

A HAUNTING IN VENICE

written

by

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based on the novel "Hallowe'en Party"

by

Agatha Christie

FADE IN ON:

EXT. VENICE, ITALY. PRE-DAWN.

*SHOTS OF THE SINKING, SEPULCHRAL CITY. CHILLED BY AUTUMN.
IN A BURIAL SHROUD OF MIST.*

*The city's secrets open to us in creeping images of crypts,
graves, suffering statues, gargoyles in pain. A stone
hunchback cowers. Hercules dares witches with his club.
Pigeons at war over scraps.*

*Through the gloom and mist emerge the two bronze shepherds
atop St. Mark's Clock. Their hammers raised --*

And STRIKE the bell --

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM. RECTORY. PRE-DAWN.

HERCULE POIROT WAKES WITH A GASP.

A moment of shock. A nightmare's duress slow to fade...

TITLE: **A HAUNTING IN VENICE**

EXT. VENICE STREETS. DAWN.

A SEAGULL flies off a cornice GROTESQUE. MUSIC RISES: "WHEN
THE LIGHTS GO ON AGAIN (ALL OVER THE WORLD)" as --

We take in "La Serenissima" at its best. Picture postcard
Venice now, with only the few EARLY RISERS awake to the dawn:

OLD NUNS sweep their stoop...

YOUNG MEN wax their vaporette...

BLACK MARKET TRADERS sell CRATES OF EGGS from a BOAT...

TITLE CARD: VENICE, ITALY 1947.

INT. BEDROOM. RECTORY. MORNING.

Looking in a mirror, Poirot combs out his (smaller)
moustaches, a visible touch of scar brushed over.

EXT. RECTORY GARDEN. MORNING.

Poirot paces outside a small stone rectory. Inspecting his
crop. Autumn vegetables in perfect alignment. Leaves lush.
A view of the MAJESTIC CHURCH his rented rectory abuts.

He kneels to brush SLUGS off the KALE to find: A SPIDER.

He carefully picks it off when -- AN ENGINE APPROACHES.

Poirot lights up. Tucks the spider under A JAR and --

AT THE RIVER RAILING

Poirot leans over the grilled gate as -- A SMALL DELIVERY BOAT approaches. A BAKER WHISTLES to Poirot with excitement. Stands to hand him A SPECIAL PASTRY BOX.

BAKER

Eggs! The eggs came, *Signore*!

Poirot refuses the NEWSPAPER offered with the box. Opens it greedily. *Voila!* A gorgeous assortment inside.

Poirot takes the delights with delight and --

EXT. RECTORY GATE. MORNING.

Poirot in an impeccable coat, pastry box under elbow. He nibbles a godsend coronetti as he opens his squeaky GATE to --

EXT. VENICE STREET.

-- WHERE A GROUP OF PETITIONERS WAIT FOR HIM. Like fans camped out for concert tickets. Telegrams and letters in hand, all CALLING his name. Eager and insistent.

DESPERATE PETITIONER

Monsieur Poirot -- you must help me. My parents both mysteriously died last year, then my brother soon after -- our doctor can't explain it --

Poirot sidesteps them all, tuning it all out. Pulls the JAR from his pocket...

Gently deposits the SPIDER on a wall. *Bye friend.*

But DESPERATE PETITIONER runs at Poirot --

DESPERATE PETITIONER

Please Monsieur, they say we're cursed --
I fear for my life! --

Very suddenly, Desperate Petitioner is CLOTHESLINED across the chest -- and SLAMS to the ground. REVEAL:

VITALE PORTFOGLIO. Gruff, powerful, protective, 50s. Retired cop come bodyguard who could stand down a Minotaur with a look, as he does now to Petitioner --

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

What'd I tell you? Touch him again and I keep the hand.

(to Poirot, not the first time)

Dottore. I beg you not to come out till I'm on the clock.

Poirot walks off at a clip, Portfoglio SIGHS. Warns any followers with a look. A CHURCH BELL STRIKES THE HOUR and --

EXT. CANAL BRIDGE. MORNING.

POIROT crosses A BRIDGE at his leisurely pace, savoring the crunch of a *pizzelle* cookie. He crosses FRAME -- a moment --

Then Portfoglio follows behind him. He's got a cookie too.

ON PORTFOGLIO. His head turns sharply, sensing -- ANOTHER PETITIONER -- RUNNING at Poirot --

ANOTHER PETITIONER

Signore Poirot, I need to speak with you about my case, please!

Portfoglio's ELBOW sends him SPLASHING into the canal, and --

EXT. ISLAND OF SAN GIORGIO MAGGIORE. MORNING.

Poirot steps off a boat, nibbling another pastry, moving for--

A GROCER'S BOAT. An OLDER WOMAN swoons at the offering of FRESH EGGS from THE GROCER. Poirot holds up TWO FINGERS to Grocer -- who in return offers him TWO EGGS OF DIFFERENT SHAPE, COLOR AND SIZE. Decidedly unequal and asymmetrical.

Poirot considers them. Measures them. Briefly squeamish.

Then nods happily, hands over his cash, and --

EXT. MUSEUM STEPS. DOGE'S PALACE. MORNING.

Poirot and Portfoglio walk up to the closed palace doors. A GUARD at attention, a tip of his cap, as --

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

I wonder if you only hired me because I can get you in before the tourists.

Poirot thanks Guard with the pastry box.

CLOSE ON: POIROT'S HAND. A TREMOR.

Poirot balls his hand into a fist. Steadies himself. Steps inside. Guard SHUTS the doors behind him --

INT. MUSEUM. DOGE'S PALACE. MORNING.

ON POIROT. The museum to himself. Alone. In front of --
Tintoretto's "Paradise." Massive, messy. Poirot takes it
in. Challenging peace before chaos.

Breathe.

EXT. RECTORY GARDEN. DAY.

A lunch of TWO UNEVEN EGGS wait in their cups.

ON POIROT. Alongside huge MARROWS, PUMPKINS. Pleased with
them, as --

Portfoglio emerges from the rectory, reluctant to intrude.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO
Monsieur Poirot?... *Dottore* --

POIROT
What is the word for a marrow this grand?
A voluptuous vegetable.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO
There's a lady here. She says she's in
Venice on urgent business. She says
she's a friend --

POIROT
I don't have any friends.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO
She said you would say that. So I should
give you this...

Vitale produces... AN APPLE. Poirot instantly brightens.

POIROT
The Authoress! *Mon vielle!*

EXT. RECTORY GATE. DAY.

The door opens on --

ARIADNE OLIVER. An ever-busy mind in an even busier body.
An instant sense that no matter what life handed her she'd
become precisely this mile-a-minute intellectual lighthouse
we meet in tweed right here.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Hello, young man. Is your mother at
home?

EXT. ROOF TERRACE. OVERLOOKING VENICE. DAY.

Portfoglio comes up the steps with A FRESH PASTRY BOX.
Carrying it to... A TERRACE. 360-Venice-views from a high
vantage. He sets down the box, sparing a glare for Ariadne.

ARIADNE OLIVER

He's safe with me, I only murder people
in books. *Vamoosh.*

Portfoglio leaves. His eyebrows argue unhappily.

ARIADNE OLIVER

That man. Really.

POIROT

You must forgive my bodyguard, his
instructions are mine. No one may pass
but the pastry man twice a day.

He offers an enticing *Zuccotto*. Ariadne declines, taking an
fresh apple from her bag of them and biting in.

ARIADNE OLIVER

You know me, apples only till supper.
It's my besetting sin. You go ahead.

POIROT

Well, I haven't had a thing all day...
Perhaps a little taste.

He helps himself. Ariadne takes a moment, takes it all in.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Dog my cats, it's true. Hercule Poirot
really has gone silent. Walled himself
up into retirement. Cakes for cases.

POIROT

I am much satisfied.

ARIADNE OLIVER

No. This is happiness not satisfaction.
A writer knows the difference. Even
picked Venice to hide in, a gorgeous
relic slowly sinking into the sea, just
like your mind without a challenge -- *ha!*
-- don't underestimate me for a clever
turn of phrase -- I am the world number
one mystery writer. Or was anyway. Best
sellers 27 of 30 books, damn the critics
on the last three. Called them all
"Small beer."

A CRUNCH of apple to punctuate. Poirot enjoys her assault.

POIROT

Ariadne Oliver... it is good to see you.
Come by way of Spain.

(off her look)

Your apples. *Manzana Reineta del Bierzo*,
a Spanish cultivar.

ARIADNE OLIVER

This is what's come of the great sleuth?
Gardening tricks. Poirot postmortem,
cause of death: Routine. What about
your little grey cells? What about the
innocents? Where do they find justice?

Poirot's light air darkens. Cake turned to ash in his mouth.

POIROT

There is no justice. The innocent are
dead.

A pause. Ariadne briefly brought low... Then standing
suddenly. Determined to quash his fatalism.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Well then. Only one thing to do about
it: You're coming with me. Time to
bring some life back into your life.

Poirot meets her eye. A defiant bite of cake.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Didn't you hear me, this is urgent!

POIROT

You are not the first who has come to
seduce me with some irresistible case.

Ariadne's eyes sparkle with mystery. Hook baited.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Not a case. Much spiffier than that.
You really are cut off from the world,
don't you know what today is?

EXT. CHURCH. DAY.

A WHISTLE -- A CRACK! FIREWORKS EXPLODE low in the sky. A
halo of SPARKS plumes and rains down against a church facade.

EXT. BRIDGE. VENICE. DAY.

CLOSE ON: A CHILD IN A HALLOWEEN COSTUME. Catching CANDY also raining down from the sky.

OTHER KIDS, ALL IN MASKS, LAUGHING. REVEAL:

A RAGAMUFFIN PARADE

CHILDREN MARCH OVER THE LONG BRIDGE. Chaperoned by NUNS. AMERICAN G.I.s hand out treats, candy, prizes. CHEERING and livening up the carnival atmosphere.

(NOTE: The children's Hallowe'en costumes are in the disconcerting homespun style of the time. More murderous than cute. HOBOS, GHOULS, MONSTERS. Some wear classic VENETIAN CARNIVAL MASKS, beautiful yet sinister.)

POIROT AND ARIADNE

Enjoy the spectacle. Portfoglio near.

ARIADNE OLIVER

We Americans imported loud music and terrible chocolate. But we also brought back Hallowe'en.

She toys with A MASK over her face. Hands it to a KID.

ARIADNE OLIVER

War makes too many orphans. Most never saw candy before. Just wait till tonight. There's a party just for them.

EXT. ON THE CAMPO DE MIRACOLI. DAY.

FIND POIROT, ARIADNE, PORTFOGLIO

Watching the giddy, candy-gorging KIDS float by on GONDOLAS.

POIROT

You are up to something, my friend.

ON ARIADNE. A pause. A confession.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Poirot, I found something -- someone -- I can't explain. I've looked at it every which way and can't figure it out.

Poirot is listening.

ARIADNE OLIVER

"The Unholy Ms. Reynolds." She's a spiritualist. A medium. According to the papers anyway.

Ariadne produces A LURID ENGLISH NEWSPAPER CLIPPING: "THE UNHOLY MS. REYNOLDS SEES FREEDOM IN HER FUTURE".

Poirot has stopped listening.

POIROT

A spiritist? Some telepath palm reader?

ARIADNE OLIVER

Joyce Reynolds, recently released from jail, was the last woman on record imprisoned under the terms of the Witchcraft Act of 1735. Judge called her a "bedevilled enchantress owed the strictest punishments of Leviticus."

POIROT

Cette pauvre enfant, we can go back to my garden right now. Every crystal gazer or clairvoyant is by default a fraud.

ARIADNE OLIVER

You think I don't know that? In my book seances rank by Communion for bilge --
(catches a NUN's eye and not flinching)
I've seen a million of these so-called psychics, each one a flimflam fake. Then... there's that one. *Astonishing*. I tell you, this Ms. Reynolds, I sat at a seance... Things happened --

POIROT

-- Tricks -- filaments --

ARIADNE OLIVER

I am the smartest person I ever met and I can't figure it out. So I came to the second. I need Detective Poirot to pop this balloon or god help me I will end up a believer. If she's real she's my next book.

POIROT

She is not.

Ariadne is on the move again, heading toward the canal.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Prove it. Spot the con I can't. Come with me to the orphans' Hallowe'en party. Then after we're invited to a seance.

HOLD ON POIROT. Watching Ariadne go. Watching AMERICAN SOLDIERS playfully help the ORPHANS onto gondolas -- and --

EXT. GONDOLA. ON THE GRAND CANAL. SUNSET.

Poirot, Ariadne, Portfoglio EACH ON THEIR OWN GONDOLA.

They cut through the wispy MIST that hovers inches over the water. They ride silently along the Grand Canal. Imposing palazzos on either side.

EXT. GONDOLA. ON THE OPEN WATER. SUNSET.

Their gondolas out on open water, the safety of the church domes behind them. FIREWORKS light up the sky.

EXT. GONDOLA. NARROW CANAL. SUNSET.

Their gondolas ROUND A CORNER... A BRIDGE OVERHEAD momentarily shrouds them in darkness, blocks their view...

Until they clear it -- and we have our first view of --

EXT. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI.

An august PALAZZO in early decay. Strangely brutalist. Beautiful, dreadful. A BALCONY juts over the CAVANA ENTRANCE: THE UPPER LOGGIA.

Above it the CLOUDS thicken and lower and churn.

ARIADNE OLIVER

There it is.

Portfoglio, as one should, reacts.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

Here?

ARIADNE OLIVER

You know the place?

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

Palazzo Lacrime di Giovani. In Venice we say every house is haunted. Or cursed.

The wind picks up. RAIN begins to fall, speckling the canal.

Ahead, a gondola deposits its cargo of children onto --

INT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. PALAZZO. DAY.

A wide dock with room for several boats. CHILDREN step off their gondolas, aided by the NUNS.

INT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. PALAZZO. MOMENTS LATER.

Torch-lit DARKNESS. The large DOUBLE DOORS SHUT. CHILDREN and NUNS crowded in. No sound but the pelting RAIN outside.

ARIADNE AND POIROT

Poirot amid the excited children. Then catching the eye of --

A BOY (LEOPOLD FERRIER) in a dark velvet MORETTA MASK. Staring at him. The mask mouthless, mute. The boy nods presciently in the direction of the DOORS, just as --

DOORS SLAM! FLOODLIGHTS SNAP ON! ILLUMINATING --

A CURTAIN

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
Are you ready, children?

The CHILDREN CHEER. An AMERICAN G.I. in A DEATH MASK steps forward, weaves the yarn --

DEATH MASK
Welcome on this All Hallows' Eve. The
Samhain. When the dead, they say, are
close -- and we become friends with fear.
Please watch your step. This house is
built on angry spirits and old bones.
Long ago this palazzo was an orphanage...

HANDS MANIPULATE SHADOW PUPPETS. THE STORY COMES TO LIFE ON THE CURTAIN SCREEN:

-- IN AN ORPHANAGE. A DOCTOR PUPPET AND A NURSE PUPPET...
FOLLOWED BY A TROOP OF CHILDREN PUPPETS...

-- THE CHILDREN ALL LINE UP FOR THEIR BEDS... CLIMBING IN...

DEATH MASK (V.O.)
Good doctors and good nurses took good
care of good children. Until...

-- THE BACKGROUND INVERTS TO BECOME...

-- THE STREET OUTSIDE! THE PALAZZO AND ITS OMINOUS BALCONY
STILL CENTERED, TOWNSPEOPLE PUPPETS BUSY BELOW IT. UNTIL...

-- A BAKER PUPPET SUDDENLY TWISTS... STAGE MAGIC TRANSFORMS HIS CLOTHES TO BLACK AND... HE DIES!

THE ORPHANS WATCHING THE PUPPET SHOW GASP.

POIROT

It is not too frightening for the children?

ARIADNE OLIVER

Scary stories make life less scary.

-- A PLAGUE DOCTOR PUPPET STEPS ON. THE TOWNSPEOPLE BEGIN TO SCATTER... AND DIE! THE BACKDROP INVERTS AGAIN AND...

DEATH MASK (V.O.)

Plagues make people afraid. And fear makes good people do terrible things...

-- BACK INSIDE THE ORPHANAGE: DOCTOR AND NURSE TIPTOE FROM THE SLEEPING CHILDREN... LOCKING THE DOOR BEHIND THEM...

DEATH MASK (V.O.)

The children soon realized they were alone. Locked in this house to die.

-- A CHILD PUPPET RUBS HER SLEEPY LITTLE EYES AWAKE... SHE TODDLES TO THE BIG DOOR... TO FIND IT LOCKED...

