

SNAP!

A SWITCH FLIPS AND A BEAM OF LIGHT BISECTS THE DARK.

The spoked REELS of a Bell & Howell JAN MOVIE PROJECTOR CLICK and TURN and feed a 16MM FILM. MUSIC RAMPS UP as...

A BLACK AND WHITE NEWSREEL PROJECTS ON A SCREEN. THE "FOX MOVIETONE NEWS" LOGO PRECEDES A HEADLINE:

**"NO JUSTICE IN ARMSTRONG KIDNAPPING"**

INT. LIVING ROOM. PRIVATE HOME. NIGHT.

Lit only by the projector and a FIRE burning in the hearth. We can just barely make out the sheet-draped furniture, the covered paintings on the walls. A room long past joy or use.

THE NEWSREEL'S INDELIBLE IMAGES HIT THE SCREEN: A COUPLE ALONE ON A DISTANT HILL. A STATELY HOUSE. A LADDER AGAINST A WINDOW. A bombastic, Brooklyn-accented NARRATOR explains:

NEWSREEL (V.O.)

The story that shocked the world continues to break hearts.

A TWO-YEAR OLD PLAYS BY A WINDOW AS ADORING PARENTS LOOK ON.

NEWSREEL (V.O.)

The nation bowed its head in sympathy for America's Golden Couple.

HUNDREDS OF REPORTERS FLOOD A NEW JERSEY POLICE STATION.

NEWSREEL (V.O.)

Every reporter worth his hat searched for an answer: Who took the Armstrong baby?

COPS SWARM A CHILD'S BEDROOM. AN EMPTY CRIB IN THE SUNLIGHT.

NEWSREEL (V.O.)

August 12, 1932. World famous pilot Colonel John Armstrong and his wife Sonia awake in horror to find their only child, darling Daisy, taken from her crib at night in her sleeping suit.

A RANSOM NOTE, JAGGED LETTERS, DEMANDS \$100,000 FOR DAISY.

CONCERNED CITIZENS READ THE PAPERS ON STREET CORNERS.

A TOUGH SHOWS OFF A BIPLANE LAPEL PIN IN A SHOW OF SUPPORT.

TOUGH

What I wouldn't give for five minutes alone with the guy what did this.

NEWSREEL (V.O.)

Desperate, the Armstrongs pay the ransom.  
But the kidnapers prove the very soul of  
evil. Days later, the child, little  
Daisy, is found dead. Murdered.

*A POLICE CAPTAIN GIVES AN AWKWARD, BREATHY FORMAL STATEMENT.*

POLICE CAPTAIN

We will find. The perfidious culprits.  
And see. Them punished.

*POLICE SHOO REPORTERS AS THE BEREAVED PARENTS GET INTO A CAR.*

NEWSREEL (V.O.)

Sonia Armstrong, daughter of renowned  
stage actress Linda Arden, is with child  
when she receives the news. The shock  
sends her into premature labor. Neither  
she nor the infant survive. The shoulders  
of a hero cannot bear the burden of grief:  
Colonel Armstrong is soon found dead of a  
gunshot wound. It is self-inflicted.

*TWO NEW GRAVES BESIDE A SMALL ONE. ALL THAT'S LEFT OF THEM.*

*THOUSANDS STAND OUTSIDE THE CEMETERY. AN OCEAN OF FLOWERS.*

NEWSREEL (V.O.)

Pressured to produce a suspect the DA  
accuses a foreign maid to the family of  
complicity in the heinous crime.

*A YOUNG WOMAN IS TAKEN TO POLICE CUSTODY, ABASHED, BROKEN.*

NEWSREEL (V.O.)

Hysterical, she throws herself out a  
window to her death, only days before she  
is proven innocent. The District Attorney  
resigns in disgrace. All as the true  
criminal escapes America to parts unknown.  
Taking the ransom and leaving behind him a  
wake of shattered lives. Never to stand  
in a court of law before a jury of twe--

*SNAP! The projector SHUTS OFF abruptly. A HAND pulls the  
newsreel off... throws THE FILM AND SEVERAL PAPERS INTO THE  
FIRE. Stokes the fire with A LONG, STRAIGHT-BLADED KNIFE.*

*The celluloid catches fast. The fire flares bright and hot  
and white. Illuminating a slip of paper. A GILDED TRAIN  
TICKET. For...*

**"THE ORIENT EXPRESS"**

CUT TO:

BLINDING WHITE SUN. BOUNCING OFF PALE LIMESTONE.

EXT. VIA DOLOROSA. JERUSALEM, MANDATORY PALESTINE. DAY.

A YOUNG BOY RUNS through MARKET stalls lining the narrow road on which Christ once carried a cross. The Boy's burden is much smaller: A small CRATE he holds dear. It is 1934.

INT. CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER. THAT MOMENT.

The Boy races past the ancient site of Cavalry. A hodgepodge of denominations. Every stone adorned and gilded. Christ died here. And for your sins at that.

The church is already PACKED. BRITISH POLICE maintain calm. Curiously, the CROWD is a MIX of faiths. CHRISTIANS beside JEWS beside MUSLIMS. All waiting for something. Or someone.

EXT. JERUSALEM STREET. THAT MOMENT.

The Boy weaves through the crowd, darting full speed into...

INT. HOTEL LOBBY.

He ducks under PORTERS, running straight for...

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN.

Where he stops, breathless. Opens his CRATE to REVEAL...

*It is full of... EGGS.*

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY. 4.5 MINUTES LATER.

A WAITER rushes a SILVER TRAY through the hotel, all as...

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM. DAY.

A SLOW AND STEADY HAND LIGHTS A MATCH... WHICH IN TURN LIGHTS A SPIRIT LAMP... CALMLY UNSCREWS THE LID OFF A TIN OF THICK CREAMY WAX... SETS THE TIN SET ATOP THE FLAME.

The wax melts and turns clear... Is POURED through a STRAINER. As it DRIPS through...

PAN OVER: A sumptuous array of TINY COMBS arranged in a perfect grid. THE STEADY HAND passes over each... Carefully selects just the right one for the day... Dips it into the clarified wax... Drips off the excess with TWO PRECISE TAPS.

The comb moves through a fantastic MOUSTACHE in precise swipes of TWO. A ritual performed with religious ceremony.

AT THE DOOR -- A very BRITISH POLICE CHIEF INSPECTOR, head of the PPF, looks on. He checks his watch, impatient, as...

WAITER ENTERS IN A HURRY. Sets down the silver tray. Takes off the lid. Breakfast is served: TWO PERFECTLY BOILED EGGS side by side like newlyweds. Toast and coffee.

Our Man (still unrevealed) sets down the tiny comb, takes from a pocket a PEN and with it compares the eggs' height.

*One egg is notably taller than its twin.*

The lid slaps back on the tray. The tray pushed off. The food untouched. Chief Inspector is at wits' end.

No choice, he signals to Waiter, and we... CUT TO:

EXT. VIA DELOROSA. JERUSALEM. DAY.

The Boy RUNS...

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN. DAY.

The crate of eggs OPENS...

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY. DAY.

The Waiter carries a silver tray...

INT. HOTEL ROOM. DAY.

The tray is presented. Waiter and Chief Inspector wait. Even the running Boy is here in breathless anticipation as...

CLOSE: The tiny comb takes two last passes through whiskers. Fingers artfully turn and shape the moustache, which swiftly submits to perfection. Our Man finally turns and we...

MEET HERCULE POIROT

The unlikeliest man you've ever had the pleasure. Nose pointed, shirt starched, suit bespoke and tailored by angels. And on his face, as incapable of escaping notice as the sun:

The fantastic MOUSTACHE. Twisted at the tips and pointed up just so. The finest investigative mind of his or any time. As he'd gladly tell you in his warm Belgian accent.

Poirot brightens at his new breakfast. Measures the eggs again. Still not right.

POIROT

Tush. How can a place be called the Holy Land when their chickens are so imprecise?

He checks his LARGE POCKET WATCH against FOUR CLOCKS set in a line on the mantle, resetting his watch on their average. Chief inspector is beyond.

## BRITISH CHIEF INSPECTOR

Mr. Poirot, if you are going to perform one of your miracles the time is now. I've got three religions bent on riot.

Poirot, on his own leisurely time, tips Waiter then Boy well.

## POIROT

I blame the poultry, not the boy. We shall try again another time, hmm?

He hefts his gold banded cane and steps out to...

EXT. VIA DELOROSA. JERUSALEM. DAY.

Poirot walks the ancient cobbled path. Takes in the marvels, sights and smells. Pauses to let a DONKEY pass.

His next step lands with a SQUISH. Patent leather and donkey shit. His shoe ruined. Poirot stares at his shitted up shoe, deeply uneasy. He considers the problem...

*Then steps his other shoe in a pile shit.* Much better now. He walks on. Bothered not by the mess but the imbalance.

INT. CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER. THAT MOMENT.

Even more CROWDED and restless. Tensions bubble over. A MUSLIM jostles a CHRISTIAN. A FIGHT BREAKS OUT. PUNCHES thrown. The POLICE try to break it up when suddenly...

The fighting STOPS... The crowd PARTS... WHISPERS TRAVEL...

Poirot steps forward. Cane TAPPING the floor. A quick turn around the room, taking it all in... then he steps before the assembled. *This is what they've been waiting for.*

## POIROT

The accused?

The POLICE bring forth A RABBI, A PRIEST and an IMAM.

The crowd RUMBLES. All certain of their man's innocence. Only Poirot LAUGHS. A hound dog howl that quiets the room.

## POIROT

It is like the old joke. A Rabbi, a Priest and an Imam... Yes? No? *Mais non.* Forgive me, I am a Belgian and a silly one at that.

He waves his gold banded cane -- accidentally getting it STUCK in a crevice on the wall so it sticks out horizontally. An attempt to free it only sticks it in more firmly. He leaves it with a shrug. *Silly indeed.*

POIROT

Let us begin.

He straightens. Poirot talks, when he wants, a mile a minute:

POIROT

Three representatives meet here under the Chief Inspector of the Police's personal supervision to discuss a divided timetable for market use. An hour after the tense meeting is done a priceless relic is found to have gone missing.

He points to AN EMPTY SHELF over a sumptuous FRESCO.

POIROT

The finger of Saint Nicodemus, its case inlaid in gold and encrusted in rubies, no doubt as the good Saint would have wanted. One of these men has stolen it --

Poirot has backed against a hanging STATUE OF CHRIST. Without turning to look he tips it slightly, *righting it when it was imperceptibly tilted, as --*

POIROT

Each protests his innocence and accuses the other, nearly coming to blows until we have the Crusades re-enacted in miniature for our pleasure. Each has a flawed and unverifiable alibi --

(points one by one)

Praying, bathing, taking a late morning stroll. The police find no pieces of evidence at all. I find one. On a meticulously well kept fresco, a single crack. From an indelicate climb in a hard soled shoe, or more likely a boot.

Indeed, on the huge, ornate fresco he has somehow spotted a small fresh SCRATCH. The crowd now hangs on his every word.

POIROT

So we must move to the psychology of the matter. Look within and not without for the truth. We ask: *Who stands to benefit from the crime?*

(eyes each)

All three of our holy men live humbly. Their thin-soled shoes poor, their families even poorer. Sudden riches and rubies would be too conspicuous to enjoy. They do not gain. At this point we must dispatch an armed man down to the South gate. You'll do --

Poirot pokes an ARMED POLICEMAN, who is confused but abides. Chief Inspector seems surprised by this.

POIROT

Indeed, the only one in all Jerusalem who benefits from such a theft and the unrest it has caused is a gentleman whose office I had searched as I waited disappointedly on my breakfast this morning... a man paid lavishly to keep the peace. The Chief Inspector of the Police.

(turning on him)

Who does not wish to lose a well-paid post when there is discussion of self-governance among natives, who does wear boots, and who does no doubt now regret inviting me to consult on this case.

All turn to the Chief Inspector.

BRITISH CHIEF INSPECTOR

How dare you accuse me?

POIROT

I accuse nothing. I only suggest possibilities. Let us see if the facts accuse. Ah, Sergeant --

Poirot gestures to a YOUNG POLICEMAN who comes forward.

POIROT

Did you search the Chief Inspector's office as I asked?

CORPORAL

Yes, Sir.

POIROT

And did you find what I said you might?

CORPORAL

Yes, Sir. Just as you said.

He opens a satchel and hands Poirot THE JEWELLED RELIC. All are stunned. Poirot holds it, hands it back to the Priest.

POIROT

This belongs to you. South gate.

Before anyone comprehends what Poirot just said...

*Chief Inspector runs for it... out a door... through to...*

EXT. THE SOUTH GATE.

*Where the Armed Guard Poirot sent down blocks his way!*

Chief Inspector VEERS -- changes direction -- down a CORRIDOR -- toward an open window -- nearly escaped when --

*WHOMP!* HE IS CLOTHESLINED BY POIROT'S CANE.

STUCK IN JUST THE RIGHT PLACE. Chief Inspector goes down hard on the cobbles. All according to plan.

All eyes stare, blown away by Poirot. Who is very pleased with himself. He steps over. Pulls his "stuck" cane free.

Chief Inspector manages to rise -- CHARGES Poirot in a rage.

*Poirot, annoyed, and far faster than you'd think, SPINS, to deliver a SERIES of powerful, precise BLOWS that knock Chief Inspector unconscious and likely shy a tooth.*

Poirot smooths his shirt, irritated he lost a button in the doing. Points absently to the clergymen with his cane --

POIROT

These men are each free to go and give thanks to their preferred deities. Please let the Embassy know they are in need a new Chief Inspector -- and I am still in need of a new breakfast.

Just then -- OUR RUNNING WAITER comes sprinting up to Poirot with the breakfast tray! TWO PERFECTLY MATCHING BOILED EGGS presented on silver. Poirot sees them, utterly delighted.

POIROT

Ah!

And we... CUT TO:

EXT. JAFFA PORT. DAY.

A taxi pulls up to the ancient quay. A star-struck ENGLISH CAPTAIN opens the door for Poirot, his collar mis-buttoned and askew in his rush to meet the great detective.

MILITARY ESCORT

I won the right to escort you to your boat, Sir. May I?

He takes up Poirot's suitcase before he can protest. The busy international port unfolds around them as they walk down the DOCKS. Art and produce and livestock loaded onto barges.

MILITARY ESCORT

To Stamboul then? Will you be back to London straight off?



POIROT

I have toiled across Africa and the Orient and seen nothing of them but hotel lobbies and crime. I am tired and have earned my holiday. I want to look at paintings and be bored by a cathedral. I have heard La Saint Sophie is magnificent, have you seen it?

Poirot sees his Escort not so much listening as staring.

POIROT

Oh out with it. You'll have a stroke trying to keep your manners.

MILITARY ESCORT

It's only -- how did you know he took the relic? From just a tiny crack on the wall! The boys at base'd have my head if I came back without an answer. How'd you even find the crack?

POIROT

(weary of questions, leery of fans)  
I have the advantage. I can only see the world as it should be. And when it is not, the imperfection stands out to me like a sodium light.

(straightens Escort's tie)

It makes most of life unbearable but it is useful in the detection of crime. We must part here.

They have reached A LARGE FERRY. Poirot steps to it.

MILITARY ESCORT

I'm to escort you on the ferry as well --

POIROT

Please do not make me beat you about the face and neck. I abhor physical exertion of any kind. And though we have only just met I am certain I abhor you.

He pokes Escort back with his cane and steps up the gangplank onto the ferry alone. It ROCKS significantly. Poirot steadies himself, not a fan of boats. And walks to...

EXT. SHIP'S STERN. FERRY. DAY.

Where a GROUP OF ARAB MEN work on the SPATTERING ENGINE.

One of the passengers, DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT, a BLACK ENGLISH GENTLEMAN, 40s, formal manners, checks the time with concern. Asks the ARAB MATE in charge.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

But will it be fixed in time? I have a connection in Stamboul, the Orient Express leaves at nine. Normally I wouldn't mind a day late -- only I have a surgery in London.

(sees he's not getting anywhere)

I'm a doctor -- doctor, yes? There's a very ill patient waiting for me. Each day rather matters you see?

(off his blank)

You don't see. Not a word of English then?

Mate blinks. Nope. Arbuthnot pulls off his coat. Steps into the engine with them to help fix it. At that moment...

ON THE GANGPLANK

MARY DEBENHAM steps aboard dressed in suitable English clothes made fine by being on her. Natural charm and inner light in buckets. Had she been born rich she'd have been married off to royalty in minutes, but alas, some must work for a living.

Poirot politely extends a hand to help her aboard. She takes it, steps on, then YAWNS enormously. Embarrassed.

MARY DEBENHAM

Forgive me. I hardly slept last night -- a bus to a train -- might have been a camel in there somewhere.

(pauses)

I know your moustache.

(frames his face in her fingers)

From the papers. You're the detective, the gifted one, Hercules Poirot.

She pronounced it like the Roman hero. He corrects her.

POIROT

*Pas assez.* I am not for the washing of stables. *Err-cyooole.*

MARY DEBENHAM

Mary Debenham, Monsieur. I'll forget a name but never a face. Not yours anyway.

POIROT

It is... specific. You come from Bagdad?

MARY DEBENHAM

(he guessed right, impressed)

It's true, no detail escapes his notice.

POIROT

In this case the detail being your ticket.

He notes the ticket sticking half out of her handbag.

POIROT

I am not above employing the obvious. Though I might also ask if you enjoyed your term there as a governess? Chalk on the sleeve and geography primer in the bag. Governess or cartographer, I made my gamble.

MARY DEBENHAM

Not above showing off either. I always begin with geography and monster them till they have the world down cold. They may get lost in life but I'll be damned if they don't know where they are.

Poirot LAUGHS, charmed by her. At which -- a fat puff of diesel SMOKE billows their way -- as the ferry engine ROARS to life. Arbuthnot steps through the smoke, hands greasy. Checks his watch.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Right on time.

Poirot tips his hat in appreciation. Then notes Mary's eye flick to Arbuthnot -- then look away. Interesting.

EXT. BOW. FERRY. DAY.

The boat chugs under the Bosphorus. Poirot takes in the glorious view of the Mediterranean. Cyprus in the distance.

From here he can see Arbuthnot join Mary at the rail as she SNAPS PHOTOS with a box BROWNIE CAMERA. Awkward smiles.

Arbuthnot checks they are alone. Not seeing Poirot, he lets his hand to graze Mary's. She does not move hers away.

Poirot smiles, intuiting this is a fresh yet unlikely couple.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

I feel so free out here on the water.

MARY DEBENHAM

I wish I could enjoy it.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

You should be out of this, Mary --

He clasps her hand, faces her. She pulls away.

MARY DEBENHAM

Not now. When it's all over. When it's done. Then -- nothing can touch us --

Mary notices Poirot, pulls away suddenly. She goes back to her camera, Arbuthnot nervously lights a PIPE. Sudden strangers again. Races separated as is still custom.

POIROT

Not on my account. My clothes are old fashioned but my thoughts are modern.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

POIROT

Perhaps the lady will explain it to you.

With a wink, he steps off, returning their privacy, and...

EXT. STAMBOUL PORT. SUNSET.

The ferry reaches the GALATA BRIDGE which spans the Golden Horn into STAMBOUL. A city of red tiles and silver domes. Spires and minarets.

INT. THE TOKATLIAN HOTEL. NIGHT.

The finest European style accommodations in Stamboul, and so a hodgepodge of arabesque and coat of arms. Poirot checks in with the solicitous CONCIERGE, too tired to take it in.

CONCIERGE

Monsieur's room has been aired out and stocked as requested in his cable: Ten hand towels, ten bath towels, ten bottles of mineral water, two sitting chairs, double duvets, and coffee with the two boiled eggs brought 8 AM sharp to your room. Suite 411.

He offers a key. Poirot lets it dangle.

POIROT

411? Did you not receive my full cable?

CONCIERGE

I -- that is we thought it was a joke --  
(off Poirot's look, checks his book)  
A thousand pardons. 401, 329... Ah!  
Room 610 is available. It is smaller.  
But it is even.

POIROT

It is perfect.

CONCIERGE

We have letters for you. And a telegram.

Concierge moves to get them, Poirot stops him with prejudice.

POIROT

No, *saperlotte*. No letters until I have eaten and slept and had myself scrubbed clean of travel in one of your excellent Turkish baths. My holiday begins now.

As Poirot moves off into the lobby we spy A STUFFY MAN spying on him... displeased with how that went down.

INT. TOKATLIAN RESTAURANT. NIGHT.

ON POIROT at a table, a volume of Dickens for company. WIDEN TO REVEAL: Poirot has ordered one of every item on the menu, and barely touched each. He tastes a final dish. Unhappy.

WAITER

That is everything on the menu. Nothing pleases you?

POIROT

I'm seldom pleased, however in the variety of disappointment there is nourishment.  
(off a new plate put before him)  
I did not order this.

WAITER

A trio of soups. *E'special* from the chef.

The HEAD CHEF looks on, desperate for his approval. Poirot eyes the bowls. He looks like a cat pet backwards.

POIROT

Soup. The enemy of moustaches. Fortunate I carry my own accommodation.

He slides A SILVER STRAW out of a CIGAR CASE. Uses it to sip the soups. He takes pity on DESPERATE CHEF and forces a nod. Waiter proffers a bottle of wine.

POIROT

I did not order this either.

WAITER

From the American gentleman. An admirer.

AT A FAR TABLE

A waxy American, sweaty 50, dines with a skittish young man who drinks too much. These are EDWARD RATCHETT and HECTOR MACQUEEN. Ratchett lifts a glass at Poirot. MacQueen gulps his down. Poirot nods his thanks. To Waiter:

POIROT

Not to be ungrateful, my tastes go less to spirits than sweets. I will accept with pleasure to drink a cup of chocolate.

Poirot's attention drifts... to a BASKET of fresh Turkish PASTRIES brought to another table. Unable to stop himself he rises to that table, smells the flaky, *kadayif* without asking. Rubs it. Tastes it. Instant ecstasy.

POIROT

I must speak to the chef!

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN. NIGHT.

FIND POIROT perched on a counter amid the kitchen bustle. Watching AN OLD TURK shaping dough over a glowing tandoor. Poirot has a stack of breads on his lap, eating worshipfully.

POIROT

Every blister nurtured to a char and never a burn. Alas perfection! I can see the soul of the city in that humble breadbowl. The world insists on decay yet here masterpieces are baked order. Mohammed, my friend, you are an artist!

The baker doesn't speak English but sees the tear in Poirot's eye and gets the idea. DESPERATE CHEF slumps. When --

A GIGGLING COUPLE

Stumbles into the kitchen, lips pressed, arms delving. Clearly looking for a place to have sex. The man, BOUC, a handsome French bon vivant and sensualist in a boyish 40, eschews hard work with as much passion as he seeks pleasure. The man would flirt with a drainpipe. The LADY of the couple is no lady at all and has made no attempt to conceal it.

BOUC

Don't mind us, we're only looking for a place to have a private argument. It will take some 20 minutes at which point we will both come to an agreement I'm sure, or at least I will. Any store room or broom closet will do.

POIROT

(clears his throat)

I am no longer a policeman, Monsieur Bouc, I will not be able to bail you out when this goes badly.

Bouc pokes out from the lady's neck and recognizes Poirot -- delighted. Instantly forgetting what he came here for.

BOUC

Poirot in the kitchen? Of course! He will sniff out the perfect pastry faster than he catches a jewel thief.

(to the lady)

(MORE)

BOUC (cont'd)

This is my dear old friend, the esteemed Poirot, who I knew before the esteem. Hercule Poirot, this is -- hrm --

POIROT

(simply)

A prostitute.

BOUC

She is.

PROSTITUTE

I am. Bouc didn't tell me he had such famous friends! The girls all follow you like their favorite football team. That murder in Mesopotamia kept us up all night till the morning paper came. I'm a huge fan of yours. Little grey cells -- order and method. I know all about it. No one beats Poirot, not ever!

An immodest shrug from Poirot. He enjoys his renown.

BOUC

Enough. We're friends because I am the only one who never asks about his cases, because I don't care, and he never judges me for being a terrible person.

