline** Just six months ago. Ah!

**Carter** Maybe Ralph is secretly married to Flora?

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) One theory. A simple solution.

**Gannett** Maybe Roger Ackroyd had been secretly married to Mrs. Ferrars?

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) A Second theory.

**Caroline** Or Roger Ackroyd had married his housekeep, Miss Russell?

*Lights begin to shift as Carter and Gannett arise and exit. Caroline cleans up a little while Sheppard speaks to the audience.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) So we had three theories on the table. A fourth or super theory was propounded by Caroline later as we got ready for bed.

*Sheppard and Caroline clean up the Mah Jong etc as they speak.*

**Caroline** Mark my words, I shouldn't be at all surprised if Geoffrey Raymond and Flora weren't married.

**Sheppard** Surely it would be 'From G.' not 'From R.' then.

**Caroline** You never know. Some girls call men by their surnames. And you heard what Miss Gannett said this evening- about Flora's carryings on.

**Sheppard** How about Hector Blunt? If it's anybody-

**Caroline** Nonsense. I dare say he admires her-may even be in love with her. But depend upon it a girl isn't going to fall in love with a man old enough to be her father when there's a good-looking secretary about. She may encourage Major Blunt with her youth and beauty. Girls are very artful. But there's one thing I do tell you, James Sheppard. Flora Ackroyd does not care a penny piece for Ralph Paton, and never has. You can take it from me.

## CHAPTER 17

**Parker**

*Lights shift. Morning. The Larches.*

**Sheppard** It occurred to me the next morning, I might have been slightly indiscreet last night bringing up the discovery of the ring. Poirot had asked me to keep it to myself. On the other hand, he had said nothing about it whilst at Fernly. I felt a little guilty and was worried that the fact would be spreading through King's Abbot like wildfire. I was expecting wholesale reproaches from Poirot any minute. (*Beat*) The joint funeral of Mrs. Ferrars and Roger Ackroyd was fixed for eleven o'clock. It was a melancholy and impressive ceremony. All the party from Fernly were there. After it was over, Poirot, took me by the arm, and invited me to accompany him back to The Larches. (*Poirot enters*) He looked grave, and I was worried it was about my indiscretion.

**Poirot** We must act. With your help I propose to examine a witness. We will question him. We will put such fear into him that the truth is bound to come out.

**Sheppard** (*Surprised*) What witness are you talking about?

**Poirot** Parker! I asked him to be at my house this morning at twelve o'clock. He should await us there at this very minute.

**Sheppard** What are you thinking?

**Poirot** I know this-that I am not satisfied.

**Sheppard** You think that it was he who blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars?

**Poirot** Either that, or- (*Pause*)

**Sheppard** Well?

**Poirot** My friend, I will say this to you-I hope it was he.

*Pause. They cross the stage as Sheppard speaks.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) On arrival at The Larches, we were informed that Parker was already there awaiting our return. As we entered the room, the butler rose respectfully.

*Lights shift.*

**Poirot** (*Pleasantly*) Good morning, Parker. One instant, I pray of you.

*Poirot begins to remove his overcoat and gloves.*

**Parker** Allow me, sir. (*Assists Poirot and places the articles neatly on a chair as Poirot watches him*)

**Poirot** Thank you, my good Parker. Take a seat, will you not? What I have to say may take some time. (*Parker sits*) Now what do you think I asked you to come here for this morning-eh?

**Parker** (*Coughs*) I understood, sir, that you wished to ask me a few questions about my late master-private like.

**Poirot** (*Beaming*) Precisement! Have you made many experiments in blackmail?

**Parker** (*Springing to his feet*) Sir!

**Poirot** Do not excite yourself. Do not play the farce of the honest, injured man. You know all there is to know about the blackmail, is it not so?

**Parker** Sir, I-I've never-never been-

**Poirot** Insulted in such a way before? Then why, my excellent Parker, were you so anxious to overhear the conversation in Mr. Ackroyd's study the other evening, after you had caught the word blackmail?

**Parker** I wasn't-I-

**Poirot** Who was your last master?

**Parker** My last master?

**Poirot** Yes, the master you were with before you came to Mr. Ackroyd?

**Parker** A Major Ellerby, sir-

**Poirot** Just so. Major Ellerby. Major Ellerby was addicted to drugs, was he not? You travelled about with him. When he was in Bermuda there was some trouble-a man was killed. Major Ellerby was partly responsible. It was hushed up. But you knew about it. How much did Major Ellerby pay you to keep your mouth shut?

*Parker is gobsmacked and shaking.*

**Poirot** (*Pleasantly*) You see, me, I have made inquiries. It is as I say. You got a good sum then as blackmail, and Major Ellerby went on paying you until he died. Now I want to hear about your latest experiment.

*Parker just stares at him.*

**Poirot** It is useless to deny. Hercule Poirot knows. It is so, what I have said about Major Ellerby, is it not?

*Parker nods reluctantly.*

**Parker** (*Moaning*) But I never hurt a hair of Mr. Ackroyd's head. Honest to God, sir, I didn't. I've been afraid of this coming all the time. (*Panicking almost to a scream*) And I tell you I didn't-I didn't kill him.

**Poirot** I am inclined to believe you, my friend. You have not the nerve-the courage. But I must have the truth.

**Parker** I'll tell you anything, sir, anything you want to know. It's true that I tried to listen that night. A word or two I heard made me curious. And Mr. Ackroyd's wanting not to be disturbed, and shutting himself up with the doctor the way he did. It's God's own truth what I told the police. I heard the word blackmail, sir, and well-

*Pause.*

**Poirot** (*Smoothly*) You thought there might be something in it for you?

**Parker** Well-well, yes, I did, sir. I thought that if Mr. Ackroyd was being blackmailed, why shouldn't I have a share of the pickings?

**Poirot** *(Leans forward with a curious expression)* Had you any reason to suppose before that night that Mr. Ackroyd was being blackmailed?

**Parker** No, indeed, sir. It was a great surprise to me. Such a regular gentleman in all his habits.

**Poirot** How much did you overhear?

**Parker** Not very much, sir. There seemed what I might call a spite against me. Of course, I had to attend to my duties in the pantry. And when I did creep along once or twice to the study it was no use. The first time Dr. Sheppard came out and almost caught me in the act, and another time Mr. Raymond passed me in the big hall and went that way, so I knew it was no use; and when I went with the tray. Miss Flora headed me off.

*Pause. They both stare at each other carefully.*

**Parker** I hope you believe me, sir. I've been afraid all along the police would rake up that old business with Major Ellerby and be suspicious of me in consequence.

**Poirot** Eh bien. I am disposed to believe you. But there is one thing I must request of you-to show me your bankbook. You have a bankbook, I presume?

**Parker** Yes, sir, as a matter of fact, I have it with me now.

*Parker produces the handbook from his pocket. It is slim and green-covered. Poirot takes it and peruses the pages.*

**Poirot** Ah! I perceive you have purchased £500 pounds worth of National Savings Certificates this year?

**Parker** Yes, sir. I have already over a thousand pounds saved-the result of my connection with-er-my late master. Major Ellerby. And I have had quite a little flutter on some horses this year-very successful. If you remember, sir, a rank outsider won the Jubilee. I was fortunate enough to back it-£20 pounds.

*Poirot hands him back his book.*

**Poirot** I will wish you good morning. I believe that you have told me the truth. If you have not-so much the worse for you, my friend.

*Parker exits. Poirot picks up his overcoat.*

**Sheppard** Going out again?

**Poirot** Yes, we will pay a little visit to the good Monsieur Hammond.

**Sheppard** You believe Parker's story?

*They leave for Hammond's.*

**Poirot** It is credible enough on the face of it. It seems clear that-unless he is a very good actor indeed-he genuinely believes it was Ackroyd himself who was the victim of blackmail. If so, he knows nothing at all about the Mrs. Ferrars business.

**Sheppard** Then in that case-who-?

**Poirot** Precisement! Who? But our visit to Monsieur Hammond will accomplish one purpose. It will either clear Parker completely or else-

**Sheppard** Well?

**Poirot** (*Apologetically*) I fall into the bad habit of leaving my sentences unfinished this morning. You must bear with me.

**Sheppard** By the way, I've got a confession to make. I'm afraid I have inadvertently let out something about that ring.

**Poirot** What ring?

**Sheppard** The ring you found in the goldfish pond.

**Poirot** (*Smiling*) Ah! Yes.

**Sheppard** I hope you're not annoyed? It was very careless of me.

**Poirot** But not at all, my good friend, not at all. I laid no commands upon you. You were at liberty to speak of it if you so wished. She was interested, your sister?

**Sheppard** She was indeed. It created a sensation. All sorts of theories are flying about.

**Poirot** Ah! And yet it is so simple. The true explanation leapt to the eye, did it not?

**Sheppard** (*Drily*) Did it?

**Poirot** (*Laughing*) The wise man does not commit himself. Is not that so? But here we are at Mr. Hammond's.

*They enter Hammond's office. Hammond rises and greets them in his dry, precise manner.*

**Poirot** Monsieur, I desire from you certain information, that is, if you will be so good as to give it to me. You acted, I understand, for the late Mrs. Ferrars of King's Paddock?

**Hammond** (*Surprised*) Certainly. All her affairs passed through our hands.

**Poirot** Very good. Now, before I ask you to tell me anything, I should like you to listen to the story Dr. Sheppard will relate to you. You have no objection, have you, my friend, to repeating the conversation you had with Mr. Ackroyd last Friday night?

**Sheppard** Not in the least. (*To the audience*) I straightaway recited that strange evening and Hammond listened with close attention. I finished with three of the best closing words for a story. (*Back to Hammond*) That is all.

**Hammond** Blackmail.

**Poirot** You are surprised?

*Hammond takes off his pince-nez and polishes them with his handkerchief.*

**Hammond** No. I can hardly say that I am surprised. I have suspected something of the kind for some time.

**Poirot** That brings us to the information for which I am asking. If anyone can give us an idea of the actual sums paid, you are the man, monsieur.

**Hammond** (*Beat*) I see no object in withholding the information. During the past year, Mrs. Ferrars has sold out certain securities, and the money for them was paid into her account and not reinvested. As her income was a large one, and she lived very quietly after her husband's death, it seems certain that these sums of money were paid away for some special purpose. I once sounded her on the subject, and she said that she was obliged to support several of her husband's poor relations. I let the matter drop, of course. Until now, I have always imagined that the money was paid to some woman who had had a claim on Ashley Ferrars. I never dreamed that Mrs. Ferrars herself was involved.

**Poirot** And the amount?

**Hammond** In all, I should say the various sums totalled at least twenty thousand pounds.

**Sheppard** Twenty thousand pounds! In one year!?

**Poirot** (*Drily*) Mrs. Ferrars was a very wealthy woman. And the penalty for murder is not a pleasant one.

**Hammond** Is there anything else that I can tell you?

**Poirot** I thank you, no. All my excuses for having deranged you.

**Hammond** Not at all, not at all.

*They exit Hammond's office.*

**Sheppard** The word *derange* is applicable to mental disorder only.

**Poirot** Ah! Never will my English be quite perfect. A curious language. I should then have said *disarranged*, *n'est-cepas?*

**Sheppard** *Disturbed* is the word you had in mind.

**Poirot** I thank you, my friend. The word *exact*, you are zealous for it. Eh bien, what about our friend Parker now? With twenty thousand pounds in hand, would he have continued being a butler? *Je ne pense pas*. It is, of course, possible that he banked the money under another name, but I am disposed to believe he spoke the truth to us. If he is a scoundrel, he is a scoundrel on a mean scale. He has not the big ideas. That leaves us as a possibility, Raymond, or-well-Major Blunt.

**Sheppard** (*Objecting*) Surely not Raymond. Since we know that he was desperately hard up for a matter of five hundred pounds.

**Poirot** That is what he says, yes.

**Sheppard** And as to Hector Blunt-

**Poirot** I will tell you something as to the good Major Blunt. It is my business to make inquiries. I make them. Eh bien-that legacy of which he speaks, I have discovered that the amount of it was close upon twenty thousand pounds. What do you think of that?

**Sheppard** (*Taken aback*) It's impossible. A well-known man like Hector Blunt.

**Poirot** (*Shrugging his shoulders*) Who knows? At least he is a man with big ideas. I confess that I hardly see him as a blackmailer, but there is another possibility that you have not even considered.

**Sheppard** What is that?

**Poirot** The fire, my friend. Ackroyd himself may have destroyed that letter, blue envelope and all, after you left him.

**Sheppard** I hardly think that likely. And yet-of course, it may be so. He might have changed his mind.

*They arrive at Sheppard's house.*

**Sheppard** Would you like to come in?

**Poirot** Thank you, my friend.

*Sheppard offers Poirot a cigarette. Caroline enters as*

they arrive inside.

**Caroline** Not found Ralph Paton yet?

**Poirot** Where should I find him, mademoiselle?

**Caroline** I thought, perhaps, you'd found him in Cranchester.

**Poirot** (*Bewildered*) In Cranchester? But why in Cranchester?

**Caroline** One of our ample staff of private detectives happened to see you in a car on the Cranchester road yesterday.

**Poirot** (*Laughing*) Ah, that! A simple visit to the dentist, c'est tout. My tooth, it aches. I go there. My tooth, it is at once better. I think no return quickly. The dentist, he says No. Better to have it out. I argue. He insists. He has his way! That particular tooth, it will never ache again.

