

The Majestic Hotel

No seaside town in the south of England is, I think, as attractive as St. Loo. It is well named the Queen of Watering Places and reminds one forcibly of the Riviera. The Cornish coast is to my mind every bit as fascinating as that of the south of France.

I remarked as much to my friend, Hercule Poirot.

"So it said on our menu in the restaurant car yesterday, mon ami. Your remark is not original."

"But don't you agree?"

He was smiling to himself and did not at once answer my question. I repeated it.

"A thousand pardons, Hastings. My thoughts were wandering. Wandering indeed to that part of the world you mentioned just

now.

that I spent there and of the events which occurred."

I remembered. A murder had been committed on the Blue Train, and the mystery a complicated and baffling one had been solved by Poirot with his usual unerring acumen.

"How I wish I had been with you," I said with deep regret.

"I too," said Poirot. "Your experience would have been invaluable to me."

I looked at him sideways. As a result of long habit, I distrust his compliments but he appeared perfectly serious. And after all, why not? I have a very long experience of the methods he employs.

"What I particularly missed was your vivid imagination, Hastings," he went on dreamily.

"One needs a certain amount of light relief. My valet, Georges, an admirable man with whom I sometimes permitted myself to discuss a point, has no imagination whatever."

This remark seemed to me quite irrelevant.

"Tell me, Poirot," I said. "Are you never tempted to renew your activities? This passive life "

"Suits me admirably- rnv frloncl Tn e;t ;,

the sun what could be more channing? To step from your pedestal at the zenith of your fame what could be a grander gesture? They say of me, 'That is Hercule Poirot! the great the unique! There was never anyone like him, there never will be!' Eh bien I am satisfied. I ask no more. I am modest."

I should not myself have used the word modest. It seemed to me that my little friend's egotism had certainly not declined with his years. He leaned back in his chair, caressing his mustache and almost purring with self-satisfaction.

We were sitting on one of the terraces of the Majestic Hotel. It is the biggest hotel in St. Loo and stands in its own grounds on a headland overlooking the sea. The gardens of the hotel lay below us freely interspersed with palm trees. The sea was of a deep and lovely blue, the sky clear and the sun shining with all the single-hearted fervor an August sun should (but in England so often does not) have. There was a vigorous humming of bees, a pleasant sound and altogether nothing could have been more ideal.

We had only arrived last night, and this was the first morning of what we proposed

conditions continued, we should indeed have a perfect holiday.

I picked up the morning paper which had fallen from my hand and resumed my perusal of the morning's news. The political situation seemed unsatisfactory but uninteresting, there was trouble in China, there was a long account of a rumored City swindle but on the whole there was no news of a very thrilling order.

"Curious thing, this parrot disease," I remarked as I turned the sheet.

"Very curious."

"Two more deaths at Leeds, I see."

"Most regrettable."

I turned a page.

"Still no news of that flying fellow, Seton, in his round-the-world flight. Pretty plucky, these fellows. That amphibian machine of his, the Albatross, must be a great invention. Too bad if he's gone west. Not that they've given up hope yet. He may have made one of the Pacific islands."

"The Solomon Islanders are still cannibals, are they not?" inquired Poirot pleasantly.

"Must be a fine fellow. That sort of thing makes one feel it's a good thing to be an

Englishman after all."

"It consoles for the defeats at Wimbledon,"
said Poirot.

"I--I didn't mean," I began.

My friend waved my attempted apology
aside gracefully.

"Me," he announced, "I am not amphibian,
like the machine of the poor Captain
Seton, but I am cosmopolitan. And for the
English I have always had, as you know, a
great admiration. The thorough way, for instance,
in which they read the daily paper."

My attention had strayed to political news.

"They seem to be giving the Home Secretary
a pretty bad time of it," I remarked
with a chuckle.

"The poor man. He has his troubles, that
one. Ah! yes. So much so that he seeks for
help in the most improbable quarters."

I stared at him.

With a slight smile, Poirot drew from his
pocket his morning's correspondence, neatly
secured by a rubber band. From this .he
selected one letter which he tossed across to

me.

"It must have missed us yesterday," he
said.

I read the letter with a pleasurable feeling
of yiternent-

"But, Poirot," I cried. "This is most flattering!"

"You think so, my friend?"

"He speaks in the warmest terms of your ability."

"He is right," said Poirot, modestly averting his eyes.

"He begs you to investigate this matter for him puts it as a personal favor."

"Quite so. It is unnecessary to repeat all this to me. You understand, my dear Hastings, I have read the letter myself."

"It's too bad," I cried. "This will put an end to our holiday."

"No, no, calmez-vous there is no question of that."

"But the Home Secretary says the matter is urgent."

"He may be right or again he may not.

These politicians they are easily excited. I have seen myself, in the Chambre des Deput(s in Paris "

"Yes, yes, but Poirot, surely we ought to be making arrangements? The express to London has gone it leaves at twelve o'clock. The next. "

"Calm yourself, Hastings, calm yourself, I pray of you! Always the excitement, the

tation. We are not going to London today nor yet tomorrow."

"But this summons "

"Does not concern me. I do not belong to your police force, Hastings. I am asked to undertake a case as a private investigator. I refuse."

"You refuse?"

"Certainly. I write with perfect politeness, tender my regrets, my apologies, explain that I am completely desolated but what will you? I have retired I am finished."

"You are not finished," I exclaimed warmly.

Poirot patted my knee.

"There speaks the good friend the faith-ful dog. And you have reason, too. The grey cells, they still function the order, the method it is still there. But when I have retired, my friend, I have retired! It is fin-ished! I am not a stage favorite who gives the world a dozen farewells. In all generosity I say: Let the young men have a chance. They may possibly do something creditable. I doubt it, but they may. Anyway they will do enough for this doubtless tiresome affair of the Home Secretary's."

"But, Poirot, the compliment!"

"M I rn h,ve cnmnliments. The Home

Secretary, being a man of sense, realizes that if he can only obtain my services all will be successful. What will you? He is unlucky. Hercule Poirot has solved his last case."

I looked at him. In my heart of hearts I deplored his obstinacy. The solving of such a case as was indicated might add still further luster to his already world-wide reputation. Nevertheless I could not but admire his unyielding attitude.

Suddenly a thought struck me and I smiled.

"I wonder," I said, "that you are not afraid. Such an emphatic pronouncement will surely tempt the gods."

"Impossible," he replied, "that anyone should shake the decision of Hercule Poirot."
"Impossible, Poirot?"

"You are right, mon ami, one should not use such a word. Eh, ma fo/, I do not say that if a bullet should strike the wall by my head, I would not investigate the matter! One is human after all!"

I smiled. A little pebble had just struck the terrace beside us, and Poirot's fanciful analogy from it tickled my fancy. He stooped now and picked up the pebble as he went

on.

"Yes one is human. One is the .qleenin

dog well and good, but the sleeping dog can be roused. There is a proverb in your language that says so."

"In fact," I said, "if you find a dagger planted by your pillow tomorrow morning

let the criminal who put it there beware!"

He nodded, but rather absently.

Suddenly, to my surprise, he rose and descended the couple of steps that led from the terrace to the garden. As he did so, a girl came into sight hmaTing up toward us.

I had just registered the impression that she was a decidedly pretty girl when my attention was drawn to Poirot who, not look-ing where he was going, had stumbled over a root and fallen heavily. He was just abreast of the girl at the time and she and I between us helped him to his feet. My attention was naturally on my friend, but I was conscious of an impression of dark hair, an impish face and big dark blue eyes.

"A thousand pardons," stammered Poirot.

"Mademoiselle, you are most kind. I regret exceedingly ouch! my foot, he pains me considerably. No, no, it is nothing really the turned ankle, that is all. In a few min-utes all will be well. But if you could help

tween you, it she will be so very kind. I am
ashamed to ask it of her."

With me on the one side and the girl on
the other we soon settled Poirot in a chair on
the terrace. I then suggested fetching a doctor,
but this my friend regretted sharply.

"It is nothing, I tell you. The ankle turned,
that is all. Painful for the moment, but soon

over." He made a grimace. "See in a little
minute I shall have forgotten. Mademoiselle,
I thank you a thousand times. You were
most kind. Sit down, I beg of you."
The girl took a chair.

"It's nothing," she said. "But I wish you
would let it be seen to."

"Mademoiselle, I assure you, it is a bagatelle. In the pleasure of your society the pain
passes already. ..."

The girl laughed.

"That's good,"

"What about a cocktail?" I suggested. "It's
just about the time."

"Well," she hesitated, "thanks very
much."

"Martini?"

"Yes, please dry Martini."

I went off. On my return,
ordered the

girl on her

after having

Clrinks, I found Poirot and the

"Imagine, Hastings," he said, "that house there the one on the point that we have admired so much, it belongs to Mademoiselle here."

"Indeed?" I said though I was unable to recall having expressed any admiration. In fact I had hardly noticed the house. "It looks rather eerie and imposing standing there by itself far from anything."

"It's called End House," said the girl. "I love it but it's a tumble-down old place. Going to rack and rt."

"You are the last of an old family, Made-moiselle?"

"Oh! we're nothing important. But there have been Buckleys here for two or three hundred years. My brother died three years ago, so I'm the last of the family."

"That is sad. You live there alone, Made-moiselle?"

"Oh! I'm away a good deal and when I'm at home there's usually a cheery crowd coming and going."

"That is so modern. Me, I was picturing you in a dark mysterious mansion, haunted by a family curse."

"How marvelous! What a picturesque imagination you must have. No, it's not

one. I've had three escapes from sudden death in as many days so I must bear a charmed life."

Poirot sat up alertly.

"Escapes from death? That sounds inter-esting, Mademoiselle."

"Oh! they weren't very thrilling. Just acci-dents, you know." She jerked her head sharply as a wasp flew past. "Curse these wasps. There must be a nest of them round here."

"The bees and the wasps---you do not like them, Mademoiselle? You have been stung yes?"

"No but I hate the way they come fight past your face."

"The bee in the bonnet," said Poirot, "your English phrase."

At that moment the cocktails arrived. We all held up our glasses and made the usual inane observations.

"I'm due in the hotel for cocktails really," said Miss Buckley. "I expect they're wonder-ing what has become of me."

Poirot cleared his throat and set down his glass.

"Ah! for a cup of good rich chocolate," he

murmured. "But in England they make it

not. Still. in I.nland vnu haxrnrnr

pleasing customs. The young girls, their hats they come on and off so prettily--so eas-ily-'

The girl stared at him.

"What do you mean? Why shouldn't they?"

"You ask that because you are young so young, Mademoiselle. But to me the natural i.ng seems to have a coiffure high and rigid--so--and the hat attached with many hatpins--/l--l et lti."

He executed four vicious jabs in the air.

"But how frightfully uncomfortable?"

"Ah! I should think so," said Poirot. No martyred lady could have spoken with more feeling. "When the wind blew it was the agony--it gave you the migraine."

Miss Buckley dragged off the simple wide-brimmed felt she was wearing and cast it down beside her.

"And now we do this," she laughed.

"Which is sensible and charming," said Poirot with a little bow.

hair

looked at her with interest. Her dark was ruffled and gave her an elfin look.

There was something elfin about her alto-gether.

The small vivid face, pansy shaped,

the enormous dark blue eyes, and something

it a hint of recklessness? There were dark shadows under the eyes.

The terrace on which we were sitting was a little used one. The main terrace where most people sat was just round the corner at a point where the cliff shelved directly down to the sea.

From round this corner now there appeared a man, a redfaced man with a rolling carriage who carried his hands half clenched by his side. There was something breezy and carefree about him--a typical sailor.

"I can't think where the girl's got to," he was saying in tones that easily carried to where we sat. "Nick Nick."

Miss Buckley rose.

"I knew they'd be getting in a state.

Attaboy George here I am."

"Freddie's frantic for a drink. Come on, girl."

He cast a glance of frank curiosity at Poirot who must have differed considerably from most of Nick's friends.

The girl performed a wave of introduction.

"This is Commander Challenger er "

But to my surprise Poirot did not supply the name for which she was waiting. Instead he 'rn.e- hnwed verst ceremnninl.lv nnd milt

mured, "Of The English Navy. I have a great regard for the English Navy."

This type of remark is not one that an Englishman acclaims most readily. Com-mander Challenger flushed and Nick Buckley took command of the situation.

"Come on, George. Don't gape. Let's find Freddie and Jim."

She smiled at Poirot.

"Thanks for the cocktail. I hope the ankle will be all right."

With a nod to me she slipped her hand through the sailor's arm and they disappeared round the corner together.

"So that is one of Mademoiselle's friends," murmured Poirot thoughtfully. "One of her cheery crowd. What about him? Give me your expert judgment, Hastings. Is he what you call a good fellow yes?"

Pausing for a moment to try and decide exactly what Poirot thought I should mean by a "good fellow," I gave a doubtful assent.

"He seems all rightmyes," I said. "So far

as one can tell by a cursory glance."

"I wonder," said Poirot.

The girl had left her hat behind. Poirot

stooped to pick it up and twirled it round

"Has he a tendresse for her? What do you think, Hastings?"

"My dear Poirot! How can I tell? Here give me that hat. The lady will want it. I'll take it to her."

Poirot paid no attention to my request. He continued to revolve the hat slowly on his finger.

"Pas encore. 'a m'amuse."

"Really, Poirot!"

"Yes, my friend, I grow old and childish, do I not?"

This was so exactly what I was feeling that I was somewhat disconcerted to have it put into words. Poirot gave a little chuckle, then, leaning forward, he laid a finger against the side of his nose.

"But no I am not so completely imbecile as you think! We will remm the hat but assuredly but later. We will return it to End House and thus we shall have the op-portunity of seeing the charming Miss Nick again."

"Poirot," I said, "I believe you have fallen in love."

"She is a pretty girl eh?"

"Well you saw for yourself. Why ask

me?"

nowadays, anything young is beautiful.
Jeunesse jeunesse It is the tragedy of

my years. But you I appeal to you? Your
judgment is not up to date, naturally, having
lived in the Argentine so long. You admire
the figure of five years ago, but you are

.at any rate more modern than I am. She

s pretty--yes? She has the appeal to

tile

sexes?"

"One sex is sufficient, Poirot. The answer,
I should say, is very much in the
affirmative. Why are you so interested in the
lady?"

"Am I interested?"

"Well look at what you've just been
saying."

"You are under a misapprehension, mon
ami. I may be interested in the lady--yes
but I am much more interested in her hat."

I stared at him, but he appeared perfectly
serious.

He nodded his head at me.

"Yes, Hastings, this very hat." He held it towards me. "You see the reason for my interest?"

"It's a nice hat," I said bewildered. "But quite an ordinary hat. Lots of girls have hats like it."

I looked at it more closely.

"You see, Hastings?"

"A perfectly plain fawn felt. Good style "

"I did not ask you to describe the hat. It is plain that you do not see. Almost incredible, my poor Hastings, how you hardly ever do see! It amazes me every time anew! But regard, my dear old imbecile it is not necessary to employ the grey cells the eyes will do. Regard regard "

And then at last I saw to what he had been trying to draw my attention. The slowly turning hat was revolving on his finger, and that finger was stuck neatly through a hole in the brim of the hat. When he saw that I had realized his meaning, he drew his finger out and held the hat towards me. It was a small neat hole, quite round, and I could not imagine its purpose, if purpose it had.

"Did you observe the way Mademoiselle Nick flinched when a bee flew past? The bee in the bonnet the hole in the hat."

"But a bee couldn't make a hole like that."

"Exactly, Hastings! What acumen! It could

not. But a bullet could, mon cher.t"

"A bullet?"

"Mais oui.t A bullet like this."

He held out his hand with a small object
in the palm of it.

"A spent bullet, mon ami. It was that which hit the terrace just now when we were talking. A spent bullet!"

"You mean ?"

"I mean that one inch of difference and that hole would be not through the hat but through the head. Now do you see why I am interested, Hastings? You were fight, my friend, when you told me not to use the word 'impossible.' Yes one is human! Ah! but he made a grave mistake, that would-be murderer, when he shot at his victim within a dozen yards of Hercule Poirot! For him, it is indeed la mauvaise chance. But you see now why we must make our entry into End House and get into touch with Mademoiselle? Three near escapes from death in three days. That is what she said. We must act quickly, Hastings. The peril is very close at hand."

End House

"Poirot," I said, "I have been thinking."

"An admirable exercise, my friend. Continue it."

We were sitting facing each other at lunch at a small table in the window.

"This shot must have been fired quite close to us. And yet we did not hear it"

"And you think that in the peaceful stillness, with the rippling waves the only sound,

we should have done so?"

"Well, it's odd."

"No, it is not odd. Some sounds you get used to them so soon that you hardly notice they are there. All this morning, my friend, speedboats have been making trips in the bay. You complained at first soon, you did not even notice. But, my friend, you could fire a machine gun almost and not notice it when one of those boats is on the sea."

"Yes, that's true."

"Ah! voila," murmured Poirot. "Made-moiselle and her friends. They are to lunch here, it seems. And therefore I must return the hat. But no matter. The affair is sufficiently serious to warrant a visit all on its

own.

He leaped up nimbly from his seat, hurried across the room, and presented the hat with a bow just as Miss Buckley and her companions were seating themselves at table.

They were a party of four, Nick Buckley, Commander Challenger, another man and another girl. From where we sat we had a very imperfect view of them. From time to time the Naval man's laugh boomed out. He seemed a simple likable soul, and I had already taken a fancy to him.

My friend was silent and distraught during our meal. He crumbled his bread, made strange little ejaculations to himself and straightened everything on the table. I tried to talk, but meeting with no encouragement, soon gave it up.

He continued to sit at the table long after

he had finished his cheese. As soon as the other party had left the room, however, he too rose to his feet. They were just settling themselves at a table in the lounge when

Poirot marched up to them in his most military fashion, and addressed Nick directly.

"Mademoiselle, may I crave one little word

with you."

The girl frowned. I realized her feelings clearly enough. She was afraid that this queer little foreigner was going to be a nuisance. I could not but sympathize with her, knowing how it must appear in her eyes. Rather unwillingly, she moved a few steps aside.

Almost immediately I saw an expression of surprise pass over her face at the low hurried words Poirot was uttering.

In the meantime, I was feeling rather awkward and ill at ease. Challenger with ready tact came to my rescue, offering me a cigarette and making some commonplace observation. We had taken each other's measure and were inclined to be sympathetic to each other. I fancied that I was more his own kind than the man with whom he had been lunching. I now had the opportunity of observing the latter. A tall, fair, rather exquisite young man, with a somewhat fleshy nose and overemphasized good looks. He had a supercilious manner and a tired drawl. There was a sleekness about him that I especially disliked.

Then I looked at the woman, she

sitting straight opposite me in a big chair and had just thrown off her hat. She was an unusual type a weary Madonna describes it best. She had fair, almost colorless hair, parted in the middle and drawn straight down over her ears to a knot on the neck. Her face was dead white and emaciated yet curiously attractive. Her eyes were very light grey with large pupils. She had a curious look of de-tachment. She was staring at me. Suddenly she spoke.

"Sit down till your friend has finished with Nick."

She had an affected voice, languid and artificial yet which had withal a curious attraction a kind of resonant lingering beauty. She impressed me, I think, as the most tired person I had ever met. Tired in mind, not in body, as though she had found everything in the world to be empty and valueless.

"Miss Buckley very kindly helped my friend when he twisted his ankle this morning," I explained, as I accepted her offer.

"So Nick said." Her eyes considered me, still detachedly. "Nothing wrong with his ankle now, is there?"

I felt myself blushing.

"Just a momentary sprain," I explained.
"Oh! well I'm elad to hear Nick didn't

invent the whole thing. She's the most heaven-sent little liar that ever existed, you know. Amazing it's quite a gift."

I hardly knew what to say. My discomfiture seemed to amuse her.

"She's one of my oldest friends," she said, "and I always think loyalty's such a tiresome virtue, don't you? Principally practiced by the Scotch like thrift and keeping the Sabbath. But Nick is a liar, isn't she, Jim? That marvelous story about the brakes of the car and Jim says there was nothing in it at all."

The fair man said in a soft rich voice, "I know something about cars."

He half turned his head. Outside amongst

other cars was a long red car. It seemed longer and redder than any car could be. It had a long gleaming bonnet of polished metal. A super car!

"Is that your car?" I asked On a sudden impulse.

He nodded.

"Yes."

I had an insane desire to say, "It would be!"

Poirot rejoined us at that moment. I rose,

he took me by the arm, gave a quick bow to
the party and drew me rapidly away.

"It is arranged my friend We are to call

on Mademoiselle at End House at half past six. She will be returned from the motoring by then. Yes, yes, surely she will have returned in safety."

His face was anxious and his tone was worried.

"What did you say to her?"

"I asked her to accord me an interview as soon as possible. She was a little unwilling naturally. She thinks I can see the thoughts passing through her mind 'Who is he this little man? Is he the bounder, the upstart, the moving-picture director?' If she could have refused she would but it is difficult asked like that on the spur of the moment, it is easier to consent. She admits that she will be back by six-thirty. 'a y est?' I remarked that that seemed to be all right then, but my remark met with little favor. Indeed Poirot was as jumpy as the proverbial cat. He walked about our sitting room all afternoon, murmuring to himself and ceaselessly rearranging and straightening the ornaments. When I spoke to him, he waved his hands and shook his head.

In the end we started out from the hotel at barely six o'clock.

"It seems incredible," I remarked as we descended the- .qten.q of the terrace. "to at

tempt to shoot anyone in a hotel garden.
Only a madman would do such a thing."

"I disagree with you. Given one condition, it would be quite a reasonably safe affair. To begin with, the garden is deserted. The people who come to hotels are like a flock of sheep. It is customary to sit on the terrace overlooking the bay eh bien, so everyone sits on the terrace. Only I Who am an original sit overlooking the garden. And even then, I saw nothing. There is plenty of cover, you observe trees, groups of palms, flowering shrubs. Anyone could hide himself comfortably and be unobserved whilst he waited for Mademoiselle to pass this way. And she would come this way. To come round by the road from End House would be much longer. Mademoiselle Nick Buckley, she would be of those who are always late and taking the short cut?

"All the same, the risk was enormous. He might have been seen and you can't make

shooting look like an accident."

"Not like an accident no."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing a little idea. I may or may not be justified. Leaving it aside for a moment, there is what I mentioned just now an es

"Which is?"

"Surely you can tell me, Hastings."

"I wouldn't like to deprive you of the pleasure of being clever at my expense!"

"Oh! The sarcasm! The irony! Well, what leaps to the eye is this: the motive cannot be obvious. If it were why then truly the risk would indeed be too great to be taken! People would say: 'I wonder if it were So and So. Where was So and So when the shot was fired?' No, the murderer the would-be murderer, I should say cannot be obvious. And that, Hastings, is why I am afraid! Yes, at this minute I am afraid. I reassure myself. I say 'There are four of them.' I say 'Nothing can happen when they are all together.' I say 'It would be madness!' And all the time I am afraid. These 'accidents' I want to hear about them!"

He turned back abruptly.

"It is still early. We will go the other way by the road. The garden has nothing to tell us. Let us inspect the orthodox approach to End House."

Our way led out of the front gate of the hotel, up a sharp hill to the right, and at the top of it a small lane with a notice on the

wall; TO END HOUSE ONLY.

We followed it and after a few hundred

yards the lane gave an abrupt turn and ended in a pair of dilapidated entrance gates, which would have been the better for a coat of paint.

Inside the gates, to the right, was a small lodge. This lodge presented a piquant contrast to the gates and to the condition of the grass-grown drive. The small garden round

it was spick-and-span, the window frames and sashes had been lately painted and there

were clean bright curtains at the windows.

Bending over a flower bed was a man in a faded Norfolk jacket. He straightened up as the gate creaked and turned to look at us. He was a man of about sixty, six feet at least with a powerful frame and a weather-beaten face. His head was almost completely bald. His eyes were a vivid blue and twinkled. He seemed a genial soul.

"Good afternoon," he observed as we passed.

I responded in kind, and as we went on

up the drive I was conscious of those blue eyes raking our backs inquisitively.

"I wonder," said Poirot thoughtfully.

He left it at that without vouchsafing any
explanation of what it was that he wondered.

The house itself was large and rather dreary

of which actually touched the roof. It was clearly in bad repair. Poirot swept it with an appraising glance before ringing the bell an old-fashioned bell that needed a Herculean pull to produce any effect and which once started, echoed mournfully on and on.

The door was opened by a middle-aged woman "a decent woman in black," so I felt she should be described. Very respectable, rather mournful, completely uninterested. Miss Buckley, she said, had not yet returned. Poirot explained that we had an appointment. He had some little difficulty in gaining his point, she was the type that is apt to be suspicious of foreigners. Indeed I flatter myself that it was my appearance which turned the scale. We were admitted and ushered into the drawing room to await Miss Buckley's return.

There was no mournful note here. The room gave on the sea and was full of sunshine. It was shabby and betrayed conflicting styles ultramodern of a cheap variety superimposed on solid Victorian. The curtains were of faded brocade, but the covers were new and gay and the cushions were positively hectic. On the walls were hung family portraits. Some of them. I thought.

looked remarkably good. There was a gramophone and some records lying idly about. There was a portable wireless, practically no books and one newspaper flung open on the end of the sofa. Poirot picked it up then laid it down with a grimace. It was the St. Loo Weekly Herald and Directory. Something impelled him to pick it up a second time and he was glancing at a column when the door opened and Nick Buckley came into the room.

"Bring the ice, Ellen," she called over her shoulder, then addressed herself to us.

"Well, here I am .and I've shaken off the others. I'm devoured with curiosity. Am I the long-lost heroine that is badly wanted for the ffims? You were so very solemn" (she addressed herself to Poirot) "that I feel it can't be anything else. Do make me a handsome offer."

"Alas! Mademoiselle "began Poirot.

"Don't say it's the opposite," she begged him. "Don't say you paint miniatures and you want me to buy one. But no with that mustache and staying at the Majestic which has the nastiest food and the highest prices in England no, it simply can't be."

The woman who had opened the door to

bottles. Nick mixed cocktails expertly, continuing to talk. I think at last Poirot's silence (so unlike him) impressed itself upon her. She stopped in the very act of filling the glasses and said sharply: "Well?"

"That is what I wish it to be well, Made-moiselle." He took the cocktail from her hand. "To your good health, Mademoiselle to your continued good health." The girl was no fool. The significance of his tone was not lost on her.

"Is anything the matter?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle. This.. ."

He held out his hand to her with the bullet on the palm of it. She picked it up with a puzzled frown.

"You know what that is?"

"Yes, of course I know. It's a bullet."

"Exactly. Mademoiselle it was not a wasp that flew past your face this morning it was this bullet."

"Do you mean was some criminal idiot

shooting bullets in a hotel garden?"

"It would seem so."

"Well, I'm damned," said Nick frankly.

"I do seem to bear a charmed life. That's number four."

I want, Mademoiselle, to hear about the other
three accidents."

She stared at him.

"I want to be very sure, Mademoiselle,
that they were accidents."

"Why, of course! What else could they
be?"

"Mademoiselle, prepare yourself, I beg,

for a great shock. What if someone is at-tempting
your e.

All Nick's response to this was a burst of
laughter. The idea seemed to amuse her
hugely.

"What a marvelous ideal My dear man,

who on earth do you think would attempt
my life? I'm not the beautiful young heiress
whose death releases millions. I wish some-body
was trying to kill me--that would be a
thrill if you like but I'm afraid there's not a
hope!"

"Will you tell me, Mademoiselle, about
those accidents?"

"Of course but there's nothing in it.

They were just stupid things. There's a heavy picture hangs over my bed. It fell in the night. Just by pure chance I had happened to hear a door banging somewhere in the

and so I escaped. It would probably have

bashed my head in. That's number one."

Poirot did not smile.

"Continue, Mademoiselle. Let us pass to number two."

"Oh! that's weaker still. There's a scrambly cliff path down to the sea. I go down that way to bathe. There's a rock you can dive off. A boulder got dislodged somehow and came roaring down just missing me. The third thing was quite different. Something went wrong with the brakes of the car I don't know quite what the garage man explained but I didn't follow it. Anyway if I'd gone through the gate and down that hill, they wouldn't have held and I suppose I'd have gone slap into the Town Hall and there would have been the devil of a smash. Slight defacement of the Town Hall, complete obliteration of Me. But owing to my always leaving something behind, I turned back and merely ran into the laurel hedge."

"And you cannot tell me what the trouble was?"

"You can go and ask them at Mott's Garage. They'll know. It was something quite simple and mechanical that had been un-screwed, I think. I wondered if Ellen's boy

[my tand-hv whn nened the dnr tn

has got a small boy) had tinkered with it. Boys do like messing about with cars. Of course Ellen swore he'd never been near the car. I think something must just have worked loose in spite of what Mott said."

"Where is your garage, Mademoiselle?"

"Round the other side of the house."

"Is it kept locked?"

Nick's eyes widened in surprise.

"Oh! no. Of course not."

"Anyone could tamper with the car unobserved?"

"Well yes I suppose so. But it is so silly."

"No, Mademoiselle. It is not silly. You do not understand. You are in danger grave danger. I tell it to you. !! And you do not know who I am?"

"No?" said Nick breathlessly.

"I am Hercule Poirot."

"Oh!" said Nick in rather a flat tone.

"Oh! yes."

"You know my name, eh?"

"Oh! yes."

She wriggled uncomfortably. A hunted look came into her eyes. Poirot observed her keenly.

"You are not at ease. That means, I sup

"Well no not all of them. But I know the name, of course."

"Mademoiselle, you are a polite little liar."
(I started, remembering the words spoken at the Majestic Hotel that day after lunch.) "I forgot--you are only a child you would not have heard. So quickly does fame pass. My friend there he will tell you."

Nick looked at me. I cleared my throat, somewhat embarrassed.

"Monsieur Poirot is
er was a great

detective," I explained.

"Ah! my friend," cried Poirot. "Is that all you can find to say? Mais dis donc/Say then to Mademoiselle that I am a detective unique, unsurpassed, the greatest that ever lived!"

"That is now unnecessary," I said coldly.
"You have told her yourself."

"Ah! yes, but it is more agreeable to have been able to preserve the modesty. One should not sing one's own praises."

"One should not keep a dog and have to bark oneself," agreed Nick with mock sympathy.
"Who is the dog, by the way? Dr. Watson, I presume."

"My name is Hastings," I said coldly.

"Battle of 1066," said Nick. "Who said I wasn't educated? Well, this is all too, too

wants to do away with me? It would be thrilling. But of course that sort of thing doesn't really happen. Only in books. I expect Monsieur Poirot is like a surgeon who's invented an operation or a doctor who's found an obscure disease and wants everyone to have it."

"Sacré tonnerre," thundered Poirot. "Will you be serious? You young people of today, will nothing make you serious? It would not have been a joke, Mademoiselle, if you had been lying in the hotel garden a pretty little corpse with a nice little hole through your head instead of your hat. You would not have laughed then eh?"

"Unearthly laughter heard at a seance," said Nick. "But seriously, Monsieur Poirot it's very kind of you and all that, but the whole thing must be an accident."

"You are as obstinate as the devil!"

"That's where I get my name from. My grandfather was popularly supposed to have sold his soul to the devil. Everyone round here called him Old Nick. He was a wicked old man but great fun. I adored him. I went everywhere with him and so they called us Old Nick and Young Nick. My real Name is Magdala."

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"Yes, it's a kind of family one. There have been lots of Magdalas in the Buckley

family. There's one up there." She nodded at a picture on the wall.

"Ah!" said Poirot. Then, looking at a portrait hanging over the mantelpiece, he said:

"Is that your grandfather, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, rather an arresting portrait, isn't it? Jim Lazarus offered to buy it, but I wouldn't sell. I've got an affection for Old Nick."

