

# **Curtain Study Guide**

## **Curtain by Agatha Christie**

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## Plot Summary

Curtain is a Hercule Poirot mystery novel by the best-selling author Agatha Christie. The story follows the main character, Arthur Hastings, where he embarks on a trip to stay in the Styles guesthouse, which is a house that he once lived in when his friends owned it. Hastings meets his good friend, and famous investigator, Hercule Poirot, who is also staying the Styles guesthouse. Hercule Poirot is a French private investigator that is world renown for solving some of the most perplexing mysteries. When Hastings arrives at the guesthouse, Poirot shows Hastings a paper that describes five different murder cases. Poirot tells Hastings that the murderer, which he names X, is responsible for all five cases.

Poirot says he knows who the killer is but he doesn't know who the intended victim is. Poirot also tells Hastings that he won't reveal to Hastings who X is. Poirot is also very old and has a bad heart. He has just returned from Egypt and so he is in a wheelchair. Poirot tells Hastings that because his mind is able but his body isn't, Poirot needs Hastings to help him with the investigation.

When Mrs. Franklin, the wife of the doctor and Hastings daughter's boss, Dr. Franklin is poisoned, it appears as if X has struck again. While the death is rendered a suicide, Poirot emphatically tells Hastings that she was purposely murdered.

By the end of the novel, Norton, another of the houseguests and who Poirot determines is X, is dead by Poirot's hand. Poirot has also died of what the coroner says is a heart attack.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Captain Hastings receives a letter from his old friend, Hercule Poirot, to return to the Styles. The Styles is country home that was once owned by one of the mutual friends. The house is now a bed and breakfast. When Captain Hastings arrives, he sees that the town itself has not changed much since he last visited it. Mrs. Luttrell, one of owners of Styles, is gardening when Captain Hastings pulls up in the driveway. Her husband, Colonel Luttrell, comes out to greet the Captain and show him to his room. They run into two other guests, Stephen Norton and Sir William Boyd Carrington on the way to the Captain's room. The Colonel tells Hastings that Poirot's room is directly opposite his and then leaves because his wife is calling him.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Captain Hastings foreshadows that a mystery unfolds while he and Hercule are staying at Styles. As the Captain meets each of the house guests, it reveals the characters that will be involved in the mystery that Poirot tries to solve while they are staying at Styles. The fact that Hastings's daughter, Judith, lives on the property also suggests that there will be some family issues that come into play in the story line.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

When Hastings walks into Poirot's room, Hastings notices immediately how much Poirot has aged since he last saw him. Poirot is hunched over in his wheelchair. His face is sunken in and his hair is grey, while his mustache is still jet black. As Poirot describes his deteriorating outer body state to Hastings, he also tells him that he has come to Styles to hunt down a murderer. He goes on to tell Hastings that his mind still works but he has summoned Hastings to help him with the physical aspects of hunting down the murderer.

Hastings tells Poirot the guests he has met and Poirot fills Hastings in on the other people that are staying at Styles. Poirot hands Hastings a paper that describes five different murder cases. After reading the cases, Hastings says he doesn't understand because there is no connection between the cases. Poirot says the connection is that all of the cases have one clear suspect and no others. Poirot assures Hastings that there is one person that knows someone in all five cases, which propels him to infer that this individual is the murderer. Poirot goes on to say that the person that is connected to all five cases is in the house.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

One of the house guests is the murderer Poirot suspects of being involved in all five of the murder cases. He is setting the scene for the murder investigation. Poirot is also setting the scene for pointing out the murderer to the innocent people in the house and having this said person convicted of all of the crimes.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Hastings says that Poirot has to stop the murderer from striking again. Poirot points out that it is difficult to do this, explaining the three ways to attempt to stop the murder from occurring. Besides the three ways Poirot spells out for stopping the murder, he also points out that he doesn't know who the intended victim is.

Before they finish their conversation, Hastings's daughter Judith comes into the room. Dr. Franklin enters the room shortly after Judith does. Dr. Franklin talks for a few minutes and then when he realizes the time, he rushes off to read to his invalid wife, Mrs. Franklin. Judith puts down Mrs. Franklin for always complaining about her health and being so feminine. Poirot rings his bell and Curtiss, his caretaker comes in to care for him. Poirot locks up the papers explaining that cases that he showed to Hastings.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Poirot implies that the murderer is there to murder one of the other guests. Not only does Poirot have to figure out who the murderer is, but he also has to try to figure out who the intended victim is. Poirot implies to Hastings that he knows who the murderer is but that he cannot divulge this information to Hastings because Hastings will give it away.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

As Hastings dress for dinner, he ponders how sound Poirot's mind is. On the way into dinner, Hastings meets two other guests, Miss Cole and Major Allerton. As they sit down to dinner, Hastings looks over the group to try to deduce which is the mystery kill Poirot has name "X." One by one, Hastings dismisses the possibilities, deciding only that Miss Cole or Major Allerton could be the killer. As Hastings looks out the dining room window, he remembers a child paying on the front lawn.

Judith interrupts her father's thoughts. When she asks him why he was acting strange at dinner, staring at everyone, he says he was remembering the past. She mentions that an old woman was murdered in the home when he was living there before, and he concurs that she was poisoned.

Judith mentions a scenario that sounds similar to one of the cases Hastings read on Poirot's sheet. She is talking about an old brute with a lot of money. When the woman set her loved ones free, they called her mad. Judith mentions that it someone that the Franklins know. Judith is talking about the Litchfield case, in which the eldest daughter confesses to murdering her parent so that her siblings can live freely off their inheritance. Judith tells her father that Mrs. Franklin would like him to visit her in her room since she is too ill to come down to dinner.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Hastings has jumped to the conclusion that "x" is a man, but could very possibly be a woman. Hastings is remembering back to a previous time, when he lived in the home, when there was another murder there. It seems as if Judith might be in love with Dr. Franklin and this is why Judith talks so poorly of Mrs. Franklin. The fact that the Franklins are connected to at least one of the cases on Poirot's sheet suggests that they are suspects. Most likely, it is Dr. Franklin, since Mrs. Franklin is an invalid unless of course, Mrs. Franklin is pretending to be an invalid.





# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Mrs. Franklin greets Hastings. She introduces her nurse to him and says that Judith has been working too hard. This causes Dr. Franklin to suggest that Judith that they go to the lab for work. After Dr. Franklin and Judith leave, Boyd Carrington tells Hastings the he and Barbara Franklin are old playmates.

Hastings goes to Poirot's room and they discuss which guests Hastings thinks of as suspects. When Hastings suggests that all he has to do is figure out which of the guests knows the people in the cases, Poirot admonishes Hastings. He tells Hastings that the owners know all of the guests or the Luttrells' friends refer people they know, so that this is not the way for Hastings to uncover who "X" is.

Hastings tells Poirot it's ridiculous that he won't tell him who "X" is because he's afraid Hastings will say something. Poirot says that he is concerned about Hastings' safety and that is why he will not reveal who "X" is.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

It seems as if Dr. Franklin and Judith might be more than colleagues. It suggests that they are having an affair as well. Boyd Carrington suggests that he fell in love with Barbara Franklin when he left home and she was a child, but returned home to find that she was a lovely young woman. Carrington and Hastings leave Mrs. Franklin. Carrington tells Hastings that he thinks the foundation of Barbara's illness is her nerves because she is sensitive and Dr. Franklin doesn't pay enough attention to her.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Hastings walks downstairs with Poirot's nurse, Curtiss. Curtiss tells Hastings of Poirot's failing health, especially his heart attacks. Hastings joins the others downstairs to play cards. Hastings witnesses Mrs. Luttrell's cheating and harshness toward Colonel Luttrell and her opponents. As Norton leaves the room with Hastings, Norton mentions Mrs. Luttrell's crassness and how her husband just takes it.

Hastings notices the side door to the garden is still open. When he says he thinks they should shut it, Norton grudgingly says that Judith and Allerton are still out of the house. Hastings restlessly tries to fall asleep. When he can't, he goes to Poirot's room to see if he has sleeping pills. On the way, he runs into Allerton. Allerton offers him some sleeping pills. Hastings asks Allerton if he knows Etherington, which is one of the people involved in the cases. Allerton says he did. When Hastings goes back to bed, he definitely thinks Allerton is X.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Norton implies that something is going on between Allerton and Judith. Hastings finds this ironic because Judith is so immune to the charms of someone like Major Allerton, who appears to be a womanizer. Hastings mentioning Etherington to Allerton might alert Allerton that Hastings thinks he is X, if in fact Allerton is X.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Hastings starts to realize how sick Poirot is. This also makes him realize that his role in the investigation will be more so than usual. Hastings tries to understand the scientific experiments that Judith and Dr. Franklin are conducting. Hastings becomes more interested, however, when he overhears a conversation between Franklin and Poirot about the ordeal bean Franklin is testing.

Franklin tells Poirot the bean is thought to kill the guilty and spare the innocent in certain African tribes. Franklin suggests that the world could do without 80% of the population.

Hastings decides to speak with Judith about her relationship with Allerton. It doesn't go well. Judith gets angry and tells her father that she is an adult and that he shouldn't meddle in her affairs. Nurse Craven comes along after Judith leaves and they talk about Mrs. Franklin's health. Nurse Craven asks if it's true that Hastings was at Styles during the war and if there was a murder in the house. He says yes to both.

The nurse mention the aura that house has. She also mentions having to testify in a murder case for one of her patients once. Carrington interrupts and invites Hastings to go see his property nearby. Carrington and Hastings talk about Poirot and about how he knows the Luttrells. Carrington also mentions a woman he would have married after his wife died but didn't. His description of her sounds familiar to Hastings.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

The case Nurse Craven mentions links her to one of the cases on Poirot's sheet. Carrington's description of the woman he wanted to marry after his wife sounds familiar to Hastings because it sounds like that of Nurse Carven, Mrs. Franklin's nurse.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Hastings continues to try to persuade Poirot into telling him who the murderer is. Poirot continues to deny him the information. The following day, Hastings tries to get Poirot to tell Carrington who the murderer is so that he can help them. Poirot emphatically says no.

Hastings is sitting, contemplating who the potential murderers are and their motives for committing murder. He's also thinking of potential victims, when Miss Cole joins him. Right before Miss Cole sits, Hastings observes Dr. Franklin walking from his lab toward the house and notes on unhappy a man Franklin is. He mentions this to Miss Cole, who agrees. She says Judith told her that Franklin was offered a position to finish his research in Africa, but that Mrs. Franklin wouldn't let him go. One of the reasons is because she would have had to stay behind and her standard of living would have fallen because the pay wasn't good.

When Hastings mentions that young people should have fun, Miss Cole says she doesn't know because she has never experienced those things. Miss Cole says she has known the Luttrells all her life. They talk about the people staying at the guest house and Hastings thinks about the people who lived in the house when his friend owned it. He realizes that none of them were happy then and none of the people staying in the house now are happy either.

Miss Cole admits that Cole is her mother's name. Her real last name is Litchfield. She is the sister of the woman that turned herself in for murdering her father so that her siblings could enjoy their inheritance. Miss Cole states that it wasn't Maggie who turned herself in to the police.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Hastings is trying to figure out who the murderer and the victim are on his own. It is not until Miss Cole provides him with further insight into some of the guests that Hastings truly gains some clues. He finds out that Miss Cole is another guest at the house that is related to one of the cases on Poirot's list. Miss Cole also implies that the woman who turned herself into the police was not her eldest sister but someone posing as her oldest sister.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Miss Cole and Hastings see Colonel Luttrell passing on the path below with some pigeons and his rifle. They call out to him and he invites them, and Norton, in for a drink. When Mrs. Luttrell finds out, while catching the Colonel opening a bottle inside of the house, she says that the drinks have to be paid for and that she always has to watch out for him like he's a child. When the Colonel comes back out, he tells them he is out of Whisky.

As Hastings watches Mrs. Luttrell head out to her garden, he thinks that no human being has the right to humiliate another human being. Carrington comes along and shares a funny story with the group. When he leaves, everyone talks about what a great guy he is.

