

POIROT

THE QUEEN OF MYSTERY

Agatha
Christie



**FIVE
LITTLE PIGS**

A Hercule Poirot Mystery

Previously published as *MURDER IN RETROSPECT*

Agatha Christie

Five Little Pigs

A Hercule Poirot Mystery

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Introduction

CARLA LEMARCHANT

Hercule Poirot looked with interest and appreciation at the young woman who was being ushered into the room.

There had been nothing distinctive in the letter she had written. It had been a mere request for an appointment, with no hint of what lay behind that request. It had been brief and businesslike. Only the firmness of the handwriting had indicated that Carla Lemarchant was a young woman.

And now here she was in the flesh—a tall, slender young woman in the early twenties. The kind of young woman that one definitely looked at twice. Her clothes were good, an expensive well-cut coat and skirt and luxurious furs. Her head was well poised on her shoulders, she had a square brow, a sensitively cut nose and a determined chin. She looked very much alive. It was her aliveness, more than her beauty, which struck the predominant note.

Before her entrance, Hercule Poirot had been feeling old—now he felt rejuvenated—alive—keen!

As he came forward to greet her, he was aware of her dark grey eyes studying him attentively. She was very earnest in that scrutiny.

She sat down and accepted the cigarette that he offered her. After it was lit she sat for a minute or two smoking, still looking at him with that earnest, thoughtful gaze.

Poirot said gently:

“Yes, it has to be decided, does it not?”

She started. “I beg your pardon?”

Her voice was attractive, with a faint, agreeable huskiness in it.

“You are making up your mind, are you not, whether I am a mere mountebank, or the man you need?”

She smiled. She said:

“Well, yes—something of that kind. You see, Mr. Poirot, you—you don’t look exactly the way I pictured you.”

“And I am old, am I not? Older than you imagined?”

“Yes, that too.” She hesitated. “I’m being frank, you see. I want—I’ve got to have—the best.”

“Rest assured,” said Hercule Poirot. “I *am* the best!”

Carla said: “You’re not modest...All the same, I’m inclined to take you at your word.”

Poirot said placidly:

“One does not, you know, employ merely the muscles. I do not need to bend and measure the footprints and pick up the cigarette ends and examine the bent blades of grass. It is enough for me to sit back in my chair and *think*. It is this”—he tapped his egg-shaped head—“*this* that functions!”

“I know,” said Carla Lemarchant. “That’s why I’ve come to you. I want you, you see, to do something fantastic!”

“That,” said Hercule Poirot, “promises well!”

He looked at her in encouragement.

Carla Lemarchant drew a deep breath.

“My name,” she said, “isn’t Carla. It’s Caroline. The same as my mother’s. I was called after her. She paused. “And though I’ve always gone by the name of Lemarchant—my real name is Crale.”

Hercule Poirot's forehead creased a moment perplexedly. He murmured: "Crale—I seem to remember...."

She said:

"My father was a painter—rather a well-known painter. Some people say he was a great painter. I think he was."

Hercule Poirot said: "Amyas Crale?"

"Yes." She paused, then she went on: "And my mother, Caroline Crale, was tried for murdering him!"

"Aha," said Hercule Poirot. "I remember now—but only vaguely. I was abroad at the time. It was long time ago."

"Sixteen years," said the girl.

Her face was very white now and her eyes two burning lights.

She said:

"Do you understand? *She was tried and convicted*...She wasn't hanged because they felt that there were extenuating circumstances—so the sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. But she died only a year after the trial. You see? It's all over—done—finished with...."

Poirot said quietly: "And so?"

The girl called Carla Lemarchant pressed her hands together. She spoke slowly and haltingly but with an odd, pointed emphasis.

She said:

"You've got to understand—exactly—where I come in. I was five years old at the time it—happened. Too young to know anything about it. I remember my mother and my father, of course, and I remember leaving home suddenly—being taken to the country. I remember the pigs and a nice fat farmer's wife—and everybody being very kind—and I remember, quite clearly, the funny way they used to look at me—everybody—a sort of furtive look. I knew, of course, children do, that there was something wrong—but I didn't know what.

