



Heather Lynn

Adapted from the short story by Agatha Christie

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BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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The Case of the King of Clubs

MURDER-MYSTERY. Adapted from the short story by Agatha Christie. One evening, famed dancer Valerie Saintclair staggers into the Oglanders' drawing room with blood on her dress and manages to murmur, "Murder!" before collapsing. Later, police discover the dead body of Henry Reedburn in the mansion next door, and suspect Saintclair is the killer. To prove that his fiancée Valerie Saintclair is innocent, Prince Paul of Maurania hires famed detective Hercule Poirot to investigate. Don't miss one of the few Agatha Christie stories in which Poirot allows a murderer to go free!

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. "The King of Clubs" is a short story by Christie that was first published in *The Sketch* in March 1923 in the United Kingdom. Poirot later became one of Christie's most famous characters. 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

(5 M, 4 F, 2 flexible)

(With doubling: 5 M, 3 F, 2 flexible)

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

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

VALERIE (OGLANDER) SAINTCLAIR: A famous dancer who is suspected of murdering theatre impresario Henry Reedburn; secretly engaged to Prince Paul of Maurania; wears a scarlet dressing gown; female.

PRINCE PAUL OF MAURANIA: A foreign prince who seeks Poirot's help as he is concerned his fiancée, Valerie Saintclair, may be involved in Henry Reedburn's murder; described as a "strange-looking young man with the fiery eyes of a fanatic"; male.

JOHN OGLANDER, SR.: Married to Mrs. Oglander and lives next door to murder victim Henry Reedburn; male.

MRS. OGLANDER: Wife of John Oglander, Sr.; female.

MISS OGLANDER: Mr. and Mrs. Oglander's daughter; her hair is neatly arranged and wears a drab-colored sports coat and tweed skirt; female.

JOHN OGLANDER, JR.: Mr. and Mrs. Oglander's son; male.

DR. RYAN: The doctor who examines the body of murder victim, Henry Reedburn; flexible.

BUTLER/MAID: Mr. Reedburn's servant at Mon Désir; flexible.

MAID: Maid at Daisymead; female.

NOTE: The same actor may play Valerie Saintclair and Miss Oglander, if desired.

Setting

London, 1925.

Sets

Poirot's study. There is a fireplace, a window, three armchairs, and a coffee table.

Mon Désir, library. A magnificent room decorated with sumptuous armchairs and/or a settee and other furniture. There is a window SL and SR, each with curtains that can be pulled across. The SR window looks out on to the front carriage drive, and the SL window looks out on to the garden. There is an embrasure at each window where there is a carved marble window seat with the arms being fashioned in the form of a lion's head. The SR window seat has a blood smear on it and a similar blood stain on the floor in front of it. There are exits SR and SL. The door at SR leads to the terrace and joins the drive. The door at SL leads to a red brick wall and garden.

Daisymead, drawing room. An unpretentious house next door to Mon Désir. The drawing room is decorated with gimcrack ornaments and many family portraits of "surpassing ugliness" adorn the walls. At CS is a bridge table with chairs. There is a fireplace with ashes in the grate. Other furnishings by be added, if desired.

Daisymead, bedroom. There is a settee near the window and other bedroom furnishings may be added, if desired.

Synopsis of SCENES

Scene 1: Hercule Poirot's study.

Scene 2: Mon Désir, library.

Scene 3: Daisymead, drawing room, a short time later.

Scene 4: Daisymead, bedroom, immediately following.

Scene 5: Daisymead, drawing room.

Scene 6: Mon Désir, library, a short time later.

Scene 7: Poirot's study.

The Case of the King of Clubs

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Props

Newspaper

Large group portrait of a gentleman with whiskers, a lady with high hair, a plump boy, and two little girls with bows of ribbon in their hair.

Patent leather slippers

Deck of cards

Books

King of Clubs card

Coffee cup

Teacup

Sound Effect

Doorbell

*"Not only is truth
stranger than fiction...
it is more dramatic."*

—Hastings

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Hercule Poirot's study. Poirot and Hastings are seated. Having finished reading the newspaper, Hastings lays it on the floor next to his chair.)