The Colonel spots a pigeon and takes aim at it. The pigeon gets away, but the Colonel sees a rabbit in the garden. He shoots and there is a scream. The Colonel realizes he has shot his wife. Norton and Hastings run to see to Mrs. Luttrell. Hastings tells Norton to get Franklin or a nurse. It's Nurse Craven who comes to tend to Mrs. Luttrell's wound in the shoulder. Franklin comes shortly after and they get Mrs. Luttrell in the house, bandaged and put to bed.

Franklin offers to give the Colonel a pick-me-up but he refuses it. Hastings spots Judith and Allerton coming up the path with their heads bent together laughing. He yells down to them to tell them what happened and Judith mentions is unfortunate. Allerton jokes about the possibility that it wasn't an accident. When Hastings tells Carrington the news, he asks the same question.

Hastings goes to Poirot's room to talk with him about the incident. Nurse Craven knocks on Poirot's door saying that Mrs. Luttrell is asking for her husband. Hastings takes the Colonel into to see his wife and he says thank God you're alright to her, which makes Hastings feel guilty about the thoughts they had about the Colonel shooting her on purpose.

After dinner, and after spending time talking to Poirot, Hastings goes to bed. This is when it hits him that if Mrs. Luttrell had died, the case would have looked like the other five cases on Poirot's list. Hastings starts to wonder if X shot Mrs. Luttrell at the same time the Colonel was shooting at the rabbit.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

It's ironic that Boyd Carrington is in the company of this group. All of them have problems and issues, but Carrington is a former governor and rich. He did tell Hastings, however, that he is lonely since his wife died. Carrington is one of the most charismatic



members of the group, and an individual they all seem to get along with. This, too, is the characteristic of many serial killers, so it could make Carrington the murderer. It's ironic that the Colonel ends up shooting his wife after she just humiliated him in front of half of the house guests.

Because Hastings dislikes Allerton, he reacts to him saying the Colonel shot his wife on purpose with outrage. Hastings has the total opposite reaction when Carrington says the same thing because Hastings likes Carrington.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Hastings tells Poirot his thought the next morning. Poirot praises Hastings for his insight, saying he didn't want to prompt him. Poirot admits that he thinks he knows the motive for all of the cases, but he still won't tell Hastings. The only evil person Hastings can think of is Allerton, so he goes to ask Judith where she and Allerton were coming from after the shooting. Judith gets very angry with her father. Judith admits she was in the village getting stamps and she ran into Allerton near the house upon her return.

Later, Hastings comes to find out that Allerton is a married man. Allerton's wife left him shortly after they were married but because she is a devout Catholic, they have never divorced.

Mrs. Franklin seems to be jealous that Mrs. Luttrell is getting all of the attention. Mrs. Franklin even suggests to Hastings that she sometimes thinks of ending it all so that she won't be a burden on Dr. Franklin. When Hastings tells Nurse Craven this, the nurse says it's nonsense.

Another day, Mrs. Franklin is dressed and looking normal. Poirot sees her coming out of her husband's lab, saying she needed to fetch her purse that she left there because she is going to Carrington's estate. After Mrs. Franklin walks away, Hastings remarks to Poirot how Mrs. Franklin plays many different roles but that they are all overdone. Nurse Craven then comes to fetch Mrs. Franklin's gloves.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Judith placing Allerton near the house when the shooting occurs implies that he could be the shooter. Mrs. Franklin being in the lab suggests that she might be accessing some of the chemicals or medications that her husband and Judith are experimenting with. It foreshadows that the next attempt on someone's life might be a poisoning or overdose of some kind.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Judith, Hastings, Norton and Carrington are having a discussion about euthanasia. Judith insists that people are able to make decisions about putting a dog down and that the same should hold true for humans. As they are all returning to the house for a meal, Norton mentions to Hastings that he shouldn't allow Judith to hang around with Allerton. He tells Hastings a story of a young girl, similar to Judith that Allerton had fall in love with him. It ended with her suicide. Hastings is able to verify the details of the story are true.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

It is ironic that the four are having a discussion about killing another human being because there is a murderer and a victim among the house guests. Now that Judith has confessed to being able to make the choice to put someone out of their misery, it adds her to the suspect list. So far, almost all of the house guests have expressed being willing or able to kill another human being, so the suspect list is quite long. The story that Norton tells Hastings about Allerton creates even more suspicion about Allerton.





# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Hastings doesn't share the information about Allerton with Poirot. After lunch, Carrington pulls Hastings aside and says he should keep Judith away from Allerton because of his reputation. Hastings finds Judith alone sitting on the swing with an unhappy expression on her face. He warns her that being involved with a married man isn't any good for her. Judith is infuriated and tells her father she hates him.

After Judith leaves, Norton and Miss Cole come along. They take Hastings on a walk to look at birds and the flora. Norton sees what he says is a speckled woodpecker in his looking glasses, but what he sees seems to trouble him. When Hastings grabs the glasses away from him, he sees what appears to be a white dress scrambling into the woods.

Carrington and Mrs. Franklin return from Carrington's home and a shopping trip. While Hastings is carrying some items up to Mrs. Franklin's room, he sees Judith come out of Allerton's room. He tells her the story Norton told him and says he forbids her from what she's doing. She says she does love him and that her father can't bully her.

After dinner, Judith wanders off to the side of the house. Hastings sees Allerton follow in the same direction, so Hastings follows Allerton. Norton tries to stop Hastings, but they both catch Allerton and Judith kissing. As Hastings walks past the summerhouse, he hears Allerton telling who Hastings assumes is Judith that she should say she's going into town and he'll say he's going to stay with a friend. They can meet at his flat and have dinner together. Hastings forms a plan in his mind but doesn't share his intentions with Norton.

