

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

Nasse House--and a Fete in progress, including, not a Treasure Hunt, but a Murder Hunt--devised by that wellknown detective novelist, Mrs. Ariadne Oliver; the prizes to be given away by the celebrated M. Hercule Poirot.

That was how it appeared to the public. But what lay behind it? What was the summons that brought Hercule Poirot at a moment's notice from London to Devonshire--to meet there the bluff Sir George Stubbs, his beautiful exotic wife, old Mrs. Folliat whose ancestors had lived at Nasse for generations, and all the other people who were helping to make the Fete a success? And what part did the little white 'Folly', set high in the woods above the river, have to play? Once again, with her habitual ingenuity, Agatha Christie presents a baffling story of murder and suspicion. Even Poirot is bewildered by a misleading tangle of evidence--and more bewildered than ever by Mrs. Oliver's confused exposition of her own plots.

An unlikely victim, an incredible disappearance, an impossible murderer... so it seems. But in the end they all make sense to Hercule Poirot.

BOOKS BY AGATHA CHRISTIE:

Tin' ABC Murders
After the Funeral
Appointment with Death
The Hound of the Baskin Family
By (the) Pricking of My Thumbs
A Caribbean Mystery
The Clocks
Curtain: Poirot's Last Case
Death Comes as the End
Death on the Nile
Dumb Witness
Endless Night
Experiment with Death
4.50 from Paddington
Hercule Poirot's Christmas
The Hollow
The Labours of Hercules

Lord Edgwaic Dies
Miss Marple's Final Ceases
The Moving Finger
Murder at Ilie Vicarage
Murder in Ilie Mews
The Murder of Roger Ackroyd
The Mysterious Mr Quill
Nemesis
One, I we, Buckle My Shoe
The Pale Horse
Passenger to Franklurl
A Pocket Full of Rye
Postern of l'ale
Tile Seven Dials Mystery
Sleeping Murder
Taken at the Flood
They Do It With Mirrors
Thirteen for Luck
I hree-Act Tragedy
Why Didn't They Ask F.vans?
The Adventure of the
Christmas Pudding
And Then There Were None
At Bertram's Hotel l ilie Body in Ilie Library
(.aid's oil Ilie Table (.'.it Among (lie Pigeons
Crooked House
Dead Man's Folly
Death in the Clouds
Destination Unknown
F.lepliaails Can Remember
F.vil Under tlie Sun
Five Little Pigs
I lallowe'en Party
Hickory Dickory Dock
The Hound of Death
l ilie I.islerdale Mystery
T ilie Mirror Cnx k'd from Side
to Side
Mrs me Ginty's Dead
A Murder is Announced

Murder in Mesopotamia
Murder is Easy
Murder on Ilie Orieni Express
The Mystery of Ilie Blue Train N or M?
Ordeal by Innocence
Parker Pyne Investigates
Peril at End House
Pond's Early Cases
Sad C;ypiess
The Sittalord Mystery
Sparkling Cyanide
They Came lo Baghdad
Third Girl
I hirteen Problems
Towards Zero
n'c:... Ere.

Biography Come Tell Me How You live
Agatha Christie: An Autobiography

Dead Man's
Folly
AGATHA CHRISTIE
CO LLINS
8 Grafton Street, London W1

William Collins Sons and Co Ltd
London Glasgow Sydney Auckland
Toronto Johannesburg
ISBN 0 00 231075 9
Firsi published 1956
This reprint 1986

Agatha Christie 1956
Made and Printed in Great Britain
by William Collins Sons and Co Ltd, Glasgow

I
it was Miss Lemon, Poirot's efficient secretary, who took the telephone call.
Laying aside her shorthand notebook, she raised the

receiver and said without emphasis, "Trafalgar 8137."
Hercule Poirot leaned back in his upright chair and closed his eyes. His fingers beat a meditative soft tattoo on the edge of the table. In his head he continued to compose the polished periods of the letter he had been dictating.

Placing her hand over the receiver. Miss Lemon asked in a low voice:

"Will you accept a personal call from Nassecombe, Devon?"

Poirot frowned. The place meant nothing to him.

"The name of the caller?" he demanded cautiously.

Miss Lemon spoke into the mouthpiece.

"Air-raid?" she asked doubtfully. "Oh, yes--what was the last name again?"

Once more she turned to Hercule Poirot.

"Mrs. Ariadne Oliver."

Hercule Poirot's eyebrows shot up. A memory rose in his mind: windswept grey hair ... an eagle profile . . .

He rose and replaced Miss Lemon at the telephone.

7

8 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Hercule Poirot speaks," he announced grandiloquently.

"Is that Mr. Hercules Porrot speaking personally?"
the suspicious voice of the telephone operator demanded.

Poirot assured her that that was the case.

"You're through to Mr. Porrot," said the voice.

Its thin reedy accents were replaced by a magnificent booming contralto which caused Poirot hastily to shift the receiver a couple of inches farther from his ear.

"M. Poirot, is that really j/om?" demanded Mrs. Oliver.

"Myself in person, Madame."

"This is Mrs. Oliver. I don't know if you'll remember me----"

"But of course I remember you, Madame. Who could forget you? "

"Well, people do sometimes," said Mrs. Oliver.

" Quite often, in fact. I don't think that I've got a very distinctive personality. Or perhaps it's because I'm always doing different things to my hair. But all that's neither here nor there. I hope I'm not interrupting you when you're frightfully busy? "

"No, no, you do not derange me in the least."

" Good gracious--I'm sure I don't want to drive you out of your mind. The fact is, I need you."

"Need me?"

" Yes, at once. Can you take an aeroplane? *'

"I do not take aeroplanes. They make me sick.**

DEAD AfAJ^S FOLLY 9

"They do me, too. Anyway, I don't suppose it would be any quicker than the train really, because I think the only airport near here is Exeter which is miles away. So come by train. Twelve o'clock from Paddington to Nassecombe. You can do it nicely. You've got three-quarters of an hour if my watch is right-- though it isn't usually."

"But where are you, Madame? What is all this about"

"Nasse House, Nassecombe. A car or taxi will meet you at the station at Nassecombe."

"But why do you need me? What is all this about } "

Poirot repeated frantically.

"Telephones are in such awkward places," said Mrs. Oliver. "This one's in the hall People passing through and talking ... I can't really hear. But I'm expecting you. Everybody will be so thrilled. Goodbye."

There was a sharp click as the receiver was replaced. The line hummed gently.

With a baffled air of bewilderment, Poirot put back the receiver and murmured something under his breath. Miss Lemon sat with her penl poised, incurious. She repeated in muted tones the final phrase of dictation before the interruption.

"--allow me to assure you, my dear sir, that the hypothesis you have advanced . . ."

Poirot waved aside the advancement of the hypothesis.

"That was Mrs. Oliver," he said. "Ariadne Oliver, the detective novelist. You may have read . . ." But

io DEAD MAJfS FOLLY

he stopped, remembering that Miss Lemon only read improving books and regarded such frivolities as fictional crime with contempt. "She wants me to go down to Devonshire to-day, at once, in "he glanced at the clock" thirty-five minutes."

Miss Lemon raised disapproving eyebrows.

" That will be running it rather fine," she said. " For what reason?"

"You may well ask! She did not tell me."

" How very peculiar. Why not ? "

"Because," said Hercule Poirot thoughtfully, "she was afraid of being overheard. Yes, she made that quite clear."

"Well, really," said Miss Lemon, bristling in her employer's defence. "The things people expect 1 Fancy thinking that you'd go rushing off on some wild goose chase like thati An important man like you I I have always noticed that these artists and writers are very unbalancedno sense of proportion. Shall I telephone through a telegram: Regret unable leave Londoni" Her hand went out to the telephone. Poirot's voice arrested the gesture.

" Du tout! " he said. " On the contrary. Be so kind as to summon a taxi immediately." He raised his voice.

"Georges! A few necessities of toilet in my small valise. And quickly, very quickly, I have a train to catch."

II

The train, having done one hundred and eighty-odd miles of its two hundred and twelve miles journey at top speed, puffed gently and apologetically through the last thirty and drew into Nassecombe station. Only one

person alighted, Hercule Poirot. He negotiated with care a yawning gap between the step of the train and the platform and looked round him. At the far end of the train a porter was busy inside a luggage compartment. Poirot picked up his valise and walked back along the platform to the exit. He gave up his ticket and walked out through the booking-office.

A large Humber saloon was drawn up outside and a chauffeur in uniform came forward.

"Mr. Hercule Poirot?" he inquired respectfully.

He took Poirot's case from him and opened the door of the car. They drove away from the station over the railway bridge and turned down a country lane which wound between high hedges on either side. Presently the ground fell away on the right and disclosed a very beautiful river view with hills of a misty blue in the distance. The chauffeur drew into the hedge and stopped.

"The River Helm, sir," he said. "With Dartmoor in the distance."

It was clear that admiration was necessary. Poirot made the necessary noises, murmuring *Magnifique!*

is DEAD MAJ^S FOLLY

several times. Actually, Nature appealed to him very little. A well-cultivated neatly arranged kitchen garden was far more likely to bring a murmur of admiration to Poirot's lips. Two girls passed the car, toiling slowly up the hill. They were carrying heavy rucksacks on their backs and wore shorts, with bright coloured scarves tied over their heads.

"There is a Youth Hostel next door to us, sir," explained the chauffeur, who had clearly constituted himself Poirot's guide to Devon. "Hoodown Park. Mr. Fletcher's place it used to be. This Youth Hostel Association bought it and it's fairly crammed in summer time. Take in over a hundred a night, they do. They're not allowed to stay longer than a couple of nights then they've got to move on. Both sexes and mostly foreigners."

Poirot nodded absently. He was reflecting, not for the first time, that seen from the back, shorts were becoming to very few of the female sex. He shut his eyes in pain. Why, oh why, must young women array themselves thus ? Those scarlet thighs were singularly unattractive I

"They seem heavily laden," he murmured.

"Yes, sir, and it's a long pull from the station or the bus stop. Best part of two miles to Hoodown Park."

He hesitated. " If you don't object, sir, we could give them a lift?"

" By all means, by all means," said Poirot benignantly. There was he in luxury in an almost empty car and here were these two panting and perspiring young women

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 13

weighed down with heavy rucksacks and without the least idea how to dress themselves so as to appear attractive to the other sex. The chauffeur started the car and came to a slow purring halt beside the two girls. Their flushed and perspiring faces were raised hopefully.

Poirot opened the door and the girls climbed in.

"It is most kind, please," said one of them, a fair girl with a foreign accent. "It is longer way than I think, yes."

The other girl, who had a sunburnt and deeply flushed face with bronzed chestnut curls peeping out beneath her head-scarf, merely nodded her head several times, flashed her teeth, and murmured, Grazie.

The fair girl continued to talk vivaciously.

"I to England come for two week holiday. I come from Holland. I like England very much. I have been Stratford Avon, Shakespeare Theatre and Warwick Castle. Then I have been Clovelly, now I have seen Exeter Cathedral and Torquay very nice I come to famous beauty spot here and to-morrow I cross river, go to Plymouth where discovery of New World was made from Plymouth Hoe."

"And you, signorina?" Poirot turned to the other

girl. But she only smiled and shook her curls.

"She does not much English speak," said the Dutch girl kindly. "We both a little French speak so we talk in train. She is coming from near Milan and has relative in England married to gentleman who keeps shop for much groceries. She has come with friend

14 DEAD MAJ'S FOLLY

to Exeter yesterday, but friend has eat veal ham pie not good from shop in Exeter and has to stay there sick. It is not good in hot weather, the veal ham pie."

At this point the chauffeur slowed down where the road forked. The girls got out, uttered thanks in two languages and proceeded up the left-hand road. The chauffeur laid aside for a moment his Olympian aloofness and said feelingly to Poirot:

"It's not only veal and ham pie--you want to be careful of Cornish pasties too. Put anything in a pasty

they will, holiday time! "

He restarted the car and drove down the right-hand road which shortly afterwards passed into thick woods. He proceeded to give a final verdict on the occupants of Hoodown Park Youth Hostel.

" Nice enough young women, some of 'em, at that hostel," he said; "but it's hard to get them to understand about trespassing. Absolutely shocking the way they trespass. Don't seem to understand that a gentleman's place is private here. Always coming through our woods, they are, and pretending that they don't understand what you say to them." He shook his head darkly.

They went on, down a steep hill through woods, then through big iron gates, and along a drive, winding up finally in front of a big white Georgian house looking out over the river.

The chauffeur opened the door of the car as a tall black-haired butler appeared on the steps.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 15

"Mr. Hercule Poirot?" murmured the latter.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Oliver is expecting you, sir. You will find her down at the Battery. Allow me to show you the way."

Poirot was directed to a winding path that led along the wood with glimpses of the river below. The path descended gradually until it came out at last on an open space, round in shape, with a low battlemented parapet. On the parapet Mrs. Oliver was sitting.

She rose to meet him and several apples fell from her lap and rolled in all directions. Apples seemed to be an inescapable motif of meeting Mrs. Oliver.

"I can't think why I always drop things," said Mrs. Oliver somewhat indistinctly, since her mouth was full of apple. "How are you, M. Poirot?"

"Trh bien, chere Madame," replied Poirot politely.

"And you?"

Mrs. Oliver was looking somewhat different from when Poirot had last seen her, and the reason lay, as she had already hinted over the telephone, in the fact that she had once more experimented with her coiffure. The last time Poirot had seen her, she had been adopting a windswept effect. To-day, her hair, richly blued, was piled upward in a multiplicity of rather artificial little curls in a pseudo Marquise style. The Marquise effect ended at her neck, the rest of her could have been definitely labelled "country practical," consisting of a violent yolk-of-egg rough tweed coat and skirt and a rather bilious-looking mustard-coloured jumper.

i6 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"I knew you'd come," said Mrs. Oliver cheerfully.

"You could not possibly have known," said Poirot severely.

"Oh, yes, I did."

"I still ask myself why I am here."

"Well, I know the answer. Curiosity."

Poirot looked at her and his eyes twinkled a little.

"Your famous woman's intuition," he said, "has, perhaps, for once not led you too far astray."

"Now, don't laugh at my woman's intuition.

Haven't I always spotted the murderer right away ? "

Poirot was gallantly silent. Otherwise he might have replied, " At the fifth attempt, perhaps, and not always then!"

Instead he said, looking round him:

"It is indeed a beautiful property that you have here."

" This ? But it doesn't belong to me, M. Poirot. Did you think it did? Oh, no, it belongs to some people called Stubbs."

"Who are they?"

" Oh, nobody really," said Mrs. Oliver vaguely. "Just rich. No, I'm down here professionally, doing a job."

"Ah, you are getting local colour for one of your chefs-d'oeuvre ? "

"No, no. Just what I said. I'm doing a job. I've been engaged to arrange a murder."

Poirot stared at her.

" Oh, not a real one," said Mrs. Oliver reassuringly.

^

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 17

"There's a big fete thing on to-morrow, and as a kind of novelty there's going to be a Murder Hunt. Arranged by me. Like a Treasure Hunt, you see; only they've had a Treasure Hunt so often that they thought this would be a novelty. So they offered me a very substantial fee to come down and think it up. Quite fun, really--rather a change from the usual grim routine."

"How does it work? "

"Well, there'll be a Victim, of course. And Clues. And Suspects. All rather conventional--you know, the Vamp and the Blackmailer and the Young Lovers and the Sinister Butler and so on. Half a crown to enter and you get shown the first Clue and you've got to

find the Victim, and the Weapon and say Whodunnit and the Motive. And there are Prizes."

"Remarkable!" said Hercule Poirot.

"Actually," said Mrs. Oliver ruefully, "it's all much harder to arrange than you'd think. Because you've got to allow for real people being quite intelligent, and in my books they needn't be."

"And it is to assist you in arranging this that you have sent for me?"

Poirot did not try very hard to keep an outraged resentment out of his voice.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Oliver. "Of course not! I've done all that. Everything's all set for to-morrow. No, I wanted you for quite another reason."

"What reason?"

Mrs. Oliver's hands strayed upward to her head. She

18 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

was just about to sweep them frenziedly through her hair in the old familiar gesture when she remembered the intricacy of her hair-do. Instead, she relieved her feelings by tugging at her ear lobes.

"I dare say I'm a fool," she said. "But I think there's something wrong."

CHAPTER II

there was a moment's silence as Poirot stared at her.

Then he asked sharply: "Something wrong? How?"

"I don't know.... That's what I want you to find out.

But I've felt more and more that I was being

engineered . . . jockeyed along. . . . Call me a fool if

you like, but I can only say that if there was to be a

real murder to-morrow instead of a fake one, I shouldn't

be surprised!"

Poirot stared at her and she looked back at him

defiantly.

"Very interesting," said Poirot.

"I suppose you think I'm a complete fool," said Mrs. Oliver defensively.

"I have never thought you a fool," said Poirot.

"And I know what you always say or look about intuition."

"One calls things by different names," said Poirot.

"I am quite ready to believe that you have noticed something, or heard something, that has definitely aroused in you anxiety. I think it possible that you yourself may not even know just what it is that you have seen or noticed or heard. You are aware only of the result. If I may so put it, you do not know what it is that you know. You may label that intuition if you like."

19

ao DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"It makes one feel such a fool," said Mrs. Oliver, ruefully, "not to be able to be definite." 11

"We shall arrive," said Poirot encouragingly. "You say that you have had the feeling of being how did you put it jockeyed along? Can you explain a little more clearly what you mean by that?"

"Well, it's rather difficult. . . . You see, this is my murder, so to speak. I've thought it out and planned it and it all fits indovetails. Well, if you know anything at all about writers, you'll know that they can't stand suggestions. People say 'Splendid, but wouldn't it be better if so and so did so and so?' or 'Wouldn't it be a wonderful idea if the victim was A instead of B? Or the murderer turned out to be D instead of E?' I mean, one wants to say: 'All right then, write it yourself if you want it that way!'"

Poirot nodded.

"And that is what has been happening?"

"Not quite.... That sort of silly suggestion has been made, and then I've flared up, and they've given in, but have just slipped in some quite minor trivial suggestion and because I've made a stand over the other, I've accepted the triviality without noticing much."

"I see," said Poirot. a Yes it is a method, that. . . .

Something rather crude and preposterous is put forward

but that is not really the point. The small minor alteration is really the objective. Is that what you mean?"

"That's exactly what I mean," said Mrs. Oliver.

DEAD MAJVS FOLLY ai "And, of course, I may be imagining it, but I don't think I am--and none of the things seem to matter anyway. But it's got me worried--that, and a sort of --well--atmosphere."

"Who has made these suggestions of alterations to you?"

"Different people," said Mrs. Oliver. "If it was just one person I'd be more sure of my ground. But it's not

Just one person--although I think it is really. I mean it's one person working through other quite unsuspecting people."

"Have you an idea as to who that one person is?"

Mrs. Oliver shook her head.

"It's somebody very clever and very careful," she said. "It might be anybody."

"Who is there?" asked Poirot. "The cast of characters must be fairly limited?"

"Well," began Mrs. Oliver. "There's Sir George Stubbs who owns this place. Rich and plebeian and

frightfully stupid outside business, I should think, but probably dead sharp in it. And there's Lady Stubbs--Hattie--about twenty years younger than he is, rather beautiful, but dumb as a fish--in fact, / think she's definitely half-witted. Married him for his money, of course, and doesn't think about anything but clothes and jewels. Then there's Michael Weyman--he's an architect, quite young, and good-looking in a craggy kind of artistic way. He's designing a tennis pavilion for Sir George and repairing the Folly."

ca DEAD MAJ^S FOLLY "Folly? What is that--a masquerade?"

"No, it's architectural. One of those little sort of temple things, white, with columns. You've probably seen them at Kew. Then there's Miss Erewis, she's a sort of secretary housekeeper, who runs things and

writes letters--very grim and efficient. And then there are the people round about who come in and help. A young married couple who have taken a cottage down by the river--Alee Legge and his wife Sally. And Captain Warburton, who's the Mastertons' agent. And the Mastertons, of course, and old Mrs. Folliat who lives in what used to be the lodge. Her husband's people owned Nasse originally. But they've died out, or been killed in wars, and there were lots of death duties so the last heir sold the place.*

Poirot considered this list of characters, but at the moment they were only names to him. He returned to the main issue.

"Whose idea was the Murder Hunt? '*

"Mrs. Masterton's, I think. She's the local M.P.'s wife, very good at organising. It was she who persuaded Sir George to have the fete here. You see the place has been empty for so many years that she thinks people will be keen to pay and come in to see it."

"That all seems straightforward enough," said Poirot.

"It all seems straightforward," said Mrs. Oliver obstinately; "but it isn't. I tell you, M. Poirot, there's something wrong."

d^q flfAN'S FOLL1' 33

Poirot looked at Mrs. Oliver and N1"- 0\y looked ba<A at poirot.

"How have you ^counted foT my p^nc^ re ? For your summons to ^e? " Poirot asked- ^

"That ^as easy," said Mrs. Oliver. Vo^to give avray the P"2^ ^r the Murder H'1"1. ^yybody's awfully thrilled- I said Iknew you, ^d ^ou^robably pCTuade you to c^g and that I wa? slre y(r name would be a terrific draw--as, of coi l l'^, ^ in be," M's, Oliver added tactfuily-

"And the suggestion was accepted-^ho^temur ?"

"I tell you, everybody was thrilled"

Mrs. Ol^" ^"Yight it unnecessary to r^^on that

amongst the younger generation one or two had asked "Who is Hercule Poirot?" "Everybody? Nobody spoke against it";

Mrs. Oliver shook her head.

That is a Party" said Hercule Poirot-

"You might have given us a line?"

"A solid-body could hardly be greeted to

come my presence." "I suppose you think I've imagined" >w^c, thing,"

Mrs. Oliver ruefully- "I must wait until I started talking to you I hadn't realised how

little

"I've got to go now."

"Calni yourself" said Poirot kindly) "Amntrigued

Under- here do we begin?"
Mrs. Oliver Synced at her watch. "It's just tea-time We'll go back to the house and
Ata you can meet everybody."

24 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

She took a different path from the one by which Poirot had come. This one seemed to lead in the opposite direction.

"We pass by the boathouse this way," Mrs. Oliver explained.

As she spoke the boathouse came into view. It jutted out on to the river and was a picturesque thatched affair.

"That's where the body's going to be," said Mrs. Oliver. "The body for the Murder Hunt, I mean."

"And -who is going to be killed?"

"Oh, a girl hiker, who is really the Yugoslavian first wife of a young Atom Scientist," said Mrs. Oliver glibly.

Poirot blinked.

"Of course it looks as though the Atom Scientist had killed her but naturally it's not as simple as that."

"Naturally not since you are concerned . . ."

Mrs. Oliver accepted the compliment with a wave of the hand.

"Actually," she said, "she's killed by the Country Squire and the motive is really rather ingenious I don't believe many people will get it though there's a perfectly clear pointer in the fifth clue."

Poirot abandoned the subtleties of Mrs. Oliver's plot to ask a practical question:

"But how do you arrange for a suitable body? "

"Girl Guide," said Mrs. Oliver. "Sally Lcgge was going to be itbut now they want her to dress up in a turban and do the fortune telling. So it's a Girl Guide

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 25

called Marlene Tucker. Rather dumb and sniffs," she added in an explanatory manner. "It's quite easyjust peasant scarves and a rucksackand all she has to do when she hears someone coming is to flop down on the floor and arrange the cord round her neck. Rather dull for the poor kidjust sticking inside that boathouse until she's found, but I've arranged for her to have a nice bundle of comicsthere's a clue to the murderer scribbled on one of them as a matter of factso it all works in."

"Your ingenuity leaves me spellbound 1 The things you think of! "

"It's never difficult to think of things," said Mrs. Oliver. " The trouble is that you think of too many, and then it all becomes too complicated, so you have to relinquish some of them and that is rather agony. We go up this way now."

They started up a steep zig-zagging path that led them back along the river at a higher level. At a twist through the trees they came out on a space surmounted by a small white pilastered temple. Standing back and frowning at it was a young man wearing dilapidated flannel trousers and a shirt of rather virulent green. He spun round towards them.

"Mr. Michael Weyman, M. Hercule Poirot," said Mrs. Oliver.

The young man acknowledged the introduction with a careless nod.

" Extraordinary," he said bitterly, " the places people put things! This thing here, for instance. Put up only

about a year ago quite nice of its kind and quite in keeping with the period of the house. But why here } These things were meant to be seen' situated on an eminence 'that's how they phrased it with a nice grassy approach and daffodils, et cetera. But here's this poor little devil, stuck away in the midst of trees not visible from anywhere you'd have to cut down about twenty trees before you'd even see it from the river."

"Perhaps there wasn't any other place," said Mrs. Oliver.

Michael Weyman snorted.

"Top of that grassy bank by the house perfect natural setting. But no, these tycoon fellows are all the same no artistic sense. Has a fancy for a 'Folly,' as he calls it, orders one. Looks round for somewhere to put it. Then, I understand, a big oak tree crashes down in a gale. Leaves a nasty scar. 'Oh, we'll tidy the place up by putting a Folly there,' says the silly ass. That's all they ever think about, these rich city fellows, tidying up! I wonder he hasn't put beds of red geraniums and calceolarias all round the house! A man like that shouldn't be allowed to own a place like this!"

He sounded heated.

"This young man," Poirot observed to himself, " assuredly does not like Sir George Stubbs."

" It's bedded down in concrete," said Weyman. " And there's loose soil underneath so it's subsided. Cracked all up here it will be dangerous soon. . . . Better pull

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 27

the whole thing down and re-erect it on the top of the bank near the house. That's my advice, but the obstinate old fool won't hear of it."

"What about the tennis pavilion?" asked Mrs. Oliver.

Gloom settled even more deeply on the young man.

" He wants a kind of Chinese pagoda," he said, with a groan. "Dragons if you please I Just because Lady

' Stubbs fancies herself in Chinese coolie hats. Who'd be an architect? Anyone who wants something decent , built hasn't got the money, and those who have the money want something too utterly goddam awful! " " You have my commiserations," said Poirot gravely. " George Stubbs," said the architect scornfully. " Who does he think he is ? Dug himself in to some cushy Admiralty job in the safe depths of Wales during the war and grows a beard to suggest he saw active naval

service on convoy duty or that's what they say. Stinking with money absolutely stinking! "

" Well, you architects have got to have someone who's got money to spend, or you'd never have a job," Mrs. Oliver pointed out reasonably enough. She moved on towards the house and Poirot and the dispirited architect prepared to follow her.

"These tycoons," said the latter bitterly, "can't understand first principles." He delivered a final kick to the lopsided Folly. " If the foundations are rotten everything's rotten."

"It is profound what you say there," said Poirot. "Yes, it is profound."

„... ? -^ a .s. rt ?? a 2 S It ^
y .^^TO ^ ^ ^
t3 iimli r ii ^
^a s^^'^^^s ^ >. <" ^ s.
PE<<-'.o'rtS --a uu <^ "cs ^u.^u^a uw S^ 0
a .Q . > ^ ^ ^ | ^ ^ ^ a .a
. oci- tSrtSa S1^ 8 *" -' ts 2i o ^6od<5^|||"> 8'2 Q^ cl<.
p n i
^.^ISgsl.^t-S Sl it ;
5SSS--5^^.^ gn^^.ll a
^-^Ugl^^l .^||.|.
"; BiyuJ^yi^K-yScata --"Oo.S
^il^ii^lirilill
hisiinii^ii^r
^ri s-? ai^iS S
U..l^ U 1|^

Isli'8 11 -4^; S
^^'^"fl bcn l3M>8 ^
33-^6s te- "ovti-, -3
og&-g0 Sg y^N-^g %
u.n^aci 'S3 ^^3(3^
^ 6 'o y I - S . " -. ^ 'S -Q ^
^ s S.g?, i^al:!1^ 5
^rji^ ^^ s
llii^l^, it
^^^^"o^s'Sa^.a^'o'i '
trs^i^Jii^i^l
^i.^j^l^limi
^ ^ ea | s'8^^!!^ ^lil43^0!^ ^^s^
CT w *"
_. <l r< '0 (fl S gJ
^-g S 5^
li ^ ^i'aS^
^Se iS ^^lig
^ SS 1;^^ 3s^ i^ ^^l
^i H |^t|
^1 u inn
g.w ^y ^'^
^t.'S ^S f^
^W. u WU- <
, -^ % S S ^ ^ ^^ V1^2.
^ 1 ^ S s a 'a ^ ^ S a
a ^w pounds rt ^ e -o .^ s ^ ^
g^-S^II^^o^S^.
^1^^1-q^llS
^yQS^^S^^^SgS^
^^^gl^^.^"3 S^
u w ctf '~'

CHAPTER III

it was Mrs. Folliat who led the way into the house and Poirot followed her. It was a gracious house, beautifully proportioned. Mrs. Folliat went through a door on the left into a small daintily furnished sittingroom and on into the big drawing-room beyond, which was full of people who all seemed, at the moment, to

be talking at once.

"George," said Mrs. Folliat. "This is M. Poirot who is so kind as to come and help us. Sir George Stubbs."

Sir George who had been talking in a loud voice, swung round. He was a big man with a rather florid red face and a slightly unexpected beard. It gave a rather disconcerting effect of an actor who had not quite made up his mind whether he was playing the part of a country squire, or of a "rough diamond" from the Dominions. It certainly did not suggest the navy, in spite of Michael Weyman's remarks. His manner and voice were jovial, but his eyes were small and shrewd, of a particularly penetrating pale blue.

He greeted Poirot heartily.

"We're so glad that your friend Mrs. Oliver managed to persuade you to come," he said. "Quite a brain-wave on her part. You'll be an enormous attraction."

30

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 31

He looked round a little vaguely.

"Hattie?" He repeated the name in a slightly sharper tone. "Hattie!"

Lady Stubbs was reclining in a big arm-chair a little distance from the others. She seemed to be paying no attention to what was going on round her. Instead she was smiling down at her hand which was stretched out on the arm of the chair. She was turning it from left to right, so that a big solitaire emerald on her third finger caught the light in its green depths.

She looked up now in a slightly startled childlike way and said, "How do you do."

Poirot bowed over her hand.

Sir George continued his introductions.

"Mrs. Masterton."

Mrs. Masterton was a somewhat monumental woman who reminded Poirot faintly of a bloodhound. She had a full underhung jaw and large, mournful, slightly bloodshot eyes.

She bowed and resumed her discourse in a deep voice which again made Poirot think of a bloodhound's baying note.

"This silly dispute about the tea tent has got to be settled, Jim," she said forcefully. "They've got to see sense about it. We can't have the whole show a fiasco because of these idiotic women's local feuds."

"Oh, quite," said the man addressed.

"Captain Warburton," said Sir George.

Captain Warburton who wore a check sports coat and

32 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

had a vaguely horsy appearance, showed a lot of white teeth in a somewhat wolfish smile, then continued his conversation.

Don't you worry, I'll settle it," he said. "I'll go and talk to them like a Dutch uncle. What about the fortune-telling tent? In the space by the magnolia? Or at the far end of the lawn by the rhododendrons?"

Sir George continued his introductions.

"Mr. and Mrs. Legge."

A tall young man with his face peeling badly from sunburn grinned agreeably. His wife, an attractive freckled redhead nodded in a friendly fashion, then plunged into controversy with Mrs. Masterton, her agreeable high treble making a kind of duet with Mrs. Masterton's deep bay.

tt--not by the magnolia--a bottleneck----"

"--one wants to disperse things--but if there's a queue----"

"--much cooler. I mean, with the sun full on the house----"

"--and the coconut shy can't be too near the house--the boys are so wild when they throw----"

"And, this," said Sir George, "is Miss Brewis--who runs us all."

Miss Brewis was seated behind the large silver tea tray.

She was a spare efficient-looking woman of forty-odd,

with a brisk pleasant manner.

"How do you do, M. Poirot," she said. "I do hope you didn't have too crowded a journey? The trains are

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 33

sometimes too terrible this time of year. Let me give you some tea. Milk? Sugar? "

"Very little milk, mademoiselle, and four lumps of sugar." He added, as Miss Brewis dealt with his request,

"I see that you are all in a great state of activity."

"Yes, indeed. There are always so many last-minute things to see to. And people let one down in the most extraordinary way nowadays. Over marquees, and tents and chairs and catering equipment. One has to keep on at them. I was on the telephone half the morning."

"What about these pegs, Amanda? " said Sir George.

"And the extra putters for the clock golf."

"That's all arranged, Sir George. Mr. Benson at the golf club was most kind."

She handed Poirot his cup.

"A sandwich, M. Poirot? Those are tomato and these are pate. But perhaps," said Miss Brewis, thinking of the four lumps of sugar, "you would rather have a cream cake?"

Poirot would rather have a cream cake, and helped himself to a particularly sweet and squelchy one.

Then, balancing it carefully on his saucer, he went and sat down by his hostess. She was still letting the light play over the jewel on her hand, and she looked up at him with a pleased child's smile.

"Look," she said. "It's pretty, isn't it? "

He had been studying her carefully. She was wearing a big coolie style hat of vivid magenta straw. Beneath it her face showed its pinky reflection on the dead-white

34 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

surface of her skin. She was heavily made up in an exotic un-English style. Dead-white matt skin, vivid cyclamen lips, mascara applied lavishly to the eyes.

Her hair showed beneath the hat, black and smooth, fitting like a velvet cap. There was a languorous unEnglish beauty about the face. She was a creature of

the tropical sun, caught, as it were, by chance in an English drawing-room. But it was the eyes that startled Poirot. They had a childlike almost vacant stare. She had asked her question in a confidential childish way, and it was as though to a child that Poirot answered.

"It is a very lovely ring," he said.

She looked pleased.

"George gave it to me yesterday," she said, dropping her voice as though she were sharing a secret with him.

"He gives me lots of things. He's very kind."

Poirot looked down at the ring again and the hand outstretched on the side of the chair. The nails were very long and varnished a deep puce.

Into his mind a quotation came: "They toil not, neither do they spin. . . ."

He certainly couldn't imagine Lady Stubbs toiling or spinning. And yet he would hardly have described her as a lily of the field. She was a far more artificial product.

"This is a beautiful room you have here, Madame," he said, looking round appreciatively.

"I suppose it is," said Lady Stubbs vaguely.

Her attention was still on her ring; her head on one

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 35

side, she watched the green fire in its depths as her hand moved.

She said in a confidential whisper: "D'you see? It's winking at me."

She burst out laughing and Poirot had a sense of sudden shock. It was a loud uncontrolled laugh.

From across the room Sir George said: "Hattie."

His voice was quite kind but held a faint admonition.

Lady Stubbs stopped laughing.

Poirot said in a conventional manner.

"Devonshire is a very lovely county. Do you not think so?"

"It's nice in the daytime," said Lady Stubbs. "When it doesn't rain," she added mournfully. "But there aren't any nightclubs."

"Ah, I see. You like night-clubs?"

"Oh, yes" said Lady Stubbs fervently.

"And why do you like night-clubs so much?"

"There is music and you dance. And I wear my nicest clothes and bracelets and rings. And all the other women have nice clothes and jewels, but not as nice as mine."

She smiled with enormous satisfaction. Poirot felt a slight pang of pity.

"And all that amuses you very much?"

"Yes. I like the casino, too. Why are there not any casinos in England?"

"I have often wondered," said Poirot, with a sigh.

"I do not think it would accord with the English character."

34 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

surface of her skin. She was heavily made up in an exotic un-English style. Dead-white matt skin, vivid cyclamen lips, mascara applied lavishly to the eyes. Her hair showed beneath the hat, black and smooth, fitting like a velvet cap. There was a languorous unEnglish beauty about the face. She was a creature of the tropical sun, caught, as it were, by chance in an English drawing-room. But it was the eyes that startled Poirot. They had a childlike almost vacant stare. She had asked her question in a confidential childish way, and it was as though to a child that Poirot answered.

"It is a very lovely ring," he said.

She looked pleased.

"George gave it to me yesterday," she said, dropping her voice as though she were sharing a secret with him.

"He gives me lots of things. He's very kind."

Poirot looked down at the ring again and the hand

outstretched on the side of the chair. The nails were very long and varnished a deep puce.

Into his mind a quotation came: "They toil not, neither do they spin. . . ."

He certainly couldn't imagine Lady Stubbs toiling or spinning. And yet he would hardly have described her as a lily of the field. She was a far more artificial product.

"This is a beautiful room you have here, Madame," he said, looking round appreciatively.

"I suppose it is," said Lady Stubbs vaguely.

Her attention was still on her ring; her head on one

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 35

side, she watched the green fire in its depths as her band moved.

She said in a confidential whisper: "D'you see? It's winking at me."

She burst out laughing and Poirot had a sense of sudden shock. It was a loud uncontrolled laugh.

