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Who Murdered Miss Marple?

INT _____ SUMMER _____ AFTERNOON

(SFX BIRD SONG AND THE BUZZ OF INSECTS HEARD THROUGH AN OPEN WINDOW, LAWN MOWER IN DISTANCE, MANTLEPIECE CLOCK CHIMES THE HOUR OF THREE, A KETTLE COMES WHISTLING TO THE BOIL, A CAT PURRS. RUSTLE OF NEWSPAPER)

MARPLE: Now then, let me see, where will it be do you think, Moriarty?

(FX CAT MEAOWS) Front page? (SLOWLY SCANNING PAGE) No...Frolicking Vicar Defrocked In Girl Guide Scandal. (EXHALES) Well, I suppose that had to be the big story this week, didn't it? Where would the Sunday tabloids be without sex, sin and surplices? Banker Fiddles While Homes Burn. Oh dear, someone stretching a pun a little too far I think. Secondary school 'graduate', no doubt. Back page? No, we won't even consider going there will we? (SNORTS) All those healthy young thugs rushing about in the mud, knocking each other senseless chasing after an inflated bladder and being paid more than a minor royal. Working themselves into a sweat and then jumping into a communal bath to sing smutty songs. Doesn't bear thinking about. You don't hear of such behaviour on the centre court at Wimbledon, oh no. Now there's a game for well-bred young ladies and gentlemen.

(SFX CAT MEAOWS)

Don't pick at the tea cosy, there's a good boy, Moriarty. Now, did I ever tell you about the time I served an ace at Cheltenham? Ladies singles champion I was, two terms in a row. Might have made it three if some little madam hadn't raised the net a couple of inches the night before the final. But let bygones be bygones I say. Rise above it as Mother would say. Mustn't harbour a grudge. (SEETHES. FX RIPS NEWSPAPER) Oops. Careless. Don't know my own strength. (FX RUSTLES PAPER)

Page two. Minister of Defence Under Fire. It gets worse doesn't it. You'd think they'd invent some new clichés every once in a while. The Prime Minister Has Full Confidence In ...Oh dear oh dear. That's a sure sign someone's in for the chop. Won't be long before the poor man will be announcing that he wants to spend more time with his family and that his wife backs him all the way accompanied by a photo of her grinning from ear to ear as if she just swallowed a coat hanger and would like to kill him, if only the cameras would go and let them have a good old set-to. Now you know why your mummy didn't get married, don't you Moriarty.

(FX CAT PURRS CONTENTEDLY)

Not such a silly old stick after all, was I? Don't tell me it's on page 3. Er...no. That's reserved for...goodness! That young baggage is the spitting image of Susan Potts, the gamekeeper's daughter who's been making cow eyes at the butcher's boy and drooling over his kidneys. Wait a minute. It IS Susan Potts! Good gracious. I didn't recognise her for a moment without..in that..Moriarty don't stare. It's rude.

(CAT SQUEALS AND KNOCKS CUP IN SAUCER WHICH RATTLES)

She's certainly filled out since she started eating meat. Well I'll be! That's given me quite a turn. Better have another Garibaldi.

(SFX BISCUIT SNAPS, PAPER STRAIGHTENED)

(CINTUES SPEAKING WITH MOUTH FULL) It must be here somewhere. For goodness sake, it was one of my most successful cases. (SFX FURIOUSLY TURNS PAGE AFTER PAGE)

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MARPLE (CONTD): Aha! There. Tsk that's not much for such a sensational case. A couple of paragraphs at the bottom of page...what is it?.. 6, flanked by an ad for surgical appliances and another for novelty cushions which do what? Ugh. Disgusting. How crude. Well, Mr Chuckles, you sit near the Major at Evensong and you won't find that so funny. Oh no. So, what does the junior crime correspondent (scoffs) of the Daily Sketch say about the greatest detective south of the smoke? Spinster Sleuth Solves Village Mystery. Cheeky so and so! Miss Jane Marple, St Mary Meade's Have-A-Go Heroine Foils Garden Gnome Trafficking Gang. You may take that tone with the local flat foot, young man, but I'll remind you that even Attila The Hun started small. Catch them young, that's what I say and you won't have to ship them off to Australia at the tax payer's expense when they grow up into – right little f-f-f-felons. They might be pinching garden gnomes today, but mark my words, they'll be whipping innocent young women off the streets of Tunbridge Wells to supply the white slave trade tomorrow if you don't nip such antisocial behaviour in the bud today. Isn't that right old fellow?

