

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S
DIAMONDS AND DEATH
By
Bob Cooner

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S DIAMONDS AND DEATH

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AGATHA CHRISTIE'S DIAMONDS AND DEATH

Cast of Characters

- Arthur Hastings: Male; middle-aged; British; Poirot's colleague and friend; admiring but jealous of Poirot's abilities; always trying to prove himself as a worthy investigator
- Hercule Poirot: Male; middle-aged; Belgian; the world's foremost detective; egotistical; guarded; fastidious
- Actress 1: Mary Marvell: Female; 20s; American; movie star; beautiful; vain; naïve (Act I); Mrs. Maltravers: Female; 20s; British; beautiful; high strung; scheming (Act II)
- Actress 2: Mrs. Murchison: Female; middle-aged; British; Poirot's housekeeper and cook; practical; observant but discreet (Acts I & II); Gardener: Male; middle-aged; British; gruff; observant (Act II)
- Actress 3: Onlooker: Fan of Mary Marvell (Act I); Lady Yardly: Female; middle-aged; British; handsome; self-possessed; intelligent (Act I); Parlormaid: Female; British; servant at Marsdon Manor; easily frightened (Act II)
- Actor 1: Onlooker: Fan of Mary Marvell (Act I); Gregory Rolf: Male; 20s-30s; American; movie star; handsome; cocky; underhanded (Act I); Butler: Male; middle-aged; British; officious (Act I); Captain Black: Male; 20s-30s; British; military officer; stalwart; honest (Act II)

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Actor 2: Onlooker: Fan of Mary Marvell (Act I); Lord Yardly: Male; middle-aged; British; landed gentry but feeling the pinch; blustery (Act I); Clerk: Male; middle-aged; British; middle-class; nervous (Act I); Dr. Bernard: Male; middle-aged; British; country doctor; stubborn; defensive (Act II); Everett: Male; middle-aged; British; slightly hammy actor (Act II)

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Acts/Scenes

Act I

- Scene 1. Poirot's flat, just after breakfast
- Scene 2. Poirot's flat, a little later that morning
- Scene 3. Poirot's flat, just after noon
- Scene 4. Poirot's flat, a little later
- Scene 5. Yardly Chase, that evening, before dinner
- Scene 6. Yardly Chase, a little later
- Scene 7. Poirot's flat, the next day, after breakfast; a taxicab
- Scene 8. Claridge's Hotel, a little later that morning
- Scene 9. Poirot's flat, that evening

Act II

- Scene 1. Poirot's flat, several weeks later, mid-morning
- Scene 2. Marsdon Leigh, the same day, late morning; the train station; Dr. Bernard's office; the road to Marsdon Manor
- Scene 3. Marsdon Manor morning room, immediately after; outside Marsdon Manor; the Anchor Inn
- Scene 4. A room at the Anchor Inn, immediately after
- Scene 5. Marsdon Manor morning room, that evening
- Scene 6. Outside Marsdon Manor, immediately after

Author's Note: Though the action of the play occurs in a variety of locations, the play is served best by using only the most minimal and necessary of furnishings (furniture, props, door units, etc.) to allow for swift and seamless transitions from scene to scene.

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ACT I ("The Adventure of the Western Star")

SCENE 1

Lights up, isolating ARTHUR HASTINGS, a middle-aged, upper middle-class, affable though somewhat formal, former British military officer.

HASTINGS. *(Narrating, to the audience.)* How do you do, ladies and gentlemen? I'm pleased you're here. Welcome. Some of you may not recognize me immediately, so please allow me to introduce myself. Captain Arthur Hastings, at your service. Now, before I begin recounting my adventures with that confounding little Belgian detective, I should like to tell you something about myself. Now, let's see— *(Reconsidering.)* Oh, why bother? I gather you're not all that interested in *me* anyway. Best we get straight to it, what? *(Down to business.)* I first encountered my brilliant Belgian friend, the renowned detective Hercule Poirot, while I was stationed in Brussels more than ten years ago—and, ever since, I have set myself the task of becoming his equal, as nearly as I can manage, in the study of human behavior. The particular day our story begins was to be no exception. Thus, I found myself standing at the window of the rooms we share looking out onto the street below. *(Lights up on the area of the stage serving as HERCULE POIROT's flat in London, mid-morning, 1924. Poirot is just finishing his breakfast. Hastings moves to the flat area and stands peering out of a window to the street below.)* I say, Poirot—that is queer.

POIROT. What is, *mon ami* [my friend]? *(As Hastings speaks, the lights come up on another area of the stage where we see the action he describes. First, we see MARY MARVELL, dressed as Hastings describes her. She is carrying a newspaper. She looks at a note in her hand and at the addresses along the street.)*

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HASTINGS. Deduce, Poirot, if you will. Here is a lady, richly dressed—fashionable hat, magnificent furs. She is strolling along slowly, looking up at the houses as she goes. (*We now see two ONLOOKERS behind Mary Marvell. They speak softly to each other as they observe Miss Marvell.*) Unknown to her, she is being shadowed by a middle-aged man and woman. (*Another ONLOOKER joins the other two and points at Mary Marvell.*) Ah! They have just been joined by another man who is pointing at the lady. So, is the lady a crook, and are the others detectives preparing to arrest her? Or are they scoundrels plotting to attack an innocent victim? (*Looking at Poirot.*) What does the great detective say?

POIROT. The great detective, *mon ami*? (*Chuckles, as he moves to the window.*) As usual your facts are tinged with your incurable romanticism. (*After a brief pause.*) *Je n'y crois pas* [I do not believe it]! That, *mon ami*, is Mary Marvell!

HASTINGS. (*Disbelieving.*) Mary Marvell, you say?

POIROT. (*Enraptured.*) *Oui!* The American film star!

HASTINGS. Are you sure?

POIROT. There is no doubt, *mon cher* [my dear]. Understandably, she is being followed by a bevy of admirers who have recognized her. (*The Onlookers get closer to Mary Marvell.*) And, by the way, my dear Hastings, she is quite aware of the fact. (*Mary Marvell curtly acknowledges the Onlookers, and the Onlookers exit, leaving Mary Marvell alone in the light.*)

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

POIROT. *Exactement* [Exactly]! And how many times have you seen Mary Marvell on the screen, *mon cher*?

HASTINGS. A handful of times, perhaps. You?

POIROT. (*Minimizing his admiration of Mary Marvell.*) *Eh*, somewhat more than that, I suppose—

HASTINGS. So, then you are a *fan* of Miss Marvell?

POIROT. (*Embarrassed, defensive.*) I admire her talent, yes.

HASTINGS. She is quite lovely, I'll give you that.

POIROT. She is more than merely lovely, my friend. She is *la première artiste du cinéma* [the most important film artist]! But I am not surprised

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you do not recognize her.

HASTINGS. (*Feebly, looking through the window.*) She looks so different in person.

POIROT. Is it that you expect her to promenade herself in the streets of London in a cowboy hat—or with a bunch of curls as an Irish colleen? Always with you it is the non-essentials! (*The lights fade on Mary Marvell. Hastings, annoyed, moves away from the window and shrugs.*) But console yourself, *mon ami*. All cannot be as Hercule Poirot! (*MRS. MURCHISON, Poirot's housekeeper and cook, enters. Though she tries, she does not pronounce French words very well.*)

MRS. MURCHISON. (*Entering.*) May I clear, Monsieur Poirot?

POIROT. *Merci, bien*, [Thank you, yes] Mrs. Murchison. (*Mrs. Murchison removes a little book from her pocket and consults it. She is trying to learn some conversational French. Having found what she's looking for, she responds.*)

MRS. MURCHISON. (*Speaking French slowly and very badly.*) *Il n'y a pas de quoi* [You're welcome].

POIROT. Listen closely. (*Pronouncing slowly and distinctly.*) *Il – n'y – a – pas – de – quoi*. (*Mrs. Murchison nods, consults her book again, and repeats the same terrible pronunciation, just more slowly.*)

MRS. MURCHISON. *Il – n'y – a – pas – de – quoi*.

POIROT. (*Trying to cover his disapproval.*) Ah, *très bien* [very good].

MRS. MURCHISON. (*Still badly mispronouncing.*) *Merci*. (*Mrs. Murchison begins to clear the plates, cups, etc.*)

POIROT. And may I compliment you on today's soft-boiled egg. *C'était magnifique* [It was wonderful]!

MRS. MURCHISON. (*Not entirely understanding Poirot but continuing to clear.*) Very good, sir.

HASTINGS. (*A little annoyed.*) You really have the best opinion of yourself, Poirot, of anyone I ever knew!

POIROT. (*Moving to the window again.*) When one is unique, Hastings, one knows it! And others share that opinion— (*Suddenly excited, nervous.*) —even, if I mistake not, Miss Mary Marvell.

HASTINGS. What?

POIROT. (*Excited, still peering out the window.*) Without doubt, she is

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coming here.

