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The Murder of Roger Ackroyd

Adapted by

PHILIP GRECIAN

Based on the novel by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Dramatic Publishing Company

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(THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD)

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For Gabrielle

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd

CHARACTERS

DR. JAMES SHEPPARD: 50 years old. The physician in King's Abbot. Upon the murder of Roger Ackroyd, Dr. Sheppard serves as Hercule Poirot's Watson-like associate. It's important to him to know what Poirot knows, and he is writing it all down with the idea of authoring a book.

CAROLINE SHEPPARD: Mid- to upper-50s. Dr. Sheppard's older unmarried sister and the leader of the village gossips. She knows everything that goes on in the village and has an ability to put pieces together and come up with an answer before anyone else in the community.

HERCULE POIROT: The famous Belgian detective who has retired to King's Abbot. Poirot is short, has quirky habits and is proud of his carefully groomed mustache. He relies on logic and critical thinking to determine the facts of a crime. He is a master of human nature who keeps his thoughts to himself and only reveals them when he is certain of his theory. He is probably 72, but dyes his black hair and mustache.

INSPECTOR RAGLAN: Late 50s. The official inspector of Ackroyd's murder. He is proud of his investigative method, though it is pedestrian at best and usually wrong. He is something of a bumbler.

FLORA ACKROYD: Early 20s. Flora is Roger Ackroyd's young and beautiful niece. She is resentful that she is financially dependent on her uncle and agrees to marry Ralph Paton in order to escape this heavy dependence even though she harbors a secret love for Major Blunt.

MRS. ACKROYD: Flora's mother and Roger Ackroyd's sister-in-law. Mrs. Ackroyd and Flora came to live at Fernly Park after her husband died. Shallow and solipsistic, she has fallen into debt in an attempt to sustain her lifestyle and is dependent upon money from her penurious brother-in-law. She is a difficult woman to be around.

GEOFFREY RAYMOND: Ackroyd's secretary and business manager, Raymond is young, charming, debonair and fascinated by every aspect of the murder and the investigation. He admits to being in debt, but the money he will receive from Ackroyd's will takes care of this.

JOHN PARKER: He is a competent servant and a worrier. He blackmailed a former employer and was looking for an opportunity to blackmail Ackroyd as well.

MAJOR HECTOR BLUNT: A big-game hunter and longtime friend of Ackroyd. Blunt is a man of few words, but when he does speak, he is ... blunt. He secretly loves Flora but feels that, as he is considerably older, she doesn't see him as a romantic partner. By his own admission, he is uncomfortable in society and prefers the jungles of Africa and India.

ELIZABETH RUSSELL: Ackroyd's chief housekeeper. She is somewhere over 40 but comes off as older due to her stern demeanor. Elizabeth is efficient and no-nonsense with a proficiency that renders her intimidating. Respectability is deeply important to her, and she has a secret that she fears would ruin her reputation if it came out.

URSULA BOURNE: Early to mid-20s. A housemaid at Fernly Park. Born into gentility, Ursula was thrown into the workforce when her father died and the family fortune was lost. Her references may be false, but she is an excellent housemaid and a hard worker.

CHARLES KENT: An alcoholic and heroin addict, Kent relies on thievery to live. He is in his late 20s or early 30s but appears worn and shabby due to heavy drug use. When he is caught attempting to burgle Fernly Park, he demonstrates anger and the shakes of a drug addict needing a fix. He speaks with an American accent.

RALPH PATON: Ackroyd's adopted stepson, Paton is 25 years old, handsome and charming, but he is terrible at handling his own finances and obligations. He is steeped in debt and counts on his stepfather's fortune for support. He is engaged to Flora and has disappeared, making him a prime suspect in Roger Ackroyd's murder.

PLACE: The village of King's Abbot, England.

TIME: September of 1926.

FLOOR PLANS: Two example floor plans with descriptions can be found in the back of the book.

SCENES

ACT I:

Scene 1: Friday, Sept. 17; the Sheppard home.

Scene 2: The same, later.

Scene 3: Fernly Park, that night.

Scene 4: Roger Ackroyd's study, later that night.

Scene 5: Fernly Park drawing room, immediately.

Scene 6: Fernly Park drawing room, 20 minutes later.

Scene 7: Saturday, Sept. 18; the Sheppard home, morning.

Scene 8: Roger Ackroyd's study, later that morning.

Scene 9: Fernly Park drawing room, noon.

Scene 10: Fernly Park drawing room, after lunch.

Scene 11: Sunday, Sept. 19; the Sheppard home, late afternoon.

Scene 12: Monday, Sept. 20; Fernly Park drawing room,
immediately.

Scene 13: Tuesday, Sept. 21; the Sheppard home, morning.