From across the room Sir George said: "Hattie."

His voice was quite kind but held a faint admonition.

Lady Stubbs stopped laughing.

Poirot said in a conventional manner.

"Devonshire is a very lovely county. Do you not think so?"

"It's nice in the daytime," said Lady Stubbs. "When it doesn't rain," she added mournfully. "But there aren't any nightclubs."

"Ah, I see. You like night-clubs?"

"Oh, yes," said Lady Stubbs fervently.

"And why do you like night-clubs so much?"

"There is music and you dance. And I wear my nicest clothes and bracelets and rings. And all the other women have nice clothes and jewels, but not as nice as mine."

She smiled with enormous satisfaction. Poirot felt a slight pang of pity.

"And all that amuses you very much?"

"Yes. I like the casino, too. Why are there not any

casinos in England ? "

"I have often wondered," said Poirot, with a sigh.

"I do not think it would accord with the English character."

36 DEAD MAN'S FOLLT

She looked at him uncomprehendingly. Then she bent slightly towards him.

"I won sixty thousand francs at Monte Carlo once.

I put it on number twenty-seven and it came up."

"That must have been very exciting, Madame."

" Oh, it was. George gives me money to play with but usually I lose it."

She looked disconsolate.

"That is sad."

" Oh, it does not really matter. George is very rich

It is nice to be rich, don't you think so ?"

"Very nice," said Poirot gently.

"Perhaps, if I was not rich, I should look like

Amanda." Her gaze went to Miss Brewis at the tea table and studied her dispassionately. " She is very ugly, don't you think?"

Miss Brewis looked up at the moment and across to where they were sitting. Lady Stubbs had not spoken loudly, but Poirot wondered whether Amanda Brewis had heard.

As he withdrew his gaze, his eyes met those of Captain Warburton. The Captain's glance was ironic and amused.

Poirot endeavoured to change the subject.

"Have you been very busy preparing for the fete?"

he asked.

Hattie Stubbs shook her head.

"Oh, no, I think it is all very boringvery stupid.

There are servants and gardeners. Why should not they make the preparations ? "

DEAD MART'S FOLLY 37

- Oh, my dear." It was Mrs. Folliat who spoke. She had come to sit on the sofa nearby. " Those are the ideas

you were brought up with on your island estates. But life isn't like that in England these days. I wish it were." She sighed. "Nowadays one has to do nearly everything oneself."

Lady Stubbs shrugged her shoulders.

"I think it is stupid. What is the good of being rich if one has to do everything oneself? "

"Some people find it fun," said Mrs. Folliat, smiling at her. "I do really. Not all things, but some. I like gardening myself and I like preparing for a festivity like this one tomorrow."

"It will be like a party?" asked Lady Stubbs hopefully.

"Just like a party--with lots and lots of people."

"Will it be like Ascot? With big hats and everyone very chic? "

"Well, not quite like Ascot," said Mrs. Folliat. She added gently, "But you must try and enjoy country things, Hattie. You should have helped us this morning, instead of staying in bed and not getting up until teatime."

"I had a headache," said Hattie sulkily. Then her mood changed and she smiled affectionately at Mrs. Folliat.

"But I will be good to-morrow. I will do everything you tell me."

"That's very sweet of you, dear."

"I've got a new dress to wear. It came this morning. Come upstairs with me and look at it."

38 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

Mrs. Folliat hesitated. Lady Stubbs rose to her feet and said insistently:

"You must come. Please. It is a lovely dress. Come wow! "

"Oh, very well." Mrs. Folliat gave a half-laugh and rose.

As she went out of the room, her small figure following Hattie's tall one, Poirot saw her face and was quite startled at the weariness on it which had replaced her smiling composure. It was as though, relaxed and

off her guard for a moment, she no longer bothered to keep up the social mask. And yet it seemed more than that. Perhaps she was suffering from some disease about which, like many women do, she never spoke. She was not a person, he thought, who would care to invite pity or sympathy.

Captain Warburton dropped down in the chair Hattie Stubbs had just vacated. He, too, looked at the door through which the two women had just passed, but it was not of the older woman that he spoke. Instead he drawled, with a slight grin:

"Beautiful creature, isn't she?" He observed with the tail of his eye Sir George's exit through a french window with Mrs. Masterton and Mrs. Oliver in tow. "Bowled over old George Stubbs all right. Nothing's too good for her! Jewels, mink, all the rest of it. Whether he realises she's a bit wanting in the top story, I've never discovered. Probably thinks it doesn't matter. After all, these financial johnnies don't ask for intellectual companionship."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 39

< * What nationality is she ? " Poirot asked curiously. " Looks South American, I always think. But I believe she comes from the West Indies. One of those islands with sugar and rum and all that. One of the old families therea Creole, I don't mean a half-caste. All very intermarried, I believe, on these islands. Accounts for the mental deficiency."

Young Mrs. Legge came over to join them.

"Look here, Jim," she said, "you've got to be on my side. That tent's got to be where we all decided on the far side of the lawn backing on the rhododendrons. It's the only possible place."

"Ma Masterton doesn't think so."

" Well, you've got to talk her out of it. '*

He gave her his foxy smile.

"Mrs. Masterton's my boss."

"Wilfrid Masterton's your boss. He's the M.P."

"I dare say, but she should be. She's the one who

wears the pants and don't I know it."

Sir George re-entered the window.

"Oh, there you are. Sally," he said. "We need you. You wouldn't think everyone could get het up over who butters the buns and who raffles a cake, and why the garden produce stall is where the fancy woollens was promised it should be. Where's Amy Folliat? She can deal with these people about the only person who can."

"She went upstairs with Hattie."

"Oh, did. she"

Sir George looked round in a vaguely helpless manner

y, D^D M^JVS FOLLr

and Miss Brewis jumped up from where she was writing
40

tickets, and said, "I'll fetch her for you, Sir George.*"

"Thank you, Amanda."

Miss Brewis went out of the room.

"Must get hold of some more wire fencing," murmured Sir George.

"For the fete?"

"No, no. To put up where we adjoin Hoodown Park in the woods. The old stuff's rotted away, and that's where they get through."

"Who get through? "

"Trespassers 1" ejaculated Sir George.

Sally Legge said amusedly:

"You sound like Betsy Trotwood campaigning against donkeys."

"Betsy Trotwood? Who's she?" asked Sir George simply.

"Dickens."

"Oh, Dickens. I read the Pickwick Papers once. Not bad. Not bad at all--surprised me. But, seriously, trespassers are a menace since they've started this Youth Hostel tomfoolery. They come out at you from everywhere wearing the most incredible shirts--boy this morning had one all covered with crawling turtles and things--made me think I'd been hitting the bottle or

something. Half of them can't speak English--just gibber at you ..." He mimicked: " 'Oh, plees--yes, haf you--tell me--iss way to ferry?' I say no, it isn't, roar at them, and send them back where they've come from, but half the time they just blink and stare and don't

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 41

understand. And the girls giggle. All kinds of nationalities, Italian, Yugoslavian, Dutch, Finnish Eskimos I shouldn't be surprised! Half of them communists, I shouldn't wonder," he e^ded darkly. "Come now, George, don't get started on communists," said Mrs. Legge. "I'll conug and help you deal with the rabid women."

She led him out of the window and called over her shoulder: "Come on, Jim. Come and l^e torn to pieces in a good cause."

" All right, but I want to put M. Poir-ot in the picture about the Murder Hunt since he's goirig to present the prizes."

" You can do that presently."

" I will await you here," said Poirot: agreeably.

In the ensuing silence, Alee Legge Stretched himself out in his chair and sighed.

"Women! " he said. "Like a swar-m of bees."

He turned his head to look out of ^he window.

"And what's it all about? Some silly garden fete that doesn't matter to anyone."

"But obviously," Poirot pointed ou.t," there are those to whom it does matter."

"Why can't people have some sens(^f Why can't they thinki Think of the mess the whole 'teyorld has got itself into. Don't they realise that the inhabitants of the globe are busy committing suicide? "

Poirot judged rightly that he w^as not intended to reply to this question. He merely shook his head doubtfully.

42 DEAD MAN'S WOLLY

" Unless we can do something Ibefore it's too late..."

Alec Legge broke off. An angry look swept over his face. " Oh, yes," he said, " I know' what you're thinking. That I'm nery, neuroticall thie rest of it. Like those damned doctors. Advising rest amd change and sea air. All right. Sally and I came do^wn here and took the Mill Cottage for three months, aand I've followed their prescription. I've fished and bcathed and taken long walks and sunbathed"

" I noticed that you had sunbaithed, yes," said Poirot politely.

" Oh, this ?" Alec's hand w^ent to his sore face.

"That's the result of a fine English summer for once in a way. But what's the good o)of it all ? You can't get away from facing truth just by running away from it."

"No, it is never any good runming away."

" And being in a rural atmosphiere like this just makes you realise things more keenlythat and the incredible apathy of the people of this country. Even Sally who's intelligent enough, is just the: same. Why bother?

That's what she says. It makes mie mad! Why bother?"

"As a matter of interest, why do you? "

"Good God, you too?"

"No, it is not advice. It is just that I would like to know your answer."

"Don't you see, somebody's g'ot to do something?"

"And that somebody is you?"

" No, no, not me personally. One can't be personal in times like these."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 43

" I do not see why not. Even in 'these times' as you call it, one is still a person."

"But one shouldn't be! In times of stress, when it's a matter of life or death, one can't think of one's own insignificant ills or preoccupations."

" I assure you, you are quite wrong. In the late war, during a severe air-raid, I was much less preoccupied by the thought of death than of the pain from a corn on my little toe. It surprised me at the time that it should

be so. 'Think,' I said to myself, 'at any moment now, death may come.' But I was still conscious of my corn indeed, I felt injured that I should have that to suffer as well as the fear of death. It was because I might die that every small personal matter in my life acquired increased importance. I have seen a woman knocked down in a street accident, with a broken leg, and she has burst out crying because she sees that there is a ladder in her stocking."

"Which just shows you what fools women are! "

"It shows you what people are. It is, perhaps, that absorption in one's personal life that has led the human race to survive."

Alee Legge gave a scornful laugh.

"Sometimes," he said, "I think it's a pity they ever did."

"It is, you know," Poirot persisted, "a form of humility. And humility is valuable. There was a slogan that was written up in your underground railways here, I remember, during the war. 'It all depends on you.' It was composed, I think, by some

IIWHfOTWH;:'!!^?;1';!;^;!."''''''-!-!^ .I

44 P^Z) MART'S FOLLY

"^unent divine--but in my opinion it was a dangerous an^ undesirable doctrine. For it is not true. Everything t^es not depend on, say, Mrs. Blank of Little-Blank-inthe-Marsh.

And if she is led to think it does, it will ""t be good for her character. While she thinks of the

part she can play in world affairs, the baby pulls over the kettle."

"You are rather old-fashioned in your views, I think. Let's hear what your slogan would be."

"I do not need to formulate one of my own. There is an older one in this country which contents me very well."

"What is that?"

**' Put your trust in God, and keep your powder dry.' >

"Well, well..." Alee Legge seemed amused. "Most

unexpected coming from you. Do you know what I should like to see done in this country? "

Something, no doubt, forceful and unpleasant," said Poirot, smiling.

Alee Legge remained serious.

* I should like to see every feeble-minded person put out--right out! Don't let them breed. If, for one generation, only the intelligent were allowed to breed, think what the result would be."

A very large increase of patients in the psychiatric ^rds, perhaps," said Poirot dryly.

"One needs roots as ^vell as flowers on a plant, M. Legge. However large a^ beautiful the flowers, if the earthy roots are destroyed there will be no more flowers." He added in

DEAD MAN'S FOLLr ^

a conversational tone: "Would you consider Lady Stubbs a candidate for the lethal chamber? "

" Yes, indeed. What's the good of a woman like that ? What contribution has she ever made to society? Has she ever had an idea in her head that wasn't of clothes or furs or jewels? As I say, what gooci is she? "

" You and I," said Poirot blandly, " arc certainly much more intelligent than Lady Stubbs. Euc " ^he shook his head sadly "it is true, I fear, tliat we are not nearly so ornamental."

" Ornamental..." Alee was beginning with a fierce snort, but he was interrupted by the re-entry of Mrs. Oliver and Captain Warburton through the window.

CHAPTER IV

"You must come and see the clues and things for the Murder Hunt, M. Poirot," said Mrs. Oliver breathlessly.

Poirot rose and followed them obediently.

The three of them went across the hall and into a small room furnished plainly as a business office.

"Lethal weapons to your left," observed Captain Warburton waving his hand towards a small baizecovered card table. On it were laid out a small pistol,

a piece of lead piping with a rusty sinister stain on it, a blue bottle labelled Poison, a length of clothes line and a hypodermic syringe.

"Those are the Weapons," explained Mrs. Oliver,
" and these are the Suspects."
She handed him a printed card which he read with
interest.

SUSPECTS

Estelle Glynne a beautiful and mysterious
young woman, the guest of
Colonel Blunt the local Squire, whose
daughter
Joan is married to
Peter Gaye a young Atom Scientist.
Miss Willing a housekeeper.
46

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 47

Qyiett -- a butler.
Maya Stavisky -- a girl hiker.
Esteban Loyola -- an uninvited guest.

Poirot blinked and looked towards Mrs. O^^ m mute incomprehension.
" A magnificent Cast of Characters," he said politely.
"But permit me to ask, Madame, what d^ the Competitor do ?"
" Turn the card over," said Captain Warburton
Poirot did so.

On the other side was printed:

Name and address.....

Solution:

Name of Murderer:.....

Weapon:

Motive:.....

Time and Place:.....

Reasons for arriving at your conclusions:

"Everyone who enters gets one of these," exp^""^ Captain Warburton rapidly. "Also a
notebook and a pencil for copying clues. There will be six clues. You go on from one
to the other like a Treasure Hunt; and the weapons are concealed in suspicious
places, here's
the first clue. A snapshot. Everyone starts with each of these."

48 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

Poirot took the small print from him and studied it

with a frown. Then he turned it upside down. He still looked puzzled. Warburton laughed.

"Ingenious bit of trick photography, isn't it?" he said complacently. "Quite simple once you know what it is."

Poirot, who did not know what it was, felt a mounting annoyance.

"Some kind of barred window?" he suggested.

"Looks a bit like it, I admit. No, it's a section of a tennis net."

"Ah." Poirot looked again at the snapshot. "Yes, it is as you say--quite obvious when you have been told what it is!"

"So much depends on how you look at a thing," laughed Warburton.

"That is a very profound truth."

"The second clue will be found in a box under the centre of the tennis net. In the box are this empty poison bottle--here, and a loose cork."

"Only, you see," said Mrs. Oliver rapidly, "it's a screw-topped bottle, so the cork is really the clue."

"I know, Madame, that you are always full of ingenuity, but I do not quite see----"

Mrs. Oliver interrupted him.

"Oh, but of course," she said, "there's a story. Like in a magazine serial--a synopsis." She turned to Captain Warburton. "Have you got the leaflets?"

"They've not come from the printers yet."

"But they promised!"

DEAD MAN'S FLLT 49

"I know. I know. Everyone always promises. They'll be ready this evening at six. I'm ^om i" to fetch them in the car."

"Oh, good."

Mrs. Oliver gave a deep sigh ^nd turned to Poirot.

"Well, I'll have to tell it you, t^n. Only I'm not very good at telling things. I ^ean H I write things, I get them perfectly clear, but if Italk. k always sounds the most frightful muddle; an'l that's why I never

discuss my plots with anyone, vv^ learnt not to, because if I do, they just look at me blankly and say eryes, but1 don't see what Happenedand surely that can't possibly make a booK-' ^ damping. And not true, because when I write it> It does! "

Mrs. Oliver paused for breath, and then went on:

" Well, it's like this. There's Pet^r Gaye who's a. young Atom Scientist and he's suspect^ of being in the pay of the Communists, and he's mafried to this girl, Joan Blunt, and his first wife's dead, but she isn't, and she turns up because she's a secret ^S^, or perhaps not, I mean she may really be a hiker--111^ the wife's having an affair, and this man Loyola tiirns up either to meet Maya, or to spy upon her, and (here's a blackmailing letter which might be from the housekeeper, or again it might be the butler, and the revolver's missing, and as you don't know who the blackmailing letter's to, and the hypodermic syringe fell out at dinner, and after that it disappeared. . . ."

Mrs. Oliver came to a full stof estimating correctly Poirot's reaction.

mmmw.nTwsc.t

50 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"I know," she said sympathetically. "It sounds just a muddle, but it isn't really---not in my head--and when you see the synopsis leaflet, you'll find it's quite clear."

And, anyway," she ended, " the story doesn't really matter, does it ? I mean, not to you. All you've got to do is to present the prizes--very nice prizes, the first's a silver cigarette case shaped like a revolver--and say how remarkably clever the solver has been."

Poirot thought to himself that the solver would indeed have been clever. In fact, he doubted very much that there would be a solver. The whole plot and action of the Murder Hunt seemed to him to be wrapped in impenetrable fog.

"Well," said Captain Warburton cheerfully, glancing at his wrist-watch. "I'd better be off to the printers

and collect."

Mrs. Oliver groaned.

"If they're not done----"

" Oh, they're done all right. I telephoned. So long."

He left the room.

Mrs. Oliver immediately clutched Poirot by the arm and demanded in a hoarse whisper:

"Well?"

"Well--what?"

"Have you found out anything? Or spotted anybody?"

Poirot replied with mild reproof in his tones:

Everybody and everything seems to me completely normal."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT y

Nor111^^'

W^> P^haps that is not quite the right word.

Lady ^"bbs, as you say, is definitely subnormal, and Mr L^SS^ wou^ appear to be rather abnormal."

O^, he's all right," said Mrs. Oliver impatiently.

TJgg)iad a nervous breakdown."

p ...ot did not question the somewhat doubtful wording of this sentence but accepted it at its face value.

(everybody appears to be in the expected state of nervo^ agitation, high excitement, general fatigue, and stC011^ irritation which are characteristic of pre- oarati^ ^or t^ls fo1 or entertainment. If you could only indicate----"

"Sh! " ^rs- O"1' grasped his arm again. "Some- one's coming."

j(yfas just like a bad melodrama, Poirot felt, his own ffritation mounting.

T^g pleasant mild face of Miss Brewis appeared round the door

q},, there you are, M. Poirot. I've been looking for you tO ^t^ y011 your room."

She ^ ^um "P ^ staircase and along a passage to a bic ^^y ^^m looking out over the river.

"The bathroom is a bathroom just opposite. Sir George talks of adding more bathrooms, but to do so would sadly impair the proportions of the rooms. I hope you'll find everything comfortable."

"Yes indeed." Poirot swept an appreciative eye over the side bookstand, the reading-lamp and the box

52 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY labelled "Biscuits" by the bedside. "You seem, in this house, to have everything organised to perfection. Am I to congratulate you, or my charming hostess?"

"Lady Stubbs's time is fully taken up in being charming," said Miss Brewis, a slightly acid note in her voice.

"A very decorative young woman," mused Poirot.

"As you say."

"But in other respects is she not, perhaps . . ." He broke off. "Pardon. I am indiscreet. I comment on something I ought not, perhaps, to mention."

Miss Brewis gave him a steady look. She said dryly:

"Lady Stubbs knows perfectly well exactly what she is doing. Besides being, as you said, a very decorative young woman, she is also a very shrewd one."

She had turned away and left the room before Poirot's eyebrows had fully risen in surprise. So that was what the efficient Miss Brewis thought, was it? Or had she merely said so for some reason of her own? And why had she made such a statement to him--to a newcomer? Because he was a newcomer, perhaps? And also because he was a foreigner. As Hercule Poirot had discovered by experience, there were many English people who considered that what one said to foreigners didn't count!

He frowned perplexedly, staring absentmindedly at the door out of which Miss Brewis had gone. Then he strolled over to the window and stood looking out. As he did so, he saw Lady Stubbs come out of the house with Mrs. Folliat and they stood for a moment or two

53 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

talking by the magnolia tree. Then Mrs. Folliat

nodded good-bye, picked up her gardening basket and gloves and trotted off down the drive. Lady Stubbs stood watching her for a moment then absentmindedly pulled out a large flower, smelt it and began slowly to walk down the path that led through the trees to the river. She looked just once over her shoulder before she disappeared from sight. From behind the magnolia tree Miss Yenn came quietly into view, paused a moment irresolutely and then followed the tall slim figure down into the trees.

A good-looking and dynamic young man, Poirot thought. He was attractive; personality, no doubt, more than that of Sir George Stubbs.

But if that's what of it? Such patterns formed themselves out of life. Rich middle-aged unattractive husband, young and beautiful wife with or without sufficient mental development, attractive and susceptible young woman. What was there in that to make Miss Oliver utter a peremptory summons through the telephone? Miss Oliver, too, doubt, had a vivid imagination but.

But after a little he turned Hercule Poirot to himself, "I am told a constant in adultery--or in incipient adultery--"

Could there really be anything in this extraordinary notion of Mrs. Oliver's that something was wrong? Mrs. Oliver was a singularly muddle-headed woman, and how she managed somehow or other to turn out coherent detective stories was beyond him, and yet, for

54 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

all her muddle-headedness she often surprised him by her sudden perception of truth.

"The time is short--short," he murmured to himself, "Is there something wrong here, as Mrs. Oliver believes? I am inclined to think there is. But what?"

Who is there who could enlighten me? I need to know more, much more, about the people in this house. Who is there who could inform me?

After a moment's reflection he seized his hat (Poirot never risked going out in the evening air with uncovered

head), and hurried out of his room and down the stairs. He heard afar the dictatorial baying of Mrs, Masterton's deep voice. Nearer at hand. Sir George's voice rose with an amorous intonation.

"Damned becoming that yasmak thing. Wish I had you in my barem. Sally. I shall come and have my fortune told a good deal to-morrow. What'll you tell me, eh?"

There was a slight scuffle and Sally Legge's voice said breathlessly:

" George, you mustn't."

Poirot raised his eyebrows, and slipped out of a conveniently adjacent side door. He set off at top speed down a back drive which his sense of locality enabled him to predict would at some point join the front drive.

His manoeuvre was successful and enabled him--- panting very slightly--to come up beside Mrs. Folliat and relieve her in a gallant manner of her gardening basket.

DEAD MAN'S FOL ^ 55

"You permit, Madame? "

"Oh, thank you, M. Poirot, that's ^7 kin! of you. But it's not heavy."

" Allow me to carry it for you td your ^cne. You live near here? "

"I actually live in the lodge by t^ front gate. Sir George very kindly rents it to me."

The lodge by the front gate of her ^^w ^ome.... How did she really feel about that, voiTot pondered.

Her composure was so absolute that ^e nad "o clue to L. L.

her feelings. He changed the subject "V ^"Tving:

"Lady Stubbs is much younger th^ her tu^band, is she not?"

" Twenty-three years younger."

" Physically she is very attractive.^ Mrs. Folliat said quietly:

" Hattie is a dear good child."

It was not an answer he had exp^"- ^s. Folliat

went on:

"I know her very well, you see. For a short time she was under my care."

"I did not know that."

"How should you? It is in a way a sad story. Her people had estates, sugar estates, in the West Indies. As a result of an earthquake, the houses there were burned down and her parents and brothers and all lost their lives. Hattie herself was at a school in Paris and was thus suddenly left without any near relatives. It was considered advisable by the authorities that Hattie should be chaperoned and introduced into society after the war."

^ ^,.,s^

"SHE WAS DEAD U.S. FOLLY" he had spent a certain time abroad. I accepted charge of her." Mrs. Folliott added with a smile:

I can smarten myself up on occasions and, nature

I had the necessary cooperation" "The late

Governor had been a close friend of ours," "Naturally, Madame I understand all that."

"It suited me very well - I was going through a difficult time. My husband had - just before the outbreak of war. My elder son was in the navy went down with his ship, "young man," who had been out in Kenya, came back, joined the command and

and was killed in Italy. That meant a lot of death duties and this house had to be put up for sale; my

was very badly off and I was glad of the distraction of having someone young to look after and travel with. I became very fond of Hattie, all the more

perhaps, because I soon realised that she was - she was

say - not fully capable of herself? "My friend

me, M. Poirot, Hattie is not mentally deficient

that she is what country folk describe as simple." "It is easily imposed upon. One would suggest

suggestion. I think myself that it was a mistake there was practically no one else had an

idea of her position might have been one of much greater difficulty. She was attractive to men and because

of an affectionate nature she was easily attracted

influenced - she had definitely been, after the

after the final winding up of her parents' estate it was discovered that the plantation was destroyed and they

^erc more debts than assets, I co^ only be thanl^i

DEAD MAJTS FOLLY 57

(hat a man such as Sir George Stubbs had fallen in love with her and wanted to marry her."

" Possiblyyesit was a solution."

" Sir George," said Mrs. Folliat, " though he is a selfmade man andlet us face ita complete vulgarian, is ^indly and fundamentally decent, besides being extremely wealthy. I don't think he would ever ask for mental companionship from a wife, which is just ys well. Hattie is everything he wants. She displays clothes and jewels to perfection, is affectionate and willing, and is completely happy with him. I confess that I am very thankful that that is so, for I admit that I deliberately influenced her to accept him. If it had turned out badly "her voice faltered a little" it would have been my fault for urging her to marry a man so many years older than herself. You see, as I told you, Hattie is completely suggestible. Anyone she is with at the time can dominate her."

" It seems to me," said Poirot approvingly, " that you made there a most prudent arrangement for her. I am not, like the English, romantic. To arrange a good marriage, one must take more than romance into consideration."

He added:

" And as for this place here, Nasse House, it is a most beautiful spot. Quite, as the saying goes, out of this world."

" Since Nasse had to be sold," said Mrs. Folliat, with a faint tremor in her voice, "I am glad that Sir George bought it. It was requisitioned during the war by the

58 DEAD ^^A^'S Ftt^y

Army and afterwards it "" ght h^g ^^ bough11 ^d made into a guest; house or a scho^ ^g rooms C^P and partitioned, dhstorte^ ^t of^ natural beauty.

Our neighbours, the Flet^s. at ^oodown, had ito ^11 their place and it is now a ^th^stel. One i^ S^d

that young people should enjoy themselves and fortunately Hoodown is lovely, and of no great architectural merit, so that the alterations do not matter. I'm afraid some of the young people trespass on our grounds. It makes George very angry - it's true that they have occasionally damaged the rare shrubs by hacking them down but they come through here trying to get a short cut to go across the

river.

L V J.

They were standing by the lodge, a small white one-ended building, lay back from the drive with a small garden in front. Mrs. Folliat took back her basket with a word of thanks.

"I was always very fond of the lodge," she said, looking at it affectionately - "it was our head garden for thirty years, used to live here. I had it to the top cottage, though it has been enlarged and modernised by Sir George - it has to be - we've got quite a young man now a gardener, with a young wife - and these young things electric irons and modern cookers and things like that. They must go with the times. "Skinner" is hardly a person left now (except from the old all new faces."

DEAD MAN'S folly

59

"I am glad, Madame," said Poirot, "that you have found a haven."

"You know those lines of Spenser's? 'Sleep after stormy seas, ease after war, death after life greatly please . . .'"

She paused and said without any change of voice

"It's a very wicked world, M. Poirot. And there are very wicked people in the world. You probably know that as well as I do. I don't say so before the young people, it might discourage them, but it's true"

Yes, it's a very wicked world. ..."

She gave him a little nod, then turned and we^ ^^
the lodge. Poirot stood still, staring at the stm^ ^

CHAPTER V

in a mood of exploration Poirot went through the front gates and down the steeply twisting road that presently emerged on a small quay. A large bell with a chain had a notice upon it: "Ring for the Ferry." There were various boats moored by the side of the quay. A very old man with rheumy eyes, who had been leaning against a bollard, came shuffling towards Poirot.

"Du ee want the ferry, sir? "

" I thank you, no. I have just come down from Nasse House for a little walk."

" Ah, 'tis up at Nasse yu are ? Worked there as a boy, I did, and my son, he were head gardener there. But I did use to look after the boats. Old Squire Folliat, he was fair mazed about boats. Sail in all weathers, he would. The Major now, his son, he didn't care for sailing. Horses, that's all he cared about. And a pretty packet went on 'em. That and the bottle--had a hard time with him, his wife did. Yu've seen her, maybe--lives at the Lodge now, she du."

" Yes, I have just left her there now."

"Her be a Folliat, to, second cousin from over Tiverton way. A great one for the garden, she is, all them there flowering shrubs she had put in. Even
60

DEAD MAN'S FOLLt g,

when it was took over during the w^ and ^e ^^ young gentlemen was gone to the war, she still looked

after they shrubs and kept 'em from b^ng overrun."

It was hard on her, both her sons ^^g killed." 'Ah, she've had a bard life, she have, what ^h this

and that. Trouble with her husband, a^d trouble with the young gentlemen, t". Not Mr. H^ry. He was as nice a young gentleman as yu could ^sh, took after

his grandfather, fond of sailing and we^ into the navy as a matter of course, but Mr. James, ^ caused her a lot of trouble. Debts and women it we^, and then, to, he were real wild in hi? temper. Bor^ one of they as can't go straight. But the war suited him, as yu might sav--eive him his chance. Ah! Them's miany who J O i I 1--

can't go straight in peace who dies lively in war." So now," said Poirot, "there are qq more; Folliats at Nasse."

The old man's flow of talk died abruptly.

"Just as yu say, sir."

Poirot looked curiously at the old man. "Instead you have Sir George St^bbs. What is thought locally of him? "

Us understands," said the old ma^, "that he be powerful rich."

His tone sounded dry and almost a^sed.

"And his wife?"

"Ab, she's a fine lady from London, she is. No use for gardens, not her. They du say, t^ as her du be wanting up here."

He tapped his temple significantly.

6a DEAD MAJ^f'S FOLLY

"Not as her isn't always very nice spoken a^ friendly. Just over a year they've been here. Bou^ the place and had it all done up like new. I rememVf as though 'twere yesterday them arriving. Arrived in the evening, they did, day after the worst gale as I e^6 remember. Trees down right and left--one down acr^ the drive and us had to get it sawn away in a hurry to get the drive clear for the car. And the big oak llr along, that come down and brought a lot of oth^ down with it, made a rare mess, it did."

" Ah, yes, where the Folly stands now ? "

The old man turned aside and spat disgustedly.

"Folly 'tis called and Folly 'tis--new-fangled n^"

sense. Never was no Folly in the old Folliats' tnft ' Her ladyship's idea that Folly was. Put up not th^6 weeks after they first come, and I've no doubt she tal^ Sir George into it. Rare silly it looks stuck up th^ among the trees, like a heathen temple. A nice sumrn^ "

house now, made rustic like with stained glass. ' have nothing against that."

Poirot smiled faintly.

"The London ladies," he said, "they must have the faintest fancies. It is sad that the day of the Follies is over."

"Don't ever believe that, sir." The old man gave a wheezy chuckle. "Always be Follies at Nasse."

"But the house belongs to Sir George Stubbs."

"That's as may be--but there's still a Folly here."

"Ah! Rare and cunning the Follies are!"

"What do you mean?"

The old man gave him a sly sideways glance.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Mrs. Folly be living up to 1 Lodge? bairn she?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Poirot slowly. "Mrs. Folly is at the Lodge and the world is very wicked and all the people in it are very wicked."

The old man stared at him.

"Ah," he said. "You've got so much there--" By 56

He shuffled away again.

"But what have I got?" Poirot asked himself with irritation as he slowly walked up the hill back to the house.

II

Hercule Poirot made a meticulous toilet with a scented pomade to his mustache and twirling them

to a ferocious couple of points. He went back from the

mirror and was satisfied by what

The sound of a gong resounded through the house

and he descended the stairs.

The butler, having finished his artistic performance,

crescendo, forte, diminuendo, rallentando,

was just replacing the gong with its hook--

His dark melancholy face showed that

Poirot thought to himself: "A mailing letter

from the housekeeper--or it may be the butler." This butler looked as though

black letters would be well within his scope. Poirot took her characters from life.

THE DEAD AFFAIRS FOLLY

Miss Srewis crossed the hall in an unbecoming lowered chiffon dress and he caught up with her, asking what he did so:

"You have a housekeeper here?"

u Oh, no, M. Poirot. I'm afraid one doesn't run to "iceties of th9.t kind nowadays, except in a really large ^tablishment, of course. Oh, no, I'm the housekeeper "^-more housekeeper than secretary, sometimes, in this House.*'

She gave a short acid laugh.

" So you are the housekeeper? " Poirot considered her ^oughtfully.

He could not see Miss Brewis writing a blackmailing ^tter. l<ow, an anonymous letter--that would be a Different thing. He had known anonymous letters bitten by women not unlike Miss Brewis--solid, Dependable women, totally unsuspected by those around ^em.

"What is your butler's name? " he asked.

"Henden." Miss Brewis looked a little astonished.

Poirot recollected himself and explained quickly:

" I ask because I had a fancy I had seen him somewhere Wore."

"Very lively," said Miss Brewis. "None of these Reople evel' seem to stay in any place more than four Months. They must soon have done the round of all ^he available situations in England. After all, it's not ^any people who can afford butlers and cooks nowadays."

They came into the drawing-room, where Sir George,

DEAD MAN'S FOL^ 65 looking somehow rather unnatural ^n a t111"1^^1.

was proffering sherry. Mrs. Oliver,ln ^-S^Y satin,

was looking like an obsolete batt^^P' and Lady Stubbs's smooth black head was b^1 down as she studied the fashions in Vogue.

Alee and Sally Legge were din^S and ALSO J"11 Warburton.

"We've a heavy evening ahead c^ us>" he warned them. "No bridge to-night. All h^5 to the P11"1?- There are any amount of notices to P1'1111' and the bi^ card for the Fortune Telling. Wh31 name sha11 we have? Madame Zuleika? Esmera^^ or Rc)many Leigh, the Gipsy Queen? "

"The Eastern touch," said SallyY- "^^T01"" in agricultural districts hates gypsies.

Zuleika sounds all

right. I brought my paint box o^ and 1 ^""g111 Michael could do us a curling snake to oi'1"11^111 the notice."

"Cleopatra rather than Zuleika, ither?"

Henden appeared at the door.

" Dinner is served, my lady."

They went in. There were candle? on the lon^ table- The room was full of shadows. Warburton and Alee Legge sat on either side of their hostess. Poirot was between Mrs; oliver and Miss Brewis. The latter was engaged in brisk S^"1 conversation about further details of preparation for tomorrow.

Mrs. Oliver sat in brooding abstinence and hardly spoke.

66 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

When she did at last break her silence, it was with a somewhat contradictory explanation.

"Don't bother about me," she said to Poirot. "I'm just remembering if there's anything I've forgotten."

Sir George laughed heartily.

"The fatal flaw, eh?" he remarked.

"That's just it," said Mrs. Oliver. "There always is one. Sometimes one doesn't realise it until a book's

actually in print. And then it's agony." Her face reflected this emotion. She sighed. "The curious thing is that most people never notice it. I say to myself, 'But of course the cook would have been bound to notice that two cutlets hadn't been eaten.' But nobody else thinks of it at all."

"You fascinate me." Michael Weyman leant across the table. "The Mystery of the Second Cutlet. Please, please never explain. I shall wonder about it in my bath**"

Mrs. Oliver gave him an abstracted smile and relapsed into her preoccupations.

Lady Stubbs was also silent. Now and again she yawned. Warburton, Alee Legge and Miss Brewis talked across her.

As they came out of the dining-room, Lady Stubbs stopped by the stairs.

"I'm going to bed," she announced. "I'm very sleepy."

"Oh, Lady Stubbs," exclaimed Miss Brewis, "there's so much to be done. We've been counting on you to help us."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 67

"Yes, I know," said Lady Stubbs. "But I'm going to bed."

She spoke with the satisfaction of a small child.

She turned her head as Sir George came out of the

dining-room.

"I'm tired, George. I'm going to bed. You don't mind?"

He came up to her and patted her on the shoulder affectionately.

" You go and get your beauty sleep, Hattie. Be fresh for tomorrow."

He kissed her lightly and she went up the stairs, waving her hand and calling out:

"Good night, all."

Sir George smiled up at her. Miss Brewis drew in her breath sharply and turned brusquely away.

"Come along, everybody," she said, with a forced cheerfulness that did not ring true. "We've got to work."

Presently everyone was set to their tasks. Since Miss Brewis could not be everywhere at once, there were soon some defaulters. Michael Weyman ornamented a placard with a ferociously magnificent serpent and the words, Madame Zuleika will tell your Fortune, and then vanished unobtrusively. Alee Legge did a few nondescript chores and then went out avowedly to measure for the hoop-la and did not reappear. The women, as women do, worked energetically and conscientiously. Hercule Poirot followed his hostess's example and went early to bed.