Hastings steals eight of Allerton's sleeping pills—replacing the missing pills with eight aspirin so the bottle will look the same. Then Hastings invites Allerton to have a whisky with him in his room, Hastings dissolving the sleeping tablets into the drink he plans to give to Allerton. Curtiss knocks on Hastings door, saying Poirot wants to see him. Hastings visits with Poirot and then returns to his room to wait for Allerton to come upstairs. While he waits, Hastings feels as if his dead wife, Cinders is with him.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Hastings never mentions Allerton's name in his discussion with Judith. It seems as if Judith thinks her father is talking about Dr. Franklin, who she is in love with, and doesn't realize he is talking about Allerton. Whatever Norton saw through his glasses, he wanted to prevent Hastings from seeing it, which suggests that it was Judith he saw doing something that concerned Norton.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Hastings awakes the next morning, having fallen asleep before getting the chance to poison Major Allerton to death. Hastings opens his window and dumps out the poisoned drink. He showers, dresses and then goes to Poirot's room to confess his intentions. Poirot tells Hastings all of the ways he would have been caught for the murder. Hastings asks Poirot if the house has an ailment of murder in it. Poirot suggests Hastings do nothing about Judith and Allerton.

At breakfast, Hastings thinks Judith changed her mind about meeting Allerton in London because she heads off to the lab with Franklin. Hastings finds out that it is supposed to be Nurse Craven's day off but that Mrs. Franklin falling ill has kept her from enjoying it. Everyone seems to ignore Mrs. Franklin's complaints, except Boyd Carrington, who feels guilty for causing Barbara to overdo it the day before on their excursions.

In the afternoon, the rain stops and everyone comes out to enjoy the outdoors. Even Mrs. Luttrell comes down, looking better and in a better mood than ever before. When Judith comes down, she joins Franklin and tells everyone Mrs. Franklin is feeling better and wants everyone to join her for coffee later. They all drink coffee, Hastings works on the crossword puzzle and then most of them retire to the balcony to wish on a shooting star. Franklin leaves the room and Judith follows. When Hastings leaves, he finds Judith and Franklin looking out the window together. Hastings walks with Franklin, who seems more chipper than usual. Franklin says that it's because he did something different tonight that changes everything.

Hastings finds Judith in Poirot's room and Judith forgives her father. Later that night, Mrs. Franklin takes violently ill and dies of poisoning,

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Because Judith goes to the lab with Franklin instead of meeting Allerton in London, it suggests that Allerton was talking to someone other than Judith when Hastings overheard the conversation. Because it was supposed to be Nurse Craven's day off and Allerton has left to visit his friend, which was part of the rendezvous plan, it implies that it was Nurse Carven Allerton was speaking to the night before.

Hastings saying he wishes he had paid better attention to the details surrounding Mrs. Franklin's illnesses suggests that she dies. Franklin's mood and statements implies that he is the one responsible for poisoning his wife.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

When Dr. Franklin gives his statement, he admits that one of the bottles in his lab that contained the poison that killed Mrs. Franklin, had been replaced with water. He doesn't know when it occurred because he hadn't used that bottle in quite some time. He testifies that he and Miss Hastings are the only two with keys to the lab, and that Mrs. Franklin borrowed his key when she left things behind in the lab. He says he never brought test tubes from the lab into the house so there isn't any way Mrs. Franklin could have taken the alkaloid that poisoned her by accident.

Nurse Craven testifies about what Mrs. Franklin ate and drank the night of her death. She also mentions that Mrs. Franklin spoke often of "ending it all." She mentions that Mrs. Franklin's mood was good, if not overexcited the night of her death. Judith testifies that she doesn't know how the tube would have been removed from the lab. She also says she never heard Mrs. Franklin talk about killing herself. Poirot testifies that he was sitting outside the lab door when he saw Mrs. Franklin come out of the lab with a bottle in her hand. The jury gives the verdict that Mrs. Franklin took her own life during a state of unsound mind.

Hastings goes into Poirot's room to ask if Poirot's testimony was the truth. Poirot never says, but he does say that Mrs. Franklin was murdered. Poirot says since the verdict came in as suicide, it closes the official case, which permits he and Hastings to determine who X is.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

The Franklin case is shaping up to be like the other cases on Poirot's list. The evidence is pointing in the direction of Dr. Franklin being the only likely suspect. Even though the jury says Mrs. Franklin took her own life, there is implication that Dr. Franklin switched the alkaloid for one of Mrs. Franklin's aspirins and this is how she ingested the poison. Nurse Craven says she took an aspirin before going to bed, so this would explain how it got into her system and the bottle of poison was never discovered.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Hastings doesn't remember much about the days following the inquest. He does remember an old woman approaching him at the cemetery. She suggests it was the doctor that murdered his wife and that it's odd that Hastings was present at this death and the death of the previous owner, who was thought to be murdered by her husband.

Poirot's health is deteriorating. Poirot admits that the heart doctor he saw previously says he is doing everything he can for him. Poirot tells Hastings this will be his last, but his most interesting case. Poirot agrees to see a doctor, but only agrees to see Franklin. After examining Poirot, Franklin tells Hastings that it is hopeless and that Poirot's heart could give out at any minute. He also tells Hastings that the job in Africa is still open and that he's leaving for it shortly. He says he isn't sad from his wife's death. He says he fell out of love with her shortly after they married. Franklin also admits that he doesn't think his wife committed suicide, but also doesn't want to know what really happened to her either.

Norton comes to Hastings to ask him an ethical question. Hastings guesses that Norton saw something in his looking glasses the day Hastings was walking with him and Miss Cole. Hastings asks if it has something to do with Mrs. Franklin's death. Norton says it could. Hastings suggests Norton confide in Poirot and get his advice.

Hastings tells Poirot. Poirot says to have Norton come see him, but not tell anyone else.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

It foreshadows the death of Hercule Poirot. Franklin implies that he knows someone murdered his wife. He also implies that he might know who it is, but that he's better off not knowing the truth. Poirot thinks that Norton's life is in danger if X finds out that he might have seen something that links X to Mrs. Franklin's murder.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Hastings tells Norton not to tell anyone else until he speaks to Poirot. When Hastings asks if anyone else knows, Norton hesitates at first, but then emphatically says no. Hastings runs into Miss Cole. When Hastings implies there is something romantic between Norton and Miss Cole, she denies it, saying they are only friends. She says she could never marry after what happened with her family. Hastings tells Miss Cole that her sister did not kill their father and that he will prove it to her one day.

