The Mysterious Affair at Styles

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AGATHA CHRISTIE

Agatha Christie was born into an upper-middle-class family in 1890. Although her father died in 1901, she had a happy childhood. Educated both at home and at school in Paris, she grew into a voracious reader. She also displayed an early talent for writing and finished her first novel in 1911, though she was unable to find a publisher for it. At the beginning of World War I, she married an army officer named Archibald Christie, but her husband's infidelity eventually led to their divorce. She published her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, in 1920. The novel features the iconic detective Hercule Poirot, whom Christie based in part on Belgian soldiers she treated as a nurse in Torquay. In 1930, she traveled to Istanbul where she met her second husband, the archaeologist Max Mallowan. The Middle East would become a setting for and influence on her mid-career novels. After returning to England, Christie wrote continuously for the rest of her life, interrupted only by a stint assisting in the pharmacy of University College Hospital in London during World War II. Christie wrote more than 60 detective novels—many featuring Poirot or Miss Marple, another recurring detective—and became the best-selling novelist of all time. She also wrote several more personal and conventional novels under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott. In recognition of her long and brilliant literary career, she was honored as Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1971. She died in Wallingford, England in 1976.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is by no means a war novel, it takes place in England during the First World War. The characters are very aware of the war's influence on their lives, especially since Hastings himself goes to Styles because he has been injured in battle and is on leave. Indeed, even the people living at Styles Court, who are very wealthy, are concerned about contributing to the country's war effort by rationing food. In the first years of the war, rationing wasn't enforced in England, but in early 1917 Germany started using submarine warfare to attack merchant ships arriving in England—a strategy aimed at diminishing England's food sources in the hopes of making it difficult for the country to continue fighting. By 1918, the government had introduced ration books, which were used to ensure that everyone received their allotment of food and nothing more. The exact year in which *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* takes place is never specified, but various comments throughout the book (about, say, giving up sugar to contribute to the war effort) suggest that it's set in the early years of the war, when rationing was still voluntary—after all, the characters tend to make a point of highlighting their *willingness* to ration supplies, implying that they have a choice. There is, then, a slight sense of overinflated nationalism at play in the novel, as the characters living in the idyllic and opulent environment of Styles Court try to make themselves seem selfless and patriotic.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Mysterious Affair at Styles isn't just Agatha Christie's debut novel—it's also the first of many books that revolve around the cunning Belgian detective Hercule Poirot. All in all, Poirot appears in 33 of Christie's novels, including *Death on the Nile*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, and *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, in which both Poirot and Arthur Hastings (the narrator of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*) return to Styles Court to investigate a new case. In terms of Agatha Christie's personal influences, she once described her sister and herself as "connoisseurs of the detective story" when they were growing up, citing *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* by Gaston Leroux as a major inspiration to her as a writer. Furthermore, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novels and stories about the famous detective Sherlock Holmes were vastly influential on Christie, especially when she was creating Hercule Poirot. Although she didn't *purposely* model Poirot on Sherlock Holmes, she later realized that the Hercule Poirot mysteries she wrote were often quite similar to Sherlock Holmes stories, considering that both Poirot and Sherlock Holmes are highly intelligent, quirky detectives who solve cases alongside rather bumbling, affable sidekicks (Hastings and Dr. Watson, respectively).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Mysterious Affair at Styles
- **When Published:** October 1920
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Fiction, Mystery, Whodunit
- **Setting:** The fictional town of Styles St. Mary in Essex, England
- **Climax:** When detective Hercule Poirot reveals that Alfred Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard are the ones who poisoned Emily Inglethorp, Alfred jumps out of his seat and lunges at Poirot.
- **Antagonist:** Alfred Inglethorp and, eventually, Evelyn Howard

EXTRA CREDIT

A Good Bet. The promotional copy accompanying *The*

Mysterious Affair at Styles claimed that Agatha Christie wrote the novel to win a bet about her ability to write a murder mystery in which it's impossible to guess the killer's identity.

Adaptation. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was famously adapted for television as part of the series *Agatha Christie's Poirot* in 1990. The actor David Suchet portrayed a version of Poirot that was very faithful to Christie's novels.

PLOT SUMMARY

Arthur Hastings is on leave from World War I when he runs into an old friend, John Cavendish. After they've gotten reacquainted, John invites Hastings to spend time at his family's country house, Styles Court. He explains that there's some tension at Styles Court these days, since his stepmother, Emily, recently married a younger man named Alfred Inglethorp. Everyone is suspicious of Alfred, thinking he's "fortune hunting." When he first arrived, he claimed to be a distant cousin to Evelyn Howard, Emily's closest friend. Emily welcomed Alfred into the home, and it wasn't long before they announced their marriage.

Hastings's first days at Styles Court mainly consist of meeting everyone who lives at the country house. He takes a particular interest in John's wife, Mary, whom he finds attractive. He also enjoys talking to Cynthia Murdock, a young woman who mixes medicines at the nearby hospital and who has been living at Styles ever since she was orphaned. Like everyone else at Styles, he dislikes Alfred Inglethorp immediately after meeting him, finding himself greatly unsettled by the man's presence.

It isn't long before calamity breaks out. Hastings hears through Cynthia that Emily and Evelyn have had a terrible fight. Evelyn apparently spoke her mind to Emily, saying Alfred is just using her for her money and waiting for her to die. She also insisted that Alfred has been having an affair with the neighbor, Mrs. Raikes, but Emily refused to believe these allegations. Evelyn has therefore decided to leave Styles at once. As everyone watches her drive away, Hastings spots a man with a big dark beard walking toward the house; it's Dr. Bauerstein, an expert in poison who's visiting from London. Bauerstein and Mary Cavendish are close friends and spend a lot of time together.

The next day, Hastings and Lawrence—John's younger brother—pay Cynthia a visit at the dispensary. Lawrence, who studied to be a doctor, opens the poison cabinet while looking for tea. He also stays behind in the dispensary while the others step out. He then goes with Hastings and Cynthia to the post office, and Hastings is astounded to run into his old friend, Hercule Poirot. Hastings insists that Poirot is an incredible detective, claiming that his friend is a celebrity of sorts. Because of this unexpected run-in, Hastings is in a good mood when he and the others return to Styles, so he's caught off guard by the tense atmosphere in the house. He and Cynthia decide to play tennis, and once they meet on the courts, Cynthia tells Hastings what she has learned: Dorcas, the maid, told her that Emily and Alfred had a terrible fight.

That evening, everyone gathers for coffee, but Emily decides to have hers in her room because she has some letters to write. Alfred pours it for her and takes it up. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Bauerstein steps inside, since Alfred saw him walking by and encouraged him to come in for coffee. At the end of the evening, Alfred announces that he has business in town and won't be back until late.

Later that night, Hastings wakes up to a terrible commotion. Awful sounds issue from Emily's bedroom, but the doors are locked. Lawrence, Hastings, and John break open the door between Emily and Cynthia's bedrooms only to find Emily in the throes of violent convulsions. It isn't long before Dr. Bauerstein makes his way into the room, saying he was walking by at just that moment. But he's too late, and Emily dies, saying "Alfred—Alfred—," though she's unable to finish her sentence. At that moment, everyone realizes Alfred isn't in the house.

Emily's regular doctor, Dr. Wilkins, comes to inspect Emily, and Dr. Bauerstein asks to have a word in private with him. Hastings senses that something is amiss, realizing that Bauerstein suspects that Emily was poisoned. Wanting to get ahead of the case, Hastings asks John if he can bring in Poirot to investigate, and though John is hesitant, he eventually agrees. Meanwhile, Wilkins and Bauerstein finish their conversation and inform John and Lawrence that, because of the strange circumstances of Emily's death, they can't issue a death certificate until there's an official inquest (a court proceeding aimed at gathering information about an incident).

Hastings rushes to Poirot's apartment and tells him everything. Poirot tells him to take his time—it's important to approach such matters levelheadedly and methodically gather the necessary details. They then go to Styles, where Poirot conducts an investigation of Emily's bedroom. He finds a piece of torn green fabric on the bolt between Cynthia and Emily's rooms, a crushed coffee cup, a still-wet coffee stain and some candlewax on the rug, Emily's dispatch case and its key, and an empty box of bromide powders, which Emily uses to help her sleep. He also roots around in the ashes of the **fireplace** and finds a scrap of heavy paper, which he thinks was part of a **will**.

After breakfast, Poirot, John, and Hastings meet with Emily's lawyer, Mr. Wells, who tells them that Emily wrote to him the day before asking him to visit in the morning—perhaps to execute a new will. He also explains that before marrying Alfred, Emily's most recent will stipulated that John would inherit her fortune. According to British law, though, this will was overridden when Emily married Alfred, though it's unclear if she knew this. When Mr. Wells and John try to go through Emily's papers, they discover that her dispatch case has been broken into—somebody forced the lock. Poirot is shocked when

they tell him this, since he locked the case only an hour before, meaning that the murderer must have taken the risk of sneaking in and stealing something from the case while everyone was still in the house. Poirot is so excited by this development that he compulsively straightens the items on the mantelpiece in Emily's bedroom, and Hastings notices that his hands are shaking violently.

At the inquest several days later, Alfred doesn't provide a plausible alibi to prove his innocence. In fact, he does such a bad job of sounding innocent that it rankles Poirot, who pleads with an old colleague, Inspector Japp, not to arrest Alfred. Japp thinks he's crazy, but he also respects Poirot, so he agrees to hear him out. Poirot then gathers everyone (including Japp) back at Styles, and he gets Alfred to confess to why he won't say where he was on the afternoon that somebody who looked like him bought strychnine from Mr. Mace, a local pharmacist who testified at the inquest. The reason, Alfred admits, is that he was with Mrs. Raikes and didn't want anyone to know. As such, Japp doesn't arrest him.

Not long after this meeting, Hastings off-handedly mentions to Poirot that Dr. Bauerstein stopped by on the night of Emily's death and had a cup of coffee. Poirot is beside himself—this detail changes everything. He borrows John's car and drives to a nearby laboratory to have a sample of cocoa tested. Emily used to have cocoa each night, but Poirot discovered that a housekeeper named Annie—who always brought the cocoa upstairs—saw what she thought was salt on the saucer that night. She gave the cocoa to Emily anyway, and now Poirot wants to have it tested, even though Bauerstein supposedly already had this done.

In the coming days, Poirot and Hastings find a fake beard in a box of dress-up clothes in the attic at Styles—an important detail, since Poirot suspects that somebody impersonated Alfred when buying the strychnine from Mr. Mace. Around this time, Hastings grows frustrated with Poirot, who never fully explains his theories and is often quite secretive. Tired of the entire affair, Hastings goes for a walk in the woods and takes a nap. Upon awakening, he hears John and Mary arguing with each other nearby. John asks Mary to stop seeing Dr. Bauerstein, but she refuses, pointing out that John spends plenty of time with certain people Mary would rather he not see. She then leaves John in the woods, at which point Hastings emerges and acts like he didn't overhear anything. Upset about Mary's relationship with Dr. Bauerstein, Hastings forms a theory that Bauerstein is the killer, excitedly telling John what he thinks and insisting that Bauerstein poisoned Emily's coffee when he first came into the house on the night of the murder.

But Hastings's theory falls flat later that day when he goes to check in on Bauerstein and discovers he's been arrested—but not for murdering Emily, Poirot later tells him. Rather, Bauerstein has been arrested for espionage; he's a foreign spy, not a murderer. Poirot informs Hastings that Bauerstein didn't even have feelings for Mary. Rather, he just wanted everyone to think they were having an affair, since the gossip would account for why he was always sneaking around at odd times. Later that same day, Hastings finds Poirot in a state of agitation, since he has figured out who the killer is but isn't sure if he should say anything. After all, he says, a "woman's happiness" is at stake, though he won't elaborate. Upon returning to Styles that evening, they discover that John Cavendish has been arrested for the murder.

John stands trial for murder two months later. Mary rents a house in London so everyone can stay there while the hearing takes place. During the trial, John's defense attorney implies that there's just as much evidence to convict Lawrence as there is to convict John. Still, the prosecution makes a compelling case against John, revealing that Inspector Japp found a vial of strychnine in his bedroom—the same vial somebody apparently bought from Mr. Mace while disguised as Alfred. Also in John's bedroom was a monocle similar to one Alfred wears. But John's lawyer focuses on Lawrence's suspicious behavior, pointing out that Evelyn Howard found a letter addressed to Lawrence from a famous costume company, ultimately suggesting that Lawrence ordered the fake beard and used it to buy strychnine while dressed as Alfred. There's also the fact that Lawrence visited the dispensary the day before Emily's death. He not only opened a cupboard containing strychnine, but also touched a bottle of it, according to a fingerprint analysis.

After the first day of the trial, Poirot is disturbed. He needs to find one last piece of evidence to prove his suspicions. Hastings notices that Poirot's hands are shaking as he speaks, and he comments that he has only ever seen his friend's hands shake once before: when he was straightening out the items on the mantelpiece after discovering that Emily's dispatch case had been forced open by someone in the house. This memory triggers something in Poirot's mind, and he excitedly runs away. The trial will resume on Monday, and Poirot doesn't return until Sunday evening. Upon his return, he summons everyone (including Alfred, who's staying in a separate apartment) to explain what he has found. He then reveals that he discovered a letter from Alfred to Evelyn Howard—a letter that told her not to worry about the delay in their plan and insisting that they would lead a life of happiness together once Emily was dead. The letter was in a vase on Emily's mantelpiece; Poirot thought to look there because Hastings reminded him that he had straightened that vase after finding the dispatch case unlocked, which made him realize that he shouldn't have needed to do this, since he had *already* straightened it when he first entered the room that morning. He thus knew to look inside the vase and ultimately found the letter, in which Alfred praises Evelyn's idea to use bromide powders, though it's unclear at first what this means. But Poirot explains exactly what happened: Alfred and Evelyn are secret lovers who poisoned Emily in the hopes of making off with her fortune. But they didn't poison her

coffee. Rather, they added her bromide powders to a medicinal tonic she was already taking on a doctor's orders. The bromide caused the strychnine to crystalize at the bottom of the bottle, and Alfred made sure to carefully pour out the medicine each night for his wife so that her final dose would contain enough strychnine to kill her. Emily was supposed to take her final dose on the evening Evelyn left, but she ended up forgetting and taking it the next night. For this reason, Alfred wrote a letter to her assuring her that the murder would take place the following night, but he never had a chance to mail it.

According to Poirot, Emily couldn't find any stamps on her last night amongst the living, so she forced open Alfred's writing desk, where she found the incriminating letter to Evelyn. She immediately realized she had to write a new will that wouldn't benefit Alfred, which is why she asked her lawyer to come the following day, since she didn't suspect she would die that very night. As Poirot goes through what happened, Alfred lunges at him, but Poirot steps aside and lets him fall to the floor. Alfred and Evelyn are then arrested.

In the aftermath of the entire ordeal, Poirot answers some of Hastings's lingering questions. Evelyn, he says, planted incriminating evidence against both John and Lawrence while everyone was busy suspecting Alfred of the crime. Poirot, for his part, knew from the beginning that Alfred was guilty, but he didn't want him to get arrested right away, since there wasn't enough evidence to convict him. Alfred knew this and was aware that nobody can be tried twice for the same crime in England. He therefore *wanted* to be arrested before the case against him was very strong. But Poirot stopped that. Of course, Poirot also knew that John Cavendish wasn't guilty, but he didn't say anything because he wanted to help him and Mary—he knew they both loved each other despite the tension in their relationship, and he was confident that going through the hardship of a murder trial would bring them together. He was right: John and Mary are deeply in love once again. As for Hastings, he's disappointed that *he* doesn't have a lover, but Poirot tells him not to despair, suggesting that there will be new opportunities to meet women whenever they investigate their next case together.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hercule Poirot – Hercule Poirot is a fastidious and intelligent Belgian detective living temporarily in England. Arthur Hastings—the novel's narrator—met him while serving in World War I, and Poirot's powers of deduction made a significant impact on him, ultimately giving him the desire to become a detective himself. Hastings is therefore delighted when he bumps into Poirot while in Styles, and he immediately brings Poirot to Styles Court in the aftermath of Emily Inglethorp's murder, confident that his friend will be able to crack the case. An organized, quick-thinking man, Poirot believes in approaching a mystery in a levelheaded way, always focusing on every detail. For Poirot, no piece of information is too small or insignificant to consider. In fact, he tries to show Hastings that sometimes the details that yield the most important results are the ones that seem out of place or hardly worthy of consideration. Many people overlook such minutia, but Poirot believes in taking *everything* into account and asking himself if all of the details of a case make sense together. He also believes in the value of keeping his hypotheses to himself, which is why he often refrains from telling Hastings what he's thinking. His secrecy annoys Hastings, but there's a good reason he doesn't want to reveal what he thinks about the case: he prefers to work in the dark, allowing murderers to think he has no idea they committed the crime. Even though Poirot's methods often seem incomprehensible and exhausting, everyone in the novel—including Hastings—respects him and gives him room to formulate his theories in his own time.

Captain Arthur Hastings – The novel's narrator, Arthur Hastings is a 30-year-old soldier on leave from World War I after having been injured in battle. While on leave, Hastings runs into John Cavendish, an old friend who invites him to spend time at Styles Court, his family's estate in the English countryside. Hastings is glad to accept this invitation, especially when he meets John's beautiful wife, Mary Cavendish, to whom Hastings takes an immediate liking. Before long, though, Hastings gets swept up in trying to help his old friend Hercule Poirot solve the murder of John's stepmother, Emily Inglethorp. Hastings has grand ideas of becoming a detective himself, priding himself in having "a certain talent for deduction," so he's quite excited to work alongside Poirot. His contributions to the investigation, however, are rarely of much use, and it soon becomes clear that Hastings lacks the knack for detective work that Poirot exemplifies so perfectly. At times, Hastings even grows frustrated because he can't follow Poirot's reasoning, and though he thinks of himself as a keen observer of human behavior, he's actually rather gullible and impulsive. In contrast to Poirot, he often seems very naïve and incredulous, but he still unwittingly manages to help the skilled detective from time to time by accidentally pointing something out that gives Poirot a new idea. In this way, he sees himself as part of the investigation, even though Poirot ends up having to explain to him how, exactly, he cracked the case.

Emily Inglethorp – Emily Inglethorp is John and Lawrence Cavendish's stepmother. She married their father when they were still young boys, so they see her as their real mother. When John and Lawrence's father died, he left the family's country house, Styles Court, and most of his savings to Emily—an arrangement Hastings thinks was unfair, since John and Lawrence have yet to see their inheritance. John, however, doesn't mind because Emily has always been kind to him, and

he's confident that she'll leave him and Lawrence with a handsome inheritance. In general, Emily is a charitable person who devotes herself to helping people—she even takes in a young woman named Cynthia, who needs financial support because she's an orphan. She's also on very good terms with Evelyn Howard, who helps her with whatever she needs and, through this relationship, eventually becomes her closest friend. At the same time, though, Emily is rather stubborn, and though she likes to show outward kindness to people, everyone seems to know that she always wants things to go her way and that she's not actually as willing to part with her money as it might seem. But none of this bothers her family until she marries a younger man named Alfred Inglethorp. Everyone thinks Alfred just married Emily for her money, and the fact that she dies from being poisoned just three months after their marriage aligns with their suspicion that he killed her—which, of course, is eventually what Hercule Poirot proves.

Alfred Inglethorp – Alfred Inglethorp is Emily Inglethorp's new husband, whom she marries about three months before the primary action of the novel takes place. With a black beard and a distinctive way of dressing, Alfred stands out in the small country town of Styles. More importantly, the other people living at Styles Court are all suspicious of him, finding it unlikely that he—as a younger man—actually loves Emily. John Cavendish tells Hastings that Alfred is clearly "fortune hunting" by marrying Emily—that is, marrying a wealthy older woman and waiting for her to die so he can take her money for himself. Right away, everyone suspects that he's the murderer, and it's true that he doesn't have a very good alibi at the inquest (the initial court hearing). But Poirot senses something strange about his behavior, realizing that Alfred is *trying* to look guilty. He then pieces together that Alfred wants to be arrested before there's much evidence against him, knowing the case would be too weak to convict him. Because a person can't be tried twice for the same crime in England, Alfred—who did, indeed, poison Emily—would ensure his own freedom if he got himself arrested right away on feeble evidence. For this reason, Poirot keeps Inspector Japp from arresting Alfred, thus making time for Poirot to figure out that Alfred and Evelyn Howard worked together to murder Emily. Although Evelyn pretends to hate Alfred, the truth is that they're in love (even though they're cousins). Their plan was to poison Emily and then leave the country with her fortune, but Poirot ruins their scheme by discovering what they did.

Evelyn Howard – A straightforward, blunt woman who likes to speak her mind, Evelyn Howard is Emily Inglethorp's closest friend. She lives at Styles Court and helps out around the house, essentially becoming a member of the family. Despite how close she is with Emily, though, it's clear that their relational dynamic is uneven, as Emily clearly holds most of the power in their friendship. When Emily marries Alfred Inglethorp (who claims to be Evelyn's distant cousin), Evelyn makes it clear that she doesn't approve. Two days before Emily's death by poisoning, Evelyn tells her friend how she feels about her new husband, insisting that Alfred only married her for her fortune and alleging that he's having an affair with their neighbor, Mrs. Raikes. The two friends have such a terrible fight that Evelyn leaves that very evening. In the days after Emily's poisoning, Evelyn returns to Styles and immediately makes it known that she believes Alfred is to blame. She makes this allegation whenever she has the chance, wanting to ensure that Hercule Poirot pursues Alfred and gets him arrested. However, Poirot later finds a letter from Alfred to Evelyn that changes the way he understands their relationship. They don't hate each other, he realizes—they're secret lovers. The letter reveals that they worked together to poison Emily and planned to escape the country with her fortune after framing John Cavendish for the murder. And if it weren't for Poirot, this might have actually happened. As it stands, though, Poirot reveals what they've done, and they're both arrested.

John Cavendish – John Cavendish is a middle-aged man Hastings used to know as a boy. Hastings views John as affable but somewhat unintelligent, but the novel subtly mocks his condescending attitude toward his friend by implying that Hastings himself is no smarter than John. Having not seen Hastings in years, John invites him to live for a while at his family country home, Styles Court, where he himself currently lives with his wife, Mary Cavendish, and his stepmother, Emily Inglethorp. He and Mary have been living at Styles Court because they're in a financial bind, partially because his stepmother won't increase his allowance, but also because his father's will stipulated that the family fortune should go to Emily while she's alive, not to his sons—something Hastings thinks is unfair, though John himself has accepted the arrangement, since his stepmother treats him kindly and will eventually pass along the family money to him and his brother, Lawrence. And yet, things get complicated when Hercule Poirot investigates Emily Inglethorp's murder and discovers that her fortune is actually slated to go to her new husband, Alfred. And though John wasn't the one to kill his stepmother, Alfred and Evelyn—the real murderers—plant evidence to make it seem like he did. He's therefore brought to trial, but Poirot gets him off the hook by revealing Alfred and Evelyn's plan at the last minute. Throughout all of this excitement, John has carried on an affair with a neighbor, Mrs. Raikes, largely because he thinks Mary doesn't love him. But when Mary is forced to watch him stand trial for murder, her affection toward him is renewed, and they start afresh as a couple in love.

