

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S



The Case of the Missing Cook

Heather Lynn

Adapted from the story by Agatha Christie

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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P.O. Box 1401

Rapid City, SD 57709

The Case of the Missing Cook

MYSTERY. Eager to tend to his personal affairs like trimming his mustache and removing a grease spot from his suit, famed detective Hercule Poirot vows to take time off from solving crimes. Instead, Poirot receives an unexpected visit from Mrs. Todd, who insists that he investigate the disappearance of her cook. When Poirot declines the case, declaring it not of “national importance,” Mrs. Todd rebukes him. “A good cook’s a good cook. And when you lose her, it’s as much to you as pearls are to some fine lady.” Poirot concedes defeat and agrees to take the case. However, days later, Poirot receives a letter from Mrs. Todd dismissing him from the case. Infuriated, Poirot vows to find the missing cook at any cost. And in the end, he declares this mystery to be one of his most interesting cases. Easy to stage.

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.

NOTE: Combine with other Agatha Christie one-acts for a full evening of mysteries.



Agatha Christie, circa 1925

About the Story

Agatha Christie was born in southwest England to a wealthy family. Growing up, Christie enjoyed reading mystery novels by Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Many of Christie's short stories were first published in periodicals and feature the famed Belgian detective Hercule Poirot. Poirot later became one of Christie's most famous characters. Christie's short story "The Adventure of the Clapham Cook" was first published in *The Sketch* in 1923 in the United Kingdom. The author of 66 detective novels and 15 short story collections, Christie is best known for her bestselling novel *And Then There Were None* and her play *The Mousetrap*.

Characters

(4 M, 3 F)

HERCULE POIROT: Famed Belgian detective; has a mustache; speaks with a French accent (opt.); male.

CAPTAIN ARTHUR HASTINGS: Poirot's friend who assists him on cases; male.

MRS. TODD: Asks Hercule Poirot to find her missing cook, Eliza Dunn; described as a "stout, red-faced lady"; female.

MR. TODD: Mrs. Todd's husband who works for a firm in London; described as a "melancholy, lantern-jawed man"; male.

ANNIE: Mrs. Todd's parlor maid, who was the last person to speak to the cook before she disappeared; wears a maid's uniform; female.

MISS ELIZA DUNN: Mrs. Todd's missing cook; has black hair that is turning gray; female.

MR. SIMPSON/MR. CROTCHET: A quiet, inconspicuous lodger at the Todds' home who works at a bank; poses as Mr. Crotchet, a lawyer from Australia; as Mr. Simpson, he wears spectacles; as Mr. Crotchet, he has a beard, wears a big hat, and speaks with a bad Australian accent; male.

Setting

Poirot's study and the Todds' home, London, 1923.

Sets

Note: The same set pieces may be used for both sets. Different pillows, curtains, etc. may be used to distinguish the setting.

Poirot's study. There is a fireplace, a window, two armchairs, and a coffee table. Another smaller chair is off to one side. A backdrop of a study may be used.

Todds' home, drawing room. A prim drawing room with lace curtains veiling the windows. There are two armchairs, a coffee table, and two smaller chairs. A backdrop of a drawing room may be used.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Poirot's study, morning.

Scene 2: Todds' home, drawing room.

Scene 3: Todds' home, drawing room.

Scene 4: Poirot's study.

Scene 5: Poirot's study, a week later.

Scene 6: Poirot's study, days later.

Props

Coffee cup

Teacup

Newspaper

Small hand mirror, for Poirot (to look at his mustache)

Letter

Stack of letters

Business card

Note

Envelope of money

Framed check for one guinea

The Case of the Missing Cook

8

Special Effects

Doorbell

Lighting to indicate a flashback

The Case of the Missing Cook

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*“A good cook’s a good cook.
And when you lose her,
it’s as much to you
as pearls are to some fine lady.”*

—Hercule Poirot

Scene 1

(AT RISE: *Hercule Poirot's study, morning. Poirot and Hastings are seated in armchairs. Poirot is drinking a cup of coffee. Hastings is drinking tea and reading the newspaper.*)

POIROT: *(To Hastings.)* The Daily Blare is a newspaper that makes the most of any opportunity for sensationalism. Robberies and murders do not lurk obscurely in its back pages. Instead they hit one in the eye in large type on the front page.

HASTINGS: *(Reads newspaper headlines.)* "Absconding Bank Clerk Disappears with Fifty Thousand Pounds Worth of Negotiable Securities"; "Husband Puts His Head in Gas Oven"; "Missing typist. Pretty girl of 21. Where is Edna Field?" There you are, Poirot, plenty to choose from. An absconding bank clerk, a mysterious suicide, a missing typist...which case will you take?

POIROT: *(Shaking his head.)* I am not interested in any of them, [mon ami]. Today, I feel inclined for a life of ease. It would have to be a very interesting case to tempt me from my chair. I have affairs of importance of my own to attend to. [*or "my friend"*]

HASTINGS: Such as?

