



**Heather Lynn**

Adapted from the story by Agatha Christie

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**BIG DOG PUBLISHING**

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## *The Kidnapping at Waverly Court*

**MYSTERY.** Adapted from the short story by Agatha Christie. Country Squire Marcus Waverly and his wife receive a mysterious note from a kidnapper who threatens to abduct their three-year-old son if they don't pay a large ransom. Oddly, the note states the exact day and time the abduction will take place. At the appointed time, Mr. Waverly, his young son, and a Scotland Yard inspector are locked in a room with police posted outside. When nothing happens, they emerge from the locked room only to discover the boy has suddenly vanished. Desperate to find their missing son, the Waverlys hire famed detective Hercule Poirot to investigate. Poirot asks, why did the kidnapper warn the family beforehand? Why not simply kidnap the boy and hold him for ransom? Suspects include the child's nanny, Mr. Waverly's devoted butler, and Mrs. Waverly's trusted secretary. Audiences will enjoy this ingenious locked-room mystery.

**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 Adventure of Johnnie Waverly" was first published in *The Sketch* in 1923 in the United Kingdom and in *The Blue Book Magazine* in the United States in 1925. 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; speaks with a French accent (opt.); has a mustache; male.

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

**MR. MARCUS WAVERLY:** A country squire whose three-year-old son, Johnnie, has been kidnapped and is being held for ransom; described as a "big, florid, jovial-looking man"; male.

**MRS. ADA WAVERLY:** Marcus Waverly's wealthy wife and Johnnie's mother; the daughter of a wealthy steel manufacturer, she controls most of the money in the family and is inclined to be tight-fisted; female.

**MISS JESSIE WITHERS:** Johnnie Waverly's nurse/governess; described as a "capable, pleasant-faced woman"; female.

**MISS COLLINS:** Mrs. Waverly's companion and secretary, who has worked for the family for just over a year; described as "brisk and alert in manner"; wears pince-nez glasses; female.

**TREDWELL:** Mr. Waverly's devoted butler who was born on the estate and has served the family his entire life; dignified in manner; male.

## *Setting*

London and Waverly Court, Surrey, 1925.

## *Sets*

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

**Jessie Withers home, sitting room.** There are two armchairs and a settee. Additional furnishings may be added, if desired.

**Waverly Court, drawing room.** A richly decorated room. There are three armchairs. There is a button on the wall that opens a wall panel, which slides aside to reveal a small secret chamber. Other assorted furnishings may be added, if desired.

## *Synopsis of Scenes*

**Scene 1:** Hercule Poirot's study.

**Scene 2:** Home of Jessie Withers, a short time later.

**Scene 3:** Waverly Court, later that day.

*The Kidnapping at Waverly Court*

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*Props*

Notes from kidnapper  
Tie pin, for Hastings  
Blank sheet of paper

*Special Effects*

Bell (to summon butler)

A wall panel that slides open to reveal a small secret chamber



*“Always sweep in the corners!”*

*—Hercule Poirot*

*Scene 1*

(AT RISE: *Hercule Poirot's study. Arthur Hastings and Hercule Poirot are seated. The Waverlys are discussing their case with Poirot. Mr. Waverly is standing with his legs straddled wide apart. Mrs. Waverly's emotion is obviously genuine, though she has a shrewd, rather hard countenance.*)

MRS. WAVERLY: (To Poirot.) You can understand the feelings of a mother...

POIROT: But, yes. I comprehend perfectly. Have faith in Papa Poirot.

MR. WAVERLY: The police—

MRS. WAVERLY: (With a wave of her hand.) I won't have anything more to do with the police! We trusted them, and look what happened! But I've heard so much about Monsieur Poirot and the wonderful things he's done, that I feel he might possibly be able to help us. A mother's feelings—

MR. WAVERLY: I suppose you know all about this business, Monsieur Poirot?

POIROT: The main facts I know, of course.

HASTINGS: Yes, for some days now, the papers have been full of "the sensational kidnapping of little Johnnie Waverly, the three-year-old son and heir of Marcus Waverly, Esquire, of Waverly Court, Surrey, one of the oldest families in England—"

(Annoyed, Poirot waves his hand and shoots Hastings a sharp look.)