-- THE CHILDREN ALL JOIN, PRESSING AGAINST THE LOCKED DOOR...

DEATH MASK (V.O.)

Starving. Calling. Clawing.

-- THE CHILDREN, VISIBLE IN THE WINDOWS, CRY FOR HELP!

DEATH MASK (V.O.)

Some say the children are still hiding in this palazzo... And they want more children to join them.

THE ORPHANS enjoy the fright.

Death Mask steps toward them.

DEATH MASK

So you be careful. For they want revenge on the doctors and nurses who left them here to die. Watch out for the mark of... The Children's Vendetta.

-- A CLAW MARK CUTS ACROSS THE CURTAIN!

DEATH MASK

*Ever since, the children trap every soul
they can here with them. With a special
taste for doctors and nurses. No one
here is a doctor, are they?... A nurse?*

OVER THE ORPHANS' FACES. All emphatically nodding "No."

DEATH MASK

Then it's safe to start the party!

THE CURTAIN FALLS -- THE DOORS SWING OPEN AND --

The children rush inside!

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

The vast reception hall UNVEILED: The real life incarnation of the puppets' backdrop. The entire *piano nobile* DECORATED SPOOKILY FOR A HALLOWE'EN PARTY. CANDLES line the GRAND STAIRCASE. Pumpkins on every perch.

The palazzo itself is ornate, graven, regal. Like a dying monarchy. Large windows (now streaked with RAIN).

A TABLE OF CARNIVAL MASKS. Classic styles, feathered, gilded and graven. *Bauta, Pantalone, Zanni, Gnaga... Columbinas and Jokers...* Ariadne puts a *Capitano* mask on Portfoglio. A painted *Romeo* for herself. Poirot declines one.

SHOTS OF THE PARTY. GAMES. GLORIOUS, GIGGLING CHAOS:

-- CHILDREN decorate BROOMS, prizes given to the best, as --

INT. MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

A handsome rehearsal space decorated with opera memorabilia: TWO FULL COSTUMES ON MANNEQUINS, one armed with A SARACEN DAGGER. PHOTOS of ROWENA on stage. Family PHOTOS.

-- MUSICAL CHAIRS: Time kept with AN ANTIQUE METRONOME CLOCK
-- A CRUSH OF CHILDREN FIGHT TO SIT, as --

INT. KITCHEN / PANTRY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

-- CHILDREN play SNAPDRAGON, ghostly fire reflected in captivated eyes, as --

INT. DINING ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

A FEAST OF HALLOWE'EN-THEMED DESSERTS. The orphans swoon.

FIND: THE BOY IN THE MORETTA MASK. LEOPOLD FERRIER, 10, preternaturally mature. While the orphans attack the buffet he is content to sit alone, A VOLUME of Poe on his lap --

Which someone SNAPS shut: OLGA SEMINOFF. Her housekeeper's uniform crisp. Her opinions severe and fixed and many. Kindness under hard layers of brimstone certainty. But she cares for Leopold enormously.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Leopold. There's an actual, literal party and you're hiding in a book. I thought you might play with other children for once.

Leopold looks up. Tips up his Moretta mask. Which we now see was held in place by A BUTTON held in the mouth.

LEOPOLD

Games are frivolous. The Hallowe'en calls for horror stories. Don't you think, Miss Olga.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Don't you at least want some cake?

LEOPOLD

That's for the orphans. I bet they never had cake before, not with real eggs. They had a hard war.

Olga crosses her arms. Leopold knows that look.

LEOPOLD

I'll check on Father. He's no good at parties.

Seminoff watches as he steps off, and --

INT. ANTIQUARIUM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

A CENTERPIECE STATUE OF DEMETER. Arm POINTING grandly up the cortile space, toward A JULIET BALCONY on THE THIRD FLOOR. Ariadne comes around with a tray, offering treats. She passes a pair of TEENS MAKING OUT who can't be bothered.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Nun alert.

The TEENS stop kissing, scurry off. Seminoff approaches Ariadne, starry eyed.

OLGA SEMINOFF

It's a thrill to have you, Ms. Oliver, you're my favorite author!

(MORE)

OLGA SEMINOFF (cont'd)
Your mysteries give me faith the wicked
will meet justice.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Sadly, life doesn't round out so well as
detective fiction.

OLGA SEMINOFF
"The Body in the Library." I read it six
times. Your silly detective from
Finland, his obsession with lists. And
cakes! Where do you get your ideas?

Ariadne steals a look at... POIROT. Busy admiring the sizes
of the PUMPKINS among the MARBLE STATUARY.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Oh, I suppose I just think them up.

INT. CLOISTERS CORRIDOR. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

A YOUNG GIRL CRIES AGAINST A WALL, not having it. ROWENA
DRAKE (40s), sees her. Heart breaking for the poor thing.

POIROT

BY AN ARCHWAY. He touches it: *Not an arch but A SOLID WALL,
a charming trompe l'oeil mural of a corridor extension.*

He observes KIDS sword fight with their brooms -- one HITS a
PORTRAIT of a YOUNG WOMAN'S FACE. The painting slides off
the wall. Poirot catches it just in time. Looks over --

To see Rowena console the CRYING GIRL. A parent's care and
patience. Until she is finally coaxing GIGGLES out of her.

POIROT AND ARIADNE

POIROT
And this is our hostess? This is the
soprano, Rowena Drake. I know her from
the Opéra-Comique -- La Scalla. A diva's
life of glamour. But she lives here?

ARIADNE OLIVER
Where did all the money go? Everyone who
ever lived here falls victim to some
tragedy, that's the legend anyway. "The
Children's Vendetta." Someone sees a
child's shadow on the wall, then the
darkness comes. Like her daughter a year
ago. That's who we're to hear from
tonight. The lost girl from beyond...

Catnip. But Poirot is angered at the thought.

POIROT

I do not believe in such things. When I was a boy I prayed all night for God to do something. To prove he was real. Send an angel, a ghost -- anything.

He takes Ariadne's water glass, places it on the edge of a plinth. Half off. All it would take is a breeze.

POIROT

Push over this glass of water, *knock it down*. He did not. He could not do the simplest thing. Because there is no god. No ghosts. Nothing.

ARIADNE OLIVER

We'll see.

INT. STAIRCASE / ANTIQUARIUM BALCONY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

CLOSE: THUNDERING FEET! TURNING A CORNER --

CHILDREN RACE BY -- passing a rangy gamine reading palms: DESDEMONA HOLLAND, (young 20s). A hardened survivor's lack of respect for propriety or property. She considers A COOKIE-GOBBLING BOY'S fate line, eyes twinkling:

DESDEMONA

You'll grow up to be a handsome prince.

COOKIE GOBBLER

You told her she'd be a lovely princess.

DESDEMONA

A royal family. Lucky ducks. Think of all the taxes you can filch.

At which, Desdemona opens her hand and dangles... A WRISTWATCH. In her other hand... A BOW. Gobbler looks at his now-naked wrist, A YOUNG GIRL touches her hair.

Pickpocket tricks, with a wink. The KIDS love it. When --

TWO MORE KIDS run for THE NARROW STAIRS (blocked by A MAKESHIFT GATE). Desdemona stops them in place.

DESDEMONA

Oh no, no one's allowed up there. That's where the ghost lives. The girl who died here last year.

(off their skeptical looks)

Don't believe me? Go on, climb up. See if she lets you leave...

The kids stare up THE NARROW STEPS TO THE THIRD FLOOR... THE DARK CORRIDOR ABOVE... THEN RUN OFF SCARED.

Desdemona, pleased, finishes Gobbler's cookie in a bite and --

INT. LIBRARY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

By the fire is DOCTOR LESLIE FERRIER, 30s. A veteran's muscular strength and military vigilance metastasized into anxiety, PTSD, reactionary OCD. He JOLTS at --

A POP! A SUDDEN SHRIEK!

But it is only A CHILD'S SHARP LAUGH at A CRACKER.

Ferrier's anxiety spikes. Lyrics to "WHEN THE LIGHTS GO ON AGAIN" muttered as a private prayer:

DOCTOR FERRIER
*...the boys are home again all over the
 world / And rain or snow is all that may
 fall from the skies above --*

A HAND LANDS ON HIS SHOULDER

LEOPOLD. Whose gentle company is Ferrier's chief balm. Kind eyes, soft words.

LEOPOLD
 You all right, Dad? Do you need a pill?

Ferrier calms. Shakes his head. Grateful for him.

LEOPOLD
 Take some punch then. We could go if
 you'd prefer.

Ferrier looks to THE HALL -- sees ROWENA cross by carrying buckets. His breath quickens. Long in love.

DOCTOR FERRIER
 It's all right. I promised Rowena I'd
 stay for it.

LEOPOLD
 Good. I was looking forward to the
 seance. I miss Alicia something awful.

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Rowena sets a bucket down on A PUDDLE under A CEILING LEAK.

Only then does Rowena notice -- THE GAME OF --

BOBBING FOR APPLES

KIDS PLUNGE THEIR FACES INTO A LARGE IRON BASIN OF WATER to come up with apples. Manic LAUGHTER. Slosy fun. One KID holds ANOTHER KID'S face under water, scaring them all.

ON ROWENA. Watching. A sad smile.

ON POIROT. Enjoying the joyful game at a distance.

POIROT

You do the children a great kindness,
madame.

ROWENA DRAKE

Adults too. Care to bob for an apple,
Mister Poirot? Looks like fun.

POIROT

(tempted, but...)
The fun is not for me.

She nods, understanding all too well. BEGIN INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. CANAL. NIGHT.

Through THICK MIST we glimpse...

A GONDOLA glides silently toward the palazzo. A MASKED,
GHOSTLY FORM rides on it, as yet indistinct, as --

INT. LIBRARY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Continuing with Rowena and Poirot --

ROWENA DRAKE

I'm glad for it. It's been too long
since there was laughter in this house.

POIROT

It is a remarkable palazzo.

Water DRIPDRIPDRIPS from the leak into the pan.

ROWENA DRAKE

You can have it. I can't afford to fix
it and I can't stand to look at it. No
one will buy it at any price, not after --

She breaks off. Stares out... DRIPDRIPDRIP... As --

EXT. CANAL. NIGHT.

The mist parts and we discern A CLOAKED FIGURE on the gondola -- A WOMAN IN A PIERROT MASK. Hood up against the rain, as --

INT. LIBRARY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

ROWENA DRAKE

Forgive me. I hoped seeing all these faces might make it hurt less.

At which Seminoff interrupts. News.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Ms. Rowena. Your guest is here.

INT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

THE MASKED WOMAN'S gondola glides up to the dock, as --

INT. LIBRARY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

ROWENA DRAKE

Good god, I'm actually nervous.

POIROT

You are a believer in psychics?

ROWENA DRAKE

This house made me believe. It holds voices. Whispers, sobbing. My daughter would stay up at night talking, I thought it was with her dolls.

Rowena feels Poirot's incredulity and judgement.

ROWENA DRAKE

My daughter... to hear her voice again, a word... I'd give that Ms. Reynolds all I have.

INT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot and Ariadne observe as --

Desdemona greets the gondola. Helps THE MASKED WOMAN step from the gondola to the dock. Where she pauses.

Then removes her cloak and mask. Revealing her face: A wounded look. This is "THE UNHOLY" MS. JOYCE REYNOLDS.

She takes in the grim home. Voice soft, almost shy:

MS. REYNOLDS

This one will be very sad.

Rowena greets her as an honored guest. A nod to Desdemona.

ROWENA DRAKE

Ms. Reynolds. Everything is prepared in the salon as your assistant specified.

Ms. Reynolds cocks her head. "Hearing" something.

MS. REYNOLDS

So noisy. Your home.

ROWENA DRAKE

They'll all be gone before we begin.

She means the children. Ms. Reynolds does not.

MS. REYNOLDS

So many. Everywhere. Horrible memories.
(looks up sharply)
Your daughter's room is on the third floor.

ON ROWENA. *How did she know that?*

MS. REYNOLDS

May we do it there?

Rowena nods. And --

CLOSE ON THE CEILING

RAIN POOLS in a crack. FOLLOW A DROPLET'S SLO-MO FALL INTO A PAN BELOW. THE WIND'S ire swells, as --

INT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. STAIRS. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot and Ariadne join Ms. Reynolds --

MS. REYNOLDS

Ariadne Oliver. My nemesis.

ARIADNE OLIVER

We meet again. "The Unholy Ms. Joyce Reynolds."

MS. REYNOLDS

The press coined that one. Not sure if I like it.

POIROT

Madame, I must say, I expected someone more...

ARIADNE OLIVER

Dramatic? -- ridiculous --

MS. REYNOLDS
An old crone --

POIROT
Yes, this is the perfect word, the crone!

MS. REYNOLDS
I didn't ask to be what I am. Why I like the term "medium" -- sort of middling. I'm not big or small, I'm not interesting at all -- but I can talk to the dead.
(recognizing him)
You. You're familiar.

POIROT
I am Hercule Poirot.

ARIADNE OLIVER
You were Hercule Poirot.

MS. REYNOLDS
The detective. You're anything but medium. You're quite famous. Am I your next quite famous case?

POIROT
I am retired from cases.

MS. REYNOLDS
But you are here to discredit me. Isn't that why the great writer brought you?

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

UNDER THE CHANDELIER, A GROUP OF KIDS PLAY ROWDILY. A BOY PUTS ON A PLAGUE DOCTOR MASK. Scares his friends as --

INT. GATED STAIRCASE. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

POIROT
Indeed, I am here as a favor to Ms. Oliver, who is eager to divine your means of divination. I must tell you, Madame, I have been all my life uncharmed by your kind.

MS. REYNOLDS
My kind?

POIROT
Opportunists who prey on the vulnerable.

MS. REYNOLDS
You don't believe in the soul's endurance after death?

POIROT
I have lost my faith.

MS. REYNOLDS
How sad for you.

POIROT
Yes. It is most sad. The truth is sad.

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

BACK ON THE RAUCOUS KIDS. Playacting the tale told in the puppet show. INTERCUT BETWEEN THE KIDS AND --

THE CHANDELIER SWAYING WITH THEIR MOVEMENTS AND --

INT. GATED STAIRCASE. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

POIROT. HIS CYNICAL FIRE IGNITING --

POIROT
Please understand, I would welcome with open arms any honest sign of devil or demon or ghost -- for if there is a ghost there is a soul -- if there is a soul there is a God who made it. And if we have God, we have everything -- meaning, order, justice. But I have seen too much of the world. Countless crimes. Two wars. The bitter evil of indifference. And I conclude, no, no god, no ghosts -- no mediums who can speak to them --

ON THE PLAYING KIDS: AS --

THE CHANDELIER DROPS FROM THE CEILING!

CRASH! CRYSTAL SHATTERS!

THE CHILDREN SCREAM AND SCATTER!

Everyone rushes aside. Breathless terror. A long pause.

ON MS. REYNOLDS. Eyes on Poirot.

MS. REYNOLDS
You were saying?

INT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

The party is over. The children, lined up, each handed a treat-bag and ushered into the RAIN.

A NUN shuts the heavy doors behind her, crosses herself.

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Seminoff sweeps up glass, muttering unhappily.

OLGA SEMINOFF
As if I didn't have enough to clean.
Shouldn't even be here past dark.

Leopold, helping Seminoff, pauses. Scans the ceiling.

LEOPOLD
I don't think they'll bother us.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO
(overhearing, now worried)
Who? What happens past dark?

POIROT

Stares up where the chandelier so recently hung.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Well? Still a charlatan?

POIROT
A ceiling weakened by water damage.
Unused to rollicking footsteps.

Poirot follows up the stairs. Ariadne looks up.

ARIADNE OLIVER
No credit for theatrical timing.

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

A GRANDFATHER AUTOMATON CLOCK STRIKES. ADAM AND EVE figures,
A SERPENT. Dancing about AN APPLE. The CHIME ECHOES, as --

INT. STAIRCASE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Seminoff UNLATCHES the gate at the base of THE NARROW THIRD
FLOOR STAIRS.

OLGA SEMINOFF
Miss Alicia's room is up here.

AT THE LANDING

Ferrier sits alone outside a locked bedroom door. Quietly
singing to himself --

DOCTOR FERRIER

*A kiss won't mean goodbye, but Hello to
love / When the lights go on again --*

Seminoff and Poirot come. Ferrier stops, embarrassed.

POIROT

If I may, please. How did the girl die?

OLGA SEMINOFF

The balcony. The canal.

POIROT

A suicide.

OLGA SEMINOFF

It wasn't her fault. They pushed her to
it.

POIROT

They?

