

Agatha Christie's
The Count and the Curse
by
Bob Cooner

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S THE COUNT AND THE CURSE

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AGATHA CHRISTIE’S THE COUNT AND THE CURSE

AGATHA CHRISTIE’S THE COUNT AND THE CURSE was originally produced as a live radio play by Woodland Opera House, Woodland, CA, directed by Matthew Abergel, live foley by Jason Hammond, and featuring the following cast:

Hastings.....	Scott Martin
Poirot.....	Darryl Strohl-De Hererra
Miss Rider/Waitress.....	Emily Delk
Dr. Hawker/O’Dowd/Ascanio.....	Aaron Baikie-Rick
Lift Attendant/Manager/Graves.....	Skyler King
Lady Willard/Harper.....	Jori Gonzales
Willard/Hassan.....	Rand Doerning
Tosswill/Dr. Ames.....	David Cross

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Captain Hastings:	Male; 40s-50s; British; upper-middle class; former military; admires Poirot but is also amused and frustrated by him.
Miss Rider:	Female; 30s-60s; British; working class; loyal, excitable.
Dr. Hawker:	Male; 30s-70s; British; upper-middle class; curious.
Hercule Poirot:	Male; 40s-50s; Belgian; upper-middle class; egotistical, fastidious, secretive, brilliant.
Lift Attendant:	Male; 20s-30s; British; working class; cheerful, cheeky.
Count Foscatini*:	Male; 30s-50s; Dead "Italian" nobleman (optional, see Note in script).
Manager:	Male; 30s-50s; British; middle class; fussy, egotistical.
Waitress:	Female; 20s-50s; British; working class; chatty, friendly.
O'Dowd:	Male; 30s-60s; Irish; middle class; gruff, self-assured.
Graves:	Male; 40s-50s; British; middle class; seemingly respectable but inwardly scheming and dishonorable.
Ascanio:	Male; 30s-50s; Italian; wealthy; powerful; intelligent.
Newsboy:	Male; older child/young teen; British; lower class; energetic.
Lady Willard:	Female; 40s-70s; British; upper class; gullible, worried.
Tosswill:	Male; 40s-70s; British; upper-middle class; polite, skeptical.
Sir Guy Willard:	Male; 20s-30s; British; upper class; adventuresome, earnest.

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Dr. Ames:	Male; 20s-40s; British; upper-middle class; seemingly earnest but inwardly greedy, conniving, murderous.
Miss Harper:	Female; 20s-30s; American; middle class; practical, scared.
Hassan:	Male; 20s-50s; Egyptian; quiet, loyal.

SUGGESTED DOUBLING FOR 3M/3W/1GN (though actors of any gender may play the roles as the gender as written)

Actor 1 (M): (Acts 1-2) Captain Hastings

Actor 2 (M): (Acts 1-2) Hercule Poirot

Actor 3 (W): (Act 1) Dr. Hawker; (Act 2), Lady Willard, Hassan

Actor 4 (W): (Act 1) Waitress, Graves; (Act 2) Miss Harper

Actor 5 (GN): (Act 1) Lift Attendant; (Acts 1-2) Newsboy; (Act 2) Guy Willard

Actor 6 (M): (Act 1) Manager, O'Dowd; (Act 2) Dr. Ames

Actor 7 (W): (Act 1) Miss Rider, Count Foscatini*, Ascanio; (Act 2) Tosswill

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Acts/Scenes

Act I

- Scene 1. Poirot and Hastings' Flat, evening after dinner
- Scene 2. Regent's Court Lobby, Lift, and Flat of Count Foscatini, immediately
- Scene 3. Regent's Court Lift and Kitchens, immediately following
- Scene 4. Regent's Court Flat of Count Foscatini, immediately following
- Scene 5. Regent's Court Lift and Lobby, immediately following
- Scene 6. Poirot and Hastings' Flat, some weeks later

