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Agatha Christie, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Mrs. Ferrars died on the night between the sixteenth and the seventeenth of September. It was a Thursday night. I was sent for at eight o'clock on Friday morning. When I arrived at her house, there was nothing that could be done. She had been dead for several hours. I examined her carefully, but the truth was clear at once. Life had already left her.

It was a little after nine when I returned to my own house. I let myself in with my key. Instead of going straight into the dining room, I stayed in the hall for a few moments. I hung up my hat and my light coat very slowly. The morning air had been cold, but that was not the reason I delayed. The truth is that I felt troubled. I did not know then what events were coming, but I felt that something serious had begun.

From the dining room came the sound of cups and plates. Then I heard my sister Caroline cough in her short, sharp way.

“Is that you, James?” she called.

It was a useless question. No one else could have been there. Still, Caroline always asks questions to which she already knows the answer. I remained in the hall a moment longer. My sister has a special skill. She learns everything that happens in our village. She does not need to go out much. Information comes to her as if carried by the wind. The servants, the shopkeepers, the milkman—somehow they all tell her things. And when she does go out, she spreads what she

knows just as quickly.

I knew that whatever I told her this morning would be known all over King's Abbot before noon. As a doctor, I believe in being careful. I do not like to share private matters. So I often say as little as possible to Caroline. She usually learns the truth anyway, but at least I feel that I have done my duty.

"What on earth are you doing out there, James?" she called again. "Why don't you come and have your breakfast?"

"I'm coming," I said. "I was just hanging up my coat."

"You could have hung up six coats in this time," she replied.

She was right.

I went into the dining room and kissed her on the cheek, as I always do. I sat down and began to eat my eggs and bacon. The bacon was already cold.

"You had an early call," said Caroline.

"Yes. At King's Paddock. Mrs. Ferrars."

"I know," said my sister calmly.

I looked up sharply. "How do you know?"

"Annie told me."

Annie is our parlormaid. She is kind and willing, but she talks too much.

There was a short silence. I continued eating. Caroline's thin nose moved slightly, as it does when she is excited.

"Well?" she asked.

"It is a sad case. She must have died in her sleep. There was nothing to be done."

"I know," said Caroline again.

This time I felt annoyed.

"You cannot know," I said. "I only found out when I got there. I have told no one."

"It was not Annie," said Caroline calmly. "It was the milkman. He heard it from the Ferrars' cook."

I should not have been surprised.

"What did she die of?" asked Caroline. "Heart failure?"

"Did the milkman not tell you that?" I asked dryly.

“He did not know.”

I sighed. It was useless to try to keep the matter from her.

“She took too much veronal,” I said. “She had been taking it for sleep. It must have been an accident.”

“Nonsense,” said Caroline at once. “She did it on purpose.”

I felt sudden anger. When someone speaks aloud what you fear in secret, you wish to deny it strongly.

“Why should she kill herself?” I demanded. “She was still young. She had money. She was healthy. There was no reason.”

“She has not looked well for months,” said Caroline firmly. “You must have noticed. She was nervous. She could not sleep. Something was troubling her.”

“What do you suggest?” I asked. “A love affair?”

Caroline shook her head.

“Remorse,” she said with satisfaction.

“Remorse?”

“Yes. You never believed me when I said she poisoned her husband. But I am more sure of it now.”

I felt a chill.

“Her husband died of illness,” I said. “He drank too much. That was the cause.”

Caroline lifted her chin.

“You only had to look at her,” she said.

Mrs. Ferrars had been a handsome woman. Even after her husband’s death, she dressed well and carried herself proudly. Many in the village had talked about her and Mr. Roger Ackroyd. It was widely believed that they would marry once her period of mourning ended.

“You are not being logical,” I said. “If she committed such a crime, she would not suddenly feel sorry.”

“Some women are hard,” said Caroline. “She was not. She could not bear suffering. She wanted to escape her husband. But afterward she could not escape her own thoughts.”

I said nothing. To my surprise, I felt that some part of what she said might be

true.

“You will see,” said Caroline. “She must have left a letter confessing everything.”

“She did not leave any letter,” I said quickly, and then wished I had not spoken so fast.

Caroline’s eyes grew bright.

“So you asked about that,” she said. “James, you are not as certain as you pretend.”

“One must always consider every possibility,” I said stiffly.

“Will there be an inquest?”

“Perhaps. If I am sure it was an accident, it may not be needed.”

“And are you sure?” she asked quietly.

I did not answer. I rose from the table.

King’s Abbot is like many small villages. We have one railway station, a post office, and two shops that sell everything from soap to boots. Many young men leave when they grow up. Those who stay are often retired officers or unmarried ladies. And above all, we have gossip.

There are two important houses near the village. One is King’s Paddock, where Mrs. Ferrars lived. The other is Fernly Park, the home of Roger Ackroyd. He is a successful man, though not born into wealth. He made his fortune in business. He is large, red-faced, friendly, and generous to village causes.

Years ago he married a widow who had a small son named Ralph Paton. The marriage was not happy. She drank heavily and died after only a few years. Ralph grew up under Ackroyd’s care. He is now twenty-five. He is handsome and charming, but he has caused much worry.

After Mr. Ferrars died, people began to notice how often Mrs. Ferrars and Roger Ackroyd were together. Many believed they would marry. Now she was dead.

As I walked on my morning calls, I kept thinking of her. Had she truly taken her own life? If so, why had she not left a clear message?

And then I remembered something. The day before, I had seen her walking with

Ralph Paton. They had been close together, speaking earnestly. At the time I thought little of it. Now the memory troubled me.

A shadow seemed to pass over my thoughts. Something had begun. I did not yet understand what it was, but I felt that quiet King's Abbot would not remain peaceful for long.

Part 2

I was still thinking of Mrs. Ferrars when I suddenly met Roger Ackroyd on the road. He was walking quickly, his head bent forward. When he saw me, he stopped at once.

"Sheppard!" he cried. "Just the man I wanted. This is terrible—terrible!"

"You have heard, then?" I asked.

He nodded. His face, usually so full of color, looked pale and heavy.

"It is worse than you think," he said in a low voice. "I must speak to you. Can you come with me now?"

"I am afraid not," I said. "I have patients to see. I must be back at my surgery before noon."

He seemed to struggle with himself.

"Then this evening," he said at last. "Come and dine. Half-past seven. I must talk to you."

"Very well," I said. "Is it about Ralph?"

