

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S



What Did the Dead Man Have Up His Sleeve?

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Adapted from the short story by Agatha Christie

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What Did the Dead Man Have Up His Sleeve?

MURDER-MYSTERY. Adapted from the short story by Agatha Christie. Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard persuades Hercule Poirot and Arthur Hastings to join him on a weekend getaway to the country town of Market Basing to take a break from crime-solving. But even in the country, Poirot reminds them, "Crime is everywhere." While enjoying a relaxing Sunday breakfast, the three are interrupted by a local police constable who requests Inspector Japp's assistance after a reclusive resident, Walter Protheroe, is found dead in a locked room. Protheroe has a gunshot wound near his left ear, but the gun is found in his right hand, ruling out suicide. But with the door and the window to the room locked from the inside, how did the murderer enter the room? Clues include a missing key, a men's handkerchief, an ashtray, and cufflinks. An ingenious locked-room mystery. Easy to stage.

Performance Time: Approximately 20-30 minutes.

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



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 Market Basing Mystery" was first published in *The Sketch* in October 1923 in the United Kingdom. The story was published in the United States in *The Blue Book Magazine* in May 1925. Later, Christie expanded the story into the novella, *Murder in the Mews*. 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, 2 F, 2 flexible, extras)

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.

CONSTABLE POLLARD: Local police officer in the town of Market Basing; calls on Inspector Japp for assistance when local resident Walter Protheroe is found dead in a locked room; flexible.

MISS CLEGG: Housekeeper for Walter Protheroe; described as "staid and calm in manner with an air of efficiency about her which commanded respect"; has grey hair parted in the middle and wears a black housekeeping uniform; female.

DR. GILES: Local doctor who examined the body of Walter Protheroe; wears a tweed jacket; flexible.

MR. PARKER: Walter Protheroe's guest from London who arrived at Leigh House just three days before his death; flashily dressed with a "shifty, unpleasant face"; male.

MRS. PARKER: Mr. Parker's wife and Walter Protheroe's guest from London who arrived at Leigh House just three days before Protheroe is found dead; flashily dressed though "handsome in a course fashion"; female.

EXTRAS: As restaurant Waitress, corpse of Walter Protheroe (or a prop body may be used).

NOTE: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

Setting

Country town of Market Basing, United Kingdom, 1923.

Sets

Village Inn, restaurant. There is a small table with three chairs. Behind the table is a window from which can be seen a honeysuckle vine. Other small tables and chairs may be present. A backdrop of a restaurant may be used.

Leigh House, bedroom of Mr. Protheroe. There is a window, a fireplace, a bed, a bedside table, and an armchair. Next to the armchair is a small side table with an ashtray on it. Note: Leigh house is a dilapidated old mansion falling into ruin so the bedroom should reflect this.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Village Inn, restaurant, Sunday morning.

Scene 2: Leigh House, Mr. Protheroe's bedroom.

Scene 3: Village Inn, restaurant.

Scene 4: Village Inn, restaurant, two days later.

Scene 5: Village Inn, restaurant.

Props

5 Plates of bacon and eggs

Coffee cup

2 Teacups

Basket or plate of bread

Sparrow

Pistol (toy)

Men's handkerchief

Cufflinks

Prop body (opt.) for corpse of Walter Protheroe (wears a dark grey lounge suit, has grey hair at his temples, and a beard)

*"That rabbit has a pleasant face,
His private life is a disgrace
I really could not tell to you
The awful things that rabbits do."*

—Arthur Hastings

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Country town of Market Basing. Inn, restaurant, Sunday morning. There is a window from which a honeysuckle vine can be seen. Inspector Japp, Arthur Hastings, and Hercule Poirot are seated at a table near the window. They are eating a breakfast of bacon and eggs. Arthur Hastings and Inspector Japp are drinking tea. Poirot is drinking coffee. Hastings and Inspector Japp are in a jovial mood.)

HASTINGS: (To Poirot and Inspector Japp.) The bacon and eggs are excellent.

(Poirot takes a sip of his coffee.)

POIROT: Ah, a weekend at a country inn and a morning of horror drinking English coffee!

JAPP: But there's nothing like the country, is there? (Inhales the air deeply.) Nobody knows us, and we know no one.

POIROT: I applaud your sentiment.

