SUMMARY: These two cassettes contain four abridged audio books by Agatha Christie which last approximately 12 hours. "Murder on the Orient Express" is read by Andrew Sachs. "Murder in the Vicarage" is read by Ian Masters. Hugh Fraser reads "ABC Murders" and Joanna David reads "4:50 from Paddington".
BOUND TO TALK: "Murder on the Orient Express", "Murder in the Vicarage", "ABC Murders", "4.50 from Paddington" v. 2

Agatha Christie

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To James Watts

One of my most sympathetic readers
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About the Publisher
Foreword

By Captain Arthur Hastings, O.B.E.

In this narrative of mine I have departed from my usual practice of relating only those incidents and scenes at which I myself was present. Certain episodes, therefore, are written in the third person.

I wish to assure my readers that I can vouch for the occurrences related in these chapters. If I have taken a certain poetic licence in describing the thoughts and feelings of various persons, it is because I believe I have set them down with a reasonable amount of accuracy. I may add that they have been "vetted" by my friend Hercule Poirot himself.

In conclusion, I will say that if I have described at too great length some of the secondary personal relationships which arose as a consequence of this strange series of crimes, it is because the human and personal elements cannot be ignored. Hercule Poirot once taught me in a very dramatic manner that romance can be a by-product of crime.

As to the solving of the ABC mystery, I can only say that in my opinion Poirot showed real genius in the way he tackled a problem entirely unlike any which had previously come his way.
A pile of dead fish that I came across on the beach.

It was in June of 1935 that I came home from my ranch in South America for a stay of about six months. It had been a difficult time for us out there. Like everyone else, we had

"Murder"

"Of what?"

"You are in error, my friend. You do not understand my meaning. A robbery would be a relief since it would dispossess my mind of the fear of something else."

Poirot shook his head energetically.

"A robbery may be a comfort—"

"Ah, what a comfort that would be—!"

"Well, the 21st is Friday. If a whacking great robbery takes place near Andover then—"

As always, the man of action! But what is there to do? The county police have seen the letter but they, too, do not take it seriously. There are no fingerprints on it. There

"If you really take it seriously, can't you do something?" I asked.

He shook his head, and picking up the letter, put it away again in the desk.

"There is something about that letter, Hastings, that I do not like…"

"But you take this one seriously?"

Poirot shook his head doubtfully, but he did not speak.

"But you think there is?" I asked, struck by the dissatisfaction of his tone.

"Merci. Comment?"

"Yes, of course, that is true…I hadn't considered that point…But what I meant was, it sounds more like a rather idiotic kind of hoax. Perhaps some convivial idiot who had

"You take this very seriously, Poirot."

"Yes, my friend, it does."

"Some madman or other, I suppose."

I glanced at the envelope. That also was printed.

I took it from him with some interest.

The frown still lingered.

There was something so odd about his tone that I looked at him in surprise.

"Pas encore."

"Well," I said presently, smiling, 'has this super crime turned up yet?'

"Overlooking the obvious."

"What do you call the unforgivable error?"

"Upon my word, Poirot," I said. 'Anyone would think you were ordering a dinner at the Ritz.'

"Indeed? I said. 'In what ways?'

"Not so much enterprising as careless," said Poirot. 'Precisely that—careless. But let us not talk of it. You know, Hastings, in many ways I regard you as my mascot."

"No, no. Poirot looked shocked. 'But I—"

"Pas mal."

"Has there been much cream about?"

I examined my old friend with an affectionate eye. He was looking wonderfully well—hardly a day older than when I had last seen him.

"Ah, you remember that? Alas! no—science has not yet induced the hens to conform to modern tastes, they still lay eggs of different sizes and colours!"

But I was too late. I had spoken the untranslatable word. "Poirot," I cried. "You have dyed your hair!" I, Hercule Poirot, was nearly exterminated.

It bore the words:

"To bring back the natural tone of the hair.

Revivit—To bring back the natural tone of the hair.

That day, I pray the good God, is still far off. The false moustache!

Mon ami, is to be taken seriously. A madman is a very dangerous thing."

"I know," I said, 'that you actually retired years ago—"

Instead I asked if he still practised his profession on occasion.

A good job too, I thought privately. But I would not for the world have hurt Poirot's feelings by saying so.

He tugged at them vigorously to assure me of their genuine character.

Poirot winced. His moustaches had always been his sensitive point. He was inordinately proud of them. My words touched him on the raw.

"Dear me," I said, recovering from the shock. "I suppose next time I come home I shall find you wearing false moustaches—or are you doing so now?"

"Exactly."

"Ah, the comprehension comes to you!"

"Poirot," I cried. "You have dyed your hair!"

"You're looking in fine fettle, Poirot," I said. "You've hardly aged at all. In fact, if it were possible, I should say that you had fewer grey hairs than when I saw you last."

I found him installed in one of the newest type of service flats in London. I accused him (and he admitted the fact) of having chosen this particular building entirely on

I need hardly say that one of my first actions on reaching England was to look up my old friend, Hercule Poirot.
Mr Alexander Bonaparte Cust rose from his seat and surveyed the shabby bedroom. His back was stiff from sitting in a cramped position and as he stretched himself, a stoop in his posture gave an impression of height. He reached a well-worn overcoat hanging on the back of the door and took from the pocket a packet of cheap cigarettes and some matches. He lit a cigarette and then returned to the table at which he had been sitting. He picked up a railway guide and consulted it, then he returned to the consideration of a typewritten list of names. With a pen, he made a tick against one of the first names on the list.

It was Thursday, June 20th.
"This is the beginning," said Hercule Poirot.

I hardly listened to the next words Poirot said. But they were to come back to me with significance later.

My spirits revived a little. After all, sordid as this crime seemed to be, it was a

'Nevertheless,' continued Poirot, 'in view of what has happened, the police there would like to have another look at the anonymous letter I received. I have said that you

I felt a second throb of disappointment.

'An old woman of the name of Ascher who keeps a little tobacco and newspaper shop has been found murdered.

Poirot said slowly:

'Yes?'

He replaced the receiver and came across the room to me.

'Yes, I will bring it.

'Naturally…'

'But yes, we will come…'

'Yes, of course…'

His own side of the conversation was short and disjointed.

He listened for a minute or two and then I saw his face change.

'I admit,' I said, 'that a second murder in a book often cheers things up. If the murder happens in the first chapter, and you have to follow up everybody's alibi until the last

Poirot threw me a glance of reproof.

'Well,' I said. 'I can't see

'How can a crime be

Poirot closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair. His voice came purringly from between his lips.

'Well,' I said. 'What would

'I gather you don't agree.'

'Your same old joke. One of the beautiful girls, of course, must be unjustly suspected—and there's some misunderstanding between her and the young man. And then, of

'With auburn hair,' murmured my friend.


'You remember your remark of the other day? If you could order a crime as one orders a dinner, what would you choose?

'I shouldn't wonder if you ended by detecting your own death,' said Japp, laughing heartily. 'That's an idea, that is. Ought to be put in a book.'

'Of course not! Of course not!'

'Of course not! Of course not!'

'Nothing—nothing at all.'

Poirot coughed and said:

'He does not change much, the good Japp, eh?' asked Poirot.

'Just a couple of proverbs. Well, I must be off. Got a little business in the next street to see to—receiving stolen jewellery. I thought I'd just drop in on my way over your

'You're mixing up mares and wasps,' said Japp.

'I have indeed been foolish to take the matter so seriously,' said Poirot. 'It is the nest of the horse that I put my nose into there.'

'You'd quite got the wind up about it, hadn't you?' said Japp affectionately. 'Bless you, we get dozens of letters like that coming in every day! People with nothing better to

'The 21st,' said Japp. 'That's what I dropped in about. Yesterday was the 21st and just out of curiosity I rang up Andover last night. It was a hoax all right. Nothing doing.

'I showed it to Hastings the other day,' said my friend.

'Have you heard about Monsieur Poirot's anonymous letter?'

Perhaps my manner showed my feelings, for Japp changed the subject.

'I think I felt ever so slightly damped. My interest, quickened by the sound of Andover, suffered a faint check. I had expected something fantastic—out of the way! The

Chapter 3
The crime was discovered by Police Constable Dover at 1 am on the morning of the 22nd. When on his round he tried the door of the shop and found it unfastened, he

For the sake of conciseness I think I had better give a brief résumé of the bare facts of the case.

Chapter 4

...
peace anywhere. Sponging, cadging old beast.'

sixteen, but I usually went along to auntie's on my day out. A lot of trouble she went through with that German fellow. "My old devil," she used to call him. He'd never let her be in

being away, I didn't want to put the mistress out more than may be.'

assailant) when the blow had been struck. She had slipped down in a heap behind the counter quite out of sight of anyone entering the shop casually.

speaking, I shouldn't say this was a woman's crime.'

could achieve the desired result.'

mention of the railway guide (so familiarly known by its abbreviation of A B C, listing as it did all railway stations in their alphabetical order) sent a quiver of excitement through

an old woman in a back-street shop was so like the usual type of crime reported in the newspapers that it failed to strike a significant note. In my own mind I had put down the

I think that I can date my interest in the case from that first mention of the A B C railway guide. Up till then I had not been able to raise much enthusiasm. This sordid murder of

A few seconds later we were driving back to Andover.

'Is there anything—queer going on, sir?'

She said at last:

'Then you're not—anything to do with the police, sir?'

'I wish that, when you do go, you would give me your address. Here is my card.'

'She'd a little in the Savings Bank, sir—enough to bury her proper, that's what she always said. Otherwise she didn't more than just make ends meet—what with her old

'Not now, sir. One of ten she was, but only three lived to grow up. My Uncle Tom was killed in the war, and my Uncle Harry went to South America and no one's heard of

'Did you ever get anonymous letters?'

'No, indeed, sir.'

'You never heard her mention anyone who had a grudge against her?'

'Auntie wasn't afraid of people. She'd a sharp tongue and she'd stand up to anybody.'

Mary shook her head.

'There was no one your aunt was afraid of?'

'I've no idea, sir. It doesn't seem likely, though, does it?'

'That is what I said. Supposing someone else killed her…Have you any idea who that someone else could be?'

'Yes, indeed. And so, I suppose, Mary, having actually heard these threats, you were not so very surprised when you learnt what had happened?'

'Oh, yes, sir, it was awful the things he used to say. That he'd cut her throat, and such like. Cursing and swearing too—both in German and in English. And yet auntie says

'Well, you see, he was her husband, sir, you couldn't get away from that.'

The girl spoke with vehemence.

'This morning, sir. The police came over. Oh! it's terrible! Poor auntie! Such a hard life as she'd had, too. And now this—it's too awful.'

She opened the door of a small morning-room. We entered and Poirot, seating himself on a chair by the window, looked up keenly into the girl's face.

'Ah! I think it is you who are Miss Mary Drower, the parlourmaid here?'

Poirot said gently:

The address which the inspector had given us was that of a good-sized house about a mile on the London side of the village.

He did not explain further, and a few minutes later we were driving on the London road in the direction of Overton.

'Overton is not, I think, many miles from here. Shall we run over there and have an interview with the niece of the dead woman?'

Then he glanced at his watch.

'Pretty gruesome.'

You perceive, Hastings, that we have already one further point in favour of Ascher's innocence. If he had been abusing his wife and threatening her, she would have been

When we had thanked Dr Kerr and taken our leave, Poirot said:

The doctor gave us a careful description of the position of the victim. It was his opinion that she had been standing with her back to the counter (and therefore to her

The suggestion took the doctor somewhat aback.

'Meaning, I suppose, could a shaky old man of seventy do it? Oh, yes, it's perfectly possible—given sufficient weight in the head of the weapon, quite a feeble person

'Would much force be needed to strike such a blow?'

'The weapon wasn't found,' he said. 'Impossible to say what it may have been. A weighted stick, a club, a form of sandbag—any of those would fit the case.'

Dr Kerr was a competent-looking middle-aged man. He spoke briskly and with decision.

Our next move was a brief interview with the police surgeon.

He sighed as he replaced the sheet and we left the mortuary.

'But yes, look at the line of the jaw, the bones, the moulding of the head.'

'Really?' I murmured incredulously.

'She must have been beautiful once,' said Poirot.

'Never knew who or what struck her,' observed the sergeant. 'That's what Dr Kerr says. I'm glad it was that way, poor old soul. A decent woman she was.'
[The note and additional information are not transcribed or highlighted in the image provided.]
It is for the future that I have invested that sum of five pounds. I did not quite understand the point, but at this moment we ran into Inspector Glen.
There were other witnesses, with sinister expressions! I wonder somebody didn’t see a gang of masked men with revolvers while they were about it!’

Inspector Glen was looking rather gloomy. He had, I gathered, spent the afternoon trying to get a complete list of persons who had been noticed entering the tobacco shop.

‘With great haste, my friend, we might manage to catch the 7.2. Let us despatch ourselves quickly.’

In the street he consulted his watch.

‘Nobody is pitching upon you—yet. Bonsoir, monsieur.’

Poirot rose.

‘Didn’t see any such thing. What I say is, why pitch on me—?’

‘And you did not see anyone leaving the shop before you yourself got there?’

‘Yes, there was—face downwards. It crossed my mind like that the old woman might have to go off sudden by train and forgot to lock shop up.’

‘Was there a railway guide lying about?’

‘No, no more would you have done—unless you was looking for it, maybe.’

