

The Mysterious Disappearance  
a play by Kirt Shineman

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Dramatist Guild Member



LMDA Member

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## The Mysterious Disappearance

### **CHARACTERS:**

CAST: 4 actors— 1 male, 3 females (the man plays all the male characters)

AGATHA CHRISTIE        85 years-old, she walks with a limp, and wears dentures. She enjoys wearing late 40's style suits and skirts with pintucks instead figure seams.

MARY WESTMACOTT        a nom de plume between 80 and 115 years-old— a spinster in a 1940's all grey vintage dress with words sewn into the print. Her severe eyes give away her curiosity. {Only Agatha can see her.}

ROSALIND HICKS        56 years-old, tall, white-haired, enjoys wearing late 60's bell-bottom pants and a blouse.

ANTHONY "TONY" HICKS        59 years-old in 1970's work clothes.

HARRY MAYNARD        old, gray beard, balding, and hefty. (Played by the same actor who portrays TONY.)

ARCHIE CHRISTIE        an elegant man dressed in a 1920's tuxedo, with tails, and he is well groomed. (Played by the same actor who portrays TONY.)

WILLIAM "BILLY" COLLINS        friend, publisher and editor for HarperCollins, in a business suit. (Played by the same actor who portrays TONY.)

### **SETTING:**

Agatha's library room of Greenway House, in Torbay, England. The room contains bookshelves, a writing desk, a couch, and swivel chairs. Parts of the bookshelves have cabinet doors, hiding a Dictaphone, and a hidden door for some mysterious exits. A telephone sits on a side-table by the couch. A grand-daughter clock stands in the corner. Windows flank the room opposite a door. Outside the room, through the archway, is a staircase, the hall, which leads to the front door, on the same side of the house as the windows. A full-length mirror hangs on the hall wall. A Christmas tree and other holiday decorations adorn the room. Portions of the set should slowly be removed as the play progresses. After each scene segments of the set disappear. By Act II, scene #3, the set should be the bones of what it was. This goes for the use of costumes, and props. Begin with full costumes and complete props, but by the final scene, only the carcass of those items exists.

### **TIME:**

The time is the end of December 1975.

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### **SYNOPSIS:**

December 1975, after Christmas, and Agatha Christie must finish her autobiography and the final novel before the new year. Yet, Agatha is fixated on an event in her past when Nancy Neele stole her husband. With Mary Westmacott's help they contemplate what it would be like to kill Nancy. When Nancy turns up dead, Agatha and Mary investigate. Even though Agatha considered murdering Nancy, did she really do it, or is her reality disappearing?

### **PLAY DEVELOPMENT:**

As a Dramatist Guild Institute student, I worked on revisions of the play in a PIP session with playwright and dramaturg Andrea Lepcio. The play received a workshop at Phoenix Theater Company's American Play New Works Festival.

### **AUTHOR'S NOTES:**

The play is not a "who-done-it", nor is it a thriller play. It portrays fictional events set before Dame Christie's death, and is loosely based on historical events that took place. The events are imagined encounters and do not purport to be true.

## PROLOGUE

*A mid-morning after Christmas, 1975. Outside the windows of Agatha Christie's library light snow falls. The room contains bookshelves, a writing desk, a couch, and swivel chairs. Parts of the bookshelves have cabinet doors, hiding a Dictaphone. AGATHA and MARY sit in the library; AGATHA at her desk reading the newspaper with her Dictaphone mic next to her. MARY flips through the Times. Her knitting bag lays beside her.*

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1: Rowcroft in the News

*On another part of the stage... a bathtub slides with a shower curtain into view... Rowcroft Nursing Home the day before Christmas Eve, 1975. Christmas music plays on a record player. The water is already filling the bathtub. HARRY, an elderly man with a gray beard and bald head, enters the bathroom. He wears a white robe and carries a glass of scotch. He reaches behind the shower curtain and turns off the water. He pulls a photograph from the robe pocket.*

HARRY

(Heavy accent) It's not the same without you, Dot.

*He kisses the photo and replaces it in his pocket. From his robe pocket he pulls out a bottle of pills. He takes a few pills with the scotch. He removes his robe, and steps into the tub. His shadow against the shower curtain shows him sliding into the tub with his glass of scotch.*

HARRY

(from behind the tub curtain) Dotty, Merry Christmas, dear.

*The bathroom lights go out. Only moonlight shines into the tub. Sounds of water splashing. The glass falls to the*

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*floor. HARRY drowns in the tub. The bathroom fades away.*

### **Scene 2: Greenway House**

*AGATHA's library. AGATHA turns a page of her newspaper, the Christmas record plays as...*

AGATHA

Another death at Rowcroft.

MARY

The nursing home?

AGATHA

Yes, and the photographs are horrible!

MARY

Let me see.

AGATHA

Photographs of each body! An elocution in the bath.

MARY

You mean an electrocution in the bath.

AGATHA

Yes. And an overdose in the bath. And now: drowning in the bath.

MARY

I would avoid the bath.

AGATHA

Good luck with that.

MARY

Seems the most dangerous place on Earth is the British countryside.

AGATHA

Full of fatalities.

MARY

You know the line: We all must as chimney sweepers ... You remember it, surely.

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AGATHA

Remind me.

MARY

How can you forget it? "Fear no more the heat o' the sun;/ Nor the furious winter's rages..." Surely you remember?

AGATHA

Forgetting is not something I control.

MARY

No, but you know the rest— "Thou thy worldly task hast done, / Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages..."

AGATHA

I don't remember it!

MARY

You do— Say it with me... "Golden lads and girls all must, As..."

AGATHA

Stop it, Mary.

MARY

It's Shakespeare.

AGATHA

I get that.

MARY

Cymbeline. One of Archie's favorites.

AGATHA

Certainly not mine.

MARY

It was. One you knew. Well.

AGATHA

I can't recall it.

MARY

How could you forget? How Archie insisted Rosalind be named after a character in Cymbeline—

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AGATHA

No one remembers Cymbeline! I'll bet even Shakespeare didn't. Anyway, leave it alone.

*AGATHA rises from her desk and moves to the record player, which she turns off.*

MARY

I'm sorry, but I thought surely you would remember it—

AGATHA

I do, but I don't. At my age... Words... Sometimes the snow slurs the words. I mean the words blur. But its why friends like you are so important, and why I love these... You anchor me when I'm feeling adrift.

MARY

You're feeling adrift?

AGATHA

I am. And a writer who can't find the birds because they've flown is a writer who is inept.

MARY

You can't find the birds?

AGATHA

Birds? No. I meant: the words. The words with wings. The ones that {fly away and die out}. (She gestures the idea.) You know. So. We must write a new one. My last review for the Marple novel?

MARY

Let's not do this—

AGATHA

Ah, here! "There was no thrill in the book. Too many words, and too little story." "Easily forgettable." "This book can be taken as a perfect example of Christie at her worst." My worst! Oh, and... "She's lost her flair. She's lost her words." Can you— Do you agree?

MARY

Can't write hits every time.

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AGATHA

But this! They wrote: "She might be a victim of her own gift. A woman no longer for the present." Like I'm not here!

MARY

Let's stop.

AGATHA

You're right. Must be the business at the nursing home. They claim its suicide. The man was... Ummm...

MARY

Constable Harry... Harry Maynard?

AGATHA

Yes. I feel... I'm grasping at... It's like I know him.

MARY

Well... Harry- Wasn't Harry at Styles?

AGATHA

Styles? You mean with Archie?

MARY

Yes. (Reading the paper) Says right here. His first case- fifty years ago- You'll never guess.

AGATHA

My missing persons case?

MARY

Yes, dear. Certainly not mine. They've put a photo of Harry with the detective.

AGATHA

Oh! Yes. Officer Maynard! Yes! He's the officer Archie brought to interrogate me.

MARY

Says he died the night before Christmas Eve. Wasn't that the same day you visited? The open house?

AGATHA

I wonder if I saw him.

MARY

You might've.



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AGATHA

Wasn't Nancy Neele at the same nursing home?

MARY

As I recall—she moved from hospital, since they couldn't do cure her.

AGATHA

Is she ill?

MARY

Cancer, I'm afraid.

AGATHA

Must be the guilt eating her.

MARY

Wouldn't that beat it all.

AGATHA

What do the Indians call that? Charm-a.

MARY

Yes, something like that.

MARY

Anyway, they moved Nancy into Rowcroft. I mention it because—well, you're not moving there?

AGATHA

No. Too many suicides. Nancy? Bet Archie would be upset.

MARY

If he were still alive?

AGATHA

True. You know, she never let Rosalind see her father.

MARY

That's not true. She visited him when you and Max went to Egypt, and you did research on the book—

AGATHA/MARY

Death on the Nile!

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AGATHA

Well, if it wasn't for Nancy, Rosalind wouldn't have been separated from her father. She was the reason for our divorce.

MARY

I'll give you that.

AGATHA

Ruined everything.

MARY

Her old sins have long shadows.

AGATHA

Since then it's been difficult to... I don't know. I mean, I love Max. I do. A decent second husband. But—. Don't get me wrong, but our love isn't the same. Not the same passion I had with Archie.

MARY

(accusatory) Oh, Agatha, you loved Archie too much. And I've always said so. It's one of the most frightening things in the world.

AGATHA

What?

MARY

Love. To love someone too much.

AGATHA

Too much? Absurd. I loved and I hated Archie.

MARY

You never hated him.

AGATHA

Yes, I did.

*The lights shift, and in the archway stands a man in silhouette. ARCHIE, is dressed in an exquisite tuxedo.*

ARCHIE

(Calling out) Darling?!

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AGATHA

(melting) Just that voice. But he always had a sting.

ARCHIE

Why get all made-up? It doesn't make a difference.

AGATHA

Many of my villains were Archie.

ARCHIE

Shall I start the car?

AGATHA

(Mimicking) Start the car—

ARCHIE

Maybe a new car. A Jaguar. Such fun. Nancy lets me drive hers. Nice! Handles well on the curves. (He looks at his watch.) How to explain such a tardy arrival.

*AGATHA throws a pen at him.*

AGATHA

That night I confronted him. You know what really took the Mickey out of me? The lipstick.

ARCHIE

What lipstick?

MARY

Can we forget the lipstick?

AGATHA

No. And it should be in the book. (*Turns on the tape dictaphone.*) Archie, and I were at Styles. We'd planned a trip to London.

ARCHIE

You're trying my patience.

MARY

You're twisting it.

AGATHA

And we were going away for the weekend—

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ARCHIE

What lipstick are you talking about?

AGATHA

I put together my bag and no lipstick-- Gone.

ARCHIE

We'll buy you another--

MARY

A woman's lipstick is very personal.

ARCHIE

Ask Rosalind. Maybe she played with it.

AGATHA

She'd never steal from me!

ARCHIE

What's it matter? Who're you going to kiss, anyway.

AGATHA

So, you haven't seen it?

ARCHIE

No. Who would take your lipstick?

AGATHA

Nancy, maybe.

ARCHIE

Nancy?

AGATHA

Has she been in my room?

ARCHIE

No. Not your room.

MARY

So indiscrete.

ARCHIE

Fine. I've changed my mind. You and Rosalind go to London. I'm staying here.

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AGATHA  
What? Without me?

ARCHIE  
Yes.

AGATHA  
All weekend?

ARCHIE  
Yes. I have golf.

