The Murder of Roger Ackroyd

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AGATHA CHRISTIE

Agatha Christie was born into a wealthy English family. Her mother, Clara, claimed to be a psychic, and Christie grew up believing in her abilities. Christie was home schooled for most of her childhood, and she wrote many stories as a teenager, many of them centered around the supernatural. She married her first husband, Archibald Christie, and later served as a nurse during World War One. In 1919 she published her first detective novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, featuring the Belgian sleuth Hercule Poirot. She went on to write more than eighty novels, mostly mysteries, starring Poirot and well as certain other recurring characters, including Mrs. Marple and Tommy and Tuppence. Christie lived a long, productive life, and by the 1950s she was the most famous mystery novelist in the world. In 1971, shortly before her death, she was made a Dame of the British Empire, the nation's highest civilian honor.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Like many mystery novels, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is set in a claustrophobic environment that seems curiously cut off from the rest of the world—as a result, the novel doesn't allude to very many notable historical events. However, Major Hector Blunt mentions "the Great War" at one point. At the time when the novel was written, there had only been one World War, and it was usually referred to as "the Great War."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Perhaps the most influential work in the detective genre is *A Study in Scarlet* (1886) by Arthur Conan Doyle, which introduced Sherlock Holmes to the world, while Edgar Allan Poe arguably invented the genre with his stories about the detective Auguste Dupin, starting with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Readers who are interested in the theory and literary structure of detective novels should consult "Knox's Ten Commandment of Detective Fiction," a short, somewhat tongue-in-cheek list of rules for detective fiction that was considered the gospel for early 20th-century mystery writers. Christie infamously violated the first of Knox's commandments—that the murderer shouldn't be the narrator of the book. However, this kind of "twist ending" is now fairly common in literature, even mystery novels. Good examples of suspenseful novels in which the narrator is revealed to be the "bad guy" include *London Fields* (1989) by Martin Amis and *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn, an avowed Agatha Christie fan!

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Murder of Roger Ackroyd
- **When Written:** Early 1926
- **Where Written:** London and Oxfordshire
- **When Published:** June 1926
- **Literary Period:** "Golden Age" detective fiction
- **Genre:** Mystery Novel
- **Setting:** King's Abbot (a small village in rural England)
- **Climax:** Hercule Poirot reveals that Dr. Sheppard is the killer
- **Antagonist:** Dr. Sheppard
- **Point of View:** First person (Dr. Sheppard)

EXTRA CREDIT

Popular. Agatha Christie is one of the most popular, widely-read novelists in *history*: for most of the 20th century, it was estimated that only the Bible and the works of William Shakespeare were more commonly read. To date, her books have sold some two billion copies, and she's probably the most translated novelist of all time (103 languages to date). In addition, Christie's play *The Mousetrap* holds the world record for longest initial theatrical run—it premiered in 1952 and is still running as of 2017, 25,000 performances later.

Breaking the rules. As every regular reader of detective novels knows, there are certain "rules" of the genre that no good detective novelist breaks. For example, in most detective novels, the fictional detective isn't revealed to be the killer—it would be an unfair breach of readers' "trust." Over the years, Christie broke her contract with the reader on several occasions—and in her final novel about Hercule Poirot, Poirot is revealed to be the killer! Readers and critics have both praised and attacked Christie for challenging the formulas of detective fiction.

PLOT SUMMARY

Dr. James Sheppard, a resident of the small village of King's Abbot, wakes up on Friday morning to learn that Mrs. Ferrars has died. He's sent to care for her, but he's too late. He determines that Ferrars has overdosed on a sleeping medication. His sister, Caroline, with whom he lives, tells him that she's sure Mrs. Ferrars killed herself out of remorse for having killed her husband, Mr. Ashley Ferrars, the previous year.

Dr. Sheppard is friendly with Roger Ackroyd, a successful middle-aged businessman who lives in the biggest house in the

village. Roger was married to a Ms. Paton, who already had a child named Ralph Paton by another marriage. After Ms. Paton drank herself to death, Roger was rumored to be involved in an affair with Mrs. Ferrars. While walking through the streets, Sheppard crosses paths with Roger, who says that he needs to speak with Sheppard right away, and invites him to dinner that evening. During the day, Sheppard is visited by a patient, Miss Russell, who works as a housekeeper in Ackroyd's house. She asks Sheppard if there's any cure for drug addiction. In the afternoon, Sheppard meets his neighbor, a mysterious foreigner named "Mr. Porrott." Porrott claims that he's come to King's Abbot to retire and grow vegetables, but that he's been unable to turn his back on his old profession. Sheppard also visits Ralph Paton at the local inn, where Ralph tells Sheppard that he's been arguing with his father about money, and that he has to "play a lone hand."

At 7:30, Sheppard arrives at the Ackroyd estate, carrying his black bag in case he's summoned on medical duty. Also present in the house is Mrs. Ackroyd (Roger's sister-in-law), Flora Ackroyd (Mrs. Ackroyd's daughter, and Ralph's fiancé), Major Hector Blunt (Roger's good friend), and Geoffrey Raymond (Roger's secretary). After dinner, Roger asks Dr. Sheppard to speak to him in his office. There, Roger explains that he and Mrs. Ferrars were in love, but that Mrs. Ferrars admitted that she'd murdered her husband, and has now killed herself. She also told Roger that somebody was blackmailing her. Just then, the butler, John Parker, enters the room with the evening mail, including an envelope from Mrs. Ferrars. Roger opens the letter and sees that it must contain the name of the blackmailer. Sheppard asks Roger to read it, but Roger says he'll do so later.

Sheppard leaves around 8:50. On his way out, he passes by a mysterious, yet oddly familiar, stranger. When he's home, he gets a call. Shouting to Caroline that Parker has told him Roger's been murdered, Sheppard races back to the Ackroyd estate. Parker is confused—he claims not to have called Sheppard at all. Nevertheless, the two men break into the study, which was locked, and find Ackroyd stabbed in the neck.

Alone in the room, Sheppard examines the body and determines that Roger has been dead for at least half an hour. Raymond rushes into the study and determines that nothing has been stolen. However, Sheppard notices that Mrs. Ferrars's letter is gone. The police arrive and take everyone's testimony. Notably, Flora claims to have seen her uncle alive at 9:50, after which she told Parker that Roger didn't want to be disturbed, and Raymond claims that he heard Roger talking to someone around 9:30. The murder weapon is a Tunisian dagger which was kept in a silver table in the Ackroyd house. The police are initially suspicious of Parker, who seems very nervous. Meanwhile, Ralph is nowhere to be found.

The next morning, Flora asks Sheppard to help her convince Sheppard's neighbor, "Mr. Porrott"—who is actually the famous detective Hercule Poirot—to take on the case of Roger's murder. Poirot agrees to do so, with the condition that he'll follow it through to the very end, no matter how painful his conclusions. Poirot says that he likes Sheppard, and begins to ask for Sheppard's help in investigating the case.

The head police inspector, Inspector Raglan, shows Poirot that the killer came in through the open window, wearing unique shoes with rubber-studded soles—shoes which resemble those owned by Ralph. Poirot also learns from Parker that a chair was shifted slightly in the time between Sheppard and Parker's discovery of the body and the police's arrival. The police also determine that the call Sheppard received came from the nearby train station. Raglan seems confident that Ralph is the killer, particularly since he's nowhere to be found, but Poirot isn't so sure. In a summerhouse outside the estate, Poirot and Sheppard find a scrap of cloth and a goose quill. They also find a woman's wedding ring in a goldfish pond, bearing the inscription, "From R."

Ackroyd's will is opened: he's left some money to Miss Russell, Flora, and Mrs. Ackroyd, but most of his fortune to Ralph. Raymond discovers that some money is missing from Roger's unlocked desk. Poirot investigates the missing money by interviewing two maids, Ursula Bourne and Elsie Dale. Ursula had been dismissed from her job earlier on Friday. Poirot assembles his suspects—Blunt, Flora, Mrs. Ackroyd, Raymond, and Sheppard—and tells them, "Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me."

Dr. Sheppard tells Poirot his theory that someone entered Roger's study through the window, leaving shoeprints behind—and yet this person couldn't have been the killer, based on Flora's testimony. Perhaps Ralph left the window open, allowing the killer to come in afterwards. Poirot says that he admires Sheppard's thinking, but that he's convinced of Ralph's innocence. Sheppard begins to see that Poirot is keeping a lot of information secret from him.

The next day, Mrs. Ackroyd, who Roger supported after her husband's death, confesses to Sheppard that she was stealing silverware from the house, and that she was deep in debt. When Sheppard speaks with Ursula again, she tells him that Ralph "ought to come back." Poirot asks for Flora and Parker's help in a "little experiment," to reenact the events of the night of the murder. Based on Flora's behavior, Poirot deduces that Flora was lying about saying goodnight to Roger at 9:50—she was just trying to conceal the fact that she stole money from her uncle's desk. Flora tearfully confesses, but Major Blunt claims that *he* took the money. Poirot tells Blunt that, quite obviously, Blunt loves Flora. He advises Blunt to share his feelings with Flora.

Raglan takes Sheppard and Poirot to meet a man the police have arrested named Charles Kent. Sheppard realizes that this is the mysterious stranger he saw on the night of the murder. Poirot confronts Miss Russell about the stranger, and Russell admits that Charles is her illegitimate, drug-addicted son, who

she met with in the summerhouse on the night of the murder. Poirot later confronts Ursula and reveals that she was Ralph Paton's secret wife. Ursula admits that Poirot is right—she cast off her wedding ring after Ralph informed her that he was going to marry Flora in order to please Roger and ensure his inheritance.

That evening, Poirot assembles the suspects, including Ursula, Blunt, Flora, Mrs. Ackroyd, Raymond, Parker, and Sheppard, in his home. He then produces Ralph Paton—who, unbeknownst to Poirot until recently, has been in hiding with the help of Dr. Sheppard. Sheppard admits that he's been protecting Ralph, knowing that he'd be the prime suspect in the murder. Poirot explains that he now knows who the killer is, and that the killer must come forward before he goes to speak with Inspector Raglan the next morning. Nobody comes forward, and the guests leave. Poirot asks Sheppard to stay behind, however. Poirot then explains that he's deduced that the killer is none other than—Dr. Sheppard himself.

Poirot explains that he's been suspicious of the phone call that Sheppard claims to have received on the night of the murder. He deduced that the purpose of this phone call was to ensure that Sheppard would be in the room when Roger's body was first discovered. Sheppard obtained a dictaphone featuring a recording of Roger's voice, and placed the dictaphone in the office, shielded by the chair, so that it would play Roger's voice at exactly 9:30, confusing Raymond into believing that Roger was still alive. In fact, Sheppard killed Roger around 8:45, much earlier than the police thought, and then left incriminating tracks on the windowsill. He'd arranged for one of his American patients to call him from the train station, giving himself a pretext for rushing back to the estate and removing the incriminating dictaphone by placing it in his black bag. The reason that Sheppard killer Roger, Poirot has deduced, is that Sheppard was Mrs. Ferrars's blackmailer: he didn't want to be caught by Roger.

Poirot calmly tells Sheppard that he can either go to the police or kill himself. Sheppard spends all night writing his confession. He plans to kill himself with an overdose of sleeping medication. He trusts that Poirot and Raglan will keep his secret, so that Caroline won't have to go through the pain of learning that her beloved brother was a murderer.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dr. James Sheppard – Dr. James Sheppard is the narrator of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. As a result, avid mystery readers—both now and especially in the 1920s—would be predisposed to trust him. In detective novels, there's a long tradition, stretching back to the *Sherlock Holmes* stories (narrated by the reliable Dr. Watson), in which the narrator of the story is the most trustworthy character—the detective's right-hand man. However, in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Agatha Christie challenges readers' assumptions about narration and the conventions of the mystery novel, and in the final pages of the book it's revealed that Dr. Sheppard is the murderer. Sheppard is a somewhat peculiar character: although he's the narrator of the book, readers learn a surprisingly small amount about him (the "twist ending" is dependent upon readers *not* learning too much about him, after all). Sheppard is a physician, and appears to be reliable, trustworthy, and altogether likeable—hence, we assume, Poirot's apparent friendship with him. In retrospect, however, Christie makes it clear that Dr. Sheppard is a weak, desperate man who, as a result of his bad investments and desire to save face, blackmails Mrs. Ferrars and is then forced to murder his friend Roger Ackroyd to prevent himself from being exposed.

Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot") – Hercule Poirot is the detective at the center of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, as well as many other Agatha Christie stories, novels, and plays. A brilliant, often arrogant Belgian with a flair for the dramatic, Poirot can sometimes be irritating to the people around him—his flamboyant continental style clashes with the English characters' simplicity and directness. Nevertheless, Poirot repeatedly proves himself to be a first-rate detective. He's an excellent researcher, who doesn't mind getting his hands dirty to solve a case; however, his greatest strength is arguably his ability to think psychologically, sizing up his suspects' personalities and assessing their precise motives for committing a crime. Poirot isn't above bending the rules to solve his crime—in the novel, he convinces Dr. Sheppard to talk about his private medical conversations with a suspect, and he also posts a false story in the newspaper. Like many fictional detectives, Poirot isn't motivated by money, or by any concrete reward for his ingenuity; rather, he seems to take on cases because of an abstract, philosophical interest in human behavior and a general desire to solve puzzles that seem inscrutable to others. At the end of the novel, Poirot deduces that Dr. Sheppard is the murderer, but, interestingly, doesn't turn Sheppard over to the police, instead allowing Sheppard to settle his affairs and die by his own hand. This is another sign that Poirot is more interested in bringing his investigation to psychological closure than in enforcing the law.

Roger Ackroyd – Roger Ackroyd is, to state the obvious, the murder victim in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, and his death prompts Hercule Poirot to investigate the case—eventually leading to Poirot's discovery that Dr. James Sheppard is the killer. Ackroyd is described as being a successful, middle-aged businessman; he's well-liked in his community, though he has a stubborn streak. Ackroyd's first wife dies of dipsomania (i.e., alcoholism), and he later begins a secret affair with Mrs. Ferrars, culminating in Ferrars's decision to murder her husband. At this point, Dr. Sheppard begins to blackmail Mrs.

Ferrars, prompting her to kill herself and send a letter to Roger Ackroyd containing Sheppard's name. After learning about the letter, Sheppard kills Ackroyd.

Caroline Sheppard – Caroline Sheppard is the sister and roommate of Dr. James Sheppard (at the time, it wasn't particularly uncommon for adult siblings to live together in English villages, even if they were fairly well-off). She's an exceptionally gossipy, curious person, and throughout the book most of the comic relief stems from her frantic attempts to learn as much as possible about the case. Although many of Caroline's instincts are wrong, she's arguably the character in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* who most perfectly represents the ideal reader of Agatha Christie mysteries: she's exceptionally curious about the murders and, crucially, she has almost meta-fictional instincts about who is and isn't guilty. (For example, she's sure—as any good mystery fan would be—that Ralph Paton can't be the killer, because this would be too obvious.)

Ralph Paton – Ralph Paton is the young, handsome son of Ms. Paton, Roger Ackroyd's first wife. He has a reputation for being dashing and charming, but also a little weak-willed. As the novel begins, Ralph is rumored to be engaged to Flora Ackroyd, whom he's known for most of his life (but to whom he's not biologically related in any way). After Roger's murder, Ralph disappears, instantly making him a suspect in the case. Throughout the novel, most of the characters seem to believe that Ralph is the killer: he had a motive (he hated Roger, and always had to convince him to lend him more money). However, as Caroline Sheppard points out, Ralph can't be the killer—it's just too easy and too obvious.

Flora Ackroyd – The beautiful young niece of Roger Ackroyd, fiancé of Ralph Paton, and daughter of Mrs. Ackroyd, Flora Ackroyd is considered a suspect in Roger's murder for several reasons. She depended on Roger for money, and never had enough of it; furthermore, she claims to have been the last person to see Roger Ackroyd before his death.

Mrs. Ackroyd – Roger Ackroyd's sister-in-law from marriage to Cecil Ackroyd, Roger's ne'er-do-well younger brother. As Dr. Sheppard describes her, she's an exceptionally tiresome woman, who complains constantly and drones on about dull topics. She's considered a suspect because of her heavy financial dependence on Roger Ackroyd, and her heavy debts, none of which Roger knew about at the time of his death.

Miss Elizabeth Russell – Roger Ackroyd's housekeeper and, it's suggested, lover for a time. She's considered a suspect in the case because of her jealousy surrounding Roger's affair with Mrs. Ferrars, as well as her need for money and her connections to drugs. It's eventually revealed that Miss Russell has an illegitimate child, Charles Kent.

Major Hector Blunt – Major Hector Blunt is a stock character in Agatha Christie novels: the "blunt," stoic, not particularly bright military man. Blunt never really seems to be a prime suspect in the murder, but he's shown to be hiding something: he has feelings for Flora Ackroyd, and at the end of the novel, the two of them are engaged.

Geoffrey Raymond – Geoffrey Raymond is Roger Ackroyd's intelligent young secretary, much admired by both Hercule Poirot and Dr. Sheppard for his vigor and capability. Raymond, like the other suspects in the murder, is hiding something: he was in debt at the time of Ackroyd's death. Raymond continues to serve the Ackroyd family faithfully even after Ackroyd's death.

Ursula Bourne / Ursula Paton – Ursula Bourne is a parlormaid in the Roger Ackroyd home, and she's considered a suspect in Roger's murder, especially after Hercule Poirot learns that she was dismissed from her position by Ackroyd on the same day Ackroyd was murdered. Toward the end of the book, it's revealed that Ursula is secretly married to Ralph Paton—a piece of information that seems to make Ursula even more of a suspect in Roger's murder.

MINOR CHARACTERS

John Parker – John Parker is the butler on the Ackroyd estate. He's considered a suspect in the case, especially after Hercule Poirot reveals that he's been blackmailing his former employer, Major Ellerby, and that he was eavesdropping on Roger Ackroyd's conversation with Dr. Sheppard just before Roger's death.

Charles Kent – The "mysterious stranger" who Dr. Sheppard notices while he's coming home from the Roger Ackroyd estate. Charles Kent is the illegitimate child of Miss Elizabeth Russell, and a ne'er-do-well drug user.

Mrs. Ferrars – The widow of Mr. Ashley Ferrars, who kills herself by overdose just before the novel begins. She had been having an affair with Roger Ackroyd, and was blackmailed about this by Dr. James Sheppard.

Ms. Paton – The first wife of Roger Ackroyd, and the mother of Ralph Paton by a previous marriage. She dies of alcoholism before the novel begins.

Annie – A parlormaid in the Sheppards' house.

Mr. Ashley Ferrars – The husband of Mrs. Ferrars, who dies about one year before the events of the novel.

Cecil Ackroyd – Roger Ackroyd's ne'er-do-well younger brother, and the late husband of Mrs. Ackroyd.

Miss Gannett – A busybody who lives in the village and likes gossiping with Caroline Sheppard.

Inspector Davis – The police inspector initially sent to investigate the death of Roger Ackroyd.

Inspector Raglan – The primary police investigator involved with the case of Roger Ackroyd's murder.

Colonel Melrose – The chief constable in the village of King's

Abbot.

Elsie Dale – A housemaid in Roger Ackroyd's home.

Mrs. Folliot – An upper-class lady who used to employ Ursula Bourne.

Colonel Carter – A resident of King's Abbot, who sometimes play **Mah Jong** with the Sheppards.

Major Ellerby – The former employer of John Parker.

Mr. Hammond – The Ackroyd family solicitor and attorney.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SECRECY AND THE UNIVERSAL CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE

Halfway through Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Hercule Poirot—the Belgian detective who's been convinced to investigate the titular crime—tells the suspects, "Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me." Poirot's claim is arguably the single most important sentence in the book, summing up Christie's belief that everyone—even nice, ordinary-seeming people—has a dark secret, and, furthermore, that everyone, under the right circumstances, is capable of committing a crime.

Over the course of Poirot's investigation, the book reveals that almost all of the characters had some motive for murdering Roger Ackroyd, a wealthy businessman living in the small village of King's Abbot. This could be considered a convention of the mystery genre (since, after all, it wouldn't be much of a murder mystery unless multiple people could be the murderer). But Christie also makes the deeper point that all people have secrets that can compel them to kill.

Some of the murder suspects are revealed to have a secret need for money. For example, Flora Ackroyd, Roger's niece, and Mrs. Ackroyd, Roger's sister-in-law, are shown to be desperate for cash, which the stingy, stubborn Roger was reluctant to give them upfront. Other suspects are motivated by a more abstract but no less intense desire for freedom; both Flora Ackroyd and Ralph Paton (Roger's adopted son) are shown to be secretly sick and tired of Roger's domineering behavior, and want to be rid of his influence forever. Other characters are shown to have committed various kinds of crimes in the past: Parker, a seemingly "proper" English butler, turns out to be a seasoned blackmailer, and Miss Russell, an equally proper-seeming housemaid, is revealed to have had an illegitimate child (which would have been considered shocking by many of Christie's readers in the 1920s). In all, the characters' questionable behavior and dark secrets confirm Poirot's observation, suggesting that no person is completely free of secrets.

