



Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F68

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The Jewel Robbery at the Grand Metropolitan

Adapted from Agatha Christie

“Poirot,” I said one day, “a change of scenery would do you good.”

“You think so, my friend?” he replied, his eyes twinkling.

“I’m certain of it.”

“Hmm,” Poirot said with a smile. “Is it all planned, then?”

“Will you come?”

“Where are we going?”

“Brighton. A friend in the City gave me a tip that’s paid off handsomely. I’ve got some extra money, as they say, to spend. A weekend at the Grand Metropolitan Hotel would be perfect for us.”

“Thank you, Hastings,” Poirot said warmly. “I accept your kind invitation. You have a generous heart to think of an old man like me. Sometimes, a good heart is worth more than all my little grey cells.”

I wasn’t thrilled with the hint that my mind wasn’t as sharp as his, but Poirot’s excitement was clear, so I brushed off my annoyance.

“Excellent,” I said quickly. “It’s settled.”

That Saturday evening, we dined at the Grand Metropolitan, surrounded by a lively crowd. Brighton was buzzing with people—men in fine suits and women in dazzling dresses, their jewels sparkling under the chandeliers. Some wore their gems with more enthusiasm than elegance.

“What a sight!” Poirot murmured, his eyes scanning the room. “This is the place for the newly rich, isn’t it, Hastings?”

“Perhaps,” I replied. “But let’s hope not everyone here made their fortune unfairly.”

Poirot nodded calmly, taking in the scene. “So many jewels,” he said. “It makes me think a clever thief would find this place a paradise. Look at that woman by the pillar, covered in gems!”

I followed his gaze. “That’s Mrs Opalsen!” I exclaimed.

“You know her?” Poirot asked.

“A little. Her husband is a wealthy stockbroker who made a fortune in the recent oil boom.”

After dinner, we met the Opalsens in the hotel lounge. I introduced Poirot, and we chatted briefly before sitting down for coffee together. Poirot complimented Mrs Opalsen's expensive jewellery, and she beamed with pride.

"Jewelry is my passion, Mr Poirot," she said. "Ed knows I love it, and whenever his business does well, he surprises me with something new. Are you interested in precious stones?"

"I have worked with many famous jewels in my career, madame," Poirot replied. He shared a story—using false names—about historic gems belonging to a royal family. Mrs Opalsen listened, enchanted.

"That's like something from a play!" she exclaimed. "You know, I have a pearl necklace with its own story. They say it's one of the finest in the world—perfectly matched pearls, flawless in colour. I must show it to you!"

"Oh, madame," Poirot said politely, "please don't trouble yourself."

"No trouble at all!" she insisted, bustling toward the elevator.

Mr Opalsen, who had been speaking with me, looked at Poirot curiously. "My wife is eager to show you her pearls," Poirot explained.

"Oh, the pearls!" Mr Opalsen said with a satisfied smile. "They're worth seeing. Cost a fortune, but I could sell them for what I paid—or more. Money's tight in the City these days, though. This Excess Profits Duty is a nightmare." He launched into financial details I couldn't follow.

A small page boy interrupted, whispering something to Mr Opalsen. "What? I'll come at once," he said, alarmed. "Is she ill? Excuse me, gentlemen." He hurried off.

Poirot leaned back, lit a tiny cigarette, and neatly arranged the empty coffee cups on the table, smiling at his handiwork. Minutes passed, and the Opalsens didn't return.

"Strange," I said. "I wonder when they'll be back."

Poirot watched the smoke curl upward. "They won't return," he said thoughtfully.

"Why not?"

"Something has happened, my friend."

"What? How do you know?" I asked.

Poirot smiled. "The manager rushed out of his office and ran upstairs, looking upset. The elevator boy is gossiping with a page, ignoring the elevator bell."

Even the waiters seem distracted. For a waiter to be distracted, Hastings, the matter must be serious. Ah, here come the police!”

Two men entered the hotel—one in a police uniform, the other in plain clothes. They spoke to a page and were led upstairs. Moments later, the page returned. “Mr Opalsen’s compliments, gentlemen. Please come upstairs.”

Poirot stood quickly, as if expecting the request. I followed, curious and eager.

The Opalsens’ rooms were on the first floor. We knocked, and a voice called, “Come in!” Inside, we found a chaotic scene. Mrs Opalsen sat in an armchair in her bedroom, sobbing loudly, her face streaked with tears and powder. Mr Opalsen paced angrily. Two police officers stood in the room, one taking notes. A frightened hotel chambermaid stood by the fireplace, while Célestine, Mrs Opalsen’s French maid, wept and wrung her hands.