"Ah!" Poirot was silent for a minute, then he said very earnestly: "Revenons a nos moutons. Listen, Mademoiselle. I implore you to be serious. You are in danger. Today, somebody shot at you with a Mauser pistol "

"A Mauser pistol?"

For the moment she was startled.

"Yes, why? Do you know of anyone who has a Mauser pistol?"

She smiled.

"I've got one myself."

"You have?"

"Yes it was Dad's. He brought it back from the War. It's been knocking round here ever since. I saw it only the other day in that drawer."

She had indicated an old-fashioned bureau.

Now, as though suddenly struck by an

open. She turned father blankly. Her voice held a new note.

"Oh!" she said. "It's---it's gone."

Accidents?

It was from that moment that the conversation took on a different tone. Up to now, Poirot and the girl had been at cross purposes. They were separated by a gulf of years. His fame and reputation meant nothing to her she was of the generation that knows only the great names of the immediate moment. She was, therefore, unimpressed by his warnings. He was to her only a rather comic elderly foreigner with an amusingly melodramatic mind.

And this attitude baffled Poirot. To begin with, his vanity suffered. It was his constant dictum that all the world knew Hercule Poirot. Here was someone who did not. Very good for him, I could not but feel but not precisely helpful to the object in view!

With the discovery of the missing pistol, however, the affair took on a new phase.

joke. She still treated the matter lightly, because it was her habit and her creed to treat all occurrences lightly, but there was a distinct difference in her manner.

She came back and sat down on the arm

of a chair frowning thoughtfully.

"That's odd," she said.

Poirot whirled round on me.

"You remember, Hastings, the little idea I mentioned? Well, it was correct, my little ideal. Supposing Mademoiselle had been found shot lying in the hotel garden? She might not have been found for some hours. Few people pass that way. And beside her hand -just fallen from it is her own pistol. Doubtless the good Madame Ellen would identify it. There would be suggestions, no

doubt, of worry or of sleeplessness "

Nick moved uneasily.

"That's true. I have been worried to death.

Everybody's been telling me I'm nervy.

Yes they'd say all that..."

"And bring in a verdict of suicide. Made-moiselle's fingerprints conveniently on the pistol and nobody else's but yes, it would be very simple and convincing."

"How terribly amusing!" said Nick, but not, I was glad to note, as though she were

Poirot accepted her words in the conventional sense in which they were uttered.

"N'est-ce pas? but you understand, Made-moiselle, there must be no more of this. Four failures yes but the fifth time there may be a success."

"Bring out your rubber-fired hearses," murmured Nick.

"But we are here, my friend and I, to obviate all that!"

I felt grateful for the we. Poirot has a habit of sometimes ignoring my existence.

"Yes," I put in. "You mustn't be alarmed, Miss Buckley. We will protect you."

"How frightfully nice of you," said Nick. "I think the whole thing is perfectly marvelous. Too, too thrilling."

She still preserved her airy detached manner, but her eyes, I thought, looked troubled.

"And the first thing to do," said Poirot, "is to have the consultation."

He sat down and beamed upon her in a friendly manner.

"To begin with, Mademoiselle, a conventional question---but have you any enemies?"

Nick shook her head rather regretfully.

"Bon. We will dismiss that possibility then. And now we ask the question of the cinema, of the detective novel who profits by your death, Mademoiselle?"

"I can't imagine," said Nick. "That's why it all seems such nonsense. There's this beastly old barn, of course, but it's mortgaged up to the hilt, the roof leaks and there can't be a coal mine or anything exciting like that hidden in the cliff."

"It is mortgaged hein?"

"Yes. I had to mortgage it. You see there were two lots of death duties quite soon after each other. First my grandfather died just six years ago, and then my brother. That just about put the lid on the financial position."

"And your father?"

"He was invalided home from the War, then got pneumonia and died in 1919. My mother died when I was a baby. I rived here with Grandfather. He and Dad didn't get on (I don't wonder), so Dad found it convenient to park me and go roaming the world on his own account. Gerald that was my brother didn't get on with Grandfather either. I dare say I shouldn't have got on with him if I'd been a boy. Being a girl saved me. Grand

block and had inherited his spirit." She laughed. "He was an awful old rip, I believe. But frightfully lucky. There was a saying round here that everything he touched turned to gold..He was a gambler, though, and gambled it away again. When he died he left hardly anything beside the house and land. I was sixteen when he died and Gerald was twenty-two. Gerald was killed in a motor accident just three years ago and the place came to me."

"And after you, Mademoiselle? Who is your nearest relation?"

"My cousin, Charles. Charles Vyse. He's a lawyer down here. Quite good and worthy but very dull. He gives me good advice and tries to restrain my extravagant tastes."

"He manages your affairs for you. eh?"

"Well... yes, if you like to put it that way. I haven't many affairs to manage. He arranged the mortgage for me and made me let the lodge."

„ ^ L , lodge. I was going to ask you about that. It is let?"

"Yes to some Australians. Croft their name is. Very hearty, you know--and all that sort of thing. Simply oppressively kind. Always bringin UD sticks of colrv

the way I let the garden go. They're rather a
nuisance really at least he is. Too terribly
friendly for words. She's a cripple, poor
thing, and lies on a sofa all day. Anyway
they pay the rent and that's the great thing."

"How long have they been here?"

"Oh! about six months."

"I see. Now beyond this cousin of yours
on your father's side or your mother's by the
way?"

"Mother's. My mother was Amy Vyse."

"Bien/Now beyond this cousin, as I was
saying, have you any other relatives?"

"Some very distant cousins in Yorkshire
Buckleys."

"No one else?"

"No."

"That is lonely."

Nick stared at him.

"Lonely? What a funny idea. I'm not down

here much, you know. I'm usually in London.

Relations are too devastating as a rule.

They fuss and interfere. It's much more fun

to be on one's own."

"I will not waste the sympathy. You are a

modem, I see, Mademoiselle. Now your

household."

"How grand that sounds! Ellen's the

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gardener not a very good one. I pay them frightfully little because I let them have the child here. Ellen does for me when I'm down here and if I have a party we get in who and what we can to help. I'm giving a party on Monday. It's Regatta Week, you know."

"Monday and today is Saturday. Yes. Yes. And now, Mademoiselle, your friends--the ones with whom you were lunching to-day, for instance?"

"Well, Freddie Rice the fair girl is practically my greatest friend. She's had a rotten life. Married to a beast of a man who drank and drugged and was altogether a queer of the worst description. She had to leave him a year or two ago. Since then she's drifted round. I wish to goodness she'd get a divorce and marry Jim Lazarus."

"Lazarus? The art dealer in Bond Street?"

"Yes. Jim's the only son. Rolling in money, of course. Did you see that car of his? And he's devoted to Freddie. They go about everywhere together. They are staying at the Majestic over the week end and are coming to me on Monday."

"And Mrs. Rice's husband?"

"The mess? Oh! he's dropped out of ev-erything. Nobody knows where he is. It

can't divorce a man when you don't know where he is."

"Evidemment!"

"Poor Freddie," said Nick pensively.

"She's had rotten luck. The thing was all fixed once. She got hold of him and put it to him, and he said he was perfectly willing, but he simply hadn't got the cash to take a woman to a hotel. So the end of it all was she forked out and he took it and off he went and has never been heard of from that

day to this. Pretty mean, I call it."

"Good heavens," I exclaimed.

"My friend Hastings is shocked," re-marked Poirot. "You must be more careful, Mademoiselle. He is out of date, you comprehend. He has just returned from those great clear open spaces, etc., and he has yet to learn the language of nowadays."

"Well, there's nothing to get shocked about," said Nick opening her eyes very wide. "I mean, everybody knows, don't they, that there are such people. But I call it a low-down trick all the same. Poor old Freddie was so damned hard up at the time that she didn't know where to turn."

"Yes, yes, not a very pretty affair. And your other friend, Mademoiselle. The good

"George? I've known George all my life well, for the last five years anyway. He's a good scout, George."

"He wishes you to marry him eh?"

"He does mention it now and again. In the small hours of the morning or after the second glass of port."

"But you remain hardhearted."

"What would be the use of George and me marrying one another? We've neither of us got a bean. And one would get terribly bored with George. That 'playing for one's side,' 'good old school' manner. After all, he's forty if he's a day."

The remark made me wince slightly.

"In fact he has one foot in the grave," said Poirot. "Oh! do not mind me, Mademoiselle. I am a grandpapa--a nobody. And now, tell me more about these accidents. The picture, for instance?"

She led the way out of the room and we followed her. The picture in question was an oil painting in a heavy frame. It hung directly over the bed head.

With a murmured, "You permit, Mademoiselle," Poirot removed his shoes and mounted upon the bed. He examined the picture and the cord and ineerly tested the

weight of the painting. With an eloquent grimace he descended.

"To have that descend on one's head no, it would not be pretty. The cord by which it was hung, Mademoiselle, was it, like this one, a wire cable?"

"Yes, but not so thick. I got a thicker one this time."

"That is comprehensible. And you examined the break the edges were frayed?"

"I think so but I didn't notice particularly. Why should I?"

"Exactly. As you say, why should you? All the same, I should much like to look at that piece of wire. Is it about the house anywhere?"

"It was still on the picture. I expect the man who put the new wire on just threw the old one away.

"A pity. I should like to have seen it."

"You don't think it was just an accident after all? Surely it couldn't have been anything else."

"It may have been an accident. It is impossible to say. But the damage to the brakes of your car that was not an accident. And the stone that rolled down the cliff I should like to see the spot where that accident

Nick took us out in the garden and led us to the cliff edge. The sea glittered blue below us. A rough path led down the face of the rock. Nick described just where the accident occurred and Poirot nodded thoughtfully. Then he asked, "How many ways are there into your garden, Mademoiselle?"

"There's the front way--past the lodge. And a tradesman's entrance a door in the wall halfway up that lane. Then there's a gate just along here on the cliff edge. It leads out onto a zigzag path that runs up from that beach to the Majestic Hotel. And then of course you can go straight through a gap in the hedge into the Majestic garden that's the way I went this morning. To go through the Majestic garden is a short cut to the town anyway.

"And your gardener where does he usually work?"

"Well, he usually potters round the kitchen garden, or else he sits in the potting shed and pretends to be sharpening the shears."

"Round the other side of the house, that is to say?"

"Yes."

"So that if anyone were to come in here and dislodge a boulder he would be very unlikely to be noticed."

Nick gave a sudden LITTLE shiver.

"Do you . do you really think that is what happened?" she asked. "I can't believe it somehow. It seems so perfectly futile."

Poirot drew the bullet from his pocket again and looked at it.

"That was not futile, Mademoiselle," he said gently.

"It must have been some madman."

"Possibly. It is an interesting subject of after-dinner conversation are all criminals really madmen? There may be a malformation in their grey cells yes, it is very likely.

That, it is the affair of the doctor. For me I have different work to perform. I have the innocent to think of, not the guilty the victim, not the criminal. It is you I am considering, Mademoiselle, not your unknown assailant. You are young and beautiful, and the sun shines and the world is pleasant, and there is life and love ahead of you. It is all that of which I think, Mademoiselle. Tell me, these friends of yours, Mrs. Rice and Mr. Lazarus they have been down here,

how long?"

"Freddie came down on Wednesday to this part of the world. She stopped with

nights. She came on here yesterday. Jim has

been touring round about, I believe."

"And Commander Challenger?"

"He's at Devonport. He comes over in his car whenever he can--weekends mostly."

Poirot nodded. We were walking back to the house. There was a silence .and then he said suddenly: "Have you a friend whom

you can trust, Mademoiselle?"

"There's Freddie."

"Other than Mrs. Rice."

"Well, I don't know. I suppose I have.

Why?"

"Because I want you to have a friend to

stay with you immediately."

"Oh!"

Nick seemed rather taken aback. She was silent a moment or two thinking. Then she said doubtfully: "There's Maggie. I could

get hold of her, I expect."

"Who is Maggie?"

"One of my Yorkshire cousins. There's a large family of them. He's a clergyman, you know. Maggie's about my age and I usually

have her to stay sometime or other in the summer. She's no fun, though one of those painfully pure girls, with the kind of hair

I was hoping to get out of having her this year."

"Not at all. Your cousin, Mademoiselle, will do admirably. Just the type of person I had in mind."

"All right," said Nick with a sigh. "I'll wire her. I certainly don't know who else I could get hold of just now. Everybody's fixed up. But if it isn't the (hoirboys' Outing or the Mothers' Beanfeast she'll come all right."

"Could you arrange for her to sleep in your room?"

"I suppose so.

"She would not think that an odd request?"

"Oh! no, Maggie never thinks. She just does--earnestly, you know. Christian works with faith and perseverance. All right, I'll wire her to come on Nlnday."

"Why not tomorrow."

"With Sunday trains? She'll think I'm dying if I suggest that. No, I'll say Monday.

Are you going to tell her about the awful fate hanging over me?"

"Nous verrons. You will make a jest of it?"

You have courage, I am glad to see."

"It makes a difference anyway," said Nick.

Something in her face struck me and I

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there was something she had left untold. We had re-entered the drawing room. Poirot was fingering the newspaper on the sofa.

"You read this, Mademoiselle?" he asked suddenly.

"The St. Loo Herald? Not seriously. I opened it to see the tides. It gives them every week."

"I see. By the way, Mademoiselle, have you ever made a will?"

"Yes, I did. About six months ago. Just before my op."

"(2u'est-ce que vous dites? Your op?"

"Operation. For appendicitis. Someone said I ought to make a will, so I did. It made me feel quite important."

"And the terms of that will?"

"I left End House to Charles. I hadn't much else to leave but what there was I left to Freddie. I should think probably the what do they call them liabilities would have exceeded the assets, really."

Poirot nodded absently.

"I will take my leave now. Au revoir, Mademoiselle. Be careful."

"What of?" asked Nick.

"You are intelligent. Yes, that is the weak point in which direction are you to be careful?"

Who can say? But have confidence Ma

demoiselle. In a few days I shall have discovered the truth.

"Until then beware of poison, bombs, re-volver shots, motor accidents and arrows dipped in the secret poison of the South American Indians," finished Nick glibly.

"Do not mock yourself, Mademoiselle," said Poirot gravely.

He paused as he reached the door.

"By the way, he said. "What price did M. Lazarus offer you for the portrait of your grandfather?"

"Fifty pounds."

"Ah!" said Poirot.

He looked earnestly back at the dark saturnine face above the mantelpiece.

"But, as I told you, I don't want to sell

the old boy."

"No," said Poirot thoughtfully. "No, I understand."

There Must Be Something!

"Poirot." I said as soon as we were out upon the road. "there is one thing I think you ought to know."

"And what is that, mon ami?"

I told him of Mrs. Rice's version of the trouble with the motor.

"Tiens! C'est intressant, fa. There is, of course, a type, vain, hysterical, that seeks to make itself interesting by having marvelous escapes from death and which will recount to you surprising histories that never happened! Yes, it is well known, that type there. Such people will even do themselves grave bodily injury to sustain the fiction."

"You don't think that-"

"That Mademoiselle Nick is of that type?"

No, indeed. You observed, Hastings, that we had great difficulty in convincing her of her da.,- .. :....- .,

open and folded back at where do you think? A little paragraph which said, 'Among the guests staying at the Majestic Hotel are M. Hercule Poirot and Captain Hastings.' Supposingmjust supposing that someone had read that paragraph. They know my name

everyone knows my name

"Miss Buckley didn't," I said with a grin.

"She is a scatterbrain she does not count.

A serious man---a criminal would know my name. And he would be afraid! He would wonder! He would ask himself questions.

Three times he has attempted the life of Mademoiselle and now Hercule Poirot arrives in the neighborhood. 'Is that coincidence?' he would ask himself. And he would fear that it might not be a coincidence. What would he do then?"

"Lie low and hide his tracks," I suggested.

"Yes yes--or else. if he had real audacity, he would strike quickly without loss of time. Before I had time to make the inquiries pouf, Mademoiselle is dead. That is what a man of audacity would do."

"But why do you think that somebody read that paragraph other than Miss Buckley?"

"It wa,-s no,,,s B.-uc..e-ywhoread tha:t

meant nothing to her. It was not even familiar.

Her face did not change. Besides she told us she opened the paper to look at the tides nothing else. Well, there was no tide table on that page."

"You think someone in the house "

"Someone in the house or who had access to it. And that last is easy the window stands open. Without doubt Miss Buckley's friends pass in and out."

"Have you any idea? Any suspicion?"

Poirot flung out his hands.

"Nothing. Whatever the motive, it is, as I predicted, not an obvious one. That is the would-be murderer's security that is why he could act so daringly this morning. On the face of it, no one seems to have any reason for desiring the little Nick's death. The property? End House? That passes to the cousin but does he particularly want a heavily mortgaged and very dilapidated old house? It is not even a family place so far as he is concerned. He is not a Buckley, remember. We must see this M. Charles Vyse, certainly, but the idea seems fantastic.

"Then there is Madame. the bosom friend with her strange eyes and her air of a lost Madonna "

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"What is her concern in the business? She tells you that her friend is a liar. C'est gentille, fait Why does she tell you? Is she afraid of something that Nick may say? Is that something connected with the car? Or did she use that as an instance and was her real fear of something rise? Did anyone tamper with the car, and if so, who? And does she know about it.?"

"Then the handsome blond M. Lazarus. Where does he fit in? With his marvelous automobile and his money. Can he possibly be concerned in any way? Commander Challenger "

"He's all right," I put in quickly. "I'm sure of that. A real pukka sahib."

"Doubtless he has been to what you consider the right school. Happily, being a foreigner, I am free from these prejudices, and can make investigations unhampered by them. But I will admit that I find it hard to connect Commander Challenger with the case. In fact I do not see that he can be so connected."

"Of course he can't," I said warmly. Poirot looked at me meditatively.

"You have an extraordinary effect on me, Hastings. You have so strongly the flair in

to go by it! You are that wholly admirable type of man, honest, credulous, honorable, who is invariably taken in by any scoundrel. You are the type of man who invests in doubtful oil fields, and non-existent gold mines. From hundreds like you, the swindler makes his daily bread. Ah well. I shall study this Commander Challenger. You have awakened my doubts."

"My dear Poirot," I cried angrily. "You are perfectly absurd. A man who has knocked about the world like I have "

"Never learns," said Poirot sadly. "It is amazing, but there it is."

"Do you suppose I'd have made a success of my ranch out in the Argentine if I was the kind of credulous fool you make out?"

"Do not enrage yourself, mon ami. You have made a great success of it you and your wife."

"Bella," I said, "always goes by my judgment."

"She is as wise as she is charming," said Poirot. "Let us not quarrel, my friend. See, there ahead of us, it says Mott's Garage. That, I think, is the garage mentioned by Mademoiselle Buckley. A few inquiries will

soon give us the truth of that little...

roduced himself by explaining that he had been recommended there by Miss Buckley. He made some inquiries about hiring a car for some afternoon drives and from there slid easily into the topic of the damage sustained by Miss Buckley's car not long ago. Immediately the garage proprietor waxed voluble. Most extraordinary thing he'd ever seen. He proceeded to be technical. I, alas, am not mechanically minded. Poirot, I should imagine, is even less so. But certain facts did emerge unmistakably. The car had been tampered with. And the damage had been something quite easily done occupying very little time. "So that is that," said Poirot as we strolled away. "The little Nick was right, and the rich M. Lazarus was wrong. Hastings, my friend, all this is very interesting."

"What do we do now?"

"We visit the post office and send off a telegram if it is not too late."

"A telegram?" I said hopefully.

"Yes," said Poirot thoughtfully. "A tele-

The post office was still open. Poirot wrote out his telegram and dispatched it. He

tents. Feeling that he wanted me to ask him, I carefully refrained from doing so.

"It is annoying that tomorrow is Sunday," he remarked as we strolled back to the hotel. "We cannot now call upon M. Vyse till Monday morning."

"You could get hold of him at his private address."

"Naturally. But that is just what I am anxious not to do. I would prefer, in the first place, to consult him professionally and to form my judgment of him from that aspect."

"Yes," I said thoughtfully. "I suppose that would be best."

"The answer to one simple little question, for instance, might make a great difference. If M. Charles Vyse was in his office at twelve-thirty this morning, then it was not he who fired the shot in the garden of the Majestic Hotel."

"Ought we not to examine the alibis of the three at the hotel?"

"That is much more difficult. It would be easy enough for one of them to leave the others for a few minutes, a hasty egress from one of the innumerable windows lounge, smoking room, drawing room, writing room,

quickly under cover to the spot whereth

retreat. But as yet, mon ami, we are not even sure that we have arrived at all the dramatis personae in the drama. There is the respectable Ellen and her so far unseen husband. Both inmates of the house and possibly, for all we know, with a grudge against our little Mademoiselle. There are even the unknown Australians at the lodge. And there may be others, friends and intimates of Miss Buckley's whom she has no reason for suspecting and consequently has not mentioned. I cannot help feeling, Hastings, that there is something behind this something that has not yet come to light. I have a little idea that Miss Buckley knows more than she told us."

"You think she is keeping something back?"

"Yes."

"Possibly with an idea of shielding whoever it is?"

Poirot shook his head with the utmost energy.

"No, no. As far as that goes, she gave me

the impression of being utterly frank. I am convinced that as regards these attempts on her life, she was telling all she knew. But there is something else something that she believes has nothing to do with that at all.

thing is. For I say it in all modesty, am
a great deal more intelligent than une petite
comme fa. I, Hercule Poirot, might see a
connection where she sees none. It might
give me the clue I am seeking. For I announce
to you, Hastings, quite frankly and
humbly, that I am as you express it, all on
the sea. Until I can get some glimmering of
the reason behind all this, I am in the dark.
There must be something--some factor in
the case that I do not grasp. What is it? Je

me demande fa sans cesse. Qu'est-ce que c'est?"

"You will find out," I said soothingly.

"So long," he said somberly, "as I do not
find out too late."

Mr. and Mrs. Croft

There was dancing that evening at the hotel.

Nick Buckley dined there with her friends

and waved a gay greeting to us.

She was dressed that evening in a floating

scarlet chiffon that dragged on the floor. Out

of it rose her white neck and shoulders and

her small impudent dark head.

"An engaging young devil," I remarked.

"A contrast to her friend eh?"

Frederica Rice was in white. She danced

with a languorous weary grace that was as far

removed from Nick's aimafion as anything

could be.

"She is very beautiful," said Poirot suddenly.

"Who? Our Nick?"

"No .the other. Is she evil? Is she good?"

Is she merely unhappy? One cannot tell. She

.

But I tell you, my friend, she is an al-lumeuse."

"What do you mean?" I asked curiously.

He shook his head smiling.

"You will feel it sooner or later. Remember my words."

Presently to my surprise, he rose. Nick was dancing with George Challenger. Frederica and Lazarus had just stopped and had sat down at their table. Then Lazarus got up and went away. Mrs. Rice was alone. Poirot went straight to her table. I followed him.

His methods were direct and to the point.

"You permit?" He laid a hand on the back of a chair, then slid into it. "I am anxious to have a word with you while your friend is dancing."

"Yes?" Her voice sounded cool, uninterested.

"Madame, I do not know whether your friend has told you. If not, I will. Today her life has been attempted."

Her great grey eyes widened in horror and surprise. The pupils, dilated black pupils, widened too.

"What do you mean?"

"Mademoiselle Buckley was shot at in the

She smiled suddenly--a gentle pitying incredulous smile.

"Did Nick tell you so?"

"No, Madame, I happened to see it with my own eyes. Here is the bullet."

He held it out to her and she drew back a LITTLE .

"But then but then---"

"It is no fantasy of Mademoiselle's imagination, you understand. I vouch for that.

And there is more. Several very curious accidents have happened in the last few days. You will have heard no, perhaps you will only arrived yesterday, did you

not. You not?"

"Yes

yesterday."

"Before that you were staying with friends, I understand. At Tavistock."

"Yes."

"I wonder, Madame, what were the names of the friends with whom you were staying."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Is there any reason why I should tell you that?" she asked coldly.

Poirot was immediately all innocent surprise.

"A thousand pardons, Madame. I was most maladroit. But I myself, having friends

met them there . . . Buchanan that is the name of my friends."

Mrs. Rice shook her head.

"I don't remember them. I don't think I can have met them." Her tone now was quite cordial. "Don't let us talk about boring people. Go on about Nick. Who shot at her? Why.>"

"I do not know whomas yet," said Poirot. "But I shall find out. Oh! yes, I shall find out. I am, you know, a detective. Hercule Poirot is my name."

"A very famous name."

"Madame is too kind."

She said slowly: "What do you want me to do?"

I think she surprised us both there. We had not expected just that.

"I will ask you, Madame, to watch over your friend."

"I will."

"That is all."

He got up, made a quick bow and we returned to our own table.

"Poirot," I said, "aren't you showing your hand very plainly?"

"Mon ami, what else can I do? It lacks

can take no chances. At any rate one thing

emerges plain to see."

"What is that?"

"Mrs. Rice was not at Tavistock. Where was she? Ah! but I will find out. Impossible to keep information from Hercule Poirot. See the handsome Lazarus has returned. She is telling him. He looks over at us. He is clever, that one. Note the shape of his head. Ah! I wish I knew "

"What?" I asked as he came to a stop.

"What I shall know on Monday," he re-turned ambiguously.

I looked at him but said nothing. He sighed.

"You have no longer the curiosity, my friend. In the old days "

"There are some pleasures," I said coldly,

"that it is good for you to do without."

"You mean ?"

"The pleasure of refusing to answer ques-tions."

"Ah, c'est malin."

"Quite so."

"Ah, well, well," murmured Poirot. "The

strong silent man beloved of novelists in the Edwardian age."

His eyes twinkled with their old glint.

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She detached herself from her partner and swooped down on us like a gaily colored bird.

"Dancing on the edge of death," she said lightly.

"It is a new sensation, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes. Rather fun."

She was off again with a wave of her hand.

"I wish she hadn't said that," I said slowly.

"Dancing on the edge of death. I don't like it."

"I know. It is too near the truth. She has courage, that little one. Yes, she has courage.

But unfortunately it is not courage that is needed at this moment. Caution, not courage voila ce qu'il nous faut.t"

The following day was Sunday. We were sitting on the terrace in front of the hotel and it was about half past eleven when Poirot suddenly rose to his feet.

"Come, my friend. We will try a little experiment. I have ascertained that M. Lazarus and Madame have gone out in the car and Mademoiselle with them. The coast is clear."

"Clear for what?"

"You shall see."

short stretch of grass to where a gate gave onto the zigzag path leading down to the sea. A couple of bathers were coming up it. They passed us laughing and talking.

When they had gone, Poirot walked to the point where an inconspicuous small gate, rather rusty on its hinges, bore the words in

half-obliterated letters END HOUSE. PRIVATE.

There was no one in sight. We passed quietly through.

In another minute we came out on the stretch of lawn in front of the house. There was no one about. Poirot strolled to the edge of the cliff and looked over. Then he walked towards the house itself. The French windows onto the veranda were open and we passed straight into the drawing room. Poirot wasted no time there. He opened the door and went out into the hall. From there he mounted the stairs, I at his heels. He went straight to Nick's bedroom sat down on the edge of the bed and nodded to me with a twinkle.

"You see, my friend, how easy it is. No one has seen us come. No one will see us go. We could do any little affair we had to do in perfect safety. We could, for instance, fray through a picture wire so that it would be

And supposing that by chance anyone did happen to be in front of the house and see us

coming. Then we would have a perfectly natural excuse, providing that we were known as friends of the house."

"You mean that we can rule out a stranger?"

"That is what I mean, Hastings. It is no stray lunatic who is at the bottom of this. We must look nearer home than that."

He turned to leave the room and I followed him. We neither of us spoke. We were both, I think, troubled in mind.

And then, at the bend of the staircase, we both stopped abruptly. A man was coming up.

He, too, stopped. His face was in shadow but his attitude was of one completely taken aback. He was the first to speak, in a loud rather bullying voice.

"What the hell are you doing here, I'd like to know?"

"Ah!" said Poirot. "Monsieur Croft, I think?"

"That's my name, but what."

"Shall we go into the drawing room to converse? It would be better, I think."

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In the drawing room, with the door shut,
Poirot made a little bow.

"I will introduce myself. Hercule Poirot,
at your service."

The other's face cleared a little.

"Oh!" he said slowly. "You're the detective
chap. I've read about you."

"In the St. Loo Herald?"

"Eh? I've read about you way back in
Australia. French, aren't you?"

"Belgian. It makes no matter. This is my
friend, Captain Hastings."

"Glad to meet you. But look, what's the
big idea? What are you doing here? Anything
wrong?"

"It depends what you call wrong."

The Australian nodded. He was a fine-looking
man in spite of his bald head and
advancing years. His physique was magnificent.
He had a heavy, rather underhung
face a crude face, I called it myself. The
piercing blue of his eyes was the most noticeable
thing about him.

"See here," he said. "I came round to
bring little Miss Buckley a handful of tomatoes
and a cucumber. That man of hers is no
good bone idle doesn't grow a thing. Lazy
hound. Mother and I why, it makes us

what we can! We've got a lot more tomatoes than we can eat. Neighbors should be matey, don't you think? I came in, as usual, through the window and dumped the basket down. I was just going off again when I heard footsteps and men's voices overhead. That struck me as odd. We don't deal much in burglars round here but after all it was possible. I thought I'd just make sure everything was all right. Then I met you two on the stairs coming down. It gave me a bit of a surprise. And now you tell me you're a bonza detec-five. What's it all about?"

"It is very simple," said Poirot, smiling.

"Mademoiselle had a rather alarming experience the other night. A picture fell above her bed. She may have told you of it?"

"She did. A mighty fine escape."

"To make all secure I promised to bring her some special chain, it will not do to repeat the occurrence, eh? She tells me she is going out this morning but I may come and measure what amount of chain will be needed. Vo//a it is simple."

Croft drew a deep breath. "So that's all it is?"

"Yes--you have had the scare for nothing.

We are very law-ahlclintr ,;:,;,;,;,.

"Didn't I see you yesterday?" said Croft slowly. "Yesterday evening it was. You passed our little place."

"Ah! yes, you were working in the garden and were so polite as to say good afternoon when we passed."

"That's right. Well well. And you're the M. Hercule Poirot I've heard so much about. Tell me, are you busy, Mr. Poirot? Because if not, I wish you'd come back with me now have a cup of morning tea, Australian fashion, and meet my old lady. She's read all about you in the newspapers."

"You are too kind, M. Croft. We have nothing to do and shall be delighted."

"That's fine."

"You have the measurements correctly, Hastings?" asked Poirot turning to me. I assured him that I had the measurements correctly and we accompanied our new friend.

Croft was a talker, we soon realized that. He told us of his home near Melbourne, of his early struggles, of his meeting with his wife, of their combined efforts and of his final good fortune and success.

"Right away we made up our minds to travel," he said. "We'd always wanted to

came down to this part of the world tried to look up some of my wife's people they came from round about here. But we couldn't trace any of them. Then we took a trip on the Continent- Paris, Rome, the Italian Lakes, Florence all those places. It was while we were in Italy that we had the train accident. My poor wife was badly smashed up. Cruel, isn't it? I've taken her to the best doctors and they all say the same there's nothing for it but time time and lying up. It's an injury to the spine."

"What a misfortune!"

Hard luck, sn t it? Well, there it was. And she'd only got one kind of fancy to come down here. She kind of felt if we had a little place of our own something small it would make all the difference. We saw a lot of messy-looking shacks, and then by good luck we found this. Nice and quiet and tucked away no cars passing, or gramo-phones next door. I took it right away."

With the last words we had come to the lodge itself. He sent his voice echoing forth in a loud "Cooee" to which came an answer-ing "Cooee."

"Come in," said Mr. Croft. He passed through the open door and up the short

on a sofa, was a stout middle-aged woman with pretty grey hair and a very sweet smile.