Act II

- Scene 1. Lady Willard's Kensington Square residence, several weeks later
- Scene 2. A Taxicab, immediately following
- Scene 3. Poirot and Hastings' Flat, immediately following
- Scene 4. An Embarkation area, Egypt, several days later
- Scene 5. An archeological Excavation Camp, immediately following
- Scene 6. Miss Harper's Tent, immediately following
- Scene 7. Poirot and Hastings' Tent at the camp, immediately following; The Dinner Tent, immediately following; Poirot and Hastings' Tent, immediately following and then later that evening

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ACT I ("The Adventure of the Italian Nobleman") SCENE 1

A mostly bare stage. If some setting or furniture pieces are used, these should be minimal, easily movable, and adaptable to allow for swift and seamless transitions from scene to scene. Props and costume pieces may (or may not) be utilized to suggest characters and behaviors. Characters and setting/prop elements referred to in the play may, in fact, not be present. It is up to the actors and the audience to create these with their imaginations. CAPTAIN ARTHUR HASTINGS enters and notices the audience.

HASTINGS. Ah, you're here, I see. Delighted you could make it. Well, first things first. I am Captain Arthur Hastings—and if my name rings any bells, it is likely because you're also familiar with the name of the eminent private detective, Hercule Poirot. You see, Poirot and I have been colleagues—friends, really—for more than a decade, having first met in his native Belgium prior to the Great War. At this stage of the game, I suppose you might say we're a pair of confirmed bachelors who happen to share a suite of rooms in Whitehaven Mansions in central London. Over the intervening years, it has been my distinct pleasure to aid Poirot in solving some of his most fascinating and confounding cases. And no matter how many times I have watched my distinguished friend untangle the most inscrutable of crimes, I am still very much in awe of his ability to do so—though I dare not confess as much to him; Poirot is quite impressed with himself enough, thank you very much, without my adding any fuel to

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that fire. *(The lights reveal a part of the stage now representing Poirot and Hastings' Flat. HERCULE POIROT and DR. HAWKER occupy this area. They are enjoying after dinner drinks.)* This particular case in question began one evening in early June 1922 with a visit from a neighbor, an acquaintance of ours—one Dr. Hawker, a member of the medical profession. It was the genial doctor's habit to drop in sometimes of an evening and have a chat with Poirot, of whose genius he was an ardent admirer. The good doctor had arrived about half-past eight, and he and Poirot had settled into a comfortable discussion on the cheery topic of arsenic poisoning. It must have been about a quarter of an hour later when the door of our sitting room flew open. *(MISS RIDER, Dr. Hawker's housekeeper, suddenly and excitedly enters. As Miss Rider enters, Hastings joins Poirot and Dr. Hawker.)*

MISS RIDER. Oh, Dr. Hawker, there you are! What a relief!

DR. HAWKER. Miss Rider?! What the devil are you doing here? *(Now to Poirot and Hastings.)* My apologies, gentlemen. This is Miss Rider, my housekeeper.

MISS RIDER. Oh, I'm so sorry, Mr. Poirot, Captain Hastings, but I just had to find the doctor. It's an emergency!

DR. HAWKER. What is it, Miss Rider? What's happened?

MISS RIDER. Oh, such a voice! It gave me a turn, it did indeed!

DR. HAWKER. What's the trouble? Who was it?

MISS RIDER. It was the telephone, doctor. I answered it—and a terrible voice spoke.

DR. HAWKER. *Whose* terrible voice?

MISS RIDER. "Help," it said. "Doctor—help. They've killed me!" Then it sort of tailed away.

HASTINGS. *(Alarmed.)* I say!

MISS RIDER. "Who's speaking?" I said. "Who's speaking?" Then, I got a reply—*(She stops abruptly. Poirot, immediately encourages her to continue.)*

POIROT. Go on, *mademoiselle*! What was the reply?

MISS RIDER. It was just a whisper. It seemed like "Foscatine"—something like that, I think—"Regent's Court."

