

**AGATHA
CHRISTIE'S**
The Murder on the Links



Doug Goheen

Adapted from the novel by Agatha Christie

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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BIG DOG PUBLISHING

P.O. Box 1401

Rapid City, SD 57709

The Murder on the Links

MYSTERY. Adapted from the novel by Agatha Christie. Famed Belgian detective Hercule Poirot and his friend Captain Arthur Hastings travel to France to meet with Paul Renauld, who has urgently requested Poirot's assistance. Upon arriving, Poirot and Hastings discover they are too late: Renauld was stabbed in the back that morning and left in a newly dug grave at the edge of a golf course. Renauld's wife claims that two masked men broke into their villa in the middle of the night, tied her up, demanded to know "the secret," and then kidnapped her husband. Why did the servants hear nothing, and why was the body found where it would be quickly discovered? Meanwhile, Hastings meets a young woman, known to him as "Cinderella," who asks to see the crime scene and then mysteriously disappears with the murder weapon. To solve the murder, Poirot must pit his wits against an arrogant, sneering French detective. An enthralling, ingenious whodunit complete with blackmail, hidden identities, plot twists, and even some romance.

Performance Time: Approximately 120 minutes.



Agatha Christie, 1910s

About the Story

Agatha Christie was born in southwest England to a wealthy upper-class family. Christie was schooled at home and enjoyed mystery novels by Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. *The Murder on the Links* (1923) is Christie's third novel and is inspired by an actual murder case in France. The novel features the famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, who became one of Christie's most famous characters and is known for his magnificent mustache and astute attention to detail. The character of Captain Arthur Hastings—who appeared in Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*—returns as Poirot's assistant and falls in love with a mysterious American acrobat with "wrists of steel." Christie dedicated *The Murder on the Links* to her husband, "A fellow enthusiast for detective stories and to whom I am much indebted for much helpful advice and criticism." The author of 66 detective novels and 15 short story collections, Christie is best known for her bestselling novel *And Then There Were None* and her play *The Mousetrap*.

Characters

(5 M, 6 F)

- HERCULE POIROT:** Belgian detective; male.
- CAPTAIN ARTHUR HASTINGS:** Veteran of WWII and a longtime friend and assistant to Poirot; falls in love with Dulcie Duveen; male.
- DULCIE/BELLA DUVEEN:** Dulcie is a mysterious American stage performer/acrobat whom Hastings knows only as "Cinderella"; Bella is Dulcie's identical twin sister, a stage performer/acrobat and Jack Renauld's fiancée; female.
[Note: Dulcie and Bella are played by the same actor.]
- MADAME RENAULD:** Matron of Villa Genevieve; widow of Paul Renauld, who had requested Poirot's assistance before he was murdered; female.
- JACK RENAULD:** Madame Renauld's son; had been in love with Marthe Daubreuil but is secretly engaged to Bella Duveen; male.
- MADAME DAUBREUIL:** Mysterious neighbor of the Renaulds; lives at Villa Marguerite; female.
- MARTHE DAUBREUIL:** Madame Daubreuil's daughter; in love with Jack Renauld; female.
- INSPECTOR GIRAUD:** Haughty inspector of the Paris Sûreté who resents Poirot's involvement in the investigation; male.
- ARMAND HAUTET:** Commissioner of Police for Merlinville who is assisting Giraud; more respectful to Poirot than Giraud; male.
- MICHELLE:** Young maid at Villa Genevieve; female.
- FRANCOISE:** Longtime domestic at Villa Genevieve; female.