DOCTOR FERRIER

Mrs. Seminoff, please --

OLGA SEMINOFF

What then, Doctor? You cared for her,
you saw.

EXT. CAMPO. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI. NIGHT.

A MAN races across the campo through the rain, toward the
palazzo doors, as --

INT. OUTSIDE ALICIA'S ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

ON A DOOR. At the dark end of the hall. Paint peeling.

Seminoff takes A KEY from her apron. Heavy works resound as
she UNLOCKS the door. Poirot stays her hand at the latch.

POIROT

Wait, please. Who has been inside here
tonight? Ms. Reynolds? Her assistant?

OLGA SEMINOFF

No one. I have the only key. No one's
stepped foot here since Miss Alicia
passed but me. To dust a bit. And to
check on Harry.

Harry?

INT. ALICIA'S ROOM. PALAZZO. MOMENTS LATER.

THE DOOR OPENS. Letting air and light into a stale room. A young girl's room allowed to mature minimally as she did.

Poirot enters -- A SUDDEN SHRIEK -- A STARTLE --

A COCKATOO. On an open stand. Harry.

Harry REARS. A grumpy bird in a mood. Seminoff takes an apple from her apron, breaks it in half to feed him.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Harry was her friend. She told him everything. Used to speak before she died. Now he just cries.

Poirot scans a room frozen in time: A dusty MIRROR... CLOTHES on a chair... A CELLO and sheet music on a stand... A LILAC TEACUP on the very edge of the nightstand, half on/half off the edge. Handle facing bed.

Poirot almost touches the teacup -- Seminoff stays his hand.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Everything is just as she left it. Ms. Rowena wouldn't let me move a thing.

SHE LOOKS OVER. ROWENA AT THE DOOR. FROZEN THERE.

A miracle of will to enter. Ferrier moves to help her.

She stops him. Enters alone. Steps to THE FOOT OF THE BED.

ASIDE, QUIETLY. Seminoff, Ariadne, Poirot observe Rowena. Mourning at the bed.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Benedicta tu in mulieribus. She and Alicia were inseparable...

INSERT CUT: ROWENA LAUGHS, CHASING A YOUNG GIRL (SEEN ONLY FROM BEHIND) DOWN A HALL -- THE GIRL HOLDS A STUFFED RABBIT --

OLGA SEMINOFF (V.O.)

The palazzo was their oasis. Only a week at a time between travel for the opera. But Alicia had the children's ghosts for company. She grew so beautiful. Then Alicia met her chef, Maxime.

INSERT CUT: ALICIA DRAKE IN A ROOFTOP GARDEN SURROUNDED BY VIOLET FLOWERS -- AN EBULLIENT SMILE -- SHARED WITH A MAN (MAXIME) -- YOUNG LOVE --

OLGA SEMINOFF (V.O.)

*They were engaged so fast, so in love.
Then she and her fiancée quarrelled. She
moved back here. That's when she started
to see the children again. They wanted
her for themselves.*

INSERT CUT: ALICIA IN HER BED, FEBRILE -- ROWENA AT HER SIDE
-- FERRIER WATCHES HELPLESSLY --

OLGA SEMINOFF (V.O.)

*She suffered her last weeks in that bed.
Seeing things. Shadows. The Children
calling her, she said. They want you
here. With them.*

ON POIROT. Watching Rowena beside Alicia's empty bed.

ON ROWENA. Summoning courage... to touch the pillow. Where
her daughter's cheek once rested...

OLGA SEMINOFF

*They drove her mad. Ms. Rowena didn't
leave her side. Fed her with a spoon
just to get her to take a drop of tea.
Begging the spirits to let her be...*

INSERT CUT: ALICIA FALLS -- SHE SINKS INTO THE CANAL --

INSERT CUT: ALICIA'S BODY LYING IN THE BOATHOUSE -- THE
TELLTALE SLASHES APPARENT ON HER BACK --

OLGA SEMINOFF (V.O.)

*They didn't. They left the mark. Of the
Children's Vendetta. The police said the
cuts were from the fall. The police...*

BACK ON SEMINOFF. Heart broken. Eyes narrowed bitterly at --

MS. REYNOLDS. Entering the room. Fingertips extended.

MS. REYNOLDS

Listening. Listening.

OLGA SEMINOFF

*Now this woman wants to disturb Alicia's
soul. I am sure of this, Monsieur, this
is not right. This is against nature and
the good Lord, somebody will have to pay.*

Reynolds circles the space. Instant empathy.

MS. REYNOLDS

So much pain here.

Hand passing over A STUFFED RABBIT perched on the CELLO.

MS. REYNOLDS

"Baba"...?

Rowena nods, astounded.

ROWENA DRAKE

Baba the Rabbit.

A LAMP BULB POPS OUT.

A LOUD ELECTRIC BELL

ECHOES FROM DOWN BELOW. RINGS AGAIN. INSISTENT. AND --

INT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. PALAZZO. MOMENTS LATER.

MAXIME GERARD comes in from the pouring rain. Urbane, 20-30s. Never wrong or outwitted -- if you ask him. Roguish good looks to infuriate further.

ON ROWENA. Not expecting him. Not happy.

ROWENA DRAKE

Maxime, no.

MAXIME GERARD

(holding A LETTER)

"Maxime. Be at Palazzo 10pm. Important news about Alicia Drake." I was invited.

ROWENA DRAKE

Not by me.

MAXIME GERARD

You're always trying to kick me out. Never worked before. If there's anything to hear I'll hear it.

ROWENA DRAKE

Tell it to your new fiancée. Waited a whole six months after Alicia died. I hear she's insensibly rich.

MAXIME GERARD

Land grants from King George rich. Bought me my own bistro on Madison Avenue. I'm going to be a New Yorker. A rich one which is the only kind to be. Come visit, I'll buy you a hot dog.

Ferrier steps up, large, threatening.

DOCTOR FERRIER
Should I throw him out?

MAXIME GERARD
Try it. Give me the excuse.

Maxime stares at him with hate. History here. A pause.

MAXIME GERARD
I lost too, Rowena.

ON ROWENA. Unhappy to admit it's true. She steps aside.

ROWENA DRAKE
Do what you want. You always do.

INT. ALICIA'S ROOM / ORATORY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

The attendees approach, carrying chairs. Setting them around the table.

MAXIME GERARD
A seance? Christ in a hat, is that what this is? Victorian fad night?

CLOSE ON: AN ELECTRIC TYPEWRITER. An IBM "Executive." ON A RAISED TABLE JUST OFF THE ARRANGED TABLES --

DOCTOR FERRIER
A typewriter? No Ouija board or crystal ball?

MS. REYNOLDS
The latest IBM. They wrote the Armistice documents on one of these. It suits me, I think myself more a secretary than anything. The voices speak and I take dictation. Desdemona?

Desdemona FLIPS the switch. The typewriter comes alive with A WARM ELECTRIC HUM. She fits A FRESH PAGE into it.

Poirot checks under the typewriter's table. Notes BABA perched on the cello.

Leopold comes to the table. Sits by Ferrier.

DOCTOR FERRIER
Leopold, maybe go read in the library?

LEOPOLD
I want to see Alicia. She was my friend too.

MS. REYNOLDS
You're not scared of ghosts?

LEOPOLD
I talk to ghosts here all the time.

MS. REYNOLDS
Do you?

LEOPOLD
They say you're a fake.

Reynolds smiles, liking him.

Outside, lightning FIRES the sky, and --

INT. ALICIA'S ROOM / ORATORY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

THE ATTENDEES SEATED: *LEOPOLD, ROWENA, ARIADNE, FERRIER, SEMINOFF, PORTFOGLIO, MAXIME. DESDEMONA STANDS A STEP AWAY FROM THE IBM.*

POIROT PACES, OBSERVING.

HARRY QUIVERS.

ON MS. REYNOLDS. She scans around the tables. Everyone settled in place. *Ready.*

MS. REYNOLDS
No one touch me until the trance is ended. The effects are painful.

Silence. Only the RAIN on the window.

The typewriter's HUM.

Reynolds lifts her fingers, as if just over typewriter keys. A pianist at the bench.

MS. REYNOLDS
Alicia Drake. I believe it was you who called to me. We invite you.

Silence.

Reynolds shudders.

MS. REYNOLDS
Too many spirits. This house is spilling with the dead. Some souls can't let go.

DESDEMONA
Do we stop, Ms. Reynolds?

MS. REYNOLDS
(shakes her head, aloud)
If someone wants to be heard we are here.
Listening. Listening.

The word lingers like an incantation.

MS. REYNOLDS
Spirits, you scream and shout and no one
hears. We do now. Listening. Alicia
Drake, find your voice.

The WIND rises. The lights FLICKER in kind.

ARIADNE OLIVER
It just got cold. Does anyone else feel
a chill?

MS. REYNOLDS
Is someone there?

Wait. Wait.

ON MS. REYNOLD'S RIGHT HAND. *HER INDEX FINGER DROPS, AND --*
SNAP! A TYPE HAMMER STRIKES THE PAGE WITH A HARD CRACK.
GASPS. LOOKS EXCHANGED.

Desdemona looks at the typewriter. A LETTER "Y" ON THE PAGE.
She pulls it out and shows it for all to see --

DESDEMONA
"Y." "Yes."

ROWENA DRAKE
She didn't touch the keys, I swear it --

MAXIME GERARD
She must've, you can't all be such fools.

OLGA SEMINOFF
This is wrong. This is very wrong.

MS. REYNOLDS
Who is there? Alicia Drake. Listening.
We are here. Listening. It is the
Hallowtide. We are close. Your spirit
is close. Your voice is loud.

A pause.

MS. REYNOLDS

Alicia!

CLOSE: SNAP! ANOTHER LETTER STRIKES THE PAGE! "A"

DESDEMONA

"A." Alicia.

SHOCK ON THEIR FACES. Ariadne shaken. A new page fit.

ON ROWENA. Emotional.

MS. REYNOLDS

Alicia. I feel you are in pain.

ROWENA DRAKE

Does it hurt? Please tell me --

A pause. Maxime nervous. Seminoff cries. Ferrier in panic.

MS. REYNOLDS

Did someone hurt you?

SNAP! ANOTHER LETTER. "Y."

DESDEMONA

Yes.

A pause. Nightmare silence... Sustained. Interrupted --

POIROT

No.

POIROT SNAPS ON THE LIGHTS. Crosses to THE FIREPLACE --

ARIADNE OLIVER

Poirot! Let her finish.

POIROT

No. I have seen enough. This is not a ghost in the walls. But let us meet a secret confederate in the chimney.

Poirot reaches up into it -- YANKS DOWN --

THUD! A YOUNG MAN LANDS ON THE FLOOR

Folded tight like a contortionist into the small space: NICHOLAS HOLLAND, as earnest as his sister Desdemona is not. As he unspools his limbs he DROPS a small RADIO-LIKE DEVICE.

Desdemona helps him up, instantly protective.

DESDEMONA

Nicholas -- are you hurt?

NICHOLAS
I'm all right.

POIROT
Ah, Nicholas. The second assistant. I am pleased to meet you. By your similar face and current predicament, I take you for the first assistant's brother as well as accomplice?

Poirot PRESSES the device. The typewriter SNAPS a key.

POIROT
A magnetic switch. *Et voilà*, the talking typewriter.

ROWENA DRAKE
A fake?...

POIROT
Mrs. Seminoff, your dedication to housekeeping may be improved. No one had been in this room except you, yet my new friend left his footstep in the fireplace.

ON THE FLOOR BY THE FIREPLACE: FOOTSTEP SCUFFS IN THE DUST.

Poirot notes the door. THE LOCK.

POIROT
The bright scratch at the keyhole indicated a lock recently picked. The world alas remains inexorably wired to bar the door after death. Ms. Oliver, you must find a new subject for your book. Ms. Drake, I am sorry for your loss, but this oracle is a fake.

ON POIROT'S HAND: LIGHTLY TOUCHING REYNOLDS' ARM.

REYNOLDS SUDDENLY CONTORTS

HER BODY DISTORTS INTO PAINFUL SHAPES, A SEIZURE'S PAROXYSM --

She SLAMS BACK violently into her chair as if THROWN --

Reynolds suddenly FLIES OUT at Ferrier with a monstrous, inhuman ROAR --

MS. REYNOLDS
Alicia --

AN ATONAL CRASH STARTLES -- THE CELLO FALLEN FROM ITS STAND.
Rowena looks. BABA is GONE -- his place now EMPTY.

ROWENA DRAKE
Where is Baba? Did someone take him?
(searching, accusing Maxime)
Did you --

MAXIME GERARD
I didn't touch anything.

REYNOLDS SLAPS HERSELF! HER BODY BEGINS TO QUAKE.

SLAP! A SECOND TIME! NAILS DRAWING BLOOD.

Her paroxysm suddenly STOPS. Her body slackens.

FROM THE QUIET... HARRY FLUTTERS... THEN SPEAKS:

HARRY
Alicia...

Harry's head turns slowly -- looks directly at --

REYNOLDS. HER TIMBRE NOT HER OWN -- IN A YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE:

MS. REYNOLDS
Mamma. Thirsty. So thirsty.

ON POIROT. Trying to comprehend.

ON ROWENA. Pale. Recognizing --

ROWENA DRAKE
Alicia?

MS. REYNOLDS
*Hurt -- why -- won't you leave me -- I
don't want -- I don't want to die --*

Though Reynolds' feet do not touch the ground her CHAIR SPINS
AND SPINS AND SPINS --

ROWENA DRAKE
What is it? What's happening?

MS. REYNOLDS
(her own voice)
Alicia. Showing me. I see her. On the
balcony. Not alone. She didn't jump.
(the NEW VOICE)
Murderer -- you killed me --
You killed me --
You killed me --
You killed me --

ROWENA SPINNING.

EYES LANDING ON SEMINOFF. ON MAXIME. ON FERRIER. STUNNED.

MS. REYNOLDS
(between TWO VOICES)
Who? Killed me! Show me! Mamma! Who
hurt you? What happened?

AS IF IN ANSWER -- THE TYPEWRITER SLAMS DOWN A SINGLE KEY --

THE BALCONY DOORS BLOW OPEN -- ARIADNE SCREAMS --

THEN ALL GOES SILENT.

Poirot without words. He looks --

ON THE PAGE. THE LETTER "M"

MS. REYNOLDS
Murder.

EXT. VENICE SKYLINE. NIGHT.

The bronze shepherds atop St. Mark's strike the BELL with their hammers. The HOUR CHIME cuts through storm.

EXT. OUTSIDE ALICIA'S ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

WITH POIROT. Leaving Alicia's room. Passing the attendees. All ashen, all still processing what they've seen.

OLGA SEMINOFF
Satanic. She truly is unholy --

LEOPOLD
It was Alicia's voice -- someone must
have killed her --

VITALE PORTFOGLIO
We can't prove any of it was real --

ARIADNE OLIVER
Then what was it? --

MAXIME GERARD
Showmanship -- theater -- catching us up
in a group hysteria --

ARIADNE OLIVER
That wasn't "War of the Worlds" on the
radio -- the damn doors blew open! I
can't explain it --

ROWENA DRAKE
 (broken)
 I can. That was my daughter.

INT. 2ND FLOOR STEPS. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot leaving. Ariadne buzzes to cut him off.

ARIADNE OLIVER
 Don't you dare leave without saying it.
 You saw what I saw and what you saw was --

POIROT
 Fake.

ARIADNE OLIVER
 Real! That woman is proof! Living proof. There's a title. Sure as hell she's my next book -- and sure as hell it's a hit! A big beer book! Good god, I have to start writing right away. "The woman who stumped Hercule Poirot."

POIROT
 I admit I cannot solve all her methods in the moment. But I will.

ARIADNE OLIVER
 You won't. Come on, you should be relieved! How incredible to believe! -- to know -- the world has mystery! A God who cares enough to make abiding souls! After death comes --

POIROT
 -- Nothing --

ARIADNE OLIVER
 -- Something.

POIROT
 If there is a God he would not break the game for her.

EXT. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI. NIGHT.

LIGHTNING shatters the sky over the palazzo.

INT. ANTIQUARIUM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

ON REYNOLDS. Ferrier cleans the fresh CUT on her cheek. Checks her pupils, satisfied. He leaves her, as --

Poirot crosses, coat on to leave. Reynolds can't help it --

MS. REYNOLDS

I hope you'll come back tomorrow. Rowena made me promise to sit for her again. Ms. Oliver says I should prepare to be quite famous.

Portfoglio from the balcony.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

Dottore, I'll find us a boat.

A disapproving glance at Reynolds as he leaves them. Reynolds leans against the wall wearily.