On the way back to the house, Hastings runs into Carrington. He says it's his last night at the house because he's moving to his own house. He also mentions that Nurse Craven told him that she thinks Franklin killed Barbara and Carrington agrees. Carrington also mentions that Nurse Craven is back at the house, staying tonight, even though she had left after the funeral.

Hastings visits Poirot on the way down to dinner. Poirot tells Hastings that if he dies before he solves the case that he has left all of the clues for Hastings in Poirot's case.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

Hastings implies that Norton's hesitation means that Norton did tell someone else about seeing something. It foreshadows that Norton is the second victim of X. Hastings worries that Nurse Craven might be back to avenge Mrs. Franklin's death by harming Dr. Franklin.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

After dinner, Norton goes up to talk to Poirot. That night, Hastings awakes in the middle of the night. When he looks into the hall, he sees Norton in his dressing gown going back into his room from the bathroom. He hears Norton turn the key and lock the door. Hastings wonders if Poirot told Norton to lock his door. Hastings locks his door and goes back to bed.

In the morning, Poirot tells Hastings that he can't yet tell him what Norton saw. Poirot says the case is ended but that he has a few loose ties to wrap up. As Poirot falls asleep, he says he'll tell Hastings the details tomorrow. After breakfast, Hastings runs into Carrington, who says that Norton is still asleep. When they go up to his room, the maid says he's not answering.

When they break the door down, they find Norton on his bed. He's dressed in his dressing gown with the key in his pocket. He has a small pistol in his hand and is shot in the head.

Hastings tells Poirot that Norton is dead and explains the circumstances to Poirot. Poirot says that Norton was murdered too. When Hastings leaves, it's the last time that he'll see Poirot alive because when Curtiss returns to the room, Poirot is dead.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

The implication is that Norton dies because X knows what he saw that day through his glasses. There is also an implication that Poirot, the only other person that knows what Norton saw, is also killed by X so that Poirot cannot say what Norton saw.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

They say Poirot died of a heart attack, but his medicine was not by his bed. Hastings believes Poirot was killed by X too. The inquest renders Norton's death a suicide. The only strange part, according to the coroner, is his shooting himself in the middle of the forehead. Hastings removes the key from around Poirot's neck to open his case. Hastings finds that the papers on the X cases are missing, which means that X took them. The only thing Hastings finds is two books of two different plays in Poirot's case. A slip of paper falls out of one of the books telling Hastings to talk to Georges, which was Poirot's valet prior to Curtiss.

They bury Poirot. Then, Judith comes to Hastings. She tells him she isn't returning to London, but accompanying Franklin to Africa as his wife. Hastings starts to think that X was a fabrication on Poirot's part and instead he was there to watch over Judith and the Franklin ménage the entire time.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

The fact that the X cases papers are missing suggests Poirot destroyed them before his death so that nobody else could find them—indicating the cases were fabrications on his part. Poirot's mention of the "curtain" to Hastings is also an indication that he was talking about a performance, something that was made up and not true.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

Hastings visits Georges, which was Poirot's valet for many years, prior to Curtiss. Poirot told Hastings Georges left to take care of his father but Georges says this isn't the case. Hastings realizes that Curtiss is X.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

It seems as if Poirot knew he was dying. This is why he returned to her first true home, Styles. This is also why he replaced Georges with Curtiss. Poirot knew that Curtiss was the one that was capable of murder because he was once in an insane asylum and then returned to work at it when he became a nurse.





# Postscript

## Postscript Summary

Four months after Poirot's death, Hastings receives a manuscript from Poirot. Poirot explains all of the clues and details of the cases to Hastings. He says that Norton is the one person that is connected to all of the cases. Although Norton is quiet, he is evil. He uses her persuasions to convince other people to commit the murders. In each case, he knew someone involved and Norton convinced them that the person they were murdering would be better off dead.

Poirot says Hastings accepts everything at face value. For example, Hastings thinks it is Judith Allerton is convincing to meet him London. Poirot points out that there is only one person that had the day off and was mad when she couldn't go and that was Nurse Craven.

Poirot admits the replacing Georges with Curtiss because Curtiss is much less intelligent than Georges. Poirot admits that he could walk the entire time he was at Styles. He walked with a limo, similar to how Norton walked with a limp.

Poirot also tells Hastings that it is Hastings himself that killed Barbara Franklin. Poirot explains that Mrs. Franklin intended on poisoning her husband with the coffee she served the night of her death. When everyone went out to see the shooting star, Hastings stayed behind. When Mrs. Franklin returns to the room, she accidentally drinks the tainted coffee that was meant for her husband. Poirot had to let the suicide notion go through because it would have been Judith and Dr. Franklin that were the primary suspects otherwise. When Norton made up his story of seeing who he alluded to was Judith and Allerton at first, he easily could have changed it to Judith and Franklin to make them suspects. Poirot confronts Norton when Norton comes up to speak to Poirot the night of his death. Poirot drugs Norton, places Norton in his wheelchair so that Curtiss puts to be who he thinks is Poirot. Because Poirot wears a wig, he removed it to impersonate Norton to make Hastings think he sees Norton walking into his room.

Poirot tells Hastings to let Elizabeth Cole—Elizabeth Litchfield—read his letter or to tell her the truth. He says she should know that is the family friend Norton that killed her father, not her sister of her own accord.

## Postscript Analysis

The night that Hastings thinks he sees Norton going from the bathroom to his bedroom, who he really saw was Poirot. Poirot was dressed as Norton so that he could kill "X" who was actually Norton.



# Characters

## Hercule Poirot

Hercule Poirot is French. He is a famous investigator responsible for solving some of the toughest cases in the country and even the world. He's an older gentlemen in his 70s. He is not married and doesn't have any children.

His health is failing. When the novel opens, Poirot is staying in a guesthouse ins Styles St. He has just returned from a trip to Egypt, where he saw a doctor about his heart problems. He is in a wheelchair and he has let his longtime caretaker, Georges go, and replaced him with a new caretaker, Curtiss.