Scene 14: Fernly Park drawing room, 20 minutes later.

ACT II:

Scene 1: Fernly Park drawing room, moments later.

Scene 2: Fernly Park drawing room, later that evening.

Scene 3: Wednesday, Sept. 22; the Sheppard home, morning.

Scene 4: The garden at Fernly Park, 10 minutes later.

Scene 5: Fernly Park drawing room, a few minutes later.

Scene 6: Thursday, Sept. 23; the Sheppard home, morning.

Scene 7: Fernly Park drawing room; 9 p.m. that night

Scene 8: Friday, Sept. 24; the Sheppard home, 5 a.m.

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd

ACT I

Scene 1

(From a dark stage, DR. JAMES SHEPPARD's recorded voice is heard.)

SHEPPARD *(V.O.)*. Lillian Ferrars had been dead for hours before anyone noticed. Her body was stone cold, though the servants wasted a good deal of time trying to revive her. It was still entirely too early Friday morning when I was sent for. The citizens of King's Abbot love discussing Roger Ackroyd's affairs over the years. Most haven't lasted long. Roger is ... difficult. Some say ... vile. Lillian Ferrars was the most recent and enduring.

(Friday morning, Sept. 17, 1926. Lights fade up on the Sheppard home on a wheeled platform DC. There is a small desk on the platform R with a chair upstage. A shelf with files and books stacked willy-nilly. There is a wax cylinder Dictaphone on the desk. There is a door on the L wall, and a small built-in bookcase downstage from that. Two chairs face each other with a small tea table between downstage. On the table, there are cups, sugar and cream and spoons. There is a coat hook and a shelf on the upstage wall with files, books, etc.

SHEPPARD sits at the desk, facing downstage and listening to his own voice on his Dictaphone.

SHEPPARD yawns, clicks off the machine, picks up the microphone and clicks the machine back on.)

SHEPPARD (*with a sigh, into the microphone*). I last saw her Wednesday, walking with Ralph Paton, Roger's stepson. I was surprised to see Ralph, as he'd left the village six months ago. Well ... Lillian Ferrars, estimated time of death ... midnight Thursday the sixteenth, Friday the seventeenth of September, 1926. Cause of death—suicide. Medical entry submitted Friday, Sept ... (*He looks at his pocket watch.*)

CAROLINE (*offstage*). James, is that you?

(*SHEPPARD raises his head and sighs. He turns off the Dictaphone and puts the microphone on the hook.*)

SHEPPARD (*with an indulgent smile*). Who else would it be, sister dear?

(*CAROLINE SHEPPARD enters from L with a tea tray, which she puts on the table.*)

CAROLINE. It could've been a burglar.

SHEPPARD. A burglar wouldn't be using the Dictaphone.

CAROLINE. I don't know why not ... you've had everyone else reciting on it.

SHEPPARD. It *is* a good deal of fun. Some of the fellows brought old files and letters to read aloud so they could hear how they sounded. Roger Ackroyd was particularly enchanted. Said he might buy one himself. I'm thinking of starting a journal with it.

CAROLINE. If you do, I suppose I'll be typing that up, too.

SHEPPARD. I suppose.

CAROLINE. Would you care for breakfast?

SHEPPARD. Just tea.

CAROLINE (*pours tea and sits*). You had an early call.

SHEPPARD (*comes down to stand upstage of the other chair and takes up his tea*). King's Paddock, Mrs. Ferrars.

CAROLINE. I know.

SHEPPARD. How did you know?

CAROLINE. Annie. Our parlor maid.

SHEPPARD. An inveterate talker.

CAROLINE. Well, yes.

SHEPPARD. And you, dear Caroline, are an inveterate listener.

CAROLINE. You can learn more by listening.

SHEPPARD. And you've built up such an Intelligence Corps of servants and tradesmen.

CAROLINE. That's how I know about Lillian Ferrars.

SHEPPARD (*puts his tea down and crosses back up to the desk*). Died in her sleep.

CAROLINE. I know.

SHEPPARD. *I* didn't even know until I got there. Annie must be a clairvoyant.

CAROLINE. No, the milkman told Annie, and Annie told me.

SHEPPARD. How did the milkman know?

CAROLINE. He was told by the Ferrars' cook. What did she die of?

SHEPPARD. Didn't the milkman tell Annie?

CAROLINE. He didn't know.

SHEPPARD. I'm shocked. (*A sigh.*) Well, I'd best tell you before the chimney sweep does. She died of an overdose of Veronal powder.

CAROLINE. I knew it!

SHEPPARD. She'd been taking it to sleep. Took too much.

CAROLINE. Did you prescribe it?