MS. REYNOLDS

These spirits are particularly savage. Sittings always exact a price.

POIROT

As I am sure do you.

ON POIROT. Studying her.

POIROT

Hardly "medium." Well done I should say, perhaps even rare.

MS. REYNOLDS

So I'm a steak.

POIROT

You are, amongst frauds, the gifted one.

MS. REYNOLDS

I wish I was a fraud. Be less painful. You know something of this I think, Monsieur. Someone dies and we comfort the grieving with secrets plain to us. Both creatures who speak for the dead. Who know the dead too well, I think.

For a moment her eyes go soft. Memory of real pain.

MS. REYNOLDS

Imagine. A war nurse who hears ghosts... Surrounded by screaming. On her ward. Inside her mind. Wave after wave of the dying and the dead. And the only thing that stopped the pain was telling the mourners what I heard. Ease their suffering, as only I can. You'd begrudge that?

Poirot considers her. Her suffering. But is still unmoved --

POIROT

You made a mother believe her daughter's soul is in torment. This is not generous, not gentle, not humble.

MS. REYNOLDS

I felt pain. I saw a murder --

POIROT

Did you see who killed Alicia Drake?

MS. REYNOLDS

It wasn't revealed. Maybe tomorrow.

POIROT

A lucrative convenience.

MS. REYNOLDS

Why is it so hard for you to believe -- death isn't an end but a door -- and God left some the key.

POIROT

Terrors for children, Ms. Reynolds.

MS. REYNOLDS

You might learn from them. Children can suffer as much as those orphans... and still laugh and play and bob for apples. They're alive.

Reynolds eyes unfix, dissociated. Truth seen at a distance.

MS. REYNOLDS

But you... suffered and became a ghost. Death everywhere you went, all your life. Soldiers. Friends... Katherine.

Poirot goes cold. A pause.

POIROT

When I meet you next it will be to tell you how you do your tricks.

MS. REYNOLDS

Then we shall not meet again.

POIROT

You must persist that you are real?

Reynolds stops. Turns. For a moment unmasked, light, playful. All artifice gone.

MS. REYNOLDS

And if I'm not, who's getting hurt?
 Magic won't come unless you call it in.
 (quiet again, "Ms. Reynolds" again)
 Unless it really is all true.

Reynolds twirls HER PIERROT MASK with a grin. Puts her mask
 ON POIROT'S FACE. Her cloak over his shoulders.

MS. REYNOLDS

Lighten up, pal. You might have fun.

She smiles. Pleased with the effect. *Poirot in a Pierrot.*

MS. REYNOLDS

I'd say to remember me. But you will.

And she's gone. Poirot's eyes, through the mask, follow
 Reynolds as she crosses behind the statue -- and --

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

The grandfather CLOCK STRIKES MIDNIGHT, as --

INT. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

WIDE ON POIROT. Stepping through. Cloaked and masked.
 VOICES from the others upstairs fade away.

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

HIGH WIDE ON POIROT. He crosses the empty space.

Passes the broken wreck of chandelier.

Passes the once MUSICAL CHAIRS. When --

He hears a low SUSURRATION. Like a whisper in his ear.

Stops. Turns to look --

No one there. Only now he sees he has stopped just
 outside... THE LIBRARY.

THE BOBBING FOR APPLES BASIN INSIDE. STILL FULL.

ON POIROT'S EYES. A twinkling caprice. Silly.

INT. LIBRARY. PALAZZO. CONTINUING.

ON THE FIREPLACE. A log collapses.

Poirot steps to the BASIN. The floating apples. He checks.

No one there to see him. He lifts up his mask.

POIROT
"Lighten up."

ON POIROT. He grins. Kneels. Hands behind his back.
He THRUSTS his face into the water. *Splash. Bubbles.*
Wait.

GASP. Poirot comes up wet. Mouth empty. Laughing.

A breath to go down again --

A BLUR OF MOVEMENT BEHIND HIM --

POIROT STRUCK ON THE BACK OF THE HEAD!

*INSIDE THE BASIN, LOOKING UP: HE HITS THE WATER. Unmoving.
Surrounded by apples. A ribbon of BLOOD plumes off his NECK.*

Wait. Wait.

He comes to. Eyes fluttering open.

SUDDENLY PRESSED DOWN IN THE WATER

Poirot fights violently -- but is held firmly --

DROWNING. Weakening -- the fight slipping --

The world going dark at the edges --

GOES BLACK. Stays black. Wait.

INT. LIBRARY. PALAZZO. MOMENTS LATER.

GASP! Poirot shocks back to consciousness with a violent
gulp of air. PORTFOGLIO hits his back. Helping him cough
out the fluid in his lungs.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO
Monsieur Poirot! *Dottore!* Can you hear
me?

Poirot nods. BLEEDING CUTS OVER HIS BACK. LIKE CLAW MARKS.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO
Who did this?

POIROT
 (tries to recall)
 I left Ms. Reynolds... Stopped at the
 apples -- silly. I lifted my mask --
 (realizing)
 It was her mask --

ON THE PIERROT MASK. IN A POOL OF WATER.

POIROT
 Where is Ms. Reynolds?

A SHRIEK OF TERROR ECHOES THROUGH THE HOUSE!

CUT ACROSS THE PALAZZO. ALL HEAR THE VIOLENT SCREAM:

LEOPOLD AND DOCTOR FERRIER IN THE KITCHEN -- NEAR NICHOLAS
 AND DESDEMONA IN THE PANTRY -- ROWENA DRAKE AND OLGA SEMINOFF
 RUSH OUT OF THE MUSIC ROOM -- MAXIME GERARD PAUSES WASHING
 HIS HANDS IN THE BATHROOM --

INT. ANTIQUARIUM. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

ON ARIADNE. THE ONE SCREAMING. STARING AT:

REYNOLDS IMPALED ON THE STATUE OF DEMETER

THE STATUE'S OUTSTRETCHED ARM PROTRUDING THROUGH REYNOLDS'
 STOMACH... REACHING UP TO THE BALCONY FROM WHERE SHE FELL...
 BLOOD LIKE A BALL GOWN DRAPED OVER THE MARBLE GODDESS.

SCRATCHES RAKED ACROSS REYNOLDS' BACK. LIKE CLAW MARKS.

EXT. CAMPO. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI. NIGHT.

The canal waters rush with the onset of STORM. A LOOSE
 SUPPORT PYLON BASHES its neighbor with each WAVE.

INT. MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

CLOSE ON: THE EARTH. It OPENS at the equator. A *hinged*
GLOBE. A TELEPHONE INSIDE. PORTFOGLIO opens it to dial --

VITALE PORTFOGLIO
 I'll phone my old station. I should know
 the men on duty.

Ariadne enters with a tea tray. Takes it to the couch, where
 Poirot recovers, handkerchief to his head. Rowena notices.

ROWENA DRAKE
 I thought my cupboards were all bare.

ARIADNE OLIVER

I scrounged up some tea left from the party. Found your honey in the linen closet.

She stirs in honey. Puts the cup into Poirot's hand. He sips. Grateful.

WITH NICHOLAS AND DESDEMONA. Scared. Quietly aside --

DESDEMONA

What do we do? She was our ticket.

NICHOLAS

We'll get there without her, I promise.

POIROT WATCHES THE OTHER ATTENDEES. All reeling, in shock --

DOCTOR FERRIER

None of you saw anyone on the stairs?

LEOPOLD

Some things can't be seen.

MAXIME GERARD

Maybe she jumped, she seemed the type --

NICHOLAS

Not Ms. Reynolds, never --

ARIADNE OLIVER

She talked about a murder. She could have known something --

MAXIME GERARD

You still think she's real? Please, she made up that murder idea to impress a famous author -- and to bait the hook on a new income stream --

ARIADNE OLIVER

Then why is she dead?

MAXIME GERARD

Gravity.

Rowena burns at Maxime accusingly.

ROWENA DRAKE

She spoke in Alicia's voice. Whoever did this took my last hope of ever hearing her again...

MAXIME GERARD

Don't look at me, I was being
interrogated by your lady writer, ask
her. Then ask the doctor where he was.
(off Ferrier)
Sick bastard already killed once here --

OLGA SEMINOFF

It wasn't either of them. You know what
it was. Hateful things live in this
house. That woman called to them. And
they answered.

ON NICHOLAS. Realizing.

NICHOLAS

In the war. Before she did sittings...

ON DESDEMONA. It hits her with a chill.

DESDEMONA

Ms. Reynolds was in the British army.
She served with the QAIMNS at Malta. She
was a nurse.

ROWENA DRAKE

A nurse. The Children's Vendetta.

Silence.

ON POIROT. Eyes coming to life. The moustaches twitch.

ON PORTFOGLIO. At the globe TELEPHONE. He hangs up.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

The canals aren't safe. We can't get a
boat here until the storm clears.

ROWENA DRAKE

When will that be?

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

It's out of police control, Signora.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Well I won't sit here and wait. I never
spent the night in this house before and
I won't now. None of you should --

Seminoff storms off --

INT. FOYER. PALAZZO.

-- For the doors. The others funnel behind when --

SEMINOFF HALTS. SURPRISED AT:

POIROT LOCKING THE FOYER GATES. JUST LIKE THE DOCTOR PUPPET.

HE EYES EACH OF THE ATTENDEES. NOW ALL SUSPECTS.

DOCTOR FERRIER

You can't trap us here --

POIROT

A medium boasts of having a vision of murder. Now she is dead. One of you felt her eyes upon you -- and killed her. Tried to kill me. No one shall leave this place until I know who. Commissario, stand here and see these gates do not open. Monsieur Gerard, you watch the commissario.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

You'd suspect me? I was a cop!

NICHOLAS

All the more reason to suspect you.

OLGA SEMINOFF

No, they already killed tonight --

POIROT

You will all have your chance to speak.

He stops. A stone wall. To Portfoglio --

POIROT

Call back the police. *Tell them Hercule Poirot is on the case.*

Poirot moves off, into --

INT. BATHROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot shut the door behind him. His hand on the lock TREMBLES. Alone, the stony mask betrays its cracks.

INT. ANTIQUARIUM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

AT THE BLOODY STATUE OF DEMETER

Reynolds' body now on a table. Ferrier covers her with a sheet. Ferrier distant, sweating. He looks up -- to --

INT. BALCONY ABOVE ANTIQUARIUM. PALAZZO.

POIROT AT THE JULIET BALCONY

Overlooking the high ceiling antiquarium from three floors up. Above Ferrier and Reynolds and Demeter. Cluttered storage: Old paintings leaning in stacks. Ariadne joins.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Is this where she...

She looks over the low balustrade. A shiver.

ARIADNE OLIVER
It's one thing to write about murder
another to see it up close.

POIROT
The attempt on my life occurred
approximately two minutes after the chime
of midnight. You were first to find the
body at...

ARIADNE OLIVER
(realizing, a hard stare)
Don't you dare look at me like a murder
suspect. We're old friends.

POIROT
Every murderer is someone's old friend.

He waits for the ECHO of her SNORT to clear before relenting.
Moving down the stairs --

POIROT
Alas, you have written too many clever
murders to be caught at the foot of your
first victim. And you are so far viably
alibied by the chef for the time. Which
is why I shall now ask you to assist me
in my investigation.

ARIADNE OLIVER
(delighted)
When do we start?

POIROT
When you collect for me our host.

Poirot takes out A NOTE PAD. A PEN tucked in. CLICK.
Ariadne takes him in, enjoying this.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Knew you were in there somewhere. All it
took was a corpse and look at you:
Hercule Poirot all over again.

ON ARIADNE. Her smile suddenly falls. Seeing something. In the stack of dusty and cobwebbed covered PAINTINGS.

She kneels down. Reaches BEHIND THE STACK -- grasping something. Her breath catches as she pulls out:

ARIADNE OLIVER
Baba the Rabbit.

She shows Poirot. *The stuffed rabbit. Found here. How?*

INT. OUTSIDE ALICIA'S ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Rowena Drake clutches Baba to her chest. She looks to where it was found. Cluttered with art in stacks.

ROWENA DRAKE
Baba the Rabbit? Are you sure? Under that mess of paintings?...

POIROT
Is this where you last saw Ms. Reynolds?

ROWENA DRAKE
Yes. I begged her to come back tomorrow night, every night. She refused at first. She was too afraid.

ARIADNE OLIVER
An enemy?

ROWENA DRAKE
The spirits. She said she felt their vendetta rising like a migraine. So I offered her triple. Then I went to Mrs. Seminoff to decide what to sell to pay her. We were in the Music Room.

ARIADNE OLIVER
When was that?

ROWENA DRAKE
Midnight. Just before.

POIROT
And then you came running.
(she nods)
If I may ask, what is directly above this balcony?

EXT. LOGGIA / ROOFTOP GARDEN. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot and Ariadne take in the now empty garden. A VIEW of Venice aglow under STORM. The RAIN beats a leaky awning over BARE FLOWER BEDS and A LINDENWOOD BEEHIVE.

ROWENA DRAKE

The garden was our secret hideaway. My daughter's favorite place. I let it all die.

She kicks over long forgotten rusty gardening tools. She steps to the BEEHIVE.

ROWENA DRAKE

Our bees, we made honey. Alicia used to tease me, "All this effort for a teaspoon of wildflower honey we can buy for six lira." I held hope they'd survived.

(a hand to it, silent)

Poor things.

POIROT

How did you come to invite Ms. Reynolds to your home?

Rowena shivers.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Couldn't we get out of the rain for this?

POIROT

Oh, *mais non*, let us enjoy the secret garden.

ROWENA DRAKE

I read about her in a magazine, I didn't think much of it. Then out of the blue one day she wrote me.

POIROT

A letter from a stranger. But she would know you from the opera, no?

ROWENA DRAKE

It was the name she used. She said she heard a message 'For Aspasia.' That was Alicia's pet name for me.

POIROT

Aspasia, the great love of the King of Pontus. From "*Mitridate*."

ROWENA DRAKE

Mozart's first opera, my first starring role. Alicia was born two months before. I found my voice because of her. Ever since... I can't sing without knowing she's waiting in my dressing room. I still can't.

POIROT

You'll never perform again?

Rowena shakes her head. Spark doused by grief.

ROWENA DRAKE

There is no music without her. I turned down marriage proposals without even a thought, why would I need anyone else? She said yes to her first.

ARIADNE OLIVER

To the charming chef. Maxime Gerard.

ROWENA DRAKE

He's a pompous ass out to marry the biggest purse he can charm. When they got engaged I tore out every flower in the garden and got on a boat to Istanbul. He must've found I wasn't as rich as he thought. The best day of my life was when he said he met someone else and called the whole thing off. Then the worst days started.

POIROT

Her illness.

ROWENA DRAKE

Her mind was on fire. She was like a little girl again.

ON ROWENA. Overcome. Broken by grief.

INT. ALICIA'S ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

THE BALCONY DOORS RATTLE. Battered by wind.

Water streams in from a CRACK in the corner.

CUT TO:

CLOSE: A FORK STABS DOWN --

INT. KITCHEN / PANTRY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

-- Into CAKE. Seminoff with a heaped plate. Nervous eating.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Oh, I'm a terrible housekeeper. I'm all she could get. A superstitious city.

POIROT

But you are superstitious too. This palazzo you believe is haunted, yes?

A pause. Fork down.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Ms. Rowena may own it. But the spirits possess it.

POIROT

And where were you, Madame Seminoff, when these murderous ghosts turned Joyce Reynolds into one of their own?

Olga pushes aside her plate, hackles raised.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Make light, go on. Why do you ask me all these questions? I did nothing wrong.

ARIADNE OLIVER

It's what he does -- or used to do. Back at it for the moment. It's going well.

OLGA SEMINOFF

What is it that you do?

POIROT

What is it I do? When a crime has been committed I can, by application of order and method, and the slow extinguishing of my own soul, find without fail or doubt... *whodunit*.

Seminoff suddenly delighted.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Like in your books! Your silly detective from Finland, he's making lists! Do you base yourself on her writing?

Ariadne's look is as smug as Poirot's is melting.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Could you tell us where were you at midnight? For the lists.

OLGA SEMINOFF

In the Music Room with Ms. Rowena.

POIROT

She joined you there before midnight, you are sure of this?

OLGA SEMINOFF

I was watching the clock and was grateful that she did.

She looks around her. Shivers.

POIROT

But you did not approve of the fortune teller. I believe you called her "Satanic." Your mind goes perhaps to Exodus 22:18.

OLGA SEMINOFF

"Maleficos non patieris vivere."

POIROT

"Do not suffer a sorceress to live."