Christie further emphasizes her point in the novel's famous ending, in which it's revealed that Dr. Sheppard, the calm, reliable narrator of the novel, is Roger Ackroyd's killer. After falling deep into debt, Sheppard began blackmailing Roger's lover, Mrs. Ferrars, and, after she killed herself and revealed Sheppard's name to Roger, Sheppard killed Roger to protect himself. It might be hard for 21st-century readers to understand how surprising—even shocking—*Roger Ackroyd*'s "twist ending" was in the 1920s. Traditionally, the narrator of a mystery novel is (along with the detective) the only person whom readers can safely assume to be innocent of the crime. (In the early 20th century, there was even an unofficial set of "commandments" for mystery writers, the first of which is that the narrator of a mystery novel should never be the killer.) By making Dr. Sheppard the killer, then, Christie goes further than her fellow mystery novelists in showing that everyone has secrets, and that even ordinary-seeming people can, under the right circumstances, be compelled to kill. In her later novels, Christie arguably took things even further, penning a novel in which Poirot himself turns out to be the killer!

DETECTION AND INTELLECT

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd doesn't just show that everybody has something to hide—it also suggests that, with a little intelligent detective work, people's secrets inevitably will be revealed. Through the character of Hercule Poirot, the Belgian detective who appears in dozens of other Christie mysteries, *Roger Ackroyd* shows how an intelligent, rational person can use their "**little grey cells**" to solve even the most challenging of mysteries. Furthermore, Christie shows how Poirot's flexible intellect—his combination of rational disinterest and intuitive exploration—is key to solving the case.

The contrast Christie sets up between Poirot's handling of the case and the official inquiry made by the police makes an argument that investigations are best when they're based on a philosophical interest in human behavior and human nature, rather than personal or professional incentives, such as the desire to close a case quickly, a quest for money or fame, or friendship with the victims. Even before Poirot begins to investigate Roger Ackroyd's murder, Christie makes it clear that he's interested in the case for purely abstract reasons. Indeed, Poirot's "disinterest" (i.e., the fact that he's not financially connected to the Ackroyd family, intimately acquainted with any of the suspects, or even legally obligated to turn over his findings to the police) is an important part of his style of detection. Because Poirot is disinterested, he's not biased toward or against particular suspects. Instead, he's free

to "size up" the suspects slowly and carefully, assessing what kinds of people they are, what their motives and secrets might be, and whether or not they'd be capable, under the circumstances, of committing a crime. As befits a detective who only takes cases out of abstract, philosophical interest, Poirot's style of detection focuses on the study of human nature. Like a good logician, Poirot proceeds from a set of premises—everybody has secrets; everybody, under the right circumstances, is capable of murder—and uses them to interview the suspects and draw conclusions about the crime. By contrast, Christie portrays the sloppier style favored by the police, who have limited resources and a strong incentive to conclude their investigation as soon as possible.

But Poirot isn't just an "armchair detective." In addition to his role as a philosophical "student of human nature," he's also willing to get his hands dirty by gathering evidence. Over the course of *Roger Ackroyd*, Poirot gathers various important pieces of evidence in the act of patrolling the Ackroyd estate, including a wedding ring, a goose quill, and a piece of cambric (a kind of fabric), without which he'd probably be unable to solve the case. Much of the time, Poirot acts like an empiricist, who believes that the best way to solve a problem is to gather evidence—either literal, physical evidence or the testimony of the suspects. But there are other occasions when Poirot seems to use his intuition to guide his investigation. Especially toward the beginning of the case, Poirot tells Dr. Sheppard that he has certain "feelings" about a particular person or piece of evidence—ideas that he's unable to support with evidence. Although many of Poirot's "feelings" later become full-fledged theories, supported by the evidence, they often begin as mere, unsubstantiated instinct. Poirot is unique from most other fictional detectives in the sense that he doesn't have any one hard and fast theory of detection. At times, he concentrates on gathering physical evidence; at other times, he focuses on forming a psychological understanding of the suspects; and sometimes, he allows his instincts to guide him. Christie implies that it is because Poirot is so flexible—he uses so many different methods of detection, employing many different aspects of his mind—that he's such a brilliant detective.

LAW VS. ETHICS

Over the course of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Agatha Christie draws an important distinction between the law—symbolized by Inspector Raglan, who is duty-bound to investigate Roger Ackroyd's murder and prosecute the killer in court—and ethics, symbolized by Hercule Poirot.

From the beginning, Christie shows that Poirot marches to the beat of his own drum. He's motivated by a personal, philosophical interest in the case of Roger's murder (see Detection theme), and answers to his own personal code of right and wrong. At various points in the book, Poirot is shown to be willing to lie, manipulate suspects, and engage in other behavior that many people would consider "wrong." He deceives suspects into giving away important information about themselves, and in the middle of the book, Poirot takes matters into his own hands by posting a fictitious story in the local newspaper, explaining that the police have arrested Ralph Paton, the prime suspect in Roger's murder. For Poirot, these deceptions are justified by the "greater good" of solving the case, and indeed, his lies are often quite useful in gathering new information. After he arranges for the fake news story to be published, for instance, Ursula Bourne comes forward and admits that she was married to Ralph Paton—a crucial piece of evidence that she would never have revealed otherwise. Although Poirot engages in plenty of questionable behavior, he clearly has a strong ethical code. Rather than being strongly committed to any particular rule or law, however, Poirot is committed above all to learning the truth, no matter how painful it might be. In this sense, he seems very different from the police, who are motivated by their desire to obey and enforce the law more than their abstract love for truth and enlightenment.

Christie further complicates themes of law and ethics at the end of the book, when Poirot, having discovered that Dr. Sheppard is the murderer, allows Sheppard to kill himself instead of turning him over to the police. The ending strongly implies that Sheppard will kill himself, and Poirot will convince Inspector Raglan to refrain from broadcasting the news of Sheppard's guilt, thereby protecting Sheppard's sister Caroline from the pain of learning that her brother was a murderer. Poirot's behavior suggests that, although he's committed to truth—in the sense that he feels a desire, and even a duty, to learn the truth about Roger's murder—he also takes into account other factors, such as Sheppard's dignity and, more importantly, the effect that his arrest will have on Caroline and the community in general. Where a police inspector would be legally bound to arrest Sheppard and put him on public trial for his crimes, Poirot opts for a more intimate, ethically holistic form of justice. Furthermore, it appears that Inspector Raglan is going to cooperate with Poirot and keep news of Sheppard's guilt quiet. This might suggest that, ultimately, *Roger Ackroyd* sides with Poirot's personal, idiosyncratic ethical code, rather than the strictly "by the book" approach favored by the police: detectives should bring the truth to light, but they should *also* take into account the effect the truth will have on other people.

GOSSIP AND SMALL TOWN LIFE

Like many mystery novels, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is set in a small, isolated community—the English village of King's Abbot—where everybody knows everybody else, and where the whole community knows when there's someone new in town. One of the most important features of small-town English life, as Christie depicts it, is the

powerful force of gossip—the information (sometimes true, sometimes not) that gets passed from person to person in a small town. And it is in part by learning to harness the power of gossip that Poirot solves the case of Roger Ackroyd's murder.

Dr. Sheppard, the narrator, constantly complains about how irritating, inaccurate, and pointless gossip can be. And yet, over the course of the book, Christie shows how gossip can be a potentially important tool of detection. Counterintuitively, gossip can be more reliable than regular, face-to-face testimony. At the very beginning of the book, Sheppard's sister Caroline learns about the death of Mrs. Ferrars almost as soon as it happens, thanks to the power of gossip: Mrs. Ferrars's parlormaid passes the message on to other people, who alert Caroline. This shouldn't suggest that gossip is always one hundred percent accurate, and indeed, there are several times when Caroline and the other gossips in King's Abbot spread completely false rumors about Poirot and Roger Ackroyd. And yet, throughout *Roger Ackroyd*, Caroline's ideas about the case—which she proceeds to share with anyone who'll listen—prove to be more accurate than the police inspector's theories and even, at times, Hercule Poirot's theories. One reason for the reliability of gossip is that, unlike with the testimony of the murder suspects, the people communicating the information have no strong incentive to lie. Gossips sometimes lie or distort the truth in order to tell a good story, but—at least as Christie presents it in the book, if not in real life—they still want to be *right*. On the other hand, each one of the murder suspects has a very strong incentive to lie (their reputations or their lives hinge on their ability to conceal the truth). On a typical day in a small English town, Christie suggests, gossip might not be the best source of information. But in the midst of a murder case, when everybody is hiding something, gossip can be one of the best ways of learning the truth.

Hercule Poirot solves the case of Roger's murder because he recognizes the power of gossip and learns how to use it to his advantage. At various point in the novel, Poirot makes important deductions based on what the town gossips, especially Caroline, tell him. Poirot uses Caroline's network of gossips to determine whether Ralph Paton owns boots, and he learns from Caroline that Ralph had met with a mysterious woman in the woods, paving the way for his conclusion that Ralph was married to Ursula Bourne, and couldn't have committed the murder. The knowledge that Ralph was walking through the woods is a particularly strong example of why gossip is so important to the art of detection. Previously, Dr. Sheppard concealed Ralph's behavior from Poirot for fear that it would lead Poirot to deduce that Sheppard was the killer. Gossip, on the other hand, doesn't discriminate based on guilt or innocence. By learning about the customs of a small English town, Poirot—an idiosyncratic Belgian outsider—learns to use gossip to his advantage, and solves his case.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

MAH JONG

As with many mystery novels, there are relatively few symbols in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*; emphasis is instead placed on the literal, albeit initially unclear, significance of various pieces of evidence, rather than on the abstract, symbolic meaning of these things. However, Dr. James Sheppard plays a game of Mah Jong with his sister Caroline and two friends, Colonel Carter and Miss Gannett. (Mah Jong is a traditional Chinese game, somewhat similar to bridge or gin rummy, that was very popular in England at the time.) During the game, Sheppard gets a "perfect hand," and, encouraged by his victory in the game, begins spilling secrets about his friendship with Hercule Poirot. The Mah Jong game could be interpreted as a symbol of the secrets that all people—especially the suspects in a murder case!—are hiding. As in a game of Mah Jong, these secrets eventually come to light, and sometimes, when the murderer has a "perfect hand" (i.e., has committed a seemingly "perfect crime"), he feels an unconscious need to spill his secret to other people. (It's worth noting that Agatha Christie often uses games to symbolize characters' psychological attributes—in *Cards on the Table*, for example, Hercule Poirot solves a case by studying how the suspects play bridge.)

"LITTLE GREY CELLS"

Many times in the book, Hercule Poirot claims that he solves his cases with the help of his "little grey cells." Literally, Poirot is talking about his brainpower (the "grey matter" of the brain)—but he also means something more specific. The little grey cells to which he refers could symbolize Poirot's unique style of detection, a combination of logical deduction, hands-on investigation, and intuition.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the William Morrow edition of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* published in 2011.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Our village, King's Abbot, is, I imagine, very much like any other village. Our big town is Cranchester, nine miles away. We have a large railway station, a small post office, and two rival "General Stores." Able-bodied men are apt to leave the place early in life, but we are rich in unmarried ladies and retired military officers. Our hobbies and recreations can be summed up in the one word, "gossip."

Related Characters: Dr. James Sheppard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dr. Sheppard, the narrator of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, sets the scene. He lives in small village in the English countryside, where many of the residents are past middle age and everybody knows everybody else. Gossip, as Sheppard suggests here, is a primary source of entertainment for the villagers: for example, Sheppard's sister, Caroline, spends a sizeable portion of her time updating herself on other people's business.

Gossip is a recurring theme of the novel—there are various points when Caroline is shown to be better informed about what's going on in town than Dr. Sheppard, or even Hercule Poirot. Poirot, recognizing the power of gossip, sometimes puts Caroline to use to answer a question. The passage is also notable because it establishes that the King's Abbot community is small and close-knit, meaning that the murderer of Roger Ackroyd is probably someone who knew the killer, and who everybody in town knows.

One cannot answer a question like that off-hand. I gave her a short lecture on the subject, and she listened with close attention. I still suspected her of seeking information about Mrs. Ferrars.
"Now, Veronal, for instance—" I proceeded.
But, strangely enough, she didn't seem interested in Veronal. Instead she changed the subject, and asked me if it was true that there were certain poisons so rare as to baffle detection.

Related Characters: Dr. James Sheppard (speaker), Mrs. Ferrars, Miss Elizabeth Russell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Dr. Sheppard proceeds with his usual duties as a physician, and receives a visit from Miss Russell, a housekeeper in Roger Ackroyd's mansion. Russell doesn't seem to be particularly ill, but she raises the topic of cocaine addiction. Then, quite unexpectedly, she brings up the concept of untraceable poisons.

The passage is a great example of two of the key literary devices of detective fiction: 1) Chekhov's gun and 2) the red herring. In fiction, a Chekhov's gun is a seemingly minor detail of the story that, by the very fact of its inclusion, is guaranteed to become important later on. The red herring is the exact opposite: a seemingly important piece of information that turns out to be a distraction. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, readers have to decide whether the various pieces of information Christie chooses to include are Chekhov's guns or red herrings—whether they're key plot points, or whether they're just designed to fool readers into thinking they know what's going on. (In this passage, cocaine use is a quasi-Chekhov's gun—related to Miss Russell's illegitimate child and his drug use—and untraceable poison is a red herring, showing that the two concepts are often indistinguishable in practice.)

Chapter 3 Quotes

"It is Fate," he said at last.
"What is Fate?" I asked irritably.
"That I should live next to a man who seriously considers Porcupine Oilfields, and also West Australian Gold Mines. Tell me, have you also a penchant for auburn hair?"

Related Characters: Dr. James Sheppard (speaker), Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Dr. Sheppard meets Hercule Poirot, the Belgian detective who appears in dozens of Agatha Christie novels. Poirot has retired to King's Abbot in order to grow vegetable marrows (a kind of squash), but he's becoming bored—he finds that he can't turn off the natural curiosity and vivaciousness that makes him such a good detective. Poirot and Sheppard bond after Sheppard admits that he's lost some money in bad investments, not unlike Poirot's friend and sidekick Captain Hastings, to whom Poirot alludes in this passage (apparently Hastings lost money on

the "Porcupine Oilfields," and Sheppard on the "West Australian Gold Mines").

The gist of the scene is the Poirot seems to think of Dr. Sheppard as a natural successor to Captain Hastings—and, indeed, that it's "Fate" that they should happen to live next to each other. This is important because it makes readers trust Sheppard even more than they did previously: they think of Sheppard as the Dr. Watson to Poirot's Sherlock Holmes, and therefore incapable of committing murder.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"Make certain that window's closed, will you," he asked. Somewhat surprised, I got up and went to it. It was not a french window, but one of the ordinary sash type. The heavy blue velvet curtains were drawn in front of it, but the window itself was open at the top.
Parker reentered the room with my bag while I was still at the window.
"That's all right," I said, emerging again into the room.
"You've put the latch across?"
"Yes, yes ... What's the matter with you, Ackroyd?"

Related Characters: Roger Ackroyd (speaker), Dr. James Sheppard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a good example of the way that Dr. Sheppard narrates the story, never telling anything but the truth, but omitting many important pieces of information. Here, Roger Ackroyd and Dr. Sheppard are alone in Ackroyd's study, and Ackroyd, feeling paranoid, asks Sheppard to check that the window is closed. As Sheppard presents the information, he tells Ackroyd that the window is, in fact, locked—leaving readers to conclude that he really locked the window. However, it's later revealed that Sheppard didn't lock the window at all—and, furthermore, that he's the murderer of Roger Ackroyd. By presenting the plot in a subtly altered way, he's tricked readers into trusting him and believing that he couldn't possibly be the killer.

At the same time, Roger's paranoia shows that he apparently knows he's in danger—probably suspecting that Mrs. Ferrars' blackmailer will come after him or try to prevent him learning their identity. The problem is, Roger places his faith in the wrong man: Sheppard, who is the blackmailer himself, and whose plans to murder Roger entirely justify Roger's paranoia.

The letter had been brought in at twenty minutes to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone. I could think of nothing. With a shake of the head I passed out and closed the door behind me.

Related Characters: Dr. James Sheppard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation is another good example of Sheppard's subtle manipulation of the narrative. He first describes how he and Roger Ackroyd discuss the mysterious letter that Mrs. Ferrars has mailed to Roger. Then he describes how he leaves the room some ten minutes later. As it's presented, it seems unlikely that Sheppard's interaction with Roger lasts ten full minutes, so it's unclear what Sheppard does in the intervening time. However, because of the casual way that Sheppard narrates the scene, many readers don't question Dr. Sheppard's behavior. Like many books and movies with twist endings, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is fun to read, but even more fun to re-read: in retrospect, it's amusing to study how Sheppard deceives his readers.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"You don't think that Parker himself might be the man we're after?" I suggested.
"It looks very like it. He was obviously listening at the door when you came out. Then Miss Ackroyd came across him later bent on entering the study. Say he tried again when she was safely out of the way. He stabbed Ackroyd, locked the door on the inside, opened the window, and got out that way, and went round to a side door which he had previously left open. How's that?"

Related Characters: Inspector Davis, Dr. James Sheppard (speaker), John Parker

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

After Roger Ackroyd is found murdered in his study, the local police force begins investigating the crime. Inspector Davis arrives at the scene and immediately begins taking witness statements and gathering evidence. He quickly decides that the most likely suspect is John Parker, the butler: Parker seemed nervous when Davis began asking him questions about his whereabouts, and he may have a financial motive for the crime.

The passage illustrates the difference between the way the police conduct their investigation and the way Hercule Poirot conducts his. Inspector Davis has many cases, and he's under pressure to arrest someone soon. Therefore, he has a bad habit of jumping to conclusions early on, and then assembling the evidence to support his hypothesis. Poirot, on the other hand, doesn't voice any particular hypothesis until he's well into his investigation: he keeps an open mind.

"Parker!" said my sister. "Fiddlesticks! That inspector must be a perfect fool. Parker indeed! Don't tell me."

Related Characters: Caroline Sheppard (speaker), Inspector Davis, John Parker

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Caroline acts as a sort of "voice of the reader." She's an incorrigible gossip, but she's strikingly well informed about what's happening in her village; she's also fascinated by the murder investigation, even though she has no particular relationship with Roger Ackroyd or his family. In short, Caroline is, in many ways, the ideal reader of an Agatha Christie novel. So it's no surprise that, in this passage, she voices an opinion that any loyal Christie fan will have formed already: there's no way the butler did it. By the 1920s, when Christie wrote many of her most famous books, the ending that "the butler did it" had become such a cliché in that self-respecting mystery novelists avoided it at all costs. Caroline's observation adds a meta-fictional element to the text—it's as if Caroline is reading the novel along with readers, and commenting on the plot.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"It is completely unimportant," said Poirot. "That is why it is so interesting," he added softly.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot") (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Hercule Poirot begins to investigate the murder of Roget Ackroyd at the request of Flora Ackroyd. His methods are strikingly different from those of Inspector Davis and Inspector Raglan: he studies the scene of the crime and notes many small, seemingly irrelevant details. One such detail is a chair that, apparently, has been moved a few inches at some point between the discovery of the body and the arrival of the police. When Sheppard asks Poirot why he's spending so much time thinking about something as seemingly unimportant as the chair's placement, Poirot explains that he's focusing on the chair *because* it's so unimportant.

Poirot's observation should ring true for fans of mystery novels. In the typical mystery novel, there's a lot of seemingly irrelevant information that turns out to be very important. So from the perspective of Poirot, as well as Christie's readers, the chair is very important to the investigation precisely because it seems irrelevant.

Chapter 8 Quotes

He looked ridiculously full of his own importance. It crossed my mind to wonder whether he was really any good as a detective. Had his big reputation been built up on a series of lucky chances?

Related Characters: Dr. James Sheppard (speaker), Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Early on, Dr. Sheppard has some doubts about Hercule Poirot's abilities. He knows that Poirot is famous for his detecting powers, but Poirot seems like an amateur at first. He doesn't offer any elaborate deductions or sophisticated theories about the case; in fact, he admits that he has no

idea who killed Roger.

Sheppard doesn't realize that Poirot's slow, deliberate pace is his greatest asset as a detective. While the police are under pressure to end the investigation soon, Poirot can afford to take his time and, crucially, get to know the suspects well enough to judge them from a psychological perspective. Poirot doesn't offer a solution to the case immediately, and that's what makes him a first-rate sleuth.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ "Look inside," commanded Poirot.
I did so. Inside was an inscription in fine writing:
From R., March 13th.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot"), Dr. James Sheppard (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 9, Hercule Poirot discovers a gold wedding ring in a muddy goldfish pond outside the Ackroyd house. The discovery of the ring is important for a few reasons: 1) It creates a new mystery in need of a solution: who "R" is (and there are at least three important characters in the novel who qualify: Ralph Paton, Geoffrey Raymond, and Roger Ackroyd himself); 2) Poirot shows the ring to Dr. Sheppard, showing that Poirot has come to think of Sheppard as a partner and friend, even if he doesn't trust Sheppard completely; 3) It emphasizes the occasionally gimmicky, plot twist-heavy nature of Christie's novels (since it's pretty implausible that Poirot would find the ring almost as soon as he arrives at the Ackroyd estate).