**Caroline** (*Deflated*) But-

**Sheppard** Ralph has a weak nature but not a vicious one.

**Poirot** Ah! But weakness, where does it end?

**Caroline** Exactly. Take James here-weak as water, if I weren't about to look after him.

**Sheppard** (*Irritably*) My dear Caroline, can't you talk without dragging in personalities?

**Caroline** (*Unmoved*) You are weak, James. I'm eight years older than you are-oh! I don't mind Monsieur Poirot knowing that-

**Poirot** (*With a little bow*) I should never have guessed it, mademoiselle.

**Caroline** Eight years older. And I've always considered it my duty to look after you. With a bad bringing up, heaven knows what mischief you might have got into by now.

**Sheppard** (*Murmuring*) I might have married a beautiful adventuress. (*Blows smoke from his cigarette and looks at the ceiling*)

**Caroline** Adventuress! If we're talking of adventuresses...

**Sheppard** (*Curious*) Well?

**Caroline** Nothing. But I can think of someone not a hundred miles away (*Turning to Poirot quickly*) James sticks to it that you believe someone in the house committed the murder. All I can say is, you're wrong.

**Poirot** I should not like to be wrong. It is not-how do you say-my metier?

**Caroline** I've got the facts pretty clearly from James and others. As far as I can see, of the people in the house, only two could have had the chance of doing it. Ralph Paton and Flora Ackroyd.

**Sheppard** My dear Caroline-

**Caroline** Now, James, don't interrupt me. I know what I'm talking about. Parker met her outside the door, didn't

he? He didn't hear her uncle saying goodnight to her. She could have killed him then and there.

**Sheppard**  
**Caroline**

Caroline!  
I'm not saying she did, James. I'm saying she could have done. As a matter of fact, though. Flora is like all these young girls nowadays, with no veneration for their betters and thinking they know best on every subject under the sun, I don't for a minute believe she'd kill even a chicken. But there it is. Mr. Raymond and Major Blunt have alibis. Mrs. Ackroyd's got an alibi. Even that Russell woman seems to have one-and a good job for her it is she has. Who is left? Only Ralph and Flora! And say what you will, I don't believe Ralph Paton is the murderer. A boy we've known all our lives.

*Silence. Poirot watches the smoke rise from his cigarette.*

**Poirot**

*(Gently and totally unlike his usual manner)* Let us take a man-a very ordinary man. A man with no idea of murder in his heart. There is in him somewhere a strain of weakness-deep down. It has so far never been called into play. Perhaps it never will be-and if so he will go to his grave honoured and respected by everyone. But let us suppose that something occurs. He is in difficulties-or perhaps not that even. He may stumble by accident on a secret-a secret involving life or death to someone. And his first impulse will be to speak out-to do his duty as an honest citizen. And then the strain of weakness tells. Here is a chance of money-a great amount of money. He wants money-he desires it-and it is so easy. He has to do nothing for it-just keep silence. That is the beginning. The desire for money grows. He must have more-and more! He is intoxicated by the gold mine which has opened at his feet. He becomes greedy. And in his greed he overreaches himself. One can press a man as far as one likes-but with a woman one must not press too far. For a woman has at heart a great desire to speak the truth. How many husbands who have deceived their wives go comfortably to their graves, carrying their secret with them! How many wives who have deceived their husbands wreck their lives by throwing the fact in those same husbands' teeth! They have been pressed too far. In a reckless moment *(which they will afterwards regret, bien entendu)* they fling safety to the winds and turn at bay, proclaiming the

truth with great momentary satisfaction to themselves. So it was, I think, in this case. The strain was too great. And so there came your proverb, the death of the goose that laid the golden eggs. But that is not the end. Exposure faced the man of whom we are speaking. And he is not the same man he was-say, a year ago. His moral fibre is blunted. He is desperate. He is fighting a losing battle, and he is prepared to take any means that come to his hand, for exposure means ruin to him. And so-the dagger strikes!

*Silence. Caroline and Sheppard are spellbound.*

**Poirot** Afterwards, the dagger removed, he will be himself again, normal, kindly. But if the need again arises, then once more he will strike.

**Caroline** *(With brevity)* You are speaking of Ralph Paton. You may be right, you may not, but you have no business to condemn a man unheard.

*The telephone rings. Sheppard answers it.*

**Sheppard** What? Yes, Dr. Sheppard speaking. *(He listens)*

*After several seconds he replaces the receiver.*

**Sheppard** Poirot, they have detained a man at Liverpool. His name is Charles Kent, and he is believed to be the stranger who visited Fernly that night. They want me to go to Liverpool at once and identify him.

**Poirot** Well, I guess it's time to catch a train...

## CHAPTER 18

### Charles Kent

*Lights shift. Caroline exits and Inspector Raglan Enters.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* Half an hour later saw Poirot, myself, and Inspector Raglan in the train on the way to Liverpool.

**Raglan** *(Clearly excited)* We may get a line on the blackmailing part of the business, if on nothing else. He's a rough customer, this fellow, by what I heard over the phone. Takes dope, too. We ought to find it easy to get what we want out of him. If there was the shadow of a motive, nothing's more likely than that he

killed Mr. Ackroyd. But in that case, why is young Paton keeping out of the way. The whole thing's a muddle-that's what it is. By the way, Poirot, you were quite right about those fingerprints. They were Mr. Ackroyd's own. I had rather the same idea myself, but I dismissed it as hardly feasible.

*Sheppard smiles knowing quite well the inspector is saving face.*

**Poirot** As regard this man, he is not yet arrested, eh?  
**Raglan** No, detained under suspicion.  
**Poirot** And what account does he give of himself?  
**Raglan** Precious little. He's a wary bird, I gather. A lot of abuse, but very little more.

*Train stops.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) On arrival at Liverpool I was surprised to find that Poirot was welcomed with acclamation. Superintendent Hayes, who met us, had worked with Poirot over some case long ago, and had evidently an exaggerated opinion of his powers.  
**Hayes** (*Cheerfully*) Now we've got Monsieur Poirot here we shan't be long. I thought you had retired!  
**Poirot** So I had, my good Hayes, so I had. But how tedious is retirement! You cannot imagine to yourself the monotony with which day comes after day.  
**Hayes** Very likely. So you've come to have a look at our own particular find? Is this Dr. Sheppard? Think you'll be able to identify him, sir?  
**Sheppard** (*Doubtfully*) I'm not very sure.  
**Poirot** How did you get hold of him?  
**Hayes** Description was circulated in the press and privately, as you know. Not much to go on, I admit. This fellow has an American accent all right, and he doesn't deny that he was near King's Abbot that night. Just asks what the hell it is to do with us, and that he'll see us in-before he answers any questions.  
**Poirot** Is it permitted that I, too, see him?  
**Hayes** Very glad to have you, sir. You've got permission to do anything you please. Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard was asking after you the other day. Said he'd heard you were connected unofficially with this case. Where's Captain Paton hiding, sir, can you tell me that?  
**Poirot** I doubt if it would be wise at the present juncture.

*Charles Kent enters and sits. Lights shift as we enter an interview room with the prisoner. Kent is around 23 years old, and his hands are slightly shaking. He seldom looks anyone in the eye. Sheppard doesn't recognize him as anyone he knows.*

**Hayes** Now then, Kent, stand up. Here are some visitors come to see you. Recognize any of them?

*Kent glances over at Poirot, Sheppard, and Raglan. It comes back to rest on Sheppard.*

**Hayes** (To Sheppard) Well, sir, what do you say?

**Sheppard** The height's the same. As far as general appearance goes, it might well be the man in question. Beyond that, I couldn't go.

**Kent** What the hell's the meaning of all this? What have you got against me? Come on, out with it! What am I supposed to have done?

**Sheppard** (Nodding) It's the man. I recognize the voice.

**Kent** Recognize my voice, do you? Where do you think you heard it before?

**Sheppard** On Friday evening last, outside the gates of Fernly Park. You asked me the way there.

**Kent** I did, did I?

**Raglan** Do you admit it?

**Kent** I don't admit anything. Not till I know what you've got on me.

**Poirot** Have you not read the papers in the last few days?

**Kent** So that's it, is it? I saw an old gent had been croaked at Fernly. Trying to make out I did the job, are you?

**Poirot** (Quietly) You were there that night.

**Kent** How do you know, mister?

**Poirot** By this. (Poirot takes the goose quill from his pocket and holds it out)

*Kent's face changes and he half holds out his hand.*

**Poirot** Snow? No, my friend, it is empty. It lay where you dropped it in the summer house that night.

**Kent** (Uncertainly) You seem to know a hell of a lot about everything, you little foreign cock duck. Perhaps you remember this: the papers say that the old gent was croaked between a quarter to ten and ten o'clock?

**Poirot** (Agreeing) That is so.

**Kent** Yes, but is it really so? That's what I'm getting at.

**Poirot** This gentleman will tell you.

*Raglan hesitates. He glances at Hayes, then at Poirot.*

**Raglan** That's right. Between a quarter to ten and ten o'clock.

**Kent** Then you've got nothing to keep me here for. I was away from Fernly Park by twenty-five minutes past nine. You can ask at the Dog and Whistle. That's a saloon about a mile out of Fernly on the road to Cranchester. I kicked up a bit of a row there, I remember. As near as nothing to quarter to ten, it was. How about that?

*Raglan writes in his notebook.*

**Kent** (*Demanding*) Well?

**Raglan** Inquiries will be made. If you've spoken the truth, you won't have anything to complain about. What were you doing at Fernly Park anyway?

**Kent** Went there to meet someone.

**Raglan** Who?

**Kent** That's none of your business.

**Hayes** You'd better keep a civil tongue in your head, my man.

**Kent** To hell with a civil tongue. I went there on my own business, and that's all there is to it. If I was clear away before the murder was done, that's all that concerns the cops.

**Poirot** Your name, it is Charles Kent? Where were you born?

**Kent** (*Smiling*) I'm a full-blown Britisher all right.

**Poirot** Yes, I think you are. I fancy you were born in Kent.

**Kent** (*Staring*) Why's that? Because of my name? What's that to do with it? Is a man whose name is Kent bound to be born in that particular county?

**Poirot** Under certain circumstances, I can imagine he might be. Under certain circumstances, you comprehend?

*Kent springs a little like he's going to go for Poirot. He thinks better of it, turns away, and laughs. Poirot nods as if satisfied and walks away, joined presently by Hayes and Raglan.*

**Raglan** We'll verify that statement. I don't think he's lying, though. But he's got to come clean with a statement as to what he was doing at Fernly. It looks to me as though we'd got our blackmailer all right. On the other hand, granted his story's correct, he couldn't

have had anything to do with the actual murder. He'd got ten pounds on him when he was arrested—rather a large sum. I fancy that forty pounds went to him—the numbers of the notes didn't correspond, but of course he'd have changed them first thing. Mr. Ackroyd must have given him the money, and he made off with it as fast as possible. What was that about Kent being his birthplace? What's that got to do with it?

**Poirot** Nothing whatever. A little idea of mine, that was all. Me, I am famous for my little ideas.

**Raglan** (*Puzzled*) Are you really?

**Hayes** (*Laughing*) Many's the time I've heard Inspector Japp say that. Monsieur Poirot and his little ideas! Too fanciful for me, he'd say, but always something in them.

**Poirot** (*Smiling*) You mock yourself at me. But never mind. The old ones they laugh last sometimes, when the young, clever ones do not laugh at all.

*Poirot exits. Raglan and Hayes follow him. Lights shift and Kent exits the opposite direction as Sheppard comes downstage towards the audience.*

**Sheppard** Poirot and I lunched together at a hotel. I know now that the whole thing lay clearly unravelled before him. He had got the last thread he needed to lead him to the truth. But at the time I had no suspicion of the fact. I overestimated his general self-confidence, and I took it for granted that the things which puzzled me must be equally puzzling to him. My chief puzzle was what the man Charles Kent could have been doing at Fernly. Again and again, I put the question to myself and could get no satisfactory reply. (*Poirot enters*) At last I ventured a tentative query to Poirot.

**Poirot** Mon ami, I do not think, I know.

**Sheppard** (*Incredulously*) Really?

**Poirot** Yes, indeed. I suppose now that to you it would not make sense if I said that he went to Fernly that night because he was born in Kent?

**Sheppard** It certainly doesn't seem to make sense to me.

**Poirot** Ah! Well, no matter. I have still my little idea.

## CHAPTER 19

## Flora Ackroyd

*Lights shift to morning. Poirot exits as Raglan enters.*

- Raglan** Good morning, Dr. Sheppard. Well, that alibi is all right enough.
- Sheppard** Charles Kent's?
- Raglan** Aye. The barmaid at the Dog and Whistle, Sally Jones, she remembers him perfectly. Picked out his photograph from among five others. It was just a quarter to ten when he came into the bar, and the Dog and Whistle is well over a mile from Fernly Park. The girl mentions that he had a lot of money on him—she saw him take a handful of notes out of his pocket. Rather surprised her, it did, seeing the class of fellow he was, with a pair of boots clean dropping off him. That's where that forty pounds went right enough.
- Sheppard** The man still refuses to give an account of his visit to Fernly?
- Raglan** Obstinate as a mule he is. I had a chat with Hayes at Liverpool over the wire this morning.
- Sheppard** Hercule Poirot says he knows the reason the man went there that night.
- Raglan** Does he?
- Sheppard** Yes. He says he went there because he was born in Kent.
- Raglan** *(Grinning and tapping his forehead)* But gone here. I've thought so for some time. Poor old chap, so that's why he had to give up and come down here. In the family, very likely. He's got a nephew who's quite off his crumpet.
- Sheppard** *(Surprised)* Poirot has?
- Raglan** Yes. Hasn't he ever mentioned him to you? Quite docile, I believe, and all that, but mad as a hatter, poor lad.
- Sheppard** Who told you that?
- Raglan** *(Grinning)* Your sister. Miss Sheppard, she told me all about it.
- Sheppard** *(Shakes his head and says to himself)* Caroline. *(To Raglan)* Come, we'll go up to The Larches together, and acquaint our Belgian friend with the latest news.
- Raglan** Might as well, I suppose. After all, even if he is a bit barmy, it was a useful tip he gave me about those fingerprints. He's got a bee in his bonnet about the

man Kent, but who knows—there may be something useful behind it.

