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Cast of Characters

CAPT. ARTHUR HASTINGS, age 30

MR. JOHN CAVENDISH, age 45

EVELYN HOWARD, age 50

MRS. MARY CAVENDISH, age 30

MR. ALFRED INGLETHORP, age 50

MISS CYNTHIA MURDOCH, age 20

MRS. EMILY INGLETHORP, age 70

DR. BAUERSTEIN, age 40

DORCAS, age 60

HERCULE POIROT, age 50

Character Doubling Assignments:

MAN 1: Capt. Arthur Hastings

MAN 2: Mr. John Cavendish, Mr. Alfred Inglethorp, Dr. Bauerstein

MAN 3: Hercule Poirot

WOMAN 1: Miss Evelyn Howard, Dorcas, Mrs. Emily Inglethorp
(offstage voice)

WOMAN 2: Mrs. Mary Cavendish, Miss Cynthia Murdoch

Casting Notes

The play is written for a cast of five: two women and three men.

Time

July–September, 1917

Setting

The action takes place on an estate in Essex, England.

One set, which should be able to represent many different rooms. The rear wall features two sturdy doors, and one small fireplace. Furniture includes a chaise, sitting chair, dresser, a small table beneath the window, and a rolltop desk.

Regarding Copyright

The Mysterious Affair at Styles was published before 1923 and is in the public domain in the USA only.

Acknowledgments

Agatha Christie's The Mysterious Affair at Styles was presented as an Educational Outreach Tour for Great Lakes Theater in Cleveland Ohio, February 2012, directed by Lisa Ortenzi. The cast and crew for the production was as follows:

ARTHUR HASTINGS James Rankin
JOHN CAVENDISH (et al) Michael Gatto
EVELYN HOWARD (et al) Anne McEvoy
MARY CAVENDISH (et al) Emily Pucell
HERCULE POIROT David Hansen

Set and Property Design Terry Martin
Costumes Esther Montgomery Haberlen
Sound Richard Ingraham

Producing Artistic Director Charles Fee
Production Manager Chris Flinchum
Education Director Daniel Hahn
Education Associate Kelly Shaffer Florian

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S
THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES

adapted by David Hansen

(Enter HASTINGS, with a case. He greets the audience as if speaking to a new friend.)

HASTINGS. The Styles Affair? No, I will never forget the Styles Affair. It was the Summer of 1917. I had been sent home from the Front, and after spending several months in a rather depressing convalescent home was given a month's leave.

Having no near relations nor friends, I was trying to make up my mind what to do, when I ran across John Cavendish. I had seen very little of him for some years. He was a good fifteen years my senior, though he hardly looked his age. As a boy, though, I had often stayed at Styles, his father's place in Essex.

(Enter JOHN CAVENDISH.)

JOHN. I suppose you know my stepmother has married again?

HASTINGS. *(To the audience:)* I hadn't, and I could not conceal my surprise. The woman must have been near seventy now. A new husband?

JOHN. Rotten little bounder, too. Name's "Alfred Inglethorp." Turns up out of nowhere, claiming to be a second cousin. Emily cottoned to him at once, made him her personal secretary. Could have knocked us all down with a feather when she announces, three months ago, that they were engaged! Fellow must be twenty years younger than she is.

HASTINGS. Difficult.

JOHN. Damnable! But how are you old sport, do come and join us at Styles. You will find it very quiet down there.

HASTINGS. My dear fellow, that's just what I want.

(Exit JOHN. HASTINGS moves with his case.)

(To audience:) And so three days later I came to Styles on a still, warm day in early July. As one looked out over the flat Essex country, lying so green and peaceful under the afternoon sun, it seemed almost impossible to believe that, not so very far away, the "great war" was running its appointed course.

(Enter EVIE HOWARD, a gruff and broad-shouldered woman. She is dressed as a groundskeeper.)

EVIE. Mr. Hastings, the wounded hero! Welcome!

HASTINGS. Oh, ah?

EVIE. (*Offering her hand.*) Evelyn Howard. Work the grounds for the lady. Weeds grow like house afire, can't keep even with 'em. Shall press you in. Better be careful.

HASTINGS. I'm sure I shall be only too delighted to make myself useful.

(*Enter JOHN.*)

EVIE. Don't say it. Wish you hadn't later.

JOHN. (*Laughs.*) You're a cynic, Evie! Come along, it's tea, you've done enough for the day.

EVIE. I'm inclined to agree with you.

JOHN. (*To HASTINGS.*) My friend, welcome to Styles. I want you to meet my wife, Mary.

(*Exit EVIE and JOHN with HASTINGS's case.*)

HASTINGS. (*To audience.*) I shall never forget my first sight of Mary Cavendish.

(*Enter MARY; a tableau.*)

Remarkable, the intense power of stillness she possessed, which nevertheless conveyed the impression of a wild untamed spirit in an exquisitely civilised body.

(*HASTINGS turns to her, about to speak.*)

(*Enter ALFRED INGLETHORP, a somewhat bizarre looking character for the time, with a long, black beard and pince-nez.*)

INGLETHORP. This is a pleasure, Mr. Hastings.

HASTINGS. (*To audience.*) In contrast, the man in question, Emily's new husband, Mr. Alfred Inglethorp, struck a rather alien note.

(*Enter EVIE with tea. They sit for tea, MARY and HASTINGS appearing uncomfortable. EVIE makes a very obvious point of sitting far from INGLETHORP, glowering at him.*)

INGLETHORP. Is soldiering your regular profession, Mr. Hastings?

HASTINGS. Before the war I was at Lloyd's of London.

INGLETHORP. And after the war?

HASTINGS. I suppose I shall return. Or a fresh start, altogether.

MARY. (*Leaning forward.*) What would you really choose as a profession, if you could consult some secret inclination?

HASTINGS. Well. You'll laugh at me.

MARY. (*Smiles:*) Perhaps I would.

HASTINGS. I've always had a secret hankering to be a detective.

MARY. The real thing? Or Sherlock Holmes?

HASTINGS. Oh, Holmes, by all means!

(*They laugh.*)

There was this man in Belgium once, famous detective, marvellous fellow. Used to say that all good detective work was a mere matter of method. Odd man, but very clever.

EVIE. Like a good detective story myself. Lots of rubbish, though. Everyone dumbfounded. Real murderer, you'd know him at once.

HASTINGS. Might be a "she."

EVIE. Murder's a violent crime. Associate it more with a man.

MARY. Not in the case of poisoning. Dr. Bauerstein was saying yesterday that there were probably countless cases of poisoning quite unsuspected.

HASTINGS. And who is Dr. Bauertsein?

MARY. He's staying in the village doing a rest cure. A London specialist, one of the greatest experts on poisons, I believe.

INGLETHORP. What a gruesome conversation. Excuse me, I must attend to my dear Emily.

(*INGLETHORP departs abruptly.*)

EVIE. Oh, yes, "dear Emily." There's no fool like an old fool. No one doubts what he married her for.

MARY. Evelyn, please.

EVIE. Farmer Raikes in the village has got a very pretty young wife. Just ask how much time that man spends over there. He's a bad lot.

MARY. That's as may be, I cannot listen to this. Excuse me.

(*MARY exits.*)

EVIE. Mr. Hastings, you're honest. I can trust you?

HASTINGS. Oh. Er?

EVIE. They're a lot of sharks, all of them. Oh, I know what I'm talking about. There isn't one of them that's not hard up and trying to get money out of her. My poor Emily. I've protected her as much as I could.

HASTINGS. Oh, I don't think. I mean. You know?

EVIE. I've lived in the world rather longer than you have. All I ask you is to keep your eyes open.

(Exit EVIE, passing JOHN on his way into the room.)

JOHN. My dear Hastings, how are you finding Styles?

