Parker transferred a respectful attention to Poirot.

'Parker,' said the little man, 'when you broke down the door with Dr Sheppard last night, and found your master dead, what was the state of the fire?'

Parker replied without a pause.

'It had burned very low, sir. It was almost out.'

'Ah!' said Poirot. The exclamation sounded almost triumphant. He went on:—

'Look round you, my good Parker. Is this room exactly as it was then?'

The butler's eye swept round. It came to rest on the windows.

'The curtains were drawn, sir, and the electric light was on.'

Poirot nodded approval.

'Anything else?'

'Yes, sir, this chair was drawn out a little more.'

He indicated a big grandfather chair to the left of the door between it and the window. I append a plan of the room with the chair in question marked with an X.

'Just show me,' said Poirot.

The butler drew the chair in question out a good two feet from the wall, turning it so that the seat faced the door.

'Voilà ce qui est curieux,' murmured Poirot. 'No one would want to sit in a chair in such a position, I fancy. Now who pushed it back into place again, I wonder? Did you, my friend?'

'No, sir,' said Parker. 'I was too upset with seeing the master and all.'

Poirot looked across at me.

'Did you, doctor?'

I shook my head.

'It was back in position when I arrived with the police, sir,' put in Parker. 'I'm sure of that.'

'Curious,' said Poirot again.

'Raymond or Blunt must have pushed it back,' I suggested. 'Surely it isn't important?'

'It is completely unimportant,' said Poirot. 'That is why it is so interesting,' he added softly.

'Excuse me a minute,' said Colonel Melrose. He left the room with Parker.

'Do you think Parker is speaking the truth?' I asked.

'About the chair, yes. Otherwise I do not know. You will find, M. le docteur, if you have much to do with cases of this kind, that they all resemble each other in one thing.'

'What is that?' I asked curiously.

'Every one concerned in them has something to hide.'

'Have I?' I asked, smiling.

Poirot looked at me attentively.

'I think you have,' he said quietly.

'But— '

'Have you told me everything known to you about this young man Paton?' He smiled as I grew red. 'Oh! do not fear. I will not press you. I shall learn it in good time.'

'I wish you'd tell me something of your methods,' I said hastily, to cover my confusion. 'The point about the fire, for instance?'

'Oh! that was very simple. You leave Mr Ackroyd at—ten minutes to nine, was it not?'

'Yes, exactly, I should say.'

'The window is then closed and bolted and the door unlocked. At a quarter past ten when the body is discovered, the door is locked and the window is open. Who opened it? Clearly only Mr Ackroyd himself could have done so, and for one of two reasons. Either because the room became unbearably hot (but since the fire was nearly out and there was a sharp drop in temperature last night, that cannot be the reason), or because he admitted some one that way. And if he admitted some one that way, it must have been some one well known to him, since he had previously shown himself uneasy on the subject of that same window.'

'It sounds very simple,' I said.

'Everything is simple, if you arrange the facts methodically. We are concerned now with the personality of the person who was with him at nine-thirty last night. Everything goes to show that that was the individual admitted by the window, and though Mr Ackroyd was seen alive later by Miss Flora, we cannot approach a solution of the mystery until we know who that visitor was. The window may have been left open after his departure and so afforded entrance to the murderer, or the same person may have returned a second time. Ah! here is the colonel who returns.'

'Colonel Melrose, would you be so extremely obliging as to sit down in this chair a minute. I thank you. Now, M. le docteur, will you kindly indicate to me the exact position of the dagger?'

I did so, whilst the little man stood in the doorway.

'The hilt of the dagger was plainly visible from the door then. Both you and Parker could see it at once?'

'Yes.'

Poirot went next to the window.

'The electric light was on, of course, when you discovered the body?' he asked over his shoulder.

I assented, and joined him where he was studying the marks on the window-sill.

'The rubber studs are the same pattern as those in Captain Paton's shoes,' he said quietly.

Then he came back once more to the middle of the room. His eye travelled round, searching everything in the room with a quick, trained glance.

'Are you a man of good observation, Dr Sheppard?' he asked at last.

'I think so,' I said, surprised.

'There was a fire in the grate, I see. When you broke the door down and found Mr Ackroyd dead, how was the fire? Was it low?'

I gave a vexed laugh.

'I—I really can't say. I didn't notice. Perhaps Mr Raymond or Major Blunt— '

The little man opposite me shook his head with a faint smile.