Poirot stepped in, calm and composed. Mrs Opalsen jumped up and rushed toward him. “I knew it was fate meeting you tonight!” she cried. “If anyone can get my pearls back, it’s you, Mr Poirot!”

“Calm yourself, madame,” Poirot said, patting her hand. “All will be well. Hercule Poirot will help you.”

Mr Opalsen turned to the police inspector. “No objection to this gentleman assisting, I hope?”

“None at all, sir,” the inspector replied politely but indifferently. “Perhaps your wife can tell us what happened.”

Mrs Opalsen, guided back to her chair by Poirot, dried her eyes and began. “After dinner, I came upstairs to get my pearls to show Mr Poirot. The chambermaid and Célestine were here, as usual—”

“Excuse me,” Poirot interrupted. “What do you mean by ‘as usual’?”

Mr Opalsen explained. “I insist no one enters this room unless Célestine is present. The chambermaid cleans in the morning with Célestine here and turns down the beds after dinner under the same rule. She never comes in otherwise.”

Mrs Opalsen continued. “I went to the drawer”—she pointed to the bottom right drawer of the dressing table—“took out my jewel case, and unlocked it. Everything seemed normal, but the pearls were gone!”

The inspector scribbled in his notebook. “When did you last see them?”

“They were there before dinner,” she said. “I considered wearing them but chose my emeralds instead and put the pearls back in the case.”

“You locked the case?” the inspector asked.

“Yes, and I keep the key on a chain around my neck.” She showed him the key. The inspector examined it and shrugged. “The thief must have had a duplicate key. It’s a simple lock. What did you do after locking the case?”

“I put it back in the drawer, where I always keep it.”

“You didn’t lock the drawer?”

“No, I never do. Célestine stays in the room until I return, so there’s no need.”

The inspector’s expression grew serious. “So, the pearls were there before dinner, and the maid never left the room?”

Célestine let out a piercing scream and threw herself at Poirot, speaking rapidly in French. “It’s outrageous! To suspect me of stealing from Madame! The police are fools! Monsieur, you’re French—”

“Belgian,” Poirot corrected gently.

“—you won’t let them accuse me while that chambermaid goes free! She’s dishonest—I’ve always said so. I watched her closely when she cleaned. Let the police search her, and they’ll find the pearls!”

The chambermaid’s face reddened. “If she’s saying I stole the pearls, she’s lying! I never touched them. I was only in the room for three minutes before Mrs Opalsen arrived, and you”—she glared at Célestine—“were here the whole time, watching me like a hawk.”

The inspector looked at Célestine. “Is that true? Did you leave the room?”

“I didn’t leave her alone,” Célestine admitted reluctantly, “but I stepped into my room twice—once for a reel of cotton, once for scissors. She must have stolen them then.”

“You were gone for a second!” the chambermaid snapped. “I’d be happy for the police to search me. I’ve nothing to hide.”

Just then, there was a knock at the door. The inspector opened it and smiled. “Good timing. I sent for a female searcher, and she’s here. Please step into the next room,” he said to the chambermaid.

The chambermaid tossed her head and went with the searcher. Célestine sank into a chair, sobbing. Poirot examined the room, noting the door by the window.

“Where does that lead?” he asked.

“The next apartment,” the inspector said. “It’s bolted on this side.”

Poirot tested the bolt, then checked the windows. "No balcony outside," he observed.

"Even if there were," the inspector said, "it wouldn't matter if the maid never left the room."

"Indeed," Poirot said, unperturbed. "Since Mademoiselle says she didn't leave—"

The chambermaid and searcher returned. "Nothing," the searcher reported.

"I told you!" the chambermaid said indignantly. "That French girl should be ashamed, accusing an honest person."

"Enough," the inspector said, opening the door. "No one suspects you. Go back to work."

The chambermaid pointed at Célestine. "Will you search her?"

"Yes, yes," the inspector said, locking the door behind the chambermaid. Célestine went with the searcher to the small room. She returned shortly, with nothing found on her.

The inspector's face darkened. "I'm afraid you'll need to come with us, miss," he told Célestine. "If the pearls aren't on you, they're hidden in this room."

Célestine shrieked and clung to Poirot. He whispered something to her, and she nodded uncertainly. "It's better not to resist," he said, then turned to the inspector. "May I conduct a small experiment, for my own curiosity?"

