

ANDRENYI & POIROT

(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!

ANDRENYI & RATCHETT

COUNTESS. Pardon me. Sorry.

RATCHETT. Hey, you're that countess, aren't you?

COUNTESS. That is correct.

RATCHETT. Well, you're awful pretty. And from what I hear, you were a commoner to start with, just like the rest of us.

COUNTESS. That is also correct.

RATCHETT. So does that mean you'll have a drink with me?

COUNTESS. I am married, *monsieur*. My husband is having business elsewhere. Please excuse me.

RATCHETT. Now not so fast.

(The COUNTESS looks up sharply, but he's blocking her way. There is something threatening about him.)

COUNTESS. Move out of the way, please.

RATCHETT. Hey, you don't need to get all high and mighty about it.

COUNTESS. If you do not move this second I will scream.

RATCHETT. *Just wait a minute!* You've said that you're unattached at the moment, and we are on a train, so who the hell's gonna know what happens in some private room on some two-bit piece o' –

(Whap! She slaps him very hard across the face. His instinct is to spring forward and attack her back.)

COUNTESS. Stay away from me.

ARBUTHNOT & DEBENHAM

COLONEL ARBUTHNOT bursts the dining room and hurries over to a table where MARY DEBENHAM is waiting. The COLONEL is a Scotsman with a Scottish accent in his mid-thirties, handsome, and very matter-of-fact. MISS DEBENHAM is an English beauty in her late twenties. There is a sadness, however, around her eyes. She is anxious.)

ARBUTHNOT. Mary. There you are!

MARY. James! At last! Where have you been?!

ARBUTHNOT. Oh, I'm not that late, am I?

MARY. Of course you are. You're always late. And I was terrified we'd miss the train. It would ruin everything!

ARBUTHNOT. I was just exploring a bit. I've never been to Istanbul before and I quite adore all this eastern nonsense.

MARY. Well, I don't. I just want to leave right now and get it over with.

(ARBUTHNOT puts his hand on her cheek.)

ARBUTHNOT. I wish to hell you were out of all this. You deserve better, you know.

MARY. Shh! Not now! No one should see us like this. Not till it's all behind us. Besides, I think we're being observed by that funny little man over there.

(She nods toward POIROT, who is hidden behind his newspaper.)

ARBUTHNOT. What, him? He's just some damned foreigner who probably doesn't even speak English.

(POIROT's newspaper gives an involuntary shake.)

MARY. Shall we order? I'm starving.

ARBUTHNOT. Not here. I found a cute little place around the corner where I'm sure the food will be ten times better.

MARY. But we can't be late for the train! We can't miss it!

ARBUTHNOT. We won't be late, I promise, now stop fussing and come on, let's hurry.

ARBUTHNOT, POIROT, BOUC & DEBENHAM

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. And as for the murder, I assume you know that the dead man was Bruno Cassetti.

MARY. I heard.

POIROT. And what do you know of the kidnapping?

MARY. Not much, I'm afraid. I've never been to the States.

POIROT. Aha. I see. And what is it that brought you to Istanbul?

MARY. I lived with a family for about a year. I'm a governess.

POIROT. And can you tell me your whereabouts last night between midnight and two o'clock?

MARY. I was in my room with Miss Ohlsson. We chatted until quite late. You see she...she talks quite a bit, especially when she's anxious, and I may have dozed off for a few minutes.

POIROT. I see.

MARY. May I go?

POIROT. You may. Oh wait. There is one last thing. Would you sign your name please.

MARY. All right.

(*She does.*)

It's a good thing I'm left-handed. I'd have trouble signing with my right at the moment.

POIROT. *Merci.*

BOUC. Please get some rest. And on behalf of the company I will have some champagne sent straight to your room.

MARY. Thank you so much.

BOUC & POIROT

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.

DRAGOMIROFF (& GRETA, POIROT & BOUC)

PRINCESS. 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!!*

HUBBARD & MACQUEEN

MRS. HUBBARD. Excuse me, young man. Are you American?

MACQUEEN. Y-yes I am.

MRS. HUBBARD. I thought so. I can see from your passport.

Us Americans have to stick together, you know. Especially in a place like this. I can't even pronounce half the things on the menu. Can you believe it? And what's a falafafafafafel? I keep seeing them on the street and they look like you could play hockey with 'em.

MACQUEEN. I believe they're made of fried chickpeas.

MRS. HUBBARD. Well there ya go. Who knew? Some people will fry anything. By the way, I don't mean to snoop but I see your train ticket sitting there on the table and I wonder – do you know if they're providing a bus to the station?

MACQUEEN. I don't think so. I-I believe the hotel has a private car.

