Scene Two

(We hear a small hotel band playing “I Want to Go Back to Michigan” by Irving Berlin. POIROT bows slightly and now we are in the dining room of the Tokatlian Hotel in Istanbul in 1934. The HEAD WAITER escorts POIROT into the room.)

HEAD WAITER. This way, monsieur. I have a beautiful table that I’m sure you will enjoy. It is monsieur’s first time in Istanbul?

POIROT. That is correct. How did you know?

HEAD WAITER. Ohh, I have my ways, monsieur. My little observations. In this business, one needs to be a detective, like that famous Poirot fellow who comes from France.

POIROT. I believe he is Belgian.

HEAD WAITER. No, no. From France. I know him personally.

POIROT. Ah.

HEAD WAITER. Your table, monsieur.

POIROT. Merci.

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

ARBUTHNOT. Mary. There you are!

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

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

MARY. Of course you are. You’re always late. And I was terrified we’d miss the train. It would ruin everything!
ARBUTHNOT. I was just exploring a bit. I've never been to Istanbul before and I quite adore all this eastern nonsense.

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

(ARBUTHNOT puts his hand on her cheek.)

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

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

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

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

(POIROT's newspaper gives an involuntary shake.)

MARY. Shall we order? I'm starving.

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

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

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

(As they go, we notice MRS. HUBBARD sitting nearby. She is an outspoken American in her fifties, well-dressed with a touch of flamboyance, and she calls to the HEAD WAITER as she rummages through her handbag for her money.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Yoohoo! Excuse me, waiter. You did a very nice job and I'm leaving you something extra because of it.

(At this moment, we notice HECTOR MCQUEEN sitting at one of the tables. He is a nervous
(The HEAD WAITER approaches POIROT.)

HEAD WAITER. Pardon, monsieur. The concierge said to tell you there are no more first class tickets for the Express tonight. It is sold out.

POIROT. Ah non!

BOUC. Attends. It is my train and it is never sold out at this time of year. That is ridiculous.

HEAD WAITER. It must be a party, or a convention, perhaps.

BOUC. Well, you tell the concierge to find a berth for Monsieur Poirot. He is my personal friend.

HEAD WAITER. But monsieur -

BOUC. The number seven is always available. It is held in reserve. Now go tell him!

HEAD WAITER. Right away, monsieur.

(He exits.)

POIROT. Merci.

BOUC. It is nothing. A gesture. Now you see this menu? Throw it away. Tonight we shall sit on the train together, just like old times, and we will dine like kings.

POIROT. The food on the train, it is edible?

BOUC. Monsieur Poirot! You stab me in the heart! I am writhing on the ground at your feet! It is not a mere train that will carry you tonight, it is a legend. It runs like no other vehicle on the earth. The fittings are from Paris, the paneling Venice, the plates are from Rome, and the taps from New York. The best food, the best beds, the best pillows, the best feathers inside the pillows. It is poetry on wheels, and Lord Byron himself could not write it better. Monsieur, prepare yourself. In one hour, I will meet you on the platform of the Orient Express.

(Suddenly we hear the “Vorwärts Drängend” passage from Mahler’s Symphony No. 1. The dining room disappears, the scene changes, and the ominous, powerful music takes us into the train station at Istanbul.)
POIROT. Of course, I'm a fool!

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

POIROT. Ah non.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POIROT. It is what I live by.

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

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

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

POIROT. Haha! C'est magnifique.
COUNTESS. Excuse me, but you have asked to see me – oh dear God.

POIROT. Forgive me, countess, but I understand you were trained as a physician, so I thought perhaps you could help me with the body.

COUNTESS. I am happy to help.

(Without hesitation, she strips off her jacket and rolls up her sleeves.)

POIROT. I'm afraid it is not a very pleasant sight.

COUNTESS. I have seen worse, believe me. I volunteered in the war.

(The COUNTESS begins examining the body.)

POIROT. Regardes. The left side of his face is slightly red, do you see?

COUNTESS. I do. It has been slapped.

BOUC. How do you know?

COUNTESS. Because I slapped it. I count eight separate wounds.

POIROT. That was my count also. Can you estimate the time of death?

COUNTESS. I would say it is between eight and ten hours ago, which puts the time between midnight and two o'clock.

POIROT. I am in accord.

COUNTESS. It appears that the killer was wild – in a frenzy of some sort.

