

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

Hercule Poiret's First Case



MURDER MYSTERY Adapted by Jon Jory

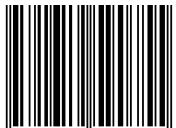
Based on *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* by Agatha Christie

Hercule Poirot's First Case

Murder mystery. Adapted by Jon Jory. Based on The Mysterious Affair at Styles by Agatha Christie. Cast: 8m., 4w., with doubling. Who poisoned the wealthy Emily Inglethorpe, and how did the murderer penetrate and escape from her locked bedroom? The brilliant Belgian detective Hercule Poirot makes his unforgettable debut in Jon Jory's dynamic adaptation of Agatha Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Poirot, a Belgian refugee of the Great War, is settling in a small village in England near the remote country manor of Emily Inglethorp, a friend who assisted him in starting his new life. Poirot's friend, Hastings, arrives as a guest at her home. When Emily is killed, Poirot uses his detective skills to solve the mystery of who killed her. Was it her fawning new husband, Alfred; her volatile housekeeper, Dorcas; her companion, Evelyn Howard; or was it Cynthia Murdoch, the pretty nurse who works in a nearby hospital dispensary? Plot twists and red herrings abound in this fast-paced, dynamic and engaging new adaptation. *Simple set. Approximate running time: 80 minutes. Code: HG9.*

Cover design: Molly Germanotta.

ISBN: 978-1-61959-075-5



9 781619 1590755 >

www.dramaticpublishing.com



Dramatic Publishing

Your Source for Plays and Musicals Since 1885

311 Washington Street
Woodstock, IL 60098
800-448-7469

© Dramatic Publishing Company

Hercule Poirot's First Case

Adapted by
JON JORY

From the novel by
AGATHA CHRISTIE



Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMXVI by
JON JORY

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(HERCULE POIROT'S FIRST CASE)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-075-5

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

Hercule Poirot's First Case

CHARACTERS

8m., 4w. with doubling.

John Cavendish

Lawrence Cavendish

Mary Cavendish

Hastings

Evie Howard

Mrs. Emily Inglethorp: Doubles Dorcas and Japp

Alfred Inglethorp: Doubles Mr. Phillips

Cynthia Murdoch: Doubles Annie and Mace

Hercule Poirot

Dr. Bauerstein: Doubles Manning

Dr. Wilkins: Doubles Sir Earnest Heavyweather

Coroner Wells: Doubles the Judge

INTERMISSION: If played straight through, the show will run about 80 minutes. If an intermission is desired, it should fall on page 39, directly after Wells' line: "This inquest is declared closed." The second act would then begin with the Japp/Poirot scene.

PRODUCING THE PLAY

The play, given its 30 locations, seems to demand a frankly theatrical scheme rather than Agatha's usual single setting. This demand, I think, will increase the audience's pleasure as she was never a strictly realistic writer.

The cast needs, even if they are dead or not in the scenes in question, to move the necessary furniture on and off in plain sight. Such furniture should be kept to a bare minimum, as in one chair and a side table representing a particular location. There are scenes where as many as six chairs might be required. Figuring this out will bond the director and stage manager together forever. In the script, when one scene ends, you will see the words "lights change." This hopefully does not necessitate a blackout. As scenes themselves may be static, this necessity of constant change will give the play dynamism.

This leads me to believe the play must be done flat on the floor without platforms to facilitate the changes. This, in turn (unless projections are used), implies a single background. This might be a painted version of the Styles estate or even, simply, a model of the house on a stand, or something else you imagine. It need not be, and probably can't be, set heavy.

To the side of the stage stands an easel on which placards are placed describing the location of the scene. This is always done by the character Cynthia, who is cheerful and charming by nature. It is always Cynthia, whether she is coming out of a scene or going into one. She does this in character.

I hope this helps.