MRS. HUBBARD. Well don't you worry, I'll ask and find out. As the Bible says, "If Moses doesn't know the answer, ask the concierge." Now I better go. I think I'm annoying that odd little man with the silly moustache. (*Sotto voce.*) And I don't think it's real.

HUBBARD & MICHEL (& BOUC)

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.

OHLSSON (& DRAGOMIROFF)

PRINCESS. Greta, you must keep up, keep up! We have to get settled in before the train starts moving!

GRETA. I have to confess to you, princess, that I am not liking trains since I am little girl. They are feeling very tight to me, like clothing that is made wrong size and is squeezing my bosom, may God forgive me.

PRINCESS. Oh, don't be silly. Trains are wonderful.

GRETA. I am also not liking the strangers and der clickety-clackety. But ve vill be sitting next to each other, *ja*? That part iss good. In Africa once I am on a train and there is noise and crying and animals and oh! And I look up from my book and sitting there next to me, right on the seat, iss a very old goat. Haha. Is true. *Old goat!* He is like my companion. And on this trip that we are taking together right now, I think it will not be so different, *ja*?

POIROT & ARBUTHNOT (& DEBENHAM)

POIROT. I must interrogate the last of your fellow passengers who has not yet answered any of my questions. Colonel Arbuthnot –

ARBUTHNOT. Me?

MARY. James?

POIROT. Do you have a problem answering my questions, *monsieur*?

ARBUTHNOT. No, of course not.

POIROT. Excellent. Now in the course of your service to your country, did you know an officer named Charles Armstrong?

ARBUTHNOT. No.

POIROT. Have you heard of him?

ARBUTHNOT. Yes, we served in the same theatre of action, but we never met.

POIROT. Have you heard of the Daisy Armstrong case?

ARBUTHNOT. Of course I have. She was murdered by some brute who was out for money.

POIROT. Did you know that Colonel Armstrong was Daisy's father?

ARBUTHNOT. No, I didn't.

POIROT. Or that he took his own life after the tragedy?

ARBUTHNOT. Oh God. I'm sorry to hear it.

POIROT. Colonel, at the hotel in Istanbul I overheard you say to Miss Debenham that you wished that she was out of all this. What did you mean?

ARBUTHNOT. I have no idea.

POIROT. Then *she* said that no one should see you together until it was, "All behind you." Until what was behind you?

ARBUTHNOT. I can't imagine.

POIROT. Are you aware that you are obstructing justice?

ARBUTHNOT. I am aware of no such thing.

POIROT. And you, *mademoiselle*, can you explain what you meant?

MARY. I told you already. I wanted to get the *trip* behind me.

POIROT. I think you are lying.

ARBUTHNOT. Now listen here!

POIROT. Sit down, colonel, I am still talking. *Now tell me what you meant at the hotel! You wanted to get her out of what?! She wanted to get what behind her?!*

(They face each other squarely and the tension is high.)

ARBUTHNOT. ... *I'm married!* All right?! I'm in the process of getting a divorce – which I deserve because my wife is seeing another man – but I'll lose my case in court if it's known that I'm seeing a woman socially. When the divorce is *behind us* we can stop hiding, which is why we've been trying to keep things *private*, no thanks to you!

POIROT. You have been doing a very poor job of it, I am afraid.

ARBUTHNOT. Well, some of us have emotions, Poirot. I'm sure you'd sacrifice your own mother if it led you to one of your damn solutions, and I don't think you know what the hell you're doing.

POIROT. I know exactly what I am doing, colonel. I am investigating the murder of Bruno Cassetti.

ARBUTHNOT. *Well, he deserved to die!*

POIROT. *Aha! Then you know who he is!*

ARBUTHNOT. Well...*yes*. They told me.

POIROT. But you did not know before they told you? And Colonel Armstrong was not your friend in the war? You did not save lives together as you fought with the Indian Army in the northern frontier?

(POIROT taps the ribbon on ARBUTHNOT's lapel.)

You did not swear fidelity and friendship with this man at the time of your trial by fire together? *And now you do not give him the respect he deserves for all the tragedy and loss that he had to endure before he took his own life?!*

(ARBUTHNOT explodes with anger, grabbing POIROT by the lapel and lifting him off his feet.)

ARBUTHNOT. SHUT UP YOU LITTLE CARPING NINNY! WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT TRAGEDY, HAH?! WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT HONOR AND LOYALTY AND YOUR GODDAMN JUSTICE!!

POIROT

*(Steam from the train billows out across the stage. Out of this mist, **HERCULE POIROT** walks into view and addresses the audience.)*

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.

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.