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ "I'm not too flush just now, as a matter of fact. Came into a legacy a year ago, and like a fool let myself be persuaded into putting it into some wild-cat scheme."
I sympathized, and narrated my own similar trouble.

Related Characters: Major Hector Blunt, Dr. James Sheppard (speaker), Major Hector Blunt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115-16

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Dr. Sheppard has received instructions to speak with Major Hector Blunt about Mrs. Ferrars, who died immediately before the beginning of the novel. During the course of their conversation, Sheppard brings up the fact that he's lost some money due to bad investments. It's worth noting that this is the second time in the novel that Christie has mentioned Sheppard's failed investments, suggesting that Sheppard's finances are important to the plot of the book. Though few readers at the time would have guessed that Sheppard is the killer (and that he killed Roger after blackmailing Mrs. Ferrars to make up for these bad investments), it's entertaining to re-read the novel and notice the subtle hints and "Chekhov's pistols," of which this passage is a prime example.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ I believe that when we find the explanation of that telephone call we shall find the explanation of the murder.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot") (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

As Hercule Poirot begins to investigate the murder of Roger Ackroyd, there's one thing that perplexes him in particular: the phone call that Dr. Sheppard received on the night of Ackroyd's murder, informing him (so Sheppard claims) that Roger has been killed. Poirot is so confused by the call that he claims that, when he understands why the call was made, the case will be solved.

Poirot's comment can be taken in a number of ways. Since the phone call is the most baffling part of the case, it seems logical to assume that it'll be the last thing that Poirot will come to understand. However, Poirot reveals at the end of the novel that he *began* his investigation by thinking about what could have prompted the phone call, eventually arriving at the conclusion that the call was a fiction, designed by Dr. Sheppard to give him an excuse to return to the Ackroyd house and retrieve the dictaphone.

"Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me." He raised his hand as a faint murmur of protest arose. "Yes, yes, I know what I am saying. It may be something unimportant—trivial—which is supposed to have no bearing on the case, but there it is. Each one of you has something to hide."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot") (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

Halfway through the novel, Poirot tells a room full of suspects that they're hiding something from him—and that he'll determine what they're hiding soon enough.

Poirot's observation is one of the most important quotations in the novel, because it emphasizes Christie's point that everybody has secrets—some bigger than others. Poirot has promised to solve the mystery of Roger Ackroyd's murder, and as he's stated, the only way for him to do so it to "leave no stone unturned." In practice, this means that Poirot must uncover *every* secret, even if it's ultimately irrelevant to the murder (and the only way for Poirot to determine if a secret really *is* irrelevant is to collect everybody's secrets and parse through them).

Chapter 13 Quotes

"It is a theory that," admitted Poirot. "Decidedly you have cells of a kind. But it leaves a good deal unaccounted for."
"Such as—"
"The telephone call, the pushed-out chair—"

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot"), Dr. James Sheppard (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 13, after days of investigating, Hercule Poirot finally begins to construct a theory of how the murder was committed. He begins by asking his partner, Dr. Sheppard, for his own theory of the murder; Sheppard proceeds to give a fairly obvious, straightforward explanation for the murder, in which Ralph visited Ackroyd around 9:30, left the door open, and (presumably by mistake) allowed the killer to enter and kill Ackroyd. Poirot points out that Sheppard's theory is plausible, but that it leaves out some important pieces of information.

Poirot's observation is interesting because it suggests the way that he constructs his own hypotheses for how a crime was committed. When some people form a hypothesis, they cherry-pick evidence that supports a position they're already predisposed to believe, omitting evidence that contradicts their idea. On the other hand, Poirot's explanation for a crime explains everything—even minute details like a chair being moved or a phone call being made. This explains why Poirot's investigations tend to take a long time—he needs to study all the evidence in order to construct one perfect, all-encompassing theory.

Chapter 14 Quotes

"He wants to know whether Ralph Paton's boots were black or brown," said Caroline with tremendous solemnity.

Related Characters: Caroline Sheppard (speaker), Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot"), Ralph Paton

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Caroline Sheppard explains to her brother, Dr. Sheppard, that Hercule Poirot has tasked her with determining the color of Ralph Paton's boots (left in his room at the local inn). Neither Caroline nor Dr. Sheppard can understand why Poirot would care about the color of the boots. However, Caroline proceeds to determine the color, using her network of gossips and family friends, in less than one day.

The passage is a good illustration of how Poirot uses the power of gossip to solve the crime: he knows that Caroline is one of the best-informed people in the village, and that he can usually trust her information. Furthermore, the passage suggests how Poirot sometimes misleads his suspects—in order to ensure that Dr. Sheppard doesn't follow his investigation too closely, Poirot obscures the real issue he's trying to investigate (*whether* Ralph had boots at all) and pretend to care about another issue (the color of the boots). This confirms that Poirot, contrary to his claims of close friendship with Sheppard, is working on his own and, perhaps, beginning to distrust Sheppard.

Chapter 15 Quotes

"'What was the point of that question about the glasses?" I asked curiously.
Poirot shrugged his shoulders. "One must say something," he remarked. "That particular question did as well as any other."

Related Characters: Dr. James Sheppard, Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot") (speaker), John Parker

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 15, Hercule Poirot once again misleads his suspects, tricking Flora Ackroyd into divulging information she would never have given up voluntarily. He pretends to need Flora's help in testing whether or not it's possible to hear a voice from the terrace outside Fernly, when in reality he's trying to test whether or not John Parker, the butler, actually saw Flora emerging from the study at 9:50. He deduces that Flora didn't actually go into Roger's study—she only pretending to do so in order to give herself an alibi for stealing money from Roger's desk. At the end of his experiment, Poirot asks Parker a question about the whiskey glasses that he brought by the study on the night of the murder. He asked this question, he later admits to Sheppard, not because he cared about the answer but because he wanted to obscure his real reason for conducting the experiment. In a sense, Poirot is conducting two different investigations: one private, one public. He often pretends to be investigating one issue when, in reality, he's interested in something completely different, and is just trying to throw suspects off the scent or force them to divulge information they would otherwise try to hide.

Chapter 16 Quotes

It was then that I went on, goaded by Caroline's gibes, and rendered reckless by my triumph.
"And as to anything interesting," I said. "What about a gold wedding ring with a date and 'From R.' inside."

Related Characters: Dr. James Sheppard (speaker), Caroline Sheppard

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 16, Dr. Sheppard plays Mah Jong (a popular game in early 20th century England, originally from China, in which four players take turns discarding tiles from their "hands" in order to make special combinations of tiles—something like gin rummy). During the course of the game, Dr. Sheppard is dealt an incredibly rare winning hand. He becomes so flushed with his victory that he starts revealing sensitive information that Poirot has shared with him—notably, the gold ring that Poirot discovered in the goldfish pond outside the Ackroyd house.

The passage is a metaphor (one of the most symbolically loaded passages in the book) for the way that the suspects in the murder of Roger Ackroyd conceal secrets from one another. Christie wrote many books in which games, especially card games, symbolize secrecy and function as gauges of the characters' psychology. But in this scene, she takes the symbol one step further: Dr. Sheppard is dealt a perfect hand (perhaps symbolizing the way he seems to have committed the perfect crime), and then proceeds to share his *other* secrets with his fellow Mah Jong players. In other words, the scene shows that Sheppard can be reckless and sometimes becomes so carried away with his own success that he blabs to others when he should hold his tongue.

Chapter 17 Quotes

Let us take a man—a very ordinary man. A man with no idea of murder in his heart. There is in him somewhere a strain of weakness—deep down. It has so far never been called into play. Perhaps it never will be—and if so he will go to his grave honored and respected by everyone. But let us suppose that something occurs. He is in difficulties—or perhaps not that even. He may stumble by accident on a secret—a secret involving life or death to someone. And his first impulse will be to speak out—to do his duty as an honest citizen. And then the strain of weakness tells.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot") (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Hercule Poirot gives a profile of Roger Ackroyd's killer. The killer, he posits, is an ordinary, likeable person, also possessed of a rather ordinary weakness, yet

who finds himself in a situation where that weakness corrupts him and leads him even to murder. Caroline believes that Poirot is talking about Ralph Paton, the prime suspect in the murder. But in retrospect, it's clear that Poirot is talking about Dr. Sheppard—an ordinary man who's blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars in order to make up for his bad investments, and then has to kill Ackroyd in order to keep the blackmailing a secret and protect his reputation.

The passage shows, at least in retrospect, that Poirot has begun to doubt Dr. Sheppard's innocence. He treated Sheppard like a dear friend—a successor to Captain Hastings, his usual sidekick—but in fact, he suspects that Sheppard isn't what he seems.

In a larger sense, the passage also supports an overarching theme of the book—the fact that everyone has the capacity for violence. Even seemingly "ordinary" people, when placed in a certain situation, are capable of murder. And it is Poirot's ability to recognize this—and even to empathize with it in a way—that makes him so successful as a detective.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ Blunt ignored my well-meant offers. He spoke to Poirot. "D'you really think—" he began, and stopped.
He is one of those inarticulate men who find it hard to put things into words.
Poirot knows no such disability. "If you doubt me, ask her yourself, monsieur."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot"), Major Hector Blunt (speaker), Flora Ackroyd

Related Themes:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Flora Ackroyd has just confessed to stealing money from her uncle, Roger Ackroyd. Major Hector Blunt, who's heard Flora's confession, then volunteers to take the blame for the theft: he tells Poirot that he'll swear in front of a judge that he stole the money. Poirot proceeds to tell Blunt that it's obvious that Blunt loves Flora—and, further, it seems that Flora has feelings for Blunt as well. The passage is interesting because it shows Poirot going above and beyond his duties as a detective. He's interested in solving the case, but he's also interested in studying human nature itself. Therefore, Poirot has been observing Blunt and Flora for some time now, and he's formed a conclusion about their potential romantic attachment. In all, the passage is a good example of Poirot's holistic, psychologically rigorous style of detection, and a reminder that he studies people first and foremost, not crimes.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ It occurred to me that there was not much which escaped Hercule Poirot.

Related Characters: Dr. James Sheppard (speaker), Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 20, it's revealed that Miss Russell has an illegitimate son: Charles Kent (the mysterious stranger who Dr. Sheppard met in the early chapters of the book). Poirot has been suspicious of some connection between Russell and Kent, since there was a goose quill (used to consume heroin) at the Ackroyd summerhouse, and since Miss Russell asked Dr. Sheppard about drug use in her medical appointment. Sheppard is impressed with Poirot's intelligence and powers of deduction.

The passage shows how greatly Sheppard has altered his opinion of Poirot in the course of one week: initially, Sheppard thought of Poirot as an arrogant, ridiculous detective with an over-hyped reputation, but now he realizes that Poirot is a brilliant, methodical man who pores over the facts in order to reach the right conclusion. Poirot is slower than the police, but that's only because he considers all the evidence. There is, in short, very little that escapes him—and the quotation also foreshadow the fact that Dr. Sheppard himself will be unable to "escape" Poirot's detection.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ "It says that Ralph has been arrested. So everything is useless. I need not pretend any longer."
"Newspaper paragraphs are not always true, mademoiselle," murmured Poirot, having the grace to look ashamed of himself, "All the same, I think you will do well to make a clean breast of things. The truth is what we need now."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot"), Ursula Bourne / Ursula Paton, Dr. James Sheppard (speaker), Ralph Paton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 22, Poirot has arranged for a fake news story to be planted in the local paper, claiming that Ralph Paton has been arrested by the police. He plants the story in order to convince the suspects (some of whom are hiding information about Ralph) to come forward and tell the truth. Sure enough, Poirot's stratagem works, and Ursula Bourne confesses that she is married to Ralph Paton: previously, she was afraid to tell the truth because she'd be revealing a possible motive for killing Roger (Roger had found out about her marriage to Ralph on the same day he was murdered, and was furious). The passage shows the lengths to which Poirot will go in order to solve a crime: his devotion to discovering the truth is so great that he's willing to lie to newspaper readers for the "greater good" of solving the case.

Chapter 23 Quotes

"I congratulate you—on your modesty!"
"Oh!" I said, rather taken aback.
"And on your reticence," he added.

I said "Oh!" again.

"Not so did Hastings write," continued my friend. "On every page, many, many times was the word 'I'. What he thought—what he did. But you—you have kept your personality in the background; only once or twice does it obtrude—in scenes of home life, shall we say?"

Related Characters: Dr. James Sheppard (speaker), Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 23, it's revealed that *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*—the novel we're reading—is a manuscript composed by Dr. Sheppard as Poirot proceeds to solve the case. Sheppard shows his manuscript to Poirot, who reads it in one sitting and then congratulates Sheppard on his writing. Sheppard, Poirot claims, has made himself a minor presence in the book—a supporting character, whose primary responsibility is to record what other people have done. Sheppard is, in other words, a pretty standard mystery novel narrator: like Dr. Watson in the Sherlock Holmes stories, he seems reliable and trustworthy, and he's often a peripheral character who's privy to some the detective's work but not to his theories or conclusions. And yet, according to Poirot, there's something unusual about Sheppard's style of writing. He barely mentions himself at all, even when he *is* an important character in the book: for example, as readers have already noticed, he fails to mention that he visited Ralph on the night of the murder, and skims over his behavior with Roger in the study. In retrospect, it's clear in this scene that Poirot is suspicious (to say the least) that Sheppard is the murderer. At times he's seemed to trust Sheppard, but now he sees through Sheppard's lies and attempts to disappear into the background. The passage is also amusing because it seems to critique the style of the standard detective novel of the 1920s, in which the narrator is a peripheral, somewhat flat character. Poirot's observations lend an almost meta-fictional quality to *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*: here, as in other places, the characters seem to be talking *about* the book itself.

Chapter 24 Quotes

I invent a nephew with mental trouble. I consult Mademoiselle Sheppard as to suitable homes. She gives me the names of two near Cranchester to which her brother has sent patients. I make inquiries. Yes, at one of them a patient was brought there by the doctor himself early on Saturday morning.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot") (speaker), Dr. James Sheppard, Caroline Sheppard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 268

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 24, Poirot discloses some of his investigative methods to a roomful of suspects. For example, he explains how he began to suspect Dr. Sheppard of some kind of wrongdoing. In order to discover what Sheppard was hiding, Poirot invented a nephew with mental problems, and asked Caroline to help him find an appropriate hospital for the nephew. Naturally, Caroline suggested the hospitals where Dr. Sheppard had visited most recently—which is, of course, exactly what Poirot wanted her to do. In one hospital, Poirot discovered Ralph Paton in hiding.

There are three things to notice about the passage. First, it reminds readers of how Poirot likes to mislead characters, telling them that he needs their help with a specific task

when, in reality, he's trying to learn something entirely different. Second, the passage confirms that Poirot has doubted Dr. Sheppard's innocence for a long time, even after he continues to refer to Dr. Sheppard as a loyal friend. Finally, the passage shows how Poirot solves the mystery by enlisting Caroline Sheppard's vast supply of information about the other characters (especially her brother).

Chapter 25 Quotes

"A person who was at the Three Boars earlier that day, a person who knew Ackroyd well enough to know that he had purchased a dictaphone, a person who was of a mechanical turn of mind, who had the opportunity to take the dagger from the silver table before Miss Flora arrived, who had with him a receptacle suitable for hiding the dictaphone—such as a black bag—and who had the study to himself for a few minutes after the crime was discovered while Parker was telephoning for the police. In fact—Dr. Sheppard!"

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot") (speaker), Flora Ackroyd, Roger Ackroyd, Dr. James Sheppard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Chapter 25, Poirot reveals who the real killer is: Dr. Sheppard. This might not seem like much of a "twist" by 21st century standards (and probably, some readers of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* will have figured out that Sheppard before this point), but in the 1920s, this was a shocking, instantly notorious ending. At the time, mystery novels were often narrated by flat, peripheral characters who, by virtue of the fact that they narrated the novel in the first person, weren't considered suspects in the crime. Christie subverts the conventions of the mystery novel by making the narrator and the killer by the same person. And since this surprise twist, there have been many novels featuring unreliable narrators who turn out to be criminals of some kind—*Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn and *London Fields* by Martin Amis are both excellent examples.

Part of the fun of reading *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is going back and seeing how cleverly Sheppard (or rather, Christie) has concealed the twist ending. Sheppard is a reliable narrator in the sense that every event he describes in the novel is the truth. However, Sheppard omits important pieces of information—for example, he describes leaving Roger Ackroyd's study ten minutes after Ackroyd receives a letter, making it unclear what happened in those ten intervening minutes (apparently, he spent them murdering Roger Ackroyd and then framing Ralph Paton for the crime). By subverting the rules of detective fiction and introducing the unreliable narrator—a staple of Modernist literature of the era—Agatha Christie changed her genre forever.

Chapter 26 Quotes

Remember what I said—the truth goes to Inspector Raglan in the morning. But, for the sake of your good sister, I am willing to give you the chance of another way out. There might be, for instance, an overdose of a sleeping draught.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot ("Mr. Porrot") (speaker), Dr. James Sheppard, Caroline Sheppard, Inspector Raglan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 26, Poirot has revealed to Dr. Sheppard that he knows Sheppard is the murderer. However, Poirot doesn't go to the police right away. Instead, he gives Sheppard a way out: in order to protect Caroline, Sheppard's sister, Poirot will allow Sheppard to kill himself. Then, it's strongly implied, Poirot will tell Inspector Raglan of the police what he knows, and Raglan will keep the findings of the investigation a secret, so as not to cause grief to Caroline, who loves Sheppard and would be shocked to learn that he's a murderer.

The passage is the final example of how Poirot distinguishes between law and ethics. In contrast to a regular police detective, Poirot doesn't adhere to society's rules for the sake of convention: he intends to bring Sheppard to justice, but he feels no obligation to ensure that Sheppard stands before a judge and goes to prison (and, it would seem, he's going to convince Inspector Raglan that allowing Sheppard to die in his sleep is the "right thing"). This might suggest that Poirot, in spite of his commitment to discovering the truth, is also conscious of the effect that truth can have on other people. Revealing that Dr. Sheppard is the killer might bring the investigation to a close, but it would also cause Caroline a lot of grief. Thus, the novel comes to an ironic conclusion: throughout the book, Poirot has depended on Caroline's gossip and extensive knowledge of the village, but now, he's going to keep the results of the investigation a secret from her. (And how successful this endeavor could

possibly be remains in question—it seems unlikely that Caroline and the other people close to Roger and Sheppard would simply accept that no murderer was found, or that Sheppard's death was unrelated to the case.)

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: DR. SHEPPARD AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE

Dr. James Sheppard, the narrator, notes that a woman named Mrs. Ferrars has died. In the morning he is sent to tend to her, but he's too late—she's already dead. He returns to his home, where he and his sister Caroline live. At that moment, his instincts tell him, "there were stirring times ahead."

The novel is narrated by Dr. Sheppard, and usually in mystery novels of the era, the narrator is the most trustworthy character. Sheppard's sense of "stirring times" foreshadows the dangerous, exciting events of the novel (events which readers already expect, given the genre, author, and title of the book).

Caroline is a talkative woman, and Dr. Sheppard knows that whatever he tells her about Mrs. Ferrars' death will soon be common knowledge in their village. Caroline has told Sheppard that Mr. Ashley Ferrars, who died a year ago, was poisoned by his wife, Mrs. Ferrars.

Caroline, a major gossip and busybody, is the main comic relief in the novel, but she's also one of the most insightful, well-informed characters. In a mystery novel, the paranoid, gossipy character is often the most realistic about what's happening.

Caroline informs Dr. Sheppard that she already knows Mrs. Ferrars is dead—Annie the parlormaid told her. Dr. Sheppard explains that Mrs. Ferrars must have accidentally overdosed on Veranol, a sleeping drug. Caroline insists that Mrs. Ferrars took the drug on purpose, out of remorse for having murdered her husband. Sheppard finds this ridiculous: surely, he says, Mrs. Ferrars would be able to live without remorse if she were capable of killing her husband. He also informs Caroline that there will be no inquest—unless he expresses uncertainty to the police about the cause of Mrs. Ferrars's death. Caroline asks Sheppard if he's "satisfied" that Mrs. Ferrars died of an accidental overdose, but Sheppard doesn't answer.

Caroline can be hyperbolic in her theories about her neighbors, but the novel also suggests that she's remarkably well informed. Sheppard's silence suggests that he might share some of Caroline's suspicions about the Ferrars family, even if he doesn't voice these suspicions. Notice, also, that Dr. Sheppard has a lot of authority in the village; he single-handedly controls whether the police make an inquest about Mrs. Ferrars' death.

CHAPTER 2: WHO'S WHO IN KING'S ABBOT

Dr. Sheppard lives in the village of King's Abbot, miles away from the nearest big town. There's a train station in the village, and an abundance of "unmarried ladies and retired military officers." Everyone in town loves gossip. There are two "important houses" in town, one of which belonged to Mrs. Ferrars, and the other of which belongs to Roger Ackroyd.