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DR. HAWKER. (*Alarmed, quickly.*) Oh, my God. No doubt it's Count Foscatini. He has a flat in Regent's Court. I must go at once. What could have happened?

POIROT. A patient of yours, Dr. Hawker?

DR. HAWKER. I attended him for a slight ailment a few weeks ago. An Italian nobleman, I dare say. Speaks English beautifully. Well, I must wish you good night, Poirot,—unless— (*Hawker stops speaking.*)

POIROT. Ah. I perceive the thought in your mind. I shall be delighted to accompany you. Quickly, Hastings, go get hold of a taxi.

HASTINGS. (*Narrating again, changing his tone.*) I say, ladies and gentlemen, have you ever noticed that taxis always make themselves scarce when one is particularly pressed for time? Mildly infuriating, I dare say. Nevertheless, I managed to capture one at last, and we were soon bowling along in the direction of Regent's Park.

SCENE 2

Poirot and Dr. Hawker are now waiting for a lift elevator in the lobby of Regent's Court, a fashionable multi-story residence.

HASTINGS. (*Continuing, joining Poirot and Hastings.*) When we arrived, there was no one in the building's lobby. The doctor pressed the lift bell impatiently— (*Which Hawker does.*) —and presently it arrived. (*We hear the "Ding!" of the elevator and suddenly, the lift doors open to reveal the LIFT ATTENDANT, who has now entered.*)

LIFT ATTENDANT. (*Cheerily.*) Where to, gents?

DR. HAWKER. (*Impatiently.*) Flat Two. Count Foscatini. (*The Lift Attendant closes the lift gate. He then engages the lift, and we hear the whirring sound of the lift motor. He and the three men are now on their way to the second floor. Inside the lift, Dr. Hawker continues, still impatiently.*) There's been an accident there, I understand.

LIFT ATTENDANT. First I've heard of it. Mr. Graves—that's Count Foscatini's butler—went out about half an hour ago, and he said nothing.

POIROT. Is the Count alone in the flat, *monsieur*?

LIFT ATTENDANT. No, sir, he's got two gentlemen dining with him.

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HASTINGS. These two gentlemen—what are they like?

LIFT ATTENDANT. I didn't see them myself, sir, but I understand they were foreign gentlemen. *(The lift arrives at its destination and the motor sound ceases.)* Here we are, gents. Second floor. *(The Lift Attendant opens the lift gate, and the passengers exit. The Lift Attendant remains in the lift with the gate still open.)* Flat Two's just there, opposite us. Doorbell's to the right.

DR. HAWKER. Thank you. *(Dr. Hawker presses the doorbell to Flat Two, and we hear a buzz. There is a momentary pause.)*

POIROT. Try the bell again, doctor. *(Dr. Hawker tries the doorbell again. Another buzz.)*

DR. HAWKER. I don't hear a sound inside, do you, Poirot?

POIROT. *Non.*

HASTINGS. *(To the Lift Attendant.)* I say, my good man, is there any pass key to this door?

LIFT ATTENDANT. There's one in the manager's office downstairs. *(The Lift Attendant doesn't move.)*

HASTINGS. Well, then, get it, and look here—I think you'd better send for the police—am I right, Poirot?

POIROT. *Oui.* There is something amiss in this flat, I fear. *(The Lift Attendant closes the lift gate. Hastings now addresses the audience directly.)*

HASTINGS. *(Narrating again.)* The lift attendant returned shortly—*(The Lift Attendant opens the lift gate again. The MANAGER has now entered into the lift.)*—and with him came the manager.

MANAGER. *(Approaching, sharply.)* Will you tell me, gentlemen, what is the meaning of all this?

DR. HAWKER. *(Urgently.)* Certainly. I received a telephone message from Count Foscatini stating that he had been attacked and was dying. You can understand that we must lose no time—if we're not already too late.

