

# **The Murder of Roger Ackroyd Study Guide**

**The Murder of Roger Ackroyd by Agatha Christie**

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## Plot Summary

When the widow, Mrs. Ferrars, commits suicide, and the wealthy Roger Ackroyd is murdered within a few days, the small English village of King's Abbot is even more full of gossip than usual. The murder is a complete mystery to the incompetent local police. Fortunately, though, the famous detective Hercule Poirot has just moved into King's Abbot and agrees to take on the case, even though he has already decided to retire from detective work.

Everyone in Mr. Ackroyd's household is a suspect. Poirot investigates the murder with Dr. James Sheppard, the town doctor and good friend of Mr. Ackroyd, by his side. As Poirot unravels the case, many secrets, largely around the themes of love and money, come out about each member of the household. Although every member of the household is a suspect at some point, the case looks the worst for Ralph Paton, Mr. Ackroyd's stepson. Ralph has several motives and many clues pointing straight at him, but this does not fool Poirot.

In a shocking twist at the end, Poirot discovers that James, the narrator of the story is the killer. James was blackmailing Mrs. Ferrars for money in return for keeping her secret about the murder of her husband. Mr. Ackroyd found out about the blackmail through a suicide letter Mrs. Ferrars wrote to him. James had to silence Mr. Ackroyd.

Poirot unravels the entire tale and then suggests to James a way out of prison and shame. The way is suicide. James decides to take Poirot's advice if only to save his beloved sister from the shame and disappointment of finding out that her brother is a murderer. First, James goes home to finish the manuscript he has been working on throughout the investigation, which consists of a written record of the case. He completes the manuscript by adding what he had previously omitted about his own guilt, sends the manuscript to Poirot and then kills himself.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The story begins with Dr. James Sheppard returning home from his visit to Mrs. Ferrars' residence. He was called there when Mrs. Ferrars was found dying, but by the time he arrived, she had already passed on. At home, his older sister, Caroline, calls out to him, curious to find out what happened during his visit. Caroline is the town gossip and rarely even has to leave her home to obtain all the little bits of juicy information she flourishes on. James suspects that the servants and tradesmen of the town constitute what he calls her Intelligence Corps.

James is apprehensive when she questions him about his outings, for he knows any information he lets slip out will become public knowledge almost immediately. Nevertheless, soon James discovers that Caroline already knows all there is to know about Mrs. Ferrars and her death, thanks to her connections with the maid and the milkman. Mr. Ferrars died a year ago, and Caroline seems to think that Mrs. Ferrars had poisoned him. Caroline's theory is that Mrs. Ferrars could no longer take the guilt of murder and therefore swallowed an overdose of sleeping pills. James tells Caroline that no one cold enough to commit murder is likely to suffer much remorse. Caroline argues that Mrs. Ferrars was not cold enough to handle the guilt of murder.

James worries that Caroline will go around town spreading her theories and people would think that they must be backed by medical facts since her brother is a doctor. Caroline says that there must be a suicide letter somewhere that explains everything. James says no such letter will be searched for or found unless he decides there is a need for an inquest.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

This first chapter opens with a possible suicide and a possible murder committed one year ago. There is already much drama and suspense, for the reader wonders whether Caroline is clever and wise, and her theories are foreshadowing of facts to be proven as the story continues or whether her ideas are pure gossip good only for entertainment. This chapter also begins to paint a picture of a loving, but not so trusting relationship between this brother and sister who live together. Caroline seems fond of her brother, but James does not trust his sister with his private information because he knows her love for gossip. In the beginning of the chapter, James says, "my instincts told me that there were stirring times ahead" (pg. 1). This foreshadows the drama to come.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter two begins with the description of the village James, the narrator, lives in. James explains that there are two important households in the town, King's Paddock and Fernly Park. King's Paddock was left to Mrs. Ferrars after her husband's death. Fernly Park is owned by Mr. Ackroyd who seems to have become close friends with Mrs. Ferrars. This made sense since the two of them were both victims of alcoholics. Mrs. Ferrars' dead husband was a terrible alcoholic, as was Mr. Ackroyd's dead wife. Mrs. Ackroyd drank herself to death and left Mr. Ackroyd her son from a previous marriage to raise all by himself. Her son's name is Ralph Paton.

A series of nannies come and go to look after the boy. Miss Russell was the one nanny who lasted the longest, and she seemed to grow close to Mr. Ackroyd during her employment at Fernly Park. Miss Russell and Mr. Ackroyd get along wonderfully, until Mrs. Cecil Ackroyd arrives at Fernly Park after the death of her husband, Mr. Ackroyd's brother. She now depends on Mr. Ackroyd's financial support and does not like sharing his attention with Miss Russell.

James recalls that just the other day, he saw Mrs. Ferrars and Ralph Paton walking head to head and chatting. He had a foreboding feeling about the situation. The next day, James bumps into Mr. Ackroyd and Mr. Ackroyd invites James to dinner claiming to want to discuss an important matter with James. Mr. Ackroyd tells James that Ralph is in London, but James had just seen Ralph in town the day before. James comes across Miss Gannet, who tries to get gossip out of James. She tells James that Mr. Ackroyd broke his engagement to Mrs. Ferrars because he knew she was a sleeping pills addict. James dismisses the gossip.

Later that day, Miss Russell comes over to James' house to see him about her painful knee. He examines her knee and finds that there is nothing wrong with it. Miss Russell slips in a few questions about drugs, addiction and drug detection.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter describes the setting of the small town with the two main households: King's Paddock and Fernly Park. It also introduces us to some new characters and their relationships. The reader meets Mr. Ackroyd and the many women in his life. Of course, by the title of the book, the reader already knows that Mr. Ackroyd will be murdered. Some suspense is also introduced when James catches Mrs. Ferrars and Ralph walking head-to-head and conversing and when Miss Russell comes to the doctor with her questions about drugs. The reader wonders what business Mrs. Ferrars and Ralph have together and why Miss Russell is so curious about the effects of certain drugs.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

James and Caroline chat about Ralph and wonder why he is in town, but staying at Three Boars Inn rather than with his stepfather. They also discuss their new neighbor who just moved into the house next door called, The Larches. Caroline is very curious about his identity and was not able to find out much about him even with the help of her Intelligence Corps. The only thing they know about the neighbor is that he is interested in growing vegetable marrows.

Later, James meets the new neighbor, Mr. Poirot, while he is in the backyard and one of Mr. Poirot's vegetables flies over and hits him. Poirot apologizes, and they chat about things they have in common. Poirot tells James that he reminds him of an old friend. James finds his neighbor very interesting. Poirot asks James about Ralph Paton and tells James that he knew Mr. Ackroyd in London, but has asked Mr. Ackroyd to keep quiet about Poirot's profession. Poirot tells James that Mr. Ackroyd confided in him that he has pressured Ralph and his niece, Miss Flora, to get engaged. James wonders why Mr. Ackroyd would confide in Mr. Poirot.

Later, at home, James sees Caroline, who tells him that she came across Mr. Ackroyd today, and he informed her that Ralph and Miss Flora are engaged. She also told him that Ralph was in town, and she knows that because, on her way home, she was walking through the woods, when she heard Ralph speaking to a girl, telling her to be patient because he cannot anger Mr. Ackroyd now or else he may take him out of the will. Caroline and James are confused as to who this girl might be. James goes off to see Ralph. James knew Ralph's mother and is on good terms with Ralph. Ralph is glad to see James and confesses that he is having major problems with his stepfather, but can't give any details.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, the reader begins to see a more playful side to James and Caroline's relationship. They play a sort of game of plucking information out of each other. Their new neighbor sounds mysterious since even Caroline's Intelligence Corps could not find out much about his identity. All they know about him is that he grows vegetable marrows, which signifies that he is not a busy working man. This creates suspense for the reader, as the reader wonders who this mysterious neighbor is and how he will be involved in the drama to come. Another interesting fact about him is that Mr. Poirot knows Mr. Ackroyd, but has asked him to keep quiet about his former profession. This creates suspense, because now the reader wonders why Poirot would want to keep his former profession a secret.



In this chapter, the reader discovers that Mr. Ackroyd is pushing Ralph and Miss Flora to marry. The fact that he has to push the engagement, means they are likely not too interested in each other. Caroline overheard Ralph talking to a girl and telling her to be patient. This creates suspense because the reader wonders who this girl might be and what is the secret that is so big that it might cost Ralph his inheritance?





# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

James arrives at Mr. Ackroyd's house, bumps into Miss Russell who seems out of breath. Then he hears a funny sound, which he later identifies as a drawer closing. He bumps into Flora who tells him about her engagement to Ralph. Then, Mrs. Ackroyd comes out and greets James, and they discuss the engagement. Mrs. Ackroyd asks James to talk to Mr. Ackroyd about Flora's settlement. Before James can reply, another guest walks in. It is Hector Blunt, a well-known hunter.

During dinner, Mr. Ackroyd looks preoccupied. After dinner, he takes James aside and confides that the last twenty-four hours of his life have been hell. He tells James that he found out that Mr. Ferrars was murdered. Mrs. Ferrars had confessed the murder to him. She had deeply despised her husband. Someone had found out about the murder and blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars for large amounts of money. James remembers Ralph and Mrs. Ferrars walking and talking head to head. Mr. Ackroyd does not know who the blackmailer is. Mr. Ackroyd is a fundamentally good citizen and not a great and passionate lover who might forgive that kind of a sin. Mrs. Ferrars asked Mr. Ackroyd to give her twenty-four hours, before he takes any action. Of course, she used those twenty-four hours to kill herself and that makes Mr. Ackroyd feel terribly guilty.

Now, Mr. Ackroyd is determined to find the blackmailer who drove his beloved Mrs. Ferrars mad and pushed her to suicide. Mr. Ackroyd believes that Mrs. Ferrars left him a letter naming the blackmailer and that she would want him to avenge her suffering. Just then, Parker walks in with a bunch of letters, one of them being a letter from Mrs. Ferrars. Mr. Ackroyd begins to read the letter, but then tells James that he will finish it later when he is alone.

James heads home. On his way, he bumps into a stranger who asks for directions to Fernly Park. James feels like he recognizes the stranger's voice. At home, Carol tries to fish for information as usual, but James does not say much and goes off to bed. Soon after, the phone rings. James takes the call and then tells Caroline that it was Parker on the phone and that he must rush back to Fernly Park because Mr. Ackroyd has been murdered.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter introduces several new plot twists and important information. Mr. Ackroyd is murdered and already there are many suspects. First of all, we know that Mr. Ackroyd read a letter from Mrs. Ferrars naming her blackmailer and therefore whoever the blackmailer might be has definite motive to kill Mr. Ackroyd. We also know that Ralph is having lots of trouble with his stepfather and may actually be the blackmailer, because James saw him and Mrs. Ferrars walking and talking. Already the case against Ralph

seems to be building up. However, there is also the stranger who James saw on his way home. James thinks he recognizes the stranger's voice, therefore, he may be someone from town.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

James rushes off to Fernly Park. Parker answers the door, but claims to know nothing when James asks him if Mr. Ackroyd is really murdered as Parker had said on the phone. Parker asserts that he made no such phone call and that, as far as he knows, Mr. Ackroyd is fine. They hurry to Mr. Ackroyd's room, but find it locked. James breaks the door. They find Mr. Ackroyd with a dagger in his back. Raymond and Blunt rush into the room. Blunt thinks it must have been a burglary.