SHEPPARD (*with a sigh*). Well, not the overdose ... but yes. (*Opens a desk drawer, takes out a glass bottle of Veronal and shakes it as he displays it.*) A little bit is handy. Too much

is deadly. I take it myself when I have trouble sleeping. For her, I was putting the doses in little paper packets. But she bought a bottle at the chemist's.

CAROLINE. She took it on purpose.

SHEPPARD. Now, why would she do that? (*Puts the Veronal back and rummages around in the drawers.*)

CAROLINE. You've just said she couldn't sleep! It was remorse.

SHEPPARD. For what? (*He takes a packet of biscuits from a drawer, moves back down to the chairs.*)

CAROLINE. Killing her husband! It took a year, but the guilt finally caught up to her!

SHEPPARD. He died of gastritis!

CAROLINE. Arsenic poisoning. The symptoms are the same.

SHEPPARD. They are ... similar.

CAROLINE. So you admit that she could've poisoned him!

SHEPPARD. I admit no such thing. (*Offers.*) Biscuit?

CAROLINE. No thank you. But you do admit that she committed suicide!

SHEPPARD (*sits*). I don't.

CAROLINE. Ten to one she left a suicide note!

SHEPPARD. She didn't leave a note of any kind! I checked to make ...

CAROLINE. Aha! You think she committed suicide, too!

SHEPPARD. No, I ... (*Pause.*) One has to take the possibility into consideration under such circumstances, but ...

CAROLINE. It can't have been easy married to Ashley Ferrars! He was a drunkard. He beat her, too. Remember the time he pushed her down the stairs!

SHEPPARD. She said she tripped.

CAROLINE. Do you believe that?

SHEPPARD. It doesn't matter what I believe. The inquest will ...

CAROLINE. So you *do* believe it was suicide! You wouldn't have an inquest if ...

SHEPPARD. I'm sure you'll know about the inquest before I schedule it. You know everything else.

CAROLINE. I do.

(They sip their tea.)

CAROLINE *(cont'd)*. Do you know that Roger Ackroyd's stepson Ralph is back in town?

SHEPPARD. I do. I saw Lillian Ferrars talking with him very earnestly only a couple of days ago.

CAROLINE. Well, that adds another element to her suicide, doesn't it!

SHEPPARD *(lost in thought for a moment)*. Could be disastrous.

CAROLINE. For Lillian?

SHEPPARD *(comes to)*. Yes. For Lillian. I heard he was staying at the Three Boars Inn, so I went over this morning to welcome him, but he wasn't in his room. How did *you* know? Well, that's a silly question.

CAROLINE. Yes, it is.

SHEPPARD. If anything happens in this village, you know.

CAROLINE. Flora and Ralph are engaged. His niece and his stepson.

SHEPPARD. Well, that's a bit of a surprise.

CAROLINE. Seems like it should be illegal.

SHEPPARD. They're not related by blood.

CAROLINE. Flora's mother's a pill.

SHEPPARD. Clara's ... unpleasant.

CAROLINE. Roger's brother dies, and right away Clara and her daughter move into Fernly Park without a by-your-leave!

SHEPPARD. I'm not sure she had a choice. Clara's broke.

CAROLINE. Of course she is. She went through Cecil's money to keep up her lifestyle! And now Roger's supporting her.

SHEPPARD. Probably felt a duty to his brother.

CAROLINE. They've been having an affair! And that Russell woman didn't like it one bit!

SHEPPARD. The housekeeper?

CAROLINE. She and Roger were having an affair, too.

SHEPPARD. So Roger was having affairs with Elizabeth Russell, Lillian Ferrars and Clara Ackroyd? I admire his stamina.

CAROLINE. You're naughty! I'd only heard this morning that Ralph was in town, and then I ran into Roger in the village ... and he didn't know!

SHEPPARD. Who told *you*?

CAROLINE. Our new neighbor ... next door at the Larches. He'd seen Ralph at the Three Boars Inn, and he asked if I knew who he was.

SHEPPARD. Our neighbor talks?

CAROLINE. I was surprised, too.

SHEPPARD. Out in his garden all day, not a word to anyone. Of course, *you'd* get him to talk.

CAROLINE. You said he must be a hairdresser.

SHEPPARD. Yes, well ... the fussy mustache, the ... is he?

CAROLINE. I forgot to ask.

SHEPPARD. Did you find out his name?

CAROLINE. Parrot.

SHEPPARD. Parrot.

CAROLINE. Like the talking bird.

SHEPPARD. And you know this because ...

CAROLINE. I happened to see some things in his letterbox.

SHEPPARD. Of course you did. So then he was out in his garden ...