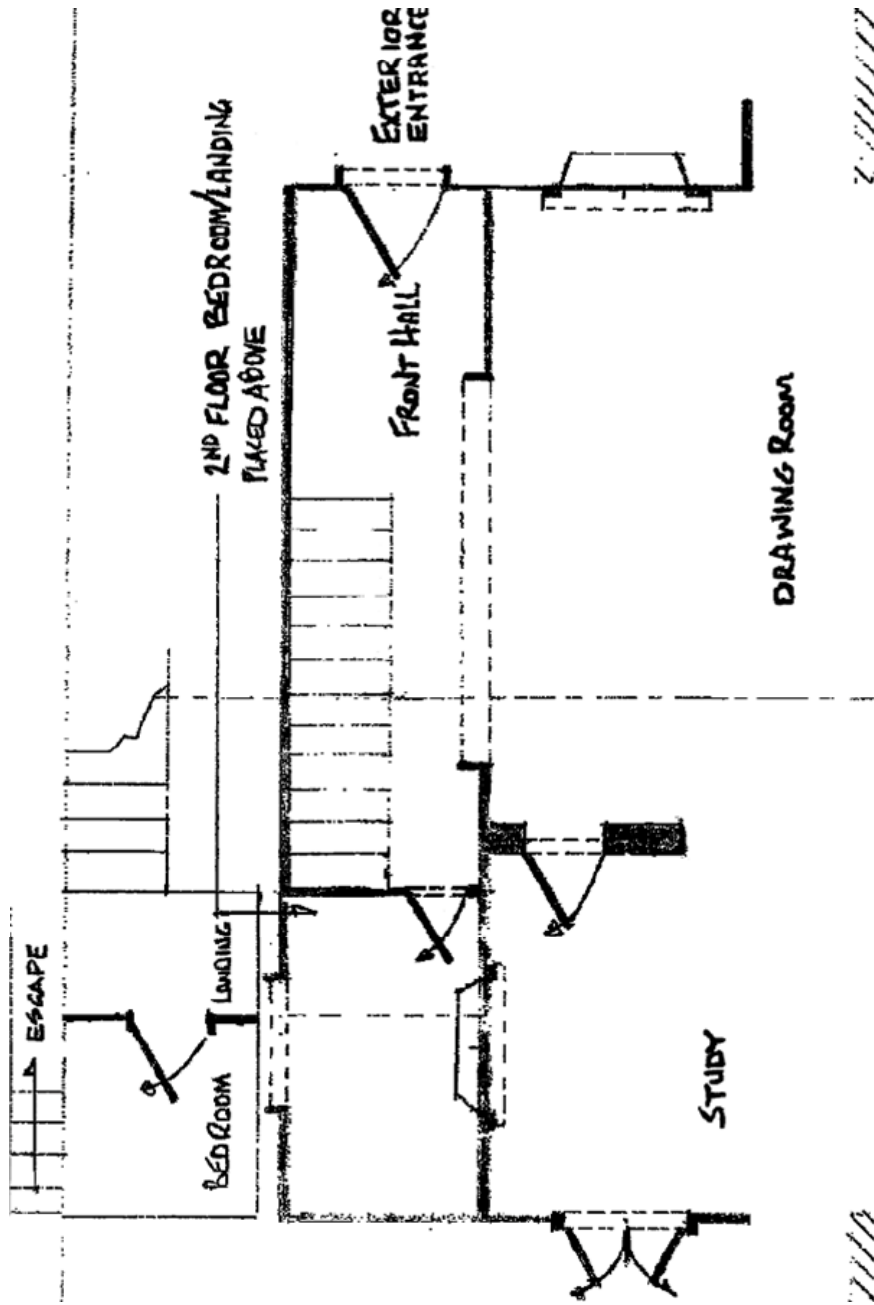
Setting

Villa Genevieve, an estate near the village of Merlinville-sur-Mer on the French coastline on the Strait of Dover, June 1920s.

Sets

Railway car. Chairs or benches will suffice. A backdrop may be used, if desired.

Villa Genevieve. A sumptuous estate. Several partial cutaway walls of the exterior suggest the scope of the manor. Two stone benches occupy small recesses DSR and DSL. The interior is divided into two large rooms. The larger drawing room, about 2/3 of the space, is SL and furnished with a low settee, a sofa and coffee table, and several chairs. A fireplace is visible at the center of the SL wall. Along the upstage wall of this drawing room runs a very large, open archway through which can be seen a hallway and a stairwell, the steps leading up SR and off. Also off of this hall is another much smaller open archway set further back and leading to the interior of the estate. An upstage door on the SR wall of the drawing room leads into the smaller study SR, occupying about 1/3 of the stage space. In this room, French doors along the SR wall lead out to a terrace. A small desk is situated on the SL wall of this room, just downstage of the doorway. On the upstage wall of the study is another fireplace flanked by bookshelves on either side. The interior wall separating the two rooms is a partial cutaway wall only. The main entrance to the villa is through the hall and out SL. (See set diagram, pg. 7)



Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I

Prologue: Before the curtain. Railway car, early morning.

Scene 1: Villa Genevieve, late morning.

Scene 2: Villa Genevieve, immediately following.

Scene 3: Villa Genevieve, a short time later.

Scene 4: Villa Genevieve, immediately following.

Intermission.

ACT II

Scene 1: Before the curtain, adjoining garden at the Villa Marguerite, the following day.

Scene 2: Villa Genevieve.

Scene 3: Villa Genevieve, immediately following.

Scene 4: Villa Genevieve.

Scene 5: Villa Genevieve, the next day.

Scene 6: Villa Genevieve.

Epilogue: Before the curtain. Railway car.

Props

Newspaper
Calling card
Hand bell
Tea service
Letters
Overcoat, for Poirot
Overcoat, for Hastings
Legal document
Fragment of pink paper
Wristwatch
Letter opener in the shape of a dagger
Sheet to cover murder victim
Handkerchief (to wrap dagger in)
Cigarette butt
Spent match
Overcoat, for Jack
Soft tape measure
Photograph of Madame Daubreuil
Blonde wig, for Dulcie
Brunette wig, for Bella
Fire poker
Shovel
Dummy to represent body

Sound Effects

Train whistle signaling departure
Train whistle signaling arrival
Doorbell
Sound of hand bell
Blood-curdling scream
Creaky steps
Sound of front door opening
Tapping sounds
Banging sound

*“The great criminal
is a great actor...”*

—Hercule Poirot

ACT I

Prologue

(Before the curtain. A railway car, June 1920s, early morning. Captain Arthur Hastings is reading a copy of "The London Times." Momentarily, he lowers the paper and directly addresses the audience.)

HASTINGS: *(To audience.)* With the Great War concluded, I found my responsibilities as private secretary to an MP further diminished, thereby creating a luxurious amount of idle time in which to wallow. Days, even weeks, would pass me by rather indifferently with no concern for what I was or wasn't up to. Yet there would come times when my association—friendship—with Hercule Poirot would insidiously intrude upon such times of tranquility and immerse me in the churning waters of yet another unsolved case. Has it really only been a few days since this most recent adventure began? Here I sat less than one week previous, minding my own business while contentedly poring over the "London Times," little expecting to be interrupted by a young woman who would eventually change my life...

(Train whistle, signaling its departure. Dulcie rushes on SR and manages to board before the car pulls out of the station.)

DULCIE: *(Calls.)* Bella?

HASTINGS: Pardon me?

DULCIE: Sorry. I'm to meet my sister. There's no one else in the car?

