Mrs McGinty was dead. She was hit on the back of the head with some sharp, heavy implement and her pitifully small savings were taken. Her lodger was hard up and had lost his job; his coat sleeve had blood on it. In due course he was arrested and tried, found guilty and condemned to death. Yet Superintendent Spence of the Kilchester police, who had been instrumental in bringing about James Bentley's conviction, did not believe the man was guilty - for no tangible reason other than that he did not think Bentley to be the type. Rather shamefacedly he took his problem to his old friend Hercule Poirot; and Poirot did not laugh - instead, he said he would help.

If Mrs McGinty was not killed by Bentley for her savings, why did she die? She was, it seemed, just an ordinary charwoman, with no secrets and no coveted possessions; she minded her own business and nobody else's. Impossible, one would think, to get

a lead; but 'Somewhere; said Poirot to himself, indulging in an absolute riot of mixed metaphor, 'there is in the hay a needle, and among the sleeping dogs there is one on whom I shall put my foot, and by shooting the arrows into the air, one will come down and hit a glass house!'

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BOOKS

BY AGATHA

CHRISTIE

The ABC Murders

After the Funeral

Appointment with Death

The Big Four By the Pricking of My Thumbs A Caribbean Mystery The Clocks Curtain: Poirot's Last Case Death Comes as the End Death on the Nile **Dumb Witness Endless Night** Experiment with Death 4-50 from Paddington Hercule Puirot's Christmas The Hollow The Labours of Hercules Lord Edgware Dies Miss Marple's Final Cases The Moving Finger Murder at the Vicarage Murder in the Mews The Murder of Roger Ackroyd The Mysterious Mr Quin Nemesis ()ne, Two, Buckle My Shoe The Pale Horse Passenger to Frankfurt

A Pocket Full of Rye
Postern of Fate
The Seven Dials Mystery
Sleepiug Murder
Taken at the Flood
They Do It With Mirrors
Thirteen for Luck
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And Theu There Were None
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Hallowe'en Party
Hickory Dickory Dock
The Hound of Death

The Listerdale Mystery
The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side
Mrs McGinty's Dead
A Murder is Announced
Murder in Mesopotamia
Murder is Easy
Murder on the Orient Express
The MysteD, of the Blue Train
N or M?
Ordeal by Innocence
Parker Pyne Investigates
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Poirot's Early Cases
Sad Cypress
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Sparkling Cyanide
They Came to Baghdad
Third Girl
Thirteen Problems
Towards Zero
etc, etc.

Biography

Come Tell Me How You Live
Agatha Christie: An Autobiography
MRS
McGINTY'S
DEAD
Agatha Christie
COLLINS
8 Graf ton Street, London
William Collins Sons and Co Ltd
London · Glasgow' Sydney' Auckland
Toronto' Johannesburg
SB o oo '231659 5
First published x95'2
This reprint 986

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Made and Printed in Great Britain by

Villiam Collins Sons and Co Ltd, Glasgow

PETEK SAUNDERS

in gratitude) for his kindness

to authors

CHAPTER I

iffIR-g ?OIROT came out of the Vieille Grand'mre

-nt into ho. He mined up e collar of ov

ough prudent, er n ni, se

- not cold. "But at my a, one no,"

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Hisres held a fleve slpy pleasure. The Escargots

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of le Poimt's one approve.
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But now, unfortunately, there was the evening to put in.

7

Hercule Poirot sighed.

",If only," he thought, "ce chef Hastings were available

· 'tie dwelt with pleasure on his remembrances of his old friend.

"My first friend in this country--and still to me the dearest friend I have. True, often and often did he enrage me. But do I remember that now? No. I remember only his incredulous wonder, his open-mouthed appreciation of my talents--the ease with which I misled him without uttering an untrue word, his bafflement, his stupendous astonishment when he at last perceived the truth that had been clear to me all along. Ce chef, crier ami I It is my weakness, it has always been my weakness, to desire to show off. That weakness, Hastings could never understand. But indeed it is very necessary for a man of my abilities to admire himselfmand for that one needs stimulation from outside. I cannot, truly I cannot, sit in a chair all day reflecting how truly admirable I am. One needs the human touch. One needs--as they say nowadays--the stooge." Hercule Poirot sighed. He turned into Shaftesbury Avenue.

Should he cross it and go on to Leicester Square and spend the evening at a cinema? Frowning slightly, he shook his head. The cinema, more often than not, enraged him by the looseness of its plots--the lack of logical continuity in the argument--even the photography which, raved over by

some, to Hercule Poirot seemed often no more than the portrayal of scenes and objects so as to make them appear totally different from what they were in reality.

Everything, Hercule Poirot decided, was too artistic nowadays. Nowhere was there the love of order and method that he himself prized so highly. And seldom was there any appreciation of subtlety. Scenes of violence and crude brutality were the fashion, and a.s a former police officer, Poirot was bored by brutality. In his early days, he had seen plenty of crude brutality. It had been more the rule than the exception. , He found it fatiguing, and intelligent.

"The truth is," Poirot reflected as he turned his steps homeward, "I am not in tune with the modern world.

8

And I am, in a superior way, a slave as other men are slaves.

My work has enslaved me just as their work enslaves them.

When the hour of leisure arrives, they have nothing with which to their leisure. The retired financier takes up

u

If, the little merchanx puts bulbs in his garden, me, I eat.

t there it is, I come round to it again. One can on/y eat tkree time a day. And in etween are the gaps."

He passed a newspaper-seller and scanned the bill.

"Result of McGinty Trial. Verdict."

It stirred no interest in lim. He recalled vaguely a small lmxagraph in the papers. It had not been an interesting murder. ,me wretched old woman knocked on the head for a few pounds. All part of the senseless crude brutality of these days.

Poirot turned into the Cqurtyard of his block of flats. As always his heart swelled in approval. He was proud of his home. A splendid syrametrical building. The lift took him up to the third floor wheT he had a large luxury flat with impeccable chromium fittings, square armchairs, and severely rectangular ornaaents. There could truly be said not to be a curve in the place

As he opened the door with his latchkey and stepped into the square, white lobby, manservant, George, stepped so, fy to meet him.

"Good eyeing, sir. There is a--gen.tleman waitlnto e you."

He relieved Poirot deftly of his overcoat.

"Indeed?" Poirot was aware of that very slight pme before the word gentleman. As a social snob, George was aa

"A Mr. Spenee, sir."

"\$pence.'--The narae, for the moment, rneaHt o*hg

to Pmrot. Yet he knew that it should do so.

Pausing for a raoment before the mirror to adjust his moustaches to a state of perfection, Poirot o .xi door of the sitting-room and entered. The man sitting in oe o the big square armchairs got up.

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"tiallo, M. Poirot, hope you remember me. It's a long
```

ime... Superintendent \$pence."

"But of course." Poirot shook him warmly by the haL

uperintendent \$pence if tl Kilchg Police. A very

9

interesting case that had been . . . As Spence had said, a

long time ago now . . .

Poirot pressed his guest with refreshments. A grenad/ne? Crdrne de Menthe? Benedictine? Crdme de Cacao?...

At this moment George entered with a tray on which was

a. whisky bottle and a siphon. "Or beer if you prefer it,

sr?" he murmured to the vistor.

Superintendent Spence's large red. face lightened.

"Beer for me," he said.

Poirot was left to wonder once more at the accomplishments

of George. He himself had had no idea that there

was beer in the flat and it seemed incomprehensible to him

that it could be preferred to a sweet liqueur.

When Spence had his foaming tankard, Poirot poured

hi,,melf out a tiny glass of gleaming green crdrne de menthe.

But it is charming of you to look me up," he said.

"Charming. You have come up from?"

"Kilchester. I'll be retired in about six months. Actually,

I was due for retirement eighteen months ago. They asked

me to stop on and I did."

"You were wise," said Poirot with feeling. "You were very wise..."

"Was I? I wonder. I'm not so sure."

"Yes, yes, you were wise," Poirot insisted. "The long hours of ennui, you have no conception of them."

"Oh, I'll have plenty to do when I retire. Moved into a new house last year, we did. Quite a bit of garden and shamefully neglected. I haven't been able to get down to it properly yet."

"Ah yes, you are one of those who garden. Me, once, I decided to live in the country and grow vegetable marrows.

It did not succeed. I have not the temperament."

"You should have seen one of my marrows last year,"

said Spence with enthusiasm. "Colossal I And my roses.

I'm keen on roses. I'm going to have "

He broke off.

"That's not what I came to talk about."

"No, no, you came to see an old acquaintance-it was

kind. I appreciate it."

"There's more to it than that, I'm afraid, M. Poirot.

I'll be hones I want something."

Poirot murmured delicately:

IO

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"There is a mortgage, possibly, on yur house? You would like a loan.."
```

Spence interrupted in a horrified voice:

"Oh, good lord, it's not money I Nothing of that kind."

Poirot waved his hands in graceful apology.

"I demand your pardon."

"I'll tell you straight out--it's damned cheek what I've

come for. If you send me away with a flea in my ear I

shan't be surprised."

"There will be no flea," said Poirot. "But continue."

"It's the McGinty case. You've read about it, perhaps?"

Poirot shook his head.

"Not with attention. Mrs. McGinty--an old woman in

shop or a house. She is dead, yes. How did she die?"

Spence stared at him.

"Lord I "he said. "That takes me back. Extraordinary.

And I never thought of it until now."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing. Just a game. Child's game. We used to

play it when we were kids. A lot of us in a row. Question

and answer all down the line. 'Mrs. McGinty's dead I'

How did she die ?' ' Down on one knee just hTe L' And then the next question, ' Mrs. McGinty's dead.' ' How did

she die ?' ' Holding her hand out just like L' And there

we'd be, all kneeling and our right arms held out stiff. And

then ,you got it! 'Mrs. McGinty's dead.' 'How did she die?' Like THIS I' Smack, the top of the row would fall sideways and down we all went like a pack of ninepins i" Spence laughed uproariously at the remembrance. "Takes me back, it does I" Poirot waited politely. This was one of the moments when, even after half a li/etime in the country, he found the English incomprehensible. He himself had played at Cache Cache in his childhood, but he felt no desire to talk about it or even to think about it. When Spence had overcome his own amusement, Poirot repeated with some slight weariness, "How did she die?" The laughter was wiped off Spence's face. He was su,d, denly himself again. 'She was hit on the back of her head with some s.harp, heavy implement. Her savings, about thirty pounds run cash, were taken after her room had been ransacked. Sh II lived alone in a small cottage except for a lodger. Man of

tl, e name of Bentley. James Bentley."

"Ah yes, Bentley."

"The place wasn't broken into. No signs of any tampering with the windows or locks. Bentley was hard up, had lot his job, and owed two months' rent. The money was found hidden under a loose stone at the back of the cottage.

Bentley's coat sleeve had blood on it and hair--same blood group and the right hair. According to his first statemem he was never near the body--so it couldn't have come there by accident."

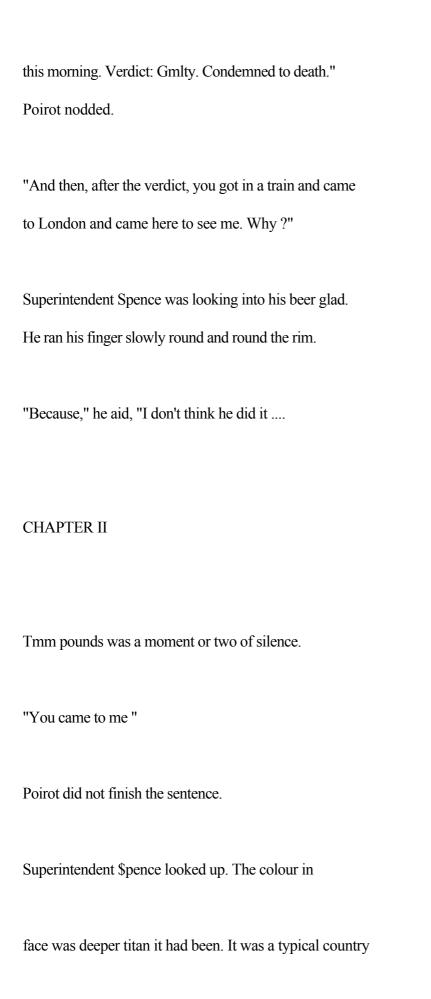
"Who found her?"

"The baker called with bread. It was the day he got paid. James Bentley opened the door to him and said he'd knocked at Mrs. McGinty's bedroom door, but couldn't get an answer. The baker suggested she might have been taken bad. They got the woman from next door to go up and see. Mrs. McGinty wasn't in the bedroom, and hadn't slept in the bed, but the room had been ransacked and the floorboards had been prised up. Then they thought of looking in the parlour. She was there, lyingon the floor, and the neighbour fairly screamed her head off. Then they got the police, of course."

"And Bentley was eventually arrested and tried?"

"Yes. The case came on at the Assizes. Yesterday.

Open and shut case. The ju were only out twenty minute



man's
face, unexpressive, self-contained, with shrewd but
honest eyes. It was the face of a man with definite standarda
who would never be bothered by doubts of himself or by
doubts of what constituted right and wrong.
"I've been a long time in the Force," he said. "I've had
a good deal of experience of this, that and the other. I can
judge a man as well as any other could do. I've had caaes of
murder during my servicesome of them straightforward
enough, some of them not so straightforward.
One caae
you know of, M. Poirot "
Poirot nodded.
"Tricky, that was. But for you, we mightn't have seen
clear. But we did see clearand there wasn't any doubt.

The same with the others you don't know about. There was Whistler, he got his--and deserved it. There were those chaps who shot old Guterman. Thee was Verall and his arsenic. Tranter got off--but he did it all right. Mra.

Courtland--she was lucky--her husband was a nasty per-verted bit of work, and the jury acquitted her accordingly.

Not justice--just sentiment. You've to allow for that happening now and again. Sometimes there isn't enough evidence sometimes there's sentiment, sometimes a mur-derer manages to put it across the jury--that last doesn't happen often, but it can happen. Sometimes it's a clever bit of work by defending counsel--or a prosecuting counsel takes the wrong tack. Oh yes, I've seen a lot of things like that. But--but "

Spence wagged a hearty forefinr.

"I haven't seen--not in nL\(\pm\) experience--an innocent man hanged for something he didn't do. It's a thing, M. Poirot, that I don't want to see."

"Not," added Spence," in this country I"

Poirot gazed back at him.

"And you think you are going to see it now.

But

wh"

lce interrupted him.

"I know some of the thin you're going to say. I'll amwer thru without you having to ask them. I was put on this case. I was put on to get evidence of what happened.

I went into the whole business very carefully. I got the

facts, all the facts I could. All those facts pointed one way

--pointed to one person. When I'd got all the facts I took thru to my superior officer. After that it was out of my

hands. The case went to the Public Prosecutor and it wa up to him. He decided to prosecutehe couldn't have done anything else--not on the evidence. And so James Bentley was arrested and committed for trial, and was duly tried and has been found guilty. They couldn't have found

what a jury have to consider. Didn't have any qualms about

him anything else, not on the evidence. And evidence is

it either, I should say. No, I should say they were all quite

satisfied he oas guilty."

"But youmare not?"

"Why?"

Superintendent Spence sighed. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully 4th his big hand.

"I don't know. What I mean is, I cam't give a reason--a concrete reason. To the jury I dare say he looked like a murderer--to me he didn't--and I know a lot more about murderers than they do."

"Yes, yes, you are an expert."

"For one thing, you know, he wash t cocky. Not cocky

at all And in my experience they usually are. Always so

damned pleased with themselves. Always think they're

stringing you along. Always sure they've been so clever

about the whole thing. And even when they're in the dock

and must know they're for it, they're still in a queer sort

of way getting a kick out of it all. They're in the limelight.

They're the central figure. Phying,the star part--perhaps

for the first time in their live They re--well--you know--

cocky I"

Spence brought out the word with an air of finality.

"You'll understand what I mean by that, M. Poirot."

x4

"I understand very well. And this James Bentleyhe was not like that ?"

"No. He was--well, just scared stiff. Scared stiff from the start. And to some people that would square in with his being guilty. But not to me."

"No, I agree with you. What is he like, this Jatrs

Bentley?"

"Thirty-three, medium height, sallow complexion, wears glasses.

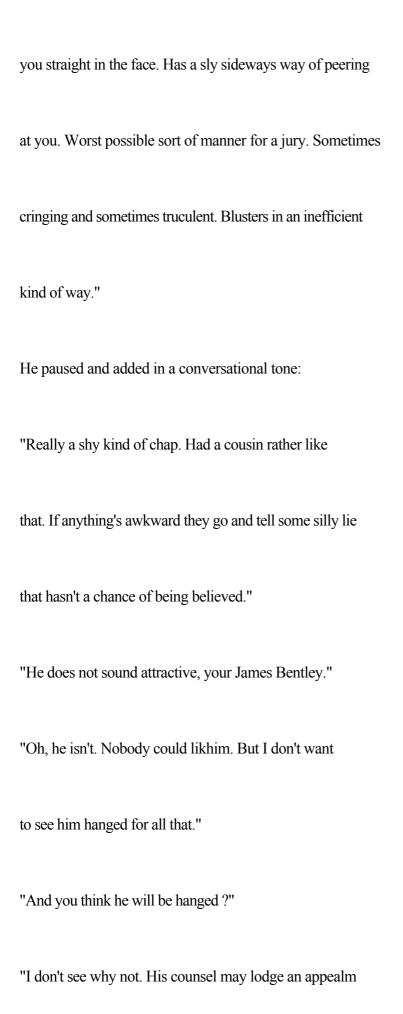
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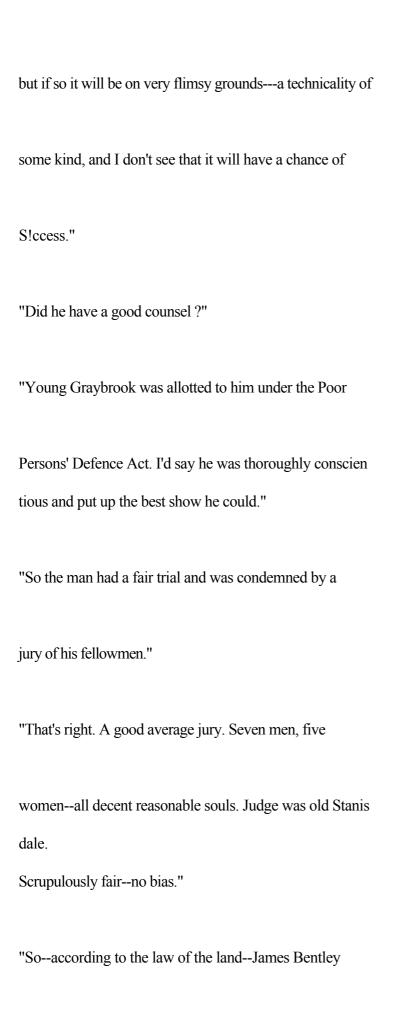
POirot arrested the flow.

"No, I do not mean his physical characteristics. What

sort of a personality?"

"Oh--that." Superintendent Spence considered. "Un prepossessing sort of fellow. Nervous manner. Can't look





has nothing to complain of?"

"If he's hanged for somexhing he didn't do, he's gut

omething to complain of "

"A very just observation."

"And the case against him was my case--I collected the

facts and put, them together--and it's on that case and those

facts that he s been condemned. And I don't like it, M.

Poirot, I don't like it."

Hercule Poirot looked for a long time at the red agitated

face of Superintendent, pence.

"Eh bien," he said. What do you suggest ?"

Spence looked acutely embarrassed.

"I expect you've got a pretty good idea of what's coming.

The Ben-tley 'case is closed. I'm on another case already--embezzlement.

Got to go up to Scotland to-night. I'm

not a free man."

"And I--am?"

Spence nodded in a shame-faced sort of way.

"You've got it. Awful cheek, you'll ttfink. But I can't

think of anything else--of any other way. I did all I could

at the time, I examined every possibility I could. And I

didn't get anywhere. I don't believe I ever would get anywhere.

But who knows, it may be different for you. You

look at things in--if you'll pardon me for saying so--in a funny sort of way. Maybe that's the way you've got to, look at them in this case. Because if James Bentley didn t kill her, then somebody else did. She didn't chop the back of her head in herself. You may be able to find something that I missed. There's no reason why you should do anything about this business. It's infernal cheek my even suggesting such a thing. But there it is. I came to you becauze it was the only thing I could think of. But if you don't want to put yourself out--and Why should you"

"Oh, but indeed there are reasons. I have leisure--too much leisure. And you have intrigued me---yes, you have intrigued me very much. It is a challenge--to the little grey cells of my brain. And then, I have a regard for you. I you, in your garden in six months' time, planting, perhap the rose bushe---and as you plant them it m not with th happiness you should be feeling, because behind everythin,, there is an unpleasantness in your brain, a recollection that yu try to push away, and I would not have you feel tlmt,

6

my friend. And finally "Poirot sat upright and nodded his head vigorously, "there is the principle of the thing. If a man has not committed murder, he should not be hanged." He paused and then added," But supposing that after all, he did kill her?"

"In that case I'd be only too thankful to be convinced of it."

"And two heads are better than one? Fo/Id, everything is settled. I precipitate myself upon the business. There is, that is clear, no time to be lost. Already the scent is cold.

Mrs. McGinty was killed--when?"

"Last November, 22nd."

"Then let us at once get down to the brass tacks."

"I've got my notes on the case which I'll pass over to yOU."

"Good. For the moment, we need only the bare outline.

If

James Bentley did not kill Mrs. McGinty, who did? "
Spence shrugged his shoulders and said heavily:

"There's nobody, so far as I can see."

"But that answer we do not accept. Now, since for every murder there must be a motive, what, in the case of Mrs. McGinty, could the motive be? Envy, revenge, jealousy, fear, money? Let us take the last and the simplest? profited by her deith?"

"Nobody very much. She had two,hundred pounds in the Savings Bank. Her niece gets that.

"Two hundred pounds is not very muchmbut in certain circumstances it could be enough. So let us consider the niece. I apologise, my friend, for treading in your footsteps. You too, I know, must have considered all this. But I

have to go over with you the ground already traversed."

Spence nodded his large head.

"We considered the niece, of course. She's thirty-eight, married. Husband is employed in the building and decorating trade--a painter. He's got a good character, steady employment, sharp sort of fellow, no fool. She's a pleasant young woman, a bit talkative, seemed fond of her aunt in a mild sort of way. Neither of them had any urgent need for two hundred pounds, though quite pleased to have

it, I dare say."

"What about her cottage? Do they get that?"

"It was rented. Of course, under the Rent Restriction

x7

Act the landlord couldn't get the old woman out. But now she's dead, I don't think the niece could have taken over--anyway she and her husband didn't want to. They've got a small modern council house of their own of which they are extremely proud." Spence sighed. "I went into the niece and her husband pretty closely--they seemed the best bet, as you'll understand. But I couldn't get hold of anything."

"Bien. Now let us talk about Mrs. McGinty herself.

Describe her to me--and not only in physical terms, if you please."

Spence grinned.

"Don't want a police description? Well, she was sixty-four.
Widow. Husband had been employed in the drapery

epartment of Hodges in Kilchester. He died about seven 5 ears ago. Pneumonia. Since then, Mrs. McGinty has been going out daily to various houses round about. Domestic chores. BroadhJnny's a small village which has lately become residential. One or two retired people, one of the partners in an engineering works, a doctor, that sort of thing. There's quite a good bus and train service to Kilchester, and Cullenquay which, as I expect you know, is quite a large summer resort, is only eight miles away, but Broadhinny itself is still quite pretty and ruralmabout a quarter of a

mile off the main Drymouth and Kilchester road."

Poirot nodded.

"Mrs. McGinty's cottage, was one of four that. form the village proper. There s the post office and village shop,

and agricultural labourers live in the others."

"And she took in a lodger?"

"Yes. Before her husband died, it used to be summer mstors, but after his death she just took one regulitr. Jame

Bentley had been there for some months."

"So we come to--James Bentley?"

"Bentley's last job was with a house agent's in Kilchester.

Before that, he lived with his mother in Cullenquay. She was an invalid and he looked after her and never went out much. Then she died, and an annuity she had died with her. He sold the little house and found a job. Well educated man, but no special qualifications or aptitudes, and, as I say, an unprepossessing manner. Didn't find it easy to get anything. Anyway, they took him on at Breather & Scuttle's. Rather a second-rate firm. I don't think he was particularly

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efficient or successful. They cut down staff and he was the one to go. He couldn't get another job, and his money ran out. He usually paid Mrs. McGinty every month for his room. She gave him breakfast and supper and charged him three pounds a week---quite reasonable, all things considered. He was two months behind in paying her, and he was nearly at the end of Iris resources. He hadn't got anotl job and she was pressing him for what he owed her."

"And he knew that she had thirty pounds in the house?

Why did she have thirty pounds in the house, by the way,

since she had a Savings Bank account ?"

"Because she didn't trust the Government. Said they'd

got two hundred pounds of her money, but they wouldn't

get any more. She'd keep that where she could hy her

hand on it any minute. She said that to one or two people.

It was under a loose board in her bedroom fioor--a very

obvious place. James Bentley admitted he knew it was

there."

"Very ,obliging of him. And did niece and husband know

that too?

"Oh yes."

"Then we have now arrived back at my first question

to you. How did Mrs. McGinty die ?"

"She died on the night of November zznd. Police

surgeon put the time of death as being between 7 and xo p.m. She'd had her supper--a kipper and bread and margarine,

and according to all accounts, she usually had that

about half-past six. If she adhered to that on the night in

question, then by the evidence of digestion she was killed

about eight-thirty or nine o'clock. James Bentley, by his

own account, was out wilding that evening from seven-fifteen

to about nine. He went out and walked most evenings

after dark. According to his own story he came in at about

nine o'clock (he had his own key) and went straight upstairs

to his room. Mrs. McGinty had had wash-basins fixed in the bedrooms because of summer visitors. He read for about half an hour and then went to bed. He heard and noticed nothing out of the way. Next morning he cam downstairs and looked into the kitchen, but there was no one there and no signs of breakfast being prepared. He says he hesitated a bit and then knocked on Mrs. McGinty's door, but got no reply.

9

"He thought she mut have overslept, but didn't like to go on knocking. Then the baker came and James Bentley went up and knocked again, and after that, as I told you, the baker went next door and fetched in a Mrs. Elliot, who eventually found the body and went off the deep end. Mrs. McGinty was lying on the parlour floor. She'd been hit on the back of the head with something rather in the nature of a meat chopper with a very sharp edge. She'd been killed instantaneously. Drawers were pulled open and things strewn about, and the loose board m the floor in her bedroom had been prised up and the cache was empty. All the windows were closed and shuttered on the inside. No signs of anything being tampered with or of being broken into from outside."

"Therefore," said Poirot, "either James Bentley must have killed her, or else she must have admitted her killer herself whilst Bentley was out?"

"Exactly. It wasn't any hold-up or burglar. Now who would she be likely to let in? One of the neighbours, or her niece, or her niece's husband. It boils down to that. We eliminated the neighbours. Niece and her husband were at the pictures that night. It is possible--just possible, that one or other of them left the cinema unobserved, bicycled three miles, killed the old woman, hid the money outside the house, and got back into the cinema unnoticed. We looked into that possibility, but we didn't find any eon-firmation of it. And why hide the money outside McGinty's house if so? Difficult place to pick it up later. Why not omewhere along the three miles back? No, the only reason for hiding it where it was hidden"

Poirot finished the sentence for him.

"Would be because you were living in that house, but didn't want to hide it in your room or anywhere inside. In fact: James Bentley."

"That's right. Everywhere, every time, you came up against Bentley. Finally there was the blood on his cuff."

"How did he account for that ?"

*' Said he remembered brushing up ag,a. inst a butcher',a, rhop the previous day. Baloney! It wash t animal blood.'

[&]quot;And he stuck to that story?'

"Not likely. At the trial he told a completely different tale. You aec, there was a hair on the cuff as well--a blood ained hair, and the hair was identical with Mr McGinty'8

hair. That had got to be explained away. He admitted then

that he had gone into the room the mght before when/az

came back from his walk. He'd gone in, he said, after

knocking, and found her there, on the floor, dead. He'd

bent over and touched her, he said, to make sure. And then

he'd lost his head. He'd always been very much affected

by the sight of blood, he said. He went to his room in a

state of collapse and more or less fainted. In the morning

he couldn't bring himself to admit he knew what had

happened."

[&]quot;A very fishy story," commented Poirot.

"Yes, indeed. And yet, you know," said Spence thought fully," it might well be true. It's not the sort of thing that

an ordinary man---or a jury---can believe. But I've come

across people like that. I don't mean the collapse story.

I mean people who are confronted by a demand for respon sible action and who simply can't face up to it. Shy people.

He goes in, say, and finds her. He knows that he ought to

do something--get the policego to a neighbourdo the

right thing whatever it s. And he funks it. He thinks

' I don't need to know anything about it. I needn't have

come in here to-night. I'll go to bed just as if I hadn't come in here at all

Behind it, of course, there's fear--

fear that

he may be suspected of having a hand in it. He thinks he'll keep himself out of it as long as possible, and so the

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silly juggins goes and puts himself into it--up to
neck."
?,pence
paused.
' It could have been that way."
"It could,"
said Poirot thoughtfullY.
"Or again,
it 'may have been just the best story his
counsel could
think up for him. But I don't know. The
waitress in
the cafe in Kilchester where he usually had lunch
said that
he always chose a table where he could look into
a wall or
a corner and not see people. He was that kind of
a chap--just a
bit screwy. But not screwy enough to be a
killer. He'd no persecution
complex or anything of that
kind."
Spence looked hopefully at Poirot--but Poirot did not
relx
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d--he was frowning.

two men sat silent for a while.

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CHAPTER III

AT LST Polrot mused himself with a sigh.

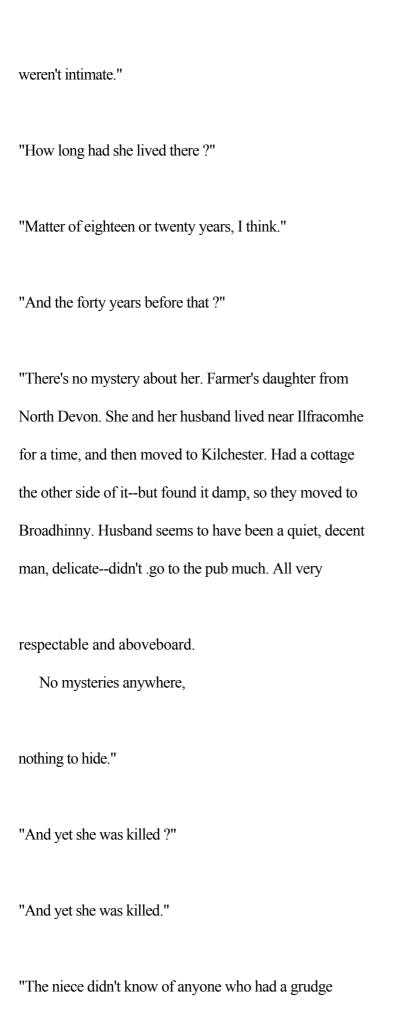
"Eh Men," he said. "We have exhausted the motive of money. Let us pass to other theories. "Had Mrs. McGinty

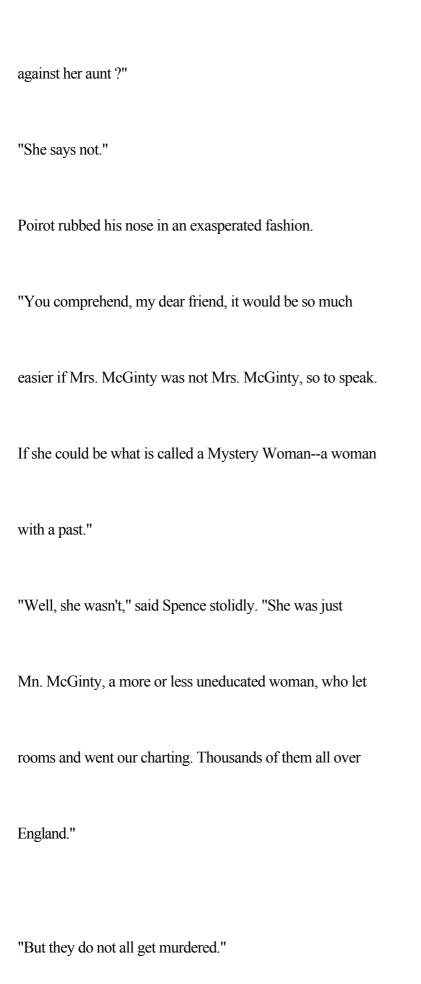
sa enemy? Was she afraid of anyone?

"No evidence of it."

"What did her neighbours have to say?"

"Not very much. They wouldn't to the pofice, perhaps, but I don't think they were holding anything back. She kept herself to herself, they said. But that's regarded as natural enough. Our villages, you know, M. Poirot, aren't friendly. Evacuees found that during the war. Mrs. McGinty passed the time of the day with the neighbours but they





No. I grant you that."

and improbable niece. An even more shadowy' and im-prob?ble stranger. Facts? Let us stick to facts. What are e facts? An elderly charwoman is murdered. A shy and uncouth young man is arrested and convicted of the murder.

Why was James Bmtley arrested?"

\$pence stared.

"The evidence against hinx I've told you "

"Yes. Evidence. But tell me, my 8Pence, was it real

evidence or was it contrived ?"

"Contrived?"

"Yes. Granted the premises that James Bentley is innocent, two possibilities remain. The evidence was manufactured, deliberately, to throw suspicion upon Or else he wssnst the unfortunate victim of circuaistances."

Yes. I see what you're driving at." "There is nothln to show that the former was the case. But again there is nthing to show that it was not so. The money was taken and hidden outside the house in a place easily found. To have actually hidden it in his room would have been a little too much for the police to swallow. The murder was commi'tted at a time wizen Bentley was taking a lonely walk, as he often did. Did the bloodstain come on his sleeve as he said it did at his trial, or was that, too, contrived? Did someone brush agaim, st. him in the darkness and smear tell-tale evidence on his sleeve ?" i I think that's going a bit far, M. Poirot."

Perhaps, perhaps. But we have got to go far. I think

that in this case we have got to go so far that the imagination

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cannot as yet see the path clearly For,
you see,
   chef
$pene, if Mrs. McGinty is just an ordinary
char woman--it
is the murderer who must be extraordinary.
Yes
   --that follows clearly. It is in the murderer and not
the
   murdered that the interest of this case lies. That is not
the
   case in most crimes. Usually it is in the personality of
the
   murdered person that the crux of the situation lies. It
is
   e. silent ded in whom I am
usually interested. Their hates,
   their loves, their actions. And when
you
really
know
the
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murdered victim, then the victim speaks, and those dead lips utter a name--the name you want to know."

Spence looked rather uncomfortable.

"These foreigners I" he seemed to be saying to himself.

"But here," continued Poirot, "it is the opp. osite. Here we guess at a veiled personalityma figure still hidden in

darkness. How did Mrs. McGinty die? Why did she

die? The answer is not to be found in studying the life

of Mrs. McGinty. The answer is to be found in the peronality

of the murderer. You agree with me there ?"

"I suppose so," said Superintendent Spence cautiously.

"Someone who wanted what? To strike down Mrs.

McGinty? Or to strike down James Bentley?"

The Superintendent gave a doubtful" H'm I"

"Yes--yes, that is one of the first points to be decided.

Who is the real victim? Who was intended to be the

victim?"

Spence said incredulously: "You really think someone would bump off a perfectly inoffensive old woman in order to get someone else hanged for murder?"

"One cannot make an omelette, they say, without break-lng eggs. Mrs. McGinty, then, may be the egg, and James Bentley is the omelette. So let me hear, now, what you know of James Bentley."

"Nothing much. Father was a doctor--died when

Bentley was nine years old. He xvent to one of the smaller

public schools, unfit for the Army, had a weak chest, was

in one of the Ministrie during the war and rived with a

possessive mother."

"Well," said Poirot, "there are certain possibilities there . . . More than there are in the rife history, of Mrs. McGinty."

"Do you seriously believe what you are suggesting?"

"No, I do not believe anything as yet. But 1 say that
there are two distinct lines of research, and that we have to
decide, very soon, which is the right one to follow."

"How are you going to set about things, M. Poirot? Is
there anything I can do?"

"First, I should like an interview with James Bentley."

"That can be managed. I'll get on to his solicitors."

"After that and subject, of course, to the result, if anym I am not hopeful--of that interview, I shall go to Broad birmy. There, aided by your notes, I shall, quickly as

0

sible, go over that same ground where you have passed re me."

"In case I've missed anything," said Spence with a wry smile.

"In case, I would prefer to say, that some circumstance should strike me in a different light to the one in which it struck you. Human reactions vary and so does human experience. The resemblance of a rich financier to a soap boiler whom I had known in Liege once brought about a most satisfactory result. But no need to go into that. What I should like to do is to eliminate one or other of the trails I indicated just now. And to eliminate the Mrs. McGinty trail--trail No. x--will obviously be quicker and easier than to attack trail No. 2. Where, now, can I stay in Broad-hinny? Is there an inn of moderate comfort?"

"There's the Three Ducks--but it doesn't put people up.

There's the Lamb in Cullavon three miles away--or there is a kind of a Guest House in Broadhinny itself. It's not really a Guest House, just a rather decrepit country house where the young couple who own it take in paying guests. I don't think," said Spence dubiously, "that it's very comfortable."

Hercule Poirot closed his eyes in agony.

"If I suffer, I suffer," he said. "It has to be."

"I don't know what you'll go there as," continued Spence doubtfully as he eyed Poirot. "You might be some kind of an opera singer. Voice broken down. Got to rest. That might do."

"I shall go," said Hercule Po[rot, speaking with accents of royal blood, "as mvself."

Spence received thi pronouncement with pursed lips.
"D'you think that's advisable?"

"I think it is essential! But yes, essential. Consider, eher ami, it is time we are up against. What do we know? Nothing. So the hope, the best hope, is to go pretending that I know a great deal. I am Hercule Poirot. I am the great, the unique Hercule Poirot. And I, Hercule Po[rot, am not satisfied about the verdict in the McGinty case.

I, Hercule Poirot, have a very shrewd suspicion of **hat really happened. Thee is a circumstance that I, alone, estimate at its true value. You see?"

"And then?"

be reactions."

"And then, having made my effect, I observe the reactions. For there should be reactions. Very definitely, there should

Superintendent Spence looked uneasily at the little man.

"Look here, M. Poirot," he said. "Don't go sticking
out, your neck. I don't want anything to happen to you."

But if it does, you would be proved right beyond the shadow of doubt, is it not so?"

"I don't want it proved the hard way," said Superintendent Spence.

CHAPTER IV

W?H gAT distaste, Hercule Poirot looked round the room in which he stood. It was a room of gracious proportions but there its attraction ended. Poirot made an eloquent grimace as he drew a suspicious finger along the top of a book case. As he had suspected--dust I He sat down gingerly on a sofa and its broken springs sagged depressingly under him. The two faded armchairs were, as he knew, little better. A large fierce-looking dog whom Poirot suspected of having mange growled from his position on a moderately comfortable fourth chair.

The room was large, and had a faded Morris wallpaper.

Steel engravings of unpleasant subjects hung crookedly on

the walls with one or two good oil paintings. The chair-covers

were both faded and dirty, the carpet had holes in ix and had never been of a pleasant design. A good deal of

miscellaneous bric-a-brac was scattered haphazard here and there. Tables rocked dangerously owing to absence of castors. One window was op.en, and no power on earth could, apparently, shut it again. The door, temporarily shut, was not likely to remain so. The latch did not hold, and with every gust of wind it burst open and whhling

"I suffer," said Hercule Poirot to himself in acute self-pity.

gusts of cold wind eddied round the room.

"Yes, I suffer."

The door burst open and the wind and Mrs. Sutmm'rhayes came in together.

She looked round the room,

a6

shouted "What?" to someone in the distance and went out again.

Mrs. Summerhayes had red hair and an attractively freckled face and was usually in a distracted state of putting things down, or else looking for them.

Hercule Poirot sprang to his feet and shut the door.

A moment or two later it opened again and Mrs. Summer-hayes reappeared. This time she was carrying a large

enamel basin and a knife.

A man's voice from some way away called out:

"Maureen, that cat's been sick again. What shall I do?"

Mrs. Summerhayes called: "I'm coming, darling. Hold

everything."

She dropped the basin and the knife and went out again.

Poirot got up again and shut the door. He said:

"Decidedly, I suffer."

A car drove up, the large dog leaped from the chair and raised its voice in a crescendo of barking. He jumped on a small table by the window and the table collapsed with a crash.

"Enfin," said Hercule Po[rot. "est immpportable I" The door burst open, the wind surged round the room, the dog rushed out, still barking. Maureen's voice came, upraised loud and clear.

"Johnnie, why the hell did you leave the back door open I

Those bloody hens are in the larder."

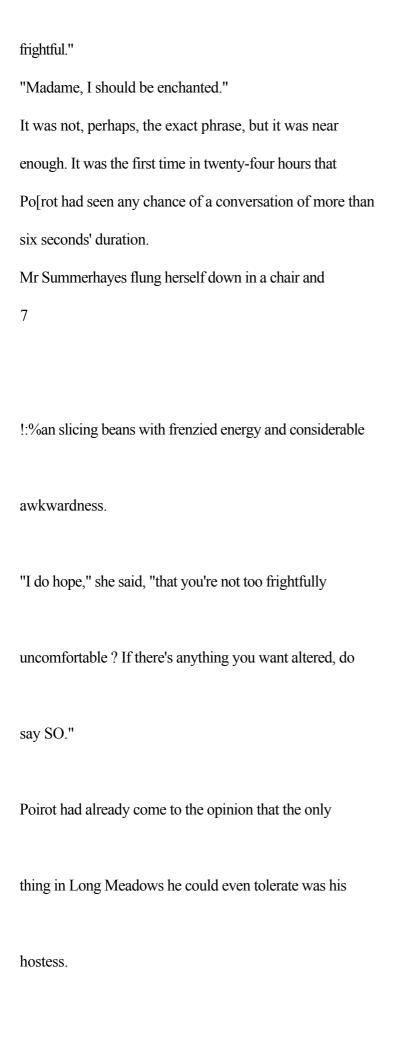
"And for this," said Hercule Po[rot with feeling," I pay seven guineas a week I"

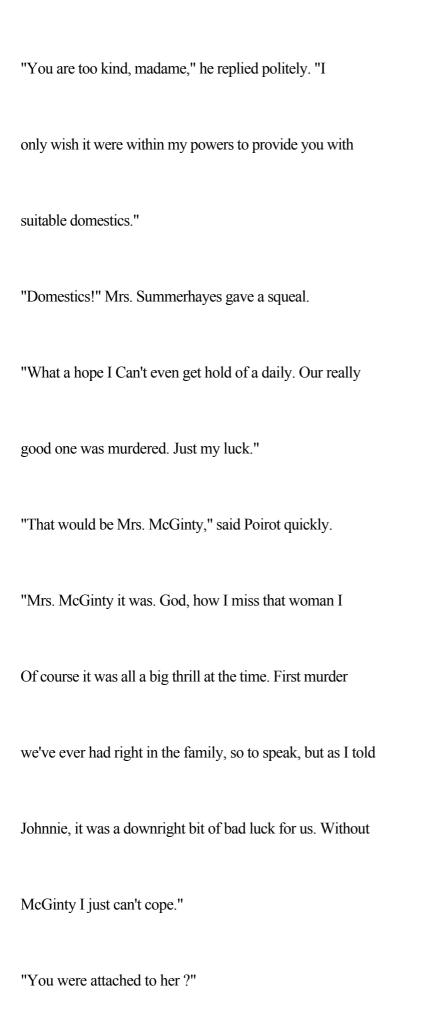
The door banged to with a crasl Through the window came the loud squawking of irate hens.

Then the door opened again and Maureen Summerhayes came in and fell upon the basin with a cry of joy.

"Couldn't think where I'd left it. Would you mind frightfully, Mr. Er--humtI mean, would it bother you if

I sliced the beans in here? The smell in the kitchen is too





"My dear man, she was reliable. She came. Monday afternoons and Thursday morningsmjust like a clock. Now I have that Burp woman from up by the station. Five children and a husband. Naturally she's never here. Either the husband's taken queer, or the old mother, or the children have some foul disease or other. With old McGinty, at least it was only she herself who came over queer, and I must ay she hardly ever did." "And you found her always reliable and honest? You had trust in her?" "Oh, she'd never pinCh anything--not even l'ood. Of course she snooped a bit. Had a look at one's letters and all

that. But one expects that sort of thing. I mean they must

five, such awfully drab lives, mustn't they?"

