

Poirot and the Regatta Mystery

A Hercule Poirot Short Story

by Agatha Christie

HARPER

NEW YORK • LONDON • TORONTO • SYDNEY

Poirot and the Regatta Mystery

'Poirot and the Regatta Mystery' was first published in the USA in The Chicago Tribune on 3 May 1936, and in The Strand in June the same year. Agatha Christie rewrote the story for its first appearance in book form, substituting Parker Pyne in place of Hercule Poirot, in the American anthology The Regatta Mystery (published by Dodd, Mead in June 1939). The original version is printed here for the first time in more than 60 years.

Mr Isaac Pointz removed a cigar from his lips and said approvingly: 'Pretty little place.'

Having thus set the seal of his approval upon Dartmouth harbour, he replaced the cigar and looked about him with the air of a man pleased with himself, his appearance, his surroundings and life generally.

As regards the first of these, Mr Isaac Pointz was a man of fifty-eight, in good health and condition, with perhaps a slight tendency to liver. He was not exactly stout, but comfortable looking, and yachting costume, which he wore at the moment, is not the most kindly of attires for a middle-aged man with a tendency to embonpoint. Mr Pointz was very well turned out – correct to every crease and button – his dark and slightly oriental face beaming out under the peak of his yachting cap. As regards his surroundings, these may be taken to mean his companions: his partner Mr Leo Stein, Sir George and Lady Marroway, an American business acquaintance – Mr Samuel

Leathern – and his schoolgirl daughter, Eve, Mrs Rustington, and Evan Llewellyn.

The party had just come ashore from Mr Pointz's yacht, the *Merrimaid*. In the morning they had watched the yacht racing and they had now come ashore to join for a while in the fun of the fair – Coconut Shies, Fat Ladies, the Human Spider and the Merry-go-rounds. It is hardly to be doubted that these delights were relished most by Eve Leathern. When Mr Pointz finally suggested that it was time to adjourn to the Royal George for dinner, hers was the only dissentient voice.

'Oh, Mr Pointz, I did so want to have my fortune told by the Real Gipsy in the Caravan.'

Mr Pointz had doubts of the essential realness of the gipsy in question, but he gave indulgent assent.

'Eve's just crazy about the Fair,' said her father apologetically. 'But don't you pay any attention if you want to be getting along.'

'Plenty of time,' said Mr Pointz benignantly. 'Let the little lady enjoy herself. I'll take you on at darts, Leo.'

'Twenty-five and over wins a prize,' chanted the man in charge of the darts in a high nasal voice.

'Bet you a fiver my total score beats yours,' said Pointz.

'Done,' said Stein with alacrity.

The two men were soon whole-heartedly engaged in their battle.

Lady Marroway murmured to Evan Llewellyn:

'Eve is not the only child in the party.'

Llewellyn smiled assent but somewhat absently. He had been absent-minded all that day. Once or twice his answers had been wide of the point.

Pamela Marroway drew away from him and said to her husband:

'That young man has something on his mind.'

Sir George murmured, 'Or someone?'

And his glance swept quickly over Janet Rustington.

Lady Marroway frowned a little. She was a tall woman exquisitely groomed. The scarlet of her fingernails was matched by the dark red coral studs in her ears. Her eyes were dark and watchful. Sir George

affected a careless 'hearty English gentleman' manner, but his bright blue eyes held the same watchful look as his wife's.

Isaac Pointz and Leo Stein were Hatton Garden diamond merchants. Sir George and Lady Marroway came from a different world – the world of Antibes and Juan-les-Pins – of golf at St Jean-de-Luz – of bathing from the rocks at Madeira in the winter.

In outward seeming they were as the lilies that toiled not, neither did they spin. But perhaps this was not quite true. There are divers ways of toiling and also of spinning.

'Here's the kid back again,' said Evan Llewellyn to Mrs Rustington.

He was a dark young man; there was a faintly hungry wolfish look about him which some women found attractive.

It was difficult to say whether Mrs Rustington found him so. She did not wear her heart on her sleeve. She had married young – and the marriage had ended in disaster in less than a year. Since that time it was difficult to know what Janet Rustington thought of anyone or anything; her manner was always the same, charming but completely aloof.

Eve Leathern came dancing up to them, her lank fair hair bobbing excitedly. She was fifteen, an awkward child, but full of vitality.

'I'm going to be married by the time I'm seventeen,' she exclaimed breathlessly. 'To a very rich man, and we're going to have six children, and Tuesdays and Thursdays are my lucky days, and I ought always to wear green or blue, and an emerald is my lucky stone, and –'

'Why, pet, I think we ought to be getting along,' said her father.

Mr Leathern was a tall, fair, dyspeptic-looking man with a somewhat mournful expression.

Mr Pointz and Mr Stein were turning away from the darts. Mr Pointz was chuckling and Mr Stein was looking somewhat rueful.

'It's all a matter of luck,' he was saying.

Mr Pointz slapped his pocket cheerfully.

'Took a tenner off you all right. Skill, my boy, skill. My old Dad was a first class darts player. Well, folks, let's be getting along. Had your fortune told, Eve? Did they tell you to beware of a dark man?'

‘A dark woman,’ corrected Eve. ‘She’s got a cast in her eye and she’ll be real mean to me if I give her the chance. And I’m to be married by the time I’m seventeen ...’

She ran on happily as the party steered its way to the Royal George.

Dinner had been ordered beforehand by the forethought of Mr Pointz, and a bowing waiter led them upstairs and into a private room on the first floor. Here a round table was ready laid. The big bulging bow-window gave on the harbour square and was open. The noise of the fair came up to them, and the raucous squeal of three roundabouts each blaring a different tune.

‘Best shut that if we’re to hear ourselves speak,’ observed Mr Pointz drily, and suited the action to the word.

They took their seats round the table and Mr Pointz beamed affectionately at his guests. He felt he was doing them well and he liked to do people well. His eyes rested on one after another. Lady Marroway – fine woman. Not quite the goods, of course, he knew that – he was perfectly well aware that what he had called all his life the *crème de la crème* would have very little to do with the Marroways – but then the *crème de la crème* was supremely unaware of his own existence. Anyway, Lady Marroway was a damned smart looking woman – and he didn’t mind if she *did* rook him a bit at Bridge. Didn’t enjoy it quite so much from Sir George. Fishy eye the fellow had. Brazenly on the make. But he wouldn’t make too much out of Isaac Pointz. He’d see to that all right.

Old Leathern wasn’t a bad fellow – long-winded, of course, like most Americans – fond of telling endless long stories. And he had that disconcerting habit of requiring precise information. What was the population of Dartmouth? In what year had the Naval College been built? And so on. Expected his host to be a kind of walking Baedeker. Eve was a nice cheery kid – he enjoyed chaffing her. Voice rather like a corncrake, but she had all her wits about her. A bright kid.

Young Llewellyn – he seemed a bit quiet. Looked as though he had something on his mind. Hard up probably. These writing fellows usually were. Looked as though he might be keen on Janet

Rustington. A nice woman; attractive and clever, too. But she didn't ram her writing down your throat. Highbrow sort of stuff she wrote, but you'd never think it to hear her talk.