HASTINGS: No.

DULCIE: Oh, bollocks! *(Catching herself.)* Oh! I apologize for my language. Most unladylike and all that, but there's reason enough for it. Do you know I've lost my only sister?

HASTINGS: Really? How unfortunate.

DULCIE: Well, aren't you sorry?

HASTINGS: Devastated.

DULCIE: That's a good boy. I liked you the first moment I set eyes on you. But you looked so disapproving I never thought we should be friends.

HASTINGS: Oh, we're friends then, are we? Better tell me something about yourself, then.

DULCIE: I'm a performer. No, not the kind you're thinking of. I've been on the boards since I was a kid of six, tumbling.

HASTINGS: I beg your pardon?

DULCIE: Haven't you ever seen child acrobats?

HASTINGS: Oh, I understand.

DULCIE: I'm American born, but I've spent most of my life in England. We've got a new show there now.

HASTINGS: We?

DULCIE: My sister and I. Sort of song and dance, with a bit of patter, and a dash of the old business thrown in. It's quite a new idea, and it hits them every time. There's going to be money in it. And you? You were through War, I suppose?

HASTINGS: *(Nods.)* I was a captain. Wounded once, and after the Somme, they invalidated me out altogether. I'm a sort of private secretary now to an MP.

DULCIE: Impressive!

HASTINGS: Not really. There's very little to do. Usually a couple of hours every day sees me through. Rather dull work, too. In fact, I don't know what I should do if I hadn't gotten something to fall back upon.

DULCIE: Do tell...

HASTINGS: I share rooms with a very interesting man. A Belgian, an ex-detective. He's now set up in London in private practice. A marvelous little man. Time and again he has proved to be right where the official police have failed.

DULCIE: That's brilliant! I adore crime. I go to all the mysteries at the movies.

HASTINGS: You remember the Styles incident?

DULCIE: The old lady who was poisoned...somewhere down in Essex?

HASTINGS: Yes. That was Poirot's first big case. But for him, the murderer would have escaped scot-free.

(Train whistle signaling arrival.)

DULCIE: Here's Calais! Goodbye, and I'll mind my language better in the future.

HASTINGS: But, surely, you'll let me look after you on the boat?

DULCIE: Not sure I'll *be* on the boat. I've got to see whether that sister of mine got aboard anywhere. But thanks all the same.

(Starts to exit.)

HASTINGS: But we're going to meet again, surely. I've told you my name. Aren't you going to tell me yours?

DULCIE: Cinderella!

(Dulcie exits. Poirot enters opposite.)

POIROT: *(Calls.)* Arthur, mon ami!

HASTINGS: Poirot! What are you doing here?

POIROT: Back to the station, quickly! I shall explain.

HASTINGS: But I've only just arrived from Calais. I'm to be in London tomorrow morning.

POIROT: Whatever it is, it can wait, n'est-ce pas? Do not agitate yourself.

HASTINGS: But what—?

POIROT: Come, we go to Merlinville-sur-Mer.

HASTINGS: Merlinville? Midway between Boulogne and here? That's over three hours away!

POIROT: Which is why we go at once. Come, a motorcar awaits us. *(Slight pause.)* Trust me, my friend. *(Hastings and Poirot cross SL as the railway car slides off SR.)* And then, after the bills, the suggestions for lectures, the invitations to the social events, I came upon this...the last of my correspondence from yesterday afternoon.

(Poirot hands a letter to Hastings. The contents of the letter are heard in a voiceover as Hastings reads to himself. The voice presumably is that of Paul Renauld.)

PAUL RENAULD: *(Voiceover.)* "Dear Sir: I am in need of the services of a detective, and for reasons which I will give you

later, do not wish to call in the official police. I have heard of you from several quarters, and all reports go to show that you are not only a man of decided ability, but one who also knows how to be discreet. I do not wish to trust details to the post, but on account of a secret I possess, I go in daily fear of my life. I am convinced that the danger is imminent, and, therefore, I beg that you will lose no time in crossing to France. I will send a car to meet you at Calais if you will wire me when you are arriving. I shall be obliged if you will drop all cases you have on hand and devote yourself entirely to my interests. I am prepared to pay any compensation needed. I shall probably require your services for a considerable period of time, as it may be necessary for you to travel to Santiago, where I spent several years of my life. I shall be content for you to name your own fee, assuring you once more that the matter is urgent. Yours faithfully, P.T. Renauld. P.S. For God's sake, come!"

(Hastings hands the letter to Poirot.)

HASTINGS: *(To Poirot.)* Distinctly out of the ordinary.

POIROT: Yes, indeed.

HASTINGS: But this Mr. Renauld hints strongly that his business is private.

POIROT: I shall manage Monsieur Renauld. By the way, I seem to know the name.

HASTINGS: There's a well-known South American millionaire fellow. His name's Renauld. I don't know whether it could be the same.

POIROT: But without a doubt. That explains the mention of Santiago, which is in Chile. Ah, we progress finely! *(Looks around for a car but no car comes.)*

HASTINGS: It looks as though no car has been sent to meet us, after all.