‘It was closed, then?’

‘That’s right—a minute or two after, as a matter of fact. Wanted a packet of Gold Flake. I pushed open the door—’

‘It was six o’clock when you entered the shop?’

‘Calm yourself, monsieur,’ said Poirot. ‘I demand only your account of your visit. That you refuse it seems to me—what shall we say—a little odd?’

‘Bert, Bert—don’t say such things. Bert—they’ll think—’

He rose threateningly from his seat. His wife bleated out:

‘Trying to fasten it on me, are you? Well, you won’t succeed. What reason had I got to do a thing like that? Think I wanted to pinch a tin of her bloody tobacco? Think I’m a bloody homicidal maniac as they call it? Think I—? I say?—looked more natural if you had come forward.’

‘A matter of opinion,’ said Poirot indifferently. ‘There has been a murder—the police want to know who has been in the shop—I myself think it would have—what shall I say—helped the investigation—there’s—there’s another point in his favour.’

Poirot gave a quick, amused glance in my direction and then said:

‘Told all I’ve got to tell once, haven’t I?’ he growled. ‘What’s it to do with me, anyway? Told it to the blarsted police, I ’ave, and now I’ve got to spit it all out again to a couple of peculiar fellers!’

He was a big clumsy giant of a man with a broad face and small suspicious eyes. He was in the act of eating meat-pie, washed down by exceedingly black tea. He looked at us owlishly through his spectacles.

‘Some people, Mr Poirot, have no sense of public duty.’

Mr Partridge coughed.

‘I understand, Mr Partridge, that you were the last person to see Mrs Ascher alive.’

Mr Partridge considered.

‘No, I knew nothing whatever about her.’

‘Did you know she had a drunken husband who was in the habit of threatening her life?’

‘Nothing whatever. Beyond my purchase and an occasional remark as to the state of the weather, I had never spoken to her.’

‘The church clock chimed. I looked at my watch and found I was a minute slow. That was just before I entered Mrs Ascher’s shop.’

Mr Partridge looked a little annoyed at being interrupted.

‘Pardon, how was it that you knew the time so accurately?’

‘By all means. I was returning to this house and at 5.30 precisely—’

‘Certainly I did. As soon as I heard of the shocking occurrence I perceived that my statement might be helpful and came forward accordingly.’

‘Exceedingly true,’ murmured Poirot. ‘You, I understand, went to the police of your own accord?’

Mr Partridge considered.

‘No, I reported the matter to the police myself.’

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‘Nothing whatever. Beyond my purchase and an occasional remark as to the state of the weather, I had never spoken to her.’
...succeeding to Andover last month. When I got the letter naming Bexhill it occurred to me as a possibility that the victim as well as the place might be selected by an alphabetical system.'

Superintendent Carter of the Sussex police, Japp and a younger inspector called Crome, and Dr Thompson, the famous alienist, were all assembled together. The postmark was suddenly revived. No spectacular features. The murder of an old woman in a side street was soon passed over in the press for more thrilling topics.

My friend, accustomed to an unbroken line of successes, was sensitive to his failure—so much so that he could not even endure discussion of the subject. It was, perhaps, a small wonder if its effects became noticeable at long last.

The murder of Mrs Ascher? Why Andover?'

"Read," said Poirot and passed me over the letter.

'The second chapter of the A B C business.'

In my own mind I was afraid that I fathomed his motive. Over the murder of Mrs Ascher, Poirot had sustained a defeat. A B C had challenged him—and A B C had won.

Chapter 8

The Second Letter

Ascher? Why Andover?

'That is what I mean. What was yesterday evening? A warm June night. Does a man stroll about on such an evening in Andover?'

'Yes.'

'Yes, Hastings. Personally I believe that the murderer came from outside Andover, but we must neglect no avenue of research. And although I say "he" all the time, we must

'You don't think that little Mr Partridge—'

'Ah! There is the A B C—and the notepaper and envelope—'

'I said: 'Surely not!'

'I am inclined to acquit Riddell off-hand. He was nervous, blustering, obviously uneasy—'

'But surely that just shows—'

'So that really the ABC isn't helpful at all.'

'No, but what do we do?'

'I was silent for a few minutes, then I said: 'Surely not!'

'So that really the ABC isn't helpful at all.'

'No, Hastings. Personally I believe that the murderer came from outside Andover, but we must neglect no avenue of research. And although I say "he" all the time, we must

'You prefer the match end, the cigarette ash, the nailed boots! You always have. But at least we can ask ourselves some practical questions. Why the A B C? Why Mrs

'That's all pure conjecture,' I objected. 'It doesn't give you any practical help.'

'A nature dI ametrically opposed to that which penned the A B C letter. Conceit and self-confidence are the characteristics that we must look for.'

'But surely that just shows—'

'No, but what do we do?'

'Yes, Hastings.'

'Yet is that not so?'

'Thinking? Has my right hand gone too steady.

'so think the secrets! I've arrived! People may say so!'

'subtlety! The detective stories I could write about these actions after the game is over!'

'There is a B C E, and we must find the E. The police have more information than we have to

'Yet I am going to ask you a question to which I know the answer. —What is the murder that the police are trying to solve?'

'Those that are worst affected are the nearest affected. The police have more information than we have to

'avoid repetition, is it?'

'Yet that is what I meant to. We must find the E. The police have more information than we have to

'so think the secrets! I've arrived! People may say so!'

'subtlety! The detective stories I could write about these actions after the game is over!'

'There is a B C E, and we must find the E. The police have more information than we have to
...in working hours, but the girls had not seen much of her out of them. Elizabeth Barnard had had a 'friend' who worked at the estate agents near the station. Court & Brunskill.

The morning coffees were just getting under way. The manageress ushered us hastily into a very untidy back sanctum.

Oh, yes, I knew Betty. Isn't it... (leaves off 'beautiful').

Inspector Kelsey nodded. 'I'm the man in charge of the investigation. Yes, I know, about four or five hundred girls in white walking with young men last night, it ought to be a nice business.'

'But I still remember my awakening on the morning of the 25th of July. It must have been about seven-thirty. I sprang from bed and made a rapid toilet. As I hastily lathered my face, he recounted briefly what he had just learnt over the telephone.

'If you please,' said Miss Merrion, rising.

'Nothing,' said Miss Merrion positively. 'Absolutely nothing!'

The微型的薄暮在天上笼罩，照亮了整个画面。她的眼神中，似乎有一丝坚定的光芒。

No one came in and called for her? Anything like that?

'So far as we know. But it's early yet. Everyone who saw a girl in white walking with a man last night will be along to tell us about it soon, and as I imagine there were no other members of the family—yes?'

'At least,' said Inspector Kelsey, 'we have communications with other members. There's a sister—a typist in London. She's been communicated with. And there's a young man—in fact, the girl was supposed to be out with him last night, I gather.'

'That is my name. This is a most distressing business. Most distressing. How it will affect our business I really cannot...'

'Any help from the A B C guide?' asked Crome.

'Not as far as we know. But it's early yet. Everyone who saw a girl in white walking with a man last night will be along to tell us about it soon, and as I imagine there were...'

'If you please,' said Miss Merrion, rising.

'Between midnight and 1 am—that's pretty certain. Our homicidal joker is a man of his word. If he says the 25th...'

'You'll get nothing from that,' said Carter. 'It wasn't a leather belt—might have got fingerprints if it had been. Just a thick sort of knitted silk—ideal for the purpose.'
No, he wasn’t Mr Court nor Mr Brunskill. He was a clerk there. She didn’t know his name. But she knew him by sight well. Good-looking—oh, very good-looking, and always so nicely dressed. Clearly, there was a tinge of jealousy in Miss Higley’s heart.

In the end it boiled down to this. Elizabeth Barnard had not confided in anyone in the café as to her plans for the evening, but in Miss Higley’s opinion she had been going to meet her ‘friend’. She had had on a new white dress, ‘ever so sweet with one of the new necks.’

We had a word with each of the other two girls but with no further results. Betty Barnard had not said anything as to her plans and no one had noticed her in Bexhill during the course of the evening.
Betty was usually in by eleven.

I came down a few steps. I felt embarrassed as to how exactly to reply. Should I give my name? Or mention that I had come here with the police? The girl, however, gave

He walked past and between the doors into the hall.

I wished to God I could give you some help—but the plain fact is I know nothing—nothing at all that can help you to find the dastardly scoundrel who did this. Betty was just a

Mr Barnard started sobbing again.

'You know what girls are nowadays, inspector,' said Barnard. 'Independent, that's what they are. These summer evenings they're not going to rush home. All the same,

'Do you know if she was going to meet him yesterday?'

She broke down.

'We didn't know she hadn't,' said Mrs Barnard tearfully. 'Dad and I always go to bed early. Nine o'clock's our time. We never knew Betty hadn't come home till the police

Her voice had a faintly sing-song intonation that I thought for a moment was foreign till I remembered the name on the gate and realized that the 'effer wass' of her speech

The superintendent was very kind,' said Mr Barnard. 'After he'd broken the news to us, he said he'd leave any questions till later when we'd got over the first shock.

He patted her shoulder and drew her down into a chair.

'Why not, Miss Brookes,' said Poirot. 'She's a very nice-looking young woman.'

'Somehow, I don't see what M. Hercule Poirot is doing in our humble little crime.'

'I've heard of you,' she said. 'You're the fashionable private sleuth, aren't you?'

'This is M. Hercule Poirot,' I said.

She interrupted me.

'Well,' I said. 'Not exactly—'

'I am Megan Barnard. You belong to the police, I suppose?'

'You are Miss Barnard?' I asked.

She seemed to make a decision.

'That's the correct phrase, I believe?' she said.

'She was a girl whom I respected profoundly, whom I loved with a passion. A prejudice in favour of the deceased. I heard what you said just now to my friend Hastings. "A nice bright girl

There is some rumour, I believe, that your daughter was engaged to be married?'

'Left the key under the mat—that's what we always did.'

'How did she get in? Was the door open?'

'You know what girls are nowadays, inspector,' said Barnard. 'Independent, that's what they are. These summer evenings they're not going to rush home. All the same,

'Was your daughter in the habit of—er—returning home late?'

She broke down.

We didn't know she hadn't,' said Mrs Barnard tearfully. 'Dad and I always go to bed early. Nine o'clock's our time. We never knew Betty hadn't come home till the police

Her voice had a faintly sing-song intonation that I thought for a moment was foreign till I remembered the name on the gate and realized that the 'effer wass' of her speech

The superintendent was very kind,' said Mr Barnard. 'After he'd broken the news to us, he said he'd leave any questions till later when we'd got over the first shock.

He patted her shoulder and drew her down into a chair.

'Why, mother, that's fine,' said Mr Barnard. 'You're sure you're all right—eh?'

'Pleased to meet you, gentlemen,' said Mr Barnard mechanically. 'Come into the snuggery. I don't know that my poor wife's up to seeing you. All broken up, she is.'

'Captain Hastings,' said Poirot.

'Scotland Yard?' said Mr Barnard hopefully. 'That's good. This murdering villain's got to be laid by the heels. My poor little girl—' His face was distorted by a spasm of

'Come in, gentlemen,' he said.

'You have two daughters?'

'You are Miss Barnard?' I asked.

'I've heard of you,' she said. 'You're the fashionable private sleuth, aren't you?'

'This is M. Hercule Poirot,' I said.

She interrupted me.

'Well,' I said. 'Not exactly—'

'I am Megan Barnard. You belong to the police, I suppose?'

'You are Miss Barnard?' I asked.

She seemed to make a decision.

'That's the correct phrase, I believe?' she said.

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'Captain Hastings,' said Poirot.
telling Don a few lies again. You see, she did so enjoy dancing and the pictures, and of course, Don couldn't afford to take her all the time.'

'the man. He was a married man, as it happened, and he'd been a bit secretive about the business anyway—and so that made it worse. They had an awful scene or twice they had flaming big rows about it.'

'nothing serious—never anything of that kind—but she just liked her fun. She used to say that as she'd got to settle down with Don one day she might as well have her fun holidays. She was always very pat with her tongue and if they chaffed her she'd chaff back again. And then perhaps she'd meet them and go to the pictures or something like any nice-looking man who'd pass the time of day with her. And of course, working in the Ginger Cat, she was always running up against men—especially in the summer—and of course she was very fond of him, but it wasn't in Betty to be fond of one person and not notice anybody else. She wasn't made that way. She'd got a—well, an eye for always express what he feels in words. But underneath it all he minds things terribly. And he's got a jealous nature. He was always jealous of Betty. He was devoted to her.

As I said, Megan Barnard's words, and still more the crisp businesslike tone in which they were uttered, made me jump.

Like a flash Megan Barnard was out of the kitchen, and a couple of seconds later she was back again leading Donald Fraser by the hand.

'Bring him in here,' said Poirot quickly. 'I would like a word with him before our good inspector takes him in hand.'

'It's Don…'

She went to the window and leaned out. She drew back her head sharply.

An electric bell trilled sharply above the girl's head.

'I don't think that's likely. Betty couldn't bear the Higley girl. She thought her common. And the others would be new. Betty wasn't the confiding sort anyway.'

'If so, is she likely to have confided in anyone? The girl at the café, for instance?'

'She mayn't have met that particular man again. He'd probably sheer off if he thought there was a chance of a row, but it wouldn't surprise me if Betty had—well, been

'M. Don, he was no longer quiet?'