"And then I went on a ship—it was exciting—it went on for days, and then I was in Canada and Uncle Simon met me, and I lived in Montreal with him and with Aunt Louise, and when I asked about Mummy and Daddy they said they'd be coming soon. And then—and then I think I forgot—only I so of knew that they were dead without remembering anyone actually telling me so. Because by that time, you see, I didn't think about them any more. I was very happy, you know. Uncle Simon and Aunt Louise were sweet to me, and I went to school and had a lot of friends, and I'd quite forgotten that I'd ever had another name, not Lemarchant. Aunt Louise, you see, told me that that was my name in Canada and that seemed quite sensible to me at the time—it was just my Canadian name—but as I said I forgot in the end that I'd ever had any other."

She flung up her defiant chin. She said:

"Look at me. You'd say—wouldn't you? if you met me: 'There goes a girl who's got nothing to worry about!' I'm well off, I've got splendid health, I'm sufficiently good to look at, I can enjoy life. At twenty, there wasn't a girl anywhere I'd have changed places with.

"But already, you know, I'd begun to ask questions. About my own mother and father. Who they were and what they did? I'd have been bound to find out in the end—

"As it was, they told me the truth. When I was twenty-one. They had to then, because for one thing, I came into my own money. And then, you see, there was the letter. The letter my mother left for me when she died."

Her expression changed, dimmed. Her eyes were no longer two burning points, they were dark dir

pools. She said:

~~“That’s when I learnt the truth. That my mother had been convicted of murder. It was—rather horrible.”~~

She paused.

“There’s something else I must tell you. I was engaged to be married. They said we must wait—that we couldn’t be married until I was twenty-one. When I knew, I understood why.”

Poirot stirred and spoke for the first time. He said:

“And what was your fiancé’s reaction?”

“John? John didn’t care. He said it made no difference—not to him. He and I were John and Carla—and the past didn’t matter.”

She leaned forward.

“We’re still engaged. But all the same, you know, it *does* matter. It matters to me. And it matters John too...It isn’t the past that matters to us—it’s the future.” She clenched her hands. “We want children, you see. We both want children. And we don’t want to watch our children growing up and be afraid.”

Poirot said:

“Do you not realize that amongst every one’s ancestors there has been violence and evil?”

“You don’t understand. That’s so, of course. But then, one doesn’t usually know about it. We do. It’s very near to us. And sometimes—I’ve seen John just look at me. Such a quick glance—just a flash. Supposing we were married and we’d quarrelled—and I saw him look at me and—and *wonder*!”

Hercule Poirot said: “How was your father killed?”

Carla’s voice came clear and firm.

“He was poisoned.”

Hercule Poirot said: “I see.”

There was a silence.

Then the girl said in a calm, matter-of-fact voice:

“Thank goodness you’re sensible. You see that it does matter—and what it involves. You don’t try and patch it up and trot out consoling phrases.”

“I understand very well,” said Poirot. “What I do not understand is what you want of *me*?”

Carla Lemarchant said simply:

“I want to marry John! And I mean to marry John! And I want to have at least two girls and two boys. And you’re going to make that possible!”

“You mean—you want me to talk to your fiancé? Ah no, it is idiocy what I say there! It is something quite different that you are suggesting. Tell me what is in your mind.”

“Listen, Mr. Poirot. Get this—and get it clearly. I’m hiring you to investigate a case of murder.”

“Do you mean—?”

“Yes, I do mean. A case of murder is a case of murder whether it happened yesterday or sixteen years ago.”

“But my dear young lady—”

“Wait, Mr. Poirot. You haven’t got it all yet. There’s a very important point.”

“Yes?”

“My mother was innocent,” said Carla Lemarchant.

Hercule Poirot rubbed his nose. He murmured:

“Well, naturally—I comprehend that—”

“It isn’t sentiment. There’s her letter. She left it for me before she died. It was to be given to me

when I was twenty-one. She left it for that one reason—that I should be quite sure. That’s all that was in it. That she hadn’t done it—that she was innocent—that I could be sure of that always.”

Hercule Poirot looked thoughtfully at the young vital face staring so earnestly at him. He said slowly:

“*Tout de même—*”

Carla smiled.