CAROLINE. Yes, and I was out in our garden watering the flowers ... and he was shouting at his vegetables.

SHEPPARD. As one does.

CAROLINE. A marrow came sailing over the fence. It missed me.

SHEPPARD. Good. One never cares to be squashed by a squash.

CAROLINE. Then he shouted again and another marrow came flying over the fence.

SHEPPARD. Missed again?

CAROLINE. By miles. "What in the world are you doing?" I shouted back. "You nearly hit me!" He didn't, of course.

SHEPPARD. Of course.

CAROLINE. Well, he came around and was most apologetic. He's promised to bring over some vegetables.

SHEPPARD. Very nice of Mister ... Parrot.

CAROLINE. It is. I'm looking forward to the vegetables ... I've also saved the ones he threw over the fence.

SHEPPARD. Waste not, want not.

CAROLINE. He speaks with an accent.

SHEPPARD. With a name like "Parrot," perhaps ... South American ... ?

CAROLINE. I thought he sounded more French. I asked him if he was French. He said no.

SHEPPARD. Ah.

CAROLINE. As for Roger, I suspect he went right off to the Three Boars, but I know he didn't find Ralph there.

SHEPPARD. That makes two of us. How do you know?

CAROLINE. I took the shortcut to the village through the woods, I heard voices. And one was Ralph Paton's.

SHEPPARD. I don't know why I bother to subscribe to the newspaper.

CAROLINE. The other was a girl. I didn't mean to listen ...

SHEPPARD. Of course not.

CAROLINE. But I couldn't help overhearing. She said something ... I didn't catch it. Ralph answered, loud and angry. He said that Roger was "fed up" with him, and he didn't want him to alter his will, because he'd changed his ways, and wanted to pay off his debts.

SHEPPARD. And the girl ... ?

CAROLINE. I couldn't see. Flora Ackroyd ... maybe.

SHEPPARD. Ralph's been a gambler. Not a good one, though.

CAROLINE. And he needs money. If I were Roger, I wouldn't give it to him.

SHEPPARD. Then I'm sure Ralph is glad you're not Roger.

CAROLINE. And I am as well. I'm perfectly content being your sister.

SHEPPARD. And who wouldn't be?

CAROLINE. So, will you be here for dinner? I'm expecting a delivery of fresh vegetables!

SHEPPARD. No, milady, I'm dining at Fernly Park.

CAROLINE. Roger invited you to dinner!

SHEPPARD. He did.

CAROLINE. Does he know about Mrs. Ferrars?

SHEPPARD. I called him this morning. I thought he should know.

CAROLINE. Because of their affair.

SHEPPARD. I don't think you can call it an affair. She was a widow, he's a widower.

CAROLINE. His first wife died to get away from him.

SHEPPARD. And who could blame her.

CAROLINE. How did he respond?

SHEPPARD. Rather well, under the circumstances. He had noticed her growing depression. Wants to discuss it ... as well as related matters.

CAROLINE. What kind of related matters?

SHEPPARD. I have no idea, but you'll probably know by lunch. I'll ask you then.

(There is a knock at the door.)

CAROLINE. Oh, that will be our vegetables, and a chance to find out about Mr. Parrot!

(She exits. SHEPPARD crosses to the Dictaphone and speaks into the microphone.)

SHEPPARD. Um ... end of notes ... Lillian Ferrars. September seventeenth, 1926.

(He turns off the machine and puts the microphone back on the hook just as CAROLINE enters with HERCULE POIROT. He is dressed in a wide-brimmed gardening hat and seen-better-days trousers, shirt and vest under a long dun-colored smock, open down the front.)

CAROLINE. Here we are! This is my brother, James.

SHEPPARD. How do you do?

CAROLINE. James, this is Mr. Parrot.

POIROT *(reacts subtly, then with a nod)*. My pleasure, *monsieur*.

SHEPPARD *(with humor)*. I understand you've been throwing vegetables at my sister.

CAROLINE. James!

POIROT. I am, of course, without defense, *monsieur*. A man may work to retire from his occupation as I have done ... but then I discover that it bores me ... I need a challenge ... and so I try to grow the *perfect* marrow. You understand? But the marrows, they defy me.

CAROLINE. What work did you do before you retired?

POIROT. The most interesting work there was in the world. The study of human nature.

SHEPPARD. Ah!

(POIROT looks away for a moment, and SHEPPARD gives CAROLINE a knowing look, pantomiming cutting hair and silently mouthing, "hairdresser." POIROT turns back to SHEPPARD.)

POIROT. I have come to realize that I miss that interesting work. You understand.

SHEPPARD. I do.

CAROLINE. Of course you miss it ... since it was so ... interesting.

POIROT. Thank you.