MANAGER. *(Apologetic, flustered.)* Oh, my word! Well, of course. Just a minute. *(He produces a large ring of keys and starts to search through them.)* I've got the key right here, I think.

HASTINGS. Hurry, man!

MANAGER. I'm sorry ... yes ... yes, here it is.

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HASTINGS. *(Narrating again.)* The manager produced the key without more ado, and we all entered the flat. *(The men, including the Lift Attendant, pass through the door and into the area that represents Flat Two.)*

MANAGER. *(To the Lift Attendant.)* That will be all, Roberts.

LIFT ATTENDANT. But guv'nor—

MANAGER. That will be all.

LIFT ATTENDANT. *(Disappointedlly exiting.)* Yes, guv'nor.

HASTINGS. *(As Hastings continues to address the audience, the other men move through the flat area as Hastings describes it.)* We passed first into a small square entry hall. A door on the right of it was half open. The manager indicated it with a nod.

MANAGER. And here is the dining room.

HASTINGS. *(Still addressing the audience.)* Dr. Hawker led the way. We followed close on his heels. As we entered the room, I gave a gasp. The round table in the center bore the remains of a meal. Three chairs were pushed back, as though their occupants had just risen. In the corner, to the right of the fireplace, was a large writing table, and sitting at it was a man—or what had been a man. *(Slumped over in a chair sits the dead body of COUNT FOSCATINI*. Poirot and Hawker approach the body to examine it. *Note: Having an actor play the dead body of Count Foscatini is entirely optional. It is equally acceptable for the other actors to play the scene as if an actual body were present even though it isn't.)* His right hand still grasped the base of the telephone, but he had fallen forward, struck down by a terrific blow on the head from behind. A marble statuette lay on the desk as well, where it had been hurriedly put down, the base of it stained with blood.

POIROT. What say you, doctor?

DR. HAWKER. Stone dead. Must have been almost instantaneous. I wonder he even managed to telephone. It will be better not to move him until the police arrive.

MANAGER. Hadn't we best, I don't know, search the flat or something?

POIROT. It is unlikely that the murderers are concealed anywhere on the premises when all they had to do was to walk straight out.

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HASTINGS. Still, it's worth a look, don't you think, Poirot? (*No response.*) Poirot? *After waiting a moment for Poirot to respond, Hastings begins narrating again, addressing the audience.*) Receiving no response, the manager and I took a turn around the flat ourselves, but, alas, to no avail. (*Poirot moves away from the dead body to focus his attention on the dining room table.*) Upon our return, I found Poirot studying the dining table with rapt attention.

POIROT. Ah, my friend. What do you see here?

HASTINGS. Well, let's see. We've got a well-polished round mahogany table. A bowl of roses in the center. White lace mats. There is a dish of fruit—but I see the three dessert plates are untouched.

POIROT. What else?

HASTINGS. Three cups, all with the remains of coffee in them—two black, one with milk. A decanter of port, half-full—I'm guessing all three men took some. Two ashtrays—looks like one of them had smoked a cigar, the other two had cigarettes.

POIROT. *Oui.*

HASTINGS. (*Puzzled.*) I must admit, Poirot, I don't know that any of these things shed any brilliant light on the situation.

POIROT. No?

HASTINGS. (*Starting to feel a bit peeved.*) So, just what is it you see that makes you so intent on these things?

POIROT. *Mon ami*, you miss the point. I am looking for something I do *not* see.

HASTINGS. And what is that?

POIROT. A mistake—even a little mistake—on the part of the murderer. (*To the Manager.*) *Monsieur*, you are the manager of this building?

MANAGER. Yes, sir, I am.

POIROT. And the residents—they are served meals that are prepared here in the building?

MANAGER. Oh, yes, sir. The cuisine here is first-class.

POIROT. I see. Will you explain to me, I pray, your system of serving these meals?