*Lights shift as they begin to cross the stage. Poirot enters and greets them with his usual smiling courtesy.*

**Raglan** The barmaid at the Dog and Whistle, Sally Jones, she remembers him perfectly. Picked out his photograph from among five others. Seems quite ok, doesn't it? A chap can't be murdering someone in one place when he's drinking in the bar in another place a mile away.

**Poirot** Are you going to release him?

**Raglan** Don't see what else we can do. We can't very well hold him for obtaining money on false pretences. Can't prove a ruddy thing.

**Poirot** *(Disgruntled)* If I were you, I should not release the man Charles Kent yet.

**Raglan** What do you mean?

**Poirot** What I say. I should not release him yet.

**Raglan** You don't think he can have had anything to do with the murder, do you?

**Poirot** I think probably not—but one cannot be certain yet.

**Raglan** But haven't I just told you—

**Poirot** *(Raising his hand protesting)* Mais oui, mais oui. I heard. I am not deaf—or stupid, thank the good God! But you see, you approach the matter from the wrong—the wrong-premises, is not that the word?

**Raglan** *(Mystified)* I don't see how you make that out. Look here, we know Mr. Ackroyd was alive at a quarter to ten. You admit that, don't you?

**Poirot** *(Smiling)* I admit nothing that is not proved!

**Raglan** Well, we've got proof enough of that. We've got Miss Flora Ackroyd's evidence.

**Poirot** That she said goodnight to her uncle? But me—I do not always believe what a young lady tells me—no, not even when she is charming and beautiful.

**Raglan** But hang it all, man, Parker saw her coming out of the door.

**Poirot** *(Sharply)* No. That is just what he did not see. I satisfied myself of that by a little experiment the other day—you remember, doctor? Parker saw her outside the door, with her hand on the handle. He did not see her come out of the room.

**Raglan** But—where else could she have been?

**Poirot** Perhaps on the stairs.

**Raglan** The stairs?

**Poirot** That is my little idea—yes.

**Raglan** But those stairs only lead to Mr. Ackroyd's bedroom.

**Poirot** Precisely.

**Raglan** You think she'd been up to her uncle's bedroom?

**Poirot** Well, why not?

**Raglan** Why should she lie about it?

**Poirot** Ah! That is just the question. It depends on what she was doing there, does it not?

**Raglan** You mean-the money? Hang it all, you don't suggest that it was Miss Ackroyd who took that forty pounds?

**Poirot** I suggest nothing. But I will remind you of this. Life was not very easy for that mother and daughter. There were bills-there was constant trouble over small sums of money. Roger Ackroyd was a peculiar man over money matters. The girl might be at her wits' end for a comparatively small sum. Figure to yourself then what happens. She has taken the money, she descends the little staircase. When she is halfway down she hears the chink of glass from the hall. She has not a doubt of what it is-Parker coming to the study. At all costs she must not be found on the stairs-Parker will not forget it, he will think it odd. If the money is missed, Parker is sure to remember having seen her come down those stairs. She has just time to rush down to the study door-with her hand on the handle to show that she has just come out, when Parker appears in the doorway. She says the first thing that comes into her head, a repetition of Roger Ackroyd's orders earlier in the evening, and then goes upstairs to her own room.

**Raglan** Yes, but later she must have realized the vital importance of speaking the truth? Why, the whole case hinges on it!

**Poirot** Afterwards it was a little difficult for Mademoiselle Flora. She is told simply that the police are here and that there has been a robbery. Naturally she jumps to the conclusion that the theft of the money has been discovered. Her one idea is to stick to her story. When she learns that her uncle is dead she is panic-stricken. Young women do not faint nowadays, monsieur, without considerable provocation. Eh bien! There it is. She is bound to stick to her story, or else confess everything. And a young and pretty girl does not like to admit that she is a thief-especially before those whose esteem she is anxious to retain.

**Raglan** (*Bringing his fist down on his hand*) I'll not believe it. It's-it's not credible. And you-you've known this all along?

- Poirot** (*Admitting*) The possibility has been in my mind from the first. I was always convinced that Mademoiselle Flora was hiding something from us. To satisfy myself, I made the little experiment I told you of. Dr. Sheppard accompanied me.
- Sheppard** (*Bitterly*) A test for Parker, you said it was.
- Poirot** (*Apologetically*) Mon ami, as I told you at the time, one must say something.
- Raglan** We must tackle the young lady right away. You'll come up to Fernly with me, Monsieur Poirot?
- Poirot** Certainly.

*Lights begin to shift to the billiard room at Fernly as Sheppard speaks to the audience. Lights come up on Flora Ackroyd and Major Hector Blunt sitting.*

- Sheppard** (*To the audience*) On inquiry for Miss Ackroyd, we were shown into the billiard room.
- Raglan** Good morning, Miss Ackroyd. Can we have a word or two alone with you?

*Blunt goes to exit.*

- Flora** (*Nervously*) What is it? Don't go, Major Blunt. (*To Raglan*) He can stay, can't he?
- Raglan** If you wish. There's a question or two it's my duty to put to you, miss, but I'd prefer to do so privately, and I dare say you'd prefer it also.
- Flora** I want you to stay-please-yes, I mean it. Whatever the inspector has to say to me. I'd rather you heard it.
- Raglan** (*Shrugging his shoulders*) Well, if you will have it so, that's all there is to it. Now, Miss Ackroyd, Monsieur Poirot here has made a certain suggestion to me. He suggests that you weren't in the study at all last Friday night, that you never saw Mr. Ackroyd to say goodnight to him, that instead of being in the study you were on the stairs leading down from your uncle's bedroom when you heard Parker coming across the hall.

*Flora looks at Poirot and he nods back to her.*

- Poirot** Mademoiselle, the other day, when we sat round the table, I implored you to be frank with me. What one does not tell to Papa Poirot he finds out. It was that, was it not? See, I will make it easy for you. You took the money, did you not?

**Blunt**        (*Sharply*) The money?

*Silence.*

**Flora**        (*Rising*) Poirot is right. I took that money. I stole. I am a thief-yes, a common, vulgar little thief. Now you know! I am glad it has come out. It's been a nightmare, these last few days! (*Sits down suddenly and hurls her hands in her face*) You don't know what my life has been since I came here. Wanting things, scheming for them, lying, cheating, running up bills, promising to pay-oh! I hate myself when I think of it all! That's what brought us together, Ralph and I. We were both weak! I understood him, and I was sorry-because I'm the same underneath. We're not strong enough to stand alone, either of us. We're weak, miserable, despicable things.

*She turns to Blunt and stamps her foot.*

**Flora**        Why do you look at me like that-as though you couldn't believe? I may be a thief-but at any rate I'm real now. I'm not lying anymore. I'm not pretending to be the kind of girl you like, young and innocent and simple. I don't care if you never want to see me again. I hate myself, despise myself-but you've got to believe one thing, if speaking the truth would have made things better for Ralph, I would have spoken out. But I've seen all along that it wouldn't be better for Ralph-it makes the case against him blacker than ever. I was not doing him any harm by sticking to my lie.

**Blunt**        Ralph. I see-always Ralph.

**Flora**        You don't understand. You never will. (*Turning to Raglan*) I admit everything; I was at my wits' end for money. I never saw my uncle that evening after he left the dinner table. As to the money, you can take what steps you please. Nothing could be worse than it is now! (*She breaks down, hides her face in her hands, and rushes out of the room*)

**Raglan**       (*Flatly*) Well, so that's that.

*Blunt comes forward.*

**Blunt**        Inspector Raglan, that money was given to me by Mr. Ackroyd for a special purpose. Miss Ackroyd never touched it. When she says she did, she is lying with the idea of shielding Captain Paton. The truth is as I

said, and I am prepared to go into the witness-box and swear to it.

*Blunt exits and Poirot pursues him with a flash.*

**Poirot** Monsieur-a moment, I beg of you, if you will be so good.

**Blunt** *(With impatience)* Well, sir?

**Poirot** *(Rapidly)* It is this: I am not deceived by your little fantasy. No, indeed. It was truly Miss Flora who took the money. All the same it is well imagined what you say-it pleases me. It is very good what you have done there. You are a man quick to think and act.

**Blunt** *(Coldly)* I'm not in the least anxious for your opinion, thank you.

*Blunt goes to leave but Poirot detains him with a hand on his arm.*

**Poirot** Ah! But you are to listen to me. I have more to say. The other day I spoke of concealments. Very well, all along I have seen what you are concealing. Mademoiselle Flora, you love her with all your heart. From the first moment you saw her, is it not so? Oh! Let us not mind saying these things-why must one in England think it necessary to mention love as though it were some disgraceful secret? You love Mademoiselle Flora. You seek to conceal that fact from all the world. That is very good-that is as it should be. But take the advice of Hercule Poirot-do not conceal it from mademoiselle herself.

**Blunt** *(Sharply)* What d'you mean by that?

**Poirot** You think that she loves the Capitaine Ralph Paton-but I, Hercule Poirot, tell you that that is not so. Mademoiselle Flora accepted Captain Paton to please her uncle, and because she saw in the marriage a way of escape from her life here which was becoming frankly insupportable to her. She liked him, and there was much sympathy and understanding between them. But love-no! It is not Captain Paton Mademoiselle Flora loves.

**Blunt** What the devil do you mean?

**Poirot** You have been blind, monsieur. Blind! She is loyal, the little one. She is bound in honour to stick by Ralph Paton.

**Sheppard** My sister told me the other night that Flora had never cared a penny piece for Ralph Paton, and never would. My sister is always right about these things.

**Blunt** *(To Poirot)* D'you really think...

**Poirot** If you doubt me, ask her yourself, monsieur. But perhaps you no longer care to-the affair of the money-

**Blunt** *(Angry laugh)* Think I'd hold that against her? Roger was always a queer chap about money. She got in a mess and didn't dare tell him. Poor kid. Poor lonely kid.

**Poirot** *(Looking towards the garden)* Mademoiselle Flora went into the garden, I think.

**Blunt** I've been every kind of a fool. Rum conversation we've been having. Like one of those Danish plays. But you're a sound fellow, Poirot. Thank you.

*Blunt takes Poirot's hand and squeezes it meaningfully.*

*Blunt exits into the garden.*

**Poirot** *(Nursing his tender hand)* Not every kind of a fool. Only one kind-the fool in love.

## CHAPTER 20

### Miss Russell

*Lights slowly shift as Raglan steps forward to Poirot and Sheppard.*

**Raglan** This alters everything, this does. I don't know whether you've realized it. Monsieur Poirot?

**Poirot** I think so, yes, I think so. You see, me, I have been familiar with the idea for some time.

**Raglan** *(Unhappily)* Those alibis now. Worthless! Got to start again. Find out what everyone was doing from nine-thirty onwards. Nine-thirty. You were quite right about the man Kent-we don't release him yet. Let me see now-nine-forty-five at the Dog and Whistle. He might have got there in a quarter of an hour if he ran. It's just possible that it was his voice Mr. Raymond heard talking to Mr. Ackroyd-asking for money which Ackroyd refused. But one thing's clear-it wasn't he who sent the telephone message. The station is half a mile in the other direction-over a mile and a half from the Dog and Whistle, and he was at the Dog and Whistle until about ten minutes past ten. Dang that telephone call! We always come up against it!

**Poirot** We do indeed. It is curious.

**Raglan** It's just possible that if Captain Paton climbed into his uncle's room and found him there murdered, he may have sent it. Got the wind up, thought he'd be accused, and cleared out. That's possible, isn't it?

**Poirot** Why should he have telephoned?

**Raglan** May have had doubts if the old man was really dead. Thought he'd get the doctor up there as soon as possible, but didn't want to give himself away. Yes, I say now, how's that for a theory? (*Delighted with himself*) Something in that, I should say.

*Lights shift as Sheppard begins to talk to the audience.*

*Poirot and Raglan exit.*

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) Poirot went to the police station with the inspector. I arrived back at my house, and hurried in to my surgery patients, who had all been waiting a considerable time. Having dismissed the last patient, I was adjusting the interior of an alarm clock, (*He picks up clock pincers. Caroline enters*) when Caroline put her head in.