Had Mrs. McGinty had a drab life "

"Ghastly, I expect," said Mrs. Summerhayes vaguely
"A1

'
ways on your knees scrubbing. And then piles of other people's washing up waiting for you on the sink

when you arrive in the morning. If I had to face that every

day, I'd be positively relieved to be murdered. I really

would."

The face of Major Summerhayes appeared at the window.

Mrs. Summerhayes sprang up, upsetting the beans, and
rushed across to the window, which she opened to the fullest
extent.

"That danmed dog's eaten the hens' food again,

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"Oh damn, now he'll be sick I"
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"Look here," John Summerhayes displayed a colander

of greenery, "is this enough spinach?"

Of course not."

"Seems a colossal amount to me."

"It'll be about a teaspoonful when it's cooked. Don't

you know by now what spinach is like ?"

"Oh lord I"

"Has the fish come?"

"llot a sign of it."

"Hell, we'll have to open a tin of something. You might

do that, Johnnie. One of the ones in the corner cupboard.

That one we thought was a bit bulged. I expect it's quit all right really."

"What about the spinach?"

"I'll get that."

She leaped through the window, and husband and wife

moved away together.

"Nora d'un nora d'un horn I" said Hercule Poirot. He

crossed the room and closed the window as nearly as he

could. The voice of Major Summerhayes came to him

borne on the wind.

"What about this new fellow, Maureen? Looks a bit

peculiar to me. What's his name again ?"

"I couldn't rememEer it just now when I was talking to

him. Had to say Mr. Er-urn. Poirotmthat's what it is.

He's French."

"You know, Maurcen, I seem to have seen that name somewhere."

"Home Perm, per[aps. He looks like a hairdresser."

Poirot winced.

"N-no. Perhaps-it's pickles. I don't know. I'm sure it's familiar. Better get the first seven guineas out of him, quick."

The voices died away.

Hercule Poirot picked up the beans from the floor whelm z9

they had scattered far and wide. Just aa he finished doing o, Mrs. Smmnerhayes came in again through the door,

"He presented them to her politely:

"Oh thanks awfully. I ay, these beans look a bit black.

We store then, you know, in crocks, salted down. But these raxm to have gone wrong. I'm afraid they won't be very

"I, too, fear that... You permit that I abut the door?

There is a decided draught."

"Ohyes, do. I'm afraid I alwaya leave doors open."

"So Ihave notice&"

"Anyway, that door never stays shut. This house is practically falling to pieces. Johnnie's father and mother l!ved here and they were very badly off, poor dears, and they never did a thing to it. And then when we came home from India to live here, we couldn't afford to do any-thing either. It's fun for the children in the holidays, though, lots of room to run wild in, and the garden and everything. Having paying guests here just enables ua to keep going, though I must ay we've had a few rude shocks"

Am I your only guest at present?

"We've got an old lady upstairs. Took to her bed the day she came and has been there ever since. Nothing the matter with her that I can see. But there she is, and I carry up four trap a .day. Nothing wrong with her appetite.

Anyway, she's going to-morrow to some niece or other."

Mrs. Summerhayea pauaed for a moment before resuming in a slightly artificial voice.

"The fishman will be here in a minute. I wonder if you'd mind--er--forking out the fitt week'a rent. You are

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staying a week, aren't you?"
"Perhaps longer."
"Sorry to bother you. But I've not got any cash in the
house and you kn0 what theae people are like--alway
dunning you."
"Pray do not apologise, madame." Poirot took out seven
pound notes and added aeven shillings. 1VI. Summerhayea
gathered the money up with avidity.
"Thanks a lot."
"I should, rhaps, madame, tell you a little mo about
myff. I am Htrcule Poirot."
The revelation left Mrs. Summerhayes unmoved.
"What a lovely name," she said kindly. "Greek, isn't
it?"
"I am, aa you may know," said Poirot, "a detective."
He tapped his chest. "Perhaps the most famous detective
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Mrs. Summerhayes screamed with amusement.

"I see you're a great practical joker, M. Poirot. What are you detecting? Cigarette ash and footprints?"

"I am investigating the murder of Mrs. McGinty," aid

Poirot. "And I do not joke."

"Ouch," said Mrs. Summerhayes. "I've cut my hand."

She raised a finger and inspected it.

Then she stared at Poirot.

"Look here," she said. "Do you mean it? What I mean is, it's over, all that. They arrested that poor haft-wit who lodged there and he's been tried and convicted and everything. He's probably been hanged by now."

"No, madame," said Poirot. "He has not been hangedM yet. And it is not' over '--the case of Mrs. McGinty. I will remind you of the line from one of your poets. 'A question i never settled until it is settled--right."

"0o," said Mrs. Summerhayes, her attention diverted from Poirot to the basin in her lap. "I'm bleeding over the beans. Not too good as we've got to have them for lunch. Still it won't matter really because they'll go into boiling water. Thing are always all right if you boil them, aren't they? Even tiros."

"I think," id Hercule Poirot quietly, "that I shall not be in for lunch."

CHAPTER V

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"I O0q'T mOW, I'm ure," said Mrs. Burch.

ObOeS-he had aid that timdy. Her m d

foi-lg tlmen th back moustache, wg

r-ed w not m ily overmm

"Vplt it'a ," she went on. "Ha'

r afie mdd d e d t. Tpg

d , d fg uh d qu
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With the neighbours all agog. I didn't feel at first we'd ever live it down. And my husband's mother's been down-ri.

ght nasty about it. Nothing of that kind ever happened in her family, she kept saying. And 'poor Joe' and all that.

%'hat about poor me? She was my aunt, wasn't she? But really I did think it was all over now."

"And supposing that James Bentley is innocent, after

all ?"

"Nonsense," snapped Mrs. Burch. "Of course he isn't

innocent. He did it all right. I never did like the looks of

him. Wandering about muttering to himself. Said to auntie,

I did: 'You oughtn't to have a man like that in the house.

Might go off his head,' I said. But she said he was quiet and

obliging and didn't give trouble. No drinking, she said, and

he didn't even smoke. Well, she knows better now, poor SOUI."

Poirot looked thoughtfully at her. She was a big, plump woman with a healthy colour and a good-humoured mouth. Tie small house was neat and clean and smelt of furniture polish and brasso. A hint appetising smell came from the direction of the kitchen.

A good wife who kept her house clean and took the trouble to cook for her man. He approved. She was prejudiced and obstinate but, after all, why not? Most decidedly, she was not the kind of woman one could imagine using a meat chopper on her aunt, or conniving at her husband's doing so. Spence had not thought her that kind of woman, and rather reluctantly, Hercule Poirot agreed with him. Spence had gone into the financial background of the Burches and had found no motive there for murder, and Spence was a very thorough man.

He sighed, and persevered with his task, which was the breaking down of Mrs. Burch's suspicion of foreigners. He led the conversation away from murder and focused on the victim of it. t Ie asked questions about" poor auntie," her health, her habits, her preferences in food and drink, her politics, her late husband, her attitude to life, to sex, to sin, to religion, to children, to animals.

Whether any of this irrelevant matter would be of use, he had no idea. He was looking through a haystack to find a needle. But, incidentally, he was learning something about Bessie Burch.

Bessie did not really know very much about her aunt. It had been a family tie, honoured as such, but without intimacy. Now and again, once a month or so, she and Joe had gone over on a Sunday. to have midday dinner with auntie, and more rarely, auntie had come over to see them. They had exchanged presents at Christmas. They'd known that auntie had a little something put by, and that they'd get it when she died.

"But that's not to say we were needing it," Mrs. Butch explained with rising colour. "We've got something put by ourselves. And we buried her beautiful. A real nice funeral it was. Flowers and everything."

Auntie had been fond of knitting. She didn't like dogs, they messed up a place, but she used to have a cat--a ginger. It strayed away and she hadn't had one since, but the woman at the post office had been going to give her a kitten. Kept her house very neat and didn't like litter. Kept bras a treat and washed down the kitchen floor every day. She made quite a nice thing of going out to work. One flailling and tenpence an hour--two shillings from Holmeleigh, that was Mr. Carpenter's of the Works' house. Rolling in money, the Carpenters were. Tried to get auntie to come more days in the week, but auntie wouldn't disappoint her

other ladies because she'd gone to them before she went to Mr. Carpenter's, and it wouldn't have been right.

Poirot mentioned Mrs. Summerhayes at Long Meadows.

Oh yes, auntie went to her--two days a week. They'd come back from India where they'd had a lot of native vants and Mrs. Summerhayes didn't know a thin,g, about a house. They tried to market-garden, but they didn t know anything about that, either. When the children came home for the holidays, the house was just pandemonium. But Mrs. Summerhayes was a nice lady and auntie liked her.

\$0 theportrait grew. Mrs. McGinty knitted, and scrubbed floors andpolished brass, she liked cats and didn't like dogs. She liked children, but not very much. She kept herself to herself.

She attended church on Sunday, but didn't take part in any church activities. Sometimes, but rarely, she went to the pictures. She didn't hold with goings on--and had given up working' for an artist and his wife when she had. discovered they weren't properly married. She didn't read

books, but she enjoyed the Sunday paper and she liked old magazne when her ladies gave them to her. Although she didn't go much to the pictures, she was interested in heating about film stars and their doings. She wasn't interested in politics, but voted Conservative like her husband had always

done. Never spent much on clothes, but got quite a lot given her from her ladies, and was of a saving disposition.

Mrs. McGinty was, in fact, very much the Mrs. McGinty that Poirot had imagined she would be. And Bessie Burch, her niece, was the Bessie Burch of Superintendent Spence's notes.

Before Poirot took his leave, Joe Burch came home for the lunch hour. A small, shrewd man, less easy to be sure about than his wife. There was a faint nervousness in his manner. He showed less signs of susp. icion and hostility than his wife. Indeed he seemed anmous to appear co-operative. And that, Poirot reflected, was very faintly out of character. For why should Joe Burch be anxious to placate an importunate foreign stranger? The reason could only be that that stranger had brought with him a letter from Superintendent Spence of the County Police.

So Joe Burch was anxious to stand in well with the police?

Was it that he couldn't afford, as his wife could, to be critical of the police?

A man, perhaps, with an uneasy conscience. Why was that conscience uneasy? There could be so many reasons--none

of them connected with Mrs. McGinty's death. Or was it that, somehow or other, the cinema alibi had been cleverly faked, and that it was Joe Burch who had knocked on the door of the cottage, had been admitted by auntie v. nd who had struck down the unsuspecting old woman. He xvould pull out the drawers and ransack the rooms to give the appearance of robbery, he might hide the money out-side, cunningly, to incriminate James Bentley, the money that was in the Savings Bank was what he was after. Two hundred pounds coming to his wife which, for some reason unknown, he badly needed. The weapon, Poirot remem-bered, had never been found. Why had that not also been left on the scene of the crime? Any moron knew enough to wear gloves or rub off fingerprints. Why then had the weapon, which must have been a heavy one with a sharp edge, been removed? Was it becauae it could easily be

identified as belonging to the Burch mnage? Was that same weapon, washed and polished, here in the house now? Something in the nature of a meat chopper, the police surgeon had said--but not, it seemed, actually a meat chopper. Something, p. erhaps a little unusual . . . a little out of the ordinary, easdy identified. The police had hunted for it, but not found it. They had searched woods, dragged

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onds. There was nothing missing from Mrs. McGinty's tchen, and nobody Could say that James Bentley had had anything of that kind in his possession. They had never traced any purchase of a meat chopper or any such implement to him. A small, but negative point m his favour.

Ignored in the weight of other evidence. But still a point...

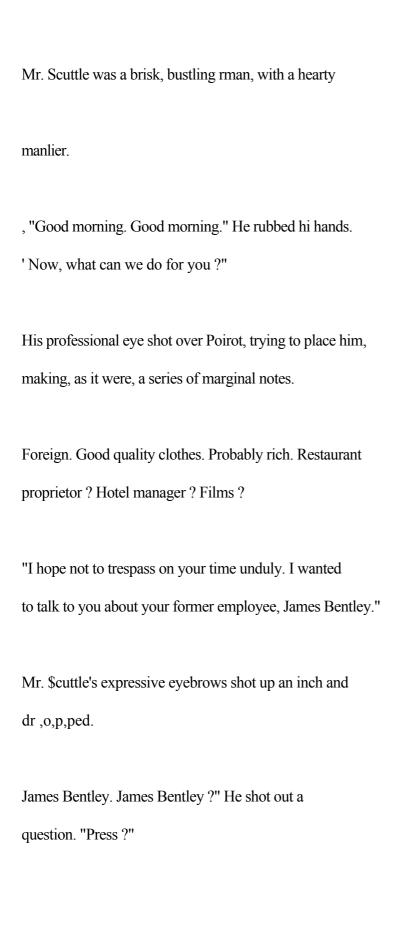
Poirot east a swift glance round the rather overcrowded little sitting-room in which he was sitting.

Was the weapon here, somewhere, in this house? Was that why Joe Butch was uneasy and conciliatory?

Poirot did not know. He did not really think so. But he was not absolutely sure

CHAPTER VI

IN T}m offices of Messrs. Breather & Scuttle, Poirot was shown, after some demur, into the room of Mr. Scuttle



[&]quot;And you wouldn't be police?"

"No. At least--not of this country."

"Not of this country." Mr. Scuttle filed this away rapidly as though for future reference. WhaVs at all about ?"

Poirot, never hindered by a pedantic regard for truth,
launched out into speech.

"I am opening a further inquiry into James Bentley's case--at the request of certain relatives of his."

"Didn't know he had any. Anyway, he's been found guilty, you know, and condemned to death."

"But not yet executed."

"While there's life, there's hope, eh?" Mr. Scuttle shook his head. "Should doubt it, though. Evidence was strong. Who are these relations of his?"

"I can tell you only this, they are both rich and powerful.

Immensely rich."

"You surprise me." Mr. Scuttle was unable to help thawing slightly. The words "immensely rich" had an attractive and hypnotic quality. "Yes, you really do surprise me."

"Bentley's mother, the late Mrs. Bentley," explained Poirot, "cut herself and her son off completely from her family."

"One of these family feuds, eh? Well, well. And young Bentley xvithout a farthing to bless himself with. Pity these relations didn't come to the rescue before." "They have only just become aware of the facts,"

explained Poirot. "They have engaged me to come with

ell speed to this country and do everything possible."

Mr. Scuttle leaned back, relaxing his business manner.

"Don't know what you can do. I suppose there's insanity?

A bit late in the day--but if you got hold of the big medicos.

Of course I'm not up in these things myself."

Poirot leaned forward.

"Monsieur, James Bentley worked here. Youcan tell

me about him."

"Precious little to tell--precious little, lie was one of

our junior clerks. Nothing against him..'. Seemed a perfectly

decent young fellow, quite conscientious and all that. But

no idea of salesmanship. He just couldn't put a project

over. That's no good in this job. If a client cornea to ua

36

with a house he wants to sell, we're there to sell it for him.

And if a client wants a house, we find him one. If k'a a

house in a lonely place with no amenities, we stress its

antiquity, call it a period piece--and don't mention the

plumbing I And if a house looks straight into the gasworks,

we talk about amenities and facilities and don't mention the

view. Hustle your client into it--that's what you're here

to do. All sorts of little tricks there are. 'We advise you,

madam, to make an immediate offer. There's a Member of

Parliament who's very keen on it--very keen indeed.

Going out to see it again this afternoon.' They fall for that

every timea Member of Parliament is always a good

touch. Can't think why I No member ever lives away from

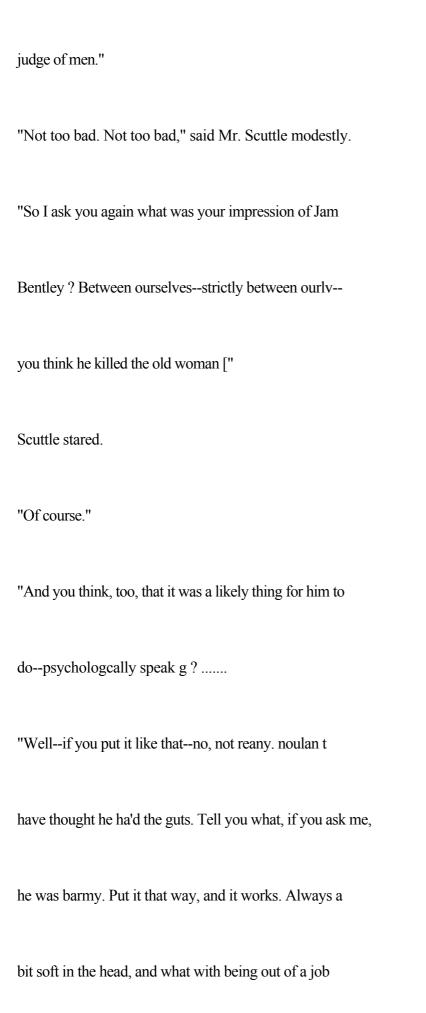
his constituency. It's just the good solid .sound of it." He laughed suddenly, displayed gleaming dentures.

"Psychology-that

s what at ts--just psychology.

Poirot leaped at the word.

"Psychology. How right you are. I see that you are a



and worrying and all that, he just went right over the edge." "You had no special reason for discharging him?" Scuttle shook his head. "Bad time of year. Staff hadn't enough to do. We sacked the one who was leass competent. That was Bentley. Always would be, I expect. Gave him a good reference and all that. He didn't get another job, though. No pep. Made bad impression ma people." It always came back to that, Poirot thought, as he left the office. James Bentley made a had imp -r-on on people. 37

He took comfort in considering various murderers he had known whom most people had found full of charm.

"Excuse me, do you mind if I sit down here and talk to you for a moment?"

Poirot, ensconced at a small table in the Blue Cat, looked up from the menu he was studying with a start. It was rather dark in the Blue Cat, which specialised in an old-world effect of oak and leaded.panes, but the young woman who had just sat down opposxte to him stood out brightly from her dark background.

She had determinedly golden hair, and wa wearing an electric blue jumper suit. Moreover, Hercule Poirot was conscious of having noticed her somewhere only a short

time previously.

She went on:

"I couldn't help, you see, hearing something of what you were saying to Mr. Scuttle."

Poirot nodded. He had realised that the partitions in the

offices of Breather & Scuttle were made for convenience rather than privacy. That had not worried him, since it was chiefly publicity that he desired.

"You were typing." he said, "to the right of the back window."

She nodded. Her teeth shone white in an acquiescing smile. A very healthy young woman, with a full buxom figure that Poirot approved. About thirty-three or four, he judged, and by nature dark-haired, but not one to be dictated to by nature.

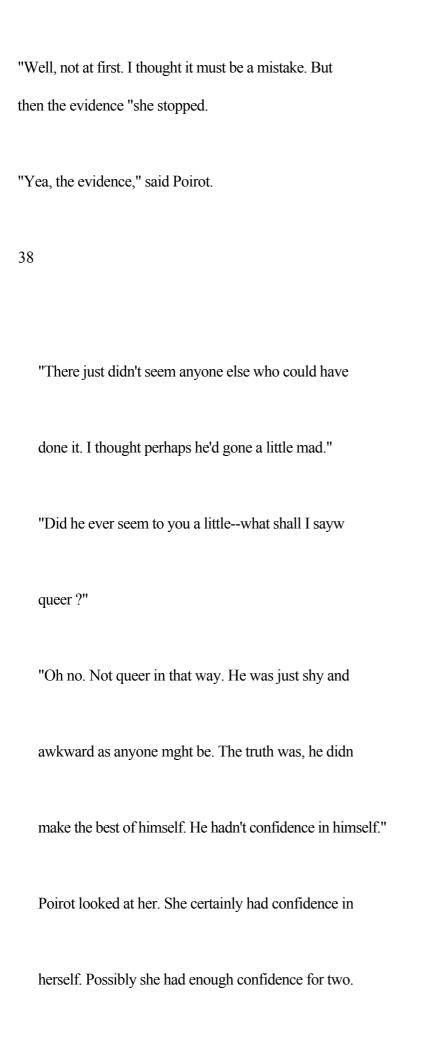
"About Mr. Bentley," she said.

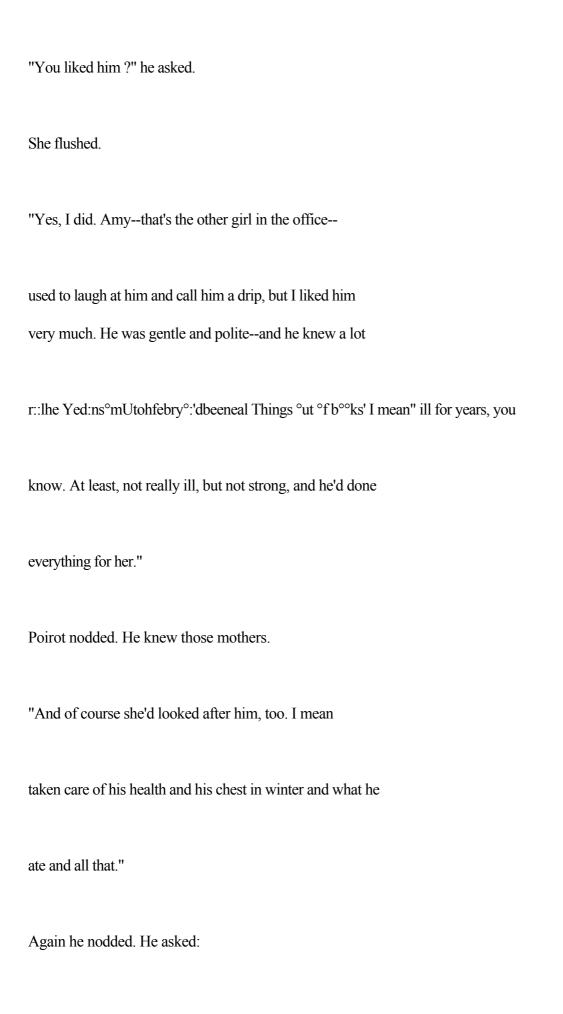
"What about Mr. Bentley?"

"Is he going t,o, appeal? Does it mean that there's new evidence? Oh, I m so glad. I couldn't--I just couldn't believe he did it."

Poirot's eyebrows rose.

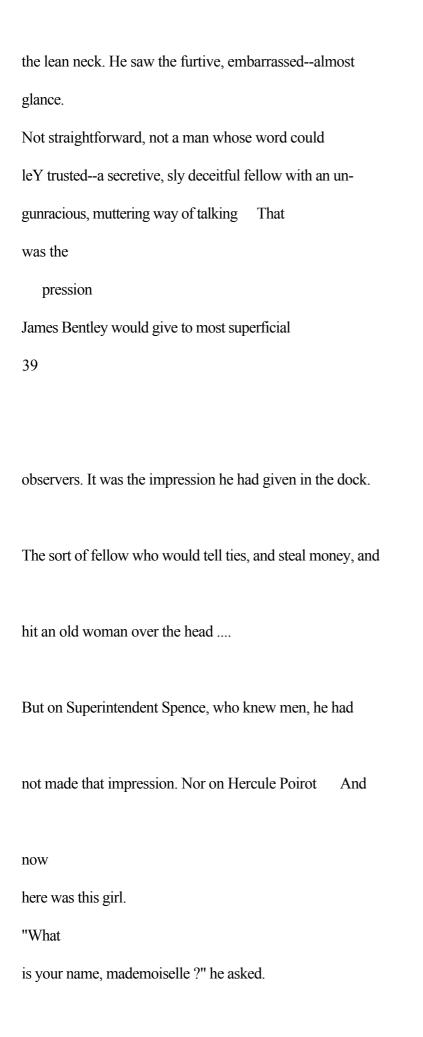
"So you never thought he did it," he said slowly.





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"You and he were friends?"
   "I don't know--not exactly. We used to talk sometimes.
   But after he left here, he--i--I didn't see much of him.
   I wrote to him once in a friendly way, but he didn't answer."
   Poirot said gently:
   "But you like him?"
   She said rather defiantly:
   "Yes, I do ... "
   "That is excellent," id Poirot.
   His mind switched back to the day of his interview with
the condemned prisoner He
saw James Bentley clearly.
   The
mouse-coloured hair, the thin awkward body, the
   hands
with their big knuckles and wrists, the Adam's apple
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in



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"Maude
Williams. Is there anything I could do--to help
2"
''T
think there is. There are people who believe, Miss Williams,
that James Bentley is innocent. They are working to
prove that fact. I am the person charged with that investigation,
and I may tell you that I have already made considerable
progresswyes, considerable progress."
He
uttered that lie without a blush. To his mind it was a
very necessary lie. Someone, somewhere, had got to be made
unea.y. Maude Williams would talk, and talk
was like a stone m a pond, it made a ripple that went on
spreading
outwards.
He said: "You tell me that you and lames
Bentley talked together. He told you about his mother and
his home life. Did he ever mention anyone with whom he,
or
perhaps his mother, was on bad terms
Maude Williams
reflected.
"No--not what you'd call bad terms. HIS mother
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didn't like young women much, I

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gather."
"Mothers of devoted sons never like young women.
No, I mean mo?e than that. Some family feud, aome
enmity.
'Someone with a grudge
?"
She shook her
head.
"He never mentioned anything of that
kind."
"Did he ever speak of his landlady, Mrs. McGinty
?" She shivered
slightly.
"Not by name. He said once that she gave him
kippers much too often--and once he said his landlady was
upset because she had lost her
cat."
"Did he ever--you must be honest,
please--mention that he knew where she kept her money?
Some of the colour went out of the girl's face, but
she threw up her chin
defiantly.
"Actually, he did. We were talking about people
being distrustful of bad he said his old
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landlady

kept

her

40

spare money under a floorboa[,d. H,e said: 'I could help mysff any day to it when she s out. Not quite as a joke, he didn't joke, more as though he were really worried by her carelessness."

"Ah," said Poirot. "That is good. From my point of view, I mean. When James Bentley thinks of stealing, it presents itself to him as an action that is done behind someone's back. He might have said, you see, 'Some day someone will knock her on the head for it."

"But either way, he wouldn't be meaning it."

"Oh no. But talk, however light, however idle, gives away, inevitably, the sort of person you are. The wise criminal would never open his mouth, but criminals are seldom wise and usually vain and they talk a good deal-and so most criminals are caught."

Maude Williams said abruptly:

"But someone must have killed the old woman."

"Naturally." ·

"Who did? Do you know? Have you any i,d,ea?"

"Yes,j, said Hercule Poirot mendaciously. 'I think I have a v'ery good idea. But we are only at the beginning of the road."

The girl glanced at her watch.

"I must get back. We're only supposed to take haft an hour. One-home place, Kfichester--I we always had j tm in London before. You'll let me know if there's anything I can do--really do, I mean?"

Poirot took out one of his cards. On it he wrote Long Meadows and the telephone number.

"That is where I am staying."

His name, he noted with chagrin, made no particular impression on her. The younger generation, he could .not but feel, were singularly lacking in knowledge of notat)le celebrities.

Hercule Poirot caught a bus back to Broacthinny feeling slightly more cheerful. At any rate there was one Person who shared his belief in James Bentley's innocence. Bentley was not so friendless as he had made hlm-e out to be.

His mind went back again to Bentley in prison. What a dispiriting interview it had been. There had been no hope aroused, hardly a stirring of interest.

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"Thank you," Bentley had said dully, "but I don't
d "
suppose there is anything anyone can o.
No, he was sure he had not got any enemies.
"When people barely notice you're alive, you're not
likelyto have any enemies."
"Your mother? Did she have an enemy?"
"Certainly not. Everyone liked and respected her."
There was a faint indignation in his tone.
"What about your friends?"
And James Bentley had said, or rather muttered, "I
haven't any friends ."
But that had not l;en quite true. For Maude Williams
was a friend.
"What a wonderful dispensation it is of Nature's," thought Hercnle Poirot, "that every man, however
superficially
unattractive, should be some woman's choice."
For all Miss Williams's sexy appearance, he had a shrewd
suspicion that she was really the maternal type.
She had the qualities that James Bentley lacked, the
energy, the drive, the refusal to be beaten, the determination
to succeed.
He sighed.
What monstrous lies he had told that day I Never mind---they,
were necessary.
For somewhereS" said Polrot to himself, indulging in
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an absolute riot of mixed metaphors, "there is in the hay a needle, and among the sleeping dogs there is one on whom I shah put my foot, and by shooting the arrov into the air, one will come down and hit a glass-house I"

CHAPTER VII

i

T COTTAOE where Mrs. McGinty had lived was only a few steps from the bus stop. Two children were playing on the doorstep. One was eating a rather wormy-looking

apple and the other was shouting and beating on the door

with a tin tray. They appeared quite happy. Poirot added

to the noise by beating hard on the door himself.

A woman looked round the corner of the house.

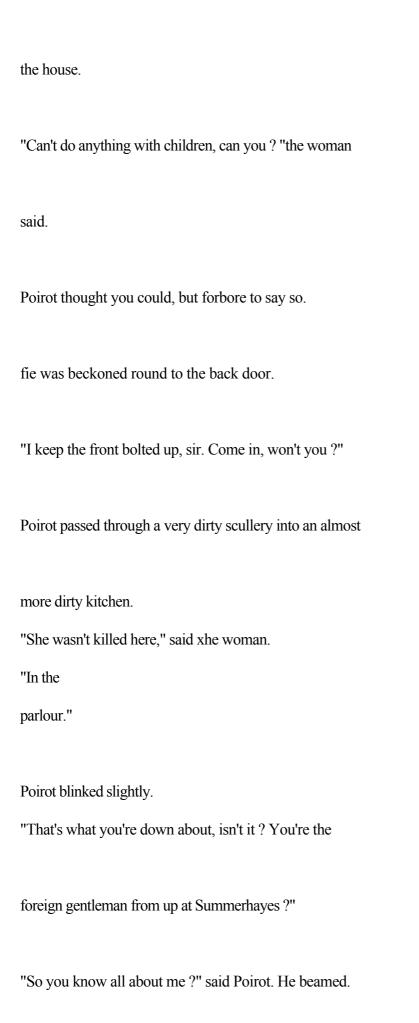
She

had on a coloured overall and her hair was untidy.

"Stop it, Ernie," she said.

"Sha'n't," said Ernie and continued.

Poirot deserted the doorstep and made for the corner of



"Yes, indeed, Mrs." "Kiddie. My husband's a plasterer. Moved in four months ago, we did. Been living with Bert's mother before ... Some folks said: 'You'd never go into a house where there's been a murder, surely? '--but what I said was, a house is a house, and better than a back sitting-room and sleeping on two chairs. Avful, this 'ousing shortage, in't it? And anyway we've never been troubled 'ere. Alway say they walk if they've been murdered, but she doem't I Like to see where it happened?" Feeling like a tourist being taken on a conducted tour, Poirot assented.

Mrs. Kiddie led him into a small room overburdened

with a heavy Jacobean suite. Unlike the rest of the house,

it showed no signs of ever having been occupied.

"Down on the floor she was and the back of her head

split open. Didn't half give Mrs. Elliot a turn. She'8 the

one what found her--she and Larkin who comes from the

Co-op with the bread. But the money wa took from

upstaira. Come along up and I'll show you where."

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Mm Kiddie led the way up the t'taircase and into · bed-room which contained a large chest of drawer, a big bra bed, some chain, and a frae assembly of baby clothe, wet and dry.

"Right here it was," said Mrs. Kiddie proudly.

Poirot looked round him. Hard to vasualise that this rampant stronghold of haphazard fecundity was once the well-scrubbed domain of an elderly woman who was house proud.

Here Mrs. McGinty had lived and slept.

"I suppose this isn't her furniture?"

"Oh no. Her niece over in Cullavon took away all that."

There was nothing left here of Mrs. McGinty. The

Kiddies had come and conquered. Life was stronger than
death.

From downstairs the loud fierce wail of a baby arose.

"That's the baby woken up," .aid Mrs. Kiddle ua-necessarily.

She plunged down the stairs and Poirot followed her.

There was nothing here for him.

He went next door.

"Ye, sir, it was me found her."

Mrs. Elliot was dramatic. A neat house, this, neat and prim. The only drama in it was Mrs. Elliot's, a tall gaunt

dark-haired woman, recounting her one moment of glorious liven, g.

'Larkin, the baker, he came and knocked at the door.

'It's Mrs. McGinty,' he said, 'we can't make her hear.

Seems she might have been taken bad.' And indeed I

thought she might. She wasn't a young woman, not by any

means. And palpitations she'd had, to my certain knowledge.

I ought she might have had a stroke. So I hurried over,

seeing as there were only the two men, and naturally they

wouldn't like to go into the bedroom."

Poirot accepted thia piece of propriety with an annu murmur.

"Hurried up the 8taira, I did. He was on the landing, pale as death he was. Not t,ha,,t I ever thought at the time --weR, of course, then I didn t know what had happened.

I knocked on the door loud and there wasn't any answer,

• o I turned the handle and I went in. The whole place

messed about--and the board in the floor up. ' It's robbery,'

I said. ' But where's the i?oor soul herself?' And then we

thought to look in the sitting-room. And there she tas... Down on the floor with her poor head stove in. Murder I

I saw at once what it was--murder I Couldn't be anything else! Robbery and murder I Here in BroadhinW. I screamed and I screamed I Quite a job they had with me. Came over all faint, I did. They had to go and get me brandy from the Three Ducks. And even then I was all of a shiver for hours and hours. 'Don't you take on so, mother,' that's what the sergeant said to me when he came. 'Don't you take on so. You go home and make yourself a nice cup of tea.' And so I did. And when Elliot came home, 'Why, whatever's happened?' he says, staring at me. Still all of a tremble I was. Always was sensitive from a child." Poirot dexterously interrupted thkq thrilling personal narrative.

"Yes, yes, one run ee that. And when was the time had seen poor Mrs. McGinty?"

Must have been the day before, when she'd stepped out into the back garden to pick a bit of mint. I was just feedin the chickens."

"Dxd she say anything to you?"

"Just good afternoon and were they hying any better."

"And that's the last time you aw her? You didn't see her on the day she died?"

"No. I saw Hhn though." Mrs. Elliot lowered her voice. "About eleven o'clock in the morning. Just walking along the road. Shuffling his feet the way he always did."

Poirot waited, but k that there was nothing to add.

He asked:

"Well, Iwas and I wasn't. Mind you, I'd always thought he was a bit daft. And no doubt about it, these daft ones do turn nasty, sometimes. My uncle had a feebleminded boy, and he could go very nasty sometimesas he grew up, that was. Didn't know his strenh. Yes, that Bentley was daft all right, and I shouldn't De surprised if they don't hang him when it comes to it, but sends him to the asylum

instead. Why, look at the place he hid the money. No one would hide money in a place IF, he that unless he wanted it to be found. Just silly and simple like, that's what he was."

"Unless he wanted it found," murmured Poirot. "You did not, by any chance, miss a chopper---or an axe?"

"No, sir, I did not. The police asked me that. Asked all of us in the cottages here. It's a mystery still what he killed her with."

IN

Hercule Poirot walked towards the post office.

The murderer had wanted the money found, but he had

not wanted the weapon to be found. For the money would point to James Bentley and the weapon would point to-vl-,om?

He shook his head. He had visited the other two cottages.

They had been less exuberant than Mrs. Kiddle and less dramatic than Mrs. Elliot. They had said in effect that

Mrs. McGinty was a very respectable woman who kept herself to herself, that she had a niece over at Cullavon, that nobody but the said niece ever came to see her, that nobody, so far as they knew, disliked her or bore a grudge against her, that was t true that there was a petition being got up for James Bentley and would they be asked to sign it?

"I get nowhere--nowhere," said Poirot to himself.

"There is nothing--no little gleam. I can well understand the despair of Superintendent Spence. But it should be different for me. Superintendent Spence, he is a very good and painstaking police officer, but me, I am Hercule Poirot.

For me, there should be illumination I"

One of his patent leather shoes slopped into a puddle and he winced.

He was the great, the unique Hercule Poirot, but he was also a very old man and his shoes were tight.

He entered the post office.

The right-hand side was given to the business of His

Majesty's mails. The left-hand side displayed a rich assortment

of varied merchandise, comprising sweets, groceries, toys, hardware, stationery, birthday cards, knitting wool and children's underclothes.

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Poirot proceeded to a leisurely purchase of stamps.

The woman who bustled forward to attend to him was

m!,ddle-ag,e,d with sharp, bright eyes.

Here, said Poirot to himself, "is undoubtedly the

brains of the village of Broadhinny."

Her name, not inappropriately, was Mrs. Sweetiman.

"And twelve pennies," said Mrs. Sweetiman, deftly

extracting them from a large book. "That's four and ten-pence

altogether. Will there be anything more, sir?"

She fixed a bright eager glance on him. Through the door

at the back a girl's head showed listening avidly. She had

untidy hair and a cold in the head.

"I am by way of being a stranger in these parts," aid

Poirot solemnly.

"That's righf, sir," agreed Mrs. Sweetiman. "Come

down from London, haven't you?"

"I expect you know my business here as well as I do," said Poirot with a slight smile.

"Oh no, sir, I've really no idea," said Mrs. Sweetiman

in a wholly perfunctory manner.

"Mrs. McGinty," ;aid Poirot.

Mrs. Sweetiman shook her head.

"That was a sad business--a shocking business."

"I expect you knew her well?"

"Oh I did. As well as anyone in Broadhinny, I should say. She'd always pass the time of day with me when she came in here for any little thing. Yes, it was a terrible tragedy. And not settled yet, or so I've heard people say."

"There is a doubt--in some quarters--as to James Bentley's guilt."

"Well," said Mrs. Sweetiman, "it wouldn't be the first time the police got hold of the wrong manwthough I wouldn't say they had in this case. Not that I should have thought it df him really. A shy awkward sort of fellow, but not dangerous or so you'd think. But there, you never know, do you?" Poirot hazarded a request for notepaper.

"Of course, sir. Just come acros the other side, will you?"

Mrs. Sweetiman bustled round to take her place behind the left-hand counter.

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"What's difficult to imagine is, who it could have been if it wasn't Mr. Bentley," she remarked as she stretched up to a top shelf for notepaper and envelopes. "We do get me nasty tramps along here sometimes, and it's possible one of these might have found a window unfastened and got in that way. But he wouldn't go leaving the money behind him, would he? Not after doing murder to get it--and

ound notes anyway, nothing with numbers or marked.

ere you are, sir, that's a nice blue Bond, and envelopes to
match."

Poirot made his purchase.

h

"Mrs. McGinty never spoke of being nervous of anyone, or afraid, did she?" he asked.

"Not to me, she didn't. She wasn't a nervous woman. She'd 8ray late sometimes at Mr. Carpenter's-that's Holmeleigh at the top of the hill. They often have people to dinner and stopping with them, and Mrs. McGinty would go there in the evening sometimes to help wash up, and she'd come down the hill in the dark, and that's more than I'd like to do. Very dark it ming down that

"Do you know her niece at allmMrs. Burch?"

"I know her just to speak to. She and her husband come over metimes."

"They inherited a little money when Mm McGinty died."

The piercing dark eyes looked at him severely.

"Well, that's natural enough, isn't it, sir? You can't take it with you, and it's only right your own flesh and

blood should get it."

"Oh yes, oh yes, I am entirely in agreement. Was Mm

McGinty fond of her niece ?"

"Very fond of her, I think, ,s, ir. In a quiet way."

"And her niece's husband?

An evasive look appeared in Mrs. \$weetima- r's fac,...

"A far as I know."

"When did you see Mrs. McGinty last?"

Mrs. Sweetiman considered, casting her mind back.

"Now let me see, when was it, Edna?" Edna, in the

doorway, sniffed unhelpfully. "Was it the day she died?

No, it was the day before-or the day before that again?

Y, it wa a Monday. That's right. She was killed on th

Wednesday. Yes, it was Monday. figae came in to buy a bottle of ink."

"She wanted a bottle of ink?"

"Expect she wanted to write a letter," said Mrs. \$weeti-man brightly..

"That seems probable. And she was quite her usual self, then? She did not seem different in any way?"

"N-no, I don't think so."

The sniffing Edna shuffled through the door into the shop and suddenly joined in the conversation.

"She was different," she asserted. "Pleased about some-thing--well--not pleased quite--excited."

"Perh,ps you're right," said Mrs. Sweetiman. "Not

that I noticed it at the time. But now that you say so son of spry, she was."

"Do you remember anything she said on that day?"

"I wouldn't ordinarily. But what with her being murdered

and the police and everything, it makes things stand

out. She didn't say anything about James Bentley, that

I'm quite sure'. Talked about the Carpenters a bit and

Mrs. Upward--places where she worked, you know."

"Oh yes, I was going to ask you whom exactly she worked

for here."

Mrs. Sweetiman replied promptly:

"Mondays and Thursdays s.h,e- went to Mrs. Summer-hayes

at Long Meadow. That s where you are staying,

isn't it?"

"Yes." Poirot sighed. "I suppose there is mt anywhere

else to stay?"

"Not right in Broadhinny, there isn't. I suppose you

aren't very comfortable at Long Meadows? Mrs. Summexhayes

is a nice lady but she doesn't know the first thing

about a house. These ladies don't who come back from

foreign parts. Terrible mess there always was there to clean

up, or so Mrs. McGinty used to say. Yes, Monday afternoons

and Thursday mornings Mrs. Summerhayes, then

Tuesday mornings Dr. Rendell's and afternoons Mrs.

Upwar-d,-at Laburnums. Wednesday was Mrs. Wetherby at

Hunter's Close and Friday Mrs. Selkirk--Mrs. Carpenter

she is now. Mrs. Upward's an elderly lady who lives with

her son. They've got a maid, but she's getting on, and Mrs.

McGinty used to go once a week to give things a good turn

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out. Mr., and Mrs. Wetherby never seem to keep any help

long---she s rather an invalid. Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter have

a beautiful home and do a lot of entertaining. They're all

very nice P.tlet.'

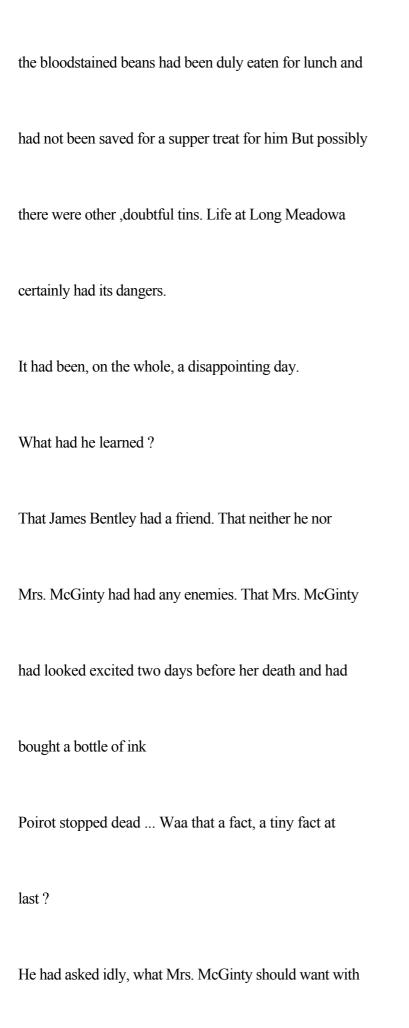
It was

final pronouncement on the population

of Broadhinny that Poirot went out into the street again.

He walked slowly up the hill towards Long Meadow.

He hoped devoutly that the contents of the bulged tin and



a bottle of ink, and Mrs. Sweetiman had replied, quite seriously, that she supposed she wanted to write a letter. There was significance there--a significance that had nearly escaped him because to him, aa to most people, writing a letter was a common everyday occurrence. But it was not ao to Mrs. McGinty. Writing a letter waa to Mrs. McGinty such ap. uncommon occurrence that she had to go out and buy a bottle of ink if she wanted to do so. Mrs. McGinty, then, hardly ever wrote letters. Mrs. \$weetiman, who was the postmistress, was thoroughly cognisant of that fact. But Mrs. McGinty had written a letter two days before her death. To whom had she written and why?

It might be quite unimportant. She might have written

to her nieceto an abaent friend. Absurd to lay roach stres

on a simple thing like a bottle of ink.

But it waz all he had got and he waa going to follow it up.

,4 bottle of ink...

CHAPTER VIII

 \cdot 'A LETTER ?" Bessie Burch shook her head. "No, I didn't get any lertter from auntie. What should she write to me about ?"