Mary Cavendish – Mary Cavendish is John Cavendish's wife. Hastings immediately finds himself attracted to her and her charming ways, but it isn't long before he feels unsettled by her close relationship with Dr. Bauerstein, a visiting doctor with whom Mary spends the majority of her free time. Because he's

jealous of Dr. Bauerstein, Hastings is all too excited to tell John at one point that he thinks Bauerstein is the killer—a theory he thinks John will like, since he has overheard John and Mary arguing about how much time she spends with Bauerstein. Of course, Hastings is wrong about this, though it eventually emerges that Bauerstein *is* somewhat sinister, since he's later arrested for espionage. Hastings assumes Mary Cavendish will be devastated by this news, but Poirot notes that Mary isn't actually in love with Bauerstein. Rather, Mary is in love with her husband, even though that wasn't the case when she first married him. Indeed, their marriage was based on a mutual agreement to spend their lives together despite the fact that Mary didn't reciprocate John's affection. That soon changed, though, and now Mary has come to love John even though he has been carrying on an affair with Mrs. Raikes. Poirot recognizes that Mary and John have feelings for each other but have trouble expressing themselves, so he decides to let John be put on trial for Emily Inglethorp's murder even though Poirot knows John is innocent. His theory is that the hardship of the trial will throw Mary and John back together—which, of course, is exactly what happens.

Lawrence Cavendish – Lawrence Cavendish is Emily Inglethorp's stepson and John Cavendish's brother. Unlike John, he's shy and reserved, which sometimes makes him hard to read. For this reason, he comes under suspicion after Emily's murder, especially because he's the only person who insists on the theory that she could have died of natural causes. Poirot finds this suggestion strange, considering that Lawrence originally trained to be a doctor but then decided to become a poet. Given his medical education, Lawrence should be perfectly capable of recognizing the effects of the strychnine poison on his stepmother, and yet he insists that she simply died of heart failure. What's more, he made a point of visiting Cynthia Murdock at the dispensary (where she mixes medicine) the day before the murder, and while he was there, he even opened a cupboard containing strychnine. However, Poirot later reveals that Lawrence's suspicious behavior has nothing to do with murdering his stepmother. Rather, Lawrence is hiding something completely different: namely, the fact that he's in love with Cynthia and doesn't want her to get in trouble. Nobody knows he has feelings for Cynthia, including Cynthia herself, but this doesn't stop him from trying to shield her from harm. When he and the others first entered Emily Inglethorp's bedroom on the night of the murder, he was shocked to see that the door leading to Cynthia's bedroom had been unbolted. He therefore thought she was the murderer, and he didn't want anyone to find out, so he tried to convince everyone that Emily wasn't poisoned to death. After Poirot reveals Alfred and Evelyn to be the real murderers, Lawrence and Cynthia finally start a romantic relationship.

Cynthia Murdock –Cynthia Murdock is a young woman living at Styles Court. She's the daughter of a good family friend of Emily Inglethorp, who takes her in when she becomes an orphan. Emily promises to leave Cynthia some money when she dies, but she doesn't actually do this, leaving Cynthia to worry what she should do. She even asks Hastings if he thinks she should leave Styles, since she thinks everyone—and especially Lawrence—hates her. She also comes under some suspicion because she works at the dispensary, where she has ready access to strychnine. What's more, Poirot reveals that the door between Cynthia and Emily's room, which is normally locked, was unbolted on the night of the murder. Lawrence noticed this right away, but he tried to hide it from the others—not because he hates Cynthia, as she thinks, but because he's secretly in love with her. In the aftermath of the entire ordeal, Poirot helps Cynthia and Lawrence see that they have feelings for each other, inspiring them to begin a romantic relationship.

Dr. Bauerstein –Dr. Bauerstein is an expert on poisons living temporarily in Styles. After learning from the others at Styles Court that Bauerstein is visiting from London, Hastings doesn't question why, exactly, a renowned specialist would spend time in a quiet country town. Instead, Hastings focuses on how jealous he is of Bauerstein, who spends a lot of time with Mary Cavendish. However, Poirot later reveals that Dr. Bauerstein doesn't actually have feelings for Mary. Indeed, the only reason he spends so much time with her is because he's a foreign spy who needs a good reason for sneaking around at strange hours. If everyone thinks he's having an affair, then, they won't question his behavior any further. Bauerstein's plan works rather well for a while, but he's eventually arrested for espionage.

Dorcas –Dorcas is one of Emily Inglethorp's housekeepers. A devoted employee, she's one of the only people who seems to care about Emily's death. She does whatever she can to help Poirot crack the case, answering all of his questions and giving him inside knowledge about what goes on at Styles Court.

Annie –Annie is a housekeeper at Styles Court. She tells Poirot and Hastings that she brings Emily Inglethorp a cup of cocoa each night before bed. On the night of the murder, she noticed there was what she believed to be salt on the cocoa cup's saucer, but she served it to Emily anyway. This information eventually helps Poirot figure out that Mary drugged Emily with a sleeping aid so she could sneak into her room that night and look at a piece of paper she *thought* would reveal John's infidelity, though she never found the paper (which didn't, of course, reveal anything about her husband's affair).

Mrs. Raikes –Mrs. Raikes is Emily Inglethorp's neighbor. Alfred Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard spread the rumor that Alfred and Mrs. Raikes are having an affair, thus justifying Alfred's supposed unwillingness to testify as to his whereabouts on the afternoon he allegedly bought strychnine. In reality, Alfred and Evelyn *want* the police to arrest Alfred for not having an alibi, since he could then claim he was simply having an affair with Mrs. Raikes and didn't want to say as much at first. Their hope is

that he'd be acquitted, and then he could never be tried for the crime again, since a person can't be tried twice for the same crime in England. Poirot, however, stops Inspector Japp from arresting Alfred, thus spoiling his and Evelyn's plan. He also tells Hastings later on that Mrs. Raikes is actually having an affair with John Cavendish.

Mr. Mace – Mr. Mace is a local pharmacist who sells strychnine to a person he *thinks* is Alfred Inglethorp. He admits at the inquest that he knows he shouldn't have done this, since only authorized people are allowed to purchase strychnine. But the townspeople in Styles greatly respect anyone who lives in Emily Inglethorp's house, so Mr. Mace made an exception.

Inspector Jimmy Japp –Jimmy Japp is an inspector at the Scotland Yard (the London police). He has worked with Poirot before and thus has a deep and abiding respect for him. Although he and his colleague, Superintendent Summerhaye, want to arrest Alfred Inglethorp right away, Poirot convinces them to hold off. In doing so, Poirot ensures that Alfred can be arrested and tried later on, when there's more evidence to convict him.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Superintendent Summerhaye –Superintendent Summerhaye works with Inspector Japp at the Scotland Yard (the London police). He wants to arrest Alfred Inglethorp at the very beginning of the case, but Poirot convinces Japp—and, in turn, Summerhaye—to wait.

Sir Ernest Heavywether –Sir Ernest Heavywether is the lawyer who defends John Cavendish when he's accused of killing Emily Inglethorp.

Mr. Philips –Mr. Philips is the prosecution lawyer who makes a case against John Cavendish when he's accused of killing Emily Inglethorp.

Dr. Wilkins –Dr. Wilkins is Emily Inglethorp's doctor. He quickly agrees with Dr. Bauerstein that Emily was poisoned, though people like Lawrence and John don't seem to think he's a very knowledgeable physician.

Mr. Wells –Mr. Wells is Emily Inglethorp's lawyer and is in charge of sorting out her will.

Manning –Manning is a gardener who works for Emily Inglethorp at Styles Court.

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.

LOGIC AND DEDUCTION

The Mysterious Affair at Styles centers around the murder of Emily Inglethorp, but the novel is really about the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot and his incredible powers of deduction. The murder takes place quite early in the novel, and Poirot spends the rest of the book piecing together what happened. His willingness to pay close attention to each and every aspect of the case ultimately suggests that successful detective work requires fastidious organization, extreme patience, and a keen eye for details that seem out of place. To highlight the importance of this kind of levelheaded reasoning, the novel juxtaposes Poirot's highly methodical mind with Hastings's bumbling and impulsive nature. Whereas Hastings (the narrator) often gets excited and jumps to conclusions, Poirot takes time to work out every detail, always confirming that things make sense before acting on his assumptions. In particular, he pays close attention to things that don't add up, never letting himself discard a piece of information simply because it doesn't make sense. In fact, he regards details that don't make sense as especially important, approaching any lapse of reason or logic as a potential clue.

At the initial court hearing, for instance, Alfred Inglethorp doesn't try very hard to prove his own innocence—it even seems like he says all the wrong things *on purpose*. Whereas Hastings doesn't make much of this, Poirot notices Alfred's strange behavior and realizes he's behaving irrationally. At first, Alfred's reasons for not trying to clear his name are unclear to Poirot, but it's exactly this lack of clarity that eventually helps the detective crack the case: Alfred *wanted* to be arrested because he knew the evidence was—at that point—too thin to actually convict him, and a person can't be tried twice for the same crime in England. What initially seemed like irrational behavior was therefore actually very logical and deliberate. Poirot uses a similar kind of deductive reasoning when he hypothesizes that Emily Inglethorp must have burned her will before dying. After all, she wouldn't have wanted a fire in her bedroom on a hot summer night unless she intended to burn something. Everyone overlooks this detail, but Poirot seizes on the fire because it doesn't fit in with the rest of the story. Instead of focusing exclusively on evidence that makes sense, then, the novel suggests that paying attention to out-of-place or illogical details is often the key to good detective work.

LOVE AND PASSION

At first glance, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* might not seem like a book about romance, but the vast majority of the characters are ultimately driven by love or desire. Like many works of detective fiction, the novel throws suspicion on almost all of its characters, casting doubt on everyone from the victim's stepsons to a young woman the victim herself took into her home. Although all of Emily Inglethorp's potential murderers attract suspicion in different

ways, most of them have something in common: their dubious behavior usually arises from clandestine matters of the heart. For instance, both John and Lawrence Cavendish—the victim's stepsons—have secret romantic feelings for other characters, and these feelings often make it difficult to discern their true motives. As a result, they seem guilty at various points throughout the novel, since they're often trying to hide something about their private lives. For instance, when Lawrence insists that Emily Inglethorp wasn't poisoned, he attracts suspicion, but he's really just trying to direct attention away from the woman he loves, Cynthia, since he thinks she's the one who killed his stepmother. In this way, it becomes clear that strong romantic feelings can cloud a person's better judgment, since Lawrence runs the risk of getting himself convicted simply because he's so focused on protecting the woman he loves. To that end, the novel suggests that romantic feelings are often so powerful that they drive people to do crazy things—like, for instance, commit murder, which is exactly what happens when Alfred Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard fall in love and decide to kill Emily Inglethorp. Although the novel doesn't condemn romance in general, then, it does outline the ways in which getting carried away with clandestine love can lead people to behave irrationally or even immorally.

SUSPENSE, INTRIGUE, AND SECRECY

As a detective novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* hinges on the suspense and intrigue of a single question: who killed Emily Inglethorp? The answer, of course, is shrouded in a compelling kind of confusion and secrecy, but the cunning detective Hercule Poirot doesn't shy away from mystery. Rather, Poirot uses suspense and secrecy to his own benefit, believing that the best way to solve a crime is by working in the dark. For this reason, he's extremely cagey about his thought process as he goes about solving the case, often annoying Hastings by refusing to answer questions about what he thinks has happened. In fact, Hastings even starts to doubt Poirot and his abilities as a detective, since his friend only lets him in on certain parts of his thought process, ultimately leading Hastings to think he's on the wrong track. But Poirot's refusal to explain his thinking is actually a calculated move. He knows Hastings is a well-intentioned but rather naïve man who would probably have trouble hiding his knowledge if Poirot were to loop him in. And this, Poirot believes, would put the entire investigation in jeopardy, since it's quite possible that Hastings would, in his excitement, accidentally reveal his suspicions to the murderer—something Poirot believes would be catastrophic, since there's no better way to catch criminals than to let them think nobody suspects them. Poirot, for his part, wants to be so subtle with his investigation that the murderer thinks he has no idea who committed the crime. "We must be so intelligent that he does not suspect us of being intelligent at all," Poirot says to Hastings. By showcasing Poirot's unwillingness to explain himself, then, the novel not only creates a feeling of suspense that keeps everyone—including its own characters—on their toes, but also suggests that detectives can harness the power of secrecy and use it for their own benefit.

WEALTH, INHERITANCE, AND POWER

The Mysterious Affair at Styles demonstrates the many ways in which wealth can complicate life and put a strain on personal relationships. As a wealthy woman, Emily Inglethorp appears to be aware of the power she holds over people because of her money, and though she makes a show of devoting herself to charity, she also seems to curry favor with people by indicating that she'll look after them financially. When she takes a young woman named Cynthia into her household, for instance, she promises to leave money for her when she dies—but when she actually dies, she doesn't leave anything behind for the young woman. To that end, Emily Inglethorp changes her will quite often, drawing up a new one at least once a year (and even more frequently in the months leading up to her death). She thus keeps her loved ones in a state of anticipation, essentially giving them extra motivation to treat her well—a rather manipulative way to approach personal connections. At the same time, though, Mrs. Inglethorp *does* have good reason to keep a tight hold on her "purse strings" (as Hastings puts it), since there are people in her life who actively want to steal her fortune—namely, her best friend and her husband. And yet, Evelyn and Alfred are the last people she would suspect of wanting to dupe her, ultimately implying that it can be quite difficult for wealthy people to recognize when others want to take advantage of them. In turn, the novel hints that wealth can give people power and influence while simultaneously making them vulnerable to manipulation.

SYMBOLS

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

THE FIRE

The fire burning in Emily Inglethorp's bedroom on the night of her murder symbolizes how easy it can be to overlook clues that otherwise seem obvious. Nobody except Poirot makes much of the fact that Emily had a fire going in her bedroom, instead latching onto other details at the scene of the crime—like, for instance, the spilled coffee, the crushed cup, the upturned bedside table, or the green fabric found on the door leading to Cynthia's room. Of course, some of these details end up helping Poirot piece together what happened that night, but the fire is perhaps the most conspicuous clue, even if it's also the one hardly anyone thinks about. Poirot,

however, identifies its significance almost right away and even urges Hastings to consider the weather on the day of Emily's death. He tries to get his friend to think along these lines because doing so would help Hastings see that it was very strange for Emily to have a fire burning in her bedroom on one of the hottest nights of the entire year. And yet, Hastings *still* doesn't give the fire any thought and is therefore surprised that Poirot is able to point to it as evidence that Emily wanted to destroy one of her **wills**. After all, there's virtually no reason she would want a fire in her bedroom on such a hot night other than to destroy an important piece of paper. The fact that the fire is such a glaring clue that everyone ignores thus embodies the human tendency to ignore things hiding in plain sight.

THE WILLS

Emily Inglethorp's many wills represent the transactional nature of the relationships she has with most people in her life. Everyone, it seems, is somewhat eager to *get* something from her—namely, her money or financial support. Of course, characters like John Cavendish are more or less content to wait patiently until she dies, at which point her fortune will be divvied up amongst her loved ones. Other people, though, are a bit more anxious to attain her wealth—like, of course, Alfred Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard, who murder her just to steal her fortune. On a more immediate level, Emily's wills also symbolize her shifting affinities and the way she tends to use her money to endear herself to people. For instance, she originally tells Cynthia that she will provide for her. In return, Cynthia lends a hand around the house, almost as if she's an unofficial secretary or housekeeper. In the end, though, Emily doesn't leave her anything in her will. What's more, the fact that Emily draws up a new will every year or so suggests that she likes to keep her loved ones on their toes, perhaps as a way of making sure they treat her well and do what she wants. In this sense, the wills themselves come to stand for how money can complicate personal connections and even add a manipulative element to the way people approach their relationships with others.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* published in 2019.

Chapter 1: I Go to Styles Quotes

He had married two years ago, and had taken his wife to live at Styles, though I entertained a shrewd suspicion that he would have preferred his mother to increase his allowance, which would have enabled him to have a home of his own. [Emily Inglethorp], however, was a lady who liked to make her own plans, and expected other people to fall in with them, and in this case she certainly had the whip hand, namely: the purse strings.

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker), John Cavendish, Emily Inglethorp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4-5

Explanation and Analysis

When Hastings runs into his old friend John Cavendish for the first time in many years, John tells him that he's living with his mother at the family's country house, Styles Court. Hastings senses that John would rather live alone with his wife but that he can't because he doesn't have enough money to do so, and he goes on to make a crucial observation about Emily Inglethorp—namely, that she's somewhat stingy with her money. Of course, it will later emerge that Emily is involved with a number of charities, but that doesn't change the fact that she herself is hesitant to give her friends and family any of her fortune, which is why Hastings implies that she keeps a tight control of the family "purse strings." From the very beginning, then, readers have good reason to suspect John Cavendish of murdering his stepmother, since he clearly needs money—and killing his stepmother would likely mean he would finally gain his inheritance.

"[…] The fellow must be at least twenty years younger than she is! It's simply barefaced fortune hunting; but there you are—she is her own mistress, and she's married him."

Related Characters: John Cavendish (speaker), Captain Arthur Hastings, Emily Inglethorp, Alfred Inglethorp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

In the first conversation Hastings has with John Cavendish

in many years, John tells him that the current situation at Styles Court would be pleasant and tolerable if only his stepmother hadn't married Alfred Inglethorp. He explains that Alfred is a much younger man who appeared out of nowhere. John, for his part, thinks it's obvious what Alfred is doing: he's "fortune hunting," which is to say that he married Emily hoping that she would soon die and leave him with her massive estate and fortune. John easily recognizes that this is what's happening, but his stepmother is strong-willed and difficult to reason with—she is, in his words, "her own mistress," meaning that she makes decisions for herself and won't let others talk her out of something she wants. As a result, she has married Alfred Inglethorp against the better judgment of everyone at Styles Court, ultimately putting her riches—and some would argue her *life*—in jeopardy for the chance to embark on a new romantic relationship.

> His watchful and attentive manner never varied. From the very first I took a firm and rooted dislike to him, and I flatter myself that my first judgements are usually fairly shrewd.

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker), Alfred Inglethorp, Emily Inglethorp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Hastings arrives at Styles Court, he meets Alfred Inglethorp for the first time. Right away, he feels unnerved by Alfred's presence, and he attributes this unsettled feeling to his own "shrewd" ability to read people right after meeting them. Although there's no reason to doubt what Hastings says at this point in the novel, the investigative work he eventually does with Hercule Poirot suggests that he has an overinflated sense of his own powers of observation. In the end, he's right to be suspicious of Alfred Inglethorp, but it's not necessarily impressive that he takes an instant disliking to him—after all, John Cavendish has already told him all about Alfred, saying that he's "fortune hunting" by marrying Emily and that he only wants the old woman's money. Given this background information, it's no wonder that Hastings is suspicious of Alfred as soon as meets him; in fact, he was probably suspicious of the man *before* meeting him. His statement here about making "shrewd" judgments thus illustrates his general lack of self-awareness, which will lead to some rather humorous moments throughout the novel.

> "Like a good detective story myself," remarked Miss Howard. "Lots of nonsense written, though. Criminal discovered in last chapter. Everyone dumbfounded. Real crime—you'd know at once."
>
> "There have been a great number of undiscovered crimes," I argued.
>
> "Don't mean the police, but the people that are right in it. The family. You couldn't really hoodwink them. They'd know."

Related Characters: Evelyn Howard, Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

In a conversation with Hastings about detective work, Evelyn Howard insists that murder mystery stories are entertaining but unrealistic. According to her, people who are closely involved in a case would know right away who the killer is. In a way, her remark is somewhat strategic. Although nobody knows it yet, she and Alfred Inglethorp have already planned to kill Emily, and part of their scheme depends on the fact that everyone will immediately suspect Alfred of killing his new wife. Evelyn and Alfred *want* people to think this, since it will lead to Alfred's arrest. By that point in the investigation, though, there won't be enough evidence to convict Alfred, so he *won't* be convicted. And because a person can't be tried twice for the same crime in England, Alfred will end up going free for the rest of his life. In turn, Evelyn's remark in this seemingly innocent conversation subtly urges Hastings and the other residents at Styles Court to impulsively trust their gut instincts, which Evelyn and Alfred intend to manipulate to their own advantage.

> "Look after her, Mr. Hastings. My poor Emily. They're a lot of sharks—all of them. Oh, I know what I'm talking about. There isn't one of them that's not hard up and trying to get money out of her. I've protected her as much as I could. Now I'm out of the way, they'll impose upon her."

Related Characters: Evelyn Howard (speaker), Captain Arthur Hastings, Emily Inglethorp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Hastings hasn't been at Styles Court for long before Evelyn Howard has a nasty quarrel with her good friend Emily Inglethorp. Evelyn finally tells Emily how she really feels about Alfred, saying that he only married her for her money and that he's having an affair with their neighbor, Mrs. Raikes. Emily refuses to believe anything her friend has said, so Evelyn leaves Styles Court. Before she does, though, she tells Hastings to "look after" Emily. Her parting words are somewhat ominous, as she assures him that *everyone* at Styles is untrustworthy. "They're a lot of sharks—all of them," she says, going on to insist that all of the residents at Styles are just "trying to get money out of" Emily one way or another. By issuing this warning, Evelyn makes yet another strategic move to hide the fact that she and Alfred are actually working together to murder Emily. She purposefully makes Hastings suspicious of everyone in the house, thus making it that much harder for him to narrow down the *real* killers.

Chapter 2: The 16th and 17th of July Quotes

"If you people only knew how fatally easy it is to poison someone by mistake, you wouldn't joke about it. Come on, let's have tea. We've got all sorts of secret stores in that cupboard. No, Lawrence—that's the poison cupboard. The big cupboard—that's right."

Related Characters: Cynthia Murdock (speaker), Captain Arthur Hastings, Lawrence Cavendish

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

When Hastings and Lawrence Cavendish decide to visit Cynthia at the dispensary, Hastings makes a joke about medical workers accidentally poisoning their patients. Cynthia doesn't like his joke, insisting that the matter isn't funny. It's "fatally easy," she says, to "poison someone by mistake." The entire conversation foreshadows Emily Inglethorp's unfortunate fate, since the old woman will soon be poisoned in her own home. Perhaps more importantly, though, what she says here contains a potential clue to the identity of Emily's murderer. When she says, "No, Lawrence—that's the poison cupboard," readers realize that Lawrence has been handling deadly poisons, a fact that will later seem very suspicious. Lawrence, after all, could potentially benefit from murdering his stepmother, since doing so would get him that much closer to inheriting the family fortune (though something would also have to happen to John in order for Lawrence to fully benefit). In this moment, then, the novel offers up a potential clue, and though Lawrence ends up being one of *many* suspects, his proximity to the poison certainly makes his behavior seem quite fishy.

Chapter 3: The Night of the Tragedy Quotes

We went slowly down the stairs. I was violently excited. I have a certain talent for deduction, and Dr. Bauerstein's manner had started a flock of wild surmises in my mind.

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker), Dr. Bauerstein , Emily Inglethorp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Hastings and the rest of the people staying at Styles Court wake in the middle of the night to discover Emily Inglethorp experiencing terrible convulsions. She dies shortly after Dr. Bauerstein arrives, at which point Bauerstein and Emily's regular doctor, Dr. Wilkins, ask everyone to leave them alone with the body. Right away, Hastings can sense that something is amiss—that is, he can tell that Emily Inglethorp didn't die of natural causes. As he and the others make their way downstairs, he starts guessing what *actually* happened. What's funny, though, is that he insists in this passage that he has a "certain talent for deduction," but he *also* says a couple of things that subtly underscore why this isn't actually the case. Indeed, it later becomes clear that Hastings *isn't* all that good at the art of logical deduction, and it's largely because he becomes "violently excited" when something out of the ordinary happens. Instead of calmly assessing a situation, he becomes overwhelmed with eagerness to solve the case, and this causes him to come up with a number of harebrained ideas—in other words, he lets a "flock of wild surmises" overtake his thoughts, demonstrating a lack of cognitive discipline and patience, which are crucial for detective work.

Chapter 4: Poirot Investigates Quotes

"The mind is confused? Is it not so? Take time, *mon ami*. You are agitated; you are excited—it is but natural. Presently, when we are calmer, we will arrange the facts, neatly, each in his proper place. We will examine—and reject. Those of importance we will put on one side; those of no importance, pouf!"—he screwed up his cherublike face, and puffed comically enough—"blow them away!"