**Caroline** Oh, there you are, James! Monsieur Poirot wants to see you.

**Sheppard** (*Irritable for being taken away from his clock*) Well, if he wants to see me, he can come in here.

**Caroline** In here?

**Sheppard** That's what I said-in here.

*Caroline exits for a moment and returns with Poirot.*

**Poirot** Aha! My friend (*Coming forward and rubbing his hands*), you have not got rid of me so easily, you see!

**Sheppard** (*Still adjusting his clock*) Finished with the inspector?

**Poirot** For the moment, yes. And you, you have seen all the patients?

**Sheppard** Yes.

*Poirot sits down, looks at him, and turns his head as if he knows a secret.*

**Poirot** You are in error. You have still one patient to see.

**Sheppard** (*Surprised*) Not you?

**Poirot** Ah, not me, bien entendu. Me, I have the health magnificent. No, to tell you the truth, it is a little complot of mine. There is someone I wish to see, you understand-and at the same time it is not necessary

that the whole village should intrigue itself about the matter-which is what would happen if the lady were seen to come to my house-for it is a lady. But to you she has already come as a patient before.

**Sheppard** Miss Russell!

**Poirot** Precisement. I wish much to speak with her, so I send her the little note and make the appointment in your surgery. You are not annoyed with me?

**Sheppard** On the contrary, that is, presuming I am allowed to be present at the interview?

**Poirot** But naturally! In your own surgery!

**Sheppard** You know (*He throws down the pincers*), it's extraordinarily intriguing, the whole thing. Every new development that arises is like the shake you give to a kaleidoscope-the thing changes entirely in aspect. Now, why are you so anxious to see Miss Russell?

**Poirot** (*Raising his eyebrows*) Surely it is obvious?

**Sheppard** There you go again. According to you everything is obvious. But you leave me walking about in a fog.

**Poirot** You mock yourself at me. Take the matter of Mademoiselle Flora. The inspector was surprised-but you-you were not.

**Sheppard** I never dreamed of her being the thief.

**Poirot** That-perhaps no. But I was watching your face and you were not-like Inspector Raglan-startled and incredulous.

**Sheppard** (*Beat*) Perhaps you are right. All along I've felt that Flora was keeping back something-so the truth, when it came, was subconsciously expected. It upset Inspector Raglan very much indeed, poor man.

**Poirot** Ah! *Pour ga oui!* The poor man must rearrange all his ideas. I profited by his state of mental chaos to induce him to grant me a little favour.

**Sheppard** What was that?

*Poirot takes out a sheet of notepaper from his pocket and reads it aloud.*

**Poirot** The police have, for some days, been seeking for Captain Paton, the nephew of Mr. Ackroyd of Fernly Park, whose death occurred under such tragic circumstances last Friday. Captain Paton has been found at Liverpool, where he was on the point of embarking for America.

*Poirot folds the piece of paper and puts it back into his pocket.*

**Poirot** That, my friend, will be in the newspapers tomorrow morning.

**Sheppard** (*Dumbfounded*) But-but it isn't true! He's not in Liverpool.

**Poirot** (*Beaming*) You have the intelligence so quick! No, he has not been found at Liverpool. Inspector Raglan was very loath to let me send this paragraph to the press, especially as I could not take him into my confidence. But I assured him most solemnly that very interesting results would follow its appearance in print, so he gave in, after stipulating that he was, on no account, to bear the responsibility.

*Sheppard stares at Poirot who just smiles back.*

**Sheppard** It beats me what you expect to get out of that.

**Poirot** (*Gravely*) You should employ your little grey cells. (*Approaching him and looking at his little clock very closely*) It is that you have really the love of the machinery?

**Sheppard** Every man has his hobby.

**Poirot** (*Checking out his work on the clock*) Decidedly, you should be an inventor by trade, not a doctor.

*The bell rings.*

**Poirot** Ah! That is your patient. Let us go into the surgery.

*Miss Russell enters very simply dressed in black.*

**Poirot** Good morning, mademoiselle. Will you be seated? Dr. Sheppard is so kind as to permit me the use of his surgery for a little conversation I am anxious to have with you.

*Miss Russell sits down.*

**Miss Russell**

It seems a queer way of doing things, if you'll allow me to say so.

**Poirot** Miss Russell-I have news to give you.

**Miss Russell**

Indeed!

**Poirot** Charles Kent has been arrested at Liverpool.

**Miss Russell**

*(With a tinge of defiance)* Well, what of it?

**Sheppard** *(Half to himself and half to the audience)* It was of Miss Russell that I had been reminded that night outside the gates of Fernly Park!

*Sheppard looks at Poirot full of his discovery and Poirot gives him an imperceptible nod back.*

**Poirot** *(To Miss Russell mildly)* I thought you might be interested, that is all.

**Miss Russell**

Well, I'm not particularly. Who is this Charles Kent anyway?

**Poirot** He is a man, mademoiselle, who was at Fernly on the night of the murder.

**Miss Russell**

Really?

**Poirot** Fortunately for him, he has an alibi. At a quarter to ten he was at a public-house a mile from here.

**Miss Russell**

Lucky for him.

**Poirot** But we still do not know what he was doing at Fernly—who it was he went to meet, for instance.

**Miss Russell**

*(Politely)* I'm afraid I can't help you at all. Nothing came to my ears. *(Going to get up)* If that is all—

**Poirot** *(Stopping her from getting up)* It is not quite all. This morning fresh developments have arisen. It seems now that Mr. Ackroyd was murdered, not at a quarter to ten, but before. Between ten minutes to nine, when Dr. Sheppard left, and a quarter to ten.

**Miss Russell**

But Miss Ackroyd said—Miss Ackroyd said—

**Poirot** Miss Ackroyd has admitted that she was lying. She was never in the study at all that evening.

**Miss Russell**

Then—

**Poirot** Then it would seem that in this Charles Kent we have the man we are looking for. He came to Fernly, can give no account of what he was doing there—

**Miss Russell**

*(Leaning forward)* I can tell you what he was doing there. He never touched a hair of old Ackroyd's head—he never went near the study. *(Terror and desperation)* He didn't do it, I tell you. Monsieur Poirot! Poirot! Oh, do believe me.

*Poirot goes over to her and pats her reassuringly on the shoulder.*

**Poirot** But yes-but yes, I will believe. I had to make you speak, you know.

**Miss Russell**

*(Suspicion)* Is what you said true?

**Poirot** That Charles Kent is suspected of the crime? Yes, that is true. You alone can save him, by telling the reason for his being at Fernly.

**Miss Russell**

*(Low and hurried voice)* He came to see me. I went out to meet him-

**Poirot** In the summerhouse, yes, I know.

**Miss Russell**

How do you know?

**Poirot** Mademoiselle, it is the business of Hercule Poirot to know things. I know that you went out earlier in the evening, that you left a message in the summerhouse to say what time you would be there.

**Miss Russell**

Yes, I did. I had heard from him-saying he was coming. I dared not let him come to the house. I wrote to the address he gave me and said I would meet him in the summerhouse, and described it to him so that he would be able to find it. Then I was afraid he might not wait there patiently, and I ran out and left a piece of paper to say I would be there about ten minutes past nine. I didn't want the servants to see me, so I slipped out through the drawing room window. As I came back, I met Dr. Sheppard, and I fancied that he would think it queer. I was out of breath, for I had been running. I had no idea that he was expected to dinner that night.

*Pause*

**Poirot** Go on. You went out to meet him at ten minutes past nine. What did you say to each other?

**Miss Russell**

It's difficult. You see-

**Poirot** Mademoiselle, in this matter I must have the whole truth. What you tell us need never go beyond these four walls. Dr. Sheppard will be discreet, and so shall I. See, I will help you. This Charles Kent, he is your son, is he not?

**Miss Russell**

(*She nods*) No one has ever known. It was long ago-long ago-down in Kent. I was not married...

**Poirot** So you took the name of the county as a surname for him. I understand.

**Miss Russell**

I got work. I managed to pay for his board and lodging. I never told him that I was his mother. But he turned out badly, he drank, then took to drugs. I managed to pay his passage out to Canada. I didn't hear of him for a year or two. Then, somehow or other, he found out that I was his mother. He wrote asking me for money. Finally, I heard from him back in this country again. He was coming to see me at Fernly, he said. I dared not let him come to the house. I have always been considered so-so very respectable. If anyone got an inkling-it would have been all up with my post as housekeeper. So, I wrote to him in the way I have just told you.

**Poirot** And in the morning you came to see Dr. Sheppard?

**Miss Russell**

Yes. I wondered if something could be done. He was not a bad boy-before he took to drugs.

**Poirot** I see. Now let us go on with the story. He came that night to the summerhouse?

**Miss Russell**

Yes, he was waiting for me when I got there. He was very rough and abusive. I had brought with me all the money I had, and I gave it to him. We talked a little, and then he went away.

**Poirot** What time was that?

**Miss Russell**

It must have been between twenty and twenty-five minutes past nine. It was not yet half past when I got back to the house.

**Poirot** Which way did he go?

**Miss Russell**

Straight out the same way he came, by the path that joined the drive just inside the lodge gates.

**Poirot** (*Nodding*) And you, what did you do?

**Miss Russell**

I went back to the house. Major Blunt was walking up and down the terrace smoking, so I made a detour to get round to the side door. It was just then on half past nine, as I tell you.

*Poirot nods and makes a couple of notes in a*

*microscopic pocketbook.*

**Poirot** I think that is all.

**Miss Russell**

Ought I-? (*Hesitating*) Ought I to tell all this to Inspector Raglan?

**Poirot** It may come to that. But let us not be in a hurry. Let us proceed slowly, with due order and method. Charles Kent is not yet formally charged with murder. Circumstances may arise which will render your story unnecessary.

**Miss Russell**

(*Rising*) Thank you very much, Monsieur Poirot. You have been very kind-very kind indeed. You-you do believe me, don't you? That Charles had nothing to do with this wicked murder!

**Poirot** There seems no doubt that the man who was talking to Mr. Ackroyd in the library at nine-thirty could not possibly have been your son. Be of good courage, mademoiselle. All will yet be well.

*Miss Russell exits.*

**Sheppard** So that's that. Every time we come back to Ralph Paton. How did you manage to spot Miss Russell as the person Charles Kent came to meet? Did you notice the resemblance?

**Poirot** I had connected her with the unknown man long before we actually came face to face with him. As soon as we found that quill. The quill suggested dope, and I remembered your account of Miss Russell's visit to you. Then I found the article on cocaine in the morning's paper. It all seemed very clear. She had heard from someone that morning-someone addicted to drugs, she read the article in the paper, and she came to ask you a few tentative questions. She mentioned cocaine, since the article in question was on cocaine. Then, when you seemed too interested, she switched hurriedly to the subject of detective stories and untraceable poisons. I suspected a son or a brother, or some other undesirable male relation. Ah! But I must go. It is the time of the lunch!

**Sheppard** Stay and lunch with us.

**Poirot** (*Shaking his head*) Not again today.

*Poirot exits as lights shift on to Sheppard who addresses the audience.*

## CHAPTER 21

## The Paragraph in the Paper

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) Caroline, of course, had not failed to see Miss Russell come to the surgery room. I had anticipated this, and had ready an elaborate account of the lady's bad knee. (*Caroline enters*) The next day she insisted, of course, that she knew what Miss Russell had really come for and that I didn't.

**Caroline** Pumping you, James. Pumping you in the most shameless manner, I've no doubt. Men are so simple! She knows that you are in Poirot's confidence, and she wants to find out things. Do you know what I think, James?

**Sheppard** I couldn't begin to imagine. You think so many extraordinary things.

**Caroline** It's no good being sarcastic. I think Miss Russell knows more about Mr. Ackroyd's death than she is prepared to admit.

**Sheppard** (*Absently*) Do you really think so?

**Caroline** You are very dull today, James. Have you seen this morning's paper? (*Hands it to him*)

**Sheppard** (*To the audience*) Of Course Poirot's newspaper article had an immense effect on Caroline.

**Caroline** I must state that I have said as much all along. I mayn't have actually mentioned Liverpool, but I knew Paton would try to get away to America. Poor boy, and so they've caught him. I consider, James, that it's your duty to see that he isn't hung.

**Sheppard** What do you expect me to do?

**Caroline** Why, you're a medical man, aren't you? You've known him from a boy upwards. Not mentally responsible. That's the line to take. Clearly. I read only the other day that they're very happy in Broadmoor-it's quite like a high-class club.

**Sheppard** That reminds me, I never knew that Poirot had an imbecile nephew?

**Caroline** Didn't you? Oh, he told me all about it. Poor lad. It's a great grief to all the family. They've kept him at home so far, but it's getting to such a pitch that they're afraid he'll have to go into some kind of institution.

**Sheppard** I suppose you know pretty well everything there is to know about Poirot's family by this time.

**Caroline** Pretty well. It's great relief to people to be able to tell all their troubles to someone.

- Sheppard** It might be if they were ever allowed to do so spontaneously. Whether they enjoy having confidences screwed out of them by force is another matter.
- Caroline** (*An air of Christian martyrdom*) You are so self-contained, James. You hate speaking out, or parting with any information yourself, and you think everybody else must be just like you. I should hope that I never screw confidences out of anybody. For instance, if Poirot comes in this afternoon, as he said he might do, I shall not dream of asking him who it was arrived at his house early this morning.
- Sheppard** Early this morning?
- Caroline** Very early. Before the milk came. I just happened to be looking out of the window-the blind was flapping. It was a man. He came in a closed car, and he was all muffled up. I couldn't get a glimpse of his face. But I will tell you my idea, and you'll see that I'm right.
- Sheppard** What's your idea?
- Caroline** (*Dropping her voice mysteriously*) A Home Office expert. The government's serious crimes unit, James.
- Sheppard** A Home Office expert. My dear Caroline!
- Caroline** Mark my words, James, you'll see that I'm right. That Russell woman was here that morning after your poisons. Roger Ackroyd might easily have been poisoned in his food that night.
- Sheppard** (*Laughing out loud*) Nonsense. He was stabbed in the neck. You know that as well as I do.
- Caroline** After death, James. To make a false clue.
- Sheppard** My good woman. I examined the body, and I know what I'm talking about. That wound wasn't inflicted after death-it was the cause of death, and you need make no mistake about it. (*She doesn't buy it*) Perhaps you will tell me, Caroline, if I have a medical degree or if I have not?
- Caroline** You have the medical degree, I dare say, James-at least, I mean I know you have. But you've no imagination whatever.
- Sheppard** (*Drily*) Having endowed you with a treble portion, there was none left over for me.