OLGA SEMINOFF

The Bible warns against it with reason.

POIROT

A witch on her Sabbath? To be burned or drowned -- or thrown off a high balcony?

OLGA SEMINOFF

No. I'm no vigilante.

POIROT

Your Scripture is keen. No less than a strict Vulgate Latin. Not the product of a parochial school, but perhaps... a convent.

Surprised at his insight. Pride in her past.

OLGA SEMINOFF

I felt my call to be a nun before I could read. Wore the habit nine years at *Ospedale della Pietà*. Then I met Mr. Seminoff. He came to fix the roof. God sets challenges.

POIROT

You fell in love and forgot God.

OLGA SEMINOFF

It's not so simple. Maybe it was.

POIROT

A final question. For the lists of course --

A SOUND interrupts his thought: *A WHISPER. Perhaps A SONG.*
Poirot turns --

But sees NOTHING. He shakes off the confusion. Resumes --

POIROT

Pardon, Madame... You who fear the dark arts so. Why would you attend a seance? An abominated act. Here, at night, when you are loathe to remain.

ON SEMINOFF. As if caught. As if on the verge of admission.

OLGA SEMINOFF

There is only one to whom I must answer.
And that is not you.

ON POIROT. About to press. Then HEARING A NEW SOUND...
WATER DRIPPING. He turns -- TIME SLOWS AS HE SEES IT:

*POIROT STANDS BEFORE A WIDE WALL -- CASCADING WITH WATER --
RIVULETS COMING DOWN FROM THE CEILING --*

IN THE CLEAR SHAPE OF THE LETTER "M."

ARIADNE OLIVER (O.S.)

(concerned)

Poirot?

TIME RESUMES: BACK ON POIROT. LOOKING AT A NORMAL WALL.

ON POIROT. He touches the wall. Dry.

POIROT

Mrs. Olga Seminoff. As a nun, what was your Saint's name?

A break in her voice.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Maria.

CLOSE ON: THE TYPEWRITTEN PAGE. THE LETTER "M."

INT. BATHROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot at the sink. A stolen moment. Breath hard to find.

He holds the page. It shakes in his hand.

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Portfoglio and Maxime at their post by the locked gate.
Portfoglio alert. Maxime anxious.

Maxime steals a look at the LOCK. As if considering a run.
Portfoglio catches his eye.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

You won't get far on a broken leg.

Maxime leans against the wall. Not going anywhere.

INT. ANTIQUARIUM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

The DRAPED CARYATIDS supporting the arch stare out. Water
DRIP-DRIPS onto them.

ON REYNOLDS' BODY. LAID ON THE TABLE. COVERED IN A SHEET,
BLOOD SOAKED AT THE ABDOMEN.

Doctor Ferrier beside her, finishes his examination.
Nervously offers his assessment --

DOCTOR FERRIER

Jagged weapon, not too sharp. Nails
maybe. No other marks on her. Other
than the obvious.

He accidentally knocks his bag to the floor. He startles.
Quickly ashamed of his hair trigger. He picks it up.

POIROT

Nothing else unusual about her condition?

DOCTOR FERRIER

Impaled on Neoclassical art might be
enough. There's no such thing as psychic
phenomena if that's what you're after.

POIROT

What of the wrist? You ignore an injury
as well as the precise time of death.

Ferrier looks again. Only now sees the wrist BENT horribly.

*INSERT CUT: THE SHOCK MOMENT OF IMPACT -- REYNOLDS' ARM
SMASHES BACK AGAINST MARBLE! THE WRISTWATCH BREAKS! --*

CLOSE ON REYNOLDS' BENT WRIST. Her WATCH. The glass BROKEN.
Ariadne notes the time on the watch frozen at 12:04.

DOCTOR FERRIER

Missed that.

Poirot eyes Ferrier. Ferrier's tics flare under scrutiny.

DOCTOR FERRIER

You're staring at me. Stop looking --
(heat building)
You think I'm a loony? I'm not --

Ferrier GRIPS a chair -- brings it BASHING DOWN, when --

LEOPOLD (O.S.)

Dad. You all right?

LEOPOLD is at the door. Ferrier pulls himself together at the sight of his son. The desired effect. Nods.

LEOPOLD

Just up here if you need me.

Leopold slips out quietly. Ferrier looks off, ashamed.

DOCTOR FERRIER

Really wish you hadn't asked me.

ON POIROT. Softening. Understanding.

POIROT

Battle scars are not always of the body.
You served.

ON FERRIER. Eye contact difficult. Memories individually clear, their connections cloudy.

DOCTOR FERRIER

RAMC. Half a kilometer behind the latest
Wermacht slaughter, patch up boys ripped
apart by MG42s, send them back for more.
Don't have to fire a rifle to feel like a
murderer every day. Even before we found
the gates.

The last word a trigger.

DOCTOR FERRIER

15 April '45. Was all supposed to be
over. We crossed the Rhine, east in the
push for Berlin. Found the gates. At
the camp at Bergen-Belsen.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Oh, God.

DOCTOR FERRIER

"Liberating." Nursing skeletons back to life. We killed two the first day with milk. We didn't know. Then typhus. All we had was aspirin and opium. Ferrier was Fersztenfeld when my grandfather emigrated from Lodz.

(then)

We burned down the huts. I wrote Leo a letter and shot myself through the chest.

(then)

I was told to stop practicing when I got home.

Poirot nods without judgement.

POIROT

Except for one patient. Last year. Alicia Drake.

DOCTOR FERRIER

A favor to Rowena. No other doctor would see her, not here. I'd been her family doctor so long. Should have said no.

POIROT

You were at a disadvantage there... You are in love with Rowena Drake.

Ferrier hesitates... But submits. Long resigned.

DOCTOR FERRIER

Lucky to be in her life at all.

POIROT

I know this has been --

Poirot pauses. Tripping on the word. On his thoughts. Ariadne's concern cut short as he reclaims focus.

POIROT

I know this has been difficult, but in your opinion... could Alicia Drake have been murdered?

ON FERRIER. No easy answer. Not when he is honest.

DOCTOR FERRIER

Alicia told me what she saw. Said the children were taunting her. I didn't listen. Wrote it off as a broken heart -- when she was going mad. She needed help, I gave her sedatives. Like milk to the starving.

(MORE)

DOCTOR FERRIER (cont'd)
 There's no such thing as psychic
 phenomena, there is psychic pain. A
 loony like me should have known.

ON POIROT. Affected by Ferrier's feelings of guilt. About
 to ask another question.

Until he hears again the SINGSONG WHISPER VOICE.

POIROT
Merci, Doctor.

Poirot steps off, the interview abruptly concluded, and --

INT. BATHROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot watches his own hand shake.

He turns on both taps. Nothing comes. A pause. Then --

A VOICE SEEM TO GROAN FROM THE TAPS. PAINED SUSURRATIONS.

Poirot tilts his head to look into the mouth of the spouts.

CLOSE: *A DROPLET OF WATER VIBRATES.*

He looks up. *A DROWNED YOUNG WOMAN'S FACE IN THE MIRROR* --

Poirot turns behind him. *Nothing.*

Only WATER RUSHING FROM THE TAPS for who knows how long.
 Steaming hot in the basin.

He shuts them off and --

INT. OUTSIDE BATHROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot steps out -- surprised to find --

LEOPOLD. Staring over his large book at Poirot. As if
 waiting for him.

LEOPOLD
 I suppose I'm lower on your list. Of who
 to interview. I'll wait, Sir.

Back to his reading. Poirot notes his book. The Poe volume.

POIROT
 The terrifying Edgar Allan Poe? For a
 boy your age it is not better perhaps
 Charles Dickens?

LEOPOLD
 He's a bit silly, don't you think?

A DOOR OPENS SUDDENLY DOWN THE HALL. Poirot starts.

Only Seminoff with a full pan of water.

LEOPOLD

My father's jumpy like you. They call it "war neurosis." "Battle Fatigue." I think that's unfair. He's not tired, he's broken. He was with me at midnight, if you were wondering.

POIROT

I was I admit.

LEOPOLD

In the kitchen, waiting for Ms. Rowena. He wanted to say goodnight. Her assistants came in just after so they're still on your list.

POIROT

Everyone is on my list.

LEOPOLD

You left on the taps.

Poirot looks. Behind him in the bathroom the sink is RUNNING. He steps back in, turns the taps off extra hard.

POIROT

I'm afraid I do not know myself tonight.

Leopold takes in Poirot, a doctor's sympathy for the symptom.

LEOPOLD

You're feeling things. Voices. It's All Hallow's Eve. The dead are as close as they can be. You were dead too, Sir. Even if only for a moment. They see you as one of their own. One with something to say would be wise to come to you.

POIROT

You talk like Ms. Reynolds.

LEOPOLD

She only pretended to know. No wonder they got cross with her.

POIROT

You have much sympathy for the dead.

LEOPOLD

Some of them are my friends.

Poirot nods his thanks, moves off when -- A HAND grasps his shoulder --

ARIADNE OLIVER
C'mon, Hercules.

Only ARIADNE. Poirot catches his breath. Follows her. Leopold watches him go.

LEOPOLD
Jumpy.

INT. OUTSIDE MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO.

MOVING WITH ARIADNE toward the Music Room. WIND and RAIN rage against the windows. Poirot off balance, breath quick.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Nicholas and Desdemona are ready for you.
(takes him in)
We can wait for the police.

ON POIROT. He straightens.

POIROT
I am Hercule Poirot, no?

ARIADNE OLIVER
No -- yes?

POIROT
Yes. If the police can succeed where I cannot I will be next off the balcony into the canal.

Both take relief in his bluster. Control again, on the move.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Back to his old self. What do you think so far? My money's on the housekeeper. Good taste in books, but brimstone fire burns hot and Rowena Drake needed the victim alive. Though that little boy... all the charm of chewing tin foil.

POIROT
Perhaps, perhaps. Every theory aspires to fact before the information is gathered. Order and method --

ARIADNE OLIVER
-- And lists.

POIROT

And lists. We continue. To the ones who knew her best. Her assistants.

ARIADNE OLIVER

You really think the help had motive?

POIROT

The help always have motive. First, having to endure to be called "the help."

A CREAK. A NEAR DOOR OPENS SLOWLY as if on its own. This time Poirot stiffens against startle as... Portfoglio comes through. Apologetic.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Him again.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

Dottore. Those two criminals, they're not exactly to be trusted.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Criminals? Those children. You might've mentioned that.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

I'm mentioning it now.

Poirot and Ariadne consider this, and --

EXT. DOCK. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI. NIGHT.

GONDOLAS battered by the storm current.

WAVES hammer the palazzo supports.

EXT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

RAIN in sheets from the crenellated roof above.

ON NICHOLAS. Framed by night and storm. Alone.

NICHOLAS

Couldn't I do this with my sister.

Poirot across from him, flanked by Ariadne.

POIROT

She waits for you comfortably.

INT. LIBRARY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

ON DESDEMONA. Alone too.

DESDEMONA
Where's my brother?

Poirot across from her, flanked by Ariadne. The siblings split up. Poirot peruses two PASSPORTS.

POIROT
He waits for you comfortably. "Desdemona and Nicholas Holland."

INTERCUT BETWEEN NICHOLAS AND DESDEMONA'S DUELING INTERVIEWS:

WITH NICHOLAS. Honest to a fault.

NICHOLAS
Our passports are forgeries.

POIROT
Not very good ones.

NICHOLAS
Horvát Nipkin and Dorenia before. Born in Hungary. Our village burned out of existence. Of all our family... somehow we were still alive. We took care of each other.

DESDEMONA
At midnight? We snuck a drink in the kitchen. The creepy kid was there.

POIROT
(flips a page of his notepad)
He has you coming in just after the hour.

DESDEMONA
He is mistaken.

POIROT
And how long were you in Ms. Reynolds' employ?

NICHOLAS
Just over a year. Best year we ever had.

DESDEMONA
We haven't been hungry since we started fronting for her.

NICHOLAS
I don't know what we'll do without her.

DESDEMONA
We managed before her.

POIROT
Yes, you stole --

NICHOLAS
We were thieves not murderers --

DESDEMONA
We did what we had to survive the war --
and after.

BACK WITH NICHOLAS. Smitten. A believer.

NICHOLAS
She just knew things. If she says Alicia
Drake was murdered...

DESDEMONA
Ms. Reynolds? Pure phony.

NICHOLAS
She was... magic.

DESDEMONA
Fake. Fake. Fake.

POIROT
So all the seances, the spirit meetings?

DESDEMONA
All a show.

Mmmn-hmmn. Ariadne hefts the REMOTE DEVICE.

POIROT
Is this magic too? For the talking
typewriter?

NICHOLAS
I mean, we'd set some tricks -- only to
drive home the reality of her visions.

DESDEMONA
She ordered me around like a Duchess and
flirted with Nicholas to keep him in
line. We put up with worse.

POIROT
Of course. She was, after all, "Our
ticket," no? "We'll get there without
her." Where were you running off to?

Desdemona folds her arms, closed off... Then relents. As if
describing Eden --

DESDEMONA

We're going to Missouri.

NICHOLAS

Missouri.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Missouri?

ON DESDEMONA. Softening with memory.

DESDEMONA

We were hiding in the Murrhardt Forest living on weeds and mice. The American trucks came through Heilbronn. I thought we were dead when they caught us. They gave us blankets. Tins of food...

NICHOLAS

They taught us the Lindy Hop...

DESDEMONA

We'd never seen anything like them before. Mix of men, colors, voices. One of them tacked up a sheet. They had a film projector but only half of a movie.

NICHOLAS

We watched half of "Meet Me in St. Louis" on an army sheet every night for a month...

Heaven.

DESDEMONA

We watched it over and over... I still don't know how it ends.

ARIADNE OLIVER

(moved)

It ends happily.

NICHOLAS

"St. Louis, Missouri." Just saying those words could get my sister to fall sleep.

DESDEMONA

The color. The beautiful people. No one sick or starving or dying. "Fifty-one thirty-five Kensington Avenue." That's where we decided to live.

NICHOLAS

It's her dream. So it's mine too.

DESDEMONA

We only had to endure the Duchess till we had enough to buy our way in. Start over.

(a shrug, rare vulnerability)
Stupid to have a dream.

A pause. Poirot changing tacks sharply. Knowingly:

POIROT

Until, impatient with your dream you grew brazen -- and skimmed from her proceeds.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Clang, clang, clang went the trolley.

Desdemona reacts. Exposed. CUTS COME FASTER NOW:

NICHOLAS

What, no? We didn't.

POIROT

Your brother already admits you did.

DESDEMONA

Idiot.

POIROT

Your sister already admits you did.

NICHOLAS

Not from Ms. Reynolds -- we wouldn't --

ON DESDEMONA. Heat rising. A wild thing in a trap.

POIROT

Perhaps she discovered your theft and made threats. Perhaps you had enough experience with the police's cruel treatment of stateless Romani urchins and, wishing to avoid deportation or worse, killed her.

(trying to get a rise)

You. The trusted... help...

ON DESDEMONA. Choosing her words carefully. Then -- not --

She explodes out of her chair!

RUNNING OUT THE DOOR --

INT. HALL. PALLAZO.

-- TO FIND PORTFOGLIO BARS THE WAY --

DESDEMONA HEEDLESS -- SHE PUNCHES HIM --

RUNS ON -- CALLING, DESPERATE --

DESDEMONA

Nicholas! Where are you? Nicholas! --

Searching -- not seeing -- A CHAIR PUSHED UNDERFOOT --

SHE TRIPS -- LANDS HARD! CAUGHT. REVEAL:

SEMINOFF. Standing over a crumpled Desdemona. *Hmmph*.

OLGA SEMINOFF

If I am trapped here, so are you.

EXT. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI. NIGHT.

The doors beaten by WIND and WATER.

EXT. DOCK. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI. NIGHT.

ON THE CANAL SURFACE. WAVES CRASH OVER FRAME.

The LOOSE PYLON groans, splintering -- BREAKS FREE, as --

INT. MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

DESDEMONA AND NICHOLAS ARE TIED TO CHAIRS. Portfoglio finishes tying Desdemona's feet.

NICHOLAS

You stole from her? You promised.

DESDEMONA

How else would we make it to America --
(Portfoglio YANKS the rope tight)

Ow! That doesn't mean I murdered her! --

Desdemona fumes, struggles against her binds, as --

ARIADNE AND POIROT ASIDE

ARIADNE OLIVER

Damn well ran like she did. Clear
motive, both unaccounted for at her time
of death... I'm changing my guess.

POIROT

It is certainly possible, yes, yes.

