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Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Many people once spoke about the strange case at Styles. At that time, the newspapers were full of it. Now the noise has become quiet. Still, some people continue to talk and guess. Because of that, and because my friend Poirot asked me, I have decided to tell the whole story clearly from the beginning. I was there. I saw what happened. I will explain it as simply as I can.

At that time, I had just returned from the war. I had been injured and sent home. After some months in a dull house for sick officers, I was given a month of leave. I had no close family, and I did not know where to go. Then, by chance, I met John Cavendish in London. We had known each other when we were boys, though we had never been very close friends.

John was older than I was, but he still looked strong and active. When he saw me, he was warm and friendly. We spoke about the past, about school, and about the war. At last he said, "Why don't you come down to Styles for your leave? Mother will be pleased to see you."

Styles Court was his mother's country house in Essex. I remembered it well from my childhood visits. It was a large and comfortable house, with wide lawns and old trees. I accepted his invitation gladly. Quiet country air was exactly what I needed.

As we talked, John told me something surprising. His mother, Mrs. Inglethorp, had married again. I could not hide my shock. I remembered her as a strong, proud

woman, already middle-aged when I was a boy. Now she must be nearly seventy.

“Yes,” John said, and his face grew hard. “She married a man called Alfred Inglethorp. He is much younger than she is. None of us like him.”

He explained that the man had first come to the house as a kind of helper and secretary. Mrs. Inglethorp was always busy with charities and meetings. Alfred had made himself useful. Then, suddenly, they were engaged. The family had been surprised and unhappy, but Mrs. Inglethorp had done as she pleased.

Three days later I arrived at the small station of Styles St. Mary. The day was warm and bright. John met me with a motor car. As we drove through the quiet green fields, I felt far away from the war and its pain.

When we reached the house, I first met Miss Evelyn Howard. She was a strong woman with clear blue eyes and a firm handshake. She spoke directly and did not hide her feelings. At once I liked her honesty.

Tea was served under a large tree on the lawn. There I met Mary Cavendish, John’s wife. I will never forget that first sight of her. She was tall and slender. Her eyes were golden brown and very deep. She seemed calm and quiet, yet I felt a strong spirit inside her. When she spoke, her voice was low and gentle. I found myself watching her more than I wished to admit.

Soon Mrs. Inglethorp herself joined us. She had white hair and a proud face. Though she was old, she moved with energy. Behind her came her husband, Alfred Inglethorp.

My first impression of him was strange and unpleasant. He had a long black beard and wore gold glasses. His face showed little feeling. He spoke in a soft, careful voice. He seemed always to watch his wife, adjusting her chair, bringing her cushions, and speaking to her with sweet words. Yet something about him felt false to me.

During tea, the talk turned to crime. I admitted that I had always wanted to be a detective. Mary laughed softly and asked why. I told her about a small Belgian detective I once knew. I described his method and his clever mind. I did not know then how important that name would soon become again in my life.

The next days passed quietly. There was Cynthia Murdoch, a lively young girl

who lived with the family. She worked in a hospital dispensary and spoke cheerfully about bottles and medicines. There was also Lawrence Cavendish, John's younger brother, quiet and thoughtful. He had once studied medicine but had left it to write poetry.

Still, under the peaceful days, I felt tension in the house. Miss Howard clearly disliked Alfred Inglethorp. She spoke sharply about him when he was not present. I sensed that she feared something.

One evening everything changed. John called Mary and me into the smoking-room. His face was troubled. Miss Howard had argued fiercely with Mrs. Inglethorp and had decided to leave the house at once.

Miss Howard entered with a small suitcase. Her face was pale but firm. She had told Mrs. Inglethorp that Alfred married her only for money. She had even warned that he was dangerous. Mrs. Inglethorp had been angry and refused to listen. So Miss Howard was leaving.

Before she went, she caught my arm and spoke in a low voice. "Watch that man," she said. "Watch her husband." Her eyes were serious. I promised I would be careful.

After she left, the house felt different. A sense of safety had gone with her. I tried to tell myself that it was only my imagination, but I could not shake off a feeling of coming trouble.

The next week was busy. There was a village event, a performance, and much work to prepare for it. On the evening before the tragedy, Mrs. Inglethorp seemed upset. I noticed that she and her husband had argued. Cynthia told me that she had heard raised voices from behind a door.

Later that night, after supper, Dr. Bauerstein visited the house. He was a tall man with dark eyes and a serious face. He was said to be an expert in poisons. I did not trust him. I also did not like how often he walked and talked with Mary Cavendish.

