

POIROT. Good evening. The story you are about to witness is one of romance and tragedy, primal murder, and the urge for revenge. What better way to spend a pleasant evening together?

From the beginning it was an odyssey of deception and trickery. One minute I could see the light, like the beam of a train engine hurtling past. The next minute, all was darkness and the thread that I pulled came away in my fingers and led to nothing.

I believe it was the greatest case of my career, but who am I to say? Modesty forbids it. It was certainly the most difficult I have ever encountered, and it made me question the very deepest values that I have held since I was a young man.

(Middle Eastern music is heard.)

It began in the exotic city of Istanbul. I planned to vacation there for several days following a trying case that was on my nerves, but things began changing the moment I stepped into the dining room of the world famous Tokatlian Hotel, where the enormity of the prices was matched only by the self-esteem of the waiters. My name, incidentally, is Hercule Poirot and I am a detective.

MONSIEUR BOUC enters. He sees **POIROT**, his face lights up and he chuckles happily. He taps **POIROT** on the shoulder. **BOUC** is another Belgian, a young middle-aged man of good humor.)

BOUC. I hope that the food at this humble establishment is up to your usual standards.

POIROT. What? What's this?... Ah, *mon Dieu*, it is *Monsieur Bouc*!

BOUC. My friend! Haha!

POIROT. *Mon ami!* But what are you doing here?

BOUC. What am *I* doing here? This is my city! I live here!

POIROT. Of course, I'm a fool!

BOUC. I run Wagon-Lit, the greatest train company in the entire world, and the central office is in this hotel. *Garçon!* This meal is on me, please charge my office.

POIROT. *Ah non.*

BOUC. *Ah oui.* It will give me pleasure, you are my guest here. So tell me, what are you doing here? You are solving a crime, eh?

POIROT. No, no, I did that last week in Syria. It was a bad affair. An army officer, a missing check, a beautiful woman, puh. It did not end well.

(As POIROT describes the case, a MAN appears in a blue down light, wearing an army tunic and an officer's hat. We are witnessing POIROT's memory.)

The man was guilty, that was certain. But perhaps, because I pressed the man too hard to admit his guilt...

(The MAN raises a pistol to his temple and fires. Bang! The noise is startling. The MAN collapses and fades away.)

It was unfortunate in the extreme. And yet I believe I did nothing wrong.

BOUC. Of course you did nothing wrong. If you break the law you must pay the price. That is what *you* have told me.

POIROT. It is what I live by.

BOUC. Now tell me, you are staying here at the hotel?

POIROT. I was hoping, eh? I was going to play the tourist, but at the desk there was a telegram from Scotland Yard, begging me to return at once, so I have asked the concierge to get me a ticket for tonight on your famous Orient Express.

BOUC. There will be no problem, and the best news is, I will be joining you, for I go to Lausanne tonight on business.

POIROT. Haha! *C'est magnifique.*

BOUC. Countess Eléna Andrenyi! Welcome! I am *Monsieur* Bouc of the Wagon-Lit.

COUNTESS. (*With a Hungarian accent.*) I am delighting to see you.

BOUC. Your reputation precedes you, *madame*. May I present my friend, *Monsieur* Hercule Poirot.

COUNTESS. The famous detective. That is being wonderful. I have read about you in the papers, *monsieur*, and I admire you greatly.

POIROT. *Őn nagyon kedves.*

COUNTESS. *Ez az igazság.*

POIROT. *Nagyon örvendek.**

COUNTESS. You speak Hungarian beautifully.

POIROT. Not as well as you speak English.

MICHEL. May I help you with your bag, *madame*?

COUNTESS. No, no, it is nothing at all.

BOUC. And your husband the count is coming?

COUNTESS. *Hélas*, he cannot join me this trip. But since I am visiting my mother it works out nicely. He does not like her.

(Offers her hand.)

Monsieur Poirot, I look forward to hearing of your wonderful adventures.

POIROT. (*Kissing her hand.*) And I look forward to telling you about them.

