

Scene Ten

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

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

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

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

POIROT. And I see that your first name is –

PRINCESS. Natalya.

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

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

POIROT. Is it yours, *mademoiselle*?

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

PRINCESS. Oh!

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

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

POIROT. And what were you anxious about?

PRINCESS. The Bolsheviks.

POIROT. And what book did you read?

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

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

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

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

PRINCESS. Yes, many times.

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

POIROT. You are very religious.

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

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

GRETA. His name was Ratchett.

(Sob.)

And I pray for his soul.

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

GRETA. Princess!

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

BOUC. She was very great.

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

POIROT. There were four who died?

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

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

GRETA. (*Crying out.*) *Ahh!*

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

PRINCESS. Greta, please! Greta!

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

(*The PRINCESS is gone.*)

POIROT. *Monsieur* MacQueen, please sit down.

MACQUEEN. Of-of-of course. Are they all right?

POIROT. They will be fine, I assure you. Now tell me, please, what exactly were your duties as secretary to your employer?

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

POIROT. And you knew him only as Samuel Ratchett.

MACQUEEN. How else would I know him?

POIROT. His real name was Bruno Cassetti.

MACQUEEN. Holy God. Are you sure of that?

BOUC. Then you know about the Armstrong case?

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

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

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

POIROT. Anyone else?

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

BOUC. Killed herself.

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

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

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

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

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

BOUC. The "other conductor"?

POIROT. There is a second conductor?

MACQUEEN. I guess so. I saw him.

BOUC. He was in uniform?

MACQUEEN. Yeah. The same one that Michel wears.

BOUC. And what did he look like?

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

POIROT. Did you speak with him?

MACQUEEN. I said hello and he just kept going.

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

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

(As soon as MACQUEEN exits, BOUC cries out.)

BOUC. Haha! I knew we would get a breakthrough! Mrs. Hubbard was telling the truth, I should have