POIROT: It is no difficulty. We will ourselves find a car. *(Exits SL.)*

HASTINGS: *(To audience or voiceover.)* And find a car we did. The most ramshackle of automobiles that ever plied for hire. After several hours of creaking and jolting along, we finally

arrived in the little town of Merlinville and proceeded to the estate of Monsieur Paul Renauld, the Villa Genevieve, to learn of a second, and much more serious, disappointment. (*Exits SL.*)

Scene I

(AT RISE: *Villa Genevieve, a sumptuous estate near the village of Merlinville-sur-Mer on the French coastline on the Strait of Dover, June 1920s, late morning. Armand Hautet, Commissary of Police for Merlinville, is looking out one of the open French doors in the study. He is holding a letter in hand. Michelle, a young maid, is squatting in front of the fireplace in the drawing room. Doorbell. Distraught, Francoise crosses in the hall upstage to answer the door. As she passes, Hautet closes the French door and goes to the desk area. Carrying a small calling card, Francoise enters the archway.*)

FRANCOISE: *(To Michelle.)* Monsieur Hautet?

MICHELLE: The study.

(Francoise crosses into the study.)

FRANCOISE: *(To Hautet.)* Two more gentlemen at the door, sir. I told them it was a bad time; however, the elder one insisted I present you his card.

HAUTET: *(Reads the card.)* Poirot, the old rascal! By all means, Francoise, show him in!

FRANCOISE: Yes, sir.

(Hautet crosses into the drawing room and lays the letter atop the desk in the study.)

HAUTET: *(Calls.)* Mademoiselle Michelle?

MICHELLE: Yes, monsieur?

HAUTET: We'll need a tea service for three, if you don't mind.

MICHELLE: Of course.

(Michelle exits. Francoise shows Poirot into the drawing room, followed by Hastings.)

HAUTET: Poirot! Delighted to see you!

POIROT: Monsieur Armand, it has been some time. A pleasure always.

(Hautet gestures for Françoise to take their coats. As Françoise takes Poirot and Hastings's coats. As she does, she eavesdrops on the following conversation.)

HAUTET: *(To Poirot.)* Your arrival is most opportune, mon ami.

POIROT: Thank you. And here... *(Introducing.)* ...an English friend of mine, Captain Arthur Hastings. Arthur, Armand Hautet.

HAUTET: *(Shaking Hastings's hand.)* Ah, a military man. How do you do, Captain?

HASTINGS: A pleasure, sir.

HAUTET: Forgive me, Poirot, but what business have you here now?

POIROT: You do not know that I have been sent for?

HAUTET: No. By whom?

POIROT: By one Monsieur Paul Renauld. This is his estate, the Villa Genevieve, no?

HAUTET: Yes, but—

POIROT: He sent a post, which I received only yesterday. It seems that he is quite anxious about an impending attempt to be made on his life.

(Françoise hurriedly exits to the hallway with the coats. After hanging the coats up, Françoise disappears into the smaller hallway upstage. With curious looks, Hastings and Poirot look after her.)

HAUTET: Monsieur, there is something...

POIROT: Yes? Out with it.

HAUTET: Monsieur Renauld was murdered early this morning.

HASTINGS: Murdered?

POIROT: What? Mon Dieu, we are too late.

HAUTET: I suspected as much when Françoise presented me your card. Apparently, he foresaw his own murder. This upsets our own theory considerably. But let us sit.

(Hautet, Poirot, and Hastings sit. Michelle enters with a tea service and serves tea.)

POIROT: You say the crime was committed only this morning?

HAUTET: Yes. The body was discovered about nine o'clock.

Madame Renauld's evidence and that of the doctors goes to show that death must have occurred about 2 a.m.

POIROT: I see.

HAUTET: You spoke of a letter. You have it with you, monsieur?

(Poirot hands Hautet the letter, which he reads.)

HASTINGS: *(To Michelle, who has served him tea.)* Thank you.

(Michelle exits.)

POIROT: *(To Hastings, sensing his anxiety.)* Do not concern yourself, Arthur. We came as quickly as possible.

HAUTET: *(Indicating letter.)* Hmm...he speaks of a secret.

What a pity he was not more explicit. We are much indebted to you, Monsieur Poirot. I hope you will do us the honor of assisting us in our investigation, or are you obliged to return to London?

POIROT: Monsieur, I propose to remain. I did not arrive in time to prevent my client's death, but I feel myself bound in honor to discover the assassin.

HAUTET: As always, a man of integrity. Also, without doubt, Madame Renauld will wish to retain your services. We are expecting Inspector Giraud from the Sûreté in Paris any moment. I'm sure you'll be able to assist each other in your investigations.

POIROT: Thank you, monsieur. You understand that, at present, I am completely in the dark. I know nothing whatsoever. *(Hautet glances over at Hastings, unsure if Hastings can be trusted. Hautet then looks over at Poirot for Poirot to confirm Hastings's trustworthiness. Poirot nods.)* Please continue...

HAUTET: This morning, the old servant Françoise, the one who just greeted you, descended from upstairs to start her work. She found the front door ajar. Feeling a momentary panic, thinking there may be burglars about, she looked into the dining room, the study, and here in the drawing room, but

found nothing and concluded that her master had simply risen early and gone for a stroll.

POIROT: This was a common practice?

HAUTET: No, but old Françoise thinks the English are rather mad and liable to do the most unaccountable things at any moment. Another servant, Mademoiselle Michelle, with the tea, here, went to call her mistress this morning and was horrified to discover her bound and gagged. At the same moment, the news came that Monsieur Renault's body had been discovered, stone dead, stabbed in the back.

POIROT: Where?

HAUTET: That is one of the most extraordinary features of the case. The body was lying face downward in an open grave on the very edge of the golf course that adjoins the property.

HASTINGS: What?

HAUTET: Yes. The pit itself was freshly dug, a spade and gloves lying nearby.

POIROT: And he had been dead how long?

