

pressured by desire, a person of seemingly good character may do the unthinkable. So, it was, I believe in this case. But that is not the end. There follows a new problem.

Exposure now faces the person of whom we are speaking. But he, or she, has changed. The moral fibre is blunted. The person is desperate, fighting a losing battle, prepared to take any means that come to hand for exposure means ruin. And so, we may clutch the dagger once more.

To this man or woman, when the dagger is removed the old persona returns again, normal, kindly. But now we know the truth about who we are, what we are capable of doing. If the need again should ever appear then once more the inner demon will arise and strike.

This is not a merciless judgement. It is, in my experience, the truth. And the truth, however ugly, however horrifying in itself, is always beautiful to the seeker.

(POIROT and the suspects vanish, swiftly.)

(SHEPPARD enters his home and hands

CAROLINE his hat. She hands him a coffee in return.)

CAROLINE. Where've you been?

SHEPPARD. 'Fraid I can't tell you.

CAROLINE. Can't or won't?

SHEPPARD. It's official business, Caroline. Poirot has me doing some legwork to prepare for the inquest. Honestly, I have no idea what he's thinking. He keeps everything to himself.

CAROLINE. Really? Well, he was quite open with me.

SHEPPARD. What? When?

CAROLINE. This morning. He dropped in with some vegetables. I think he just needed someone to confide in.

SHEPPARD. And why should he confide in you?

CAROLINE. I have one of those faces. People tell me things. And he's got a lot on his mind, poor dear. I think he might be a little sweet on me. Ha! We talked and talked for hours.

SHEPPARD. Hours?

CAROLINE. Oh yes, we spoke about everything. A little about gardening, a little about the murder. A little about his family. He has an ill nephew, did you know? They're going to have to put him in an asylum like St. Bernard's up in Cranchester. I told him how Mrs. Clannet's son was a dipsomaniac and -

SHEPPARD. Caroline! What did he say about the murder?

CAROLINE. He agrees with me that Ralph should come forward if he's to clear his name.

SHEPPARD. Did you mention what you overheard in the woods?

CAROLINE. I did!

SHEPPARD. Good Lord. What else did you divulge?

CAROLINE. He wanted to know what patients you saw the other day.

I told him about Colonel Hibbert's neuralgia, and the sea sick sailor boy with the ear infection and also a mention of Miss Russell, poking around about poison.

SHEPPARD. Those were private conversations!

CAROLINE. Then you shouldn't have talked so loudly. Something fishy about that Russell woman and Poirot knows it. And as for Ralph, I'm sure there's an -

SHEPPARD. Caroline, you're as good as tightening the noose around the poor boy's -