'One must always proceed with method. I made an error of judgment in asking you that question. To each man his own knowledge. You could tell me the details of the patient's appearance—nothing there would escape you. If I wanted information about the papers on that desk, Mr Raymond would have noticed anything there was to see. To find out about the fire, I must ask the man whose business it is to observe such things. You permit— '

He moved swiftly to the fireplace and rang the bell.

After a lapse of a minute or two Parker appeared.

'The bell rang, sir,' he said hesitatingly.

'Come in, Parker,' said Colonel Melrose. 'This gentleman wants to ask you something.'

Colonel Melrose entered with an animated manner.

'That telephone call has been traced at last,' he said. 'It did not come from here. It was put through to Dr Sheppard at 10.15 last night from a public call office at King's Abbot station. And at 10.23 the night mail leaves for Liverpool.'

'I can't help thinking you're mistaken, inspector,' said Colonel Melrose warmly. 'I've known Ralph Paton from a boy upward. He'd never stoop to murder.'

'Maybe not,' said the inspector tonelessly.

'What have you got against him?' I asked.

'Went out just on nine o'clock last night. Was seen in neighbourhood of Fernly Park somewhere about nine-thirty. Not been seen since. Believed to be in serious money difficulties. I've got a pair of his shoes here—shoes with rubber studs in them. He had two pairs, almost exactly alike. I'm going up now to compare them with those footmarks. The constable is up there seeing that no one tampers with them.'

'We'll go at once,' said Colonel Melrose. 'You and M. Poirot will accompany us, will you not?'

We assented, and all drove up in the colonel's car. The inspector was anxious to get at once to the footmarks, and asked to be put down at the lodge. About half-way up the drive, on the right, a path branched off which led round to the terrace and the window of Ackroyd's study.

'Would you like to go with the inspector, M. Poirot?' asked the chief constable, 'or would you prefer to examine the study?'

Poirot chose the latter alternative. Parker opened the door to us. His manner was smug and deferential, and he seemed to have recovered from his panic of the night before.

Colonel Melrose took a key from his pocket, and unlocking the door which led into the lobby, he ushered us through into the study.

'Except for the removal of the body, M. Poirot, this room is exactly as it was last night.'

'And the body was found—where?'

As precisely as possible, I described Ackroyd's position. The arm-chair still stood in front of the fire.

Poirot went and sat down in it.

'The blue letter you speak of, where was it when you left the room?'

'Mr Ackroyd had laid it down on this little table at his right hand.'

Poirot nodded.

'Except for that, everything was in its place?'

'Yes, I think so.'

Chapter 8

Inspector Raglan is Confident

We looked at each other.

'You'll have inquiries made at the station, of course?' I said.

'Naturally, but I'm not over sanguine as to the result. You know what that station is like.'

I did. King's Abbot is a mere village, but its station happens to be an important junction. Most of the big expresses stop there, and trains are shunted, re-sorted, and made up. It has two or three public telephone boxes. At that time of night three local trains come in close upon each other, to catch the connection with the express for the north which comes in at 10.19 and leaves at 10.23. The whole place is in a bustle, and the chances of one particular person being noticed telephoning or getting into the express are very small indeed.

'But why telephone at all?' demanded Melrose. 'That is what I find so extraordinary. There seems no rhyme or reason in the thing.'

Poirot carefully straightened a china ornament on one of the bookcases.

'Be sure there was a reason,' he said over his shoulder.

'But what reason could it be?'

'When we know that, we shall know everything. This case is very curious and very interesting.'

There was something almost indescribable in the way he said those last words. I felt that he was looking at the case from some peculiar angle of his own, and what he saw I could not tell.

He went to the window and stood there, looking out.

'You say it was nine o'clock, Dr Sheppard, when you met this stranger outside the gate?'

He asked the question without turning round.

'Yes,' I replied. 'I heard the church clock chime the hour.'

'How long would it take him to reach the house—to reach this window, for instance?'

'Five minutes at the outside. Two or three minutes only if he took the path at the right of the drive and came straight here.'

'But to do that he would have to know the way. How can I explain myself?—it would mean that he had been here before—that he knew his surroundings.'

'That is true,' replied Colonel Melrose.

'We could find out, doubtless, if Mr Ackroyd had received any strangers during the past week?'

'Young Raymond could tell us that,' I said.

'Or Parker,' suggested Colonel Melrose.

