**Agatha Christie – The Murder on the Links - 6 The Scene of the Crime**

20th Century prose-fiction

An extract from a novel written in 1923.

Hercule Poirot, a famous Belgian detective, has travelled to Merlinville-sur-Mer in France to meet Paul Renauld, who has asked for his help. When they arrive, Renauld has been found dead. His wife collapsed after seeing her dead husband's body.

Between them, the doctor and M. Hautet carried the unconscious woman into the house. The commissary looked after them, shaking his head.

“*Pauvre femme*,” he murmured to himself. “The shock was too much for her. Well, well, we can do nothing. Now, M. Poirot, shall we visit the place where the crime was committed?”

“If you please, M. Bex.”

We passed through the house, and out by the front door. Poirot had looked up at the staircase in passing, and shook his head in a dissatisfied manner.

“It is to me incredible that the servants heard nothing. The creaking of that staircase, with *three* people descending it, would awaken the dead!”

“It was the middle of the night, remember. They were sound asleep by then.”

But Poirot continued to shake his head as though not fully accepting the explanation. On the sweep of the drive, he paused, looking up at the house.

“What moved them in the first place to try if the front door were open? It was a most unlikely thing that it should be. It was far more probable that they should at once try to force a window.”

“But all the windows on the ground floor are barred with iron shutters,” objected the commissary.

Poirot pointed to a window on the first floor.

“That is the window of the bedroom we have just come from, is it not? And see—there is a tree by which it would be the easiest thing in the world to mount.”

“Possibly,” admitted the other. “But they could not have done so without leaving footprints in the flower-bed.”

I saw the justice of his words. There were two large oval flower-beds planted with scarlet geraniums, one each side of the steps leading up to the front door. The tree in question had its roots actually at the back of the bed itself, and it would have been impossible to reach it without stepping on the bed.

“You see,” continued the commissary, “owing to the dry weather no prints would show on the drive or paths; but, on the soft mould of the flower-bed, it would have been a very different affair.”

Poirot went close to the bed and studied it attentively. As Bex had said, the mould was perfectly smooth. There was not an indentation on it anywhere.

Poirot nodded, as though convinced, and we turned away, but he suddenly darted off and began examining the other flower-bed.

“M. Bex!” he called. “See here. Here are plenty of traces for you.”

The commissary joined him—and smiled.

“My dear M. Poirot, those are without doubt the footprints of the gardener’s large hobnailed boots. In any case, it would have no importance, since this side we have no tree, and consequently no means of gaining access to the upper story.”

“True,” said Poirot, evidently crestfallen. “So you think these footprints are of no importance?”

“Not the least in the world.”

Then, to my utter astonishment, Poirot pronounced these words:

“I do not agree with you. I have a little idea that these footprints are the most important things we have seen yet.”

M. Bex said nothing, merely shrugged his shoulders. He was far too courteous to utter his real opinion.

“Shall we proceed?” he asked instead.

“Certainly. I can investigate this matter of the footprints later,” said Poirot cheerfully.