HASTINGS. How do you make that out? (*Mrs. Murchison exits with the breakfast things. Poirot primps for the arrival of Mary Marvell—examining his boutonniere, fluffing his pocket handkerchief, straightening his tie and moustache, etc.—all the while, trying to feign a calm demeanor for Hastings.*)

POIROT. Very simply. This street is not aristocratic, *mon ami*. In it, there is no fashionable doctor, no fashionable dentist—still less is there a fashionable milliner.

HASTINGS. I see, yes, but—

POIROT. But there *is* a fashionable detective! “You have lost your gold pencil case? You must go to the little Belgian. He is too marvelous! Everyone goes there!” And they arrive—in flocks, *mon ami*! (*A doorbell rings. Mrs. Murchison enters and heads off to the front door of the flat.*) What did I tell you? That will be Miss Marvell. (*Mary Marvell, followed by Mrs. Murchison, enters.*)

MRS. MURCHISON. (*Impressed.*) Miss Marvell, sir.

POIROT. (*Gushing a bit, bowing formally.*) It is an honor, Miss Marvell. Truly—an honor.

MARY MARVELL. (*Extending her hand, which Poirot takes.*) That’s very kind of you, Mr. Poirot.

POIROT. Not at all. (*Poirot notices Mrs. Murchison lurking.*) That will be all, Mrs. Murchison.

MRS. MURCHISON. (*Trying, but still mispronouncing.*) *Merci?* (*Poirot nods weakly and Mrs. Murchison exits. Mary Marvell immediately begins nervously and excitedly speaking. As she does, Poirot ushers her to a chair.*)

MARY MARVELL. You will probably think me very foolish, Mr. Poirot, but Lord Cronsaw was telling me last night how wonderfully you cleared up the mystery of his nephew’s death—

POIROT. (*Interrupting.*) Ah, yes, the affair at the Victory Ball—

MARY MARVELL. (*Continuing.*) —and I felt I just *must* have your advice. Undoubtedly, it’s only a silly hoax—Gregory says so—my husband Gregory Rolf, the actor—but it’s just worrying me to death.

POIROT. (*Smiling encouragingly.*) Proceed, *madame*. You comprehend—

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I am still in the dark.

MARY MARVELL. (*Removing three letters from her handbag and handing them to Poirot.*) It's these letters.

POIROT. Ah, *oui*. (*Scrutinizing the letters.*) Cheap paper—the name and address carefully printed. Let us see the inside. (*Hastings peers over Poirot's shoulder.*)

MARY MARVELL. I just assumed the first letter was a joke. You really wouldn't believe the kind of mail I get sometimes. When I got the second, though, I began to wonder.

POIROT. (*Reading from the first letter.*) "The great diamond, the Western Star, which is the left eye of the god, must return whence it came."

(*Looking now at the second letter.*) I see the second letter is the same.

MARY MARVELL. The third came just yesterday, and it seemed to me that the matter might be more serious than I had imagined after all.

POIROT. (*Reading from the third letter.*) "You have been warned. You have not obeyed. Now it will be taken from you. At the full of the moon, the two diamonds—the Western and Eastern Stars—the left and right eyes of the god— shall return. So it is written." (*Examining the envelopes again.*) I see they did not come by post, these letters.

MARY MARVELL. (*Secretively, dramatically.*) No, the desk clerk at the hotel told Gregory they were delivered by hand—by a curious Chinese fellow. That's what frightens me.

POIROT. Why?

MARY MARVELL. Because Gregory bought the diamond in Chinatown in San Francisco three years ago. It was his wedding present to me.

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

MARY MARVELL. (*Interrupting, excitedly.*) Exactly—the Western Star! It *has* to be. Gregory remembers that at the time there was some story attached to the diamond, but the man who sold it wasn't handing out any information. According to Greg, the man seemed scared to death and in a mortal hurry to get rid of the thing. He sold it to Greg for only about a tenth of its value.

POIROT. (*Nodding.*) The story seems of an almost unbelievable romanticism. And yet—who knows? (*To Hastings.*) I pray you, Hastings,

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hand to me my little almanac. (*Hastings does so. Poirot looks through the book.*) Now—when is the date of the full moon? Ah, Friday next. That is in three days' time.

MARY MARVELL. What are you saying, Mr. Poirot?

POIROT. *Eh bien* [Well], *madame*, you seek my advice—I give it to you. This story of the Chinese god may be a hoax—

MARY MARVELL. (*Interrupting.*) Is that what you think?

POIROT. (*Continuing.*) —*but* it may not! Therefore, I counsel you, *madame*, to place the diamond in my keeping until after Friday next. Then we can take what steps we please.

MARY MARVELL. (*After a pause, constrainedly.*) I'm afraid that's impossible.

POIROT. (*Narrowing his focus.*) You have it with you, do you not? (*Mary Marvell hesitates, then reaches into the bosom of her gown and removes a long chain holding on its end a beautiful large diamond. Poirot extends his hand.*) With your permission, *madame*? (*She places the jewel in his hand, and Poirot inspects it.*) A magnificent stone—without a flaw. (*He returns it to her.*) And you carry it about with you—like that?

MARY MARVELL. No, no, I'm *very* careful with it, Mr. Poirot—really! When we travel, it's locked up in my jewelry case and left in the hotel safe deposit. We're staying at Claridge's. I just brought it along today for you to see.

POIROT. Then you will leave it with me, *n'est-ce pas* [won't you]? You will be advised by Papa Poirot?

MARY MARVELL. (*Hesitantly.*) Well, you see, it's this way, Mr. Poirot. On Friday, we're going down to Yardly Chase to spend a few days with Lord and Lady Yardly. (*Hastings particularly notices this bit of information.*) I'll let you in on a little secret, Mr. Poirot. Greg and I have got a deal on with Lord Yardly. We're trying to arrange to do a film down there using their ancient pile of a home as a location. (*Hastings and Poirot are both somewhat shocked at Mary Marvell's remark.*)

HASTINGS. (*A bit offended.*) You mean Yardly Chase?

POIROT. (*Defensive.*) Why, Yardly Chase, *madame*, is one of the show places of all of England!

MARY MARVELL. (*Nodding, unaware they have taken offense.*) I guess

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it's the real old feudal stuff, all right. But Lord Yardly wants a pretty stiff price, and, of course, I don't know yet whether the deal will go through, but Greg and I always like to combine business with pleasure.

POIROT. (*His disappointment in Mary Marvell growing.*) But—pardon me if I am dense, *madame*—surely it is possible to visit Yardly Chase without taking the diamond with you?

MARY MARVELL. (*Firmly.*) I want to wear it down there.

HASTINGS. I presume there are some very famous jewels in the Yardly collection, a large diamond among them?

MARY MARVELL. (*Curtly.*) That's right.

POIROT. (*Under his breath to Hastings.*) Ah, *c'est comme ça* [it's like that]! (*Louder.*) Then you are already acquainted with Lady Yardly—or perhaps your husband is?

MARY MARVELL. (*A little defensive.*) We both met them when they were on vacation in California three years ago—spent quite a lot of time with them, actually. (*A short pause, then abruptly.*) Do either of you read the “Society Gossip” column in the paper?

HASTINGS. (*Minimizing his interest in gossip.*) Well, from time to time, I suppose— (*Meanwhile, Mary Marvell has produced the paper she has with her, and opens it to find the column.*)

MARY MARVELL. (*Interrupting.*) I ask because, in today's, there's a bit on famous jewels, and it's really very curious— (*Hastings extends his hand and Mary Marvell gives the paper to him. She points to the column.*) Right there.

HASTINGS. (*Reading.*) “... Amongst other famous stones may be included the ‘Star of the East,’ a diamond in the possession of the Yardly family.” (*Giving Poirot a look and continuing to read.*) “An ancestor of the present Lord Yardly brought it back from China. The stone is said to be the right eye of a Chinese temple god. Another diamond, exactly similar in shape and size, formed the left eye, and the story goes that both jewels would, in course of time, be stolen. ‘One eye shall go West, the other East, till they meet once more in triumph and return to the god.’” (*To Poirot.*) I say!

POIROT. (*Reaching for the paper.*) Let me see that, Hastings. (*Reading.*) “It is a curious coincidence that there is, at the present time, a stone

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corresponding closely in description with this 'Star of the East.' It is known as the 'Star of the West' and is the property of the celebrated film actress Mary Marvell." (*Looking up now.*) Curious indeed. Without a doubt a romance of the first water! (*The doorbell rings, and Mrs. Murchison dutifully enters from the kitchen. She crosses and exits to answer the front door. Poirot continues, somewhat mockingly.*) And you are not afraid, *madame*? You do not fear to introduce these two Siamese twins to each other lest a strange Chinese fellow should appear and, presto!, whisk them away to the Far East?

MARY MARVELL. (*Defensive.*) I can't believe that Lady Yardly's diamond is anywhere as good as mine. Mine is insured for fifty thousand dollars, you know. Anyway, I intend to find out. (*Mrs. Murchison enters, followed by GREGORY ROLF, looking every inch the movie star. Again, Mrs. Murchison is impressed.*)

MRS. MURCHISON. Mr. Rolf to see you, sir.

GREGORY. (*Spotting his wife.*) Ah, there you are, sweetheart! I said I'd call 'round for you, and here I am.