Mrs. Inglethorp went to bed carrying a cup of coffee. That image stayed clearly in my mind. At the time, it seemed unimportant.

I went to sleep thinking of many small things—the argument, Miss Howard's

warning, Alfred's strange manner. I did not know that before morning our peaceful country house would be filled with fear and death.

In the middle of the night, I was woken by Lawrence Cavendish. His face was white and shaken. "Mother is very ill," he said. "She has locked herself in her room."

I dressed quickly and followed him down the corridor. From inside her room came terrible sounds. The door was locked. We forced it open.

Mrs. Inglethorp lay on the bed, her body shaking with violent convulsions. The sight was terrible. She tried to speak but could not. Suddenly her body bent in a strange arch. Then she cried out a single word: "Alfred—"

A moment later she lay still.

We sent for doctors. Dr. Bauerstein arrived first, then Dr. Wilkins. They examined her carefully. After some time, they came out and said that a post-mortem examination would be necessary. They could not give a simple cause of death.

I felt cold inside. A terrible thought entered my mind. Poison.

I remembered the coffee. I remembered the argument. I remembered Miss Howard's warning.

And in that moment I knew that my quiet visit to Styles was over. A dark and serious mystery had begun.

Part 2

I did not sleep again that morning. After the doctors left, the house felt strange and empty. The servants moved quietly. No one spoke loudly. It was as if the walls themselves were listening.

John and Lawrence were in the dining room. Their faces showed shock, but not only shock. There was also confusion and fear. I stood near the window and thought hard. Mrs. Inglethorp's last word had been her husband's name. That could mean many things. It could be love. It could be accusation. It could be a cry for help. But in my heart, I feared it meant something darker.

When the doctors said they could not give a death certificate, I felt certain that poison was involved. The word “strychnine” had been mentioned. I remembered how Cynthia had joked about poison in the hospital. I remembered Dr. Bauerstein’s interest in rare poisons. Everything in my mind began to connect in a strange way.

It was then that I made a decision. I would bring in Hercule Poirot.

I told John about him. I explained that he had once been one of the best detectives in Belgium. At first John hesitated. He did not want scandal. He did not want police questions and newspaper stories. But finally he agreed. If there had been foul play, it was better to know the truth.

I went at once to Poirot’s small house in the village. He opened the door himself. When I told him what had happened, his face grew serious. He listened carefully while I told him every detail from the night before.

I described the argument. I described Mrs. Inglethorp taking the coffee upstairs. I described how the door had been locked. I described her last word.

Poirot asked many questions. Some seemed strange to me. He asked whether Mrs. Inglethorp had eaten well at supper. I did not see why that mattered, but he said that it was important.

“If she was poisoned at eight,” he said quietly, “why did the symptoms appear only at five in the morning? Strychnine acts quickly. There is something unusual here.”

His calm way of speaking made me feel both comforted and nervous. He saw problems where I saw none. He saw meaning in small details that I had forgotten.

We returned to Styles together. John gave us the keys to Mrs. Inglethorp’s room and to Alfred Inglethorp’s room. The doctors had locked both.

Poirot went to work at once. He moved quickly but carefully. He studied the broken door. He examined the bolt. He looked at the bed, the table, and the floor.

On the floor lay the broken pieces of a coffee cup. The cup had been crushed almost to powder. Poirot bent down and studied it closely.

“Someone stepped on this,” he said softly.

“Yes,” I answered. “In the confusion.”

He shook his head. "Perhaps. But perhaps not."

On the writing table stood a small purple box. It was locked. Poirot examined the key carefully. He did not open the box yet, but he took the key and placed it in his pocket.

On another small table stood a tray with a cup and a saucepan. There was still some dark liquid inside.

Poirot dipped a finger into it and tasted it carefully. "Cocoa," he said. "With a little rum."

"Cocoa?" I asked. "But she took coffee to bed."

"Yes," said Poirot quietly. "She took coffee."

That difference troubled me.

He then pointed out a small dark stain on the carpet near the window. He touched it and smelled it.

"Coffee," he said again.

He also found a small piece of dark green cloth caught in the door bolt. It was tiny, almost nothing. Yet he placed it carefully into an envelope.

"Everything matters," he said to me.

After finishing his search, he stood still in the middle of the room. His eyes moved slowly around the walls.

"We have many small facts," he said. "But facts alone are not enough. We must arrange them. We must ask: who had the chance? Who had the reason?"