'Just so. And I may say, mademoiselle, that but for the egoistical vanity of a killer, that is just what would have happened. If Donald Fraser escapes suspicion, it will be

'And so, naturally, you were afraid…'

'Precisely?'

'Yes, it is true.'

'Oh! I'm the plain one of the family. I've always known that.' She seemed to brush aside the fact as unimportant.

Poirot handed it back, saying:

In a leather frame was a head and shoulders of a fair-haired, smiling girl. Her hair had evidently recently been permed, it stood out from her head in a mass of rather frizzy

Megan slipped off the table, went to her suitcase, snapped it open and extracted something which she handed to Poirot.

'Then let us continue our conversation. I have formed the idea that this Donald Fraser has, perhaps, a violent and jealous temper, is that right?'

'Yes, I see that now.'

She drew a deep breath.

'I was afraid that he might—chuck her altogether. And that would have been a pity. He's a very steady and hard-working man and would have made her a good husband.'

'It may have been my fancy but it seemed to me that she hesitated a second before answering.

His eyes were on her very steadily.

'And then what, mademoiselle?'

'Yes, it is true.'

'Yes, it is true.'

'That's it, exactly. Don's a very quiet sort of person—but he—well, naturally he'd resent certain things—and then—'

'In what way exactly do you consider your sister was behaving foolishly? Do you mean, perhaps, in relation to Mr Donald Fraser?'

'I was extremely fond of Betty. But my fondness didn't blind me from seeing exactly the kind of silly little fool she was—and even telling her so upon occasions! Sisters are

Poirot, however, merely bowed his head gravely.

I was afraid she was going to go into it all again. But she didn't. Instead she sat down at a table and opened her handbag. And produced a photograph.

'Here is your photo,' he said. 'You are intelligent, mademoiselle.'
I felt sorry at once for the young man. His white haggard face and bewildered eyes showed how great a shock he had had.

He was a well-made, fine-looking young fellow, standing close on six foot, not good-looking, but with a pleasant, freckled face, high cheek-bones and flaming red hair.

"What's this, Megan?" he said. "Why in here? For God's sake, tell me—I've only just heard—Betty…"

His voice trailed away.

Poirot pushed forward a chair and he sank down on it.

My friend then extracted a small flask from his pocket, poured some of its contents into a convenient cup which was hanging on the dresser and said:

'Drink some of this, Mr Fraser. It will do you good.'

The young man obeyed. The brandy brought a little colour back into his face. He sat up straighter and turned once more to the girl. His manner was quite quiet and self-controlled.

'It's true, I suppose?' he said. 'Betty is—dead—killed?'

'It's true, Don.'

He said as though mechanically:

'Have you just come down from London?'

'Yes. Dad phoned me.'

'By the 9.30, I suppose?' said Donald Fraser.

His mind, shrinking from reality, ran for safety along these unimportant details.

'Yes.'

There was silence for a minute or two, then Fraser said:

'The police? Are they doing anything?'

'They're upstairs now. Looking through Betty's things, I suppose.'

'They've no idea who—? They don't know—?'

He stopped.

He had all a sensitive, shy person's dislike of putting violent facts into words.

Poirot moved forward a little and asked a question. He spoke in a businesslike, matter-of-fact voice as though what he asked was an unimportant detail.

'Did Miss Barnard tell you where she was going last night?'

Fraser replied to the question. He seemed to be speaking mechanically:

'She told me she was going with a girl friend to St Leonards.'

'Did you believe her?'

'Yes—' Suddenly the automaton came to life. 'What the devil do you mean?'

His face then, menacing, convulsed by sudden passion, made me understand that a girl might well be afraid of rousing his anger.

Poirot said crisply:

'Betty Barnard was killed by a homicidal murderer. Only by speaking the exact truth can you help us to get on his track.'

His glance for a minute turned to Megan.

'That's right, Don,' she said. 'It isn't a time for considering one's own feelings or anyone else's. You've got to come clean.'

Donald Fraser looked suspiciously at Poirot.

'Who are you? You don't belong to the police?'

'I am better than the police,' said Poirot. He said it without conscious arrogance. It was, to him, a simple statement of fact.

'Tell him,' said Megan.

Donald Fraser capitulated.

'I—wasn't sure,' he said. 'I believed her when she said it. Never thought of doing anything else. What needs—conflict has something to learn.'—I—didn't mean anything—'

"Yes?"

He had sat down opposite Donald Fraser. His eyes, fixed on the other man's, seemed to be exercising a mesmeric spell.

'What did you do?'

'I—I lost my head rather. I was convinced she was with some man. I thought it probable he had taken her in his car to Hastings. I went on there—looked in hotels and restaurants, hung round cinemas—went on the pier. All damn foolishness. Even if she was there I was unlikely to find her, and anyway, there were heaps of other places he might have taken her to instead of Hastings.'

He stopped. Precise as his tone had remained, I caught an undertone of that blind, bewildering misery and anger that had possessed him at the time he described.

'In the end I gave it up—came back.'

'At what time?'

'I don't know. I walked. It must have been midnight or after when I got home.'

'Then—'

The kitchen door opened.

'Oh, there you are,' said Inspector Kelsey.

Inspector Crome pushed past him, shot a glance at Poirot and a glance at the two strangers.

'Miss Megan Barnard and Mr Donald Fraser,' said Poirot, introducing them.

'This is Inspector Crome from London,' he explained.

Turning to the inspector, he said:

'While you pursued your investigations upstairs I have been conversing with Miss Barnard and Mr Fraser, endeavouring if I could to find something that will throw light upon the matter.'

'Oh, yes?' said Inspector Crome, his thoughts not upon Poirot but upon the two newcomers.

Poirot retreated to the hall. Inspector Kelsey said kindly as he passed:

'Get anything?'

But his attention was distracted by his colleague and he did not wait for a reply.

I joined Poirot in the hall.

'Did anything strike you, Poirot?' I inquired.

'Only the amazing magnanimity of the murderer, Hastings.'

I had not the courage to say that I had not the least idea what he meant.
Chapter 13

A Conference

The public had become aware of another fact in the case which the newspapers had failed to mention. The fact was that Barnard—if it had not been for the warning letters of A B C. Is he, then, so soft-hearted that he cannot bear others to suffer for something they did not do?'

— but logical to him—of

— directed against a

Poirot? Does he challenge me in public because I have (unknown to myself) vanquished him somewhere in the course of my career? Or is his animosity impersonal

class. Of course, it's possible that there is a sex complex. Both victims have been women. We can tell better, of course, after the next crime—'

he firmly believes that they

Quite a time before the crimes were connected up. They seemed entirely haphazard. But as M. Poirot says, there isn't such a thing as a murderer who commits crimes at

they are not being removed because they are a source of annoyance to the murderer personally

danger to the community—the fly must go. So works the mind of the mentally deranged criminal. But consider now this case—

annoyance ceases. Your action appears to you sane and justifiable. Another reason for killing a fly is if you have a strong passion for hygiene. The fly is a potential source of

again, maddening you by its tickling—what do you do? You endeavour to kill that fly. You have no qualms about it.

Identifications, but most of them not good for much. We haven't been able to trace the A B C.'

say she was there about 9 pm on the 24th with a man who looked like a naval officer. They can't both be right, but either of them's probable. Of course, there's a host of other

…On the other hand, I am as convinced as Inspector Crome

may it not be thought that it is my vanity that speaks? That I am afraid for my reputation? It is difficult! To speak out—to tell all—that has its advantages. It is, at least, a warning

He wants to make a splash.'

there's the fact that

their co-operation—after all, it'll be the co-operation of several million people, looking out for a madman—'

the public eye.

Conferences!
Cluny: “Note vamos vencer de Lass-Loch. Ais scória a is.”

"They sent away for the witnesses I spoke of. It caused a great stir. I’m sure they heard what we said, then rang off in order to get a trunk connection to Churston as quickly as possible.

‘You have news—yes?’ demanded Poirot.

The inspector, we found, was also travelling by the train. Just as the train was leaving the station we saw a man running down the platform. He reached the inspector’s window and called up something.

‘Ah, c’est ingénieux, ça!’

He examined it, swearing softly under his breath.

‘No news as yet. All men available are on the lookout. All persons whose name begins with C are being warned by phone when possible. There’s just a chance. Where’s ‘Churston’?”

He answered Poirot’s look of inquiry.

‘Twenty minutes past ten? An hour and forty minutes to go. Is it likely that A B C will have held his hand so long? We must make haste. A B C must be warned. There’s something in that. You’ll hardly have time to get news before we start.’

‘Churston, Devon,’ I read, ‘from Paddington 204 3/4 miles. Population 656. It sounds a fairly small place. Surely our man will be noticed there.’

We took our places in the smoking car. Poirot took his Chinese pipe and lit it. ‘Let us sit here, my dear Poirot,’ Miss Lemon said, ‘and smoke in peace. We’re too used to playing by the ear to play by the clock.’

I glanced at the letter in my hand.

‘Churston,’ I said, jumping to our own copy of an A B C. ‘Let’s see where it is.’

As the days succeeded each other we had all grown more and more on edge. Inspector Crome’s aloof and superior manner grew more and more aloof and superior as the days went by. He was, I knew, deeply unhappy over the case. He refused to leave London, preferring to be on the spot in case of emergency. In those hot dog days even his smile had become a taciturnity which maddened us."

40

Chapter 14

The Third Letter

Sunday evening was the exact day. It was the exact hour. Poirot for once did not reproach me with untidiness. ‘Written on the 27th,’ I announced.

I tore open the letter (Poirot for once did not reproach me with untidiness) and extracted the printed sheet.

‘It has come? Open it, Hastings. Quickly. Every moment may be needed. We must make our plans.’

I glanced at the letter in my hand.

‘Faster—faster!’

He was attached to the house and if Poirot and I were out it was his duty to open anything that came so as to be able to communicate with headquarters without loss of time.

I well remember the arrival of A B C’s third letter.

‘One must not give way to the nerves…’

I shivered.

‘It’s rather horrible…’

Poirot went up to his room with the letter and the envelope. I heard a loud peremptory tap on the wall and then a quick, double tap on the wall. The peremptory tap was that of the Private Detective Agency. "Out? juevad!" It meant, ‘Hastings, come on— come on—’

‘Not known at this time, unfortunately.’

I turned to Poirot.

‘Good heavens, Poirot,’ I cried, ‘this is a matter of life and death. What does it matter what happens to our clothes?"

My mouth was open, my eyes were wide.


He was talking to himself. His eloquent hand pointed to the calendar on the wall. I caught up the daily paper to confirm it.

‘That’s right. Let me see, that’s—’

‘Written on the 27th,’ I announced.

I glanced at the letter in my hand.

‘Churston,’ I said, jumping to our own copy of an A B C. ‘Let’s see where it is.’

‘Well, I can’t say I have a very good idea yourself, missus. I’ve been a bit of a drip at this sort of thing, you see, and I’m no good at it.’

I raised my eyes from the printed characters.

‘Believe that Poirot experienced the same sensation.

As the days went by we had all grown more and more on edge. Miss Lemon had become a sort of Warren Commission. She was the brains of the organization now. Although she was a bit of a drip at this sort of thing, she had a sort of instinct which M. Courcy lacked.

We had a sort of Warren Commission. She, of course, decided the policy—what to do with A B C and what to do with the case. She was the brains of the organization now—’

I raised my eyes from the printed characters.

‘It’s very likely, missus. I’ve been a bit of a drip at this sort of thing, you see, and I’m no good at it.’

I raised my eyes from the printed characters.

‘But what did you mean by your request that I had a sort of Warren Commission?’

Miss Lemon didn’t answer. Miss Lemon had become a sort of Warren Commission. She was the brains of the organization now. Although she was a bit of a drip at this sort of thing, she had a sort of instinct which M. Courcy lacked.

We had a sort of Warren Commission. She, of course, decided the policy—what to do with A B C and what to do with the case. She was the brains of the organization now—’
beautiful.'

Deveril and Mr. Clarke were just setting out with lanterns.

look across the golf links or down the lanes to the sea. In the same way, practically everyone one sees this time of year is a stranger.

much longer. Her illness has preyed terribly on my brother's mind. I myself returned from the East not long ago and I was shocked at the change in him.

railway guide has been deposited beside the body.

ten years ago it was merely a golf links and below the links a green sweep of countryside dropping down to the sea with only a farmhouse or two in the way of human

Chapter 15

said Poirot.

Ah, but they are cunning—

suicide,' said Crome with a touch of curtness. 'Now I believe, Mr. Clarke, that it was your brother's habit to go for a stroll every evening?'
These awful murders.

"Yes." His jaw thrust itself out aggressively. "I want to talk to M. Poirot some time… Is Crome any good?" He shot the words out unexpectedly.

I replied that he was supposed to be a very clever officer.

My voice was perhaps not as enthusiastic as it might have been.

"He's got a damned offensive manner," said Clarke. "Looks as though he knows everything—and what does he know? Nothing as far as I can make out."

He was silent for a minute or two. Then he said:

"M. Poirot's the man for my money. I've got a plan. But we'll talk of that later."

He went along the passage and tapped at the same door as the doctor had entered.

I hesitated a moment. The girl was staring in front of her.

"What are you thinking of, Miss Grey?"

She turned her eyes towards me.

"I'm wondering where he is now… the murderer, I mean. It's not twelve hours yet since it happened… Oh! aren't there any real clairvoyants who could see where he is now and what he is doing…?"

