

# **Peril at End House, by Agatha Christie Study Guide**

**Peril at End House, by Agatha Christie by Agatha  
Christie**

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# Contents

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| <a href="#">Peril at End House, by Agatha Christie Study Guide.....</a>                                     | <a href="#">1</a>  |
| <a href="#">Contents.....</a>   | <a href="#">2</a>  |
| <a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>   | <a href="#">3</a>  |
| <a href="#">Chapter 1, The Majestic Hotel and Chapter 2, End House.....</a>                                 | <a href="#">4</a>  |
| <a href="#">Chapter 3, Accidents? and Chapter 4, There Must Be Something!.....</a>                          | <a href="#">7</a>  |
| <a href="#">Chapter 5, Mr. and Mrs. Croft and Chapter 6, A Call Upon Mr. Vyse.....</a>                      | <a href="#">9</a>  |
| <a href="#">Chapter 7, Tragedy and Chapter 8, The Fatal Shawl.....</a>                                      | <a href="#">11</a> |
| <a href="#">Chapter 9, A. to J. and Chapter 10, Nick's Secret.....</a>                                      | <a href="#">13</a> |
| <a href="#">Chapter 11, The Motive and Chapter 12, Ellen.....</a>   | <a href="#">15</a> |
| <a href="#">Chapter 13, Letters and Chapter 14, The Mystery of the Missing Will.....</a>                    | <a href="#">17</a> |
| <a href="#">Chapter 15, Strange Behavior of Frederica and Chapter 16, Interview with Mr. Whitfield.....</a> | <a href="#">19</a> |
| <a href="#">Chapter 17, A Box of Chocolates.....</a>  | <a href="#">21</a> |
| <a href="#">Chapter 18, The Face at the Window.....</a>   | <a href="#">23</a> |
| <a href="#">Chapter 19, Poirot Produces a Play and Chapter 20, J.....</a>                                   | <a href="#">25</a> |
| <a href="#">Chapter 21, The Person—K. and Chapter 22, The End of the Story.....</a>                         | <a href="#">27</a> |
| <a href="#">Characters.....</a>   | <a href="#">29</a> |
| <a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>   | <a href="#">34</a> |
| <a href="#">Themes.....</a>   | <a href="#">36</a> |
| <a href="#">Style.....</a>  | <a href="#">38</a> |
| <a href="#">Quotes.....</a>   | <a href="#">41</a> |
| <a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>  | <a href="#">42</a> |



# Plot Summary

In *Peril at End House*, retired detective Hercule Poirot becomes involved in the seeming murder attempts against Nick Buckley, the attractive young owner of a family mansion called End House. Nick's cousin Maggie Buckley is killed, presumably mistaken for Nick, and Poirot gets Nick to reveal that she's secretly engaged to airman Michael Seton and heir to a large fortune. After Nick becomes poisoned by chocolates laced with cocaine, Poirot eventually realizes that he's been mistaken all along. Nick was never the intended victim. She murdered Maggie to take her place as Seton's supposed fiancée and heir.

As the novel begins, Poirot is on vacation in St. Loo, when a bullet hits the wall by his head. He discovers that beautiful, young Nick Buckley has had three recent close calls with death, and he believes that someone is trying to murder her. Nick agrees to ask her cousin Maggie to her house to guard against danger. However, at a fireworks show the night that Maggie arrives, Maggie borrows Nick's shawl and is shot to death, presumably having been mistaken for Nick. Poirot rushes Nick off to a rest home, where visitors will not be allowed, for protection.

Poirot's list of suspects includes Nick's cousin Charles Vyse, a lawyer, who would inherit End House, Nick's family home, and Nick's friend Frederica Rice, a drug user who would inherit the rest of Nick's possessions. However, Nick has nothing of value to leave, and the house is mortgaged. Poirot has an inspiration, though. He realizes from how Nick has acted that she is secretly engaged to missing airman Michael Seton. Seton's rich uncle recently died, and Nick stands to inherit a fortune.

While Nick is in the rest home, she eats some chocolate poisoned with cocaine and Poirot reproaches himself for letting harm come to her. He has asked her to eat no food from outside the home, but the chocolates had Poirot's card in them. Poirot investigates and finds only confusion. Two boxes of chocolates were delivered, one by mail and one by hand. The one delivered by hand came from Lazarus, an art dealer friend of Nick's and a boyfriend of Frederica. Lazarus says Frederica told him to buy the chocolates, and Frederica says that Nick, or someone who said they were Nick, phoned and asked for them. Poirot is stumped.

Finally, Poirot has an epiphany. He realizes that Nick has been lying the whole time. She faked the accidents that Poirot thought were murder attempts, and she was never secretly engaged to Seton. Nick's cousin Maggie was Seton's fiancée, and Nick killed her so that she could take Maggie's place and inherit the money. Poirot stages a reading of Nick's will and a séance at the end of the novel, and he traps Nick into revealing the secret hiding place where she's put the murder weapon. Nick is arrested, but she asks Frederica for her watch, which contains a stash of cocaine. Nick plans to poison herself in actuality, this time.



# Chapter 1, The Majestic Hotel and Chapter 2, End House

## Chapter 1, The Majestic Hotel and Chapter 2, End House Summary

In *Peril at End House*, retired detective Hercule Poirot becomes involved in the seeming murder attempts against Nick Buckley, the attractive young owner of a family mansion, End House. Nick's cousin Maggie Buckley is killed, presumably mistaken for Nick, and Poirot gets Nick to reveal that she's secretly engaged to airman Michael Seton and heir to a large fortune. After Nick becomes poisoned by chocolates laced with cocaine, Poirot eventually realizes that he's been mistaken all along. Nick was never the intended victim. She murdered Maggie to take her place as Seton's supposed fiancée and heir.

As Chapter 1 begins, Poirot and his friend Captain Hastings are staying at the Majestic Hotel in the English seaside town of St. Loo. Hastings reflects on the beauty of the English seaside, and Poirot recalls solving the mystery of the Blue Train in the south of France. Hastings wonders if Poirot might come out of retirement, and Poirot says he's happy to have retired at the height of his career. Hastings looks at the newspaper, remarking to Poirot that Michael Seton, the pilot attempting a round-the-world flight in his amphibious plane the Albatross, has still not been heard from. When Hastings mentions the British Home Secretary, Poirot reveals that he's been asked to take on a high-level, top-secret investigation, which he has refused.

Hastings wonders if anything could tempt his friend to return to work. Poirot admits that, if a bullet hit the wall near his head, he would be tempted by human curiosity, as he picks up what Hastings thinks is a pebble that has just hit the wall. Poirot abruptly begins walking toward the garden and trips near a pretty girl, Nick Buckley apparently twisting his ankle. He asks the girl and Hastings to help him to a chair and invites the girl to sit down. Nick owns End House, a decaying family home on a lonely point. Poirot also learns that she has had three recent near escapes from death.

Poirot remarks at how easily modern hats, unsecured by old-fashioned hatpins, come off, and Nick takes hers off to demonstrate. Her friend, Commander George Challenger, comes looking for Nick, and she goes off with him, leaving her hat behind. Poirot tells Hastings that the hat will give them an opportunity to visit Nick later that day, and Hastings wonders at his friend's interest in the young girl. Poirot points out what Hastings has missed: a bullet hole in the hat. The object that Poirot picked up from the floor was a bullet after all.

In Chapter 2, Hastings remarks how strange it is that they didn't hear a shot, but Poirot points out the noise of the passing speedboats would mask it. Since Nick is having lunch at the hotel with Commander Challenger and another man and woman, Poirot



returns the hat then, noting that they'll still visit End House later. After lunch, he speaks with her to make an appointment for later, while Hastings sizes up her companions. He likes Challenger, but dislikes the over-sleek other man, Jim, who owns an expensive red sports car. The woman, who looks weary and colorless, calls Nick a liar.

That evening, Hastings and Poirot head to End House. On the way, they pass a man gardening at a small cottage on the grounds. The door is opened by a servant in black, who reluctantly admits them to a crowded room. Poirot picks up a newspaper discarded on the sofa. Then, Nick enters and mixes drinks, wondering what the men could want. Poirot shows her the bullet and asks about the other three supposed accidents. Nick scoffs at the idea someone is trying to kill her, saying they must be accidents. A heavy picture over her bed fell one night, and a boulder rolled down a cliff where she was swimming. Finally, the brakes went wrong on her car.

Poirot believes the accidents are genuine murder attempts, commenting on Nick's stubbornness. Nick says that's where she gets her nickname. Her grandfather, Old Nick, was commonly compared to the devil, and she was known as Young Nick. Her real name is Magdala, a family name. Poirot comments on the portrait of Old Nick over the mantelpiece. Jim Lazarus, Nick's sleek friend, had offered to buy it. Then, Poirot mentions that the shot came from a Mauser pistol, and Nick discovers that hers is missing.

