

AGATHA
CHRISTIE'S



*The
Disappearance
of Mr. Davenheim*

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Adapted from the short story by Agatha Christie

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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The Disappearance of Mr. Davenheim

MYSTERY. Adapted from the story by Agatha Christie. When a well-known banker mysteriously disappears, famed detective Hercule Poirot bets Inspector Japp from Scotland Yard that he can solve the mystery in just one week without even leaving his study. The banker, Mr. Davenheim, left his house one Saturday afternoon to post some letters and was never seen again. Police discover that a concealed safe in his study had been broken into and cash, bonds, and jewelry stolen. Later, Mr. Davenheim's clothing is found in a lake and his ring is discovered in a ditch. To solve the case, Poirot asks himself, "If I were this man, where would I hide?" Easy to stage with just one simple set.

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, who later became one of Christie's most famous characters. "The Disappearance of Mr. Davenheim" was first published in *The Sketch* in March 1923 in the United Kingdom and in the United States in *The Blue Book Magazine* in December 1923 under the title "Mr. Davenby Disappears." 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

(3 M)

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.

Setting

London, 1925.

Sets

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

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Poirot's study.

Scene 2: Poirot's study, the following evening, 8 p.m.

Scene 3: Poirot's study, the next day, 11 a.m.

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

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

Props

Tea set with a silver teapot
Silk handkerchief
Plate of bread and butter
Telegram
Newspaper
Hardboiled eggs
Eggcup
Broken eggshells
Registered letter
Five-pound bill
Sheet of paper
Pen or pencil

Sound Effect

Sharp “rat-tat” knock at the door

*“Poirot, you endeavor,
with a marked lack of success,
to look modest.”*

—Inspector Japp

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Poirot's study. Hercule Poirot and Arthur Hastings are awaiting Inspector Japp's arrival. A tea set is on the coffee table. Poirot is carefully straightening the cups and saucers.)

POIROT: (*Annoyed.*) The landlady has a habit of throwing rather than placing cups and saucers on the table. (*Sighs.*) Such a pity. (*Breathes heavily on the silver teapot and polishes it with a silk handkerchief.*)

HASTINGS: (*To Poirot.*) I suspect our old friend Inspector Japp will be arriving at any moment. The kettle's on the boil—

POIROT: (*Shakes his head disapprovingly.*) That English poison you refer to as "tea"!

HASTINGS: And to better suit your palate, a small enamel saucepan is warming your thick, sweet hot chocolate.

(*A sharp "rat-tat" is heard at the door. Inspector Japp enters briskly.*)

JAPP: Hope I'm not late. To tell the truth, I was yarning with Miller, the man who's in charge of the Davenheim case.

HASTINGS: Ah, yes. For the last three days, the papers have been full of the strange disappearance of Mr. Davenheim, senior partner of Davenheim and Salmon, well-known bankers and financiers. On Saturday last, he walked out of his house and has not been seen since. I should have thought that it would be almost impossible for anyone to "disappear" nowadays.

POIROT: (*Annoyed.*) The landlady has a habit of placing the plate of bread and butter off by an eighth of an inch. (*Sighs.*) Such a pity. (*Adjusts the plate of bread and butter on the table an eighth of an inch. To Hastings, sharply.*) Be exact, my friend. What do you mean by "disappear"? To which class of disappearance are you referring?

The Disappearance of Mr. Davenheim

HASTINGS: (*Laughs.*) Are disappearances classified and labeled, then?

(*Inspector Japp laughs. Poirot frowns.*)

POIROT: But certainly they are! They fall into three categories. First, and most common, the "voluntary disappearance." Second, the much-abused "loss of memory" case...rare, but occasionally genuine. Third, a murder and a more-or-less successful disposal of the body. Do you refer to all three as impossible of execution?

HASTINGS: Very nearly so, I should think. You might lose your own memory, but someone would be sure to recognize you, especially in the case of a well-known man like Davenheim. And bodies can't be made to vanish into thin air. Sooner or later, they turn up, concealed in lonely places or in trunks. Murder is out. In the same way, the absconding clerk or the domestic defaulter is bound to be found in these days of wireless telegraphy. He can be headed off from foreign countries as ports and railway stations are watched. And, as for concealment in this country, his features and appearance would be known to everyone who reads a daily newspaper. He's up against civilization.

POIROT: [Mon ami], you make one error. You do not allow for the fact that a man who has decided to disappear might be that rare machine: a man of method. He might bring intelligence, talent, a careful calculation of detail to the task. And then I do not see why he should not be successful in baffling the police force. [*Or "my friend"*]

JAPP: (*With a wink at Hastings. Good-humoredly.*) But not you, I suppose? He couldn't baffle you, eh, Monsieur Poirot?