Bouc and the Lady perch with Poirot on the counter. Bouc helps himself to what dishes pass by in WAITERS' arms.

POIROT

*Mon ami*, what luck. I am finally on holiday and I know no one else in the entire country.

BOUC

You're back to none in two hours. I ride on the Orient Express at nine, official Wagon Lit Director business. I practically live in my compartment these days. Uncle pays me absurdly to keep on his gorgeous train and far from him at the home office. Consigned to wine and dine handsome travelers for eternity. There's an art to nepotism.

POIROT

You are its Rembrandt.

The kitchen door swings open. THE STUFFY MAN who spied on Poirot earlier enters the kitchen, anxious. Holding A TELEGRAM. He spots Poirot, beelines for him. Poirot SIGHS with irritation... already sensing the outcome.

STUFFY MAN

Mr. Poirot.

POIROT

It grows crowded in here. Are you a prostitute as well?

STUFFY MAN

Goodness, no.

BOUC

(liking the look of him)  
Shame. Is this man bothering you?

POIROT

He is about to.

STUFFY MAN

Sir, forgive me, you had letters waiting for you with the desk. Letters and a --

POIROT

Telegram. I declined it before, I do again. Letters never bring good news. Telegrams even worse. Bouc, what was the last cable you received?

BOUC

News of mother's passing.

POIROT

Technology only finds ways of bringing you sorrow more swiftly.

STUFFY MAN

I was told you might say that and was asked to make certain you read this directly. I'm afraid I must insist.

POIROT

(enjoying his anxiety)  
A funny expression of the English, this "I'm afraid so -- I am afraid not." As a species the English pretend to be unemotional -- when all the time they are terrified!

STUFFY MAN

With all respect, Sir --

He presses the telegram on him. Poirot halts him knowingly.

POIROT

You are from the British consulate.



STUFFY MAN  
(surprised)  
I am, Sir.

POIROT  
It is the Kassner case.

STUFFY MAN  
Why, yes.

POIROT  
And I was correct in -- certain  
predictions.

STUFFY MAN  
(unnerved/impressed)  
Quite.

POIROT  
I do not need to read the telegram.

BOUC  
How fun. Did someone cheat or die?

POIROT  
Someone has interrupted my need for rest  
and relaxation and a proper Turkish  
scrubbing. It appears I must travel with  
you tonight, Bouc. Do you think I can  
find accommodation on your Calais coach?

BOUC  
I'm not good for much but I sure as hell  
can get you a ticket on my train in the  
dead of winter. I promise, three days on  
the Orient Express will beat any holiday!

Resigned, Poirot takes his stack of pastries and...

INT. HOTEL ELEVATOR. MOMENTS LATER.

Poirot has his coat on, hat in one hand, case in the other.

STUFFY MAN  
Your expenses have been paid. You'll be  
met in Calais then escorted to Dover to  
rail to London Victoria. I'd like to  
formally express gratitude on behalf o--

The elevator PINGS open. Poirot stops him on the dot.

POIROT  
You are making it worse by talking.

He marches off.

BOUC

If you're ever on the train, look me up.

A wink and Bouc escorts Poirot across...

INT. HOTEL LOBBY. (CONTINUOUS SEQUENCE).

...Where they PASS an ebullient Cuban, BINIAMINO MARQUEZ. JOIN MARQUEZ, who carries his own heavy bag even though a PORTER walks beside him. Marquez hands Porter a big tip.

PORTER

I didn't carry your luggage, Mr. Marquez.

MARQUEZ

I had a good week! We celebrate when fortune smiles -- and we share the good fortune! Remember to say nice things about us Americans, yes?

He claps Porter on the back, heads for the door, PASSING...

THE FRONT DESK

...Where we JOIN MACQUEEN (the nervous American from the restaurant) as he settles their bill, marking payment in a LEATHER LEDGER. MacQueen turns peevishly to...

...A BUTLER, MASTERMAN, who neatly stacks several trunks. Masterman is an elegant 60. Stoic and precise. Every thought guarded by perfect propriety. You could stare at him for years and never know a thing about him.

MACQUEEN

Hey, Masterman. You got everything?

MASTERMAN

I do not make mistakes.

FOLLOW MASTERMAN as he leads A PARADE OF PORTERS on with their luggage, himself PASSING...

THE HOTEL BAR

...Where we JOIN a lithe, DANGEROUSLY HANDSOME MAN with his back to the world. Peacock's clothes that strain to contain a powerful frame. This is COUNT RUDOLPH ANDRENYI. And he wants nothing to do with the ITALIANS carousing nearby. One gets too close, notices the Count.

ITALIAN FAN

Goodness! I saw you dance *La Sylphide* at the Monte Cristo Ballet. The Count Andrenyi, eh! Mind if I take your photo?

Without waiting on the reply SNAP! The FLASHBULB GOES OFF.

The Count slowly rises to his full height. In a blink -- HE GRABS THE CAMERA -- SMASHES IT! Returns to his drink.

Italian Fan and his TWO FRIENDS flank the Count menacingly. TAPS Count on shoulder. Bad idea. In another blink --

*THE COUNT PUNCHES HIM IN THE FOREHEAD -- SIDESTEPS THE TWO COMING AT HIM -- SWIPES ONE'S LEG -- KICKS THE OTHER IN THE NECK. A BALLETTIC BEATDOWN.* The Count cocks a fist to PUNCH Fan again, when...

A HAND TOUCHES HIS ARM

An ethereal YOUNG WOMAN has come to his side. Face obscured by a thick hood and dark sunglasses. A woman who does not wish to be seen. This is his wife, THE COUNTESS ELENA ANDRENYI. *IN HUNGARIAN, SUBTITLED:*

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

*Time to go, my love.*

Count DROPS Fan. Takes her hand. Completely in her spell. She crosses the bar taking all breath with her when...

*FLASH!* A REPORTER SNAPS A PHOTO of them. The Count stares him a murder. Beat. Reporter SMASHES his own camera, as...

The Count and Countess step out the FRONT DOOR, and we CUT TO:

SUITCASES -- CLOSED -- CINCHED -- ZIPPED -- BUCKLED -- AND THROWN ONTO RACKS. A THICK EXHALE OF STEAM AND -- CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM. NIGHT.

THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Chuffs in place. A five star neo-baroque hotel on rails. Rich black hide and bright bronze trim. Every corner carved, every surface gilded, no expense spared. Only the finest food, service and accommodation. Yet somehow it all comes together to define First Class *belle époque* elegance.

A PROCESSION OF PORTERS push carts to the kitchen. Crates of winter produce, fish and meat on thick BLOCKS OF ICE, as --

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

The CLEANING CREW buff the brass and marquetry, as --

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

WAITERS polish silver, set plates on tables with a ruler, as --

INT. KITCHEN CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

A CHEF tastes from a SAUCIER's pan, throws it out the window --

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM.

*SPLAT.* The sauce narrowly misses the Calais coach CONDUCTOR: PIERRE MICHEL. 30s, trustworthy, as dim as he is well-intentioned. Michel sidesteps the butter puddle and checks the time on the train station CLOCK. He PULLS the STEAM WHISTLE -- FOUR SHORT BLASTS. *SHOUTS in a breath:*

MICHEL

The Simplon Orient Express with stops in Sophia, Nis, Belgrade, Vincovci, Brod with transfer to Bucharest, Zagreb, Trieste, Venezia, Milan, Lausanne, Dijon, Paris, Boulogne, Calais with connection to Dover and London leaves in --  
 (pauses, counts on his fingers)  
 Thirty-five minutes! --  
 (pauses, counts again)  
 Twenty-five minutes!

A passing PORTER shakes his head. *Try again.*

MICHEL

One hour!

EXT. STAMBOUL STREETS/TAXI. NIGHT.

A TAXI wends through CROWDED STREETS. Waits for an ox drawn cart to pass. The window rolls down...

Mary Debenham STICKS her HEAD OUT her taxi window, absorbing it all. She cranks her camera. SNAPS photos. She catches sight of ANOTHER TAXI running alongside hers.

THROUGH HER VIEWFINDER: *She sees COUNT ANDRENYI inside. He leans back, giving a rare glimpse of the elusive Countess, hood drawn back to show her face. The backlight casts her frail beauty in perfect shadow. Dandelion beauty the slightest breeze might end.*

Mary lowers her camera without taking the shot.

INT. CHEAP HOTEL ROOM. NIGHT.

GERHARD HARDMAN primps at the mirror. The middle part and spectacles of an ambitious professor. The crisp grid packing of an irritating one. Hardman places his hat on his head...

Then tucks A REVOLVER into his suitcase under the shirts.

EXT. ARASTA BAZAAR. NIGHT.

RATCHETT walks through the market in a pith helmet that acts like a beacon to hawking MERCHANTS: Scarves, ceramics, spices and teas, bright brass and verdigrised copper and of course an endless assortment of lamps to rub and wish upon.

An aggressive JEWELRY MERCHANT homes in on Ratchett -- who ignores him... The Merchant next tries MASTERMAN who walks behind Ratchett -- shows him a tacky ring.

Masterman stops, puts on glasses, takes one look.

MASTERMAN

Oh, dear god no.

The Merchant moves on, passing MACQUEEN, who is grabbed into a kiosk by a pushy RUG SALESMAN. MacQueen is easily scared:

MACQUEEN

Please, leave me alone. Just take it!

He throws cash at the salesman and pushes his way out, as --

INT. COMPARTMENTS. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

Michel perfects the crease on every ROBE, LINEN and TOWEL -- each emblazoned with the proud WAGON LIT CREST -- as --

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM. NIGHT.

MRS. CAROLINE HUBBARD, late-40s, negotiates her luggage down the length the Orient Express like a seasoned traveler. If it is possible to walk loud she does. A woman who has seen enough of the world to have an opinion on the whole thing and if you give her half a moment she will tell you all about it.

Hubbard is instantly surrounded by PAUPER CHILDREN who flock to likely targets for sympathy. They don't expect her brass.

HUBBARD

What adorable tiny robbers. Well back in California we expect goods for services and I don't see any of you lending a hand with my luggage.

They SHOUT in Turkish, hands out. She's enjoying this.

HUBBARD

I'm of two minds of what to do is the thing. My first husband you see was opposed to giving a penny of his hard earned money to anyone who wasn't himself, while my second husband couldn't refuse a wide eye and upturned hand. My third was a wash since any money he had came from me which I got from the first and second, so I suppose he was on your end of the chow line. Oh but you are such adorable little brown children. Let's see what wonders my change purse holds.

They know that word, "Purse," and stick out their hands.

HUBBARD

I have here a good handful of coins with a hideous face I suppose must be your queen. Is this your queen? I've been traveling so much I lost count of the relevant nobility. Now -- I can give one of these to each of you and you're fed for a day or I can make one of you a king. What's it to be?

CHILDREN

A KING! A KING!

They jump for her coins. She LAUGHS, and --

EXT. ARASTA BAZAAR. NIGHT.

MERCHANTS see a shock of BLOND HAIR in a neat bun pass alone and zoom in on the easy target. They come around to find...

GRETA OHLSSON. A tall, hulking Swede, with a nasty "don't fuck with me" SCAR across her temple. Hardly some defenseless tourist. A merchant finds the nerve to show her an AMULET.

GRETA

You want I should buy something? No, I cannot help. You pray to the wrong god.  
(looks at the amulet)  
What is this? A *nazar*? Ward off the evil eye? I have no need for spells or petty magics, I am protected by the most Heavenly Father, who grants strength and purpose to even the tiniest mouse.

She checks her watch. Decides she has the time:

GRETA

I will make a deal. I shall buy some nonsense from each of you if you repeat after me.

(flips open her BIBLE)

Ah, one of my favorites. Close, close. After me now, good and loud: "It is appointed for men to die once -- and after this comes judgement."

On "judgement" we... CUT TO:

THE STATION CLOCK. IT TICKS TO 8:45 AND --

THE WHISTLE BLASTS THREE TIMES, 15 MINUTE WARNING... CUT TO:

TWO SMALL YIPPY DOGS LEAP UP THE TRAIN STEPS INTO --

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

They run down the sleeper car corridor preceding their owner:

THE PRINCESS NATALIA DRAGOMIROFF. 60s but carries herself as if well over 100. Eyes like frozen shrimp. Russian royalty expects perfection and seldom finds it. No one knows this better than the shy woman two steps behind her...

The Princess' beleaguered and flinchy LADY'S MAID, HILDEGARDE SCHMIDT. Lives in perpetual fear of her lady's disapproval, which is constant. Yet would gladly die for her.

Michel leads the Princess and Schmidt down the corridor to --

INT. FIRST CLASS COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS.

He presents their lush compartment: Cordoba leather ceiling, crystal bas-reliefs, velvet curtains. The Princess takes it in at a glance. Beat.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

No.

Schmidt sighs, used to this, and --

INT. ANOTHER FIRST CLASS COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

Michel shows another gorgeous room.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

No.

INT. THIRD COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

And a third. Here the Princess pauses. Then simply steps in.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

I am not yet unpacked.

Schmidt gives an audible squeak and jumps to it, and --

INT. GRETA OHLSSON AND MARY DEBENHAM'S COMPARTMENT. NIGHT.

Greta lifts her bag onto the high rack, tucks away the baubles she bought at the bazaar. Then hefts Mary's heavy case up for her with ease.

INT. RATCHETT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

RATCHETT looks out the train window. Nervous to get going.

RATCHETT

What're they waiting on? Let's go already. Soon as we get out of here have them make up the bed.

Masterman finishes unpacking Ratchett's things. Turns aside, WINCING. A SHARP PAIN in his jaw he hides from his master.

MASTERMAN

It is already arranged, Mister Ratchett.

RATCHETT

And bring my Dictaphone.

Masterman has it in hand and gives it to him. Ratchett looks annoyed his butler gives him nothing him to yell about.

RATCHETT

Get MacQueen in here. Tell him to bring the receipts from the Milan sale and to prepare a telegram.

Masterman nods -- *Of course*. Steps out to...

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

Masterman crosses to MacQueen at a window sipping at a flask.

MacQueen eye rolls, *Yeahyeahyeah*, puts away his drink, and --

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

A harried Michel follows Bouc and Poirot alongside the train.

BOUC

Give special care to my friend, Michel!  
I want him pampered like a zoo panda.

MICHEL

But Monsieur Bouc, we are fully booked.  
There is no space left.

BOUC

We shall make space. He can have the  
Number 16. The 16 is always left open  
for official use. Very comfortable.

Poirot and Bouc step up onto the sleeper car...

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

MICHEL

16 is taken. The Austrian professor  
booked it two days ago.

BOUC

There is not one first-class sleeping car  
on the whole train? Second class?

MICHEL

There is no berth at all.



BOUC

At this time of year? Must be some convention, salesmen traveling in a pack.

As they proceed down the corridor MARY steps out of her cabin, taken aback to see Poirot again. But then a grin.

MARY DEBENHAM

Hello again. Are you joining us?

POIROT

It depends who wins this debate.

Bouc and Michel argue over the roster: AN OVERHEAD MAP OF COMPARTMENTS ON THE CALAIS COACH.

BOUC

We take on the Bucharest-Paris coach when we reach Belgrade tomorrow, the problem is only for tonight. Here, an opening --

MICHEL

It is a lady's berth. A German woman, the Russian Lady's maid.

BOUC

(to Poirot, eyebrows)  
Fancy a maid, Poirot?

MICHEL

(misses the innuendo entirely)  
Should I ask her? Maybe she is "modern."

BOUC

German. Likely not. Have all the passengers arrived?

MICHEL

One hasn't come yet -- A.M. Harris. He is confirmed.

BOUC

(convincingly)  
"All passengers must check in at least one half hour before time of departure or the seat may be forfeit." Wagon Lit policy guidebook, page 32, paragraph 8. The rules must be enforced or what is the point of making them up. Please take Monsieur Poirot's luggage to Number 7.

Poirot bristles at the odd number.

POIROT

7. Someone in London had better be dead.

Poirot follows Michel down the corridor, trying to avoid collision, when Hubbard pops out her door and BUMPS into Poirot. Instantly taken with him.

POIROT

Apologies, Madam. I meant no disrespect.

HUBBARD

You could try to mean a little.

Poirot tries to get past Hubbard. She doesn't make it easy.

HUBBARD

One thing about train travel, you're always knocking into somebody. It's wonderful. And where else do you find such a bracing mix of race, nationality and class all together in one place?

POIROT

Perhaps the whole of America.

With that he goes. Hubbard chats on noisily as if he was listening or that was the normal way of drawing breath.

HUBBARD

Well put. I do look forward to getting back. Travel's fine for spicy food, mosques and meeting men but eventually you just miss your own bed. I've been accused of being on a husband hunt abroad and I can't in all honesty deny it. I like my time alone, but a lady has certain needs that deserve to be met, if she has any money, and preferably on a regular basis.

She catches Hardman's disapproving face, undaunted, as --

INT. MACQUEEN'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS.

Poirot steps in to escape her. MacQueen sees him settle in, sets his LEDGER carefully down on the night stand --

MACQUEEN

Hullo? I think you're in the wrong berth.

He repeats the line again in American-accented FRENCH.

POIROT

The train is full, we are as you say 'bunk mates' for the night.

MACQUEEN

Oh. Only I was hoping to have the compartment to myself.

POIROT

I'm equally disappointed in you. Nothing to fear, I do not steal and I'm certain I don't snore. Though -- I do not know why I am certain. I always assumed I didn't. You can tell me in the morning.

The WHISTLE BLOWS an elongated blast, and everything LURCHES.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM. NIGHT.

The engine HISSES. The great wheels CREAK then TURN.

*AND THE ORIENT EXPRESS LEAVES THE STATION...*

EXT. STAMBOUL OUTSKIRTS. NIGHT.

IT LEAVES THE TWINKLING CITY BEHIND... AND GLIDES... INTO THE DARK.

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

Late night quiet. Mary Debenham stares out a window, watches the giant trees and tiny towns go by. Arbuthnot, chatting with MacQueen, passes her by. Their eyes meet, as --

INT. SALON CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

SERVERS clean and close down the bar. Only Count Andrenyi remains, drinks what's left of a bottle of Unicum, as --

INT. MACQUEEN'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

MacQueen reads in his berth. He takes up his LEDGER, as --

Above him -- Poirot snores like the devil.

EXT. DARK NIGHT.

The Orient Express barrels through the PITCH BLACK. As if every star was extinguished and nothing else existed.

A CIRCLE OF LIGHT SHINES AHEAD. Like a harvest MOON on the horizon, or another train coming at them... The light grows wider... brighter... until we realize it is a circle of...

DAYLIGHT. We are coming out A MOUNTAIN TUNNEL into...

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. MORNING.

*The night has given way to a bright, cold winter day.*

WIND WHIPS STEAM off the engine onto SNOW-STREAKED COUNTRYSIDE. Winter wheat stretching for miles. Loping cattle, coats left shaggy. Tiny thatch roofed HAMLETS where life has gone on unchanged for centuries.

INT. MACQUEEN'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. MORNING.

A KNOCK on the door. Poirot bolts upright. His MOUSTACHE GUARD like an eye mask over his top lip. Michel uses his PASS KEY, enters with a TRAY for Poirot.

MICHEL

To your compartment at precisely 8.  
Viola: Coffee with more sugar than a man  
could want. As well as --

HE REVEALS THEN MEASURES TWO UPRIGHT, BOILED EGGS. PERFECT.

MICHEL

You'll find nothing to disappoint you on my watch. Also, when you take supper I will move your valises to M. Bouc's compartment at his insistence. We take on the Athens Coach empty at Belgrade so he moves easily into it.

POIROT

You are exquisite, Michel.

A BELL RINGS from another compartment. SCHMIDT waves Michel over to come quickly. The Princess has needs. Michel sighs, then remembers -- one last thing: He uncovers a perfect CAKE. Off Poirot, rare delight...

EXT. BELGRADE STATION. DAY.

KITCHEN STAFF carries aboard fresh ice and steaming fresh BREADS. STOKERS shovel coal. The train has stopped to restock in the rustic Slavic town. Quaint hand-built stone and shingle homes. Stark contrast to...

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Delicate art nouveau, glass panel inlaid with Cuban mahogany.

Bouc makes the rounds. Pouring wine and flirting as his passengers dine. He pours for Mary Debenham, seated with Greta. Arbuthnot sits across Hardman at a near table.

BOUC

Compliments of the Wagon Lit. I am here for all your needs.

MARY DEBENHAM

My needs are well met, thank you.

A polite pass. Bouc nods, offers to Greta, attracted.

GRETA

No, thank you. I do not drink.

BOUC

It does not agree with you?

GRETA

Sin does not agree with me. And vice is where the devil finds his star players.

BOUC

(Ah well, bows politely)  
We should probably no longer speak.

POIROT ENTERS

Holding a volume of Dickens. Passes MacQueen and Ratchett.

POIROT

My "bunk mate." I trust you slept well.

MACQUEEN

I always do. It's a gift I suppose, to sleep well anywhere.

POIROT

The pint of Kentucky bourbon helps.

RATCHETT

Care to join me? My man was just leaving.

POIROT

With regret, I have an appointment with the Director of the train.

ON BOUC'S TABLE

Poirot joins Bouc, eyeing plates as he passes, eager.

POIROT

I see the finest meals in Europe are had not in any one city but the train that goes through them.

BOUC

And still, the best things on the train are not food.

He makes eyes at Hubbard. Who saves her smiles for Poirot. Who hides behind his Dickens. Bouc loves it all.

BOUC

Something about a tangle of strangers pressed together for days with nothing in common but a need to go from one place to another, then never to see each other again. Boredom plus anonymity plus a constant gentle rocking...

POIROT

With your hobbies you will amount to nothing.

BOUC

God I hope so.

THE PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

Is at a near table with Schmidt and her dogs. A WAITER waits to take her order as she hands Schmidt a dog and a brush.

SCHMIDT

I brushed Dalia this morning.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

You tortured her with a comb but you did not brush her. Order me the fish.

SCHMIDT

(scans the menu, to Waiter:)  
Exchange grouper for sole, escarole for the potato and oil for butter on the whole.

Poirot overhears the amended order with deep admiration.

POIROT

That was gorgeous, your Excellency. Garcon, the same, please.

Bouc raises a brow, leans to Poirot.

BOUC

The Princess Dragomiroff. If I were ever to marry for money, I would marry for that much money. You are missing out, with your books and your capers.

POIROT

Romance is not for me. My mind seeks to the perfect -- and there can be no perfection in love.

AT A NEAR TABLE, HARDMAN finishes. A crisp AUSTRIAN ACCENT that should make anyone with a working knowledge of upcoming WWII history cringe. He rises to Michel, off Arbuthnot --

HARDMAN

I would prefer in the future to be sat not with that man. Like should be seated with like. We are... not alike.

Arbuthnot swallows the racial insult. But Mary cannot.

MARY DEBENHAM

Not all of us are so concerned with the separateness of races, Professor.

HARDMAN

It is out of respect for all kinds that I prefer to keep them separate. To mix your red wine and the white would be to ruin them both.

Mary considers this. Pours the two wines in front her together into a single glass. Drinks the whole thing down.

MARY DEBENHAM

I like a good rosé.

And she walks out on Hardman. Poirot LAUGHS out loud.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

THE ORIENT EXPRESS cuts through ice crusted plains.

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. LATER.

Poirot is alone with his coffee and book after a great meal. RATCHETT notes the otherwise EMPTY car... Comes over to Poirot with a plate of cake. Ratchett aims for chummy and naive and some might even buy it.

RATCHETT

Mind if I...? Dessert's an indulgence and I feel silly indulging alone.

POIROT

Nonsense, I am at my happiest alone. But for a slice of the same I offer a chair.

RATCHETT

I been trying to make your acquaintance, Poirot. I never sat so close to fame before. Once rode the bus with Ty Cobb.  
(off Poirot's look)  
Detroit.  
(off Poirot's look)  
Ball player.

Poirot gets his cake and immediately starts shaving off the icing, leaving only the chocolate.

RATCHETT

You're a peculiar man.