## **Chapter 1, The Majestic Hotel and Chapter 2, End House Analysis**

Hastings' review of the newspaper at the beginning of Chapter 1 includes a number of items, and the mention of Seton is added to set up this important piece of background in the story. Although Michael Seton is never seen in the novel, he is a crucial character. The scene with the newspaper fulfills a second purpose, however. Poirot has already said that he won't come out of retirement to work on another case, but Hastings' mention of the British Home Secretary gives Poirot a chance to illustrate this point. He has been personally asked, as a private favor, to help this high official. Hastings believes it is a high honor, and Poirot's mention of it to Hastings seems tantamount to bragging. However, Poirot declares himself uninterested. The high profile case of political intrigue is contrasted to the small, personal, and immediate case of the bullet that strikes by Poirot's head.

In the opening scene, Poirot's character is clearly laid out. He is self-satisfied and confident in his own superiority. He is observant and intelligent, as shown when he notices first the bullet and then the hole in Nick's house. Poirot is also not reluctant to use deception. He pretends to twist his ankle and lures Nick Buckley into conversation, lying about the fact that he admired her house on the hill. Throughout the novel, nearly all the characters will practice some sort of deception, from hiding their feelings to weaving complex webs of lies.



Chapter 2 begins to introduce the suspects in the murder mystery. Jim Lazarus presents an external image of wealth, but Hastings dislikes him for seeming oily. Frederica calls Nick a liar, something that seems out of place in the conversation and casts suspicion on her motives. Hastings takes an immediate liking to Challenger, who is extremely British and military. Hastings and Challenger share a culture, and so Hastings begins to trust Challenger almost immediately. Poirot's comments show the reader that Hastings' judgment is not to be relied on, setting the stage for the reader to become suspicious of Challenger. The incident of the picture is also designed to create vague suspicions. Why would Lazarus want to buy it? As a murder mystery, the novel will hint at reasons to suspect almost every character, to keep the reader wondering and guessing.



# Chapter 3, Accidents? and Chapter 4, There Must Be Something!

## Chapter 3, Accidents? and Chapter 4, There Must Be Something! Summary

In Chapter 3, after the discovery of the missing pistol, Poirot explains his theory that the person who shot at Nick probably meant to make it look like a suicide. Nick is finally disposed to take Poirot seriously. He asks if she has any enemies, and she says no, and that no one stands to gain from her death. She's broke, and the house is mortgaged. Her mother died, and she was raised by her grandfather while her father traveled after the war. Her grandfather made a lot of money and gambled it all away. He died when Nick was sixteen, and her brother died a few years ago. Her father is also dead. Her nearest relative is a cousin, Charles Vyse, a lawyer. She also has distant cousins named Buckley in Yorkshire.

The man Poirot and Hastings noticed living at the lodge is an Australian named Croft. He and his wife have rent the lodge for the last six months. Nick's only servants are Ellen and her husband, a gardener. They have a child who lives at the house. Nick tells Poirot about Freddie Rice, the woman she lunched with, who recently left her addict husband. She's involved with the sleek man, Jim Lazarus, an art dealer, but can't get a divorce from her no-good husband. George Challenger wants to marry Nick, but she's not interested.

Nick shows Poirot the painting that fell on her bed, and Poirot asks about the cord, which has been thrown away. Nick also shows Poirot the place where the stone rolled down toward her. Poirot points out how easy it would be to arrange the accidents. He asks Nick to have a friend come stay with her, and Nick thinks of her cousin Maggie, a boring clergyman's daughter. Poirot asks if she's made a will, and Nick did, before an appendectomy, leaving End House to Charles Vyse and everything else to Freddie. As Poirot is about to leave, he asks how much Lazarus offered for the picture of Nick's grandfather, and Nick says fifty pounds.

In Chapter 4, Hastings and Poirot drive away from End House. Hastings tells Poirot about Freddie's description of Nick as a liar, but Poirot points out that Nick is reluctant to believe she's in danger, not sensationalizing her position. Poirot says the task of keeping Nick safe will be difficult, and the one thing he can do is give Nick more protection, by inviting her cousin. Still, he's afraid. He also noted his name in the newspaper opened on the sofa, and wonders if the murderer knows Poirot is in town. It might spur the murderer into quick action.

Poirot reviews the characters in Nick's life, seeing no reason for murder, but he already knew the motive wouldn't be obvious. They stop by Mott's Garage and the mechanic confirms Nick's car was tampered with. Then, Poirot sends off a telegram, not telling



Hastings what is in it. Poirot does tell Hastings that he suspects Nick is keeping something back, something she believes has nothing to do with the murder attempts.

## **Chapter 3, Accidents? and Chapter 4, There Must Be Something! Analysis**

Chapter 3 introduces more suspects. Charles Vyse is Nick's nearest relative, and suspicion is thrown on him by Nick's will, which leaves the house to Vyse. More suspicion is thrown on Frederica, because she is also named in the will. The Crofts are unknowns, recently involved in Nick's life. The chapter gives background on Nick's life, and also gives details of Nick's "accidents." Nick's entire performance, first pretending not to believe she is in danger and then letting Poirot convince her, is an act. Nick is a liar, as Frederica said, and she is the ultimate deceiver. Her name, Nick, associates her with the devil, and turns out to be more apt than anyone guesses. She is a master manipulator, using Poirot in a complex plot.

Poirot rejects Freddie's accusation of Nick as a liar, but he uses faulty premises. Nick's motive is not to make herself important and sensationalize her life. She is far more practical, and her lies are subtle and targeted. She even goes to the trouble of tampering her own brakes to bolster her story. The mention of Poirot's name in the paper is an important clue, revealing that Nick is already lying about only reading the tides in the paper. Poirot misreads this clue, as well, believing instead that someone else saw his name in the paper.





# Chapter 5, Mr. and Mrs. Croft and Chapter 6, A Call Upon Mr. Vyse

## Chapter 5, Mr. and Mrs. Croft and Chapter 6, A Call Upon Mr. Vyse Summary

In Chapter 5, Hastings and Poirot see Nick at the hotel dance that evening with her friends. Poirot notes the contrast between the animated Nick and her weary friend Freddie. He goes to speak with Freddie, telling her that her friend was shot at. Freddie at first disbelieves, until Poirot shows her the bullet. He asks Freddie what friends she was staying with before coming to the hotel, and when she takes offense, he makes up an excuse. Poirot asks Freddie to watch over her friend, and returns to his table. From the conversation, he believes Frederica Rice is lying, and that she was not visiting friends as she said.

Poirot brings Hastings to Nick's and shows Hastings how easy it would be for anyone to sneak in unnoticed. On the way out, they encounter Mr. Croft bringing tomatoes and cucumbers to Nick. Poirot introduces himself and makes up a story about bringing Nick special chain for the picture that fell. Croft invites Poirot to meet his wife, and Poirot accepts. Croft's wife was injured in a train accident, and they're staying at the lodge while she recovers. Mrs. Croft is excited to meet the famous detective. They have tea, and Mrs. Croft gossips that Charles Vyse wants to marry Nick. She thinks Nick should settle down with Challenger, though. Then, the Crofts show off pictures of Australia. Poirot leaves wondering if the Crofts are a shade too Australian, and are just playing a part.

As Chapter 6 begins, Poirot gives Hastings a note to have delivered to Nick. Later, Nick comes to their hotel and brings a telegram that Maggie is arriving that afternoon. She also says she's arranged for the workman Poirot is sending to be let in to End House. Nick is feeling the strain of feeling she's in danger. Poirot presses her, feeling there's something she's not telling him. She denies it. Nick says she's always wanted to produce a play at End House, and now she's in a real-life drama there, as the murder victim. Poirot asks if anyone has wanted to buy End House, but she's received no offers and wouldn't want to sell, unless someone offered her an exorbitant price. She invites Poirot over that night to watch fireworks.

Poirot and Hastings go to see Charles Vyse. Poirot consults the pale, balding lawyer about a contract he's considering, and then brings up Nick Buckley. He finds out Charles was out of the office the afternoon Nick was shot at. Poirot also asks if Nick might consider selling the house, and Charles firmly denies that Nick would ever sell, under any circumstances, saying that she's devoted to the house. After the meeting, Poirot notes that Charles's description of Nick's attitude toward the house was different than Nick's own, and that he has no alibi for the shooting incident.



## Chapter 5, Mr. and Mrs. Croft and Chapter 6, A Call Upon Mr. Vyse Analysis

Nick and Freddie are contrasted throughout the novel. Nick is dark-haired, while Freddie is light-haired. Nick is animated and bouncy, while Freddie is weary and languid. The two women are literary foils. As Freddie emerges as a prime suspect, the reader begins to suspect that the contrast goes even further and that perhaps Nick is good while Freddie is evil. The end of the novel reverses this implication. Nick, despite appearances, is good, while Freddie is evil. A similar comparison can be made between the upright-seeming Challenger, who turns out to be less than righteous, and the smarmy-seeming Lazarus, who turns out to be far more laudable.