"Who do you think this is, Mother?" said Mr. Croft. "The extraspecial world-celebrated detective, Mr. Hercule Poirot. I brought him right along to have a chat with you."

"If that isn't too exciting for words," cried Mrs. Croft, shaking Poirot warmly by the hand. "Read about that Blue Train business, I did, and you just happening to be on it, and a lot about your other cases. Since this trouble with my back, I've read all the detective stories that ever were, I should think. Nothing else seems to pass the time away so quick. Bert dear, call out to Edith to bring the tea along."

"Right you are, Mother."

"She's a kind of nurse attendant, Edith is," Mrs. Croft explained. "She comes along each morning to fnt me up. We're not both-ering with servants. Bert's as good a cook and a house-parlor-man as you'd find any-where, and it gives him occupation., that and the garden."

"Here we are," cried Mr. Croft reappear-ing with a tray. "Here's the tea. This is a great day in our lives, Mother."

Poirot?" Mrs. Croft asked as she leaned over a little and wielded the tea pot.

"Why yes, Madame, I take the holiday."

"But surely I read that you had retired--that you'd taken a holiday for good and all."

"Ah! Madame, you must not believe ev-erything you read in the papers."

"Well, that's true enough. So you still carry on business?" .

"When I find a case that interests me."

"Sure you're not down here on work," required Mr. Croft shrewdly. "Calling it a

holiday might be all part of the game."

"You mustn't ask him embarrassing ques-tions, Bert," said Mrs. Croft. "Or he won't come again. We're simple people, Mr. Poirot, and you're giving us a great treat coming here today--you and your friend. You really don't know the pleasure you're giving us."

She was so natural and so frank in her gratification that my heart quite warmed to her.

"That was a bad business about the picture," said Mr. Croft.

"That poor little girl might have been killed," said Mrs. Croft with deep feeling.

"She is a live wire. Liven the place up

when she comes in, h,,, xT^ t ,,, ,

the way in these stuck-up English places. They don't like life and gaiety in a girl. I don't wonder she doesn't spend much time down here. And that long-nosed cousin of hers has no more chance of persuading her to settle down here for good and all than than well, I don't know what."

"Don't gossip, Milly," said her husband.

"Aha," said Poirot. "The wind is in that quarter. Trust the instinct of Madame! So M. Charles Vyse is in love with our little friend?"

"He's silly about her," said Mrs. Croft.

"But she won't marry a country lawyer. And I don't blame her. He's a poor stick anyway. I'd like her to marry that nice sailor what's his name, Challenger. Many a smart marriage might be worse than that. He's older than she is, but what of that? Steadying that's what she needs. Flying about all over the place, the Continent even, all alone or with that queer-looking Mrs. Rice. She's a sweet girl, Mr. Poirot I know that well enough. But I'm worried about her. She's looked none too happy lately. She's had what I call a haunted kind of look. And it worries me! I've got my reasons for being interested

Mr. Croft got up from his chair rather suddenly.

"No need to go into that, Milly," he said.
"I wonder Mr. Poirot, if you'd care to see some snapshots of Australia?"

The rest of our visit passed uneventfully. Ten minutes later we took our leave.

"Nice people," I said. "So simple and unassuming. Typical Australians."

"You liked them?"

"Didn't you?"

"They were very pleasant very friendly."

"Well, what is it then? There's something, I can see."

"They were, perhaps, just a shade too 'typical,'" said Poirot thoughtfully. "That cry of 'Cooee' that insistence on showing us snapshots, was it not perhaps playing a part just a little too thoroughly?"

"What a suspicious old devil you are!"

"You are fight, mon ami. I am suspicious of everyone of everything. I am afraid, Hastings afraid."

A Call Upon Mr. Vyse

Poirot clung firmly to the Continental break-fast. To see me consuming eggs and bacon upset and distressed him ,.so he always said. Consequently he breakfasted in bed upon coffee and rolls and I was free to start the day with the traditional Englishman's break-fast of bacon and eggs and marmalade.

I looked into his room on Monday mom-ing as I went downstairs. He was sitting up in bed arrayed in a very marvelous dressing gown.

"Bonjour, Hastings. I was just about to nng. This note that I have written, will you

be so good as to get it taken over to End House and delivered to Mademoiselle at once.

I held out my hand for it. Poirot looked at me and sighed.

"If only .if only, Hastings, you would part

: -t...m.. ,.tool rff t the side!

What a difference it would make to the sym-metry
of your appearance. And your mus-tache.
If you must have a mustache, let it be
a real mustache a thing of beauty such as
mine."

Repressing a shudder at the thought, I
took the note firmly from Poirot's hand and
left the room.

I had rejoined him in our sitting room
when word was sent up to say Miss Buckley
had called. Poirot gave the order for her to
be shown up.

She came in gaily enough, but I fancied
that the circles under her eyes were darker
than usual. In her hand she held a telegram
which she handed to Poirot.

"There," she said, "I hope that will please
you!"

Poirot read it aloud.

"Arrive 5:30 today Maggie."

"My nurse and guardian!" said Nick. "But
you're wrong, you know. Maggie's got no
kind of brains. Good works is about all she's
fit for. That and never seeing the point of
jokes. Freddie would be ten times better at
spotting hidden assassins. And Jim Lazarus
would be better still. I never feel one has got
to the bottom of Jim."

"And the Commander Challenger?"

"Oh! George! He'd never see anything till it was under his nose. But he'd let them have it when he did see. Very useful when it

came to a showdown, George would be."
She tossed off her hat and went on.

"I gave orders for the man you wrote about to be let in. It sounds mysterious. Is he installing a dictaphone or something like that?"

Poirot shook his head.

"No, no, nothing scientific. A very simple little matter of opinion, Mademoiselle. Some-thing I wanted to know."

"Oh, well," said Nick, "it's all great fun, isn't it?"

"Is it, Mademoiselle?" asked Poirot gently.

She stood for a minute with her back to us, looking out of the window. Then she turned. All the brave defiance had gone out of her face. It was childishly twisted awry, as she struggled to keep back the tears.

"No," she said. "It isn't really. I'm afraid I'm afraid. Hideously afraid. And I always thought I was brave."

"So you are, mon enfant, so you are. Both Hastings and I, we have both admired your courage."

"No," said Nick, shaking her head. "I'm not brave. It's it's the waiting. Wondering the whole time if anything more's going to happen. And how it'll happen! And expecting it to happen."

"Yes, yes it is the strain."

"Last night I pulled my bed out into the middle of the room. And I fastened my window and bolted my door. When I came here

this morning,. I came round by the road. I couldn't I smaply couldn't come through the garden. It's as though my nerve had gone all of a sudden. It's this thing coming on top of everything else."

"What do you mean exactly by that, Mademoiselle? On top of everything else?"

There was a momentary pause before she replied.

"I don't mean anything particular. What the newspapers call 'the strain of modern life,' I suppose. Too many cocktails, too many cigarettes all that sort of thing. It's just that I've got into a ridiculous sort of ... of state."

She had sunk into a chair and was sitting there, her small fingers curling and uncurling themselves nervously.

"You are not being frank with me, Made

"There isn't there really isn't."

"There is something you have not told
me.

"I've told you every single smallest thing."

She spoke sincerely and earnestly.

"About these accidents
about the attacks
upon you, yes."

"Well then?"

"But you have not told me everything that
is in your heart in your life "

She
said slowly.

"Can
anyone do that... ?"

"Ah!
then," said Poirot with triumph. "You
admit it!"

She
shook her head. He watched her keenly.

"Perhaps,"
he suggested shrewdly, "it is not
your secret?"

I
thought I saw a momentary flicker of her
eyelids. But almost immediately she jumped

up.

"Really

and truly, M. Poirot, I've told you every single thing I know about this stupid business.

If you think I know something about someone else, or have suspicions, you are wrong. It's having no suspicions that's driving me mad! Because I'm not a fool. I can see that if these 'accidents' weren't acci-

somebody very near at hand somebody who knows me. And that's what is so awful. Because I haven't the least idea not the very least who that somebody might be." She went over once more to the window and stood looking out. Poirot signed to me not to speak. I think he was hoping for some further revelation, now that the girl's self-control had broken down.

When she spoke, it was in a different tone of voice, a dreamy far away voice.

"Do you know a queer wish I've always had? I love End House. I've always wanted to produce a play there. It's got an an atmosphere of drama about it. I've seen all sorts of plays staged there in my mind. And now it's as though a dream were being acted there. Only I'm not producing it... I'm in it! I'm fight in it! I am, perhaps, the person who dies in the first act."

Her voice broke.

"Now, now, Mademoiselle." Poirot's voice was resolutely brisk and cheerful. "This will not do. This is the hysteria."

She turned and looked at him sharply.

"Did Freddie tell you I was hysterical?"

she asked. "She says I am, sometimes. But you mustn't always believe what Freddie

says. There are times, you know, when - when she isn't quite herself."
There was a pause, then Pmrot asked a
totally irrelevant question.

"Tell me, Mademoiselle," he said. "Have
you ever received an offer for End House?"

"To sell it, do you mean?"

"That is what I meant."

"NO."

"Would you consider selling it if you got a
good offer?"

Nick considered for a moment.

"No, I don't think so. Not, I mean, unless
it was such a ridiculously good offer that
it would be perfectly foolish not to."

"Precisely."

"I don't want to sell it, you know, because
I'm fond of it."

"Quite so I understand."

Nick moved slowly towards the door..

"By the way, there are fireworks tonight.

-A:eht o'clock. The
Will you come? Dinner at

fireworks begin at nme-thirty. You can see
them splendidly from the garden where it
overlooks the harbor."

"I shall be enchanted."

"Both of you, of course," said Nick.

"Many thanks," I said.

drooping spirits," remarked Nick. And with a little laugh she went out.

"Pauvre enfant," said Poirot.

He reached for his hat and carefully flicked an infinitesimal speck of dust from its sur-face.

"We are going out?" I asked.

"Mais oui, we have legal business to trans-act, mon ami."

"Of course. I understand."

"One of your brilliant mentality could not fail to do so, Hastings."

The offices of Messrs. Vyse, Trevannion & Wynnard were situated in the main street of the town. We mounted the stairs to the first floor and entered a room where three clerks were busily writing. Poirot asked to see Mr. Charles Vyse.

A clerk murmured a few words down a telephone, received, apparently, an affma-tire reply, and remarking that Mr. Vyse would see us now, he led us across the pas-sage, tapped on a door and stood aside for us to pass in.

From behind a large desk covered with legal papers, Mr. Vyse rose up to greet us.

He was a tall young man, rather pale, with

imnu..ixre fentnre. I-le wa. going a little bald

on either temple and wore glasses. His coloring was fair and indeterminate.

Poirot had come prepared for the encounter.

Fortunately he had with him an agreement, as yet unsigned, and on some technical points in connection with this, he wanted Mr. Vyse's advice.

Mr. Vyse, speaking carefully and correctly, was soon able to allay Poirot's alleged doubts, and to clear up some obscure points of the wording.

"I am very much obliged to you," murmured Poirot. "As a foreigner, you comprehend, these legal matters and phrasing are most difficult."

It was then that Mr. Vyse asked who had sent Poirot to him.

"Miss Buckley," said Poirot promptly.

"Your cousin, is she not? A most charming young lady. I happened to mention that I was in perplexity and she told me to come to you. I tried to see you on Saturday morning about half past twelve but you were out."

"Yes, I remember. I left early on Saturday."

"Mademoiselle your cousin must find that large house very lonely? She lives there alone,

"Quite so."

"Tell me, M. Vyse, if I may ask, is there any chance of that property being in the market?"

"Not the least, I should say."

"You understand: I do not ask idly.. I have a reason! I am m search myself, of lust such a property. The climate of St. Loo enchants me. It is tree that the house ap-pears to be in bad repair, there has not been, I gather, much money to spend upon it. Under those circunstances, is it not possible that Mademoiselle would consider an offer?"

"Not the least likelihood of it," Charles Vyse shook his head with the utmost deci-sion. "My cousin is absolutely devoted to the place. Nothing would induce her to sell, I

know. It is, you understand, a family place."

"I comprehend that, but--"

"It is absolutely out of the question. I know my cous'm. She has a fanatical devo-tion to the house."

A few minutes later we were out in the street again.

"Well, my friend," said Poirot. "And what impression did this M. Charles Vyse make upon you?"

"A very negative one," I said at last. "He is a curiously negative person."

"Not a strong personality, you would say?"

"No, indeed. The kind of man you would never remember on meeting him again. A mediocre person."

"His appearance is certainly not striking. Did you notice any discrepancy in the course of our conversation with him?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "I did. With regard to the selling of End House."

"Exactly. Would you have described Mademoiselle Buckley's attitude towards End House as one of 'fanatical devotion'?"

"It is a very strong term."

"Yes--and M. Vyse is not given to using strong terms. His normal attitude a legal attitude---is to under- rather than overstate. Yet he says that Mademoiselle has a fanatical devotion to the house of her ancestors."

"She did not convey that impression this morning," I said. "She spoke about it very sensibly, I thought. She's obviously fond of the placemjust as anyone in her position would be but certainly nothing more."

"So, in fact, one of the two is lying," said Poirot thoughtfully.

"One would not suspect Vyse of lying."

to do.," remarked Poirot. "Yes, he has quite the air of a George Washington, that one.

Did you notice another thing, Hastings?"

"What was that?"

"He was not in his office at half past twelve on Saturday."

Tragedy

The first person we saw when we arrived at End House that evening was Nick. She was dancing about the hall wrapped in a marvelous kimono covered with dragons.

"Oh! it's only you!"

"Mademoiselle I am desolated!"

"I know. It did sound rude. But you see, I'm waiting for my dress to arrive. They promised the brutes promised faithfully!"

"Ah! if it is a matter of la toilette/There is a dance tonight, is there not?"

"Yes. We are all going on to it after the fireworks. That is, I suppose we are."

There was a sudden drop in her voice.

But the next minute she was laughing.

"Never give in! That's my motto. Don't think of trouble and trouble won't come!

I've got my nerve back tonight. I'm going to

There was a footfall on the stairs. Nick turned.

"Oh! here's Maggie. Maggie, here are the sleuths that are protecting me from the se-cret assassins. Take them into the drawing room and let them tell you about it."

In turn we shook hands with Maggie Buckley and as requested she took us into the drawing room. I formed an immediate favorable opinion of her.

It was, I think, her appearance of calm good sense that so attracted me. A quiet girl, pretty in the old-fashioned sense certainly not smart. Her face was innocent of makeup and she wore a simple, rather shabby, black evening dress. She had frank blue eyes, and a pleasant slow voice.

"Nick has been telling me the most amaz-ing things," she said. "Surely she must be exaggerating? Who ever would want to harm Nick? She can't have an enemy in the world."

Incredulity showed strongly in' her voice. She was looking at Poirot in a somewhat unflattering fashion. I realized that to a girl like Maggie Buckley, foreigners were always suspicious.

"Nevertheless, Miss Buckley, I assure you.

She made no reply but her face remained
tmbelieving.

"Nick seems quite fey tonight," she re-marked.
"I don't know what's the matter
with her. She seems in the wildest spirits."

That word fey! It sent a shiver through
me. Also, something in the 'intonation of her
voice had set me wondering.

"Are you Scotch, Miss Buckley?" I asked
abruptly.

"My mother was Scottish," she explained.
She viewed me, I noticed, with more ap-proval
than she viewed Poirot. I felt that my
statement of the case would carry more
weight with her than Poirot's would.

"Your cousin is behaving with great brav-ery,"
I said. "She's determined to carry on

as usual."

"It's the only way, isn't it?" said Maggie.
"I mean whatever one's inward feelings,
are k is no good making a fuss about them.

That's only uncomfortable for everyone else."
She paused and then added in a soft voice,
"I'm very fond of Nick. She's been very
good to me always."

We could say nothing more for at that
moment Frederica Rice drifted into the room.
She was wearing a gown of Madonna blue

soon followed her and then Nick danced in. She was wearing a black frock and round her was wrapped a marvelous old Chinese shawl of vivid lacquer red.

"Hullo, people," she said. "Cocktails."

We all drank and Lazarus raised his glass to her.

"That's a marvelous shawl, Nick," he said.

"It's an old one, isn't it?"

"Yes brought back by Great-GreatGreat-Uncle Timothy from his travels."

"It's a beauty a real beauty. You wouldn't find another to match it if you tried."

"It's warm," said Nick. "It'll be nice when we're watching the fireworks. And it's gay. I I hate black."

"Yes," said Frederica. "I don't believe I've ever seen you in a black dress before, Nick. Why did you get it?"

"Oh! I don't know." The girl flung aside with a petulant gesture, but I had caught a curious curl of her lips as though of pain.

"Why does one do anything?"

We went into dinner. A mysterious manservant had appeared hired, I presume for the occasion. The food was indifferent. The champagne, on the other hand, was good.

nuisance his having to go back to Plymouth last night. He'll get over this evening some time or other, I expect. In time for the dance, anyway. I've got a man for Maggie. Present-able, if not passionately interesting."

A faint roaring sound drifted in through the window.

"Oh! curse that speedboat," said Lazarus. "I get so tired of it."

"That's not the speedboat," said Nick. "That's a seaplane."

"I believe you're right."

"Of course I'm right. The sound's quite different."

"When are you going to get your Moth, Nick?"

"When I can raise the money," laughed Nick.

"And then, I suppose, you'll be off to

Australia like that girl what's her name?" "I'd love to "

"I admire her enormously," said Mrs. Rice in her tired voice. "What marvelous nerve! All by herself too."

"I admire all these flying people," said Lazarus. "If Michael Seton had succeeded in

his flight round the world he'd have been

sand pities he's come to grief. He's the kind of man England can't afford to lose."

"He may still be all right," said Nick.

"Hardly. It's a thousand to one against by now. Poor Mad Seton."

"They always called him Mad Seton, didn't they?" asked Frederica.

Lazarus nodded.

"He comes of rather a mad family," he said. "His uncle, Sir Matthew Seton who died about a week ago. he was as mad as a hatter."

"He was the mad millionaire who ran bird sanctuaries, wasn't he?" asked Frederica.

"Yes. Used to buy up islands. He was a great woman hater. Some girl chucked him once, I believe, and he took to Natural His-tory by way of consoling himself."

"Why do you say Michael Seton is dead?" persisted Nick. "I don't see any reason for giving up hope--yet."

"Of course, you knew him, didn't you?" said Lazarus. "I forgot."

"Freddie and I met him at Le Touquet last year," said Nick. "He was too marvel-ous, wasn't he, Freddie?"

"Don't ask me, darling. He was your con-quest,
not mine. He tonk vn

"Yes--at Scarborough. It was simply too wonderful."

"Have you done any flying, Captain Hastings?" Maggie asked of me in polite conversational tones.

I had to confess that a trip to Paris and back was the extent of my acquaintance with air travel.

Suddenly, with an exclamation, Nick sprang up.

"There's the telephone. Don't wait for me. It's getting late. And I've asked lots of people."

She left the room. I glanced at my watch. It was just nine o'clock. Dessert was brought, and port. Poirot and Lazarus were talking art. Pictures, Lazarus was saying, were a great drug in the market just now. They went on to discuss new ideas in furniture and decoration.

I endeavored to do my duty by talking to Maggie Buckley, but I had to admit that the girl was heavy in hand. She answered pleasantly but without throwing the ball back. It was uphill work.

Frederica Rice sat dreamily silent, her elbows on the table and smoke from her cigarette curling round her fair head. She looked

It was just twenty past nine when Nick
put her head round the door.

"Come out of it, all of you! The animals
are coming in two by two."

We rose obediently. Nick was busy greet-ing
arrivals. About a dozen people had been
asked. Most of them were rather uninterest-ing.
Nick, I noticed made a good hostess.
She sunk her modernisms and made every-one
welcome in an old-fashioned way.
Amongst the guests I noticed Charles Vyse.

Presently we all moved out into the garden
to a place overlooking the sea and the har-bor.
A few chairs had been placed there for
the elderly people, but most of us stood. The
first rocket flamed to Heaven.

At that moment, I heard a loud familiar
voice and turned my head to see Nick greet-ing
Mr. Croft.

"It's too bad," she was saying, "that Mrs.
Croft can't be here too. We ought to have
carried her on a stretcher or something."

"It's bad luck on poor Mother altogether.
But she never complains that woman's got
the sweetest nature Ha! that's a good one."
This as a shower of golden rain showed up
in the sky.

The night was a dark one there was no

mrrn tho noxxr mr"n hino' dle in three

days' time. It was also, like most stormy evenings, cold. Maggie Buckley, who was next to me, shivered.

"I'll just run in and get a coat," she murmured.

"Let me."

"No, you wouldn't know where to find it."

She turned towards the house. At that moment Frederica Rice's voice called.

"Oh! Maggie, get mine too. It's in my room."

"She didn't hear," said Nick. "I'll get it, Freddie. I want my fur one... this shawl isn't nearly hot enough. It's this wind."

There was, indeed, a sharp breeze blowing off the sea.

Some set pieces started down on the quay.

I fell into conversation with an elderly young lady standing next me who put me through a rigorous catechism as to life, career, tastes and probable length of stay.

Bang! A shower of green stars filled the sky. They changed to blue, then red, then silver.

Another and yet another.

"'Oh!' and then 'Ah!' that is what one says," observed Poirot suddenly close to my

you not f'md? Brrr! The grass, it is damp to the feet! I shall suffer for this a chill. And

no possibility of obtaining a proper tisane.t"

"A chill? On a lovely night like this?"

"A lovely night! A lovely night! You say that, because the rain it does not pour down in sheets! Always when the rain does not fall, it is a lovely night. But I tell you, my friend, if there were a little thermometer to consult you would see."

"Well," I admitted. "I wouldn't mind put-ting on a coat myself."

"You are very sensible. You have come from a hot climate."

"I'll bring yours."

Poirot lifted first one, then the other foot from the ground with a catlike motion.

"It is the dampness of the feet I fear.

Would it, think you, be possible to lay the

hands on a pair of galoshes?"

I repressed a smile.

"Not a hop?," I said. "You understand, Poirot, that it as no longer done."

"Then I shall sit in the house," he de-clared.

"Just for the Guy Fawkes show, shall

I wantonly enrhummer myself?. And catch, per-haps,
a fluxion de poitrine?"

Poirot still murmuring indignantly, we

clapping drifted up to us from the quay below where another set piece was being shown a ship, I believe, with WELCOME TO OUR VISITORS displayed across it.

"We are all children at heart," said Poirot thoughtfully. "Les Feux d'Artifices, the Party, the games with balls yes, and even the conjuror, the man who deceives the eye, however carefully it watches mais qu'est-ce que vous avez?"

I had caught him by the arm, and was clutching him with one hand while with the other I pointed.

We were within a hundred yards of the house and just in front of us, between us and the open French window, there lay a huddled figure wrapped in a scarlet Chinese shawl

"Mon Dieu!" whispered Poirot. "Mon Dieu "

The Fatal Shawl

I suppose it was not more than forty seconds that we stood there, frozen with horror, un-able to move, but it seemed like an hour. Then Poirot moved forward shaking off my hand. He moved stiffly like an automaton.

"It has happened," he murmured, and I can hardly describe the anguished bitterness of his voice. "In spite of everything--in spite of my precautions it has happened. Ah! mis-erable criminal that I am, why did I not guard her better. I should have foreseen, yes- I should have foreseen. Not for one instant should I have left her side."

"You mustn't blame yourself," I said.

My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth and I could hardly articulate.

Poirot only responded with a sorrowful

shake of his head. He knelt down 1,, ,

And at that moment we received a second shock.

For Nick's voice rang out, clear and gay, and a moment later Nick appeared in the square of the window silhouetted against the lighted room behind.

"Sorry I've been so long, Maggie," she said. "But "

Then she broke off staring at the scene before her.

With a sharp exclamation Poirot turned over the body on the lawn and I pressed forward to see.

I looked down into the dead face of Maggie Buckley.

In another minute Nick was beside us. She gave a sharp cry.

"Maggie..Oh! Maggie it it can't "

Poirot was still examining the girl's body. At last very slowly he rose to his feet.

"Is she is "Nick's voice broke off.
"Yes, Mademoiselle. She is dead."

"But why? But why? Who could have wanted to kill her?"

Poirot's reply came quickly and firmly.
"It was not her they meant to kill, Made-moiselle!

It was you! They were misled by
the shawl."

"Why couldn't it have been me?" she wailed. "Oh! why couldn't it have been me? I'd so much rather. I don't want to live now. I'd be glad. I'd be glad to die."

She flung up her arms wildly and then staggered slightly. I passed an arm round her quickly to support her.

"Take her into the house, Hastings," said

Poirot. "Then ring up the police."

"The police?"

"Mais oui. Tell them someone has been shot. And afterwards stay with Mademoiselle Nick. On no account leave her."

I nodded in comprehension of these instructions, and supporting the half-fainting girl, made my way through the drawing room window. I laid the girl on the sofa there, with a cushion under her head, and then hurried out into the hall in search of the telephone.

I gave a slight start on almost running into Ellen. She was standing there with a most peculiar expression on her meek respectable face. Her eyes were glittering and she was passing her tongue repeatedly over her dry lips. Her hands were trembling, as though with excitement. As soon as she saw me, she spoke.

"Yes," I said curtly. "Where's the telephone?"

"Nothing--nothing wrong, sir?"

"There's been an accident," I said evasively.

"Somebody hurt. I must telephone."

"Who has been hurt, sir?"

There was a positive eagerness in her face.

"Miss Buckley. Miss Maggie Buckley."

"Miss Maggie? Miss Maggie? Are you sure, sir--I mean are you sure that--that it's Miss Maggie?"

"I said. "Why?"

"I'm quite sure,

"Oh!--nothing. I . I thought it might be one of the other ladies. I thought perhaps it

might be ..Mrs. Rice."

"Look here," I said. "Where's the telephone?"

"It's in the little room here, sir." She opened the door for me and indicated the instrument.

"Thanks," I said. And as she seemed disposed to linger, I added, "That's all I want, thank you."

"If you want Dr. Graham--"

"No, no," I said. "That's all. Go, please."

She withdrew reluctantly, as slowly as she dared. In all probability :she would listen

After all, she would soon know all there was to be known.

I got the police station and made my re-port. Then, on my own initiative, I rang up the Dr. Graham Ellen had mentioned. I found his number in the book. Nick, at any rate, should have medical attention, I felt

even though a doctor could do nothing for that poor girl lying out there. He promised to come at once and I hung up the receiver and came out into the hall again.

If Ellen had been listening outside the door she had managed to disappear very swiftly. There was no one in sight when I came out. Nick

I went back into the drawing room. was trying to sit up.

"Do you think could you get me brandy?"

"Of course."

some

I hurried into the dining room, found what I wanted and came back. A few sips of the spirit revived the girl. The color began to come back into her cheeks. I rearranged the cushion for her head.

"It's all so awffi." She shivered. "Every-thing
everywhere."

"I know, my dear, I know."

such a waste. If it only were me. It would be all over "

"You mustn't," I said, "be morbid."

She only shook her head, reiterating: "You don't know! You don't know!"

Then, suddenly, she began to cry. A quiet, hopeless sobbing like a child. That, I thought, was probably the best thing for her, so I made no effort to stem her tears.

When their first violence had died down a little, I stole across to the window and looked out. I had heard an outcry of voices a few minutes before. They were all there by now, a semicircle round the scene of the tragedy, with Poirot like a fantastical sentinel, keeping them back.

As I watched, two uniformed figures came striding across the grass. The police had arrived.

I went quietly back to my place by the sofa. Nick lifted her tearstained face.

"Oughtn't I to be doing something?"

"No, my dear. Poirot will see to it. Leave it to me."

Nick was silent for a minute or two, then she said: "Poor Maggie. Poor dear old Maggie. Such a good sort who never harmed

This must have been a terrible shock."
fingers were on her pulse. "Not too bad. He turned to me.
"Has she had anything?"
"Some brandy," I said.
"I'm all right," said Nick bravely.
"Able to answer a few questions, eh?" "Of course."

her. I feel as though I'd killed her bringing
her down in the way that I did."
I shook my head sadly. How little one can
foresee the future. When Poirot insisted on
Nick's inviting a friend, how little did he
think that he was signing an unknown girl's
death warrant.

We sat in silence. I longed to know what
was going on outside but I loyally fulfilled
Poirot's instructions and stuck to my post.
It seemed hours later when the door
opened and Poirot and a police inspector
entered the room. With them came a man
who was evidently Dr. Graham. He came
over at once to Nick.

"And how are you feeling, Miss Buckley?
His

The police inspector moved forward with
a preliminary cough. Nick greeted him with
a ghost of a smile.

"Not impeding the traffic this time," she

I gathered they were not strangers to each other.

"This is a terrible business, Miss Buckley," said the inspector. "I'm very sorry about it. Now Mr. Poirot here whose name I'm very familiar with (and proud we are to have him with us, I'm sure) tells me that to the best of his belief you were shot at in the grounds of

the Majestic Hotel the other morning?"
Nick nodded.

"I thought it was just a wasp," she explained.
"But it wasn't."

"And you'd had some rather peculiar accidents before that?"

"Yes at least it was odd their happening

account of the various

so close together."

She gave a brief
circumstances.

"Just so. Now how came it that your
cousin was wearing your shawl tonight?"

"We came in to fetch her coat it was
rather cold watching the fireworks. I flung
off the shawl on the sofa here. Then I went

upstairs and put on the coat I'm wearing
now a light nutria one. I also got a wrap
for my friend Mrs. Rice out of her room.
There it is on the floor by the window.
Then Maggie called out that she couldn't

She went down and called up she still
couldn't find it. I said it must have been left

in the car it was a tweed coat .she was
looking for she hasn't got an evenng furry
one and I said I'd bring her down some-thing
of mine. But she said it didn't mat-ter
she'd take my shawl if I didn't want it.

And I said of course but would that be
enough? And she said, Oh! yes, because she
really didn't feel it particularly cold after
Yorkshire She just wanted something. And
I said all right, I'd be out in a minute. And

when I did. did come out "

She stopped, her voice breaking...
"Now, don't distress yourself,

Buckley. Just tell me this: Did you hear a
shot or two shots?"

Nick shook her head.

"No only just the fireworks popping and
the squibs going off."

"That's just it," said the inspector. "You'd

never notice a s. hot with all that going on.
It's no good asking you, I suppose, if you've

any clue to who is making these attacks upon you?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Nick. "I can't imagine."

"And you wouldn't be likely to," said the

xWvrh it looks like to me. Nasty business.

'i won't need to ask you any more
w u,.

. -:--+ i l'm more sorry about
quesuons tomgm, -,-

this than I can say."

Dr. Graham stepped forward.

',T,,, ning to suggest, Miss Buckley., that

---- ^--'t stay here. Ive been talking t over
yuu u,x

. J

"--' nuts-

with M. Porot. I know of an excenent

ing home. You've had a shock, ,y, ou know.

What you need is complete rest

Nick was not looking at him. Her eyes
gone to Poirot.

ha,al'ls it--because of the shock?" she asked.

He came forward.

"I want you to feel safe, mon enfant. And I
want to feel, too, that you are safe. There
will be a nurse there--a nice practical
unimaginative nurse. She will be near you all
night. When you wake up and cry out ..she
will be there, close at hand. You understand?"

"Yes," said Nick. "I understand. But you
don't. I'm not afraid any longer. I don't care
one way or another. If anyone wants to murder
me, they can."

"Hush, hush," I said. "You're over-sprung.

"You don't know. None of you know!"

good one," the doctor broke in soothingly.
"I will take you in my car. And we will give you a little something to ensure a good night's rest. Now what do you say?"

"I don't mind," said Nick. "Anything you like. It doesn't matter."

Poirot laid his hand on hers.