Poirot suggested: "There might have been something she wanted to tell you."

"Auntie wasn't much of a one for writing. She was getting on for seventy, you know, and when she w young they didn't get much schooling."

"But she could read and write?"

"Oh, of course. Not much of a one for reading, though she liked her News of the World and her Sunday Comet. But writing came a bit difficult always. If she'd an ything to let me know about, like putting us off from coming to see her, or saying she couldn't come to us, she'd usually ring up Mr. Benson, the chemist next door, and he'd send the message in. Very obliging that way, he is. You see, we're in the area, so it only cost twopence. There's a call-box at the post office in Broadhinny."

Poirot nodded. He appreciated the fact that twopence was better than twopence ha'penny. He already had a picture of Mrs. McGinty as the spare and saving kind. She

had been, he thought, very fond of money.

He persisted gently:

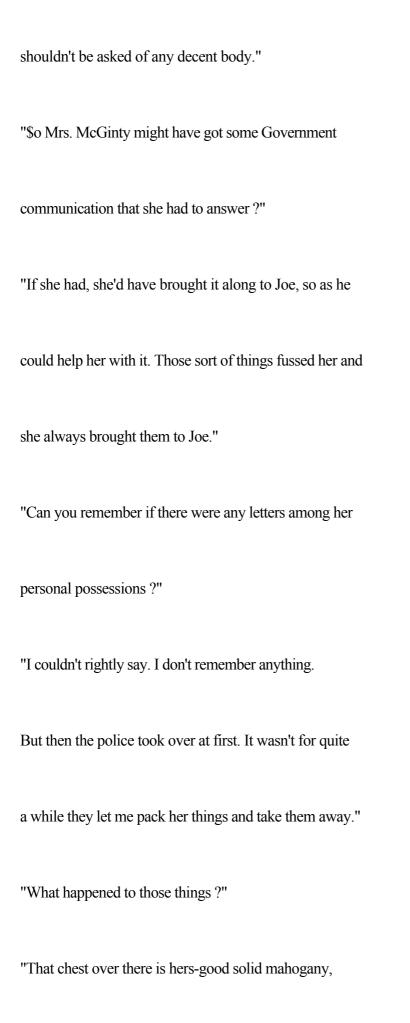
"But your aunt did write to you sometimes, I suppose ?"

"Well, there were cards at 'Xmas."

"And perhaps she had friends in other parts of England to whom she wrote ?"

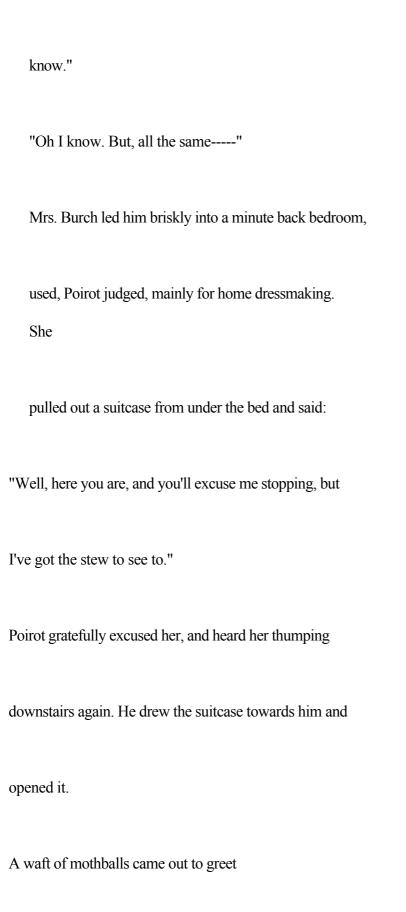
"I don't know about that. There was her sister-in-law, but she died two year ago and there was a Mrs. Birdlip but she's dead too." "So, if abe wrote to omeone, it would be mot likely in answer to a letter she had received ?" ,A, gain Bessie Burch looked doubtful. Idon't know who'd be writing to her, I'm sure. Of course," her face brightene "there's lwa} 'ti Government." Poirot agreed that in these days, communications from what Bessie loosely referred to as" the Government" were the rule, rather than the exception. "And a lot of fandangle it usually is," said Mrs. Burch.

"Forms to fill in, and a lot of impertinent questions as



and there's a wardrobe upstairs, and some good kitchen stuff. The rest we sold because we'd no room for them." "I meant her own personal things." He added: "Such things as brushes and combs, photographs, toilet things, clothes . . . " "Oh, them. Well, tell you the truth, I packed them in a suitcase and it's still upstairs. Didn't rightly know what to do with them. Thought I'd take the clothes to the jumble sale at 'Xmas, but I forgot. Didn't seem nice to take them to one of those nas, ty second-hand clothes people." "I wonder--might I see the contents of that suitcase?" "Welcome, I'm sure. Though I don't think you'll find

anything to help you. The police went through it all, you



With a feeling of pity, he lifted out the contents, so eloquent in their revelation of a woman who was dead. A rather worn long black coat. Two woollen jumpers. A coat and skirt. Stockings. No underwear (presumably Bessie Burch had taken those for her own wear). Two pairs of shoes wrapped up in newspaper. A brush and comb, worn but clean. An old dented silver-backed mirror. A photograph in a leather frame of a wedding pair dressed in the style of thirty years agora picture of Mrs. McGinty and her husband presumably. Two picture post-cards of Margate. A china dog. A recipe torn out of a paper for making vegetable marrow jam. Another piece dealintg with "Flying Saucers" on a sensational note. A third clipping dealt with Mother Shipton's prophecies. There was also a Bible and a Prayer Book.

There were no handbags, or gloves. Presumably Bessie

Burch had taken these, or given them away. The clothes

here, Poirot judged, would have been too smdll for the buxom

Bessie. Mrs. McGinty had been a thin, spare woman.

He unwrapped one of the pairs of shoes. They were of quite good quality and not much worn. Decidedly on the small side for Bessie Butch.

He was just about to wrap. them up neatly again when his

eye waa caught by the. heading on the piece of newspaper.

It was the Sunday Comet and the date was November xgth.

Mrs. McGinty had been killed on November 22nd.

This then was the paper she had bought on the Sunday preceding her death. It had been lying in her room and Bessie Butch had used it in due course to wrap up her atmt's thin;

Sunday, lovember x9th. And on Monday Mrs. McGinty had gone into the pot office to buy a bottle of ink

Could that be because of something she had een in Sunday's newspaper?

He unwrapped the other pair of shoes. They were wpped in the News of the World of the same date.

ne smoothed out both papers and took them over to a chair where he sat down to read them. And at once made a discovery. On one page of the Sunday Comet, omething had been cut out. It was a rectangular'piece out of the middle page. The space was too big for any of tlxe clipping he had found.

He looked through both newpapers, but could find
nothing else of interest. He wrapped them round the 8hoes
again and packed the suitcase timiy.
Then he went downstairs.
Mrs. Burch was busy in the kitchen.
"Don't suppose you found anything?" she said.
п
н т
ı
You do
Alas, no. He added m a casual vmce:"
remember if there was a cutting from a newspaper in your aunt's purse or in her handbag, was there ?"

"Can't remember any. Perhaps the police took it."

But the police had not taken it. That Poirot knew from his study of Spence's notes. The contems of the dead woman's handbag had been listed, no newspaper cutting was among them.

"Eh bien," said Hercule Poirot to himself. "The next step is easy. It will be either the wash-out--or else, at last, I advance."

Sitting very still, with the dusty files of newspaper in front of him, Poirot told himself that his recognition of the significance of the bottle of ink had not played him false.

The Sunday Comet was 'given to romantic dramatisation8 of past events.

The paper at which Poirot was looking wa the Sunday Comet of Sunday, November x9th.

At the top of the middle page were these words in big type:

wo2 vnvs oF nYoom

WHERE ARB THESE WOMth IqOW?

Below the caption were four very blurred reproductions of photographs clearly taken many years ago.

The subjects of them did not look tragic. They looked, actually, rather ridiculous, since nearly all of them were dressed in the style of a bygone day, and nothing is more ridiculous than the fashions of yesterday--though in another t.hirty years or so their charm may have reappeared, or at any rate be once more apparent.

54

Under each photo was a name.

Eva Kan,, th "other wonum" in the famous Craig case.

Janice Courtland, the "tragic wife" whose husband was a

f-d in human form.

Little Lily Gamboll, tragic cPa'ld product of our oercroded

age.

Vera Blake, tmsuspeeting wife of a killer.

And then catne the question in bold type agaia:

ARE THI!S£ WOMI NOW?

Poirot blinked and set himself to read meticulously the somewhat romantic prose which gave the life stories of these dim and blurry heroines.

The name of Eva Kane he remembered, for the Craig

Case had been a very celebrated one. Alfred Craig had

been Town Clerk of Parminster, a conscientious, rather

nondescript little man, correct and pleasant in his behaviour.

He had had the misfortune to marry a tiresome and temperamental

wife. Mrs. Craig ran him into debt, bullied him,

nagged him, and suffered from nervous maladies that unkind

friends said were entirely imaginary. Eva Kane was the

young nursery governess in the house. She was nineteen,

pretty, hel)less and rather simple. She fell desperately in

love with (2raig and he with her. Then one day the nelgh, born heard that Mrs. Craig had been "ordered abroad

for her health. That had been Craig's story. He took her

up to London, the first stage of the journey, by car late one

evening, and" saw her off" to the South of France. Then

he returned to Parminster and at intervals mentioned how

him wife's health was no better by her accounts of it in

letters. Eva Kane remained behind to housekeep for him,

and tongues soon started wagging. Finally, Crmg received new of his wife's death abroa55 He went away and returned a week later, with an account of the funeral.

In sorae ways, Craig was a simple man. He made the mistake of mentioning wheze his wife had died, a moderately well-known resort on the French Riviera. It only remained for someone who had a relative or friend living there to write to them, discover that there had been no death or funeral of anyone of that name and, after a period of rsak gossip, to comatmicate with the police.

55

Subseauent events can be briefly summarised.

Mrs. (raig had not left for the Riviera. She had been of in neat pieces and buried in the Craig cellar. And the autopsy of the remains showed poisoning by a vegetable alkaloid.

Craig was arrested and sent for trial. Eva Kane was originally charged as an accessory, but the charge was dropped, since it appeared clear that she had throughout been completely ignorant of what had occurred. Craig in the end made a full confession and was sentenced and executed.

Eva Kane, who was expecting a child, left Parminster an.d,

in the words of the Sunday Comet: Kindly relatives in tm

New World offered her a home. Changing her name, the pitiful
young girl, seduced in her trusting youth by a cold-blooded
murde er, left these shores for ever, to begin a new life and to
keep for ever locked in her heart and concealed from her
daahter the name of her father.

"My dau£hter shall grow up happy and innocent. Her life shall tot be-tainted by-the cruel past. That I have swon.

My tragic memories shall remain mine alone."

Poor frail trusting Eva Kane. To learn, so younz, the villainy and infamy of man. Where is she now? Is tere, in some Mid-western town, an elderly woman, quiet and respected by her neighbours, who has, perhaps, sad eyes4nd does a young woman, happy and cheerful, ,ith children, perhaps, of ¢ier own, come and see "Momma," telling her of all the little rubs and grievances of daily life---with no idea of what past sufferings her mother has endured?

"Oh la la I" said Hercule Poirot. And passed on to the next Tragic Victim.

Janice Courtland, the "tragic wife," had certainly been unfortunate in her husband. His peculiar practices, referred to in such a guarded way as to rouse instant curiosity, had been suffered by her 'for eight years. Eight years of martyrdom, the Sunday Comet said firmly. Then Janice made a friend. An idealistic and umvor!dly young man who, horrified by a scene between husband and wife that he had witnessed

by accident, had thereupon assaulted the husband with such vigour that the latter had crashed in his skull on a sharply-edged marble fire surround. The jury had found that provotion had been intense, that the young idealist had 56

had no intention of killing, and a trace of five yea for manslaughter was given.

The suffering Janice, horrified by all the publicity the case had brought her, had gone abroad "to forget."

Has she forgotten? asked the Sunday Comet. We hope so.

Somewhere, perhaps, is a happy wife and mother to vhom those years of nightmare suffering silently endured, seem now only like a dream

"Well, well," said Hercule Poirot and passed on to
Lily Gamboll, the tragic child product of our overcrowded
age.

Lily Gamboll had, it seemed, been removed from her overcrowded home. An aunt had assumed responsibility for Lily's life. Lily had wanted to go to the pictures, aunt had said "No." Lily Gamboll had picked up the meat chopper which was lying conveniently on the table and had aimed a blow at her aunt with it. The aunt, though autocratic, was small and frail. The blow killed her. Lily was

a well-developed and muscular child for her twelve years.

An approved school had opened its doors and Lily had disappeared from the everyday scene.

By now she is a oornan, free again to take her place in our ciilisat3n. Her conduct, during her years of confinement and l.obation, is said to hae been exemplary. Does not this show that it is not the child, but the system, that we must blame?

B.ro?ght .u in ignorance, in slum conditions, little Lily was the mctim o.I her environment.

Now, having atoned for her tragic lapse, she lives somewhere, happily, we hope, a good citizen and a good wife and mother. Poor little Lily Gamboll.

Poirot shook his head. A child of twelve who took a swing at her aunt with a meat chopper and hit her hard enough to kill her was not, in his opinion, a nice child. His sympathies were, in this case, vnth the aunt.

He passed on to Vera Blake.

Vera Blake was clearly one of those women with whom everything, goes wronff-. She had first taken up- with a boyfriend who turned out to be a gan, ster wanted by the police for killing a bank watchman. he had then married a respectable tradesman who turned out to be a receiver of stolen goods. Her two children had likewise, in due course, attracted the attention of the police. They went with mamma

to department torea and did a pretty line in shoplifting.

Finally, however, a "good man" had appeared on the scene. He had offered tragic Veraa home in the Dominions.

She and her children should leave this effete country.

Frevn henceforward a New Life aoaited them. At last, after long years of repeated blows from Fate, Vera's troubles ae

"I wonder," said Poirot sceptically. "Very possibly she will find she has married a confidence trickster who works the liners I"

Ks. ne with tousled curly hair over her ears and an enormous Lat, held a bunch of roses up to her ear like a telephone receiver. Janice Courtland had a cloche hat pushed down over her ears and a waist round her hips. Lily Gamboll was a plain child with an adenoidal appearance of open mouth, hard breathing and thick spectacles. Vera Blake was so trag:,cally black and white that no features shoxved. For some reason Mrs. McGinty had torn out this feature, photographs and all. Why? Just to keep because the stories interested her? He thought not. Mrs. McGinty had kept very few things during her sixty-odd years of life. Poirot knew that from the police reports of her belongings.

she had bought a bottle of ink and the inference was that she, who never wrote letters, was about to write a letter. If it had been a business letter, she would probably have asked Joe Burch to help her. So it had not been business.

It had beenwwhat?

Poirot'a eye looked over the four photographs once again.

Where, the Sunday Comet asked, are these women now?

One of them, Poirot thought, might have been in Broad-hinny last November.

It not until the following day that Poirot fotmd himself tte d tete with Miss Pamela Horsefall.

Miss Horsefall couldn't give him long, because sh had

to rush away to Shettielcl, she explain

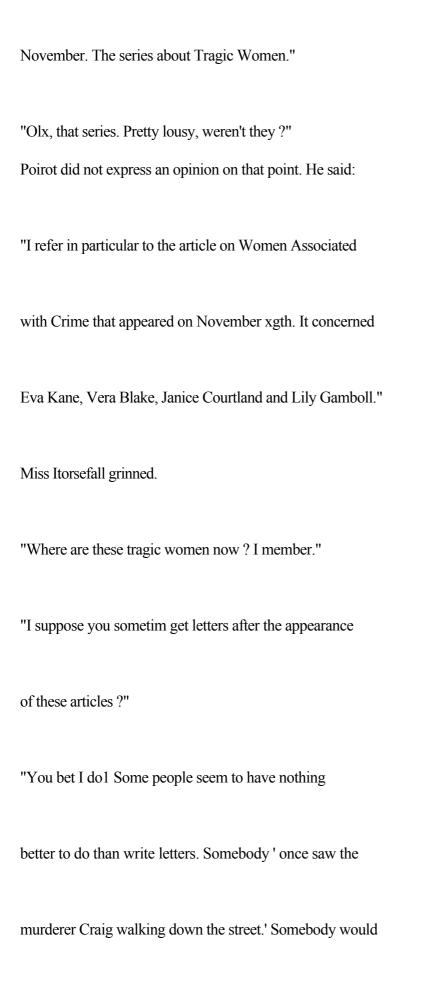
Miss Horsefall was tall, manly-looking, a bard drinker and xaoker, and it would seem, looking at her, kiglfiy improbable that it h wb. ich had -dropped such treacly sentiment in tlae unaay C'omet. Nevertheless it

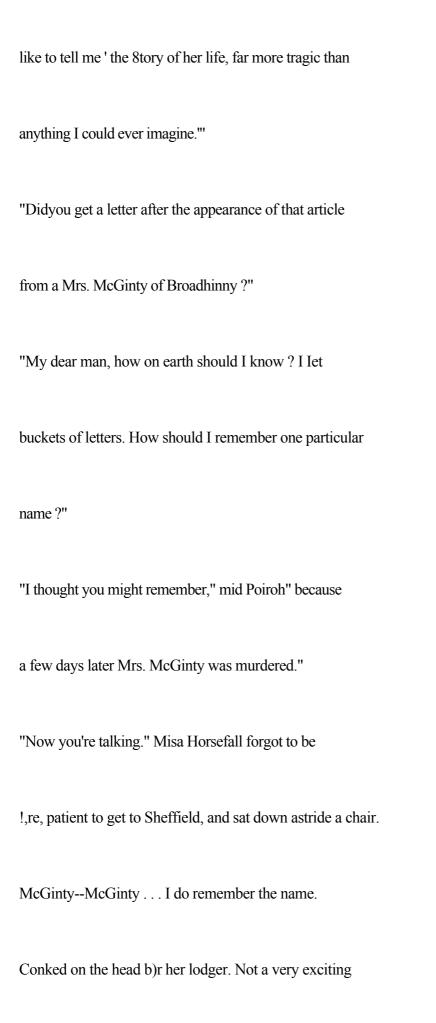
"Cough it up, cough it up," said Miss Horsefall impatiently to Poirot. "Vve got to be going."

It xs about your arucle in the Sunday Comet.

Last

58





c'aae from the point orview of the public. No x appeal about it. You say the woman wrote to me?" "She wrote to the Sunday Confer, I think." "Same thing. It would crone on to me. And with the murder--and her name being in the news-surely I should remember " She toppecl. "Look here--it wasn't from Broadhinny. It was from Broadway." "80 you do remember?" 59

"Well, I'm not sure... But the name... Comic name, isn't it? McGintyl Yes--atrocious writing and quite illiterate. If I'd only realised... But I'm sure it came from Broadway."

Poirot said: "You say yourself the writing was bad.

Broadway and Broadhinny--they could look alike."

"Yes--might be so. After all, one wouldn't be likely to know these queer rural names.. McGi.nty-yes.. I do re-member definitely. Perhaps the muraer nxea the name for me,"

"Can you remember what she said in her letter?"

"Something about a photograph. She knew where there was a photograph like in the paper--and would we pay hex

anything for it and how m,ach?"

"And you answered?"

"My dear man, we don't want anything of that kind. We sent bck the standard reply. Polite thanks but nothing doing. But as we sent it to Broadway--I don't suppose she'd ever get it."

She knew exhere there was a photograph.. "

Into Poirot's mind there came back a remembrance.

Maureen Summerhayes' careless voice saying, "Of course she snooped round a bit."

Mrs. McGinty had snooped. She was honest, but she liked to know about things. And people kept things foolish, meaningless thins from the past. Kept them for sentimental reasons, or just overlooked them and didn't remember they were there-

Mrs. McGinty had seen an old photogxaph and later she had recognised it reproduced in the Sunday Comet. And she had wondered if there was any money in it

He rose briskly. "Thank you, Miss Horsefall. You will pardon me, but those notes on the cases that you wrote, were they accurate? I notice, for instance, that the year of the Craig trial is given wrongly--it was actually a year later than you say. And in the Courtland case, the husband's name was Herbert, I seem to remember, not Hubert. Lily

Gamboll's aunt lived in Buckinghamshire, not Berkshire."

Miss Horsefall waved a cigarette.

"My dear man. No point in accuracy. Whole thing was a romantic farrago from beginning to end. I just mugged up the facts a bit and then let fly with a lot of hou ha."

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"What I am trying to say is that even the characters of your heroines are not, perhaps, quite as represented."

Pamela let out a neighing sound like a horse.
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"Course they weren't. What do y.ou think? I've no doubt that Eva Kane was a thorough little bitch, and not an injured innocent at all. And as for the Courtland woman, why did she suffer in silence for eight years with a sadistic

.,. An ert? Because he was rolling in money, and the romantic

friend hadn't any."

d the tragic child, Lily Gamboll ?"

"I wouldn't care to have her gambolling about me with

a meat chopper."

Poirot ticked off on his fingers.

"They left the country--they went to the New World--

abroad--' to the Dominions '--' to start a New Life.' And

there is nothing to show, is there, that they did not, subse

quently, come back to this country?"

"Not a thing," ag,,reed Miss Horsefall.

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"And now
   I really must fly
   Later
that night Poirot rang up Spence,
   "I've been wondering about you, Poirot- Have you got
   anything? Anything at all?"
   "I have made my inquiries," said Poirot grimly.
   "Yes ?"
   "And the result of them is this: The people zoho li in
Br,dhinny are all very nice people."
   What do you mean by that, M. Poirot?
"Oh, my friend, consider. 'Very nice people.' That has
been, before now, a motive for murder."
CHAPTER IX
i
"ALL Vta¥ nice people," murmured Poirot as he turned/n
at the gate of Crossways, near the station.
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A brass plate in the doorpost announced that Dr. Rendell, M.D., lived there.

Dr. Rendell was a large cheerful man of forty. He greeted his guest with definite empressement.

"Our quiet little village is honoured," he said, "by the presence of the great Hercule Poirot."

"Ab," said Poirot. He was gratified. "You have, then, heard of me?"

"Of courSe we have heard of you. Who hasn't?"

The answer to that would have been damaging to Poirot's self-esteem. He merely said politely: "I am iortunate to find you at home."

It was not particularly fortunate. It was, on the contrary, astute timing. But Dr. Rendell replied heartily:

"Yes. Just caught me. Surgery in a quarter of an hour.

Now what can I d,o for you? I'm devoured with curiosity to know what you re doing doa here. A rest cure? Or have we crime in our midst?"

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"In the past tensemnot the present."
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"Of course. Of course. I was forgetting. But don't say you're concerned with that--at this late date?"

"If I may mention this to you in confidence, I am employed by the defence. Fresh evidence on which to lodge an appeal."

ar. Rendell said sharply: "But what fresh evidence can there be ?"

"That, alas, I am not at liberty to state"

"Oh, quite--please forgive me."

"But I have come across certain things which are, I may say--very curious--very--how shall I put it ?--suggestive ?
I came to you, Dr. Rendell, because I understand that MrS.
McGinty occasionally was employed here."

"Oh yes, yes--she wa.v---- What about a drink? Sherry? Whisky? You prefer sherry? So do I.' He

[&]quot;Past? I don't remembers"

[&]quot;Mrs. McGinty."

brought two glasses and, sitting down by Poirot, he v,x-nt ma: "She used to come once a week to do extra cleaning. I've got a very good housekeeper--excellentmbut the brasses-and scrubbing the kitchen floortwell, my Mrs. Scott can't get down on her very well. Mm McGinty was an excellent worker."

,

Do you think that he was a truthful 0n? '*

Truthful? Well, that's an odd quesUon. I don't think

I could say--no opportunity of imowing. ,far as I know she was quite "

"If then she made a statement to anyone, you think that gatement would probably be true?"

Dr. Rendell looked faintly disturbed.

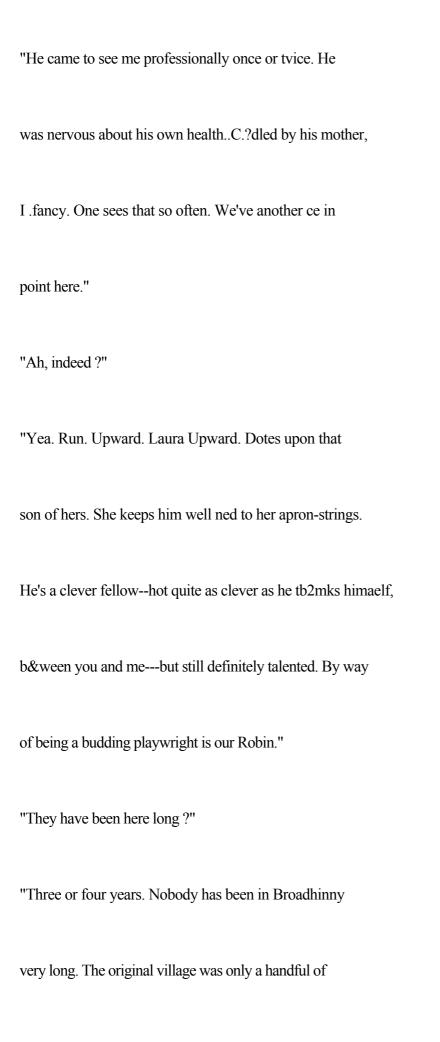
"Oh, I wouldn't like to go as far as that. I really know so little about her. I could ask Mrs. Scott. She'd know better."

"No, no. It would be better not to do that."

"You're arousing my curiosity," said Dr. Rendell

enially. "What was it she was going around saying? omething a bit libellous, was it? Slanderous, I uppose

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Poirot merely shook his head. He said: "You under
   stand, all this is extremely hush hush at present. I am only
   at the very commencement of my investigation."
   Dr. Rendell said rather .drly:
   "You'll have to hurry a blt, won't you?"
   "You are right. The time at my disposal is short."
   "I must say yo/surprise me . . . We've all been quite
   sure down here that Bentley did it. There didn't seem any
   doubt possible."
   "It seemed an ordinary aordid crime-not very interact
   hag.
That ia what you would say?"
   "Yes--yes, that sums it up we fairly"
   "You knew James Bentley? "ry
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cottages, grouped round Long Meadows. You're ataying there, I understand?" "I am," said Poirot without undue elation. Dr. Rendell appeared amused. "Guest Houae indeed," he "What that young woman knows about running a Guest House is just nothing at all She's lived in India all her married life with servants running round all over the place. I bet you're uncomfortabl,e,. Nobody ever stays long. As for poor old Summerhayes, he 11 never make anything of this market gardening stunt he's trying to run. Nice fellow--but not an idea of the com-merdal life--and the commercial life it's got to be nowadays if you want to keep your head above water. Don't run away with the idea that I heal the sick. I'm just a glorified form-filler and signer of certificates. I like the Summerhayes, though. She's a charming creature, and though Summerh,--es has a devilish temper and is inclined to be moody, he s one of the old gang. Out of the top drawer all right. You should have known old Colonel Summerbayes, a regular

tartar, proud as the devil."

"That was Major Summerhayes' father ?"

"Yes. There wasn't much money when the old boy died and of course the, re have been death duties to cripple these people, but they re determined to stick to the old place.

One doesn't know whether to admire them, or whether to

He looked at I watch.

say' Silly fools.""

"I must not keep you," said Poirot.

"I've got a few minutes still. Besides, I'd like you to meet my wife. I can't think where she is. She was immensely interested to hear you were down here. We're both very crime-minded. Red a lot about it."

"Criminology, fiction, or the Sunday papers?" asked Poirot sm'ding.

"All three."

"Do you descend as low as the Sunday Comet" Rendetl laughed.

"What would Sunday be without it?"

"They had some interesting articles above five months
.ago. One in particular about women who had been involved
m murder cases and the tragedy of their lives."

"Yes, I remember the one you mean. All a lot of hooey, though"

"Ah, you think that?"

"Well of course the Craig cse I only know from readin

about i, but one of the othersCourtlaud case, I can tell you t/t worn was no u-agi¢ innoceu. Regular viciou

bit of goods. I know becau an uncle of n. husband. He was certainly no beauty, bu.ne, at.nded

much better. She got hold of that youn ms w,e was

egged him on to murder. Then he goes t.nn. orn

sla°ghter and she goes off, a rich widoW, and rntrmmn

"The Sunday Co,net did

mentiorl

remember whom sin married ,,ot

that. Do yoO

Rendell shook his head.

"Don't think I ever heard the name, I.

me that she'd done pretty well for herseff.ut someone
"One wondered in reading the article here those fou
women were now," mused Poirot.

"I know. One may have met one of thl a at a party last week. I bet they all keep their past pre certainly never recognise any of 'em fro y dark. You¥I graphs. My word, they looked a plain 10,' n those photo"

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The clock chimed and Poirot rose to hi. feet. "I muS
detain you no longer. You have been x
   kind."
   "Not much help, I'm afraid. The n°st
       ere man barelr
knows what his charlady looks like. But h lf,, second, yoO
must meet the wife. She'd never forgive n a
   He preceded Poirot out into the hall, calg,
           loudly
   "ShelaghShelagh-"
   A faint answer came from upstairs.
   "Come down here. I've got something [
   A thin fair-haired pale woman ran lightly !,r youl.
think of that ?" Y
"Oh," Mrs. Rendell appeared to be tartled out
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speaking. Her very pale blue eyes stared Poirot appre/

hensively.

"Madame," said Poirot, bowing over hand in hi most foreign manner.

"We "ea, you

"But we didn't know

went quickly to her husband's face.

"It is from him she takes the Greenwich time," saic

Poirot to himself.

He uttered a few florid phrases and took,...

.... if a e cas leave.

An impression remained vath him o g $\,$;. n, and a tongue-tied, apprehensive Mrs. Rendll.

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So much for the Rendells, where Mrs. McGinty had gone to work on Tuesday mornings.

Hunter's Close was a solidly built Victorian house approached by a long untidy drive overgrown with weeds. It had not originally been considered a big house, but was now big enough to be inconvenient domestically.

Poirot inquired of the foreign young woman who opened the door for Mrs. Wetherby. She stared at him and then said: "I do not know.

Please to come. Miss Henderson perhaps?"

She left him standing in the hall. It {as in an estate agent's phrase "fully furnished"mwith a good many curios from various parts of the world. Nothing looked very clean or well dusted.

Presently the foreign gift reappeared. She said: "Please to come," and showed him into a chilly little room with a large desk. On the mantelpiece was a big and rather evil-looking copper coffee pot with an enormous hooked spout like a large hooked nose.

The door opened behind Poirot and a girl came into the

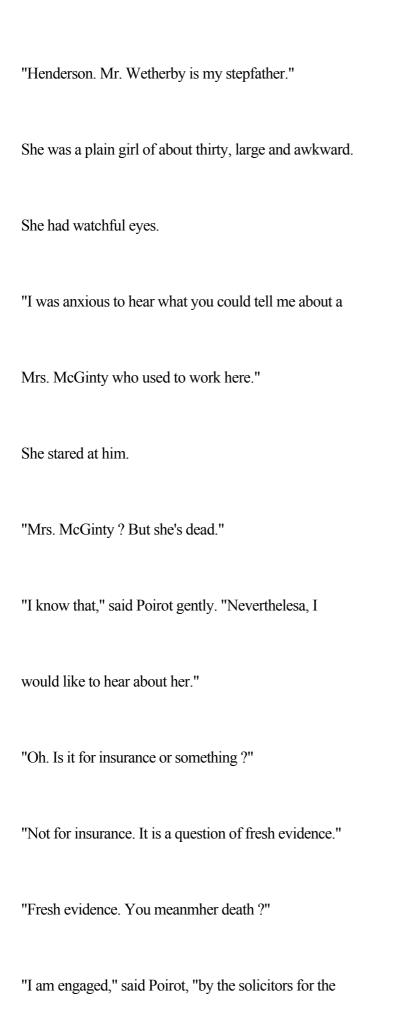
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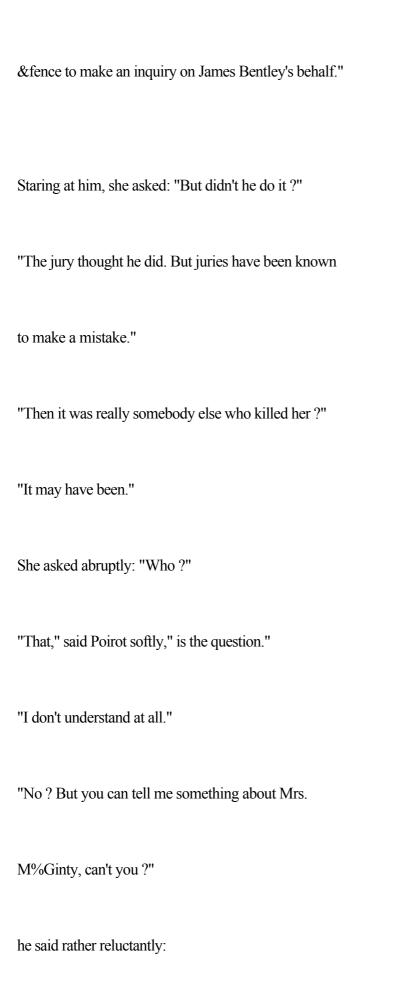
"My mother is lying down," abe said.

"Can I do

anything for you?"

"You are Miss Wetherby?"





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I suppose so
                   What
do you want to know?"
   "Well--to
begin with--what did you think of her?"
   "Why--nothing
in particular. She was just like anybody
   else."
   "Talkative
or silent? Curious or reserved? Pleasant or
   moros-.
A nice woman, or--not a very nice woman?"
   Mist
-Ienderson reflected.
   "She
worked well--but she talked a lot. Sometimes she
said
rather funny things  I didn't--really--like
her very
much."
,The
door
opened and the foreign help said:
, Miss
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Deirdre, your mother say: please to bring."

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' My
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mother wants me to take this gentleman upstairs to her ?"

,

Yes please, thank you."

Deirdre

Henderson looked at Poirot doubtfully. "Will you come up to my mother?" "But certainly."

Deirdre

led the way across the hall and up the stairs. She said inconsequently: "One does get so very tired of foreigners."

Since

her mind was clearly running on her domestic help and not on the visitor, Poirot did not take offence. He reflected that Deirdre Henderson seemed a rather simple young woman-simple to the point of gaucheness.

The

room upstairs was crowded with knick-knacks. It was
the room of a woman who had travelled a good deal and
who had been determined wherever she went to have a souvenir
of the place. Most of the souvenirs were clearly made
for the delight and exploitation of tourists. There were

too many sofas and tables and chair in the room, too

little 'r and too many draperies---and in the midst of it all was Mrs. Wetherby.

iX{rs. Wetherby seemed a small woman---a pathetic smart woman in a large room. That was the effect. But she was not really quite so small as she had decided to appear. The "poor little me "type can achieve its result quite well, even if really of medium height.

She was reclining very comfortably on a sofa and near her were books and some knitting and a glass of orange juice and a box of chocolates. She said brightly:

"You must forgive me not getting up, but the doctor does so insist on mY resting every day, and everyone scolds me if I don't do what I'm told."

Poirot took her extended hand and bowed over it with the proper murmur of homage.

Behind him, uncompromising, Deirdre said: "He wanta to know about Mrs. McGinty."

The delicate hand that had lain passively in his tightened and he was reminded for a moment of the talon of a bird. 'Not really a piece of delicate Dresden chim~-a scratchy predatory claw . . .

Laughing slightly, Mrs. Wetherby said:

"How ridiculous you are, Deirdre darling. Who is Mrs.

McGinty?"

"Oh, Mummy--you do remember really. She worked for us. You know, the one who was murdered."
},Mrs. ,W. etherby closed her eyes, and shivered.
'Don t, darling. It was all so horrid. I felt nervous for weeks afterwards. Poor old woman, but so stupid to keep money under the floor. She ought to have put it in the bank. Of course I remember all that--I'd just forgotten her frame."

Deirdre said stolidly:

"He wants to know about her."

"Now do sit down, M. Poirot. I'm quite devoured by curiosity. Mrs. Rendell just rang up and she said we had a very famous criminologist down here, and she described

ou. And then, when that idiot Frieda described a visitor, felt sure it must be you, and I sent down word for you to come up. Now tell me, what/s all this ?"

"It is as your daughter says, I want to know about Mm.

McGinty. She worked here. She came to you, I unde stand, on Wednesdays. And it was on a Wednesday she aie,, i So she had txen here that day, had, she not?"

suppose so. Yes, I suppose so. I can t really tell now. It's so long ago."

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"Yes. Several months. And she did not say anything that day--anything special ?"
```

"That class of person always talks a lot," aid Mm.

Wetherby with distaste. "One doesn't really listen. And anyway she couldn't tell she was going to be robbed and killed that night, could she?"

"There is cause and effect," said Poirot.

Mrs. Wetherby wrinkled her forehead.

"I don't see what you mean."

"Perhaps I do not see myself--not yet. One work

through darkness towards light Do

you take in the

Sunday

papers, Mrs. Wetherby?"

Her

blue eyes opened very wide.

"Oh

yes. Of course. We

have the Observer and the