Poirot's keen senses and attention to detail are what helps him to solve his murder cases, robberies, and other mysteries. Poirot invites his long time friend, Arthur Hastings, to Styles to solve five murder cases. He tells Hastings that he needs Hastings to take care of physical aspects of the investigation, as well as be his eyes and ears, because Poirot doesn't get around as well as he used to. Poirot doesn't come downstairs to dinner in the novel, but retires to his room prior to dinner starting.

Occasionally, Poirot has Curtiss push his wheelchair outside to take in the fresh air. During his life, Poirot has always been somewhat of a hypochondriac. Now that Poirot knows he's dying, he isn't so concerned with his health, but is really biding his time until his heart takes him, but hoping to solve the murder cases prior to going.

## Captain Arthur Hastings

Captain Arthur Hastings is one of Poirot's best friends. He is the narrator of the novel and he is beckoned to Styles by Poirot. Hastings was married and has three grown children. His wife, Cinders, is dead. One of his daughter's, Judith, is staying at Styles.

Hastings also previously lived in Styles. It was a couple of decades prior to the novel taking place. One of Hastings's friends owned the home at the time. when Hastings was living there, a murder took place then as well. Hastings wonders if the house carries a curse, now that three more people are dead at Styles.

According to Poirot, Hastings is very one-sighted. Once Hastings sees something or hears something, he takes it face value. Hastings doesn't dig or investigate what he hears or sees to determine that various possibilities, but tends to focus on one and stick to it.



## Mrs. Daisy Luttrell

Mrs. Daisy Luttrell is a frail elderly lady. She has a lot of white curly hair, rosy pink cheeks and blue eyes. She runs the Styles guesthouse with her husband, Colonel Luttrell. She is known for being a very shrewd business woman, so she is relatively strict with the food, drink and caretaking of the guests and the guesthouse property.

When she plays bridge, she tends to cheat. Additionally, she is very harsh with her husband. She seems to tease, taunt and rule over him. At one point in the novel, her husband accidentally shoots Daisy while she is tending in the garden, mistaking her for a rabbit.

After she recovers, she seems to be a little nicer. She still cheats at bridge, but she doesn't seem to be as harsh on her husband or on the other guests.

## Colonel Luttrell

Colonel Luttrell owns the Style bed and breakfast with his wife Mrs. Luttrell. He is a very tall and elderly. He has mild blue eyes and a habit of tugging at his white moustache. He acts vague and nervous. While the Colonel is known for being an excellent shot, he mistakes his wife for a rabbit and ends up shooting her, mistaking her for a rabbit. He seems to bow down to his wife and so the Colonel does what she says and what she asks of him.

## Stephen Norton

Stephen Norton is a man that Captain Hastings runs into on the stairs when Captain Hastings first arrives at Styles. Stephen loves bird watching. Stephen has grey hair and a medium build. He walks with a slight limp.

Norton is into bird watching, so he is always carrying special glasses to spot birds. Throughout the novel, Norton is continuously planting ideas in people's heads. For example, he makes Hastings believe that Judith and Allerton are having an affair. Norton also tells Colonel Luttrell that he is thirsty, so when the Colonel tries to serve Norton a dna few others free drink, his wife admonishes him so that everyone overhears.

Norton is shot in the head one night in his room. It is the same night that he reveals to Poirot that he saw something that might pertain to Mrs. Franklin's death. By the end of the novel, Poirot reveals in a letter to Hastings that Norton is X and that Poirot is responsible for killing Norton to put an end to his streak of murders.



## Sir William Boyd Carrington

Sir William Boyd Carrington is in his fifties. He is good looking and has a deep tan. He looks as if he spends a lot of time outdoors. His character and personality are very attractive and Captain Hastings decides he likes Sir William Boyd Carrington at once. He also gives off an aura of a typical old Englishman, which is a rare commodity. He is also a former governor of a province in India.

Carrington is childhood friends with Barbara Franklin. It seems that he is in love with Mrs. Franklin, but doesn't get to do anything about it because Mrs. Franklin dies. Carrington owns an estate close to the guesthouse and so by the end of the novel, the estate is ready from the renovations for him to move.

## Miss Elizabeth Cole

Miss Cole is a tall and attractive woman. She is one of the house guests staying at Styles. She is approximately 33 or 34 years old. Later in the novel, she reveals to Hastings that Cole is her mother's maiden name and that she is really Elizabeth Litchfield. The Litchfield case is one of the cases on Poirot's list.

Elizabeth's father was a rich tyrant that kept a tight reign on his family. When he is murdered, an investigation determines it was murder. Elizabeth's oldest sister, Maggie Litchfield, turns herself in as her father's murderer. Maggie says she turned herself in so that the rest of her siblings could enjoy their inheritance.

Miss Cole and Norton seem to become good friends in the novel. She thinks she shouldn't marry, however, because she is tainted because of her family history. When Poirot reveals to Hastings that Norton was the family friend that convinced Maggie to kill her father, making Norton X, Poirot encourages Hastings to allow Elizabeth to see the letter so that she can understand that she isn't tainted and can live a normal life.

## Major Allerton

Major Allerton is another guest at Styles. Hastings puts him in his 40s. Allerton looks like he lives a life full of drinking and gambling. He has big bags under his eyes and Hastings takes an instant dislike to him.

Allerton is popular with the women and unpopular with the men. Hastings believes that Allerton is wooing Judith and that Judith is in love with Allerton. Norton reveals to Hastings that Allerton was involved with a young woman similar to Judith's age before and that she ended up committing suicide over Allerton. Norton also tells Hastings that Allerton is married, but that his wife left him years ago. Since his wife is a devout Catholic, she won't grant him a divorce, however.



## Mrs. Barbara Franklin

Mrs. Barbara Franklin is Dr. Franklin's wife. She is in her thirties. She has big brown eyes, parts her hair down the middle, and possesses a long, gentle face. She is very thin and she is so pale that her skins has a transparent appearance.

Mrs. Franklin spends a lot of time in her room because she is ill. Everyone says she is sick because of a nervous condition, rather than a physical ailment. Throughout the novel, her mood seems to swing from happy, chipper and healthy to sickly, complaining and taking to her bed.