POIROT. Regardes. See this. Of the eight stab wounds, five appear strong and three are mere scratches. And wait, do you see, the wounds are from different directions. Do you see it? I need a pencil.

BOUC. Here.

POIROT. Bon. Now watch. We place the pencil inside each wound and push it gently...

BOUC. Ugh! Is this necessary?
COUNTESS. Perhaps the man changed hands during the stabbing.

BOUC. Or there were two assailants. One right-handed and one left-handed.

COUNTESS. One strong, one weak.

POIROT. It is not impossible. But now another question presents itself: why did Mr. Ratchett not fight back when all the while he had this gun under his pillow?

(POIROT pulls the revolver out from under the pillow.)

COUNTESS. Oh là là.

BOUC. Alors. May I see it?

(BOUC takes the gun.)

COUNTESS. How did you find it?

POIROT. He showed it to me yesterday so I knew it was here somewhere.

BOUC. It is an automatic and I believe it is loaded.

(He waves it around.)

POIROT. Attention!

COUNTESS. Ah!

BOUC. Wait! There is a safety switch, it is not on.

POIROT. S'il vous plait, mon ami! Have you not heard of the fatal accident?!

(He takes the gun from BOUC, but stops suddenly and sniffs the air.)

Un moment.

(He sniffs again and puts his finger up.)

I have a very good nose.

(He picks up RATCHETT's empty wine glass and sniffs.)

Aha. Smell the glass of wine.

COUNTESS. It smells of almonds.
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POIROT bows slightly and now we are in the dining room of the Tokatlian Hotel in Istanbul in 1934. The HEAD WAITER escorts POIROT into the room.)

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POIROT. I believe he is Belgian.

HEAD WAITER. No, no. From France. I know him personally.

POIROT. Ah.

HEAD WAITER. Your table, monsieur.

POIROT. Merci.

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

ARBUTHNOT. Mary. There you are!

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

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

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

(And now we see MICHEL at the end of the sleeping corridor. He is trying to work with the train's two-way radio, a clunky old-fashioned piece of machinery subject to problems.)

(First we hear the whining screech of the radio trying to find a signal – Oweeeeee, Oweeeeee! – then the crackle of the static when the signal is found.)

MICHEL. Orient Express to Belgrade Station. Orient Express to Belgrade Station. Emergency call number 867. Alert Code Blue. This is important. Do you read me? Hello? Are you there, Belgrade?

RADIO. (With much static.) We read you, Express. Pray continue.

MICHEL. We've just left Sofia and the snow is becoming heavier by the minute. I am getting concerned as we head into the mountains. Please prepare your rescue equipment in case of stoppage. Hello? Do you read me?

(Ohweeeeeeeeeeeee!)

Belgrade?

(Ohweeeeeee!

Belgrade, can you hear me?!)
young American in his thirties with a
strained, rather beleaguered face.)

MRS. HUBBARD. Excuse me, young man. Are you American?
MACQUEEN. Y-yes I am.

MRS. HUBBARD. I thought so. I can see from your passport.
Us Americans have to stick together, you know.
Especially in a place like this. I can't even pronounce
half the things on the menu. Can you believe it? And
what's a falafalafalafel? I keep seeing them on the street
and they look like you could play hockey with 'em.
MACQUEEN. I believe they're made of fried chickpeas.

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

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

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

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

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

BOUC. My friend! Haha!

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

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

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

MARY. Oh thank God! I thought you weren't coming!
ARBUTHNOT. What's the matter? I got your note.
MARY. I'll tell you what the matter is! I'm frightened because we shouldn't be doing this!
ARBUTHNOT. Now calm down.
MARY. I can't calm down! We have to stop this!
ARBUTHNOT. Now that's ridiculous.
MARY. No it isn't! Oh that's the trouble with you military men, you never show any real emotion, it's always stiff upper lip no matter what's going on!
ARBUTHNOT. Mary, we're doing nothing wrong! You have to remember that.
MARY. I'm trying! I really am!

(She hugs ARBUTHNOT.)

ARBUTHNOT. Better?
MARY. Yes, I think so.
ARBUTHNOT. There was a hill near my home in Scotland, and I'd sit for hours watching the trains go by in the valley below. I knew they were heading to exotic locales and I wanted to climb aboard in the worst way.
MARY. But you didn't.
ARBUTHNOT. No. I suppose I knew somehow that I'd break my mother's heart.
MARY. You're a very good man.
ARBUTHNOT. She was a very good woman.
MARY. Do you know what the worst of it is with all this traveling we've been doing? We don't get any privacy. It's just so maddening!
ARBUTHNOT. Well, I don't see anyone around at the moment, do you?
MARY. No, I suppose I don't.