We left the room and went downstairs.

Alfred Inglethorp was in the hall. His face showed deep sadness. He spoke of his poor wife and her kind heart. His voice trembled. But I noticed that his eyes were dry.

Poirot watched him quietly. He said very little.

Soon after, the police were informed. An officer came to ask questions. The house felt more tense than ever.

The post-mortem took place that evening. The result confirmed the doctors' suspicion. Mrs. Inglethorp had died of strychnine poisoning.

When the news was told to us, there was silence.

Poison. Murder.

The word hung in the air like smoke.

Now there was no doubt. Someone in this house had killed her.

I felt a cold weight in my chest. I looked at John. He looked at the floor. Lawrence's face was pale.

And Alfred Inglethorp? He lifted his hands slowly and covered his face.

But still, I remembered the crushed coffee cup. I remembered the cocoa. I remembered the strange delay before the poison acted.

Something did not fit.

That night, I spoke privately with Poirot again.

"It must be Alfred," I said. "She cried his name."

Poirot looked at me calmly.

"Perhaps," he said. "Or perhaps she called to him for help."

"But the argument—"

"Arguments are common in marriage," he replied.

"Then who?" I asked.

He smiled slightly.

"My friend, you are impatient. We must not run ahead. We must let the facts speak."

In the days that followed, Poirot questioned everyone in the house. He spoke with Dorcas, the loyal servant. He spoke with Cynthia. He spoke with Mary. He spoke with the brothers.

Each conversation revealed something new. Small details began to appear. A will had been made. A quarrel about money had taken place. A letter had been written and destroyed.

I began to see how deep the problem truly was.

Styles Court, which had seemed peaceful and bright when I arrived, now felt full of secrets.

And at the center of it all stood one question:

Who had placed strychnine in Mrs. Inglethorp's cup?

I did not yet know that the answer would surprise us all.

Part 3

The next morning the house felt heavy and tired. No one had slept well. The servants moved about quietly, and even the birds outside seemed to sing more softly. I walked in the garden for a short time, trying to clear my mind. The sun was bright, but inside me there was only shadow.

Poirot joined me soon after breakfast. He carried his small notebook and looked very serious.

“Today,” he said, “we must look not only at the crime, but at the people. A crime is not only an action. It is also a human act. Therefore we study the humans.”

We began with Dorcas, the old servant. She had worked at Styles for many years. Her eyes were red from crying.

“Poor mistress,” she said. “She was always good to us.”

Poirot asked gently about the events of the previous afternoon. Had she heard anything unusual? Had she seen anything?

Dorcas hesitated. Then she admitted that she had heard raised voices in the boudoir. Mrs. Inglethorp and her husband had argued strongly. She had heard Mrs. Inglethorp say something about “shame” and “deception.”

“Did you hear anything about poison?” Poirot asked.

“No, sir,” Dorcas said quickly. “Nothing like that.”

After Dorcas, we spoke with Cynthia. She looked pale but tried to be cheerful.

“It is all like a bad dream,” she said.

Poirot asked her about the coffee and about the cocoa. Cynthia explained that Mrs. Inglethorp often drank cocoa at night if she could not sleep. The cocoa was prepared in the kitchen and taken up later.

“But on that night,” Cynthia said, “she carried coffee to her room herself after supper.”

“And did anyone else have coffee?” Poirot asked.

“Yes, we all did,” she replied. “It was served in the drawing-room.”

That fact struck me. If the coffee had been poisoned before it was served, others

might have died as well. Yet only Mrs. Inglethorp had been harmed.

Next we spoke with Mary Cavendish.

She stood very straight while answering Poirot's questions. Her face was calm, but her hands were tightly folded.

"You walked with Dr. Bauerstein often," Poirot said quietly.

"Yes," she answered.

"And yesterday afternoon?"

"I did not go. I had something else to do."

Poirot watched her closely. "You argued with Mrs. Inglethorp yesterday afternoon."

A faint color rose to her cheeks. "Yes."

"May I ask why?"

She paused. "It concerned family matters."

"Money?" Poirot asked softly.

She did not reply at once. Finally she said, "Yes. Money."

That answer seemed important.

After Mary, we met Lawrence. He looked nervous and avoided our eyes.

Poirot asked him about his mother's health.

"She had a weak heart," Lawrence said. "But she was strong in spirit."

"You studied medicine once," Poirot added.

"Yes, but I left it years ago."