POIROT. (*To Mrs. Murchison who has stayed to get a look at the handsome Gregory Rolf.*) *Merci bien*, Mrs. Murchison.

MRS. MURCHISON. (*Trying and failing with her pronunciation.*) *Je vous en prie* [You're welcome]? (*Again, Poirot nods weakly and Mrs. Murchison exits.*)

POIROT. (*Making a little bow to Gregory.*) *Hercule Poirot, monsieur.*

MARY MARVELL. This is my husband, Mr. Poirot—Gregory Rolf.

POIROT. Yes, I am familiar with Monsieur Rolf from the cinema.

GREGORY. Oh, don't tell me that the illustrious Hercule Poirot is a fan of the flicks!

POIROT. I am a devotee of all manner of art, *monsieur*.

GREGORY. Well, I'm flattered, Mr. Poirot—though a bit surprised you recognize me. My last few pictures haven't exactly set the box office on fire—anyway, not like Mary's.

MARY MARVELL. Don't listen to him, Mr. Poirot—he's just fishing for compliments. (*To Gregory.*) And besides, sweetheart, I always consider my success *your* success.

GREGORY. She's pretty swell, don't you think, Mr. Poirot?

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POIROT. (*Confused by the slang but taking a stab at a response.*) I would say so—yes.

GREGORY. (*To Mary Marvell.*) And just what does the great detective say to our little problem, my dear? (*To Poirot.*) Same as I do—just a lotta “phonus balonus?” (*Poirot, confused by the slang term, looks to Hastings for help. Hastings shrugs.*)

GREGORY. (*Laughing.*) A bunch of baloney! A hoax! What about it, Mr. Poirot? What do you say?

POIROT. (*Smiling, but serious.*) Hoax or no hoax, Monsieur Rolf, I have advised *madame* not to take the jewel with her to Yardly Chase on Friday.

GREGORY. Ha! I’ve told her the same thing, believe me—but she’s a woman through and through, you know what I mean? She can’t bear to think of some other dame outshining her in the jewelry department.

MARY MARVELL. (*Sharply.*) Nonsense!

POIROT. (*Shrugging.*) *Madame*, I have advised. I can do no more.

MARY MARVELL. (*A bit taken aback.*) That’s it, then?

POIROT. *Oui, madame. C’est fini* [It is finished]. (*Bowing, and then crossing to the door to show them out.*) *Au revoir* [Goodbye]. (*Mary Marvell and Gregory look at each other, and then proceed to leave.*)

GREGORY. (*Somewhat nonplussed, indicating to his wife to proceed.*) I guess that’s our cue, darling.

MARY MARVELL. (*Passing Poirot, a bit put out.*) Thank you for your time, Mr. Poirot.

POIROT. *Je vous en prie* [You are welcome]. (*Mary Marvell and Gregory having exited, Poirot turns excitedly to Hastings.*) Oh, *la la!* *Les femmes* [Women]! Once they have made up their minds, nothing will change them, *n’est-ce pas* [will it]? The husband, he hit the nail on the head, though, did he not? All the same, he most assuredly was not very tactful, eh, *mon vieux* [old chap]?

HASTINGS. No, he wasn’t. In fact, Poirot, I recall hearing a rather unpleasant rumor a few years ago about Mr. Gregory Rolf.

POIROT. And just where did you come across this rumor, Hastings? The “Society Gossip” column, perhaps?

HASTINGS. Perhaps—and, well, you know, people talk.

POIROT. And the rumor— ?

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HASTINGS. Well, two rumors actually: One was that Lord Yardly, despite appearances to the contrary, desperately needed capital and was in the States trying to drum up interest with some American investors.

POIROT. Ah, I see. And the other rumor?

HASTINGS. The other concerned the lady of the Yardly manor: Supposedly, when they were in California and met Miss Marvell, Lady Yardly had quite a few private meetings, as it were, with a certain dashing movie star—

POIROT. Ah!

HASTINGS. Indeed. Gregory Rolf.

POIROT. So I thought. All the same, there is something curious underneath all this.

HASTINGS. (*Needling Poirot a bit.*) So, what was it like for you, Poirot, meeting Mary Marvell in person? Was she everything you'd imagined her to be?

POIROT. She was indeed very lovely, but—

HASTINGS. Yes?

POIROT. I think, *mon ami*, I prefer her on the screen.

HASTINGS. I see.

POIROT. (*Collecting his coat and hat in preparation to leave.*) With your permission, I will take the air. (*Exiting.*) Await my return, I beg of you. I shall not be long. (*Lights dim on Poirot's flat as Hastings steps aside into the light that isolates him.*)

SCENE 2

HASTINGS. (*Narrating.*) And just like that, he was off to who knows where. As the morning wore on, I grew weary of waiting for my friend's return, so I took to a comfortable chair with the morning papers. (*Lights up in Poirot's flat. Hastings crosses, picks up the papers, settles in the chair, folds the paper across his chest, and puts his head back for a snooze. As soon as he does, the doorbell rings. Mrs. Murchison enters from the kitchen. She notices Hastings asleep in a chair, his reading material resting on his chest, but does not disturb him. She exits to the front door, and then re-enters.*)

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MRS. MURCHISON. *(Clearing her throat to rouse Hastings.)* Ahem.

HASTINGS. *(Awaking, startled.)* Wha—what is it?

MRS. MURCHISON. It's another lady to see Mr. Poirot, sir. I've told her he's not in, but she says as how she'll wait, seeing as how she's come up from the country.

HASTINGS. *(Seizing an opportunity.)* Oh! Please show her in, Mrs. Murchison. Perhaps I can do something for her. *(Mrs. Murchison exits, while Hastings rises from the chair and readies himself to meet the guest. Mrs. Murchison re-enters, ushering in the new guest, the elegant and sophisticated LADY YARDLY.)*

MRS. MURCHISON. Right this way, your ladyship. *(To Hastings.)* Lady Yardly, sir.

HASTINGS. Thank you, Mrs. Murchison. *(Mrs. Murchison remains, impressed by the new guest.)* Thank you indeed, Mrs. Murchison. *(Mrs. Murchison takes the hint and exits. Hastings offers Lady Yardly a chair.)* Do sit down, Lady Yardly. My friend Poirot is out, but he should be back very shortly. *(Lady Yardly sits.)* In the meantime—

LADY YARDLY. Yes?

HASTINGS. *(Diving in.)* Lady Yardly, I know why you have come here. You have received blackmailing letters about the diamond.

LADY YARDLY. *(Astonished.)* You know? How?

HASTINGS. *(Smiling.)* By a perfectly logical process. If Miss Marvell has had warning letters, then—

LADY YARDLY. *(Interrupting.)* Mary Marvell? She has been here?

HASTINGS. She has just left. As I was saying, if she, as the holder of one of the twin diamonds, has received a mysterious series of warnings, you, as the holder of the other, must necessarily have done the same. *(Pleased with himself.)* You see how simple it is? I am right, then? You have also received these strange communications?

LADY YARDLY. *(Hesitating.)* That is so.

HASTINGS. And were yours also left by hand—by some Chinese chap?

LADY YARDLY. What? No, they came by post. But you say Miss Marvell has undergone the same experience?

HASTINGS. *(Showing Mary Marvell's letters to Lady Yardly.)* Indeed, she has. *(Lady Yardly peruses the letters with great interest.)*

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LADY YARDLY. Yes, it all fits. My letters are duplicates of hers. True, they came by post—but there *is* a curious perfume suffusing them—something in the nature of joss stick—that at once suggested the East to me. What does it all mean?

HASTINGS. That is what we must find out. You have your letters with you? We might learn something from the postmarks.

LADY YARDLY. *(After a moment's hesitation.)* No—no, I don't. You see, unfortunately, I destroyed them. You understand, at the time I regarded the whole affair as some foolish joke. *(Standing.)* Can it be true that some Chinese criminal gang are really trying to recover the diamonds? It seems too incredible.

HASTINGS. And just as soon as Poirot returns, you will tell him what you have told me—

LADY YARDLY. *(Suddenly making a decision.)* No—no, I don't think that will be necessary. I shan't wait for Monsieur Poirot. *(She starts to leave.)* I'm sorry to have bothered you. You can tell Monsieur Poirot all this, can't you? Thank you, Mr.— ? *(Lady Yardly hesitates, her hand outstretched.)*

HASTINGS. Captain Arthur Hastings.

LADY YARDLY. Oh, yes, of course! How stupid of me! You're a friend of the Cavendishes, aren't you? It was they who sent me to see Monsieur Poirot.

HASTINGS. Ah, yes. I've known them for years. We're old friends.

LADY YARDLY. *(Exiting.)* Yes, well, thank you again. You've been most helpful. Please have Monsieur Poirot be in touch as quickly as possible.

HASTINGS. You'll hear from us, most assuredly. *(Hastings is very pleased with himself as the lights dim on Poirot's flat and he steps again into the light that isolates him.)*

SCENE 3

HASTINGS. *(Narrating.)* When Poirot returned, I told him what had transpired during his absence. He questioned me rather sharply over the details of the conversation I'd had with Lady Yardly, and I could read that he was not at all pleased. Truth be told, he was inclined to be a tad jealous.