As in so many mystery novels, Roger Ackroyd *is set in a small, isolated community where everybody knows everybody else. The isolated, close-knit setting 1) suggests that the criminal is someone who everybody knows, and 2) creates a paranoid, suspenseful mood, since the criminal is hiding a big secret from their neighbors. It's also telling that the owners of the two most "important houses" in town are also the two main victims of the novel.*

Roger Ackroyd is a successful, middle-aged manufacturer of (Dr. Sheppard thinks) wagon wheels. He's red-faced, genial, and very likeable. When Roger was younger, he married a woman named Ms. Paton, a widow with a child. Paton turned out to be a dipsomaniac (i.e., alcoholic), and she drank herself to death. Roger raised Paton's biological child, Ralph, a handsome, "wild lad."

These sections provide the necessary exposition for the murder mystery. Roger (who, readers already know from the title, will become the murder victim) is a wealthy man, creating an immediate financial motive for the crime.

Everyone in town has been gossiping about how Roger and Mrs. Ferrars were "getting on very well," and for a while, people thought that they'd marry. Just before the Ferrars family moved to the village, however, Roger was rumored to be involved with a housekeeper named Miss Russell. Another recent arrival in the village was Mrs. Ackroyd, the widow of Roger's "ne'er do-well younger brother" Cecil Ackroyd, and her daughter. Dr. Sheppard notes that it was to Mrs. Ackroyd's advantage that Roger remain unmarried, since she depended on Roger for money.

The passage describes other important characters in the novel (and suspects in the murder), laying out some other potential motives for Roger's killing. Again, Roger's money would seem to be an important factor in other people's relationships with him—Mrs. Ackroyd depends on his generosity, for example.

Dr. Sheppard tries to understand Mrs. Ferrars' death. If she'd killed herself, he thinks, she would have left some note. When Sheppard last saw Mrs. Ferrars, he thinks, she seemed normal. Then he remembers that he saw her yesterday when she was walking with Ralph Paton. It was in this moment, Sheppard now recalls, that he began to feel a sense of foreboding.

As the first chapter suggested, Dr. Sheppard does secretly entertain Caroline's theory that Mrs. Ferrars killed herself. By twice *emphasizing Dr. Sheppard's sense of foreboding, Christie further foreshadows Roger's murder and draws readers' attention to Ralph's relationship with Mrs. Ferrars.*

Dr. Sheppard crosses paths with Roger Ackroyd in the street. Roger seems "a … wreck of his usual jolly, healthy self." He tells Sheppard that they need to talk, and invites him for dinner at 7:30. Sheppard blurts out, "Is it Ralph?" Roger claims that Ralph is in London, and—seeing that a busybody named Miss Gannett is walking by—says he'll see Sheppard that evening. Mrs. Gannet catches up with Sheppard and begins telling him her theories about Mrs. Ferrars' death: that she was a "drug-taker" and that Roger had broken off his engagement with her as a result.

Something is on Roger's mind, clearly, but—as is the cliché in many detective stories—Roger doesn't get a chance to tell the narrator what's been going on. Miss Gannett's theory about Mrs. Ferrars might seem ridiculous, and yet, considering that this is a mystery novel, it's a hypothesis worth entertaining. You could even say that Caroline and Miss Gannett are the ideal readers of Agatha Christie novels—they know that they should be a little paranoid, suspect the worst, and construct elaborate theories based on minor details.

Dr. Sheppard proceeds to tend to his patients. At lunch, Miss Russell comes to see him. She's a stern, handsome woman, and she asks him to examine her knee. Sheppard examines Russell, but finds nothing the matter. Nevertheless, he gives her a bottle of liniment. Russell asks Sheppard about being "a slave of the drug habit," particularly cocaine, and if there's a cure. Sheppard says he doesn't know. Russell also asks if there are any untraceable poisons. Sheppard tells her that curare such a poison, though he doesn't have any. Russell leaves, and Sheppard guesses that she has been reading detective stories.

Miss Russell's comments about drugs and poisons illustrate two important concepts in mystery novels: Chekhov's gun and the red herring. In works of fiction, a Chekhov's gun is a small detail of the story that's introduced early and in the end is revealed as crucial—mystery novels are full of them. A red herring, on the other hand, is a detail that's designed to mislead or distract readers. Part of the challenge (and the fun) of reading a mystery novel is deciding whether unusual details—such as Miss Russell's visit—are Chekhov's guns or red herrings.

CHAPTER 3: THE MAN WHO GREW VEGETABLE MARROWS

At lunch, Dr. Sheppard tells Caroline that he'll be dining with Roger Ackroyd that night. Caroline says that Ralph has been staying at the local inn, and Sheppard doesn't question her—he trusts Caroline for such information. Caroline also tells her brother that Ralph has probably been spending time with Flora Ackroyd, his "cousin" (though they're not biologically related). Caroline adds that Ralph and Flora may be engaged, but Sheppard is unconvinced.

Once again, Caroline acts as an important source of information—Dr. Sheppard doesn't question her authority (and therefore the reader doesn't, either). And although Sheppard does question Caroline's theory about Ralph and Flora, he's already entertained some of her other theories, which may prove to be correct after all.

At lunch, Dr. Sheppard thinks about the foreigner who has moved in next door. His name is "Mr. Porrott," and neither he nor Caroline has been able to learn anything whatsoever about him. Based on his mustache, Sheppard guesses that he's a hairdresser.

By this point, the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot was a popular character in Christie's novels, and readers would have recognized him from Sheppard's description of his famous mustache. It's a sign of Poirot's outsider-ness that in this small, close-knit town, nobody knows anything about him.

That afternoon, Sheppard is working in his garden when a vegetable marrow (a kind of squash) whizzes by his head. A moment later, "Mr. Porrott" appears. He apologizes: he's been cultivating vegetables for months, and is furious that they haven't grown well. Sheppard asks Mr. Porrott why he's moved to the village, and he explains that he's been trying in vain to escape his "old busy days." Sheppard tells Porrott that recently he came into "a legacy," and yet he's still living in his village.

Sheppard and Poirot seem to become friends almost immediately. They bond by discussing how they've been unable to turn their backs on their old lives—Sheppard because he still lives in his small village, Poirot because he's still interested in his old profession.

Mr. Porrott explains to Dr. Sheppard that he's come to live in the village because his old friend—an honest, occasionally foolish friend—has gone to live in South America. As a result, Porrott no longer feels that he can proceed with "the study of human nature." Sheppard says that for his part, he's made bad investments and has lost a lot of money lately. Porrott tells Sheppard that he's a lot like Porrott's old friend.

Poirot's usual sidekick (the Dr. Watson character to Poirot's Sherlock Holmes) is named Captain Hastings—this is the character Poirot says has gone to South America. Notice that Sheppard admits he's lost a lot of money, suggesting a possible financial motive for a crime. However, Poirot makes readers (or at least Agatha Christie fans) think that Sheppard can be trusted by comparing him to Hastings—the usual narrator and the most trustworthy character in a Christie novel.

Mr. Porrott asks Dr. Sheppard if he can name someone, based on Porrott's description: dark hair, very handsome. Sheppard immediately concludes that Porrott is describing Ralph Paton. Porrott explains that he knows Roger Ackroyd from London, and has asked Ackroyd to keep quiet about his profession—Porrott is so eager to remain incognito that he hasn't even corrected "the local version of my name." Porrott goes on to explain that there's something about Ralph that he's been unable to understand.

Poirot is connected to Roger Ackroyd in vague ways that he doesn't describe in any detail. He's come to King's Abbot to retire from his years of being a detective, and yet he's unable to curb his curiosity about other people—the very curiosity that made him such a good detective in the first place.

Dr. Sheppard leaves Mr. Porrott and goes inside his house; Caroline has just come home. She tells Dr. Sheppard that she's just seen Roger Ackroyd, who told her that Ralph and Flora are engaged. Caroline told Roger that Ralph was in town, and Roger seemed surprised. She also explains that, while walking home through the woods, she heard Ralph arguing with a woman. Ralph said, "it is quite on the cards the old man will cut me off with a shilling." Ralph then explained that he'd become a rich man as soon as "the old man" died.

Sure enough, Caroline's theories about Ralph and Flora turn out to be correct, confirming that—paranoid and gossipy though she might be—she's a surprisingly reliable source. Therefore, we might also trust Caroline when she says that she overheard Ralph with another woman. Ralph's comments suggest some tension between him and Roger (his "old man"), based on the fact that Roger controls Ralph's finances.

Dr. Sheppard decides to go to the Three Boars inn, where he expects to find Ralph. Sheppard knows Ralph well, since he knew Ralph's mother years ago. Ralph has "a strain of weakness" in him, though he's handsome and charming. At the inn, Ralph greets Sheppard and offers him a drink. He explains that Roger Ackroyd has put him in "a devil of a mess." Sheppard asks if he can help in any way, but Ralph murmurs, "I've got to play a lone hand."

Sheppard is vague about just how well he knows Ralph—he knew Ralph's mother, but it's unclear if he and Ralph are friends, if they see each other often, etc. Ralph seems to be in some kind of trouble, and seems to be on the verge of taking matters into his own hands—suggesting, once again, that he might be a suspect in the titular crime.

CHAPTER 4: DINNER AT FERNLY

A little before 7:30 pm, Dr. Sheppard arrives at Roger Ackroyd's estate, known as Fernly. The butler, Parker, lets Sheppard inside, where Sheppard finds Ackroyd's secretary, Geoffrey Raymond. Raymond greets Sheppard and, noticing Sheppard's black bag, asks him if he's here on medical business. Sheppard explains that he expects to be called out at any minute. Raymond leaves Sheppard by himself in the room. Sheppard is about to walk into the drawing rom when he hears the sound of a window being shut.

The chapter begins with two seemingly minor details that, mystery fans will recognize, probably aren't minor at all: Sheppard's black bag, and the window being shut. But it's not clear if these details are examples of a red herring or of Chekhov's gun.

Inside the drawing room, Sheppard finds Miss Russell, who's breathing hard. Russell says she didn't expect Sheppard for dinner, and Sheppard senses that his presence there is somehow displeasing to her. Russell walks away, leaving Sheppard in the drawing room. He notices that all the windows are "long french ones," meaning that the sound he just heard couldn't have been a window shutting. He realizes that the sound came from the lid of a silver table (a table for holding silverware and other valuables).

Christie emphasizes two details in this passage: Miss Russell's heavy breathing (perhaps suggesting that she's just run from somewhere) and the fact that the silver table was just shut.

A moment later, Flora Ackroyd enters. She's a beautiful young woman, though many people dislike her. Flora proudly shows Dr. Sheppard her engagement ring, which Ralph gave her a month previously. Flora and Ralph announced their engagement yesterday, and Roger has promised to set them up in one of his houses. Just then, Mrs. Ackroyd enters. Dr. Sheppard dislikes Mrs. Ackroyd greatly: she's cold and "most unpleasant." Mrs. Ackroyd professes herself overjoyed with her daughter's engagement, but tries to convince Sheppard to give Roger advice for making "settlements" for Flora. Before Sheppard can answer, Major Hector Blunt enters. Blunt is a well-known big-game hunter, and—despite being very different from Roger—he and Roger have been friends for years. Sheppard notices that Blunt begins speaking to Flora right away.

Flora is, indeed, engaged, just as Caroline predicted. Flora's comments emphasize her financial ties to Roger Ackroyd, her uncle (and, potentially, her motive for killing Roger). The passage also emphasizes Mrs. Ackroyd's financial ties to Roger: she depends on him for money, and she seems to be thinking about money near-constantly (hence her comment about "settlements"). Finally, the passage introduces Major Blunt. While Blunt doesn't seem to have any strong financial motives, he begins talking to Flora immediately, perhaps hinting at a romantic attraction.

At dinner, Dr. Sheppard sits next to Mrs. Ackroyd and Flora Ackroyd. Dinner is tense, and Roger Ackroyd seems depressed. After dinner, Roger leads Dr. Sheppard to his study. Roger asks Sheppard for a tablet (pill), and Sheppard—guessing that Roger is trying to make their conversation seem medical—plays along, asking Parker to bring his black bag from the hall. Roger asks Sheppard to make sure the window is closed, so Sheppard goes over to the window and tells Roger it's closed.

Christie brings up the black bag not once but twice in this chapter, suggesting that it's somehow important to the story. Roger clearly has something important to tell Sheppard, since he asks about the window and makes Sheppard confirm that the window is, indeed, shut. (Why he doesn't check the window himself is anyone's guess.)

When Parker has brought Dr. Sheppard's bag and left, Roger begins to speak openly. He says he's "in hell" and that he only asked about the tablets so that Parker wouldn't be suspicious. Roger asks Sheppard—who "attended Ashley Ferrars in his last illness"—if he considered that Ferrars was poisoned. Roger then explains that Ashley *was* poisoned, by Mrs. Ferrars; she told him so just before her death.

Roger confirms another one of Caroline's "wild theories," suggesting that, if anyone in the novel is trustworthy, it's her. Also notice that Dr. Sheppard has a lot of access to the Ferrars family's affairs—he's examined both the husband and the wife after their deaths.

Roger goes on to explain to Dr. Sheppard that he asked Mrs. Ferrars to marry him three months ago, but she refused. Yesterday, Ferrars explained her reason for refusing—she's guilty of killing her husband, a crime she committed partly because she loved Roger and partly because she despised her husband. Roger tells Dr. Sheppard that someone was blackmailing Mrs. Ferrars, but she wouldn't tell him the person's name. However, Roger wants to track down the blackmailer and "make him pay." He's certain that Mrs. Ferrars left him a message before her death, which must have been a suicide.

The detail that Mrs. Ferrars was being blackmailed adds another motive for killing Roger (preventing him from exposing the blackmailer's name). For some reason, though, Mrs. Ferrars seems not to have left a suicide note of any kind—one might imagine that she'd leave such a note, containing the blackmailer's name, for Roger to find.

Just then, Parker enters with the mail and leaves. Roger finds an envelope from Mrs. Ferrars. He asks Dr. Sheppard again if he shut the window, and Sheppard insists that he has. Roger explains that he's had a feeling of being watched all evening. Then Sheppard and Ackroyd hear a door being pushed very slightly. Sheppard checks outside—there's nobody there. Roger opens the letter and begins to read. Mrs. Ferrars explains that she is going to kill herself and leave to Roger "the punishment of the person who has made my life a hell." Roger pauses and then tells Sheppard that he'll read the letter later, when he's alone. Sheppard asks Roger to read the letter now—just not aloud. Roger refuses. Sheppard presses the point, but Roger again refuses.

The butler comes in to deliver Mrs. Ferrars's suicide note at the exact instant Roger mentions that Mrs. Ferrars probably left left him a note of some kind. Then, perhaps even more implausibly, Roger says that he's going to read the suicide note sometime later, when he's alone. (If Roger had really been so tense and anxious all day long, wouldn't he want to read the note as soon as possible?) Sheppard, somewhat impertinently, presses Roger to read the letter now, which arguably makes Roger, a stubborn and hardheaded man, less likely to read it.

Around 8:50 pm, some ten minutes after the letter arrived, Dr. Sheppard leaves the study, "the letter still unread." Sheppard tries to think if there's anything he's "left undone." Outside, he sees Parker, whom he tells, "Mr. Ackroyd particularly does not want to be disturbed." Sheppard puts on his coat and leaves. Outside, he passes by a "stranger" with "a hoarse voice." The stranger asks Dr. Sheppard which way Ackroyd's house is, and Sheppard answers him, thinking that the man's voice is familiar.

Sheppard doesn't say what happens in the ten minutes between the letter's arrival and 8:50, but because of the casual tone of the passage, readers might not pay too much attention to the precise timing. The mysterious stranger Sheppard sees outside seems like another suspect, and, given that his voice is familiar, readers might think that one of the characters has disguised him- or herself.

Around ten o'clock, when Dr. Sheppard is in bed, the phone rings. He shouts to Caroline that it's Parker: Roger Ackroyd has just been found murdered.

The phone call seems to alert Dr. Sheppard to the event readers already knew would happen—Roger's murder.

CHAPTER 5: MURDER

Having heard the news of Roger Ackroyd's murder, Dr. Sheppard drives over to the Ackroyd house. Parker lets him in, and Sheppard demands to know if he's called the police. Parker seems confused—he knows nothing about a murder. Sheppard explains that, five minutes ago, someone called him, saying it was Parker, to explain that Ackroyd had been murdered. Parker suggests it was a practical joke.

If Parker didn't call Sheppard with the information, readers might well ask, then who did, and why? This ultimately becomes one of the central aspects of the mystery.

Dr. Sheppard asks to see Roger Ackroyd, just to be sure that he's all right. Parker leads him to the study, which appears to be locked. Sheppard calls Roger's name, but hears no answer. Worried, he breaks down the door. Inside, Parker and Sheppard find Ackroyd sitting in his armchair, a knife sticking out of the back of his neck. Sheppard instructs Parker to call the police, and then tell Raymond and Major Blunt. Alone, Sheppard inspects the body—Ackroyd has clearly been dead for "some little time."

Dr. Sheppard is worried—the phone call seems to have rattled him, explaining why he breaks down the door. Sheppard is alone in the study for a brief moment, during which he supposedly attends to his duties as a doctor, confirming that the body has been dead for a certain amount of time, a conclusion that nobody else in the novel questions.

Blunt and Raymond rush into the study. Raymond suggests that there was a robbery—nobody would have any other motive for killing Roger Ackroyd. He looks through the drawers, however, and finds that nothing is missing. There are a few letters on the floor, but Mrs. Ferrars' letter is nowhere to be found.

Raymond's claim that nobody had a motive for killing Roger already seems naïve—on the contrary, many characters had a motive, often financial. However, the absence of Ferrars' letter suggests that the blackmailer was somehow involved.

The village inspector arrives, accompanied by a constable. He asks about the body, and Dr. Sheppard explains that he was summoned by a call. He also notes that Roger Ackroyd has been dead at least half an hour. The inspector notices two shoeprints on the windowsill, seemingly from shoes with rubber studs. The inspector posits that the killer climbed in through the window and stabbed Ackroyd from behind. Suddenly Dr. Sheppard remembers the mysterious stranger he met earlier that night. However, Parker says that nobody else came to the house that night.

The inspector begins assembling clues, such as the shoe prints, and taking everyone's testimony, beginning with Dr. Sheppard's. The mysterious stranger, whoever it was, seems like a likely suspect in the murder—perhaps entering through the window (since Parker claims nobody else came through the door).

The inspector tries to determine the exact time of death. He asks Dr. Sheppard about Roger Ackroyd, and Sheppard recalls leaving around 8:50. Raymond recalls hearing Ackroyd's voice from the study around 9:30—he wasn't sure who Ackroyd was talking to, but he heard him saying something about "the calls on my purse" and being unable to "accede to your request." Blunt claims not to have seen Ackroyd after dinner. The inspector suggests that Ackroyd must have let a stranger into the house, and that Ackroyd must have been alive at 9:30. Parker adds that Roger saw Flora around 9:50—she told Parker, who was bringing whisky to the study, that Roger didn't want to be disturbed. The inspector becomes suspicious—he asks Parker why he was returning to the study, and Parker suddenly becomes flustered.

Ackroyd seems to have been alive at 9:30—even if nobody saw his body, Raymond heard his voice. Further, the fact that Roger was talking about money ("the calls on my purse") suggests that he may have been speaking to the blackmailer. Both Flora and Parker seem like likely suspects—Flora because she may have been the last person to see Roger alive; Parker because he's getting nervous.

The inspector asks more questions. Parker explains that the only ways to access Roger Ackroyd's study would be to come through the main hall or through a window. Then, the inspector asks to speak with Flora Ackroyd. Raymond goes to summon her, with instructions not to tell her that her uncle is dead. Flora comes downstairs a moment later, and the inspector informs her that there's been a robbery. He asks her about her conversation with her uncle, and Flora confirms that she came in to the study around 9:50 to say good night, and that Roger seemed perfectly fine. Major Blunt goes to Flora and tells her, gently, that Roger's been killed. Flora faints. Dr. Sheppard and Major Blunt carry her upstairs to bed.

Notice that Flora gives her alibi before she even knows that Roger has been murdered. This is relevant to the plot, since Flora would be more likely to casually give a fake alibi before knowing about the stakes of the investigation than after. The scene is also a sign of the sexism of English society in the early 20th century, since Flora is portrayed as being too fragile and delicate to cope with the news of Roger's murder.

CHAPTER 6: THE TUNISIAN DAGGER

Dr. Sheppard has just brought Flora Ackroyd to her room. Coming downstairs, he speaks to the inspector. The inspector asks for a better description of the stranger, but Sheppard can't give him one—it was dark. He has a feeling that the man was trying to disguise his voice.

Sheppard's testimony further suggests that the stranger was someone whom Sheppard has already met (given that he seemed familiar, and was trying to disguise his voice).

The inspector, whose name is Davis, brings Dr. Sheppard to the study to ask him more questions. He asks Sheppard about blackmail—a possibility that Parker has just raised. Sheppard realizes that Parker must have been listening at the door, and Davis explains that he's suspicious of Parker. Sheppard decides to tell Davis the truth: he explains what Roger told him, including the information about Mrs. Ferrars and the blackmailer. Davis realizes that Roger's murderer might have been Mrs. Ferrars's blackmailer. Sheppard suggests that the blackmailer may have been Parker himself, and Davis agrees.