HASTINGS. It really is a glorious old place.

JOHN. Oh, it's pleasant enough if you want to lead the idle life. I drill with the volunteers twice a week, and lend a hand at the farms. My wife Mary works regularly with the Women's Land Army, supporting the war effort. She is up at five every morning to milk. Styles is a fine property. It'll be mine some day, should be mine now by rights, if my father had only made a decent will. And then I shouldn't be so damned hard up as I am now.

HASTINGS. Gah.

JOHN. I don't mind telling you that I'm at my wit's end for money.

(Enter CYNTHIA.)

Why, Cynthia. You are late to-day. This is Mr. Hastings, Miss Cynthia Murdoch.

(CYNTHIA and JOHN; another tableau.)

HASTINGS. *(To audience:)* Cynthia Murdoch was a fresh-looking young creature, full of life and vigor. As she tossed off her little Voluntary Aid Detachment cap, I admired the great loose waves of her auburn hair, and the smallness and whiteness of the hand she held out for me to take.

JOHN. Miss Murdoch is a protégée of my mother's, the daughter of an old schoolfellow of hers, been with us nearly two years now. She works in the Red Cross Hospital at Tadminster.

HASTINGS. I have got a cousin who is in nursing, and she is terrified of all the nuns.

CYNTHIA. I don't wonder. Sisters are, you know, Mr. Hastings. They simply are. You've no idea. But I'm not a nurse, thank heaven, I work in the dispensary.

HASTINGS. How many people do you poison?

CYNTHIA. Oh, hundreds!

(They laugh. JOHN exits.)

MRS. INGLETHORP. *(Off:)* Cynthia? Is that you?

CYNTHIA. Yes, Aunt Emily.

MRS. INGLETHORP. Do you think you can come in here and write a few letters for me?

CYNTHIA. Certainly, Aunt Emily.

(Exit CYNTHIA. HASTINGS sighs.)

HASTINGS. *(To audience:)* I had arrived at Styles on the 5th of July. I come now to the events of the 16th and 17th of that month. I will attempt to recapitulate the incidents of those days in as exact a manner as possible.

The 15th of July, a Sunday, was a day of turmoil. We were all busy during the morning arranging and decorating the Hall in the village where the Famous Bazaar was to take place.

The following morning, Mrs. Emily Inglethorp stayed in bed for breakfast.

(CYNTHIA enters and takes HASTINGS' arm as he gallantly leads her into the room.)

CYNTHIA. Are you enjoying your time away from the action, Mr. Hastings?

HASTINGS. You know? I believe I am. Last night's entertainment was simply marvellous, I thought Mrs. Inglethorp's recitation deserved all its acclaim. Your tableaux was also quite lovely.

CYNTHIA. Why thank you, Mr. Hastings.

HASTINGS. And taking the time to show us all round the dispensary today, you really shouldn't have. What a lot of bottles! Do you really know what's in them all?

CYNTHIA. *(Groaning:)* Say something original! You may as well ask, *(Doing a spot-on impersonation of HASTINGS:)* "How many people have you poisoned!"

HASTINGS. *(Chuckling:)* Huh-huh! You've got me!

CYNTHIA. If you knew how easy it is to poison someone by mistake, you wouldn't laugh.

(Enter DORCAS, the parlourmaid.)

Dorcas, could we trouble you for some tea?

DORCAS. Will take a moment, ma'am, the lady has sent for me to light the fire in her room.

HASTINGS. Is she all right?

DORCAS. Seems a bit tired, is all. Says she's turning in directly after supper.

CYNTHIA. No tea, then, we'll be off.

DORCAS. It's no trouble, it's just—

CYNTHIA. Dorcas, you're a darling, thank you.

(CYNTHIA looks expectantly at HASTINGS.)

HASTINGS. Oh, ah. Tennis?

CYNTHIA. Yes, please! I'll just get my racquet.

(Exit CYNTHIA.)

DORCAS. Fetch a racquet, sir?

(Exit DORCAS.)

HASTINGS. What? Oh, yes, please.

(HASTINGS is about to turn and go, when the following exchange is heard from behind a door. He stops to listen.)

MRS. INGLETHORP. *(Off:)* Mary, this has nothing to do with you!

MARY. *(Off:)* Then show it to me, Mrs. Inglethorp!

MRS. INGLETHORP. *(Off:)* It is not what you imagine, Mary!

MARY. *(Off:)* When he's not mooning over silly little Cynthia, he's down in the village with that shameless Mrs. Raikes!

(Re-enter CYNTHIA with her racquets, catching HASTINGS listening. She smiles, with a finger to her lips.)

MRS. INGLETHORP. *(Off:)* It is not what you imagine, it does not concern you in the least.

CYNTHIA. *(Sotto voce:)* What a row! Is "he" still in there?

HASTINGS. No, it's, erm...

CYNTHIA. Dorcas told me of a real bust-up between poor Aunt Emily and that wretched man. I hope she sends him away and never speaks to him again.

HASTINGS. *(Changing the subject:)* Ah. Well. Sorry, I still can't get over that amazing coincidence at the post office, running into my old friend Poirot!

(CYNTHIA links arms with HASTINGS.)

CYNTHIA. *(Impersonating POIROT with a laugh:)* "Mon ami Hastings! It is indeed mon ami Hastings!"

HASTINGS. Uncanny!

CYNTHIA. Yes, well, we know Monsieur Poirot well, Mrs. Inglethorp was one of the first in the community to welcome the Belgian refugees to Styles-Saint-Mary. He's a dear man, strange that you know him.

HASTINGS. You've been entertaining a celebrity unawares.

(Exit CYNTHIA with HASTINGS, HASTINGS doubling-back to address the audience.)

Tennis with Miss Murdoch was a welcome distraction from the atmosphere of tension that hung over Styles that week-end. Afterwards, Cynthia and I sat by an open window in the drawing room.

(DORCAS enters with coffee, followed by INGLETHORP.)

DORCAS. Will you remind Cynthia to take Mrs. Inglethorp her coffee, sir? I am needed in the pantry.

INGLETHORP. Do not trouble, Dorcas, I will take it to Emily.

(MARY enters as INGLETHORP pours coffee. Exit DORCAS.)

HASTINGS. Mrs. Cavendish.

MARY. *(Looking out the window:)* It is too hot. We shall have a thunderstorm.

(Exit INGLETHORP.)

Oh! Here comes Dr. Bauerstein! What an ... odd hour to come.

(MARY rises swiftly and heads out to greet the doctor, leaving HASTINGS alone. He sits quietly for a moment, waiting for someone to come, alone with his coffee.)

(In the other room we can hear others laughing, their conversation overlapping in a cacophony of jolly spirits. DR. BAUERSTEIN sounds like a very charming and likeable fellow.)

MARY. *(Off:)* What have you been doing, doctor?

BAUERSTEIN. *(Off:)* Forgive me, I must make my apologies.

CYNTHIA. *(Off:)* Don't be silly.

JOHN. *(Laughing, off:)* Doctor Bauerstein, you are in a plight.

MARY. *(Off:)* You're covered in mud!

BAUERSTEIN. *(Off:)* Yes, well, that's a very funny story.

DORCAS. *(Off:)* I shall need to get a broom.

CYNTHIA. *(Off:)* You do tell the best stories, simply the best!

MRS. INGLETHORP. *(Off:)* Cynthia dear, carry my dispatch case upstairs.

BAUERSTEIN. (*Off:*) Afraid my appearance is very disreputable.

CYNTHIA. (*Off:*) Nonsense.

BAUERSTEIN. (*Off:*) I should go.

MARY. (*Off:*) Stay! Have some coffee.

(*INGLETHORP enters, crossing through the drawing room, calling out:*)

INGLETHORP. I'll walk down to the village with you. I must see our agent over those estate accounts. No one need sit up. I will take the latch-key.