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot, Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

After gaining permission from John Cavendish to bring Poirot in to investigate the circumstances surrounding Emily Inglethorp's death, Hastings rushes over to the detective's house and tells him everything he knows. In response, Poirot urges him to take his time to sort out his thoughts. He recognizes that it's "natural" to be confused at this stage, since so many overwhelming events have come to pass. But he also suggests that it will eventually be necessary for Hastings to calm down and "arrange the facts" by putting them in their "proper place" and seeing how they fit together. His point is that good detective work relies on the investigator's ability to work methodically and logically—it would be incredibly hard, after all, to solve a mystery without taking an inventory of every detail and identifying whether or not it's important in the broader scope of the case. Poirot therefore encourages Hastings to collect his thoughts so that they can go through what has happened in an intelligent, informed manner.

"[…] One fact leads to another—so we continue. Does the next fit in with that? *A merveille!* Good! We can proceed. This next little fact—no! Ah, that is curious! There is something missing—a link in the chain that is not there. We examine. We search. And that little curious fact, that possibly paltry little detail that will not tally, we put it here!" He made an extravagant gesture with his hand. "It is significant! It is tremendous!"

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot, Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

Poirot has just impressed upon Hastings how crucial it is to identify all of the relevant and important details of a murder case before trying to solve it. Hastings, however, doesn't know *how* to decide which details are important and which ones aren't, so Poirot patiently explains his investigative method. He begins by putting everything in sequence and seeing how it all fits together. "One fact leads to another," he says, highlighting the causal relationship between each aspect of a case. By putting everything in order, it's possible to identify the areas of confusion, or the places where the details simply don't make sense in the broader context of the case. Rather than simply forgetting about these discrepancies, Poirot places special emphasis on them, since he realizes that they might lead to important clues or discoveries. Anything that doesn't make sense, then, is "significant" and shouldn't be ignored, and it is by investigating these murky areas that Poirot will slowly—methodically—unravel the case.

"Beware! Peril to the detective who says: 'It is so small—it does not matter. It will not agree. I will forget it.' That way lies confusion! Everything matters."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot, Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

While describing his investigative method, Poirot tells Hastings to never ignore small details that don't line up with the rest of the case. He implies that people have a tendency to turn away from things that don't make sense, insisting that small, confusing details don't matter in the broader context of a murder case. And yet, taking this approach is a sure-fire way to find oneself in a pit of confusion, since the case itself won't make any sense if the investigator passes over the seemingly tiny, insignificant particulars. Such details, after all, are what provide a sense of context to everything else, even if they seem confusing at first. By telling Hastings never to ignore the things that mystify him, then, Poirot ultimately highlights the fact that detective work requires people to develop a meticulous and methodical mind—the kind of mind that will never lazily

ignore potential evidence, instead genuinely believing that "everything matters."

"[…] Well, strychnine is a fairly rapid poison. Its effects would be felt very soon, probably in about an hour. Yet, in Mrs. Inglethorp's case, the symptoms do not manifest themselves until five o'clock the next morning: nine hours! But a heavy meal, taken at about the same time as the poison, might retard its effects, though hardly to that extent. Still, it is a possibility to be taken into account. But, according to you, she ate very little for supper, and yet the symptoms do not develop until early the next morning! Now that is a curious circumstance, my friend. Something may arise at the autopsy to explain it. In the meantime, remember it."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), Emily Inglethorp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Hercule Poirot speaks these words to Hastings in an attempt to explain an important area of confusion in the case of Emily Inglethorp's murder. It has already been generally agreed upon that Emily died of strychnine poisoning, but Poirot goes beyond this fact to point out that, if the strychnine had been in her evening coffee, she would have died much earlier in the night, since strychnine is a "rapid poison" that takes effect very quickly. Of course, if Emily had eaten a big meal for dinner, the effects of the poison might have been somewhat delayed, but Hastings has already told Poirot that Emily hardly ate that evening. It's therefore reasonable for Poirot to consider the possibility that the poison wasn't in Emily's coffee. And yet, neither he nor anyone else knows of any other way the poison could have been introduced into her system. Having already told Hastings that discrepancies and confusions should never be ignored, Poirot urges him to remember this detail, which will likely yield important information.

I had the utmost difficulty in controlling my excitement. Unknown to herself, Annie had provided us with an important piece of evidence. How she would have gaped if she had realized that her "coarse kitchen salt" was strychnine, one of the most deadly poisons known to mankind. I marvelled at Poirot's calm. His self-control was astonishing. I awaited his next question with impatience, but it disappointed me.

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker), Annie , Hercule Poirot, Emily Inglethorp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

When Poirot and Hastings ask Annie (one of the housekeepers) some questions about the night of Emily Inglethorp's death, she reveals that she saw what she thought was "coarse kitchen salt" on the saucer of Emily's cocoa cup. Even though she noticed the "salt," Annie brought the cocoa to Emily anyway. Hastings immediately assumes that the salt was actually strychnine, and he has the "utmost difficulty in controlling [his] excitement" about this apparent discovery. In contrast, Poirot remains completely calm. Hastings finds his friend's ability to hide his thoughts "astonishing," though he'll later learn that Poirot *wasn't* hiding anything—he simply doesn't let himself get carried away with the assumption that the "salt" was actually strychnine. This moment is a perfect illustration of the difference between Hastings and Poirot. Whereas Poirot never jumps to conclusions and always maintains his composure, Hastings quickly invests himself in whatever idea seems most probable to him at the time. Moreover, he has a hard time "controlling" himself when he seizes on these ideas, which means he could risk betraying his suspicions in a scenario in which he ought to practice complete discretion—like, for instance, if he were questioning a murderer. It is perhaps because of Hastings's inability to hide his suspicions that Poirot refuses to let him in on his own theories as the investigation progresses.

Chapter 5: "It Isn't Strychnine, Is It?" Quotes

Everyone was assembled in the dining room. Under the circumstances, we were naturally not a cheerful party. The reaction after a shock is always trying, and I think we were suffering from it. Decorum and good breeding naturally enjoined that our demeanour should be much as usual, yet I could not help wondering if this self-control were really a matter of great difficulty. There were no red eyes, no signs of secretly indulged grief. I felt that I was right in my opinion that Dorcas was the person most affected by the personal side of the tragedy.

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker), Dorcas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

The day after Emily Inglethorp is poisoned, everyone staying at Styles Court gathers for breakfast, and Hastings notes that, as might be expected, nobody is in a particularly good mood. And yet, he *also* notices that the atmosphere isn't necessarily weighted down by grief, either. Trying to account for this lack of overt emotion, he ponders the nature of "decorum," wondering if everyone at the breakfast table is hiding their sadness out of a desire to maintain a sense of composure. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* takes place in England, which is a country that tends to value the idea of maintaining a "stiff upper lip," or a kind of emotional resilience in the face of hardship. It's possible, then, that Emily Inglethorp's friends and family are simply following the manners that come along with "good breeding" in England. What's even more likely, though, is that very few people at the table actually feel genuine sorrow about Emily's death. She was, after all, a somewhat difficult person to get along with, and though she was involved with a number of charitable organizations, she was otherwise rather greedy with her money and never felt comfortable lending it to her loved ones. The lack of emotion at breakfast therefore probably has more to do with her slightly unlikable personality than it has to do with "decorum."

> "You gave too much rein to your imagination. Imagination is a good servant, and a bad master. The simplest explanation is always the most likely."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), Captain Arthur Hastings

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

After searching Emily Inglethorp's boudoir, Poirot finds an envelope, upon which Emily wrote the sentences "I am possessed" and "He is possessed," though with several different spellings of the word "possessed." Right away, Hastings jumps to the conclusion that Emily thought she was possessed by some kind of demon. Later, though, Poirot explains that Emily must have been writing a new will and using the envelope to practice the spelling of "possessed." When Hastings admits that his hypothesis was wildly off-base, Poirot comments on his friend's overactive imagination. Although using one's imagination can be helpful in an investigation, it's unhelpful to rely on it too much. In other words, an imagination can be used to help an investigator think creatively within a logical framework. Without that logical framework, though, an overactive imagination can steer an investigator seriously astray, which is exactly what happened to Hastings when he instantly jumped to absurd conclusions about Emily's state of mind on the night of her death.

> "I had forgotten that," I said thoughtfully. "That is as enigmatical as ever. It seems incredible that a woman like Mrs. Cavendish, proud and reticent to the last degree should interfere so violently in what was certainly not her affair."
>
> "Precisely. [...]"
>
> "It is certainly curious," I agreed. "Still, it is unimportant, and need not be taken into account."
>
> A groan burst from Poirot.
>
> "What have I always told you? Everything must be taken into account. If the fact will not fit the theory—let the theory go."

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Hastings, Hercule Poirot (speaker), Mary Cavendish, Emily Inglethorp

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84-5

Explanation and Analysis

As Poirot and Hastings discuss the case, Poirot asks what Hastings makes of the argument between Mary Cavendish and Emily Inglethorp, which Hastings overheard the day before Emily's death. Hastings, for his part, had completely cast the entire matter from his mind, but he now returns to it and notes how strange it is that Mary—who is otherwise so polite—would argue so vehemently with her stepmother. However, Hastings doesn't spend much time thinking about this odd detail: it doesn't make sense to him, so he decides once and for all that "it is unimportant" and that it "need not be taken into account." Given that Poirot has already told him very clearly that *every* detail—no matter how small—matters in an investigation, Hastings's readiness to immediately forget about the whole argument is so misguided that it's almost comedic. Indeed, he not only calls it "unimportant" but also *explicitly* says they shouldn't spend time thinking about it. Poirot, on the other hand, believes

that seemingly insignificant details that make no sense are often the most helpful clues, so he urges his friend not to move on so fast.

Chapter 7: Poirot Pays His Debts Quotes

"Yes, yes, too conclusive," continued Poirot, almost to himself. "Real evidence is usually vague and unsatisfactory. It has to be examined—sifted. But here the whole thing is cut and dried. No, my friend, this evidence has been very cleverly manufactured—so cleverly that it has defeated its own ends."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), Captain Arthur Hastings

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

After Alfred Inglethorp testifies at the inquest, Poirot begins to feel suspicious about the mounting evidence against him. It seems quite likely that Alfred will be arrested, since he failed to present a convincing alibi concerning his whereabouts on the day that somebody who looked like him purchased strychnine from the local pharmacist. And yet, Poirot senses that the evidence against Alfred is too "conclusive." In real life, he explains to Hastings, the evidence people leave behind is messy, strange, and nonsensical—at first, that is. It's only after spending time with the clues and "sift[ing]" through the details that an investigator can make sense of what happened. In this case, though, the evidence builds a cohesive narrative that condemns Alfred as Emily Inglethorp's murderer. And though somebody like Hastings would be all too willing to simply accept this evidence at face value, Poirot sees such perfection as a sign of trickery, ultimately indicating that the entire story has been fabricated to make it *seem* like Alfred should be arrested.

Chapter 8: Fresh Suspicions Quotes

"Who put it in the chest, I wonder?"

"Someone with a good deal of intelligence," remarked Poirot drily. "You realize that he chose the one place in the house to hide it where its presence would not be remarked? Yes, he is intelligent. But we must be more intelligent. We must be so intelligent that he does not suspect us of being intelligent at all."

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Hastings, Hercule Poirot (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

While looking for a green dress that matches the fabric found on the door bolt between Cynthia and Emily Inglethorp's bedrooms, Poirot and Hastings discover a fake black beard. It's hiding in a chest full of dress-up costumes from when John and Lawrence Cavendish were little boys. This discovery is significant because Poirot has already established that somebody bought strychnine while disguised as Alfred Inglethorp—who, of course, has a big black beard. When Hastings wonders aloud who put the fake beard in the chest (which is in the attic), Poirot notes that whoever put it there is quite smart—after all, it's the only possible hiding place that wouldn't attract suspicion from anyone who happened to find it. To that end, finding the beard in such an ingenious hiding place is somewhat discouraging, since it suggests that the murderer is very adept and hiding his or her tracks. For this reason, Poirot tells Hastings that they'll have to be so intelligent that the murderer thinks they're *un*intelligent—a statement that hints at Poirot's tendency to work as secretly as possible, keeping his discoveries to himself so that the murderer doesn't even sense that Poirot has any inkling of what happened. In this way, Poirot believes, they will eventually be able to catch the murderer off-guard.

Chapter 10: The Arrest Quotes

"Because she cares for someone else, *mon ami*."

"Oh!" What did he mean? In spite of myself, an agreeable warmth spread over me. I am not a vain man where women are concerned, but I remembered certain evidences, too lightly thought of at the time, perhaps, but which certainly seemed to indicate—

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot, Captain Arthur Hastings (speaker), Mary Cavendish, Dr. Bauerstein

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

When Hastings excitedly tells Poirot that Dr. Bauerstein has been arrested, Poirot patiently explains that the doctor wasn't taken in for murdering Emily Inglethorp (as Hastings

had assumed). Rather, Bauerstein was arrested for espionage. Poirot then tells Hastings that Bauerstein's relationship with Mary was just an act—he didn't love her, he just wanted everyone to attribute his suspicious behavior to the fact that he was having an affair. What's more, Mary never loved Bauerstein, either, since she has feelings for somebody else.

Upon hearing that Mary has feelings for another person, Hastings lets his mind run wild with the possibility that she's in love with *him*. Of course, she has done nothing to indicate that she has any romantic feelings for him, but Hastings himself is fond of Mary, so he's capable of convincing himself of "certain evidences" of her love—"evidences" he thinks he must have overlooked at first. His ability to get so excited in this moment is a perfect illustration of his lack of control over his own mind; in the same way that he hastily jumps to conclusions while helping Poirot investigate, he now abandons all logic at the mere possibility that Mary could be interested in him.

Chapter 11: The Case for the Prosecution Quotes

"I say, that's playing it a bit low down," I protested.

"Not all. We have to deal with a most clever and unscrupulous man, and we must use any means in our power—otherwise he will slip through our fingers. That is why I have been careful to remain in the background. All the discoveries have been made by Japp, and Japp will take all the credit. [...]"

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Hastings, Hercule Poirot (speaker), Mary Cavendish, John Cavendish

Related Themes:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

While John Cavendish is on trial for murder, Poirot tells Hastings that there's still a missing "link" in the evidence. He therefore has to secretly work to find that final "link," which will prove the truth once and for all. In order to do this, though, he will have to investigate the matter in private, without anyone knowing what he's doing—especially Mary and John Cavendish. Hastings thinks it's unfair of Poirot to work against John without telling him or Mary, but that's because Hastings assumes Poirot is trying to prove John's guilt. In reality, Poirot is searching for the final piece of evidence that will prove that the murderers were Alfred Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard, but Hastings doesn't know this. Nonetheless, Poirot doesn't tell his friend his plan, though he does explain why he needs to work so secretly: if he doesn't, he says, the murderer(s) will "slip through [his] fingers" because they'll know to cover their tracks. As a result, Poirot has to be so discreet that nobody knows what he's doing—including, it seems, Hastings.

Chapter 12: The Last Link Quotes

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "She had only made it out that very afternoon!"

"Nevertheless, *mon ami*, it was Mrs. Inglethorp. Because, in no other way can you account for the fact that, on one of the hottest days of the year, Mrs. Inglethorp ordered a fire to be lighted in her room."

Related Characters: Captain Arthur Hastings, Hercule Poirot (speaker), Emily Inglethorp, Mary Cavendish

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

In his explanation of what happened on the night of Emily Inglethorp's death, Poirot tells Hastings and everyone else who lives at Styles Court that Emily was the one to burn her own will. Hastings can't believe his ears—yet another indication of how far he was from grasping the truth on his own. But Poirot helps him see that there's no other way to explain the fact that Emily had a fire going in her bedroom on the hottest night of the year. By drawing everyone's attention to the fire, Poirot spotlights the fact that it was glaringly out of place in the context of Emily's bedroom. And yet, until this point, nobody has stopped to consider how strange it was that Emily had a fire going. Instead, they've focused on other details, like the smashed coffee cup and the bedside table that tipped over. For Poirot, though, the fire is a crucial detail because it was so incongruous with the rest of the scene, thus proving his belief that small, seemingly nonsensical aspects of a case are often the things that yield the most information.

Chapter 13: Poirot Explains Quotes

"Because, *mon ami*, it is the law of your country that a man once acquitted can never be tried again for the same offence. Aha! But it was clever—his idea! Assuredly, he is a man of method. See here, he knew that in his position he was bound to be suspected, so he conceived the exceedingly clever idea of preparing a lot of manufactured evidence against himself. He wished to be suspected. He wished to be arrested. He would then produce his irreproachable alibi—and, hey presto, he was safe for life!"

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), Alfred Inglethorp, Captain Arthur Hastings

Related Themes:

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

Having explained almost everything else about how he identified Alfred Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard as the murderers, Poirot spells out for Hastings why Alfred actively *tried* to get arrested at the beginning of the investigation. It was, Poirot suggests, a clever plan, since Alfred and Evelyn knew there wouldn't be enough evidence against Alfred to convict him—at first, that is. For this reason, they wanted him to get arrested early on, which is why he intentionally gave such a terrible alibi at the inquest. When Poirot says that Alfred is a "man of method," he actually pays him what is, in Poirot's world, a very high compliment. For Poirot, "method" and order is the mark of an intelligent person. In turn, his recognition of Alfred's intelligence suggests that getting away with an elaborate crime requires the same kind of levelheaded, clever thinking as *solving* such crimes. The problem with Alfred's plan, though, is that it was *too* clever, which ultimately attracted Poirot's suspicion and made it impossible for Alfred and Evelyn to go undetected.

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: I GO TO STYLES

Captain Arthur Hastings has decided to set the record straight about what happened in the infamous "Styles Case." He's close friends with the family involved in this case, so he wants to dispel the sensational stories that have been circulating as a result of the scandal, which took place while Hastings himself was staying at Styles Court.

The beginning of The Mysterious Affair at Styles *sets the stage for the mystery and intrigue yet to come. Although Hastings doesn't reveal what, exactly, happened at Styles Court, it's clear that the events were rather scandalous, since they attracted widespread attention. The novel thus begins by creating a suspenseful atmosphere, as readers prepare to learn what happened.*

Hastings's tale begins after he's wounded in the First World War. After a brief period in the hospital, he's granted sick leave, but he's unsure of what to do with himself. Fortunately, he runs into an old friend, John Cavendish, who happily talks to him about old times. John is older than Hastings, but they know each other well because Hastings used to spend time with John's family in Essex. Hastings is particularly surprised to hear that John's stepmother, Emily, has remarried. She originally married John's father when John was still young, and she quickly made her way into the hearts of everyone in the family. John's father was particularly enamored of her—so enamored, in fact, that he left most of his money and Styles Court, the family's country house, to her when he died.

The Cavendish family's backstory in this section might seem somewhat unremarkable, but it's worth noting the details about money, since it's clear that the Cavendish family is quite wealthy. After all, John's father not only leaves behind money, but also Styles Court, which—given that it has a name*—sounds quite lavish. And yet, Emily is John's stepmother, not his biological mother. The fact that she's the one who inherited everything from John's father, then, is a possible point of tension in the family—something that could lead to jealous greed and animosity.*

Hastings thinks it was unfair of John's father to leave both Styles Court *and* the majority of his money to John's stepmother, but neither John nor his brother, Lawrence, ever minded very much—they accepted her as their mother. Although John was a lawyer for a short period, these days he has been living with his wife, Mary Cavendish, at Styles with his mother. Hastings suspects that John would probably rather his stepmother simply give him a bit of money to lead his own life, but his mother always does what she wants and expects everyone to follow her lead—especially when it comes to controlling the family money.

Hastings makes a point of saying that John and Lawrence don't mind that their stepmother inherited everything from their father, but he also *goes out of his way to note that Emily is a bit stingy. Even though John seems content with his current situation, the fact remains that many people might resent Emily for refusing to dole out the family money a bit more generously. Already, then, possible tensions surrounding wealth and inheritance begin to swirl through the novel.*

John doesn't like his stepmother's new husband, Alfred Inglethorp, who practically showed up out of nowhere. The man claimed to be a distant cousin of Evelyn Howard's—a woman who helps out at Styles and is very close friends with John's stepmother, Emily. Evelyn is protective of Emily, which is partially why she's suspicious of Mr. Inglethorp; she was even hesitant to acknowledge a familial connection with the newcomer, but Emily instantly took to him. She's always helping people who are less fortunate than her by founding various societies, so in her general spirit of kindness, she employed Inglethorp as a secretary of sorts. And then, three months ago, she announced to the family that they were getting married.

Given that Emily has control of a respectable fortune, it's suspicious that a relatively unknown man would arrive out of nowhere to woo her—especially since that man, Alfred, is notably younger than her. Although it's not unheard of for a younger man to fall in love with an old woman, it's reasonable to think that the arrangement would put certain people—like, say, John Cavendish and Evelyn Howard—on high alert.

According to John, Alfred Inglethorp is just "fortune hunting" by marrying his stepmother, who's now known as Mrs. Emily Inglethorp. Hastings listens to his old friend's complaints about how much the marriage has unsettled the family, but he also accepts an invitation to come stay at Styles, apparently undeterred by the drama. He arrives at the train station in the village of Styles St. Mary three days later. On the way to the house, John tells him that life in the family's grand old country home is generally pretty quiet. His wife, Mary, does quite a bit of the farming, while he himself occasionally helps train local military volunteers. Things would be pretty ideal, he says, if it weren't for Alfred Inglethorp.

The term "fortune hunting" suggests that Alfred Inglethorp doesn't have romantic feelings for Emily and instead just wants to inherit her wealth whenever she dies. Of course, such intentions are certainly sinister, but they're also hard to prove, which is presumably why neither John nor anyone else at Styles Court has intervened to protect the family fortune. After all, doing so would mean making the awkward argument that Emily's new husband doesn't actually love her—an undoubtedly difficult thing to say to a newlywed.

On their way into the house, John and Hastings find Evelyn Howard working in one of the gardens. She's a curt, straightforward woman with a serious face. After talking for a moment about the gardens, she goes with Hastings and John to have some tea, where Hastings meets John's wife, Mary. Instantly, Hastings is struck by Mary's beauty. Charmed by her attention, he tells entertaining stories about his time in the war, hoping that she finds him interesting. Soon enough, though, Emily Inglethorp cuts his stories short, telling Hastings that it's good to see him again. Hastings is glad to see her, too, but he instantly dislikes her new husband, Alfred, who hovers behind her and gives Hastings an uneasy feeling.

Although The Mysterious Affair at Styles *is primarily a novel about mystery, it contains quite a bit of romance. Hastings's fondness for Mary Cavendish is a good example of this, since he appears to fall for her immediately. On another note, whereas Hastings quickly takes a liking to Mary, he's instantly suspicious of Alfred Inglethorp. His initial feelings of distrust set the stage for the novel's general atmosphere of suspicion and suspense.*

Alfred Inglethorp's presence seems to cast a cloud over everyone's mood—except, that is, for Mrs. Inglethorp, who speaks to him with an air of importance about some sort of charitable organization she's involved in. When conversation returns to normal, the members of the household ask Hastings what he'll do after the war. He sheepishly admits he'd like to be a detective. He once met an extraordinary Belgian detective who ignited his interest in the field. This Belgian gentleman was very impressive when it came to cracking cases, and he once told Hastings that the key to good detective work is simply devoting oneself to "method" and organization.

The mere fact that Hastings aspires to become a detective hints at the excitement and suspense that will soon overtake Styles Court. For now, though, Hastings simply idealizes detective work, which he has learned requires a certain kind of patience and a logical, levelheaded approach to gathering details—an approach that will come into play later in the novel.