POIROT: My wardrobe, Hastings. If I mistake not, there is on my new grey suit a spot of grease sufficient to trouble me. Then there is my winter overcoat. I must store it in Keatings Powder. And I think—yes, I think—the moment is ripe for the trimming of my moustache, and afterwards I must apply the pomade.

(Hastings strolls over to the window.)

The Case of the Missing Cook

11

HASTINGS: (*Sarcastic.*) Well, I doubt if you'll be able to manage all that. (*Doorbell. Smiles.*) A ring of the bell. You have a client!

POIROT: Unless the affair is one of national importance, I touch it not.

(*Mrs. Todd enters.*)

MRS. TODD: (*To Poirot.*) You're Monsieur Poirot? (*Sinks into a chair.*)

POIROT: I am Hercule Poirot, yes, madame.

MRS. TODD: (*Eyeing Poirot with some disfavor.*) You're not a bit like what I thought you'd be. Did you pay for the bit in the paper saying what a clever detective you are, or did they put it in themselves?

POIROT: (*Drawing himself up, insulted.*) Madame!

MRS. TODD: I'm sorry, but you know what these papers are like nowadays. You begin reading a nice article, "What a Bride Said to Her Plain, Unmarried Friend," and it's all about a product you buy to shampoo your hair with! Nothing but puff! But no offence taken, I hope? (*Poirot doesn't answer.*) I'll tell you what I want you to do for me: I want you to find my cook. (*Poirot stares at Mrs. Todd, speechless. Hastings smiles.*) Nowadays, servants get silly ideas in their heads and want to be typists and whatnots. I'd like to know what my servants have to complain of! An afternoon and evening off a week, alternate Sundays, washing put out, same food as we have, and never a bit of margarine in the house, nothing but the very best butter!

(*Poirot rises.*)

POIROT: (*Haughtily.*) I fear you are making a mistake, madame. I am not holding an inquiry into the conditions of domestic service. I am a private detective.

The Case of the Missing Cook

12

MRS. TODD: I know that. Didn't I tell you I wanted you to find my cook for me? Walked out of the house on Wednesday, without so much as a word to me, and never came back.

POIROT: I am sorry, madame, but I do not touch this particular kind of business. I wish you good morning.

MRS. TODD: (*Snorts with indignation.*) That's it, is it, my fine fellow? Too proud, eh? Only deal with government secrets and countesses' jewels? Let me tell you...a servant's every bit as important as a tiara to a woman in my position. We can't all be fine ladies going about in our motor cars with our diamonds and our pearls. A good cook's a good cook. And when you lose her, it's as much to you as pearls are to some fine lady.

(*Poirot chuckles and sits back in his chair.*)

POIROT: Madame, you are in the right, and I am in the wrong. Your remarks are just and intelligent. This case will be a novelty. Never yet have I hunted for a missing cook. (*Sarcastic.*) Truly here is the problem of national importance that I was demanding of Fate just before your arrival. (*Shoots Hastings a look.*) [En avant!] You say this jewel of a cook went out on Wednesday and did not return? That is the day before yesterday. [*or "Onward!"*]

MRS. TODD: Yes, it was her day out.

POIROT: Perhaps, madame, she has met with some accident. Have you inquired at any of the hospitals?

MRS. TODD: That's exactly what I thought yesterday, but this morning she sent for her belongings. And not so much as a note to me! If I'd been at home, I'd not have let it go, treating me like that! But I'd just stepped out to the butcher.

POIROT: Will you describe your cook to me?

MRS. TODD: She is middle-aged, stout, black hair turning grey...most respectable. She'd worked ten years at her last place. Eliza Dunn, her name is.

The Case of the Missing Cook

15

POIROT: And you had no disagreement with her on Wednesday?

MRS. TODD: None whatsoever. That's what makes it all so strange.

POIROT: How many servants do you keep, madame?

MRS. TODD: Two. The parlor maid, Annie, is a very nice girl...a bit forgetful and her head full of young men, but a good servant if you keep her up to her work.

POIROT: Did she and the cook get on well together?

MRS. TODD: They had their ups and downs, of course, but on the whole, very well.

POIROT: And the girl can throw no light on the mystery?

MRS. TODD: She says not, but you know how servants are...they all hang together.

POIROT: Well, well, we must look into this. Where did you say you resided, madame?

MRS. TODD: At Clapham...88 Prince Albert Road.

POIROT: [Bien], madame, I wish you good morning, and you may count upon seeing me at your residence during the course of the day. *(Mrs. Todd nods and exits. Looking at Hastings ruefully.)* Well, well, Hastings, this is a novel affair that we have here: "The Case of the Missing Cook"! Never, never, must our friend Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard hear of this! *(Poirot takes out a small mirror and looks at his mustache. Sighs.)* Regretfully, I must postpone grooming my moustache to another day. *(Looks up.)* We must set out for Clapham! [*or "good"*]

[END OF FREEVIEW]