(SFX CAT PURRS AS IF IN AGREEMENT. THE CHURCH CLOCK STRIKES THREE)
Oh dear, oh dear. Did you hear that Moriarty? I shall have to talk to the Vicar again I can see. Church clock's almost five minutes slow.

(SFX CAT MEOWS) Yes, shocking isn't it. Can't rely on anything these days. Whatever next? Postie delivering the morning mail after lunch? A work to rule at the Women's institute? Mr Kipling going into liquidation? Perish the thought. What would dear old mama have said, eh? Poor girl went into a coma the day Green Shield stamps were abolished and she only had three books left to fill to get a limited edition Coronation china tea set with matching tea cosy. You can imagine what this would have done to her, can't you now. One more cup I think while the water's still warm. (SFX CLATTER OF TEA BEING MADE) I know for a fact Mrs Wiggins sets the rising of her meringues by the church clock and you know how unpalatable they can be when they're overdone by even a minute or two, don't you. Yes, tasted a few culinary castoffs in your time, haven't you my sweet. There. A nice dish of milk for the cutest little criminal mastermind in St Mary Meade. I'll just snip out this little item for the scrapbook and then we'll see about finishing off that fiendishly difficult crossword in the Parish newsletter, shall we. Can't let the church warden out fox Ms Jane Marple, the southern counties crossword champion three consecutive years running.

(SFX SCISSORS CUTTING ITEM FROM PAPER) Now where did I leave the paste? That reminds me where IS Mrs Fletcher? She ought to have been here at three to clear away the tea things and show the Brasso who's boss. Where is that wretched woman? First the disappointing little notice in the paper, then the housekeeper decides to take a half day without giving us notice. It really is too much.

(SFX KNOCK AT FRONT DOOR)

A ha. What did I tell you, you little chatterbox. That'll be her now. Probably got waylaid at the white Horse again. I'll have to speak to her about that. She can pop in for a pink gin and a natter till the cows come home after work for all I care, but not on my time! (voice trails off as she goes to answer the front door)

(SFX FRONT DOOR OPENED).

Oh, it's you! – MARPLE SCREAMS (SFX BODY FALLS TO FLOOR. CAT SQUEALS)

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Scene 2 INT _____

INSPECTOR: Well, Trumpington. What do we have here?

PC: A body, Sir.

INSPECTOR: Ah yes, the proverbial corpus delectable. Evidently someone's been using the old biddy as a pin cushion. One, two ..six knitting needles right through the old ticker. And what's all this ketchup doing on her cardy? Dropped the sauce in the fracas?

PC: Er no, that's not ketchup, Sir.

INSPECTOR: Oh. (gags) (SFX RUNNING STEPS)

PC: (calling after him) Bathroom's second door on the right, Sir. Just mind out for the (CRASH OF FALLING OBJECTS) umbrella stand.

DOCTOR: I think you can remove the body now constable.

PC: Very well, Doctor.

DOCTOR: New is he, your boss?

PC: Desk jockey from Scotland Yard, Ma'am. Top brass thought we couldn't handle such a high profile case on our lonesome.

DOCTOR: Ah yes. They seem to think we spend our time 'oohing' and 'aaaring' like extras in the 'Archers'. Should spend a week with the stiffs and me. Had a really interesting case last week down in Midsomer Common. Fellow was operating a wood chip machine. Wife said he'd dropped his sandwich by the circular blade and tried to retrieve it, silly chap. Terrible mess. Of course that wasn't how it really happened. Seems he was playing Happy Families with the Baker's wife, the Butcher's daughter and the post mistress until his wife found out and put an end to it and to him. I managed to piece it together, literally and figuratively speaking, by -

INSPECTOR (returning a bit winded): Sorry 'bout that. Last vestiges of the flu. Can't seem to shake it off.

DOCTOR: Yes, very nasty that spring flu. Had a bout of it myself last Christmas. Oh well, better be getting back. Bodies don't autopsy themselves, you know, at least not the ones I have to carve up.