Evelyn Howard notes that she likes reading detective stories, though most of it is absurd. In real life, she maintains, it's always obvious who the murderer is. Hastings challenges this idea, but Evelyn insists that the people close to the victim would surely have a gut feeling about who the murderer was. She herself would certainly be able to sense it if he (the murderer) came near. Hastings points out that women can be murderers, too, but Miss Howard feels that murder is more of a masculine crime. "Not in a case of poisoning," Mrs. Cavendish chimes in. She was talking to her friend Dr. Bauerstein about this matter the other day, adding that many poisonings probably go unsolved because people don't know much about poison.

Evelyn's remark about intuition is noteworthy, as it contrasts what Hastings has just said about approaching detective work with an organized, methodical mindset. According to Evelyn, the best investigations are those that take gut feelings into account—an idea that the novel itself will play with and challenge as the plot thickens.


The conversation about poison is interrupted by the arrival of Cynthia Murdock, a young woman Mrs. Inglethorp recently took in. Cynthia works as a volunteer at the local hospital and has lived at Styles ever since she was orphaned. Hastings assumes she's a nurse, but she actually works in the hospital's dispensary, which is where the medicine is stored and mixed for the patients. Hastings jokingly asks how many people she has poisoned. "Oh, hundreds!" she laughs.

This is the second time poison has been mentioned in a rather short amount of time, perhaps suggesting that whatever scandalous "affair" is to take place at Styles Court might involve poison. What's more, the novel plays with readers' expectations in this section by subtly casting suspicion on multiple characters: Evelyn Howard's remark about intuition makes her seem eager to convince the others to forgo a rigorous investigation, Mary Cavendish's comment about poisoning being a feminine crime gives the impression that she's well acquainted with such matters, and Cynthia's joke about accidentally killing "hundreds" of patients makes her seem cavalier and sinister.

Hastings goes upstairs to his room and looks out the window. He's surprised to see a sinister man emerge from a shadow. He studies the man's face, which seems overcome with troubled thoughts, and it takes several moments before Hastings realizes that he knows this man: it's John's younger brother, Lawrence. He wonders why Lawrence seems so perturbed, but then he casts the issue from his mind and goes about his day. That night, Hastings dreams about the fetching Mary Cavendish.

The sinister, suspicious atmosphere continues to build in this section, as Hastings has an uneasy feeling after seeing Lawrence emerge from a shadow. Everyone, it seems, is a potential suspect for the crime that will soon take place at Styles Court.

After lunch the following day, Hastings and Mary Cavendish go on a walk. They learn upon returning that a big argument has disturbed the household. Evelyn Howard enters the house's smoking room to tell Hastings, Mary, and John what happened. Apparently, she told Emily Inglethorp what she really thinks about her new husband—namely, that Alfred Inglethorp is nothing but a younger man who wants to scheme Emily out of her money. She even suggested that Alfred has been having an affair with Mrs. Raikes, the wife of a local farmer. Mrs. Raikes, Evelyn believes, is the real person Alfred loves, and he's more likely to kill Emily in her sleep than actually devote himself to her romantically.

Evelyn has finally confronted Emily about the thing that has been weighing on everyone else's mind: namely, that Alfred Inglethorp wants to con her out of her money and doesn't actually love her. Although John has implied that he feels the same way, he clearly hasn't been able to broach the subject with his stepmother, most likely because doing so would be quite awkward. Evelyn, however, clearly sees it as her duty to protect her friend, so she's willing to have this difficult conversation.


Enraged by Evelyn Howard's words, Emily insisted that her friend had spoken nothing but "wicked lies" and that she should leave the house immediately—which is exactly what Evelyn plans to do. Before she goes, though, she pulls Hastings aside and tells him to look after her dear friend Emily. She doesn't trust anyone else in the household, but she can see that Hastings is an honest man. He promises to do whatever he can to protect her, though he notes that her worries seem unfounded. Nevertheless, Evelyn pushes him to stay vigilant; all he needs to do is keep an eye on what goes on at Styles, and he'll see how untrustworthy everyone is. He must especially watch out for Alfred Inglethorp, Evelyn says.

The rift that opens between Emily and Evelyn suggests that Emily is quite unwilling to consider the possible dangers of her new husband. This reaction, it seems, is most likely why nobody else has broached the subject with her—she clearly believes Alfred is in love with her, so she vehemently rejects any suggestion that he's trying to con her out of her money. Evelyn, however, will not be convinced otherwise, which is why she tells Hastings to look out for Emily, thus adding to the ominous atmosphere that has descended upon Styles Court.

Hastings sees Evelyn out to the driveway, where a car is waiting for her. As everyone watches her leave, Hastings sees a bearded man walking toward the house. He asks John about this man, and John tensely replies that his name is Dr. Bauerstein, a doctor staying in the village after a nervous breakdown. Dr. Bauerstein is a renowned expert on poison and also happens to be close friends with Mary Cavendish, though John doesn't seem to want to talk about this detail.

John's relative unwillingness to speak at any length about Dr. Bauerstein and his friendship with Mary suggests that there's some kind of animosity between the two men. Although the root of this tension isn't yet clear, John's negative attitude toward Bauerstein adds yet another layer of suspicion and unease to the already fraught relational dynamics of Styles Court.

John invites Hastings for a short walk, complaining as they go about the disagreement between his stepmother and Evelyn Howard. As they walk, they pass a pretty woman named Mrs. Raikes. Hastings is about to point out that Mrs. Raikes is the woman Evelyn Howard accused Alfred Inglethorp of having an affair with, but John quickly cuts him off before he can finish the sentence, as if he doesn't want to talk about Mrs. Raikes.

Yet again, John's desire to avoid certain topics contributes to the confusion and mystery cloaking the various relationships at his family's country home. Hastings, for his part, is simply trying to piece everything together, but this task proves more difficult than he might have expected—a sign that there are all sorts of secrets and rifts between the people he has decided to stay with while he's on leave from the military.

Sensing John's discomfort, Hastings changes the subject by complimenting the beauty and serenity of Styles. John agrees and notes that he will inherit it someday—he should have *already* inherited it, he says, but his father was unreasonable with his **will**. If the will had been better, John wouldn't be so financially strained right now. Hastings is surprised to hear that his friend doesn't have much money and asks if Lawrence—John's brother—could lend him some. But Lawrence wasted all his money self-publishing his terrible poetry. As Hastings and John return from their walk, Hastings feels a "sinister" feeling afoot at Styles, sensing that anything could happen now that Evelyn Howard is gone.

John previously suggested that he didn't mind that his father left everything to Emily, but he changes his tune in this moment by lamenting his lack of financial security. His complaints perhaps help explain his ill will toward Alfred Inglethorp, since Alfred poses a threat to John's eventual inheritance—an inheritance he has been waiting on for a long time. Perhaps feeling that everyone truly is after Emily's money, Hastings suddenly feels like Evelyn was right: nobody at Styles can be trusted.

CHAPTER 2: THE 16TH AND 17TH OF JULY

A few days later, Evelyn Howard sends Hastings a letter telling him that she's working at a hospital roughly 15 miles away. She wants him to write to her if Mrs. Inglethorp has a change of heart and expresses a desire to contact her again. Even though the argument between Miss Howard and Mrs. Inglethorp unsettled the atmosphere at Styles, Hastings enjoys himself at the country home—except, that is, when he sees Mary Cavendish spending so much time with Dr. Bauerstein. He doesn't understand what she sees in him, finding Bauerstein off-putting and suspicious.

Hastings's suspicion of Dr. Bauerstein isn't necessarily all that dependable, since his judgment is obviously clouded by his fondness for Mary Cavendish. He is, in other words, jealous of Dr. Bauerstein's close relationship with her, and his jealousy impairs his ability to accurately assess whether or not Bauerstein is trustworthy.

On Monday the 16th, Emily Inglethorp hosts a charity event, at which she recites a war poem. The next day, she takes Hastings and Lawrence out to lunch, and on their way back, Lawrence suggests that they should pay Cynthia a visit at the hospital. Mrs. Inglethorp has a few matters to attend to at home, so she goes on ahead while Hastings accompanies Lawrence to the hospital, where Cynthia eagerly welcomes them for tea. She shows them the dispensary, where she and another medical professional prepare medicine for the hospital's patients. Hastings jokingly asks how many people Cynthia has poisoned, and she makes fun of him for asking something so unoriginal—everyone, after all, always makes a joke about accidental poisonings when they visit the dispensary.

Cynthia and Hastings's conversation about poison adds to the novel's atmosphere of suspense, especially since there have already been several mentions of poison. Although it's not yet clear what, exactly, is going to happen at Styles Court to create such a scandalous mystery, it seems overwhelmingly likely that it will have something to do with poison.

Cynthia gets tired of jokes about poison, especially since it's so easy to actually poison someone by accident. As she speaks, Lawrence looks through the many bottles, prompting Cynthia to interrupt herself to tell him not to go poking around in a certain area, saying, "No, Lawrence—that's the poison cupboard." She then invites them to step out onto a small balcony. As Hastings, Cynthia, and Cynthia's coworker leave the room, Lawrence stays behind for a moment, but Cynthia soon calls after him and he joins them. On their way home, Hastings reflects on Lawrence's behavior, finding him difficult to read because he's shy. He has noticed, however, that both Lawrence and Cynthia are especially reserved when they're around each other, though they were perfectly cordial this afternoon.

The way Lawrence behaves around the poison is undeniably suspicious. And yet, Hastings doesn't seem to make much of the fact that his acquaintance not only opens the poison cupboard but also stays behind when everyone else leaves the room. Other than simply narrating the events, Hastings doesn't voice any suspicions about Lawrence; his only comments about Lawrence's behavior have to do with how he acted around Cynthia. And though this might simply be due to the fact that nothing sinister has happened yet, it seems noteworthy that Hastings is such a trusting and unobservant person—he wants to be a detective, but his powers of observation and inference hint that he might not possess the cynical, calculating mind of a sleuth.

Hastings stops to get some stamps on the way back to Styles. Stepping out of the post office, he's astonished to come face to face with his old Belgian friend, Hercule Poirot. He excitedly introduces Cynthia to Poirot, but Cynthia already knows him—Poirot is well acquainted with the people living at Mrs. Inglethorp's house, since Mrs. Inglethorp has treated him and his fellow Belgians very well while they've been away from home during the war. The whole way back to Styles, Hastings talks about Poirot's incredible skills as a detective.

There's something comedic about how much Hastings admires Poirot, given that the novel has already implied that he himself isn't necessarily built for detective work. Hastings has already declared that he wants to be a detective because of his friendship with Poirot, but the scene in the dispensary with Lawrence and Cynthia has subtly suggested that he doesn't have the sharp, curious ways of thinking that somebody like Poirot surely possesses.

When Hastings and the others return, they find Mrs. Inglethorp in a strange mood. Cynthia asks if everything is all right, and Mrs. Inglethorp sharply says everything is fine. She then demands that Dorcas, one of the servants, bring her some stamps. Dorcas can see that Mrs. Inglethorp is upset and suggests that she might benefit from some rest, but Mrs. Inglethorp refuses: she must finish some letters before the mail goes out. Having said this, she asks Dorcas if she lit a **fire** in her bedroom like she asked, and Dorcas assures her that she did.

The Mysterious Affair at Styles *is full of small details that might seem unimportant but later become quite crucial. This is especially true in the book's first chapters, since even the smallest occurrences will later come under scrutiny in the aftermath of the novel's defining event. Suffice it to say, this section contains an important detail—namely, the fact that Emily Inglethorp wants to have a fire going in her bedroom.*

After Mrs. Inglethorp disappears into her room to write her letters, Hastings and Cynthia decide to play tennis. They each go get ready with the plan of meeting back up on the court. On his way, Hastings walks by the open window of Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom and overhears a conversation between her and Mary Cavendish. Their tones are forceful, as if they're arguing, and Mary says, "Then you won't show it to me?" Mrs. Inglethorp replies by assuring her that whatever they're talking about has "nothing to do" with what Mary thinks, but Mary persists, accusing Mrs. Inglethorp of trying to "shield him"—though it's unclear to whom she's referring.

The particulars of this exchange are all but incomprehensible at this point in the book. The only thing that readers can glean from what Hastings overhears is that Mary thinks Emily Inglethorp is protecting someone (a man) by keeping quiet about something. Beyond this, it's impossible to know what's going on, but the confusion adds to the secrecy and suspense pervading the otherwise pleasant atmosphere of Styles Court.

Hastings hurries on and meets up with Cynthia, who tells him there has been a terrible argument between Emily Inglethorp and Alfred Inglethorp. Dorcas overheard the fight a little earlier and filled Cynthia in. Hastings immediately thinks about what Evelyn Howard implied about Alfred having an affair with Mrs. Raikes, but he doesn't say anything. Despite all the drama, Alfred Inglethorp reveals no emotion that night at dinner. Afterwards, everyone settles in with some coffee, but Mrs. Inglethorp decides she'll have hers in her room, where she will be writing a letter. Mary Cavendish is about to bring it to her, but Mr. Inglethorp tells her not to bother—he will bring it up.

Once again, the social dynamics at Styles Court are quite tense, as everyone seems to know about the arguments taking place in the house. In addition, this scene contains more small details that, though seemingly insignificant in the present, will factor heavily into later parts of the novel—details, for instance, like Alfred Inglethorp's insistence upon bringing Emily her coffee.

Lawrence quickly follows Alfred upstairs. Meanwhile, everyone relaxes downstairs, and Hastings relishes the opportunity to simply pass the time in Mary Cavendish's company. But then Dr. Bauerstein arrives, much to Hastings's disappointment. Bauerstein is covered from head to toe in mud, explaining that he was just examining some rare ferns nearby when Mr. Inglethorp found him and insisted that he come in for coffee. Just then, Emily Inglethorp steps into the hall and asks Cynthia to bring up her dispatch case—a case she uses to store all of her correspondences. Because she stepped into the hall, Hastings notes, there are three witnesses who can attest that she was, at that point, still holding her coffee, which she had yet to sip.

While the events that Hastings narrates in this scene might seem exhaustive and trivial, the mere fact that his narration is so focused on small details hints that something major is going to happen. When he says that three people—himself included—witness Emily Inglethorp holding her coffee and that she hasn't sipped it yet, he implies that something about her coffee (and the timeline of when she drinks it) is important.

After a moment, Dr. Bauerstein takes his leave. Alfred decides to walk him home, saying he has to meet an accountant in town to talk about certain accounts. He announces that he's taking a key with him, so nobody has to sit up waiting to let him back in.

That Alfred goes out of his way to make sure nobody waits up for him only makes his behavior seem even more suspicious. At this point in the novel, it seems overwhelmingly likely that everyone's misgivings about him might actually be well founded.

CHAPTER 3: THE NIGHT OF THE TRAGEDY

Late that night, Hastings is awakened by Lawrence Cavendish. Lawrence, who is holding a candle, tells Hastings that Emily Inglethorp is incredibly sick but seems to have locked herself in her bedroom. Hastings jumps out of bed and follows Lawrence toward Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom, from which they can hear her struggling in agony. John is by the door, too, along with several servants, and the entire house is slowly coming to life with excitement and worry. Before trying to break down the door, Hastings and the others go to Cynthia's room, which shares a wall with Mrs. Inglethorp's. There's a door leading between the two rooms, but it's always bolted shut—still, they must check. They find Mary Cavendish already in Cynthia's room shaking her awake. When they try the door, though, they find it locked.

It appears that the novel's mounting suspense has come to a breaking point, as everyone realizes Emily Inglethorp is in some kind of distress in the middle of the night. However, it's still not clear what has happened—nor will it necessarily be clear until the very end of the novel. For now, though, Hastings simply continues to provide a detailed account of everyone's whereabouts, which will later come under greater scrutiny.

Hastings, John, and Lawrence break down Mrs. Inglethorp's door. They find her writhing on the bed, her back arched in terrible convulsions. As Hastings turns to tell Lawrence that he'll leave to get out of the way, he is struck by Lawrence's facial expression—the man is completely pale, as if he has just seen a ghost. He's staring at the wall behind Hastings's head, as if something terrible is there. But when Hastings looks himself, he sees nothing out of the ordinary: just the trinkets on the mantelpiece and the ashes of the **fire** Mrs. Inglethorp had burning in the fireplace earlier that night.

Hastings has no idea why Lawrence looks so stricken in this moment, since there are no glaring details that would reasonably cause him such horror. And yet, this confusion is exactly the kind of thing Hastings will soon have to get used to, since what happens at Styles Court is shrouded in mystery and intrigue. Some details, it seems, might seem small and unimportant to Hastings but profoundly significant to others—it all depends on what a person knows; and Hastings, of course, knows very little.

Mrs. Inglethorp's convulsions subside for a moment, but then they get even worse. John and Mary try to give her brandy, but it doesn't help. Dr. Bauerstein rushes into the room right as Mrs. Inglethorp's entire body arches on the bed, with her shoulders and feet on the mattress and the middle of her body pushed into the air. "Alfred—Alfred—," she says, but she dies before finishing the sentence.

The violent nature of Emily Inglethorp's death is important, since she seemed completely fine before going to bed. Indeed, it's not as if she felt ill the last time everyone saw her, ultimately suggesting that something sinister happened between the time she went upstairs and the time she died.

Hastings realizes it's actually early in the morning, not the middle of the night. Dr. Bauerstein had been walking past Styles when he saw a car rushing out to fetch Mrs. Inglethorp's doctor, Mr. Wilkins. He now confers with Mr. Wilkins, who arrived shortly after Mrs. Inglethorp's death. He explains to Wilkins that the convulsions he witnessed were very extreme—so extreme that he wishes Wilkins had been there himself to see them. The two doctors then ask everyone to leave them to speak privately for a moment.

Dr. Bauerstein's presence is somewhat suspicious, since it's unclear why he would just happen *to be walking by Styles Court at such an hour. But Hastings doesn't make much of this coincidence, even though he himself is acutely aware of the possibility that Bauerstein and Mary are having an affair. Again, then, Hastings's powers of deduction seem somewhat weak, despite his desire to be a detective.*

While the doctors confer in private, Hastings can hardly control himself. He's quite excited by these events, especially since he suspects foul play. Judging by Dr. Bauerstein's reaction, he strongly believes Mrs. Inglethorp was poisoned.

Despite Hastings's somewhat undiscerning nature, he does *intuit that something is amiss, realizing that Emily clearly didn't die of natural causes. But the question of* how *Emily died remains—and, for that matter, who killed her?*

As everyone waits for the doctors to finish, they realize Alfred Inglethorp isn't present. Nobody knows where he is, and John notes that he's nowhere to be found in the entire house. The doctors then reemerge and inform John that they won't be able to furnish a death certificate before an official autopsy is performed. In fact, Bauerstein says that, due to the circumstances surrounding Mrs. Inglethorp's death, there will most likely have to be an official inquest. John begrudgingly agrees and then takes the keys to Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom from Dr. Bauerstein, who advises him to keep the room locked until the inquest takes place.

An inquest is an official court proceeding aimed at gathering information about an incident and, more often than not, a death. The fact that Bauerstein thinks there will have to be an inquest suggests that he thinks there was foul play involved. Furthermore, his advice to lock the doors adds a great deal of suspense to the novel, as the scene of the crime remains untouched, just waiting for further investigation.

Hastings takes John and Lawrence aside. He knows John is going to be wary of attracting publicity, since he tends to be an optimist who would rather focus on positive things. Lawrence, however, has a more nervous disposition, so Hastings thinks he will see the importance of investigating the murder before things progress too far. He asks the brothers if he can bring in Hercule Poirot to investigate, explaining that it's important to get a jumpstart on a case before there's too much attention surrounding it.

Although Hastings is sometimes a bit unobservant, he does *seem to understand a few things about detective work. His suggestion to bring in Hercule Poirot at this early stage shows that he grasps how important it is to begin an investigation before there's time for the criminal to get rid of any pertinent evidence. Since John has locked the doors to Emily's bedroom, there might still be plenty of clues waiting at the scene of the crime.*

To Hastings's surprise, Lawrence immediately pushes against this idea, saying that Dr. Bauerstein is inventing things—he only suspects poisoning, Lawrence believes, because he himself specializes in poison and is obsessed with it. But his brother disagrees and gives Hastings permission to bring in Poirot, though he doesn't think the case will be hard to crack: Alfred Inglethorp, he believes, is clearly to blame. Before Hastings goes to fetch Poirot, he stops in the house's library, where he finds a book about the effects of strychnine poisoning.

Lawrence's response to Hastings's suggestion is somewhat alarming, since it seems so unlikely that his stepmother died of natural causes. The mere suggestion that this is what happened throws some suspicion on Lawrence, though Hastings doesn't seem too bothered by the comment. Instead, he quickly makes his way to the house's library to read about strychnine, indicating that he has a good hunch about the specific poison that killed Emily. Hastings therefore proves that he is *capable of using his intuition, though he doesn't seem to be very skilled in the art of reading other people.*

CHAPTER 4: POIROT INVESTIGATES

On his way to get Poirot, Hastings encounters Alfred Inglethorp in town. Inglethorp acts devastated about his wife's death, saying that he just heard the news. Suspicious, Hastings asks where he has been, and he claims that the accountant he visited the night before kept him late, and then he realized he'd forgotten to bring the key, so he stayed with the banker in town. He laments the loss of his wife, talking about how "noble" she was, and his words disgust Hastings, who thinks he's a hypocrite to say such nice things about a woman he clearly murdered.

Alfred Inglethorp's story about staying in town is somewhat fishy, especially since everyone suspected him of wanting to steal Emily's money before *Emily even died. Now that she has seemingly been murdered, Alfred's behavior seems even more suspect. No matter what he says in this moment, it's unlikely he'll be able to dispel Hastings's feeling that he was the one who killed Emily Inglethorp.*

Hastings leaves Alfred Inglethorp and goes to Poirot's and explains everything that has happened. Poirot urges him to take a moment to collect his thoughts—that way, they will be able to put the events together and arrange the details. They will then discard the facts that are unimportant. But Hastings has trouble identifying which facts are important and which ones aren't, so Poirot explains that each detail has to make sense with everything else. They have to put the facts in sequential order, and if each one leads logically to the next, then they can continue on with their thought process. But if a fact *doesn't* lead logically to the next, they must find the missing link in the chain of events. No detail, he says, is too small to investigate.

Right away, Poirot emphasizes the importance of maintaining an organized, disciplined approach to the investigation. In order to discern which details are worthy of deeper consideration, he and Hastings need to look for gaps in the story, or places where something doesn't make sense. What's clear is that Poirot believes in thinking about things rationally instead of emotionally. Because Hastings is overcome by excitement and confusion, Poirot urges him to take a moment to regain his composure.

Poirot points out that Hastings has left out an important detail—namely, whether or not Mrs. Inglethorp ate well on the night of her death. Hastings is dumbfounded by this question and doesn't understand why it's important. Poirot is surprised by his friend's ignorance, but he doesn't say why the detail is so crucial. Slightly annoyed, Hastings says he doesn't think Mrs. Inglethorp ate very much, since she was too upset to have a big appetite. Satisfied with this answer, Poirot says he's ready to go to Styles.

Poirot doesn't clarify why he wants to know about Emily Inglethorp's diet on the night of her death, though it seems likely that he's trying to figure something out about how she metabolized the poison. Still, his unwillingness to loop Hastings in establishes a pattern that will run throughout the novel—a pattern of Poirot having a hunch but refusing to tell Hastings what it is, thus adding to the novel's overall suspense.

When they reach Styles, Poirot and Hastings pause outside the house. Poirot remarks how beautiful it is but notes that the family's grief has surely tempered this beauty. His comment prompts Hastings to think about how nobody really seems to care much about Mrs. Inglethorp's death. Poirot senses what he's thinking and revises what he has said, acknowledging that Mrs. Inglethorp wasn't related by blood to anybody currently living at Styles, so it makes sense that nobody is prostrate with grief.

