

AGATHA
CHRISTIE'S



*The
Disappearance
of the
Western
Star*

Heather Lynn

Adapted from the story by Agatha Christie

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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The Disappearance of the Western Star

MYSTERY. Adapted from the story by Agatha Christie. American film star Mary Marvell has received three threatening letters warning that her diamond, the “Western Star,” will be stolen on “the night of the full moon.” Concerned, she consults detective Hercule Poirot but stubbornly ignores his advice to hand over the diamond for safekeeping because she wants to wear the diamond when she visits Lady Yardly, who owns a similar diamond known as the “Star of the East.” At the Yardlys’ estate, Lady Yardly is attacked by an intruder and the “Star of the East” diamond is ripped from her neck. The next day, Miss Marvel’s “Western Star” diamond is stolen from her hotel room. It is up to Poirot to find the diamonds and return them to their rightful owners, but to do so, he must create a ruse clever enough to bring things to a head. However, in doing so, things come to a head between Poirot and his good friend Arthur Hastings, who declares he is fed up with Poirot making a fool of him.

Performance Time: Approximately 30-40 minutes.

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

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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. Poirot later became one of Christie's most famous characters. Christie's short story "The Adventure of the Western Star" was first published in *The Sketch* in April 1923 in the United Kingdom and in *The Blue Book Magazine* in February 1924 in the United States. 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, 3 F, 2 flexible)

(With doubling: 5 M, 3 F)

HERCULE POIROT: Eccentric Belgian private detective famed for his ability to solve mysteries; dresses impeccably and has a trademark mustache of which he takes great pride; speaks with a French accent (opt.); male.

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

MISS MARVELL: American film star and owner of the "Western Star" diamond; described as "small and slender, very fair and girlish-looking, with the wide innocent blue eyes of a child"; richly dressed in a gown with a long chain with a large white diamond set in platinum, a fashionable hat, and furs; female.

GREGORY B. ROLF: An American film star; married to Mary Marvell; described as "a splendid-looking man from his crisply curling black head, to the tips of his patent-leather boots, he was a hero fit for romance"; male.

LORD YARDLY: Owner of Yardly Chase, a country estate; has gone into debt and is considering selling the family diamond, the "Star of the East"; described as "a cheery, loud-voiced sportsman with a rather red face, but with a good-humored bonhomie about him that was distinctly attractive and made up for any lack of mentality"; male.

LADY YARDLY: Lord Yardly's wife; described as "tall, dark, with flashing eyes, and a pale proud face, yet something wistful in the curves of the mouth"; wears a long white shimmering dress and a long thin chain with a large white diamond set in platinum; female.

BUTLER: Lord Yardly's butler at Yardly Chase; male.

DETECTIVE: Scotland Yard detective; flexible.

CLERK: Hotel clerk at the Magnificent Hotel; flexible.

MRS. MURCHISON: Poirot's landlady; female.

Options for Doubling

MRS. MURCHISON/CLERK (flexible)

BUTLER/DETECTIVE (flexible)

Setting

London, 1925.

Sets

Poirot's study. There are two armchairs near a coffee table.

The room has a fireplace and a window with an armchair near it. There is a small table on one side of the room. Along a wall is a bookcase with assorted books including an almanac and one volume with "Peerage" written on it. The books are arranged on the bookshelf in an orderly and methodical way with the tallest books on the top shelf, the next tallest on the row beneath, and so on.

Yardly Chase, drawing room. An old paneled hall with a fireplace. There is a small side door in the angle of a wall.

Magnificent Hotel, manager's office. There is a desk with 3-4 office chairs. A backdrop may be used if desired.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Hercule Poirot's study.

Scene 2: Hercule Poirot's study, the next day.

Scene 3: Yardly Chase, drawing room, 5:30 p.m.

Scene 4: Yardly Chase, drawing room, 30 minutes later.

Scene 5: Hercule Poirot's study, the next morning.