MICHEL. Compartment twelve, countess.

(The COUNTESS sweeps away, into the train.)

BOUC. I think you are in love, my friend.

POIROT. I will not discount this possibility.

* POIROT: You are very kind.

COUNTESS: It is simply the truth.

POIROT: It is an honor to meet you.

(At this moment, MRS. HUBBARD blows onto the platform.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Is this that Orient Express I keep hearing about? It doesn't *look* that impressive, at least not from here.

MICHEL. You are Mrs. Hubbard?

MRS. HUBBARD. Mrs. Helen Caroline Peabody-Wolfson-Van Pelt-Hubbard, if you please, from the beautiful garden state of Minnesota. Mr. Peabody, my first husband, was a very good soul but the poor man had no talent for longevity, and I shouldn't say poor because he did very nicely for himself, thank you very much. My second husband was a Mr. Wolfson who I loved rather dearly, but he loved a lot of women and so I traded up and got a Van Pelt, but I caught him in bed with that redhead from the Waldorf who did his nails. Then at last I found Mr. Hubbard and I call him my little white knight for saving me from a life of bridge games and watery cocktails at the Minneapolis Country Club.

BOUC. And is Mr. Hubbard joining you?

MRS. HUBBARD. No, Mr. Hubbard is not joining me. Mr. Hubbard and I traveled together once and he said it raised his blood pressure. I don't know why. So now I do it for both of us. *(To MICHEL.)* Do you like to travel?

MICHEL. I travel every day.

MRS. HUBBARD. Then you and I should exchange notes some time.

MICHEL. Compartment three.

MRS. HUBBARD. Is that yours or mine?

MICHEL. Yours, *madame*.

MRS. HUBBARD. I hope it's comfy.

MICHEL. I have never had a complaint, *madame*.

MRS. HUBBARD. I'm sure you haven't.

(She exits.)

POIROT *enters, followed by RATCHETT, who is trying to catch up with him.*)

RATCHETT. Mr. Poirot, slow up! Now I'd like to discuss that proposition I mentioned.

POIROT. *Non, non*, I'm afraid it is not a good time.

RATCHETT. Oh sure it is. Sit down. I'll be quick, I promise.

POIROT. I am afraid -

RATCHETT. Sit down.

POIROT. ... *Eh bien*. Proceed.

RATCHETT. Now I want you to take on a job for me.

POIROT. I take on few new cases.

RATCHETT. You'll take this one on, I guarantee it.

POIROT. And why is that?

RATCHETT. Because I'm talkin' big money here. Mr. Poirot, I have an enemy.

POIROT. I would guess that you have several enemies.

RATCHETT. Now what is *that* supposed to mean?

POIROT. You are successful, *n'est-ce pas*? Successful people have many enemies.

RATCHETT. Right. That's it exactly! You see I've been getting some threatening letters lately and I want an extra pair of eyes to do some snoopin' around. And that's what you do, am I right? Snoopin'? Of course, I can take care of myself.

(He flashes the gun under his coat.)

But I'll pay you five thousand dollars. How does that sound?

POIROT. *Non*.

Ratchett - Poirot

5B

RATCHETT. All right, ten. For a few days' work.

POIROT. I am not for sale, *monsieur*. I have been very fortunate in my profession and I now take only such cases as interest me - and frankly, you do not interest me.

RATCHETT. You want me to grovel, is that it?

POIROT. I want nothing, *monsieur*, except to leave.

Hubbard - Michel - Ratchett

6A

(We now see three adjoining sleeping compartments lined up next to each other. From the audience's perspective: POIROT's compartment is on the left, RATCHETT's compartment is in the center, and MRS. HUBBARD's compartment is on the right. POIROT and RATCHETT share a common wall with no connecting door. RATCHETT and MRS. HUBBARD share a common wall with a connecting door.)

(When the lights come up, we see POIROT and RATCHETT in their respective compartments getting ready for bed.)