And old Leo! *He* wasn't getting younger or thinner. And, blissfully unaware that his partner was at that moment thinking precisely the same thing about him, Mr Pointz corrected Mr Leathern as to pilchards being connected with Devon and not Cornwall, and prepared to enjoy his dinner.

'Mr Pointz?' said Eve when plates of hot mackerel had been set before them and the waiters had left the room.

'Yes, young lady?'

'Have you got that big diamond with you right now? The one you showed us last night and said you always took about with you.'

Mr Pointz chuckled.

'That's right. My mascot, I call it. Yes, I've got it with me all right.'

'I think that's awfully dangerous. Somebody might get it away from you in the crowd at the Fair.'

'Not they,' said Mr Pointz. 'I'll take good care of that.'

'But they *might*,' insisted Eve. 'You've got gangsters in England as well as we have, haven't you?'

'They won't get the Morning Star,' said Mr Pointz. 'To begin with it's in a special inner pocket. And anyway – old Pointz knows what he's about. Nobody's going to steal the Morning Star.'

Eve laughed. 'Bet I could steal it!'

'I bet you couldn't,' Mr Pointz twinkled back at her.

'Well, I bet I could. I was thinking about it last night in bed – after you'd handed it round the table for us all to look at. I thought of a real cute way to steal it.'

'And what's that?'

Eve put her head on one side, her fair hair wagged excitedly.

'I'm not telling you – now. What do you bet I couldn't?'

Memories of Mr Pointz's youth rose in his mind.

'Half a dozen pairs of gloves,' he said.

'Gloves,' cried Eve disgustedly. 'Who wears gloves?'

'Well, do you wear silk stockings?'

'Do I not? My best pair laddered this morning.'

‘Very well then. Half a dozen pairs of the finest silk stockings –’

‘Oo-er,’ said Eve blissfully. ‘And what about you?’

‘Well, I need a new tobacco pouch.’

‘Right. That’s a deal. Not that you’ll get your tobacco pouch. Now I’ll tell you what you’ve got to do. You must hand it round like you did last night –’

She broke off as two waiters entered to remove the plates. When they were starting on the next course of chicken, Mr Pointz said: –

‘Remember this, young woman, if this is to represent a real theft, I should send for the police and you’d be searched.’

‘That’s quite O.K. by me. You needn’t be quite so lifelike as to bring the police into it. But Lady Marroway or Mrs Rustington can do all the searching you like.’

‘Well, that’s that, then,’ said Mr Pointz. ‘What are you setting up to be? A first-class jewel thief?’

‘I might take to it as a career – if it really paid.’

‘If you got away with the Morning Star it would pay you. Even after recutting, that stone would be worth over thirty thousand pounds.’

‘My!’ said Eve impressed. ‘What’s that in dollars?’

Lady Marroway uttered an exclamation.

‘And you carry such a stone about with you?’ she said reproachfully. ‘Thirty thousand pounds.’ Her darkened eyelashes quivered.

Mrs Rustington said softly, ‘It’s a lot of money ... And then there’s the fascination of the stone itself ... It’s beautiful.’

‘Just a piece of carbon,’ said Evan Llewellyn.

‘I’ve always understood it’s the “fence” that’s the difficulty in jewel robberies,’ said Sir George. ‘He takes the lion’s share – eh, what?’

‘Come on,’ said Eve excitedly. ‘Let’s start. Take the diamond out and say what you said last night.’

Mr Leathern said in his deep melancholy voice:

‘I do apologize for my offspring. She gets kinder worked up.’

‘That’ll do, Pops,’ said Eve. ‘Now then, Mr Pointz –’

Smiling, Mr Pointz fumbled in an inner pocket. He drew something out. It lay on the palm of his hand, blinking in the light.

A diamond ...

Rather stiffly, Mr Pointz repeated as far as he could remember his speech of the previous evening on the *Merrimaid*.

‘Perhaps you ladies and gentlemen would like to have a look at this? It’s an unusually beautiful stone. I call it the Morning Star and it’s by way of being my mascot – goes about with me everywhere. Like to see it?’

He handed it to Lady Marroway, who took it, exclaimed at its beauty and passed it to Mr Leathern, who said, ‘Pretty good. Yes, pretty good,’ in a somewhat artificial manner, and in his turn passed it to Llewellyn.

The waiters coming in at that moment there was a slight hitch in the proceedings. When they had gone again, Evan said ‘Very fine stone’ and passed it to Leo Stein, who did not trouble to make any comment but handed it quickly on to Eve.

‘How perfectly lovely!’ cried Eve in a high affected voice.

‘Oh!’ she gave a cry of consternation as it slipped from her hand. ‘I’ve dropped it.’

She pushed her chair back and got down to grope under the table. Sir George at her right, bent also. A glass got swept off the table in the confusion. Stein, Llewellyn and Mrs Rustington all helped in the search. Finally, Lady Marroway joined in.

Only Mr Pointz took no part in the proceedings. He remained in his seat sipping his wine and smiling sardonically.

‘Oh dear,’ said Eve still in her artificial manner. ‘How dreadful! Where *can* it have rolled to? I can’t find it anywhere.’

One by one the assistant searchers rose to their feet.

‘It’s disappeared all right, Pointz,’ said Sir George smiling.

‘Very nicely done,’ said Mr Pointz, nodding approval. ‘You’d make a very good actress, Eve. Now the question is, have you hidden it somewhere or have you got it on you?’

‘Search me,’ said Eve dramatically.

Mr Pointz’s eye sought out a large screen in the corner of the room.

He nodded towards it, and then looked at Lady Marroway and Mrs Rustington.

‘If you ladies will be so good –’

‘Why, certainly,’ said Lady Marroway smiling.

The two women rose.

Lady Marroway said: –

‘Don’t be afraid, Mr Pointz. We’ll vet her properly.’

The three went behind the screen.

The room was hot. Evan Llewellyn flung open the window. A newsvendor was passing.

Evan threw down a coin and the man threw up a paper.

Llewellyn unfolded it.

‘Hungarian situation’s none too good,’ he said.

‘That the local rag?’ asked Sir George. ‘There’s a horse I’m interested in ought to have run at Haldon to-day – Natty Boy.’

‘Leo,’ said Mr Pointz. ‘Lock the door. We don’t want those damned waiters popping in and out till this business is over.’

‘Natty Boy won three to one,’ said Evan.

‘Rotten odds,’ said Sir George.

‘Mostly Regatta news,’ said Evan, glancing over the sheet.

The three young women came out from the screen.

‘Not a sign of it,’ said Mary Rustington.

‘You can take it from me she hasn’t got it on her,’ said Lady Marroway.

Mr Pointz thought he would be quite ready to take it from her. There was a grim tone in her voice and he felt no doubt that the search had been thorough.

‘Say, Eve, you haven’t swallowed it?’ asked Mr Leathern anxiously. ‘Because maybe that wouldn’t be too good for you.’

‘I’d have seen her do that,’ said Leo Stein quietly. ‘I was watching her. She didn’t put anything in her mouth.’