POIROT: Me also! Why not?

JAPP: Poirot, you endeavor—with a marked lack of success—to look modest.

The Disappearance of Mr. Davenheim

12

POIROT: It is true that I approach such problems with an exact science, a mathematical precision, which seems, alas, only too rare in the new generation of detectives.

JAPP: (*Wide grin.*) I don't agree. Miller, the man who's on this case, is a smart chap. You may be very sure he won't overlook a footprint, or a cigar ash, or even a crumb. He's got eyes that see everything.

POIROT: So has the London sparrow. But all the same, I should not ask the little brown bird to solve the disappearance of Mr. Davenheim.

JAPP: Come now, monsieur, you're not going to diminish the value of details as clues?

POIROT: By no means. The danger is they may assume undue importance. Most details are insignificant. Only one or two are vital. It is the brain, "the little grey cells" ... (*Taps his forehead.*) ...on which one must rely. The senses mislead. One must seek the truth within...not without.

JAPP: You don't mean to say, Monsieur Poirot, that you would undertake to solve a case without moving from your chair, do you?

POIROT: That is exactly what I mean...granted the facts are placed before me. I regard myself as a consulting specialist.

(Inspector Japp bursts out laughing, slapping his knee.)

JAPP: Bet you [a fiver] that you can't lay your hand—or tell me where to lay my hand—on Mr. Davenheim, dead or alive, before a week is out. [*Or "five pounds"*]

(Poirot considers the wager.)

POIROT: [Eh bien, mon ami], I accept. [Le sport], it is the passion of you English. Now, the facts. [*or "Well, my friend"*] [*or "Gambling"*]

JAPP: On Saturday last, as is his usual custom, Mr. Davenheim took the 12:40 train from Victoria to Chingside,

where his palatial country place, "The Cedars," is situated. After lunch, he strolled round the grounds and gave various directions to the gardeners.

POIROT: His manner?

JAPP: Everybody agrees that he appeared absolutely normal as usual. After tea, he poked his head into his wife's bedroom, saying that he was going to stroll down to the village and post some letters. He added that he was expecting a Mr. Lowen, on business. If Mr. Lowen should arrive before he returned, he was to be shown into the study and asked to wait. Mr. Davenheim then left the house by the front door, passed leisurely down the drive and out the gate, and...was never seen again. From that hour, he vanished completely.

POIROT: Pretty, very pretty. Altogether a charming little problem. Proceed, my good friend...

JAPP: About a quarter of an hour later, a tall dark man with a thick black moustache rang the front doorbell and explained that he had an appointment with Mr. Davenheim. He gave the name of Lowen, and in accordance with the banker's instructions, was shown into the study. Nearly an hour passed. Mr. Davenheim did not return. Finally, Mr. Lowen rang the bell and explained that he was unable to wait any longer, as he must catch his train back to town. Mrs. Davenheim apologized for her husband's absence, which seemed odd since she knew him to have been expecting the visitor. Mr. Lowen reiterated his regrets and took his leave. Well, as everyone knows, Mr. Davenheim did not return.

POIROT: And the police?

JAPP: Early on Sunday morning, the police were communicated with but could make neither head nor tail of the matter. Mr. Davenheim seemed literally to have vanished into thin air. He had not been to the post office, nor had he been seen passing through the village. At the station, they were positive he had not departed by any train. His own motorcar had not left the garage. If he had hired a

car to meet him in some lonely spot, it seems almost certain that by this time, in view of the large reward offered for information, the driver of it would have come forward to tell what he knew. True, there was a small meeting at Enfield, five miles away, and if he had walked to that station, he might have passed unnoticed into the crowd. But since then, his photograph and a full description of him have been circulated in every newspaper, and nobody has seen him.

POIROT: Any clues?

JAPP: We have, of course, received many letters from all over England, but each clue, so far, has ended in disappointment. On Monday morning, a further sensational discovery came to light. Behind a curtain in Mr. Davenheim's study stands a safe, and that safe had been broken into and rifled. The windows were fastened securely on the inside, which seems to eliminate an ordinary burglary, unless, of course, an accomplice within the house fastened the windows again afterward. On the other hand—Sunday having intervened and the household being in a state of chaos—it is likely that the burglary was committed on Saturday and remained undetected until Monday.

POIROT: [Précisément]. Well, is he arrested, [ce pauvre] Monsieur Lowen? [Or "Precisely"] [or "this poor"]

JAPP: Not yet. But he's under pretty close supervision.

POIROT: (*Nods.*) What was taken from the safe? Have you any idea?