HASTINGS: Truth is stranger than fiction! (*Slight pause. Poirot looks incensed.*) I guess my remark was not, perhaps, an original one.

(*Poirot carefully flicks an imaginary fleck of dust off his creased trousers.*)

POIROT: (*Sarcastic.*) How profound! What a thinker...my friend Hastings!

HASTINGS: I will not display any annoyance at your quite uncalled-for gibe. (*Taps the newspaper.*) You've read this morning's paper?

POIROT: I have. And after reading it, I folded it anew symmetrically. I did not cast it on the floor as you have done, with your so lamentable absence of order and method.

HASTINGS: Order and Method are your gods. You go so far as to attribute all your success to them. (*Indicating newspaper.*) Then you saw the account of the murder of Henry Reedburn? (*Poirot nods.*) It was that which prompted my remark. Consider that solid middle-class English family, the Oglanders. Father and mother, son and daughter...typical of thousands of families all over this country. The men and women of the family go to the city. Their lives are perfectly peaceful and utterly monotonous. Last night, they were sitting in their neat, suburban drawing room at Daisymead, Streatham, playing bridge. Suddenly, without any warning, the French door bursts open, and a woman staggers into the room. Her grey satin frock is marked with a crimson stain. She utters one word..."Murder!"...before she sinks to the ground. It is

possible that they recognize her from her pictures as Valerie Saintclair, the famous dancer who has lately taken London by storm.

POIROT: Is this your eloquence or that of "The Daily Newsmonger"?

HASTINGS: "The Daily Newsmonger" was in a hurry to go to press and contented itself with bare facts, but the dramatic possibilities of the story struck me at once.

POIROT: (*Nods.*) Wherever there is human nature, there is drama. But...it is not always just where you think it is. Remember that. Still, I, too, am interested in the case since it is likely that I shall be connected with it.

HASTINGS: Indeed?

POIROT: Yes. A gentleman rang me up this morning and made an appointment with me on behalf of Prince Paul of Maurania.

HASTINGS: But what has that have to do with the case?

POIROT: You do not read your pretty little English scandal papers? See here. (*Points to a paragraph in a newspaper story.*)

HASTINGS: (*From newspaper, reads.*) "...whether the foreign prince and the famous dancer are really engaged! And if the lady likes her new diamond ring!"

POIROT: And now to resume your dramatic narrative. Mademoiselle Saintclair had just fainted on the drawing room carpet at Daisymead...

HASTINGS: As a result of Mademoiselle's first murmured words when she came round, the two male Oglanders stepped out, one to fetch a doctor to attend to the lady, who was evidently suffering terribly from shock, and the other to the police station...whence after telling his story, he accompanied the police to Mon Désir, Mr. Reedburn's magnificent villa, which is situated at no great distance from Daisymead. There, they found Mr. Reedburn—who by the way, suffers from a somewhat unsavory reputation—lying in the library with the back of his head cracked open like an eggshell.

POIROT: (*Hears voices offstage.*) Ah, here is Monsieur le Prince!

(*Prince Paul of Maurania enters.*)

PRINCE PAUL: Monsieur Poirot? (*Poirot bows.*) Monsieur, I am in terrible trouble...greater than I can well express.

POIROT: I comprehend your anxiety. Mademoiselle Saintclair is a very dear friend, is she not?

PRINCE PAUL: I hope to make her my wife. I should not be the first of my family to make a morganatic marriage. My brother Alexander has also defied the Emperor. We are living now in more enlightened days, free from the old caste prejudice. Besides, Mademoiselle Saintclair, in actual fact, is quite my equal in rank. You have heard hints as to her history?

POIROT: There are many romantic stories of her origin, not an uncommon thing with famous dancers. I have heard that she is the daughter of an Irish charwoman as well as the story that makes her mother a Russian grand duchess.

PRINCE PAUL: The first story is, of course, nonsense. But the second is true. Valerie, though bound to secrecy, has let me guess as much. Besides, she proves it unconsciously in a thousand ways. I believe in heredity, Monsieur Poirot.