MANAGER. I'd be happy to. It's a very modern system, as a matter of fact. If you'll just follow me into the flat's kitchenette— (*The Manager*

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leads Poirot to the flat's kitchenette, Hawker and Hastings following behind. He indicates the service lift.) You see this small hutch in the wall here? This is the service lift, commonly called a “dumbwaiter”—but that sounds so coarse, don't you think? We prefer “service lift.”

POIROT. Go on, *monsieur*.

MANAGER. Yes, of course—as I was saying, the service lift runs to the large kitchens at the top of the building. One orders one's meal through the service telephone— *(Indicating a phone on a wall.)* —conveniently located just here—and the dishes are sent down in the lift, one course at a time. The dirty plates and dishes are sent up to the kitchens in the same manner. No domestic worries, you understand, and at the same time one avoids the wearying publicity of always dining in a restaurant.

POIROT. *Certainement.* Then the plates and dishes that were used here tonight are now on high in the kitchen. If you permit, I will go there?

MANAGER. *(A bit taken aback.)* Oh—of course, if you like. The lift man, Roberts, will take you up and introduce you—but I'm afraid you won't find anything that's of any use. The staff up there are handling hundreds of plates and dishes, and they'll be all lumped together.

POIROT. All the same, I would like to see for myself, *s'il vous plait*.

MANAGER. As you wish. *(The Manager crosses toward the Lift Attendant, who is still at the open lift.)* Roberts?

LIFT ATTENDANT. *(Cheerily.)* Yes, guv'nor?

MANAGER. Would you please take these gentlemen up to the kitchens?

LIFT ATTENDANT. *(Surprised.)* Right-o, guv'nor. *(Then cheerily again.)* Step right in, gents. *(Hawker and the Manager exit as the Lift Attendant escorts Poirot and Hastings into the lift and closes the gate. He starts the lift on its journey and we hear the lift's whirring motor. The lift ascends to an upper floor that houses the kitchens.)* I gather you gents are suddenly feeling a bit peckish?

POIROT. No, *monsieur*, we are not feeling, as you say, “peckish.” Only if you will deliver us to the kitchens, *monsieur*, *s'il vous plait*?

LIFT ATTENDANT. As you wish, guv'nor.

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SCENE 3

The lift stops, as does the motor sound, and the Lift Attendant opens the gate. We hear kitchen sounds of dishes and cutlery being stacked, shuffled, etc., which will continue throughout the scene.

LIFT ATTENDANT. *(Continuing.)* Here we are, gents. Fifth floor kitchens. *(Then, as the men exit to the kitchens area ...)* Bone appateet.

HASTINGS. *(Narrating again, directly addressing the audience.)* Poirot and I visited the kitchens and questioned the member of the kitchen staff—*(A WAITRESS enters to Poirot.)*—who had taken the order from Count Foscatini's flat.

WAITRESS. The order was given from the *à la carte* menu—for three: soup julienne, filet de sole normande, tournedos of beef, and a rice soufflé.

POIROT. I see. And at what time was the order placed?

WAITRESS. What time? Just about eight o'clock, I should say.

POIROT. *Très bien.* And might it be possible for me to examine the dishes that were used for this order?

WAITRESS. Oh, no, I'm terribly sorry. I'm afraid the plates and dishes have been all washed up by now.

POIROT. That is unfortunate.

WAITRESS. You were thinking of fingerprints, I suppose? *(Then, somewhat sheepish.)* I do beg pardon, but truth is, I recognized you straight away from your picture in the papers. You're Hercule Poirot, aren't you? The famous French detective?

POIROT. *(Flattered, but bristling a bit.)* *Oui, madame.* I am the famous Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot.

WAITRESS. I knew it! It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Poirot. A pleasure indeed.

POIROT. And you, *madame.* Now—

WAITRESS. *(Interrupting.)* Anyway, as I said, I'm ever so sorry about the fingerprints.

