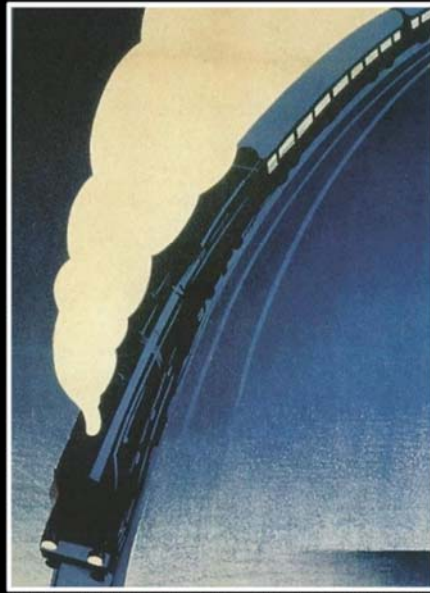


AGATHA CHRISTIE'S



THE MYSTERY OF THE BLUE TRAIN

Doug Goheen

Adapted from the novel by Agatha Christie

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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THE MYSTERY OF THE BLUE TRAIN

MURDER-MYSTERY. Adapted from the novel by Agatha Christie. The famed detective Hercule Poirot boards the luxurious Blue Train bound for the French Riviera. Among the passengers is Ruth Kettering, an American heiress on her way to meet up with her paramour, the dashing Comte De La Roche. The next morning, Ruth is found dead in her compartment, and her famous ruby, "Heart of Fire," has been stolen. Ruth's father, an American millionaire, convinces the retired Poirot to hunt down his beloved daughter's murderer. Clues include a mysterious man spotted in Ruth's train compartment, a cigarette case with an inscribed gold "K" on it, and some hair found at the scene. To solve the case, Poirot dismisses the usual suspects and relies on his "finesse" to reveal the true murderer. With its plot twists and surprise ending, this mystery will keep your audiences guessing until the very end.

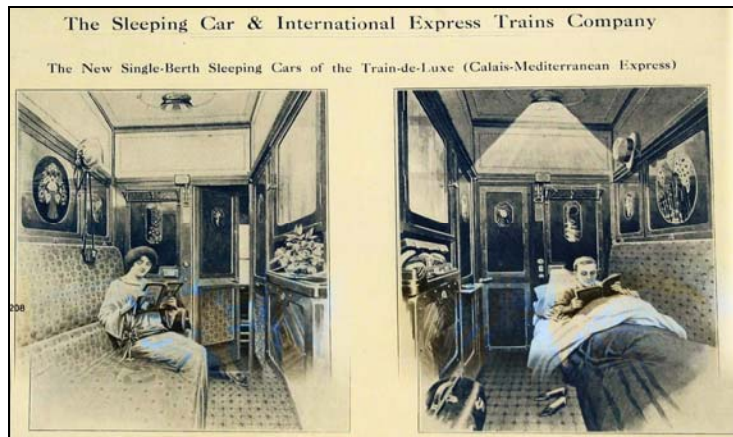
Performance Time: Approximately 120 minutes.



Agatha Christie and her dog Peter

ABOUT THE STORY

Agatha Christie was born in southwest England to a wealthy family. Growing up, Christie enjoyed reading mystery novels by Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (1928) is based on Christie's 1923 short story, "The Plymouth Express" and features the famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, who became one of Christie's most famous characters. Christie wrote most of the novel in 1926 when she was in Canary Islands and dedicated the book to the two members of her O.F.D (Order of Faithful Dogs): Peter, her beloved terrier, and Charlotte Fischer, Christie's secretary. The novel features the first appearance of Mr. Goby, a recurring character, and the first description of the village of St. Mary Mead. The author of 66 detective novels and 15 short story collections, Christie is best known for her bestselling novels *And Then There Were None* and *Murder on the Orient Express* as well as her play *The Mousetrap*.



Advertisement for the Blue Train, 1920s.

THE BLUE TRAIN

In 1922 the Calais-Mediterranean Express train's teak carriages were replaced with blue steel and gold trim and the train became known as the Blue Train. The Blue Train offered single compartments designed for those traveling alone, which was considered a major innovation at the time. The single compartments often had doors that could open to adjoining suites. The dining car could serve 42 passengers at a time. English clientele departed London's Victoria Station to catch the midday ferry to Calais, where they boarded the Blue Train. The Blue Train then took them to Paris, where other passengers would board for a 7:30 departure. This gave passengers time to settle into the compartments and dress for dinner before continuing on to various stops in the French Riviera including Cannes, Nice, and Monaco.

CHARACTERS

(9 M, 8 F, 5 flexible, opt. extras)
 (With doubling: 7 M, 7 F, 3 flexible)
 (Tripling possible.)

- HERCULE POIROT:** Eccentric Belgian private detective famed for his ability to solve mysteries; dresses impeccably and has a trademark mustache in which he takes great pride; speaks with a French accent (opt.); male.
- RUFUS VAN ALDIN:** American millionaire and Ruth Kettering's father; wants Ruth to divorce her husband, Derek Kettering; described as being a "big, broad-shouldered man"; wears an overcoat; male.
- RUTH KETTERING:** Rufus Van Aldin's only daughter who is unhappily married to Derek Kettering and has reignited her past romance with the dashing Comte de la Roche; female.
- DEREK KETTERING:** Ruth Kettering's British husband, who is the son of Lord Leconbury and is next in line for a royal title; a self-confident, strikingly handsome man; male.
- MIRELLE:** Gold-digging Parisian dancer and Derek Kettering's paramour; wants Derek to reconcile with his wife so he won't be cut off from Ruth's millions in a divorce; wears a lot of makeup; female.
- ARMAND, THE COMTE DE LA ROCHE:** Ruth Kettering's paramour; Rufus Van Aldin considers the Comte a common swindler and scoundrel and made Ruth end her previous relationship with him; male.
- KATHERINE GREY:** Passenger on the Blue Train and a fan of detective novels; cousin of Lady Tamplin; female.
- LADY ROSALIE TAMPLIN:** Distant cousin of Katherine Grey and Lenox Tamplin's mother; lives in the Villa Marguerite on the French Riviera; described as a "golden haired, blue-eyed lady"; female.
- LENOX TAMPLIN:** Lady Tamplin's daughter who lives with her at the Villa Marguerite; has a romantic interest in Derek Kettering; female.
- COMMISSARY CAUX:** Senior French police officer in Nice; holds Poirot in high regard and welcomes Poirot's assistance on the case;

described as “a pompous-looking official personage”; wears a police uniform and an overcoat; male.

MAJOR KNIGHTON/MARQUIS: Rufus Van Aldin’s secretary, a quiet war veteran who walks with a limp; the shadowy “Marquis,” a famous jewel thief who has long white hair, wears a half-mask with a black coat, an opera hat, and carries a cane; male.

DEMETRIUS PAPOPOLOUS: Greek international jewelry dealer and an acquaintance of Poirot’s; flexible.

ADA MASON (aka Kitty Kidd): A renowned actress who has been working for Ruth Kettering as a maid for the past two months; wears black clothing and grey traveling gloves on the Blue Train; female.

PIERRE MICHEL: Train porter on the Blue Train who delivers a meal basket to Ruth Kettering; male.

CORA PARSON: Theater producer and an old friend of Poirot’s; female.

MR. GOBY: Operates a private investigation service; described as “a small elderly man, shabbily dressed, with eyes that look carefully around the room, but never at the person to whom he is speaking”; male.

MILDRED: Maid who works for Lady Tamplin; female.

GASTON: Servant to the Comte de la Roche; male.

AGENT: Ticket agent at the train station; flexible.

THUG 1, 2: Thugs who work for the Marquis; flexible.

WAITER/WAITRESS: Server at a restaurant; flexible.

CHARLES MONTROSE: Voiceover; male.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR: Heard as a voiceover during the Blue Train’s journey; male.

EXTRAS (opt.): As additional Spectators at the horse track.

OPTIONS FOR DOUBLING

MILDRED/CORA (female)
THUG 1/TICKET AGENT (flexible)
THUG 2/WAITER (flexible)
GASTON/PIERRE MICHEL (male)
MR. GOBY/CHARLES MONTROSE (male)
COMTE DE LA ROCHE/ TRAIN CONDUCTOR (male)

OPTIONS FOR TRIPLING+

TICKET AGENT/MILDRED/CORA (female actor)
THUG 1/CHARLES MONTROSE/MR. GOBY/ GASTON (male)
THUG 2/PIERRE MICHEL/WAITER/CONDUCTOR (male)

SETS

Aboard the Blue Train with scenes in London, Paris, Nice, Antibes, and Cannes, 1922. Multiple locales necessitate the use of various simple set pieces to suggest settings. The action should flow freely from one scene to the next. The set should be kept as simple as possible. There are three platforms of varying heights.

I.) HIGHEST LEVEL PLATFORM (approx 36"-48"). This level accommodates the Blue Train.