'Ou tous les deux,' suggested Poirot, smiling.

Colonel Melrose went in search of Raymond, and I rang the bell once more for Parker.

Colonel Melrose returned almost immediately, accompanied by the young secretary, whom he introduced to Poirot. Geoffrey Raymond was fresh and debonair as ever. He seemed surprised and delighted to make Poirot's acquaintance.

'No idea you'd been living among us incognito, M. Poirot,' he said. 'It will be a great privilege to watch you at work—Hallo, what's this?'

Poirot had been standing just to the left of the door. Now he moved aside suddenly, and I saw that while my back was turned he must have swiftly drawn out the arm-chair till it stood in the position Parker had indicated.

'Want me to sit in the chair whilst you take a blood test?' asked Raymond good-humouredly. 'What's the idea?'

'M. Raymond, this chair was pulled out—so—last night when Mr Ackroyd was found killed. Some one moved it back again into place. Did you do so?'

The secretary's reply came without a second's hesitation.

'No, indeed I didn't. I don't even remember that it was in that position, but it must have been if you say so. Anyway, somebody else must have moved it back to its proper place. Have they destroyed a clew in doing so? Too bad!'

that in the case of my being able to contribute something to the solution of the mystery, my name may not be mentioned.'

Inspector Raglan's face lightened a little.

'I've heard of some very remarkable successes of yours,' observed the colonel, thawing.

'I have had much experience,' said Poirot quietly. 'But most of my successes have been obtained by the aid of the police. I admire enormously your English police. If Inspector Raglan permits me to assist him, I shall be both honoured and flattered.'

The inspector's countenance became still more gracious.

Colonel Melrose drew me aside.

'From all I hear, this little fellow's done some really remarkable things,' he murmured. 'We're naturally anxious not to have to call in Scotland Yard. Raglan seems very sure of himself, but I'm not quite certain that I agree with him. You see, I—er—know the parties concerned better than he does. This fellow doesn't seem out after kudos, does he? Would work in with us unobtrusively, eh?'

'To the greater glory of Inspector Raglan,' I said solemnly.

'Well, well,' said Colonel Melrose breezily in a louder voice, 'we must put you wise to the latest developments, M. Poirot.'

'I thank you,' said Poirot. 'My friend, Dr Sheppard, said something of the butler being suspected?'

'That's all bunkum,' said Raglan instantly. 'These high-class servants get in such a funk that they act suspiciously for nothing at all.'

'The fingerprints?' I hinted.

'Nothing like Parker's.' He gave a faint smile, and added: 'And yours and Mr Raymond's don't fit either, doctor.'

'What about those of Captain Ralph Paton?' asked Poirot quietly.

I felt a secret admiration for the way he took the bull by the horns. I saw a look of respect creep into the inspector's eye.

'I see you don't let the grass grow under your feet, Mr Poirot. It will be a pleasure to work with you, I'm sure. We're going to take that young gentleman's fingerprints as soon as we can lay hands upon him.'

'I think, M. le docteur, that you know very well what I mean, though you pretend not to do so. I suggest that it would have been a relief to you if you had found that Captain Paton had been at home all the evening.'

'Not at all,' I said sharply.

The little detective shook his head at me gravely.

'You have not the trust in me of Miss Flora,' he said. 'But no matter. What we have to look at is this—Captain Paton is missing, under circumstances which call for an explanation. I will not hide from you that the matter looks grave. Still, it may admit of a perfectly simple explanation.'

'That's just what I keep saying,' cried Flora eagerly.

Poirot touched no more upon that theme. Instead he suggested an immediate visit to the local police. He thought it better for Flora to return home, and for me to be the one to accompany him there and introduce him to the officer in charge of the case.

We carried out this plan forthwith. We found Inspector Davis outside the police station looking very glum indeed. With him was Colonel Melrose, the Chief Constable,83 and another man whom, from Flora's description of 'weaselly,' I had no difficulty in recognizing as Inspector Raglan from Cranchester.

I know Melrose fairly well, and I introduced Poirot to him and explained the situation. The chief constable was clearly vexed, and Inspector Raglan looked as black as thunder. Davis, however, seemed slightly exhilarated by the sight of his superior officer's annoyance.

'The case is going to be plain as a pikestaff,' said Raglan. 'Not the least need for amateurs to come butting in. You'd think any fool would have seen the way things were last night, and then we shouldn't have lost twelve hours.'