“No, mother wasn’t like that! You’re thinking that it might be a lie—a sentimental lie?” She leaned forward earnestly. “Listen, Mr. Poirot, there are some things that children know quite well. I can remember my mother—a patchy remembrance, of course, but I remember quite well the *sort* of person she was. She didn’t tell lies—kind lies. If a thing was going to hurt she always told you so. Dentists, thorns in your finger—all that sort of thing. Truth was a—a natural impulse to her. I wasn’t, I don’t think, especially fond of her—but I trusted her. I *still* trust her! If she says she didn’t kill my father then she didn’t kill him! She wasn’t the sort of person who would solemnly write down a lie when she knew she was dying.”

Slowly, almost reluctantly, Hercule Poirot bowed his head.

Carla went on.

“That’s why it’s all right for *me* marrying John. *I* know it’s all right. *But he doesn’t*. He feels that naturally I would think my mother was innocent. It’s got to be cleared up, Mr. Poirot. And *you’re* going to do it!”

Hercule Poirot said slowly:

“Granted that what you say is true, mademoiselle, sixteen years have gone by!”

Carla Lemarchant said: “Oh! of course it’s going to be *difficult!* Nobody but *you* could do it!”

Hercule Poirot’s eyes twinkled slightly. He said:

“You give me the best butter—*hein?*”

Carla said:

“I’ve heard about you. The things you’ve done. The way you have done them. It’s psychology that interests you, isn’t it? Well, that doesn’t change with time. The tangible things are gone—the cigarette end and the footprints and the bent blades of grass. You can’t look for those any more. But you can go over all the facts of the case, and perhaps talk to the people who were there at the time—they’re all alive still—and then—and then, as you said just now, you can lie back in your chair and *think*. And *you’ll know what really happened....*”

Hercule Poirot rose to his feet. One hand caressed his moustache. He said:

“Mademoiselle, I am honoured! I will justify your faith in me. I will investigate your case of murder. I will search back into the events of sixteen years ago and I will find out the truth.”

Carla got up. Her eyes were shining. But she only said:

“Good.”

Hercule Poirot shook an eloquent forefinger.

“One little moment. I have said I will find out the truth. I do not, you understand, have the bias. I do not accept your assurance of your mother’s innocence. If she was guilty—*eh bien*, what then?”

Carla’s proud head went back. She said:

“I’m her daughter. I want the *truth!*”

Hercule Poirot said:

“*En avant*, then. Though it is not that, that I should say. On the contrary. *En arrière....*”

COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE

“Do I remember the Crale case?” asked Sir Montague Depleach. “Certainly I do. Remember it very well. Most attractive woman. But unbalanced, of course. No self-control.”

He glanced sideways at Poirot.

“What makes you ask me about it?”

“I am interested.”

“Not really tactful of you, my dear man,” said Depleach, showing his teeth in his sudden famous “wolf’s smile,” which had been reputed to have such a terrifying effect upon witnesses. “Not one of my successes, you know. I didn’t get her off.”

“I know that.”

Sir Montague shrugged his shoulders. He said:

“Of course I hadn’t quite as much experience then as I have now. All the same I think I did all that could humanly be done. One can’t do much without *cooperation*. We *did* get it commuted to penal servitude. Provocation, you know. Lots of respectable wives and mothers got up a petition. There was a lot of sympathy for her.”

He leaned back stretching out his long legs. His face took on a judicial, appraising look.

“If she’d shot him, you know, or even knifed him—I’d have gone all out for manslaughter. But poison—no, you can’t play tricks with that. It’s tricky—very tricky.”

“What was the defence?” asked Hercule Poirot.

He knew because he had already read the newspaper files, but he saw no harm in playing the complete ignorant to Sir Montague.

“Oh, suicide. Only thing you *could* go for. But it didn’t go down well. Crale simply wasn’t that kind of man! You never met him, I suppose? No? Well, he was a great blustering, vivid sort of chap. Great womanizer, beer drinker—all the rest of it. Went in for the lusts of the flesh and enjoyed them. You can’t persuade a jury that a man like that is going to sit down and quietly do away with himself. just doesn’t fit. No, I was afraid I was up against a losing proposition from the first. And she wouldn’t play up! I knew we’d lost as soon as she went into the box. No fight in her at all. But there it is—if you *don’t* put your client into the box, the jury draw their own conclusions.”