*The bell rings and Sheppard answers it. Poirot enters.*

- Poirot** It is that I need to reduce the figure a little. You will accompany me for a little walk, doctor? (*To Caroline*) And perhaps later, Miss Caroline will give us some tea?

**Caroline** Delighted. Won't your-er-guest come in also?

*Sheppard looks at the audience shaking his head.*

**Poirot** You are too kind. But no, my friend reposes himself. Soon you must make his acquaintance.

**Caroline** *(One last valiant effort)* Quite an old friend of yours, so somebody told me.

**Poirot** Did they? Well, we must start.

*Lights shift as Sheppard and Poirot walk. Caroline exits.*

**Poirot** I have a commission for you, my friend. Tonight, at my house. I desire to have a little conference. You will attend, will you not?

**Sheppard** Certainly.

**Poirot** Good. I need also those in the house-that is to say: Mrs. Ackroyd, Mademoiselle Flora, Major Blunt, Mr. Raymond. I want you to be my ambassador. This little reunion is fixed for nine o'clock. You will ask them-yes?

**Sheppard** With pleasure; but why not ask them yourself?

**Poirot** Because they will then put the questions: Why? What for? They will demand what my idea is. And, as you know, my friend, I much dislike to have to explain my little ideas until the time comes. *(Sheppard smiles)*

**Sheppard** When do you want me to do this?

**Poirot** Now, if you will. We are close to the house.

**Sheppard** Aren't you coming in?

**Poirot** No, me, I will promenade myself in the grounds. I will rejoin you by the lodge gates in a quarter of an hour's time.

*Mrs. Ackroyd enters sipping an early cup of tea.*

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** So grateful to you, doctor, for clearing up that little matter with Poirot. But life is one trouble after another. You have heard about Flora, of course?

**Sheppard** *(Cautiously)* What exactly?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** This new engagement. Flora and Hector Blunt. Of course, not such a good match as Ralph would have been. But after all, happiness comes first. What dear Flora needs is an older man-someone steady and reliable, and then Hector is really a very

distinguished man in his way. You saw the news of Ralph's arrest in the paper this morning?

**Sheppard** Yes, I did.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** (*Closing her eyes and shuddering*) Horrible. Geoffrey Raymond was in a terrible way. Rang up Liverpool. But they wouldn't tell him anything at the police station there. In fact, they said they hadn't arrested Ralph at all. Mr. Raymond insists that it's all a mistake-a-what do they call it?-canard of the newspaper's. I've forbidden it to be mentioned before the servants. Such a terrible disgrace. (*Shutting her eyes in anguish*) Fancy if Flora had actually been married to him.

*Sheppard goes to speak.*

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** You were here yesterday, weren't you, with that dreadful Inspector Raglan? Brute of a man-he terrified Flora into saying she took that money from poor Roger's room. And the matter was so simple, really. The dear child wanted to borrow a few pounds, didn't like to disturb her uncle since he'd given strict orders against it. But knowing where he kept his notes she went there and took what she needed.

**Sheppard** Is that Flora's account of the matter?

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** My dear doctor, you know what girls are nowadays. So easily acted on by suggestion. You, of course, know all about hypnosis and that sort of thing. The inspector shouts at her, says the word 'steal' over and over again, until the poor child gets an inhibition-or is it a complex?-I always mix up those two words-and actually thinks herself that she has stolen the money. I saw at once how it was. But I can't be too thankful for the whole misunderstanding in one way-it seems to have brought those two together-Hector and Flora, I mean. And I assure you that I have been very much worried about Flora in the past: why, at one time I actually thought there was going to be some kind of understanding between her and young Raymond. Just think of it! A private secretary-with practically no means of his own.

**Sheppard** It would have been a severe blow to you. Now, Mrs. Ackroyd, I've got a message for you from Hercule Poirot.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** (Alarmed) For me?

**Sheppard** And the others. I assure you nothing to be worried about. Will you come and let the others know to come too? Nine O'Clock.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Certainly, I suppose we must come if Monsieur Poirot says so. But what is it all about? I like to know beforehand.

**Sheppard** I, myself, do not know any more than you do.

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Very well. I will tell the others, and we will be there at nine o'clock.

**Sheppard** Thank you, Mrs. Ackroyd.

*The lady bows and exits. Poirot enters and Sheppard turns into him. Lights shift.*

**Sheppard** I've been longer than a quarter of an hour, I'm afraid. But once that good lady starts talking it's a matter of the utmost difficulty to get a word in edgeways.

**Poirot** It is of no matter. Me, I have been well amused. This park is magnificent. Shall we set off home?

*Lights shift. Caroline enters with Ursula Bourne. Bourne takes a seat and Caroline moves towards Sheppard and Poirot. It is like she has been watching them arrive up to the door of the home. Caroline puts her finger to her lips.*

**Caroline** (Excited) Ursula Bourne. The parlourmaid from Fernly is here! I've put her in the dining room. She's in a terrible way, poor thing. Says she must see Poirot at once. I've done all I could. Taken her a cup of hot tea. It really goes to one's heart to see anyone in such a state.

**Poirot** In the dining room?

**Sheppard** This way.

*He leads Poirot right in front of Bourne sitting. She has been weeping. Lights shift.*

**Sheppard** Ursula Bourne.

*Poirot moves past Sheppard with outstretched hands.*

**Poirot** No, that is not quite right, I think. It is not Ursula Bourne, is it, my child-but Ursula Paton? Mrs. Ralph Paton.

## CHAPTER 22

### Ursula's Story

*Lights begin to shift slowly and highlight Ursula. She nods once and begins to break down completely. Caroline rushes past the men and puts her arm around the girl, patting her on the shoulder.*

**Caroline** *(Soothingly)* There, there, my dear. It will be all right. You'll see-everything will be all right.

*Ursula sits up and wipes her eyes.*

**Ursula** This is very weak and silly of me.

**Poirot** *(Kindly)* No, no, my child. We can all realize the strain of this last week.

**Sheppard** It must have been a terrible ordeal.

**Ursula** And then to find that you knew. How did you know? Was it Ralph who told you? *(Poirot shakes his head)* You know what brought me to you tonight. This - *(She holds out a crumpled piece of newspaper)*

*Poirot glances at Sheppard and winks.*

**Ursula** It says that Ralph has been arrested. So everything is useless. I need not pretend any longer.

**Poirot** *(With a bit of shame)* Newspaper paragraphs are not always true, mademoiselle. All the same, I think you will do well to make a clean breast of things. The truth is what we need now. *(She hesitates, looking at him doubtfully)* You do not trust me. Yet all the same you came here to find me, did you not? Why was that?

**Ursula** *(In a low voice)* Because I don't believe that Ralph did it. And I think that you are clever, and will find out the truth. And also -

**Poirot** Yes?

**Ursula** I think you are kind.

**Poirot** It is very good that-yes, it is very good. Listen, I do in verity believe that this husband of yours is innocent-but the affair marches badly. If I am to save him, I must know all there is to know-even if it should seem to make the case against him blacker than

before. So you will tell me the whole story, will you not? From the beginning?

**Caroline** (*Settling herself comfortably in an armchair*) You're not going to send me away, I hope. What I want to know, is why this child was masquerading as a parlourmaid?

**Sheppard** Masquerading?

**Caroline** That's what I said. Why did you do it, child? For a wager?

**Ursula** For a living. I am one of seven in my family. We are a poor Irish family. When my father died, most of us girls were cast out into the world to find our own way. My older sister married Captain Folllott. I was determined to earn my own living and preferred the job of parlourmaid to being a nursery governess. I wanted to be the real thing and my sister supplied me the reference. I have been a success at my job - competent and thorough. I enjoy the work and it gives me plenty of time to myself. I met Ralph and we fell in love. Ralph persuaded me to get married in secret because his stepfather would not hear of his marrying a penniless girl. Better to break the news to him afterwards when the timing was more favourable. And so I became Ursula Paton. The plan was for Ralph to pay off his debts, find a job, and then, when he was in a position to support us, and independent of his adopted father, we would break the news to him. In the end, Ralph hoped that his stepfather, ignorant of the marriage, might be persuaded to pay off his debts. The revelation of Ralph's liabilities enraged Roger instead and he refused to help at all. Some months passed, and Ralph was asked back to Fernly. Mr. Ackroyd demanded Ralph should marry Flora. Ralph did not love her, and it was an easy business arrangement. On both sides. Roger Ackroyd dictated his wishes and they both agreed to them. Flora would get liberty, money, and an enlarged horizon. Ralph's debts would be paid, and he could start again with a clean sheet. I gather Ralph saw vaguely the engagement with Flora being broken off after a decent interval had elapsed. He was anxious to keep it from me—a secret between him and Flora. He knew my nature would not accept it. Then his stepfather decided to announce the engagement. He did not tell Ralph, only Flora, and the news fell on me like a bombshell. Ralph summoned me and we met in the wood. Ralph implored me to keep silent for a little while longer but I was determined to not

conceal anything. I wanted to tell Mr. Ackroyd the truth immediately. We parted acrimoniously. That afternoon, I revealed the truth to Mr. Ackroyd. He was furious, already obsessed with his own troubles, and he was not the kind of man to forgive deceit. He directed much rancour at Ralph and accused me of deliberately trying to "entrap" the adopted son of a wealthy man. Unforgiveable things were said on both sides. That evening, I met Ralph in the summerhouse, stealing out from the house by the side door. Ralph blamed me for having irretrievably ruining his prospects by my ill-timed revelation to Mr. Ackroyd. I reproached Ralph for his duplicity. We parted ways and it was a little over half an hour later that Roger Ackroyd's body was discovered. I have not seen nor heard from Ralph since.

**Sheppard** A damning series of facts. Alive, Ackroyd could hardly have failed to alter his will—I knew him well enough to know that to do so would be his first thought. His death came in the nick of time for both of you.

**Poirot** (*Agreeing in tone with Sheppard*) Mademoiselle, I must ask you one question, and you must answer it truthfully, for on it everything may hang: What time was it when you parted from Captain Ralph Paton in the summerhouse? Now, take a little minute so that your answer may be very exact.

**Ursula** (*With a bitter laugh*) Do you think I haven't gone over that again and again in my own mind? It was just half past nine when I went out to meet him. Major Blunt was walking up and down the terrace, so I had to go round through the bushes to avoid him. It must have been about twenty-seven minutes to ten when I reached the summerhouse. Ralph was waiting for me. I was with him ten minutes—not longer, for it was just a quarter to ten when I got back to the house.

**Sheppard** I see why you were so insistent with your question the other day. If only Ackroyd could have been proved to have been killed before a quarter to ten, and not after.

**Poirot** Who left the summerhouse first?

**Ursula** I did.

**Poirot** Leaving Ralph in the summerhouse?

**Ursula** Yes—but you don't think—

**Poirot** Mademoiselle, it is of no importance what I think. What did you do when you got back to the house?

**Ursula** I went up to my room.

**Poirot** And stayed there until when?

**Ursula** Until about ten o'clock.

**Poirot** Is there anyone who can prove that?

**Ursula** Prove? That I was in my room, you mean? (*In horror*) Oh! No. But surely-oh! I see, they might think-they might think-

**Poirot** That it was you who entered by the window and stabbed Mr. Ackroyd as he sat in his chair? Yes, they might think just that.

**Caroline** Nobody but a fool would think any such thing. (*She pats Ursula on the shoulder*)

**Ursula** (*With her face in her hands*) Horrible, horrible.

**Caroline** Don't worry, my dear. Monsieur Poirot doesn't think that really. As for that husband of yours, I don't think much of him, and I tell you so candidly. Running away and leaving you to face the music.

**Ursula** (*Shaking her head*) Oh, no. It wasn't like that at all. Ralph would not run away on his own account. I see now. If he heard of his stepfather's murder, he might think himself that I had done it.

**Caroline** He wouldn't think any such thing.

**Ursula** I was so cruel to him that night-so hard and bitter. I wouldn't listen to what he was trying to say-wouldn't believe that he really cared. I just stood there telling him what I thought of him, and saying the coldest, cruellest things that came into my mind-trying my best to hurt him.

**Caroline** Do him no harm. Never worry about what you say to a man. They're so conceited that they never believe you mean it if it's unflattering.

**Ursula** (*Twisting and untwisting her hands nervously*) When the murder was discovered and he didn't come forward, I was terribly upset. Just for a moment I wondered-but then I knew he couldn't-he couldn't... but I wished he would come forward and say openly that he'd nothing to do with it. I knew that he was fond of Dr. Sheppard, and I fancied that perhaps Dr. Sheppard might know where he was hiding. (*Turning to Sheppard*) That's why I said what I did to you that day. I thought, if you knew where he was, you might pass on the message to him.