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It had become rather a habit of his to consistently belittle my abilities, and I think he was more than a mite chagrined to find no loophole for criticism in my handling of the matter. (*The lights of Poirot's flat brighten as we move into the scene and Hastings crosses to speak to Poirot who has entered. Poirot is looking through a large book.*) —and, confident that I could relay all the details of this business to you, she left. So—what say you, Poirot? Terribly curious, isn't it?

POIROT. *Bien* [Good]! The plot develops. (*Finding what he's been looking for in the book.*) Ah, here we are. Yardly. (*Reading.*) “10th viscount, served South African War ... *C'est pas important* [That is not important] ... married 1907 to the Honorable Maude Stopperton, fourth daughter of the 3rd Baron Cotteril ... Clubs ... residences ...” (*Closing the book.*) *Voilà*, that does not tell us much. But tomorrow morning we see this *milord* ourselves!

HASTINGS. What?

POIROT. Yes, I will telegraph him to meet us here.

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

POIROT. I am not acting for 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 so you're going to wire Lord Yardly to dash up here to London just to suit your convenience? I dare say he won't be pleased.

POIROT. *Au contraire* [On the contrary], if I preserve for him his family diamond, he shall be very grateful.

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

POIROT. Almost a certainty. Everything points that way.

HASTINGS. But how—?

POIROT. (*Gesturing to Hastings to be quiet.*) Not now, I pray you. Let us not confuse the mind. (*Starting to exit, carrying the book with him.*) As I have often told you, Hastings, we must always have order, method, *logique* [logic]—

HASTINGS. (*Overlapping with Poirot.*) “... method, *logique*—” Yes, yes, I'm well aware, Poirot. *Well aware.* (*As Poirot exits, Hastings steps into the light isolating him while the lights dim on Poirot's flat.*)

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SCENE 4

HASTINGS. (*Narrating.*) Poirot's wire summoning Lord Yardly to London was met with some alarm, and thus his lordship arrived at our flat late the following morning. Lord Yardly turned out to be a cheery, loud-voiced sportsman with a rather reddish face, but with a good-humored bonhomie about him that made up for any lack of native wit. (*Lights up on Poirot's flat. LORD YARDLY is in mid-conversation with Poirot. The light on Hastings dims as he crosses to join the two men.*)

LORD YARDLY. Extraordinary business this, Poirot. Can't make heads or tails of it. Seems my wife's been getting odd kinds of letters, and now this Miss Marvell's had 'em too, what? What do you think it all means?

POIROT. (*Handing the paper with the "Society Gossip" column to Lord Yardly.*) First, *milord*, I would ask you if the facts in this "Society Gossip" column are substantially correct?

LORD YARDLY. (*Angrily.*) Not at all—it's all damned nonsense! There's never been any romantic story attached to the diamond! It came from India originally, I believe. I've never heard of all this Chinese god stuff.

POIROT. Still, the stone *is* known as the "Star of the East."

LORD YARDLY. Well, what if it is?

POIROT. (*Smiling a little.*) What I would ask you to do, *milord*, is to place yourself into the hands of Hercule Poirot. If you do so unreservedly, I have great hopes of averting the theft.

LORD YARDLY. Then you think there's actually something to these wild tales?

POIROT. Will you do as I ask?

LORD YARDLY. Of course, I will, but—

POIROT. (*Interrupting.*) *Bien!* Then permit that I ask you a few questions. This financial affair of your leasing Yardly Chase for a motion picture—is it, as you say, all "fixed up" between you and Mr. Gregory Rolf?

LORD YARDLY. Oh, he told you about it, did he? No, no, there's nothing settled. (*After a brief pause.*) Might as well get the damned thing straight. I've made rather an ass of myself in many ways, Poirot—I'm up to my ears in debt—and the tax bills on the estate are murderous—but I

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want to straighten things up and be able to stay on at the old place. Gregory Rolf is offering me big money—enough to set me on my feet again. I don't want to do it—I hate the thought of all that crowd play-acting 'round the Chase—but I may have to, unless— (*Lord Yardly stops mid-sentence.*)

POIROT. (*After a brief pause.*) You have, then, another string to your bow? Permit that I make a guess? It is to sell the “Star of the East?”

LORD YARDLY. (*Nodding.*) I'm afraid so. It's been in the family for some generations. Still, it's not the easiest thing in the world to find a buyer. That jeweler Hoffberg, the Hatton Garden man, is on the lookout for a likely buyer for it, but he'll have to find one soon or it's a washout.

POIROT. One more question, *si vous voulez bien* [if you don't mind]—Lady Yardly, which plan does *she* approve?

LORD YARDLY. Oh, she's bitterly opposed to my selling the jewel. You know how women are. She's all for this film stunt.

POIROT. I comprehend. (*After a pause.*) Here is what you will do: Return to your home at once, *bien*?

LORD YARDLY. Back to Yardly Chase? But damn it, man, I just rushed down here—

POIROT. (*Interrupting.*) And say no word to anyone—to anyone, *c'est comprise* [is that understood]?

LORD YARDLY. Well, yes, if that's what you require—

POIROT. (*Interrupting.*) *Oui, milord.* Expect us there this evening shortly after seven.

LORD YARDLY. I suppose, yes, but I don't see—

POIROT. (*Interrupting.*) *Ça n'importe pas* [It does not matter]. (*Poirot starts to usher Lord Yardly out.*) You will see, *milord*, that I preserve for you your diamond, *n'est-ce pas* [will you not]?

LORD YARDLY. (*Bewildered.*) Of course, but—

POIROT. (*Interrupting as Lord Yardly exits.*) Then do as I say. (*Poirot and Hastings give each other a look, as Hastings moves to his isolated light.*)

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SCENE 5

HASTINGS. *(Narrating.)* Frankly, I was just as confused as Lord Yardly as to why we left London late that afternoon bound for Yardly Chase. Poirot, in his typically maddening fashion, refused to let me in on his scheme. It was nearing half-past seven that evening when we arrived. Yardly Chase was indeed, as Miss Marvell had said, an “ancient pile,” but, nevertheless, an impressive stately manor. *(The light dims on Hastings and brightens on the drawing room of Yardly Chase. Lord Yardly, now dressed for dinner, stands near the fireplace with a glass of brandy and his pipe, waiting for his wife to come down for dinner. Hastings joins Poirot, awaiting to be introduced at Yardly Chase. A BUTLER, Mullings, leads them into the drawing room.)*

BUTLER. Monsieur Poirot and Captain Hastings.

LORD YARDLY. Ah—there you are, Poirot. I was beginning to wonder if you’d made your train.

POIROT. For our untimely arrival, *excusez-nous, s’il vous plaît* [please pardon us.] And your wife, *milord?*

LORD YARDLY. *(Consulting his pocket watch.)* I expect her down any minute.

POIROT. And you have said nothing to her as I instructed— ?

LORD YARDLY. What do you take me for, Poirot? I’m not one to shirk a direct order—even one that requires keeping secrets from the missus.

POIROT. *Tres bien.*

LORD YARDLY. *(To the Butler.)* Mullings, would you mind seeing what’s keeping my wife?

BUTLER. Very well, sir. *(The Butler starts to exit.)*

LORD YARDLY. *(Catching the Butler as he leaves.)* And let her know I’m feeling quite peckish. *(At this moment, Lady Yardly enters, dressed for dinner.)*

LADY YARDLY. *(Having overheard her husband’s last remark.)* As usual, George. *(To the Butler.)* Thank you, Mullings. Let Cook know that I’m down now.

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BUTLER. (*Nodding.*) Yes, madame. (*The Butler exits.*)

LADY YARDLY. (*Extending her hand.*) Ah, Monsieur Poirot.

POIROT. (*Taking her hand and curtly bowing.*) Madame.

LADY YARDLY. (*Extending her hand again.*) And Captain Hastings.

HASTINGS. (*Taking her hand.*) A pleasure to see you again.

LADY YARDLY. I was wondering who possibly could be calling at this hour.

POIROT. *Excusez-nous, s'il vous plaît* [Please pardon us]. I apologize for our untimely arrival, *madame*—you are about to repair to your dining room, *n'est-ce pas* [is that so]?

LADY YARDLY. As a matter of fact—

POIROT. But it is that I investigate still this affair of Miss Marvell's. She comes to you on Friday, does she not?

LORD YARDLY. Yes, that's right—

POIROT. *Très bien.* Also— (*Turning to Lady Yardly.*) I wanted to ask of you, Lady Yardly, if you recollect at all the postmarks on the letters you received?

LADY YARDLY. I'm afraid I don't. It is stupid of me. But, you see, I never dreamt of taking them seriously.

POIROT. *C'est normal* [Understandable.] (*The doorbell rings again.*)

LORD YARDLY. (*Referring to another unexpected guest.*) Now what? (*Calling off to the Butler.*) Mullings?

POIROT. (*Looking about.*) With your permission, I make a little tour first to make sure all is secure.

LORD YARDLY. Oh—you plan to stay the night then?