(INSPECTOR GAGGING)

PC: Second on the right, Sir. Mind the – (CRASH OF FALLING OBJECTS)

DOCTOR: I'll see myself out.

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PC: (whistles and moves objects about as if looking under or behind them.)
Feeling better, Sir?

INSPECTOR: (sniffing and clearing his throat): Yes, fine. Now don't you bother about me.
Make a note of the position of the body and er –

PC: The pattern of the wound made by the needles?

INSPECTOR: Quite so. Could be significant.

PC: How so, sir?

INSPECTOR: Oh, you know, could be a ritual killing. A Satanic offering. Join the er.. dots
and we might find it forms a pentagram or some such. I've read about what goes on in these
villages. Closet communities. No wonder the locals look at strangers suspiciously. All civil
on the surface and God fearing church folk on Sunday, but catch them in the woods on the
Summer Solstice and they're skylad and cavorting with the satyrs and such.

PC: (Disbelieving) Is that right?

INSPECTOR: Hmm. I think we've done all the good we can do here. Secure the crime scene,
Constable. Set a Bobby on the door and let's make ourselves known around the village.
Someone must have an idea who had it in for the old girl. A place this small. Everyone knows
everyone else's business. Just have to tease it out of them. Have to be subtle though. Not let
on you know they know something.

(SFX OPENS FRONT DOOR, BIRD SONG AND BUZZING BEES. TWO PAIRS OF
FOOTSTEPS ON GRAVEL AS THEY WALK AND TALK)

PC: Sounds a good strategy to me, Sir.

INSPECTOR: Oh yes. You don't get to be where I am without having the know-how to
outsmart the Charlie Peace's of this world. Your average criminal is very low down on the
evolutionary scale, I'll have you know. Just one rung above the newt. Had a Cocker Spaniel
with more more gumption than some of the lags I put inside. Caught one chap breaking into a
bakery... (voice trails off as they walk into the distance)

SCENE 3 _____ INT _____ SOLICITOR'S OFFICE
(sfx TYPING)

SOLICITOR: Have that letter ready for my signature before you go for your lunch will you
please, Maureen.

Now, Inspector, Constable. If you'll come through to my office. What was it you wanted to
see me about?

(SFX FOOSTEPS DOOR CLOSING BEHIND THEM)

INSPECTOR: I'm sure you've heard about the death of Miss Marple, Mr Plowright. And you
being her solicitor –

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SOLICITOR: Indeed. Terrible business. Tragic. (SFX TEA CUP RATTLING IN SAUCER. NOISILY SLURPS TEA. TEA CUP PLACED BACK IN SAUCER) A grave loss to the community she was. I was quite a fan, you know. Read all her cases. Now with her out of the picture every little felon is going to be rubbing their hands and planning the next crime with no fear of getting caught. Can I offer you a ginger nut?

INSPECTOR: No thank you sir. (CLEARING HIS THROAT) But you still have the professionals, you know. Amateur detectives are all very well for your petty village crimes, but I can't see Miss Marple apprehending the likes of Jack The Ripper (CHUCKLES CONTEMPTUOUSLY)

SOLICITOR: I think you'll find Jack The Ripper was never apprehended, Inspector. (TEA CUP IN SAUCER. DRINKS NOISILY)

INSPECTOR: The Ripper? Oh yes, indeed. Slip of the tongue. I meant The Rillington Place murderer of course.

SOLICITOR: That would be John Reginald Christie who gave himself up to a bobby on Putney Bridge because he was tired of being on the run? Sure I can't tempt you?

CONSTABLE: We were hoping you might be able to divulge the contents of Miss Marple's will, Mr Plowright.

SOLICITOR: Sorry, Constable. Everything is subjudice while the Will is in probate. As the Executor of the estate I am working pro bono and if it transpires that the trustees are minors then I will have to act in loco parentis, as it were.

INSPECTOR: Ah yes, I thought you'd say that. (WHISPERING TO CONSTABLE) A foreigner. Make a note of that Constable. (TO SOLICITOR) I'm afraid we need to see the document all the same. One of the beneficiaries might have been desperate for funds and become a little impatient, if you get my meaning.

SOLICITOR: Sorry. My hands are tied. Client privilege, don't you know. Of course it would be different if my client had expired in testate.