—Jon Jory

Hercule Poirot's First Case

AT RISE: *The stage is bare. Upstage there is a painting or model of the Styles estate, built in the early nineteenth century and somewhat reconstructed in 1923. A member of the cast brings on the painter's easel, which is set facing the audience DL. CYNTHIA MURDOCH, a young woman in her early 20s, brings on a placard that reads, "The Garden at Styles." She will do this many times. She gives a quick insouciant curtsy to the audience and exits. Three men enter and arrange themselves. They are LAWRENCE CAVENDISH, JOHN CAVENDISH and HASTINGS. The lights brighten, and we begin.*

JOHN. First rate indeed, Hastings. Well done. A great pleasure having my old school fellow back at Styles. This is my brother, Lawrence Cavendish, who assisted in contacting the war office.

LAWRENCE. A pleasure, sir. You are well remembered.

HASTINGS. The pleasure is, of course, mine.

JOHN. The years melt away, eh. Happy summers we had.

HASTINGS. As I wrote, having been invalided home from the front ... *(He walks with a cane.)* and spending some months in that rather depressing convalescent home, I was, to say the least, delighted by your invitation.

JOHN. Once friends at the war office had unearthed you, I sent by first post.

LAWRENCE. Pray excuse me, Hastings, I believe I'm called for. *(Exits.)*

HASTINGS. Your mother is well, I hope?

JOHN. Did I write you she has married again?

HASTINGS. Has she?

JOHN. Rotten little bounder too! Making life jolly difficult, I tell you. As for Evie ... you remember Evie?

HASTINGS. I don't, I'm afraid.

JOHN. After your time. She's mother's companion, factotum and Jack of all Trades. Game as they make them. Anyway, this fellow turned up from nowhere. Second cousin or something of Evie's. Absolute outsider! Great black beard, boots in all weathers. Mother took him on as Secretary, and then three months ago they were engaged. Twenty years younger ... simply bare faced fortune hunting.

HASTINGS. Difficult situation.

JOHN. Damnable. Hello! Wonder if we've time to pick up Cynthia? (*Checks watch.*) Can't be done. Started from the hospital by now.

HASTINGS. Your wife?

JOHN. No, protégé of Mother's. Daughter of her school fellow. He came a cropper and the girl was left penniless. Mother to the rescue. Quite attractive by the way.

(EVIE HOWARD, a middle-aged woman in a stout, tweed skirt, enters.)

JOHN (*cont'd*). Hullo Evie, here's our wounded hero, Mr. Hastings, Miss Howard. Mother's right hand.

EVIE. Pleasure, I'm sure. Got you standing in the weeds has he? Press you into service, you don't look sharp.

HASTINGS. Beg your pardon?

EVIE. Weeding. Have you weeding, Mr. Hastings.

HASTINGS. Ah.

(MARY CAVENDISH, JOHN's wife, enters. An untamed spirit in civilized form.)

MARY. Well this is wonderful indeed. My dear, Mr. Hastings, how nice of you to come.

JOHN. My wife, Mary.

MARY. What an uncivilized welcome, John. We must have tea. Else what is that formal garden for?

(MARY moves off, calling for DORCAS. MRS. EMILY INGLETHORP, a handsome, white-haired, older lady enters.)

JOHN. Mother, you remember Mr. Hastings?

(She is followed on by her husband, ALFRED INGLETHORP.)

EMILY. Do I not? Partners in archery we were. Lovely to see you again, Hastings, I am very sorry for your injury in that dreadful war.

(LAWRENCE brings a chair for his mother.)

EMILY *(cont'd)*. Really, Lawrence, you needn't have. Mr. Hastings, may I introduce my husband, Alfred Inglethorp.

ALFRED. Good show, Hastings. Showed the Boche, eh. Awfully glad. *(Turns to EMILY.)* Emily dearest, let me turn the cushion as I fear it's damp. *(He does. She sits.)* Is soldiering your regular profession, sir?

(MARY returns.)

HASTINGS. No, before the war I was at Lloyds.

ALFRED. And you'll return there?

HASTINGS. Either that or a fresh start—but that, I fear, would provoke laughter.

MARY. Now you simply must tell. I don't know about tea, Dorcas is never where she ought.

HASTINGS. I've a secret hankering to be a detective.

(General reaction.)

MARY. How lovely. Scotland Yard or Sherlock Holmes?