LADY YARDLY. We were just about to go in for dinner—

POIROT. (*Assuming an invitation that has not yet been proffered.*) That is very kind of you, but I regret to say, Lady Yardly, we have left our bags at the inn. (*The Butler crosses the room on his way to the front hall.*)

LORD YARDLY. That's all right. We'll send down for them.

HASTINGS. No, that's not necessary—

LORD YARDLY. No trouble at all—and you will join us for dinner. (*To his wife.*) Isn't that right, Maude?

LADY YARDLY. (*Left with no choice.*) Yes—of course. Please stay. I'm sure Cook has prepared more than enough.

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HASTINGS. But we're not at all dressed for dinner—

LORD YARDLY. Nonsense—

POIROT. Well, if you insist—

LADY YARDLY. It's settled then. *(The Butler enters with a telegram on a silver tray. He takes the telegram to Lord Yardly.)*

LORD YARDLY. *(Taking the telegram.)* Thank you, Mullings. *(The Butler exits. Lord Yardly opens the telegram.)* Pardon. *(Lord Yardly reads the telegram and visibly stiffens. He hands it abruptly to Lady Yardly, who reads the telegram. Lord Yardly speaks to Poirot.)* It's from the jeweler—Hoffberg. He thinks he's found a buyer for the diamond—an American, sailing for the States tomorrow. They're sending a chap down tonight to vet the stone. By Jove, though, if this goes through—

LADY YARDLY. I wish you wouldn't sell it, George. It's been in the family so long. *(She waits for a response from her husband but receives none.)* I see. Then I'd best go get the necklace. I suppose I'll need to display "the goods." *(She hands the telegram back to her husband and starts to leave, but then turns to Poirot.)* It's one of the most hideous necklaces that was ever designed! George always promised to have the stones reset for me, but ... I suppose now it doesn't matter. *(Lady Yardly exits.)*

POIROT. *Milord, s'il vous plaît* [if you please], may I see the telegram? *(Lord Yardly hands the telegram to Poirot who examines it closely and then reads it. Hastings looks on.)*

HASTINGS. You say this Hoffberg chap has business in Hatton Garden?

LORD YARDLY. Yes, he works primarily with De Beers Consolidated.

HASTINGS. Ah, of course, De Beers. And Hatton Garden, you say? That puts me in mind of— *(Turning to Poirot.)* —of that nasty business with Lady Hatton—remember, Poirot—?

POIROT. *(Interrupting, trying to stop Hastings before he can proceed.)* Tsk, tsk, tsk, not now, *mon ami*—

HASTINGS. *(Continuing undeterred.)* —whose dismembered body was found lying on the cold cobbles of Farringdon Road, her heart still beating in her chest.

LORD YARDLY. I say, let's *not* mention that to Lady Yardly, what?

HASTINGS. They say Lady Hatton's ghost yet walks the streets—

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POIROT. (*Firmer.*) Hastings! *Ça suffit* [That's enough]!

HASTINGS. (*A bit defensive.*) It is an intriguing tale, you must admit. (*Lady Yardly enters just inside the door, now wearing the necklace.*)

LORD YARDLY. Ah, my dear—there you are.

LADY YARDLY. (*With one hand just touching the necklace, somewhat gaily.*) Behold the sacrifice. (*Moving to reach the light switch which is just outside the door.*) Now, Monsieur Poirot, Captain Hastings—you wait right there while I turn on the big light, and you shall feast your eyes on the ugliest necklace in all of England! (*As she steps out to turn on the light switch, suddenly all the lights go out, the door bangs shut, and, in the darkness, we hear a woman's piercing scream.*)

LORD YARDLY. (*Still in darkness.*) My God! That was Maude's voice! (*The men ad lib excitedly as they rush in the darkness to open the door and turn the lights back on. When the lights illuminate, they have discovered Lady Yardly lying outside the door.*) Bring her inside! Help me, Hastings!

POIROT. Careful, milord, careful! (*They get her inside. She seems barely conscious. The necklace is missing.*)

LADY YARDLY. (*Weakly.*) He's got it—that Chinese man—

LORD YARDLY. (*Rising.*) God damn the fiend! (*As Lord Yardly is about to go after the culprit, Poirot stops him.*)

POIROT. (*Springing up.*) No, milord! (*As he's leaving, to Hastings.*) Hastings! (*Poirot and Hastings run out the door, but within moments they re-enter. Poirot holds the necklace.*)

LORD YARDLY. (*Seeing the recovered necklace.*) Oh, thank God, Poirot! You've got it.

POIROT. (*Unfurling the necklace to show it more fully.*) Not so, milord. (*We see that there is a large gap in the necklace where the "Eastern Star" diamond should be. Lord Yardly gasps.*)

LADY YARDLY. The "Star of the East"—it's gone!

HASTINGS. That settles it. These were no ordinary thieves! The one stone was all they wanted.

POIROT. But how did the fellow get in?

LADY YARDLY. It must have been through the side door. (*Poirot quickly exits to check the door to the outside hall.*)

LORD YARDLY. (*Following Poirot and calling off after him.*) But it's

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always locked.

POIROT. (*Entering again after a moment.*) The door is *not* locked, *milord*—and I have found *this*. (*Poirot extends his hand to show a torn piece of embroidered Chinese silk.*) In his haste, the thief must have caught his sleeve in the door. (*To Hastings.*) *Allons vite* [Let's hurry]! He cannot have gone far as yet. (*Poirot hurriedly exits, leaving Lord Yardly to tend to his wife. Hastings moves quickly to the light that isolates him while the lights dim on the drawing room of Yardly Chase.*)

SCENE 6

HASTINGS. (*Narrating.*) In vain, we hunted and searched. In the pitch darkness of the night, the thief had found it easy to make his getaway. We returned reluctantly, and Lord Yardly sent a footman post-haste to fetch the police. Lady Yardly, sufficiently recovered, told us what had happened. (*Lights out on Hastings and up again in the drawing room of Yardly Chase. Lady Yardly is drinking a brandy. The Butler is serving drinks from a tray to Poirot and Lord Yardly. Hastings joins them and collects a drink as well. Lady Yardly has been recounting her experience.*)

LADY YARDLY. —and I was just about to turn on the other light when a man sprang on me from behind. He tore the necklace from my neck with such force that I fell headlong to the floor.

POIROT. This man—can you describe him?

LADY YARDLY. I'm afraid I only saw a glimpse of him disappearing through the side door. I did catch sight of his embroidered robe—the piece of which you found, Monsieur Poirot. (*A doorbell sounds, and the Butler exits to answer it.*)

POIROT. I apologize again, *madame*, that my friend and I were not swift enough to apprehend the thief.

LORD YARDLY. The police will catch the blackguard.

HASTINGS. With any luck. (*The Butler enters and crosses to Lord Yardly.*)

BUTLER. (*In a low voice.*) The gentleman Mr. Hoffberg sent, m'lord. He says you expect him.

LORD YARDLY. (*Flustered.*) Good heavens! (*To Lady Yardly.*) We must

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see him, I suppose. *(To the Butler.)* Not here, Mullings, in the library. *(The Butler exits. Now, extending his hand to Lady Yardly.)* My dear— ? *(To Poirot and Hastings.)* Pardon us, gentlemen. *(Lord and Lady Yardly exit.)*

HASTINGS. Look here, Poirot, hadn't we better get back to London?

POIROT. You think so? Why?

HASTINGS. *(Digging at Poirot a little.)* Well, things haven't gone very well, have they? I mean, you tell Lord Yardly to place himself in your hands and all will be well—and then the diamond vanishes from under your very nose.

POIROT. *(Crestfallen.)* Ah—true. It was not one of my most striking triumphs.

HASTINGS. So, having rather—pardon the expression—made a mess of things, don't you think it would be more graceful to leave immediately?

POIROT. But the dinner—the without a doubt *excellent* dinner—that the chef of Lord Yardly has prepared?

HASTINGS. *(Impatiently.)* Oh, what's dinner at a time like this?

POIROT. *(Horried.)* *Mon Dieu* [My God]! In this country you treat *la gastronomie* [gastronomy] with a criminal indifference!

HASTINGS. There *is* another reason why we should get back to London as soon as possible, Poirot.

POIROT. What is that, my friend?

HASTINGS. The other diamond—the one belonging to Miss Marvell.

POIROT. *Eh bien*, what of it?

HASTINGS. *(A bit annoyed.)* Don't you see? The thieves have already got one—now they'll go for the other!

POIROT. *(A sudden shock of admiration.)* Oh, but your brain, my friend! *C'est merveilleux* [That's wonderful]! Do you know for the moment I had not thought of that?

HASTINGS. Then it's lucky I *have*. So you see, there's no time to waste.

POIROT. There is plenty of time. The full of the moon, it is not until Friday.