**Sheppard** I?

**Caroline** (*Sharply*) Why should James know where he was?

**Ursula** It was very unlikely, I know, but Ralph had often spoken of Dr. Sheppard, and I knew that he would be likely to consider him as his best friend in King's Abbot.

**Sheppard** My dear child, I have not the least idea where Ralph Paton is at the present moment.

**Poirot** That is true enough.

**Ursula** But- (*She holds out the newspaper cutting in a puzzled fashion*)

**Poirot** Ah! That. (*Slightly embarrassed*) A bagatelle, mademoiselle. A rien du tout. Not for a moment do I believe that Ralph Paton has been arrested.

**Ursula** But then-

**Poirot** There is one thing I should like to know-did Captain Paton wear shoes or boots that night?

**Ursula** (*Shaking her head*) I can't remember.

**Poirot** A pity! But how should you? Now, madame (*wagging his forefinger and smiling*) no questions. And do not torment yourself. Be of good courage, and place your faith in Hercule Poirot.

## CHAPTER 23

### Poirot's Little Reunion

**Caroline** And now, (*Rising*) that child is coming upstairs to lie down. Don't you worry, my dear. Monsieur Poirot will do everything he can for you-be sure of that.

**Ursula** I ought to go back to Fernly.

**Caroline** Nonsense. You're in my hands for the time being. You'll stay here for the present, anyway-eh, Monsieur Poirot?

**Poirot** It will be the best plan. This evening I shall want mademoiselle-I beg her pardon, madame-to attend my little reunion. Nine o'clock at my house. It is most necessary that she should be there.

*Caroline nods and exits with Ursula. Poirot drops into a chair.*

**Poirot** So far, so good. Things are straightening themselves out.

**Sheppard** (*Gloomily*) They're getting to look blacker and blacker against Ralph Paton.

**Poirot** (*Nodding*) Yes, that is so. But it was to be expected, was it not?

*Poirot leans back, his eyes half closed, the tips of his fingers just touching each other. Suddenly he sighs and shakes his head.*

**Sheppard** What is it?

**Poirot** It is that there are moments when a great longing for my friend Hastings comes over me. That is the friend of whom I spoke to you-the one who resides now in Argentine. Always, when I have had a big case, he has been by my side. And he has helped me-yes, often he has helped me. For he had a knack, that one, of stumbling over the truth unawares-without noticing it himself, bien entendu. At times, he has said something particularly foolish, and behold that foolish remark has revealed the truth to me! And then, too, it was his practice to keep a written record of the cases that proved interesting.

**Sheppard** *(With a slight embarrassed cough)* As far as that goes..

*Poirot sits upright in his chair, his eyes sparkling.*

**Poirot** But yes? What is it that you would say?

**Sheppard** Well, as a matter of fact. I've read some of Captain Hasting's narratives, and I thought, why not try my hand at something of the same kind. Seemed a pity not to-unique opportunity-probably the only time I'll be mixed up with anything of this kind.

*Poirot springs up from his chair and startles Sheppard for a second.*

**Poirot** But this is magnificent-you have then written down your impressions of the case as you went along?  
*(Sheppard nods)* Epatant! Let me see them-this instant.

**Sheppard** *(Stammering)* I hope you won't mind. I may have been a little-er-personal now and then.

**Poirot** Oh! I comprehend perfectly; you have referred to me as comic-as, perhaps, ridiculous not and then? It matters not at all. Hastings, he also was not always polite. Me, I have the mind above such trivialities.

*Sheppard rummages through a drawer in his desk and produces an untidy pile of manuscript.*

**Sheppard** With an eye on possible publication in the future, I have divided the work into chapters. Last night, I was able to bring it up to date with an account of Miss Russell's visit. I have twenty chapters.

*Poirot looks at him. Impressed. Poirot turns and exits as lights shift.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* I was obliged to go see a patient at some distance away and it was past eight o'clock when I got back. *(Caroline enters)* I was greeted with a plate of hot dinner on a tray, and the announcement that Poirot and my sister had supped together at half past seven. Apparently, Poirot had then gone to my workshop to finish his reading of my manuscript. *(Poirot enters with manuscript at other side of the stage and sits by a window)*

**Caroline** I hope, James, that you've been careful in what you say about me in it?

*Sheppard gives a look to the audience of "he hadn't been careful at all".*

**Caroline** *(Reading his expression)* Not that it matters very much. Monsieur Poirot will know what to think. He understands me much better than you do. *(She exits)*

*Sheppard turns and walks into the window light in the workshop. Poirot places the manuscript neatly beside him and lays his hand on it.*

**Poirot** Eh Bien. I congratulate you-on your modesty!

**Sheppard** *(Taken aback)* Oh!

**Poirot** And your reticence.

**Sheppard** Oh!

**Poirot** Not so did Hastings write. On every page, many, many times was what he thought-what he did. But you-you have kept your personality in the background; only once or twice does it obtrude-in scenes of home life, shall we say?

**Sheppard** *(Nervously)* What do you really think of the stuff?

**Poirot** You want my candid opinion?

**Sheppard** Yes.

**Poirot** *(Jesting now aside)* A very meticulous and accurate account. *(Kindly)* You have recorded all the facts faithfully and exactly-though you have shown yourself becomingly reticent as to your own share in them.

**Sheppard** And it has helped you?

**Poirot** Yes. I may say that it has helped me considerably. Come, we must go over to my house and set the stage for my little performance.

*Caroline enters as they begin to go.*

**Caroline** May I come as well?

**Poirot**     *(Tactfully)* I should much like to have had you present, mademoiselle, but at this juncture it would not be wise. See you, all these people tonight are suspects. Amongst them, I shall find the person who killed Mr. Ackroyd.

**Sheppard** You really believe that?

**Poirot**     *(Drily)* I see that you do not. Not yet do you appreciate Hercule Poirot at his true worth.

*Ursula enters down the staircase.*

**Poirot**     You are ready, my child? That is good. We will go to my house together. Mademoiselle Caroline, believe me, I do everything possible to render you service. Good evening.

*Caroline disappointed watches them exit. Lights shifts to The Larches. Caroline exits as we transition into dinner. On the table we have various siropes and glasses. Also a plate of biscuits. Several chairs are brought on by Poirot, Sheppard, and Ursula. The chairs are placed beside each other on one side of the room. The actors can also place the table, siropes and glasses, if you wish. We might see them set up the whole scene to music unless you have found a way to pre-set this scene during the last one. Poirot concentrates on arranging the lamps in a way that throws light on the side of the room where the chairs are grouped. He places a chair on the other side for himself.*

*The bell rings.*

**Poirot**     They arrive. Good, all is in readiness.

*Poirot steps forward and Mrs. Ackroyd and Flora enter. Major Blunt and Mr. Raymond follow behind them.*

**Poirot**     Welcome, Mrs. Ackroyd and Miss Ackroyd. It is most good of you to come, Major Blunt and Mr. Raymond.

**Raymond**   *(Laughing)* What's the great idea, Poirot? Some scientific machine? Do we have bands round our wrists which register guilty heart-beats? There is such an invention for this, isn't there?

**Poirot**     I have read of it, yes. But me, I am old-fashioned. I use the old methods. I work only with the little grey cells. Now let us begin-but first I have an announcement to make to you all.

*He takes Ursula's hand and draws her forward.*

**Poirot** This lady is Mrs. Ralph Paton. She was married to Captain Paton last March.

*Mrs. Ackroyd shrieks.*

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd** Ralph! Married! Last March! Oh, but it's absurd. How could he be? Really, Monsieur Poirot, I don't believe you.

*Ursula goes to speak but Flora cuts her off, going quickly to her side, and passing her hand through Ursula's arm.*

**Flora** You must not mind our being surprised. You see, we had no idea of such a thing. You and Ralph have kept your secret very well. I am-very glad about it.

**Ursula** *(In a low voice)* You are very kind, Miss Ackroyd, and you have every right to be exceedingly angry. Ralph behaved very badly-especially to you.

**Flora** You needn't worry about that *(giving Ursula's arm a consoling pat)*. Ralph was in a corner and took the only way out. I should probably have done the same in his place. I do think he might have trusted me with the secret, though. I wouldn't have let him down.

*Poirot clears his throat and raps the table gently.*

**Flora** The board meeting's going to begin. Monsieur Poirot hints that we mustn't talk. But just tell me one thing. Where is Ralph? You must know if anyone does.

**Ursula** *(With emotion)* But I don't. That's just it, I don't.

**Raymond** Isn't he detained at Liverpool? It said so in the paper.

**Poirot** *(Shortly)* He is not at Liverpool.

**Sheppard** In fact, no one knows where he is.

**Raymond** Except Hercule Poirot, eh?

**Poirot** Me, I know everything. Remember that.

**Raymond** *(Lifting his eyebrows)* Everything? Whew, that's a tall order!

**Sheppard** *(Incredulously)* Do you mean to say you can really guess where Ralph Paton is hiding?

**Poirot** You call it guessing. I call it knowing, my friend.

**Sheppard** In Cranchester?

**Poirot** No, not in Cranchester.

*Poirot gestures for them to take their seats. As they sit, Parker and Russell enter.*

**Poirot**      *(Satisfaction)* Ah, the number is complete. Everyone is here.

*An uneasiness comes over all the guests. They feel a suggestion in all this as of a trap that had closed upon them.*

*Poirot pulls a list and reads it.*

**Poirot**      Mrs. Ackroyd, Miss Flora Ackroyd, Major Blunt, Mr. Geoffrey Raymond, Mrs. Ralph Paton, John Parker, Elizabeth Russell.

*He lays the paper down on the table.*

**Raymond**     What's the meaning of all this?

**Poirot**      The list I have just read is a list of suspected persons. Every one of you present had the opportunity to kill Mr. Ackroyd-

**Mrs.**

**Ackroyd**     *(Springing up)* I don't like it. I don't like it. I would much prefer to go home.

**Poirot**      *(Sternly)* You cannot go home, madame, until you have heard what I have to say. *(Pauses and clears his throat)* I will start at the beginning. When Miss Ackroyd asked me to investigate the case, I went up to Fernly Park with the good Doctor Sheppard. I walked with him along the terrace, where I was shown the footprints on the windowsill. From there Inspector Raglan took me along the path which leads to the drive. My eye was caught by a little summerhouse, and I searched it thoroughly. I found two things—a scrap of starched cambric and an empty goose quill. The scrap of cambric immediately suggested to me a maid's apron. When Inspector Raglan showed me his list of the people in the house, I noticed at once that one of the maids—Ursula Bourne, the parlourmaid—had no real alibi. According to her own story, she was in her bedroom from nine-thirty until ten. But supposing that instead she was in the summerhouse? If so, she must have gone there to meet someone. Now we know from Dr. Sheppard that someone from outside did come to the house that night—the stranger whom he met just by the gate. At first glance it would seem that our problem was solved, and that the stranger went to the

summerhouse to meet Ursula Bourne. It was fairly certain that he did go to the summerhouse because of the goose quill. That suggested at once to my mind a taker of drugs-and one who had acquired the habit on the other side of the Atlantic where sniffing 'snow' is more common than in this country. The man whom Dr. Sheppard met had an American accent, which fitted in with that supposition. But I was held up by one point. The times did not fit. Ursula Bourne could certainly not have gone to the summerhouse before nine-thirty, whereas the man must have got there by a few minutes past nine. I could, of course, assume that he waited there for half an hour. The only alternative supposition was that there had been two separate meetings in the summerhouse that night. Eh bien, as soon as I went into that alternative I found several significant facts. I discovered that Miss Russell, the housekeeper, had visited Dr. Sheppard that morning, and had displayed a good deal of interest in cures for victims of drug habit. Taking that in conjunction with the goose quill, I assumed that the man in question came to Fernly to meet the housekeeper, and not Ursula Bourne. Who, then, did Ursula Bourne come to the rendezvous to meet? I was not long in doubt. First I found a ring-a wedding ring-with 'From R.' and a date inside it. Then I learnt that Ralph Paton had been seen coming up the path which led to the summerhouse at twenty-five minutes past nine, and I also heard of a certain conversation which had taken place in the wood near the village that very afternoon-a conversation between Ralph Paton and some unknown girl. So I had my facts succeeding each other in a neat and orderly manner. A secret marriage, an engagement announced on the day of the tragedy, the stormy interview in the wood, and the meeting arranged for the summerhouse that night. Incidentally this proved to me one thing, that both Ralph Paton and Ursula Bourne (or Paton) had the strongest motives for wishing Mr. Ackroyd out of the way. And it also made one other point unexpectedly clear. It could not have been Ralph Paton who was with Mr. Ackroyd in the study at nine-thirty. So we come to another and most interesting aspect of the crime. Who was it in the room with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty? Not Ralph Paton, who was in the summerhouse with his wife. Not Charles Kent, who had already left. Who, then? I posed my cleverest-my most audacious question: (*Leaning forward*

*and shooting these next words triumphantly at them)*  
Was anyone with him?

**Raymond** (*Not impressed*) I don't know if you're trying to make me out a liar, Monsieur Poirot, but the matter does not rest on my evidence alone—except perhaps as to the exact words used. Remember, Major Blunt also heard Mr. Ackroyd talking to someone. He was on the terrace outside, and couldn't catch the words clearly, but he distinctly heard the voices.

**Poirot** (*Nodding*) I have not forgotten. But Major Blunt was under the impression that it was you to whom Mr. Ackroyd was speaking.