He directed a vengeful glance at poor Davis, who received it with perfect stolidity.

'Mr Ackroyd's family must, of course, do what they see fit,' said Colonel Melrose. 'But we cannot have the official investigation hampered in any way. I know M. Poirot's great reputation, of course,' he added courteously.

'The police can't advertise themselves, worse luck,' said Raglan.

It was Poirot who saved the situation.

'It is true that I have retired from the world,' he said. 'I never intended to take up a case again. Above all things, I have a horror of publicity. I must beg,

'It is of no consequence,' said the detective. 'Of no consequence whatever. What I really want to ask you is this, M. Raymond: Did any stranger come to see Mr Ackroyd during this past week?'

The secretary reflected for a minute or two, knitting his brows, and during the pause Parker appeared in answer to the bell.

'No,' said Raymond at last. 'I can't remember any one. Can you, Parker?'

'I beg your pardon, sir?'

'Any stranger coming to see Mr Ackroyd this week?'

The butler reflected for a minute or two.

'There was the young man who came on Wednesday, sir,' he said at last. 'From Curtis and Troute, I understood he was.'

Raymond moved this aside with an impatient hand.

'Oh! yes, I remember, but that is not the kind of stranger this gentleman means.' He turned to Poirot. 'Mr Ackroyd had some idea of purchasing a dictaphone,' he explained. 'It would have enabled us to get through a lot more work in a limited time. The firm in question sent down their representative, but nothing came of it. Mr Ackroyd did not make up his mind to purchase.'

Poirot turned to the butler.

'Can you describe this young man to me, my good Parker?'

'He was fair-haired, sir, and short. Very neatly dressed in a blue serge suit. A very presentable young man, sir, for his station in life.'

Poirot turned to me.

'The man you met outside the gate, doctor, was tall, was he not?'

'Yes,' I said. 'Somewhere about six feet, I should say.'

'There is nothing in that, then,' declared the Belgian. 'I thank you, Parker.'

The butler spoke to Raymond.

'Mr Hammond has just arrived, sir,' he said. 'He is anxious to know if he can be of any service, and he would be glad to have a word with you.'

'I'll come at once,' said the young man. He hurried out. Poirot looked inquiringly at the chief constable.

'The family solicitor, M. Poirot,' said the latter.

'It is a busy time for this young M. Raymond,' murmured M. Poirot. 'He has the air efficient, that one.'

'I believe Mr Ackroyd considered him a most able secretary.'

'He has been here—how long?'

'Just on two years, I fancy.'

'His duties he fulfils punctiliously. Of that I am sure. In what manner does he amuse himself? Does he go in for le sport?'

'Private secretaries haven't much time for that sort of thing,' said Colonel Melrose, smiling. 'Raymond plays golf, I believe. And tennis in the summer time.'

'He does not attend the courses—I should say the running of the horses?'

'Race meetings? No, I don't think he's interested in racing.'

Poirot nodded and seemed to lose interest. He glanced slowly round the study.

'I have seen, I think, all that there is to be seen here.'

I, too, looked round.

'If those walls could speak,' I murmured.

Poirot shook his head.

'A tongue is not enough,' he said. 'They would have to have also eyes and ears. But do not be too sure that these dead things'—he touched the top of the bookcase as he spoke—'are always dumb. To me they speak sometimes—chairs, tables—they have their message!'

He turned away towards the door.

'What message?' I cried. 'What have they said to you to-day?'

He looked over his shoulder and raised one eyebrow quizzically.

'An opened window,' he said. 'A locked door. A chair that apparently moved itself. To all three I say, "Why?" and I find no answer.'

He shook his head, puffed out his chest, and stood blinking at us. He looked ridiculously full of his own importance. It crossed my mind to wonder whether he was really any good as a detective. Had his big reputation been built up on a series of lucky chances?

I think the same thought must have occurred to Colonel Melrose, for he frowned.

'Anything more you want to see, M. Poirot?' he inquired brusquely.

'You would perhaps be so kind as to show me the silver table from which the weapon was taken? After that, I will trespass on your kindness no longer.'

We went to the drawing-room, but on the way the constable waylaid the colonel, and after a muttered conversation the latter excused himself and left us together. I showed Poirot the silver table, and after raising the lid once or

'They might make a mistake,' said Flora. 'They are on their way to make a mistake now, I think. Please, M. Poirot, won't you help us? If—if it is a question of money— '

Poirot held up his hand.