68 DEAD MAN'S FOLLT

in

Poirot came down to breakfast on the following morning at nine-thirty. Breakfast was served in prewar

fashion. A row of hot dishes on an electric heater.

Sir George was eating a full-sized Englishman's breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon and kidneys. Mrs. Oliver

and Miss Brewis had a modified version of the same. Michael Weyman was eating a plateful of cold ham.

Only Lady Stubbs was unheedful of the fleshpots and was nibbling thin toast and sipping black coffee. She was wearing a large pale-pink hat which looked odd at the breakfast table.

The post had just arrived. Miss Brewis had an

enormous pile of letters in front of her which she was rapidly sorting into piles. Any of Sir George's marked " Personal" she passed over to him. The others she opened herself and sorted into categories.

Lady Stubbs had three letters. She opened what were clearly a couple of bills and tossed them aside. Then she opened the third letter and said suddenly and clearly:

"Oh!"

The exclamation was so startled that all heads turned towards her.

"It's from Etienne," she said. "My cousin Etienne. He's coming here in a yacht."

"Let's see, Hattie." Sir George held out his hand.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 69

She passed the letter down the table. He smoothed out the sheet and read.

"Who's this Etienne de Sousa? A cousin, you say? **

"I think so. A second cousin. I do not remember him very well--hardly at all. He was----"

"Yes, my dear?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

" It does not matter. It is all a long time ago. I was a little girl."

"I suppose you wouldn't remember him very well. But we must make him welcome, of course," said Sir George heartily. "Pity in a way it's the fete today, but we'll ask him to dinner. Perhaps we could put him up for a night or two--show him something of the country ?"

Sir George was being the hearty country squire.

Lady Stubbs said nothing. She stared down into her coffee-cup.

Conversation on the inevitable subject of the fete became general. Only Poirot remained detached, watching the slim exotic figure at the head of the table. He wondered just what was going on in her mind. At that very moment her eyes came up and cast a swift glance along the table to where he sat. It was a look so shrewd and appraising that he was startled.

As their eyes met, the shrewd expression vanished--emptiness returned. But that other look had been there, cold, calculating, watchful. ...

Or had he imagined it? In any case, wasn't it true that people who were slightly mentally deficient very

7 DEAD man's FOLLY

often had a kind of sly native cunning that sometimes surprised even the people who knew them best.

He thought to himself that Lady Stubbs was certainly an enigma. People seemed to hold diametrically opposite ideas concerning her. Miss Brewis had intimated that Lady Stubbs knew very well what she was doing. Yet Mrs. Oliver definitely thought her halfwitted, and Mrs. Folliot who had known her long and intimately had spoken of her as someone not quite normal, who needed care and watchfulness.

Miss Brewis was probably prejudiced. She disliked Lady Stubbs for her indolence and her aloofness. Poirot wondered if Miss Brewis had been Sir George's secretary prior to his marriage, if so, she might easily resent the coming of the new regime.

Poirot himself would have agreed wholeheartedly with Mrs. Folliot and Mrs. Oliver--until this morning. And, after all, could he really rely on what had been only a fleeting impression?

Lady Stubbs got up abruptly from the table.

"I have a headache," she said. "I shall go and lie down in my room."

Sir George sprang up anxiously.

"My dear girl. You're all right, aren't you? n "It's just a headache's.*"

" You'll be fit enough for this afternoon, won't you? "

"Yes, I think so."

"Take some aspirin. Lady Stubbs," said Miss Brewis briskly. "Have you got some or shall I bring it to you?"

DEAD MA'S FOLLY 7,

"I've got some."

She moved toward the door. As she went she hopped the handkerchief she had been squeezing between her fingers, and moving quietly forward, picked it up unobtrusively.

Sir George, about to follow his wife, was stopped by Miss Brewis.

"About the parking of cars this afternoon, Sir George. I'm just going to give Mitchell instructions. Do you think that the best plan would be, as you said----?"

Poirot, going out of the room, heard no more.

He caught up his hat in the stairs.

"Madame, you drop papers."

He proffered the hat with a bow.

She took it unheeding.

"Did I? Thank you."

"I am most distressed, Madame, that you should be suffering. Partiality when your cousin is comiing."

i

She answered quickly almost violently.

"I don't want to see Lenne. I don't like him. He's dead. He was always been afraid of him. He does dead things."

The door of the dining room opened and Sir George came across the hall and up the stairs.

"Haute, my poor dear-- Let me come and tuck you up."

They went up the stairs together, his arm round her tenderly, his face worried and absorbed.

ya DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

Poirot looked up after them, then turned to encounter Miss Brewis moving fast, and clasping papers.

"Lady Stubbs's headache----" he began.

"No more headache than my foot," said Miss Brewis crossly, and disappeared into her office, closing the door behind her.

Poirot sighed and went out through the front door on to the terrace. Mrs. Masterton had just driven up in a small car and was directing the elevation of a tea marquee, baying out orders in rich full-blooded tones. She turned to greet Poirot.

"Such a nuisance, these affairs," she observed. "And

they will always put everything in the wrong place. No, Rogers! More to the left--le/t--not right! What do you think of the weather, M. Poirot ? Looks doubtful to me. Rain, of course, would spoil everything. And we've had such a fine summer this year for a change. Where's Sir George? I want to talk to him about car parking."

" His wife has a headache and has gone to lie down."

" She'll be all right this afternoon," said Mrs. Masterton confidently. "Likes functions, you know. She'll make a terrific toilet and be as pleased about it as a child. Just fetch me a bundle of those pegs over there, will you? I want to mark the places for the clock golf numbers."

Poirot, thus pressed into service, was worked by Mrs. Masterton relentlessly, as a useful apprentice. She condescended to talk to him in the intervals of hard labour.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY ^

"Got to do everything yourself, I find. Only way. ... By the way, you're a friend of the Eliots, I believe?" Poirot, after his long sojourn in England, comprehended that this was an indication of social recognitio}i.

Mrs. Masterton was in fact saying: "Although a foreigner, I understand you are One of Us." She continued to chat in an intimate manner.

"Nice to have Nasse lived in again. We were all ^o afraid it was going to be a hotel. You know what it is nowadays; one drives through the country and passes place after place with the board up ' Guest House' (>r ' Private Hotel' or ' Hotel A.A. Fully Licensed.' ah

the houses one stayed in as a girl--or where one went <:o dances. Very sad. Yes, I'm glad about Nasse and so is poor dear Amy Folliat, of course. She's had such a hai'd life--but never complains, I will say. Sir George h<is done wonders for Nasse--and not vulgarised it. Don't know whether that's the result of Amy Folliat's influence--or whether it's his own natural good taste. He has got quite good taste, you know. Very surprising

in a man like that."

"He is not, I understand, one of the landed gentry?" said Poirot cautiously.

"He isn't even really Sir George--was christened it, I understand. Took the idea from Lord George Sanger's Circus, I suspect. Very amusing really. Of course we never let on. Rich men must be allowed their little snobberies, don't you agree? The funny thing is that in spite of his origins George Stubbs would go down perfectly well anywhere. He's a throwback. Pu^e

74 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

type of the eighteenth century country squire. Good blood in him, I'd say. Father a gent and mother a barmaid, is my guess."

Mrs. Masterton interrupted herself to yell to a gardener. "Not by that rhododendron. You must leave room for the skittles over to the right- Right---not left! '*

She went on: "Extraordinary how they can't tell their left from their right. The Brewis woman is efficient. Doesn't like poor Hattie, though. Looks at her sometimes as though she'd like to murder her. So many of these good secretaries are in love with their boss. Now where do you think Jim W^rburton can have got to? Silly the way he sticks to calling himself 'Captain.' Not a regular soldier and never within

miles of a German. One has to put up, of course, with what one can get these days--and he's a h&rd worker--but I feel there's something rather fishy about him.

Ah! Here are the Legges."

Sally Legge, dressed in slacks and a yellow pullover, said brightly:

"We've come to help."

"Lots to do," boomed Mrs. Masterton. "Now, let me see ..."

Poirot, profiting by her inattention, slipped away.

As he came round the corner of the house on to the front terrace he became a spectator of a new drama.

Two young women, in shorts, with bfigh1 blouses,

had come out from the wood and were standing un-
der the trees

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY ^ one of them he

certainly looking in at the house- ^ ^ yesterday's
thought he recognised the Italla of Lady Stubbs's
lift in the car. From the window ^ ^ addressed them
bedroom Sir George leaned out wrathfully,

"You're trespassing," he said, "with the green

"Please?" said the young woman with the green
"You can't come through here"

a. a royal-blue headscarf

other young woman, the

scarf, said brightly: "Please? Nassecombe Quay",

carefully. It is this way? "George. "You're trespassing." bellowed

"Please?" "You've got to go "Trespassing! -no way back",

back. BACK! The way you go when they consulted

They stared as the gesticulated. Finally, doubt together

in a flood of foreign fully, blue-scarf said:

"Back? To the house?" road--road?--round

"That's right. And you take that

that way." George mopped his

They retreated unwillingly- his brow and looked down at the ground," he said. "Used

"Spend my time turning people's eyes padlocked that.

to come through the top gate ^ having got over

Now they come through the window ^ ^ ^ ^ ^

the fence. Think they can see they can, of course,

the quay easily this way. well"

76 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

much quicker. But there's no right of way never has
been. And they're practically all foreigners don't
understand what you say, and just jabber back at you
in Dutch or something."

"Of these, one is German and the other Italian, I
think I saw the Italian girl on her way from the
station yesterday."

"Every kind of language they talk. . . . Yes, Hattie?

What did you say?" He drew back into the room.

Poirot turned to find Mrs. Oliver and a well-developed
girl of fourteen dressed in Guide uniform close behind
him.

"This is Mariene," said Mrs. Oliver.

Marlene acknowledged the introduction with a pronounced snuffle. Poirot bowed politely.

"She's the Victim," said Mrs. Oliver.

Marlene giggled.

"I'm the horrible Corpse," she said. "But I'm not going to have any blood on me." Her tone expressed disappointment.

"No?"

"No. Just strangled with a cord, that's all. I'd of liked to be stabbed and have lashings of red paint."

"Captain Warburton thought it might look too realistic," said Mrs. Oliver.

"In a murder I think you ought to have blood," said Marlene sulkily. She looked at Poirot with hungry interest. "Seen lots of murders, haven't you? So she says."

"One or two," said Poirot modestly.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT ^

He observed with alarm that Mrs. Oliyg^ was leaving them.

"Any sex maniacs?" asked Marlene y^h avidity.

"Certainly not."

"I like sex maniacs," said Marier^ with relish.

"Reading about them, I mean."

"You would probably not like meeti^ one."

"Oh, I dunno. D'you know what? ; believe we've got a sex maniac round here. My granq^d saw a body in the woods once. He was scared and ,-^n away, and when he come back it was gone. It ^ a woman's body. But of course he's batty, my gra^dad is, so no one listens to what he says."

Poirot managed to escape and regaini^ the house by a circuitous route, took refuge in his bedroom. He felt in need of repose.

CHAPTER VI

lunch was an early and quickly snatched affair of a cold buffet. At two-thirty a minor film star was to

open the fete. The weather, after looking ominously like rain, began to improve. By three o'clock the fete was in full swing. People were paying the admission charge of half a crown in large numbers, and cars were lining one side of the long drive. Students from the Youth Hostel arrived in batches conversing loudly in foreign tongues. True to Mrs. Masterton's forecast, Lady Stubbs had emerged from her bedroom just before half-past two, dressed in a cyclamen dress with an

enormous coolie-shaped hat of black straw. She wore large quantities of diamonds.

Miss Brewis murmured sardonically:

"Thinks it's the Royal Enclosure at Ascot, evidently!"

But Poirot complimented her gravely.

"It is a beautiful creation that you have on, Madame."

"It is nice, isn't it," said Hattie happily. "I wore it for Ascot."

The minor film star was arriving and Hattie moved forward to greet her.

Poirot retreated into the background. He wandered around disconsolately--everything seemed to be proceeding in the normal fashion of fetes. There was a coconut shy, presided over by Sir George in his heartiest

78

DEAD MAJ^S FOLf y

w 79

fashion, a skittle alley and a hoQ_ , _ ,

P-la There were

various "stalls" displaying local ,_ . ,

,, . , , , t^duce of fruit,

vegetables Jams and cakes-and ,^ displaying

"fancy objects." There were "raf^,. ^ J^ ^

baskets or rruit; even, it seemed, r . ,

"Lucky Dip " for children at twope^ a P^

There was a good crowd of peop) , ,

- ,,, . ,,, , . - . r\e by now and an

Exhibition of Children's Dancme bea,, _ .

rir /., , , , r. ^an- Poirotsawno

sign of Mrs. Oliver, but Lady Stubbs, . . . ,
 , , - 's cyclamen pink
figure showed up amongst the crowd,
 , r wd as she drifted
rather vaguely about. The focus of attention . . . ,
-i k , t. ^ mention, however,
seemed to be Mrs. Folliat. She was . . . , ' ,
 , , ^nite transformed
in appearance-wearing a hydrangea^ ^^ ^^
and a smart grey hat, she appeared ^ ^^ ^ ^
proceedings, greeting new arrivals, a^ acting people
to the various side shows.
Poirot lingered near her and listened-! r .i,
 . - ^d to some of the
conversations.

"Amy, my dear, how are you? "

" Oh, Pamela, how nice of you and -c, ,
o , , ' . _ . ' " Edward to come.

Such a long way from Tiverton."

"The weather's held for you. R^_ , . .

, . . , "member the year
before the war? Cloudburst came ^ , c

, , - , , , , . . ^owo about four
o'clock. Ruined the whole show."

"But it's been a wonderful su^ , _ ,
t^ , . . t . . ^uner this year.

Dorothy! It's ages since I've seen yo^

"We felt we had to come and see ^^ ^ ^

I see you've cut back the berberis oi\ ^ , , -

^es^it shows the hydrangeas ^er.'don't you

80 DEAD MA^S FOLLT

"How wonderful they are. What a blue I But, my
dear, you've done wonders in the last year. Nasse is
really beginning to look like itself again."

Dorothy's husband boomed in a deep voice:

" Came over to see the commandant here during the
war. Nearly broke my heart."

Mrs. Folliat turned to greet a humbler visitor.

" Mrs. Knapper, I am pleased to see you. Is this Lucy ?

How she's grown? "

"She'll be leaving school next year. Pleased to see you looking so well, ma'am."

"I'm very well, thank you. You must go and try your luck at hoop-la, Lucy. See you in the tea tent latci, Mrs. Knapper. I shall be helping with the teas." An elderly man, presumably Mr. Knapper, said diffidently:

" Pleased to have you back at Nasse, ma'am. Seems like old times."

Mrs. Folliat's response was drowned as two women and a big beefy man rushed towards her.

" Amy, dear, such ages. This looks the greatest success! Do tell me what you've done about the rose garden. Muriel told me that you're restocking it with all the new floribundas."

The beefy man chipped in.

"Where's Marylin Gale----? "

"Reggie's just dying to meet her. He saw her last picture."

"That her in the big hat? My word, that's some getup."

DEAD MAN'S FOL, Lr 81

"Don't be stupid, darling. That's Hattie Stubbs.

You know, Amy, you really shouldn't let her go round quite so like a mannequin."

" Amy ? " Another friend claimed attention. * This is Roger, Edward's boy. My dear, io nice to have you back at Nasse."

Poirot moved slowly away and absent-mindedly invested a shilling on a ticket that might win him the Pg-

He heard faintly still, the " So good of you to come " refrain from behind him. He wondered whether Mrs. Folliat realised how completely she had slipped into the role of hostess or whether it was entirely unconscious. She was, very definitely this afternoon, Mrs. Folliat of Nasse House.

He was standing by the tent labelled " Madams

Zuleika will tell your fortune for 2s. 6d." Teas had just begun to be served and there was no longer ;a queue for the fortune telling. Poirot bowed hits head, entered the tent and paid over his half-crown wvillingly for the privilege of sinking into a chair andl resting his aching feet.

Madame Zuleika was wearing flowing blacky robes, a gold tinsel scarf wound round her head and a veeil across the lower half of her face which slightly rnuiffled her remarks. A gold bracelet hung with luckyr charms tinkled as she took Poirot's hand <md gave himi a rapid reading, agreeably full of money to come?, success with a dark beauty and a miraculous escape; from an accident.

FR1;8a DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"It is very agreeable all that you tell rae^^^ Legge. I only wish that it could come true.'

"Oh! " said Sally. "So you know me, do y^ "

"I had advance information--Mrs. Oliver me that you were originally to be the ' victim^ t at you had been snatched from her for the Occt1 ' "

"I wish I was being the (body,' " said Sally' "Much more peaceful. All Jim Warburton's fault. (s lt four o'clock yet? I want my tea. I'm off duty fro11 four to half-past."

I** 1"

"Ten minutes to go, still," said Poirot, consi'1"11^ ms large old-fashioned watch.

"Shall I bring ^ a ^P of tea here ? "

" No, no. I want the break. This tent is sti^S- Are there a lot of people waiting still ? "

"No, I think they are lining up for tea."

"Good."

Poirot emerged from the tent and was im^ ^^ ^ challenged by a determined woman and ma^ P^ sixpence and guess the weight of a cake.

A hoop-la stall presided over by a fat fl101"61'1^ woman urged him to try his luck and, mir1 to ^

'311

discomfiture, he immediately won a large Ke^P^

Walking sheepishly along with this he eni;011111^^ Michael Weyman who was standing gloomy on the outskirts near the top of a path that led do^" to the quay.

"You seem to have been enjoying you^ ' ^' Poirot," he said, with a sardonic grin.

Poirot contemplated his prize.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 83

"It is truly horrible, is it not?" he said sadly.

A small child near him suddenly burst out crying.

Poirot stooped swiftly and tucked the doll into the child's arm.

"Voilà, it is for you."

The tears ceased abruptly.

"There isn't the gentleman kind? Say, Ta, ever so"

"Children's Fancy Dress," called out Captain Warburton through a megaphone. "The first class- three to five. Form up, please."

Poirot moved towards the house and was cannoned into by a young man who was stepping backwards to take a better aim at a coconut. The young man scowled and Poirot apologised, mechanically, his eye held fascinated by the varied pattern of the young man's shirt. He recognised it as the "turtle" shirt: of Sir George's description. Every kind of turtle, tortoise and sea monster appeared to be writhing and crawling over it.

Poirot blinked and was accosted by the Dutch girl to whom he had given a lift the day before.

"So you have come to the fête," he said. "And your friend?"

"Oh, yes, she, too, comes here this afternoon.- I have not seen her yet, but we shall leave together by the bus that goes from the gates at five-fifteen. We go to Torquay and there I change to another bus for Plymouth. It is convenient."

This explained what had puzzled Poirot, the fact that

84 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

the Dutch girl was perspiring under the weight of a rucksack.

He said: "I saw your friend this morning.**"

"Oh, yes, Elsa, a German girl, was with her and she told me they had tried to get through woods to the

river and quay. And the gentleman who owns the house was very angry and made them go back."

She added, turning her head to where Sir George was urging competitors at the coconut shy:

"But now--this afternoon, he is very polite."

Poirot considered explaining that there was a difference between young women who were trespassers and the same young women when they had paid two shillings and sixpence entrance fee and were legally entitled to sample the delights of Nasse House and its grounds. But Captain Warburton and his megaphone bore down upon him. The Captain was looking hot and bothered.

"Have you seen Lady Stubbs, Poirot? Anyone seen Lady Stubbs? She's supposed to be judging this Fancy

Dress business and I can't find her anywhere."

"I saw her, let me see--oh, about half an hour ago.

But then I went to have my fortune told."

"Curse the woman," said Warburton angrily. "Where can she have disappeared to? The children are waiting and we're behind schedule as it is."

He looked round.

"Where's Amanda Brewis?"

Miss Brewis, also, was not in evidence.

"It really is too bad," said Warburton. "One's got

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 85

to have some co-operation if one's trying to run a show.

Where can Hattie be? Perhaps she's gone into the house."

He strode off rapidly.

Poirot edged his way towards the roped-off space where teas were being served in a large marquee, but there was a long waiting queue and he decided against it.

He inspected the Fancy Goods stall where a determined old lady very nearly managed to sell him a plastic collar box, and finally made his way round the;

outskirts to a place where he could contemplate the activity from a safe distance.

He wondered where Mrs. Oliver was.

Footsteps behind him made him turn his head. A young man was coming up the path from the quay; &

very dark young man, faultlessly attired in yachting; costume. He paused as though disconcerted by the scene; before him.

Then he spoke hesitatingly to Poirot.

"You will excuse me. Is this the house of Sir Georges Stubbs?"

"It is indeed." Poirot paused and then hazarded a guess. "Are you, perhaps, the cousin of Lady Stubbs? **

"I am Etienne de Sousa----"

"My name is Hercule Poirot."

They bowed to each other. Poirot explained the circumstances of the fete. As he finished. Sir George came across the lawn towards them from the coconut shy.

86 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"De Sousa? Delighted to see you. Hattie got your letter this morning. Where's your yacht? "

"It is moored at Helmmouth. I came up the river to the quay here in my launch."

"We must find Hattie. She's somewhere about. . . .

You'll dine with us this evening, I hope?"

"You are most kind."

"Can we put you up? "

"That also is most kind, but I will sleep on my yacht. It is easier so."

"Are you staying here long? "

"Two or three days, perhaps. It depends." De Sousa shrugged elegant shoulders.

"Hattie will be delighted, I'm sure," said Sir George politely. "Where is she? I saw her not long ago."

He looked round in a perplexed manner.

"She ought to be judging the children's fancy dress.

I can't understand it. Excuse me a moment. I'll ask Miss Brewis."

He hurried off. De Sousa looked after him. Poirot looked at De Sousa.

"It is some little time since you last saw your

cousin? " he asked.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

" I have not seen her since she was fifteen years old.

Soon after that she was sent abroad to school at a convent in France. As a child she promised to have good looks."

He looked inquiringly at Poirot.

" She is a beautiful woman," said Poirot.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 87

" And that is her husband ? He seems what they call ' a good fellow,' but not perhaps very polished? Still, for Hattie it might be perhaps a little difficult to find a suitable husband."

Poirot remained with a politely inquiring expression on his face. The other laughed.

" Oh, it is no secret. At fifteen Hattie was mentally undeveloped. Feeble minded, do you not call it? She is still the same? "

"It would seem soyes," said Poirot cautiously.

De Sousa shrugged his shoulders.

" Ah, well! Why should one ask it of women that they should be intelligent? It is not necessary."

Sir George was back, fuming. Miss Brewis was with him, speaking rather breathlessly.

" I've no idea where she is, Sir George. I saw her over by the fortune teller's tent last. But that was at least twenty minutes or half an hour ago. She's not in the house."

" Is it not possible," asked Poirot, " that she has gone to observe the progress of Mrs. Oliver's murder hunt ? "

Sir George's brow cleared.

"That's probably it. Look here, I can't leave the shows here. I'm in charge. And Amanda's got her hands full. Could you possibly have a look round, Poirot? You know the course."

But Poirot did not know the course. However, an inquiry of Miss Brewis gave him rough guidance. Miss Brewis took brisk charge of De Sousa and Poirot went off murmuring to himself, like an incantation:

88 DEAD MAJ^FS FOLLY

"Tennis Court, Camellia Garden, The Folly, Upp""

Nursery Garden, Boathouse .. ."

As he passed the coconut shy he was amused to noti^ Sir George proffering wooden balls with a dazzling

smile of welcome to the same young Italian wom"1 whom he had driven off that morning and who ^as clearly puzzled at his change of attitude.

He went on his way to the tennis court. But tb^ was no one there but an old gentleman of military

aspect who was fast asleep on a garden seat with I118 hat pulled over his eyes. Poirot

retraced his steps to the house and went on down to the camellia garden- In the

camellia garden Poirot found Mrs. OH^ dressed in purple splendour, sitting on a garden s^1 in a brooding attitude, and looking rather like ^sSiddons.

She beckoned him to the seat beside her.

"This is only the second clue," she hissed. "I thilA I've made them too difficult.

Nobody's come yet."

At this moment a young man in shorts, with a prominent Adam's apple, entered the garden. With a cry of satisfaction he hurried to a tree in one corl^1' and a further satisfied cry announced his discovery ^ the next clue. Passing them, he felt impelled to communicate his satisfaction.

"Lots of people don't know about cork trees," he s^d confidentially. " Clever photograph, the first clue, b01 I spotted what it was--section of a tennis net. Thtf0 was a poison bottle, empty, and a cork. Most of 'el" will go all out after the bottle clue--I guessed it was a red herring. Very delicate, cork trees, only hardy I13

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 89

this part of the world. I'm interested in rare shrubs and trees. Now where does one go, I wonder?"

He frowned over the entry in the notebook he cayried.

"I've copied the next clue but it doesn't seem to make sense." He eyed them suspiciously. "You competing ?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Oliver. "We're just--looking - on."

"Righty-ho. ... * When lovely woman stoops to folly,,' . . . I've an idea I've heard that somewhere."

"It is a well-known quotation," said Poirot.

"A Folly can also be a building," said Mrs. Oliver helpfully. " White--with pillars," she added.

" That's an idea! Thanks a lot. They say Mrs. Ariadne Oliver is down here herself somewhere about. I'd like to get her autograph. You haven't seen her about, have you? "

" No," said Mrs. Oliver firmly.

"I'd like to meet her. Good yarns she writes."* He lowered his voice. "But they say she drinks like a fish."

He hurried off and Mrs. Oliver said indignantly:

"Really! That's most unfair when I only like lemonade! "

"And have you not just perpetrated the great unfairness in helping that young man towards the next clue?"

"Considering he's the only one who's got here so far, I thought he ought to be encouraged."

"But you wouldn't give him your autograph."*

90 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

That's different," said Mrs. Oliver. " Sht Here come some more."

But these were not clue hunters. They were two women who having paid for admittance were determined to get their money's worth by seeing the grounds thoroughly.

They were hot and dissatisfied.

"You'd think they'd have some nice flower-beds." said one to the other. "Nothing but trees and more trees. It's not what I call a garden.9'

Mrs. Oliver nudged Poirot, and they slipped quietly away.

"Supposing," said Mrs. Oliver distractedly, "that nobody ever finds my body? "

" Patience, Madame, and courage," said Poirot. "The afternoon is still young."

"That's true," said Mrs. Oliver brightening. "And it's half-price admission after four-thirty, so probably lots of people will flock in. Let's go and see how that Marlene child is getting on. I don't really trust that girl, you know. No sense of responsibility. I wouldn't put it past her to sneak away quietly, instead of being

a corpse, and go and have tea. You know what people are like about their teas."

They proceeded amicably along the woodland path and Poirot commented on the geography of the property.

"I find it very confusing," he said. "So many paths, and one is never sure where they lead. And trees, trees everywhere."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 91

"You sound like that disgruntled woman we've just left."

They passed the Folly and zig-zagged down the path to the river. The outlines of the boathouse showed beneath them.

Poirot remarked that it would be awkward if the murder searchers were to light upon the boathouse and find the body by accident.

"A sort of short cut? I thought of that. That's why the last clue is just a key. You can't unlock the door without it. It's a Yale. You can only open it from the inside."

A short steep slope led down to the door of the boathouse which was built out over the river, with a little wharf and a storage place for boats underneath. Mrs. Oliver took a key from a pocket concealed amongst her purple folds and unlocked the door.

"We've just come to cheer you up, Marlene," she said brightly as she entered.

She felt slightly remorseful at her unjust suspicions of Mariene's loyalty, for Marlene, artistically arranged as "the body" was playing her part nobly, sprawled on the floor by the window.

Marlene made no response. She lay quite motionless. The wind blowing gently through the open window rustled a pile of "comics" spread out on the table.

"It's all right," said Mrs. Oliver impatiently. "It's only me and M. Poirot. Nobody's got any distance with the clues yet."

Poirot was frowning. Very gently he pushed Mrs.

ga DEAD MAJ^TS FOLLr

Oliver aside and went and bent over the girl on the floor. A suppressed exclamation came from his lips. He looked up at Mrs. Oliver.

"So . . ." he said. "That which you expected has happened."

"You don't mean.. " Mrs- Oliver's eyes widened in horror. She grasped for one of the basket chairs and sat down. "You can't mean . . . She isn't dead}"

Poirot nodded.

"Oh, yes," he said. "She is dead. Though not very long dead."

"But how?"

He lifted the corner of the gay scarf bound round the girl's head, so that Mrs. Oliver could see the ends of the clothes line.

"Just like my murder," said Mrs. Oliver unsteadily.

"But who} And vohy^"

"That is the question," said Poirot.

He forbore to add that those had also been her questions.

And that the answers to them could not be her answers, since the victim was not the Yugoslavian first wife of an Atom Scientist, but Marine Tucker, a fourteen-year-old village girl who, as far as was known, had not an enemy in the world.

CHAPTER VII

detective inspector bland sat behind a table in the study. Sir George had met him on arrival, had taken him down to the boathouse and had now returned with

him to the house. Down at the boathouse a photographic unit was now busy and the fingerprint men and the medical officer had just arrived.

"This do for you here all right? " asked Sir George.

"Very nicely, thank you, sir."

"What am I to do about this show that's .going on, tell 'em about it, stop it, or what ?
"

Inspector Bland considered for a moment or two.

"What have you done so far. Sir George?" he asked.

"Haven't said anything. There's a sort of idea floating round that there's been an accident. Nothing more than that. I don't think anyone's suspected yet that it's--er--well, murder."

"Then leave things as they are just for the moment," decided Bland. "The news will get round fast enough, I dare say," he added cynically. He thought again for a moment or two before asking, "How many people do you think there are at this affair?"

"Couple of hundred I should say," answered Sir George, "and more pouring in every moment. People seem to have come from a good long way round. In

93

^ DEAD MAN'S FOLLY fact the wh0^ thing's being a roaring success. Damned unfortunat6Inspectoi'

Bland inferred correctly that it was the murder an^ not the success of the fete to which Sir George wa^ referring.

"A coup^ f hundred," he mused, "and any one of them I su^P086* could have done it."

He sighe""

"Tricky ^ sal(! Sir George sympathetically. "But I don't see ^hat reason any one of them could have had. The ^^ole thing seems quite fantastic--don't see who ^uld want to go murdering a girl like that."

"How ro^h can you ^l me about the girl? She was a local girl' I understand?"

"Yes. H^ people live in one of the cottages down near the q^y- Her father works at one of the local farms_pa^^o11'8) I think." He added, "The mother is here at ^e f61^ tms afternoon. Miss Brewis--that's my secret^yi an(! s^e can t^l yo11 about everything

much bett^ than I can--Miss Brewis winkled the woman oV1 an(! has got her somewhere, giving her

cups 01 tea'

"Quite ^" said the inspector, approvingly. "I'm

not quite clear yet, Sir George, as to the circumstances of all this. What was the girl doing down there in the boathouse? I understand there's some kind of a murder hunt--or treasure hunt, going on."

Sir George nodded.

"Yes. I thought it rather a bright idea. Doesn't

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 95

seem quite so bright now. I think Miss Brewis can probably explain it all to you better than I can. I'll send her to you, shall I? Unless there's anything else you want to know about first."

"Not at the moment, Sir George. I may have more questions to ask you later. There are people I shall want to see. You, and Lady Stubbs, and the people who discovered the body. One of them, I gather, is the woman novelist who designed this murder hunt as you call it."

"That's right. Mrs. Oliver. Mrs. Ariadne Oliver."

The inspector's eyebrows went up slightly.

"Ohher!" he said. "Quite a best-seller. I've read a lot of her books myself "

"She's a bit upset at present," said Sir George,

"naturally, I suppose. I'll tell her you'll be wanting her, shall I? I don't know where my wife is. She seems to have disappeared completely from view. Somewhere among the two or three hundred, I suppose not that she'll be able to tell you much. I mean about the girl or anything like that. Who would you like to see first?"

"I think perhaps your secretary. Miss Brewis, and after that the girl's mother."

Sir George nodded and left the room.

The local police constable Robert Hoskins, opened the door for him and shut it after he went out. He then volunteered a statement obviously intended as a commentary on some of Sir George's remarks.

"Lady Stubbs is a bit wanting," he said, "up here"

96 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

He tapped his forehead. "That's why he said she wouldn't be much help. Scatty, that's what she is."

"Did he marry a local girl? "

" No. Foreigner of some sort. Coloured, some say, but I don't think that's so myself."

Bland nodded. He was silent for a moment, doodling with a pencil on a sheet of paper in front of him.

Then he asked a question which was clearly off the record.

" Who did it, Hoskins ? " he said.

If anyone did have any ideas as to what had been going on, Bland thought, it would be P.O. Hoskins.

Hoskins was a man of inquisitive mind with a great interest in everybody and everything. He had a gossiping wife and that, taken with his position as local constable, provided him with vast stores of information of a personal nature.

"Foreigner, if you ask me. 'Twouldn't be anyone local. The Fuckers is all right. Nice, respectable family. Nine of 'em all told. Two of the older girls is married, one boy in the Navy, the other one's doing his

National Service, another girl's over to a hairdresser's at Torquay. There's three younger ones at home, two boys and a girl." He paused, considering. "None of 'em's what you'd call bright, but Mrs. Tucker keeps her home nice, clean as a pin--youngest of eleven, she was. She's got her old father living with her."

Bland received this information in silence. Given in Hoskins's particular idiom, it was an outline of the Fuckers ' social position and standing.

DEAD AfAM-'S FOLLY 97

That's why I say it was a foreigner" continued Hoskiris. "One of those that stop up to the Hostel at Hoodown, likely as not. There's sornb queer ones among themand a lot of goings-on. Be surprised, you would, at what I've seen 'em doing in the bushes and the woods! Every bit as bad as what goes on in parked cars along the Common."

P.C. Hoskins was by this time an absolute specialist on the subject of sexual "goings-on." They formed a

large portion of his Conversation when off duty and having his pint in the Bull and Bear. Bland said:

"I don't think the-e was anythingwell, of that kind. The doctor will tell us, of course, as \$oon as he's finished his examination."

"Yes, sir, that'll be up to him, that wiill. But what I say i, you never knc>w with foreigners. Turn nasty, they can, all in a mon^ent."

Inspector Bland sighed as he thought to himself that it was not quite as ea^y 35 ^at. It was all very well for Constable Hoskins to put the blame conveniently on "foreigners." Th& door opened and the doctor walked in.

"Done my bit," he ^marked. "Shall they take her away now? The other, outfits have packed up."

"Sergeant Cottrill vyill attend to that," said Bland.

"Well, Doc, what's th& finding? "

"Simple and straightforward as it can be," said the doctor. "Nocomplications. Garrotted v^ith a piece of clothes line. Nothing <could be simpler o:r easier to do. No struggle of any ki[nd beforehand. I'd say the kid

98 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

didn't know what was happening to her until it had happened."

"Any signs of assault? "

"None. No assault, signs of rape, or interference of any kind."

" Not presumably a sexual crime, then ? "

"I wouldn't say so, no." The doctor added, "I shouldn't say she'd been a particularly attractive girl."

"Was she fond of the boys? "

Bland addressed this question to Constable Hoskins.

"I wouldn't say they'd much use for her," said Constable Hoskins, " though maybe she'd have liked it if they had."

" Maybe," agreed Bland. His mind went back to the pile of comic papers in the boathouse and the idle scrawls on the margin. "Johnny goes with Kate,"

" Georgie Porgie kisses hikers in the wood." He thought

there had been a little wishful thinking there. On the whole, though, it seemed unlikely that there was a sex angle to Marlene Tucker's death. Although, of course, one never knew. . . . There were always those queer criminal individuals, men with a secret lust to kill, who specialised in immature female victims. One of these might be present in this part of the world during this holiday season. He almost believed that it must be so for otherwise he could really see no reason for so pointless a crime. However, he thought, we're only at the beginning. I'd better see what all these people have to tell me.

"What about time of death?" he asked.

DEAD MAJVS FOLLY 99

The doctor glanced over at the clock and his own watch.

"Just after half-past five now," he said. "say I saw her about twenty past five she'd been dead 'bout an hour. Roughly, that is to say. Put it between four o'clock and twenty to five. Let you know if there's anything more after the autopsy." He added: "You'll get the proper report with the long words in due course. I'll be off now. I've got some patients to see."

He left the room and Inspector Bland asked Hoskins to fetch Miss Brewis. His spirits rose a little when Miss Brewis came into the room. Here, as he recognised at once, was efficiency. He would get clear answers to his questions, definite times and no muddle-headedness.

"Mrs. Tucker's in my sitting-room," Miss Brewis said as she sat down. "I've broken the news to her and given her some tea. She's very upset, naturally. She wanted to see the body but I told her it was much better not. Mr. Tucker gets off work at six o'clock and was coming to join his wife here. I told them to look out for him and bring him along when he arrives. The younger children are at the fete still, and someone is keeping an eye on them."*

"Excellent," said Inspector Bland, with approval. * I

think before I see Mrs. Tucker I would like to hear what you and Lady Stubbs can tell me."