HASTINGS. Holmes by all means. I'm awfully drawn to it. I came across a famous detective in Belgium once, and he quite inflamed me. Marvelous little fellow. I would hope to base my method on his.

EVIE. Like a good detective story myself. Lots of nonsense written through. Criminal discovered in the last chapter to general amazement. Real crime—you'd know at once. Not the police but the family, couldn't hoodwink them.

HASTINGS *(amused)*. Spot the murderer right off, would they?

EVIE. I would. Feel it in my fingertips.

EMILY. Oh, here's Cynthia!

(CYNTHIA enters in a nurse's uniform.)

CYNTHIA. Hullo, you lot.

EMILY. Late today, dear. Mr. Hastings—Miss Murdoch.

CYNTHIA. And quite nice looking. Oh! Exhausted! *(Flings herself down.)* Do sit on the grass. Ever so much nicer.

EMILY. Cynthia heads the Tadminster dispensary.

MARY. Ever so many little bottles.

CYNTHIA. Don't leave me alone, Lawrence, I'll be thought eccentric.

LAWRENCE. You are eccentric, Cynthia, luckily it's charming. I won't get down, I'd stain.

CYNTHIA. Oh, god.

HASTINGS. How many people do you poison? *(Sits beside her.)*

CYNTHIA. Oh hundreds, the poor devils.

EMILY *(rising)*. Could you possibly write a few more notes for me, Cynthia dear?

CYNTHIA *(jumping up)*. Certainly, Aunt Emily. A pleasure lolling about with you, Mr. Hastings. *(Exits.)*

EMILY. John will show you to your room, I'm sure. Supper is at half past seven. You must regard this as your home, Mr. Hastings.

(Lights change. Tea furniture off. Two formal chairs on. HASTINGS enters to JOHN, followed by MARY. The easel reads: "The Parlor.")

JOHN. A nice walk I hope.

MARY. Hayfield and back. Mr. Hastings strove to appreciate the pastoral.

JOHN. Look here, Mary, there's a deuce of a mess. Evie's had a row with Alfred Inglethorp and she's off.

MARY. Evie? Off?

JOHN. Yes, you see ...

(EVIE enters.)

JOHN. Ah, Evie herself.

EVIE. You needn't stare. I've simply spoken my mind on that dreadful Inglethorp.

MARY. My dear Evelyn, in what way?

EVIE. To Emily of course ... told her there's no fool like an old fool. What do you think he married you for? Just ask the bouncer how much time he spends with Farmer Raikes' pretty young wife? That man would as soon murder you in your bed as look at you. Of course she won't hear of it, so I'm off. No discussion now. Gone this minute!

MARY. I best see Mrs. Inglethorp. (*Exits*)

JOHN. I suppose I best look up trains. (*Exits, leaving HASTINGS and EVIE.*)

EVIE. Look after her, Mr. Hastings. My poor old Emily. They're a lot of sharks—all of them. Now I'm out of the way they'll savage her. Above all, watch that devil her husband.

(*EVIE exits. HASTINGS, thinking, moves down to a "window." JOHN re-enters.*)

JOHN. Great heaven's what a jumble! Mother can't do without Evie.

HASTINGS (*looking out*). Who is the bearded gent with your wife?

JOHN. That is Dr. Bauerstein, apparently doing a rest cure in the village. Mary enjoys his conversation. London specialist in poisons I believe. Fanatic hiker. You know, Hastings, Evie's going to be badly missed. A rough tongue, but a great friend to mother.

(*Lights change. Easel: "The Grounds." Bare stage.*)

HASTINGS. Penny-bright day despite the storm clouds indoors.

JOHN. Quite so. A glorious old place, Styles.

HASTINGS (*looking off*). Lovely girl out walking.

JOHN. Mrs. Raikes, the farmer's wife. Local Jezebel by reputation.

HASTINGS. The one Evie spoke of?

JOHN. Yes, that's the one. (*Stops.*) You know, Hastings, the Styles property will be mine one day—should be already if my father had only made a decent will. I shouldn't be so damn hard up as I am now. Wits end, really.

