

THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Caroline Sheppard is seated in the study of the house she shares with her brother Dr. James Sheppard. The corner of the room will contain a small work bench. James is an inveterate 'fixer'. )

CAROLINE: What on Earth are you doing out there James?

JAMES: (Off.) Just coming, my dear. I've been hanging up my coat.

CAROLINE: You could have hung up half a dozen in this time.

NARRATOR: She was quite right. I could have. (He is dressed at all times exactly as James. James enters.) I walked in, gave Caroline the usual peck on the cheek and took up my favorite chair.

CAROLINE: You've had an early call.

JAMES: Yes. King's Paddock. Mrs. Ferrars.

CAROLINE: I know.

NARRATOR: Said my sister.

JAMES: How did you know?

CAROLINE: Annie told me.

NARRATOR: Our housemaid. A nice girl but an inveterate talker.

CAROLINE: Well?!!!!

JAMES: A bad business. Nothing to be done. She died in her sleep. (Goes to work bench and putters.)

CAROLINE: I know.

JAMES: You can't know. I didn't know until I got there and I haven't mentioned it to a soul. If Annie knows, she must be clairvoyant.

CAROLINE: It wasn't she that told me. It was the milkman. He had it from the Ferrars' cook.

NARRATOR: Mrs. Ferrars died the night of September 16, I was sent for the following morning. Nothing to be done. She had been dead some hours. It was just a few minutes past nine when I arrived home again. I purposely delayed hanging up my hat and coat. To tell the truth I was considerably upset and worried. I am not pretending that at that moment I foresaw the events of the next few weeks. I emphatically did not. But my instincts told me that there were stirring times ahead

CAROLINE: What did she die of? Heart failure?

JAMES: Didn't the milkman tell you?

CAROLINE: He didn't know.

NARRATOR: To tell the truth it was my sister who caused my delay. The motto of the mongoose family, so Mr. Kipling tells us is "Go and find out." If Caroline ever adopts a crest, I should certainly suggest a mongoose rampant. Though Caroline can do any amount of finding out sitting placidly at home. The servants and trades people constitute her intelligence corps. She is also adept at spreading news. I knew that whatever I told her about the affair would be common knowledge in the space of half an hour. I took pains that she not gain any knowledge from me directly, though I daresay she will have gained it from some quarter.

JAMES: She died of an overdose of Veranol. She'd been taking it lately for sleeplessness. Must have taken too much.

CAROLINE: Nonsense, she took it on purpose.

NARRATOR: Mrs. Ferrars' husband died a year ago and Caroline has asserted, without the least foundation, that his wife had poisoned him.

JAMES: There you go, rushing along without rhyme or reason. Why on Earth should Mrs. Ferrars wish to commit suicide? A widow, fairly young still, very well off, in good health. It's absurd.

CAROLINE: She's looked positively awful of late. And you just said that she hasn't been sleeping.

JAMES: What is your diagnosis?

CAROLINE: Remorse.

JAMES: Remorse?

CAROLINE: Yes. You never would believe she murdered her husband. I now believe it more than ever. An overwhelming impulse drove her to get rid of him. She was the sort of person who could not endure suffering of any kind and 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.

NARRATOR: I told her that her idea was nonsense.

JAMES: That is utter nonsense.

NARRATOR: It would be all wrong that Caroline should arrive at the truth simply by a kind of inspired guesswork and everyone thinking she'd done so based on Medical data supplied by me. Life is trying.

CAROLINE: Ten to one she's left a letter confessing everything.

JAMES: She didn't leave a letter of any kind.

CAROLINE: So you did inquire about that.

JAMES: One must always consider the possibility of suicide.

CAROLINE: Will there be an inquest?

JAMES: Not if I'm satisfied that an overdose was taken accidentally.

CAROLINE: Are you absolutely satisfied? (James and Caroline go about their business during the course of the next narrative.)

NARRATOR: I did not answer her. I would at this time, give you some idea about our village. King's Abbot is very like any village. Our big town is Cranchester, nine miles away. We have a large railway station, a small post office and two "General stores". Able bodied men are apt to leave early in life. But we are rich in unmarried ladies and retired military officers. Our hobbies and recreation can be summed up in a word. Gossip. There are two houses of any importance. One is King's Paddock, left to Mrs. Ferrars by her late husband. The other, Fernly Park, is owned by Roger Ackroyd, (Caroline exits.) a very successful manufacturer of wagon wheels. He has a genial nature, and is in fact the life and soul of our little village. At twenty-one he fell in love with and married a beautiful woman some five years his senior. (James exits.) Her name was Paton and she was widowed with one child. The marriage was short and painful. To put it bluntly, Mrs. Ackroyd was a dipsomaniac and drank herself into an early grave. Her son Ralph then seven was raised by Ackroyd, who always regarded him as his own son. Ackroyd and Mrs. Ferrars got on well. And after her husband's death, the intimacy grew. It was freely conjectured that at some time they would marry. It seemed fitting. It was once widely thought that he might marry Miss Russell, his housekeeper. But for the advent of Mrs. Ferrars, it is said Ackroyd could have hardly escaped. That and one other factor, the unexpected arrival of the widow and daughter of Ackroyd's younger brother. Mrs. Cecil Ackroyd has taken up residence at Fernly Park. (James re-enters and the Narrator notices that he has changed his jacket and so crosses to the changing room and also changes, to the matching jacket. James sits.) I don't know what Mrs. Ackroyd thought of the Ferrars affair. It was however to her advantage that Ackroyd remain unmarried. Such are our preoccupation's in King's Abbot. Now there has been a new arrangement of the kaleidoscope. We have been jerked into the midst of tragedy.

CAROLINE: (Off.) James, you have a visitor.

NARRATOR: I was enjoying a short rest between seeing patients and admittedly thinking about the death of Mrs. Ferrars. Had she taken her own life? Had she done so, wouldn't she have left some word behind? Women in my experience, usually wish to reveal the state of mind which led to such a fatal action. I suddenly remembered, seeing her the day before. Walking with Ralph Paton. I remembered that he had quarreled with his stepfather and that he had not been in Kings Abbot for some months and so something struck me as odd about their tête-à-tête. It was then my visitor entered. It was Roger Ackroyd.

ACKROYD: (Entering.) Sheppard. This is a terrible business!

JAMES: You've heard?

ACKROYD: Look here, Sheppard, I've got to talk to you. Can you come back with me?

JAMES: I've got three patients yet to see.

ACKROYD: Then this afternoon. No, better still, dine tonight. Seven thirty? Will that suit you?

JAMES: Yes, I can manage that all right. What's wrong? Is it Ralph?

ACKROYD: Ralph? Oh! No it's not Ralph. Ralph's in London. What makes you think it's ---- It's a ghastly business. See you tonight Sheppard. (As he turns to leave.) Seven thirty.

(He exits. Lights down on study. James remains seated in the darkened room.)

NARRATOR: After I had seen my last patient and once again retired to my study, (Lights up on study.) Caroline stuck her head in the door.

CAROLINE: (Peering into the room.) Miss Russell would like to speak with you.

JAMES: (Pause.) I'll see her in here.

NARRATOR: There is a suggestion of cast iron about Miss Russell. (She enters.) Something that is above the ill's of the flesh.

RUSSELL: Good morning Dr. Sheppard. I should be much obliged if you took a look at my elbow.

NARRATOR: (James will examine her and give her a bottle of liniment.) I took a look and must admit could find nothing. It crossed my mind that it may have been a ploy to enable her to obtain information concerning Mrs. Ferrars' death. I was apparently mistaken. She made a brief reference to the tragedy and nothing more. Yet she seemed disposed to linger and chat.

RUSSELL: Well, thank you very much for the liniment, Doctor (Pause.) Not that I believe it will do the least good.

JAMES: It certainly won't do any harm.

RUSSELL: I don't believe in all these drugs. They do lot's of harm. For instance, take the cocaine habit.

NARRATOR: I was taken aback.

JAMES: Well, as far as that goes-----

RUSSELL: It's very prevalent in high society.

NARRATOR: I'm sure Miss Russell knows far more about high society than I do. I did not attempt to argue with her.

RUSSELL: Just tell me this Doctor. Suppose you are really a slave of the drug habit. Is there any cure?

NARRATOR: I still suspected her of seeking information about Mrs. Ferrars.

JAMES: Now, Veronal, for instance-----

NARRATOR: I detected no reaction.

RUSSELL: Is it true that there are certain poisons so rare as to defy detection?

JAMES: Ah, you have been reading detective stories.

RUSSELL: Yes.

JAMES: The essence of a detective story is to have a rare poison, if possible something from South America, that nobody has ever heard of. Death is instantaneous and western science is powerless to detect it. That is the kind of thing you mean?

RUSSELL: Yes. Is there really such a thing?

JAMES: I'm afraid there isn't. There's Curare, of course.

NARRATOR: I told her a about Curare, but she seemed to loose interest.

RUSSELL: (Rising.) Thank you Doctor, I must be getting back.

JAMES: Good day, Miss Russell. (She exits and Caroline enters.)

NARRATOR: I would never have suspected Miss Russell of a fondness for detective stories. I told Caroline that I would be dining at Fernly.

CAROLINE: Excellent, you'll hear all about it. By the way, what is the trouble with Ralph?

JAMES: With Ralph? There isn't any.

CAROLINE: Then why is he staying at The Three Boars?

NARRATOR: I did not question Caroline's statement that Ralph Paton was staying at the local inn. That she said so was enough for me.

JAMES: Ackroyd told me he was in London.

CAROLINE: Oh!---he arrived yesterday morning and is still there. Last night he was out with a girl.

NARRATOR: Ralph is out with a girl most nights of his life. I did wonder why here and not London.

JAMES: One of the barmaids?

CAROLINE: No. That's just it. He went out to meet her. I don't know who she is. But I can guess.

NARRATOR: I waited patiently.

CAROLINE: His cousin.

JAMES: Flora Ackroyd?

NARRATOR: Flora is, of course, no relation whatever to Ralph Paton.

CAROLINE: Flora Ackroyd.

JAMES: Why not go to Fernly, if he wanted to see her?

CAROLINE: Secretly engaged. Old Ackroyd won't hear of it.

NARRATOR: I saw a good many flaws in Caroline's theory but forbore to point them out. An innocent remark about our new neighbor created a diversion. The house next door "The Larches" has been taken by a stranger. To Caroline's annoyance she has not been able to find out anything about him, except that he is a foreigner, his name is Porrot. That and his apparent interest in growing vegetable marrow's.

JAMES: My dear Caroline, there's no doubt at all about his profession. He's a retired hairdresser. Look at his mustache.

CAROLINE: If the man were a hairdresser, he would have wavy hair - not straight. All hairdressers do.

NARRATOR: I cited several known to me who had straight hair but Caroline was not convinced.

CAROLINE: 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 whether he was a Frenchman and he said he wasn't and somehow I didn't care to ask him any more.

NARRATOR: I began to be interested. A man capable of shutting up Caroline and sending her away empty must be something of a personality.

CAROLINE: I believe he's got one of those new vacuum cleaners----

NARRATOR: I saw her mind at work. Perhaps, the loan of this machine and the chance of further interrogation. I took the opportunity to escape into the garden.

JAMES: (Leaves the room and crosses to the garden.)

## SCENE 2

(James is in his garden. A squash comes hurtling over the wall accompanied by.)

POIROT: I demand of you a thousand pardons, Monsieur. (Peering over the wall.) I am without defense. For some months now I have cultivated the marrow's. This morning suddenly I enrage myself with these marrow's I seize the biggest. I hurl him over the wall. Monsieur, I am ashamed. I prostrate myself.

NARRATOR: In light of such apologies, my anger melted. After all the wretched vegetable hadn't hit me. I did hope, throwing things over walls was not our new neighbors hobby.

POIROT: Ah! No, do not disquiet yourself. It is not with me a habit. Can you figure to yourself Monsieur, that a man may work towards a goal, may labor to attain a certain kind of leisure 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.

JAMES: I fancy that is a common enough occurrence. 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, the object gained, we find what we miss is the daily toil. Mark you, Monsieur, my work was interesting work. The most interesting work in the world.

JAMES: Yes?

NARRATOR: I said encouragingly. For the spirit of Caroline was strong within me.

POIROT: The study of human nature, Monsieur!

JAMES: Just so.

NARRATOR: Clearly a retired hairdresser.

POIROT: Also, I had a friend, one, who for many years never left my side. Occasionally of an imbecility to make one afraid. Never the less he was very dear to me. I miss, at times even his stupidity, his naiveté, his honest outlook. The pleasure of delighting and surprising him by my superior gifts. All these I miss more than I can tell you.

JAMES: Is he dead?

POIROT: Not so. He lives and flourishes on the other side of the world. He is now in the Argentine.

JAMES: I have always wanted to go to South America.

POIROT: You will go there, yes?

JAMES: I could have gone. But, I was foolish and worse, greedy. I risked the substance for the shadow.

POIROT: I comprehend. You speculated?

NARRATOR: I felt secretly entertained. This ridiculous little man was so portentously solemn.

POIROT: Not the porcupine oil fields?

JAMES : No. I plunked for a gold mine in Western Australia.

POIROT: It is fate.

JAMES: What is fate?

POIROT: Indeed, this has not been a wasted morning. I have made the acquaintance of a man who in some ways reminds me of my far off friend. By the way, I should like to ask you a question. 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.

JAMES: That must be Captain Paton.

POIROT: I have not seen him before.

JAMES: He is the son. Adopted son, rather of Mr. Roger Ackroyd.

POIROT: Of course, I should have guessed. Mr. Ackroyd spoke of him.

JAMES: You know Mr. Ackroyd?

POIROT: Mr. Ackroyd knew me in London, when I was at work there. I have asked him to say nothing of my profession down here.

JAMES: 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.

JAMES: Indeed.

NARRATOR: I said. Not knowing quite what to say.

POIROT: Captain Ralph Paton? He is engaged to Mr. Ackroyd's niece, the charming Miss Flora.

JAMES: Who told you so?

POIROT: Mr. Ackroyd. He was very pleased about it. I believe he even brought some pressure to bear on the young man. That is never wise. A young man should marry to please himself, not to please a step-father from whom he has expectations.

NARRATOR: My ideas were completely upset. I could not see Ackroyd taking a hairdresser into his confidence. He extends great genial patronage to the lower orders but he has a very great sense of his own dignity. I began thinking that he was not a hairdresser after all.

JAMES: What made you notice Ralph Paton? His good looks?

POIROT: No, not alone, though he is unusually good-looking, for an Englishman. What your lady novelists would call a Greek god. No, there was something about the young man I did not understand.

NARRATOR: It was as if he was summing up the boy by the light of some inner knowledge that I did not share. At that moment my sister called.

CAROLINE: (Off.) James.

(Fade to black and curtain.)

### SCENE 3

Caroline enters the study with James just behind.)

CAROLINE: I met Mr. Ackroyd.

JAMES: Yes?

CAROLINE: I stopped him but he seemed anxious to get away.

NARRATOR: I have no doubt that that was the case.

CAROLINE: I asked him about Ralph. He had no idea the boy was down here. He said he thought I must have made a mistake. !! A mistake!

JAMES: Ridiculous, He ought to have known better.

CAROLINE: Then he went on to tell me that Ralph and Flora were engaged.

JAMES: I know.

CAROLINE: Who told you?



JAMES: Our new neighbor.

NARRATOR: Caroline wavered. Then she declined the red herring.

CAROLINE: I told him that Ralph was staying at The Three Boars.

JAMES: You might someday do a lot of harm with this habit of repeating everything indiscriminately.

CAROLINE: Nonsense. People ought to know things. I consider it my duty to tell them. Mr. Ackroyd was very grateful, and I think went straight off to The Three Boars. But he didn't find Ralph there.

JAMES: No?

CAROLINE: No. As I was coming back through the wood-----

JAMES: Through the wood?

CAROLINE: It was such a lovely day, I thought I would make a little round. The woods are so perfect in the Autumn.

NARRATOR: Caroline doesn't care a hang for the woods any time of year. It was good sound mongoose instinct which took her there.

JAMES: Well, go on.

CAROLINE: As I say, I was just coming back through the wood when I heard voices. (Pause.)

JAMES: Yes?

CAROLINE: One was Ralph Paton's. The other was a girl's. Of course I didn't mean to listen-----

JAMES and NARRATOR: Of course not.

CAROLINE: I simply couldn't help overhearing. She said something I couldn't make out and Ralph answered. He sounded very angry. "My dear girl" he said "don't you realize that the old man will cut me off without a shilling. I don't want to give him a reason to alter his will. You just leave it to me." Those were his exact words. Just then I stepped on a twig or something and they lowered their voices and moved away. So I was unable to see who the girl was.

NARRATOR; That must have been most vexing.

JAMES: I suppose you hurried off to The Three Boars, felt faint and went in for a glass of brandy. Were both barmaids on duty?

CAROLINE: It wasn't a barmaid. In fact I am almost sure it was Flora Ackroyd. Only?-----

JAMES: Only it doesn't make sense.

CAROLINE: If not Flora, who could it have been?

NARRATOR: Rapidly my sister ran through a list of all the maidens in King's Abbot, (Lights down on sitting room.) with profuse reasons for and against. When she paused for a breath I murmured something about a patient and slipped out. On inquiry at The Three Boars I found that Capt. Paton had just come in. I went up to his room. The greeting was cordial, we had a drink and he confided to me that he and

his step-father were at odds. The gravity in his voice told me he spoke the truth. It was a serious matter. When I asked if there were anything I could do, he said he could tell me no more and must play the thing out alone.

#### SCENE 4

(CURTAIN (Opens to reveal foyer at Fernly Park. The drawing room is dark.)

NARRATOR: It was a few minutes before half past seven when Parker, the butler, took my coat and black bag. Raymond, Ackroyd's secretary was just passing with some papers.

RAYMOND: Good evening, Doctor coming to dine or is this a professional call? (Indicating the black bag.)

JAMES: I'm prepared for a call from a confinement case.

RAYMOND: The ladies will be down directly. I must take these papers to Mr. Ackroyd and tell him you are here. Let yourself into the drawing room, will you? (Parker & Raymond exit.)

NARRATOR: I took a moment to adjust my tie, then turned toward the drawing room. (A loud noise like that of a window shutting, then lights up in the drawing room to reveal Miss Russell moving swiftly toward the door. As he opens the door to enter he almost collides with her coming out.)

JAMES: Excuse me.

RUSSELL: (Somewhat out of breath.) No, pardon me, Doctor.

JAMES: I'm afraid I'm a few minutes early.

RUSSELL: Oh! I don't think so. It's only just gone half past seven.

JAMES: How's the elbow?