The fact that nobody at Styles Court seems particularly sad about Emily Inglethorp's death effectively throws suspicion on everyone, *making it seem as if anybody living at Styles could be the murderer. And yet, there's also another possible explanation as to why nobody is too broken up about her death: indeed, it's possible that she simply wasn't all that likable.*

Hastings still wants to know why Poirot cares about what Mrs. Inglethorp ate the night before. Poirot, for his part, reminds Hastings that he doesn't usually like to explain his thought process until he has figured everything out, but he acquiesces: the reason Mrs. Inglethorp's dinner is important is because strychnine usually takes effect very quickly. But Mrs. Inglethorp didn't show any effects of poisoning until 5 in the morning, roughly nine hours after she most likely drank the coffee. If she had eaten a very heavy meal, it's possible that the large amount of food would have slowed the process, but the fact that she didn't eat much doesn't account for this discrepancy.

Poirot's point about the time it takes for strychnine to take effect demonstrates his highly logical thought process. If someone were to have poisoned Emily's coffee with strychnine, it should have taken effect much faster than it did—unless, of course, she ate a big meal, which Hastings confirms she did not. Poirot has thus already found a detail that doesn't make sense, giving him something to focus on as they go into the investigation.

After obtaining the key from John, Poirot and Hastings go through Emily's room. Poirot pays meticulous attention to every small detail. He inspects the bolt on the door between Mrs. Inglethorp and Cynthia's rooms, eventually taking out some forceps and extracting something delicate from the bolt itself. He also finds a cup and saucer on a chest of drawers. There's liquid on the saucer, so he dips his finger into it and tastes it, discovering that it's cocoa with a little bit of rum. There's also a bedside table that has been knocked over. Beside it there's a coffee cup that has been crushed. What's strange, though, is that a lamp lying next to it is broken very neatly. In contrast, the coffee cup has been ground into a fine powder, suggesting that somebody stepped on it.

Once again, the novel presents a scene that is packed with details, all of which are currently unintelligible but will soon become important. For now, though, it's immediately clear that the broken coffee cup is especially suspicious, since it seems as if somebody has intentionally destroyed it—perhaps to cover up the fact that it contained strychnine.

Poirot finds a ring of keys on the floor. He discovers that one of them opens Mrs. Inglethorp's purple dispatch case, but he doesn't read the papers contained inside—he doesn't have the "authority" to do that, though he says somebody should review the papers as soon as possible. He then examines a brown stain on the carpet before declaring that the room has yielded a handful of "points of interest." They are: (1) the coffee cup that has been ground into a powder; (2) Mrs. Inglethorp's dispatch case and the key that opens it; (3) the stain on the carpet, which is damp and smells like coffee; (4) a small strand of green fabric taken from the bolt on the door leading to Cynthia's room; and (5) some spots of candlewax on the rug.

Poirot's examination of the room yields quite a few clues, but it's not yet clear to Hastings—or, for that matter, to most readers—why these clues are important or what they mean. As Poirot goes through everything he found, the novel highlights his extraordinary skill for detective work, framing his thought process as a marvel of logical deduction, though it remains to be seen what, exactly, he has deduced from these findings.

Hastings thinks the candlewax on the rug was from Lawrence's candle the previous night, but Poirot disagrees—Lawrence's candle, after all, is still sitting nearby and is made of pink wax, whereas the wax on the carpet is white. Poirot believes that Mrs. Inglethorp didn't have a candle in the room with her, but he won't tell Hastings what this implies, instead urging his friend to use his own powers of deduction. To that end, he withholds his final "point[] of interest," saying that he'd like to keep the sixth thing he's found to himself for a while.

Poirot's tendency to keep certain theories or findings to himself suggests that he prefers to mull things over before he speaks them aloud. It also suggests that he sees value in keeping certain things quiet, as if detective work involves a similar kind of secrecy as committing a crime.

Before leaving Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom, Poirot checks the fireplace for any clues. Sure enough, he finds a small scrap of unburnt paper. The only legible letters on it are: "ll and." However, the paper itself seems thick and official, suggesting that it was once a **will**. Although Hastings is quite surprised, Poirot is not—he expected to find the remnants of a will in the **fire**.

The existence of a burned-up will adds a new layer of complexity to the case, since the question of who will inherit Emily Inglethorp's wealth is something that has clearly been weighing on everyone's mind. In fact, her fortune is most likely the reason somebody murdered her in the first place, though that person might have had to somehow change her will—or, perhaps, destroy it.

Poirot goes to ask Dorcas some questions in the boudoir. On his way, he stops to admire some beautiful flowerbeds outside Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom. Hastings hurries him along by saying they have more important things to do, but Poirot suggests that the begonias before them might be just as important as anything else. Finally, though, he moves on and begins his interview with Dorcas, who tells him that she overheard Mrs. Inglethorp's argument with her husband the previous day. Apparently, Emily Inglethorp accused Alfred of lying to and tricking her, and she said that he had brought disgrace to her household. She also said that she had already decided what to do and that the prospect of a "scandal" wouldn't stop her from doing what she must.

Poirot's enigmatic comments about the flowerbeds underscore his belief that no detail is too small to overlook—everything, he thinks, could potentially play into the case. His conversation with Dorcas sheds a bit of light onto Emily's state of mind on her last day alive, as she seems to have been disturbed by the prospect of some sort of scandal. The snippet that Dorcas overheard aligns with Evelyn Howard's suggestion that Alfred is having an affair, though there's not enough information yet to confirm this.

Poirot asks Dorcas if she's sure that Mrs. Inglethorp was arguing with her husband. Dorcas is confident in this regard, asking who else it would have been, if not Alfred Inglethorp. She continues by saying that Mrs. Inglethorp summoned her a little later. She was holding a piece of paper with writing on it, and she seemed very troubled. She said, "These few words—and everything's changed." She also told Dorcas to never trust a man. Before Dorcas left, Mrs. Inglethorp also muttered something about marital scandals, saying she would certainly "hush" everything up if she could.

While Dorcas is sure that Emily was arguing with Alfred, Poirot isn't so sure—after all, doing good detective work means getting to the bottom of every last detail, not making assumptions simply because they're convenient. As far as Poirot is concerned, then, Emily could have been arguing with almost anyone, since nobody has fully confirmed that she was talking to Alfred. Dorcas's information about the piece of paper in Emily's hands later that day only adds to the confusion, though it does *align with the idea that she was doing something to her will, since she said that everything would be "changed" with just a "few words."*

Dorcas notes that Mrs. Inglethorp probably put the piece of paper she'd been holding into her purple dispatch case. Moving on, Poirot asks Dorcas if Mrs. Inglethorp took a sleeping powder last night. She normally does, Dorcas informs him, but she didn't last night, since she took her last dose two days ago. After Dorcas leaves, Hastings asks how Poirot knew that Mrs. Inglethorp uses sleeping powders. Poirot takes out a small box that pharmacists use to store bromide powder, and though it looks normal to Hastings, Poirot points out that the box doesn't have the name of the pharmacist on it.

The box of bromide powders is the final clue that Poirot found in Emily's room but decided not to mention. The fact that Hastings doesn't notice anything strange about the box underscores his tendency to overlook small details, especially when Poirot notes the absence of a pharmacist's name—a sign that the box itself might have been obtained in an unusual, potentially suspicious way.

Next, Poirot interviews Annie, a younger servant at Styles. Annie knows about the letters Mrs. Inglethorp wrote the previous night—specifically, who they were addressed to, since she was the one who sent them out. One was to Evelyn Howard, the other was to her lawyer (Mr. Wells), one was to a caterer's establishment, and the fourth letter Annie can't recall. Before letting Annie go, Poirot asks about the saucepan of cocoa in Mrs. Inglethorp's room. Annie explains that she herself brought Mrs. Inglethorp this cocoa every night. It consisted of cocoa, milk, sugar, and a little bit of rum. She would bring it to Mrs. Inglethorp just before bed, though not before letting the cocoa sit on a side table in the hall for a while first.

Given that strychnine usually takes effect quite quickly, it's possible that it was in Emily's cocoa—not in her coffee. After all, she tended to drink the cocoa later at night, potentially accounting for why she didn't start convulsing until the early hours of the next morning. By interviewing Annie, then, Poirot has uncovered yet another detail to further investigate.

Annie becomes increasingly agitated as she talks about the cocoa. She finally admits that there was salt on the tray and that it might have gotten into the cocoa, though she served it to Mrs. Inglethorp anyway. Hastings becomes incredibly excited, thinking that he and Poirot have found the cause of Mrs. Inglethorp's death. Poirot, however, stays calm and moves on. He asks if Annie saw candle wax on the carpet when she brought the cocoa to Mrs. Inglethorp, and Annie says that she didn't—Mrs. Inglethorp never had a candle, just a reading lamp.

Hastings lets his excitement get the better of him. Of course, it does *seem quite important that some sort of substance might have made its way into Emily Inglethorp's cocoa, but Poirot doesn't seem to latch onto this detail like Hastings does—perhaps because he recognizes the importance of verifying such ideas before jumping to conclusions. Instead of getting hung up on the cocoa, then, he continues to ask questions, ultimately confirming that somebody must have entered Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom, since the candlewax on the carpet couldn't have been from her light source, considering that she never used candles in her bedroom.*

After Annie leaves, Hastings giddily congratulates Poirot, thinking he's made a great discovery. But Poirot doesn't know what he's talking about, so Hastings explains that the "salt" in the cocoa must have been the strychnine—what else could it have been? "It might have been salt," Poirot says. His comment annoys Hastings, who secretly thinks his friend might have lost his touch for detective work. Poirot senses his annoyance and asks if he disagrees with him, but Hastings standoffishly remarks that they're both entitled to their own opinions.

For Poirot, being a good detective means never getting carried away with an idea. Everything has to fit into a narrative that makes sense, but that doesn't necessarily mean something that seems *obvious is true. To that end, Poirot recognizes that the substance that looked like salt in the cocoa might have been strychnine, but it* also *might have been salt. Hastings, on the other hand, lets his excitement overwhelm him, and though it's unclear whether or not the cocoa contained poison, it seems likely that Hastings's unfounded confidence in this moment could potentially cause him to overlook other important pieces of evidence.*

Before they leave the boudoir, Poirot goes over to Alfred Inglethorp's writing desk. It's locked, but he manages to open it with one of the keys from Mrs. Inglethorp's keyring, which he has in his possession—the key itself isn't a perfect fit, but it still opens the desk. Inside, Poirot sees that Alfred is incredibly organized, which he admires. To Hastings's surprise, he doesn't look at any of the documents, though he makes a remark that Hastings finds inscrutable: that there aren't any stamps in the desk but that there *could* have been. He then closes the door and turns to leave.

Poirot's process as a detective isn't all that easy to track. At this stage in the investigation, he's simply collecting as much information as he can, and though most of the things he finds don't make sense yet, his mysterious remarks add to the novel's suspense and put readers in the same confused but fascinated state of mind as Hastings himself.

The boudoir didn't give them much information, Poirot says. It did, however, produce something of interest. He pulls out a wrinkled envelope, upon which somebody has written the following in a nonlinear fashion: "posessed I am posessed He is possessed I am possessed possessed."

The piece of paper Poirot finds in the boudoir is rather bewildering, ultimately adding to Hastings's—and, in turn, the reader's—sense of confusion and intrigue. Indeed, as Poirot continues to investigate, the case seems to become increasingly complex and layered.

CHAPTER 5: "IT ISN'T STRYCHNINE, IS IT?"

Hastings recognizes the handwriting on the envelope as Mrs. Inglethorp's and wonders if she was in the midst of some kind of "demoniacal possession." Before he can think this over, though, Poirot declares that they have to go examine the coffee cups—a suggestion that annoys Hastings, who's sure that the cocoa was what the murderer poisoned. But Poirot simply laughs at his friend's obsession with the cocoa. He then leads Hastings to the drawing room, where he asks him to tell him everything about the coffee hour the night before. Hastings tells him where everyone was, pointing out each person's coffee cup, since Annie has yet to clean them up.

Yet again, Poirot doesn't dwell on confusing new aspects of the case. He doesn't sit in the boudoir mulling over what the note means, like Hastings would if he were left to his own devices. Instead, he moves on, simply filing the information in his mind and waiting for a better time to continue thinking about it, perhaps when his thoughts about the note link up to some new finding.


Poirot takes samples from each of the five coffee cups (Mr. Inglethorp doesn't drink coffee), tasting them as he goes. As he does this, a look of surprise crosses over him, but he doesn't explain the reaction—he simply says that he had suspected something but that he now thinks he was wrong. He and Hastings then meet John Cavendish, who tells them breakfast is ready. He also asks about the investigation, noting that his brother, Lawrence, insists that their stepmother must have died of heart failure. It has been hard for everyone in the house, he adds, to be around Mr. Inglethorp, since everyone thinks he's the murderer.

The fact that Poirot tastes everyone's coffee illustrates his exhaustive approach to detective work. Instead of assuming that Emily Inglethorp's coffee—which spilled on the carpet in her bedroom—was the only thing that might yield up any clues, he goes through all *of the coffee cups, apparently making some sort of discovery in the process (though he once again withholds his findings). On another note, John's comment about Lawrence once again casts suspicion on his brother, since it seems so clear that Emily was poisoned, thus raising the question: why does Lawrence want people to think Emily died of natural causes?*


The mood at breakfast isn't very uplifting, but it's also not overrun with sorrow. Hastings thinks this is because everyone present is devoted to upholding a sense of "decorum," though he wonders if this kind of "self-control" is a sign of politeness or a sign that nobody cares that much about Mrs. Inglethorp's death. Alfred Inglethorp, in fact, is the only person who seems stricken by guilt, but everyone dislikes his display of emotion, thinking that he's simply acting.

The lack of genuine emotion at the breakfast table hints that Emily Inglethorp was not well-liked. What's more, the idea that nobody cares much about her death hints that anyone *could be the murderer, though the fact that Alfred is the only sad person also casts suspicion on him, since it makes him stand out and forces everyone to wonder if he's faking his sorrow.*


Cynthia complains about having a headache, so Poirot jumps up and offers to get her some coffee, claiming that it's the best remedy for headaches. She accepts but asks him not to put sugar in it. He obliges, asking if she gave up sugar because of wartime rationing, but she says she has never taken sugar in her coffee—a comment that brings excitement to Poirot's eyes. Hastings notices this change come over his friend and can tell that Poirot is making all kinds of calculations in his mind, though it's unclear why.

What, exactly, is going through Poirot's head in this moment remains unclear. However, it seems likely that there's some kind of connection between Cynthia's remark about sugar and the fact that Poirot sampled everyone's coffee right before breakfast. In some way, Cynthia's preference for unsweetened coffee has factored into Poirot's calculations about what happened the evening before Mrs. Inglethorp's death.

Mrs. Inglethorp's lawyer, Mr. Wells, arrives at Styles. John invites Poirot and Hastings to meet with him and Wells in the study. On their way, Poirot whispers to Hastings about the coffee cups, saying that his instincts were right and that it's good he tasted all of the coffee left in the cups—comments that make no sense to Hastings. When they reach the study, Mr. Wells tells them that there will certainly be an inquest and that both John Cavendish and Mr. Inglethorp will be called to the stand to give information about what happened on the day of Mrs. Inglethorp's death.

Hastings continues to experience a state of complete confusion as the details of the case become increasingly hard to track. Thankfully for him, though, Mr. Wells confirms that there will be an inquest, which will perhaps clarify some of the hazier aspects of the investigation, since the point of an inquest is to uncover the circumstances surrounding a given incident.

Poirot asks Mr. Wells if the letter that Mrs. Inglethorp wrote to him contained anything of importance, but the lawyer says that it simply asked him to come to see her the next day because she wanted his advice on a pressing matter. Poirot also asks who would inherit Mrs. Inglethorp's money, and Mr. Wells says that—according to her most recent will, which was made in August of the previous year—her entire fortune would go to John Cavendish. At first, Poirot thinks this is unfair to Lawrence, but Mr. Wells explains that Lawrence would also receive a good deal of money, since his father's will stipulated that he should receive some of his leftover money upon Mrs. Inglethorp's death.

Although nobody blatantly addresses the implications of Emily Inglethorp's will, the fact is that whoever is set to inherit her money will naturally attract some suspicion. After all, her death benefits anyone whom her will designates as her inheritor. As such, both John and Lawrence would have had a motive to murder her.

Even if Mrs. Inglethorp's most recent will was fair to both her sons, Poirot points out that it must not be valid anymore, since she married Mr. Inglethorp. By British law, her will was made "null and void" when she got married, and Mr. Wells notes that it's unclear whether or not she was aware of that at the time of her death. John, however, insists that she *was* aware, since he talked about it with her yesterday.

Because Emily's will—which left everything to John—was made "null and void" when she remarried, Alfred Inglethorp yet again seems like a likely culprit, since he stands to benefit greatly from her death. Once again, then, he emerges as a prime suspect.

John Cavendish and Mr. Wells are about to search through Mrs. Inglethorp's papers to see if she happened to have made a new will, but Poirot saves them the trouble: she *did* make a new one. But it doesn't exist anymore, since it was burned in her fireplace. He shows them the fragment he found among the ashes. It's possible that the will was old, not new, but Poirot thinks it was made yesterday afternoon.

There's quite a bit of confusion surrounding Emily Inglethorp's will—a confusion that will continue to run throughout the novel. Whether or not she made a new will before her death is very important, since it would suggest that something had happened to make her change her mind about who should inherit her fortune. And yet, the fact that the new will was destroyed suggests foul play, inviting readers to wonder about the circumstances leading to its destruction.

To prove his point, Poirot asks John to call for one of his gardeners. When the gardener, Manning, arrives he answers Poirot's questions, explaining that he was planting begonias when Emily Inglethorp came to the window and asked the other gardener to go into town to obtain a "form of will." Once he'd brought it back, she spent some time with the will and then asked both Manning and the other gardener to come inside to sign something. She put a piece of paper over the top of the will so that they couldn't see what it said, and then they signed their names as witnesses.

Manning's story about Emily Inglethorp inviting him and the other gardener into the house confirms Poirot's theory that she created a new will before dying. The two gardeners served as official witnesses, though they don't actually know what the will entailed. Nonetheless, Manning makes it clear that Poirot was right: for some reason, Emily felt it necessary to create a new will, and though her reasons remain unknown, the mere fact that she did so adds even more suspense and intrigue to the investigation.

Mr. Wells realizes that Emily Inglethorp wanted him to come to the house that morning to make the new will she'd created official. When John Cavendish asks how Poirot knew Manning and the other gardener had served as witnesses, Poirot simply smiles and says, "A scribbled-over old envelope, and a freshly planted bed of begonias."

Yet again, Poirot's thought process is hard to follow, even when he ostensibly explains his reasoning. In this case, what he says to John is very enigmatic, though it suggests that something about the envelope he found in the boudoir (with "possessed" written all over it) and the begonias he noticed earlier somehow came together in his mind to create a cohesive clue—a good illustration of his impressive powers of deduction.

The sound of a car arriving outside interrupts the conversation; Evelyn Howard has returned. Hastings and the others go down to greet her, and when John Cavendish introduces Poirot as a detective helping them investigate the case, she wonders why they need anyone to investigate at all—Alfred Inglethorp, she believes, clearly murdered Emily. She asks them if they've already taken him to prison, and when John tells her to be careful about flinging around accusations because some people—like Lawrence—think the death was a natural accident, she grows angry. She even shames him for indulging such foolish thinking. Hastings, for his part, realizes how hard it is going to be for John, as a host, to have Evelyn Howard and Alfred Inglethorp in the house at the same time.

Unlike Poirot, Evelyn Howard is perfectly willing to get carried away with a hunch or suspicion. Of course, her behavior here is in keeping with the fact that she strongly dislikes Alfred. In fact, the only reason she wasn't in the house at the time of the murder is that she argued with Emily about Alfred, insisting that he didn't love her and even implying that he might kill her one day in order to steal her fortune. It's no wonder, then, that she accuses him of the crime without stopping to consider any other possibilities.

Later that day, Poirot seeks out Evelyn Howard and asks her if he can depend on her help. She says he can, but she still doesn't see why he needs much assistance, since it's so obvious to her that Alfred Inglethorp is the murderer. Still, Poirot presses on. He says he specifically needs her help because she's the only person who seems to have shed a tear about Emily's death. Evelyn becomes somewhat defensive, going on a rant about how Emily blocked people out by always demanding something in return whenever she helped people. Evelyn, however, didn't let Emily push her around, and in that way, she was actually able to get close to her. But Alfred Inglethorp ruined all that by murdering her.

Evelyn's remark about Emily always pushing people away and expecting something in return for her kindness helps make sense of why nobody seems particularly upset about her death—she was, it seems, hard to love. All the same, Evelyn appears to have devoted herself to her friend, which is perhaps why she so vehemently wants to apprehend Alfred. Her passion about this matter is striking, since it stands in stark contrast to the way everyone else has responded to Emily's death.

After speaking with Evelyn Howard, Poirot and Hastings meet up with John Cavendish and Mr. Wells again. They go to Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom to look through her purple dispatch case. Poirot pulls out the key that he took, explaining that he locked the case earlier that morning. However, Cavendish points out that the case isn't locked. Poirot is shocked—he, after all, has both of the keys that open the dispatch case, meaning that somebody entered the room and forced the dispatch case's lock within the last hour. Poirot thinks the person could have unlocked the room itself with almost any of the keys intended for the other bedrooms, since the locks are fairly generic.

The fact that the dispatch case is open suggests that the murderer returned to the scene of the crime. Moreover, this must have happened rather recently, since only a short period of time has passed since Poirot locked the dispatch case earlier in the morning. It's reasonable to conclude, then, that the killer has been in the house at the same time as Poirot and Hastings.

Thinking out loud, Poirot straightens out the objects sitting on the mantelpiece. Hastings notices that his friend's hands are shaking as he suggests that there must have been some kind of evidence in the dispatch case—a piece of evidence so crucial that the murderer thought it was worth taking the risk of breaking into the bedroom while everyone was home and forcing the case's lock open. Frantic with the idea of trying to find whatever document was taken from the case, Poirot rushes out of the room.

Once again, Poirot shows excitement but doesn't necessarily explain his entire thought process. This time, though, he at least notes the main implications of what has just happened, telling Hastings that the dispatch case must have contained something extremely condemning, since the murderer otherwise wouldn't have taken a chance by returning to the scene of the crime in broad daylight to retrieve it.

Hastings runs into Mary Cavendish outside the room and asks if Alfred and Evelyn have interacted. She, for her part, doesn't care if they encounter each other—in fact, she'd like to see them argue things out, since everyone is keeping their thoughts and feelings pent up. Hastings points out that John, Mary's husband, feels differently and doesn't want Alfred and Evelyn to cross paths, but Mary dismisses this with a disparaging few words about her husband. Hastings finds that her comment annoys him, so he stands up for John, eventually insinuating that Mary spends too much time with Dr. Bauerstein—a comment he instantly regrets. Without a word, Mary walks away.

Hastings fails to hide his jealousy of Mary's close relationship with Dr. Bauerstein. Of course, his jealousy isn't all that justified, since he and Mary certainly aren't romantically involved with each other—in fact, he only met Mary a few days ago. Nonetheless, he has clearly let himself get swept up in his feelings for her, which is a good indication of his tendency to act somewhat impulsively on his own emotions.

Hastings hears Poirot speaking loudly to everyone in the house. He goes downstairs and pulls his friend aside, asking if it's a good idea to tell the whole household that somebody broke into Emily Inglethorp's bedroom and forced open the dispatch case. Poirot agrees that maybe it's not the best idea, but it's too late now. They then decide to return to Poirot's lodgings in town. On their way out of the house, Poirot stops Cynthia and asks if she's the one who mixed Mrs. Inglethorp's sleeping powders. Cynthia tentatively says that she did, explaining that they're made of bromide.