Mrs. Franklin is poisoned to death. The coroner's verdict is that it is a suicide. Poirot reveals to Hastings in his letter that Mrs. Franklin accidentally poisoned herself in an attempt to poison and kill her husband, so that she could be with Boyd Carrington.

## Nurse Craven

Nurse Craven is the caretaker for Mrs. Franklin. She is a tall and attractive woman. She has auburn hair, with long, white hands. At times, Nurse Craven does not speak when something is asked of her but instead turns her head as if she is trying to understand or doesn't understand what the speaker is saying.

## Judith Hastings

Judith Hastings is Captain Hastings daughter. Judith works with Dr. Franklin as his assistant. She is assisting him in experimenting on a potential new drug from an African plant. Judith is very hard-edged and unemotional. She is very loyal to Dr. Franklin and a hard worker. It turns out that Judith and Dr. Franklin are in love. When Mrs. Franklin dies, Dr. Franklin accepts a research position in Africa and Judith plans to join him as his wife.

## Dr. John Franklin

Dr. John Franklin is tall and gangly. He is clumsy and always knocking things over and bumping into things. He is also a brilliant scientist. He is conducting research experiments on an African plant that might produce a new drug that treats an African disease. He seems to be indifferent when it comes to his wife and her illness. When his wife dies, he seems relieved and tells Hastings that he has accepted the job in Africa. He admits to Hastings that he and Barbara were in love, but shortly after they married, each of them fell out of love with one another.



# Objects/Places

## Styles St. Mary

Styles St. Mary is town where the guesthouse is. When Hastings arrives in the town, he notices that it hasn't changed much since he was there decades before. It is a small, countryside town somewhere in England.

## Styles Guesthouse

The Styles guesthouse is a bed and breakfast in Styles St. Mary's. In previous years, Hastings' friend owned the home and Hastings lived there after the first war. Now, the home owners are Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell. The guesthouse is the primary setting for the entire novel. The house is also the location of several murders and deaths, including the wife of Hastings' friend decades prior, and Mrs. Franklin, Norton, and Poirot during the novel.

## Case List

The case list is a sheet that Poirot put together describing the five cases he thinks one person is responsible for committing. He shows this list to Hastings upon his arrival at Styles. Poirot keeps the case list locked in his case. When Poirot dies and Hastings opens the box to retrieve the information, the case list is missing.

## Lab

The lab is a separate building on the Styles estate. It is the building that Dr. Franklin and Judith are using for their experiments. It comes out that Poirot sees Mrs. Franklin exiting the lab with a bottle in her hand shortly before her death. It also turns out that the poison used to kill Mrs. Franklin came from the lab.

## Pistol

A small pistol is the weapon that kills Norton. The gun is found in Norton's hand. The maid testifies that she saw the gun on his nightstand a couple of times when she was cleaning. The investigator determines the pistol belonged to Norton. In his letter to Hastings, Poirot admits to using the pistol to kill Norton.



## Bird Watching Glasses

Norton is almost always carrying around the special glasses he uses for bird watching. They are a type of binocular. It is through these glasses that Norton claims to have seen something the might pertain to Mrs. Franklin's death. Hastings snatches the glasses away from Norton one day and Hastings thinks he sees a white gown rushing into the woods.

## Bottle

Poirot testifies that he sees Mrs. Franklin leaving Dr. Franklin's hand with a bottle in her hand/. A bottle of the drug used to poison Mrs. Franklin is found in the lab to have been replaced with water. The bottle of poison, however, is not found after Mrs. Franklin's death.

## Poirot's Locked Case

Poirot's locked case is where he keeps his important documents. While at Styles, it is where Poirot locks up the case sheets. Poirot tells Hastings that if he passes away before the end of the case that Hastings will find indications in the case to help Hastings solve the mystery. Poirot wears the key to unlock the case around his neck. When Hastings open the locked case, all he finds are two books of plays and a slip of paper that tells Hastings to talk to Curtiss, Poirot's previous valet.

## Key

On the night of Norton's murder, Hastings sees Norton go into his room and hears Norton use the key to lock his door. The same key is found in Norton's pocket when they find his dead body on the bed. It turns out that Poirot had the key to Norton's room because that was the room where he was originally staying, until he asked to be moved. Poirot claims to lose the key, so that the owners replace it for when Norton checks into the room. The key is what permits Poirot to murder Norton and stop Norton from murdering anyone else.

## Alkaloid

An alkaloid is the drug that poisoned Mrs. Franklin. Dr. Franklin is working with several different alkaloids in his lab. One of the alkaloids is determined to be missing from the lab and replaced with a bottle of water.



# Themes

## Good versus Evil

The primary plot throughout the entire novel is that of good versus evil. Hercule Poirot has an inner struggle with good versus evil and so do each of the characters that are involved in the story as the murder plot unfolds. One of the primary struggles with good versus evil is with the Styles guesthouse. Hastings, Poirot and several of the guests question whether or not the house has an evil environment because of the murder that took place there decades before. As more guests at the guesthouse start to die, it makes it look like the house is evil.

Each of the characters struggles with the good and evil of the other characters they encounter while staying at the guesthouse. This is especially true of Hastings because he is evaluating whether or not each guest is capable of murder. As the characters of the novel interact with one another, several conversations about murder and euthanasia ensue, which all indicate that every person has a little bit of evil in them that would permit them to commit murder or perform an act of euthanasia under the right circumstances.

## Mental States

Another primary theme in the novel is the mind or mental state of human beings. Primarily, the focus falls on whether or not Barbara Franklin is physically ill, or whether she is a hypochondriac perpetuating her physical ailments.

When it turns out that Norton is X, his mental state also comes into question. While Norton does not physically murder any of the victims, Norton mentally pushes the murderers to commit their crimes. Norton convinces the people who commit the murders that it is the right thing to do. This makes Norton a sadist, who mentally enjoys pushing people to find the evil in themselves that permits them to commit the crime.