RUSSELL: Much the same, thank you Doctor. I - I, only came in to see if the flowers were all right. (She exits.)

NARRATOR: (James follows the described actions but must block audience view of silver table.) I looked about the room and began to amuse myself trying to find what it was that had made the sound I had heard. I came upon what I believe is called a silver table. The lid of which lifts, as I opened it, it slipped through my fingers. (Repeat the same noise.) I repeated the action. Then lifted the lid..

FLORA: (Entering the room and crossing, startles James.) All this fuss about things because some one wore or used them seems to me nonsense. There not wearing or using them now. The pen George Elliot used to write "The Mill on the Floss", that sort of thing, well, it's only just a pen after all. If you're really keen on George Elliot, why not get "The Mill on the Floss" in a cheap edition and read it?

JAMES: Good evening, I suppose you never read such old, out-of-date stuff Miss Flora?

FLORA: You're wrong, Doctor, I love "The Mill on the Floss" You haven't congratulated me yet. Haven't you heard? (She shows off a engagement ring.) I'm going to marry Ralph. Uncle is very pleased. It keeps me in the family, you see.

JAMES: My dear, I hope you will be very happy.

MRS. ACKROYD: (As she enters.) Good evening, Doctor, so sorry for being so late.

NARRATOR: I'm sorry to say but I detest Mrs. Ackroyd.

MRS. ACKROYD: (As the doctor crosses to her.) Have you heard our wonderful news? Flora and Mr. Ralph-----

NARRATOR: As she was speaking she gave me a handful of assorted knuckles and rings to squeeze.

MRS. ACKROYD: I can't tell you my dear Dr. Sheppard, the relief to a poor mother's heart.

NARRATOR: She sighed. Her eyes remained shrewdly observant of me.

MRS. ACKROYD: I was wondering. You are such an old friend of dear Roger. We know how much he trusts you. So difficult for me, in my position but, there are so many tiresome things, settlements, you know, all that. I do believe dear Roger plans to make settlements upon dear Flora but as you know he's just a, a, leeeeeetle peculiar about money. I wondered, you know, if you could just sound him out on the subject. We feel you are like an old friend and Flora is so fond of you.

NARRATOR: Gladly, at this point she was interrupted by the entrance of Major Blunt. So I did not have to tell her that I do not meddle in the affairs of others.

MRS. ACKROYD: You know Major Blunt, don't you Doctor?

JAMES: Yes, indeed.

NARRATOR: A lot of people know Hector Blunt. He's shot more wild animals in unlikely places than any man living. A strange friendship, he and Ackroyd.

BLUNT: How are you, Sheppard.

FLORA: Major Blunt, I wish you would tell me about these African things. (He crosses to her at the silver table.)

PARKER: (Opening the door.) Dinner, is served. (All exit.)

CURTAIN

NARRATOR: My place at the table was between Mrs. Ackroyd and Flora. Hector Blunt was on Mrs. Ackroyd's other side and Geoffrey Raymond next to him. Dinner was not a cheerful affair. Ackroyd was 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 reticence. To say it was a long affair does not fully explain how drawn out and tiring it was. Immediately after dinner Ackroyd slipped his arm through mine and led me off to his study. His mood still quite somber. Parker entered right behind us with coffee.

## SCENE 5

(Curtain open and lights up. Roger Ackroyd's study)

ACKROYD: Once we've had our coffee, we don't wish to be disturbed.

PARKER: Yes, sir.

NARRATOR: I sat and took a cup of coffee.

ACKROYD: I've had a return of that pain after food lately. (Helps himself to coffee. The arrangement of his chair will leave him, when seated, three quarters upstage.) I must have more of those tablets.

NARRATOR: I played along.

JAMES: They're in my bag, I'll get them.

ACKROYD: Don't trouble, Parker, bring in the Doctors bag, Will you?

PARKER: Very good sir. (He exits.)

ACKROYD: Make sure the window is closed, will you?

JAMES; (Crosses to and shuts window.)

PARKER: (Enters with bag and places it on the table, then exits.)

ACKROYD: You've put the latch across?

JAMES: Yes. What's the matter with you Ackroyd?

ACKROYD: I'm in hell, nobody knows what I've gone through the last twenty four hours. This business of Ralph's is the last straw but we won't talk about that now. It's the other ----! I don't know what to do about it and I've got to make up my mind soon.

JAMES: What's the trouble?

ACKROYD: Sheppard, you attended Ashley Ferrars, did you not?

NARRATOR: I was taken by surprise.

JAMES: Yes, I did.

ACKROYD: Did you never suspect ---- did it ever enter you're head, that, that, well, that he might have been poisoned?

NARRATOR: I made up my mind what to say. Ackroyd was not Caroline.

JAMES: At the time, no. But since, well, it was mere idle talk on my sister's part that first put the idea into my head. I have been unable to get it out. Mind you I have no foundation for suspicion.

ACKROYD: He was poisoned!

JAMES: Who by?

ACKROYD: His wife.

JAMES: How do you know that?

ACKROYD: She told me.

JAMES: When?

ACKROYD: Yesterday. My God! Yesterday! It seems ten years ago. You see Sheppard I'm telling you this in confidence. I want your advice, I can't carry the whole weight by myself. I don't know what to do.

JAMES: How did she come to make this confession to you?

ACKROYD: Some time ago I asked her to marry me and she consented on condition it not be made public until her year of mourning was up. Yesterday I pointed out to her that a year and three weeks had passed since her husband's death. Suddenly without warning, she broke down. She told me everything. How she suffered at the hands of that brute. But then. It was cold blooded murder, my God.

NARRATOR: I saw the repulsion in his face. So Mrs. Ferrars must have seen it.

ACKROYD: She told me all. It seems someone has known all along and was blackmailing her. It was the strain of that which drove her nearly mad.

JAMES: Who was the man?

ACKROYD: She wouldn't tell me his name. As a matter of fact she didn't say it was a man. But of course.

JAMES; Of course, it must have been a man. Do you suspect someone?

ACKROYD: Something she said made me think, the person in question might be among my household staff. No. I must have misunderstood her.

JAMES: What did you say?

ACKROYD: What could I say? She saw the awful shock it had been to me. Then, the question, what was my duty in the matter? She had made me, an accessory after the fact. She saw all that, I think, quicker than I did. I was stunned. She asked me for twenty-four hours, made me promise to do nothing till then. She refused to give me the name of the blackmailer. It never occurred to me that she might. -- And I drove her to it.

JAMES: No! Don't take an exaggerated view of things. The responsibility for her death does not lie at your door.

ACKROYD: What now? The poor lady is dead. Why rake up old troubles?

JAMES: I agree with you.

PARKER: (Knocks and enters with three letters on a salver.) The evening post, sir. (He puts them down collects the coffee things and exits.)

ACKROYD: (Takes the letters holds the one in the long blue envelope and lets the others fall.) Her writing, she must have posted it last night, just before, before--(He rips open the envelope.) You're sure you shut the window? All evening I've had the feeling of being watched. (He unfolds the letter and begins to read, 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. So I am taking the only road open to me. I leave to you the punishment of the person who has made my life a hell for the last year. I would not tell you the name, but I propose to write it now. I have no children or near relations to be spared, and so do not fear publicity. If you can Roger, my very dear Roger, forgive me the wrong I would have done you. Since, when the time came, I could not do it after all." Sheppard, forgive me but I must finish this when I am alone alone.

JAMES: No, read it now.

NARRATOR: Ackroyd starred at me in surprise.

JAMES: I did not mean read it to me, but read it through now.

ACKROYD: No, I'd rather wait.

JAMES: At least read the name of the man.

NARRATOR: The letter had been brought in at twenty minutes to nine. (Fade to black slowly.) It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him. The letter still unread. As I exited the room I looked back wondering if there had been anything I had left undone. I could think of nothing. (James is exiting into foyer and closing door behind him.)

JAMES: (Encountering Parker in foyer.) Mr. Ackroyd particularly does not want to be disturbed. He told me to tell you so.

PARKER: Quite so, sir. I fancied I heard the bell ring.

(He helps Sheppard with his coat. Curtain, fade to black)

## SCENE 6

NARRATOR: This was such a palpable untruth that I did not bother to reply. I stepped out into the night. Everything seemed dark and still. The village clock chimed nine as I passed through the lodge gates. I almost collided with a man coming up the road.

MAN: (Off.) This the way to Fernly Park, Mister?

NARRATOR: He was wearing a hat pulled down over his eyes and his collar was turned up. I could see little of his face but he seemed young. These are the lodge gates I said.

MAN: (Off.) Thank you, mister.

NARRATOR: Something was familiar about him. A resemblance,,, something in his manner. In another few minutes I was in my own sitting room, (Lights up on James and Caroline in study.) Feeding Caroline a slightly fictitious account of the evening. The phone rang. I answered, it was a quarter past ten.

JAMES: Hello. Parker calling, from Fernly. What? They've just found Roger Ackroyd murdered. (He exits followed by Caroline. Lights down.)

## SCENE 7

( (Curtain opens. Lights up James and Parker in foyer. The study is visible but not lit.)

JAMES: Where is he?

PARKER: I beg your pardon, sir?

JAMES: Mr. Ackroyd. Don't stand there staring at me man. Have you notified the police?

PARKER: The police, sir. Did you say the police?

JAMES: Parker, if as you say, your master has been murdered--

PARKER: The master? Murdered? Impossible, sir!

JAMES: Didn't you telephone me, and tell me that Mr. Ackroyd had been found murdered?

PARKER: Oh! No indeed, sir. I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing.

JAMES: Do you mean this is all a hoax?

PARKER: Did the person use my name?

JAMES: Yes, indeed.

PARKER: A wicked joke to play, sir.

JAMES: Where is Mr. Ackroyd?

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

JAMES: I know he did not want to be disturbed but it's an odd sort of joke. I'd just like to satisfy myself that he's all right.

PARKER: Quite so sir.

JAMES: Come along. (He walks over to the study door and finds it locked, he tries forcing the door.) Ackroyd.

Ackroyd!

PARKER: It's locked.

JAMES: We shall have to force it. (Together they force the door open.)

NARRATOR: Ackroyd was sitting as I had left him in the arm chair facing the fire.

PARKER: (Lights up, they advance towards Ackroyd. One chair has been moved to at least slightly obscure the audience view of a table up C.) Stabbed from behind (The knife is visible.) horrible!

JAMES: (As Parker reaches for the dagger.) You mustn't touch that, go at once and ring up the police. (He escorts Parker to the door.) Inform them of what has happened here. Then tell Mr. Raymond and Major Blunt.

PARKER: Very good sir.

CURTAIN

NARRATOR: I did what little had to be done and was careful not to disturb the position of the body or handle the dagger at all. Nothing was to be gained by moving it. Poor Ackroyd was dead.

SCENE 8

(Open curtain. Once again the study, the chair which was out of place has been returned to its place. James and Parker are present. As the curtain opens Raymond and Blunt enter.)

RAYMOND: Where's the-- (Just as he enters the room Blunt rushes by him.) My God! It's true.

JAMES: (Blunt continues toward Ackroyd. James draws him back.) Nothing must be moved. The police must see him exactly as he is.

RAYMOND: (Joining the others.) This is terrible.

NARRATOR: Raymond regained his composure but his hand was shaking.

RAYMOND: Must have been a burglar.

JAMES: Murder; but what motive? (Door bell rings. Parker exits.)

NARRATOR: I looked around the room, nothing seemed disturbed. I looked down, the letters still lay on the floor where Ackroyd had dropped them. But the blue one was not among them. (Parker returns with two men.) The local Inspector and a constable.

RAGLAN: Good evening, gentlemen. I'm terribly sorry. A good kind gentleman like Mr. Ackroyd. The butler says it's murder. A bad business. (He moves to the body.) Been moved at all?

JAMES: Beyond making certain that life was extinct, no.

RAGLAN: Ah! And the murderer got clear away. For the moment. Now then, who found the body?



NARRATOR: I explained the circumstances carefully.

RAGLAN: A telephone message? From the butler?

PARKER: A message that I never sent.

RAGLAN: Did it sound like his voice Doctor?

JAMES: I can't say I noticed. I took it for granted.

RAGLAN: How long would you say he's been dead?

JAMES: Half an hour at least, perhaps longer.

RAGLAN: The door was locked on the inside, you say? What about the window?

JAMES: I closed and bolted it earlier at Mr. Ackroyd's request.

RAGLAN: (Crossing to window.) Well, it's open now. That's the way he left and from the looks of these shoe prints it's the way he came in. Plain as a pikestaff. Unusual shoe print. (He makes a note.) Any valuables missing?

RAYMOND: Not that we can discover.

RAGLAN: He climbs in, sees Mr. Ackroyd is asleep stabs him from behind then looses his nerve and runs off. Leaving his tracks. No suspicious strangers been hanging about lately?

JAMES: Oh!

RAGLAN: What is it Doctor?

NARRATOR: I explained about the man I had met.

RAGLAN: Anyone answering that description come to the door?

PARKER: No, sir.

RAGLAN: What about the back?

PARKER: I don't think so sir, I'll make inquiries.

RAGLAN: I'll make my own inquiries. First of all I want to fix the time of death. When was Mr. Ackroyd last seen alive?

JAMES: I left at, let me see, about ten minutes to nine. He told me he did not want to be disturbed and I repeated the order to Parker.

PARKER: Just so, sir.

RAYMOND: Mr. Ackroyd was certainly alive at half-past nine, I heard his voice in here.

RAGLAN: Who was he talking to?

RAYMOND: I don't know. 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. Now it seems the Doctor had already left.

JAMES: I was home by quarter past nine and didn't go out again till the telephone call.

BLUNT: I never saw him after dinner.

RAGLAN: Thank you Major. Oh! By the by you haven't been down visiting in a while.

BLUNT: My last chance was let's see, about a year ago.

RAGLAN: (To Raymond.) You didn't overhear any of the conversation, did you?

RAYMOND: Just a fragment and assuming he was speaking with Doctor Sheppard it struck me as odd. As near as I can remember Mr. Ackroyd said "The calls on my purse have been so frequent of late", that is what he was saying, "that I fear it is impossible for me to accede to your request." I went away again, so I did not hear any more. I rather wondered, because Dr. Sheppard-----

JAMES: Does not ask for loans for himself or subscriptions for others.

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

PARKER: If, you, will excuse me. Miss Flora saw him after that.

RAGLAN: Miss Flora?

PARKER: I was bringing a tray with soda and whisky when she came out of this room and told me that her uncle did not want to be disturbed.

RAGLAN: You had already been told that, had you not?

PARKER: Quite so sir but I always bring the whisky and soda about that time, sir, and ask if there's anything else. I was doing the usual without thinking.

NARRATOR: I think we all thought Parker rather suspicious.

RAGLAN: I must see Miss Ackroyd at once. Does she know yet?

RAYMOND: No.

RAGLAN: Well, no need to tell her yet. Tell her there's been a burglary and ask her if she would mind dressing and coming down to answer a few questions.

RAYMOND: Yes, sir. (He exits.)

RAGLAN: We will leave this room exactly as it is. I CNN return after I have heard what Miss Ackroyd has to tell me.

NARRATOR: We were then ushered out of the room.

RAGLAN: Jones, you'd better stay here. Don't let any one in.

(All exit the room and turn lights off the constable remains in the room as others exit. Lights remain up in foyer.)

## SCENE 9

NARRATOR: When Flora descended the staircase, she looked anxious and upset. The Inspector stepped toward her and said.

RAGLAN Good evening, Miss Ackroyd, we're afraid there has been an attempted robbery and we want you to help us.

FLORA: I don't quite understand.

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

FLORA: Quite right. I had been in to say good night.

RAGLAN: Was there any one with him?

FLORA: He was alone.

RAGLAN: Did you happen to notice if the window was open?

FLORA: I can't say, the curtains were drawn.

RAGLAN: Your uncle seemed quite as usual?

FLORA: I think so.

RAGLAN: Do you mind telling us exactly what passed between you?

FLORA: I said, "Good night uncle, I'm going to bed now." He gave a sort of grunt and I went over and kissed him. He said something about how nice I looked and then he told me to run away he was busy. So I went.

RAGLAN: Did he ask not to be disturbed?

FLORA: Oh! Yes, I forgot this, he said, "Tell Parker I don't want any- thing more to-night." and that he should not be disturbed. I met Parker just outside the door and gave him uncle's message. Wont you tell me what has been stolen?

RAGLAN: We're not quite certain.

FLORA: What is it? Your hiding something from me.

BLUNT: (Moving between Flora and the Inspector takes her outstretched hand in both of his.) It's bad news, Flora. Bad news for all of us. Your uncle Roger, (Pause.) It will be a shock to you. Bound to be. Poor Roger's dead.

FLORA: When?

BLUNT: Very soon after you left him, I'm afraid.

(Lights to black and curtain.)

NARRATOR: Flora raised her hand to her throat, gave a little cry and I hurried to catch her as she fell. Blunt and I carried her upstairs and placed her on her bed. Then I got him to wake Mrs. Ackroyd and tell her the news. Flora soon revived and I told her mother what to do for the girl. Then I hurried downstairs again.

## SCENE 10

(Curtain up.) The Inspector is in the study as James enters.)

RAGLAN: How's the young lady, Doctor?

JAMES: Coming around, her mother's with her.

RAGLAN: That's good. Apparently no one has been to the back door tonight. Jones, we don't want to be disturbed and we don't want any eavesdropping either. (The constable exits.) Now, what's all this about blackmail.

JAMES: Blackmail?

RAGLAN: Is it in Parker's imagination? Or, is there something in it?

JAMES: If he heard anything he must have been listening outside this door.

RAGLAN: Nothing more likely. I don't like his manner. He knows something. When I questioned him he got his back up and blurted out some story about blackmail.

NARRATOR: I took an instant decision and narrated the events of the evening. The Inspector listened keenly, Occasionally asking a question.

RAGLAN: Most extraordinary. And the letter has disappeared? Gives us what we've been looking for. A motive.

JAMES: I realize that.

RAGLAN: Ackroyd thought it might be a member of the household? Rather an elastic term, household.

JAMES: You don't think, Parker-----

RAGLAN: Obviously listening at the door. Then Miss Ackroyd came across him later bent on entering. Say he tried again later, stabbed Ackroyd, locked the door and went out the window.

JAMES: If Ackroyd read the letter after I'd gone, I don't see him sitting there turning it over in his mind for another hour. He'd have had Parker in straight away.

RAGLAN: If he didn't have time to read it? Someone was with him at half past nine. If they entered as you left, followed by Miss Ackroyd. Well he wouldn't have had a chance till close on ten o'clock.

JAMES: And the telephone call?

RAGLAN: Parker all right, before he thought of the locked door and went out the window. Or he panicked, that was it.