Inspector Davis initially suspects that the butler committed the crime. By the early 20th century, the revelation that "the butler did it" had become so common in detective stories that the most popular mystery writers made a point of never using it. (In fact, one of "Knox's Ten Commandments of Detective Stories," a set of rules that many mystery writers used, is that the butler should never *be the killer. So it's probably meant to be a sign of Davis's cluelessness that he assumes that Parker is the criminal—any reader of mystery novels would know this can't be right.*

Inspector Davis next turns his attention to the murder weapon: a beautiful, ornate blade. Sheppard examines it and notes that the murder was clearly committed by a right-handed man; furthermore, Ackroyd may have died without knowing who killed him. Davis notices fingerprints on the weapon. He shows it to Geoffrey Raymond, who recognizes it as a gift from Tunis, which Major Blunt gave Ackroyd—Major Blunt promptly confirms this. The knife, Raymond explains, was kept in the silver table. This prompts Sheppard to recall that he heard the sound of the table lid being shut. He can't, however, remember if the knife was there when he examined the table. Davis summons Miss Russell, who recalls seeing the silver table open and shutting it. She can't remember if the knife was there.

Here, readers learn why the sound of the silver table shutting was so important: it housed the Tunisian dagger with which Roger Ackroyd was murdered. This is an important step forward for the investigation, because the inspector can determine when the dagger was still in the table—and therefore, who would have been able to steal it. However, neither Sheppard nor Russell can recall whether or not the dagger was present.

Davis thanks the men for their help and says he'll be back. Before he leaves, however, he asks Parker's "opinion of a small pocket diary." Raymond, realizing what this means, tells Sheppard that Parker is clearly a suspect. He suggests that they donate their fingerprints to Davis. Together, the men present Davis with cards, which they've marked accordingly.

Davis obtains Parker's fingerprints by getting him to handle the diary. The fact that Raymond and Sheppard then offer their fingerprints willingly would suggest that they're not concerned about their fingerprints being on the dagger.

Dr. Sheppard returns to his home, where Caroline is waiting. He doesn't mention the blackmailing, but tells Caroline everything else. Caroline finds it absurd that Parker could be the murderer.

Caroline really does seem to be modeled on the ideal mystery novel reader: like any seasoned Agatha Christie fan, she knows the butler couldn't have done it—it's just too much of a cliché.

CHAPTER 7: I LEARN MY NEIGHBOR'S PROFESSION

The next morning Dr. Sheppard goes to work, and returns in the afternoon. Caroline informs him that Flora Ackroyd wants to see him. Flora explains that Sheppard's neighbor is Hercule Poirot, the famous detective. Flora has heard that Poirot retired, but she wants to persuade him—with Sheppard's help—to take up Roger Ackroyd's case. Dr. Sheppard insists that Flora not involve Poirot. However, Flora notes that Sheppard went to the Three Boars to talk to Ralph later at night, after Roger's body was found. Sheppard admits that he went to the inn, only to find—as Flora has—that Ralph was gone. Since then, an inspector has visited the Three Boars, apparently because he thinks Ralph is guilt of the murder. Flora wants to hire Poirot to prove Ralph innocent.

Poirot has managed to remain incognito for a long time—but now, his services are required. Notice that Sheppard tries to discourage Flora from asking Poirot for his help—he knows, after his conversation with "Mr. Porrott," that Poirot doesn't need much prodding to return to detecting. Also notice that Sheppard has concealed something from the readers: that he went to visit Ralph on the night of the murder. Strangely, Caroline seems to be a more reliable, more trustworthy figure than Sheppard. Although everything Sheppard tells readers would appear to be true, he omits plenty.

Dr. Sheppard and Flora go to visit Hercule Poirot. Poirot has heard about the murder, and offers his services to Flora. He insists that he'll work for free, and that he'll follow the case through to the end. Flora says that she wants "all the truth," and insists that Poirot work on the case.

Poirot doesn't work for money—rather, he takes cases because of his philosophical interest in the people involved, his curiosity about human nature, and an apparent pleasure he derives from solving difficult puzzles. His highest commitment, it would seem, is to the truth itself, no matter how painful it might be.

Poirot then asks Sheppard to explain what he knows about the case. Sheppard explains the events of the previous night and—with Flora's prompting—his visit to the Three Boars. Sheppard claims that he visited because he wanted to tell Ralph about the murder. Poirot suggests that he visited because he wanted to reassure himself that Ralph had been home all evening, but Sheppard denies this.

Sheppard is once again reluctant to disclose his visit to Ralph on the night of the murder, for reasons that aren't yet explained. Right away, Poirot proves himself to be an insightful detective by suggesting that Sheppard wanted to make sure Ralph had been home—but it's still not clear how well Ralph and Sheppard know one another.

Poirot suggests that he and Dr. Sheppard go to the police. There, Sheppard introduces Poirot to Inspector Davis, and meets Colonel Melrose, chief constable in the area. Finally, Sheppard and Poirot meet Inspector Raglan, the main investigator on the case. Colonel Melrose explains that he can't have Poirot interfering with the investigation. However, Poirot "saves the day" by insisting that his name never be mentioned in conjunction with the case. After this, the investigators become more gracious.

Unlike his counterparts on the police force, Poirot isn't interested in money or recognition. Poirot's curiosity about human behavior makes him a superb detective—whereas people like Inspector Raglan, the passage strongly implies, are more concerned about getting credit for their work.

Inspector Raglan informs Poirot and Dr. Sheppard that he's tested the fingerprints on the knife blade—they don't belong to Sheppard, Raymond, or Parker. Poirot asks about Ralph's fingerprints, and Raglan insists that he'll test them as soon as possible. He adds that Ralph was seen near Ackroyd's home around 9:30 pm. Furthermore, Colonel Melrose has obtained a pair of Ralph's shoes from the Three Boars inn. The shoes have rubber studs, similar to the windowsill shoeprints.

Right away, Ralph appears to be a prime suspect in the murder of Roger Ackroyd—but he also might be too obvious of a culprit.

Poirot goes with Melrose and Dr. Sheppard to examine the study, which the police haven't disturbed. Poirot asks how the room appeared when Sheppard found it—for example, whether the fire in the fireplace was low. Sheppard admits that he can't recall. Poirot also examines the shoeprints on the windowsill and finds them to be identical to Ralph Paton's shoes. Poirot then summons Parker, and Parker recalls that the fire had burned low, that the curtains were drawn, and that the electric light was on when he first saw Ackroyd's body. Parker also remembers that a chair near the door was moved from its current position. Poirot wonders who would have moved the chair. Sheppard points out that this detail can't be important, to which Poirot replies, "It is completely unimportant. That is why it is so interesting."

Poirot is an experienced, practically minded detective, with a keen eye for details—for example, the state of the fire in the fireplace. Notice that Dr. Sheppard doesn't *always have such an eye for detail, and seems surprised when other people, such as Parker, do. The chair—interesting* because *it's so unimportant—is a good example of a Chekhov's pistol: the very fact that Christie mentions it at all suggests that, contrary to what Sheppard claims, it really is important to the solution of the mystery.*

Poirot tells Dr. Sheppard something he's noticed during his career: in all cases, all the suspects have something to hide—even Dr. Sheppard, Poirot guesses. Sheppard, embarrassed, asks Poirot about his methods. Poirot explains: when the body was discovered, the door was locked and the window was open. Only Roger Ackroyd himself could have opened the window, either because the room was warm (but this is unlikely, since the fire was low) or because he "admitted someone that way." Further, Ackroyd would only have admitted someone he knew very well—the person who was in the room at 9:30. Just then, Colonel Melrose enters the room: he's just gotten word that the call Dr. Sheppard received at 10:15 last night came from a phone at King's Abbot train station—"and at 10:23 the night mail leaves for Liverpool."

Poirot's observation about how everyone has something to hide is almost a thesis statement for The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, *if not the entire mystery genre. Poirot's job isn't only to solve the crime—in order to do so, he has to undercover his suspects' secrets, whether they have anything to do with the murder or not. Poirot doesn't exempt Dr. Sheppard from the list of people who have secrets—or, more implicitly, from the suspect list. This is strange, since traditionally the narrator of a mystery novel is the only character (other than the detective) who's* not *a suspect.*

CHAPTER 8: INSPECTOR RAGLAN IS CONFIDENT

Immediately following the events of the last chapter, Dr. Sheppard stands in Roger Ackroyd's home. The call he received last night was from King's Abbot station, a train station that connects to major express lines. Thousands of people pass through every day. Why, Colonel Melrose wonders, would anyone call Sheppard? "When we know that," Poirot says, "we shall know everything."

Poirot quickly senses the importance of the phone call to Dr. Sheppard. Yet he doesn't offer any concrete reason why *the call is so important; rather, he seems to intuit its importance. Poirot is a rational, empirical detective, but he also allows his instincts to guide him.*

Poirot suggests that Colonel Melrose summon Raymond and Parker. Poirot asks Raymond if he moved the chair, but Raymond says he didn't. Poirot asks both men if Ackroyd had received any unexpected visitors, like the one Dr. Sheppard saw on his way home last night, in the last week. Parker recalls a salesman who tried to sell Ackroyd a dictaphone (a recording device), but the salesman was shorter than the man Sheppard remembers.

Two potential Chekhov's pistols or red herrings appear in this passage: the chair that may or may not have been moved, and the dictaphone salesman. Once again, mystery readers have to decide if Christie is including these minor details because they're not really minor at all, or because she's trying to confuse her readers.

Just then, a man named Mr. Hammond, the family solicitor (a kind of lawyer), arrives to speak with Raymond about Roger Ackroyd's affairs. Raymond nods and leaves, and Poirot notes, "He had the air efficient, that one." Poirot asks Colonel Melrose some questions about Raymond. He learns that Raymond has been with Ackroyd for two years, and plays tennis. Sheppard asks Poirot what he knows so far. Poirot replies that he has lots of questions—the open window, the moved chair, and the locked door—but no answers. Sheppard begins to wonder if Poirot is really such a brilliant detective after all.

While it's not explained, Colonel Melrose Poirot presumably knew Roger fairly well—well enough to know when he hired a new secretary. Poirot tries to size up Geoffrey Raymond and, it's implied, figure out if Raymond could have murdered his boss of two years. But for the time being, Poirot doesn't have any answers—just a lot of disparate evidence. Sheppard rather foolishly questions whether Poirot's lack of an immediate solution to the crime proves that he's a mediocre detective—when, in reality, the process of gathering evidence has to be slow and deliberate (and, furthermore, it wouldn't be much fun for readers if Poirot solved the crime so quickly.

Poirot asks one more thing before he leaves—to see the silver table. In the drawing room, Poirot examines the table. Suddenly Inspector Raglan enters, saying that this won't be much of a case—just "a nice enough young fellow gone wrong." However, Raglan wants to know how Poirot investigates a case. Poirot responds that he always listens to "the **little grey cells** of the brain." The key to a case, Poirot insists, is psychology. Raglan, however, says that he believes in the importance of "method." Ackroyd was seen alive at 9:45, and at 10:30 his body was discovered to be about half an hour deceased—that leaves fifteen minutes in which the crime must have occurred.

Inspector Raglan has already made up his mind that the killer is Ralph Paton (the "nice young fellow" he alludes to). Raglan stresses the importance of method—i.e., a rigorous schedule of gathering evidence, taking testimony, and reaching a conclusion. Poirot, on the other hand, prefers a looser, more improvisational style of detection. He has the luxury of taking his time with his cases, since detection is his hobby, not his job. Thus, Poirot often reaches a solution after the police have given up.

Raglan produces a list of everyone's alibis between 9:45 and 10:00. Major Blunt was in the billiard room with Mr. Raymond; Mrs. Ackroyd was there, too, and went to sleep around 9:55. Flora Ackroyd was seen walking from Ackroyd's room to her bedroom. Miss Russell was upstairs after 9:45, and Parker went to the pantry, where Miss Russell saw him. Poirot examines Raglan's list and says, "I am quite sure that Parker did not do the murder." Raglan also tells Poirot that he's spoken to the people at the Three Boars, who confirm that Ralph walked toward Ackroyd's house around 9:25. Raglan concludes that Ralph Paton is the prime suspect—he must have made the call to Dr. Sheppard from the station. Poirot asks why Ralph would call Dr. Sheppard, and Raglan can only reply, "Murderers do funny things."

From Poirot's perspective, there are concrete, logical reasons to doubt Ralph's guilt—for example, the fact that Dr. Sheppard received a phone call before the body was discovered. From Raglan's perspective, however, Ralph is the most obvious and the most convenient suspect—he's already made up his mind, and he dismisses any pieces of evidence that conflict with his theory. (Finally, from readers' perspective, it's obvious that Ralph can't be the killer because it's too easy and too obvious for a mystery novel.)

Raglan tries to convince Poirot by comparing Ralph's shoes with the windowsill shoeprints. They're identical, but Poirot points out that many people have shoes with rubber studs. Raglan then takes Poirot outside the house: there's a stream near the terrace, which, he says, must have wetted the soles of Ralph's shoes before he entered the house. As they walk by, Poirot tells Dr. Sheppard that God must have sent Sheppard to replace Poirot's friend Hastings. Poirot and Sheppard then walk by a summerhouse on the Fernly grounds. Inside, Poirot finds a starched piece of cambric (a kind of fabric), perhaps from a handkerchief, as well as a small quill. To Sheppard's confusion, Poirot shouts, "a good laundry does not starch a handkerchief!"

As Poirot and Dr. Sheppard proceed with their case, they seem to become firm friends. Poirot appears to trust Sheppard—which is why he compares Sheppard to Captain Hastings, his usual sidekick in other Christie stories. The scrap of cambric is a useful piece of evidence for Poirot, since it probably belonged to a member of the working class, such as a maid (someone who wouldn't be able to take their clothes to a first-rate laundry).

CHAPTER 9: THE GOLDFISH POND

Poirot and Dr. Sheppard walk back from the summerhouse. By this time Inspector Raglan has gone. Poirot studies Ackroyd's house and murmurs, "Who inherits it?" Sheppard says that he's surprised by such a question, and that he wishes he'd thought of it earlier. When Poirot inquires what Sheppard means, Sheppard says, "Everyone has something to hide."

Sheppard alludes to the fact that he, too, is probably hiding something from Poirot—and, it would seem, from the reader. Yet Sheppard's claim also suggests that he's not really interested in Roger's money.

Poirot and Dr. Sheppard then walk to a small goldfish pond. There, they notice Flora and Major Blunt. Flora asks if Blunt will be going on any expeditions, and Blunt blushes. Blunt remains quiet, admitting that he's no good at talking. Flora suddenly exclaims that, in spite of everything, she's happy. She tells Blunt, "there's something awfully consoling about you." Next, Flora explains that Roger has left her 20,000 pounds in his will—money that represents "freedom." Major Blunt then sees something shiny in the pond and tries to retrieve it. This prompts Flora to recall Melisande, an opera character who—Blunt says—"married an old chap." Blunt stops trying to retrieve the object, and tells Flora that everything will be fine. Flora agrees—she's sure that Poirot will clear Ralph's name.

Flora and Blunt's interaction (they don't know that Sheppard and Poirot are watching them) suggests that 1) Flora had a motive to kill Roger, since she wanted freedom from her domineering uncle, and 2) Blunt and Flora seem to be attracted to one another, in spite of Flora's engagement to Ralph (hence the allusion to Melisande). And yet Flora also seems genuinely loyal to Ralph—she hired Poirot to protect Ralph from the police, after all.

Poirot and Dr. Sheppard emerge from where they've been eavesdropping, and greet Flora and Major Blunt. Poirot asks Blunt to tell him when he last saw Roger Ackroyd. Blunt explains that he saw Ackroyd at dinner, and, while he was standing on the terrace at 9:30, he heard Ackroyd's voice coming from the study. Poirot points out that Blunt couldn't have heard the voice from so far away, and Blunt, embarrassed, says that he'd walked to the corner of the terrace because he thought he'd seen "a woman disappearing into the bushes." Blunt claims to have heard Ackroyd speaking to Raymond, though when Poirot questions him, he admits that he just *assumed* it was Raymond.

Blunt doesn't seem to have any particular motive for killing Roger Ackroyd, but his testimony is confusing and somewhat conflicted, perhaps indicating that he's hiding something. He changes his testimony regarding the voice he heard from the study, and he revises his claims about the terrace, adding a story about seeing a woman walking toward the bushes.

Poirot next asks Flora about the dagger, and she insists that, when she looked at the silver table with Dr. Sheppard, the dagger wasn't there. Flora further points out that Inspector Raglan doesn't believe her story—he thinks she's just trying to make it seem less likely that Ralph committed the murder. Poirot points to the shiny object in the water and tries to fish it out, but he says he's unable to do so. Poirot, Blunt, Flora, and Dr. Sheppard walk up to the Ackroyd house to have lunch. On the walk, Poirot shows Sheppard what was really in the water—a wedding ring with the inscription, "From R., March 13th."

The passage nicely captures Poirot's multi-pronged approach to detection. He tries to understand the psychology of his suspects by asking them important questions, but he's also willing to get his hands dirty, obtaining evidence from the goldfish pond (and hiding the fact that he actually obtained it). Notice that the ring leaves it unclear who "R" is—and there are lots of "R" characters in this book—Roger, Raymond, and Ralph.

CHAPTER 10: THE PARLORMAID

Inside the house, Dr. Sheppard, Poirot, Flora, and Major Blunt meet Mr. Hammond, who's been speaking with Mrs. Ackroyd. Mrs. Ackroyd tells the group that she believes Ralph to have "accidentally" killed Roger. Poirot pulls the lawyer aside for a chat, and Dr. Sheppard, unsure whether or not he should join, comes near. Poirot invites Sheppard to his side, saying, "We investigate this affair side by side." Mr. Hammond explains that he finds it unlikely that Ralph Paton killed Roger Ackroyd, although Ralph was pressed for cash. Ackroyd's will has just been opened: he's left 500 pounds to Raymond, 1,000 pounds to Miss Russell, 10,000 to Mrs. Ackroyd, 20,000 to Flora, and the rest to Ralph.

Mrs. Ackroyd seems to be in denial about her brother-in-law's death. This might suggest that she couldn't have had the wherewithal or ingenuity to kill him, or it might show an obvious (and suspicious) desire to avoid the matter altogether. Notice, also, that Poirot emphasizes that he and Dr. Sheppard are partners. However, it's certainly possible that Poirot is emphasizing his friendship with Sheppard in order to trick him into letting his guard down. The passage also shows that Ralph had a lot to gain by killing Roger—a vast fortune.

Poirot then pulls Dr. Sheppard aside and gives him instructions: he wants Sheppard to bring up the name of Mrs. Ferrars to see how Major Blunt reacts. Sheppard proceeds with his instructions, and Blunt simply says that he knew Mrs. Ferrars, betraying no signs of discomfort. He adds that she seemed to have aged a lot lately. The men chat, and Blunt brings up the fact that he's come into a legacy recently, but lost his money on "some wild-cat scheme." Sheppard sympathizes and relates his own story. Sheppard then reports back to Poirot on what he's learned.

Major Blunt seems not to have any deep feelings about Mrs. Ferrars, although it's also possible that he's good at controlling his emotions (he's described as being very stoic, after all). For the second time in the book, Christie emphasizes the point that Sheppard has lost money on bad investments—a sign, perhaps, that this is important information.

At lunch, Mrs. Ackroyd tells Dr. Sheppard that she's hurt about being left only 10,000 pounds. She adds that Roger Ackroyd admired Miss Russell greatly, hence the money he left her. She also remembers how Miss Russell tried to marry Roger—a plan that Mrs. Ackroyd thwarted. Annoyed, Sheppard asks Mrs. Ackroyd about the inquest, and Mrs. Ackroyd seems surprised—surely, she says, Roger died by accident. "Brutally," Dr. Sheppard explains that he was murdered.

Mrs. Ackroyd continues to show signs that she hasn't fully grasped Roger's death—she continues to exist under the delusion that he had an accident of some kind. At the same time, she seems to have had a clear motive for murder—she may have believed that Roger would leave her his fortune (although, as it turns out, most of the money goes to Ralph).

Raymond recalls that Roger cashed a check for a hundred pounds yesterday afternoon, and adds that he usually leaves the money in his unlocked desk drawer. Inspector Raglan, who's in the house asking more questions, goes with Raymond, Sheppard, and Poirot to search the desk. The money is still in the desk but, much to Raymond's surprise, forty pounds are missing. One of the servants who Ackroyd trusted, Raymond suggests, must have stolen the money. He recalls that Ackroyd had recently hired a housemaid named Elsie Dale. He also notes that one of the parlormaids just announced that she'd be leaving.

It's a mark of the classism in English high society of the era that the guests immediately blame the servants for the missing money, rather than considering each other (this is especially remarkable considering that many of the characters in the novel have been shown to be desperate for cash).