Scene 6: Magnificent Hotel, a short time later.

Scene 7: Hercule Poirot's study, 4 p.m.

Props

Letters
Handbag/purse, for Miss Marvell
3 Envelopes
Almanac
Book with "Peerage" on the cover
Long thin chain with a large white stone, for Miss Marvel
Tabloid newspaper
Telegram
Silver tray
Long white shimmering gown, for Lady Yardly
Long thin chain with a large white stone missing, for Lady
Yardly
Teacup

Special Effects

Doorbell
Tapping at the door
"Blazing fire" in fireplace (lighting effect)
Gong sounding
Door banging shut
Scream
Red mark on Lady Yardly's throat where the necklace has
been wrenched off
Piece of embroidered silk
Telephone ringing
Sound of a door slamming shut

*I'm fed up!
You have made
an absolute laughingstock of me.
You encouraged me
to make a perfect fool of myself!"*

—Arthur Hastings

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Scene 1

(AT RISE: *Hercule Poirot's study. Poirot is comfortably seated in the depths of an armchair. Arthur Hastings is standing at the window, looking out idly on the street below.*)

HASTINGS: That's odd.

POIROT: (*Placidly.*) What is, [mon ami]? [*or "my friend"*]

HASTINGS: Deduce, Poirot, from the following facts. Here is a young lady...richly dressed, fashionable hat, magnificent furs. She is coming along slowly, looking up at the houses as she goes. Unknown to her, she is being shadowed by three men and a middle-aged woman. They have just been joined by an errand boy, who points after the young woman, gesticulating as he does so. What drama is being played out? Is the young woman a crook, and are the shadowers detectives preparing to arrest her? Or are they the scoundrels, and are they plotting to attack an innocent victim? What does the great detective say?

POIROT: The great detective, [mon ami], chooses, as ever, the simplest course. He rises to see for himself. (*Joins Hastings at the window and looks out. Poirot chuckles.*) As usual, your facts are tinged with your incurable romanticism. That is Miss Mary Marvell, the American film star. She is being followed by a bevy of admirers, who have recognized her. And, my dear Hastings, she is quite aware of the fact! [*or "my friend"*]

HASTINGS: (*Laughs.*) So all is explained! But you get no marks for that, Poirot. It was a mere matter of recognition.

POIROT: In truth, how many times have you seen Mary Marvell on the screen, [mon ami]? [*or "my friend"*]

(*Hastings ponders this.*)

HASTINGS: About a dozen times perhaps.

POIROT: And I...once! Yet, I recognize her, and you do not!

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HASTINGS: (*Feebly.*) She looks so different...

POIROT: Ah! Is it that you expect her to promenade herself in the streets of London in a cowboy hat? Always with you it is the nonessentials! But console yourself, [mon ami]. All cannot be as Hercule Poirot! I know it well. [*or "my friend"*]

HASTINGS: (*Annoyed but amused.*) You really have the best opinion of yourself of anyone I ever knew!

POIROT: When one is unique, one knows it! And others share that opinion...even, if I mistake not, Miss Mary Marvell.

HASTINGS: What?

POIROT: Without doubt. She is coming here.

HASTINGS: How do you know?

POIROT: Very simply. This street...it is not aristocratic, [mon ami]! In it, there is no fashionable doctor, no fashionable dentist...still less is there a fashionable clothing designer! But there *is* a fashionable detective! [Oui], my friend, it is true. I have become fashionable...trendy! One asks to another, [comment]? "You have lost your gold pencil case? You must go to the little Belgian. He is too marvelous!" Everyone goes! Runs! And they arrive! In flocks, [mon ami]! With problems of the most foolish! (*Doorbell.*) What did I tell you? That is Miss Marvell. [*or "my friend"*] [*or "Yes"*] [*or "how?"*]

(*Poirot's landlady, Mrs. Murchison, enters with Mary Marvell. Poirot and Hastings rise and greet Mary Marvell. Mrs. Murchison exits.*)