Someone call for the police and the police arrive. James explains everything. Parker tells them that he locked the windows earlier himself, but the police find the window open, and they see clear footprints right outside the window. James describes the strange man he saw on his way home. Raymond says he heard Mr. Ackroyd talking to someone at 9:30. James left Mr. Ackroyd at 9:15. Raymond claims to have overheard some of the conversation at 9:30. Someone was asking Mr. Ackroyd for money, and he replied: "the calls on my purse have been so frequent as of late that I fear it is impossible for me to accede to your request" (pg. 41).

Parker tells the police that Miss Flora saw Mr. Ackroyd after all that, and she told him not to disturb Mr. Ackroyd when she saw him walking to Mr. Ackroyd's room with drinks. The police go to question Flora. Flora tells the police that she said good night to her uncle at 9:45 and then told Parker not to disturb her uncle because those were her uncle's wishes. When the police tell Flora that her uncle was murdered, she faints.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

When James arrives at Fernly Park, Parker claims he did not make that phone call. This brings the new question of who would have made that phone call and what would they have to gain from informing people about the murder? After they discover Mr. Ackroyd's body, Parker and Blunt attempt to touch Mr. Ackroyd's body, possibly to mess up evidence. Parker's behavior seems suspicious because he tries to go back to Mr. Ackroyd's room even after James had tells him once that Mr. Ackroyd does not want to be disturbed. He doesn't back off, until Flora gives him the same message again.

The conversation Raymond overheard between Mr. Ackroyd and an unknown person, likely whoever came through the window, sounds like an important clue. It seems like someone was asking Mr. Ackroyd for money and Mr. Ackroyd was refusing them. When Flora hears of her uncle's death, she faints. This tells us that Flora is either sincere in her sorrow and shock, and therefore unlikely to be the killer, or that she is one grand actress.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Officer Davis asks James about the mysterious man he saw on his way home from Fernly Park. James remembers little about the man's appearance, but still feels like there was something familiar about the man's voice. Davis asks James for a private chat in the study. Davis asks James, what's the story about the blackmailer? It seems Parker had mentioned a blackmailer to Davis. He must have overheard Mr. Ackroyd's conversation with James earlier. James tells Davis what Mr. Ackroyd told him.

James and Davis discuss Parker as a suspect. They wonder why he kept on trying to get into Mr. Ackroyd's room even after he was told that Mr. Ackroyd did not want to be disturbed. They figure Parker could have committed the murder and later slipped out of the window and back in through the side door. They examine the weapon and crime scene and figure that Mr. Ackroyd was killed by a right-handed man, who stood behind him. Fingerprints are taken.

The police officer, takes the murder weapon, a curio, to the billiard's room where Raymond is and asks Raymond about it. Raymond says he recognizes it and that it was a gift from Blunt, a dagger from Tunisia. James and Davis discuss what a fine young man Raymond is and what a great secretary he made to Mr. Ackroyd. They ask Blunt about the dagger and Blunt admits that it was a gift from him to Mr. Ackroyd.

Raymond tells the group that the dagger was usually kept in the silver table in the drawing room. James realizes that the sound he heard the day before must have been the silver table being shut, and he tells the officer about this. Officer Davis says that he is leaving now, but before he leaves, he takes Parker's fingerprints. Raymond offers his own fingerprints and James', as well. He also tells the officer that Blunt will come to the station in the morning to give his fingerprints.

James goes home to find Caroline waiting for him and anxious to hear about what happened. He tells her the whole story, including how Parker seems an obvious suspect. Caroline tells him that she thinks Officer Davis is a fool for suspecting Parker. She knows him to be a decent man, and that he would never have killed Mr. Ackroyd.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

During the investigation, everybody seems to have bits of information to offer. James tells what he knows about the stranger and also informs the officer about the blackmail story. Raymond and Blunt shed light on the murder weapon. Parker seems like a possible suspect at this point, but when James tells that to Caroline, she thinks suspecting Parker is foolish. Caroline seems to have a good instinct about these things because earlier she thought that Mrs. Ferrars had murdered her husband and then killed herself from the guilt and the reader found out that that was mostly true.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

The next day, after doing his rounds, James comes home to find Flora waiting for him. She asks him to go with her to see the little man who lives in the Larches. Her uncle had told her that the man is a retired detective and is famous for his investigative talents. James discourages Flora from the idea, insinuating that she might not like the outcome of the investigation since Ralph may be found guilty. Flora assures him that although Ralph is no saint, he would never kill anyone. James denies that he suspects Ralph, but Flora confronts him about going to the Three Boars Inn last night. James is surprised that she knows about that. She says she was just going there to visit Ralph when she happened to see James there. They talk about how they both found out that Ralph had left the Three Boars Inn at nine and never returned.

Flora tells James that she is worried about Ralph because she found out from some of the workers at the inn that inspector Raglan came and asked for Ralph. She worries that Ralph might now be a suspect. James asserts again that it might not be a good idea to go to Poirot and for the truth to come out, but Caroline jumps in and asserts that Ralph is a good boy and could never be guilty of such a crime. Flora agrees with her and tells them that she knows Ralph very well. James gives in and accompanies Flora to Poirot's house.

James and Flora explain the story to Poirot and ask for his help. Poirot warns them that he does not take his cases lightly and that if he begins an investigation, he stays until the end. He also warns them that much dirt is uncovered during his investigation, and they might not like everything that comes out. Flora assures him that she wants the whole truth to come out and so Poirot agrees to take on the case. James relays all the information he knows so far. Poirot asks James why he went to the Three Boars Inn yesterday. James says he went to tell Ralph about his uncle's murder. Poirot asks him if that is the only reason. James says yes.

Poirot and James go to the police station and inspector Raglan is upset to hear that Poirot is intruding in the case. Inspector Raglan is after the limelight and does not want to share any of the glory of solving the case with anyone else. Poirot assures the inspector that he wants no publicity for his part in the investigation and this eases inspector Raglan's nerves and makes him agree to sharing information with Poirot. They discuss suspects and Ralph seems to have much evidence stacked up against him.

Poirot, James and the police go to Mr. Ackroyd's home and into the room where he was murdered. They allow Poirot to get a sense of the murder scene. Meanwhile, the police discover that the shoe prints outside the window match Ralph's shoes. Poirot begins to ask a lot of questions and his investigative talents begin to show. When he wants to ask about fire in the fireplace, he knows to ask Parker because Parker is in charge of the fire and would know best how to answer those questions.



Poirot finds out that someone pushed the grandfather chair back into position after Parker saw it a little out of position on the night of the murder. Poirot asserts that everyone has something to hide. James asks him whether he thinks that he too has something to hide. Poirot says yes. He thinks that James knows more about Ralph than he is saying. James changes the subject and asks Poirot about his methods. Poirot explains the significance of knowing if the fire was low or high last night. That information could tell him whether Mr. Ackroyd opened his window for air or to let someone in. Colonel Melrose walks in and announces that the mysterious phone call that James received was made from King's Abbot train station at 10:15. At 10:23, the night rail left for Liverpool.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

When Flora decides to take the case to a world famous detective and begs him to find the whole truth, this suggests her innocence and unshakable faith in Ralph. She claims to know him well, and she is certain he is not the killer. Poirot says that, when he takes on a case, he must continue to the end and likely this means the uncovering of dirt on everyone's part, because everyone has something to hide. This foreshadows a lot of drama to come and much uncovering of dirty secrets. Poirot also tells Flora and James that he hopes they will not be sorry for asking him to investigate. This suggests that when Poirot does reveal the whole truth, it may be so bad and so revealing, that many people might be sorry and particularly those who came to him in the first place asking him to take the case.

So far, the reader knows that Mr. Ackroyd opened his window and someone came into his room. The reader also knows that Mr. Ackroyd was seen alive after that by Flora. This means that whoever came in through the window may not be the same person who killed him. The colonel's new information about the phone call only adds more mystery to the whole situation and does not tell the reader much about who may have placed the call and what their motive might have been.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

The chapter opens with the narrator, Dr. Sheppard asking whether inquiries will be made at the station. He is told that they would indeed be made, but there is little hope for success. This is due to the fact that King's Abbot, though a small village, is also an important train junction. At the time of night in question, no less than three trains arrive near each other, and the chance of anyone noting a particular individual using a telephone or boarding the express is small.

Melrose asks, probably rhetorically, why anyone would have telephoned at all. To him, the situation seems chaotic and random. Poirot disagrees, and tells him that when they disentangle the mystery behind the call, they will then know everything.

Poirot then questions Dr Sheppard, asking him to reconfirm that it was Nine o'clock when he met the stranger outside the gate. Sheppard confirms this, as he heard the clock tower ring out the time. Poirot continues the questioning, inquiring as to how long it would take the stranger to reach the house they were standing. The reply confirms that it would take five minutes, and only two or three if he were familiar with the path to the right of the drive.

They summon Raymond and Parker, to see if Mr. Ackroyd had received any strangers in the past week.

Poirot greets the cheerful Raymond by pointing out that an armchair had been moved from its original position at the crime scene. He asks him point-blank if he had done so. Raymond denies having done so, and indeed didn't even remember that it had been in a different position at all. He then is asked whether Mr. Ackroyd had admitted any strangers in the last week. He thinks on this for a couple minutes, and then says that he remembered no one.

Mr. Parker then arrives, and is asked the same question. He remembers someone, and starts to describe him, although Raymond waves away the person in question as having been unimportant. This visitor was a representative from a Dictaphone company, who had come at Mr. Ackroyd's behest so as to sell him one of their Dictaphones. No arrangement was reached, and so he left empty-handed.

At Poirot's request, the butler goes on to describe the sales representative:

"He was fair-haired, sir, and short. Very neatly dressed in a blue serge suit. A very presentable young man, sir, for his station in life."

Poirot asks the Doctor to confirm that the man he met was in fact tall, and he does so. Poirot therefore dismisses this line of inquiry.



While this is all going on, Mr. Hammond, the family solicitor, arrives at the front door, and Mr. Raymond hastens to greet him. When he is gone, Poirot comments on his efficient air and inquires as to how long Raymond has been working at the estate. The reply places the duration of his employment at around two years.

What follows is a brief philosophical exchange, wherein Poirot points out that the otherwise mute furniture of the room is capable of speaking volumes to him. There is an opened window, a locked door, and a chair that apparently moved itself. Each of these has a message to convey. Poirot then asks, as a last trespass on their courtesy, to see the table from which the murder weapon had been taken. He looks over the silver table, lifting the lid up and letting it drop a couple times, before opening a large window and stepping out onto the terrace.