"I know, Mademoiselle. I know what you must feel. I stand before you ashamed and stricken to the heart. I, who promised protection, have not been able to protect. I have failed. I am a miserable. But believe me, Mademoiselle, my heart is in agony because of that failure. If you knew what I am suffering, you would forgive me, I am sure."

"That's all right," said Nick, still in the same dull voice. "You mustn't blame yourself. I'm sure you did the best you could. Nobody could have helped it or done more, I'm sure. Please don't be unhappy."

"You are very generous, Mademoiselle."
"No, I "

There was an interruption. The door flew open and George Challenger rushed into the

room.

"What's all this?" he cried. "I've just arrived. To find a policeman at the gate and a

III

IIIr

about? For God's sake, tell me. Is it is it Nick?"

The anguish in his tone was dreadful to hear. I suddenly realized that Poirot and the doctor between them completely blotted out Nick from his sight.

Before anyone had time to answer, he re-peated his question.

"Tell me it can't be true Nick isn't dead?"

"No, mon ami," said Poirot gently. "She is alive."

And he drew back so that Challenger could see the little figure on the sofa.

For a moment or two Challenger stared at her incredulously. Then, staggering a little, like a drunken man, he muttered: "Nick Nick."

And suddenly dropping on his knees be-side the sofa and hiding his head in his hands, he cried in a muffled voice, "Nick my dar-ling I thought that you were dead."

Nick tried to sit up.

"It's all right, George.
I'm quite safe."

He raised his head
wildly.

"But

Don't be an idiot.

and looked round

somebody's dead? The policeman

"Yes," said Nick. "Maggie. Poor old Maggie. Oh! ."

A spasm twisted her face. The doctor and

Poirot came forward. Graham helped her to her feet. He and Poirot, one on each side, helped her from the room.

"The sooner you get to your bed the better," remarked the doctor. "I'll take you along at once in my car. I've asked Mrs. Rice to pack a few things ready for you to take."

They disappeared through the door. Challenger caught my arm.

"I don't understand. Where are they taking her?"

I explained.

"Oh! I see. Now then, Hastings, for God's sake give me the hang of this thing. What a ghastly tragedy! That poor girl."

"Come and have a drink," I said. "You're all to pieces."

"I don't mind if I do."

We adjourned to the dining room.

"You see," he explained as he put away a stiff whiskey and soda, "I thought it was Nick."

There was very little doubt as to the feelings of Commander George Challenger. A more transparent lover never lived.

A. to J.

I doubt if I shall ever forget the night that followed. Poirot was a prey to such an agony of self-reproach that I was really alarmed.

Ceaselessly he strode up and down the room heaping anathemas on his own head and deaf to my well-meant remonstrances.

"What is it to have too good an opinion of oneself?. I am punished yes, I am punished.

I,

Hercule Poirot. I was too sure of myself."

"No, no," I interpolated.

"But who would imagine who could imagine such unparalleled audacity? I had taken, as I thought, all possible precautions.

I had warned the murderer "

"Warned the murderer?"

"Mais oui. I had drawn attention to myself.

I had let him see that I suspected someone. I had made it, or so I thought, too dangerous for him to dare to repeat his at

round Mademoiselle. And he slips through it! Boldly under our very eyes almost, he slips through it! In spite of us all of everyone being on the alert, he achieves his object."

"Only he doesn't," I reminded him.

"That is the chance only! From my point of view, it is the same. A human life has been taken, Hastings whose life is nonessential?"

"Of course," I said, "I didn't meant that."

"But on the other hand, what you say is true. And that makes it worse ten times worse. For the murderer is still as far as ever from achieving his object. Do you understand, my friend? The position is changed for the worse. It may mean that not one life but two will be sacrificed."

"Not while you're about," I said stoutly.

He stopped and wrung my hand.

"Merci, mon ami.t Merci.t You still have confidence in the old one you still have the faith. You put new courage into me. Hercule Poirot will not fail again. No second life shall be taken. I will rectify my error for, see you, there must have been an error! Somewhere there has been a lack of order and mothnci in my mnlly n ullnrnnocl

I will start again. Yes, I will start at the beginning. And this time I will not fail."

"You really think, then," I said, "that Nick Buckley's life is still in danger?"

"My friend, for what other reason did I send her to this nursing home?"

"Then it wasn't the shock "

"The shock! Pah! One can recover from shock as well in one's own home as in a nursing home better for that matter. It is not amusing there, the floors of green lino-leum, the conversation of the nurses the meals on trays, the ceaseless washing. No, no, it is for safety and safety only. I take the doctor into my confidence. He agrees. He will make all arrangements. No one, mon ami, not even her dearest friend, will be admitted to see Miss Buckley. You and I are the only ones permitted. Pour les autres eh b/en.t 'Doctor's orders,' they will be told. A phrase very convenient and one not to be gainsaid."

"Yes," I said. "Only."

"Only what, Hastings?"

"That can't go on for ever."

"A very true observation. But it gives us a little breathing space. And you realize, do you not, that the character of our operations

"In what way?"

"Our original task was to ensure the safety of Mademoiselle. Our task now is a much simpler one. a task with which we are well acquainted. It is neither more or less than the hunting down of a murderer."

"You call that simpler?"

"Certainly it is simpler. The murderer has, as I said the other day, signed his name to the crime. He has come out into the open."

"You don't think--" I hesitated, then went on. "You don't think that the police are right? That this is the work of a madman, some wandering lunatic with homicidal mania?"

"I am more than ever convinced that such is not the case."

"You really think that"

I stopped. Poirot took up my sentence, speaking very gravely.

"That the murderer is someone in Mademoiselle's own circle? Yes, mon ami, I do."

"But surely last night must almost rule out that possibility. We were all together and- "

He interrupted.

"Could you swear, Hastings,
ttcular terscn h,-i ,,,,,, ,4: tha.,any par

any one person there whom you could swear you had seen all the time?"

"No," I said slowly, struck by his words.

"I don't think I could. It was dark. We all moved about, more or less. On different occasions I noticed Mrs. Rice, Lazarus, you,

Croft, Vyse but all the time no."

Poirot nodded his head.

"Exactly. It would be a matter of a very few minutes. The two girls go to the house. The murderer slips away unnoticed, hides behind that sycamore tree in the middle of the lawn. Nick Buckley, or so he thinks, comes out of the window, passes within a foot of him, he fires three shots in rapid succession "

"Three?" I interjected.

"Yes. He was taking no chances this time.

We found three bullets in the body."

"That was risky, wasn't it?"

"Less risky in all probability than one shot would have been. A Mauser pistol does not make a great deal of noise. It would resemble more or less the popping of the fireworks and blend in very well with the noise of them."

"Did you find the pistol?" I asked.

"No. And there, Hastings, lies to my mind

responsible for this. We agree, do we not, that Miss Buckley's own pistol was taken in the first place for one reason only, to give her death the appearance of suicide.

"Yes."

"That is the only possible reason, is it not? But now, you observe, there is no pretense of suicide. The murderer knows that we should not any longer be deceived by it.

He knows, in fact what we know!"

I reflected, admitting to myself the logic of Poirot's deduction.

"What did he do with the pistol do you think?"

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"For that, it is difficult to say. But the sea was exceedingly handy. A good toss of the arm, and the pistol sinks, never to be recovered.

We cannot, of course, be absolutely sure but that is what I should have done."

His matter-of-fact tone made me shiver a little.

"Do you think do you think he realized that he'd killed the wrong person?"

"I am quite sure he did not," said Poirot grimly. "Yes, that must have been an unpleasant

little surprise for he earned the truth. To her, when

At that moment I brought me of the strange attitude of the mind, Ellen. I gave Poirot an account of her peculiar demeanor. He seemed much interested.

"She betrayed surprise, did she, that it was Maggie who was dead?"

"Great surprise."

"That is curious. And yet, the fact of a tragedy was clearly not a surprise to her. Yes, there is something there that must be looked into. Who is she, this Ellen? So quiet, so respectable in the English manner? Could it be she who -?" he broke off.

"If you're going to include the accidents," I said, "surely it would take a man to have rolled that heavy boulder down the cliff."

"Not necessarily. It is very largely a question of leverage. Oh, yes! It could be done."

He continued his slow pacing up and down the room.

"Anyone who was at End House last night comes under suspicion. But those guests no, I do not think it was one of them. For the most part, I should say, they were mere

cquaintances. There was no intimacy between a

them and the young mistress of the house."

"Charles Vyse was there," I remarked.

logically, our strongest suspect." He made a gesture of despair and threw himself into a chair opposite mine. "Vo// it is always that we come back to! Motive! We must find the motive if we are to understand this crime. And it is there, Hastings, that I am continually baffled. Who can possibly have a motive for doing away with Mademoiselle Nick? I have let myself go to the most absurd suppositions. I, Hercule Poirot, have descended to the most ignominious flights of fancy. I have adopted the mentality of the cheap thriller. The grandfather the 'Old Nick' he who is supposed to have gambled his money away. Did he really do so, I have asked myself?. Did he, on the contrary, hide it away? Is it hidden somewhere in End House? Buried somewhere in the grounds? With that end in view (I am ashamed to say it) I inquired of Mademoiselle Nick whether there had ever been any offers to buy the house."

"Do you know, Poirot," I said, "I call that rather a bright idea. There may be something in it."

Poirot groaned.

"You would say that! It would appeal, I knew, to your romantic but slightly mediocre mind. Buried treasure yes, you would

"ell I don't see why not "

"B, ecause, my friend, the more prosaic ex-planafion is nearly always the more probable.

Ther Mademoiselle's father. I have played with even more degrading ideas concerning him. He was a traveler. Supposing, I say to myself, that he has stolen a jewel .. the eye of a god. Jealous priests are on his track. Yes, I, Hercule Poirot, have descended to depths such as these.

"I have had other ideas concerning this father," he went on. "Ideas at once more dignified and more probable. Did he, in the course of his wanderings, contract a second marage? Is there a nearer heir than M. Charles Vyse? But again, that leads nowhere, for we are up against the same difficulty that there is really nothing of value to inherit.

"I have neglected no possibility. Even that chaxace reference of Mademoiselle Nick's to the offer made her by M. Lazarus. You remember? The offer to purchase her grand-faer's portrait. I telegraphed on Saturday for an expert to come down and examine that picture. He was the man about whom I wrote to Mademoiselle this morning. Sup-posing, for instance, it were worth several

"You surely don't think a rich man like young Lazarus.. ?"

"Is he rich? Appearances are not every-thing. Even an old established firm with palatial showrooms and every appearance of prosperity may rest on a rotten basis. And what does one do then? Does one run about crying out .that times are hard? No, one buys a new and luxurious car. One spends a little more money than usual. One lives a little more ostentatiously. For credit, see you, is everything! But sometimes a monumental business has crashed for no more than a few thousand pounds of ready money.

"Oh! I know," he continued forestalling my protests. "It is farfetched but it is not so bad as revengeful priests or buried treasure. It bears, at any rate, some relationship to things as they happen. And we can neglect nothing, nothing that might bring us nearer the truth."

With careful fingers he straightened the objects on the table in front of him. When he spoke, his voice was grave and, for the first time, calm.

"Motive!" he said. "Let us come back to that, and regard this problem calmly and methodically. To begin with, how many

are the motives which lead one human being to take another human being's life?

"We exclude for the moment homicidal mania. Because I am absolutely convinced that the solution of our problem does not lie there. We also exclude killing done on the spur of the moment under the impulse of an ungovernable temper. This is a cold-blooded deliberate murder. What are the motives that actuate such a murder as that?

"There is, first, Gain. Who stood to gain by Mademoiselle Buckley's death? Directly or indirectly. Well, we can put down Charles Vyse. He inherits a property that, from the financial point of view, is probably not worth inheriting. He might, perhaps, pay off the mortgage, build small villas on the land and eventually make a small profit. It is possible. The place might be worth something to him if he had any deeply cherished love of it if it were, for instance, a family place. That is, undoubtedly an instinct very deeply implanted in some human beings, and it has, in cases I have known, actually led to crime.

But, I cannot see any such motive in Mr. Vyse's case.

"The only other person who would benefit at all by Mademoiselle Buckley's death is

would clearly be a very small one. Nobody else, as far as I can see, gains by Mademoiselle Buckley's death.

"What is another motive? Hate or love

that has turned to hate. The ct/me passionnel.

Well, there again we have the word of the observant

Madame Croft that both Charles

Vyse and Commander Challenger are in love with the young lady."

"I think we can say that we have observed the latter phenomenon for ourselves," I remarked with a smile.

"Yes he tends to wear his heart on his sleeve, the honest sailor. For the other, we rely on the word of Madame Croft. Now, if Charles Vyse felt that he was supplanted, would he be so powerfully affected that he would kill his cousin rather than let her be the wife of another man?"

"It sounds very melodramatic," I said doubtfully.

"It
sounds, you would say, un-English. I
agree.
But even the English have emotions.
And
a type such as Charles Vyse is the most
likely
to have them. He is a repressed young
man
. One who does not show his
feelings
easily. Such often have the most violent
feel

No, no, he is not the type. But with Charles

Vyse--yes, it is possible. But it does not entirely satisfy me.

"Another motive for crime Jealousy. I separate it from the last, because Jealousy may not, necessarily, be a sexual emotion. There is envy envy of possession of supremacy. Such a jealousy as drove the Iago of your great Shakespeare to one of the cleverest crimes (speaking from the professional point of view) that has ever been committed."

"Why was it so clever?" I asked, momentarily diverted.

"Parbleu because he got others to execute it. Imagine a criminal nowadays on whom one was unable to put the handcuffs because he had never done anything himself. But this is not the subject we were discussing. Can jealousy, of any kind, be responsible for this crime? Who has reason to envy Mademoiselle? Another woman? There is only Madame Rice, and as far as we can see, there was no rivalry between the two women. But again, that is only 'as far as we can see.' There may be something there.

"Lastly Fear. Does Mademoiselle Nick, by any chance, hold somebody's secret in

if it were known, might ruin another life? If so, I think we can say very definitely, that she herself is unaware of it. But that might be, you know. That might be. And if so, it makes it very difficult. Because, whilst she holds the clue in her hands, she holds it unconsciously and will be quite unable to tell us what it is."

"You really think that is possible?"

"It is a hypothesis. I am driven to it by the difficulty of finding a reasonable theory elsewhere. When you have eliminated other possibilities you turn to the one that is left and say--since the other is not--this must be so "

He was silent a long time.

At last, rousing himself from his absorption, he drew a sheet of paper towards him and began to write.

"What are you writing?" I asked curiously.

"Mort ami, I am composing a list. It is a list of people surrounding Mademoiselle Buckley. Within that list, if my theory is correct, there must be the name of the murderer."

.He co--n,tinued to write for perhaps twenty minutes thvn eh,,,,,4 .t.--t--.

"Voile, mort ami. See what you make of it."

The following is a reproduction of the paper.

A.

Ellen.

B.

Her gardener husband.

C.

Their child.

D.

Mr. Croft.

E.

Mrs. Croft.

IF.

Mrs. Rice.

G.

Mr. Lazarus.

H.

Commander Challenger.

I.

Mr. Charles Vyse.

J.

?

REMARKSi

A.

Ellen. Suspicious circumstances. Her attitude and words on hearing of the crime. Best opportunity of anyone to have staged accidents and to have known of pistol but unlikely to have tampered with car, and general mentality of crime seems above her level. Motive. None---unless Hate arising out of some incident unknown.

cedents and general relations with N.B.

B.

Her husband. Same as above. More likely to have tampered with car. Note. Should be interviewed.

C.

Child. Can be ruled out.

Note. Should be interviewed. Might give valuable information.

D.

Mr. Croft. Only suspicious circumstance.

The fact that we met him mounting the stair to bedroom floor. Had ready explanation which may be true. But it may not! Nothing known of antecedents. Motive. None.

E.

Mrs. Cro. Suspicious circumstances.

None. Motive. None.

IF.

Mrs. Rice. Suspicious circumstances.

Full opportunity. Asked N. B. to fetch wrap. Has deliberately tried to create impression that N. B. is a liar and her account of "accidents" not to be relied on. Was not at Tavistock when accidents occurred. Where was she? Motive. G'ain? Very slight. Jealousy? Possible, but nothing known. Fear? Also possible, but nothing known. Mata. Converse with N. B. on subject.

See if any light is thrown upon matter.
Possibly something to do with IF. R.'s
marriage.

G.

Mr. Lazarus. Suspicious circumstances.

General opportunity. Offer to
buy picture. Said brakes of car were
quite all right (according to IF. R.).
May have been in neighborhood prior
to Friday.

Motive. None, unless profit on picture. Fear? unlikely.

Note. Find out where J. L. was before
arriving at St. Loo. Find out financial
position of Aaron Lazarus and Son. Commander Challenger. Suspicious circumstances.

None. Was in neighborhood
all last week, so opportunity for
"accidents" good. Arrived half an hour
after murder. Motive. None.

I.

Mr. Vyse. Suspicious circumstances.

Was absent from office at time when
shot was fired in garden of hotel. Opportunity
good. Statement about selling
of End House open to doubt. Of a
repressed temperament. Would probably
know about pistol.

Motive. Gain? Slight. Love or Hate?

Fear? Unlikely.

Note. Find out who held mortgage.

Find out position of Vyse's fn'rn.

? There could be a J.: e.g., an outsider. But with a link in the form of one of the foregoing. If so, probably connected with A., D. and E. or IF.

The existence of J. would explain (1) Ellen's lack of surprise at crime and her pleasurable satisfaction. (But that might be due to natural pleasurable excitement of her class over deaths.)

(2) The reason for Croft and his wife coming to live in lodge. (3) Might supply motive for IF. R.'s fear of secret being revealed or for jealousy.

Poirot watched me as I read.

"It is very English, is it not?" he remarked with pride. "I am more English when I write than when I speak."

"It's an excellent piece of work," I said warmly. "It sets all the possibilities out most clearly."

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, as he took it back from me. "And one name leaps to the eye, my friend, Charles Vyse. He has the best opportunities. We have iwn him

list of racehorses, he would start favorite,
n' est-ce pas?"

"He is certainly the most likely suspect."

"You have a tendency, Hastings, to prefer
the least likely. That, no doubt, is from read-Ing
too many detective stories. In real life,
nine times out of ten, it is the most likely
and the most obvious person who commits
the crime."

"But you don't really think that is so this
time?"

"There is only one thing that is against it.
The boldness of the crime! That has stood
out from the first. Because of that, as I say,
the motive cannot be obvious."

"Yes, that is what you said at first."

"And that is what I say again."

With a sudden brusque gesture he crum-pled
the sheets of paper and threw them on
the floor.

"No," he said, as I uttered an exclamation
of protest. "That list has been in vain. Still,
it has cleared my mind. Order and method!
That is the first stage. To arrange the facts
with neatness and precision. The next
stage "

"Yes?"

The correct employment of the little grey cells! I advise you, Hastings, to go to bed."

"No," I said. "Not unless you do. I'm not going to leave you."

"Most faithful of dogs! But see you, Hastings, you cannot assist me to think. That's all I am going to do- think."

I still shook my head.

"You might want to discuss some point with me."

"Well--well---you are a loyal friend. Take at least, I beg of you, the easy chair."

That proposal I did accept. Presently the room began to swim and dip. The last thing I remember was seeing Poirot carefully retrieving the crumpled sheets of paper from the floor and putting them away tidily in the wastepaper basket.

Then I must have fallen asleep.

Nick's Secret

It was daylight when I awoke.

Poirot was still standing where he had been the night before. His attitude was the same, but in his face was a difference. His eyes were shining with that queer catlike green light that I knew so well.

I struggled to an upright position, feeling very stiff and uncomfortable. Sleeping in a chair is a proceeding not to be recommended at my time of life. Yet one thing at least resulted from it I awoke not in that pleasant state of lazy somnolence but with a mind and brain as active as when I fell asleep.

"Poirot," I cried. "You have thought of something."

He nodded. He leaned forward tapping the table in front of him.

"Tell me, Hastings, the answer to these three questions. Why has Mademoiselle Nick

a black evening dress--she

black? Wh- did s
never wears

.y.
he say last night, 'I have

nothing to live for--now'?"

I stared. The question seemed beside the
point.

"Answer those questions, Hastings, answer
them!"

"Well--as to the first--she said she had
been worried lately."

"Precisely. What has she been worried
about?"

"And the black dress--well, everybody
wants a change sometimes."

"For a married man, you have very little
appreciation of feminine psychology. If a
woman thinks she does not look well in a
color, she refuses to wear it."

"And the last well, it was a natural thing
to say after that awful shock."

"No, mon ami, it was not a natural thing

to say. To be horror-struck by her cousin's death, to reproach herself for it--yes, all that is natural enough. But the other, no. She spoke of life with weariness as of a thing no longer dear to her. Never before had she displayed that attitude. She had been deft-ant--yes, she had snapped the fingers, yes--

and then. wh,n 'that I,...-1. a

weet and she did not wish to die. But weary of life no! That never! Even before dinner that was not so. We have here, Hastings, a psychological change. And that is interesting. What was it caused her point of view to change?"

"The shock of her cousin's death?"

"I wonder. It was the shock that loosed her tongue. But suppose the change was before that. Is there anything else could account for it?"

"I don't know of anything."

"Think, Hastings. Use your little grey cells."

"Really "

"What was the last moment we had the opportunity of observing her?"

"Well, actually, I suppose, at dinner."

"Exactly. After that, we only saw her receiving guests, making them welcome purely a formal attitude. What happened at the end of dinner, Hastings?"

"She went to telephone," I said slowly.

"La bonheur. You have got there at last. She went to telephone. And she was absent a long time. Twenty minutes at least. That is a long time for a telephone call. Who spoke to her over the telephone? What did they say?"

found out, Hastings, what happened in that
twenty minutes. For there, or so I fully believe,
we shall find the clue we seek."

"You really think so?"

"Mais oui, ma/s oui! All along, Hastings, I

have told you that Mademoiselle has been
keeping something back. She doesn't think it
has any connection with the murder--but I,
Hercule Poirot, know better! It must have a
connection. For all along, I have been conscious
that there was a factor lacking. If there
were not a factor lacking why then, the
whole thing would be plain to me! And as it
is not plain to me--eh bien--then the missing
factor is the keystone of the mystery! I
know I am right, Hastings

"I must know the answer to those three
questions. And men--and then--I shall be-
gin to see"

-. "Well," I said, stretching my stiffened
limbs, "I think a bath and a shave are in-
order by the time. I had had a bath and changed
into day clothing I felt better. The stiffness
and weariness of a night passed in uncomfortable
conditions passed off. I arrived at
the breakfast table feeling that one drink of
hot coffee

I glanced at the paper, but there was little news in it beyond the fact that Michael Seton's death was now definitely confirmed. The intrepid airman had perished. I wondered whether, tomorrow, new headlines would have sprung into being. "GmL MtmDERED DURING FIREWORK PARTY. MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY." Something like that.

I had just finished breakfast when Frederica Rice came up to my table. She was wearing a plain little frock of black marocain with a little soft pleated white collar. Her fairness was more evident than ever.

"I wanted to see M. Poirot, Captain Hastings. Is he up yet, do you know?"

"I will take you up with me now," I said.

"We shall find him in the sitting room."

"Thank you."

"I hope," I said, as we left the dining room together, "that you didn't sleep too badly?"

"It was a shock," she said in a meditative voice. "But of course I didn't know the poor girl. It's not as though it had been Nick."

"I suppose you'd never met this girl before?"

"Once -at Scarborough. She came over to

"It will be a terrible blow to her father
and mother," I said.

"Dreadful."

But she said it very impersonally. She was,
I fancied, an egoist. Nothing was very real to
her that did not concern herself.

Poirot had finished his breakfast and was
sitting reading the morning paper. He rose
and greeted Frederica with all his customary
Gallic politeness.

"Madame," he said. "Enchant.t"

He drew forward a chair.

She thanked him with a very faint smile
and sat down. Her two hands rested on the
arms of the chair. She sat there very upright
looking straight in front of her. She did not
rash into speech. There was something a
little frightening about her stillness and aloof-ness.

"M. Poirot," she said at last. "I suppose
there is no doubt that this sad business last
night was all part and parcel of the same
thing? I mean that the intended victim was
really Nick?"

"I should say, Madame, that there was no
doubt at all."

Frederica frowned a little.

There was some curious undercurrent in her voice that I could not understand.

"Luck, they say, goes in cycles," remarked Poirot.

"Perhaps. It is certainly useless to fight against it."

Now there was only weariness in her tone. After a moment or two, she went on.

"I must beg your pardon, M. Poirot. Nick's pardon, too. Up till last night I did not believe. I never dreamed that the danger was serious."

"Is that so, Madame?"

"I see now that everything will have to be gone into carefully. And I imagine that Nick's immediate circle of friends will not be immune from suspicion. Ridiculous, of

but there it is. Am I right, M.

course,

Poirot?"

"You are very intelligent, Madame."

"You asked me some questions about Tavistock the other day, M. Poirot. As you will find out sooner or later, I might as well tell you the truth now. I was not at

Tavistock."

"No, Madame?"

"I motored down to this part of the world
with Mr. Lazarus early last week. We did

essary. We stayed at a little place called Shellacombe."

"That is, I think, about seven miles from here, Madame?"

"About that- yes."

Still that quiet faraway weariness.

"May I be impertinent, Madame?"

"Is there such a thing--in these days?"

"Perhaps you are right, Madame. How long have you and M. Lazarus been friends?"

"I met him six months ago."

"And you care for him, Madame?"

Frederica shrugged her shoulders.

"He is. rich."

"Oh! I,, I,," cried Poirot. "That is an ugly thing to say."

She seemed faintly amused.

"Isn't it better to say it myself. -than to have you say it for me?"

"Well--there is always that, of course.

May I repeat, Madame, that you are very intelligent."

"You will give me a diploma soon," said Frederica and rose.

"There is nothing more you wish to tell me, Madame?"

"I do not think so- no. I am going to take some flower.q rnni if,-, kT;,l. --.a

"Ah, that is very amiable of you. Thank you, Madame, for your frankness."

She glanced at him sharply, seemed about to speak, then thought better of it and went out of the room, smiling faintly at me as I held the door open for her.

"She is intelligent," said Poirot. "Yes, but so is Hercule Poirot!"

"What do you mean?"

"That it is all very well and very pretty to force the richness of M. Lazarus down my throat--"

"I must say that rather disgusted me." "Mort chef, always you have the right reaction in the wrong place. It is not, for the moment, a question of good taste or otherwise. If Madame Rice has a devoted friend who is rich and can give her all she needs--why then obviously Madame Rice would not need to murder her dearest friend for a mere pittance."

"Oh!" I said.

"Precisément! 'Oh!'"

"Why didn't you stop her going to the nursing home?"

"Why should I show my hand? Is it Hercule Poirot who prevents Mademoiselle Nick from seeing her friends?, Q/? ./:dt2t

nurses! So full of rules and regulations and 'doctor's orders.'"

"You're not afraid that they may let her in after all? Nick might insist."

"Nobody will be let in, my dear Hastings, but you and me. And for that matter, the sooner we make our way there, the better."

The sitting room door flew open and George Challenger barged in. His tanned face was alive with indignation.

"Look here, M. Poirot," he said. "What's the meaning of this? I rang up that damned nursing home where Nick is. Asked how she was and what time I could come round and see her. And they say the doctor won't allow any visitors. I want to know the meaning of that? To put it plainly, is this your work? Or is Nick really ill from shock?"

"I assure you, Monsieur, that I do not lay down rules for nursing homes. I would not dare. Why not ring up the good doctor

what was his name now? Ah! yes, Graham."

"I have. He says she's going on as well as could be expected usual stuff. But I know all the tricks my uncle's a doctor. Harley Street. Nerve specialist. Psychoanalysis all the rest of it. Putting relations and friends off with soothing words. I've heard about it

anyone. I believe you're at the bottom of this, M. Poirot."

Poirot smiled at him in a very kindly fashion. Indeed, I have always observed that Poirot has a kindly feeling for a lover.

"Now listen to me, mon ami," he said. "If one guest is admitted, others cannot be kept out. You comprehend? It must be all or none. We want Mademoiselle's safety, you and I, do we not? Exactly. Then, you understand it must be none."

"I get you," said Challenger slowly. "But then "

"Chut! We will say no more. We will forget even what we have said. The prudence, the extreme prudence, is what is needed at present."

"I can hold my tongue," said the sailor quietly.

He turned away to the door, pausing as he went out to say: "No embargo on flowers, is

there? So long as they are not white ones." Poirot smiled.

"And now," he said as the door shut behind the impetuous Challenger. "Whilst M. Challenger and Madame and perhaps M. Lazarus all encounter each other in the flower shoo, you and I will drive quietly to our

"And ask for the answer to the three questions?" I said.

"Yes. We will ask. Though, as a matter of fact, I know the answer."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"Yes.",

"But when did you find out?"

"Whilst I was eating my breakfast, Hastings. It stared me in the face."

"Tell me."

"No, I will leave you to hear it from Mademoiselle."

Then, as if to distract my mind, he pushed an open letter across to me.

It was a report by the expert Poirot had sent to examine the picture of old Nicholas Buckley. It stated definitely that the picture was worth at most twenty pounds.

"So that is one matter cleared up," said

Poirot.

"No mouse in that mousehole," I said

remembering a metaphor of Poirot's on one

past occasion.

"Ah! you remember that? No, as you say,

no mouse in that mousehole. Twenty pounds

and M. Lazarus offered fifty. What an error

of judgment for a seemingly astute

young

man

and the young

man. But there, there- oh, oh...

The nursing home was set high on a hill overlooking the bay. A white-coated orderly received us. We were put into a little room downstairs and presently a brisk-looking nurse came to us.

One glance at Poirot seemed to be enough. She had clearly received her instructions from Dr. Graham together with a minute description of the little detective. She even concealed a smile.

"Miss Buckley has passed a very fair night," she said. "Come up, will you?"

In a pleasant room with the sun streaming into it, we found Nick. In the narrow iron bed, she looked like a tired child. Her face was white and her eyes were suspiciously red, and she seemed listless and weary.

"It's good of you to come," she said in a flat voice.

Poirot took her hand in both of his.

"Courage, Mademoiselle. There is always something to live for."

The words startled her. She looked up in his face.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh!"

"Will you not tell me now, Mademoiselle, what it was that has been worrying you lately?"

Or shall I guess? And may I offer you, Ma

Her face flushed.

"So you know. Oh! well, it doesn't matter
who knows now. Now that it's all over. Now

that I shall never see him again."

Her voice broke.

"Courage, Mademoiselle."

"I haven't got any courage left. I've used
up every bit in these last weeks. Hoping and
hoping and just lately hoping against
hope."

I stared. I could not understand one word.

"Regard the poor Hastings," said Poirot.

"He does not know what we are talking
about."

Her unhappy eyes met mine.

"Michael Seton, the airman," she said. "I
was engaged to him and he's dead."

The Motive

I was dumbfounded.

I turned to Poirot.

"Is that what you meant?"

"Yes, mon arm. This morning--I knew."

"How did you know? How did you guess?"

"You said it stared you in the face at break-fast."

"So it did, my friend. From the front
page of the newspaper. I remembered the
conversation at dinner last night--and I saw

every morning

-' - al

He

turned to me next afternoon . . .

„you heard the news last night?"

Yes. On the wireless. I made an excuse

about the telephone. I wanted to hear the

swallowed

news alone--in case.

She

has, d

I. "And I heard n. -/e'took her hand in
know. I know."

pie arriving. I don't know how I got through it. It all felt like a dream. I could see myself from outside behaving just as usual. It was queer somehow."

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"And then, when I went to fetch Freddie's wrap I broke down for a minute. I pulled myself together quite quickly. But Maggie kept calling up about her coat. And then at last she took my shawl and went, and I put on some powder and some rouge and followed her out. And there she was dead "

"Yes, yes, it must have been a terrible shock."