POIROT

I am of an age and level of experience where I know what I like and what I do not. What I like pleases me enormously.

(MORE)

POIROT (cont'd)

What I do not I cannot abide. For example, the forced pleasantries before what is determined to be a business discussion.

RATCHETT

Oh you're fun. I'll cut to it: I'd like to offer you a job. "Avenger of the innocent," isn't that what they call you in the papers?

POIROT

And you are an innocent.

RATCHETT

I'm an art dealer, new to it but my beginners luck has carried out. Relics, antiquities, rugs recently, Orientals... Like I said, I'm new to the game, so my eye is amateur, at the mercy of these so-called appraisers, you can't trust a one. Some of my customers find after they buy a piece that they're not exactly original. Hardly my fault if a Kashan silk turns out to be a fake.

POIROT

Hardly.

RATCHETT

I managed to make some enemies is the thing. I got a few letters, someone making threats. Most likely it's the Italians, I sold a set of Safavid carpets in Milan, the buyers aren't too happy with the provenance. They want their money back -- with interest. Italians...  
(*what can you do?*)  
Then along comes the genius detective...

POIROT

Me.

RATCHETT

You.

POIROT

Ah.

RATCHETT

I'd like to hire you to watch my back till I can get someplace safe. Easy money for you, peace of mind for me.

He claps his hands, confident on an easy sale. A pause. Poirot takes a giant bite of his cake, then --



POIROT  
I understand.

                  RATCHETT  
Good.

                  POIROT  
I refuse.

Ratchett takes it like a slap. Anger rising.

                  RATCHETT  
Maybe I wasn't clear -- someone's out to  
get me -- I'm not about to let them.

Ratchett pulls out a pearl-handled PISTOL. POINTS IT.

                  POIROT  
You are holding a gun on me.

                  RATCHETT  
Not on you -- on the world.

                  POIROT  
Where I reside.

Poirot tips the gun out of his direction with his fork, keeps  
eating. Ratchett appreciates his lack of flinch at a gun.

                  RATCHETT  
I see you're the right man for the job.  
How's ten-thousand sound? For a week.

                  POIROT  
(patience spent)  
A generous offer, Mr. Ratchett, I must  
decline. I have travelled across the  
Levant solving crime upon crime and it  
has worn me thin being the only man on  
two continents capable of seeing what is  
obvious. Now I must do the same London  
when I can already say with certainty it  
was the husband covering for the wife's  
indiscretion with the cook seen by the  
postman. I am bored, I am tired, and I  
am tired of being bored. It is already  
clear who is after you, you don't need a  
detective, you need a thug. Better two.

                  RATCHETT  
Fifteen thousand. I'm offering you  
money, good money and lots of it. The  
world's cold and cruel, man, you take  
what you can when it's offered.

POIROT

I make no claims on the world. I take what I need and at times what I want. I indulge my caprices and my belly is always full -- usually with a nice cake.

RATCHETT

(insulted, irate)

I see, job's too hushed for you, no flashbulbs, no papers. You only take cases that bring you in for celebration.

POIROT

You sell fakes to gangsters and are suffering the consequences. I detect criminals, I do not work for them.

RATCHETT

You're saying no to my dirty money?

POIROT

I am saying no to you.

RATCHETT

Is it the business with the gun?

POIROT

No, it is far more personal than that.  
(beat, studies him)  
I -- do not like your face.

Poirot takes a bow, takes his book, takes his leave.

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DUSK.

MacQueen smokes a cigarette, chatting animatedly with Arbuthnot, as the train slows down into a STATION.

EXT. VINCOVCI STATION. DUSK.

The weather has turned bitter. SNOW falls. Poirot and Bouc button their coats and step off the train into WHIPPING WIND.

BOUC

You hate the cold.

POIROT

I like how the snow sets all surfaces back to zero. Makes equals of us all.

BOUC

I only hope we don't get held up in this storm.

At which -- the lovely COUNTESS ANDRENYI steps off the train. She wears only thin clothes against the ripping cold.

BOUC

Better yet, I hope we do.

She steps unsteadily. The Count is immediately at her side. Walks her aside, away from any prying eyes.

POIROT

The young couple keep to themselves.

BOUC

If you had a wife like that, would you go out much?

The Count wraps her in his coat, protective and gentle.

BOUC

That is a man in love.

POIROT

That is a man in luck.

INT. RATCHETT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

The train is moving again. Ratchett is mid-yell at Masterman, who takes it without a flinch.

RATCHETT

How else did it get in here if not you!

MASTERMAN

I couldn't say, Sir.

RATCHETT

Just get my coffee.

Masterman backs out, moves to shut the door. Ratchett sees HUBBARD IN THE CORRIDOR. Checks her out overtly...

RATCHETT

Leave that open will you?

HUBBARD

Eyes linger any longer I'll have to charge rent.

RATCHETT

Not so fast. I'd prefer not to sleep tonight.

HUBBARD

Stick to the coffee.

RATCHETT

You're insulted.

HUBBARD

Disappointed. Some men have a good look and all they have to do is keep their mouths shut and they can take home any prize they want -- and still the mouth opens.

She SLAMS his door. She sees POIROT enjoyed her exchange.

POIROT

You have a keen intuition, Mrs. Hubbard.

HUBBARD

My second husband used to say just so. Hold that-- my first. Intuition yes, memory less so. It was Robert actually, my third. Brightest man I ever met, face like a turnip but I loved that turnip. Best funeral of the bunch -- he was a Jew you see and they bury fast and casket closed. I like my goodbyes quick without the face to face thank you very much.

Poirot bows out. Heads into his compartment next to Ratchett's -- now passing MASTERMAN, who comes with Ratchett's TRAY OF COFFEE.

EXT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

The train climbs as they approach the Dinaric Alps. SNOW falls heavily now. An angry STORM, not done building.

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

Poirot performs his fastidious bedtime rituals.

QUICK SHOTS AS: He ties his robe... Applies moisturizing coats to his hands from a phalanx of lotions... Winds his CLOCKS... Sets them in a row over the sink, all as...

EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP. THAT MOMENT.

THE STORM EXPLODES WITH LIGHTNING that strikes the South face of the mountain. A DEEP GROAN of shifting ice...

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

Poirot sets down a framed PHOTO OF A MAN IN UNIFORM: A BELGIAN OFFICER FROM WORLD WAR I. Poirot straightens. Salutes with reverence. Only then opens his box of combs.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE. THAT MOMENT.

A heavy build up of snow and ice CRACKS under its own weight. ICE BREAKS off in titanic sheets.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS. NIGHT.

The Orient Express barrels ahead towards the oncoming --

AVALANCHE

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

Poirot brushes his moustache in those precise strokes of two.

POIROT

And 17 and 18 -- and 19 and 20 -- and --

BOOM! THE WORLD LURCHES!

INT. ENGINE CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

A WALL OF SNOW ENGULFS THE ENGINE!

INT. DINING CAR. THAT MOMENT.

Dishes and glasses fall and shatter.

INT. MARQUEZ AND MASTERMAN'S COMPARTMENT. THAT MOMENT.

Marquez falls from his bunk. His SUITCASE opens -- dozens of MINIATURE TOY CARS and PHOTOS spill out all over Masterman.

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

Poirot picks himself up off the floor. Laments his things strewn about. Smooths his moustache. Opens the door to...

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

The passengers are knocked about but no one hurt. Poirot crosses Marquez (on the floor picking up PHOTOS) to Michel:

POIROT

Are we dead?

MICHEL

The snow stopped the train for the moment.  
We should be moving along shortly.

The passengers return to bed. MARY seems acutely concerned.

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. LATER THAT NIGHT.

Poirot has put his all things back to order. Re-salutes the PHOTO. Climbs into bed. Puts on his moustache guard. Looks out the window: They are still STOPPED. He begins to read.

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT / CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

*BEGIN A SEQUENCE, FAST, DISORIENTING, OF INTERRUPTED SLEEP AS:*

- 1) A LOUD GROAN COMES THROUGH THE WALL. LIKE A CRY.
- 2) Poirot opens his compartment door to inspect, sees --
- 3) Michel KNOCKS at the door beside his. No answer.

MICHEL  
Mr. Ratchett?

KNOCKS AGAIN. Finally, RATCHETT ANSWERS THROUGH HIS DOOR:

RATCHETT (O.S.)  
*Ce n'est rien. Je me suis trompé.*

MICHEL  
*Bien, Monsieur. Good night.*

- 4) A BELL RINGS down the hall. Michel leaves to answer it.
- 5) Poirot returns to bed. Glances at his CLOCKS: 12:37.
- 6) Then, MORE NOISES from the WALL. *FOOTSTEPS. WATER RUNS.*
- 7) Someone down the hall RINGS their BELL REPEATEDLY.
- 8) Annoyed, Poirot RINGS HIS BELL. Michel quickly comes.

POIROT  
Mrs. Hubbard again?

MICHEL  
Mrs. Hubbard always.

Poirot shrugs, shuts his door, again back to bed...

- 10) A LOUD THUMP RATTLES HIS DOOR. *What now?*
- 11) Poirot's head pops out into the corridor again to see:  
A WOMAN IN A SCARLET KIMONO

Move down the corridor towards the toilet at the end.

- 12) Poirot SLAMS his door. Lifts his moustache guard to cover his eyes. SNAPS OFF THE LIGHTS. To sleep.

TO BLACK.

EXT. ORIENT EXPRESS. SUNRISE.

*MORNING SUN REVEALS THE ENGINE OFF THE RAILS AND ON ITS SIDE IN AN EMBANKMENT. MORE SNOW falls entrenching it deeper.*

The train is on a STEEP MOUNTAIN RISE. A breathtaking view of DINARA MOUNTAIN. Though you might not want to look down.

INT. SALON CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Bouc explains to Hubbard, Mary Debenham, Doctor Arbuthnot, Princess Dragomiroff, MacQueen, Hardman, Marquez and Greta Ohlsson. They are not taking this well.

BOUC

I'm sorry, we are still unable to move.

MACQUEEN

How long're we supposed to  
just sit here? --

MARY DEBENHAM

(agitated)  
-- Yes, someone must be doing  
something.

BOUC

Of course I am doing something, I am  
doing nothing. In -- two hours and ten  
minutes, when we do not arrive at Brod as  
scheduled they will surmise our situation  
and dispatch a team of large men with  
shovels to clear the way.

HUBBARD

That could take days! What kind of a  
train you running? First a man comes in  
my room in the middle of the night -- now  
this! I have a connection to make, my  
boat sails day after tomorrow from Paris!

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Without you I'd wager. Or me in London.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

I hold you accountable for the loss of my  
time, Monsieur Bouc.

BOUC

Madame, the meals, the wine, the softness  
of your sheets are mine. You can't hold  
me accountable for the weather.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

Of course I can. You are the one here.

BOUC

Please, my friends, the chef is on hand,  
the bar stocked. I have even provided  
for the view.

Indeed, outside their window is a grand view of the mountain  
and the FOREST leading to it. If we are going to be stuck  
the stage is set. Hubbard is unappeased. Hardman frets:

HARDMAN

My conference in Turin... I'm to present  
my findings on Bakelite for military use.

MARQUEZ

(sits back with a magazine)  
And I was to meet at the auto factory in Sochaux about auto imports. Nothing to do about it but relax -- America will have to get on without the Peugeot!

GRETA

Yes. Some things, they are God's will...  
And we must accept it.

Greta stares out the window on the mountains, submitted to her fate... PRELAP: KNOCKKNOCKKNOCK!

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

Masterman is at Ratchett's door with his breakfast tray.

MASTERMAN

Breakfast for you, Mr. Ratchett. Your coffee.

No answer. Strange. He KNOCKS again.

Poirot exits his cabin to see Masterman KNOCKING loudly. Strange. Instinct tugs at him. He tries the door himself.

POIROT

Mr. Ratchett?

Poirot kneels. Feels under the door --

POIROT

Cold air. Bring Bouc immediately.  
(beat)  
And the Doctor.

CLOSE: A KEY TURNS. THE DOOR OPENS. CATCHES ON THE CHAIN.

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Michel removes his pass key, steps aside. Poirot nods to Arbuthnot. Who KICKS HIGH. The door BREAKS open on...

INT. RATCHETT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS.

Poirot, Bouc and Doctor Arbuthnot step inside to find... The window OPENED. SNOW accumulated beside...

RATCHETT

SLUMPED IN HIS BED AT AN UNDIGNIFIED ANGLE. A SHEET OVER HALF OF HIM. ARTERIAL SPRAY ON THE WALL ABOVE HIM.

Poirot carefully pulls back the sheet.



REVEAL: A BLOODY CHEST. RATCHETT HAS BEEN STABBED TO DEATH.

Arbuthnot moves to him. Poirot warns:

POIROT  
Touch nothing else. Only the man.

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

Poirot and Bouc step out. Bouc reels. Slumps to the floor.

BOUC  
This is horrible. First the accident,  
now I'll have to meet the police at some  
grimy station and make a report --

POIROT  
And a man is dead.

BOUC  
(covering his selfishness)  
And a man is dead!

Arbuthnot comes out, warming up from the cold cabin.

BOUC  
No chance of a suicide?

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT  
He was stabbed. A long bladed knife,  
straight edge, tapering to 2.3 inches. I  
count twelve wounds. Three mortal, two  
breaking clear through belts of bone and  
muscle, the rest shallow.

POIROT  
Left hand side or the right?

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT  
That's the thing. The wounds are  
haphazard. They don't seem to follow any  
pattern. As if the killer wasn't sure.  
Or closed his eyes and struck blind.

POIROT  
Or wanted to confuse the police. Can you  
estimate the time of death?

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT  
Hard to say with the window open. My  
best guess, between midnight and two.

Michel, mystified and shaken, taps his conductor's chair at  
the far end, with a clear view down the corridor.

MICHEL

But -- no one went in his compartment the whole night! I sat right here in my seat the whole night -- I would have seen someone go in. It is impossible.

Desperate, Bouc gestures to Poirot to talk privately in...

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS.

BOUC

I need your help, my friend.

POIROT

I cannot unmurder the man.

BOUC

You have to find who did this. We stop next in Brod, we cannot arrive with a stabbed body and no culprit. The Slavs will ransack the train and everyone on it. If I expose the Company to this indignity I'll lose my job!

POIROT

You can find another.

BOUC

I'm not qualified for anything! I implore you on behalf of the entire *Compagnie Internationale des Wagon Lits* -- when the police come we can present them with the case closed. You're the only one who can save me!

POIROT

Your faith touches me. I am on holiday, *mon cher*. You promised me my rest.

BOUC

Think of it as a little beachside puzzle. Nothing to your mind. You look up the antecedents of our passengers, establish their bona fides. Then you do what you do, you sit in a chair, eat cake and think until the solution presents itself. What else will you do while we sit in the snow? Without constant stimulation, your little grey cells will starve and die.

POIROT

I have my book.

Bouc throws Poirot's volume of Dickens out the window.

BOUC

Slavs, Poirot! Do you really want to submit to Slavic hospitality? Delays, annoyances, prison. Yes, prison cells for us all! They'll bungle the case -- and take months to do it. Fat roaches drowning in your moustache wax.

(no reaction)

Then I appeal to your sense of Justice.

This gets through to Poirot. He is listening.

BOUC

If we leave this to the police they will choose a culprit, right or wrong -- and hang him. Most likely Mr. Marquez for no other reason than his name is Marquez. Or Doctor Arbuthnot for the color of his skin. And a killer will go free to live a good life or worse, to kill again. For god's sake they still use the guillotine! You are the only man who can bring justice.

Poirot takes this in. From here he can see through a window into the Dining Car. All the passengers inside. All in danger. One of them a killer. A pause, then...

ON POIROT. The moustache TWITCHES with a DECISION.

POIROT

You made up that part about the guillotine.

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

POIROT MARCHES SHARPLY DOWN THE HALL. *The case is joined!*

POIROT

I require a map of the Calais coach --

BOUC

Of course.

POIROT

Full use of the kitchen cart --

BOUC

Anything!

POIROT

And your shoes.

*Shoes?*

CLOSE ON: BOUC'S BEAUTIFUL LOAFERS SQUISH ON SNOW. We are --

EXT. ROOF OF THE TRAIN. DAY.

Poirot wears them. Standing ON TOP of a car. He looks out on the train, framed on one side by MOUNTAIN and FOREST, the other by CLIFF. Counts out the cars back to front --

POIROT

Storage, storage, empty sleeper, sleeper, salon, dining, kitchen, coal, engine. The doors between sleepers were locked at night?

MICHEL

Absolutely. Done myself.

He holds his PASS KEY. Fixed to a chain that is fixed to his belt. Bouc climbs up wearing toiletry cases on his feet.

BOUC

The train has been searched. No one is hiding on it or under it.

POIROT

We can therefore limit our investigation to those who slept in the Calais coach.

He STOMPS his foot: They are standing atop it. Poirot looks out on the forest side of the train.

POIROT

The open window was a feint, meant to make us believe the killer had left through it. In all likelihood we'd have believed it but for the snow, alas...

BOUC

(seeing it)  
No tracks.

POIROT

None. As the only traveler who slept in another coach and who also had passage arranged before the deceased you have the good fortune to be the only one who is not a suspect and so may assist me.

BOUC

You'd suspect me?

POIROT

God himself is a suspect at the beginning of a case. And right now he seems the only one capable of committing the crime.

Poirot holds the OVERHEAD MAP OF THE COACH (with the passengers' NAMES and compartments) over the roof.

*POIROT'S POV: As if seeing THROUGH the roof INTO the sleeper -- the COMPARTMENTS AND INHABITANTS all now locked in memory.*

He tucks away the MAP. SKIPS toward the ladder with a surefootedness Bouc does not possess. The beginnings of mystery have unleashed a puckishness in Poirot. Michel and Bouc struggle to keep up, as --

POIROT

I do not approve of murder. All crime requires an aberration of the natural inclinations. Murder most so. Everyday we meet people we know the world would be better without, yet we do not shoot them. To look into a man's eyes as you snatch from him the ability to be is a rare thing indeed. So -- let us find the crack! I need to see all passengers' passports and tickets. You will arrange for me interview each of them. We will gather their evidence, then apply order and method until one culprit presents as capable and incentivized to break with natural and Yugo-Slav law.

(HALTS, wheels on Michel)

I can begin with you, my boy.

Michel shivers. Perhaps the desired intent.

MICHEL

Here? In the cold?

POIROT

We can be brief. I will be asking you to bring some hot tea in a moment and prefer to establish now it won't be poisoned.

BOUC

Come, I've known Michel for years.

Still, Poirot inspects Michel's passport, making him nervous.

POIROT

Pierre Michel of Avignon. You say you were in our sleeper coach all night. You never left it?

MICHEL

Only once. When we reached the station in Vincovci.

POIROT

Maybe you slept?

MICHEL

Never. The chef's coffee is strong.

POIROT

Perhaps it moved you to the toilet? With the evening paper? We are investigating a murder, no time to be shy about nature's calls.

MICHEL

No, I tell you no assassin could have moved through the car without me seeing him. And I have the only pass key.

Michel's eyes widen realizing how bad that sounds. Poirot studies him -- then suddenly GRIPS the ladder, JUMPS down to --

EXT. TRACKS.

Michel begs after Poirot as he CLOMPS through the snow, checking UNDER THE TRAIN --

MICHEL

Oh god, that makes me doubly suspect. I didn't do anything -- I swear --

Poirot stops to face him, eyes locked.

POIROT

Did anyone go into Ratchett's compartment after he went to bed?

Michel nods and --

*INSERT CUT: A FLASHBACK -- MICHEL'S POV AS: MACQUEEN GOES IN TO SEE RATCHETT. THEN MASTERMAN.*

MICHEL (V.O.)

*His secretary, then his valet. Then he rang at 20 to one... only to say it was a mistake.*

MICHEL KNOCKS ON RATCHETT'S DOOR, HEARS HIM CALL FROM WITHIN:

RATCHETT (O.S.)

*Ce n'est rien. Je me suis trompé.*

*(NOTE: Our POV FLASHBACKS should have a quality to them to denote we are witnessing an account of an event, distinct from clear, objective truth.)*

BACK ON: POIROT. His demeanor shifts, pace quickening, subjects shifting to throw Michel off:

POIROT

Go on, all you saw and did until morning.

MICHEL

I addressed a bell or so --

POIROT

-- Who? --

MICHEL

Princess Dragomiroff asked me to fetch her maid. Then the American, Hubbard, was upset -- I answered your bell -- then I made up the bed for Mr. MacQueen --

POIROT

Was he alone?

MICHEL

With Doctor Arbuthnot, arguing politics I think. Or tennis. I get the names confused, which one has Stalin? He went to bed, then I sat in my chair the rest of the night.

POIROT

No one else passed?

MICHEL

One of the ladies went to the toilet at the end, a red kimono. Dragons. Oh, and you stuck your head out again, Monsieur.

POIROT

(suddenly)

Ratchett was rude to you.

MICHEL

No more than I'm used to -- maybe a bit --

POIROT

-- You are not married? --

BOUC

-- Is this relevant to the --

POIROT

-- Why? Are you unpleasant? Violent? A drinker? --

MICHEL

-- No, I occasionally I may have a --

POIROT

-- Why then?

MICHEL

(admitting)

-- My mother. I had to care for her. She lived with me the last years. She was... disturbed. A deep melancholy. She passed only a month ago.

A pause. Poirot relents. Satisfied. Eyes kindly again.

MICHEL

I thought I'd feel free after she passed.  
Now that she's gone... I miss her. She  
was the only family I had left.

POIROT

In time even grief passes. Thank you,  
Michel, that is all. Painless, no?

Hardly. Poirot steps back toward the train. Bouc scowls:

BOUC

That was mean.

POIROT

I have too many friends as it is.

BOUC

I'm your only friend!

POIROT

Allons-y. We have a car full of  
passengers to upset.

He climbs back aboard, energized... And we...

INT. SALON CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Poirot takes off the sopping shoes, hands them back to Bouc.  
Puts his own dry ones back on. ALL THE PASSENGERS (but the  
Countess) are assembled, waiting on Bouc to explain:

BOUC

I need you all to remain calm.

HUBBARD

What now? Do we have to march home?

BOUC

(fumfering)

Allow me to-- It seems, well, our bad  
luck has worsened, that is --

POIROT

(out with it)

A passenger has died on the train. Mr.  
Ratchett.

*THE NEWS HITS EACH SUSPECT. A TABLEAUX OF REACTIONS, TOO  
MANY TO TAKE IN. \*\* REMEMBER THIS MOMENT \*\**

MACQUEEN

So they got him after all.

POIROT

You assume he was killed?



All stare at MacQueen. MacQueen does poorly under stress.

MACQUEEN

No -- not at all, I just meant he was in fine health -- he had enemies.

POIROT

Indeed. He was murdered.

MARY DEBENHAM

Good god. A murder, here?

HUBBARD

(distressed)

I told you someone was rooting about my cabin! No one would listen!

PRINCESS DRAFOMIROFF

MICHEL

What is this? How many

attacks have we sustained? --

There was no one in her cabin

-- I looked myself!

SHOUTING. Poirot quiets the chaos with a RAP of his cane:

POIROT

As we are snowbound for the foreseeable future, I have, at M. Bouc's request, elected to take on the case and find for him our criminal.

HARDMAN

And why you?

POIROT

I am Detective Hercule Poirot. I have -- some experience in these matters. I will speak to all of you in kind. The more you cooperate the sooner this will all be behind us. For the time being I must recommend outside of meals you remain in your compartments with the doors locked.

HUBBARD

I feel like a prisoner here!

POIROT

It is for your own safety. If there was a murder then there was a murderer.

(and then)

*The murderer is with us -- on the train now.*

The dark thought settles. The passengers look to one another, distrustful. A night ago friendly strangers. Today each a suspect in a murder. And we... CUT TO:

A DOOR SLIDES OPEN. REVEAL: RATCHETT'S BODY IN HIS BED

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. MOMENTS LATER.

Poirot has brought MacQueen to see him. MacQueen turns pale.

MACQUEEN

Yeah. That's Ratchett.

POIROT

Only for the official record. It bothers you to see his body?