POIROT: I, too, believe in heredity. I have seen some strange things in connection with it. But to business, Monsieur le Prince. What do you want of me? What do you fear? I may speak freely, may I not? (*Prince Paul nods.*) Is there anything to connect Mademoiselle Saintclair with the crime? She knew Reedburn, of course?

PRINCE PAUL: Yes. He professed to be in love with her.

POIROT: And she?

PRINCE PAUL: She would have nothing to do with him.

POIROT: (*Looking at Prince Paul keenly.*) Had she any reason to fear him?

PRINCE PAUL: (*Hesitates.*) There was an incident. You know Zara, the clairvoyant?

POIROT: No.

PRINCE PAUL: She is wonderful. You should consult her some time. Valerie and I went to see her last week. She read the cards for us. She spoke to Valerie of trouble...of gathering clouds. Then she turned up the last card—the covering card—they call it. It was the king of clubs. She said to Valerie, “Beware. There is a man who holds you in his power. You fear him. You are in great danger. Do you know of whom I refer?” Valerie went white. She nodded and said, “Yes, yes, I know.” Shortly afterward, we left. Zara’s last words to Valerie were, “Beware of the king of clubs. Danger threatens you!” I questioned Valerie. She would tell me nothing...assured me that all was well. But now, after last night, I am more sure than ever that in the king of clubs Valerie saw Reedburn and that he was the man she feared. (*Slight pause.*) Now you understand my agitation when I opened the paper this morning. Supposing Valerie, in a fit of madness— (*Stops himself.*) Oh, it is impossible!

(*Poirot kindly pats Prince Paul on the shoulder.*)

POIROT: Do not distress yourself, I beg of you. Leave it in my hands.

PRINCE PAUL: You will go to Streatham? I gather she is still there...at Daisymead prostrated by the shock.

POIROT: I will go at once.

PRINCE PAUL: I have arranged matters through the embassy. You will be allowed access everywhere.

POIROT: Then we will depart. Hastings, you will accompany me? (*Hastings nods.*) [Au revoir], Monsieur le Prince. [*Or “Goodbye”*]

(*They exit. Blackout.*)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: *Mon Désir*, library. Butler ushers Poirot and Hastings into the library, the scene of the murder.)

BUTLER: (*To Poirot.*) It was in the recess near the window looking out on to the garden that the body had lain. The body has been removed, the police having concluded their examination.

HASTINGS: (*To Poirot.*) That is annoying. Who knows what clues they may have destroyed.

POIROT: (*Smiles.*) How often must I tell you that clues come from within?! In the little grey cells of the brain lies the solution to every mystery. (*To Butler.*) I suppose, except for the removal of the body, the room has not been touched?

BUTLER: No, sir. It's just as it was when the police came up last night.

POIROT: These curtains... (*Points to curtains.*) ...I see they pull right across the window recess. They are the same in the other window. Were they drawn last night?

BUTLER: Yes, sir, I draw them every night.

POIROT: Then Reedburn must have drawn them back himself?

BUTLER: I suppose so, sir.

POIROT: Did you know your master expected a visitor last night?

BUTLER: He did not say so, sir, but he gave orders he was not to be disturbed after dinner. You see, sir, there is a door leading out of the library onto the terrace at the side of the house. He could have admitted anyone that way.

POIROT: Was he in the habit of doing that?

BUTLER: (*Coughs discreetly.*) I believe so, sir.

(*Poirot approaches the SR French door in question. It is unlocked. He steps through it to the terrace, which joins the drive SR. Note:*

Poirot may exit offstage, if desired. If so, the next line is heard offstage.)

POIROT: What about the other door?

BUTLER: The fruit garden, sir. There is a door leading to it farther along, but it is always locked at six o'clock.

(Poirot nods and re-enters the library.)

POIROT: Did you hear nothing during last night's events?

BUTLER: Well, sir, we heard voices in the library, a little before nine. But that wasn't unusual, especially being a lady's voice. But, of course, once we were all in the servants' hall, we didn't hear anything at all. And then, about eleven o'clock, the police came.

POIROT: How many voices did you hear?

BUTLER: I couldn't say, sir. I only noticed the lady's.

POIROT: Ah, I—

BUTLER: I beg pardon, sir, but Dr. Ryan is still in the house, if you would care to see him.