Poirot said:

“Is that what you meant when you said just now that one cannot do much without cooperation?”

“Absolutely, my dear fellow. We’re not magicians, you know. Half the battle is the impression the accused makes on the jury. I’ve known juries time and again bring in verdicts dead against the judge’s summing up. ‘E did it, all right’—that’s the point of view. Or ‘*He* never did a thing like that—don’t tell me!’ Caroline Crale didn’t even *try* to put up a fight.”

“Why was that?”

Sir Montague shrugged his shoulders.

“Don’t ask me. Of course, she was fond of the fellow. Broke her all up when she came to and realized what she’d done. Don’t believe she ever rallied from the shock.”

“So in your opinion she was guilty?”

Depleach looked rather startled. He said:

“Er—well, I thought we were taking that for granted.”

“Did she ever admit to you that she was guilty?”

Depleach looked shocked.

“Of course not—of course not. We have our code, you know. Innocence is always—er—assumed.

If you’re so interested it’s a pity you can’t get hold of old Mayhew. Mayhews were the solicitors who briefed me. Old Mayhew could have told you more than I can. But there—he’s joined the great majority. There’s young George Mayhew, of course, but he was only a boy at the time. It’s a long time ago, you know.”

“Yes, I know. It is fortunate for me that you remember so much. You have a remarkable memory.

Depleach looked pleased. He murmured:

“Oh well, one remembers the main headings, you know. Especially when it’s a capital charge. And of course, the Crale case got a lot of publicity from the press. Lot of sex interest and all that. The girl in the case was pretty striking. Hard-boiled piece of goods, I thought.”

“You will forgive me if I seem too insistent,” said Poirot, “but I repeat once more, you had no doubt of Caroline Crale’s guilt?”

Depleach shrugged his shoulders. He said:

“Frankly—as man to man—I don’t think there’s much doubt about it. Oh yes, she did it all right.”

“What was the evidence against her?”

“Very damning indeed. First of all there was motive. She and Crale had led a kind of cat and dog life for years—interminable rows. He was always getting mixed up with some woman or other. Couldn’t help it. He was that kind of man. She stood it pretty well on the whole. Made allowances for him on the score of temperament—and the man really was a first-class painter, you know. His stuff’s gone up enormously in price—enormously. Don’t care for that style of painting myself—ugly forceful stuff, but it’s *good*—no doubt of that.

“Well, as I say, there had been trouble about women from time to time. Mrs. Crale wasn’t the meek kind who suffers in silence. There were rows all right. But he always came back to her in the end. These affairs of his blew over. But this final affair was rather different. It was a girl, you see—and quite a young girl. She was only twenty.

“Elsa Greer, that was her name. She was the only daughter of some Yorkshire manufacturer. She’s got money and determination, and she knew what she wanted. What she wanted was Amyas Crale. She got him to paint her—he didn’t paint regular Society portraits, ‘Mrs. Blinkety Blank in satin and pearls,’ but he painted figures. I don’t know that most women would have cared to be painted by him—he didn’t spare them! But he painted the Greer girl, and he ended by falling for her good and proper. He was getting on for forty, you know, and he’d been married a good many years. He was just ripe for making a fool of himself over some chit of a girl. Elsa Greer was the girl. He was crazy about her, and his idea was to get a divorce from his wife and marry Elsa.

“Caroline Crale wasn’t standing for that. She threatened him. She was overheard by two people to say that if he didn’t give the girl up she’d kill him. And she meant it all right! The day before it happened, they’d been having tea with a neighbour. He was by way of dabbling in herbs and home-brewed medicines. Amongst his patent brews was one of coniine—spotted hemlock. There was some talk about it and its deadly properties.

“The next day he noticed that half the contents of the bottle had gone. Got the wind up about it. They found an almost empty bottle of it in Mrs. Crale’s room, hidden away at the bottom of a drawer. Hercule Poirot moved uncomfortably. He said:

“Somebody else might have put it there.”

“Oh! She admitted to the police she’d taken it. Very unwise, of course, but she didn’t have a solicitor to advise her at that stage. When they asked her about it, she admitted quite frankly that she had taken it.”