MACQUEEN

Any body. Never seen a dead man before. Hard to believe, you talk to a man... and only the next morning, he's -- blue.

Poirot closes Ratchett's door. MacQueen opens his flask.

BOUC

Is this really the time for drinking?

MACQUEEN

My boss is dead, I'm out of a job, and you're looking at me like I did it...

*Cheers.*

POIROT

I make no allegation. You knew him so we collect from you the essential facts.

(checks his notes)

So. Samuel Edward Ratchett. Age 55 and no further. You were a relative of his?

MACQUEEN

Goodness, no. I was his secretary. Closer to translator really. Book his travel, order his steaks. The man ate more steak than I've seen my whole life.

POIROT

His business?

MACQUEEN

Antiques. Had no qualification for it, not the eye or the languages. Truth is, he had no head for business, accounting, none of it. I took care of everything. I found most all of his legitimate pieces to buy. Though sometimes he came up with items he "found" himself.

POIROT

He had forged you mean.

MacQueen shrugs.

POIROT

How long were you in his employ?

MACQUEEN

A year. Prohibition wasn't to my taste, so I found myself abroad. In bad debt and in need of a job. I'm a lawyer by education not disposition. Was downright awful at it, but my eye for art is...

(impressed with himself)

We met at an auction house in Riga. He outbid me on a set of Iznik vases. I didn't have the money to make a serious play and, boy, did he ever. He liked my taste, told me to name my price to work for him. I aimed high.

POIROT

Then you were fond of him.

MACQUEEN

I was fond of his money. Ratchett was crude, demanding, insulting and most likely a felon. I suspect he had to leave the States in a hell of a hurry if you get my meaning. But my bread was buttered pretty thick with him, I can hold my tongue about plenty for that. I suppose I'm not doing myself any favors telling you I couldn't stand the guy.

POIROT

On the contrary. If you were overly emotional I might suspect a farce. When did you last see him?

MACQUEEN

Must've been about ten. He called me in to look over our sales in Italy.

POIROT

Milan?

MacQueen is surprised he knew that. Nods.

POIROT

If you could describe for me your movements last night.

MACQUEEN

Well, let's see... I went to see Ratchett to go over those accounts -- I had to translate, as the contracts were in French, and he didn't speak a word --

*INSERT CUT: MACQUEEN'S POV -- HE GOES OVER RECEIPTS IN HIS LEDGER WITH RATCHETT -- ARGUES OVER DRINKS WITH ARBUTHNOT --*

MACQUEEN (V.O.)

*I struck up a chat with the colored doctor, Arbuthnot. Had a few drinks, stretched our legs.*

*THEY STEP OFF THE TRAIN AT THE STATION INTO THE BRACING AIR.*

MACQUEEN

He had some odd opinions about Stalin I had to turn around, he was all right. I don't hold a man's race against him, but I don't often go for Britishers. Pompous bunch of tea sops most days.

POIROT

And about what time did your party end?

MACQUEEN

He left just after two.

Poirot catches Bouc's eye: *After the murder was committed.*

POIROT

Do you know of any specific enemies Mr. Ratchett may have had.

MACQUEEN

Gosh, take a number.

POIROT

He confided he had been threatened.

MACQUEEN

He got a few nasty letters. I handled his correspondence, I have them if you like. Some anyway -- he tore the rest up in a rage, with the bits in the fire --

INT. MACQUEEN'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. MOMENTS LATER.

MacQueen opens his LEDGER from its spot on the night stand. Finds TWO LETTERS. Poirot opens them: A MISHMASH OF LETTERS CLIPPED OUT OF PAPERS AND MAGAZINES:

**"no one Gets the BEtTr of us" "bettR WaTCH yOurSELf, SEE!"**

POIROT

Monotonous. Amateur. A cartoon of a blackmail letter. Down to the mock Chicago drawl. Method gleaned from detective novels and bad ones at that.

(with a shudder)

Doyle.

Poirot nods to Bouc, done with MacQueen for now.

BOUC

Thank you. If we have any further questions we will call upon you again.

MacQueen nods, heads out. Bouc is enjoying this.

BOUC

"If we have any further questions..." So official. Is this what it's like to have an actual job?

A KNOCK. MacQueen pops his head back in. One last thought:

MACQUEEN

Have you considered the Latin man? Awful big guy and... his kind don't have the same distaste for murder. Historically.

POIROT

I thought you don't hold a man's race against him.

MACQUEEN

I suppose -- depends on the race.

With that, he goes.

POIROT

And he was doing so well.

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

MacQueen sits at a table. Catches eyes with Masterman. Who turns away, distrusting, suspicious.

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Poirot looks over the blackmail letters again.

BOUC

You think it's MacQueen?

POIROT

It is too early to say. All the same I admit I cannot see him stabbing his victim 12 times in a frenzy.

BOUC

Not sober anyway. Maybe we should speak to the Latin man next. They are known to settle their disputes with a knife --

POIROT

-- And the French with surrender.

Bouc makes a decidedly French face, but takes his point.

BOUC  
Who did it then?

POIROT  
I do not know yet. It is time we ask.

BOUC  
Ask? Who?

POIROT  
The victim of course!

CUT TO: RATCHET. DEAD EYES STARING. AS HIS VOICE PLAYS:

*RATCHETT (ON DICTOPHONE)*  
*-- Receipts total 28,000 pounds, at my count that's 1,200 short. I didn't spend it so someone's got it. Might be time to change banks. Look into one of those Swiss affairs --*

INT. RATCHETT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

*CLICK!* Poirot stands over RATCHETT'S DICTOPHONE. Turns it OFF. Considers what he heard. Moves to examine the body.

POIROT  
Let us see if our doctor gave a factual account.

BOUC  
He took an oath, he can't lie.

POIROT  
Many men take oaths to honor their wives for all time, yet somehow still find themselves atop the maid.  
(approving)  
12 stab wounds, yes. Patternless. If Arbuthnot is guilty he did not let it influence his responsibilities.

He checks the dead man's pockets. A GOLD WATCH in the chest pocket. Case dented savagely. The crystal CRACKED.

BOUC  
It's stopped -- 1:15. This agrees with the doctor on time of death -- between twelve and two. Here we have it.

POIROT  
It is possible, yes. Certainly possible.

BOUC

I do not quite understand you.

POIROT

I do not understand myself! I understand nothing at all. These two wounds are deep, yet there is no blood, as if the man was already dead when they were delivered. Some powerful, some mere scratches. This one a right handed thrust, here the left... And during all this our victim, vigorous and full of the Chef's strong coffee merely lies still and accepts death? Does he struggle or cry out or defend himself?

Poirot reaches under Ratchett's pillow to find... RATCHETT'S GUN. Hands it to Bouc, who holds it like a wet rat.

Poirot looks to the nightstand. On it are a brush, an empty glass, a bottle of water, a coffee cup. He sniffs each. Stops at THE COFFEE CUP.

POIROT

Barbital. The mickey slipped.

BOUC

Drugged him to avoid...

*The gun.* Poirot shifts his attention to AN ASHTRAY. TWO CIGAR BUTTS. A CHARRED FRAGMENT OF PAPER ASH.

Bouc finds A LADIES HANDKERCHIEF on the floor by the bed. Monogrammed with an "H."

POIROT

A lady's handkerchief. An *objet de luxe*, handmade, expensive cambric, 200 francs in Paris. She even has an initial.  
(skeptical, then notices)  
And she has a friend.

Poirot is amused to find A PIPE CLEANER on the floor near it.

BOUC

Another clue.

POIROT

Oh yes. One cannot complain of having no clues in this room. Dropped most conveniently. A masculine clue beside the feminine. A riot of clues... There is one, however, that seems genuine. Of everything meant for us to find, this was not. The accidental breadcrumb.

Poirot RINGS THE BELL. Then gently picks up the ASHTRAY. Michel comes, answering the bell.

POIROT

Good Michel. I require an old fashioned woman's hatbox. The Princess's Lady Maid should do. Do not say why you're asking.

MICHEL

I have no idea why I'm asking.

POIROT

Excellent!

About to leave, Poirot takes one look back at dead Ratchett.

POIROT

I like his face dead even less.

He throws a sheet over Ratchett... and we...

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Poirot disassembles his spirit lamp, removing the wax tin as Michel comes with a HATBOX.

MICHEL

She was out of her room. Too bad, I thought of a great excuse for taking it --

POIROT

It is perfect.

MICHEL

-- Customs regulation.

POIROT

Until 15 years ago hatboxes relied on this peculiar barbarism. Pins to skewer the poor hat into wire mesh.

Poirot takes two round humps of WIRE NETTING out of the hatbox. Gives the hatbox back to Michel.

POIROT

Customs regulation complete. Please return it before it is missed.

Dismissing Michel to work in private. Michel goes.

Poirot flattens the netting. Gently uses his flat moustache combs to place the THE CHARRED PAPER ASH FRAGMENTS from the ashtray between the two now-flat wire screens, as --



POIROT

Habitually, I find it better to consider the psychology of why a clue was left rather than analyze what the object is under glass. One must seek the truth within -- not without. In this case, however, I welcome a little scientific assistance.

He LIGHTS the spirit lamp, readies a pen. Places the screens over the flame. Wisps of SMOKE then...

THE ASHES GOES UP LIKE FLASH PAPER. But in that instant LETTERS BECOME APPARENT, WORDS GLOW. Too fast for us.

*Not too fast for Poirot. He instantly draws what he saw. Exactly the same letters and hand. A mind like a scanner.*

CLOSE ON HIS COMPLETED SKETCH: THE WORD FRAGMENTS READ:

A S  
A STRONG  
BLOOD IS ON  
HAND  
YOU WILL DIE  
T

BOUC

"T"... Who is "T"?

POIROT GOES SILENT. SUDDENLY HAUNTED. All pride in his cleverness overtaken by darkness. He sinks in his chair.

Blows out the candle.

INT. SALON CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Poirot stares out a window alone. Quiet. A tray of gorgeous foods set out. But the only thing Poirot touches is a small, porcelain tea cup, which he rolls around in his fingers. Something has changed. Bouc approaches cautiously.

POIROT

This is no longer a beachside puzzle.

(and then)

I know the dead man's real name. It is not Ratchett -- but Cassetti.

BOUC

I -- know that name...

POIROT

Then you also know the name Armstrong.

BOUC

Good god. That -- was -- he.

POIROT

(nods)

I once believed evil could never go unpunished. The Armstrong Kidnapping taught me otherwise. Captain Armstrongs' family was... the rare thing. Goodness like that is delicate as a tea cup.

*INSERT: NEWSREEL FOOTAGE. PLAYED NOW WITHOUT SOUND. ONLY POIROT'S HAUNTED VOICE OVER THE HAUNTING IMAGES:*

*THE ARMSTRONGS, A GOLDEN COUPLE IN THEIR PRIME HUG BY A PLANE.*

POIROT (V.O.)

*People aspired to them...*

*NEWSREEL: THE LADDER OUTSIDE THE HIGH BEDROOM WINDOW.*

INTERCUT: BOUC AND POIROT.

POIROT

In the cocked up sideshow of a trial every member of their household staff stood up and swore they would have died to save the child -- or the parents from their mortal grief. A nurse was even beaten trying to fight the kidnapper. But the child was taken.

BOUC

Little Daisy wasn't it?

*NEWSREEL: A CHILD'S BEDCLOTHES FOUND SOILED IN THE WOODS. A RANSOM LETTER, PORED OVER BY POLICE.*

POIROT (V.O.)

*Ransom paid, yet the child was found murdered. Accusations flew but when the true culprit was finally named -- he had already bribed his way out of the country before he could be apprehended --*

SLO-MO CLOSE: The tea cup slips from his hand. SHATTERS.

BOUC

Cassetti. Ratchett.

Poirot takes his SKETCH of the burned note and fills in the MISSING LETTERS -- so it reads COMPLETE:

DAISY  
ARMSTRONG'S  
BLOOD IS ON  
YOUR HANDS  
YOU WILL DIE  
FOR IT

POIROT

How many innocent lives ruined, or ended in that perversion of justice. Captain Armstrong, pregnant Sonia -- the baby she carried who never had a chance to live at all -- the suicide of the wrongly accused maid.

NEWSREEL: THE COURT PROCEEDINGS LIKE A CIRCUS. A RAGING CROWD CHARGES THE ACCUSED YOUNG WOMAN.

POIROT (V.O.)

To say nothing of the living deaths of the family. Sonia's mother was the stage actress, Linda Arden -- a young sister -- neither heard from since.

FINALLY, STILL IN SILENCE, LITTLE DAISY PLAYS, AS HER PARENTS WATCH ON. THE GOLDEN FAMILY BEFORE THE FALL. ALL GONE NOW.

BOUC

I wish you had been there. This Cassetti would not have gotten away.

Poirot straightens. Shoulders ready for the burden. I am here now.

POIROT

A great many would have wanted Cassetti dead just as we found him. Even more when we add his enemies as Ratchett. We must narrow that number to one.

A charged moment -- interrupted as -- Michel KNOCKS. Trying to keep someone from entering behind him.

MICHEL

Apologies, Monsieur. Mrs. Hubbard -- she insists on seeing you -- immediately. I held her as best I could --

At which -- MRS. HUBBARD PUSHES HER WAY IN. *Hmpf!*

HUBBARD

I'll speak to them now, thank you --

MICHEL

(apologetic)  
She is very strong.

HUBBARD

When no one listens to me I make myself heard. I've been trying to get in to see you since all this madness began!

POIROT

Mrs. Hubbard. You have a head full of steam and a mouth full of words. I am sorry to have kept you waiting. You have something of importance.

HUBBARD

You're goddamn right I do, what I've been trying to say all day: The murderer was in my compartment last night!

No small detail. Poirot and Bouc exchange looks.

HUBBARD

I thought I might be killed, turns out I might had only he got Ratchett instead. I just fell back asleep after giving the Swedish woman an aspirin -- I woke up in the dark -- and I knew there was a man in my compartment!

INSERT CUT: HUBBARD'S POV -- HER EYES SHOCK AWAKE, SEEING MOVEMENT. A SHADOW GLIDES IN THE DARK, A FOOTSTEP CREAKS --

HUBBARD (V.O.)

I was so scared I couldn't move. First I thought it was Ratchett not taking no for an answer. Or a thief after my jewelry.

THE SHADOW CLOSES IN ON HUBBARD IN HER BED -- SHE BITES HER LIP TO AVOID SCREAMING -- HER HAND SLOWLY MOVES TO THE BELL --

HUBBARD (V.O.)

I couldn't see his face, but I could feel him. The intent of him. He meant harm. I reached for the bell -- and rang the living hell out of it.

MICHEL UNLOCKS HER DOOR WITH ITS FRANTICALLY RINGING BELL -- LIGHT FLOODS IN FROM THE HALL TO REVEAL: THE ROOM IS EMPTY.

HUBBARD

But by then he was gone. I haven't calmed since.

POIROT

"He." You are certain it was a man?

HUBBARD

I know what it feels like when there's a man in your bedroom. I told your conductor -- he wouldn't believe me. Said it's impossible, it must've been a nightmare. I said check the communication door between my room and Ratchett's, he must have left through there --

*INSERT CUT: MICHEL INSPECTS HER ROOM -- FINDS NOTHING -- TRIES TO CALM HER AS SHE RANTS (AS POIROT SAW).*

HUBBARD

Sure enough it wasn't bolted.

Michel nods. She's right.

HUBBARD

And I know I locked it before going to sleep -- after what Ratchett said to me. He made a rather overt overture. Didn't think it past him to make an unwanted advance. I don't mean to speak ill of the dead, but the man put me off.

POIROT

You may speak of this dead any way you wish. You have heard perhaps of the Armstrong Kidnapping?

HUBBARD

(confused)

Of course, you couldn't avoid it. I tried with that story -- morbid stuff. There's never any justice in the world, certainly not in that case.

POIROT

Until now. The child's murderer, Cassetti, died last night. Ratchett was the man.

A pause. Then Hubbard smirks with haughty pride.

HUBBARD

I told you, I knew he was a rotten one! A keen intuition, didn't you say? About men especially. For example I trust you implicitly, and Bouc here not at all.

POIROT

Did you happen to know the Armstrongs?

HUBBARD

Knew of, can't say I had the pleasure. There's money and there's money. But you do believe me, about the man in my room?

POIROT

I am only taking accounts, Mrs. Hubbard.

HUBBARD

I'm aware you think me a silly woman, no need to hide it. I have proof it's true!

She pulls out a SMALL GOLD BUTTON. Bouc takes it. Holds it against Michel's uniform. *It matches his tunic's buttons.*

BOUC

It is from the uniform of a Wagon Lit attendant. It may have fallen from Michel's when he searched your room.

MICHEL

(counts off his tunic, nervous)  
I am not missing any.

HUBBARD

Well I found it at the foot of my bed, on the cover. Right where I slept. What do you call that?

Poirot smiles. A hint of flirt to curry favor.

POIROT

I call it evidence. Thank you, Mrs. Hubbard, I am glad you forced your way to us. If you would indulge for me a personal question.

(she'd love to)

What is the color of your dressing gown?

HUBBARD

Odd question but all right, pink flannel.

POIROT

Nothing in scarlet silk?

HUBBARD

I'd happily make a change to suit a fellow's tastes. I'm very amenable.

"Amenable" said to invite interpretation. As she goes Poirot "notices" the HANDKERCHIEF on the table. The embroidered H.

POIROT

Ah. You forgot something.

HUBBARD

Oh no, I cut mine from my latest late husband's old shirts. My frugal streak, and he had delicate skin so his shirts were the softest cotton imaginable. Nice way to remember him.

She shows her own handkerchief. Blows her nose.

POIROT

May I ask you please not to mention this news to the others? Of Cassetti.

HUBBARD  
(zips her lips)  
Dormouse.

The door closes behind her. Bouc rolls his eyes audibly.

BOUC  
You know she will tell them immediately.

He LAUGHS. *He is counting on it.* And we... CUT TO:

THE MAP OF THE CALAIS COACH. SOARING OVER THE LABELED  
COMPARTMENTS. LANDING ON NUMBER 4. AND A NAME: MASTERMAN.

INT. KITCHEN CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

CLOSE ON: MASTERMAN. Poirot holds his passport. Poirot has taken up in the kitchen. Helping himself to food and tools to illustrate his points as instinct dictates.

POIROT  
Your name, please.

MASTERMAN  
You are holding my passport.

POIROT  
Of course. Edward Henry Masterman, of 21 Friar Street. I often begin with simple rote questions to set people at ease. I see you are in need of no such pleasantries. To the point then.

MASTERMAN  
It is the most efficient way, Sir.

POIROT  
When did you last see your master?

MASTERMAN  
About him. I must first say I had no notion whatsoever he was this -- Cassetti. To imagine him responsible for that horror... Had I known I would never have consented to his service.

Poirot eyes Bouc. *Dormouse indeed.*

POIROT  
Have you ever traveled to the States?

MASTERMAN  
Once, yes. Years ago and briefly.

POIROT  
For what purpose?

MASTERMAN

To confirm a suspicion.

POIROT

Which was?

MASTERMAN

That I would not like it. I was offered a position in Boston, saw Boston, and immediately returned to London.

POIROT

Is that where Mr. Ratchett was from?

MASTERMAN

I can't say as I know.

POIROT

In his service -- nine months, you never engaged your employer in conversation.

MASTERMAN

It would not have been proper. A valet and his master should be as strangers. It helps with the unavoidable intimacy. I last saw Mister Ratchett at 9 o'clock.

*INSERT CUT: MASTERMAN ENTERS RATCHETT'S COMPARTMENT WITH A KEY -- SETS DOWN THE COFFEE TRAY -- CLEANS -- POURS, AS --*

*MASTERMAN (V.O.)*

*I brought his coffee, hung his clothes --*

MASTERMAN WINCES, rubs his jaw. Ashamed to be caught in pain.

POIROT

You have the toothache perhaps?

MASTERMAN

I apologize for the display. I have an extraction scheduled in London this week. Mr. Ratchett insisted on my not putting it off any longer. He said he was tired of hearing my groans suppressed.

POIROT

And this sympathetic Ratchett, was it his usual practice to drink coffee at night?

MASTERMAN

Not at all. When traveling he often took a sleeping draught and brandy before bed. But he had been very agitated of late and said he preferred to stay alert. Especially so last night. He had found a letter -- in his compartment.



INSERT CUT: RATCHETT WAVES A LETTER, YELLS AT MASTERMAN:

RATCHETT  
How'd this get in here!

MASTERMAN  
I haven't the slightest idea, Sir.

RATCHETT  
Did you put it in here?

MASTERMAN  
Me, Sir?

RATCHETT  
You see any other idiots in here?

MASTERMAN  
If I were to leave something upsetting  
under your pillow I assure you it would  
not be a letter.

BACK ON: POIROT. He LAUGHS. Masterman is not unproud.

MASTERMAN  
I poured his coffee and he dismissed me,  
not to be disturbed till morning. Quite  
usual for him.

POIROT  
Ah. The coffee. It appears his cup had  
been laced with barbital, keeping him  
from defending against his assailant.  
You will now tell me you did not put it  
in there --

MASTERMAN  
Of course I didn't --

POIROT  
Right on schedule. Where then did you  
procure the coffee and cups?

He points to the kitchen's samovar, surrounded by CUPS.

MASTERMAN  
Right here, Sir. I ordered it at dinner  
to be ready at 9 and so it was. I  
noticed they keep the cups face up, which  
allows the collection of dust and  
particulates. Anyone might have had  
access to his cup before me.

POIROT  
If you please, what did you do after you  
left your master?

MASTERMAN

I went to my berth to bed. The Number 4.  
Shared with the with the Spanish fellow.

POIROT

Cuban.

MASTERMAN

I am sure there is a difference, Sir. He  
snored, I read.

POIROT

You did not sleep? Something bothering  
you? The toothache, or possibly --

At this Poirot does something strange: *He goes SILENT. For a long time.* An unbearable quiet in which he merely sits.

And thinks... And thinks some more...

Masterman squirms, Bouc sweats. Finally, as if a discovery:

POIROT

You say what you think.

MASTERMAN

You too. In time.

POIROT

A man with your dedication to excellence,  
so proper he does not so much as ask his  
employer's home would never speak to his  
master as you did -- unless he felt his  
career coming to some close. I witnessed  
you lift a large trunk, still vital, a  
decade's more service in you, were it not  
for something -- pointed...

(he stares)

No mere tooth. The lungs perhaps?

Masterman considers the lie and discards it. Removes his  
hand from his jaw. Takes out a cigarette.

MASTERMAN

The thyroid. Spread now to stomach.

(lights it, draws)

Same as got my father five years younger.  
Months at best. "Inoperable, I'm  
afraid," said the doctor -- and suddenly  
I wasn't. Afraid. I would only do what  
I wanted from here on. I speak my mind  
now. It's very invigorating. I can now  
say for example that I'd never let you  
out in those shoes in this weather were  
you my master, completely inappropriate.

POIROT

To say nothing of the moustache?

MASTERMAN

Of the moustache I would say nothing. It is resplendent.

POIROT

What do you take for the pain?

MASTERMAN

(with pride)

I take nothing for my pains. No barbital if that's what you're after. I don't believe in it.

POIROT

Do you smoke a pipe as well?

MASTERMAN

Only these gaspers. Just took up the habit. They're meant to be bad for the lungs but as mine are only rented...

He blows smoke. A pause. Poirot nods his thanks, finished. Masterman moves for the door, when --

POIROT

Mr. Masterman. I am sorry about -- the toothache.

Masterman nods with gratitude and leaves. Bouc pours a drink, satisfied:

BOUC

There it is. A man dying is a man with nothing to lose. With an employer who berated him so often and so publicly. Or he learned the man's secret, and knowing he'll be dead long before he might stand trail he rids the world of him.

POIROT

Bravo. If only for the problem of Mr. Marquez being able to confirm his whereabouts at the time of death.

Bouc sinks, theory ablated.

POIROT

If it was easy I would not be famous. Next!