'Not that, I beg of you, mademoiselle. Not that I do not care for money.' His eyes showed a momentary twinkle. 'Money, it means much to me and always has done. No, if I go into this, you must understand one thing clearly. I shall go through with it to the end. The good dog, he does not leave the scent, remember! You may wish that, after all, you had left it to the local police.'

'I want the truth,' said Flora, looking him straight in the eyes.

'All the truth?'

'All the truth.'

'Then I accept,' said the little man quietly. 'And I hope you will not regret those words. Now, tell me all the circumstances.'

'Dr Sheppard had better tell you,' said Flora. 'He knows more than I do.'

Thus enjoined, I plunged into a careful narrative, embodying all the facts I have previously set down. Poirot listened carefully, inserting a question here and there, but for the most part sitting in silence, his eyes on the ceiling.

I brought my story to a close with the departure of the inspector and myself from Fernly Park the previous night.

'And now,' said Flora, as I finished, 'tell him all about Ralph.'

I hesitated, but her imperious glance drove me on.

'You went to this inn—this "Three Boars"—last night on your way home?' asked Poirot, as I brought my tale to a close. 'Now exactly why was that?'

I paused a moment to choose my words carefully.

'I thought some one ought to inform the young man of his uncle's death. It occurred to me after I had left Fernly that possibly no one but myself and Mr Ackroyd were aware that he was staying in the village.'

Poirot nodded.

'Quite so. That was your only motive in going there, eh?'

'That was my only motive,' I said stiffly.

'It was not to—shall we say—reassure yourself about ce jeune homme?'

'Reassure myself?'

They told me all about his having been there, and the questions he had asked. He must think Ralph did it.'

'That's a change of mind from last night, if so,' I said slowly. 'He doesn't believe in Davis's theory that it was Parker then?'

'Parker indeed,' said my sister, and snorted.

Flora came forward and laid her hand on my arm.

'Oh! Dr Sheppard, let us go at once to this M. Poirot. He will find out the truth.'

'My dear Flora,' I said gently, laying my hand on hers. 'Are you quite sure it is the truth we want?'

She looked at me, nodding her head gravely.

'You're not sure,' she said. 'I am. I know Ralph better than you do.'

'Of course he didn't do it,' said Caroline, who had been keeping silent with great difficulty. 'Ralph may be extravagant, but he's a dear boy, and has the nicest manners.'

I wanted to tell Caroline that large numbers of murderers have had nice manners, but the presence of Flora restrained me. Since the girl was determined, I was forced to give in to her and we started at once, getting away before my sister was able to fire off any more pronouncements beginning with her favourite words, 'Of course.'

An old woman with an immense Breton cap opened the door of The Larches to us. M. Poirot was at home, it seemed.

We were ushered into a little sitting-room arranged with formal precision, and there, after the lapse of a minute or so, my friend of yesterday came to us.

'Monsieur le docteur,' he said, smiling. 'Mademoiselle.'

He bowed to Flora.

'Perhaps,' I began, 'you have heard of the tragedy which occurred last night.'

His face grew grave.

'But certainly I have heard. It is horrible. I offer mademoiselle all my sympathy. In what way can I serve you?'

'Miss Ackroyd,' I said, 'wants you to—to— '

'To find the murderer,' said Flora in a clear voice.

'I see,' said the little man. 'But the police will do that, will they not?'

twice and letting it fall, he pushed open the window and stepped out on the terrace. I followed him.

Inspector Raglan had just turned the corner of the house, and was coming towards us. His face looked grim and satisfied.

'So there you are, M. Poirot,' he said. 'Well, this isn't going to be much of a case. I'm sorry, too. A nice enough young fellow gone wrong.'

Poirot's face fell, and he spoke very mildly.

'I'm afraid I shall not be able to be of much aid to you, then?'

'Next time, perhaps,' said the inspector soothingly. 'Though we don't have murders every day in this quiet little corner of the world.'

Poirot's gaze took on an admiring quality.

'You have been of a marvellous promptness,' he observed. 'How exactly did you go to work, if I may ask?'

'Certainly,' said the inspector. 'To begin with—method. That's what I always say—method!'

'Ah!' cried the other. 'That, too, is my watchword. Method, order, and the little gray cells.'

'The cells?' said the inspector, staring.

'The little gray cells of the brain,' explained the Belgian.

'Oh, of course; well, we all use them, I suppose.'