1.) Blue Train exterior. Its blue and gold detail suggests the opulence within. If possible, the exterior of the Blue Train should be evident throughout the play, except for scenes that occur *on* the train. The exterior of the train can be seen as a projection or there can be some type of covering, hard or soft, that represents the exterior of the train. When the time comes to reveal the interior of the train, the exterior must be capable of being removed quickly and quietly. It is possible not to use the train exterior at all. In this case, the interior of the train should not be fully lit until those scenes aboard the train occur.

2.) Blue Train interior. The interior of the train may be abstract or detailed. There should be three distinct compartments. The walls of the compartments are fragmentary such that the audience is able to see any traffic occurring in the hallway upstage of the 3 compartments. The doors to the compartments and the door between Ruth's and Ada's berths are apparent.

A.) Ada and Ruth's double compartment. At CS is a double compartment with two sleeping berths separated by a sliding door or curtain. Ada Mason's berth is SR. Ruth Kettering's berth is SL. Both compartments have a single bed with blankets and a small table or desk.

B.) Katherine Grey's compartment. Located far SL. There is a single bed with blankets and a small table or desk.

C.) Dining car. Located far SR. There is a small café table(s) and chairs.

D.) Walkway. Upstage of the berths is a narrow walkway extending the length of the train so the audience can see passengers traveling between the berths.

II.) MID-LEVEL PLATFORM (approximately 18"-24"). This platform consists of three playing areas indicated in the script as platform SR, platform CS, and platform SL. Each of these areas is about 8' x 10'. One or two steps lead from the middle level down to the floor level, creating the flexibility for an actor to move from the floor level to the middle level and vice versa without exiting the stage.

1.) Platform SL. Van Aldin's suite at the Savoy, London.

There is a chair, a desk with a drawer, and a telephone.

2.) Platform SR. Villa Marguerite garden terrace. There is a small wrought iron table with 3 chairs.

3.) Platform CS.

A.) Ticket booth. There is a booth.

B.) Hotel lounge (Derek Kettering). There is a small table and two chairs.

III.) BOTTOM LEVEL PLATFORM (stage floor). There are three playing areas, referred to as DSR, DCS, or DSL.

1.) DSR area.

A.) Parisian street. There is a gas lamppost that emits a faint glow.

B.) Ruth Kettering's residence. There are two small chairs with a table between them. There is a mirror on the wall (or a hand mirror will suffice).

C.) Mirelle's flat (far DSR). Mirelle's flat is furnished with exotic Eastern flair and includes a chaise lounge.

D.) Examining room, Nice. There is a desk and a chair(s).

2.) DSL area.

A.) Katherine Grey's residence (far DSL). There is an armchair, a table, and two chairs.

B.) Comte's Villa Marina, Antibes. There are two elegant Louis XV armchairs with an elaborate Rococo table between them. A bottle of wine and two glasses rest atop the table.

3.) DCS area.

A.) Restaurant. There are two chairs, a small table, and a menu.

B.) Spectator section, Cannes International Horse Jumping Contest. There is seating on each side. Benches may be used.

C.) Hotel lounge. There is a small table and two chairs.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Parisian street, Van Aldin's suite at the Savoy, Ruth Kettering's residence, Mirelle's flat, Katherine Gray's residence, Villa Marguerite garden terrace, train station ticket booth.

Scene 2: Interior of the Blue Train, Van Aldin's suite at the Savoy.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Villa Marguerite garden terrace, examining room in Nice, Comte's Villa Marina in Antibes, a restaurant, Villa Marguerite garden terrace.

Scene 2: Spectator section at the race track in Cannes, Van Aldin's suite at the Savoy, Derek Kettering's hotel lounge, Villa Marguerite garden terrace, Mirelle's flat, Villa Marina in Antibes, Van Aldin's suite at the Savoy.

PROPS

Pocket watch, for Rufus Van Aldin	Second outfit of clothing, for Katherine Grey
Small red leather-bound case	Meal basket
Small box of jewels (fits inside the leather-bound case)	Mirror, for Ruth Kettering's train compartment
Jeweler's loupe	Meal, for Poirot in dining car
Envelope of money	"Le Monde" newspaper, for Poirot
Pistol (toy pistol that looks real)	Desk, for Ruth's compartment
Long black coat, opera hat, black half-mask, long white-haired wig and cane, for Marquis	Detective novel, for Katherine Grey
Stack of mail	Breakfast in dining car, for Katherine Grey
Letters	Passport, for Katherine Grey
Hairbrush, for Ruth Kettering's residence	Dummy for Ruth Kettering's corpse (rolled up in a rug with blankets on top of it. The head is facing the wall so the face is unseen)
Hand mirror, for Ruth Kettering's residence	Small red leather pouch with the initials "R.V.K." on it
Ruby necklace with large stone ("Heart of Fire") in the center	2 Telegrams
Business folder with several papers	Letter
Chinese hand fan, for Mirelle	Bottle of wine and 2 wineglasses, for Comte's Villa Marina
Letter, for Katherine Grey	Menu, for restaurant
2 Chairs for Lady Rosalie Tamplin's garden terrace	Glass of "cognac"
"Daily Mail" newspaper	Cloth napkin
Plate of fruit	Cigarette case with a gold "K" inscribed on it
Train tickets	Tea set
Luggage for Ruth	"The London Times" newspaper
Blankets for Ada Mason's sleeping berth	Small container (with unseen hair inside)
Wristwatch, for Katherine Grey	

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Fog
Gas lamppost that emits a faint glow
Bell that tolls the midnight hour
Train whistle in the distance
Train whistle to board train
Sound of train pulling out of the station
Sound of train coming to a stop
Sounds of a struggle
Sound of someone being strangled and gasping for air
Sounds from a horse track gallery and the track
Subdued spectator reactions at a horse track

“ONE SHOULDN'T DIE ON A TRAIN...
IT GIVES THE TRAIN AN EXCUSE
FOR BEING EVEN LATER THAN USUAL.”

—LENOX TAMPLIN

ACT I
SCENE 1

(PRE-SET: On the upper level, the exterior of the Blue Train is faintly visible. Its blue and gold detail suggests the opulence within. A gas lamppost DSR emits a faint glow. As houselights fade, fog rolls in. Dim lights come up on a Parisian street. A bell tolls the midnight hour. Rufus Van Aldin enters DSL and crosses to the lamppost. He checks his pocket watch and looks around in anticipation. As the last stroke tolls, Papopolous enters furtively DSR. He looks around anxiously. For the following, Van Aldin and Papopolous converse in hushed tones.)

VAN ALDIN: Monsieur Papopolous?

PAPOPOLOUS: I am he.

VAN ALDIN: Rufus Van Aldin.

PAPOPOLOUS: The American is punctual.

VAN ALDIN: The hour upon which we agreed.

PAPOPOLOUS: I must apologize for the unconventionality of the meeting place. But secrecy is of the utmost importance, you understand.

VAN ALDIN: Of course.

PAPOPOLOUS: I cannot afford to be connected with this business whatsoever. I have your word, have I not, that no details of this transaction will be made public in any way?

VAN ALDIN: That has already been agreed upon. Now perhaps you will produce the goods.

PAPOPOLOUS: You have the money in notes?

VAN ALDIN: Yes.

(Papopolous looks around to make certain they're alone before extracting a small leather-bound case inside his overcoat and pulls out a small box. He opens the box for Van Aldin, who pulls a jeweler's loupe from his overcoat to examine the contents of the box.)

PAPOPOLOUS: *(Indicating jewels.)* You thought perhaps they were paste?

VAN ALDIN: Such an investment warrants extreme scrutiny.

PAPOPOLOUS: And you are satisfied, I presume?

(Van Aldin extracts an envelope of money from a pocket inside his overcoat.)

VAN ALDIN: Most satisfied, Monsieur.

(Papopolous counts the money in the envelope.)

PAPOPOLOUS: Everything is correct.

VAN ALDIN: All right, then. Good evening.

(Van Aldin starts to exit SL. Papopolous watches him as he nears SL. Suddenly, from the shadows, Thugs 1, 2 appear. Thug 1 moves to block Van Aldin's exit. Thug 2 moves behind Van Aldin to his SR. Van Aldin calmly looks at both before extracting a pistol and firing at the leg of Thug 2, who screams in agony and collapses. Thug 1 disappears into the shadows. Van Aldin sees Papopolous watching him and then calmly exits SR. Slowly, Van Aldin exits SL. Thug 2 writhes in pain, moaning.)

THUG 2: *(Calls.)* Someone! Please help! Help me!

(Marquis, a tall man in a long black coat with an opera hat and long white hair, appears USL. Carrying a cane, Marquis is wearing a black half-mask and slowly approaches Thug 2.)

THUG 2: *(Sees Marquis.)* Thank God!

MARQUIS: If you wish.

THUG 2: My leg! He shot my leg!

MARQUIS: I'm aware of that misfortune.