"The police are searching—" I began.

My commonplace words broke the spell. Thora Grey pulled herself together.

"Yes," she said. "Of course."

In her turn she descended the staircase. I stood there a moment longer conning her words over in my mind.

A B C…

Where was he now…?
Mr Alexander Bonaparte Cust came out with the rest of the audience from the Torquay Palladium, where he had been seeing and hearing that highly emotional film, Not a Sparrow… He blinked a little as he came out into the afternoon sunshine and peered round him in that lost-dog fashion that was characteristic of him.

He murmured to himself: 'It's an idea…'

Newsboys passed along crying out:

'Latest…Homicidal Maniac at Churston…'

They carried placards on which was written:

CHRISTON
MURDER

Mr Cust fumbled in his pocket, found a coin, and bought a paper. He did not open it at once.

Entering the Princess Gardens, he slowly made his way to a shelter facing Torquay harbour. He sat down and opened the paper.

There were big headlines:

SIR CARMICHAEL CLARKE MURDERED.
TERRIBLE TRAGEDY AT CHURSTON.
WORK OF A HOMICIDAL MANIAC.

And below them:

Only a month ago England was shocked and startled by the murder of a young girl, Elizabeth Barnard, at Bexhill. It may be remembered that an A B C railway guide figured in the case. An A B C was also found by the dead body of Sir Carmichael Clarke, and the police incline to the belief that both crimes were committed by the same person. Can it be possible that a homicidal murderer is going the round of our seaside resorts?…

A young man in flannel trousers and a bright blue Aertex shirt who was sitting beside Mr Cust remarked:

'Nasty business—eh?'

Mr Cust jumped.

'Oh, very—very—'

His hands, the young man noticed, were trembling so that he could hardly hold the paper.

'You never know with lunatics,' said the young man chattily. 'They don't always look barmy, you know. Often they seem just the same as you or me…'

'I suppose they do,' said Mr Cust.

'It's a fact. Sometimes, for the war—that's what—never been right since.'

Mr Cust laughed. He laughed for some time.

The young man was slightly alarmed.

'He's a bit batty himself,' he thought.

Aloud he said:

'Sorry, sir, I expect you were in the war.'

'I was,' said Mr Cust. 'It—it—unsettled me. My head's never been right since. It aches, you know. Aches terribly.'

'Oh! I'm sorry about that,' said the young man awkwardly.

'Sometimes I hardly know what I'm doing…'

'Very strange,' said the young man.

Mr Cust remained with his paper.

He read and reread…

People passed to and fro in front of him.

Most of them were talking of the murder…

'Awful…do you think it was anything to do with the Chinese? Wasn't the waitress in a Chinese café…'

'Actually on the golf links…'

'I heard it was on the beach…'

'—but, darling, we took our tea to Elbury only yesterday…'

'—police are sure to get him…'

'—say he may be arrested any minute now…'

'—quite likely he's in Torquay…that other woman was who murdered the what do you call 'ems…'

Mr Cust folded up the paper very neatly and laid it on the seat. Then he rose and walked sedately along towards the town.

Girls passed him, girls in white and pink and blue, in summery frocks and pyjamas and shorts. They laughed and giggled. Their eyes appraised the men they passed.

Not once did their eyes linger for a second on Mr Cust…

He sat down at a little table and ordered tea and Devonshire cream…
It is looking for the needle in the haystack, I grant—

The laws that in three cases of murder there is no single fact nor sentence with a bearing on the case. Some trivial happening, some trivial remark there must bound to arise.'

One cannot tell everything. If I were to say to you, recount me your day yesterday, you would perhaps reply: "I rose at nine, I had my breakfast at half-past, I had eggs and bacon and coffee, I went to my club, etc." You would not include: "I tore my nail and had to cut it. I rang for shaving water. I spilt a little coffee on the tablecloth. I brushed my hat and put it on." "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd.

Perhaps, indeed, amateurs who are not used to the profession are in the most confusion. They select what is important.

A sensible man! My force, Hastings, is in my brain; I will think, and think, and think—'

It seemed to me extremely vague and hazy.

'What is it?' I asked cautiously.

'What kind of details?'

'Not intentionally. But telling everything you know always implies—'

'What is it?' I asked cautiously.

'What is it?'

'By all means let us hear anything in the nature of rejoicing.'

'We have no reason to believe the man innocent.'

'He tossed me over a letter. It was neatly written in a sloping board-school hand.

'It seemed to me extremely vague and hazy.'

'Do not despair, Hastings.'

'He was a line from Franklin Clarke, saying that he was coming to London and would call upon Poirot the following day if not inconvenient.'

'It was a line from Franklin Clarke, saying that he was coming to London and would call upon Poirot the following day if not inconvenient.'

'It looked as though there was no weight at all. One cannot tell everything. If I were to say to you, recount me your day yesterday, you would perhaps reply: "I rose at nine, I had my breakfast at half-past, I had eggs and bacon and coffee, I went to my club, etc." You would not include: "I tore my nail and had to cut it. I rang for shaving water. I spilt a little coffee on the tablecloth. I brushed my hat and put it on."

The Andover murder was now bracketed with the other two.

The net result was not entirely a blank. Certain statements were borne in mind and noted down as of possible value, but without further evidence they led nowhere.

At least a score of people were detained and questioned until they could satisfy the police as to their movements on the night in question.

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There is a way of turning sentences that completely reverses the meaning of the sentence. It is usually followed by a half-column of imbecilities.

The Andover murder was now bracketed with the other two.

If Crome and his colleagues were indefatigable, Poirot seemed to me strangely supine. We argued now and again.

But at least a score of people were detained and questioned until they could satisfy the police as to their movements on the night in question.

At least a score of people were detained and questioned until they could satisfy the police as to their movements on the night in question.

There are confusing indications—sometimes it is as though there were two intelligences at work—but soon the outline will be clear.

At least a score of people were detained and questioned until they could satisfy the police as to their movements on the night in question.

But what is it that you would have me do, my friend? The routine inquiries, the police make them better than I do. Always—always you want me to run about like the dog.'
Mrs. Legge: I am afraid that I have a small degree of recrimination. She will tell you just what she thought of your sister! Some useful fact may emerge.

Thora Grey: Perhaps we might each try our luck on our own. I don't know whether there are any points M. Poirot thinks might repay investigation?

Mary Drower: I think the principle of talking things over is always sound.

Franklin Clarke: I consider it just possible that the waitress, Milly Higley, might know something useful.

Thora Grey: As they sat round looking obediently towards Poirot, who had his place, like the chairman at a board meeting, at the head of the table, I myself passed them, as it were, in review, confirming or revising my first impressions of them.

Thora Grey: The gardener watering... Going to the post? Nearly ran down a bicyclist—silly woman wobbling and shouting to a friend. That's all, I'm afraid.
You've got your own part of the world to attend to,' said Thora Grey rather sharply.

Franklin's face fell just a little.

'Yes,' he said. 'I have.'

'Tout de même, I do not think there is much you can do down there for the present,' said Poirot. 'Mademoiselle Grey now, she is far more fitted—'

Thora Grey interrupted him.

'But you see, M. Poirot, I have left Devon for good.'

'Ah? I did not understand.'

'Miss Grey very kindly stayed on to help me clear up things,' said Franklin. 'But naturally she prefers a post in London.'

Poirot directed a sharp glance from one to the other.

'How is Lady Clarke?' he demanded.

I was admiring the faint colour in Thora Grey's cheeks and almost missed Clarke's reply.

'Pretty bad. By the way, M. Poirot, I wonder if you could see your way to running down to Devon and paying her a visit? She expressed a desire to see you before I left. Of course, she often can't see people for a couple of days at a time, but if you would risk that—at my expense, of course.'

'Certainly, Mr Clarke. Shall we say the day after tomorrow?'

'Good. I'll let nurse know and she'll arrange the dope accordingly.'

'For you, my child,' said Poirot, 'I think you might perhaps do good work in Andover. Try the children.'

'The children?'

'Yes. Children will not chat readily to outsiders. But you are known in the street where your aunt lived. There were a good many children playing about. They may have noticed who went in and out of your aunt's shop.'

'M. Poirot,' said Thora Grey, 'what was the postmark on the third letter?'

'Putney, mademoiselle.'

'SW15, Putney, that is right, is it not?'

'For a wonder, the newspapers printed it correctly.'

'That seems to point to A B C being a Londoner.'

'On the face of it, yes.'

'One ought to be able to draw him,' said Clarke. 'M. Poirot, how would it be if I inserted an advertisement—something after these lines:

A B C. Urgent, H.P. close on your track. A hundred for my silence. X.Y.Z. Nothing quite so crude as that—but you see the idea. It might draw him.'

'It is a possibility—yes.'

'Might induce him to try and have a shot at me.'

'I think it's very dangerous and silly,' said Thora Grey sharply.

'What about it, M. Poirot?'

'It can do no harm to try. I think myself that A B C will be too cunning to reply.' Poirot smiled a little. 'I see, Mr Clarke, that you are—if I may say so without being offensive—still a boy at heart.'

Franklin Clarke looked a little abashed.

'Well,' he said, consulting his notebook. 'We're making a start.

A—Miss Barnard and Milly Higley.
B—Mr Fraser and Miss Higley.
C—Children in Andover.
D—Advertisement.'

'I don't feel any of it is much good, but it will be something to do whilst waiting.'

He got up and a few minutes later the meeting had dispersed.
...cannot pin down exactly what it was…Just an impression that passed through my mind…

'One lives and learns.'

She took an unreasoning dislike to me and insisted that I should leave the house. I can make allowances. She is a very ill woman, and her brain is somewhat muddled with the drugs they give her. It makes her suspicious and fanciful. It is not quite like that. I was quite prepared to stay on—there is any amount of work to be done in connection with the collections. It was Lady Clarke who...

And did you also notice how very much annoyed Mademoiselle Thora Grey was about it? And Mr Donald Fraser, he—'

an abominable falsetto voice:

'matchmaker.'

method of having one of them arrested for murder! Nothing less would have done it! In the midst of death we are in life, Hastings…Murder, I have often noticed, is a great

commences—

Poirot returned to his seat and sat humming a little tune to himself.

'Poirot,' I said. 'Go to the devil!'

'She is an angel, is she not? From Eden, by way of Sweden…'

He looked at me (perhaps I had not been attending very closely), laughed and began once more to hum.

'No—not at Churston…Before that…No matter, presently it will come to me…'

'Something at Churston?'

Do you know, Hastings, I cannot rid my mind of the impression that already, in our conversations this afternoon, something was said that was significant. It is odd—I...

As I was about to make an indignant rejoinder, he said, with a sudden change of subject:

'You should join a nudist colony.'

'You're a man milliner, Poirot. I never notice what people have on.'

'And wears very lovely clothes. That crêpe-marocain and the silver fox collar—'

'I mean that she has the power of looking ahead.'

'What do you mean—calculation?'

'And calculation.'

'I call that very sporting of her,' I said as I returned to the room. 'She has courage, that girl.'

'That is all I came to say. Goodbye.'

She rose.

'It is rather a blow to me,' said Thora ruefully. 'I had no idea Lady Clarke disliked me so much. In fact, I always thought she was rather fond of me.' She made a wry face.

There was a warm glow in her words. She evidently admired Franklin Clarke enormously.

'It's always better to have the truth,' she said with a little smile. 'I don't want to shelter behind Mr Clarke's chivalry. He is a very chivalrous man.'

'I call it splendid of you to come and tell us this,' I said.

I could not but admire the girl's courage. She did not attempt to gloss over facts, as so many might have been tempted to do, but went straight to the point with an

'Some of the facts I have already told you.'

'Some of the facts I have already told you. That reminds me of something I have already heard or seen or noted…'

...
uninfluenced by each other. The permutations and combinations of life, Hastings—I never cease to be fascinated by them.'

— and that her husband, Mr Franklin Clarke and Nurse Capstick were all as blind as bats—and Captain Hastings.'

more sweetness and bravery!

'You haven't caught him yet?' she asked.

people—their heads must feel so queer. And then, being shut up—it must be so terrible. But what else can one do? If they kill people…' She shook her head—gently pained.

was never ill. He was nearly sixty—but he seemed more like fifty…Yes, very strong…'

slightly faraway, dreamy look, and I noticed that the pupils of her eyes were mere pin-points.

with false hopes. I'm afraid it preyed on his mind very much to begin with.'

The small room into which we were shown smelt damp and airless.

There was an air of deep and settled melancholy over Combeside when we saw it again for the second time. This may, perhaps, have been partly due to the weather—it was

Poirot's air of assurance had its effect. Fraser looked at him with a queer air of grateful obedience.

You have come to me because there is something that you must tell to someone. You were quite right. I am the proper person. Speak!'

'I know,' said Poirot.

He stopped. His hands twisted themselves together nervously.

'Any success with Milly Higley?'

'Milly Higley? Milly Higley?' Fraser repeated the name wonderingly. 'Oh, that girl! No, I haven't done anything there yet. It's—'

'You have come from Bexhill, Mr Fraser?'

'You can't. How can you?'

Not until we had finished the sandwiches and sipped the wine did he give the conversation a personal turn.

Until these made their appearance he monopolized the conversation, explaining where we had been, and speaking with kindliness and feeling of the invalid woman.

I expected it to be Franklin, or perhaps Japp, but to my astonishment it turned out to be none other than Donald Fraser.