HASTINGS. *(Sticking to his guns.)* Nevertheless, Poirot—

POIROT. Nevertheless, *mon ami*— *(After a moment of consideration.)* *Très bien!* You are right. *Allons-y* [Let's go]! *(Poirot exits. Hastings steps into the light that isolates him.)*

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SCENE 7

HASTINGS. *(Narrating.)* My idea was to go at once to Claridge's and relate to Miss Marvell what had occurred, but Poirot would have none of it, insisting that waiting until the next day would be time enough. I gave in rather grudgingly. The following morning, I readied myself to leave for the hotel, but Poirot seemed strangely disinclined to stir out. I suspected that, having botched things up to start with, he was singularly loath to proceed with the case. He pointed out, with some degree of common sense, that—*(Lights go out on Hastings and up on Poirot at his breakfast table. The next day. Poirot is holding the morning paper. Hastings joins Poirot.)*

POIROT. *(Dovetailing immediately on Hastings' line.)* —the details of the theft at Yardly Chase are already in the morning papers; therefore, *mon ami*, the Rolfs must know already quite as much as we could tell them.

HASTINGS. *(Defensive.)* But we were *there*, Poirot! Surely, we know more than the papers are reporting—*(Hastings takes the paper to which Poirot has referred and looks at it. At that instant, the telephone rings and Poirot answers.)* Hercule Poirot speaks. *(Poirot listens and reacts to the voice on the phone, saying nothing. As he does, his face betrays disappointment. Hastings watches.)* *Merci bien.* I will be there. *(Turning to Hastings, excited and ashamed.)* What do you think, *mon ami*? The diamond of Miss Marvell, it has been stolen.

HASTINGS. *(Standing, annoyed.)* What? And what about all that “full of the moon” nonsense *now*? *(Poirot hangs his head in shame.)* When did it happen?

POIROT. Just this morning, I understand.

HASTINGS. *(Rubbing it in.)* If only you had listened to me. You see, I was right!

POIROT. It appears so, *mon ami.* *(Springing into action, gathering his things to leave.)* Appearances are deceptive, they say, but it certainly appears so. We will to the hotel at once. *(Poirot moves to the area on stage, currently not illuminated, that is used to isolate Hastings for his narration. Hastings, still in the lit area of Poirot's flat, quickly grabs his coat and hat, speaking as he does so.)*

HASTINGS. *(Narrating.)* As we hurried in the taxi, I puzzled on the

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devious machinations of the thief's scheme. (*Lights dim on Poirot's breakfast table, as Hastings moves to join Poirot side-by-side. Lights up on Hastings and Poirot. They are now in a taxi on the way to Claridge's. Hastings continues, now speaking to Poirot.*) I say, Poirot, that "full of the moon" ruse was clever. The whole point of it was to get us to concentrate on the Friday, and so be off our guard beforehand. It is a pity you did not realize that.

POIROT. (*Nonchalantly.*) *Ma foi* [Indeed]! One cannot think of everything! (*Poirot exits.*)

HASTINGS. (*Self-satisfied.*) Cheer up. Better luck next time.

SCENE 8

HASTINGS. (*Hastings remains in the light that isolates him. He narrates again.*) At the hotel, we found Gregory Rolf anxiously awaiting us in the lobby. (*Lights come up on the lobby of Claridge's. Gregory Rolf and a hotel desk CLERK are waiting. Poirot enters, approaching Rolf and the Clerk. Hastings joins them.*)

GREGORY. Ah, Mr. Poirot—at last! We're getting to the bottom of it, but it's almost unbelievable. How the guy had the nerve to pull it off in broad daylight, I can't think.

POIROT. Tell us, please, Monsieur Rolf, everything you can remember.

GREGORY. I left the hotel at 11:15. But then at 11:30, an imposter entered the hotel, went to the front desk, and—

HASTINGS. An imposter, you say?

GREGORY. Yes, a damned lookalike for me, according to this fellow.

POIROT. (*To the Clerk.*) You were at the desk, *monsieur*?

CLERK. I was, sir, yes, sir.

POIROT. Go on.

CLERK. Well, as Mr. Rolf said, the gentleman approached the desk and demanded the jewel case from the safe deposit. He signed the receipt and everything.

POIROT. (*Extending his hand.*) The receipt, *s'il vous plaît*?

CLERK. I'm afraid I don't have it, sir—handed it over to the police. Then, Mr. Rolf—

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GREGORY. (*Protesting.*) Now, hold on there— !

CLERK. Rather the *other* gentleman who *looked* like Mr. Rolf—he told me his signature probably looked different because he'd hurt his hand getting out of the taxi. Truth be told, sir, I didn't really notice any difference in the signatures. (*Hastings scoffs.*) Then he joked and said, "Well, don't run me in this time anyway. I've been getting threatening letters from some Chinese chap, and the worst of it is I look rather like one myself—it's something about my eyes, I suppose."

GREGORY. (*Interrupting, protesting.*) I mean, really—

CLERK. Well, I looked at him, and I saw right away what he meant. I mean, his eyes *were* slanted up the corners. I'd never noticed that about Mr. Rolf before.

GREGORY. (*Angrily leaning in.*) Damn it all, man—do you notice it *now*?

CLERK. No, sir, can't say I do.

HASTINGS. Bold customer, eh, Poirot? Thought the eyes might be noticed and took the bull by the horns to disarm suspicion. (*To Gregory.*) So this imposter chap—he must have watched you leave the hotel and nipped in as soon as you were well away.

POIROT. What about the jewel case?

GREGORY. It was found in the corridor of the hotel. Only one thing had been taken—the "Western Star" itself.

CLERK. (*To Poirot.*) Will that be all, sir?

POIROT. *Oui, monsieur.* (*The Clerk exits. Now, to Gregory.*) Is it permitted to see your wife, *monsieur*?

GREGORY. I'm afraid that wouldn't be a good idea, Poirot. She seems to be in a state of shock.

HASTINGS. I dare say.

POIROT. (*After a pause.*) I have not been of much use, I fear. (*After a moment's consideration.*) Monsieur Rolf, to make amends, I would like to have you and your wife as my guests for supper this evening.

GREGORY. Oh—well, I'm afraid we have quite a full day ahead of us tomorrow. We leave London soon after breakfast to take the train to Yardly.

POIROT. I would consider it an honor if you would accept my invitation,

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monsieur. It would be but a small token of apology for my ineptitude in this catastrophe. (*Gregory doesn't answer immediately.*) Shall we say seven o'clock?

GREGORY. (*Agreeing reluctantly.*) Well—all right, then, sure, I suppose. Seven it is.

POIROT. Ah! *Très bien* [Very good]! I am most pleased.

GREGORY. Now, if you'll excuse me, Mary needs me upstairs. (*Gregory exits.*)

POIROT. *Au revoir, monsieur.* (*To Hastings, privately.*) Hastings, I have some private matters to which I must attend. I will meet you back at the rooms.

HASTINGS. Are you sure you're all right?

POIROT. I will be fine, *mon ami*. (*Starting to exit, then stopping.*) I know all that you feel about this miserable business. I admit I have not distinguished myself. You, in my place, might have distinguished yourself.

HASTINGS. Try not to take it too hard, old man. Everyone falters from time to time.

POIROT. *C'est la vie, hein* [That's life, eh]? I go now first to send a telegram.

HASTINGS. Who to?

POIROT. To Lord and Lady Yardly. They too will be joining us for supper this evening.

HASTINGS. Hold on—you're assuming an awful lot, aren't you, Poirot? What if they already have another engagement?

POIROT. If they have another engagement, I assure you, Hastings, they will cancel. (*As he exits.*) *Au revoir*, my friend! (*Hastings, completely perplexed, does not respond. As the lights dim on the hotel lobby, Hastings moves to the light that isolates him.*)

SCENE 9

HASTINGS. (*Narrating.*) Feeling somewhat bewildered by Poirot's impetuous dinner invitations, I went back to our rooms to await his return. When he arrived late in the afternoon, he immediately withdrew to his room to bathe and dress for dinner. (*The lights come up on Poirot's flat as*

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Hastings moves into the scene.) At seven o'clock on the dot, the doorbell rang— *(The doorbell rings. Mrs. Murchison immediately enters, crosses, and exits to answer the door.)* —and Poirot finally emerged from his room.

POIROT. *(Entering, dressed for dinner, looking at his pocket watch.)* Ah, *mon ami*. Let us put all disappointment aside, shall we? *Voilà!* Our guests they have arrived. *(Mrs. Murchison enters followed by an excited Lord and Lady Yardly. Mrs. Murchison exits. Poirot bows formally as he greets Lord and Lady Yardly.)* I am delighted you were able to accept, *milord*.

LORD YARDLY. *(Puzzled and a bit peevish.)* Yes, well, your wire was quite insistent, Poirot.

LADY YARDLY. *(Chilly.)* Hardly the sort of dinner invitation we are accustomed to receiving.

POIROT. I demand pardon. I hope that you will nevertheless appreciate the fare that has been arranged for you this evening.

LADY YARDLY. And exactly what sort of “fare” would that be? I suspect that supper is not all that is being served tonight.

POIROT. You are very perceptive, *madame*. *(The doorbell rings, and once again, Mrs. Murchison enters, crosses, and exits to answer the door. Meanwhile, the conversation continues.)* That will be the other guests.

LADY YARDLY. I wasn't aware it was a party, Monsieur Poirot. Otherwise, I would have brought a gift.

