



Heather Lynn

Adapted from the story by Agatha Christie

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The Plymouth Express Murder

MURDER-MYSTERY. Adapted from the short story by Agatha Christie. A wealthy American steel magnate hires famed detective Hercule Poirot to hunt down the killer of his daughter, Flossie, who was murdered on a train while on her way to a ball in Plymouth. A passenger finds Flossie's body stuffed underneath a seat in a train compartment, and police discover Flossie's jewels have been stolen. The only suspect is a mysterious gentleman who had been spotted earlier in Flossie's train compartment by her maid. While Inspector Japp scours the train line for clues, Poirot stays put and focuses on the psychology of the crime. There are plenty of twists and turns and even a red herring in this classic Christie mystery, which served as the basis for Christie's novel, *The Mystery of the Blue Train*.

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.



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 eccentric Belgian detective Hercule Poirot. "The Plymouth Express Affair" was first published in *The Sketch* in April 1923 in the United Kingdom and in the U.S. in *The Blue Book Magazine* in January 1924. The story was expanded five years later into the novel, *The Mystery of the Blue Train*. 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, 1 flexible)

(With doubling: 4 M, 2 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.

INSPECTOR JAPP: Scotland Yard detective and an old friend of Poirot's; male.

MR. EBENEZER HALLIDAY: A wealthy industrialist known as "the steel king of America" whose daughter, Flossie, was found murdered on a train; described as "a large, stout man with piercing eyes and an aggressive chin"; male.

JANE MASON (aka GRACIE KIDD): Maid to Flossie Halliday Carrington; the accomplice of notorious jewel thief Red Narky; described as "a respectable, hard-featured woman, as emotionless in the face of tragedy as only a good servant can be"; female.

ALICE SIMPSON: Passenger on the Plymouth Express who discovers Flossie's body; female.

PORTER: Train porter; flexible.

MAID: Mr. Halliday's maid; nonspeaking; female.

Options for Doubling

ALICE SIMPSON/MAID (female)

PORTER/INSPECTOR JAPP (male)

Setting

London, 1925.

Sets

First-class compartment on the Plymouth Express train. The train compartment has two rows of seats facing each other and a window.

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

Mr. Halliday's mansion, library. Richly decorated with assorted furnishings. There are three armchairs and/or a settee, a small desk, a wastepaper basket, and a room rug.

Mr. Halliday's mansion, bedroom. There is a working door and miscellaneous bedroom furniture.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: First-class compartment of the Plymouth Express train.

Scene 2: Hercule Poirot's study.

Scene 3: Mr. Halliday's library, a short time later.

Scene 4: Poirot's study, the following morning.

Scene 5: Mr. Halliday's mansion, a bedroom.

Props

Large trunk
Small suitcase
Papers and magazines
Money for tip
Newspaper
Inkstand
Hand bell (or can be sound effect)
Pin
Wastepaper basket
Garment brush
Galoshes, for Poirot
Hat, for Poirot
Letter
Croissant
Coffee cup
Teacup
Black trunk with labels on it and a lock
Small twist of wire
Assorted clothing
Bright blue coat and skirt
Small hat of white fox fur
Handcuffs

Special Effects

Sound of train doors banging shut

Loudspeaker: "Plymouth only. Change for Torquay.

Plymouth next stop."

Train whistle

Sound of train leaving the station

Sound of train coming to a stop

Knock at the door

Approaching footsteps

*"Inspector Japp is the younger generation
knocking on the door.
And they are so busy knocking,
that they do not notice
that the door is open!"*

—Hercule Poirot

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Carrying a small suitcase, Alice Simpson enters a first-class compartment of the Plymouth Express train. A Porter follows her, carrying a heavy trunk. The Porter is about to swing the trunk up to the rack, but Alice stops him.)

ALICE: (To Porter.) No, leave it on the seat. Here you are.

(Alice hands the Porter a generous tip.)

PORTER: Thank you, madam.

(Porter exits. The sound of doors banging shut is heard. Heard over the loudspeaker: "Plymouth only. Change for Torquay. Plymouth next stop." Train whistle. Sound of the train leaving the station. Alice has the train compartment to herself. Chilly, she closes window. She sniffs the air and frowns.)

ALICE: What a smell! It reminds me of when I was in the hospital. (Sniffs the air again. Realizes.) Yes, chloroform. That's it! (Opens the window and moves to another seat. She sits, looking out the window. She opens a smaller suitcase, takes out some papers and magazines, and closes the suitcase. She goes to shove her suitcase under the opposite seat but without success. She shoves harder with rising impatience, but it is still stuck out halfway into the carriage.) Why the devil won't it go in?

(Alice pulls the suitcase out completely, stoops down, and peers under the seat. She screams and repeatedly jerks the train's communication cord. The sound of the train coming to a halt is heard. Blackout.)

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Scene 2

(AT RISE: *Hercule Poirot's study. Poirot is drinking coffee. Hastings is drinking tea. There is a newspaper on the coffee table.*)

POIROT: [Mon ami], You have, I know, been deeply interested in this mystery of the Plymouth Express. Read this... [or "my friend"]

(*Poirot flicks a letter across the table to Hastings. Hastings picks up the letter.*)

HASTINGS: (*Reads.*) "Dear Sir: I shall be obliged if you will call upon me at your earliest convenience. Yours faithfully, Ebenezer Halliday." (*Looks at Poirot, inquiringly.*) The connection is not clear to my mind.

(*Poirot picks up the newspaper.*)

POIROT: (*Reads.*) "A sensational discovery was made last night. A young woman returning to Plymouth found under the seat of her compartment, the body of a woman, stabbed through the heart. The young woman at once pulled the communication cord, and the train was brought to a standstill. The victim, who was about 30 years of age, and richly dressed, has not yet been identified." And later we have this. (*Reads.*) "The woman found dead in the Plymouth Express has been identified as the Honorable Mrs. Rupert Carrington." You see now, my friend? Or if you do not, I will add this: Mrs. Rupert Carrington was, before her marriage, Flossie Halliday, daughter of old man Halliday, the "steel king of America."

HASTINGS: And he has sent for you? Splendid!

POIROT: I did him a little service in the past. And, once, when I was in Paris for a royal visit, I had Mademoiselle Flossie pointed out to me. She nearly made a bad decision.

HASTINGS: What do you mean?

POIROT: A certain Count de la Rochefour. "A bad hat," as you would say. An adventurer, pure and simple, who knew how to appeal to a romantic young woman. Luckily, her father got wind of it in time. He took her back to America in haste. I heard of her marriage some years later, but I know nothing of her husband.

HASTINGS: Well, the Honorable Rupert Carrington is no beauty, by all accounts, either. He had pretty well run through his own money, and I would imagine old man Halliday's dollars came along in the nick of time. I would say that for a good-looking, well-mannered, utterly unscrupulous young scoundrel, it would be hard to find his match!

POIROT: Ah, the poor little lady!

HASTINGS: I fancy he made it obvious at once that it was her money, and not she, that had attracted him. I believe they drifted apart almost at once. I have heard rumors lately that there was to be a definite legal separation.

POIROT: Old man Halliday is no fool. He would tie up her money pretty tight.

HASTINGS: I daresay. Anyway, I know as a fact that the Honorable Rupert is said to be extremely hard up.

POIROT: Aha! I wonder...

HASTINGS: You wonder what?

POIROT: My good friend, do not jump down my throat like that. You are interested, I see. Suppose you accompany me to see Mr. Halliday? (*Hastings nods.*) There is a taxi stand at the corner. Let us be off.

[END OF FREEVIEW]