(*Exit INGLETHORP, as laughter dies away. HASTINGS remains alone with his coffee.*)

(*Silence.*)

HASTINGS. I do not like this Dr. Bauerstein.

(*Exit HASTINGS. Sudden, marked transition in time from early evening to night.*)

(*MRS. INGLETHORP, off, cries out in horror and pain.*)

(*HASTINGS reenters in his nightshirt, encountering JOHN, holding a candle and standing outside of the door to a bedroom.*)

HASTINGS. What's the matter?

JOHN. Emily seems to be having some kind of fit. Unfortunately she has locked herself in.

(*DORCAS joins them as HASTINGS makes a futile attempt to open the door.*)

DORCAS. Oh, the poor mistress! Try going through Mr. Inglethorp's room, sir.

(*JOHN disappears through the adjacent door.*)

HASTINGS. Where is Inglethorp?

(*JOHN swiftly reemerges into the hallway.*)

JOHN. Blighter hasn't even been in his room tonight, the bedding is undisturbed. And that door is bolted from mother's room as well.

DORCAS. Whatever will we do?

HASTINGS. Break the door down!

JOHN. Hang about, what about Cynthia's room on the other side?

DORCAS. No good, sir. That's bolted, too. Mrs. Cavendish is in there already trying to rouse the poor lass.

JOHN. We must break the door in!

(HASTINGS and JOHN heave together, and after a few unsuccessful attempts, the door crashes in.)

(JOHN and DORCAS head in together, HASTINGS remains behind to address the audience.)

HASTINGS. *(To audience:)* What we were to witness is almost too horrible to describe. Mrs. Inglethorp, lying on the bed, her whole form agitated by violent convulsions, her bedside table overturned. The sputtering ashes in her fireplace with John's candle gave the room a distressingly haunted and animated glow. The matron's limbs relaxed, however, and she was able to speak in short gasps.

MRS. INGLETHORP. *(Off:)* Better now...very sudden...stupid of me...to lock myself in.

(MARY emerges from the room. She is wearing her white Women's Land Army smock and armlet.)

(Enter DORCAS.)

MARY. *(To HASTINGS:)* Cynthia, poor girl, is quite frightened. *(To DORCAS:)* Could you get the girl a brandy?

DORCAS. Yes, Ma'am.

(Exit DORCAS.)

HASTINGS. Mrs. Cavendish? You're dressed...?

MARY. It's almost dawn.

(A fresh, strangled cry of pain comes from the bedroom. DR. BAUERSTEIN flies down the hall, and pushes his way into the bedroom past HASTINGS and MARY. MARY swiftly follows him into the room.)

Dr. Bauerstein!

MRS. INGLETHORP. *(Off:)* Alfred! Alfred!

(DR. BAUERSTEIN emerges from the room, quite troubled.)

HASTINGS. What...?

BAUERSTEIN. She's gone. Her convulsions were of a peculiar violence.

HASTINGS. In what way, peculiar?

(DORCAS enters from down the hall.)

DORCAS. The mistress?

BAUERSTEIN. *(To HASTINGS:)* I couldn't say. No, I...shouldn't.

(MARY emerges from the bedroom.)

MARY. The poor thing.

BAUERSTEIN. Dorcas, send for Dr. Wilkins, will you? And be hasty.

(DORCAS nods, and exits, followed by BAUERSTEIN.)

MARY. Why did Dr. Bauerstein seem so peculiar?

HASTINGS. Listen! (*Looks around:*) I believe she has been poisoned!

MARY. What?

HASTINGS. I'm certain Dr. Bauerstein suspects it.

MARY. No, no—not that! Not that!

(MARY swoons briefly, and HASTINGS moves swiftly to catch her, but she just as quickly regains her balance and denies him this dramatic moment.)

No. Leave me. I'd rather be alone.

(MARY departs. JOHN emerges from the bedroom.)

HASTINGS. Where is Inglethorp!

JOHN. He's not in the house! Bauerstein is insisting upon a post-mortem.

HASTINGS. Does he think that's necessary?

JOHN. He cannot give her a death certificate without one. Under these circumstances.

HASTINGS. Then he's fairly certain. There's been foul play.

JOHN. I am afraid to say so. Worse yet, an inquest will likely not be avoided.

HASTINGS. Oh dear. John, I am going to ask you something.

JOHN. Well?

HASTINGS. There happens to be a contingent of Belgian refugees in the village, and today I was reacquainted with an old friend by the name of Hercule Poirot. In his day he was a most famous detective. I want you to let me call him in.

JOHN. What? Now?

HASTINGS. Time is an advantage.

JOHN. We don't want any scandal.

HASTINGS. Oh no! Poirot is discretion itself.

JOHN. Very well. It seems a clear enough case, if it is as I suspect. But I leave it in your hands.

(All depart.)

(Door opens to reveal HASTINGS and POIROT. The latter, holding a small case, strides confidently into the room and glances around.)

HASTINGS. Erm.

POIROT. My friend, why do you remain there like the stuck pig?

HASTINGS. Foot-marks?

POIROT. What an idea! There has already been an army in the room. Now, come and aid me in my search.

(POIROT moves to set down his case on something, goes to the small table, notices a small dispatch-case on the floor next to the table.)

POIROT. Now. We will examine, and reject. Those of importance we will put on one side, and those of no importance—POUF! We blow them away.

(He puts his case on the table, picks up and examines the purple one. HASTINGS enters hesitantly.)

POIROT. Eh voila!

(POIROT takes a small key from the case, hands it to HASTINGS, who holds it up, there is a small piece of wire twisted through the handle.)

HASTINGS. How do you know what is important and what isn't?

(POIROT has already made his way to the stage right door, unbolts it, opens and closes it several times, as quietly as possible.)

POIROT. One leads to another, so we continue.

(He whips out a pair of forceps and a small envelope from his pocket, pulls threads from the door bolt and places them into the envelope, which he hands to HASTINGS. POIROT also pockets the key from the dispatch case.)

POIROT. Does the next fit in with that? A merveille! Good, we can proceed.

(POIROT goes over to the desk, upon which is set a small spirit lamp and saucepan. He opens a drawer, and pockets a small tin from the drawer. He dips his finger into the sauce pan and tastes.)

POIROT. Eugh!

HASTING. Oh!

POIROT. Cocoa! With, I think, rum in it.

(He moves to the chaise/bed, crouching behind it.)

POIROT. We examine, we search. And that paltry little detail that will not tally, we put it here. It is significant! It is tremendous! Ah.

HASTINGS. Yes?

(POIROT pinches up some very tiny porcelain fragments.)

POIROT. Curious.

HASTINGS. Is it?

POIROT. This coffee cup has been smashed to powder.

HASTINGS. I suppose someone stepped on it.

POIROT. Exactly! Someone stepped on it, either because it contained strychnine...or because it did not contain strychnine.

HASTINGS. *(Shrugs awkwardly:)* Uhm.

(POIROT moves to the window, noticing a small brown stain in the floor. He gets down to examine, and then smell it.)

POIROT. Beware to the detective who says, "It is so small, it does not matter." That way lies confusion. Everything matters.

(He rises, takes a test tube from his pocket, gets a sample of the cocoa which he seals, and hands to HASTINGS.)

POIROT. We have found in this room seven points of interest. Shall I enumerate them or shall you?

HASTINGS. Oh, you.

POIROT. Very well. One, a coffee cup ground into powder. Two, a despatch-case with a key in the lock. Three, a stain on the floor that is damp and smells of coffee. Four, threads from some dark green fabric—

HASTINGS. Ah! The door!

POIROT. Yes, perhaps entirely unimportant. Five, fresh peat on the floor by the desk. Six, THIS!