(POIROT takes meticulous care of his hair and moustache and folds his clothes with precision.)

(RATCHETT, on the contrary, is annoyed with everything, growls unhappily, and takes a large, unhappy swig from a glass of wine.)

(Meanwhile, MRS. HUBBARD has picked up her telephone and is buzzing MICHEL. Bzzzzzzz! Bzzzzzzz!)

MRS. HUBBARD. Hello?! Hello?!

(We hear MICHEL's voice through the receiver.)

MICHEL. *(Offstage.)* Oui, madame?

MRS. HUBBARD. *(Opening her door.)* Michel, could you bring me a bourbon, please. And put it on the rocks. The tap water's terrible.

MICHEL. *(Offstage.)* Right away, madame.

MRS. HUBBARD. And how about some nibbles?

MICHEL. *(Offstage.)* Nibbles, madame?

MRS. HUBBARD. Munchies. Yummies. Things to snack on while I drink my bourbon.

MICHEL. *(Offstage.)* Ah, you mean like crisps, *madame.*

MRS. HUBBARD. Yeah, like crisps. We call 'em nibbles in the midwest. Have you ever nibbled on anything, Michel?

MICHEL. *(Offstage.)* I have not had that pleasure, *madame.*

MRS. HUBBARD. Well, you bring me those crisps and I'll give you a lesson. Over and out.

(She hangs up, then looks in the mirror.)

You're not doin' so bad there, kid. You're lookin' younger all the time. Ha!

(She turns on her radio, hears a tune she likes, and starts to sing and do a dance routine. She's surprisingly professional. The more she sings, the louder she gets.)

COME ON AND HEAR, COME ON AND HEAR ALEXANDER'S
RAGTIME BAND

COME ON AND HEAR, COME ON AND HEAR 'BOUT THE
BEST BAND IN THE LAND

THEY CAN PLAY A BUGLE CALL LIKE YOU NEVER HEARD
BEFORE

SO NATURAL THAT YOU WANT TO GO TO WAR

THAT'S JUST THE BESTEST BAND WHAT AM, OH HONEY
LAMB

COME ON ALONG -

(We now see RATCHETT in the compartment next to her. He's livid and bangs on the wall.)

RATCHETT. Would you keep it down!

MRS. HUBBARD. Shut up! Who asked you?!

RATCHETT. It's the middle of the night!

(Bzzz! Bzzz! RATCHETT is buzzing for the attendant, and MICHEL hurries down the corridor.)

MICHEL. Sir, what is it?!

RATCHETT. Would you tell that ridiculous woman in there to keep it down, it's time for bed!

Hubbard - Michel - Ratchett

6c

MRS. HUBBARD. (*Calling in to RATCHETT's room.*) Ridiculous woman? I heard that!

MICHEL. *Monsieur*, if the lady wants to sing a little song –

RATCHETT. It is twelve o'clock at night!

(**MRS. HUBBARD** *bares into RATCHETT's compartment through the connecting door.*)

MRS. HUBBARD. Now listen you, just mind your own business.

RATCHETT. Stay out of here! This is my compartment!

MRS. HUBBARD. If I want to enjoy myself, I'm gonna do it, so just pipe down.

RATCHETT. You're insane, you're just... *Get out!*

MRS. HUBBARD. What are you, a thug? Are you in the mafia? Michel, I think he's dangerous.

(*Seeing RATCHETT's gun on his night stand.*)

Oh my God, he's got a gun! Michel, it's a gun!

MICHEL. It is not against the law, *madame*.

RATCHETT. Get out this instant!

MRS. HUBBARD. You must be crazy!

RATCHETT. I said get out!

(*She walks out, slamming the door behind her. Bang!*)

Scene Seven

(Lights up on the observation deck. MARY rushes in and looks around. A moment later, ARBUTHNOT enters.)