‘I couldn’t swallow a great thing all points like that,’ said Eve. She put her hands on her hips and looked at Mr Pointz. ‘What about it, big boy?’ she asked.

‘You stand over there where you are and don’t move,’ said that gentleman.

Between them, the men stripped the table and turned it upside down. Mr Pointz examined every inch of it. Then he transferred his

attention to the chair on which Eve had been sitting and those on either side of her.

The thoroughness of the search left nothing to be desired. The other four men joined in and the women also. Eve Leathern stood by the wall near the screen and laughed with intense enjoyment.

Five minutes later Mr Pointz rose with a slight groan from his knees and dusted his trousers sadly. His pristine freshness was somewhat impaired.

'Eve,' he said, 'I take off my hat to you. You're the finest thing in jewel thieves I've ever come across. What you've done with that stone beats me. As far as I can see it must be in the room, as it isn't on you. I give you best.'

'Are the stockings mine?' demanded Eve.

'They're yours, young lady.'

'Eve, my child, where *can* you have hidden it?' demanded Mrs Rustington curiously.

Eve pranced forward.

'I'll show you. You'll all be just mad with yourselves.'

She went across to the side table where the things from the dinner table had been roughly stacked. She picked up her little black evening bag –'

'Right under your eyes. Right ...'

Her voice, gay and triumphant, trailed off suddenly.

'Oh!' she said. '*Oh ... !*'

'What's the matter, honey?' said her father.

Eve whispered, 'It's gone! It's *gone* ...'

'What's all this?' asked Pointz coming forward.

Eve turned to him impetuously.

'It was like this. This bag of mine has a big paste stone in the middle of the clasp. It fell out last night and just when you were showing that diamond round I noticed that it was much the same size. And so I thought in the night what a good idea for a robbery it would be to wedge your diamond into the gap with a bit of plasticine. I felt sure nobody would ever spot it. That's what I did tonight. First I dropped it – then went down after it with the bag in my hand, stuck it into the gap with a bit of plasticine which I had handy, put my bag on

the table and went on pretending to look for the diamond. I thought it would be like the Purloined Letter – you know – lying there in full view under all your noses – and just looking like a common bit of rhinestone. And it was a good plan – none of you *did* notice.'

'I wonder,' said Mr Stein.

'What did you say?'

'Nothing,' said Leo Stein.

Mr Pointz took the bag, looked at the empty hole with a fragment of plasticine still adhering to it and said slowly, 'It may have fallen out. We'd better look again.'

The search was repeated, but this time it was a curiously silent business. An atmosphere of tension pervaded the room.

Finally everyone in turn gave it up. They stood looking at each other.

'It's not in this room,' said Stein.

'And nobody's gone out,' said Sir George significantly.

There was a moment's pause. Eve burst into tears.

'There, there,' said Pointz awkwardly.

Sir George turned to Leo Stein.

'Mr Stein,' he said, 'just now you murmured something under your breath. When I asked you to repeat it, you said it was nothing. But as a matter of fact I heard what you said. Miss Eve had just said that none of us noticed the place where she had put the diamond. The words you murmured were, 'I wonder.' What we have to face is the probability that one person *did* notice – and that that person is in this room now. I suggest that the only fair and honourable thing is for everyone present to submit to a search. The diamond cannot have left the room.'

When Sir George played the part of the old English gentleman, none could play it better. His voice rang with sincerity and indignation.

'Bit unpleasant, all this,' said Mr Pointz unhappily.

'It's all my fault,' sobbed Eve. 'I didn't mean –'

'Buck up, kiddo,' said Mr Stein kindly. 'Nobody's blaming you.'

Mr Leathern said in his slow pedantic manner: –

‘Why, certainly, I think that Sir George’s suggestion will meet with the fullest approval from all of us. It does from me.’

‘I agree,’ said Evan Llewellyn.

Mrs Rustington looked at Lady Marroway, who nodded a brief assent. The two of them went back behind the screen and the sobbing Eve accompanied them.

A waiter knocked on the door and was told to go away.

Five minutes later eight people looked at each other incredulously.

The Morning Star had vanished into space ...

Hercule Poirot looked thoughtfully at the dark tragic face of the young man opposite him.

‘*Eh bien?*’ he said. ‘What is it you want of me?’

Evan Llewellyn did not pause for a moment. His reply came like lightning.

‘The truth.’

Poirot caressed his magnificent moustaches thoughtfully.

‘You are sure of that – eh?’

‘Of course I am.’

‘I ask,’ explained Poirot, ‘because it is a stock reply, that, of – oh, so many people. And when I produce the truth for them they are sometimes not pleased at all. They are sometimes dismayed and sometimes embarrassed and sometimes completely – ah yes, I have it – flabbergasted. What a word, that! A word that pleases me greatly.’

‘It’s the truth I want,’ repeated Evan.

‘But – pardon me – it was not your diamond that was stolen, M. Llewellyn. You wish to employ me to recover the property of somebody else – and that somebody not, I fancy, a person wholly sympathetic to you.’

‘It’s not old Pointz I’m worrying about.’

Poirot looked at him inquiringly. Evan went on:

‘I’ve come to you because of a remark you once made – or were said to have made. Someone repeated it to me.’

‘And what was that remark?’

‘That it was not the guilty who mattered – but the innocent. That made me feel there might be – hope.’

Poirot nodded his head gently.

‘Ah yes, I begin to see ... I begin to see ...’

‘I’m innocent! But unless the real truth gets out nobody is ever going to think so.’

Poirot was silent a moment. Then he said quietly:

‘Are you quite certain that the facts are exactly as you have recounted them. There is nothing that you have omitted?’

Evan considered a moment.

‘I don’t think I’ve left out anything. Pointz brought out the diamond and passed it round – that wretched American child stuck it on her ridiculous bag and when she came to look at the bag, the diamond was gone. It wasn’t on anyone – old Pointz himself even was searched – he insisted upon it – and I’ll swear it was nowhere in that room! *And nobody went out of the room.*’

‘The waiters? The *maître d’hôtel*?’ suggested Poirot.

Llewellyn shook his head.

‘They went out before the girl began messing about with the diamond, and afterwards Pointz locked the door so as to keep them out. No, it lies between one of us.’

‘It would certainly seem so,’ said Poirot. ‘A pretty little problem.’

‘That damned evening paper!’ said Evan Llewellyn bitterly. ‘I saw it come into their minds – that that was the only way –’

‘Repeat me that again very exactly.’

‘It was perfectly simple. I threw open the window, whistled to the man, threw down a copper and he tossed me up the paper. And there it is, you see – *the only possible way the diamond could have left that room* – thrown by me to an accomplice waiting in the street below.’

Poirot shook his head.

‘Not the only possible way.’

‘What other way can you suggest?’

‘Since you say you did not throw it out, there *must* have been some other way!’

‘Oh, I see. I hoped you meant something more definite than that. Well, I can only say that I *didn't* throw it out. I can't expect you to believe me – or anyone else to either!’

‘Oh, yes, I believe you,’ said Poirot, smiling a little.

‘You do? Why?’