JAMES: Yes.

RAGLAN: We'll find out from the telephone exchange. We don't want to alarm him just yet. To all appearances we'll be concentrating on the mysterious stranger. The weapon ought to tell us something. (Moving towards the dagger, which had been removed from the body and placed on a table.) Can't be many like it about.

JAMES: The blow was delivered by a right handed man standing behind him and death was probably instantaneous. He may not have seen his assailant.

RAGLAN: Butlers can creep about as soft footed as cats. We'll have a look at the dagger. There may be fingerprints.

NARRATOR: Toe prints, now that would have been interesting

CONSTABLE: (Popping his head in the door, with Blunt and Raymond behind him.) Mr. Raymond and Major Blunt are here sir.

RAGLAN: All right, send them in. (Under his breath.) Don't want to be disturbed! Idiot. (As Raymond and Blunt enter.) Ever seen this before?

RAYMOND: Yes sir, a gift from Major Blunt.

BLUNT: That's right, a Tunisian dagger.

RAGLAN: You're quite sure?

BLUNT: No doubt whatever.

RAGLAN: Where was it usually kept?

RAYMOND: In the silver table in the drawing room.

JAMES: What?

RAGLAN: Yes, Doctor?

NARRATOR: I related the events of my arrival earlier that night.

RAGLAN: I shall have a word with Miss Russell, Jones, go and find her. Was the dagger in place then Doctor?

JAMES: I'm not quite sure. It may have been.

RAGLAN: Could have been taken any time. I shall be coming up in the morning with the chief constable until then I'll keep the key of that door. I want Colonel Melrose to see everything exactly as it is. I shall have to pack this up carefully (Taking the dagger.)

## SCENE 11

(As lights go down and curtain closes, Caroline takes her seat in their sitting room.)

NARRATOR At this point Jones arrived with Miss Russell, who under questioning owned up that she might have found the lid of the silver table open and closed it but could not say if the dagger was present. It was late when I got back. I had hoped Caroline had gone to bed I should have known better. (Lights up on Caroline.) She managed to extract the story from me. I said nothing about blackmail but contented myself with giving her the facts of the murder. The police suspect Parker (To Caroline.) There seems to be a fairly clear case against him.

CAROLINE: Parker! Fiddlesticks! That Inspector must be a perfect fool. Parker indeed! Don't tell me. (She exits.)

NARRATOR: With which announcement we went to bed.

(Black.)

## SCENE 12

(Lights up, James enters his study )

NARRATOR: The following morning I hurried over my round. My excuse? (Caroline enters.) I had no very serious cases to attend and so returned home early.

CAROLINE: (In an excited whisper.) Flora Ackroyd is here.

JAMES: What?

CAROLINE: She's very anxious to see you.

JAMES: Show her in.

FLORA: (As Caroline brings her in.) Dr. Sheppard, I have come to ask you to help me.

CAROLINE: Of course he'll help you, my dear.

FLORA: I want you to come to The Larches with me.

JAMES: The Larches?

NARRATOR: That took me by surprise.

CAROLINE: To see that funny little man?

FLORA: Yes. You know who he is, don't you?

JAMES: We fancied that he might be a retired hairdresser.

FLORA: He's Hercule Poirot! You know who I mean, the detective. He's retired and came down here to live. Uncle knew who he was but he promised not to tell any one, because Mr. Poirot wanted to live quietly and not be bothered.

JAMES: So that's who he is.

FLORA: You have heard of him?

JAMES: I'm rather an old fogey but I have heard of him. Why do you want to see him?

CAROLINE: To get him to investigate the murder. Don't be so stupid James.

NARRATOR: I was not being stupid. Caroline does not always understand what I'm driving at.

JAMES: Haven't you got confidence in Inspector Raglan?

CAROLINE: Of course she hasn't. I haven't either.

NARRATOR: Anyone would have thought Caroline's uncle had been murdered. JAMES: Would he take up the case?

FLORA: I've got to persuade him.

CAROLINE: I'll go with you if you like.

FLORA: I'd rather the Doctor, Miss Sheppard.

NARRATOR; She knows the value of being direct. Any hints would surely have been wasted on Caroline.

FLORA: Dr. Sheppard, having found the body, would be able to give all the details to M. Poirot.

JAMES: I advise you not to drag this man into the case.

FLORA: I know why you say that but it is for exactly that reason. I know Ralph.

CAROLINE: Ralph? What has this got to do with Ralph?

FLORA: Ralph may be foolish but he wouldn't murder any one.

JAMES: I never thought it of him.

FLORA: Why did you go to the three boars last night?

NARRATOR: I had hoped that visit would remain unnoticed.

JAMES: How did you know?

FLORA: This morning I heard he was staying there.

JAMES: You had no idea he was in Kings Abbot?

FLORA; None. I went there and asked for him. They told me, what I suppose they told you. That he went out last night about nine o'clock and never came back. He may have gone anywhere, even back to London.

JAMES: And left his luggage?

FLORA: I don't care. There must be an explanation.

JAMES: The police don't suspect Ralph. They're working on quite another track.

FLORA: That's just it, they do suspect him. That Inspector Raglan showed up this morning at the Three Boars. They told me the questions he'd been asking. He must think Ralph did it.

JAMES: Last night's suspect was Parker..

CAROLINE: Parker indeed.

FLORA: Oh! Dr. Sheppard, let us go at once to this M. Poirot. He will find out the truth.

JAMES: Are you quite sure the truth is what you want?

FLORA: I know Ralph better than you do.

CAROLINE: Ralph may be extravagant but he's a dear boy and has the nicest manners.

NARRATOR: I wanted to tell Caroline that large numbers of murderers have had nice manners but the girls presence restrained me. Since she was determined, I was forced to give in to her, (James and Flora exit followed by Caroline.) We started at once, getting away before my sister was able to fire off any more pronouncements.

### SCENE 13

(Lights up slowly on Poirot's sitting room.)

NARRATOR; An old woman opened the door of the Larches to us. She escorted us to the sitting room. The little man rose to greet us.

POIROT: Monsieur Le Doctor, Mademoiselle.

JAMES: You have heard of the tragedy which occurred last night?

POIROT: I have heard. It is horrible. I offer Mademoiselle all my sympathy. In what way can I serve you?

JAMES: Miss Ackroyd, wants you to----

FLORA: To find the murderer.

POIROT: The police will do that, will they not?

FLORA: They might make a mistake. Please, M. Poirot, won't you help us? If it is a question of money----



POIROT: Not that I do not care for money. Money, It means much to me. 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. You may wish that, after all, you had left it to the local police.

FLORA: I want the truth.

POIROT: All the truth?

FLORA: All the truth.

POIROT: Then I accept and I hope you will not regret those words. Now tell me all the circumstances.

FLORA: Dr. Sheppard knows more than I do.

NARRATOR: Thus enjoined, I plunged into a careful narrative of the previous nights events. As I brought my tale to a close.

POIROT: You went to the Three Boars on your way home? Exactly why was that? JAMES: I thought some one ought to inform the young man of his step-fathers death perhaps no one else knew he was there.

POIROT: Quite so. That was your only motive for going there? You pretend not, but would it not have been a relief to find that Capt. Paton had been in all evening? No matter. What we have to look at is this, Capt. Paton is missing, under circumstances which call for explanation. The matter, It looks grave. Still, a simple explanation is possible yes? FLORA: Just what I keep saying.

NARRATOR: Poirot suggested an immediate meeting with the police. (Lights down.) He thought it better for Flora to return home and for me to arrange things and introduce him to the Inspector. I carried out his plan forthwith. It was arranged and Inspector Raglan meet Poirot at my home within the hour.

CURTAIN

SCENE 14

(Poirot, James and Raglan in James' study.) )

RAGLAN: The case is as plain as a pike staff. No need for amateurs to be butting in. Mr. Ackroyd's family must, of course, do as they see fit but we cannot have the official investigation hampered in any way.

POIROT: I had never intended to take up a case again. I must beg, that if I am able to contribute in some small way, that my name not be mentioned

RAGLAN: I've heard of some of your remarkable successes.

POIROT: I have had much experience but most of my successes have been obtained with the aid of the police. I admire enormously, your English police. I shall be honored to help in any small way.

RAGLAN: Well, We must put you wise to the latest developments.

POIROT: Thank you, my friend Dr. Sheppard, said something of the butler being suspected.

RAGLAN: That's all bunkum.

JAMES: The finger prints?

RAGLAN: Nothing like Parker's. Yours and Mr. Raymond's don't fit either Doctor. We'll have those of Capt. Paton as soon as we pick him up.

JAMES: I can't help thinking you are wrong. I know Ralph Paton and he would never stoop to murder.

RAGLAN: Maybe not.

POIROT: What do you have which implicates the young man?

RAGLAN: Went out just on nine o'clock last night. Not been seen since. Believed to have serious money difficulties. Got a pair of his shoes here, with rubber studs. He had two pair. I'm going up to compare them with those marks at Fernly. (To James.) Would you and M. Poirot care to accompany me?

NARRATOR: We accented and all drove up to Fernly. (All exit through curtains, which open to reveal Ackroyd's study.)

## SCENE 15

RAGLAN: Except for the body, M. Poirot, this room is as it was last night.

POIROT: And the body was?

NARRATOR: As precisely as possible, I described the scene.

POIROT: The hilt of the dagger, it was plainly visible from the door?

JAMES: Yes.

POIROT: (Crossing to window and looking at footprints. Then rings the service bell.) The rubber studs are the same pattern as those on Capt. Paton's shoes. I have some few questions for Parker.

PARKER: (Enters after a few seconds.) The bell rang and I----

RAGLAN: Come in Parker. This gentleman has something to ask you.

POIROT: Parker, When you forced the door open with Dr. Sheppard last night, what was the shape of the fire?

PARKER: It had burned very low sir, it was almost out.

POIROT: Now, look around the room, my good Parker. Is this room exactly as it was then?

PARKER: (Looking around.) The curtains were drawn and the light was on.

POIROT: Anything else?

PARKER: Yes, this chair was drawn out. (He draws the chair out.)

POIROT: Why there? Who pushed it back? Was it you?

PARKER: No, sir. I was very upset.

POIROT: Did you, Doctor?

JAMES: (Shakes his head.)

PARKER: It was back in position, when I arrived with the police.

POIROT: Curious.

JAMES: Raymond or Blunt must have pushed it back. Surely it is not important.

POIROT: It is completely unimportant, that is why it is so interesting.

RAGLAN: Excuse me a minute. (He leaves the room ushering Parker.)

JAMES: Do you think he is telling the truth?

POIROT: About the chair, yes. Otherwise I do not know. Let me tell you this, these kinds of cases resemble each other in one thing.

JAMES: What is that?

POIROT: Every one concerned has something to hide.

JAMES: Have I?

POIROT: I think you have.

JAMES: But-----

POIROT: Have you told me everything known to you about this young Paton? I will not press you, I shall learn in good time.

JAMES: About the fire. I confess-----

POIROT: When you left the window was closed the door open. At quarter past ten the door is locked and the window open. On a cool night with the fire nearly gone, Mr. Ackroyd would have had to open the window. I think he would do so only to admit someone he knew.

JAMES: It sounds very simple.

POIROT: If you arrange the facts methodically. But who was the person with him at nine-thirty? That must be the person admitted by the window. Although Miss Flora saw her uncle alive later we cannot approach a solution to the mystery until we know who that visitor was. Ah! the inspector returns. (Raglan enters.)

RAGLAN: The telephone call has been traced. It was put through at 10:15 last night from King's Abbot station and at 10:23 the night mail left for Liverpool.

POIROT: You'll have inquiries made?

RAGLAN: Naturally. But why telephone at all? There seems to be no reason.

POIROT: Be sure there was a reason.

RAGLAN: What reason could it be?

POIROT: When we know that we shall know everything. You say it was nine o'clock when you met the stranger?

JAMES: Yes, the village clock chimed the hour.

POIROT: How long to reach this window?

JAMES: Five minutes. If he took the path as little as two or three.

POIROT: He would have to know the way, no?

RAGLAN: That's true.

POIROT: Could we find out if Mr. Ackroyd had received any strangers this week?

JAMES: Young Raymond could tell us that.

RAGLAN: (Exiting.) Or Parker.

POIROT: Ou tous les deux.

NARRATOR: As Raglan went in search of Raymond I rang for Parker. Poirot scanned the room and pulled the chair away from the wall. It was not long before Raglan returned with the young secretary.

RAGLAN: Mr. Raymond, this is Hercule Poirot.

RAYMOND: M. Poirot. It will be a privilege to watch you at work. Hallo, what's this. (Referring to the chair. Then good naturedly.) Want me to sit in it while you take a blood test? Is that the idea?

POIROT: Last night it was here, so. Did you put it back? (Enter Parker.)

RAYMOND: No. I didn't even notice it. Has someone destroyed a clue?

POIROT: It is of no consequence. Did any stranger call on Mr. Ackroyd this past week?

RAYMOND: I can't remember any one. Can you Parker?

PARKER: There was a young man who came on Wednesday, sir. From Curtis and Troute, I understood.

RAYMOND: Oh, yes. Mr. Ackroyd had some idea about purchasing a Dictaphone. But nothing came of it.

POIROT: Can you describe this young man?

PARKER: He was fair-haired sir and short.

POIROT: The man you met Doctor?

JAMES: About six feet.

POIROT: Thank you Parker.

PARKER: (To Raymond.) Mr. Hammond has arrived, he is anxious to know if he can be of service.

RAYMOND: I'll come at once (He exits.)

RAGLAN: The family solicitor.

POIROT: It is a busy time for this young Mr. Raymond. He has the air efficient. He has been here how long?

RAGLAN: Just on two years.

POIROT: His duties he fulfills punctiliously, of that I am sure. In what manner does he amuse himself? Does he go in for le sport?

RAGLAN: He plays golf, I believe and tennis in the summer.

POIROT: He does not attend the running of the horses?

RAGLAN: I don't think he's interested in racing.

POIROT: I have seen, I think, all there is to be seen here.

JAMES: If those walls could speak.

POIROT: Be not to sure these dead things are always dumb. To me they speak sometimes. Chairs, tables, they have their message.

JAMES: What message?

POIROT: An open window, a locked door. A chair that apparently moved itself. To all these I say why and find no answer. If I may inquire, how did you go about your investigation?

RAGLAN: Method. That's what I always say, method.

POIROT: That to is my watch word. Method, order and the little gray cells.

RAGLAN: The cells?

POIROT: The little gray cells of the brain.

RAGLAN: Of course; well, we all use them I suppose.

POIROT: To a greater or lesser degree. Then there is the psychology of a crime.

RAGLAN: I'll tell you how I set to work. First of all, method. Mr. Ackroyd was last seen alive at a quarter to ten, by his niece. That's fact number one isn't it?

POIROT: If you say so.

RAGLAN: At half past ten, the Doctor here says that Mr. Ackroyd has been dead at least half an hour. You stick to that Doctor?

JAMES: Half an hour, or longer.

RAGLAN: A quarter of an hour in which the crime must have been committed. I made a list of every one in the house, setting down where and what they were doing between 9:45 and 10 PM. (Hands the sheet to Poirot.)

NARRATOR: I read over Poirot's shoulder. Very complete and in a neat script.

RAGLAN: Except for something fishy about Parker, they all seem to be quite all right.

POIROT: A very complete list. (Putting the list in pocket.) I am quite sure that Parker did not do the murder.

JAMES: So is my sister and she usually is right.

NARRATOR: Nobody paid any attention to me.

RAGLAN: 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.

POIROT: What time was that?

RAGLAN: Exactly twenty-five minutes past nine. Clear enough. At twenty-five past nine, Capt. Paton is seen coming towards the house. At nine-thirty or so Mr. Raymond hears some one in here asking for money and Mr. Ackroyd refusing. Next? Capt. Paton leaves through the window. He walks along the terrace, he is angry. He comes upon the open drawing room window. It's now a quarter to ten. Miss Flora Ackroyd is saying good-night to her uncle. Major Blunt, Raymond and Mrs. Ackroyd are in the billiard room. The drawing room is empty. He steals in, takes the dagger and returns to the study. He comes 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: Why?

RAGLAN: Difficult to say. Then the footprints, the same, that is to say, they're not the same pair that actually made them he went away in those, this pair is just like them only a little older, the studs are worn down.

POIROT: A very foolish young man, Captain Ralph Paton. To leave so much evidence of his presence.

RAGLAN: It was a fine dry night, he left no prints on the terrace or the gravel path but unluckily for him, a spring must have welled up recently at the end of the path from the drive. His print was found there as well.

POIROT: You noticed a woman's footprint's?

RAGLAN: Several different women have walked that way and men as well. It's a short cut to the house. It would be impossible to sort out all the footsteps. It's the ones on the window sill that are really important.

NARRATOR: At this point Poirot abruptly asked to see the silver table in the drawing room. (All exit study curtain.) We went to the drawing room. On the way Inspector Raglan excused himself and left us alone. I showed Poirot the silver table and after raising the lid once or twice, he pushed open the window and off we went to the summer house. As we entered I was startled to see the detective drop to his hands and knees and go crawling around the floor. When he again rose to his feet he had in his possession two objects, a goose quill which he placed in his pocket and a piece of starched white fabric.

(The curtain opens, voices over in black.)

SCENE 16

(Out door set with Poirot and James positioned above looking down upon an area with a bench.)

POIROT: What do you think?

JAMES: A scrap of torn handkerchief.

POIROT: A fragment of handkerchief? Perhaps. But remember this - a good laundress does not starch a handkerchief.

NARRATOR: M. Poirot continued as we left to return to the house.

POIROT: Un belle propriete, who inherits it all?

NARRATOR: It is an odd thing but the question had never entered my head.

POIROT: It is a new idea?

JAMES: Yes. I had not thought---

POIROT: I wonder, you would not tell me your true thoughts.

JAMES: Every one has something to hide?

POIROT: Exactly.

JAMES: You 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. The air is pleasant today.

NARRATOR: I followed as he walked a bit. Then he found a spot where the trees had been cleared and a seat had been put. (Lights up.) Sitting there, one had a splendid view of the countryside and down below a paved recess and a goldfish pond with another seat.

POIROT: England is very beautiful and so are English girls. Hush my friend and look at the pretty picture below us.

NARRATOR: It was then I saw Flora. She was moving along the path we had just left. Though dressed in black she seemed somehow to convey a lightness of spirit. She almost to dance. A man stepped out of the trees, it was Hector Blunt.

FLORA: Oh! ---- You startled me.

NARRATOR: Blunt stood there and said nothing.

FLORA: What I like about you, is your cheery conversation.

BLUNT: Never was much for talking. Not even as a lad.