(ARBUTHNOT takes her in his arms and kisses her with passion. They really go at it. She responds in kind.)

Oh, James!

ARBUTHNOT. Be strong.

MARY. I will. I promise.

(They hear someone coming and spring apart.)

(MACQUEEN enters.)

MACQUEEN. Hi, I-I hope I'm not interrupting.

ARBUTHNOT. Of course you're interrupting, you moron. Are you blind?

MACQUEEN. Oh, I'm sorry! I-I-I can go get a snack or a-

(The train stops. They all look up in surprise.)

ARBUTHNOT. Oh my God, the train is stopping.

MARY. What is it?! What's happening!

MACQUEEN. The snow! Look!

ARBUTHNOT. Oh, not now!

MARY. We've hit a snowdrift!!

ARBUTHNOT. Oh Christ, that's all we need!

MACQUEEN. Shall I go take a look?!

ARBUTHNOT. What good will that do?

MARY. James. He's right. Let him go.

ARBUTHNOT. Mary?

MARY. Go ahead, Mr. MacQueen, we'll be here waiting for you.

MACQUEEN. I'll-I'll be back in a minute!

(He runs off.)

ARBUTHNOT. Why did you send him off like that?

(MARY takes him in her arms and goes back to kissing him.)
LITTLE GIRL. Faster, faster! You're a train, you're a train!

THE NANNY. Daisy Armstrong!

   (Tickling, laughter. They're in the room.)

   Now straight into bed and no more nonsense.

LITTLE GIRL. Oh, all right.

   (She gets into bed. The NANNY sits beside her.)

THE NANNY. Close your eyes. Night, night.

   (The NANNY exits. We hear the door open and close. A beat of calm, and then we hear a deep, ominous sound, like the bass note of an organ. Light from the hallway spills into the room, and we see the shadow of a hulking man entering the room. Perhaps we see the LITTLE GIRL as well.)

LITTLE GIRL. Who are you? Go away. Nanny!

THE MAN. Come!

LITTLE GIRL. No! I won't! I won't come! Mama! Daddy!

   AHHHHHHHHHH!

   (Her scream turns into the scream of a train whistle, as the train goes past us again with another roar. Vrooooom!)

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

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

   From the beginning it was an odyssey of deception and trickery. One minute I could see the light, like the beam of a train engine hurtling past. The next minute, all was darkness and the thread that I pulled came away in my fingers and led to nothing.
I believe it was the greatest case of my career, but who am I to say? Modesty forbids it. It was certainly the most difficult I have ever encountered, and it made me question the very deepest values that I have held since I was a young man.

(Middle Eastern music is heard.)

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

(The platform is full of steam and smoke and is throbbing with activity. In the background we glimpse the sleek, shining body of the Orient Express gleaming with romance. The greatest train in the world is about to accept its passengers and sail out of the station.)

(At the center of the activity is MICHEL, the conductor. He is a good looking Frenchman, about forty, with a quiet, almost grave sense of humor. He has a clipboard in hand listing the names and compartments of the passengers. Meanwhile, we hear an announcement over the loudspeaker.)

ANNOUNCER. Messieurs et mesdames, l'Orient Express partira dans vingt minutes du quai numéro dix. Veuillez faire attention aux marches, soyez prudent et bon voyage. Ladies and gentlemen, the Orient Express will depart in twenty minutes from platform ten. Please watch your step and have a safe trip.

(Bells and whistles sound as PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF enters like a galleon in full sail with a woman named GRETA OHLSSON in her wake. The PRINCESS is in her seventies. She is Russian, expensively dressed and heavily bejeweled. GRETA, by contrast, is Swedish, with a Swedish accent. She is in her thirties and plain. There is a frightened, sheep-like quality about her. She is carrying three or four suitcases and struggles with them.)

PRINCESS. Greta, will you please put those suitcases down, you are driving me mad!

GRETA. No, no, princess, do not have concern, they are not so heavy as they look, I am sure.

PRINCESS. They are extremely heavy!
MICHEL. Princess Dragomiroff. How lovely to see you.  
(To GRETA.) Please, let me help you, madame.