“For what reason?”

“She made out that she’d taken it with the idea of doing herself in. She couldn’t explain how the bottle came to be empty—nor how it was that there were only her fingerprints on it. That part of it was pretty damaging. She contended, you see, that Amyas Crale had committed suicide. But if he’d taken the coniine from the bottle she’d hidden in her room, *his* fingerprints would have been on the bottle as well as hers.”

“It was given him in beer, was it not?”

“Yes. She got out the bottle from the refrigerator and took it down herself to where he was painting in the garden. She poured it out and gave it to him and watched him drink it. Every one went up to lunch and left him—he often didn’t come in to meals. Afterwards she and the governess found him there dead. Her story was that the beer *she* gave him was all right. Our theory was that he suddenly felt so worried and remorseful that he slipped the poison in himself. All poppycock—he wasn’t that kind of man! And the fingerprint evidence was the most damning of all.”

“They found her fingerprints on the bottle?”

“No, they didn’t—they found only *his*—and they were phoney ones. She was alone with the body, you see, while the governess went to call up a doctor. And what she must have done was to wipe the bottle and glass and then press his fingers on them. She wanted to pretend, you see, that she’d never even handled the stuff. Well, that didn’t work. Old Rudolph, who was prosecuting, had a lot of fun with that—proved quite definitely by demonstration in court that a man *couldn’t* hold a bottle with his fingers in that position! Of course *we* did our best to prove that he *could*—that his hands would take up a contorted attitude when he was dying—but frankly our stuff wasn’t very convincing.”

Hercule Poirot said:

“The coniine in the bottle must have been put there before she took it down to the garden.”

“There was no coniine in the bottle at all. Only in the glass.”

He paused—his large handsome face suddenly altered—he turned his head sharply. “Hallo,” he said. “Now then, Poirot, *what are you driving at?*”

Poirot said:

“*If* Caroline Crale was innocent, how did that coniine get into the beer? The defence said at the time that Amyas Crale himself put it there. But you say to me that that was in the highest degree unlikely—and for my part I agree with you. He was not that kind of man. Then, if Caroline Crale did not do it, *someone else did.*”

Depleach said with almost a splutter:

“Oh, damn it all, man, you can’t flog a dead horse. It’s all over and done with years ago. Of course she did it. You’d know that well enough if you’d seen her at the time. It was written all over her! I even fancy that the verdict was a relief to her. She wasn’t frightened. No nerves at all. Just wanted to get through the trial and have it over. A very brave woman, really....”

“And yet,” said Hercule Poirot, “when she died she left a letter to be given to her daughter in which she swore solemnly that she was innocent.”

“I dare say she did,” said Sir Montague Depleach. “You or I would have done the same in her place.”

“Her daughter says she was not that kind of woman.”

“The daughter says—pah! What does *she* know about it? My dear Poirot, the daughter was a mere

infant at the time of the trial. What was she—four—five? They changed her name and sent her out of England somewhere to some relatives. What can *she* know or remember?”

“Children know people very well sometimes.”

“Maybe they do. But that doesn’t follow in this case. Naturally the girl wants to believe her mother didn’t do it. Let her believe it. It doesn’t do any harm.”

“But unfortunately she demands proof.”

“Proof that Caroline Crale didn’t kill her husband?”

“Yes.”

“Well,” said Depleach. “She won’t get it.”

“You think not?”

The famous K.C. looked thoughtfully at his companion.

“I’ve always thought you were an honest man, Poirot. What are you doing? Trying to make money by playing on a girl’s natural affections?”

“You do not know the girl. She is an unusual girl. A girl of great force of character.”

“Yes, I should imagine the daughter of Amyas and Caroline Crale might be that. What does she want?”

“She wants the truth.”

“Hm—I’m afraid she’ll find the truth unpalatable. Honestly, Poirot, I don’t think there’s any doubt about it. She killed him.”

“You will forgive me, my friend, but I must satisfy myself on that point.”