‘It is a matter of the psychology,’ said Poirot. ‘You are not of the type that steals jewellery. There are crimes, of course, that you might commit – but we will not enter into that subject. At any rate I do not see you as the purloiner of the Morning Star.’

‘Everyone else does, though,’ said Llewellyn bitterly.

‘Everyone?’

‘They looked at me in a queer sort of way at the time. Marroway picked up the paper and just glanced over at the window. He didn't say anything. But Pointz cottoned on to it quick enough! I could see what they all thought. There hasn't been any *open* accusation. That's the devil of it.’

Poirot nodded sympathetically.

‘It is worse than that,’ he said.

‘Yes. It's just suspicion. I've had a fellow round asking questions – routine inquiries, he called it. One of the new dress-shirted lot of police, I suppose. Very tactful – nothing at all hinted. Just interested in the fact that I'd been hard up and was suddenly cutting a bit of a splash.’

‘And were you?’

‘Yes – some luck with a horse or two. Unluckily my bets were made on the course – there's nothing to show that that's how the money came in. They can't disprove it, of course – but that's just the sort of easy lie a fellow would invent if he didn't want to show where the money came from.’

‘I agree. Still, they will have to have a good deal more than that to go upon.’

‘Oh, I'm not afraid of actually being arrested and charged with the theft. In a way that would be easier – one would know where one was. It's the ghastly fact that all those people believe I took it.’

‘All those people? Are you sure that it is *all* these people you mean?’

Llewellyn stared. 'I don't understand you.'

'I have a little idea that it is not all these people, but one person in particular.'

Evan Llewellyn flushed. He said again: –

'I don't understand you.'

Poirot leaned forward in a confidential manner.

'But yes, it is so, is it not? There *was* one person in particular? And I think – I rather think that it was Mrs Rustington?'

Llewellyn's dark face flushed deeper still.

'Why pitch on her?'

Poirot flung up his hands.

'There is obviously *someone* whose opinion matters to you greatly – probably a lady. What ladies were there? An American flapper? Lady Marroway? But you would probably *rise* not *fall* in Lady Marroway's estimation if you had brought off such a *coup*! I have heard something of that lady! Clearly, then, Mrs Rustington.'

Llewellyn said with something of an effort:

'She – she's had rather an unfortunate experience. Her husband was a down and out rotter. It's made her unwilling to trust anyone. She – if she thinks –'

He found it difficult to go on.

'Quite so,' said Poirot. 'Therefore she must no longer think what she may be thinking. The matter must be cleared up.'

Evan gave a short laugh. 'That's easy to say.'

'And quite easy to do,' said Poirot confidently.

Evan stared incredulously. 'You think so?'

'*Mais oui* – this problem is so clear cut! So many possibilities are ruled out. The answer must really be extremely simple. Indeed already I have a kind of glimmering –'

Llewellyn continued to stare.

Poirot drew a pad of paper towards him and picked up a pen.

'Perhaps you would give me a brief description of the party?'

'Haven't I already done so?'

'I mean their personal appearance – the colour of their hair and so on.'

'But, M. Poirot, what *can* that have to do with it?'

‘A good deal, *mon ami*, a good deal. Have you not heard the fortune tellers – a dark man crosses your path, etc.’

Somewhat unbelievably, Evan described the personal appearance of the members of the yachting party.

Poirot made a note or two, pushed away the pad and said:

‘Excellent. By the way, did you say a wine-glass was broken?’

Evan stared again.

‘Yes, it was knocked off the table and then it got stepped on.’

‘Very unpleasant, the splinters of glass,’ said Poirot. ‘Whose wine-glass was it?’

‘I think it was the child’s – Eve.’

‘Ah! And who sat next to her on that side?’

‘Sir George Marroway.’

‘You didn’t see which of them knocked it off the table?’

‘Afraid I didn’t. Does it matter?’

‘Not really. No. That was a superfluous question. *Eh bien!*’ He stood up. ‘Good morning, Mr Llewellyn. Will you call again in three days’ time? I think the whole thing will be quite satisfactorily cleared up by then.’

‘Are you joking, M. Poirot?’

‘I never joke on professional matters,’ said Poirot with dignity. ‘This matter is serious. Shall we say Friday at 11.30? Thank you.’

Evan arrived on the Friday morning in a considerable turmoil of feeling. Hope and scepticism fought for mastery.

Poirot rose to meet him with a beaming smile.

‘Good morning, Mr Llewellyn. Sit down. Have a cigarette?’

Llewellyn waved aside the proffered box.

‘Well?’ he said.

‘Very well, indeed,’ said Poirot beaming. ‘The police arrested the gang last night.’

‘The gang? What gang?’

‘The Amalfi gang. I thought of them at once when you told me your story. I recognized their methods, and once you had described the guests, *eh bien*, there was no doubt at all in my mind!’

‘But – well – who *are* the Amalfi gang?’

‘Father, son and daughter-in-law – that is if Pietro and Maria are really married – *entre nous*, there is some doubt on the point.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Evan puzzled.

‘But it is so simple! The name is Italian, and no doubt the origin is Italian, but old Amalfi was born in America. His methods are usually the same. He impersonates a real business man whose name is well known in the trade, introduces himself to a prominent figure in the jewel business in some European country and then plays his little trick. In this case he was deliberately on the track of the Morning Star. Pointz’s idiosyncrasy was well known in the trade. Maria Amalfi played the part of the daughter (amazing creature, twenty-seven at least, and nearly always plays a part of sixteen).’

‘Not Eve!’ gasped Llewellyn.

‘*Précisément*. The little Eve. The American ingénue. *C’est épatant, n’est ce pas?* The third member of the gang got himself taken on as an extra waiter at the Royal George – it was holiday time, remember, and they would need extra staff. He may even have bribed a regular man to stay away. The scene is set. Eve challenges old Pointz in her ingenuous schoolgirlish manner, and he takes on the bet. He passes round the diamond as he has done the night before. The waiters enter the room to remove the plates, and Leathern retains the stone until they have gone out of the room. When they do leave, the diamond leaves also, *neatly attached with a morsel of chewing gum to the underside of the plate that Pietro bears away*. So simple!’

‘But I saw it *after* that.’

‘No, no, you saw a paste replica, good enough to deceive a casual glance. Stein, the only man to have spotted a fraud, you told me hardly looked at it. Eve drops it, sweeps off a glass, too, and steps firmly on stone and glass together. Miraculous disappearance of diamond! Both Eve and Leathern can then submit to as much searching as anyone pleases!’

‘Well – I’m –’

Evan shook his head at a loss for words.

‘You say you recognized the gang from my description? Had they worked this trick before?’

‘Not exactly – but it was their kind of business. Naturally my attention was at once directed to the girl Eve.’

‘Why? I didn’t suspect her – nobody did. She seemed such a – such a *child*.’

‘That is the peculiar genius of Maria Amalfi. She is more like a child than any child could possibly be! But remember the plasticine! This bet was supposed to have arisen quite spontaneously – yet the little lady had some plasticine with her all handy. That spoke of premeditation. My suspicions fastened on her at once.’

Llewellyn rose to his feet.

‘M. Poirot I – I – can’t tell you how grateful I am to you. It’s – it’s wonderful.’