- MARY.** Oh thank God! I thought you weren't coming!
- ARBUTHNOT.** What's the matter? I got your note.
- MARY.** I'll tell you what the matter is! I'm frightened because we shouldn't be doing this!
- ARBUTHNOT.** Now calm down.
- MARY.** I can't calm down! We have to stop this!
- ARBUTHNOT.** Now that's ridiculous.
- MARY.** No it isn't! Oh that's the trouble with you military men, you never show any *real* emotion, it's always stiff upper lip no matter *what's* going on!
- ARBUTHNOT.** Mary, we're doing nothing wrong! You have to remember that.
- MARY.** I'm trying! I really am!
- (She hugs ARBUTHNOT.)*
- ARBUTHNOT.** Better?
- MARY.** Yes, I think so.
- ARBUTHNOT.** There was a hill near my home in Scotland, and I'd sit for hours watching the trains go by in the valley below. I knew they were heading to exotic locales and I wanted to climb aboard in the worst way.
- MARY.** But you didn't.
- ARBUTHNOT.** No. I suppose I knew somehow that I'd break my mother's heart.
- MARY.** You're a very good man.
- ARBUTHNOT.** She was a very good woman.
- MARY.** Do you know what the worst of it is with all this traveling we've been doing? We don't get any privacy. It's just so maddening!
- ARBUTHNOT.** Well, I don't see anyone around at the moment, do you?

(**POIROT** removes a pair of tweezers from his pocket and delicately moves the pajamas away from the wounds.)

BOUC. What are you doing?

POIROT. I am examining the wounds – there appear to be seven – no, eight stab wounds to the chest. *Monsieur* MacQueen, when did you see him last?

MACQUEEN. *Me?* I-I-I don't know anything! He was fine last night when I put out his wine.

POIROT. You are his secretary. What do you know about him?

MACQUEEN. Not very much. He-he-he never spoke about himself at all. Frankly, I think he was hiding something. That's just an impression.

POIROT. And why was that do you think?

MACQUEEN. I-I think he was fleeing from America to get away from something, and I think he managed it until a few weeks ago.

POIROT. And then?

MACQUEEN. He began to get some threatening letters. They're in my room. Do you want to see them?

POIROT. Yes. Go quickly. And please ask the countess to join me here.

MACQUEEN. I'll be right back!

(**MACQUEEN** runs off.)

BOUC. It is incredible for such a thing to happen on *my* train! Ooh, it's freezing in here.

POIROT. You have observed the window.

BOUC. *Oui*, it is open.

POIROT. And what do you see outside?

BOUC. Nothing.

POIROT. Exactly. No footprints. No marks in the snow. Which means that no one entered or left through the window.

BOUC. Then why is it open?

POIROT. I assume to mislead the police when they arrive.

BOUC. The police?!

POIROT. Of course the police. It is murder.

BOUC. The Yugoslavian police department? Oh no, no, no, no, no, no, no. We do not want them. You must solve the murder, then *you* tell *them* who did it.

POIROT. I have interfered too much already.

BOUC. But my company is at stake!

POIROT. But *mon ami* -

BOUC. Just think what a Yugoslavian police inquiry would do to my company. People would say, "Oh no, I cannot travel on the Orient Express, I could be murdered in my bed," and our sales would suffer and I would lose my *clients*!

POIROT. But I am due in London in three days' time.

BOUC. Then solve it in two! You are a magician. I have seen you work! You listen, you look, you pester, you make yourself a pain in the backside, then suddenly poof!, the case is solved like *that*!

POIROT. The police would be angry.

BOUC. The Yugoslavian police department? They are like the three stooges in the movie house. They poke each other in the eyes by accident. They would be thrilled not to have to do any work. If you save them the job, they will put up a statue of you in the center of Zagreb!

POIROT. I would need a plan of the coach.

BOUC. Done.

POIROT. And the passports and tickets of everyone on board.

BOUC. Done.

Scene Ten

(*Bang! The lights come up instantly on the dining car. POIROT, BOUC, the PRINCESS, and GRETA.*)

PRINCESS. *Monsieur* Poirot, we are here out of a sense of duty, that is all. I do not like having my day disturbed.

