

Side 1

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!

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.*

(*She exits.*)

POIROT. She is quite the character.

BOUC. They are all characters. If I was Balzac, I would write a novel about all of them.

POIROT. And just think: for three days these strangers are brought together in the closest of quarters, eating and sleeping under a single roof.

BOUC. And then at the end they part, never to see each other again.

POIROT. Unless, unless.

BOUC. Unless what?

POIROT. Unless there is an accident. Or something fatal occurs.

BOUC. *Monsieur* Poirot! Why do you say such a thing?!

POIROT. Forgive me. It is my business. And I sense that something is wrong – that there is a tension among these passengers of yours. One of them does not fit in. It makes me frightened.

BOUC. Oh, *monsieur*! No more business, please. You must now succumb to nothing but pleasure – and prepare yourself to step aboard the pride of the company Wagon-Lit for the most memorable journey of your entire life!