THUG 2: I didn't expect him to have a pistol.

MARQUIS: Nor did I expect *you* to fail.

THUG 2: Please...

MARQUIS: The direct attack...it works sometimes, but very seldom. Nevertheless, it occasionally saves precious time. And to fail costs very little...an injury, perhaps. However, my other plan will not fail.

THUG 2: Can you not see I'm bleeding?

MARQUIS: My eyesight is not so sharp at this hour.

THUG 2: Please...

MARQUIS: But I do see that the task for which you and your friend were hired was not completed. Therefore, I'm afraid I can offer no recompense...

THUG 2: You can't leave me here!

MARQUIS: ... of any kind.

(With his cane, the Marquis jabs the wounded leg of Thug 2, who cries out in agony. The Marquis exits USL. Thug 1 reappears cautiously, making sure the Marquis has gone. Thug 1 lifts Thug 2 under his arms and drags him off. A train whistle is heard in the distance. The lamppost glides off as the scene shifts to the platform SL. Van Aldin is seated at a desk in his suite at the Savoy in London, staring at his recently purchased box of jewels. He hears someone approaching off SL. He closes the leather-bound case, places it in the desk drawer, and turns to a stack of mail resting on the desktop. Major Knighton, his secretary, enters, carrying more letters. He walks with a limp.)

VAN ALDIN: Hello, Knighton.

KNIGHTON: Ah! Glad to see you back, sir. Had a good time?

VAN ALDIN: Fair enough. Paris is rather a one-horse city nowadays. Still, I got what I went over for.

KNIGHTON: You usually do, I believe.

VAN ALDIN: That's so. *(Indicating letters.)* Anything urgent?

KNIGHTON: I don't think so, sir. Mostly the usual stuff. But Mrs. Kettering called both yesterday and this morning. She seems quite anxious to see you at once, sir.

VAN ALDIN: Is that so? *(Pause.)* Care to see something, Knighton?

(Van Aldin opens the desk drawer, removes the leather-bound case, opens it, and invites Knighton to take a look.)

KNIGHTON: My God, sir! Are they...are they real?

VAN ALDIN: *(Chuckling.)* They are, indeed. But I don't wonder at your asking that. Among these rubies are the three largest in the world. Catherine of Russia wore them. The center one there is known as the "Heart of Fire." It's perfect...not a flaw in it.

KNIGHTON: They must be worth a fortune.

VAN ALDIN: Four or five-hundred thousand dollars...apart from the historical interest.

KNIGHTON: Thus, the trip to Paris.

VAN ALDIN: Yes. They're a present for Ruthie Vera.

KNIGHTON: Ah.

VAN ALDIN: She's my only child. There is no one on this earth who knows quite what she means to me.

KNIGHTON: I understand now Mrs. Kettering's anxiety over the telephone.

VAN ALDIN: You are wrong there, Major. She doesn't know about these. They are my little surprise for her. *(Shuts the case and begins to put on his overcoat.)* It is a hard thing how little one can do for those one loves. I can buy a good portion of the earth for Ruth, if it would be of any use to her, but it isn't. I can hang these things around her neck and give her a moment or two's pleasure maybe, but...when a woman is not happy in her home –

KNIGHTON: You're going out again, sir?

VAN ALDIN: Yes. I'm going round to see my daughter. I'll not stand for this. *(Starts to exit and turns back.)* Oh, and Knighton, see if you can get hold of Mr. Goby. Set up an appointment for next week sometime, won't you?

KNIGHTON: Very good, sir.

(Van Aldin exits SL. Knighton lifts the telephone receiver and taps the cradle several times as the lights cross fade to the SR area. Van Aldin re-enters DSL and begins crossing SR. As he does, he meets another individual, Armand, the Comte de la Roche, crossing from SR to SL. Van Aldin thinks he recognizes the Comte, who disappears SL. Puzzled, Van Aldin continues his cross and arrives at his daughter's residence DSR. Ruth Kettering is sitting in a small chair. There are two chairs with a table between. She's brushing her hair.)

VAN ALDIN: Ruth?

(Ruth rises to meet Van Aldin.)

RUTH: *(Embracing him.)* Daddy!

VAN ALDIN: You're alone?

RUTH: Of course, I'm alone. I've been telephoning Major Knighton all day to try and get hold of you, but he couldn't say for sure when you were expected back.

VAN ALDIN: So he told me. I only got back from Paris an hour ago.

RUTH: Come, sit.

VAN ALDIN: He thought you were anxious about something.

RUTH: He's a funny man. Quite protective of you and your privacy.

VAN ALDIN: One of the things I like about him. Just getting to know him a bit, actually. Met him two months ago at a Swiss resort. Since I'm likely to be in England for the next six months, I wanted an Englishman who knows the ropes and can attend to the social side of things for me. Served in the war as well, which accounts for the limp, you know.

RUTH: Well, he certainly seems trustworthy at any rate.

VAN ALDIN: But what about all this anxiety? What is it, Ruthie?

RUTH: You can guess, I'm sure.

VAN ALDIN: Derek?

RUTH: It's unspeakable. I've hardly seen him for the last month. He goes about everywhere with that woman.

VAN ALDIN: What woman?

RUTH: Mirelle, that dancer at the Parthenon. Can't you do anything, Dad?

VAN ALDIN: There are several things I might do, but there's only one that will do any real good.

RUTH: What do you mean?

VAN ALDIN: Have you got the grit to admit to all the world that you've made a mistake? To cut your losses and start afresh?

RUTH: You mean...

VAN ALDIN: Divorce.

RUTH: Divorce. Oh.

VAN ALDIN: You've got to learn that there are times when it's the only way. I might find ways of getting Derek back to you, but it would all come to the same in the end, Ruth. He's a scoundrel. I blame myself for ever letting you marry him. But you were set on having him, and I crossed you once before in the way of love.

RUTH: You did.

VAN ALDIN: I was too softhearted to do it a second time. But Ruth, Derek Kettering married you for your money. That's all there is to it. Get rid of him!

RUTH: Suppose he doesn't consent?

VAN ALDIN: He won't have a say in the matter, regardless of any nominal title he might hold. He has nothing to stand on. (*Ruth is silent.*) What is it? There's something troubling you.

RUTH: No, nothing at all.

VAN ALDIN: It'll be all right, little girl. Don't you worry at all. Now, let's forget about all this. I've brought you a present from Paris.

RUTH: For me? Something nice?
VAN ALDIN: I hope you'll think so.

(Van Aldin takes the case from his pocket and holds it out for her. Ruth opens it and gasps.)

RUTH: Oh, Dad! It's beautiful!
VAN ALDIN: Rather in a class by themselves, aren't they?
RUTH: The most gorgeous thing I've ever seen.
VAN ALDIN: *(Putting the ruby necklace around her neck.)* Here. Let's try them on, shall we?
RUTH: *(Fingering the necklace and admiring the jewels in a mirror downstage.)* These must have cost you a fortune. How did you get hold of them?
VAN ALDIN: That's my secret. They had to be bought privately, of course. They're very well-known. See the biggest stone in the middle? That's the historic "Heart of Fire."
RUTH: Catherine the Great?
VAN ALDIN: You've heard of it?
RUTH: Of course! *(Turns to face him.)* Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! I shall cherish them always.
VAN ALDIN: I'm glad you like them, Ruthie. And now, I must set up a meeting with the solicitors. I'll phone you to let you know when we can meet.
RUTH: All right. Daddy...
VAN ALDIN: Yes?
RUTH: I don't suppose it—this—will keep me from going to the Riviera?
VAN ALDIN: When are you off?
RUTH: The 14th.
VAN ALDIN: That'll be fine. These things take a long time to develop. By the way, I shouldn't take those rubies abroad if I were you. Leave them at the bank. We don't want to have you robbed and murdered for the sake of the "Heart of Fire." *(Kisses her on the cheek.)* Goodbye, dear. *(Van Aldin exits, crossing back SL to his suite at the Savoy. Ruth returns to the mirror and stares at the ruby necklace as the lights shift back to Van Aldin's. Van Aldin removes his coat. Calls.)* Knighton!

(Knighton enters.)

KNIGHTON: Yes, sir?

VAN ALDIN: *(Handing his overcoat to Knighton.)* You've gotten hold of Mr. Goby?

KNIGHTON: Not yet, sir. He was out for the afternoon.

(Van Aldin sits at the desk.)

VAN ALDIN: Keep trying, won't you?

KNIGHTON: Yes, sir. Also, Mr. Kettering is here.

VAN ALDIN: Kettering?

KNIGHTON: Yes, sir. Arrived about half an hour ago. He's in the foyer.

VAN ALDIN: Show him in.

KNIGHTON: *(Exiting SL.)* Very good, sir.

(Knighton exits SL. Van Aldin opens the desk drawer and takes out a business folder. He opens it and takes out several papers. Knighton ushers in Kettering.)

KNIGHTON: *(Announcing.)* Mr. Kettering.