(MICHEL relieves GRETA of the luggage.)

GRETA. It iss mademoiselle. I am not married, except to God almighty who lives in heaven.  
(She crosses herself.)

PRINCESS. Oh Greta please, not now. (To MICHEL.) This is Greta Ohlsson.

GRETA. I am a missionary and I verk in Africa with little babies.

PRINCESS. I have agreed to pay her way if she will assist me as I travel to Paris.

MICHEL. But your usual companion, Miss Schmidt –?

GRETA. She iss very sick.

PRINCESS. The doctors are calling it a cardiac event, but she is German so it is very unlikely to slow her down.

GRETA. I vill pray for Miss Schmidt and God vill protect her.

PRINCESS. Greta, please, that is enough, just get on the train.

MICHEL. You are in compartment eleven, princess, as usual.  
(To GRETA.) And Miss Ohlsson, you are sharing with a Miss Mary Debenham in compartment four.

(MARY enters, dressed stylishly.)

MARY. I'm Miss Debenham.

MICHEL. Ah, mademoiselle. You will be sharing with Miss Ohlsson here.

GRETA. I vill do my very best so I am not disturbing you.

MARY. Oh, I'm sure we'll get along just fine.

(At which moment, SAMUEL RATCHETT appears.  
He's a middle-aged American businessman, brusque, unforgiving, with a threatening demeanor, and a whiplash of a voice.)

RATCHETT. Hector!
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. Jo, 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 Casetti, 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 Casetti, 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 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?
MICHEL. Princess Dragomiroff. How lovely to see you.
(To GRETA.) Please, let me help you, madame.

(MICHEL relieves GRETA of the luggage.)

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RATCHETT. Hector!
MACQUEEN. Here, sir. I-I’m right here.
RATCHETT. Is the luggage on board?
MACQUEEN. Yes sir, it is. And I-I checked this morning for any mail that might have arrived overnight, and-and this came in apparently –
RATCHETT. (Reading.) Goddammit!
MACQUEEN. I know, it’s awful. I mean just look at this! “Prepare to die”?
RATCHETT. Keep your voice down!
MACQUEEN. You should call the police!
RATCHETT. It’s none of their business.
MACQUEEN. But these are dangerous! This is the third one you’ve had in a week. It’s good you have a gun.
RATCHETT. Would you keep your voice down!
(By this time, POIROT has entered and approached MICHEL.)

POIROT. Excuse me. Could you direct me to compartment number seven, please.
MICHEL. Number seven, monsieur? I believe there must be some mistake.
POIROT. Let us hope not. I must get to London by the end of the week. My name is Hercule Poirot.
MICHEL. Hercule Poirot, the detective?
(Heads turn. POIROT is a celebrity.)
RATCHETT. Well, what do you know! Hercule Poirot! I’ve heard o’ you. You’re famous.
POIROT. Merci, monsieur.
RATCHETT. The name is Ratchett. Samuel Ratchett. Import-export. And I may have some business for you.
POIROT. I’m afraid I am on vacation, monsieur.
RATCHETT. Oh, you’ll change your mind when you hear the price. Eh? Haha!
MICHEL. Monsieur Ratchett, you are in compartment two.
there is noise and crying and animals and oh! And I look up from my book and sitting there next to me, right on the seat, iss a very old goat. Haha. Is true. Old goat! He is like my companion. And on this trip that we are taking together right now, I think it will not be so different, ja?

(GRETA exits. The PRINCESS reacts and follows her off as POIROT enters, followed by RATCHETT, who is trying to catch up with him.)

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

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

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

POIROT. I am afraid -

RATCHETT. Sit down.

POIROT. ... Eh bien. Proceed.

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

POIROT. I take on few new cases.

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

POIROT. And why is that?

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

POIROT. I would guess that you have several enemies.

RATCHETT. Now what is that supposed to mean?

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

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

(He flashes the gun under his coat.)

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

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

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

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

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

(POIROT exits. RATCHETT is darkly unhappy. He stomps his foot. After a beat, the COUNTESS enters, passing through. She nods as she tries to go past him.)

COUNTESS. Pardon me. Sorry.

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

COUNTESS. That is correct.

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

COUNTESS. That is also correct.

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

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

RATCHETT. Now not so fast.

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

COUNTESS. Move out of the way, please.

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

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

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