The question came to my lips without thought. Perhaps because so many of Ackroyd's troubles in the past had been connected with Ralph.

He stared at me as though I had spoken in a strange language.

"Ralph? No. Ralph is in London."

That answer surprised me greatly. I was certain that I had seen Ralph only the day before. But at that moment we were interrupted by Miss Ganett, one of the most eager listeners and speakers of gossip in the village. Ackroyd muttered a word of farewell and hurried away.

Miss Ganett came up to me at once.

“So sad about poor Mrs. Ferrars,” she began, her eyes sharp and bright. “They say she had been taking drugs for years. Of course, one never believes everything one hears, but still—there is often a little truth in such things.”

I made polite replies. I have had much practice in saying very little.

“And I hear,” she continued, lowering her voice, “that there was an engagement with Mr. Ackroyd. But perhaps it was broken off?”

I did not answer. Instead, I remarked that gossip often does harm.

She looked disappointed.

When at last I escaped and returned home, I found several patients waiting. I saw them one by one, but my mind kept returning to what Ackroyd had said. Worse than I think. What could he mean?

After the last patient had gone, I was about to take a short walk in the garden before lunch when I noticed that someone was still sitting in the waiting room. It was Miss Russell, Ackroyd’s housekeeper.

Miss Russell is tall and dark, with a strong face and firm mouth. She gives the impression of strength and control. I had never imagined that she would come to me for any small complaint.

“Good morning, Dr. Sheppard,” she said calmly. “I have some trouble with my knee.”

I examined her knee. There was nothing serious that I could see. Her description of pain was vague. For a moment I wondered whether she had come only to speak about Mrs. Ferrars. But she did not mention the matter directly.

“I do not believe in many medicines,” she said after a time, glancing at my shelves of bottles. “Drugs do harm. Look at those who become slaves to them.”

“It depends on the case,” I said carefully.

“Is there any cure,” she asked, “for someone who is truly under the power of drugs?”

I gave her a general explanation. She listened closely.

“What about poisons?” she asked suddenly. “Are there poisons that cannot be detected?”

I smiled slightly.

“That is something one finds in detective stories,” I said. “In real life, most poisons can be discovered.”

She asked more questions, but her interest seemed to shift quickly. When she left, I felt that she had been searching for something—though I did not know what.

At lunch I told Caroline that I would dine at Fernly Park.

“Good,” she said at once. “You will learn everything. By the way, what is wrong with Ralph?”

“Nothing is wrong,” I said. “Why should there be?”

“Because he is staying at the Three Boars instead of at Fernly.”

I stared at her.

“Ackroyd told me Ralph is in London.”

“He arrived yesterday morning,” said Caroline firmly. “He was seen. And last night he met a girl.”

That did not surprise me. Ralph has always been popular with young women.

“Who?” I asked.

“I do not know. But I believe it is Flora Ackroyd.”

Flora is Ackroyd’s niece. Fair-haired, blue-eyed, and very self-possessed.

“Why should they meet secretly?” I asked.

“Because they are engaged,” said Caroline with satisfaction. “And perhaps Mr. Ackroyd does not approve.”

I was not convinced, but I did not argue.

Later that afternoon I decided to go to the Three Boars and see Ralph myself.

When I entered his room without knocking, he looked up and smiled.

“Sheppard! I am glad to see you.”

He looked tired, but his smile was bright.

“I am in trouble,” he said after a moment. “Serious trouble.”

“With your stepfather?” I asked.

He nodded.

“I cannot explain,” he said. “I must handle this alone.”

There was something in his tone that struck me deeply. Ralph is often careless, often cheerful. But now he sounded thoughtful and almost afraid.

“If I can help—” I began.

“No,” he said quickly. “Thank you, but no.”

We spoke a little more, but he told me nothing clear. When I left him, I felt more uneasy than before.

That evening I walked to Fernly Park. The sky was dark, and the air cool. Parker, the butler, opened the door at once.

In the drawing room I found Flora examining some silver objects in a glass case. She looked fresh and bright.

“You have not congratulated me,” she said, holding out her hand. On her finger was a fine pearl ring.

“Ralph and I are engaged,” she said calmly. “Uncle is pleased.”

I wished her happiness. She spoke lightly of the future—of hunting, of the season in London, of sailing in summer. She seemed full of plans.

Mrs. Ackroyd entered next. She is thin and sharp, always smiling but never warm. She spoke at once of settlements and money. I listened politely, though I had no wish to advise on such matters.

Major Blunt joined us soon after. He is a man of few words, strong and silent. He stood near the fire, watching us all with quiet eyes.

Dinner was not lively. Ackroyd seemed troubled. He ate little and spoke less.

When it was over, he took my arm.

“Come to my study,” he said. “We must talk.”

In his study he paced the room before sitting down.

“I am in a terrible state,” he said. “Everything has changed in one day.”

Then, after a long silence, he asked suddenly:

“Did you ever suspect that Mr. Ferrars was poisoned?”

I hesitated.

“I did not at the time,” I said. “But later—yes, the thought came.”

“He was poisoned,” said Ackroyd. “His wife told me so.”

I felt a shock run through me.

“When?”

“Yesterday. She confessed everything.”

He explained how she had admitted giving poison to her husband. She had been blackmailed ever since by someone who knew the truth.

“She would not tell me his name,” he said. “But she promised I would hear from her within twenty-four hours.”

At that moment Parker entered with the evening post. Among the letters was one in a blue envelope.

Ackroyd stared at it.

“Her writing,” he whispered.

He opened it and began to read.

After a few lines he stopped.

“I must read this alone,” he said.

I urged him to read it through at once. For some reason I felt strongly that he should not delay.

But he refused.

At ten minutes to nine I left him in the study, the letter still unread in his hand.

As I stepped out into the night, the church clock struck nine.

I had the strangest feeling that something terrible was about to happen.

Part 3

The night air felt colder than before. A thin mist was rising from the ground, and the trees around Fernly Park stood dark and silent. As I passed through the lodge gates, the church clock struck nine. The sound echoed across the quiet village.

I had gone only a short distance when I nearly collided with someone walking quickly in the opposite direction. It was Major Blunt.

“Good evening,” he said in his abrupt manner.

“Good evening,” I replied.

He paused for a moment, looking at me with those steady gray eyes of his.

“Been with Ackroyd?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“He seemed upset at dinner,” Blunt said.