It's somewhat uncharacteristic of Poirot to make a mistake while investigating. Hastings thinks it's unwise for Poirot to put the whole household on alert, and though Poirot eventually agrees, it seems unlikely that he let himself get carried away—rather, it's quite probable that his decision to tell everyone that somebody broke into the dispatch case was a very calculated, strategic choice, even if he decides to hide that from Hastings. After all, Poirot believes in rationality, so it's unlikely that he would really let himself behave irrationally just because he's flustered.

On the way back to town, Poirot explains that Mr. Wells and John Cavendish opened Emily Inglethorp's writing desk and found yet *another* will, this one from just before her marriage. The will left everything to Alfred Inglethorp, who claims to have been unaware of its existence. Poirot then tells Hastings how he knew that Mrs. Inglethorp had written a new will yesterday. The scrap of paper with the word "possessed" written on it is what tipped him off, since he could tell that Mrs. Inglethorp was trying to figure out how to spell the word. Plus, the word itself is something frequently used in a will.

Although Poirot tends to work in secrecy, he slowly divulges his thoughts to Hastings—when, that is, it's appropriate to do so. He withholds information because he doesn't want to get carried away with an idea (like Hastings himself often does). Finally, though, he reveals his powerful skill at making informed hypotheses, outlining that he knew Emily had made a new will because of her botched attempt to spell "possessed" on the envelope. It thus becomes clear that Poirot is quite talented at making calculated inferences based on the information at hand—even if he doesn't divulge those inferences right away.

What's more, Poirot explains, there was a little bit of garden soil on the floor of her boudoir, suggesting that the gardeners had come inside. Because the begonias right outside the boudoir were newly planted, he knew Mrs. Inglethorp must have summoned the gardeners yesterday afternoon. When Hastings admires his friend and admits that he himself had let his mind run wild with ideas after seeing the scrap paper with the word "possessed" on it, Poirot says that Hastings let his imagination have too much power. "Imagination is a good servant," he says, "and a bad master."

Poirot's comment about imagination underscores his belief in the importance of rationality and logic. Imagination can certainly be helpful, but only when it's in service of a grounded, logical theory. But if people lead *with a fantastical, grandiose theory, then their overactive imaginations can lead them astray.*

Still answering Hastings's questions, Poirot says he didn't actually know that one of the dispatch case's keys was missing—it was just a guess. The key on Mrs. Inglethorp's keyring that opened the dispatch case was very shiny, suggesting to him that it was a replacement, not the original. Hastings insists that Alfred Inglethorp must have stolen the original key, but Poirot expresses doubt: he isn't so sure that Alfred is guilty. Turning to another aspect of the case, he asks Hastings what he thinks about the argument he overhead between Mary Cavendish and Mrs. Inglethorp, but Hastings says it's probably unimportant—a comment that annoys Poirot, since *nothing* should be written off as trivial.

Despite Poirot's willingness to help his friend develop the discerning mind of a detective, Hastings seems somewhat incapable of recognizing what is perhaps the most important aspect of good detective work: a fine attention to detail. Poirot has already said that details that don't make sense or seem irrelevant often yield the most important clues, but Hastings seems to have forgotten this advice. As such, he doesn't even try *to connect the argument he overheard to any of Poirot's findings—a mistake that Poirot clearly sees as lazy, though he doesn't say how, exactly, the conversation might fit into the broader picture.*

Poirot invites Hastings into his apartment, where they sit and think about the case. Eventually, they look down into the street and see a pharmacist named Mr. Mace sprinting toward the building. When he arrives, he frantically asks if Mrs. Inglethorp was poisoned by strychnine. Poirot answers in a low voice that Hastings can't hear, and then Mr. Mace leaves. Poirot notes that the man will certainly have evidence to present at the inquest.

Again, it's unclear what's happening at this point in the novel, though it's certainly significant that a pharmacist seems so flustered by the possibility that Emily was poisoned using strychnine. His question seems to suggest that he might have had something to do with selling the strychnine to whoever murdered Emily, which would—as Poirot hints—give him something very important to say at the inquest.

Hastings tries to get Poirot to tell him what he's thinking, but his friend demands silence. He needs a moment to collect his thoughts, since everything is out of order. Finally, he emerges from contemplation feeling a bit better. He says that there are two important things to consider: first, that the weather yesterday was extremely warm and pleasant, and second, that Mr. Inglethorp has a black beard and wears distinctive clothes and glasses. Hastings is bewildered, but Poirot won't tell him why these things are important, noting that Hastings should be able to come to his own conclusions.

Poirot doesn't want to proceed until he has collected his thoughts, clearly recognizing that taking a moment to think is a crucial part of detective work. After he puts his thoughts in order, though, he speaks cryptically to Hastings, once again withholding his own ideas and leaving his friend—and, of course, the readers—in a state of suspense and anticipation.

For his part, Poirot says he owes a lot to Mrs. Inglethorp, since she was kind to Belgian refugees like himself. With this in mind, he will intervene if it seems like her husband is about to be arrested. "She would never forgive me if I let Alfred Inglethorp, her husband, be arrested *now*—when a word from me could save him!" he declares.

Poirot's desire to protect Alfred is hard to understand, since he hasn't given much information to prove that Alfred is innocent. What's more, it's unlikely that he would want to save Alfred simply because that's what Emily would have wanted—Poirot wants to respect Emily's memory, but it's doubtful that he'd overlook the truth in order to do so. It's probable, then, that there's something to suggest that Alfred shouldn't be arrested at this time, though Poirot keeps his reasons secret.

CHAPTER 6: THE INQUEST

In the days leading up to the inquest, Poirot works on his own, which annoys Hastings because he wants to be part of the investigation. Thinking Poirot might go to Mrs. Raikes's farm, Hastings goes there himself. He meets one of the farmworkers as he approaches, and the worker tells him that Poirot has been there multiple times. He also says that another person from the Styles country home often comes to visit. He doesn't say whom he's talking about, but he hints that this person is having an affair with Mrs. Raikes. Hastings comes away feeling angry at Mr. Inglethorp for disrespecting Mrs. Inglethorp so blatantly.

By striking out on his own, Hastings essentially decides to rely on his own instincts as a detective, even though his instincts haven't proved all that great so far. It is perhaps for this reason that he simply tries to trace Poirot's footsteps, hoping to find out what his friend is up to as he pursues the case. In doing so, Hastings thinks he has made an important discovery: namely, that Alfred's affair with Mrs. Raikes isn't just a rumor, thus (possibly) confirming that he never loved Emily and only married her for her money.

At the inquest, Dr. Bauerstein explains that Mrs. Inglethorp's death seemed to be the result of strychnine poisoning. However, he notes that strychnine acts very quickly, which means the timeline of her death doesn't make much sense, since she most likely drank the coffee sometime around 8 in the evening but didn't die until much later. She also drank some cocoa later in the night, but Dr. Bauerstein had the cocoa analyzed and didn't find any strychnine—he also adds that cocoa wouldn't mask the bitter taste of strychnine like coffee would.

Dr. Bauerstein's statements outline the puzzling dilemma surrounding Emily's death. She died of strychnine poisoning, but it's a mystery how *this happened; it would have kicked in faster if it had been in the coffee, and she would have tasted it if it had been in the cocoa. What's interesting, though, is that this is the exact kind of detail—one that doesn't make sense—that Poirot likes to focus on. Solving this discrepancy would, it seems, go a long way toward solving the entire case.*

Next, Lawrence Cavendish presents his evidence, which mostly reaffirms his brother's. Just before he finishes, though, he suggests that his stepmother's death might not have been a murder. He reveals that she had been taking a tonic that contained strychnine. With this in mind, he references several cases in which such tonics containing strychnine eventually poison people, taking a "cumulative effect" on the victim. Lawrence also suggests that Emily may have simply taken too much of her medicine by accident. But Mr. Wilkins—Emily's doctor—refutes this idea, saying that she would have had long-term symptoms leading up to a cumulative poisoning. Plus, even four doses of her tonic taken at the same time wouldn't have been enough to kill her.

Lawrence's insistence that Emily died of natural causes makes him seem like he has something to hide, as if he murdered her and now wants to throw everyone off track. Still, though, the information he introduces about the tonic containing strychnine is certainly important, since it's a new detail that is highly relevant to the case. As the investigation proceeds, then, it becomes clear that Poirot and the others are far from unraveling the entire story, which is complex and layered.

One of the people on the jury points out that Mrs. Inglethorp's pharmacist could have accidentally put too much strychnine in her tonic. But then Dorcas is called to present her evidence, and she says that the medicine wasn't made recently—Mrs. Inglethorp took the final dose the day that she died. Mary Cavendish is the next witness, and she explains that she awoke at 4:30 as per usual and was getting dressed when she heard the sound of Mrs. Inglethorp's bedside table falling over. She then ran to Mrs. Inglethorp's room with everyone else.

The hypothesis that Emily's tonic accidentally contained too much strychnine falls flat when Dorcas notes that it wasn't made recently—after all, if it contained too much strychnine, Emily would have shown symptoms long before the night she died. The investigation therefore still has to find a way to account for how, exactly, the fatal dose of strychnine was introduced into her system.

The examiner at the inquest asks Mary Cavendish about an argument she overheard on Tuesday the 17th (the last day before Mrs. Inglethorp's death). Suddenly, Mary becomes sheepish and hesitant. It occurs to Hastings that she's stalling for time, trying her best to think of something to say without answering the question. Finally, it becomes clear that she was sitting outside Mrs. Inglethorp's boudoir and clearly heard an argument in which Mrs. Inglethorp said something about "causing scandal between husband and wife." However, she claims to have tuned out the rest. Her general behavior during this line of questioning gives Hastings an uneasy feeling, but the examiner lets her go.

It's unclear why Mary would hesitate to answer questions about the argument she overheard, though there's the possibility that the argument was actually about her. Indeed, Hastings himself suspects Mary of carrying on an affair with Dr. Bauerstein, so it's possible that Emily Inglethorp somehow found out about her infidelity. Naturally, Mary wouldn't want to talk about this publicly. If this is the case, then it becomes clear that illicit romance can make it much harder to sort out the details of a mystery, since the people involved in secret affairs are hesitant to divulge information.

Eventually, Cynthia is called to present her evidence, but she doesn't have much to say—even though her room is right next to Mrs. Inglethorp's, she didn't hear the commotion and only woke up when Mary Cavendish came to get her. Next, Evelyn Howard presents her evidence in the form of the letter written to her by Mrs. Inglethorp on the evening before her death. The letter expresses a desire for the two friends to make up, but it doesn't get into specifics, other than to say that Evelyn said terrible things about Alfred but that Emily wanted to forget all about such things.

The details presented at the inquest might seem somewhat tedious, but that's only because—as Poirot has already pointed out—every detail matters, no matter how seemingly small or insignificant. Therefore, it's necessary to collect information from Cynthia and Evelyn, especially since the initial facts of the crime will later be called into question as Poirot continues to investigate.

After Evelyn Howard, the examiner calls Mr. Mace (the pharmacist) to present evidence. He admits to having sold strychnine to Mr. Inglethorp on Monday—the day before Mrs. Inglethorp's death. Mr. Inglethorp claimed to need the poison to put down a dog. Mace feels guilty about this, since he's not technically allowed to sell strychnine to unauthorized people, but he did so because he thought Mr. Inglethorp was a respectable man.

It now becomes clear why Mr. Mace rushed to Poirot's apartment and frantically asked if Emily died of strychnine poisoning: he was the one, he now admits, to sell the poison to Alfred. This is a very condemning piece of information—one that makes it seem highly unlikely that Alfred could possibly be innocent.

Hastings sympathizes with Mr. Mace, since it's well known that everyone in town reveres the people who live at Styles Court and want to be in their good graces. It's only natural, then, that Mr. Mace bent the rules for Mr. Inglethorp, who even signed his name in a small book—a requirement for anyone buying strychnine. Mr. Mace produces the book at the inquest, and sure enough, it contains Mr. Inglethorp's name.

The people living at Styles Court appear to enjoy a certain privilege in town, since everyone respects them and wants to please them. There is, then, a sense of power that comes along with the Inglethorp/Cavendish family's wealth.

Mr. Inglethorp takes the stand. He denies everything that has been leveled against him. His mood is somber and straightforward, and instead of making a great effort to prove his innocence, he simply states that everything that has been said is untrue. There isn't even a dog at Styles Court, he points out. He also insists that the signature in the book doesn't match his own. Writing out his actual signature, he holds it up for the jury to see, and it's agreed that the two signatures aren't the same. However, when the questioner asks where Inglethorp was on the day that Mr. Mace says he bought the strychnine, he can't answer—he doesn't remember. He was out walking, but he can't say where he went or even which direction he walked in.

Alfred Inglethorp's alibi is terrible because it lacks specificity. In the same way that tracking a murderer requires a detective to be very detail-oriented, proving one's own innocence means giving a clear, indisputable account of why the allegations are untrue. Alfred, however, appears unable to give this kind of account, ultimately making himself seem guilty.

As Mr. Inglethorp fails to provide a suitable alibi, Poirot shifts in his seat. "Does this imbecile of a man *want* to be arrested?" he mutters to himself. Meanwhile, Inglethorp refutes everything the examiner says, noting that he didn't even have an argument with his wife on that fateful Tuesday before her death. Even though both Mary Cavendish and Dorcas claim to have overheard him arguing with her, he denies that this happened. When the examiner asks why his wife uttered his name as her last dying words, he suggests that she thought Dr. Bauerstein—who also has a dark beard—was him. Poirot finds this idea interesting, though he doesn't necessarily believe it; he simply mutters that it's an "ingenious supposition."

It's evident that Poirot doesn't want Alfred to be arrested for murdering Emily, but it's not so clear why *he feels this way. Indeed, all signs seem to suggest that Alfred is guilty. And yet, Poirot seems to be* rooting *for him to get off the hook, which is why he's so frustrated that Alfred can't provide a plausible alibi. Poirot's agitation in this scene only adds to the novel's suspense and tension, as readers are forced to wait—alongside Hastings—to discover Poirot's reasoning for wanting to protect Alfred.*

When the examiner asks Inglethorp if he poured his wife's coffee and took it to her, he says that he did, indeed, pour it, but that he *didn't* take it to her. He was about to bring it to her bedroom, but then a "friend" came to the door, so he set the coffee down on a table in the hallway. Upon his return just a few minutes later, it was gone. Hastings doesn't think this story proves Inglethorp's innocence, since Inglethorp certainly had plenty of time to poison the coffee. Meanwhile, Poirot nudges him and points at two detectives sitting in the back of the courtroom. He identifies one of them to Hastings as Jimmy Japp, a detective with the Scotland Yard.

Throughout the inquest, one of Alfred's only tactics is to throw suspicion onto Dr. Bauerstein. First, he points out that Bauerstein has a beard like his own, suggesting that he might have been the one to purchase the strychnine. Now, he reveals that Bauerstein arrived just as Alfred was about to bring the coffee to Emily, meaning that Bauerstein (or, perhaps, someone else) might have had a moment to poison it. But Hastings finds this implausible, though it's worth noting that he might just think this because he's already decided Alfred is guilty.

CHAPTER 7: POIROT PAYS HIS DEBTS

Poirot makes his way to Jimmy Japp and his associate, Superintendent Summerhaye, after the inquest. Japp gushes about Poirot's brilliant detective work. He then suggests that the case is quite clear: Alfred Inglethorp is obviously the murderer. When Poirot voices his skepticism, though, Japp listens to him. Summerhaye thinks he's crazy, but Japp knows how good Poirot's instincts are. He hints that he and Summerhaye have a warrant for Inglethorp's arrest, but Poirot urges him not to make use of that warrant. Japp is inclined to listen to Poirot, but he needs a good reason to justify his decision *not* to make the arrest. Poirot, for his part, would rather not reveal his reasoning, but he agrees to show Japp—and everyone else—why Alfred shouldn't be arrested.

The fact that Inspector Japp is willing to delay arresting Alfred based on nothing more than Poirot's word underscores just how widely respected Poirot is as a detective. Although Hastings often finds Poirot exhausting and even sometimes doubts his skills as an investigator, there's no question that he has a reputation as an ingenious detective—a reputation he will perhaps justify when he finally reveals why he thinks Alfred Inglethorp shouldn't be arrested.

Agreeing to meet Poirot and Hastings at Styles, Japp and Summerhaye take their leave. Poirot then complains about how stupidly Alfred Inglethorp answered questions during the inquest. He insists that the evidence against Alfred is "too conclusive." In his experience, useful evidence tends to be "vague and unsatisfactory," consisting of the kinds of details that have to be carefully considered and analyzed before they make sense. To Poirot's eye, then, the evidence against Alfred Inglethorp has been "cleverly manufactured" to make him look guilty—so cleverly, in fact, that it's ultimately working against itself.

According to Poirot, the truth is never as tidy as a lie. After all, lies are purposefully created to hide something, so they're often meticulously constructed. The truth, on the other hand, is more organic and therefore encompasses all of the imperfections and oddities of real life.

Poirot doesn't think Alfred Inglethorp actually bought strychnine from Mr. Mace. After all, Mr. Mace is relatively new in town, having only been in the village for about a month. Plus, Mrs. Inglethorp usually has her medicine made up elsewhere, meaning that Mr. Mace probably doesn't have a solid idea of what Mr. Inglethorp looks like up close. Poirot reminds Hastings of the point he stressed earlier about Alfred Inglethorp's distinctive looks and way of dressing. It's easy, he now explains, to impersonate somebody with unique attributes like a big black beard and noteworthy clothes. It's harder, though, to impersonate someone who doesn't stand out.

Poirot suggests that Alfred wasn't the one to buy the strychnine, even though Mr. Mace claimed he did. Rather, he thinks that somebody impersonated Alfred, which is why Poirot previously mentioned the importance of Alfred's distinctive looks (he also mentioned the importance of the weather on the day of Emily's death, but he saves that point for later). By explaining this to Hastings, Poirot's reasons for not wanting to have Alfred arrested begin to emerge.

Changing the subject, Poirot admits that he found Lawrence Cavendish's behavior at the inquest strange. Lawrence went to medical school, studying to be a doctor even though he didn't end up pursuing the profession. Still, his suggestion that his stepmother accidentally poisoned herself by taking her prescribed medicine was surprising, since his medical education should have helped him recognize the improbability of such a thing happening. On the whole, Poirot is suspicious of almost everyone's testimonies: he thinks that Mary Cavendish is withholding information about the argument she overheard, that Evelyn Howard isn't telling the complete truth, and that it's especially strange that Cynthia didn't hear the bedside table fall over.

Poirot's point about Lawrence builds on the suspicion surrounding his behavior in the days after his stepmother's death. He's the only person who has even entertained the possibility that Emily died of natural causes. And yet, he of all people should know better, since he has a medical background and should be able to easily spot the effects of strychnine. Still, though, his odd behavior doesn't answer any questions, since so many people—according to Poirot—are apparently hiding things, which only makes the case more difficult to crack.

Hastings and Poirot go to Styles with the Scotland Yard detectives. Poirot gathers everyone in the house. Addressing Alfred Inglethorp, he suggests that the man doesn't seem to quite comprehend how much trouble he's in. He tries to get him to see that he's on the verge of being arrested for murder. Having outlined how serious the charges are, Poirot asks Alfred once more to say where he was on Monday afternoon (when Mr. Mace claims to have sold him strychnine). But Alfred refuses, saying he can't bring himself to believe that somebody would be "so monstrous" as to accuse him of murdering his wife.

Even after Poirot explains how close he is to being arrested, Alfred can't bring himself to come up with a plausible alibi. At this point, then, it's still unclear why Poirot is so convinced that he shouldn't be arrested, since Alfred's behavior both at the inquest and in this conversation is so evasive and suspicious.

Because Alfred won't speak about his whereabouts on Monday afternoon, Poirot does so for him. He says that Mr. Inglethorp couldn't have purchased strychnine that afternoon because he was walking Mrs. Raikes back to her house from a nearby farm. Poirot has found five witnesses who can confirm this alibi.

Finally, Poirot reveals his reasons for not thinking Alfred should be arrested. It's not actually the case that Alfred lacks an alibi. To the contrary, he has a very solid, plausible way of proving that he didn't buy strychnine from Mr. Mace, but he apparently doesn't want to use this alibi because he doesn't want everyone to know (or to think*) that he's having an affair with Mrs. Raikes. In this way, matters of the heart factor into this already complicated case.*

CHAPTER 8: FRESH SUSPICIONS

Japp is grateful to Poirot for preventing him from arresting Alfred Inglethorp, which he now believes would have been a mistake. Alfred, for his part, says he didn't talk about the alibi at the inquest because there are already rumors circulating about him and Mrs. Raikes—rumors, he clarifies, that are malicious and untrue.

Whether or not Alfred is having an affair with Mrs. Raikes is somewhat unclear. What is clear, though, is that he was seen walking with her on the very same afternoon that someone impersonated him and bought strychnine. He therefore has a perfectly good alibi, even if he doesn't want to use it for fear of sullying his reputation and making him look like a dishonest husband.

After discussing Alfred's innocence, Japp asks to be shown to Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom. On the way out of the room, Poirot takes Hastings aside and tells him to go stand in the other wing and wait there until Poirot returns. Hastings obliges but has no idea why he's supposed to do this. When Poirot finally returns, Hastings tells him that nothing happened. But Poirot presses him, saying that he must have heard a big bump. Hastings, however, heard nothing, even though Poirot knocked over Mrs. Inglethorp's bedside table.

Poirot's experiment replicates what happened on the night of Emily's death. What's interesting is that Mary Cavendish claims to have been awoken by the sound of Emily's bedside table falling over—and yet, Hastings doesn't hear anything while standing in her part of the upstairs wing. Although Poirot doesn't make much of his findings in this moment, his experiment ultimately casts suspicion on Mary, essentially confirming that she's trying to hide something.

Looking out the window, Hastings sees Dr. Bauerstein and talks about how much he dislikes him. He admits that he enjoyed seeing Bauerstein covered in mud on Tuesday evening. Poirot gapes at him and asks him to clarify what he means, not knowing that Dr. Bauerstein was seen at the house on Tuesday evening. He can't believe Hastings originally glossed over this detail, but Hastings thought it was insignificant.

Once again, Hastings fails to grasp Poirot's belief that no detail is too small to consider when conducting an investigation. To that end, it's not as if Dr. Bauerstein's presence on Tuesday evening is even all that insignificant, since it means that Bauerstein must be considered a possible suspect (a small plot hole here is that Poirot should already have known about Bauerstein's presence on that Tuesday evening, since Alfred himself mentioned it during the inquest, though he doesn't actually use Bauerstein's name during his testimony).

Poirot rushes to find John Cavendish and asks to borrow his car, announcing that he has some business in the nearby town of Tadminster. Once in the car, he tells Hastings that Dr. Bauerstein's presence at Styles on Tuesday evening changes everything. They already know that Alfred Inglethorp poured Mrs. Inglethorp's coffee but then set it down. The presence of yet another person complicates matters.

By helping Poirot learn that Dr. Bauerstein visited Styles Court on the evening of Emily's death, Hastings unwittingly plays an essential role in the investigation. In a way, this is how Hastings is useful to Poirot—although he often doesn't know how he's helping, his naivety sometimes enables him to unknowingly deliver important information. Although he might not be able to connect the dots during an investigation, then, there's no denying that he observes everything that goes on.

Poirot asks Hastings if he has any suspicions of his own, and Hastings admits that he finds something fishy about Evelyn Howard's hatred for Alfred Inglethorp. He doesn't necessarily suspect that she killed Emily Inglethorp, but he makes a weak argument for the possibility that she burned her friend's **will** to make sure Alfred wouldn't inherit anything. But Poirot says Hastings isn't thinking clearly. He's right, however, about the strange nature of Evelyn's hatred for Alfred—there's something unnaturally intense about it. Poirot has his own theory about this hatred, but he is going to keep it to himself.

