

**SHEPPARD.** Miss Russell, do we know if Mr. Ackroyd received any strangers in the past week?

**MISS RUSSELL.** Nothing on the calendar. Parker?

**PARKER.** A young man, came down last Wednesday, sir. From Curtis and Trout, I understood he was.

**MISS RUSSELL.** Yes. Mr. Ackroyd had some idea of purchasing a dictation machine. The firm sent down their representative, but I believe Mr. Ackroyd decided against it as I do all his dictation, personally. The salesman was short and squat.

**SHEPPARD.** Then he's not who I saw on the path.

**POIROT.** A good line of questioning, Doctor. I thank you, all.

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** Yes, *WE* thank you.

*(The SERVANTS leave.)*

**SHEPPARD.** What're you thinking, Poirot?

*(POIROT examines the glass curio table.)*

**POIROT.** Oh, I have not yet thought about what to think. This case is very curious. And very interesting.

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** And very much solved, as far as can tell. Ralph Paton's our man.

**POIROT.** And how exactly have you come to your solution? I wonder?

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** Method, sir. Captain Paton leaves The Three Boars at nine o'clock. He heads to Fern Hill. At nine thirty, Parker hears Ackroyd refusing to give Paton money. Paton leaves the way he came in - through the window. At the terrace, he overhears Miss Flora's goodnight to her uncle. He steals in, takes the dagger from the table, and returns through the study window and strikes. He slips out the window and makes for the station, rings up from there.

**POIROT.** But, why?

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** Difficult to say on that. Murderers do funny things. And then, there's the footprints outside the window. Shoes with rubber studs!

**POIROT.** Captain Paton is a foolish man, to leave behind so much evidence.

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** Indeed! A tragic case. A nice young fellow, a former soldier, no less, gone wrong. That's all there is to it.

**POIROT.** Then, I'm afraid I'm not much help to you, after all, Inspector.

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** I know it must be a wallop in the old broad basket, but I think we did our job without any help from the old guard this time out. It was good to see the famed Hercule Poirot in action one last time. I'll tell the boys at the station. Sir, it's been a pleasure.

**POIROT.** I'm sure it has.

**INSPECTOR RAGLAN.** Doctor.

*(INSPECTOR RAGLAN exits.)*

**SHEPPARD.** The Inspector may be satisfied, but I'm not. What's more, I question his method.

**POIROT.** Method? I have known road sweepers with more method. But you mustn't blame him. They teach the new ones only to follow the rules. Men like the Inspector are no longer encouraged to become...creative when considering a crime.

**SHEPPARD.** Pity the change.

**POIROT.** Do you really want to help me, Doctor?

**SHEPPARD.** There is nothing I should like better. You don't know what a dull ol' fogey's life I lead.

**POIROT.** Good! We are colleagues, then! Come!

*(Fernly disappears. SHEPPARD addresses the audience.)*

**SHEPPARD.** We searched the grounds. I had no idea what he was looking for, but to watch him was a thrill.

One could see how he'd earned his reputation. Down by the little boat house by the pond.

*(They are at the boat house.)*

It's quite dark in here, filled with cobwebs.

Well, Mr. Poirot. Nothing here but an old row boat, some rusty chairs, and a forgotten croquet set. No one has been here for some time.

**POIROT.** Fernly has many secrets, I think. Who inherited the estate, I wonder?

**SHEPPARD.** I hadn't considered it.

**POIROT.** HA! I wonder just what you mean by that, Doctor. Oh, no! You would not tell me your true thoughts. Everyone has something to hide. Even you, my friend.

**SHEPPARD.** My sister recently said something similar about people keeping secrets.

**POIROT.** She is wise. But it is not easy to hide things from Hercule Poirot. Eventually, I see it all, good and bad. Ah! Now, what do you make of this?

**SHEPPARD.** Found something?

*(POIROT delicately picks up -)*

**POIROT.** A scrap. Stiff white linen.

**SHEPPARD.** Torn from a handkerchief?

**POIROT.** Perhaps. And this! HA!

*(He picks up -)*

A goose quill by the look of it. With a blood stain at the base? It has punctured flesh, recently. And we are not done. Do you see? Something gold glistening in the pond. There amongst the weed. Look!

*(He rolls up his sleeve and reaches into the water.)*

**SHEPPARD.** There you have it. Looks like -

*(POIROT pulls out -)*

**POIROT.** A wedding ring. "From R., March 13th."

**SHEPPARD.** What does it mean?

**POIROT.** It means...it is time for tea.

*(They enter Fernly. FLORA enters from the terrace with MAJOR BLUNT.)*

**FLORA.** Mister Poirot! Hello! Major, this is the detective I told you about.

**POIROT.** I know Major Blunt by reputation. Hello, sir.

**MAJOR BLUNT.** Ah, how do you do?

**POIROT.** I do well, at present. But, I am glad to have encountered you. When did YOU last see Mr. Ackroyd alive?

*(MAJOR BLUNT leans into POIROT with a threatening air.)*

**MAJOR BLUNT.** I've already answered a dozen times! At half past nine I stepped out to smoke on the terrace, before I went to the billiard room - and I heard Ackroyd talking in the study.

**POIROT.** To whom?

**MAJOR BLUNT.** You're asking the wrong questions, man! What about the woman's footprints? Have you looked into that?