```
Sunday
Times. Why?"
   ''I
wondered.
   Mrs.
McGinty took the Sunday Comet
and
the News of the World."
   He
paused but nobody said anything.' g.
sighed
and half closed her eyes. She said :Mrs.
   Wetherby
"It was all very upsetting. That horrible lodger of her.
I don't think really he can have been quite right in the
head. Apparently he was quite an educated man, too.
That makes it worse, doesn't it?"
   "Does it?"
```

"Oh yes--I do think so. Such a brutal crime. A meat

chopper. Ugh I"

"The police never found the weapon," said Poirot.

"I expect he threw it in a pond or something."

"They dragged the p(mds," said Deirdre. "I saw them."

"Darling," her mother sighed, "don't be morbid. You

know how I hate thinking of things like that. My head." Fiercely the girl turned on Poirot.

"You mustn't go on about it," she said. "It's bad for her. She's frightfully sensitive. She can't even read detective stories."

"My apologies," said Poirot. He rose to hi feet. "I

have only one excuse. A man is to be hanged in three weeks'

time. If he did not do it"

Mrs. Wetherby raised herself on her elbow. Her voice was shrill.

"But of course he did it," she cried. "Of course he did."

Poirot shgok his head.

"I am not so sure."

He left the room quickly. As he went down the stairs, the girl came after him. She caught up with him in the hall.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"What I sad, mademoselle.

"Yes, but ... ' She stopped.

Poirot said nothing.

Deirdre Henderson said slowly:

"You've upset my mother. She hates things like thatm robberies and murders andmand violence."

"It must, then, have been a great shock to her when a woman who had actually worked here was killed."

"Oh yes--oh yes, k was."

"She was prostratedtyes?"

"She wouldn't hear anything about it

tr, to--to spare her things. All the beastliness."

'Wnat about the war?"

"Luckily we never had any bombs near here."

"What was your part in the war, mademoiselle?

"Oh, I did V.A.D. work in Kilchester. And some driving for the W.V.S. I couldn't have left home, of course. Mother needed me. As k was, she minded my being out so much. It was all very difficult. And then servants---naturally

mother's never done any housework--she's not strong

enough. And it was so difficult to get anyone at all. That's why Mrs. McGinty was such a blessing. That's when she began coming to us. She was a splendid worker. But of course nothingtanywhere--is like it used to be."

"And do you mind that so much, mademoiselle?"

"I? Oh no." She seemed surprised. "But it's different for mother. She--she lives in the past a lot."

"Some people do," said Poirot. His visual memory conjured up the room he had been in a short time before.

There had been a bureau drawer half pulled out. A drawer full of odds and ends-- silk pin-cushion, a broken fan, a

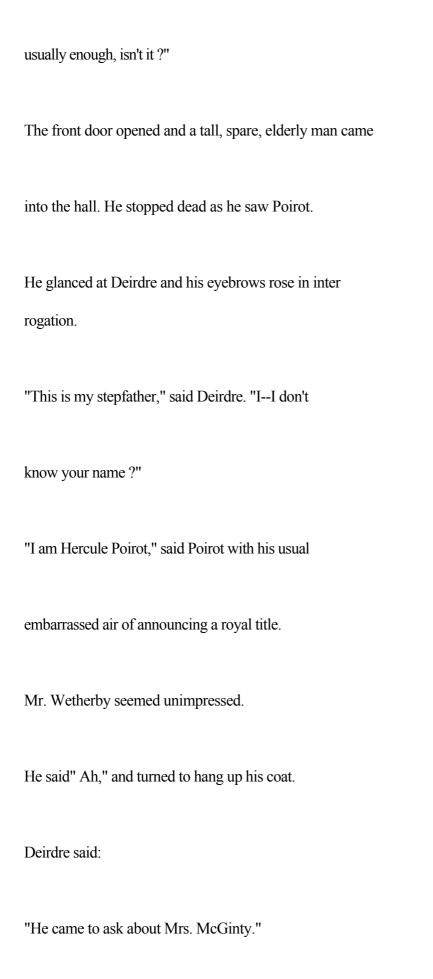
silver coffee pot---some old magazines. The drawer had been too full to shut. He said Softly: "And they keep things--memories of old days--the dance programme, the fan, the photographs of bygone friends, even the menu cards and the theatre programmes because, looking at these thi, , old memor!esre,,vive."

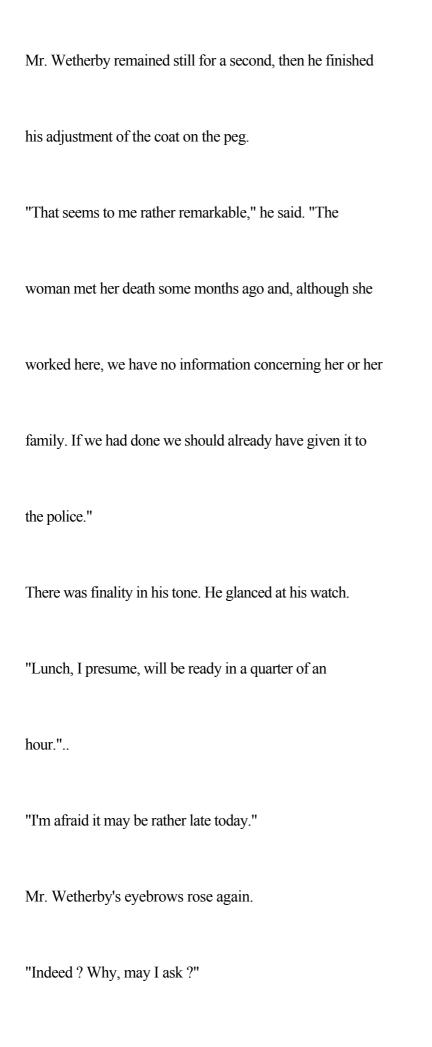
Isuppose that s 't, id Deirdre. "I can't undertand

ou o,?

Deirdre said slowly:

"I don't know that I look anywhere... I mean, to-day's





"Frieda has been rather busy."

"My dear Deirdre, I hate to remind you, but the task of running the household devolves on you.

I should

appreciate a little more punctuality."

?

Poirot opened the front doo snd let himself out. He glanced over his shoulder.

There was cold dislike in the gaze that Mr. Wetherby .gave his stepdaughter. There was something very like hate m the eyes that looked back at him.

CHAPTER X

POIROT LEFT his third call until after luncheon. Luncheon was under-stewed oxtail, watery potatoes, and what Maureen hoped optimistically might turn out to be pancakes. They were very peculiar.

Poirot walked slowly up the hill. Presently, on his right, he would come to Laburnums, two cottages knocked into one and remodelled to modern taste. Here lived Mrs.

Upward and that promising young playwright, Robin

Upward.

Poirot paused a moment at the gate to pass a hand over his moustaches. As he did so a car came twisting slowly down the hill and an apple core directed with force struck him on the cheek.

Startled, Poirot let out a yelp of protest. The car halted and a head came through the window.

"I'm so sorry. Did I hit you?"

Poirot paused in the act of replying. He looked at the rather noble face, the massive brow, the untidy billows of grey hair and a chord of memory stirred. Th apple core, too, assisted his memory.

"But surely," he exclaimed," it is Mrs. Oliver."

It was indeed, that celebrated detective-story writer.

Exclaiming 'Why, it's M. Poirot," the authoress attempted to extract herself from the car. It was a small car and Oliver was a large woman. Poirot hsstened to assist.

Murmuring in 'an explanatory voice, "Stiff after the long drive," Mrs. Oliver suddenly arrived out on the rather in the manner of a volcanic eruption.

Large quantities of apples cme, too, sad robed merrily down the hill.

"Bag'8 burst," explained Mrt Oliver.

.She brushed a few stray pieces of half-consumed aple

from the jutting shelf of her bust and then shook herself

rather like a large Newfoundland dog. A last apple, con cealed in the recesses of her person, joined its brothers and

sisters.

"Pity the bag burst," said Mrs. Oliver. "They were

Cox's. Still I suppose there will be lots of apples down here

in the country. Or aren't there? Perhaps they all get sent

sway. Things are so odd nowadays, I find. Well, how are

you, M. Poirot? You don't live here, do you? No, I'm sure you don't. Then I suppose it's murder?

Not my

hostess, I hope ?"

"Who is your hostess?"

"In there," said Mrs. Oliver, nodding her head. "That's

to say if that's a house called Laburnums, half-way down the hill on the left after you pass the church.

Yes, that

must be it. What's she like?"

"You do not know her?"

"No, I've come down professionally, so to speak. A book of mine is being dramatisedmby P, obin Upward.

We're

supposed to sort of get together over it."

"My felicitations, madame."

"It's not like that at all," said Mrs. Oliver. "So far it's

re agony. Why I ever let myself in for it I don't know.

y books bring me in quite enough money--that is to say
the blood-suckers take most of it, and if I made m?re, they'd
take more, so I don't overstrain myself. But you we no idea
of the agony of having your characters taken and made to
say things that they never would have said, and do thins
that they never would have done. And if you protest, all
they say is that it's' good theatre.' That's all Ro-b-m Upward
thinks of. Everyone says he's very clever. If he s so clever

I don't see why he doesn't write a play of his own and leave my poor unfortunate Finn alone. He's not even a Finn any longer. He's become a member of the Norwegian Resistance movement." She ran her hands through her hair. "What have I done with my hat?"

Poirot looked into the car.

I think madame, that you must have been sitting.on it."

"It does look like it," agreed Mrs. Oliver, surveying the
.-wr.kag. "Oh well," she continued cheerfully, "I never
mind it much. But I thought I might have to go to church

on Sunday, and although the Archbishop has said one needn't, I' still think that the more old-fashioned clergy expect one to wear a hat. But tell me about your murder or whatever it is. Do you remember our murder?"

"Very well indeed."

"Rather fun, wsn't it? Not the actual murder--I didn't like that at all. But afterwards. Who is it this time?"

"Not so picturesque a person as Mr. Shaitana. An elderly charwoman who was robbed and murdered five months ago. You may have read about it. Mrs. McGinty. A young man was convicted and sentenced to death-"

"And he didn't do it, but you know who did, and you're going to prove it," said Mrs. Oliver rapidly. "Splendid."

"You go too fast," said Poirot with a sigh. "I do not yet know who did it---and from there it will be a long way to prove it."

"Men are so slow," said Mrs. Oliver disparagingly.

"I'll soon tell you who did it. Someone down here, I suppose? Give me a day or two to look round, and I'll spot

the murderer. A woman's intuition--that's what you need.

I was quite right over the Shaitana case, wasn't I?"

Poirot gallantly forebore to remind Mrs. Oliver of her rapid changes of suspicion on that occasion.

"You men," said Mrs. Oliver indulgently. "Now if a woman were the head of Scotland Yard"

She left this well worn theme hanging in the air as a voice hailed them from the door of the cottage.

"Hallo," said the voice, an agreeable light tenor. "Is that Mrs. Oliver?"

"Here I am," called Mrs. Oliver. To Poirot she murmured:

"Don't worry. I'll be very discreet."

"No, no, madame. I do not want you to be discreet. On the contrary."

Robin Upward came down the path and through the gate.

He was bareheaded and wore very old grey flannel troUSers and a disreputable sports coat. But for a tendency to embonpoint, he would have been good looking.

"Ariadne, my precious I" he exclaimed and embraced her warmly.

He stood away, his hands on her shoulders.

"My dear, I've had the most marvellou idea for the second act." "Have you?" said Mm. Oliver without enthuim. "This is M. Hercule Poirot." "Splendid," said Robin. "Have you got any luggage?" "Yes, it's in the back." Robin hauled out a couple of suitcases. "Such a bore," he said. "We've no proper servants. Only old Janet. And we have to spare her all the time. That's such a nuisance don't you think? How heavy your cases are. Have you got bombs in them ?" He staggered up the path, calling out over hi shoulder: "Come in and have a drink." "He means you," said Mrs. Oliver, removing her hand-bag, a book, and a pair of old shoes from the front seat. Dd you actually say just now that you wanted me to be

indiscreet?"

"The more indiscreet the better."

"I shouldn't tackle it that way myself," said Mrs. Oliver,

"but it's your murder. I'll help all I can."

Robin reappeared at the front door.

"Come in, come in," he called. "We'll see about the car later. Madre is dying to meet you."

Mrs. Oliver swept up the path and Hercule Poirot followed her.

The interior of Laburnums was charm;rig. Poirot gueased that a very large sum of money had been spent on it, but the result was an expensive andcharming ?implicity. Each small piece of cottage oak was a genuine piece.

In a wheeled chair by the fireplace of the living-room

Laura Upward smiled a welcome. She was a vigorous-looking woman of xy-odd, with iron-grey hair and a determined chin.

"I'm delighted to meet you, Mrs. Oliver," she said. "I

expect you hate people talking to you about your books, but they've been an enormous solace to me for years--and especially since I've been such a cripple."

"That's very nice of you," said Mrs. Oliver, looking ,u, ncorafortable and twistin her hands in a schoolgirlish way.

Oh, this is M. Poirot, a old friend of mine. We met by chance just outside here. Actually I hit him with an apple core. Like William Tell--only the other way about."

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core. Like William Tell--only the other way about."

"How d'you do, M. Poirot. Robim"

"Yes, Madre?"

"Get some drinks. Where are the cigarettes?"

"On that table."

Mrs. Upward asked: "Are you a writer, too, M. Poirot .;" .

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Oliver. "He's a detective. You know. The Sherlock Holmes kind--deerstalkers and violins and all that. And he's come here to solve a murder."

There was a faint tinkle of broken glass. Mrs. Upward said sharply: "Robin, do be careful." To Poirot she said: "That's very interesting, M. Poirot."

"So Maureen Summerhayes was right," exclaimed
Robin. "She told me some long rigmarole about having
a detective on the]remi,ss. She seemed to think it
frightfully funny. But it s really quite serious, isn't it?

"Of course it's serious," said Mrs. Oliver. "You've got a criminal in your midst."

"Yes, but look here, who's been murdered? Or is it someone that's been dug up and it's all frightfully hush hush?"

"It is not hush hush," said Poirot. "The murder, you know about it already."

"Mrs. Mc---something: a charwoman--last autumn," said Mrs. Oliver.

"Oh I" Robin Upward sounded diseppointed. "But that's all over."

"It's not over at all," said Mrs. Oliver. "They arrested the wrong man, and he'll be hanged if M. Poirot doesn't

find the real murderer in time. It's all frightfully exciting."

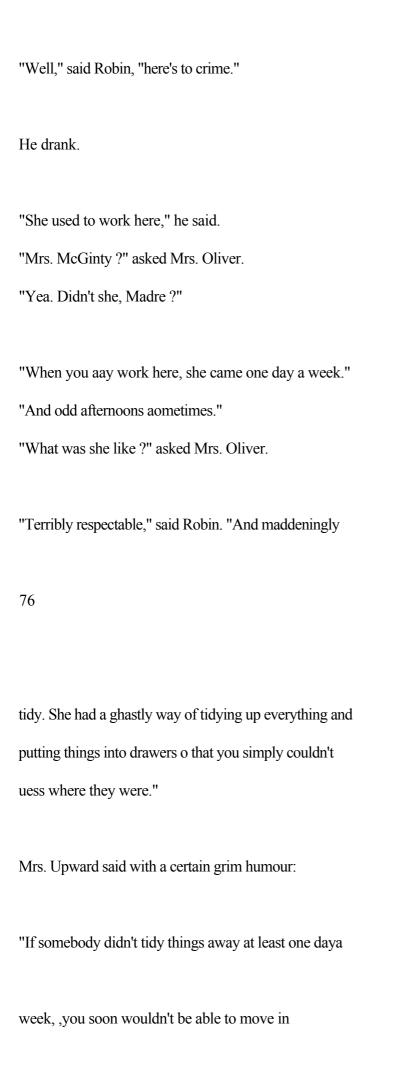
Robin apportioned the drinks.

"White Lady for you, Madre."

"Thank you, my dear boy."

Poirot frowned slightly. Robin handed drinks to Mrs.

Oliver and to him.



small

house.

"I know, Madre, I know. But unles things am left where I put them, I simply can't work at all. My note get all disarranged."

"It's annoying to be as helpless as I am," said Mrs.

Upward. "We have a faithful old maid, but it's all she can manage just to do a little simple cooking."

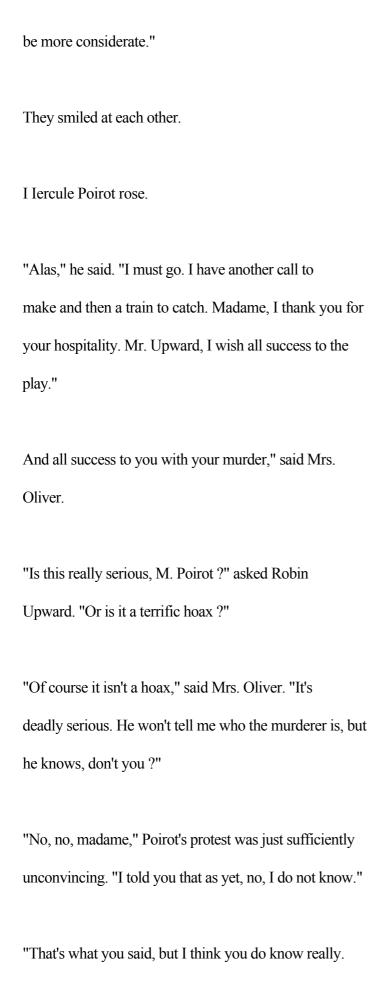
"What is it?" asked Mrs. Oliver. "Arthritis?"

"Some form of it. I shall have to have a permanent
nurse-companion soon, I'm afraid. Such a bore. I like
being independent."

"Now, darling," said Robin. "Don't work yourself up." He patted her arm.

She smiled at him with sudden tenderness.

"Robin's as good as a daughter to me," she said. "He does everything--and thinks of everything. No one could



But you're so frightfully secretive, aren't you?"

Mrs. Upward said sharply:

"Is this really true? It's not a joke?"

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"It is not a joke, madame," said Poirot.

He bowed and departed.

clear tenor voice:

As he went down the path he heard Robin Upward's

"But Ariadne, darling," he said, "it's all very well, but with that moustache and eYe. g, how can one take him seriously? Do you really mean he s good?"

Poirot smiled to himself. Good indeed I

About to cross the narrow lane, he jumped back just in time.

The Summerhayes' station wagon, lurching and bumping, came racing past him. Summerhayes was driving.

"Sorry," he called. "Got to catch train." And faintly

from the distance: "Covent Garden..."

Poirot also intended to take a train--the local train to

Kilchester, where he had arranged a conference with

Superintendent Spence.

He had time, before catching it, for just one last call.

He went to the top of the hill and through gates and up a well-kept drive to a modem house of frosted concrete with a square roof and a good deal of window. This was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter. Guy Carpenter was a partner in the big Carpenter Engineering Works--a very rich man who had recently taken to poliues. He and his

The Carpenters' front door was not opened by foreign help, or an aged faithful. An imperturbable manservant opened the door and was loath to admit Hercule Poirot. In his view Hercule Poirot was the kind of caller who i left outside. He clearly suspected that Hercule Poirot had come to ell something.

"Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter are not at home."

wife had only been married a short tune.

"Perhaps, then, I might wait?"

"I couldn't say when they will be in."

He dosed the door.

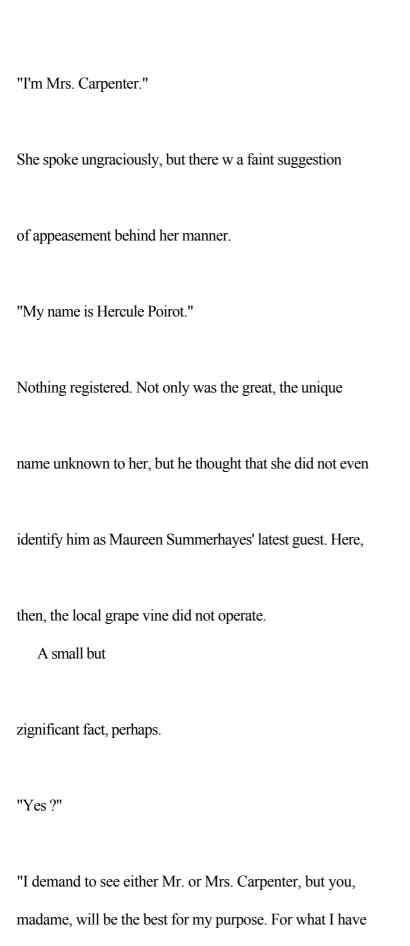
Poirot did not go down the drive. Instead he walked round the corner of the house and almost collided with a tall young woman in a mink coat.

"Hallo," she said. "What the hell do you want?'

Poirot raised his hat with gallantry.

"I was hoping," he aid," that I could see Mr. or Mm

Carpter. Have I the pleasure of -eing Mrs. Carpenter?"



to ask is of domestic matters."

"We've got a Hoover," said Mrs. Carpenter suspiciously.

Poirot laughed.

"No, no, you misunderstand. It is only a few questions that I ask about a domestic matter."

"Oh, you mean one of these domestic questionnaires.

I do think it's absolutely idiotic " She broke off.

"Perhaps you'd better come inside."

Poirot smiled faintly. She had just gtopped herself from uttering a derogatory comment. With her husband's political activities, caution in criticising Government activities was indicated.

She led the way through the hall and into a good-sized room giving on to a carefully tended garden. It was a very new-looking room, a large brocaded suite of sofa and two wing-chairs, three or four reproductions of Chippendale chairs, a bureau, a writing desk. No expense had been paredt the best firms had been employed, and there wa ahaolutely no sign of individual taste. The bride, Poirot thought, had been what ? Indifferent ? Careful ?

He looked at her appraisingly a she turned. An expensive and good-looking young woman. Platinum blonde hsir, carefully applied make-up, but something more--wide eom-flower blue eyes--eyes with a wide frozen tare in beautiful drowned eyes. She said--graciously now, but concealing boredom: "Do sit down." He sat. He said: "You are most amiable, madme. Thee questions now that I wish to ask you. They relate to a Mrs. McGinty who died--was killed that is to say--last November." "Mrs. McGinty? I don't know what you mean?" She was glaring at him. Her eye hard and suspicions. "You remember Mrs. McGinty?" "No, I don't. I don't know anything about her." "You remember her murder? Or is murder so common here that you do not even notice it?" "Oh, the murder? Yes, of course. I'd forgotten what the old woman's name was." "Although she worked for you in this house?" "She didn't. I wasn't living here then. Mr. Carpenter

and I were only married three months ago."

"But she did work for you. On Friday mornings, I think it was. You were then Mrs. Selkirk and you lived in Rose Cottage."

She said sulkily:

"If you know the answers to everything I don't see why you need to ask questions. Anyway, what's it all about ?"
"I am making an investigation into the circumstance of the murder."

"Why? What on earth for? Anyway, why come to me?"

"You might know somethingmthat would help me."

"I don't know anything at all. Why should I? She was only a stupid old charwoman. She kept her money under the floor and somebody robbed and murdered her for it. It was quite disgustixg--beastly, the whole thing.

Like

things you read in the Sunday papers."

Poirot took that up quickly.

"Like the Sunday papers, ye. Like ,the Sunday Comet.

You read, perhaps, the Sunday Comet?

She jumped up, and made her way, blunderingly, towards

the opened french windows. So uncertainly did she go that she actually collided with the window frame. Poirot was reminded of a beautiful big moth, fluttering blindly against a lamp shade. She called: "Guy--Guy I" A man's voice a little way away answered: "Eve ?" "Come here quickly." A tall man of about thirty-five came into sight. He

quickened his pace and came across the terrace to the window. Eve Carpenter said vehemently:

"There's a man here--a foreigner. He's asking me all sorts of questions about that horrid murder last year. Some old charvoman--you remember? I hate things like that.

You know I do."

Guy Carpenter frowned and came into the drawing-room

through the window. He had a long face like a horse, he was pale and looked rather supercilious. His manner was pompous.

Hercule Poirot found him unattractive.

"May I ask what all this is about ?" he asked. "Have you been annoying my wife ?"

Hercule Poirot spread out his hands.

"The last thing I should wislx is to annoy so charming a lady. I hoped only that, the deceased woman having worked for her, she might be able to aid me in the investigations I am making."

"But--what are these investigations?"

"Yes, ask him that," urged has wife.

"A fresh inquiry is being made into the circumstance of

Mrs. McGinty's death."

"Nonsense--the case is over."

"No, no, there you are in error. It is not over."

"A fresh inquiry, you say?" Guy Carpenter frowned.

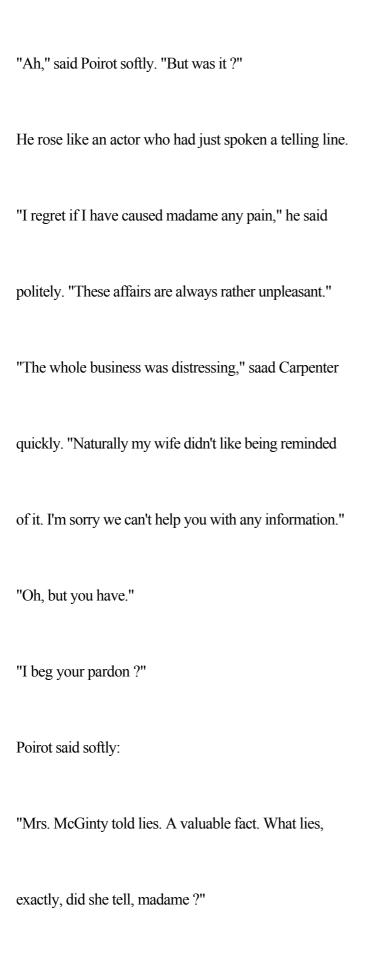
He said suspiciously: "By the police? Nonsense--you're nothing to do th the police."

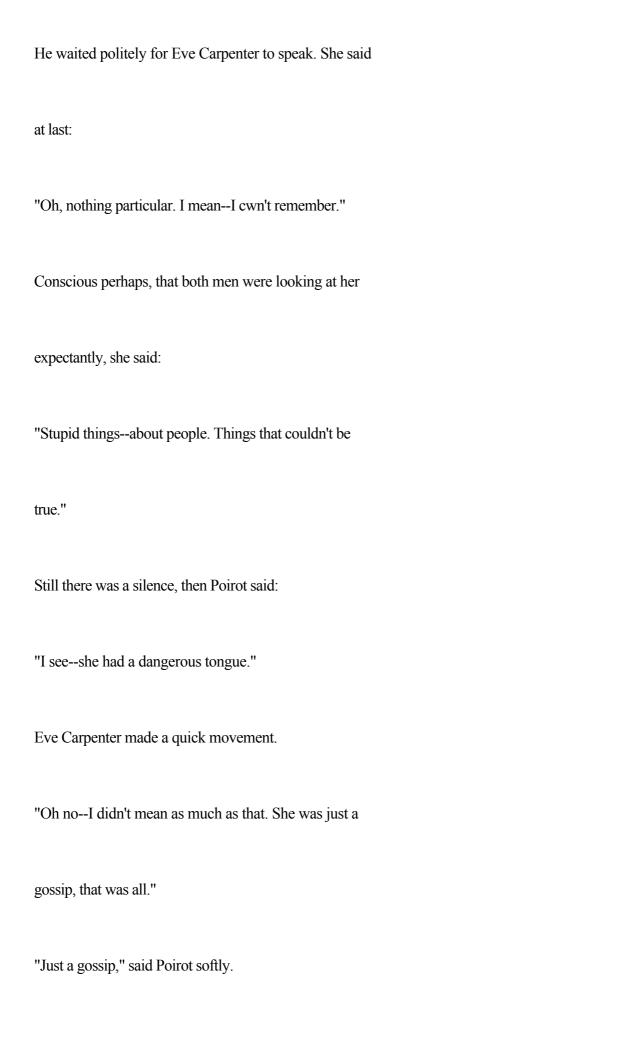
"That is correct. I am working independently of the police."

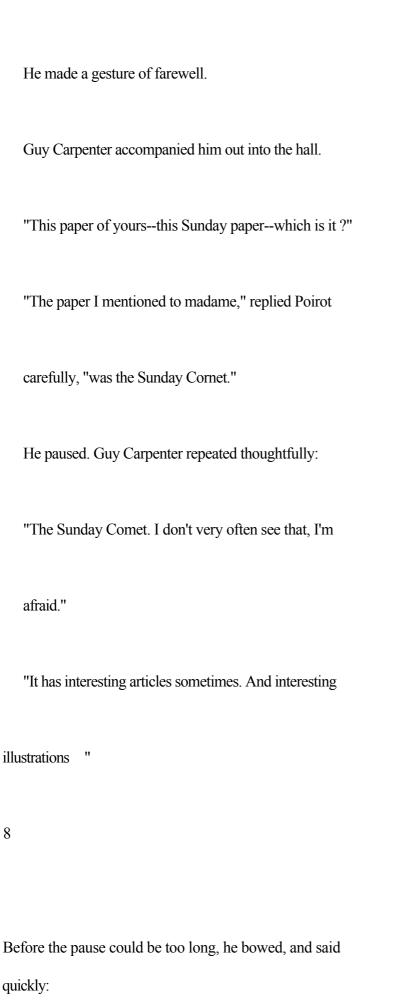
"It's the Press," Eve Carpenter broke in. "Some horrid Sunday newspaper. He said so."

A gleam of caution came into Guy Carpenter's eye. In

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his position he was not anxious to antagonise the Press.
He said, more amicably:
"My wife is very sensitive. Murders and things like that
upset her. I'm sure it can't be necessary for you to bother
her. She hardly knew this woman."
Eve said vehemently:
"She was only a stupid old charwoman. I told him so."
She added:
"And she was a frightful liar, too."
"Ah, that is interesting." Poirot turned a beaming face
8x
   from one to the other of them. "So she told lies. That may
   give us a very valuable lead."
   "I don't see how," said Eve sulkily.
   "The establishment of motive," said Poirot. "That i
   the line I am following up."
   "She was robbed of her savings," said Carpenter sharply.
   "That was the motive of the crime."
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"An revoir, Mr. Carpenter. I am sorry if I have--disturbed
you."
Outside the gate, he looked back at the house.
"I wonder," he said. "Yes, I wonder..."
CHAPTER XI
SUPERINTENDENT SPENCE sat opposite Hercule Poirot and
sighed.
"I'm not saying you haven't got anything, M. Poirot,"
he said slowly. "Personally, I think you have.
   But it's
thin. It's terribly thin I"
Poirot nodded.
"By itself it will not do. There must be more."
   "My sergeant or I ought to have spotted that newspaper."
   "No, no, you cannot blame yourself. The crime was so
   obvious. Robbery with violence. The room all pulled about,
the money nnssmg.''
   Why should there be significance. ,, to
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you in a torn newspaper amongst the other confus,on.

Spence repeated obstinately:

"I should have got that. And the bottle of ink .. '

"I heard of that by the merest Chance."

"Yet it meant something to you--why?"

I "Only because of that chance phrase about writing a etter. You and I, Spence, we write so many letters--to us it is such a matter of course."

Superintendent Spence sighed. Then he laid out on the table four photographs.

"These are the photos you asked me to get--the original photos that the Sunday Comet used. At any rate they're a little, clearer than the reproductions. But upon my word, they re not much to go upon Old, faded--and with women the hair-do makes a difference. There's nothing defufite in any of -th-em to go upon like ears or a profile. That c/oche nat and that arty hair and the roses I Doesn't give you a chance."

"You agree with me that we can discard Vera Blake?"
"I should think so. If Vera Blake was in Broadhinny,

evex3,one xvould know it--telling the sad story of her life seems to have been her speciality."

"What can you tell me about the others?"

"I've got what I could for you in the time. Eva Kane left the country after Craig was sentenced. And I can tell

you the name she took. It was Hope. Symbolic, perhaps?" Poirot murmured:

"Yes, yes--the romantic approach. 'Beautiful Evelyn

Hope is dead.' A line from one of your poets. I'fiare say
she thought of that. Was her name Evelyn, by the way?"

"Yes, I believe it was. But Eva was what she was known as always. And by the way, M. Poirot, now that we're on the subject, the police opinion of Eva Kane doesn't quite

square with this article here. Very far from it."

Poirot smiled.

"What the police think--it is not evidence. But it ia

usually a very sound guide. What did the police think of Eva Kane?"

"That she was by no means the innocent victim that the public thought her. I was quite a young chap at the time and remember hearing it discussed by my old Chief and Inspector Traill who was in charge of the case. Traill believed (no evidence, mind you) that the pretty little idea of putting Mrs. Craig out of the way was all Eva Kane's idea--and that she not only thought of it, but she did it. Craig came home one day and found his little friend had taken a short cut. She thought it would all pass off as natural death, I dare say. But Craig knew better. He got the wind up and disposed of the body in the cellar and elaborated the plan of having Mrs. Craig die abroad. Then, when the whole thing came out, he was frantic in his asservatxons that he'd done it alone, that Eva Kane had known nothing about it. Well," Superintendent Spence shrugged his shoulders, "nobody could prove anything else. The stuff was in the house. Either of them could have used it. Pretty Eva Kane was all innocence and horror. Very well she did it, too: a clever little actress. Inspector Traill had his doubts--but there was nothing to go upon. I'm giving you that for what it's worth, M. Poirot. It's not evidence."

B. utt suggests the possibility that one, at least, of these

' tragac women' was something more than a tragic woman--

that she was a murderess and that, if the incentive was strong enough, she might murder again... And now the next one, Janice Courtland, what can you tell me about her ?"

"I've looked up the files. A nasty bit of goods. If we hanged Edith Thompson we certainly ought to have hanged Janice Courtland. An unpleasant pair, she and her husband, nothing to choose between them, and she worked on that young man until she had him all up in arms. But all the time, mark you, there was a rich man in the background, and it was to marry him she wanted her husband out of the way."

"Did she marry him?"

Spence shook his head.

"No idea."

"She went abroad--and then?"

Spence shook his head.

"She was a free woman. She'd not been charged with anything. Whether she married, or what happened to her, we don't know."

"One might meet her at a cocktail party any day," said

Poirot, thinking of Dr. Rendell's remark.

"Exactly."

Poirot shifted his gaze to the last photograph.

"And the child? Lily Gamboll?"

"Too young to be charged with murder. She was sent to an approved school Good record there. Was taught shorthand and typing and was found a job under probation. Did well. Last heard of in Ireland. I think we could wash

all, she'd made good, and people don't hold it against a kid of twelve for doing something in a fit of temper. What

her out, you know, M. Poirot, same as Vera Blake. After

about washing her out?"

"I might," said Poirot, "if it were not for the chopper.

It is undeniable that Lily Gamboll used a chopper on her aunt, and the unknown killer of Mrs. McGinty used something that was said to be like a chopper."

"Perhaps you're right. Now, M. Poirot, let's have your side of firings. Nobody's tried to do you in, I'm glad to \$ee."

"N-no," said Poirot, with a momentary hesitation.

"I don't mind telling you I've had the wind up about

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you once or twice since that evening in London. Now what

are the possibilities amongst the residents of Broadhinny?" Poirot opened his little notebook.

"Eva Kane, if she is still alive, would be now approaching sixty. Her daughter, of whose adult life our Sunday Comet paints such a touching picture, would be now in the thirties.

Lily Gamboll would also be about that age. Janice Courtland

would now be not far short of fifty."

Spence nodded agreement.

"So we come to the residents of Broadhinny, with

especial reference to those for whom Mrs. McGinty worked."

"That last is a fair assumption, I think."

"Yes, it is complicated by the fact that Mrs. McGinty did occasional odd work here and there, but we will assume for the time being that she saw whatever she did see, pre-sumably a photograph, at one of her regular 'houses.'

"Agreed."

her death. Mrs. Wetherby is the right age for Eva Kane

and she has a daughter of the right age to be Eva Kane's da,u, ghter--a daughter said to be by previous marriage."

And as regards the photograph?,a,

"Mon chef, no positive identification from that is possible.

Too much time has passed, too much water, as you say, has flowed from the waterworks. One can but say this:

Mrs. Wetherby has been, decidedly, a pretty woman. She has all the mannerisms of one. She seems much too fragile and helpless to do murder, but then that was, I understand, the popular belief about Eva Kane. How much actual physical strength would have been needed to kill Mrs.

McGinty is difficult to say without knowing exactly what weapon was used, its handle, the ease with which it could be swung, the sharpness of its cutting edge, etcetera."

"Yes, yes. Why we never managed to find that--but go on.'

"The only other remarks I have to make about the Wetherby household are that Mr. Wetherby could make himself, and I fancy does make himself, very unpleasant if he likes. The daughter is fanatically devoted to her mother. She hates her stepfather. I do not remark on these facts. I present them, only, for consideration. Daughter might

gill to prevent mother's past coming to stepfather's ears.

Mother might kill for same reason. Father might kill to
prevent 'scandal' coming out. More murders have been
committed for respectability than ,o ,n,e would believe possible I
The Wetherbys are' nice people.

?,pence nodded.

If--I say if--there is anything in this Sunday Comet business, then the Wetherbys are dearly the best bet," he said.

"Exactly. The only other person in Broadhinny who would fit in age with Eva Kane m Mrs. Upward. There are two arguments against Mrs. Upward, as Eva Kane, having killed Mrs. McGinty. First, she suffers from ,arhr, itis, and spends most of her time in a wheeled chair

"In a book," said Spence enviously, "that wheeled chair business would be phony, but in real life it's probably all according to Cocker."

"Secondly," continued Poirot, "Mrs. Upward seems of a dogmatic and forceful disposition, more inclined to bully than to coax, which does not agree with the accounts of our young Eva. On the other hand, people's characters do develop and self-assertiveness is a quality that often comes with age."

"That's true enough," conceded Spence. "Mrs. Upward --not impossible but unlikely. Now the other possibilities.

Janice Courtland?"

"Can, I think, be ruled out. There is no one in Broad-hi,n,
Uy the right age."

Unless one of the younger women is Janice Courtland with her face lifted. Don't mind me--just my little joke."

"There are three women of thirty-odd. There is Deirdre
Henderson. There is Dr. Rendell's wife, and there is Mrs.
Guy Carpenter. That is to say, any one of these could be
Lily Gamboll or alternatively Eva Kane's daughter as far as

"And as far as possibility goes?'

Poirot sighed.

"Eva Kane's daughter may be tall or short, dark or fair--we have no guide to what she looks like. We have con-sidered Deirdre Henderson in that role. Now for the other two. First of all I will tell you this: Mrs. Rendell is afraid of something."

"Afraid of you?'

7

"I think so."

"That might be significant," said Spence slowly. "You're suggesting that Mrs. Rendell might be Eva Kane's daughter or Lily Gamboll. Is she fair or dark?"

"Fair."

"Lily Gamboll was a fair-haired child."

"Mrs. Carpenter is also fair-haired. A most expensively made-up young woman. Whether she is actually good-looking or not, she has very remarkable eyes. Lovely wide-open dark-blu6 eyes."

"Now, Poirot" Spence shook his head at his friend.

"Do you know what she looked like as she ran out of the room to call her husband? I was reminded of a lovely fluttering moth. She blundered into the furniture and stretched her hands out like a blind thing."

Spence looked at him indulgently.

"Romantic, that's what you are, M. Poirot,:' he said.

"You and your lovely fluttering moths and wide-open

blue eyes."

"Not at all," said Poirot. "My friend Hastings, was

romantic and sentimental, me never I Me, I am severely

practical. What I am telling you is that if a girl's claJm. to

beauty depend principally on the loveliness of her eyes, then, no matter how short-sighted she is, she will take off

her spectacles and learn to feel her way round even if outlines

are blurred and distances hard to judge."

And gently, with his forefinger, he tapped the photograph

of,e child,-Lily Gamboll in her thick disfiguring, s, pectacles.

,' So thats what you think? Lily Gamboll?'

' No, I speak only of what might be. At the time M.

McGintl- died Mrs. Carpenter was not yet Mrs. Carpenter.

She was a young war widow, very badly off, living in a

labourer's cottage. She was engaged to be married to the

rich man of the neighbourhood--a man with political

ambitions and a great sense of his own importance. If Guy

Carpenter had found out that he was about to marry, say,

a child of low origin who had attained notoriety by .hitting

her aunt on the head with a chopper, or alternatively the

daughter of Craig, one of the most notorious criminals of the

century--prominently placed in your Chamber of Horrors

--well, one asks would he have gone through with it? You

that kind of man. I would put him down as selfish, ambitious, and a man very nice in the manner of his reputation. I think that if young Mrs. Selkirk, as she was then, was anxious achieve the match she would have been very very anxious tt no hint of an unfortunate nature got her fiance's

"I tell you again, ,non chef, I do not know. I examine only

"I see, you think it's her, do you?"

PwatOSsibilities. Mrs. Carpenter was on her guard against me,

ctfful, alarmed."

"That looks bad."

"Yes, yes, but it is all very difficult. Once I stayed with some friends in the country and they xvent out to do the shooting. You know the way it goes? One walks with the dogs and the guns, and the dogs, they put up the game--it flies out of the woods, up into the air and you go bang bang. That is like us. It is not only one bird we put up, perhaps, there are other birds in the covert. Birds, perhaps, with which we have nothing to do. But the birds themselves

do not know that. We must make very sure, chef ami, which is our bird. During Mrs. Carpenter's widowhood,

there may have been indiscretions--no worse than that, but still inconvenient. Certainly there must be some reason why she says to me quickly that Mrs. McGinty was a liar I"
Superintendent Spence rubbed his nose.

"Let's get this clear, Poirot. What do you really think ?"

"What I think does not matter. I must knoo. And a yet, the dogs have only just gone into the covert."

Sence murmured: "If we could get anything at all

definite. One really suspicious circumstance. As it is, it's

all theory and rather far-fetched theory at that. The whole

thing's thin, you know, as I said. Does anyone really

murder for the reasons we've been considering?"

"That depends," said Poirot. "It depends on a lot of

family circumstances we do not know. But the passion for

respectability is very strong. These are not artists or

Bohemians. Very me people live in Broadhirmy. My postmistress

said so. And nice people like to preserve their

niceness. Years of happy marriedlife, maybe, no suspicion

that you were once a notorious figure in one of the most

sensational murder trials, no suspicion that your child is

the child of a famous murderer. 'One might say ' I would

89

rthr di thn bare my husband know' Or 'I would

rthr die n my daught disv who

d y would go on to refl it would

rps, M. McGind

Spee d quietly:

"So you tnk k' the Wtherb."

"No. They fit th bet, perhaps, but that is all. In aal character, Mrs. Upward i a more likely killer tn M. Wherby. Sh has deenafion and xllpower and he fairly dote on her son. To prevent h leng of wt happened before she maed his faer and ted down to rpectable married bliss, I ink she ght go if."

"Would it upset him so much?"

"Personally I do not think . Young Robin h a modem sceptical point of view, is thorohly selfish, and in any case s less devoted, I should y, to his mother t he to Mm. He is not another James Bentley."

"Granting Mrs. Upward was Eva Kane, her son Robin

"Granting Mrs. Upward was Eva Kane, her son Robin wouldn't 1 M. McGin to prevent t fang

"Not for a moment, I should y. He would probably pitalise it. Use the fact for publifiw for Ma pla] I 't RobM Upward coMg a murd for esp-bili, or devotion, or in fa for arising but a good oSd to Robin Upward."

Spence sighed. He id: "It's a de field. We y

able to g something on the pt histo of people.

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others leaving it.
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   Shaken, Y0irot subsided % to a
e'ge head been pushed.
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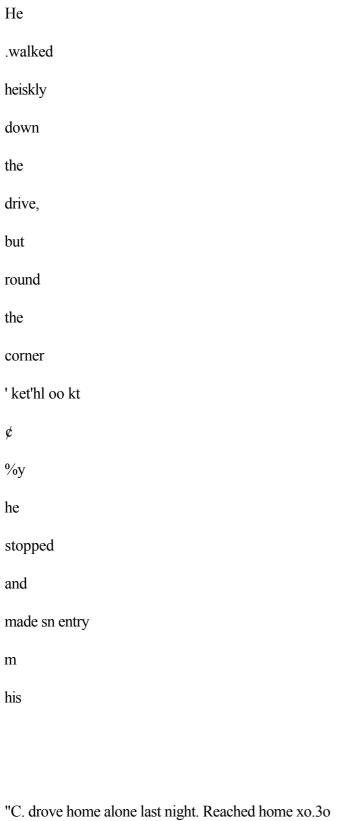
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CHAPTER XII
Tvr:. wha was testing the electric meter passed the
time of day .ith Guy Carpenter's superior manservant,
who was watcli e h'
   ·., rl--lrxl.
"Electric, goin to operate on a new barns,n line
explained. "graded iat rate according to occupancy."
The superi0 butler remarked sceptically:
thm' W,hat ,tou mean is it's going to cost more like' every-
   g else.
   "That depends' Fair shares for all, that's what I ay.
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Did you go i to the meeting at Kilchester last night? " "No."
"Your boss, Mr, Carpenter, spoke very well, they say.
Think he'll get in ?"
   It was a % shave last time
   ١.
   Ye
   A b, ,
I believe"
ncrea aha twenty-five
majority, something
like that. Do You drive him in to these meetings,
or does
he drive himstl
? ,,
',Usuall.y
4;es
himself. Likes driving. He's got a
it. oils entley,
   "" Does hirlf, well. Mrs. Carpenter
dnve' too? n
   "eoSneDn
a lot too fast, in my opinion."
, allv
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do. Was she at the meeting last night too?

Or isn t he Interested in pohtics ?"

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rrexen e
is, anvway However, she
didn
t suc k
   out last night,
ltad a ache or something and left
in the
   mi,,ddle of the3eeche,,
Te electrician peered into the fuse boxes.
   'Nearly
done now," he remarked. He put a few mor
desultory
quettion
S
a he
collected
his
tools
and
prepared to
depart.
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thnapprox.). Could have been at Kilchester Central Station e indicated. Mrs. C. left m..eeting early. Got home only ten minute before (2. Said to have come home by

It was the second entry in the electrician's book. The

"Dr. R. called out on case last night. Direction of
Kilchester. Could have been at Idlchester Central
Station at time indicated. Mrs. R. alone all evening in
house (?) After taking coffee in, Mrs. Scott, housekeeper,
did not see her again that night. Has mll car of hex

At Laburnums, collaboration was in proces

Robin Upward was saying earnestly:

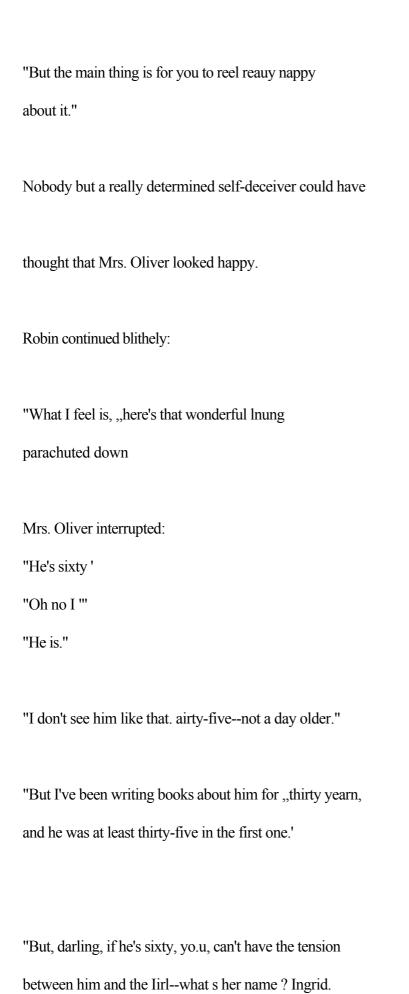
"You do see, don't you, what a wonaerm line tnax

And if we really get a feling of sex a.n.tagonism betwee.n

chap and the ga'l it'll pep the whole .tl?ing up enorn.ousJy

Sadly, Mrs. Oliver ran her hands tlarough her windswept lgre, hair, causing it to look as though swept not by wind ut by a tornado.

"You do see what I mean, don't you, Ariadne darling?"
"Oh, I see what you mean." aid Mrs. O. liver.glo?mily.



I mean, it would make Mm just a nasty old man I'

"It certainly would."

"So you see, he must be thirty-five," said Robin

triumphantly.

"Then he can't be Sven Hjerson. Just make him a

Norwegian young man who's in the Resistance Movement."

"But darling Ariadne, the whole point of the play is Sven

Hjerson. You've got an enormous public who simply adore Sven Hjerson, and who'll flock to see Sven Hjerson. He's bo,x, offce, darling I"

But people who read my books know what he's like!

You can't invent an entirely new young man in the Norwegian

Resistance Movement and just call him Sven

Hjerson."

"Ariadne darling, I did explain all that. It's not a book, darling, it's a play. And we've just got to have glamour!

And if we get this tension, this antagonism between \$ven

Hjerson and this--what's-her-name ?--Karen--you know,

all against each other and yet really frightfully attracted"

"\$ven Hjerson never cared for women," said Mrs.

Oliver coldly.

"But you can't have him a pansy, darling I Not for this sort of plaf., I mean it's not green bay trees or anything

like that. it s thrills and murders and clean open-air fun."

The mention of open air had its effect.

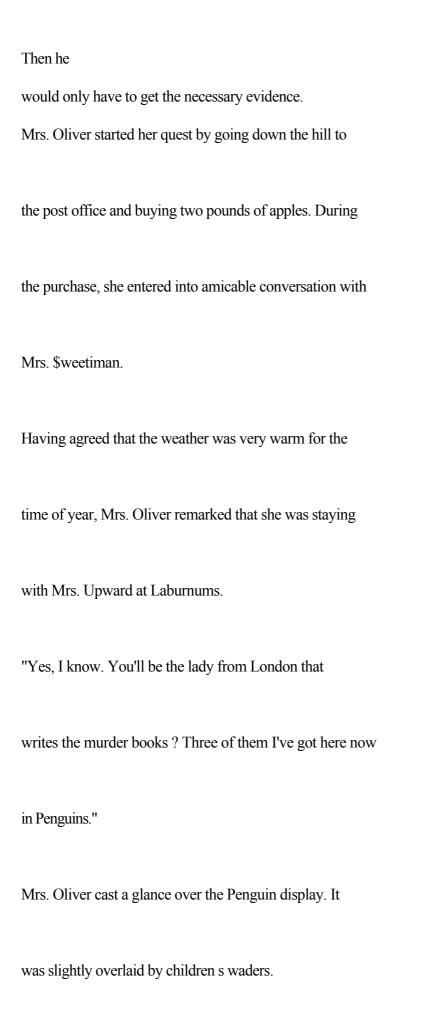
"I think I'm going out," said Mrs. Oliver abruptly.

"I need air. I need air badly."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Robin tenderly.

"No, I'd rather go alone." "Just as you like, darling. Perhaps you're right. I'd better go and whip up an egg nog for Madre. The poor sweet is feeling just a teeny weeny bit left out of things. She does li.e attention, you know. And you'll think about that scene in the cellar, won't ou? The whole thing is coming really wond.erfully well. It s going to be the most tremendous success. I nnow it is I" Mrs. Oliver sighed. "But the main thing," continued Robin, "is for you to feel happy about it I" Casting a cold look at him, Mrs. Oliver threw a showy military cape which she had once bought in Italy about her ample shoulders and went out into Broadhinny. She would forget her troubles, she decided, by turning her mind to the elucidation of real crime. Hercule Poirot needed help. She would take a look at the inhabitants of Broadhinny, exercise her woman's intuition which had never

failed, and tell Poirot who the murderer was.



"The .4flair of the Second Goldfish," she mused, "that's

quite a good one. The Cat it was Who iSled--that's where I

made a blowl?ipe a foot long and. it's really dx feet. Ridiculous

that a blowpipe should be that se, but someone wrote from

a museum to tell me so. Sometimes I think there are people

who only read books in the hope of finding mistakes in

them. What's the other one of them? Oh I Death of a

Ddbutante--that's, frightful tripe I I made sulphonal soluble

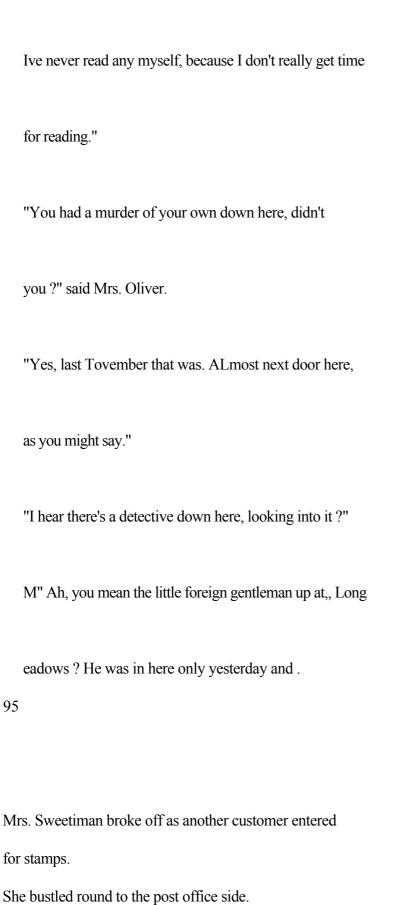
in water and it isn t, and the whole thing is wildly impossible

from start to finish. At least eight people die before Sven

Hjerson gets his brainwave."

"Ver popular they are," said Mrs. Sweetiman, unmoved

,b this interesting serf-criticism. "You wouldn't believe I



"Good morning, Miss Henderson. Warm for the time

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of year, today."
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"Yes, it is."

Mrs. Oliver stared hard at the tall girl's back. She had a Sealyham with her on a lead.

"Means the fruit blossom will get nipped later I" said

Mrs. Sweetiman, with gloomy relish. "How's IVies.

W,e, therby keeping P"

'Fairly well, thank you. She hasn't been out much.

There's been such an east wind lately."

"There's a very good picture on at Kilchester this week,

Miss Henderson. You ought to go."

"I thought of going last night, but I couldn't really

bother."

"It's Betty Grable next week--I'm out of \$s. books of

stamps. Will two va. 6d. ones do you?"

As the girl went out, Mrs. 0liver said:

"Mrs. Wetherby's an invalid, isn't she?'

"That's as may be," Mrs. Sweetiman replied rather

acidly. "There's some of us as hasn't the time to lay by."

"I do so agree with ou," said Mrs. Oliver. "I tell

Mrs. Upward that if she d only make more of an ffort to

use her legs it would be better for her."

Mrs. Sweetiman looked amused.

"She gets about when she wants to--or so I've heard."

"Does she now?"

Mrs. Oliver considered the source of information.

"Janet?" she hazarded.

"Janet Groom grumbles a bit," said Mrs. \$weetiman.

"And you can hardly wonder, can you? Miss Groom's not so young herself and she has the rheumatism cruel bad when the wind's in the east. But archititis, it's called, when it's the gentry has it, and invalid chairs and what not. Ah well, I wouldn't risk losing the use of my legs, I wouldn't. But there, nowadays even if you've got a chilblain you run to the doctor with it so as to get your money's worth out of the National Health. Too much of this health business we've got. Never did you any good thinking how bad you feel."

"I expect you're right," said Mrs. Oliver.

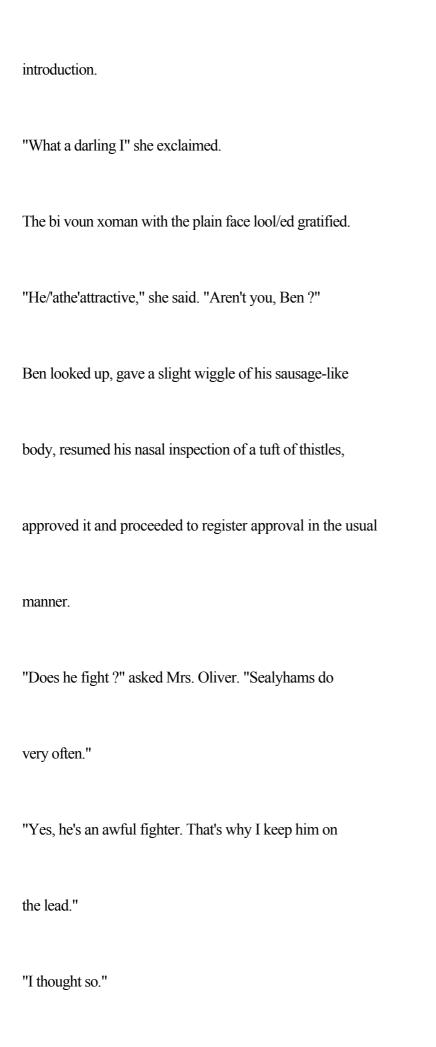
She picked up her a.es and went out in pursuit of Deirdre Henderson.

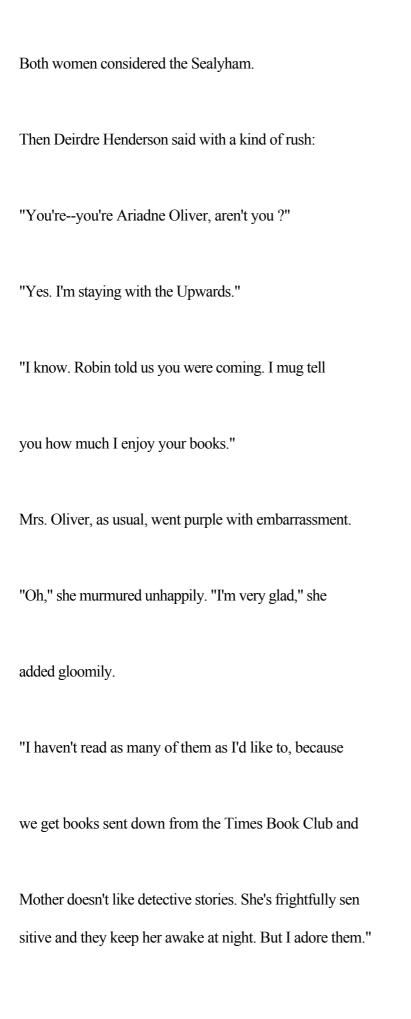
' was not difficult, since the

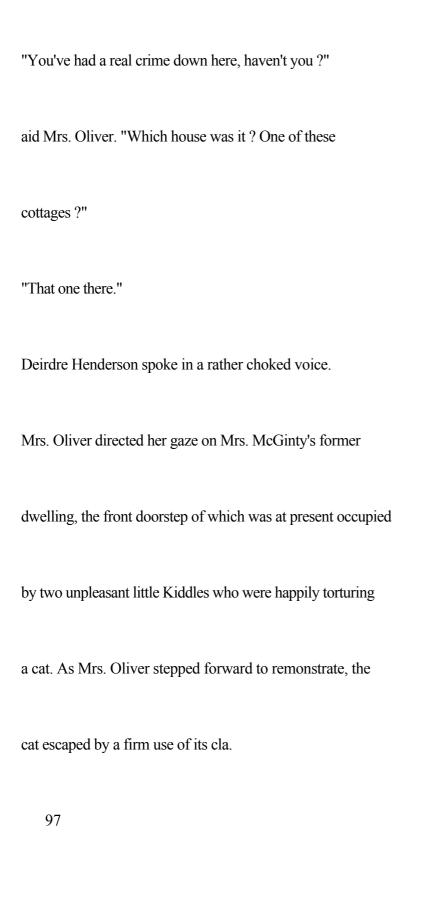
Sealyham was old and fat and was enjoying,,a leisurely examination of tufts of grass and pleasant smeus.

Dogs,

Mrs. Oliver considered, were always a means at







The Idest Kiddle, who had been severely scratched, set

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"" e you right," said Mrs. Oliver, adding to Deirdre
enOeon: "It don't/ook like a house where there's
oc'na', .
   Bohk doesn't"
   -. women seeme to be in accord about that.
   Iv].rS.
   " A-Oliver continued.
   her old charwora, wasn't it, and somebody robbed
   i -H% lodger She had some money--under the floor."
   I s%,
   "Dr Henderson d,d. suddenly:
... u -erhaps it wan t him after all. There s a funny
```