Poirot does not tell Hastings what's in the note he's delivering to Nick, and he doesn't tell Nick why he's sending a workman to her house. Poirot, like Nick, holds secrets. He does not let others know what he is doing. This is one way in which Poirot outsmarts murderers, by using deception and secrecy. The battle between Poirot and Nick is one in which each is deceiving and lying, and the successful one will be the one who can see through the other's lies while hiding his or her own. The idea of producing a play at End House reflects this focus on deception. A play is an orchestrated event, which deceives and manipulates the audience (although the audience members are willing participants in this deception). Nick is already orchestrating a play, and Poirot will orchestrate his own.



# Chapter 7, Tragedy and Chapter 8, The Fatal Shawl

## Chapter 7, Tragedy and Chapter 8, The Fatal Shawl Summary

In Chapter 7, when Poirot and Hastings arrive at Nick's, she is waiting for her dress to arrive. Nick introduces her cousin Maggie, who takes the sleuths to the drawing room. Maggie has a simple, quiet beauty, and is disbelieving of the story of attacks against Nick. Frederica Rice arrives, followed by Lazarus and Nick, in a black dress and a unique red shawl. Freddie comments that she's never seen Nick wear black before.

Lazarus hears what he thinks is a speedboat go by, but Nick points out it's the sound of a sea-plane. The talk turns to Michael Seton and his flight around the world. Nick expresses hope that he may still be alive, but Lazarus is dubious and mentions Seton's mad, wealthy, woman-hating uncle, Sir Matthew Seton. Nick hopes Seton is alive. She knew him, and once flew in his plane. Around nine o'clock, Nick runs in to get the phone, while the party eats dessert.

More people arrive after dinner for the fireworks. Charles Vyse is there as well as Mr. Croft. It's chilly out during the fireworks show, and Maggie goes to get a coat. Nick runs in as well, to get Freddie's wrap and a warmer one for herself. Soon, Poirot is also complaining about the cold and damp, and he and Hastings head inside. As they approach the house, they see a figure collapsed on the ground, wearing Nick's red Chinese shawl.

Chapter 8 begins. Poirot begins to blame himself, fearing the worst. Then they hear Nick's voice, coming from in the house. The body is Maggie, who borrowed Nick's shawl. Poirot says she was mistaken for Nick. Nick is hysterical and despairing, and Hastings takes her into the house. On his way to the phone to call the police, he runs into Ellen, who seems surprised that Maggie's been hurt and says she thought maybe it was Freddie Rice. Hastings phones the police and Nick's doctor, Dr. Graham.

Hastings checks in on Nick and gets her some brandy. Poirot deals with the police when they arrive, while Nick wishes that she was the one who had died. Dr. Graham arrives and checks Nick. The police inspector talks to her, asking about the attempts on her life. Nick explains what's happened and how Maggie borrowed Nick's shawl when Nick exchanged it for a heavier coat. Nick says she didn't hear a shot, just the fireworks. Dr. Graham and Poirot plan to put Nick in a nursing home, for health and safety. She concedes, though she says she doesn't care if she dies. Then, Challenger arrives, afraid that Nick might be dead, and he runs to her when he sees she's alive. Nick is upset, and the doctor leads her off.



## Chapter 7, Tragedy and Chapter 8, The Fatal Shawl Analysis

While Frederica poses a contrast to Nick, Maggie does as well. Maggie and Nick are cousins, fairly close relatives. They have similar coloring and will turn out to even share a name. However, Maggie represents Nick's opposite. The daughter of a reverend, she is closely tied to God, while Nick's name ties her to the devil. Whereas Nick is a modern, stylish woman, Maggie is a plain and simple girl, not interested in clothes or makeup. Maggie is just too good, a boring person according to Nick's standards, concerned with good works and a quiet life. Nick will turn out to be a true opposite, too evil, concerned with her own greed and desires.

While Maggie and Nick's differences are many, their similarities are what sets the stage for the crime. Maggie and Nick are similar enough in appearance for one to be mistaken for the other. They also share a name. Though it will not be revealed until the end of the novel, both women are named Magdala, a circumstance that will allow Nick to commit an early form of identity theft, impersonating Magdala as the inheritor of Seton's fortune.



# Chapter 9, A. to J. and Chapter 10, Nick's Secret

## Chapter 9, A. to J. and Chapter 10, Nick's Secret Summary

As Chapter 9 begins, Poirot is distressed that he's allowed the murder to happen, despite his precautions. Even though Nick is not dead, a girl has been killed, and the murderer will still strike again. Poirot swears to find where his logic was wrong and stop the killer. Meanwhile, Nick is safe at the nursing home, where only Poirot and Hastings will be allowed to see her. Poirot is convinced the murderer is a friend of Nick's, not a homicidal maniac as the police seem to think. Poirot points out how easy it would be for anyone to slip away from the fireworks and commit the crime. The three shots that were fired would fit in well with the sound of the fireworks.

The Mauser pistol was not found, and Poirot says it's more proof the murderer isn't a stranger. The pistol was stolen to make the death seem like suicide, but no attempt was made to stage a suicide scene. The murderer must know a faked suicide would be useless, since Poirot is already investigating. Poirot despairs that there is no discoverable motive, only melodramatic speculations. He even is having the painting Lazarus tried to buy appraised, in case it's extremely valuable. Poirot goes in detail through possible motives: gain, hate, jealousy, or fear. None of the theories seem likely. Then Poirot makes a list of people around Nick, labeled A. through J.

Ellen is suspicious because she seemed to know a tragedy had happened but was surprised Maggie was the victim. Her husband, like Ellen, had access to the house and gun. Poirot rules out their child but makes a note to interview him. Croft was discovered climbing the stairs in Nick's house, but his explanation may be true. Nothing is known against his wife. Freddie Rice has tried to paint Nick as a liar, and sent Nick inside for a wrap. Lazarus tried to buy the picture and seemed to think nothing was wrong with Nick's brakes. Challenger had opportunity. Charles Vyse was away from the office when Nick was shot at and made questionable statements about Nick's attitude toward End House. Then, there is J., an unknown person who could be involved. Poirot feels he's cleared his mind, and sits back in his chair to think.

Chapter 10 begins the next morning. Poirot has had an epiphany. He poses questions to Hastings. Why has Nick been so upset? Why did she wear black, which she never wears? Why did she wish she was dead last night? Her actions have not been natural. He points out to Hastings that she went to the telephone and was gone twenty minutes. Something happened during that time to change her attitude, and Poirot needs to know what it is.

Hastings bathes and breakfasts, noting in the paper that Michael Seton has been confirmed dead. Frederica Rice approaches him, asking if Poirot is up yet, and Hastings



brings her up to the room with him. Freddie tells Poirot that she didn't believe Nick was in real danger until last night. She's come to tell Poirot the truth, that she wasn't visiting friends in Tavistock before arriving in St. Loo, as she'd claimed. She'd been staying in a nearby town with Lazarus. She indicates that she's with Lazarus for his money, and after she leaves, Poirot points out that Freddie emphasized her rich boyfriend to eliminate any financial motive.

Challenger bursts in, upset that he hasn't been allowed in to see Nick. Poirot hints to him that it's for Nick's safety. Then, Poirot and Hastings head to the nursing home, though Poirot says he already knows the answers to his questions. Before they leave, Poirot gives Hastings the report of the appraiser. Nick's painting was only worth twenty pounds. When they arrive at the nursing home, Poirot comforts Nick, offering her sympathy. Nick reveals that she was engaged to Michael Seton, but now he's dead.

## **Chapter 9, A. to J. and Chapter 10, Nick's Secret Analysis**

Poirot's inflated self-image is a two-edged sword. While Poirot has huge confidence in his ability and does not hesitate to tout his own abilities, when he is unable to prevent a crime, he blames himself bitterly, if melodramatically. Poirot would not blame himself so much if he did not have a seemingly exaggerated opinion of his own capabilities. Poirot sees himself as having far greater than normal abilities, and so he also sees himself as having far greater than normal responsibilities. Poirot realizes that there must be an error in his logic, and in this he is correct. He is still being fooled by Nick's deceptions.

Poirot's list of suspects is a murder mystery device, setting out the puzzle for the reader. At the same time, the suspect list misleads the reader. It emphasizes red herrings, such as the unknown person J., questions about Ellen's surprise, Croft being in the house, Lazarus offering to buy the painting, and Vyse's lack of an alibi, and the only hints at the real solution, such as Freddie's accusation that Nick is a liar, are couched as suspicions against other people. The end result is to obfuscate the true solution to the puzzle.

Poirot's realizations come as sudden epiphanies. One of his theories about crime is that, once the detective has gathered information, all he needs to do is sit and think to solve the crime. In this novel, Poirot's progress does not come gradually. It comes in leaps of thinking that occur when Poirot focuses his great brain on the problem. In this case, Poirot clears his brain with his list of suspects and then simply sits and thinks. Over the course of the night, the epiphany that Nick is engaged to the missing airman, Michael Seton, comes to him. Unfortunately, this epiphany is false based on fake clues that Nick has left for him. Poirot still hasn't seen through her deceitfulness.