INSPECTOR: I don't think her medical condition has any bearing on this, Sir.

SOLICITOR: What I can tell you though is that Miss Marple was quite litigious.

INSPECTOR: How's that?

SOLICITOR: She was in the habit of suing anyone who didn't meet her exacting standards. (CHAIR SCRAPES AS HE RISES) Every file on this shelf is a pending action against someone she had a difference of opinion with. Half the village must be here. Let's see now (SFX THUD OF HEAVY FOLDER ON DESK. THUMBING THROUGH PAPERS) Ash, William. Occupation: Gardner. Complaint: Neglect of prize chrysanthemums resulting in loss of blooms which had been raised to enter in Village Flower Show. Damages sought etc etc

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(SFX THUD OF A SECOND FOLDER ON DESK)

SOLICITOR (CONT): Boscombe, Sarah. Occupation: Post Mistress. Complaint: Plaintiff alleges failure to employ sufficient counter staff resulted in long queue which led to her missing last post and thereby chance to enter National Crime Writer's short story competition which she had high expectation of winning a substantial cash prize and standing in the community etc etc (SFX THUD OF FOLDER LANDING ON DESK) Fletcher, Jessica. Occupation: Housekeeper.

INSPECTOR: Alright. I get the picture. Rather a case of too many suspects.

SOLICITOR: Quite.

INSPECTOR: Well, that's been very helpful Mr Plowright. Perhaps you might allow us to look through those files in the next day or two and make a few notes?

SOLICITOR: Certainly, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: Well, we'll be about our business, make a few more enquiries about the village and come back later this afternoon if that's convenient.

PLOWRIGHT: Yes, indeed. Well, good day, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: Good day, Sir

SCENE 4 _____ EXT _____ STREET
(BIRDS SINGING, CARS DRIVING PAST, BICYCLE BELL)

CONSTABLE: So, where to now, Sir?

INSPECTOR: I think a light lunch would be in order. Must be a good English pub in a village this size.

SCENE 3 _____ INT _____ Pub.
(SFX PUB ATMOSPHERE, GLASSES CLINKING, RAUCOUS CONVERSATION, THUD OF DARTS AND SOMEONE CALLING OUT SCORE TO CHEERS AND SMATTERING OF APLAUSE)

BARMAID/LANDLORD: Well gents, what will it be?

INSPECTOR: I'll have a pint of your best, Landlord. And a packet of pork scratchings.

BARMAID/LANDLORD: And you, Constable?

INSPECTOR: Nothing for him. He's on duty. (ASIDE) When I'm done grilling the rustic we'll mix with the locals and see what we can pick up.

PC: Yes sir.

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(SFX GLASSES PUT ON COUNTER)

BARMAID/LANDLORD: That'll be three and nine, gents.

INSPECTOR: Ah, would you mind Constable? I fear I've left the wherewithal in my other jacket.

(SFX SMALL CHANGE COUNTED OUT AND SCOOPED UP)

BARMAID/LANDLORD: You're not from around these parts are you? Must be the chap they brought down from London to investigate the 'orrible murder.

INSPECTOR: Yes. That's right. I can tell you're an observant young lady. Maybe you can help us with our enquiries.

BARMAID/LANDLORD: If you want my opinion she was probably mixed up in a ménage a trois. Done in by a femme fatale, if I'm any judge of human nature. A crème passionale, if you get my drift. And there you have it - a fate accomplie.

INSPECTOR: Did you get all that down Constable?

PC: Yes sir, Every accent (pronounced 'axe sont')

BARMAID/LANDLORD (off - to another customer) And what's your poison Miss?

INSPECTOR: She's obviously not from around these parts. Another bloomin' foreigner. As I said, might be better if we mix with the locals. Make yourself inconspicuous Constable and we'll see what we can ferret out.

(SFX CACOPHONY OF VOICES RISES, GLASSES CLINKING AND CHEERS OF ONLOOKERS AS SKITTLES MATCH CLIMAXES DROWNING OUT SPEECH. SOUND OF BALL STRIKING AND FELLING SKITTLES)

INSPECTOR: Good evening, gentlemen. And what recreational pursuit do we have here?

RUSTIC 1: Beg yer pardon?