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e.n down her¢a foreigner. His name's Hercule
· 'OIFOE,
" Heule Poirot? Oh yes, I know all about him.
"s. really a deteve?"
. .-vx,y dear he's fightfully celebrated. And terribly
clever.
alli',,Tha, perhaps he'll find out that he didn't do it after
"XV.,,
   odger. e Oey. OU,
get off.'ute
   "B- VOUt wnyr
   use I don't wmt
tO
   M.'-rs-' 'liver--"%-- looked a, her curiously, startled by the
passion - .
```

```
, '-q net voice.
   " sai Deirdre slowly, I didn t know him. But
   once % of his foot caught in a trap and he helped me to
   get him ·
   "xrree. And we talked a little ....
   "t was he like "
   c as dreadfully lonely. His mother had just died.
rte,, w. asriehtfully fon of his mother."
   .nq v areverv fond of yours ?" said Mrs. Oliver
,. ,. [e, That made e understand. Understand what
Ielt, ·
   s,eam Mothex and I--we ye just got each other,
you
"I thought Robin told ,me that you had a stepfather."
```

Deirdre said bitterly: 'Oh yes, I've got a stepfather."

Mrs. Oliver said vaguely: "It's not the same thing, is it, as one's own father. Do you remember your own father?"

"No, he died before I was born. Mother married Mr.

Wetherby when I was four years old. ItI've always hated him. And Mother " She paused before saying:

"Mother's had a very sad life. She's had no sympathy or understanding. My stepfather is a most unfeeling man, hard and cold."

Mrs. Oliver nodded, and then murmured:

"This James Bentley doesn't sound at all like a criminal."

"I never thought the police would arrest him. I'm sure
it must have been some tramp. There are horrid tramps

along this road sometimes. It must have been one of them."

Mrs. Oliver said consolingly:

"Perhaps Hercule Poirot will find out the truth."

"Yes, perhaps-"

She turned off abruptly into the gateway of Hunter's Close.

Mrs. Oliver looked after her for a moment or two, then "drew a small notebook from her handbag. In it she wrote:

'Not Deirdre Henderson," and underlined the not o firmly that the pencil broke.

Half-way up the hill she met Robin Upward coming

down it with a handsome platinum-haired young woman.

Robin introduced them.

"This is the wonderful Ariadne Oliver, Eve," he said.

"My dear, I don't know how she does it. Looks so benevo-lent, too, doesn't she? Not at all as though she wallowed in crime. This is Eve Carpenter. Her husband is going to be our next Member. The present one, Sir George Cart-wright, is quite gaga, poor old man. He jumps out at young girls from behind doors."

"Robin, you mustn't invent such terrible lies. You'll discredit the Party"

"Well, why shoald I care? It isn't my Party. I'm a Liberal. That's the only Party it's possible to belong to nowadays, really small and select, and without a chance of getting in. I adore lost causes."

He added to Mrs. Oliver:

"Eve wants us to come in for drinks this evening. A sort of Party for you, Ariadne. You know, meet the lion. We're all terribly terribly thrilled to have you here. Can't you put the scene of your next murder in Broadhinny?"

"Oh do, Mrs. Oliver," said Eve Carpenter.

"You can easily get Sven Hjerson down he.re," said
Robin. "He can be like Hercule Poirot, staying at the
Summerhayes' Guest House. We're just going there now
becaus' I told Eve Hercule Poirot is just as much a celebrity
in his line as you are in yours, and she says she was rather
rude to him yesterday, so she's going to ask him to the
party too. But seriously, dear, do make your next murder
happen in Broadhinny. We'd all be so thrilled."

"Oh do, Mrs. Oliver. It would be such fun," said Eve Carpenter.

"Who shall we have as murderer and who as victim?" asked Robin.

"Who's your present charwoman?" asked Mrs. Oliver.

"Oh my dear, not that kind of murder. So dull. No,

I think Eve here would make rather a nice victim. Strangled,

perhaps, with her own nylon stockings. No, that's been done."

"I think you'd better be murdered, Robin," said Eve.

"The coming playwright, stabbed in country, cottage."

"We haven't settled on a murderer yet,' said Robin.

"What about my Mamma? Using her wheeled chair so that there wouldn't be footprints. I think that would be lovely."

"She wouldn't want to stab you, though, Robin.

Robin considered.

"No, perhaps not. As a matter of fact I was considering her strangling you. She wouldn't mind doing that half as much."

"But I want you to be the victim. And the person who kills you can be Deirdre Henderson. The repressed plain girl whom nobody notices."

"There you are, Ariadne," said Robin. "The whole plot of your next novel presented to you. All you'll have to do is work in a few fahe clues, and---of course-do the Too

actual writing. Oh, goodness, what terrible dogs Maureen does have."

They had turned in at the gate of Long Meadows, and

two Irish wolfhounds had rushed forward, barking.

Maureen Summerhayes came out into the stableyard with

a bucket in her hand.

"Down, Flyn. Come here, Cormic. Hallo. I'm just

cleaning out Piggy's stable."

"We know that, darling," said Robin. "We can smell

you, from here. How's Piggy getting along?"

We had a terrible fright about him yesterday. He was

nreag down and he didn't want his breakfast. Johnnie and

d up all the diseases in the Pig Book and couldn't sleep

for worrying about him, but this morning he was frightfully

well and gay and absolutely charged Johnnie when Johnnie

came in with his food. Knocked him flat, as a matter of

fact. Jotmnie had to go and have a bath."

"What exciting lives you and Johnnie lead," said Robin.

Eve said: "Will you and Jolmnie come in and have

drinks with us this evening, Maureen?"

"Love to."

"To meet Mrs. Oliver," said Robin, "but actually you can meet her now. This is she."

"Are you really?". said Maureen. "How thrilling?

You and Robin are doing a play together, aren't you?"

"It's coming along splendidly," said Robin. "By the way, Ariadne, I had a brainwave after you went out tlxis morning. About casting."

"Oh, casting," said Mrs. Oliver in a relieved voice.

"I know just the right person to play Eric. Cecil Leech
---he's playing in the Little Rep at Cullenquay. We'll run
over and see the show one evening."

"We want your P.G.," said Eve to Maureen. "Is he about ? I want to ask him to-night too."

"We'll bring him along," said Maureen.

"I think I'd better ask him myself. As a matter of fact I was a bit rude to him yesterday." "Ohl Well, he's somewhere about," said Maureen amnaguely. "In the garden, I think--Cormic--Flyn--ose ed dogs.. "She dropped the bucket with a ci,tter and ran in the direction of the duck pored, whence a furious quacking had arisen. **I0I**

CHAPTER XIII

MRs. OLXVEa, glass in hand, approached Hercule Poi. rot towards the end of the Carpenters' party. Up till ttmt moment they had each of them been the centre of an admir-ing

circle. Now that a good deal of gin had been consumed, and the party was going well, there was a tendency for old friends to get together and retail local scandal, and the two outsiders were able to talk to each other.

"Come out on the terrace," said Mrs. Oliver, in a con-spirator's whisper.

At the same time she pressed into his hand a small piece of paper.

Together they stepped out through the french windows and walked along the terrace. Poirot unfolded the piece of

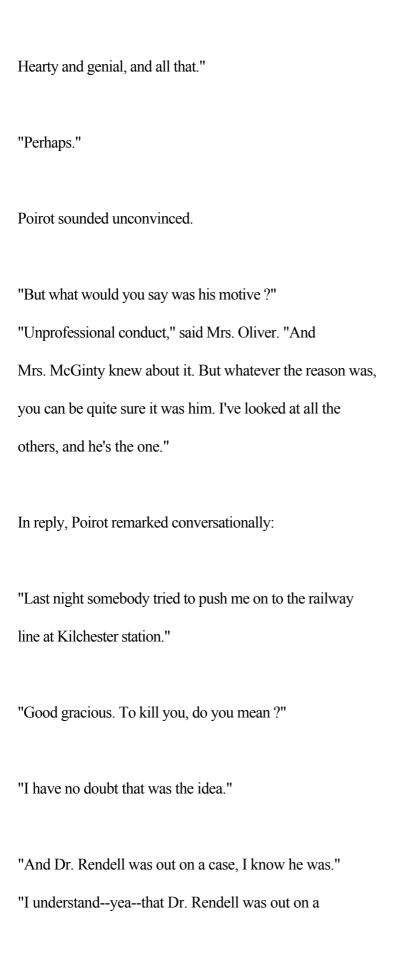
pa'p'er. Rendell," he read.

He looked questioningly at Mrs. Oliver. Mrs. Oliver nodded vigorously, a large plume of grey hair falling across her face as she did so.

"He's the murderer," said Mrs. Oliver.

"You think so? Why?"

"I just know it," said Mrs. Oliver. "He's the type.



"When that settles it," said Mrs. Oliver with satisfaction.

"Not quite," said Poirot. "Both Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter were in Kilchester last night and came home separately.

Mrs. Rendell may have sat at home all the evening listening to her wireless or she may not--no one can say. Miss Henderson often goes to the pictures in Kilchester."

"She didn't last night. She was at home. She told

"You cannot believe all you are told," said Poirot reprovingly. "Families hang together. The foreign maid, Frieda, on the other hand, was at the pictures last night, so she cannot tell us who was or was not at home at Hunter's Close I You see, it is not so easy to narrow things down."

"I can probably vouch for our lot," "said Mrs. Oliver.

"What time did you say this happened?

"At nine thirty-five exactly."

"Then at any rate Laburnums has got a clean bill of health. From eight o'clock to half-past ten, Robin, his mother, and I were playing poker patience."

"I thought possibly that you and he were closeted together do?g the collaboration?"

'Leaving Mamma to leap on a motor bicycle concealed in the shrubbery?" Mrs. Oliver laughed. "No, Mamma was under our eye." She sighed as sadder thought\$ came to her. "Collaboration," she said bitterly. "The whole

thing's a nightmare I How would you like to see a big black moustache stuck on to Superintendent Battle and be told it was you."

Poirot blinked a little.

"But it is a nightmare, that suggestion I N

"Now you know what I suffer."

"I, too, I suffer," said Poirot. "The cooking of Madame Summerhayes, it is beyond description. It is not cooking at all. And the draughts, the cold winds, the upset stomachs of the cats, the long hairs of the dogs, the broken legs of the chairs, the terrible, terrible bed in which I sleep.

.shut his eyes in remembrance of agonies--" the teptd water m the bathroom, the holes in the stair carpet, and the coffee words cannot describe to you the fluid which they serve to you as coffee. It i an affront to the stomach."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Oliver. "And yet, you 'know, she's awfully nice."

"Mrs. Summerhayes? She is charming. She is quite channing. That makes it much more difficult."

"Here she comes now," said Mrs. Oliver.

Maureen Summerhayes was approaching them.

There was an ecstatic look on her freckled face. She carried a glass in her hand. She smiled at them both with ffection.

"I think I'm a bit tiddly," she announced. "Such lots of lovely gin. I do like parties I We don't often have one in Broadhinny. It's because of you both being so celebrated. I wish I could write books. The trouble with me is, I can't do anything properly."

"You are a good wife and mother, madame," said Poirot primly.

Maureen's eyes opened wide. Attractive hazel eyes in a small freckled face. Mrs. Oliver wondered how old she wa Not much more than thirty, she guessed.

"Am I?" said Maureen. "I wonder. I love them all terribly, but is that enough?"

Poirot coughed.

"If you will not think me presumptuous, madame. A wife who truly loves her husband should take great care of his tomaCh. It is important, the stomach."

Maureen looked slightly affronted.

"Jolmnie's got a wonderful stomach," he said indignantly.

"Absolutely flat. Practically not a stomach t

"I was referring to what is put inside it"

"You mean my cooking," said Maureen. "I never think it matters much what one eats."

Poirot groaned.

"Or what one wears," said Maureen dreamily. "Or what one does. I don't think things matter--not really."

She was silent for a moment or two, her eyes aicoholicalJy hazy, as though she was looking into the far distance.

"There was a woman writing in the paper the other day," she said suddenly. "A really stupid letter. Asking

what was best to do--to let your childbe adopted by someone who could give it every advantage--every ad'antage, that's what she said--and she meant a good education, and clothes and comfortable surroundings--or whether to keel it when you couldn't give it advantages of any kind. I think that's xo4

stupid--.rea/-y stupid. If you can just give child enough

to eatthat s all treat matters."

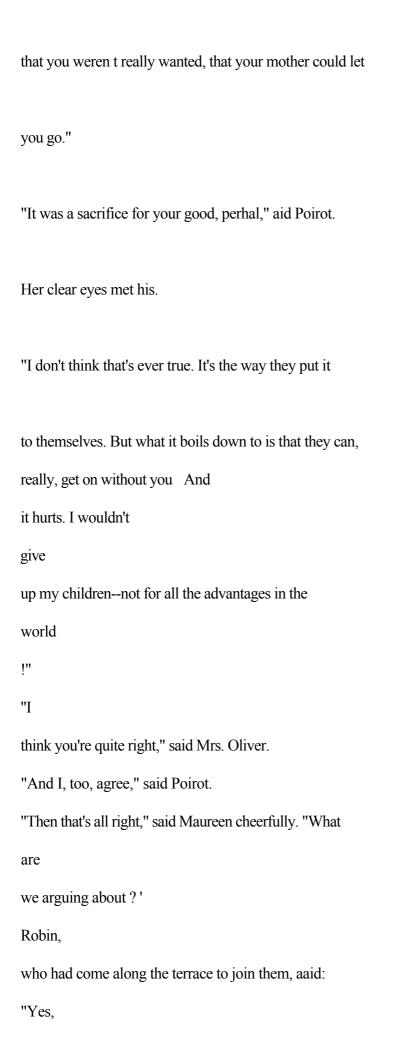
She stared down into her empty glass as though it were

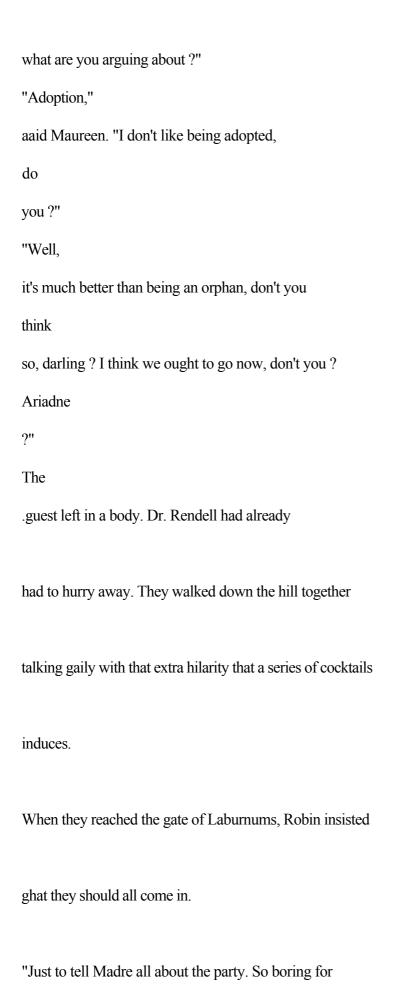
a crystal.

"ir ought to know," she said. "I was an adopted child.

My mother parted with me and I had every advantage, as

they call it. An,d. it's always hurt--always--alwaysto know





her, poor sweet, not to have been able to go because her leg was playing her ul.

But she so hate being left out of things."

I

They surged in cheerfully and Mrs. Upward seemed p eased to see them.

"Who else was there? "she asked. "The Wetherbw?"

-." No, Mm. Wetherby didn't feel well enough, and that Henderson girl wouldn't come without her."

zo5

"She's really rather pathetic, isn't she?" said Shelagh Rendell.

"I think almost pathologi--c,: don't you?" said Robin.

"It's that mother of hers, said Maureen. "Some mothers really do almost eat their young, don't they?"

She flushedsuddenly as she met Mrs. Upward's quizzical eye.

"Do I devour you, Robin ?" Mrs. Upward asked.

"Madre I Of course not I"

To cover her confusion Maureen hastily plunged into an account of her breeding experiences with Irish wolfholmds.

The conversation became technical.

Mrs. Upward said decisively:

"You can't get away from heredity--in people as well as

d°elagh" Rendell murmured:

"Don't you think it's environment?"

Mrs. Upward cut her short.

"No, my dear, I don't. Environment can give a veneer--no

more. It's what's bred in people that counts."

Hercule Poirot's eyes rested curiously on Shelagh Rendell's

flushed face. She said with what seemed unnecessary

passion:

"But that's cruel--unfair."

Mrs. Upward said: "Life is unfair."

The slow lazy voice of Johnnie Summerhayes joined in.

"I agree with Mrs. Upward. Breeding tells. That's been

my creed always."

Mrs. Oliver said questioningly: "You mean things are

handed down. Unto the third or fourth generations'

Maureen Summerhayes said suddenly in her sweet high

voice:

"But that quotation goes on: ' And show mercy unto

thousands.""

Once again everybody seemed a little embarrassed, perhaps

at the serious note that had cr.ept into the conversation.

They made a diversion by attacking Poirot.

"Tell us all about Mrs.. McGinty, M. Poirot Why

didn't the dreary lodger kill her ?"

"He used to mutter, you know," said Robin. "Walking

about in the lanes. I've often met hixm And really, definitely,

he looked frightfully queer."

"You must have some reason for thinking he didn't kill

her, M. Poirot. Do tell us."

Poirot smiled at them. He twirled his moustache.

"If he didn't kill her, who did?"

"Yes, who did?"

Mrs. Upward said dryly: "Don't embarrass the man.

He probably suspects one of us."

"One of us? Oo I"

In the clamour Poirot's eyes met those of Mrs. Upward.

They were amused and--something else---challenging?

"He suspects one of us," said Robin delightedly. "Now

then, Maureen," he assumed the manner of a bullying K.C.,

"Where were you on the night of the--what night zva it?"

"November 22nd," said Poirot.

"On the night of the 22nd?"

"Gracious, I don't know," said Maureen.

"Nobody could know after all this time," said Mr

Rendell.

"Well, I can," said Robin. "Because I was broadcasting

that night. I drove to Coalport to give a talk on Some

Aspects of the Theatre. I remember because I discussed

Galsworthy's charwoman in the Silver Box at great length

and the next day Mrs. McGinty was killed andlwondered

if the charwoman in the play had been like her."

"That's right," said Shelagh Rendell suddenly. "And I remember now because you said your mother would be all alone because it was Janet's night off, and I came down here after dinner to keep her company. Only unfortunately I couldn't make her hear."

"Let me think," said Mrs. Upward. "Ohl yes, of course. I'd gone to bed with a headache and my bedroom faces the back garden."

"And next day," said Shelagh, "when I heard Mrs.

McGinty had been killed, I thought 'Oo! I might have

passed the murderer in the dark 'mbecause at first we all

thought it must have been some tramp who broke in."

"Well, I still don't remember what I was doing," said

Maureen. "But I do remember the next morning. It wa

the baker told us. 'Old Mrs. McGinty's been done in,'

he said. And there I was, wondering why she hadn't turned up as usual."

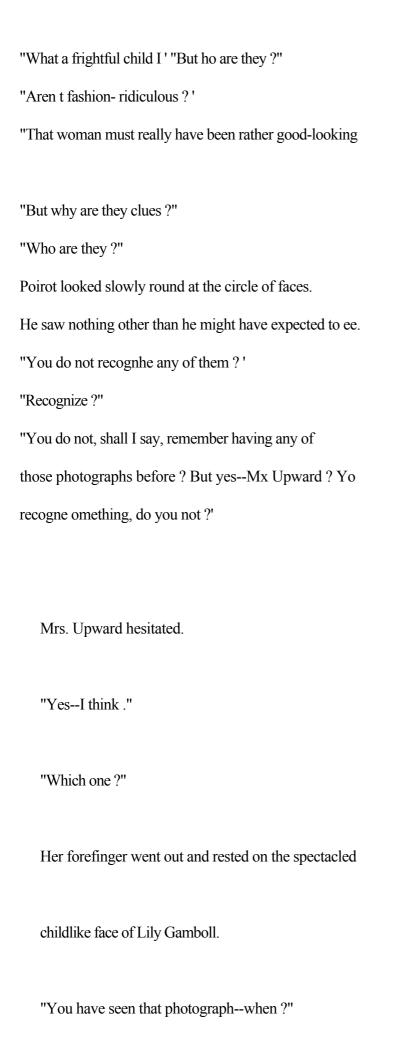
She gave a shiver.

[&]quot;It's horrible really, isn't it?" she said.

Mrs. Upward was still watching Poirot. He thought to himself: "She s a very intelligent womm -- and a ruthless one. Also selfish. In whatever she did, she would have no qualms and no remorse " A thin voice was speaking--urging, querulous. "Haven't you got any clues, M. Poirot?" It was Shelagh RendeR. Johnnie Summerhayes' long dark face lit up enthusiastically. "That's it, clues," he said. "That's what I like in detective stories. Clues that mean everything to the detective -- and nothing to you--until the end when you fairly kick yourself. Can't you give us one little clue, M. Poirot?" Laughing, pleading faces turned to him. A game to th--em' all (or perhaps not to one of them?). But murder wasn t a game--murder was dangerous. You never knew. With a sudden brusque movement, Poirot pulled out fourphotographa from his pocke "You want a clue?" he said. "Vo//A 1" And with a dramatic gesture he to.ed them down on the table. They clustered round, bending over, and uttering ejaculations. "Look I" "What frightful frumps I"

"Just look at the roses. 'Rome, to, a/t/may I''

"My dear, that hat I"



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"Quite recently Now
where--no, I can't remember.
But
I'm sure I've seen a photograph just like that."
   She
sat frowning, her brows drawn together.
She
came out of her abstraction as Mrs. Rendell came to her.
"Goodbye,
Mrs. Upward. I do hope you'll come to tea with
me one day if yot feel up to it."
   "Thank
you, my dear. If Robin pushes me up the hill."
"Of course, Madre. I've developed the most tremendous muscles
pushing that chair. Do you remember the day we
   went
to the Wetherbys and it was so muddy
   "Ah I" said Mrs. Upward suddenly.
   "What is it, Madre?"
   "Nothing. Go on."
   "Getting you up the hill again. First the chair skidded
and then I skidded. I thought we'd never get home."
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Laugb:ug, they took their leave nd trooped out.

Alcol:d'., Poirot thought, certainly loosens the tongue.

Had he been wise or foolish to display those photographs?

Had that gesture also been the result of alcohol?

He wasn't sure.

But, murmuring an excuse, he turned back.

He pushed open the gate and walked up to the house.

Through the open window on his left he heard the murmur

of two voices. They were the voices of Robin and Mrs.

Oliver. Very little of Mrs. Oliver and a good deal of Robin.

Poirot pushed the door open and went through the right-hand

door into the room he had left a few moments before.

Mrs. Upward was sitting before the fire. There was a rather

look on her face. She had been so deep in thought that

his entry startled her.

At the sound of the apologetic little cough he gave, she

looked up sharply, with a start.

"Oh, 'she said. "It's you. You startled me."

." .I am sorry, madame. Did you think it was someone

et,se t Who did you think it was ?"

xo9

She did not answer that, merely said:

"Did you leave something behind?

"What I feared I had left was danger."

"Danger?"

"Danger, perhaps, to you. Because you recognised one of those photographs just now."

"I wouldn't say recoguised. All old photographs look exactly alike."

"Listen, madame. Mrs. McGinty also, or so I believe, recognised one of those photographs, fflnd Mrs. McGty is dead."

With an unexpected glint of humour in her eye, Mm. Upward said:

"Mrs. McGinty's dead. How did she die ? \$ticldng Ig, r neck outjust like L Is that what you mean ?"

"Yes. If you know anything--anything at all, tell it to me now. It will be safer so."

"My dear man, it's not nearly so simple as that. I'm not at all sure that I do know anything--certainly nothing as definite as a fact. Vague recollections are very tricky things. One would have to have some idea of how and

where and when, if you follow what I mean."

"But it seems to me that you already have that idea."

"There is more to it than that. There are various factors to be taken into consideration. Now it's no good your rushing me, M. Poirot. I'm not the kind of person who rushes into decisions. I've a mind of my own, and I take time to make it up. When I come to a decision, I act. But not till I'm ready."

"You are in many ways a secretive woman, madame"

"Perhaps--up to a point. Knowledge is power. Power

must only be used for the right ends. You will excuse my

saying that you don't perhaps appreciate the pattern of our

English country life'

"In other words you say to me, 'You ar only a damned foreigner."

Mrs. Upward mm]ed slightly.

"I shouldn't be a rude as that."

"If you do not want to talk to me, there is SuPerintendent Spence.'

"My dear M. Poirot. Not the police. No at this stage"
He shrugged his shoulders.

ΙlΟ

"I have warned you." he said.

For he was sure that by now Mrs. Upward reraembetl quite well exactly when and where she had seen th photograph of Lily Camboll.

CHAPTER XI¥

"D£cm-LY," said Hercule Poirot to himself the followinl morning, "the spring is here."

His apprehensions of the night before seemed singularly groundless.

Mrs. Upward wa a sensible woman who could take gooCl care of herself.

Nevertheless in some curious way, she intrigued him.

did not at all understand her reactions. Clearly she did no
want him to. She had recognised the photograph of Lilt
Gamboll and she was determined to p. lay a lone hand.

Poirot, pacing a garden path while he pursued thes
reflections, was startled by a voice behind him.

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Mrs. Rendell had come up so quietly that he had no
heard her. Since yesterday he had felt extremely nervous" Pardon, madame. You made me jump."
1Vlrs. Rendell smiled mechaniCally. If he were nervou
1Vlrs. Rendell, he thought, was even more so. There w
twitching in one of her eyelids and her hands
restlessly together.
"I--I hope I'm not inteupting yo Perhstn you'r
busy."
"But no, I am not busy. The day it is fine. I enjoy t!
feeling of spring. It is good to be outdoors. In the hous
of Mrs. Summerhayes there h always, but tlwy, th
current of air."
"The current
"What in England you cll a draught."
"Yes. Yes, I suppose there i'
Ш
"The windows, they will not shut and the doo they fl,dY
open all the time."
"It's rather a ramshackle house. And of COurse, the
```

Summerhayes are so badly off they can't afford to do muc..

"M. Poirot."

to it. I'd let itgo if I were them. I know it's been ia the,t

family for hundreds of years, but nowadays you just can

cling on to things for sentiment's sake."

"No, we are not sentimental nowadays."

There was a silence. Out of the corner of his eS'e PoiroPt

watched those nervous white hands. He waited fo her tt;°

take the initiative. When she did speak it was abruptly.

"I suppose," she said," that when you are, well, i'tavti)'

gating a thing, you'd always have to have a pretext ?"

Poirot considered the question. Though he did not 100

at her, he was perfectly well aware of her eager sideway/a glance fixed on him.

,,

[&]quot;As you say, madame," he replied noncommittally.

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ia a convenience."
"To explain your being there, and--and askin§ things./
"It might be expedient."
"Why--why are you really here in Broadhixmr,
Poirot?"
"He turned a mild surprised gaze on her.
But, my dear lady, Itold you--to inquire into he deatl
of Mrs. McGinty."
Mrs. Rendell said sharply:
"I know that's what you say. But it's ridiculou."
Poirot raised his eyebrows.
"Is it ?"
"Of course k is. Nobody believes it."
"And yet I assure you, it is simple fact." '
Her pale blue eyes blinked and she looked away.
"You won't tell me."
"Tell you--what, madame?"
She changed the subject abruptly again, it seemed.
"I wanted to ask you--about anonymous letters,"
"Yes," said Poirot encouragingly as she stopped.
"They're really always lies, aren't they?"
"They are somettmes lies," said Poirot cautiously.
"Usually," she persisted.
"I don't know that I would go as far as aying that,"
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Shelagh Rendell said vehemently:

"They're cowardly, treacherous, mean things I"

"All that, yes, I would agree."

"And you wouldn't ever believe what was said in one, would you?"

"That is a very difficult question," said Poirot gravely,;

"I wouldn't. I wouldn't believe anything of that kind.

She added vehemently:

"I know why you're down here. And it isn't true, I tell you, it isn't true."

She turned sharply and walked away.

Hercule Poirot raised his eyebrows in an interested fashion.

"And now what?" he demanded of himself. "Am I being taken up the garden walk? Or is this the bird of a different colour

?It

was all, he felt, very confusing.

Mrs. Rendell professed to believe that he was down here for a reason other than that of inquiring into Mrs. McGinty's death. She had suggested that that was only a pretext.

Did she really believe that? Or was she, as he had just said to himself, leading him up the garden walk?

What had anonymous letters got to do with it?

Was Mrs. Rendell the original of the photograph that
Mrs. Upward had said she had "seen recently"?
In other words, was Mrs. Rendell Lily Gamboll? Lily
Gamboll, a rehabilitated member of society, had been last
heard of in Eire. Had Dr. Rendell met and married his
wife there, in ignorance of her history? Lily Oamboll had
been trained as a stenographer. Her path and the doctor's

Poirot shook his head and sighed.

might easily have crossed.

It was all perfectly possible. But he had to be sure.

A chilly wind sprang up suddenly and the sun went in.

Poirot shivered and retraced his steps to the house.

Yes, he had to be sure. If he could find the actual weapon of the murder

And at that moment, with a strange feeling of certainty--he saw it.

xx3

.afterwards he wondered whether, subconsciously, he had seen and noted it .much earlier. It had stood there, presumably, ever since he had come to Long Meadows . . .

There on the littered top of the bookcase near the window.

He thought: "Why did I never notice that before?"

He picked it up, weighed it in his hands, examined it,

balanced it, raised it to strike

Maureen came in through the door with her usual rush, two dogs accompanying her. Her voice, light and friendly, said:

"Hallo, are you playing with the sugar cutter?"

"Is that what it is? A sugar cutter?"

"Yes. A sugar cutter--or a sugar hammer--I don't

know what exactly is the right tenn. It's rather fun, isn't

it? So childish with the little bird on top."

Poirot turned the implement carefully in his hands.

Made of much ornamented brass, it was shaped like an

adze, heavy, with a sharp cutting edge. It was studded here

and there with coloured stones, pale blue and red. On top

of it was a frivolous little bird with turquoise eye.

"Lovely thing for killing anyone, wouldn't it be?" said

Maureen conversationally.

She took it from him and aimed a murderous blow on a

point in space.

"Frightfully easy," ,she said. "What's that bit in the

Idylls of the King? "Mark's way," he said, and clove

him to the brain.' I should think you could cleave anyone

to the brain with this all right, don't you?"

Poirot looked at her. Her freckled face was serene and

cheerful.

She said:

"I've told Johnnie xvhat's, coming to hi,m,,if I get fed up

with him. I call it the xvife's best friend I

She laughed, put the sugar hammer down and turned tmvards the door.

"What did I come in here for ?" she mused. "I can't remember... Bother I I'd better go and see if that pudding needs more water in the saucepan

٠,,

,P,o?rot's voice stopped her before she got to the door. ,

You br,o, ught this back with you from India, perhaps?'
"Oh no,' said Maureen. "I got it at the B. and B. at

"B. and B. ?" Poirot was puzzled.

"Bring and Bu,," explained Maureen glibly. "At the Vicarage. You bring things you don't want, and you buy something. Something not too frightful if you can.find it.

Of course there's procucally never anything you really want.

I got this and that coffee pot. I like the coffee pot's nose and I liked the little bird on the hammer."

The coffee pot was a small one of beaten copper. It

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had a big curving spout that struck a familiar note to
Poirot.
"I think they come from Baghdad," said Maureen. "At
least I think that's what the Wetherbys said. Or it may have
been Persia."
"It was from the Wetherbys' house, then, that these
came?"
"Yea. They've got a most frightful lot of junk. I must
go. That pudding."
       Poirotp'
       the
   She went out. The door banged.
       cked up
sug'4.r cutter again and took it to the window
On
the cutting edge were faint, very faint, discoloumtions.
Poirot nodded his head.
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He hesitated for a moment, then he carried the sugar

hammer out of the room and up to his bedroom. There he packed it carefully in a box, did the whole thing up neatly in paper and string, and going downstairs again, left the house.

He did not think that anyone would notice the disap-pearance of the sugar curer. It was not a tidy household.

At Laburnums, collaboration was pursuing its difficult

"But I really don't feel it's right making him a vegetarian, darling," Robin was objecting. "Too faddy. And definitely not glamorous."

"I can't help it," said Mrs. Oliver obstinately. "He's

always been a vegetarian. He takes round a little machine for grating raw carrots and turnips."

"But, Ariadne, precious, rchy?"

"How do I know?" said Mrs. Oliver crossly. "How do I know why I ever thought of the revolting man? I must have been mad I Why a Finn when I know nothing about Finland? Why a vegetarian? Why all the idiotic mannerisms

he's got? These things just happen. You try something--and people seem to like it--and then you go on--and before yo know where you are, you've got someone like that m,ddening Sven Hjerson tied to you for life. And people even write and say how fond you must be of him. Fond of him? If I met that bony, gangling, vegetable-eating Finn in real life, I'd do a better murder than any I've ever invented."

Robin Upward gazed at her with reverence.

"You know, Ariadne, that might be rather a marvellous idea. A real Sven Hjerson--andyou murder him. You might make a Swan Song book of itmto be published after your

"No fear I "said Mrs. Oliver. "What about the money?

Any money to be made out of murders I want now."

"Yes. Yes. There I couldn't agree with you more."

The harassed playwright strode up and down.

"This Ingrid creature is getting rather tiresome," he said.

"And after the cellar scene which is really going to be marvellous, I don't quite see how we're going to prevent the next scene from being rather an anticlimax."

Mrs. Oliver was silent. Scenes, she felt, were Robin Upward's headache.

Robin shot a dissatisfied glance at her.

That morning, in one of her frequent changes of mood,

Mrs. Oliver had disliked her windswept coiffure. With a brush dipped in water she had plasteredher grey locks close to her skull. With her high forehead, her massive glasses, and her stern air, she was reminding Robin more and more of a school teacher who had awed his early youth. He found it more and more difficult to address her as darling, and even flinched at" Ariadne."

He said fretfully:

"You know, I don't feel a bit in the mood to-day. All that gin yesterday, perhaps. Let's scrap work and go into

the question of casting. If we can get Denis Callory, of course it will be too marvellous, but he's tied up in films at the moment. And Jean Bellews for Ingrid would be just right--and she wants to play it which is so nice. Eric--as I say, I've had a brainwave for Eric. We'll go over to the Little Rep to-night, shall we? And you'll tell me what you think of Cecil for the part."

Mrs. Oliver agreed hopefully to this project and Robin went off to telephone.

"There," he said returning. "That's all fixed."

iv

The fine morning had not lived up to its promise. Clouds

had gathered and the day was oppressive with a threat of

rain. As Poirot w.alked through the dense shrubberies to

the front door of Hunter's Close, he decided that he would

not like to live in this hollow valley at the foot of the hill.

The house itself was closed in by trees and its walls suffocated

in ivy. It needed, he thought, the woodman's axe.

(The axe. The sugar cutter?)

He rang the bell and after getting no response, rang it

again.

It was Deirdre Henderson who opened the door to him.

She seemed surprised.

"Oh," she said," it's you."

"May I come in and speak to you?"

"I--well, yes, I suppose so."

She led him into the small dark sitting-room where he

had waited before. On the mantelpiece he recognised the

big brother of the small coffee pot on Maureen's shelf. Its

vast hooked nose seemed to dominate the small Western

room with a hint of Eastern ferocity.

"I'm afraid," said Deirdre in an apologetic tone, "that we're rather upset to-day. Our help, the German girl--she's

going. She's only been here a month. Actually it

seems she just took this post to get over to this country

because there was someone she wanted to marry. And now

they've fixed it up, and she's going straight off tonight."

Poirot clicked his tongue.

"Most inconsiderate."

"It is, isn't it? My stepfather says it isn't legal. But even if it isn't legal, if she just goes off and gets married, I don't see what one can do about it. We shouldn't even have known she was going if I hadn't found her packing her clothes. She would just have walked out oft he house without a-word."

"It is, alas, not an age of consideration.

"No," said Deirdre dully. "I suppose it's not."

She rubbed her forehead with the back of her hand.

"I'm tired," she said. "I'm, very tired."

