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*Dramatic Publishing*

# Agatha Raisin and the Quiche of Death

A Mystery/Comedy in Two Acts

Adapted by  
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From the book by  
M.C. BEATON



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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# AGATHA RAISIN AND THE QUICHE OF DEATH

A Play in Two Acts

For 8 Men and 10 Women (with doubling)\*  
(may be performed by as many as 12m and 17w)

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

Agatha Raisin, 53 . . . . . a retired public relations director  
Wilkes, middle-aged . . . . . a detective chief inspector  
Bill Wong, 23 . . . . . a detective constable  
Roy Silver, 25 . . . . . a public relations assistant  
Joe Fletcher, middle-aged . . . . . landlord of the Red Lion tavern  
Sheila Barr, middle-aged. . . . . a neighbor of Agatha Raisin  
Doris Simpson, mid-50s . . . . . a housekeeper  
Vera Cummings-Browne, 52 . . . . . a resident of Carsely  
Ella Cartwright, middle-aged . . . . . a resident of Carsely  
Margaret Bloxby, middle-aged. . . . . the vicar's wife  
John Cartwright, middle-aged. . . . . Ella Cartwright's husband

\*See the following page for minor characters and doubling suggestions.

THE TIME: The 1990s.

THE PLACE: In and around the Cotswolds region of England (two scenes in London).

## Doubling Suggestion for a Cast of 8 Men, 10 Women

Major characters (5m, 6w) should be played by one actor each.

<u>6th Man</u>	<u>7th Man</u>	<u>8th Man</u>
1st Citizen	3rd Citizen	Lord Pendlebury
Mr. Economides	Steve Reginald Cummings Browne	Gentleman
Twiggs	Estate Agent	Mr. Boggle
Reporter	Attendant	James Lacey
<u>7th Woman</u>	<u>8th Woman</u>	<u>9th Woman</u>
Gladys	Lulu	Felicity
1st woman	2nd Woman	3rd Woman
Mrs. Mason (1st Villager)	Mrs. Poston	Madelaine (3rd Villager)
	Mrs. Boggle	Marie Borrow
	Neighbor Lady (2nd Villager)	
	<u>10th Woman</u>	
	2nd Citizen	
	Josephine	
	Barbara James	
	Mrs. Josephs (4th Villager)	

Actors playing multiple roles may also appear as May Day fairgoers and in the optional London Street scene.

All actors including principles, when offstage, may be assigned the following offstage voices: Bert Simpson, Official, Announcer, Alf Bloxby, Mr. Jones, Young Woman, Playwright, Londoner, Woman, Jessie (also crowds).

# ACT ONE

*(The setting has one specific locale—the study of Agatha Raisin’s cottage, in the UC area. The study comprises no more than one-third of the stage space. The other numerous locales in the play may be situated in any of five open areas (see suggested ground plan at end of play-book), perhaps designated by four separate platforms and the downstage area.*

*There are no physical doors to any of the locales, whether they be a house, a tavern, a restaurant, etc., although the study should have a defined opening in the back, such as an arch or doorway, which leads to the rest of the cottage.*

*If platforms are used, it is suggested that they have backing flats to facilitate efficient entrances and exits. The platforms may be furnished sparsely with nondescript chairs and a small table or two, or, when such items are needed, they may be brought on by the actors.*

*The opening scene of the play includes several flashbacks as AGATHA RAISIN is being questioned by INSPECTOR WILKES and DETECTIVE BILL WONG. AGATHA is involved in all flashbacks except one, and WILKES is in the other. In each case the characters*

*should move fluidly in and out of the flashbacks with no breaks in the action.*

*At rise, the stage is dark as AGATHA's opening line is heard.)*

AGATHA. What have I done?... What have I done?

*(The lights come up to reveal AGATHA standing in the study between the seated WILKES and WONG who are taking notes. Near WONG's chair is a large paper bag.)*

WILKES. So, Mrs. Raisin, you are admitting that you killed Reginald Cummings-Browne with your poisoned quiche.