HAUTET: The family physician, Dr. Durand, examined the body this morning at ten o'clock. He said the death occurred at least seven and possibly up to ten hours ago.

POIROT: That fixes it between midnight and 3 a.m.

HAUTET: Exactly. And Madame Renault's evidence places it after 2 a.m. When Michelle discovered her bound and gagged, the doctor was summoned and prescribed a sedative as Madame was understandably most agitated. Word then came that Monsieur Renault's body had been discovered, and Dr. Durand reported immediately to the site.

POIROT: And the inmates of the house, monsieur?

HAUTET: There is old Françoise, the housekeeper. She lived for many years with the former owners of the Villa Genevieve. The young girl, Michelle, lives in Merlinville. She comes from most respectable parents. The chauffeur, who happened to be away last night. And Gabriel Stonor, a secretary, brought over from England by Monsieur Renault. However, he is away on holiday. And, of course, Madame Renault and her son, Jack, who also happens to be away from home at present.

POIROT: I see.

HAUTET: You are interested to begin the questioning?

POIROT: Indeed.

(Hautet rises and starts to exit through the large archway.)

HAUTET: I shall bring in Françoise. *(Exits.)*

HASTINGS: *(To Poirot.)* What do you think?

POIROT: The little grey cells are quite confused at this point.

HASTINGS: Whoever the murderer, or murderers, they acted more quickly than expected.

POIROT: Yes, that is key to our consideration.

(Hautet enters with Françoise, who appears anxious.)

HAUTET: *(To Françoise.)* As you heard earlier, madame, this is Monsieur Hercule Poirot, a private investigator, and his assistant, Arthur Hastings. They merely wish to visit with a few of the staff regarding Monsieur Renauld.

FRANÇOISE: Of course. *(Sits.)*

HAUTET: You have been a long time in service here at the Villa Genevieve?

FRANÇOISE: Eleven years with Madame la Vicomtesse. Then when she sold the villa this spring, I consented to remain on with the English master.

HAUTET: Now, with this matter of the front door, whose business was it to fasten at night?

FRANÇOISE: Mine, monsieur. I always saw to it myself.

HAUTET: And last night?

FRANÇOISE: I fastened it as usual.

POIROT: You are sure of that?

FRANÇOISE: I swear it by the blessed saints, monsieur.

HAUTET: What time would that be?

FRANÇOISE: The same time as usual...half past ten.

HAUTET: What about the rest of the household?

FRANÇOISE: Madame had gone up some time before. Michelle went up with me. Monsieur was still in the study.

POIROT: Then if anyone unfastened the door afterward, it must have been Monsieur Renauld himself?

FRANCOISE: Why would he...with robbers and assassins passing every minute? He was not an imbecile. The lady had already gone.

HAUTET: The lady? What lady?

FRANCOISE: Why, the lady who came to see him.

POIROT: This lady had been to see him last night?

FRANCOISE: Yes, monsieur, and many other evenings as well.

HAUTET: Who is she? Do you know her?

FRANCOISE: I know well enough who it was. It was Madame Daubreuil.

HAUTET: Madame Daubreuil...from the Villa Marguerite just across the way?

FRANCOISE: Oh, she's a pretty one.

HAUTET: You mean they were—

FRANCOISE: How should I know? But, monsieur, he was very rich, and Madame Daubreuil, she was poor. She lives so quietly with her daughter. No doubt about it...she has her history! I have seen the men's heads turn after her as she goes down the street. And, lately, she has had some money to spend. The whole town knows it.

POIROT: And Madame Renauld...how did she take this...friendship?

FRANCOISE: She was always most amiable. One would say that she suspected nothing. But all the same, the heart suffers, does it not? She was not the same woman who arrived here a month ago. Monsieur, too, has changed. One could see he was on the brink of a crisis of the nerves.

POIROT: What time did you say Madame Daubreuil left?

FRANCOISE: About 25 minutes after ten, monsieur.

HAUTET: Have you any idea, Françoise, why Madame Daubreuil wouldn't have exited through the French doors in the study? Would it not have been more discreet?

FRANCOISE: Perhaps. I do not know, monsieur. I keep to my own as best I can.

POIROT: And when did Monsieur Renauld retire?

FRANCOISE: He came up ten minutes after we did. The stair creaks, so one hears everyone who goes up and down.

HAUTET: Which of the servants came down first in the morning?

FRANCOISE: I did. At once, I saw the door swinging open.

HAUTET: And the other downstairs windows...they were all fastened?

FRANCOISE: Every one of them. There was nothing suspicious or out of place anywhere.

HAUTET: Poirot?

POIROT: No more questions. Bon. Thank you, Madame.

HAUTET: *(To Francoise.)* Please send Mademoiselle Michelle in, if you please.

(Francoise rises and starts to exit.)

FRANCOISE: Of course. *(Turns back.)* I will tell you one thing more: That Madame Daubreuil...she is a bad one. Oh, yes. One woman knows about another, and she is a bad one. Remember that.

(Francoise exits to the hall and upstage.)

HASTINGS: *(To Poirot and Hautet.)* That was quite an initiation into the case.

(Poirot appears unfazed. Michelle enters and sits.)

HAUTET: *(To Michelle.)* Did you notice any changes in Monsieur Renauld?

MICHELLE: Of course, I noticed a change in Master. Everyone did. He became more and more morose. He ate less. He was always depressed.

HAUTET: Was it you who admitted Madame Daubreuil to the house last night?

MICHELLE: Not last night, monsieur, the night before.