In the housekeeper's room, Inspector Raglan, Dr. Sheppard, and Poirot speak with Miss Russell about Elsie Dale. Russell explains that Elsie would never have stolen money—she has great references and is always well behaved. The men also speak with Ursula Bourne, a parlormaid who gave notice after Roger became annoyed with the way she arranged his papers. Ursula insists that she was nowhere near Roger's desk last night—that was Elsie's job. Poirot asks Ursula how long her confrontation with Roger was—half an hour, Ursula says. Russell explains that Ursula has good references from Marby, an old estate.

Note that Ursula says Roger took half an hour to fire her—which seems like a suspiciously long conversation. Second, it appears that there are actually two crimes that need solving: Roger's murder and the theft of the money. Poirot seems to be operating under the assumption that solving one crime will help him solve the other. Even if the two crimes aren't linked in any way (and they're not, as it turns out), investigating them together gives Poirot a way of better understanding his suspects.

Before the men leave the housekeeper's room, they ask Miss Russell her opinion of Parker. She doesn't say anything, but purses her lips. Inspector Raglan notes that Parker is "wrong" somehow, but adds that he couldn't have killed Roger—he had too many duties around the house.

Just as there is more than one crime to solve, there's probably more than one criminal to catch. Parker may be guilty of some crime, but he doesn't seem to be a murderer—perhaps the same could be said of Russell.

Dr. Sheppard wonders if any of the papers on Roger's desk contained important information—this might explain why Roger had such a lengthy talk with Ursula about how she arranged them. Poirot points out that Ursula is one of the only suspects without an alibi—and yet she would seem to have no motive. Poirot also points out that Sheppard has been assuming that Mrs. Ferrars' blackmailer was a man when, in fact, it could have been a woman. Poirot decides that tomorrow they'll go to Marby. He admits to Sheppard that everything points to Ralph's guilt—however, he intends to follow through on his promise to Flora to "leave no stone unturned."

As it stands, the most likely suspect in Roger's murder is Ralph Paton—however, Poirot's investigation is just getting started, and the novel is only half over. If there's one rule of detective novels, it's that the killer is never the most likely suspect (if it were any other way, the novel wouldn't be very entertaining). Where the police (who have other cases to deal with, and just want to get their jobs done) reach a conclusion early on, Poirot continues to investigate.

CHAPTER 11: POIROT PAYS A CALL

The next day, Dr. Sheppard goes to Marby by himself to learn about Ursula Bourne. Mrs. Folliot, the lady of the house, invites Sheppard inside. When Sheppard asks her about Ursula, her face freezes, and there's a new, angry tone in her voice. Sheppard tries to learn more about Ursula, but finds that Mrs. Folliot is unwilling to tell him much. He gives up and leaves.

Sheppard goes to Marby by himself, while Poirot stays in King's Abbot (although originally it was Poirot's idea to go). Sheppard doesn't have much of a talent for getting witnesses to divulge their secrets—but clearly there is something *secret going on regarding Ursula.*

Back at home, Caroline informs Dr. Sheppard that Poirot has dropped by. He talked about his "**little grey cells**," and asked Caroline questions about the murder. Sheppard is angry to learn that Caroline has told Sheppard what she overheard in the woods. Caroline is surprised that Sheppard *didn't* give Poirot this information. Poirot also asked Caroline questions about the patients Sheppard treated on the day of the murder—including an American steward from an ocean liner, and Miss Russell. Dr. Sheppard remembers that Miss Russell had asked him about poisons.

Although Sheppard doesn't seem to understand, it's pretty clear that Poirot asked him to leave King's Abbot so that Poirot could talk to Caroline without Sheppard influencing her. Poirot, apparently recognizing that Caroline is a valuable source of information, learns a lot from his visit, some of it about Dr. Sheppard himself, and some of it about Ralph's walk in the woods.

CHAPTER 12: ROUND THE TABLE

At the inquest, Dr. Sheppard presents his evidence about the time and cause of Roger Ackroyd's death. The coroner notes, but doesn't stress, Ralph Paton's absence. Meanwhile, Inspector Raglan alerts the police in neighboring towns to Ralph's absence. Inspector Raglan reports that nobody saw Ralph at King's Abbot station—which is odd, since he's recognizable. Sheppard suggests that he may have made the call to throw the police off the scent. Poirot repeats: "When we find the explanation of that telephone call we shall find the explanation of the murder."

Poirot continues to believe that the phone call is the key to understanding the case—and yet thus far he appears to have made few inquiries into the call. Or perhaps this is Poirot's point: the phone call is the most perplexing element of the case, meaning that the only way to understand it is to solve the rest of the case first.

The conversation turns to the fingerprints on the knife. Poirot believes that they'll lead nowhere useful. Fingerprint records suggest that none of the people in the house held the dagger—which would suggest that the killer was either Ralph or the stranger Dr. Sheppard saw. Suddenly, Poirot asks Inspector Raglan if he checked Roger Ackroyd's fingerprints, and suggests that the fingerprints belonged to Roger. Casually, Poirot mentions that, while he's no expert in in fingerprints, the location of the prints on the knife seemed unnatural—not the way someone would hold a blade to actually use it. Raglan promises to look into the matter.

Poirot uses his considerable experience as a detective to give advice to the official police inspector. He often recognizes things that the police are slow to realize—here, for example, that the fingerprints on the knife are arranged in an unusual position, suggesting that they were placed there after (or even before) the murder.

Poirot proposes to Dr. Sheppard that they meet with the "family." Later that day, they meet in the Ackroyd house with Raymond, Mrs. Ackroyd, Flora, and Major Blunt. Poirot first asks Flora to disclose Ralph's location if she's knows it, since doing so would be the best way to clear his name. Flora insists that she has no idea where Ralph is. Next, Poirot makes the same plea to the others. Instead of replying, Mrs. Ackroyd tells Flora that she's been saved from embarrassment, since her engagement to Ralph was never announced. Yet Flora insists that Raymond still send an announcement to the paper.

Poirot's questioning would seem to suggest that he still considers Ralph Paton to be a prime suspect. But perhaps he's taking a different tact, and believes that the best way to solve the crime would be to find out why Ralph Paton has left, whether or not he's guilty. Flora seems genuinely eager to marry Ralph, in spite of the possibility that he could be a murderer. Perhaps this is because she loves him, or maybe it's because she wants her uncle's full fortune.

Suddenly Poirot tells the people in the room, "Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me." Nobody speaks.

This is another important statement in the book, and for the mystery genre in general—even if they're not murderers, almost everyone has some kind of secret.

CHAPTER 13: THE GOOSE QUILL

That evening, Dr. Sheppard goes to Poirot's home for dinner. Poirot asks about Caroline, and Sheppard demands to know why Poirot visited while Sheppard was out; Poirot chuckles and says, "I always like to employ the expert." He asks why Sheppard didn't tell him the truth about Ralph, and Sheppard doesn't answer. Sheppard asks if Poirot is suspicious of Russell, considering what she asked about poisons.

Poirot doesn't explain his remark about employing the expert. It could mean that he had a valuable meeting with Caroline, the "expert" in town gossip. But the remark also suggests that Poirot was trying to get Dr. Sheppard, the medical "expert," out of the way by giving him something to do. With Sheppard gone, Poirot is able to learn information about Ralph that Sheppard has refused to tell him, and he appears to be becoming more suspicious of Sheppard.

Poirot, noticing that Sheppard is impatient, says that Sheppard is like "the little child who wants to know the way the engine works." He proceeds to give Sheppard a lecture on his methods. Sheppard has told Poirot he left the house at 8:50; however, Sheppard's clock could have been wrong. Yet Parker can confirm the time. Sheppard has also claimed he ran into a stranger. Poirot can confirm this because a maid ran into the stranger a few minutes earlier, and the stranger asked her the way to Roger Ackroyd's house. The stranger was also seen at the Three Boars, where a barmaid reported he spoke with an American accent.

Poirot has to be careful not to rely too extensively on any single witness's testimony, unless other witnesses can corroborate it. Poirot has clearly been conducting his own investigation, independent of Dr. Sheppard—for example, he spoke with people at the Three Boars in order to learn as much as he could about the mysterious stranger who Dr. Sheppard saw on the night of the murder.

Suddenly Poirot produces the quill that he found in the summerhouse. Dr. Sheppard remembers having heard about Canadians and Americans who consume heroin in such a way. Poirot points out that the use of the "scrap of starched cambric" should now be obvious to Sheppard. However, Sheppard claims that he can't imagine what it was used for. He asks why the stranger went to the summerhouse, and Poirot points out that Mrs. Ackroyd said she'd brought Flora from Canada. Poirot next brings up the parlormaid's dismissal, pointing out that it doesn't take half an hour to fire someone.

Poirot has a few pieces of evidence to work with: the quill, which suggests drug use could be connected to Roger's murder, the cambric, whose meaning Poirot teasingly refuses to divulge, and Ursula's testimony. Poirot's challenge is to distinguish between secrets that have some relevance to the murder of Roger Ackroyd and secrets that don't (but might be interesting in their own right). The only way for Poirot to solve the crime is to learn everything *about his suspects.*

Poirot asks Dr. Sheppard for his thoughts. Dr. Sheppard produces a scrap of paper on which he's jotted some thoughts. He notes that Roger Ackroyd was heard talking to someone around 9:30, that Ralph Paton probably came in through the window, as evidenced by his shoe prints, and that Ackroyd was nervous that evening. Finally, he suggests that the person in the study at 9:30 asked Roger for money. And yet, it couldn't have been Ralph who killed Roger, since Roger was alive at 9:50 pm. The best hypothesis, Sheppard claims, is that Ralph left the window open, allowing a robber to enter.

Dr. Sheppard puts together a fairly obvious theory of how Roger Ackroyd was killed: Ralph came in through the window, left, and inadvertently allowed the killer to come in through the window afterward. However, Sheppard doesn't believe that Ralph could be the killer, as Inspector Raglan seems to believe. This could be because Sheppard knows and trusts Ralph; furthermore, Ralph seemingly couldn't have been the killer because Roger was still alive at 9:50.

Poirot notes that Sheppard's theory doesn't explain everything. It doesn't explain the pushed-out chair, or the missing forty pounds—however, Sheppard points out, Roger may have given Ralph the forty pounds. Poirot agrees, but points out another thing—it's unclear why Major Blunt was sure that Roger was talking with Raymond. Next, Poirot asks why Ralph has left the town if he's innocent.

The problem with Sheppard's theory, much like Raglan's, is that he cherry-picks facts that support his theory and ignores everything else. Poirot's theory will be much more thorough, explaining every aspect of the crime, including seemingly trivial details like the chair.

Poirot also wants to know what Dr. Sheppard thinks of the motive for murder. Sheppard points out that money could be a motive—Ralph stood to inherit Roger's fortune. Poirot adds that there are other motives: the blackmailer could have been trying to conceal their name by stealing the envelope, or get out of a "financial scrape." All of this, Sheppard points out, would suggest Ralph. Poirot, however, disagrees: he's decided that Ralph Paton is innocent.

Poirot has entertained the idea that Ralph was the killer, but now he seems to be moving away from such a theory, partly because of the evidence and partly because of his own instincts. Nevertheless, it seems clear that money was an important motive for the killer: Roger was a rich man, and he was going to take action against Mrs. Ferrars' blackmailer.

CHAPTER 14: MRS. ACKROYD

After Dr. Sheppard's conversation with Poirot, he begins to see how much information Poirot has concealed. He showed Sheppard the objects he collected, but not the logical deductions he made. Before Monday, Sheppard thought of himself as playing Watson to Poirot's Sherlock Holmes; now, he realizes, their paths have diverged.

Sheppard finally realizes that he and Poirot aren't really on the same page: Poirot sometimes asks for his help, but he doesn't trust Sheppard with his innermost thoughts. It's unclear if Sheppard now understands that Poirot was trying to get rid of him by sending him to check up on Mrs. Folliot.

On Tuesday, Mrs. Ackroyd summons Dr. Sheppard to examine her. She claims that she's "prostrated" by the horror of Roger's death—a claim that Sheppard finds ridiculous. He prescribes a tonic. Mrs. Ackroyd continues to complain—first about how Poirot has "bullied" her, and then about how Flora should have consulted her before hiring Poirot. She brings up Dr. Sheppard's conversation with Ursula, and asks what Ursula told him. Sheppard senses that Mrs. Ackroyd has something to hide. She begs Sheppard to listen to her, and to present her testimony to Poirot "in the right light." Sheppard says he will.

This time, Dr. Sheppard is gentler with Mrs. Ackroyd than he was during their previous conversation: instead of "brutally" telling her the truth, he allows her to speak, even if she does so in a rambling, boring way. Mrs. Ackroyd seems to be on the verge of revealing a secret to Dr. Sheppard, perhaps because Poirot's speech has jolted her into coming clean.

Mrs. Ackroyd proceeds to explain to Dr. Sheppard that she's had "many bills," some of which she didn't show to Roger. On the day of Roger's killing, she opened Roger's desk and found his will. While she was reading it, Ursula Bourne entered the room. Afterwards, Roger came home, and Ursula asked if she could speak with him. Mrs. Ackroyd begs Sheppard to present this information to Poirot in a favorable light. Dr. Sheppard can sense that Mrs. Ackroyd has more to say—intuitively, he asks her if she left the silver cabinet open, and she admits that she did, knowing that some of Roger's silver could fetch a high price. Miss Russell startled her as she was going through the silver. Dr. Sheppard remembers seeing Miss Russell closing the silver table on the evening before Roger's murder. He also remembers how Miss Russell seemed slightly out of breath at the time. He wonders aloud if Miss Russell "has had her handkerchiefs starched."

As the earlier chapters suggested, Mrs. Ackroyd has been in debt for a long time—she's strapped for cash, and depended on Roger. Yet Mrs. Ackroyd doesn't admit to stealing the money from Roger's desk—only opening Roger's will (which would explain why, that evening, she was trying to persuade Flora to make "settlements" with Roger). Mrs. Ackroyd admits that she's been hiding some things about herself, but none of these things seem particularly relevant to Roger's murder—she's a thief, but not a killer. However, her testimony points Dr. Sheppard in the direction of Miss Russell, who may have gone to the summerhouse (and left a handkerchief).

Dr. Sheppard leaves to speak to Ursula Bourne. He tells her that he knows *she* wanted to speak to Roger, not the other way around. Ursula admits this, but also asks Dr. Sheppard about Ralph Paton, murmuring, "He ought to come back." Finally, she asks Dr. Sheppard when the murder was committed. When Sheppard replies that it can't have happened before 9:45, Ursula seems relieved.

Ursula seems to know Ralph better than she'd let on previously—hence her repeated plea that he "come back." She is relieved, possibly because Ralph has an alibi (since the murder happened after 9:45).

When Dr. Sheppard comes home, his sister tells him that Poirot asked her to determine if Ralph Paton's boots, which he left at the Three Boars, were black or brown. Caroline asks a friend's maid, Clara, who also works around the Three Boars, about the boots, and by lunchtime Caroline has determined that the boots were—contrary to what Poirot thought—black. Dr. Sheppard can't imagine what the color of the boots has to do with Roger Ackroyd's murder.

For the second time, Poirot asks Caroline for her help. Caroline is an important source of information—she has a network of friends and fellow gossips who can quickly gather almost any information that Poirot asks for. However, Christie doesn't reveal why Poirot cares about the boots' color, again emphasizing that Poirot and Sheppard aren't always working side-by-side.

CHAPTER 15: GEOFFREY RAYMOND

The afternoon after he sees Mrs. Ackroyd, Dr. Sheppard comes home, and Caroline informs him that Geoffrey Raymond has left—he was looking for Poirot. Poirot has just returned to his home, Caroline adds. She suggests that Sheppard go over to tell Poirot that Raymond is looking for him, but Sheppard refuses. Then Caroline gives him a pot of jam which, supposedly, she's promised to give Poirot. Faux-casually, she tells Sheppard that, while he's over there, he should tell Poirot that the boots are black.

Caroline clearly wants Dr. Sheppard to tell Poirot about the color of the boots as soon as possible, but doesn't seem to want to go tell him herself—so she sends Sheppard, supposedly to deliver a pot of jam.

At Poirot's house, Sheppard presents Poirot with the jam and tells him about his conversation with Mrs. Ackroyd. Poirot is interested in this information, but not too excited. The key point, he and Sheppard agree, is that Miss Russell was coming through the room from the outside, possibly because she'd gone to meet someone. Sheppard tells Poirot that the boots were black—information which seems to disappoint Poirot.

Poirot still refuses to explain why he was so curious about the color of the boots. However, he's interested in the information Dr. Sheppard offers him about Miss Russell, and agrees with Sheppard that she'd been meeting with someone.

Poirot asks Sheppard about his appointment with Miss Russell. Sheppard tells Poirot that, after the confidential portion of the visit, Russell asked about drug use and poison, mentioning cocaine. Poirot then produces a newspaper story about cocaine use from last Friday: this is probably why Russell mentioned cocaine.

Supposedly, Dr. Sheppard isn't legally obligated to remain silent about his appointment with Miss Russell, provided that Russell wasn't talking about her medical condition. (This is a questionable interpretation of the law, but hey, it's a mystery novel.)

Raymond arrives at Poirot's house, explaining that he's anxious to catch Poirot. He has a confession to make: before Roger Ackroyd's will was opened, he was in debt. Now, with the money Ackroyd left him, he's fine. Raymond wasn't going to disclose this information previously, since he was afraid he'd incriminate himself, but he's realized that he has an airtight alibi, and therefore has nothing to worry about. With these words, Raymond leaves, smiling. Alone, Poirot tells Sheppard that he trusts Raymond's explanation—although, if Raymond didn't have an alibi, Poirot might be suspicious. In all, he's come to realize, almost everyone had a motive to kill Ackroyd, except Major Blunt. However, Poirot adds, he has a feeling Blunt is hiding something. There's an old saying: the English only conceal their love—and Blunt isn't good at concealing anything.

Much like Mrs. Ackroyd, Raymond has taken Poirot's statement to heart: he's been hiding something, and he decides that it's best to come forward and spill his secrets. Raymond's secret, however, seems pretty trivial, and certainly not much of a reason to kill Roger Ackroyd—so either he's still hiding something bigger, or he's not much of a suspect in the case. The same goes with Blunt: Poirot believes that Blunt is in love with someone (this someone, we can guess, is probably Flora, with whom he was speaking flirtatiously in an earlier chapter).

Sheppard suggests that Roger Ackroyd's killer wasn't Mrs. Ferrars's blackmailer. Poirot agrees, suggesting that Parker may have been the blackmailer but not the killer, and may have removed the letter. Sheppard remembers that, when he first burst into the study and found Ackroyd's body, he didn't notice if the letter was there or not. Poirot decides that he and Sheppard are going to try "a little experiment" on Parker.

One of the challenges of the case is that there are multiple crimes: the theft, the murder, and the blackmail. Although it would seem to make sense that the crimes are connected, there's no guarantee that they are, or that they're connected in a causal or coherent way.

At Fernly, Poirot and Sheppard greet Flora, and Poirot tells her that they're going to test Parker's innocence. Poirot then greets Parker and explains that he wants Parker's help testing whether it's possible to hear voices from the terrace outside the study window. He asks Parker to fetch a tray, so that they can reenact the scene. Parker does so and stops outside the study, and Flora tells him, "Mr. Ackroyd doesn't want to be disturbed," just as she did on the night of the murder. Parker nods and says, "Very good." Poirot notices that Parker has brought two glasses—Parker claims that he did the same on the night of the murder, since he always brings two glasses. Poirot thanks Parker and dismisses him. Alone, Dr. Sheppard and Flora ask Poirot what he's up to. Poirot explains that he asked about the glasses because "One must say something." He says he's learned something he's been curious about for a while.

Poirot convinces his suspects to help him solve the case, but he's not always clear about what, exactly, he's using them for in his "little experiments." For example, at the end of the chapter Poirot will only say that he's learned "something" important from Parker and Flora's recreation of the crime, raising the question of whether he was really interested in whether it's possible to hear voices from the terrace—or whether his "experiment" was just a diversion to distract someone into divulging a different kind of clue.

CHAPTER 16: AN EVENING AT MAH JONG

The night after the previous chapter, Sheppard and Caroline play **Mah Jong** with two gossipy friends, Colonel Carter and Miss Gannett. As they play, Carter mentions that he's heard rumors of blackmail. Miss Gannett says she saw Flora Ackroyd in the morning—and she was with another man, though Gannett doesn't name him.

Mah Jong is one of the few important symbols in the novel. Christie was fond of using games (especially cards) as a metaphor for the way that people hide their secrets from others, and Mah Jong is a prime example. Once again, the local gossips seem to have better information about what's going on than Sheppard—Miss Gannett claims she saw Flora with a man (perhaps Blunt).

Miss Gannett points out that Flora has been fortunate. She was the last person to see Roger Ackroyd alive, and Gannett guesses that Ralph has been staying away from the village in order to draw suspicion away from Flora. Miss Gannett also mentions that her maid knows Elsie. Elsie mentioned that money was stolen from Fernly, and said that Ursula, the parlormaid, was responsible. Elsie has also suggested that Ursula was involved in a gang of some kind—she spends a lot of time by herself on her days off. Caroline now voices her theory about Ralph Paton. She believes that Ralph is hiding out in Cranchester, the nearest big town. Based on a passing remark that Poirot made in her presence the other day, she thinks that Ralph left the village on foot, rather than by train, and chose to stay in Cranchester because it's the last place anybody would look. She also saw Poirot heading to Cranchester in a car.