**Raymond** (*Taken aback*) Blunt knows now that he was mistaken.  
**Blunt** Exactly.

**Poirot** Yet there must have been some reason for his thinking so.

**Blunt** (*Holding up his hand in protest*) Oh, no! I know the reason you will give—but it is not enough. We must seek elsewhere. I will put it this way. From the beginning of the case, I have been struck by one thing—the nature of those words which Mr. Raymond overheard. It has been amazing to me that no one has commented on them—has seen anything odd about them. (*Pause and then quoting*) "... the calls on my purse have been so frequent of late that I fear it is impossible for me to accede your request." Does nothing strike you as odd about that?

**Raymond** I don't think so. He has frequently dictated letters to me, using almost exactly those same words.

**Poirot** Exactly. That is what I seek to arrive at. Would any man use such a phrase in talking to another? Impossible that that should be part of a real conversation. Now, if he had been dictating a letter—

**Raymond** You mean he was reading a letter aloud. Even so, he must have been reading to someone.

**Poirot** But why? We have no evidence that there was anyone else in the room. No other voice but Mr. Ackroyd's was heard, remember.

**Raymond** Surely a man wouldn't read letters of that type aloud to himself—not unless he was—well—going barmy.

**Poirot** (*Softly*) You have all forgotten one thing. The stranger who called at the house the preceding Wednesday. (*They all stare at him*) But yes, on Wednesday. The young man was not of himself important. But the firm he represented interested me very much.

**Raymond** (*Gasping*) The Dictaphone Company! I see it now. A Dictaphone. That's what you think?

- Poirot** (*Nodding*) Mr. Ackroyd had promised to invest in a Dictaphone, you remember. Me, I had the curiosity to inquire of the company in question. Their reply is that Mr. Ackroyd did purchase a Dictaphone from their representative. Why he concealed the matter from you, I do not know.
- Raymond** He must have meant to surprise me with it. He had quite a childish love of surprising people. Meant to keep it up his sleeve for a day or so. Probably was playing with it like a new toy. Yes, it fits in. You're quite right-no one would use quite those words in casual conversation.
- Poirot** It explains, too, why Major Blunt thought it was you who were in the study. Such scraps as came to him were fragments of dictation, and so his subconscious mind deduced that you were with him. His conscious mind was occupied with something quite different-the white figure he had caught a glimpse of. He fancied it was Miss Ackroyd. Really, of course, it was Ursula Bourne's white apron he saw as she was stealing down to the summerhouse.
- Raymond** All the same, this discovery of yours, brilliant though it is (I'm quite sure I should never have thought of it), leaves the essential position unchanged. Mr. Ackroyd was alive at nine-thirty, since he was speaking into the Dictaphone. It seems clear that the man Charles Kent was really off the premises by then. As to Ralph Paton-? (*He hesitates glancing at Ursula*)
- Ursula** (*Steadily*) Ralph and I parted just before a quarter to ten. He never went near the house, I am sure of that. He had no intention of doing so. The last thing on earth he wanted was to face his stepfather. He would have funk'd it badly.
- Raymond** It isn't that I doubt your story for a moment. I've always been quite sure Captain Paton was innocent. But one has to think of a court of law-and the questions that would be asked. He is in a most unfortunate position, but if he were to come forward-
- Poirot** That is your advice, yes? That he should come forward?
- Raymond** Certainly. If you know where he is-
- Poirot** I perceive that you do not believe that I do know. And yet I have told you just now that I know everything. The truth of the telephone call, of the footprints on the windowsill, of the hiding-place of Ralph Paton-
- Blunt** (*Sharply*) Where is he?
- Poirot** (*Smiling*) Not very far away.

**Sheppard** In Cranchester?

**Poirot** (*Turning towards Sheppard*) Always you ask me that. The idea of Cranchester, it is with you an idee fixe. No, he is not in Cranchester. (*Pointing a dramatic forefinger*) He is- there!

*Everyone's head turns. Lights come up on Ralph Paton standing on stage.*

## CHAPTER 24

### Ralph Paton's Story

*Gasps and cries of surprise are heard from everyone but Poirot. Ralph walks over to his wife, Ursula, and grabs her hand. He smiles at Sheppard. Poirot also smiles and shakes his eloquent finger at Sheppard.*

**Poirot** (*Demanding*) Have I not told you at least thirty-six times that it is useless to conceal things from Hercule Poirot? That in such a case he finds out? (*He turns to the others*) One day, you remember, we held a little séance about a table-just the six of us. I accused the other five persons present of concealing something from me. Four of them gave up their secret. Dr. Sheppard did not give up his. But all along I have had my suspicions. Dr. Sheppard went to the Three Boars that night hoping to find Ralph. He did not find him there; but supposing, I said to myself, that he met him in the street on his way home? Dr. Sheppard was a friend of Captain Paton's, and he had come straight from the scene of the crime. He must know that things looked very black against him. Perhaps he knew more than the general public did-

**Sheppard** (*Ruefully*) I did. I suppose I might as well make a clean breast of things now. I went to see Ralph that afternoon. At first he refused to take me into his confidence, but later he told me about his marriage, and the hole he was in. As soon as the murder was discovered, I realized that once the facts were known, suspicion could not fail to attach to Ralph-or, if not to him, to the girl he loved. That night I put the facts plainly before him. The thought of having possibly to give evidence which might incriminate his wife made him resolve at all costs to-to- (*Hesitates*)

**Ralph Paton**

To do a bunk. You see, Ursula left me to go back to the house. I thought it possible that she might have attempted to have another interview with my stepfather. He had already been very rude to her that afternoon. It occurred to me that he might have so insulted her-in such an unforgivable manner-that without knowing what she was doing (*He stops*)

*Ursula releases her hand from his and steps back.*

**Ursula** You thought that, Ralph! You actually thought that I might have done it?

**Poirot** Let us get back to the culpable conduct of Dr. Sheppard. Dr. Sheppard consented to do what he could to help him. He was successful in hiding Captain Paton from the police.

**Raymond** Where? In his own house?

**Poirot** Ah, no indeed. You should ask yourself the question that I did. If the good doctor is concealing the young man, what place would he choose? It must necessarily be somewhere near at hand. I think of Cranchester. A hotel? No. Lodgings? Even more emphatically, no. Where, then? Ah! I have it. A nursing home. A home for the mentally unfit. I test my theory. I invent a nephew with mental trouble. I consult Mademoiselle Sheppard as to suitable homes. She gives me the names of two near Cranchester to which her brother has sent patients. I make inquiries. Yes, at one of them a patient was brought there by the doctor himself early on Saturday morning. The patient, though known by another name, I had no difficulty in identifying as Captain Paton. After certain necessary formalities, I was allowed to bring him away. He arrived at my house in the early hours of yesterday morning.

**Sheppard** Caroline's Home Office expert. And to think I never guessed!

**Poirot** You see now why I drew attention to the reticence of your manuscript. It was strictly truthful as far as it went-but it did not go very far, eh, my friend?

**Ralph Paton**

Dr. Sheppard has been very loyal. He has stood by me through thick and thin. He did what he thought was best. I see now, from what Monsieur Poirot has told me, that it was not really the best. I should have come forward and faced the music. You see, in the

home, we never saw a newspaper. I knew nothing of what was going on.

**Poirot** (*Drily*) Dr. Sheppard has been a model of discretion. But me, I discover all the little secrets. It is my business.

**Raymond** (*Impatiently*) Now we can have your story of what happened that night.

**Ralph Paton**

You know it already. There's very little for me to tell. I left the summerhouse about nine forty-five, and tramped about the lanes, trying to make up my mind as to what to do next-what line to take. I'm bound to admit that I've not the shadow of an alibi, but I give you my solemn word that I never went to the study, that I never saw my stepfather alive-or dead. Whatever the world thinks. I'd like all of you to believe me.

**Raymond** No alibi. That's bad. I believe you, of course, but-it's a bad business.

**Poirot** (*Cheerfully*) It makes things very simple, though. Very simple indeed. (*They all stare at him*) You see what I mean? No? Just this-to save Captain Paton the real criminal must confess. (*He beams at all of them*) but yes-I mean what I say. See now, I did not invite Inspector Raglan to be present. That was for a reason. I did not want to tell him all that I knew-at least I did not want to tell him tonight. (*He leans forward and his whole personality changes - dangerous*) I who speak to you-I know the murderer of Mr. Ackroyd is in this room now. It is to the murderer I speak. Tomorrow the truth goes to Inspector Raglan. You understand?

*A tense silence. The bell rings. Poirot walks off stage. We hear "Telegram, sir" and Poirot's voice saying "Thank you, Mademoiselle". Poirot enters again tearing open the telegram. Poirot is reading the message.*

**Blunt** (*Abrupt and resonant*) The murderer is amongst us, you say? You know-which?

*Poirot crumples the telegram in his hand.*

**Poirot** I know-now. (*He taps the crumpled ball of paper*)

**Raymond** (*Sharply*) What is that? A wireless message-from a steamer now on her way to the United States.

*Silence. Poirot Bows.*

**Poirot** Messieurs et Mesdames, this reunion of mine is at an end. Remember-the truth goes to Inspector Raglan in the morning.

## CHAPTER 25

### The Whole Truth

*Poirot gestures to Sheppard to stay. Lights shift.  
Sheppard speaks to the audience as they all begin to exit.*

**Sheppard** *(To the audience)* I was puzzled. For a moment I was inclined to think that the scene I had just witnessed was a gigantic piece of bombast. There had been real menace in his words-a certain indisputable sincerity. But I still believed him to be on entirely the wrong tack.

**Poirot** Well, my friend, and what do you think of it all?

**Sheppard** I don't know what to think. What was the point? Why not go straight to Inspector Raglan with the truth instead of giving the guilty person this elaborate warning?

*Poirot sits down and takes out his case of tiny Russian cigarettes. He lights a cigarette and takes a few puffs thinking. After several seconds...*

**Poirot** Use your little grey cells. There is always a reason behind my actions.

**Sheppard** *(Beat)* The first one that occurs to me is that you yourself do not know who the guilty person is, but that you are sure that he is to be found amongst the people here tonight. Therefore your words were intended to force a confession from the unknown murderer?

**Poirot** *(Nodding)* A clever idea, but not the truth.

**Sheppard** I thought, perhaps, that by making him believe you knew, you might force him out into the open-not necessarily by confession. He might try to silence you as he formerly silenced Mr. Ackroyd-before you could act tomorrow morning.

**Poirot** A trap with myself as the bait! Merci, mon ami, but I am not sufficiently heroic for that.

**Sheppard** Then I fail to understand you. Surely you are running the risk of letting the murderer escape by thus putting him on his guard?

**Poirot**     *(Shaking his head)* He cannot escape. There is only one way out-and that way does not lead to freedom.

**Sheppard**   *(Incredulously)* You really believe that one of those people here tonight committed the murder?

**Poirot**     Yes, my friend.

**Sheppard**   Which one?

*Silence. Poirot puts out his cigarette.*

**Poirot**     I will take you the way that I have travelled myself. Step by step you shall accompany me, and see for yourself that all the facts point indisputably to one person. Now, to begin with, there were two facts and a little discrepancy in time which especially attracted my attention. The first fact was the telephone call. If Ralph Paton were indeed the murderer, the telephone call became meaningless and absurd. Therefore, I said to myself, Ralph Paton is not the murderer. I satisfied myself that the call could not have been sent by anyone in the house, yet I was convinced that it was amongst those present on the fatal evening that I had to look for my criminal. Therefore I concluded that the telephone call must have been sent by an accomplice. I was not quite pleased with that deduction, but I let it stand for the minute. I next examined the motive for the call. That was difficult. I could only get at it by judging its result. Which was-that the murder was discovered that night instead of-in all probability-the following morning. You agree with that?

**Sheppard**   Ye-es. Yes. As you say, Mr. Ackroyd, having given orders that he was not to be disturbed, nobody would have been likely to go to the study that night.

**Poirot**     Tres bien. The affair marches, does it not? But matters were still obscure. What was the advantage of having the crime discovered that night in preference to the following morning? The only idea I could get hold of was that the murderer, knowing the crime was to be discovered at a certain time, could make sure of being present when the door was broken in-or at any rate immediately afterwards. And now we come to the second fact-the chair pulled out from the wall. Inspector Raglan dismissed that as of no importance. I, on the contrary, have always regarded it as of supreme importance. In your manuscript you have drawn a neat little plan of the study. If you had it with you this minute you would see that-the chair being

drawn out in the position indicated by Parker-it would stand in a direct line between the door and the window.

**Sheppard**  
**Poirot**

The window!