JAPP: We've been going into that with the junior partner of the firm and Mrs. Davenheim. Apparently, there was a considerable amount in bearer bonds and a very large sum in notes, owing to some large transaction having been just carried through. There was also a small fortune in jewelry. All of Mrs. Davenheim's jewels were kept in the safe. The purchasing of them had become a passion of her husband and hardly a month passed that he did not give her a present of some rare and costly gem.

HASTINGS: Altogether a good haul.

(Annoyed, Poirot shoots Hastings a hard look.)

POIROT: *(To Inspector Japp.)* Now, what about Lowen? Is it known what his business was with Davenheim that evening?

JAPP: Well, the two men were apparently not on very good terms. Lowen is a speculator in quite a small way. Nevertheless, he has been able, once or twice, to score a coup off Davenheim in the market, though it seems they seldom or never actually met. It was a matter concerning some South American shares that led the banker to make his appointment.

POIROT: Had Davenheim interests in South America, then?

JAPP: I believe so. Mrs. Davenheim happened to mention that he spent all last autumn in Buenos Aires.

POIROT: Any trouble in his home life? Was he on good terms with his wife?

JAPP: I would say his domestic life was quite peaceful and uneventful. Mrs. Davenheim is a pleasant, rather unintelligent woman. Quite a nonentity, I think.

HASTINGS: *(Chuckles.)* Then we must not look for the solution of the mystery there.

(Annoyed, Poirot shoots Hastings a hard look.)

POIROT: *(To Inspector Japp.)* Had he any enemies?

JAPP: He had plenty of financial rivals, and no doubt there are many people whom he has gotten the better of who bear him no particular goodwill. But there is no one who wanted him dead. And, if they had, where is the body?

HASTINGS: Exactly. As I say, "Bodies have a habit of coming to light with fatal persistency."

(Annoyed, Poirot shoots Hastings a hard look.)

JAPP: By the way, one of the gardeners says he saw a figure going round to the side of the house toward the rose garden. The French door of the study opens to the rose garden, and Mr. Davenheim frequently entered and left the house that way. But the gardener was a good way off at work on some cucumber frames and cannot even say whether it was the figure of his master or not. Also, he cannot fix the time with any accuracy. It must have been before six, as the gardeners cease work at that time.

POIROT: And Mr. Davenheim left the house when?

JAPP: About half-past five or thereabouts.

POIROT: What lies beyond the rose garden?

JAPP: A lake.

POIROT: With a boathouse?

JAPP: Yes, a couple of boats are kept there. I suppose you're thinking suicide, Monsieur Poirot? (*Proudly.*) Well, I don't mind telling you that Miller's going down tomorrow expressly to see that piece of water dragged. That's the kind of man he is!

POIROT: (*Faint smile.*) Hastings, I pray you, hand me that copy of "The Daily Megaphone." If I remember rightly, there is an unusually clear photograph of the missing man. (*Hastings fetches "The Daily Megaphone" and hands it to Poirot. Poirot studies the photograph attentively.*) Hmm, wears his hair rather long and wavy, full moustache, pointed beard, bushy eyebrows. (*To Japp.*) Eyes dark?

JAPP: Yes.

POIROT: Hair and beard turning grey?

JAPP: (*Nods.*) Well, Monsieur Poirot, what have you got to say to it all? (*Smiles.*) Clear as daylight, eh?

POIROT: On the contrary, most obscure. (*Japp smiles.*) Which gives me great hopes of solving it.

JAPP: Eh?

POIROT: I find it a good sign when a case is obscure. If a thing is clear as daylight...[eh bien], mistrust it! For someone has made it so. [*or "well"*]

The Disappearance of Mr. Davenheim

17

JAPP: *(Shaking his head, pityingly.)* Well, each to their fancy.

But it's not a bad thing to see your way clear ahead.

POIROT: I do not *see*. I shut my eyes...and think.

JAPP: Well, you've got a week to think.

POIROT: And you will bring me any fresh developments that arise...the result of the labors of the hardworking and lynx-eyed Inspector Miller?

JAPP: Certainly. That's in the bargain. Well, I must be off.
(Rises to exit. Hastings accompanies Japp. To Hastings as he exits.) Seems a shame, doesn't it? Like robbing a child!

(Inspector Japp chuckles and exits. Hastings rejoins Poirot.)

POIROT: *(Insulted.)* [Eh bien!] You make fun of Papa Poirot, is it not so? *(Shakes his finger at Hastings.)* You do not trust his grey cells? Ah, do not be confused! Let us discuss this little problem...incomplete as yet, I admit, but already showing one or two points of interest. *[or "Well!"]*

HASTINGS: The lake!

POIROT: And even more than the lake...the boathouse!

HASTINGS: *(Looks sideways at Poirot.)* I guess that at this moment it would be quite useless to question you further?

[END OF FREEVIEW]