

AGATHA
CHRISTIE'S



Heather Lynn

Adapted from the story by Agatha Christie

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

Copyright © 2022, Heather Lynn

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Double Elm is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and all of the countries covered by the Universal Copyright Convention and countries with which the United States has bilateral copyright relations including Canada, Mexico, Australia, and all nations of the United Kingdom.

Copying or reproducing all or any part of this book in any manner is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or videotaping without written permission from the publisher.

A royalty is due for every performance of this play whether admission is charged or not. A “performance” is any presentation in which an audience of any size is admitted.

The name of the author must appear on all programs, printing, and advertising for the play and must also contain the following notice: “Produced by special arrangement with Big Dog/Norman Maine Publishing LLC, Rapid City, SD.”

All rights including professional, amateur, radio broadcasting, television, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved by Big Dog/Norman Maine Publishing LLC, www.BigDogPlays.com, to whom all inquiries should be addressed.

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

P.O. Box 1401

Rapid City, SD 57709

The Double Clue

3

The Double Clue

MYSTERY. Adapted from the story by Agatha Christie. Mrs. Hardman, a wealthy collector, summons famed detective Hercule Poirot to recover her jewels that were stolen at a tea party, which was attended by several high-society guests. Poirot investigates four suspects: a Russian countess, an English grande dame whose aunt is a kleptomaniac, a South African millionaire, and a discreet jewel agent for the well-to-do. During the investigation, Poirot discovers two clues, but for him, two clues are too many! Features the first appearance of Christie's recurring character, the captivating Countess Vera Rossakoff. Easy to stage with just a few set pieces.

Performance Time: Approximately 20-30 minutes.

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

The Double Clue

4



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. "The Double Clue" was first published in *The Sketch* in March 1923 in the United Kingdom and features the first appearance of recurring character Countess Vera Rossakoff, a captivating Russian jewel thief. 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*.

The Double Clue

5

Characters

(2 M, 4 F)

HERCULE POIROT: Famed Belgian detective; speaks with a French accent; male.

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

MRS. HARDMAN: A wealthy collector who calls upon Poirot to help her recover jewels that were stolen at a tea party attended by high society guests; female.

COUNTESS VERA ROSSAKOFF: Captivating Russian countess who attended Mrs. Hardman's tea party; wears elegant clothing and furs; female.

MISS PARKER: A young woman who attended Mrs. Hardman's tea party; acts as an agent for the well-to-do when they want to sell jewels discretely; female.

SECRETARY: Secretary to Mrs. Johnston, a South African millionaire who has recently arrived in England and was present at Mrs. Hardman's tea party; female.

The Double Clue

6

Setting

London, England, 1925.

Sets

Note: Sets may be as simple or elaborate as your budget allows.

Home of Mrs. Hardman, sitting room. There is a chaise lounge with two armchairs and a small coffee table. On one wall is a wall safe with an operational door and velvet-lined shelves. A display case with antique fans is displayed prominently.

Home of Miss Parker, sitting room. There is an armchair and/or chaise lounge.

Hercule Poirot's study. There is a fireplace with an armchair on each side and a coffee table.

Countess's suite at the Carlton. There is a chaise lounge and a bureau.

Home of Mrs. Johnston, sitting room. Two armchairs are present (opt.). A bare stage may be used, if desired.

The Double Clue

7

Synopsis of Scenes

- Scene 1:** Mrs. Hardman's home, sitting room.
Scene 2: Miss Parker's home, sitting room.
Scene 3: Poirot's study and the home of Mrs. Johnston, later that afternoon.
Scene 4: Poirot's study, that evening.
Scene 5: Mrs. Hardman's home, sitting room.
Scene 6: Countess's suite at the Carlton.
Scene 7: Poirot's study, that evening.

The Double Clue

8

Props

Pair of women's gloves

Flat cigarette case with the monogrammed initials "B. P." on
the cover

Pink teacup

Hot toddy glass

Book entitled, "First Steps in Russian"

Folded slip of paper

Black silk handbag

*"It is a great compliment
that I pay you,
Monsieur Poirot.
There are very few men
in the world
whom I fear."*

— Countess Rossakoff

The Double Clue

10

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Home of Mrs. Hardman, sitting room. Mrs. Hardman is seated. Poirot and Hastings enter.)

MRS. HARDMAN: (To Poirot.) Thank you for responding to my urgent summons. I have been writhing about in an agony of indecision.

POIROT: Pray tell me how I can help.

MRS. HARDMAN: Under the circumstances, to call in the police is abhorrent to me. On the other hand, not to call them in is to acquiesce to the loss of some of the gems of my collection. You, Monsieur Poirot, are a compromise. But above everything...no publicity! My rubies, Monsieur Poirot, and the emerald necklace are said to have belonged to Catherine de' Medici.

POIROT: The collection of a lifetime.

MRS. HARDMAN: In a way, I am somewhat of a celebrity, and the fashionable life is my profession. I am rich, but not remarkably so, but I spend my money zealously in the pursuit of social pleasure. My hobby is collecting. I have a collector's soul: old lace, old fans, antique jewelry...nothing crudely modern.