AGATHA. I'm admitting no such thing. I'm simply saying I can't believe I retired from a prosperous position in London to move to a peaceful cottage in the Cotswolds, and within two weeks I'm being accused of murder.

WILKES. At this point you are only being *questioned*, Mrs. Raisin. But Mr. Cummings-Browne died Saturday night, shortly after eating your quiche which his wife brought home from the annual baking competition.

AGATHA. But he was the judge. Why didn't he keel over after sampling it that afternoon?

WONG. Because he ate only a small sliver of each quiche. But he had two healthy servings on Saturday night. Well...maybe *healthy* is not the right word.

AGATHA. Mrs. Cummings-Browne said she thought her husband died of a stroke.

WILKES. That was before the autopsy. The forensic lab determined otherwise.



AGATHA. What *did* he die of?

WONG. Cowbane.

AGATHA. Cowbane? Is that like mad cow disease?

WILKES. It's a poisonous plant found in several parts of the British Isles, including East Anglia, Southern Scotland and here in the West Midlands.

AGATHA. Why would I murder someone I hardly knew?

WILKES. You knew the Cummings-Brownes well enough to treat them to dinner.

AGATHA. But I admitted to you, I did that only to get an edge on the competition.

WILKES. A competition you ultimately lost. (*Looking at his notes.*) After which you left the school hall in a huff.

AGATHA. Because I had the best quiche there. But I assure you, it would take more than losing a meaningless baking contest to drive me to murder.

WILKES. We're not saying you deliberately poisoned the quiche, Mrs. Raisin. It could very well have been accidental.

WONG. We wish we could see what you put in your quiche, but there are no ingredients in your pantry.

AGATHA. As I told you, I bought only what I needed. I'm very—thrifty that way.

WILKES. Very well. Before Detective Wong and I leave, may we take it from the beginning once more.

AGATHA (*a bit sarcastically as she points to his notes*). Are you afraid you've omitted something, Inspector Wilkes?

WILKES. Not at all. But perhaps it's possible that *you've* omitted something, Mrs. Raisin. This time, try to remember every single detail. Let's go back to your last day in London.

AGATHA. That far?

WONG. You're getting off easy, Mrs. Raisin. Inspector Wilkes usually makes people go all the way back to their birth. (*WILKES clears his throat disapprovingly.*) Sorry, sir. Just trying to put Mrs. Raisin at ease. Go ahead, please.

AGATHA. I was hoping to get away that day without any silly hoopla, but alas—

(*GLADYS, ROY SILVER, LULU and FELICITY enter the "outer office" of a public relations firm. They carry wrapped gifts. AGATHA walks toward the area. [Note: It is suggested that WILKES and WONG watch this flashback—and the others—with little movement or expression, but without "freezing."]*)

GLADYS. Shh! Here she comes. Here she comes.

(*AGATHA enters the area.*)

ROY, LULU, FELICITY & GLADYS (*singing to the tune of "Happy Birthday"*).

"Congratulations to you,  
Congratulations to you,  
Congratulations, dear Agatha,  
Congratulations to you."

AGATHA. Goodness, what is all this?

ROY. A little going-away party for our dear, sweet Aggie.

AGATHA. I'm neither dear *nor* sweet as all of you well know. (*ALL laugh.*)

LULU. You *can* be when you want to be.

AGATHA. A necessary evil for running a public relations firm.

FELICITY. A very *successful* public relations firm.

AGATHA. But after today I can drop my façade of charm and grace and ride off into the sunset to my little retirement cottage in Carsely where I don't have to be nice to anyone.

ROY. Nonsense. You'll be the queen of that little village in no time.

LULU. Here, Agatha. Open your gifts.

AGATHA (*opening LULU's gift*). You really shouldn't have.

ROY. But aren't you glad we did?

AGATHA. A bottle of scent. (*Opening the bottle.*) Hmm.