(POIROT gestures to a splash of candle grease by the table.)

Candle grease. It must be recent, a good housemaid would have removed it at once with blotting paper and a hot iron. Oh! One of my very best hats once—

HASTINGS. That may have been John's candle from last night.

POIROT. Only one candle was brought into the room?

HASTINGS. Yes. That one.

(HASTINGS points to a candle on the dresser.)

POIROT. That candle is pink. This stain is white.

HASTINGS. And seven, the cocoa?

POIROT. No. The seventh point I will keep to myself for the present. Nothing more to be done...unless...

(POIROT gets onto his hands and knees in the fireplace, sorting through the ashes.)

The fire burns...it destroys...but by chance... AH!

(POIROT rises, triumphantly holding up a small, charred scrap of paper clenched in his forceps.)

There, mon ami! What do you think of that?

HASTINGS. What should I think of that?

(Enter DORCAS.)

POIROT. Nothing at all.

(POIROT hastily places the fragment into a small envelope.)

DORCAS. You asked for me, sir.

HASTINGS. Not right now, Dorcas.

POIROT. Pray be seated, mademoiselle.

HASTINGS. But, Poirot...

(DORCAS enters nervously and sits.)

POIROT. You have been with your mistress many years, is it not so?

DORCAS. Ten years, sir. She was a very good mistress to me.

POIROT. Yesterday afternoon, your mistress had a quarrel?

DORCAS. I don't know that I ought to—

POIROT. My good Dorcas, your mistress lies dead, you are not betraying her secrets. It is necessary that we should know all, to bring her murderer to justice.

DORCAS. *(Suddenly fierce:)* Amen to that! And, no naming names, there's one in this house that none of us could abide!

(There is an awkward pause as POIROT waits for DORCAS to regain her composure. He straightens pieces on the mantel.)

POIROT. This quarrel. What time did you hear of it?

DORCAS. I couldn't say. It wasn't tea-time, perhaps four o'clock or later. I happened to be passing along when I heard very loud and angry voices in the boudoir downstairs. I didn't mean to listen, but, well. There it is.

POIROT. What did you hear?

DORCAS. My mistress said quite plainly, "You need not think that scandal between husband and wife will deter me," I could not hear what Mr. Inglethorp said—

HASTINGS. You are sure it was Mr. Inglethorp?

(*POIROT casts a disapproving glance at HASTINGS.*)

DORCAS. Whose else could it be?

POIROT. My dear, proceed.

DORCAS. Later, at five o'clock she rang for a cup of tea, and when I brought it she looked dreadful. She had something like a letter in her hand, a piece of paper, and she kept...staring at it. And she whispered, "These few words—and everything's changed." Mrs. Mary Cavendish came in just then, and she went silent.

POIROT. What would she be likely to do with such a...letter?

DORCAS. I don't know. Lock it in that purple case of hers, where she keeps all of her important papers.

POIROT. And she has lost the key?

DORCAS. Yes, how did you know?

POIROT. Your mistress has a dark green dress?

DORCAS. What? No, sir.

POIROT. Anyone else in the house, anything green?

DORCAS. No, sir—not that I know of.

POIROT. Did she take a sleeping powder last night?

DORCAS. Not last night.

POIROT. So sure?

DORCAS. The box was empty, she took the last two days ago.

(*POIROT has moved to look out the window.*)

POIROT. Thank you, Dorcas. I have been admiring these flower beds, how many gardeners are employed here?

DORCAS. Only three now, sir. Five, we had, before the war, when it was kept as a gentleman's place should be. I wish you could have

seen it then, sir. A fair sight it was. But now there's only two men left, and a new-fashioned woman gardener in breeches and such-like. Ah, these are dreadful times.

POIROT. The good times will come again. At least we hope so. Thank you, Dorcas.

DORCAS. Yes, sir.

(DORCAS goes to leave.)

HASTINGS. Sleeping powders...?

(POIROT reveals a small tin.)

POIROT. This, left in the desk. My "number seven." Oh! One last thing, Dorcas, the cocoa, in the saucepan, did she have that every night?

(DORCAS returns.)

DORCAS. Yes, she warmed it up whenever she fancied it. Milk, tea-spoon of sugar, two teaspoons of rum.

POIROT. Who brought it to her?

DORCAS. I did. Always. And if there were salt in it last night, it wasn't my fault.

(HASTINGS squeaks in apprehension.)

POIROT. What on earth makes you think there was salt in it?

DORCAS. I saw salt on the tray, coarse kitchen salt. I suppose I should have taken it down, but I thought it was only on the tray. I brushed it off and took it in.

HASTINGS. Are you sure it was—

POIROT. *(Indicating:)* When you did the room yesterday, did you notice this candle grease on the floor?

DORCAS. Oh dear! No. Mrs. Inglethorp didn't keep a candle, only a reading lamp. If that had been there before I would have taken it up with blotting paper and a hot iron.

POIROT. Of course you would have! That is all, Dorcas.

DORCAS. Yes, sir.

(DORCAS exits.)

HASTINGS. Poirot! Congratulations!

POIROT. What?

HASTINGS. The cocoa was poisoned, and not the coffee!

POIROT. You think the cocoa contained strychnine?

HASTINGS. Of course! The salt on the tray, what else could it have been?

POIROT. It might have been salt.

HASTINGS. Well. If you're going to take it that way.

(POIROT slips his arm through HASTINGS' as they move to exit the room.)

POIROT. Come, come mon ami. Ne vous fachez pas. Allow me to interest myself in coffee cups, and I will respect your cocoa. There! Is it a bargain.

(Exit POIROT, without HASTINGS.)

HASTINGS. *(To audience.)* Poirot held more conversations with the house staff before we were joined by my friend, John Cavendish.

(Enter JOHN with POIROT.)

JOHN. How are things proceeding? Do your investigations point to a natural death, or must we prepare ourselves for the worst?

POIROT. Can you tell me the views of the other members of the family? Mrs. Cavendish, perhaps?

JOHN. I have not the least idea what my wife's views on the subject are. You know, Inglethorp has returned, one's gorge does rise at it, sitting down to eat with a possible murderer.

POIROT. I understand the situation is quite difficult for you. Mr. Inglethorp's reason for not returning last night was that he had forgotten the latch-key, is that not so?

JOHN. So he said, I could check—

POIROT. No need, if he had taken it, and I am not saying he had, he would have had ample time to replace it by now. Do not let it trouble you. One thing I would like to ask, if it is not too sensitive?

JOHN. Not at all.

POIROT. Who stands to inherit your stepmother's money?

JOHN. Well. By her last will, dated August of last year, after various unimportant legacies to servants and so on, she gave her entire fortune to me. It would be impossible for me to keep up Styles without it.

POIROT. I see. But then, by your English law, that was revoked when she remarried?

JOHN. Yes, that document was null and void.

POIROT. Hein! And she was aware of this fact?

JOHN. She was. We were discussing that matter only yesterday.

POIROT. Ah! You said, "her last will." She has made others?

JOHN. At least one a year, changing her mind to grant a varied benefit to one or another member of the family.

POIROT. So it would not surprise you if she had made a new will in favour of someone not even a member of the family, someone like the groundskeeper, Miss Howard, perhaps?

JOHN. It would not surprise me in the least.

POIROT. Ah! Let us go have breakfast.

(Exit JOHN.)

HASTINGS. *(Aside, to POIROT:)* Do you think Mrs. Inglethorp has left all her money to Miss Howard?

POIROT. No.

HASTINGS. Then—

POIROT. Hush!

(Enter DORCAS with breakfast, which she sets before departing. CYNTHIA enters and sits, looking dreadful.)

HASTINGS. Cynthia? You do not look well.

CYNTHIA. No, I've got the most beastly headache.

(POIROT rises, and goes to the coffee stand.)