# Chapter 11, The Motive and Chapter 12, Ellen

## Chapter 11, The Motive and Chapter 12, Ellen Summary

As Chapter 11 begins, Poirot explains that he deduced Nick's secret when he learned of Seton's death from the morning paper. Nick said she heard the news on the radio. Even now, she wishes that she had been killed since her fiancé is dead. Nick says she met Seton a year ago and became engaged after Christmas. They kept the engagement a secret because Seton's uncle, Sir Matthew Seton, hated women and wouldn't want Michael to marry. Nick didn't even tell Freddie, and she doesn't think Freddie guessed.

Sir Matthew Seton died a week ago, but Nick still felt like she shouldn't tell anyone about her engagement. She admits that she hinted to one person, and Poirot begins questioning her about Charles Vyse, revealing that Mrs. Croft told him about Charles's feelings for Nick. Nick says he disapproved of her but was still infatuated. Poirot chastises Nick that she must obey him and see no friends. Before he leaves, he asks Nick where her will is. She doesn't remember but thinks it is probably in the library or the bedroom and gives Poirot permission to search for it.

In Chapter 12, Poirot explains to Hastings that the motive for the crime is now clear. The wealthy Sir Matthew Seton died, and must have left his fortune to Michael Seton. Then after Seton went missing, the murder attempts began. Poirot postulates that Michael must have made a will leaving his money to Nick. Hastings objects that no one knew about the engagement, but Poirot says that someone must have known or guessed. Nick might have had letters from Michael Seton that anyone could have found. Poirot has narrowed down the suspects to two. Freddie Rice is named in Nick's will to inherit her property. The other suspect is Charles Vyse, who may not have known about the will and may have thought he would inherit. Hastings believes Vyse is the more likely suspect, but Poirot thinks that attempting murder before Michael Seton's death was confirmed was rash, not in tune with a legal mind.

Hastings and Poirot arrive at End House. Ellen's husband is mowing the lawn, accompanied by their ten-year-old son. The boy morbidly talks about the murder and about seeing pigs slaughtered. Poirot and Hastings go into the house and call for Ellen, letting her know that they're searching the house. Ellen admits that she was surprised that Maggie was killed. However, she wasn't surprised that something terrible happened. She says the house has an atmosphere of evil. Poirot asks about the shots, which Ellen did not hear. She was clearing the table, which Poirot thinks is odd, since she might have been out at the fireworks. Ellen heard Nick and Maggie come in, and Maggie take Nick's shawl. Poirot also asks if there is a secret compartment in the house, and Ellen confirms that there is but can't say exactly where.



## Chapter 11, The Motive and Chapter 12, Ellen Analysis

The fact that Nick didn't tell anyone about her engagement to Seton, even after Sir Matthew Seton was dead, is a clue that she is lying. In actuality, Nick couldn't have told anyone about the engagement, for fear that the story might get to Maggie's ears. Maggie herself could have told someone about her engagement, such as her parents, and this is a flaw in Nick's plan. If Maggie told anyone about her engagement after Sir Matthew Seton's death, it could leave Nick in danger of exposure. However, Nick is Maggie's confidant, the one person who knows about Maggie's engagement, and Nick may feel confident that Maggie wouldn't tell anyone else without Nick knowing.

Another clue to the truth is the fact that the supposed murder attempts against Nick began after Sir Matthew Seton died but before Michael Seton was confirmed killed. If Michael Seton were not actually dead, or he had predeceased his uncle, murdering his fiancée would accomplish nothing. However, since these aren't true murder attempts, they are accomplishing an important goal: setting the stage for Maggie's murder to seem like a mistaken identity and supporting Nick's claim that she is Michael Seton's beloved.





# Chapter 13, Letters and Chapter 14, The Mystery of the Missing Will

## Chapter 13, Letters and Chapter 14, The Mystery of the Missing Will Summary

As Chapter 13 begins, Poirot wonders why Ellen did not go out to see the fireworks. He explains that his question about a secret compartment was related to a possible "J.," an unknown outsider. In the library, Poirot and Hastings search for Nick's will. They arrange Nick's disorganized papers but find no will. They do find a letter from Freddie, indicating that she takes drugs. Poirot and Hastings move on to Nick's room, but they find no will there, either. Hastings is horrified when Poirot begins searching Nick's underwear drawer, but Poirot laughs. He finds in the drawer love letters from Michael Seton. Against Hastings' instincts, he helps Poirot read through them.

Poirot and Hastings find six letters, beginning on New Year's. In them, Seton abhors keeping the relationship a secret and expresses his love. He mentions Scarborough, and says that once the round-the-world flight is over, they can reveal their relationship. The last letter, just before he left, says that he's made a will, leaving it all to her, and that he even remembered her real name was Magdala. Poirot notes that the evidence of the will was there for anyone to find. As they leave, Poirot asks Ellen about Michael Seton to find out if she's read the letters, but Ellen seems completely surprised that Nick was engaged to him.

In Chapter 14, Poirot and Hastings visit Nick again. Poirot asks about the will, suggesting it might be behind the secret panel, but Nick denies that such a thing exists. Nick is also very surprised that Ellen did not go out to see the fireworks. Poirot brings the discussion back to the will, and Nick recalls it was Mr. Croft's suggestion. Then she realizes that she mailed it to Charles Vyse. Nick gives Poirot written permission to see the will. As Poirot is about to leave, he comments on the flowers in the room. Nick shows him grapes someone sent her. Poirot cautions her that she is not to eat anything sent in from the outside.

Poirot and Hastings go to see Vyse, but the lawyer denies ever receiving a will from Nick. Poirot is not sure if he is lying, or if something else has happened to the will. They go to visit Mr. Croft. The Crofts are talkative and take over the conversation, until Poirot finds a moment to ask about the will. Ellen and her husband witnessed the will, and then Croft mailed it to Charles Vyse. After Poirot and Hastings leave, Poirot admits that he sees no reason for Croft to lie, but he reveals that he obtained Croft's fingerprints on a piece of newspaper to send to Scotland Yard.



## Chapter 13, Letters and Chapter 14, The Mystery of the Missing Will Analysis

Nick is contrasted to Poirot in her disorganization. Nick seems careless, and nothing about her seems well-planned. Poirot even calls her feather-brained. In actuality, Nick's carelessness is something of a deception. She has carefully orchestrated the events that have happened, with great attention to detail. Her chronic disorganization may lead Poirot to underestimate her mental capacity.

Poirot shows his disregard for privacy and social niceties when he searches in Nick's underwear drawer and reads her love letters. The conservative Hastings is appalled by this tendency in Poirot, but Poirot is correct when he assumes Nick would have no objections. In fact, Nick anticipates and desires for Poirot to find the love letters, which are planted there to bolster her story that she is engaged to Seton.

The letters contain several clues, though, that Nick is not Seton's beloved. First, none of them mention her name, only the name Magdala. Second, there are missing letters. Third, there is no mention of Nick's appendicitis operation, which took place around the date of one of the letters. Finally, Ellen seems genuinely surprised at the engagement, a clue that the letters have not been in Nick's dresser for Ellen to find and read for very long. The clues are easy to overlook. The mention of Scarborough bolsters Nick's claim somewhat, but it is misleading. Maggie was also at Scarborough with Nick, and this is where Maggie met Seton. The meeting at Scarborough was the end of Nick's relationship with Seton, not the beginning.

The biggest red herring in the novel is Nick's will. Since the supposed motive for the murder attempts on Nick was money, Nick's will is a key piece of evidence. Whoever inherits Nick's money is the killer. Charles Vyse comes under suspicion for suppressing the will, since he is Nick's next of kin and might inherit without a will. Freddie is under suspicion for being named in the will. Finally, Croft becomes a suspect because he is the last person to have seen the will and claims to have mailed it.



# Chapter 15, Strange Behavior of Frederica and Chapter 16, Interview with Mr. Whitfield

## Chapter 15, Strange Behavior of Frederica and Chapter 16, Interview with Mr. Whitfield Summary

In Chapter 15, Colonel Weston, the Chief Constable, visits Poirot. He's grateful for Poirot's help, hoping to keep the case away from Scotland Yard. He despairs of getting evidence, and Poirot says that the gun has likely been thrown into the ocean. Weston says Vyse is cautious, and if he's the killer, it will be hard to prove. If the killer is Freddie, she'll likely get impatient and try again. The inquest is the next day, but details about Nick will be kept from the public. Maggie's parents are coming in from Yorkshire. Before he leaves, Weston shows Poirot a paper the police found on the grounds, a torn scrap asking for money. Poirot gets permission to hold onto the paper.

Commander Challenger visits, asking about the progress of the investigation. Poirot mentions that he has suspicions of two people but refuses to name them. When Challenger mentions his alibi, Poirot points out that he took an excessive amount of time driving to Nick's, so his alibi doesn't clear him. Poirot also mentions Michael Seton to Challenger, who has heard rumors he and Nick were engaged. Poirot hints that after her grief passes, perhaps Nick will return Challenger's affection.