INSPECTOR: I am referring to the game in which you are engaged.

RUSTIC 2: 'E means what are yer playing, Bob.

RUSTIC 1: Why didn't e say so then? Skittles.

INSPECTOR: Of course, of course. Admirable. A miniature version of our national game, the game that Drake played before he trounced the Armada.

RUSTIC 2: I don't know no Drake, mister. If he's from around here he wouldn't last two minutes against our Bob. Regional champion, aren't you Bob?

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RUSTIC 1: I am that.

INSPECTOR: I like a game of skill myself. Got to have a steady eye, steady hands, steely nerve.

(CRASH OF FALLING SKITTLES. APPLAUSE.)

RUSTIC 1: I am that.

INSPECTOR: Yes, I can see that. Need a steady eye and a steady hand for most things. Hunting rabbits, for instance.

(DEATHLY SILENCE. ALL QUIET IN PUB)

RUSTIC 2: I hope you ain't implying we us poaching round these parts.

INSPECTOR: Oh dear no. I wouldn't accuse anyone of – oh no. I was merely observing that such skills would be most useful in the country –

RUSTIC 2: Fer fiddling and diddling, like? Are you casting aspirations on our doings?

INSPECTOR: No, indeed not. Nothing of the sort. Perhaps we could break the ice by imbibing some fine local beverage?

RUSTIC 2: Come again?

INSPECTOR: Drinks all round. Constable, settle the bill there's a good fellow.

SCENE 4 INT _____ PUB _____ LATER THAT EVENING

BARMAID/LANDLORD: Time gentlemen please!

(SFX GENERAL HUBBUB AS CROWD EXITS PUB INTO STREET. HOOTING OF AN OWL, SOUND OF BICYCLES BEING UNLOCKED AND RIDEN OFF, BELLS PINGED, CALLS OF 'GOODNIGHT BOB' AND SUCH)

PC: Come along sir. We'll have to get you back to the hotel before the local bobbies see you in this state.

INSPECTOR: (SINGING DRUNKENLY) Too lovely black eyes, oh what a surprise, only for telling...

PC: Now, now Sir. Have to keep the noise down. People are trying to sleep.

INSPECTOR: (slurring his words) You know what upsets me Constable. What really, really makes me melancholic? I hate to drink alone. Did you know that? And what's even sadder than that is singing alone. Did you know that too? I mean as well. Whatever. Come on, join in. Too lovely black eyes –

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PC: Sssh now Sir

INSPECTOR: Don't sush me. I'm singing in key. It's not often I'm singing in key but I am now. Listen. Too lovely –

LOCAL BOBBY: Ullo ullo. What's all this then? (SNIGGERS) You know I've been waiting twenty years to say that. Drunk and disorderly are we? Need a hand with him son?

PC: Well actually –

LOCAL BOBBY: These drunks can be a bit of a handful can't they. Don't be ashamed to ask for help to manhandle them into the station. Just along here and round the next corner. Soon have you in a nice warm cell Sir then you can sleep it off and in the morning you can tell your troubles to the magistrate. Wife left you? Kids don't listen to you? Had a bit of bad luck on the gee-gees?

PC: I think I'd better explain –

LOCAL BOBBY; No need, Constable. He's a heavy fellow isn't he? No shame in asking for help.

INSPECTOR continues singing drunkenly as he is carried off down the street (fades out)

SCENE 5 _____ INT _____ JAIL

(SFX Jingle of keys and heavy footsteps as policeman walks down to cells whistling as he goes. BANGS ON CELL DOORS WITH TRUNCHEON)

PC: Wakey, wakey! Rise and shine! And a very good morning to all guests of Her Majesty's B&B this bright and beautiful Spring day.

(SFX Key noisily inserted in lock)

Good morning Inspector. And how did we sleep last night?

INSPECTOR (groans) Just let me out will you. I've got a case I'm working on.

PC: I don't think so, Sir. The Chief Inspector brought a new man in first thing this morning when he heard you were a bit 'tired and emotional'. You're to be what they call 'an impartial observer' from now on, I hear.

INSPECTOR: What? They can't do that. I was pursuing several significant leads. I was close to an arrest. Who could be more au fait with the case than I?