"Depends on what it is," the inspector said cautiously.

Poirot spoke to Célestine. "You said you went to your room for a reel of cotton. Where was it?"

"On the chest of drawers," she replied.

"And the scissors?"

"There too."

"Could you repeat those actions? You were sitting here, yes?"

Célestine sat, then stood, walked to her room, picked up an object, and returned. Poirot timed her with a large watch.

"Again, please," he said.

After the second time, he made a note and thanked her. He bowed to the inspector. "Thank you for your patience."

The inspector began searching the room, pulling out drawers, checking cupboards, and even tapping the floor. Mr Opalsen watched sceptically. "Do you really think you'll find them?"

"Yes, sir," the inspector said. "She didn't have time to take them out of the room. They're here."

"Impossible," Poirot said quietly.

"What?" the inspector asked.

Poirot smiled. "Let me show you. Hastings, take my watch—carefully, it's a family heirloom. I timed Mademoiselle's absences: twelve seconds the first time, fifteen the second. Now watch me. Madame, may I have the jewel case key?"

Mrs Opalsen handed it over. "Hastings, say 'Go!'"

"Go!" I said.

Poirot swiftly opened the drawer, took the jewel case, unlocked it, selected a piece of jewelry, locked the case, and returned it to the drawer. His movements were lightning-fast.

"How long, Hastings?" he asked.

"Forty-six seconds," I said.

"You see?" Poirot said. "The chambermaid wouldn't have had time to take the necklace, let alone hide it."

"Then it's the maid," the inspector said, resuming his search. He moved to Célestine's room.

Poirot turned to Mr Opalsen. "The necklace was insured, yes?"

"Yes," Mr Opalsen said, surprised. "It was."

"What does that matter?" Mrs Opalsen cried. "I want my pearls, not money!"

"I understand, madame," Poirot said. "Sentiment is everything. But for monsieur, insurance may offer some comfort."

Suddenly, the inspector shouted in triumph, holding up the necklace. Mrs Opalsen leaped from her chair, overjoyed. "My pearls!" she cried, clutching them.

"Where were they?" Mr Opalsen asked.

"In the maid's bed, hidden in the mattress springs," the inspector said. "She must have hidden them before the chambermaid arrived."

Poirot examined the necklace carefully, then returned it with a bow. The inspector said, "We'll need to keep it for evidence, madame, but it will be returned soon."

Mr Opalsen frowned. "Is that necessary?"

"Just a formality," the inspector assured him.

"Let him take it, Ed," Mrs Opalsen said. "I'll feel safer."

Poirot touched my arm. "Let's go, Hastings. Our work here is done."

Outside, Poirot paused. "I'd like to see the room next door," he said.

The room, a large double, was empty and dusty. Poirot grimaced at a mark on a table near the window. "The cleaning here is poor," he said.

He checked the door connecting to Mrs Opalsen's room. "Bolted on both sides," he noted.

"What are we doing here?" I asked impatiently.

Poirot seemed lost in thought. "The case isn't over, Hastings," he said.

"But the maid stole the pearls! They were in her bed."

"Those were not the real pearls," Poirot said. "They were fake."

I stared, stunned. "Fake?"

"Yes, mon ami. The inspector knows little about jewels. Soon, there will be quite a commotion."

"We must tell the Opalsens!" I said.

"No," Poirot said. "Mrs Opalsen will sleep better thinking her pearls are safe. The real theft may have happened earlier, and the pearls she locked up tonight were already fake."

I was bewildered. Poirot led me to the chambermaids' break room, where our chambermaid was recounting her story to colleagues. Poirot interrupted politely. "Excuse me, could you unlock Mr Opalsen's room?"

She did so, and as she left, Poirot showed her a glossy white card. "Have you seen this among Mr Opalsen's things?"

She examined it. "No, sir. The valet would know better."

Poirot thanked her, and we entered the room. He rang the bell three times for the valet, who arrived promptly. Poirot showed him the card, but the valet hadn't seen it either. As he left, he glanced curiously at the wastepaper basket Poirot had emptied.

“The necklace was heavily insured,” Poirot murmured, sifting through the papers.

“What are you getting at?” I asked.

“You see nothing, as usual,” he teased. “Let’s return to our rooms.”

Back in our suite, Poirot changed quickly. “I must go to London tonight,” he said. “The real work is done, but I need confirmation. No one fools Hercule Poirot!”