HAUTET: But Francoise just told us that Madame Daubreuil was here last night.

MICHELLE: No, monsieur. A lady did come to see Monsieur Renauld last night, but it was not Madame Daubreuil. This lady was dark, but shorter, and much younger. And I think she was English.

POIROT: And why is that, mademoiselle?

MICHELLE: She asked for Monsieur Renauld in quite good French, but the accent, however slight, one can always tell.

HAUTET: Could you understand what they said?

MICHELLE: The lady was speaking too fast for me to understand, but I did hear monsieur's last words as he opened the door for her. "Yes, yes, but for God's sake, go now!"

HAUTET: "For God's sake, go now." You are quite certain this is what you heard?

MICHELLE: Quite. *(A bell sounds from upstairs indicating Madame Renauld is calling. Rises.)* It's the lady.

HAUTET: Poirot?

POIROT: Nothing more. Thank you, mademoiselle. *(Michelle exits through the hallway and up the stairs.)* Her room, then, is upstairs?

HAUTET: Directly over the study Françoise mentioned. *(Approaches the study.)* In here...

(Hautet, Poirot, and Hastings move into the study. Hastings crosses to the French doors.)

HASTINGS: The windows to which you referred?

HAUTET: Yes. *(Noticing the letter he left lying on the desk.)* Ah, I have forgotten. This letter we found in the pocket of the dead man's overcoat.

(Note: During the following voiceover, Poirot takes the letter and reads it. Hastings opens one of the French doors and exits onto the terrace. Hautet follows him but remains just inside, looking out.)

BELLA: *(Voiceover.)* "My Dearest One: Why have you not written for so long? You do love me still, don't you? Your letters lately have been so different—cold and strange—and now this long silence. It makes me afraid. If ever you were to stop loving me, I don't know what I should do...kill myself, perhaps. I can't live without you. Sometimes, I fancy another woman is coming between us. Let her look out! That's all I say! And you, too! I'd as soon kill you as let her have you! I mean

it! But then, I'm writing high-flown nonsense. You love me, and I love you. Yes, love, love, love you! Your own adoring Bella."

(Poirot hands the letter back to Hautet.)

POIROT: And the assumption is—

HAUTET: Obviously, Monsieur Renauld was entangled with this Englishwoman, Bella. He comes over here, meets Madame Daubreuil, and starts an intrigue with her. He cools off to the other, and she instantly suspects something. The letter contains a distinct threat, borne of jealousy. The fact that Renauld was stabbed in the back seems to point distinctly to its being a woman's crime.

POIROT: The stab in the back, yes...but not the digging of the grave. You have no other letters?

HAUTET: No. *(From inside a desk drawer, he extracts a legal document and hands it to Poirot.)* But we did come across this in his private papers...his most recent will. *(Poirot reads the will.)* Notice the date: only a fortnight ago.

(Through the archway, we see Madame Renauld slowly descending the stairs, substantially helped by Michelle. Françoise waits at the base of the steps.)

POIROT: And this Gabriel Stonor is the secretary of whom you earlier spoke?

HAUTET: Yes. Lives in England, but comes over on weekends.

POIROT: And everything else left unconditionally to his beloved wife, Eloise. *(Hands Hautet the will.)* Simply drawn up, but perfectly legal. Witnessed by the two servants, Françoise and Michelle. Nothing so very unusual about that.

(Françoise and Michelle help Madame Renauld into the drawing room, seating her and fussing about her.)

HAUTET: But a bit unfair to his son since it leaves him entirely dependent on his mother. Should she marry again and her

second husband obtain an ascendancy over her, Jack Renauld might never touch a penny of his father's money.

POIROT: Ah, the hearthrug! It is crooked! (*Bends down to straighten it and spies a small fragment of pink paper.*) Here, as in England, the domestics omit to sweep under the mats! (*Holding the fragment out to Hastings, who takes it and inspects it closely.*) You recognize, Monsieur Hastings?

HASTINGS: No, though this particular shade of pink paper seems very familiar.

POIROT: A fragment of a check.

HASTINGS: (*Reads.*) "Duveen."

HAUTET: (*Looking over Hastings's shoulder.*) Bien! This check was payable to, or drawn by, someone named Duveen.

(*Francoise heads to the study.*)

POIROT: The former, I fancy. For, if I am not mistaken, the handwriting is that of Monsieur Renauld.

FRANCOISE: (*Entering study.*) Excuse me, gentlemen. Madame Renauld has come down and should like to visit with you in the drawing room.

HAUTET: Excellent. Thank you, Madame.

(*Hautet, Poirot, and Hastings move back into the drawing room. Francoise stands protectively next to Madame Renauld.*)

MME. RENAULD: Pray be seated, messieurs.

HAUTET: I hope, Madame, that it will not distress you unduly to relate to us what occurred last night.

MME. RENAULD: Not at all, monsieur. I know the value of time in cases as heinous as this.

HAUTET: Very well, Madame. Permit me to introduce two who will be assisting on the case, Messieurs Hercule Poirot and Arthur Hastings.

MME. RENAULD: Gentlemen. I welcome any assistance in tracking down these barbarous assassins.

HAUTET: Very well. At what time did you go to bed last night?

MME. RENAULD: At half past nine, monsieur. I was tired.

HAUTET: And your husband?

MME. RENAULD: About an hour later, I fancy.

HAUTET: What happened then?

MME. RENAULD: We slept. I was awakened by a hand pressed over my mouth. I tried to scream out, but the hand prevented me. There were two men in the room. They were both masked.