AGATHA  
With Nancy?

ARCHIE  
Perhaps.

MARY  
He wouldn't flaunt their affair in your face like that?

AGATHA  
He did! (To Archie) She will not step into my house!!

ARCHIE  
Your house! It is MY house! And I will not be told who can and can not come here!

*ARCHIE exits up the stairs. The lights return to the previous settings.*

AGATHA  
Cheating on me with *her*! And chasing a skirt all over the countryside right in front of me! Maddening! I went upstairs, packed my things, and put on my coat, and gloves. And drove away from the house. I drove until I had a plan.

MARY  
You had no plan.

AGATHA  
I had a plan.

MARY  
Which was to...?

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AGATHA

To disappear.

MARY

To run away, you mean.

AGATHA

Oh, hush. I need to put this down while I have it. (Speaking into the Dictaphone) The police searched and searched for me. Everyone looked including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He took one of my gloves to a medium. Even the great Sherlock Holmes could not find any clues. But they were there. In plain sight. It was all in the motive. The murder wasn't a who-done-it, or a why-done-it. But how. And where did I go?

*A banging on the front window.*

AGATHA/MARY

(SCREAM!!)

MARY

(after her scream) Oh my!

*Incensed with the interruption MARY packs her knitting. AGATHA looks closer, pulling back the drapes to see out the window. The face of a man appears. [TONY.] AGATHA jumps back. Seen from the waist up, TONY, in a workman's overalls, and knit cap, covered in snow, speaks, but he can't be heard through the window. [Tony doesn't see MARY. Only AGATHA sees MARY.]*

AGATHA

Tony! Don't do that!

TONY

(With gestures: "I am sorry.")

MARY

He has the manners of an ox!

AGATHA

Even his face upsets my train of thought.

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TONY

(With gestures: "Didn't mean to scare you.")

AGATHA

Can't you see I'm working?!

*TONY falls.*

AGATHA

TONY!

MARY

I always thought he looked like Archie.

AGATHA

Certainly not!

MARY

Some girls marry their fathers; maybe Rosalind saw a likeness—

AGATHA

Tony's nothing like Archie!

MARY

Of course not. I'll put on the kettle.

*MARY exits. TONY reappears.*

AGATHA

TONY! BE CAREFUL!

TONY

(With gestures: about the train being delayed.)

AGATHA

Choo? What? Oh! What about the train?

TONY

(With gestures: he's giving up on the conversation.)

AGATHA

Just clear the walk.

*AGATHA leaves the curtain and returns to her writing. As she turns off the tape recorder.*

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AGATHA

If I hadn't seen his birth certificate, I'd swear Tony was American. Where was I?

*AGATHA rewinds some of the tape. She presses play.*

RECORDING: (AGATHA's voice from the tape-recording)

"...Even the great Sherlock Holmes could not find any clues. But they were there. In plain sight. It was all in the motive. The murder wasn't a who-done-it, or a why-done-it. But how. And where did I go?"

*Then we hear a recording of banging on the window. Quickly, AGATHA presses stop, then record.*

AGATHA

*(Dictating into the microphone)* All the elements of a murder were there. Classic Christie. I'd parked near the spring we all called, The Silent Pool. People knew a young girl and her brother died there. My silence, my innocence. My death. Drowning in silence. And the single glove I left? The fur coat? Gifts from Archie. A hunter. A former First World War fighter pilot. I was dying at the hands of my unfaithful husband. Death comes in so many shapes.

*The grand-daughter clock strikes eleven o'clock. Covered in snow, ROSALIND enters the hall, wearing a jacket, and carrying the mail.*

ROSALIND

There must be an inch of ice! I told Tony to clear off the walk.

AGATHA

Well— Sue him! You're a—a—a—

ROSALIND

A barrister?

AGATHA

Yes!



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ROSALIND

If I had time to practice law, maybe I would.

AGATHA

How was the walk from / the cottage house?

ROSALIND

I took the car. Picked up the post. Final notice on... everything. Electric. Water. Heating oil. Credit cards. Oh? *(Pause as she examines an envelope.)* Interesting.

AGATHA

What is it?

ROSALIND

A fan letter. I'll stick it with the others.

AGATHA

We can answer those later.

ROSALIND

Sure. Given any more thought to Rowcroft House.

AGATHA

I'm not ready for nurses! I'm comfortable here!

ROSALIND

Really?

AGATHA

Really. Quiz me.

ROSALIND

Mum, let's not-

AGATHA

Who's the leader of our country?

ROSALIND

Okay. Who is the leader of our country?

AGATHA

The Queen!

ROSALIND

And she is...?

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AGATHA

Elizabeth.

ROSALIND

And the king is...?

AGATHA

Never going to wear a crown.

ROSALIND

And the Prime Minister?

AGATHA

Oh, that old, fat. The old—

ROSALIND

Fat?

AGATHA

I meant fart. The old fart—

ROSALIND

Yes?—

AGATHA

(It came to her) Harold!

ROSALIND

Yes, but—

AGATHA

See? I know things, and I'm not ready for *that* place!

ROSALIND

Okay, but I found it nice. The nurses were lovely.

AGATHA

Then you live there.

ROSALIND

And what? Leave you? Sorry. You're stuck with me.

AGATHA

Hoorah! Anyway, I could never live where it smells like that.

ROSALIND

It didn't smell.

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AGATHA

Exactly. It smelled like nothing. Ever notice? Mortuaries don't smell. Neither do cemeteries.

ROSALIND

Oh, stop it. Think about it.

AGATHA

Give me that...

ROSALIND

Brochure?

AGATHA

Yes. I was looking for something to start a fire. Thank you.

ROSALIND

Alright-alright-

AGATHA

Oh, and were you two warm enough / at the cottage?

ROSALIND

Warm enough. We would've come earlier. But Max and Mathew. We took them. / To the train station-

AGATHA

Yes- yes. I was in the bath.

ROSALIND

Yes, and Mother, I wish you wouldn't.

AGATHA

Wouldn't what, dear? Complete your sentences, Ros.

ROSALIND

Bathe without my assistance. You could fall again.

AGATHA

Tony's the one who falls.

ROSALIND

Mum, we can't have another fall.

AGATHA

I use the handle rails.

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ROSALIND

Those aren't handle railings. Those are towel racks.

AGATHA

Maybe they should be handle railings.

ROSALIND

By the way, Tony thinks the train, the London train return, shall be significantly delayed.

AGATHA

I wouldn't worry, Rosalind. The boy's in good hands.

ROSALIND

The boy? You mean Mathew?

AGATHA

Yes.

ROSALIND

My son knows London. Better than I do. I worry about step-father. Not like he used to be.

AGATHA

None of us is.

*(Pause.)*

ROSALIND

How's the autobiography coming?

AGATHA

Good. Writing it... generates...

ROSALIND

Memories?

AGATHA

Yes.

ROSALIND

Good. And when you finish the tape, put it in the box, mark the sleeve, label it by dates—

AGATHA

1926—

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ROSALIND

Mum, 1926? It's due! Billy expects it. Wants it January first. You must finish. Or we might all be living in a single room flat in Belfast.

AGATHA

Max, you, me and clumsy?

ROSALIND

Yes. All of us. We have a deadline, and if we don't meet it, then Mr. HarperCollins says he's cutting you off.

*The lights shift into her imagination, and BILLY walks through the bookshelf in his fancy suit. He carries a book with a book jacket. Both BILLY and AGATHA are in a spotlights.*

BILLY

I hate to cut you off, but we have deadlines—

AGATHA

One book every year—I can't do it.

BILLY

Maybe you can't. Maybe you're not up to it—

AGATHA

I didn't say I won't, but the autobiography takes me places I'd rather not go.

BILLY

And—

AGATHA

And that takes time—

BILLY

It's either the autobiography or Marple's last case.

AGATHA

Sleeping Murder?

ROSALIND

We need to— You pulled it out, right?

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AGATHA

It's not ready—It's not good. And it must be. And as they say, you're only as good as your last.

BILLY

How bad can it be?

AGATHA

Embarrassing. It's upstairs next to my trunk. We'll go over it first. Bring the manuscript in the trunk.

ROSALIND

(She stands arms akimbo.)

AGATHA

Dear, I haven't looked at it since...

BILLY

'44?

AGATHA

'44, and we were being bombed by the Germans. With all the explosions I'm sure it's full of typos, and exclamations. You'll need to re-type it.

ROSALIND

(Sarcastic) Type it? Your editor can.

*The lights shift as AGATHA drifts into her mind. [ROSALIND is busy with transcribing notes, she does not see the fantasy.]*

AGATHA

Billy? Type?

BILLY

Ha! No. We also need to redo your publicity photo. In this one you look 70.

AGATHA

Well I'm over 80!

BILLY

Good reason to re-shoot it. Now, I have notes. Let's go over them, shall we?—

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AGATHA  
Notes?

BILLY  
Revisions, really.

AGATHA  
Those'll take months.

BILLY  
Not with a mind like yours—

AGATHA  
You have no idea.

BILLY  
First. On pages twenty-to-twenty-six, it wanders.

AGATHA  
I often wonder why I keep you on—

BILLY  
People's minds wander and writing can't. Next, to have a mystery there must be a dead body—

AGATHA  
There is a dead body. Weren't you paying attention?!—

BILLY  
And there must be a murderer—

AGATHA  
Oh? You want a murderer?

*AGATHA opens a drawer and pulls out a handgun. [ROSALIND is busy with the book. She does not see this fantasy.]*

BILLY  
*(Not looking up from his notes)* There is a murderer, I know, but not until chapter four. That's too long to make the audience wait. They want a murder up-front—

AGATHA  
A murder. Of course.

*BILLY sees AGATHA holding the handgun.*

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BILLY

(He squeals) Oh! Let's not get melodramatic.

AGATHA

Melodramatic?

BILLY

How did you get a gun?

AGATHA

It is still possible for some of us to own firearms.

BILLY

Put it away, and discuss my revisions—

AGATHA

Some of us personally know the queen—

BILLY

You don't know how to handle a gun.

AGATHA

I've written enough about it, I should know how to kill someone.

BILLY

You have no clue how to really kill someone. Stop playing—

*AGATHA pulls the trigger. BANG! BILLY is shot. He falters, drops the notes, and falls behind the couch.*

AGATHA

Oh? I don't know how?

BILLY

You shot me? Right in my...

AGATHA

Right where most men have a heart. Except you.

BILLY

Oh, I'm ... [bleeding].

AGATHA

A bleeding heartless liberal. And I guess you'll expire quickly.



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BILLY

Call for help. Agatha... Please. I'm... I'm... Ohhhh.

*He dies. AGATHA returns the gun to the drawer as the lights revert to the previous settings. [Somehow BILLY exits behind the couch.]*

ROSALIND

Mum?

AGATHA

Dear?

ROSALIND

You like Mr. Collins.

AGATHA

Not his notes!

ROSALIND

Every writer hates notes—

AGATHA

Can't we send off Poirot, first?

ROSALIND

We / did—

AGATHA

We must publish Poirot's last, first.

ROSALIND

(Concerned) You've been working hard today—

AGATHA

Writing Hercule's death was delicious!

ROSALIND

I'm sure it was, but—

AGATHA

And my readers will never see it coming. Curtains for Hercule!  
We must get it published.

ROSALIND

We did.

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AGATHA

We did?