POIROT. Then let us begin immediately. Now it says in your passport that you are Russian.

PRINCESS. That is correct. I have been in exile since the Bolshevik dogs took over.

POIROT. And I see that your first name is -

PRINCESS. Natalya.

POIROT. And is this your handkerchief, *madame*?

PRINCESS. Of course not. It has the letter *H* on it. My initials are N. D. Natalya Dragomiroff.

POIROT. Is it yours, *mademoiselle*?

GRETA. No, no, I could not afford such a beautiful thing as this. It would be a sin.

PRINCESS. Oh!

POIROT. And may I ask each of you where you were last night between midnight and two o'clock.

PRINCESS. I could not sleep, so at midnight the Countess Andrenyi and I read a book together in my room. Out loud. It is the very best way to get to sleep when you are anxious.

POIROT. And what were you anxious about?

PRINCESS. The Bolsheviks.

POIROT. And what book did you read?

PRINCESS. *A Tale of Two Cities*, it is very comforting.

POIROT. And you, Miss Ohlsson? Where were you?

GRETA. I was in my room with Miss Debenham, who is also nice. We talked from twelve o'clock until two o'clock and then we slept. You can ask her!

POIROT. And have either of you ever been to America?

PRINCESS. Yes, many times.

GRETA. I have not been to America but I must go some day to raise money for my babies in Africa.

POIROT. You are very religious.

GRETA. *Ja*, since I was little girl and Jaysus came to visit me in my garden. He spoke vith me, und told me I must verk hard to help little babies in Africa.

POIROT. And I'm sure you have done it beautifully, *mademoiselle*. Just one more question for both of you ladies. Are you aware of the identity of the man who was killed last night?

GRETA. His name was Ratchett.

(Sob.)

And I pray for his soul.

PRINCESS. No, my dear, his name was Bruno Cassetti, the countess told me, and what *I* pray is that his soul is damned and that he burns in hell for all eternity.

GRETA. Princess!

PRINCESS. He murdered a girl named Daisy Armstrong and her grandmother is my dearest friend. You would know her as the actress Linda Arden.

BOUC. She was very great.

PRINCESS. Not *was*, *monsieur*. She *is* very great. She is very much alive and remains the greatest actress of the American stage. And when her five year old granddaughter was murdered by this *monster* Cassetti, it took her years to recover, indeed she has not *yet* recovered!

POIROT. There were four who died?

PRINCESS. No, *five*, *monsieur*! *Five* people died! Little Daisy, and then her mother, who was pregnant, died in childbirth, and the baby died, too. And the little girl's father, Colonel Armstrong, could not live with what happened and ended his life! And a housemaid as well! Five human souls were extinguished. So please forgive me, Greta, if I take the view that there is no forgiveness

in a case such as this and that Mr. Cassetti should have been *flogged to death and his remains cut up and thrown onto a rubbish heap!!*

GRETA. *(Crying out.) Ahh!*

(GRETA runs from the room. The PRINCESS runs after her and bumps into MACQUEEN, who is just entering.)

PRINCESS. Greta, please! Greta!

MACQUEEN. I'm-I'm-I'm so sorry.

(The PRINCESS is gone.)

Scene Three

(We shift to the dining car where POIROT is waiting, as BOUC bursts suddenly into the room.)

BOUC. No one! There is no one, I tell you! Not a single person is on this train who should not be here!

POIROT. You are positive?

BOUC. *Entirely!* It has gone too far. *Our lives are in danger!*

POIROT. It is like a magic trick.

BOUC. It is unbelievable! I told Michel to go on searching and he may find *something*.

POIROT. I do not expect so.

BOUC. Then where did he go, this man who is dressed like a train conductor?