Inspector Raglan then appears, stating that this won't be much of a case. A "nice enough young fellow gone wrong." It is apparent that the inspector considers this case more or less closed.

What follows is an exchange regarding the nature of the crime. Whereas Poirot sees complexity, the inspector sees simplicity. The inspector presents the facts of the case in a straightforward manner:

First, the last person to see Ackroyd alive was his niece Flora, at a quarter to 10. The Doctor's report stated that Ackroyd had been dead for at least half an hour (or longer) when his body was discovered at 10:30. This left a mere 15 minute window for the crime to be committed. A list was made of everyone who had been in the house at that time, along with what they were doing. The list runs as follows:

"Mr Raymond. - Billiard room. (See above.)

Mrs Ackroyd. - 9.45 watching billiard match. Went up to bed 9.55. (Raymond and Blunt watched her up staircase.)

Miss Ackroyd. - Went straight from her uncle's room upstairs. (Confirmed by Parker, also housemaid, Elsie Dale.)

Servants:

Parker. - Went straight to butler's pantry. (Confirmed by housekeeper. Miss Russell, who came down to speak to him about something at 9.47, and remained at least ten minutes.)

Miss Russell. - As above. Spoke to housemaid, Elsie Dale, upstairs at 9.45.

Ursula Bourne (parlourmaid). - In her own room until 9.55. Then in Servants' Hall.

Mrs Cooper (cook). - In Servants' Hall.

Gladys Jones (second housemaid). - In Servants' Hall.

Elsie Dale. - Upstairs in bedroom. Seen there by Miss Russell and Miss Flora Ackroyd.

Mary Thripp (kitchenmaid). - Servants' Hall."

He continues by mentioning that the cook in question had worked there for seven years, the parlourmaid had worked there for eighteen months, and Parker just over a year. The





others were new hires. He feels that something was odd about Parker, but Poirot and the doctor immediately claim that they believe him innocent.

The inspector continues by stating that Mary Parker saw Ralph Paton turned in at the gate and started walking toward the house at 9:25. She saw this while pulling the curtains. At 9:30 Raymond hears someone asking Ackroyd for money, which he refuses to give.

The inspector then speculates that Paton exits as he came in, through the window, snuck over to the drawing room and snatches up the dagger (while Ackroyd's niece is bidding him goodnight), then returns to the study window, slips off his shoes, climbs in, and murders Ackroyd, before escaping off into the night via that same study window.

When Poirot demands to know the rationale for the murderer's behavior, the inspector has no answer for him. Still, he urges him to review the footprints, which seemed to match the ones taken from Paton's room at the inn. That said, the thing that makes them match are their rubber studs, which are common elements of footwear.

While the footprints are being examined, Poirot notices a small summer house to the left of the path, and he and the Doctor go off to investigate it. Searching the home he finds two things out of place, a goose quill and the fragment of a white handkerchief. He points out, with a certain degree of self satisfaction, that a good laundry would not starch a handkerchief.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

The essential tension in this chapter can be unpacked by looking at Poirot's philosophical discussion of the information that can be gleaned from observation and the conflict between the inspector and Poirot at the chapter's close. Essentially, the conflict is between the obvious and the hidden. To the inspector, the only question at issue can be summed up as "What?". He wants to know what the facts are. Once he possesses the facts, he draws the simplest, most direct conclusions possible from them. For Poirot, this is an insufficient way of deducing the truth. For him, the essential question is not "What?" but rather "Why?". He wants to know why the facts are the way that they are. Why did the murderer act the way he did, why did the objects of the case end up in the configuration they were, why was the chair moved after the crime scene was discovered? From the disposition of the facts of the case, he seeks to divine the intent and thought process of the killer. Once he has figured this out, he can reason out the most likely suspect.

This is, of course, an extremely complex way of solving a case. It requires to essentially read the mind of a person who is not available to be questioned and who would certainly lie if he were so available. Therefore, we can assume that to successfully pursue this manner of reasoning, Poirot will need to get a grasp on the personalities, backgrounds, and motivations of the various suspects, probably through talking to each of them about the others, and from there reason backwards. He needs to figure out



which one of them would have the most motivation both to kill the victim and to act in the particular manner that the physical evidence indicates that the murder occurred.

Poirot's character is lighthearted and somewhat whimsical, but his manner betrays a certain degree of arrogance as well. He clearly thinks himself smarter than the inspector, and he basically scoffs at the man's straightforward handling of the case. One does not get the feeling, however, that this arrogance will lead Poirot into making mistakes. Rather, it is his dismissiveness of the standard interpretation of the murder that leads him to the summer house, and what may well be the next series of clues.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Poirot and James walk back to the main house and Poirot asks about who will inherit Mr. Ackroyd's beautiful estate. James realizes that he should have thought to ask such an important question. As they chat, they see Flora walking along in her black dress, her face full of joy. She stops to do a little pirouette. A man comes out from behind a tree. It is Blunt. Flora is startled, but then begins to casually chat with Blunt.

Flora teases Blunt about his age and Blunt turns red with embarrassment. Blunt says he should leave now. He tells Flora that he is a rough fellow and does not belong in high society. Flora asks Blunt to say, and he is happy to hear it. Flora feels comfortable with Blunt and confesses to him that the source of her happiness is the 20,000 pounds her uncle left her. She admits that the money means a lot to her and that she will no longer scheme and lie to get by. When she realizes that she slipped that out, she tries to do some damage control and explains that she means she will no longer have to lie about being thankful for all the second hand stuff she gets from relatives. This new money will give her a sense of freedom she longed for.

Flora also confides in Blunt and tells him that she is not worried about Ralph because she knows that the famous Poirot will find the real murderer. Blunt notices something glimmering in the pond. Before he has a chance to take a look, James and Poirot approach the Flora and Blunt. Flora introduces Blunt to Poirot. Poirot questions Blunt and finds out that Blunt had gone out for a smoke on the terrace on the day of the murder and walked to the edge of the terrace where he could hear voices from Mr. Ackroyd's office. He assumed that it was Raymond in Mr. Ackroyd's office. He also noticed a woman disappear into the bushes.

The four of them go to the pond to check out the object that is glimmering in the pond, but they find nothing. Flora invites everyone to lunch. On the way in, Poirot shows a gold wedding band to James and tells him that he did indeed find something in the pond, but he didn't want everyone to know yet. Inscribed in the ring is: "From R. March 13th."

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Flora is acting suspicious in this chapter. First, she is wearing a black dress, which suggests she is mourning her uncle, but then James and Poirot see her dancing joyfully. She then confesses to Blunt that she is excited about the money her uncle left her because it will mean that she will not have to lie and scheme anymore. This leaves the reader wondering what Flora had to lie and scheme about before and if she possibly had enough motive to kill her uncle, but at the same time she is the one who insisted on hiring a famous detective to find the killer, so she must not be guilty herself.



Blunt obviously has feelings for Flora, but also seems to feel like he is not good enough for her. Blunt also assumes that she is taken since she is engaged to Ralph. The new information that Blunt gives to Poirot leaves the reader wondering about Raymond. If Raymond really was in the office with Mr. Ackroyd, then he becomes a suspect who warrants more investigation. The ring also leads to more questions. The initial R could stand for Raymond or it could stand for Ralph. Of course, it could also be an R for Roger.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Poirot meets Mrs. Ackroyd and Mr. Hammond the lawyer in charge of Mr. Ackroyd's estate. Mrs. Ackroyd slips and says she Poirot will surely find Ralph. Flora quickly corrects her and says that Poirot is not here to find Ralph, he is here to find the murderer. Hammond says he is happy that Poirot is acting on Ralph's behalf. Poirot explains that he is acting on behalf of justice. Hammond sticks up for Ralph and claims that Ralph could not possibly be the murderer, even though he always needed money from his stepfather.

Poirot asks Hammond questions about Mr. Ackroyd's will. Hammond tells Poirot that all the household helpers get some money; Mrs. Ackroyd and Flora get a nice chunk and the rest all goes to Ralph.

Poirot takes James aside and tells him he must be his helper. Poirot needs James to ask Blunt some questions. Poirot does not want to ask the questions himself because he does not want Blunt to get suspicious. James is ask about Mrs. Ferrars and her husband. James goes for a walk with Blunt and questions him casually. Blunt says that Mrs. Ferrars was a strange and deep woman. Later, James reports to Poirot that there is nothing suspicious about Blunt.

Mrs. Ackroyd takes James aside and confides in him that she is disappointed that Mr. Ackroyd left her so little money. She also complains about the large sum of 1000 pounds that he left to Miss Russell. She does not understand what he saw in her. Mr. Hammond interrupts and asks when should the inquest be held? Mrs. Ackroyd feels like an inquest is not necessary. She had said earlier that the murder must have been an accident or something. Mrs. Ackroyd gets anxious when anyone asks her questions and does not give any useful answers.

Hammond asks Raymond if he needs any money right now in order to run the household. Raymond says that there is some cash for emergencies in Mr. Ackroyd's bedroom. He saw him put the cash in his drawer the day before his murder. They go to the bedroom to get the money and find 40 pounds missing from the 100 pounds originally placed there. They discuss the servants and who of them might steal. Miss Russell tells the inspector that the parlor maid is quitting because she had a skirmish with Mr. Ackroyd about disarranging some papers on his desk. When they confront the parlor maid, she claims that she did not steal any money.

Poirot and James discuss the parlor maid and what her skirmish with Mr. Ackroyd could have been about. Inspector Raglan had given Poirot a paper listing every household member's alibi. Poirot notices that Ursula, the parlor maid, does not have an alibi. However, Poirot cannot figure out what her motive might be. They decide to investigate Ursula further. James asks Poirot if he thinks Ralph is guilty. Poirot admits that all the



clues point to Ralph, but he cannot say anything for certain, until he continues his investigation.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Mrs. Ackroyd is suspicious with her slip of the tongue and her idea that the murder must have been an accident. It is also interesting that she is so apprehensive about answering questions. She also makes no secret out of her disappointment with the small sum of money Mr. Ackroyd left her. Besides Mrs. Ackroyd's fishy behavior, Ursula is brought on as a new suspect. She had an argument with Mr. Ackroyd that no one knows the subject of and now she is quitting her job.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Poirot assigns James to investigate one of Ursula's former employers, Mrs. Folliott. When James visits her, Mrs. Folliott tells him she was happy with Ursula. James asks about Ursula's background, but Mrs. Folliott gets nervous and angry and does not understand why James is asking so many questions. James can tell when someone is lying, and he knows that Mrs. Folliott is not telling the truth.

James leaves Mrs. Folliott's home, does his rounds for his patients and then goes home. Caroline is home and chats with her brother, making sure to mention that Mr. Poirot stopped by today just to speak to her. She told James that Mr. Poirot told her about all the great people he solved murders for. Mr. Poirot also told her that they had better find Ralph soon or else it is going to look very bad for him. James asks her if she told Poirot about overhearing Ralph talk to a woman in the woods. Caroline says she did. James is upset and tells her that she is helping to incriminate Ralph.