POIROT. It is I who will have a gift for you, *madame*. *(Mrs. Murchison enters, followed by Mary Marvell and Gregory Rolf. The tension is thick, only thinly masked by their practiced gentility.)* I believe introductions are not needed, *n'est-ce pas?*

MARY MARVELL. Heavens, no! We've known George and Maude for a few years now, haven't we, Greg?

GREGORY. It's nice to see you both again—though the circumstance isn't a very happy one, I'm afraid.

MARY MARVELL. We read all about your dreadful robbery in the papers this morning. Oh, Maude—it must have been terrifying for you!

LADY YARDLY. *(Still very chilly.)* Yes, it was—and we understand you've been the victims of a similar theft.

MARY MARVELL. I'm still rocked by the whole experience. *(Reaching out to take Lady Yardly's hand.)* Just feel—like a leaf.

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LADY YARDLY. (*Quickly releasing Mary's hand.*) Yes, I see.

HASTINGS. (*Trying to cut the tension.*) Shall we start with drinks?

GREGORY. By all means.

LORD YARDLY. No, I think drinks can wait. Poirot, there's something fishy going on here—and I want to know what it is.

POIROT. What do mean, *milord*?

LORD YARDLY. Well, first of all, that man who came to see us last night about buying the diamond—I've rung 'round to the jeweler's today, and they say they know nothing of him—and nothing of any telegram being sent to me either. You don't think that the *thief* was the one who—?

POIROT. (*Interrupting, holding up his hand to silence Lord Yardly.*) No, *milord*, I do not. It was *I* who sent that wire to you last night—and *I* who hired the gentleman in question.

LORD YARDLY. (*Sputtering.*)
What?

HASTINGS. (*Simultaneously.*)
You—but why?

POIROT. My little idea was to bring things to head.

HASTINGS. (*Shocked.*) “Bring things to head”? My God, Poirot!

POIROT. I demand pardon for my *petite ruse* [little ruse]—but it was all in the service of preventing the theft of the diamond.

LADY YARDLY. Which you did *not* prevent after all.

POIROT. I regret that I did not, *madame*, and for that I demand pardon. But I hope to be of some assistance to you in its recovery.

LADY YARDLY. And just how do you propose to go about that?

POIROT. *Permettez-moi* [Allow me]—if you grant me patience, I will endeavor to explain. To do so, we must start at the beginning. (*After a moment's pause.*) I understand, *madame*, that you first met the Rolfs while on holiday in California, is that not so?

LADY YARDLY. Yes, my husband and I saw them somewhat during our visit there.

MARY MARVELL. The four of us had quite a few laughs together, didn't we?

POIROT. It is also my understanding that it was not always four of you in the group.

MARY MARVELL. Well, of course, I was called to the studio quite a lot.

POIROT. (*To Lord Yardly.*) And you, *milord*—were you not also

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pursuing business ventures while on holiday?

LORD YARDLY. As a matter of fact, I did spend some time with some American chaps discussing a small investment.

POIROT. So, I take it there were times when Lady Yardly was left alone with Monsieur Rolf.

LORD YARDLY. I suppose so, but—

POIROT. Monsieur Rolf is handsome. He has an air about him of romance—but, in truth, *ce monsieur* [this man], he is all business.

LORD YARDLY. Just what are you implying, Poirot? Out with it.

POIROT. It is this, *milord*: Gregory Rolf made love to Lady Yardly, and then he blackmailed her.

GREGORY. How dare you!

POIROT. *(To Lady Yardly.)* Do you deny it, *madame*?

LORD YARDLY. That's quite enough, Poirot. *(Taking his wife's arm to lead her away.)* We'll be leaving.

LADY YARDLY. *(Pulling away from her husband.)* No, it's true. *(All react with shock. Mary Marvell gives Gregory a hard look.)*

GREGORY. I can explain, darling— *(Mary Marvell slaps Gregory hard and steps away from him.)*

LORD YARDLY. *(To Lady Yardly.)* How could you?

LADY YARDLY. I swear to you, George, it was nothing. A foolish indiscretion. You must believe me.

POIROT. *(To Lady Yardly.)* But undoubtedly, Monsieur Rolf had letters from you, Lady Yardly—letters that could be twisted to bear a *different* interpretation—letters that Monsieur Rolf no doubt threatened to show to your husband.

LORD YARDLY. Is that true, Maude? *(Lady Yardly nods.)*

POIROT. Terrified by the prospect of divorce and having no money of your own, you agreed to all of Monsieur Rolf's demands, isn't that so, *madame*?

LADY YARDLY. I am ashamed to say I did.

GREGORY. *(Protesting vehemently.)* What demands?

POIROT. *(To Gregory.)* The ones you have been exacting for years, Monsieur Rolf—beginning with the “Star of the East” diamond itself.

LORD YARDLY. *(Shocked.)* What are you talking about, Poirot?

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POIROT. For the past three years, your diamond, *milord*, the “Star of the East,” has been in the possession of Miss Marvell.

LORD YARDLY. That’s impossible!

MARY MARVELL. But *my* diamond was the “Star of the *West*,” Mr. Poirot. Yes, they were said to be very similar, but they *are* two different stones.

POIROT. The two diamonds, *madame*, said to be so miraculously alike—

MARY MARVELL. Yes?

POIROT. (*Continuing.*) —they do not exist!

HASTINGS. What?

POIROT. (*To Hastings.*) There was only *one* diamond, my friend! The one Monsieur Rolf blackmailed Lady Yardly into handing over to him in California three years ago.

HASTINGS. But we saw Lady Yardly wearing the necklace with the “Star of the East” diamond just last night!

POIROT. I demand pardon, my friend. You do not recall her hand concealed the part of the necklace where a gap would have shown the missing jewel?

HASTINGS. (*Recalling with some shame.*) Now that you mention it—yes, I believe you’re right. How did I miss that?

POIROT. I suspect that when Lady Yardly forfeited the real “Star of the East” to Monsieur Rolf, she was forced to permit him to substitute a paste replica to be set in her necklace.

LADY YARDLY. I’m afraid so—yes.

POIROT. And suddenly, *voilà!* The twin diamond, the “Star of the *West*,” suddenly appears in California!

LORD YARDLY. But that stone had been in the family for years, Maude! How could you just hand it over to this bounder?

LADY YARDLY. George, can’t you see I had no choice? I was so dreadfully ashamed, and it was the only way I had of keeping him quiet.

POIROT. (*To Lady Yardly.*) And it all goes well for you, does it not, *madame*? That is until your husband encounters some financial woes and proffers the possible sale of the “Star of the East.” The substitution will no doubt be discovered!

HASTINGS. The paste copy!

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LADY YARDLY. Yes, I was frantic with worry, as you can imagine. Incredibly, I read in the papers that the Rolfs had just arrived in London on holiday, so I wrote to Gregory. I explained that if my husband were to discover the truth about the jewel, I'd be forced to confess to him the details of my indiscretion—and then, if George were to begin divorce proceedings, I would have no choice but to name Mr. Rolf as co-respondent. Of course, Gregory didn't want that sort of publicity, so he came up with this scheme of a *double* robbery.

POIROT. (*To Gregory.*) In this way, Monsieur Rolf, not only will you be awarded the fifty thousand dollars insurance money for the alleged "loss" of Miss Marvell's diamond—

HASTINGS. (*Ashamed again.*) Oh, my God, the insurance!

POIROT. (*To Hastings.*) Aha, you had forgotten that! (*To Gregory again.*) But *also* you will still *have* the real diamond!

GREGORY. This is preposterous! I mean, really—you're making me out to be some sort of criminal mastermind.

POIROT. And are you not? The warning letters to your wife, the mysterious gentleman from the Far East, the fantastic tale of the twin jewels reported in the papers—all sprang from your ingenious mind!

MARY MARVELL. That's just not so—it can't be! (*To Gregory.*) Gregory—tell me you weren't behind all of that! (*Gregory is stony and silent.*)

POIROT. (*To Mary Marvell.*) Oh, he is indeed quite clever, *madame*—but not as clever as Hercule Poirot. (*To all.*) It is at this point that I put my finger in the pie. The arrival of the diamond expert—the one for whom I had arranged—is announced. Lady Yardly, as she has arranged with Monsieur Rolf, immediately enacts the *faux* theft—and does so very well, I must say.

GREGORY. Bravo, Mr. Poirot! That's quite brilliant. Go on—let's hear some more of this fiction.

POIROT. No, no, *monsieur*—Hercule Poirot, he sees nothing but *facts*. What happens *en réalité* [in reality]? The lady switches off the light, bangs the door, throws her necklace down the passage, and screams. She has previously removed the paste diamond with pliers upstairs—is that not so, Lady Yardly?

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LADY YARDLY. You're uncanny, Monsieur Poirot. Yes, that's right.

POIROT. *And to place a piece of silk in the door beforehand is child's play! And of course, Monsieur Rolf, as soon as you read of the robbery at Yardly Chase in the papers this morning, you arrange your own *petite comédie* [little comedy]!*

HASTINGS. *(Ashamed.)* The *second* counterfeit robbery!