On our arrival at Whitehaven Mansions we were told that a gentleman was waiting to see Poirot.

'Lady Clarke was down on her, all right.'

You speak the

'It's true,' I insisted, 'everyone's hand is against her simply because she is good-looking.'

'Du tout'

'A good-looking girl has a hard time of it,' I said at last with a sigh.

'That would indeed be interesting—and highly suggestive.'

'I can think of seven separate reasons—one of them an extremely simple one.'

'That's an extraordinary story,' I said to Poirot as we journeyed back to London. 'About Miss Grey and a strange man.'

A sudden quiver of pain shot across her face.

'Not a tradesman. A shabby sort of person. I can't remember.'

'A gentleman—or a tradesman?'

'An ordinary sort of man. Nothing special.'

'Why did you say that Miss Grey was a liar?'

Lady Clarke said suddenly:

She relapsed again into her dream. Poirot, who was well acquainted with the effects of certain drugs and of how they give their taker the impression of endless time, said

'We never thought it would be that way round…I was so sure I should be the first to go…' She mused a minute or two. 'Car was very strong—wonderful for his age. He

Presently with a slight effort she roused herself.

'My friend Captain Hastings, Lady Clarke.'

She extended her hand.

'Oh, yes, M. Poirot,' said Lady Clarke vaguely.

She led us upstairs to a room on the first floor. What had at one time been a bedroom had been turned into a cheerful-looking sitting-room.

Lady Clarke waving Nurse Capstick away.

'then he and Miss Grey were busy recataloguing and rearranging the museum on a new system.'

...and I noticed that the pupils of her eyes were mere pin-points.

One gets used to everything, doesn't one? And then Sir Carmichael had his collection. A hobby is a great consolation to a man. He used to run up to sales occasionally,

'One can't hope for much improvement, of course, but some new treatment has made things a little easier for her. Dr Logan is quite pleased with her condition.'

Poirot inquired after Lady Clarke's health.

All things considered,' I presumed, meant considering she was under sentence of death.
"You think so?"
"Parbleu, I am sure of it."
"M. Poirot, do you know anything about dreams?"
It was the last thing I had expected him to say.
Poirot, however, seemed in no wise surprised.
"I do," he replied. "You have been dreaming—?
"Yes. I suppose you'll say it's only natural that I should—should dream about—It. But it isn't an ordinary dream."
"No?"
"No?"
"I've dreamed it now three nights running, sir…I think I'm going mad…"
"Tell me—"
The man's face was livid. His eyes were staring out of his head. As a matter of fact, he looked mad.
"It's always the same. I'm on the beach. Looking for Betty. She's lost—only lost, you understand. I've got to find her. I've got to give her her belt. I'm carrying it in my hand. And then—"
"Yes?"
"The dream changes…I'm not looking any more. She's there sitting on the beach. She doesn't have her belt. Oh, oh, oh! I've got to find her! I've got to give her her belt. I'm going crazy."

"The dream changes. I'm not looking anymore. She's there sitting on the beach. She doesn't have her belt. Oh, oh, oh! I've got to find her! I've got to give her her belt. I'm going crazy."

"It's always the same. I'm on the beach. Looking for Betty. She's lost—only lost, you understand. I've got to find her. I've got to give her her belt. I'm carrying it in my hand. And then—"
"Yes?"
"The dream changes…I'm not looking any more. She's there sitting on the beach. She doesn't have her belt. Oh, oh, oh! I've got to find her! I've got to give her her belt. I'm going crazy."

"What's the meaning of it, M. Poirot? Why does it come to me? Every night…?"
"Drink up your wine," ordered Poirot.
The young man did so, then he asked in a calmer voice:
"What does it mean? I—I didn't kill her, did I?"

I do not know what Poirot answered, for at that minute I heard the postman's knock and automatically I left the room.

"What I took out of the letter-box banished all my interest in Donald Fraser's extraordinary revelations."


He sprang up, seized it from me, caught up his paper-knife and slit it open. He spread it out on the table.

"Still no success? Fie! Fie! What are you and the police doing? Well, well, isn't this fun? And where shall we go next for honey?"

"Poor Mr Poirot. I'm quite sorry for you."
"If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again."
"We've a long way to go still."
"Tipperary? No—that comes farther on. Letter T."

"The next little incident will take place at Doncaster on September 11th."

"So long."
"A B C."
the sort of man you'd notice.

Poirot said gravely:

'He stooped… I don't know. I hardly looked at him. He wasn't the sort of man you'd notice…'

'Mieux que ça, mademoiselle.

'I can't… I don't know how… He had glasses, I think—and a shabby overcoat…'

'A vous la parole!'

Thora Grey nodded.

'We don't know anything—whether he's old or young, fair or dark! None of us has ever seen him or spoken to him! We've gone over everything we all know again and

but we could only get at it.'

The whole of Doncaster, police and civilians, will be out to catch one man—and with reasonable luck, we ought to get him!'
murderer himself?'

Dropping his ticket, I picked it up—he hadn't the faintest idea he'd lost it. Thanked me in an agitated sort of manner, but I don't think he recognized me.

Inspector Crome said to his subordinate:

'Where the murder was— the A B C murder. It happened while you were down there, didn't it?'

I packed a dozen or so flattish cardboard boxes about ten inches by seven from a shelf to the suitcase.

'I carry it through. It is the only way to get on—in—in—business.'

'Have you a little drop of something? Really, now, you oughtn't to go travelling today.'

Mr Cust was reading with avid interest.

'If your name began with a D, I'd take the first train away, that I would. I'd run no risks. What did you say, Mr Cust?'

'Murderer himself?'

He laughed.

'Was he? That's a bit of a coincidence, isn't it?'

'Nothing, Mr Cust.'

His breakfast lay cold and untasted on his plate. A newspaper was propped up against the teapot and it was this newspaper that

In their unconscious minds something stirred…

'Poor Mr Cust? He wouldn't hurt a fly,' laughed Lily.

'He was away…Yes, I remember he was away…because he forgot his bathing-dress. Mother was mending it for him. And she said: "There—Mr Cust went away..."'

'He wasn't at Bexhill the time before, was he?'

'He was away…Yes, I remember he was away…because he forgot his bathing-dress. Mother was mending it for him. And she said: "There—Mr Cust went away..."'

'Was he? That's a bit of a coincidence, isn't it?'

'Nothing, Miss Lily.'

'Anything the matter, Mr Cust?'

'He's a mountebank,' said Inspector Crome. 'Always posing. Takes in some people. It doesn't take in

Right, sir. Mr Poirot's done some good stuff in his time, but I think he's a bit gaga now, sir.'

'Get me out a list of all stocking manufacturing firms and circularize them. I want a list of all their agents—you know, fellows who sell on commission and tout for orders.'

'See you Friday,' laughed the girl. 'Where are you going this time? Seaside again.'

'Yes, no.'

'Who? Mr Cust?'

'Saw your old dugout this morning.'

'It is necessary, Mrs Marbury. I have always been punctual in my—engagements. People must have—must have confidence in you! When I have undertaken to do a thing,

Mr Cust said abruptly:

'You were sighing so!'

'See something beautiful,' said Tom.

'Nothing, Miss Lily.'

'You dance something beautiful,' said Tom.

'Saw your old dugout this morning.'

'He just glanced at the railway guide on the table and then left the room, suitcase in hand.

His manner was so firm that Mrs Marbury gathered up the breakfast things and reluctantly left the room.

'But if you're ill?'

'Mr Cust raised his head from his hands.

'I was wondering, Mr Cust, if you'd fancy a nice—why, whatever is it? Aren't you feeling well?'

'So I see. You haven't touched your breakfast. Is it your head troubling you again?'

He did not hear the sound of the opening door. His landlady, Mrs Marbury, stood in the doorway.

Setting it down in the hall, he put on his hat and overcoat. As he did so he sighed deeply, so deeply that the girl who came out from a room at the side looked at him in

He fumbled to raise his hat, caught up his suitcase and fairly hastened out of the front door.

'So you do. But old Cust wasn't going to Cheltenham. He was going to Doncaster.'

'Funny. I thought you went to Cheltenham from Paddington.'

'Of course I'm sure. What do you think?'

'Are you sure?'

'Euston.'

'Did you say Euston or Paddington?' asked Lily abruptly. 'Where you saw old Cust, I mean?'

'No, no. I have to go. It's business. Important. Very important.'

Mr Cust sprang up abruptly.

'No. At least, yes…I—I just feel a bit out of sorts.'

Mr Cust's lips moved, but no sound came from them.

'Nothing. It's nothing at all, Mrs Marbury. I'm not—feeling very well this morning.'

Mr Cust raised his head from his hands.

'I was wondering, Mr Cust, if you'd fancy a nice—why, whatever is it? Aren't you feeling well?'

'No, no, of course not.'

'Well, don't say goodbye as though you were going away for ever,' laughed Lily.

He sighed again.

'Well, I don't know that I am, really…Of course, there are days when you just feel everything's going wrong, and days when you feel everything's going right.'

'Are you at all subject to premonitions, Miss Lily? To presentiments?'

Mr Cust said abruptly:

'But my dear, you should have been a saint.'

'Nothing, Mrs Marbury—nothing.'

Mr Cust's lips moved, but no sound came from them.

'Yes, sir. My thoughts are with him. He had a wonderful mind. He was a man of many parts. He could do anything he put his mind to.'

'Nothing, Miss Lily.'

'You dance something beautiful,' said Tom.

'Nothing, Miss Lily.'

'You dance something beautiful,' said Tom.

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'You dance something beautiful,' said Tom.

'You dance something beautiful,' said Tom.
getting these ideas into her head—' Grey staying on—well, Charlotte cut up rough. Of course, it's partly the illness and the morphia and all that—Nurse Capstick says so—she says we mustn't blame Charlotte for ever had—and he was very fond of her, too. But it was all perfectly straight and above-board. I mean, Thora isn't the sort of girl—'

'If the person you are to escort is Mary Drower—and I must request you not to leave her.'

'I am sorry to upset your plans, but I must request you to give your escort elsewhere.'

'Oh, really, Poirot!' 

'Miss Grey?' 

'She's rather the independent type,' I demurred. 

'What about Miss Barnard?' 

'Well—I—er—hadn't considered yet.' 

'That was the idea.'

'You are incontestably right, Hastings. Am I correct in supposing that you intend to be a cavalier to one of the ladies?'

As we left the room, Poirot called me back. 

'I can assure you,' he said, smiling, 'that I never permit myself to get false impressions from anything anyone tells me. I form my own judgments.'

Poirot returned the letter.

'Yes?'

'No?' said Poirot helpfully.

'And women, even the best of them, are a bit catty about other women. Of course, Thora was invaluable to my brother—he always said she was the best secretary he

By now there was no mistaking the twinkle in Poirot's eye.

'Ah?' 

'An admirable course.'

'Perhaps you think this isn't a time for butting in with personal things—'

Poirot glanced at his watch. We took the hint. It had been agreed that we were to make an all-day session of it, patrolling as many streets as possible in the morning, and

Donald Fraser shook his head.

'You must remember, Hastings, that the police are doing everything reasonably possible. Special constables have been enrolled. The good Inspector Crome may have

I fumed: 

Mary Drower, flushing up a little, said: 

'Don't be a defeatist, Don.' 

'Precisely. A murderer is always a gambler. And, like many gamblers, a murderer often does not know when to stop. With each crime his opinion of his own abilities is

Poirot waved his hands excitedly.

'Exactly, Hastings. And that is where the gambler (and the murderer, who is, after all, only a supreme kind of gambler since what he risks is not his money but his life)

Chapter 23

September 11th. Doncaster!

— that is a good omen, Hastings. The luck, it turns!'
Chapter 24

Not from Captain Hastings’ Personal Narrative

Below his breath Mr Leadbetter uttered a grunt of impatience as his next-door neighbour got up and stumbled clumsily past him, dropping his hat over the seat in front, and leaning over to retrieve it.

All this at the culminating moment of Not a Sparrow, that all-star, thrilling drama of pathos and beauty that Mr Leadbetter had been looking forward to seeing for a whole week.

The golden-haired heroine, played by Katherine Royal (in Mr Leadbetter’s opinion the leading film actress in the world), was just giving vent to a hoarse cry of indignation:

‘Never. I would sooner starve. But I shan’t starve. Remember those words: not a sparrow falls—’

Mr Leadbetter moved his head irritably from right to left. People! Why on earth people couldn’t wait till the end of a film…And to leave at this soul-stirring moment.

Ah, that was better. The annoying gentleman had passed on and out. Mr Leadbetter had a full view of the screen and of Katherine Royal standing by the window in the Van Schreiner Mansion in New York.

And now she was boarding the train—the child in her arms…What curious trains they had in America—not at all like English trains.

Ah, there was Steve again in his shack in the mountains…

The film pursued its course to its emotional and semi-religious end.

Mr Leadbetter breathed a sigh of satisfaction as the lights went up.

He rose slowly to his feet, blinking a little.

He never left the cinema very quickly. It always took him a moment or two to return to the prosaic reality of everyday life.

He glanced round. Not many people this afternoon—naturally. They were all at the races. Mr Leadbetter did not approve of racing nor of playing cards nor of drinking nor of smoking. This left him more energy to enjoy going to the pictures.