HASTINGS. Couldn't your brother help you?

JOHN. Lawrence? He's gone through every penny he ever had publishing rotten verses in fancy bindings. Rather enjoy the weather than think of it.

(Two short benches on, making a car. Lights change. JOHN off. LAWRENCE on, driving. Easel is changed to say, "The Automobile.")

HASTINGS. Awfully good of you, Lawrence, to drive me about.

LAWRENCE. Must take in the neighborhood, eh? I say, we might go a mile out of our way and pay a visit to Cynthia in her dispensary.

HASTINGS. Very charming girl.

LAWRENCE. Quite.

HASTINGS. Like to see her in her habitat.

(Lights change, "car" off. Easel says, "Dispensary." The two men are joined by CYNTHIA in a white coat.)

HASTINGS (*cont'd*). Lots of bottles, Miss Murdoch. Do you really know what's in them all?

CYNTHIA (*a groan*). I think I shall bestow a prize on our first visitor who doesn't say, "a lot of bottles." Next you'll ask whom I've poisoned lately.

HASTINGS. Promise I won't.

CYNTHIA. Come boys, let's have a cupper. We've a dozen teas in the cupboard. That's the poison cupboard, Lawrence ... the other one.

(Lights change. Easel says, "Lawn of the Dispensary." Table on. Two chairs.)

CYNTHIA *(cont'd)*. Ah, the blessed sun. *(She sits. LAWRENCE sits. HASTINGS stands.)* Now let's talk about something amusing.

HASTINGS. Rather like tea at the Borgias.

CYNTHIA *(smiling)*. Need to be bound and gagged, you do.

(HERCULE POIROT starts to cross the stage. He stops, amazed.)

POIROT. Mon ami, Hastings!

HASTINGS. Good heavens, Poirot! How remarkable. Cynthia Murdoch, Lawrence Cavendish, the renowned detective, Hercule Poirot.

POIROT. We are acquainted. I know Mademoiselle Cynthia, as it is by the charity of the good Mrs. Ingelthorp that I am here. She has extended a saving generosity to seven of my country people, war refugees, you see. Our little house is just there and we have visitors so I must leave you. This disappointment we will remedy with alacrity. *(Bows and leaves.)*

LAWRENCE. He goes everywhere in a rush that gentleman.

CYNTHIA. Such a dear little man. I'd no idea you knew him.

HASTINGS. You've been entertaining a celebrity unawares. His triumphs as a sleuth are legendary in Belgium.

(Lights change. Easel says, "The Living Room." One chair.)

HASTINGS *(cont'd)*. Home again. A delightful outing quite due to you, Miss Cynthia.

CYNTHIA. I am always delightful on Wednesdays, Mr. Hastings.

(EMILY enters in a robe.)

EMILY *(surprised)*. Oh it's you.

CYNTHIA. Your recitation went down awfully well at the village celebration, Aunt Emily.

EMILY. Yes, well ... how nice.

CYNTHIA. Is there anything the matter?

EMILY. Certainly not. Why should there be?

CYNTHIA. You seem quite startled.

EMILY. Not at all. I am looking for the maid, Dorcas, to light the fire in my room as I've letters I must finish by post time. If you'll excuse me. *(Exits.)*

CYNTHIA. Surprising. I wonder what's up?

(LAWRENCE turns on his heel and exits.)

CYNTHIA *(cont'd)*. Lawrence, where on earth are you going?

(MARY enters.)

MARY. Have you seen Mrs. Inglethorp?

CYNTHIA. Gone like a sprinter to her boudoir.

(MARY exits in that direction.)

CYNTHIA *(cont'd)*. What on earth? I must join the circus, Mr. Hastings. Lawrence?

(CYNTHIA exits. HASTINGS, alone, hears the following offstage dialogue.)

MARY *(off)*. And why don't you show it to me?

EMILY. My dear Mary, it has nothing to do with that matter and does not concern you in the least.

MARY. I might have known you would shield him, Emily.

CYNTHIA *(re-enters behind HASTINGS)*. Anything interesting, Mr. Hastings?