“Well, I don’t know what more you can do. You can read up the newspaper accounts of the trial. Humphrey Rudolph appeared for the Crown. He’s dead—let me see, who was his junior? Young Fogg, I think. Yes, Fogg. You can have a chat with him. And then there are the people who were there at the time. Don’t suppose they’ll enjoy your butting in and raking the whole thing up, but I dare say you’ll get what you want out of them. You’re a plausible devil.”

“Ah yes, the people concerned. That is very important. You remember, perhaps, who they were?”

Depleach considered.

“Let me see—it’s a long time ago. There were only five people who were really in it, so to speak—I’m not counting the servants—a couple of faithful old things, scared-looking creatures—they didn’t know anything about anything. No one could suspect them.”

“There are five people, you say. Tell me about them.”

“Well, there was Philip Blake. He was Crale’s greatest friend—had known him all his life. He was staying in the house at the time. *He*’s alive. I see him now and again on the links. Lives at St. George Hill. Stockbroker. Plays the markets and gets away with it. Successful man, running to fat a bit.”

“Yes. And who next?”

“Then there was Blake’s elder brother. Country squire—stay at home sort of chap.”

A jingle ran through Poirot’s head. He repressed it. He must *not* always be thinking of nursery rhymes. It seemed an obsession with him lately. And yet the jingle persisted.

“This little pig went to market, this little pig stayed at home....”

He murmured:

“He stayed at home—yes?”

“He’s the fellow I was telling you about—messed about with drugs—and herbs—bit of a chemist. His hobby. What was his name now? Literary sort of name—I’ve got it. Meredith. Meredith Blake. Don’t know whether he’s alive or not.”

“And who next?”

“Next? Well, there’s the cause of all the trouble. The girl in the case. Elsa Greer.”

“*This little pig ate roast beef,*” murmured Poirot.

Depleach stared at him.

“They’ve fed her meat all right,” he said. “She’s been a go-getter. She’s had three husbands since then. In and out of the divorce court as easy as you please. And every time she makes a change, it’s for the better. Lady Dittisham—that’s who she is now. Open any *Tatler* and you’re sure to find her.”

“And the other two?”

“There was the governess woman. I don’t remember her name. Nice capable woman. Thompson—Jones—something like that. And there was the child. Caroline Crale’s half sister. She must have been about fifteen. She’s made rather a name for herself. Digs up things and goes trekking to the back of beyond. Warren—that’s her name. Angela Warren. Rather an alarming young woman nowadays. I met her the other day.”

“She is not, then, the little pig who cried Wee Wee Wee...?”

Sir Montague Depleach looked at him rather oddly. He said drily:

“She’s had something to cry Wee-Wee about in her life! She’s disfigured, you know. Got a bad scar down one side of her face. She—Oh well, you’ll hear all about it, I dare say.”

Poirot stood up. He said:

“I thank you. You have been very kind. If Mrs. Crale did *not* kill her husband—”

Depleach interrupted him:

“But she did, old boy, she did. Take my word for it.”

Poirot continued without taking any notice of the interruption.

“Then it seems logical to suppose that one of these five people must have done so.”

“One of them *could* have done it, I suppose,” said Depleach, doubtfully. “But I don’t see why any of them *should*. No reason at all! In fact, I’m quite sure none of them *did* do it. Do get this bee out of your bonnet, old boy!”

But Hercule Poirot only smiled and shook his head.

COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION

“Guilty as Hell,” said Mr. Fogg succinctly.

Hercule Poirot looked meditatively at the thin clear-cut face of the barrister.

Quentin Fogg, K.C. was a very different type from Montague Depleach. Depleach had force, magnetism, an overbearing and slightly bullying personality. He got his effects by a rapid and dramatic change of manner. Handsome, urbane, charming one minute—then an almost magical transformation, lips back, snarling smile—out for your blood.

Quentin Fogg was thin, pale, singularly lacking in what is called personality. His questions were quiet and unemotional—but steadily persistent. If Depleach was like a rapier, Fogg was like an auger. He bored steadily. He had never reached spectacular fame, but he was known as a first-class man on law. He usually won his cases.

Hercule Poirot eyed him meditatively.

“So that,” he said, “was how it struck you?”

Fogg nodded. He said:

“You should have seen her in the box. Old Humpie Rudolph (he was leading, you know) simply made mincemeat of her. Mincemeat!”