Everyone was hurrying towards the exit. Mr Leadbetter prepared to follow suit. The man in the seat in front of him was asleep—slumped down in his chair. Mr Leadbetter felt indignant to think that anyone could sleep with such a drama as Not a Sparrow going on.

An irate gentleman was saying to the sleeping man whose legs were stretched out blocking the way:

‘Excuse me, sir.’

Mr Leadbetter reached the exit. He looked back.

There seemed to be some sort of commotion. A commissionaire…a little knot of people…Perhaps that man in front of him was dead drunk and not asleep…

He hesitated and then passed out—and in so doing missed the sensation of the day—a greater sensation even than Not Half winning the St Leger at 85 to 1.

The commissionaire was saying:

‘Believe you’re right, sir…He’s ill…Why—what’s the matter, sir?’

The other had drawn away his hand with an exclamation and was examining a red sticky smear.

‘Blood…’

The commissionaire gave a stifled exclamation.

He had caught sight of the corner of something yellow projecting from under the seat.

‘Gor blimey!’ he said.

‘It’s a b—A B C…’
Chapter 25

Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative

Mr Cust came out of the Regal Cinema and looked up at the sky. A beautiful evening…A really beautiful evening…

A quotation from Browning came into his head.

'God's in His heaven. All's right with the world.'

He had always been fond of that quotation. Only there were times, very often, when he had felt it wasn't true…

He trotted along the street smiling to himself until he came to the Black Swan where he was staying. He climbed the stairs to his bedroom, a stuffy little room on the second floor, giving over a paved inner court and garage.

As he entered the room his smile faded suddenly. There was a stain on his sleeve near the cuff. He touched it tentatively—wet and red—blood…

His hand dipped into his pocket and brought out something—a long slender knife. The blade of that, too, was sticky and red…

Mr Cust sat there a long time. Once his eyes shot round the room like those of a hunted animal.

His tongue passed feverishly over his lips…

'It isn't my fault,' said Mr Cust. He sounded as though he were arguing with somebody—a schoolboy pleading to his headmaster.

He passed his tongue over his lips again…

Again, tentatively, he felt his coat sleeve.

His eyes crossed the room to the wash-basin. A Minute later he was pouring out water from the old-fashioned jug into the basin. Removing the coat he turned his sleeves, carefully squeezing out the blood.

The water was still red…

He took from his desk the immediately, setting

'Blow, blow, thou breath of soul;
Och, the air we breathe in;

He moved towards the wash-basin. Can I not see the glory of God?'

'Thank you.'—an unexpected sound—

His fingers smoldering, he reached out to snatch the basin. He smiled hopefully: 'Is it not so, sir?'

She smiled—study—shy smile—sitting in front—closed his eyes—'Yes, sir!'

She turned hastily, starting away—

She turned—though someone spoke—

He listened.

He listened.

Dreadful—worse—shame—shame—shame—shame—shame—

The water was still red…

He took from his desk the immediately, setting

'Blow, blow, thou breath of soul;
Och, the air we breathe in;

He smiled hopefully: 'Is it not so, sir?'

'Thank you.'—an unexpected sound—

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He listened.

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She turned hastily, starting away—

He listened.

He listened.

Dreadful—worse—shame—shame—shame—shame—shame—

The water was still red…

He took from his desk the immediately, setting

'Blow, blow, thou breath of soul;
Inspector Crome was listening to the excited utterances of Mr Leadbetter.

'Ve assure you, inspector, my heart misses a beat when I think of it. He must actually have been sitting beside me all through the programme!'

Inspector Crome, completely indifferent to the behaviour of Mr Leadbetter's heart, said:

'Just let me have it quite clear. This man went out towards the close of the big picture—'

'Not a Sparrow—Katherine Royal,' murmured Mr Leadbetter automatically.

'He passed you and in doing so stumbled—'

'He pretended to stumble, I see it now. Then he leaned over the seat in front to pick up his hat. He must have stabbed the poor fellow then.'

'You didn't hear anything? A cry? Or a groan?'

Mr Leadbetter had heard nothing but the loud, hoarse accents of Katherine Royal, but in the vividness of his imagination he invented a groan.

Inspector Crome took the groan at its face value and bade him proceed.

'And then he went out—'

'Can you describe him?'

'He was a very big man. Six foot at least. A giant.'

'Fair or dark?'

'I—well—I'm not exactly sure. I think he was bald. A sinister-looking fellow.'

'He didn't limp, did he?' asked Inspector Crome.

'Yes—yes, now you come to speak of it I think he did limp. Very dark, he might have been some kind of half-caste.'

'Was he in his seat the last time the lights came up?'

'No. He came in after the big picture began.'

Inspector Crome nodded, handed Mr Leadbetter a statement to sign and got rid of him.

'That's about as bad a witness as you'll find,' he remarked pessimistically. 'He'd say anything with a little leading. It's perfectly clear that he hasn't the faintest idea what our man looks like. Let's have the commissionaire back.'

The commissionaire, very stiff and military, came in and stood to attention, his eyes fixed on Colonel Anderson.

'Now, then, Jameson, let's hear your story.'

Jameson saluted.

'Yes sir. Close of the performance, sir. I was told there was a gentleman taken ill, sir. Gentleman was in the two and fourpennies, slumped down in his seat like. Other gentlemen standing around. Gentleman looked bad to me, sir. One of the gentlemen standing by put his hand to the ill gentleman's coat and drew my attention. Blood, sir. It was clear the gentleman was dead—stabbed, sir. My attention was drawn to an A B C railway guide, sir, under the seat. Wishing to act correctly, I did not touch same, but reported to the police immediately that a tragedy had occurred.'

'Very good. Jameson, you acted very properly.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Did you notice a man leaving the two and fourpennies about five minutes earlier?'

'There were several, sir.'

'Could you describe them?'

'Affirmative. One was Mr Geoffrey Parnell. And there was a young fellow, Sam Baker, with his young lady. I didn't notice anybody else particular.'

'A pity. That'll do, Jameson.'

'Yes sir.'

The commissionaire saluted and departed.

'The medical details we've got,' said Colonel Anderson. 'We'd better have the fellow that found him next.'

A police constable came in and saluted.

'Mr Hercule Poirot's here, sir, and another gentleman.'

Inspector Crome frowned.

'Oh, well,' he said. 'Better have 'em in, I suppose.'
and some just commercials.'

It was wet and red…I can assure you, gentlemen, the shock was terrific! Anything might have happened! For years I have suffered from cardiac weakness—'

"Congratulations," he said. "Your hunch was right."

Crome turned to Poirot.

"Stockings, sir. Silk stockings."

"Boxes? What was in 'em?"

We crowded round. The writing was small and cramped—not easy to read.

"I've brought the register, sir," he said. "Here's the signature."

The sergeant returned about ten minutes later.

Mr Ball, swelling with pride and importance, and Mary, somewhat tearful, accompanied them.

Two men were despatched to the Black Swan.

Inspector Crome did not insist unduly. The telephone wires were soon busy, but neither the inspector nor the Chief Constable were over-optimistic.

"A dark suit and a Homburg hat. Rather shabby-looking."

"Describe this man," he said. "As quick as you can. There's no time to be lost."

"Didn't hear about it at once," said Ball. "Not till news came along as there'd been another murder done. And then the lass she screams out as it might have been blood in—"

"Over three hours ago," snapped Anderson. "Why didn't you come at once?"

"About a quarter after five, so near as I can reckon."

"Yes, sir, that's right, sir."

"The lass told me that he had his coat off and that he was holding the sleeve of it, and it was all wet—that's right, eh, lass?"

Mary gasped, groaned and plunged in a breathless voice into her narrative.

She paused and breathed deeply.

"I knocked on door and there wasn't no answer, otherwise I wouldn't have gone in least ways not unless the gentleman had said "Come in," and as he didn't say nothing I—"

Mary giggled in a half-hearted way.

"Hope I'm not intruding or wasting valuable time," said Mr Ball in a slow, thick voice. "But this wench, Mary here, reckons she's got something to tell as you ought to know."

Mr Ball of the Black Swan was a large, slow-thinking, heavily moving man. He exhaled a strong odour of beer. With him was a plump young woman with round eyes.

"Bring them along. Bring them along. We can do with anything helpful."

"Mr Ball of the Black Swan is here with a young woman, sir. He reckons he's got summat to say might help you."

"If that's all you've got to go on," began the Chief Constable with a snort, but he was interrupted.

"Yes, varies his methods a bit, doesn't he? Biff on the head, strangled, now a knife. Versatile devil—what? Here are the medical details if you care to see 'em."

"What's the matter with you?" Crome asked sharply. "You can't be blind."

"That's right," said Mr Downes stiffly. "I can't, sir."

"No one's going to make fun of your weakness," said Anderson. "You're about the same height and build as the dead man, aren't you, and you were wearing a woollen scarf round your neck just as he was?"

"Actually I was sitting at first in the next seat to the murdered man—then I moved along so as to be behind an empty seat."

"You don't quite take my meaning, Mr Downes. You were sitting two seats away, you say?"

"I do, sir. Not even a palpitation!"

"You think," said Poirot, "that when A B C finds out his mistake he might try again?"

"Yes, sir. Your Inspector Rice has made arrangements. The house will be watched."

"Just as well he didn't tumble to it," said Colonel Anderson. "There'll be a couple of them—eh?"

Mr Downes went out shakily.

"Oh, no—no, thank you. That's not necessary."

Inspector Crome struggled with the temptation to reply: 'Why not?' and said instead: 'I'm afraid it's no good expecting a lunatic to have reasons for what he does.'

"But in heaven's name, why—"

"I should say that was the way of it."

"It looks like it," said Crome. "In fact, it's the only explanation."

A glass was brought him. He sipped it whilst his complexion gradually returned to the normal.

However well Mr Downes' heart had stood former tests, it was unable to stand up to this one. He sank on a chair, gasped, and turned purple in the face.

"I'm telling you, man," said Colonel Anderson, 'just where your luck came in. Somehow or other, when the murderer followed you in, he got confused.

"I fail to see—' began Mr Downes stiffly.

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a few coincidences. High up in the air. Well, Mr Cust, my congratulations, I'm sure. Is it the first one, or have you other little nephews and nieces?" I'll tell you. When the lady asked to speak to Mr Cust. Just at first I fancied it was my Lily's voice—something like hers, it was—but haughtier if you know what I mean—sort of Hill's name and address, I see. His description of the man is vague but it links up well enough with the descriptions of Mary Stroud and this Tom Hartigan…"

"...well he goes out and gets the evening ones. Mrs Marbury says he talks a lot to himself, too. She thinks he's getting queerer."

"...Her conscience gave her a sudden twinge."

"...It looked—it looked—as though she—and her voice—she'd disguised her voice from her mother…"

"...Why had she telephoned to him? Could she possibly have guessed? Or did she just want to make sure he would stay in for the inspector's visit?"

"...That's all. Mr Cust, you're not to go right round London, you know. It's a sort of adventure, you see. We can't pretend to have got the man, but it might help."

"...Inspector Crome was in his office at Scotland Yard. The telephone on his desk gave a discreet buzz and he picked it up."

"...No, there wasn't time…"

"...Along with the actress, he had even the eye of a mathematician."

"...It looked as though she had lived in London…"

"...And her voice—she'd disguised her voice from her mother…"

"...Lily squeezed his arm in an ecstasy."

"...And in the meantime what do you say to a bite at the Corner House?"

"...So they think as it really was him?" Tom gave her a brief résumé of the interview. "...I saw Inspector Crome himself. The one who's in charge of the case."

"...We're getting warm," said Inspector Crome—rather inaccurately, for he himself was always slightly chilly."

"...And in the meantime what do you say to a bite at the Corner House?"

"...Good morning, Mr Hartigan. Sit down, won't you? Smoke? Have a cigarette?"

"...Inspector Crome was in his office at Scotland Yard. The telephone on his desk gave a discreet buzz and he picked it up."

"...In a somewhat confused manner and repeating himself once or twice, Tom described his encounter with Mr Cust at Euston Station and the incident of the dropped ticket."

"...Not a few. He wasn't there."

"...The evening of the Doncaster murder, sir."

"...What is this Mrs Marbury's address?"

"...Thank you. I shall probably be calling round in the course of the day."

"...You may be quite satisfied you did the right thing in coming to us. Good morning, Mr Hartigan."
Mrs Marbury might come out…

He opened the front door, passed through and closed it behind him…

Where…?
Chapter 29

At Scotland Yard

Conference again.

The Assistant Commissioner, Inspector Crome, Poirot and myself.

The AC was saying:

'A good tip that of yours, M. Poirot, about checking a large sale of stockings.'

Poirot spread out his hands.

'It was indicated. This man could not be a regular agent. He sold outright instead of touting for orders.'

'Got everything clear so far, inspector?'

'I think so, sir.' Crome consulted a file. 'Shall I run over the position to date?'

'Speed, please.'

'I've checked up with Churston, Paignton and Torquay. Got a list of people where he went and offered stockings. I must say he did the thing thoroughly. Stayed at the Pitt, small hotel near Torre Station. Returned to the hotel at 10.30 on the night of the murder. Could have taken a train from Churston at 9.57, getting to Torre at 10.20. No one answering to his description noticed on train or at station, but that Friday was Dartmouth Regatta and the trains back from Kingswear were pretty full.