FLORA: That was a very long time ago, I suppose.

BLUNT: Yes, it was

FLORA: How does it feel to be Methuselah? (A friendly laugh.)

BLUNT: Remember the fellow who sold his soul to the devil in return for being made young again? There's an opera about it.

FLORA: Faust?

BLUNT: That's the beggar. Some of us would do it if we could.

FLORA: Anyone would think you were creaking at the joints to hear you.

NARRATOR: He said nothing for a moment and then said it was time he was getting back to Africa.

FLORA: Going on another expedition - shooting things?

BLUNT: Expect so. Usually do, you know - shoot things, I mean. 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 thing's one's expected to say. Yes, time I went.

FLORA: Your not going at once? Not while were in all this trouble. Oh! Please, if you go----

BLUNT: You want me to stay?

FLORA: We all-----

BLUNT: I meant you personally.

FLORA: I want you to stay, if, if that makes any difference.

NARRATOR: They fell silent, then sat on the stone seat by the pond.

FLORA: It's such a lovely morning, I'll tell you why I feel so happy. However heartless you think me. It is, because Mr. Hammond has told us about the will. Uncle has left me twenty thousand pounds.

BLUNT: Does it mean so much to you? (Pause.) Miss Ackroyd, can I do anything? About Paton, I mean. I know how anxious you must be.

FLORA: Thank you. There is really nothing to be done. I've got hold of the most wonderful detective in the world and he's going to find out all about it.

NARRATOR: For some time I had felt uneasy as to our position. True they only had to look up to see us. I should have drawn their attention before now had not my companion put a warning pressure on my arm. But now he rose briskly to his feet, clearing his throat.

POIROT: I demand pardon, I cannot allow Mademoiselle thus to compliment me and not draw attention to my presence. I must join you and apologize.

NARRATOR: We hurried down to them as he apologized. Pleasantries were exchanged, Flora said something about getting back and Major Blunt escorted her. (They exit.) After they left Poirot fixed his attention on something in the water. (He rolls up his sleeve and plunges his arm into the pond. He extracted it holding out his hand to reveal a woman's wedding ring.)



POIROT: This inscription, "from R., March 13th." This is an interesting find, is it not, my friend? (Lights to black and curtain.)

## SCENE 17

NARRATOR: We returned to the house. Upon returning to the study we came face to face with Flora and Major Blunt once more.

(Curtain opens and lights up to reveal Flora and Blunt in the study as James and Poirot enter.)

POIROT: Again Mademoiselle Flora, Major. I am glad to encounter you again. I am in need of some information that you can give me. When did you last see M. Ackroyd alive?

BLUNT: At dinner.

POIROT: You did not see nor hear from him after that?

BLUNT: Didn't see him. Heard his voice.

POIROT: How was that?

BLUNT: I was out on the terrace-----

POIROT: What time was this?

BLUNT: About half-past nine. I was walking up and down smoking. I heard Ackroyd talking in his study

POIROT: From what part of the terrace?

BLUNT: Went as far as the corner.

POIROT: Ah! Indeed.

BLUNT: Thought I saw a woman disappearing into the bushes. Just a gleam of white. Might have been mistaken. It was then I heard Ackroyd's voice, speaking to his secretary.

POIROT: Mr. Raymond?

BLUNT: That's what I supposed at the time. Seems I was wrong.

POIROT: He did not address him by name?

BLUNT: Oh! No. I took it for granted because he had said just before I came out that he was taking some papers to Ackroyd.

POIROT: Can you remember what he was saying?

BLUNT: Afraid not.

POIROT: Of no importance. Did you move a chair when you came into the study after the body was discovered?

BLUNT: Chair? No - why should I?

POIROT: There is something I wanted to ask Mademoiselle. When you were examining the things in the silver table, was the dagger still there?

FLORA: As I told Inspector Raglan, I am sure it was not there. He thinks I'm saying it to shield Ralph.

JAMES: Aren't you?

POIROT: And you Doctor. It is too bad.

MRS. ACKROYD: (Entering with Mr. Hammond and followed by Raglan who is making and checking notes.) Mr. Hammond is staying to lunch. You know Major Blunt, Mr. Hammond? And dear Dr. Sheppard also a close friend of poor Roger's and let me see--

FLORA: This is M. Hercule Poirot, mother, I told you about him.

MRS. ACKROYD: Of course. He is to find Ralph, is he not?

FLORA: He is to find out who killed uncle.

NARRATOR: I joined Poirot who was standing aside, With Mr. Hammond.

JAMES: Perhaps I am intruding?

POIROT: Not at all, you and I, M. le Docteur, we investigate this affair side by side. Without you I would be lost. I desire a little information from the good Mr. Hammond.

HAMMOND: You are acting on behalf of Captain Ralph Paton?

POIROT: Not so. I am acting in the interest of justice, Miss Ackroyd has asked me to investigate the death of her uncle.

HAMMOND: I cannot believe Captain Paton is involved. However strong the circumstantial evidence against him. The mere fact that he was hard pressed for money----

RAGLAN: More circumstantial evidence?

POIROT: Was he hard pressed for money?

HAMMOND: It was a chronic condition with him. Money went through his hands like water.

RAGLAN: I see.

POIROT: I see. Mr. Hammond, you are acquainted with the provisions of the will?

HAMMOND: Yes, of course.

POIROT: You will tell me the terms of that will?

HAMMOND: They are quite simple. After paying certain legacies and bequests-----

POIROT: Such as?

HAMMOND: A thousand pounds to the housekeeper, Miss Russell; fifty pounds to the cook, Emma Cooper; five hundred pounds to his secretary, Mr. Geoffrey Raymond. Then to various hospitals----

POIROT: Ah! The charitable bequests, they interest me not.

HAMMOND: 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: Very large. Captain Paton will be a wealthy young man.

MS. ACKROYD: Mr. Hammond. (Summoning him.)

HAMMOND: Excuse me. (He crosses to Mrs. Ackroyd.)

POIROT: (Grasping James's arm.) Regard the irises. (Then, loudly.) Magnificent are they not? (Sotto voce.) Do you really wish to aid me in this investigation?

JAMES: Yes, indeed. You don't know what a dull life I lead.

POIROT: Good, we will be colleagues. In a minute or two I think Maj. Blunt will join us. He is not happy with the good mama. There are some things I want to know but do not wish to seem to want to know them. You comprehend? So it will be your part to ask the questions.

JAMES: What questions?

POIROT: I want you to introduce the name of Mrs. Ferrars.

JAMES: Yes?

POIROT: Be very natural. Ask if he was here when her husband died and when he answers, watch his face, without seeming to.

NARRATOR: There was no time for more. (Blunt crosses to them.) At that moment Blunt left the others and came over to us. I suggested a stroll on the terrace. (They exit.)

HAMMOND: (To Mrs. Ackroyd.) As to the question of money. You have all you need, for the present? I mean, ready money. Cash, if not. I can arrange to let you have whatever you require.

RAYMOND: Mr. Ackroyd cashed a check for a hundred pounds yesterday.

MRS. ACKROYD: A hundred pounds?

HAMMOND: Where is the money?

RAYMOND: In an old collar box in his bedroom. He always kept his cash there.

RAGLAN: I think we ought to make sure that money is there.

(Hammond, Raymond, Poirot and the Inspector exit as James and Blunt return.)

MRS. ACKROYD: (Taking James aside.) I can't help feeling a little hurt. I mean, Roger's lack of confidence in me. A mother could be trusted to safeguard the interests of her child. A lack of trust, that's what I call it-----

(Blunt and Flora exit.)

JAMES: You forget, Flora was Ackroyd's own niece, a blood relation, it would have been different had you been his sister.

MRS. ACKROYD: As poor Cecil's widow I think my feelings ought to have been considered. And then, to leave all that money - a thousand pounds - fancy, a thousand pounds! To that woman.

JAMES: What woman?

MRS. ACKROYD: That Russell woman. Something very odd about her. Roger wouldn't hear a word against her. She certainly did her best to marry him. I soon put a stop to that. She's always hated me. Naturally. I saw through her.

RAGLAN: (He enters with Poirot, Hammond and Raymond.) He kept his money like that in an unlocked drawer.

RAYMOND: Mr. Ackroyd had perfect faith in the honesty of all the servants.

RAGLAN: You saw Mr. Ackroyd put this money away last night?

RAYMOND: I'm sure. He said a hundred pounds was too bulky to take down to dinner.

POIROT: The affair is simple. He either paid out forty pounds last night or it has been stolen.

RAGLAN: That's it in a nutshell. Which of the servants would have been in his room last evening?

RAYMOND: I suppose the housemaid would turn down the bed.

RAGLAN: What do we know about her?

MRS. ACKROYD: She's not been here long but she's a nice ordinary girl.

RAGLAN: (To Raymond) The other servants; all right, as far as you know?

RAYMOND: I, think so.

RAGLAN: None of them leaving or anything like that?

RAYMOND: The parlor maid is leaving. She gave notice yesterday.

RAGLAN: To you?

RAYMOND: I have nothing to do with the servants. Miss Russell attends to the household matters.

RAGLAN: Think I'd better have a word with Miss Russell and I'll see that Dale girl as well. (To Raymond.) Would you arrange it?

RAYMOND: At once. (He exits.)

NARRATOR: At this time I should bring you and M. Poirot up to date on my conversation with Major Blunt.

JAMES: (To Poirot.) "How things change in a short time." I said. "Last Wednesday, Ackroyd was with me on this very spot and full of spirits. Now, three days later, he's dead, poor fellow. Mrs. Ferrars dead. You knew her, didn't you?" He only nodded his head. I asked if he had seen her recently and he said he'd gone to call with Ackroyd last Tuesday. He Then said. "Fascinating woman something odd about her one could never know what she was up to." I asked, had he met her before. He said, just after she'd come here to live and that she'd changed a lot. He had not know her husband.

POIROT: Anything else?

JAMES: He had a legacy a year ago but at present is not flush. I'll swear the man is above board.

POIROT: Without doubt.

(Enter Miss Russell, Ursula Bourne remains in foyer.)

RAGLAN: Miss Russell. I do have some questions concerning the staff, first, about Elsie Dale.

RUSSELL: Been at Fernly about five months, nice girl, quick at her duties and most respectable. Good references. The last one in the world to take anything not belonging to her.

RAGLAN: The Parlor maid?

RUSSELL: A most superior girl. Very quiet and lady like. An excellent worker.

RAGLAN: Then why is she leaving?

RUSSELL: I understand Mr. Ackroyd found fault with her. Yesterday, I believe. He was very annoyed and she gave notice. You may ask her yourself. Ursula. (Calling out into the hall. The girl enters.)

RAGLAN: You are Ursula Bourne?

URSULA: Yes, sir.

RAGLAN: I understand you are leaving?

URSULA: Yes, sir.

RAGLAN: Why?

URSULA: I disarranged some papers on Mr. Ackroyd's desk. He was very angry about it and I said that I had better leave. He told me to go as soon as possible.

RAGLAN: Were you in Mr. Ackroyd's bedroom last night? Tidying up or anything?

URSULA: No, sir. That is Elsie's work. I never go near that part of the house.

RAGLAN: A large sum of money is missing from his room.

URSULA: (Angrily.) I know nothing about any money. If you're thinking I took it, you are wrong.

RAGLAN: I am not accusing you, no need to excite yourself.

POIROT: It was yesterday afternoon that Mr. Ackroyd dismissed you or you dismissed yourself, was it not?

URSULA: (Nod's.) Yes, sir.

POIROT: The interview between you and Mr. Ackroyd, how long did it last? Twenty minutes, a half hour?

URSULA: Not longer than half an hour.

POIROT: Thank you, Mademoiselle.

RAGLAN: That'll do. (She exits.) (To Miss Russell.) How long has she been here? What about her references?

RUSSELL: Mrs. Richard Folliot, Marby Grange, Marby. Quite good country people.

RAGLAN: Well, let's have a look at the other one, Elsie Dale.

CURTAIN

NARRATOR: Elsie Dale was a big fair girl, with a pleasant but slightly stupid face. She answered our questions readily enough and showed much concern over the loss of the money. The inspector found her answers satisfactory.

SCENE 18

(James and Poirot in James' sitting room.)

JAMES: I wonder what papers the girl disarranged that could have caused Ackroyd to be in such a state.

POIROT: Raymond said there were no important papers on the desk.

JAMES: Yes, but-----

POIROT: It strikes you as odd that Ackroyd should fly into a rage over such a trivial matter?

JAMES: It does rather.

POIROT: What do you think of the girl?

JAMES: She seemed a nice girl.

POIROT: Seemed a nice girl, yes. (Pause.) See, my friend, (Producing Raglans list.) I will show you something. You may not have noticed at the time, one person on this list has no alibi. Ursula Bourne.

JAMES: You don't think---

POIROT: Dr. Sheppard, I dare to think anything. She may have killed him. But I confess I find no motive. Can you?

JAMES: None whatever.

POIROT: Since the blackmailer was a man, it follows, she cannot be the blackmailer, then---

JAMES: Strictly speaking, Mrs. Ferrars' letter mentioned a person, we took for granted, that it was a man.

POIROT: It is possible. I must rearrange my ideas. Method, order, never have I needed them more. Everything must fit in its appointed place, otherwise I am on the wrong tack. A man's life depends upon it.

JAMES: You believe Ralph to be innocent?

POIROT: Do you want to know the truth?

JAMES: Of course.

POIROT: Then you shall have it. My friend, everything points to the assumption that he is guilty.

JAMES: What?

POIROT: Yes, that stupid Inspector - for he is stupid - has everything pointing his way. I seek 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 is very sure, that little one. Very sure indeed. Where is Marby?

NARRATOR:(As James and Poirot exit, lights down on sitting room.) On my trip to Marby I met with Mrs. Folliot, who was very gracious at first. She seemed somewhat surprised at my inquiry, gave me little more than that the girl had worked there almost two years. When pressed further, where she came from, why she left. Mrs. Folliot became uncomfortable and upset. There was plainly some mystery in the background and it was clear I was not going to learn anything further. I took my leave and upon returning home found Caroline in the sitting room.

#### SCENE 19

(Lights up in James' study.)

CAROLINE: I've had a very interesting afternoon.

JAMES: Have you? Miss Ganett drop in for tea?

CAROLINE: Guess again.

JAMES: Someone else from the intelligence corps?

CAROLINE: M. Poirot.

JAMES: Why?

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, your charming sister.

JAMES: Did he talk about the murder?

CAROLINE: What else is there to talk about? I was able to set him right upon several points. He was very grateful to me. He said I had the makings of a born detective and a wonderful Psychological insight into human nature. He talked about the little gray cells and there function. His own, he says, are of the first quality.

JAMES: He would say so.

CAROLINE: He thinks it very important that Ralph should come forward and give an account of himself. He says his disappearance will produce an unfortunate impression at the inquest.

JAMES: What did you say?

CAROLINE: I agreed and told him that people were talking.

JAMES: Did you tell what you overheard in the wood?

CAROLINE: I did.

JAMES: Do you realize what you're doing? Your putting a halter round Ralph Paton's neck.

CAROLINE: Not at all. I was surprised you hadn't told him.

JAMES: I took care not to. I'm fond of the boy.

CAROLINE: So am I. I don't believe he did it and so the truth can't hurt him. We ought to give M. Poirot all the help we can.

JAMES: Did Poirot ask you any more questions?

CAROLINE: Only about the patients you had that morning.

JAMES: My patients?

CAROLINE: Yes, how many and who.

JAMES: You were able to tell him?

NARRATOR: Of course.

CAROLINE: Of course. He seemed most interested in Miss Russell.

JAMES: Why shouldn't Miss Russell consult me?

CAROLINE: Fiddlesticks! She was after something, depend on it. That was what he was trying to get at, M. Poirot, I mean. There's something fishy about that woman and he knows it.

JAMES: Precisely the remark Mrs. Ackroyd made to me yesterday.

CAROLINE: Ah! Mrs. Ackroyd, there's another.

JAMES: Another what?

(Fade to black as they exit.)



NARRATOR: Caroline did not explain her remarks. A joint inquest was held on Monday at Fernly Park. I do not propose to give all the details. The absence of Ralph Paton was commented on but not stressed by the coroner. (Lights up on James' sitting room.) Afterwards, Poirot and I had a few words with Inspector Raglan.

## SCENE 20

RAGLAN: If he's innocent, why doesn't he come forward and give an explanation? There's no news from Liverpool either.

POIROT: Liverpool? He has no luggage and as far as we know no money.

RAGLAN: That telephone message from the station.

POIROT: Unless it was intended to throw you off the scent.

RAGLAN: Do you think that's the explanation?

POIROT: I do not know. I do believe however that when we find the explanation for that telephone call we will find the explanation for the murder.

JAMES: You said something like that before.

POIROT: I always come back to it.

JAMES: It seems irrelevant.

RAGLAN: I wouldn't say that. And I think Mr. Poirot harps on it too much. We have better clues. The fingerprints on the dagger for instance.

POIROT: M. Le 'Inspector, beware the street that leads nowhere. So it may be with the fingerprints - they may lead nowhere.

RAGLAN: I have taken the prints of everyone in the house that night.

JAMES: Including mine.

RAGLAN: None of them correspond. That leaves two alternatives. Ralph Paton or the mysterious stranger. When we get hold of those two---

POIROT: Without overlooking any one?

RAGLAN: Without overlooking any one.

POIROT: The quick and the dead?

RAGLAN: You mean-----

POIROT: The dead M. L'Inspecteur. (Pause.) I am suggesting, that the fingerprints found on the dagger handle are those of Mr. Ackroyd himself. It is an easy matter to verify.

RAGLAN: Are you suggesting suicide?

POIROT: Ah! No. After the blow was struck, I think the murderer closed the victims hand around the dagger handle.

RAGLAN: Why?

POIROT: To make a confusing case even more confusing.

RAGLAN: It's an idea. I'll look into it. But don't be disappointed if nothing comes of it. (He exits.)

POIROT: Now that we are left to our own devices, what do you think my, my good friend, of a little family reunion?

(Lights down.)

## SCENE 21

NARRATOR: The little reunion as Poirot had called it, took place about half an hour later in the study at Fernly Park. The servants were not present. So we were six in all. Mrs. Ackroyd, Flora, Major Blunt, young Raymond, Poirot and myself.

(Curtain opens on the assembled group.)

POIROT: Messieurs, Mesdames, I have called you together for a certain purpose. To begin, I make a special plea to Mademoiselle.

FLORA: To me?

POIROT: You are engaged to Captain Ralph Paton. I beg you most earnestly, if you know of his whereabouts, to persuade him to come forward.

FLORA: (Moves as if to speak.)