"I don't know where Lady Stubbs is," said Miss Brewis acidly. "I rather imagine she got bot-ed with the fete and has wandered off somewhere, but I don't

100 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

expect she can tell you anything more than I can.

What exactly is it that you want to know?"

"I want to know all the details of this murder hunt first and of how this girl, Mariene Tucker, came to be taking a part in it."

"That's quite easy."

Succinctly and clearly Miss Brewis explained the idea of the murder hunt as an original attraction for the fete, the engaging of Mrs. Oliver, the well-known novelist, to arrange the matter, and a short outline of the plot.

"Originally," Miss Brewis explained, "Mrs. Alee Legge was to have taken the part of the victim."

"Mrs. Alee Legge?" queried the inspector.

Constable Hoskins put in an explanatory word.

"She and Mr. Legge have the Lawders' cottage, the pink one down by Mill Creek. Came here a month ago, they did. Two or three months they got it for."

"I see. And Mrs. Legge, you say, was to be the original victim? Why was that changed?"

"Well, one evening Mrs. Legge told all our fortunes and was so good at it that it was decided we'd have a fortune teller's tent as one of the attractions and that Mrs. Legge should put on Eastern dress and be Madame Zuleika and tell fortunes at half a crown a time. I don't think that's really illegal, is it. Inspector? I mean it's usually done at these kind of fetes."

Inspector Bland smiled faintly.

"Fortune telling and raffles aren't always taken too

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 101

seriously, Miss Brewis," he said. "Now and then we

have to make an example."

" But usually you're tactful ? Well, that's how it was. Mrs. Legge agreed to help us that way and so we had to find somebody else to do the body. The local Guides were helping us at the fete, and I think someone suggested that one of the Guides would do quite well."

"Just who was it who suggested that. Miss Brewis? "

** Really, I don't quite know. ... I think it may have been Mrs. Masterton, the Member's wife. No, perhaps it was Captain Warburton. . . . Really, I can't be sure. But, anyway, it was suggested."

" Is there any reason why this particular girl should have been chosen?"

"N-no, I don't think so. Her people are tenants on the estate, and her mother, Mrs. Tucker, sometimes comes to help in the kitchen. I don't know quite why we settled on her. Probably her name came to mind first. We asked her and she seemed quite pleased to do it."

"She definitely wanted to do it? "

" Oh, yes, I think she was flattered. She was a very moronic kind of girl," continued Miss Brewis, "she couldn't have acted a part or anything like that. But this was all very simple, and she felt she'd been singled out from the others and was pleased about it."

" What exactly was it that she had to do ? "

" She had to stay in the boathouse. When she heard anyone coming to the door she was to lie down on the floor, put the cord round her neck and sham dead."

loa DEAD MAJ'S FOLLY Miss Brewis's tones were calm and business-like. The fact that the girl who was to sham dead had actually been found dead did not at the moment appear to affect her emotionally.

" Rather a boring way for the girl to spend the afternoon when she might have been at the fete," suggested Inspector Bland.

"I suppose it was in a way," said Miss Brewis, "but one can't have everything, can one? And Marlene did enjoy the idea of being the body. It made her feel

important. She had a pile of papers and things to read to keep her amused."

" And something to eat as well ? " said the inspector.

"I noticed there was a tray down there with a plate and glass."

" Oh, yes, she had a big plate of sweet cakes, and a raspberry fruit drink. I took them down to her myself." Bland looked up sharply.

"You took them down to her? When? "

" About the middle of the afternoon."

"What time exactly? Can you remember? "

Miss Brewis considered a moment.

"Let me see. Children's Fancy Dress was judged, there was a little delay--Lady Stubbs couldn't be found, but Mrs. Folliat took her place, so that was all right.

. . . Yes, it must have been--I'm almost sure--about five minutes past four that I collected the cakes and the fruit drink."

" And you took them down to her at the boathouse yourself. What time did you reach there? "

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 103

" Oh, it takes about five minutes to go down to the boathouse--about quarter past four, I should think."

" And at quarter past four Mariene Tucker was alive and well ?"

" Yes, of course," said Miss Brewis, " and very eager to know how people were getting on with the murder hunt, too. I'm afraid I couldn't tell her. I'd been too busy with the side shows on the lawn, but I did know that a lot of people had entered for it. Twenty or thirty to my own knowledge. Probably a good many more."

" How did you find Mariene when you arrived at the boathouse ?"

"I've just told you."

"No, no, I don't mean that. I mean, was she lying on the floor shamming dead when you opened the door?"

"Oh, no," said Miss Brewis, "because I called out

just before I got there. So she opened the door and I took the tray in and put it on the table."

"At a quarter past four," said Bland, writing it down, "Mariene Tucker was alive and well. You will understand, I'm sure, Miss Brewis, that that is a very important point. You are quite sure of your times?"

"I can't be exactly sure because I didn't look at my watch, but I had looked at it a short time previously and that's as near as I can get." She added, with a sudden dawning realisation of the inspector's point, "Do you mean that it was soon after----"

"It can't have been very long after, Miss Brewis.*

104 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Oh, dear," said Miss Brewis.

It was a rather inadequate expression) but nevertheless it conveyed well enough Miss Brewis's dismay and concern.

"Now, Miss Brewis, on your way down to the boathouse and on your way back again to the house, did you meet anybody or see anyone near the boathouse?" Miss Brewis considered.

No," she said, "I didn't meet anyone. I might have, of course, because the grounds are open to everyone this afternoon. But on the whole, people tend to stay round the lawn and the side shows and all that. They like to go round the kitchen gardens and the greenhouses, but they don't walk through the woodlands as much as I should have thought they would. People tend to herd together very much at these affairs, don't you think so, Inspector?"

The inspector said that that was probably so. "Though, I think," said Miss Brewis, with sudden

memory, "that there was someone in the Folly."

"The Folly?"

"Yes. A small white temple arrangement. It was put up just a year or two ago. It's to the right of the path as you go down to the boathouse. There was someone in there. A courting couple ^ inspect. Someone was laughing and then someone s^d, 'Hush.'"

"You don't know who this courting couple was? "
"I've no idea. You can't see the front of the Folly
from the path. The sides and back are enclosed."

The inspector thought for a moment or two, but it

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 105

did not seem likely to him that the couple whoever
they were in the Folly were important. Better find
out who they were, perhaps, because they in their turn
might have seen someone coming up from or going
down to the boathouse.

"And there was no one else on the path? No one at
all?" he insisted.

"I see what you're driving at, of course," said Miss
Brewis. "I can only assure you that I didn't meet
anyone. But then, you see, I needn't have. I mean, if
there had been anyone on the path who didn't want
to see them, it's the simplest thing in the world
just to slip behind some of the rhododendron bushes.
The path's bordered on both sides with shrubs and
rhododendron bushes. If anyone who had no business
to be there heard someone coming along the path, they
could slip out of sight in a moment."

The inspector shifted on to another tack.

"Is there anything you know about this girl yourself,
that could help us?" he asked.

"I really know nothing about her," said Miss Brewis.
"I don't think I'd ever spoken to her until this affair.
She's one of the girls I've seen about I know her
vaguely by sight, but that's all."

"And you know nothing about her nothing that
could be helpful?"

"I don't know of any reason why anyone should want
to murder her," said Miss Brewis. "In fact it seems to
me, if you know what I mean, quite impossible that
such a thing should have happened. I can only think

106 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

that to some unbalanced mind, the fact that she was

to be the murdered victim might have induced the wish to make her a real victim. But even that sounds very far fetched and silly."

Bland sighed.

"Oh, well," he said, "I suppose I'd better see the mother now."

Mrs. Tucker was a thin, hatchet-faced woman with stringy blonde hair and a sharp nose. Her eyes were reddened with crying, but she had herself in hand now, and was ready to answer the inspector's questions.

"Doesn't seem right that a thing like that should happen," she said. "You read of these things in the papers, but that it should happen to our Mariene"

"I'm very, very sorry about it," said Inspector Bland gently. "What I want you to do is to think as hard as you can and tell me if there is anyone who could have had any reason to harm the girl ? "

"I've been thinking about that already," said Mrs. Tucker, with a sudden sniff. "Thought and thought, I have, but I can't get anywhere. Words with the teacher at school Mariene had now and again, and she'd have her quarrels now and again with one of the girls or boys, but nothing serious in any way. There's no one who had a real down on her, nobody who'd do her a mischief."

"She never talked to you about anyone who might have been an enemy of any kind? "

" She talked silly often, Mariene did, but nothing of that kind. It was all make-up and hair-dos, and what

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 107

she'd like to do to her face and herself. You know what girls are. Far too young she was, to put on lipstick and all that muck, and her Dad told her so, and so did I. But that's what she'd do when she got hold of any money. Buy herself scent and lipsticks and hide them away."

Bland nodded. There was nothing here that could help him. An adolescent, rather silly girl, her head full of film stars and glamourtiere were hundreds of

Marlenes.

"What her Dad'll say, I don't know," said Mrs. Tucker. "Coming here any minute he'll be, expecting to enjoy himself. He's a rare shot at the coconuts, he is." She broke down suddenly and began to sob.

"If you ask me," she said, "it's one of them nasty foreigners up at the Hostel. You never know where you are with foreigners. Nice spoken as most of them are, some of the shirts they wear you wouldn't believe. Shirts with girls on them with these bikinis, as they call them. And all of them sunning themselves here and there with no shirts at all on it all leads to trouble. That's what I say!"

Still weeping, Mrs. Tucker was escorted from the room by Constable Hoskins. Bland reflected that the local verdict seemed to be the comfortable and probably age-long one of attributing every tragic occurrence to unspecified foreigners.

CHAP111 SIR VII1

-got a sharp tongue, sb^," H(s)kins said ^eiihe returned. "Nags her b^-Wd ^d bulhes ^r old father. I dare say she's s^s sharp to the ?1 o^e or twice and now she's fe^g bad bout ". N.01 that girls mind what their m^rs sayt0 them- Dfops off 'em like water off a dud'lll(::ls.ack" Inspector Bland cut st^i these 8^^l reflections and told Hoskins to fetc'i^^rs. ol^er, .

The inspector was sl^tly ^tled ^ th^ sight of Mrs. Oliver. He hMaot expected anytlxing so voluminous, so purple a^to szicba- state of em^otional disturbance. i ,

"I feel awful," said M^bliver, ^^8 dowia in the chair in front of hil^ ^e a F11^ ^^nc^alige.

"awful," she added i^bat ^^ ^ly capital letters.

The inspector made ^W anit'ig"ous noi&es, ^nd Mrs. Oliver swept on.

"Because, you see. i^ mur^ I did u! ..

For a startled momenl^pectolB1^ thought that Mrs. Oliver was accusi^Wel^1^"1^

"Why I should ever have been the wife of an Atom Scientist to imagine.-said Mrs. Oliver sheepily her hand with '008

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 109

her elaborate hair-do in a frenzied manner with the result that she looked slightly drunk. "Absolutely asinine of me. It might just as well have been the second gardener who wasn't what he seemed--and that wouldn't have mattered half as much because, after all, most men can look after themselves. If they can't look after themselves they ought to be able to look after themselves, and in that case I shouldn't have minded so much. Men get killed and nobody minds--I mean, nobody except their wives and sweethearts and children and things like that."

At this point the inspector entertained unworthy suspicions about Mrs. Oliver. This was aided by the faint fragrance of brandy which was wafted towards him. On their return to the house Hercule Poirot had firmly administered to his friend this sovereign remedy for shocks.

"I'm not mad and I'm not drunk," said Mrs. Oliver intuitively divining his thoughts, "though I dare say with that man about who thinks I drink like a fish and says everybody says so, you probably think so

too."

"What man?" demanded the inspector, his mind switching from the unexpected introduction of the second gardener into the drama, to the further introduction of an unspecified man.

"Freckles and a Yorkshire accent," said Mrs. Oliver.

"But, as I say, I'm not drunk and I'm not mad. I'm just upset. Thoroughly upset," she repeated, once more resorting to capital letters.

no DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"I'm sure, madam, it must have been most distressing," said the inspector.

"The awful thing is," said Mrs. Oliver, "that she wanted to be a sex maniac's victim, and now I suppose she was which should I mean? "

"There's no question of a sex maniac," said the inspector.

"Isn't there?" said Mrs. Oliver. "Well, thank God for that. Or at least, I don't know. Perhaps she would rather have had it that way. But if he wasn't a sex maniac, why did anybody murder her, Inspector? "

"I was hoping," said the inspector, "that you could help me there."

Undoubtedly, he thought, Mrs. Oliver had put her finger on the crucial point. Why should anyone murder Marlene ?

" I can't help you," said Mrs. Oliver. " I can't imagine who could have done it. At least, of course, I can, imagine I can imagine anything! That's the trouble with me. I can imagine things now this minute, (could even make them sound all right, but of course none of them would be true. I mean, she could have been murdered by someone who just likes murdering girls (but that's too easy) and, anyway, too much of a coincidence that somebody should be at this fete who wanted to murder a girl. And how would he know that: Marlene was in the boathouse? Or she might have known some secret about somebody's love affairs, or she may have seen someone bury a body at night, or she may have recognised somebody who was concealing his

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY identity--or she may have known a secret about where some treasure was buried during the war. Or the man in the launch may have thrown somebody into the river and she saw it from the window of the boathouse

--or she may even have got hold of some very important message in secret code and not known what it was herself."

" Please! " The inspector held up his hand. His head was whirling.

Mrs. Oliver stopped obediently. It was clear that she could have gone on in this vein for some time, although

it seemed to the inspector that she had already envisaged every possibility, likely or otherwise. Out of the richness of the material presented to him, he seized upon one phrase.

"What did you mean, Mrs. Oliver, by the (man in the launch'? Are you just imagining a man in a launch?"

"Somebody told me he'd come in a launch," said Mrs. Oliver. "I can't remember who. The one we were talking about at breakfast, I mean," she added.

"Please." The inspector's tone was now pleading.

He had had no idea before what the writers of detective stories were like. He knew that Mrs. Oliver had written forty-odd books. It seemed to him astonishing at the moment that she had not written a hundred and forty. He rapped out a peremptory inquiry. "What is all this about a man at breakfast who came in a launch?"

"He didn't come in the launch at breakfast time,"

iiia DEAD MAJTS FOLLY

said Mrs. Oliver," it was a yacht. At least, I don't mean that exactly. It was a letter."

"Well, what was it? " demanded Bland. "A yacht or a letter?"

"It was a letter," said Mrs. Oliver, "to Lady Stubbs. From a cousin in a yacht. And she was frightened," she ended.

"Frightened? What of?"

"Of him, I suppose," said Mrs. Oliver. "Anybody could see it. She was terrified of him and she didn't want him to come, and I think that's why she's hiding now."

"Hiding?" said the inspector.

"Well, she isn't about anywhere," said Mrs. Oliver.

"Everyone's been looking for her. And / think she's hiding because she's afraid of him and doesn't want to meet him."

"Who is this man? " demanded the inspector.

"You'd better ask M. Poirot," said Mrs. Oliver.

"Because he spoke to him and I haven't. His name's Estabanno, it isn't, that was in my plot. De Sousa, that's what his name is, Etienne de Sousa."

But another name had caught the inspector's attention.

"Who did you say?" he asked. "Mr. Poirot?"

"Yes. Hercule Poirot. He was with me when we found the body."

"Hercule Poirot. ... I wonder now. Can it be the same man? A Belgian, a small man with a very big moustache."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLr 113

"An enormous moustache," agreed Mrs. Oliver.

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"It's a good many years since I met him. I was a young sergeant at the time."

"You met him on a murder case?"

"Yes, I did. What's he doing down here?"

"He was to give away the prizes," said Mrs. Oliver.

There was a momentary hesitation before she gave this answer, but it went unperceived by the inspector.

"And he was with you when you discovered the body," said Bland. "H'm, I'd like to talk to him."

"Shall I get him for you?" Mrs. Oliver gathered up her purple draperies hopefully.

"There's nothing more that you can add, madam?"

Nothing more that you think could help us in any way?"

"I don't think so," said Mrs. Olivet. "I don't know anything. As I say, I could imagine reasons"

The inspector cut her short. He had no wish to hear any more of Mrs. Oliver's imagined solutions. They were far too confusing.

"Thank you very much, madam," he said briskly.

"If you'll ask M. Poirot to come and speak to me here I shall be very much obliged to you."

Mrs. Oliver left the room. P.O. Hoskins inquired with interest:

"Who's this Monsieur Poirot, sir? '*"

" You'd describe him probably as a scream " said Inspector Bland. "Kind of music hall parody of a Frenchman, but actually he's a Belgian. But in spite of his absurdities, he's got brains. He must be a fair age now."

ii4 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

of his absurdities, he's got brains. He must be a fair age now."

"What about this De Sousa?" asked the constable.

"Think there's anything in that, sir?"

Inspector Bland did not hear the question. He was struck by a fact which, though he had been told it several times, was only now beginning to register.

First it had been Sir George, irritated and alarmed.

"My wife seems to have disappeared. I can't think where she has got to." Then Miss Brewis, contemptuous:

"Lady Stubbs was not to be found. She'd got

bored with the show." And now Mrs. Oliver with her theory that Lady Stubbs was hiding.

"Eh? What? " he said absently.

Constable Hoskins cleared his throat.

"I was asking you, sir, if you thought there was anything in this business of De Sousa--whoever he is."

Constable Hoskins was clearly delighted at having a specific foreigner rather than foreigners in the mass, introduced into the case. But Inspector Bland's mind was running on a different course.

"I want Lady Stubbs," he said curtly. "Get hold of her for me. If she isn't about, look for her."

Hoskins looked slightly puzzled but he left the room obediently. In the doorway he paused and fell back a little to allow Hercule Poirot to enter. He looked back over his shoulder with some interest before closing the door behind him.

" I don't suppose," said Bland, rising and holding out his hand, " that you remember me, M. Poirot."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY (15

"But assuredly," said Poirot. "It is now give me

a moment,, just a little moment. It is the young
sergeantyes, Sergeant Bland whom I met fourteen
no, fifteen years ago."

"Quite right. What a memory! "

" Not at all. Since you remember me, why should I
not remember you?"

It would be difficulty Bland thought, to forget
Hercule Poirot, and this not entirely for complimentary
reasons.

" So here you are, M. Poirot," he said. " Assisting at
a murder once again."

" You are right," said Poirot. " I was called down here
to assist."

" Called down to assist ?" Bland looked puzzled.

Poirot said quickly:

"I mean, I was asked down here to give away the
prizes of this murder hunt."

" So Mrs. Oliver told me."

"She told you nothing else?" Poirot said it with
apparent carelessness. He was anxious to discover
whether Mrs. Oliver had given the Inspector any hint
of the real motives which had led her to insist on
Poirot's journey to Devon.

"Told me nothing else? She never stopped telling
me things. Every possible and impossible motive for
the girl's murder. She set my head spinning. Phew!
What an imagination! "

" She earns her living by her imagination, man ami"
said Poirot dryly.

n6 DE^ MANIS FOLLr

-She mentioned a man called De Sousa-did she
imagine that?"

"No, that is sob^ fact"" " There was some^^S abovit a letter at breakfast and
a yacht and coming "P the nver in a launch- I couldntt
pounds **.)9

make head or tail Poirot embarked ^P011 an emanation. He told of the
scene at the break^ table' the letter Lady Stubbs's
headache. "Mrs. Oliver sai^ that Lady stubbs was frightened.

Did you think she ^as afraid't00 ? " "That was the impression she gave me"

"Afraid of this cousin of hers ? Why?"

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no idea. As she told me was that he was bad-a bad man. She is' V011 understand, a little simple.

Subnormal."

"Yes, that seems to be Poirot's own round here. She didn't say she was afraid of this De Sousa?"

"No."

"But you think her fear was real ? "

"If it was not, then she is a very clever actress," said

Poirot dryly.

"I'm beginning to have some odd ideas about this case," said Bland. He stepped and walked slowly to

and fro. "It's that cursed woman's fault. I believe."

"Mrs. Oliver's?" "Yes She's out of our dramatic ideas into my head."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"And you think they may be true? "

"Not all of them naturally but one or two of them mightn't be as wild as they sounded. It all depends _ .

He broke off as the door opened to re-admission

Hoskins.

"Don't seem able to find the lady, sir," he said. she's not about anywhere."

"I know that already," said Bland irritably. "You find her."

"Sergeant Farrell and P.C. Lorimer are searching the grounds, sir," said Hoskins. "She's not in the house " he added.

"Find out from the man who's taking admission tickets at the gate if she's left the place. Either, on foot or in a car."

"Yes, sir."

Hoskins departed.

"And find out when she was last seen and where"

Bland shouted after him.

"So that is the way your mind is working "

Poirot.

"It isn't working anywhere yet," said Bland "but

I've just woken up to the fact that a lady who taught to be on the premises isn't on the premises 1 Any j want to know why. Tell me what more you kno,-^ about what's-his-name De Sousa."

Poirot described his meeting with the youing man who had come up the path from the quay.

"He is probably still here at the fete," he said.

"Shall I tell Sir George that you want to see him? "

n8 DEAD MAJ^S FOLLY

"Not for a moment or two," said Bland. "I'd like to find out a little more first. When did you yourself last see Lady Stubbs? "

Poirot cast his mind back. He found it difficult to remember exactly. He recalled vague glimpses of her tall, cyclamen-clad figure with the drooping black hat moving about the lawn talking to people, hovering here and there; occasionally he would hear that strange loud laugh of hers, distinctive amongst the many other confused sounds.

" I think," he said doubtfully, " it must have been not long before four o'clock."

"And where was she then, and who was she with? "

" She was in the middle of a group of people near the house."

" Was she there when De Sousa arrived ?"

"I don't remember. I don't think so, at least I did not see her. Sir George told De Sousa that his wife was somewhere about. He seemed surprised, I remember, that she was not judging the Children's Fancy Dress, as she was supposed to do."

" What time was it when De Sousa arrived ? "

"It must have been about half-past four, I should think. I did not look at my watch so I cannot tell you exactly."

"And Lady Stubbs had disappeared before he arrived?"

" It seems so."

"Possibly she ran away so as not to meet him," suggested the inspector.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 119

"possibly," Poirot agreed.

"Well, she can't have gone far," said Bland. "We ought to be able to find her quite easily, and when we do . . ." He broke off.

"And supposing you don't?" Poirot put the question with a curious intonation in his voice.

"That's nonsense," said the inspector vigorously.

"Why? What do you think's happened to her?"

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"What indeed? One does not know. All one does know is that she has disappeared!"

"Dash it all, M. Poirot, you're making it sound quite sinister."

"Perhaps it is sinister."

"It's the murder of Marlene Tucker that we're investigating," said the inspector severely.

"But evidently. So why this interest in De Sousa?"

"Do you think he killed Marlene Tucker?"

Inspector Bland replied irrelevantly:

"It's that woman!"

Poirot smiled faintly.

"Mrs. Oliver, you mean?"

"Yes. You see, M. Poirot, the murder of Marlene Tucker doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense at all. Here's a nondescript, rather moronic kid found strangled and not a hint of any possible motive."

"And Mrs. Oliver supplied you with a motive?"

"With a dozen at least! Amongst them she suggested that Marlene might have a knowledge of somebody's secret love affair, or that Marlene might have witnessed

somebody being murdered, or that she knew where a buried treasure was hidden, or that she might have seen from the window of the boathouse some action performed by De Sousa in his launch as he was going up the river."

"Ah. And which of those theories appeals to you, mon cher?"

"I don't know. But I can't help thinking about them."

Listen, M. Poirot. Think back carefully. Would you say from your impression of what Lady Stubbs said to you this morning that she was afraid of her cousin's coming because he might, perhaps, know something about her which she did not want to come to the ears of her husband, or would you say that it was a direct personal fear of the man himself?"

Poirot had no hesitation in his reply.

"I should say it was a direct personal fear of the man himself."

"H'm," said Inspector Bland. "Well, I'd better have a little talk with this young man if he's still about the place."

A

CHAPTER IX

although he had none of Constable Hosklins's ingrained prejudice against foreigners. Inspector Bland took an instant dislike to Etienne De Sousa. The polished elegance of the young man, his sartorial perfection, the rich flowery smell of his brilliantined hair, all combined to annoy the inspector.

De Sousa was very sure of himself, very much at ease. He also displayed, decorously veiled, a certain aloof amusement.

"One must admit," he said, "that life is full of surprises. I arrive here on a holiday cruise, I admire the beautiful scenery, I come to spend an afternoon with a little cousin that I have not seen for years--and what happens? First I am engulfed in a kind of carnival with coconuts whizzing past my head, and immediately afterwards, passing from comedy to tragedy, I am embroiled in a murder."

He lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply, and said:

"Not that it concerns me in any way, this murder. Indeed, I am at a loss to know why you should want to interview me."

"You arrived here as a stranger, Mr. De Sousa----"

De Sousa interrupted:

"And strangers are necessarily suspicious, is that it?"

iaa DE^D MAN'S FOLLY

"No, no, not at all, sir. No, you don't take my meaning. Your yacht, I understand, is moored in Helmmouth?"

"That is so, yes.'*

"And you came up the river this afternoon in a motor launch?"

"Againthat is so."

"As you came up the river, did you notice on your right a small boathouse jutting out into the river with a thatched roof and a little mooring quay underneath it?"

De Sousa threw back his handsome, dark head and frowned as he reflected.

" Let me see, thei-g ^as a creek and a small grey tiled house."

"Farther up the river than that, Mr. De Sousa. Set amongst trees."

" Ah, yes, I remember now. A very picturesque spot. I did not know it was the boathouse attached to this house. If I had doi^e so, I would have moored my boat there and come ashore. When I asked for directions I had been told to <:ome up to the ferry itself and go ashore at the quay there."

"Quite so. And that is what you did? '*

"That is what I did."

"You didn't land at, or near, the boathouse?"

De Sousa shook his head.

" Did you see anyone at the boathouse as you passed ? "

"See anyone? No. Should I have seen anyone? "

"It was just a possibility. You see, Mr. De Sousa, the

DEAD AfAJ^S FOLLY

murdered girl was in the boathouse this afternoon.

She was killed there, and she must have b^ killed at a time not very distant from when you w^p passing "

Again De Sousa raised his eyebrows.

"You think I might have been a wit^s to this

murder ?"

"The murder took place inside the boathouse but you might have seen the girl--she might have looked out from the window or come out on to the balcony. If you had seen her it would, at any rate, have narrowed the time of death for us. If, when you'd hissed she'd been still alive----"

" Ah, I see. Yes, I see. But why ask me articulately ? There are plenty of boats going up and down from Helmouth. Pleasure steamers. They pass the whole time. Why not ask them ? "

"We shall ask them," said the inspector. "Never fear, we shall ask them. I am to take it, that you saw nothing unusual at the boathouse ? "

"Nothing whatever. There was nothing to show there was anyone there. Of course I did not look at it with any special attention, and I did not go to the windows as you suggest, but if so I should not have seen that person." He added in a polite tone, " I am sorry that I cannot assist you." "Oh, well," said Inspector Bland in a friendly manner, " we can't hope for too much. There are just a few other things I would like to ask you. De Sousa."

CHAPTER 4 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Yes?"

"Are you alone down here or have you friends with you on this cruise? "

" I have had friends with me until quite recently, but for the last three days I have been on my own--with the crew, of course."

"And the name of your yacht, Mr. De Sousa ? "

"The Esperance"

"Lady Stubbs is, I understand, a cousin of yours? "

De Sousa shrugged his shoulders.

"A distant cousin. Not very near. In the islands, you must understand, there is much intermarrying. We are all cousins of one another. Hattie is a second

or third cousin. I have not seen her since she was practically a little girl, fourteen--fifteen."

"And you thought you would pay her a surprise visit today?"

"Hardly a surprise visit, Inspector. I had already written to her."

"I know that she received a letter from you this morning, but it was a surprise to her to know that you were in this country."

"Oh, but you are wrong there, Inspector. I wrote to my cousin--let me see, three weeks ago. I wrote to her from France just before I came across to this country."

The inspector was surprised.

"You wrote to her from France telling her you proposed to visit her?"

"Yes. I told her I was going on a yachting cruise and that we should probably arrive at Torquay or

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 125

Helm mouth round about this date, and that I would let her know later exactly when I should arrive."

Inspector Bland stared at him. This statement was at complete variance with what he had been told about the arrival of Etienne De Sousa's letter at the breakfast table. More than one witness had testified to Lady Stubbs having been alarmed and upset and very clearly startled at the contents of the letter. De Sousa returned his stare calmly. With a little smile he flicked a fragment of dust from his knee.

"Did Lady Stubbs reply to your first letter?" the inspector asked.

De Sousa hesitated for a moment or two before he answered, then he said:

"It is so difficult to remember.... No, I do not think she did. But it was not necessary. I was travelling about, I had no fixed address. And besides, I do not think my cousin, Hattie, is very good at writing letters." He added: "She is not, you know, very intelligent, though I understand that she has grown

into a very beautiful woman."

"You have not yet seen her?" Bland put it in the form of a question and De Sousa showed his teeth in an agreeable smile.

"She seems to be most unaccountably missing," he said. "No doubt this espice de gala bores her."

Choosing his words carefully, Inspector Bland said:
<t Have you any reason to believe, Mr. De Sousa, that your cousin might have some reason for wishing to avoid you ? *'

126 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Hattie wish to avoid me? Really, I do not see why. What reason could she have?"

"That is what I am asking you, Mr. De Sousa."

"You think that Hattie has absented herself from this fete in order to avoid me? What an absurd idea."

"She had no reason, as far as you know, to beshall we say? afraid of you in any way?"

"Afraid of me?" De Sousa's voice was sceptical and amused. "But if I may say so. Inspector, what a fantastic idea!"

"Your relations with her have always been quite amicable?"

"It is as I have told you. I have had no relations with her. I have not seen her since she was a child of

fourteen."

** Yet you look her up when you come to England?"

"Oh, as to that I had seen a paragraph about her in one of your society papers. It mentions her maiden name and that she is married to this rich Englishman, and I think 'I must see what the little Hattie has turned into. Whether her brains now work better than they used to do.'" He shrugged his shoulders again.

"It was a mere cousinly politeness. A gentle curiosity no more."

Again the inspector stared hard at De Sousa. What, he wondered, was going on behind the mocking, smooth facade? He adopted a more confidential

manner.

" I wonder if you can perhaps tell me a little more about your cousin? Her character, her reactions?"

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 127

De Sousa appeared politely surprised.

" Really has this anything to do with the murder of the girl in the boathouse, which I understand is the real matter with which you occupy yourself?"

" It might have a connection," said Inspector Bland.

De Sousa studied him for a moment or two in silence.

Then he said with a slight shrug of the shoulders:

" I never knew my cousin at all well. She was a unit in a large family and not particularly interesting to me. But in answer to your question I would say to you that although mentally weak, she was not, as far as I know, ever possessed by any homicidal tendencies."

"Really, Mr. De Sousa, I wasn't suggesting that!"

"Weren't you? I wonder. I can see no other reason for your question. No, unless Hattie has changed very much, she is not homicidal." He rose. "I am sure that you cannot want to ask me anything further, Inspector. I can only wish you every possible success in tracking down the murderer."

" You are not thinking of leaving Helmmouth for a day or two, I hope, Mr. De Sousa?"

"You speak very politely, Inspector. Is that an order?"

"Just a request, sir."

"Thank you. I propose to stay in Helmmouth for two days. Sir George has very kindly asked me to come and stay in the house, but I prefer to remain on the Esfi^rance. If you should want to ask me any further questions, that is where you will find me."

He bowed politely.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

P.C. Hoskins opened the door for him, and he went out.

" Smarmy sort of fellow," muttered the inspector to

himself.

"Aah," said P.C. Hoskins in complete agreement.

"Say she is homicidal if you like," went on the inspector, to himself. "Why should she attack a nondescript girl ? There'd be no sense in it."

"You never know with the barmy ones," said Hoskins.

"The question really is, how barmy is she?"

Hoskins shook his head sapiently.

" Got a low I.Q^, I reckon," he said.

The inspector looked at him with annoyance.

"Don't bring out these new-fangled terms like a parrot. I don't care if she's got a high I.Q^ or a low I.Q^ All I care about is, is she the sort of woman who'd think it funny, or desirable, or necessary, to put a cord round a girl's neck and strangle her? And where the devil is the woman, anyway? Go out and see how Frank's getting on."

Hoskins left obediently, and returned a moment or two later with Sergeant Cottrell, a brisk young man with a good opinion of himself, who always managed to annoy his superior officer. Inspector Bland much preferred the rural wisdom of Hoskins to the smart know-all attitude of Frank Cottrell.

"Still searching the grounds, sir," said Cottrell.

"The lady hasn't passed out through the gate, we're quite sure of that. It's the second gardener who's there

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT

t99

giving out the tickets and taking the admission money
He'll swear she hasn't left."

" There are other ways of leaving than by the main gate, I suppose? "

" Oh, yes, sir. There's the path down to the ferry but the old boy down there--Merdell, his name is--^o also quite positive that she hasn't left that way. He's about a hundred, but pretty reliable, I think. He described quite clearly how the foreign gentleman arrived in his launch and asked the way to Nasse House. The ol() man

told him he must go up the road to the gate and nav for admission. But he said the gentleman seem.ed to know nothing about the fete and said he was a relation of the family. So the old man set him on the part, >, from the ferry through the woods. Merdell seeing to have been hanging about the quay all the afternoon so he'd be pretty sure to have seen her ladyship if she'd come that way. Then there's the top gate that leads over the fields to Hoodown Park, but that's been \vired up because of trespassers, so she didn't go through there. Seems as though she must be still here, doesn't it?"

"That may be so," said the inspector, "but there's nothing to prevent her, is there, from slipping Under a fence and going off across country? Sir Geor&g still complaining of trespassing here from the h^ostel next door, I understand. If you can get in the wa^y the trespassers get in, you can get out the same w^y t suppose."

" Oh, yes, sir, indubitably, sir. But I've talked t^> h-.

130 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

maid, sir. She's wearing "Cottrell consulted a paper in his hand" a dress of cyclamen crepe georgette (whatever that is), a large black hat, black court shoes with four-inch french heels. Not the sort of things you'd wear for a cross-country run."

"She didn't change her clothes? "

"No. I went into that with the maid. There's nothing missing nothing whatever. She didn't pack a suitcase or anything of that kind. She didn't even change her shoes. Every pair's there and accounted for."

Inspector Bland frowned. Unpleasant possibilities were rising in his mind. He said curtly;

"Get me that secretary woman again Bruce whatever her name is.'*

n

Miss Brewis came in looking rather more ruffled than usual, and a little out of breath.

"Yes, Inspector?" she said. "You wanted me?
If it isn't urgent. Sir George is in a terrible state
and"

"What's he in a state about? "

"He's only just realised that Lady Stubbs is well,
really missing. I told him she's probably only gone for
a walk in the woods or something, but he's got it into
his head that something's happened to her. Quite
absurd."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

i 131

"It might not be so absurd, Miss Brewis. After all
we've had one murder here this afternoon."

"You surely don't think that Lady Stubbs...? But
that's ridiculous! Lady Stubbs can look after herself"
-Can she?"

"Of course she can! She's a grown woman, isn't
she?"

"But rather a helpless one, by all accounts "

"Nonsense," said Miss Brewis. "It's Lady Stubbs
now and then to play the helpless little girl. She doesn't
want to do anything. It takes her hours, and in, I dare
say, but it doesn't take me in! "

"You don't like her very much, Miss Brewis?"

Bland sounded gently interested.

Miss Brewis's lips closed in a thin line.

"It's not my business either to like or dislike her,"
she said.

The door burst open and Sir George came in.

"Look here," he said violently, "something's happened
something. Where's Hattie? You've got to find
Hattie. What the hell's going on here I don't
know. This confounded fete-some homicidal
maniac's got in here, paying his half-crown and looking
like everyone else, spending his afternoon murdering
people. That's what it looks like."

"I don't think we need take such an exaggerated view
as that. Sir George."

"It's all very well for you sitting there behind the

table, writing things down. What I v^am is my wife"
"I'm having the grounds searched,] gu. Gcoree."

132 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Why did nobody tell me she'd disappeared? She's been missing a couple of hours now, it seems. I thought it was odd that she didn't turn up to judge the Children's Fancy Dress stuff, but nobody told me she'd really gone."

"Nobody knew," said the inspector.

"Well, someone ought to've known. Somebody ought to have noticed."

He turned on Miss Brewis.

"You ought to have known, Amanda, you were keeping an eye on things."