Poirot made a deprecating gesture.

‘A bagatelle,’ he murmured. ‘A mere bagatelle.’

‘You’ll let me know how much – er –’ Llewellyn stammered a little.

‘My fee will be most moderate,’ said Poirot with a twinkle. ‘It will not make too big a hole in the – er – horse-racing profits. All the same, young man, I should, I think, leave the horses alone in future. An animal a little uncertain, the horse.’

‘That’s all right,’ said Evan. ‘You bet I will.’

He shook Poirot by the hand and strode from the office.

He hailed a taxi and gave the address of Janet Rustington’s flat.

He felt in a mood to carry all before him.

THE QUEEN OF MYSTERY

Agatha
Christie

THE
REGATTA
MYSTERY

AND OTHER STORIES

Featuring Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, and Mr. Parker Pyne

One

THE REGATTA MYSTERY

“The Regatta Mystery” was first published as “Poirot and the Regatta Mystery” in the USA in the *Chicago Tribune*, 3 May 1936, and then in *Strand Magazine*, June 1936. It first appeared in its current form in the American book *The Regatta Mystery and Other Stories*, published by Dodd, Mead, June 1939.

Mr. Isaac Pointz removed a cigar from his lips and said approvingly:
“Pretty little place.”

Having thus set the seal of his approval upon Dartmouth harbour, he replaced the cigar and looked about him with the air of a man pleased with himself, his appearance, his surroundings and life generally.

As regards the first of these, Mr. Isaac Pointz was a man of fifty-eight, in good health and condition with perhaps a slight tendency to liver. He was not exactly stout, but comfortable-looking, and a yachting costume, which he wore at the moment, is not the most kindly of attires for a middle-aged man with a tendency to embonpoint. Mr. Pointz was very well turned out—correct to every crease and button—his dark and slightly Oriental face beaming out under the peak of his yachting cap. As regards his surroundings, these may have been taken to mean his companions—his partner Mr. Leo Stein, Sir George and Lady Marroway, an American business acquaintance Mr. Samuel Leathern and his schoolgirl daughter Eve, Mrs. Rustington and Evan Llewellyn.

The party had just come ashore from Mr. Pointz’ yacht—the *Merrimaid*. In the morning they had watched the yacht racing and

they had now come ashore to join for a while in the fun of the fair—Coconut shies, Fat Ladies, the Human Spider and the Merry-go-round. It is hardly to be doubted that these delights were relished most by Eve Leathern. When Mr. Pointz finally suggested that it was time to adjourn to the Royal George for dinner hers was the only dissentient voice.

“Oh, Mr. Pointz—I did so want to have my fortune told by the Real Gypsy in the Caravan.”

Mr. Pointz had doubts of the essential Realness of the Gypsy in question but he gave indulgent assent.

“Eve’s just crazy about the fair,” said her father apologetically. “But don’t you pay any attention if you want to be getting along.”

“Plenty of time,” said Mr. Pointz benignantly. “Let the little lady enjoy herself. I’ll take you on at darts, Leo.”

“Twenty-five and over wins a prize,” chanted the man in charge of the darts in a high nasal voice.

“Bet you a fiver my total score beats yours,” said Pointz.

“Done,” said Stein with alacrity.

The two men were soon wholeheartedly engaged in their battle.

Lady Marroway murmured to Evan Llewellyn:

“Eve is not the only child in the party.”

Llewellyn smiled assent but somewhat absently.

He had been absentminded all that day. Once or twice his answers had been wide of the point.

Pamela Marroway drew away from him and said to her husband:

“That young man has something on his mind.”

Sir George murmured:

“Or someone?”

And his glance swept quickly over Janet Rustington.

Lady Marroway frowned a little. She was a tall woman exquisitely groomed. The scarlet of her fingernails was matched by the dark red coral studs in her ears. Her eyes were dark and watchful. Sir George affected a careless “hearty English gentleman” manner—but his bright blue eyes held the same watchful look as his wife’s.

Isaac Pointz and Leo Stein were Hatton Garden diamond merchants. Sir George and Lady Marroway came from a different

world—the world of Antibes and Juan les Pins—of golf at St. Jean-de-Luz—of bathing from the rocks at Madeira in the winter.

In outward seeming they were as the lilies that toiled not, neither did they spin. But perhaps this was not quite true. There are diverse ways of toiling and also of spinning.

“Here’s the kid back again,” said Evan Llewellyn to Mrs. Rustington.

He was a dark young man—there was a faintly hungry wolfish look about him which some women found attractive.

It was difficult to say whether Mrs. Rustington found him so. She did not wear her heart on her sleeve. She had married young—and the marriage had ended in disaster in less than a year. Since that time it was difficult to know what Janet Rustington thought of anyone or anything—her manner was always the same—charming but completely aloof.

Eve Leathern came dancing up to them, her lank fair hair bobbing excitedly. She was fifteen—an awkward child—but full of vitality.

“I’m going to be married by the time I’m seventeen,” she exclaimed breathlessly. “To a very rich man and we’re going to have six children and Tuesdays and Thursdays are my lucky days and I ought always to wear green or blue and an emerald is my lucky stone and—”

“Why, pet, I think we ought to be getting along,” said her father.

Mr. Leathern was a tall, fair, dyspeptic-looking man with a somewhat mournful expression.

Mr. Pointz and Mr. Stein were turning away from the darts. Mr. Pointz was chuckling and Mr. Stein was looking somewhat rueful.

“It’s all a matter of luck,” he was saying.

Mr. Pointz slapped his pocket cheerfully.

“Took a fiver off you all right. Skill, my boy, skill. My old Dad was a first class darts player. Well, folks, let’s be getting along. Had your fortune told, Eve? Did they tell you to beware of a dark man?”

“A dark woman,” corrected Eve. “She’s got a cast in her eye and she’ll be real mean to me if I give her a chance. And I’m to be married by the time I’m seventeen. . . .”

She ran on happily as the party steered its way to the Royal George.

Dinner had been ordered beforehand by the forethought of Mr. Pointz and a bowing waiter led them upstairs and into a private room on the first floor. Here a round table was ready laid. The big bulging bow window opened on the harbour square and was open. The noise of the fair came up to them, and the raucous squeal of three roundabouts each blaring a different tune.

“Best shut that if we’re to hear ourselves speak,” observed Mr. Pointz drily, and suited the action to the word.

They took their seats round the table and Mr. Pointz beamed affectionately at his guests. He felt he was doing them well and he liked to do people well. His eye rested on one after another. Lady Marroway—fine woman—not quite the goods, of course, he knew that—he was perfectly well aware that what he had called all his life the *crème de la crème* would have very little to do with the Marroways—but then the *crème de la crème* were supremely unaware of his own existence. Anyway, Lady Marroway was a damned smart-looking woman—and he didn’t mind if she *did* rook him at Bridge. Didn’t enjoy it quite so much from Sir George. Fishy eye the fellow had. Brazenly on the make. But he wouldn’t make too much out of Isaac Pointz. He’d see to that all right.