Smells nice, Lulu. (*Taking FELICITY's gift.*) Thank you, Felicity. (*Opening the gift.*) A book on gardening. Does this mean I now have to plant a garden? (*Laughter as AGATHA opens GLADYS' gift.*)

GLADYS. A vase for your flowers.

FELICITY. From your *garden*.

AGATHA. You've really put the pressure on me now, Gladys.

ROY (*handing AGATHA his gift*). And finally, for the lady who, I hope, will need them.

AGATHA (*opening the gift*). Three pairs of crotchless panties? (*The WOMEN playfully scold ROY.*) At my age, I doubt I'll have any use for them.

ROY. You never know. Some horny farmer will probably be chasing you through the shrubbery in no time. (*Laughter.*)

AGATHA (*handing the gifts to LULU*). Here, Lulu. Hold these while I make the obligatory parting speech. (*Sincere, but not maudlin.*) Thank you all. I'm not going to

China, you know. You'll be able to come and see me... Your new bosses, Pedmans, have promised not to change anything, so life will go on for all of you much the same. Thank you all for your dedicated service. And thank you for your gifts—even Roy's. (*Laughter and applause.*)

ROY. Come on. Let's go into the kitchen. I've made a special champagne punch, Aggie. It's a real knicker rotter. (*ROY, GLADYS, LULU and FELICITY exit as AGATHA returns to the study.*)

AGATHA (*speaking even before she reaches the study*). So, I arrived here in this quaint little village. No more temperamental pop stars to handle, no more book publishers to pamper. Just freedom and relaxation. At first the people seemed friendly enough.

(*Three CITIZENS enter and exit at various points, speaking to the unseen AGATHA.*)

1st CITIZEN. Mawning to you. Nasty weather, wouldn't you say?

2nd CITIZEN. Good a'ternoon. Looks like the sun is trying to peek out.

3rd CITIZEN. Evening. A bit warmer today, wouldn't you say?

AGATHA. And I did make a few early acquaintances down at the Red Lion. Especially the landlord, Mr. Fletcher.

(*She goes to the "Red Lion" as JOE FLETCHER enters.*)

FLETCHER. Afternoon, Mrs. Raisin. The usual?

AGATHA. But, Mr. Fletcher, I've only been in here once before. And that was for only one drink.

FLETCHER. I know. Gin and tonic. Light on the tonic. But you see, Mrs. Raisin, folks who come to Carsely get set in their ways pretty quickly. And now that you're a Carselinean—well, what do you say?

AGATHA (*after a pause*). Sure. Why not? The usual.

FLETCHER. Right-o. (*Calling toward offstage as he begins to exit.*) Tilly... Gin and tonic for Mrs. Raisin. Light on the tonic. (*He exits as AGATHA moves toward the study.*)

AGATHA. Of course, one is bound to find a thorn among the roses.

*(MRS. SHEILA BARR enters carrying a watering can and mimes watering flowers. AGATHA stops short of the study and goes to MRS. BARR.)*

AGATHA. Hello. I've just recently moved in.

MRS. BARR (*coolly*). Yes. The Budgen cottage.

AGATHA. Lovely flowers. I am Agatha Raisin. And you are...?

MRS. BARR. Mrs. Sheila Barr. You must forgive me, Mrs., er, Raisin. But I am very busy at the moment.

AGATHA. I won't take up much of your time. I need a cleaning woman. Could you suggest one?

MRS. BARR. It's almost impossible to get anyone to clean. I have Mrs. Simpson, so I'm very lucky.

AGATHA. Perhaps she might do a few hours for me.

MRS. BARR. I am sure she would not. Good day. (*She exits.*)

AGATHA. We'll see about that.

*(She goes to the "Red Lion" as FLETCHER enters carrying a drink.)*

FLETCHER. Hello, Mrs. Raisin. Saw you coming. Here's the usual.

AGATHA. Not today, Mr. Fletcher. I'm in a hurry. I'm looking for Mrs. Simpson. Do you know where she lives? She cleans.