## Friendship/Relationships

Friendships and relationships are a third major theme that runs throughout the novel. First, there is the long time friendship between Poirot and Hastings. The two men have a long history together. Since both men are alone without wives, the two men often depend and lean on one another. When Poirot dies, Hastings feels as if he is truly alone in the world.

The relationship between the Luttrells also comes into question. At first, Mrs. Luttrell seems to bully her husband. She is demeaning and overbearing in their relationship. After she is shot, however, both of the Luttrells realize how close they were to losing



each other. This causes them to rekindle the love that caused them to marry in the first place.

The Franklin marriage is another relationship that is under the microscope. Mrs. Franklin makes it seem as if she is desperately in love with Dr. Franklin, but it turns out to be an act so that she can murder Dr. Franklin and be with Boyd Carrington. While Dr. Franklin is attentive to Mrs. Franklin's needs, it is obvious to most that he is not in love with her. After Mrs. Franklin's death, Dr. Franklin admits that they fell out of love shortly after they married, and that they stayed together out of obligation.

The final romantic relationship is that between Judith and Dr. Franklin. The two are in love and plan to marry before he goes on his research project to Africa. They were using their work in the lab as a cover for being together. While they were working on the experiments, their common ground led them to fall in love. Poirot tells Hastings in his letter that Judith and Dr. Franklin have a lasting love and that they will be happy together.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view from the perspective of the narrator, Captain Arthur Hastings. The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Captain Hastings. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Hastings's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrator. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

## Setting

The novel is set primarily in the Styles guesthouse, which is in Styles St. Mary. While it never specifically states the time period when the novel takes place, it seems to be in the 19th or 20th centuries. The main characters are involved in the events leading up to and the aftermath of the death of two of the guests.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the character that seems one of the most innocent characters, Norton, is X and the person responsible for causing all the murders. However, as events unfold, the murders are a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The author, however, interjects many French words to fit into the setting of the novel because Hercule Poirot is French. The language is from the 19th or 20th century, which is when the novel is set, and also seems to have British spellings of some words. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is always detailed enough for the reader to truly understand what is happening.

## Structure

The novel is divided into 19 chapters and a postscript. The length of each chapter ranges from four pages 22 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is the struggle of human beings in choosing between good and evil. One subplot is the mental state of

mind of each of the characters, primarily Barbara Franklin and Norton. Another subplot is the relationships that the characters form amongst each other.



## Quotes

"And does it not intrigue you, my friend, to see the address from which I write? It recalls old memories, does it not? Yes, I am here, at Styles" (Chapter 1, p. 2).

"I am here to hunt down a murderer" (Chapter 2, p. 7).

"Yes, if you know the intended victim. But do you not realize, Hastings, that here I do not know the victim" (Chapter 3, p. 12).

"That's wicked - wicked. An abuse of power. It shouldn't be allowed. Old people, sick people, they shouldn't have the power to hold up the lives of the young and strong. To keep them tied down, fretting, wasting their power and energy that could be used - that's needed. It's just selfishness"  
(Chapter 4, p. 18).

"I was saying that you overwork poor Judith Hastings shamefully. Now Captain Hastings is here, he and I are going to put our heads together and we're not going to allow it"  
(Chapter 5, p. 20).

"I shall understand it if he ever takes a hatchet to her" (Chapter 6, p. 25).

"Certainly not. And one swallow does not make a summer. But one murderer, Hastings, does make a murder" (Chapter 7, p. 37).

"Yes, I think invalids - chronic invalids - usually are very selfish. One can't blame them perhaps. It's so easy" (Chapter 8, p. 41).

"Exactly. That is often the case, remember. Underneath the quarrels, the misunderstandings, the apparent hostility of everyday life, a real and true affection can exist" (Chapter 9, p. 52).

"Then I am right. This is another X case" (Chapter 10, p. 53).

"Don't let it go further, of course - but I do happen to know something pretty foul about him" (Chapter 11, p. 62).



"I know how ineffectual and maddened one feels, but the only thing to do is to accept defeat. Accept it man" (Chapter 12, p. 68).

"Houses do have an atmosphere. This house has a bad history" (Chapter 13, p. 72).

"Yes, Hastings, she was murdered" (Chapter 14, p. 86).

"Be very careful, Hastings. It is urgent that he shall not tell anyone - he must not even hint. To do so might be dangerous" (Chapter 15, p. 95).

"Indications in kind. They will mean nothing to X - be assured of that - but they will lead you to the discovery of the truth" (Chapter 16, p. 100).

"No, Norton did not kill himself. He was deliberately killed" (Chapter 17, p. 104).

"I'm not going as his assistant. I'm going as his wife" (Chapter 18, p. 107).

"He left with you, did he not, a message for me" (Chapter 19, p. 108).

"Ah, I see. The dagger or the cup of poison" (Postscript, p. 118).

## Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Hercule Poirot? Why has he chosen to tell Hastings parts of the story leading up to the murders, but refuses to divulge other information to Hastings? Do you believe that Poirot knows who the murderer is the whole time? Why do you think Poirot kills Norton at the end of the novel?

Discuss the relationship between Hastings and Poirot. Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Hastings feel about Poirot? How does Poirot feel about Hastings? How do Hastings's feelings change after Poirot's death? What does he do about it? What happens to Hastings?

Who is Norton? Is he smart, simple or just a really good actor? Do you think Norton could have pulled off the murders without convincing others to carry out the murders? Why do you think Norton agrees to tell Poirot what he saw? What role does Poirot play in Norton's death?

Why do Judith and Dr. Franklin hide their relationship? Do you think anyone suspects that Judith and Dr. Franklin are just acting? If Mrs. Franklin hadn't accidentally poisoned herself, do you think Judith and Dr. Franklin would have done something to get rid of her?

Discuss the murders. What impact do the murders have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?

Who is Hastings? Do you think that he takes things for face value, as Poirot suggests? Is it a coincidence that Hastings's daughter is staying at the guesthouse or do you think it is part of Poirot's plan to kill X?

What do you think happens to the living characters after they leave the guesthouse? Do you think that Major Allerton continues his relationship with Nurse Craven? What happens to Judith and Dr. Franklin?