So far, Ralph and Parker have been the prime suspects in the case; now, however, Gannett raises the possibility that Flora could have committed the murder. This foreshadows the way that Poirot will begin to investigate Flora more closely. Caroline, along with Miss Gannett, seems to know a lot that Dr. Sheppard doesn't—for example, she saw Poirot heading to Cranchester for some reason. Evidently, Poirot is still hiding many things from Sheppard, reminding readers that, contrary to what Poirot claimed, he and Sheppard aren't always partners.

Colonel Carter and Miss Gannett now ask Dr. Sheppard for his own theories about the murder, but Sheppard claims that Poirot hasn't shared any information with him. Suddenly, he notices that he's been dealt the perfect **Mah Jong** hand, the so-called "Perfect Winning." "Reckless with triumph," Dr. Sheppard proceeds to tell his guests about the ring Poirot found in the pond. The players then guess that Roger was secretly married to Mrs. Ferrars, that Ralph was married to Flora, or that Roger was married to Miss Russell. But then Caroline suggests that Geoffrey Raymond was married to Flora. Caroline insists, "Flora Ackroyd does not care a penny piece for Ralph Paton, and never has."

In this symbolically loaded scene, Dr. Sheppard gets the perfect hand and then gets reckless and cocky, sharing the information that Poirot shared with him about the golden ring. This could be considered a metaphor for the way that Sheppard and the other characters sometimes get reckless and divulge secret information that they would do better to keep to themselves (especially in Sheppard's case, when he feels he has committed a "perfect" crime). The chapter ends with another one of Caroline's insights about the case (which, so far, have proven to be accurate): Flora doesn't love Ralph.

CHAPTER 17: PARKER

The next morning, Dr. Sheppard realizes that, due to the "exhilaration" of having a perfect **Mah Jong** hand, he's been indiscrete about sharing information. He goes to the funeral of Mrs. Ferrars and Roger Ackroyd, afraid that Poirot will reproach him for spreading information. At the funeral, Poirot doesn't reproach him, but only asks for his help examining a witness: Parker. Poirot is now fairly sure that Parker was Mrs. Ferrars's blackmailer—or at least, he tells Sheppard, "I hope it was he."

Poirot's cryptic remark might suggest that he has another theory for who the blackmailer could be, and is worried that this second theory might turn out to be the truth. The fact that he feels invested in someone not *being guilty is an early indication that he might already be considering his "friend" Sheppard with suspicion.*

At Fernly, Poirot and Dr. Sheppard greet Parker. Poirot asks Parker if he's ever blackmailed someone, and Parker becomes very offended. Poirot demands to know who Parker's last master was, and Parker says, "a Major Ellerby." Immediately, Poirot explains that he knows Major Ellerby to have been a drug addict and potential murderer. Poirot calmly explains that Parker blackmailed Ellerby, and still receives a "good sum" to keep quiet about the murder. Parker admits that Poirot is right—but he insists that he didn't murder Roger Ackroyd. He says he listened to Ackroyd on the night of the murder, and after listening, Parker thought that he could get "a share of the package" by blackmailing Roger. Poirot asks to see Parker's finances, and Parker obliges. He shows Poirot that he's invested money, much of it from blackmailing Major Ellerby, in National Savings Certificates. Poirot then dismisses Parker.

Poirot claims to have known all about Major Ellerby (though there's no explanation for how, exactly, he knows this is offered—maybe Poirot knows him from a previous case, or maybe he's been investigating this matter without Sheppard's knowledge. Parker insists—and Poirot seems to believe—that he didn't kill Roger Ackroyd, even though he's blackmailed others. Notice that Parker seems to think that Roger, not Mrs. Ferrars, was the real blackmail target, suggesting that Parker is either lying or doesn't really know what's going on between Roger and Mrs. Ferrars (and thus is probably innocent of murder). Notice that Poirot isn't interested (as the police might be) in judging or persecuting Parker's other crimes—he's only focused on solving the puzzle of Roger's death.

Alone, Poirot tells Dr. Sheppard that he believes Parker: Parker wasn't the killer, and he sincerely thought that Roger Ackroyd, not Mrs. Ferrars, was the blackmail victim. Dr. Sheppard nods, and then admits to Poirot that he told his sister and guests about the ring in the goldfish pond. Poirot laughs and says that Sheppard can do whatever he wants. Their next task, he now explains, is to visit Mr. Hammond.

Poirot seems oddly un-phased that Dr. Sheppard revealed the sensitive information about the golden ring in the pond—possibly suggesting that Poirot hasn't shared any truly crucial information with Sheppard.

Dr. Sheppard and Poirot visit Mr. Hammond to inquire about Mrs. Ferrars. Sheppard recaps his conversation with Roger Ackroyd on Friday, and Hammond is unsurprised to hear that Mrs. Ferrars was being blackmailed—he'd suspected as much for a while, since Mrs. Ferrars was losing money. After Hammond leaves, Poirot tells Sheppard he's sure of Parker's innocence—there's no way he would have continued on as a butler if he'd gotten so much money from Mrs. Ferrars. Poirot also raises the possibility that Roger threw the letter in the fire after reading it.

Parker now has a pretty solid alibi for not killing Roger: the fact that he's still a butler. No butler who'd been so successful at blackmailing someone as rich as Mrs. Ferrars would continue to be a butler for very long. Poirot also notes that the absence of the letter doesn't necessarily *prove that the killer knew about the blackmail, even if it seemed to do so at first.*

Dr. Sheppard invites Poirot to his home. There, Caroline asks Poirot if he's found Ralph Paton in Cranchester. Poirot is surprised for a moment, but then explains that he only visited Cranchester to see the dentist. Caroline goes on to tell Poirot, very excitedly, that she believes Flora to have killed Roger Ackroyd. Parker never heard Roger say goodnight—suggesting Flora killed him and then told Parker not to enter the study. Speaking almost to himself, Poirot says, "Let us take a man—a very ordinary man." This man, Poirot explains, is not a killer, but he has a trace of weakness. He's in some difficulty, and he's stumbled upon a valuable secret. The secret corrupts him. Eventually, he faces exposure for his sins—desperate to maintain his reputation, he lashes out, and "the dagger strikes." Caroline says, "You are speaking of Ralph Paton," but faults Poirot for criticizing "a man unheard."

In retrospect, this is one of the first points in the novel when Poirot is shown to believe that Dr. Sheppard is the murderer. He's shown signs of distrust for Sheppard before, but now he fully indicates that he's been considering whether Sheppard is capable of killing someone. Caroline believes that Poirot is talking about Ralph Paton, when he's really talking about Dr. Sheppard himself: an ordinary yet weak man who, in order to save his reputation and recover from some financial difficulties (the bad investments Sheppard has twice mentioned) commits a horrible crime.

Just then, the phone rings, and Dr. Sheppard answers it: the police have detained a man, Charles Kent, in Liverpool. He's believed to be the stranger who was at the Ackroyd house on the night of the murder.

The chapter ends on something of a cliffhanger: now that the stranger has been apprehended, there may be new insight (or new complications) for the case.

CHAPTER 18: CHARLES KENT

In Liverpool, Dr. Sheppard and Poirot meet with Inspector Raglan, who wants Sheppard to identify Charles Kent. When Raglan first sees Poirot, he admits that Poirot was right: the fingerprints on the knife were Roger Ackroyd's own.

Raglan confirms Poirot's observation and, at the same time, the fact that Poirot is a much cleverer, more intelligent detective than anyone on the police force.

Raglan brings Dr. Sheppard and Poirot to meet Charles Kent. Kent is a young man, and as Sheppard stares at him, he finds it difficult to tell if Kent is, indeed, the man he saw on Friday. But when Kent speaks, Sheppard nods and tells Raglan and Poirot that this is the stranger he saw. Kent claims that he was nowhere near Fernly on Friday, but Poirot produces the quill he found in the summerhouse, and Kent holds out his hand, almost reflexively. Poirot says that Kent dropped this quill. Kent doesn't deny this, but he insists that he couldn't have killed Roger Ackroyd: he left around 9:25 and was at a local saloon by 9:45. Poirot asks Kent if he was born in Kent. Kent angrily denies this, and demands to know why Poirot would ask such a question. Poirot doesn't answer.

As in earlier chapters, it's not always clear why Poirot is asking his suspects certain questions. He asks Kent about the quill in order to determine if he'd been to the summerhouse (and thus if he'd met anyone there)—but there seems to be no obvious reason why Poirot would need to inquire about Kent's last name (although later it's revealed that this is connected to his status as an illegitimate child). Part of the charm of Poirot, and of Christie's novel in general, is that Poirot doesn't always explain why he does what he does—however, he usually explains everything in the final chapters of the book.

Alone, Poirot, Raglan, and Dr. Sheppard discuss the possibility that Charles Kent was the blackmailer. However, Raglan insists that Kent couldn't have been the killer. He asks Poirot why he asked Kent about his birth, and Poirot merely says that he has "a little idea." Afterwards, Poirot and Dr. Sheppard dine in a hotel. Sheppard wonders what Charles Kent could have been doing at Fernly, and Poirot admits he doesn't know. Nevertheless, he says, he still has his little idea.

Poirot's talk with Kent has been productive, apparently: Kent has given him an idea that he didn't have before. However, he doesn't tell Dr. Sheppard what this idea might be.

CHAPTER 19: FLORA ACKROYD

The next morning, Dr. Sheppard finishes his work and finds Inspector Raglan waiting outside his home. Raglan has confirmed Charles Kent's alibi—he was indeed at the saloon. A barmaid also remembers that he had a lot of money, suggesting that he was the one who stole the forty pounds from the drawer. However, Kent refuses to say what he did at Fernly. Raglan also mentions that Poirot has a nephew who's "off his crumpet"—something that Caroline has told Sheppard recently. But even if Poirot, like his nephew, is "a bit barmy," Raglan admits that Poirot gave him a good tip regarding the dagger.

Charles Kent has helped further Poirot's investigation, but evidently he couldn't have been the killer. The passage also includes a seemingly bizarre aside (and another example of Chekhov's gun): the fact that Poirot has a mentally ill nephew. Raglan admits that he respects Poirot (an observation that will make the book's finale, in which Poirot and Raglan need to work closely together, more plausible).

Raglan and Dr. Sheppard visit Poirot, and Poirot listens patiently to Raglan's news. He tells Raglan not to release Charles Kent yet—he may have had something to do with the murder. Poirot then suggests that Flora may have been the one who stole the money from Roger Ackroyd's desk. When she and Parker rehearsed their actions, Poirot discovered that Parker only saw Flora with her hand on the door—he never actually saw her coming *out* of the study. Perhaps she was coming down from Roger's room and pretended to be coming from the study to hide the fact that she'd been upstairs looking for the money.

Finally, we learn the real reason why Poirot asked Parker and Flora to recreate the scene of the crime: he deceived Flora into revealing that she'd lied about her alibi. Therefore, it follows that Flora is the thief, and made up the story about wishing her uncle goodnight to hide the truth.

Inspector Raglan, Dr. Sheppard, and Poirot agree to speak to Flora. At Fernly, they find Flora with Major Hector Blunt. Flora asks Blunt to stay for the questioning. Raglan asks her about her behavior on Friday night, and Poirot asks, "You took the money, did you not?" Flora admits that she did. She says she stole because she'd been desperate for money for years—Roger was always stingy with her and Ralph. Blunt mutters, "I see—always Ralph," and Flora insists, "You don't understand." Flora rushes out.

When Flora admits that she took the money, she also admits that she'd resented her uncle's stinginess and controlling behavior, suggesting that she may have had a motive for killing him. The scene also reconfirms that Blunt is attracted to Flora, hence his bitter comment, "I see—always Ralph."

Major Blunt tells Raglan that Roger gave *him* the forty pounds, and that Flora never touched it—and he's prepared to say as much before a judge. Poirot tells Blunt that he's not fooled—Blunt is protecting Flora. Clearly, Blunt loves Flora, and, Poirot suggests, he should tell her this. Poirot says that Flora only agreed to marry Ralph Paton to please Roger Ackroyd and escape her current life—she never loved him. Blunt tells Poirot, "You're a sound fellow." He walks out to find Flora.

In this scene Poirot doesn't just play the part of a detective whose job is to solve a crime and move on—he also acts as an adviser of sorts for Major Blunt, who, a little surprisingly, takes Poirot's advice without question. Poirot is a detective, but more generally speaking, he's a student of human nature. Blunt's awkward courting of Flora also provides some comic relief for the novel.

CHAPTER 20: MISS RUSSELL

Inspector Raglan turns over the new information: the murder could have happened as early as 9:30, and Charles Kent might have been the man Raymond heard asking Roger Ackroyd for money. However, he couldn't have placed the phone call from the station, since the station is on the other side of town from the saloon.

Flora's confession clears something up at least, in that it's now possible that Roger may have been dead even before 9:50, and as early as 9:30 (at which time Roger was heard talking to someone in the study).

Dr. Sheppard returns to his office and later goes home. There, Caroline tells him that Poirot is waiting for him. Poirot informs Sheppard that he's arranged for Miss Russell to come to Sheppard's offices, telling her that Sheppard needs to meet with her for medical reasons. Poirot smiles and says that everything is becoming clearer—but this annoys Sheppard. Poirot shows Sheppard an article that he's arranged to have placed in tomorrow's paper, stating that Ralph Paton has been apprehended just as he was about to sail to America. The article is false, but Poirot hopes to use it to his advantage. Poirot also notices a homemade radio in Sheppard's home, and Sheppard admits that he's always loved machines.

Poirot reveals that he's often willing to take matters into his own hands, even if it means behaving somewhat unethically. He places a false story in the newspaper, with the goal of tricking some of the suspects (who might be lying on Ralph's behalf) into coming forward. Lying to the hundreds or even thousands of people who read the paper could certainly be considered an unethical act, but for Poirot it's justified by the fact that it might lead to solving the crime. Notice, also, that Sheppard loves machines—something that will be revealed as important.

Poirot and Dr. Sheppard leave for Sheppard's office, where they find Miss Russell. Poirot informs Russell that Charles Kent was arrested. In that instant, Sheppard realizes that Kent reminded him of Russell. When Poirot tells Russell that Kent must have been the killer, Russell becomes distressed. She admits that Charles came to see her in the summerhouse. She says she left a note there, letting him know that he'd have to wait, and then rushed back to the house (leaving her out of breath). Russell then met with Kent around 8:50. Poirot guesses that Charles is Miss Russell's son, and Russell nods—many years ago, while she was living in Kent, she had an illegitimate child. As he grew up, Charles began taking drugs, and begged his mother for money. On Friday, around 9:25, Miss Russell gave him money. She insists that he couldn't have killed Roger Ackroyd, though, since Ackroyd was speaking to someone around 9:30.

Poirot senses that Miss Russell is loyal to Charles Kent in some way, and when he lies and tells Russell that Charles is guilty of the crime, he confirms his suspicions. Poirot doesn't always know everything, but he knows how to deal with suspects and convince them to divulge hidden information that might be useful to the case (he also learns why Charles's last is "Kent"—Russell named him after the town where he was born). Notice that, as the novel goes on, the secrets the characters give up become increasingly painful (in the 1920s, having an illegitimate child would have been perceived as a shameful thing by most of Christie's readers). Poirot himself doesn't seem to judge Russell's behavior in any way: his goal is to reach the truth about one specific crime.

Miss Russell leaves the room, and Dr. Sheppard tells Poirot that her testimony suggests that Ralph Paton is the murderer. Poirot reveals that he'd already suspected some connection between Russell and Charles Kent, since 1) Russell mentioned drugs and 2) the goose quill suggested drugs, too. Russell had asked Sheppard about cocaine, and then pivoted to talking about poisons because she didn't want to draw attention to herself. Sheppard realizes that "there was not much which escaped Hercule Poirot."

Gradually Dr. Sheppard has come to respect Poirot more and more. While he underestimated Poirot at first, he now understands that Poirot works slowly and methodically, stringing pieces of evidence (such as the goose quill) and testimony (such as Miss Russell's) into a proper theory.

CHAPTER 21: THE PARAGRAPH IN THE PAPER

Dr. Sheppard leaves his office and returns to Caroline, who insists that Miss Russell must know more about Roger Ackroyd's death than she's letting on. The next morning, the newspaper publishes the fictional story about Ralph Paton being arrested. Caroline tells Sheppard she suspected as much, and that it's Sheppard's duty to make sure Ralph isn't convicted. She also tells Sheppard she saw a mysterious man enter Poirot's home earlier that morning—Caroline guesses that it was a Home Office expert. Poirot then visits Dr. Sheppard, and Caroline tries to raise the subject of his guest. Poirot, who can tell what she's trying to do, deflects from the topic. He invites Dr. Sheppard for a walk. On the walk, he asks Sheppard to come to his house that evening, and to invite Major Blunt, Flora, Raymond, and Mrs. Ackroyd.

This passage represents one of the only times in the entire novel when Caroline is wrong: first, because she thought Ralph was arrested, and second, because she thinks the mysterious stranger is a "Home Office" expert. (The British Home Office was a government department that handled serious crimes—sort of an early 20th century English version of the FBI.) Neither Sheppard nor his sister can understand what Poirot is up to; indeed, it's likely that Dr. Sheppard is just as curious about the mysterious stranger's identity as Caroline, even if he doesn't ask Poirot about it. Poirot is apparently almost ready to announce the killer's identity.

Dr. Sheppard goes off to the Ackroyd house to invite everyone. Inside, he finds Mrs. Ackroyd, who tells her that Flora has just gotten engaged to Major Blunt. She notes how Flora confessed having stolen money from Roger Ackroyd on the night of the murder. She also mentions that, at one point, she believed that Flora had "some kind of understanding" with Geoffrey Raymond. Bemused, Sheppard invites Mrs. Ackroyd to Poirot's home.

Flora evidently returns Major Blunt's feelings for her, suggesting that she agreed to marry Ralph primarily to make her uncle happy, not because she loved Ralph. In this Caroline was correct once again.

Dr. Sheppard rejoins Poirot and walks home, where they find Caroline, who tells them that Ursula Bourne has come to the house, demanding to see Poirot. Inside, Poirot greets Ursula, but addresses her as "Ursula Paton."

The chapter ends on another cliffhanger: somehow, Poirot has deduced that Ursula is already married to Ralph Paton.

CHAPTER 22: URSULA'S STORY

Ursula—who Poirot has just called "Ursula Paton"—begins to weep. Caroline embraces her, murmuring, "there, there." Ursula says she has read the report of Ralph's arrest, and has decided to stop pretending. Poirot sheepishly mutters that not all newspaper stories are true, but nonetheless asks Ursula to tell the truth, in the hopes that her testimony can clear Ralph's name.

Poirot's decision to plant a fake news story has clearly paid off: Ursula has come forward because she sees no further point in lying for Ralph's sake. Poirot seems slightly embarrassed by his "trick," but he urges Ursula to tell her story anyway.

Ursula proceeds to tell Dr. Sheppard, Caroline, and Poirot what she's been hiding. While working as a parlormaid for the Ackroyds, she fell in love with Ralph Paton and secretly married him—Ralph insisted that Roger would never let him marry "a penniless girl." Ralph planned to pay his debts and announce the marriage to Roger—however, he fell deeper into debt instead, and Roger instructed him to marry Flora. Unwilling to push back, Ralph agreed. He saw marrying Flora as a business deal, designed to ingratiate himself to his stepfather and relieve his debt. On the afternoon before Roger's murder, Ursula met with Roger and told him everything about Ralph. Furious, Roger dismissed her. Later that evening, Ursula met Ralph in the summerhouse, where they argued. Ursula says she hasn't seen Ralph since that evening.

Ursula's testimony is important for a few reasons: 1) it explains the gold ring in the pond, 2) it explains why Ralph went to Fernly on the night of the murder, 3) it explains two of the people who were in the summerhouse, 4) it gives Ralph another motive for killing Roger, and 5) it explains why Roger took half an hour to talk to Ursula on the day of his murder—he wasn't just firing her.

Dr. Sheppard listens carefully to Ursula's story, and realizes why she kept silent: had she told the truth, people would have thought that she'd murdered Roger before he could cut Ralph (and, in effect, Ursula herself) out of his will. Poirot then asks Ursula at what time she left Ralph in the summerhouse. Ursula answers that she arrived there around 9:33, and left about ten minutes later, returning to the house at 9:45. She remembers this very precisely, since her meeting with Ralph was so important.

Ursula has remained silent about her marriage to Ralph to avoid incriminating herself. Now that she's come forward, however, Poirot and Sheppard have a much more precise idea of the timeline of Friday night, since (perhaps a little implausibly) she remembers the exact minute when she visited the summerhouse.