He paused and then said unexpectedly:

“On the whole, you know, it was rather too much of a good thing.”

“I am not sure,” said Hercule Poirot, “that I quite understand you?”

Fogg drew his delicately marked brows together. His sensitive hand stroked his bare upper lip. He said:

“How shall I put it? It’s a very English point of view. ‘Shooting the sitting bird’ describes it best. Is that intelligible to you?”

“It is, as you say, a very English point of view, but I think I understand you. In the Central Criminal Court, as on the playing fields of Eton, and in the hunting country, the Englishman likes the victim to have a sporting chance.”

“That’s it, exactly. Well, in this case, the accused *didn’t* have a chance. Humpie Rudolph did as he liked with her. It started with her examination by Depleach. She stood up there, you know—as docile as a little girl at a party, answering Depleach’s questions with the answers she’d learnt off by heart. Quite docile, word perfect—and absolutely unconvincing! She’d been told what to say and she said it. It wasn’t Depleach’s fault. That old mountebank played his part perfectly—but in any scene that needs two actors, one alone can’t carry it. She didn’t play up to him. It made the worst possible effect on the jury. And then old Humpie got up. I expect you’ve seen him? He’s a great loss. Hitching his gown up and swaying back on his feet—and then—straight off the mark!

“As I tell you, he made mincemeat of her! Led up to this and that—and she fell into the pitfall every time. He got her to admit the absurdities of her own statements, he got her to contradict herself, she floundered in deeper and deeper. And then he wound up with his usual stuff. Very compelling—very convinced: ‘I suggest to you, Mrs. Crale, that this story of yours about stealing conium in order to commit suicide is a tissue of falsehood. I suggest that you took it in order to administer it to your husband who was about to leave you for another woman, and that you *did* deliberately administer it to

him.' And she looked at him—such a pretty creature—graceful, delicate—and she said: 'Oh, no—no didn't.' It was the flattest thing you ever heard—the most unconvincing. I saw old Depleach squirm in his seat. He knew it was all up then."

Fogg paused a minute—then he went on:

"And yet—I don't know. In some ways it was the cleverest thing she could have done! It appealed to chivalry—to that queer chivalry closely allied to blood sports which makes most foreigners think of such almighty humbugs! The jury felt—the whole court felt—that she hadn't got a chance. She couldn't even fight for herself. She certainly couldn't put up any kind of a show against a great big clever brute like old Humpie. That weak, unconvincing: '*Oh no—no, I didn't,*' it was pathetic—simply pathetic. She was done for!

"Yes, in a way, it was the best thing she could have done. The jury were only out just over half an hour. They brought her in: Guilty with a recommendation to mercy.

"Actually, you know, she made a good contrast to the other woman in the case. The girl. The jury were unsympathetic to *her* from the start. She never turned a hair. Very good looking, hard-boiled, modern. To the women in the court she stood for a type—type of the homebreaker. Homes weren't safe when girls like that were wandering abroad. Girls damn full of sex and contemptuous of the rights of wives and mothers. She didn't spare herself, I will say. She was honest. Admirably honest. She'd fallen in love with Amyas Crale and he with her, and she'd no scruples at all about taking him away from his wife and child.

"I admired her in a way. She had guts. Depleach put in some nasty stuff in cross-examination and she stood up well to it. But the court was unsympathetic. And the judge didn't like her. Old Avis, it was. Been a bit of a rip himself when young—but he's very hot on morality when he's presiding in his robes. His summing up against Caroline Crale was mildness itself. He couldn't deny the facts but he threw out pretty strong hints as to provocation and all that."

Hercule Poirot asked:

"He did not support the suicide theory of the defence?"

Fogg shook his head.