Caroline tells Ralph that Mr. Poirot also asked about James' patients and Caroline had listed his patients for Poirot. She did not forget to mention Miss Russell, whom she felt terribly suspicious about. James feels that Miss Russell is not all that suspicious since she was asking about drugs and poisons, whereas Mr. Ackroyd was murdered with a dagger.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

James finds out very little about Ursula from her former employer, Mrs. Folliott, therefore Ursula remains under suspicion. James feels that Mrs. Folliott is lying and therefore she may be hiding something about Ursula or possibly for Ursula. Mr. Poirot's visit to Caroline is interesting. If Poirot wants to find out about James' patients, why would he not ask James himself? Why does he go to Caroline? Does he feel that James may not tell the whole truth? James is upset that Caroline told Poirot about Ralph in the woods, so Poirot may be right in assuming that James may not be completely honest with him.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

On Monday, an inquest takes place. The police issue a grand search for Ralph and say it looks bad that he had disappeared. The inspector, Poirot and James discuss the case. Poirot asserts that the phone call is the crucial clue to the case. The inspector feels that the fingerprints on the dagger are of more immediate importance. Poirot warns the inspector that the fingerprints may lead nowhere. The inspector admits that he took fingerprint samples from the entire household and none matched the prints on the dagger. Poirot points out that the inspector forgot to check Mr. Ackroyd's fingerprints. Poirot's theory is that the murderer put Mr. Ackroyd's prints on the dagger to confuse the case. Poirot knows this because the prints on the dagger were in an odd position, as if someone was holding the dagger backwards.

Poirot calls everyone for a meeting: Mrs. Ackroyd, Flora, Blunt, Raymond and James. He says he wants to make a plea to Flora. He pleads for her to tell them where Ralph is for Ralph's own sake. Flora swears she knows nothing of his whereabouts. Poirot pleads with the others if any of them have any information on Ralph to speak up. Mrs. Ackroyd says, Ralph sure looks suspicious and good thing the engagement is not announced formally yet.

Mrs. Ackroyd wonders aloud what will become of Ralph and his estate if he is found guilty. Flora is enraged at her mother's careless remarks. She asks Raymond to send a formal announcement of her engagement to Ralph to the newspapers first thing in the morning. Mrs. Ackroyd protests emotionally and pleads with Poirot to intervene. Blunt sticks up for Flora. Poirot intercedes and asks Flora to wait just two more days for Ralph's sake, because such an announcement could hamper the case. Flora reluctantly agrees.

Poirot assures everyone that he will surely uncover the truth very soon, in spite of all of them. Raymond asks, what do you mean in spite of all of us? Poirot tells them that he knows each of them has a little secret that they probably think is not important. They all murmur protests. Poirot looks at them. They all drop their gaze, including James. He asks them to come out with it. No one speaks up. What a pity, he sighs.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Mrs. Ackroyd is obviously not fond of Ralph, but could there be more to her constant finger pointing at Ralph? Maybe Mrs. Ackroyd wants Ralph to be blamed for the murder to cover up her own guilt. Also, Mrs. Ackroyd's curiosity about what will become of Ralph and his estate should he be found guilty suggests even more reason for her to want Ralph to end up in jail. That way, she and Flora keep the house all to themselves.





Flora proves her courage and loyalty to Ralph with her bold request to make her engagement public. Poirot asks Flora for two more days to solve the case. Poirot is very confident in all his actions. His accusation that they all are keeping secrets from him foreshadows the uncovering of a lot more dirt in the days to come. All of them look down when he says this, which suggests that he is right to believe that they are all hiding something.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Poirot invites James to dinner that evening. They discuss Poirot's conversation with Caroline. Poirot asks James why he did not tell him about the conversation in the woods earlier. He also asks James about Miss Russell. As they discuss suspects, Poirot tells James that he must always remember that people do not always tell the truth. Poirot and James discuss the stranger. Poirot has verified the stranger's existence. Someone saw the stranger at the Three Boards Inn and noted that he had an American accent.

Poirot reminds James about the goose quill they found in the summerhouse. He tells James that a goose quill is commonly used to take heroin, a drug common in the United States and Canada. Poirot believes that the stranger never went to the main house, but only to the summerhouse for some sort of rendezvous. Poirot reminds James that Mrs. Ackroyd and Flora came from Canada.

James and Poirot discuss Ursula. Poirot asks James for his opinion. James takes out his notes where he jotted down the main points of the crime. James gives Poirot his theory. Poirot quickly points out several things wrong with James' theory. James says all the evidence points to Ralph and that Ralph has three very good motives. Poirot disagrees with James and says that Ralph is likely not the killer. Three motives are too much. Poirot wisely points out that sometimes the innocent act guilty.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

The case against Ralph continues to grow stronger, but that does not seem to be fooling Poirot. Poirot believes that sometimes the innocent act guilty, and he realizes that there is no undisputable evidence against Ralph. This may foreshadow Ralph's innocence. Poirot also realizes that the case against Ralph seems a little too perfect, with three motives and tons of consequential evidence that makes him suspicious. Poirot may be thinking that Ralph was framed.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

This chapter begins with the narrator speaking directly to the reader, telling the reader that the whole affair has now moved into a new phase. The narrator explains that the case can be divided into two parts, with the first part starting with Mr. Ackroyd's murder and ending on Monday night. After Monday night, things change. James no longer follows Poirot around and each man becomes preoccupied with his own business. James no longer tries to gather bits and pieces of information from Poirot. The mystery was like a puzzle to which everyone contributed a piece, but only Poirot knew how to put the pieces of the puzzle together. Only Poirot understood the significance of seemingly insignificant bits of information.

Mrs. Ackroyd summons James to her bedside. She tells James she is sick with shock over Mr. Ackroyd's death and that the murder is just now sinking in. James knows that that is not why she summoned him. He knows that Mrs. Ackroyd is indirect and it will take time to find out what she really wants. Mrs. Ackroyd slowly begins to relay her story to James, in hopes that he will then relay it to Poirot in a positive light. Mrs. Ackroyd recalls how Poirot accused them all of hiding things, and she babbles in defense of herself. She tells James that the servants are gossiping about Ursula and that she herself feels suspicious of the parlor maid. Then, she rants about how greedy and tight-fisted Mr. Ackroyd was with her and her daughter.

Mrs. Ackroyd tells James that once she felt really curious about Mr. Ackroyd's will and poked around in his office. Ursula caught her and then Mr. Ackroyd walked in as well. Mrs. Ackroyd made some excuse and went off to her room. Ursula asked to speak to Mr. Ackroyd. James in a sudden stroke of genius asks Mrs. Ackroyd if it was her who left the silver drawer open. She admits it was her. She claims she wanted to find out about the worth of one Mr. Ackroyd's pieces because she thought it was worth much more than he knew, and she would surprise him with the good news. Mrs. Ackroyd left the drawer open because she heard footsteps. James remembers seeing Miss Russell entering the drawing room all out of breath.

On his way out, James chats with Ursula. She asks him about Ralph. They also discuss the timing of the murder. James then goes home. At home, Caroline tells him that she has met with Poirot again and that she is helping him with his case. Poirot wants Caroline to find out whether Ralph's shoes were black or brown. Caroline asked around and found out that the shoes were black, contrary to what Poirot guessed.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

At the beginning of the chapter, the narrator speaks directly to the reader making for an interesting change of tone in the story. The narrator is of course James, and he now



tells us that a second phase of the investigation has begun and that James is no longer in constant touch with Poirot. James seems to be pursuing his own concerns now.

Mrs. Ackroyd's confession to James is unclear and creates even more suspicion about her. She certainly seems very keen on getting her hands on as much of Mr. Ackroyd's money as she could. It seems she may have been selling some of the household valuables in order to create some extra money for herself. It is unclear whether her confession is an attempt to hide something bigger or a sincere attempt to help the case.

Caroline finds out that Ralph's boots were black and not brown. This is the opposite of what Poirot was expecting. Perhaps this means that Poirot was also wrong about Ralph's innocence.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Mrs. Ackroyd was the first to react to Poirot's accusation that each of them is holding something back. Caroline tells James that Raymond came over looking for Poirot. Caroline suggests to James that he go over to Poirot's home and see what is going on. James insists that he does not need to know everything that happening. Caroline tells him that he is every bit as curious as her, but simply unwilling to admit it.

A few minutes later, Caroline hands James a jar of homemade jam and tells James that she promised it to Poirot and that he must deliver it to him. James resists, but then gives in. He insists though, that he will only leave the jar at the door. As he is leaving, Caroline reminds James to tell Poirot about Ralph's black boots.

James ends up in Poirot's home. They discuss Mrs. Ackroyd's confession, Ralph's black boots and Miss Russell's curiosity about drugs. Poirot asks if Miss Russell specifically asked about cocaine. James says yes. Poirot shows James a recent article about cocaine smuggling.

Raymond arrives at Poirot home. He tells Poirot that he indeed had something to hide. He admits that he was in debt and the 500 pounds he inherited from Mr. Ackroyd helped him out. He is not afraid of being accused of murder because he feels he had a very good alibi being in the billiard's room with Blunt. Raymond says that he is glad that he has cleared his conscience and leaves.

Poirot and James discuss Blunt as a possible suspect. James suggests that the murderer and blackmailer may not be the same person. Poirot agrees. They go on to discuss Parker and how he is most likely to find that letter and may indeed be the blackmailer. They decide to put him through a little test. They go to Fernly Park and Poirot asks everyone to reenact the evening of the murder. Poirot feels that Parker knows something that he is not telling.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

Poirot's accusation that everyone is hiding something seems to be bearing fruit now. First, Mrs. Ackroyd confessed and now Raymond has come clean. The reenactment leaves Poirot with ideas about Parker and the feeling that Parker is hiding something, but we do not find out in chapter 15 what Poirot has learned from the reenactment. James' suggestion that the blackmailer and murderer could possibly be two different people seems to pique Poirot's attention and, therefore, may be a possibility. Evidently, there may be two criminals to uncover, not just one.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

That night, James and Caroline have guests over for a game of Mah Jong, a very popular pastime in King's Abbot. Miss Ganett and Colonel Carter come over to play. Miss Ganett says that she saw Flora with someone today and that she thinks Flora could be guilty. Caroline and Miss Ganett gossip throughout the game. They gossip about Ursula, Miss Russell and the whole case in general.