SHEPPARD. I understand the balance. Leisure on one hand, interesting work on the other. Recently I came into some money. I wanted to travel ... but, the money's gone, and I'm still here with my interesting work.

POIROT. The chains of habit. Sometimes we realize, grow frustrated ... and, perhaps, we hurl vegetables over the fences, eh?

SHEPPARD *(with a laugh)*. Perhaps so!

CAROLINE. You missed me, so no harm done!

POIROT. Also, I had a friend ... who was helpful for my work.

CAROLINE. Another hairdresser?

POIROT. Excuse me?

SHEPPARD (*signals CAROLINE for silence*). Nothing, nothing. Go on.

POIROT. I could ... how you say ... bounce a ball from him. I delighted in surprising him with my insights into human nature. I miss this more than I can tell you.

CAROLINE. He died?

POIROT. He moved away. Argentina.

CAROLINE (*gives SHEPPARD a look*). South America!

SHEPPARD. I've always wanted to go to South America ... but that legacy I mentioned. I was foolish, risked it on speculation.

POIROT. It is fate! My friend did also! And he too was unsuccessful! You are a man who is like my far-off friend! Ah, I had best get back to tending my garden, eh?

SHEPPARD. And I suppose I should make a few calls and prepare for dinner tonight.

POIROT (*bows*). *Madame, monsieur. (He exits.)*

CAROLINE. I think he's French.

SHEPPARD. Hm. Well ... let's hop to it! I'll freshen up. (*Starts to exit.*)

CAROLINE. I'll type up your notes.

SHEPPARD (*stops and turns*). That can wait. It's not like I'll be making another visit on Mrs. Ferrars.

CAROLINE. I'll go to market then and run errands. We can use something to go with our new vegetables.

(SHEPPARD and CAROLINE exit in opposite directions as the lights fade to black.)

Scene 2

(The Sheppard home, later that night. In the darkness, we hear the chatter of typewriter keys. The lights fade up. SHEPPARD is at the typewriter. The Dictaphone has been removed.)

CAROLINE *(entering)*. Back from dinner?

SHEPPARD. I am.

CAROLINE. What are you doing?

SHEPPARD. I got bored, so I typed up my notes.

CAROLINE. I was going to do that, but I couldn't find the Dictaphone.

SHEPPARD. I saved you the time. Have a good time shopping?

CAROLINE. I did. And I got a lot of good gossip.

SHEPPARD. Of course. You remember that journal I planned to start? I've started it. *(He points to a small pile of already typed pages.)*

CAROLINE. So ambitious!

SHEPPARD. Yes, well ... dinner at Fernly was ... mysterious. I wanted to get my thoughts down.

CAROLINE. I'm intrigued. Would you like to share them?

SHEPPARD. I walked over to Fernly ...

(He picks up the papers and goes through them for reference. As he relates his visit, he puts page after page back down on the desk as he's finished with them.)

SHEPPARD *(cont'd)*. Rang the front bell, and the butler let me in.

CAROLINE. Parker.

SHEPPARD. Yes, Parker. Just as I entered, Ackroyd's secretary—

CAROLINE. Geoffrey Raymond.

SHEPPARD. Walked by and asked if I was on a professional call.

CAROLINE. A professional call?

SHEPPARD. I had my medical bag. I'm monitoring some patients. I'd given them the telephone number at Fernly, just in case.

CAROLINE. Ah.

SHEPPARD. As I passed the library, I heard ... a sound ... like a window slamming shut.

CAROLINE. A window?

SHEPPARD. Bear with me. Miss Russell came running out, nearly collided with me.

CAROLINE. The housekeeper.

SHEPPARD. She was short of breath, as if she'd been running.

CAROLINE. It *is* a big house.

SHEPPARD. So I went into the library, and there was a display case against the far wall.

CAROLINE. That's new. Displaying what?

SHEPPARD. Memorabilia. Old silver ... a baby shoe supposedly worn by King Charles the First ... African curios and jade figures.

CAROLINE. You love jade.

SHEPPARD. I lifted the top for a closer look ... it slipped through my fingers ... and when it fell, I realized that was the sound I'd heard.

CAROLINE. Someone else had been admiring the curios.

SHEPPARD. Flora Ackroyd came in. We talked about the curios. She expressed doubts as to King Charles ever having worn the baby shoe. And she showed me an engagement ring. Said she was going to marry Ralph Paton. Then her mother walked in.

CAROLINE. Have I mentioned I don't like her?

SHEPPARD. You have. She said I should ask Roger what he plans to leave Flora in his will.

CAROLINE. See?

SHEPPARD. Fortunately, just then, Major Blunt arrived and we—

CAROLINE. The big game hunter.