VAN ALDIN: Thank you, Mr. Knighton. *(Knighton nods his head and exits. Derek Kettering, a strikingly handsome man, enters quite self-confident.)* Come in. Sit down.

(Kettering sits.)

KETTERING: Not seen you for a long time, sir. About two years, I should say.

VAN ALDIN: I'm not going to beat about the bush. *(Hands the papers to Kettering.)* I have advised Ruth to file a petition for divorce.

KETTERING: *(Glancing at the papers, seemingly unbothered.)* And what did Ruth say?

VAN ALDIN: Ruth proposes to take my advice.

KETTERING: Does she really?

VAN ALDIN: Is that all you've got to say?

KETTERING: I think you know she's making a great mistake.

VAN ALDIN: From your point of view, she doubtless is.

KETTERING: Oh, come now. Don't let's be personal. I'm only thinking of Ruth. You know my poor old father really can't last much longer. All the doctors say so. Ruth need only give it a

couple more years before I shall be Lord Leconbury and she Lady Leconbury, which is why she married me in the first place.

VAN ALDIN: I won't have any of your impudence!

KETTERING: Not at all. The truth is I'm in very low water financially. If Ruth divorces me, it will put me in quite a nasty hole. After all, she's stood it for ten years. Why not stand it a little longer? The old man can't possibly last another 18 months. It would be a pity if Ruth shouldn't get what she married me for.

VAN ALDIN: You suggest that my daughter married you for your title and position?

KETTERING: You don't think it was a love match?

VAN ALDIN: You spoke very differently in Paris ten years ago.

KETTERING: Did I? Perhaps I did.

VAN ALDIN: I have no doubt that you married Ruth for her money.

KETTERING: And she married me for love?

VAN ALDIN: Certainly.

KETTERING: I see you believe that. So did I at the time. However, I can assure you, my dear father-in-law, that I was very soon undeceived.

VAN ALDIN: I don't know what you're getting at, and I don't care. You've treated Ruth very badly.

KETTERING: Oh, I have, but she's tough, you know. She's your daughter, but she's even harder than you. You, at least, love one person better than yourself. Ruth never has and never will.

VAN ALDIN: That's enough. You are here so that I can tell you fair and square what I intend to do. And you'd better not try to defend the case.

KETTERING: Is that a threat?

VAN ALDIN: Take it any way you please.

KETTERING: And supposing I *did* defend the case?

VAN ALDIN: You haven't got a leg to stand on, you young fool. Your conduct has been notorious all over London.

KETTERING: Ruth has been kicking up a row about Mirelle, I suppose. Very foolish of her. I don't interfere with *her* friends.

VAN ALDIN: What do you mean?

KETTERING: I see you don't know everything, sir. (*Rises.*) Giving advice is not much in my line. But in this case, I should suggest most strongly a perfect frankness between father and daughter. (*Starts to exit.*) Good day, sir. (*Exits.*)

VAN ALDIN: (*Picks up the phone. Into phone.*) Yes. 5-7-3-6, please.
(*To himself.*) "A perfect frankness"? (*Into phone.*) Yes, Mr. Goby?
I've got a job for you.

(*Lights cross fade to the flat of Mirelle far DSR. The quarters are furnished with an exotic Eastern flair, including a chaise lounge. Mirelle is reclining on the chaise lounge. A heavily made-up dancer, Mirelle fans herself with a rigid Chinese hand fan. Kettering enters and stands watching her for a few moments. Mirelle becomes aware of his presence.*)

MIRELLE: Monsieur Derek! [Mon amour.] [*"My love."*]

KETTERING: Hello, Mirelle. (*Kisses her on the cheek.*) What have you been doing with yourself? Just got up, I suppose.

MIRELLE: No, silly boy. I have been at work, rehearsing. It's a new dance...marvelous. I shall put all the passion of the desert into it. I shall dance hung over with jewels. Oh, and by the way, there is a pearl that I saw yesterday on Bond Street...a black pearl.

KETTERING: My dear girl, it's no use talking of black pearls to me. At the present moment, the fat is in the fire.

MIRELLE: (*Sits up.*) Oh, no! Something is wrong?

KETTERING: My esteemed father-in-law is preparing to go off the deep end.

MIRELLE: The deep end?

KETTERING: He wants Ruth to divorce me.

MIRELLE: How stupide! Why should she want to divorce you?

KETTERING: Mainly because of you, [mon cher]! [*"my dear"*]

MIRELLE: But this is foolish. What are you going to do about it?

KETTERING: What are *we* going to do about it? On the one side, a man with unlimited money; on the other, a man with unlimited debt. There is no question as to who will come out on top.

MIRELLE: They are extraordinary, these Americans. It is not as though your wife was fond of you.

KETTERING: You are going to stick with me?

MIRELLE: You know I adore you, Derek.

KETTERING: So. The rats will leave the sinking ship.

MIRELLE: [Vraiment, mon ami.] I am so fond of you. You are so charming...[un beau garçon, but ce n'est pas pratique. [*"Really, my friend."*] [...*"a handsome boy, but it is not practical."*]

KETTERING: A rich man's luxury, then. Is that it?

MIRELLE: If you wish to put it that way. Listen to me. You are a little bit foolish. I am not made to be poor. Now, pay attention: You must make it up with your wife.

KETTERING: I am afraid that's not going to actually be in the sphere of practical politics.

MIRELLE: Practical? I do not understand.

KETTERING: Van Aldin, my dear, is the kind of man who makes up his mind and sticks to it.

MIRELLE: I have heard about him. He is very rich, [oui]? Almost the richest man in America. A few days ago, in Paris, he bought the most wonderful ruby in the world...the "Heart of Fire" it is called. ["yes"]

KETTERING: How do you know of that?

MIRELLE: Mirelle knows of things. It is a wonderful stone...a stone that should belong to a woman like me. I love jewels, Derek. They speak to me. But you don't understand. You are only a man. Van Aldin will give these rubies to his daughter, I suppose. She is his only child?

KETTERING: Yes.

MIRELLE: And when he dies, she will inherit all his money. She will be a rich woman.

KETTERING: She is already a rich woman. He gave her a couple of million when she married me.

MIRELLE: A couple of million! That is immense. And if she died suddenly, it would all come to you?

KETTERING: As things stand at present, yes.

MIRELLE: [Mon Dieu]! If she were to die, what a solution that would be! ["My God!"]

(Pause.)

KETTERING: The only thing that could save me now. I like your practical mind, Mirelle; however, I'm afraid my wife is an extremely healthy person.

MIRELLE: [Eh bien.] There are accidents. *(Pause. Sees Derek's reaction.)* But we must not dwell on possibilities. There must be no more talk of this divorce. Your wife will give up the idea. ["Well..."]

KETTERING: And if she won't?

MIRELLE: I think she will, [mon ami]. She is one of those who would not like the publicity. [*"my friend"*]

KETTERING: What do you mean?

MIRELLE: I mean the gentleman who calls himself Le Comte de la Roche.

KETTERING: How do you know of him?

MIRELLE: I know all about him. I am Parisienne, after all. He was her lover before she married you, was he not?

KETTERING: That is a lie. Please remember that you are speaking of my wife.

MIRELLE: You are extraordinary, you English. She was in love with him before she married you, but her father stepped in and sent him about his business. And poor little Mademoiselle wept so many tears! But she obeyed. And you know, [mon ami], as well as Mirelle knows that it is a very different story now. She sees him nearly every day, and on the 14th, she goes to Paris to meet him. [*"my friend"*]

KETTERING: How do you know all this?

MIRELLE: [Moi]? I have many friends in Paris who know of this [coquin]. It is all arranged. She is going to the Riviera, she says, but in reality she will meet Le Comte in Paris. Take my word for it. (*Pause.*) If you are clever, you have her in the hollow of your hand. You can make things very awkward for her. [*"scoundrel"*] [*"Me?!"*]

KETTERING: (*Angry.*) Oh, be quiet. For once, shut your painted mouth!

(Kettering storms off. An amused Mirelle laughs softly to herself as she falls back on the chaise and resumes fanning herself. The lights fade and come up on Katherine Grey far DSL, seated in an armchair and reading a letter, the contents of which we hear as a voiceover.)

CHARLES MONTROSE: (*Voiceover.*) "Miss Katherine Grey. Little Crampton. St. Mary Mead. Kent."

(Lights remain on the scene as they fade in on the platform SR, where Lady Rosalie Tamplin is sitting with her daughter, Lenox, on a garden terrace. Lady Tamplin is reading the "Daily Mail" while Lenox is eating some fruit.)

LADY TAMPLIN: (*Reacting to an article in the newspaper.*) Well. Well, well, well.

LENOX: What is it?

(Lady Tamplin slides the newspaper across the table to her daughter, who begins reading. [Note: The lights are now on for both scenes and remain so until indicated.])