“He is under strain,” I answered carefully.

Blunt nodded once. He did not ask further questions. He turned and walked on toward the house.

I continued toward the village. My mind was troubled. Ackroyd’s words about the confession and the blackmailer repeated themselves again and again. A name had been written in that letter. A name that might change everything.

I had gone perhaps halfway home when I heard hurried steps behind me. I turned. It was Parker.

He was breathing quickly.

“Dr. Sheppard, sir,” he said. “Would you kindly return at once? Mr. Ackroyd wishes to see you again.”

“Is anything wrong?” I asked sharply.

“I cannot say, sir. He rang for me, but when I reached the door he did not answer. The door is locked.”

I felt a sudden chill.

“Locked?”

“Yes, sir. From the inside.”

We hurried back together. The study door stood at the end of the passage. Parker knocked firmly.

“Mr. Ackroyd!” he called.

There was no reply.

I tried the handle. It would not move.

“Stand aside,” I said.

I knocked loudly.

“Ackroyd!” I called. “It is Sheppard. Open the door.”

Still there was silence.

I looked at Parker.

“We must break it down.”

He hesitated only a moment. Together we threw our weight against it. The wood cracked. On the third attempt the door burst inward.

The room was dimly lit. The fire burned low in the grate. The desk lamp shone over the writing table.

Roger Ackroyd lay on the floor beside his chair.

A knife was driven deep into his neck.

For a moment I could not move. The sight was so sudden, so terrible, that my mind refused to understand it.

Parker gave a low cry.

I forced myself forward and knelt beside Ackroyd. I touched his hand. It was already cold.

“He is dead,” I said quietly.

The letter lay on the desk, partly unfolded.

I stood slowly.

“No one must enter this room,” I said firmly. “Send for the police at once.”

Parker hurried away.

I remained alone with the body.

The knife was still in place. I recognized it at once. It was one of the ornamental daggers from the silver table in the drawing room.

So that had been the sound I heard earlier. Someone had lifted the lid of that table.

My thoughts moved quickly now.

The window.

I went to it and examined it carefully. It was closed. The latch was fastened.

I opened it and looked outside. The ground below showed no clear marks in the faint light. The terrace was quiet.

I closed the window again.

Then I returned to the desk.

The blue envelope lay there. The letter inside was folded back. But I did not read it.

The police must see everything as it was.

Yet I could not help glancing at the last lines visible.

The name.

It had been written clearly.

I felt my heart beat hard.

A sudden sound made me turn.

It was Raymond, the secretary, pale and shaking.

“What has happened?” he asked.

“Mr. Ackroyd has been murdered,” I said.

He stared at me in disbelief.

“Impossible!”

“I am afraid not.”

Soon the house was in confusion. Mrs. Ackroyd cried loudly. Flora stood white and still, her hands clasped tightly together. Major Blunt remained silent, his face hard.

I took charge as calmly as I could until Inspector Raglan arrived from Cranchester.

He examined the body carefully.

“Stabbed with this knife?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said.

“When did you last see him alive?”

“At about ten minutes to nine,” I replied. “I left him reading a letter.”

“What letter?”

“A letter from Mrs. Ferrars.”

The inspector’s eyes sharpened.

“Where is it?”

We looked at the desk.

The envelope was there.

But the letter was gone.

A deep silence filled the room.

“You are certain it was here?” Raglan asked.

“Quite certain.”

He nodded slowly.

“Then someone has removed it.”

The mystery had begun.

Outside, the church clock struck ten.

The quiet village of King's Abbot was no longer peaceful.

And I, Dr. James Sheppard, found myself standing at the center of events that would shake every household before they were finished.

Part 4

Inspector Raglan stood very still for a moment after I told him that the letter was missing. His eyes moved slowly around the room. He did not speak at once. Then he said quietly, "No one has touched anything since the body was found?"

"No one," I replied. "I remained here until you arrived. Parker went to telephone you. The others were kept out."

He nodded and bent down again beside the body. He examined the knife carefully without removing it. Then he rose.

"Time of death?" he asked.

"Very shortly after I left," I said. "Perhaps within ten minutes."

"You are sure of that?"

"I left at ten minutes to nine. The clock was striking nine as I passed through the gates. If he was alive when I left, it cannot have been long after."

Inspector Raglan looked thoughtful.

"And the door was locked from the inside," he said slowly.

"Yes. Parker tried it. I tried it. We broke it down together."

"And the window?"

"Fastened," I said. "I examined it myself."

He walked over to the window and checked it again. He opened it and leaned out. The night air entered the room.

"No ladder," he murmured. "No marks below."

He closed it again.

"This is a very strange case," he said at last.

In the hall I could hear low voices. Mrs. Ackroyd was speaking loudly and

quickly. Flora's voice did not rise above a whisper. Major Blunt said nothing.

"I must question everyone," said the inspector. "But first, doctor, tell me exactly what passed between you and Mr. Ackroyd this evening."

I told him as clearly as I could. I spoke of the confession Mrs. Ferrars had made the day before. I told him about the letter that had arrived with the evening post. I explained how Ackroyd had begun to read it but had decided to finish it later in private.

"And you did not see the name written in it?" asked Raglan sharply.

I paused for a fraction of a second.

"No," I said. "He did not turn the page before I left."

The inspector watched me closely. Then he nodded.

"Very well. Now I will speak to the others."

He left the room. I remained behind. I felt tired suddenly, as though the strength had gone from my legs. The events of the evening seemed unreal.

A murder. In King's Abbot.

After some time I went out into the hall. Raymond was standing there, pale and shaken.

"This is dreadful," he said. "Simply dreadful."

"When did you last see him?" I asked.

"After dinner," he replied. "He told me to see that he was not disturbed."

"Did you hear anything? Any cry?"

"Nothing," said Raymond. "I was in my room writing letters."

Parker approached us quietly.

"Inspector Raglan would like to speak to you next, doctor," he said.

I returned to the study. The inspector had made notes in a small book.

"One more question," he said. "Did Mr. Ackroyd have any enemies?"

"None that I know of," I answered. "He was a respected man."

"And what about this blackmailer?" Raglan asked.

"That person may have had a motive," I said.

"Yes," he agreed. "The missing letter may have contained the name."

He closed his notebook.

“We shall find it,” he said.

Soon the house was full of quiet movement. A constable stood at the door. No one was allowed to leave.

Flora came toward me in the hall. Her face was white, but she did not cry.