SHEPPARD. And we all went to the dining room and sat down to dinner.

CAROLINE. Was it good?

SHEPPARD. It was. But afterward, things got ... odd.

CAROLINE (*grabs the pages from his hand*). You're going too slowly.

SHEPPARD. Hey!

CAROLINE (*reading and summarizing as she evades SHEPPARD, who is trying to retrieve the journal pages*).

So, after dinner, Roger took you to his study, and asked you to lock the window.

SHEPPARD. Felt he was being spied upon. Look here, our conversation was private, I don't think you ...

CAROLINE. He said he'd been involved with Mrs. Ferrars. I told you!

SHEPPARD. Such a gossip!

CAROLINE (*rifling through the pages quickly*). And that she has poisoned her husband! I was right!

SHEPPARD (*with a sigh, he stops*). Yes, you were right. And she told Roger she was being blackmailed.

CAROLINE. Why would he tell you all this?

SHEPPARD. People ... tell me things.

CAROLINE. You should have gone into the ministry.

SHEPPARD (*takes another lunge at her*). Caroline, give me my—

CAROLINE. And she's being blackmailed! By whom?

SHEPPARD. She ... said she'd tell him later.

CAROLINE. Then killed herself.

SHEPPARD. Yes.

CAROLINE. Well, that certainly puts the kibosh on telling him later.

SHEPPARD. Except ...

CAROLINE. What?

SHEPPARD. About then, Parker knocked on the door and came in with the post. There was a distinctive blue envelope, addressed in Lillian Ferrars' hand.

CAROLINE. What? (*She shuffles through the papers. Reads quickly.*) A suicide note! She wrote it in a letter!

SHEPPARD. He dismissed Parker and began to read it aloud. It's in there.

CAROLINE (*reading, mumbling periodically as she rushes through the text on the last piece of paper*). "My dear Roger ... forgive me ... the only choice I have ... person has made my life hell on earth ... I couldn't tell you the name before ... I will tell you now ... "

SHEPPARD. That was the gist, anyway. I couldn't exactly copy it out.

CAROLINE (*turns the paper over*). Where's the rest? Who was the blackmailer?

SHEPPARD. He wouldn't tell me. Said he needed to read it alone. He ... asked me to leave, and keep it a secret. And we need to do that ... at least for now. Do you think you *can* keep a secret?

CAROLINE. Why should I?

SHEPPARD. It's not our secret to give away.

CAROLINE. I'll keep mum ... for now.

SHEPPARD. Might not be secret for long. When I left the room ... there was Parker.

CAROLINE. He was listening?

SHEPPARD. I told him Ackroyd didn't want to be disturbed. Then I got my coat and left. The church clock chimed nine as I was through the gate, where I nearly collided with a man.

CAROLINE. What man?

SHEPPARD. It was dark. He had his collar turned up and his hat pulled down in front. He asked the way to Fernly Park. I told him ... a few minutes later I was home. It's ten o'clock ... and I'm ... exhausted.

CAROLINE. I am too! It's been an exciting day all the way around.

SHEPPARD. I'm off to bed. *(He begins to move R.)* We can solve our mysteries tomorrow.

CAROLINE. Good night. *(She moves L.)*

SHEPPARD. Good night.

(They exit. The lights fade to black.)

Scene 3

(That night in the Fernly Park drawing room. In the darkness, we hear a hard rapping at the door and SHEPPARD's voice.)

SHEPPARD. Parker! Let me in! It's Sheppard! Parker!

(The lights come up on the drawing room. There is an alcove one step up on the back wall L with a door, R, going into the study and two steps L opposite the door going up to another closed door. A divan is centered on the upstage)