ROSALIND

Yes. Six, seven months ago.

AGATHA

Oh. Good.

ROSALIND

Well, finish the autobiography— send it off. Before you forget it all.

AGATHA

I've got it.

ROSALIND

Let's be honest Mum.

AGATHA

I am... I am...

ROSALIND

AGATHA

ROSALIND

Okay.

*ROSALIND exits. As AGATHA turns on the tape-recorder and slides the door to hide the reel-to-reel. She speaks into the microphone and sits on the couch.*

AGATHA

I hadn't lost my... Not like Officer Maynard suggested. I knew what I was doing. I just didn't want to talk about it.

*AGATHA leans her head back on the couch, as the lights alter.*

### **Scene 3: Mary**

*The grand-daughter clock strikes eleven o'clock. MARY enters from the kitchen. She carries in tea service.*

MARY

Why not just be honest with her?

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AGATHA

What?

MARY

I heard you. You said you're honest. (Scoffs).

AGATHA

I am.

MARY

No, you're not.

AGATHA

What good's being honest when nobody is, and I don't enjoy being different.

MARY

But you are. And you know it.

AGATHA

True. But I meant to say, "difficult" rather than "different", but I -

MARY

You slipped up.

AGATHA

My slips are my best part. That's true. I don't like to be different.

MARY

Or difficult.

AGATHA

That too.

MARY

Agatha? Can we talk? I need to tell you something.

AGATHA

Of course.

MARY

I haven't told you this, and I know you will be upset, but hear me out.

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AGATHA

What is it?

MARY

I'm leaving. Taking a holiday, so to speak.

AGATHA

What? To where?

MARY

It's time.

AGATHA

Time for what?

MARY

Time for me. I'm going to— I'm going to visit Greece.

AGATHA

What would you want to see there?

MARY

The ruins. The past. It's nice.

AGATHA

You can't.

MARY

I can't?

AGATHA

No. I need you.

MARY

But I want to see it before it fades away.

AGATHA

Stay. Please.

MARY

Agatha—

AGATHA

You help so much.

MARY

But I'm not a good help—

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

You are. You help with the book.

MARY

That's a lot of pressure.

AGATHA

No. I need you.

MARY

With what?

AGATHA

My new plot.

MARY

A new one? I don't know. Maybe I should go—

AGATHA

Mary! Since Rowcroft, I've wondered: why does someone take a life—take their own life or, you know, commit murder? That's what the new story is about.

MARY

Murder? That's not a new story.

AGATHA

No, but when is murder, murder, and when is it an accident?

MARY

You already know the answer. Now, concerning my leave. I don't—

AGATHA

I wonder: could murder be a genetic thing?

MARY

Scientists would've found it, I would think.

AGATHA

So, it's not genetic. What about psychological?

MARY

Perhaps, but psychological traits come through in other actions, so one could tell if they are a murderer before they murder someone. If they kill a pet, or attack an immigrant, or hurt themselves—

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

But murderers are good at hiding.

MARY

I don't find that to be true. I don't find a person can hide their true selves for long. Murderous tendencies come through other actions. I can tell by the way they garden or how they treat their children. Killers don't appreciate life.

AGATHA

So, murder is a choice.

MARY

I think so.

AGATHA

But there's a cause, a motive—

MARY

Everything has a cause. You plant a seed. It grows. A person kills someone for a reason.

AGATHA

But what if someone killed without a motive? Just for the experience?

MARY

To murder just to murder?

AGATHA

What if the objective was to discover if one could murder?

MARY

To find that out one would have to do it.

AGATHA

To commit the murder—

MARY

But who would do that? And the victim? Who would be the victim?

AGATHA

The victim must be random. Just to see what it feels like.

MARY

The regret?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Or the pleasure?

MARY

Oh no. There's no pleasure killing.

AGATHA

We don't know, do we?

MARY

I guess not. I've never killed anyone.

AGATHA

Neither have I.

*They share a giggle.*

MARY

The victim would need to be randomly picked. Any connection would create a motive.

AGATHA

Sure. Someone widowed? Maybe a survivor from the obituary.

MARY

No, no. That's cruel.

AGATHA

You're right. Maybe someone sick? With cancer.

MARY

A cancer victim? Sure. Then it'll look like mercy.

AGATHA

Yes. And the killer should be...?

MARY

A man.

AGATHA

No. A woman.

MARY

A woman with no criminal past.

The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

No criminal past— Have you ever shoplifted, or stolen anything?

MARY

Never. You?

AGATHA

No.

MARY

So you and I *could* do it.

*They share another giggle.*

AGATHA

I've wondered how it felt.

MARY

Are you suggesting...?

AGATHA

Why not? For the writing, of course.

MARY

Of course, but—

AGATHA

I mean I wonder: what if the criminal chose evil as their good?

MARY

I don't follow.

AGATHA

They commit a crime to set crooked things straight. There is the suicide trend... A woman who destroyed a marriage..

MARY

AGATHA

MARY

I thought we were talking hypothetically. For a story.

AGATHA

Hypothetical? (Beat.) Really?

MARY

Yes.



## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Yes.

*MARY gets up and gathers her things.*

MARY

I can't talk to you when you're like this.

AGATHA

I would never do it—

MARY

You sound serious—

AGATHA

But you could do it—

MARY

Kill Nancy!? Not on your life!

AGATHA

But you have a natural flair for justice.—

MARY

Justice is not murder—

AGATHA

It can be.

MARY

Is this why you want me to stay?

AGATHA

We work so well—

MARY

You con me to stay so I would commit murder—! I'll have no part in this!

AGATHA

Nancy's the wrong type of victim anyway.

MARY

Which is precisely why you think you can—. You need to put this story out of your head. Just leave it alone. It's no good. Anyway, it has no detective, no Poirot since he's dead.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

You're getting all riled for nothing.

MARY

But I see it, and you don't. You have every reason to do it. No one would suspect you. You're old. You're famous. You've never done it.

AGATHA

Exactly. Never done it. Until now.

MARY

You would kill her.

AGATHA

If Poirot can do it, why can't I?

MARY

It's impossible.

AGATHA

It's classic!

MARY

See! You are serious!

AGATHA

Serious? Of course. And I have the weapon, too.

*(She retrieves two vials from behind a few books on the bookshelf. One vial is filled with berries, and the other with a green liquid.)*

AGATHA

Most unusual stuff.

MARY

You can't do this!

AGATHA

Our yew tree. It's in the garden. Ros pulled the berries off and asked if could use them for tea.

MARY

They're poisonous.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

I've taken precautions.

MARY

You'll never get away with it.

AGATHA

I could.

MARY

You won't.

AGATHA

Then stay to make sure I don't do it.

MARY

AGATHA

MARY

You're genuinely planning it.

AGATHA

For the fun of writing—

MARY

Well, it's not fun.—

AGATHA

You know I'm all mouth and no trousers.

MARY

None the less.

AGATHA

Fine. I'm sorry, Mary.

MARY

Apology accepted—

AGATHA

Now, stay.

MARY

No.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Who else am I going to talk to?

MARY

Talk to the birds for all I care. I'm not talking about you committing murder. Good-day, Agatha!

*MARY exits. Lights change.*

### Scene 4: The Escape by Taxi

*Instantly, TONY stumbles in the door.  
The grand-daughter clock strikes eleven  
thirty.*

AGATHA

*(Calling out)* Back so soon. You know, I wasn't serious.

TONY *(laying in the entryway)*

Just me, Mum.

AGATHA

Oh. You.

TONY *(laying in the entryway)*

What's not serious?

AGATHA

Serious? What?

TONY

You said you weren't serious.

AGATHA

I thought you were someone else.

TONY

Who, mum?

ROSALIND *(from upstairs)*

Tony? Did you clear the walk with a broom?

TONY

*(Calling out to Ros)* Yes, dear, I used yours.

ROSALIND *(from upstairs)*

Perfect. I hear London's socked-in. Heard it on the telly.

The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

(mumbling) Hate that thing. Too much violence.

*TONY knocks off some snow and removes his jacket and boots. He slips in the process.*

ROSALIND (from upstairs)

You alright?!

TONY

Fine!

AGATHA

He's fallen.

TONY

I'm getting up.

AGATHA

Maybe you should stay down.

TONY

Hey, what's for lunch, / dear—?

AGATHA

Darling, bring down the manuscript!

ROSALIND (from upstairs)

Got it!

*The phone rings.*

ROSALIND (from upstairs)

Tony, get that?

TONY

I can—

AGATHA

No, you stay. / You're all wet.

ROSALIND (from upstairs)

I'll start lunch.

*The phone rings again.*

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

I've got it!

*AGATHA answers the phone.*

AGATHA

Hello? (Pause.) Oh, Max, I can barely hear you. How are the trains? (Pause.) Cancelled?

TONY

Told you they / would be—

AGATHA

(to the phone) Stay at the Hilton. They must have room.

TONY

We can't afford the Hilton!

AGATHA

Oh, that's where you are... Of course. It's nice. (Pause.) I am. Yes. I'm working. Ros has me busy. (Beat.) Tell me, Max: the boy? Is he...?

TONY

(with the brochure) Rowcroft? I wouldn't stay there. Not with the recent rash of suicides. A few offed themselves last month.

AGATHA

(To Tony) The nursing home suicides: awful.

TONY

Seems redundant, doesn't it?

*ROSALIND enters from the stairway.*

ROSALIND

Is that Max and Mathew?

TONY

Yes. They're at the Hilton.

ROSALIND

Good. (Yelling) Stay dry!

AGATHA

(into the phone) Yes, Max... Yes...

## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

We can't afford the Hilton. Stay within our means.

ROSALIND

Where would you suggest?

TONY

They could stay near Shacklewell Arms.

ROSALIND

With the lonely hearts and dirty tarts? Maybe find a prostitute while they're at it. No, dear, they're fine.

*ROSALIND exits to the kitchen.*

ROSALIND

Max? Don't forget to eat. / And feed your grandson!

AGATHA

Eat a proper lunch. Not just... (Pause.) Good. Roast beef. That's good for both of you. Now, you call if the plans change. ...  
Alright. Love you, both. Ta-ta.

*AGATHA hangs up the phone.*

AGATHA

They'll stay over. Should be gone by tomorrow.

ROSALIND (Off-stage)

Keep writing, Mum!

AGATHA

(Groan)

TONY

Don't feel like writing?

AGATHA

No. I'm motivated, it's just... Nothing.

TONY

The words aren't there?

AGATHA

The words are out there, but they're just not coming to me.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

Yet, you still make a go of it. Which, you know, I find impressive. I mean, more people read you than anyone. It's the Bible, then you.

AGATHA

(frustrated) Oh, God.

TONY

And he stopped writing years ago.

AGATHA

Maybe he ran out of ideas.

TONY

(With a laugh) Maybe.

AGATHA

He also didn't have the bills we have.

TONY

There are those. But... I mean, your ideas. Where do your ideas come from?

AGATHA

If you'd really like to know: an idea visits me. Sits right down and whispers the most amazing things. Ideas come to me at odd times. I could be examining tree berries and suddenly a splendid ideas lands in my head, and I just must pull it all together.

TONY

And what's that like?