POIROT: Ah, Miss Marvell, undoubtedly one of the most popular actresses on the screen. I am—

MISS MARVELL: I am well aware who you are. That is why I am here. (*Poirot draws forward a chair for her. She sits.*) I have only lately arrived in England in company with my husband, Gregory B. Rolf, also a film actor. We were married about a year ago in the States, and this is our first

visit to England. We have been given a great reception. Everyone has gone simply mad over my wonderful clothes, my furs, my jewels...particularly the great diamond that has been nicknamed after me, "The Western Star." Much—true and untrue—has been written about this famous stone, which has been insured for the enormous sum of 50,000 pounds.

POIROT: How may I assist you, madame?

MISS MARVELL: You will probably think me very foolish, Monsieur Poirot, but Lord Cronshaw was telling me last night how wonderfully you cleared up the mystery of his nephew's death, and I felt that I must seek your advice. I daresay, it's only a silly hoax—Gregory says so—but it's just worrying me to death.

(Slight pause.)

POIROT: *(Encouragingly.)* Proceed, madame. You comprehend, I am still in the dark.

MISS MARVELL: It's these letters.

(Miss Marvell unclasps her handbag and draws out three envelopes, which she hands to Poirot.)

POIROT: *(Scrutinizing envelopes closely.)* Cheap paper. The name and address carefully printed. Let us see inside. *(Removes a letter from the envelope.)* The writing consists of a single sentence carefully printed like the envelope.

(Hastings approaches. Poirot hands the letter to Hastings to read aloud.)

HASTINGS: *(Reads.)* "The great diamond, which is the left eye of the idol, must return whence it came."

(Poirot removes the second letter from its envelope and hands it to Hastings to read aloud.)

HASTINGS: *(Reads.)* "The great diamond is in the left eye of the idol and must return whence it came."

POIROT: *(Disappointed.)* The second letter is couched in precisely the same terms. Perhaps the third is more explicit.

(Poirot removes the third letter from its envelope and hands it to Hastings to read aloud.)

HASTINGS: *(Reads.)* "You have been warned. You have not obeyed. Now the diamond will be taken from you. At the full of the moon, the two diamonds, which are the left and right eye of the idol, shall return. So it is written."

MISS MARVELL: *(To Poirot.)* The first letter I treated as a joke. When I got the second, I began to wonder. The third one came yesterday, and it seemed to me that the matter might be more serious than I had imagined, after all.

POIROT: I see these letters did not come by post.

MISS MARVELL: No. They were left...by a man. That is what frightens me.

POIROT: Why?

MISS MARVELL: Because it was from a man in San Francisco that Gregory bought the stone three years ago.

POIROT: I see, madame, that you believe the diamond referred to in the letters to be—

MISS MARVELL: "The Western Star." At the time, Gregory remembers that there was some story attached to the stone, but the owner wouldn't reveal any information. Gregory says the owner seemed scared to death and in a mortal hurry to get rid of the thing. He only asked for about a tenth of its value. It was Greg's wedding present to me.

POIROT: *(Nods, thoughtfully.)* The story seems of an almost unbelievable romanticism. And yet...who knows? I pray of you, Hastings, hand me my little almanac.

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(Hastings goes to the bookcase, retrieves the almanac, and hands it to Poirot.)

POIROT: (*Paging through the almanac.*) [Voyons]! When is the date of the full moon? Ah, Friday next. That is in three days' time. [Eh bien], madame, you seek my advice. I give it to you. This [*belle histoire*] may be a hoax... (*Dramatically.*) ...but it may not! Therefore, I counsel you to place the diamond in my keeping until after Friday next. Then we can take what steps we please. [*or "Let's see!"*] [*or "Well,"*] [*or "beautiful story"*]

MISS MARVELL: I'm afraid that's impossible.