"Still, you know something about drugs?"

Lawrence stiffened. "Very little now."

Poirot thanked him politely, but I could see that he was thinking deeply.

Finally we came to Alfred Inglethorp.

He sat in the library, his hands folded, his beard perfectly arranged. He looked sad but controlled.

"This is a terrible loss," he said. "My poor wife."

Poirot spoke calmly. "You were not in the house last night."

"No. I was with Mr. Denby. He will confirm that."

"You quarreled with your wife earlier."

“A small disagreement,” he replied. “Nothing serious.”

“What was it about?”

Alfred hesitated. “Personal matters.”

Poirot leaned forward slightly. “Was it about money?”

Alfred’s eyes flashed for a moment. “My wife was a generous woman. She managed her affairs as she wished.”

“Did she change her will recently?” Poirot asked suddenly.

Alfred seemed surprised. “Yes. Only yesterday.”

That statement caused me to look sharply at Poirot.

“And the new will favored you?” Poirot continued.

“Yes,” Alfred answered quietly.

The room felt colder.

A new will. Made the day before death.

After we left him, I could not hide my thoughts.

“Surely that is clear proof,” I said to Poirot. “He gains everything.”

Poirot shook his head slowly. “Motive, yes. But proof? No. Many people need money here.”

That was true. John had admitted that he was in financial difficulty. Lawrence had spent much on his writing. Even Cynthia depended on Mrs. Inglethorp’s kindness.

The police continued their investigation. They searched Alfred’s room. They found no poison there. They also learned that strychnine had once been purchased at the village chemist.

The chemist remembered selling it. It had been signed for under Mrs. Inglethorp’s name.

That shocked us all.

Why would she buy strychnine?

“For rat poison,” Alfred explained quickly. “We had a problem in the barns.”

But the explanation did not fully satisfy anyone.

The inquest was held soon after. Many questions were asked. Many answers were given.

The result was that Alfred Inglethorp was arrested on suspicion of murder.

When the police led him away, he did not resist. He looked calm.

I felt relief. The case seemed simple. He had motive. He had argued with her. She had cried his name.

Yet when I told Poirot that it was finished, he shook his head.

“No, my friend,” he said quietly. “It has only begun.”

“But he is arrested.”

“Yes.”

“Then what is wrong?”

Poirot looked at me with deep eyes.

“The coffee-cup,” he said. “The cocoa. The delay of the poison. The broken fragments. They do not speak clearly. When facts do not agree, we must listen very carefully.”

I felt uneasy again.

If Alfred was not guilty, then someone else was.

And that someone else still walked freely in the house of Styles.

The thought sent a chill through me.

That night I lay awake for hours.

I remembered Mary’s pale face. I remembered Lawrence’s terror when we broke into the room. I remembered John’s worry about money.

Could it be one of them?

I did not want to believe it.

But the truth was hidden somewhere among us.

And Hercule Poirot was determined to find it.

Part 4

The arrest of Alfred Inglethorp did not bring peace to the house. If anything, it made the air heavier. Though many believed him guilty, there was still doubt. And doubt is like a dark cloud. It does not leave quickly.

John tried to act as if everything would soon return to normal. He spoke about

estate work and about small village matters. But I could see that he was worried. His mother was dead. The family name was now tied to murder. And the newspapers had begun to write about “The Styles Case.”

Lawrence became even more quiet than before. He spent long hours alone. Sometimes I saw him walking quickly through the garden, as if trying to escape from his own thoughts.

Mary Cavendish changed as well. Her calm manner remained, but there was a sharpness in her eyes now. She seemed to be watching everyone, as if she feared something might break at any moment.

Cynthia tried to stay cheerful. Yet once I saw her sitting alone, staring at nothing. When she noticed me, she smiled quickly. But the smile did not reach her eyes.

Poirot, however, appeared satisfied. Not happy. Never happy in such a case. But satisfied that things were moving in the correct direction.

“The arrest,” he told me, “was necessary. But it is not the end.”

“Then what do you expect?” I asked.

“I expect the truth,” he replied calmly.

He continued to examine small details. He returned again and again to Mrs. Inglethorp’s room. He studied the door, the bolt, and the broken cup. He also asked questions about the cocoa.

One afternoon he surprised me with a strange request.

“Tell me, Hastings,” he said, “on the night of the tragedy, did you hear any sound like a table falling?”

I thought carefully. “No. I heard nothing until Lawrence woke me.”