CHARLES MONTROSE: *(Voiceover.)* "Dear Miss Grey: You are perhaps aware that the financial consultation management team of Burton, Montrose, and Bell has been overseeing Mrs. Emma Harfield's estate for the past 63 years. However, you are no doubt unaware of Mrs. Harfield's substantial investment as an original shareholder in Stockton and Darlington Railways over 40 years ago. Said institution has not only survived the Great War, unlike a number of other manufacturers, but has, in fact, thrived. Consequently, at this most unfortunate time of her passing, Emma Harfield was an extremely wealthy woman."

LENOX: *(To Lady Tamplin.)* What about it? It's the sort of thing that's always happening. Needle-clicking old women are always dying in villages and leaving fortunes of millions to their humble companions.

LADY TAMPLIN: Yes, dear, I know, and I daresay the fortune is not like anything as large as they say it is. Newspapers are so inaccurate these days. But even if you cut it down by half—

LENOX: Well, it has not been left to us.

LADY TAMPLIN: Not exactly, Lenox. But this girl, this Katherine Grey, is actually a cousin of mine...one of the Worcestershire Greys, the Edgeworth lot. My very own cousin. Fancy!

LENOX: Ah-ha!

CHARLES MONTROSE: *(Voiceover.)* "By all accounts, you yourself are an extremely sensible woman who has effectively endured the quite challenging task of serving as caretaker for Mrs. Harfield for the last ten years. Though not always apparent, we are nonetheless aware of her fondness for you and are thus very pleased to inform you that she has left her considerable fortune exclusively to you."

LADY TAMPLIN: *(To Lenox.)* Well, one cannot help wondering—

LENOX: What's in it for us?

LADY TAMPLIN: Really, Lenox. Is that all you ever consider?

LENOX: Just get on with it, Mother.

LADY TAMPLIN: Well, dear, I was thinking that it would be very nice if I wrote to Katherine and suggested that she pay us a little

visit out here. Naturally, she is quite out of touch with society. It would be nicer for her to be launched by one of her own people.

LENOX: "Her own people"?

CHARLES MONTROSE: *(Voiceover.)* "Her one remaining family relative, a cousin named Mary Anne Harfield, has laid claim to at least a portion of her holdings. However, Emma Harfield very explicitly stated in her will that under no circumstances should any portion of her estate be given to said cousin, due to her 'extreme avariciousness and total neglect.'"

LADY TAMPLIN: *(To Lenox.)* Yes, her own people.

LENOX: How much do you think you could get her to cough up?

LADY TAMPLIN: Well, we should have to come to some financial arrangement, of course. What with one thing and another...the War, you know...

CHARLES MONTROSE: *(Voiceover.)* "In short, Miss Grey, you're going to be a very wealthy woman. Please contact our offices at some point in the near future to discuss the necessities facilitating the transference of said funds."

LADY TAMPLIN: *(To Lenox.)* She was a very nice girl, as I remember...quiet, never wanted to shove herself forward, not a beauty, certainly not a man hunter.

LENOX: Unlike, say –

LADY TAMPLIN: What? What were you going to say?

LENOX: Never mind, Mother. Suffice it to say you're currently on your fourth husband.

LADY TAMPLIN: Oh, pooh. Lenox, darling, fetch me my stationery, won't you?

(Lenox exits.)

CHARLES MONTROSE: *(Voiceover.)* "Again, on behalf of the entire firm here at Burton, Montrose, and Bell, please accept our deepest condolences on the loss of your long-time employer. *(Lenox returns with stationery, on which Lady Tamplin begins to write. Voiceover.)* Sincerely, Charles Montrose. Burton, Montrose, and Bell. CFP. London."

LADY TAMPLIN: *(Writes.)* "My dearest cousin, Katherine..."

(Katherine looks up, thinking. Lights fade on both areas. The furniture for the Tamplin area on the platform SR and the Katherine Grey area DSL are

both struck, A ticket booth appears CS. An Agent stands upstage of the booth. Derek Kettering approaches from DSR and moves to the booth.)

KETTERING: *(To Agent.)* I wish to go to Nice. Will you give me particulars?

AGENT: What date, sir?

KETTERING: Today. The 14th. What's the best train?

AGENT: Well, of course, the *best* train is what they call the Blue Train. You avoid the tiresome customs business at Calais.

KETTERING: Yes, yes.

AGENT: But so late. It departs in a matter of hours, and the Blue Train is nearly always all booked up.

(Katherine enters SL and approaches the booth.)

KETTERING: It's very important. See if there's a berth left.

AGENT: Yes...I'm looking... *(Sees an available berth.)* Ah! It's all right, sir. Still three berths left. Name?

(Pause.)

KETTERING: La Roche.

AGENT: La Roche. Very good, sir. Thank you very much.

KETTERING: Thank you.

(Kettering starts to exit SR. Katherine approaches the window.)

KATHERINE: *(To Agent.)* Yes, I wish to claim my ticket for the Blue Train, please.

(The sound of Katherine's voice stops Kettering in his tracks. He looks back and watches the exchange.)

AGENT: Of course, Miss. Name?

KATHERINE: Grey. Katherine Grey.

KETTERING: *(To himself.)* With the grey eyes.

AGENT: Ah, yes. Here we are. Departure this afternoon. The Blue Train to the Riviera, with stops at Paris, Lyon, and Marseilles before arriving at Nice. You've been to the Riviera, I presume?

KATHERINE: No.

AGENT: Ah, well, you're in for a treat, Miss.

(Agent passes Katherine a ticket.)

KATHERINE: So I've heard. Thank you.

(Katherine exits SL. Kettering watches her exit, turns, and starts to exit SR. He is interrupted, however, by Major Knighton, who enters SR.)

KETTERING: Mr. Knighton. What's in the wind now? What brings you here?

KNIGHTON: As you might expect, sir, I am sent by Mr. Van Aldin.

KETTERING: Really? And how did he know to look for me here?

KNIGHTON: He didn't share that information with me, sir.

KETTERING: Well, no matter. What, pray tell, does my esteemed father-in-law want now? You have come on his business, I take it?

KNIGHTON: I have, yes. I rather wish Mr. Van Aldin had chosen someone else.

KETTERING: Bad as all that, is it? Well, go on. I can imagine how his errands would rarely be pleasant ones.

KNIGHTON: I am directed to make you a definite offer.

KETTERING: An offer? Well, now. That sounds rather interesting.

KNIGHTON: Shall I go on?

KETTERING: By all means.

KNIGHTON: I shall state the proposition in the fewest possible words.

KETTERING: Please.

(Unseen by Kettering and Knighton, Ruth Kettering enters from the platform SL. She sees Kettering and Knighton and hangs back to eavesdrop.)

KNIGHTON: The matter is simply this: Mrs. Kettering, as you know, is about to file a petition for divorce. If the case goes undefended, you will receive 100,000 on the day that the decree is made absolute.

KETTERING: A hundred thousand dollars?

KNIGHTON: Pounds.

KETTERING: And if I refuse his handsome offer?

KNIGHTON: In the event of your refusing this proposition, Mr. Van Aldin wished me to tell you in plain words that he proposes to break you. Just that.

KETTERING: Well, well! I suppose he can do it. I certainly should not be able to put up much of a fight against America's man of many millions. However, Mr. Knighton, I wish you to return to my father-in-law and tell him to take himself and his bribes to hell. Is that clear?

KNIGHTON: Perfectly. And, if you'll allow me to say, Mr. Kettering, I am glad you have answered as you have.

(Knighton exits DSR. Kettering exits USR. Ruth cautiously makes her way to the ticket booth.)

RUTH: *(To Agent.)* Yes. Ticket for Ruth Kettering for the Blue Train, please

AGENT: For today?

RUTH: Yes. This afternoon.

AGENT: Very good, Miss. *(Searching for the ticket.)* A busy run, that.

RUTH: Really?

(Van Aldin enters SR and watches Ruth.)

AGENT: Two berths left for the entire train.

RUTH: Goodness. All for the Riviera?

AGENT: Most. Though some are scheduled to depart in Paris or Lyon. Yes, here we are, Mrs. Kettering.

(Agent hands Ruth Kettering a ticket.)

RUTH: Thank you.

AGENT: A good trip then, Mrs. Kettering.

RUTH: We'll hope so.

VAN ALDIN: We certainly do.

(Ruth turns and sees Van Aldin.)

RUTH: *(Surprised.)* Dad!

VAN ALDIN: Why, Ruth, how you jumped!

RUTH: I didn't expect to see you, I suppose. You already said goodbye, and I thought you had that conference today.

VAN ALDIN: So I did. But you are more important to me than any number of silly conferences. I came to take a last look at you since I'm not going to see you for some time.

RUTH: That's very sweet of you, Dad. I wish you were coming, too.

VAN ALDIN: What would you say if I did?

(Pause.)

RUTH: Just for a moment, I really thought you meant it. But it isn't really for very long, Dad. You're coming out next month, after all. It's so much nicer than this month down there. You've got all sorts of things you can't possibly leave just now.