POIROT. I have no idea! That is the problem! Every time I find a piece of the puzzle, there is a suspect who has an alibi. Colonel Arbuthnot? He could have a grudge against Cassetti from a business dealing – but then MacQueen gives him an alibi from twelve to two, they are chatting on the observation deck! Aha, I say. What about Miss Ohlssohn? – she is strange, there is something not right about her – but she swears that she and Miss Debenham are up all night *chattering* in the room they are sharing. And so it goes with Mrs. Hubbard and the princess *and now Miss Debenham is shot and I am out of suspects!*

(ARBUTHNOT and MARY enter.)

ARBUTHNOT. Poirot! I have brought Miss Debenham as you requested, now what do you want with her?

POIROT. I merely wish to ask her some questions. Colonel, you may go.

ARBUTHNOT. I beg your pardon?

POIROT. You are not needed for this.

ARBUTHNOT. Well, I'm sorry to hear it, because I'm staying.

POIROT. I am sorry also because you are not.

ARBUTHNOT. Now listen to me you little *Frenchman* -

BOUC. He is Belgian.

ARBUTHNOT. I don't care if he's the man in the moon, I'm not leaving her!

MARY. It's all right, James. Honestly. I'm sure it won't take long.

POIROT. She is correct. I need a mere ten minutes.

ARBUTHNOT. Well, I don't like it! Do you understand? And you can put that in your meerschaum pipe and smoke it!

BOUC. That is Sherlock Holmes.

ARBUTHNOT. Oh, go to hell!

(**ARBUTHNOT** stalks out.)

POIROT. *Bon.* Please sit down, Miss Debenham. There is much pain?

MARY. Well, it's rather sore, that's all.

POIROT. You are very brave. Let us all be grateful that it is not worse.

BOUC. (*Crossing himself.*) Thank the Lord.

POIROT. Now Miss Debenham. In the hotel yesterday I heard you speaking with the colonel and you said you were terrified you would miss the train. Can you tell me why it was so important to you?

MARY. It wasn't that at all. I didn't want to be late.

POIROT. But you said you wanted to, "Get it over with." Get it, "All behind you." Get what behind you? You seemed quite agitated.

MARY. I'm afraid you're reading into it. I'm tremendously punctual, that's all.

POIROT. Aha. *Pardon.* It is my profession. Sometimes I am too *imaginatif.* And you and the colonel are very close, I take it?

MARY. We only met a few days ago, and I suppose we rather hit it off.

POIROT. *Non, non, c'est tout.* Would you now be so kind as to remove your tunic, please?

(MICHEL, confused, looks to BOUC for guidance, and BOUC nods. MICHEL removes his tunic and hands it to POIROT.)

I see that none of your buttons are missing, and moreover, the thread for each button is old, so nothing was sewn on recently.

MICHEL. That is correct, but may I ask -?

POIROT. Mrs. Hubbard found this button in her room this morning.

MICHEL. *(Examining it.)* It is not mine, *monsieur.*

POIROT. So I see. But it matches yours exactly.

MICHEL. It does.

POIROT. Michel, are there other attendants on this train at the moment?

MICHEL. There is one in second class. A ticket taker I have known for years.

POIROT. Is he large or small?

MICHEL. Quite large, I'm afraid. Shall I ask him to see you?

POIROT. *Non, non,* that is quite all right. And what other passengers, besides the ones in this coach, are on the train?

MICHEL. There is hardly anyone at the moment. It is the off-season. There is a mother and child on the Belgrade carriage and that is all.

POIROT. And could there be a second conductor on this train wearing a uniform like yours?

MICHEL. Oh no, *monsieur,* there is no such thing. I had to earn this uniform with many years of service. However...

POIROT. *Oui?*

MICHEL. Well, frankly, I am not sure I trust her word, but Miss Ohlsson says that last night she saw what she calls a second conductor on the train.

POIROT. *(Suddenly alert.)* Miss Ohlsson?

MICHEL. *Oui*, she told me this morning.

BOUC. She did not tell *us* this morning.

MICHEL. She said he was wearing a uniform like mine and when she spoke to him he did not respond. In fact...

POIROT. What? *Tell me quickly!*

MICHEL. The princess tells me that she also saw this man last night.