POIROT. Coffee! Unparalleled for the mal de tête. It will revive you. One sugar, or two?

CYNTHIA. None, please.

POIROT. No sugar? You abandon it due to the war, eh?

CYNTHIA. No, I never take it in my coffee.

POIROT. *(Aside:)* Sacre. *(To CYNTHIA:)* Mademoiselle, did you ever make up Mrs. Inglethorp's medicines?

CYNTHIA. No.

POIROT. Only her sleeping powders?

CYNTHIA. *(Flushing:)* Yes, I made her sleeping powders once.

POIROT. Were they Sulphonal? Veronal?

CYNTHIA. No, no. They were bromide powders.

POIROT. Ah, bromide powders! Thank you, mademoiselle. (*Aside, to HASTINGS:*) Mademoiselle Cynthia does not take sugar in her coffee.

HASTINGS. What?

POIROT. Chut! No more now.

(*JOHN reenters, sits with HASTINGS and POIROT.*)

JOHN. Word from mother's lawyer. There will be an inquest.

POIROT. Clever man, your Dr. Bauerstein. Great authority on toxicology, I hear.

JOHN. (*Stiffly:*) Indeed. We shall have to appear as witnesses, on Friday. That leaves time for the post-mortem.

(*CYNTHIA rises, ill.*)

CYNTHIA. Please excuse me.

JOHN. (*Embarrassed:*) I beg your pardon, Cynthia.

(*She goes.*)

HASTINGS. How awkward.

JOHN. (*Rising:*) Blast! (*To POIROT:*) Will you come with me, Monsieur Poirot? The lawyer and I are going through my mother's papers. She kept her most important documents in a purple dispatch-case, which we must look through carefully.

HASTINGS. Perhaps we will discover a later will.

POIROT. There is a later will.

JOHN and HASTINGS. *What?*

POIROT. Or rather, there was one. (*He reaches into this jacket:*) See here.

(*POIROT holds up the burnt fragment.*)

HASTINGS. From the fireplace!

JOHN. Possibly this is an older will.

POIROT. I do not think so. I am almost certain it was made no earlier than yesterday afternoon.

HASTINGS. What?

JOHN. Impossible!

POIROT. I took the liberty of speaking to your two gardeners—your two male gardeners—and they insist that yesterday afternoon Mrs.

Inglethorp called them each in to sign a long document beneath her signature.

JOHN. Good heavens, what an extraordinary coincidence! Writing a will on the very day of her death!

POIROT. Are you so sure it is a coincidence? Your mother had a violent quarrel with...someone yesterday afternoon?

JOHN. What do you mean?

HASTINGS. What made you think to ask the gardeners?

POIROT. Oh, a freshly planted bed of begonias, earth on the floor of her bedroom...

(Enter EVELYN HOWARD.)

EVIE. Have they taken him to prison yet?

HASTINGS. What? Who?

EVIE. Who? Alfred Inglethorp of course.

JOHN. My dear Evie, do be careful. Here's Monsieur Poirot, he's helping us investigate.

EVIE. Nothing to investigate. Alfred Inglethorp murdered poor Emily. I always told you he would.

JOHN. My dear Evie, don't shout so. Whatever we may think, it is better to say as little as possible for the present.

EVIE. You're all off your heads. The man will be out of the country any moment, he won't stay here and wait to be hanged. "Heart failure." My father was a doctor, I can tell you that little Dr. Wilkins is the greatest fool I have ever seen. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, John Cavendish.

POIROT. Mademoiselle, I want to ask you something.

EVIE. Ask away. *(To JOHN:)* Hanging's too good for him. Ought to be drawn and quartered, like in good old times.

POIROT. Monsieur Cavendish, would you excuse us?

JOHN. Of course.

(He goes.)

POIROT. Believe me, Miss Howard, if Mr. Inglethorp is the man, he shall not escape me. But I must ask you to trust me. In all this house of mourning, yours are the only eyes that have wept.

EVIE. I was fond of her! Yes! Emily was a very generous woman, but she always wanted a return. She never let people forget what

she had done for them. I was on a different footing, took my stand. "So many pounds a year I'm worth to you. Well and good. But not a penny besides, not a pair of gloves." She didn't understand. And so, out of the whole bunch, I was the only one who could allow myself to be fond of her. Then a glib-tongued scoundrel comes along, and pooh! All my years of devotion go for nothing.

POIROT. I understand, mademoiselle. It is most natural. You think that we lack fire and energy, but trust me, it is not so.

(Enter JOHN.)

JOHN. Time is short, Mr. Poirot, would you join us in mother's room for the inspection?

(Exit EVIE one way, POIROT and JOHN another, passing MARY as she enters.)

MARY. What is happening?

HASTINGS. They need to inspect the...where it happened. *(Indicating EVIE's exit:)* Mr. Inglethorp isn't here, is he? Miss Howard won't encounter him, will she?

MARY. Would it be a disaster if she did?

HASTINGS. Don't you think so?

MARY. I should like to see a good flare up. We are all thinking so much and saying little.

HASTINGS. John is anxious to keep them apart.

MARY. Oh, John!

HASTINGS. Old John's an awfully good sport.

MARY. You are loyal to your friend. I like that.

HASTINGS. Are you my friend?

MARY. I am a very bad friend. I am charming to them one day, and forget all about them the next.

HASTINGS. You seem invariably charming to Dr. Bauerstein.

(MARY stiffens. She departs swiftly and without another word.)

HASTINGS. Oh dear. *(To audience:)* By the time I had joined my associates in Mrs. Inglethorp's room, Poirot had made a terrible discovery.

(POIROT storms in with the dispatch-case raised high, followed by JOHN.)

POIROT. Mille tonnerres! This lock has been forced! And I have the key in my pocket! En voila une affaire!

HASTINGS. What?

POIROT. Who—that is the question! Why—if I only knew. When? Since I was here an hour ago.

(POIROT's hands are shaking, he rearranges pieces on the mantel.)

This is the thing. There was something in that case, some piece of evidence, slight perhaps, but still enough of a clue to connect the murderer with the crime. It was vital to him that it should be destroyed before it was discovered. Therefore, he took the great risk of coming in here, forcing the lock—it must have been something of great importance.

JOHN. What was it?

POIROT. I DO NOT KNOW! I guessed nothing! I have behaved like an imbecile! I should never have left that case here. Ah, triple pig! Is it destroyed? Is there not yet a chance? Hastings, I must be off at once!

HASTINGS. What? To where?

POIROT. That I cannot tell you, I must be away from Styles St. Mary for the day. I cannot attend the Inquest!

HASTINGS. Absurd! You must!

POIROT. No, no, there is much to do and little time. You must witness on my behalf, you, my friend, must be my eyes and ears!

(POIROT rushes out, followed by JOHN.)

HASTINGS. *(To audience:)* On Friday, attend the Inquest I did. When my friend finally arrived from his journey later that afternoon, I described to him in absolute detail every question the Coroner put to the members of the house.

(POIROT enters, and takes a seat as spectator, as HASTINGS assumes the role of CORONER.)

HASTINGS. *(To POIROT:)* The Coroner first called Dr. Bauerstein.

(Enter DR. BAUERSTEIN.)

HASTINGS. *(As CORONER:)* Dr. Bauerstein, could Mrs. Inglethorp have swallowed the poison by accident?

BAUERSTEIN. I consider it unlikely. Strychnine is not used for any domestic purposes. Its sale is restricted.

CORONER. What happened when you arrived at Styles?

BAUERSTEIN. I entered Mrs. Inglethorp's room, she was at that moment in a tetanic convulsion. She gasped out her husband's name, "Alfred! Alfred!"

CORONER. Could the poison have been administered to her in the after-dinner coffee taken to her by her husband?