POIROT: One little minute, say nothing. His position grows daily more dangerous. If he had come forward at once. If you really believe in his innocence, persuade him to come forward before it is too late.

FLORA: Too late?

POIROT: Mademoiselle, will you not trust me and tell me where he is hiding?

FLORA: M. Poirot, I swear that I have no idea where he is and that I have neither heard from nor seen him since before the murder.

NARRATOR: After a brief silence Poirot exploded.

POIROT: Bien! That is that. Now I appeal to these others. You are all friends of the missing man. If you know where Ralph Paton is hiding, speak out.

MRS. ACKROYD: (After a pause.) I must say, it looks as though it is very fortunate that the engagement was never formally announced.

FLORA: Mother!

MRS. ACKROYD: Providence, I have a devout belief in a divinity that shapes our ends.

RAYMOND: Surely you don't make the almighty directly responsible for thick ankles.

MRS. ACKROYD: Flora has been saved a terrible amount of notoriety and unpleasantness.

FLORA: Mother! You don't think Ralph did it?

BLUNT: Come Mrs. Ackroyd.

MRS. ACKROYD: 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: (Raymond reacts strongly the others stare in amazement.) What?

MRS. ACKROYD: I can see, you are all against me but I do think it rather odd that Ralph has not come forward. I must say that I am thankful the engagement was never formally announced.

FLORA: It will be, to-morrow.

MRS. ACKROYD: 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.

FLORA: (To Blunt.) You understand? What else can I do? As things are, I must stand by Ralph. Don't you see? (She looks at him searchingly and after a pause he nods.)

RAYMOND: I appreciate your motives, Miss Ackroyd but wouldn't it do to wait a day or two?

FLORA: (In a clear steady voice.) To-morrow.

RAYMOND: M. Poirot, can't you say anything?

BLUNT: Nothing to be said, she's doing the right thing and I'll stand by her.

FLORA: (Holding out her hand.) Thank you, Major.

POIROT: Mademoiselle, will you let an old man congratulate you on your courage and loyalty? But I ask you to postpone the announcement. I ask it in Ralph Paton's interest as well as yours. You frown. You put the case in my hands, you must not hamper me now.

NARRATOR: Flora did not reply immediately.

FLORA: I do not like it but I will do what you say.

POIROT: I continue. 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. In all probability this is the last case I shall ever investigate. But Hercule Poirot does not end with failure. Messieurs et Mesdames, I tell you, I mean to know. And I shall know-in spite of you all.

RAYMOND: (In good humor.) How do you mean - in spite of us all?

POIROT: Just that. Every one in this room is concealing something from me. Yes, yes, I know what I am saying. - It may be something unimportant - trivial - which you think has no bearing on the case. But there it is. Each one of you has something to hide.

NARRATOR: His glance, challenging and accusing, swept around the room, every pair of eyes dropped before his. Yes, mine as well.

POIROT: I am answered. I appeal to you all. Tell me the truth. Will no one speak?. 'C'est dommage,' (As he exits.) It is a shame.

## SCENE 22

(James' sitting room. Poirot and James are seated as the lights come up.)

NARRATOR: That evening, after dinner at my house, Poirot and I settled in for coffee in my study. He declared to me that my sister was a most interesting woman.

JAMES: I am afraid you've been giving her a swelled head.

POIROT: I always like to employ the expert.

JAMES: So you got all the gossip, true and untrue.

POIROT: And a great deal of information.

JAMES: Such as?

POIROT: That she overheard Ralph Paton's conversation in the wood?

NARRATOR: I decided to change the direction of our conversation.

JAMES: I wish you'd tell me, what you think of it all.

POIROT: You wish that?

JAMES: I do.

POIROT: You have seen what I have seen. In fact a bit more. What do you think?

NARRATOR: As I recall, I actually took offense.

JAMES: I am afraid you are laughing at me. I have no experience in matters of this kind.

POIROT: You are like the little child who wants to know how the engine works. You wish to see the affair, not as the family Doctor sees it but with the eye of a detective who knows and cares for no one, to whom they are all strangers and suspects.

JAMES: You put it very well.

POIROT: The first thing is to get a clear picture of what happened that evening. But always bear in mind that the person who speaks may be lying.

JAMES: Rather a suspicious attitude.

POIROT: But necessary, I assure you. First. Dr. Sheppard leaves the house at ten minutes to nine. How do I know that?

JAMES: Because I told you so.

POIROT: You might not be speaking the truth, or, your watch, it could have been wrong. Parker also says that you left at ten minutes to nine, so we accept that and move on. At nine o'clock, you meet a man just outside the gates of Fernly. How do I know it is so?

JAMES: I told you.

POIROT: I am able to tell, because the maid of Miss Ganett met him a few minutes before and he inquired of her directions to Fernly Park. So now we know that he was in fact a stranger and that his mission was no secret since he twice asked the way there.

JAMES: I see.

POIROT: The man stopped at the three boars, and from the barmaid I learn that he spoke with an American accent. Did it strike you that he had an accent?

JAMES: Yes, I think he had a slight one.

POIROT: Precisement. There is also this. (He produces the quill.) Which I found at the summer house. It is used in sniffing cocaine.

JAMES: Cocaine? Wait.

POIROT: This method of taking the drug is popular in Canada and the states.

JAMES: What attracted you to the summer house?

POIROT: It seems fairly certain that the stranger came neither to the front nor the back door. What more convenient place to meet someone from the house than the summer house? In it I found two clues, the scrap of cambric and the quill.

JAMES: About the cambric?

POIROT: You do not use the little gray cells. It is not obvious?

JAMES: Not to me. Who, did he meet in the summer house?

POIROT: You will remember that Mrs. Ackroyd and her daughter came from Canada? Another point. What did you think of the parlor maid's story?

NARRATOR: I was completely at sea.

JAMES: What story?

POIROT: The story of her dismissal. Does it take half an hour to dismiss a servant? And she says she was in her room from nine-thirty until ten, No one confirms that. To me it grows clear. Now, tell me your theories.

JAMES: I've scribbled a few suggestions. (Taking a piece of paper from his pocket.)

POIROT: Excellent, you have method. Let us hear them.

JAMES: We must look at the thing logically---

POIROT: Just what my friend Hastings used to say but alas, he never did so.

JAMES: Number 1. Mr. Ackroyd was heard talking to someone at half-past nine. 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. Number 3. Mr. Ackroyd was nervous that evening and would only have admitted someone he knew. Number 4. The person with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty was asking for money, and we know Ralph was in a scrape. These four points show that the person with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty was Ralph Paton. We also know that Mr. Ackroyd was alive at a quarter to ten, and so it was not Ralph who killed him. He left the window open and the murderer came in that way.

POIROT: Who was the murderer?

JAMES: The American. He may have been in league with Parker who was the person blackmailing Mrs. Ferrars. If so Parker may have heard enough to realize the game was up and his accomplice later committed the murder with the dagger supplied by Parker.

POIROT: You have gray cells of a kind. But you leave a good deal unaccounted for.

JAMES: Such as?

POIROT: The telephone call, the pushed out chair-----

JAMES: Do you really think the latter important?

POIROT: It may have been pulled out by accident and returned by someone unconsciously. Then there is the missing forty pounds.

JAMES: Given by Ackroyd to Ralph?

POIROT: That still leaves something unexplained.

JAMES: What?

POIROT: Why was Blunt so certain that it was Raymond with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty?

JAMES: He explained that.

POIROT: You think so? Tell me then, what were Ralph Paton's reasons for disappearing?

JAMES: Finding out that his uncle had been murdered just after he had been there. He might have panicked. Men have been known to act guilty when they are perfectly innocent.

POIROT: That is true but let us not lose sight of something.

NARRATOR: I knew what he was going to say.

JAMES: Motive! Ralph Paton inherits a great fortune.

POIROT: That is one motive.

JAMES: AND NARRATOR: 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 Blackmailing Mrs. Ferrars. Remember, as far as Hammond knew, Ralph Paton had not applied to his step-father for help of late. Did he have another source of money? Then. He was in some sort of scrape, which he feared might get back to his step father's ears. And finally, the one you just mentioned.

JAMES: The case does look bad 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, Ralph Paton is innocent.

(Black and curtain.)

### ACT III

#### SCENE 1

NARRATOR: From the time of the murder, until Monday night following we have the events as presented to Hercule Poirot. I saw what he saw. I try my best to read his mind. He showed me all his discoveries, but held back the impressions he had formed. As I came to know later, this was characteristic of him. After Monday our ways diverged. But this being Kings Abbot I got to hear of his movements. I had my own preoccupation's. Looking back it was rather like a jig-saw puzzle to which every one contributed their own little piece. Poirot alone earns the renown of fitting them together. Some of the incidents seemed to be meaningless. For instance, the black boots, but that comes later. Now let us take things in order from Monday morning. I begin with a summons from Mrs. Ackroyd.

(Ackroyd's study. Mrs. Ackroyd sits in a chair wrapped in a blanket as the curtain rises James is standing over her.)

JAMES: Well, what seems to be the matter with you?

MRS. ACKROYD: I am absolutely prostrated. It's the shock of poor Roger's death.

NARRATOR: It's a pity that a Doctor is precluded from being able sometimes to say what he really thinks. Bunkum! Is what I would have said. I prescribed a tonic.

MRS. ACKROYD: Then that scene yesterday.

JAMES: What scene?

MRS. ACKROYD: That dreadful little Frenchman, or whatever he is. Bullying us all as he did. It has quite upset me. I don't know what he meant, shouting like that. I have given the Police every assistance. I can't think why Flora brought that ridiculous little man into the case. I am hiding nothing. Why he positively accused me-----

JAMES: Since you are not concealing anything, it is of no consequence.

MRS. ACKROYD: Servants are so tiresome. They gossip and it gets around and there is probably nothing to it.

JAMES: Have the servants been talking?

MRS. ACKROYD: I'm sure you'd know Doctor. It was that, Ursula Bourne wasn't it? She's leaving and naturally would make all the trouble she could. It's important that no wrong impressions get out. But if that girl was spiteful-----

JAMES: If I were you, I would make a clean breast of things.

MRS. ACKROYD: I thought doctor, that you might put it to M. Poirot, explain it. Those dreadful bills. Some I didn't show Roger at all. Men don't understand, and of course they mounted up.

JAMES: It's a habit they have.

NARRATOR: Did I mention that I am ashamed but I detest Mrs. Ackroyd?

MRS. ACKROYD: It's all a matter of expectations. I expected that Roger would provide for me. I only thought to glance at his will. Just so that I might make arrangements.

NARRATOR: A very delicate situation indeed. Fortunately, words, ingeniously used, will serve to mask the ugliness of naked facts.

MRS. ACKROYD: Dear Doctor Sheppard, I can trust you not to misjudge me and to represent the matter in the right light to M. Poirot. It was on Friday afternoon-----

JAMES: (After a pause.) Yes, on Friday afternoon?- Well?

MRS. ACKROYD: I went into Roger's study. I had a real reason for going. I mean, there was nothing underhanded about it. I saw all those papers heaped on the desk, it just came to me. Did Roger keep his will in one of the drawers? I'm so impulsive, always was.

JAMES: You searched his desk. Did you find the will?

MRS. ACKROYD: (With a little scream.) How dreadful it sounds, but it wasn't like that. Men are so secretive, one is forced to adopt little subterfuges in self defense.

JAMES: And the result?

MRS. ACKROYD: Most awkward. As I got to the bottom drawer, Bourne came in. I called her attention to a few specks of dust on the furniture. There's something different about her. To well educated, that's my opinion. You can't tell who -----

JAMES: What happened next?

MRS. ACKROYD: Roger came in. I thought he was out for a walk. "What's all this." he said. I said, "Nothing, I just came in to fetch Punch." and I took Punch, and went out. Bourne stayed behind. I heard her ask if she could speak with him --- you will explain to M. Poirot, won't you? You see, it was such a trivial matter.

JAMES: That's all? You've told me everything?



MRS. ACKROYD: Ye-es, oh! Yes.

NARRATOR: That moments hesitation, I knew there was more.

JAMES: Was it you who left the silver table open? The night of the murder ?

MRS. ACKROYD: (In a whisper.) How did you know? I was startled. I heard footsteps coming along the terrace outside. I hastened out of the room and got upstairs before Parker opened the door for you.

NARRATOR: What interested me was that Miss Russell must have entered through the window. Where had she been? I thought of the summer house and the scrap of cambric.

JAMES: I wonder if Miss Russell has -----

MRS. ACKROYD: Do you think you could explain to M. Poirot?

JAMES: Oh! Certainly. Absolutely.

(Lights to black and curtain.)

NARRATOR: As I was leaving I encountered Miss Bourne, she asked if there was any news about Ralph Paton. I took the opportunity to let her know that I knew that she had not been sent for Friday afternoon but was already present when Roger Ackroyd entered his study. At which point she told me that she had already determined in her mind to give notice.

(Lights up on James' study. Caroline is seated, as James enters.)

## SCENE 2

NARRATOR: Caroline welcomed me home with news.

CAROLINE: I've had a visitor.

JAMES: Yes?

CAROLINE: M. Poirot. I am helping him with the case.

NARRATOR: What will she be like with her detective instincts encouraged?

JAMES: Are you going around looking for Ralph Paton's mysterious girl?

CAROLINE: No, it's something special M. Poirot wants me to find out.

JAMES: What is it?

CAROLINE: He wants to know if Ralph Paton's boots were black or brown. A lot hangs on it.

JAMES: Well?

CAROLINE: M. Poirot thought they were brown. He was wrong, they were black.

NARRATOR: It puzzled me. What could that have to do with the case?

CAROLINE: Oh, by the by, Geoffrey Raymond stopped in.

JAMES: Did he want to see me?

CAROLINE: He had just come from the Larches, M. Poirot was out, He thought he might be here or that you would know where he was.

JAMES: I haven't the least idea.

CAROLINE: He went down to the Village, pity, because M. Poirot came right after he left.

JAMES: Came here?

CAROLINE: No, to his own house. (Pause.) Aren't you going across?

JAMES: My dear Caroline, what for?

CAROLINE: Mr. Raymond wanted to see him about something.

JAMES: I can exist without knowing what my neighbors are doing.

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.

(Fade to black on study.)

NARRATOR: A few minutes later, I found myself delivering a jar of home made Medlar jelly to the Larches, accompanied by a request, to mention that Capt. Paton's boots where indeed black.

### SCENE 3

(The curtain opens and lights up on Poirot, in his sitting room, James enters.)

POIROT: Come in my friend, have a seat. The room it is not to hot HOT? The English have a mania for fresh the air. You have something for me?

JAMES: Two things actually., First from my sister. (Handing him the jam.) POIROT: How kind of Mademoiselle Caroline, She has remembered her promise. And the second thing?

JAMES: Information, of a kind.

NARRATOR: I informed him of my interview with Mrs. Ackroyd.

POIROT: It does confirm the evidence of the housekeeper.

JAMES: But she said that she went in to see about the flowers.

POIROT: No matter, probably a little lie to explain her presence, but if she were not tampering with the silver table, we must now look for another cause.

JAMES: She must have gone out to meet with someone.

POIROT: You think so?

JAMES: I do.

POIROT: So do I.

JAMES: By the way, a message from my sister. Ralph Paton's boots were black.

POIROT: That is a pity. Miss Russell, her visit on Friday, is it indiscreet to ask what passed at the interview? Apart from the medical details, I mean.

JAMES: Not at all. We talked for a few minutes about poisons and the ease or difficulty in detecting them and about drug-taking and drug-takers.

POIROT: With special reference to cocaine?

JAMES: How did you know?

NARRATOR: He handed me a copy of the "Daily Budget" dated Friday September 16th containing a lurid article about the smuggling of cocaine.

POIROT: That is what put cocaine into her head, my friend.

(The door opens and Raymond enters.)

RAYMOND: M. Poirot. How are you Doctor? This is the second time I have been here this morning. I was anxious to catch you.

JAMES: Perhaps I'd best be off?

RAYMOND: Not on my account Doctor. No, it's just, I've got a confession to make.

POIROT: En Verit'e?

RAYMOND: It is of no consequence, really. You accused us all of holding back something. I, plead guilty. I've had something to hide.

POIROT: What is that?

RAYMOND: I am in debt, this legacy comes in the nick of time. Five hundred pounds puts me on my feet again with a little to spare. I've got nothing to fear, yet when you thundered out that stuff about concealing things, I felt a nasty pang of conscience and thought-----

POIROT: You are a very wise young man. You see, when I suspect someone is hiding something from me I suspect the thing may be very bad indeed. You have done well.

RAYMOND: I am glad to be cleared of suspicion. (As he exits.) I'll be off now. Good day.

JAMES: Yes, good day. (To Poirot.) So that is that.

POIROT: Yes. But had he not been in the billiard room, who knows? Many people in that house stood to benefit from Mr. Ackroyd's death. Only one in fact does not. Major Blunt. Two of them have given me the truth.

JAMES: Do you think the Major has something to conceal?

POIROT: There is a saying. Englishmen conceal only one thing, Their love. Major Blunt, my friend is not good at concealment.

JAMES: I wonder, have we jumped to conclusions on one point?

POIROT: What is that?

JAMES: That the murderer and the blackmailer are not one and the same.

POIROT: Very good. Very good indeed. I wondered if that idea would come to you. The letter, it disappeared. That does not mean the murderer took it. Parker may have removed it unnoticed by you.

JAMES: Parker?

POIROT: I always come back to Parker. No, he did not commit the murder. He is likely to have come across information about Mrs. Ferrars than a casual guest such as Major Blunt.

JAMES: He may have taken the letter. I didn't notice.

POIROT: Till after Blunt and Raymond were in the room?

JAMES: I don't remember.

POIROT: That widens the field. But Parker is the most likely. It is in my mind to try a little experiment with Parker. Will you come with me to Fernly? (He gestures and the two men exit.) (The narrator will deliver the next speech in and around the dimly lit room.)

NARRATOR: We set out at once. Poirot asked to see Miss Ackroyd and she soon joined us in the foyer. Poirot explained to Miss Flora that he needed her assistance in an experiment to determine the innocence or guilt of Parker. To reconstruct some of his actions of Friday night. She accepted. Parker was sent for and asked to bring the tray or whatever it was he had with him on the night in question. (At this point lights up in foyer area on Poirot, James, Parker and Miss Flora.)

#### SCENE 4

POIROT: 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 any one could have heard the voices of Miss Ackroyd and yourself in the foyer that night. I want you to enact that little scene over again. You came from the hall ---  
- so. Mademoiselle was - where?

FLORA: Here.

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 play me the little comedy.

FLORA: Oh! "Parker. Mr. Ackroyd doesn't want to be disturbed again tonight." Is that right?