POIROT: (To Mr. Waverly.) But please recount to me the whole story, monsieur, I beg of you. And in detail, if you please.

MR. WAVERLY: Well, I suppose the beginning of the whole thing was about ten days ago when I got an anonymous

letter that I couldn't make head nor tail of. The writer had the impudence to demand that I should pay him 25,000 pounds...25,000 pounds, Monsieur Poirot! Failing the agreement, he threatened to kidnap Johnnie. Of course, I threw the thing into the wastepaper basket without more ado. Thought it was some silly joke.

POIROT: You received a second letter?

MR. WAVERLY: Yes. Five days later, I received a letter that said, "Unless you pay, your son will be kidnapped on the 29th." That was on the 27th. Ada was worried, but I couldn't bring myself to treat the matter seriously. We're in England! Nobody goes about kidnapping children and holding them for ransom!

POIROT: It is not a common practice, certainly. Proceed, monsieur.

MR. WAVERLY: Well, Ada gave me no peace. So feeling a bit of a fool, I laid the matter before Scotland Yard. They didn't seem to take the thing very seriously...inclined to my view that it was some silly joke. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, I got a third letter.

POIROT: What did it say?

MR. WAVERLY: (*Takes out the letter, reads.*) "You have not paid. Your son will be taken from you at twelve o'clock noon tomorrow, the 29th. It will cost you 50,000 pounds to recover him." Up I drove to Scotland Yard again.

POIROT: What was their impression?

MR. WAVERLY: This time they were more concerned. They thought that the letters were written by a lunatic, and that in all probability, an attempt of some kind would be made at the hour stated. They assured me that they would take all due precautions. Inspector McNeil and a sufficient force would come down to Waverly on the morrow and take charge. I went home much relieved.

POIROT: What happened then?

MR. WAVERLY: We had the feeling of being in a state of siege. I gave orders that no stranger was to be admitted and that no one was to leave the house. The evening passed off

without any untoward incident, but on the following morning, my wife became seriously unwell. (*Mrs. Waverly nods.*) Alarmed by her condition, I sent for Dr. Dakers.

MRS. WAVERLY: (*To Poirot.*) My symptoms appeared to puzzle Dr. Dakers. While hesitating to suggest that I had been poisoned, I could see that was what was in his mind. There was no danger, he assured me, but it would be a day or two before I would be able to get about again.

MR. WAVERLY: (*To Poirot, continuing.*) Anyway, returning to my own room, I was startled and amazed to find a note pinned to my pillow. It was in the same handwriting as the others and contained just three words: "At twelve o'clock." I admit, Monsieur Poirot, that I saw red! Someone in the house was in on this...one of the servants. But they never spilt the beans on each other. However, Miss Collins, my wife's companion, informed me that she had seen Johnnie's governess slip down the drive early that morning.

POIROT: What did the governess say?

MR. WAVERLY: I taxed her with it, and she broke down. She had left the child with the nursery maid and stolen out to meet a friend of hers...a man! Pretty goings on! She denied having pinned the note to my pillow. She may have been speaking the truth, I don't know. I felt I couldn't take the risk of the child's own governess being in the plot. One of the servants was implicated...of that I was sure! Finally, I lost my temper and sacked all the servants, governess and all. Send the whole lot packing, that was my idea. I gave them an hour to pack their trunks and get out of the house.

POIROT: Was not that a little injudicious, monsieur? For all you know, you might have been playing into the enemy's hands.

MR. WAVERLY: (*Stares at him.*) I don't see how that could be. I wired London for a fresh lot of servants to be sent down that evening. In the meantime, there'd be only people I could trust in the house: my wife's secretary, Miss Collins,

and Tredwell, the butler, who has been with me since I was a boy.

POIROT: *(To Mrs. Waverly.)* And this Miss Collins...how long has she been with you?

MRS. WAVERLY: Just a year. She has been invaluable to me as a secretary and a companion and is also a very efficient housekeeper.

POIROT: And the governess?

MRS. WAVERLY: She has been with us six months. She came to me with excellent references. All the same, I never really liked her, although Johnnie was quite devoted to her.

POIROT: Still, I gather she had already left when the catastrophe occurred.

MRS. WAVERLY: Yes, you are quite right.