“Dr. Sheppard,” she said softly, “it cannot be true. Uncle cannot be dead.”

“I am afraid it is true,” I said gently.

She closed her eyes for a moment.

“Who could have done it?” she whispered.

I had no answer.

Later, as the night grew deeper, I was allowed to return home. The inspector had taken my statement. He would question me again the next day.

The road back to my house seemed longer than usual. The village lay silent. A light burned in Caroline’s window. She was waiting.

As soon as I entered, she came into the hall.

“What has happened?” she demanded.

“Roger Ackroyd has been murdered,” I said quietly.

For once Caroline did not speak at once. Her face changed.

“Murdered?” she repeated.

“Yes.”

She drew in her breath.

“James,” she said slowly, “this is terrible.”

I nodded and went into the dining room. I felt suddenly older than I had that morning.

Caroline followed me.

“When?” she asked.

“Between ten minutes to nine and nine o’clock.”

“But you were there,” she said quickly.

“Yes. I left him alive.”

She looked at me closely.

“And the letter?” she asked.

I stared at her.

“What letter?”

“The letter you mentioned this morning,” she said. “You told me Mrs. Ferrars left no letter. But I could see you were not certain.”

I hesitated.

“A letter did arrive,” I said at last. “But it has disappeared.”

Caroline’s eyes shone.

“Then that letter held the key,” she said. “Someone removed it.”

I did not answer.

“James,” she continued, “who was in the house?”

“Mrs. Ackroyd. Flora. Major Blunt. Raymond. Parker.”

“And Ralph?” she asked quickly.

I felt my heart tighten.

“Ralph was at the Three Boars,” I said.

“Was he?” she replied quietly.

I did not like her tone.

“He was there when I saw him,” I said firmly.

Caroline moved closer.

“James, did you ever think that perhaps the blackmailer was someone we know?”

“Anyone might be,” I said.

She was silent for a moment.

“This will shake the village,” she said at last. “Nothing like this has ever happened here.”

“No,” I agreed.

I went up to my room soon after. But I did not sleep.

I lay awake, thinking of the locked door, the closed window, the missing letter.

And the name that had been written on that final page.

Somewhere in King’s Abbot, someone knew the truth.

And before long, that truth would begin to come to light.

The next morning broke gray and cold. I had slept very little. My thoughts had turned in circles through the long hours of darkness. When I came down to breakfast, Caroline was already at the table. There were two newspapers beside her plate. She had read them both.

“It is already in the early edition,” she said. “The whole district will know before noon.”

I poured myself coffee without replying.

“They say,” Caroline continued, “that Mr. Ackroyd was stabbed with an ornamental dagger. And that the study was locked from the inside.”

“Yes,” I said shortly.

“Then how could anyone escape?”

“That,” I replied, “is the inspector’s problem.”

She watched me.

“And the letter?” she asked.

“There is no letter,” I said.

She raised her eyebrows.

“But you told me—”

“The letter has vanished,” I interrupted.

Caroline drew in her breath sharply.

“Then someone removed it after the murder,” she said at once. “Which means the murderer was still in the room.”

I felt a sudden irritation.

“Please do not jump to conclusions,” I said. “The police will investigate.”

“Of course they will,” she said calmly. “And I suppose they will begin with the household.”

That was true.

Before noon Inspector Raglan arrived at my surgery. He wished to clarify certain details. He asked again about the time I had left the house, about the position of the body, about the window and door.

“No footprints?” he asked.

“None that I saw,” I said.

“And you are certain the latch was fastened?”

“Yes.”

He made notes.

“It seems impossible,” he murmured.

“Locked room cases are rare,” I said.

“Not impossible,” he replied quietly.

He then told me that each member of the household had been questioned separately.

“Mrs. Ackroyd was in the drawing room,” he said. “Miss Flora also. Major Blunt states that he went out for a walk after dinner and returned about nine.”

“Did anyone see him return?” I asked.

“No. He entered by the front door. Parker did not notice the exact time.”

“And Raymond?”

“In his room writing letters.”

“Parker?”

“In the pantry. He says he heard nothing unusual.”

I nodded.

“And Ralph?” I asked carefully.

“Captain Paton states that he was at the Three Boars all evening,” said Raglan. “He claims not to have left.”

“Claims?” I repeated.

“We must verify,” said the inspector calmly.

When he left, I felt no comfort.

That afternoon I went to the Three Boars. Ralph was there.

He looked pale.

“I heard,” he said as soon as I entered. “It is awful.”

“You were not at Fernly last night?” I asked.

“No,” he said at once. “I stayed here.”

“All evening?”

He hesitated very slightly.

“Yes.”

I watched him closely.

“Ralph,” I said quietly, “did you know that Mrs. Ferrars confessed to Mr. Ackroyd?”

His face changed.

“Confessed?” he repeated.

“That she had poisoned her husband.”

He stared at me.

“Good God,” he said.

“And that someone had been blackmailing her.”

He turned away and walked to the window.

“This is madness,” he muttered.

“Do you know who that person was?” I asked.

He swung round sharply.

“No,” he said. “Of course not.”

I was not certain whether I believed him.

“Ralph,” I said slowly, “if there is anything you should tell me, tell me now.”

He shook his head.

“I told you yesterday. I must play a lone hand.”

The words echoed strangely in my mind.

I left him feeling more troubled than ever.

That evening, as I returned home, I saw a small figure standing near my gate. It was our new neighbor.

“Ah, doctor,” he said cheerfully. “So the calm of your village has been disturbed.”

“Yes,” I said shortly.

“I have read the paper,” he continued. “A locked room, a missing letter. Very interesting.”

I looked at him sharply.

“You find it interesting?”

“Human nature is always interesting,” he replied gently.

There was something in his tone that caught my attention.

“You knew Mr. Ackroyd,” I said.

“Slightly,” he replied.

“Did you know Mrs. Ferrars?”

“No,” he said.

He looked at me thoughtfully.

“Tell me, doctor,” he added softly, “do you believe in logic?”

“Of course,” I said.

“Then logic must guide us,” he said. “Facts first. The murderer entered the study. The murderer left the study. The door was locked from within. The window was fastened. Therefore—”

He paused.

“Therefore?” I prompted.

He smiled faintly.

“Therefore, one of our facts is wrong.”

I felt a sudden stir of interest.

“You think the window was not fastened?” I asked.