*RING! THE BELL CHIMES -- MICHEL'S BOOTS CLOMP THE POLISHED WOOD CORRIDOR -- A DOOR OPENS, ONTO --*

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

The passengers sit in uncomfortable, suspicious silence, as --

MICHEL enters, boots CLOMPING -- up to --

GRETA OHLSSON. Michel TAPS her shoulder whispers to her.

MACQUEEN

Bell tolls for you now, Miss. One by one  
for each of us.

(as she goes)

Don't sweat it, he's not so tough.

MacQueen flicks on THE RECORD PLAYER. MUSIC plays. THE DOOR SHUTS, and -- BEGIN A SEQUENCE:

INT. KITCHEN CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. MOMENTS LATER.

POIROT WITH GRETA. Her imposing size all the more heightened in the smallish kitchen. She has to stoop to stand.

GRETA

May I ask what is your role in all this?

POIROT

I am to help find justice.

GRETA

This is God's province, not man's.

POIROT

So we should have no police?

GRETA

They are servants of... Perhaps then you are too.

POIROT

If I am it is entirely by accident. Miss Greta Ohlsson. You were a trained nurse? And now -- a missionary. Such a calling. If I may, why did you change professions?

GRETA

I owed it to God. There were -- indulgent times in my youth...

INTERCUT: THE BELL RINGS -- MICHEL'S BOOTS CLACK -- HE TAPS MARQUEZ -- TAPS HARDMAN -- ANOTHER BELL -- AND --

INT. KITCHEN CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. INTERCUT.

POIROT WITH HARDMAN. Answering with Teutonic pride.

HARDMAN

Professor of Engineering. It is science that will win back for Germany her pride. Ascension is bound to technology...

INT. MARQUEZ AND MASTERMAN'S COMPARTMENT. INTERCUT.

POIROT WITH MARQUEZ. An exuberant open book.

MARQUEZ

Emanuel Marquez! I know the Latin temperament is consistent with such a violent murder by knife, I wish to be clear of any association. Ask me anything and I shall answer -- lying is no longer in my nature.

POIROT

"No longer"?...

WITH GRETA

GRETA

...I drank. A weakness I have overcome...

WITH MARQUEZ

MARQUEZ

...I made many mistakes as a boy. I stole. I escaped prison and bribed myself onto a boat to the US where I swore never to steal again! When people trust you they buy more. More business, less jail! God bless America! You will ask me about last night? Last night I eat with the Austrian man who does not like anyone but Austrians...

WITH HARDMAN

HARDMAN

...No -- I have never travelled to America. A cesspool of miscegenation. Their "melting pot" is cast off scraps -- the world's dogbucket.

POIROT

Where did you say your conference was, Herr Professor?

HARDMAN

Turin. I am the only Austrian to present, which means without me the findings will be substandard. The Italians are cows, the Swedes sheep...

WITH GRETA

GRETA

...I left my room only to get an aspirin. A small migraine, threatening to enlarge. Mrs. Hubbard offered me something at dinner, I declined at first -- when sleep fought me I went to ask for it...

WITH MARQUEZ

MARQUEZ

...I go to my room which I share with the English butler who likes nobody. A fish. He groans a lot. He sees I am there the whole night until morning...

WITH GRETA

GRETA

I should say, in case it is relevant... there was an embarrassing moment. When I went to see Mrs. Hubbard I -- at first opened the wrong door...

*INSERT CUT: GRETA'S POV AS SHE ACCIDENTALLY OPENS RATCHETT'S COMPARTMENT -- HE GRINS AT HER, PATS HIS BED --*

RATCHETT

*Well you look like a gal who can handle just about anything.*

*AN INVITATION TO JOIN -- SHE SLAMS THE DOOR -- BACKS AWAY.*

WITH MARQUEZ

MARQUEZ

...An American passport. I am American now! Three American children! Thomas Jefferson Marquez. William Henry Marquez and my daughter, Millard Filmore Marquez. More children, more presidents! Each to work in the business. Automobiles.

(off a toy car)

I have three showrooms! I go to America with nothing! There the banks do not hear accents, only sound business proposals...

HARDMAN

HARDMAN

...The Belgians aren't entirely derelict. But the entire African delegation, well, the Negroid race is suitable for athletics and labor, but science? And the Latins? Murderers, felons and thieves...

MARQUEZ

MARQUEZ

...Once I was a thief -- now I am father,  
am boss. Am rich!...

GRETA

GRETA

...That must have been about twenty  
minutes to eleven.

POIROT

Intriguing. You are now as far as it is  
known the last to see Ratchett alive.

*Gulp.*

MARQUEZ

POIROT

Did your love of automobiles come from  
your time as chauffeur or before?

MARQUEZ

I -- did not say I was a chauffeur?

POIROT

The photos that spilled out of your  
luggage. There was one -- a boy in a  
Packard wearing a chauffeur's hat...

INSERT CUT: POIROT'S POV OF THE CORRIDOR AFTER THE AVALANCHE  
-- MARQUEZ CLEANS UP HIS MESS OF SPILLED PHOTOS -- PUSH IN  
CLOSE ON ONE IMAGE: A BOY IN A HAT HOLDING A STEERING WHEEL.

POIROT

It had every indication of a proud Thomas  
Jefferson visiting his papa at work. Who  
did you chauffeur?

*Recalled from a glance. Marquez squirms, no longer smiling.*

WITH GRETA

GRETA

Miss Debenham was asleep when I returned.  
Finally so was I. She will tell you I  
remained in our cabin the whole night.

POIROT

Might Miss Debenham have left the  
compartment without your noticing?

GRETA

(firmly)

Surely not. I sleep very lightly. The slightest sound and I bolt upright. I --  
(blisters with memory)  
I was surprised once. *Never again...*

WITH MARQUEZ

MARQUEZ

...Well -- I drove many different people.

POIROT

Someone must have stood out. Banks only offer loans with collateral -- and you say you came with nothing. Someone must have provided surety, or cosigned. A devoted employer who trusted in you?

Marquez crosses his arms. The chatterbox shut.

MARQUEZ

I do not wish to answer any more questions.

WITH GRETA

Her trauma, unelaborated. Poirot's eyes note the SCAR over Greta's brow. Then her HANDS. Her markedly rough knuckles.

POIROT

You have the callouses of a boxer.

GRETA

I travel dangerous cities. I trained hard and can defend myself now. I've become a match for any man my weight.

POIROT

You do not trust to God anymore since-- your surprise?

GRETA

In case he is busy.

Her looks dares any man to try it. CLOSE ON: THE BELL -- RINGING AGAIN AND -- END OF SEQUENCE -- as --

INT. SALON CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Poirot greets MARY DEBENHAM as she enters. Offers her a couch beside Bouc. Mary does not seem nervous or upset. More like she was looking forward to her turn with him.



POIROT

Miss Debenham. For you we take the more comfortable seat.

MARY DEBENHAM

While you made my roommate suffer cramped quarters. I see. You choose the best location to extract the truth from each suspect. Put her off balance, put me at ease. Clever. How did she fare?

POIROT

Alas. You and she speak for each other. She says you did not leave the cabin and you will now say the same of she. If I trust you I must trust her.

MARY DEBENHAM

But you don't trust me yet, you can't possibly. We met briefly on a boat. Friendly, but not friends. A pale mauve, by the way.

Poirot grins, enjoying her. *Pardon?*

MARY DEBENHAM

Miss Ohlsson told me you asked the color of her dressing gown. I can't imagine why, but in case you wanted, that's mine. She's very worried, she fears terribly you suspect her as the last person to see Ratchett alive. You don't, do you?

POIROT

Let us be fixed for the moment on you. Would you please write down your full name and permanent address here.

MARY DEBENHAM

I have no address at present. I'm staying with my sister until my next employment settles. Is that all right?

She writes as asked. Poirot looks at the paper.

POIROT

Mary Hermione Debenham, temporarily of 61 Beviden, London. You at times go by your middle name? Hermoione?

MARY DEBENHAM

A constant Mary, when I'm not paid as Miss Debenham. You must not have your theory fixed if you're testing my handwriting. Rooting through the rubbish bin. Right handed by the way.

POIROT

(a nod to her insights)  
I admit I cannot make sense of the facts.

MARY DEBENHAM

You can't disappoint on this one. To catch the killer of a murderer. Forget famous, you'd be outright notorious.

POIROT

Again, let us remain fixed on you.

MARY DEBENHAM

Of course, of course. I'll be a boring witness to you, I'm afraid.

Bouc chuckles at the private joke on "I'm afraid."

POIROT

Alors, where were you when we stopped at Vincovci?

MARY DEBENHAM

In my bed. Where I remained all night. Except to hear about our crash.

POIROT

Did you have any opinion of the dead man.

MARY DEBENHAM

I -- well, I can't say I thought about it. If he is who you say I am glad not to have known him. I don't quite see the point of your question.

Poirot notes she's become defensive. He grins, needles like an older brother:

POIROT

It does not please you this method?

MARY DEBENHAM

It seems a waste of time.

POIROT

Our train is buried, we have time to waste! Forgive my eccentricities. Human nature is perverse in its complexity. To plumb it takes the right tools. Some are scattered and the cold air sharpens their answers, others are forthcoming when they think me dumb... And of course others are precise and deflective -- so I must ask what you feel, what you thought --

MARY DEBENHAM

(chastising)

Like the low ceiling for the tall woman.  
Spare your tools, Sir, and ask direct.

POIROT

The stern governess emerges.

MARY DEBENHAM

I employ the rules and the ruler only  
with the ones that need it. Preferring  
neither to good behavior.

POIROT

*Eh bien*, the direct method. You knew  
Doctor Arbuthnot before the boat to  
Stamboul?

Mary did not expect this. This is no longer any fun at all.

MARY DEBENHAM

No.

POIROT

Such camaraderie. Instant attraction  
then? Love at first...

(off her reaction)

We are not in America, there are no laws  
against it, Mademoiselle.

MARY DEBENHAM

Nor are there laws against my silence.  
And I've never been to America.

POIROT

Do you think Doctor Arbuthnot could have  
committed the crime?

MARY DEBENHAM

Certainly not.

POIROT

I must remind you that you do not know  
him very well, Mademoiselle.

MARY DEBENHAM

I know the type well enough. I could be  
wrong -- it's an instinct. As governess  
it's my job to see bad behavior in the  
seconds before it happens -- I daresay  
I've stopped a thousand fights from  
breaking out, or pencils launched, or  
milk cups caught before tumbling. I have  
reflexes for misbehavior -- and they were  
not engaged.

POIROT

Very good. I will now ask the meaning of certain words I heard on our ferry ride. You and the stranger Arbuthnot standing closer than strangers might, you said, "Not now. When it's all over. When it's done. Then nothing can touch us."

He enjoys her surprise.

POIROT

At my school when I was young there were no unwritten rules about eavesdropping.

MARY DEBENHAM

You think I meant murder. "To a man with a hammer every problem is a nail." You live crime, you see it in your work every day. You can't imagine two people talking about anything else -- but evil.

POIROT

Not so. I see enough crime to know the criminal act is the anomaly. One person committed this murder, the rest here are decidedly average, containing the usual admixture of good and bad, fine and irritating, fidelity, charity and guile -- but not evil -- nothing so broken as the ability to drug a man and kill him as he lies defenseless -- *wildly stabbing his body about the chest and neck 12 times -- then watch him watch you as the life spills slowly out of him -- until the sin is complete.* No, I do not see crime in every conversation, but when I do it is as ignorable to me as glass in the teeth. So what, Miss, did you mean!

Shaken, Mary considers her answer. A long pause. Then she recovers herself. Meets Poirot's eyes defiantly:

MARY DEBENHAM

As we established. There are no laws against my silence.

POIROT

(then)

It doesn't matter. I shall find out.

A look held. A challenge. PRELAP: THE SLOW SCRAPE OF...

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

A MATCH. The head IGNITES. Bouc lights a cigarette to calm himself. Where Poirot is his usual gay self.

BOUC

Your line of work is very stressful. You put her on her on her guard -- and through her the Doctor.

POIROT

*Mon ami*, if you wish to catch a rabbit you put a ferret in the hole, and if the rabbit is there he runs.

BOUC

She does hold secrets. Could be she.

POIROT

Behind this business, I am convinced, there is a cool, intelligent, resourceful brain. Miss Debenham answers to that description. She strikes you as a killer?

BOUC

She doesn't seem the type to stab a man. More the type to sue him in court.

Poirot shrugs grandly.

BOUC

What about our Swedish missionary? She certainly has the strength, the brimstone conviction of the faithful. Yet Marquez seemed caught at something. And the Count Andrenyi refusing to cooperate...

Poirot only shrugs again, relishing Bouc's frustration. This is all still fun for him.

BOUC

Don't you usually have your suspicions by this point!

POIROT

Usually, yes. The little grey cells should have handed me their result and I should be deeply bored. You found for me the unusual case. You have not made much progress yourself?

He TAPS the WINDOW. OUTSIDE: A DOZEN MEN DIG OUT THE TRAIN. But the engine is still off kilter. And HEAVY SNOW falls.

BOUC

Give me time, half a mountain fell on us.

POIROT

You should warn the passengers to put on their coats.

(MORE)

POIROT (cont'd)  
 (off Bouc's surprise)  
 It was already five degrees colder inside this morning than yesterday and another five since. You instructed Michel to ration heat. Will we be out of coal by morning?

BOUC  
 (caught)  
 If that.

POIROT  
 Then we work quickly. I cannot investigate frozen.

They arrive at the Princess' door. Bouc takes a look at the delicate older woman feeding her dogs from a silver tray.

BOUC  
 You don't think she could do such a thing.

POIROT  
 In my experience the upper classes are capable of horrific acts commensurate with their wealth. And she commands a strong hand.

At which, Schmidt LIFTS a couch to clean under. *Very strong.*

INT. PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS.

The Princess waves Poirot in as he KNOCKS.

POIROT  
 Apologies for the intrusion, Excellency.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF  
 A murder has been committed. Certain actions have to be performed. That is all there is to it.

POIROT  
 Not all are such amiable company. Princess Natalia Dragomiroff. You are traveling from Constantinople.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF  
 I stayed at the Austrian embassy as a guest. My maid, Fraulein Schmidt, was with me.

She shoots a withering look to Schmidt, who realizes her mistake unspoken and sets out tea. Poirot eyes her passport.

POIROT  
 Hildegard Schmidt, born in Dusseldorf.

Schmidt mumble-nods her reply.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF  
Speak clearly, the Detective has work  
ahead of him.

SCHMIDT  
Yes, Sir. Dusseldorf.

Just then a WAITER brings a lunch platter: A gorgeous duck  
breast. Poirot eyes it as Schmidt carries it to Princess.

POIROT  
*Quel dommage.* Her duck is overcooked.

Schmidt tests it doneness with a pinky. Serves the plate.

SCHMIDT  
A perfect medium rare.

Poirot raises his hands in apology. Opens his notes:

POIROT  
Would your Excellency be so kind as to  
give me an account of her movements last  
night.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF  
After dinner I went to bed. God blessed  
me with long life then cursed me with a  
bad back to make it miserable. Rheumatic  
pains. I do not complain.

Schmidt bites her tongue. The Princess serves herself tea.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF  
At about quarter to one I called for  
Fraulein Schmidt -- she massaged me then  
read to me for a time. Then I sleep.

POIROT  
You have an unspoken choreography, you  
two. She has been with you long?

SCHMIDT  
(proudly)  
Fifteen years.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF  
(wearily)  
Fifteen years.

The Princess pours Poirot a cup. Adds three sugars.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF  
I noticed you take three.

POIROT

For royalty, you are very capable.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

I am not helpless. I only prefer to be helped, or what is the point of being a princess. People need royalty on display so they know to what to aspire.

POIROT

No doubt the Hubbard spoke to you.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

I do not speak with Americans if it can be helped.

POIROT

Ah. Then it falls to me. You have visited America. Despite your aversion.  
(she nods)

Were you at any time acquainted with a family by the name of -- Armstrong.

The Princess goes quiet. Puts down her cup.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

They endured an unspeakable tragedy.  
Yes. I knew them. Knew them well.

She nods to Schmidt to bring a suitcase. Takes from inside it a PHOTOGRAPH of golden hued John and Sonia Armstrong.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

I was an admirer of her mother, Linda Arden. The Broadway actress. So much ugliness in the world but she possessed rare genius. A once-a-century talent. We became friends. I insisted on it. Her granddaughter Daisy was my goddaughter. She was...

(she breaks off, unable)

Miss Arden was to turn to directing. She would have become the first woman titan of Broadway -- but for the tragedy.

POIROT

The mother -- Arden? She is dead?

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

She may as well be. She no longer leaves her home. No longer speaks. To anyone.

POIROT

There was a younger sister as well.



PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

Very young. A clumsy -- what is the word -- tomboy. Sent away to a sanitorium in New England, behavior problems as you can imagine. I do not see how this relates to our troubles, Detective.

POIROT

You of all will... The man killed last night. His true name was Cassetti.

Her eyes narrow at hearing the name. In a rare undignified moment she SPITS. IN RUSSIAN:

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

*May his soul rot in shit.*

(then, ENGLISH again)

I see. I admit I know the family and the man is dead. You must find the coincidence unbearable. I do not care. They were an -- exquisite family.

POIROT

It is also true that only a small number of families comprise the upper class. They make it a point to know one another so they can be sure no one tries to slip among their ranks. You may be permitted a coincidence. Do you recognize anyone from the Armstrong household on this train? Family, staff... Governess...

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

No. Though this man's face does remind me somewhat of Mrs. Armstrong's cook.

She looks to Bouc. Who takes offense at the thought.

POIROT

You are most patient. I must now ask a few questions of your Fraulein Schmidt.

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

There is no need, I can speak to her character. She is the opposite of *chic*, her manners are unconscionable, and she makes mistakes as a laundress that would drive a proper Chinaman to suicide -- or perhaps that is the Japanese habit...

(Schmidt deflates)

But. She is devoted.

Schmidt reinflates, beams with pride.

POIROT

Even still. If you will allow...

He turns to Schmidt. Amiable, and IN GERMAN, SUBTITLED:

POIROT

*Fraulein. Do you like your Lady? Answer please in German.*

SCHMIDT

*(thrown by the question)  
But her Excellency cannot comprehend me.*

POIROT

*That is the point. Do you like Madame la Princesse?*

SCHMIDT

*It is possible to love without liking.*

POIROT

*(LAUGHS)*

*In your own language you have a strength you lack in English.*

PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF

*I do not appreciate not being in on a joke. Much less being its likely subject.*

The Princess glowers. Schmidt withers. Poirot produces the HANDKERCHIEF. The "H" forward.

POIROT

*This is yours? "Hildegarde."*

SCHMIDT

*It is too fine for me. I -- don't know whose it is.*

POIROT

*Do have anything to add to her account of last night?*

SCHMIDT

*As she said. She sent the conductor for me, I put on my dressing gown --*

POIROT

*Ah, the red silk one?*

SCHMIDT

*Blue flannel. I gave her massage for a half hour, read to her -- she complains of my accent. Then I returned to my bed.*

POIROT

*She gains strength from complaint. Did you see anyone when you returned?*

SCHMIDT

*Only the other conductor. He came out a compartment, ran into me on his way out.*

Thinking nothing of it. But Poirot is taken aback. ENGLISH:

POIROT

"Other conductor." You mean Michel?

SCHMIDT

No, a different one than had awoken me.

A pause. Poirot's imagination is instantly lit -- he grabs her by the hand -- PULLS her suddenly --

INT. SALON CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. CONTINUOUS.

He leads a flustered Schmidt straight up to MICHEL, who hands out blankets. Michel is unnerved as they all stare at him.

POIROT

Are you sure you didn't see him?

SCHMIDT

I'm certain. The other conductor was a small man, with a short beard.

POIROT

Fraulein, there is no other conductor.

SCHMIDT

I know what I saw!

*INSERT CUT: A SMALL-FRAMED CONDUCTOR BUMPS INTO SCHMIDT -- QUICK BUT ENOUGH TO SEE A HINT OF A BEARD -- HIGH-VOICED:*

*"CONDUCTOR"*

*Pardon.*

SCHMIDT

I remember because his voice was high, like a woman's. His uniform was the same. Exactly.

POIROT

Though I suspect short a button.  
(decided, to Michel)  
I need your pass key immediately! --

SMASH TO: LUGGAGE. PIECE AFTER PIECE OPENED --

INT. VARIOUS COMPARTMENTS. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Poirot systematically, indelicately searches DOZENS OF CASES. The PASSENGERS watch on -- alternately HELPFUL, IRRITATED, UNCOMFORTABLE -- as their personal ITEMS FLY BY:

Soaps -- shirts -- books -- a case entirely full of WHISKEY.  
 A flurry of WOMEN'S DRESSING GOWNS: Blue flannel, pale  
 mauve, buff Jaeger material, every color EXCEPT RED. A WHITE  
 ROBE FLUTTERS BY and -- BEGIN INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. SNOWY FIELD. DAY.

BLINDING WHITE SNOW -- CHURNED BY RIPPING WINDS. SOMEONE --  
 WE ARE UNCLEAR WHO -- RUNS THROUGH THE DEEP POWDER. MOVING  
 AS FAST AS S/HE CAN -- RUNNING AWAY FROM THE TRAIN, AS --

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

SNOW beats against the WINDOW as Poirot goes through a final  
 suitcase. Frustrated.

BOUC

A thousand photos, endless socks,  
 dressing gowns of every color but red.  
 And no contraband conductor's uniform.

POIROT

Is this all the passengers' luggages?

MICHEL

All but the Count and Countess Andrenyi.  
 He refuses a search.

Poirot eyes the withheld luggage: A BLUE MOROCCO CASE. He  
 notes A DAMP TAG with the INITIALS "E.A." Bouc shrugs:

BOUC

They travel under diplomatic visas.

POIROT

You told him it is for an official  
 investigation?

MICHEL

Yes.

POIROT

And?

MICHEL

He threatened to feed my teeth to my ass.

BOUC

Where else could it be?

A pause. Poirot's intuition kindled:

POIROT

There is one more suitcase we have not  
 checked...

EXT. SNOWY FIELD. THAT MOMENT.

*THE SNOW AND WIND COVER THE TRACKS OF UNSEEN RUNNER -- WHO DISAPPEARS INTO THE FOREST, AS --*

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

Poirot stares at HIS OWN SUITCASE. FLIPS the latch already knowing what he will find: FOLDED ON TOP IS...

BOUC

It is the red kimono!

POIROT

It is a gauntlet. Very well. I take it up.

BOUC

Someone thinks he is outwitting Poirot.

POIROT

Someone is so far right. But -- we are beginning to catch his game. He does not wish anyone to accidentally suffer blame for his actions --

He stops. Eyes brightening suddenly with insight, and --

INT. SCHMIDT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. MOMENTS LATER.

Schmidt and Bouc watch Poirot circle her room. Schmidt flusters as... his eyes land on a CRISP STACK OF LINENS. Runs a hand down the side: ONE is a millimeter out of line.

POIROT

And as day follows night...

He topples the stack. Folded beneath it is: A SMALL SIZED WAGON LIT UNIFORM. Schmidt blanches.

SCHMIDT

But -- it isn't mine! I told you of the man in the uniform, why would I tell you if it was me?

POIROT

You wouldn't. Which makes your compartment the ideal place to hide it. If it was the *Madame la Princesse* we found stabbed I would look no further.

The uniform's SLEEVE reveals A MISSING BUTTON. A MATCH.

POIROT

Voila. And if a conductor's uniform...

He pats down the tunic. Inside a pocket: A PASS KEY.

POIROT

Why not a conductor's pass key? Now we know how our killer passes magically through locked doors.

BOUC

A small size. Fitted for a slender woman. Not Miss Ohlsson. Or Fraulein Schmidt. Miss Debenham?

POIROT

She is alibied for the time it was worn.

BOUC

Then you suspect a man after all?

POIROT

I do. A slender man. Who enjoys...  
(sniffs a sleeve, grins)  
Bourbon.

EXT. WOODS. THAT MOMENT.

*THE FLEEING RUNNER SKIDS DOWN A DANGEROUSLY STEEP SLOPE, AS --*

INT. MACQUEEN'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. MOMENTS LATER.