PARKER: To the best of my recollection, Miss Flora but I fancy you used the word evening instead of night. "Very good Miss, shall I lock up as usual?"

FLORA: "Yes, please." (Parker exits followed by Flora.)

FLORA: (Over her shoulder.) Is that enough?

POIROT: Admirable. By the way, Parker, (Parker returns.) Are you sure there were two glasses on the tray that evening?

PARKER: I always bring two glasses, sir. Is there anything further?

POIROT: Nothing, I thank you.

Foyer to black.)

NARRATOR: (Still in the dimly lit study of Poirot.) The joint funerals of Mrs. Ferrars and Mr. Ackroyd were fixed for the following day. After it was over, Poirot, took me by the arm and invited me back to the Larches.

## SCENE 5

(Lights up in the study as the men enter.)

POIROT: We must act. With your help I must examine a witness. We will question him. We will put such fear into him that the truth is bound to come out.

JAMES: What witness?

POIROT: Parker. (A knock on the door.) I asked him to meet me here this morning. That will be him now. Come in please. (The door opens and Parker enters.) Good morning Parker. Thank you for coming. Take a seat, will you not? What I have to say may take some time. (Parker nods assent and takes a seat.) Now why do you think I have asked you here?

PARKER: I, understand sir, that you wished to ask me some questions about my late master ----- private like.

POIROT: Precisement. Have you made many experiments in blackmail?

PARKER: Sir? (Springing to his feet.)

POIROT: Do not excite yourself and 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 M. Ackroyd's study the other evening? Was it that you heard the word blackmail?

PARKER: I wasn't - I --I ----

POIROT: Who was your last employer?

PARKER: My last employer?

POIROT: Yes before you came to M. Ackroyd.

PARKER: A Major Ellerby, sir---

POIROT: Just so. Major Ellerby, a man addicted to drugs. Was he not? In Bermuda, some trouble, a man was killed. He was somehow implicated. How much did he pay to keep your mouth shut? You see, I have made some inquiries. Now I want the truth. It is useless to deny. Hercule Poirot Knows.

PARKER: I never hurt a hair of Mr. Ackroyd's head. I've been afraid of this, but I tell you I didn't kill him.

POIROT: I am inclined to believe you but I must have the truth.

PARKER: It's true that I tried to listen. A word or two made me curious.. Mr. Ackroyd shutting himself up with the Doctor the way he did. It's the truth, what I told the police. I heard the word blackmail, sir and well--

JAMES: You thought there might be something in it for you?

PARKER: Well - well, yes, I did, sir. I thought---

POIROT: Before that night did you know if Mr. Ackroyd was being blackmailed?

PARKER: No, indeed not sir.

POIROT: How much did you overhear?

PARKER: Not very much. I hope you believe me sir, I have been afraid the police would find out about Major Ellerby and be suspicious of me.

POIROT: Eh buen, I am disposed to believe you but I would ask, you have a bank book I presume. May I see it?

PARKER: As it happens I have it with me now. (He hands it to Poirot.)

POIROT: I see you have purchased 500 pounds of National Savings Certificates this year?

PARKER: Yes, sir.

POIROT: I will wish you good morning. (Giving back the book.) I believe you have told me the truth.

PARKER: Good day to you gentlemen. (He exits.)

JAMES: You believe Parker's story?

POIROT: It is credible on it's face. It seems that he believes Ackroyd himself was the victim of blackmail. If so, he knows nothing of the Mrs. Ferrars business.

JAMES; By the way, I have a confession to make. I'm afraid I have let slip out something about that ring.

POIROT: What ring?

JAMES: The ring you found in the pond.

POIROT, Ah! Yes.

JAMES: I hope you are not annoyed? It was careless of me.

POIROT: Not at all, My good friend, Not at all. You are at liberty to speak out if you wish. She was interested, your sister?

JAMES: She was indeed. It created a sensation. All sorts of theories are flying about.

POIROT: And yet it is so simple. The true explanation leapt to the eye, did it not?

JAMES: Did it?

(Black and curtain.)

## SCENE 6

NARRATOR: We discovered from Mr. Hammond, that Mrs. Ferrars had cashed large amounts of securities in the past year, saying that the moneys had gone to poor relatives of her husbands. Mr. Hammond's suspicion was, the money was paid to some woman who had a claim on Ashley Ferrars. The shocking point was the amount. Twenty thousand pounds. That seemed to eliminate Parker. Would he have stayed on with that kind of money?

(Lights up on James' study as he and Poirot enter.)

POIROT: Parker, he has not the big ideas. That leaves us, Raymond, or possibly Blunt.

JAMES: Surely, not Raymond and as to Major Blunt.

POIROT: I will tell you something as to the good Major Blunt. It is my business to make inquiries. I make them. The legacy of which he speaks, I have discovered the amount to be close to twenty thousand pounds, what do you think of that?

CAROLINE: (Entering.) Not found Ralph Paton yet?

POIROT: Where should I Find him, Mademoiselle?

CAROLINE: I thought perhaps Cranchester. One of our able private detectives happened to see you in a car on the Cranchester road.

POIROT: Ah! that, a visit to the Dentist. My tooth it aches, I go there. My tooth it is at once better. That particular tooth it will never again ache.

JAMES: A weak nature, Ralph, but not a vicious one.

POIROT: But, weakness, where does it end?

CAROLINE: Exactly. Take James, weak as water, if I weren't around to look after him.

JAMES: Can't you talk without dragging in personalities?

CAROLINE: 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. James tells me that you believe some one in the house committed the murder. All I can say is, you are wrong.

POIROT: I should not like to be wrong.

CAROLINE: I've got the facts. As far as I can see, only two of them had the chance. Ralph Paton and Flora Ackroyd.

JAMES: My dear Caroline ----

CAROLINE: I know what I'm talking about. Parker did not hear her say good night to her uncle.

JAMES: Caroline!

CAROLINE: I'm not saying she did it. I'm saying she could have done. I don't think it even for a minute. 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 she does. Who's left? Only Ralph and Flora.

POIROT: Let us take a man, he stumbles on a secret involving life or death, his first impulse is to speak out, to do his duty. Then, there is a chance for a great deal of money. He has to do nothing for it, only keep silent. That is the beginning. He becomes greedy and in his greed overreaches himself. One can press a man as far as one likes but a woman one must not press to far. For at her heart there is a great desire to tell the truth. In a reckless moment flings safety to the winds and proclaims the truth with great momentary satisfaction to. So it was in this case. The strain was to great and so there came the proverb, The death of the goose that laid the golden eggs. That is not the end. Faced with exposure the man is no longer the man he was, say a year ago. He is desperate, and is prepared to take any means to avoid exposure. And so the dagger strikes.

NARRATOR: It was as though he had laid a spell upon the room.

POIROT: Afterwards, he will be himself again, normal but if the need again arises, then once more he will strike.

CAROLINE: You are speaking of Ralph Paton? You may be right, you may not, but you have no business to condemn a man unheard.

(The phone rings. James answers.)

JAMES: Hello. What? Yes. This is Dr. Sheppard speaking. (He listens. then replaces the receiver.) Poirot, they have detained a man at Liverpool. His name is Charles Kent. He is believed to be the stranger who visited Fernly that night.

Fade to black.)



NARRATOR: Upon arrival in Liverpool I was surprised to find that Poirot was welcomed with acclamation. Superintendent Hayes, who met us had worked with him long ago and had an exaggerated opinion of his powers.

## SCENE 7

(Poirot, Raglan, James and Hayes meet in what is the foyer area. They then enter through the doors to center stage. A black traveler will cover all interior sets. a single chair, center, lighted as if an interrogation were in progress. Charles Kent is seated in the chair.)

HAYES: (As the lights come up on foyer.) Now we've got M. 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, retirement! You cannot imagine the monotony.

HAYES: Is this Dr. Sheppard? Think you'll be able to identify him sir?

JAMES: I'm not very sure.

HAYES: He fits the description and has an American accent.

POIROT: Is it permitted that I too, see him?

HAYES: Yes, sir. (He opens the door they enter interrogation room.) Now then Kent, here are some visitors come to see you.(To James.) Well, what do you say?

JAMES: The height's the same, as far as general appearance, he might be the man. Beyond that I cannot go.

KENT: What the hell's the meaning of this? What have you got against me. What am I supposed to have done?

JAMES: He's the man, I recognize his voice.

KENT: Recognize my voice, do you? From where?

JAMES: On Friday evening last, at Fernly Park. You asked me the way there.

KENT: I don't admit anything. Not till I know what this is about.

POIROT: A man was murdered there that night.

KENT: So that's it, is it? Trying to make out that I did it, are you?

POIROT: You were there that night.

KENT: How do you know?

POIROT: (Removing the goose quill from his pocket.) By this.

KENT: (Reaches out.)

POIROT: No, my friend, it is empty. It lay where you dropped it that night.

KENT: You seem to know a hell of a lot about everything, you little foreign duck. The papers say the old bird was croaked after nine-forty-five.

POIROT: That is so.

KENT: Is it really? That's what I want to know.

POIROT: This gentleman will tell you.

RAGLAN: That's right, Between quarter to ten and ten o'clock.

KENT: I was away from Fernly by twenty-five minutes past nine. You can ask at the Dog and Whistle. They'll know me. (Raglan makes a note of this.) Well?

RAGLAN: Inquiries will be made. What were you doing at Fernly Park?

KENT: Went there to meet someone.

RAGLAN: Who?

KENT: I went there on my own business and that's all.

POIROT: Your name, it is, Charles Kent. Where were you born? (Pause.) I fancy you were born in Kent.

RAGLAN: We'll verify his statement. I'd like to know why he was at Fernly. Looks as though we have our blackmailer all right.

(Lights down as Raglan, James and Hayes exit. Poirot will slowly come down to the light of narrators location,)

NARRATOR: Poirot and I lunched together at an hotel. I know now that the whole thing lay clearly unraveled before him. He had got the last thread he needed to lead him to the truth. At that time though I had no suspicion of the fact. I took it for granted that the things which puzzled me must be puzzling to him. My chief puzzle was, what Kent was doing at Fernly. At last I asked Poirot what he thought.

POIROT: Mon ami, I do not think. I know.

NARRATOR: Really?

POIROT: Yes, to you it does not make sense to say that he went to Fernly that night because he was born in Kent?

NARRATOR: It certainly does not.

POIROT: No matter. I have my little idea. (He moves from the light and exits.)

NARRATOR: The next morning found me along with Inspector Raglan awaiting the appearance of Poirot at the Larches.

## SCENE 8

(As the curtain opens on Poirot's sitting room James is standing as Raglan enters.)

JAMES: Good morning Inspector, M. Poirot will be with us shortly.

RAGLAN: Good morning Dr. Well that alibi is all right enough.

JAMES: Charles Kent's?

RAGLAN: The barmaid at the Dog and Whistle, remembers him. Picked out his photo. He was there at quarter of ten all right. She mentioned that he had a lot of money on him. That's where the forty pounds went right enough.

JAMES: Poirot says he knows why he went there that night.

RAGLAN: He does?

JAMES: He says it was because he was born in Kent.

NARRATOR: I felt a distinct pleasure in passing on my discomfort.

RAGLAN: A bit gone here, (Pointing to his head.) 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 mad.

JAMES: Poirot?

RAGLAN: Yes. Hasn't he ever mentioned it to you?

JAMES: Who told you?

RAGLAN: Your sister told me all about it.

NARRATOR: She never rests until she knows the last details of everyone's family secrets. I have never been able to instill in her the decency of keeping them to herself.

RAGLAN: If he is a bit balmy, it was a useful tip he gave me about those fingerprints. If he's got a bee in his bonnet about Kent, There might be something useful there.

POIROT: (Entering.) Ah, good morning, gentlemen. Inspector, as to the matter of the alibi of the man Kent?

RAGLAN: A chap can't be murdering someone in one place when he's drinking in another a mile away.

POIROT: Are you going to release him?

RAGLAN: Don't see what else we can do.

POIROT: If I were you I would not release him just yet.

RAGLAN: What do you mean?

POIROT: What I say. I SHOULD NOT RELEASE HIM.

RAGLAN: Do you think he had anything to do with the murder?

POIROT: I think probably not, but one cannot be certain, yet.

RAGLAN: But haven't I just told you----

POIROT: Mais oui, Mais oui. I heard. I am not deaf. Thank the good God! But you see, you approach the matter from the wrong- wrong- premises, is that not the word?

RAGLAN: Look here, we know Mr. Ackroyd was alive at a quarter to ten. ?

POIROT: That is not proved!

RAGLAN: We've got proof enough of that. We've got Miss Flora Ackroyd's evidence.

POIROT: That she said good-night 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: Parker saw her coming out of the door.

POIROT: No!! That is just what he did not see. He saw her with her hand on the handle, the little experiment Dr.? He did not see her come out of the room.

RAGLAN: Then she had been?

POIROT: Perhaps the stairs.

RAGLAN; The stairs?

POIROT: That is my little idea, yes.

JAMES: To Ackroyd's bedroom?

POIROT: Precisely.

RAGLAN: You, don't suggest that it was Miss Ackroyd who took the money.

POIROT: I suggest nothing. But I will remind you of this. Life was not easy for that mother and daughter. There were bills, and constant trouble over money. Roger Ackroyd was peculiar about money matters. The girl might be at wits end over a small sum. Figure to yourself then what happens. She has taken the money, she descends the stairs. Half way down she hears sounds from the hall. She has no doubt. It is Parker coming to the study. She has just time to rush to the door, and place her hand on the handle. When Parker arrives she says the first thing that comes into her head. That her uncle does not wish to be disturbed, and then goes up to bed.

RAGLAN: But later?

POIROT: She is told simply that there has been a robbery. She assumes, the theft of the money has been discovered. When she later learns that her uncle is dead, she is trapped and bound to stick to her story.

RAGLAN: (Bring a fist down on the table hard. ) And you knew this all along?

POIROT: This has been in my mind from the first. Therefore my little experiment.

JAMES: A test for Parker, you said.

POIROT: Mon ami, as I told you at the time, one must say something.

(Fade to black and curtain.)

NARRATOR: The Inspector, requested the use of Poirot's house and inviting he and myself to join him sent off immediately for Miss Flora to present herself for another interview. As we waited her arrival I thought how Poirot had set up that whole experiment while keeping every one in the dark. Every one, including me. When Miss Flora arrived she was accompanied by Maj. Blunt. The Inspector asked to speak to her alone. Maj. Blunt excused himself but she stopped him and requested that he stay. Inspector Raglan stated that he preferred to question her privately. She then spoke directly to Maj. Blunt.

## SCENE 9

(Curtain opens and lights up on study.)

FLORA: I want you to stay, please. Whatever the Inspector has to say, I'd rather you heard it.

RAGLAN: Now Miss, M. Poirot here has suggested that you were not in the study on Friday night. That you never saw your uncle to say good night. instead you were on the stairs when you heard Parker coming.

POIROT: What one does not tell papa Poirot he finds out. You see, I make it easy for you. You took the money, did you not?

BLUNT: The money?

(Silence and a pause.)

FLORA: Yes, I took the money. These last few days have been a nightmare. You don't know what life has been like since I came here. Wanting things, running up bills, promising to pay, scheming. I hate what I've become. That's what brought us together, Ralph and I. We're both weak!. We were not strong enough to stand alone, either of us. (She catches blunts unbelieving gaze, stomps her foot.) Why do you look at me like that? You don't believe me? I am not lying any more. I'm not young and innocent. If you never want to see me again? You must believe one thing, If my speaking out would have made things better for Ralph, I would have spoken out. But it wouldn't. It makes the case against him darker than ever. I did him no harm sticking to my lie.

BLUNT: Ralph! I see always Ralph.

FLORA: You don't understand, you never will. I admit everything. I never saw my uncle that night after dinner. As to the money, you can take what steps you like. Nothing could be worse than it is now. (She breaks down and rushes from the room.)

RAGLAN: So, that's that.

BLUNT: Inspector. That money was given to me by Mr. Ackroyd for a special purpose. Miss Ackroyd never touched it. When she said she did she was lying, with the idea of shielding Capt. Paton. The truth is as I said and I am prepared to go into the box and swear to it. (He turns and attempts to leave, Poirot stops him.)

POIROT: Monsieur, a moment, I am not deceived. Miss Flora took the money. All the same, it is well imagined what you say, it pleases me. It is very good what you have done. You are a man quick to think and to act.

BLUNT: I am not in the least interested in your opinion, thank you. (Again he attempts to leave but is blocked.)

POIROT: Ah! But you will listen. I have more to say. The other day I spoke of concealment's. I have seen, what you are concealing. You are in love with Mademoiselle Flora. From the moment you saw her, is it not so? You seek to conceal it from all the world. That is maybe as it should be. Take the advice of Hercule Poirot, do not conceal it from the lady herself. It is not Ralph Paton the Mademoiselle Flora loves.

BLUNT: What the devil do you mean?

POIROT: You have been blind, Monsieur. Blind! She is loyal, Ralph Paton is under a cloud, She is bound in honor to stick by him.

BLUNT: Do you think-----

POIROT: If you doubt me, ask her yourself. Perhaps you no longer care? The affair of the money---

BLUNT: 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, that's all. I've been every kind of a fool. (Taking Poirot's hand with a firm grip which causes him to wince.) You are a sound fellow M. Poirot. Thank you. (He exits.) POIROT: (As the lights fade.) Not every kind of a fool. Only one kind. The fool for love.

CURTAIN

SCENE 10

NARRATOR: All alibis were now worthless. The murder could have been committed at nine-thirty. Kent is once again a suspect, He could have run to the Dog and Whistle in less than fifteen minutes but the telephone call. The train station is a mile in the other direction. He could not have made the call. Raglan

thought possibly Ralph had found his uncle dead and fled in panic. Making the call to get the doctor up there as soon as possible, just in case he was not dead. The Inspector swelled his chest out importantly. I had patients to see. Poirot walked with the Inspector to the police station and I attended to my Surgery. (Lights up on James' study as he enters and becomes preoccupied with a small clock.) When I had dismissed my last patient I closed up and went to my study. Having a hobby is to me essential to keep my mind organized and running in good order.<sup>41</sup>

CAROLINE: (Enters.) Oh! There you are James! M. Poirot wants to see you.

JAMES: Well? (He is annoyed at the interruption and drops something.)

NARRATOR: Caroline startled me and I dropped a piece of delicate mechanism.

JAMES: Show him in.

CAROLINE: This room could do with a little straightening. (She exits.)

POIROT: (After a pause enters.) Ah! My friend, you have not got rid of me so easily.

JAMES: Finished with the Inspector?

POIROT: For the moment, yes. And you, you have seen all the patients?

JAMES: (Still working at the bench.) Yes.