ARIADNE OLIVER

You're doing that thing where you pretend
to know more than everyone else in the
world.

POIROT

I as yet know nothing. The truth does
not come without a tax of effort.

(off her look)

You woke the bear from his sleep, you
cannot cry when he tangos.

ARIADNE OLIVER

That's not an expression in any language.

POIROT

We continue --

Moving for the door -- Poirot suddenly FREEZES -- hearing --
THE WHISPERING SUSURRATION. WHICH RISES INTO A CHILD'S SONG.
ON POIROT. No doubt this time.

POIROT

Do you hear this? All around us.

Ariadne reluctantly shakes her head.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

I heard nothing.

DESDEMONA

Your investigator has poached his egg.

ARIADNE OLIVER

A bang to the head might be your limit
for tonight.

Poirot's eyes search. Certain.

POIROT

Someone else is in this house.

They look around them. NOTHING. Only --

Leopold now at the door. With Ferrier.

LEOPOLD

Did you hear it?

A pause. Leopold can see from Poirot's face he alone has.

LEOPOLD

Me and you then. Listening. Wait.

They wait. Nothing.

Wait.

THE PHONE RINGS

Portfoglio picks it up. Taps the receiver. Cold.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

Still dead.

Poirot takes the phone from him. Listens.

A GENTLE STATIC CRACKLE. THE QUIET SUSURRATION. A WHISPER.

Then gone. He hangs up. When --

A MOVEMENT OF SHADOW IN THE HALL. A CHILD'S OUTLINE ON THE WALL. RUNNING --

INT. OUTSIDE MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO.

Poirot rushes out. Follows the curious SHADOW.

Lost. Maybe never there at all. At which --

A FLURRY OF MOVEMENT AND SHADOW -- FRANTIC FOOTSTEPS --

MOVING INTO THE PIANO NOBILE. Poirot chases -- up --

INT. CLOISTERS CORRIDOR. PALAZZO.

Following the wild flutter -- up to --

INT. LANDING. PALAZZO.

SOMETHING FLIES IN FRONT OF HIM. REVEAL:

IT IS ONLY HARRY. Landing on a shelf. Relief.

POIROT

It's all right. You can come out.

Poirot steps to Harry when, as if in answer --

A YOUNG GIRL

Emerges from hiding behind the door. 10, frightened, frightening. She stares.

POIROT

You're not in any trouble. There is nothing to fear. You came with the children?

A pause. She nods.

POIROT

You have been hiding here this whole time?

She nods.

POIROT

Did you hear the woman fall?

She nods.

POIROT

Did you see?

She nods.

POIROT

Did someone push her?

A pause. The Girl about to speak, when --

ARIADNE OLIVER

Who are you talking to?

-- Ariadne enters. Poirot turns to her -- back --

THE GIRL IS GONE

POIROT

I saw -- a child. You must have heard.

Ariadne concerned. Poirot staring. Uncertain.

ARIADNE OLIVER

I say this as someone who cares and who knows you. You're not yourself tonight.

Suddenly -- BOOM! The palazzo SHUDDERS ALL AROUND THEM.

This time Ariadne reacts.

ARIADNE OLIVER

That I heard.

They run off -- downstairs --

INT. MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

DESDEMONA AND NICHOLAS still tied. Frightened.

BOOM! BOOM!

Portfoglio's fear spikes. He backs from the room, leaving them tied and helpless --

NICHOLAS

Wait, untie us! You can't leave us here!

BOOM! BOOM!

INT. STAIRCASE. PALAZZO. MOMENTS LATER.

ON POIROT. Hearing it -- coming down to --

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO.

All but Nicholas and Desdemona gathered, when --

BOOM! BOOM! ALL AROUND THEM. ALL react. ROWENA'S breath catches with alarm. Ferrier panics.

DOCTOR FERRIER

You heard that. You all...

MAXIME GERARD

Must be the pipes.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Pipes? Sounds like the blitz.

ROWENA DRAKE

All my years here I never heard this.

OLGA SEMINOFF

I have. When they're angry.

BOOM!

LEOPOLD

We've upset them.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

How do we un-upset them?

LEOPOLD

Listen.

Sudden quiet.

ON POIROT. HEARING A GROANING ATONAL VOICE ENMESHED IN THE EXPLOSIVE SOUND. He tracks the sound...

DOWN. To the floor.

POIROT
It comes from the basement.

A pause.

ROWENA DRAKE
There is no basement in this house.

Poirot is undeterred. He turns -- eyes wild -- finding --

INT. CLOISTERS CORRIDOR. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Where the GIRL cried earlier. Crusted walls. The portrait. The (false) ARCH mural on the wall.

Poirot moves for the ARCH. Stands before it.

Ariadne watches with worry. Shakes her head.

Poirot feels along the wall. His fingers FINDING AN EDGE.

He digs into it. Pulls a PENKNIFE from his pocket and CUTS along the edge. Old plaster cracks and pulls away.

POIROT KICKS THE WALL -- IT FLIES INWARD -- ON A HINGE --

A DOOR. Studded with rusty nails. Hidden for centuries.

AND LEADING TO... A BASEMENT.

Poirot looks to Rowena. Stunned.

INT. CLOISTERS CORRIDOR. PALAZZO. MOMENTS LATER.

Poirot holds up a candle. SEES ON THE BACK OF THE DOOR:

NAIL MARKS. DEEP, DESPERATE SCRATCHES IN THE WOOD. Whatever is down below was someone's coffin.

A SINGLE WORD LEGIBLY SCRATCHED: "DOTTORE"

ARIADNE OLIVER
"Dottore." Doctor. The Children's Vendetta.

Poirot step down into the webbed darkness. A moment.

Portfoglio takes Rowena's candle to follow.

ARIADNE OLIVER

You want to go down into that?

Not at all. But he does anyway. Following into --

INT. BASEMENT. PALAZZO.

Primeval wood CREAKS underfoot.

POIROT AND PORTFOGLIO MOVE CAUTIOUSLY DOWN THE STAIRS...
THROUGH AN ANCIENT GATE... Into the dank *magazzini*-style
basement: A low-ceilinged store room directly above the
water table. Ancient support PILINGS protrude to support
JOISTS at the ceiling. A foot of water FLOODS the floor.

BOOM! EVEN LOUDER NOW -- PORTFOGLIO TURNS --

INT. CLOISTERS CORRIDOR. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

All react. Ferrier backs away, eyes darting.

BOOM! BOOM! LIKE MORTARS GOING OFF. CLOSING IN.

ON SEMINOFF. Praying to herself. BOOM! BOOM!

ON FERRIER. Hands over his ears. Panic set in.

DOCTOR FERRIER

*And the ships will sail again all over
the world / Then we'll have time for
things like wedding rings--*

LEOPOLD

Dad...

INT. BASEMENT. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

BOOM! Portfoglio and Poirot step through the floodwater.

Candlelight cuts through centuries old dust and webbing.
Catches SHAPES against the walls --

DOLLS. Toys. Small chairs. A child's wheelchair.

RATS SQUEAL. Poirot raises his candle to see --

SMALL SKELETONS. Centuries old and forgotten.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

They really did lock those children in
here to die.

Poirot drawn forward... To the end of the dark space...

A SMALL HUMAN FORM THERE. A CHILD'S SILHOUETTE ON THE WALL.
LIKE THE OMEN SHADOW SEEN BEFORE.

Poirot steps toward it, as --

INT. CLOISTERS CORRIDOR. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

BOOM! CLOSER NOW. ROWENA SCREAMS. GRABS FERRIER'S ARM --

ON FERRIER. Behind his eyes horrors experienced again. A
full blown PTSD panic attack. Chest too tight to breathe.

LEOPOLD

Leave him. He's having a nervestorm.

MAXIME GERARD

Dammit, Ferrier, not now. Pull it
together.

He lays a hand on Ferrier. Ferrier reacts without thought --

HE PUNCHES MAXIME BRUTALLY --

GRABS HIS THROAT -- BASHES HIM AGAINST THE WALL, AS --

INT. BASEMENT. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

BOOM! Portfoglio follows the explosive sound --

He peers through the SMALL GRATED WINDOW:

EXT. CANAL. PALAZZO.

A VIEW OF THE CANAL OUTSIDE: THE LOOSE PYLON IS CAUGHT
AGAINST THE WALL. ANOTHER HUGE STORM WAVE CRASHES ONTO THE
PYLON -- IT BASHES THE WALL POWERFULLY --

INT. BASEMENT. PALAZZO.

RATTLING A SUPPORT PILING INSIDE, REVERBERATING UP THROUGH
THE CEILING JOISTS -- TO LURCH THE ENTIRE PALAZZO STRUCTURE!
CAUSING THE EXPLOSIVE SOUND! BOOM!

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

Storm waves. Not ghosts.

WITH POIROT. Closing in on THE CHILD'S SILHOUETTE. Its FORM
coming into focus, as --

INT. CLOISTERS CORRIDOR. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

BOOM! MAXIME CHOKING -- FERRIER RAVING -- SQUEEZING --
UNRESPONSIVE TO LEOPOLD'S ATTEMPTS TO PULL HIM OFF --

BOOM! MAXIME KICKS FERRIER OFF -- KNOCKING LEOPOLD BACK --

BOOM! FERRIER UNLEASHES -- THROWS MAXIME THROUGH A WINDOW --
HOLDS HIS FACE OVER A SHARP SHARD -- PRESSES DOWN, AS --

INT. BASEMENT. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

Poirot so close to THE CHILD. He reaches out a hand --

BOOM! He grasps its shoulder --

AN ANGRY SHADOW ERUPTS! EXPLODING OUT!

THE CHILD FALLS OVER -- REVEAL:

A SEETHING BEEHIVE

FORMED IN THE CHEST OF A LONG-DEAD SMALL SKELETON.

GLISTENING, DRIPPING COMB. RIGID GEOMETRY IN JAGGED BONE.
ALIVE WITH FURIOUS ACTIVITY.

THE DISTURBED SWARM RAGES AND CHURNS. SWIRLING AROUND THEM.

EXT. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI. THAT MOMENT.

The pylon finally BREAKS apart -- floats away in pieces, as --

INT. CLOISTERS CORRIDOR. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

THE BOOMING HALTS. Sudden quiet.

Except for Maxime, STRUGGLING. Ferrier pressing his face
closer and closer to the glass.

All frightened of Ferrier. All keeping back.

All but Leopold. Soothing.

LEOPOLD

Dad... Dad, it's me, I'm right here.

ON FERRIER. Miles and years away.

LEOPOLD

You're here with me... you see me?

Leopold's words begin to penetrate. Ferrier's grip loosens.

Maxime pulls away.

Ferrier realizing what he has done. Leopold holds him.

LEOPOLD
It's just a thing.

Rowena nods. Watching them, and --

INT. MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

CLOSE ON: WRISTS RUBBED PAINFULLY RAW. Untied.

Portfoglio frees Desdemona and Nicholas from their binds.

Desdemona stands sharply -- SLAPS PORTFOGLIO. Then silently clears the room -- giving way for --

FERRIER. Laying on the sofa. Poirot watches Leopold gently administer to his father, giving him A PILL and water.

LEOPOLD
Just needs his rest, don't you, Dad.

DOCTOR FERRIER
I should be taking care of you.

LEOPOLD
You do.

Already drowsy. Leopold leaves him. Poirot to follow --

Only Ferrier GRIPS Poirot's hand. Hard. Intense.

DOCTOR FERRIER
I should have listened. I saw. Demons.
Evil. Everywhere in this house. We're
their hands. The broken ones.

ON FERRIER. Fading. But desperate for Poirot to see.

DOCTOR FERRIER
You and me. We're the same. Wherever we
go... Death follows.

Squeezing Poirot's hand. Poirot trying to convince himself --

POIROT
There is a rational answer to all of
this. There must be. Bees in the
basement. An ordinary killer upstairs.

DOCTOR FERRIER
No. Listen.
(eyes closing)
Believe.

His hand slips. And he's out. Poirot leaves quietly --

INT. OUTSIDE MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO.

-- Joins Rowena and Leopold outside the Music Room door.

ROWENA DRAKE
(SHUTS the doors)
He can rest in my music room. Quietest
room in the house, nearly soundproof. We
should lock it for his safety...

Rowena LOCKS the Music Room door from the outside with A KEY.

ROWENA DRAKE
You keep the key. For ours.

Rowena hands the key to Poirot. He nods, pockets it.

She eyes MAXIME. Flaring with hate.

Poirot watches Rowena as she collects herself. Then turn to
Leopold -- finding cheer and a bright smile for his benefit.

ROWENA DRAKE
Come, Leopold. Time for more cake I
think.

LEOPOLD
I've had too much.

ROWENA DRAKE
Well I haven't.

She takes Leopold's hand and walks off with him, and --

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

The grandfather clock STRIKES FOUR. Eve and the Serpent
dance, but poor Adam shudders awkwardly in place, stuck, as --

INT. KITCHEN / PANTRY / DINING ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

A PANTRY DOOR SWINGS, OPEN / SHUT / OPEN, giving SWIPED views
of ROWENA AND LEOPOLD. Inside eating cake at A SERVANTS'
TABLE (by a PHONE). Rowena's gaze lasers up on the last
swing, hate in her eyes. The door closes.

ON MAXIME. Feeling it. She was looking at him.

MAXIME GERARD
Of course she'd say that. From her point
of view it's true, I did kill Alicia.

Maxime resumes cleaning surfaces, organizing drawers, piles
loose APPLES into a neat stack in the basket.

POIROT

You are nervous. A chef in the kitchen should be at home.

MAXIME GERARD

An empty kitchen, I swear I could think straight if I had some eggs to separate. Rowena believes what she wants: A medium saw Alicia murdered, color me the gunman.

POIROT

You do not believe Ms. Reynolds... Her typewriter with a message from the departed... of your initial. "M" for Maxime.

MAXIME GERARD

(cleaning roughly, scoffs)

A haunted house? Humans are so desperate to shape chaos into tidy stories, double that in distress. It isn't a wash of a trillion stars it's ol' Cassiopeia, that blur of light on the family photo must be Grandad's ghost. Alicia was mentally ill. It killed her. It didn't have to. A proper doctor would've treated her properly, not that twitch salad -- shit --

-- A wince of PAIN. HIS THUMB CUT on a mislaid KNIFE in his haste. Bloody thumb to mouth.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Honey's good on a cut in a pinch, ancient antiseptic.

Ariadne hands him the jar of HONEY from the tea set. A daub of honey on his cut. He SNIFFS it.

MAXIME GERARD

Not wildflower. Can't place it.

He pulls a crisp handkerchief from a pocket. A FOLDED PAPER falls out with it.

CLOSE ON: HALF OF A RIPPED VIVEX PROCESS COLOR PHOTOGRAPH: ALICIA AND MAXIME ON THE ROOF (AS IN THE EARLIER MEMORY). MAXIME TORN AWAY SO IT IS ONLY HER FACE HE CARRIES. ALICIA IN LOVE, HAPPY. THE GARDEN ALSO TORN OFF, UNSEEN.

POIROT

Such sunshine happiness. Torn in two.

Maxime can't help but look. And be moved by what he sees.

MAXIME GERARD

Alicia tore up the photo in her room
after I ended it. Last time we spoke.

POIROT

You did call off your engagement.

MAXIME GERARD

(reigns in his feelings)

You heard. She wasn't rich enough for
me.

Trying for glib. Poirot not convinced.

POIROT

Her picture carried in your pocket, you
came tonight when summoned. I believe
you loved Alicia Drake. More than money.
Yet you walked away...

ON MAXIME. A guilty pause. Pride melting to confession.

MAXIME GERARD

Some women, you marry them you marry
their mother too.

POIROT

The mother did not approve of you?

MAXIME GERARD

She wouldn't approve of the Pope. Rowena
didn't know how to exist alone. Tore up
their garden for spite and took off
abroad. Alicia was all twisted with
guilt, wanted to chase her around the
world. And I finally saw... I'd never
be the most important thing in her life.

ARIADNE OLIVER

So you broke it off and broke her heart.
Because a woman made you feel small.

He feels even smaller now.

MAXIME GERARD

I came back to Venice to beg her to take
me back... When I heard she was sick...
Rowena wouldn't let me see her. Wouldn't
show her my letters.

(then)

Next time I saw Alicia was in a coffin.

(then)

Maybe it was my fault.

POIROT

If you will permit please, your
invitation?

Maxime sets down a LETTER. Poirot and Ariadne inspect it.

ARIADNE OLIVER

A simple note.

POIROT

Indeed. No distinguishing language, the
stationery plain, cleanly typewritten.
The professionally anonymous letter--

Poirot breaks off, his thoughts pushed off their path...
First by the WHISPER. THEN BY SOMETHING ON THE LETTER.