"I can't be everywhere," said Miss Brewis. She sounded suddenly almost tearful. "I've got so much to see to. If Lady Stubbs chose to wander away"

"Wander away? Why should she wander away?"

She'd no reason to wander away unless she wanted to avoid that dago fellow."

Bland seized his opportunity.

"There is something I want to ask you," he said.

"Did your wife receive a letter from Mr. De Sousa some three weeks ago, telling her he was coming to this country?"

Sir George looked astonished.

"No, of course she didn't."

"You're sure of that?"

"Oh, quite sure. Hattie would have told me. Why, she was thoroughly startled and upset when she got his letter this morning. It more or less knocked her out. She was lying down most of the morning with a headache."

\ DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 133

<t What did she say to you privately about her cousin's visit? Why did she dread seeing him so much?"

Sir George looked rather embarrassed.

"Blessed if I really know," he said. "She just kept saying that he was wicked."

"Wicked? In what way?"

"She wasn't very articulate about it. Just went on rather like a child saying that he was a wicked man. Bad; and that she wished he wasn't coming here. She said he'd done bad things."

"Done bad things? When? "

"Oh, long ago. I should imagine this Etienne De Sousa was the black sheep of the family and that Hattie picked up odds and ends about him during her childhood without understanding them very well. And as a result she's got a sort of horror of him. I thought it was just a childish hangover myself. My wife is rather childish sometimes. Has likes and dislikes, but can't explain them."

" You are sure she did not particularise in any way, Sir George?"

Sir George looked uneasy.

"I wouldn't want you to go by--er--by what she said."

"Then she did say something? "

"All right. I'll let you have it. What she said was-- and she said it several times--' He kills peopled "

CHAPTER X

"he kills people," Inspector Bland repeated.

"I don't think you ought to take it too seriously,"* said Sir George. " She kept repeating it and saying, (He kills people,' but she couldn't tell me who he killed or when or why. I thought myself it was just some queer, childlike memory--trouble with the natives--something like that."

"You say she couldn't tell you anything definite-- do you mean couldn't. Sir George--or might it have been wouldn't^ "

"I don't think . . ." He broke off. "I don't know.

You've muddled me. As I say, I didn't take any of it seriously. I thought perhaps this cousin had teased her a bit when she was a kid--something of that kind. It's difficult to explain to you because you don't know my

wife. I am devoted to her, but half the time I don't listen to what she says because it just doesn't make sense. Anyway, this De Sousa fellow couldn't have had anything to do with all this--don't tell me he lands here off a yacht and goes straight away through the woods and kills a wretched Girl Guide in a boathouse!

Why should he?"

"I'm not suggesting that anything like that happened," said Inspector Bland, "but you must realise,

134

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 135

Sir George, that in looking for the murderer of Marlene Tucker the field is a more restricted one than one might think at first."

"Restricted!" Sir George stared. "You've got the whole ruddy fete to choose from, haven't you? Two hundredthree hundredpeople? Any one of 'em might have done it."

" Yes, I thought so at first, but from what P've learnt now that's hardly so. The boathouse door has a Yale lock. Nobody could come in from outside without a key."

"Well, there were three keys."

" Exactly. One key was the final clue in this Murder Hunt. It is still concealed in the hydrangea walk at the very top of the garden. The second key was in the possession of Mrs. Oliver, the organiser of the Murder Hunt. Where is the third key. Sir George? "

"It ought to be in the drawer of that desk where you're sitting. No, the right-hand one with a lot of the other estate duplicates."

He came over and rummaged in the drawee

"Yes. Here it is all right."

"Then you see," said Inspector Bland, "what that means ? The only people who could have got into the boathouse were first, the person who had completed the Murder Hunt and found the key (which as for as we know, did not happen). Second, Mrs. Oliver or some member of the household to whom she may have lent

her key, and, third, someone whom Marleike herself admitted to the room."

136 DEAD MART'S FOLLY

" Well, that latter point covers pretty well everyone, doesn't it?"

" Very far from it," said Inspector Bland. " If I understand the arrangement of this Murder Hunt correctly, when the girl heard anyone approaching the door she was to lie down and enact the part of the Victim, and wait to be discovered by the person who had found the last clue--the key. Therefore, as you must see for yourself, the only people whom she would have admitted, had they called to her from outside and asked her to do so, were the people who had actually arranged the Murder Hunt. Any inmate, that is, of this house--that is to say, yourself, Lady Stubbs, Miss Brewis, Mrs. Oliver--possibly M. Poirot whom I believe she had met this morning. Who else, Sir George ? "

Sir George considered for a moment or two.

"The Legges, of course," he said. "Alee and Sally Legge. They've been in it from the start. And Michael Weyman, he's an architect staying here in the house to design a tennis pavilion. And Warburton, the Mastertons--oh, and Mrs. Folliat of course."

"That is all--nobody else? "

"That's the lot."

" So you see. Sir George, it is not a very wide field."

Sir George's face went scarlet.

" I think you're talking nonsense--absolute nonsense! Are you suggesting--what are you suggesting? "

"I'm only suggesting," said Inspector Bland, "that there's a great deal we don't know as yet. It's possible, for instance, that Marlene, for some reason, came out

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 137

of the boathouse. She may even have been strangled somewhere else, and her body brought back and arranged on the floor. But even if so, whoever arranged her was again someone who was thoroughly cognisant

with all the details of the Murder Hunt. We always come back to that." He added in a slightly changed voice, " I can assure you, Sir George, that we're doing all we can to find Lady Stubbs. In the meantime I'd like to have a word with Mr. and Mrs. Alee Legge and Mr. Michael Weyman."

"Amanda."

" I'll see what I can do about it, Inspector," said Miss Brewis. "I expect Mrs. Legge is still telling fortunes in the tent. A lot of people have come in with the halfprice admission since five o'clock, and all the side shows are busy. I can probably get hold of Mr. Legge or Mr. Weyman for you--whichever you want to see first."

"It doesn't matter in what order I see them," said Inspector Bland.

Miss Brewis nodded and left the room. Sir George followed her, his voice rising plaintively.

"Look here, Amanda, you've got to . . ."

Inspector Bland realised that Sir George depended a great deal upon the efficient Miss Brewis. Indeed, at this moment. Bland found the master of the house rather like a small boy.

Whilst waiting, Inspector Bland picked up the telephone, demanded to be put through to the police station at Hclmmouth and made certain arrangements with them concerning the yacht Espfrance.

138 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

" You realise, I suppose," he said to Hoskins who was obviously quite incapable of realising anything of the sort," that there's just one perfectly possible place where this damn woman might beand that's on board De Sousa's yacht?"

"How d'you make that out, sir? "

" Well, the woman has not been seen to leave by any of the usual exits, she's togged up in a way that makes it unlikely that she's legging it through the fields or woods, but it is just possible that she met De Sousa by appointment down at the boathouse and that he took her by launch to the yacht, returning to the fete

afterwards."

"And why would he do that, sir?" demanded Hoskins, puzzled.

"I've no idea," said the inspector, "and it's very unlikely that he did. But it's a possibility. And if she is on the Esperance, I'll see to it that she won't get off there without being observed."

" But if her fair hated the sight of him ..." Hoskins

dropped into the vernacular.

" All we know is that she said she did. Women," said the inspector sententiously, " tell a lot of lies. Always remember that, Hoskins."

"Aab," said Constable Hoskins appreciatively.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 139

II

Further conversation was brought to an end as the door opened and a tall vague-looking young man entered. He was wearing a neat grey flannel suit, but his shirt collar was crumpled and his tie askew and his hair stood up on end in an unruly fashion.

"Mr. Alee Legge?" said the inspector, looking up.

"No," said the young man, "I'm Michael Weyman. You asked for me, I understand."

"Quite true, sir," said Inspector Bland. "Won't you take a chair?" He indicated a chair at the opposite side of the table.

"I don't care for sitting," said Michael Weyman, "I like to stride about. What are all you police doing here anyway? What's happened?"

Inspector Bland looked at him in surprise.

"Didn't Sir George inform you, sir?" he asked. "Nobody's informed me, as you put it, of anything. I don't sit in Sir George's pocket all the time. What has happened? "

"You're staying in the house, I understand? w

"Of course I'm staying in the house. What's that got to do with it?"

" Simply that I imagined that all the people staying in the house would by now have been informed of this afternoon's tragedy."

140 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Tragedy? What tragedy?"

"The girl who was playing the part of the murder victim has been killed."

"No!" Michael Weyman seemed exuberantly surprised.

"Do you mean really killed? No fakery-pokery?"

"

I don't know what you mean by fakery-pokery. The girl's dead."

"How was she killed?"

" Strangled with a piece of cord."

Michael Weyman gave a whistle.

"Exactly as in the scenario? Well, well, that does give one ideas." He strode over to the window, turned rapidly about, and said, " So we're all under suspicion, are we? Or was it one of the local boys? "

"We don't see how it could possibly have been one of the local boys, as you put it," said the inspector.

" No more do I really," said Michael Weyman. " Well, Inspector, many of my friends call me crazy, but I'm not that kind of crazy. I don't roam around the countryside strangling under-developed spotty young women."

"You are down here, I understand, Mr. Weyman, designing a tennis pavilion for Sir George?"

" A blameless occupation," said Michael. " Criminally speaking, that is.

Architecturally, I'm not so sure. The finished product will probably represent a crime against

good taste. But that doesn't interest you, Inspector.

What does interest you? "

"Well, I should like to know, Mr. Weyman, exactly

DEAD MAJVS FOLLT 141 where you were between quarter past four this afternoon

and say five o'clock."

"How do you tape it down to that--medical

evidence?"

"Not entirely, sir. A witness saw the girl alive at a quarter past four."

"What witness--or mayn't I ask?"

"Miss Brewis. Lady Stubbs asked her to take down a tray of creamy cakes with some fruit-ade to the girl."

"Our Hattie asked her that? I don't believe it for a moment."

"Why don't you believe it, Mr. Weyman?"

"It's not like her. Not the sort of thing she'd think of or bother about. Dear Lady Stubbs's mind revolves entirely round herself."

"I'm still waiting, Mr. Weyman, for your answer to my question?"

"Where I was between four-fifteen and five o'clock? Well, really, Inspector, I can't say off-hand. I was about --if you know what I mean."

"About where?"

"Oh, here and there. I mingled a bit on the lawn, watched the locals amusing themselves, had a word or two with the fluttery film star. Then, when I got sick of it all, I went along to the tennis court and mused over the design for the Pavilion. I also wondered how soon someone would identify the photograph that was the first clue for the Murder Hunt with a section of tennis net."

"Did someone identify it? '*

142 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Yes, I believe someone did come along, but I wasn't really noticing by then. I got a new idea about the Paviliona way of making the best of two worlds. My own and Sir George's."

"And after that?"

"After that? Well, I strolled around and came back to the house. I strolled down to the quay and had a crack with old Merdell, then came back. I can't fix any of the times with any accuracy. I was, as I said, in the first place, abouti That's all there is to it."

"Well, Mr. Weyman," said the inspector briskly, "I

expect we can get some confirmation of all this."

"Merdell can tell you that I talked to him on the quay. But of course that'll be rather later than the time you're interested in. Must have been after five when I got down there. Very unsatisfactory, isn't it, Inspector?"

"We shall be able to narrow it down, I expect, Mr. Weyman."

The inspector's tone was pleasant, but there was a steely ring in it that did not escape the young architect's notice. He sat down on the arm of a chair.

"Seriously," he said; "who can have wanted to murder that girl?"

"You've no ideas yourself, Mr. Weyman?"

"Well, off-hand, I'd say it was our prolific authoress, the Purple Peril. Have you seen her imperial purple get-up? I suggest that she went a bit off her onion and thought how much better the Murder Hunt would be if there was a real body. How's that?"

DEAD MAFTS FOLLT 143 "Is that a serious suggestion, Mr. Weyman?"

"It's the only probability I can think of."

"There's one other thing I would like to ask you, Mr. Weyman. Did you see Lady Stubbs during the course of the afternoon?"

"Of course I saw her. Who could miss her? Dressed up like a mannequin of Jacques Fath of Christian Dior?"

"When did you see her last?"

"Last? I don't know. Striking an attitude on the lawn about half-past three--or a quarter to four perhaps."

"And you didn't see her after that?"

"No. Why?"

"I wondered--because after four o'clock nobody seems to have seen her. Lady Stubbs has---vanished, Mr. Weyman."

"Vanished 1 OurHattie?*"

"That surprises you?"

"Yes, it does rather.... What's she up to, t wonder?"

"D'you know Lady Stubbs well, Mr. Weyman?"

" Never met her till I came down here four or five days ago."

"Have you formed any opinions about her?"

"I should say she knows which side her bread is buttered better than most," said Michael Weyman dryly.

"A very ornamental young woman and knows how to make the most of it."

"But mentally not very active? Is that right? "

" Depends what you mean by mentally," ssaid Michael

144 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

Weyman. "I wouldn't describe her as an intellectual. But if you're thinking that she's not all there, you're wrong." A tone of bitterness came into his voice.

"I'd say she was very much all there. Nobody more so."

The inspector's eyebrows rose.

"That's not the generally accepted opinion."

"For some reason she likes playing the dim nitwit.

I don't know why. But as I've said before, in my opinion, she's very much all there."

The inspector studied him for a moment, then he said:

" And you really can't get any nearer to exact times and places between the hours I have mentioned? "

" Sorry." Weyman spoke jerkily. " I'm afraid I can't. Rotten memory, never any good about time." He added, "Finished with me?"

As the inspector nodded, he left the room quickly.

"And I'd like to know," said the inspector, half to himself and half to Hoskins, " what there's been between him and her Ladyship. Either he's made a pass at her and she's turned him down, or there's been some kind of a dust-up." He went on, " What would you say was the general opinion round these parts about Sir George and his lady?"

"She's daft," said Constable Hoskins.

" I know^oa think that, Hoskins. Is that the accepted view ?"

"I'd say so.**

"And Sir George-is he liked?"

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 145

"He's liked well enough. He's a good sportsman and he knows a bit about farming. The old lady's done a lot to help."

"What old lady?"

"Mrs. Folliat who lives at the Lodge here."

"Oh, of course. The Folliats used to own this place, didn't they?"

"Yes, and it's owing to the old lady that Sir George and Lady Stubbs have been taken up as well as they have. Got 'em in with the nobs everywhere, she has."

"Paid for doing so, do you think?"

"Oh, no, not Mrs. Folliat." Hoskins sounded shocked. "I understand she knew Lady Stubbs before she was married and it was she who urged on Sir George to buy this place."

"I'll have to talk to Mrs. Folliat," said the inspector.

"Ah, she's a shrewd old lady, she is. If anything is going on, she'd know about it."

"I must talk to her," said the inspector. "I wonder where she is now.**"

CHAPTER XI

Mrs. Folliat was at that moment being talked to by Hercule Poirot in the big drawing-room. He had found her there leaning back in a chair in a corner of the room. She had started nervously when he came in. Then sinking back, she had murmured:

"Oh, it's you, M. Poirot."

"I apologise, Madame. I disturbed you."

"No, no. You don't disturb me. I'm just resting, that's all. I'm not as young as I was. The shock--it was too much for me."

"I comprehend," said Poirot. "Indeed, I comprehend."

Mrs. Folliat, a handkerchief clutched in her small hand, was staring up at the ceiling. She said in a voice half-stifled with emotion:

"I can hardly bear to think of it. That poor girl."

That poor, poor girl----"

"I know," said Poirot. "I know."

** So young," said Mrs. Folliat; "just at the beginning of life." She said again, "I can hardly bear to think of it."

Poirot looked at her curiously. She seemed, he thought, to have aged by about ten years since the time early in the afternoon, when he had seen her, the
146

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 147

gracious hostess, welcoming her guests. Now her face seemed drawn and haggard with the lines in it clearly marked.

" You said to me only yesterday, Madame, it is a very wicked world."

"Did I say that?" Mrs. Folliat seemed startled. "It's true.... Oh, yes, I'm only just beginning to know how true it is." She added in a low voice, "But I never thought anything like this would happen."

Again he looked at her curiously.

"What did you think would happen, then? Something?"

" No, no. I didn't mean that."

Poirot persisted.

" But you did expect something to happen--something out of the usual."

" You misunderstand me, M. Poirot. I only mean that it's the last thing you would expect to happen in the middle of a fete like this."

" Lady Stubbs this morning also spoke of wickedness."

"Hattie did? Oh, don't speak of her to me--don't speak of her. I don't want to think about her." She was silent for a moment or two, and then said, " What did she say--about wickedness ? "

" She was speaking of her cousin. Etienne De Sousa. She said that he was wicked, that he was a bad man. She said, too, that she was afraid of him."

He watched, but she merely shook her head incredulously.

"Etienne De Sousa--who is he? "

148 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Of course, you were not at breakfast. I forgot, Mrs. Folliat. Lady Stubbs received a letter from this cousin of hers whom she had not seen since she was a girl of fifteen. He told her that he proposed to call upon her to-day, this afternoon."

"And did become?"

"Yes. He arrived here about half-past four."

"Surelyd'you mean that rather handsome, dark young man who came up the ferry path? I wondered who he was at the time."

"Yes, Madame, that was Mr. De Sousa."

Mrs. Folliat said energetically:

"If I were you I should pay no attention to the things Hattie says." She flushed as Poirot looked at her in surprise and went on, "She is like a childI mean, she uses terms like a childwicked, good. No half shades. I shouldn't pay any attention to what she tells you about this Etienne De Sousa."

Again Poirot wondered. He said slowly:

"You know Lady Stubbs very well, do you not, Mrs. Folliat?"

"Probably as well as anyone knows her. Possibly even better than her husband knows her. And if I do ? "

"What is she really like, Madame? "

"What a very odd question, M. Poirot."

"You know, do you not, Madame, that Lady Stubbs cannot be found anywhere? "

Again her answer surprised him. She expressed no concern or astonishment. She said:

"So she has run away, has she? I see."

DEAD MAJfS FOLLT 149

"It seems to you quite natural, that?"

"Natural? Oh, I don't know. Hattie is rather unaccountable."

"Do you think she has run away because she has a guilty conscience?"

"What do you mean, M. Poirot?w

"Her cousin was talking about her this afternoon. He mentioned casually that she had always been mentally subnormal. I think you must know, Madame, that people who are subnormal mentally are not always accountable for their actions."

"What are you trying to say, M. Poirot? "

"Such people are, as you say, very simplelike children. In a sudden fit of rage they might even kill."

Mrs. Folliat turned on him in sudden anger.

"Hattie was never like that! I won't allow you to say such things. She was a gentle warm-hearted girl, even if she was a little simple mentally. Hattie would never have killed anyone"

She faced him, breathing hard, still indignant.

Poirot wondered. He wondered very much.

n

Breaking into this scene, P.C. Hoskins made his appearance.

He said in an apologetic manner:

" I've been looking for you, ma'am."

"Good evening, Hoskins." Mrs. Folliat was once

150 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

more her poised self again, the mistress of Nasse House.

"Yes, what is it?"

"The inspector's compliments, and he'd be glad to have a word with you--if you feels up to it, that is," Hoskins hastened to add; noting as Hercule Poirot had done, the effects of shock.

" Of course I feel up to it." Mrs. Folliat rose to her feet. She followed Hoskins out of the room. Poirot, having risen politely, sat down again and stared up at the ceiling with a puzzled frown.

The inspector rose when Mrs. Folliat entered and the constable held the chair for her to sit down.

"I'm sorry to worry you, Mrs. Folliat," said Bland.

"But I imagine that you. know all the people in the neighbourhood and I think you may be able to help us."

Mrs. Folliat smiled faintly. " I expect," she said," that

I know everyone round here as well as anyone could do. What do you want to know. Inspector? "

"You knew the Fuckers? The family and the girl? "

" Oh, yes, of course, they've always been tenants on the estate. Mrs. Tucker was the youngest of a large family. Her eldest brother was our head gardener. She married Alfred Tucker, who is a farm labourer--a stupid man but very nice. Mrs. Tucker is a bit of a shrew A good housewife, you know, and very clean in the house, but Tucker is never allowed to come anywhere farther than the scullery with his muddy boots on. All that sort of thing. She nags the children rather. Most of them have married and gone into jobs

DEAD MAFFS FOLLY 151

now. There was just this poor child, Marlene, left and three younger children. Two boys and a girl still at school."

"Now, knowing the family as you do, Mrs. Folliat, can you think of any reason why Marlene should have been lulled today?"

" No, indeed I can't. It's quite, quite unbelievable, if you know what I mean, Inspector. There was no boyfriend or anything of that kind, or I shouldn't think so. Not that I've ever heard of, anyway."

"Now what about the people who've been taking part in this Murder Hunt? Can you tell me anything about them?"

" Well, Mrs. Oliver I'd never met before. She is quite unlike my idea of what a crime novelist would be. She's very upset, poor dear, by what has happened--naturally."

"And what about the other helpers--Captain War- burton, for instance?"

"I don't see any reason why he should murder Marlene Tucker, if that's what you're asking me," said Mrs. Folliat composedly. "I don't like him very much. He's what I call a foxy sort of man, but I suppose one has to be up to all the political tricks and all that kind of thing, if one is a political agent. He's certainly energetic and has worked very hard over this fete. I

don't think he could have killed the girl, anyway,

because he was on the lawn the whole time this afternoon."

The inspector nodded.

152 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"And the Legges. What do you know about the Legges?"

"Well, they seem a very nice young couple. He's inclined to be what I should call--moody. I don't know very much about him. She was a Carstairs before her marriage and I know some relations of hers very well. They took the Mill cottage for two months, and I hope they've enjoyed their holiday here. We've all got very friendly together."

"She's an attractive lady, I understand."

"Oh, yes, very attractive."

"Would you say that at any time Sir George had felt that attraction?"

Mrs. Folliat looked rather astonished.

"Oh, no, I'm sure there was nothing of that kind. Sir George is really absorbed by his business, and very fond of his wife. He's not at all a philandering sort of man."

"And there was nothing, you would say, between Lady Stubbs and Mr. Legge? "

Again Mrs. Folliat shook her head.

"Oh, no, positively."

The inspector persisted.

"There's been no trouble of any kind between Sir George and his wife, that you know of? "

"I'm sure there hasn't," said Mrs. Folliat, emphatically.

"And I would know if there had been."

"It wouldn't be, then, as a result of any disagreement between husband and wife, that Lady Stubbs has gone away?"

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 153

"Oh, no." She added lightly, "The silly girl. I understand, didn't want to meet this cousin of hers. Some childish phobia. So she's run away just like a child

might do."

"That's your opinion. Nothing more than that? **

"Oh, no. I expect she'll turn up again quite soon.

Peeling rather ashamed of herself." She added carelessly,

"What's become of this cousin, by the way? Is

he still here in the house? "

" I understand he's gone back to his yacht.*

"And that's at Helmmouth, is it?"

"Yes, at Helmmouth."

"I see," said Mrs. Folliat. "Well, it's rather unfortunate--Hattie

behaving so childishly. However, if

he's staying on here for a day or so, we can make her

see she must behave properly."

It was, the inspector thought, a question, but

although he noticed it he did not answer it.

"You are probably thinking," he said, "that all this is rather beside the point. But you

do understand, don't

you, Mrs. Folliat, that we have to range over rather a

wide field. Miss Brewis, for instance. What do you

know about Miss Brewis?"

" Well, she's an excellent secretary. More than a secretary.

She practically acts as housekeeper down here.

In fact, I don't know what they'd do without her."

"Was she Sir George's secretary before he married

his wife? "

"I think so. I'm not quite sure. I've only known her

since she came down here with them."

READ MAWS FOLLr . .

IM - , .like Lady Stubb. very much' does she? ,

8 d /^. Filial. "Pr^ afraid she doesnt- I

<t No," said ^ ' ^, care for wives

don't think th^e ^ood secretari^ ev ^ ^^

, ... know what I mean^' ""v much, if yourl 10 ho asked Miss Brewis

u iiT or ^aay otubbs ' . , . i .

"Was it you" ' . . ^e girl in the boat<

i, i, md a fruit drink ' 10 -" to take cakes '-

h0^ " ,r, looked slightly ^surprised.

Mrs. Folha11 . ". 7 dM-i-ine some cakes and

.. _ ,, miss Brewis col ^lecll"&

"I remember - 'alcine them along to
 i-- -i riving sae was t^--"6 . . . ,
 things and W " 1,-d particularly asked
 Marlene. I did"1 know anyone ^ had^ ^ ^ ^., her to do it, or arranged about ' It-
 me." . <i-- tea tent from four
 "I see. You^ youwere 'e^as also having tea
 o'clock on. I behove Mr^ . Leg^6 was
 in the tent at t^ tlme-' , ^ go. At least I don't
 "Mrs. Le^ N0' I don't th1^ i.xn quite sure she
 , .in? her there. In ff ract* , , ,. remember seer's , influx by the bus from
 , , tfe'd had a great i Intlux "" wasn't there. "" . ^y round the tent and
 -, i t remember lookix^--o .. ,
 Torquay, anf1 4snmrner visitors; there
 thinking ^^\\^ ^r^think Mrs. Legge
 was hardly, face there that I kne.^-
 must have coo"11110 tea later-" ^ doesn't matter."
 t<oh> we11-'^^^ think that'8 all He added sino0"117'.""1' I 1-- been very kind. We
 Thank you, ^ ^T^^s^r^n shortly."
 can only ho^at ^^^^irt -Very thought^
 "Ihopeso,^83!^"011-^^ anxiety" She
 of the dear ^ ^S us a" ^0 m ^ ^ ^ spoke briskly but the animation^111

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 155

very natural. "I'm sure," said Mrs. Folliat, " that she's quite all right. Quite all right."
 At that moment the door opened and an attractive young woman with red hair and a
 freckled face came
 in, and said:
 "I hear you've been asking for me? "
 "This is Mrs. Legge, Inspector," said Mrs. Folliat.
 " Sally, dear, I don't know whether you've heard about
 the terrible thing that has happened? "
 "Oh, yes! Ghastly, isn't it? " said Mrs. Legge. She uttered an exhausted sigh, and sank
 down in the chair
 as Mrs. Folliat left the room.
 "I'm terribly sorry about all this," she said. "It
 seems really unbelievable, if you know what I mean.
 I'm afraid I can't help you in any way. You see, I've
 been telling fortunes all the afternoon, so I haven't seen anything of what was going
 on."
 " I know, Mrs. Legge. But we just have to ask everybody

the same routine questions. For instance, just where were you between four-fifteen and five o'clock?"

"Well, I went and had tea at four o'clock."*

"In the tea tent?"

"Yes."

"It was very crowded, I believe? **

" Oh, frightfully crowded."

"Did you see anyone you knew there? '*

"Oh, a few old people, yes. Nobody to speak to.

Goodness, how I wanted that teal That was four o'clock, as I say. I got back to the fortune telling tent

*54 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY " ^e doesn't like Lady Stubbs very much ^^ ^,y

"No," said Mrs. Folliat, "I'm afraid shg doesn't. I don't think these good secretaries ever do ca^g ^ ^ygg much, if you know what I mean. Perhaps i^g natural."

"Was it you or Lady Stubbs who asked ^^ ^^ to take cakes and a fruit drink to the girl ^ ^ ^^ _ house ? *

Mrs. polliat looked slightly surprised.

" I feinember Miss Brewis collecting son^ cakes and things and saying she was taking thei^ ^^g ^ Marlenfe. I didn't know anyone had partiCy^ ^^ her to clo it, or arranged about it. It cert^y ^^ me.

"I se^. you say you were in the tea ten^ ^^ ^^ . o'clock on. I believe Mrs. Legge was also having tea in the tent at that time."

"Mrs. Legge? No, I don't think so. At ^ , ^^ remember seeing her there. In fact, I'm qi^ g^ ^ wasn't there. We'd had a great influx by t^g ^ ^^ Torquay, and I remember looking round .^ ^ thinking that they must all be summer vis^ . ..i,-- was hardly a face there that I knew. I thini ^^ ^ must h^ve come in to tea later."

"Oh, well," said the inspector, "it doesi^ matter"

He added smoothly. "Well. I really thin^ ^,g ^ Thank you, Mrs. Folliat, you've been ver ^^ ^ can only hope that Lady Stubbs will retur^ shortly "

" I hope so, too," said Mrs. Folliat. " Very^oughtless of the 4ear child giving us all so much an^g(ghe spoke briskly but the animation in her vc;^ .

very natural. "I'm sure," said Mrs. Folliat, "that she's quite all right. Quite all right."*

At that moment the door opened and an attractive young woman with red hair and a freckled face came in, and said;

"I hear you've been asking for me?"

"This is Mrs. Legge, Inspector," said Mrs. Folliat.

"Sally, dear, I don't know whether you've heard about the terrible thing that has happened?"

"Oh, yes! Ghastly, isn't it?" said Mrs. Legge. She uttered an exhausted sigh, and sank down in the chair as Mrs. Folliat left the room.

"I'm terribly sorry about all this," she said. "It seems really unbelievable, if you know what I mean. I'm afraid I can't help you in any way. You s^e, I've been telling fortunes all the afternoon, so I haveii't seen anything of what was going on."

"I know, Mrs. Legge. But we just have to ask everybody the same routine questions. For instance, just where were you between four-fifteen and five o'clock?"

"Well, I went and had tea at four o'clock.**

"In the tea tent?"

"Yes."

"It was very crowded, I believe? '*

"Oh, frightfully crowded."

"Did you see anyone you knew there? "

"Oh, a few old people, yes. Nobody to speak to. Goodness, how I wanted that teal That was four o'clock, as I say. I got back to the fortune telling tent

156 DEAD MAN'S POLLY at half-past four and -went on with my job. And goodness

knows what I was promising the women in the end. Millionaire husbands, film stardom in Hollywood-- heaven knows what. Mere journeys across the sea, and suspicious dark women seemed too tame."

"What happened during the half-hour when you were absent--I mean, supposing people wanted to have their fortunes told?"

"Oh, I hung a card up outside the tent. * Back at fourthirty.'

"

The inspector made a note in his pad.

"When did you last see Lady Stubbs?"

"Hattie? I don't really know. She was quite near at hand when I came out of the fortune telling tent to go to tea, but I didn't speak to her. I don't remember seeing her afterwards. Somebody told me just now that she's missing. Is that true?"

"Yes, it is."

"Oh, well," said Sally Legge cheerfully, "she's a bit queer in the top story, you know. I dare say having a murder here has frightened her."

"Well, thank you, Mrs. Legge."

Mrs. Legge accepted the dismissal with promptitude. She went out, passing Hercule Poirot in the doorway.

in
Looking at the ceiling, the inspector spoke.

"Mrs. Legge says she was in the tea tent between four

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 157

and four-thirty. Mrs. Folliat says she was helping in the tea tent from four o'clock on but that Mrs. Legge was not among those present." He paused and then went on, "Miss Brewis says that Lady Stubbs asked her to take a tray of cakes and fruit juice to Mariene Tucker. Michael Weyman says that it's quite impossible Lady Stubbs should have done any such thing it would be most uncharacteristic of her."

"Ah," said Poirot, "the conflicting statements 1 Yes, one always has them."

"And what a nuisance they are to clear up, too," said the inspector. "Sometimes they matter but in nine times out of ten they don't. Well, we've got to do a lot of spade work, that's clear."

"And what do you think now, nwn chert What are the latest ideas?"

"I think," said the inspector gravely, "that Mariene Tucker saw something she was not meant to see. I think that it was because of what Mariene Tucker saw that she had to be killed."

"I will not contradict you," said Poirot. "The point is what did she see? "

" She might have seen a murder," said the inspector.

"Or she might have seen the person who did the murder."

"Murder?" said Poirot. "The murder of whom? **

"What do you think, Poirot? Is Lady Stubbs alive or dead?"

Poirot took a moment or two before he replied.

Then he said:

-8 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"I think, mon ami, that Lady Stubbs is dead. And I will tell you why I think that. It is because Mrs. Folliat thinks she is dead. Yes, whatever she may say now, or yet end to think, Mrs. Folliat believes that Hattie Stibbs is dead. Mrs. Folliat," he added, "knows a great deal that we do not."

CHAPTER XII

HfStCVts poirot came down to the breakfast table on the following morning to a depleted table. Mrs. Oliver, still suffering from the shock of yesterday's occurrence, was having her breakfast in bed. Michael Weyman had had a cup of coffee and gone out early. Only Sir George and the faithful Miss Brewis were at the breakfast table. Sir George was giving indubitable proof of his mental condition by being unable to eat any breakfast. His plate lay almost untasted before him. He pushed aside the small pile of letters which, after opening them, Miss Brewis had placed before him. He drank coffee with an air of not knowing what he was doing. He said:

"Morning, M. Poirot," perfunctorily, and then relapsed into his state of preoccupation. At times a few ejaculatory murmurs came from him.

" So incredible, the whole damn' thing. Where can she be?"

"The inquest will be held at the Institute on Thursday," said Miss Brewis. "They rang up to tell us." Her employer looked at her as if he did not understand.

' Inquest ?" he said. " Oh, yes, of course." He sounded 159

i60 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY dazed and uninterested. After another sip or two of coffee he said, "Women are incalculable. What does she think she's doing? "

Miss Brewis pursed her lips. Poirot observed acutely enough that she was in a state of taut nervous tension.

"Hodgson's coming to see you this morning," she remarked, "about the electrification of the milking sheds on the farm. And at twelve o'clock there's the----"

Sir George interrupted.

"I can't see anyone. Put 'em all off! How the devil d'you think a man can attend to business when he's worried half out of his mind about his wife? "

"If you say so. Sir George." Miss Brewis gave the domestic equivalent of a barrister saying " as your lordship pleases." Her dissatisfaction was obvious.

"Never know," said Sir George, "what women get into their heads, or what fool things they're likely to do! You agree, eh?" He shot the last question at Poirot.

" Les femmet They are incalculable," said Poirot, raising his eyebrows and his hands with Gallic fervour. Miss Brewis blew her nose in an annoyed fashion.

"She seemed all right," said Sir George. "Damn pleased about her new ring, dressed herself up to enjoy the fete. All just the same as usual. Not as though we'd had words or a quarrel of any kind. Going off without a word."

" About those letters. Sir George," began Miss Brewis.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY I61 "Damn the bloody letters to hell!" said Sir George, and pushed aside his coffee-cup-

He picked up the letters by his hat and More or less threw them at her.

" Answer them any way you like 'I can't be bothered.

He went <^n more or less to l^mse^ m an injured tone, "Doesn't seem to be anything I can d0- Don't even know if that police chap's a^v g00^ very soft ^o\ieQ and all t^at"

"The police are, I believe" said Miss Brewis, "very efficient. They have amp^ facilities for tracing the whereabouts of missing pe^"0-" "They take days sometimes" said sir George' ltt0 find some miserable kid w^018 run off and hidden mm' self in a haystack."

"I do^t think Lady Sti^s is ^V to be in a haystack, S^r George."

- If oi^iy i could do some^h^g" repeated the unhappy husband. I think, you kr^w. I'll put an advertisement in the capers. Take it dov^ Amanda, will you? " He paused a moment in th^vght. "Hattie. Please corn home. Desperate about y^- Geor9e' Au the P^" Amantla."

Miss Brewis said addl^y:

"La^y Stubbs doesn't? often read the papers, Sir George. She's no interest at all in current affairs or whaf^ going on in th^ world." She added, rather cattily, but Sir George was not in the mood to appreciate cattiness, "(pi course you could put at advertisement in Vogues That might catch her eye,"

i6a DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

Sir George said simply:

"Anywhere you think but get on with it."

He got up and walked towards the door. With his hand on the handle he paused and came back a few steps.

He spoke directly to Poirot.

" Look here, Poirot," he said, "you don't think she's dead, do you ? "

Poirot fixed his eyes on his coffee-cup as he replied:

" I should say it is far too soon. Sir George, to assume anything of that kind. There is no reason as yet to entertain such an idea."

"So you do think so," said Sir George, heavily. "Well," he added defiantly. "I don't! /say she's quite

all right." He nodded his head several times with increasing defiance, and went out banging the door behind him.

Poirot buttered a piece of toast thoughtfully. In cases where there was any suspicion of a wife being murdered, he always automatically suspected the husband. (Similarly, with a husband's demise, he suspected the wife.) But in this case he did not suspect Sir George with having done away with Lady Stubbs. From his brief observation of them he was quite convinced that Sir George was devoted to his wife. Moreover, as far as his excellent memory served him (and it served him pretty well). Sir George had been present on the lawn the entire afternoon until he himself had left with Mrs. Oliver to discover the body. He had been there on the lawn when they had returned with the news. No, it was not Sir George who was responsible

DEAD MA'S FOLLOWS 163

for Hattie's death. That is, if Hattie were dead. After all, Poirot told himself, there was no reason to believe so as yet. What he had just said to Sir George was true enough. But in his own mind the conviction was unalterable. The pattern, he thought, was the pattern of murderer double murder.