Old Leathern wasn’t a bad fellow—longwinded, of course, like most Americans—fond of telling endless long stories. And he had that disconcerting habit of requiring precise information. What was the population of Dartmouth? In what year had the Naval College been built? And so on. Expected his host to be a kind of walking Baedeker. Eve was a nice cheery kid—he enjoyed chaffing her. Voice rather like a corncake, but she had all her wits about her. A bright kid.

Young Llewellyn—he seemed a bit quiet. Looked as though he had something on his mind. Hard up, probably. These writing fellows usually were. Looked as though he might be keen on Janet Rustington. A nice woman—attractive and clever, too. But she didn’t ram her writing down your throat. Highbrow sort of stuff she wrote but you’d never think it to hear her talk. And old Leo! *He* wasn’t getting younger or thinner. And blissfully unaware that his partner was at that moment thinking precisely the same thing about him, Mr. Pointz

corrected Mr. Leathern as to pilchards being connected with Devon and not Cornwall, and prepared to enjoy his dinner.

“Mr. Pointz,” said Eve when plates of hot mackerel had been set before them and the waiters had left the room.

“Yes, young lady.”

“Have you got that big diamond with you right now? The one you showed us last night and said you always took about with you?”

Mr. Pointz chuckled.

“That’s right. My mascot, I call it. Yes, I’ve got it with me all right.”

“I think that’s awfully dangerous. Somebody might get it away from you in the crowd at the fair.”

“Not they,” said Mr. Pointz. “I’ll take good care of that.”

“But they *might*,” insisted Eve. “You’ve got gangsters in England as well as we have, haven’t you?”

“They won’t get the Morning Star,” said Mr. Pointz. “To begin with it’s in a special inner pocket. And anyway—old Pointz knows what he’s about. Nobody’s going to steal the Morning Star.”

Eve laughed.

“Ugh-huh—bet I could steal it!”

“I bet you couldn’t.” Mr. Pointz twinkled back at her.

“Well, I bet I could. I was thinking about it last night in bed—after you’d handed it round the table, for us all to look at. I thought of a real cute way to steal it.”

“And what’s that?”

Eve put her head on one side, her fair hair wagged excitedly. “I’m not telling you—now. What do you bet I couldn’t?”

Memories of Mr. Pointz’s youth rose in his mind.

“Half a dozen pairs of gloves,” he said.

“Gloves,” cried Eve disgustedly. “Who wears gloves?”

“Well—do you wear nylon stockings?”

“Do I not? My best pair ran this morning.”

“Very well, then. Half a dozen pairs of the finest nylon stockings —”

“Oo-er,” said Eve blissfully. “And what about you?”

“Well, I need a new tobacco pouch.”

“Right. That’s a deal. Not that you’ll get your tobacco pouch. Now I’ll tell you what you’ve got to do. You must hand it round like you did

last night—”

She broke off as two waiters entered to remove the plates. When they were starting on the next course of chicken, Mr. Pointz said:

“Remember this, young woman, if this is to represent a real theft, I should send for the police and you’d be searched.”

“That’s quite OK by me. You needn’t be quite so lifelike as to bring the police into it. But Lady Marroway or Mrs. Rustington can do all the searching you like.”

“Well, that’s that then,” said Mr. Pointz. “What are you setting up to be? A first class jewel thief?”

“I might take to it as a career—if it really paid.”

“If you got away with the Morning Star it would pay you. Even after recutting that stone would be worth over thirty thousand pounds.”

“My!” said Eve, impressed. “What’s that in dollars?”

Lady Marroway uttered an exclamation.

“And you carry such a stone about with you?” she said reproachfully. “Thirty thousand pounds.” Her darkened eyelashes quivered.

Mrs. Rustington said softly: “It’s a lot of money . . . And then there’s the fascination of the stone itself . . . It’s beautiful.”

“Just a piece of carbon,” said Evan Llewellyn.

“I’ve always understood it’s the ‘fence’ that’s the difficulty in jewel robberies,” said Sir George. “He takes the lion’s share—eh, what?”

“Come on,” said Eve excitedly. “Let’s start. Take the diamond out and say what you said last night.”

Mr. Leathern said in his deep melancholy voice, “I do apologize for my offspring. She gets kinder worked up—”

“That’ll do, Pops,” said Eve. “Now then, Mr. Pointz—”

Smiling, Mr. Pointz fumbled in an inner pocket. He drew something out. It lay on the palm of his hand, blinking in the light.

“A diamond. . . .”

Rather stiffly, Mr. Pointz repeated as far as he could remember his speech of the previous evening on the *Merrimaid*.

“Perhaps you ladies and gentlemen would like to have a look at this? It’s an unusually beautiful stone. I call it the Morning Star and it’s

by way of being my mascot—goes about with me anywhere. Like to see it?”

He handed it to Lady Marroway, who took it, exclaimed at its beauty and passed it to Mr. Leathern who said, “Pretty good—yes, pretty good,” in a somewhat artificial manner and in his turn passed it to Llewellyn.

The waiters coming in at that moment, there was a slight hitch in the proceedings. When they had gone again, Evan said, “Very fine stone,” and passed it to Leo Stein who did not trouble to make any comment but handed it quickly on to Eve.

“How perfectly lovely,” cried Eve in a high affected voice.

“Oh!” She gave a cry of consternation as it slipped from her hand. “I’ve dropped it.”

She pushed back her chair and got down to grope under the table. Sir George at her right, bent also. A glass got swept off the table in the confusion. Stein, Llewellyn and Mrs. Rustington all helped in the search. Finally Lady Marroway joined in.

Only Mr. Pointz took no part in the proceedings. He remained in his seat sipping his wine and smiling sardonically.

“Oh, dear,” said Eve, still in her artificial manner, “How dreadful! Where *can* it have rolled to? I can’t find it anywhere.”

One by one the assistant searchers rose to their feet.

“It’s disappeared all right, Pointz,” said Sir George smiling.

“Very nicely done,” said Mr. Pointz, nodding approval. “You’d make a very good actress, Eve. Now the question is, have you hidden it somewhere or have you got it on you?”

“Search me,” said Eve dramatically.

Mr. Pointz’ eye sought out a large screen in the corner of the room.

He nodded towards it and then looked at Lady Marroway and Mrs. Rustington.

“If you ladies will be so good—”

“Why, certainly,” said Lady Marroway, smiling.

The two women rose.

Lady Marroway said, “Don’t be afraid, Mr. Pointz. We’ll vet her properly.”

The three went behind the screen.

The room was hot. Evan Llewellyn flung open the window. A news vendor was passing. Evan threw down a coin and the man threw up a paper.

Llewellyn unfolded it.

“Hungarian situation’s none too good,” he said.

“That the local rag?” asked Sir George. “There’s a horse I’m interested in ought to have run at Haldon today—Natty Boy.”

“Leo,” said Mr. Pointz. “Lock the door. We don’t want those damned waiters popping in and out till this business is over.”

“Natty Boy won three to one,” said Evan.

“Rotten odds,” said Sir George.

“Mostly Regatta news,” said Evan, glancing over the sheet.

The three young women came out from the screen.

“Not a sign of it,” said Janet Rustington.