Caroline announces that she thinks she knows where Ralph is. Miss Ganett questions Caroline. Caroline says that due to something Poirot said, she thinks that Ralph is in Cranchester, the closest big city. Caroline pesters James to contribute to the gossip, until he gives in and tells them all about the ring Poirot found in the pond with the engravings, March 13, from R. They all have fun guessing where the ring came from. Caroline reminds them not to rule out Raymond. He could have secretly married Flora. Everyone is surprised at this suggestion. James asks, what about Blunt? Caroline says, no way, because why would Flora want Blunt when she has the young and handsome Raymond around? Caroline also asserts that Flora cares nothing for Ralph and that that should be obvious to everyone.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

James gives into his sister's pestering for gossip and tells the guests about the ring Poirot found in the pond. He seems to have a weakness for her. Caroline seems to think she has everybody figured out. She is convinced that Flora does not care about Ralph or any other man, but must be in love with Raymond because he is young and handsome and therefore the obvious choice of any young lady. Miss Ganett tells the group that she saw Flora with someone, but the reader is still in suspense to find out who that person might be.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

The next morning James feels guilty about letting the information about the ring slip out. That afternoon Mr. Ackroyd and Mrs. Ferrars' funerals take place. Poirot takes James aside looking worried. James worries that Poirot found out about his slip about the ring. Poirot tells James that soon Parker is coming over, and they will question him harshly, until the truth comes out.

Parker arrives. Poirot confronts him blackmailing his former employer, Mr. Ellerby. Parker eventually confesses to the blackmail and even tells Poirot and James that he was eavesdropping on the conversation in Mr. Ackroyd's office because he thought he could find a way to get in on the blackmail. He asserts that he found out nothing from the eavesdropping and that he has nothing to do with the murder.

After Parker leaves, James confesses that he told some people about the ring. Poirot and James then go to Mr. Hammond's office and ask him for Mrs. Ferrars' financial records. They tell him that she was being blackmailed. Mr. Hammond explains to them that Mrs. Ferrars withdrew 20,000 pounds inexplicably in the last year. They discuss Blunt and Raymond as possible blackmailers and then James invites Poirot over for dinner.

Over dinner, James, Caroline and Poirot discuss the case. Caroline continues to vouch for Ralph and pick on Flora, but then suggests that the murderer is not likely to be any of the household members. Poirot goes into a hypothetical tale about a man who is weak but not evil, who blackmails Mrs. Ferrars for money and then one thing leads to the other, and he ends up needing to kill Mr. Ackroyd. Their conversation is interrupted by a phone ring. James announces that the call is from the police. They have found the stranger. His name is Charles Kent and James is needed in Liverpool immediately to identify him.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

Poirot's hypothetical tale about the murderer provides interesting insight into the psychology of the killer. Poirot seems to think that the killer is not an evil person, but only a greedy person who got desperate. It sounds like Poirot is talking about Ralph, but Poirot does not name him specifically, maybe because he knows how avid Caroline is with her idea of Ralph's innocence. The story takes on a new twist with the arrest of the stranger. Now, the reader is in suspense to find out who this stranger is and how he fits in to the whole case.



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

James, Poirot and Inspector Raglan take the train to Liverpool. Inspector Raglan tells them that Charles Kent is a heavy drugs user, but that is all they know for now. When they arrive, the officer on duty tells them that Charles Kent has an American accent and that he admits to being around King's Abbot on the day of the murder.

When James sees Kent, he realizes there is nothing familiar about him. He can't even positively identify him, until he hears his voice and recognizes it. Kent will admit to nothing, until Poirot takes out the goose quill from his pocket and tells Kent that this is proof that he was in the summerhouse at Fernly Park. Kent gives in and admits he was in the summerhouse, but promises that he left at 9:25, which is before the murder took place. He also claims to have an alibi.

Poirot thinks Kent may be the blackmailer. Poirot also makes a bid deal out of where Kent is from. No one else understands why that is a big deal. Poirot tells James one of his famous "little ideas." He thinks Kent's going to Fernly Park that day has something to do with his being born in Kent.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

There is still a lot of mystery around Kent, although Poirot seems to be unraveling that mystery bit by bit. Poirot displays his investigative genius again by pushing Kent into confession with the goose quill. In this chapter, the reader is introduced to Poirot's "little ideas." Poirot himself shamelessly explains to James how once in a while he has these spurts of genius. Poirot's "little idea" in this chapter about Kent going to Fernly Park due to his being born in Kent seems far-fetched, but the reader knows that Poirot is usually right. There is no explanation as to where Poirot may have come up with such an idea.





# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

Inspector Raglan runs into James and tells him that Kent's alibi checked out. James tells the inspector about Poirot's little idea. The inspector says Poirot must be a little crazy and that he heard from Caroline that insanity ran in Poirot's family. The inspector and James go together to tell Poirot about Kent's alibi.

Poirot tells the inspector that if her were him, he would not release Kent, but the inspector insists that he has nothing to base holding Kent on. Poirot explains that his alibi may not be worth much if the murder was committed earlier than they thought. Flora could be lying about when she last saw her uncle. Poirot suggests that Flora may have been the one to steal that 40 pounds and then pretend that she was leaving her uncles' office when Parker saw her when she was actually coming down the stairs.

Poirot and the others go to visit Flora and find her with Blunt. The inspector confronts her. She caves in and confesses to stealing the money. She says she has had to do a lot of stealing, lying and cheating to get by. That is why she feels that she and Ralph are so close, because they have both had to live this way. She says she did not think the lie was a big deal, as long as it did not harm Ralph.

Blunt tries to save Flora from her own confession and says that Mrs. Ackroyd gave him that money for something and that Flora is only taking the blame because she thinks she is protecting Ralph. Blunt storms off. Poirot follows him and tells him that he knows that Flora really did take that money but that Blunt should know that Flora does not really love Ralph. Blunt is shocked, but also overjoyed at the news.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

The reader does not know how Poirot finds out about Flora stealing the money, but it turns out that he is right. Flora too is hiding something and Poirot finds out what it is as promised. Flora admits to being a liar and cheater, but also says that Ralph is too. This may mean that Ralph is indeed the blackmailer, but he is not likely to be the murderer.

Flora obviously has strong feelings of friendship for Ralph, but she does not love him romantically. Blunt clearly is in love with Flora, so much so that he is willing to take the blame for her crime. Flora does not seem to realize how much trouble her lie causes for the case. The whole timing of the crime must now be rethought.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

Inspector Raglan is frustrated because Flora's lie has thrown off the whole case. All of the alibis must now be reconsidered. James and Poirot go to meet Miss Russell. Poirot wants to confront her about something. He tells her about Kent and how he is now a suspect in the case due to Flora's confession. Miss Russell is distraught with the news. She caves in and admits that Kent is her son from before marriage and that he comes to her every now and then for money.

Miss Russell tells Poirot her deep dark secret so that she can be Kent's alibi, and he can be cleared. Poirot reassures Miss Russell that he will keep her secret and that soon the crime will be solved. Poirot tells James that he asked Inspector Raglan for a favor to help him solve the case. He asked the inspector to send a newspaper announcement saying that Ralph has been captured in Liverpool while he was on his way to America.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

Miss Russell and Kent's true stories have come out, and they seem cleared of the murder. Poirot keeps weeding out more and more of the suspects. Poirot's request from Inspector Raglan to print an announcement about Ralph's capture creates suspense because the reader does not know why Poirot wants this done and what the outcome might be.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

The announcement Poirot requested is published in the paper and Caroline, amongst others, is shocked. She tells James that he must do something to save Ralph, because she is sure of his innocence. Caroline tells James that Poirot had a male visitor today, but she does not know who it was. Poirot arrives at their house and asks James to join him for a walk. They walk towards Fernly Park. Poirot asks James to call everyone at Fernly Park for a meeting that evening at Poirot's home.

James speaks to Mrs. Ackroyd first. She tells him that she felt horrible about Ralph, but that Raymond did not believe the news and that he actually called the police who confirmed his suspicions. She also gives him another piece of interesting news. Flora is now engaged to Ralph, but Mrs. Ackroyd was happier with the idea of Ralph as a husband for her daughter. Mrs. Ackroyd also tells James that the inspector must have hypnotized Flora and made her confess to the theft, but the reality is that Flora only borrowed that money without asking so she would not disturb her uncle when he was busy.

James tells Mrs. Ackroyd about the meeting, and she assures him that they will all be there. When Poirot and James return from their walk, they find Ursula in James' house crying and disheveled. Poirot goes up to Ursula and calls her, Mrs. Ralph Paton.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

Poirot calls everyone for a meeting, creating suspense because a lot of information will probably be revealed at this meeting. Raymond did not believe the newspaper announcement. This makes him suspicious. Does he know something not everyone else knows? How did he know the announcement was fake? When Poirot and James return to find Ursula in James' house, the reader knows that we will now find out Ursula's story and discover what she is hiding. The chapter ends with great suspense because Poirot calls Ursula Mrs. Ralph Paton. The reader now wants to know how Ursula ended up married to Ralph and how Poirot found out about the secret union.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

Poirot comforts Ursula with the suggestion that not all newspaper articles are true. Then, he urges her to trust him and tell him her story from start to finish. Ursula tells her tale. Ursula, comes from a poor family and began to work early in her life to support herself. She meets Ralph through her job and falls in love with him. Ralph urges her to marry him secretly because Mr. Ackroyd would never approve of his marriage to a poor girl, and he needed to stay on good terms with Mr. Ackroyd, until he could get out of the financial trouble he is in. Mr. Ackroyd has his heart set on Ralph and Flora marrying, and he pushed for their engagement with the promise to help Ralph financially.

The trouble began when Mr. Ackroyd decides to announce the engagement. When Ursula finds out about the engagement, she is floored. She confronts Ralph, and he begs her to be patient, but she insists on telling Mr. Ackroyd the truth. She meets with Mr. Ackroyd and tells him the truth. They have a big fight. In the evening, she meets Ralph in the summerhouse, and they also have a big fight. Half an hour later, Mr. Ackroyd is dead and therefore never had a chance to take Ralph out of his will.

Ursula senses that Poirot may suspect her in the murder since she has motive, and she is terrified, but Caroline comforts her and tells her there is no way anyone would suspect her. Ursula also insists that Ralph did not do it either, even though it looks very bad for him. Poirot asks Ursula whether Ralph was wearing shoes or boots that evening. Ursula does not remember.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

After hearing Ursula's story, the case against Ralph seems even more dire. He seems to have very strong motive to kill his uncle. Ursula left Ralph in the summerhouse just before the murder was committed. Ursula's story also helps to explain the conversation Caroline overheard in the woods and the ring Poirot found in the pond. The reader also now knows what Ursula and Mr. Ackroyd were arguing about in the office and why she left her job.



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

Caroline takes Ursula to a bedroom to rest. Poirot reminds her that she has to be at the meeting at his house at nine o'clock. James and Poirot chat about the case. Poirot reminisces about his old friend Hastings who used to help him with his investigations. He says Hastings used to keep a written record of the cases and that used to prove quite helpful. James shyly admits to Poirot that he has been keeping a record of the case and Poirot is overjoyed. James takes out the manuscript, which consists of twenty chapters, containing information up to Miss Russell's visit.

James leaves to check on a patient and Poirot dines with Caroline and then sits in James' workshop and reads the manuscript. James asks Poirot for his opinion on the manuscript. Poirot praises James' work and tells him it has been very helpful. Then Poirot, James and Ursula go to the meeting and leave Caroline who is sad that she is not invited to join them. Poirot fusses about preparing the scene, until the guests arrive.