POIROT: Yes, please send him in.

(Butler exits and re-enters with the Dr. Ryan. Butler exits.)

DR. RYAN: Monsieur Poirot, I presume? *(Poirot nods and gestures for him to sit.)* I will give you all the information you require.

POIROT: Proceed...

DR. RYAN: Reedburn had been lying near the window, his head by the marble window seat. There were two wounds, one between the eyes, and the other—the fatal one—on the back of his head.

POIROT: He was lying on his back?

DR. RYAN: Yes. There is a mark. *(Points to a small dark stain on the floor.)*

POIROT: Could not the blow on the back of the head have been caused by him striking the floor?

DR. RYAN: Impossible. Whatever the weapon was, it penetrated some distance into the skull.

(Poirot goes to inspect the embrasure of each window, where there is a carved marble seat, the arms being fashioned in the form of a lion's head.)

POIROT: Supposing he had fallen backward on this projecting lion's head and slipped from there to the ground. Would that not cause a wound such as you describe?

DR. RYAN: Yes, it would. But the angle at which he was lying makes that theory impossible. And, besides, there would be traces of blood on the marble of the seat.

POIROT: Unless they were washed away?

DR. RYAN: *(Shrugs.)* That is hardly likely. It would be to no one's advantage to give an accident the appearance of murder.

POIROT: Quite so. Could either of the blows have been struck by a woman?

DR. RYAN: Oh, quite out of the question, I should say. You are thinking of Mademoiselle Saintclair, I suppose?

POIROT: I think of no one in particular until I am sure.

DR. RYAN: *(Indicating the open French door.)* It is through here that Mademoiselle Saintclair fled. *(Points.)* You can just catch a glimpse of Daisymead between the trees. Of course, there are many houses nearer to the front of the house on the road, but as it happens, Daisymead, though some distance away, is the only house visible on this side.

POIROT: Thank you for your amiability, Doctor. Come, Hastings, we will follow the footsteps of Mademoiselle.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(AT RISE: *Daisymead, drawing room, a short time later. Hastings and Poirot look around the room as they await the arrival of Miss Oglander.*)

HASTINGS: *(To Poirot.)* The room has evidently not been touched since the night before. The ashes are still in the fireplace grate, and the bridge table is still in the centre of the room with a dummy exposed and the hands thrown down. This place is somewhat overloaded with gimcrack ornaments...a good many family portraits of surpassing ugliness adorn the walls.

(Poirot gazes at the portraits and straightens two that are hanging a bit askew.)

POIROT: [La famille], it is a strong tie, is it not? *(Looking at a family portrait.)* Sentiment...it takes the place of beauty. [Or "Family"]

HASTINGS: Agreed. *(Looking closely at a family group portrait comprising a gentleman with whiskers, a lady with a high hair, a plump boy, and two little girls with bows of ribbon in their hair.)* I take this to be the Oglander family in earlier days.

(Miss Oglander enters and looks at Poirot and Hastings inquiringly. Poirot steps forward.)

POIROT: Miss Oglander? *(Miss Oglander nods.)* I regret to impose upon you, especially after all you have been through. The whole affair must have been most disturbing.

MISS OGLANDER: *(Cautiously.)* It has been rather upsetting. I must apologize for the state this room is in. Servants get so foolishly excited.

POIROT: It was here that you were sitting last night?

MISS OGLANDER: Yes, we were playing bridge after supper, when—

POIROT: Excuse me, how long had you been playing?

MISS OGLANDER: Well...I really can't say. I suppose it must have been about ten o'clock.

POIROT: And you yourself were sitting...where?

MISS OGLANDER: Facing the window. I was playing with my mother. Suddenly, without any warning, the door burst open, and Miss Saintclair staggered into the room.

POIROT: You recognized her?

MISS OGLANDER: Her face looked familiar.

POIROT: She is still here, is she not?

MISS OGLANDER: Yes, but she refuses to see anyone. She is still quite distressed.

POIROT: I am confident she will see me. Will you tell her that I am here at the express request of Prince Paul of Maurania?