VAN ALDIN: Well, that's so, I suppose.

RUTH: Of course, it's so.

VAN ALDIN: Ruth, there's another reason I came here.

RUTH: Yes?

VAN ALDIN: I spoke with Derek.

RUTH: You saw him?

VAN ALDIN: I did. He advised me to be sure that there was perfect frankness between father and daughter. What did he mean by that, Ruthie?

RUTH: I don't know.

VAN ALDIN: What did he mean when he said you had your own friends?

RUTH: I've got lots of friends. I don't know what he meant.

VAN ALDIN: Let me be clear...who's the man?

RUTH: What man?

VAN ALDIN: The man. That's what Derek was driving at...some special man who's a friend of yours. I know there's nothing to it, but we've got to look at everything as it might appear to the court. *(Ruth is silent.)* Come on, honey. Don't be afraid of your own father. I've never been too harsh, have I? Even that time in Paris — *(Realizes.)* Good God!

RUTH: What?

VAN ALDIN: You've been seeing that fellow again, haven't you?

RUTH: What fellow?

VAN ALDIN: The one we had all that fuss about years ago. You know who I mean well enough!

RUTH: You mean...you mean the Comte de la Roche?

VAN ALDIN: The Comte de la Roche! I told you at the time that the man was a swindler, a Don Juan! You got tangled up with him very deeply, but I got you out of his clutches.

RUTH: Yes, you did. And I married Derek Kettering.

(Ada Mason enters SL, carrying Ruth's luggage. She stops to listen.)

VAN ALDIN: You wanted to! And now you've been seeing this Comte fellow again!

RUTH: You're wrong about Armand...the Comte. I know of his indiscretions in his youth. He told me all about them. But he also told me that he loved me, that I was the only one he ever truly cared for. It broke his heart when you parted us in Paris, and now—

ADA MASON: *(Calls.)* Miss Kettering, it is time.

RUTH: Goodbye, Dad. I'll see you next month.

(Ruth hugs Van Aldin and crosses in front of Ada to exit SL. Ada stands for a moment, glaring at Van Aldin. He glares back, turns, and exits SR. Ada exits after Ruth SL. Train whistle sounds. Hercule Poirot scurries on from DSL.)

POIROT: [Mon Dieu!] Never have I been late before! *(At the ticket booth. To Agent.)* Poirot. For the Blue Train. Hercule Poirot. ["My God!"]

(Lights fade to black. Sound of the train pulling out of the station.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: Continuous action. During the blackout, the facade of the train's exterior is removed [or the projection extinguished], revealing the partial interior of the Blue Train. Three compartments are visible. At far SR is the dining car. At CS is a double compartment, consisting of two sleeping berths separated by a sliding door. The SR portion will be taken by Ada Mason; the SL by Ruth Kettering. The far SL compartment belongs to Katherine Grey. The walls of the compartments are fragmentary such that the audience is able to see any traffic occurring in the hallway US of the three compartments. The doors to the three compartments, as well as the door between Ruth's and Ada's berths, are apparent. Periodically during the journey, the voice of the train's Conductor is heard in a voiceover in both French and English. Note: French is optional.)

CONDUCTOR: (Voiceover.) [Bienvenue a bord du train bleu.]
Welcome aboard the Blue Train. [Prochainement, nous partiron
pour Paris avec une arrivee prevue vers quatre heures.] Shortly,
we shall depart for Paris with expected arrival around four o'clock.

(Lights up on the dining car SR. Katherine and Ruth are sharing a small cafe table and have completed their meal. A small red pouch lies on the table by Ruth. [Note: During the following, Ada Mason can be dimly seen, unpacking and arranging various blankets in her sleeping berth.]

KATHERINE: (To Ruth.) I've lived ten years in a very small village,
St. Mary Mead.

RUTH: Ten years? And what did you do in St. Mary Mead for an
entire decade?

KATHERINE: I was a caretaker and paid companion for an elderly
woman, which is actually the reason I'm here at all.

RUTH: What do you mean?

KATHERINE: I made only enough to buy myself strong country
shoes. Now, I've been left with what seems to me a fortune,
though I daresay it would not seem so much to you.

RUTH: Why do you say that?

KATHERINE: Just an impression. You asked earlier if I had been to
the Riviera, which I told you I hadn't. But you, on the other hand,
indicated you went every year.

RUTH: Well, I don't know about St. Mary Mead, but January and February in London are horrible. It will be heavenly to get into the sunshine.

KATHERINE: I'm sure it will be a wonderful feeling.

RUTH: Tell me what other impressions you formed about me.

KATHERINE: Oh, I don't— *(Stops.)*

RUTH: I want to know. As we left Victoria Station, I looked across at you, and I had the sort of feeling that you understood what was going on in my mind.

KATHERINE: I assure you, I'm not a mind reader.

RUTH: But will you tell me, please, just what you thought?

KATHERINE: I shall, but you musn't think me impertinent.

RUTH: Of course not.

KATHERINE: I thought that for some reason you were in great distress of mind, and I was sorry for you.

(Pause.)

RUTH: You're quite right. I'm in terrible trouble. I should like to tell you about it, if I may.

KATHERINE: If you wish, of course.

RUTH: I don't know what to do. There is a man whom I am fond of...very fond, indeed. We cared for each other when we were young, and we were thrust apart most brutally and unjustly. Now, we have come together again.

KATHERINE: Yes?

RUTH: I...I'm going to meet him now. I daresay you think it all wrong, but you don't know the circumstances. My husband is impossible. He has treated me disgracefully.

KATHERINE: I'm sorry.

RUTH: What I feel so badly about is this: I have deceived my father. It was he who came to see me off at Victoria today. He wishes me to divorce my husband and, of course, he has no idea that I'm going to meet this other man. He would think it extremely foolish.

KATHERINE: Isn't it?

RUTH: I...I suppose so. But I can't draw back now.

KATHERINE: Why not?

RUTH: I...it's all arranged, and it would break his heart...again. I don't know. Ever since I left Victoria, I've had a horrible feeling of something...something that is coming to me very soon that I can't

escape. *(Pause.)* You must think I'm mad talking like this, but I tell you, something terrible is going to happen.

KATHERINE: Don't think it. Try to pull yourself together. You could send your father a wire from Paris if you like, and he would come to you at once.

RUTH: Yes! I could do that! My dear old father. I never knew until today how terribly fond of him I am. I've been very foolish.

CONDUCTOR: *(Voiceover.)* Nous dirigerons ensuite vers la Riviera, avec quelques arrêts en cours de route. We shall now proceed to the beautiful Riviera, with a few stops along the way.

RUTH: *(To Katherine.)* I'm quite all right now. I suppose, really, I just needed someone to talk to. I can't think now why I've been making such an absolute fool of myself.

(Train whistle sounds. Katherine rises.)

KATHERINE: I'm glad you feel better. I must be getting back to my own compartment.

RUTH: Of course. *(As Katherine starts to exit, Ada steps out into the hallway.)* And, Katherine... *(Katherine turns back.)* ...thank you.

(As Katherine exits the dining car into the hallway, Ada sees her and shrinks back. Katherine does not see Ada. After Katherine crosses past, Ada re-enters the hallway, looking after Katherine, who now enters her own compartment SL. Ada looks back SR in the direction of Ruth before going back into her own berth. Sound of the train coming to a stop. Lights fade to black.)

CONDUCTOR: *(Voiceover.)* [Bienvenue dans la Ville Lumière.]
Welcome to the City of Lights.

(In the blackness, the following actions occur: Major Knighton appears SR, and from the hallway enters Ada's compartment. Hercule Poirot enters SL, crossing past the two ladies' compartments before entering the dining car SR. A scuffle is heard in Ruth's compartment involving Ada, Knighton, and Ruth. Due to the Conductor's announcement, Poirot only barely registers the ruckus from the ladies' compartment. Sounds of a struggle, of a character being strangled, gasping for breath, are heard. [Note: None of this action should be visible to the audience, except those diminished sounds which they can hear.] The Conductor continues throughout the action.)

CONDUCTOR: (*Voiceover.*) [Meme si notre sejour a Paris sera bref—uniquement pour accueillir a bord des passagers supplementaires, et faire mes adieux a quelques autres—vous aurez neanmoins suffisamment de temps pour vous degourdir les jambes, si vous le souhaitez.] Though our stay in Paris will be brief—only to welcome aboard additional passengers and to bid adieu to a few others—there is nonetheless sufficient time for you to stretch your legs should you so choose. [Le coup de sifflet retentira pour vous alerter de la suite de notre voyage vers la belle Riviera a bord du magnifique Train Bleu!] The whistle will sound to alert you of the continuation of our journey to the beautiful Riviera aboard the magnificent Blue Train!