“You can take it from me she hasn’t got it on her,” said Lady Marroway.

Mr. Pointz thought he would be quite ready to take it from her. There was a grim tone in her voice and he felt no doubt that the search had been thorough.

“Say, Eve, you haven’t swallowed it?” asked Mr. Leathern anxiously. “Because maybe that wouldn’t be too good for you.”

“I’d have seen her do that,” said Leo Stein quietly. “I was watching her. She didn’t put anything in her mouth.”

“I couldn’t swallow a great thing all points like that,” said Eve. She put her hands on her hips and looked at Mr. Pointz. “What about it, big boy?” she asked.

“You stand over there where you are and don’t move,” said that gentleman.

Among them, the men stripped the table and turned it upside down. Mr. Pointz examined every inch of it. Then he transferred his attention to the chair on which Eve had been sitting and those on either side of her.

The thoroughness of the search left nothing to be desired. The other four men joined in and the women also. Eve Leathern stood by the wall near the screen and laughed with intense enjoyment.

Five minutes later Mr. Pointz rose with a slight groan from his knees and dusted his trousers sadly. His pristine freshness was

somewhat impaired.

“Eve,” he said. “I take off my hat to you. You’re the finest thing in jewel thieves I’ve ever come across. What you’ve done with that stone beats me. As far as I can see it must be in the room as it isn’t on you. I give you best.”

“Are the stockings mine?” demanded Eve.

“They’re yours, young lady.”

“Eve, my child, where *can* you have hidden it?” demanded Mrs. Rustington curiously.

Eve pranced forward.

“I’ll show you. You’ll all be just mad with yourselves.”

She went across to the side table where the things from the dinner table had been roughly stacked. She picked up her little black evening bag—

“Right under your eyes. Right. . . .”

Her voice, gay and triumphant, trailed off suddenly.

“Oh,” she said. “*Oh . . .*”

“What’s the matter, honey?” said her father.

Eve whispered: “It’s gone . . . it’s *gone*. . . .”

“What’s all this?” asked Pointz, coming forward.

Eve turned to him impetuously.

“It was like this. This pochette of mine has a big paste stone in the middle of the clasp. It fell out last night and just when you were showing that diamond round I noticed that it was much the same size. And so I thought in the night what a good idea for a robbery it would be to wedge your diamond into the gap with a bit of plasticine. I felt sure nobody would ever spot it. That’s what I did tonight. First I dropped it—then went down after it with the bag in my hand, stuck it into the gap with a bit of plasticine which I had handy, put my bag on the table and went on pretending to look for the diamond. I thought it would be like the Purloined Letter—you know—lying there in full view under all your noses—and just looking like a common bit of rhinestone. And it was a good plan—none of you *did* notice.”

“I wonder,” said Mr. Stein.

“What did you say?”

Mr. Pointz took the bag, looked at the empty hole with a fragment of plasticine still adhering to it and said slowly: “It may have fallen out.

We'd better look again."

The search was repeated, but this time it was a curiously silent business. An atmosphere of tension pervaded the room.

Finally everyone in turn gave it up. They stood looking at each other.

"It's not in this room," said Stein.

"And nobody's left the room," said Sir George significantly.

There was a moment's pause. Eve burst into tears.

Her father patted her on the shoulder.

"There, there," he said awkwardly.

Sir George turned to Leo Stein.

"Mr. Stein," he said. "Just now you murmured something under your breath. When I asked you to repeat it, you said it was nothing. But as a matter of fact I heard what you said. Miss Eve had just said that none of us noticed the place where she had put the diamond. The words you murmured were: 'I wonder.' What we have to face is the probability that one person *did* notice—that that person is in this room now. I suggest that the only fair and honourable thing is for every one present to submit to a search. The diamond cannot have left the room."

When Sir George played the part of the old English gentleman, none could play it better. His voice rang with sincerity and indignation.

"Bit unpleasant, all this," said Mr. Pointz unhappily.

"It's all my fault," sobbed Eve. "I didn't mean—"

"Buck up, kiddo," said Mr. Stein kindly. "Nobody's blaming you."

Mr. Leathern said in his slow pedantic manner:

"Why, certainly, I think that Sir George's suggestion will meet with the fullest approval from all of us. It does from me."

"I agree," said Evan Llewellyn.

Mrs. Rustington looked at Lady Marroway who nodded a brief assent. The two of them went back behind the screen and the sobbing Eve accompanied them.

A waiter knocked on the door and was told to go away.

Five minutes later eight people looked at each other incredulously.

The Morning Star had vanished into space. . . .

Mr. Parker Pyne looked thoughtfully at the dark agitated face of the young man opposite him.

“Of course,” he said. “You’re Welsh, Mr. Llewellyn.”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

Mr. Parker Pyne waved a large, well-cared-for hand.

“Nothing at all, I admit. I am interested in the classification of emotional reactions as exemplified by certain racial types. That is all. Let us return to the consideration of your particular problem.”

“I don’t really know why I came to you,” said Evan Llewellyn. His hands twitched nervously, and his dark face had a haggard look. He did not look at Mr. Parker Pyne and that gentleman’s scrutiny seemed to make him uncomfortable. “I don’t know why I came to you,” he repeated. “But where the Hell *can* I go? And what the Hell can I *do*? It’s the powerlessness of not being able to do anything at all that gets me . . . I saw your advertisement and I remembered that a chap had once spoken of you and said that you got results . . . And—well—I came! I suppose I was a fool. It’s the sort of position nobody can do anything about.”

“Not at all,” said Mr. Parker Pyne. “I am the proper person to come to. I am a specialist in unhappiness. This business has obviously caused you a good deal of pain. You are sure the facts are exactly as you have told me?”

“I don’t think I’ve left out anything. Pointz brought out the diamond and passed it around—that wretched American child stuck it on her ridiculous bag and when we came to look at the bag, the diamond was gone. It wasn’t on anyone—old Pointz himself even was searched—he suggested it himself—and I’ll swear it was nowhere in that room! *And nobody left the room—*”

“No waiters, for instance?” suggested Mr. Parker Pyne.

Llewellyn shook his head.

“They went out before the girl began messing about with the diamond, and afterwards Pointz locked the door so as to keep them out. No, it lies between one of us.”

“It would certainly seem so,” said Mr. Parker Pyne thoughtfully.

“That damned evening paper,” said Evan Llewellyn bitterly. “I saw it come into their minds—that that was the only way—”

“Just tell me again exactly what occurred.”

“It was perfectly simple. I threw open the window, whistled to the man, threw down a copper and he tossed me up the paper. And there it is, you see—the only possible way the diamond could have left the room—thrown by me to an accomplice waiting in the street below.”

“Not the *only* possible way,” said Mr. Parker Pyne.

“What other way can you suggest?”

“If you didn’t throw it out, there *must* have been some other way.”

“Oh, I see. I hoped you meant something more definite than that. Well, I can only say that I *didn’t* throw it out. I can’t expect you to believe me—or anyone else.”

“Oh, yes, I believe you,” said Mr. Parker Pyne.

“You do? Why?”