Frederica arrives to get her watch back from Challenger, who picked it up from the shop for her. Freddie seems surprised to hear of Nick's engagement, saying she thought Michael lost interest in Nick after a while. Freddie turns to Poirot, and then suddenly seems unwell. She asks about the investigation, and then leaves. Poirot and Hastings head into town, and Challenger accompanies them. Poirot orders flowers for Nick and signs a card to go with them, revealing to Challenger that Nick is not allowed any food from outside.

As Chapter 16 begins, the inquest is adjourned. Poirot and Hastings talk to Maggie Buckley's parents, who are deeply grieved and urge Poirot to find the murderer. They wish they could visit Nick in the nursing home. The last time they saw her was in August, when Nick was at Scarborough with Maggie. After the conversation, Poirot again chastises himself for allowing Maggie to be murdered.

Poirot and Hastings head to London. They visit the Setons' attorney who confirms that Sir Matthew Seton left a large fortune to Michael Seton. He died after an operation to remove a tumor. Michael Seton's will, though informal, is legal. He made it before leaving on his round-the-world flight, leaving everything to Magdala Buckley, his fiancée. If she had died, all the money would go to her inheritors. Even with taxes for three deaths in a row, the inheritance would be enormous.



After the discussion with the attorney, Poirot and Hastings go to dinner with Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard. Japp has checked Croft's fingerprints and though he's unknown to Scotland Yard, he can't be traced in Australia. Japp also reveals that Lazarus is in financial trouble. Poirot has also had Japp look into Challenger's uncle, a psychiatrist. The next day, Poirot and Hastings head back to St. Loo, only to discover that Nick has been poisoned with cocaine.

## **Chapter 15, Strange Behavior of Frederica and Chapter 16, Interview with Mr. Whitfield Analysis**

The paper that the police found on the grounds is another red herring. It is an indication of "J.," someone in the background who is only hinted at so far. The similarity to Freddie's handwriting vaguely involves her. The implication in the novel is that this similarity is due to both Freddie and the note's author being drug addicts. Freddie's estranged husband has been discussed in the novel, but always in the background, as someone uninvolved in the present problems. The clever reader may associate the note with Freddie's estranged husband, and identify him as a potential "J." Freddie's experience of suddenly feeling faint while in Poirot's suite, where the note is sitting on the table,

Maggie Buckley's parents point out that Maggie was in Scarborough at the same time as Nick, and the reader should already know that Nick was at Scarborough with Michael Seton. Scarborough is where Maggie and Seton met. Maggie's father and mother are the injured parties in the drama. They have lost a daughter, and they plead in this conversation for Poirot to find the murderer. Maggie's father is a reverend and couches his request in terms of evil. There are few shades of gray in the novel. Although they can be disguised, there is good, and there is evil. Maggie is good, and Nick is evil.

Chapter 16 ends with a cliffhanger. Nick has been poisoned. The reader is left to wonder what has happened and how someone has gotten through Poirot's preventative measures. Ending a chapter with momentous news urges the reader to turn the page.



# Chapter 17, A Box of Chocolates

## Chapter 17, A Box of Chocolates Summary

In Chapter 17, Poirot and Hastings rush back to the nursing home, where they learn from Dr. Graham that Nick will recover. She was poisoned by a box of chocolates laced with cocaine. Three chocolates were cut in half and the cocaine inserted in the filling. Poirot is very upset by the instance. He feels that he must be on the wrong track about the murder. When Poirot and Hastings are able to visit Nick, Poirot chastises her for not following his instructions. However, Nick says the chocolates came from Poirot. The card that Poirot included with his flowers is stuck in the chocolate box.

Poirot talks to the orderly on duty when the chocolates arrived and finds that Lazarus brought a box of chocolates. The orderly put the box on a table, where packages are kept until the nurses take them up. Poirot talks to the nurse who took it up and finds that the package was sitting on the table for 20 minutes. The nurse also says that there was another identical box of chocolates that came in the mail. Nick looked at both of them, and kept the one with Poirot's card in it. Neither the nurse nor Nick is sure which box seemed to be from Poirot, the one Lazarus delivered or the one that came in the mail.

Poirot and Hastings go to see Lazarus and question him about the chocolates. He says that Freddie asked him to pick them up. Freddie claims that Nick, or someone pretending to be Nick, called her and asked her to get the chocolates. Poirot tells Freddie that the chocolates were poisoned and that Nick is in danger of dying. Freddie is the obvious suspect, but Poirot is not convinced. It seems too simple. He asks Hastings to buy him some playing cards, and he starts building card houses to calm himself down. By the morning, Poirot has hatched a plan to learn more information by faking Nick's death.

## Chapter 17, A Box of Chocolates Analysis

With every failure that Poirot experiences, he blames the disaster on himself, but also on his faulty logic. Poirot doesn't merely chastise himself. He says that he must have missed something, and that his logic must have gone wrong. Logic and deduction is paramount. If Poirot can make his logic flawless, then he can be completely successful, Poirot believes.

The evidence of the chocolate box, with the faked card and two different boxes coming in two different ways, is meant to confuse. Nick implicates Freddie by phoning her to ask for the chocolates, part of a master plot to put the blame on her friend. However, she keeps her options confused and keeps the sleuth guessing by piling false clues in his path. This is much the same technique the author uses on the reader, piling on red herrings and faulty assumptions to trick the reader into not seeing the truth of the story.

Poirot again has an inspiration after taking time to think through his problem. In this instance, he uses the house of cards as a soothing activity to calm his brain and allow him to think clearly. He has made another significant leap toward solving the puzzle.



# Chapter 18, The Face at the Window

## Chapter 18, The Face at the Window Summary

In Chapter 18, Hastings wakes with a bout of malaria and is sick while Poirot arranges to fake Nick's death with the help of Dr. Graham, the nursing home, and the police. Poirot reports that he has ordered a large bouquet of lilies, and that Frederica is in mourning and acting as if she knows or suspects something. Poirot finds the ruse with the chocolates difficult to unravel, especially with the two boxes. Hastings suggests that Lazarus could have substituted the chocolates, but he has no visible motive. Hastings begs Poirot to let Challenger know that Nick is okay, but Poirot refuses to endanger his plan.

The next time Hastings wakes from his fever, he sees Poirot writing on the list of suspects from A. to J. that he made earlier, making a list of questions about each. He asks why Ellen didn't go to the fireworks, whether she's lying about the secret panel, and whether she read the love letters from Seton. He wonders about possible mental problems in Ellen's husband and son. He asks who Mr. Croft really is and whether he mailed Nick's will, and the same questions about his wife.

Poirot wonders whether Freddie knew of Nick's engagement and will, who supplies her drugs, and why she became faint in Poirot's hotel room one day. He wonders about the phone call Freddie claims to have gotten asking for chocolates and why she is acting as if she's hiding something. Poirot mentions that he has myriad questions about Frederica. Lazarus, on the other hand, has few questions. Did he poison the chocolates? Why did he offer Nick fifty pounds for the portrait of her grandfather, which is only worth twenty? Poirot asks why Nick told Challenger she was engaged, and what the relationship is between Challenger and his uncle, the doctor. Regarding Vyse, Poirot wonders why he said Nick was fanatically devoted to End House and whether he's lying about receiving the will. Finally, Poirot wonders whether there is a J. Suddenly, Hastings sees a horrible face at the window, but by the time Poirot looks, it is gone.

The next day, Poirot receives a letter from Maggie Buckley's mother, containing a letter Maggie wrote before she died, saying she had a pleasant journey and doesn't know why Nick wanted her to come down Monday when Tuesday would be just as good. She mentions the Crofts, Freddie, and Lazarus. Poirot gets a phone call from Charles Vyse, claiming he has just received Nick's will. After the call, Poirot picks up the letter again, thinking that something was odd in it. Suddenly, Poirot has an inspiration. It is all so simple, and he has been wrong all along. His list of questions are almost all explained. He will send a telegram to confirm two things. Meanwhile, he plans to stage a play at End House, a play with a ghost.



## Chapter 18, The Face at the Window Analysis

Poirot's plan to fake Nick's death is yet another deception. He plans to deceive all of the suspects in order to gather more information that will once and for all elucidate the mystery. Because Poirot has not arrived at the solution yet, he believes that his information is incomplete. Poirot also writes a list of questions, building on his earlier list of suspects. He outlines all the unexplained or possibly suspicious things that have happened. Everything on the list of questions will need to be explained in the correct solution. The list of questions is a challenge to the reader, who is dared to come up with a solution that will answer all of them.

The true clue that keys Poirot in to the truth comes in the form of the letter from Maggie Buckley. The murdered girl gives Poirot information that he needs. The reader is given the entire text of the letter, so that he or she has the opportunity to find the clue. The clue gives Poirot his final inspirational leap of the novel. Poirot has finally corrected his thinking and is ready to reveal the murderer.