(Miss Oglander nods and exits. Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(AT RISE: *Daisymead, bedroom, immediately following. On a settee by the window, Valerie Saintclair is lounging and turns her head as Poirot and Hastings enter. Her eyes fasten on Poirot.*)

VALERIE: *(To Poirot, languidly.)* Paul sent you?

POIROT: Yes, mademoiselle. I am here to serve him...and you.

VALERIE: What do you want to know?

POIROT: Everything that happened last night...everything.

VALERIE: *(With a weary smile.)* Do you think I would lie? I am not stupid. I see well enough that there can be no concealment. He held a secret of mine...that man who is dead. He threatened me with it! For Paul's sake, I endeavored to make terms with him. I could not risk losing Paul. Now that he is dead, I am safe. But I did not kill him.

POIROT: *(Shakes his head, with a smile.)* It is not necessary to tell me that, mademoiselle. Now, recount to me what happened last night.

VALERIE: I offered him money. He appeared to be willing to deal with me. He said last night at nine o'clock I was to go to Mon Désir. I knew the place. I had been there before. I was to go round to the side door into the library so that the servants would not see me.

POIROT: Excuse me, mademoiselle, but were you not afraid to trust yourself alone there at night?

(Slight pause.)

VALERIE: Perhaps I was. But, you see, there was no one I could ask to go with me. And I was desperate. Reedburn admitted me to the library. Oh, that man! I am glad he is dead! He played with me...as a cat does with a mouse. He taunted me. I begged him on my knees! I offered him every

jewel I have. All in vain! Then he named his own terms. Perhaps you can guess what they were. I refused. I told him what I thought of him. I shouted at him. He remained calm, smiling. And then, as I fell to silence at last, there was a sound from behind the curtain in the window. He heard it, too. He strode to the curtains and flung them apart. There was a man hiding...a dreadful-looking man, a hobo! He struck at Mr. Reedburn and then he struck again! Mr. Reedburn went down. The hobo grabbed at me with his bloodstained hand. I tore myself free, slipped through the window, and ran for my life. I saw the lights of this house and ran toward them. The blinds were up, and I saw some people playing bridge. I almost fell into the room. I just managed to gasp "Murder!" and then everything went black.

POIROT: Thank you, mademoiselle. It must have been a great shock to your nervous system. As for this "hobo," could you describe him? Do you remember what he was wearing?

VALERIE: No...it was all so quick. But I would know the man anywhere. His face is burnt into my brain.

POIROT: Just one more question, mademoiselle...the curtains of the other window, the one looking out on the drive, were they drawn? *(Valerie looks puzzled as she tries to remember.)*
[Eh bien], mademoiselle? *[or "well"]*

VALERIE: I think—I am almost sure—yes, quite sure! They were not drawn.

POIROT: That is curious since the other ones were. No matter. It is, I daresay, of no great importance. You are remaining here long, mademoiselle?

VALERIE: The doctor thinks I shall be fit to return to town tomorrow. *(Lowers voice.)* These people, they are very kind, but they are not of my world. I shock them! And to me... *(With faint bitterness.)* ...well, I am not fond of the bourgeoisie.

POIROT: *(Nods.)* I understand. I hope I have not fatigued you unduly with my questions.

VALERIE: Not at all, monsieur. I am only too anxious for Paul to know all as soon as possible.

POIROT: Then I will wish you good day, mademoiselle. *(Poirot and Hastings start to exit. Poirot stops when he spies a pair of patent leather slippers. Indicating slippers.)* Yours, mademoiselle?

VALERIE: Yes, monsieur. They have just been cleaned and brought up.

POIROT: Ah.

(Poirot and Hastings exit. Lights down on the scene. Spotlight up on Poirot and Hastings, who are standing off to one side.)

POIROT: *(To Hastings.)* Ah, it seems that the domestics are quite eager to clean shoes, though they forget the fireplace grate. Well, [mon ami], at first there appeared to be one or two points of interest, but I fear—I very much fear—that we must regard the case as finished. It all seems straightforward enough. *[or “my friend”]*

HASTINGS: And the murderer?

POIROT: *(Grandiloquently.)* Hercule Poirot does not hunt down hobos!

[END OF FREEVIEW]