POIROT: Perhaps, Monsieur Waverly, you will be so kind as to continue.

MR. WAVERLY: Well, Inspector McNeil arrived about 10:30. The servants had all left by then. He declared himself quite satisfied with the internal arrangements. He had various men posted on the grounds guarding all the approaches to the house, and he assured me that if the whole thing turns out not to be a hoax, we would undoubtedly catch my mysterious correspondent.

POIROT: Where was Johnnie?

MR. WAVERLY: I had Johnnie with me, and he and I and the inspector went together into the room we call the "council chamber." The inspector locked the door. There is a big grandfather clock there, and as the hands drew near to twelve—I don't mind confessing that I was as nervous as a cat—there was a whirring sound, and the clock began to strike. I clutched Johnnie close. I had a feeling a man might drop from the skies. The last stroke sounded, and as it did so, there was a great commotion outside...shouting and running. The inspector flung up the window, and a constable came running up, "We've got him sir! He was sneaking up through the bushes!"

POIROT: What did you do then?

MR. WAVERLY: We hurried out onto the terrace, where two constables were holding a ruffian in shabby clothes, who was twisting and turning in a vain endeavor to escape. One of the policemen held out an unrolled parcel that they had wrested from him.

POIROT: What was inside the parcel?

MR. WAVERLY: It contained a pad of cotton wool and a bottle of chloroform. It made my blood boil to see it! There was a note, too, addressed to me. I tore it open. It bore the following words, "You should have paid up. To recover your son will now cost you 50,000 pounds. In spite of all your precautions, he has been abducted on the 29th as I said." I let out a great laugh—the laugh of relief—but as I did so, I heard the hum of a motorcar and a shout. I turned my head. Racing down the drive toward the south lodge at a furious speed was a low, long grey car. It was the man who drove it who shouted, but that was not what gave me a shock of horror. It was the sight of Johnnie's flaxen curls. The child was in the car beside him! The inspector shouted, "The child was here not a minute ago!"

POIROT: Who was there when he said this?

MR. WAVERLY: We were all there: myself, Tredwell, and Miss Collins.

POIROT: When did you last see Johnnie?

MR. WAVERLY: I cast my mind back, trying to remember. (*Thinks.*) When the constable called us, I ran out with the inspector, forgetting all about Johnnie. And then there came a sound that startled us, the chiming of a church clock from the village. With an exclamation, the inspector pulled out his watch. It was exactly twelve o'clock. With one common accord, we ran to the council chamber. The clock there marked the hour as ten minutes past. Someone must have deliberately tampered with the clock, for I have never known it to gain or lose time before. It is a perfect timekeeper.

*(Mr. Waverly pauses.)*

POIROT: *(Looks down at the floor.)* Ah, but the rug is askew. *(Straightens the rug, which Mr. Waverly had pushed askew with his feet.)* Ah, much better. A pleasing little problem, obscure and charming. I will investigate it for you with pleasure. Truly it was [planned a merveille]. [*or "a planned spectacle"*]

*(Mrs. Waverly looks at Poirot reproachfully.)*

MRS. WAVERLY: *(Wails.)* But my boy!

POIROT: *(With sympathy.)* He is safe, madame. He is unharmed. Rest assured, these miscreants will take the greatest care of him. Is he not to them the turkey—  
*(Realizes.)* No, the goose that lays the golden eggs?

MRS. WAVERLY: Monsieur Poirot, I'm sure there's only one thing to be done: pay up. I was all against it at first, but now! A mother's feelings—

POIROT: *(Hastily.)* But we have interrupted monsieur in his history. *(To Mr. Waverly.)* Proceed.

MR. WAVERLY: I expect you know the rest pretty well from the papers. *(Hastings nods enthusiastically. Poirot shoots him an annoyed look.)* Of course, Inspector McNeil got on the telephone immediately. A description of the car and the man was circulated all round, and it looked at first as though everything was going to turn out all right. A car—answering to the description with a man and a small boy—had passed through various villages, apparently headed to London. At one place, they stopped and it was noticed that the child was crying and obviously afraid of his companion. When Inspector McNeil announced that the car had been stopped and the man and boy detained, I was relieved. But you know the sequel.

HASTINGS: The boy was not Johnnie.

**[END OF FREEVIEW]**