HAUTET: Can you describe them at all, Madame?

MME. RENAULD: One was very tall, and had a long black beard. The other was short and stout with a reddish beard. They both wore hats pulled down over their eyes.

POIROT: Too much beard.

MME. RENAULD: You mean they were fake?

HAUTET: Most likely, Madame. But continue...

MME. RENAULD: It was the short man who was holding me.

He forced a gag into my mouth, and then bound me with rope, hand and foot. The other man was standing over my husband. He had taken my little dagger paper knife from the dressing table and was holding it with the point just over his heart. I was nearly fainting with terror. Nevertheless, I listened desperately to what they said. They were speaking in too low a tone for me to completely understand. But I recognized the language, a Spanish such as is spoken in some parts of South America. They grew impatient. Their voices rose and they demanded "the secret." Paul did not or could not respond. They demanded he dress himself. As he did, he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Eloise. I shall return before morning." Then they hustled him out, admonishing him to keep quiet or he was a dead man. After that, I must have fainted. The next thing I recollect is Michelle rubbing my wrists and giving me brandy.

HAUTET: Madame Renault, have you any idea what it was for which the assassins were searching?

MME. RENAULD: None whatsoever.

POIROT: Had you any knowledge that your husband feared something?

MME. RENAULD: I had seen a change in him, yes.

POIROT: How long ago was that?

MME. RENAULD: Ten days, perhaps.

HAUTET: Did you ever question your husband as to the cause?

MME. RENAULD: Once only. He put me off evasively. Since he evidently wished to conceal the fact from me, I pretended I noticed nothing.

HAUTET: Were you aware that he had called in the services of a detective?

MME. RENAULD: *(Surprised.)* A detective?

HAUTET: Yes, this gentleman, Monsieur Hercule Poirot. He arrived just now in response to a summons from your husband. *(Hands the letter to Mme. Renauld, who reads it.)* Might we have a little more tea, Françoise?

FRANÇOISE: Of course.

(Françoise takes the teapot and exits through the hall to the kitchen. Hautet and Poirot exchange a look.)

MME. RENAULD: I had no idea.

HAUTET: Now, Madame, I wish you to be frank with me. Is there any incident in your husband's past life in South America that might throw light on his murder?

MME. RENAULD: I can think of none. Certainly, my husband had some enemies, but I can think of no one particular case.

POIROT: You can fix the time of this outrage?

MME. RENAULD: Yes, I distinctly remember hearing the clock on the mantelpiece strike two.

(Hautet extracts a wristwatch from his jacket pocket.)

HAUTET: And, here, too, is a wristwatch knocked off the dressing table by the assassins, no doubt, and smashed to bits. The hands of the watch point to seven o'clock.

(Poirot extends his hand to Hautet, who hands him the watch.)

MME. RENAULD: Yes, it was Paul's habit to place his watch atop the table every night before climbing into bed.

POIROT: *(Examining the watch.)* The glass is broken, yes, but the watch itself is still going.

HAUTET: But is it not seven o'clock now?

POIROT: No, it is a few minutes after five. Possibly the watch gains, is that so, madame?

MME. RENAULD: It does gain, but I've never known it to gain quite so much as that.

HASTINGS: What do you make of that, Poirot?

POIROT: I make of that a mystery.

HAUTET: Madame, the front door was found ajar. It seems almost certain that the murderers entered that way, yet it has not been forced at all. Can you suggest any explanation?

MME. RENAULD: Possibly my husband went out for a stroll and forgot to latch it when he came in. He was quite absentminded.

HAUTET: Since the men insisted on Monsieur Renault dressing himself, it looks as though the place to which they were taking him, the place where "the secret" was concealed, lay some distance away.

MME. RENAULD: But he spoke of being back by morning.

POIROT: *(To Hautet.)* What time does the last train leave the station at Merlinville?

HAUTET: 11:50 one way, and 12:17 the other. A motorcar containing two foreigners is quite likely to have been noticed. An excellent point, Poirot.

POIROT: Madame, do you know anyone by the name of Duveen?

MME. RENAULD: No, for the moment, I cannot say I do.

POIROT: And what of a woman whose Christian name is Bella?

MME. RENAULD: No.

HAUTET: Are you aware that your husband had a visitor last night?

MME. RENAULD: No. Who was that?

POIROT: A lady.

MME. RENAULD: Indeed?

(Hautet extracts a small letter opener wrapped in a handkerchief.)

HAUTET: *(Indicating letter opener.)* Do you recognize this?

MME. RENAULD: *(Subtle gasp.)* Yes, that is my little dagger.

HAUTET: Yes, Madame. Your husband was killed with this weapon. This was on your dressing table last night?

MME. RENAULD: I'm certain of it. It was a present from my son. He was in the Air Force. This was made from an airplane wire given to me by Jack as a souvenir of the war.

POIROT: Your son...where is he now?

MME. RENAULD: Jack? He is on his way to Buenos Aires. My husband sent him to conduct some sort of business. I know nothing of its nature. But that was not his final destination. He was going from there to Santiago.

HASTINGS: Again, Santiago!

(Poirot crosses to Madame Renauld.)

POIROT: Pardon, Madame, but may I examine your wrists?
(Shocked at his request, Madame Renauld nevertheless extends her hands for Poirot to examine. Françoise enters with tea. Indicating wrists.) They must cause you great pain.

HAUTET: *(To Mme. Renauld.)* Young Monsieur Renauld must be communicated with at once by wireless. I hoped he might be near at hand to save you some pain.