Poirot is always on the lookout for details that are out of place. Nobody at Styles Court likes Alfred, but Evelyn's passionate hatred for him still seems out of place, especially because she already disliked him so much before *the murder. Of course, Poirot doesn't necessarily imply that Evelyn herself is the murderer simply because she has the capacity to hold onto such vehement hatred, but he* does *suggest that the general nature of her rage is a bit fishy.*

Moving on from the topic of Evelyn Howard, Poirot wants Hastings to say something to Lawrence Cavendish the next time they're alone together: "Find the extra coffee cup, and you can rest in peace!" Hastings has no idea what this means, but he agrees to pass the message along. At this point, they pull up to the "Analytical Chemist" laboratory in Tadminster, where Poirot drops off a sample of the cocoa he took from the saucepan in Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom. When Hastings reminds him that Dr. Bauerstein already tested the cocoa, Poirot says he knows—he simply wants to have it tested again, though he won't say why.

Poirot's message to Lawrence is very cryptic, but the mere fact that he wants to convey a riddle to him in the first place suggests that he has been carefully considering how Lawrence fits into the broader picture of Emily's murder. Without dwelling on the message, though, he moves on by having the cocoa analyzed, apparently doublechecking the work Bauerstein did—perhaps suggesting that he doesn't trust that Bauerstein did what he said he would do.

A few days later, Hastings and Poirot look for a green dress in a box of dress-up costumes in the attic. They don't find one, but they *do* find a big, fake black beard. It looks newly made. Back downstairs, Poirot asks Dorcas about how often the costume box was used, and she says that they would sometimes have a "dress-up" night. Lawrence once dressed as the Char of Persia, she says. But when Poirot asks if Lawrence wore the fake beard for that role, Dorcas says he made his own beard out of some wool he borrowed from her—she didn't know the costume box even *had* a professionally-made beard in it, remarking that it must be a very new addition.

The reason Hastings and Poirot go through the dress-up box is that they're trying to find the green garment that Poirot discovered on the bolt between Cynthia and Emily's rooms. Instead, they find a black beard, which was most likely used by whomever impersonated Alfred while buying the strychnine. The fact that it's hidden in the attic further confirms that the murderer is someone living at Styles Court.

After speaking with Dorcas, Poirot explains to Hastings that the murderer is clearly very intelligent, having placed the beard in the only place it wouldn't attract suspicion. But Poirot and Hastings need to be even more intelligent than the murderer—so intelligent, in fact, that the murderer thinks they're *un*intelligent and suspects nothing. Still, Poirot needs help, so he tries yet again to win over Evelyn Howard as an ally.

What Poirot says about outsmarting the murderer is indicative of his entire approach to detective work. Indeed, sometimes being clever means acting naïve or innocent, which, in turn, puts people at ease and increases the likelihood that they'll accidentally slip up and reveal something crucial to the investigation.

Poirot asks Evelyn Howard if she *really* still thinks Alfred Inglethorp killed Emily. She says she does, but then Poirot rephrases the question to suggest that he doesn't believe she *ever* thought Alfred was guilty; she only wants to trick herself into thinking this as a way of downplaying her intuition that it was somebody else; somebody she couldn't bear to accuse. Miss Howard breaks down, agreeing that she suspects somebody else but can't bring herself to believe her own suspicions. In the end, though, she decides to help Poirot, though she doesn't say who, exactly, she thinks killed her friend. When Evelyn leaves, Poirot refuses to explain things to Hastings, who becomes annoyed and decides to keep any discoveries he makes to himself, hoping to eventually surprise Poirot with his conclusions whenever he's able to formulate them.

Poirot and Evelyn's conversation is confounding, since the person they're talking about goes unnamed throughout the entire exchange. Hastings—and the readers—are therefore left to guess at Poirot's thought process once again, as Poirot continues to work in the dark as a way of hiding his own cunning intelligence as a detective.

CHAPTER 9: DR. BAUERSTEIN

Hastings walks outside and sees Lawrence playing croquet, so he approaches him and delivers Poirot's message. He explains that Poirot wanted him to wait until they were alone before saying, "Find the extra coffee cup, and you can rest in peace." Lawrence has no idea what he's talking about. He asks him to say it again, but hearing it a second time doesn't help him make any sense of the words.

Even Lawrence is stumped by Poirot's mysterious message. Given that Lawrence has no idea what the detective could be referring to, it's likely that Poirot has some kind of hidden motive, perhaps hoping the message will encourage Lawrence to think hard about something he might otherwise have ignored. In a way, then, Poirot begins to cast a wide net by involving other members of the Styles household in his investigation.

That afternoon, Hastings goes for a walk through the woods. He lies underneath a tree at a certain point and drifts to sleep. When he awakes, he realizes that John and Mary Cavendish are having an argument in the woods. They don't know he's nearby, and though he doesn't necessarily want to, he can't help but listen to their conversation. John asks Mary if she's going to keep seeing Dr. Bauerstein even though John himself doesn't want her to. Mary says she will do whatever she wants, adding that John shouldn't act like he doesn't have his own secret acquaintances. Just before she leaves, he catches her arm and asks if she's in love with Bauerstein. "Perhaps," she says before walking away.

Hastings stumbles on some interesting information in this scene, as he confirms that Mary and Dr. Bauerstein's relationship is something that upsets John—indeed, it appears that Mary is having an affair, though neither she nor John fully say as much. If Dr. Bauerstein is a suspect in the murder case, though, Mary's romantic relationship with him might account for her unwillingness to be completely truthful at the inquest.

Once Mary is gone, Hastings emerges as if he's just walking through the woods. John doesn't seem to suspect that he overheard anything, merely greeting him and starting to complain about the publicity that the murder has attracted to the family. He also expresses distress about the murderer's identity—if it's not Alfred Inglethorp, he says, then it must be somebody else in the house. As soon as he says this, Hastings has an idea, which he blurts out: the murderer must be Dr. Bauerstein. He even tells John that Poirot suspects Bauerstein, citing Poirot's excitement after hearing that Bauerstein visited the house on Tuesday evening. Hastings himself thinks Bauerstein must have poisoned the coffee when Alfred let him into the house.

Hastings once again shows his impulsive side when he blurts out that Dr. Bauerstein must be the murderer. He does this, it appears, because he wants to bond with John over a mutual dislike of Bauerstein, of whom he himself is jealous because of his relationship with Mary. Caught up in his excitement, he suggests that even Poirot suspects Bauerstein of the murder—a somewhat irresponsible thing to say, since John is, at this point in the novel, just as suspicious as anyone else and therefore probably isn't someone Hastings should be confiding in.

John Cavendish—whom Hastings has previously suggested is somewhat slow and unimaginative—is hesitant to go along with Hastings's theory. He points out that Bauerstein wouldn't have known whose cup he was poisoning. Hastings takes a moment and then suggests that the coffee wasn't what killed Mrs. Inglethorp. Instead, Bauerstein must have poisoned her *cocoa*, which is why Poirot took it to be analyzed. But John points out that Bauerstein himself had already had the cocoa analyzed—a point Hastings latches onto, insisting that Bauerstein probably substituted the sample for one without poison. But then John reminds Hastings that cocoa isn't bitter enough to mask the taste of strychnine.

The exchange between John and Hastings in the woods is somewhat humorous, since John makes Hastings look irrational and overexcited even though Hastings secretly thinks John is unintelligent. Hastings fancies himself a sharp, observant person who's well-suited for detective work, but John quickly pokes holes in every single theory he proposes, ultimately illustrating that Hastings isn't quite as clever as he'd like to think.

Hastings is no longer sure of his theory. But then he realizes that Dr. Bauerstein might have had an accomplice—someone, perhaps, like Mary Cavendish. He hopes John hasn't just thought the same thing. He also suddenly remembers the conversation he overheard between Mary and Mrs. Inglethorp, thinking that maybe Mrs. Inglethorp found out about her feelings for Bauerstein and threatened to tell John, ultimately giving Mary a motive to kill her. What's more, he realizes that Miss Howard's reluctance to admit her true suspicions supports the idea of Mary being the murderer. Evelyn Howard, after all, wouldn't want to accuse Mary, and even Mrs. Inglethorp herself probably wouldn't want to see the Cavendish name fall into disgrace, even if that meant letting her own death go "unavenged."

Hastings's theory spins out of control in this moment, as he tries desperately to make sense of his own suggestion. And yet, it's worth noting that his thought process becomes a bit more detailed and in-depth, as he finally tries to make sense of the conversation he overheard between Mary and Emily—a conversation he previously couldn't be bothered to even consider important. He thus goes from spouting off half-baked ideas to engaging in a more rigorous kind of mental investigation, suggesting that all detectives have to start somewhere, even when that means entertaining some unlikely ideas.

Not wanting John to think too much about the matter anymore, Hastings changes the subject. They return to Styles Court, where everyone is gathering for tea. Cynthia says she wants to talk to Hastings afterwards, so they go for a walk. She tells him that Mrs. Inglethorp promised to leave her money—but she didn't do it, and now Cynthia doesn't know what she should do. She wants to know if Hastings thinks she should leave Styles Court, and when he insists that everyone would be sad to see her go, she says that Mary Cavendish hates her. She also thinks Lawrence hates her.

Although Hastings might not be the best detective, it appears that certain members of the Styles Court household see him as a trustworthy confidant. Cynthia, at least, feels comfortable telling him about her tricky financial situation, revealing that Emily Inglethorp wasn't quite as generous as she liked to pretend to be. She also speaks truthfully about how she feels unwanted at Styles, indicating that Hastings is simply the kind of person people want to confide in.

As she complains about everyone at Styles Court hating her, Cynthia throws herself on the grass. Hastings realizes she's quite attractive and suddenly finds himself asking her to marry him. She can't believe her ears, and instead of giving him a straight answer, she starts laughing hysterically. He's offended, but she tries to assure him that he shouldn't be—he clearly doesn't mean what he says. She jokes that he should be careful about proposing to people out of nowhere; somebody might actually say yes sometime! She then thanks him for cheering her up and walks back.

Once again, Hastings acts quite impulsively, seizing on his sudden affection for Cynthia and deciding that they would make a good married couple. His thinking here is obviously ridiculous, but he's unable to recognize his own absurdity, ultimately demonstrating a lack of self-awareness that contributes to why he's not cut out for detective work. Such work, after all, requires people to be discreet, discerning, and capable of controlling their emotions.

Dissatisfied with his interaction with Cynthia, Hastings decides to go into town to check on Bauerstein, thinking that *somebody* should be keeping tabs on him. When he goes to Bauerstein's apartment, though, a woman downstairs tells him that the police took him away. Before asking any other questions, Hastings sprints off to find Poirot.

While Hastings is clearly not cut out for detective work, it seems—in this moment, at least—that he's onto something by suspecting Dr. Bauerstein of murdering Emily. Bauerstein, after all, has been arrested, though it's worth noting that Hastings doesn't stick around to find out why the doctor was taken in by the police—yet another indicator that he's not very good at gathering important information.

CHAPTER 10: THE ARREST

When Hastings reaches Poirot's apartment, he discovers that he has gone to London without notice. Perplexed, he makes his way back to Styles Court and tells John about Bauerstein's arrest, and the two of them decide not to say anything until the news breaks in the following day's paper. Except, the next day's paper says nothing of the arrest. Thankfully, though, Poirot returns from London and clears things up—of course, he hadn't heard that Bauerstein was arrested, but he still can confidently say why it happened. The doctor wasn't taken in by police for murdering Mrs. Inglethorp, but because he's a foreign spy.

Once again, Hastings's skills as a detective are somewhat lacking. He immediately assumes that Dr. Bauerstein was arrested for killing Emily Inglethorp, simply because that would fit with the narrative Hastings himself has already convinced himself is true. By fixating on his own ideas and letting his mind run wild, then, Hastings misses the truth.

Poirot points out how odd it is that Dr. Bauerstein—a renowned specialist—has been living in a small country town instead of London. Bauerstein also goes around at strange hours of the night, a sure sign that he's a spy. Poirot notes that he's clearly a native German, though he has been in England so long that he has mostly gotten rid of his accent. Poirot thinks he established a private connection with Mary Cavendish so that people would gossip about them having an affair. As long as everyone thought they were sneaking around together, they would completely overlook Bauerstein's spy work.

According to Poirot, Bauerstein used his supposed affair with Mary Cavendish as a way of hiding his spy work. Bauerstein thus proves that it's possible to use love and passion to one's own advantage, since it's widely understood that people often do crazy things for love. Romance therefore becomes something people can use to mask their sinister behavior—an important point to remember as the novel progresses.

Poirot's comment about Bauerstein and Mary's relationship gives Hastings hope that Bauerstein never truly cared about Mary in a romantic way. In fact, Poirot even suggests that Mary never felt strongly for Bauerstein, either. When pressed, though, all he will say is that she has feelings for somebody else. Hastings lets his mind run wild with this suggestion, hoping that Mary has a special fondness for him.

This time, Hastings isn't particularly annoyed by Poirot's secrecy. Instead, he lets himself get carried away with the idea that Mary might have romantic feelings for him, thus demonstrating his tendency to favor theories that seem appealing to him instead of looking at things objectively.

As Poirot and Hastings discuss Dr. Bauerstein's arrest, Evelyn Howard enters the room and gives Poirot a piece of paper, telling him that she found it on top of the wardrobe in Emily Inglethorp's room. The paper is a letter from a famous theatrical costume company and is addressed to Lawrence Cavendish. Poirot doesn't read out what the paper says. Instead, he simply says that he guessed that such a paper might exist and therefore asked Evelyn to look for it. Putting the matter aside, he calls for Dorcas and asks her if there were any problems on Monday the 16th with the bell system in Emily Inglethorp's room. She confirms that there was, indeed, a problem, adding that she thinks a mouse chewed through the wire. Somebody came and fixed it on Tuesday morning.

The discovery of the letter from a costume company to Lawrence perhaps suggests that Lawrence was the one who bought the fake black beard that was used to impersonate Alfred at the dispensary. Indeed, the letter adds to the growing list of indicators that Lawrence was somehow involved in Emily Inglethorp's murder, though Poirot doesn't dwell on the matter—or, at the very least, he doesn't let the others know what he makes of this new development.

Overjoyed with the information he has just discovered, Poirot dances out of the house and runs across the yard. Mary Cavendish enters the room and looks at Poirot out the window, joking about how odd he is. She and Hastings then have a tense conversation in which Hastings tries to discern if Mary truly dislikes Cynthia (as Cynthia herself has suggested). Mary instantly senses what he's doing and assures him that Cynthia doesn't have to worry about her.

Hastings enjoys the idea of becoming everyone's confidant at Styles Court, but he lacks the subtlety and grace to serve as a mediator between people like Mary and Cynthia. The fact that Mary instantly recognizes that he's talking to her on Cynthia's behalf illustrates just how bad Hastings is at hiding his true motives—a terrible quality for anyone interested in detective work to possess.

Mary reveals that she and John aren't happy, going on to tell Hastings the original circumstances of their marriage. When both her parents died, she explains, she lived a miserable life with her aunts. She then met John, who asked her to marry him. But she didn't love him back. John accepted this and *still* wanted to marry her, and—hoping she'd come to love him—she accepted. But she now thinks they've drifted apart, believing that John has grown tired of her. For this reason, she's considering leaving him and Styles Court altogether.

Even though Hastings doesn't have the smooth interpersonal skills he'd like to think *he has, it's obvious that people seem to trust him. Mary, for instance, opens up to him about her strained marriage to John. In doing so, she possibly gives Hastings some hope that he might have a chance with her, though it's worth noting that nothing about what she says necessarily implies this.*

Hastings tells Mary not to do anything "rash," and then—for reasons he can't begin to understand himself—asks her what she thinks of Bauerstein's arrest. Her demeanor changes, but she has no trouble talking about how Bauerstein must be a German spy. Still, the comment puts an end to their conversation, as Mary leaves the room as soon as possible.

Even though Hastings himself has romantic feelings for Mary, he becomes defensive of John when Mary suggests that she might leave him. He most likely thinks Mary means she will leave her husband to be with Bauerstein, which is why he impulsively brings up the fact that the doctor was recently arrested for espionage. Yet again, then, Hastings lets his emotions get the best of him.

Later that afternoon, Lawrence pulls Hastings aside. "I think I've found the extra coffee cup!" he whispers, but he'll say no more. Curious about what this means, Hastings visits Poirot's apartment to deliver the message. But he finds Poirot in a state of turmoil, and when he asks what's wrong, Poirot cryptically says he's trying to decide whether or not to speak up—he has, after all, determined the killer's identity. The problem, though, is that a "woman's happiness" is at stake. He doesn't explain what he means by this enigmatic statement. Moving on, Hastings delivers Lawrence's message, which pleases Poirot.

The message about the "extra coffee cup" remains unclear and mysterious, adding to the mounting feeling of confusion that Hastings himself clearly feels in relation to the investigation. Poirot, on the other hand, seems to have a perfect grasp of everything that has happened, considering that he has figured out the murderer's identity. And yet, he still *doesn't reveal his theories, preferring instead to ponder them on his own while continuing to make enigmatic statements that only heighten Hastings's—and, in turn, the reader's—sense of intrigue and suspense.*

Poirot tells Hastings that he visited the dispensary and that, though Cynthia wasn't there because she has Wednesdays off, the person working showed him everything he needed to see. He then changes topics by asking Hastings to look at three fingerprint samples. The first sample is of a man's finger, the second is of a woman's, and the final one is jumbled and messy, but Hastings can see that it displays the same fingerprint as the one in the first sample. Poirot agrees with this assessment, which confirms his own thoughts. He explains that the first sample is of Lawrence's finger. The second one is of Cynthia's finger. And the final sample is taken from a bottle of strychnine that is kept in the dispensary.

The fact that Lawrence's fingerprints were found on a bottle of poison in the dispensary seems quite condemning, especially considering all of the other evidence stacked against him—including, of course, the letter from the costume maker, which suggests that he bought a fake beard to impersonate Alfred Inglethorp. And yet, there's a discrepancy between these two pieces of evidence: if Lawrence dressed as Alfred and bought strychnine from Mr. Mace's pharmacy, then why would he also *have needed to steal strychnine from the dispensary?*

Hastings is flabbergasted. But Poirot isn't so sure about his own discovery—there's too much strychnine involved in the case, he says. There was the strychnine in Mrs. Inglethorp's tonic, the strychnine sold by Mr. Mace, and now the strychnine with Lawrence's fingerprints. The poison's abundance throughout the case seems suspicious to the seasoned detective.

Whereas Hastings immediately jumps to conclusions, Poirot thinks critically about the evidence they've gathered. There's so much strychnine involved in this case, he realizes, that it doesn't necessarily help narrow things down to a single culprit. Indeed, it's almost as if somebody has tried *to plant as much evidence as possible.*

Hastings and Poirot's conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Mary Cavendish. She was in the village and knew Hastings was at Poirot's, so she wanted to see if he would walk her back. Poirot is disappointed that she didn't come to pay him a visit, but she promises to do so someday if he ever invites her. In turn, he tells her that if she ever needs to confide in him, she should feel free to do so. His comment catches her off guard, but then she recovers and invites him to walk back to Styles Court with her and Hastings. The whole way back, Hastings has the distinct feeling that Mary is anxious in Poirot's presence.

This exchange between Poirot and Mary is hard to understand, but the fact that he says she can tell him anything suggests that he already knows she has something to divulge. The problem, though, is that she doesn't seem willing to tell him her secret yet, despite the likelihood that he already knows exactly what she's hiding.

When Hastings, Poirot, and Mary arrive at Styles Court, Dorcas rushes out and tells them that the police have arrested Mr. Cavendish. Hastings immediately assumes she's referring to Lawrence, but Dorcas corrects him—the police, she says, arrested John. Hearing this, Mary faints into Hastings's arms. As he breaks her fall, Hastings briefly catches a knowing glimmer of "triumph" in Poirot's eyes.

Once again, Hastings is caught completely off guard while Poirot remains unsurprised. Poirot seems to have already known that the police would arrest John Cavendish. Because he likes to keep his theories to himself, though, he never said anything, thus adding to the novel's feeling of suspense and surprise.

CHAPTER 11: THE CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION

John Cavendish is tried for murder two months later. In the intervening time, Hastings picks Poirot's brains about the case. Hastings himself never suspected John, even though Poirot implies that John was an obvious potential culprit—after all, if Alfred Inglethorp wasn't the one whom people overheard arguing with Emily Inglethorp, then it must have been either John or Lawrence. Still, though, Poirot doesn't necessarily think John will be found guilty, since there are still some missing links in the case. For this reason, Poirot will not take part in the trial. Instead, he'll continue to investigate, saying that it's important for Mary Cavendish to believe that Poirot is working *for* John, when—in reality—he'll be working *against* him.

In many ways, it makes sense that John would have killed his stepmother. He did, after all, have a motive to murder her, since doing so would potentially help him inherit Styles Court and the family fortune. Poirot, however, isn't satisfied with the evidence against John, which is why he wants to go out and gather more, evidently believing there's still a missing link that, once found, will prove the killer's guilt once and for all.

When Hastings criticizes Poirot's plan to undermine Mary and John Cavendish, Poirot tells him that there's nothing else to be done: they are dealing with a very intelligent criminal and must therefore act accordingly.

Hastings dislikes the idea of going behind John's back. His hesitancy ultimately suggests that he has trouble accepting the idea that John is the murderer. Poirot, however, is only interested in finding the truth, so he ignores Hastings's sentimentality in the pursuit of incontrovertible evidence.

The trial is set to take place in London in September. Hastings has been working at the war office in London, and Mary Cavendish rents a house in the city for everyone to stay in while the trial unfolds. On the day of the trial, a lawyer named Mr. Philips opens the proceedings by making a case against John. Mr. Philips says that John was having an affair with Mrs. Raikes and that Emily Inglethorp confronted him about his infidelity on the afternoon before her death. Mr. Philips also claims that John purchased strychnine the previous day while disguised as Alfred Inglethorp. According to Mr. Philips, Emily Inglethorp made a new **will** after her argument with John—a will that benefited Alfred instead of John. Mr. Philips claims that John poisoned Emily and then destroyed the new will.

The case against John is compelling. He certainly had a motive to kill his stepmother, since even he has admitted that he's in a period of financial hardship. And, of course, murdering Emily would potentially alleviate that hardship. It remains to be seen, though, how John's defense attorney will spin the story, as it has become quite clear throughout the investigation that John isn't the only person who could have killed Emily.

As witnesses are called to the stand, it emerges that the same vial of strychnine Mr. Mace sold to the person he *thought* was Mr. Inglethorp was later found by Jimmy Japp in John Cavendish's bedroom. He also found a monocle like the one Alfred wears in John's bedroom. When John's defense attorney, Sir Ernest Heavywether, cross examines the witnesses, he makes a number of insinuations about Lawrence Cavendish. At the end of the day, when they're on their way home for the evening, Poirot muses about Heavywether's tactics, guessing that the attorney is simply trying to suggest that there's as much evidence against Lawrence as there is against John—after all, there *is* the letter from the costume company suggesting that Lawrence wrote them to obtain a fake beard.

At this point in the trial, it isn't very clear whether or not John is the murderer. After all, Poirot's right that there's just as much evidence to convict Lawrence Cavendish. And yet, the discovery of the strychnine vial and the monocle amongst John's possessions is undeniably suspicious and sinister, suggesting that it will be hard for his lawyer to prove his innocence. Indeed, it's perhaps because Sir Ernest Heavywether recognizes the difficulty of proving John's innocence once and for all that he attempts to simply direct attention toward other people and their suspicious behavior—if he can't clear John's name, he can at least cast doubt on everyone else.