POIROT: You have it with you? (*Miss Marvell hesitates a moment, slips her hand into the bosom of her gown, and draws out a long thin chain. She leans forward and opens her hand. In her palm is a diamond of white fire exquisitely set in platinum. Draws in his breath with a long hiss.*) [Épatant]! You permit, madame? (*Takes the diamond in his hand, scrutinizes it keenly, and then hands it to her with a little bow.*) A magnificent stone...without a flaw! And you carry it about with you, [*comme ça!*] [*or "Amazing!"*] [*or "like that!"*]

MISS MARVELL: No, no, I'm very careful, really, Monsieur Poirot. As a rule, it's locked up in my jewel case and left in the hotel safe deposit box. We're staying at the Magnificent Hotel, you know. I just brought it along today for you to see.

POIROT: And you will leave it with me, [*n'est-ce pas?*]? You will be advised by Papa Poirot? [*or "will you not?"*]

MISS MARVELL: Well, you see, it's this way, Monsieur Poirot. On Friday, we're going down to Yardly Chase to spend a few days with Lord and Lady Yardly. I'll let you in on a little secret, Monsieur Poirot. We've got a deal with Lord Yardly. There's a chance of us arranging to film a play down there at his ancestral home.

HASTINGS: (*Excited.*) At Yardly Chase? Why, it's one of the show places of England!

(Poirot shoots Hastings an annoyed look.)

MISS MARVELL: *(Nods.)* I guess it's the real old feudal stuff, all right. But he wants a pretty stiff price, and, of course, I don't know whether the deal will go through, but Greg and I always like to combine business with pleasure.

POIROT: But—pardon if I am dense, madame—surely, it is possible to visit Yardly Chase without taking the diamond with you?

MISS MARVELL: I want to wear it down there.

HASTINGS: Surely, there are some very famous jewels in the Yardly collection, a large diamond amongst them?

MISS MARVELL: That is so.

POIROT: *(Under his breath.)* Ah, [c'est comme ça]! *(Aloud.)* Then you are without doubt already acquainted with Lady Yardly, or perhaps your husband is? [*or "that's the way it is!"*]

MISS MARVELL: Gregory knew her when she was out West three years ago. *(Hesitates. Abruptly.)* Do either of you ever read the tabloid "Society Gossip"? *(Guilty and shamefacedly, Poirot and Hastings nod.)* I ask because in this week's issue, there is an article on famous jewels, and it's really very curious— *(Hastings rises, goes to the table at the other side of the room, and returns with the tabloid newspaper in question. Miss Marvell takes the newspaper from Hastings and pages through it to find the article. Reads.)* "...amongst other famous stones may be included the 'Star of the East,' a diamond in the possession of the Yardly family. An ancestor of the present Lord Yardly brought it back with him from China, and a romantic story is said to be attached to it. According to the story, the stone was once the right eye of a temple god. Another diamond, exactly similar in form and size, formed the left eye, and the story goes that this jewel, too, would in time be stolen. 'One eye shall go West, the other East, till they shall meet once more. Then, in triumph shall they

return to the idol.' It is a curious coincidence that there is at the present time a stone corresponding closely in description with this one and known as the 'Star of the West' or the 'Western Star.' It is the property of the celebrated film actress, Miss Mary Marvell. A comparison of the two stones would be interesting."

POIROT: [Épatant!] Without doubt, a romance of the first order! *(To Mary Marvell. Mocking tone, but with an undercurrent of seriousness.)* And you are not afraid, madame? You have no superstitious terrors? You do not fear to introduce these two Siamese twins to each other lest a mysterious man should appear and—presto!—whisk them both back to China? *[or "Amazing!"]*

MISS MARVELL: I don't believe that Lady Yardly's diamond is as good a stone as mine. Anyway, I'm going to see.

(Suddenly, Gregory Rolf strides in.)

GREGORY ROLF: I said I'd call round for you, Mary, and here I am. Well, what does Monsieur Poirot say to our little problem? Just one big hoax, same as I do?