"*That* never really had a leg to stand upon. Mind you, I don't say Depleach didn't do his best with it. He was magnificent. He painted a most moving picture of a great-hearted, pleasure-loving, temperamental man, suddenly overtaken by a passion for a lovely young girl, conscience stricken, yet unable to resist. Then his recoil, his disgust with himself, his remorse for the way he was treating his wife and child and his sudden decision to end it all! The honourable way out. I can tell you, it was a most moving performance; Depleach's voice brought tears to your eyes. You saw the poor wretch torn by his passions and his essential decency. The effect was terrific. Only—when it was all over—and the spell was broken, you couldn't quite square that mythical figure with Amyas Crale. Everybody knew too much about Crale. He wasn't at all that kind of man. And Depleach hadn't been able to get hold of any evidence to show that he was. I should say Crale came as near as possible to being a man without even a rudimentary conscience. He was a ruthless, selfish, good-tempered happy egoist. Any ethics he had would have applied to painting. He wouldn't, I'm convinced, have painted a sloppy, bad picture—no matter what the inducement. But for the rest, he was a full-blooded man and he loved life—he had a zest for it. Suicide? Not he!"

"Not, perhaps, a very good defence to have chosen?"

Fogg shrugged his thin shoulders. He said:

"What else was there? Couldn't sit back and plead that there was no case for the jury—that the prosecution had got to prove their case against the accused. There was a great deal too much proof.

She'd handled the poison—admitted pinching it, in fact. There was means, motive, opportunity—everything.”

“One might have attempted to show that these things were artificially arranged?”

Fogg said bluntly:

“She admitted most of them. And, in any case, it's too farfetched. You're implying, I presume, that somebody else murdered him and fixed it up to look as though she had done it.”

“You think that quite untenable?”

Fogg said slowly:

“I'm afraid I do. You're suggesting the mysterious X. Where do we look for him?”

Poirot said:

“Obviously in a close circle. There were five people, were there not, who *could* have been concerned?”

“Five? Let me see. There was the old duffer who messed about with his herb brewing. A dangerous hobby—but an amiable creature. Vague sort of person. Don't see him as X. There was the girl—she might have polished off Caroline, but certainly not Amyas. Then there was the stockbroker—Crale's best friend. That's popular in detective stories, but I don't believe in it in real life. There's no one else—oh yes, the kid sister, but one doesn't seriously consider her. That's four.”

Hercule Poirot said:

“You forget the governess.”

“Yes, that's true. Wretched people, governesses, one never does remember them. I do recall her dimly though. Middle-aged, plain, competent. I suppose a psychologist would say that she had a guilty passion for Crale and therefore killed him. The repressed spinster! It's no good—I just don't believe it. As far as my dim remembrance goes she wasn't the neurotic type.”

“It is a long time ago.”

“Fifteen or sixteen years, I suppose. Yes, quite that. You can't expect my memories of the case to be very acute.”

Hercule Poirot said:

“But on the contrary, you remember it amazingly well. That astounds me. You can see it, can you not? When you talk the picture is there before your eyes.”

Fogg said slowly:

“Yes, you're right—I do see it—quite plainly.”

Poirot said:

“It would interest me, my friend, very much, if you would tell me *why*?”

“Why?” Fogg considered the question. His thin intellectual face was alert—interested. “Yes, now *why*?”

Poirot asked:

“*What* do you see so plainly? The witnesses? The counsel? The judge? The accused standing in the dock?”

Fogg said quietly:

“That's the reason, of course! You've put your finger on it. I shall always see *her*... Funny thing, romance. She had the quality of it. I don't know if she was really beautiful... She wasn't very young—tired looking—circles under her eyes. But it all centered round her. The interest—the drama. And yet half the time, *she wasn't there*. She'd gone away somewhere, quite far away—just left her body there quiescent, attentive, with the little polite smile on her lips. She was all half tones, you know, lights and shades. And yet, with it all, she was more alive than the other—that girl with the perfect body, and

the beautiful face, and the crude young strength. I admired Elsa Greer because she had guts, because she could fight, because she stood up to her tormentors and never quailed! But I admired Caroline Crale because she didn't fight, because she retreated into her world of half lights and shadows. She was never defeated because she never gave battle."

He paused:

"I'm only sure of one thing. She loved the man she killed. Loved him so much that half of her died with him...."

Mr. Fogg, K.C., paused and polished his glasses.

"Dear me," he said. "I seem to be saying some very strange things! I was quite a young man at the time, you know. Just an ambitious youngster. These things make an impression. But all the same I'm sure that Caroline Crale was a very remarkable woman. I shall never forget her. No—I shall never forget her...."

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