“I think,” he said, “that nothing must be accepted without question.”

He raised his hat politely and walked away.

I stood for a moment, watching him go.

Caroline came to the door.

“Talking to the foreigner?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“He is not what he seems,” she said confidently.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean,” she said, lowering her voice, “that he is not a simple gardener.”

I thought of his words.

Nothing must be accepted without question.

The locked door.

The fastened window.

The missing letter.

Somewhere within those facts lay the truth.

And I had the uncomfortable feeling that the truth was nearer to me than I wished to believe.

Part 6

The next morning brought fresh developments. Inspector Raglan sent word that a meeting would be held at Fernly Park. All members of the household were to be present. I was asked to attend in my professional capacity.

When I arrived, the atmosphere in the house felt heavy and strained. The servants moved quietly. Voices were low.

In the drawing room, Mrs. Ackroyd sat upright in a chair, her lips pressed thin. Flora stood near the window, pale but composed. Major Blunt leaned against the mantelpiece, silent as always. Raymond looked restless. Parker stood near the door.

Inspector Raglan entered with measured steps.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he began, “we must establish a clear account of last night.”

He turned first to Parker.

“At what time did Dr. Sheppard leave the study?”

“Ten minutes to nine, sir,” Parker replied.

“You are certain?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And when did you next approach the study?”

“At nine-fifteen, sir. Mr. Ackroyd had rung earlier for me. I knocked, but received no answer. I then sought Dr. Sheppard.”

The inspector nodded and turned to Mrs. Ackroyd.

“You remained in the drawing room?”

“Yes,” she said. “I was with Flora.”

“Did you leave the room at any time?”

“Only briefly,” she said. “To fetch a shawl.”

“At what time?”

She hesitated.

“I cannot say exactly.”

Flora spoke softly.

“It was before nine,” she said. “We were together when the clock struck nine.”

The inspector made a note.

He then looked at Major Blunt.

“You went out?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“For air,” Blunt replied shortly.

“When did you return?”

“About nine.”

“Did anyone see you?”

“No.”

The inspector regarded him steadily.

“You entered by the front door?”

“Yes.”

“Did you pass the study?”

“Yes.”

“Did you hear anything?”

“No.”

There was a silence.

Finally Raglan turned to Raymond.

“You were in your room?”

“Yes.”

“Did you leave it?”

“No.”

“Did you hear anything unusual?”

“Nothing.”

The inspector closed his notebook.

“Very well. Now, Captain Paton.”

Ralph entered at that moment. He had been sent for.

He looked tense.

“You state that you were at the Three Boars all evening,” said Raglan.

“Yes.”

“Can anyone confirm that?”

“The landlord,” said Ralph. “And the barman.”

“Did you leave at any time?”

Ralph hesitated.

“No.”

The inspector’s eyes narrowed slightly.

“You are sure?”

“Yes.”

The questioning ended for the moment.

As we left the room, Flora touched my arm.

“Dr. Sheppard,” she whispered, “Ralph is hiding something.”

I looked at her quickly.

“What do you mean?”

“He did leave the inn,” she said quietly. “He came to see me.”

My heart seemed to stop.

“When?”

“Before dinner,” she said. “We met in the wood.”

I remembered Caroline’s account.

“Did anyone see you?” I asked.

“I do not think so,” she replied.

“And after dinner?”

She shook her head.

“I did not see him again.”

I felt a deep unease.

Later that afternoon Inspector Raglan spoke to me privately.

“We have discovered something,” he said.

“What?”

“A footprint near the study window. Not clear—but present.”

“But the window was fastened,” I said.

“Yes,” he replied calmly. “It was fastened when we saw it.”

I did not answer.

“And there is another matter,” he added. “The dagger.”

“What about it?”

“It does not belong to the silver case in the drawing room.”

“Not belong?” I repeated.

“No. One dagger remains in the case. The one used in the murder is different.”

I felt a strange sensation.

“Then where did it come from?” I asked.

“That,” he said, “is what we must discover.”

That evening, as I walked home, I found myself thinking again of my neighbor.

He had said that one fact must be wrong.

The locked door.

The fastened window.

Or perhaps something else entirely.

When I entered my house, Caroline looked up eagerly.

“Well?” she demanded.

“The police have found a footprint,” I said.

“Outside the window?” she asked at once.

“Yes.”

“Then someone escaped that way.”

“Perhaps,” I said.

She shook her head slowly.

“James,” she said quietly, “there is something we are not seeing.”

I could not disagree.

In the quiet of my room that night, I began to understand that this was not a simple case of violence.

It was a case of deception.

And in deception, appearances are never what they seem.

Part 7

The following morning brought a new development that disturbed the entire household. A maid reported that a dictaphone had been discovered in Mr. Ackroyd's study. It had been placed on a small table near the desk.

Inspector Raglan summoned me at once.

"Doctor," he said, "did you notice this machine last night?"

"No," I replied honestly. "I did not."

The inspector bent over the device. He pressed a button. A faint mechanical sound followed, and then a voice filled the room.

It was Roger Ackroyd's voice.

"The name of the man is—"

The recording stopped abruptly.

There was a sharp silence.

"It appears," said the inspector slowly, "that someone arranged for this to play after the doctor left."

I felt a cold wave pass through me.

"You mean," I said carefully, "that it was intended to create the impression that he was alive?"

"Exactly," said Raglan.

The room seemed smaller.

"Then the murder may have occurred earlier," I said.

"Possibly," he replied.

He looked at me thoughtfully.

"Doctor, are you absolutely certain that Mr. Ackroyd was alive when you left?"

I felt my pulse quicken.

"He spoke to me," I said.

"But you did not see him after that?"

I hesitated only a fraction of a second.

“No,” I said.

The inspector nodded slowly.

“We must consider every possibility.”

The idea took shape in my mind. If the dictaphone had been set to play, then the time of death might not be what we thought.

And if that were true, then alibis might fall apart.

That afternoon the police returned to the Three Boars. Ralph was questioned again.

He admitted now that he had left the inn for a short time.

“Only for a walk,” he said.

“At what time?” demanded the inspector.

“Between eight and nine.”

“Where did you go?”

“Toward Fernly,” he said reluctantly.

“Why?”

He remained silent.

“You were seen in the wood,” said Raglan.

Ralph’s face tightened.

“I was meeting someone,” he said at last.

“Who?”

He did not answer.

The silence stretched.

Finally he said quietly, “I cannot say.”