FLOOR PLANS

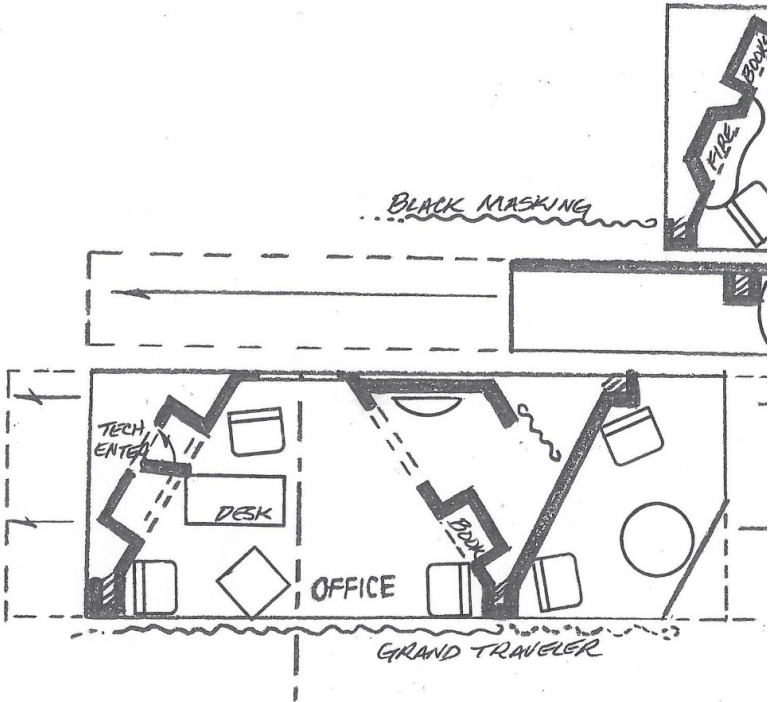
Before writing a play, the author designs a set for visualization and reference throughout the process. He makes sketches and often includes a finished version of these sketches with his scripts. For *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, he turned to designer Ron Zastrow to draw the floor plan based on his sketches. Zastrow, being a highly creative person, couldn't help but see the setting in an entirely different way, and so he provided a second design—the way he saw it.

Both of the example floor plans on the following pages are entirely optional. Perhaps no theatre producing the play will ever use the designs; but if there is a theatre that needs a jumping off point, these will help.

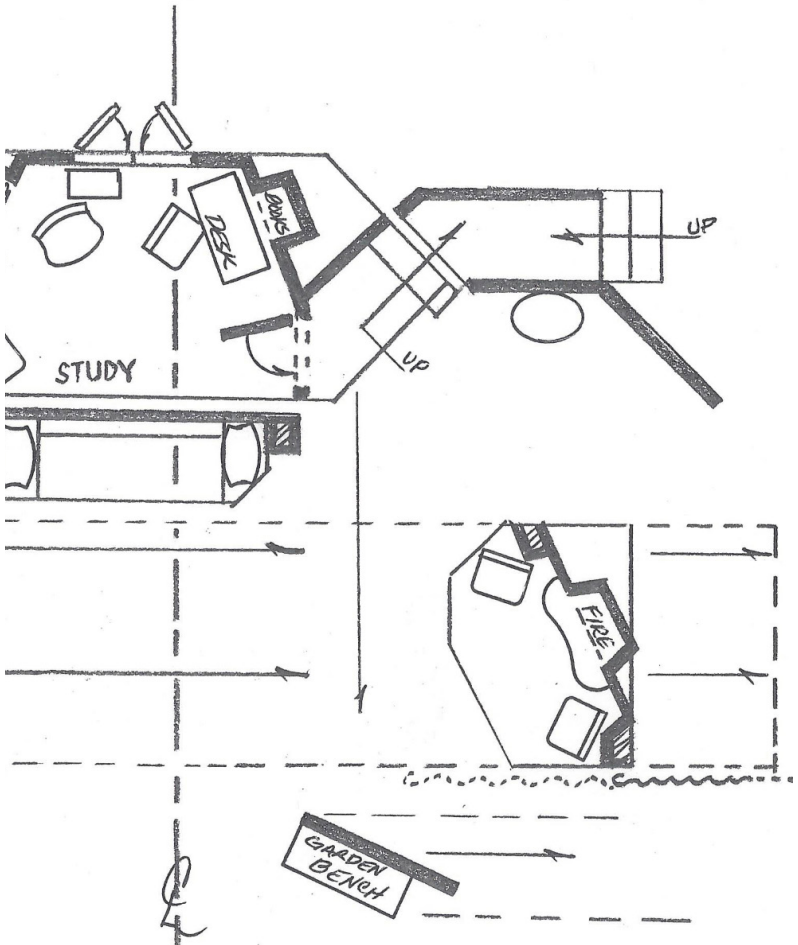
FLOOR PLAN 1 (Grecian): This design is based on the author's original vision and sketches used throughout his writing process. The references in the script are to this design.

FLOOR PLAN 2 (Zastrow): This design is window-centric. The action of the play is dependent on the interaction (whether seen or not) through windows in the library, the study, the summerhouse and in Sheppard's home. Additionally, the clues discovered in the garden scene receive a strong visual. Additional description provided on the design spread.