POIROT. *Oh là là, oh là là, oh là là.*

BOUC. What is it?

POIROT. It is just the kind of clue that I have been waiting for.

(He springs into action.)

Michel, come with me. I will need your help quickly.
Monsieur Bouc, we shall be right back. Do not move!

BOUC. But where are you going?

POIROT. You will see in a moment!

GRETA. (*Offstage, approaching.*) No, no, no, please put it back! It is my suitcase! You may not take it!

(POIROT bursts into the room followed by MICHEL who is carrying a battered suitcase. MICHEL is followed by GRETA, the COUNTESS, and the PRINCESS. GRETA is hysterical and POIROT and the COUNTESS are trying to calm her down.)

COUNTESS. He must have a reason.

POIROT. I have an excellent reason.

GRETA. Please stop!

PRINCESS. *Monsieur* Poirot, really!

POIROT. Miss Ohlsson, you must permit me to take a look in your suitcase.

GRETA. But they are private things! It has my undergarments!

PRINCESS. *Monsieur* Poirot!

POIROT. Miss Ohlsson, we will look at nothing that will embarrass you, you have my promise. Wait! I have an idea. Princess, would you be so kind as to assist me?

PRINCESS. I suppose.

POIROT. Miss Ohlsson: Michel tells me that you saw a second conductor on the train last night. Is that correct?

GRETA. *Ja.*

POIROT. And what did he look like?

GRETA. He was small like a woman.

PRINCESS. That is correct. I saw him as well.

POIROT. *Ah bon*, that is perfect. It seems that virtually everyone on this train has seen the second conductor except myself and *Monsieur* Bouc. So the question now is where did he go. Is he hiding on the train? If he were still in uniform, we could spot him quickly. Therefore, at least one conclusion is that he has *hidden* his uniform and done so in the luggage of one of the passengers.

GRETA. But why choose me? There are other suitcases! Try the other ones first!

POIROT. *(The magician.)* Princess, would you be so kind as to raise the lid and tell us what you see inside?

(The PRINCESS raises the lid - and pulls out a uniform identical to the one that MICHEL is wearing.)

COUNTESS. It is the uniform.

GRETA. Ahh! I have never seen it! I have hurt no one, ever! I would not do such a thing!! I am not a murderer!!

POIROT. Oh now, now, now, I am not accusing you, you did nothing wrong.

GRETA. I did nothing wrong!!

POIROT. *Monsieur* Bouc, does the jacket have all its buttons in place?

BOUC. No. There is one missing.

POIROT. *Monsieur* MacQueen, please sit down.

POIROT. Now tell me, please, what exactly were your duties as secretary to your employer?

MACQUEEN. Well I-I wrote his letters and did his errands and things.

POIROT. And you knew him only as Samuel Ratchett.

MACQUEEN. How else would I know him?

POIROT. His real name was Bruno Cassetti.

MACQUEEN. Holy God. Are you sure of that?

BOUC. Then you know about the Armstrong case?

MACQUEEN. You bet I do. My father was the district attorney for the state of New York and he brought the case against that...son of a bitch. I'm sorry, but you have no idea what he did to that family. And they were so kind to me!

POIROT. Can you tell us who was in the Armstrong household?

MACQUEEN. Mrs. Armstrong had a sister. She went to graduate school, but after the tragedy she moved to Europe and I think she got married. Her name was *Helena*. And also Mrs. Armstrong's mother would come to visit. She was an actress.

POIROT. Anyone else?

MACQUEEN. There was a governess and a baby nurse, and then poor Suzanne. She was a French housemaid – she came from Paris – and my father's office thought she might be implicated, and...and she was so distraught from the accusations that she –

BOUC. Killed herself.

MACQUEEN. (*Nods.*) Only it turned out that she was innocent. My father was shattered. He never recovered.

POIROT. And where were you last night between midnight and two o'clock?

MACQUEEN. Twelve to two? I-I was with Colonel Arbuthnot on the observation deck.