"You don't understand. I was angry! I wished it had been me! I wanted to be dead and there I was alive and perhaps to live for years! And Michael dead drowned far

away in the Pacific."

"Pauvre enfant."

"I don't want to be alive. I don't want to live, I tell you!" she cried rebelliously.

"I know I know. To all of us, Mademoi-selle, there comes a time when death is preferable to life. But it passes sorrow passes and grief. You cannot believe that now, I know. It is useless for an old man like me to

talk. Idle words that's what you think
idle words."

"You think I'll forget ,and marry someone
else. Never I"

She looked rather lovely as she sat up in
bed, her two hands clenched and her cheeks
bunaing.

Poirot said gently, "No, no. I am not
thinking anything of the kind. You are very
lucky, Mademoiselle. You have been loved
by a brave man .. a hero. How did you come
to meet him?"

"It was at Le Touquet last September.
Nearly a year ago."

"And you became engaged when?"

"Just after Christmas. But it had to be a
secret."

"Why was that?"

"Michael's uncle old Sir Matthew Seton.
He loved birds and hated women."

"Ah, ce West pas raisonnable,t"

"Well I don't mean quite that. He was a
complete .crank. Thought women ruined a
man's life. And Michael was absolutely dependent
on him. He was frightfully proud of
Michael and it was he who financed the
building of the Albatross and the expenses of
the round-the-world flieht. It was the dear

If Michael had pulled it off--well, then he could have kept his uncle anything. And since Matthew had still cut up rough, well, it wouldn't have really mattered. Well, he would have been made--a kind of, his uncle would have come round in the end."

"Yes, yes, I see."

But Michael said that would be fatal if anything leaked out. We must keep it a dead secret. And I did. I never told anyone--not even Freddie."

Poole groaned.

"If only you had told me, Mademoiselle."

Nick stared at him.

"But what difference would it have made? It couldn't have anything to do with these mysterious attacks on me? No, I'd promised Michael--and I kept my word. But it was awful--the anxiety, wondering and getting in a state the whole time. And everyone saying one was so nervous. And being unable to explain."

"Yes, I comprehend all that."

"He was missing once before, you know.

Crossing the desert on the way to India.

That was pretty awful, and then after all, it

saying to myself that it would be the same
this time. Everyone said he must be dead--and
I kept telling myself that he must be all

right really. And then last night..."
Her voice trailed away.

"You had hoped up till then?"

"I don't know. I think it was more that I
refused to believe. It was awful never being
able to talk to anyone."

"Yes, I can imagine that. Were you never
tempted to tell Madame Rice, for instance."
"Sometimes I wanted to frightfully."
"You do not think she guessed?"

"I don't think so." Nick considered the
idea carefully. "She never said anything. Of
course she used to hint things sometimes.
About our being great friends and all that."

"You never considered telling her when
M. Seton's uncle died? You knew that he
died about a week ago?"

"I know. He had an operation or some-thing.
I suppose I might have told anybody
then. But it wouldn't have been a nice way
of doing it, would it? I mean it would have
seemed rather boastful to do it just then
when all the papers were full of Michael.
And reporters would have come and inter-viewed
me. It would all have been rather

"I agree with you, Mademoiselle. You could not have announced it publicly. I only meant that you could have spoken of it privately to a friend."

"I did sort of hint to one person," said Nick. "I- thought it was only fair. But I don't know how much he--the person took

Poirot nodded.

"Are you on good terms with your cousin, M. Vyse?" he asked with a rather abrupt change of subject.

"Charles? What put him into your head?"

"I was just wondering, that was all."

"Charles means well," said Nick. "He's a frightful stick, of course. Never moves out of his place. He disapproves of me, I think."

"Oh! Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle. And I hear that he has laid all his devotion at your feet!"

"Disapproving of a person doesn't keep you from having a crush for them.. Charles thinks my mode of life as reprehensible and he disapproves of my cocktails, my complexion, my friends and my conversation. But he still feels my fatal fascination. He always hopes to reform me, I think."

a twinkle, "Who have you been pumping to get the local information?"

"You must not give me away, Mademoi-selle. I had a little conversation with the Australian lady, Madame Croft."

"She's rather an old dear when one has time for her. Terribly sentimental. Love and home and children you know the sort of thing."

"I am old-fashioned and sentimental my-self, Mademoiselle."

"Are you? I should have said that Captain Hastings was the sentimental one of you

tWO."

I blushed indignantly.

"He is furious," said Poirot eyeing my discomfiture with a good deal of pleasure.

"But you are right, Mademoiselle. Yes, you are right."

"Not at all," I said angrily.

"Hastings has a singularly beautiful na-ture. It has been the greatest hindrance to me at times."

"Don't be absurd, Poirot."

"He is, to begin with, reluctant to see evil

anywhere, and when he does see it his right-teous
indignation is so great that he is inca

beautiful nature. No, mon ami, I will not permit you to contradict me. It is as I say."

"You've both been very kind to me," said Nick gently.

"I, Iti, Mademoiselle. That is nothing.

We have much more to do. To begin with, you will remain here. You will obey orders. You will do what I tell you. At this juncture I must not be hampered."

Nick sighed wearily.

"I'll do anything you like. I don't care what I do."

"You will see no friends for the present."

"I don't care. I don't want to see anyone."

"For you the passive part for us the ac-five one. Now, Mademoiselle, I am going to leave you. I will not intrude longer upon your sorrow."

He moved towards the door, pausing with his hand on the handle to say over his shoulder:

"By the way, you once mentioned a will you made. Where is it, this will?"

"Oh! it's knocking round somewhere."

"At End House?"

"Yes."

"In a safe? Locked up in your desk?"

"Well, I really don't know. It's somewhere

tidy, you know. Papers and things like that would be mostly in the writing table in the library. That's where most of the bills are. The will is probably with them. Or it might be in my bedroom."

"You permit me to make the search yes?"

"If you want to--yes.

you like."

"Merci, Mademoiselle. I

of your permission."

Look at anything

will avail myself

Ellen

Poirot said no word till we had emerged from the nursing home into the outer air. Then he caught me by the arm.

"You see, Hastings? You see? Ah! Sacr tonnerre! I was right! I was right! Always I knew there was something lacking some piece of the puzzle that was not there. And without that missing piece the whole thing was meaningless."

His almost despairing triumph was double Dutch to me. I could not see that anything very epoch-making had occurred.

"It was there all the time. And I could not see it. But how should I? To know there is something that, yes but to know what that something is. Ah! c'est bien plus difficile."

"Do you mean that this has some direct bearing on the crime?"

"Ma foi, do you not see?"

"A. n rntter nf frct. I clan't"

"Is it possible? Why, it gives us what we have been looking for the motive the hidden obscure motive!"

"I may be very dense, but I can't see it. Do you mean jealousy of some kind?"

"Jealousy? No, no, my friend. The usual motive the inevitable motive. Money, my friend, money!"

I stared. He went on, speaking more calmly.

"Listen, mon ami. Just over a week ago Sir Matthew Seton dies. And Sir Matthew Seton was a millionaire one of the richest men in England."

"Yes, but "

"Attende. One step at a time. He has a nephew whom he idolizes and to whom, we may safely assume, he has left his vast fortune."

"But "

"Mais emi legacies, yes, an endowment to do with his hobby, yes, but the bulk of the money would go to Michael Seton. Last Tuesday, Michael Seton is reported missing and on Wednesday the attacks on Mademoiselle's life begin. Supposing, Hastings, that Michael Seton made a will before he started on this flight, and that in that will he left all

"That's pure supposition."

"It is supposition yes. But it must be so. Because, if it is not so, there is no meaning in anything that has happened. It is no paltry inheritance that is at stake. It is an enormous fortune."

I was silent for some minutes turning the matter over in my mind. It seemed to me that Poirot was leaping at conclusions in a most reckless manner, and yet I was secretly convinced that he was right. It was his extraordinary flair for being right that influenced me. Yet it seemed to me that there was a good deal to be proved still.

"But if nobody knew of the engagement," I argued.

"Pah! Somebody did know. For the matter of that, somebody always does know. If they do not know, they guess. Madame Rice suspected. Mademoiselle Nick admitted as much. She may have had means of turning

those suspicions into certainties."

"How?"

"Well, for one thing, there must have been letters from Michael Seton to Mademoiselle Nick. They had been engaged some time. And her best friend could not call that young lady anything but careless. She leaves thins

she has ever locked up anything in her life.
Oh! yes, there would be means of making sure."
"And ,Frederica Rice would know about
the will that her friend had made?"

"Doubtless. Oh! yes, it narrows down
now. You remember my list a list of persons
numbered from A. to J. It has narrowed
down to only two persons. I dismiss
the servants. I dismiss the Commander Challenger
even though he did take one hour
and a half to reach here from Plymouth
and the distance is only thirty miles. I dismiss
M. Lazarus who offered fifty pounds
for a picture that was only worth twenty. I
dismiss the Australians so hearty and so
pleasant. I keep two people on my list still."
"One is Frederica Rice," I said slowly.
I had a vision of her face, the golden hair,
the white fragility of the features.
"Yes. She is indicated very clearly. However
carelessly worded Mademoiselle's will
may have been, she would be plainly indicated
as a residuary legatee. Apart from End
House, everything was to go to her. If Mademoiselle
Nick instead of Mademoiselle
Maggie had been shot last night, Madame
Rice would be a rich woman today."

"You mean that you can hardly believe that a beautiful woman can be a murderess? One often has a little difficulty with members of a jury on that account. But you may

be right. There is still another suspect."

"Who?"

"Charles Vyse."

"But he only inherits the house."

"Yes but he may not know that. Did he make Mademoiselle's will for her? I think not. If so, it would be in his keeping, not 'knocking around somewhere' or whatever the phrase was that Mademoiselle used. So, you see, Hastings, it is quite probable that he knows nothing about that will. He may believe that she has never made a will and that, in that case, he will inherit as next of

"You know," I said. "That really seems to be much more probable."

"That is your romantic mind, Hastings. The wicked solicitor! A familiar figure in fiction. If as well as being a solicitor he has an impassive face, it makes the matter almost certain. It is true that, in some ways, he is more in the picture than Madame. He would be more likely to know about the pistol and more likely to use one."

"Perhaps. Though, as I have told you, much can be done by leverage. And the fact that the boulder was dislodged at the wrong minute, and consequently missed Mademoi-selle, is more suggestive of feminine agency. The idea of tampering with the interior of a car seems masculine in conception though many women are as good mechanics as men nowadays. On the other hand, there are one

or two gaps in the theory against M. Vyse."

"Such as ?"

"He is less likely to have known of the engagement than Madame. And there is another point. His action was rather precipi

"What do you mean?"

"Well, until last night there was no certitude that Seton was dead. To act rashly, without due assurance, seems very uncharacteristic of the legal mind."

"Yes," I said. "A woman would jump to conclusions."

"Exactly. Ce que femme veut, Dieu veut. That is the attitude."

"It's really amazing the way Nick has caped. It seems almost incredible."

And suddenly I remembered the tone in Frederica's voice as she had said: "Nick bears

I shivered a little.

"Yes," said Poirot thoughtfully. "And I can take no credit to myself. Which is humiliating."

"Providence," I murmured.

"Ah! mon ami, I would not put on the shoulders of the good (load the burden of

men's wrongdoing. You say that in your Sunday morning voice of thankfulness. . . without reflecting that what you are really saying is that le bon Dieu has killed Miss Maggie Buckley."

"Really, Poirot!"

"Really, my friend! But I will not sit back and say 'le bon Dieu has arranged everything, I will not interfere.' Because I am convinced that le bon Dieu created Hercule Poirot for the express purpose of interfering. It is my

We had been slowly ascending the zigzag path up the cliff. It was at this juncture that we passed through the little gate into the grounds of End House.

"Pouf," said Poirot. "That ascent is a steep one. I am hot. My mustaches are limp. Yes, as I was saying just now, I am on the side of the innocent. I am on the side of Mademoi

"You
husband
house."

the side of Mademoiselle Maggie because she
has been killed."

"And you are against Frederica Rice and
Charles Vyse."

"No, no, Hastings. I keep an open mind.
I say only that at the moment one of those
two is indicated. Chut!"

We had come out on the strip of lawn by
the house and a man was driving a mowing
machine. He had a long stupid face and
lackluster eyes. Beside him was a small boy
of ten, ugly but intelligent looking.

It crossed my mind that we had not heard
the mowing machine in action, but I pre-sumed
that the gardener was not overwork-ing
himself. He had probably been resting
from his labors, and had sprung into action

on hearing our voices approaching.

"Good morning," said Poirot.

"Good morning, sir."

are the gardener, I suppose. The

of Madame who works in the

"He's my dad," said the small boy.

"That's right, sir," said the man. "You'll be the foreign gentleman, I take it, that's really a detective. Is there any news of the

moment. She has passed a satisfactory night"
"We've had policemen here," said the
-small boy. "That's where the lady was killed.
Here by the steps. I seen a pig killed once,
haven't I, Dad?"

"No,

Ah, said his father unemotionally.

"Dad used to kill pigs when he worked on
a farm. Didn't you, Dad? I seen a pig killed.

I liked it."

"Young 'uns like to see pigs killed," said

the man, as though stating one of the unalterable facts of nature.

"Shot with a pistol, the lady was," continued the boy. "She didn't have her throat

cut. No."

We passed on to the house, and I felt

thankful to get away from the ghoulish child.

Poirot entered the drawing room, the windows of which were open, and rang the bell.

Ellen, neatly attired in black, came in answer

to the bell. She showed no surprise at seeing

US.

"I come from seeing her at the immediate

Poirot explained that we were here by permission
of Miss Buckley to make a search of
the house.

"Very good, sir."

"The police have finished;"

wanted, sir. They've been about the garden since very early in the morning. I don't know whether they've found anything."

She was about to leave the room when Poirot stopped her with a question.

"Were you very surprised last night when you heard Miss Bucldey had been shot?"

"Yes, sir, very surprised. Miss Maggie was a nice young lady, sir. I can't imagine any-one being so wicked as to want to harm her."

"If it had been anyone else, you would not have been so surprised--eh?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir?"

"When I came into the hall last night," I said, "you asked at once whether anyone had been hurt. Were you expecting anything of the kind?"

She was silent. Her fingers pleated a corner of her apron. She shook her head and murmured:

"You gentlemen wouldn't understand."

"Yes, yes," said Poirot, "I would understand. However fantastic what you may say, I would understand."

She looked at him doubtfully, then seemed to make up her mind to trust him.

"You see, sir," she said, "this isn't a good

I was surprised and a little contemptuous.
Poirot, however, seemed to find the remark
not in the least unusual.'

"You mean it is an old house."

"Yes, sir, not a good house."

"You have been here long?"

"Six years, sir. But I was here as a girl. In
the kitchen as kitchen maid. That was in the
time of old Sir Nicholas. It was the same
then."

Poirot looked at her attentively.

"In an old house," he said, "there is some-times
an atmosphere of evil."

"That's it, sir," said Ellen eagerly. "Evil.
Bad thoughts and bad deeds too. It's like dry
rot in a house, sir, you can't get it out. It's a
sort of feeling in the air. I always knew
something bad would happen in this house,
someday."

"Well, you have been proved right."

"Yes, sir."

There was a very slight underlying satisfaction
in her tone, the satisfaction of one
whose gloomy prognostications have been
shown to be correct.

"But you didn't think it would be Miss
Maggie."

"No, indeed, I didn't, sir. Nobody hated

It seemed to me that in those words was a clue. I expected Poirot to follow it up, but to my surprise he shifted to quite a different subject.

"You didn't hear the shots fired?"

"I couldn't have told with the fireworks going on. Very noisy they were."

"You weren't out watching them?"

"No, I hadn't finished clearing up dinner."

"Was the waiter helping you?"

"No, sir, he'd gone out into the garden to

have a look at the fireworks."

"But you didn't go."

"No, sir."

"Why was that?"

"I wanted to get finished."

"You don't care for fireworks?"

"Oh, yes, sir, it wasn't that. But you see, there's two nights of them, and William and I get the evening off tomorrow and go down into the town and see them from there."

"I comprehend. And you heard Mademoi-selle Maggie asking for her coat and unable to find it?"

"I heard Miss Nick run upstairs, sir, and

Miss Buckley call up from the front hall
saying she couldn't find somefixing and I
heard her say, all right, she'd take the

"Pardon- "Poirot interrupted. "You did not endeavor to search for the coat for her or get it from the car where it had been left."

"I had my work to do, sir."

"Quite so. -and doubtless neither of the two young ladies asked you because they thought you were out looking at the fire works?"

"Yes, sir."

"So that, other years, you have been out looking at the fireworks?"

A sudden flush came into her pale cheeks.

"I don't know what you mean, sir. We're always allowed to go out into the garden. If I didn't feel like it this year, and would rather get on with my work and go to bed, well, that's my business, I imagine."

"Mais oui. Mais oui. I did not intend to

offend you. /hy should you not do as you
prefer? To make a change, it is pleasant."

He paused and then added: "Now another
little matter in which I wonder whether you
can help me. This is an old house. Are there,
do you know, any secret chambers in it?"

"Well--there's a kind of sliding panel in
this very room. I romemh- 1,;... ,.

where it is. Or was it in the library? I can't

say, 'BlincioUruei fora per, on, t. ede. ?; oard

"Oh! no, indeed, sir. A

P

place--a kind of niche. About a foot square,
sir, not more than that."

"Oh! that is not what I meant at all."

The blush rose to her face again. , 1

"If you think I was hiding anywhere
wasn't! I heard Miss Nick run down the
stairs and out and I heard her cry out---and
I came into the hall to see d--if anything
was the matter. And that's the gospel truth,
sir. That's the gospel truth."

Letters

Having successfully got rid of Een, Poirot turned a somewhat thoughtful face towards me.

"I wonder now did she hear those shots? I think she did. She heard them, she opened the kitchen door. She heard Nick rash down the stairs and out and she herself came into the hall to find out what had happened. That is natural enough. But why did she not go out and watch the fireworks that evening? That is what I should like to know, Hastings."

"What was your idea in asking about a secret hiding place?"

"A mere fanciful idea that, after all, we might not have disposed of J."

„j.?,,

"Yes. The last person on .my list. The problematical outsider. Supposing for some

to the house last night. He (I assume a he) conceals himself in a secret chamber in this room. A girl passes through whom he takes to be Nick. He follows her out and shoots her. Non c'est idiot,t And anyway, we know that there is no hiding place. Ellen's decision to remain in the kitchen last night was a pure hazard. Come, let us search for the will of Mademoiselle Nick."

There were no papers in the drawing room. We adjourned to the library, a rather dark room looking out on 'the drive. Here there was a large old-fashioned walnut bureau writing table.

It took us some time to go through it. Everything was in complete confusion. Bills and receipts were mixed up together. Letters of invitation, letters pressing for payment of accounts, letters from friends.

"We will arrange these papers," said Poirot sternly, "with order and method."

He was as good as his word. Half an hour later, he sat back with a pleased expression on his face. Everything was neatly sorted, docketed and filed.

"C'est bien, a. One thing is at least to the good. We have had to go through everything so thoroughly that there is no possibility of

"No, indeed. Not that there's been much to find."

"Except possibly this."

He tossed across a letter. It was written in large sprawling handwriting, almost indecipherable.

Darling, Party was too, too marvellous.

Feel rather a worm today. You were wise

not to touch that

sniff---A---,

tts.tx- taOll t t:ver start,

darling. It's too damned hard to give u .

I'

"

P

m writing the boy frie..n.d to hurry up the supply. What Hell life is.

Yours, Freddie.

"Dated last Febru." :

thoughtfully. "She takes d""Jrgs, ourrs,Zr knew that as soon as I looked at her."

"Really? .I never s. uspected such a thing."

"It is fairly obvious. You have only to look at her eyes. And then there are her extraordinary variations of mood. Sometimes she is all on edge, stnmg up. sometimes she is lifeless inert."

"Drug-taking affects the moral sense, does it not?"

"Inevitably. But I. do not t,-.-M.-rs-. Rice is a real addict. 1 , o, ,t,

"And Nick?"

"There are no signs of it. She may have attended a dope party now and then for fun, but she is no taker of drugs."

"I'm glad of that."

I remembered suddenly what Nick 'had said about Frederica that she was not always herself. Poirot nodded and tapped the letter he held.

"This is what she was referring to, undoubtedly. Well, we have drawn the blank, as you say, here. Let us go up to Mademoiselle's room."

There was a desk in Nick's room also, but comparatively little was kept in it. Here again, there was no sign of a will. We found the registration book of her car and a perfectly good dividend warrant of a month back. Otherwise there was nothing of importance. Poirot sighed in an exasperated fashion.

"The young girls they are not properly trained nowadays. The order, the method, it is left out of their bringing up. She is charming, Mademoiselle Nick, but she is a featherhead. Decidedly she is a feather

rassment, "those are underclothes."

He paused in surprise.

"And why not, my friend?"

"Don't you think--I mean we
hardly "

He was now going through the contents of
a chest of drawers.

"Surely, Poirot," I said with some embar

Can

He

broke into a roar of laughter.

"Decidedly., my poor Hastings, you be-long
to the Victorian era. Mademoiselle Nick
would tell you so if she were here. In all
probability she would say that you had the
mind like the sink! Young ladies are not
ashamed of their underclothes nowadays. The
camisole, the camiknicker, it is no longer a
shameful secret. Every day, on the beach, all
these garments will be discarded within a
few feet of you. And why not?"

"I don't see any need for what you are
doing."

"Ecoutez, my friend. Clearly, she does not
lock up her treasures, Mademoiselle Nick. If
she wished to hide anything from sight--where
would she hide it? Underneath the
stockings and the petticoats. Ah! what have

we here?"

He held up a tacket of lettortis4

"The love letters of M. Michael Seton, if I mistake not."

Quite calmly, he untied the ribbon and began to open out the letters.

"Poirot," I cried scandalized. "You really can't do that. It isn't playing the game."

"I am not playing a game, mon ami." His voice rang out suddenly harsh and stem. "I am hunting down a murderer."

"Yes, but private.letters "

"May have nothing to tell me--On the other hand, they may. I must take every chance, my friend. Come, you might as well read them with me. Two pairs of eyes are no worse than one pair. Console yourself with the thought that the stanch Ellen knows them by heart."

I did not..like it. Still I realized that in Poirot's posmon he could not afford to be squ..eamish, and I consoled myself by the quibble that Nick's last word had been "Look at anything you like."

The letters spread over several dates, beginning last winter. New Year's Day.

DARLING,

The New Year is in and I'm making good resolutions. It seems too wonderful to be

You've made all the difference to my life.
I believe we both knew from the very
first moment we met. Happy New Year,
my lovely girl.
Yours for ever,
MICHAEL

Feb. 8th
DEAREST Love,
How I wish I could see you more often.
This is pretty rotten, isn't it? I hate all
this beastly concealment but I explained
to you how things are. I know how much
you hate lies and concealment. I do too.
But honestly, it might upset the whole
apple cart. Uncle Matthew has got an
absolute bee in his bonnet about early
marriages and the way they wreck a
man's career. As though you could wreck
mine, you dear angel.
Cheer up, darling. Everything will
come right.
Yours,
MI-IL

March 2nd
I oughtn't to write to you two days
running, I know. But I must. When I
was ut vesterdav I thought of you. I flew

over Scarborough. Blessed, blessed,
blessed Scarborough the most wonderful
place in the world. Darling, you don't

know how I love you.

Yours,

MICHAEL

April 18th

DEAREST,

The whole thing is fixed up.
Definitely. If I pull this off (and I shall
pull it off) I shall be able to take a firm
line with Uncle Matthew and if he
doesn't like it .-well, what do I care? It's
adorable of you to be so interested in my
long technical descriptions of the
Albatross. How I long to take you up in
her. Someday! Don't for goodness sake,
worry about me. The thing isn't half so
risky as it sounds, I simply couldn't get
killed now that I know you care for me.
Everything will be all right, sweetheart.
Trust your MICHAEL

April 20th

You angel--every word you say is true
and I shall treasure that letter always. I'm

different from everybody else. I adore
you.

Yours,

MICHAEL

The last was undated.

Dearest,

Well I'm off tomorrow. Feeling
tremendously keen and excited and
absolutely certain of success. The old
Albatross is all tuned up. She won't let me
down.

Cheer up, sweetheart, and don't worry.
There's a risk, of course, but all life's risk
really. By the way, somebody said I ought
to make a will (tactful fellow but he
meant well) so I have on a half sheet of
notepaper and sent it to old Whitfield. I'd
no time to go round there. Somebody
once told me that a man made a will of
three words, "All to Mother," and it was
legal all right. My will was rather like
that I remembered your name was really
Magdala which was clever of me! A
couple of the fellows witnessed it.

Don't take all this solemn talk about
wills to heart, will you? (I didn't mean
that nun. An accident.} I shall be as right

as rain. I'll send you telegrams from India and Australia and so on. And keep up heart. It's going to be all right. See?

Good night and God bless you,
Michael

Poirot folded the letters together again.

"You see, Hastings? I had to read them to make sure. It is as I told you."

"Surely you could have found out some other way?"

"No, mon chef, that is just what I could not do. It had to be this way. We have now

some very valuable vidence."

"In what way?"

"We now know that the fact of Michael's having made a will in favor of Mademoiselle Nick is actually recorded in writing. Anyone who had read those letters would know the fact. And with letters carelessly hidden like that, anyone could read them."

"Ellen?"

"Ellen, al[n. ost certain, y, I should say. We will try a little experiment on her before

passing out.'

"There is no sign of the will."

"No, that is curious. But in all probability
it is thrown on top of a bookcase, or inside a

selle's memory on that point. At any rate, there is nothing more to be found here." Ellen was dusting the hall as we descended. Poirot wished her good morning very pleasantly as we passed. He turned back from the front door to say: "You knew, I suppose, that Miss Buckley was engaged to the airman, Michael Seton?"

She stared.

"What? The one there's all the fuss in the papers about?"

"Yes."

"Well, I never. To think of that. Engaged to Miss Nick."

"Complete and absolute surprise registered very convincingly," I remarked as we got outside.

"Yes. It really seemed genuine."

"Perhaps it was," I suggested.

"And that packet of letters reclining for months under the lingerie? No, mon ami."

"All very well," I thought to myself. "But we are not all Hercule Poirots. We do not all go nosing into what does not concern us."

But I said nothing.

"This Ellen she is an enigma," said Poirot. "I do not like it. There is something here that I do not understand"

The Mystery of the Missing

Will

We went straight back to the nursing home.

Nick looked rather surprised to see us.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," said Poirot, answering her look. "I am like the Jack in the Case.

I pop up again. To begin with I will tell you that I have put the order in your affairs.

Everything is now neatly arranged."

"Well, I expect it was about time," said

Nick unable to help smiling. "Are you very tidy, M. Poirot?"

"Ask my friend Hastings here."

The girl turned an inquiring gaze on me.

I detailed some of Poirot's minor peculiarities--toast that had to be made from a square

loaf--eggs matching in size--his objection to golf as a game "shapel?s and haphazard"

whose only redeeming teature was the tee

which Poirot had solved by his habit of

straightening ornaments on the mantelpiece.

Poirot sat by, smiling.

"He makes the good tale of it, yes," he said when I had finished. "But on the whole it is true. Figure to yourself, Mademoiselle, that I never cease trying to persuade Hastings to part his hair in the middle instead of on the side. See what an air lopsided and unsymmetrical it gives him."

"Then you must disapprove of me, M. Poirot," said Nick. "I wear a side parting. And you must approve of Freddie who parts her hair in the middle."

"He was certainly admiring her the other evening," I put in maliciously. "Now I know the reason."

"C'est assez," said Poirot. "I am here on serious business. Mademoiselle, this will of yours, I find it not."

"Oh!" She wrinkled her brows. "But does it matter so much? After all, I'm not dead. And wills aren't really important till you are dead, are they?"

"That is correct. All the same, I interest myself in this will of yours. I have various little ideas concerning it. Think, Mademoiselle. Try to remember where you placed

"I don't suppose I put it anywhere particular," said Nick. "I never do put things in places. I probably shoved it into a drawer."

"You did not put it in the secret panel at any chance?"

"The secret what?"

"Your maid, Ellen, says that there is a secret panel in the drawing room or the library."

"Nonsense," said Nick. "I've never heard of such a thing. Ellen said so?"

"Mais oui. It seems she was in service at the End House as a young girl. The cook showed it to her."

"It's the first I've ever heard of it. I suppose Grandfather must have known about it, but, if so, he didn't tell me. And I'm sure I would have told me. M. Poirot, are you sure Ellen isn't making it all up?"

"No, Mademoiselle, I am not at all sure. Il me semble that there is something odd about this Ellen of yours."

"Oh! I wouldn't call her odd. William's half-wit, and the child is a nasty little brat, but Ellen's all right. The essence of respectability."

"Did you give her leave to go out and see

"Of course. They always do. They clear up afterwards."

"Yet she did not go out."

"Oh! yes, she did."

"How do you know, Mademoiselle?"

"Well--well- I suppose I don't know. I told her to go and she thanked me and so of course I assumed that she did go."

"On the contrary she remained in the house."

"But--how very odd!"

"You think it odd?"

"Yes, I do. I'm sure she's never done such a thing before. Did she say why.>"

"She did not tell me the real reason of that I am sure."

Nick looked at him questioningly.

"Is it important?"

Poirot flung out his hands.

"That is just what I cannot say, Mademoi-selle. C'est curieux. I leave it like that."

"This panel business too," said Nick re-flectively.

"I can't help thinking that's fright-fully

queer--and unconvincing. Did she
show you where it was?"

"I don't believe there is such a thing."

"She said she couldn't remember."

"It certainly looks like it ,,

"She certainly recounts the histories! She said also that End House was not a good house to live in."

Nick gave a little shiver.

"Perhaps she's right there," she said slowly. "Sometimes I've felt that way myself. There's a queer feeling in that house "

Her eyes grew large and dark. They had a fated look. Poirot hastened to recall her to other topics.

"We have wandered from our subject, Mademoiselle. The will. The last will and testament of Magdala Buckley."

"I put that," said Nick with some pride.

"I remember putting that, and I said pay all debts and testamentary expenses. I remembered that out of a book I'd read." '

"You did not use a will form, then?"

"No, there wasn't time for that. I was just going off to the nursing home, and besides Mr. Croft said will forms were very dangerous. It was better to make a simple will and not try to be too legal."

"M. Croft. He was there?"

"Yes. It was he who asked me if I'd made one. I'd never have thought of it myself. He said if you died in in "

"Intestate," I said.

tate, the Crown pinched a lot and that would be a pity."

"Very helpful, the excellent M. Croft!"

"Oh! he was," said Nick warmly. "He got Ellen in and her husband to witness it. Oh! of course! What an idiot I've been!"

,We looked at her inquiringl,,.

we t>een a perfect diot. Letting you hunt round End House. Charles has got it, of course! My cousin, Charles Vyse."

"Ah! so that is the explanation."

"Mr. Croft said a lawyer was the proper person to have charge of it."

"Trs correct, ce bon M. Croft."

"Men are useful sometimes," said Nick.

"A lawyer or the bank--that's what he said. And I said Charles would be best. So we stuck it in an envdope and sent it off to him straight away."

She lay back on her pillows with a sigh.

"I'm sorry I've been so frightfully stupid. But it is all fight now. Charles has got it, and if you really want to see it, of course he'll show it to you."

"Not without an authorization from you," said Poirot, smiling.

"How silly."

of paper from a little stack that lay beside her bed. "What shall I say? Let the dog see

the rabbit?"

"Comment?"

I laughed at his startled face.

He dictated a form of words, and Nick wrote obediently.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," said Poirot as he took it.

"I'm sorry to have given you such a lot of trouble. But I really had forgotten. You know how one forgets things almost at once?"

"With order and method in the mind one does not forget."