(The lights fade in to reveal Ruth Kettering in her compartment, facing downstage. Neither Ada nor Knighton are present. Poirot is in the dining car SR, finishing his meal while reading a copy of "Le Monde." Katherine, now wearing a new outfit, is in her compartment SL. She checks her wristwatch and sees that it is dinnertime. She rises and checks her appearance in a mirror. Pierre Michel, a porter enters SR, carrying a meal basket. He crosses to Ruth's compartment and knocks.)

RUTH: (*Without turning around, calls.*) [Entrez-vous.] [*"Enter."*]

PIERRE MICHEL: It's the porter, Madame. You ordered the meal basket?

(Carrying a book, Katherine exits her compartment and heads toward the dining car.)

RUTH: Place it there, on the desk. [Merci.] [*"Thank you."*]

PIERRE MICHEL: Of course. Oh, and Madame, I have included additional provisions for your companion.

RUTH: That's kind of you. However, Ada Mason has disembarked.

PIERRE MICHEL: Very good, Madame.

(Pierre Michel places the basket on the desk and starts out. He encounters Katherine, who has stopped in front of Ruth's room and is looking in. [Note: Ruth continues facing downstage during the following.]

KATHERINE: Oh, I'm sorry. Ruth, I'm wondering if you would perhaps like to join me for dinner?

RUTH: Not tonight, dear. I'm very tired.

PIERRE MICHEL: *(To Katherine, indicating Ruth.)* Madame has requested a meal basket this evening.

KATHERINE: *(To Ruth.)* Oh. I see now, yes. All right. I have a book, anyway. Well, perhaps tomorrow morning

RUTH: Yes, tomorrow morning.

KATHERINE: Goodnight, then.

RUTH: Goodnight. *(Katherine exits and heads to the dining car. Pierre Michel starts off.)* Oh, and young man?

PIERRE MICHEL: Yes, Madame?

RUTH: I do not wish to be awakened early tomorrow morning. I've had a long day and wish to sleep in.

PIERRE MICHEL: Very good, Madame.

(Pierre Michel exits and heads off SL. Once in the dining car, Katherine looks around, unsure of where to go. Poirot notices her.)

POIROT: *(To Katherine.)* [Excusez-moi], Madame. ["Excuse me"]

KATHERINE: *(Correcting.)* Mademoiselle.

POIROT: Ah! [Pardonnez-moi]. I only assumed a lady such as yourself would be married. ["Forgive me."]

KATHERINE: Yes, well...

POIROT: No matter. You will join me?

KATHERINE: *(Deliberates briefly.)* Of course.

(Katherine places her detective novel on the table and sits opposite Poirot.)

POIROT: There we are. Not so bad, huh?

KATHERINE: *(Smiles.)* No.

POIROT: *(Referring to the book.)* I see, Mademoiselle, that you have a little detective story.

KATHERINE: They amuse me.

POIROT: Now, why is that? I ask as a student of human nature...why should that be?

KATHERINE: Perhaps they give one the illusion of living an exciting life.

POIROT: Yes. There is something in that.

KATHERINE: Of course, one knows that such things don't really happen.

(Furtively, Derek Kettering enters SL, searching for his wife's room.)

POIROT: Ah, but sometimes, Mademoiselle...sometimes they do. I, who speak to you...they have happened to me. And who knows? Someday, you might be in the thick of things as well.

KATHERINE: I don't think that likely. Nothing of that kind ever happens to me.

POIROT: Would you like it to? *(Katherine is startled by the question and does not respond. Kettering has found his wife's room, and during the dialogue break above, knocks lightly on the door. Not getting any response, he quietly opens the door, finding it unlocked. Continuing after Kettering opens the door.)* I think you have a yearning in you for interesting happenings. Who knows? You may get more than you bargain for.

KETTERING: *(At Ruth's door, softly.)* Ruth?

KATHERINE: *(To Poirot.)* Is that a prophecy?

POIROT: I never prophesy. *(Spotting Ruth on the bed, Kettering approaches her, leaving the door ajar.)* It is true that I have the habit of being right, but I do not boast of it.

KATHERINE: I must return to my compartment now. Goodnight, Mr. Poirot.

POIROT: You are not eating?

KATHERINE: No, I'm not really hungry, after all.

(Thinking Ruth is sleeping, Kettering leaves her compartment.)

POIROT: Well, then. Why eat, eh? Goodnight, Mademoiselle. Thank you for the chat. And may you sleep well.

(Katherine exits the dining car and heads to her compartment. However, as she approaches Ruth's compartment, she nearly collides with Derek Kettering, who is emerging from Ruth's berth.)

KETTERING: *(To Katherine.)* Forgive me.

KATHERINE: No, I wasn't really watching.

KETTERING: I've seen you before.

KATHERINE: Perhaps. *(Sidles past him.)* Excuse me, I must return to my compartment.

(Katherine returns to her compartment. Kettering stares after her for a few moments. He then makes his way to just upstage of her compartment.)

KETTERING: *(To himself.)* Our paths shall cross again, Katherine Grey.

(Kettering exits SL as the lights fade.)

CONDUCTOR: *(Voiceover.)* [Attention, passagers, s'il vous plait.] Attention, passengers, if you please. [Alors que vous preparez a vous retirer pour la soiree, soyez assure que le Train Bleu poursuivra son voyage vers la Cote d'Azur, avec de tres brefs arrets a Lyon, Marseille et Cannes avant d'arriver a notre destination finale.] As you prepare to retire for the evening, you may rest assured that the Blue Train will continue its journey to the Riviera, with very brief stops in Lyon, Marseilles, and Cannes before arriving at our ultimate destination. [Quand vous reveillerez le matin, nous serons dans la belle Nice!] When you awaken in the morning, we shall be in beautiful Nice! [Bonne nuit et faites de beaux reves!] Goodnight and pleasant dreams!

(The next morning. Katherine has crossed back to the dining car SR, where she has just finished her breakfast. Ready to return to her compartment, she gathers her things. A uniformed official, Monsieur Caux, enters.)

CAUX: *(To Katherine.)* You will excuse me, Madame. Pray be seated. I am Monsieur Caux, the Commissary of Police.

KATHERINE: You wish to see my passport? Here it is.

(Katherine hands Caux her passport, and he looks it over.)

CAUX: Thank you, Madame. But what I really desire is a little information.

KATHERINE: Information?

CAUX: About a lady who has been a fellow passenger of yours. You lunched with her yesterday.

KATHERINE: Oh. I'm afraid I can't tell you anything about her. We fell into conversation over our meal, but she is a complete stranger to me. I've never even seen her before.

CAUX: You could perhaps provide some idea of that conversation?

KATHERINE: I could, but at the moment, I see no reason to do so.
CAUX: No reason? Oh, yes, Madame, I can assure you that there is indeed a reason...a very simple one.
KATHERINE: Yes?
CAUX: This morning, the lady in question was found dead in her compartment.
KATHERINE: Dead! Was it...was it heart failure?
CAUX: No. She was murdered.
KATHERINE: Murdered?!
CAUX: Since the porter had seen you talking with her, he quite naturally reported the fact to the police, and that is why, Madame, we're here. We hope to gain some information.
KATHERINE: I'm very sorry. I don't even know her name.
CAUX: Her name is Kettering. Ruth Vera Kettering. That we know from her passport and from the labels on her luggage. What exactly was the nature of your conversation with her yesterday?
KATHERINE: Well, she told me, in confidence, about her marital difficulties with her husband. And...
CAUX: Go on, Madame. The lady is deceased.
KATHERINE: *(After deliberating.)* She was on her way to meet another man, a man with whom she had been heavily involved some years before. She never forgot him.
CAUX: What other man?
KATHERINE: She didn't say. But she felt most guilty about deceiving her father, who had interceded in the previous affair.

(Poirot enters the dining car and looks inquiringly at Caux and Katherine.)

CAUX: *(To Poirot.)* What is it, sir? We cannot be disturbed.
POIROT: My name is Hercule Poirot.
CAUX: *The Hercule Poirot?*
POIROT: The same. I remember meeting you once, Monsieur Caux, at the Surete in Paris, though doubtless you have forgotten me.
CAUX: Not at all, Monsieur. Come in, I pray you. You know of this?
POIROT: I know. I came to see if I might be of any assistance.
CAUX: We should be flattered, of course. Let me present to you Madame... *(Consulting the passport he is holding.)* ...uh...Mademoiselle Grey.
POIROT: *(To Katherine.)* It is strange, is it not, that my words should have come true so quickly?

KATHERINE: *(To Caux.)* I suppose it could not be suicide.

CAUX: No, it could not be suicide. She was strangled with a length of black cord.

KATHERINE: How horrible!

CAUX: Yes, it is horrible. But you, Mademoiselle, have great courage, which is why I am going to ask you to do something distressing, but so very necessary.

KATHERINE: What?

CAUX: I am going to ask you to be so good as to accompany me to the next compartment.

KATHERINE: The next...you mean...must I?

CAUX: Someone must identify her, and since the maid has disappeared, you appear to be the person who has seen her most since she boarded the train.

KATHERINE: Very well.