*AGATHA is in a semi-spotlight.*

AGATHA

Like a dog. A dog with a bone. When I have it I'm slightly embarrassed with it, so I take it, and retire with it, and write it down. And when I return with mud on my nose, I feel as everyone knows what muck I've been digging through. (Pause.) Putting it into words, into story, means also that it puts words into me. When I make a story, craft it, write it, live with it, sit and talk to it, I surrender to the page, to the scene, and I am alive. In the moment. And it is the making of a story, for me the writing is nothing's mortal enemy. Writing fights off the blackness which I know is coming, and the more I do it, the more



## The Mysterious Disappearance

I keep at it, the more I win. When it comes, and it is coming, I tell you: I won't surrender.

*The lights return to normal.*

TONY

I'm sure you won't.

AGATHA

No. So...? Um... where was I?

TONY

You were saying how you write, and I was wishin' I could write, but I don't have a creative bone in my body.

AGATHA

And sometimes I wish I was like you.

TONY

What is that?

AGATHA

Logical, dear. Um. Tom?

TONY

Tony, Mum.

AGATHA

Sorry.

TONY

No worry. What was it?

AGATHA

Are the taxis running? The locals?

TONY

Sure. They gotta make rent like anybody. Why— why'd you want a taxi? I can give you a lift.

AGATHA

It's nothing. Just between us, alright? Don't want Ros in on it.

TONY

Okay. And anyway, you don't want to be out in this.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

I wouldn't think of it. Do you, um, do you think people recognize me?

TONY

You mean because of the book jacket photo?

AGATHA

It is several years off.

TONY

And you don't give interviews, so—

AGATHA

Old age might be a disguise.

TONY

For what? Oh! I get it! A seed has just landed!

AGATHA

Yes, it has. I was just thinking: if a person wanted to settle an old score, how I might do so. Just curious, that's all.

ROSALIND (off-stage)

Mum! Wash for lunch!

TONY

And I'm curious what we've got to eat.

*AGATHA starts up the stairs. TONY exits to the kitchen. AGATHA waits. Then she sneaks back down the stairs, grabs her long coat, and gloves. AGATHA in the library reaches behind the bookshelf for a bottle of liquid and pulls out a bottle of pills from a drawer in the desk.*

TONY (off-stage)

She went upstairs.

ROSALIND (off-stage)

I know she's tired but—

TONY (off-stage)

She can't keep it up.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

*ROSALIND and TONY enter the hall. AGATHA hides from their view. ROSALIND looks up the stairs.*

ROSALIND

She's fine. She can finish one more book.

TONY

Don't push her, Ros.

ROSALIND

I know what she's capable of.

TONY

Maybe we should just sell somethings off.

ROSALIND

Exactly. Sell the diamonds.

TONY

Well, we need to liquidate. We can't keep up the cottage and this place.

ROSALIND

I know!

TONY

I've told Max. He's no help. He says, "Talk to Agatha!"

ROSALIND

She doesn't like things to change.

TONY

Things must change. If we rent out the cottage and move in here, then we could save thousands of pounds.

ROSALIND

She'd never let us rent the cottage to strangers.

TONY

You could return to your practice and let me take care of her.

ROSALIND

She'd strangle me, and then bury you alive.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

There must be some solution. With all the taxes, and cost of living! And what we give the Queen! I'm sick of being servants of the State!

ROSALIND

Stop spouting Thatcher's lines at me—

TONY

Well, she's correct. We need something changed! We'll be broke by the taxes!

ROSALIND

Go up, and check on her—

*ROSALIND exits to the kitchen. TONY exits up the stairs. AGATHA's dressed in her coat. She dials the phone.*

AGATHA

(Whispering) A taxi, yes. I'm at Greenway House. Yes. I'll meet the driver at the gate. ... Good. Right away.

*She hangs up the phone. She shoves the bottles into her coat pockets, pulls on her gloves, and opens the door. The lights black out.*

### Scene 5: Agatha's Missing

*The grand-daughter clock strikes three. The snow is lighter than before. The trunk stands upright in the entry. ROSALIND on the telephone.*

ROSALIND

(Into the phone) Yes, but officer, she's only slightly younger than God! She's eighty-three! She shouldn't be out on her own. ... I'd be happy to wait twenty-four hours if I knew she had a compass, and knew how to read a compass, and she was HOME IN HER BED! ... I'll make you a deal. You start looking for her, and I'll stop YELLING AT YOU! ... If she doesn't have her pills, she might—... Detective, someone must have seen her. She can't just disappear. What?... Has she ever gone missing before? Well, yes. But many years ago, and... Eleven days, but... We'll wait. ... Yes, if she shows up... ... I'll call you personally. ... Okay. Yes, officer. Thank you. Cheers.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

*ROSALIND hangs up the telephone. TONY teeters into the room with a cup of tea.*

TONY

Police not much help?

ROSALIND

About as good as diet water. Something's not right.

TONY

She's your mother, not mine.

ROSALIND

If she were your mother, we'd know which bar to look.

TONY

Maybe she went to London?

ROSALIND

Are you daft? London?

TONY

To see Max and Mathew? I could ring them, see if she popped in—

ROSALIND

Max will panic, and what can he do?

TONY

The same as us, I guess. Wait. Let's just wait.

ROSALIND

Wait for what? The Russians to find her?

TONY

ROSALIND

TONY

ROSALIND

I'm sorry. I'm just not sleeping well. Not with... And I see where this is going. How I can't leave. I leave her alone. Not anymore.

TONY

But I'm here—And Max—

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

Yes, you're here, I know— But Max. He can't handle this. I just... You and I? We're pretty fortunate, and I realize that, but if we lose the house... With all the bills... She'll need me every minute. A new place? She'll get worse. And so we must stay here. Which I hate. Being stuck here. I'll be— I'm already stuck with this. I'm stuck here, stuck like an inmate. And you've been a saint. Really, wonderful. Saint Tony. But my feisty mother, who used to be bold and adventurous, who loved her walks, her garden. Loved going to the train station with her grandson, and shopping with me in London—. That's all fading, isn't it? I know it is, and... I'm grasping to hold on my mother. I want my mother back.

TONY

She's not all gone—

ROSALIND

I know. But I want to keep her— keep her as she was, and I know that's not possible, but that's what I want, and it hurts. It weighs like a ton. My shoulders. My whole body. I walk up here from the cottage, and each step is... It's like a slog through mud. I know what's coming. And maybe it's here. Maybe that's what's happened. And I can handle it. I just don't want to, but I can. We can. (Breath). Depending on what she's like when she returns, I'll call the doctor. I'll get what she needs. I... We are a family, and we'll get through this.

*TONY stands and stares at ROSALIND.*

ROSALIND

Anthony? Has the cat got your tongue? Out with it!

TONY

I don't think it's what you think.

ROSALIND

What? You mean I shouldn't worry?

TONY

Yes— but not for the reason you think—

ROSALIND

Not for the reason— What? Finish your sentences, Tony!

TONY

She mentioned settling an old score.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

Settling an old score? With whom?

TONY

Nancy. Oh? Look? At the gate—

*A taxi pulls up to the house.*

ROSALIND

Who's here? (She looks through the window.) A taxi?

TONY

Ah! There she is! I'll fetch her.

*TONY flounders from the house. ROSALIND watches through the window.*

ROSALIND

(Looking through the window) Tony! Careful! She's not a bag of groceries! (Pause.) Oh! Don't just let her walk alone--! Stop jabbering with the driver—Never mind--. If I want it done right...

*ROSALIND exits.*

*The front door opens. ROSALIND, and AGATHA walks into the foyer with TONY. MARY enters from somewhere in the house, carrying a bag full of knitting. TONY helps AGATHA remove her fur coat, gloves, and leads her into the library. Meanwhile, ROSALIND speaks.*

ROSALIND

Mother! Where have you been? I've been worried sick.

TONY

The cabbie is a Tory! / One of us!—

ROSALIND

You called a taxi?

MARY

Were you lost, dear?

AGATHA

I was knackered.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

You're knackered? Of course you were.

AGATHA

I fear I am not in my perfect mind.

MARY

You know me, and her, and this place—

AGATHA

(To Mary) You were going to leave me.

ROSALIND

No. Of course not.

AGATHA

You were.

TONY

We aren't leaving.

AGATHA

Did you pay the driver?

TONY

I did.

ROSALIND

(with a chuckle) Thank God.

MARY

(with a laugh) I didn't "leave"—

AGATHA

Please don't laugh at me.

ROSALIND

I'm not laughing, but Mother— you've been missing half the day.

AGATHA

Half the day?

MARY

Be comforted, good madam.



## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

You missed lunch, and no one knew where you were.

TONY

Rosalind, let us not over-react.

AGATHA

Was I wearing this? My coat—

MARY

Oh, dear, Dame Lear.

ROSALIND

Mother, are you listening to me? I can't watch you every second of every day. / You can't wonder off.

AGATHA

(To TONY) Thank you, dear.

TONY

Sit. I'll get you tea.

AGATHA

Rosalind, would you make me a small plate? /I'm a bit peckish.

ROSALIND

If you'd stayed for lunch you wouldn't be—

TONY

What would you like, Agatha?

AGATHA

Apples and roast beef? Do we have any roast beef?

ROSALIND

No—

TONY

Lunchmeat or / some chicken salad.

ROSALIND

Did you take your pills—

AGATHA

That'll do nicely.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

You know if you don't take your pills—

AGATHA

I don't know but they're right here...

*As TONY lurches to the kitchen, AGATHA digs through her pockets, but realizes her coat is not on her. MARY sits next to AGATHA. (Remember: only Agatha sees MARY.)*

MARY

You took off your coat.

AGATHA

They're in my coat.

ROSALIND

In your / coat? Your pills?

TONY (off-stage)

The coat? It's in the foyer—

AGATHA

I took them with water.

ROSALIND

Where? Where did you take them? Where did you go?

MARY

Did you go to Rowcroft?

AGATHA

I did.

ROSALIND

You did? You did what?

AGATHA

I visited an old friend at Rowcroft.

ROSALIND

Rowcroft? But you hated it.

MARY

Was Nancy there?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Yes.

MARY

Oh my-my-my.

ROSALIND

Yes? Mother. The nursing home? For the open house?

AGATHA

I told you.

ROSALIND

No, you didn't.

AGATHA

It was all perfectly fine. I am fine now.

ROSALIND

(sarcastic) I thought you're comfortable here?

AGATHA

Of course I am. This is my home. *(She looks at the trunk.)* Why is my trunk down here? Ros, I wish you'd discuss these things with me—

ROSALIND

You told me to.

AGATHA

I did?

ROSALIND

To bring the manuscript. It's in there. But you've locked it.

AGATHA

No, I didn't.

ROSALIND

It is. We couldn't find the key.

AGATHA

The manuscript was beside the trunk. Not in the trunk.

ROSALIND

It was?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Right beside it.

ROSALIND

Do you want it now?

AGATHA

My diamonds are in the trunk.

ROSALIND

Yes.

AGATHA

Are you stealing from me?

ROSALIND

It's not like that.

AGATHA

ROSALIND

AGATHA

You are! You're stealing them!

ROSALIND

Don't get excited, Mum.

*TONY enters with a plated sandwich, which, as he trips, the sandwich slides from the plate. He picks it up, brushes it off, and re-plates it.*

TONY

A snack. It's still good. Thirty-second rule. I did my best, but I couldn't find the butter.

ROSALIND

I'll bring the manuscript, and then you tell me how you liked Rowcroft.