"I'll have to have a course of some kind," said Nick. "You're giving me quite an inferiority complex."

"That is impossible. Au revoir, Mademoiselle."

He looked round the room. "Your flowers are lovely."

"Aren't they? The carnations are from Freddie and the roses from George and the lilies from Jim Lazarus. And look here "

She pulled the wrapping from a large basket of hothouse grapes by her side.

Poirot's face changed. He stepped forward sharply.

"You have not eaten any of them?"

"Do not do so. You must eat nothing,
Mademoiselle, that comes in from outside.

You comprehend?"

"Oh!"

She stared at him, the color ebbing slowly
from her face.

"I see. You think you think it isn't over
yet. You think that they're still uying?" she
whispered.

He took her hand.

"Do not think of it. You are safe here.
But remember nothing that comes in from
outside."

I was conscious of that white frightened

face on the pillow as we left the room.
Poirot looked at his watch.

"Bon. We have just time to catch M. Vyse
at his office before he leaves it for lunch."

On arrival we were shown into Charles
Vyse's office after the briefest of delays.

The young lawyer rose to greet us. He
was as formal and unemotional as ever.

"Good morning, M. Poirot. What can I
do for you?"

Without more ado Poirot presented the letter Nick had written. He took it and read it, then gazed over the top of it at us in a

"I beg your pardon. I really am at a loss to understand--"

"Has not Mademoiselle Buckley made her meaning clear?"

"In this letter," he tapped it with his fingernail, "she asks me to hand over to you, a will made by her and entrusted to my keeping in February last."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"But, my dear sir, no will has been entrusted to my keeping."

"Comment?"

"As far as I know my cousin never made a will. I certainly never made one for her."

"She wrote this herself, I understand, on a sheet of notepaper and posted it to you. The lawyer shook his head.

"In that case all I can say is that I never received it."

;;iReally, M. Vyse--"

never received anything of the kind, M. Poirot."

There was a pause, then Poirot rose to his

feet'n that case, M. Vyse, there is nothing more to be said. There must be some mistake."

"Certainly there must be some mistake."

"Good day, M. Vyse."

"Good day, M. Poirot."

"And that is that," I remarked when we

were out in the street once more.

"Prcisknent."

"Is he lying, do you think?"

"Impossible to tell. He has the good poker face, M. Vyse, besides looking as though he had swallowed one. One thing is clear, he will not budge from the position he has taken up. He never received the will. That is his point."

"Surely Nick will have a written acknowledgement of its receipt."

"Cette petite, she would never bother her head about a thing like that. She dispatched it. It was off her mind. Voil& Besides, on that very day, she went into a nursing home to have her appendix out. She had her emotions, in all probability."

"Well, what do we do now?"

"Parbleu, we go and see M. Croft. Let us see what he can remember about this business. It seems to have been very much his doing."

"He didn't profit by it in any way," I said thoughtfully.

"No. No, I cannot see anything in it from
his point of view. He is probably merely the

busybody the man who likes to arrange his neighbor's affairs."

Such an attitude was indeed typical of Mr. Croft, I felt. He was the kindly know-all who causes so much exasperation in this world of ours.

We found him busy in his shirt sleeves over a steaming pot in the kitchen. A most savory smell pervaded the little lodge.

He relinquished his cookery with enthusiasm being clearly eager to talk about the murder.

"Half a jiffy," he said. "Walk upstairs. Mother will want to be in on this. She'd never forgive us for talking down here. Cooee Milly. Two friends are coming up."

Mrs. Croft greeted us warmly and was eager for news of Nick. I liked her much better than her husband.

"That poor dear girl," she said. "In a nursing home, you say? Had a complete breakdown, I shouldn't wonder. A dreadful business, Mr. Poirot perfectly dreadful. An innocent young girl like that shot dead. It doesn't bear thinking about it doesn't in-deed. And no lawless wild part of the world either. Right here in the heart of the old country. Kept me awake all night, it did."

and leaving you, old lady," said her husband, who had put on his coat and joined us. "I don't like to think of your having been left all alone here yesterday evening. It gives me the shivers."

"You're not going to leave me again, I can tell you," said Mrs. Croft. "Not after dark, anyway. And I'm thinking I'd like to leave this part of the world as soon as possible. I shall never feel the same about it. I shouldn't think poor Nicky Buckley could ever bear to sleep in that house again."

It was a LITTLE difficult to reach the object of our visit. Both Mr. and Mrs. Croft talked so much and were so anxious to know all about everything. Were the poor dead girl's relations coming down? When was the funeral? Was there to be an inquest? What did the police think? Had they any clue yet? Was it true that a man had been arrested in Plymouth?

Then, having answered all these questions, they were insistent on offering us lunch. Only Poirot's mendacious statement that we were obliged to hurry back to lunch with the Chief Constable saved us.

At last a momentary pause occurred and Poirot got in the question he had been

"Why, of course," said Mr. Croft. He pulled the blind cord up and down twice, frowning at it abstractedly. "I remember all about it. Must have been when we first came here. I remember. Appendicitis that's what the doctors said "

"And probably not appendicitis at all," interrupted Mrs. Croft. "These doctors they always like cutting you up if they can. It wasn't the kind you have to operate on anyhow. She'd had indigestion and one thing and another and they'd X-rayed her and they said out it had better come. And there she was, poor LITTLE soul just going off to one of those nasty homes."

"I just asked her," said Mr. Croft, "if she'd made a will. More as a joke than anything else."

"Yes?"

"And she wrote it out then and there. Talked about getting a will form at the post office but I advised her not to. Lot of trouble they cause sometimes, so a man told me. Anyway, her cousin is a lawyer. He could draw her out a proper one afterwards if everything was right as of course I knew it would be. This was just a precautionary matter."

"Oh! Ellen, the maid, and her husband."

"And afterwards? What

it?"

"Oh! we posted it to

you know."

"You know that it was posted?"

"My dear M. Poirot, I posted it myself.

Right in this box here by the gate."

was done with

Vyse. The lawyer,

"So if M. Vyse says he never got it "

Croft stared.

"Do you mean that it got lost in the post?

Oh! but surely that's impossible."

"Anyway, you are certain that you posted

it."

"Certain sure," said Mr. Croft heartily.

"I'll take my oath on that any day."

"Ah! well," said Poirot. "Fortunately it does not matter. Mademoiselle is not likely to die just yet awhile."

We made our escape.

"Et voilà" said Poirot when we were out of earshot and walking down to the hotel.

"Who is lying? M. Croft? Or M. Charles Vyse? I must confess I see no reason why M. Croft should be lying. To suppress the will would be of no advantage to him especially when he had been instrumental in getting it

and tallies exactly with what was told us by

Mademoiselle Nick. But all the same "

"Yes?"

"All the same, I am glad that M. Croft was doing the cooking when we arrived. He left an excellent impression of a greasy thumb and first finger on a corner of the newspaper that covered the kitchen table. I managed to tear it off unseen by him. We will send it to our good friend Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard. There is just a chance that he might know something about it."

"Yes?"

"You know, Hastings, I cannot help feeling that our genial M. Croft is a little too good to be genuine."

"And now," he added. "Le dgjeuner. I faint with hunger."

Strange Behaviour of Frederica

Poirot's inventions about the Chief Constable were proved not to have been so mendacious after all. Colonel Weston called upon us soon after lunch.

He was a tall man of military carriage with considerable good looks. He had a suitable reverence for Poirot's achievements with which he seemed to be well acquainted.

"Marvelous piece of luck for us having you down here, M. Poirot," he said again and again.

His one fear was that he should be compelled to call in the assistance of Scotland Yard. He was anxious to solve the mystery and catch the criminal without their aid.

Hence his delight at Poirot's presence in the neighborhood.

Poirot, as far as I could judge, took him completely into his confidence.

"Never heard of anything like it. Well, the girl ought to be safe enough in a nursing home. Still, you can't keep her there for ever?"

"That, M. le Colonel, is just the difficulty. There is only one way of dealing with i
to

"And that is?"

"We must lay our hands on the person responsible."

"If what you suspect is true, that isn't going to be so easy."

"Ah.t je le sais bien."

"Evidence! Getting evidence is going to be the devil."

He frowned abstractedly.

"Always difficult, these cases, where there's no routine work. If we could get hold of the pistol "

"In all probability it is at the bottom of the sea. That is, if the murderer had any sense."

"Ah!" said Colonel Weston. "But often they haven't. You'd be surprised at the fool things people do. I'm not talking of murderers we don't have many murderers down in these parts, I'm glad to say but in ordinary police court cases. The sheer damn fool

"They are of a different mentality, though."

"Yes-. perhaps. If Vyse is the chap, well, we'll have our work cut out. He's a cautious man and a sound lawyer. He'll not give him-self away. The woman--well, there would be more hope there. Ten to one she'll try again.

Women have no patience."

He rose.

"Inquest tomorrow morning. Coroner will work in with us and give away as little as possible. We want to keep things dark at present."

He was turning towards the door when he suddenly came back.

"Upon my soul, I'd forgotten the very thing that will interest you most, and that I want your opinion about."

Sitting down again, he drew from his pocket a torn scrap of paper with writing on it and handed it to Poirot.

"My police found this when they were searching the grounds. Not far from where you were all watching the fireworks. It's the only suggestive thing they did find."

Poirot smoothed it out. The writing was large and stralinm

" must have money at once. If not
you

what will happen. I'm warning you"

Poirot frowned. He read and re-read it.

"That is interesting," he said. "I may keep
it?"

"Certainly. There are no fingerprints on
it. I'll be glad if you can make anything of
it."

Colonel Weston got to his feet again.

"I really must be off. Inquest tomorrow,
as I said. By the way, you are not being
called as witness only Captain Hastings.
Don't want the newspaper people to get wise
to your being on the job."

"I comprehend. What of the relations of
the poor young lady?"

"The father and mother are coming from
Yorkshire today. They'll arrive about half
past five. Poor souls. I'm heartily sorry for
him. They are taking the body back with

them the following day."

He shook his head.

"Unpleasant business. I'm not enjoying

this, M. Poirot."

"Who could, M. le Colonel? It is, as you

When he had gone, Poirot examined the scrap of paper once more.

"An important clue?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"How can one tell? There is a hint of blackmail about it. Some one of our party that night was being pressed for money in a very unpleasant way. Of course, it is possible that it was one of the strangers."

He looked at the writing through a little magnifying glass.

"Does this writing look at all familiar to you, Hastings?"

"It reminds me a little of something--ah! I have it. that note of Mrs. Rice's."

"Yes," said Poirot slowly. "There are resemblances. Definitely there are resemblances. It is curious. Yet I do not think that this is the writing of Madame Rice. Com"

me," he said as a knock came at the door.

It was Commander Challenger.

"Just looked at it," he explained. "Wanted to know if you were any further forward."

"Parbleu," said Poirot. "At this moment I am feeling that I am considerably, further back. I seem to progress en reculant."

and what a wonderful chap you are. Never had a failure, they say."

"That is not true," said Poirot. "I had a bad failure in Belgium in 1893. You recollect, Hastings? I recounted it to you. The affair of the box of chocolates."

"I remember," I said.

And I smiled, for at the time that Poirot told me that tale, he had instructed me to say "chocolate box" to him if ever I should fancy he was growing conceited! He was then bitterly offended when I used the magical words only a minute and a quarter later.

"Oh! well," said Challenger. "That is such a long time ago it hardly counts. You are going to get to the bottom of this, aren't you?"

"That I swear. On the word of Hercule Poirot. I am the dog who stays on the scent and does not leave it."

"Good. Got any ideas?"

"I have suspicions of two people."

"I suppose I mustn't ask who they are?"

"I should not tell you! You see, I might possibly be in error."

"My alibi is satisfactory, I trust," said

Challenger with a faint twinkle.

Poirot smiled indulgently at the bronzed

a few minutes past 8:30. You arrived here at five minutes past ten ... twenty minutes after the crime had been committed. But the distance from Devonport is only just over thirty miles and you have often done it in an hour since the road is good. So, you see, your

alibi is not good at all!"

"Well, I'm "

"You comprehend, I inquire into every-thing. Your alibi, as I say, is not good. But there are other things beside alibis. You would like, I think, to marry Mademoiselle Nick?"

The sailor's face flushed.

"I've always wanted to marry her," he said huskily.

"Precisely. Eh bien Mademoiselle Nick was engaged to another man. A reason, perhaps, for killing the other man. But that is unnecessary he dies the death of a hero."

"So it is true that Nick was engaged to Michael Seton? There's a rumor to that effect all over the town this morning."

"Yes it is interesting how soon news spreads. You never suspected it before?"

"I knew Nick was engaged to someone she told me so two days ago. But she didn't give me a clue as to who it was."

left her, I fancy, a very pretty fortune. Ah!
assuredly, it is not a moment for killing Ma-demoiselle
Nick from your point of view.
She weeps for her lover now, but the heart
consoles itself. She is young. And I think,
Monsieur, that she is very fond of you

Challenger was silent for a moment or two.
"If it should be..." he murmured.
There was a tap on the door.

It was Frederica Rice.

"I've been looking for you," she said to
Challenger. "They told me you were here. I
wanted to know if you'd got my wrist watch
back yet."

"Oh! yes, I called for it this morning."
He took it from his pocket and handed it
to her. It was a watch of rather an unusual
shape .round, like a globe, set on a strap of
plain black moiré. I remembered that I had
seen one much the same shape on Nick
Buckley's wrist.

"I hope it will keep better time now."

"It's rather a bore. Something is always
going wrong with it."

"It is for beauty, Madame, and not for
utility," said Poirot.

"Can't one have both?" She looked from
one to the other of us. "Am I interrupting a

"No, indeed, Madame. We were talking the gossip not the crime. We were saying how quickly news spreads how that every-one now knows that Mademoiselle Nick was engaged to that brave airman who perished."

"So Nick was engaged to Michad Seton!" exclaimed Frederica.

"It surprises you, Madame?"

"It does a little. I don't know why. Cer-tainly I did think he was very taken with her last autumn. They went about a lot together. And then, after Christmas, they both seemed to cool off. As far as I know, they hardly met."

"The secret, they kept it very well."

"That was because of old Sir Matthew. I suppose. He was really a little off his head, I

"You had no suspicion, Madame? And yet Mademoiselle Nick was such an intimate friend."

"Nick's a close little devil when she likes," murmured Frederica. "But I understand now why she's been so nervy lately. Oh! and I ought to have guessed from something she said only the other day."

"Your little friend is very attractive, Madame."

"Old Tim I .7.1< n<cl 1'n thlnlr n 11' ntl

time," said Challenger with his loud rather tactless laugh.

"Oh! Jim ." She shrugged her shoulders,

but I thought she was annoyed.
She turned to Poirot.

"Tell me, M. Poirot, did you

She stopped. Her tall figure swayed and her face turned whiter still. Her eyes were fixed on the center of the table.

"You are not well, Madame."

I pushed forward a chair, helped her to sink into it. She shook her head, murmured: "I'm all right," and leaned forward, her face between her hands. We watched her awkwardly.

She sat up in a minute.

"How absurd! George darling, don't look so worried. Let's talk about murders. Some-thing exciting. I want to know if M. Poirot is on the track."

"It is early to say, Madame," said Poirot noncommittally.

"But you have ideas yes?"

"Perhaps. But I need a great deal more evidence."

"Oh!" She sounded uncertain.

Suddenly she rose.

down. Perhaps tomorrow they'll let me see Nick."

She left the room abruptly. Challenger frowned.

"you never know what that woman's up to. Nick may have been fond of her, but I don't believe she was fond of Nick. But there you can't tell with women. It's darling-darling darling all the time. and

'damn

you' would probably express it much better.

Are you going out, M. Poirot?" For Poirot

had risen and was carefully brushing a speck off Ms hat.

"Yes,

I am going into the town."

"I've

got nothing to do. May I come with you?"

"Assuredly.

It will be a pleasure."

We

left the room. Poirot, with an apology, went back.

"My

stick," he explained as he rejoined US.

Challenger

wincing slightly. And indeed the stick,

with its embossed gold band, was somewhat ornate.

Poirot's

first visit was to a florist.

"I

must send some flowers to Mademoiselle Nick," he explained.

to be filled with orange carnations. The whole
to be tied up with a large blue bow.

The shopwoman gave him a card and he
wrote on it with a flourish, "With the Com-pliments
of Hercule Poirot."

"I sent her some flowers this morning,"
said Challenger. "I might send her some
fruit."

"Inutile." said Poirot.

"Why.>"

"I said it was useless. The eatables it is
not permitted."

"Who says so?"

"I say so. I have made the rule. It has
already been impressed on Mademoiselle
Nick. She understands."

"Good Lord!" said Challenger.

He looked thoroughly startled. He stared
at Poirot curiously.

"So that's it, is it?" he said. "You're still
afraid."

Interview with Mr. Whitfield

The inquest was a dry proceeding--mere bare bones. There was evidence of identification, then I gave evidence of the finding of the body. Medical evidence followed.

The inquest was adjourned for a week. The St. Loo murder had jumped into prominence in the daily press. It had, in fact, succeeded "SEXOS STZLL MZSSSG.

KNOWN FaTE OF MISSING AIRMAN."

Now that Seton was dead and due tribute had been paid to his memory, a new sensation was due. The St. Loo Mystery was a godsend to papers at their wits' end for news in the month of August.

After the inquest, having successfully dodged reporters, I met Poirot and we had an interview with the Rev. Giles Buckley and his wife.

ing pair, completely unworldly and unsophisticated.

Mrs. Buckley was a woman of character, tall and fair and showing very plainly her northern ancestry. Her husband was a small man, grey-headed, with a diffident appealing manner.

Poor souls, they were completely dazed by the misfortune that had overtaken them and robbed them of a well-loved daughter, "Our Maggie" as they called her.

"I can scarcely realize it even now," said Mr. Buckley. "Such a dear child, M. Poirot. So quiet and unselfish always thinking of others. Who could wish to harm her?"

"I could hardly understand the telegram," said Mrs. Buckley. "Why it was only the morning before that we had seen her off."

"In the midst of life we are in death," murmured her husband.

"Colonel Weston has been very kind," said Mrs. Buckley. "He assures us that everything is being done to find the man who did this thing. He must be a madman. No other explanation is possible."

"Madame, I cannot tell you how I sympathize with you in your in... and how I ad

"Breaking down would not bring Maggie

back to us," said Mrs. Buckley sadly.

"My wife is wonderful,"

said the clergy

man. "Her faith and courage are greater than

mine. It is all so--so bewildering, M.

Poirot."

"I know---I know, Monsieur."

"You are a great detective, M. Poirot?"

said Mrs. Buckley.

"It has been said, Madame."

"Oh! I know. Even in our remote country

village we have heard of you. You are going

to find out the truth, M. Poirot?"

"I shall not rest until I do, Madame."

"It will be revealed to you, M. Poirot,,,"

quavered the clergyman. "Evil c

,"

tumor go un

pumshed.

"Evil never goes unpunished, Monsieur.
But the Punishment is sometimes secret."

"What do you mean by that, M. Poirot?"

Poirot only shook his head.

”

o

.

Poor little Nick," said Mrs. Buckley. "I
am really sorriest of all for her ,--

- . naa a most
pathetic letter. She says she feels she asked

Maggie down here to her death."

"That is morbid," said Mr. Buckley.

"V--c, 'L... I

traordinary not to let her own family visit her."

"Doctors and nurses are very strict," said Poirot evasively. "They make the rules so and nothing will change them. And doubtless they fear for her the emotion the natural emotion she would experience on seeing you."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Buckley doubtfully. "But I don't hold with nursing homes. Nick would do much better if they let her come back with me right away from this place."

"It is possible but I fear they will not agree. It is long since you have seen Made-moiselle Buckley?"

"I haven't seen her since last autumn. She was at Scarborough. Maggie went over and spent the day with her and then she came back and spent a night with us. She's a pretty creature though I can't say I like her friends. And the life she leads well, it's hardly her fault, poor child. She's had no upbringing of any kind."

"It is a strange house End House," said Poirot thoughtfully.

"I don't like it," said Mrs. Buckley. "I never have. There's something all wrong about that house. I disliked old Sir Nicholas

"Not a good man, I'm afraid," said her husband. "But he had a curious charm."

"I never felt it," said Mrs. Buckley.

"There's an evil feeling about that house. I wish we'd never let our Maggie go there."

"Ah! wishing," said Mr. Buckley and shook his head.

"Well," said Poirot. "I must not intrude upon you any longer. I only wished to proffer to you my deep sympathy."

"You have been very kind, M¹. Poirot. And we are indeed grateful for you are doing."

"You return to Yorkshire--when?"

"Tomorrow. A sad journey. Goodby, M. Poirot, and thank you again."

"Very simple delightful people," I said after we had left.

Poirot nodded.

"It makes the heart ache, does it not, mon ami? A tragedy so useless- so purposeless. Cette jeune fille Ah!

.
but I reproach myself
bitterly. I, Hercule Poirot, was on the spot

and I did not prevent the crime!"

"Nobody could have prevented it."

"You speak without reflection, Hastings.

.No ordinary person could, have prevented

It--but of what crime, I do not know.

other people's, if you do not manage to do what ordinary people cannot?"

"Well, of course," I said. "If you are going to put it like that"

"Yes, indeed. I am abashed, downhearted completely abased."

I reflected that Poirot's abasement was strangely like other people's conceit, but I

prudently forbore making any remark.

"And now," he said. "En avant. To London."

"London?"

"IV/a/s oui. We shall catch the two o'clock train very comfortably. All is peaceful here. Mademoiselle is safe in the nursing home. No one can harm her. The watchdogs therefore can take leave of absence. There are one or two little pieces of information that I require."

Our first proceeding on arriving in London was to call upon the late Captain Seton's solicitors, Messrs. Whitfield, Pargiter & Whitfield.

Poirot 'had arranged for an appointment beforehand, and although it was past six o'clock, we were soon closeted with Mr. Whitfield, the head of the firm.

He was a very urbane and impressive per

Chief Constable and another from some high official at Scotland Yard.

"This is all very irregular and unusual, M... ah Poirot," he said, as he polished his eyeglasses.

"Quite so, M. Whiffield. But then murder is also irregular.., and I am glad to say, sufficiently unusual."

"True. True. But rather farfetched--to make a connection between this murder and

my late client's bequest--eh?"

"I think not."

"Ah! you think not. Well under the cir-cumstances-and I must admit that Sir Henry puts it very strongly in his letter I shall be er- happy to do anything that is in my power."

"You acted as legal adviser to the late Captain Seton?"

"To all the Seton family, my dear sir. We have done so our firm have done so, I mean. for the last hundred years."

"Parfaitement. The late Sir Matthew Seton made a will?"

"We made it for him."

"And he left his fortune--how?"

"There were several bequests, one to the

Natural History Museum. hut the

he left to Captain Michael Seton absolutely.
He had no other near relations."

"A very large fomme you say?"

"The late Sir Matthew was the second
richest man in England," replied Mr.
Whiffield composedly.

"He had somewhat peculiar views, had he
not?"

Mr. Whitfield looked at Poirot severely.

"A millionaire, M. Poirot, is allowed to be
eccentric. It is almost expected of him."

Poirot received this correction meekly and
asked another question.

"His death was unexpected, I under-stand?"

"Most unexpected. Sir Matthew enjoyed
remarkably good health. He had an internal

growth, however, which
pected. It reached a vital
mediate operation was

no one had sus-tissue
and an im
necessary.

The

operation was, as always on these occasions,
completely successful. But Sir Matthew
died."

"And his fortune passed to Captain Seton."

"That is so."

"Captain Seton had, I understand, made a
will before leaving England?"

"If you can call it a will yes," said Mr.

"Is it legal?"

"It is .perfectly legal. The intention of the testator s plain and it is properly witnessed.

Oh! yes, it is legal."

"But you do not approve of it?"

"My dear sir, what are we for?"

I had often wondered. Having once had occasion to make a perfectly simple will my-self, I had been appalled at the length and verbiage that resulted from my solicitor's of-fice.

"The truth of the matter was," continued Mr. Whitfield, "that at the time Captain Seton had little or nothing to leave. He was dependent on the allowance he received from his uncle. .,He felt, I suppose, that Anything would Do.

And he thought correctly, I whispered to myself.

"And the terms of this will?" asked Poirot.

"He leaves everything of which he dies possessed to his affianced wife, Miss Magdala Buckley, absolutely. He names me as his executor."

"Then Miss Buckley inherits?"

"Certainly Miss Buckley inherits."

"And if Miss Buckley had happened to die last

the money would go to whoever she had named in her will as residuary legatee or failing a will, to her next of kin.

"I may say," added Mr. Whitfield with an air of enjoyment, "that the death duties would have been enormous. Enormous! Three deaths, remember, in rapid succession." He shook his head. "Enormous!"

"But there would have been something left?" murmured Poirot meekly.

"My dear sir, as I told you, Sir Matthew was the second richest man in England." Poirot rose.

"Thank you, Mr. Whitfield, very much for the information that you have given me."

"Not at all. Not at all. I may say that I shall be in communication with Miss Buckley indeed I believe the letter has already gone. I shall be happy to be of any service I can to her."

"She is a young lady," said Poirot, "who could do with some sound legal advice."

"There will be fortune hunters, I am afraid," said Mr. Whitfield, shaking his head.

"It seems indicated," agreed Poirot. "Good day, Monsieur."

"Goodby, M. Poirot. Glad to have been of

service to you. Your name is ah!--familiar

He said this kindly with an air of one making a valuable admission.

"It is all exactly as you thought, Poirot," I said when we were outside.

"Mort ami, it was bound to be. It could not be any other way. We will go now to the Cheshire Cheese where Japp meets us for an early dinner."

We found Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard awaiting us at the chosen rendezvous. He greeted Poirot with every sign of warmth.

"Years since I've seen you, Moosior Poirot! Thought you were growing vegetable mar-rows in the country."

"I tried, Japp, I tried. But even when you grow vegetable marrows you cannot get away from murder."

He sighed. I knew of what he was thinking that strange affair at Femley Park. How I regretted that I had been far away at that time.

"And Captain Hastings too," said Japp.

"How are you, sir?"

"Very fit, thanks," I said.

"And now there are more murders?" continued Japp facetiously.

"As you say more murders."

"Well, you mustn't be denre..ocl ,.1,4

your way clear well you can't go about at
your time of life and expect to have the
success you used to do. We all of us get stale
as the years go by. Got to give the young
'uns a chance, you know."

"And yet the old dog is the one who
knows the tricks," murmured Poirot. "He is
cunning. He does not leave the scent."

"Oh! well we're talking about human be-ings,
not dogs."

"Is there so much difference?"

"Well, it depends how you look at things.
But you're a caution, isn't he, Captain
Hastings? Always' was. Looks much the
same .-hair a bit thinner on top but the face
fungus fuller than ever."

"Eh?" said Poirot. "What is that?"

"He's congratulating you on your mus-t:aches,"
I said soothingly.

"They are luxuriant, yes," said Poirot
complacently caressing them.

app went off into a roar of laughter.

"Well," he said, after a minute or two.

"I've done your bit of business. These fin-gerprints
you sent me "

"Yes?" said Poirot eagerly.

"Nothing doing. Whoever the gentleman

may be he hasn't assed through our hands.

nobody of that description or name is known there."

"So there may be something fishy after all. But he's not one of the lads.

"As to the other business," went on Japp.
"Yes?"

"Lazarus and Son have a good reputation. Quite straight and honorable in their dealings. Sharp, of course.-- but that's another matter. You've got to be sharp in business. But they're all right. They're in a bad way, though financially, I mean."

"Oh!--is that so?"

"Yes. the slump in pictures has hit them badly. And antique furniture too. All this modern continental stuff coming into fashion. They built new premises last year and well. as I say, they're not far from Queer Street."

"I am much obliged to you."

"Not at all. That sort of thing isn't my line, as you know. But I made a point of finding out as you wanted to know. We can always get information."

"My good Japp, what should I do without

an old friend. I let you in on some pretty good cases in the old days, didn't I?" This, I realized, was Japp's way of acknowledging indebtedness to Poirot who had solved many a case which had baffled the Inspector.

"They were the good days--yes."

"I wouldn't mind having a chat with you now and again even in these days. Your methods may be old-fashioned but you've got your head screwed on the right way, M. Poirot."

"What about my other question. The Dr. MacAllister?"

"Oh! him. He's a woman's doctor. I don't mean a gyneco-logist. I mean one of these nerve doctors tell you to sleep in purple walls and an orange ceiling talk to you about your libido whatever that is--tells you to let it rip. He's a bit of a quack if you ask me--but he gets the women all right. They flock to him. Goes abroad a good deal--does kind of medical work in Paris, I

some believe."

"Why Dr. MacAllister?"

dered. I had never heard

"Where does he come in?"

"Dr. MacAllister is the

I asked bewil-of the name.

uncle of Com

remember he referred to an uncle who was a doctor?"

"How thorough you are," I said. "Did you think he had operated on Sir Matthew?"

"He's not a surgeon," said Japp.

"Mon ami," said Poirot, "I like to inquire into everything. Hercule Poirot is a good dog. The dog follows the scent, and if, re-grettably, there is no scent to follow, he noses around seeking always something that is not very nice. So also, does Hercule Poirot. And often oh! so often does he find it!"

"It's not a nice profession, ours," said Japp. "Stilton, did you say? I don't mind if I

do. No, it's not a nice profession. And yours is worse than mine not official, you see, and therefore a lot more worming yourself into places in underhand ways."

"I do not disguise myself, Japp. Never have I disguised myself."

"You couldn't," said Japp. "You're unique. Once seen, never forgotten."

Poirot looked at him rather doubtfully.

"Only my fun," said Japp. "Don't mind me. Glass of port? Xgrell, if you say so "

The eveirg became thoroughly harmoni-ous.

XVre were soon in the middle of reminis

This

that

and

the other. I

cences.

case,

case,

past. Those had been good days. How old and experienced I felt now!

Poor old Poirot. He was perplexed by this case I could see that. His powers were not what they were. I had the feeling that he was going to fail that the murderer of Maggie Buckley would never be brought to book.

"Courage, my friend," said Poirot slapping me on the shoulder. "All is not lost. Do

not pull the long face, I beg of you."

"That's all right. I'm all right."

"And so am I. And so is Japp."

"We're all all right," declared Japp hilariously.

And on this pleasant note we parted.

The following morning we journeyed back to St. Loo. On arrival at the hotel Poirot rang up the nursing home and asked to speak to Nick.

Suddenly I saw his face change he almost dropped the instrument.

"Comment? What is that? Say it again, I beg."

He waited for a minute or two listening. Then he said, "Yes, yes, I will come at

once.

He turned a pale face to me.

"Why did I go away, Hastings? Mon D/eu.t

A Box of Chocolates

All the way to the nursing home Poirot mur-mured and muttered to himself. He was full of self-reproach.

"I should have known," he groaned. "I should have known! And yet, what could I do? I took every precaution. It is impossible. No one could get to her! Who has disobeyed my orders?"

At the nursing home we were shown into a little room downstairs and after a few minutes Dr. Graham came to us. He looked exhausted and white.

"She'll do," he said. "It's going to be all right. The trouble was knowing how much

she's taken of the damned stuff."

"What was k?"

"Cocaine."

"She will live?"

"Yes, yes, she'll live."

get at her? Who has been allowed in?" Poirot

fairly danced with impotent excitement.

"Nobody has been allowed in."

"Impossible."

"It's true."

"But then ."

"It was a box of chocolates."

"Ah, sacra. And I told her to eat nothing
nothing that came from outside."

"I don't know about that. It's hard work
keeping a girl from a box of chocolates. She
ate only one, thank goodness."

"Was there cocaine in all the chocolates?"

"No. The girl ate one. There were two
others in the top layer. The rest were all
right."

"How was it done?"

"Quite clumsily. Chocolate cut in half
the cocaine mixed with the filling and the
chocolate stuck together again. Amateurishly.