POIROT: Mademoiselle is sensible. Monsieur Caux, may I accompany you?

CAUX: I would much appreciate it, [mon ami]. [*"my friend"*]

(Caux, Poirot, and Katherine exit the dining car and cross to the compartment of Ruth Kettering. Caux unlocks the door and enters first, followed by Poirot, who gently ushers in Katherine.)

CAUX: *(To Poirot and Katherine.)* In here.

(Poirot, Caux, and Katherine enter the room. Caux approaches the corpse, which is lying on the bed rolled up in a rug with blankets on top of it. The head is facing the wall, unseen. Caux beckons Katherine, who hesitantly approaches the corpse. Once there, Caux pulls back the blankets and positions the head such that Katherine can see who it is. She gasps and covers her mouth with her hand.)

CAUX: It is Madame Kettering?

(Katherine nods.)

POIROT: Her face...disfigured almost beyond recognition. When was that done, I wonder?

CAUX: The doctor says after.

POIROT: Strange. *(To Katherine.)* Be brave, Mademoiselle. Look at her well. You are sure this is the same woman you talked to in the dining car?

(Katherine gingerly picks up the dead woman's hand and inspects it.)

KATHERINE: I am sure. The face is barely recognizable. However, yesterday as we were talking, I noticed this tiny mole on her wrist. It is the same woman.

POIROT: [Très bon.] You are an excellent witness, Mademoiselle. [*Very good.*]

CAUX: The murderer seems to have been carried away by rage. *(Covers the corpse.)*

POIROT: That smashing blow to the face...why? Did he think perhaps if the face were unrecognizable, she might not be identified? Or did he hate her so much that he could not resist striking that blow even after she was dead? Mademoiselle Katherine, anything else you notice? Anything missing?

KATHERINE: No, I don't think so. Wait! When we were in the dining car, she carried a small red-leather pouch. She kept a close watch on it throughout lunch. I noticed the initials on it..."R. V. K." *(Poirot explores the room.)* I thought it must have been a coin purse or a case for something valuable...some jewels, perhaps. *(Sees that Poirot has evidently found something.)* What is it?

POIROT: Four [auburn] hairs. *(Bending over the corpse.)* Yes, they are from the head of Madame. [*Or insert actor's hair color.*]

KATHERINE: You attach importance to that?

POIROT: What is important? What is not? One cannot say at this stage, but we must note each little fact carefully.

CAUX: *(Lifts the food basket.)* Look at this. An untouched food basket.

POIROT: She was delivered this?

CAUX: Yes. Probably Pierre Michel.

KATHERINE: I stopped by her room last night to see if perhaps she would like to join me for dinner. The porter was there, delivering that basket.

POIROT: We may speak with Monsieur Michel?

CAUX: Of course. One little minute. *(Exits through the door and off SL.)*

KATHERINE: *(To Poirot.)* It's so very strange. To have been sharing a lunch with her yesterday, sipping a glass of Bordeaux and discussing marital challenges, and then...mortality smacks you right in the face.

POIROT: Literally.

KATHERINE: That anyone could do something like that—

(An anxious Pierre Michel enters, followed by Inspector Caux.)

POIROT: *(To Pierre Michel.)* Ah, you are the porter on duty last night in this compartment?

PIERRE MICHEL: [Oui], Monsieur. [*“yes”*]

POIROT: There is no need to be anxious, [jeune home]. We simply would like to hear your story as to what happened last night in Paris. [*“young man”*]

PIERRE MICHEL: Very good. It was after we had left the Gare de Lyon when I was asked to deliver the dinner basket. She received the basket and advised me that she did not wish to be awakened at an early hour the next morning...this morning.

POIROT: You did not go into the adjoining compartment?

PIERRE MICHEL: No, Monsieur. Madame mentioned that she had been obliged to leave her maid behind in Paris.

POIROT: And you did not happen to notice a scarlet leather case in the room?

PIERRE MICHEL: No, Monsieur. I did not.

POIROT: Would it have been possible for a man to have been concealed in the adjoining compartment?

PIERRE MICHEL: The door was half open. If a man had stood behind the door, I should not have been able to see him.

POIROT: And this morning?

PIERRE MICHEL: As Madame requested, I did not disturb her. It was just before Cannes that I ventured to knock on the door. I received no reply, so I opened it. She was in the adjoining compartment. She appeared to be asleep in the bed. I took her by the shoulder to rouse her, and then — *(Breaks down crying.)*

CAUX: And then you saw what happened. I think we know all we need to know, Pierre. Console yourself. You have not been guilty of any negligence.

PIERRE MICHEL: Thank you, Monsieur. You will report as much to the company?

CAUX: Of course.

PIERRE MICHEL: Thank you, Monsieur. *(Exits SL.)*

CAUX: *(To Poirot.)* The doctor said the lady was probably dead before the train reached Lyon. Her dismissal of the maid seems significant. Did the man join the train at Paris, and did she conceal him in the adjoining compartment? Did they quarrel, and then did he kill her in a fit of rage? And then there is the possibility that her assailant was a train robber who knew of the jewels she was carrying. He might have then disembarked at Lyon.

POIROT: Or he might have come on to Nice.

CAUX: A very bold course. We must get hold of the maid. It is possible she has the red leather case with her.

POIROT: And you, Mademoiselle, you heard and saw nothing during the night?

KATHERINE: Nothing.

POIROT: *(To Caux.)* We will detain Mademoiselle no longer, I think.

CAUX: Of course. She will leave her address?

KATHERINE: The Villa Marguerite. Lady Tamplin.

POIROT: You permit that I see you again, Mademoiselle? Or have you so many friends that your time will be all taken up?

KATHERINE: On the contrary. I shall have plenty of leisure, and I shall be very pleased to see you again.

POIROT: Excellent. *(Taking her hand in his.)* We will investigate this affair together, [n'est-ce pas]? [*"will we not?"*]

KATHERINE: [Oui], Monsieur. [*"yes"*]

(Lights cross fade to Van Aldin's suite at the Savoy on the platform SL. Van Aldin is going through some papers on his desk. Momentarily, Major Knighton enters SL.)

VAN ALDIN: Major, what you told me about seeing Ruth's maid in Paris last night...I can't make it out. You must have been mistaken.

KNIGHTON: I couldn't have been mistaken, sir. I actually spoke to her.

VAN ALDIN: You spoke to her?

KNIGHTON: Yes, sir. I saw a woman who looked familiar –

VAN ALDIN: Ada Mason.

KNIGHTON: Yes, sir. I was quite sure it was Mrs. Kettering's maid. I went up to her and asked if Mrs. Kettering was staying there.

VAN ALDIN: And she told you that Ruth had gone on to the Riviera and had sent her to the Ritz to await further orders there?

KNIGHTON: Exactly that, sir.

VAN ALDIN: It is very odd, unless the woman had been impertinent or something of the kind.

KNIGHTON: In which case, surely Mrs. Kettering would have paid her a sum of money and told her to return to England. She would hardly have sent her to the Ritz.

VAN ALDIN: That is true. But Ruth is always changing her mind about things at a moment's notice. The maid didn't give any reason for this change of plan?

KNIGHTON: She said, sir, that Mrs. Kettering had met an old friend unexpectedly.

VAN ALDIN: An old friend? Man or woman?

KNIGHTON: I believe she said a man, sir.

VAN ALDIN: A man. An old friend. I'm afraid I know of this old friend, Knighton.

KNIGHTON: Yes, sir. Oh! The post came, sir. A telegram for you. *(Van Aldin opens the telegram and reads. Slowly he stands, shocked.)* What is it, sir? Something the matter?

VAN ALDIN: It's Ruth.

KNIGHTON: Your daughter?

VAN ALDIN: *(Numb.)* She's dead.

KNIGHTON: What? Oh, sir. An accident on the train?

VAN ALDIN: Murdered.

KNIGHTON: Oh, dear God!

VAN ALDIN: My little girl. My little Ruthie.

KNIGHTON: I'm so sorry, sir.

VAN ALDIN: *(Indicating telegram.)* This is from the police at Nice. I must go out there by the first train.

KNIGHTON: Five o'clock from Victoria, sir.

VAN ALDIN: You'll come with me, Knighton. Quickly, pack your things.

(Knighton turns to exit but encounters Mr. Goby, who enters SL.)

GOBY: Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Van Aldin.

VAN ALDIN: It is a bad situation, Mr. Goby. I'm quite pressed for time. Have you anything important to tell me?

GOBY: The movements of Mr. Kettering, sir. You wished them reported to you.

VAN ALDIN: Yes. Well?

GOBY: Mr. Kettering has left London for the Riviera, sir.

VAN ALDIN: What? When?

GOBY: Yesterday morning. *(Pause.)* The dancer from Paris, Mademoiselle Mirelle, left at the same time.

VAN ALDIN: On the same train?

GOBY: Yes, sir. Both on the same line. The Blue Train.

(Train whistle. Lights fade. Curtain. Intermission.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]