

Princess, Greta, Mary, Ratchett, MacQueen + Michael Side 4

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 numero 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!*