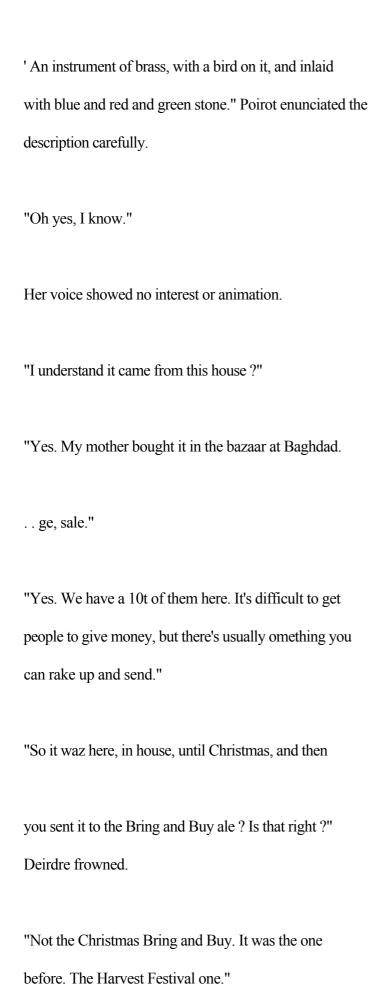
"Yes," said Poirot gently. I think you may be very tired."

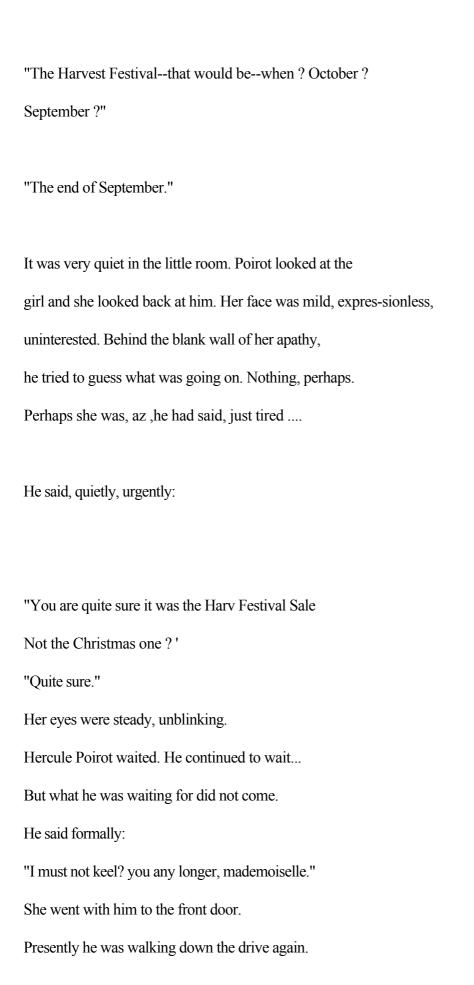
"xqxat was it you wanted, M. Poirot?"

"I wanted to ask you about a sugar hammer."

"A sugar hammer?"

"Her face was blank, uncomprehending.





Two divergent statements--statements that could not possibly be reconciled.

Who was right? Maureen Summerhayea or Deirdre Henderson?

If the sugar cutter had been used as he believed it had been used, the point was vital. The Harvest Festival had been the end of September. Between then and Christmas, on November z2nd, Mrs. McGinty had been killed. Whose property-had the sugar cutter been at that time?

He went to the post office. Mrs. Sweetiman was always helpful and she didher best. She'd been to both sales, she said. She always went. You picked up many a nice bit there. She helped, too, to arrange things beforehand.

Though most people brought things with them and didn't send them beforehand.

A brass hammer, rather like an axe, with coloured stones and a little bird? No, she couldn't rightly remember. There was such a lot of things, and so much confusion and some things snatched up at once. Well, perhaps she did remember something like that--priced at five shillings it had been, and with a copper coffee pot, but the pot had got a hole in the bottom--you couldn't use it, only for ornament. But she couldn't remember when it was--some time ago. Might have been Christmas, might have been before. She hadn't been noticing

She accepted Poirot's parcel. Registered? Yea.

She copied down the address; he noticed just a sharp flicker of interest in her keen black eyes as she handed him the receipt.

Hereule Poirot walked slowly up the hill, wondering to himself.

Of the two, Maureen Summerhayes, scatterbrained,

cheerful, inaccurate, was the more likely to be wrong.

Harvest or Christmas, it would be all one to her.

Deirdre Henderson, slow, awkward, was far more likely

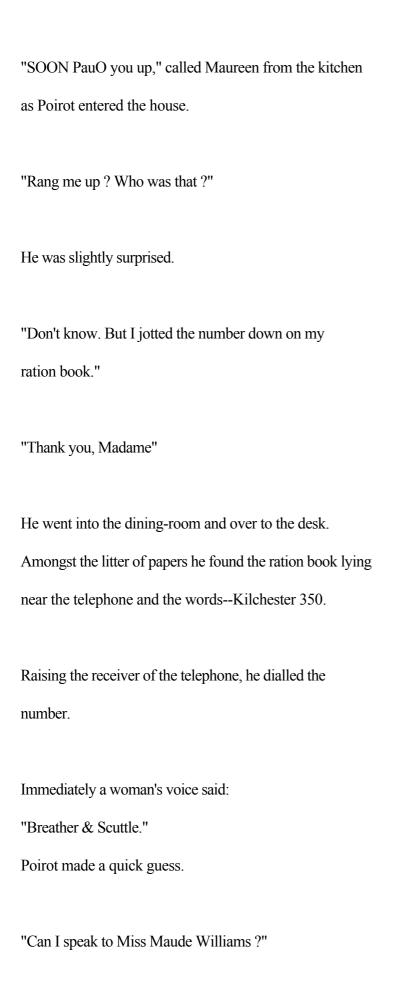
to be accurate in her identification of times and dates.

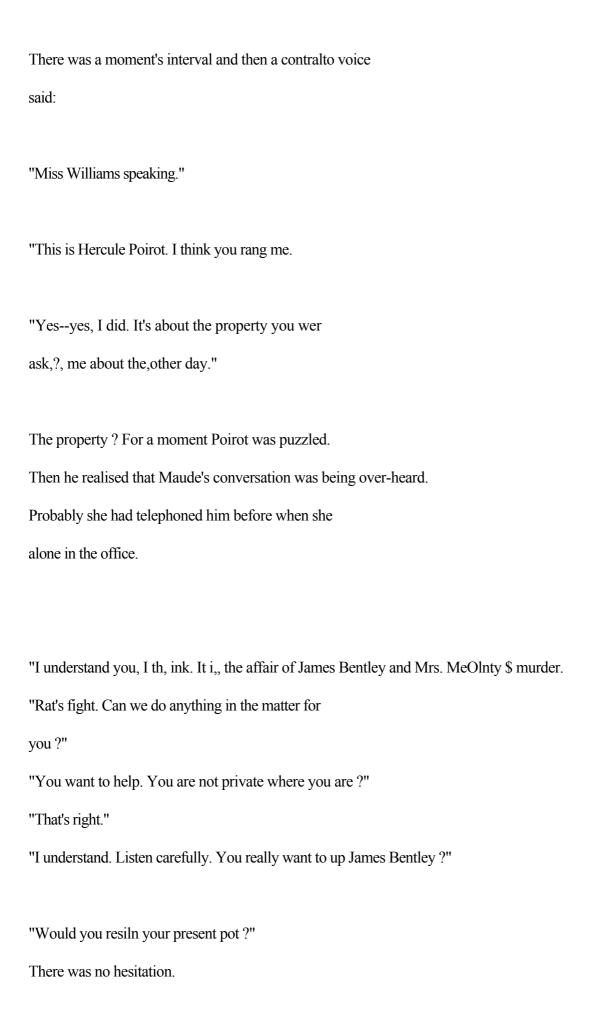
Yet there remained that irking question.

Why, after his questions, hadn't she asked him why he wanted to know? Surely a natural, an almost inevitable, question?

But Deirdre Henderson hadn't asked it.

CHAPTER XV





"Yes."

~ Would you be willing to take a domestic post? Possibly with not very eongenisl people."

,, yes.,,

"Could you get away at once? By to-morrow, for ista=nce.),

"Oh yes, M. Poirot. I think that could be managed."

"You understand what I want you to do. You would

be a domestic help--to live in. You can cook?"

A faint amusement tinged the voice.

"Very well."

"Bon D:u, what a rarltyl Now listen, I am coming into Kilchester at once. I will meet you in the same csf wh,,eee.ou, ,,b?ore, at lunch time."

"An admirable young woman," he reflected. "Quick-witted, knows her own rnirtd---perhal:, even, she can

With some aiculty he disinterred the local telephone directory from under a treatise on pigkceping and looked up the Wetherbys' number.

The voice that answered him was that of Mrs. Wemerby.

"'Allo'?' Allo? It is M. Poirot--you remember,

"I don't think I "

"M. Hercule Poirot."

"Oh yes--of coursedo forgiw me. Rather a domestic

"It is for that reson exactly I rang you up. I am desolated to lesrn of your "

"So ungrateful--these foreign girls. Her fare paid over here, and everything. I do so hate ingratitude."

"Yes, yes. I do indeed sympathise. It is monstrous--that is why I hasten to tell you that I have, perhaps, a solution.

By the merest chance I know of a young woman wanting a domestic post. Not, I fear, fully trained."

"Oh, there's no such thing training nowadays. Will she cook--so many of them won t cook."

"Yes--yes--she cooks. Shall I then send her to youm at least on trial? Her name is Maude Williams."

"Oh, please do, M. Poirot. It's most kind of you. Anything would be better than nothing. My husband is so

There was an interruption. Mrs. Wetherby spoke to someone entering the room, and though she had placed her

hand over the receiver Poirot could hear her slightly muffled words.

particular and gets so annoyed with dear Deirdre when the

household doesn't go smoothly. One can't expect men to

understand how difficult everything is nowadays--I "

"It's that little etective man--knows of someone to come in to replace Frieda. No, not foreign--English, thank goodness. Very kind of him, really, he seems quite concerned about me. Oh, darling, don't make objections.

What does it matter? You know the absurd way Roger goes on. Well, I think it's very kind--and I don't suppose she's too awful."

The asides over, Mrs. Wetherby spoke with the utmost graciousness.

"Thank you very much, M. Poirot. We are most grateful."

Poirot replaced the receiver and glanced at his watch He went to the kitchen.

"Madame, I shall not be in to lunch. I have to go to Kilchester."

"Thank goodness," said Maureen. "I didn't get to that

pudding in time. It had boiled dry. I think it's really all

right--just a little scorched perhaps. In case it tasted rather

nasty I thought I would open'a bottle of those raspberries

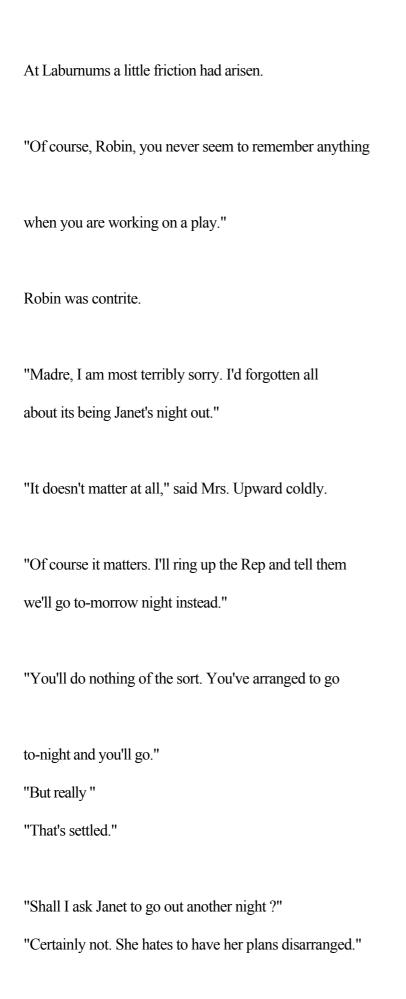
I put up last summer. They seem to have a bit of mould

on top but they say nowadays that that doesn't matter. It's

really rather good for you--practically penicillin."

Poirot left the house, glad that scorched pudding and

near-penicillin were not to be his portion to-day. Better--far better--eat macaroni and custard and plums at the Blue Cat than the improvisations of Maureen Summcrhayes.

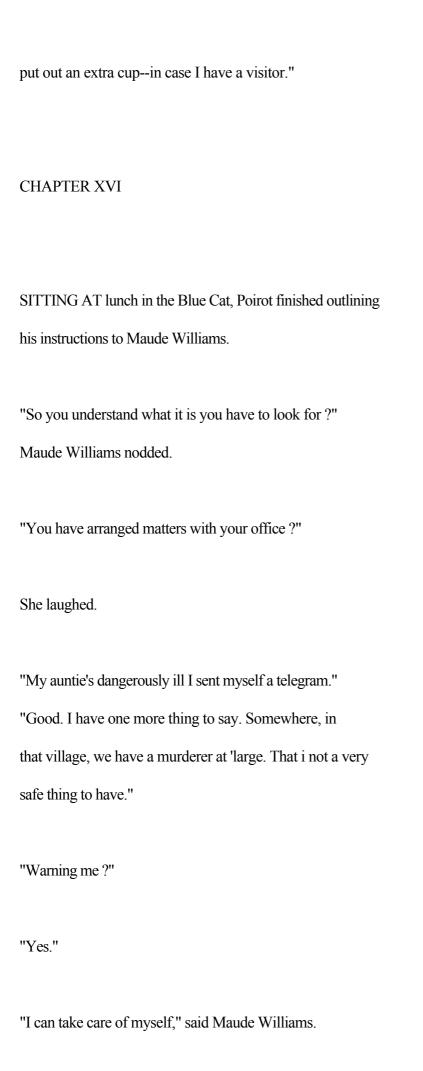


"I'm sure she wouldn't really mind. Not if I put it to her " "You'll do nothing of the sort, Robin. Please don't go upsetting Janet. And don't go on about it. I don't care to feel I'm a tiresome old woman spoiling other people's pleasure." "Madresweetest" "That's enough--you go and enjoy yourselves. I know who I'll ask to keep me company." "Who ?" "That's my secret," said Mrs. Upward, her good humour restored. "Now stop fussing, Robin."

"I'll do my own ringing up, thank you. It's all settled.

Make the coffee before you go, and leave it by me in the percolator ready to switch on. Oh, and you might as well

"I'll ring up Shelagh Rendell "



"That," said Hercule Poirot, "might be classed under the heading of Famous Last Words."

She laughed again, a frank amused laugh. One or two heads at near tables turned round to look at her.

Poirot found himself appraising her carefully. A strong, confident young woman, full of vitality, keyed up and eager to attempt a dangerous task. Why? He thought again of James Bentley, his gentle defeated voice, his lifele apathy.

Nature was indeed curiotm and interesting.

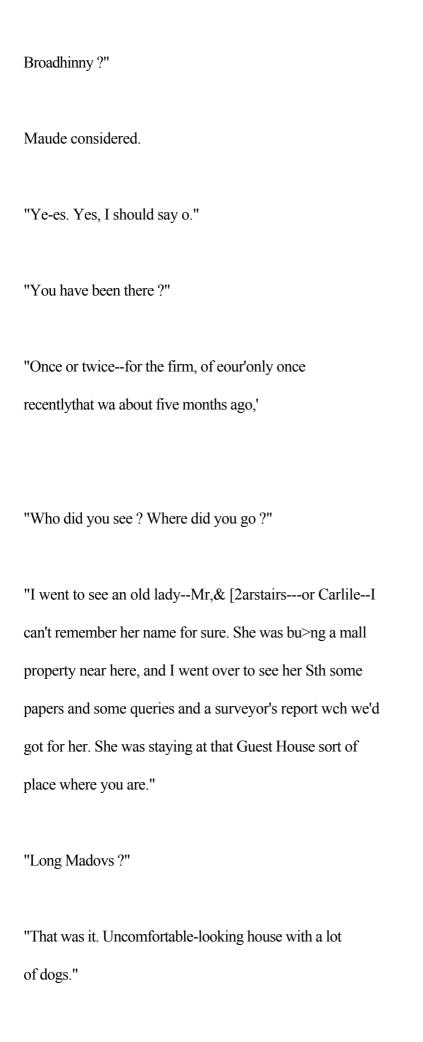
Maude said:

"You're as/u/g me to do it, aren't you? Why suddenly try to put me off?"

"Because if one offers a mission, one must be emact about what it involves."

"I don't think I'm in any danger," said Maude eon-fidently.

"I do not think o at the moment. You are unknown in



Poirot nodded. "Did you ee Mrs. Summerhayes, or Major Summer-hayes 2" "I saw Mrs. Summerhayes, I suppose it was. She took me up to the bedroom. The old pussy was in bed." "Would Mrs. Summerhayes remember you?" "Don't suppose so. Even if she did, it wouldn't matter, would it? After all, one changes one's job quite often these days. But I don't suppose she even looked at me. Her sort don't." There was a faint bitterness in Maude Williams' voic "Did you see anyone else in Broadhinny?" Maude said rather awkwardly: "Well, I saw Mr. Bentley." 'Al% you saw Mr. Bentley. By accident." Maude wriggled a little in her chair.

"No, as a matter of fact, I'd sent him a p.e. Telling

him I was coming that day. Asked him if he'd meet me aa a matter of fact. Not that there was anyxvhere to go. Dead little hole. No card or cinema or anything. 'S a matter of fact we just talked in the bus stop. While I was waiting for my bus back."

"That was before the death of Mrs. McGinty?"

"Oh yes. But not much before, though. Because it was only a few days later ttxat it was all in the newspapers."

"Did Mr. Bentley speak to you at all of his landlady?"

"I don't think so."

"And you spoke to no one else in Broadhinny?"

"Well---only Mr. Robin Upward. I've heard him talk

on the wirelesS. I saw him coming out of his cottage az d I

recognised him from his pictures and I did ask him for his

autograph.'

x25

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whied out 'q pen and wrote it at once."

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He wonde d w t b to her voice.

"And he gave it you?"

"Oh yes, he was ever so nice about it. I hadn't my book with me, but I'd got an odd sheet of notepaper, and he whipped out his fountain pen and wrote it at once."

"Do you know any of the other people in Broadhinny by ,ight?"

"Well, I know the Carpenters, of course. They're in Kilchester a lot. Lovely car they've got, and she wears lovely clothes. She opened a Bazaar about a month ago. They say he's going to be our next M.P."

Poirot nodded. Then he took from his pocket the envelope that he always carried about with him. He spread the four photographs on the table.

"Do you recognise any of--what's the matter?"

"It was Mr. Scuttle. Just going out of the door. I hope he didn't see you with me. It might seem a bit odd. People are talking about you, you know. Saying you've been sent over from Paris--from the Sooretay or some name like that."

"I am ,Belan, not French, but no matter."

"What s this about these photographs?" She bent over, studying them closely. "Rather on the old-fashioned side, aren't they?"

"The oldest is thirty years ago."

"Awfully silly, old fashioned clothes look. Makes the women look such fools."

"Have you seen any of them before?"

"D'you mean do I recognise any of the women, or do you

mean have I see the pictures?" "Either." "I've an idea I've seen that one." Her finger reted against Janice Courtland in her cloche hat. "In some paper or other, but I can't remember when. That kid looks a bit familiar, too. But I can't remember when I saw them; some time ago." "All those photographs appeared in the Sunday Comet on the Sunday before Mrs. McGinty died." Maude looked at him sha.ly. "And they've got, something to do with it? That's why you want me to She did not finish the sentence. "Yes," said Hercule Poirot. "That is why."

He took something else from his pocket and showed it to her. It was the cutting from the Sunday Cornet.

"You had better read that," he said.

She read it carefully. Her bright golden head bent over

the flimsy bit of newsprint.

Then she looked up.

"So that's who they are ? And reading this has given you ideas ?"

"You could not express it more justly."

"But all the same I don't see-----" She was silent a moment, thinking. Poirot did not speak. However ple.ased he might be with his own ideas, he was always ready to near other people's ideas too.

"You think one or other of these people is in Broad-hinny

"It might be, might it not?"

"About that."

"Of course. Anyone may be anywhere . . . " She went

on, placing her finger on Eva Kane's pretty simpering face:

She d be quxte old now--about Mrs. Upward's age.

"Wqaat I was thinking was--the sort of woman she was--there must be several people who d have at n for lac .

"That is a point of view," said Poirot slowly. "Yes, ½t is a point of view." He added: "You remember the Craig case?"

"Who doesn't?" said Maude Williams. "Why, he's in

Madame Tussaud's I I was only a kid at the time, but the

newspapers are always bringing him up and comparing the

case with other cases. I don't suppose it will ever be for-gotten,

do you?"

Poirot raised his head sharply.

He wondered what brought that sudden note of bitterness

into her voice.

CHAPTER XVII

FEELING COMPLETELY bewildered, Mrs. Oliver was endeavouring to cower in the corner of a very minute theatrical dressing-room. Not being the figure to cower, she only succeeded in bulging. Bright young men, removing grease paint with towels, surrounded her and at intervals pressed warm beer upon her.

Mrs. Upward, her good humour completely restored, had speeded their departure with good wishes. Robin had been assiduous in making all arrangements for her comfort before departure, runnin back a couple of times after they were in the car to see that all was as it should be.

On the last occasion he came back grinning.

"Madre was just ringing off on the telephone, and the svicked old thing still won't tell me who she was ringing up.

But I bet I know."

"I know, too," said Mrs. Oliver.

"Well, who do you say?"

"Hercule Poirot."

"Yes, that's my guess, too. She's going to pum, p him.

Madre does like having her little secrets, doesnt she?

Now darling, about the play to-night. It's very important

that you tell me honestly just what you think of Cecil--and whether he's your idea of Eric . . . "

Needless to say, Cecil Leech had not been at all Mrs.

Oliver's idea of Eric. Nobody, indeed, could have been more unlike. The play itself she had enjoyed, but the ordeal of "going round afterwards" was fraught with its usual terrors.

Robin, of course, was in his element. He had Cecil (at least Mrs. Oliver supposed it was Cecil) pinned against the wall and was talking nineteen to the dozen. Mrs. Oliver had been terrified of Cecil and much preferred somebody called Michael who was talking to her kindly at the moment. Michael, at least, did not expect her to reciprocate, in fact Michael seemed to prefer a monologue. Somebody called Peter made occasional incursions on the conversation, but x8

on the whole it resolved itself into a thin stream of faintly amusing malice by Michael.

"--too sweet of Robin," he was saying. "We've been urging him to come and see the show. But of course he's completely under that terrible woman's thumb, isn't he?

Dancing attendance. And really Robin is brilliant, don't

you think so? Quite quite brilliant. He shouldn't be sacrificed on a Matriarchal altar. Women can be awful, can't they? You know what she did to poor Alex Roscoff? All over him for nearly a year and then discovered that he wasn't a Russian migr at all. Of course he had been telling her some very tall stories, but quite amusing, and we all knew it wasn't true, but after all why should one care ?--and then when she found out he was just a little East End tailor's son, she dropped him, my dear. I mean, I do hate a snob, don't you? Really Alex was thankful to get away from her. He said she could be quite frightening ometimes--a little queer in the head, he thought. Her rages I Robin dear, we're talking about your wonderful Madre. Such a daame she couldn't come to-night. But it's marvellous to have Mrs. Oliver. All those delicious murders."

An elderly man with a deep bass voice grasped Mrs.

Oliver's hand and held it in a hot, sticky grasp.

"How can I ever thank you?" he said in tones of deep melancholy. "You've saved my life :aved my life many a time."

Then they all came out into the fresh night air and went across to the Pony's Head, where there were more drinks

and more stage conversation.

By the time Mrs. Oliver and Robin were driving home-ward, Mrs. Oliver was quite exhausted. She leaned back and closed her eyes. Robin, on the other hand, talked wi,out stopping.

and you do think that might be an idea, don't

you?" he finally ended.

"What?'

Mrs. Oliver jerked open her eyes.

She had been lost in a nostalgic dream of home. Walls eov. ered with exotic birds and foliage. A deal table, her type-wtter, black coffee, apples everywhere . . . What bliss,

glorious and solitary bliss I What a mistake for an

author to emerge from her secret fastness. Authors were shy, unsociable creatures, atoning for their lack of social aptitu.de by inventing their own companions and con-versations.

"I'm afraid you're fired," said Robin. "Not really. The truth is I'm not very good with peopl\$" "I adore,, .pe°ple, don't, you?" said Robin happily. "No, satd Mrs. Ohver firmly. "But you must. Look at all the people in your books." "That's different. I think trees are much nicer than people, more restful." "I need people," said Robin, stating an obvious fact. "They stimulate me." He drew up at the gate of Laburnums. "You go in," he said. "I'll put the car away." Mrs. Oliver extracted herself with the usual diculty an,d, walked up, the path.

It wasn't. Mrs. Oliver pushed it open and entered. There were no lights on, and that struck her as rather ungracious

The door s not locked," Robin called.

on her hostess's.part. Or was it perhaps economy? Rich people were so otten economical. There was a smell of scent m the hall, something rather exotic and expensive. For a moment Mrs. Oliver wondered if she were in the right house, then she found the light switch and pressed it down.

The light sprang up in the low oak-beamed square hall.

The door into the sitting-room was ajar and she caught sight of a foot and leg. Mrs. Upward, after all, had not gone to bed. She must have fallen asleep in her chair, and since no lights were on, she must have been asleep a long time.

Mrs. Oliver went to the door and switched on the lights in the sitting-room.

"We're back" she began and then stopped.

Her hand went up to her throat. She felt a fight knot

there, a desire to scream that she could not put into operation.

Her voice came out in a whisper:

"Robin--Robin . . . "

It was some time before she heard him coming up the path, whistling, and then she turned quickly and ran to

meet him in the hall.

"Don't go in there--don't go in. Your mother--he--she's dead--I think--she's been killed . . ."

x30

CHAPTER XVIII

"QutT n T bit of work," said Superintendent Spenee.

His red countryman's face was angry. He looked across to where Hercule Poirot sat gravely listening.

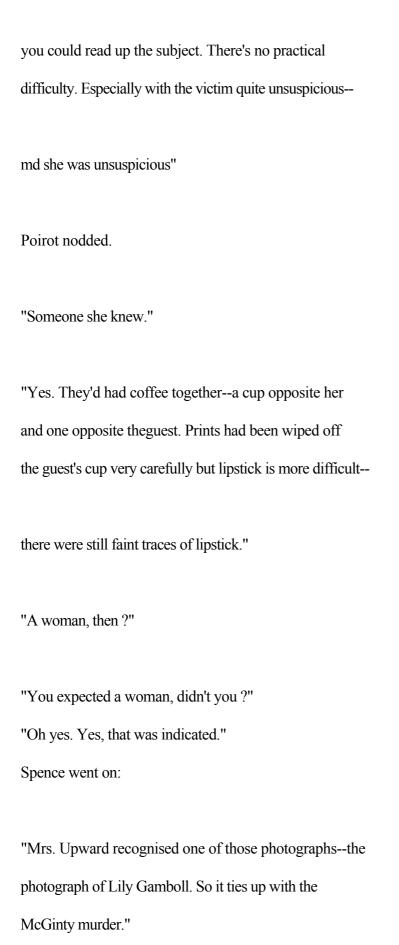
"Neat and ugly," he said. "She was strangled," he went on. "Silk scarf--one of her own silk scarves, one she'd been wearing that day--just passed around the neck and the ends crossed--and pulled. Neat, quick, efficient.

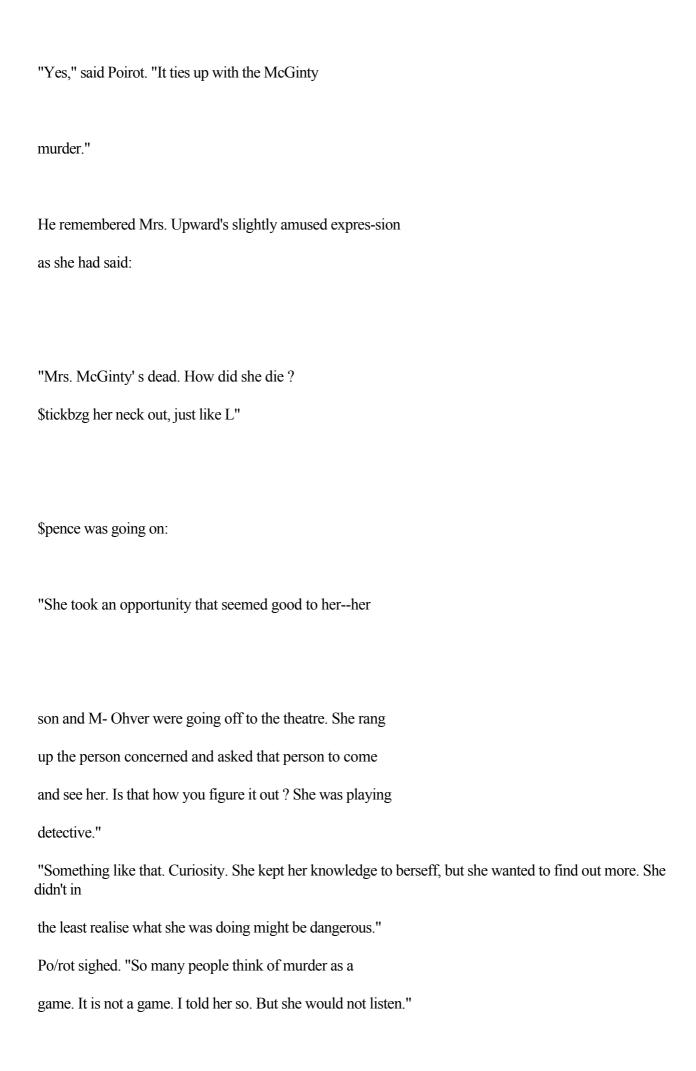
The thugs did it that way in India. The victim doesn't

struggle or cry out--pressure on the carotid artery."

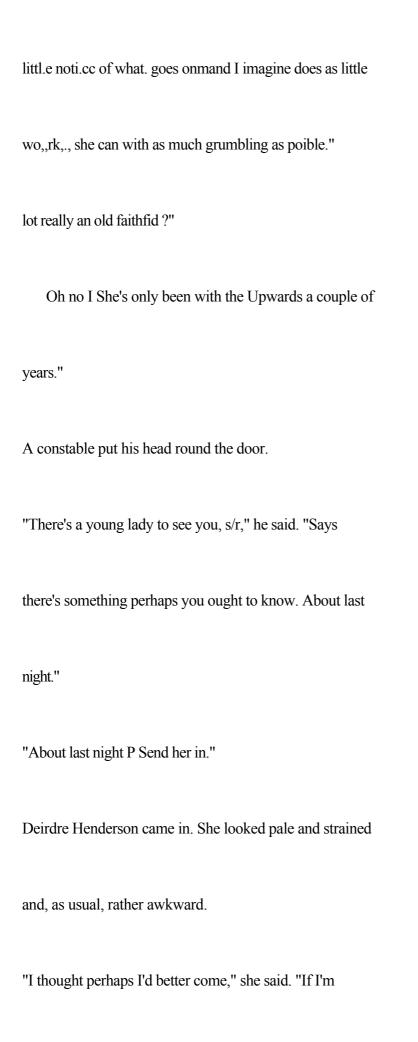
"Special knowledge?"

"Could be--need not. If you were thinking of doing it,





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"No-, we. know that. Well, that fits in fairly well. When
young lovin started off with Mrs. Oliver and ran back into
the house his mother had just finished telephoning to someone.
She wouldn't' say who to. Played it mysterious. Robin
and Mrs. Oliver thought it might be you."
"I wish it had been," said Iercul Poirot. "You have
no idea to whom it was that she telephoned?"
"None whatever. It's all automatic round here, you
knOW."
   "The maid couldn't help you in any way?"
   "No '
She came m about half-past ten--she has a key
   to the back door. She went straight into her own room
   which leads off the kitchen and went to bed. The house
   was dark and she assumed that Mrs. Upward had gone to
   bed and that the others had not yet returned."
   Spence added:
   "She's deaf and pretty crotchety as well. Takes very
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'-m. terrupting you or anything," she added apologetically.

Not at all, Miss Henderson."

Spence rose and pushed forward a chair. She sat down on ,it squarely in an ungainly schoolgirlish sort of way.

'Something about last night?" said Spence encouragingly.

"About Mrs. Upward, you mean?"

"Yes, it's true, isn't it, that she was murdered? I mean the post said so and the baker. Mother said of course it couldn't be true " She stopped.

"I'm afraid your mother isn't quite right there. It's true enough. Now, you wanted to make a--to tell us something

Deirdre nodded.

"Yes," she said. "You see, I was there."

A difference crept into Spence's manner. It was, perhaps, even more gentle, but an official hardness underlay it.

"You were there," he said. "At Laburnums. At what time?"

"I don't know exactly," said Deirdre. "Between half-past eight and nine, I.suppose. Probably nearly nine. After dinner, anyway. You see, she telephoned to me."

"Mrs. Upward telephoned to you?"

"Yes. She said Robin and Mrs. Oliver were going to the theatre in Cullenquay and that she would be all alone and would I come along and have coffee with her." "And you went?" ,, yes.,,

"And you--had coffee with her?"

Deirdre shook her head.

"No, I got there--and I knocked. But there wasn't any answer. So I opened the door and went into the hall. It was quite dark and I'd seen from outside that there was no light in the sitting-room. So I was puzzled. I called' Mr Upward' once or twice but there was no answer. So I thought there must be some mistake."

"What mistake did you think there could have been P"
"I thought perhaps she'd gone to the theatre with them
after all."

"Without letting you know?'*

"That did seem queer."

"You couldn't think of any other explanation?"

"Well, I thought perhaps Frleda might have bungled the original message. She does get things wrong soraetime x33

She's a foreigner. She was excited hemelf lag night beca ae was lesvmg."



He showed her out and came back.

He sat down, drummed on the table and looked at Poirot.

"No lipstick," he said. "Or is that only this mornin!?"

"No, it is not only this morning. She never uses it."

"That's odd, nowadays, isn't it?"

"She is rather an odd kind of girl--undeveloped."

"And no scent, either, as far as I could smell. That Mrs.

Oliver says there was a distinct smell of scent---expensive cent, she says--in the house last night. Robin Upward confirms that. It wasn't any scent his mother uses."

"This girl would not use scent, I think," said Poirot.

"I shouldn't think so either," said Spence. "Looks rather like the hockey captain from an old-fashioned girls' school

---but she must be every bit of thirty, I should say."

"Quite that."

"Arrested development, would you .say?"

Poirot considered. Then he said t was not quite o drnple as that.

"It doesn't fit," aid Spence frowning. "No lipstick, no scent. And since she's got a perfectly good mother, and Lily Gamboll's mother was done in in a drunken bm,w 1 in Cardiff when Lily Gamboll was nine years old, I don t see how she can be Lily Gamboll. But--Mrs. Upward tele-phoned her to come there last night--you can't get away

from that.' He rubbed his nose. "It isn't straightfor g° "at about the medical evidence?'

"Not much help there. All the police surgeon will definitely,, is that she was probably dead by half-past time,' So she may have been dead when Deirdre Henderson came to Laburnums?'

"Probably was if the girl is s-,l,ing the truth. Either she is speaking the truth--or else she s a deep one. Mother didn't want her to come to us, she said. Anytlg there?

Poirot considered.

"Not particularly. It is what mother would say. She is the type, you comprehend, that avoids unpleasantness.' \$pence sighed.

"So we've got Deirdre Henderson--on the spot. Or else someone who came there before Deirdre Henderson.

A woman. A woman who uses lipstick and exp,,ensive scent."

Poirot murmured: "You will inquire

Spence broke in

"I'm inquiring I Just tactfully for the moment. We don't want to alarm anyone. What was Eve Carpenter doing last night? What was Shelagh Rendell doing last night? Ten to one they were just sitting at home. Carpenter, I know, had a politicalmeeting."

"Eve," said Poirot thoughtfully. "The fashions in names change, do they not? Hardly ever, nowadays, do you hear of an Eva. It nas .gone out. But Eve, it is popular."

"She can afford expeusve scent," said Spence, pursuing his own train of thought.

He sighed.

"We've got to get at more of her background. It's so convenient to be a war widow. You can turn up anywhere looking pathetic and mourning some brave young airman. Nobody likes to ask you questions."

He turned to another subject.

"That sugar hammer or what-not you sent along--I think you've hit the bull's-eye. It's the, weapon used in the McGinty murder. Doctor agrees it s exactly suitable for the type of blow. And there 'has been blood on it. It was washed, of course--but they don't reslise noWaday that a microscopic amount of, blood will give a reaction with the latest reagcats. Yes, it s human blood all right. And that

again ti up with the Wetherbys and the Henderson girl.

Or doesnt it?"

"Deirdre Henderson was quite definite that the sugar hammer went to the Harvest Festival Bring and Buy."

"And Mrs. Summerhayes was equally positive it was the Christmas one?"

"Mrs. Summerhayes is never positive about anything," said Poirot gloomily. "She is a charming person, but she has no order or method in her composition. But I will tell you this--I who have lived at Long Meadows--the doors and the windows they are always open. Anyone--anyone at all, could come and take something away and later come and put it back and neither Major Summerhayes nor Mrs. Summerhayes would notice. If it is not there one day, she thinks that her husband has taken it to joint a rabbit or to chop wood--and he, he would think she had taken it to chop dogmeat. In that house nobody uses the right implements-they just seize what is at hand and leave it in the wrong place. And nobody remembers anything. If I were to live like that I should be in a continual state of anxiety-but they--they do not seem to mind."

"Well--there's one good thing about all this--they won't exe,cute James Bentley until this business is all cleared up.

We we forwarded a letter to the Home Secretary'a office. It

Spence sighed.

gives us what we've been wanting--time."

"I think," said Poirot," that I would like to ee Bentley again--now that we know a lit'de more."

There was little change in James Bentley. He was, perhaps, rather thinner, his hands were more restless--otherwise he was the same quiet, hopeless creature.

Hercule Poirot spoke carefully. There had been some fresh evidence. The police were re-opening the case. There was, therefore, hope...

But James Bentley was not attracted by hope.

He said:

"It will be all no good. What more can they fred ollt?"

"Your friends," said Hercule Po[rot, "are working very hard."

"My friends?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I have no friends."

"You should not say that. You have, at the very least, two friends."

"Two friends? I should like to 'know who they are."

His tone expressed no wish for the information, merely a weary disbelief.

"First, there is Superintendent Spence"

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Spe ce? Spence? The pohce superintendent who worked up the case against me? That's almost funny."

"It is not funny. It is fortunate. Spence is a very shrewd and conscientious police officer. He likes to be very sure that he has got the right man."

"He's sure enough of that."

"Oddly enough, he is not. That is why, as I said, he is your friend."

"That kind of a friend I"

Hercule Po[rot waited. Even James Bentley, he thought, must have some human attributes. Even James Bentley could not be completely devoid of ordinary human curiosity.

And true enough, presently James Bentley said:

"Well, who's the other?'

"The other is Maude Williams."

Bentley did not appear to react. "Maude Williams? Who is she?"

"She worked in the office of Breather & Scuttle."

"-Oh--that Miss Williams."

"Prdcisdment, that Miss Williams."

"But what's it got to do with her?"

There were moments when Hercule Poirot found the personality of James Bentley so irritating that he heartily wished that he could believe Bentley guilty of Mrs.

McGinty's murder. Unfortunately the more Bentley annoyed him, the more he came round to Spence's way of thinking. He found it more and more difficult to envisage Bentley's murdering anybody. James Bentley's attitude to murder would have been, Poirot felt sure, that it wouldn't be much good anyway. If cockiness, as Spence insisted, was a characteristic of murderers, Bentley was certainly no murderer.

x37

Containing himself, Poirot aid:

"Miss Williams interests herself in th affair.

She ia

convinced you are innocent."

"I don't see what she can know about it."

"She knows you."

James Bentley blinked, tie said, grudgingly:

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"I suppose she does, in a 'ay, but not well."
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"You worked together in the office, did you not? You

had, sometimes, meals togetb-er?"

"Well--yes--once or txvice. The Blue Cat Cafe,

very convenient just across the street."

"Did you never go for walks with her?"

"As a'matter of fact we did, once. We walked up on the downs."

} I ercule Poirot exploded.

"llama roi, is it a crime that I seek to drag from you? To

keep the company with a pretty girl, is it not natural? Is

it not enjoyable? Can you not be pleased with yourself

about it?"

"I don't see why," said James Bentley.

"At your age it is natural and right to enjoy the company

of girls?'

"I don't know many girls."

"Ca se z'oit .t But you should be ashamed of that, not smug! You knew Miss Williams. You worked with her

and talked with her and sometimes had meals with her, and

once went for a walk on the downs. And when I mentioR

her, you do not even remember her name I"

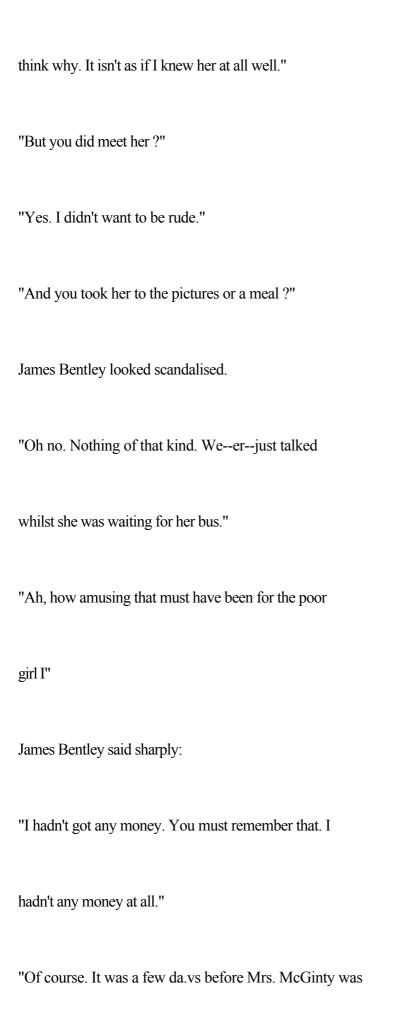
James Bentley flushed.

"Well, you see--I've never had much to do with girls.

And she isn't quite what you'd call a lady, is she? Oh very

nice--and all that--but I can't help feeling that Mother

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would have thought her common."
"It is what you think that matters."
Again James Bentley flushed.
"Her hair," he said. "d the kind of clothes abe
--Mother, of course, was old-fashioned ."
He broke off.
"But you found Miss Williams--what shall I
sympathetic?"
"She was alwaya very kind," said Jamea Bentley slowly.
"But she didn't--really--understand.
   Her mother died
when she was only a child, you see."
   "And then you lost your job," said Poirot. "You couldn't
   get another. Miss Williams met you once at Broadhinny, I
   understand?"
   James Bentley looked distressed.
   "Yes--yes. She was coming over there on business and
   he sent me a post-c.rd. Asked me to meet her. I can't
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killed, wasn't it?"
   James Bentley nodded. He said unexpectedly:
   "Yes, it was on the Monday. She was killed on Wed
   nesday."
   "I'm
going to ask you something else, Mr. Bentley.
   Mrs. McGinty took the Sunday Comet."
   "Yes, she did."
   "Did you ever see her Sunday Comet?"
   "She used to offer it sometimes, but I didn't often accept.
   Mother didn't care for that kind, of paper."
   "So you didn't see that week s Sunday Comet?"
"And Mrs. McGinty didn't speak about it, or about
anything in it?"
"Oh yes, she did," said James Bentley unexpectedly.
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"8he was full of it"
"Ah la la. So she was full of it. And what did she ty?
Be careful. This is important."
"I don't remember very well now. It was all about
old ,m. urder case. Craig, I think it was--no, perhaps it
wasa t Craig. Anyway, she aid omebody comaected with
x$9
   the case was living in Broadhinny now. Full of it, she was.
   I couldn't see why it mattered to her."
   "Did she say who it was--in Broadhinny?"
   James Bentley said vaguely:
   "I think it was that woman whose son writes plays."
   "She mentioned her by name?"
   No---I--really it's so long ago-----"
   "I implore you--try to think. You want to be free
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again, do you not ?"
   "Free ?" Bentley sounded surprised.
   "Yes, free."
   "I--yes--I suppose I do "
   "Then think I What did Mrs. McGinty say?"
   "Well-something like--' so pleased with herself as she
   is and so proud. Not so much to be proud of if ali's known.'
   And then, 'You'd never think it was the same woman to
   look at the photograph.' But of course it had been taken
   years ago."
   "But what made you sure that it was Mrs. Upward of
   wh,,om she was speaking?"
   I really don't know I
just formed the impression.
She
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had been speaking of Mrs. Upwardtand then I lost

interest

and didn't listen, and afterwardstwell, now I come

to

think of it, I don't really know who she was speaking

about.