FLETCHER. Ah, that would be Doris Simpson. Don't recall the number, but it's Wakefield Terrace. Ask anyone in the area. They'll know which house.

AGATHA. Thank you. Maybe I will have that drink after all. *(She drinks it all in one gulp.)* Sorry. I seem to have left my purse at home. Put it on my tab.

FLETCHER. But you don't have a tab, Mrs. Raisin.

AGATHA. I do now.

FLETCHER. I guess you do at that. *(Calling to offstage.)* Tilly, start a tab for Mrs. Raisin. *(He exits as AGATHA goes toward MRS. SIMPSON'S "house.")*

MRS. SIMPSON'S VOICE *(from offstage)*. Bert, there's a woman coming up the path.

BERT SIMPSON'S VOICE *(from offstage)*. If it's a solicitor, tell her to bugger off.

MRS. SIMPSON'S VOICE. She doesn't look to be selling anything. *(She enters. To AGATHA.)* Good evening to you.

AGATHA. Are you Mrs. Simpson?

MRS. SIMPSON. Yes.

AGATHA. I'm Agatha Raisin.

MRS. SIMPSON. Oh yes. You moved into the Budgen cottage.

AGATHA. I need someone to clean—few hours a week.

MRS. SIMPSON. I already got three jobs plus the supermarket on weekends.

BERT SIMPSON'S VOICE. Supper's getting cold, Doris.

AGATHA. How much does Mrs. Barr pay you?

MRS. SIMPSON. Five pounds an hour.

BERT SIMPSON'S VOICE. Tell the woman to come back tomorrow.

AGATHA. I'll pay you seven pounds an hour.

MRS. SIMPSON. But what would poor Mrs. Barr do?

AGATHA. Probably her own cleaning from now on. I'll also give you a full day's work, and lunch is included.

BERT SIMPSON'S VOICE. Won't the woman take "no" for an answer, Doris?

MRS. SIMPSON (*calling back to offstage, a bit irritated*). The "woman" wants to pay me seven pounds an hour for a full day's work with lunch thrown in for free. (*A brief pause.*)

BERT SIMPSON'S VOICE. Well, don't just stand there, Doris. Invite the lady in for supper. (*MRS. SIMPSON exits as AGATHA goes toward the study.*)

WILKES (*even before AGATHA reaches the study*). And what was Mrs. Barr's reaction to your stealing her cleaning woman away?

AGATHA (*as she crosses and enters the study*). She was livid, of course. Could have given snorting lessons to a bull.

WILKES. How did you learn of the quiche competition?

AGATHA. It was posted at the General Store. It said a Mr. Cummings-Browne was to be the judge. It listed all the

other competitions as well—cakes, pies, jellies, floral arrangements...

WILKES. Why did you decide to enter?

AGATHA. I began to realize what really mattered in these villages. Being the best at something domestic. I knew if I could win, people would sit up and take notice. But how was I to know the judging was rigged?

WONG. We don't know that for a fact, Mrs. Raisin.

AGATHA. Then why has the same woman won it for eight years running?

WONG. Perhaps she makes the best quiche.

AGATHA. The quiche *I* entered was the best.

WONG. How do you know?

AGATHA. *That I will keep to myself. (A bit sarcastically.)*  
Unless it's a pertinent part of the investigation.

WILKES (*dismissing the remark*). Why did you call on the Cummings-Brownes earlier that week?

AGATHA. I was in the PR business for thirty years, Inspector Wilkes. I learned to do whatever it takes to get an edge over the competition.

*(She walks toward the "Red Lion." FLETCHER enters with a drink.)*

FLETCHER. Saw you coming again, Mrs. Raisin. Gin and tonic. Light on the tonic.

AGATHA. It'll have to wait, Mr. Fletcher. I'm in a rush. Where does Mr. Cummings-Browne live?

FLETCHER. Ah, the Major. Plumtrees cottage. Directly across from the church.