

Side 8

Michel the Conductor / Head Waiter (double role)

Dialect: French accent

Description: The punctual and efficient conductor of the Orient Express, with moments of humor. The Head Waiter appears briefly with poise and elegance.

Hercule Poirot

Dialect: Belgian/French accent (consistent, not cartoonish)

Description: World-famous detective. Precise, observant, fastidious, with an eccentric sense of humor. Must carry authority while also being engaging to the audience.

Mary Debenham

Dialect: British (Received Pronunciation or neutral upper-class British)

Description: A calm and composed English governess. Intelligent, reserved, and seemingly in control of her emotions.

Helen Hubbard

Dialect: American (Midwestern or Minnesotan “upper Midwest” sound works well)

Description: A bold, outspoken American traveler. Talkative, dramatic, and larger-than-life, with a flair for comedy.

Hector MacQueen

Dialect: American (New York or Mid-Atlantic)

Description: Secretary to Ratchett. Nervous, excitable, and eager to please, but easily flustered.

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

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 falafafafafafel? 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.