# Chapter 19, Poirot Produces a Play and Chapter 20, J.

## Chapter 19, Poirot Produces a Play and Chapter 20, J. Summary

In Chapter 19, Poirot gathers all the suspects at End House. Charles Vyse takes the lead at the gathering. He reads the will that he received in the mail. It appoints Vyse as the executor and leaves everything in Nick's possession to Mildred Croft, citing an unnamed service she performed for Nick's father. Everyone is in shock from the will's contents, except Mrs. Croft. She says that the service Nick mentioned is a secret and will remain one. She also says that her connection with Nick's father is the reason the Crofts came to End House and that Nick wouldn't accept any rent from them. They only pretended to pay. Vyse says he knew nothing about any of this and refutes the suggestion that he might want to contest the will.

Poirot suggests a séance to talk to Nick, claiming that Hastings is a medium. Poirot turns off the lights and rushes the gathering into the séance. Hastings fakes going into a trance. Soon, the dining room door slowly opens, revealing the white-clad form of Nick Buckley, who glides smoothly into the room. The people gathered together gasp, and Ellen screams. Then, Poirot flicks on the light, revealing that Nick is real. Nick laughs and confronts Mrs. Croft, who tries to play the will off as a joke. Inspector Japp is there, and he arrests the Crofts. Mrs. Croft is actually a forger named Milly Merton, who forged the will. Suddenly, a bullet flies through the window, hitting Frederica.

In Chapter 20, Poirot and Challenger rush to the window. They carry back with them a man who Hastings recognizes as the face he saw at the window. He has blood flowing down the side of his head. Freddie comes forward, but Poirot stops her. She was not hurt by the shot, only grazed, and she pushes past Poirot to the man, who opens his eyes and sees her. The man first hopes he's killed her and then apologizes. Freddie forgives him, kneeling by him. Then he dies. Freddie reveals that the man was her husband, a drug addict. Freddie has been working on kicking her own addiction since she left him. Her husband would always demand money from her, threatening to shoot himself and her. Freddie is convinced he shot Maggie. The piece of paper the police found in the garden was written by him, and seeing it gave Freddie her faint spell in Poirot's room. Still, Freddie doesn't understand, because her husband couldn't have poisoned Nick.



## Chapter 19, Poirot Produces a Play and Chapter 20, J. Analysis

The gathering together of all the suspects is a traditional scene in murder mystery. The sleuth has all of the suspects together, and from among them, he will pick the murderer, clearing up smaller mysteries along the way. Poirot's gathering first clears up the question of the Crofts and the will, which is the biggest red herring in the novel. Mildred Croft and her husband are criminals, as Poirot suspected because they seemed a little too "authentic" Australian. By reading the will, Poirot reveals that the will Vyse received was not in any way the will that Nick described. Because Nick is still alive, the Crofts' crime of deception is exposed, through yet another deception.

The second red herring that is cleared away is the question of "J.," Freddie's estranged husband. However, J.'s appearance, shooting Freddie and then himself, is happenstance more than a result of Poirot's orchestration. Still, the existence of J. must be cleared up before the real murder can be unraveled. J.'s existence explains what Freddie has been hiding and the partial note found by the police in the garden. However, J. doesn't completely explain the mystery, as most readers will realize.



# Chapter 21, The Person—K. and Chapter 22, The End of the Story

## Chapter 21, The Person—K. and Chapter 22, The End of the Story Summary

In Chapter 21, Poirot brings Freddie some wine. She asks what will happen now, and Nick begs to cover up the whole incident, now that Freddie's husband is dead. Hastings, Lazarus, Challenger, Croft, Ellen, and her husband all agree. Charles Vyse is the only dissenter, taking the correct legal point of view. Poirot agrees. He takes the side of truth, which he prepares to reveal. Poirot shows the group his list of suspects and admits that he left someone off: Nick herself. During the séance, Japp watched her open a secret panel, take out a pistol, and plant it in Freddie Rice's coat. Poirot accuses Nick of murdering Maggie, whose name was also Magdala, to inherit Seton's money. Seton was engaged to Maggie, not Nick. The police are there to arrest her. Before they go on, Nick asks Freddie for her watch as a memento.

In Chapter 22, Poirot, Hastings, Lazarus, Challenger, and Vyse gather in the drawing room after Nick is taken away. Poirot explains. He was taken in by Nick, who Freddie correctly said was a clever liar. The "accidents" were fictitious, and Nick was, as Vyse said, fanatically devoted to End House. Out of money, she tried to attract Seton as a rich husband, but he fell for plain Maggie instead. Nick was the only one who knew. When Sir Matthew died and Michael went missing, Nick saw her opportunity, faked the accidents, and invited Maggie to stay. Seeing Poirot's name in the paper, she decided to make him a part of the plan and faked the shooting at the hotel.

The night of the fireworks, she gave Maggie her shawl, shot her, and then pretended to be in the house all the time. To complete the illusion, Nick arranged to get the chocolates, put Poirot's card in them, and poisoned herself with cocaine she had on her. She planned to frame Freddie, who had the gift of keeping love, something Nick lacked. The Croft's forgery was completely unrelated. Poirot was misled about Nick until he realized from Maggie's letter that Nick had already invited her to stay. All the discrepancies added up if Nick was the one who was lying. Since he knew Magdala was a family name, he guessed it was Maggie's full name, and he realized that the love letters he found never mentioned Nick's name. Plus, one of the letters was dated near the time of Nick's appendectomy, and it's not mentioned in the letter. Poirot staged the scene to find the secret panel, where he suspected the gun was hidden. Ellen didn't go to the fireworks because she felt something was wrong and was afraid Nick might do something to Freddie.

Poirot reveals that no defense will be needed for Nick. Challenger is Nick and Freddie's drug supplier, and he delivers cocaine in the odd-shaped watches. Nick plans to poison herself with Freddie's supply. Freddie and Lazarus plan to marry, now, and Freddie believes she's kicked her drug habit. As the evening winds up, Poirot asks Lazarus why



he offered too much for the picture. He says that he expected Nick to get it appraised, and he next time he offered to buy a picture, she wouldn't be suspicious of his price. The picture opposite is worth 5,000 pounds.

## **Chapter 21, The Person—K. and Chapter 22, The End of the Story Analysis**

Almost all of the people at the gathering want to cover up the story of Freddie's estranged husband. They are willing to bend the rules, believing that there is more justice in covering up the instance than finding the truth. However, Poirot is more interested in truth than almost anything else. He believes that justice cannot be found without truth, the opposite of deception. Poirot's propensity to offend Hastings' sensibilities by doing things like going through Nick's underwear is all in the service of truth. Poirot doesn't care about propriety or privacy, as long as he is uncovering truth. Ultimately, no matter what deceptions Poirot orchestrates, his goal is truth.

However, Poirot's goal is not necessarily to follow the letter of the law. He doesn't see any reason to stop Freddie from giving her supply of cocaine to Nick. His job is not to stop Nick from killing herself. It is only to expose the truth and therefore achieve justice for the victim, Maggie Buckley.



# Characters

## Hercule Poirot

Hercule Poirot is a retired private detective. A former member of the Belgian police force, he has made a name for himself by using his "little gray cells" to solve crimes. Poirot lives in England, and he looks very foreign, with an exorbitant mustache and sleeked back hair. He is particular about his suits and patent leather shoes. Often people who meet him do not take him seriously at first. However, Poirot is extremely intelligent, has a deep understanding of human nature, and has inspirations of deduction. He is very aware of his own capabilities, and has no sense of modesty. Poirot's inflated self-image seems egotistical to his friend Captain Hastings.

Poirot also offends the British sensibilities of Hastings with his disregard for personal privacy and social niceties. Poirot does not balk at reading personal love letters or going through Nick Buckley's underwear drawer. Poirot, however, has a strong sense of justice. His primary goal is to catch a murderer, and privacy is a minor concern next to justice.

Despite Poirot's intellect, he is taken in by Nick Buckley. He is cleverly drawn out of retirement, something an invitation from the highest government officials can't do. Poirot believes Nick's cleverly manufactured story of being under attack by a would-be murder. He reprimands himself harshly and experiences deep guilt and responsibility when Maggie Buckley is killed. However, Poirot's intellect wins in the end, as he finally puts the pieces together and sees through Nick Buckley's lies.

## Nick Buckley

A beautiful, dark-haired, modern girl, Nick Buckley gets her name from her obstinate nature and her close relationship with her grandfather, known as Old Nick because of his reputation as a local devil. The name turns out to be more appropriate than anyone guesses, as Nick is an evil person. She is fanatically devoted to her family home, a fact that she cleverly hides from Hercule Poirot. Nick doesn't have the money to upkeep her dilapidated old mansion, and so when she sees an opportunity to inherit a large fortune, she will stop at nothing to make it happen. Nick's plan hinges on the lucky circumstance that her cousin, Maggie Buckley, is secretly engaged to the pilot Michael Seton and will soon inherit a fortune. Maggie and Nick both have the same family name, Magdala. Since only Maggie knows which Magdala Buckley Seton is engaged to, Nick plots to murder Maggie and inherit the money.