What you might call a homemade job."

Poirot groaned.

"Ah! if I knew if I knew. Can I see
Mademoiselle?"

you come back in an hour I think you
can see her," said the doctor. "Pull yourself

together, man. She isn't going to die."

For another hour we walked the streets of

mind ..pointing out to him that all was well,
that, after all, no mischief had been done.

But he only shook his head, and repeated
at intervals:

"I am afraid, Hastings, I am afraid...."

And the strange way he said it made me,
too, feel afraid.

Once he caught me by the arm.

"Listen, my friend. I am all wrong. I have
been all wrong from the beginning."

"You mean it isn't the money... ."

"No, no, I am right about that. Oh! yes.
But those two .it is too simple too easy,
that. There is another twist still. Yes, there
is something!"

And then in an outburst of indignation:

"Ah! cette petite! Did I not forbid her? Did
I not say 'Do not touch anything from out-side'?
And she disobeys me me, Hercule
Poirot. Are not four escapes from death
enough for her? Must she take a fifth chance?
Ah, c'est inou!"

At last we made our way back. After a
brief wait we were conducted upstairs.

Nick was sitting up in bed. The pupils of
her eyes were widely dilated. She looked
feverish and her hands kept twitching vio-lently.

of her. He cleared his throat and took
hand in his.

"Ah! Mademoiselle--Mademoiselle."

"I shouldn't care," she said defiantly,

Poirot experienced real emotion at the sight
her

they had got me this time. I'm sick of it
all---sick of it!"

"Pauvre petite.t"

"Something in me doesn't like to give them
best!"

"That is the spirit, le sport you
must be
the
good sport, Mademoiselle."

"Your
old nursing home hasn't been so safe
after all," said Nick.

"If
you had obeyed orders, Mademoiselle..."

"She

looked faintly astonished.

"But
I have."

"Did
I not impress upon you that you
were
to eat nothing that came from outside?" "No
more I did."

"But
these chocolates--"

"Well,
they were all right. You sent them." "What
is that you say, Mademoiselle?" "You

sent them!"

"Me?"

Never. Never anything of the kind." "But you did. Your card was in the box." "What?"

the table by the bed. The nurse came for-ward.

"You want the card that was in the box?"

"Yes, please, nurse."

There was a moment's pause. The nurse

returned to the room with it in her hand.

"Here it is."

I gasped. So did Poirot. For on the card, in flourishing handwriting, were written the same words that I had seen Poirot inscribe on the card that accompanied the basket of flowers: "With the Compliments of Hercule Poirot."

"S acr tonnerre.t"

"You see," said Nick accusingly.

"I did not write this!" cried Poirot.

"What?"

"And yet," murmured Poirot, "and yet it is my handwriting."

"I know. It's exactly the same as the card that came with the orange carnations. I never

doubted that the chocolates came from you."

Poirot shook his head.

"How should you doubt? Oh! the devil!

The clever cruel devil! To think of that! Ah!

but he has genius, this man, genius! 'With the Compliments of Hercule Poirot.' So simple.

Yes, but one had to think of it. And I I did

Nick moved restlessly.

"Do not agitate yourself, Mademoiselle. You are blameless, blameless. It is I that am to blame, miserable imbecile that I am! I should have foreseen this move. Yes, I should have foreseen it."

His chin dropped on his breast. He looked the picture of misery.

"I really think "said the nurse.

She had been hovering nearby, a disapproving expression on her face.

"Eh? Yes, yes, I will go. Courage, Made-moiselle. This is the last mistake I will make. I am ashamed, desolated I have been tricked, outwitted, as though I were a little schoolboy. But it shall not happen again. No. I promise you. Come, Hastings."

Poirot's first proceeding was to interview the matron. She was, naturally, terribly up-set over the whole business.

"It seems incredible to me, M. Poirot, absolutely incredible. That a thing like that should happen in my nursing home."

Poirot was sympathetic and tactful. Having soothed her sufficiently, he began to inquire into the circumstance of the arrival of

the fatal packet. Here, the matron told, IvoA

who had been on duty at the time of its arrival.

The man in question, whose name was Hodd, was a stupid but honest-looking young fellow of about twenty-two. He looked nervous and frightened. Poirot put him at his ease, however.

"No blame can be attached to you," he said kindly. "But I want you to tell me exactly when and how this parcel arrived."

The orderly looked puzzled.

"It's difficult to say, sir," he said slowly.

"Lots of people come and inquire and leave things for the different patients."

"The nurse says this came last night," I said. "About six o'clock."

The lad's face brightened.

"I do remember, now, sir. A gentleman brought it."

"A thin-faced gentleman fair-haired?"

"He was fair-haired but I don't know about thin-faced."

"Would Charles Vyse bring it himself?" I murmured to Poirot.

I had forgotten that the lad would know a local name.

"It wasn't Mr. Vyse," he said. "I know him. It was a bigger gentleman handsome

"Lazarus," I exclaimed.

patients."

"Do you remember what was left?"

"Must have been about

Poirot shot me a warning glance and I regretted my precipitance.

"He came in a large car and he left this parcel. It was addressed to Miss Buckley?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what did you do with it?"

"I didn't touch it, sir. Nurse took it up."

"Quite so, but you touched it when you took it from the gentleman, n'est-ce pas?"

"Oh! that, yes, of course, sir. I took it from him and put it on the table."

"Which table? Show me if you please."

The orderly led us into the hall. The front door was open. Close to it, in the hall, was a long marble-topped table on which lay letters and parcels.

"Everything that comes is put on here, sir. Then the nurses take things up to the

time this parcel

five-thirty, or a

little after. I know the post had just been, and that's usually at about half-past five. It was a pretty busy afternoon, a lot of people leaving flowers and coming to see patients."

"Thank you, T. ..."

This proved to be one of the probationers,

a fluffy little person all agog with excitement.

She remembered taking the parcel up

at six o'clock when she came on duty.

"Six o'clock," murmured Poirot. "Then it must have been twenty minutes or so that the parcel was lying on the table downstairs."

"Pardon?"

"Nothing, Mademoiselle. Continue. You took the parcel to Miss Buckley?"

"Yes, there were several things for her.

There was this box and some flowers also sweet peas from a Mr. and Mrs. Croft, I think. I took them up at the same time. And there was a parcel that had come by post and curiously enough that was a box of Fuller's chocolates also."

"Comment? A second box?"

"Yes, rather a coincidence. Miss Buckley opened them both. She said: 'Oh! what a shame. I'm not allowed to eat them.' Then she opened the lids to look inside and see if they were both just the same, and your card was in one and she said, 'Take the other impure box away, nurse. I might get them mixed up.' Oh! dear, whoever would have thought of such a thing? Seems like an Edgar Wallace, doesn't it?"

"Two boxes, you say? From whom was the other box?"

"There was no name inside."

"And which was the one that came that had the appearance of coming ... from me? The one by post or the other?"

"I declare now--I can't remember. Shall I go up and ask Miss Buckley?"

"If you would be so amiable."

She ran up the stairs.

"Two boxes," murmured Poirot. "There is confusion for you."

The nurse returned breathless.

"Miss Buckley isn't sure. She unwrapped them both before she looked inside. But she thinks it wasn't the box that came by post."

"Eh?" said Poirot a little confused.

"The box from you was the one that didn't come by post. At least she thinks so, but she isn't quite sure."

"Diable?" said Poirot as we walked away.

"Is no one ever quite sure? In detective books -yes. But life real life is always full of muddle. Am I sure, myself, about anything at all? No, no--a thousand times, no."

"Lazarus," I said.

"Yes, that is a surprise, is it not?"

"Shall you say anything to him about it?"

how he takes it. By the way, we might as well exaggerate the serious condition of Ma-demoiselle. It will do no harm to let it be assumed that she is at death's door. You comprehend? The solemn face Yes, admirable. You resemble closely an undertaker. C'est tout fait bien."

We were lucky in finding Lazarus. He was bending over the bonnet of his car outside the hotel.

Poirot went straight up to him. "Yesterday evening, M. Lazarus, you left a box of chocolates for Mademoiselle," he began without preamble.

Lazarus looked rather surprised.

"Yes?"

"That was very amiable of you."

"As a matter of fact they were from Freddie, from Mrs. Rice. She asked me to get them."

"Oh! I see."

"I took them round there in the car."

"I comprehend."

Poirot was silent for a minute or two and

then said: "Madame Rice, where is she?"

"I think she's in the lounge."

We found Frederica having tea. She looked

"What is this I hear about Nick being taken ill?"

"It is a most mysterious affair, Madame. Tell me, did you send her a box of chocolates yesterday?"

"Yes. At least she asked me to get them for her."

"She asked you to get them for her?"

"Yes."

"But she was not allowed to see anyone. How did you see her?"

"I didn't. She telephoned."

"Ah! And she said what?"

"Would I get her a two-pound box of Fuller's chocolates."

"How did her voice sound weak?"

"No not at all. Quite strong. But different somehow. I didn't realize it was she speaking at first."

"Until she told you who she was?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure, Madame, that it was your friend?"

Frederica looked startled.

"I I why, of course it was. Who else could it have been?"

"That is an interesting question, Madame."

"Could you swear, Madame, that it was your friend's voice apart from what she said?"

"No," said Frederica slowly. "I couldn't. Her voice was certainly different. I thought it was the phone or perhaps being ill "

"If she had not told you who she was, you would not have recognized her?"

"No, no, I don't think I should. Who was it, M. Poirot? Who was it?"

"That is what I mean to know, Madame."

The graveness of his face seemed to awaken her suspicions.

"Is Nick has anything happened?" she

asked breathlessly.

Poirot nodded.

"She is ill dangerously ill. Those chocolates, Madame were poisoned."

"The chocolates I sent her? But that's impossible impossible!"

"Not impossible, Madame, since Made-moiselle is at death's door."

"Oh! my God." She hid her face in her hands, then raised it white and quivering. "I don't understand I don't understand. The

other, yes, but not this. They couldn't be
poisoned. Nobody ever touched them but
me and Jim. You're making some dreadful

t xs not I that m. ade a mistakeeven
though my name was m the box."

She stared at him blankly.

"If Mademoiselle Nick dies- "he said,
and made a threatening gesture with his
hand.

She gave a low cry.

He turned away, and taking me by the
arm, went up to the sitting room.

He flung his hat on the table.

"I understand nothing but nothing! I am
in the dark. I am a LITTLE child. Who stands
to gain by Mademoiselle's death? Madame
Rice. Who buys the chocolates and admits it
and tells a .story of being rung up on the
telephone mat cannot hold water for a
minute? Madame Rice. It is too simple--too
stupid. And she is not stupid no."

"Well, then "

"But she takes cocaine, Hastings. I am
certain she takes cocaine. There is no mistaking
it. And there was cocaine in those
chocolates. And what does she mean when
she said, 'The other, yes, but not this.' It
needs explaining, that! And the sleek M.
Lazarus what is he doing in all this? What
does she know, Madame Rice? She knows
smething. But I cannot make her sneal-

speech. But she knows something, Hastings.

Is her tale of the telephone true, or did she invent it? If it is true, whose voice was it?

"I tell you, Hastings, this is all very black--very black."

"Always darkest before dawn," I said reassuringly.

He shook his head.

"Then the other box that came by post.

Can we rule that out? No, we cannot, because Mademoiselle is not sure. It is an annoyance, that?

He groaned.

I was about to speak when he stopped me.

"No, no. Not another proverb. I cannot bear it. If you would be the good friend the good helpful friend "

"Yes," I said eagerly.

"Go out, I beg of you, and buy me some playing cards."

I stared.

"Very well," I said coldly.

I could not but suspect that he was making a deliberate excuse to get rid of me.

Here, however, I misjudged him. That night, when I came into the sitting room about ten o'clock, I found Poirot carefully

It was an old trick of his soothing his nerves. He smiled at me.

"Yes you remember. One needs the pre-cision. One card on another so in exactly the right place and that supports the weight of the card on top and so on, up and up. Go to bed, Hastings. Leave me here, with my house of cards. I clear the mind."

It was about five in the morning when I was shaken awake.

Poirot was standing by my bedside. He looked pleased and happy.

"It was very just what you said, mon ami Oh! it was very just. More, it was spirituel,t"

I blinked at him, being imperfectly awake. "Always darkest before dawn that is what you said. It has been very dark and now it is dawn."

I looked at the window. He was perfectly right.

"No, no, Hastings. In the head! The mind! The little grey cells!"

He paused and then said quietly.

"You see, Hastings, Mademoiselle is dead."

"What?" I cried, suddenly wide awake.

"Hush hush. It is as I say. Not really
bien entendu but it can be arranged. Yes,

for twenty-four hours it can be arranged. I
arrange it with the doctors, with the nurses.

"You comprehend, Hastings? The murderer
has been successful. Four times he has
tried and failed. The fifth time he has succeeded.

"And now, we shall see what happens
next

"It will be very interesting."

The Face at the Window

The events of the next day are completely hazy in my memory. I was unfortunate enough to awake with fever on me. I have been liable to these bouts of fever at inconvenient times ever since I once contracted malaria.

In consequence, the events of that day take on in my memory the semblance of a nightmare with Poirot coming and going as a kind of fantastic clown, making a periodic appearance in a circus.

He was, I fancy, enjoying himself to the full. His pose of baffled despair was admirable. How he achieved the end he had in view and which he had disclosed to me in the early hours of the morning, I cannot say. But achieve it, he did.

It cannot have been easy. The amount of deception and subterfuge involved must have

been enormous. The French character is averse

to lying on a wholesale scale and that, no less, was what Poirot's plan required. He had, first, to get Dr. Graham converted to the scheme. With Dr. Graham on his side, he had to persuade the Matron and some members of the staff of the nursing home to conform to the plan. There again, the difficulties must have been immense. It was probably Dr. Graham's influence that turned the scale.

Then there was the Chief Constable and the police. Here, Poirot would be up against officialdom. Nevertheless he wrung at last an unwilling consent out of Colonel Weston. The Colonel made it clear that it was in no way his responsibility. Poirot and Poirot alone was responsible for the spreading abroad of these lying reports. Poirot agreed. He would have agreed to anything so long as he was permitted to carry out his plan.

I spent most of the day dozing in a large armchair with a rug over my knees. Every two or three hours or so, Poirot would burst in and report progress.

"Gomment fa va, mon ami? How I com-miserate you. But it is as well, perhaps. The farce, you do not play it as well as I do. I come this moment from ordering a wreath

friend large quantities of lilies. 'With heartfelt regret. From Hercule Poirot.' Ah! what a comedy."

He departed again.

"I come from a most poignant conversation with Madame Rice," was his next piece of information. "Very well dressed in the black, that one. Her poor friend. what a tragedy! I groan sympathetically. Nck, she says, was so joyous, so full of life. Impossible to think of her as dead. I agree. 'It is,' I say, 'the irony of death that it takes one like that. The old and useless are left.' Oh! 1/ 1/ I groan again."

"How you are enjoying this," I murmured feebly.

"Du tout. It is part of my plan, that is all.

To play the comedy successfully, you must put the heart into it. Well, then, the conventional expressions of regret over, Madame comes to matters nearer home. All might she has lain awake wondering about those sweets. It is impossible impossible. 'Madame,' I say. 'It is not impossible. You can see the analyst's report.' Then she says, and her voice is far from steady, 'It was cocaine, you say?' I assent. And she says, 'Oh! my God. I don't understand.'"

"She understands well enough that she is in danger. She is intelligent. I told you that before. Yes, she is in danger, and she knows it."

"And yet it seems to me that for the first time you don't believe her guilty."

Poirot frowned. The excitement of his manner abated.

"It is profound what you say there, Hastings. No it seems to me that some-how the facts no longer fit. These crimes

so far what has marked them most the sub-tlety, is it not? And here is no subtlety at all only the crudity, pure and simple. No,

it does not fit."

He sat down at the table.

"Voila let us examine the facts. are three possibilities. There are the

There
sweets
bought by Madame and delivered by M.
Lazarus. And in that case the guilt rests with one or the other or both. And the telephone call, supposedly from Mademoiselle Nick, that is an invention pure and simple. That is the straightforward the obvious solution.

"Solution 2. The other box of sweets
that which came by post. Anyone may have
sent those. Any of the suspects on our list
from A. to J. (You remember? A very wide

is the point of the telephone call? Why com-plicate matters with a second box?"

I shook my head feebly. With a tempera-ture of 102, any complication seemed to me quite unnecessary and absurd.

"Solution 3. A poisoned box was substi-tuted for the innocent box bought by Ma-dame. In that case the telephone call is ingenious and understandable. Madame is to be what you call the kitten's paw. She is to pull the roasting chestnuts out of the fire. So Solution 3 is the most logical, but, alas, it is also the most difficult. How be sure of sub-sfituting a box at the right moment? The orderly might take the box straight upstairs a hundred and one possibilities might pre-vent the substitution being effected. No, it does not seem sense."

"Unless it were Lazarus," I said.

Poirot looked at me.

"You have the fever, my friend. It mounts,

does it not?"

I nodded.

"Curious how a few degrees of heat should stimulate the intellect. You have uttered there an observation of profound simplicity. So simple, was it, that I had failed to consider it. But it would suppose averv curious state

Madame, doing his best to get her hanged.
It opens up possibilities of a very curious
nature. But complex very complex."

I closed my eyes I was glad I had been
brilliant, but I did not want to think of
anything complex I wanted to go to sleep.

Poirot, I think, went on talking, but I
did not listen. His voice was vaguely sooth

It
was late afternoon when I saw him next.
"My little plan, it has made the fortune of
the flower shops," he announced. "Ev-erybody
orders wreaths. M. Croft, M. Vyse,
Commander Challenger "

The last name awoke a chord of compunc-tion
in my mind.

"Look here, Poirot," I said. "You must
let him in on this. Poor fellow, he will be
distracted with grief. It isn't fair."

"You have always the tenderness for him,
Hastings."

"I like him. He's a thoroughly decent chap

You've got to take him into the secret"
Poirot shook his head

"No, mon ami. I do not make the excep-tions."

"But you don't suspect him of having any-thing
to do with it?"

"Think how he must be suffering."

"On the contrary, I prefer to think of what a joyful surprise I prepare for him. To think the loved one dead and find her alive! It is a sensation unique stupendous."

"What a pig-headed old devil you are. He'd keep the secret all right."

"I am not so sure."

"He's the soul of honor. I'm certain of it."

"That makes it all the more difficult to keep a secret. Keeping a secret is an art that requires many lies magnificently told, and a great aptitude for playing the comedy and enjoying it. Could he dissemble, the Commander Challenger? If he is what you say he is, he certainly could not."

"Then you won't tell him?"

"I certainly refuse to imperil my little idea for the sake of the sentiment. It is life and death we play with, mon cher. Anyway, the suffering, it is good for the character. Many of our famous clergymen have said so- even a bishop if I am not mistaken."

I made no further attempt to shake his decision. His mind, I could see, was made up.

"I shall not dress for dinner," he murmured.

"I am too much troubled," he said.

self-confidence has crashed I am broken. I
have failed. I shall eat hardly any dinner

the food untasted on the plate. That is the
attitude, I think. In my own apartment I will
consume some brioches and some chocolate
ficlairs (so called) which I had the foresight
to buy at a confectioner's. Et vous?"

"Some more quinine, I think," I said
sadly.

"Alas, my poor Hastings. But courage, all
will be well tomorrow."

"Very likely. These attacks often last only
twenty-four hours."

I did not hear him return to the room. I
must have been asleep.

When I awoke, he was sitting at the table
writing. In front of him was a crumpled
sheet of paper smoothed out. I recognized it
for the paper on which he had written that
list of people A. to J.... which he had after-wards
crumpled up and thrown away.

He nodded in answer to my unspoken
thought.

"Yes, my friend, I have resurrected it. I
am at work upon it from a different angle. I
compile a list of questions concerning each
person. The questions may have no bearing
on the crime they are just things that I do

and for which I seek to supply the answer from my own brain."

"How far have you got?"

"I have finished. You would like to hear? You are strong enough?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I am feeling a great deal better."

"A la bonheur.t Very well, I will read them to you. Some of them, no doubt, you will consider puerile."

He cleared his throat.

Ellen. Why did she remain in the house and not go out to see fireworks? (Un-usual, as Mademoiselle's evidence and surprise make clear.) What did she think or suspect might happen? Did she admit anyone (J. for instance) to the house? Is she speaking the truth about the secret panel? If there is such a thing why is she unable to remember where it is? (Mademoiselle seems very certain there is no such thing and she would surely know.) If she invented it, why did she invent it? Had she read Michael Seton's love letters or was her surprise at Mademoiselle Nick's engagement genuine?

seems? Does he share Ellen's knowl-edge
whatever it is, or does he not? Is
he, in any respect, a mental case?

The child. Is his delight in blood a natu-ral
instinct common to his age and de-velopment,
or is it morbid, and is that
morbidity inherited from either parent?
Has he ever shot with a toy pistol?

Who is Mr. Croft? Where does he really
come from? Did he post the will as he
swears he did? What motive could he
have in not posting it?

Same as above. Who are Mr. and Mrs.
Croft? Are they in hiding for some rea-son
and if so, what reason? Have they
any connection with the Buckley family?
Mrs. Rice. Was she really aware of the
engagement between Nick and Michael
Seton? Did she merely guess it, or had
she actually read the letters which passed
between them? (In that case she would
know Mademoiselle was Seton's heir.)
Did she know that she herself was Ma-demoiselle's
residuary legatee? (This, I
think, is likely. Mademoiselle would
probably tell her so, adding perhaps that
she would not get much out of it.) Is
there any truth in Commander Chal

tracted by Mademoiselle Nick? (This might explain a certain lack of cordiality between the two friends which seems to have shown itself in the last few months.) Who is the 'boy friend' mentioned in her note as supplying the drug? Could this possibly be J.? Why did she turn faint one day in this room? Was it something that had been said or was it something she saw? Is her account of the telephone message asking her to buy chocolates correct or is it a deliberate lie? What did she mean by 'I can understand the other but not this'? If she is not herself guilty, what knowledge has she got that she is keeping to herself?.

"You perceive," said Poirot, suddenly breaking off, "That the questions concerning Madame Rice are almost innumerable. From beginning to end, she is an enigma. And that forces me to a conclusion. Either Madame Rice is guilty, or she knows, or shall we say, thinks she knows .. who is guilty. But is she right? Does she know or does she merely suspect? And how is it possible to make her speak?"

"Well, I will go on with my list of questions.

Mr. Lazarus. Curious there are practically no questions to ask concerning him except the crude one, 'Did he substitute the poisoned sweets?' Otherwise I find only one totally irrelevant question. But I have put it down. 'Why did M. Lazarus offer fifty pounds for a picture that was only worth twenty?'"

"He wanted to do Nick a good turn," I suggested.

"He would not do it that way. He is a dealer. He does not buy to sell at a loss. If he wished to be amiable he would lend her money as a private individual."

"It can't have any bearing on the crime, anyway."

"No, that is true but all the same, I should like to know. I am a student of the psychology, you understand.

"Now we came to H.

Commander Challenger. Why did Made-moiselle Nick tell him she was engaged to someone else? What necessitated her

else. Had he proposed to her? What are his relations with his uncle?"

"His uncle, Poirot?"

"Yes, the doctor. That rather questionable character. Did any private news of Michael Seton's death come through to the Admiralty before it was announced publicly?"

"I don't quite see what you're driving at, Poirot. Even if Challenger knew beforehand about Seton's death, it does not seem to get us anywhere. It provides no earthly motive for killing the girl he loved."

"I quite agree. What you say is perfectly reasonable. But these are just things I should like to know. I am still the dog, you see, nosing about for the things that are not very nice!"

Mr. Vyse. Why did he say what he did about his cousin's fanatical devotion to End House? What possible motive could he have in saying that? Did he, or did he not, receive the will? Is he, in fact, an honest man or is he not an honest man?

before a giant question mark. Is there such a person, or is there not

"Mort Dieu.t my friend, what have you?"

I had started from my chair with a sudden shriek. With a shaking hand I pointed at the window.

"A face, Poirot!" I cried. "A face pressed against the glass. A dreadful face! It's gone now but I saw it."

Poirot strode to the window and pushed it open. He leant out.

"There is no one there now," he said thoughtfully. "You are sure you did not imagine it, Hastings?"

"Quite sure. It was a horrible face."

"There is a balcony, of course. Anyone could reach there quite easily if they wanted to hear what we were saying. When you say a dreadful face, Hastings, just what do you mean?"

"A white staring face, hardly human."

"Mon ami, that is the fever. A face, yes. An unpleasant face, yes. But a face hardly human no. What you saw was the effect of a face pressed closely against the glass that allied to the shock of seeing it there at

"It was not the face of anyone you knew?"

"No, indeed."

"Mm. it might have been, though! I doubt if you would recognize it under these circumstances. I wonder now yes, I very much wonder."

He gathered up his papers thoughtfully.
"One thing at least is to the good. If the owner of that face overheard our conversation we did not mention that Mademoiselle Nick was alive and well. Whatever else our visitor may have heard, that at least escaped

"But surely," I said, "the results of this er brilliant maneuver of yours have been slightly disappointing up to date. Nick is dead and no startling developments have occurred!"

"I did not expect them yet awhile. Twenty-four hours, I said. Mort ami, tomorrow, if I am not mistaken, certain things will arise. Otherwise I am wrong from start to finish. There is the post, you see. I have hopes of tomorrow's post."

I awoke in the morning feeling weak but with the fever abated. I also felt hungry. Poirot and I had breakfast served in our

"Well?" I said maliciously, as he sorted his letters. "Has the post done what you expected of it?"

Poirot, who had just opened two envelopes which patently contained bills, did not reply. I thought he looked rather cast down and not his usual cock-a-hoop self.

I opened my own mail. The first was a notice of a Spiritualist meeting.

"If all else fails, we must go to the Spiritualists," I remarked. "I often wonder that more tests of this kind aren't made. The spirit of the victim comes back and names the murderer. That would be proof."

"It would hardly help us," said Poirot absently. "I doubt if Maggie Buckley knew whose hand it was that shot her down. Even if she could speak she would have nothing of

value to tell us. Tiens, that is odd."

"What is?"

"You talk of the dead speaking, and at that moment I open this letter."

He tossed it across to me. It was from Mrs. Buckley.

Langley Rectory

DEAR M. POIROT,

On my return here I found a letter

at St. Loo. There is nothing in it of interest to you, I'm afraid, but I thought perhaps you would care to see it.

Thanking you for your kindness,

Yours sincerely,

JEAN BUCKLEY

The enclosure brought a lump to my throat. It was so terribly commonplace and so completely untouched by any apprehension of tragedy.

DEAR MOTHER

I arrived safely. Quite a comfortable journey. Only two other people in the carriage all the way to Exeter.

It is lovely weather here. Nick seems very well and gay a little restless perhaps, but I cannot see why she should have telegraphed for me in the way she did. Tuesday would have done just as well.

No more now. We are going to have tea with some neighbors. They are Australians and have rented the lodge. Nick says they are kind but rather awful. Mrs. Rice and Mr. Lazarus are coming to stay. He is the art dealer. I will post

will catch the post. Will write tomor-row.

Your loving daughter,

MAGGIE

P.S. Nick says there is a reason for her wire. She will tell me after tea. She is very queer and jumpy.

"The voice of the dead," said Poirot quietly. "And it tells us ..nothing."

"The box by the gate," I remarked idly.

"That's where Croft said he posted the will."

"Said so yes. I wonder. How I wonder!"

"There is nothing else of interest among your letters?"

"Nothing, Hastings, I am very unhappy. I am in the dark. Still in the dark. I comprehend nothing."

At that moment the telephone rang. Poirot went to it.

Immediately I saw a change come over his face. His manner was very restrained, never-theless he could not disguise from my eyes his intense excitement.

His own contributions to the conversation were entirely noncommittal so that I could not gather what it was all about.

Presently, however with a "Trs bien. Je vous remercie," he put back the receiver and

came back to where I was sitting. His eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"Mon ami," he said. "What did I tell you?"

Things have begun to happen."

"What was it?"

"That was M. Charles Vyse on the tele-phone. He informs me that this morning, through the post, he has received a will signed by his cousin, Miss Buckley, and dated the 25th of February, last."

"What? The will?"

"Evidemment."

"It has turned up?"

"Just at the right moment, West-ce pas?"

"Do you think he is speaking the truth?"

"Or do I think he has had the will all along? Is that what you say? Well, it is all a little curious. But one thing is certain. I told you that if Mademoiselle Nick was supposed to be dead, we should have developments-and sure enough, here they are!"

"Extraordinary," I said. "You were right. I suppose this is the will making Frederica Rice residuary legatee?"

"M. Vyse said nothing about the contents of the will. He was far too correct. But there seems very little reason to doubt that this is

the same will. It is witnessed, he tells me, by
Ellen Wilson and her husband."

"So we are back at the old problem," I

said. "Frederica Rice."

"The enigma?"

"Frederica Rice," I murmured inconsequentially.

"It's a pretty name."

"Prettier than what her friends call her.

Freddie" he made a face "ce n'est pas

jolie for a young lady."

"There aren't many

Frederica," I said. "It's

abbreviations of

not like Margaret

where you can have half a dozen Maggie,

Margot, Madge, Peggie "

"True. Well, Hastings, are you happier now? That things have begun to happen?"

- "Yes, of course. Tell me did you expect this to happen?"

"No not exactly. I had formulated nothing very precise to myself. All I had said was that given a certain result, the causes of that

result must make themselves evident."

"Yes," I said respectfully.

"What was it that I was going to say just as that telephone rang?" mused Poirot. "Oh! yes, that letter from Mademoiselle Maggie. I wanted to look at it once again. I have an idea in the back of my mind that something in it struck me as rather curious."

I picked it up from where I had tossed it,

and handed it to him.

He read it over to himself. I moved about the room, looking out of the window and observing the yachts racing on the bay. Suddenly an exclamation startled me. I turned around.

Poirot was holding his head in his hands and rocking himself to and fro apparently in an agony of woe.

"Oh!" he groaned, "but I have been blind blind."

"What's the matter?"

"Complex, I have said? Complicated? Mais non. Of a simplicity extreme extreme. And miserable one that I am, I saw nothing nothing."

"Good gracious, Poirot, what is this light that has suddenly burst upon you?"

"Wait wait do not speak. I must arrange my ideas. Rearrange them in the light of this discovery so stupendous."

Seizing his list of questions, he ran over them silently, his lips moving busily. Once or twice he nodded his head emphatically. Then he laid them down and leaning back in his chair he shut his eyes. I thought at last that he had gone to sleep.

Suddenly he sighed and opened his eyes.

"But yes!" he said. "It all fits in! All the thin.that have n7?led rn All th

that have seemed to me a little unnatural.
They all have their place."

"You mean--you know everything?"

"Nearly everything. All that matters. In some respects I have been right in my deductions. In other ways ludicrously far from the truth. But now it is all clear. I shall send today a telegram asking two questions but the answers to them I know already I know here? He tapped his forehead.

"And when you receive the answers?" I asked curiously.

He sprang to his feet.

"My friend, do you remember that Made-moiselle Nick said she wanted to stage a play at End House? Tonight, we stage such a play in End House. But it will be a play produced by Hercule Poirot. Mademoiselle Nick will have a part to play in it." He grinned suddenly. "You comprehend, Hastings, there will be a ghost in this play. Yes, a ghost! End House has never seen a ghost. It will have one tonight. No "as I tried to ask a question, "I will say no more. Tonight, Hastings, we will produce our comedy and reveal the truth. But now, there is much to do much to do."

He hurried from the room.

Poirot Produces a Party

It was a curious gathering that met that night at End House.

I had hardly seen Poirot all day. He had been out for dinner but had left me a message that I was to be at End House at nine o'clock. Evening dress, he had added, was not necessary.