POIROT: You are in error. You still have one to see.

JAMES: Not you?

POIROT: Ah! Not me, Bien entude. Me, I have the health magnificent. No, to tell the truth, there is some one I wish to see. You understand? It is not necessary that the whole village should intrigue itself about the matter. Which would happen if the lady were seen coming to my house. But to you she has already come as a patient.

JAMES: Miss Russell!

POIROT: Precisement. I wish to speak with her, so I send her a note and make an appointment. You are not annoyed with me?

JAMES: No, to the contrary. That is, presuming I am allowed to be present at the interview.

NARRATOR: I was intrigued.

POIROT: But naturally.

JAMES; (Putting aside his hobby.) Every new development is like turning a kaleidoscope. Now, why are you anxious to see Miss Russell?

POIROT: Is it not obvious?

JAMES: There you go again. According to you everything is obvious and you leave me walking about in a fog.

POIROT: I am not so sure. Take the matter of Mademoiselle Flora, the Inspector was surprised, but you, you were not.

JAMES: I never dreamed she was a thief.

POIROT: Perhaps no. I watched your face, you were not, like Inspector Raglan, startled and incredulous.

JAMES: Perhaps you are right. I felt that Flora was keeping back something, it did upset the Inspector very much indeed.

POIROT: He must rearrange his ideas. I profited by his state of mental chaos to induce him to grant me a little, favor.

JAMES: What was that?

POIROT: (Producing a piece of paper.) The police have, for some days been seeking Capt. Ralph Paton, the stepson of Mr. Roger Ackroyd, who died under tragic circumstances. Capt. Paton has been found in Liverpool, where he was about to embark for America. That, my friend, will appear in the newspapers tomorrow morning.

JAMES: But, but it isn't true! He's not in Liverpool.

POIROT: You have the intelligence so quick!

JAMES: What do you expect to get out of this?

POIROT: (Crossing to the work bench.) You should employ your little gray cells. You have really the love of machinery.

NARRATOR: Every man to his hobby, I showed him my home made wireless.

POIROT: You should have been an inventor--- (The door bell rings James exits, Poirot remains at the work bench until James returns with Miss Russell.)

NARRATOR: Once again I was struck by the remnants of beauty.

POIROT: Good morning, Mademoiselle. Will you be seated?

RUSSELL: Thank you, this seems a strange way of doing things.

POIROT: Miss Russell, I have news to give you.

RUSSELL: Indeed!

POIROT: Charles Kent has been arrested in Liverpool.

RUSSELL. (Showing no reaction.) What of it?

NARRATOR: In that moment it struck me.

POIROT: I thought you might have been interested.

RUSSELL: I'm not. Who is this Charles Kent.

POIROT: He is the man, who was at Fernly Park the night of the murder.



RUSSELL: Really?

POIROT: His alibi, seems no longer to be valid. It now appears the murder took place between ten minutes to nine and a quarter to ten.

RUSSELL: But Miss Ackroyd said,-----Miss Ackroyd said-----

POIROT: Miss Flora has admitted she was lying. She was never in the study at all that evening.

RUSSELL: Then---?

POIROT: It would seem, Charles Kent is the man we are looking for. He gives no reason for being at Fernly that night.

RUSSELL: He never touched a hair on old Ackroyd's head.

POIROT: You alone can save him. Tell us his reason for being at Fernly.

RUSSELL: He came to meet me.

POIROT: In the summer-house, yes I know.

RUSSELL: How do you know?

POIROT: It is the business of Hercule Poirot to know things. You went out earlier in the evening to leave a message to say what time you would be there.

RUSSELL: I slipped out through the drawing room window, as I came back, I met Dr. Sheppard.

POIROT: Then you went out again at ten past nine.

RUSSELL: Yes. But you see----

POIROT: I must have the whole truth. I will help you if I can. This Charles, he is your son. Is he not?

RUSSELL: It was long ago, down in Kent. I-----

NARRATOR: So that was it!

RUSSELL: I never told him I was his mother. I paid for his board and lodging. In the end he turned out bad, he drank. Then drugs. I managed to pay his passage to Canada. He found out I was his mother and wrote asking for money. When he got back to England he wrote he was coming to see me. I wrote and directed him to the summer-house.

POIROT: On the day you came to see Dr. Sheppard?

RUSSELL: I wondered if something could be done to help him.

POIROT: So, he came that night to the summer-house?

RUSSELL: He was rough and abusive. I had brought all the money I had and gave it to him. We talked a little and then he left.

POIROT: What time was that?

RUSSELL: Not quite nine thirty. I went back to the house. Major Blunt was walking up and down the terrace smoking, so I made a detour to get around to the side door. It was just half past nine.

POIROT: I think that is all.

RUSSELL: Must the police know?

POIROT: It may come to that. But let us not be in a hurry.

RUSSELL: You, you do believe me-----

POIROT: The man talking with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty could not have been your son. (As he shows her to the door.) Be of good cheer and all will be well. Thank you. (She exits.)

JAMES: Every time we come back to Ralph Paton. How did you know it was Russell this Kent fellow came to meet?

POIROT: I remembered your account of Miss Russell's visit. Add to that the quill found at the summer house. Ah! but I must go, it is time for lunch.

JAMES: Stay, and lunch with us.

POIROT: I should not like to force Mademoiselle Caroline to adopt a vegetarian diet two days in succession. (He exits.)

NARRATOR: It occurred to me that not much escaped Hercule Poirot. Caroline, of course had not failed to see Miss Russell come to the door. (Caroline enters.) I had anticipated this and had ready an elaborate account of the lady's bad knee.

CAROLINE: Pumping you for in information. In the most shameless manor, I've no doubt. It's no good interrupting. And you without the least idea what she was doing. Men are so simple. She knows that you are in M. Poirot's confidence. Do you know what I think James?

JAMES: I couldn't begin to imagine.

NARRATOR and JAMES: You think so many extraordinary things.

CAROLINE: It's no good being. I think Miss Russell knows more about Mr. Ackroyd's death than she's prepared to admit.

JAMES: Do you really?

CAROLINE: You are very dull today, James.

(Lights down.)

NARRATOR: Our conversation then dealt with purely personal matters. The paragraph inspired by Poirot appeared in the local paper the next morning. I was in the dark as to it's purpose. But,---- it's effect on Caroline was immense.

SCENE 11

NARRATOR: She began by stating, most untruly, that she had said as much all along. I raised my eyebrows, but did not Argue. Caroline, however, must have felt a prick of conscience, For she went on.

(Lights up again in study.)

CAROLINE: I mayn't have actually said Liverpool but I knew he'd try and get away to America. That's what Crippen did. Now they've caught him and I consider it your duty to see that he isn't hanged.

JAMES: What do you expect me to do?

CAROLINE: You're a medical man, not mentally responsible. That's the line to take.

NARRATOR: Clearly!----- Caroline's words reminded me of something.

JAMES: I didn't know that Poirot had an disturbed nephew.

CAROLINE: You didn't? Oh, he told me about it.

JAMES: And you know everything there is to know about his family by this time?

CAROLINE: Pretty well. It is a great relief to people to be able to tell their troubles to someone.

JAMES: If, they were allowed to do so spontaneously. Not having confidences pried out of them.

CAROLINE: I should hope that I never pry confidences out of anybody. for instance, If M. Poirot comes in this afternoon, as he might do, I shall not dream of asking him who it was that arrived at his house early this morning.

JAMES: Early this morning?

CAROLINE: I just happened to be looking out of a window. It was a man. He came in a closed car and was all muffled up. I think, a Home Office expert.

JAMES: A Home Office expert? My dear Caroline!

CAROLINE: You'll see I'm right. That Russell woman was here that morning after your poisons. Roger Ackroyd might have been poisoned.

JAMES: He was stabbed in the neck.

CAROLINE: After death, to leave a false clue.

JAMES: My good woman, I examined the body and I know what I am talking about. Perhaps, you will tell me, if I have a Medical Degree or not.

CAROLINE: I dare say, you have, but you have no imagination whatever.

(As lights in study dim and Poirot enters.)

NARRATOR: I was amused to notice Caroline's maneuvers that afternoon when Poirot, duly arrived. She skirted the question of Poirot's guest in every way imaginable. By the twinkle in his eyes, I saw that he realized her objective. He remained blindly impervious. (Lights up.) Till finally.

JAMES: Caroline, perhaps M. Poirot would care for tea?

CAROLINE: Of course. won't your - er - guest be joining us?

POIROT: You are too kind but no, my friend reposes himself. Soon you must make his acquaintance.

CAROLINE: Quite an old friend, (As she exits.) of yours, so somebody told me.

POIROT: Did they? I have a commission for you, my friend. Tonight, at my house, I desire to have a little conference. You will attend, yes?

JAMES: Certainly.

POIROT: Good. I need also all those from Fernly Park. I want you to be my Ambassador. This little reunion is fixed for nine o'clock. You will ask them, yes?

JAMES: With pleasure, but why not ask them yourself?

POIROT: Because, they will ask questions. I do not like to explain my little ideas until the time comes.

JAMES: When should I do this?

POIROT: Now, if you will. I will accompany you to Fernly but I will not go in with you.

(They exit. lights down.)

NARRATOR: The only member of the family at home proved to be Mrs. Ackroyd.

## SCENE 12

(Special up on Mrs. Ackroyd, Center in front of curtain.)

MRS. ACKROYD: So grateful to you, Doctor, for clearing up that little matter with M. Poirot. But, life is one trouble after another. You have heard about Flora, of course? The new engagement, Flora and Major Blunt, of course not as good a match as Ralph, but after all happiness comes first. What 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? Horrible! Geoffrey was in a terrible way. Rang up Liverpool. They wouldn't tell him anything, in fact they said they hadn't arrested Ralph at all. Mr. Raymond insisted it was all a mistake - a - what do you call it? Canard of the newspaper's. I've forbidden it to be mentioned in front of the servants. Fancy if Flora had actually been married to him. You were here yesterday, with that dreadful Inspector Raglan? Brute of a man... He terrified Flora into saying she took that money. You know what girls are like 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 she stole the money. But the whole thing seems to have brought the two of them together, Hector and Flora, I mean. Why at one time I 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.

NARRATOR: It would have been a severe blow. I've got a message from M. Hercule Poirot.

MRS. ACKROYD: For me?

(Light down on Mrs. Ackroyd.)

NARRATOR: She accepted, and said she would inform the others. I met Poirot at the gate and we returned to my house where Caroline informed us that Ursula Bourne was waiting in my study.

### SCENE 13

(Lights up in study Ursula Bourne is seated as Caroline, Poirot and James enter she raises her head. She has been crying.)

JAMES: Ursula Bourne?

POIROT: No, that is not quite right. Is it not rather Ursula Paton? Mrs. Ralph Paton.

CAROLINE: (As the girl stares at Poirot, Caroline puts her arm around the girl.) There, there, My dear. It will be all right, you'll see, everything will be all right.

NARRATOR: Buried under the curiosity and scandal-mongering there is a lot of kindness in Caroline.

URSULA: This is very weak and silly of me.

POIROT: No, my child. We all realize the strain of this last week.

JAMES: It must have been a terrible ordeal.

URSULA: (She thrusts a crumpled up newspaper toward Poirot.) It says that Ralph has been arrested. Everything is useless. I needn't pretend any longer.

POIROT: All the same, I think you will do well to tell the whole truth. The truth is what we need now. (Pause.) You do not trust me? All the same you came here did you not? Why was that?

URSULA: Because I think that you are clever and will find out the truth. And also-----

POIROT: Yes.

URSULA: I think you are kind.

POIROT: I do believe that your husband is innocent, but the affair moves badly. If I am to save him I must know all there is to know. Even should it appear to make the case against him worse.

URSULA: How well you understand.

POIROT: You will tell me the whole story, from the beginning.

NARRATOR: Ursula Bourne; One of a family of impoverished folk cast out into the world on the death of their father. Her eldest sister was married to Capt. Folliott. It was she that I had seen that Sunday in Marby. The cause of her embarrassment now clear. With references provided by her sister Ursula found work at Fernly.

URSULA: I enjoyed the work and had plenty of time to myself. Then I met Ralph. It was his idea to marry in secret, to break the news to his step-father at a more favorable time. Then, after refusing to help Ralph with his financial troubles Mr. Ackroyd announced the engagement of Miss Flora and, my husband. Ralph got a message to me and we met in the wood. He begged me to keep quiet a little longer. That afternoon I told Mr. Ackroyd the truth. He was furious and accused me entrapping Ralph. Unforgivable things were said, by us both. Ralph and I met again that evening at the summer house. He was angry. Half an hour after we parted Mr. Ackroyd's body was discovered. I have not seen nor heard from Ralph since that night.

POIROT: Mademoiselle, I must ask you one question and you must answer it truthfully. For on it every thing may hang. What time was it when you parted from Capt. Paton? Now take a little minute, so that your answer may be very exact.

URSULA: It was just a quarter to ten when I got back to the house.

POIROT: Who left the summer house first?

URSULA: I did. You don't think-----

POIROT: 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: About ten o'clock.

POIROT: You can prove that?

URSULA: Prove? That I was in my room, You mean? Oh! I see. They might think -- they might think-----

POIROT: That it was you who entered by the window and committed this murder?

CAROLINE: None but a fool would think any such thing. And M. Poirot doesn't think so either. That husband of yours, I don't think much of him and will tell you so candidly. Running away and leaving you to face the music.

URSULA: No. Ralph would not run away on his own account. I see now, he might think to himself that I had done it.

CAROLINE: He wouldn't think any such thing.

URSULA: I said the coldest cruelest things to him, I tried to hurt him.

CAROLINE: Never worry about what you say to a man. They are so conceited they never believe you mean it if it is unflattering.

URSULA: I know he couldn't - he couldn't. I wish he would come forward and deny it. I knew that he was a very good friend of Dr. Sheppard and I fancied that the Doctor might know where he was.

JAMES: I?

CAROLINE: Why should James know where he is?

URSULA: Unlikely, I know. Ralph had often spoken of Dr. Sheppard and I knew that he considered him his best friend in King's Abbot.

JAMES: My dear child, I have no idea where Ralph Paton is.

POIROT: That is true enough.

URSULA: But---(Holding out the newspaper clipping.)

POIROT: Ah! That. No Mademoiselle, Ralph Paton has not been arrested.

URSULA: But?

POIROT: Did Capt. Paton wear shoes or boots that night?

URSULA: I can't remember.

POIROT: Pity! Now, do not torment yourself. Be of good courage and place your faith in Hercule Poirot.

CAROLINE: Don't worry child M. Poirot will do all he can for you, be sure of that.

URSULA: I ought to go back to Fernly.

CAROLINE: Nonsense, you'll stay here and lie down.

POIROT: It will be the best plan. This evening I shall want Mademoiselle, I beg your pardon, Madame, to attend my little reunion. nine o'clock at my house. (Caroline leads Ursula out of the room.)

POIROT: So far, so good. Things straighten themselves out.

JAMES: They're looking worse against Ralph Paton.

POIROT: That is so but it was to be expected, was it not? (He leans back in his seat finger tips together in a contemplative pose. Suddenly he sighs and shakes his head.)

JAMES: What is it?

POIROT: There are moments, a longing for my friend Hastings. Always when I have had a big case, he was at my side. Often he has helped me. At times he has said something quite foolish and behold that remark has revealed the truth to me! Then, too, It was his practice to keep a written record of the cases that proved interesting

JAMES: As far as that goes I -----(He stops, pauses.)

POIROT: Yes? What was it you would say?

JAMES: Probably the only time I'll be mixed up with anything of this kind. I thought, it seemed a unique opportunity. I would try my hand--

NARRATOR: I must have struck a nerve.

POIROT: (Springing up.) But this is magnificent, you have written down your impressions of the case?

NARRATOR: I had a moment's terror that he was going to embrace me in French fashion but mercifully he refrained.

JAMES: Yes.

POIROT; Epatant! Let me see them; This instant.

JAMES: I hope you won't mind, I may have been a little - er - personal now and then.

POIROT: I Comprehend perfectly; You have referred to me as comic as, perhaps, ridiculous now and then? It matters not. Hastings, was not always polite. Me, I have a mind above such trivialities.

(Lights down on study.)

NARRATOR: I produced an untidy pile of papers which I handed over to him. I was at that time obliged to go out on a case and so left him with my notes. It was past eight o'clock when I got back to be greeted by dinner on a tray and the announcement that Poirot and my sister had supped together at half-past seven and that the former had then gone to my study to finish my manuscript. My sister expressed her hope that I had been careful in what I had to say about her. My jaw dropped, I had not been careful at all. "No matter M. Poirot will know what to think." Said Caroline. I went into the study.

(Lights up in study. Poirot is reading. James enters.)

POIROT: Eh bien, I congratulate you, on your modesty!

JAMES: Oh!

POIROT: And your reticence.

JAMES: Oh?

POIROT: Not so did Hastings write. On every page, many, many times the word "I". 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?

JAMES: Has it helped you?

POIROT: (As Caroline enters with Ursula.) Yes. I may say that it has helped considerably. Come, we must go to my house and set the stage. (To Caroline.) I should very much like you to be present, Mademoiselle but it would not be wise. All these people to-night are suspects, among them I shall find the murderer of Roger Ackroyd.

JAMES: Do you really believe that?



POIROT: Not yet do you appreciate Hercule Poirot at his true worth. Are you ready, my child? Mademoiselle Caroline, I am at your service, good evening. Come Doctor.

(All exit. Lights down.)

NARRATOR: We went out leaving Caroline, rather like a dog who has been refused a walk, standing at the front door step gazing after us.

#### SCENE 14

(Curtain opens lights up on Poirot's sitting room. Present are Ursula, James and Poirot who is moving about rearranging things. There is a knock at the door.)

POIROT: They arrive. Good. All is in readiness. (The door opens and Mrs. Ackroyd, Miss Flora, Raymond and Blunt enter.) It is most good of you to come. Welcome ladies, (He greets Mrs. Ackroyd and Flora.) and Major Blunt and Mr. Raymond.

RAYMOND; What's the idea here? Some scientific machine? Do we have bands round our wrists, which register guilty heart-beats? There is such an invention, 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 gray cells. We begin, but first I have an announcement to make. This lady is Mrs. Ralph Paton. They were married last March.

MRS. ACKROYD: (A small shriek.) Ralph, married, but it's absurd. How could he be? Married, to Bourne? Really, M. Poirot, I don't believe you.

(Begins to speak but Flora comes to her side and takes her arm.)

FLORA: You must not mind our being surprised. You see, we had no idea. I for one am glad.

URSULA: You are very kind. You have every right to be angry. Ralph behaved badly. Especially to you.