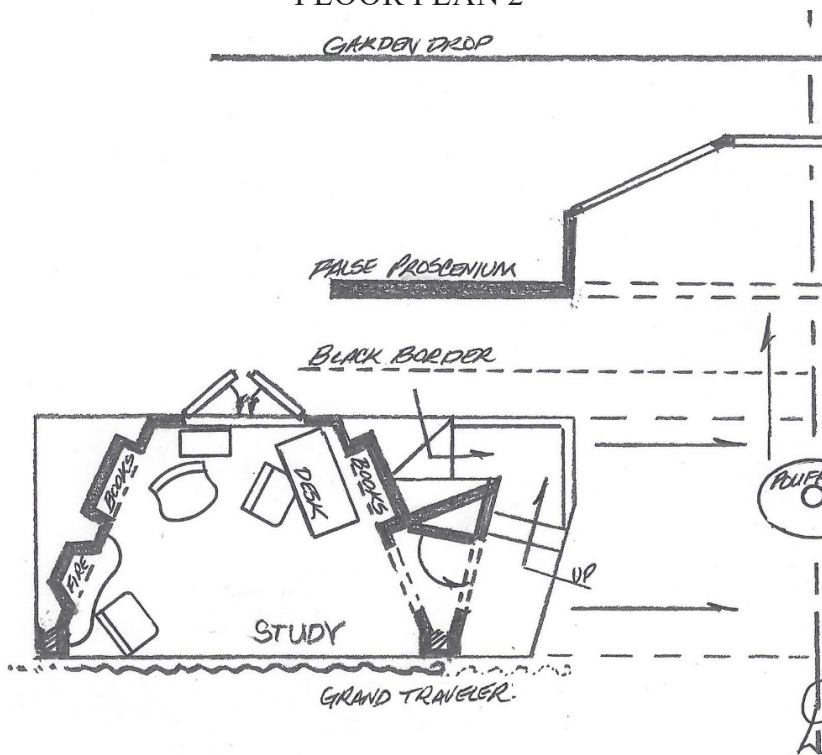
FLOOR PLAN 1



(GRECIAN)

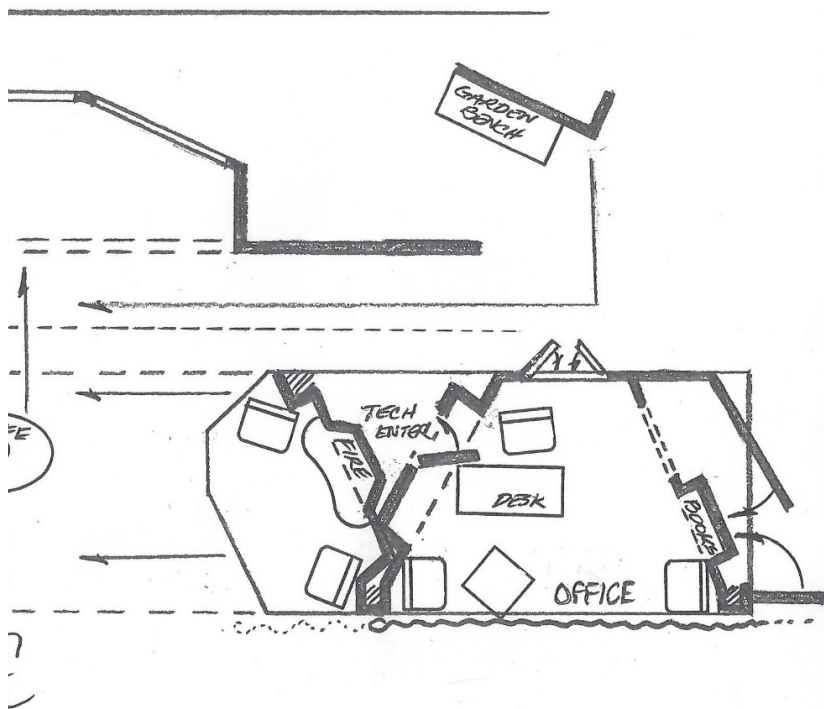


FLOOR PLAN 2



Upstage, a false proscenium shows a huge bay of Gothic windows without drapery that looks out to the gardens. CL and CR are entrances into this drawing room. C is a large pouffe with a center post back that can be moved up and downstage during scene shifts. DL, and up one step onto a wagon, is a fireplace with two chairs and a low table. Behind this and attached to it is the doctor's office. A secret technical entrance allows for the quick change of desk dressings in blackouts. DR, on a second wagon, is the locked door to Ackroyds's study and the small stair that leads to his bedroom. Behind this door and continuing L on the same wagon is Ackroyd's study.

(ZASTROW)



Offstage, a rolling bench with an attached hedge wall is stored. When needed for the garden, it is rolled in to cover the pouffe. Exterior lighting of the false proscenium, highlighting of the garden and other lighting as described by the playwright complete this scene. The windows in the doctor's office and Ackroyd's study show green gardens outside. The pouffe can be minimized by green upholstery together with patterned light. Lowering a black border behind these sets and closing the grand drape slightly will continue the scene change illusion.