That refusal made everything worse.

When I saw him later, he looked worn and strained.

“Ralph,” I said, “this silence will harm you.”

“I know,” he replied. “But I gave my word.”

“To whom?”

He shook his head.

“I cannot tell you.”

I left him with a heavy heart.

Meanwhile, suspicion spread quietly through King's Abbot.

Mrs. Ackroyd spoke often of security and danger. Raymond appeared nervous. Major Blunt remained calm, though watchful.

And my neighbor observed everything.

One evening he came to call.

"Doctor," he said politely, "may I ask you a question?"

"Of course."

"When you left the study, what exactly did Mr. Ackroyd say?"

"He said he would read the letter later," I replied.

"And you heard no cry?"

"None."

"And you did not read the final page?"

"No."

He studied me closely.

"It is curious," he said softly, "how many small details matter."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Only this," he replied. "Truth often hides in the smallest corner."

He rose to leave.

"You think Ralph guilty?" I asked suddenly.

He paused.

"I think," he said gently, "that appearances are powerful things."

After he left, I sat alone for a long time.

The dictaphone.

The altered time of death.

The missing letter.

Ralph's silence.

Every path seemed to lead in one direction.

Yet something within me resisted that conclusion.

Because if the obvious answer were true, then the mystery would already be solved.

And it was not solved.

Not yet.

Part 8

Two days later the inquest was held. The small courtroom in Cranchester was crowded. News of the murder had spread far beyond King's Abbot. People whispered in low voices as we took our seats.

I gave my evidence first. I described my visit to Fernly Park, my conversation with Roger Ackroyd, and the discovery of the body. I spoke carefully and calmly. I felt many eyes upon me.

The coroner asked, "In your opinion, doctor, at what time did death occur?"

"Originally I believed it to be shortly after I left the house, at ten minutes to nine," I said. "However, in light of the discovery of the dictaphone, it is possible that death occurred earlier."

A murmur ran through the room.

"Earlier?" asked the coroner.

"Yes. The recording could have been arranged to create the impression that Mr. Ackroyd was still alive."

The inspector confirmed this.

Ralph gave his statement next. He admitted leaving the inn.

"I walked toward Fernly," he said.

"Did you enter the house?" asked the coroner.

"No," Ralph replied firmly.

"Did you see anyone?"

He hesitated.

"No."

I could see that he was holding something back.

Flora was pale but steady when she spoke. She confirmed that Ralph had met her earlier in the day, but not after dinner.

Major Blunt gave his account in his usual brief manner.

"I was outside," he said. "I heard nothing."

Mrs. Ackroyd's voice trembled as she spoke of her shock and grief.

Parker described breaking down the door.

At the end of the session, the verdict was returned: wilful murder by person or persons unknown.

The case remained open.

That evening, as I returned home, my neighbor was waiting once more.

"The inquest was instructive," he said lightly.

"You attended?" I asked.

"Naturally."

He walked beside me.

"Tell me, doctor," he continued, "when a man wishes to create an illusion, what must he control?"

"The details," I said without thinking.

"Exactly," he replied.

We walked a few steps in silence.

"You are troubled," he observed.

"It is a troubling case," I said.

"It is a fascinating case," he corrected gently.

I looked at him sharply.

"You enjoy it?"

"I enjoy the pursuit of truth," he said simply.

He stopped at his gate.

"The key lies not in what is said," he added softly, "but in what is omitted."

That night I thought long about his words.

What had been omitted?

The letter.

The name.

The moment when Roger Ackroyd had paused before turning the page.

I remembered clearly how I had urged him to read it.

Why had I done so with such force?

I turned that question over and over in my mind.

Because I wished him to know the truth?

Or because I feared what that truth might reveal?

The days that followed brought further tension.

Ralph's position grew worse. His movements on the night of the murder remained unclear. His refusal to name the person he had met raised suspicion.

Flora defended him fiercely.

"Ralph would never do such a thing," she said to me.

"You are certain?" I asked.

She looked at me with steady blue eyes.

"Yes."

Meanwhile, Inspector Raglan searched for the missing letter. The house was examined from cellar to attic. Nothing was found.

And always, the question remained:

If the letter named the blackmailer, and if that person was also the murderer, then the removal of the letter was the key.

One evening, as I sat alone in my study, a sudden thought came to me.

The dictaphone had been set.

The window had been examined.

The door had been locked.

These were not actions of panic.

They were actions of planning.

The murderer had known exactly what he was doing.

And had relied on us to accept what we saw.

I felt a strange unease.

Because I had seen everything.

I had been the last to see Roger Ackroyd alive.

And perhaps that was the most important fact of all.

Part 9

The investigation did not move quickly after the inquest. Inspector Raglan

questioned everyone again, and then again. He checked times, movements, and small details. Yet nothing clear appeared.

Ralph's situation grew worse. The police could not prove that he had entered the house, but they could not prove that he had not. His silence about the person he met in the wood troubled them deeply.

One afternoon Flora came to see me.

She stood very straight in my consulting room.

"Dr. Sheppard," she said, "Ralph is in danger."

"Yes," I said quietly.

"You believe he is innocent?" she asked.

I hesitated.

"I do not believe he killed his uncle," I said at last.

She studied me closely.

"But you are not certain," she said.

I did not answer.

She drew a breath.

"Ralph met someone that evening," she said. "It was not me."

"Then who was it?" I asked quickly.

"I do not know," she replied. "But he was trying to protect her."

"Her?"

She nodded.

"It was a woman."

The pieces shifted in my mind.

A woman.

Not Flora.

Who then?

"Did you see her?" I asked.

"No. But I saw Ralph's face. He would not risk everything for nothing."

She turned toward the door.

"You must help him," she said quietly.

After she left, I sat thinking.

A woman in the wood.

A secret meeting.

A refusal to speak.

I began to review every woman connected to the house.

Mrs. Ackroyd.

Flora herself.

The parlormaid.

Miss Russell.

And then I remembered Miss Russell's questions about poisons and drugs.

That evening I walked past Fernly and saw Miss Russell in the garden.

She greeted me calmly.

"The inspector has been here again," she said.

"Yes," I replied.

"It is unpleasant for everyone," she added.

I studied her face.

"Were you in the wood the night of the murder?" I asked suddenly.

Her expression did not change.

"No," she said simply.

"Did you ever meet Captain Paton there?"

"Certainly not."

Her voice was steady.