POIROT: (Gently.) If you will recount to me the circumstances of the disappearance of your gems?

MRS. HARDMAN: Yesterday afternoon, I had a little tea party...quite an informal affair, some half a dozen people or so. I have given one or two tea parties during the season, and though perhaps I should not say so, they have been quite a success. Well, early in the afternoon, I was showing my guests my collection of medieval jewels. I keep them in a wall safe over there. (Points to safe.) It is arranged like a cabinet inside with a colored velvet background to properly display the gems. Afterward, we inspected the fans in the case on the wall. (Points to the display case.) Then we all

The Double Clue

11

went to the studio for music. It was not until after everyone had gone that I discovered someone had rifled through the safe! I must have failed to shut it properly and someone had seized the opportunity to strip it of its contents. The rubies! The emerald necklace! What would I not give to recover them! But there must be no publicity! You fully understand that, do you not, Monsieur Poirot? My own guests...my personal friends! It would be a horrible scandal!

POIROT: Who was the last person to leave this room when you went to the studio?

MRS. HARDMAN: Mrs. Johnston. You may know her...the South African millionaire? She is renting the Abbotburys' house on Park Lane. She lingered behind a few moments, I remember. But, surely, oh, surely, it could not be her!

POIROT: Did any of your guests return to this room during the afternoon on any pretext?

MRS. HARDMAN: I was prepared for that question, Monsieur Poirot. Three of them did so: Countess Vera Rossakoff, Miss Parker, and Lady Runcorn.

POIROT: Tell me about them...

MRS. HARDMAN: The Countess Rossakoff is a very charming Russian lady, a member of the old regime. She has recently come to this country. She had bade me goodbye, so I was therefore somewhat surprised to find her in this room gazing in rapture at my cabinet of fans. You know, Monsieur Poirot, the more I think of it, the more suspicious it seems to me. Don't you agree?

POIROT: Let me hear about the others.

MRS. HARDMAN: Well, Miss Parker simply came here to fetch a case of miniatures that I was anxious to show to Lady Runcorn.

POIROT: And Lady Runcorn herself?

MRS. HARDMAN: As I dare say, you know, Lady Runcorn is a woman of considerable force of character who devotes most of her time to various charitable committees. She

The Double Clue

12

simply returned to fetch a handbag she had laid down somewhere.

POIROT: Bien, madame. So we have four possible suspects: the Russian countess, the English grande dame, the South African millionaire, and Miss Parker. Who is Miss Parker, by the way?

(The question appears to embarrass Mrs. Hardman.)

MRS. HARDMAN: *(Awkwardly.)* She is, er...she is a young lady. Well, in fact, a young lady I know.

POIROT: I had already deduced as much. What does she do, this Miss Parker?

MRS. HARDMAN: She is a young lady about town, not perhaps quite in the swim, if I may so express myself.

POIROT: How did she come to be a friend of yours, may I ask?

MRS. HARDMAN: Well, er, on one or two occasions she has performed certain little commissions for me.

POIROT: Continue, madame...

(Long awkward pause. The last thing Mrs. Hardman wants to do is to continue, but Poirot waits silently for her to resume. Finally, Mrs. Hardman gives in.)

MRS. HARDMAN: *(With a pitiful look.)* You see, Monsieur Poirot, it is well known that I am interested in antique jewels. Sometimes there is a family heirloom to be disposed of, which, mind you, would never be sold in the open market or to a dealer. But a private sale to me is a very different matter. *(Slight pause.)* Miss Parker arranges the details of such things. She is in touch with both sides, and thus any little embarrassment is avoided. She brings anything of that kind to my notice. For instance, the Countess Rossakoff has brought some family jewels with her

The Double Clue

13

from Russia. She is anxious to sell them. Miss Parker was to have arranged the transaction.

POIROT: I see. And you trust her implicitly?

MRS. HARDMAN: I have had no reason to do otherwise.

POIROT: Mrs. Hardman, of these four people, which do you yourself suspect?

MRS. HARDMAN: Oh, Monsieur Poirot, what a question! They are my friends, as I told you. I suspect none of them...or all of them, whichever way you like to put it.

POIROT: I do not agree. You suspect one of the four. It is not Countess Rossakoff. It is not Miss Parker. Is it Lady Runcorn or Mrs. Johnston?

MRS. HARDMAN: You drive me into a corner, Monsieur Poirot, you do, indeed. I am most anxious to have no scandal. Lady Runcorn belongs to one of the oldest families in England. But it is true, it is most unfortunately true, that her aunt, Lady Caroline, suffers from a most melancholy affliction: kleptomania. It was known, of course, by all her friends, and her maid returned the teaspoons, or whatever it was she stole, as promptly as possible. You see my predicament!

POIROT: Very interesting. May I examine the safe? (*Mrs. Hardman assents. Poirot pushes back the door of the safe and examines the interior, revealing empty velvet-lined shelves.*) Even now the door does not shut properly. I wonder why? (*Swings the door to and fro. Examines the door closely.*) Ah, what have we here? (*Holds up a glove.*) A glove, caught in the hinge. A woman's glove.

