

(He hurls the dagger, off target but close to POIROT. THWACK! The blade sticks from the floor, vibrating.)

MAJOR BLUNT. I wasn't going to... I would never have...

(The madness passes.)

POIROT. Under the right circumstances, perhaps you might.

MAJOR BLUNT. Tougher than you look, aren't you? Guess you found me out, too.

POIROT. Why must people in England always treat love as though it was some dirty little secret? And yet, you are blind to the truth, Major.

MAJOR BLUNT. What do you mean?

POIROT. Come, now. It is not Captain Paton Miss Flora loves.

MAJOR BLUNT. Do you really think...?

POIROT. Sacre bleu, must I spell it out?

MAJOR BLUNT. I've been a complete fool. Can you forgive me, Poirot?

POIROT. Your pride is wounded. Mine is not. She is in the garden, now. If you love her, go.

(MAJOR BLUNT exits. POIROT exhales with relief.)

Oh! Mon dieu!

SHEPPARD. Well! That was quite an event! I was afraid he was going to kill you.

POIROT. Yes, the thought had occurred to me, too.

SHEPPARD. Are you all right?

(POIROT pulls the knife free and returns it to the curio table.)

POIROT. I am merely a small Belgian detective and he is a big game hunter, yes? And still, one might say this was "the lopsided match." The Major gave up his secrets all too quick, you see. As did Miss Flora.

SHEPPARD. Ha. You played them both, didn't you? Bravo! But, hold on. Flora's account alters our timeline, doesn't it? All those alibis are worthless, now.

You were right about not releasing Kent. He could have done it.

POIROT. But, the phone call.

SHEPPARD. We always come up against it, yes.

POIROT. Ah. And here is another little surprise. This afternoon's edition of the newspaper. Read.

(POIROT hands him the newspaper.)

SHEPPARD. "The police have been seeking Captain Ralph Paton, the nephew of Roger Ackroyd, whose death occurred under tragic circumstances last Friday. Captain Paton has been found at Liverpool, on the point of embarking for America." But it isn't true!

POIROT. Raglan was loathe to let me send this to the press. If I am wrong, I will take the responsibility.

SHEPPARD. How does this help us?

POIROT. Use your little grey cells. One of our players does not want us to know what happened to Captain Paton.

(MISS RUSSELL enters.)

MISS RUSSELL. Parker said you called for me?

POIROT. Ah, Miss Russell. I have news I wish to share with you.

MISS RUSSELL. News?

POIROT. Charles Kent has been arrested in Liverpool.

(*A pause.*)

MISS RUSSELL. Well, what of it?

(*There is an uncomfortable silence.*)

I don't understand. Who is he?

POIROT. The man who came to Fernly the night of the murder. I intend to know who he came to see, too.

(*Another silence. POIROT's stare is intense and exasperating. Finally, MISS RUSSELL winks.*)

MISS RUSSELL. He never touched Mr. Ackroyd. You must believe me.

POIROT. I do. But I needed to hear you say it.

MISS RUSSELL. Is he suspected of the crime?

POIROT. Yes. But you alone can save him. Why was he here?

MISS RUSSELL. He came to see me.

POIROT. In the boat house.

MISS RUSSELL. How did you know?

POIROT. It is the business of Poirot to know these things. Charles Kent, he is your son, is he not?

(*SHEPPARD gasps.*)

SHEPPARD. Her son?

MISS RUSSELL. Yes. No one has ever known. It was long ago, down in Kent. I wasn't married.

POIROT. So you took the name of the county as a surname for him, I understand.

MISS RUSSELL. He was raised by my relatives. I was only allowed to see him on rare occasions while he was growing up, before they moved him to Canada. Charles was always a good boy but things turned out rather

badly for him. He drank, then took drugs. Somehow, he found out that I was his mother. He wrote asking for money and said he was coming to Fernly.

POIROT. So you chose to meet in the boat house.

MISS RUSSELL. I gave him all the money I had. Charles barely said a word, then left.

POIROT. What time was that?

MISS RUSSELL. Twenty-five minutes past nine. He left the way he came.

POIROT. Then, you came back to Fernly and saw Major Blunt walking the terrace, smoking.

MISS RUSSELL. Yes. Inspector Raglan will surely blame Charlie. He'll go to the gallows for something he didn't do! ...Please help him.

POIROT. I told you not to keep secrets. Now, things are more complicated... One last thing, has Miss Bourne left Fernly Hall yet?

MISS RUSSELL. Yes, a short while ago. Just after the late post arrived.

SHEPPARD. But where did she go?

POIROT. Don't you know, Doctor? She is no doubt at your house. Keep up.

(*Fernly and MISS RUSSELL disappear.*)

CAROLINE and URSULA BOURNE appear in the Sheppards' kitchen. URSULA has been crying. SHEPPARD and POIROT enter.)

CAROLINE. There, there, dear. I found her in such a state! I asked her to come in to collect herself.

URSULA. I needed to speak to you privately. Doctor. The newspaper says that Ralph Paton has been arrested. Arrested!