Poirot open MacQueen's drawers: *Full of BOTTLES*. He checks the night stand, not finding what he's looking for.

BOUC

Looking for something?

POIROT

1,200 pounds. MacQueen kept a ledger close at his bedside. All his dealings with Ratchett -- and perchance the answers to some outstanding questions...

BOUC

Then where is MacQueen's ledger?  
(looks about)  
Where is MacQueen?

EXT. WOODS. DAY.

*REVEAL: MACQUEEN IS THE RUNNER. PANTING WITH THE EFFORT OF TRUDGING THROUGH BLINDING BLIZZARD. HE PULLS FROM HIS COAT --*

*HIS LEDGER. THEN -- HIS LIGHTER. IT TAKES FEW TRIES TO SPARK -- BUT HE LIGHTS THE LEDGER ON FIRE -- STUFFS IT BURNING INTO A TREE -- RUNS ON, AS --*

EXT. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Poirot and Bouc step off the train in search. The snow comes in waves, thick and biting as a SANDSTORM. Poirot looks out... A brief moment of visibility... His eyes narrow...

Locking the terrain in his memory. Lines form as on a map.

POIROT  
*Putain de merde.*

He draws RATCHETT'S GUN. FIRES AT AN ANGLE!

ON MACQUEEN: Hearing the SHOT, he changes course -- deeper into the woods -- toward A RIVER --

ON POIROT: He grabs Bouc's SCARF -- wraps it around his mouth -- AND RUNS INTO THE BLINDING BLIZZARD.

EXT. WOODS. THAT MOMENT.

Snowblind, Poirot can't see more than five feet, can't hear anything but WIND. Still, he continues into the storm...

A GIANT BRANCH RIPS OFF A TREE -- comes right at his head --

Poirot ducks it but barely. Follows what looks like MOVEMENT ahead -- HE HALTS SUDDENLY -- just in time as --

THE SNOW BREAKS OFF UNDERFOOT -- FALLS A MILE DOWN! REVEAL:

HE IS INCHES FROM A CLIFF. Obscured by the blizzard. He backs away. Continues after --

MACQUEEN. Who pushes ahead fast as he can. Not very. Tripping as he goes. HE SLAMS INTO A TREE. Shakes off the pain. Looks back. Catches a glimpse through the snow of...

POIROT. Coming after him. A bloodhound. Poirot finds A FOOTPRINT in the snow. On the trail. Follows it -- when --

CRACK! HE IS BLUDGEONED OVER THE HEAD!

Poirot pulls himself up. Looks around him. NOTHING. MacQueen could be anywhere. He takes a cautious step...

CRACK! A CLUB COMES DOWN ON HIM AGAIN -- AGAIN -- AGAIN! Poirot FALLS. A heavy branch drops atop him, and --

MACQUEEN BOLTS AWAY. Haphazard. Chest heaving. CLIMBING down the steep and rocky mountainside -- getting away when --

His foot SLIPS -- the ICE BREAKS off -- HE HITS THE ROCK -- ROLLING -- OUT OF CONTROL -- HE FALLS!

INTO THE RIVER

EXT. UNDERWATER.

MACQUEEN IS IN SHOCK. DISORIENTED. FREEZING. BUBBLES ESCAPE HIS MOUTH, A SCREAM THWARTED BY SHOCK AND ICE.

HE TRIES TO SWIM TOWARD THE LIGHT -- ICE BLOCKS HIS PATH -- HE TRIES AGAIN -- MORE ICE. LUNGS BURNING... OUT OF AIR...

HE SINKS

HE IS SECONDS FROM DEATH. A BRIEF MOMENT OF PEACE, WHEN --  
A HAND GRABS HIM BY THE SHOULDERS.

EXT. RIVERBANK.

Poirot PULLS MacQueen from the icy water onto land. Confirms MacQueen is still breathing...

Then hits him. Laments his wet and ruined loafers.

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

Bouc and the passengers react to a shivering MacQueen led back aboard to his compartment. Greta is aghast. Masterman deeply disappointed. Hubbard enthralled at Poirot's catch.

HUBBARD

Is that it? You have your man?

GRETA

Heavens!

MARY DEBENHAM

Him? How could he?

HARDMAN

The American, no surprise.

INT. MACQUEEN'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

MacQueen is wrapped in blankets. Poirot takes away his flask. Hands him tea.

BOUC

Should we tie him?

POIROT

I don't think he will make another run for it. *Bouffon* -- you are lucky you are stupid in predictable ways.

MACQUEEN

I've nothing to say, except I didn't kill him. Anyway I couldn't have. I was with Arbuthnot the whole night, like I said.



BOUC

You run like the guilty.

MACQUEEN

I knew Ratchett best, I knew you'd get to pointing fingers at me eventually. But I didn't do it. Why would I?

POIROT

Let us see if Mr. Ratchett can tell us.

He uncovers... THE DICTOPHONE. The dead man's VOICE PLAYS:

RATCHETT (ON DICTOPHONE)

-- Receipts total 28,000, at my count that's 1,200 short. I didn't spend it so someone's got it --

He STOPS the tape. MacQueen stops shivering, starts sweating.

POIROT

"He had no head for business, accounting, none of it. I took care of everything." I believe you had been stealing from your employer, for some time. You had debts --

MACQUEEN

-- You can't prove any of that.

POIROT

I do not have to. You have done so for me. A most diligent secretary.

Poirot drops THE HALF BURNED LEDGER on the table. Found.

POIROT

Still readable in places. Including this: The last month, the math does not tally as the final sums suggest. It is -- what is the wonderful English word? Named for the fantastic chocolate --

BOUC

Fudged.

POIROT

Fudge!

MacQueen stares at the incriminating book a moment. Then:

MACQUEEN

I did more than fudge, I stole outright. Thousands. I knew his money wasn't honest so what'd it matter if it changed hands. That doesn't mean I stabbed him -- why would I slaughter my cash cow?

BOUC

He was beginning to suspect you.

MACQUEEN

*I didn't kill him -- !*

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT (O.S.)

He didn't.

They turn to see -- DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT at the door.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

I expect his alibi revolves around me.  
Drinking till the early hours...

(tries to read Poirot, gets nothing)  
Well it's true. I saw him having a glass  
and remarked on the lesser quality of  
American liquor. He offered me a tippie  
to change my mind, then another. He had  
the finest selection of whiskeys I ever  
tasted. The more I told him I didn't  
like them the more he poured so I didn't  
stop. We got to arguing politics, he had  
some tomfool opinions on Stalin I had to  
correct. But the man knows his spirits.

Poirot directs Arbuthnot to discuss this privately out in --  
INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

POIROT

You confirm you were with him all night.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

We smoked and spoke till nearly two, yes.

POIROT

Such chums. He with his cigarettes and  
you -- ah yes -- you are the only man on  
our train to smoke a pipe. May I see it?

Arbuthnot feels the questions now pointed at him. Swallows  
his outrage. Unzips a pipe case: Pipe. Tobacco. CLEANERS.

POIROT

You are yourself traveling from India?

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

I stopped for one night to see Ur of the  
Chaldees and three nights in Bagdad with  
the AOC, who happens to be an old friend.

POIROT

Had you ever been in Mr. Ratchett's cabin  
while he was yet alive, Doctor?

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT  
You're interviewing me now?  
(off Poirot's silence, answering)  
I most certainly was not.

POIROT  
But this is one of yours, *n'est-ce pas*?

The PIPE CLEANER from the crime scene. It matches his.

ARBUTHNOT  
One of mine, yes -- but not mine. In the army we'd lose smoking privileges if we left rubbish about. I learned to keep mine in my pocket. Only courteous.

He empties his pocket: Four similar pipe cleaners wadded up.

POIROT  
Can you explain how a pipe cleaner of yours got into the cabin of the dead man?

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT  
I can concoct as many guesses as you -- someone took one of mine, someone bought the same common brand -- they'd all be just that: Guesses. I am a doctor, Sir, I heal people I do not end them.

POIROT  
About this. You must have worked very hard indeed to become a doctor. Not many of your race are allowed the opportunity.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT  
They are not. Middlesex Medical College permits one per class. I was given the honor in '24. I was a sniper in my tour. A sharpshooter. Saved more than a few officers. Some grateful. The best of them recognized a fair mind with a steady hand and supported my education. I take their generosity as a debt.

POIROT  
Were any of these benefactors American?

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT  
Fellow Scots primarily. I have no ties in the States.

POIROT  
Other than your new friend MacQueen. Who you only just met.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Yes. Just.

POIROT

Did you ever know a Colonel Armstrong?

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Well -- I might've known two or three Armstrongs. Tommy in the 60th -- and Selby Armstrong, killed at the Somme.

POIROT

I mean the Colonel John Armstrong who married an American wife and whose only child was kidnapped and killed.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Him. Well. Never came across the fellow. He had a very distinguished career before his fame. Got the V.C.

POIROT

And Miss Debenham? You only just met her as well?

Arbuthnot's fury rises at this surprise mention of Mary.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

We met when we shared the railway convoy car from Kirkuk to Nissibin.

POIROT

She claims it the ferry. She has made herself problematically suspicious.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

(as if this said it all:)

Mary is a lady. You leave Mary out of this -- I can vouch for her character.

POIROT

As you have vouched for MacQueen's time.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

You -- I say -- whu, you won't listen to reason! --

POIROT

Almost never. I like to see an angry Englishman -- they have so little experience with emotions that when they feel any at all they lose all power of speech. Thank you, Doctor.

Arbuthnot sees his best efforts have only limited value. He leaves in a huff. Poirot returns to...

INT. MACQUEEN'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS.

Poirot rejoins Bouc, who keeps an eye on MacQueen.

POIROT

You are lucky. The good doctor insists he did not let you out of his sight.

MACQUEEN

There you go. I couldn't have done it.

POIROT

Oh, but you could. Your employer's habit was to take a sleeping draught at night. You could easily access the drug.

*INSERT CUT: MACQUEEN DOSES A COFFEE CUP -- THEN DOSES A WHISKEY BEFORE HANDING IT TO ARBUTHNOT -- ARBUTHNOT SLUMPS, ASLEEP -- MACQUEEN STEALS A PIPE CLEANER FROM HIS POCKET --*

POIROT (V.O.)

*You lace his cup. Do the same with one of the doctor's many drinks...*

*MACQUEEN SLASHES RATCHETT -- PLANTS A PIPE CLEANER -- PASSES SCHMIDT WEARING THE UNIFORM, INTO HIS CABIN TO WAKE ARBUTHNOT.*

POIROT

And it is done. Just in time for you to resume chatting amiable politics.

MACQUEEN

But why would I do any of that?

BOUC

(taps the LEDGER)

We have established your motive.

POIROT

Or. Let us suggest an even better reason. A more -- familial reason.

He lets the suggestion linger. MacQueen's fear spikes.

POIROT

"A lawyer by education not disposition. Was downright awful at law." Why did you pursue law at all I wonder. Was it to appease a demanding father?... One you adored but could not please with your eye for the arts... One who had himself made a good name in the field -- then lost it. There was a renowned MacQueen, was there not? A District Attorney for the state of New Jersey? *Responsible for the prosecution in the Armstrong case.*

CLOSE ON MACQUEEN. Hot with the rush of memory. And with being found out. He lowers his head. No denying it.

MACQUEEN

They didn't have a suspect... Dad was pressured to go after this poor French girl with a weak alibi. A maid, Susanne. He hung his whole case on her. Then... she killed herself. She was innocent. By the time any evidence pointed to Cassetti, he was long gone. They tore my old man apart. He tore himself apart.

POIROT

Do you still wish to claim you did not know Ratchett was Cassetti?

MacQueen sinks. Trapped. Nothing to say.

POIROT

You found him, insinuated into his life, bled him dry to settle your father's debts and then... to settle the score. I knew the why, I only needed the how.

Now he has it: The UNIFORM and KEY. Bouc puffs, satisfied.

MACQUEEN

No... It wasn't like that, I swear, I --

A MORTAL SHRIEK SUDDENLY PIERCES THE CABIN.

INT. HUBBARD'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS.

Poirot follows the SCREAM -- rushes in to find --

HUBBARD -- BLEEDING ON THE FLOOR -- A KNIFE IN HER BACK.

Bouc runs. Poirot helps Hubbard, as much in shock as she is.

POIROT

The doctor is coming. Did you see anything? Anyone?

HUBBARD

Someone kicked in the door -- covered my face --

Nothing more. Arbuthnot enters, quickly assesses. Calming:

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

It's deep. No waiting on hospital. Please, lie still, Mrs. Hubbard.

HUBBARD

Are you a good doctor or one of those butchers?

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

A Caucasian doctor may make mistakes and keep his reputation. I don't have the luxury.

Hubbard CRIES OUT as he removes the KNIFE. Puts pressure on the wound and preps a SUTURE from his kit.

Bouc lifts the knife with a handkerchief: A STRAIGHT-BLADED DAGGER. Sham Oriental. This is the blade from our opening.

POIROT

(slumps)

There will be no fingerprints on it. The killer was merely disposing of the murder weapon -- and a possible witness.

EXT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

WIND blows mercilessly. But the snow has stopped. A DOZEN WORKERS hike have resumed their dig to free the train. LANTERNS swinging. Flickering light.

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

The WIND SHAKES the windows and WHISTLES its way within. It is cold inside. The passengers must bundle and stamp against it for the duration. Michel hands out extra blankets. All but the Count and Countess are present.

The passengers exchange distrustful looks. Mary catches Hardman's eye. Now outright scared of him.

The door opens. Poirot leads in MacQueen. Exonerated and free to rejoin the rest.

Arbuthnot checks Hubbard's stitches and bandage:

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

It didn't hit the lung or artery. She's lucky to be alive.

HUBBARD

You all are.

(rages at Poirot)

Some genius. Why haven't you solved this! Where's your criminal?

Poirot has no answer. He feels her accusation. Their fear.

MARY DEBENHAM

Give the man time.

HUBBARD

I can't give much more, I'm running out of blood! Accosting Mr. MacQueen while the real killer is right here among us -- one of you! Free to kill again!

(to the others, pleading)

Whoever you are -- I have no idea, I've said nothing. Please -- just leave me alone! Please...

She breaks down. Genuine terror. All share her fear.

Bouc sees Poirot is silent -- so he turns on the VICTROLA. MUSIC fills the car. "Try A Little Tenderness." Strangely light given the mood.

BOUC

My friends, I'm assured the tracks will be clear by morning. Please return to your rooms --

MARY DEBENHAM

Hardly. I'm sleeping here where everyone can see me and I can see everyone.

The others SHOUT, also unappeased. Poirot breaks his silence with a RAP of his CANE. His granite voice QUIETS the room:

POIROT

You should all do the same. Stay here. Conserve heat, remain in the open, safely in view. Until morning.

(pauses)

The thing about a killer, he will never hesitate to kill again.

He turns for the door.

HUBBARD

Where are you going?

He gives each a final stare. And walks out. Leaving the passengers to eye one another. Afraid.

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

Bouc follows Poirot. The weight of rare failure is taking a toll. Poirot thought he had this tied in a bow.

BOUC

So you were wrong, everybody does it.

Poirot chuffs. Hands Bouc something heavy: RATCHETT'S GUN.

POIROT

Watch over them. Especially Mrs. Hubbard.



BOUC

What do I do with this?

POIROT

If someone tries to kill anyone kill them first.

He SLAMS his door behind him.

INT. POIROT'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

A PUFF OF FROST BREATH billows over the spirit lamp's small FLAME, which burns in a tin can. Poirot warms his hands on the can. The Victrola ECHOES thinly from the dining car.

POIROT

You taught me this one. How to stay warm in a frozen jeep. "At least enough to keep the fingers on the hand."

For a moment it seems he is speaking to the KNIFE, now on a shelf. Then we see he speaks to THE PHOTO of the OFFICER IN UNIFORM, its frame newly cracked. Perhaps we only now notice the officer sports a THICK MOUSTACHE.

POIROT

I am stuck, old friend. The facts do not align. Here, there, everywhere a suspect, and none will stick. I cannot find the crack in the wall...

He looks out the window, sees the snow dig's progress.

POIROT

And time is short.  
(then)  
One of them... Why does he elude me?  
(and then)  
I left the police and a fine pension because I no longer believed the ability to mete justice was with the system. "It falls to us, good men, thoughtful, thorough and true. Better than God." Didn't you say...

Right now he doesn't feel like any of those. The mask of his perfection briefly removed. He turns the picture over. Poirot lies down. Breathes... *Good men.*

A BUMP FROM OUTSIDE. POIROT BOLTS UP. Looks out the window. Searches for anyone prowling the night. It is just the wind.

CLOSE ON HIS DOOR. THE BOLT LOCKS. An admission of fear.

Poirot lays back on his bed. Eyes at the ceiling.

PUSH IN ON POIROT. His eyes unfix.

PUSH IN ON THE VICTROLA. The record turns.

PUSH IN ON THE CEILING. In POIROT'S POV the wood panel lattice lines begin to swirl and realign...

BECOMING THE MAP OF THE COACH. THE COMPARTMENTS FILL WITH EACH PASSENGER IN HIS/HER PLACE ON THE NIGHT OF THE CRIME.

*PULL BACK, BACK, BACK from the overhead view until we are...*

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. FLASHBACK.

A STILL FRAME. A FROZEN FRAGMENT OF TIME: THE PRECISE MOMENT POIROT TOLD THE PASSENGERS RATCHETT IS DEAD. A PERFECT "PHOTO" TAKEN AND FIXED IN HIS MIND.

ONLY NOW POIROT IS FREE TO WALK ABOUT THE FROZEN MOMENT. STUDYING THE DETAILS:

A FORK OUT OF PLACE ON A TABLE SHIMMERS WITH AN UGLY OCHRE LIGHT, A SYNESTHETIC HIGHLIGHTING OF ANY ANOMALY...

A WINE STAIN ON A NAPKIN DOES THE SAME IN PURPLE...

POIROT FIXES HIS GAZE... EXTRANEIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE CAR BEGIN TO FLY AWAY... THE SILVERWARE... THE TABLES... FINALLY THE WALLS... UNTIL NOTHING IS LEFT BUT...

EXT. SNOWY FIELD. DAY.

THE PASSENGERS. FROZEN IN THEIR TABLEAU ON A FIELD OF PEACEFUL SUNLIT SNOW. FREE OF DISTRACTION, POIROT CIRCLES HIS SUSPECTS. SCANS THE EXPRESSION ON EACH FACE:

MASTERMAN EMBARRASSED. MARQUEZ STUNNED. HARDMAN IRRITATED. HUBBARD ENTHRALLED, AS IF AUDIENCE TO AN EXCITING PLAY.

ARBUTHNOT'S LIPS SHIMMER IN GOLD, PURSED AGAINST REVEALING GENUINE THOUGHT, A MICRO-EXPRESSION OF RAGE AND... INTERCUT:

A FLURRY OF IMAGES AS HE PLAYS OUT THE SCENARIOS IN HIS MIND:

*-- Arbuthnot and MacQueen act TOGETHER -- MacQueen watches the door as -- Arbuthnot STABS RATCHETT -- MacQueen steps out in the uniform -- signals when Schmidt is gone, as --*

POIROT STEPS THROUGH THE MEMORY "PHOTO". THE PASSENGERS IN THE SNOW. HE STUDIES GRETA'S AGHAST EXPRESSION, AND...

*-- Greta opens Ratchett's door not by accident but HOLDING THE KNIFE, then --*

*-- MASTERMAN hands over A STACK OF CASH to MARQUEZ -- who puts his finger to his lips, promising silence, then --*

-- MARY DEBENHAM pulls off the uniform -- pours bourbon on its sleeve before hiding it in Schmidt's compartment --

POIROT SHAKES OFF THAT THOUGHT, SCRUTINIZES SCHMIDT'S FACE...

-- THE PRINCESS nods to SCHMIDT -- who STABS RATCHETT! She looks back to the Princess who shakes her head -- "You're doing it all wrong" -- so she STABS again and again! --

A CRIMSON SHIMMER DRAWS POIROT'S EYE... TO THE COUNT... POIROT STUDIES THE SMILE CURLED ON HIS LIPS. SUPPRESSED JOY. HE BENDS TO SEE THE COUNT'S HAND BALLED UP IN A FIST, AND...

-- THE COUNT opens Ratchett's WINDOW, steps over the dead man and CLIMBS OUT THE WINDOW -- moving hand over hand back to his compartment -- easy ACROBATICS for him, as --

-- THE COUNTESS walks the corridor in THE RED KIMONO, and --

LIGHTNING FAST SHOTS: THE DAMP TAG ON THE BLUE CASE -- THE ASHES OF THE BURNED NOTE -- THE LIST OF PASSENGERS NAMES --

POIROT'S EYES SNAP OPEN IN HIS BED. PRELAP: KNOCKKNOCKKNOCK!

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT.

Poirot BANGS urgently on a door. Charged and not to be stopped. The door opens a crack on -- Count Andrenyi. Pulled from bed and pissed.

POIROT

Forgive the hour but we don't have many hours left to us.

COUNT ANDRENYI

I do not have to speak with you.

POIROT

Diplomatic immunity. Yes, I hear you object to my conversation.

COUNT ANDRENYI

Not myself. That you should bother my wife.

POIROT

May we speak then?

COUNT ANDRENYI

(beat)

No.

He shuts the door, but Poirot's CANE STOPS it.

POIROT

Call the embassy.

INT. THE ANDRENYIS' COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS.

He pushes in. The Andrenyis have a double first class cabin, the front made up into a living room, putting bedroom and Countess behind THE CLOSED DOOR. LIGHTS are kept DIM.

POIROT

Only a few questions and a short tour of your luggages, *Monsieur le Comte*. Mere formality.

He opens the blue Morocco case he was not permitted earlier. Clothes. Hat. Toilet kit, as --

POIROT

I saw your Faust. But for a briefly sluggish glissade behind Mephistopheles you were flawless. I wept openly and was asked by many to compose myself. Order is seldom seen in the world, perfection nearly never, I stand in awe. Yet with a job to do. You live in Budapest?

COUNT ANDRENYI

My family owns an estate outside I do not visit. We live out of hotel rooms and the luggage you are destroying.

Poirot finishes searching the case. Noting that LABEL again. He leaves a bottle of PERFUME on top, extends a hand expectantly. Andrenyi reluctantly hands him their passports.

POIROT

Rudolph and Elena Maria Andrenyi of Jászboldogháza. Do I say correctly? The Hungarian language is baffling to those not born to it. Letters come out of nowhere and attack.

(noticing)

A grease spot on your wife's name.

CLOSE: Indeed there is a smudge on ELENA, still legible.

COUNT ANDRENYI

We travel often with the ballet. More often than not greeted by a customs agent in the middle of his supper.

POIROT

Stamped in New York. You have travelled the States.

COUNT ANDRENYI

Of course. I had a residency in Washington for a year.

POIROT

Did you meet anyone there named Armstrong?

COUNT ANDRENYI

I meet many, I remember few. I drank then. This was before I met my wife.

POIROT

You know I must to speak with her.

COUNT ANDRENYI

Impossible. Elena... is not well. We only now travel to London for the doctor. She never left the cabin once last night.

POIROT

If you do not permit me question her your reluctance will be noted to the Yugo-Slav police -- who we shall soon meet -- and she will be detained. By the time they determine what a diplomatic passport is you and your wife will have been hostage a month.

Andrenyi rises at the threat -- FLIPS OVER A CHAIR -- advances on Poirot -- when we hear a thick HUNGARIAN ACCENT:

COUNTESS ANDRENYI (O.S.)

I think sometimes you love fighting more than dance.

THE COUNTESS

Has come from the bedroom. No hood to cover her face Poirot sees she is beautiful. Tragically so. Like the cowslip mis-bloomed in frost. Not built to withstand the harsh world. She kisses the Count to calm him. Eyes Poirot quizzically.

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

You are funny looking, Monsieur Poirot. Are all detectives so funny looking?

POIROT

As a species yes, but me more so. *Madame la Comtesse*, forgive my waking you.