POIROT. *(To Gregory.)* You *yourself* stole the *real* diamond which you'd placed in the hotel's safe, did you not, Monsieur Rolf?—with the assistance of a touch of greasepaint at the corner of each eye! *(To the rest.)* Ah, I must see him on the film—he is indeed an *artiste*, that one!

MARY MARVELL. That was *my* diamond! So, it's not really been stolen after all?

POIROT. Alas, *madame*, the diamond is not yours—but it *is* quite securely ensconced in your husband's pocket handkerchief, if I am not mistaken.

HASTINGS. What?

POIROT. *(Demonstrating to Hastings by patting his own suit pocket.)* You did not notice an ever-so-slight bulge, right here?

GREGORY. This is truly outlandish, Poirot—this tale you've concocted. Why, no one in his right mind would believe it!

POIROT. My friend at Scotland Yard might think otherwise, Monsieur Rolf. Shall I ring Inspector Japp and tell him the tale?

MARY MARVELL. Do you really have it with you, Gregory?

GREGORY. What a ridiculous question! What kind of fool do you take me for? *(In a smooth and sudden motion, Mary Marvell reaches for Gregory's pocket square, pulls it out, and from it removes the long chain on which hangs the "Star of the East" diamond.)*

MARY MARVELL. Apparently a bigger one than I ever realized. *(Handing the jewel to Poirot.)* Here, Mr. Poirot.

POIROT. *(Taking the jewel.)* *Merci, madame.* *(Handing the jewel to Lord Yardly.)* *Milord*, your diamond. I promised your "Star of the East" should be preserved to you, and I have kept my word.

LORD YARDLY. I am grateful to you, Monsieur. Poirot. You are a gentleman. *(To Gregory.)* And you, sir, are nothing of the sort. Expect to hear from my solicitors.

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POIROT. I do not think that wise, *milord*.

LORD YARDLEY. But this scoundrel needs to pay for what he's done, what? I mean, after all—

POIROT. (*Interrupting.*) Considering the circumstances of the crime and the reputations of all involved, I think it best that you are satisfied that the diamond has been returned to you, *n'est-ce pas?*

LADY YARDLY. He's right, George.

LORD YARDLY. (*After a moment.*) All right, then—yes. (*To Gregory.*) But if you ever try to contact me or my wife again, I shall ruin you. (*Again, Gregory remains stone-faced and silent. Now, to Poirot.*) My apologies, Poirot, but we won't be staying. I seem to have completely lost my appetite. (*Indicating to Lady Yardly to leave.*) Maude? (*Lady Yardly starts to exit.*)

LADY YARDLY. Thank you again, Monsieur Poirot. I must confess—I'm terribly ashamed of my actions throughout this entire affair. I hope you will not think too badly of me.

POIROT. On the contrary, *madame*. You have my admiration.

LADY YARDLY. That's kind of you. Goodnight. (*She exits.*)

LORD YARDLY. Goodnight, Mr. Poirot. (*He exits.*)

POIROT. Monsieur Rolf, you should consider yourself a very fortunate man.

GREGORY. Should I?

HASTINGS. If Lord Yardly hadn't changed his mind, you could be facing a litany of charges.

MARY MARVELL. Yes, thank you for that, Mr. Poirot.

POIROT. Make no mistake, *madame*, I did not speak on your husband's behalf. My concern was for you and for Lady Yardly.

GREGORY. (*Turning to Mary Marvell.*) I think we should go now, darling.

MARY MARVELL. You go on. I'll be right there. (*Gregory exits.*) I just wanted to thank you personally, Mr. Poirot. My mind is still whirling a bit—but at least my eyes have been opened.

POIROT. I am truly sorry for what Monsieur Rolf has put you through, *madame*.

MARY MARVELL. Oh, it's nothing compared to what I'm about to put

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him through, believe me.

POIROT. I hope that your film career does not suffer as a result of his misdeeds.

MARY MARVELL. Oh, don't you worry about that. Even if all this *does* come out, you know what they say—there's no such thing as bad publicity! Goodnight. (*Mary Marvell gives Poirot a quick kiss on the cheek, turns, and exits. Poirot is quite astonished. He turns to Hastings, who is obviously bothered by what he has witnessed.*)

HASTINGS. Poirot—am I quite demented?

POIROT. What do you mean, *mon ami*?

HASTINGS. You led me to believe, throughout this entire matter, that you were always a step behind—and that I was steadily beating you at your own game!

POIROT. No, no, my friend—

HASTINGS. (*Interrupting.*) Oh, yes—from the very beginning when I interviewed Lady Yardly and she told me about the letters she'd received.

POIROT. *Eh, bien.* Lady Yardly's letters—

HASTINGS. It's obvious now that it was Rolf who had sent those letters to her—duplicates of the ones he'd sent to his wife.

POIROT. No, not at all. She came here to seek my aid not about the possible theft of her diamond, but about her dilemma regarding Monsieur Rolf's *blackmail* scheme, did she not? *But* when she heard that Mary Marvell—whom she knew to be her enemy—had been here first, she changed her mind, jumping at a pretext that *you*, my friend, offered her.

HASTINGS. *I* offered her—?

POIROT. When you relayed to me the details of your interview with the lady, you said that *you* were the one to first mention the threatening letters Miss Marvell had received regarding her diamond. Lady Yardly jumped at the chance your words offered.

HASTINGS. (*Ashamed.*) I don't believe it—

POIROT. *Mon ami*, it is a pity you study not the psychology. And she told you that the letters were destroyed?

HASTINGS. Well, yes—

POIROT. Oh, *la la*, never does a woman destroy a letter if she can avoid it—not even if it would be more prudent to do so. She received no letters

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threatening the theft of the “Eastern Star” diamond, *mon ami*. The only letters of which Lady Yardly was in possession were threats from a star of the Hollywood films.

HASTINGS. And that man you hired to show up at Yardly Chase pretending to be from Hoffberg’s to—what was it you said?—to “bring things to head?”

POIROT. And did it not?

HASTINGS. That’s not the point, Poirot! And the two robberies—you led me to believe they were genuine criminal acts, when you know all along they were utter shams!

POIROT. But, my friend, had I told you what I had deduced, your reactions might not have been so convincingly impassioned.

HASTINGS. (*His anger rising.*) Oh, it’s all very well for you, Poirot, but you’ve made a perfect fool of me—from beginning to end!

POIROT. *Excuse-moi* [Pardon me], *mon ami*—

HASTINGS. Letting me believe in this fiction that you were fumbling, and that I, for once, was a step ahead of you—

POIROT. (*Interrupting.*) Where is the harm, my friend?

HASTINGS. No, it’s all very well to try and explain it away afterward as you always do, but there really is a limit!

POIROT. But you were so enjoying yourself, my friend. I had not the heart to shatter your illusions.

HASTINGS. It’s no good, Poirot. I tell you I’m fed up! (*Hastings gathers his hat and coat in preparation to leave.*)

POIROT. *Mon Dieu* [My God] but how you enrage yourself for nothing, *mon ami*!

HASTINGS. (*At the door.*) You’ve gone too far this time—too far! (*Hastings, in a huff, exits. We hear a door slam as he leaves the apartment. Poirot collects himself quickly and returns to his tea. Having overheard the raised voices and excitement, Mrs. Murchison pokes back into the room.*)

MRS. MURCHISON. Everything all right, sir?

POIROT. *Tout va bien, merci* [All is well, thank you].

MRS. MURCHISON. (*Taking out her booklet to consult it, and then mispro-nouncing her response badly.*) *De rien* [You’re welcome]. (*After a*

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pause.) And your guests?

POIROT. They have left, Mrs. Murchison.

MRS. MURCHISON. But what about supper? Took me all afternoon, sir.

POIROT. *Je suis désolé* [I am sorry].

MRS. MURCHISON. *(Consulting her book again and not finding the expression, repeating it under her breath, mispronouncing.)* “*Je suis désolé ...*”

POIROT. *(Providing the proper pronunciation and translating.)* *Je suis désolé.* It means “I am sorry.” A thousand apologies. Truly.

MRS. MURCHISON. All right, sir. *(Mrs. Murchison, disappointed and a bit put out, starts to exit.)*

POIROT. Mrs. Murchison?

MRS. MURCHISON. Yes, sir?

POIROT. Just one for supper this evening.

MRS. MURCHISON. You mean, just yourself? No Captain Hastings?

POIROT. *Oui. C'est ça* [That's right].

MRS. MURCHISON. *(Mispronouncing.)* *Tres bien.* *(Mrs. Murchison exits. Poirot winces. He sits, not as self-satisfied as usual. Lights dim just a bit on Poirot, as another light comes up isolating Hastings, who has re-entered.)*

HASTINGS. *(Narrating, to audience.)* Absolutely infuriating, isn't he? Infuriatingly egotistical, infuriatingly smug— *(After a pause.)* —and, I suppose, infuriatingly right—which is the *most* infuriating thing of all! *(Another pause.)* Eventually, of course, I'll forgive him—but not yet. Not until he apologizes. I can afford to wait. Let him stew a bit. *(Another pause.)* You go on about your business. Have your interval. I'll just wait. You'll see. He'll come around. *(To offstage.)* Lights! *(Blackout.)*

END OF ACT I

THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—

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