She talked a lot, you know."

Poirot

sighed.

He

said: "I do not thiiak myself that it was Mrs. Upward

of

whom she spoke. I think it was somebody else. It is

preposterous

to reflect that if you are hanged it will be

because

you do not pay proper attention to the people with whom you converse Did Mrs. McGinty speak much to you of the housea where she worked, or the ladies of those

"Yea, in a way--but it's no good asking me. You don't

an to realise, M. Poirot, that I had my own life to think

of at that time. I was in very serious anxiety."

"Not in so much serious anxiety as you are now I Did

Mrs. McGinty speak of Mrs. CarpenterMrs. Selklrk she

was then--or of Mrs. Rendell?"

"Carpenter has that new house at the top of the hill and a big car, hasn't he? He was engaged to Mrs. Selkirkm Mrs. McGinty was always very down on Mrs. Selkirk x40

I don't know why. ' Jumped up,' that's what she used to

call her. I don't know what she meant by ir."

"And the Rendells?"

"He's the doctor, isn't he? I don't remember her saying

anything particular about them."

"And the Wetherbys?"

"I do remember what she said about them." James

Bentley looked pleased with himself. "" No patience with
her fusses and her fancies,' that's what she said. And about
him,' Never a word, good or bad, out of him."" He paused.

"She said--it was an unhappy house?"

Hercule Poirot looked up.-For a second James Bentley's

voice had held something that Poirot had not heard in it before. He was not repeating obediently what he could recall. His mind, for a very brief space, had moved out of its apathy. James Bentley was thinking of Hunter's Close, of the life that went on there, of whether or not it was an

unhappy house. James Bentley was thinking objectively.

Poirot said softly:

"You knew them? The mother? The father? The daughter?"

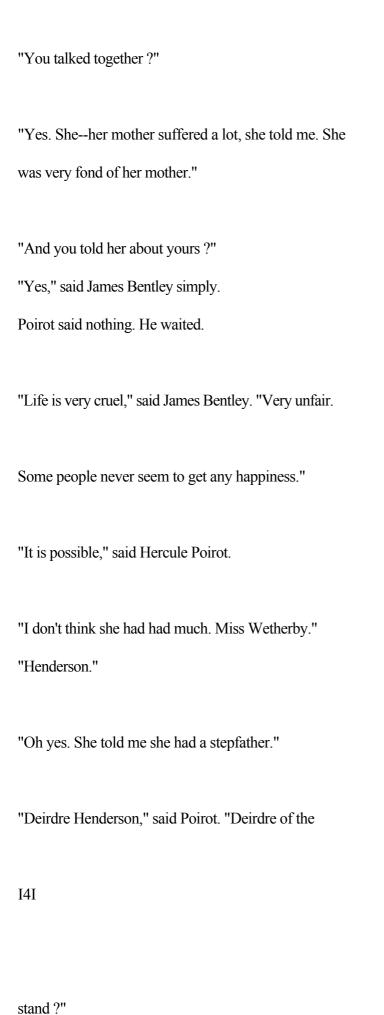
"Not really. It was, the dog. A Sealyham. It got caught in a trap. She couldn't get it undone. I helpedher."

There was again something new in Bentley's tone. "I helped her," he had said, and in those words was a faint echo of pride.

Poirot remembered what Mrs. Oliver had told him of her

conversation with Deirdre Henderson.

He said gently:



James Bentley flushed.

"I thought, he said," she wa rather good-looking.

CHAPTER XIX

"Now just you listen to me," said Mrs. Sweetiman.

Edna sniffed. She had been listening to Mrs. Sweetiman for some time. It had been a hopeless conversation, going round in circles. Mrs. Sweetiman had said the same things everal times, varying the phraseology a little, but even that not much. Edna had sniffed and occasionally blubbered and had reiterated her own two contributions to the discussion: first, that she couldn't ever! Second, that Dad would skin her alive, he would.

"That's as may be," said Mrs. Sweetiman," but murder's murder, and what you saw you saw, and you can't get away from it."

Edna sniffed.

"And what you did ought t do "

Mrs. Sweetiman broke off and attended to Mrs. Wetherby, who had come in for some knitting pins and another ounce of wool.

"Haven't seen you about for some time, re'am," said IIrs. Sweetiman brightly.

"No, I've been very far from well lately," said Mrs.

Wetherby. "My heart, you know." She sighed deeply.

"I have to lie up a great deal."

"I heard as you've got some help at last," aid Mrs.

Sweetiman. "You'll want dark needles for this light wool."

"Yes. Quite capable as far as she goes, and cooks not

at all badly. But her manners I And her appesxaace I Dyed

hair and the moat unsuitable tight jumpers."

"Ah," said Mrs. Sweetiman. "Girls ae't trained

t. eeer to service nowadays. My mother, she started ,t

n and she got up at a quarter to five every morning.

Head housemaid she was when she finished, and three

there's none of that nowadays--girls m'en't trained now-adays, they're just educated, like Edna."

Both women looked at Edna, who leant against the post office counter, sniffing and sucking a peppermint, and looking particularly vacant. As an example of education, she hardly did the educational system credit.

"Terrible about Mrs. Upward, wasn't it?" continued Mrs. Sweetiman conversationally, as Mrs. Wetherby sorted through various coloured needles.

"Dreadful," said Mrs. Wetherby. "They hardly dared

tell me. And when they did, I had the most frightful palpitations. I'm so sensitive."

"Shock to all of us, it was," said Mrs. Sweetiman. "As for young Mr. Upward, he took on something terrible. Had her hands full with him, the authoress lady did, uatil the doctor came and give him a sedd3iff or something. He's gone up to Long Meadows now as a paying guest, felt he couldn't stay in the cottage--and I don't know as I blame him. Janet Groom, she's gone home to her niece and the

g

olice have got the key. The lady what writes the murder ooks has gone back to London, but she'll come dowT for the inquest."

Mrs. Sweetiman imparted all this information with relish.

She prided herself on being well informed. Mrs. Wetherby,
whose desire for knitting needles had perhaps been prompted
by a desire to know what was going on, paid for her
purchase.

"It's most upsetting," she said. "It makes the whole village so dangerous. There must be a maniac about. When

I think that my own dear daughter was out that nig,h,t, that she herself might have been attacked, perhaps killed. 'Mrs. Wetherby closed both eyes and swayed on her feet. Mrs. Sweetiman watched her with interest, but without alarm. Mrs. Wetherby opened her eyes sgsin, and said with

"This place should be patrolled. No young people should go about after dark. And all doors should be locked and bolted. You know that up at Long Meadows, Mrs. 8ummerhayes never locks any of her doors. Not even at sight. She leaves the back door and the drawing-room window open so that the dogs and cats can get in and out. I ray, eft comider that i absolute madne, but abe ays

they've always done it and that if burglara want to get in, they alxvays can."

"Reckon there wouldn't be much for a burglar to take up at Long Meadows," said Mrs. Sweetiman.

Mrs. Wetherby shook her head sadly and departed with her purchase.

Mrs. Sweetiman and Edna resumed their argument.

"It's no good your setting yourself up to know best," said Mrs. Sweetiman. "Right's right and murder's murder.

Tell the truth and shame the devil. That's what I say."

"Dad would skin me alive, he would, for sure," said Edna. "I'd talk to your Dad," said Mrs. Sweetiman. "I couldn't ever," said Edna. "Mrs. Upward's dead," said Mrs. Sweetiman. "And you saw something the police don't know about. You're employed in the post office, aren't you? You're a Government servant. You've got to do your duty. You've got to go along to Bert Hayling " Edna's sobs burst out anew. "Not to Bert, I couldn't. However could I go to Bert? It'd be all over the place." Mrs. Sweetiman said rather hesitantly: "There's that foreign gentleman." "of a foreigner, I couldn't. Not a foreigner." "No, maybe you're right there." A car drew up outside the post office with a squealing of brakes. Mrs. Sweetiman's face lit up. "That's Major Summerhayes, that is. You tell it all to him and he'll advise you what to do." "I couldn't ever," said Edna, but with less conviction. Johnnie Summerhayes came into the post office, staggering under the burden of three cardboard boxes.

"Good morning, Mrs. Sweetiman," he said cheerfully.

"Hope these aren't overweight?"

Mrs. Sweetiman attended to the parcels in her official

capacity. As Summerhayes was licking the stamps, she

spoke.

"Excuse me, sir, I'd like your advice about omething."

"Yes, Mrs. Sweetiman?"

x44

"Seeing as you belong here, sir, and will know best what

to do."

Summerhayes nodded. He was always curiously touched

by the lingering feudal spirit of English villages. The

villagers knew little of him personally, but because his father

and his grandfather and many great-great-grandfathers had

lived at Long Meadows, they regarded it as natural that he

should advise and direct when asked so to do.

"It's about Edna here," said Mrs. Sweetiman.

Edna sniffed.

Johrmie Summerhayes looked at Edna doubtfully. Never,

he thought, had he seen a more unprepossessing girl.

Exactly like a s,l?, ed rabbit.. Seemed half-witted too.

Surely she couldn't be in what was known officially as "trouble." But no, Mrs. Sweetiman would not have come to him for advice in that case.

"Well," he mid kindly, "what's the difficulty?"

"It's about the murder, ir. The night of the murder.

Edna saw something."

Johnnie Summerhayea transferred his quick dark gaze

from Edna to Mrs. Sweetiman and back again to Edna.

"What did you see, Edna?" he said.

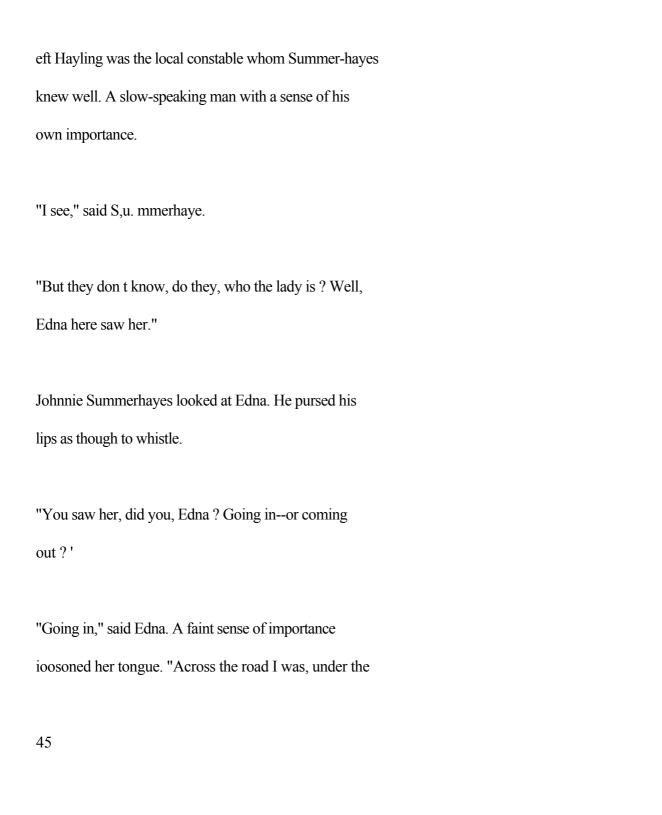
Edna began to sob. Mrs. Sweenan took over.

"Of course we've been heating this and that. Some's rumour and some's true. But it's said definite as that there were a lady there that night who drank coffee with Mrs.

Upward. That's so, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"I know as that's true, because we had it from Bert



tre Just by the turn of the lane where it's drk. Isaw her. She went in at the gate and up to the door ami ood there a bit, and friend then he wet in."

Johnnie Summerhayes' brow cleared.

"That's all tight," he aid. "It was Mis Henderson.

The police know all about that She went and told them."

Edna shook her head.

"It wasn't Miss Henderson," she said.

"It wasn't--then who was it?"

"I dunno. I didn't see her face. Had her back to me,

he had, going up the path and standing there. But it

wasn't Miss Henderson."

"But how do you know it wasn't Miss Henderson if you

didn't sec her face ?"

"Because she had fair hair. Miss Henderson's is dark." Johnnie Summerhayes looked dis, believing.

"It was a very dark night. You d hardly be able to ee

the colour of anyone's hair."

"But I did, though. That light was on over the porch.

Left like that, it was, because Mr. Robin and the detective

lady had gone out together to the theatre. And she

was sanding tight under it. A dark coat she had on,

and no hat, and her hair was shining fair as could be. I

saw it."

Johnnie gave a slow whistle. His eyes were sea-ious now. "What time was it?" he asked.

Edna sniffed.

"I don't tightly know."

"You know about what time," said Mrs. Sweetiman.

"It wasn't nine o'clock. I'd have heard the church. And

it was after half-past eight."

"Between haft-past eight and nine. How long did she

dunno, sir. BH I didn't wait no longer. And I didn't hear nothing. No groar or crie or nothing like that." Edna sounded slightly aggtieved.

But there would have been no groans and no cries. Johnnie Summerhayes knew that. He said gravely:

"Well, there's only one thing to be done. The police have got to hear about this."

Edna burt into long sniffling sob.

She cast an imploring look at Mrs. Sweetiman and bolted into the back room. Mrs. Sweetiman took over with corn"

It's like this, sir," she said in answer to Summerhayes' inquiring glance. "Edna's been behaving very foolish like.

Very stri-c,t her Dad is, maybe a bit over strict, but it's hard to say what s best nowadays. There's a nice young fellow over to Cullavon and he and Edna have been going together nice and steady, and her Dad was quite pleased about it, but Reg he's on the slow side, and you know what girls are.

Edna's taken up lately with Charlie Masters.""

Masters? One of Farmer Cole's men, isn't he?"

"That's right, sir. Farm labourer. And a married man with two children. Always after the girls, he is, and a bad fellow in every way. Edna hasn't got any sense, and her

Dad, he put a stop to it. Quite right. So, you see, Edna was going into Cullavon that night to go to the pictures with Reg--at least that's what she told her Dad. But really she went out to meet this Masters. Waited for him, she did, at the turn of the lane where it seems they used to meet. Well, he didn't come. Maybe his wife kept him at home, or maybe he's after another girl, but there it is. Edna waited but at last she gave up. But it's awkward for her, a you can see, explaining what she was doing there, when she ought to have taken the bus into Cullavon."

Johnnie Summerhayes nodded. Suppressing an irrelevant feeling of wonder that the unprepossessing Edna could have sufficient sex appeal to attract the attention of two men, he

"She doesn't want to go to Bert Hayling about it," he said with quick comprehension.

dealt with the practical aspect of the situation.

"That's right, sir."

Summerhayes reflected rapidly.

"I'm afraid the police have got to know," he said gently.

"That's what I told her, sir," said Mrs. Sweetiman.

"But they will probably be quite tactful about---er--the circumstances. Possibly she mayn't have to give evidence.

And what she tells them, they'll keep to themselves. I could zing up Spence and ask him to come over here--no, better still, I'll take young Edna into Kilchester with me in my

car. If she goes to the police station there, nobody here need know anythiq, g about it. I'll just ring them up tim and warn them we're coming."

And so, after s brief telephone call, the sniffing Edna, buttoned firmly hato her coat and encouraged by a pat on the back xrom Mrs. Sweetiman, stepped into the station wagon and was driven rapidly away in the direction of Kilchester.

CHAPTER XX

HmCULV- Porno? was in Superintendent Spence's office in Kilchester. He was leaning back in a chair, his eyes closed and the tips of his fingers just touching each other in front of him.

The superintendent received some reports, gave instructions to a sergemat, and finally looked across at the other nlan.

"Getting a brainwave, M. Poirot?" he demanded. "I reflect," said Poirot. "I review."

"I forgot to ask you. Did you get anything useful from

James Bentley when you saw him ?"

Poirot shook his head. He frowned.

It was indeed of James Bentley he had been thinking.

It was armoring, thought Poirot with exasperation, that

on a case sucfi as this where he had offered his services without reward, solely out of friendship and respect for an upright police officer, that the victim of circumstances should so lack any romantic appeal. A lovely young girl, now, bewildered and innocent, or a fine upstanding young man, also bewildered, but whose "head is bloody but unbowed" thought Poirot, who had been reading a ood deal of 'nglish etry in an anthology lately. Insteaff, he had James Bentley, a pathological case if there ever was one, a self-centred creature who had never thought much of anyone but himself. A man ungrateful for the efforts that were being made to save him--almost, one might say, uninterested in them.

Really, thought Poirot, one might as .vell let him be hanged since he does not seem to care...

No, he would not go quite as far as that.

Superintendent Spence's voice broke into these reflections.

 \cdot "Our interview," said. Poirot, ". was, if I might say so, singularly unproductive. Anything useful that Bextley

might have remembered he did not remembertwhat he

did remember is so vague and uncertain that one cannot

build upon it. But at any rate it seems fairly certain that

Mrs. McGinty was excited by the article in the Sunday Comet and spoke about it to Bentley with special reference

to 'someone connected with the case,' living in Broad-

 $hi?\pounds'ith''''''$ which case ?" asked Superintendent \$pence s ,h, ly.

'Our friend could not be sure," said Poirot. "He said, rather doubtfully, the Craig casebut the Craig case being the only one he had ever heard of, it would, presumably, be the only one he could remember. But the 'someone' was a woman. He even quoted Mrs. McGinty's words. Somebody who had.' not so much to be proud of if ali's kown."

"Proud?"

"Ma/s out;" Poirot nodded his appreciation. "A suggestive word, is it not?"

"No clue a to who the proud lady was?'

"Bentley suggested Mrs. Upward--but as far as I cm see for no real reason I"

Spence shook his head.

"Probably because she was a proud masterful sort of woman--outstsndingly so, I should say. But it couldn't have been Vlrs. Upward, because Mrs. Upward's dead, and dead for the same reason as Ms. McGint¥ died--because she recognised a photograph."

Poirot said sadly: "I wasted her."

Spence murmured irritably:

"Lily Gamboll I So far as age goes, there are only two possibilities, Mrs. Rendell and Mrs. Carpenter. I don't count the Henderson girl--she's got a background."

"And the others have not?"

\$pence sighed.

"You know what things are nowada. The war stirred

up everyone and everything. The approved chool where

Lily Gamboli w, and all ts records, were ctroyed by a

49

direct hit. Then take people. It's the hardest thing in the

world to check on people. Take Broadhinny--the only people

in Broadhinny we know anything about are the Summer-hayes

family, who have been there for three hundred

years, and Guy Carpenter, who's one o.f..the. engin.r,!

Carpenters. All the others are--what snau say--nmar

Dr. Rendell's on the Medical Register and we know where

he trained and where he's practised, but we don't know Iris

home background. His wife came from near Dublin. Eve Selkirk, as she was before she married Guy Carpenter, was

a pretty young war widow. Anyone can be a pretty young

war widow. Take the WetherbysBthey seem to have

floated round the world, here, there and everywhere. Why?

Is there a reason? Did he embezzle from a bank? Or did

they occasion a scandal? I don't say we can't dig up about people. We can--but it takes time. The people themselves

won't help you."

"Because they have something to conceal--but it need

not be murder," said Poirot.

"Exactly. It may be trouble with the law, or it may be a humble ogin, or it m,a.y be common -or .garden scandal.

But whatever it is, they we taken a lot of paros to cover up Band that makes it difficult to uncover."

"But not impossible."

"Oh no. Not impossible. It just takes time. As I say, if Lily Gamboll is in Broadhinny, she's either Eve Carpenter or S.h,e-lagh Rendell. I've questioned them--just routine --that s the way I put it. They say they were both at home --alone. Mrs. Carpenter was the wide-eyed innocent, Mrs. Rendell was nervous--but then she's a nervous type, you can't go by that."

"Yes," said Poirot thoughtfully. "She is a nervous
e was thinking of Mrs. Rendell in the garden at Long
Meadows. Mrs. Rendell had received an anonymous letter,
or so she said. He wondered, as he had wondered before,
about that statement.

\$pence went on:

"And we have to be careful--because even if one of them/s guilty, the other is innocent."

"And Guy Carpenter is a prospective Member o Parliament and an important local figure."

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"That wouldn't help him if he was guilty of murder or accessory to it," said Spence grimly.
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"I know that. But you have, have you not, to be sure?"

"That's right. Anyway you'll agree, won't you, that it

lies between the two of them?"

Poirot sighed.

"No--no--I would not say that.

There are other

possibilities."

"Such as ?"

Poirot was silent for a moment, then he said in a different, almost casual tone of voice:

',i Why do people keep photographs?"

Why ? Goodness knows Why do people keep all ,sorts of things--junk--trash, bits and pieces. They do--that s all there is to it I"

"Up to a point I agree with you. Some people keep things. Some people throw everything away as soon as they have done with it. That, yes, it is a matter of temperament.

But I speak now especially of photographs. Why do people keep, in particular, photograpks?"

"As I say, because they just don't throw things away. Or else because it reminds them "

Poirot pounced on the words.

"Exactly. It remttds them. Now again we askmwhy?

Why does a woman keep a photograph of herself when youn.g? And I say that the first reason is, essentially, vanity. ne nas been a pretty girl and she keeps a photograph of herself to remind her of what a pretty girl she was. It encourages her when her mirror tells her unpalatable things. She says, perhaps, to a friend, 'That was me when I was eighteen...' and she sighs You agree?" "Yes--yes, I should say that's true enough." "Then that is reason No. x. Vanity. Now reason No. a. Sentiment." "That's the same thing?" "No, no, not quite. Because this leads you to preserve not only your own photograph but that of someone else. . . A picture of your married daughter--when she was a ch ,d sitting on a hearthrug with tulle round her."

' I've seen some of those," Spence

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grinned.
"Yes. Very embarrassing to the subject sometimes,
but
mothers like to do it. And sons and daughters often
keep
pictures of their mothers, especially, ay, if their mother
died young. 'This was my mother as a girl."
"I'm beginning to see what you're driving at, Poirot."
"And there is, possibly, a third category. Not vanity,
not sentiment, not love--perhaps hate--what do you say "
"Hate ?"
"Yes. To keep a desire for revenge alive. Someone who
has injured you--you might keep a photograph to remind
you, might you not?"
"But surely that doesn't apply in this case ["
"Does it not?"
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"What are you thinking of?'

Poirot murmured:

"Newspaper reports are often inaccurate. The Sunday

Comet stated that Eva Kane was employed by the Craigs
as a nursery governess. Was that actually the case?"

"Yes, it was. But we're working on the assumption that it's Lily Gamboll we're looking for."

Poir;x sat up suddenly very straight in his chair. He wagged an imperative forefinger at Spence.

"Look. Look at the photograph of Lily Gamboll. She is not prett3--nol Frankly, with those teeth and those spectacles she is hideously ugly. Then nobody has kept that photograph for the first of our reasons. No woman would Ireep that photo out of vanity. If Eve Carpenter or Shelagh Rendell, who are both good-looking women, especially Eve Carpenter, had this photograph of themselves, they would

tear it in pieces quickly in case somebody should ee it I"
"Well, there is something in that."

"So reason No. x is out. Now take sentiment. Did any-body

love Lily Gamboll at that age (. The whole point, o,f
Lily Gamboll is that they did not. ne was an unwantea
and unloved child. The person who liked her best was her
aunt, and her aunt died under the chopper. So it was not
sentiment that kept this picture. And revenge? Nobody
hated her either. Her murdered aunt was a lonely woman
without a husband and with no close friends. Nobody had
hate for the little slum child---only pity."

"Look here, M. Poirot, what you're saying is that nobody would have kept that photo."

"Exactly--that is the result of my reflections."

"But somebody did. Because Mrs. Upward had seen it."

"Had she?"

"Dash it all. It was you who told me. bae said so herself."

"Yes, she said so," said Poirot. "But the late Mrs.

Upward was, in some ways, a secretive woman. She liked to 'manage things her own way. I showed the photographs,

and she recognised one of them. But then, for some reason,

she wanted to keep the identification to herself. She wanted,

let us say, todeal with a certain situation in the way she

fancied. And so, being very quick-wiRed, she deliberately pointed to the wrong picture. Thereby keeping her knowledge to herself."

"But why?"

"Because, as I say, she wanted to play a lone hand."

"It wouldn't be blackmail? She was an extremely wealthy woman, you know, widow of a North Country manufacturer."

"Oh no, not blackmail. More likely beneficence. Weql say that she quite liked the person in question, and that she didn't want to give their secret away. But nevertheless she was cur/ous. She intended to have a private talk with that person. And whilst doing so, to make up her mind whether or not that person had had anything to do with the deth of Mrs. McGinty. Something like that."

"Then that leaves the other three photos in ?"

"Precisely. Mrs. Upward meant to get in touch with the person in question at the first opportunity. That came when her son and Mrs. Oliver went over to the Repertory Theatre at Cullenquay."

"And she telephoned to Deirdre Henderson. That puts

Deirdre Henderson right back in the picture. And her mother I"

?,uperintendent \$pence shook his head sadly at Poirot.

You do like to make it difficult, don't you, M. Poirot?"

he said.

CHAPTER XXI

Mas. WrvansY walked back home from the post office with a gait surprisingly spry in one habitually reported to be an invalid.

Only when she had entered the front door did she once more shuffle feebly into the drawing-room and collapse on the sofa.

The bell was within reach of her hand and she rang it.

Since nothing happened she rang it again, this time keeping her finger on it for some time.

In due course Maude Williams appeared. She was

wearing a flowered overall and had a duster in her hand.

"Did you ring, madam?"

"I rang twice. When I ring I expect someone to come at once. I might be dangerously ill."

"I'm sorry, madam. I was upstairs."

"I know you were. You were in my room. I heard you overhead. And you were pulling the drawers in and out. I can't think why. It's no part of your job to go prying into my things."

"I wasn't prying. I was putting some of the things you left lying about away tidily."

"Nonsense. All youpeople snoop. And I,,won't have it.

I'm feeling very faint. Is Miss Deirdre in?

"She took the dog for a walk."

"How stuvid. She might know I would need her. Bring me in egg baten up in milk and add a little brandy. The brandy is on the sideboard in the dining-room."

"There are only just the three eggs for bre, IrCast tolllorow."

"Then

someone will have to go without. Hurry, will

OU ? Don't stand there looking at me. And you're wearing r too much make-up. It isn't suitable."

There was a bark in the hall and Deirdre and her Sealy-ham came in as Maude went out.

"I heard your voice," said Deirdre breathlessly. "What have you been saying to her?"

"Nothing."

"She looked like thunder."

"I put her in her place. Impertinent girl."

"Oh, Mummy darling, must you? It's so difficult to get anyone. And she does cook well."

"I suppose it's of no importance that she's insolent to reel Oh well, I shan't be with you much longer." Mm. Wetherby,,rolled up her ey,, and took some fluttering breaths. I walked too far, she murmured.

"You oughtn't to have gone out, darling. Why didn't yo,u, tell me you were going?"

I thought some air would do me good. It's so stuffy.

It doesn't matter. One doesn't really want to five--not if one's only a trouble to people."

"You're not a trouble, darling. I'd die without you."

"You're a good girltbut I can see how I weary you and get on your nerves."

"You don't--you don't," said Deirdre passionately.

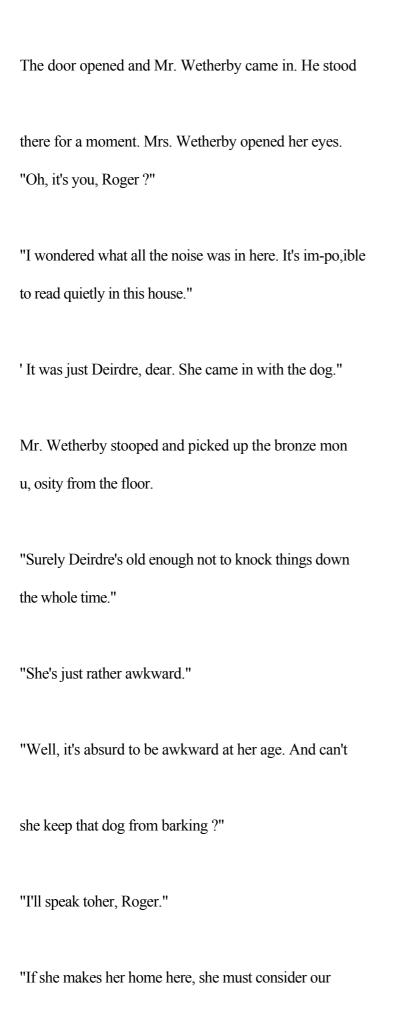
Mrs. Wetherby sighed and let her eyelids fall.

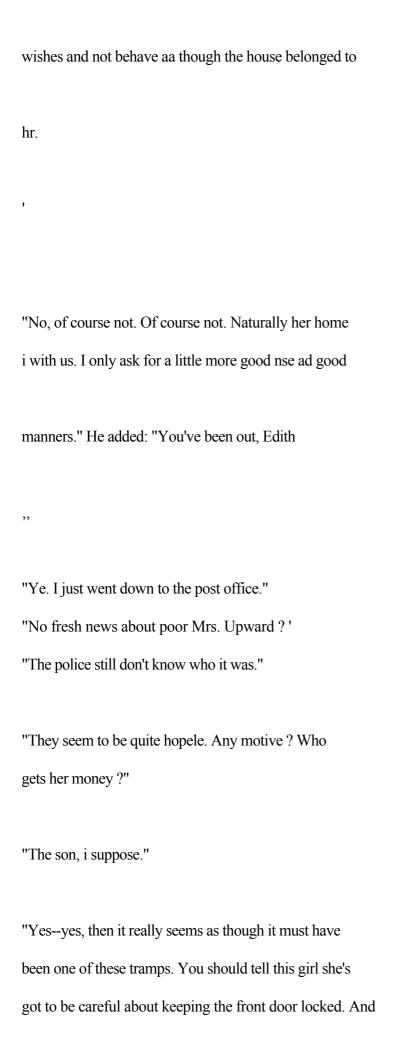
"I---ean't talk much," she murmured. "I must just lie still."

"I'll hurry up Maude with the egg nog."

Deirdre ran out of the room. In her hurry she caught her elb, ow on a table and a bronze god bumped to the ground.

.' .So clumsy," murmured Mrs. Wetherby to herself, wincing.





only to open it on the chain when it gets near dusk. Thee men are very daring and brutal nowadays."

"Nothing seems to have been taken from Mrs. Upward'."

"Not like Mrs. McGinty," said Mrs. Wetherby.

"Mrs. McGinty? Oh I the charwoman. What's Mm.

McGinty got to do with Mrs. Upward?"

"She did work for her, Roger."

"Don't be silly, Edith."

Mrs. Wetherby closed her eyes again. As Mr. Wetherby went out of the room she smiled to berseff.

She opened her eyes with a start to find Maude standing over her, holding a glass.

"Your egg nog, madam," said Maude.

Her voice was loud and clear. It echoed too resonantly iii the deadened house.

Mrs. Wetherby looked up with a vague feeling of alarm.

How tall and unbending the girl was. She stood over Mrs.

Wetherby like--" like a figure of doom," Mrs. Wetherby thought to herself--and then wondered why such ordinary words had come into her head.

She raised herself on her elbow and took the glass.

"Thank you, Maude," she said

Maude turned and went out of the room.

Mrs. Wetherby still felt vaguely ulcer.

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CHAPTER XXII

I1 POIROT took a hired car back to BroackVfirmy.

He was tired because he had been thinking. Thipking

was always exhausting. And his thinking had not been

entirely satisfactory. It was as though a pattern, perfectly

visible, was woven into a piece of material and yet, although he was holding the piece of material, he could not see what the pattern was. But it was all there. That was the point. It was all there. Only it was one of thtroe .patterns, seff-coloured and subtle, that are not easy to percexve. A little way out of Kilchester his car encountered the Snmmerhayes' station wagon coming in the opposite direction. Johnnie was driving and he had a passenger. Poirot hardly noticed them. He was still absorbed in thoht. en he got back to Long Meadows, he went into axe drawing-room. He removed a colander full of spinach from

the most comfortable chair in the room and sat down.

From overhead came the faint drumming of a typewriter.

It was Robin Upward, struggling with a play. Three versions

he had already torn up, so he told Poirot. Somehow, he

couldn't concentrate.

Robin might feel his mother's death quite sincerely, but

he remained Robin Upward, chiefly interested in himself.

"Madre," he said solemnly, "would have wished me to

go on with my work.'

Hercule Poirot naa heard many peop!e say much the

aarne thing. It was one of the most convement assumptions,

this know[edge of what the dead would wish. The bereaved

had never any doubt about their dear ones' wishes and those

wishes usually squared with their own inclinations.

In this case it was probably true. Mrs. Upward had had

great faith in Robin's work and had been extremely proud

of him.

Poirot leaned back and closed his ey

He thought of Mrs. Upward. He considered what Mrs.

Upward had really been like. He remembered a pkra.

that he had once heard used by a police officer.

"We'll take him apart and see what makes him tick."

What had made Mrs. Upward tick?

There was a crash, and Maureen Summerhayes came in.

Her hair was flapping madly.

"I can't think what's happened to Johnnie," she said.

"He just went down to the post office with those special orders. He ought to have been back hours ago. I want him to fix the henhouse door."

A true gentleman, Poirot feared, would have gallantly offered to fix the henhouse door himself. Poirot did not.

He wanted to go on thinking about two murders and about the character of Mrs. Upward.

"And I can't find that Ministry of Agriculture form," continued Maureen. "I've looked everywhere."

"The spinach is on the sofa," Poirot offered helpfully.

Maureen was not worried about spinach.

"The form came last week," she mused. "And I must have put it somewhere. Perhaps it was when I was darning that pullover of Johnnie's."

She swept over to the bureau and started pulling out the drawers. Most of the contents she swept on to the floor ruthlessly. It was agony to Hercule Poirot to watch her. Suddenly she uttered a cry of triumph.

"Got it I"

Delightedly she rushed from the room.

Hercule Poirot sighed and resumed meditation.

To arrange, with order and precision

He frowned. The untidy heap of objects on the floor by

the bureau distracted his mind. What a way to look for things I

Order and method. That was the thing. Order and method.

Though he had turned sideways in his chair, he could still see the confusion on the floor. Sewing things, a pile of socks, letters, knitting wool, magazines, sealing wax, photographs, a pullover

It was insupportable

Poirot rose, went across to the bureau and with quick deft movements began to return the objects to the open drawers.

The pullover, the socks, the knitting wool. Then, in the next drawer, the sealing wax, the photographs, the letters.

The telephone rang.

The sharpness of the bell made him jump.

He went across to the telephone and lifted the receiver.

"Allo, 'allo, 'allo," he said.

The voice that spoke to him was the voice of Superintendent Spence.

"Ah it's you, M. Poirot. Just the man I want."

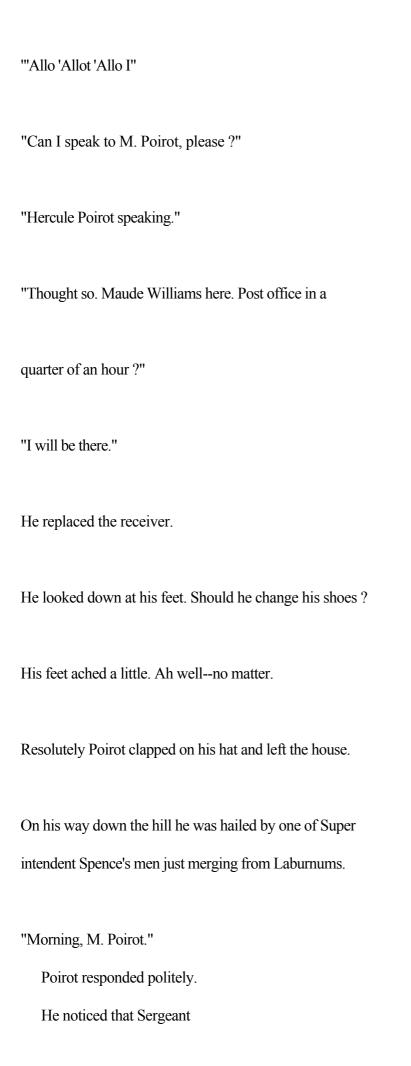
Spence's voice was almost unrecognisable. A very worried man had given place to a confident one.

"Filling me up with a lot of fandangle about the wrong photograph," he said with reproachful indulgence. "We've

of some new evidence. Girl at the post office in Broad inny. Major Summerhayes just brought her in. It seems she was standing practically opposite the cottage that night and she saw a woman go in. Sometime after eight-thirty and before nine o'clock. And it wasn't Deirdre Henderson. It was a woman with fair hair. That puts us right back where we wereit's definitely between the two of them--Eve Carpenter and Shelagh Rendell. The only question is --which ?" Poirot opened his mouth but did not speak. Carefully, deliberately, he replaced the receiver on the stand.

He stood there staring unsedngly in front of him.

The telephone rang again.



Fletcher was looking excited.

"The Super sent me over to have a thorough check up,"

he explained. "You know--any lile thLng we .might .have. missed. Never know, do you? We d been over the (lesx, of

course, but the Super got the idea there might be a secret

drawer--must have been reading spy stuff. Well, there wasn't

a secret drawer. But after that I got on to the books. Sometimes

people slip a letter into a book they re reading. You

!mow ?"

Poirot said that he knew. "And you found something?"

he asked politely.

"Not a letter or anything of that sort, no. But I found

raething interestingwat least I think it's interesting.

Look here."

He upwrapped from a piece of newspaper an old and rather decrepit book.

"In one of the bookshelves it was. Old book, published

years ago. But look here." He opened it and showed the

flyleaf. Pencilled across it were the words: Evelyn Hope.

"Interesting, don't you think? That's the name, in ease

you don't remembers"

"The name that Eva Kane took when she left England.

I do remember," said Poirot.

"Looks as though when Mrs. McGinty spotted one of

those photos here in Broadhirmy, it was our Mrs. Upward.

Makes it kind of complicated, doesn't it ?"

"It does," said Poirot with feeling. "I can assure you that when you go back to Superintendent Spence with this piece of information he will pull out his hair by the roots wyes, assuredly by the roots."

"I hope it won't be as bad as that," said Sergeant Fletcher.

Poirot did not reply. He went on down the hill. He had ceased to think. Nothing anywhere made .sense.

He went into the post office. Maude Wfiliams was there

looking at knitting patterns. Poirot did not speak to her.

He went to the stamp counter. When Maude had made

her purchase, Mrs. Sweetiman came over to him and he

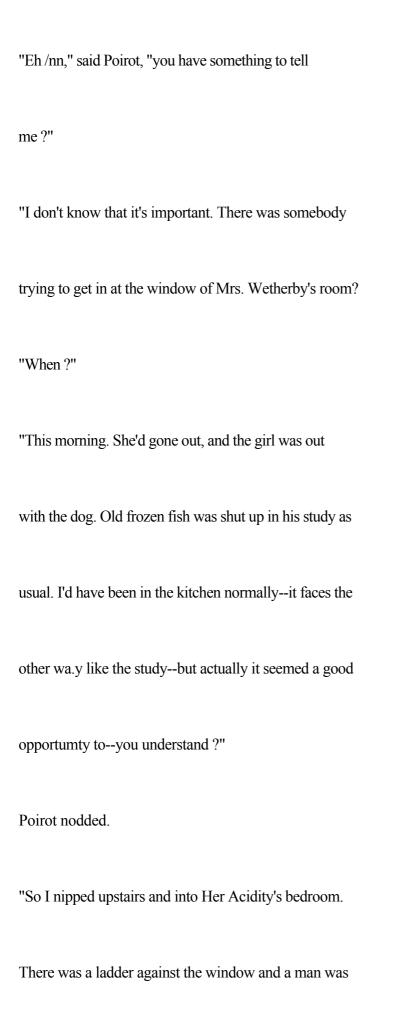
bOraht some stamps. Maude went out of the shop.. .

· Sweetiman seemed preoccupied and not taLRatve.

Poirot as able to follow Maude out fairly quickly. He caught her up a short distance along the road and fell into step beside her.

Mrs. Sweetiman, looking out. of the post office .window, xclaimed to herself disapprovingly. "Those foreigners l

All the same, every manjack of 'em. Old enough to be her grandfather, he ia I"



fumbling with the window catch. She's had everything
locked and barred since the murder. Never a bit of fresh
air. When the man saw me he scuttled down and made off.
The ladder was the gardener'she'd been otting back the
ivy and had gone to have his elevenses."
"Who was the man? Can you describe him?"
"I only got the merest glimpse. By the time I got to the
window he was down the ladder and gone, and when I first
saw ifita he was against the sun, so I couldn't see his face."
"You are sure it was a man?"
M.?ude considered·
"Dressed as a manan old felt hat on. It might have
been a woman, of course "
"It

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is interesting," said Poirot. "It is very interesting. ... Nothing else?"
"Not yet. The junk that old woman keeps I Must be
dotty She came in without me hearing this morning and
bawlet me out for snooping. I shall be murdering her next.
If anyone asks to be murdered that woman does. A really
nasty bit of goods."
Poirot murmured softly:
"Evelyn Hope.."
"What's that?" he spun round on him.
I61
"So you know that name?"
"Why--yes . . . It's the name Eva Whatsernmne took
when she went to Australia. It--it was in the paper--the
Sunday Comet."
"The Sunday Comet said many things, but it did not say
that. The police found the name written in a book in Mrs.
Upward's house."
Maude exclaimed:
"Then it was herand she thln't die out there . . .
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Michael was right."

"Michael?"

Maude said abruptly:

"I can't stop. I'll be late serving lunch. I've got it all ia the oven, but it will be getting dried up."

She started off at a run. Poirot stood looking after her.

At the post office window, Mrs. Sweetiman, her nose glued to the plane, wondered if that old foreigner had been making suggestions of a certain character

Back at Long Meadows, Poirot removed his shoes, and put on a pair of bedroom slippers. They were not chic, not m his opinion comme ilfaut--but there must be relief.

He sat down on the easy-chair again and began once more to think. He had by now a lot to think about.

There were things he had missed--little things.

The pattern waa all there. It only needed cohesiom

Maureen, glasa in hand, talking in a dreamy voic--v.

aking a question. .. Mrs. Oliver's account of her evening at the Rep. Cecil Michael? He was almost sure that shk had mentioned a Michael--Eva Kane, nur'y govae to the Craigs--

Evelyn Hope...

Of course I Evelyn Hope I

CHAPTER XXIII

Egg CARPrrER came into the Summerhayes' house in the casual way that most people did, using any door or window that was convenient.

She was looking for Hercule Polrot and when she found him she did not beat about the bush.

"Look here," she said. "You're a detective and you're supposed to be good. All right, I'll hire you."

"Suppose I am not for hire. Mort Dieu, I am not a taxicab I"

"You're a private detective and private detective get paid, don't they?"

"It is the custom."

"Well, that's what I'm saying. I'll pay you.

I'll pay

you well."

'For what? What do you want me to do."

Eve Carpenter said sharply:

"Protect me against the police. They're crazy. They seem to think I killed the Upward woman. And they're nosing round, asking me all sorts of questions--ferreting out things. I don't like it. It's driving me mental."

Poirot looked at her. Something of what she said was true. She looked many years older than when he had first seen her a few weeks ago. Circles under her eyes spoke of sleepless nights. There were lines from her mouth to her chin, and her hand, when she lit a cigarette, shook badly.

"Madame, what can I do?"

' Fend them off somehow or other. Damned cheek I If
Guy was a man he'd stop all tiffs. He wouldn't let them
persecute me."

"You've got to stop it," she said. "You've got to."

"And--he dcs nothing?"

She aid sullenly:

"I've not told him. He just talks pompously about giving e police all the assistance possible. It's all right for He was at some ghastly pohtieal meeting that night."

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"And you?"
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"I was just sitting at home. Listening to the radio actually."

"But, if you can prove that "

"How can I prove it? I offered the Crofts a fabulous sum to say they'd been in and out and seen me thetethe damned swine refused."

"That was a very unwise move on your part."

"I don't see why. It would have settled the business."

"You have probably convinced your servants that you did commit the murder."

"Well--I'd paid Croft anyway for"

"For what?"

"Nothing."

"Rememberwyou want my help."

"Oh I it was nothing that matters. But Croft took the message from her."

"From Mrs. Upward?"

"Yes. Asking me to go down and see her that night."

"And you say you didn't go?"

"Why should I go? Damned dreary old woman. Why should Igo and hold her hand? I never dreamed of going for a moment."

"When did this message come?"