POIROT. I am less interested in fingerprints, *madame*, than I am in Count Foscatini's appetite. Do you know—did he partake of every dish?

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WAITRESS. Oh, yes—but of course I can't say how much of each he, in particular, ate. The plates were all soiled, and the dishes empty—that is to say, with the exception of the rice soufflé. There was a fair amount of that left.

POIROT. (*Satisfied.*) Ah! *Merci, madame*—you have been most helpful. *Au revoir.*

WAITRESS. (*As Poirot and Hastings leave.*) Oh, you're most welcome. (*Calling after them.*) Wait 'til I tell my Alf I met the one-and-only Hercule Poirot! He won't believe it! (*Kitchen sounds fade as Poirot and Hastings approach the Lift Attendant who has been waiting for them to return.*)

LIFT ATTENDANT. Going down, gents? Second floor again?

HASTINGS. (*As he and Poirot step into the lift.*) Yes, please.

LIFT ATTENDANT. Right-o. (*The Lift Attendant closes the lift gate, and, as the Lift Attendant engages the lift, we hear the whirring sound of the lift motor again. Hastings and Poirot speak as they travel in the lift.*)

POIROT. Decidedly, Hastings, we are dealing with a man of method.

HASTINGS. Do you mean the murderer or Count Foscatini?

POIROT. The Count was undoubtedly an orderly gentleman. After imploring help and announcing his approaching demise, he carefully replaced the telephone receiver.

HASTINGS. (*An idea coming to him.*) Ah, so you suspect poison—and the blow on the head was merely a ruse, then? (*Poirot smiles a curious smile but does not answer. As the lift arrives at its destination, the motor sound ceases.*)

LIFT ATTENDANT. Second floor, gents. (*The Lift Attendant opens the gate. As Poirot and Hastings exit the lift ...*) Good luck catching who done it, guv.

POIROT. It is not a matter of "luck," *monsieur*.

LIFT ATTENDANT. Oh? What is it, then?

POIROT. It is expertise.

LIFT ATTENDANT. Well, good luck with that, then. (*The Lift Attendant closes the gate.*)

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SCENE 4

Poirot shakes his head dismissively as he crosses into the Flat Two area, Hastings following behind.

HASTINGS. *(Narrating again.)* We re-entered the flat to find Dr. Hawker talking with the local police inspector. *(Hawker and INSPECTOR O'DOWD have entered and are engaged in a conversation.)*

DR. HAWKER. *(Seeing Poirot and Hastings.)* Ah, there you are. O'Dowd, this is Hercule Poirot and his colleague Captain Hastings. Gentlemen, Inspector O'Dowd.

HASTINGS. How do you do?

POIROT. How do you do, Inspector?

O'DOWD. So, this is the famous Hercule Poirot, is it? The great private detective? Oh, yes, I know all about you.

POIROT. I am very flattered, *monsieur*—

O'DOWD. *(Interrupting.)* So, Mr. Poirot, I understand the good doctor here was with you when he got the telephone call from the deceased?

POIROT. Yes, that is correct.

O'DOWD. And I hear you've been conducting some of your own investigations into what's happened here?

POIROT. As a matter of fact, Inspector—

O'DOWD. *(Interrupting.)* As a matter of fact, Mr. Poirot, my men and I are on the case now, so I'll thank you to leave the police work to the police.

POIROT. *(Angered.)* *Pour qui vous vous prenez* [Who do you think you are], *monsieur*?

HASTINGS. *(Calming Poirot, taking control of the situation.)* Now, now, now, Poirot. I'm sure this gentleman would be interested to know that Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard is a close friend of yours—

O'DOWD. *(Interrupting.)* Inspector Japp, you say?

HASTINGS. That's right. Inspector Japp.

O'DOWD. *(Uncomfortable.)* Scotland Yard, you say?

HASTINGS. Quite. And not only that, but Inspector Japp routinely relies on Poirot's special expertise. Isn't that right, Poirot?