“You’ll fail one day,” I said, annoyed by his confidence.

“Don’t be upset, my friend. I need a favour. Brush the sleeve of my coat—there’s white powder on it. You saw me touch the dressing table drawer?”

“No,” I admitted.

“You must observe, Hastings. I found powder on the drawer and rubbed it on my sleeve—a careless act. It’s French chalk, used to make drawers slide smoothly.”

I laughed. “I thought you were building up to something dramatic!”

“Au revoir, Hastings,” he said, leaving swiftly.

The next morning, with no word from Poirot, I went out, met friends, and returned late after a car breakdown. At the hotel, I found Poirot with the Opalsens, looking pleased.

“Hastings!” he cried. “Everything is perfect!”

“You got my pearls back!” Mrs Opalsen said, beaming.

“You were right, my dear,” Mr Opalsen said.

I looked at Poirot, confused. “Explain, please.”

“Sit, my friend,” Poirot said. “The chambermaid and valet have been arrested.”

“Them? But I thought—”

“You thought wrong,” Poirot said. “Remember the French chalk? It was a clue. The chambermaid and valet planned the theft. The valet waited in the next room. When Célestine left briefly, the chambermaid opened the drawer, passed the jewel case through the door, and the valet took the necklace using a duplicate key. He replaced it with a fake, and the case was returned. The chambermaid hid the fake necklace in Célestine’s bed to frame her.”

“Why did you go to London?” I asked.

“The card I showed them—it was treated to capture fingerprints. I took it to Scotland Yard, where Inspector Japp identified the prints as belonging to two known jewel thieves. They were arrested, and the real necklace was found with the valet.”

Mrs Opalsen clapped her hands. “I’ve got my pearls!”

I shook my head, amazed. “This should bring you fame, Poirot.”

“Not at all,” he said calmly. “The inspectors will take the credit. But”—he patted his pocket—“Mr Opalsen gave me a cheque. This weekend didn’t go as planned, Hastings. Shall we return next weekend—my treat?”

The thieves’ felonious plan was clever but flawed. Their meticulous preparation—using French chalk and a duplicate key—showed their audacious ambition. Yet, their subterfuge failed under Poirot’s keen eye, leading to their arrest and Célestine’s exoneration.

2. Comprehension Questions

Question 1: Where did Hastings suggest going for a weekend trip, and why?

Question 2: What was Mrs Opalsen’s passion, and how did she show it?

Question 3: Why did Mr Opalsen insist that Célestine be present when the chambermaid was in the room?

Question 4: What did Mrs Opalsen discover when she opened her jewel case?

Question 5: How did Célestine react when she was suspected of stealing the pearls?

Question 6: What did Poirot find on the dressing table drawer, and what was it used for?

Question 7: Why did Poirot go to London, and what did he do there?

Question 8: Who were the real thieves, and how did they carry out the theft?

Question 9: What clue helped Poirot confirm the identity of the thieves?

Question 10: What was the outcome for Mrs Opalsen’s pearls, and how did Poirot benefit?

Answers

Answer 1: Hastings suggested going to Brighton because he had extra money from a financial tip and thought a weekend at the Grand Metropolitan Hotel would be enjoyable.

Answer 2: Mrs Opalsen's passion was jewelry, and she showed it by proudly wearing expensive gems and eagerly wanting to display her pearl necklace to Poirot.

Answer 3: Mr Opalsen insisted Célestine be present to ensure no one entered the room alone, preventing theft or misconduct.

Answer 4: Mrs Opalsen discovered that her pearl necklace was missing from the jewel case.

Answer 5: Célestine reacted with outrage, screaming, speaking rapidly in French, and accusing the chambermaid of being dishonest.

Answer 6: Poirot found French chalk on the drawer, used by cabinetmakers to make drawers slide smoothly, indicating someone tampered with it.

Answer 7: Poirot went to London to take a card with fingerprints to Scotland Yard, where Inspector Japp identified the thieves.

Answer 8: The chambermaid and valet were the thieves. The chambermaid passed the jewel case to the valet through the connecting door, who replaced the real necklace with a fake one.

Answer 9: The fingerprints on the glossy card Poirot showed to the chambermaid and valet matched those of known jewel thieves, confirming their guilt.

Answer 10: The real pearls were recovered from the valet, and Mrs Opalsen got them back. Poirot received a cheque from Mr Opalsen as a reward.