Nick is a liar and a manipulator. Her friend Freddie knows it, but Nick is so convincing that she takes in Hercule Poirot through most of the book. She arranges several "accidents" to create the impression that her own life is in danger, and seeing Hercule Poirot's name in the paper, arranges a fake shooting to occur right next to him, intriguing



Poirot and drawing him into her plot. With Poirot vouching that Nick's life is in danger, no one doubts it. Poirot even creates an excuse for Nick to invite her friend Maggie over to visit, when he asks Nick to have a friend stay with her for safety. Nick arranges for Maggie to wear her bright red, easily spotted scarf, and then she kills her cousin. She knows that everyone will think Maggie was killed in mistake for herself. Nick is wild, clever, self-centered, and amoral. She is also unlucky in love, able to initially attract men but not keep them. She pulls off her crime, but she cannot get away with it, because she is outmatched by Poirot's intellect.

## Captain Hastings

Captain Hastings is Poirot's friend and companion. Hastings is kindly and conservative. He has traditional British values. Hastings is appalled by Poirot's tendency to ignore social niceties. Poirot has no qualms about searching Nick's underwear drawer and read her love letters, but Hastings does. However, Hastings ends up going along with Poirot for the greater good of finding a murderer. Hastings is straightforward and well-meaning.

Poirot serves Hastings back-handed compliments, insulting his intelligence but terming him as imaginative and romantic. Poirot also tells Hastings that he is completely backwards in judging people, and this is proven true. Hastings judges people by their external persona, which is dangerous in a world of deception piled on deception. Because Challenger is very British and military, Hastings presumes that he's upright and trustworthy, and is shocked when Challenger turns out to be a drug dealer.

## Maggie Buckley

Maggie Buckley is Nick's cousin. She met and fell in love with Michael Seton, who Nick had been spending time with. Maggie is a straight-laced, simple, honest girl. She doesn't wear a lot of makeup or expensive clothes. She is not stylish. Nick is horrified that her chance at marrying money is destroyed when Seton falls in love with undeserving, goody-goody Maggie. However, since Maggie and Nick both have the same family first name, Magdala, Nick sees a way to turn the situation to her advantage. When Seton's rich uncle dies, and Seton is missing and presumed dead, Nick puts into motion a plan to murder Maggie and take her place as Seton's secret fiancée. Maggie is unsuspecting. She comes to Nick's house when she gets the invitation, though she is disbelieving that Nick is in danger. She takes Nick's easily identifiable red shawl when Nick makes the suggestion, and Nick shoots her dead once Seton's death is confirmed, completing her plan. Maggie never suspects that her cousin is her direst enemy.



## Michael Seton

Michael Seton is a pilot attempting a round-the-world flight. He is secretly engaged to Maggie, but Nick pretends that she's his fiancée to inherit his fortune. Seton is confirmed killed during his flight, setting Nick's plan into action.

## Commander George Challenger

Commander Challenger is one of Nick's group of friends. He appeals to Captain Hastings because of his English naval appearance, but he turns out to be a drug dealer, who supplies Nick and Freddie with drugs.

## Jim Lazarus

Jim is a London art dealer who drives a long, expensive red car. Hastings takes an immediate dislike to him, feeling like he's too sleek. Though everyone thinks that Jim is wealthy, he's actually going through difficult financial problems. Jim is involved with Freddie Rice and wants to marry her.

## Frederica (Freddie) Rice

Freddie Rice is Nick Buckley's best friend. She is married to a drug addict, but they are separated. Freddie wants a divorce, but her husband is uncooperative. In fact, he threatens to kill himself and her, extorting money out of his estranged wife. Freddie has also become addicted to drugs, and she is trying to kick the habit. Nick is jealous of Freddie, who has the ability to attract and keep a man, and she plans to frame Freddie for the murder, although Nick is also willing to hang the murders on Freddie's estranged husband. When Nick is arrested, Freddie gives her a supply of cocaine so that Nick can kill herself instead of facing a trial and conviction. Freddie is involved with Jim Lazarus and plans to marry him at the end of the novel.

## Ellen

Ellen is Nick's middle-aged maid.

## Charles Vyse

Charles is Nick's cousin, who will inherit End House if she dies. Charles is in love with Nick and wants to marry her, but she is not interested in him. He is a dry and correct lawyer.



## **Bert Croft**

Bert Croft is Milly Croft's husband, and they live together at the lodge at End House. Bert convinces Nick to make a will before an operation for appendicitis, and then he suppresses it. Later, he substitutes a forgery that his wife made, leaving all of Nick's possessions to Mrs. Croft.

## **Mildred Croft**

Milly Croft is Bert's wife, but she is not who she says she is. She is confined to a wheelchair, but she is actually a well-known forger named Milly Merton who was injured in an escape after her last caper. Milly forges a fake will, leaving all of Nick's possessions to her.

## **Edith**

Edith is the nurse who cares for Mrs. Croft.

## **Sir Matthew Seton**

Sir Matthew is Michael Seton's wealthy and woman-hating uncle, who has recently died and left Michael Seton a fortune.

## **Dr. Graham**

Dr. Graham is Nick's doctor, who puts Nick into a nursing home for safety at Poirot's request.

## **Colonel Weston**

Colonel Weston is the Chief Constable investigating Maggie Buckley's murder, and he allows Poirot to carry out the deception that Nick Buckley has been killed.

## **Reverend and Mrs. Buckley**

Reverend and Mrs. Buckley are Maggie Buckley's parents, who through forwarding Poirot Maggie's last letter to them, provide Poirot with the information that Maggie was already planning a visit to Nick's.



## **J.**

Poirot uses the letter J to stand for an unknown actor in the drama he's investigating. He discovers that there is a J participating in the ongoing events, Frederica Rice's estranged husband, a drug addict who is extorting money from her and who finally shoots himself.



## Objects/Places

### The Red Chinese Shawl

Nick wears a unique, easily recognizable red Chinese shawl on the night of the fireworks so that she can later encourage Maggie to wear it instead. That way, it will seem that Maggie was shot in mistake for Nick.

### The Black Dress

Nick never wears black, but she orders a black dress to wear on the night of the fireworks. At one point, Poirot believes the black dress is in mourning for Seton, but actually Nick wears the black dress to be dressed similarly to her cousin Maggie.

### End House

End House is Nick's family home in St. Loo. Nick is fanatically devoted to End House, and she wants money to be able to upkeep and live in the house.

### The Albatross

The Albatross is Michael Seton's amphibian plane, in which he's attempting to fly around the world.

### The Majestic

The Majestic is a high end hotel in the English seaside town of St. Loo, where Hercule Poirot goes to stay.

### The Bullet

A bullet hits the wall by Poirot's head while he is on the terrace of his hotel, which prompts him to become involved in the case through curiosity. In actuality, Nick has arranged the instance for the express purpose of attracting Poirot's attention.

### Mott's Garage

Nick takes her car to Mott's Garage after sabotaging her own brakes, and the mechanic at the garage is able to back up her story of murder attempts against her.



## **The Opened Newspaper**

Nick leaves a newspaper carelessly open on her sofa, opened to a page that mentions Poirot's visit to St. Loo. Nick denies that she looked at anything but the tide tables in the newspaper.

## **The Wristwatches**

Frederica and Nick have unusual, globe-shaped wristwatches. These contain drugs, delivered by Commander Challenger.

## **Scarborough**

Nick Buckley is at Scarborough with Michael Seton, the airman she is hoping to attract. However, Maggie Buckley comes out to visit Nick, and Seton falls for her instead, instigating the murder that Poirot must later unravel.



# Themes

## Deception

Peril at End House is filled with deception. The whole story as Poirot and Hastings see it is orchestrated by Nick Buckley, specifically to deceive. Nick engineers fake attempts on her life, and creates the illusion that she is engaged to Michael Seton. Nick is only able to do this because of another deception. Maggie Buckley and Michael Seton are deceiving Seton's uncle by keeping their marriage plans a secret. If it weren't for this deception, Nick would never be able to attempt her plan. Maggie believes that one should keep one's feelings to oneself, and not burden others with them, an attitude she expresses shortly before her death. By keeping her feelings about Michael Seton's disappearance inside, another kind of deception, she unwittingly makes Nick's plan possible.

Drugs also require deception. Challenger puts on the attitude of a respectable, military British man to hide the fact that he is a drug dealer. Nick and Freddie's watches are deceitful, hiding the cocaine that they keep concealed on their wrists. Similarly, Freddie is deceptive when she keeps her difficult relationship with her estranged husband a secret.

Poirot is hardly adverse to deception. He orchestrates his own deceptions, pretending to everyone that Nick is dead. Then, he fakes a séance, where Nick is revealed to be alive. This deception is not as simple as it seems because Poirot is also deceiving Nick. Secretly, the scene is designed to trap Nick into revealing the hiding place where she has stashed the murder weapon, the evidence needed to convict her. However, Poirot's deceptions are ultimately designed to reveal truth and unravel others' deceptions.

## Evil

The novel draws clear lines between good and evil. Evil is portrayed as something tangible in the novel, something that can be felt and responded to by most people. Ellen says it outright, that she feels that End House has an evil atmosphere. The people of the town labeled Nick's grandfather as evil, branding him Old Nick. The branding of Nick by the same reference to the devil is an indication that the presence of evil was tangible on her, even as a child.