POIROT: *(Smiles. Dryly.)* Hoax or no hoax, Mr. Rolf, I have advised your wife not to take the jewel with her to Yardly Chase on Friday.

GREGORY ROLF: I'm with you there, sir. I've already said so to Mary. But I guess she can't bear to think of another woman outshining her in the jewel line.

MISS MARVELL: *(Sharply.)* What nonsense, Gregory!

POIROT: *(Shrugs.)* Madame, I have advised you. I can do no more. [C'est fini]. *[or "We're finished here."]*

(Poirot bows to Miss Marvell and Gregory Rolf, and they exit. Poirot returns to his armchair.)

POIROT: *(To Hastings.)* Oh là là! [Histoire de femmes]! The good husband, he hit the nail on the head...[tout de même],

he was not tactful! Assuredly not. [*or "A typical woman!"*]
[*or "nevertheless,"*]

HASTINGS: Her words have awoken a vague echo of remembrance in my mind. Some gossip...what was it now? (*Remembers.*) Why, yes. A few years ago, Lord and Lady Yardly paid a visit to the States. Rumor had it that his lordship had rather "gone the pace" out there with the assistance of some lady friends, but surely there was something more, some gossip that coupled Lady Yardly's name with that of a movie star in California. Why? It came to me in a flash. Of course, it was none other than Gregory B. Rolf.

POIROT: (*Nods vigorously.*) So I thought. All the same, there is something curious underneath all this. With your permission, [*mon ami*], I will take my leave. Await my return, I beg of you. I shall not be long. [*or "my friend"*]

(*Poirot exits. Lights dim to show passage of time. Hastings falls asleep in his chair. Lights fade up. A tapping at the door is heard. Mrs. Murchison, the landlady, enters.*)

MRS. MURCHISON: (*To Hastings.*) It's another lady to see Mr. Poirot, sir. I told her he was out, but she says she'll wait, seeing as she's come up from the country.

HASTINGS: Ah, show her in, Mrs. Murchison. Perhaps I can do something for her.

(*Lady Yardly enters and Hastings recognizes her immediately.*)

HASTINGS: Do sit down, Lady Yardly. (*Draws forward a chair.*) My friend Poirot is out, but I know for a fact that he'll be back very shortly.

LADY YARDLY: Oh, thank you very much. (*Sits.*) How do you know of me?

HASTINGS: Your portrait has featured too often in the society papers to allow you to remain unknown. Lady Yardly, I feel

a desire to rise to the occasion as my friend Poirot is out. There is no doubt that I, too, possess a deductive sense in a marked degree. (*Leans forward.*) Lady Yardly, I know why you have come here: You have received blackmailing letters about the diamond.

(Lady Yardly stares at Hastings open-mouthed, all color gone from her cheeks.)

LADY YARDLY: (*Gasps.*) You know?! How?!

HASTINGS: (*Smiles.*) By a perfectly logical process. If Miss Marvell has had threatening letters—

LADY YARDLY: Miss Marvell? She has been here?

HASTINGS: She just left. As I was saying, if she, as the holder of one of the twin diamonds, has received a mysterious series of warnings, then you, as the holder of the other stone, must have been warned as well. You see how simple it is? I am right, then? You have received these strange communications also?

(For a moment, Lady Yardly hesitates, as though in doubt whether to trust Hastings or not.)

LADY YARDLY: (*Bows her head in assent.*) That is so.

HASTINGS: Were yours, too, left...by a mysterious man?

LADY YARDLY: No, they came by post. But, tell me, has Miss Marvell undergone the same experience, then?

HASTINGS: Yes. The message read something to the effect that, "The great diamond is in the left eye of the god and must return whence it came."

LADY YARDLY: It all fits. My letters are the duplicates of hers. It is true that they came by post, but there is a curious scent impregnating them, something in the nature of incense, that at once suggested the East to me. What does it all mean?