I could read nothing in her eyes.

As I turned away, I felt no closer to the truth.

Later that night my neighbor came to call once more.

He entered quietly and sat opposite me.

"Doctor," he said, "you look troubled."

"I am," I admitted.

"Good," he replied.

I stared at him.

"Good?"

"Yes. When one is troubled, one thinks more carefully."

He leaned forward slightly.

“Tell me, who benefits from Mr. Ackroyd’s death?”

I considered.

“Ralph,” I said slowly.

“Yes,” he said. “But who else?”

I frowned.

“Flora perhaps,” I said. “If she inherits.”

“And if she does not?” he asked gently.

I looked at him.

“What do you mean?”

“Did Mr. Ackroyd make a new will recently?” he asked.

“I do not know,” I said.

He nodded.

“The motive may not be as simple as it appears.”

He rose to leave.

“You think the police are wrong?” I asked.

“I think,” he replied softly, “that the truth is rarely found by following the most obvious path.”

After he left, I felt a growing weight inside me.

The investigation was narrowing.

Suspicion circled around Ralph.

But there were cracks in the case.

The missing letter remained unexplained.

The dictaphone had altered the time of death.

The footprint by the window could have been placed deliberately.

And still no one had found the name written on that final page.

I found myself remembering again the moment in the study.

Ackroyd had paused.

His finger had rested on the page.

I had urged him to read.

He had refused.

Then I had left.

The last person to see him alive.

The last person to speak with him.

The last person to stand in that room before the murder.

The thought returned again and again.

And I began to feel that events were moving toward something that could not be stopped.

Part 10

The following week brought a sharp turn in events. Inspector Raglan received information that Ralph had attempted to withdraw a large sum of money from a local bank shortly before the murder. Though the request had been refused, the detail did not help his case.

The rumor spread quickly. In King's Abbot nothing remains private for long.

Caroline repeated the news at breakfast with a grave expression.

"Money troubles," she said. "That always leads to danger."

I said nothing.

Later that day I was summoned again to Fernly Park. The inspector wished to speak to all present once more.

When I entered the drawing room, tension was visible in every face.

Ralph stood near the fireplace, pale but firm. Flora sat beside him, her hand resting on the arm of his chair.

Inspector Raglan cleared his throat.

"Captain Paton," he said, "you admit that you needed money."

"Yes," said Ralph quietly.

"And that you visited the grounds of Fernly Park on the night in question."

"Yes."

"And yet you deny entering the study."

"I deny it."

The inspector paused.

“Where did you go after leaving the wood?”

“Back to the inn.”

“Alone?”

Ralph hesitated.

“No.”

Every eye turned toward him.

“Who was with you?” demanded Raglan.

Ralph closed his eyes briefly.

“I cannot say.”

Flora rose suddenly.

“You must,” she said.

Ralph shook his head.

“No.”

Inspector Raglan’s voice hardened.

“Then you leave us no choice. You are placing yourself in grave danger.”

There was silence.

Then, quietly, a voice spoke from the doorway.

“Perhaps I can help.”

All turned.

It was Miss Russell.

She entered slowly.

“Captain Paton was with me,” she said.

The room froze.

Ralph stared at her in shock.

“You?” he whispered.

She nodded.

“Yes. We met in the wood.”

Inspector Raglan looked at her carefully.

“For what purpose?”

Miss Russell lifted her chin.

“For a private matter.”

“What private matter?”

She hesitated only a moment.

“I am the person who was blackmailing Mrs. Ferrars.”

A gasp passed through the room.

Ralph rose to his feet.

“No!” he cried.

She did not look at him.

“It is true,” she said calmly. “I learned of the poisoning. I demanded money. Captain Paton discovered it. He confronted me. We met to discuss it.”

Inspector Raglan stepped forward.

“You admit to blackmail. But do you admit to murder?”

“No,” she replied firmly. “I did not kill Mr. Ackroyd.”

The inspector’s eyes narrowed.

“You were near the house.”

“Yes.”

“You had motive.”

“Perhaps,” she said quietly. “But I did not kill him.”

The room felt suffocating.

Ralph moved toward her.

“Why?” he asked in a low voice.

She looked at him then.

“Because you would not betray me,” she said simply.

I felt a strange tightening in my chest.

The pieces were shifting again.

The blackmailer had confessed.

Yet the murder remained.

Inspector Raglan turned to Ralph.

“You protected her,” he said.

Ralph nodded once.

“Yes.”

“Even knowing it might cost you your freedom?”

“Yes.”

The inspector closed his notebook slowly.

“Miss Russell,” he said, “you will come with us.”

She inclined her head.

As she left the room, she did not look back.

The silence that followed was heavy.

Flora sank back into her chair.

“Then Ralph is innocent,” she whispered.

Inspector Raglan did not reply.

“The blackmail explains one part,” he said at last. “But it does not explain the murder.”

I stood very still.

Miss Russell had confessed to blackmail.

But she had not taken the letter.

She had not arranged the dictaphone.

She had not locked the door.

And she had not removed the knife.

The true murderer still walked free.

And I felt, more strongly than ever, that the answer lay closer than anyone realized.

Because every fact was in place.

Every action had meaning.

And the smallest detail—perhaps the smallest word—would reveal everything.

Part 11

Miss Russell’s confession changed the direction of the case, but it did not end it. She admitted blackmail without hesitation. She explained that she had discovered Mrs. Ferrars’s secret through chance observation and had taken advantage of it. Yet she continued to deny the murder of Roger Ackroyd.

Inspector Raglan remained cautious.

“Blackmail is one crime,” he said. “Murder is another.”

Miss Russell did not tremble.

“I did not kill him,” she repeated.

She was taken away for further questioning.

Ralph was released for the time being, though suspicion did not disappear entirely. His protection of Miss Russell had nearly ruined him.

That evening Flora came to my house once more.

“It is over,” she said faintly.

“Not entirely,” I replied.

“Ralph is safe,” she insisted.

I did not answer.

“You still doubt,” she said.

“I doubt everything,” I said quietly.

After she left, I walked in the garden for some time. The air was cool. The sky clear.

I found myself thinking of the dictaphone again.

The timing.

The arrangement.

The careful planning.

This had not been an act of passion.

It had been calculated.

Later that night there was a knock at my door.

My neighbor entered without hurry.

“Doctor,” he said softly, “the game advances.”

I did not reply.

He sat down and studied me.