"When I was out. I don't know exactly when---betweea

five and six, I think. Croft took it." "And you gave him money to forget he had taken that message. Why ?" "Don't be idiotic. I didn't want to get mixed up in it all." "And then you offer him money to give you an alibi? What do you suppose he and his wife think?" "Who cares what they think " "3, jury may care," said Poirot gravely. She stared at him. "You're not serious?" "I am serious." "They'd listen to servants--and not to me?" Poirot looked at her. ,Such crass rudeness and stupidity 1 Antagonising the people who might have been helpful. A short-sighted stupid rmlicy Short-sigbted iΙ

Such lovely wide blue eyea.

He said quietly:

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"Why don't you wear glasses, madame? You need
them."
"What? Oh, I do sometimes. I did as a child."
"And you had then a plate for your teeth."
She stared.
"I did, as a matter of fact. Why all this?"
"The ugly duckling becomes the swan?"
"I was. certainly ugly . enou g h."
"Dd your mother think so?"
,S, he ,si-'-d, sharply:
I don t remember my mother. What the hell are we
talking about anyway? Will you take on the job
"I regret I cannot."
"Why can't you?"
"Because in this affair I act for James Bentley."
"James Bentley? Oh, you mean that half-wit who
killed the charwoman.
   What's he got to do with the
Upwards?"
"Perhaps--nothing."
   "Well, then I Is it a question of money? How much?"
   "That is your great m/stake, madame. You think always
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in terms of money. You have 'money and you think that

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only money counts."

"I haven't always had money." said Eve Carpenter.

"No," said Poirot. "I thought not." He nodded his

head gently. "That explains a good deal. It excuses some
things .... '

Eve Carpenter went out the way she had come, blundering
a little in the light as Poirot remembered her doing "before.

Poirot said softly to himself: "Evelyn Hope...
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\$o Mrs. Upward had rung up both Deirdre Henderson and Evelyn Carpemer. Perhaps she had rung up someone

else. Perhaps----

With a crash Maureen came in.

"It's my scissors n>w. Sorry lunch is late. I've got three pairs and Ican't fred one of them."

She rushed over to the bureau and the process with which Poirot was well acquainted was repeated. This time, the objective was attained rather sooner. With a cry of joy, Maureen departed.

Almost automatically, Poirot stepped over and began to

replace the things in the drawer. Sealing wax, notepaper, a work basket, photographs

Photographs...

He stood staring at the photograph he held in his hantL

Footsteps rushed back along the passage.

Poirot could move quickly in spite of his age. He had dropped the photograph on the sofa, put a cushion on it. and had himself sat on the cushion, by the time that Maureen reentered.

"Where the hell I've put a colander full of spinach"

"But it is there madame."

He indicated the colander as it reposed beside him on the sofa.

"S,o that's where I left it." She snatched it up. "Everything s behindhand to-day..." Her glance took in Hercule Poirot sitting bolt upright.

"Wat on earth dQ you want to sit there for ? Even on a cushion, it's the most uncomfortable seat in the room. All the springs are broken."

"I know, madame. But I am--I am admiring that picture on the wall."

Maureen glanced up at the oil painting of a naval officer complete with telescope.

"Yesmit's good. About the only good thing in the house.

We're not sure that it isn't a Gainsborough." She sighed.

"Johnnie won't sell it, though. It's his great-great and I think a few more greats, grandfather and he went down with his ship or did something frightfully galla,xt. Johnnie's terribly proud of it."

"Yes," said Poirot gently. "Yes, be has something to be proud about, your husband I'

It was three o'clock when Poirot arrived at Dr. Rendell's house.

He had eaten rabbit stew and spinach and hard potatoe and a rather peculiar pudding, not scorched this time.

Instead, "The water got m," Maureen had explained. He had drunk half a cup of muddy coffee. He did not feel well.

The door was opened by the elderly housekeeper Mrs. Scott, and he asked for Mrs. Rendell.

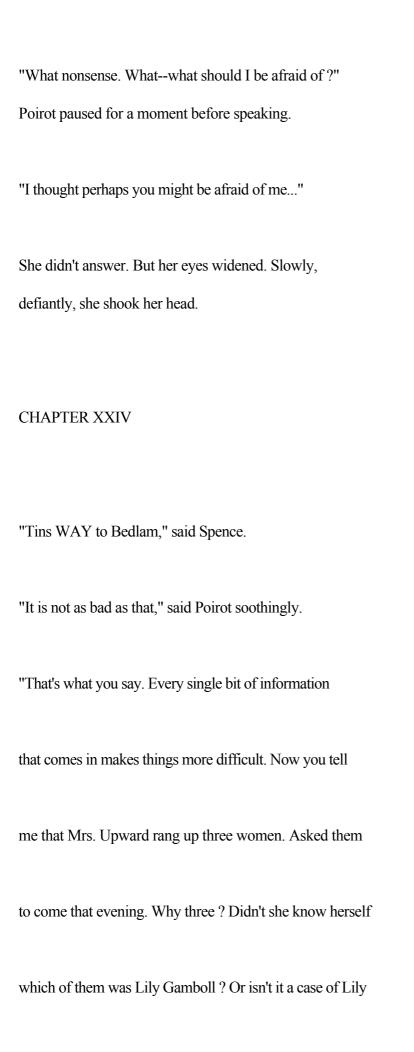
.She was in the drawing-room with the radio on and started up when he was announced.

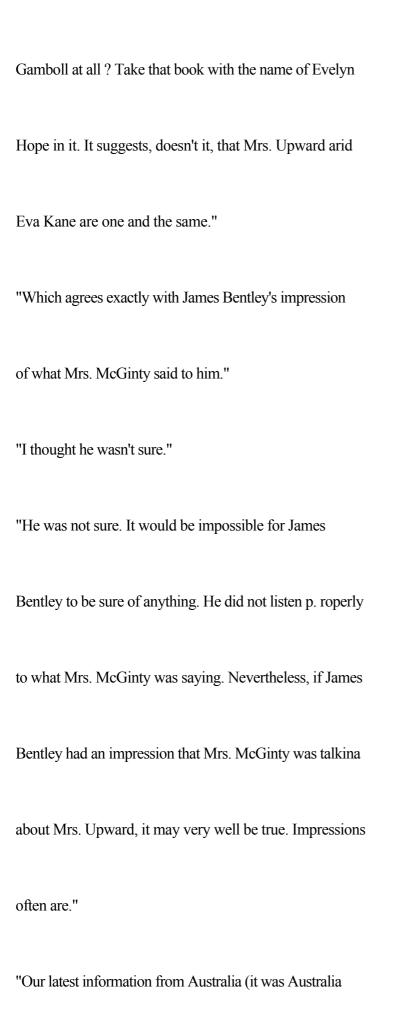
He had the same impression of her that he had had the first time he saw her. Wary, on her guard, frightened of him, or frightened of what he represented.

She seemed paler and more shadowy than she had done. He was almost certain that she was thinner. "I want to ask you a question, madame." "A question? Oh? Oh yes?" "Did Mm Upward telephone to you on the day of her death?" She stared at him. She nodded. "At what time?" "Mrs. Scott took the message. It was about six o'clock, I thinkT' "What was the message? To ask you to go there that evening?" "Yes. She said that Mrs. Oliver and Robin were going into Kilchester and she would be all alone as it was Janet's night out. Could I come dox and keep her company." "Was any time suggested?" "Nine o'clock or after."

"And you went?" "I meant to. I really meant to. But I don't tmow how it was, I fell fast asleep after dinner that night. It was after ten when I woke up. I thought it was too late." "You did not tell the police about Mrs. Upward's call?" Her eyes widened. They had a rather innocent childlike stare. "Qught I to have done? Since I didn't go, I thought, it didn t matter. Perhaps, even, I felt rather guilty. If I d gone, she might have been alive now." She caught her breath suddenly. "Oh, I hope it wasn't like that." "Not quite like that," said Poirot. "He paused and t[ten said: 'What are you afraid of, madame?" She caught her breath sharply. "Afraid? I'm not afraid.'

"But you are."





she went to, by the way, not .America).seems to be to the effect that the 'Mrs. Hope' m question died out there twenty years ago." "I have already been told that," said Poimt. "You always know everything, don't you, Poirot?" Poirot took no notice of this be. He said:, "At the one end we have Mrs. Hope deceased in Australia--and at the other ?"

"At the other end we have Mrs. Upward, the widow of a rich North Country manufacturer. She lived with him near Leeds, and had a son. Soon after the son's birth, her husband died. The boy was inclined to be tubercular and since her

husband's death she lived mostly abroad."

"And. when does this saga begin?"

"The saga begins four years after Eve Kane left England.

Upward met his wife somewhere abroad and brought her home after the marriage."

"So actually Mrs. Upward could be Eva Kane. What was her maiden name?"

"Itargraves, I understand. But what's in a name?"

"XVhat indeed. Eva Kane, or Evelyn Hope, may have died in Australia--but she may have arranged a convenient decease and resuscitated herself as Hargraves and made a wealthy match."

"It's all a long time ago," said Spence. "But supposing that it's true. Supposing she kept a picture of herself and supposing that Mrs. McGinty saw it--then one can only assume that she killed Mrs. McGinty."

"That could be, could it not? Robin Upward was broadcasting that night. Mrs. Rendell mentions going to the cottage that evening, remember, and not being able to make herself heard. According to Mrs. Sweetiman, Janet Groom told her that Mrs. Upward was not really as

crippled as she made out."

"That's all very. well, Poirot, but the fact remains that she herself was kii!ed--after recognising a photograph. Now you want to make out that the two deaths are not connected."

"No, no. I do not say that.

They are connected all

right."

"I give it up."

"Evelyn Hope. There is the key to the problem."

"Evelyn Carpenter? Is that your idea? Not Lily Gamboll

--but Eva Kane's daughter I But surely she wouldn't kill

her own mother."

"No, no. This is not matricide."

"What an irritating devil you are, Poirot. You'll be aying next that Eva Kane and Lily Gamboll, and Janice Courtland and Vera Blake are aR living in Broadhinny. All four suspects."

"We have more than ibux. Eva Kane was the Craigs' nursery governess, remember."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Where there is a nursery governess, there must be children--or at least a child. What happened to the Craig children?"

"There was a girl and a boy, I believe. Some relative took them."

"So there are two more people to take into account. Tw people who might have kept a photograph for the third reason I mentioned--revenge."

"I don't believe it," said Spence.

Poirot sighed.

"It has to be considered, all the same. I think I know the truth--though there is one tot that baffles me utterly."

"I'm glad something baffles you," said Spence.

"Confirm one thing for me, mon cher Spence. Eva Kane left the country before Craig's execution, that is fight?"

"Quite right."

"And she was, at that time, expecting a child?"

"Quite fight."

"Bon [h'eu, how stupid I have been," said Hercul¢

Poirot. "The whole thing is simple, is it not?"

It was after that remark that there was very nearly a third murder--the murder of Hercule Poirot by Superintendent Spence in Kilchester Police Headquarters.

"I want," said Hercule Poirot," a personal call To 1VI.

Ariadne Oliver."

A personal call to Mrs. Oliver was not achieved without difficulties. Mrs. Oliver was working and could not be di turbed. Poirot, however, disregarded all deniah. Presently he heard the authoregs's voice.

It was cross and rather breathless.

"Well, what is it?" said Mrs. Oliver. "Have you got to ring me up just now? I've thought of a most wonderful idea for a murder in a draper's shop. You know, the old-fashioned kind that sells combinations and funny vesta with long sleeves."

"I do not know," said Poirot. "And anyway what I

have to say to, you i far more important."

"It couldn t be," aaid Mrs. Oliver. "Not to me, I

mean. Unless I get a rough sketch of my idea jotted down,

it will go I"

Hercule Poirot paid no attention to this creative agony. He asked sharp imperative questions to which Mrs. Oliver replied somewhat vaguely. "Yes--yes--it's a little Repertory Theatre---I don't know its name Well, one of them was Cecil Something, an,d, the one I was talking to was Michael." Admirable. That is all I need to know." "But why Cecil and Michael ?" "Return to the combinations and the long-sleeved vests, madame." can't think why you don't arrest Dr. Rendell," said Mrs. Oliver. "I would, if I were the Head of Scotland Yard." "We, ry possibly. I wish you luck with the murder ia the draper \$ shop." "The

whole idea has gone now," said Mrs. Oliver. "You've

''T

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ruined it."
Poirot
apologised handsomely.
He
put down the receiver and smiled at Spence.
"We
go now--or at least I will go--to interview a young actor
whose Christian name is Michael and who plays the less
unportant parts ia the Cullenquay Repertory Theatre.
I
pray only that he is the right Ivlacnae.
"Why
on earth. "
Poirot
dexterously averted the rising wrath of Superia-tendent Spenee.
"Do you
know, chef ami, what is a secret de Polichinelle ?"
"Is this
a French lesson?" demanded the superia-tendent wrathfully.
"A secret de
PolicMnelle is a secret that everyone emu know. For this
reason the people who do not know it never hear about it--for
if everyone thinka you know a thing, nobody tells you."
"How I manage
to keep my hands off you I don't know, aaid Superintendent
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Spmc

CHAPTER XXV

THE INQUEST was over--a verdict had been returned of murder by a person or persons unknown.

After the inquest, at the invitation of Hercule Poirot, those who had attended it came to Long Meadows.

Working diligently, Poirot had induced some semblance of order in the long drawing-room. Chairs had been arranged in a neat semi-circle, Maureen's dogs had been excluded with difficulty, and Hercule Poirot, a self-appointed lecturer, took up his position at the end of the room and initiated proceedings with a slightly self-conscious clearing of the throat.

"Messieurs et Mesdames-"

He paused. His next words were unexpected and seemed almost farcical.

"Mrs. McGinty's dead. How did she die?

Down on her knees just like L

Mrs. McGinty's dead. How did she die?

Holding her hand out just like I.

Mrs. McGinty's dead. How did she die?

Like this..."

Seeing their expressions, he went on:

"No, I am not mad. Because I repeat to you the childish rhyme of a childish game, it does not mean that I am in my second childhood. Some of you may have played that game as children. Mrs. Upward had played it. Indeed she repeated it to me--with a difference. She said: 'Mrs. McGinty's dead. How did she die? Sticking her neck out just like L' That is what she said--and that is what she did. She stuck her neck out--and so she also, like Mrs. McGinty, died

"For our purpose we must go back to the beginning--to
Mrs. McGinty--down on her knees scrubbing other
people's houses. Mrs. McGinty was killed, and a man,
James Bentley, was arrested, tried and convicted. For certain
reasons, Superintendent Spence, the officer in charge of the
case was not convinced of Bentley's guilt, strong though

I72

the evidence was. I agreed with him. I came down here to answer a question. How did Mrs. McGinty die? Why did she die?'

"I will not make you the long and complicated histories.

I will say only that as simple a thing as a bottle of ink gave me a clue. In the Sunday Comet, read by Mrs. McGinty on the Sunday before her death, four photographs were published. You know all about those photographs by now, so I will only say that Mrs. McGinty recognised one of those photographs as a photograph she had seen in one of the houses where she worked.

"She spoke of this to James Bentley though he attached no importance to the matter at the time, nor indeed afterwards. Actually he barely listened. But he had the impression that Mrs. McGinty had seen the photograph in Mrs.

Upward's house and that when she referred to a woman who

need not be so proud if all was known, she was referring to Mrs. Upward. We cannot depend on that statement of his, but she certainly used that phrase about pride and there is no doubt that Mrs. Upward was a proud and imperious woman.

"As you all know--some of you were present and the others will have heard--I produced those four photographs at Mrs. Upvard's house. I caught a flicker of surprise and recognition in Mrs. Upward's expression and taxed her with it. She had to admit it. She said that she 'had seen one of the photographs somewhere but she couldn't remember where.' When asked which photograph, she pointed to a photograph of the child Lily Gamboll. But that, let me tell you, was not the truth. For reasons of her own, Mrs. Upward wanted to keep her recognition to herself. She po,!nted to the wrong photograph to put me off. 'But one person was not deceived4e murderer. One person knew which photograph Mrs. Upward had recognised. And here I will not beat to and fro about the bush--the photograph in question was that of Eva Kane--a woman who was accomplice, victim or possibly leading spirit in the famous Craig Murder Case.

"On the next evening Mrs. Upward was killed. She was killed for the same reason that Mrs. McGinty was killed. Mrs. McGinty stuck her hand out, Mrs. Upw'0xd tuck

"Now before Mrs. Upward died, three women received telephone calls. Mrs. Carpenter, Mrs. RendeR, and Mbs Henderson. All three calls were a message from Mrs. Upward asking the person in question to come and see her that evening. It was her servant's night out and her son and Mrs. Oliver were going into Cullenquay. It would seem, therefore, that she xvanted a private conversation with each of these three women.

"Now why three women? Did Mrs. Upward know where she had seen the photograph of Eva Kane? Or did she know she had seen t but could not remember where? Had these three women anything in common? Nothing, it would seem, but their age. They were all, roughly, in the neighbourhood of thirty.

"You have, perhaps, read the article of the Sunday

Comet. There is a truly sentimental picture in it of Eva

Kane's daughter in years to come. The women asked by

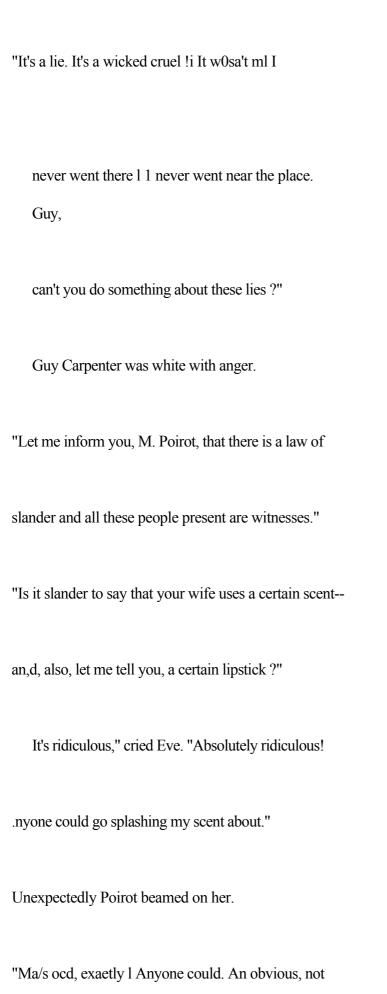
Mrs. Upward to come and see her were all of the right age
to be Eva Kane's daughter.

"So it would seem that living in Broadhinny was a young woman who was the daughter of the celebrated murderer Craig and of his mistress Eva Kane, and it would also seem that that young woman would go to any lengths to prevent that fact being known. Would go, indeed, to the length of twice committing murder. For when Mra. Upward wa found dead, there were two coffee cups on the table, both ul, and on the visitor's cup faint traces of lipstick.

"Now let us go back to the three women who received telephone messages. Mrs. Carpenter got the message but says she did not go to Laburnums that night. Mrs. Rendell meant to go, but fell asleep in her chair. Miss Henderson did go to Laburnums but the house was dark and she could no, make anyone hear and she came away again.

That is the story these three women tell--but there i conflicting evidence. There is that second coffee cup with lipstick on it, and an outside witne, the girl Edna, stte positively that she saw a fair-haired woman go/n to the home. There is also the evidence of cent--4m expensive and exotic scent which Mrs. Carpea alone of tho

There was an interruption. Eve Carpenter cried out:



very subtle thing to do. Clumsy and crude. So clumsy that,

ss far as I was concerned, it defeated its object. It did more.

It gave me, as the phrase goes, ideas. Yes, it gave me ideas.

"\$cent--nd traces of lipstick on a cup. But it is so

easy to remove lipstick from a cup--I assure .you ev, ery

trace can be wiped off q,u, ite easily. Or the cups trtemseives

could be removed and xashed. Why not? There was no

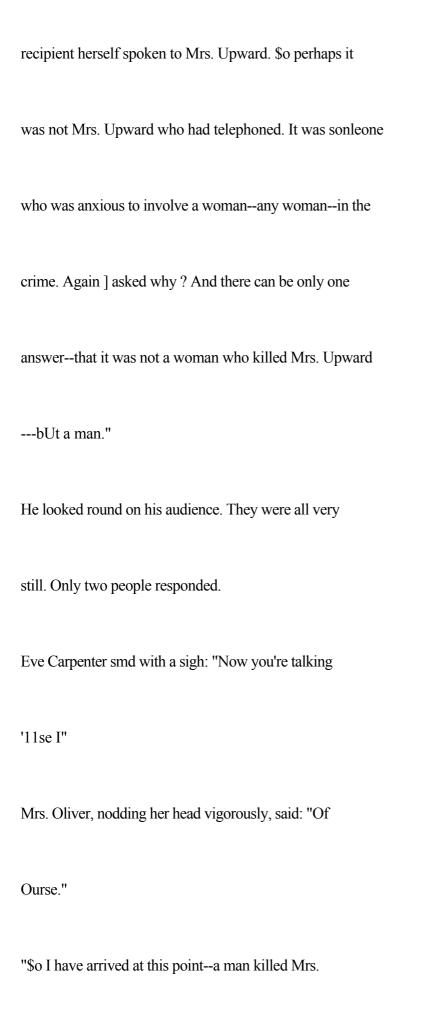
one in the house. But that .was not done. I asked myself

why? And the answer seemed to be a deliberate stress on

femininity, an underlining of the fact that it was a woman's

murder. I reflected on the telephone calls to those three

women--all of them had been messages. Ia no case had the



ward and a man killed Mrs. McGinty! What man?
e reason for the murder must still be the same--it all
hinges on a photograph. In whose poession was that

first

question? And why was it

p

OtOgraph? That is the

Well, that is perhaps not o difficult. Say that it was

kept originally for sentimental reasons. Once Mrs. McGinty is--removed, the photograph need not be destroyed. But after the second murder, it is different. This time the h otograph has definitely been connected with the murder. e photo.raph is now a dangerous thing to keep. Ther fore you will all agree, it is sure to be destroyed."

He looked round at the heads that noddedageement.

," But, for all that, the photograph was not destroyed I
No, it was not destroyed I I know that--because I found
it. I found it a few days ago. I found it in this house. In
the drawer of the bureau that you see standing against the
wall. I have it here."

He held out the faded photograph of a .simpering girl with roses.

"Yes," said Poirot. "It is Eva Kane. And on the back of it are written two words in,pencil. Shall I tell you what they are?' My mother'...'

Ilia eyes, grave and accusing, rested on Maureen Summer-haves.

She pushed back the hair from her face and stared

at Jaim with wide bewildered eyes.

"I don't understand. I never"

".No, Mrs. Summerhayes, you do not understand. There can be only two reasons for keeping this photograph after the second murder. The first of them is an innocent sentimentality. You had no feeling of guilt and so you could keep the photograph. You told us yourself, at Mrs. Car-Denter'a house one day, that you were an adopted child.

I doubt whether you have ever known what your real mother's name was. But somebody else knew. Somebody who has all the pride of familyma pride that makes him

cling to his ancestral home, a pride in his ancestors and his

lineage. That man would rather die than have the world--and

his children--know that Maureen Summerhayes is the daughter of the murderer Craig and of Eva Kane. That man, I have said, would rather die. But that would not help, would it? So instead let us say that we have here a man who is prepared to kill."

Johnnie \$ummerhayes got up from his seat. His voice, when he spoke, was quiet, almost friendly.

"Rather a lot of nonsense you're talkin', aren't you
Enjoying yourself spouting out a lot of theories? Theori
that's all they u 1 lying things about my wife----'

His anger broke suddenly in a furiou tide.

"You damned filthy swmc

The swiftness of his rush across the floor took the room unawares. Poirot skipped back nimbly and Superintendent Speq-ce was suddenly between Poirot and Summerhayes. "Now,; now, Major Summerhayes, take it easy--take it easy,

Summerhayes recovered himself, shrugged, said:

"Sorry. Ridiculous really I After all--anyone can stick a photograph in a drawer."

"Precisely," said Poirot. "And the interesting thinj about this photograph is that it has no fingerprints on it. He paused, then nodded his head gen,tl, y,.

"But it should have had," he said. 'If Mrs. Summer-hayes

kept it, she would have kept it iocently, and so her

fingerprints \$hou/d have been on t.

Maureen exclaimed:

"I think you're mad. I've never seen that photograph

in my life--except at Mrs. Upward's that day."

"It is fortunate for you," said Poirot, "that I know that

you are speaking the truth. The photograph was put into

that drawer only a few minutes before I foundit there. Twice that morning the contents of that drawer were tumbled on

to the ground, twice I replaced them; the first time the

photograph was not in the drawer, the second time it tvas.

It had been placed there during that intervaland I kno y ho.-

A new note crept into his voice. He was no longer a ridiculous little man with an absurd moustache and dyed

hair, he was a hunter very close to his quarry.

"The crimes were committed by a turin--they were

mitred for the simplest of all reasons--for money. In Mrs.

Upward's house there was a book found and on the flyleaf

of that book is written Evely Holm. Hope was the name

Eva Kane took when she left England. If her real name

was Evelyn then in all probability she gave the name of

Evelyn to her ch:Id when It was born. B,,t Eelya a

mvam as well as a vaoman'\$. Why had we assumed that Eva

Kane's child was a girl? Roughly because the \$.. Cot said so I But actually the \$wday Comet had not saia

so in so many words, it had assumed it because of a to -marc-tic

her child was born--so nobody could say what the ex of the child would be.

"That is where I let myself be misled. By the romantic inaccuracy of the Press.

"Evelyn Hope, Eva Kane's son, comes to England. He is talented and he attracts the attention of a very rich woman who knows nothing about his origin--only the romantic story he chooses to tell her. (A very pretty little story it was--all about a tragic young ballerina dying of tuberculosis in Paris I)

"She is a lonely woman who has recently lost her own son. The talented young playwright takes her name by deed poll.

"But?your-,, real name is Evelyn Hope, isn't it, Mr.

t,noard

Robin Upward cried out shrilly:

"Of course it isn't I I don't know what you're talking

"You really cannot hope to deny it. There are people who know you under that name. The name Evelyn Hope, written in the book, is in your handwriting--the same handowriting as the words 'my mother' on the back of this

photograph. Mrs. McGinty saw the photograph and the

writing on it when she was tidying your things away. She

spoke to you about it after reading the Sunday Comet. Mrs. McGinty assumed that it was a photograph

of Mrs. Utnoard when young, since she had no idea Mrs. Upward was not

your real mother. But you knew that if once she mentioned

the matter so that it came to Mrs. Upward's ears, it would

be the end. Mrs. Upward had quite fanatical views on the

subject of heredity. She would not tolerate for a moment

an adopted son who was the son of a famous murderer.

No,,r would she forgive your lies on the subject.

' So Mrs. McGinty had at all costs to be silenced. You

r

romised her a little present, perhaps, for being discreet.

ou called on her the next evening on your way to broad-cast--and

you killed her I Like this..."

With a sudden movement, Poirot seized the sugar hammer

from the shelf and whirled it round and down as though to

bring it crashing down on Robin's head.

So menacing was the gesture that several of the circle

cried out.

x?8

Robin Upward screamed. A high terrified scream.

He yelled: "Don't... don't . . . It was an accident.

I swear it was an accident. I didn't mean to kill her. I lost my,,head. I swear I did." You washed off the blood and put the sugar hammer back in this room where you had found it. But there are new scientific methods of determining blood stains--and of bringing up latent fingerprints." "I tell you I never meant to kill her It was all a mistake And anyway it isn't -m fault I'm n t responsible. It's in my blood. I can t help it. You cim t hang me for something that isn't my fault Under his

breath 8pence muttered: "Can't we? You

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see if
we don't !"
Aloud he
spoke in a grave official voice:
"I must
warn you, Mr. Upward, that anything you
say...
CHAPTER
XXVI
"I REALLY
DON'T see, M. Poirot, how ever you came to suspect Robin
Upward."
Poirot looked
complacently at the faces turned towards him.
He
always
enjoyed explanations.
"I ought
to have suspected him much sooner. The clue, such a
simple clue, was the sentence uttered by Mrs. Summer-hayes at the
cocktail party that day. She said t,o Robin Upward: 'I
don't like being adopted, do you? Those were the revealing
two words. Do you? They meant--they could only mean--that
Mrs. Upward was not Robin's own mother.
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"Mrs. Upward

was morbidly

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anxious herself that no one should know that

Robin was not her own son. She had probably heard too many ribald comments on brilliant young men who live with and upon elderly women. And very few people did know---only the small theatrical coterie where she had first come across Robin. She had few intimate friends in this country, having lived abroad so long, and she chose in any case to come and settle down hero

far away from her own Yorkshire. Even when she met friends of the old days, she did not enlighten them when they assumed that this Robin was the same Robin they had known as a little boy.

"But from the very first something had struck me as not quite natural in the household at Laburnums. Robin's attitude to Mrs. Upward was not that of either a spored child, or of a devoted son. It was the attitude of a prot6g6 to apatron. The rather fanciful title of Madre had a theatrical touch. And Mrs. Upward, though she was clearly Very fond of Robin, nevertheless unconsciously treated him as a

prized possession that she had bought and paid for.

"So there is Robin Upward, comfortably established, with 'Madre's' purse to back his ventures, and then into his assured world comes Mrs. McGinty who has recognised the photograph that he keeps in a drawer--the photograph with 'my mother' written on the back of it. His mother, whom he has told Mrs. Upward was a talented young ballet dancer who died of tuberculosis I Mrs. McGinty, of course, thinks that the photograph is of Mrs. Upward when young, since she assumes as a matter of course that Mrs. Upward is Robin's own mother. I do not think that actual blackmail ever entered Mrs. McGinty's mind, but she did hope, per-haps, for a 'nice little present,' as a reward for holding her tongue about a piece of bygone gossip which would not have been pleasant for a' proud' woman like Mrs. Upward.

"But Robin Upward was taking no chances. He purloins the sugar hammer, lau ,ghingly referred to as a perfect weapon for murder by Mrs. Summerhayes, and on the following evening, he stops at Mrs. McGinty's cottage on his way to broadcast. She takes him into the parlour, quite un-suspicious, and he kills her. He knows where she keeps her savings--everyone in Broadhinny seems to knowwand h fakes a burglary, hiding the money outside the house.

Bentley is suspected and arrested. Everything is now

for clever Robin Upward.

"But then, suddenly, I produce four photographs, and Mrs. Upward recognises the one of Eva Kane as being identical with a photograph of Robin's ballerina mother! She needs a little time to think things out. Murder is involved. Can it be possible that Rob----? No, refuses to believe it.

"What action she would have taken in the end we do not know. But Robin was taking no chances. He plans the whole raise en scne. The visit to the Rep on Janet's night out, the telephone calls, the coffee cup carefully smeared with lipstick taken from Eve Carpenter's bag, he even buYs a bottle of her distinctive perfume. The whole thing was a theatrical scene setting with prepared props. Whilst Mra. Oliver waited in the car, Robin ran back twice into the house. The murder was a matter of seconds. After that there was only the swift distribution of the 'props.' And with Mm. Upward dead, he inherited a large fortune by the terms of her will, and no suspicion could attach to him since it would seem quite certain that a woman had committed the crime. With three women visiting the cottage that night, one of them was almost sure to be suspected. And that, indeed, was so.

"But Robin, like all criminals, was careless and over confident. Not only was there a book in the cottage with hi, original name scribbled in it, but he also kept, for pur-poses of his own, the fatal photograph. It would have been much safer for him if he had destroyed it, but he clung to the belief that he could use it to incriminate someone else at the right moment.

"He probably thought then of Mrs. Summerhayea. That may be the reason he moved out of the cottage and into Long Meadows. After all, the sugar hammer was hers, and IVlra. Summerhayes was, he knew, an adopted child and might find it hard to prove she was not Eva Kane's daughter.

"However, when Deirdre Henderson admitted having been on the scene of the crime, he conceived the idea of planting the photograph amongst her possessions. He tried to do so, using a ladder that the gardener had left against the window. But Mrs. Wetherby was nervous and had insisted on all the windows being kept locked, so Robin did not succeed in his purpose. He came straight back here and pUt the photograph in a drawer which, unfortunately for him, I had searched only a short time before.

"I knew, therefore, that the photograph had been planted,

and I knew by whom--by the only other person in the house
--that person who was typing industriously over my head.

"Since the name Evelyn Hope had been written on the fl.leaf of the book from the cottage, Evelyn Hope must he either Mrs. Upward--or Robin Upward. . . .

"The name Evelyn had led me astray--I had connected it with Mrs. Carpenter since her name was Eve. But Evely

"I remembered the conversation Mrs. Oliver had told

me about at the Little Rep in Cullenquay. The young actor who had been talking to her was the person I wanted to confirm my theory--the theory that Robin was not Mrs.

Upward's own son. For by the way he had talked, it seemed clear that he knew the real facts. And his story of Mrs.

Upward's swift retribution on a young man who had deceived her as to his origim was suggestive.

"The truth is that I ought to have seen the whole thing very much sooner. I was handicapped by a serious error.

I believed that I had been deliberately pushed with the intention of sending me on to a railway line--and that the person who had done so was the murderer of Mrs. McGinty.

Now Robin Upward was practically the only person in

Broadhinny who could not have been at Kilchester station at that time."

There was a sudden chuckle from Iohnnie Summe-

' Probably some old market woman with a basket. They do shove."

Poirot said:

"Actually, Robin Upward was far too conceited to fear me at all. It is a chara'teristic of murderers. Fortunately, perhaps. For in this case there was very little evidence." Mm. Oliver stirred.

"Do you mean to say," she demanded incredulously,
"that Robin murdered his mother whilst I sat outside in
the car, and that I hadn't the leat idea of it? There wouldn't
have been time I"

"Oh yes, there would. People's ideas of time are usually ludicrously wrong. Just notice some time how swiftly a stage run be reset. In case it was mostly a matter of props."

"Good theatre," murmured Mrs. Oliver mechanically.

"Yes, it was pre-eminently a theatrical murder. All very much contrived."

"And I sat there in the ear--and hadn't the least idea I"
"I am afraid," murmured Poirot, "that your woman's
intuition was taking a day off....'

CHAPTER XXVII

"I'M NOT going back to Breather & Scuttle," said Maude

Williams. "They're a lousy finn anyway."

"And they have served their purpose."

"What do you mean by that, M. Poirot?"

"Why did you come to this part of the world? N

I suppose being Mr. Knowall, you think you know? N

"I have a little idea."

"And what is this famous idea?"

Poirot was looking meditatively at Maude's hair.

"I have been very discreet," he said. "It has been

assumed that the woman who went into Mrs. Upward's

house, the fair-haired woman that Edna saw, was Mrs.

ofCfCrenter, and that she has denied being there simply out

ight. Since it was Robin Upward who killed Mrs.

Upward, her presence has no more significance than that

of Miss Henderson. But all the same I do not think she

tg\$ there. I think; Miss Williams, that the woman Edna

sa,w, was you.",,

Why me?

Her voice was hard.

Poirot countered with another question.

"Why were you so interested in Broadhinny? gVhy,

when you went over there, did you ask Robin Upward for

an autograph--you are not the autograph-hunting type.

What did you know about the Upwards? Why did you come to this part of the world in the first place? How did you know that Eva Kane died in Australia and the name she took when she left England?"

"Good at guessing, aren't you? Well, I've nothing to hide, not really."

She opened her handbag. From a worn notecase she pulled out a small newspaper cutting frayed with age. It showed the face that Poirot by now knew so well, the sunperkwfaCe of Eva Kane.

ritten acroSS it were the words, \$h¢ Mllcd my mother.

Poirot handed it back to her.

"Yes, I thought so. Your real name is Craig?"

Maude nodded.

"I was brought up by some cousinsvery decent they were. But I was old enough when it all happened not to forget. I used to think about it a good deal. About her. She was a nasty bit of goods all right--children know I My father was justweak. And besotted by her. But he took the rap. For something, I've always believed, that she did. Oh yes, I know he's an accessory after the fact--but it's not quite the same thing, is it? I always meant to find out what had become of her. When I was grown up, I got

detectives on to it. They traced her to Australia and finally reported that she was dead. She'd left a son--Evelyn Hope he called himself.

"Well, that seemed to close the account. But then I got pally with a young actor chap. He mentioned someone called Evelyn Hope who'd come from Australia, but who now called himself Robin Upward and who wrote plays.

I was interested. One night Robin Upward was pointed out to me--and he was with his mother. So I thought that, after all, Eva Kane wam't dead. Instead, she was queening it about with a packet of money.

"I got myself a job down here. I was curious--and a bit more than curious. All right, I'll admit it, I thought I'd like to get even with her in some way When ybu brought

up

the

all this business about James Bentley, I jum ..d to

conclusion that it has Mrs. Upward who'd killed

Mrs.

McGinty. Eva Kane up to her tricks again. I happened

to

hear from Michael West that Robin Upward and

Mrs.

Oliver were coming over to this show at the

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Cullenquay
Rep. I decided to go to Broadhinny and beard the
woman.
I meant--I don't quite know what I meant. I'm
telling
you everything--I took a little pistol I had in the war
with
me. To frighten her? Or more? Honestly,
I don't
knOW.
"Well, I got there. There was no sound in
the house.
The door was unlocked. I went in. You know
how I
found her. Sitting there dead, her face all
pule and
swollen. All the things I'd b
n thinking seemed silly and
melodramatic. I knew that I
d never, really, want to kill
anyone
when it came to it
                   But I
did realise that it might
   be awkward to explain what I'd
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been doing in the house.

It was a cold night and I'd got gloves
on,
so
I
knew
I
hadn't

left any fingerprints, and I didn't think for a moment anyone had seen me. That's all." She paused and added abruptly: "What,, are. you,, goin. g to do about, it ."

Nothing, smd Hercule Poarot. "I wish you good luck in life, that is alL"

EPILOGUE

HmCUL Porno? and Superintendent Spence were celebrating at the La 1,"lle Crand'mbre.

As coffee was served Spence leaned back in his chair and gave a deep sigh of repletion.

"N.ot at all bad grub here," he said approvingly. "A bit frenckified, perhaps, but after all where can you get a decent

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eak and chips nowadays?"
"I had been dining here on the evening you first came to
me," said Poirot reminiscently.
"Ah, a lot of water under the bridge since then. I've
got to hand it to you, M. Poirot. You did the trick all
   rih"
   g t.
   A slight smile creased his wooden countenance.
"Lucky
   -ta,-,t young man didn't realise how very little
evidence we d really got. Why, a clever counsel would have
made mincemeat of it! But he lost his head completely.
and gave the show away. Spilt the beans and incriminated
himself up to the hilt. Lucky for us I"
"It was not entirely luck," said Poirot revrovingly "I
phyed him, as you play the big fish I He thinks Ie the
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evidence against Mrs. Summerhayes seriouslymwhen it is

not so, he suffers the reaction and goes to pieces. And

besides, he is a coward. I whirl the sugar hammer and he

thinks I mean to hit him Acute fear alway produces the

"I. ucky y. ou didn't ..ffer from Major Summerhayes' a/cco.n," ad .Spence with a grin. "Got a temper, he has,

- qmck

on hh feet. I only got between you just in time.

Has

he forgiven you yet?"

M" Oh yes, we are/he firmest friends. And I have given ra Summerhayes a cookery book and have also taught her personally how to make an omeletteBon lhYu, what I

He closed his eyes.

"Complicated business, the whole thing," ruminated

Spence, uninterested in Poirot'\$ agonised memories. "Just

shows how true the old saying is that everyone's got some-thing

to hide. Mrs. Carpenter, now, had a narrow squeak

of being arrested for murder. If ever a woman acted guilty,

she did, and all for what ?"

"Eh bien, what?" asked Poirot curiously.

"Just the usual business of a rather unsavoury past.

She had been a taxi dancer--and a bright girl with plenty of men friends I She wasn't a war widow when she came and settled down in Broadhinny. Only what they call nowadays an 'unofficial wife.' Well, of course all that wouldn't do for a stuffed shirt like Guy Carpenter, so she'd spun him a very different sort of tale. And she was frantic lest the whole thing xvould come out once we started poking round into people's origins."

He sipped his coffee, and then gave a low chuckle.

"Then take the Wetherbys. Sinister sort of house. Hate and malice. Awkward frustrated sort of girl. And what's

behind that ? Nothing ,sinister. Just money I Plain . s. cl."

"As simple as that 1

"The girl has the money--quite a lot of it. Left her by an aunt. So mother keeps tight hold of her in case she should want to marry. And stepfather loathes her because she has the dibs and pays the bills. I gather he himself has been a failure at anything he's tried. A mean cuss--and as

for Mrs. W., she's pure poison dissolved in sugar."

"I agree with you." Poirot nodded his head in a satisfied fashion. "It is fortunate that the girl has money. It makes

her marriage to James Bentley much more easy to arrange."

Superintendent Spence looked surprised.

"Going to marry James Bentley? Deirdre Henderson?
Who says so?"

"I say so," said Poirot. "I occupy myself with the affair.

I have, now that our little problem is over, too much time on my hands. I shall employ myself in forwarding this marriage. As yet, the two concerned have no idea of such a thing. But they are attracted. Left to themselves, nothing would happen--but they have to reckon with Hercule Poirot. You will see I The affair will march."

Spence grinned.

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"Don't rmnd ticking your fingera m other poople's

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pie, do you?"
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"Mtn cker, that does not come well from you," aid Poirot reproaclffully.

"Ah, you've got me there. All the same, James Bentley i a poor stick."

"Certainly he is a poor stick l At the moment he is positively aggrieved because he is not going to be hanged."

"He ought to be down on his knees with gratitude to you," said Spenee.

"Say, rather, to you. But apparently he does not think o." "Queer cuss."

"As you say, and yet at least two women have been prepared to take an interest in him. Nature i very unexpected."

"I thought it was liaude W'dliams you were going to pair off with him."

"He shall make his choice," aid Poirot. "He shall--how do you say it ?--award the apple. But I think that it is Deirdre Henderson that he will choose. Maude Williams has too much energy and vitality. With her he would retire even farther into his shell."

"Can't think why either of them should want him I"

"The ways of Nature are indeed inscrutable."

"All the same, you'll have your work cut out. First bringing him up to the scratch--and then prising the girl loose from poison puss mother---he'll fight you tooth and claw I"

"Success is on the side of the big battalions."

"On the side of the big moustaches, I uppoe you

Spence roared. Poirot troked his moustache eom-placently and su.ggested a brandy.

"I don't mind if I do, M. Poirot."

Poirot gave the order.

"Ah," aid \$pence, "I knew there was something else
I had to tell you. You remember the Rendell?"

"Naturally."

"Well, when we were checking up on him, something rather odd came to light. It seems that when his first wife died in Leeds where his practice was at that time, the p?lice there got ome rather nasty anonymous letters about him. Saying, in ffect, that he'd poisoned her. Of course

people do say that sort of thing. She'd been attended by

an outside doctor, reputable man, and he seemed to think

her death was quite above board. There was nothing to go

upon except the fact that they'd mutually insured their lives in each other's favour, and people do do that Nothing for

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us to go upon, as I say, and yet--I wonder? What do
you
think?"
Poirot
remembered Mrs. Rendell's frightened air. Her
mention
of anon3ous letters, and her insistence that
she
did not believe anything they said. He remembered,
too,
her certainty that his inquiry about Mrs
McGinty was
only
a pretext.
He said," I should imagine that it was not only
the polic
who got
anonymous letters."
"Sent them to her, too
"I think so. When I appeared in Broadhinny,
she
thought I was on her husband's track, and that the
McGinty
business was a pretext. Yes--and he thought so, too
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That explains it [ It was Dr. Rendell who tried to push
me
under the train that night
Ι''
"Think he'll have a shot at doing this wife in, too
?"
"I think she would be wise not to insure her life in
his
fvour," said Poirot dryly. "But if he believea
we have an
eye on him he will
probably be prudent."
"We'll do what we can. We'll keep an
ey on our
doctor, and make
it clear we're doing
Poirot
raised his brandy glass.
"To
Mrs. Oliver," he said.
"What put her into your
head suddenly?"
"Woman's
intuition," said Poirot.
There was silence for a moment, then
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Spence said slowly:
"Robin Upward is coming up for trial
next week. You
know, Poirot, I can't
help feeling doubtful
Poirot interrupted
him with horror.
"tv/on D/eu £ You are not now doubtful about Robin
Upward's guilt, are you? Do not say you want
to over
Superintendent Spe
-n, ee grinned reassuringly.
"Good lord, no. lie s a murderer all
right l" lie added: "Cocky
e
ough
for
anything I "
ТНВ
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