A stumble and giggle as she moves to a chair. It doesn't take the world's greatest detective to see she is stoned.

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

I am always awake at night. The day I sleep. Some fear darkness... I cannot stand the light.

POIROT

You are not entirely yourself.

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

No, this is me. I am always like this.

POIROT

You are always under the influence of...

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

Barbital. I take oceans of it.

(off the Count)

There is no sense in the lie, Love, he can see through us. I cannot go outside without it. I cannot sleep without it. I take it against my fears.

POIROT

Of what are you afraid?

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

Everything. I had a nightmare yesterday about apples. Apples... drowning in them. If a woman is afraid of apples she has no place in the world. I am not good at things.

POIROT

I must tell you, barbital is what drugged the victim.

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

Oh, I would never share any of mine.

She gives an addict's dark laugh. The Count moves to her. Poirot now sees why he's so protective. Off her passport:

POIROT

Elena Maria Andrenyi. The manifest has your maiden name as Goldenberg. Goldenberg, Jewish yes?

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

Not so Jewish my middle name isn't Maria.

POIROT

You are a dancer like your husband?

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

Not like my husband. Chorus. He lifted me during a rehearsal of *Façade* and I never wanted to be put down again. He is touched by the angels. I was shoved by passion and hard work to become adequate.

POIROT

Is this your only dressing gown?

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

I have another, corn colored chiffon.  
(shows him)

I like speaking to detectives, you never know what they will ask next. I'm particularly good with capitals -- my governess was a stickler for geography.

She giggles. Poirot sets the robe down over the case.

POIROT

Thank you for indulging my whims. May I lastly ask you for your signature, only to say all we have discussed is accurate and true. Both of you.

He offers them papers. Poirot notes the Countess hesitate before she signs, an effort to concentrate. He compares her signature to her passport. His brow knits.

COUNT ANDRENYI

Are you satisfied?

POIROT

I am always satisfied to uncover a liar.  
(sees they are insulted)  
Madame, your first name is not Elena, but Helena. The label on your case is dry. It was wet earlier, after you changed it.

Count rises sharply. Countess puts out a hand to stop him.

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

You are very shrewd, Detective. My husband heard about some evidence, a handkerchief embroidered with an 'H,' and didn't want my 'H' to be involved.

*INSERT CUT: THE ANDRENYIS SOAK THEN SCRAPE HER LUGGAGE TAG -- SHE CAREFULLY ALTERS HER NAME ON HER PASSPORT, 'H' TO 'E'--*

COUNTESS ANDRENYI (V.O.)

*So we took it off my passport and my bag.  
I was only scared --*

ON THE HANDKERCHIEF. Poirot slides it to her, confident now.

POIROT

As you should be.

COUNT ANDRENYI

It is no crime to want to be distant from trouble.

POIROT

(weighing this)

That may be. Yet here is trouble. I have been having a most difficult time, you see... A curious detail of the Armstrong tragedy at the center of this is how many were wounded by it. A vast web of pain. For example, the mother, Linda Arden, once celebrated on the stage, is no longer heard from. Nor her surviving young daughter. I would like to know more about this Duchess of Broadway, Ms. Arden. But here, as we are, on the train, in the snow, cut off from the normal routes of procedure, I must use what tools I have left --

He taps his forehead.

POIROT

So I make certain assumptions about her. For example, I can assume she is studied. Her name, "Arden," is taken from "As You Like It," the forest of Rosalind and Arden... I can also assume she is of Jewish ancestry. After all, who is most likely to take a stage name?... Then I wonder... What was her original name?

Countess takes her husband's hand. Squeezes it white.

POIROT

It is not too far a walk to suggest it was, perhaps, Goldenberg. Especially when we find a young woman the correct age, living in a world of fear -- the deliberate opposite of the Princess Dragomiroff's description of her -- hiding as best she can the maiden name... Helena Goldenberg.

The Countess goes silent. The Count rages --

POIROT

-- You cannot punch facts, Sir! All you have told me was a tissue of lies.

(at her)

*You are Helena Goldenberg, younger daughter of Linda Arden. Helena Goldenberg, sister of Mrs. Armstrong. You lost everyone to Ratchett. Your loving sister -- her kind husband. Their daughter was the light in your life -- her perfect face -- the darling curls -- every moment since a nightmare --*



Poirot holds her look -- waiting -- breathless to see if his gamble worked: A moment and... *She breaks down.* Admission by tears. The Count stares Poirot a murder.

POIROT

But if he were to die, so might the fear.

The Count is unleashed -- he comes at Poirot like a tiger.

Poirot ducks precisely two quick PUNCHES -- a match for Count's technique but not his speed -- *WHAM!* The third PUNCH LANDS savagely! He THROWS Poirot against the wall --

COUNT ANDRENYI

She didn't lift a hand against him!  
Though she should have. I swear it. On  
my life. And may I never dance again.

(then)

I swear on the soul of Daisy Armstrong.

He pleads with desperate honesty... infinite sincerity...

Poirot takes this in. Is moved by her tears. By his plea.

POIROT

Then you can swear it to the police.

Andrenyi explodes -- jumps Poirot. Poirot YANKS the belt of the dressing gown -- the case SLAMS -- THE PERFUME BOTTLE BREAKS IN THE COUNT'S FACE -- POIROT WRAPS THE BELT AROUND HIS LEG -- SPINS -- TAKES COUNT DOWN -- GETS ATOP HIM --

THE COUNT GRABS POIROT AT THE THROAT -- CHOKING HIM.

POIROT GRIPS COUNT'S KNEE LIKE A VISE. COUNT SCREAMS.

POIROT

That is your patella, turned 20 degrees.  
I admit you are the stronger fighter, if  
you persist you will win. But not before  
I turn your knee 10 degrees more and  
ensure you truly do never dance again.

POIROT TURNS HIS KNEE FURTHER -- COUNT ROARS -- BUT DOESN'T STOP -- ONLY CHOKES POIROT HARDER --

POIROT GASPS, FADING -- BOTH EQUALLY MATCHED IN AGONY WHEN --

CRACK! Andrenyi DROPS suddenly and hard. REVEAL:

HARDMAN

Behind him. HIS REVOLVER IN HAND. He just KNOCKED OUT the Count before he might've killed Poirot.

INT. SALON CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. MOMENTS LATER.

Hardman hands Poirot some water. Poirot composes himself, furious at himself. Part of his collar has come undone -- he doesn't notice it. Bouc comes rushing in --

BOUC

Get away from him.

POIROT

He just rescued me. Perhaps a mistake.

HARDMAN

I hear noises and run. Just in time, yes? So you believe the Count and Countess are the killers?

Poirot's at a loss, frustrated. Much as he wants to say yes:

POIROT

The Count is protective, I cannot say murderous. And the Countess... could no sooner kill a bedroom spider. You may cease with the false accent, Professor Hardman, you are neither Austrian nor German. It is a good imitation. Based on someone you know?

Bouc is confused. Poirot waits for Hardman to give in... Then he does. His voice of a sudden fully, brashly AMERICAN:

HARDMAN

Local butcher where I grew up was a Kraut -- good man, great accent. What did it?

POIROT

"Turin." Emphasis one the wrong syllable for a proper and proud Teuton.

HARDMAN

Ha! You're a sharp knife, I'll give you that. *Herr Professor Gerhard Hardman* is my cover. Sorry about the colored folk cracks, just playing my part. Hell I'm half a Heeb myself. Cyrus Bethman Hardman.

Hands Poirot his AMERICAN PASSPORT and card.

POIROT

A Pinkerton Detective.

HARDMAN

30 years on the job. Same line of work, you and me.

BOUC

Lies everywhere. We are surrounded by liars and lies!

HARDMAN

Hey, I'm honest. You can call in my bona fides, they'll back me. Just as soon could have been me sent to figure this case out, Poirot. My methods woulda been bit more go-ahead. Like how I tailed you when I saw you going after Andrenyi -- figured you'd hit trouble with that one.

POIROT

The true Western spirit of hustle.

Hardman puts his hat back on, a PI's jaunty angle now.

HARDMAN

We like a thing done. I was in Stamboul heading back from a job when the office cabled. Ratchett asked for a man offering triple time, lucky me being nearby. I met him. He was scared. Said someone was after him. Wanted me to tail him till he could hole up.

POIROT

He attempted to hire me to do the same.

HARDMAN

Both? Funny, he told me to be on the look out for a small dark man with a womanish voice. A lot of muscle for that description.

Poirot catches Bouc's eye. This fits Schmidt's account.

HARDMAN

But I did my job I tell you, watched the hall all night through a crack in my door and not a stranger got in. Any thug trying to get in our coach'd have to pass right by me. I'd take my oath on it.

POIROT

Did you see at all the Count or Countess?

HARDMAN

Nothing doing. Just some passengers going to bed, the gents pretty late... The conductor bopped around to answer a bell here and there. Only time anyone got anywhere near Ratchett's door was when the Swedish giant got an aspirin next door.

POIROT  
 (suddenly intrigued)  
 This was when?

HARDMAN  
 When the train stopped at the station.

Poirot takes is all in. His mouth works, as if trying to chew the tough facts like bad steak. He opens the door to the sleeper coach. The corridor. Checks the angles.

*Poirot's eye perceives a GLISTER OF COLOR, twinkling red-gold.*

ON POIROT. He sinks, stricken. *If you're unclear whether it's because he's crushed at losing -- or by what he's just found -- good. Hold that thought.*

POIROT  
 Would you also take your oath on 30 years as a Pinkerton? Or would you lie again about having been a policeman first.

Added as an afterthought, unrelished. Hardman blanches.

POIROT  
 Your gun, the checkered trigger and widened rear sight, polish blue finish -- alterations to the Colt Army Special for their Official Police Positive model, 1927 issue. You were a cop before a Pinkerton. There appears no end to the lies manufactured just for me.

After a long silence, Hardman gives a weak grin, backs out.

HARDMAN  
 Welp, anything I can do to help, just holler.

POIROT  
 There is one thing, Mr. Hardman. You may leave your gun.

Hardman halts. Reluctantly unholsters his revolver. As it HITS the table --

EXT. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAWN.

SHINK! A PICKAXE SWINGS. ICE FLIES. THE DIGGERS chip the LAST of the ICE off the wheels. The train is nearly free.

The rest of the MEN assemble great cantilevers under the engine to heave it back onto the track.

ON POIROT. Watching the dig thoughtfully from...

EXT. BETWEEN RAIL CARS. ORIENT EXPRESS.

The narrow alcove between STORAGE CARS. Poirot looks up. The sun has made the sky blush. Dawn threatens to pale. Bouc unscrews MacQueen's flask, a toast:

BOUC

*"Every once in a while,  
You come cross a smile,  
That makes you do the same.  
Perhaps at some end,  
You'll think back on that friend.  
And life won't have seemed so plain."*

He drinks. Offers Poirot, who declines.

POIROT

I have only the grey cells to make do with and few enough at that. I cannot spare a single soldier. Perhaps at some end I will be able to sit on a porch in my rocking chair, look on a garden full of vegetable marrows and sample every kind of spirit I ever refused.

BOUC

Invite me to that party, would you?

At which... MARY DEBENHAM comes out to meet Poirot.

Bouc looks to Poirot -- *Are you sure of this?*

Poirot nods. Bouc steps away. Poirot and Mary are alone.

MARY DEBENHAM

You wanted to see me again. Another interview.

POIROT

(shakes his head)

I collected all the evidence I can from the passengers. I have a list of ten questions I am no closer to answering and the train is nearly on its way. It was an exercise, this, of the brain. Mine is taxed to the limit, and Bouc's was only ever of limited value. You have a clear mind and I enjoy your company, I thought you might have an insight. If not then at least the time before failure is passed.

He shows her his note pad, on which he jotted ten questions:

MARY DEBENHAM

-- *Whose handkerchief did we find?*  
-- *Who dropped the pipe cleaner?*  
-- *Who wore the scarlet kimono?*  
-- *Who was the man or woman masquerading  
in the uniform?*  
-- *Why do the hands of the watch point to  
1:15?*  
-- *Was Ratchett truly murdered at that  
time?*  
-- *Was it earlier? Or later?*  
-- *By one person or more?*  
-- *Which of them?*

(beat, shrugs)

The elucidation of crime is your metier,  
not mine. I'm sorry I can't help you.

POIROT

This is a new sensation.

MARY DEBENHAM

Uncertainty?

POIROT

I do not like it.

MARY DEBENHAM

Somewhere there must be the 11th question  
you don't yet know to ask that will give  
you the answer to the rest.

Poirot likes that idea. Then...

POIROT

I could point an easy finger at the  
Countess Andrenyi. The police will  
accept it without question. I determined  
she is the sister of Mrs. Armstrong.

MARY DEBENHAM

(shocked)

Are you certain?

POIROT

As such, she does emerge as the most  
highly motivated.

MARY DEBENHAM

(haunted)

Yes... I can see why...

POIROT

Yet I suspect she may perhaps be innocent.  
Perhaps, perhaps... Without the better  
answer I cannot keep the police ignorant  
of the possibility, can I?

Mary wrestles with this fact, unsure how to respond.

POIROT

Or -- perhaps I can. So many have lied to me of late and don't seem to mind. You yourself did so effortlessly.

MARY DEBENHAM

(thrown)

Me? I don't know what you --

POIROT

Before you refused to answer my question, you told me you had never been to America. You also concealed the fact that at the time of the Armstrong tragedy you were living in the home as governess.

Mary's shock reveals the truth: *He's right.* Poirot grins, no more uncertainty. This was all a feint and trap for her.

POIROT

You knew the Countess is Mrs. Armstrong's younger sister because you also taught her in New York when she was a girl. Beginning, as always, with geography.

Mary is caught. She backs up, but cannot go anywhere in this tight space. She recovers herself enough to try --

MARY DEBENHAM

I have my living to get. A girl detained in connection to a murder case, do you think any decent middle-class family would want to engage that girl? --

POIROT

You planned Ratchett's murder, then sent for the Countess to witness it. Did you hope to save her life by ending his? If she saw him dead the Helena you knew might return --

*The train LURCHES. Up ahead WORKMEN PULL the cantilever. The engine being ROCKED AND HOISTED back onto the tracks.*

Mary looks to the door she came from. BOUC stands on the other side. Bars the way. Moving fast --

Mary GRABS the handle of the opposite door -- slips inside --

INT. STORAGE CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

Filled with crates, luggage, stacked in rows floor to ceiling. Dark but for a few pencils of daylight streaming in. Poirot follows, advances toward Mary. She backs away.

POIROT

You waited for your roommate to sleep and she didn't. You drugged her, misjudging her size and using too little, the barbital gave her a headache...

*INSERT CUT: GRETA NURSES A HEADACHE -- SHE STEPS OUT -- MARY LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW TO SEE THEM SLOWING TO THE STATION --*

POIROT (V.O.)

She left to ask for an aspirin when the train stopped at Vincovci -- the conductor was on the platform -- the coast clear -- you made your move...

*SHE MOVES BEHIND GRETA WHO, TAKING ASPIRIN FROM HUBBARD, BLOCKS THE CORRIDOR AND HIDES HARDMAN'S VIEW OF HER --*

POIROT (V.O.)

At 20 minutes to 11, Greta, great Swedish Spruce she is, obscured you from view. Allowing you to enter without being seen by Michel or Mr. Hardman.

*MARY SETS DOWN THE BLOODY KNIFE -- DENTS THE WATCH, CHANGES THE TIME -- CROSSES THE CORRIDOR IN THE UNIFORM, PASSING SCHMIDT -- HIDES THE UNIFORM IN SCHMIDT'S COMPARTMENT --*

*GRETA RETURNS TO THEIR CABIN TO FIND MARY IN BED WHERE SHE LEFT HER. THE DOOR SLAMS!*

INT. STORAGE CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

*SLAM!* CRATES CRASH DOWN as the train ROCKS back and forth, almost there. A CRATE BREAKS open, creosote (oil) spills along the floor. Mary has nowhere left to run.

POIROT

When Doctor Arbuthnot realized he failed to discourage you from murder, he tried to conceal your actions by falsifying the time of death to when your alibi is sound -- the time you put on the watch -- accessory after the fact. I only do not know how you managed to answer Michel through the door at 12:37, that will come. You loved Daisy Armstrong -- you loved her family -- so you killed Cassetti. Dropping this.

(the handkerchief)

Mary Hermione Debenham. Disappointing to find it was you, I meant what I said about enjoying your company. Bouc! We are in here --

Oh it is good to be back in control.



Mary stops seeking exit. Stands proud. Resigned. Venomous.

MARY DEBENHAM

Cassetti was a pig. He deserved to die!  
Before he could kill more children.

*KRA-KOOM!* THE WHOLE TRAIN QUAKES. THE ENGINE IS BACK ON THE TRACKS! Mary moves to run, Poirot fixes her --

POIROT

We will soon be off, let's keep this dignified. You will be handed over to the police in Brod. There are extenuating circumstances, I will do what I can to make sure you do not face the gallows. Monsieur Bouc!

A pause. No one comes.

POIROT

Bouc?

THE TRAIN WHISTLE GIVES A LONG SCREAMING BLAST --

BANG! A SHOT RINGS OUT! Poirot turns around to see...

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT. HOLDING A REVOLVER. ON HIM.

Only then does Poirot feel it in his chest. Does the BLOOD bloom. HE'S BEEN SHOT.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

I didn't want to do that.

Poirot fumbles for his pocket. Arbuthnot takes Hardman's gun off Poirot before he can draw, throws it out a window. Agitated, as if angry at Poirot for making him do this.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Damn you. She didn't kill him. I did.

HE PUNCHES POIROT. A boxer's economy -- short, precise JABS. Poirot slumps. A tangle of pain.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Mary -- go! I can't let you take the blame for what I did alone. Go!

Mary heads for the door. Stops at Arbuthnot. They lock eyes.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

We were never meant to be together.

MARY DEBENHAM

You stupid man.

INT. ATHENS SLEEPER CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS.

Mary runs through from the storage car. Passes a passed out BOUC. Knocked out and on the floor.

INT. ENGINE ROOM. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

SHOVELS throw COAL into a mounting fire. HEAT WAVES rising.

EXT. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

STEAM begins to RISE off the ENGINE. A giant yawning awake.

*PISTONS ROTATE -- THE WHEELS CREAK -- THE WHISTLE SHRIEKS!*

INT. STORAGE CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. THAT MOMENT.

*THE TRAIN SHUDDERS -- THEY ARE MOVING!* Arbuthnot stumbles -- SHOOTs as -- Poirot dives away -- hiding in the darkness --

Arbuthnot searches for him in the dark, gun in hand, as --

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

John Armstrong was my commander, my best friend. He believed in me. Got me into school, gave me a future. Cassetti destroyed him.

Hidden, Poirot tries a HATCH on the floor -- LOCKED. He SCANS the strewn luggage for anything he can use: A CLOCK. A SCARF. A NAIL FILE. Arbuthnot slowly steps closer, as --

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Mary and I found each other in grief. Then I found Ratchett. Mary hated him, but she didn't want any more death from this. Our plan was to reveal him to the police -- that's what you overheard. But when I saw his face -- I knew he didn't deserve a trial. I had to kill him.

Poirot wads up cotton from the scarf -- ties on the file as --

POIROT

You drugged MacQueen -- changed the watch -- lied about the time of death --

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

I couldn't let Mary be accused. Or MacQueen. My sins are mine to pay for alone. I'm not a killer, I'm a soldier. A soldier kills to protect. Now I have to protect myself from you --

He sees Poirot RUN -- HE SHOOTs -- MISSES, and --

*CLOSE: THE ALARM CLOCK GOES OFF -- the BELL hits the FILE -- which SPARKS to LIGHT the COTTON TINDER -- which IGNITES --*  
*THE SPILLED CREOSOTE. FIRE BURNS ACROSS THE FLOOR --*

Arbuthnot backs away from the spreading flames -- rounds a corner following Poirot -- FIRES -- *BLAM!* --

*AT NOTHING.* Poirot is GONE. In his place: *THE OPEN HATCH.*  
 LOCK BURNED AWAY -- ICY GROUND FLYING BY BELOW. *INTERCUT:*

EXT. UNDER THE TRAIN.

Poirot grasps the undercarriage -- INCHES ABOVE THE GROUND which RIPS by at shredding speed -- he crawls for the front.

*BLAM!* A BULLET BLOWS through the floor mere feet behind him.

ARBUTHNOT walks slowly, SHOOTING the FLOOR at two foot intervals. *BLAM!* The next SHOT hits closer... *BLAM!* The next right at Poirot's FEET...

Poirot sees a PATCH OF ICE on the tracks ahead -- LETS GO OF THE TRAIN -- SLIDING ON THE ICE! Train FLIES over him! He GRABS a CHAIN LOOP between CARS -- momentum SWINGS HIM VIOLENTLY UP ONTO --

THE SIDE OF THE TRAIN. HE GRIPS A LADDER. CLIMBS UP.

A HAND GRABS HIS LEG. PULLS HIM DOWN ONTO --

INT. REAR PLATFORM/OBSERVATION DECK. ORIENT EXPRESS.

POIROT CRASHES DOWN. Looks up: Arbuthnot stands over him. The world speeding by behind. Poirot rises, hurt, unsteady.

He SWINGS wildly -- MISSING wildly -- manages to KNOCK his gun OVER THE RAILING. Arbuthnot lets loose on Poirot -- *an exhausted combination of lethal blows.* But Poirot keeps coming at him. Pure instinct unable to stop. Slurring:

POIROT

But then who dropped the hanky?

Arbuthnot THROWS Poirot against the RAILS. TRIES TO PUSH POIROT OFF THE EDGE! But Poirot won't let go.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Why won't you die?

Beat. ON POIROT. Bent over backwards, holding on for his life, he looks back on the train -- which is at a BEND --

*TIME SLOWS: For a brief moment he can see into the cars ahead. ALL TWELVE OF THE PASSENGERS BRIEFLY FRAMED IN THEIR WINDOWS. Each separate. Each part of the whole.*

ON POIROT: A curious look. A sudden chill. AN INSIGHT:

POIROT

*The eleventh question.*

The insight hits like lightning -- and gives him wings. Poirot shakes off the pain, the frustration, the violence endured -- strength summoned to KICK Arbuthnot off him --

ELBOW HIM IN THE FACE THE NECK -- GRAB THE AWNING -- AND WITH BOTH FEET -- KICK ARBUTHNOT -- WHO GOES CRASHING THROUGH THE GLASS DOOR -- AND WE -- SMASH TO:

*THUMP!* AN UNCONSCIOUS ARBUTHNOT LANDS HEAVILY IN A CHAIR.

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Dropped by Poirot. Mary instantly goes to Arbuthnot to revive him. Done with hiding her obvious concern and affection. Arbuthnot comes to. She kisses him.

MARY DEBENHAM

You stupid man.

ALL THE PASSENGERS, MICHEL AND BOUC ARE IN THE CAR. Bouc holds a towel to the back of his head. The train speeds.

ALL LOOK TO POIROT. Who stares out the window at the fast passing world. Wet. Wounded. Eyes wild. In the distance we make out a small town built around a medieval castle.

POIROT

I was looking forward to seeing *La Saint Sophie*. I love cathedrals. Mankind imposing order on the chaos, impossible symmetry. The most beautiful woman I ever saw had two different colored eyes, one blue one green. I could not bear to look at her. I could not bear to look away...

He trails off.

BOUC

Poirot?...

No answer. Only the sound of the engine. THE TRAIN WHISTLE.

BOUC

In minutes we reach the station... The police are waiting... Do we hand them the Doctor? Poirot?...

Poirot closes his eyes. Pained more by his thoughts than his wounds. Then...

POIROT

During an epic fight behind the train more wildly improbable than any *roman policier* I have ever read Doctor Arbuthnot asked me why I am not yet dead. He knew, of course, the answer.

(to Arbuthnot, off his wound)

Because you insisted on it. A sharpshooter, who does not kill at close range? Your shot was not an error. It was a surgery. Precisely administered. To wound and to slow. You were only trying to protect your lady love, who you feared may, rightly or wrongly, take blame. You want to be caught and go to jail for the crime. You could not kill me because you are no killer.