Poirot begins the meeting by announcing Ursula's marriage to Ralph and everyone is shocked. Mrs. Ackroyd is upset. Flora understands. She asks Ursula to tell her where Ralph is, but Ursula does not know. Poirot says that he knows. Poirot ignores their questions about Ralph and reads out a list of all their names. Then he tells them they are all suspects. Mrs. Ackroyd protests and says she wants to go home. Poirot says they must all wait to hear everything he has to say.

Poirot begins to explain the case from the beginning. He tells them all of the clues that he found and what they meant to him. Then he comes to an important question. He asks them who was in the room with Mr. Ackroyd at 9:30. He eliminates many of the suspects due to their having alibis. Then he says, maybe no one was with Mr. Ackroyd. Poirot explains then how he came to the conclusion that no one was necessarily in the room with Mr. Ackroyd at that time due to Mr. Ackroyd recent purchase of a Dictaphone. The conversation winds back to Ralph and Poirot finally announces that Ralph is right here in the room with them.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Poirot claims to have everything figured out and there is great suspense as he leads this meeting during which he claims he will reveal the killer. Mrs. Ackroyd is very upset and is the only character who seems very uncomfortable and anxious. The story takes on a new twist with the introduction of the Dictaphone. The end of the chapter provides a big surprise with the sudden appearance of Ralph.



# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

Ralph rushes to his wife's side. Poirot tells the guests that he had promised to find out everything. He shakes his finger at James and tells the guests that everyone gave up their little secret except James. James confesses that his secret was that he had met Ralph after the murder and made it clear to him that he was a major suspect and that he might even have to testify to evidence against his wife since she was a suspect as well. This made Ralph flee from the whole situation. He had worried that Ursula may have gotten into a big fight with Mr. Ackroyd and a fight like that could get out of hand and have deadly results, he thought. Ursula is upset to hear that Ralph even considered the idea that she may have murdered his uncle.

Poirot leads the conversation back to James. He says that James helped hide Ralph from the police. Poirot says he figured out that James would think of a home for the mentally unfit as a good hiding place for Ralph and when he tested his guess, he found himself correct. Poirot tells James that he sensed that James was holding something back in the manuscript. Ralph thanks James for helping him out. Poirot points out that what James did damaged Ralph's case, not helped it. Ralph says he realizes now that he should not have gone into hiding.

Raymond asks Ralph for his story. Ralph says his story is that after he fought with his wife, he left the house and never saw his uncle. Raymond says that it looks bad for him not to have an alibi. Poirot says that the only way to save Ralph is for the true murderer to confess, but Poirot does not want the confession to happen tonight, and he did not invite the police to the meeting on purpose. Poirot says the murderer is in this room now and the murderer must know that tomorrow the truth will reach Inspector Raglan.

Poirot's maid walks in with a telegram. Poirot opens it, reads it and says now he knows for sure who the murderer is, now that he has read the wire transfer from a steamer on her way to the United States. Poirot says the meeting is over and that the murderer will be announced to Inspector Raglan in the morning.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

Poirot claims that the murderer is someone in the room and that the telegram he just received confirms that, but for some reason he wants to wait until morning to announce the killer publicly and to notify the police. The reader does not know yet why Poirot would give the killer this extra time in which he/she can escape or kill Poirot or do several other horrible things. However, the reader knows now that the killer is not Ralph, because Poirot said that the real murderer must confess to clear Ralph.

James is beginning to look suspicious. He was last to give up his little secret, but there seems to be more to his story, more to his secret than he admitted to Poirot. James

claims to have helped Ralph simply for Ralph's own good, but Poirot points out that hiding Ralph hurt his case instead of helping him and even Ralph realizes this now.



# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

Poirot motions for James to stay behind after the meeting. James asks Poirot why he chose to give the murderer this elaborate warning. Poirot tells him to use his grey cells. James guesses, to make the real killer confess because Poirot is not really sure who it is. Then he guesses that Poirot is setting a trap by provoking the real killer to try to silence Poirot. Poirot says no to both guesses. James asks who Poirot thinks the killer is. Poirot begins to explain to James how he cracked the case.

Poirot explains that Ralph had no motive to make that the telephone call and so he is not the killer. The telephone call must have been made by an accomplice and not someone from the household. The motive for the call was difficult to guess, but Poirot realized that the effect of the call was that the murder was discovered that night rather than in the morning. The killer might want to be there when Mr. Ackroyd is discovered dead and that James, Blunt, Raymond and Parker were first at the scene before the police arrived.

Poirot points out that the pulled out chair has always been a crucial clue to him. Poirot notes that James had a nice diagram of the study in his manuscript. Poirot realizes that the chair must have been pulled out to cover the view of whatever was on the table in front of the window. Whoever made the phone call, Poirot adds, wanted to be at the scene to retrieve whatever was being hidden on that table. Poirot says that he eliminated Parker because Parker would not need to make the phone call to be on scene when the murder is discovered. In addition, it was Parker who noted the pulled out chair.

Poirot then talks about what the item the killer wanted out of sight might be. He reminds James that during the meeting they concluded that Mr. Ackroyd probably was speaking into the Dictaphone that night, but if so, then why was no Dictaphone found? The Dictaphone might be what the killer tried to hide on the round table and then took away by being first at murder scene. The killer must have a bag or something to carry Dictaphone away in without being noticed.

James asks why someone would want to remove the Dictaphone. Poirot notes that maybe Mr. Ackroyd was not speaking into the Dictaphone at 9:30, maybe he was already dead and Blunt was hearing only Mr. Ackroyd's recorded voice. James says, then the murderer must have been in the room at that time to turn the machine on. Poirot says no, there could have been a timer. The killer must have known about the Dictaphone and must have known how to make a timer for it.

Poirot speaks about Ralph's footprints at the window. Poirot suggests someone made Ralph's prints to frame him. Who had the opportunity to take Ralph's shoes from Three Boars that evening asks Poirot? Then Poirot points out one more detail about the killer,





the killer must have been able to obtain the dagger from the silver table long before the time of the murder.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

As Poirot paints a portrait of the killer, his motives, means and method and that picture begins to slowly take the shape of James, but it no certain terms yet. The reader is also still in suspense at to why Poirot is allowing the killer time to escape or to kill Poirot. Why is Poirot telling James about these new clues that all point to James? The revelation of all these clues also shows that Poirot had stopped telling James everything he discovers about the case, long ago.



# Chapter 26

## Chapter 26 Summary

Poirot tells James that it was only the discrepancy in time that first drew his attention away from James. James says, why would I kill Mr. Ackroyd? Poirot tells him he knows that it was him who was blackmailing Mrs. Ferrars. Who would have better knowledge that she killed her husband than the doctor attending to the case? James mentioned a legacy he received years ago to explain the money he has, but Poirot found no trace of a legacy.

James asks Poirot how he explains the phone call. Caroline told Poirot that one of James' patients on the morning of the murder was a steward from an American liner. He was likely going to leave Liverpool by train that evening. James could have asked the man to make the call. Poirot contacted the steward and found out his theory was true.

James yawns and tells Poirot his ideas are crazy and impractical. Poirot warns James not to take this lightly because the truth will be in police hands by morning, but Poirot is willing to offer James another way out simply for Caroline's sake. Poirot suggests that James can finish his manuscript without holding back any information and then possibly overdose on sleeping pills. Poirot warns James not to try to silence him as he did to Mr. Ackroyd. James tells Poirot that he is no fool, yawns again, as if unconcerned, and goes home.

## Chapter 26 Analysis

Poirot made his wishes clear. He wants James to finish the manuscript and then kill himself to spare Caroline from dealing with a murderer for a brother. James admits nothing during the scene. He puts Poirot down and calls his theory impractical. James goes home and the reader does not know what James will do next. Will James plot to kill Poirot? Will he take Poirot's advice and kill himself?



# Chapter 27

## Chapter 27 Summary

It's five in the morning and James speaks in first person and claims that he has been writing all night but is now done. He says his original intention for his writing was to publish it one day as one of Poirot's failures. James points out that he had a premonition of disaster from the beginning. He says that he knew he had to murder Mr. Ackroyd as soon as he heard that Mrs. Ferrars was dead. The Dictaphone was not working and James told Mr. Ackroyd he would fix it. This gave him a chance to do what he needed with it. James sent Parker to call police and then retrieved the Dictaphone and pushed chair back into place. James says he was shocked that Parker noticed the pulled out chair. He is also perplexed by Flora claiming to have seen her uncle alive at quarter to ten.

James says he worries about Caroline finding out, but he will take the way out Poirot offered him. He trusts Poirot to keep the truth a secret from Caroline. He thinks grief over his death will be easier for Caroline to deal with. James will send the manuscript to Poirot and then overdose on drugs, perhaps Veronal, the same medication Mrs. Ferrars used to kill herself. James wants to point out that he feels that Mrs. Ferrars' death was her decision, and he does not feel responsible. He ends by saying that he wishes Poirot never retired and came here to grow vegetable marrows.

## Chapter 27 Analysis

In this chapter, James fills in all the final missing pieces. James decides to take Poirot up on his offer. Poirot will keep the fact that James was the murderer from Caroline in return for James' suicide. James will overdose on sleeping pills, and he, ironically, chooses the same pills Mrs. Ferrars overdosed on. The completed manuscript will clear Ralph and all will be well for the rest of the townspeople.



# Characters

## Dr. James Sheppard

The narrator of the story, Dr. James Sheppard, is a clever and discreet doctor, who cares deeply for his sister. He would do anything for her, but give up the kind of gossip information that she lives for. Dr. James Sheppard becomes Poirot's unofficial assistant in the murder investigation, following him around town looking for clues and discussing suspects and motives. James is intrigued by Poirot's investigative skills and keeps a written account of the case throughout the investigation. James' secret hope is that one day he will publish this manuscript as one of Poirot's failures. James does not realize that Poirot is more clever than James gave him credit for. In the end, Poirot solves the case and finds James guilty of murder. Although James is a murderer and blackmailer, he ends his story with an act of love for his sister. He chooses to kill himself and allow his sister to deal with the grief of his death, which he feels will pass, rather than deal with finding out that her brother is a murderer and losing the fondness and pride she has in him.

There seems to be two sides to James. There is the helpful doctor who cares deeply for his sister and friends and then there is the cold-blooded murderer and money thirsty blackmailer that no one knows about or sees. Somehow, James hides the evil part of himself so well, that no one suspects him of such evil acts and instead they all trust him with their stories and secrets, even Poirot, at first. James' last act of killing himself seems to come from the kinder side of him, the side of him that selflessly loves his sister. Although, since James is the narrator of the book, the reader must realize that all the reader knows of James is what James is willing to write about himself. This may be why the reader never gets a sense of James' evilness, until the reader suddenly and shockingly discovers that he is the killer near the end.