The next day, the prosecution presents more evidence, including a strip of "blotting paper" found in Emily Inglethorp's checkbook—a close study of the paper shows that it still bears the hint of some words written on the **will**, which she covered with the blotting paper. "…everything of which I die possessed I leave to my beloved husband Alfred Ing…," read the faint words.

The blotting paper presented in court seems to prove that the will John Cavendish has been accused of destroying did, in fact, benefit Alfred Inglethorp. If this is the case, then it would make sense for John to want to burn it, since his stepmother's previous will named him—John—as the person who would inherit her fortune.

Finally, Lawrence is called to the stand. Sir Heavywether ruthlessly questions him, making it clear that Lawrence would be the one to inherit Styles Court if something happened to prevent John from inheriting it. Heavywether also brings up the trip Lawrence made with Hastings to the dispensary on Tuesday the 17th. He asks Lawrence if he unlocked the poison cupboard and touched some of the bottles, and Lawrence has no choice to admit that he did. Heavywether reveals that Lawrence's fingerprints were found on a bottle of strychnine. Lawrence has little to say in his own defense, and Heavywether finishes questioning him.

Unable to unequivocally prove John Cavendish's innocence, Heavywether casts doubt on Lawrence to illustrate just how much evidence there is against other *people involved in the case. Lawrence, for his part, is in a particularly tricky position, since the evidence against him seems just as definitive and condemning as the evidence against John. In fact, the evidence against both brothers is so convincing that some readers might suspect that they worked* together *to kill Emily Inglethorp.*

Heavywether says that John did not buy the strychnine on Monday the 16th, claiming that he was at that time in a place called Marston's Spinney because an anonymous note had summoned him there. It's clear, Heavywether suggests, that the true criminal lured John to this remote destination so that he would have no alibi, since he was alone at Marston's Spinney. But when Mr. Philips cross-examines John, he once again casts suspicion on him.

At the inquest, Alfred Inglethorp made himself look guilty by refusing to give specific information about his whereabouts on the day that somebody who looked like him purchased strychnine. It was later suggested, though, that Alfred did *have a good alibi, since he was with Mrs. Raikes. John now finds himself in a similar predicament, but his alibi is just as weak as Alfred's original excuse, though this might be because the cunning criminal tricked him into going somewhere so remote that it would be impossible for him to clear his name.*

That evening, Poirot goes to his room without having tea. Hastings can tell that the detective is disturbed, so he follows him in the hopes of talking about the case. But Poirot only wants to sit and build a house of cards, saying that doing precise work with his hands helps him think more clearly—and clarity, he suggests, is exactly what the case lacks right now. Hastings compliments his friend on his steady hands, saying that he has only seen Poirot's hands shake once: when Poirot straightened out the trinkets on the mantelpiece after discovering that Emily Inglethorp's dispatch case had been forced open. As soon as he reminds Poirot of this moment, Poirot jumps up and yells that he has an idea. He rushes out of the house and does not return that night.

Poirot once again emphasizes the importance of organization and clarity. Detective work requires a logical, ordered mind, which is why he feels it necessary to sit in concentration instead of always talking about his ideas. Hastings, however, doesn't have this kind of discipline, so he tends to think aloud without paying much attention to what he's saying—an approach that, just this once, seems to have helped Poirot realize something crucial, though it's unclear what, exactly, came to mind.


CHAPTER 12: THE LAST LINK

The trial is to resume on Monday, but Poirot still hasn't returned by Sunday morning. He finally reappears that afternoon and summons everyone in the London household, announcing that he has something important to say. He even invites Alfred Inglethorp, who has been staying nearby. When they're all gathered, he reminds them of three things he found when he first investigated Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom: (1) a scrap of green fabric, (2) a stain on the carpet, and (3) an empty box of bromide powder. He explains that the green fabric was torn from a small green bracelet owned by Mary Cavendish, indicating that she entered Mrs. Inglethorp's room through the door leading to Cynthia's bedroom.

After a long investigation in which he largely kept important details and revelations to himself, Poirot finally sits everyone down to explain his findings. The first major thing he reveals is that the scrap of green fabric came from one of Mary's bracelets, suggesting that she unbolted the door between Cynthia and Emily's bedrooms—a door that otherwise always remained bolted. Because of this piece of information, the beginning of Poirot's explanation casts suspicion on Mary.


Everyone stirs with excitement and confusion as Poirot presses on, reminding them that Mary Cavendish claimed at the inquest to have heard the bedside table fall over. However, Poirot conducted an experiment by placing Hastings near Mary's room and then knocking over the bedside table—and Hastings heard nothing at all. Mary, then, was actually inside Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom when the table fell. Poirot suggests that Mary was looking for something in Emily's room when Emily surprised her by starting to convulse. Mary dropped some candlewax in surprise and quickly ran into Cynthia's room, bolting the door behind her. Because she could already hear people coming, she woke Cynthia up, acting as if she'd come to do so from the hall.

According to Poirot's account, Mary's behavior on the night of Emily's death was certainly suspicious, but not because she intended to murder her mother-in-law. Rather, she was simply looking for something in Emily's room when Emily started showing the effects of poisoning. What remains unclear, though, is what *Mary needed to find so badly—or, for that matter, why she had to sneak into Emily's room in the middle of the night to get it.*

Mary Cavendish says that Poirot is correct. She didn't reveal any of this in court because she didn't think it would help prove John's innocence. Poirot agrees, but he also clarifies to everyone else that Mary isn't the one who destroyed the **will**—the only person who could have done that, Mary chimes in, is Mrs. Inglethorp herself. Hastings can't believe his ears. He is once again flabbergasted and voices his utter surprise, but Poirot confirms what Mary has said. After all, he adds, why would Emily Inglethorp have had a **fire** going on one of the hottest nights of the entire year? The answer, of course, is that she needed to destroy the will.

Very early in the investigation, Poirot told Hastings to bear two things in mind: Alfred Inglethorp's distinctive looks, and the weather on the day of Emily's death. The importance of the second detail is now made clear, as Poirot points out that Emily died on one of the hottest nights of the year, meaning that she certainly didn't need a fire in her bedroom to keep warm. Rather, she needed the fire because she wanted to destroy a will. The fact that so many of the characters overlooked this detail underscores the nature of Poirot's genius, which lies in paying attention to the simple but crucial aspects of a case.

Poirot says that Emily Inglethorp had two conversations on Tuesday the 17th in which she used very similar language, as she spoke about a "scandal between husband and wife." The first conversation was with John Cavendish; the second one was with Dorcas. However, she was actually talking about two *different* scandals. Poirot explains that Mrs. Inglethorp spoke to John at 4:00 and threatened to reveal something to his wife (who, incidentally, overheard the conversation). At 4:30, Emily made a **will** leaving the Styles estate to Alfred. At 5:00, Dorcas found her holding a piece of paper. Emily was very upset and asked for a **fire** to be made. Poirot reasons that something must have happened between 4:30 and 5:00 to make Emily want to destroy the new will.

Even with Poirot's explanation, the case gets a bit complicated here. From the information he has provided, it seems that Emily found out something about John Cavendish that made her want to ensure that her fortune wouldn't revert to him after her death—she didn't know, it seems, that marrying Alfred had already nullified her most recent will, which named John as her inheritor. She therefore made a new will in Alfred's favor, but by the time Dorcas saw her at 5:00 that evening, something had happened to make her change her mind about Alfred inheriting her fortune.

The strange thing, Poirot says, is that Emily was alone between 4:30 and 5:00. Knowing that she had no stamps in her desk, Poirot believes she broke into Alfred's locked desk to borrow some, at which point she found the piece of paper that Dorcas later saw her holding—a piece of paper that she wasn't meant to see. Mary Cavendish thought the piece of paper was a letter proving that John was having an affair, so she wanted to see it. But Emily wouldn't give it to her. Mary then found the key to Emily's dispatch case (which had been lost that morning). She unbolted the door between Cynthia and Emily's room with the plan of returning later that night, and she drugged Cynthia so she wouldn't wake up as she passed through her room.

Poirot has yet to reveal what the piece of paper that upset Emily Inglethorp so much actually said. Suffice it to say, whatever the paper had on it made her rethink her entire relationship with Alfred, pushing her to destroy the will she made in his favor. Mary, for her part, assumed the piece of paper had something to do with what she and Emily had argued about earlier—something, it seems, about John having an affair. Her suspicious behavior was therefore linked to her burning need to get ahold of the mysterious piece of paper in order to know one way or another if John cheated on her.

Suspecting that Mary Cavendish had drugged Cynthia's coffee to make her fall fast asleep, Poirot had the coffee in all of the cups analyzed—but none of them contained anything out of the ordinary. When he learned that Dr. Bauerstein had joined everyone for coffee, though, he realized that there should have been yet another cup (including the broken one in Mrs. Inglethorp's room). There was, in other words, a missing coffee cup. Furthermore, all of the coffee Poirot had analyzed contained sugar, suggesting that Cynthia's cup was the missing one, since she doesn't take sugar in her coffee.

Poirot's impressive powers of deduction led him to the discovery that Cynthia's coffee cup was missing, and though this might seem somewhat trivial, it's exactly the kind of small discrepancy that Poirot looks for when investigating a case. Finding the missing coffee cup, he knew, would help him build a clearer picture of what happened on the evening of Emily's death—and since there are so many suspects and possible ways that Emily might have been poisoned, it was important for him to follow up on every potential lead.

At this point, Poirot shifts his attention to the cup of cocoa that Annie thought someone had spilled salt into. He had a sample of the cocoa analyzed, even though Dr. Bauerstein had already taken it to the lab—Bauerstein, after all, was only testing for strychnine. Poirot discovered that there was, indeed, a drowsy narcotic present in the cocoa. It was also present in Cynthia's coffee cup, which Lawrence later found in a brass vase. Mary Cavendish, Poirot explains, drugged both Emily Inglethorp and Cynthia so that she could sneak into their rooms at night.

Since things can get a bit confusing in this investigation, it might help to reiterate what Poirot has just explained. Acting on the belief that Emily possessed a piece of paper proving John's infidelity, Mary put a sleeping drug into Cynthia's coffee so that she could sneak through her room and into Emily's room in the middle of the night. She also put the same sleeping drug into Emily's cocoa, which was sitting in the hall. Although it certainly seems quite sinister that she drugged Emily, then, the fact is that she did so for fairly innocent reasons.

As soon as she realized that Mrs. Inglethorp had been poisoned, Mary thought she herself accidentally killed the old woman. She therefore hid Cynthia's coffee cup in the vase, but she couldn't get rid of the cocoa without attracting suspicion. Thankfully for her, she soon realized that Emily Inglethorp died from strychnine and not the drug Mary herself slipped into her drink. But, Poirot says, this is why the strychnine took so long to kick in: the sleeping drug delayed its effects.

One of the case's major discrepancies has now been solved. Strychnine is a drug that acts very quickly, so it didn't make sense that Emily only started showing effects of poisoning in the early hours of the morning. Now, though, Poirot has managed to account for this confusing detail by discovering that the sleeping aid Mary Cavendish put in Emily's cocoa held off the effects of the strychnine.

Lawrence interjects to say that it all makes sense now: the sleeping drug held off the effects of the drugged coffee. But Poirot stops him. The coffee, he says, was not drugged. After all, Emily Inglethorp didn't even *drink* the coffee, since it spilled all over the carpet when she set it down on the unsteady bedside table. The strychnine, then, wasn't in the coffee. It was in Emily's medicine. Hastings blurts out that the murderer must have added strychnine to Emily's tonic, but Poirot reminds him that the murderer didn't *need* to add it—her tonic already contained strychnine.

Hastings once again gets so excited that he jumps to conclusions. Poirot, however, maintains his levelheaded approach and calmly informs everyone of an important detail: Emily's tonic already contained strychnine. Of course, this detail actually isn't a major revelation, since Lawrence already pointed it out at the initial inquest. However, Dr. Wilkins insisted at the inquest that there wasn't enough strychnine in Emily's tonic to kill her. Poirot will therefore have to account for how, exactly, the strychnine in Emily's medicine was strong enough to be fatal.

Instead of adding strychnine, the murderer only needed to add Emily's bromide powder to the tonic. Poirot learned from a pharmaceutical book that bromide can cause strychnine to crystallize, leading it to build up at the bottom of a bottle. Poirot then suggests that the person who poured Emily's tonic for her each night was careful to only serve her the liquid on top, meaning that all of the strychnine built up in the bottom of the bottle. The last dose, then, was sure to kill her, since it contained a huge amount of strychnine.

The inherent genius of this murder case is its relative simplicity: the murderer didn't need to do anything except make sure that a lethal ingredient that was already present *in Emily's medicine built up at the bottom of the bottle. Then, the only thing the murderer had to do was wait for Emily to take the final dose, which would contain nothing but a highly concentrated amount of strychnine. Because this tactic is so simple, though, it doesn't account for all of the other clues (and red herrings) that have cropped up throughout the novel—details Poirot will have to account for in his explanation of what happened.*

Poirot believes that the murder was clearly *supposed* to happen on Monday, not Tuesday. That's why Emily's bell was tampered with on Monday, for instance. But Emily forgot to take her last dose of medicine that night. She therefore took the fatal dose the *next* day, and it's because of this delay that Poirot was able to crack the case. He now whips out a letter and declares that it was written by the murderer. The letter itself is addressed to Evelyn Howard and tells her not to worry—there has been a delay, but everything will surely happen the following day. "There's a good time coming once the old woman is dead and out of the way," the murderer writes, adding that Evelyn was a genius to think of using the bromide powders. The letter ends abruptly and without a signature.

Poirot hasn't yet said who wrote this letter to Evelyn, but the letter itself reveals that Evelyn Howard was an accomplice to the murderer. It was, the letter clarifies, Evelyn's idea to use bromide powder to crystallize the strychnine in Emily's tonic, thus ensuring that she would take a lethal dose at the bottom of the bottle. Of course, it's not yet clear why *Evelyn would want to kill Emily, especially since she's (supposedly) her best friend, but the fact that she's guilty of helping kill the old woman* does *make sense of her behavior earlier in the novel—Poirot, for his part, noted early on that her vehemence toward Alfred Inglethorp seemed suspicious.*

As Poirot reads aloud, Alfred Inglethorp stands. "You devil! How did you get it?" he yells before lunging at Poirot, who gracefully steps aside. Poirot takes this opportunity to officially reveal the murderer himself, gesturing to Alfred Inglethorp as he careens to the floor.

Poirot doesn't need to explain his careful detective work in order to reveal Alfred as the murderer; rather, Alfred reveals himself *by losing his temper and hurling himself at Poirot. In doing so, he effectively helps Poirot solve the mystery, though there are still many loose ends that need to be tied up.*

CHAPTER 13: POIROT EXPLAINS

Sitting with Hastings several days after Evelyn Howard and Alfred Inglethorp have been arrested, Poirot says that he didn't tell his friend what he was thinking because Hastings isn't very good at hiding his thoughts and emotions. Poirot needed Alfred Inglethorp to think he wasn't on to him.

Poirot confirms that Hastings isn't cut out for detective work, which often requires a person to be discreet. Whereas Poirot is quite skilled at hiding his suspicions, Hastings tends to blurt things out or behave in ways that make his thoughts obvious to anyone paying attention.

Going on, Poirot explains that he never thought John Cavendish was guilty. He also notes that he didn't want Alfred to be arrested in the beginning—not because he thought he was innocent, but because he thought he was *guilty*. Under British law, a person can't be tried for a crime of which they've already been arrested and acquitted. Alfred's terrible excuses at the inquest indicated to Poirot that the man *wanted* to be arrested. The evidence at that point in the case wouldn't have been enough to convict him, and then he'd be safe for the rest of his life.

Alfred's scheme to get arrested was certainly clever, but it tipped Poirot off. After all, most innocent people would take any chance available to them to prove *their innocence, but Alfred didn't do this. Instead, he provided vague answers at the inquest, essentially saying the worst possible things for a person to say while trying to defend themselves. In turn, Poirot realized that Alfred* wanted *to be arrested, ultimately picking up on this fact because there was no other way of explaining Alfred's behavior. Yet again, then, a discrepancy in the case led to important information.*

Poirot also explains that he discovered that Alfred Inglethorp never had a romantic relationship with Mrs. Raikes. Rather, John Cavendish was the one having an affair with Mrs. Raikes. The fact that Alfred let everyone think he and Mrs. Raikes were having an affair made Poirot suspicious, ultimately indicating that he was hiding something much bigger. Poirot continues by explaining that Evelyn Howard dressed up as Alfred when she went to buy the strychnine. Poirot thinks Evelyn and Alfred would have gotten away with their plan if they'd simply added bromide to Emily's tonic and waited for her to take the last dose. Instead, they tried to stir up suspicion by buying extra strychnine and signing Alfred's name in handwriting that looked like John Cavendish's, thus making it look like John was guilty.

Alfred and Evelyn's plan to kill Emily Inglethorp was ingenious because it was simple. To that end, Poirot implies that simplicity makes a case much more difficult to crack, since discrepancies and complications are what lead to the most revelatory clues. But Alfred and Evelyn ruined their chances of escaping by trying too hard to cast suspicion on other people. In doing so, they created confusion, but they also *created more clues for Poirot to work with.*

The plan, Poirot explains, was for Emily to take her final—fatal—dose of medicine on Monday evening. Therefore, Alfred purposefully went to a public space far from Styles Court on that day, and the fake story about him having an affair with Mrs. Raikes was supposed to account for his hesitancy to talk about his whereabouts. Meanwhile, Evelyn staged an argument with Emily and left the house, removing herself from the crime scene. But then Emily didn't take the final dose until Tuesday evening. All might have still worked out, but then Alfred made the mistake of writing to Evelyn. But Emily must have entered while he was writing, since the letter was unfinished. He therefore locked it in his writing desk and left, assuming Emily wouldn't break into the desk.

The murderers might not have been discovered by Poirot if Alfred hadn't tried to write Evelyn a letter updating her on why Emily was still alive. Indeed, Alfred let his emotions override his rationality, deciding to write to his lover instead of playing it safe by staying quiet. In the same way that detective work requires a person to be restrained and logical, then, getting away with a terrible crime also seems to demand a certain detachment from intense emotions. The problem that Alfred encountered, though, is that his passion was simply too much to handle, which is why he made the mistake of writing the letter.

When Emily Inglethorp realized she didn't have any stamps, Poirot says, she opened Alfred's writing desk using a mismatched key. She thus found the letter to Evelyn and realized that she and Alfred were lovers and that they were planning something behind her back, though she unfortunately didn't realize they were planning to murder her. Seeing that she'd been duped, she wrote a letter to Mr. Wells asking him to come the following the day, clearly wanting to make sure her eventual death wouldn't benefit Alfred. She also destroyed the **will** she had just made in Alfred's favor. Lastly, she put the letter—which Dorcas saw her holding—in her dispatch case.

If Emily Inglethorp had lived through the night, she would have met with her lawyer, Mr. Wells, the following day. In doing so, she would have learned that the will she'd just destroyed—the one benefitting Alfred—didn't change anything about her affairs; by marrying Alfred, she unknowingly overrode her previous will, which benefitted John Cavendish. However, Emily didn't *live through the night, so her inheritance was, at the time of her death, slated to go to Alfred, though Poirot's discovery will certainly ensure that this doesn't happen.*

After the murder, Alfred must have realized that Emily had taken the incriminating letter he wrote to Evelyn. He therefore risked breaking into her bedroom the morning after her death and forcing open the case. But once he'd done this, he heard people approaching the room, so he ripped the letter into three strips, balled them up, and stuffed them into a vase on the mantelpiece. Poirot says that Hastings helped him solve this by pointing out that Poirot's own hands shook when he straightened the items on the mantelpiece. Poirot realized that he had *already* straightened these items the first time he'd entered the room, so there should have been no need to do it again. This realization led him to the vase, which in turn yielded the incriminating letter.

Poirot solved the case by revisiting a detail he had overlooked—namely, the fact that the vase on the mantelpiece was crooked even though he'd already straightened it. The fact that Hastings, of all people, was the one to help him realize this is rather ironic, since Hastings himself tends to overlook small details because he fails to recognize their importance. In this case, though, he unknowingly helped Poirot revisit a crucial aspect of the case, suggesting that sometimes a sense of open-minded naivety and objectivity can help solve a case.

While everyone suspected Alfred, Poirot says, Evelyn went around planting false evidence. For example, she slipped the vial of strychnine into John Cavendish's drawer. Hastings wonders about Lawrence, assuming that the evidence against him was all manufactured by Evelyn and Alfred. But Poirot disagrees—the evidence against Lawrence had more to do with something else: namely, the fact that he thought Cynthia was the murderer. Poirot then reveals that Lawrence loves Cynthia and wanted to protect her. The reason Lawrence went so pale while looking over Hastings's shoulder on the night of the murder was that he saw Cynthia's door unbolted.

When Poirot reveals that Lawrence is in love with Cynthia, he touches on how love and passion can drive people to behave in suspicious ways. Throughout the investigation, Lawrence has often seemed like an obvious culprit. In reality, though, he was just trying to protect Cynthia from harm, thus demonstrating how romantic feelings can distort judgment and encourage people to do risky things.

As soon as Lawrence saw the unbolted door, he crushed the coffee cup in Emily Inglethorp's room because he remembered that Cynthia had gone upstairs with Emily that night. He hoped that crushing the cup would make it impossible to test its contents, and then he tried to convince everyone that Emily had died of natural causes. But then Poirot suggested to him—through the message delivered by Hastings—that there was a missing coffee cup that could exonerate Cynthia once and for all, since it would prove that Cynthia herself had been drugged with a drowsy narcotic.

Poirot finally helps Hastings make sense of the cryptic message he had him deliver to Lawrence about the missing coffee cup. All Lawrence had to do, Poirot had implied, was find the coffee cup that Mary Cavendish had hidden after drugging Cynthia. In doing so, he would be able to prove that Cynthia wasn't guilty of murdering Emily—after all, Cynthia was fast asleep. Slowly but surely, then, the many discrepancies in the case begin to make sense.

As for John and Mary Cavendish, the trial seems to have revived their affection for one another. Poirot has always recognized that, despite the friction in their relationship, they're both quite fond of each other. The problem, though, was that they both thought the other one didn't care about them; until, that is, the trial, which revealed their affections. Poirot could have proved John's innocence before he went to trial, but he decided not to say anything because he knew it would benefit a "woman's happiness"—namely, *Mary*'s happiness, since the trial brought her closer to her husband once more.

Although the novel suggests that love can drive people to behave in ill-advised ways, the book itself isn't necessarily cynical when it comes to romance in general. Rather, Poirot appears to have a keen understanding of romantic affection and the things that tie people together, which is why he didn't step in before John was put on trial—he knew the trial would bring Mary and John back together, and he recognized that this is something they would both want. He therefore used his cunning skills as a detective to not only solve the case, but also to reunite two lovers.

As Poirot talks about bringing Mary and John back together, Cynthia enters and thanks both him and Hastings with a kiss on the cheek. Hastings has no idea what this means, but Poirot patiently explains that Cynthia must have found out that, contrary to her belief, Lawrence is in love with her. Sure enough, Lawrence passes at that moment, and when Poirot congratulates him on his newfound happiness with Cynthia, he blushes. But all of this talk of love makes Hastings sigh with disappointment. When Poirot asks what's wrong, he simply says that both Cynthia and Mary are "delightful women," prompting his friend to tell him not to despair—"We may hunt together again, who knows?" he says.

Having finally grasped what happened in the case of Emily Inglethorp's murder, Hastings is left with little more than a sense of disappointment; he hoped, it seems, that he would develop a romantic bond with somebody over the course of the investigation. Instead, he has simply played the role of a kind and affable houseguest and—to a certain extent—a detective's assistant. Although Hastings's experience at Styles Court didn't result in romantic happiness, Poirot cheers his friend up by implying that he will perhaps find love during a future investigation—a comment that hints at the six other Hercule Poirot Mystery *novels in which Hastings will later appear.*

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