BAUERSTEIN. Strychnine is a fairly rapid drug in its action. I presume Mrs. Inglethorp took the coffee after dinner about eight o'clock, whereas symptoms did not manifest themselves until the early hours of the morning.

CORONER. Mrs. Inglethorp was in the habit of drinking cocoa in the middle of the night—

BAUERSTEIN. No, no, I took a sample of the cocoa in the saucepan and had it analyzed, there was no strychnine present.

(POIROT chuckles softly, HASTINGS looks irritated.)

In any event, strychnine has an unusually bitter taste. Cocoa would be powerless to mask it. Coffee has a bitter taste of its own which might cover the taste of strychnine.

CORONER. Have you analyzed the coffee?

BAUERSTEIN. Not from her cup, it had been completely smashed.

CORONER. Dr. Bauerstein, were you aware that at the time of her death, Mrs. Inglethorp was taking a tonic that contained strychnine.

BAUERSTEIN. I am aware of that fact, but I do not believe that has any bearing on this tragedy.

CORONER. You do not?

BAUERSTEIN. No, strychnine can be found in several medications in trace amounts, for its...stimulative properties.

CORONER. Stimulative?

BAUERSTEIN. Laxative.

CORONER. Yes, I follow. Is it not possible her death was as a result of strychnine from her medicine in her system?

BAUERSTEIN. No, that is preposterous. If she had been accumulating the poison in her system in that way it would have manifest itself in a long period of chronic symptoms, and not sudden death in this way.

CORONER. Accidental overdose, perhaps?

BAUERSTEIN. No, truly. Mrs. Inglethorp always has a large amount made up at one time, she would have had to "accidentally" swallow the whole bottle at once. The supposition is ridiculous. The fact is, on the day she died she had taken the last dose from a bottle which had been prepared weeks earlier.

CORONER. Thank you, Dr. Bauerstein. Will Mrs. John Cavendish please come forward?

(MARY enters and takes her seat.)

Mrs. Cavendish, you were sitting, reading on the bench just outside the long window of the boudoir yesterday afternoon, were you not?

MARY. Yes, that is so.

CORONER. Please tell us of the quarrel you overheard.

MARY. I?

CORONER. The window was open, was it not? You could not have failed to hear the voices inside.

MARY. I do not remember hearing anything.

CORONER. Nothing?

MARY. I am not in the habit of listening to private conversations.

CORONER. How would you know it was private if you had not heard even a stray word or phrase?

MARY. Yes. I do remember. Mrs. Inglethorp said, "I don't know what to do; scandal between husband and wife is a dreadful thing." Then I fixed my mind upon my book.

CORONER. I see. Thank you, Mrs. Cavendish. Would Mr. Alfred Inglethorp please step forward.

(Enter INGLETHORP.)

Mr. Inglethorp, I will come straight to the point. On Monday evening last, did you purchase strychnine for the purpose of poisoning a dog?

INGLETHORP. No, I did not. There is no dog at Styles.

CORONER. I have sworn testimony from the chemist's assistant in Styles St. Mary that a man of your description purchased strychnine on Monday last, and that you purchased it from him.

INGLETHORP. He is mistaken.

CORONER. Mr. Inglethorp, where were you the evening of Monday, July 16, 1917?

INGLETHORP. I can't remember.

CORONER. That is absurd.

INGLETHORP. I have an idea I was out walking.

CORONER. In what direction?

INGLETHORP. I really can't remember.

CORONER. So you cannot tell me where you were when you were seen to be purchasing strychnine at the chemist's?

INGLETHORP. If you like to take it that way.

POIROT. (*Murmuring:*) Sacre! The imbecile wants to be arrested!

CORONER. You were heard to quarrel with your wife on Tuesday afternoon—

INGLETHORP. You are misinformed. I was absent from the house the entire afternoon.

CORONER. Can anyone testify to that?

INGLETHORP. You have my word.

CORONER. Did you take coffee to your wife that night?

INGLETHORP. I poured her coffee, yes, but left it on the hall table when I was told Dr. Bauerstein was at the door. When I returned, it was gone.

CORONER. Mr. Inglethorp. Can you explain your wife's dying words?

INGLETHORP. Certainly. She called my name. I am her husband. It was an appeal to me.

CORONER. Thank you, Mr. Inglethorp. That is all.

POIROT. Things are moving quickly my friend. If they arrest Mr. Inglethorp the case against him will be dismissed at once.

HASTINGS. You believe Inglethorp to be innocent?

POIROT. Why not?

HASTINGS. But the evidence is so conclusive.

POIROT. Yes. Too conclusive. Here is a man, who sets out to poison his wife. He goes boldly to the village chemist's and purchases strychnine under his own name, with a story about a dog which is bound to be proved absurd. He does not employ the poison that night. No, he waits until he has had a violent quarrel with her, of which the whole household is aware. He prepares no defense, no shadow of an alibi. Bah! Do not ask me to believe that any man could be so idiotic! It puzzles me. Me! Hercule Poirot!

HASTINGS. But he was seen purchasing strychnine.

POIROT. I beg your pardon, a man with a black beard and wearing glasses was seen purchasing strychnine. Suppose someone wanted to pass themselves off as you, would that be easy?

HASTINGS. Well—

POIROT. I will tell you why it would not be easy, you are a clean-shaven man. To appear unmistakably as you, in broad-daylight? Ridicule! But Alfred Inglethorp? His clothes, his beard, his glasses, those are his personal appearance! No. Our criminal diverted suspicion from himself by throwing it onto Mr. Inglethorp.

HASTINGS. If that was the case, why does he not say where he was at six o'clock on Monday evening?

POIROT. Ah, why indeed. For that matter, what of Mrs. Cavendish, she is not telling all she knows. It is certain she heard more of that "private conversation" than she is willing to admit.

HASTINGS. She is the last person one would accuse of eavesdropping.

POIROT. Exactly. However, her evidence has shown me I made a mistake. The quarrel did take place earlier in the afternoon. And Dr. Bauerstein, what was he doing up and dressed at that hour in the morning?

HASTINGS. I understand he has insomnia, says he was walking past the estate and saw the lights on.

POIROT. Which is a very good, or a very bad explanation.

HASTINGS. (*Sarcastically:*) Any more faults to find with the evidence?

POIROT. Mon ami, when you find that people are not telling the truth—look out!

HASTINGS. Miss Cynthia has been entirely truthful...

POIROT. Perhaps. But it was strange that she never heard a sound, sleeping next door. She must be a famous sleeper, that one!

HASTINGS. Pardon me?

POIROT. Pardonnez-moi!

(*POIROT twists his moustaches and exits.*)

HASTINGS. (*To audience:*) The next morning it was in the papers, all over England: MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY IN ESSEX! WEALTHY LADY POISONED! Poirot asked John to drive him into the village, and that afternoon asked me to join him for one more encounter with Alfred Inglethorp.

(*Enter INGLETHORP and POIROT.*)

POIROT. Mr. Inglethorp, a very dark shadow is resting on this house.

INGLETHORP. My poor wife. Poor Emily! It is terrible.

POIROT. I do not think you realize how terrible it may be, for you. Do you understand?

INGLETHORP. No, what do you mean?

POIROT. You are suspected of poisoning your wife.

INGLETHORP. Good heavens! What a monstrous idea!

POIROT. Do you still refuse to say where you were at six o'clock Monday afternoon? (*Pause.*) Speak!

INGLETHORP. No. No one could accuse me of what you say.

POIROT. Soit! I must speak for you.

INGLETHORP. You? How? You do not know—

POIROT. Mon ami, Hastings!

HASTINGS. Mn?

POIROT. The man who entered the chemist's shop, and purchased strychnine at six o'clock on Monday last was not Mr. Inglethorp.

HASTINGS. Er, no?