Miss Brewis interrupted his thoughts by speaking with almost tearful venom.

"Men are such fools," she said, "such absolute fools! They're quite shrewd in most ways, and then they go marrying entirely the wrong sort of woman."

Poirot was always willing to let people talk. The more people who talked to him, and the more they said, the better. There was nearly always a grain of wheat among the chaff.

"You think it has been an unfortunate marriage?" he demanded,

"Disastrous quite disastrous."

"You mean that they were not happy together?"

"She'd a thoroughly bad influence over him in every way."

"Now I find that very interesting. What kind of a bad influence?"

"Making him run to and fro at her beck and call,

getting expensive presents out of him far more jewels than one woman could wear. And furs. She's got two mink coats and a Russian ermine. What could any woman want with two mink coats, I'd like to know?"

Poirot shook his head.

164 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"That I would not know," he said.

"Sly," continued Miss Brewis. "Deceitful! Always playing the simpleton--especially when people were here. I suppose because she thought he liked her that way!"

"And did he like her that way?"

"Oh, men!" said Miss Brewis, her voice trembling on the edge of hysteria. "They don't appreciate efficiency or unselfishness, or loyalty or any of those qualities! Now with a clever, capable wife Sir George would have got somewhere."

"Got where?" asked Poirot.

"Well, he could take a prominent part in local affairs. Or stand for Parliament. He's a much more able man than poor Mr. Masterton. I don't know if you've ever heard Mr. Masterton on a platform--a most halting and uninspired speaker. He owes his position entirely to his wife. It's Mrs. Masterton who's the power behind the throne. She's got all the drive and the initiative and the political acumen."

Poirot shuddered inwardly at the thought of being married to Mrs. Masterton, but he agreed quite truthfully with Miss Brewis's words.

"Yes," he said, "she is all that you say. A femme formidable" he murmured to himself.

"Sir George doesn't seem ambitious," went on Miss Brewis; "he seems quite content to live here and potter about and play the country squire, and just go to London occasionally to attend to all his city directorships and all that, but he could make far more of

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 165

himself than that with his abilities. He's really a very remarkable man, M. Poirot. That woman never understood him. She just regards him as a kind of machine for tipping out fur coats and jewels and expensive clothes. If he were married to someone who really appreciated his abilities . . ." She broke off, her voice wavering uncertainly.

Poirot looked at her with a real compassion. Miss Brewis was in love with her employer. She gave him a faithful, loyal and passionate devotion of which he was probably quite unaware and in which he would certainly not be interested. To Sir George, Amanda Brewis was an efficient machine who took the drudgery of daily life off his shoulders, who answered telephone calls, wrote letters, engaged servants, ordered meals and generally made life smooth for him. Poirot doubted if he had ever once thought of her as a woman. And that, he reflected, had its dangers. Women could work themselves up, they could reach an alarming pitch of hysteria unnoticed by the oblivious male who was the object of their devotion.

"A sly, scheming, clever cat, that's what she is," said Miss Brewis tearfully.

"You say is, not was, I observe," said Poirot.

"Of course she isn't dead!" said Miss Brewis, scornfully.

"Gone off with a man, that's what she's done! That's her type."

"It is possible. It is always possible," said Poirot. He took another piece of toast, inspected the marmalade pot gloomily and looked down the table to see if there

166 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

were any kind of jam. There was none, so he resigned himself to butter.

"It's the only explanation," said Miss Brewis. "Of course he wouldn't think of it."

"Has there been any trouble with men?" asked Poirot, delicately.

"Oh, she's been very clever," said Miss Brewis.

"You mean you have not observed anything of the

kind?"

"She'd be careful that I shouldn't," said Miss Brewis.

"But you think that there may have been what shall I say surreptitious episodes?"

"She's done her best to make a fool of Michael Weyman," said Miss Brewis. "Taking him down to see the camellia gardens at this time of year! Pretending she's so interested in the tennis pavilion."

"After all, that is his business for being here and I understand Sir George is having it built principally to please his wife."

"She's no good at tennis," said Miss Brewis. "She's no good at any games. Just wants an attractive setting to sit in, while other people run about and get hot. Oh, yes, she's done her best to make a fool of Michael Weyman. She'd probably have done it too, if he hadn't had other fish to fry."

"Ah," said Poirot, helping himself to a very little marmalade, placing it on the corner of a piece of toast and taking a mouthful dubiously. "So he has other fish to fry, M. Weyman?"

"It was Mrs. Legge who recommended him to Sir

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY ,67

George," said Miss Brewis. "She knew him before she was married. Chelsea, I understand, and all that. She used to paint, you know."

"She seems a very attractive and intelligent young woman," said Poirot tentatively.

"Oh, yes, she's very intelligent," said Miss Brewis.

"She's had a university education and I dare say could have made a career for herself if she hadn't married."

"Has she been married long?"

"About three years, I believe. I don't think the marriage has turned out very well."

"There is--the incompatibility?"

"He's a queer young man, very moody. Wanders off a lot by himself and I've heard him very bad-tempered with her sometimes."

"Ah, well," said Poirot, "the quarrels, the reconciliations, they are a part of early married life. Without

them it is possible that life would be drab."

"She's spent a good deal of time with Michael Weyman since he's been down here," said Miss Brewis.

"I think he was in love with her before she married Alee Legge. I dare say it's only a flirtation in her side."

"But Mr. Legge was not pleased about it, perhaps?"

"One never knows with him, he's so vague. but ; think he's been even moodier than usual, lately,"

"Did he admire Lady Stubbs, perhaps?"

"I dare say she thought he did. She thinks she only has to hold up a finger for any man to fall in love with her!"

,68 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

in an case^ 11 ^e has gone off with a man, as you suggest yls aot Mr- Weyman, for Mr. Weyman is sdll here."

"It's sc^^ody she's been meeting on the sly, I've no doubt" ^d Miss Brewis. "She often slips out of the hous^ on ^e quiet and goes off into the woods by herself. i?he was out the night before last. Yawning and sayine sb was going "P to hed. I caught sight of her not half an hour later slipping out by the side door with a sba^ over her head."

Poirot looked thoughtfully at the woman opposite him. W wondered if any reliance at all was to be placed in M"8 Brewis's statements where Lady Stubbs was con^"1^, or whether it was entirely wishful thinking on her part. Mrs. Folliat, he was sure, did not shar^ Miss Brewis's ideas and Mrs. Folliat knew Hattie iiW^h better than Miss Brewis could do. If Lady Stubbs had run away with a lover it would clearly suit Miss Brewis's book very well. She would be left to console (he bereaved husband and to arrange for him efficiently ^e details of divorce. But that did not make it true of probable, or even likely. If Hattie Stubbs had left with a lover, she had chosen a very curious time to do so, Poirot thought. For his own part he did not believe s^ had.

Miss Brewis sniffed through her nose and gathered together various scattered correspondence.

"If Sir George really wants those advertisements put in, I suppose I'd better see about it," she said. "Complete waste of time. Oh, good morning,

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 169

Mrs. Masterton," she added, as the door opened with authority and Mrs. Masterton walked in.

"Inquest is set for Thursday, I hear," she boomed.

"Morning, M. Poirot."

Miss Brewis paused, her hand full of letters.

"Anything I can do for you, Mrs. Masterton?" she asked.

"No, thank you, Miss Brewis. I expect you've plenty on your hands this morning, but I do want to thank you for all the excellent work you put in yesterday. You're such a good organiser and such a hard worker. We're all very grateful."

"Thank you, Mrs. Masterton."

"Now don't let me keep you. I'll just sit down and have a word with M. Poirot."

"Enchanted, Madame," said Poirot. He had risen to his feet and he bowed.

Mrs. Masterton pulled out a chair and sat down.

Miss Brewis left the room, quite restored to her usual efficient self.

"Marvellous woman, that," said Mrs. Masterton.

"Don't know what the Stubbses would do without her. Running a house takes some doing nowadays. Poor Hattie couldn't have coped with it. Extraordinary business, this, M. Poirot. I came to ask you what you thought about it."

"What do you yourself think, Madame?"

"Well, it's an unpleasant thing to face, but I should say we've got some pathological character in this part of the world. Not a native, I hope. Perhaps been let

170 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY out of an asylum--they're always letting 'em out halfcured

nowadays. What I mean is, no one would ever want to strangle that Tucker girl. There couldn't be any motive, I mean, except some abnormal one. And if this man, whoever he is, is abnormal I should say he's probably strangled that poor girl, Hattie Stubbs, as well. She hasn't very much sense you know, poor child. If she met an ordinary-looking man and he asked her to come and look at something in the woods she'd probably go like a lamb, quite unsuspecting and docile."

"You think her body is somewhere on the estate? "

"Yes, M, Poirot, I do. They'll find it once they search around. Mind you, with about sixty-five acres of woodland here, it'll take some finding, if it's been dragged into the bushes or tumbled down a slope into the trees. What they need is bloodhounds," said Mrs. Masterton, looking, as she spoke, exactly like a bloodhound herself. " Bloodhounds! I shall ring up the Chief Constable myself and say so."

"It is very possible that you are right, Madame," said Poirot. It was clearly the only thing one could say to Mrs. Masterton.

"Of course I'm right," said Mrs. Masterton; "but I must say, you know, it makes me very uneasy because the fellow is somewhere about. I'm calling in at the village when I leave here, telling the mothers to be very careful about their daughters--not let 'em go about alone. It's not a nice thought, M. Poirot, to have a killer in our midst."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT

-A little point, Madame. How could a strange man have obtained admission to the boathouse? That mid need a key."

" Oh, that," said Mrs. Masterton,"that's g^ enough. She came out, of course."

" Came out of the boathouse?"

"Yes. I expect she got bored, like girls go probably wandered out and looked about her. The> ^ . likely thing, I think, is that she actually saw ^attie Stubbs murdered. Heard a struggle or someth^g^ ^^ ^ see and the man having disposed of Jadv Sr i^hs

naturally had to kill her too. Easy enough; .. take her back to the boathouse, dump her - he^p ^a come out, pulling the door behind him. ^ ^g y jg lock. It would pull to, and lock."

Poirot nodded gently. It was not his purpose^ ^ ^ with Mrs. Masterton or to point out to her^ . u interesting

fact which she had completely overlooked; o]^ ^ ^ Marlene Tucker had been killed away from^ry. ..i, y.^ house, somebody must have known enough about^i<. the murder game to put her back in the exact^ ^g ^ position which the victim was supposed to *- o,,,,,mp
Instead, he said gently:

"Sir George Stubbs is confident that his^ ^g ^ g^^ alive."

"That's what he says, man, because ^p wants to believe it. He was very devoted to her, yoi^ know " She

added, rather unexpectedly, "I like George^ .,lk spite of his origins and his city background q 3 j i, .. he goes down very well in the county. That^g worst that

172 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

can be said about him Is that he's a bit of a snob^' And after all, social snobbery's harmless enough."

Poirot said somewhat cynically:

"In these days, Madame, surely money has become as acceptable as good birth."

"My dear man, I couldn't agree with you more.

There's no need for him to be a snob only got to buy the place and throw his^ money about, and we'd all come and call! But actually, the man's liked. It's not only his money. Of course Amy Folliat's had something to do with that. She has sponsored them, and mind you, she's got a lot of influence^ in this part of the world.

Why there have been folliats here since Tudor times."

"There have always been Folliats at Nasse House,"

Poirot murmured to himself li1111^^

"Yes." Mrs. Master1011 sighed. "It's sad, the toll taken by the war. Young men ^Wed in battle death duties and all that. That^n whoever comes into a place can't afford to keep it up and has to sell"

"But Mrs. Folliat, although she has lost her home, still lives on the estate."

"Yes. She's made the Lodge quite charming too.

Have you been inside it? "

" No, we parted at the door."

"It wouldn't be every[^]y's cup of tea," said Mrs. Masterton. " To live at the lodge of your old home and see strangers in possession. But to do Amy Folliat justice I don't think she feels bitter about that. In fact, she engineered the wh[^] thing. There's no doubt she imbued Hattie with the idea of living down here, and

DEAD MAJVS FOLLY 173

got her to persuade George Stubbs into it. The thing, I think, that Amy Folliat couldn't have borne was to see the place turned into a hostel or institution, or carved up for building." She rose to her feet. " Well, I must be getting along. I'm a busy woman."

" Of course. You have to talk to the Chief Constable about bloodhounds."

Mrs. Masterton gave a sudden deep bay of laughter.

" Used to breed 'em at one time," she said. " People tell me I'm a bit like a bloodhound myself."

Poirot was slightly taken aback and she was quick enough to see it.

"I bet you've been thinking so, M. Poirot," she said.

CHAPTER XIII

after Mrs. Masterton had left, Poirot went out and strolled through the woods. His nerves were not quite what they should be. He felt an irresistible desire to look behind every bush and to consider every thicket of rhododendron as a possible hiding-place for a body. He came at last to the Folly and going inside it, he sat down on the stone bench there, to rest his feet which were, as was his custom, enclosed in tight, pointed patent-leather shoes.

Through the trees he could catch faint glimmers of the river and of the wooded banks on the opposite side. He found himself agreeing with the young architect that this was no place to put an architectural fantasy of this kind. Gaps could be cut in the trees, of course, but even then there would be no proper view. Whereas, as Michael Weyman had said, on the grassy bank near

the house a Folly could have been erected with a delightful vista right down the river to Helmmouth. Poirot's thoughts flew off at a tangent. Helmmouth, the yacht Esperance, and Etienne De Sousa. The whole thing must tie up in some kind of pattern, but what the pattern v/as he could not visualise. Tempting strands of it showed here and there but that was all.

174

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 175

Something that glittered caught his eye and he bent to pick it up. It had come to rest in a small crack of the concrete base to the temple. He held it in the palm of his hand and looked at it with a faint stirring of recognition. It was a little gold aeroplane charm. As he frowned at it, a picture came into his mind. A bracelet. A gold bracelet hung over with dangling charms. He was sitting once more in the tent and the voice of Madame Zuleika, alias Sally Legge, was talking of dark women and journeys across the sea and good fortune in a letter. Yes, she had had on a bracelet from which depended a multiplicity of small gold objects. One of these modern fashions which repeated the fashions of Poi rot's early days. Probably that was why it had made an impression on him. Some time or other, presumably, Mrs. Le^ge had sat here in the Folly, and one of the charms had fallen from her bracelet. Perhaps she had not even noticed it. It might have been some days agoweeks perhaps. Or, it might have been yesterday afternoon. . . .

Poirot considered (hat latter point. Then he heard footsteps outside and looked up sharply. A figure came round to the front of the Folly and stopped, startled, at the sight of Poirot. Poirot looked with a considering eye on the slim, fair young man wearing a shirt on which a variety of tortoise and turtle was depicted. The shirt was unmistakable. He had observed it closely yesterday when its wearer was throwing coconuts. He noticed that the young man was almost unusually

perturbed. He said qiiickly in a foreign accent:

176 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

" I beg your pardon--I did not know----"

Poirot smiled gently at him but with a reproving air.

" I am afraid," he said, " that you are trespassing."

"Yes, I am sorry."

"You come from the hostel? **

"Yes. Yes, I do. I thought perhaps one could get through the woods this way and so to the quay."

"I am afraid," said Poirot gently, " that you will have to go back the way you came. There is no through road."

The young man said again, showing all his teeth in a would-be agreeable smile:

" I am sorry. I am very sorry.'*

He bowed and turned away.

Poirot came out of the Folly and back on to the path, watching the boy retreat. When he got to the ending of the path, he looked over his shoulder. Then, seeing Poirot watching him, he quickened his pace and disappeared round the bend.

" Eh bien," said Poirot to himself, " is this a murderer I have seen, or is it not? "

The young man had certainly been at the fete yesterday and had scowled when he had collided with Poirot, and just as certainly therefore he must know quite well that there was no through path by way of the woods to the ferry. If, indeed, he had been looking for a path to the ferry he would not have taken this path by the Folly, but would have kept on the lower level near the

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 177

river. Moreover, he had arrived at the Folly with the air of one who has reached his rendezvous, and who is badly startled at finding the wrong person at the meeting place.

" So it is like this," said Poirot to himself. " He came here to meet someone. Who did he come to meet ?"

He added as an afterthought, "And why? "

He strolled down to the bend of the path and looked at it where it wound away into the trees. There was no sign of the young man in the turtle shirt now.

Presumably he had deemed it prudent to retreat as rapidly as possible. Poirot retraced his steps, shaking his head.

Lost in thought, he came quietly round the side of the Folly, and stopped on the threshold, startled in his turn. Sally Legge was there on her knees, her head bent down to the cracks in the flooring. She jumped up, startled.

Oh, M. Poirot, you gave me such a shock. I didn't hear you coming."

"You were looking for something, Madame? "

"Ino, not exactly."

"You had lost something, perhaps," said Poirot.

"Dropped something. Or perhaps . . .' He adopted a roguish, gallant air." "Or perhaps, Madame, it is a rendezvous. I am, most unfortunately, not the person you came to meet? "

She had recovered her aplomb by now.

" Does one ever have rendezvous in the middle of the morning? " she demanded, questioningly.

178 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Sometimes," said Poirot, "one has to have a rendezvous at the only time one can. Husbands," he added sententiously, " are sometimes jealous."

" I doubt if mine is," said Sally Legge.

She said the words lightly enough, but behind them Poirot heard an undertone of bitterness.

" He's so completely engrossed in his own affairs."

"All women complain of that in husbands," said Poirot. " Especially in English husbands," he added.

"You foreigners are more gallant."

" We know," said Poirot, " that it is necessary to tell a woman at least once a week, and preferably three or four times, that we love her; and that it is also wise to bring her a few flowers, to pay her a few compliments,

to tell her that she looks well in her new dress or her new hat."

"Is that what you do?"

"I, Madame, am not a husband," said Hercule Poirot.

"Alas!" he added.

"I'm sure there's no alas about it. I'm sure you're quite delighted to be a carefree bachelor."

"No, no, Madame, it is terrible all that I have missed in life."

"I think one's a fool to marry," said Sally Legge.

"You regret the days when you painted in your studio in Chelsea?"

"You seem to know all about me, M. Poirot?"

"I am a gossip," said Hercule Poirot. "I like to hear all about people." He went on, "Do you really regret, Madame?"

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Oh, I don't know." She sat down impatiently on the seat. Poirot sat beside her.

He witnessed once more the phenomena which he was becoming accustomed. This attractive redhaired girl was about to say things to her which she would have thought twice about saying to an Englishman.

"I hoped," she said, "that when we came down here for a holiday away from everything, that things would be the same again. . . . But it hasn't worked out like that."

"No?"

"No. Alec's just as moody and--oh, I don't know--wrapped up in himself. I don't know what the matter

with him. He's so nervous and on edge. He rings him up and leaves queer messages for him and he won't tell me anything. That's what makes me nervous. He won't tell me anything! I thought at first it was a good woman, but I don't think it is. Not really. But her voice held a certain doubt which Poirot was quick to notice.

"Did you enjoy your tea yesterday afternoon, Madame?" he asked.

"Enjoy my tea?" She frowned at him, she thought

seeming to come back from a long way ^ay. Then she said hastily, " Oh, yes. You've no idea ^ exhausting it was, sitting in that tent muffled up ^ ^ those veils. It was stifling."

"The tea tent also must have bee^ somewhat stifling?"

i8o DEAD MAN'S FOLLT

"Oh, yes, it was. However, there's nothing like a cuppa, is there?"

" You were searching for something just now, were you not, Madame? Would it, by any possibility, be this ? " He held out in his hand the little gold charm.

"Ioh, yes. Oh, thank you, M. Poirot. Where did you find it ? "

" It was here, on the floor, in that crack over there."

"I must have dropped it some time."

"Yesterday?"

" Oh, no, not yesterday. It was before that."

"But surely, Madame, I remember seeing that particular charm on your wrist when you were telling me my fortune."

Nobody could tell a deliberate lie better than Hercule Poirot. He spoke with complete assurance and before that assurance. Sally Legge's eyelids dropped.

"I don't really remember," she said. "I only noticed this morning that it was missing."

"Then I am happy," said Poirot gallantly, "to be able to restore it to you."

She was turning the little charm over nervously in her fingers. Now she rose.

" Well, thank you, M. Poirot, thank you very much," she said. Her breath was coming rather unevenly and her eyes were nervous.

She hurried out of the Folly. Poirot leaned back in the seat and nodded his head slowly.

No, he said to himself, no, you did not go to the tea tent yesterday afternoon. It was not because you

DEAD MAJ^S FOLLT i8t

wanted your tea that you were so anxious to know if it was four o'clock. It was here you came yesterday afternoon. Here, to the Folly. Half-way to the boathouse. You came here to meet someone.

Once again he heard footsteps approaching. Rapid, impatient footsteps. "And here perhaps," said Poirot, smiling in anticipation, "comes whoever it was that Mrs. Legge came up here to meet."

But then, as Alee Legge came round the corner of the Folly, Poirot ejaculated:

"Wrong again."

"Eh? What's that?" Alee Legge looked startled.

"I said," explained Poirot, "that I was wrong again."

"I am not often wrong," he explained, "and it exasperates me. It was not you I expected to see."

"Whom did you expect to see?" asked Alee Legge.

Poirot replied promptly.

"A young man--a boy almost--in one of these gaily patterned shirts with turtles on it."

He was pleased at the effect of his words. Alee Legge took a step forward. He said rather incoherently:

"How do you know? How did--what d'you, mean?"

"I am psychic," said Hercule Poirot, and closed, his eyes.

Alee Legge took another couple of steps forward.

Poirot was conscious that a very angry man was standing in front of him.

"What the devil did you mean?" he demanded.

"Your friend has, I think," said Poirot, "gone back

i8a DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

to the Youth Hostel. If you want to see him you will have to go there to find him."

"So that's it," muttered Alee Legge.

He dropped down at the other end of the stone bench-

"So that's why you're down here? It wasn't a

question of 'giving away the prizes.' I might have

known better." He turned towards Poirot. His face was haggard and unhappy. "I know what it mu?t

seem like," he said. "I know what the whole thing

looks like. But it isn't as you think it is. I'm being

victimised. I tell you that once you get into these

people's clutches, it isn't so easy to get out of them. And I want to get out of them. That's the point, I want to get out of them. You get desperate, you know - You feel like taking desperate measures. You feel you're caught like a rat in a trap and there's nothing you can do. Oh, well, what's the good of talking? You know what you want to know now, I suppose. You've got your evidence." He got up, stumbled a little as though he could hardly see his way, then rushed off energetically without a backward look.

Hercule Poirot remained behind with his eyes very wide open and his eyebrows rising.

"All this is very curious," he murmured. "Curious and interesting. I have the evidence I need, haven't I? Evidence of what? Murder?"

CHAPTER XIV

Inspector Bland sat in Helmmouth Police Station. Superintendent Baldwin, a large comfortable-looking man, sat on the other side of the table. Between the two men, on the table, was a black sodden mass. Inspector Bland poked at it with a cautious forefinger. "That's her hat all right," he said. "I'm sure of it,

though I don't suppose I could swear to it. She fancied that shape, it seems. So her maid told me. She'd got one or two of them. A pale pink and a sort of puce colour, but yesterday she was wearing the black one. Yes, this is it. And you fished it out of the river? That makes it look as though it's the way we think it is."

"No certainty yet," said Baldwin. "After all," he added, "anyone could throw a hat into the river."

"Yes," said Bland, "they could throw it in from the boathouse, or they could throw it in off a yacht."

"The yacht's sewed up, all right," said Baldwin. "If she's there, alive or dead, she's still there."

"He hasn't been ashore to-day?"

"Not so far. He's on board. He's been sitting out in a deck-chair smoking a cigar."

Inspector Bland glanced at the clock.

"Almost time to go aboard," he said.

"Think you'll find her?" asked Baldwin.

"I wouldn't bank on it," said Bland. "I've got the
183

,84 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY reeling, you know, that he's a clever devil." He was lost in thought for a moment, poking again at the hat. 'fthen he said, "What about the body--if there was a pody? Any ideas about that? "

"Yes," said Baldwin, "I talked to Otterweight this <orning. Ex-coastguard man. I always consult him in anything to do with tides and currents. About the time

(he lady went into the Helm, if she did go into the rtelm, the tide was just on the ebb. There is a full moon (low and it would be flowing swiftly. Reckon she'd be carried out to sea and the current would take her

(owards the Cornish coast. There's no certainty where (he body would fetch up or if it would fetch up at all. One or two drownings we've had here, we've never (ecovered the body. It gets broken up, too, on the ^ocks. Here, by Start Point. On the other hand, it flight fetch up any day."

" If it doesn't, it's going to be difficult," said Bland.

" You're certain in your own mind that she did go ^nto the river ?"

"I don't see what else it can be," said Inspector ^land sombrely. " We've checked up, you know, on the

t?uses and the trains. This place is a cul-de-sac. She ^as wearing conspicuous clothes and she didn't take ^ny others with her. So I should say she never left J^asse. Either her body's in the sea or else it's hidden ^omewhere on the property. What I want now," he

<yent on heavily, " is motive. And the body of course," (ie added, as an afterthought. "Can't get anywhere until I find the body."

DEAD MAJ^'s FOLLY 185

" What about the other gir] ? "

" She saw itor she saw something. We'll get at the facts in the end, but it won't be easy."

Baldwin in his turn looked up at the clock.

"Time to go," he said.

The two police officers were received on board the Esp^rance with all De Sousa's charming courtesy. He offered them drinks which they refused, and went on to express a kindly interest in their activities.

"You are farther forward with your inquiries regarding the death of this young girl ?"

"We're progressing," Inspector Bland told him.

The superintendent took up the running and expressed very delicately the object of their visit.

"You would like to search the Esp^rancet '* De Sousa did not seem annoyed. Instead he seemed rather anaused.

" But why ? You think I conceal the murderer or do you think perhaps that I am the murderer myself? "

"It's necessary, Mr. De Sousa, as I'm sure you'll understand. A search warrant..."

De Sousa raised his hands.

"But I am anxious to co-operateeager! Let this be all among friends. You are welcome to search where you will in my boat. Ah, perhaps you think that I have here my cousin. Lady Stubbs ? You think, perhaps, she has run away from her husband and taken shelter with me? But search, gentlemen, by all means search.."

The search was duly undertaken. It was a thorough one. In the end, striving to conceal their chagrin, the two police officers took leave of Mr. De Sousa.

186 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

" You have found nothing ? How disappointing. But I told you that was so. You will perhaps have some refreshment now. No ?"

He accompanied them to where their boat lay alongside.

"And for myself? " he asked. "I am free to depart? You understand it becomes a little boring here. The weather is good. I should like very much to proceed to Plymouth."

" If you would be kind enough, sir, to remain here for the inquest--that is to-morrow--in case the Coroner should wish to ask you anything."

"Why, certainly. I want to do all that I can. But after that?"

"After that, sir," said Superintendent Baldwin, his face wooden, " you are, of course, at liberty to proceed where you will."

The last thing they saw as the launch moved away from the yacht, was De Sousa's smiling face looking down on them.

n

The inquest was almost painfully devoid of interest. Apart from the medical evidence and evidence of

identity, there was little to feed the curiosity of the spectators. An adjournment was asked for and granted. The whole proceedings had been purely formal. What followed the inquest, however, was not quite

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 187

so formal. Inspector Bland spent the afternoon taking a trip in that well-known pleasure steamer. The Devon Belle. Leaving Brixwell at about three o'clock, it rounded the headland, proceeded around the coast, entered the mouth of the Helm and went up the river. There were about two hundred and thirty people on board besides Inspector Bland. He sat on the starboard side of the boat, i canning the wooded shore. They came round a bend in the river and passed the isolated grey tiled boathouse that belonged to Hoodown Park. Inspector Bland looked surreptitiously at his watch. It was just quarter-past four. They were coming now close beside the Nasse boathouse. It nestled remote in its trees with its little balcony and its small quay below. There was no sign apparent that there was anyone inside the boathouse, though as a matter of fact, to Inspector Bland's certain knowledge, there was someone inside. P.C. Hoskins, in accordance with orders, was on duty there.

Not far from the boathouse steps was a small launch. In the launch were a man and girl in holiday kit. They were indulging in what seemed like some rather rough horse-play. The girl was screaming, the man was playfully pretending he was going to duck her overboard. At that same moment a stentorian voice spoke through a megaphone.

"Ladies and gentlemen," it boomed, "you are now approaching the famous village of Gitcam where we shall remain for three-quarters of an hour and where you can have a crab or lobster tea, as well as Devonshire

188 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY cream. On your right are the grounds of Nasse House. You will pass the house itself in two or three minutes, it is just visible through the trees. Originally the home of Sir Gervase Folliat, a contemporary of Sir Frands Drake who sailed with him in his voyage to the new world, it is now the property of Sir George Stubbs. On your left is the famous Gooseacre Rock. There, ladies and gentlemen, it was the habit to deposit scolding wives at low tide and to leave them there until the water came up to their necks."

Everybody on the Devon Belle stared with fascinated interest at the Gooseacre Rock. Jokes were made and there were many shrill giggles and guffaws.

While this was happening, the holidaymaker in the boat, with a final scuffle, did push his lady friend overboard. Leaning over, he held her in the water, laughing and saying, "No, I don't pull you out till you've promised to behave."

Nobody, however, observed this with the exception of Inspector Bland. They had all been listening to the megaphone, staring for the first sight of Nasse House through the trees, and gazing with fascinated interest at the Gooseacre Rock.

The holidaymaker released the girl, she sank under water and a few moments later reappeared on the other side of the boat. She swam to it and got in, heaving herself over the side with practised skill. Policewoman Alice Jones was an accomplished swimmer.

Inspector Bland came ashore at Gitcham with the other two hundred and thirty passengers and consumed

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 189

a lobster tea with Devonshire cream and scones. He said to himself as he did so, " So it could be done, and no one would notice 1 "

m

While Inspector Bland was doing his experiment on the Helm, Hercule Poirot was experimenting with a tent on the lawn at Nasse House. It was, in actual fact,

the same tent where Madame Zuleika had told her fortunes. When the rest of the marquees and stands had been dismantled Poirot had asked for this to remain behind.

He went into it now, closed the flaps and went to the back of it. Deftly he unlaced the flaps there, slipped out, relaced them, and plunged into the hedge of rhododendron that immediately backed the tent. Slipping between a couple of bushes, he soon reached a small rustic arbour. It was a kind of summer-house with a closed door. Poirot opened the door and went inside. It was very dim inside because very little light came in through the rhododendrons which had grown up round it since it had been first placed there many years ago. There was a box there with croquet balls in it, and some old rusted hoops. There were one or two broken hockey sticks, a good many earwigs and spiders, and a round irregular mark on the dust on the floor. At this Poirot looked for some time. He knelt down, and taking a little yard measure from his pocket, he

190 DEAD MAJTS FOLLY

measured its dimensions carefully. Then he nodded his head in a satisfied fashion.

He slipped out quietly, shutting the door behind him. Then he pursued an oblique course through the rhododendron bushes. He worked his way up the hill in this way and came out a short time after on the path which led to the Folly and down from there to the boathouse. He did not visit the Folly this time, but went straight down the zig-zagging way until he reached the boathouse. He had the key with him and he opened the door and went in.

Except for the removal of the body, and of the tea tray with its glass and plate, it was just as he remembered it. The police had noted and photographed all that it contained. He went over now to the table where the pile of comics lay. He turned them over and his expression was not unlike Inspector Eland's had been as he noted the words Marlene had doodled down there

before she died. "Jackie Blake goes with Susan Brown."
" Peter pinches girls at the pictures." " Georgie Porgie
kisses hikers in the wood." "Biddy Fox likes boys."
"Albert goes with Doreen."

He found the remarks pathetic in their young crudity.
He remembered Marlene's plain, rather spotty face. He
suspected that boys had not pinched Marlene at the
pictures. Frustrated, Marlene had got a vicarious thrill
by her spying and peering at her young contemporaries.
She had spied on people, she had snooped, and she had
seen things. Things that she was not meant to have
seen--things, usually, of small importance, but on one

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 191

occasion perhaps something of more importance?
Something of whose importance she herself had had
no idea.

It was all conjecture, and Poirot shook his head
doubtfully. He replaced the pile of comics neatly on the
table, his passion for tidiness always in the ascendent.
As he did so, he was suddenly assailed with the feeling
of something missing. Something. . . . What was it?
Something that wight to have been there.... Something.
... He shook his head as the elusive impression faded.
He went slowly out of the boathouse, unhappy and
displeased with himself. He, Hercule Poirot, had been
summoned to prevent a murder and he had not
prevented it. It had happened. What was even more
humiliating was that he had no real ideas even now,
as to what had actually happened. It was ignominious.
And to-morrow he must return to London defeated.
His ego was seriously deflated even his moustaches
drooped.

CHAPTER XV

it was a fortnight later that Inspector Bland had a long
and unsatisfying interview with the Chief Constable
of the County.

Major Merrall had irritable tufted eyebrows and
looked rather like an angry terrier. But his men all

liked him and respected his judgment.

"Well, well, well," said Major Merrall. "What have we got? Nothing that we can act on. This fellow De Sousa now? We can't connect him in any way with the Girl Guide. If Lady Stubbs's body had turned up, that would have been different." He brought his eyebrows down towards his nose and glared at Bland. "You think there is a body, don't you?"

"What do you think, sir?"

"Oh, I agree with you. Otherwise, we'd have traced her by now. Unless, of course, she'd made her plans very carefully. And I don't see the least indication of that. She'd no money, you know. We've been into all the financial side of it. Sir George had the money. He made her a very generous allowance, but she's not got a stiver of her own. And there's no trace of a lover. No rumour of one, no gossip and there would be, mark you, in a country district like that."

He took a turn up and down the floor.

192

DEAJ) MAffS FOLLY 193

<t The plain fact of it is that we don't know. We think De Sousa for some unknown reason of his own, made

away with his cousin. The most probable thing is that he got her to meet him down at the boathouse, took her aboard the launch and pushed her overboard.

You've tested that that could happen?"

"Goad lord, sir! You could drown a whole boatful of people during holiday time in the river or on the seashore. Nobody'd think anything of it. Everyone spends their time squealing and pushing each other off things. But the thing De Sousa didn't know about, was that that girl was in the boathouse, bored to death with nothing to do and ten to one was looking out of the window."

"Hostuns looked out of the window and watched the performance you put up, and you didn't see him?"

"No, sir. You'd have no idea anyone was in that boathouse unless they came out on the balcony and

showed themselves--"

" Perhaps the girl did come out on the balcony. De Sousa realises she's seen what he's doing, so he comes ashore ^nd deals with her, gets her to let him into the boathouse by asking her what she's doing there. She tells hirai, pleased with her part in the Murder Hunt, he puts the cord round her neck in a playful manner--and whoooosh ..." Major Merrall made an expressive gesture with his hands. "That's that! Okay, Bland; okay. H,et's say that's how it happened. Pure guesswork. "We haven't got any evidence. We haven't got a body, and if we attempted to detain De Sousa in this

194 DEAD MART'S FOLLY

country we'd have a hornet's nest about our ears. We'll have to let him go."

"A he going, sir?"

" He's laying up his yacht a week from now. Going back to his blasted island."

" So we haven't got much time," said Inspector Bland gloomily.

" There are other possibilities, I suppose ? "

" Oh, yes, sir, there are several possibilities. I still hold to it that she must have been murdered by somebody who was in on the facts of the Murder Hunt. We can clear two people completely. Sir George Stubbs and Captain Warburton. They were running shows on the lawn and taking charge of things the entire afternoon. They are vouched for by dozens of people. The same applies to Mrs. Masterton, if, that is, one can include her at all."

"Include everybody," said Major Men-all. "She's continually ringing me up about bloodhounds. In a detective story," he added wistfully, "she'd be just the woman who had done it. But, dash it, I've known Connie Masterton pretty well all my life. I just can't see her going round strangling Girl Guides, or disposing of mysterious exotic beauties. Now, then, who else is there ? "

"There's Mrs. Oliver," said Bland. "She devised the

Murder Hunt. She's rather eccentric and she was away on her own for a good part of the afternoon. Then there's Mr. Alee Legge."

"Fellow in the pink cottage, eh? "

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 195

" Yes. He left the show fairly early on, or he wasn't seen there. He says he got fed up with it and walked back to his cottage. On the other hand, old Merdell that's the old boy down at the quay who looks after people's boats for them and helps with the parking he says Alee Legge passed him going back to the cottage about five o'clock. Not earlier. That leaves about an hour of his time unaccounted for. He says, of course, that Merdell has no idea of time and was quite wrong as to when he saw him. And after all, the old man is ninety-two."