POIROT'S POV: *Heightened*. Hazy haloes. Prismatic
refractions of light. A synesthetic representation of
connection, HIGHLIGHTING CERTAIN LETTERS ON THE PAGE:

Be At Palazzo 10pm

Important news about ALicia Drake

His eyes find the neat stack of APPLES in the basket.

ON POIROT. Faint. He grips the table for balance.

Ariadne catches him, supporting him, and --

ARIADNE OLIVER

That's it, you're done. Let's go --

INT. LIBRARY. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Ariadne brings Poirot in to a window and opens it.

POIROT

His interview... We did not finish.

ARIADNE OLIVER

You were going to expose some lie he
told, probably accuse him of being
secretly Vichy, then he'd threaten to
deck you, effort spared.

Portfoglio follows them in, concerned for Poirot.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

Is he all right?

ARIADNE OLIVER

Guard dog, be useful, get him a chair.

Poirot relents, nods. Shaky and shaken. Grateful to her.

POIROT

Yes... A chair. It is good to have a friend in this. How long have we known each other?

ARIADNE OLIVER

The Canning Road Municipal Baths Murder. I bullied my way into observing you as research for a book. Wrote Poirot thinly veiled. They saw through it and you got famous. Infamous.

Portfoglio brings a chair. *Poirot suddenly stands straight.*

POIROT

Thank you. Not for me. For you.

Entreating Portfoglio to sit. Sweating, but firm. Alert.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

You want to interview me?

ARIADNE OLIVER

Leave him be. You turned on a cold engine, took a few knocks to the head. Sit this one out. Let morning come.

CLOSE ON THE FIREPLACE. WIND HOWLS down from the chimney. The rush of air superheats the fire. A PULSE of heat.

Poirot looks to THE BOBBING FOR APPLES BASIN.

POIROT

Apples. I almost died, right here. This palazzo plays tricks. It puts things in front of me again and again... apples.

A look between Ariadne and Portfoglio. Worried at Poirot gone strange.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

A trick of the mind.

POIROT

Then my mind wishes to tell me something. How did you come to be a policeman?

ARIADNE OLIVER

I do wish you'd let go of this --

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

It's all right. I'll answer. My father was a cop, family business really. I never knew anything else.

POIROT

Yet you retired early. Only last year.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

The family business was no longer for me. Perhaps never was. I had the strength but not the skin. I drank when I couldn't sleep and I could never sleep. You were a policeman once, you understand... Eventually you get a case... and you know it's the last one you can stomach and still know your soul.

POIROT

What case was it for you?

A pause. Portfoglio fears what he already knows is coming.

POIROT

Why did you lie about never having been here before? When clearly you had. You knew precisely where to find the hidden telephone --

INSERT CUT: IN THE MUSIC ROOM -- PORTFOGLIO MOVES STRAIGHT FOR THE GLOBE -- OPENS IT TO FIND THE PHONE INSIDE --

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

The case was already such a spectacle. The family deserved their privacy.

POIROT

But you were the policeman on duty when Alicia Drake was found dead.

INSERT CUT: IN THE CANAL -- PORTFOGLIO HOLDS ALICIA'S BODY --

A pause. A nod. In a distant room the telephone RINGS.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

Yes. I pulled her from the water out front at dawn. Retired the next day.

POIROT

Soon to become my excellent bodyguard. The dragon at my gate. Who not once permitted a soul to pass... Yet only this morning interrupted me to ask if I indeed knew the woman with the apples.

CLOSE ON THE FIREPLACE. COALS in the fire fall with A CRASH.

POIROT

So many months my peace undisturbed, you
resolutely guarding me from curiosity or
company. Grown men cast into the canal.
Ariadne Oliver waltzes through. Why?

INSERT CUT: ARIADNE AND PORTFOGLIO OUTSIDE POIROT'S RECTORY
GATE -- A CONSPIRATORIAL NOD AS HE LETS HER IN --

POIROT

Because you were in league. The three of
you. The Authoress and the bodyguard
working with the medium. In the cahoot.
Feigning disdain, conspiring to bring me
to the seance. To make me a fool.

Ariadne stares at Poirot, heart breaking with concern.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Poirot. I'm worried about you.

POIROT

Details of Alicia Drake's life and death,
provided by the policeman present at her
death. Details of me. Provided not by
divination but by letter, from you. Then
in the seance, with all eyes on the
medium, your hands were free --

INSERT CUT: THE SEANCE, ALL EYES ON REYNOLDS -- ARIADNE
YANKS A CORD UNDER HER CHAIR -- TO OPEN THE BALCONY DOORS --
SHE THEN POKETS BABA -- PULLS BABA OUT TO PLANT IT AND
"FIND" IT UNDER STACKED PAINTINGS --

POIROT

The secret accomplice. To make me
believe the impossible. Mediums and
magic. Ghosts and God. Then to use my
name in your next book. Fame for the
medium --

(to Portfoglio)

A percentage to you --

(to Ariadne)

Your literary standing restored. "The
woman who stumped Hercule Poirot." Not
Joyce Reynolds, but Ariadne Oliver.

ON ARIADNE. Concern turns to stone. Unrepentant. A new
biting mockery etched. Perhaps her true face, met only now
for the first time.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Oh, won't you forgive me.

POIROT
Only God can forgive.

ARIADNE OLIVER
Bit of a pickle then.

POIROT
Let us discover how you did it. Baba?

ARIADNE OLIVER
A good touch.

POIROT
The personal invitation to the fiance?

ARIADNE OLIVER
Guaranteed drama with that one. Three flops, I needed a win. The book's already written. Except the ending. Keeps getting longer.

POIROT
We were friends.

ARIADNE OLIVER
You don't have friends, you have admirers. You only have them because of me. I wrote you up as a genius, your little grey cells the right hand of God's Justice. Why shouldn't I use you to sell books? *Genius*. You're a fool. An ego. A black cloud that lures death. You know it too. That's why you quit.

ON POIROT. Her venom hitting his bloodstream.

POIROT
Is this why you killed Joyce Reynolds?

ARIADNE OLIVER
I did not.

EXT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

Desdemona and Nicholas conspire, voices low --

DESDEMONA
They'll turn us in first chance they get.
I'm not going back to prison.

NICHOLAS

You're not. There's a window on the second floor, we can get by them.

They glance at Seminoff and Maxime -- both distracted, when --

A THROAT SCRAPING SCREAM FROM THE MUSIC ROOM!

EXT. OUTSIDE MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO.

Desdemona and Nicholas are at the Music Room door first. Concerned to hear FERRIER SHOUTING FROM WITHIN.

They try the door -- LOCKED -- as --

INT. LIBRARY. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

Resume. Poirot driving it home to Ariadne.

POIROT

If she were to die, the medium slain by ghost, unholy would become irresistible --

ARIADNE OLIVER

Come on. You're tap dancing now --

POIROT

Your new book an instant legend. Working together --

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

She didn't -- we didn't --

POIROT

To conceal murder!

Ariadne afire when -- DESDEMONA STORMS IN -- interrupting --

DESDEMONA

The key -- come quick! Hurry! --

INT. OUTSIDE MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO. THAT MOMENT.

Nicholas urgently works the locked doors with a PICK. Muffled sounds of DESPERATE STRUGGLE inside --

MAXIME GERARD

Something's in there with him. Open the lock already --

NICHOLAS

I need time!

Maxime SHOULDERS the door. BAM! BAM!

The door holds. A SHARP CRY OF PAIN from within.

Poirot, Ariadne, Portfoglio arrive with Desdemona -- rush for the door. Rowena and Leopold come just behind as --

LEOPOLD

What happened? What's wrong with him?

Poirot fits the key -- THE LOCK SNAPS --

THE DOORS FLY OPEN -- THEY ALL POUR IN TO FIND --

INT. MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO.

DOCTOR FERRIER DEAD. *Slumped by the piano.*

THE SARACEN KNIFE. *Protruding from the center of his back.*

BLOOD POOLING. *DRIPDRIPDRIPPING to the floor.*

Shock on their faces.

Shock on his.

HOLD ON LEOPOLD. Small. Alone.

INT. ANTIQUARIUM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Seminoff shakes out a sheet. It billows and falls and settles in the form of...

A BODY. FERRIER'S BODY. LAID OUT BESIDE MS. REYNOLDS.

Beneath them: A puddle. BLOOD mixed with leaking RAINWATER.

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

LEOPOLD

In Seminoff's arms. Sobs. Not hearing her words of comfort.

LEOPOLD

Why did he have to be alone?

INT. MUSIC ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot scans the door... The walls... Searching...

ROWENA DRAKE

There's no other way in the room -- only the door -- you had the only key.

POIROT

Not possible...

Poirot looks over THE SUSPECTS. Landing last on Ariadne.

ARIADNE OLIVER

No. No, I was right in front of you.

NICHOLAS

He was shouting at someone.

Eyes fall to Maxime.

MAXIME GERARD

I hated him but I didn't want him dead, he had a child for crissake! Anyway I was outside with them trying to get in.

DESDEMONA

It's true. The doctor was alone in here.

Seminoff at the door.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Not alone. Not in this house.

ROWENA DRAKE

A doctor... A nurse and a doctor. The Children's Vendetta.

Portfoglio stares at the blood puddle under the piano. Shivers in new fear.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

There's no other way in. I can't understand... If this room wasn't safe nowhere is safe. None of us are safe. Nothing -- human -- could have done this.

Ariadne holds Leopold's forgotten book. Poe.

ARIADNE OLIVER

"It is only left for us to prove that these apparent 'impossibilities' are, in reality, not such." Come on, leave him. Let the detective detect. He'll come to it soon enough. He already knows.

The group files from the room. Ariadne holds back a moment.

ARIADNE OLIVER

For once in your life admit you're up against something bigger than you.

And she is gone. Only Seminoff remains. Summoning courage.

OLGA SEMINOFF

You asked why I stayed, while they
summoned spirits...

ON SEMINOFF. Burdened by guilt.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Alicia was wasting away as she went mad.
Ms. Rowena stayed at her side day and
night. One day I pleaded with her to
take some rest, I promised to keep watch.
She slept past nightfall. It got to
midnight. I heard voices, footsteps.
Alicia was sleeping so soundly.

She takes down A FRAMED COLOR PHOTOGRAPH from a shelf.

OLGA SEMINOFF

She must have woken after I left. Gone
to the balcony --

Voice broken with memory.

POIROT

You would beg her ghost forgiveness.

OLGA SEMINOFF

(aloud, confessing)

I am sorry... I should have stayed with
you.

Only painful silence. She shows the photo to Poirot.

OLGA SEMINOFF

I loved that girl. She died because I
was stupid and scared.

ON POIROT. Seeing the photo. The air leaves his lungs.

ON THE PHOTO: A VIVEX PROCESS COLOR PHOTOGRAPH OF ALICIA AS
A YOUNG GIRL. PERCHED GAYLY IN THE ROOFTOP GARDEN SURROUNDED
BY A RAINBOW VARIETY OF FLOWERS IN BLOOM.

ON YOUNG ALICIA'S FACE: THE SAME GIRL POIROT SAW UPSTAIRS.

ON POIROT. The bulk of his blood in his heart.

CUT TO:

INT. ALICIA'S ROOM. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

Poirot SLAMS the doors behind him. Barricading his sanity
against what cannot be. A sound... *THE WHISPERED SONG.*

Harry FLUTTERS on his perch in fear.

Poirot leans against a table for balance. Looks up --

FACING A MIRROR:

*HIS REFLECTION TWISTED -- A NIGHTMARE DISTORTION OF ALL THAT
WAS MOST FAMILIAR -- NOW WILD -- DEPLETED -- IMBALANCED --*

WITH HIM IN THE MIRROR: A CHILD'S FACE.

YOUNG ALICIA (V.O.)

*Why don't you have the answer? You
always have the answer. You speak for
the dead.*

Poirot turns.

ALICIA

*Stares in judgement. Hair wet. Black canal water spilling
from her mouth. Raging at him.*

ALICIA

Believe!

Poirot starts. Steps back. Into the mirror -- WHICH FALLS --

SHATTERING

FRIGHTENING HARRY --

WHO FLIES FROM HIS PERCH

FLIES WILD -- CIRCLES THE ROOM -- ROUNDS TO THE BED

WING TIPPING THE TEACUP ON THE NIGHTSTAND. TIME SLOWS AS:

ALICIA'S TEACUP TEETERS

AND FALLS

AND SHATTERS ON THE FLOOR --

POIROT STARES. AT A CUP FALLEN. A child's prayer answered.

Poirot beyond word or thought, as...

CLOSE ON: A PIECE OF THE BROKEN TEACUP ROLLS...

UNDER THE BED... ROLLS... TO A STOP...

ATOP SOMETHING. Lost under the bed. PAPER.

He reaches under for it. Brushes off the dust.

CLOSE ON: HALF A TORN PHOTO. THE OTHER HALF OF MAXIME'S:

THIS HALF SHOWS MAXIME'S JOYFUL FACE. THE GARDEN FULL OF BRIGHT VIOLET FLOWERS VISIBLE BEHIND HIM.

ON POIROT. STARING AT MAXIME'S PICTURE. SEEING IT. THE IMPOSSIBLE CONNECTION FORMS. *Because of a fallen cup. And --*

EXT. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI. VENICE. NIGHT.

The violent CANAL WATERS. A stolen glimpse of MOON above amid storm. Monstrous clouds scud across and devour it.

INT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. PALAZZO. NIGHT.

WITH MAXIME. Agitated. Feeling the others' eyes on him.

MAXIME GERARD

No, I won't wait to be next. I should never have come. I'm leaving. You should all leave this place... and never look back.

He moves to the side door, only --

THE GATE DROPS. Barring the way.

POIROT APPEARS AT THE DOOR. Eyes aflame.

POIROT

(to Maxime)

You were not afraid to come when invited. But now... you are afraid?

ON MAXIME. *He is.* Poirot nods.

POIROT

Tonight we are all afraid.

Poirot looks across our suspects.

POIROT

There have been two impossible murders. A woman falls, alone. A man stabbed in the back, alone. Each appears committable only by phantom. As if the living have been killed -- by the dead. Ghosts. Who haunt this terrible house.

Ariadne picks up on this. Energizing.

ARIADNE OLIVER

"Appears"?... You know something.

LEOPOLD

You know who killed my father?

We can see it in his step. This is Poirot kindled by horrible certainty. An ugly truth unfolding.

POIROT

I cling to the fixed pillars of truth.
 "Order and method." I must consider Ms.
 Reynolds' assistants, survivors,
 desperate and threatened.

He turns to PORTFOGLIO AND ARIADNE. Her eyes dare him.

POIROT

The ex-police-commissario, who has been
 in this house twice, each time death
 occurs. The Authoress, determined,
 capable, murderously clever...

He turns to SEMINOFF.

POIROT

Our avenging angel, so keen on justice as
 she prescribes it.

(to Maxime)

I think of the former love, full of rage
 for the doctor -- and only a fragment of
 a photograph to remember such happiness.

He holds the two pieces of the torn photo together.

His hand steady.

POIROT

Yet in order to understand this case we
must believe in what cannot be... The
 unnatural. And now... I do.

Poirot closes his eyes. Seeing it.

POIROT

I believe in murder not by ghost. But by
 a monster.

(a pause)

There has been a third death which
 explains the other two. The murder of
Alicia Drake. Committed by...

His eyes open and land... On Maxime. He then turns --

POIROT

Her mother. Her murderer.

-- TO ROWENA DRAKE.

POIROT

A mother who killed her own child. Then
killed twice more to hide her terrible
sin.

Seminoff disbelieving. Rowena enraged by the charge.

ROWENA DRAKE

How dare you -- after all I suffered, to
accuse me -- of harming my little girl?

The ECHO of her rage fades. Then Poirot begins --

POIROT

Your little girl had grown. You could
not fathom losing her to anyone. In a
rage tore up your garden of rainbow
flowers --

INSERT CUT: ROWENA DESTROYS THE GARDEN --

ARIADNE OLIVER

Flowers? You're too far gone now --

POIROT

But you replanted your garden. Not with
a rainbow. But with a single color.

ON MAXIME'S TORN PHOTO: NOW REASSEMBLED. MAXIME AND ALICIA
IN FRONT OF A FULLY VIOLET GARDEN --

POIROT

The single color that could give you back
what you would not live without.

ON ROWENA. Her defiance melting. *He knows.*

POIROT

All night I am hearing, seeing things
which are not there. I begin to believe
in the impossible presence of ghosts,
when in fact I had been doped. Drugged.
With an hallucinogenic poison.