POIROT. No! I can produce no less than five witnesses to swear that at six o'clock on that day Mr. Inglethorp was seen escorting a gentlewoman of the village, a Mrs. Raikes, back to her home from a neighbouring farm, at least two and a half miles distant from the village. (*To INGLETHORP:*) There is absolutely no question as to your alibi.

HASTINGS. (*To INGLETHORP:*) Why couldn't you say all this at the inquest?

POIROT. There was a certain rumor—

INGLETHORP. A most malicious and utterly untrue one. With my poor Emily not yet buried, can you wonder I was anxious that no more lying rumors should be started.

HASTINGS. I'd sooner have any amount of rumors than be arrested for murder!

INGLETHORP. I was foolish, no doubt. But you do not know how I have been persecuted and maligned. (*Bowing slightly.*) Mr. Poirot.

(*Exit INGLETHORP.*)

POIROT. We now know one person who did not buy the poison, we have cleared away the manufactured clues. Now to the real ones. Who took the coffee to Mrs. Inglethorp?

HASTINGS. Aulgh.

POIROT. In showing my hand so soon, our criminal will now be doubly careful. Tell me, you have no suspicions yourself.

HASTINGS. Well. It's foolish.

POIROT. Come now, pay attention to your instincts.

HASTINGS. I have suspected Miss Howard is not telling all she knows. We have entirely left her out as a possible suspect.

POIROT. Very good! Never fear to speak your mind! But you are mistaken. I rang up the hospital where she was volunteering yesterday. She was on duty Tuesday afternoon, and all that evening.

HASTINGS. Oh. Really. It's her extraordinary vehemence against Mr. Inglethorp that started me thinking she'd do anything against him.

POIROT. You find her vehemence unnatural?

HASTINGS. Violently so. I believed she may have tried to poison him, and Mrs. Inglethorp got hold of it by mistake. I appreciate that sounds ridiculous.

POIROT. Still, it is always wise to suspect everybody until you can prove logically that they are innocent.

(Exit POIROT.)

HASTINGS. Very well. But it's all extremely mysterious. *(To audience:)* The funeral of Mrs. Inglethorp took place the following day.

(Enter JOHN.)

JOHN. Inglethorp is leaving, going to reside at Styles Arms.

HASTINGS. Oh?

JOHN. And a great relief it is, too. I'm thankful he's had the tact to go. It's a good thing Styles wasn't Emily's to leave to him. Couldn't bear to think of the fellow lording it here. He's welcome to her money.

HASTINGS. You'll be able to keep the place all right?

JOHN. Oh yes. Half my father's money goes with the place. Will be a pinch, I am in a bit of a hole right now. Ghastly though, the papers. Headlines glaring, "Mysterious Affair at Styles" and all that. Rubbish. Makes you wish the war would pick up.

HASTINGS. No. Not really.

JOHN. Hmm? Anyway.

(Enter POIROT.)

POIROT. Life is so precious. My regrets, Mr. Cavendish, to you and your family, it was a beautiful service. *(To HASTINGS:)* Mon ami, would you be so kind as to drive me back to my cottage?

(Exit POIROT and HASTINGS. JOHN is about to follow them, when MARY CAVENDISH enters.)

JOHN. Where have you been?

(She does not respond.)

I won't have it.

MARY. Have you any right to criticize my actions?

JOHN. It will be the talk of the village.

MARY. Oh, if it is only village gossip that you mind.

(HASTINGS reenters unseen, and chooses to remain just out of sight to eavesdrop.)

JOHN. You will continue to see Bauerstein against my express wishes?

MARY. Have you no friends of whom I should disapprove?

JOHN. Are you in love with this fellow?

MARY. Perhaps.

(MARY departs. JOHN stands helpless, and HASTINGS decides to enter as though he was just passing through.)

HASTINGS. Oh! Hullo.

JOHN. Hastings! Seen Poirot safely back to his cottage?

HASTINGS. Mn.

JOHN. Is he any good, though, really?

HASTINGS. One of the finest of his day.

JOHN. Must be something in it, then. Quaint chap.

(JOHN looks around, and lowers his voice.)

JOHN. It's a nightmare...who did it? It may have been an accident, with Inglethorp out of the way, there's no one else, except—one of us.

HASTINGS. Can't you guess?

JOHN. Who?

(HASTINGS looks around nervously.)

HASTINGS. Bauerstein.

JOHN. Impossible!

HASTINGS. Not at all!

JOHN. But why?

HASTINGS. I don't know! But Poirot thinks so, too. Remember, Inglethorp said he put down the coffee in the hall. Bauerstein had just arrived, he could have dropped something into it in passing.

JOHN. How could he have known that was her coffee? No, old fellow, I don't think that will wash.

HASTINGS. Then what about the cocoa!

JOHN. No, no, that was found to be free of strychnine when it was analyzed by Dr. Bauerstein.

(Pause.)

BOTH. Ah!

HASTINGS. The cocoa!

JOHN. But the bitter taste—?

HASTINGS. That was his word.

JOHN. But the cocoa wasn't downstairs.

HASTINGS. Maybe he has an accomplice.

JOHN. But who?

(HASTINGS, about to suggest MARY, hesitates.)

In any event, Bauerstein was the one who demanded a post-mortem. Anyone else would have been content to let it go at heart disease. No, I'm blest if I can see what his motive could have been.

(Enter CYNTHIA.)

CYNTHIA. Oh!

JOHN. Cynthia. Hullo.

CYNTHIA. Hello, Mr. Cavendish. If you would excuse us, I would like to talk to Mr. Hastings.

JOHN. Not at all. Miss. Hastings.

(JOHN exits.)

HASTINGS. Well?

(CYNTHIA throws herself onto the divan.)

CYNTHIA. Oh! Mr. Hastings you are always so kind. What shall I do, now that Aunt Emily... Do you think I ought to go away from here?

HASTINGS. Good heavens, no! They don't want to part with you, I'm sure.

CYNTHIA. Mrs. Cavendish does, she hates me. And John can't bear to be in the same room with me, either. It's rather horrid when no one loves you, isn't it?

HASTINGS. But we do, I do, I mean, everyone does! Mr. Cavendish—Miss Howard—

CYNTHIA. Oh yes, Evie. But John never speaks to me if he can help it, and Mary can hardly bring herself to be civil to me... I don't know what to do.

(CYNTHIA bursts into tears. HASTINGS stands awkward and helplessly. He kneels.)

HASTINGS. Marry me, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA. *(Bursts out laughing:)* Funny man! You are perfectly sweet.

HASTINGS. I don't see anything to laugh at.

CYNTHIA. No, indeed. *(Impersonating him:)* "Marry me, Cynthia!" Somebody might accept you next time. Good-bye, you've cheered me up very much.

(JOHN reenters, suddenly.)

JOHN. Hastings! He's been taken!

HASTINGS. What?

JOHN. Bauerstein! He's been arrested!

(Exit JOHN, followed by CYNTHIA.)

(Enter POIROT.)

POIROT. Bonjour, mon ami!

HASTINGS. Poirot! Dr. Bauerstein has been arrested!

POIROT. Bauerstein is arrested, then?

HASTINGS. Yes!

POIROT. It does not surprise me. Proximity to the coast.

HASTINGS. What does that have to do with the murder of Mrs. Inglethorp?

POIROT. Dr. Bauerstein has been arrested for the murder of Mrs. Inglethorp?

HASTINGS. Yes! What? Yes!

POIROT. Impossible, who told you that?

HASTINGS. Er, no one. But he has been arrested.

POIROT. But of course. For espionage.

HASTINGS. He's a spy?

POIROT. It did not strike you as peculiar that a famous London doctor should bury himself in a little village like this? He is, of course, a German by birth. He has practiced so long in this country that nobody thinks of him as anything but an Englishman. A very clever man.