You, too, have my first idea. I imagined that the chair was drawn out so that something connected with the window should not be seen by anyone entering through the door. But I soon abandoned that supposition, for though the chair was a grandfather with a high back, it obscured very little of the window-only the part between the sash and the ground. No, mona mi-but remember that just in front of the window there stood a table with books and magazines upon it. Now that table was completely hidden by the drawn-out chair-and immediately I had my first shadowy suspicion of the truth. Now, supposing that there had been something on that table not intended to be seen? Something placed there by the murderer? As yet I had no inkling of what that something might be. But I knew certain very interesting facts about it. For instance, it was something that the murderer had not been able to take away with him at the time that he committed the crime. At the same time, it was vital that it should be removed as soon as possible after the crime had been discovered. And so-the telephone message, and the opportunity for the murderer to be on the spot when the body was discovered. Now, four people were on the scene before the police arrived. Yourself, Parker, Major Blunt, and Mr. Raymond. Parker I eliminated at once, since at whatever time the crime was discovered, he was the one person certain to be on the spot. Also, it was he who told me of the pulled-out chair. Parker, then, was cleared (of the murder, that is. I still thought it possible that he had been blackmailing Mrs. Ferrars). Raymond and Blunt, however, remained under suspicion since, if the crime had been discovered in the early hours of the morning, it was quite possible that they might have arrived on the scene too late to prevent the object on the round table being discovered. Now what was that object? You heard my arguments tonight in reference to the scrap of conversation overheard? As soon as I learned that a representative of a Dictaphone company had called, the idea of a Dictaphone took root in my mind. You heard what I said in this room not half an hour ago? They all agreed with my theory-but one vital fact seems to have escaped them. Granted that a Dictaphone was being

used by Mr. Ackroyd that night-why was no Dictaphone found?

**Sheppard** I never thought of that.

**Poirot** We know that a Dictaphone was supplied to Mr. Ackroyd. But no Dictaphone has been found amongst his effects. So, if something was taken from the table-why should not that something be the Dictaphone? But there were certain difficulties in the way. The attention of everyone was, of course, focused on the murdered man. I think anyone could have gone to the table unnoticed by the other people in the room. But a Dictaphone has a certain bulk-it cannot be slipped casually into a pocket. There must have been a receptacle of some kind capable of holding it. You see where I am arriving? The figure of the murderer is taking shape. A person who was on the scene straightaway, but who might not have been if the crime had been discovered the following morning. A person carrying a receptacle into which the Dictaphone might be fitted-

**Sheppard** But why remove the Dictaphone? What was the point?

**Poirot** You are like Mr. Raymond. You take it for granted that what was heard at nine-thirty was Mr. Ackroyd's voice speaking into a Dictaphone. But consider this useful invention for a little minute. You dictate into it, do you not? And at the same later time a secretary or a typist turns it on, and the voice speaks again.

**Sheppard** (*Gasp*) You mean?

**Poirot** (*Nodding*) Yes, I meant that. At nine-thirty Mr. Ackroyd was already dead. It was the Dictaphone speaking-not the man.

**Sheppard** And the murderer switched it on. Then he must have been in the room at that minute?

**Poirot** Possibly. But we must not exclude the likelihood of some mechanical device having been applied-something after the nature of a time lock, or even a simple alarm clock. But in that case we must add two qualifications to our imaginary portrait of the murderer. It must be someone who knew of Mr. Ackroyd's purchase of the Dictaphone and also someone with the necessary mechanical knowledge. I had got this far in my own mind when we came to the footprints on the window ledge. Here there were three conclusions open to me: (1) They might really have been made by Ralph Paton. He had been at Fernly that night and might have climbed into the study and found his uncle dead there. That was one hypothesis. (2) There was the possibility that the footmarks might have been made by somebody

else who happened to have the same kind of studs in his shoes. But the inmates of the house had shoes soled with crepe rubber, and I declined to believe in the coincidence of someone from outside having the same kind of shoes as Ralph Paton wore. Charles Kent, as we know from the barmaid of the Dog and Whistle, had on a pair of boots 'clean dropping off him.' (3) Those prints were made by someone deliberately trying to throw suspicion on Ralph Paton. To test this last conclusion, it was necessary to ascertain certain facts. One pair of Ralph's shoes had been obtained from the Three Boars by the police. Neither Ralph nor anyone else could have worn them that evening, since they were downstairs being cleaned. According to the police theory, Ralph was wearing another pair of the same kind, and I found out that it was true that he had two pairs. Now for my theory to be proved correct it was necessary for the murderer to have worn Ralph's shoes that evening-in which case Ralph must have been wearing yet a third pair of footwear of some kind. I could hardly suppose that he would bring three pairs of shoes all alike-the third pair of footwear were more likely to be boots. I got your sister to make inquiries on this point-laying some stress on the colour, in order-I admit it frankly-to obscure the real reason for my asking. You know the result of her investigations. Ralph Paton had had a pair of boots with him. The first question I asked him when he came to my house yesterday morning was what he was wearing on his feet on the fatal night. He replied at once that he had worn boots-he was still wearing them, in fact-having nothing else to put on. So we get a step further in our description of the murderer-a person who had the opportunity to take these shoes of Ralph Paton's from the Three Boars that day. There is one further point. The murderer must have been a person who had the opportunity to purloin that dagger from the silver table. You might argue that anyone in the house might have done so, but I will recall to you that Flora Ackroyd was very positive that the dagger was not there when she examined the silver table. (Beat) Let us recapitulate-now that all is clear. A person who was at the Three Boars earlier that day, a person who knew Ackroyd well enough to know that he had purchased a Dictaphone, a person who was of a mechanical turn of mind, who had the opportunity to take the dagger from the silver table before Miss

Flora arrived, who had with him a receptacle suitable for hiding the Dictaphone—such as a black bag—and who had the study to himself for a few minutes after the crime was discovered while Parker was telephoning for the police. In fact—Dr Sheppard!

## CHAPTER 26

### And Nothing But The Truth

Silence.

**Sheppard** (*Laughing*) You're mad.

**Poirot** No, I am not mad. It was the little discrepancy in time that first drew my attention to you—right at the beginning.

**Sheppard** (*Puzzled*) Discrepancy in time?

**Poirot** But yes. You will remember that everyone agreed—you yourself included—that it took five minutes to walk from the lodge to the house—less if you took the short cut to the terrace. But you left the house at ten minutes to nine—both by your own statement and that of Parker, and yet it was nine o'clock when you passed through the lodge gates. It was a chilly night—not an evening a man would be inclined to dawdle; why had you taken ten minutes to do a five minutes' walk? All along I realized that we had only your statement for it that the study window was ever fastened. Ackroyd asked you if you had done so—he never looked to see. Supposing, then, that the study window was unfastened? Would there be time in that ten minutes for you to run round the outside of the house, change your shoes, climb in through the window, kill Ackroyd, and get to the gate by nine o'clock? I decided against that theory since, in all probability a man as nervous as Ackroyd was that night, would hear you climbing in, and then there would have been a struggle. But supposing that you killed Ackroyd before you left—as you were standing beside his chair? Then you go out of the front door, run round to the summerhouse, take Ralph Paton's shoes out of the bag you brought up with you that night, slip them on, walk through the mud in them, and leave prints on the window ledge, you climb in, lock the study door on the inside, run back to the summerhouse, change back into your own shoes, and race down to the gate—I went through similar actions the other day, when you were with Mrs. Ackroyd—it took ten

minutes exactly. Then home-and an alibi-since you had timed the Dictaphone for half past nine.

**Sheppard** (*Forced*) My dear Poirot, you've been brooding over this case too long. What on earth had I to gain by murdering Ackroyd?

**Poirot** Safety. It was you who blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars. Who could have had a better knowledge of what killed Mr. Ferrars than the doctor who was attending him? When you spoke to me that first day in the garden, you mentioned a legacy received about a year ago. I have been unable to discover any trace of a legacy. You had to invent some way of accounting for Mrs. Ferrar's twenty thousand pounds. It has not done you much good. You lost most of it in speculation-a gold mine in Western Australia?-then you put the screw on too hard, and Mrs. Ferrars took a way out that you had not expected. If Ackroyd had learnt the truth he would have had no mercy on you-you were ruined for ever.

**Sheppard** (*Rallying*) And the telephone call? You have a plausible explanation of that also, I suppose?

**Poirot** I will confess to you that it was my greatest stumbling block when I found that a call had actually been put through to you from King's Abbot station. I at first believed that you had simply invented the story. It was a very clever touch, that. You must have some excuse for arriving at Fernly, finding the body, and so getting the chance to remove the Dictaphone on which your alibi depended. I had a very vague notion of how it was worked when I came to see your sister that first day and inquired as to what patients you had seen on Friday morning. I had no thought of Miss Russell in my mind at the time. Her visit was a lucky coincidence, since it distracted your mind from the real object of my questions. I found what I was looking for. Among your patients that morning was the steward of an American liner. Who more suitable than he to be leaving for Liverpool by the train that evening? And afterwards he would be on the high seas, well out of the way. I noted that the Orion sailed on Saturday, and having obtained the name of the steward, I sent him a wireless message asking a certain question. This is his reply you saw me receive just now. (*He holds out the message and reads*) Quite correct. Dr. Sheppard asked me to leave a note at a patient's house. I was to ring him up from the station with the reply. The reply was 'no answer'. (*Beat*) It was a clever idea. The call was genuine, your sister

saw you take it, but there was only one man's word as to what was actually said—your own!

**Sheppard** (Yawning) All this is very interesting—but hardly in the sphere of practical politics.

**Poirot** You think not? Remember what I said—the truth goes to Inspector Raglan in the morning. But, for the sake of your good sister, I am willing to give you the chance of another way out. There might be, for instance, an overdose of a sleeping draught. You comprehend me? But Captain Ralph Paton must be cleared—ga va sans dire. I should suggest that you finish that very interesting manuscript of yours—but abandoning your former reticence.

**Sheppard** You seem to be very prolific of suggestions. Are you sure you've quite finished?

**Poirot** Now that you remind me of the fact, it is true that there is one thing more. It would be most unwise on your part to attempt to silence me as you silenced Monsieur Ackroyd. That kind of business does not succeed against Hercule Poirot, you understand.

**Sheppard** (Smiling) My dear Poirot, whatever else I may be, I am not a fool. (He rises to his feet) Well, well (Yawns), I must be off home. Thank you for a most interesting and instructive evening.

*Sheppard goes to exit as Poirot rises and bows with his accustomed politeness.*

## CHAPTER 27

### Apologia

*Sheppard walks over to a chair and a desk and sits down. Poirot exits. Lights shift to early morning. Sheppard pulls his manuscript from the desk and begins writing. After a few moments Sheppard looks up and begins to speak to the audience.*

**Sheppard** A strange end to my manuscript. I meant it to be published some day as the history of one of Poirot's failures! Odd, how things pan out. You know, all alone I've had a premonition of disaster, from the moment I saw Ralph Paton and Mrs. Ferrars with their heads together. I thought then that she was confiding in him; as it happened, I was quite wrong there, but the idea persisted even after I went into the study with Ackroyd that night, until he told me the truth. Poor old Ackroyd. I'm always glad that I gave him a chance.

I urged him to read that letter before it was too late. Or let me be honest-didn't I subconsciously realize that with a pigheaded chap like him, it was my best chance of getting him not to read it? His nervousness that night was interesting psychologically. He knew danger was close at hand. And yet he never suspected me. The dagger was an afterthought. I'd brought up a very handy little weapon of my own, but when I saw the dagger lying in the silver table, it occurred to me at once how much better it would be to use a weapon that couldn't be traced to me. I suppose I must have meant to murder him all along. As soon as I heard of Mrs. Ferrars's death, I felt convinced that she would have told him everything before she died. When I met him and he seemed so agitated, I thought perhaps he knew the truth, but that he couldn't bring himself to believe it, and was going to give me the chance of refuting it. The Dictaphone he had given me two days ago to adjust. Something had gone a little wrong with it, and I persuaded him to let me have a go at it. I took it up with me in my bag that evening. (*Beat*) I am rather pleased with myself as a writer. I mean, what could be neater, for instance, than the following: (*He reads to the audience*)

"The letters were brought in at twenty minutes to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone."

All true, you see. But Suppose I had put a row of stars after the first sentence! (*He reads again*) "The letters were brought in at twenty minutes to nine." Star, star, star-"It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread." Would somebody then have wondered what exactly happened in that blank ten minutes? When I looked round the room from the door, I was quite satisfied. Nothing had been left undone. The Dictaphone was on the table by the window, timed to go off at nine-thirty (the mechanism of that little device was rather clever-based on the principle of an alarm clock), and the armchair was pulled out so as to hide it from the door. I must admit that it gave me rather a shock to run into Parker just outside the door. I have faithfully

recorded that fact. Then later, when the body was discovered, and I sent Parker to telephone for the police, what a judicious use of words: "I did what little had to be done!" It was quite little-just to shove the Dictaphone into my bag and push back the chair against the wall in its proper place. I never dreamed that Parker would have noticed that chair. Logically, he ought to have been so agog over the body as to be blind to everything else. But I hadn't reckoned with the trained servant complex. I wish I could have known beforehand that Flora was going to say she'd seen her uncle alive at a quarter to ten. That puzzled me more than I can say. In fact, all through the case there have been things that puzzled me hopelessly. Everyone seems to have taken a hand. My greatest fear all through has been Caroline. I have fancied she might guess. Curious the way she spoke that day of my "strain of weakness." Well, she will never know the truth. There is, as Poirot said, one way out...

I can trust him. He and Inspector Raglan will manage it between them. I should not like Caroline to know. She is fond of me, and then, too, she is proud.. My death will be a grief to her, but grief passes...

(Beat) When I have finished writing, I shall enclose this whole manuscript in an envelope and address it to Poirot. And then-what shall it be? Veronal? There would be a kind of poetic justice. Not that I take any responsibility for Mrs. Ferrars's death. It was the direct consequence of her own actions. I feel no pity for her. (Beat) I have no pity for myself either. So let it be Veronal. But I wish Hercule Poirot had never retired from work and come here to grow vegetable marrows.

*We see Sheppard take 21 grams of Veronal.*

*Lights snap to black.*

## **The End**