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POIROT. (*Still angered.*) *Précisément.*

O'DOWD. (*Grudgingly.*) Well, then, ... in that case, ... I suppose you can stay and have a look around. I can't see you'll do any particular harm.

POIROT. (*Through gritted teeth, sarcastic.*) *Merci, Inspector.* We shall endeavor to stay out of your way.

HASTINGS. (*Turning to address the audience, narrating again.*) It was a lucky thing my mention of Inspector Japp convinced O'Dowd to permit us to stay, for it wasn't five minutes before a portly, middle-aged man came rushing into the room with every appearance of grief and anxiety.

(*GRAVES enters the flat excitedly.*) It was Graves, butler to the late Count Foscatini—and the story he had to tell was a sensational one.

GRAVES. (*Out of breath, excited.*) Yesterday morning, you see, two gentlemen arrived here at the flat asking to speak to the Count. They were Italians, and the elder of the two, a man of about forty, gave his name as Signor Ascanio. The younger was a well-dressed lad in his mid-twenties, I'd say.

POIROT. Were these men expected?

GRAVES. Apparently, yes. The Count seemed prepared for their visit, though he hadn't informed me of such. At any rate, he sent me out on an errand to inquire of his tailor about the progress on a new suit of clothes. It occurred to me that the errand was not a particularly pressing one, so, well— (*He stops abruptly, but Poirot pushes ahead.*)

POIROT. Go on, *monsieur.*

GRAVES. I admit that my curiosity got the better of me. I mean, what was the reason for the visit by these men that morning—and why hadn't Count Foscatini told me they'd be calling? So, instead of leaving immediately, I confess I lingered about in the adjacent room, trying to hear something of what they were saying.

POIROT. And what did you hear?

GRAVES. Not much, I'm afraid—but enough to understand that some kind of monetary proposition was being discussed, and that the basis of it was a threat.

HASTINGS. I say!

GRAVES. And I must tell you—the discussion was anything but amicable. In the end, I heard Count Foscatini say clearly that he didn't

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have the time to argue any more with the gentlemen—but if they would come back the following night at eight o'clock for dinner, they could resume their discussion. Just then, I heard footsteps coming toward me. I certainly didn't want to be discovered eavesdropping, so I left quickly.

POIROT. And these two men who came yesterday morning—they were the same who were here this evening for dinner?

GRAVES. The very same. They arrived at eight on the dot.

POIROT. And tonight, during dinner, Monsieur Graves—you had the opportunity to listen and observe?

GRAVES. Strictly in the performance of my duties, yes.

POIROT. And— ?

GRAVES. Well, during dinner they talked of matters of little consequence—politics, the weather, the theatre, what have you. But after dinner, once I'd brought in the port and the coffee, the Count suggested that I take the rest of the evening off.

O'DOWD. Oh, he did, did he? Was that typical of him when he had guests?

GRAVES. No, Inspector, it wasn't. That's what made me think it must be some business of a very unusual kind that he was going to discuss with these gentlemen.

POIROT. And did you do as your employer suggested, Monsieur Graves?

GRAVES. *(Not understanding.)* Excuse me, sir?

POIROT. Did you in fact take the rest of the evening off?

GRAVES. Oh, yes, I did, sir. I believe I left the flat about 8:30.

POIROT. I see. Go on.

HASTINGS. *(Narrating again.)* Graves went on to say he'd met a friend of his who'd accompanied him to the Metropolitan Music Hall in Edgeware Road. Strangely, nobody had seen the Count's two guests leave, but the time of the murder was fixed clearly enough at 8:47. It seems a small clock on the writing table had been swept off by Foscatini's arm and had stopped at that precise minute, which agreed with the account of the telephone summons Dr. Hawker's housekeeper had relayed to us earlier.