HASTINGS. That...that...

POIROT. His comings and goings with Mrs. Cavendish must have been very useful, obfuscating his true mission through the idle gossip they were creating.

HASTINGS. You mean he doesn't have feelings for her?

POIROT. Nor she for him! She cares for another man!

HASTINGS. She cares for another? (*Believing it may be himself:*) Oh!

(*Enter EVIE, handing a piece of paper to POIROT.*)

EVIE. On top of the wardrobe, sir. In Mr. Cavendish's room.

(*EVIE departs hastily. POIROT eagerly looks at the paper.*)

POIROT. (*Reading:*) "Messrs. Parkson's, the well-known theatrical costumiers, addressed to J. Cavendish, Esq., Styles Court, Styles St. Mary, Essex."

HASTINGS. Where did this come from?

POIROT. From on top of the wardrobe.

HASTINGS. Yes, but, is it important?

POIROT. Moderately so. It confirms a surmise of mine. Having deduced its existence, I set Miss Howard to search for it. No doubt we will contact Parkson's and discover they have recently delivered to Styles a bushy, black beard.

HASTINGS. Ah-ha! Poirot, have you made up your mind about this crime?

POIROT. I believe I know how it was committed.

HASTINGS. Ah!

POIROT. Unfortunately, I have no proof. Unless...

(*POIROT suddenly dashes out of the room calling:*)

Mademoiselle Dorcas, Mademoiselle Dorcas, un moment, s'il vous plait!

(Enter MARY.)

HASTINGS. Mrs. Cavendish!

MARY. What is your remarkable friend doing?

HASTINGS. Really, I can't tell you.

MARY. *(Laughs:)* Is he quite mad?

HASTINGS. I honestly don't know. "Though this be madness, there is method in it."

MARY. I see.

HASTINGS. That's Shakespeare.

MARY. I know.

HASTINGS. Ah.

MARY. Mr. Hastings, do you think I and my husband are happy?

HASTINGS. Oh. Er.

MARY. Well. I will you tell you we are not happy.

HASTINGS. Ah.

MARY. My father was English, but my mother was a Russian.

HASTINGS. Ah!

MARY. Pardon me?

HASTINGS. A hint of something...exotic, uh, foreign, about you.

MARY. She died when I was quite a little child. My father was broken-hearted. He joined the Consular Service, and wherever he went, I followed. By age twenty-three I had been nearly all over the world. I loved it.

(POIROT enters unseen, and decides to place himself out of sight to listen.)

When he died, I had to live with an old aunt in Yorkshire. The monotony of it drove me almost mad. Then I met John Cavendish. He was my chance to escape. I was honest, I told him I liked him very much, but not in any way what the world calls "in love." He was satisfied with that, and so we married.

(Pause.)

We are not well-matched.

(Pause.)

You do not know how this hateful place has been a prison to me! I am not going to remain at Styles.

HASTINGS. You are going to leave him?

MARY. Yes.

HASTINGS. Don't do anything rash!

MARY. *(Laughing:)* Oh, rash!

HASTINGS. You know that Dr. Bauerstein has been arrested?

(MARY's mood grows indifferent.)

MARY. John was so kind to inform me, yes.

HASTINGS. Well, what do you think?

MARY. What should I think? Apparently he is a German spy. These flowers are quite dead, I must do them again. Would you mind moving, Mr. Hastings, thank you.

(Exit MARY. Enter POIROT, hand to his head.)

POIROT. Sacre.

HASTINGS. My friend, you are not ill, I trust?

POIROT. No, no. But I decide an affair of great moment.

HASTINGS. Whether to catch the criminal or not?

POIROT. "To speak or not to speak," as you say, "that is the question." Shakespeare.

HASTINGS. I know.

POIROT. Ha ha!

HASTINGS. Is this amusing?

POIROT. No, no, it is serious. The most serious of all things hangs in the balance—a woman's happiness. These little grey cells. It is "up to them." No one but I, Hercule Poirot, can save her!

(The loud cry of MARY is heard from another room.)

HASTINGS. Mary?

(Enter DORCAS.)

DORCAS. Oh, sir! Oh, sir!

POIROT. My dear Dorcas!

DORCAS. I don't know how to tell you—

HASTINGS. Tell us at once!

DORCAS. Now Mr. Cavendish has been arrested!

HASTINGS. John? My old friend, John?

POIROT. Every murderer is somebody's old friend.

HASTINGS. You might have given me a hint.

POIROT. Perhaps I did not because he was your old friend. But I must not appear in the case. Until I have found that last link in my chain, I must remain behind the scenes.

(Exit POIROT and DORCAS. HASTINGS addresses the audience.)

HASTINGS. On 15 September, John Cavendish appeared in the dock at the Old Bailey, charged with "The Wilful Murder of Emily Agnes Inglethorp," and pleaded "Not Guilty."

The Prosecution presented the murder as premeditated and cold. The accused was a spendthrift and a rake, at the end of his financial tether. His stepmother taxed him with news of a possible affair, a quarrel ensued, and the prisoner purchased strychnine wearing a disguise by means to throw the crime upon another man, specifically the new husband of his stepmother of whom he had been bitterly jealous.

(Enter POIROT.)

POIROT. Things are going very badly, mon ami.

(POIROT pulls a pack of playing cards from his coat and begins to create a house of cards. HASTINGS appears incredulous.)

I steady my nerves. This employment requires precision of the fingers. Precision of the fingers leads to precision of the brain.

(POIROT raises story after story of cards.)

To find that last link, it is done—so! By placing one card...upon... another...

HASTINGS. Your hand never shakes! I have only seen it shake once, when you stood by the mantel in Mrs. Inglethorp's room, distractedly twiddling with things upon it.

(POIROT utters a bizarre, inarticulate cry, and smashes the house of cards.)

HASTINGS. Good heavens! Are you ill?

POIROT. An idea! And you, my friend, have given it to me!

(POIROT kisses HASTINGS on both cheeks, and dashes from the room.)

Dorcas! I need you!

HASTINGS. (*To audience:*) Soon enough, Poirot had requested Mary convene a kind of bizarre reunion in her salon.

(*Enter POIROT, MARY and EVIE.*)

POIROT. We must begin our proceedings. I have sent to Styles Arms, Mr. Inglethorp will join us in a few minutes.

EVIE. If that man comes into the house, I leave it!

POIROT. No, no. I was called in by Monsieur John Cavendish to investigate this case. I at once examined the bedroom of the deceased.

I found: first, threads of green material, caught in the bolt of the door to Mademoiselle Cynthia's room, torn from a green armlet, of the type worn by the Women's Land Army—Mrs. Cavendish?

HASTINGS. But that door was bolted from the inside!

POIROT. We only have her word for that, is that not correct, Mrs. Cavendish?

MARY. It is, Monsieur.

POIROT. So. She is in her mother-in-law's room, searching for something she has not found. Suddenly Mrs. Inglethorp awakens and is seized with an alarming paroxysm. Mrs. Cavendish, startled, drops her candle, spilling the grease, picks it up and retreats quickly through Mademoiselle Cynthia's room.

HASTINGS. (*To MARY:*) You destroyed the will?

POIROT. No! That was done by Mrs. Inglethorp herself! Why would she otherwise have ordered a fire drawn on a day when it was 80 degrees in the shade?

HASTINGS. But she made it out only that very afternoon.

POIROT. Oui, mon ami, and either before or after the quarrel that took place that afternoon, when Dorcas heard her mistress cry, "You need not think that scandal between husband and wife will deter me," and Mrs. Cavendish heard her state, "I don't know what to do; scandal between husband and wife is a dreadful thing." It took me time to realize they were two different arguments!

HASTINGS. The first with her son, the second with her husband!

POIROT. Indeed!

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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