“Miss Russell has confessed to blackmail,” he said.

“Yes.”

“And yet you do not feel relief.”

“No.”

He nodded.

“Because the central question remains.”

“Yes,” I said.

“The letter,” he said.

“Yes.”

He leaned forward.

“Doctor, consider this: if the murderer wished to hide the name written in that letter, then the murderer must have known that the letter existed.”

I felt my pulse quicken.

“Yes,” I said slowly.

“And who knew that a letter had arrived?”

I thought back carefully.

“Mr. Ackroyd and myself,” I said.

“And Parker,” he added gently.

I frowned.

“Parker brought the post,” I said.

“Yes,” he replied.

There was silence.

“You suspect Parker?” I asked.

“I suspect everyone,” he said lightly.

He rose.

“There is something I must show you tomorrow,” he said. “Until then, think carefully.”

After he left, I sat alone for a long time.

The letter had been opened in my presence.

The final page had been turned.

The name had been written.

And I had seen something.

Had I?

I tried to recall the exact position of the paper.

The ink.

The fold.

A detail hovered at the edge of memory.

The next afternoon my neighbor invited me to his house.

I had never been inside before.

The room was neat and orderly. On the table lay several objects arranged carefully.

“Doctor,” he said calmly, “this is a problem of psychology.”

He held up a small mechanical device.

“A dictaphone can be set in advance,” he said. “The voice may speak after the speaker is dead.”

“Yes,” I said.

“But who would think of such a plan?”

I did not answer.

“A man of imagination,” he continued. “A man who understands the effect of appearances.”

He looked directly at me.

“And a man who was present in the room.”

My throat felt dry.

“Many were present,” I said.

“But only one remained alone with Mr. Ackroyd before his death,” he replied softly.

I met his eyes.

For a long moment neither of us spoke.

Then he said quietly:

“Doctor Sheppard, I know.”

The words fell gently.

Not accusing.

Not angry.

Simply certain.

I felt a strange calm.

“You know?” I repeated.

“Yes,” he said. “You killed him.”

There was no sound in the room except the ticking of a clock.

“You see,” he continued gently, “Mrs. Ferrars named you in her letter.”

I felt no surprise.

“You feared exposure,” he went on. “You had blackmailed her. You had driven her to despair. When you realized that Mr. Ackroyd would read your name, you acted quickly.”

The events replayed clearly in my mind.

The knife.

The dictaphone.

The locked door.

The window.

“You urged him to read the letter at once,” he said softly. “Why? Because you wished to know how much he had seen.”

I closed my eyes briefly.

“When he refused, you killed him before he could finish.”

His voice remained calm.

“You removed the letter. You arranged the dictaphone. You created the illusion of life.”

I opened my eyes.

“And you know all this?” I asked quietly.

“Yes,” he said.

I studied him carefully.

“What will you do?” I asked.

He was silent for a moment.

“I offer you a choice,” he said at last.

“A choice?”

“Yes. The law will demand justice. But you may choose your own end.”

I understood him.

“You mean,” I said slowly, “suicide.”

He inclined his head.

“It would spare your sister public shame,” he said gently.

Caroline.

The thought of her face filled my mind.

“You give me time?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said. “Until tomorrow.”

He rose and moved toward the door.

“Good evening, Doctor.”

He left quietly.

I remained alone.

The truth stood before me clearly.

I had believed myself clever.

I had believed the details secure.

Yet one mind had seen through them.

And now there remained only one final act.

Part 12

I walked home slowly.

The village looked the same as always. The houses stood in neat rows. A light shone from the window of the shop. Somewhere a dog barked.

Nothing in King’s Abbot showed that a man had been killed. Nothing showed that another man would soon die.

When I entered the house, Caroline called from the sitting room.

“James? Is that you?”

“Yes,” I answered.

I went in and stood by the fire.

She looked at me closely.

“You look tired,” she said.

“It has been a long day.”

“Have you been with that foreigner again?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“He is not what he seems,” she said quietly.

I almost smiled.

“No,” I said. “He is not.”

She studied me.

“James, there is something you are not telling me.”

“There is much I cannot tell you,” I said.

She frowned slightly.

“This case is terrible,” she said. “I keep thinking of poor Mr. Ackroyd. And Mrs. Ferrars too. Such tragedy.”

I felt a sharp movement of memory.

Mrs. Ferrars sitting opposite me that last morning.

Her pale face.

Her fear.

I had believed myself in control then.

I had believed that blackmail was merely a matter of money.

I had not foreseen that she would confess.

I had not foreseen that she would take her life.

And I had certainly not foreseen that Roger Ackroyd would receive that letter.

Caroline spoke again.

“What do you think will happen now?”

I looked at her.

“The truth will come out,” I said.

“It always does,” she replied firmly.

I went upstairs soon after.

In my room I sat at the desk and opened a drawer.

Inside lay the small bottle of veronal tablets I had kept.

How strange that the same drug had ended Mrs. Ferrars’s life.

I placed the bottle on the desk.

Then I took out paper and began to write.

I wrote calmly and clearly.

I explained everything.

How I had discovered Mrs. Ferrars’s guilt.

How I had demanded money in return for silence.
How fear had grown within her.
How she had confessed to Roger Ackroyd.
How I had realized that the letter would reveal my name.
And how, in that moment, I had chosen murder to save myself.
I described the plan.
The removal of the dagger from the silver case.
The swift blow.
The arrangement of the dictaphone.
The locking of the door.
The return through the window.
Every detail.
I wrote also of my meeting with my neighbor.
Of his calm certainty.
Of his offer.
When I finished, I read the pages carefully.
There was no anger in me.
Only a clear understanding.
I folded the pages and placed them in an envelope.
I addressed it.
Then I sat back.
Caroline's voice drifted faintly from downstairs.
I felt a tightness in my chest.
Shame would fall on her if the truth were shouted in court.
I could not bear that.
I opened the bottle and counted the tablets.
Enough.
I poured water into a glass.
For a moment I hesitated.
I thought of my patient's faces.
Of the quiet mornings.

Of the small routine of life.
All gone.
I swallowed the tablets one by one.
The taste was bitter.
I lay down on the bed.
The room seemed to grow dim.
My last thought was of the man who had seen through me.
He had been quiet.
Patient.
Certain.
He had waited until I saw the truth myself.
And in that, perhaps, he had been kinder than the law.
The darkness came gently.
And with it, silence.