(The dead body of Count Foscatini is now lying now prone on a couch. Poirot, Hawker, and O'Dowd are gathered round observing it. Hastings joins them as he continues his narration.)* The police surgeon having made

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his examination, the body was now lying on the couch. For the first time, I saw the face of the dead Count—the olive complexion, the long nose, the luxuriant black moustache, and the full red lips drawn back from the dazzlingly white teeth. Not altogether a very pleasant face.

O'DOWD. Well, the case seems clear enough. The only difficulty will be to lay our hands on this Signor Ascanio. *(Joking.)* I suppose his address isn't in the dead man's pocket by any chance?

POIROT. You have observed, Inspector, that the Count Foscatini was an orderly man.

O'DOWD. Then I think I'll just take a look. *(He gingerly reaches into the dead man's pocket, and—voilà!—he produces a note in his hand.)* Well, glory be and the saints be praised, would you look at that—and the writing just as neat as a schoolmarm: "Signor Paolo Ascanio, Grosvenor Hotel."

HASTINGS. *(Addressing the audience directly, narrating again.)* The inspector placed a telephone call to the hotel then turned to us with a grin.

O'DOWD. Just in time. Our fine Signor was about to leave to catch the boat train to the Continent when my men got there and nabbed the hooligan. *(Changing his tone.)* Well, gentlemen, that's about all we can do here. It's a bad business, but straight-forward enough. One of these Italian vendetta things, like as not.

HASTINGS. *(Narrating still.)* Thus airily dismissed, we left the flat.

SCENE 5

Poirot, Hastings, and Hawker move to the lift. The Lift Attendant has entered, waiting for the men with the lift gate open.

DR. HAWKER. Like the plot of one of those detective stories, eh? Real exciting stuff. Wouldn't believe it if you read about it.

LIFT ATTENDANT. Which way now, gents? *(Poirot, Hastings, and Hawker enter the lift.)*

POIROT. Down, *s'il vous plait.*

LIFT ATTENDANT. *(Closing the lift gate.)* Right-o, guv'nor. *(We hear the whir of the lift motor as the lift descends to the lobby. The men continue their conversation.)*

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DR. HAWKER. So, what says the master detective? Nothing much to work your little grey cells over this time, what?

POIROT. You think not?

DR. HAWKER. What could there be?

POIROT. Well, for example, there is the window.

HASTINGS. The window? But it was fastened. Nobody could have got in or out that way. I noticed it especially.

POIROT. And why were you able to notice it? *(The lift arrives at its destination, and the sound of the motor ceases.)*

LIFT ATTENDANT. First floor lobby. *(As the men exit the lift.)* By the by, guv, didja work out who done it?

POIROT. That, *monsieur*, remains to be resolved. *Je vous souhaite une bonne soirée.* [I bid you good evening.] *(Poirot, Hastings, and Hawker move aside into the lobby.)*

LIFT ATTENDANT. Same to you, gents. Oh revwahr. *(He closes the lift gate and then exits.)*

HASTINGS. I say, Poirot, what did you mean, why was I able to notice the window?

POIROT. It is to the curtains I refer. They were not drawn, but still open. A little odd, that.

HASTINGS. I suppose ...

POIROT. And then there was the coffee. It was very black coffee.

HASTINGS. Well, what of it?

POIROT. Very black. Also, let us remember that very little of the rice soufflé was eaten, and we get—what?

DR. HAWKER. *(Laughing.)* Moonshine, I guess! You're pulling my leg.

POIROT. Never do I pull the leg, *monsieur le docteur*. Hastings here knows that I am perfectly serious.

HASTINGS. But I still don't know what you're getting at. You don't suspect the butler, do you? Do you imagine he might have been in with the gang and put some sort of drug in the coffee? I suppose the police will test his alibi?

POIROT. Without doubt, my friend—but it is the alibi of Signor Ascanio that interests me.

DR. HAWKER. You think he has an alibi?

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POIROT. That is just what worries me. I have no doubt that we shall soon be enlightened on that point.

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