## Hercule Poirot

Poirot starts out as the mysterious neighbor who moves into The Larches next door to Dr. James Sheppard and his sister Caroline. Later the reader finds out that Poirot is a famous detective, known for his brilliant investigative methods. Poirot is supposed to be retired, but gives into Miss Flora's pleas to take on the case of Mr. Roger Ackroyd's murder. Poirot's investigative methods include the use of what he calls his "gray cells" and coming up with seemingly far-fetched "little ideas."

Poirot's genius juxtaposes with Inspector Raglan, from the police force's, traditional yet fruitless methods. Poirot is not after limelight or popularity. In fact, he seems to hide from it and asks for no credit for his work. At the same time, he has an air of shameless confidence that surprises people.



## **Caroline Sheppard**

Caroline is the loving older sister of Dr. James Sheppard. She lives with her brother and awaits his return home everyday in order to fish out as much gossipy information from him as she can. Her curiosity is endless. She has a huge network of unofficial informants who provide her with the latest town gossip. James jokingly calls her network the Intelligence Corps. Caroline's connections and knowledge of the townspeople often proves helpful to Poirot for investigation.

## **Ralph Paton**

Ralph Paton is the handsome stepson of Mr. Ackroyd and the suspect to which most of the clues in the case point to. Everybody in town seems to love Ralph with all his charm and good looks. Although Ralph often gets himself into trouble, particularly financial trouble and needs to rely on his stepfather to help him out. Mr. Ackroyd agrees to help him, but in return for his agreement to marry Miss Flora, Mr. Ackroyd's niece. Meanwhile, Ralph is in love with the Parlor maid, Ursula and marries her secretly. He cannot tell his stepfather because if he does he may be disinherited. After Mr. Ackroyd's death, Ralph disappears and when he comes back from hiding at the end of the story, he returns to his wife and inherits the greater part of Mr. Ackroyd's wealth.

## **Miss Russell**

Miss Russell is a good-looking housekeeper, who works for Mr. Ackroyd. She and Mr. Ackroyd seem to have a liking for each other, but no official relationship. Her actions become suspicious when she shows up at Dr. Sheppard's house and inquires about poisons and drugs. Poirot investigates her and uncovers her dark secrets. Miss Russell has a son from before marriage who often comes to her for money. Poirot promises Miss Russell to keep her shameful secret between them.

## **Mrs. Cecil Ackroyd**

Mrs. Ackroyd is the pretentious widow of Mr. Ackroyd's dead brother. She accepts the charity of her brother-in-law, but often complains of his miserliness and vows that she would do anything for her independence. She is a suspect in the murder, but only briefly, since she does not have much of an alibi. Mr. Ackroyd did not leave her much money in his will.

## **Flora Ackroyd**

Flora is the golden haired, creamy skinned niece of Mr. Ackroyd. Mr. Ackroyd pushes her into an engagement with Ralph, even though Ralph and Flora love each other only



as friends. Flora is not a suspect for long, since she is the one who went to Poirot and begged him to take on the case. She did this hoping to clear Ralph of suspicion , as

she was sure he did not commit the murder. Flora proves to be a very loyal friend to Ralph even when she finds out about his marriage to Ursula. Flora's dark secret is that she stole some money from her uncle. Flora tells a lie to cover up her theft, and her lie messes up the investigation for a while, until Poirot forces her to tell the truth. In the end, Flora gets engaged to Blunt, a friend of Mr. Ackroyd's.

## **Parker**

Parker is Mr. Ackroyd's butler. He is a humorless nervous man who was a suspect in the case especially when Poirot discovered that he had blackmailed a former employer for money. Parker admits to his past sin, but insists that he had nothing to do with Mr. Ackroyd's murder.

## **Geoffrey Raymond**

Raymond is Mr. Ackroyd's debonair and efficient secretary. Raymond does not have a strong enough motive to be a real suspect for long. Raymond is young and handsome, so much so that Caroline assumes that Flora must want to marry Raymond and therefore does not really care about Ralph Paton.

## **Major Blunt**

Major Blunt is a courageous, stocky and cool-headed hunter. Blunt has grey eyes and rarely speaks. Blunt was a good friend of Mr. Ackroyd, even though he was much younger than Mr. Ackroyd and very different from him. Blunt felt like he did not fit into the world of high-class people, yet he was in love with Miss Flora and wanted to remain by her side throughout her troubles. In the end, he is overjoyed to find out that Flora feels the same way about him, and they get engaged.

## **Ursula Bourne**

Ursula is a tall and pretty parlor maid at the Ackroyd household. She is married to Ralph secretly and is furious when she finds out Mr. Ackroyd has forced Ralph and Flora to be engaged. She confronts Mr. Ackroyd, contrary to Ralph's wishes, and gets into a big argument with him. She is then forced to leave her position at the Ackroyd household. She becomes a suspect when Poirot and James speak to her former employers and find them unwilling to tell much about Ursula's past. In the end when Ralph return, she is reunited with her husband, and her troubles are over.



## Charles Kent

Charles Kent is Miss Russell's son from before marriage. He takes drugs and goes to his mother every now and then for money. He is the stranger James sees on his way home from Fernly on the day of the murder. Kent is a major suspect in the murder for a long time, until Poirot uncovers the true reason for his visit to Fernly Park.



# Objects/Places

## King's Abbot

King's Abbot is a small town nine miles from the big town of Cranchester. The village consists of a large railway station, a small post office and two rival general stores. Most of the townspeople consist of unmarried ladies and retired military officers. The townspeople's favorite pastime is gossip. The small tightly knit town is where Mr. Ackroyd lives and where the famous Hercule Poirot decides to retire.

## Fernly Park

One of the two most important houses in King's Abbot, Fernly Park is owned by Mr. Ackroyd, a wealthy businessman. Fernly Park is where the murder of Roger Ackroyd takes place and every member of the household, butler, parlor maid, housekeeper, secretary and even relatives are suspects in the murder.

## The Larches

The Larches is the property belonging to Mr. Poirot. Poirot purchases this house in King's Abbot, where he hopes to retire and spend his time in the garden growing vegetable marrows. The Larches is where the final meeting of all the suspects takes place, summoned by Poirot. During this meeting, the real story comes out and the murderer is uncovered.

## The Intelligence Corps

The Intelligence Corps is what James calls his sister Caroline's network of gossip seekers. Caroline can sit in her home and never leave, yet she will still know everything happening in the town due to her Intelligence Corps. Caroline's sources prove helpful for Poirot in his investigation.

## The Tunisian Dagger

The Tunisian dagger is a gift from Major Blunt to Mr. Ackroyd. Mr. Ackroyd kept it in his silver drawer. The killer took it out of the drawer and used it to kill Mr. Ackroyd.

## Dictaphone

Mr. Ackroyd purchases a Dictaphone early in the story. It stops working and James takes it away promising to fix it. The Dictaphone becomes important in the investigation





when Poirot uncovers how the killer used it to help create an alibi. Guests in Mr. Ackroyd's house heard Mr. Ackroyd's voice on the Dictaphone and thought he was still in his office when he was actually already dead.

## **The Summerhouse at Fernly Park**

The summerhouse is where many important meetings take place such as the one between Miss Russell and her son Kent. In addition, the meeting between Ralph and Ursula takes place there. This is why Poirot find two clues there, a handkerchief and a goose quill, which later help him in uncovering Miss Russell's dark secret and Ursula and Ralph's secret marriage.

## **The Ring**

Poirot finds a ring in a pond at Fernly Park. The ring creates a big mystery since engraved in it is "From R, March 13." Later Poirot discovers that Ralph has married Ursula and then ring belongs to her.

## **The Little Gray Cells**

Poirot often refers to little gray cells and how important it is to use them when trying to crack a case. He encourages James to use his gray cells throughout the story. It is clear that Poirot has a distinctive and effective investigative method, and he gives credit for his skills to his little gray cells.

## **The Manuscript**

James keeps a written record of the case as he follows Poirot around town finding clues and interviewing suspects. This written record proves crucial in the case. When Poirot reads the manuscript, he notices that James is holding back information. This along with other clues leads Poirot to conclude that James is the killer. In the end, James does as Poirot requests; he fills in the missing parts in the manuscript and sends it to Poirot before he kills himself.

## Social Sensitivity

Christie has been accused of being snobbish in her concerns. Indeed her works are without exception set among the British upper classes; she herself commented once that she was surprised at the number of servants in her early books. Another term often applied to her is "cozy," because her books are so often set in closed surroundings. Both *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and *The Moving Finger* take place in small English villages, with the action of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* centering in the household of a wealthy businessman, complete with icily correct butler and nervous parlor maid. *The Moving Finger* concerns murder and poison pen letters unleashed on the genteel inhabitants of a quiet country village. However, both snobbery and coziness acted as liberating rather than limiting influences on Christie's fiction. During the period in which she produced her best work, murder was a rare occurrence in the British upper classes; this allowed her the dramatic possibilities inherent in the shock of the unexpected and of the subsequent investigation. The closed surroundings emphasized the disruption of order that a murder entails, and consequently clarified the harmony resulting from the reestablishment of that order. In Christie's detective fiction, perhaps more than any other, one can see the essentially comic nature of the genre, as Northrop Frye defined it: The established order, tacitly regarded as good and desirable for all participants, is upset and then restored.

Christie's own response to accusations of snobbery was simply that she did not know what miners talked about in pubs so she could not write about them. She had to write what she knew, as does any author. The books in which she attempts to deal with international conspiracies are among her weakest and are proof that her so-called snobbery and coziness were finally her strengths. Her essentially conservative morality offered comfort to her millions of readers, who knew that in Christie's books murder was always a crime that would be legally avenged; the very smallness of the crime made it imaginable.

# Themes

## Themes

The overarching theme of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and *The Moving Finger* is the same as that for all crime fiction: the clash between good and evil. The working out of this theme on the side of good constitutes the essentially comic nature of such fiction.

Within this theme Christie develops two others in her books. In the Hercule Poirot stories, readers are constantly reminded of the importance of thinking and of order. Poirot eschews the Holmesian technique of getting down on his knees with a magnifying glass to find clues; instead, he uses his "little grey cells" to solve the mystery, often making gentle fun of the other characters for their desire for action rather than thought. Poirot also seeks logic and order above all, even to the habit of straightening pictures, pencils, or other objects, as well as the clues in a case. This passion for order invariably leads him to the solution that others have missed, such as the links among the death of Mrs. Ferrars, the murder of Ackroyd, and the disappearance of Ralph Paton.

In the Jane Marple stories, another theme is developed: the importance and protection of the innocent. In *The Moving Finger*, a number of innocent people receive poison pen letters; Christie treats their distress with sympathy, and when Miss Marple is brought on the scene to solve the mystery, she must put young Megan Hunter in danger before she can get the murderer to reveal himself. "We are not put into this world to avoid danger when an innocent fellow-creature's life is at stake," Miss Marple says; in several of her stories she puts herself in danger more than once, and in *A Pocket Full of Rye* she rushes to the aid of a poor servant girl. In the Marple stories, and to a less noticeable degree in all Christie's crime fiction, the innocent must be protected from the suspicion of guilt, for such suspicion finally destroys happiness.