"Rather unsatisfactory," said Major Merrall. "No motive or anything of that kind to tie him in ?"

"He might have been having an affair with Lady Stubbs," said Bland doubtfully, "and she might have been threatening to tell his wife, and he might have done her in, and the girl might have seen it happen"

"And he concealed Lady Stubbs's body somewhere? "

" Yes. But I'm blessed if I know how or where. My men have searched that sixty-five acres and there's no trace anywhere of disturbed earth, and I should say that by now we've rooted under every bush there is. Still, say he did manage to hide the body, he could have thrown her hat into the river as a blind. And Marlene Tucker saw him and so he disposed of her? That part of it's always the same." Inspector Bland paused, then said, " And, of course, there's Mrs. Legge"

"What have we got on her?"

" She wasn't in the tea tent from four to half-past as she says she was," said Inspector Bland slowly. "I

196 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

spotted that as soon as I'd talked to her and to Mrs. Folliat. Evidence supports Mrs. Folliat's statement.

And that's the particular, vital half-hour." Again he paused. "Then there's the architect, young Michael Weyman. It's difficult to tie him up with it in any way, but he's what I should call a likely murdererone of those cocky, nervy young fellows. Would kill anyone and not turn a hair about it. In with a loose set, I shouldn't wonder."

"You're so damned respectable. Bland," said Major Merrall. "How does he account for his movements? "

" Very vague, sir. Very vague indeed."

"That proves he's a genuine architect," said Major Merrall with feeling. He had recently built himself a house near the sea coast. " They're so vague, I wonder they're alive at all sometimes."

"Doesn't know where he was or when and there's nobody who seems to have seen him. There is some evidence that Lady Stubbs was keen on him."

"I suppose you're hinting at one of these sex murders ?"

"I'm only looking about for what I can find, sir,*" said Inspector Bland with dignity. "And then there's Miss Brewis . . ." He paused. It was a long pause.

"That's the secretary, isn't it? "

"Yes, sir. Very efficient woman."

Again there was a pause. Major Merrall eyed his subordinate keenly.

"You've got something on your mind about her, haven't you? " he said.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 197

"Yes, I have, sir. You see, she admits quite openly that she was in the boathouse at about the time the murder must have been committed."

"Would she do that if she was guilty? "

" She might," said Inspector Bland slowly. " Actually, it's the best thing she could do. You see, if she picks up a tray with cake and a fruit drink and tells everyone she's taking that for the child down there--well, then, her presence is accounted for. She goes there and comes back and says the girl was alive at that time. We've

taken her word for it. But if you remember, sir, and look again at the medical evidence. Dr. Cook's time of death is between four o'clock and quarter to five. We've only Miss Brewis's word for it that Marlene was alive at a quarter past four. And there's one curious point that came up about her testimony. She told me that it was Lady Stubbs who told her to take the cakes and fruit drink to Marlene. But another witness said quite definitely that that wasn't the sort of thing that Lady Stubbs would think about. And I think, you know, that they're right there. It's not like Lady Stubbs. Lady Stubbs was a dumb beauty wrapped up in herself and her own appearance. She never seems to have ordered meals or taken an interest in household management or thought of anybody at all except her own handsome self. The more I think of it, the more it seems most unlikely that she should have told Miss Brewis to take anything to the Girl Guide."

"You know. Bland," said Men-all, "you've got something there. But what's her motive, if so? "

198 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"No motive for killing the girl," said Bland; "but I do think, you know, that she might have a motive for killing Lady Stubbs. According to M. Poirot, whom I told you about, she's head over heels in love with her employer. Supposing she followed Lady Stubbs into the woods and killed her and that Marlene Tucker, bored in the boathouse, came out and happened to see it? Then of course she'd have to kill Marlene too. What would she do next? Put the girl's body in the boathouse, come back to the house, fetch the tray and go down to the boathouse again. Then she's covered her own absence from the fete and we've got her testimony, our only reliable testimony on the face of it, that Marlene Tucker was alive at a quarter past four "

"Well," said Major Merrall, with a sigh, "keep after it. Bland. Keep after it. What do you think she did with Lady Stubbs's body, if she's the guilty party? "

" Hid it in the woods, buried it, or threw it into the

river."

"The last would be rather difficult, wouldn't it?"

"It depends where the murder was committed," said the inspector. "She's quite a hefty woman. If it was not far from the boathouse, she could have carried her down there and thrown her off the edge of the quay."

"With every pleasure steamer on the Hdm looking on?"

"It would be just another piece of horse-play. Risky, but possible. But I think it far more likely myself that she hid the body somewhere, and just threw the hat into the Helm. It's possible, you see, that she, knowing

DEAD MA.T\ 'S FOIL'

the house and grounds well might how

where you could conceal a body. She my ha.v '

to dispose of it in the riverr later. Wio k^ some P ace

is, of course, if she did it," =added lector V^ managed

afterthought. "But. actually, sir, I ^ows' ihat - vy Bland as an

Sousa----" ^, ,

Major Merrall had bee noting ()wn

pad. He looked up now, clearing hs thi\^

"It comes to this, therfc.. We cansun\^ points follows: we've got five o-a- six peo]^\

wh ' killed Mariene Tucker. Scame ofthqi ar^" I' It as

on a

than others, but that's as fsir as we ca go. ;1 cou ..,we 1 i. i- 1,'n 01- f "lore likely

way, we know why she was kilkt Sh< ' \ In a scneral

., ^ In a general Butunil w(^ _", . ,

because she saw somethinaz. Butunil w^ . . , ,

. . ,1, , Ie was killed

what it was she saw--we don t knot who '<

Put like that. you mafce it soun^i bit ^ know exact^

"Oh, it is difficult. Bixt we shalget 'i""6", "6"; , 'uifficult, sir."

end." ', . ,

, . , ^t- -. ;n i, i here--in the

" And meantime that cAap will live 1^

laughing in his sleeve--having gt n.^ \

" Vt England- murders." 1 . "You're fairly sure about him, ren't ly w1 tw0

say you're wrong. All tfcie same.." i , , , ,

The chief constable was silent for a moment then he said, with a shrug of his shoulders

"Anyway, it's better than having ten or twenty psychopathic murderers- We'd probably

third murder on our hands by now."

"They do say things go in three" said the sergeant gloomily.

"The inspector

THE DEAD MAJ'S FOLLY

He repeated that remark the following morning when he heard that old Merdell, returning home from a visit to his favourite pub across the river at Gitcham, must have exceeded his usual potations and fallen in the river when boarding the quay. His boat was found adrift, and the old man's body was recovered that evening.

The inquest was short and simple. The night had been dark and overcast, old Merdell had had three pints of beer and, after all, he was ninety-two.

The verdict brought in was Accidental Death.

CHAPTER XVI

Hercule Poirot sat in a square chair in front of the square fireplace in the square room of his London flat. In front of him were various objects that were not square: that were instead violently and almost impossibly curved. Each of them, studied separately, looked as if they could not have any conceivable function in a sane world. They appeared improbable, irresponsible, and wholly fortuitous. In actual fact, of course, they were nothing of the sort.

Assessed correctly, each had its particular place in a particular universe. Assembled in their proper place in their particular universe, they not only made sense, they made a picture. In other words, Hercule Poirot was doing a jigsaw puzzle.

He looked down at where a rectangle still showed improbably shaped gaps. It was an occupation he found soothing and pleasant. It brought disorder into

order. It had, he reflected, a certain resemblance to his own profession. There, too, one was faced with various improbably shaped and unlikely facts which, though seeming to bear no relationship to each other, yet did each have its properly balanced part in assembling the whole. His fingers deftly picked up an improbable piece of dark grey and fitted it into a blue sky. It was, he now perceived, part of an aeroplane.

301

202 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Yes," murmured Poirot to himself, "that is what one must do. The unlikely piece here, the improbable piece there, the oh-so-rational piece that is not what it seems; all of these have their appointed place, and once they are fitted in, eh bien, there is an end of the business. All is clear. All is--as they say nowadays--in the picture."¹⁹

He fitted in, in rapid succession, a small piece of a minaret, another piece that looked as though it was part of a striped awning and was actually the backside of a cat, and a missing piece of sunset that had changed with Turneresque suddenness from orange to pink. If one knew what to look for, it would be so easy, said Hercule Poirot to himself. But one does not know what to look for. And so one looks in the wrong places or for the wrong things. He sighed vexedly. His eyes strayed from the jigsaw puzzle in front of him to the chair on the other side of the fireplace. There, not half an hour ago, Inspector Bland had sat consuming tea and crumpets (square crumpets) and talking sadly. He had had to come to London on police business and that police business having been accomplished, he had come to call upon M. Poirot. He had wondered, he explained, whether M. Poirot had any ideas. He had then proceeded to explain his own ideas. On every point he outlined, Poirot had agreed with him. Inspector Bland, so Poirot thought, had made a very fair and unprejudiced survey of the case.

It was now a month, nearly five weeks, since the

occurrences at Nasse House. It had been five weeks of

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 203

stagnation and of negation. Lady Stubbs's body had not been recovered. Lady Stubbs, if living, had not been traced. The odds, Inspector Bland pointed out, were strongly against her being alive. Poirot agreed with him.

"Of course," said Bland, "the body might not have been washed up. There's no telling with a body once it's in the water. It may show up yet, though it will be pretty unrecognisable when it does."

"There is a third possibility," Poirot pointed out. Bland nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I've thought of that. I keep thinking of that, in fact. You mean the body's there at Nasse, hidden somewhere where we've never thought of looking. It could be, you know. It just could be. With an old house, and with grounds like that, there are places you'd never think of that you'd never know were there."

He paused a moment, ruminated, and then said; "There's a house I was in only the other day. They'd built an air-raid shelter, you know, in the war. A flimsy sort of more or less home-made job in the garden, by the wall of the house, and had made a way from it into the house into the cellar. Well, the war ended, the shelter tumbled down, they heaped it up in irregular mounds and made a kind of rockery of it. Walking through that garden now, you'd never think that the place had once been an air-raid shelter and that there was a chamber underneath. Looks as though it was always meant to be a rockery. And all the time,

204 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

behind a wine bin in the cellar, there's a passage leading into it. That's what I mean. That kind of thing. Some sort of way into some kind of place that no outsider would know about. I don't suppose there's an actual Priest's Hole or anything of that kind? "

"Hardly not at that period."

"That's what Mr. Weyman says she says the house was built about 1790 or (hereabouts). No reason for priests to hide themselves by that date. All the same, you know, there might be somewhere, some alteration in the structure something that one of the family might know about. What do you think, M. Poirot?"

"It is possible, yes," said Poirot. "Mais oui, decidedly it is an idea. If one accepts the possibility, then the next thing is who would know about it? Anyone staying in the house might know, I suppose?"

"Yes. Of course it would let out De Sousa." The inspector looked dissatisfied. De Sousa was still his preferred suspect. "As you say, anyone who lived in the house, such as a servant or one of the family, might know about it. Someone just staying in the house would be less likely. People who only came in from outside, like the Legges, less likely still."

"The person who would certainly know about such a thing, and who could tell you if you asked her, would be Mrs. Folliat," said Poirot.

Mrs. Folliat, he thought, knew all there was to know about Nasse House. Mrs. Folliat knew a great deal...

Mrs. Folliat had known straight away that Hattie Stubbs was dead. Mrs. Folliat knew, before Marlen &

^S FOLLT 205

a u *. c- ki 4 pounds Z) (it was a very wicked world and Hattie Stubbs^ j. . u1 i

and that there Vs,1.'t. wlcked P60?16 m lt- MrsFolliat.

thought v r ^ was the ^ to the

whole business. p0 M format' he re ' was a key that would ^Bu^^ . .

"I've interview0eas1^ several1 tmes' sald the

H-sr v pleasant she's been about

inspector. "Very ^ v

i,- ^ ' A distressed that she can't

everything, and g^g ^

suggest anything i,pinf,i" . . , t3 , ' ^ "elptul., poirot. Bland was perCan't

or won'^ ^ou/

haps thinking th^ ^^ , .. , .

'ri- , . ^same- >' he said, "that you can't
"There's a type of lad - i ic
ir) ^^Aem, or persuade them, or
force. You can't ^^en (p ' p
diddle them."
t.t r> * *i- couldn't force or persuade
No, Poirot tho^t, yo^
or diddle Mrs. fq]], . . . , . , ulat- A his tea, and sighed and
The inspector k^ c w . . .
, - . <lau nmls* out his Jigsaw puzzle to
gone, and Poirot i,,,i -,,,<; " r,
. . . , naa 6 ^asperation. For he was alleviate his m^^ ,/ J ^ humiliated. Mrs.
exasperated. Bot^ exaspe^ercule Poirot, to elucidate
Oliver had summrin^ k;r^ ,.
^neamm> kat there was something
a mystery. She l j fpi^ , . . , ' udu reic Amething wrong. And she
wrong, and there j, ., j i-- _ y _ , " _ .
u j i i -a o Hercule Poirot, first to
had looked conf^ .i ^ '
Gently Prevented it--and, secondly,
prevent it--and h^ i,a.i --. ^, . . , . . ,
. . -"ad not y he had not discovered the
to discover the kin j ,
. -- . """" ano he type of fog where there
killer. He was in ., r__ _ v 3i 0. ,
. . H "^ m as gleams of light. Every
is from time to , - ^mv , , . i. , , , ,
^me banit ^ (q mm, he had had one
now and then, or. - -.A , . . , , , , ,
c ^ r u se" A time he had failed to
of those glimpses, ^nd ^

ao6 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

penetrate farther. He had failed to assess the value of
what he seemed, for one brief moment, to have seen.
Poirot got up, crossed to the other side of the hearth,
rearranged the second square chair so that it was at a
definite geometric angle, and sat down in it. He had
passed from the jigsaw of painted wood and cardboard
to the jigsaw of a murder problem. He took a notebook

from his pocket and wrote in small neat characters:

"Etienne De Sousa, Amanda Brewis, Alee Legge, Sally Legge, Michael Weyman."

It was physically impossible for Sir George or Jim Warburton to have killed Marlene Tucker. Since it was not physically impossible for Mrs. Oliver to have done so, he added her name after a brief space. He also added the name of Mrs. Masterton since he did not remember of his own knowledge having seen Mrs. Masterton constantly on the lawn between four o'clock and quarter to five. He added the name of Henden, the butler; more, perhaps, because a sinister butler had figured in Mrs. Oliver's Murder Hunt than because he had really any suspicions of the dark-haired artist with the gong stick. He also put down " Boy in turtle shirt " with a query mark after it. Then he smiled, shook his head, took a pin from the lapel of his jacket, shut his eyes and stabbed with it. It was as good a way as any other, he thought.

He was justifiably annoyed when the pin proved to have transfixed the last entry.

"I am an imbecile," said Hercule Poirot. " What has a boy in a turtle shirt to do with this? "

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 207

But he also realised he must have had some reason for including this enigmatic character in his list. He recalled again the day he had sat in the Folly, and the surprise on the boy's face at seeing him there. Not a very pleasant face, despite the youthful good looks. An arrogant ruthless face. The young man had come there for some purpose. He had come to meet someone, and it followed that that someone was a person whom he could not meet, or did not wish to meet, in the ordinary way. It was a meeting, in fact, to which attention must not be called. A guilty meeting. Something to do with the murder?

Poirot pursued his reflections. A boy who was staying at the Youth Hostel--that is to say, a boy who would be in that neighbourhood for two nights at most.

Had he come there casually ? One of the many young students visiting Britain? Or had he come there for a special purpose, to meet some special person? There could have been what seemed a casual encounter on the day of the fete--possibly there had been.

I know a good deal, said Hercule Poirot to himself.

I have in my hands many, many pieces of this jigsaw.

I have an idea of the kind of crime this was--but it must be that I am not looking at it the right way.

He turned a page of his notebook, and wrote: Did Lady Stubbs ask Miss Brewis to take tea to Marlene? If not, why does Miss Brewis say that she did?

He considered the point. Miss Brewis might quite easily herself have thought of taking cake and a fruit drink to the girl. But if so why did she not simply say

ao8 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY so? Why lie about Lady Stubbs having asked her to do so? Could this be because Miss Brewis went to the boathouse and found Marlene dead' } Unless Miss Brewis was herself guilty of the murder, that seemed very unlikely. She was not a nervous woman nor an imaginative one. If she had found the girl dead, she would surely at once have given the alarm?

He stared for some time at the two questions he had written. He could not help feeling that somewhere in those words there was some vital pointer to the truth that had escaped him. After four or five minutes of thought he wrote down something more.

Etienne De Sousa declares that he wrote to his cousin three weeks before his arrival at Nasse House. Is that statement true or false?

Poirot felt almost certain that it was false. He recalled the scene at the breakfast table. There seemed no earthly reason why Sir George or Lady Stubbs should pretend to a surprise and, in the latter's case, a dismay, which they did not feel. He could see no purpose to be accomplished by it. Granting, however, that Etienne De Sousa had lied, why did he lie? To give the impression that his visit had been announced and welcomed? It might be so, but it seemed a very doubtful

reason. There was certainly no evidence that such a letter had ever been written or received. Was it an attempt on De Sousa's part to establish his bona fides--to make his visit appear natural and even expected? Certainly Sir George had received him amicably enough, although he did not know him.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 209

Polrot paused, his thoughts conning to a stop. 5'r George did not know De Sousa. His wife, who did know him, had not seen him. Was there perhaps something therel Could it be possible that the Etienne De Sousa who had arrived that day at the fete was n<>t the real Etienne De Sousa? He went over the idea in his mind, but again he could see no point to it. What had De Sousa to gain by coming and representing himself as De Sousa if he was not De Sousa ? In any cas< De Sousa did not derive any benefit from Hattie's dea<h. Hattie, as the police had ascertained, had no mojjeiy of her own except that which was allowed hsr by her, husband.

Poirot tried to remember exactly what sle had said to him that morning. "He is a bad mar. He does wicked things." And, according to Bland, she had said to her husband: "He kills people."

There was something rather significant ibout that,

now that one came to examine all the faces' He kills people.

On the day Etienne De Sousa had cone to Nasse House one person certainly had been kilid, possibly two people. Mrs. Folliat had said that oneshould pay no attention to these melodramatic remarksof Hattie's. She had said so very insistently. Mrs. Foliat. . . Hercule Poirot frowned, then brought hiihand down with a bang on the arm of his chair.

" Always, always--I return to Mrs. Follia. She is the key to the whole business. If I knew what s]e knows...

I can no longer sit in an arm-chair and jus think. No,

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"I must take a train and go again to Devon and visit Mrs. Folliat."

II

Hercule Poirot paused for a moment outside the big wrought-iron gates of Nasse House. He looked ahead of him along the curving drive. It was no longer summer. Golden-brown leaves fluttered gently down from the trees. Near at hand the grassy banks were coloured with small mauve cyclamen. Poirot sighed. The beauty of Nasse House appealed to him in spite of himself. He was not a great admirer of nature in the wild, he liked things trim and neat, yet he could not but appreciate the soft wild beauty of massed shrubs and trees.

At his left was the small white porticoed lodge. It was a fine afternoon. Probably Mrs. Folliat would not be at home. She would be out somewhere with her gardening basket or else visiting some friends in the neighbourhood. She had many friends. This was her home, and had been her home for many long years. What was it the old man on the quay had said?

"There'll always be Follis at Nasse House."

Poirot rapped gently upon the door of the Lodge. After a few moments' delay, he heard footsteps inside. They sounded to his ear slow and almost hesitant. Then the door was opened and Mrs. Folliat stood framed in the doorway. He was startled to see how old

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY an

and frail she looked. She stared at him incredulously for a moment or two, then she said:

"M. Poirot? You!"

He thought for a moment that he had seen fear leap into her eyes, but perhaps that was sheer imagination on his part. He said politely:

"May I come in, Madame? "

"But of course."

She had recovered all her poise now, beckoned him in with a gesture and led the way into her small sittingroom.

There were some delicate Chelsea figures on the mantelpiece, a couple of chairs covered in exquisite petit point, and a Derby tea service stood on the small table. Mrs. Folliat said:

" I will fetch another cup."

Poirot raised a faintly protesting hand, but she pushed the protest aside.

" Of course you must have some tea."

She went out of the room. He looked round him once more. A piece of needlework, a petit point chair seat, lay on a table with a needle sticking in it. Against the wall was a bookcase with books. There was a little cluster of miniatures on the wall and a faded photograph in a silver frame of a man in uniform with a stiff moustache and a weak chin.

Mrs. Folliat came back into the room with a cup and saucer in her hand.

Poirot said, "Your husband, Madame?"

"Yes."

Noticing that Poirot's eyes swept along the top of

8ia DEAD MAJTS FOLLY the bookcase as though in search of further photographs, she said brusquely:

" I'm not fond of photographs. They make one live in the past too much. One must learn to forget. One must cut away the dead wood."

Poirot remembered how the first time he had seen Mrs. Folliat she had been clipping with secateurs at a shrub on the bank. She had said then, he remembered, something about dead wood. He looked at her thoughtfully, appraising her character. An enigmatical woman, he thought, and a woman who, in spite of the gentleness and fragility of her appearance, had a side to her that could be ruthless. A woman who could cut away dead wood not only from plants but from her own life. . .

She sat down and poured out a cup of tea, asking:

"Milk? Sugar?"

"Three lumps if you will be so good, Madame? "

She handed him his cup and said conversationally:

"I was surprised to see you. Somehow I did not

imagine you would be passing through this part of the world again."

"I am not exactly passing through," said Poirot.

"No?" She queried him with slightly uplifted eyebrows.

" My visit to this part of the world is intentional."

She still looked at him in inquiry.

" I came here partly to see you, Madame."

"Really?"

" First of all--there has been no news of the young Lady Stubbs?"

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY "S Mrs. Folliat shook her head.

"There was a body washed up the other day in Cornwall," she said. " George went there to see if he could identify it. But it was not her." She added--

"I am very sorry for George. The strain has been very great."

"Does he still believe that his wife may be alive

Slowly Mrs. Folliat shook her head.

"I think," she said, "that he has given up hope. After

all, if Hattie were alive, she couldn't possibly conceal herself successfully with the whole of the country and the Police looking for her. Even if something like a loss of memory had happened to her--well, surely the police would have found her by now? "

"It would seem so, yes," said Poirot. "Do the police still search? "

" I suppose so. I do not really know."

" But Sir George has given up hope."

"He does not say so," said Mrs. Folliat. "Of course I have not seen him lately. He has been most of the time in London."

"And the murdered girl? There have been no developments there?"

"Not that I know of." She added, "It seems a senseless crime--absolutely pointless. Poor child--"

" It still upsets you, I see, to think of her, Madame?"

Mrs. Folliat did not reply for a moment or so. Then she said:

" I think when one is old, the death of anyone is young upsets one out of due proportion. Why

ai4 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

folks expect to die, but that child had her life before her."

"It might not have been a very interesting life."

"Not from our point of view, perhaps, but it might have been interesting to her."

"And although, as you say, we old folk must expect to die," said Poirot, "we do not really want to. At least /do not want to. I find life very interesting still."

"I don't think that I do."

She spoke more to herself than him, her shoulders drooped still more.

"I am very tired, M. Poirot. I shall be not only ready, but thankful, when my time comes."

He shot a quick glance at her. He wondered, as he had wondered before, whether it was a sick woman who sat talking to him, a woman who had perhaps the knowledge or even the certainty of approaching death. He could not otherwise account for the intense weariness and lassitude of her manner. That lassitude, he felt, was not really characteristic of the woman.

Amy Folliat, he felt, was a woman of character, energy and determination. She had lived through many troubles, loss of her home, loss of wealth, the deaths of her sons. All these, he felt, she had survived. She had cut away the "dead wood," as she herself had expressed it. But there was something now in her life that she could not cut away, that no one could cut away for her. If it was not physical illness he did not see what it could be. She gave a sudden little smile as though she were reading his thoughts.

DEAD MAJfS FOLLT "5

"Really, you know, I have not very much t10 llve ^0^ M. Poirot," she said. "I have many friends bi"1 n0 near relations, no family."

* 1

"You have your home," said Poirot on an1 ""P11" ^

"You mean Nasse? Yes----"

"It is your home, isn't it. although tech"11^1^ It is the property of Sir George Stubbs? Now ^lr George Stubbs has gone to London you r"1" in ms stead."

Again he saw the sharp look of fear in1 her eyes When she spoke her voice held an icy edge t10 lt'

"I don't quite know what you mean, M. Folrot- I am grateful to Sir George for renting me the house but I do rent it. I pay him a yearly sum for it with the right to walk in the grounds."

Poirot spread out his hands.

"I apologise, Madame. I did not mean to offend you."

"No doubt I misunderstood you," said Mrs. Folliat coldly.

"It is a beautiful place," said Poirot. "A beautiful house, beautiful grounds. It has about it a peace, great serenity."

"Yes." Her face lightened. "We have always felt that. I felt it as a child when I first came here."

"But is there the same peace and serenity here, Madame?"

"Why not?"

"Murder unavenged," said Poirot. "The spilling of innocent blood. Until that shadow lifts, there will be no peace."

ai6 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"There will be no peace." He added, "I think you know that, Madame, as well as I do."

Mrs. Folliat did not answer. She neither moved nor spoke. She sat quite still and Poirot had no idea what she was thinking. He leaned forward a little and spoke again.

"Madame, you know a good deal--perhaps everything--about this murder. You know who killed that girl, you know why. You know who killed Hattie Stubbs, you know, perhaps, where her body lies

now."

Mrs. Folliat spoke then. Her voice was loud, almost harsh.

"I know nothing," she said. "Nothing."

"Perhaps I have used the wrong word. You do not know, but I think you guess, Madame. I'm quite sure that you guess."

"Now you are being--excuse me--absurd! "

"It is not absurd--it is something quite different--it is dangerous"

"Dangerous? To whom?"

* To you, Madame. So long as you keep your knowledge

to yourself you are in danger. I know murderers better than you do, Madame."

"I have told you already, I have no knowledge."

"Suspicious, then----"

" I have no suspicions."

"That, excuse me, is not true, Madame."

"To speak out of mere suspicion would be wrong-- indeed, wicked."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 217

Poirot leaned forward. "As wicked as what was done here just over a month ago?"

She shrank back into her chair, huddled into herself. She half whispered:

"Don't talk to me of it." And then added, with a long shuddering sigh. "Anyway, it's over now. Done finished with."

"How can you tell that, Madame? I tell you of my own knowledge that it is never finished with a murderer."

She shook her head.

"No. No, it's the end. And, anyway, there is nothing I can do. Nothing."

He got up and stood looking down at her. She said almost fretfully:

"Why, even the police have given up."

Poirot shook his head.

" Oh, no, Madame, you are wrong there. The police do not give up. And I," he added, "do not give up either. Remember that, Madame. I, Hercule Poirot, do not give up."

It was a very typical exit line.

CHAPTER 5CVII

after leaving Nasse, Poirot went to the village where, by inquiry, he found the cottage occupied by the Fuckers . His knock at the door went unanswered for

some moments, as it was drowned by the high-pitched tones of Mrs. Tucker's voice from inside,

"--And what be yu thinking of, Jim Tucker, bringing

them boots of yours on to my nice linoleum ? If I've tell ee once I've tell ee a thousand times. Been polishing it all the morning, I have, and now look at it."

A faint rumbling denoted Mr. Tucker's reaction to these remarks. It was on the whole a placatory rumble.

"Yu've no cause to go forgetting. 'Tis all this eagerness to get the sports new? on the wireless. Why, '(wouldn't have took ee to minutes to be off with them boots. And yu, Gary, do ee ndind what yu'm doing with that lollipop. Sticky finders I will not have on my best silver teapot. Marilyn, that be someone at the door, that be. Du ee go and sec who 'tis."

The door was opened gingerly and a child of about eleven or twelve years old peered out suspiciously at Poirot. One cheek was bulged with a sweet. She was a fat child with small blue eyes and a rather piggy kind of prettiness.

" 'Tis a gentleman, mum," she shouted,

218

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY aig

Mrs. Tucker, wisps of hair hanging over her somewhat hot face, came to the door.

"What is it?" she demanded sharply. "We don't need ..." She paused, a faint look of recognition came

across her face. " Why let me see, now, didn't I see you with the police that day ?"

"Alas, Madame, that I have brought back painful memories," said Poirot, stepping firmly inside the door.

Mrs. Tucker cast a swift agonised glance at his feet, but Poirot's pointed patent leather shoes had only trodden the high road. No mud was being deposited on Mrs. Tucker's brightly polished linoleum.

" Come in, won't you, sir," she said, backing before him, and throwing open the door of a room on her right hand.

Poirot was ushered into a devastatingly neat little parlour. It smelt of furniture polish and Brasso and contained a large Jacobean suite, a round table, two potted geraniums, an elaborate brass fender, and a large

variety of china ornaments.

"Sit down, sir, do. I can't remember the name.

Indeed, I don't think as I ever heard it."

"My name is Hercule Poirot," said Poirot rapidly. "I found myself once more in this part of the world and I called here to offer you my condolences and to ask you if there had been any developments. I trust the murderer of your daughter has been discovered?"

"Not sight or sound of him," said Mrs. Tucker, speaking with some bitterness. "And 'tis a downright wicked shame if you ask me. 'Tis my opinion the

220 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY police don't disturb themselves when it's only the likes of us. What's the police anyway? If they'm all like Bob Hoskins I wonder the whole country isn't a mass of crime. All that Bob Hoskins does is spend his time looking into parked cars on the Common."

At this point, Mr. Tucker, his boots removed, appeared through the doorway, walking on his stockinged feet. He was a large, red-faced man with a pacific expression.

"Police be all right," he said in a husky voice. "Got their troubles just like anyone else. These here maniacs ar'n't so easy to find. Look the same as you or me, if you take my meaning," he added, speaking directly to Poirot. The little girl who had opened the door to Poirot appeared behind her father, and a boy of about eight poked his head round her shoulder. They all stared at

Poirot with intense interest.

"This is your younger daughter, I suppose," said Poirot.

"That's Marilyn, that is," said Mrs. Tucker. "And that's Gary. Come and say how do you do, Gary, and mind your manners."

Gary backed away.

"Shy-like, he is," said his mother.

"Very civil of you, I'm sure, sir," said Mr. Tucker, "to come and ask about Marlene. Ah, that was a terrible business, to be sure."

"I have just called upon Mrs. Folliat," said M. Poirot. " She, too, seems to feel this very deeply."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY aai

" She's been poorly-like ever since," said Mrs. Tucker. " She's an old lady and't was a shock to her, happening as it did at her own place."

Poirot noted once more everybody's unconscious assumption that Nasse House still belonged to Mrs. Folliat.

"Makes her feel responsible-like in a way," said Mr. Tucker, "not that 'twere anything to do with her."

"Who was it that actually suggested that Mariene should play the victim ?" asked Poirot.

"The lady from London that writes the books," said Mrs. Tucker promptly.

Poirot said mildly:

" But she was a stranger down here. She did not even know Mariene."

"'Twas Mrs. Masterton what rounded the girls up," said Mrs. Tucker, "and I suppose 'twas Mrs. Masterton said Mariene was to do it. And Mariene, I must say, was pleased enough at the idea."

Once again, Poirot felt, he came up against a blank wall. But he knew now what Mrs. Oliver had felt when she first sent for him. Someone had been working in the dark, someone who had pushed forward their own desires through other recognised personalities. Mrs. Oliver, Mrs. Masterton. Those were the figureheads. He said:

"I have been wondering, Mrs. Tucker, whether Mariene was already acquainted with this--er--homicidal maniac."

DEAD ^s FOLLr She wouldn't know ft0^ like that'" said Mrs-333

Tucker virtuously. . "Ah" said Poirot, "b^t as your husband has just observed, these maniacs ^ ^ difficult to ^ They , , , ,1 and me. Someone may have

look the same as--er--you . 7

^n i r ^p f^i or even before it. Made

spoken to Marlene at the ' '

friends with her in a perf^Y harmless manner- Glven

^^^So^^^--0111^ take presents from a strait I ^S^ her up better

^u^he might see ^ harm in it" .said poirot' persisdog. " Supposing it ^ been some mce lady wh0

had offered her things." "Someone, you mean, l^ Y^S Mrs. Legge down to the Mill Cottage."

yes," said Poirot. SO^006 hlte that-" , ^

"Give Marlene a lipS^ once' she dld'" sal(i Mrs- Tucker. " Ever so mad, I ^as- I won't have you putting

i_ ^ ^ ,,, f^^ Marlene, I said. Think what

that muck on your face, \, , ' , .

your father would say. W<'11. she s^ P^Y as ^ be'

'tis the lady down at L^d^ cott^ as give it me.

Said as how it would ^ me' she did- we11.1 sald'

don't you listen to what n0 London ladies say. Tis

all very well for them, pai^S their faces and ^^S their eyelashes and everytt^ else-

But Y0^ a decent girl, I said. and you wash Y01"-face with ^bp and watCT until you're a good deal o^ than what you are now.

But she did not ag^ with ^ l ex^" sald Poirot, smiling.

^

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY (.

" When I say a thing I mean it," said Mrs. Tuck'^.

The fat Marilyn suddenly gave an amused gigJ Poirot shot her a keen glance. Pe

"Did Mrs. Legge give Marlene anything else?"

asked. ,Pe

"Believe she gave her a scarf or summat--one ^

hadn't no more use for. A showy sort of thi^c but not much quality. I know quality when I to it," said Mrs. Tucker, nodding her head. "Used ac work at Nasse House as a girl, I did. Proper stuff ^11

ladies wore in those days. No gaudy colours and ac this nylon and rayon; real good silk. Why, so^y

of their taffeta dresses would have stood ftp themselves." (r1-

" Girls like a bit of finery," said Mr. Tucker ^f,

dulgently. "I don't mind a few bright colours iflys'

but I won't have this 'ere mucky lipstick." ,^

"A bit sharp I was with her," said Mrs. Tucker, "my eyes suddenly misty," and her gorn in that terrible wr1' Wished afterwards I hadn't spoken so sharp, /'^s nought but trouble and funerals lately, it .ieeil/^e

Troubles never come singly, so they say, and 'tis u enough." ^t

"You have had other losses?" inquired Poirot politely. ^e

"The wife's father," explained Mr. Tucker. "Co^te across the ferry in his boat from the Three Do^s 1. n at night, and must have missed his footing getting ^t to the quay and fallen in the river. Of course he oug ?u to have stayed quiet at home at his age. But there,

aaa DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"She wouldn't know nobody like that," said Mrs. Tucker virtuously.

"Ah," said Poirot, "but as your husband has just observed, these maniacs are very difficult to spot. They look the same as you and me. Someone may have spoken to Marlene at the fete, or even before it. Made friends with her in a perfectly harmless manner. Given her presents, perhaps."

" Oh, no, sir, nothing of that kind. Marlene wouldn't take presents from a stranger. I brought her up better than that."

"But she might see no harm in it," said Poirot, persisting. " Supposing it had been some nice lady who had offered her things."

" Someone, you mean, like young Mrs. Legge down to the Mill Cottage."

"Yes," said Poirot. "Someone like that."

" Give Marlene a lipstick once, she did," said Mrs. Tucker. " Ever so mad, I was. I won't have you putting that muck on your face, Marlene, I said. Think what your father would say. Well, she says, perky as may be, 'tis the lady down at Lawder's Cottage as give it me. Said as how it would suit me, she did. Well, I said, don't you listen to what no London ladies say. 'Tis all very well for them, painting their faces and blacking their eyelashes and everything else. But you're a decent girl, I said, and you wash your face with soap and water until you're a good deal older than what you are now."

"But she did not agree with you, I expect," said Poirot, smiling.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 223

"When I say a thing I mean it," said Mrs. Tucker. The fat Marilyn suddenly gave an amused giggle. Poirot shot her a keen glance.

"Did Mrs. Legge give Marlene anything else?" he asked.

"Believe she gave her a scarf or summat--one she hadn't no more use for. A showy sort of thing, but not much quality. I know quality when I see it," said Mrs. Tucker, nodding her head. "Used to work at Nasse House as a girl, I did. Proper stuff the ladies wore in those days. No gaudy colours and all this nylon and rayon; real good silk. Why, some of their taffeta dresses would have stood up by themselves."

"Girls like a bit of finery," said Mr. Tucker indulgently.

"I don't mind a few bright colours myself, but I won't have this 'ere mucky lipstick."

"A bit sharp I was with her," said Mrs. Tucker, her eyes suddenly misty, "and her gorn in that terrible way. Wished afterwards I hadn't spoken so sharp. Ah, nought but trouble and funerals lately, it seems. Troubles never come singly, so they say, and 'tis true enough."

"You have had other losses?" inquired Poirot politely.