'In a greater or lesser degree,' murmured Poirot. 'And there are, too, differences in quality. Then there is the psychology of a crime. One must study that.'

'Ah!' said the inspector, 'you've been bitten with all this psychoanalysis stuff? Now, I'm a plain man— '

'Mrs Raglan would not agree, I am sure, to that,' said Poirot, making him a little bow.

Inspector Raglan, a little taken aback, bowed.

'You don't understand,' he said, grinning broadly. 'Lord, what a lot of difference language makes. I'm telling you how I set to work. First of all, method. Mr Ackroyd was last seen alive at a quarter to ten by his niece, Miss Flora Ackroyd. That's fact number one, isn't it?'

'If you say so.'

'Well, it is. At half-past ten, the doctor here says that Mr Ackroyd has been dead at least half an hour. You stick to that, doctor?'

'Certainly,' I said. 'Half an hour or longer.'

'Very good. That gives us exactly a quarter of an hour in which the crime must have been committed. I make a list of every one in the house, and work through it, setting down opposite their names where they were and what they were doing between the hour of 9.45 and 10 p.m.'

He handed a sheet of paper to Poirot. I read it over his shoulder. It ran as follows, written in a neat script:—

> Major Blunt.—In billiard room with Mr Raymond. (Latter confirms.)
> Mr Raymond.—Billiard room. (See above.)
> Mrs Ackroyd.—9.45 watching billiard match. Went up to bed 9.55. (Raymond and Blunt watched her up staircase.)
> Miss Ackroyd.—Went straight from her uncle's room upstairs. (Confirmed by Parker, also housemaid, Elsie Dale.)
>
> Servants:—
> Parker.—Went straight to butler's pantry. (Confirmed by housekeeper, Miss Russell, who came down to speak to him about something at 9.47, and remained at least ten minutes.)
> Miss Russell.—As above. Spoke to housemaid, Elsie Dale, upstairs at 9.45.
> Ursula Bourne (parlourmaid).—In her own room until 9.55. Then in Servants' Hall.
> Mrs Cooper (cook).—In Servants' Hall.
> Gladys Jones (second housemaid).—In Servants' Hall.
> Elsie Dale.—Upstairs in bedroom. Seen there by Miss Russell and Miss Flora Ackroyd.
> Mary Thripp (kitchenmaid).—Servants' Hall.

'The cook has been here seven years, the parlourmaid eighteen months, and Parker just over a year. The others are new. Except for something fishy about Parker, they all seem quite all right.'

'A very complete list,' said Poirot, handing it back to him. 'I am quite sure that Parker did not do the murder,' he added gravely.

'Flora,' I said gravely, 'be guided by me. I advise you not to drag this detective into the case.'

Flora sprang to her feet. The colour rushed into her cheeks.

'I know why you say that,' she cried. 'But it's exactly for that reason I'm so anxious to go. You're afraid! But I'm not. I know Ralph better than you do.'

'Ralph,' said Caroline. 'What has Ralph got to do with it?'

Neither of us heeded her.

'Ralph may be weak,' continued Flora. 'He may have done foolish things in the past—wicked things even—but he wouldn't murder any one.'

'No, no,' I exclaimed. 'I never thought it of him.'

'Then why did you go to the "Three Boars" last night?' demanded Flora, 'on your way home—after uncle's body was found?'

I was momentarily silenced. I had hoped that that visit of mine would remain unnoticed.

'How did you know about that?' I countered.

'I went there this morning,' said Flora. 'I heard from the servants that Ralph was staying there— '

I interrupted her.

'You had no idea that he was in King's Abbot?'

'No. I was astounded. I couldn't understand it. I went there and asked for him. They told me, what I suppose they told you last night, that he went out at about nine o'clock yesterday evening—and—and never came back.'

Her eyes met mine defiantly, and as though answering something in my look, she burst out:—

'Well, why shouldn't he? He might have gone—anywhere. He may even have gone back to London.'

'Leaving his luggage behind?' I asked gently.

Flora stamped her foot.

'I don't care. There must be a simple explanation.'

'And that's why you want to go to Hercule Poirot? Isn't it better to leave things as they are? The police don't suspect Ralph in the least, remember. They're working on quite another tack.'

'But that's just it,' cried the girl. 'They do suspect him. A man from Cranchester turned up this morning—Inspector Raglan, a horrid, weaselly little man. I found he had been to the "Three Boars" this morning before me.