*ROSALIND exits up the stairs.*

TONY

So you went to Rowcroft?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

(Concerning the sandwich) Thank you... ummm.

TONY

Tony, mum.

AGATHA

Of course.

MARY

Was she there?

AGATHA

Yes. Not looking well.

TONY

I'm not looking well?

MARY

May I just ask it, straight up?

AGATHA

It was justified.

MARY

It. Was. Not.

AGATHA

It was.

TONY

What was justified?

AGATHA

Sometimes justice is long delayed, but it comes in the end.

TONY

Too true.

MARY

And... When you left...?

AGATHA

Yes. She's dead.

TONY

Whose dead?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

MARY  
Nancy's dead?

AGATHA  
She died.

MARY  
Oh dear.

TONY  
Who died?

MARY  
Did you kill her? Agatha? Did you?

TONY  
(Calling up the stairs) Honey?

AGATHA  
I don't remember.

*ROSALIND returns with the manuscript.*

ROSALIND  
What is it?

TONY  
She's talking to herself. / She's pretty far gone.

AGATHA  
I'm all right.

MARY  
Do you have the berries and the poison?

AGATHA  
They're in my coat.

TONY  
What's in your coat, mum?

*MARY goes to AGATHA's coat and digs through the pockets. She pulls out the empty vial and the lipstick.*

The Mysterious Disappearance

MARY  
Your color, Agatha?

AGATHA  
There it is.

TONY  
Yes?

AGATHA  
I got it back.

ROSALIND  
Got what?

AGATHA  
Never mind.

MARY  
Is there poison residue on this?

AGATHA  
Don't do that.

*MARY puts the items back in the coat.*

ROSALIND  
It must be the cold. You over-did it today. Would you like to rest upstairs?

AGATHA  
A nap would be nice.

MARY  
I don't see the berries or the poison. / You used them?

AGATHA  
It's all blurry. I think I did.

ROSALIND  
I'm sure it is.

TONY  
Do you want your coat?

AGATHA  
Has it disappeared?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

Leave the coat! Let's give her some rest.

TONY

Is it my sandwich?

ROSALIND

No, it's her head.

MARY

Was Nancy in her bed?

AGATHA

Yes. In the bed when I arrived.

ROSALIND

Mother? Let's get you to bed.

MARY

But when you left, she was dead?

AGATHA

Yes— She died. That's for sure. She's dead.

ROSALIND

Mum?

TONY

What is she saying?

AGATHA

Am I different?

ROSALIND

No, Mum, you're the same old Agatha.

AGATHA

And I walked out, and no one noticed me. Like I was walking in a dream. Have they already forgotten me?

TONY

They won't forget you, that's for sure.

ROSALIND

Up you go. Let's get you tucked in, get you warm. Help me get her upstairs.



The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Hold me, or we'll both go down like London Bridge.

TONY

Up we go!

*TONY helps ROSALIND stand AGATHA. AGATHA looks at her lap/waist, which is damp, and she realizes she wet herself.*

AGATHA

I... . I... . Oh, dear...

ROSALIND

Mother?

*ROSALIND notices that AGATHA wet herself.*

AGATHA

(in tears) I am wet.

ROSALIND

Oh. Yes. I see.

AGATHA

I'm sorry, Ros.

ROSALIND

It's okay. We know what to do. Let's go to the bath. Tony?

MARY

The bath?

AGATHA

Oh, please, not the bath.

ROSALIND

It's okay.

AGATHA

No, it's not.

ROSALIND

I'll help you. And next week Tony will put in some hand railings.

The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

Of course—

AGATHA

Don't tell... Don't tell Max, please.

ROSALIND

It's our secret, Mum. Can we move? Let's go up-stairs. Okay.

AGATHA

I had the strangest feeling... I wasn't... I was on a stage, and... Where we did *The Mousetrap*, and I was on stage.

ROSALIND

(At the stairs.) Up. There's a few more steps.

TONY

You've got this.

*TONY and ROSALIND move AGATHA up the stairs and exit from view. MARY grabs her coat and things*

MARY

(As if to herself) Something doesn't fit. I mean, would she?

*MARY exits just as TONY re-enters. He hears a machine. He slides the bookshelf panel, and he sees the tape recorder spinning, as it has run out of tape. He turns it off. He connects the tape to the other reel. He rewinds the tape to a spot. He presses play.*

RECORDING: (AGATHA's voice from the tape-recording)

Mary? ...

TONY

(to himself) Mary?

*As TONY listens to the recording, he digs into AGATHA's coat pockets. He pulls out an empty vial.*

## The Mysterious Disappearance

RECORDING: (AGATHA's voice from the  
tape-recording)

Mary! Since Rowcroft, I've wondered: why does someone take a  
life—take their own life or, you know, commit murder? That's  
what the new story is about. (Silence.) No, but when is murder,  
murder, and when it's an accident?

*TONY sits near the reel-to-reel as it  
plays out. He listens, contemplating the  
empty vial. Slowly the lights dim to  
black. [There is NO INTERMISSION.]*

## ACT TWO

*Agatha's library, same as in Act One, later. A walker stands near the couch. The trunk stands in the corner.*

### Scene 1: A Dead Delicate Fiend

*The grand-daughter clock strikes ten. The late December light streams through the windows. TONY sits, doing the crossword. Outside, car doors close, and a car drives through the gravel, leaving the house. ROSALIND, wearing a sweater, enters the house.*

ROSALIND

Max'll stop at the pharmacy. He has a list.

TONY

I thought you were going / with him?

ROSALIND

Someone needs to stay here.

TONY

What do you think I'm doing?

ROSALIND

I mean, when she wakes I should be the one—

TONY

I don't think she's really asleep—

ROSALIND

All I'm saying is: You could've gone with him.

TONY

Oh? The pharmacy is not a job for two men.

ROSALIND

And what is? Putting in a light bulb?

TONY

Well it took six of us to get the couch in here.

ROSALIND

Four too many men, if you ask me.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

Did Max say any more about the tape-recording?

ROSALIND

Mum's always talked out her novels. She takes on the characters and plays the parts. It's how she wrote Mousetrap, and Witness-

TONY

But to talk about the possibility of murder, and then she goes missing. Probably to Rowcroft.-

ROSALIND

We don't know for sure-

TONY

We should talk to the taxi driver.

ROSALIND

Yes, Mr. Detective.

TONY

Well!?

ROSALIND

What?

TONY

You heard the recording. She wants to murder someone! (Hinting.) Then- She goes missing, and she thinks she went to the very same place your evil step-mother died. Just putting the clues together.

ROSALIND

Nancy wasn't evil.

TONY

You called her the "B" word daily / most of our marriage-

ROSALIND

I never said that.

TONY

Okay-What'd you call her?

ROSALIND

A delicate fiend.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

Ahhh. That's such a nicer phrase. And now that she's dead you want to treat her like a saint?

ROSALIND

I didn't say she was a saint.

TONY

She kept you from seeing your dad. She ruined your mother's marriage, and it was all put out for the public to see. If that's not a bitch, I don't know what is.

ROSALIND

Anthony!

TONY

(Whispered) Well. She was. And you know it.

ROSALIND

She may, of course, have had some remarkable qualities.

TONY

But—

ROSALIND

But, probably not.

TONY

So does your mother harbor any resentment or hate toward Nancy?

ROSALIND

Oh, please—

TONY

You heard the tape—

ROSALIND

Yes, I heard it, but that doesn't mean—

TONY

But it could. The Queen of Crime wanted to see what murder felt like, and, ta-da, a patient dies at the nursing home—

ROSALIND

It's a nursing home—

## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

—and you barristers are always ones to talk about doubt and motive and means.

ROSALIND

They've had a rash of suicides—

TONY

Or murders. It's just like Hercule. People doubted Piorot could do it, and he was stuck in a wheelchair.

ROSALIND

Mother is not him.

TONY

She isn't?

ROSALIND

What has gotten into you?

TONY

You're right. Never mind... I'm just putting together the pieces.

ROSALIND

Help me detect the key to the trunk, Mister! Check the kitchen drawers for the key to the trunk.

TONY

To the trunk? / You're still on about that—?

ROSALIND

I want to see those diamonds. Get them appraised.

TONY

And have you asked Max about the key?

ROSALIND

Of course.

TONY

You did?—

ROSALIND

In an indirect way.

TONY

So as not to arouse any suspicion. Of course.

The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

He has enough to worry about—

TONY

I'll just go get the drill.

ROSALIND

We can't wake Mother.

TONY

Why are they so important?

ROSALIND

I don't know, why are diamonds so important?

TONY

Why now, to you?

ROSALIND

I want to see them. See if they have any value.

TONY

They're diamonds. They have value.

*He sees her struggling against a buried fear. TONY reaches out to ROSALIND. He grasps her hand, and she tries to pull away, scared, almost, but he holds on to her, gently.*

TONY

What is it, really?

ROSALIND

Nothing. I'm fine.

TONY

Ros? Please? You're trembling.

ROSALIND

It's the cold.

TONY

Okay. And?

ROSALIND

You'll think I'm silly.



## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

Try me.

ROSALIND

Mum. When I see her, and when she forgets, things, you, what we did yesterday, I get... [scared.] Silly, I know, but... I think: will she [forget me]-? I know she might-Forget me. What we were to each other. And I see her, her hands, and I see my hands. Or her neck, and I see my neck, and how... When we used to dress up, and we would go to London and for a play, or a movie of hers, and how she was, all adorned. But now... I see her, and I'm sorry, but I see [me]. And it's all very... I don't know. Scary. To see-To watch what I fear I will... What I will become. Horribly silly, but it brings out this meanness. This anger in me-I know it. I'm horrible to her-

TONY

No you're not-

ROSALIND

I am. But I know it, and that makes it [harder]. And... I feel if I don't keep busy, I'll... Crumble.

TONY

What is it-What do you see in her?

ROSALIND

That makes me...? I guess... I'm prejudiced against my future self.

TONY

Aren't we all?

ROSALIND

Yeah-probably. But what we had, what Mother had... What I had with her... I don't want to lose it. And we could. We could lose this place. Our position. Our standing. I see that. It's going. I see it fading, and it's not just an era, it's a past, and I don't want that to... I just don't.

TONY

It'll be okay. It will be.

ROSALIND

See? I'm just being silly. Now. Enough of that! There must be a key in the kitchen junk drawer. Check there.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

(Overly acting as he exits) "I shall deliver you the key that locks up your restraints," my dear Rosalind.

ROSALIND

Stop acting and find it.

*TONY "raspberries" ROSALIND and he exits to the kitchen. AGATHA and MARY enter from the stairs.*

ROSALIND

Mother? You up?

AGATHA

Good... Good morning, Ros.

ROSALIND

Sorry. Did we wake you?

AGATHA

No.

ROSALIND

Would you like anything to eat?

AGATHA

(Nods her head.)

ROSALIND

Want some tea and toast.

MARY

Would that be nice?

AGATHA

(Nods her head.)

ROSALIND

(Yelling off to the kitchen) Mum's up! Put on the kettle!

TONY (from the kitchen)

'Mornin' to ya, Dame Christie!

*TONY in the kitchen opens cabinets and makes tea.*

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND  
How are you feeling?

MARY  
You rested.

AGATHA  
Where's Max...?

ROSALIND  
He's running errands.

AGATHA  
I could've gone with him.

ROSALIND  
I thought it best for you to sleep.

MARY  
He is so impatient.