“Exactly,” said Poirot. “And yet the table was overturned. Curious.”

He then asked about the time.

“The symptoms began at five in the morning,” he said. “But strychnine acts much sooner. Therefore we must consider that the poison was taken later than we think.”

“But she drank the coffee at eight,” I insisted.

Poirot looked at me gently. “Are you sure?”

I was silent.

We returned to the matter of the will. The new will had not yet been found. Only the lawyer knew that it existed. It had been made the afternoon before Mrs. Inglethorp died.

“Where is it?” I asked.

“That,” said Poirot, “is an excellent question.”

He began to search the house for it. He paid special attention to the purple despatch-case found in Mrs. Inglethorp’s room. He still had the key.

One evening he asked John for permission to open it officially. John agreed.

Inside were papers and letters. But the new will was not there.

“Then it has been removed,” Poirot said quietly.

“By whom?” I asked.

He did not answer at once. Instead he walked slowly to the window and looked out at the dark garden.

“Someone who feared it,” he said at last.

The police investigation continued. They searched Alfred Inglethorp’s movements on the night of the crime. Mr. Denby confirmed that Alfred had stayed at his house after midnight. That gave Alfred an alibi for the early morning hours.

Yet the poison had to be given earlier.

The chemist’s evidence also raised problems. The strychnine had been signed for in Mrs. Inglethorp’s name. But the chemist admitted that he had not looked closely at the person who signed the book.

“So the signature could have been false,” I said.

“Yes,” said Poirot. “Very possible.”

Then something unexpected happened.

The police found that Alfred Inglethorp had been in the village at the exact time the poison was purchased. A witness had seen him near the chemist’s shop.

That seemed to destroy his alibi.

Alfred was charged with murder.

The case went to court.

The trial was long and serious. Many people came to watch. The newspapers wrote about every detail.

I attended each day with Poirot.

The evidence seemed strong. The argument. The new will. The poison. The witness in the village.

The prosecution built a clear picture. Alfred Inglethorp had married for money. He feared that his wife might change her will again. He poisoned her coffee.

When the judge asked for his defense, Alfred spoke firmly. He denied everything.

Then, at the most dramatic moment, new evidence appeared.

Mr. Denby stepped forward and gave a detailed statement. Alfred had been with him until late. More than that, he had left Denby's house only to return shortly after because he had forgotten something. The time matched the chemist's story in a different way.

There was confusion in the courtroom.

Then Poirot stood up.

It was not common for him to speak there, but he asked permission to question one small point.

He spoke calmly. He asked about the time of purchase at the chemist's shop. He asked about handwriting. He asked about light conditions.

Slowly, carefully, he showed that the evidence against Alfred was not as clear as it seemed.

The judge ordered a pause.

Later, the charge against Alfred Inglethorp was withdrawn.

He was free.

When we left the court, I was deeply shocked.

"Then he did not do it?" I asked.

Poirot's eyes were serious.

"No," he said quietly. "He did not."

"But everything pointed to him!"

"Everything was made to point to him," Poirot corrected.

"Made?" I repeated.

"Yes," he said. "Someone was clever. Very clever."

A cold feeling passed through me.

If Alfred was innocent, then someone else had planned not only the murder, but also the false trail.

Someone had wanted Alfred to hang.

Someone inside Styles Court.

I suddenly understood that the case was far deeper than I had imagined.

And the true criminal was still close to us.

Closer than I dared to think.

Part 5

When Alfred Inglethorp returned to Styles after his release, the house felt different again. Some people avoided him. Others watched him closely. He walked with calm steps, his face controlled, his voice soft as ever. He did not show anger. He did not show fear. He simply returned to his room and his quiet manner.

John tried to be polite, but the strain was clear. Lawrence kept away. Mary behaved with cold courtesy. Cynthia seemed confused and uneasy.

I could not hide my surprise from Poirot.

“If Alfred did not kill her,” I said, “then we are back at the beginning.”

Poirot shook his head.

“No, my friend. We are much further than the beginning. We now know one important thing.”

“What is that?”

“That the crime was planned with great care.”

He began to explain.

“The poison was not placed in the coffee at supper. If it had been, the symptoms would have appeared much earlier. Therefore the poison must have been taken later.”

“But how?” I asked.

“By another drink,” he replied quietly.

The cocoa.

The word came to me at once.

“Yes,” Poirot said. “The cocoa taken to her room later that night.”

“But who prepared it?”

“That is what we must discover.”

He continued.