## Secrets

In a small town like King's Abbot, it is very difficult to keep a secret, but all of the characters were keeping their own little secrets. Poirot himself at first wanted to keep his former profession a secret, so he could retire in peace. Of course, just like all the other secrets he himself later extracts, his own secret came out. Then we have Mrs. Ferrars' secret that she killed her husband. Mrs. Ferrars' secret leads her into a messy situation of blackmail when James sees an easy way to make big money by blackmailing Mrs. Ferrars. For Mrs. Ferrars, it is dirty hidden secrets that ultimately lead her to melt under the pressure and commit suicide.

Poirot tells all of the suspects during a meeting that he knows each of them is keeping a secret and can probably be helpful in the case if they would come out with it. He assures them that he will find out all he needs to know whether they cooperate or



not. Because secrets are often paired with guilt, many of the suspects sooner or later confess their secrets. The biggest secret of all, James' secret, only comes out in the end when the twist in the story line is revealed. It is also as if the writer herself, Agatha Christie, was keeping a secret from the reader. The reader only finds out at the end that the story they are reading is actually the manuscript written by James as he recorded the progress of the case and as he later decided to end the manuscript with his confession and apology.

## Money

Money is the central motive for most of the characters. Mr. Ackroyd was murdered because of money. Mrs. Ferrars was blackmailed for money. Parker blackmailed his former employer for money. Ralph could not announce his marriage to his true love for fear of losing money. Kent comes to visit his mother for money. Mrs. Ackroyd and Flora have to scheme and steal in order to get by because Mr. Ackroyd does not give them enough money. Raymond asks Mr. Ackroyd for a loan because he gambles and loses his money. Money is definitely a central theme and a huge motivating factor for most of the characters.

Mr. Ackroyd is the wealthy character in the story, and he seems to use his money to hold power over everyone. He uses his power of wealth to push Ralph and Flora into an engagement they do not wish for. All of the characters have to stay on good terms with Mr. Ackroyd and suck up to him and sometimes even plot against each other in order to squeeze as much money out of Mr. Ackroyd as possible. When Mr. Ackroyd dies, every member of the household is a suspect, because they were all after his money.

## Small Town Gossip

King's Abbot is a small town where everybody knows everybody else's business, or at least they try to. In a small town, news travels fast and the reader sees that happening in this story. In such towns, there is usually a central hub where news is collected and a network through which it is dispatched. In King's Abbot, that central hub is Caroline and the network is her Intelligence Corps. Caroline's network includes the milkman and various housekeepers working for various employers. Sometimes this proves helpful for Poirot in solving the case, because if he needs a certain piece of information, he knows to go straight to the central hub, Caroline, and she is sure to find it for him. Other times, the phenomenon of small town gossip proves to be a hindrance, like the time James gives in and tells his sister and her friends about a clue Poirot found, the ring in the pond, a clue that Poirot wanted to keep secret for a while longer.



# Style

## Points of View

*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is written in first person with Dr. James Sheppard providing the voice of the narrator. The reader hears the whole story from James' perspective. In the end of the story, when the reader discovers that James has been keeping a record of the investigation, the reader realizes that the story they just read is likely that manuscript that James has been working on all along. This is important because it leads the reader to question what they have read. Poirot points out that in the manuscript draft he read, James was holding back on a lot of information. James agrees to revise the manuscript to include his guilty doings in it, but there is not guarantee that he does not leave out anything. Chances are, James, as the narrator, left much out of the story since the reader has no idea of James' evil side, until the last chapter or so when the reader discovers that James is a blackmailer and a cold-blooded murderer. A third person narration would have likely led to a more well-rounded and honest portrayal of James.

## Setting

*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* takes place in the small town of King's Abbot, which is nine miles away from the large town of Cranchester. The major hallmarks of the town are a large railway station, a small post office and two rival general stores. It is the kind of town that able-bodied men leave early in life. Therefore, the town consists mostly of retired military officers and unmarried women. The town's major pastime is gossip. There are two major properties or homes in King's Abbot. The first is King's Paddock, left to Mrs. Ferrars by her late husband and the second is Fernly Park, owned by Mr. Ackroyd. Fernly Park is where the main action of the story takes place.

## Language and Meaning

*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is a fast paced, action driven story, nearly devoid of long expository paragraphs or fancy metaphors and descriptive imagery. The story instead thrives on suspense and quick unfolding of information and action. The narrator uses simple, yet formal language, like the language of high-class people. The language is straightforward and rarely figurative.

The narrator foreshadows horrible happenings from the start of the story and even throughout the narrative. The story creates great suspense for the reader as the James follows Poirot, and they find one clue after the other and uncover secrets that unravel tales of love, pain and greed. The reader does not find out who the murderer is until the end of the story. When the reader does find out that the murderer is James, it is a shock.



A problem arises when the reader realizes that since the murderer is the narrator, the story may not be all that reliable. James portrays himself as a mild mannered and kind doctor. Even in the end of the story when the reader finds out that James is a criminal, James as the narrator, still portrays himself positively because he makes it sound like he is going to commit suicide simply to spare his sister the disappointment and shame of finding out that her brother is a murderer.

## Structure

The novel consists of 27 short and fast-paced chapters. The main plot line is the murder of Roger Ackroyd and Poirot's investigation, but Poirot's investigations lead to many smaller subplots. Each subplot unravels one of the household members' secrets. The story also follows the typical structure of a mystery novel or a whodunit story, where the crime is committed in the beginning and the rest of the story is an investigation of all the possible suspects and a final resolution takes place at the end when the criminal is revealed. The novel also takes on an interesting circular turn in that it opens and ends with a suicide. Mrs. Ferrar's suicide is what ignites the murder of Roger Ackroyd and series of events that follow and then the story ends with James' suicide. James decides to end his life the same way as Mrs. Ferrars, with an overdose of sleeping pills. He sees a sort of justice in this, although he does not blame himself directly for her suicide.



## Quotes

"I shall go through with it to the end." Chapter 7, pg. 57

"You will find, M. le docteur, if you have much to do with cases of this kind, that they all resemble each other in one thing... everyone concerned in them has something to hide," Chapter 7, pg. 63

"But it is not easy to hide things from Hercule Poirot." Chapter 9, pg. 75

"He talked a lot about the little gray cells of the brain, and of their functions. His own, he says, are of the first quality." Chapter 11, pg. 99

"You are like the little child who wants to know the way the engine works. You wish to see the affair, not as the family doctor sees it, but with the eye of a detective who knows and cares for no one to whom they are all strangers and all equally liable to suspicion." Chapter 13, pg. 111.

"Men have been known to do that-act guilty when they're perfectly innocent." Chapter 13, pg. 115

"I played Watson to his Sherlock." Chapter 14, pg. 116

"It was rather like a jigsaw puzzle to which every one contributed his own little piece of knowledge or discovery. But their task ended there. To Poirot belongs the renown of fitting those pieces into their correct place." Chapter 14, pg. 116

"Every little irrelevancy had a bearing upon the whole." Chapter 21, pg. 177-178

"For a moment I was inclined to think that the scene I had just witnessed was a gigantic piece of bombast-that he had been what he called "playing the comedy" with a view to making himself interesting and important." Chapter 25, pg. 203

""Whatever else I may be, I am not a fool." Chapter 26, pg. 210

"A strange end to my manuscript. I meant it to be published some day as the history of one of Poirot's failures! Odd, how things pan out." Chapter 27, pg. 211

# Adaptations

Christie's work has been adapted for the stage and screen many times; she herself adapted seven of her tales for the stage, including *The Mousetrap* which has broken all records for a consecutive run, and *Witness for the Prosecution* which received an award in New York for the best foreign play of the 1954-1955 season. At least twenty films have been made of her work, including the famous Margaret Rutherford series of Miss Marple films and the more recent and expensively produced *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) directed by Sidney Lumet. Television adaptations have included both Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot stories, the most recent being the PBS Miss Marple series with Joan Hickson in the lead role (1986-1987). A musical spoof of *And Then There Were None* titled *Something's Afoot* appeared on Broadway in 1976; the climactic number, sung by the entire cast, was "I Owe It All to Agatha Christie."





## Topics for Discussion

What was the effect for Poirot and his investigation of having James, the murderer, be his right hand man during the investigation? Did James hamper the investigation in any way?

What did James do to influence the investigation, and how did he play with the clues in order to frame Ralph and keep himself looking innocent?

Why did Poirot offer James a way out at the end? What does that tell us about Poirot's character?

Compare and contrast Poirot and Inspector Raglan. Discuss how their personalities and investigative methods differ. How does that author juxtapose Inspector Raglan with Poirot?

Describe the relationship James and Caroline have. How much do they really trust each other?

What clues does the author plant in the novel that hint at the identity of the true murderer?

Discuss the surprise ending of the story. What is your opinion about the author's twist of the conventional use of the narrator as the mouthpiece for truth? What effect does this have on the believability of the story?

What techniques does the author use to distract us from and disguise the real killer throughout the story?

## Literary Precedents

The chief literary precedent for detective and crime fiction is Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), and his other "tales of ratiocination," with their emphasis on logical deduction in solving a crime.

Closer to Christie is Arthur Conan Doyle and his Sherlock Holmes tales.

Conan Doyle introduced the eccentric amateur detective, his less sharp-witted chronicler (Poirot's Watson is Captain Hastings), the atmosphere of the English countryside and of London, the importance of careful observation, and the detective story as intellectual exercise. Indeed, since Conan Doyle, the detective story has been the favorite popular genre of intellectuals. During the so-called Golden Age of detective fiction — the 1920s and 1930s — when Christie came to popularity, other writers of the genre used the similar "classic" form, in particular Dorothy Sayers, and the tradition continues to the present in the books of Ruth Rendell.

## Related Titles

Of the large number of Christie's works it is difficult to choose the most important, but a few have attracted more attention than others. The short story "The Three Blind Mice," which later became a successful stage play, originated as a radio play in 1946, and was published in 1950 in a collection called *The Mousetrap and Other Stories*.

It is an excellent example of Christie's use of a closed setting, in this case a snowbound manor house, and of her ability to abandon her famous amateur detectives when she wanted. Similar is *And Then There Were None* (1939), Christie's classic tale based on the rhyme "Ten Little Indians" in which ten people, in a large house on an island, are murdered one by one.

*Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *Death on the Nile* (1937) are two of the most famous Poirot novels and good examples of Christie's very occasional use of a more exotic setting than an English village. *Curtain*, originally written in 1940 but not published until 1975, was Christie's attempt to kill off Poirot; Christie wrote *Sleeping Murder* at the same time, a Miss Marple book which was not published until 1976.

A different Christie emerges from *Come, Tell Me How You Live* (1946), her descriptions of her travels with her second husband, archeologist Max Mallowan. Here, Christie's sprightly sense of humor and her obvious happiness with Mallowan create a lively and informative memoir.



# Copyright Information

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