FLORA: You needn't worry about that Ralph was cornered and took the only way out.

POIROT: (Raps gently on the table to get overtone's attention.)

FLORA: (To Ursula.) Just tell me, where is Ralph?

URSULA: I don't know. That's just it I don't know.

RAYMOND: He's detained at Liverpool.

POIROT: He is not in Liverpool.

JAMES: No one knows where he is.

RAYMOND: Except, Hercule Poirot?

POIROT: Me, I know everything, remember that.

RAYMOND: Everything?

JAMES: Do you mean that you've guessed where Ralph Paton is hiding?

POIROT: You call it guessing. I call it knowing, my friend.

JAMES: In Cranchester?

POIROT: No. (Parker and Miss Russell enter the room.) The number is complete, Every one is here.

RAYMOND: What is the meaning of all this?

POIROT: Every one present had the opportunity to kill Mr. Ackroyd-----

MRS. ACKROYD: I don't like this. I would much prefer to go home.

POIROT: You cannot go home, Madame, until you have heard what I have to say. (Pause. then he clears his throat and begins,) 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. We walked along the terrace and were shown the footprints on the window-sill. From there Inspector Raglan took me along the path leading to the drive. My eye caught sight of the summer house and I searched it. I Found two things, a scrap of starched cambric and a goose quill. The fabric suggested to me a Maid's apron. When the Inspector showed me the list of people in the house, I noticed at once that one of the maids, Ursula Bourne, had no alibi. According to her, she was in her bedroom from nine-thirty until ten. I supposed, that she was in the summer house. If so, she must have gone there to meet some one. Now, we know from Dr. Sheppard that some one from outside did come to the house that night. At first glance, our problem is solved. I was certain that he did go to the summer house. The goose quill it suggested to me a taker of drugs and one who had acquired the habit on the other side of the Atlantic, where sniffing is more common than in this country. The man also spoke with an American accent, which fit in with that supposition. Ah! But the times did not fit. Ursula Bourne could not have gone to the summer house before nine-thirty, and the man must have been there by a few minutes past nine. Of course, he could have waited. An alternative supposition. There had been two separate meetings that night. As soon as I went to that alternative I found several facts of interest. Miss Russell, had visited Dr. Sheppard that morning and displayed a interest in cures for victims of the drug habit. That and the goose quill led me to believe the man had come to Fernly to meet Miss Russell and not Ursula Bourne. Who then did she meet. I was not long in doubt. First, I found a wedding ring, an inscription `From R' and a date inside. Then I heard that Ralph Paton had been seen on the path to the summer house at twenty-five minutes past nine. I also heard of a certain conversation which took place in the wood that afternoon. So I had my facts succeeding each other in order. A secret marriage, an engagement announced the day of the tragedy, a stormy interview in the wood and the meeting arranged for the summer house that night. Incidentally, this proved that Capt. Paton and Ursula Bourne had strong motives. It also made one other point. It could not have been Ralph Paton who was in the study with Mr. Ackroyd at nine-thirty. So we come to another interesting question. Who was in the room with him at nine-thirty? Not Ralph Paton, who was at the summer house with his wife. Not Charles Kent, Who had already left. Who, then? I then posed my cleverest and most audacious question: Was any one with him?

RAYMOND: M. Poirot, remember the matter does not rest on my evidence alone. Major Blunt also heard Mr. Ackroyd talking to some one.

POIROT: Major Blunt was under the impression that it was you.

RAYMOND: He now knows that he was mistaken.

BLUNT: Exactly.

POIROT: He must have some reason for thinking so. From the beginning I have been struck by something. The words overheard by Mr. Raymond. "The calls on my purse have been so frequent of late that I fear it is impossible for me to accede to your request." Do they not strike you as odd?

RAYMOND: I don't think so. He frequently dictated letters using almost those exact words.

POIROT: Exactly! That is what I seek to arrive at. Would a 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: If he was reading a letter aloud. Even so, he must have been reading it to some one.

POIROT: We have no evidence that there was any one else in the room. No other voice was heard.

RAYMOND: He would not read letters of that type aloud to himself.

POIROT: There was, you will recall, a man who called the preceding Wednesday. He was not of himself important but the firm he represented interested me very much.

RAYMOND: The Dictaphone company. I see. A Dictaphone, that's what you think.

POIROT: Me, I had the curiosity to inquire of the company in question. Their reply is that Mr. Ackroyd did purchase a Dictaphone from them. Why he concealed the matter I do not know.

RAYMOND: He must have meant to surprise me. Yes it fits in. You're quite right, no one would use that language in casual conversation.

POIROT; It explains, too, why Major Blunt thought it was you. Such scraps as came to him were fragments of dictation and so he deduced that it was you. He was also occupied with something else at the time, A white figure he had caught a glimpse of. It was in reality, Ursula Bourne's white apron he saw.

RAYMOND: All the same, Mr. Ackroyd was alive at nine-thirty, since he was speaking into the Dictaphone. The man, Kent was off the premises by then. As to Ralph Paton -----

URSULA: Ralph and I parted just before a quarter to ten. He never went near the house, I am sure of that. The last thing on earth he wanted to do was to face his stepfather.

RAYMOND: I've always been quite sure Capt. Paton was innocent. But in a court of law the questions would be asked. 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, you do not believe that I do know. And yet, I have just told you that I know everything. The truth of the telephone call, of the foot prints, of the hiding place of Ralph Paton-----

BLUNT: Where is he?

POIROT: Not very far away.

JAMES: In Cranchester?

POIROT: Always you ask me that, It is with you an Idee fixe. No, he not in Cranchester. He is, (Pause.) There. (Pointing toward the door as Ralph Paton emerges. He crosses to his wife as Poirot speaks to James.) Have I not told you, that it is useless to conceal things from Hercule Poirot. That, he finds out. One day, (Speaking to all.) you remember, we held a little seance, just the six of us. and I accused the other five persons of concealing something from me. Four of them gave up their secret. Dr. Sheppard did not. All along I had my suspicions. Dr. Sheppard went to the Three Boars that night hoping to find Ralph. He did not find him there. Suppose I said to myself, that he met him on the street on his way home? Dr. Sheppard was a friend of Capt. Paton's and had just come from the scene of the crime. Perhaps he knew more than the general public.

JAMES: I did. I had gone to see Ralph that afternoon. At first he did not take me into his confidence but later told me about his marriage and the whole he was in. As soon as the murder was discovered I realized that suspicion would fall on him, if not him to the girl he loved. That night I put the facts to him. The thought of having possibly to give evidence which might incriminate his wife made him resolve to----

-

RALPH: You see, Ursula had left me to go back to the house. I thought she might have attempted to talk with my stepfather again. He had already been rude to her that afternoon. It occurred to me that he might have insulted her, in such an unforgivable manner, that without thinking what she was doing-----

URSULA: You thought that? You actually thought that I might have done it.

POIROT: Let us get back to the culpable conduct of Dr. Sheppard, he consented to do what he could and was successful in hiding Capt. Paton from the police.

RAYMOND: In his own house?

POIROT: Ah, no, indeed. I asked myself, what place would the Doctor choose? Somewhere near at hand. I think of Cranchester. An hotel? 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 the charming sister of Dr. Sheppard as to suitable homes. She gives me the names of two to which her brother has sent patients. I make inquiries. I locate Capt. Paton. After some formalities, I was allowed to bring him away. He arrived at my house in the early hours of yesterday morning.

JAMES: Caroline's home office expert.

POIROT: Your manuscript Dr. it was strictly truthful as far as it went but it did not go very far, eh, my friend?

RALPH: Dr. Sheppard has been very loyal. He did what he thought best. I see now, that it was not really. 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: DR. Sheppard has been the model of discretion but me, I discover all the little secrets. It is my business.

RAYMOND: Now we can have the story of what happened that night.

RALPH: You know it already. I left the summer house. True I have no alibi but I never saw my stepfather alive or dead. Whatever the world thinks, I'd like you all to believe that.

RAYMOND: No alibi, I believe you but it is a bad business.

POIROT: It is very simple though, very simple indeed. You see what I mean? No? Just this, to save Capt. Paton the real criminal must confess. Yes, I mean what I say. See now, I do not invite the Inspector to be present. That was for a reason. I did not want to tell him all that I know, At least, not tonight.

NARRATOR: He leaned forward and suddenly his voice and his personality changed. He suddenly became dangerous.

POIROT: I who speak to you, I know the murderer of Mr. Ackroyd is in this room. It is to the murderer I speak. To-morrow the truth goes to Inspector Raglan. You understand?

(At this moment Poirot's housekeeper comes forward with a telegram. He takes it and tears it open.)

BLUNT: You know the murderer?

RAYMOND: What is that.

POIROT. A wireless message, from a steamer now on her way to the United States. Messieurs et Mesdames, this reunion of mine is at an end. Remember, The truth goes to Inspector Raglan in the morning.

NARRATOR: A slight gesture from Poirot enjoined me to stay behind as he saw the others out. (Poirot does so and escorts the others out of the room.) I was puzzled. For the first time I was absolutely at sea as to Poirot's meaning. For a moment I thought the scene I had just witnessed was a gigantic piece of bombast, that he had been "Playing the comedy". In spite of myself, I was forced to believe in an underlying reality.

POIROT: (Returning to the room and closing the door behind him.) Well my friend, what do you think of it all?

JAMES: I don't know what to think. What was the point? Why not go straight to the Inspector with the truth instead of giving warning?

POIROT: Use your little gray cells. There is always a reason behind my actions.

JAMES: It occurs to me that you do not know who the guilty person is. But you are sure he was to be found amongst the people here tonight. Therefore your words were meant to force a confession from the unknown murderer.

POIROT: Not quite the truth.

JAMES: Perhaps to force him into the open, he might try to silence you as he silenced Mr. Ackroyd.

POIROT: A trap, I am afraid not. Mon ami.

JAMES: Then you must tell me. Which one?

POIROT: I will take you the way that I have traveled myself. There were two facts and one discrepancy in time which especially, attracted my attention. The first fact was the telephone call. Which would be meaningless if Ralph Paton were the murderer. Therefore, Ralph Paton was not the murderer. The call could not have been made by any one in the house, yet I was convinced that the criminal was among those present that evening. I concluded that the telephone call must have been made by an accomplice. I was not quite pleased with that deduction but I let it stand. I next examined the motive for the call. I could only get at that by judging it's result. That the murder would be discovered that same night. Do you agree?

JAMES: Ye-es, Ackroyd having given orders not to be disturbed,----

POIROT: Tres bien. But, what was the advantage gained? I could only think that knowing when, the murderer, could arrange to be present when the crime was discovered or at any rate immediately afterwards. Now we come to the second fact. The chair pulled out from the wall. Your account contains a neat plan of the study. It shows that the chair located as Parker indicated, would obstruct the view of someone entering the room. But what is hidden? The window. But no. You remember a table just in front of the window? It is what was hidden. Something on that table obscured from view? Something placed there by the murderer? I knew, one thing, it was something the murderer could not take away with him at the time that he committed the crime. Also that it must be removed as soon as possible. And so the telephone call. Now, four people were on the scene before the police arrived. Yourself, Parker, Major Blunt and Mr. Raymond. Parker I eliminated at once. He would have been the first to arrive no matter what. Also, he told me of the pulled out chair. Raymond and Blunt could not be likewise eliminated. Now! What was that object? There were references to the scrap of conversation overheard. Then, the matter of the representative from the Dictaphone company. This matter it took root in my mind. You heard what I said in this room? They all agreed with my theory but one fact escaped them. Why was no Dictaphone found? You see where I am arriving? The figure of the murderer is taking shape. A person at the scene who would not have been there had the crime been discovered in the morning. And carrying a receptacle into which the Dictaphone might fit-----

JAMES: Why remove the Dictaphone? What was the point?

POIROT: Like Mr. Raymond, you take for granted that Mr. Ackroyd was speaking into that device. Consider this. You speak into it and some time later a secretary or typist turns it on and the voice speaks again.

JAMES: You mean-----

POIROT: Yes! At nine-thirty. Mr. Ackroyd was already dead. It was the Dictaphone speaking, not the man.

JAMES: If the murderer switched it on, then he must have been in the room--

POIROT: Possibly. Though we must not exclude the likelihood of some mechanical device. Now, we come to the footprints. Assuming again that Capt. Paton is innocent, they must have been put there by someone trying to throw suspicion on him. The pair of shoes obtained by the police at the Three Boars, had been downstairs being cleaned, no one could have worn them. The police think Ralph was wearing the other pair. I think perhaps Capt. Paton is wearing a third pair of footwear. I got your sister to make inquiries on this point, laying stress on the color, in order to obscure the real reason for my asking. You know the results, Ralph Paton did have a pair of boots with him. The same ones he wore when he arrived at my house yesterday morning, he none others to put on. So we have a further description of the murderer. There is one further point. The murderer must have had an opportunity to purloin that dagger from the silver table. Let us recapitulate. A person who was at the Three Boars 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, who had the study to himself for a few minutes after the crime was discovered while Parker was telephoning the police. In fact - you, Doctor Shepard.

NARRATOR: I could do nothing but laugh.

JAMES: (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.

JAMES: Discrepancy in time?

POIROT: It is a five minute walk from the lodge gate to the house, less if you take the short cut to the terrace. You left the house at ten minutes to nine. Yet it was nine o'clock when you passed through the lodge gates. We had only your word that the window was ever fastened. I eliminate the possibility that you doubled back changed shoes, climbed through the window and killed Ackroyd. Suppose you had killed him before you left? You go out the front door change to Capt. Paton's shoes, walk through the mud and climb in the window, leaving footprints. You lock the door from the inside, then out the window, change shoes once again and race down to the gate. From there to home and an alibi, since you had timed the Dictaphone for half past nine.

JAMES: My dear Poirot.

NARRATOR: I said in a voice that sounded strange even to my own ears.

JAMES: You have been brooding over this case too long. What on earth had I to gain?

POIROT: Safety. You had blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars. Our first meeting, in the garden; you spoke of a legacy. I have been unable to discover any trace of a legacy. When you lost Mrs. Ferrars' twenty thousand pounds you put the screw on to hard and Mrs. Ferrars took a way out that you had not expected. If Ackroyd learned the truth, you would be ruined.

JAMES: The phone call. You have an explanation for that?

POIROT: I confess, that was not easy. I was surprised that the call was real. I had thought it was an invention. It was very cleverly done, an excuse to arrive at Fernly, find the body and remove the

Dictaphone. I had only a vague notion as to how it worked when I inquired of your sister as to the patients you had seen on Friday. Among them the steward of an American liner, who was leaving for Liverpool by train that evening. I noted that the Orion sailed on Saturday and wired the steward asking a certain Question. This is the reply. (Reproducing the wire.)

NARRATOR: (Stepping up and taking the wire and reading it.) "Quite correct. Dr. Sheppard asked me to take a note to a patient's house. I was to ring him up from the station with a reply. The reply was 'No.'"

JAMES: All this is very interesting.

POIROT: The truth, as I said, goes to Inspector Raglan in the morning but for the sake of your sister, I am willing to give you another way out. You comprehend me? But, Capt. Paton must be cleared. I suggest that you finish your very interesting manuscript; abandoning your former reticence.

JAMES: Are you quite finished?

POIROT: One thing more. It would be most unwise to attempt to silence me as you silenced M. Ackroyd. Against Hercule Poirot, you will not succeed.

JAMES: I must be off home.

(As James exits, Poirot turns and bows with his accustomed politeness. Lights dim in Poirot's study as he goes about his business. Lights up on James' study as he crosses and enters the room. He takes a seat.)

## SCENE 16

NARRATOR: Five A.M. I am very tired. My arm aches from writing. A strange end to my manuscript. I meant it as a history of Hercule Poirot's failure. Odd how things turn out. JAMES: All along I've had a premonition of disaster, from the moment I saw Ralph Paton and Mrs. Ferrars together. I thought then that she was confiding in him; as it happens, I was quite wrong. The idea persisted even after I went into the study with Ackroyd that night.

NARRATOR: Until he told me the truth. Poor Ackroyd.

JAMES: I am glad that I gave him a chance. I urged him to read the letter before it was too late.

NARRATOR: To be honest. I knew he wouldn't read it, especially if I insisted.

JAMES: He was quite nervous and knew danger was close at hand.

JAMES & NARRATOR: Yet he never suspected me.

NARRATOR: The dagger was an after thought.

JAMES: He had given me the Dictaphone two days earlier to adjust.

NARRATOR: Something had gone wrong with it and I persuaded him to let me have a go at it instead of sending it back.



JAMES: I did what I wanted to it and took it up with me in my bag that evening.

NARRATOR: I am rather pleased with myself as a writer. What could be neater, for instance, than the following?

JAMES: "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."

NARRATOR: 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 arm chair was pulled out so as to hide it from view. I must admit, it gave me rather a shock to run into Parker just outside the door.

JAMES: Later when the body was discovered I sent Parker to telephone the police.

NARRATOR: What a judicious use of words.

JAMES: "I did what little had to be done."

NARRATOR: It was quite little.

JAMES: I shoved the Dictaphone into my bag and pushed the chair back to it's proper place.

NARRATOR: I never dreamed Parker would have noticed that chair.

JAMES: I wish I could have known that Flora was going to say she had seen her uncle alive at a quarter to ten.

NARRATOR: That puzzled me more than I could say.

JAMES: My greatest fear all through has been that Caroline might guess the truth. Curious, the way she spoke that day of my "Strain of weakness". Well, she will never know the truth. There is as Poirot put it, 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. When I have finished writing, I shall enclose this whole manuscript in an envelope and address it to Poirot.

NARRATOR: Then, what shall it be? Veranol? That would be a kind of poetic justice.

JAMES: I take no responsibility for Mrs. Ferrars' death. It was a direct consequence of her own actions. I feel no pity for her.

NARRATOR: I have no pity for myself either.

JAMES: So let it be Veranol.

NARRATOR; (As James takes the draught and lights fade to black.) But I wish Hercule Poirot had never retired from work and come down here to grow vegetable marrow's.

CURTAIN

The end

## CHARACTORS

1. NARRATOR.....AGED 50ish
2. CAROLINE..... 50ish
3. JAMES..... 50ish
4. ACKROYD..... 50ish
5. POIROT..... 50ish
6. RUSSELL..... 45
7. PARKER..... 40 to 60
8. RAYMOND..... late twenties
9. FLORA..... early twenties
10. MRS. ACKROYD..... 45
11. BLUNT..... late forties
12. KENT..... 30
13. RAGLAN..... 45
14. CONSTABLE..... 30
15. POIROT'S SERVANT..... old
16. URSULA..... 25
17. HAYES..... 40
18. PATON..... 25
19. HAMMOND ..... 35