“The crushed coffee cup was meant to mislead us. It was destroyed so that we would believe the poison was in the coffee. But in truth, the poison was elsewhere.”

I felt both impressed and ashamed. The answer had been there, but I had not seen it.

Poirot next turned his attention to the will.

“Why was the new will not found?” he asked.

“Perhaps it was destroyed,” I suggested.

“Exactly. And by whom?”

If the will favored Alfred, then destroying it would harm him. That meant someone else had reason to remove it.

John stood to inherit if there were no new will. Lawrence also had something to gain.

I felt uneasy again.

Poirot asked to see the chemist’s book once more. He studied the signature carefully. Then he compared it with letters written by different members of the household.

He did this quietly and without telling anyone his true purpose.

One afternoon he came to me with a serious face.

“Hastings,” he said, “I will soon call everyone together. It is time.”

My heart beat faster.

That evening, in the drawing-room, the whole family gathered. John, Mary, Lawrence, Cynthia, Alfred, and even Dorcas stood near the door. The air was tense.

Poirot stood in the center of the room.

“Mesdames et messieurs,” he began calmly, “we are here to speak of the death of Mrs. Inglethorp.”

No one moved.

“It was murder,” he continued. “A clever murder. But not clever enough.”

He first explained how the poison was placed in the cocoa, not the coffee. He showed how the delay in symptoms proved this. He explained how the coffee cup was broken to create a false trail.

Then he spoke of the will.

“Mrs. Inglethorp made a new will on the afternoon before her death,” he said. “But that will was destroyed.”

He paused.

“Why? Because it did not favor the person who destroyed it.”

His eyes moved slowly from face to face.

I held my breath.

At last his gaze rested on Lawrence Cavendish.

Lawrence turned pale.

“No,” he whispered.

Poirot continued calmly.

“You had studied medicine. You knew about drugs. You had access to the cocoa. You also knew that your mother had changed her will in favor of Alfred. You feared losing everything.”

Lawrence shook his head weakly.

“I loved her,” he said.

“Perhaps,” Poirot answered gently. “But you also feared poverty.”

The room felt frozen.

Poirot then explained how Lawrence had disguised himself when buying the poison. The chemist had not looked closely. The signature had small differences from Mrs. Inglethorp’s usual writing. Poirot showed these differences clearly.

“And you attempted to blame Alfred,” Poirot added. “You knew there had been an argument. You knew suspicion would fall on him.”

Lawrence covered his face with his hands.

Silence filled the room.

At last he spoke in a broken voice.

“I did not mean to kill her so painfully,” he said. “I thought it would be quick.”

Mary gave a small cry. John stood as if turned to stone. Cynthia began to weep softly.

The truth was out.

Lawrence Cavendish had murdered his mother.

The police were called. Lawrence did not resist.

As they led him away, he did not look at anyone.

The house of Styles was silent again.

Later that night, I walked with Poirot in the garden.

“You see,” he said softly, “the human heart is complex. Love, fear, pride, need—they mix together.”

“I never suspected him,” I admitted.

“Because he seemed gentle,” Poirot said. “But even gentle men can act in despair.”

I looked up at the quiet sky. The stars shone calmly, as if nothing had happened.

“And Alfred?” I asked.

Poirot smiled faintly.

“He is guilty only of marrying for money,” he said. “Not of murder.”

Styles Court would never feel the same to me again.

I had come there for peace and rest. Instead, I had seen how easily trust can break, and how carefully evil can hide.

But I had also seen the power of reason and patience.

And once again, I had witnessed the brilliance of Hercule Poirot.

Part 6

The next day, however, something unexpected happened.

I had believed the case was finished. Lawrence had confessed. The police had taken him away. The house was silent with shock. Yet Poirot did not look satisfied.

That afternoon he asked me to walk with him again.

“Hastings,” he said quietly, “tell me—do you truly believe that Lawrence is the murderer?”

I hesitated. "He confessed."

Poirot nodded slowly. "Yes. He confessed."

"And you showed the proof," I said. "The handwriting. The cocoa. The will."

Poirot stopped walking. He looked at me very carefully.

"My friend," he said softly, "sometimes a confession is not the end. Sometimes it is only the beginning."

I stared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," he replied calmly, "that I allowed Lawrence to believe that I suspected him."

"Allowed him?" I cried.

"Yes."

I felt my heart beat hard. "Then—you do not think he did it?"

"No," said Poirot simply.

The ground seemed to move under my feet.

"But he confessed!"