AGATHA  
You could have woke me.

ROSALIND  
You needed to sleep.

AGATHA  
I'm fine!

ROSALIND  
And that's why Max slept on the couch and not in your bed.  
Right. You're fine.

AGATHA  
I am!

ROSALIND  
You don't recall going up-stairs last night and when Max came to  
bed, you wouldn't let him in?

AGATHA  
I was toying with him. Now, stop badgering me!

MARY  
Is the story in the paper?

The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Tell the butler to bring me the paper with my breakfast.

ROSALIND

The butler?

AGATHA

Was the paper delivered this morning?

ROSALIND

Yes.

AGATHA

Then he can bring it with my toast. Is that too much to ask?

*ROSALIND retrieves the newspaper.*

ROSALIND

No, I've got it.

AGATHA

Good! You know I always start my day with the newspaper.

ROSALIND

I am aware.

*ROSALIND hands AGATHA the newspaper.  
Furiously, AGATHA searches the paper.*

ROSALIND

Can I help?

AGATHA

No.

TONY (from the kitchen)

Ros?! I found one! Come see!

MARY

It must be here.

AGATHA

It must.

ROSALIND

I'll be right back.

The Mysterious Disappearance

*ROSALIND exits to the kitchen.  
The lights change.*

**Scene 2: Mary and Imogen**

*MARY sits in her chair.*

MARY

Tea— Rosalind's service— She always rushes in with the tea like a bull at the gate post.

AGATHA

Mary?

MARY

Yes, dear?

AGATHA

Is Nancy dead?

MARY

She is.

AGATHA

I think I did it.

MARY

Maybe. Agatha, I've done some snooping around.

AGATHA

You should leave that to Jane.

MARY

Well... I thought I'd give it a go.

AGATHA

And? Do we know how Nancy died? It's not in the paper.

MARY

Honestly, the killer was pathetically stupid. I noticed poison on her pillow.

AGATHA

Oh? What kind of poison?

MARY

Taxine.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Oh no.

MARY

I doubt I would've spotted it, if I wasn't aware of the yew berries, and how they smell, and the like.

AGATHA

Yew berries. I have a big yew tree in the garden.

MARY

Well, don't panic. We don't have all the facts.

AGATHA

You're right. What did they find with the body?

MARY

Some golf score sheet.

AGATHA

Yes. I was told she liked to reminisce about her best golf games.

*The lights shift to AGATHA's imaginary world as ARCHIE in his tux enters from some strange cottage hidden "door". Both ARCHIE and AGATHA are in a spotlights.*

AGATHA

She and Archie would talk about golf all into the night.

ARCHIE

She loved golf. The woods. The stiff putter.

AGATHA

Oh, please. Talking about golf is like talking about knee socks. Boring!

ARCHIE

Golf is a religion.

AGATHA

For atheists and heathens.

ARCHIE

It's our life together.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

She did often confuse tea time with tee time. She brought her clubs to the committee tea party.

ARCHIE

Nancy's funny that way isn't she.

AGATHA

Whose names were on the golf score sheet?

MARY

Archie.

AGATHA

Of course.

MARY

And some Major someone-or-other.

ARCHIE

Ahh, the Major.

MARY

I must say, I don't believe they actually played golf.

AGATHA

(prudish) Never played golf?

ARCHIE

We knocked a few balls around.

AGATHA

OHHH! Where's my gun?

ARCHIE

You don't really want me dead.

AGATHA

No—I want you to hurt just like you hurt me—

ARCHIE

Oh dear, you don't really. And anyway, you are too late. Too late, dear.

*ARCHIE vanishes. The imaginary lights shift back to the previous lighting.*

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

I'll right it—I will! Damn him. Damn him. Well. What else did you discover with the body?

MARY

The remnants of a burned letter. The type of letter or small card which comes with a flower delivery.

AGATHA

Could you read the card?

MARY

Yes. (Nods.) It read: "The game is up." Signed "I. C.".

AGATHA

The game is up?

MARY

It's making sense to me. Let me ask you, what do you remember... when you left the house?

AGATHA

I took a taxi. I remember the taxi. Going to Rowcroft. Getting out at Rowcroft.

MARY

Did you talk to anyone?

AGATHA

The cabbie.

MARY

Yes. Anyone else?

AGATHA

The front desk manager.

MARY

A boisterous woman with glasses around her neck?

AGATHA

Yes.

MARY

And you signed in? At the front desk?



## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Yes.

MARY

When I spoke with the nurse, she didn't remember you. I described you, but she couldn't recall your face. But then again, she hardly looked up from her typing to even make eye-contact with me.

AGATHA

And her eye glasses?

MARY

Stayed around her neck-

AGATHA

Yes-

MARY

She did say that Nancy was distressed about the recent suicides at the nursing home. So distressed, in fact, that Nancy feared for her life.

AGATHA

Feared for her life?

MARY

Nancy continuously called in the maintenance man to check the windows. Check the bath, and she would never eat with a knife. Nurse was very adamant about that fact.

AGATHA

You should follow-up on this maintenance fellow.

MARY

Oh, I plan to. (Shaking her head) But as a suicide? There was no weapon, no razor, no knife, no over-dose of pills. It doesn't seem likely-

AGATHA

What with the yew berries and all-

MARY

It looks like murder to me.

AGATHA

Oh dear.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

MARY

And now, to pass to your own movements. When you arrived, did you give your name?

AGATHA

Yes, I'm sure I would.

MARY

Which name?

AGATHA

I don't know. I gave my name. Agatha.

MARY

Or did you say you were Dame Christie? (Pause.) Or did you say Lady Mallowan? (Pause.) Or did you use my name. Mary Westmacott?

AGATHA

I didn't use that name. (Pause.) I don't remember.

MARY

There was no Dame, and no Christie on the registry.

AGATHA

And no "Agatha"?

MARY

No.

*MARY pulls out notes.*

MARY

Nancy did have an odd visitor. One, I think who gave her the burned card. It was a few hours before you supposedly visited, dear.

AGATHA

A few hours?

MARY

Possibly.

AGATHA

Alright. Who was the visitor?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

MARY

Do you know Imogen Cymbeline?

AGATHA

Goodness, no.

MARY

Imogen brought the flowers for Nancy. Orchids. What matters now is the time of death.

AGATHA

And the motive.

MARY

For other people—yes. We must discover if anyone else had a motive to kill her?

AGATHA

The motive and the opportunity.

MARY

Exactly. The nurses checked on Mrs. Nancy only before meal times.

AGATHA

So before breakfast, before lunch, and before supper?

MARY

Yes, and then at bedtime. You were at Rowcroft after lunch.

AGATHA

When did they find Nancy's body?

MARY

When they did their rounds, before dinner.

AGATHA

Oh, dear. Then I could have done it.

*The tea kettle in the kitchen whistles,  
and then descends.*

MARY

You might be the killer, but the poison needed time to seep into Mrs. Nancy's system. It is the kind of poison that works slowly. Overtime. When Nancy laid her head on the pillow, she inhaled

## The Mysterious Disappearance

the poison, and she'd have slept with ease. My dear, I do not believe you're the killer.

AGATHA

But I need to be sure.

MARY

Indeed.

ROSALIND (off-stage)

Tea's almost ready, Mum.

AGATHA

Good, dear!

MARY

I need to make another inquiry. You'll be fine while I'm out?

AGATHA

I'm sure they'll nurse me back to tip-top-shape. Please find out who killed Nancy. Who this Imogen is.

MARY

I have an idea as to his or her identity. You keep them busy.

*MARY exits. The lights alter.*

### Scene 3: The Daughter's Key

*The grand-daughter clock strikes ten-thirty. Suddenly the telephone rings. She notices the door is ajar. AGATHA sits at her desk looking at the phone, ringing.*

ROSALIND (off-stage)

The phone!

*The phone rings, again. ROSALIND enters with tea service and the manuscript.*

ROSALIND

(entering) Am I the only one who can answer the phone? Mother?

AGATHA

Yes, dear.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

Nothing.

*ROSALIND picks up the telephone.*

ROSALIND

The Christie residence. Hello? [Beat.] Excuse me. You're a reporter for who? [Beat.] How did you get this number?... [Beat.] Yes we are excited that *Curtains* is on the best-sellers... [Beat.] No. She's fine. She's not missing and she's not sick. Your informant misled you. [Beat.] The police--? Now look here. We have a strict policy-- [Beat.] NO! SHE'S NOT GIVING INTERVIEWS BECAUSE SHE'S BUSY--

*ROSALIND slams down the phone. She takes time to recover.*

ROSALIND

Mother, you'd be happy to know that the Poirot novel is at the top of the Best Sellers. *Curtains* is a hit!

AGATHA

Wonderful. Jane's last case should also be quite something too.

ROSALIND

Shall we check our last edits, and send it off?

*BILLY steps into the room with his notes. ROSALIND is positioned in shadows. Both BILLY and AGATHA are in a spotlights.*

BILLY

Good idea! Check my edits.

AGATHA

Oh, dear, I'm sick of notes.

ROSALIND

Me too.

BILLY

Agatha, you can't ignore my notes.

AGATHA

Are all those notes for my last--

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

Yes, but—

BILLY

They won't take but a minute.

AGATHA

You always say that—

BILLY

I do not. If we were doing a Mary Westmacott novel maybe—

AGATHA

Ahh, Mary—. Max loved her!

BILLY

She never quite did it for me.

ROSALIND

Mum?

BILLY

Anyway, pour me a cup, and I'll be through my notes before the tea is cold.

AGATHA

Very well. *One cup* of tea.

ROSALIND

None for me.

*AGATHA pours a cup of tea for BILLY. She adds a spoon of sugar.*

BILLY

Now, you've forgotten that detective mysteries must have a detective, and as we can see, there is no detective.

AGATHA

I don't care. I've made a career out of breaking rules. And anyway Death Comes at the End? No detective.

ROSALIND

Do we need a detective?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

BILLY

(Taking the tea) The audience expects certain things. A detective is one of them.

ROSALIND

We don't need one, a detective. But we do need clues.

AGATHA

They are there! I've put all the clues—

BILLY

Bodies, murders, and weapons are in short supply.

AGATHA

You aren't looking!

ROSALIND

I'm looking, mother.

BILLY

I don't see it—

AGATHA

I've provided enough information—

BILLY

Maybe you think you did, but I don't see it. In your heyday, I saw it, crystal clear, but now?

AGATHA

What?

ROSALIND

It's not working.

AGATHA

I disagree!

BILLY

As your editor I implore you to give more clues—

AGATHA

--for those shrewd enough to see them. The clues are in plain sight!

## The Mysterious Disappearance

BILLY

Well then, provide a stupid friend who doesn't see the clues.

ROSALIND

On page twenty-seven, I was confused with this passage—

BILLY

You need a Hastings fellow.

ROSALIND

When the man—

AGATHA

I don't want another man mucking about. Cut him out!

ROSALIND

We could do that. That was my suggestion—

BILLY

No, we can't cut him out. We need a character who doesn't conceal his thought, who's not as smart as the average—

AGATHA

You're such a good Hastings!

ROSALIND

Am I?

BILLY

I am not! You're missing my point! The challenge should be the struggle—

ROSALIND

I struggled with this page—

BILLY

A struggle between the writer and her audience.

ROSALIND

If we cut from here to here—see?

