

*(He patters.)*

**SHEPPARD.** Nine thirty. In the kitchen. Odds and ends. My mind wandering back to Fernly and poor Ackroyd. A quarter past ten.

*(CAROLINE enters in a robe.)*

**CAROLINE.** I thought I heard you. Still awake?

**SHEPPARD.** Just turning in.

*(The phone rings.)*

**CAROLINE.** That'll be Mrs. Bates, I suspect. The baby, again. Poor child is -

*(SHEPPARD answers.)*

**SHEPPARD.** Hello? Yes? It is, thank you. What? What? I can't hear you well. Say that again? Oh. My. Certainly!

*(He hangs up.)*

Hand me my bag. I need to pull the car around.

**CAROLINE.** What is it?

**SHEPPARD.** That was Parker telephoning from Fernly. They've just found Roger Ackroyd. Murdered!

*(SHEPPARD rushes offstage.)*

*(Fernly reappears. There is a banging on the door from the main hallway. PARKER races to the front door.)*

*(Offstage.)* Parker! Parker let me in!

**PARKER.** One moment, please!

*(PARKER lets the DOCTOR in. SHEPPARD rushes into the drawing room. PARKER follows.)*

**SHEPPARD.** Where is he?

**PARKER.** I beg your pardon, sir?

**SHEPPARD.** Don't stand there staring at me, man. Have you notified the police?

**PARKER.** The police, sir?

**SHEPPARD.** What's the matter with you, Parker? You said your employer had been murdered?

**PARKER.** Murdered?

**SHEPPARD.** Didn't you telephone me not five minutes ago to say Mr. Ackroyd had been murdered?

**PARKER.** I beg your pardon!

**SHEPPARD.** Is this is some kind of hoax? Where is Mr. Ackroyd?

**PARKER.** In the writing room, I fancy. The ladies have gone to bed. And Major Blunt is in the billiard room.

**SHEPPARD.** If this is a practical joke, I don't appreciate it.

*(SHEPPARD pounds on the doors of the writing room.)*

Ackroyd? Ackroyd are you in there?

*(No answer. He tries the handle.)*

It's locked. Ackroyd it's Sheppard! Let me in!

*(Silence.)*

Look here, Parker, I'm going to pry open the doors. I'll take full responsibility.

**PARKER.** If you say so, sir.

*(SHEPPARD grabs a poker from fireplace and pries open the doors.)*

**SHEPPARD.** Roger?

(**SHEPPARD** stumbles backward. **ROGER ACKROYD** is seated at his desk, hunched over in the dark of the room. He is revealed to have a metal dagger in his neck.)

(*The other chair in the room is oddly placed, close to the doorway and facing upstage. All else is pristine.*)

**PARKER.** Good Lord! Oh! Mr. Ackroyd -

**SHEPPARD.** Is dead. Stabbed from behind.

(*There is an uncomfortable silence. Both MEN are frozen by the sight. Then, PARKER approaches the body.*)

No, no. You mustn't touch anything. It is imperative not to disturb the body or the dagger. The police must see him exactly as he is, now. And by all means, nobody must know what has happened here until the authorities arrive. Go make the call.

**PARKER.** The call, sir?

**SHEPPARD.** The police, Parker. You must go and telephone the police without delay.

**PARKER.** The police? Yes, sir.

**SHEPPARD.** Let them know what terrible thing has happened. Tell them to send their very best. Now, go.

(**PARKER** leaves.)

Ackroyd. My God. Ackroyd. Can this be real?

(**SHEPPARD** closes the doors.)

(**MAJOR BLUNT, PARKER** and **INSPECTOR RAGLAN** appear. **BLUNT** is notably agitated. **PARKER** stands in the corner.)

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** Oy! A bad business! A very bad business, indeed. Now, as I understand it, the doctor and the butler found the body. Major Blunt was in the billiard room, the ladies were upstairs and Miss Russell and Miss Bourne were in their respective quarters. The question remains - when did the death occur?

**SHEPPARD.** At least half an hour earlier than when we found him. It took you only thirty minutes to get here. So that sets the crime at -

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** Nearly an hour ago. Quite.

And no one has disturbed the body since. Am I right, sir?

**SHEPPARD.** Quite right, Inspector Rogan.

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** Rag-lan, sir. Inspector Raglan. I've been down in Cranchester looking into a series of robberies.

Good job I was near. A murder in King's Abbot. Hard to believe, isn't it? Who would do such a thing?

**SHEPPARD.** Yes, we were hoping perhaps you could figure that out.

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** And I will! Oh, yes, I will. Mark my words.

**MAJOR BLUNT.** It must have been a robbery.

**SHEPPARD.** Is anything missing?

**MAJOR BLUNT.** Whoever it was, took him by surprise. Roger never had a chance.

**SHEPPARD.** But, how did the burglar get in?

**MAJOR BLUNT.** I've been pondering that.

**SHEPPARD.** What do you think happened, Major?

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** Just a moment now, please. I'm in charge here.

**MAJOR BLUNT.** All right, then what do you think happened?