"Out of fear," Poirot answered. "Out of weakness. Not out of guilt."

He began to explain.

"Lawrence is sensitive. He had argued with his mother before in the past. He feels always that he disappoints people. When I accused him, he believed for a moment that perhaps he was capable of such a thing. But that does not make him a murderer."

"Then who?" I whispered.

Poirot turned toward the house.

"We must call them together once more."

That evening, once again, the family gathered in the drawing-room.

Lawrence was there, pale but silent. The police had not yet formally charged him. Alfred Inglethorp stood near the fireplace, calm as always.

Poirot began to speak.

"Yesterday, I made an accusation," he said. "It was necessary. It was part of my plan. But it was not the truth."

A murmur ran through the room.

“Lawrence Cavendish is not the murderer.”

John let out a breath. Mary looked at her brother-in-law with new hope. Lawrence stared at Poirot in disbelief.

Poirot continued.

“The crime was planned long before the night of Mrs. Inglethorp’s death. It was not a sudden act of fear. It was cold and careful.”

His eyes rested on Alfred Inglethorp.

“The marriage itself was part of the plan.”

Alfred did not move.

“You see,” Poirot said, “Mr. Inglethorp did not marry for money alone. He married with a partner.”

A silence fell.

Poirot turned slowly toward the door.

“Miss Evelyn Howard,” he said.

The door opened.

Miss Howard stepped inside.

I could not believe my eyes.

She stood straight and firm, just as she had on the day she left Styles. Her face was serious.

“Yes,” she said quietly.

The room seemed frozen.

Poirot spoke clearly.

“Alfred Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard were not enemies. They were allies. They had known each other before he came to Styles.”

I remembered her fierce anger, her warnings, her strong words against him.

“It was all a show,” Poirot said. “A quarrel arranged to make everyone believe she hated him. That way, no one would suspect that they worked together.”

John shook his head slowly. “Impossible.”

“No,” said Poirot gently. “Very possible.”

He explained step by step.

Alfred married Mrs. Inglethorp to gain her trust and access to her money. But he feared that she might change her will. He and Evelyn planned together.

The poison was bought under Mrs. Inglethorp's name. Alfred arranged to appear suspicious. He even allowed himself to be arrested.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because," Poirot answered, "he knew the evidence was weak. Once the charge failed, he would be safe from trial again. And suspicion would turn elsewhere."

My mind raced.

"The cocoa," Poirot continued. "Miss Howard had access to the kitchen before she left. She prepared it carefully. The poison was added later, in the cup taken upstairs."

"But she was not in the house!" I cried.

"She returned secretly," said Poirot calmly. "Only for a short time. No one noticed. The house was busy. The night was dark."

Miss Howard's face did not change.

Alfred spoke at last.

"You have no proof," he said.

Poirot smiled slightly.

"On the contrary."

He described how he had found letters between Alfred and Evelyn, hidden in a garden shed. He had also discovered small differences in handwriting that connected the poison purchase to Alfred.

Most important of all, he had traced their meetings before and after the crime.

"You planned the argument," Poirot said. "You planned the broken cup. You planned everything."

Miss Howard lifted her chin.

"Yes," she said quietly. "We planned it."

A deep silence followed.

Alfred closed his eyes briefly.

The police stepped forward.

This time there was no denial.

Alfred Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard were taken away together.

As the door closed behind them, I felt as if a long storm had finally passed.

John sank into a chair. Mary stood still, her face pale but calm. Lawrence looked as if a great weight had been lifted from him.

Poirot adjusted his moustache gently.

“There,” he said softly. “Now it is finished.”

Later, as we stood outside under the quiet sky, I spoke in a low voice.

“I never suspected her.”

“That,” said Poirot, “was the point.”

“And Alfred?”

“A clever man,” Poirot said. “But not clever enough.”

I looked back at the house of Styles.

When I had first arrived, it had seemed peaceful and safe.

Now I knew that behind calm faces can hide deep secrets.

And once again, I understood that the smallest detail—the smallest difference—can lead to the truth.

Hercule Poirot had solved the mystery.

And Styles would never be the same again.

Part 7

After the arrest of Alfred Inglethorp and Miss Howard, the house remained very still. No one spoke much that night. The servants moved softly. Doors closed with care. It felt as if the walls of Styles had heard too much and now wished to rest.

I walked with Poirot in the garden once more. The evening air was cool. A light wind moved the leaves. For a time, neither of us spoke.