BILLY

You've presented to them a challenge: spot the culprit before you reveal him or her.

ROSALIND

It makes sense. And this clue is too obvious—



The Mysterious Disappearance

BILLY

And you give them more clues.

AGATHA

I like how it works—

BILLY

But you're not being fair.

ROSALIND

I agree, but we can tighten it up a bit—

BILLY

You've got a trick up your sleeve in this one, and it's not fair.

AGATHA

Oh please stop this. Did you actually read the whole thing?

ROSALIND

Yes, I did.

BILLY

These are my secretary's notes.

AGATHA

Oh please!

BILLY

Just... listen to... Ohhh.

*BILLY has major stomach pains.*

AGATHA

Not feeling well?

ROSALIND

I'm fine.

BILLY

No. Something seems wrong with... {Stomach pain.} Ugh...

AGATHA

It must be the digoxin.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND/BILLY

The... what?

AGATHA

Comes from the foxglove flowers. They're all over. Attacks the heart, and once in your blood stream, you feel it? Your heart slowing down?

BILLY

What did you...?

AGATHA

Your heart will slow down until the point where it eventually stops.

BILLY

Oh no. Why?

*BILLY slides down the wall clutching his tea, his papers, and his chest.*

ROSALIND

Mother?

AGATHA

Ros?!

ROSALIND

AGATHA

AGATHA

Let's work on the autobiography.

ROSALIND

We can. Okay. Give me a sec.

BILLY

You can't keep... ignoring me—

ROSALIND

I need to grab it.

AGATHA

Did you type the section on the disappearance?

ROSALIND

It's here.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

*BILLY exits through a secret exit as ROSALIND retrieves the autobiography off the desk.*

ROSALIND

All right. So. Mum? Your... Yes. Here. This section. Your disappearance. Now. About the hotel during the disappearance. You write that when you left Father you checked into—

AGATHA

I checked into a hotel, that's right.

ROSALIND

Okay, but you say it was next to Nancy Neele's hotel.

AGATHA

Your father arranged for Nancy to live in the hotel.

ROSALIND

Right around the way? Next door?

AGATHA

I know it's strange, dear. And I swear I didn't know. Not until I saw her the next morning.

ROSALIND

And did she see you?

AGATHA

No. I think. I don't remember.

ROSALIND

But you stayed?

AGATHA

I did. Disguised. To keep an eye on her.

ROSALIND

And you didn't hurt her—

AGATHA

No—

ROSALIND

You should've—

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Oh, of course not. Not then. I was too distraught. By losing your father. I loved him. And I wasn't thinking straight. I don't know what I wanted but to be replaced by a younger woman?

ROSALIND

Of course it hurt—

AGATHA

You bet it did. I mean, what did she have that I didn't? I kept asking myself. Was it because she was prettier? Was it because she played golf and I didn't? I needed answers. And at the hotel I realized your father... He was like a stranger. He'd come to the hotel restaurant and have dinner with her—

ROSALIND

When you were missing?

AGATHA

He was looking at her, instead of looking for me.

ROSALIND

Did you really want him looking for you?

AGATHA

Of course I did!

ROSALIND

Then why did you register under your nom-de-plume Westmacott?

AGATHA

If HE WAS LOOKING, HE WOULD HAVE KNOWN! I used my middle name. MARY. He just wasn't looking!

ROSALIND

Alright.

AGATHA

And if it hadn't been for those musicians who identified me and called the police... Called Officer Maynard.

ROSALIND

Harry—

AGATHA

He brought Archie and the doctors, who whisked me away before too many reporters discovered I wasn't dead. My doctors met us

## The Mysterious Disappearance

at Marple Manor. There they made the proper examinations. Said I'd disappeared. A fugue state. It was nothing of the sort! I was mad. I was so mad, but we are not allowed to do that! Not then! And... Police officer Maynard, he asked me questions and then he left. As the door closed behind him. Archie and Nancy stood over me. And do you know, Ros? Nancy wore my lipstick.

ROSALIND

Are you sure it was your lipstick?

AGATHA

A woman knows her lipstick.

ROSALIND

And did Nancy ever tell father she took it?

AGATHA

No. But I never said a word either.

ROSALIND

And were you jealous?

AGATHA

Oh, of course but I couldn't do anything about it—

ROSALIND

No, you wouldn't have harmed anyone.

AGATHA

That's what I thought for so many years. I was content with just putting those ideas in my books.

*TONY enters with sandwiches.*

TONY

Isn't it elevenzies?

AGATHA

Tea? Lovely.

*ROSALIND gives AGATHA a napkin. Rosalind pours the tea. TONY takes his tea too.*

TONY

I heard you two talking about Nancy Neele, and if you don't mind—

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

Tony.

TONY

If she were still with us and if you ran into Nancy, like say at a book signing, would you talk to her?

AGATHA

If she approached me.

ROSALIND

You would?

AGATHA

Yes, if she approached me.

ROSALIND

What would you say to her?

AGATHA

Hello. And then I'd probably ask her: why. I mean, we were friends, for a few months we'd chaired a committee together. I liked her, and then she started sleeping with your father. She knew what she was doing. So, I would ask her. Why? Why go after Archie? Why go after my daughter's father? But she would never answer me. She was not what she appeared. She was a dark soul.

ROSALIND

Your tea, Mum.

TONY

(To ROSALIND) And Ros? If you saw Nancy, what would you say to her?

ROSALIND

Me?

TONY

You were seven or eight. And she kept you from your father.

ROSALIND

I don't know. Offer her a small chicken-salad sandwich?

*MARY bursts into the room just as AGATHA brings the tea to her lips.*

## The Mysterious Disappearance

MARY

Don't! Agatha, don't drink that!

AGATHA

What?

ROSALIND

Mum?

MARY

She's the one! She could be poisoning you too!

AGATHA

Is this... poisoned?

*TONY coughs up part of his sandwich. As MARY removes her coat and hat...*

ROSALIND

What? It's not poisoned, Mum.

AGATHA

Ros?

TONY

Tasted fine to me.

MARY

I've found the solution.

ROSALIND

It is fine. Go ahead.

MARY

(Over) We've come to the point in the mystery, Agatha, the chapter of tying up the loose ends—

AGATHA

(At the same time) You wouldn't poison your / own mother.

ROSALIND

(Interrupting) Of course not!

MARY

—demonstrating that all individual/ events are part of a coherent picture.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

Mum? Aren't you hungry?

AGATHA

Where've you been?

ROSALIND

You know where I've been. We made these for tea.

MARY

I went back to the nursing home. To find out who visited Nancy the day she died. I've discovered the identity of I. C.

AGATHA

Where's Max?

TONY

You know where he is—

AGATHA

No—

ROSALIND

He went to town to get your prescriptions. What's wrong?

MARY

Ask *her* what's wrong?

AGATHA

I wouldn't have guessed, my own daughter.

ROSALIND

What are you talking about?

AGATHA

Was it for the diamonds?

ROSALIND

The diamonds?—

TONY

I told you we should have asked—

ROSALIND

They're in the trunk. We just don't want you giving them away willie-nilly.



## The Mysterious Disappearance

MARY

Don't let her distract you from the real issue. -

AGATHA

Stealing from me! -

MARY

Ask about I. C. -

AGATHA

I'm getting to that.

TONY

(Simultaneously) Who's she talking to?

ROSALIND

(Simultaneously) You're getting to what, Mother? I'm right here.

MARY

She almost had me fooled.

AGATHA

Mary, I've got this.

ROSALIND

Mary? You've got what, Mother?

MARY

Go ahead. Ask. Who is I. C.?

ROSALIND

(Simultaneously) Mother?

TONY

(Simultaneously) Mary?

AGATHA

Rosalind, who is Imogen Cymbeline?

ROSALINE

Imogen Cymbeline? Why?

MARY

It was the name on the register at Rowcroft.

TONY

What-?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

Imogen Cymbeline— AGATHA

Why— ROSALIND

Why?— MARY

Why are you bringing that up— ROSALIND

I. C. was the last person to visit Nancy Neele-- AGATHA

Nancy?— ROSALIND

Before she died. MARY

Yes, Nancy. Who signed I. C.? AGATHA

Who is I. C.? MARY

I signed I. C. Imogen Cymbeline. ROSALIND

I knew it! MARY

Imogen, the step-daughter of the queen. It was our game. ROSALIND

And the game is up! MARY

You and Agatha? TONY

You knew that, Mum. ROSALIND

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

No, I didn't!

ROSALIND

You called her the evil queen of Cymbeline, and I was—

AGATHA

You're making that up!

ROSALIND

No. Don't you remember when Nancy died?

AGATHA

NO!

MARY

She visited Nancy the day she died?

AGATHA

You were there when Nancy died?

ROSALIND

Yes—

AGATHA

(She begins to realize) Not me? I didn't—

ROSALIND

No— You never went there—

AGATHA

I never went to the nursing home?

ROSALIND

No—Well, we visited it, together—

AGATHA

But today— No. Yesterday?

ROSALIND

No. You disappeared two days ago. You left the house two days ago, when Max and Mathew went into London. Are you talking about when you left the house?

AGATHA

I went to Rowcroft —

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

No, Mother. You're confused.

AGATHA

I didn't?

ROSALIND

I'm sorry, but... It's a... You're... Mum.

AGATHA

Am I?

MARY

You are not—

AGATHA

I thought—

TONY

The cab driver just drove you around, and dropped you off—

MARY

At the nursing home—

TONY

—back here. He drove you around for hours. Just driving.

ROSALIND

And he brought you home.

AGATHA

I never went to Rowcroft?

ROSALIND

No. Not in the last few days. But I went there and visited Nancy—

AGATHA

You did?

ROSALIND

Yes.

AGATHA

And you tried to cover up your visit with a fake name?

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

It wasn't a cover-up. You knew about it.

AGATHA

I knew?

TONY

You never told me—

ROSALIND

I did. After. She's my step-mother. And of course I visited her. I went after work. She had cancer. And I had to work it out on my own.

TONY

But I thought you hated the delicate fiend.

ROSALIND

I was conflicted, okay?! I took her flowers. But Mother, Nancy died in 1958.

AGATHA

1958? But it's...

MARY

That's impossible.

TONY

Seventeen years-ago.

ROSALIND

She didn't die this week.

TONY

Some other patient died this week.

AGATHA

Not Nancy?

ROSALIND

No. (Pause.) Who gave you that notion?

AGATHA

(Looking at MARY.)

ROSALIND

(Looking at MARY, not seeing her, so she looks at TONY.)

The Mysterious Disappearance

(Shrugging)

TONY

(Shakes her head.)

MARY

ROBALIND

Tony? What do I...?

TONY

Be honest. Tell her.

AGATHA

Tell me what? I'm right here!

ROBALIND

You are. I just... (Silence.) How'd you get this idea, Mother?

AGATHA

Mary... She. Um...

ROBALIND

She's not... (Silence.) Mum. Look at me. Nancy died in 1958.

AGATHA

She died in 1958?

MARY

But Rosalind visited Nancy in the nursing-

AGATHA

Yes. (To Rosalind) You went to Rowcroft without me? Did you visit the old man?

ROBALIND

What old man, Mother-?

AGATHA

The police officer-

MARY

HARRY!-

AGATHA

who committed suicide right before Christmas.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

No, of course not. I was here with you, and Mathew, and... Don't you remember. We opened presents. Mathew's girlfriend was here.