HASTINGS: (*Shakes his head.*) That is what we must find out. Do you have the letters with you? We might learn something from the postmarks.

LADY YARDLY: Unfortunately, I destroyed them. You understand, at the time, I regarded it as some foolish joke. Can it be true that some gang is really trying to recover the diamonds? It seems too incredible.

HASTINGS: We could go over the facts, but I doubt we can achieve further elucidation of the mystery without Poirot present.

(Lady Yardly rises.)

LADY YARDLY: I really don't think I need to wait for Monsieur Poirot. You can tell him all this, can't you? Thank you so much, Mr. — (*Hesitates with her hand outstretched.*)

HASTINGS: Captain Hastings.

(They shake hands.)

LADY YARDLY: Of course! How stupid of me! You're a friend of the Cavendishes, aren't you? (*Hastings nods.*) It was Mary Cavendish who sent me to Monsieur Poirot. Well, I must take my leave.

(Lady Yardly exits. Hastings settles back in his armchair to resume his nap. Pause. Poirot enters.)

HASTINGS: Ah, Poirot! Lady Yardly arrived to consult with you, but she didn't think she needed to wait since she could entrust me to update you with the details of her case upon your return.

POIROT: I am not pleased to have been absent.

HASTINGS: (*Insulted.*) I, too, possess a deductive sense in a marked degree. I knew immediately why Lady Yardly had

come here. She has received blackmailing letters about her diamond as well.

POIROT: Of course, [mon ami]. That is not why I regret being absent. [*or "my friend"*]

HASTINGS: (*Annoyed.*) Yes, I can read between the lines that you are not pleased to have been absent. I also fancy that you are just a least bit inclined to be jealous. It has become rather a habit with you to consistently belittle my abilities, and I think you are chagrined at finding no loophole for criticism.

POIROT: (*Ignores him.*) [Bien!] The plot develops. Pass me, I pray you, that "Peerage" on the top shelf there. (*Hastings retrieves the book from the bookcase and hands it to Poirot. Poirot pages through it.*) Ah, here we are! (*Reads.*) "Yardly. 10th viscount, served South African War." [Tout ça n'a pas d'importance]. "Married 1907 Honorable Maude Stopperton, fourth daughter of 3rd Baron Cotteril." (*Scanning page.*) Um, um, um. (*Reads.*) "Has two daughters, born 1908, 1910." Voilà, that does not tell us much. But, tomorrow morning, we see Lord Yardly! [*or "Well!"*] [*or "Of no importance"*]

HASTINGS: What?

POIROT: Yes. I sent him a telegraph.

(*Poirot hands the "Peerage" to Hastings. Hastings returns it to the bookcase but places it on a different shelf.*)

HASTINGS: I thought you had washed your hands of the case.

POIROT: I am not acting on behalf of Miss Marvell since she refuses to be guided by my advice. What I do now is for my own satisfaction...the satisfaction of Hercule Poirot! Decidedly, I must have a finger in this pie.

HASTINGS: And you calmly wire Lord Yardly to dash up to town just to suit your convenience? He won't be pleased.

POIROT: [Au contraire], if I preserve for him his family diamond, he ought to be very grateful. [*or "On the contrary,"*]

HASTINGS: Then you really think there is a chance of it being stolen?

POIROT: (*Placidly.*) Almost a certainty. Everything points that way.

HASTINGS: But how – ?

POIROT: (*Gestures for Hastings to stop with the questions.*) Not now, I pray you! Let us not confuse the mind. (*Looks over at the bookcase. Admonishingly.*) Observe that "Peerage"! How you have replaced it! Do you not see that the tallest books go on the top shelf, the next tallest on the row beneath, and so on? Thus, we have order and method, which, as I have often told you, Hastings –

HASTINGS: (*Defeated.*) Indeed.

(*Hastings hastily removes the offending volume and puts it in its proper place on the bookshelf. Poirot smiles. Blackout.*)

[END OF FREEVIEW]