POIROT. And did you see anyone last night you did not recognize?

MACQUEEN. No. I saw Michel the conductor, and the other conductor, and Colonel Arbuthnot, and Miss Debenham –

BOUC. The “other conductor”?

POIROT. There is a second conductor?

MACQUEEN. I guess so. I saw him.

BOUC. He was in uniform?

MACQUEEN. Yeah. The same one that Michel wears.

BOUC. And what did he look like?

MACQUEEN. I don't know. He had his hat pulled down. He was small-boned, you know what I mean? Sort of feminine.

POIROT. Did you speak with him?

MACQUEEN. I said hello and he just kept going.

POIROT. You are very helpful, thank you. You may go. And please ask Michel to come see me.

MACQUEEN. Sure thing. I'll see you later.

(A moment. POIROT sighs deeply.)

COUNTESS. You seem troubled.

POIROT. I am getting more and more concerned.

COUNTESS. That another crime will occur?

POIROT. No. That I will solve this one.

(POIROT picks up one of the passports and reads the contents.)

Countess. What is your maiden name?

COUNTESS. Goldenberg. As you see in the passport.

POIROT. *Oui.* But now you use Andrenyi.

COUNTESS. My husband's name.

POIROT. Of course. The Countess Andrenyi. And I believe your first name is Eléna.

COUNTESS. That is correct. I am a suspect?

POIROT. I merely ask questions. That is my job.

COUNTESS. I thought we were friends.

POIROT. It is my greatest wish, but please indulge me. This morning I examined your passport and I saw a grease spot at the beginning of your name, Eléna. The spot occurs before the first letter, and it could easily hide another letter, such as H. Now if you add an H at the beginning of the name, it becomes *Helena*, which is used by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

COUNTESS. That is true.

POIROT. The kind of name an actress might choose for her daughter.

COUNTESS. I suppose.

POIROT. An actress such as Linda Arden, the grandmother of Daisy Armstrong.

COUNTESS. If you say so.

POIROT. And the name Linda Arden is itself a stage name, surely. The word Arden was the maiden name of Shakespeare's mother and also the name of the forest in his play entitled -

COUNTESS. *As You Like It.*

POIROT. You know your Shakespeare well for a Hungarian.

COUNTESS. I have studied Shakespeare since I was a child.

POIROT. Yes, I know. I believe your mother Linda Arden taught it to you.

(The COUNTESS is shaken but tries to hide it.)

And that would make you the *aunt* of little Daisy Armstrong, the aunt who went to graduate school and got a degree in medicine, then moved to Europe and got married.

COUNTESS. *(A catch in her throat.)* I do not know this woman...

(Sob.)

But I would imagine that she still suffers from the loss of her niece and her sister.

(She starts to weep quietly.)

POIROT. My dear, there is no use denying it. When the train gets underway again and we reach the next city, a simple telegram will get me a photograph of Daisy's aunt and it will all be over.

COUNTESS. *(Suddenly without the Hungarian accent - purely American.)* But I didn't kill him! I should have but I didn't. I didn't even know who he was until you discovered it. But when you did, I realized that if you knew that I was Daisy's aunt, you would *think* that I killed him because he was...a *blackmailer*. And a *swine!* And the murderer of a darling, sweet, innocent child who deserved to live!!

POIROT. *Madame, really -*

COUNTESS. *It's the truth, I swear to God!* But I'll tell you this: If I had known who he was - that he was *Bruno*

Cassetti - the man who stole two of the people I loved most in this world - I would have pushed the dagger through his chest myself, and believe me, no other wounds would have been necessary!

(She stamps her foot in frustration - she is so angry she can't control herself - and she runs from the room in tears.)

*(**POIROT** is alone. He looks careworn and weary. We hear the agonized sounds of a solo cello once again, this time from the first movement of Bach's Cello Suite No. 5 In D Minor. And the lights dim.)*

*(As we transition into the next scene, we see the **COUNTESS** in a corner of the train weeping from the depths of her soul.)*