TONY

Oh, yes. She gave me a stupid pet rock-

ROSALIND

TONY!

TONY

Well, how do you walk a rock?

AGATHA

But the officer... His suicide wasn't a suicide-

TONY

The suicides-Oh! We had talked about them.

MARY

Maynard-

ROSALIND

Let's stop this talk. I don't want to hear any more about suicides!

TONY

ROSALIND

TONY

ROSALIND

It was someone we didn't know.

MARY

But she knew. Rosalind knew Police Officer Maynard and Nancy-

TONY

We only read about him.

ROSALIND

You read about it and you must've... I don't know-Imagined more than what was really there. Mum? In 1958, I visited Nancy when she died. We've gone over this when she died. You were horribly distressed when you found out that I'd visited her behind your back so much.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

(To MARY) But she was murdered?

ROSALIND

No. She wasn't. It was cancer. And that was a long time ago. This is nothing—. I mean... Nothing to feel ashamed about. This— Something triggered your memory and—

AGATHA

The suicides made me think about it, and how Nancy went into the nursing home—

MARY

Rosalind visited Nancy quite often—

AGATHA

You visited *her often* those last few months—

TONY

You did?

ROSALIND

Yes. After work.

AGATHA

Did she recognize you?

ROSALIND

Not at first, but eventually.

TONY

And you kept going back? Why?

ROSALIND

She was so *delicate*, and frail, and I didn't know if I could go through with it. Seeing her die, watching her suffer without knowing how she'd taken my father away from me.

MARY

You never told your father, did you?

AGATHA

Did your father know?

ROSALIND

That I was visiting Nancy? No.—



## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

Oh dear—

ROSALIND

(over) He'd died. He'd already died. Years before her. Right? You remember? Nancy and father? They never had other kids, so Nancy was happy to have the visitors. Someone to talk to. Sometimes we'd talk about golf, the village, politics. And I'd fluff up her pillow—

MARY

And sprinkle taxine on it in the process!

AGATHA

(Ignoring Mary) Wait. I didn't murder Nancy?

TONY

Mum, you didn't kill her or anyone.

ROSALIND

Oh, no, Mum. You've never murdered anyone. You're a writer. Not a killer. You are not a danger to anyone. Mum, I think your mind is - How can I say this?

TONY

Not reliable.

AGATHA

I can't trust it.

ROSALIND

No, maybe not.

TONY

But you can trust us, Mum. We'll tell you the truth.

ROSALIND

We're here for you. (Pause.) You're here with us, and you're okay.

*AGATHA begins to panic.*

AGATHA

I can't control this?

ROSALIND

No—I don't think so—But—

## The Mysterious Disappearance

TONY

(Over) Relax—You're safe—

AGATHA

(To Mary) You're Mary?

MARY

I am.

ROSALIND

(Over) Mum? Mary is you.

AGATHA

My nom de plume?

MARY

Westmacott—Yes.

TONY

(over) Mary is you.

AGATHA

Me? Oh.

ROSALIND

That's okay—

AGATHA

I'm not okay— This is not okay--

ROSALIND

Mum...

AGATHA

I remember when we first started—

MARY

I remember that—

AGATHA

As a little girl—

ROSALIND

(overlapping) When you were a little girl?

The Mysterious Disappearance

MARY

(overlapping) As a little girl? When we were friends—And we made up stories—

AGATHA

I'd imagine with Mary—

ROSALIND

You made up stories—

MARY

(overlapping) I am the stories, the plots—We create and talk them out—

ROSALIND

(overlapping) You'd talk them out—

AGATHA

I don't feel so well—

*Lights slowly fade on ROSALIND and the others, and only shine brightly on AGATHA. She looks alone in a spotlight on stage. Slowly all of them move away from AGATHA, into the dark.*

ROSALIND

Mum? Look at me.

*AGATHA does not look at ROSALIND.*

AGATHA

Am I where?

ROSALIND

*(muted and in the dark)* Here with us—

AGATHA

No. This isn't right.

MARY

*(muted and in the dark)* What?

TONY

*(muted and in the dark)* Take my hand.

*AGATHA doesn't reach to TONY. [AGATHA's voice should sound different.]*

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Can I be honest?

MARY

Please.

ROSALIND

Of course.

TONY

Mum?

AGATHA

Parts of the day are fine, and I'm at the top of my game, but then I slide into the edge. Like I walk into the spot of Swiss cheese. Into the... Spots. I fall into them, or I mean holes. But the holes are fuzzy lights. The high lights. No. I mean the spotlight. May well be highlights or footlights, like those at the theater. But at the theater, when I write a play, I know every line, every word, and the character stands in the witness box to... To witness for the audience, the people, and I am writing it, but I'm not because I don't have a clue. And now... What am I supposed to say? I don't know sometimes when I'm in a spot until... Umm. Sorry— What's my line? I mean something goes here, I know, and you're there, and I'm... I am supposed to say something... Can someone? Do we have a prompter? Is that the phrase? I can't see you there, in the wings, but could you please give me my line... I should know it, know what to say because I wrote this, I wrote the play, but... I don't know... the line. (*Panic sets in.*) Please. Please. Did I miss a cue?

MARY

No, dear. It's not a play. You're at home. There's Ros. Tony. Your husband is on his way. They're all here. Let them help.

AGATHA

You can help. You've always helped.

ROSALIND

Yes, of course Mum.

MARY

Let her help. She's sacrificed so much.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

But you have a way, the words, the stories. I can't write without you.

ROSLIND

You can—

MARY

Give her a chance. She's learned a lot.

AGATHA

She's a lawyer—

ROSALIND

I am. But—

MARY

She's your daughter first.

AGATHA

She's not you.

MARY

No. But she can do what I can't. Let her.

AGATHA

I don't want to be a burden.

MARY/ROSALIND

Trust her./You're not.

TONY

*(in the dark holding out his hand)* We're right here, Mum.

AGATHA

Ros?

ROSLIND

*(muted)* I'm right here. Hold my hand.

*AGATHA holds ROSALIND's hand, then TONY's hand, and slowly the lights return to normal.*

AGATHA

Oh, Rosalind. I am so—

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

Shhh. These things happen.

AGATHA

Not to me— I made it through Greece, and Afghanistan, and Egyptian digs. I survived the Germans, twice! And Churchill two or three times! I am a Dame, for god's sake! I am not this! (Embarrassed.) Oh, who can tell me who I am when you're gone?

TONY

I can.

ROSALIND

We're not going anywhere. And, if I have to, I will tell you who you are every day.

AGATHA

Maybe I'll have to read my own book.

ROSALIND

Maybe so.

AGATHA

No, really. Who will tell my story, Ros?

ROSALIND

I will. I promise.

MARY

This is bad—

TONY

If this is bad, we'll take it.

AGATHA

(Over) I don't know what I was thinking. I am not so... . I'm slipping, dear.

ROSALIND

Yes. I know. That's why we're here.

AGATHA

I can't do anything about it. Ros? Tony. I'm scared.

ROSALIND

It's okay.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

I've always had my feet on the ground. Please. Know one thing dear, and I must say this while I can. (She tries to speak.) [She thinks the following but she cannot find the words: before another... "I love you. I love you. I love you. Dear daughter, and you dear, take care of each other. Don't let a day go by when you don't turn to the other and share your love. Because once the mind is gone, once you lose the mind and the memories, we lose ourselves, and each other. I love you."]

ROSALIND

I love you, too, Mum. You rest. We'll get you a glass of water, but you rest. Put your head back. Close your eyes. And rest. I'm sure this has been very trying for you. Tony? Let Mum rest, okay?

TONY

Of course.

*He touches ROSALIND, and exits to the kitchen. ROSALIND tidies up the room and looks at the post from the other day. The lights shift. AGATHA closes her eyes and leans back her head.*

ROSALIND

We have some fan letters to answer. The ones that came a few days ago. Shall we?

AGATHA

They always cheer me up. Let's.

MARY

(Almost whispered) I'm still here.

AGATHA

(eyes closed) Yes, you're here.

ROSALIND

I'm right here.

MARY

You're not going to do anything about it are you?

AGATHA

Read the first one to me.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

ROSALIND

This one arrived shortly after Christmas.

MARY

There are still questions I need answered.

ROSALIND

There's no return address on the envelope.

*As ROSALIND opens the envelope and pulls out a letter.*

AGATHA

Go ahead.

MARY

The police officer—

ROSALIND

On the letter... It's from Rowcroft.

AGATHA

(With eyes shut) I'm listening.

MARY

Listen to me.

ROSALIND

(Reading) "Dear Ms. Agatha Christie.

AGATHA

Go on, Ros—

ROSALIND

You probably don't remember me, but my name is Harry Maynard."

MARY

Officer Maynard!

ROSALIND

"I recently read about your success and that you have a new movie coming about your disappearance. I wonder who is playing me in the movie."

MARY

It must be a letter asking for money.



## The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA

Doesn't look like blackmail.

MARY

Blackmail is rarely black!

AGATHA

Shhhh.

ROSALIND

You want me to stop?

AGATHA

No, no. Go on.

ROSALIND

"I wanted to apologize. Ever since those days I've felt responsible. I was a heel. You wanted to leave the man who mistreated you. But I took you back to him. Forgive me. Those were different times, and I didn't fully understand. As my illness is ravaging my body, I am calling it quits. I wanted to amend those regrets still hanging over my head. Forgive me. Officer Harry Maynard."

AGATHA

Isn't that something.

MARY

It's nonsense.

ROSALIND

You touched many people.

AGATHA

True.

ROSALIND

Just rest. You've just had a busy day.

AGATHA

I have.

ROSALIND

It's time to rest.

MARY

There it is. It's time I go.

The Mysterious Disappearance

AGATHA  
You're not leaving—?

MARY  
I am.

AGATHA  
Don't leave.

ROSALIND  
I haven't left.

*ROSALIND sits in the shadows.*

AGATHA  
Mary, we should call the police.

MARY  
No.

AGATHA  
But the letter is evidence.

MARY  
No, dear. It's time I go away.

AGATHA  
You promised.

MARY  
I never did.

AGATHA  
But you're my best friend.

ROSALIND  
Shhh, Mum. Rest.

AGATHA  
When're you coming back?

MARY  
I'm not.

AGATHA  
You have to, you must. I don't want you to go without me.

## The Mysterious Disappearance

MARY

I'm leaving.

AGATHA

No! What will you do?

MARY

I'll go to the beach. I'll write your name in the sand.

AGATHA

I love the beach.

ROSALIND

The beach? Yes, you've always liked the beach.

*MARY grabs her purse.*

MARY

It is lovely this time of year. Fewer crowds.

AGATHA

Let me come with you.

MARY

You can't go where I'm going. I'm sorry to leave this way, but...

AGATHA

You're not explaining right. You're usually good with words, but—

MARY

It's been lovely.

AGATHA

Why can't you tell me why?

MARY

Thank you, Agatha.

*MARY blows a kiss to AGATHA.*

MARY

I love you, dear Agatha.

*ROSALIND sits near her mother in the shadows. MARY grabs her coat.*

## The Mysterious Disappearance

MARY

You made my life so exciting. Such fun we had. Such love and life, together. You're the best. Ta-

*AGATHA sleeps. MARY vanishes through the hallway mirror. Slowly, the lights fade to black on ROSALIND and AGATHA.  
The end of the play.*