

There was not an indentation on it anywhere.

Poirot nodded, as though convinced, and we turned away, but he suddenly darted off and began examining the other flower-bed.

'Monsieur Bex!' he called. 'See here. Here are plenty of traces for you.'

The commissary joined him – and smiled.

'My dear Monsieur Poirot, those are without doubt the footprints of the gardener's large hobnailed boots. In any case, it would have no importance, since this side we have no tree, and consequently no means of gaining access to the upper storey.'

'True,' said Poirot, evidently crestfallen. 'So you think these footprints are of no importance?'

'Not the least in the world.'

Then, to my utter astonishment, Poirot pronounced these words:

'I do not agree with you. I have a little idea that these footprints are the most important things we have seen yet.'

M. Bex said nothing, merely shrugged his shoulders. He was far too courteous to utter his real opinion.

'Shall we proceed?' he asked, instead.

'Certainly. I can investigate this matter of the footprints later,' said Poirot cheerfully.

Instead of following the drive down to the gate, M. Bex turned up a path that branched off at right

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angles. It led, up a slight incline, round to the right of the house, and was bordered on either side by a kind of shrubbery. Suddenly it emerged into a little clearing from which one obtained a view of the sea. A seat had been placed here, and not far from it was a rather ramshackle shed. A few steps farther on, a neat line of small bushes marked the boundary of the Villa grounds. M. Bex pushed his way through these, and we found ourselves on a wide stretch of open downs. I looked round, and saw something that filled me with astonishment.

'Why, this is a Golf Course,' I cried.

Bex nodded.

'The links are not completed yet,' he explained. 'It is hoped to be able to open them some time next month. It was some of the men working on them who discovered the body early this morning.'

I gave a gasp. A little to my left, where for the moment I had overlooked it, was a long narrow pit and by it, face downwards, was the body of a man! For a moment my heart gave a terrible leap, and I had a wild fancy that the tragedy had been duplicated. But the commissary dispelled my illusion by moving forward with a sharp exclamation of annoyance:

'What have my police been about? They had strict orders to allow no one near the place without proper credentials!'