At last I said, “Poirot, I must understand everything clearly. From the beginning.”

He nodded. “Yes, my friend. It is right that you should know.”

We sat on a wooden bench near the old sycamore tree where we had first taken tea. It seemed a lifetime ago.

“First,” Poirot said calmly, “we must remember that the marriage itself was part of a plan. Alfred Inglethorp was not a foolish young man. He was patient. He waited. He studied Mrs. Inglethorp’s habits. He learned how she trusted people.”

“And Miss Howard?” I asked.

“She knew him before,” Poirot replied. “They were connected by family in a distant way, but more than that, they were partners. They pretended to dislike each other strongly. That was very clever. It made everyone believe they were enemies.”

I remembered Miss Howard’s sharp words, her warnings to me.

“She even told me to watch him,” I said slowly.

Poirot gave a small smile. “Exactly. That made you trust her.”

I felt ashamed.

“The argument on the day before the death,” Poirot continued, “was arranged. It was meant to be overheard. Mrs. Inglethorp believed it was real. She thought Miss Howard truly hated her husband.”

“But why kill her at that time?” I asked.

“Because of the will,” said Poirot. “Mrs. Inglethorp had changed it before. She could change it again. Alfred feared losing everything. So they acted.”

He spoke slowly and clearly, so that I could follow each step.

“The poison was strychnine. It was purchased under Mrs. Inglethorp’s name. Alfred made sure he would appear suspicious. He was seen near the chemist’s shop. But he planned also to create doubt about the exact time.”

“The delay in the poison’s effect,” I said.

“Yes,” said Poirot. “Strychnine acts quickly. Therefore the poison must be taken at a later hour than we first believed.”

“In the cocoa.”

“Precisely.”

He explained that Mrs. Inglethorp often drank cocoa before sleep. That night was no different. The cocoa was prepared earlier. It was placed on a tray. At some point, the poison was added to it.

“But how did Miss Howard return?” I asked.

“Very simply,” said Poirot. “She knew the grounds well. She came through the

garden. It was late. Everyone was tired. No one noticed.”

The broken coffee cup, he said, was part of the false story. It was crushed to make us believe the poison had been in the coffee.

“And you, Poirot,” I said suddenly, “you helped create Alfred’s alibi.”

He looked at me kindly.

“Yes.”

I stared at him.

“When Alfred was arrested, the case against him seemed strong. But it was too strong. It was perfect. That made me doubt.”

“So you tested it,” I said.

“Yes. I arranged matters so that the charge would fail. Once the court released him, he believed himself safe. He became less careful.”

I slowly began to understand the depth of his plan.

“You allowed him to feel secure,” I said.

“Exactly.”

The letters found in the shed had been carelessly hidden. The connection between Alfred and Miss Howard became clear once Poirot looked for it directly.

“Everything was there,” Poirot said. “Only it was hidden behind strong emotion and clever acting.”

We sat in silence again.

At last I asked, “Did Mrs. Inglethorp suspect?”

Poirot’s face grew serious.

“Perhaps she suspected something about the will. But not about the murder. She trusted too easily.”

A deep sadness filled me.

The house of Styles had seemed full of busy life when I arrived. Now it felt older, quieter.

“And the family?” I asked.

“They will recover,” Poirot said gently. “Time helps. And truth helps more.”

The next morning I spoke with John. He looked tired, but relieved.

“It is over,” he said. “Thank heaven it is over.”

Lawrence thanked Poirot with quiet emotion. Mary stood beside her husband, her face calm but thoughtful.

Cynthia came to me later in the garden.

“It feels strange,” she said softly. “Like waking from a dream.”

I agreed.

Before I left Styles, I walked once more through the long path by the park gates. The grass moved gently in the wind. The village lay peaceful beyond.

Poirot joined me one last time.

“You will write this story,” he said.

“Yes,” I answered.

“Tell it clearly,” he added. “Not with noise. Not with drama. Only with truth.”

I promised I would.

As I boarded the train at the small station of Styles St. Mary, I looked back at the quiet countryside. It seemed impossible that such darkness had hidden there.

Yet I had learned something important.

Evil does not always shout. It often smiles softly. It may wear a beard. It may speak kindly. It may even warn you against itself.

But careful thought, patience, and reason can uncover it.

That is the lesson I carried with me.

And that is why I have written this account of what happened at Styles.

The mysterious affair had reached its end.

But I knew, as the train moved forward, that this would not be my last adventure with Hercule Poirot.