Poirot asks Ursula where she went after 9:45. Ursula claims she went to bed, but also admits that nobody can verify this. Poirot points out that Ursula could have committed the murder—a suggestion that Ursula finds terrifying. She points out that Ralph may have run away from the house after hearing about the murder and assuming that Ursula had done it. She also explains that she went to see Dr. Sheppard, assuming that Sheppard might know Ralph's whereabouts and pass on her message to Ralph. Sheppard insists that he has no knowledge whatsoever of Ralph's whereabouts. Poirot thanks Ursula and then tells her that the story in the newspaper is a mere "rien du tout." Ursula looks confused, and Poirot quickly asks her to tell him if Ralph wore shoes or boots during their meeting in the summerhouse. Ursula says she can't remember.

At the end of the chapter, Poirot admits that he planted the fake story in the newspaper, leading Ursula to come forward; however, instead of saying this directly, he phrases it in a somewhat evasive way ("rien du tout" means "nothing at all"), so that it takes Ursula a moment or two to understand the implications of his statement. The chapter ends before Ursula expresses any anger with Poirot for lying to her. Also, notice that Poirot is now asking about whether Ralph wore boots at all—the color no longer seems to concern him.

CHAPTER 23: POIROT'S LITTLE REUNION

Ursula tells Poirot that she should go back to Fernly now, but Caroline insists that she stay in the Sheppards' home. Poirot agrees, adding that he wants Ursula to attend his "little reunion."

The "little reunion" is a staple of Christie novels: all the suspects (now including Ursula) gather together to hear Poirot announce the killer's identity.

When Ursula and Caroline are out of the room, Dr. Sheppard tells Poirot that the case against Ralph Paton is looking strong. Poirot agrees, and mentions offhandedly that he wishes his friend Hastings were around—especially since Hastings liked to write about Poirot's cases. Sheepishly, Dr. Sheppard tells Poirot that he's read some of Hastings' work, and has been trying his own hand at writing about the murder. Poirot asks to see the manuscript, and Sheppard shows him twenty chapters of the book he's been writing all week. Poirot sits down to read it.

As the novel comes to an end, Ralph Paton seems like the obvious killer—as has been the case throughout the book. The passage also suggests that The Murder of Roger Ackroyd *itself is a manuscript that Dr. Sheppard has penned, giving the novel a self-referential, meta-fictional tone (a tone that was already implied in the character of Caroline, who often seems to be commenting on the conventions of mystery novels).*

A while later, Poirot finishes the manuscript and compliments Dr. Sheppard on his modesty. He says that while Hastings made himself a main character in his books, Dr. Sheppard has purposefully kept himself "in the background." Poirot then invites Sheppard over to his house for his meeting with the suspects. He apologizes for being unable to invite Caroline, but insists that it needs to remain confidential. However, Poirot still wants to bring Ursula with him to the meeting. He insists that, that very evening, he'll expose Roger Ackroyd's killer.

Like many narrators of mystery novels, Dr. Sheppard is a fairly ordinary character, who usually remains in the "background" of the book. However, Poirot seems to think that there's a difference between Hastings' style of narrating and Sheppard's, perhaps suggesting that Sheppard is hiding some secret that Poirot has yet to discover. The passage is another example of the growing divide between Sheppard and Poirot, who, at one point, seemed to be good friends.

In Poirot's home, Dr. Sheppard sees that he's arranged the guests' chairs so that they're bathed in bright light, leaving one chair—where, presumably, Poirot himself will sit—in darkness. The guests arrive. Poirot introduces them to Ursula, explaining that she's Ralph Paton's wife. Mrs. Ackroyd is surprised. Flora tells Ursula not to worry, adding that she wishes Ralph had told her his secret. Raymond asks Poirot about Ralph's arrest, and Poirot explains that Ralph has not, in fact, been detained. He will not, however, say if he knows where Ralph can be found.

Poirot makes sure the suspects sit in the light, symbolizing the way his investigation will bring many surprising revelations "to light." As the suspects come into Poirot's home, he informs them that Ralph hasn't actually been captured, rather than letting his lie stand.

Poirot clears his throat, signaling for everyone to sit down. Everyone is here: John Parker, Mrs. Ackroyd, Flora Ackroyd, Raymond, Ursula Bourne, Hector Blunt, and Elizabeth Russell. Poirot points out that every single person had a motive to kill Roger Ackroyd. Mrs. Ackroyd becomes distressed at this and tries to leave, but Poirot insists that nobody will leave until they've heard what he has to say.

The implication of the scene is that the murderer of Roger Ackroyd is sitting in the room. One might imagine that the murderer would try to leave in the course of Poirot's announcement, but Poirot's confidence and authority seem to bind everyone to their chair.

Poirot began his investigation with the shoeprints on the windowsill of Roger Ackroyd's study, with Dr. Sheppard as his aid. He says he searched the summerhouse at Fernly, where he found starched cambric and a quill. The cambric made Poirot think of a maid's apron. Poirot also learned that Ursula Bourne had no alibi—she claimed she was in bed. It seemed to follow that Ursula went to meet someone, and this person later went to Roger's study. This person could have been an American, because 1) using a quill to sniff drugs is common in America and 2) Sheppard saw an American-accented stranger.

Poirot walks the suspects through his process, filling in many of the gaps in the novel thus far—another convention of the detective novel, as many mysteries are solved for the reader.

There was one problem, Poirot continues: the times didn't work out. Ursula couldn't have been in the summerhouse before 9:30, whereas the stranger must have showed up around 9. Perhaps there were two separate meetings. Poirot then learned about Miss Russell's interest in drugs, discovered a ring in the pond, and, finally, learned of a conversation between Ralph Paton and a mysterious woman. Assembling the evidence, Poirot guessed that Ralph and Ursula met in the woods and promised to meet in the summerhouse. Poirot concluded that Ralph could not have been in the study with Roger Ackroyd at 9:30.

After considering the concrete pieces of evidence, Poirot contemplates the timing of the murder. Notice that he made use of Caroline's mentions of Ralph walking through the woods with a mysterious woman—it was this piece of evidence that helped Poirot formulate his theory that Ralph and Ursula were married.

Who, Poirot wondered, *was* in the study with Roger Ackroyd at 9:30? Poirot then began to wonder if *anyone* was there. Raymond says that he and Major Blunt heard Roger talking to someone. Poirot reminds Raymond of the words he claimed to have overheard: "the calls on my purse …" This phrase, Poirot argues, sounds like something Roger would write. Raymond guesses that Roger was reading a letter aloud, but Poirot reminds Raymond of the dictaphone salesman who appeared on Wednesday. Poirot called the company and learned that Roger had purchased a dictaphone. (Raymond guesses that Roger was intending to surprise him with the dictaphone.) Poirot brings up how Blunt thought he heard Raymond—perhaps, subconsciously, he was reacting to Roger's businesslike tone as he dictated a letter. Blunt had also noticed a figure that night—Ursula Bourne in her apron.

Thinking laterally, Poirot questions the assumption Inspector Raglan had from the beginning of the investigation: that Roger was speaking to someone at 9:30 in the study. Here, some of the "Chekhov's guns'" from earlier in the book come full-circle: for example, the dictaphone salesman who Raymond mentioned in passing turns out to be very important. To explain the fact that Roger didn't tell anyone about his dictaphone, Christie is forced to add the detail that Roger liked surprises, which hadn't been mentioned beforehand.

Raymond compliments Poirot, but points out that Ralph still seems to be a prime suspect. Poirot smiles and tells the guests that he's learned about everything—the shoeprints, the mysterious phone call, and especially the disappearance of Ralph Paton. He points to the doorway—where Ralph is now standing.

It would appear that Poirot has known about Ralph's location all along, suggesting that he knows something else important about the case that he's about to share with his guests.

CHAPTER 24: RALPH PATON'S STORY

Ralph Paton stands beside Ursula, smiling at Dr. Sheppard. Poirot points at Sheppard and says, "Have I not told you at least thirty-six times that it is useless to conceal things from Hercule Poirot?"

Poirot can be smug and arrogant at times—he has a high opinion of himself, and he gets pleasure from solving difficult cases.

Poirot reveals that he'd been suspicious of Dr. Sheppard ever since he learned that Sheppard visited Ralph on the night of the murder. Sheppard then decides to tell the truth. He says he went to see Ralph that afternoon, and Ralph told him about being in debt, and about his marriage to Ursula. After learning of the murder, Sheppard—recognizing that Ralph would be accused of the crime—urged Ralph to hide. Ralph agreed, thinking that Ursula might have killed Roger.

Poirot returns the reader's attention to the fact that Dr. Sheppard visited Ralph Paton on the night of the murder—an event that, curiously, Dr. Sheppard tried to conceal. Sheppard claims that he did so because he wanted to protect Ralph from the police, and knew that he'd be the prime suspect in Roger's murder.

Poirot explains that Dr. Sheppard hid Ralph in a nursing home for the mentally ill. Poirot tested his theory by inventing a fictional nephew with mental problems and mentioning him to Caroline, who immediately referred Poirot to hospitals where Sheppard had gone. At one of these, Poirot found that Sheppard had recently checked in a patient—who turned out to be Ralph. Ralph, Sheppard now realizes, was the "Home Office expert" Caroline saw. Ralph says that Sheppard has been loyal to him, but now sees that he should have come forward immediately.

In this chapter, many of the novel's Chekhov's guns come back into play; for example, Poirot's nephew is revealed to be a stratagem by which Poirot learned where Ralph was hiding (with Caroline, yet again, providing the necessary information). We also once again see Poirot using unusual methods to trick people into divulging information they might otherwise want to keep secret.

Ralph now tells the guests what happened to him on the night of the murder. He left the summerhouse at 9:45, but has no alibi after that. He swears that he didn't kill Roger Ackroyd. Raymond says that he believes Ralph, but adds that the police won't. Poirot then announces why he's brought everyone here tonight: he knows that the murderer is somewhere in the room. Tomorrow, he'll tell Inspector Raglan what he knows, unless the real murderer confesses right away.

For a while, it seemed that Ralph's version of events would solve the crime—either because Ralph was the killer or because he'd provide testimony that would implicate the real killer. Yet Ralph's testimony doesn't seem to add much to Poirot's case. Poirot knows who the real killer is, though, and based on his behavior, it seems safe to conclude that it's not Ralph.

Just then, Poirot's Breton maid enters the room, carrying a telegram. Poirot reads the telegram and nods—now, he announces, he knows without a doubt who the murderer is. The telegram came from a "steamer now on her way to the United States." Nobody speaks. Poirot repeats himself: the murderer must confess, or Poirot will send the truth to Inspector Raglan the next morning.

Strangely, Poirot is giving the murderer a chance to come clean in private, before he goes to the police. This might suggest that Poirot, unlike Inspector Raglan, isn't strictly committed to obeying the law: he wants to achieve justice and learn the truth, but not necessarily by turning over the criminal to law enforcement.

CHAPTER 25: THE WHOLE TRUTH

Still no one confesses, and eventually the guests head home, but Poirot gestures for Dr. Sheppard to remain behind. Alone, Poirot asks Dr. Sheppard what he thought of the evening, and Sheppard admits he's baffled. He asks if Poirot knows the murderer's identity, or if, perhaps, he was trying to pressure the murderer into an outburst. Poirot smiles and confirms that he knows who the murderer is. He promises to walk Sheppard through his process.

Dr. Sheppard continues to think that Poirot trusts him completely, despite the fact that Poirot has gone behind Sheppard's back time and time again in the interest of learning the truth. It also seems that Sheppard is still confident that he's committed the perfect crime, and so keeps playing his part of the "Watson" to Poirot's "Holmes."

Poirot says he began by considering Dr. Sheppard's telephone call: if Ralph Paton had really been the murderer, then there would have been no call. He then considers the motive for the call, judging what it accomplished: the murder was discovered that night, instead of the next morning. Perhaps the reason for the call was that the murderer wanted to ensure that he or she was present when the body was discovered.

As Poirot claimed earlier, the phone call is the key to understanding the case. By asking what the phone call accomplished, Poirot developed a sophisticated hypothesis for the murder—one which he hasn't alluded to or shared with Dr. Sheppard previously.

Poirot next considered the chair pulled out from the wall. The chair blocked the window so that someone standing by the window couldn't have seen anything lying on the table. Poirot couldn't be sure what this "thing" was, but he guessed that the murderer wanted to remove it as soon as possible. Perhaps the murderer called in order to come to the house and remove the object. There were four people at the scene of the crime before the police arrived: Dr. Sheppard, Major Blunt, Raymond, and Parker. Parker had nothing to gain by calling—he would have been first on the scene no matter when the body was found.

The chair, as readers may have suspected, turns out to be a crucial part of the case, not a trivial detail. Notice that Poirot has apparently whittled down the suspects to only four people, including Dr. Sheppard. And yet Sheppard doesn't seem nervous.

Poirot next turned to the object on the table, which, after calling the company, he guessed was a dictaphone. This object would have been very difficult to remove surreptitiously—the murderer would have needed some kind of receptacle. Poirot also deduced that the voice Raymond heard at 9:30 might not have been Roger Ackroyd's literal voice, but only a recording. This would suggest that Roger was dead at 9:30, and perhaps that the murderer placed some kind of mechanical device to switch the dictaphone on at 9:30, after he or she left. The murderer must also have known Roger well enough to know about the dictaphone.

While discussing the dictaphone in Chapter 23, neither Poirot nor Raymond raised the possibility that the sound coming from Roger's office at 9:30 was a dictaphone recording, not an actual human being's voice. However, Poirot has clearly been considering this possibility for some time, confirming that he often keeps his theories hidden from other people.

Poirot next considered the shoeprints. There were three possibilities: 1) They were made by Ralph Paton; 2) They were made by someone else; 3) They were made by someone deliberately trying to incriminate Ralph Paton. Poirot rejected 2) because it was unlikely that someone would have the same kind of shoes as Ralph. Poirot considered 3) and guessed that Ralph had two similar pairs of shoes. One pair was being cleaned on the night of the murder, but the murderer could have stolen the other. This would suggest that Ralph was wearing a third pair of shoes—boots, perhaps. Poirot sent Caroline to determine whether Ralph had boots, obscuring the reason for his inquiry by asking about their *color*. When Ralph arrived at Poirot's house that morning, Poirot immediately asked him what he'd been wearing on the night of the murder; Ralph explained that he'd been wearing boots.

The murderer was clearly trying to frame Ralph Paton for the crime by wearing a pair of his shoes; therefore, it follows that the killer would have had access to Ralph's shoes, and might have known Ralph well enough to visit him at the inn. Poirot, it's now clear, misled Caroline by asking her to check on the boots' color *(much as he misled Flora by tricking her into thinking that he wanted to test whether it was possible to hear a voice from the terrace). Once again Poirot's methods are unorthodox but ingenious.*

So the murderer, Poirot now tells Dr. Sheppard, must have been at the Three Boars earlier in the day to steal Ralph's shoes. He also must have had an opportunity to steal the dagger after Flora Ackroyd examined the silver table. The murderer must have been mechanically minded, must have known Roger Ackroyd well enough to know about his dictaphone, must have been carrying a receptacle to carry the dictaphone—such as a black bag—and must have been alone in the study shortly after the crime was discovered. This person must, in fact, be Dr. Sheppard.

Here, we come to the novel's surprise ending: Dr. Sheppard is the killer. While this might not seem that surprising for contemporary readers, it was pretty shocking in the 1920s. At the time, mystery novels adhered to a very rigorous format, such that the narrator of the book was automatically considered a trustworthy character (for example, in the Sherlock Holmes novels, the trustworthy Dr. Watson narrates). Nevertheless, Christie twisted the conventions of the mystery novel by making the narrator the killer, winning both criticism and praise in the process. (This is an example of a "twist" that's partly ruined by how often it's been copied by other works since its publication. It's fairly common nowadays—see Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl for a good example.)

CHAPTER 26: AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

Poirot has just accused Dr. Sheppard of killing Roger Ackroyd. Dr. Sheppard laughs and says that Poirot is insane. Poirot then points out that Dr. Sheppard's statement was the only proof offered for the fact that the window was locked. Poirot realized that Sheppard must have killed Ackroyd before leaving the study. Then he must have run outside, changed into Ralph's shoes (which he'd kept in his bag), left prints on the windowsill, and rigged the dictaphone to play at 9:30.

In this chapter, readers begin to see how Sheppard has managed to pen an entirely truthful manuscript about the murder without giving away the fact that he's a murderer: while everything he says in the book is the truth, he's omitted a lot of information, or carefully worded his statements to avoid incriminating himself.

Dr. Sheppard protests that he had nothing to gain by killing Roger Ackroyd. On the contrary, Poirot guesses, Sheppard killed Roger to protect himself. He blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars, having gone into debt due to bad investment—and he hadn't, contrary to what he told Poirot during their first encounter, come into a legacy. Then, when Ferrars died, Sheppard had to prevent Roger from learning the blackmailer's identity. Poirot's biggest obstacle in solving the case, he admits to Dr. Sheppard, was the phone call. The steward of an American liner—one of Dr. Sheppard's own patients—had made the call from King's Abbot station. Poirot telegraphed the man earlier and received a message, confirming that Sheppard asked him to phone him from the station.

In retrospect, it's clear that Poirot was referring to Dr. Sheppard, not Ralph Paton, in Chapter 17: an ordinary, weak man, who's driven to murder because of financial difficulties and a threat to his reputation. This would indicate that Poirot has been suspicious of Dr. Sheppard for a long time. It's not clear if Poirot ever considered Sheppard a good friend, comparable to Captain Hastings, or if he only pretended to think so to trick Sheppard.

Dr. Sheppard tells Poirot that he's weary of Poirot's lecture. However, Poirot reminds Sheppard that he'll tell Inspector Raglan the truth tomorrow—unless, for Caroline's sake, Dr. Sheppard chooses an easier way out, such as an overdose. He suggests that Sheppard finish his manuscript. He also warns Sheppard not to try to silence him, as he silenced Roger Ackroyd. Sheppard smiles and says, "whatever else I may be, I am not a fool."

Poirot is prepared to bring Dr. Sheppard to the police, and yet he's also giving Sheppard another way out: suicide. While a police officer would be legally bound to arrest Sheppard, Poirot adopts a subtler, and perhaps more ethical strategy: to protect Caroline from the shock of learning that her brother is a killer, Dr. Sheppard can kill himself, and—it's implied—Poirot will convince Raglan not to publicize the findings of the investigation. (Although it also seems unlikely that Caroline would simply accept that no killer had been found at all, not to mention how all the other murder suspects would react, and how effective Caroline usually is at discovering secrets in her town.)

CHAPTER 27: APOLOGIA

It's 5 a.m., and Dr. Sheppard has just finished his manuscript. He pities Roger Ackroyd, and wishes Roger had read the letter when Sheppard gave him the chance. Or perhaps, subconsciously, he urged Roger to read the letter because he *knew* this would make Roger unlikely to read the letter.

Christie presents the book we're reading as a manuscript, penned by Dr. Sheppard and completed in his last hours of life. One reason that the reader may have doubted that Sheppard could be the killer is that he insisted that Roger read the letter, which would naturally imply that Sheppard wasn't the blackmailer. Sheppard's explanation is that he pitied Roger and didn't want to kill him. Had Roger read the letter and learned that Sheppard was the blackmailer, he might have screamed for help, or put up a fight (rather than sitting in his chair and allowing Sheppard to stab him in the back), rendering Sheppard's complicated murder plot unworkable.

Dr. Sheppard says that he used a dagger to kill Roger Ackroyd as an afterthought. He'd brought his own weapon, but decided to use one that couldn't be traced to him. Sheppard had planned to murder Roger as soon as he heard of Mrs. Ferrars's death. When he ran into Roger in the street, he half-expected Roger to have already learned he was the blackmailer. Thus, he took precautions before coming to Roger's house.

Another reason readers may have doubted that Dr. Sheppard could be the killer is that he used a weapon from the Ackroyd house, suggesting that the crime was committed by someone who had regular access to the knife. However, Sheppard explains that he simply substituted one weapon for another.

Dr. Sheppard says he is proud of himself for misleading readers, particularly when describing the time of the murder. He simply omitted everything he'd done between 8:40 and 8:50, including setting up the dictaphone, which Roger had asked him to fix, and which had been rigged like an alarm clock to go off at 9:30. Later that night, he was able to do "what little had to be done"—namely, returning the dictaphone to his bag and pushing the chair back.

Dr. Sheppard was one of the first unreliable narrators to appear in a detective novel; in fact, introducing the unreliable narrator to detective fiction is probably one of Christie's most important contributions to the genre. Nowadays, narrators can't be trusted in detective novels—they're just as likely to be suspects as any of the other characters.

Dr. Sheppard must now contemplate his "way out." To save Caroline from the truth, he says, he'll take a sleeping pill—perhaps Veronal, creating a kind of "poetic justice," since Mrs. Ferrars killed herself in the same way. He concludes, "I have no pity for myself," but adds, "I wish Hercule Poirot had never retired from work and come here to grow vegetable marrows."

The novel comes to an end with Sheppard planning to kill himself, and Poirot planning to conceal the truth from Caroline. With his signature blend of intuition, logic, and empiricism, Poirot has discovered the truth. But Poirot isn't just interested in truth—he's also committed to justice: preventing the truth from causing distress to other people, such as Sheppard's loving sister.

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