INSERT CUT: ROWENA WATCHES ARIADNE SPOON HONEY INTO POIROT'S
TEA -- POIROT DRINKS HIS POISONED TEA --

CLOSE ON MAXIME'S PHOTO. THE VIOLET FLOWERS.

POIROT

There is a poison which grows in the flowering species of Rhododendron Ponticum, its highest concentration in the nectar, that concentrates further when processed by bees... Into honey.

INSERT CUT: ROWENA CARESSES HER BEEHIVE --

-- MAXIME SMELLS THE HONEY -- WRINKLES HIS NOSE --

MAXIME GERARD

Not wildflower. Can't place it.

ARIADNE OLIVER

(seeing it)

Poisoned honey. Gardening tricks.

POIROT

They call it "Deli bal" in Turkey, where it grows wild. Where Rowena Drake travelled, alone, angry. "Mad Honey." A mere teaspoon of the poison induces weakness, fever, hallucination...

INSERT CUT: ROWENA WITH HER LIVE BEEHIVE -- THE HONEY STIRRED INTO ALICIA'S TEA -- ALICIA IN HER BED, FEBRILE -- DEPENDENT -- SPOONFED --

ROWENA BACKS AWAY.

POIROT

You replanted your garden with the toxic flower that would produce Mad Honey for your bees to feast on.

ROWENA DRAKE

I couldn't do that, I wouldn't --

POIROT

Your daughter was not possessed -- she was poisoned. By a mother who could not let her go. Who lovingly spoonfed her controlled doses of poison honey in her tea. Keeping her just sick enough to prevent a reunion with her repentant love. Weak. Helpless. "Like a child again." Yours again. Until... A mistake.

INSERT CUT: ALICIA WAKES, THRASHING -- SEMINOFF POURS TEA -- STIRS IN HONEY -- OFFERS IT TO ALICIA --

POIROT

Mrs. Seminoff watched her while you slept at last. Night fell and she grew frightened. But Alicia woke, disturbed, weak. Not knowing the truth Olga Seminoff did as she believed you would do... and served Alicia Drake calming tea, sweetened with honey. Too sweet.

ON SEMINOFF. Eyes filling.

OLGA SEMINOFF

I didn't know -- I didn't --

POIROT

Alicia Drake did not run to her balcony to commit suicide. Her heart had stopped in her sleep.

(at Rowena)

Overdosed on your poison.

INSERT CUT: ROWENA FINDS ALICIA DEAD -- CALCULATING --

POIROT (V.O.)

You woke -- to find her dead. And then you made your monstrous choice.

INSERT CUT: ON THE ROOF, ROWENA SEARCHES HER GARDENING TOOLS -- GRABS THE PRONGED CULTIVATOR -- SLASHES ALICIA'S BACK --

-- THROWS HER BODY OVER THE LOGGIA --

-- ALICIA FALLS INTO THE CANAL, SINKS INTO DARK WATERS --

POIROT (V.O.)

You made the mark of the Children's Vendetta. You cut her. Threw her into the canal. Made her a suicide. A victim of legend. Of ghosts.

INSERT CUT: AT THE DOCK, ROWENA, PORTFOGLIO, AND FERRIER CRADLE ALICIA'S BODY IN THE WATER --

POIROT (V.O.)

Your love-blind and incapable doctor found nothing to arouse suspicion at the inquest. The police, predisposed to superstition, easily satisfied.

ROWENA SCANNING. Portfoglio on the stairs prevents escape.

POIROT

The poison jar left with the linens by the careless housekeeper. You had gotten away with killing your own child.

(MORE)

POIROT (cont'd)
 (then)
 Until Ms. Oliver drew my attention...

INSERT CUT: ARIADNE OLIVER AT THE HALLOWE'EN PARTY --

ARIADNE OLIVER
Where did all the money go?

POIROT
 The answer, I suspect... is Blackmail.

INSERT CUT: ROWENA READS A BLACKMAIL LETTER IN FEAR --

POIROT
Someone had found you out. And so you paid for their silence. Again and again you paid. But now, your fortune gone, this house unsalable "at any price," you were desperate to get out from under the blackmailer's thumb. But who could it be?

INSERT CUT: FERRIER OBSERVING ALICIA SICK IN BED --

POIROT (V.O.)
Your obvious suspect was Doctor Ferrier. Perhaps not so naive a witness. Perhaps he recognized the poison symptoms, his love rejected...

POIROT. Backed by the others. Seminoff bewildered. Leopold can't bear it. Portfoglio is a wall. Rowena cornered, as --

POIROT
 Then you received letters from The Unholy Ms. Reynolds. Claiming messages from your lost daughter. Too many intimate details known. Teasing knowledge of the crime. Her services offered at a heavy price. Surely this was your blackmailer. She had to be stopped. To be safe, both had to be stopped. But how?

ARIADNE OLIVER
 A seance... In a haunted house... On Hallowe'en.

POIROT
 The perfect opportunity to conceal the murder of those you suspected of blackmail. Hiding behind superstition, legend, fear. The clock struck. And so did you...

INSERT CUT: ROWENA LOOKS DOWN THE STAIRS -- CLOCKS POIROT IN THE MASK -- SHE BASHES HIM ON THE HEAD -- SLASHES HIM WITH THE SAME CULTIVATOR -- SHOVES HIS HEAD IN THE BASIN --

-- SHE SEES HIS FACE -- BACKS AWAY, LEAVING HIM TO DROWN --

POIROT (V.O.)

In your haste, a mistake of the mask.
Leaving me, you found your target --

INSERT CUT: ROWENA SPRINGS AT REYNOLDS ON THE JULIET BALCONY -- SLASHES -- PUSHES HER OFF THE LEDGE --

-- REYNOLDS FALLING -- IMPALED -- BLOOD SPATTERS THE STATUE --

ROWENA DRAKE

I was with Mrs. Seminoff at midnight.

OLGA SEMINOFF

She was. We were together, I saw the time.

POIROT

You saw the time on the clock in the Music Room, which is nearly soundproof. Where she asked you to wait... Where she previously changed the time --

INSERT CUT: ALONE IN THE MUSIC ROOM, ROWENA ROLLS THE TIME ON THE METRONOME CLOCK BACK EIGHT MINUTES -- RUNS OFF --

-- ROWENA RUSHES TO THE CLOSED MUSIC ROOM DOORS, FLUSHED --

-- SHE ENTERS TO MEET SEMINOFF AS THE METRONOME CLOCK ROUNDS TO MIDNIGHT --

POIROT

Where you could not hear the true midnight chime.

ARIADNE OLIVER

It read midnight when it was really --

INSERT CUT: THE BROKEN WATCH ON REYNOLDS' WRIST: 12:04 --

POIROT

After Joyce Reynolds' death. The only evidence discarded with a magician's touch of misdirection.

INSERT CUT: ON THE ROOF, ROWENA KICKS HER GARDENING TOOLS -- AS THEY CLATTER, SHE DROPS THE CULTIVATOR UNNOTICED --

-- THE RAIN WASHES IT CLEAN OF BLOOD --

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

What about Ferrier? She wasn't anywhere near him.

POIROT

Indeed, she made a show of a locked door, giving me the sole key.

(to Rowena)

But you would not kill Doctor Ferrier with a knife. Your murder weapon would be a telephone. The phone line was dead because of the storm -- but the internal line remained clear --

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

We heard another ring. No call would come from outside the house -- only from inside.

INSERT CUT: ROWENA TAPS THE KITCHEN PHONE -- ONE EYE ON LEOPOLD ENJOYING HIS CAKE, NONE THE WISER, AS --

POIROT (V.O.)

She, in the kitchen. He, sealed in the Music Room...

INSERT CUT: FERRIER PICKS UP THE RINGING GLOBE PHONE -- HIS EXPRESSION OF HORROR AS HE LISTENS --

POIROT (V.O.)

You confessed to him everything. To being the murderer of Joyce Reynolds. Of staging your daughter's suicide.

DOCTOR FERRIER

It's not possible --

POIROT (V.O.)

And then you made your threat:

INSERT CUT: ROWENA WHISPERS AT THE KITCHEN PHONE -- A KNIFE READY IN HER HAND -- EYES COLD -- STARING AT LEOPOLD --

ROWENA DRAKE

Do exactly as I tell you...

FERRIER LISTENING IN TERROR --

POIROT (V.O.)

You threatened to kill his son, his only reason to live, if he did not do what you told him. And what you told him to do was to take the knife...

INSERT CUT: TEARFUL FERRIER TAKES THE KNIFE FROM THE
COSTUMED MANNEQUIN -- PRESSES ITS HILT AGAINST A WALL AND --
THROWS HIMSELF BACK ONTO THE BLADE -- PIERCING THROUGH --
INTO HIS HEART --

LEOPOLD
She killed my Dad?...

NICHOLAS
And Ms. Reynolds...

MAXIME GERARD
And Alicia.

Icy silence. Rowena cornered. Exposed.

ROWENA DRAKE
No -- I would never hurt her. It was an
accident. She was my whole life --

OLGA SEMINOFF
You poisoned her.

ROWENA DRAKE
To protect her.

MAXIME GERARD
To control her.

ROWENA DRAKE
To keep her safe from you --

Rowena backs out -- SLAMS the doors -- BOLTS THEM --
SHE RUNS.

Poirot after her --

UP THE NARROW STAIRS, AND --

EXT. LOGGIA / ROOFTOP GARDEN. PALAZZO.

POIROT COMES THROUGH THE BALCONY DOORS.

Rowena holds the cultivator blades at him. Backing away.
Angry fists of WIND. Sheeting RAIN to make it hard to see.
HER BACK AGAINST THE BALCONY -- READY TO STRIKE --

ROWENA DRAKE
I couldn't let her go. She was mine.

LIGHTNING FIRES

A GLIMPSE OF WHAT MIGHT BE ALICIA IN THE RAIN AND

A HAND

GRASPS ROWENA

SHE DROPS THE WEAPON

AND FALLS

OVER THE BALCONY AS ALICIA ONCE DID

POIROT RACES TO THE BALCONY AS --

EXT. MID-AIR / DOCK / CANAL. PALAZZO.

ROWENA FALLS TOWARD THE WATER

HER HEAD CRACKS AGAINST A MOORING POLE AS SHE LANDS

HER BODY STILL

SINKING.

EXT. LOGGIA / ROOFTOP GARDEN. PALAZZO.

Poirot watches the ghost outline of Rowena's body entwined with another disappear.

LOST INTO DARK WATERS.

TO BLACK.

EXT. *BASILICA DI SAN MARCO*. VENICE. DAWN.

The rising sun breaks through passing storm cloud over the *Basilica*. Dawn is a second chance if you live to see it.

The city awakens. Better off not knowing.

THE TOWER BELLS CHIME in All Saints' Day.

EXT. *PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI*. DAWN.

The palazzo quite beautiful in the soft morning light. Daylight banishes fear in favor of practicalities:

A POLICEMAN secures the last of THREE BODIES on their boat.

The police boat quietly takes the dead away.

INT. PIANO NOBILE. PALAZZO. DAWN.

FIND POIROT. Making his way out. He passes --

MAXIME. Who may never know the same confidence again. He holds Baba in his hand. A goodbye to lost love.

MAXIME GERARD

She was the best thing about me. If
there is a soul... You gave hers peace.

He squeezes Baba. Poirot nods. Continues on to --

INT. BOATHOUSE / CAVANA. PALAZZO.

-- Where Portfoglio waits for him with his coat and hat.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

They'll rule Ms. Drake a suicide. Unless
you would like to make a statement
otherwise.

Poirot shakes his head.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

Can I at least see you home safe before
you turn me in for fraud?

POIROT

In the daylight neither appears necessary.

A nod. Gratitude.

VITALE PORTFOGLIO

In the end it is you protecting me.
Dottore.

And Poirot moves on --

BY THE GATE

Where Mrs. Seminoff warmly buttons up Leopold's coat.

OLGA SEMINOFF

He'll live with me and Mr. Seminoff. And
Harry. We'll mind him as our own. Might
insist on a bit more sunshine.

In loving hands. Poirot kneels down to Leopold.

POIROT

You are a precocious boy. Who is perhaps
ashamed at how much he likes attention.
I know something of this.

(MORE)

POIROT (cont'd)

You must never blame yourself for anything that happened in this house.

OLGA SEMINOFF

Why would he do that?

But Poirot and Leopold do understand one another. Leopold for once looks like a normal boy. Small. Guilty.

LEOPOLD

But it's all my fault.

POIROT

You didn't care for money for yourself... You wanted to help your father.

LEOPOLD

Dad couldn't work, I only used the money for our bills. I didn't even know what to do with the rest. It's all under my mattress.

POIROT

Rowena Drake presumed her blackmailer was the fake medium or the family doctor. When it was neither. Only the doctor's son saw the truth.

LEOPOLD

It was obvious from Dad's notes. Mad honey poisoning, just like Mitridate from her opera. "The Poison King." I read all about it in one of her books in the library. I tested the theory...

POIROT

You sent a blackmail letter. Another...

Leopold nods, ashamed.

POIROT

Perhaps there is a use for this money in your mattress. To make good of regret.

EXT. CAMPO. PALAZZO LACRIME DI GIOVANI. DAWN.

NICHOLAS AND DESDEMONA

Await their fate and future with trepidation.

NICHOLAS

We survived before Ms. Reynolds. We'll do better than survive. I promised we'd get to America and we will.

She feels the hollowness of optimism. At which, Seminoff and Leopold approach, resolute. Their boat waiting for them.

OLGA SEMINOFF
Come with us you two.

NICHOLAS
To the police station?

OLGA SEMINOFF
Us to home. You, to America. Missouri I understand. Passage for two. We can help with that I think.

ON DESDEMONA. She lights up with stolen hope.
She looks to Nicholas. Takes his hand, and --
They step on the boat with Seminoff. A journey begun.
Leopold joins them. A final word to Poirot --

LEOPOLD
You solved the case. But you had help, didn't you? You heard her.

A pause. Poirot's thoughts his own.

POIROT
Bonne chance, my friend.

LEOPOLD
Don't worry, people who die in this house always come back. I'll see them again.
(waves to the palazzo)
I'll see you soon, Dad.

And their boat motors away. A spark of possibility restored.
Poirot watches them disappear up the canal.

ON THE BRIDGE

ARIADNE OLIVER
I won't apologize. You ruined my book. Neither living nor proof. Have to rewrite the whole thing.

POIROT
So long as it does not include my name.

ARIADNE OLIVER
I never want to hear your name again.

She notes Poirot staring up reverentially at the palazzo.

ARIADNE OLIVER

Just a house now, all debunked... But
you've got the look like a believer.

(off Poirot, realizing)

You did. You saw something.

POIROT

I was under the influence. My
subconscious mind assembled facts ahead
of the rational --

ARIADNE OLIVER

You saw. You know.

A pause.

POIROT

I know only we cannot hide from our
ghosts. Whether they are real or not.
We must make our peace with them. And
live life somehow.

ARIADNE OLIVER

And how will you live your life?

CLOSE ON POIROT. The question labors in his mind. And --

EXT. VENICE STREET / RECTORY. DAY.

Weary Poirot nears his front gate. The morning's box of
pastries left untouched. The familiar PETITIONERS asleep
outside. Still waiting.

Poirot walks right by Desperate Petitioner.

Who wakes up abruptly. Looks up to see --

THE RECTORY GATE LEFT OPEN BEHIND POIROT.

THE CHURCH BELL STRIKES. Petitioner blinks. Fixes his hair
and tie, and --

EXT. ROOF TERRACE. DAY.

FOLLOW PETITIONER. Tentatively entering.

DESPERATE PETITIONER

Monsieur? Monsieur Poirot?

Petitioner comes up the stairs to find --

POIROT. Eyes alert despite the sleepless night. Ignoring the city view to scan through documents and make his notes.

POIROT

You parents died one soon after the other, then your brother.

Petitioner nods.

POIROT

Your trusted doctor is a beloved old friend to the family.

Petitioner nods.

POIROT

Your brother was unmarried, as are you. No other relations.

Petitioner nods. Poirot circling as --

POIROT

Your family is not cursed. I suspect your brother added a codicil to his will naming your doctor beneficiary should all the members of your small family perish, after which I suspect he then murdered them claiming natural causes at their deathbeds -- and your life is next in danger. You may wish to sit --

Poirot stops suddenly. FROZEN. Seeing it:

A LILAC TEACUP

On the edge of a table. Just off.

Poirot stares at it a long time.

Pushes it back. Safely on.

Listening.

END.