“Not a criminal type,” said Mr. Parker Pyne. “Not, that is, the particular criminal type that steals jewellery. There are crimes, of course, that you might commit—but we won’t enter into that subject. At any rate I do not see you as the purloiner of the Morning Star.”

“Everyone else does though,” said Llewellyn bitterly.

“I see,” said Mr. Parker Pyne.

“They looked at me in a queer sort of way at the time. Marroway picked up the paper and just glanced over at the window. He didn’t say anything. But Pointz cottoned on to it quick enough! I could see what they thought. There hasn’t been any open accusation, that’s the devil of it.”

Mr. Parker Pyne nodded sympathetically.

“It is worse than that,” he said.

“Yes. It’s just suspicion. I’ve had a fellow round asking questions—routine inquiries, he called it. One of the new dress-shirted lot of police, I suppose. Very tactful—nothing at all hinted. Just interested in the fact that I’d been hard up and was suddenly cutting a bit of a splash.”

“And were you?”

“Yes—some luck with a horse or two. Unluckily my bets were made on the course—there’s nothing to show that that’s how the money came in. They can’t disprove it, of course—but that’s just the sort of easy lie a fellow would invent if he didn’t want to show where the money came from.”

“I agree. Still they will have to have a good deal more than that to go upon.”

“Oh! I’m not afraid of actually being arrested and charged with the theft. In a way that would be easier—one would know, where one was. It’s the ghastly fact that all those people believe I took it.”

“One person in particular?”

“What do you mean?”

“A suggestion—nothing more—” Again Mr. Parker Pyne waved his comfortable-looking hand. “There *was* one person in particular, wasn’t there? Shall we say Mrs. Rustington?”

Llewellyn’s dark face flushed.

“Why pitch on her?”

“Oh, my dear sir—there is obviously someone whose opinion matters to you greatly—probably a lady. What ladies were there? An American flapper? Lady Marroway? But you would probably rise not fall in Lady Marroway’s estimation if you had brought off such a coup. I know something of the lady. Clearly then, Mrs. Rustington.”

Llewellyn said with something of an effort,

“She—she’s had rather an unfortunate experience. Her husband was a down and out rotter. It’s made her unwilling to trust anyone. She—if she thinks—”

He found it difficult to go on.

“Quite so,” said Mr. Parker Pyne. “I see the matter is important. It must be cleared up.”

Evan gave a short laugh.

“That’s easy to say.”

“And quite easy to do,” said Mr. Parker Pyne.

“You think so?”

“Oh, yes—the problem is so clear cut. So many possibilities are ruled out. The answer must really be extremely simple. Indeed already I have a kind of glimmering—”

Llewellyn stared at him incredulously.

Mr. Parker Pyne drew a pad of paper towards him and picked up a pen.

“Perhaps you would give me a brief description of the party.”

“Haven’t I already done so?”

“Their personal appearance—colour of hair and so on.”

“But, Mr. Parker Pyne, what can that have to do with it?”

“A good deal, young man, a good deal. Classification and so on.”

Somewhat unbelievably, Evan described the personal appearance of the members of the yachting party.

Mr. Parker Pyne made a note or two, pushed away the pad and said:

“Excellent. By the way, did you say a wine glass was broken?”

Evan stared again.

“Yes, it was knocked off the table and then it got stepped on.”

“Nasty thing, splinters of glass,” said Mr. Parker Pyne. “Whose wine glass was it?”

“I think it was the child’s—Eve.”

“Ah!—and who sat next to her on that side?”

“Sir George Marroway.”

“You didn’t see which of them knocked it off the table?”

“Afraid I didn’t. Does it matter?”

“Not really. No. That was a superfluous question. Well”—he stood up—“good morning, Mr. Llewellyn. Will you call again in three days’ time? I think the whole thing will be quite satisfactorily cleared up by then.”

“Are you joking, Mr. Parker Pyne?”

“I never joke on professional matters, my dear sir. It would occasion distrust in my clients. Shall we say Friday at eleven thirty? Thank you.”

Evan entered Mr. Parker Pyne’s office on the Friday morning in a considerable turmoil. Hope and scepticism fought for mastery.

Mr. Parker Pyne rose to meet him with a beaming smile.

“Good morning, Mr. Llewellyn. Sit down. Have a cigarette?”

Llewellyn waved aside the proffered box.

“Well?” he said.

“Very well indeed,” said Mr. Parker Pyne. “The police arrested the gang last night.”

“The gang? What gang?”

“The Amalfi gang. I thought of them at once when you told me your story. I recognized their methods and once you had described the guests, well, there was no doubt at all in my mind.”

“Who are the Amalfi gang?”

“Father, son and daughter-in-law—that is if Pietro and Maria are really married—which some doubt.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s quite simple. The name is Italian and no doubt the origin is Italian, but old Amalfi was born in America. His methods are usually the same. He impersonates a real business man, introduces himself to some prominent figure in the jewel business in some European country and then plays his little trick. In this case he was deliberately on the track of the Morning Star. Pointz’ idiosyncrasy was well known in the trade. Maria Amalfi played the part of his daughter (amazing creature, twenty-seven at least, and nearly always plays a part of sixteen).”

“Not Eve!” gasped Llewellyn.

“Exactly. The third member of the gang got himself taken on as an extra waiter at the Royal George—it was holiday time, remember, and they would need extra staff. He may even have bribed a regular man to stay away. The scene is set. Eve challenges old Pointz and he takes on the bet. He passes round the diamond as he had done the night before. The waiters enter the room and Leathern retains the stone until they have left the room. When they do leave, the diamond leaves also, neatly attached with a morsel of chewing gum to the underside of the plate that Pietro bears away. So simple!”

“But I saw it after that.”

“No, no, you saw a paste replica, good enough to deceive a casual glance. Stein, you told me, hardly looked at it. Eve drops it, sweeps off a glass too and steps firmly on stone and glass together. Miraculous disappearance of diamond. Both Eve and Leathern can submit to as much searching as anyone pleases.”

“Well—I’m—” Evan shook his head, at a loss for words.

“You say you recognized the gang from my description. Had they worked this trick before?”

“Not exactly—but it was their kind of business. Naturally my attention was at once directed to the girl Eve.”

“Why? I didn’t suspect her—nobody did. She seemed such a—such a *child*.”

“That is the peculiar genius of Maria Amalfi. She is more like a child than any child could possibly be! And then the plasticine! This bet was supposed to have arisen quite spontaneously—yet the little lady had some plasticine with her all handy. That spoke of premeditation. My suspicions fastened on her at once.”

Llewellyn rose to his feet.

“Well, Mr. Parker Pyne, I’m no end obliged to you.”

“Classification,” murmured Mr. Parker Pyne. “The classification of criminal types—it interests me.”

“You’ll let me know how much—er—”

“My fee will be quite moderate,” said Mr. Parker Pyne. “It will not make too big a hole in the—er—horse racing profits. All the same, young man, I should, I think, leave the horses alone in future. Very uncertain animal, the horse.”

“That’s all right,” said Evan.

He shook Mr. Parker Pyne by the hand and strode from the office.

He hailed a taxi and gave the address of Janet Rustington’s flat.

He felt in a mood to carry all before him.