SCENE 6 _____ INT _____ POLICE INTERVIEW ROOM

POIROT (IN HEAVY BELGIAN ACCENT): Now Madam, you may be asking yourself, 'why 'ave I been brought 'ere to be interviewed by the greatest detective in the world when surely his modus operendi is to assemble all the suspects in one room and then integrate them?'

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JESSICA: Interrogate them.

POIROT: Do not contradict me, Madam. When the little grey cells are sur le cas – on the case – I brook no interference, no interruption. You see when I was asked to look VERY closely into this most baffling of murders I asked myself just one question.

JESSICA: And what would that have been, Monsieur?

POIROT: Who had the motive? Hmm? Because it appears that everyone in the village had the means and the opportunity, but only one person had the motive. The means were at hand, Oui? The knitting needles with which the victim was so brutally stabbed! (BANGS FIST ON TABLE TO STARTLE SUSPECT) Second, opportunity. Who 'ad the opportunity?

JESSICA: That's two questions.

POIROT: Please Madam. Everyone knew where Miss Marple lived and that she always kept her front door unlocked as you English are in the habit of doing in case a neighbour needs the sugar or the gossip. So, anyone could have found a pretext to call that morning and no one would have remembered anything unusual. Therefore, we must concentrate on motive, ne'est pas?

JESSICA: Ah yes. Motive.

POIROT: But here we have a sufeit of suspects. This Miss Marple she is most unloved, no? Someone had it in for her, as you say. Someone was amer – bitter and determined to stop her once and for all from poking her nose in everyone's busy ness. Don't think I didn't sense the (heavy Belgian accent) re-sent-ament. The landlord who must turn away drinkers after hours for fear of losing his license because he knows she is watching from the window through her opera glasses. The butcher and the baker who lose customers because she reports them to the health inspectors when she sees them not washing their hands after picking the noses or the pork chops off the floor. I could go on.

JESSICA: I don't doubt it for a second.

POIROT: May I? (IMPATIENTLY) Everybody in the village has reason to dislike her, but this is normal in England, no? The tittle and the tattle and the peering through curtains to wag the finger. But none of these neighbours are so filled with hate that they would commit murder. So I ask myself. Poirot, I said, 'oo iz this person who feels they have been overshadowed, overlooked? Someone maybe who shared their suspicions about these crimes with Miss Marple and was, how you say – put out when she took the credit. Someone who let her do so because she herself did not want to be in the spotlight. Someone who preferred to solve the puzzles and let Miss Marple take the stage and the applause. A shy quiet person who like the proverbial worm was stretched until it snapped! Voila! Her housekeeper! Mrs Jessica Fletcher.

JESSICA: Well done, Monsieur. I guess my goose is cooked. But if you imagine for one minute that I'll make a dash for that window and leap to my doom to satisfy your penchant for poetic justice I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed.

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POIROT: Au contraire. I have no taste for the cheap melodrama, madam. It is the thrill of the chase, the playing of the game that engages Poirot. La frisson sur le tete, ne'cest pas? And besides, this is not the denouement that I would wish for – it is not the happy ending. Tsk Quel horreur. Chic alors. Mon dieu!

JESSICA: (Ingratiatingly) Indeed.

POIROT: So, what to do? Here is the dilemma. Its goes against all my principles and experience to turn the blind eye and yet - crime it is an enterprise en pleine croissance, non?

JESSICA: A plain croissant? You mean someone's going to rob a bakery?

POIROT: (Exasperated) Madam! If you please –a pleine croissance – a growing industry and even the likes of Poirot are not so arrogant as to cut off our noses to spit in our faces. Even I cannot be in several places at once.

JESSICA: I suppose not.

POIROT: Mai Non. Two heads are better than one, oui? And so I make to you the offer. Join with Poirot. Put your not inconsiderable skills and la mystique feminine, the female instinct for sniffing out the rotten apples to good use and we will forget all that has been said in this room today. (SFX RUSTLES THE CONFESSION) What do you say madam? Poirot and Fletcher. Partners In Crime!

JESSICA: Fletcher and Poirot monsieur. Ladies first.

POIROT: (audible shrug) Bien Sur. (SFX RIPS UP CONFESSION) I think this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

(MUSIC PLAYS OUT)

ENDS