"The wife's father," explained Mr. Tucker. "Come across the ferry in his boat from the Three Dogs late at night, and must have missed his footing getting on to the quay and fallen in the river. Of course he ought to have stayed quiet at home at his age. But there, yu

334 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

can't do anything with the old 'uns. Always pottering about on the quay, he was."

"Father was a great one for the boats always," said Mrs. Tucker. "Used to look after them in the old days

for Mr. Folliat, years and years ago that was. Not," she added brightly," as father's much loss, as you might say. Well over ninety, he was, and trying in many of his ways. Always babbling some nonsense or other. 'Twas time he went. But, of course, us had to bury him nice and two funerals running costs a lot of money."

These economic reflections passed Poirot by a faint remembrance was stirring.

"An old man on the quay? I remember talking to him. Was his name? "

"Merdell, sir. That was my name before I married."

"Your father, if I remember rightly, was head gardener at Nasse?"

"No, that was my eldest brother. I was the youngest of the family eleven of us, there were." She added with some pride. "There's been Merdells at Nasse for years, but they're all scattered now. Father was the last of us."

Poirot said softly:

"There'll always be Folliats at Nasse House n

"I beg your pardon, sir? "

"I am repeating what your old father said to me on the quay."

"Ah, talked a lot of nonsense, father did. I had to shut him up pretty sharp now and then."

DEAD MA[^]'S FOLLY 225

"So Marlene was Merdell's granddaughter," said Poirot. "Yes, I begin to see." He was silent for a moment, an immense excitement was surging within him. "Your father was drowned, you say, in the river?"

"Yes, sir. Took a drop too much, he did. And where he got the money from, I don't know. Of course he used to get tips now and again on the quay helping people with boats or with parking their cars. Very cunning he was at hiding his money from me. Yes, I'm afraid as he'd had a drop too much. Missed his footing, I'd say, getting off his boat on to the quay. So he fell

in and was drowned. His body was washed up down to Helmmouth the next day. 'Tis a wonder, as you might say, that it never happened before, him being ninety-two and half blinded anyway."

"The fact remains that it did not happen before"

" Ah, well, accidents happen, sooner or later"

"Accident," mused Poirot. "I wonder."

He got up. He murmured:

"I should have guessed. Guessed long ago. The child practically told me"

" I beg your pardon, sir ?"

"It is nothing," said Poirot. "Once more I tender you my condolences both on the death of your daughter and on that of your father."

He shook hands with them both and left the cottage.

He said to himself:

" I have been foolishvery foolish. I have looked at everything the wrong way round."

aa6 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Himister."

It was a cautious whisper. Poirot looked round. The fat child Marilyn was standing in the shadow of the cottage wall. She beckoned him to her and spoke in a whisper.

" Mum don't know everything," she said. " Marlene didn't get that scarf off of the lady down at the cottage."

" Where did she get it ? "

"Bought it in Torquay. Bought some lipstick, too, and some scentNewt in Parisfunny name. And a jar of foundation cream, what she'd read about in an advertisement." Marilyn giggled. "Mum doesn't know. Hid it at the back of her drawer, Marlene did, under her winter vests. Used to go into the convenience at the bus stop and do herself up, when she went to the pictures."

Marilyn giggled again.

" Mum never knew."

"Didn't your mother find these things after your

sister died ? "

Marilyn shook her fair fluffy head.

"No," she said. "I got 'em nowin my drawer.

Mum doesn't know."

Poirot eyed her consideringly, and said:

"You seem a very clever girl, Marilyn."

Marilyn grinned rather sheepishly.

"Miss Bird says it's no good my trying for the grammar school."

"Grammar school is not everything," said Poirot.

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 337 "Tell me, how did Marlene get the money to buy these things?"

Marilyn looked with close attention at a drainpipe.

" Dunno," she muttered.

"I think you do know," said Poirot.

Shamelessly he drew out a half-crown from his pocket and added another half-crown to it.

" I believe," he said, " there is a new, very attractive shade of lipstick called ' Carmine Kiss.' "

" Sounds smashing," said Marilyn, her hand advanced towards the five shillings. She spoke in a rapid whisper.

"She used to snoop about a bit, Marlene did. Used to see goings-on--you know what. Marlene would promise not to tell and then they'd give her a present, see?"

Poirot relinquished the five shillings.

"I see," he said.

He nodded to Marilyn and walked away. He murmured again under his breath, but this time with intensified meaning:

"I see."

So many things now fell into place. Not all of it.

Not clear yet by any means--but he was on the right track. A perfectly clear trail all the way if only he had had the wit to see it. That first conversation with Mrs. Oliver, some casual words of Michael Weyman's, the significant conversation with old Merdell on the quay, an illuminating phrase spoken by Miss Brewis--the arrival of Etienne De Sousa.

A public telephone box stood adjacent to the village

aa8 DEAD MAN'S FOLLT

post office. He entered it and rang up a number. A few minutes later he was speaking to Inspector Bland.

" Well, M. Poirot, where are you ? "

" I am here, in Nassecombe."

"But you were in London yesterday afternoon? "

" It only takes three and a half hours to come here by a good train," Poirot pointed out. " I have a question for you."

"Yes?"

" What kind of a yacht did Etienne De Sousa have?"

" Maybe I can guess what you're thinking, M. Poirot, but I assure you there was nothing of that kind. It wasn't fitted up for smuggling if that's what you mean. There were no fancy hidden partitions or secret cubbyholes. We'd have found them if there had been. There was nowhere on it you could have stowed away a body."

" You are wrong, mon cher, that is not what I mean. I only asked what kind of a yacht, big or small ?"

"Oh, it was very fancy. Must have cost the earth. All very smart, newly painted, luxury fittings."

"Exactly," said Poirot. He sounded so pleased that Inspector Bland felt quite surprised.

"What are you getting at, M. Poirot? " he asked.

"Etienne De Sousa," said Poirot, "is a rich man. That, my friend, is very significant."

" Why ? " demanded Inspector Bland.

" It fits in with my latest idea," said Poirot.

"You've got an idea, then? "

" Yes. At last I have an idea. Up to now I have been very stupid."

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 999

a You mean we've all been very stupid."

"No," said Poirot, "I mean specially myself. I had the good fortune to have a perfectly clear trail presented to me, and I did not see it."

"But now you're definitely on to something? M

" I think so, yes."

"Look here, M. Poirot"

But Poirot had rung off. After searching his pockets for available change, he put through a personal call to Mrs. Oliver at her London number.

"But do not," he hastened to add, when he made his demand, "disturb the lady to answer the telephone if she is at work."

He remembered how bitterly Mrs. Oliver had once reproached him for interrupting a train of creative thought and how the world in consequence had been deprived of an intriguing mystery centring round an old-fashioned long-sleeved woollen vest. The exchange, however, was unable to appreciate his scruples.

"Well," it demanded, "do you want a personal call or don't you ?"

" I do," said Poirot, sacrificing Mrs. Oliver's creative genius upon the altar of his own impatience. He was relieved when Mrs. Oliver spoke. She interrupted his apologies.

"It's splendid that you've rung me up," she said. "I was just going out to give a talk on How I Write My Books. Now I can get my secretary to ring up and say I am unavoidably detained."

" But, Madame, you must not let me prevent"*

so DEAD MAJTS FOLLT

"It's not a case of preventing," said Mrs. Oliver joyfully.

" I'd have made the most awful fool of myself.

I mean, what can you say about how you write books ?

What I mean is, first you've got to think of something, and when you've thought of it you've got to force yourself to sit down and write it. That's all. It would have taken me just three minutes to explain that, and then the Talk would have been ended and everyone would have been very fed up. I can't imagine why everybody is always so keen for authors to talk about writing. I should have thought it was an author's business to write, not talk."

" And yet it is about how you write that I want to

ask you."

"You can ask," said Mrs. Oliver; "but I probably shan't know the answer. I mean one just sits down and writes. Half a minute, I've got a frightfully silly hat on for the Talk--and I must take it off. It scratches my forehead." There was a momentary pause and then the voice of Mrs. Oliver resumed in a relieved voice, "Hats are really only a symbol, nowadays, aren't they? I mean, one doesn't wear them for sensible reasons any more; to keep one's head warm, or shield one from the sun, or hide one's face from people one doesn't want to meet. I beg your pardon, M. Poirot, did you say something?"

"It was an ejaculation only. It is extraordinary," said Poirot, and his voice was awed. "Always you give me ideas. So also did my friend Hastings whom I have not seen for many, many years. You have given me

^^_^^'" .r-/rn'

DEAD MAA "S FOLLY, ay

now the clue to yet another piece of my problem. But no more of all that. Let me ask you instead my question. Do you know an atom scientist, Madame ? "

" Do I know an atom scientist ? " said Mrs. Oliver in a surprised voice. "I don't know. I suppose I may. I mean, I know some professors and things. I'm never quite sure what they actually do."

" Yet you made an atom scientist one of the suspects in your Murder Hunt? "

"Oh, that\ That was just to be up to date. I mean, when I went to buy presents for my nephews last Christmas, there was nothing but science fiction and the stratosphere and supersonic toys, and so I thought when I started on the Murder Hunt, ' Better have an atom scientist as the chief suspect and be modern.' After all, if I'd needed a little technical jargon for it I could always have got it from Alee Legge."

"Alee Leggethe husband of Sally Legge? Is he an atom scientist ? "

" Yes, he is. Not Harwell. Wales somewhere. Cardiff.

Or Bristol, is it? It's just a holiday cottage they have on the Helm. Yes, so, of course, I do know an atom scientist after all."

"And it was meeting him at Nasse House that probably put the idea of an atom scientist into your head ? But his wife is not Yugoslavian."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Oliver, "Sally is English as English. Surely you realise that\ "

"Then what put the idea of the Yugoslavian wife into your head?"

833 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

" I really don't know.... Refugees perhaps ? Students ? All those foreign girls at the hostel trespassing through the woods and speaking broken English."

"I see.... Yes, I see now a lot of things.*"

"It's about dme," said Mrs. Oliver.

- Pardon?"

" I said it was about time," said Mrs. Oliver. " That you did see things, I mean. Up to now you don't seem to have done anything" Her voice held reproach.

" One cannot arrive at things all in a moment," said

Poirot, defending himself. "The police," he added, "have been completely baffled."

"Oh, the police," said Mrs. Oliver. "Now if a woman were the head of Scotland Yard ..."

Recognising this well-known phrase, Poirot hastened to interrupt.

" The matter has been complex," he said. " Extremely complex. But now I tell you this in confidence but now I arrive!"

Mrs. Oliver remained unimpressed.

"I dare say," she said; "but in the meantime there have been two murders."

"Three," Poirot corrected her.

"Three murders? Who's the third? "

"An old man called Merdell," said Hercule Poirot.

"I haven't heard of that one," said Mrs. Oliver.

"Will it be in the paper?"

"No," said Poirot, "up to now no one has suspected that it was anything but an accident."

"And it wasn't an accident? "

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 233

"No," said Poirot, "it was not an accident."

"Well, tell me who did it--did them, I mean--or can't you over the telephone? "

"One does not say these things over the telephone,** said Poirot.

"Then I shall ring off," said Mrs. Oliver. "I can't bear it."

"Wait a moment," said Poirot, "there is something else I wanted to ask you. Now, what was it? "

"That's a sign of age," said Mrs. Oliver. "I do that, too. Forget things----"

"There was something, some little point--it worried me. I was in the boathouse . . ."

He cast his mind back. That pile of comics. Marlene's phrases scrawled on the margin. "Albert goes with Doreen." He had had a feeling that there was something lacking--that there was something he must ask Mrs. Oliver.

"Are you still there, M. Poirot?" demanded Mrs. Oliver. At the same time the operator requested more money.

These formalities completed, Poirot spoke once more.

"Are you still there, Madame? "

"I'm still here," said Mrs. Oliver. "Don't let's waste any more money asking each other if we're there. What is it?"

"It is something very important. You remember your Murder Hunt? "

"Well, of course I remember it. It's practically what we've just been talking about, isn't it? "

234 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"I made one grave mistake," said Poirot. "I never read your synopsis for competitors. In the gravity of discovering a murder it did not seem to matter. I was

wrong. It did matter. You are a sensitive person, Madame. You are affected by your atmosphere, by the personalities of the people you meet. And these are translated into your work. Not recognisably so, but they are the inspiration from which your fertile brain draws its creations."

"That's very nice flowery language," said Mrs. Oliver. " But what exactly do you mean ? "

" That you have always known more about this crime than you have realised yourself. Now for the question I want to ask you two questions actually; but the first is very important. Did you, when you first began to plan your Murder Hunt, mean the body to be discovered in the boathouse? "

"No, I didn't."

" Where did you intend it to be? "

"In that funny little summer-house tucked away in the rhododendrons near the house. I thought it was just the place. But then someone, I can't remember who exactly, began insisting that it should be found in the Folly. Well, that, of course, was an absurd idea! I mean, anyone could have strolled in there quite casually and come across it without having followed a single clue. People are so stupid. Of course I couldn't agree to that."

"So, instead, you accepted the boathouse?"

" Yes, that's just how it happened. There was really

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 235

nothing against the boathouse though I still thought the little summer-house would have been better."

"Yes, that is the technique you outlined to me that first day. There is one thing more. Do you remember telling me that there was a final clue written on one of the ' comics ' that Marlene was given to amuse her ? *"

" Yes, of course."

"Tell me, was it something like" (he forced his memory back to a moment when he had stood reading various scrawled phrases): "Albert goes with Doreen; George Porgie kisses hikers in the wood; Peter pinches

girls in the Cinema? "

"Good gracious me, no," said Mrs. Oliver in a slightly shocked voice. "It wasn't anything silly like that. No, mine was a perfectly straightforward clue." She lowered her voice and spoke in mysterious tones.

" Look in the hiker's rucksack."

" Epatant! " cried Poirot. " Epatant! Of course, the 'comic' with that on it would have to be taken away. It might have given someone ideas! "

"The rucksack, of course, was on the floor by the body and"

"Ah, but it is another rucksack of which I am thinking."

" You're confusing me with all these rucksacks," Mrs. Oliver complained. " There was only one in my murder story. Don't you want to know what was in it?"

"Not in the least," said Poirot. "That is to say," he added politely, "I should be enchanted to hear, of course, but"

236 DEAD MAN'S FOLLT

Mrs. Oliver swept over the " but."

"Very ingenious, / think," she said, the pride of authorship in her voice. "You see, in Marlene's haversack, which was supposed to be the Yugoslavian's wife's haversack, if you understand what I mean----"

"Yes, yes," said Poirot, preparing himself to be lost in fog once more.

"Well, in it was the bottle of medicine containing poison with which the country squire poisoned his wife. You see, the Yugoslavian girl had been over here training as a nurse and she'd been in the house when Colonel Blunt poisoned his first wife for her money. And she, the nurse, had got hold of the bottle and taken it away, and then come back to blackmail him. That, of course, is why he killed her. Does that fit in, M. Poirot?"

"Fit in with what?"

" With your ideas," said Mrs. Oliver.

"Not at all," said Poirot, but added hastily, "All the

same, my felicitations, Madame. I am sure your Murder Hunt was so ingenious that nobody won the prize."

"But they did," said Mrs. Oliver. "Quite late, about seven o'clock. A very dogged old lady supposed to be quite gaga. She got through all the clues and arrived at the boathouse triumphantly, but of course the police were there. So then she heard about the murder, and she was the last person at the whole fete to hear about it, I should imagine. Anyway, they gave her the prize." She added with satisfaction, "That horrid young man

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 237

with the freckles who said I drank like a fish never got farther than the camellia garden."

"Some day, Madame," said Poirot, "you shall tell me this story of yours."

"Actually," said Mrs. Oliver, "I'm thinking of turning it into a book. It would be a pity to waste it."

And it may here be mentioned that some three years later Hercule Poirot read *The Woman in the Wood*, by Ariadne Oliver, and wondered whilst he read it why some of the persons and incidents seemed to him vaguely familiar.

CHAPTER XVIII

the sun was setting when Poirot came to what was called officially Mill Cottage, and known locally as the Pink Cottage down by Lawder's Creek. He knocked on the door and it was flung open with such suddenness that he started back. The angry-looking young man in the doorway stared at him for a moment without recognising him. Then he gave a short laugh.

"Hallo," he said, "it's the sleuth. Come in, M. Poirot. I'm packing up."

Poirot accepted the invitation and stepped into the cottage. It was plainly, rather badly furnished. And Alee Legge's personal possessions were at the moment taking up a disproportionate amount of room. Books, papers and articles of stray clothing were strewn all

around, an open suitcase stood on the floor.

"The final break up of the menage," said Alee Legge.

"Sally has cleared out. I expect you know that."

"I did not know it, no."

Alee Legge gave a short laugh.

"I'm glad there's something you don't know. Yes, she's had enough of married life. Going to link up her life with that tame architect."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Poirot.

"I don't see why you should be sorry."

238

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 239

"I am sorry," said Poirot, clearing off two books and a shirt and sitting down on the corner of the sofa,

"because I do not think she will be as happy with him as she would be with you."

"She hasn't been particularly happy with me this last six months."

"Six months is not a lifetime," said Poirot, "it is a very short space out of what might be a long happy married life."

"Talking rather like a parson, aren't you?"

"Possibly. May I say, Mr. Legge, that if your wife has not been happy with you it is probably more your fault than hers."

"She certainly thinks so. Everything's my fault, I suppose."

"Not everything, but some things."

"Oh, blame everything on me. I might as well drown myself in the damn river and have done with it."

Poirot looked at him thoughtfully.

"I am glad to observe," he remarked, "that you are now more perturbed with your own troubles than with those of the world."

"The world can go hang," said Mr- Legge. He added bitterly, "I seem to have made the most complete fool of myself all along the line."

"Yes," said Poirot, "I would say that you have

been more unfortunate than reprehensible in your conduct."

Alee Legge stared at him.

240 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Who hired you to sleuth me?" he demanded. "Was it Sally?"

"Why should you think that?"

"Well, nothing's happened officially. So I concluded that you must have come down after me on a private job."

"You are in error," replied Poirot. "I have not at any time been sleuthing you. When I came down here I had no idea that you existed."

"Then how do you know whether I've been unfortunate or made a fool of myself or what?*"

"From the result of observation and reflection," said Poirot. "Shall I make a little guess and will you tell me if I am right?"

"You can make as many little guesses as you like," said Alee Legge. "But don't expect me to play."

"I think," said Poirot, "that some years ago you had an interest and sympathy for a certain political party. Like many other young men of a scientific bent. In your profession such sympathies and tendencies are naturally regarded with suspicion. I do not think you were ever seriously compromised, but I do think that pressure was brought upon you to consolidate your position in a way you did not want to consolidate it. You tried to withdraw and you were faced with a threat. You were given a rendezvous with someone. I doubt if I shall ever know that young man's name. He will be for me always the young man in the turtle shirt"

Alee Legge gave a sudden explosion of laughter.

DEAD MAJTS FOLLY 241

"I suppose that shirt was a bit of a joke. I wasn't seeing things were funny at the time."

Hercule Poirot continued.

" What with worry over the fate of the world, and the worry over your own predicament, you became, if I may say so, a man almost impossible for any woman to live with happily. You did not confide in your wife. That was unfortunate for you, as I should say that your wife was a woman of loyalty, and that if she had realised how unhappy and desperate you were, she would have been whole-heartedly on your side. Instead of that she merely began to compare you, unfavourably, with a former friend of hers, Michael Weyman."

He rose.

"I should advise you, Mr. Legge, to complete your packing as soon as possible, to follow your wife to London, to ask her to forgive you and to tell her all that you have been through."

" So that's what you advise," said Alee Legge. " And what the hell business is it of yours ?"

" None," said Hercule Poirot. He withdrew towards the door. " But I am always right."

There was a moment's silence. Then Alee Legge burst into a wild peal of laughter.

"Do you know," he said, "I think I'll take your advice? Divorce is damned expensive. Anyway, if you've got hold of the woman you want, and are then not able to keep her, it's a bit humiliating, don't you think? I shall go up to her flat in Chelsea, and if I find Michael there I shall take hold of him by that

242 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

hand-knitted pansy tie he wears and throttle the life out of him. I'd enjoy that. Yes, I'd enjoy it a good deal."

His face suddenly lit up with a most attractive smile.

" Sorry for my filthy temper," he said, " and thanks a lot."

He clapped Poirot on the shoulder. With the force of the blow Poirot staggered and all but fell.

Mr. Legge's friendship was certainly more painful than his animosity.

"And now," said Poirot, leaving Mill Cottage on

painful feet and looking up at the darkening sky,
"where do I go?"

CHAPTER XIX

the chief constable and Inspector Bland looted up with keen curiosity as Hercule Poirot was ushered in. The chief constable was not in the best of tempers. Only Bland's quiet persistence had caused him to cancel his dinner appointment for that evening.

" I know, Bland, I know," he said fretfully. " Maybe he was a little Belgian wizard in his day--but surely, man, his day's over. He's what age? "

Bland slid tactfully over the answer to this question which, in any case, he did not know. Poirot himself was always reticent on the subject of his age.

"The point is, sir, he was there--on the spot. And we're not getting anywhere any other way. Up against a blank wall, that's where we are."

The chief constable blew his nose irritably.

"I know. I know. Makes me begin to believe in Mrs. Masterton's homicidal pervert. I'd even use bloodhounds, if there were anywhere to use them."

"Bloodhounds can't follow a scent over water."

"Yes. I know what you've always thought, Bland.

And I'm inclined to agree with you. But there's absolutely no motive, you know. Not an iota of motive."

"The motive may be out in the islands." 243

244 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"Meaning that Hattie Stubbs knew something about De Sousa out there ? I suppose that's reasonably possible, given her mentality. She was simple, everyone agrees on that. She might blurt out what she knew to anyone at any time. Is that the way you see it?"

" Something like that."

"If so, he waited a long time before crossing the sea and doing something about it."

" Well, sir, it's possible he didn't know what exactly had become of her. His own story was that he'd seen a

piece in some society periodical about Nasse House, and its beautiful chatelaine. (Which I have always thought myself," added Bland parenthetically, "to be a silver thing with chains, and bits and pieces hung on it that people's grandmothers used to clip on their waistbands --and a good idea, too. Wouldn't be all these silly women for ever leaving their handbags around.) Seems, though, that in women's jargon chatelaine means mistress of a house. As I say, that's his story and maybe it's true enough, and he didn't know where she was or who she'd married until then."

" But once he did know, he came across post-haste in a yacht in order to murder her ? It's far-fetched, Bland. very farfetched."

"Butitcou^be,sir."

" And what on earth could the woman know ? "

" Remember what she said to her husband. ' He kills people'"

"Murder remembered? From the time she was

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 245

fifteen? And presumably only her word for it? Surely he'd be able to laugh that off? "

"We don't know the facts," said Bland stubbornly.

" You know yourself, sir, how once one knows who did a thing, one can look for the evidence and find it."

"H'm. We've made inquiries about De Sousa--discreetly--through the usual channels--and got nowhere."

"That's just why, sir, this funny old Belgian boy might have stumbled on something. He was in the house--that's the important thing. Lady Stubbs talked to him. Some of the random things she said may have come together in his mind and made sense. However that may be, he's been down in Nassecombe most of today."

" And he rang you up to ask what kind of a yacht Etienne De Sousa had ? "

"When he rang up the first time, yes. The second time was to ask me to arrange this meeting."

"Well," the chief constable looked at his watch, "if he doesn't come within five minutes ..."

But it was at that very moment that Hercule Poirot was shown in.

His appearance was not as immaculate as usual. His moustache was limp, affected by the damp Devon air, his patent-leather shoes were heavily coated with mud, he limped, and his hair was ruffled.

"Well, so here you are, M. Poirot." The chief constable shook hands. "We're all keyed up, on our toes, waiting to hear what you have to tell us."

246 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

The words were faintly ironic, but Hercule Poirot, however damp physically, was in no mood to be damped mentally.

"I cannot imagine," he said, "how it was I did not see the truth before."

The chief constable received this rather coldly.

"Are we to understand that you do see the truth now?"

"Yes, there are details--but the outline is clear."

"We want more than an outline," said the chief constable dryly. "We want evidence. Have you got evidence, M. Poirot?"

"I can tell you where to find the evidence."

Inspector Bland spoke. "Such as?"

Poirot turned to him and asked a question.

"Etienne De Sousa has, I suppose, left the country."

"Two weeks ago." Bland added bitterly, "It won't be easy to get him back."

"He might be persuaded."

"Persuaded? There's not sufficient evidence to warrant an extradition order, then?"

"It is not a question of an extradition order. If the facts are put to him----"

"But what facts, M. Poirot?" The chief constable spoke with some irritation. "What are these facts you talk about so glibly?"

"The fact that Etienne De Sousa came here in a

lavishly appointed luxury yacht showing that his family is rich, the fact that old Merdell was Marlene Tucker's grandfather (which I did not know until to DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 247 day), the fact that Lady Stubbs was fond of wearing the coolie type of hat, the fact that Mrs. Oliver, in spite of an unbridled and unreliable imagination, is, unrealised by herself, a very shrewd judge of character, the fact that Marlene Tucker had lipsticks and bottles of perfume hidden at the back of her bureau drawer, the fact that Miss Brewis maintains that it was Lady Stubbs who asked her to take a refreshment tray down to Marlene at the boathouse."

"Facts?" The chief constable stared. "You call those facts? But there's nothing new there."

"You prefer evidence--definite evidence--such as-- Lady Stubbs's body?"

Now it was Bland who stared.

"You have found Lady Stubbs's body?"

"Not actually found it--but I know where it is hidden. You shall go to the spot, and when you have found it, then--then you will have evidence--all the evidence you need. For only one person could have hidden it there."

"And who's that?"

Hercule Poirot smiled--the contented smile of a cat who has lapped up a saucer of cream.

"The person it so often is," he said softly; "the husband. Sir George Stubbs killed his wife."

"But that's impossible, M. Poirot. We know it's impossible."

"Oh, no," said Poirot, "it is not impossible at all. Listen, and I will tell you."

CHAPTER XX

hercule poirot paused a moment at the big wroughtiron gates. He looked ahead of him along the curving drive. The last of the golden brown leaves fluttered down from the trees. The cyclamen were over. Poirot sighed. He turned aside and rapped gently on the door of the little white pilastered lodge.

After a few moments' delay he heard footsteps inside, those slow hesitant footsteps. The door was opened by Mrs. Folliat. He was not startled this time to see how old and frail she looked.

She said, "M. Poirot? You again? "

"May I come in? "

"Of course."

He followed her in.

She offered him tea which he refused. Then she asked in a quiet voice:

" Why have you come ?"

"I think you can guess, Madame."

Her answer was oblique.

** I am very tired," she said.

"I know." He went on, "There have now been three deaths, Hattie Stubbs, Marlene Tucker, old Merdell."

She said sharply;

"Merdell? That was an accident. He fell from the

248

^wwmwm^'.wm^

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 349

quay. He was very old, half-blind, and he'd been drinking in the pub."

" It was not an accident. Merdell knew too much."

"What did he know?"

" He recognised a face, or a way of walking, or a voice something like that. I talked to him the day I first came down here. He told me then all about the Folliat family about your father-in-law and your husband, and your sons who were killed in the war. Only they were not both killed, were they? Your son Henry went down with his ship, but your second son, James, was not killed. He deserted. He was reported at first, perhaps, Missing believed killed, and later you told everyone that he was killed. It was nobody's business to disbelieve that statement. Why should they ? "

Poirot paused and then went on:

"Do not imagine I have no sympathy for you, Madame. Life has been hard for you, I know. You can

have had no real illusions about your younger son, but he was your son, and you loved him. You did all you could to give him a new life. You had the charge of a young girl, a subnormal but very rich girl. Oh yes, she was rich. You gave out that her parents had lost all their money, that she was poor, and that you had advised her to marry a rich man many years older than herself. Why should anybody disbelieve your story? Again, it was nobody's business. Her parents and near relatives had been killed. A firm of French lawyers in Paris acted as instructed by lawyers in San Miguel. On her marriage, she assumed control of her own fortune.

250 DEAD MAJFS FOLLT She was, as you have told me, docile, affectionate, suggestible. Everything her husband asked her to sign, she signed. Securities were probably changed and resold many times, but in the end the desired financial result was reached. Sir George Stubbs, the new personality assumed by your son, became a rich man and his wife became a pauper. It is no legal offence to call yourself 'sir ' unless it is done to obtain money under false pretences. A title creates confidence--it suggests, if not birth, then certainly riches. So the rich Sir George Stubbs, older and changed in appearance and having grown a beard, bought Nasse House and came to live where he belonged, though he had not been there since he was a boy. There was .nobody left after the devastations of war who was likely to have recognised him. But old Merdell did. He kept the knowledge to himself, but when he said to me slyly that there would always be Folliats at Nasse House, that was his own private joke.

" So all had turned out well, or so you thought. Your plan, I fully believe, stopped there. Your son had wealth, his ancestral home, and though his wife was subnormal she was a beautiful and docile girl, and you hoped he would be kind to her and that she would be happy."

Mrs. Folliat said in a low voice:

"That's how I thought it would be--I would look

after Hattie and care for her. I never dreamed----"

" You never dreamed--and your son carefully did not tell you, that at the time of the marriage he was already

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 251 married. Oh, yes--we have searched the records for what we knew must exist. Your son had married a girl in Trieste, a girl of the underground criminal world with whom he concealed himself after his desertion. She had no mind to be parted from him, nor for that matter had he any intention of being parted from her. He accepted the marriage with Hattie as a means to wealth, but in his own mind he knew from the beginning what he intended to do."

" No, no, I do not believe that I cannot believe it....

It was that woman--that wicked creature."

Poirot went on inexorably:

"He meant murder. Hattie had no relations, few friends. Immediately on their return to England, he brought her here. The servants hardly saw her that first evening, and the woman they saw the next morning was not Hattie, but his Italian wife made up as Hattie and behaving roughly much as Hattie behaved. And there again it might have ended. The false Hattie would have lived out her life as the real Hattie though doubtless her mental powers would have unexpectedly improved owing to what would vaguely be called 'new treatment.' The secretary, Miss Brewis, already realised that there was very little wrong with Lady Stubbs's mental processes.

"But then a totally unforeseen thing happened. A cousin of Hattie's wrote that he was coming to England on a yachting trip, and although that cousin had not seen her for many years, he would not be likely to be deceived by an imposter.

35a DEAD MAN'S FOLLY

"It is odd," said Poirot, breaking off his narrative, " that though the thought did cross my mind that De

Sousa might not be De Sousa, it never occurred to me that the truth lay the other way round--that is to say,

that Hattie was not Hattie."

He went on:

"There might have been several different ways of meeting that situation. Lady Stubbs could have avoided a meeting with a plea of illness, but if De Sousa remained long in England she could hardly have continued to avoid meeting him. And there was already another complication. Old Merdell, garrulous in his old age, used to chatter to his granddaughter. She was probably the only person who bothered to listen to him, and even she dismissed most of what he said because she thought him 'batty.' Nevertheless, some of the things he said about having seen 'a woman's body in the woods,' and 'Sir George Stubbs being really Mr. James' made sufficient impression on her to make her hint about them tentatively to Sir George. In doing so, of course, she signed her own death warrant. Sir George and his wife could take no chances of stories like that getting around. I imagine that he handed her out small sums of hush money, and proceeded to make his plans. " They worked out their scheme very carefully. They already knew the date when De Sousa was due at Helmmouth. It coincided with the date fixed for the fete. They arranged their plan so that Marlene should be killed and Lady Stubbs 'disappear' in conditions which

DEAD MAN'S FOLLT 253

should throw vague suspicion on De Sousa. Hence the reference to his being a 'wicked man' and the accusation: 'he kills people.' Lady Stubbs was to disappear permanently (possibly a conveniently unrecognisable body might be identified at some time by Sir George), and a new personality was to take her place. Actually, 'Hattie' Would merely resume her own Italian personality.

All that was needed was for her to double the parts over a period of a little more than twenty-four hours. With the connivance of Sir George, this was easy. On the day I arrived, 'Lady Stubbs' was supposed to have remained in her room until just before teatime.

Nobody saw her there except Sir George. Actually, she dipped out, took a bus or a train to Exeter, and travelled from Exeter in the company of another girl student (several travel every day this time of year) to whom she confided her story of the friend who had eaten bad veal and lamb pie. She arrives at the hostel, books her cubicle, and goes out to 'explore.' By tea time. Lady Stubbs is in the drawing-room. After dinner. Lady Stubbs goes early to bed--but Miss Brewis caught a glimpse of her slipping out of the house a short while afterwards. She spends the night in the hostel, but is out early, and is back at Nasse as Lady Stubbs for breakfast. Again she spends a morning in her room with a 'headache,' and this time manages to stage an appearance as a 'trespasser' rebuffed by Sir George from the window of his wife's room where he pretends to turn and speak to his wife inside that room. The changes of costume were not difficult--shorts and an

254 DEAD MAN'S FOLLOWS open shirt under one of the elaborate dresses that Lady Stubbs was fond of wearing. Heavy white make-up for Lady Stubbs with a big coolie hat to shade her face; a gay peasant scarf, sunburned complexion, and bronzed curls for the Italian girl. No one would have dreamed that those two were the same woman.

" And so the final drama was staged. Just before four o'clock Lady Stubbs told Miss Brewis to take a tea-tray down to Marlene. That was because she was afraid such an idea might occur to Miss Brewis independently, and it would be fatal if Miss Brewis should inconveniently appear at the wrong moment. Perhaps, too, she had a malicious pleasure in arranging for Miss Brewis to be at the scene of the crime at approximately the time it was committed. Then, choosing her moment, she slipped into the empty fortunetelling tent, out through the back and into the summerhouse in the shrubbery where she kept her hiker's rucksack

with its change of costume. She slipped through the woods, called to Marlene to let her in, and strangled

the unsuspecting girl then and there. The big coolie hat she threw into the river, then she changed into her hiker dress and make-up, packed up her cyclamen georgette dress and high-heeled shoes in the rucksack--and presently an Italian student from the youth hostel joined her Dutch acquaintance at the shows on the lawn, and left with her by the local bus as planned. Where she is now I do not know. I suspect in Soho where she doubtless has underworld affiliations of her own nationality who can provide her with the necessary

DEAD MAN'S FOLLY 255

papers. In any case, it is not for an Italian girl that the police are looking, it is for Hattie Stubbs, simple, subnormal, exotic.

"But poor Hattie Stubbs is dead, as you yourself, Madame, know only too well. You revealed that knowledge when I spoke to you in the drawing-room on the day of the fete. The death of Marlene had been a bad shock to you--you had not had the least idea of what was planned; but you revealed very clearly, though I was dense enough not to see it at the time, that when you talked of 'Hattie,' you were talking of two different people--one a woman you disliked who would be * better dead,' and against whom you warned me 'not to believe a word she said '--the other a girl of whom you spoke in the past tense, and whom you defended with a warm affection. I think, Madame, that you were very fond of poor Hattie Stubbs. . . ."

There was a long pause.

Mrs. Folliat sat quite still in her chair. At last she roused herself and spoke. Her voice had the coldness of ice.

"Your whole story is quite fantastic, M. Poirot. I really think you must be mad. . . , All this is entirely in your head, you have no evidence whatsoever."

Poirot went across to one of the windows and opened it.

"Listen, Madame. What do you hear? "

"I am a little deaf. . . . What should I hear?"

" The blows of a pick axe,... They are breaking up the
concrete foundation of the Folly. . . . What a good

256 DEAD MAN'S FOLLY place to bury a body--where a tree has been uprooted
and the earth is already disturbed. A little later, to
make all safe, concrete over the ground where the body
lies, and, on the concrete, erect a Folly. . . ." He added
gently: "Sir George's Folly. . . . The Folly of the
owner of Nasse House."

A long shuddering sigh escaped Mrs. Folliat.

"Such a beautiful place," said Poirot. "Only one
thing evil. . . . The man who owns it. . . ."

" I know." Her words came hoarsely. " I have always
known. . . . Even as a child he frightened me. . . .

Ruthless.... Without pity.... And without conscience.

. . . But he was my son and I loved him. ... I should
have spoken out after Hattie*s death. . . . But he was
my son. How could / be the one to give him up?

And so, because of my silence--that poor silly child was I I
killed. . . . And after her, dear old Merdell.. . . Where p
would it have ended? "

" With a murderer it does not end," said Poirot.

She bowed her head. For a moment or two she stayed
so, her hands covering her eyes.

Then Mrs. Folliat of Nasse House, daughter of a long ,
line of brave men, drew herself erect. She looked
straight at Poirot and her voice was formal and remote. '

"Thank you, M. Poirot," she said, "for coming to i
tell me yourself of all this. Will you leave me now?

There are some things that one has to face quite
alone. ..."

THE END