Nick has a problem with men. She is young, attractive, and personable. However easy it is for Nick to attract men, they are "put off" of her after a while. They just don't remain attracted to her. This is an indication that men are unconsciously detecting Nick's evil nature, which puts them off of her. No one can seem to put a finger on the problem, but after a while, Nick's evil becomes apparent.

Poirot's goal is to foil evil. He doesn't see it in Nick, because it is well disguised. However, Nick is the source of evil in the novel. She is manipulative, lying, greedy,



jealous, and selfish, at the heart, however attractive and pleasant she seems on the surface. Her evil qualities lead her to, without a qualm, orchestrate a plan to murder her cousin in cold blood. Ultimately, her evil cannot be kept hidden, and Poirot exposes her.

## Justice

In the novel, Maggie Buckley's parents are the people who most need justice. They are the ones who have been wronged and have been robbed by Nick Buckley's actions. Maggie Buckley herself can no longer be helped, though Poirot does believe that the victim deserves justice through the punishment of the killer. Maggie's parents' presence in the novel is a strong motivator for Poirot to bring the crime home to its perpetrator.

Maggie Buckley's parents beg Poirot to combat the evil that has taken their daughter and bring the culprit to justice. Justice is something that Poirot takes seriously, and at the core of justice is truth. The truth must be exposed for justice to be done. Although Poirot is deceptive, he does not intend for his deceptions to last. He intends them to reveal the truth and allow justice to be done.

Most of the characters in the novel are willing to cover up the truth, when they think that Freddie's estranged husband committed the crimes. Poirot and Vyse are the only two who believe that the truth must be revealed. Poirot, however, does not believe that justice is necessarily the same as the societal rules and laws. This is shown when he doesn't object to Freddie giving Nick her wristwatch full of cocaine. Poirot has deduced that the watches contain cocaine, and he knows that Nick will kill herself. For Poirot, Nick's death is justice enough. She does not need to be tried and sentenced by a court.



# Style

## Point of View

Peril at End House is told in the first person, from the point of view of Captain Hastings. Hastings occupies a special position in the novel, as Poirot's friend and constant companion who sees the events unfold firsthand, but who is not privy to what is going on inside Poirot's head. By seeing the events through Hastings' eyes, the reader is able to gather all the information that Poirot gathers, hear the stories of all the characters, and see everything that Poirot sees. At the same time, the reader is kept in the dark about Poirot's conclusions, left to make his or her own guesses about the truth.

The truth in Peril at End House is obfuscated. The novel's perspective does not see into any of the characters' minds except for Hastings, otherwise the story would be quite different. The characters' deceptions are kept secret, only to be revealed by Poirot's unceasing investigation. If the reader were able to see into other characters' minds, the novel would become a cat-and-mouse story, where the interest was not in discovering the truth but in finding out how the sleuth would trick the murderer and reveal the plot.

Hastings and Poirot are outsiders, and the story is told from the outside. Approaching it externally, as opposed to from the point of view of one of Nick's close friends, allows the truth to be even more obfuscated. Poirot and Hastings don't see anything about Nick that she hasn't planned them to see, and they don't know her intimate history, such as her propensity for lying.

## Setting

The setting of Peril at End House is a summer vacation town on the coast of England called St. Loo. End House itself is a dilapidated old mansion, falling apart, set atop a cliff on the English coast. The house is essential to the plot because it is essentially Nick's motivation. Nick has an unreasonable love for her house and she is willing to murder to have the money to upkeep it and to continue to live there.

The house represents Nick's past and her connection with her grandfather. The fact that Nick won't sell the portrait of her grandfather shows a connection between her grandfather and the house. It is meaningful to her because of the memories and because of the connection with her family's past. However, what Nick has inherited through the family that she loves is evil.

End House carries with it an atmosphere of evil and deception. Ellen feels that the house is evil. She picks up on the negativity of Nick, which is reflected in the house itself. The presence of a secret compartment hidden in the house extends the house's atmosphere to one of deception. Because the location of the secret compartment is unknown and vague through most of the novel, the house remains mysterious, and



anything may be hidden in it. The fact that the house is falling apart adds to its atmosphere. The physical decay indicates moral decay, as well.

## Language and Meaning

The names in the novel are significant. Nick's name refers to the devil, and also ties her to her evil old grandfather, Old Nick. She has inherited some of her evil nature from the grandfather who raised her. The name of the house, End House, is also significant. The house is the end-all of Nick's life, and it is also the place where Maggie's life will end. The house is also the place where Nick's plotting and manipulation will finally end, the culminations of all her plans.

The plot of the novel hinges on names. Nick and Maggie have family names, and they both have the same name, Magdala. Their names are obfuscated by nicknames, which are rife among the women in the novel. Maggie, Nick, and Freddie all go by common nicknames, hiding their actual names. Even Mildred Croft goes by Milly (but ironically, Milly or Mildred is her real name, although her last name is a fiction).

In the novel, Poirot has a distinctive way of speaking. His non-native English marks him as a foreigner, especially since it is interspersed with French words and phrases. Challenger's way of speaking puts him solitary in the British military tradition, on the other hand, making Hastings take an immediate liking to him. Although people are judged by their modes of speech, these are often deceptive.

## Structure

The structure of *Peril at End House* is linear. The beginning point is the moment of Poirot's involvement in Nick's plot. This means that much of the story has happened in the past. Nick's plot is already in motion, and she has already engineered three supposed attempts on her life. Maggie's love affair with Seton is in the past, and Sir Matthew Seton's death is also past. The fact that these events are in the past helps them remain obfuscated in their true meanings for the reader.

The story follows Poirot's investigation. Since he is closely tied with Nick, in her confidence, and taking Nick entirely into his confidence, the truth remains hidden through most of the novel. Maggie's death is an important plot point, the actual murder, happening about a third of the way through the novel. The cocaine poisoning of Nick is a similar plot point, and it marks the beginning of the novel's ending. After the cocaine poisoning, Poirot begins to make all the connections he needs to unravel the truth.

The novel's solution proceeds in a series of inspirations by Poirot. He is inspired to realize that Nick was engaged to Michael Seton (or at least that she's pretending to be). Then, he is inspired to pretend that Nick is dead. Finally, he has the inspiration that Nick is the real killer. The novel is concluded with a traditional murder-mystery scene, where all of the suspects are gathered together. After the red herrings in the plot are elucidated, Poirot goes on to explain in detail how Nick's plot worked and how he

realized the solution. The end of the novel explains the final detail, why Lazarus offered too much money for the painting.





## Quotes

"'It's called End House,' said the girl. 'I love it—but it's a tumble-down old place. Going to rack and ruin.'" —Chapter 1, The Majestic Hotel

"She still treated the matter lightly, because it was her habit and her creed to treat all occurrences lightly, but there was a distinct difference in her manner." —Chapter 3, Accidents?

"'Dancing on the edge of death,' she said lightly." —Chapter 5, Mr. and Mrs. Croft

"'It's the only way, isn't it?' said Maggie. 'I mean—whatever one's inward feelings are—it is no good making a fuss about them. That's only uncomfortable for everyone else.'" —Chapter 7, Tragedy

"'It is a list of people surrounding Mademoiselle Buckley. Within that list, if my theory is correct, there must be the name of the murderer.'" —Chapter 9, A. to J.

"His eyes were shining with that queer cat-like green light that I knew so well." —Chapter 10, Nick's Secret

"'I don't want to be alive. I don't want to live, I tell you!' she cried, rebelliously." —Chapter 11, The Motive

"'Decidedly, my poor Hastings, you belong to the Victorian era. Mademoiselle Nick would tell you so if she were here.'" —Chapter 13, Letters

"'It will be revealed to you, M. Poirot,' quavered the clergyman. 'Evil cannot go unpunished.'" —Chapter 16, Interview with Mr. Whitfield

"'Do not agitate yourself, Mademoiselle. You are blameless—blameless. It is I that am to blame, miserable imbecile that I am!'" —Chapter 17, A Box of Chocolates

"I realized then what an actress the world had missed. Nick had wanted to play a part at End House. Now she was playing it..." —Chapter 19, Poirot Produces a Play

"'Voilà!' he said. 'The person K.! It was Mademoiselle Nick who shot her cousin, Maggie Buckley.'" —Chapter 21, The Person—K.



## Topics for Discussion

Does Nick have any redeeming qualities by the end of the novel? What does the reader actually know about Nick's character?

Why is Poirot successfully deceived by Nick throughout most of the novel? What does this say about both Poirot and Nick?

When is deception a good thing in the novel and when is it bad?

In the novel, evil is a real and present actuality. How does the novel define evil?

How fair is the novel in presenting the mystery to the reader? How surprising is the ending, and is it satisfying?

Is Poirot's egotism deserved? Are his self-recriminations deserved when things go wrong?

Describe Poirot's moral code. What moral ideals are a high and low priority for Poirot?