MME. RENAULD: You refer to the identification of my husband's body? *(Hautet bows his head.)* I am a strong woman, monsieur. I can bear all that is required of me.

FRANÇOISE: *(Anxious.)* Madame, perhaps we –

(Mme. Renauld stands.)

MME. RENAULD: *(To Hautet.)* I am ready now. If you would be so good as to give me your arm, monsieur?

(Hautet extends his arm, which Madame Renauld holds onto as the four of them – Hautet, Poirot, Hastings, and Madame Renauld—slowly exit. After a few moments, Michelle enters from the hallway, sees the room is empty, and starts to assist Françoise in clearing the tea service. A blood-curdling scream is heard off SL. Michelle drops a teacup and saucer. Françoise and Michelle stare at each other.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: Villa Genevieve, immediately following. Hastings enters the archway leading into the drawing room.)

HASTINGS: *(To audience.)* The five of us walked to the shed where Monsieur Renauld's body had been moved after its discovery. I'm not sure what Poirot was expecting in the way of a reaction from Madame Renauld, but whatever it was, her response clearly surprised him. "Paul," she cried out. "My husband! Oh, Lord!" Whereupon, she pitched forward and fell unconscious to the ground. Hautet and I brought her back to the house. Poirot hung back, wishing to visit the actual scene of the crime, a hundred yards from the villa, on the edge of a nearly completed new golf course, which was set to open the following month.

(Hautet descends the creaky steps and enters the drawing room.)

HAUTET: *(To Hastings.)* The shock was too much for her. Nothing to do now but wait.

HASTINGS: It is incredible that the servants heard nothing this morning. That creaking of the staircase with *three* people descending it would awaken the dead.

HAUTET: It was the middle of the night, remember? They were sound asleep by then.

(Poirot and Giraud enter from the French doors in the study. Giraud is an inspector from the Paris Sûreté. For the following, they converse as they move into the drawing room.)

GIRAUD: Thus, Monsieur Poirot, it's not so likely that the criminals entered from these doors. They could not have done so without leaving footprints in the flower bed.

POIROT: You think not, monsieur?

HAUTET: Ah, Poirot, I see you've met Inspector Giraud. *(To Giraud.)* I had no idea that you'd arrived, monsieur.

GIRAUD: Yes, I was at the scene of the crime gathering evidence.

So fortunate to finally meet the esteemed Hercule Poirot, who cut quite a figure in the old days, n'est c'est pas? But the methods, as we just experienced, are quite different now.

POIROT: The crimes, though...they are very much the same, are they not?

HAUTET: *(To Giraud.)* And this is Monsieur Arthur Hastings, assisting Monsieur Poirot.

GIRAUD: *(To Hastings.)* A pleasure, sir. Perhaps your youth will illuminate to your mentor the new techniques of criminology.

HASTINGS: *(Shaking his hand.)* Perhaps.

HAUTET: *(To Giraud.)* So, then, your observation at the site?

GIRAUD: Before Monsieur Poirot arrived, I was in the midst of investigating the area. A spade was lying close by, as well as a pair of garden gloves. They belong to Paul Renauld, or at least to his gardener. I tell you, the men who carried out this crime were taking no chances. The man was stabbed with his own dagger and would have been buried with his own spade. They counted on leaving no traces, but I'll beat them. There's always something, and I mean to find it.

POIROT: And, of course, the discolored piece of lead piping, which lay beside the spade.

GIRAUD: Might have been lying around for weeks. Anyway, it doesn't interest me.

POIROT: And I, on the contrary, find it very interesting.

GIRAUD: Tell me, Monsieur Hautet, the whitewashed line that extends all around the grave, is it a device of the police?

HAUTET: No, monsieur. It is an affair of the golf course. It shows that there is to be a bunker there.

POIROT: A bunker? That is the irregular hole filled with sand and a bank on one side?

HAUTET: Yes.

POIROT: Monsieur Renauld, without doubt, he played golf?

HAUTET: Yes, he was a keen golfer. It's mainly owing to him that this work is being carried forward. He even helped with the design.

POIROT: Hmm...it was not such a good choice they made of a spot to bury the body. When the men began to dig up the ground, all would have been discovered.

GIRAUD: Exactly! And that proved they were strangers to the place. It's an excellent piece of indirect evidence.

POIROT: Unless, of course, they *wanted* it to be discovered.

(Girard looks at Poirot for a long moment.)

GIRAUD: Yes, well, I wish to return to the site before the police completely contaminate the remaining evidence. *(Starts to exit.)*
I'll show myself out. Good afternoon, gentlemen. *(Exits.)*

POIROT: *(To Hautet.)* Monsieur, you will accompany me to the terrace? I wish to consider this matter of footprints with you. *(Poirot and Hautet go out the French doors to the terrace. Hastings remains in the study.)* So Madame's room would be easily accessible by the tree?

HAUTET: Possibly, but not without leaving footprints in the flower beds. And as you see, there are no prints at all.

POIROT: Ah, mon ami, sometimes we must consider the absence of physical evidence to be the presence of a quieter proof altogether.

HAUTET: So what are you thinking, monsieur?

(Hautet and Poirot go back to the study and join Hastings.)

POIROT: I am thinking that the case seems straightforward enough, and yet I am not satisfied. And do you know why? Because of the wristwatch that is two hours fast. And then there are several curious little points that do not seem to fit. For instance, if the object of the murder was revenge, why did they not stab Renauld in his sleep and have done with it?

HASTINGS: But they wanted "the secret."

[END OF FREEVIEW]