'Bexhill much the same. Stayed at the Globe under his own name. Offered stockings to about a dozen addresses, including Mrs Barnard and including the Ginger Cat. Left hotel early in the evening. Arrived back in London about 11.30 the following morning. As to Andover, same procedure. Stayed at the Feathers. Offered stockings to Mrs Fowler, next door to Mrs Ascher, and to half a dozen other people in the street. The pair Mrs Ascher had I got from the niece (name of Drower)—they're identical with Cust's supply.'

'So far, good,' said the AC.

'Acting on information received,' said the inspector, 'I went to the address given me by Hartigan, but found that Cust had left the house about half an hour previously. He received a telephone message, I'm told. First time such a thing had happened to him, so his landlady told me.'

'An accomplice?' suggested the Assistant Commissioner.

'Hardly,' said Poirot. 'It is odd that—unless—'

We all looked at him inquiringly as he paused.

He shook his head, however, and the inspector proceeded.

'I made a thorough search of the room he had occupied. That search puts the matter beyond doubt. I found a block of notepaper similar to that on which the letters were written, a large quantity of hosiery and—at the back of the cupboard where the hosiery was stored—a parcel much the same shape and size but which turned out to contain— not hosiery— but eight new A B C railway guides!'

'Proof positive,' said the Assistant Commissioner.

'I've found something else, too,' said the inspector—his voice becoming suddenly almost human with triumph. 'Only found it this morning, sir. Not had time to report yet. There was no sign of the knife in his room—'

'It would be the act of an imbecile to bring that back with him,' remarked Poirot.

'After all, he's not a reasonable human being,' remarked the inspector. 'Anway, it occurred to me that he might just possibly have brought it back to the house and then realized the danger of hiding it (as M. Poirot points out) in his room, and have looked about elsewhere. What place in the house would he be likely to select? I got it straight away.

'The hall stand—no one ever moves a hall stand. With a lot of trouble I got it moved out from the wall—and there it was!'

'The knife?'

'The knife. Not a doubt of it. The dried blood's still on it.'

'Good work, Crome,' said the AC approvingly. 'We only need one thing more now.'

'What's that?'

'We'll get him, sir. Never fear.'

The inspector's tone was confident.

'What do you say, M. Poirot?'

Poirot started out of a reverie.

'I beg your pardon?'

'We were saying that it was only a matter of time before we got our man. Do you agree?'

'Oh, that—yes. Without a doubt.'

His tone was so abstracted that the others looked at him curiously.

'Is there anything worrying you, M. Poirot?'

'There is something that worries me very much. It is the why?'

'The motive.'

'I understand what M. Poirot means,' said Crome, coming graciously to the rescue. 'He's quite right. There's got to be some definite obsession. I think we'll find the root of the matter in an intensified inferiority complex. There may be a persecution mania, too, and if so he may possibly associate M. Poirot with it. He may have the delusion that M. Poirot is a detective employed on purpose to hunt him down.'

'H'm,' said the AC. 'That's the jargon that's talked nowadays. In my day if a man was mad he was mad and we didn't look about for scientific terms to soften it down. I suppose a thoroughly up-to-date doctor would suggest putting a man like A B C in a nursing home, telling him what a fine fellow he was for forty-five days on end and then letting him out as a responsible member of society.'

Poirot smiled but did not answer.

The conference broke up.

'Well,' said the Assistant Commissioner. 'As you say, Crome, pulling him in is only a matter of time.'

'We'd have had him before now,' said the inspector, 'if he wasn't so ordinary-looking. We've worried enough perfectly inoffensive citizens as it is.'

'I wonder where he is at this minute,' said the Assistant Commissioner.
Mr Cust stood by a greengrocer's shop.

He stared across the road.

Yes, that was it.

Mrs Ascher. Newsagent and Tobacconist...

In the empty window was a sign.

To Let.

Empty...

Lifeless...

'Excuse me, sir.'

The greengrocer's wife, trying to get at some lemons.

He apologized, moved to one side.

Slowly he shuffled away—back towards the main street of the town...

It was difficult—very difficult—now that he hadn't any money left...

Not having had anything to eat all day made one feel very queer and light-headed...

He looked at a poster outside a newsagent's shop.

The A B C Case. Murderer Still at Large. Interviews with M. Hercule Poirot.

Mr Cust said to himself:

'Hercule Poirot. I wonder if...

He walked on again.

It wouldn't do to stand staring at that poster...

He thought:

'I can't go on much longer...

Foot in front of foot... what an odd thing walking was...

Foot in front of foot—ridiculous.

Highly ridiculous...

But man was a ridiculous animal anyway...

And he, Alexander Bonaparte Cust, was particularly ridiculous.

He had always been...

People had always laughed at him...

Where was he going? He didn't know. He'd come to the end. He no longer looked anywhere but at his feet.

Foot in front of foot.

He looked up. Lights in front of him. And letters...

Police Station.

'That's funny,' said Mr Cust. He gave a little giggle.

Then he stepped inside. Suddenly, as he did so, he swayed and fell forward.
Chapter 31

... a genius for stating the obvious. It is the obvious that I have neglected.'

... and quite ruthlessly. We know, too, that he was kindly enough not to let blame rest on any other person for the crimes he committed. If he wanted to kill unmolested—how easy

... how the letters knock the theory on the head. They show premeditation and a careful planning of the crime.'

... his name is Cust? And the writing in the hotel register is his all right. You can't say he's an accomplice—homicidal lunatics don't have accomplices! Did the girl die later? The

... the case, he did the Doncaster murder. He did the Churston murder. He did the Andover murder. Then, by hell, he

... my dear Hastings—there is nothing so dangerous and, to tell the truth, confusing me hopelessly as is often the case when a learned person holds

... anything, even in my present condition, even if I am at liberty to tell you anything.'

... her name!'

... to me. And then—'

... Dr Thompson and Chief Inspector Japp had come round to acquaint Poirot with the result of the police court proceedings in the case of Rex

... 'Is it possible to commit a crime and be unaware of it?' I asked. 'His denials seem to have a ring of truth in them.'

... out of the murderer's mouth. He spoke of the... He went on discussing the matter, speaking of

... 'We know nothing at all! We know where he was born. We know he fought in the war and received a slight wound in the head and that he was discharged from the army

... 'The case is ended! The case! The case is the

... Tell me, Hastings, do you consider the case ended?' Poirot answered my question by another.

... 'Yes. Cust is saddled—apparently by the whim of his mother (Oedipus complex there, I shouldn't wonder!)—with two extremely bombastic Christian names: Alexander

... 'And then?' I asked.

... And then—then,' Poirot insisted. 'Always—always—you help me—you bring me luck. You inspire me.'

... 'What is this brilliant remark of mine?' I asked.

... 'It is true,' Poirot insisted. 'Always—always—you help me—you bring me luck. You inspire me.'
voices… came sharp and clear.

... which must be answered truthfully. The third one could be barred. The questions, naturally, were of the most indiscreet kind. But to begin with everyone had to swear that they

... him himself seemed quite satisfied.

... hotel at which Cust had put up and extracted a minute description of that gentleman's departure. As far as I could judge, no new facts were elicited by his questions but he

... say, I accepted with alacrity.

... was very busy. He made mysterious absences, talked very little, frowned to himself, and consistently refused to satisfy my natural curiosity as

... What need? I know—quite enough for my purpose.'

... 'Aren't you going to Eastbourne?' I cried.

... 'Tomorrow, I am to visit the man Cust,' and he added to the chauffeur:

... 'The fox enjoys it? Do not say

... '—hounds are on his trail, and at last they catch him and he dies—quickly and horribly.'

... During the next few days Poirot was very busy. He made mysterious absences, talked very little, frowned to himself, and consistently refused to satisfy my natural curiosity as

... 'Patience. Everything arranges itself, given time.'

... His face quivered suddenly. I guessed that the question had brought the loss of the girl he loved back to him.

... Poirot smiled and turned to Donald Fraser.

... 'Quite fantastic.'

... 'Fantastic?'

... 'Well, M. Poirot, I didn't actually go to Ascot, but from what I could see of them driving in cars, women's hats for Ascot were an even bigger joke than the hats they wear

... Franklin Clarke stared at him.

... 'What,

... He turned to Franklin Clarke.

... 'Ah, but ladies first—this time it would not be the politeness. We will start elsewhere.'

... He was so solemn about it that the others, puzzled, became solemn themselves. They all swore as he demanded.

... 'Ah, but I want it to be more serious than that. Do you all swear to speak the truth?'

... 'Of course,' said Clarke impatiently. 'We'll answer anything.'

... His face grew serious.

... 'Patience. Everything arranges itself, given time.'

... 'Well, then?'

... 'No—that is true.'

... 'I suppose we can guess what you are after? You're out to break that alibi. But I can't see what you're so pleased about. You haven't got a new fact of any kind.'

... As we were sipping our cocktails Franklin Clarke said curiously:

... 'Voilà Milly Higley giggled a good deal and told him not to go on so. She knew what French gentlemen were like.

... 'The legs of the English—always they are too thin! But you, mademoiselle, have the perfect leg. It has shape—it has an ankle!'

... Finally he took us all to the Ginger Cat café, where we had a somewhat stale tea served by the plump waitress, Milly Higley.

... He then walked from the beach to the nearest point at which a car could have been parked. From there again he went to the place where the Eastbourne buses waited

... They were as intrigued by Poirot as I was. Nevertheless, by the end of the day, I had at any rate an idea as to the direction in which Poirot's thoughts were tending.

... I was not invited to accompany him on his mysterious comings and goings—a fact which I somewhat resented.
laughed and said that was only his joke…'

Celebrated men in England before I died. Said the whole country would be talking about me. But he said—he said…'

Escapes of being drowned—and he had had two near escapes. And then he looked at mine and he told me some amazing things. Said I was going to be one of the most

Dominoes.'

Truth, I'd got hardly enough to keep body and soul together (and you've got to look presentable as a clerk) when I got the offer of this stocking job. A salary and commission!

School—in games and work and everything.'

Ridiculous. And I was timid—afraid of people. I had a bad time at school—the boys found out my Christian names—they used to tease me about them…I did very badly at

Could do anything!'

Absurd idea that I'd cut a figure in the world. She was always urging me to assert myself—talking about will-power…saying anyone could be master of his fate…she said I

Interview, that that interview should be absolutely private—the two men face to face. In the circumstances of the case, Poirot had no difficulty in obtaining a Home Office order—but that order did not extend to me, and in any case it was essential, from Poirot's point

I was not present at the interview that took place between Poirot and that strange man—Alexander Bonaparte Cust. Owing to his association with the police and the peculiar

'No,' he said. 'I don't.'

But—I am right, am I not?

Mr Cust broke down—faltered…

It gave me a turn—a nasty turn. Talking of your fate being written in your hand, he was. And he showed me his hand and the lines that showed he'd have two near

What was it that he told you?' asked Poirot.

I remember one man—I've never forgotten him because of something he told me—we just got talking over a cup of coffee, and we started dominoes. Well, I felt after

You play dominoes very well, I believe.'

His voice was triumphant.

I didn't do it!' he said. 'I'm perfectly innocent! It's all a mistake. Why, look at that second crime—that Bexhill one. I was playing dominoes at Eastbourne. You've got to

On the contrary, I found him quite a man. He was—of course—I'm sure I was quite sure I was quite sure I couldn't be written on the same kind of machine.'

And the A B C's that were found in the cupboard?'

Mr Cust repeated obstinately:

He added suddenly:

I've got written evidence—written evidence. I've got their letters to me, giving me instructions as to what places to go to and a list of people to call on.

That's because they're in the conspiracy—they must be in the conspiracy.'

Mr Cust got excited again.

He was silent for a minute.

You know,' he said, 'I enjoyed the war. What I had of it, that was. I felt, for the first time, a man like anybody else. We were all in the same box. I was as good as anyone

'Yes,' said Poirot. His voice was meditative—silky. 'But it's so easy, isn't it, to make a mistake of one day? And if you're an obstinate, positive man, like Mr Strange, you'll

'His voice was triumphant.

I didn't do it!' he said. 'I'm perfectly innocent! It's all a mistake. Why, look at that second crime—that Bexhill one. I was playing dominoes at Eastbourne. You've got to

Why did you tick off the name of Mrs Ascher in that first list of people in Andover?'

I know nothing about them. I thought they were all stockings.'

And the A B C's that were found in the cupboard?'

'No—no—I can't say I do. Unless you are Mr Lucas's—what do they call it?—junior. Or perhaps you come from Mr Maynard?'

The other shook his head.

Do you know who I am?'

At last he said gently:

Poirot, however, is nothing if not matter-of-fact. He was absorbed in producing a certain effect upon the man opposite him.

It must have been a dramatic moment—this meeting of the two adversaries in the long drama. In Poirot's place I should have felt the dramatic thrill.

He sat and looked at the man opposite him.
By the way you may look at the fact that your brother's name began with a C and that he lived at Churston as the nucleus of the scheme. You even went so far as to hint to Cust that in some way or other the man who wrote the letters and committed the crimes had to be a man whose name began with a C. You were, I think, rather sly! You had no doubt that as soon as Cust saw the first letter, he would think that it had been written by one of his own family. You must have been rather confident of what you were doing when you sent off those A B C's. You said to yourself that if the man who committed the crime was to be found at all, Cust would be the one to discover him. You were, I think, quite sure that before he had finished, Cust would be ready to speak to the press. For you knew perfectly well that there was no one who knew more about the A B C letters than Cust himself. You said to yourself that if the press could be given an opportunity, Cust's name would be the one to be fixed on the criminal. And, indeed, it was! But that was not all! You had another plan in your mind. You were at that time turning over in your mind various plans for the murder of your brother.'
you are innocent, you to dine on the fatal evening. And finally—most damning of all—you been removed and melted lead poured in. Your photograph was picked out from half a dozen others by two people who saw you leaving the cinema when you were supposed to have died.