The whole thing was like a rather ridiculous dream.

On arrival I was ushered into the dining room, and when I looked around I realized that every person on Poirot's list from A. to I. (J. was necessarily excluded, being in the Mrs. Harris-like position of "there ain't no such person") was present.

Even Mrs. Croft was there in a kind of invalid chair. She smiled and nodded at me.

"This is a surprise, isn't it?" she said cheerfully. "It makes a change for me, I

and again. All M. Poirot's idea. Come and sit by me, Captain Hastings. Somehow I feel this is rather a gruesome business but Mr. Vyse made a point of it."

"Mr. Vyse?" I said rather surprised. Charles Vyse was standing by the mantel-piece. Poirot was beside him talking earnestly to him in an undertone.

I looked round the room. Yes, they were all there. After showing me in (I had been a minute or two late) Ellen had taken her place on a chair just beside the door. On another chair, sitting painfully straight and breathing hard, was her husband. The child, Alfred, squirmed uneasily between his father and mother.

The rest sat round the dining-table. Frederica in her black dress, Lazarus beside her, George Challenger and Croft on the other side of the table. I sat a little away from it near Mrs. Croft. And now Charles Vyse with a final nod of the head took his place at the head of the table and Poirot slipped unobtrusively into a seat next to Lazarus.

Clearly the producer, as Poirot had styled himself, did not propose to take a prominent part in the play. Charles Vyse was apparently in charge of the proceedings. I wondered

The young lawyer cleared his throat and stood up. He LOOKed just the same as ever, impassive, formal and unemotional.

"This is rather an unconventional gathering we have here tonight," he said. "But the circumstances are very peculiar. I refer, of course, to the circumstances surrounding the death of my cousin, Miss Buckley. There will have, of course, to be an autopsy., there seems to be no doubt that she met her death by poison, and that that Poison was administered with the intent to kill. This is police business and I need not go into it. The police would doubtless prefer me not to do

SO.

"In an ordinary case, ee will of a de-ceased person is read after funeral, but in deference to M. Poirot's especial wish, I am proposing to read it before the funeral takes place. In fact, I am proposing to read it here and now. That is why everyone has been asked to come here. As I said just now, the circumstances are unusual and justify a de-parture from precedent.

"The will itself came into my possession in a somewhat unusual manner. Although dated last February, it only reached me by post this morning. However, it is undoubt

no doubt on that point, and though a most informal document, it is properly attested."

He paused and cleared his throat once

more.

Every eye was upon his face.

From a long envelope in his hand, he drew out an enclosure. It was, as we could see, an ordinary piece of End House note-paper with writing on it.

"It is quite short," said Vyse. He made a suitable pause, then began to read.

"This is the last Will and Testament of Magdala Buckley. I direct that all my funeral expenses should be paid and I appoint my cousin Charles Vyse as my executor. I leave everything of which I die possessed to Mildred Croft in grateful recognition of the services rendered by her to my father Philip Buckley which

services nothing can ever repay.

"Signed Magdala Buckley

"Witnesses Ellen Wilson

"William Wilson"

I was dumbfounded! So I think was every-one else. Only Mrs. Croft nodded her head in quiet understanding.

ever meant to let on about it. Philip Buckley was out in Australia, and if it hadn't been for me well, I'm not going into that. A secret it's been and a secret it had better remain. She knew about it, though. Nick did, I mean. Her father must have told her. We came down here because we wanted to have a look at the place. I'd always been curious about this End House Philip Buckley talked of. And that dear girl knew all about it, and couldn't do enough for us. Wanted us to come and live with her, she did. But we wouldn't do that. And so she insisted on our having the lodge and not a penny of rent would she take. We pretended to pay it, of course, so as not to cause talk, but she handed it back to us. And now this! Well, if any-one says there is no gratitude in the world, I'll tell them they're wrong! This proves it."

There was still an amazed silence. Poirot looked at Vyse.

"Had you any idea of this?"

Vyse shook his head.

"I knew Philip Buckley had been in Aus-tralia. But I never heard any rmnors of a scand'al there."

He looked inquiringly at Mrs. Croft. She shook her head.

never have said a word and I never shall.

The secret goes to the grave with me."

Vyse said nothing. He sat QUIETLY tapping the table with a pencil.

"I presume, M. Vyse" Poirot leaned forward "that as next of kin, you could contest that will? There is, I understand, a vast fortune at stake which was not the case when the will was made."

Vyse looked at him oddly.

"The will is perfectly valid. I should not dream of contesting my cousin's disposal of her property."

"You're an honest fellow," said Mrs. Croft approvingly, "and I'll see you don't lose by it."

Charles shrank a little from this well-meant but slightly embarrassing remark.

"Well, Mother," said Mr. Croft, with an elation he could not quite keep out of his voice. "This is a surprise! Nick didn't tell me what she was doing."

"The dear sweet girl," murmured Mrs. Croft putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I wish she could look down and see us now. Perhaps she does who knows?"

"Perhaps," agreed Poirot.

Suddenly an idea seemed to strike him.

He looked round.

"An ideal We are all here seated round a table. Let us hold a sance."

"A sgance?" said Mrs. Croft somewhat shocked. "But surely "

"Yes, yes, it will be most interesting. Hastings, here, has pronounced mediumisfic

powers." (Why fx on me, I thought.) "To get through a message from the other world the opportunity is unique! I feel the conditions are propitious. You feel the same, Hastings?"

"Yes," I said resolutely, playing up. "Good. I knew it. Quick, the lights."

In another minute he had risen and switched them off. The whole thing had been rushed on the company before they had the energy to protest, had they wanted to do so. As a matter of fact they were, I think, still dazed with astonishment over the will.

The room was not quite dark. The curtains were drawn back and the window was open for it was a hot night, and through those windows came a faint light. After a minute or two, as we sat in silence, I began to be able to make out the faint outlines of the furniture. I wondered very much what I was supposed to do and cursed Poirot heart-ily for not having given me any instructions beforehand:

However, I closed my eyes and breathed in a rather stertorous manner.

Presently Poirot rose and tiptoed to my chair. Then returning to his own, he mur-mured: "Yes, he is already in a trance. Soon things will begin to happen."

There is something about sitting in the dark, waiting, that fills one with unbearable apprehension. I know that I myself was a prey to nerves and so, I am sure, was every-one else. And yet I had at least an idea of what was about to happen. I knew the one vital fact that no one else knew.

And yet in spite of all that, my heart leapt into my mouth as I saw the dining-room door slowly opening.

It did so quite soundlessly (it must have been oiled) and the effect was horribly grisly. It swung slowly open and for a minute or two that was all. With its opening a cold blast of air seemed to enter the room. It was, I suppose, a common or garden draft owing to the open window, but it felt like the icy chill mentioned in all the ghost stories I have ever read.

And then we all saw it. Framed in the doorway was a white shadowy figure. Nick Buckley

a kind of floating ethereal motion that certainly conveyed the impression of nothing

I realized then what an actress the world had missed. Nick had wanted to play a part at End House. Now she was playing it, and I felt convinced that she was enjoying herself to the core. She did it perfectly.

She floated forward into the room and the silence was broken.

There was a gasping cry from the invalid chair beside me. A kind of gurgle from Mr. Croft. A startled oath from Challenger.

Charles Vyse drew back his chair, I think. Lazarus leaned forward. Frederica alone made no sound or movement.

And then a scream rent the room. Ellen sprang up from her chair.

"It's her!" she shrieked. "She's come back. She's walking! Them that's murdered always walks. It's her! It' her!"

And then, with a click the lights went on.

I saw Poirot standing by them, the smile of the ringmaster on his face. Nick stood in the middle of the room in her white draperies.

It was Frederica who spoke first. She stretched out an unbelieving hand touched her friend

"Nick," she said. "You're you're real."

It was almost a whisper.

Nick laughed. She advanced.

"Yes," she said. "I'm real enough. Thank you so much for what you did for my father, Mrs. Croft. But I'm afraid you won't-be able to enjoy the benefit of that will just yet."

"Oh! my God," gasped Mrs. Croft. "Oh! my God." She twisted to and fro in her chair. "Take me away, Bert. Take me away. It was all a joke, my dear all a joke, that's all it was. Honest."

"A queer sort of joke," said Nick.

The door had opened again and a man had entered so quietly that I had not heard him. To my surprise I saw that it was Japp. He exchanged a quick nod with Poirot as though satisfying him of something. Then his face suddenly lit up and he took a step forward towards the squirming figure in the invalid chair.

"Hullo-ullo-ullo," he said. "What's this?"

An old friend! Milly Merton, I declare! And at your old tricks again, my dear."

He turned round in an explanatory way to the company, disregarding Mrs. Croft's shrill protests.

"Cleverest forger we've ever had, Milly Merton- We knew there had been a nei-

dent to the car they made their last getaway in. But there! Even an injury to the spine wouldn't keep Milly from her tricks. She's an artist, she is!"

"Was that will a forgery?" said Vyse. He spoke in tones of amazement.

"Of course it was a forgery," said Nick scornfully. "You don't think I'd make a silly will like that, do you? I left you End Ftouse, Charles, and everything else to Frederiea."

She crossed as she spoke and stood by her friend, and just at that moment it hapPened.t

A spurt of flame from the window d the hiss of a bullet. Then another and e sound of a groan and a fall outside

And Frederica on her feet with a thin trickle of blood running down her atm.

It was all so sudden that for a moment no one knew what had happened.

Then, with a violent exclamation, Poirot ran to the window. Challenger was with him.

A moment later they reappeared, carrying with them the limp body of a man. As they lowered him carefully into a big leather arm-chair and his face came into view, I uttered a cry. "The face the face at the window."

It was the man I had seen looking in on us the previous evening. I recognized him at once. I realized that when I had said he was hardly human I had exaggerated as Poirot had accused me of doing.

Yet there was something about his face that justified my impression. It was a lost face the face of one removed from ordinary humanity.

White, weak, depraved, it seemed a mere

mask as though the spirit within had fled
long ago.

Down the side of it there trickled a stream
of blood.

Frederica came slowly forward till she
stood by the chair.

Poirot intercepted her.
"You are hurt, Madame?"
She shook her head.

"The bullet grazed my shoulder that is

She put him aside with a gentle hand and
bent down.

The man's eyes opened and he saw her
looking down at him.

"I've done for you this time, I hope," he
said, in a low vicious snarl, and then, his
voice changing suddenly till it sounded like a
child's, "Oh! Freddie, I didn't mean it. I
didn't mean it. You've always been so decent
to me

"It's all right "

She knelt down beside him.

"I didn't mean "

His head dropped. The sentence was never
finished.

Frederica looked up at Poirot.

"Yes, Madame, he is dead," he said
gently.

She rose slowly from her knees and stood

looking down at him. With one hand she

touched his forehead ..pitifully, it seemed.

Then she sighed and turned to the rest of us.

"He was my husband," she said quietly.

"J.," I murmured.

Poirot caught my remark and nodded a

quick assent.

"Yes," he said softly. "Always I felt that
there was a J. I said so from the beginning,
did I not?"

"He was my husband," said Frederica
again. Her voice was terribly tired. She sank
into a chair that Lazarus brought for her. "I
might as well tell you everything now.

"He was completely debased. He was a
drug fiend. He taught me to take drags. I
have been fighting the habit ever since I left
him. I think at last I am nearly cured.

But it has been difficult. Oh! so horribly

difficult. Nobody knows how difficult!

"I could never escape from him. He used

to turn up and demand money with threats.

A kind of blackmail. If I did not give him

money he would shoot himself. That was

always his threat. Then he took to threaten
ing to shoot me. He was not responsible. He

was mad crazy

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Buckley. He didn't mean to shoot her, of course. He must have thought it was me.

"I ought to have said, I suppose. But after all, I wasn't sure. And those queer accidents Nick had that made me feel that perhaps it wasn't him after all. It might have been someone quite different.

"And then one day I saw a bit of his handwriting on a torn piece of paper on M. Poirot's table. It was a part of a letter he had sent me. I knew then that M. Poirot was on the track.

"Since then I have felt that it was only a matter of time

"But I don't understand about the sweets. He wouldn't have wanted to poison Nick. And anyway, I don't see how he could have had anything to do with that. I've puzzled and puzzled."

She put both hands to her face, then took them away and said with a queer pathetic finality:

"That's all "

The Person K.

Lazarus came quickly to her side.

"My dear," he said. "My dear."

Poirot went to the sideboard, poured out a glass of wine and brought it to her, standing over her while she drank it.

She handed the glass back to him and smiled.

"I'm all right now," she said. "What.. what had we better do next?"

She looked at Japp, but the Inspector shook his head.

"I'm on holiday, Mrs. Rice. Just obliging an old friend that's all I'm doing. The St.

Loo police are in charge of the case."

She looked at Poirot.

"And M. Poirot is in charge of the St. Loo police?"

"Oh! quelle idle, Madame/ I am a mere

1-..11...1..!..... ,,

"M. Poirot," said Nick, "can't we hush it up?"

"You wish that, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes. After all I'm the person most concerned. And there will be no more attacks on me now."

"No, that is true. There will be no more attacks on you now."

"You're thinking of Maggie. But, M. Poirot, nothing will bring Maggie back to life again. If you make all this public, you'll only bring a terrible lot of suffering and publicity on Frederica and she hasn't deserved it."

"You say she has not deserved it?"

"Of course she hasn't! I told you right at the beginning that she had a brute of a husband. You've seen tonight what he was. Well, he's dead. Let that be the end of things. Let the police go on looking for the man who shot Maggie. They just won't find him, that's all."

"So that is what you say, Mademoiselle? Hush it all up."

"Yes. Please. Oh! please. Please, dear M. Poirot."

Poirot looked slowly round.

"What do you all say?"

"I agree," I said as Poirot looked at me.

"I too," said Lazarus.

"Best thing to do," from Challenger.

"Let's forget everything that's passed in this room tonight." This very determinedly from Croft.

"You would say that? interpolated Japp.

"Don't be hard on me, dearie," his wife sniffed to Nick, who looked at her scornfully but made no reply.

"Ellen?"

"Me and William won't say a word, sir.

Least said, soonest mended."

"And you, Mr. Vyse?"

"A thing like this can't be hushed up," said Charles Vyse. "The facts must be made known in the proper quarter."

"Charles," cried Nick.

"I'm sorry, dear. I look at it from the legal aspect."

Poirot gave a sudden laugh.

"So you are seven to one. The good Japp is neutral."

"I'm on holiday," said Japp with a grin.

"I don't count."

"Seven to one. Only M. Vyse holds out on the side of law and order! You know, M. Vyse, you are a man of character!"

"The position is quite clear. There is only one thing to do."

"Yes you are an honest man. Eh bien I, too, range myself on the side of the minority. I, too, am for the truth."

"M. Poirot!" cried Nick.

"Mademoiselle you dragged me into the case. I came into it at your wish. You cannot silence me now."

He raised a

threatening forefinger in a gesture that I knew well.

"Sit down, all of you, and I will tell you the truth."

Silenced by his imperious attitude, we sat down meekly and turned attentive faces towards him.

"Icoutez. I have a list here a list of persons connected with the crime. I numbered them with the letters of the alphabet including the letter J. J. stood for a person unknown linked to the crime by one of the

others. I did not know who J. was until tonight, but I knew that there was such a

person. The events of tonight have proved that I was right.

"But yesterday, I suddenly realized that I had made a grave error. I had made an omission. I added another letter to my list. The letter K-

"Another person unknown?" asked Vyse with a slight sneer.

"Not exactly. I adopted J. as the symbol for a person unknown. Another person unknown would be merely another J. K. has a different significance. It stands for a person who should have been included in the original list, but who was overlooked."

He bent over Frederica.

"Reassure yourself, Madame. Your husband was not guilty of murder. It was the person K. who shot Mademoiselle Maggie." She stared.

"But who is K.?"

Poirot nodded to Japp. He stepped forward and spoke in tones reminiscent of the days when he had given evidence in police courts.

"Acting on information received, I took up a position here early in the evening, having been introduced secretly into the house by M. Poirot. I was concealed behind the curtains in the drawing room. When everyone was assembled in this room, a young lady entered the drawing room and switched on the light. She made her way to the fireplace, and opened a small recess in the paneling that appeared to be operated with a

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' .
I

With this in her hand she left the room. I followed her and opening the door a crack I

was able to observe her further movements. Coats and wraps had been left in the hall by the visitors on arrival. The young lady carefully wiped the pistol with a handkerchief and then placed it in the pocket of a grey wrap, the property of Mrs. Rice "

A cry burst from Nick.

"This is untrue every word of it!"

Poirot pointed a hand at her.

"Voilà!" he said. "The person who shot her cousin, Mademoiselle Nick who shot her cousin, Maggie Buckley. "

"Are you mad?" cried Nick. "Why should I kill Maggie?"

"In order to inherit the money left to her by Michael Seton! Her name too was Magdala Buckley and it was to her he was engaged .not you."

"You,,, you "

She stood there trembling speak. Poirot turned to Japp.

"You telephoned the police?"

"Yes, they are waiting in the hall now.

They've got the warrant."

"You're all mad!" cried Nick contemptu-

unable to

"Freddie, give me your wrist watch as as a souvenir, will you?"

Slowly Frederica unclasped the jeweled watch from her wrist and handed it to Nick.

"Thanks. And now I suppose we must go through with this perfectly ridiculous

comedy.

"The comedy you planned and produced in End House. Yes but you should not have given the star part to Hercule Poirot. That, Mademoiselle, was your mistake your very grave mistake."

The End of the Story

"You want me to explain?"

Poirot looked round with a gratified smile and the air of mock humility I knew so well. We had moved into the drawing room and our numbers had lessened. The domestics had withdrawn tactfully, and the Crofts had been asked to accompany the police. Frederica, Lazarus, Challenger, Vyse and I remained.

"Eh b/en I confess it I was fooled fooled completely and absolutely. The little Nick, she had me where she wanted me, as your idiom so well expresses it. Ah! Madame, when you said that your friend was a clever little liar how right you were! How right!"

"Nick always told lies," said Frederica composedly. "That's why I didn't really believe in these marvelous escapes of hers."

"And I imbecile that I was did!"

"Didn't they really happen?" I asked. I was, I admit, still hopelessly confused.

"They were invented very cleverly to give just the impression they did."

"What was that?"

"They gave the impression that Mademoiselle Nick's life was in danger. But I will begin earlier than that. I will tell you the story as I have pieced it out not as it came to me imperfectly and in flashes.

"At the beginning of the business then, we have this girl, this Nick Buckley, young and beautiful, unscrupulous, and passionately

and fanatically devoted to her home."

Charles Vyse nodded.

"I told you that."

"And you were right. Mademoiselle Nick loved End House. But she had no money. The house was mortgaged. She wanted money she wanted it feverishly and she could not get it. She met this young Seton at Le Touquet, he is attracted to her. She knows that in all probability he is his uncle's heir and that that uncle is worth millions. Good, her star is in the ascendant, she thinks. But he is not really seriously attracted. He thinks her good fun, that is all. They meet at Scarborough, he takes her up in his machine

Maggie and falls in love with her at first sight.

"Mademoiselle Nick is dumbfounded. Her cousin Maggie whom she has never even considered pretty! But to young Seton she is 'different.' The one girl in the world for him. They become secretly engaged. Only one person knows has to know. That person is Mademoiselle Nick. The poor Maggie she is glad that there is one person she can talk to. Doubtless she reads to her cousin parts of her fiancé's letters. So it is that Mademoiselle gets to hear of the will. She pays no attention to it at the time. But it remains in her mind.

"Then comes the sudden and unexpected death of Sir Matthew Seton and hard upon that the rumors of Michael Seton's being missing. And straight away an outrageous plan comes into our young lady's head. Seton does not know that her name is Magdala also. He only knows her as Nick. His will is clearly quite informal a mere mention of a name. But in the eyes of the world Seton is her friend! It is with her that his name has been coupled. If she were to claim to be engaged to him, no one would be surprised. But to do that successfully Maggie must be

"Time is short. She arranges for Maggie to come and stay in a few days' time. Then she has her escapes from death. The picture whose cord she cut through. The brake of the car that she tampers with. The boulder that perhaps was natural and she merely invented the story of being underneath on the path.

"And then she sees my name in the paper (I told you, Hastings, everyone knew Hercule Poirot!) and she has the audacity to make me an accomplice! The bullet through the hat that falls at my feet. Oh! the pretty comedy. And I am taken in! I believe in the peril that menaces her! Bon.t She has got a valuable witness on her side. I play into her hands by asking her to send for a friend.

"She seizes the chance and sends for Maggie to come a day earlier.

"How easy the crime is actually. She leaves us at the dinner table and after hearing on the wireless that Seton's death is a fact, she starts to put her plan into action. She has plenty of time then to take Seton's letters to Maggie look through them and select the few that will answer her purpose. These she places in her own room. Then, later, she and Maggie leave the fireworks and go back to

shawl. Then stealing out after her, she shoots her. Quick, into the house, the pistol concealed in the secret panel (of whose existence she thinks nobody knows). Then upstairs. There she waits till voices are heard. The body is discovered. It is her cue.

"Down she rushes and out through the window.

"How well she played her part! Magnificently! Oh! yes, she staged a fine drama here. The maid, Ellen, said this was an evil house. I am inclined to agree with her. It was from the house that Mademoiselle took her inspiration."

"But those poisoned sweets," said Frederica. "I still don't understand about that."

"It was all part of the same scheme. Do you not see that if Nick's life was attempted after Maggie was dead that absolutely settled the question that Maggie's death had been a mistake.

"When she thought the time was ripe she rang up Madame Rice and asked her to get her a box of chocolates."

"Then it was her voice?"

"But, yes! How often the simple explanation is the true one! N'est-ce pas? She made

her explanation a little different that was

all. So that you might be in doubt when questioned. Then, when the box arrived again how simple. She fills three of the chocolates with cocaine (she had cocaine with her, cleverly concealed), eats one of them and is ill but not too ill. She knows very well how much cocaine to take and just what symptoms to exaggerate.

"And the card my card! Ah! Sapristi she has a nerve! It was my card the one I sent with the flowers. Simple, was it not? Yes, but it had to be thought of...."

There was a pause and then Frederica asked, "Why did she put the pistol in my coat?"

"I thought you would ask that, Madame. It was bound to occur to you in time. Tell me had it ever entered your head that Ma-demoiselle Nick no longer liked you? Did you ever feel that she might hate you?"

"It's difficult to say," said Frederica slowly. "We lived an insincere life. She used to be fond of me."

"Tell me, M. Lazarus it is not a time for false modesty, you understand was there anything between you and her?"

"No," Lazarus shook his head. "I was attracted to her at one time. And then I

"Ah!" said Poirot nodding his head sagely.

"That was her tragedy. She attracted people and then they 'went off her.' Instead of liking her better and better you fell in love with her friend. She began to hate Madame Madame who had a rich friend behind her. Last winter when she made a will, she was fond of Madame. Later it was different.

"She remembered that will. She did not know that Croft had suppressed it that it had never reached its destination. Madame (or so the world would say) had got a motive for desiring her death. So it was to Madame she telephoned asking her to get the chocolates. Tonight, the will would have been read, naming Madame her residuary legatee and then the pistol would be found in her coat the pistol with which Maggie Buckley was shot. If Madame found it, she might incriminate herself by trying to get rid of it."

"She must have hated me," murmured Frederica.

"Yes, Madame. You had what she had not the knack of winning love, and keeping it."

"I'm rather dense," said Challenger, "but I haven't quite fathomed the will business yet."

"Run That'.q a different business alto

gether a very simple one. The Crofts are lying low down here. Mademoiselle Nick has

to have an operation. She has made no will. The Crofts see a chance. They persuade her to make one and take charge of it for the post. Then, if anything happens to her if she dies they produce a cleverly forged will leaving the money to Mrs. Croft with a reference to Australia and Philip Buckley whom they know once visited that country.

"But Mademoiselle Nick has her appendix removed quite satisfactorily so the forged will is no good. For the moment, that is. Then the attempts on her life begin. The Crofts are hopeful once more. Finally, I announce her death. The chance is too good to be missed. The forged will is immediately posted to M. Vyse. Of course, to begin with, they naturally thought her much richer than she is. They knew nothing about the mortgage."

"What I really want to know, M. Poirot," said Lazarus, "is how you actually got wise to all this. When did you begin to suspect?"

"Ah! there I am ashamed. I was so long--so long There were things that worried me yes. Things that seemed not quite right, Discrepancies between what Mademoiselle

me. Unfortunately, I always believed Made-moiselle Nick.

"And then, suddenly, I got a revelation. Mademoiselle Nick made one mistake. She was too clever. When I urged her to send for a friend she promised to do so and sup-pressed the fact that she had already sent for Mademoiselle Maggie. It seemed to her less suspicious but it was a mistake.

"For Maggie Buckley wrote a letter home immediately on arrival and in it she used one innocent phrase that puzzled me. 'I cannot see why she should have telegraphed for me in the way she did. Tuesday would have done just as well.' What did that mention of Tuesday mean? It could only mean one thing. Maggie had been coming to stay on Tuesday any-way. But in that case Mademoiselle Nick had lied or had at any rate suppressed the

"And for the first time I looked at her in a different light. I criticized her statements. Instead of believing them, I said, 'Suppose this were not true.' I remembered the dis-crepancies. 'How would it be if every time it was Mademoiselle Nick who was lying and not the other person?'

"I said to myself, 'Let us be simple. What

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"And I saw that what had really happened, was that Maggie Buckley had been killed. Just that! But who could want Maggie Buckley dead?"

"And then I thought of something else, a, foolish remarks that Hastings had made

just five minutes before He had said that there were plenty of abbreviations for Margaret Maggie, Margot, etc. And it suddenly occurred to me to wonder what was Mademoiselle Maggie's real name?

"Then, tout d'un coup, it came to me! Suddenly her name was Magdala. It was a Buckley name, Mademoiselle Nick had told me so. Two Magdala BUCKLEYS. Suppos-

"In my mind I ran over the letters of Michael Seton's that I had read. Yes there was nothing impossible. There was a man, named of Scarborough but Maggie had been in Scarborough with Nick her mother had told me so.

"And it explained one thing which had troubled me. Why were there so few letters? Why a girl keeps her love letters at all, she keeps all of them. Why these select few? Was there any peculiarity about them?"

"And I remembered that there was no

differently but they began with a term of endearment. Nowhere in them was there the name--Nick.

"And there was something else, something that I ought to have seen at once that cried the truth aloud."

"What was that?"

"Why this. Mademoiselle Nick underwent an operation for appendicitis on February 27th last. There is a letter of Michael Seton's dated March 2nd, and no mention of anxiety, of illness or anything unusual. That ought to have shown me that the letters were written to a different person altogether.

"Then I went through a list of questions that I had made. And I answered them in the light of my new idea.

"In all but a few isolated questions the result was simple and convincing. And I answered, too, another question which I had asked myself earlier. Why did Mademoiselle Nick buy a black dress? The answer was that she and her cousin had to be dressed alike, with the scarlet shawl as an additional touch. That was the true and convincing answer, not the other. A girl would not buy mourning before she knew her lover was dead. She would be unreal unnatural.

And the thing I hoped for happened! Nick Buckley had been very vehement about the question of a secret panel. She had declared there was no such thing. But if there were

and I did not see why Ellen should have invented it Nick must know of it. Why was she so vehement? Was it possible that she had hidden the pistol there? With the secret intention of using it to throw suspicion on somebody later?

"I let her see that appearances were very black against Madame. That was as she had planned. As I foresaw, she was unable to resist the crowning proof. Besides it was safer for herself. That secret panel might be found by Ellen and the pistol in it!

"We are all safely in here. She is waiting outside for her cue. It is absolutely safe, she thinks, to take the pistol from its hiding place and put it in Madame's coat

"And so at the last she failed... ."
Frederica shivered.

"All the same," she said, "I'm glad I gave her my watch."

"Yes, Madame."

She looked up at him quickly.

"You know that too?"

"What about Ellen?" I asked, breaking in.

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"No. I asked her. She told me that she decided to stay in the house that night because in her own phrase she 'thought something was up.' Apparently Nick urged her to see the fireworks rather too decisively. She had fathomed Nick's dislike of Madame. She told me that 'she felt in her bones something was going to happen' but she thought it was going to happen to Madame. She knew Miss Nick's temper, she said, and she was always a queer little girl."

"Yes," murmured Frederica. "Yes, let us think of her like that. A queer little girl. A queer little girl who couldn't help herself. . . I shall anyway."

Poirot took her hand and raised it gently to his lips

Charles Vyse stirred uneasily.

"It's going to be a very unpleasant business," he said quietly. "I must see about some kind of defense for her, I suppose."

"There will be no need, I think," said Poirot gently. "Not if I am correct in my assumptions."

He turned suddenly on Challenger.

"That's where you put the stuff, isn't it?" he said. "In those wrist watches."

"I I "the sailor stammered at a loss

hearty good-fellow manner. It has deceived Hastings but it does not deceive me. You make a good thing out of it, do you not the traffic in drugs You and your uncle in Harley Street."

"M. Poirot!"

Challenger rose to his feet.

My little friend blinked up at him placidly.

"You are the useful 'boy friend.' Deny it if you like. But I advise you if you do not want the facts put in the hands of the police to go."

And to my utter amazement, Challenger did go. He went from the room like a flash.

I stared after him openmouthed.

Poirot laughed.

"I told you so, mon ami. Your ins 'tincts are always wrong. C'est patent.t"

"Cocaine was in the wrist watch "I began.

"Yes, yes. That is how Mademoiselle Nick had it with her so conveniently at the nursing home. And having finished her supply in the chocolate box she asked Madame just now for hers which was full."

"You mean she can't do without it?" "Non, non. Mademoisdle Nick is not an

tonight she needed it for a different purpose.

It will be a full dose this time."

"You mean ?" I gasped.

"It is the best way. Better than the
hangman's rope. But pst! we must not say so
before M. Vyse who is all law and order.
Officially I know nothing. The contents of

the wrist watch
my part."

"Your guesses

it is the merest guess on

are always right, M.

Poirot," said Frederica.

"I must be going," said Charles Vyse, cold'

disapproval in his attitude as he left the room.

Poirot looked from Frederica to Lazarus.

"You are going to get married eh?"

"As soon as we can."

"And indeed, M. Poirot," said Frederica,
"I am not the drug taker you think. I have
cut myself down to a tiny dose. I think
now with happiness in front of me I shall

not need a wrist watch any more."

"I hope you will have happiness,
Madame," said Poirot gently. "You have suffered
a great deal. And in spite of everything
you have suffered, you have still the quality
of mercy in your heart... ."

"I will look after her," said Lazarus. "My

hinee ie in n hnci rnxr ht I holiovo I ehnl

pull through. And if I don't well, Frederica does not mind being poor with me."

She shook her head smiling.

"It is late," said Poirot, looking at the clock.

We all rose.

"We have spent a strange night in this strange house," Poirot went on. "It is, I think, as Ellen says, an evil house "

He looked up at the picture of old Sir Nicholas.

Then, with a sudden gesture, he drew Lazarus aside.

"I ask your pardon, but, of all my questions, there is one still unanswered. Tell me, why did you offer fifty pounds for that picture?

It would give me much pleasure to know so as, you comprehend, to leave nothing unanswered."

Lazarus looked at him with an impassive face for a minute or two. Then he smiled.

"You see, M. Poirot," he said, "I am a dealer."

"Exactly."

"That picture is not worth a penny more than twenty pounds. I knew that if I offered Nick fifty, she would immediately suspect it was worth more and would get it valued

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offered her far more than it was worth. The next time I offered to buy a picture she

would not have got it valued."

"Yes, and then?"

"The picture on the far wall is worth at least five thousand pounds," said Lazarus

dryly.

"Ah!" Poirot drew a long breath.

"Now I know everything," he said happily.

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Composed in 18 pt Plantin
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