(Lights change. Easel: "The Library." Three chairs are set. ALFRED, EMILY and MARY are seated. CYNTHIA whispers to HASTINGS downstage.)

CYNTHIA *(cont'd)*. Another row. This time Aunt Emily and her husband. I do hope she's found him out at last.

EMILY. What is this whispering, Cynthia?

CYNTHIA. Only my secret passion for pudding, Aunt Emily. Every morsel of the meal was delicious.

EMILY. Yes, wasn't it? I'll leave youth to its secrets. Send my coffee to the boudoir, Mary. I've just five minutes to catch the post. *(Exits.)*

MARY *(to CYNTHIA and HASTINGS)*. Do you prefer the twilight or shall we have lights?

CYNTHIA. Twilight, please.

ALFRED *(rising)*. You must pardon me. I will take Mrs. Inglethorp her coffee as requested. *(Exits.)*

MARY. The man has certain dog-like qualities don't you think?

CYNTHIA *(laughing)*. Mary!

MARY. It's almost too hot. We shall have a thunderstorm.

DR. BAUERSTEIN *(off)*. Is anyone home?

MARY. Well, this is an evening of wonders.

(ALFRED returns, heading off to the front door.)

ALFRED. Easy on. I'll see to it.

CYNTHIA *(looking out a "window")*. It's Dr. Bauerstein I think.

MARY. At this hour? The man's quite intriguing.

CYNTHIA. I've noticed you think so.

(ALFRED ushers in DR. BAUERSTEIN, who is muddy and wet through.)

MARY. Good heavens, Doctor, what on earth have you been doing?

CYNTHIA. Playing in the mud apparently.

(John enters.)

DR. BAUERSTEIN. Apologies for presenting myself in this dreadful state. I was seeking an umbrella and most certainly did not mean to come in, but Mr. Inglethorp insisted.

ALFRED. Do let me bring you some dry things. *(Exits.)*

JOHN. Well, Bauerstein, you are in a plight.

(EMILY enters.)

JOHN *(cont'd)*. Let me get you some coffee to warm up the mud.

EMILY. Dear me, Dr. Bauerstein.

DR. BAUERSTEIN. I am quite mortified to be seen like this. I'll forego the coffee. You see, in my professional capacity I had just run across quite a rare species of fern, but lost my footing and slipped ignominiously into a neighboring pond.

MARY. How ghastly.

EMILY. Quite. Please excuse me all, I'm a touch under the weather and am going to bed. (*To DR. BAUERSTEIN.*) I'm sure Alfred will see to you.

(EMILY exits. ALFRED enters.)

ALFRED. An umbrella for you, Bauerstein. You are too distraught for company. Wrap up in this blanket ...

DR. BAUERSTEIN. Very embarrassing.

ALFRED. I'll walk down to the village with you as I must see our estate agent. No one need sit up. I will take the latch key.

(They go.)

CYNTHIA. Ferns at this hour? I don't think so.

(Lights change. Two chairs off. HASTINGS sits, reading. Easel: "Hastings's Room." A knock on a rolling door.)

HASTINGS. Come in.

(LAWRENCE enters agitated.)

LAWRENCE. You must excuse me, Hastings.

HASTINGS. Lawrence. Is something the matter?

LAWRENCE. We are afraid mother is very ill, a fit perhaps, but she has locked herself in.

HASTINGS. I'll come at once.

(Chair off. Rolling door moves. JOHN enters to join LAWRENCE and HASTINGS. Easel: "Upstairs Hallway.")

LAWRENCE (*tries door*). We could try going through Mr. Inglethorp's room.

(Another rolling door on.)

HASTINGS. Did he return?

(They enter through ALFRED's door.)

HASTINGS *(cont'd)*. Beds not been slept in.

(Another door.)

HASTINGS *(cont'd)*. Connecting door locked as well. Isn't there a door into Miss Cynthia's room?

LAWRENCE. Always bolted, I fear.

HASTINGS. All right then ... shoulder to shoulder, we'll break it down.

(They "break" in. Lights out. Lights up. EMILY on the floor in convulsions.)