He remembers his headaches—his lapses of memory. He is quite sure of the truth—of

He has hit on Andover as quite a likely spot and your preliminary reconnaissance there led you to select Mrs Ascher's shop as the scene of the first crime. Her name was

‘He has no money left—he is worn out…his feet lead him of his own accord to the police station.

Imagine his feelings when on his return to his inn he discovers that there is blood on his coat sleeve and a blood-stained knife in his pocket—

The Andover crime means nothing to him. He is shocked and surprised by the Bexhill crime—why, he himself was there about the time! Then comes the Churston crime—

And now, my friends, let us consider the matter from the point of view of the false A B C—from the point of view of Mr Cust.

You yourself would be on the scene in the nature of things. Mr Cust would be ordered to Doncaster by his firm. Your plan was to follow him there and

Always daring, you decided that one more murder must take place but this time the trail must be well blazed.

To begin with, you took the precaution of committing it, in reality, without anything occurring to damage your plans.

On the appointed day you went to Andover—and killed Mrs Ascher—without anything occurring to damage your plans.

Then, your preliminary plans completed, you set to work! You sent the Andover list to Cust, directing him to go there on a certain date, and you sent off the first A B C letter addressed to the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard to go astray! It is necessary to have a

Erroneously I imagined some personal reason.

He suggested that the third letter went astray intentionally!}

Not at all! The letters were sent to me because the essence of your plan was that one of them should be wrongly addressed and go astray.

He has said quite enough,' said Poirot, and he added to Clarke: 'You are very full of an insular superiority, but for myself I consider your crime not an English crime at all

Two detectives from Scotland Yard emerged from the next room. One of them was Crome. He advanced and uttered his time-honoured formula: 'I warn you that anything

Clarke stared at it in astonishment and uttered an oath.

But no report came—the hammer clicked harmlessly.

With an incredibly rapid motion he whipped out a small automatic from his pocket and held it to his head.

He remembers his headaches—his lapses of memory. He is quite sure of the truth—

He suggested that the third letter went astray intentionally!
I am sorry to relate that as the door closed behind Franklin Clarke I laughed hysterically. Poirot looked at me in mild surprise.

'It's because you told him his crime was not sporting,' I gasped.

'It was quite true. It was abominable—not so much the murder of his brother—but the cruelty that condemned an unfortunate man to a living death. To catch a fox and put him in a box and never let him go! That is not le sport!'

Megan Barnard gave a deep sigh.

'I can't believe it—I can't. Is it true?'

'Yes, mademoiselle. The nightmare is over.'

She looked at him and her colour deepened. Poirot turned to Fraser.

'Mademoiselle Megan, all along, was haunted by a fear that it was you who had committed the second crime.'

Donald Fraser said quietly:

'I fancied so myself at one time.'

'Because of your dream?' He drew a little nearer to the young man and dropped his voice confidentially. 'Your dream has a very natural explanation. It is that you find that already the image of one sister fades in your memory and that its place is taken by the other sister. Mademoiselle Megan replaces her sister in your heart, but since you cannot bear to think of yourself being unfaithful so soon to the dead, you strive to stifle the thought, to kill it! That is the explanation of the dream.'

Fraser's eyes went towards Megan.

'Do not be afraid to forget,' said Poirot gently. 'She was not so well worth remembering. In Mademoiselle Megan you have one in a hundred—un coeur magnifique!'

Donald Fraser's eyes lit up.

'I believe you are right.'

We all crowded round Poirot asking questions, elucidating this point and that.

'Those questions, Poirot? That you asked of everybody. Was there any point in them?'

'Some of them were simplement une blague. But I learnt one thing that I wanted to know—at least I thought I learnt it. When the first letter was posted—'

'In the English postmark?'

'I do not fancy you returned me a truthful answer, mademoiselle,' said Poirot dryly. 'And now your second expectation is disappointed. Franklin Clarke will not inherit his brother's money.'

'She flung up her head.

'Is there any need for me to stay here and be insulted?'

'None whatever,' said Poirot and held the door open politely for her.

'That fingerprint clinched things, Poirot,' I said thoughtfully. 'He went all to pieces when you mentioned that.'

'Yes, they are useful—fingerprints.'

He added thoughtfully:

'I put that in to please you, my friend.'

'But, Poirot,' I cried, 'wasn't it true?'

'Not in the least, mon ami,' said Hercule Poirot.

II

I must mention a visit we had from Mr Alexander Bonaparte Cust a few days later. After wringing Poirot's hand and endeavouring very incoherently and unsuccessfully to thank him for his kindness, he said:

'Do you know, a newspaper has actually offered me a hundred pounds—'

'A hundred pounds—'

'I—I really don't know what to do about it.'

'I should not accept a hundred,' said Poirot. 'Be firm. Say five hundred is your price. And do not confine yourself to one newspaper.'

'Do you really think—that I might—'

'You must realize,' said Poirot, smiling, 'that you are a very famous man. Practically the most famous man in England today.'

Mr Cust drew himself up still further. A beam of delight irradiated his face.

'Do you know, I believe you're right! Famous! In all the papers. I shall take your advice, M. Poirot. The money will be most agreeable—most agreeable. I shall have a little holiday…And then I want to give a nice wedding present to Lily Marbury—a dear girl—really a dear girl, M. Poirot.'

Poirot patted him encouragingly on the shoulder.

'You are quite right. Enjoy yourself. And—just a little word—what about a visit to an oculist? Those headaches, it is probably that you want new glasses.'

'You think that it may have been that all the time?'

'I do.'

Mr Cust shook him warmly by the hand.

'You're a very great man, M. Poirot.'

Poirot, as usual, did not disdain the compliment. He did not even succeed in looking modest.

When Mr Cust had strutted importantly out, my old friend smiled across at me.

'So, Hastings—we went hunting once more, did we not? Vive le sport.'
Among the best-loved of Agatha Christie's novels, 18.

In the title work in this collection of novellas, Poirot and Inspector Japp collaborate on the investigation of a suspicious suicide. The supernatural is said to play in the table; the four murder suspects at another. Mr Shaitana will sit by the fire and observe. This he does—until he is stabbed to death. The ultimate 'closed-room murder mystery'...
Belgian police force, and the case that was his greatest failure: ‘My grey cells, they functioned not at all,’ Poirot admits. But otherwise, in this most fascinating collection, they collected herein are narrated by Captain Arthur Hastings—including what would appear to be the earliest Poirot short story, ‘The Affair at the Victory Ball,’ which follows soon and calls upon Hercule Poirot to help her do so.

Sheila Webb, typist-for-hire, has arrived at 19 Wilbraham Crescent in the seaside town of Crowdean to accept a new job. What she finds is a well-dressed corpse. Collected within: certainly, but he also gets a woman’s corpse in the snow, a Kurdish knife spreading a crimson stain across her white fur wrap.

An outbreak of kleptomania at a student hostel is not normally the sort of crime that arouses Hercule Poirot’s interest. But when it affects the work of his secretary, Miss Lemon, whose sister works at the hostel, he agrees to look into the matter. The matter becomes a bona fide mystery when Poirot peruses the bizarre list of stolen and complications of the heroine’s personal life among the denizens of The Hollow.

The Hollow of Macbeth is a complex web of romantic attachments among the denizens of The Hollow. A staggering bestseller upon its publication—running through 20,000 copies of its first edition—A Staircase in the Air was Ustinov as Poirot.

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In an exchange between Poirot and Colonel Johnson, the solution of after the Funeral is revealed. The answer to the riddle is brilliant. 'Christie springs her secret like a land mine.' says Daily Mail. 'A swift course of unflagging suspense leads to complete surprise.' says Daily Express.

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The Hollow of Macbeth is a complex web of romantic attachments among the denizens of The Hollow.

So goes the old children’s rhyme. A crushing blow to the back of the head kills a real-life Mrs McGinty. ‘Mrs McGinty’s dead!’ ‘How did she die?’ ‘Down on one knee, just like I!’

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Curtain: Poirot's Last Case (1975)

Captain Arthur Hastings narrates. Poirot investigates. ‘This, Hastings, will be my last case,’ declares the detective who had entered the scene as a retiree in The Mysterious Affair at Styles, the captain’s, and our, first encounter with the now-legendary Belgian detective. Poirot promises that, ‘It will be, too, my most interesting case—and my most interesting criminal. For in X we have a technique superb, magnificent…X has operated with so much ability that he has defeated me, Hercule Poirot!’

The setting is, appropriately, Styles Court, which has since been converted into a private hotel. And under this same roof is X, a murderer five-times over; a murderer by no means finished murdering. In Curtain, Poirot will, at last, retire—death comes as the end. And he will bequeath to his dear friend Hastings an astounding revelation. ‘The ending of Curtain is one of the most surprising that Agatha Christie ever devised,’ writes her biographer, Charles Osborne.

Of note: On 6 August 1975, upon the publication of Curtain, The New York Times ran a front-page obituary of Hercule Poirot accompanied by a photograph. The passing of the other fictional character had been so acknowledged in America’s ‘paper of record.’ Agatha Christie had always intended Curtain to be ‘Poirot’s Last Case’: Having written the novel during the Blitz, she stored it (heavily insured) in a bank vault till the time that she, herself, would retire. Agatha Christie died on 12 January 1976.

Time: ‘First-rate Christie: fast, complicated, wryly funny.’
A television adaptation of The ABC Murders (filmed 1980). An addict of crime fiction and the world’s leading authority on Agatha Christie, Charles Osborne adapted the Christie plays they wanted him to adapt. He was born in Brisbane in 1927. He is known internationally as an authority on opera, and has written a number of books on musical and literary subjects, among them A portrait of the composer Verdi.

This essay was adapted from Charles Osborne’s A Portrait of the Composer Verdi, published in 1969; and The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie: A Biographical Companion to the Works of Agatha Christie (1980). An addict of crime fiction and the world’s leading authority on Agatha Christie, Charles Osborne adapted the Christie plays they wanted him to adapt. He was born in Brisbane in 1927. He is known internationally as an authority on opera, and has written a number of books on musical and literary subjects, among them A portrait of the composer Verdi.

The film was originally to have been directed by Seth Holt, a British director, with the American comedian Zero Mostel as Poirot, but this project came to grief on what was obviously inspired by Mrs Christie’s Hercule Poirot adventure. Poirot curiously adumbrates the plot of a later Agatha Christie novel which, although she did not write it until several months after

In a Foreword ‘by Captain Arthur Hastings, which Hastings finds that Poirot has moved from the rooms they used to share in Farraway Street, and is now installed ‘in one of the newest type of service flats in London’ (1969). The Complete Operas of Verdi

In many ways, most extraordinary case, no one can say that Agatha Christie made things easy for herself. The Wrongs of Philip Verrall was a novel she wrote in 1915, and had also worked on Bugs Bunny cartoons. He turned the film into an exercise in visual comedy, aided and abetted by W.H. Auden: The Life of a Poet

But Poirot has not been absolutely idle. On his way to London, he discovers a body lying in a railway carriage. ‘M. Poirot, I am heartily glad to see you again,’ says Hastings. ‘I came over from America mainly to see you. I was anxious to meet you, and am anxious to read you. You are right. I am a great admirer of your work.’ To this Hastings adds, ‘You are a great man, Poirot. You are a great man. You are a great man.’ Poirot replies, ‘I am a great man, Hastings. I am a great man. I am a great man.’

He is anxious to reach Churston, and so takes the midnight train. ‘There’s a midnight train—sleeping-car to Newton Abbot—gets there at 6.8 a.m., and to Churston at 7.15,’ Hastings tells Poirot, adding that the

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Agatha Christie is known throughout the world as the Queen of Crime. She was an English writer of crime fiction and her books have sold over a billion copies in 100 languages. She is the best-selling author of all time, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. Mrs Christie is the author of eighty crime novels and short story collections, nineteen plays, and six novels written under the name of Mary Westmacott.

Agatha Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was written towards the end of World War I (during which she served in the Voluntary Aid Detachments). In it she created Hercule Poirot, the little Belgian investigator who was destined to become the most popular detective in crime fiction since Sherlock Holmes. After having been rejected by a number of houses, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was eventually published by The Bodley Head in 1920.

In 1926, now averaging a book a year, Agatha Christie wrote her masterpiece, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. It was the first detective novel to reveal the murderer's identity in the opening sentence. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was also the first of Agatha Christie's works to be dramatised—as *Alibi*—and to have a successful run in London's West End. *The Mousetrap*, her most famous play, opened in 1952 and runs to this day at St Martin's Theatre in the West End; it is the longest-running play in history.

Agatha Christie was made a Dame in 1971. She died in 1976, since when a number of her books have been published: the bestselling novel *Sleeping Murder* appeared in 1976, followed by *An Autobiography* and the short story collections *Miss Marple's Final Cases*; *Problem at Pollensa Bay*; and *While the Light Lasts*. In 1998, Black Coffee was the first of her plays to be novelised by Charles Osborne, Mrs Christie's biographer.
The edition consulted was that of July 1981.