(to the rest)

None of you are killers. Though one of you of course must be.

The train takes a corner at speed. They hold on for balance.

POIROT

The strangeness of this case has had me bouncing from theory to ill-formed theory like a pulp shamus or worse yet a cop. I thought I found a crime so sloppy and piecemeal I could not hold straight in my mind the facts. When truly what I beheld was... perfect. The truth, however ugly in itself, is always curious and beautiful to seekers after it.

(then)

It is time to solve this case. There are two possible solutions to the crime. One difficult because it reconciles with most but not all the facts. One more -- complex. So tortuous the details are only now taking shape in my mind. Bouc, I must ask you to leave this car.

BOUC

Now?

POIROT

For your benefit. When you come back in I will have for you your man. Or woman.

BOUC

Before you tell me who did it? The only way I'm leaving is if you throw me off!

Bouc finds for once he cares. Poirot nods his appreciation.

POIROT

You must swear to abide by whatever I say.

Bouc agrees. Poirot wads up the famous handkerchief. Stuffs it into the bullet hole in his shoulder with a wince, as --

POIROT

You stay too, Michel. Our suspects prove very agile when accused. I may need you to help subdue our killer.

The passengers grow nervous. Poirot straightens. *HE BEGINS:*

POIROT

A man has died. Samuel Edward Ratchett, alias Cassetti, an evil man who committed a heinous crime. He was last known to be alive at 12:37AM when he shouted through his door. The watch in his pocket was stopped at a quarter past one. Time of death estimated between midnight and 2. A half hour after midnight, the train ran into a snowdrift after which time it is impossible anyone left the train. We are therefore forced to conclude that the murderer is to be found among the occupants of our coach alone.

(he stops)

Or so we thought.

The passengers react, surprised.

POIROT

I offer my first solution: Ratchett feared a certain enemy. An irate Italian business associate, a rogue, slender mafioso, enters the train at Vincovci, as MacQueen and Arbuthnot take the air.

*INSERT CUT: A SHADOWY FIGURE SLIPS ABOARD UNSEEN -- STABS RATCHETT -- DRINKS SPILLING LIQUOR ON HIS SLEEVE -- DISCARDS THE UNIFORM UNDER SCHMIDT'S BLANKETS -- SLIPS OFF.*

POIROT (V.O.)

*Equipped with a uniform and pass key, he ferociously stabs Ratchett -- leaves through the communicating door to Mrs. Hubbard's compartment -- drinks to celebrate or steady his nerves -- then escapes unseen. The outside job it appears at first glance to be.*

The tale settles among the passengers. A mixture of shock and relief at knowing. It is BOUC who shakes his head:

BOUC

No -- nonono -- it doesn't fit! Where are the tracks? Why hide the uniform? Who drugs Ratchett? Or calls through his door? Who stabs Mrs. Hubbard? Dammit, you taught me how to scrutinize, I was much happier being stupid.

Poirot nods warmly to his friend. He knows it too. He scans each of the passengers' faces in turn. We can see the insights form in his mind as they come.

POIROT

Or. I must look back to our twelve.  
(a pause)

The second solution. It may yet be that one of you has planned the murder to look like our lone wolf: I find the body accompanied by strange facts and even stranger clues.

*INSERT CUT: THE CLUES IN RATCHETT'S ROOM: BROKEN WATCH -- PIPE CLEANER -- HANDKERCHIEF -- BLACKMAIL LETTERS -- ASHES --*

POIROT

There are the bizarrely inconsistent wounds. The watch in Ratchett's pajama pocket, an unlikely place to wear one's watch to sleep, likely deliberately put and faked, along with the time on it. The pipe cleaner is intended to be found, it is admitted by the Doctor. Not so the handkerchief, which is denied by all presented with it. The threatening notes are clear fakes planted. I myself hear a cry from Ratchett's compartment.

*INSERT CUT: POIROT STICKS HIS HEAD OUT IN TO THE CORRIDOR AS MICHEL KNOCKS ON RATCHETT'S DOOR --*

POIROT (V.O.)

A voice answers through the door in French -- yet Mr. Macqueen tells us, thrice tells us, Ratchett spoke no French -- or any languages. Clearly our killer.

*INSERT CUT: THE ASHES FOUND -- THE LETTER RECONSTRUCTED.*

POIROT

When the deed is done the killer burns the genuine letter. He does not expect us to reconstruct it. He learns I have uncovered the identity of Ratchett/Cassetti and the handkerchief is found. Now he is on the run. He hides his costumes where he can.

(MORE)

POIROT (cont'd)

He attempts to silence Mrs. Hubbard. All this as I gather your evidence. Such as it is.

Poirot is in his element now, Minnesota Fats dancing around the pool table, regaining control as he pieces it together:

POIROT

One by one each of you passes me some farcical lie or gross omission, some exposed on the spot, some in due course. Most frustratingly, I have so far been unable to prove a case against anyone as each of you is given an alibi -- most by a deeply unlikely, and so trustworthy source. MacQueen and Arbuthnot, the Englishman and the Cuban, a Swedish Missionary and a London governess. An international trading house of excuses!

He mulls this, then...

POIROT

I recall something Mrs. Hubbard and I discussed early in our journey. Where else but on a train does one encounter such a "bracing mix" of race, nationality and class in one place? Where else such a melting pot -- but the great melting pot herself. In America we might easily find just such a diverse household.

The thought lingers. He sets it aside.

POIROT

We turn then to the question of  motive. I am old-fashioned in my methods. I follow the adage, "Who stands to benefit from the crime?" Most often the profit is financial, frequently jewels. Our crime is the murdering of a murderer. The benefit is of the spirit, the alleviation of suffering. To avenge. To quiet a shouting voice in the head that prevents sleep -- or makes one take endless drugs to silence it.

Some are able to meet Poirot's eye. The Countess looks away.

POIROT

To identify the murderer we must determine who among us has a connection to the Armstrong kidnapping? We find a surprising number of options...

He turns to DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT.



POIROT

First we have Doctor Arbuthnot, who served under generous Colonel Armstrong, who helped a talented man hampered by prejudice gain an education. A dedicated, indebted friend... In grief he meets and finds solace in the company of Daisy's governess.

Poirot now faces MARY DEBENHAM.

POIROT

Surprisingly full of venom. Almost like a mother to Daisy. And so close to Mrs. Armstrong's young sister...

He looks down the car at the COUNT AND COUNTESS ANDRENYI.

POIROT

Helena Goldenberg. Now grown into the Countess Andrenyi. Of thready substance, not long for this world if she carries on as she is. Married to a powerful man no stranger to rage and violence, who may hope the sight of Ratchett dead will rescue his beloved from slow suicide. The Countess has more family friends...

His eye fixes on PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF.

POIROT

Princess Dragomiroff was godmother to the dear girl with the curls. She admits it so freely I was inclined to accept the coincidence. Until my investigation of the monogrammed handkerchief found at the scene dismisses other possibilities... The letter "H" in the Russian alphabet of course pronounced "N." Natalia Dragomiroff. This belongs to you, Madame.

He presents the Princess the now bloodied handkerchief.

POIROT

Though she appears frail, she conceals considerable strength. Or we can imagine she committed the crime with the help of her devoted maid...

Poirot wheels on SCHMIDT.

POIROT

Who before her current employ was, I believe, cook to the Armstrong family, where she met and impressed the Princess 15 years ago, perhaps by telling medium from well at a touch. My test revealed a chef's eye.

*INSERT CUT: SCHMIDT ORDERS FOR THE PRINCESS -- TESTS THE DUCK BREAST WHEN POIROT DOUBTS IT.*

POIROT

Your lady took pains to describe the Armstrong's cook as a man with a face like Bouc's to deflect suspicion as far as she can away from you, as she did for the younger sister. In the end she cares for you, Fraulein.

Schmidt turns away from his stare.

POIROT

We are already in possession of an absurd assortment suspects. Yet we are not done, are we? We also have the nurse in charge of little Daisy. Her sense of religious zeal perhaps comes from guilt at allowing Daisy to be taken.

Poirot has stopped in front of GRETA.

POIROT

Hoping to serve God until you have made amends. You were in her room the night when Ratchett came in through the window.

*INSERT CUT: IN DAISY'S ROOM THE NIGHT OF THE CRIME. RATCHETT APPROACHES THE CRIB -- GRETA RISES FROM HER CHAIR --*

POIROT (V.O.)

You woke too late -- when you tried to stop him...

*RATCHETT CRACKS HER OVER THE HEAD WITH A CROWBAR -- SHE FALLS TO THE FLOOR DEEPLY CONCUSSED. HER SCAR IS FORMED.*

POIROT

You had a glass of wine too many with your supper and have ever since blamed yourself for not being alert to stop him. "Never again."

*INSERT CUT: GRETA FORCEFULLY DECLINES BOUC'S OFFER OF WINE.*

Greta CRIES. Guilt she will carry as long as her scar.

GRETA

She knew nothing but kindness and love.  
Until -- I let her be taken...

POIROT

We are running out of household  
positions. The dedicated staff all of  
whom spoke so lovingly at trial.  
(the thought strikes him)  
To round it out, the butler --

MASTERMAN interrupts, comes forward.

MASTERMAN

No need to divine with me, Sir. As I  
said, I cannot be bothered to lie. I was  
Colonel Armstrong's batman in the war,  
and afterwards his valet in New York. He  
was as fine a man as God ever made.

POIROT

Indeed. He offered opportunities to  
people few would have. For example...  
his chauffeur. A bank loan changes his  
life so he may build his dream automobile  
empire -- but someone must co-sign this  
loan. With a lack of credentials it must  
be someone respected, someone known. To  
whom he is indebted for life.

MARQUEZ looks like a pricked balloon.

POIROT

What of the Pinkerton detective? Who  
lies about first being a policeman. Mr.  
Hardman's connection comes from another  
angle. An officer assigned to  
investigate the Armstrong case perhaps.  
You become attached to someone...

HARDMAN goes white as Poirot sees it. *Of course.*

POIROT

There is another, uncelebrated victim.  
The French maid. You fell in love with  
her before was falsely accused. You quit  
the police when you witnessed the  
travesty of justice committed by the  
system you served --  
(off MacQueen)  
When MacQueen's father insisted on her  
arrest. When she took her own life.

MACQUEEN burns with shame. His patrimony.

The tough Hardman sinks, heart unrecovered.

HARDMAN

Susanne was... so gentle. And she fell for me. Old and already getting grey. I told her she could do better... but there she was, on time for every date. She was my last shot at something soft and good. A family.

Poirot slows. Building to something difficult.

POIROT

Only one soul can claim to have lost more than any of you. The tragic Linda Arden. Mother of Sonia, grandmother of Daisy. Retired from the stage... *but for one final performance*. A comic role. Noisy and ridiculous.

He is standing before...

POIROT

Mrs. Hubbard. One of you would have to be most convincing to decry the lone assassin slipping through her cabin. It would take a gifted actor.

A pause. Hubbard puts a hand to her brow... and pulls off a WIG. Dark hair falls to her shoulders. With the wig gone, so leaves the character of "Hubbard." Without the silly lady to play she is older, chilling, fierce. All Hubbard's frivolity and joy was a role played perfectly.

HUBBARD

You're a very wonderful man.

Poirot takes a long look at his desperate, ruined SUSPECTS.

*A FLASH IMAGE: EACH OF THEM BEFORE THE KIDNAPPING. SMILING. HEARTS FULL AND UNDAMAGED. THEY WERE ALL ONCE AS GOLDEN HUED AS THE ARMSTRONGS. AS INNOCENT AS DAISY.*

ON POIROT. Sharing the air with death.

POIROT

A murder should have one victim. When Ratchett kills Daisy Armstrong a dozen lives are broken, deformed, ended. They demand justice. Of all these wounded souls... we must finally answer... Who among them is a killer? Who takes up the knife?

Poirot trembles with the conclusion:

POIROT

The answer is, no single one of you could have done it. No pair of killers working together. *It can only have been done by all of you. Together.*

The 12 frozen. Bouc's breath forgotten. Poirot's head low.

POIROT

I could not see it. My mind seeks the aberration -- the single crack on the wall. These walls are demolished! Why else is a train so full in the dead of winter? Why the inconsistent wounds? The abundance of evidence, the mythical "small dark man with a womanish voice," the kimono, the --  
 (stops suddenly, unsettled)  
 But this would require the complicity of-- the conductor.

Poirot turns to MICHEL.

POIROT

Pierre Michel. A decent man so many years in the Company's employ, do they bribe him?  
 (seeing it)  
 A mother who dies of melancholy, "The only family I had left"... After you lost your sister. Susanne Michel.

Poirot puts a hand on Michel's shoulder. A look to Hardman. The shared loss of Susanne.

POIROT

Alors, that is 13. With only 12 stab wounds. Who does not step forward?...

He closes his eyes. Ah. *Everything is explained.* The haunting truth is now entirely clear.

POIROT

A plan was formed. Every minute detail of their evidence composed. Alibis, room assignments, a debate on Stalin. Every interaction an orchestrated lie to confuse me -- not a lie... A play. Actors all in a singular performance. Directed by a master.

He looks to HUBBARD/LINDA ARDEN.

POIROT

The star of stage, poised to become the first great woman director of the age. Instead, Linda Arden made her debut on the Orient Express. For a private audience.

INT. LIVING ROOM. PRIVATE HOME. NIGHT. (FLASHBACK)

Where we began. Linda Arden's Long Island home. A house of mourning. Her dark hair is ragged. Her eyes haunted. She stares into the cold, empty fireplace.

POIROT (V.O.)

They came to you in their grief, one by one over the sad years. Some matched the savagery of your anger...

SHE IS VISITED FIRST BY PRINCESS AND SCHMIDT...

MICHEL SITS IN A CHAIR BESIDE HER, EYES FULL...

MACQUEEN STARES INTO HER FIREPLACE, JAW SET WITH RAGE...

ARBUTHNOT PRESSES HUBBARD'S HAND GOODBYE AS MARY ENTERS. AND SO THEY MEET...

POIROT (V.O.)

The hole in their heart that could only be filled with action.

THE COUNTESS HAS TO BE PROPPED UP TO SIT, DRUG ADDLED...

POIROT (V.O.)

Perhaps murder can save a life.

ON HUBBARD. STARING INTO THE FIREPLACE. WHICH NOW RAGES WITH FIRE. MATCH CUT TO:

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

ON HUBBARD. Cinder voiced. Hiding nothing.

HUBBARD

It was my plan. I recruited them. I had Hardman track down Cassetti posing as Ratchett, I sent MacQueen to gain his employment, then Masterman. MacQueen could arrange he travel on the train when Michel was on duty.

POIROT

So you could do it together. The jury of twelve he escaped has finally found Ratchett. He prepares for bed at nine...

INT. KITCHEN CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT. (FLASHBACK)

MASTERMAN LACES THE COFFEE CUP WITH BARBITAL.

INT. CORRIDOR. ORIENT EXPRESS. NIGHT. (FLASHBACK)

MICHEL CHECKS THE COAST IS CLEAR. SIGNALS TO HUBBARD.

POIROT (V.O.)

And then --

INT. RATCHETT'S COMPARTMENT. NIGHT. (FLASHBACK)

Hubbard enters the room. Knife in hand. It is cathedral quiet. Solemn and harrowing.

She stands over Ratchett. Hating. The door opens.

Hardman enters first. She hands him the knife.

Hardman stands over Ratchett. Who starts to MOVE. Drugged but conscious. HUBBARD HOLDS RATCHETT'S WEAK ARMS DOWN. LOOKS INTO HIS EYES SO HE SEES HER FACE AS HARDMAN RAISES THE KNIFE. FINDS HIS NERVE.

POIROT (V.O.)

For a lost love --

HARDMAN STABS RATCHETT

He gives her back the knife. They each come. One by one. A silent, ghostly procession. HUBBARD remains in the room, judge overseeing her jury. Handing the next the knife. Each in turn takes a moment to stand over the man who destroyed some vital part of their life... Raises the knife and...

POIROT (V.O.)

For a disgraced father --

MACQUEEN STABS RATCHETT

POIROT (V.O.)

For a beloved charge --

MARY STABS RATCHETT

GRETA STABS RATCHETT

POIROT (V.O.)

For a ruined sister --

MICHEL STABS RATCHETT

POIROT

For a dead master --





INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Poirot faces the passengers. All shock still and effected.

BOUC

If we hadn't still been stuck in the snow the body would have been found in the morning when we had crossed into Italy...

POIROT

The conductor's uniform long disposed out a window. It would be put down as an outside assailant who slipped out easily in Brod as we slept. The snow changes everything. It results in my meddling. Things must be hidden...

INT. ORIENT EXPRESS. VARIOUS.

MACQUEEN STUFFS THE KIMONO IN POIROT'S CASE, DRINKS, SPILLING ON THE UNIFORM -- WHICH HE HANDS TO SCHMIDT -- MACQUEEN RUNS OFF THE TRAIN AND FLEES INTO THE BLIZZARD.

POIROT (V.O.)

I accuse MacQueen. Doctor Arbuthnot makes an attempt to exonerate him, but I am stubborn. This elicits a remarkable improvisation on your part.

INT. MACQUEEN'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY (FLASHBACK)

Poirot accuses MacQueen with the ledger after his escape attempt. Arbuthnot speaks in his defense.

POIROT (V.O.)

You couldn't let him shoulder your blame. So you took the knife, and you demanded --

INT. HUBBARD'S COMPARTMENT. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY. (FLASHBACK)

HUBBARD THRUSTS THE KNIFE INTO ARBUTHNOT'S HAND -- HE RESISTS WHAT SHE'S ASKING HIM TO DO -- SHE YELLS --

HUBBARD

Do it, goddamn you!

SHE TURNS HER BACK -- RELUCTANTLY, ARBUTHNOT FINDS THE RIGHT SPOT -- RAISES THE KNIFE --

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

POIROT

The doctor knowing how to wound without killing. With knife and gun.

Poirot touches his wound, Hubbard's sling. Eyes Hubbard:

POIROT

You wrote their parts, you directed them.

HUBBARD

In every detail.

POIROT

Nurtured precise, authentic performances from a company of amateur players.

MARY DEBENHAM

She asked nothing I wouldn't give freely.

DOCTOR ARBUTHNOT

Nor I. Any of us.

HUBBARD

Stop it. *All of you, stop.* No one should hang for this but me. It was my plan. Tell the police it was me alone. There's no life left in me anymore.

(off Mary and Arbuthnot)

They have a chance now. Helena I pray has a chance... They can all live, find some joy somewhere. Let it end with me.

She stands beside Helena, pleading. Poirot sees she is sincere.

POIROT

*You want me... to let all these killers go?*

HUBBARD

They're not killers. They were all good people once. They could be again.

THE WHISTLE SCREAMS. A BRIDGE AHEAD AND THEN THE TRAIN WILL REACH THE STATION. Poirot is considering his options.

BOUC

The station. Poirot?

Silence. Poirot struggles. There is no right answer.

POIROT

I thought myself the last resort of justice because I always knew. There is right, there is wrong... Now there is you... I cannot consign all of you to death -- and I cannot let you go.

(he reaches into his pocket)

I -- cannot judge this. You must decide.

*He lays A GUN on the table. Ratchett's gun. Leaves the barrel pointed at himself.*

POIROT

You wish to go free without punishment for your crime, then you must only commit one more. I will not stop you.

BOUC

You can't let them kill you -- !

Poirot silences him -- *Stay back. You swore to abide.* Poirot is dead serious. He is ready to die. And be rid of a world he cannot master.

POIROT

Bouc can lie, I cannot. You must silence me. There is a bridge before the town only moments ahead, you open the door and drop me out, then walk away innocent at the station.

Mary looks: The bridge is just ahead.

POIROT

Do it! One of you find the nerve! You were jury for Ratchett, be the same for yourselves. End one more life. Then yours can begin.

Mary considers THE GUN. But doesn't move. MacQueen makes a half step to take it then stops. None of them can do it.

THREE LONG WHISTLE BLASTS. Then terrifying silence. Until --

THE CLICK OF THE HAMMER PULLED. Poirot looks.

HUBBARD HOLDS THE GUN. POINTS IT UNSTEADILY AT POIROT.

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

Mother, don't!

HUBBARD

I already died with Daisy.

Before anyone can stop her she turns the gun on her own neck.

COUNTESS ANDRENYI

No! --

*Too late. She pulls the trigger.*

CLOSE ON THE HAMMER AS IT FALLS. STRIKES!

CLICK. CLICK.

THERE IS NO BULLET. THE GUN IS EMPTY.

A long pause. Poirot slowly walks up to her.

POIROT

The thing about a killer, he will never  
hesitate to kill again.

Poirot never intended anyone else to die. He only needed to  
know if they were killers. His plan all along.

He takes the gun. Now knowing. *There are no killers here.*

EXT. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

THE ORIENT EXPRESS SLOWS TO A STOP. PULLS INTO THE STATION.

INT. DINING CAR. ORIENT EXPRESS. DAY.

Dead silence as they hear the train doors THUNK open.

POIROT

Bouc. Tell the police I am ready.

BOUC

Which of your two solutions will you  
share?

The question hangs. No one breathes or moves. Off Poirot...

EXT. BROD STATION. DAY.

Bright sunlight sparks off the clean blanket of fresh fallen  
snow. Snow sets all surfaces back to zero. Makes equals of  
us all.

Brod is a quaint town, even more so freshly frosted. Every  
angle looks like Christmas. Rows of shops, cars and porters,  
ready to receive the newcomers off the train.

UNDER A ROW OF FRESH ICICLES

Poirot and Bouc stand with a chorus of POLICEMEN. Poirot  
speaks. They take notes, hanging on his every word, as...

Michel comes off the train...

He helps Princess Dragomiroff and Schmidt with their bags...

Poirot watches over Bouc's shoulder, as...

Marquez and Masterman step down together and walk off...

Followed by MacQueen... Then Greta... Then Hardman...

Mary and Arbuthnot step off... Arm in arm into a future  
together... In love in the sun...

None of them are stopped or bothered. They are free to go. The first solution given.

Hubbard, wig back on, walks past Poirot. Her eye meets his with whatever comes past gratitude. The smallest smile indicates she may yet find some joy somewhere.

Lastly the Countess Andrenyi is helped off by the Count, hood on and covering her face. Poirot watches as she hesitates, at first fearful of the bright light.

Then... she pulls back her hood. Steps into the sun.

As they walk off the Count may limp, but the Countess walks straight and steady. Her face turned up to the dazzling sunlight. Unafraid. Golden hued and impossibly beautiful.

She picks an apple off a kitchen cart, takes it with her.

Poirot smiles.

But the smile quickly fades. He has lightened their burden only by putting the weight on his shoulders.

*And with that, he has the honor to retire from the case.*

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM. DAY.

The police disperse. A grateful Bouc leads Poirot back to the train, bucking him up.

BOUC

You saved me. The next time I have a New England steel heiress up in the Number 16 I promise I'll think of you.

(off Poirot's grump)

Stop that, I won't have you moping. You have the entire train to yourself, no one will bother you for the rest of your trip. I already told the chef to make you one of every dessert he knows.

POIROT

I thought I knew everything about crime and criminals. I don't know a thing.

BOUC

(sees something ahead)

You know enough.

Bouc points: Up ahead A BRITISH MILITARY OFFICER by a LARGE CAR nervously searches the station. He is in a lather, clearly dressed in a hurry, tie askew. He holds A SIGN:

"HERCULE POIROT"

OFFICER

Hello? I'm looking for a Mr. Poirot.  
He's needed on a very urgent matter.

BOUC

He is on holiday.

Bouc leads Poirot on. But --

Poirot stops. Reluctantly steps forward.

POIROT

The Kassner case again?

OFFICER

No, Sir, something far worse. I have to  
take him to Egypt straight away, I'm  
afraid. There's been a murder, Sir.  
Right on the bloody Nile.

(hoping)

*Are you the detective?*

ON POIROT. He reaches out a hand. Fixes the man's tie.

Turns and shapes his fantastic moustache.

Which swiftly submits to perfection.

He'll have to be.

END.