HASTINGS: (To Inspector Japp.) Yes, it was your idea that we should all go for the weekend to the little country town of Market Basing.

JAPP: Yes, when off-duty, I am an ardent botanist and discoursed upon minute flowers possessed of unbelievably lengthy Latin names, somewhat strangely pronounced.

POIROT: And with an enthusiasm even greater than what you give to your cases.

JAPP: (Ignores Poirot's comment.) Ah, this is the life! When I retire, I shall have a little place in the country like this far from crime!

POIROT: [Le crime, il est partout]. [or "Crime is everywhere."]

(Poirot helps himself to a piece of bread. A sparrow lands and balances itself impertinently on the windowsill or on the vine. Poirot frowns at the sparrow and tries to make it fly away.)

HASTINGS: *(Recites in a jovial manner.)*

“That rabbit has a pleasant face,
His private life is a disgrace
I really could not tell to you
The awful things that rabbits do.”

(Hastings and Inspector Japp chuckle. Poirot shoots Hastings an annoyed look.)

JAPP: *(Leaning back in his chair.)* Lord, I believe I could manage another egg and perhaps a slice or two of bacon. What do you say, Captain?

HASTINGS: I'm with you. What about you, Poirot?

POIROT: *(Shakes his head no.)* One must not so replenish the stomach that the brain refuses to function.

JAPP: *(Chuckles.)* I'll risk replenishing my stomach a bit more. I've got a large stomach. *(Chuckles.)* And by the way, you're getting stout yourself, Monsieur Poirot. *(To Waitress, calls.)* Here, Miss, eggs and bacon twice.

(Constable Pollard enters and approaches their table.)

CONSTABLE POLLARD: *(To Poirot and Hastings.)* I hope you'll excuse me troubling Inspector Japp, gentlemen.

JAPP: I'm on holiday. No work for me.

CONSTABLE POLLARD: I'd be glad to get your advice.

JAPP: *(Relents.)* What is the case?

CONSTABLE POLLARD: Gentleman up at Leigh House...shot himself...through the head.

JAPP: Well, they will do it. Debt, or a woman, I suppose. Sorry, I can't help you, Pollard.

CONSTABLE POLLARD: The point is...that he couldn't have shot himself. Leastways, that's what Dr. Giles says.

(Inspector Japp puts down his cup of tea.)

JAPP: Couldn't have shot himself? What do you mean?

CONSTABLE POLLARD: That's what Dr. Giles says. He says it's plumb impossible. He's puzzled...the door was locked from the inside and the windows were bolted. But he sticks to it that the man couldn't have committed suicide.

JAPP: That settles it! *(Waitress brings two plates of bacon and eggs and Japp waves her away. Waitress exits with the food.)* Tell me everything. Start from the beginning.

CONSTABLE POLLARD: The name of the deceased is Walter Protheroe. He was a man of middle age and something of a recluse. He had come to Market Basing eight years ago and rented Leigh House...a rambling, dilapidated old mansion fast falling into ruin. He lived in a corner of it with his wants attended to by a housekeeper whom he had brought with him. Miss Clegg is her name, and she is a very superior woman and highly thought of in the village.

JAPP: Anyone else residing there?

CONSTABLE POLLARD: Though Leigh House has fallen into ruin, just lately, Mr. Protheroe had visitors staying with him, a Mr. and Mrs. Parker from London.

JAPP: Who discovered the body?

CONSTABLE POLLARD: This morning, unable to get a reply when she went to call her master and finding the door locked, Miss Clegg became alarmed and telephoned for the police and the doctor. Dr. Giles and I arrived at the same moment. Together, we succeeded in breaking down the oak door of his bedroom.

JAPP: How did you find the body?

CONSTABLE POLLARD: Mr. Protheroe was lying on the floor, shot through the head, and the pistol was clasped in his right hand. It looked like a clear case of suicide. After examining the body, however, Dr. Giles became clearly perplexed. Finally, he drew me aside and communicated his perplexities to me, whereupon I had at once thought of you, Inspector Japp. I left the doctor in charge and hurried down to the inn.

JAPP: *(To Poirot and Hastings, sighs.)* Well, gentlemen, I guess we must be on our way.

POIROT: Ah, yes, crime *is* everywhere...

[END OF FREEVIEW]