(*Poirot holds the glove out to Mrs. Hardman so she can get a better look at it.*)

MRS. HARDMAN: That's not one of my gloves.

POIROT: (*Looking inside the safe.*) Aha! Something more! (*Picks up a flat cigarette case from the floor of the safe.*)

MRS. HARDMAN: My cigarette case.

The Double Clue

14

POIROT: Yours? Surely not, madame. Those are not your initials.

(Poirot points to an entwined monogram of two letters, "B" and "P," in platinum. Mrs. Hardman takes the case from Poirot.)

MRS. HARDMAN: You are right. It is very much like mine, but the initials are different. A "B" and a "P." *(Realizes.)*
Good heavens...Miss Parker!

POIROT: It would seem so. A somewhat careless young woman, especially if the glove is hers also. That would be a double clue, would it not?

MRS. HARDMAN: Miss Parker! What a relief! Well, Monsieur Poirot, I leave it to you to recover the jewels. Place the matter in the hands of the police if you think fit...that is, if you are quite sure that it is she who is guilty...

(Lights down on the sitting room. Spotlight up on Poirot and Hastings, who have left Mrs. Hardman's residence and are standing off to one side.)

POIROT: *(To Hastings.)* See, my friend, this Mrs. Hardman has one law for the titled and another law for the plain. Me, I have not yet been ennobled, so I am on the side of the plain. I have sympathy for this young woman. The whole thing is a little curious, is it not? *(Before Hastings can respond.)* There was Mrs. Hardman suspecting Lady Runcorn. There was I, suspecting the Countess and Mrs. Johnston, and all the time, the obscure Miss Parker was our thief.

HASTINGS: Why did you suspect the other two?

POIROT: [Parbleu!] It is such a simple thing to be a Russian aristocrat or a South African millionaire. Any woman can call herself a Russian countess. Anyone can rent a house on Park Lane and call herself a South African millionaire. Who is going to contradict them? Let us go to Bury Street. Our careless, young friend, Miss Parker, lives here. Let us, as

The Double Clue

15

you say, "strike while the iron is in the fire" ... [Or "Upon my soul!"]

HASTINGS: (*Correcting.*) It's "strike while the fire is hot."

POIROT: Ah, you English and your ridiculous idioms!

(*Poirot and Hastings exit. Blackout.*)

The Double Clue

16

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Home of Miss Parker, sitting room. Miss Parker is reclining on a chaise longue. Poirot and Hastings enter.)

POIROT: Good morning, mademoiselle. I come from Mrs. Hardman. Yesterday, at her tea party, somebody stole all her jewels. Permit me to ask you, mademoiselle... *(Pulls out the glove from his pocket and holds it up.)* ...is this your glove?

(Miss Parker stares at the glove, as though gathering her wits.)

MISS PARKER: Where did you find it?

POIROT: Is it your glove, mademoiselle?

(Pause.)

MISS PARKER: No, it isn't.

POIROT: And this cigarette case... *(Holds out cigarette case.)* ...is it yours?

MISS PARKER: Certainly not. I always carry a silver one.

POIROT: Very well, mademoiselle. I will put the matter in the hands of the police.

MISS PARKER: Oh, I say, I wouldn't do that if I were you. Beastly unsympathetic people, the police. Wait a bit. I'll go round and see old Mrs. Hardman. *(Poirot and Hastings start to exit. Calls.)* Look here. Oh, stop a minute.

POIROT: *(To Hastings as they exit. Chuckles.)* We have given her something to think about, have we not? Tomorrow we will observe what has occurred.

(Poirot and Hastings exit. Blackout.)

The Double Clue

17

Scene 3

(AT RISE: Poirot's study, later that afternoon. Without the least warning, Countess Vera Rossakoff enters with a flourish.)

COUNTESS ROSSAKOFF: You are Monsieur Poirot? *(Poirot nods.)* What is this that you have done? You accuse that poor young woman! It is despicable! It is scandalous! I know her! She is a chicken, a lamb...never would she steal! She has done everything for me! I will not stand by and see her martyred and butchered!

POIROT: Tell me, madame, is this her cigarette case?

(Poirot holds out the cigarette case, and the Countess inspects it.)

COUNTESS ROSSAKOFF: Yes, it is hers. I know it well. What of it? Did you find it in the room? We were all there. She dropped it then, I suppose. Ah, you policemen...you are worse than the Red Guards!

POIROT: And is this her glove?

(Poirot holds out the glove, and the Countess inspects it.)

COUNTESS ROSSAKOFF: How should I know? One glove is like another. Do not try to stop me! She must be set free! Her character must be cleared. You shall do it. I will sell my jewels and give you a much money.

POIROT: Madame—

COUNTESS ROSSAKOFF: It is agreed, then? *(Before Poirot can respond.)* No, no, do not argue. The poor girl! She came to me, tears in her eyes. "I will save you," I said. "I will go to this man...this ogre, this monster! Leave it to Vera." Now, it is settled, I go. *(Exits with a flourish.)*

[END OF FREEVIEW]